The Evolution of Election Coverage on British Television News, 1979-2005

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to provide a comprehensive account of the nature and degree of change in British television news coverage of General Elections. By creating and utilising an in-depth content analysis coding frame, the analysis measures news quantitative and qualitative data across 270 bulletins, approximately 148hrs, of news content across the seven elections from 1979 to 2005. In doing so, it fills two gaps in the existing literature. First, it provides the first dedicated and consistent longitudinal analysis of British election news. Given the acknowledged importance of television news in the modern political process, it is important to develop an understanding of how campaign news content has changed, both as a source of information for the public at moments of democratic renewal, and also in terms of the normative role of journalism in British politics. Second, it develops a toolkit by which political news content can be accurately and reliably measured. Most of the existing empirical research into British television election news content has employed inadequate or non-replicable measures, leaving a fragmentary body of data from which longitudinal conclusions cannot be drawn with confidence. By adapting and applying a series of measures based on other longitudinal media content studies, the thesis sets out a means by which future studies of news content can be guided.

The thesis thus generates new data on four aspects of election news content. First, it casts serious doubt on the 'tabloidisation' thesis, demonstrating that news in British terrestrial news bulletins has retained both an overwhelmingly serious news agenda, and a substantial commitment to election news coverage. Not only have levels of campaign coverage remained steady, but campaign coverage has been given a consistently prominent place in news bulletins, indicating a lasting commitment to a more 'sacerdotal' approach to campaign coverage on both BBC and ITV, despite increasing competition in the television environment. Second, an analysis of the balance of substantive policy content and strategic campaign coverage shows that journalists on British television news have adopted aspects of an increasingly adversarial approach to covering campaigns, and have tended to view their role ever more as interpreters of political messages and campaign actions. Third, the research shows comprehensive evidence of a dramatic shrinking of political soundbites over the period of study, and a replacement of disappearing politician speech by journalists who feature more and speak progressively more often over the period of study. Finally, in order to determine the effect of technological changes in television news reporting, the thesis compares campaign and non-campaign news output, determining that, while some

aspects of change in election news can be ascribed to technological changes, the rise of the journalist as the most prominent speaker in campaign news items cannot.

Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature: 

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List of Abbreviations

BARB: Broadcasters' Audience Research Board

BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation

ENG: Electronic newsgathering

IBA: Independent Broadcasting Authority

ITA: Independent Television Authority

ITC: Independent Television Commission

ITN: Independent Television News

ITV: Independent Television

Ofcom: Office of Communications

PEB: Party Election Broadcast

PSB: Public Service Broadcasting

SDP: Social Democrat Party

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Chapter 1: Assessing Change in Television News Content

1.1 Introduction

This thesis measures the nature and degree of change in television news during general election campaigns in the UK, between 1979 and 2005. By applying a large-scale quantitative content analysis to nightly news bulletins on BBC1 and ITV during official campaigning periods, it is able to provide a comprehensive account of trends in television coverage of elections in the UK, applying a unified methodology to an area of political communication research which currently lacks a developed and consistent empirical approach. In doing so, the thesis uncovers compelling evidence of long-term changes in the character of political campaign coverage in British television news bulletins. A consistently high volume of campaign coverage and preferential placing in bulletins indicates an enduring 'sacerdotal' approach to election news on both BBC and ITV, despite the increasing commercial pressures affecting the latter during the period of study. In terms of tone, there is evidence of the increasing use of strategic framing in covering election stories, while there is a substantial increase in the levels of interpretation of political motives and messages by correspondents. Thirdly, political soundbites have diminished to levels noted in high-profile studies of American campaign coverage, as journalists overtake politicians as the main speakers in campaign news. Finally, the thesis considers the role of new technologies in television newsmaking on these processes, particularly shortening soundbites. The analysis and results are also used to test the pessimistic theories of a 'crisis' in public communication, and the supposed 'convergence' of media systems as viable theories of change in television election news.

The period between the 1979 and 2005 general elections was a time of unprecedented change in the UK's political and television news landscapes. In the space of 26 years, the BBC/ITV terrestrial duopoly was shattered after almost three decades as Channel Four was launched in 1982, followed by Channel 5 in 1997. Sky Television (which rapidly became BSkyB) began satellite news broadcasting just a few short years after the logistical nightmare of satellite communication for journalists during the Falklands conflict (Morrison and Tumber, 1988), while the explosion of cable and then digital channels altered the viewing habits of the British public. During the 1990s, the emergence of the internet and – following CNN's, and latterly Sky's, lead – 24-hour news

utterly transformed the political public sphere and the relationships between the news media, politics, and the public.

Politically, the changes were no less drastic: the market-driven social, economic and political upheavals under the Thatcher government – largely unforeseen in 1979 – followed by the besieged Major years, was paralleled by the near-collapse of Labour as an electoral force in the early eighties, a slow return to respectability under Kinnock, the acrobatic repositioning of New Labour, landslide victory in 1997 and subsequent electoral success. Here another duopoly was broken as the Liberals, joining the SDP in the Alliance and later formalising the union as the Liberal Democrats, became a credible alternative for the electorate for the first time since Lloyd-George, creating a two-and-a-half party system and causing the news broadcasters interminable problems in achieving balance in political coverage. Among the electorate, ideologically-charged industrial struggles of the 1970s and early 1980s gradually subsided to a simmering discontent, accompanied by lower public trust, falling turnout and plummeting party membership (Mair and van Biezen, 2001; Lloyd, 2004; House of Commons, 2009).

Yet in spite of this backdrop of fragmentation and flux, increasing consolidation has been observed in the sphere of political communication in the UK, as television news has increasingly become the dominant medium through which both day-to-day and electoral politics are conducted. Continuity exists, too, in the popularity of television news on BBC 1 and ITV despite an exponential increase in alternative news sources, and also in high levels of trust in television news held by the voting public (Negrine, 1994; Ofcom, 2008). On these grounds, and – as will be shown below – because of consistently dire predictions concerning the effect of changes in news provision on politics in the UK, analysis of changing election news content on the main television news bulletins is vital, firstly to ascertain the nature of change in output and its likely impact, and secondly to evaluate whether existing predictive theories of change are correct in their (generally) pessimistic assessment and in their accounts of the form of change.

Television Election News in the UK – A Rationale for Analysis

This thesis analyses the nature of change in television news in the UK during general election campaigns across a 26-year period encompassing seven elections. Specifically, the analysis focuses on news bulletins broadcast during campaigning periods prior to elections, with special focus placed on the news content that deals directly with each election. Three

propositions underpin the composition of the project. The first is that news is a product of, and is shaped by, the institutional, socio-political and professional environment and context in which it is constructed, and so changes in this environment, whether internally- or externally-originating, exert influence on the composition of news. The second proposition is that broadcast news performs a vital function in modern democratic politics through its capacity to provide citizens with information about the public realm, from which rational political decisions can be formulated. Therefore, changes in the composition of television news can have a tangible effect on the engagement of the public with politics, thus validating the analysis of changing news content as an issue central to trends in democratic politics and civic engagement. Thirdly, it is contended that, since trends in news output can best be discerned over considerable time periods and through samples encompassing large numbers of bulletins (due respectively to the slow accretion of individual changes in working practices and organizational procedural norms, and to fluctuations in news content as a result of significant emerging stories), that a large-scale quantitative content analysis exercise will provide thorough and consistent evidence of change in news output. The quantitative coding frame employed here addresses each of these assumptions, and allows clear and relevant conclusions to be drawn from empirical evidence of the changing content and composition of television election news in the UK, while retaining the potential for replication in different national contexts, acknowledging the concerns in the comparative political communication literature over convergence in media systems and news output.

Comparative and case-study analyses of change in political communication have, in recent decades, attempted to account for observed transnational similarities in trends affecting the channels of communication between politicians, the news media and the electorate. In general, the resulting theories and models of change in political communication contain two related hypotheses: first, that the net impact of certain observed changes in the conduct and operation of political communication has been detrimental to democracy and the political public sphere; second, that comparative research has identified elements of convergence in media systems internationally, with substantial effects on national-level political communication throughout developed democracies. The centrality of television as a primary medium of political communication in recent decades means that, should these hypotheses hold true, then evidence of decline and/or transnational convergence should be evident in television news output. Thus, beyond providing a descriptive analysis of change in television news between the UK general elections between 1979 and 2005, a core aim of this thesis is to use television election

news coverage as a means to measure whether theories of transnational change are effective in explaining changing news content, and whether the prognosis of a decline in quality is exhibited in the output of broadcast news organisations. These hypotheses, while comprising a number of different related theories and accounts (which will be discussed in Section 1.2.4 below), are here redefined as the 'crisis' hypothesis, which denotes a broadly negative effect on the ability of journalism to fulfil its normative role as a result of trends in political communication, and the 'convergence' hypothesis which asserts that the hallmark of change is a process of homogenisation among political communication systems.

This chapter sets out an account of how a longitudinal analysis of election news coverage in a modern Western democracy can be constructed with these considerations in mind, leaving the specifics of the British case until Chapter 2. Section 1.2 begins with an outline of the main normative accounts of the role of journalism in liberal democratic polities, and the nature of news content as a product created in a specific organisational context. This is followed by a discussion of the various theoretical approaches adopted to guide the analysis of news content. The case is made that a systemic/longitudinal approach is necessary to investigate the nature of change in a national political communication environment. Thirdly, the two major theories of media change chosen to guide the empirical analysis – 'crisis' and 'convergence', are assessed. Finally, a series of hypotheses are generated concerning how change may manifest itself in the specific context of television news. Section 1.3 outlines the methodological approaches used in the content analysis exercise, and links the hypotheses to a means of measurement of content change.

1.2: Television Election News in Political Communication: Assessing Change

1.2.1 Overview

Normative theories of the role of news media in democratic society are inherently problematic with regard to the conduct of empirical research. On one hand, they can provide a stable conceptual boundary within which the researcher can establish the variables for analysis and set the benchmarks by which judgements can be made when significant results are obtained. On the other, they can impel a research project to tacitly and unquestioningly champion one particular viewpoint in the conduct of the inquiry, and

in the interpretation of its outcomes. As a result, an empirical study testing hypotheses according to normative principles must acknowledge that these principles are contingent on the acceptance of a particular set of ideological or ethical views. 'We are', says Schudson, 'a long way from a coherent normative theory of journalism' (1995: 29); likewise, Hallin and Mancini, analysing media systems, query whether 'manichean' normative theories of the press are of value in understanding and assessing the composition and performance of political communication (2004: 14). However, this thesis bases its analysis of news content on a set of normative assumptions about how television news reporting during elections should be conducted and explores how they have been served over time in British television election news. There are two reasons for this, which are described here, before being outlined more comprehensively in the sections below.

First, the longitudinal nature of the study dictates that, to identify those aspects of news content that have changed, an account must be given of why evidence of change is important beyond the purely descriptive empirical sense. Presented with starting and finishing conditions of news composition at the extremities of the study, and pathways of change in between, a deeper understanding of the implications of trends for the socio-political environment in which news operates is necessary to elevate the analysis beyond a simple report of what changed, how, and when. The need to do so is also due in part to the entrenchment of news in social and political life in liberal democratic societies, and particularly in the special circumstances of election campaigns. Where the core values of representative democracy hinge on an engaged public making informed decisions during moments of democratic renewal, the normative role of the news media as a key component of democratic activity gains significance in any analysis. Thus, 'performance indicators' of election news in a longitudinal analysis are invariably linked to assessments of the normative role of the media in furthering the operation of democratic politics. This is the position underpinning Section 1.2.2 below, where the main normative theories of the behaviour of news media are assessed in terms of how they conceive of the role that television news content – as a fundamental component of the political communication process in which media outlets participate – plays during election campaigns, and how the various 'real world' conditions affecting how news content is shaped render purely normative accounts insufficient as the sole basis for critiquing content.

Second, the empirical analysis has been designed to test two related claims made by various academic and journalistic sources about political communication in liberal democracies in recent decades: that there has been a serious decline in the 'quality' of

political communication, of which the news, as the main point of contact between the public and politics in a modern democracy, represents both a symptom of deeper ills and as an agent of decline in its own right; and that transnational forces of change in political communication systems are fostering an element of convergence among the media systems of the interconnected network of nations in the global environment, resulting in changes in qualitative aspects of news output. Both of these positions are underpinned by a concern with the ability of the news media to perform certain roles within democratic societies, and the purported consequences of changes in political communication that are deemed to threaten the benefits that these roles provide. Pessimistic accounts of changes in political communication in recent decades far outweigh optimistic interpretations of developments (McNair, 2000), and are based, among other things, on: pronouncements of 'dumbing down'; an over-powerful and hyperadversarial media; and the erosion of sacrosanct standards in public communication – all strictly normative concepts. Paralleling this narrative of decline is the belief that national media systems are susceptible to transnational economic, political and cultural trends that similarly will erode standards in news media output and interactions between citizens, political actors and journalists in the triangular interrelationship of political communication. In short, if both of these positions hold true, the consequences for democratic politics are grave. Section 1.2.4 investigates the bases for these assertions, and the ways in which news content is expected to reflect the narratives of decline and transnational change. The empirical measurements of trends in election news content adopted in this thesis apply the normative benchmarks that underpin the 'pessimistic' accounts of political communication in order to test the validity of these arguments.

1.2.2 News, Content and Democracy: Normative Issues and Practical Considerations

The link between news – in all its forms – and democratic politics is fundamental. Such core features of ideal democratic systems as governmental legitimacy through possession of a popular mandate, rational voting behaviour, scrutiny of powerful interests and public engagement in the wider social environment, share a common foundation in the accessibility and abundance of information about public life. The importance of news media in democratic politics has been extolled since the early Enlightenment and the first calls for press freedom, prompted by a combination of increasing social complexity, more widespread literacy, and the growing influence of a nascent bourgeois class (Siebert, 1956;

Habermas, 1992; McNair, 2003a). As the philosophical and theoretical foundations of modern liberal democracy were laid in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the symbiotic relationship between a well-functioning democratic society and an informed citizenry was given prominent placing, as was the need for independent and reliable sources of information from which enlightened self-rule could proceed (Paine, 1791 [1998]; de Tocqueville, 1835 [1998]; Mill, 1861 [1998]). In such theoretical terms, the place of news in the democratic process is central:

> ...in a democracy, it is the people who rule. The voice of the people is heard in the voting booth. The decisions made by the people in the voting booth are based on the information made available to them. That information is provided by the news media. Hence, the news media are indispensible to the survival of democracy (Altschull, 1984: 19)

While this may oversimplify the processes at play somewhat, the root of the argument retains significant relevance today in any society that purports to operate on democratic principles. Without access to sufficient information, citizens lack the ability to articulate their interests, to evaluate suitable candidates, or to appreciate the link between policies and outcomes in a wider political context (Manin, 1997: 167). Where this basic representative principle is lacking, democracy "loses legitimacy, and may cease to function in a legitimate way" (Dahlgren, 2009: 1). Information is the lifeblood of democracy, and, where the news media are its primary supplier, news content is a central source of the political learning among citizens from which democratic politics can emerge. The normative theories attached to the operation of the news media in liberal democratic societies are of particular relevance in an analysis of news content; indictors of 'performance' determined by certain criteria provide the benchmarks by which changing news output can be assessed. As the empirical analysis of this thesis consists of an investigation of accusations of a 'crisis' in political communication and the supposedly detrimental outcomes of trends of convergence in the systemic arrangements and interactions of political and media institutions, so normative accounts of news media are important in establishing the significance of changing content. Here, three overlapping concepts in the ideal role of – particularly television – journalism in civil society with special relevance for content analysis will be briefly outlined: the notion of a 'free marketplace of ideas' in which adequate provision of political information contains a diverse array of viewpoints; the concept of a political 'public sphere' to which news media (should) contribute in abundance; and the social responsibility/public service approach to journalism, with its ill-defined but cherished commitment to 'quality' provision of political information.

Normative Theories of the Media

The 'free marketplace of ideas' principle, otherwise articulated as a high degree of press freedom from external regulation, arose from philosophical arguments about the nature of intersubjective truth, and passed through the Atlantic republican tradition of the early United States and the utilitarian liberalism of the 19th Century to establish itself as a robust normative principle of both how censorship (overt or hidden) of public voices should be minimised, and how the availability of political information is linked to the health of democracy. The theory was first articulated by John Milton (1644 [1990]) in defence of intellectual freedom in a time of repressive government control over all forms of mass communication (Siebert, 1956; McNair, 2003a). The core of the argument concerned the capacity of individuals to distinguish between good and bad, truth and falsehood, provided they had access to the totality of ideas of other individuals. A Darwinian process of selection would ensure that false or unworthy ideas would be ultimately discredited. The concept influenced Thomas Jefferson, and in turn the founding documents of the United States (Pocock, 1975; Altschull, 1990). Keane (1991) ascertains three concepts underpinning the early belief in press freedom: that media should provide a space in which the public can see right from wrong and good from evil; the reinforcement of truth through challenging accepted and entrenched ideas; and the belief that freedom of the press is the strongest guarantee of individual freedom against powerful elites, government or otherwise. Each of these notions was expanded by J.S. Mill in his utilitarian conception of liberty, a defining text in the late 19th and 20th Centuries, as the news media in their modern form took shape and developed (1998 [1861]). He advocated maximised press freedom from government interference (a corollary of the classical liberal creed of individual freedom), absolute freedom in thought and discussion where individuals' wellbeing was not at risk, and the need for society to test and reaffirm cherished truths. The core principles of this 'Libertarian' theory of the press are regarded as powerful normative obligations for news media in democratic politics. Freedom from government interference, particularly through financial independence of media outlets, a commitment to the provision of objective, fair, and full information to citizens, and a 'watchdog' role in holding government (and other powerful interests) to account are all valued functions that news media are expected to perform.

The 'Social Responsibility' theory of the role of news media has its roots in the Libertarian theory, and so is not mutually exclusive, but attaches new ideas and different

legitimating principles (Peterson, 1956). Whereas the Libertarian model concerns the purely mechanistic principles that ensure that democratic discourse can flourish and citizens can participate fully in public life, the Social Responsibility model attaches moral duties and responsibilities to communication by news media. By superimposing this ethical dimension onto the traditional concepts of freedom of expression and governmental scrutiny, the Social Responsibility model must rely on a less programmatic set of criteria that dictate how best to articulate and fulfil the public interest, and prescribes a more proactive approach to the selection and provision of output. The distinction reflects Berlin's (1969) dichotomy of 'positive' and 'negative' liberty, with the Social Responsibility approach favouring positive freedoms for the citizen: 'It is not enough', says Peterson, 'to tell a man that he is free to achieve his goals; one must provide him with the appropriate means of achieving these goals" (1956: 94). However, this summary encapsulates the controversy inherent in the theory: its vulnerability to accusations of paternalism – even elitism – where the interests of citizens are formulated from above, and media output is adjusted accordingly. Expressed in the archetypal Reithian founding principles of the BBC, it is held that the role of broadcast media in society is to 'inform' and 'educate', as well as to entertain (Crisell, 2002; Curran and Seaton, 2003). The sentiment is that mass media can – and should – play a positive role in society, with journalism occupying a central role in the process.

This ideological characteristic is augmented by the other central tenet of Social Responsibility theory: the insulation of media output (and, by extension, the public) from purely market-oriented principles. Certain aspects of media output, it is argued, and news provision in particular, are too important to be left to the market for adequate provision, as popular demand alone is not the optimal measure of the utility of content for citizens. A strict interpretation of this position was put forward by the UK's 1962 *Pilkington Report on Broadcasting*:

> "To give the public what it wants" is a misleading phrase: misleading because as commonly used it has the appearance of an appeal to democratic principle but the appearance is deceptive. It is in fact patronising and arrogant, in that it claims to know what the public is, but defines it as no more than the mass audience; and in that it claims to know what it wants, but limits its choice to the average of experience. (Quoted in Coase, 1966: 442)

In order to remedy these perceived shortcomings of commercially-determined output, some regulation of media output must be applied, and professional and ethical principles must shape content. Ultimately, adherence to one or other of the Libertarian or Social Responsibility theories requires consideration of the concept of the public interest. Market

principles provide an undeniably accurate measure of popularity, while the free marketplace of ideas and the self-righting principle theoretically provide an environment in which public communication can occur without arbitrary restrictions. Conversely, the potentially paternalistic imposition of principles to guide how mass media should behave and how news should operate compels media outlets to cater for sections of the public and provide content which otherwise would not be served by a completely free market-oriented environment.

In the context of television, this distinction lies behind the question of ownership, regulation, and the economic basis of media outlets and systems. The Libertarian or free-market approach to media advocates private and pluralistic ownership of media outlets and news providers, guaranteeing freedom from interference from government, and independence to scrutinise powerful interests without fear of political reprisal. With funding obtained primarily from advertising, a main purpose of broadcasting companies is to entice and retain audiences, thus providing potential advertisers with a quantifiable market to which products can be targeted. Programming strategies accordingly reflect the need to maximise audiences to deliver optimal revenue. Competition dictates that public preference is the ultimate arbiter and, where competition is intense, news can be exposed to the same criteria for inclusion in schedules as all other programming, and news content within bulletins can be subjected to the very same principles. The principles of Public Service Broadcasting (PSB), on the other hand, explicitly eschew the commercial broadcasting ethos:

> ...public broadcasting is above all else a structure of ambition, a belief that the sheer presence of broadcasting within all our lives can and must be used to nurture society, to proffer the opportunity for society and its inhabitants to be better served than by systems which primarily seek consumers for advertisers (Tracey, 1998: 18)

Structures of regulation that seek to 'nurture society', and forms of public – and in some cases government – funding (Swanson and Mancini, 1996; Hallin and Mancini, 2004) govern public broadcasting, with significant consequences for news content, as will be explored below.

A further normative dimension of news within civil society that concerns content is the concept of the public sphere. First, and most comprehensively, described by Habermas (1992 [1962]), the public sphere is an arena for rational-critical debate in which citizens can discuss and debate public affairs. It is ultimately an ideal, rather than a quantifiable reality (Davis, 2010), but the circumstances for free and open debate among citizens, and

the bulwark it creates between a free citizenry and the state, are of undeniable value to civil society. The public sphere both consists of, yet permeates and surrounds, the totality of citizens who participate in it, in a cyclical relationship whereby exposure to the public sphere alters the knowledge and perceptions of the individual, thus reconstituting the public sphere in which they are situated, and so on. This is a self-evidently abstract concept, since all individuals are not in continual interaction within society. The role of the media, then, and the information that they bring to the attention of citizens, is of vital importance in facilitating effective engagement in the public sphere (Dahlgren, 1995; Harrison, 2000; McQuail, 2005). An active and open public sphere is dependent on certain normative attributes concerning news media, particularly freedom of speech and expression, universality and equality of access, and political independence and pluralism of media that are accessible to all citizens, and which provide adequate information to foster the rational-critical debate on which the concept (and civil society) stands (Tracey, 1998; Lilleker, 2006: 175).

However, the application of normative ideals to assessment of the impact of media on democracy poses difficulties due to the lack of a coherent democratic standard to which media analysis should adhere. The 'watchdog' function, and the 'social contract' function of providing information to citizens, implies that journalism is under "some form of – at least moral – obligation to democracy" (Strömbäck, 2005: 333). However, a democratic standard to which journalists should conform has not been adequately formulated (cf. Strömbäck, 2005). As a result, there is no set standard of the extent to which journalism is obligated to perform its normative role. Zaller's (2003) 'Burglar Alarm standard', in which the news media's role is to flag events of particular interest to 'monitorial' citizens (Schudson, 1998), even if through sensational means, received a flurry of criticism (Bennett, 2003; Patterson, 2003), but it highlights the pitfalls in applying rigid normative standards to the news media's performance. This is particularly true when the practical issues surrounding newsmaking are considered.

Newsmaking in Practice

'News', the product of journalism, is a highly stylised and constructed form of communication. Regardless of its role in the wider public arena, news is the product of a multitude of contextual conventions and pressures, personal and institutional, and the measurement of its content must take these into account. News as a genre is determined by

a large number of criteria concerning content, and journalists interpret and execute these criteria whilst subject to professional, organisational, sociological and personal constraints. News organisations themselves are influenced by economic and political restraints, and the wider social environment in which they operate. The content of news, therefore, is dependent on the interplay between each of these pressures. This section looks at the factors that account for how observable news content is arrived at in order to clarify how a normative assessment of changing news content can test whether there has been an observable decline or convergence in political communication.

The purpose of journalism is to provide a representation of the world to the (interested) public. According to McNair, journalism is "any *authored* text, in written, audio or visual form, which *claims* to be (i.e. is presented to its audience as) a *truthful* statement about, or record of, some *hitherto unknown* (new) feature of the *actual, social* world" (1998: 4; emphasis in original). On top of this, though, news is a highly selective series of statements about the world, in which a practically infinite series of events are filtered and condensed into a finite and spatially-limited package – a newspaper, magazine or bulletin. For journalists and news organisations to construct news out of this chaotic information flow, a series of operational and structural factors influence which phenomena are selected for reporting (Venebles, 1993). A series of observational studies have determined which news values are applied to events and used to inform the creation of news stories (Galtung and Ruge, 1973; Schlesinger, 1987; Bell, 1991; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001; Gans, 2004). These values provide a dependable guide by which organisations can plan logistics and how to allocate resources to cover certain topics, and journalists can judge which stories to pursue, and which will be printed or transmitted. News values tend to be highly stable, in part because of the nature and goals of news organisations: regular deadlines[1] and tight schedules demand regularity in the creation of news, and do not encourage dramatic changes in output. Thus, news values dictate the subject matter of news; certain types of events and stories have a higher probability of fulfilling the selection criteria of news, and gaining inclusion. This can inculcate certain forms of bias (discussed below), or can result in the dominance of certain types of subject over others in news agendas (McCombs and Shaw, 1972).

While news values differ across different news organizations, there are a number of internal and external pressures acting on organisations, and the professional codes defining

[1] Although this is becoming less true with the advent of the rolling news cycle

journalistic behaviour. The system-level economic, social and political constraints on newsmaking will be discussed specifically and in depth in Section 1.2.3 below. It is important to register now, though, that the basis of funding, orientation towards profit-making through news provision, proprietorial control, media regulation and levels of governmental interference in newsmaking, are among the variables that impact upon the way journalism is conducted (Swanson and Mancini, 1996; Hallin and Mancini, 2004). As well as these factors, the personal and professional circumstances of journalists play a significant part in the composition of news. At a personal level, journalists are subjected to many workplace-related pressures: strict deadlines and adherence to institutional customs limit journalistic endeavour, strengthening the influence of news values. Job security, workforce scarcity and the effects of multi-skilling in newsrooms can also tangibly affect the composition of news (Davies, 2008; Lewis, Williams and Franklin, 2008). The single most significant influence on the conduct of journalists in Anglo-Saxon media systems, however, is the commitment to objectivity, or the guarantee of 'truth' in reporting through the dedication to basing journalism on the presentation of independently-verifiable objective 'facts'. The belief in objectivity is seen as a crucial mechanism by which the subjective views of journalists are eliminated from the process of reporting, and the inherent 'truth' of journalism is insulated from manipulation or interpretation. It is, in Schudson's words:

> ...the belief that one can and should separate facts from values. Facts, in this view, are assertions about the world open to independent validation. They stand beyond the distorting influences of any individual's personal preferences. Values, in this view, are an individual's conscious or unconscious preferences for what the world should be; they are seen as ultimately subjective and so without legitimate claim on other people. The belief in objectivity is a faith in "facts," a distrust of "values", and a commitment to their segregation (1978: 6)

Objectivity represents something of an unattainable ideal, but one which is worthy of striving for (Schudson, 1995; Harrison, 2000). It can also be used as a defensive measure to insulate journalists from criticism, rather than as a motivating creed (Tuchman, 1972). Regardless, it represents a powerful factor in the construction of news.

A related, but not identical, professional code for journalists is that of impartiality, a defining feature of most instances of broadcast journalism. Impartiality is adopted due to the 'specific technical and formal characteristics of broadcast journalism' that appear to make it more 'believable' as a source of information (McNair, 2003a: 36), and because the scarcity of time and space in broadcast bulletins often negates the ability of journalists to fully and rigorously apply the principles of objectivity *within* stories (Harrison, 2000). The

purpose of impartiality, as with objectivity, is to minimise the existence of – or grounds for accusations of – bias in news reporting (McQuail, 2005). However, it differs from objectivity in its conceptualisation of 'truth': whereas objectivity assumes that there is a single empirical truth about which it is possible to be objective, impartiality takes a relativist view, in which perspectives may be interchangeable (Lewis, Inthorn and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2005; Starkey, 2007). This is reflected in the means by which impartiality is achieved in practice. Impartiality dictates the choice and use of sources in order to reflect different points of view; where facts or accounts are contested, varying viewpoints must be aired, without undue prominence given to one source (McQuail, 2005: 357). Thus, the composition of broadcast news is affected by the imposition of impartiality as a guarantor of balance in reporting. This is particularly the case with political and election reporting, due to the centrality of controversy and contestation to the political process, as Chapter 2 (below) shows. Objectivity, likewise, impacts upon the construction and presentation of broadcast news:

> It is most commonly applied via devices such as the routine use of facts and figures; two spokespersons; live pictures to show that something is happening; use of previous storylines to set a precedent or storyline to follow, and so on (Harrison, 2000: 141).

The presence of objectivity and impartiality doesn't, however, insulate journalism from accusations of bias. The principle of objectivity, already alluded to above as an 'unattainable ideal', is itself problematic. Harrison (2000: 144) sees three reasons for the 'impossibility of objectivity': first, the 'unavoidable process' of the selection of news requires a subjective judgement by journalists; second, editing and selection of material in the process of making news reports requires implicit assumptions about events; third, news is produced in the context of powerful external and internal pressures, with priority given to powerful sources. The tendency towards the use of powerful sources is also demonstrated empirically by Gans (2004). The fact-checking element central to objectivity can also favour powerful interests, with efficient sources from whom detailed facts and figures can be more easily obtained (Harrison, 2000; Philo and Berry, 2004). Thus, news has been seen, in the critical tradition, to perpetuate the status quo, and dominant ideological or financial interests in society, whether through consistent deviant representation of social or ideological groups (Glasgow University Media Group, 1976), or through implicit support for the incumbent economic or political establishment (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). Schudson sees news as a 'cultural product', a 'strategic ballet' between sources and journalists (1995: 3); McNair claims that it is a construction,

dependent on the 'technological, economic, political and cultural histories' of the particular contexts in which they are made (1998: 12). The connivance of journalists themselves in generating bias is less certain, however. Rather, institutional pressures present journalists with "limited leeway in selection decisions, which is further reduced by their allegiance to professionally shared values" (Gans, 2004: 79), while the complexity of news organisations and the spectrum of political views held by their workers renders coordinated bias unrealistic (Price, 2010).

A final factor affecting broadcast news content is the role of changing technology on the composition of news bulletins, and the methods used to create them. The introduction of Electronic Newsgathering (ENG) equipment to newsrooms and reporting teams greatly enhanced the mobility of reporters, particularly in challenging environments. Digital cameras and recording media continued this trend[2], while the proliferation of digital cameras on personal devices such as mobile phones heralded an entirely new stream of raw material for journalists in user-generated content. At the same time, the progression from film, via tape, to computerised digital editing equipment presents editors with greater power to fashion and manipulate raw footage into more complex and visually-compelling reports, while reporters on the ground have the ability to edit fresh footage on the spot, making the gathering and reporting of news a more organic process (MacGregor, 1997; Boyd et al., 2004) Empirical evidence of the impact of news technology on news content is relatively scarce, but the reliance of broadcast news on audio or visual footage, and the limited time slot of bulletins means that technologically-driven changes to newsgathering and editing have tangible effects on the physical and informational content of news (Winston, 2001).

Normative Theories of the News Media as a Justification for Research

This section has laid out the justification for an analysis of changing television news content like that which forms the basis of the empirical contribution of this thesis. On purely descriptive terms, the integral role that journalism plays in modern public life should render concrete changes to content significant. However, the description of parameters by which news output can be judged as changing *from* and *to* something requires engagement with normative theories of the role of news in civil society. This is

[2] The historical development of recording equipment and media is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 6.

especially significant given the secondary purpose of this thesis – of investigating the validity of theories that lament a collapse in the 'beneficial' functions of the news media in the democratic process, and that pressures on news institutions will result in convergence of media systems and output, with similar negative effects. By holding the assumption that news should be oriented towards the defence of individuals from powerful interests, the unfettered discussion of public concerns, a constructive role in political learning, or the maintenance of an open and free public sphere, tacit acceptance is given to the proposition that news output should be measured in terms of how well it reflects these aims. The 'crisis' and 'convergence' hypotheses, it is shown in Section 1.2.4 below, both assert that observed and predicted changing political-media relations are harmful to democracy. In order to explore whether this is the case, the measurement of news content should be conducted in a way that can verify these claims.

The composition of news content is the end product of a series of processes, each affected by dynamic professional and institutional conventions and the exertion of external pressures. The application of news values to daily events, and the judgements that inform the final edition of the news bulletin, all take place in a certain temporal and physical context. The end product – content – is all the more important since, to the vast majority of the public, these processes and judgements are entirely opaque (Hall, 1973; Hartley, 1982), and on the part of journalists there is often "no adequate point of contact with the audience" (Schlesinger, 1987). This 'structural lacuna' elevates the importance of news content in the democratic process, where the informational content of news is the point of contact between the citizen, events, and the unknown journalistic processes that connect the two. It is this interposition of the news media between citizens and politics that makes news content so significant. The particular circumstances of election news raise the stakes somewhat, since the normative theories that inform the measurement of news content have a definite goal in sight: the servicing of the democratic principle through the rational judgements of citizens in an environment where access to political information is vital. Before setting out the specific criteria by which news content will be judged, the following section describes theories of change in political communication, and the 'crisis' and 'convergence' hypotheses, setting out the specific questions that will be directed at news content.

1.2.3 Political Communication: A Framework for Research

This thesis is situated within the field of political communication. As such, it is concerned with what McNair (2003b: 4) terms "purposeful communication about politics", involving some aspect of the relationship between three groups: formal political and state actors, media actors, and citizens and non-state actors (Lilleker, 2006). Acknowledgement of the parity of importance of these three groups in the political communication process represents a theoretical development from Lasswell's (1948) top-down and unidirectional model of communication, and an appreciation that the effect and form of political communication goes beyond the transmission and reception of messages from political advocates. Feedback is an important facet of the process, and one which ensures that each group plays a vital role in political communication (Norris, 2000; Lilleker, 2006; Negrine, 2008). Political communication as an active process therefore consists of three directional modes of communication between the three sets of actors (McNair, 2003b: 4):

1. All forms of communication undertaken by politicians and other political actors for the purpose of achieving special objectives;
2. Communication addressed *to* these actors by non-politicians such as voters and newspaper columnists;
3. Communication *about* these actors and their activities, as contained in news reports, editorials and other forms of media discussion about politics

This represents the multitude of actors and actions that, despite continual developments in the composition of each group and the environment within which they operate, combine to create a relatively stable field of communication that is observable and measureable.

The Systemic Approach to Political Communication Research

The continual renegotiation of the processes of political communication prompted Blumler and Gurevitch (1995; see also Gurevitch and Blumler, 1977) to propose the 'systemic' approach to political communication analysis in order to assess how changes in one aspect of political communication must have a knock-on effect on all other aspects, given the interconnectedness of the system. It remains a valid concept for exploring political communication (Stanyer, 2007), and is of particular relevance for this thesis, for two reasons: firstly, change in one aspect of the political communication system (in this case, the form of news reports containing political information) can be analysed in terms of

changes in the wider systemic context; and secondly, it provides a framework by which changes in the overall system can be evaluated.

Following Blumler and Gurevitch's terminology, a political communication system consists of four elements: political institutions in their communications aspects; media institutions in their political aspects; audience orientations to political communication; and the communication-relevant aspects of political culture (Gurevitch and Blumler, 1977: 273-274). These elements and their interrelationships "are not frozen in time but continually evolve" and "exist in a complex condition of volatile and precarious equilibrium" (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995: 203). Thus the system is at all times susceptible to – yet able to accommodate – change, through an implicit self-righting principle that will continue as long as the components of the system remain separate and interdependent. Within this ideal-typical system, there are two axes of interaction through which the communication pathways outlined in McNair's three-part political communication model (above) are achieved. Political and media institutions are engaged, within the systemic model, in 'horizontal' interaction in which political messages are negotiated and prepared. Meanwhile, on a 'vertical' axis, they are "separately and jointly engaged in disseminating and processing information to and from the mass citizenry" (Gurevitch and Blumler, 1977: 274). The systemic model also accounts for changes in political communication, the dynamics of which are technological, sociological, and political (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995: 206), and reside in 'exogenous' and 'internal' categories. These can be broadly described as: those motors of change that occur independently of the actors operating within the system in their communication-related activities; and those that arise as the result of the relationships between the groups of actors within the system.

An assessment of the effects and nature of the 'exogenous' and 'internal' forces of change will be discussed below, as they relate more closely to the normative aspects of Blumler and Gurevitch's work, and to the conceptualisation of comparative models of political communication. The systemic model has been outlined in particular depth here because it represents a uniquely useful theoretical framework to inform a longitudinal analysis of changing news content. In the first place, it defines news content as a product of, and source of information within, a wider social and institutional context, while also accounting for the notion that the context, like the interrelating components that comprise it, must change over time. The exploration in Section 1.2.2 (above) of the various pressures and contributory factors influencing news production outlines the idea that news is not

produced in a vacuum, but in a context in which the particular format of the published article or broadcast story is influenced by the orientation of 'media institutions in their political aspects' to the other three elements of the system (audience/citizens, political institutions and actors, and the communication-relevant aspects of political culture). The composition of news content over time can therefore be seen to be dependent on the changing context in which it is made, beyond the narrow horizons of the newsroom. The second conceptual strength of the systemic model in relation to this study is its in-built acceptance that instability affecting the system can come from outside as well as within. The corpus of theories of transnational change in political communication with which this analysis will be concerned below are invariably presented as a series or list of explanations for converging or changing media systems, and qualitative changes in political communication. The systemic model, with its permeable boundary susceptible to 'exogenous' sources of instability, transposes the influence of change onto all aspects of the system. Thus, to illustrate with one example, investigation of the effect of one or more motors of change (for instance, technological advancements) on a single aspect of political communication (news content), with related effects on the entire system (shortening soundbites). By considering one aspect of political communication as part of a larger interrelated whole, it is possible to assess the 'exogenous' trends that form the backbone of the 'convergence' hypothesis.

During election campaigns, political communication is of heightened importance. On top of the simple fact that in terms of volume more political communication is undertaken during campaigns, normative considerations of the role of the news media in politics place greater emphasis on the role of news in democracy:

> The importance of... election news coverage for the way democracy works originates from the simple fact that people rely on the news media for information that might help them decide how to vote, and that the news media thus can exert considerable power with regards to which issues, attributes and frames people consider important and salient. Thus, if we believe that it is important from a democratic point of view that people are at best reasonably well-informed with regards to politics on Election Day, then it is imperative that the election news coverage provides people with the information they need to make enlightened judgements and decisions (Strömbäck and Kaid, 2008: 13)

A further interlinking of political communication research and election campaigns is due to the unique practical opportunities afforded by elections beyond the normative dimension of 'good' democracy. Blumler and McQuail (2001) define the reasons for this interconnectedness, which also stand as partial justifications for the present project. Most important is the fact that election campaigns mark periods of considerable innovation in

the strategies and organisation of political communication, among political and media actors. As the need to communicate with confirmed supporters and potential voters becomes paramount, political actors increase the volume of their messages, and seek to maximise the impact and penetration of their communicative output by adapting to circumstances (Norris et al, 1999). A further methodological benefit of analysing elections is that they act as convenient benchmarks for trends (Blumler and McQuail, 2001). Set either a uniform length of time apart, or, where a set period between elections is not constitutionally specified, a significant period apart, elections provide useful snapshots of political communication, with the particular contexts of elections allowing for comparative analysis of certain variables across elections and over time. The analysis of political communication during election campaigns also provides empirical data that can feed back into normative debates on citizenship, democracy, and the role of the media.

'Mediated Politics' and Professionalised Political Communication

A major concern of political communication scholarship, whether at the level of channels and techniques of communication or at the systemic level, is the relative position of political and media actors. A consistent assertion in the literature on Western political communication over the past three decades is the growth of media influence and the movement of the news media to centre stage in politics. This phenomenon of 'mediated politics' (Bennett and Entman, 2001) denotes a situation where the mass media constitute the main channel for political information (Strömbäck and Kaid, 2008), where media output is the primary vehicle of communication between government and the public (Strömbäck, 2008), and where "governance, along with a host of related processes such as opinion formation could not occur... without various uses of media" (Bennett and Entman, 2001: 1). In such a situation, it is argued that the increased importance of the mass media (in particular the news media) in the processes of communication between political advocates and the public greatly alters the methods, form and scope of political communication during both 'normal' politics, and during the critical junctures of election campaigns. The supposed 'negative' effects of his shift are varied, and will be discussed below under the assessment of the 'crisis' hypothesis. Although the 'mediation' in a situation of mediated politics is performed by all sections of the mass media in a given system, television, particularly television news, is perceived as a particular catalyst for a more media-centred politics (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999; Gunther and Mughan, 2000).

Conceptually, ‘mediated politics’ is somewhat static, denoting an either/or scenario in which *either* traditional modes of political engagement (face-to-face canvassing, party or social group organising, and directly-experienced unmediated engagement) comprise the majority of the communication processes in the political sphere, *or* these methods have been supplanted by the mass media. Yet historical-empirical analyses of political communication indicate that the move to a situation of mediated politics results from a progressive series of social and political developments (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999; Norris et al, 1999; Bennett and Entman, 2001). Thus, the concepts of ‘mediatisation’ (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999; Strömbäck, 2008; Strömbäck and Kaid, 2008) and ‘media logic’ (Altheide and Snow, 1979; Mazzoleni, 1987) better encompass the interactions and interdependencies in political communication systems that both direct and reflect change, and provide a background before which the changing influence and composition of television election news content can be assessed. A ‘mediated’ political communication system is one in which the mass media have assumed such a prominent role that they are a necessity in the political process, and so politics is no longer ‘autonomous’ (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999: 250). Beyond a ‘mediating’ role, the mass media in fact dictate the character and format of political communication and campaigning. This occurs primarily through the imposition of ‘media logic’ on the political communication system, whereby, as constructors of the public sphere of information and opinion, and transmitters of political messages, the news media are independently able to apply their own values and criteria on the form and content of the information that reaches the electorate. Just as crucially, this ‘media logic’ supplants the traditional ‘political logic’ (Meyer, 2002) governing the activities of political advocates, resulting in a symbiotic relationship in which politicians shape their behaviour to suit the media (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999, Kepplinger, 2002). The imposition of media logic can also have a tangible effect on news content (Hallin, 1992).

The process of mediatisation, and the colonisation of the processes of the political communication system by media logic, is proposed by Strömbäck (2008; see also Strömbäck and Kaid, 2008) to consist of a four-stage process, dependent on four variables: the extent of the mass media’s dominance as a source of political information; the independence of the media to control their own content and apply their own news values; and the dominance of media over political logic in both media content and the actions of political actors (Strömbäck, 2008: 235). The first phase of mediatisation corresponds to the existence of ‘mediated politics’, i.e. where the media are the foremost channel of political communication. The second phase represents a growing (but never complete, due to the

interconnectedness of the system) independence of media institutions over content, and sees the media:

> ...no longer unconditionally mediate the messages preferred by their different sources. They now make their own judgement regarding what [are] thought to be the appropriate messages from the perspective of their own medium, its format, norms and values, and its audiences (ibid: 237).

The media, at this stage, hold the upper hand in the "negotiation of newsworthiness" (Cook, 2005), and have greater scope to influence the content of political information as it reaches the public. The third phase is reached when political actors adapt to the prominent media logic, and seek to influence the news by accommodating their communicative output to media conventions, schedules, and news values. Finally, the fourth phase in the progression, roughly corresponding to Blumler and Kavanagh's (1999) 'Third Age' of political communication, sees not just an adaptation to the media logic by political actors, but an 'internalisation' of news values, so that the limits and scope of political advocacy is entirely oriented towards the use of media, and the dominant news values, to communicate with the electorate (Strömbäck and Kaid, 2008: 4). Mediatisation is, on this reading, not a unidirectional process, and it is possible for politicians in an inherently dynamic political communication system to regain power relative to the media. However, a comparative study of 22 countries suggests that the majority can be situated in the third phase (Kaid and Strömbäck, 2008: 421).

The effects on the institutional and organisational processes of political communication among political advocates has been profound, particularly with regards to election campaigning. Campaigning has undergone a transformation in recent decades across western polities (Negrine, 2008), the transnational nature of which is a key component of the convergence hypothesis (Negrine and Papathanassopoulos, 1996; Scammell, 1997). Foremost in the purported factors governing change in campaigning is the centrality of the media as the main tool through which campaigns are conducted, and in particular the role of television (Butler and Ranney, 1992; Kavanagh, 1995; Farrell, 1996). The evidence of media logic infusing the political process is strongest during election campaigns, as attempts by political parties and candidates to adapt to opportunities afforded by the news media to reach and influence voters shape the conduct and form of campaigning (Norris et al, 1999; Plasser and Plasser, 2002). Like political communication, an evolution in the practices of campaigning is seen to follow a stable pathway. Norris et al propose that there have been three ages of political campaigning: a 'pre-modern', pre-television age of press dominance, loose networks of local grassroots campaigners, and

short, *ad hoc* campaigns; a 'modern' age defined by televised politics and campaigns, with longer, more professional, centralised and coordinated campaigns; and a contemporary 'post-modern' campaign, governed by an independent media following the dominant media logic, fragmentation of media outlets and audiences, and a struggle for control over the messages reaching the electorate (1999: 22-23). The key aspects of this progression are the insinuation of the news media into the predominant position of influence over campaign conduct, and greater professionalization of campaigning.

Professionalisation (though the use of the term itself is disputed – see Negrine and Lilleker, 2002) is taken to mean the greater rationalisation and organisation of the design and management of election campaigns by political advocates. Perhaps best captured by Swanson and Mancini's description of the 'scientificisation' of politics (1996: 14-15), it denotes a process of greater control and co-ordination of the macro- and micro-level tactics, messages and techniques of campaigning, coupled with the co-option of non-political expertise from fields as diverse as marketing, advertising, public relations, and – tellingly – the media. The purpose itself of campaigning alters, from the spread of messages to potential supporters to a preoccupation with victory at all costs, reflecting the de-ideologisation of politics, and the rise of the "catch-all" party (Kirchheimer, 1966)[3]. The relationship between parties and the electorate is changed as well, with 'data-driven' campaigning relying on opinion measurement through polling and market research techniques, with messages and the presentation of candidates constructed accordingly (Scammell, 1997; Franklin, 2004).

The professionalisation of political communication and of campaigning has, however, been ascribed a more tangible effect on news output, one that has implications not just for analyses of political news coverage, but also for the operation of political journalism in modern democracy. Returning to Blumler and Gurevitch's systemic model, it is stated that "...political and media organisations... are involved in the course of message preparation in much 'horizontal' interaction with each other, while, on a 'vertical' axis, they are separately and jointly engaged in disseminating and processing information and ideas to and from the mass citizenry" (Gurevitch and Blumler, 1977: 274). The 'horizontal' interaction denotes, in the abstract, the interactive and competitive process of message preparation, where a competitive and – increasingly, as will be seen – conflictual

[3] The social and electoral root causes of the changing nature and outlook of political parties are discussed below in the investigation of the background of transnational changes in political and media systems.

negotiation takes place between political and media actors over the composition of news output. "In modern political communication systems mediated political messages are a subtly composite product, reflecting the contributions and interactions of two different types of communicators: advocates and journalists" (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995: 103). This "inter-institutional level" conflict is related both to changes in political news output, and to central themes in modern political communication relevant to the overarching questions addressed in this thesis, namely: developments contributing to a supposed 'crisis' in political communication, and the influence of transnational trends – in this case of professional campaigning expertise – on national news provision.

As the discussion of professionalisation and 'scientificisation' above, and the discussion of 'mediation' in the previous section, indicate, there is an increasing tendency among political advocates to use mass media to communicate their messages to an electorate that is less ideologically tied to traditional patterns of voting behaviour and affective ties to particular parties (see Section 1.2.4 below for a summary of this secularisation' of modern politics). To briefly summarise, it is proposed that, as ideological differences between candidates have eroded in recent decades, and as class-based voting has to an extent been replaced by more fragmentary and ephemeral political preferences, political advocates are no longer able to rely on large, stable supports, and are driven – through a combination of existential justification and the function of representing popular will – to appeal to shifting groupings among the electorate, as well as a dwindling core support (Norris et al., 1999; Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Politics in general, and campaigning in particular, thus becomes an exercise in targeted communication, conducted increasingly – due to a decline in traditional grassroots campaigning activities – through the mass media.

As political advocates compete for an increasing cohort of weakly-aligned or 'undecided' voters, the chief aim of their political communication and campaigning is that of persuasion, rather than the mobilisation of traditional supporters (Norris et al., 1999). Harding, in a statement that merits inclusion at length, succinctly – if irreverently – outlines the logic behind persuasive (professionalised) campaigning:

> ...any constituency – a market, an electorate, a congregation, an audience – can be sliced into five groups: strong supporters, soft supporters, undecideds, soft opposition, and strong opposition. A candidate (or a product) might as well forget about the strong opposition, as they'll never be persuaded. They hate you and the horse you rode in on. Whatever you do, it won't be good enough. Likewise, your campaign should not spend too much time worrying about the strong supports. They need to be paid a little attention, of course, enough to ensure that they do not feel as though they are being

> taken for granted... The real action, therefore, lies with the remaining three groups – the soft opposition, the soft supporters, and the undecideds. The soft opposition is willing to hear your case and may even be convinced. Failing that, they might at least be induced to stay away from the polls. Then there are the soft supporters, who need to be ushered into the strong-supporters camp. And finally, there are the undecideds, the people who really are up for grabs. They are the small sliver of the electorate – or marketplace – who, in a world of increasingly tight races, can hold the key to winning (2008: 77)

There are two important points to be taken from this description. The first is that campaign strategy can be expressed in an entirely decontextualised fashion: policy, circumstances, or the nuances of the target population are entirely disregarded – the approach is one where persuasion is both the means and the end, a belief that there is a 'correct way' to campaign successfully, provided messages can be used to achieve the persuader's aim of maximising support. This is the logic of 'victory at all costs', or the idea that there is a separate set of 'campaigning rules' that can be applied to any campaign (Guzzetta et al., 1981; Scammell, 1997). The second point is equally important: the language of strategic persuasion is not specific to political campaigning, but derived from marketing, advertising, or any other rhetorical means of persuasive communication. Thus, the theory of persuasive campaigning is posited not solely by political advocates or party workers, but by professionals and experts from the fields of public opinion research, market research, advertising, former journalists and so on. 'Professionalisation' of political campaigning therefore has two dimensions: the application of a scientific theory and logic of persuasion, and the injection into the organisation of political communication of experts in the aforementioned fields (Plasser and Plasser, 2002).

The 'scientificisation' of political campaigning encapsulates this shift nicely. Swanson and Mancini (1996) draw on Habermas, citing the "ever more frequent use of experts, technicians, and scientists in the political field, leading to control by specialists of the production, possession, and comprehension of information thought necessary to sound decision making" as the philosophy of modern campaigning (1996: 14). Injected into the practice of modern (and post-modern – Norris et al., 1999; Plasser and Plasser, 2002) political campaigning by political parties is an array of specialist consultants in opinion-polling, marketing and advertising, providing technical expertise and advice to politicians, with the sole aim of electoral success (Gould, 1998; Negrine et al., 2007; Negrine, 2008). This is tempered to some extent by national political and cultural contextual factors (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995), but as essentially a scientific, technical, and above all instrumental approach to campaigning: "The goal of the scientificisation process is simply the electoral victory, not finding useful public policy alternatives. This goal seems to result

inescapably from the weakening of party organisation and the changes we have seen in political systems" (Swanson and Mancini, 1996: 15).

The 'mediation' or 'mediatisation' of politics has already been discussed, but the professionalisation of political communication shows the means and justification by which the use of the news media as the primary forum for message-dissemination by political advocates has arisen. As partisan attachment becomes more unpredictable and voter preferences orientate more towards clusters of issues rather than monolithic ideological positions (see Section 1.2.4 below), then messages (as parties) must become 'catch-all' – broad and consistent statements of position, disseminated to the widest possible audience, in order to maximise the exposure of voters potentially open to persuasion to the message[4]. Television, particularly prior to the multi-channel explosion and fragmentation of recent years, provides political advocates with an ideal opportunity to attempt to shape the information and messages that reach the electorate (Kavanagh, 1995; Scammell, 1995; Rosenbaum, 1997; Franklin, 2004). Here is the 'horizontal' interaction posited by Blumler and Gurevitch, and the prime source of tension between political and media actors, with implications for the composition of news output, and the quality of political views.

At the root of the tensions are the conflicting organisational aims of political parties and candidates on one hand, and journalistic institutions on the other. Whereas political advocates seek to use the news media to propagate messages to the electorate, journalists seek to maintain their professional autonomy as producers of news, and the traditional normative functions of scrutinising the actions and behaviour of political actors (Semetko et al., 1991). Where this situation arises – concerted attempts to manipulate mediated messages by politicians in the face of robust defensive measures on the part of journalists – the result is a fundamentally adversarial relationship that has been linked to a more aggressive and disdaining coverage of politics by journalists, with potentially detrimental effects on citizen engagement (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995: 210).

In the systemic model, message production is a process of negotiation. Journalists have a complex interrelationship with politicians – a situation of mutual dependency exists whereby each profits from the source material and dissemination, respectively, which the other offers – at both the institutional and, in some cases, personal levels. The interposition

[4] The rise of new communication technologies, most notably the internet, provide further opportunities for targeted 'narrow-casting' to particular demographics (Norris et al., 1999; Plasser, 2002), but this focus will continue to focus solely on television, due to constraint of time and space.

of professionalised campaigning, and the strategic use of the media through news management and manipulative techniques into this symbiotic relationship prompts a "journalistic fightback" with significant implications for news output. News management takes a number of forms and, like the other aspects of the professional campaign, is purely instrumental on the part of political advocates, and dependent on scientific or 'expert' knowledge of the operation of political journalism (Franklin, 1998, 2004; Stanyer, 2007; Negrine, 2008). The proliferation of 'spin doctors' and media consultants in campaigning across the world is testament to the desire to obtain measurably beneficial coverage in news output (or negative coverage of opponents) (Plasser and Plasser, 2002; Harding, 2008). An elementary component of news management is the tendency to condense complex political messages to a small number of repetitive slogans or speech fragments which allow for little or no interpretation, and which are reiterated to the extent that their inclusion in coverage is inevitable (Kavanagh, 1995; Scammell, 1995; Franklin, 2004). Describing this phenomenon in the context of studio interviews, Kavanagh points out the obstructive techniques employed by politicians: "...leaders arrive in the studio, armed with buzz words , statistics and sound bites which they deliver and repeat almost regardless of the question. Faced with an awkward question they usually give an answer which is elusive or irrelevant" (1995: 202). Other techniques of manipulating news media can be tentatively placed in two categories: those that seek to obtain control over the message through alleviating the professional pressures facing journalists; and those which seek to prompt or deter certain actions by exerting new pressures on journalists – an elaborate carrot-and-stick approach. In the first category are activities such as: timing political events, press conferences or statements to accommodate fixed deadlines in journalistic schedules; charging press officers and spin doctors to point out possible errors, misconceptions and ambiguity (in order to "coax the reporter to cover the speech as their politician wants") (Kavanagh, 1995: 203), and – in some extreme cases – offering pre-produced footage to journalists (Harrison, 1992). The latter category is characterised by the exertion of pressure, occasionally threatening, on journalists to follow a certain line (Kavanagh, 1995); "institutionalised complaining" (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995: 174), and the creation of tightly-managed campaigning agendas to determine which issue-themes are covered on a given day (e.g. Gould, 1998).

This poses a fundamental dilemma to journalist. On one hand, they are obliged (to varying degrees depending on institutional, normative and regulatory contextual factors) to provide coverage of political events, especially during campaign periods where the importance of the availability of political information is amplified. On the other hand,

regardless of injuries to professional pride caused by overt and hidden manipulation of media content, are also duty-bound through professional values to scrutinise potential abuses of power by politicians, and to provide the public with both information and details of potential or actual media manipulation. In a finite news space (particularly salient in the case of television), journalists are faced with the problem of fulfilling both of these roles simultaneously.

The rise of 'adversarial' and 'interpretive' journalism (discussed in Section 1.2.4 below) has been associated with a reaction by journalists to concerted message management techniques by political parties and candidates – the "journalistic fightback" which is key to Blumler and Gurevitch's 'crisis of public communication' thesis – and which has a tangible and potentially detrimental effect on the content of news made available to the public during election periods:

> Certain characteristic features of political coverage may therefore be regarded as attempts by journalists to re-establish control over their own product. One is a fixation on process rather than substance, treating politics more as a game with effective and failed strategies, dramatic ups and downs, personalities large and small, heroic and villainous, victories and losses (1995: 210).

Coverage accordingly tends towards a more strategy-oriented and game-centric approach to the representation of politics, while at the same time adopting a more 'disdaining' stance: "covering events in a manner designed to demonstrate the reporters' distance from their propagandistic purposes, indicating that the event has been contrived, describing how it has been crafted and presenting it as a public relations effort to be taken with a pinch of salt" (ibid. 210). This can be justified in normative and practical terms – it is very much the role of journalists to inform the public where they may be being misled – but a central plank of the 'crisis' hypothesis (outlined below) is that a shift towards covering politics and elections in this fashion can have a significant depressive effect on public trust in politics and the merits of political engagement (Sabato, 1991; Patterson, 1993; Cappella and Jamieson, 1997).

Professionalised campaigning, and the consequent 'dialectic' of message preparation and the form of news output is clearly central to the supposed processes affecting the composition of television news in recent decades. It touches on core aspects of political communication and the role of the news media in modern democracy in ways that, where they have been analysed, are associated with trends in mediated politics that may be detrimental to the democratic process. The following section looks more closely at the hypotheses of change in political communication, very much linked to the

professionalisation of campaigning and journalistic reactions, and their impact on television news.

1.2.4 Changing Political Communication: 'Crisis' and 'Convergence' Investigated

Theoretical and empirical accounts of change in political communication have tended to focus on normative issues, particularly the performance of the news media and the style and manner of the communication strategies employed by political actors and institutions. The normative dimension, though important in itself, is also relevant to the longitudinal comparative approach: if change in a particular variable is demonstrated to exist, what are the implications, and how are the points of comparison to be appraised? The expected change in television election news in the UK over a 26-year period must therefore be interpreted in terms of its potential effect on British political communication. The dramatic increase in the role of television in political communication internationally in recent decades means that change in news content is of substantial concern for the political and democratic processes of Western countries, and so considerations of 'better' or 'worse' news have greater weight when assessing change. Prior to outlining the criteria against which the news samples will be measured in Section 1.2.5 below, this section will outline two schools of thought that have been particularly influential within political communication scholarship, and – more importantly – make claims that, if demonstrable in a content analysis of televised election coverage, will have serious implications for the quality of democracy in the UK.

Two related constellations of studies related to changes in political communication have particular resonance for longitudinal analysis, both claiming that, over recent decades, political communication in Western democracies has transformed, with overwhelmingly negative consequences. For ease of identification, they are referred to here as the 'crisis' hypothesis and the 'convergence' hypothesis, although this terminology is not always used by the scholars whose work is subsumed under each term. The 'crisis' hypothesis encompasses the academic and journalistic accounts stating that aspects of political communication have become significantly worse over time, leading to an overall net loss in systemic terms as news media are less able (or less willing) to perform the vital functions of the fourth estate. The 'convergence' hypothesis denotes the proliferation of comparative studies that have observed growing similarities in national political communication systems, with important ramifications for the future, and an identifiable

path of progress in media system development. These particular hypotheses have been chosen as benchmarks by which to construct the empirical analysis of election news because not only is the nature of change in news media content an important factor of both, but because the consistency and authority of these positions is such that they are established – if not uncontested – positions in political communication and campaign research. The analysis of each hypothesis is accordingly weighted in favour of their purported effects on news output, and on political communication as a whole.

The 'Crisis' Hypothesis

The term 'crisis' was applied to the changing state of political communication in Western democracies by Blumler and Gurevitch (1995; Blumler, 1997) in their attempt to utilise their systemic framework to summarise a series of trends in political advocacy, the organisation and operation of news media in politics, and voter behaviour. Their definition of the term depends on a viewing of political communication systems as holistic units maintaining a shifting equilibrium where exogenous and endogenous forces of change subtly but definitively alter the overall composition of political communication with, as they state, potentially negative effects. Blumler and Gurevitch's 'crisis in public communication' rests on some contestable assumptions, as will be shown. However, it also accounts for a number of observed trends in politics, journalism, and civic engagement that have similarly drawn pessimistic conclusions about the changing nature of political communication and its future directions. The definition of the 'crisis' hypothesis used here takes both Blumler and Gurevitch's all-encompassing model and other similar accounts to comprise what has elsewhere been termed the 'pessimistic' approach to political communication analysis (McNair, 2000; 2006), whereby change is viewed through a negative lens.

Blumler and Gurevitch sum up the implications of their conception of the 'crisis' as follows:

> Thus, confidence in the norms of citizenship is waning. Tactics of political campaigning appear ever less savoury. The watchdog role of journalism is often shunted into channels of professionalization, witch-huntery, soap-operatics and sundry trivialities. It is difficult for unconventional opinions to break into the established 'marketplace of ideas', and political arguments are often reduced to slogans and taunts. Suspicion of manipulation is rife, and cynicism is growing. The public interest in constructive civic communication is short-changed (1995: 1)

Every major aspect of the systemic conception of political communication is under threat on this reading: the 'new' nature of political campaigning depresses political engagement; journalism fails to perform its functions of information provision and of scrutinising power centres; representation is inhibited by the inability of new opinions to be aired, and citizen interest in public life is diminished and misdirected. Each of the pathways of communication in the system is distorted, and the resulting equilibrium does not adequately fulfil the expectations of a well-functioning national system. The core dynamic influencing this process is the elevation of the news media, television news in particular, to a dominant position in politics as a whole (as represented in the discussion of mediated politics and 'mediatisation' in Section 1.2.3, above) (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Blumler, 1997), and so the behaviour of journalists and the content of news media output plays a prominent role in various accounts of the decline in quality in political communication (although politicians also share a large portion of the blame). Criticisms of media content and behaviour tend to focus respectively on the decline in the factual and informative content of news, better known as 'tabloidisation', and the increasing failure of journalists to fulfil their idealised fourth estate roles as impartial and objective conveyors of political information, and conscientious guardians of the public interest through scrutiny of the behaviour of elites, particularly governments.

'Tabloidisation', or the 'dumbing-down' of media content, connotes a sense of decline and decay (Barnett, 1998; Gripsrud, 2000) and describes the increasing application of considerations of entertainment value and populism to media content in general, but also more pointedly to news content (Franklin, 1997; Langer, 1998). Thus, there is a sense of the "bad" chasing out the "good" (Barnett, 1998), increasing focus on news topics arbitrarily designated 'trivial', and a decline in the amount and informative content of political news, and its increasingly peripheral position in news output. Research into tabloidization focuses on the quantitative replacement of information-rich, substantive, 'hard' news content by populist 'soft' news (Barnett, Seymour and Gaber, 2000; Patterson, 2000; Winston, 2002), or the behaviour of journalists in applying news values that favour more light-hearted, entertainment-oriented content to serious public and political affairs (Semetko et al., 1991; Patterson, 1993; McQuail, 1995; Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; Franklin, 1997). The failure of news media to perform their prescribed role in the hypothetical political communication system is ascribed to a substantial increase in adversarial, highly critical coverage of politics and political actors to the exclusion of constructive political information and analysis (Patterson, 1993; Blumler, 1997; Barnett, 2002), and a change in the style and format of political reporting towards a greater focus

on conflict, competition, and the relative 'success' or 'failure' of political actions (Patterson, 1993; McQuail, 1995; Blumler, 1997; Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). It is not just the behaviour and output of media institutions that is at fault, however. While the growth of a powerful, disdaining media is a central component of the 'crisis' (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995), changes in the use of media by political actors are also a major factor in the decline in quality of political communication. The professionalization of political communication, and political campaigning in particular, across democratic societies has amplified the attempts of political actors to use the mass media to propagate their political messages, and the growth of a 'competitive struggle' between politicians and the media over the form and presentation of political events and information (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1990; Scammell, 1995; Franklin, 2004), as 'media logic' defines the composition of political communication. Increasingly strident attempts by political actors to dominate the news agenda and influence content are seen to have led to an antagonistic 'journalistic fightback' (Blumler, 1997), involving attempts by journalists to regain control of the informational content of their output, often involving more critical and interpretive content, and the substitution of politically-originated messages with coverage of attempts by candidates to manipulate the political communication process (Zaller, 2001).

Breaking down the 'crisis' concept into its constituent causes, components and consequences gives an insight into the processes that are held to be at play, and highlights the purported direction of trends towards more sensational, adversarial, and more interpretive political coverage that provides less substantive information for citizens. The causes ascribed to the process are generally perceived to lie in the economic and regulatory environment of journalism within many national systems, and the changing relationship between political parties and candidates, and their support. Blumler and Gurevitch's (1995) conception of the root causes of the crisis identifies four dimensions (societal transformation; political transformation; the dynamics of inter-communicator relationships; and a subsequent reshaping of the political communication system), but most aspects of these can be grouped under the changing functional roles of political parties in a more volatile electoral environment, and increasing economic pressures on journalistic outlets, both private and public. In the first place, the greater need for political advocates to appeal to potential voters through the mass media places journalists in a position where their role in campaigning – as in normal periods of political communication – is pivotal. As Patterson (1993) points out, the norms and goals of journalism are not the same as those of politics, and to expect the mass media to organise and relay national election campaigns in a way that provides sufficient substantive information to the public is unfair and unrealistic.

The ‘modern publicity process’ (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1990; 1995) thus results in the hubristic expectation that news outlets, with finite space in which to summarise events, particularly in short broadcast news bulletins, and with institutional goals geared towards audience maximisation, will be able to adequately provide the volume, complexity and contextualisation of a modern election campaign, all the while defending their professional role in the face of manipulative practices by political advocates and campaign personnel. The second main cause, and the one which is seen to drive even ‘serious’ news outlets towards a more sensational, populist news agenda (Sparks and Tulloch, 2000) is an increasingly competitive news environment (Franklin, 1997; Barnett, 1998; Patterson, 2000; Barnett and Gaber, 2001; Lewis et al., 2008). Greater competition, the effects of growing economic pressure, and the subsequent reduction in newsroom resources, are seen to lead to the primacy in news organisations of the commercial imperative to maximise audiences and thus to sensationalise content, including that of political coverage. This process affects public service-oriented news organisations as well as commercial.

The result of these pressures is a change to a political communication system in which it is claimed political coverage is increasingly marginalised in favour of more popular content, including celebrity and entertainment stories, and heavy coverage of violent or otherwise sensational crime with questionable relevance in relation to public life. Such political coverage as is actually included in news is seen to be negative, extremely critical of politics in general, increasingly interpretive of the motives and behaviour of political actors, and preoccupied with the presentation of politics as a conflictual contest between relative ‘winners’ and ‘losers’, with strategic framing of political messages mixed with coverage of election campaigns as a horse-race between candidates. The role of journalists is seen to have shifted from one of scrutiny of political elites, to one of disdain (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995); an ‘Age of Contempt’ (Barnett, 2002) in journalism in which the traditional normative ‘watchdog’ role has shifted to that of ‘attack dog’ (Sabato, 1991).

The effects of these developments on political communication are believed to be wide-ranging and invariably detrimental to democratic politics. Hyperadversarial coverage of politics and campaigning is seen to lead to widespread disillusionment with mainstream politics among the electorate, and disengagement from the electoral process (Barnett, 2002; Schlesinger, 2006). Over-critical and strategic framing of politics leads to growing cynicism (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997), while the increasingly negative and manipulative forms of election campaigning employed by political parties and candidates serve to

further turn off voters (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1995; Franklin, 2004). The intense competition between political parties and media outlets over the news agenda leads to confrontational and increasingly acrimonious relations between the two (Barnett and Gaber, 2001), while the 'journalistic fightback' results in greater interpretation of, and interference in, political news output by journalists (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Zaller, 2001). In terms of news content and output, empirical analyses of political news coverage have demonstrated a rise in 'soft' news in place of political coverage over time (Barnett, Seymour and Gaber, 2000; Patterson, 2000; Winston, 2002), with political coverage receiving less coverage both in volume and prominence. These empirical studies are examined in greater depth in Section 2.4, below; while they provide some valuable information on changes in news provision, they do not deal with election coverage in substantial depth.

The overall consequences of the processes described above are seen to be detrimental for democratic politics, according to a pessimistic reading of trends. However, it should be noted that there is a robust critique of the pessimistic approach. It is generally based on contestable assumptions: a 'utopian' ideal of an earlier golden age of journalism that lacks both credibility and empirical justification (Gripsrud, 2000; McNair, 2000); and an elitist assumption that some modes of discourse are inherently 'better' than others (McNair, 2000). The much-professed onslaught of 'tabloidisation' is seen less as a lamentable 'dumbing-down' of political and cultural life, and more of an 'opening-out' of opportunities for citizens to engage with political processes that may be labyrinthine and exclusionary: "a less elite-driven news agenda – one that recognises the importance of the emotional and the apparently trivial – offers wider opportunities for political engagement to all sections of society" (Temple, 2006: 257). The precarious economic situation of many media outlets can be taken to mean that the adoption of more accessible and more populist news reporting is necessary to preserve the position of news as a viable source of information:

> ...defenders [of soft news] say that audiences are the lifeblood of the news – that without economic security, a free press would exist only in name. They say there is no value in news that is admired but is not watched or read. And they claim that soft content is not worthless – it provides information that can guide people's actions as citizens (Patterson, 2000: 3)

The supposedly destructive effects of hypercritical coverage of the manipulative techniques employed by political actors to influence media content, and intrusive coverage of strategic behaviour is seen as a valid and vital defence against spin and news

management, and a subversion of the power of resource-rich actors with influence over public opinion (McNair, 2000; 2004). Finally, empirical studies on the contents and effects of modern political journalism have shown evidence of a 'ratcheting-up' of interest and knowledge among citizens (Norris, 2000; de Vreese, 2005).

The 'crisis' hypothesis is, therefore, not without its critics. It is, however, a prominent theory of the effects on news output and civic engagement of changes in political, media, and social systems in the West over the past three decades and more. It is on that basis alone a valid yardstick against which news content can be measured. The implications of the 'crisis' hypothesis are, moreover, so detrimental to normative conceptions of democratic politics, and to the role therein of the news media, that evidence of the presence, or not, of aspects of tabloidization, adversarialism and interpretive journalism are highly pertinent to a longitudinal study of election news. The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate, empirically, the extent of these aspects in the British context.

The 'Convergence' Hypothesis

The 'convergence' hypothesis is the second system-level theoretical account of change in political communication that has influenced the empirical inquiry applied in this thesis. The term 'convergence' is used to summarise theories stating that transnational trends in political communication and media systems are showing increasing similarities among a number of characteristics to the point where an element of (not necessarily absolute) convergence has been noted, and is expected to increase in the future. These theories of convergence are concerned with ongoing evolutionary processes which tend to be grouped under terms that emphasise the teleological aspects of the theory: Americanisation, Globalisation, Secularisation, Modernisation, Hybridisation, to name but a few. These terms – in the conceptual form in which they are used in the political communication literature – have arisen, for the most part, from comparative multinational analyses of different political communication systems, and so they are a significant appendage of the systemic approach mapped out in the previous section. They also link directly to the 'crisis' hypothesis as attempts to explain the form, causes and consequences of changes in the processes of political communication, and considerations of the costs and benefits of trends in media output are again a central part of the hypothesis. Beyond the simple measurement of variables to determine how change is manifested, the theories of convergence provide an evolutionary and predictive account of media system change. In other words, if

convergence if occurring, then the composition of media output (in this case, news) should follow certain observable trends. A final point to note is that theories of convergence have generally originated in analyses of election campaigning, due to the accumulation of data from the heightened scrutiny of the three sets of actors that participate in political communication. This renders them of greater interest to a study that focuses on elections; as the theories of convergence have matured they have expanded to account for changes in political communication at the systemic level.

The idea that there has been, and continues to be, a transnational convergence in the composition and operation of political communication systems is inextricably linked to the comparative approach to media system analysis. Revisiting Blumler and Gurevitch's systemic model, the 'equilibrium' in which a given political communication system is situated is determined by the nature of, and interactions between, political institutions, the mass media, and the citizenry, all operating within the wider national political culture (1995: 5). The dynamism of systems is brought about by both endogenous and exogenous pressures which act upon all components of the system, prompting a continual renegotiation of patterns of interaction and communication between the three groups of actors (ibid: 204-205). Descending from this level of abstraction, the practical implication of this notion is that social, economic, political and technological developments have a continual impact on the day-to-day operation of political communication in democratic societies. The comparative tradition, and the application of media model typologies (whether normative, as in *Four Theories of the Press*, or empirical, as in Hallin and Mancini's three models of media and politics) to the international community involve the analysis and comparison of the constituent parts of national media and political systems. Thus, the literature on change in political communication has gradually unearthed evidence that the responses to endogenous and exogenous pressures by different national political and media systems (and by extension, political communication systems) have resulted in observed similarities emerging internationally. Attempts to advance a single concept to account for this process have been undermined by the complexity of the social and political causes that have been ascribed to convergence, and by the relative scarcity of comprehensive multinational studies. However, there is sufficient common ground between the different accounts to ascertain the supposed impact of convergence on election news coverage.

The first comprehensive attempt to describe elements of convergence in political communication is the concept of Americanisation', the idea that national systems have

been subjected to a process of homogenisation towards that of the United States (Elebash, 1984; Pfetsch and Esser, 2003). The theory has its roots in the spread of innovations in election campaigning expertise and technologies from the United States, and the subsequent changes to the communication strategies of political parties and candidates, to political-media relations, and to the form and content of political messages. Swanson and Mancini, for instance, use the term "to refer descriptively to particular types and elements of election campaigns and professional activities connected with them that were first developed in the United States and are now being applied and adapted in various ways in other countries" (1996: 6). The discussion of 'professionalisation' of political communication in the previous section is seen to be a direct consequence of this process (Negrine and Papathanassopoulos, 1996; Negrine, 2008), as tried and tested techniques and the diffusion of professional campaigning expertise (Scammell, 1997) across the world leads to an element of 'standardisation' in global political campaigning (Plasser and Plasser, 2002). The centrality of mass media, particularly television, to many of the 'new' techniques is another major thread of the theory (Negrine and Papathanassopoulos, 1996; Negrine, 2008). Americanisation is, then, a source of exogenous pressure on political communication, according to the systemic approach. The USA, as the place of origin of techniques and expertise in political communication is the 'role model' towards which other national systems will gravitate, in a targeted, uni-linear fashion.

The drawbacks of the theory of Americanisation of political communication are, however, obvious. Firstly, it assumes that the American model of political communication is static, when in fact research suggests that, while some countries may be adopting some aspects of US-originated campaigning, "[t]his simplistically ignores certain dimensions along which US political communication may itself be evolving, opening up new or bigger differences from prevailing practices elsewhere" (Blumler and Gurevitch, 2001: 400). Secondly, as a theory of 'homogenisation' or 'standardisation', Americanisation ignores the potential for national systems – complex and multifaceted arrangements of historically-entrenched institutions, cultural norms and regulatory legislation – to resist the charms of the American model. Despite this, however, Americanisation still retains some explanatory merit: empirical evidence has shown that a 'standard model' of campaign practices has been observed internationally (Plasser and Plasser, 2002), and the transnational spread of campaigning practices suggests that convergence of a kind is occurring, even if its causes and nature are too complex to be ascribed to unidirectional diffusion from the United States. Further criticisms are outlined below, but in summary relate to the inadequacy of a

'unidirectional' model of transmission of American characteristics, and Americanisation's lack of consideration of the resistance of national political and media systems to change.

A response to the failure of Americanisation to adequately account for the observed transnational convergence in political communication is the concept of 'modernisation', a more wide-reaching theory that looks for the root causes of systemic change in historical, social, political, cultural and economic changes affecting public life in recent decades. Modernisation denotes the "general and fundamental process of change" that is seen to lead to alterations in national political communication environments (Swanson and Mancini, 1996: 6). In doing so, the 'endogenous' pressures affecting national systems are acknowledged in a manner that Americanisation overlooks. 'Modernisation', as a term in political communication, sees the root causes of the overarching view of change in Western societies as associated with the decline of influence of the traditional aggregative institutions in society (such as churches, trade unions, or political parties), and the replacement of the traditional social order with a more fragmented and individualised society (Hallin and Mancini, 2003; 2004): "[in] general terms... modernisation fragments social organisation, interests, and identity, creating a complicated landscape of competing structures and conflicting realities which citizens must navigate" (Swanson and Mancini, 1996: 9). This process of 'secularisation' (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999; Hallin and Mancini, 2004) has, it is argued, profoundly affected the traditional relationship between the public and the odd structure of class-based or ideological parties. As parties lose their affective bonds with voters, they are faced with the dual-edged problem of an inability to represent the diverse and growing array of perspectives and identities among their traditional support, and direct competition from new political institutions that emerge among the fragmented and increasingly instrumentally-motivated voting public, such as interest groups, or single-issue parties (Dahl, 1971). The Darwinian response of political parties across the Western world was the shedding of ideological positions and the identification with broad social divisions as the basis of representation, and evolution into "catch-all" parties designed to maximise support within a de-aligned electorate (Kirchheimer, 1966: 190-191; Swanson, 2003).

The result is a new relationship between political advocates and voters, the hallmarks of which are lower levels of stable, dependable party identification, and a greater focus on persuasion rather than mobilisation of the electorate as the goal of political campaigning and communication (Hallin and Mancini, 2003). The subsequent transformation of political communication leads to the 'modern publicity process' and the

rise of a powerful, autonomous media indicative of Strömbäck's 'mediatisation' process, both outlined in the previous section. The main causes of modern campaigning conditions are therefore ascribed to the process of modernisation/secularisation (Negrine, 2008).

This may be seen to account for changes in the rational motivation of political actors, and a reformulation of their goals in a campaigning environment. However, more relevant for the specific outlook of this study are changes to media systems, institutions, and output. In the terms of the 'convergence' hypothesis, "the most powerful force for homogenisation" of media systems is commercialisation (Hallin and Mancini, 2003: 38). Hallin and Mancini's analysis of European media system homogenisation is of particular interest for an analysis of British broadcast journalism. The spread of commercial television throughout Europe in the 1980s, alongside a relaxation of regulatory control over media ownership and the growth of robust pro-private ownership lobbies, overhauled the broadcasting landscape, competition among media outlets, and media orientations towards audiences: "Broadcasting has been transformed from a political and cultural institution in which market forces played a minimal role into an industry in which they are central, even for the remaining public broadcasters who must fight to maintain audience share" (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 252). The net result, in Hallin and Mancini's view, is similar to the accusations of the 'pessimistic' literature summarised in the 'crisis' hypothesis:

> Commercialisation... is clearly shifting European media systems away from the world of politics and toward the world of commerce. This changes the social function of journalism, as the journalist's main objective is no longer to disseminate ideas and create social consensus around them, but to produce entertainment and information that can be sold to individual consumers (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 277)

Thus, the application of commercial principles to television news output and the decreased legitimacy of arguments in favour of public funding for television in an environment of increased choice (Jacka, 2003) are seen to erode the quality of political journalism. Intensification of competition is thought to lead to "greater infusion of entertainment values into editorial decisions and political reporting, covering politics "only in the ways and to the extent that it is good to do" in order to attract and hold the audience (Swanson, 2003: 50). Therefore, certain trends in news coverage, in common with the bleak assessment of the 'crisis' hypothesis emerge: soundbite news (Hallin, 1992; Esser, 2008); horse-race campaign coverage (Patterson, 1993; Cappella and Jamieson, 1997); adversarialism (Swanson, 2003); and increasingly interpretive journalism. 'Tabloidisation', and reduction in the volume and prominence of political coverage on both commercial and

public service providers are again seen as significant negative outcomes of media-political communication convergence.

A final factor in the suitability of the convergence literature as a means of informing a longitudinal analysis of news coverage is that consideration is given to the 'limits' of homogenisation – the extent to which nationally-specific institutional conditions can affect the adoption of aspects of homogenisation. Although political communication systems have permeable borders, they are each developing from different starting points, with different institutional arrangements. The refuted 'standardisation' of political communication set out in Americanisation, while visible to an extent in terms of the presence of certain techniques of campaigning or the similar uptake of television as the primary medium of political communication, is replaced with the concept of 'hybridisation', "a merger of traditional country- and culture-specific campaign practices – with select transnational features of modern campaigning" (Plasser and Plasser, 2002: 350). The idea is extended outwards to the media system level by Hallin and Mancini, who state that "it seems unlikely that media systems could entirely converge while party and electoral systems remain sharply different" (2004: 283). A number of factors are held to limit the extent of convergence, including: electoral systems; party systems; regulation of campaigning and media; the presence of public, private, or mixed media systems, among others. These will be explored in more detail in Section 2.2, below, where changes to the British political communication system will be analysed in the national context.

'Crisis' and 'Convergence': A Framework for Analysis

In summary, the constellations of theories that make up the discrete but related 'crisis' and 'convergence' hypotheses have been chosen as cases by which British television election coverage will be analysed due to a combination of the seriousness of the claims they make and the need to assert whether their influence is seen in television election news output, and the existing lack of empirical evidence in news coverage to demonstrate this. They stand as consistent accounts of longitudinal change in political communication, and both make assertions about the style and content of political coverage and the operation of political communication during election campaigns. On this topic, the 'crisis' hypothesis dictates that political communication is being damaged by developments in campaigning, political journalism, and changes in intra-communicator relationships. Although this is only one (albeit consistent and popular) reading of developments in political

communication, the implications are grave for democratic politics when there is a reduction in the quantity and quality of information made available to citizens during election campaigns, and where coverage increasingly fosters cynicism and hostility towards mainstream political processes, and depresses civic engagement among the electorate. The 'convergence' hypothesis also considers news content and the fulfilment of normative journalistic and political roles, but goes further in providing a blueprint for change, both structurally and longitudinally. If there are aspects of homogenisation in a given political communication system, then news coverage should acknowledge this if, as the proponents of modernisation theory state, changes in political and media systems affect the construction and aims of communication by political advocates and editorial dispositions towards political news coverage. Combined, these two hypotheses provide a valid means of evaluating the performance, over time, of television journalism during periods of intense democratic activity. The following section outlines how this translates into a method of analysing news content.

1.2.5 News Content and Change: Hypotheses

So far, this chapter has outlined the theoretical background to a longitudinal analysis of election news coverage in recent decades. The normative functions of journalism in democratic society have been set out, due to the insistence in much of the political communication literature that these have been placed under threat by developments in political and media systems. The systemic approach to political communication has been adopted because of the growing empirical evidence of endogenous and exogenous pressures impacting upon national systems, with evidence of elements of homogenisation. Two major narratives in the recent history of political communication are, then, that it has become measurably and progressively 'worse' in accordance with certain normative positions, and that transnational pressures are shaping change according to a particular specific template. This thesis aims to test whether these statements are true in the case of election news coverage. As noted in the introduction, the question is not *whether* British television election news has changed (for change is inevitable), but *how* it has changed. As the discussion of modern 'mediated' politics and modern campaigning makes clear, television news is a hugely influential component of modern political communication, and has become more so in recent decades. Thus, the content of election news, and the political and journalistic interactions and processes that combine to determine the final form of news items and bulletins as they are broadcast to the public, is of significant importance to

modern democratic politics. One purpose of this study, outlined here, is to determine how a content analysis project can determine how television news has changed, in accordance with the forecasts of the 'crisis' and 'convergence' hypotheses.

Three major dynamics can be analysed in election news coverage to investigate change in output in the context of modern political communication: evidence of tabloidization; increasingly strategic and adversarial coverage more concerned with the 'horse-race' aspects of campaigning than with substantive policy information; and the presence of a 'sound bite culture' in political and journalistic speech. These are not, of course, an exhaustive list of potential attributes of television news by any means. However, they do allow for meaningful quantitative data to be gathered charting trends in election coverage over time. While these three areas of inquiry were deduced from the literature described above, a fourth emerged during and after a pilot analysis was undertaken prior to the full coding exercise: that technological developments in the particular area of television newsmaking, editing and production have influenced change in the structure and composition of *all* news coverage, with election coverage changing accordingly.

The justification and specific methodologies used to investigate these phenomena in British election coverage are detailed at the beginning of the respective chapters outlining the empirical analysis, but the general hypotheses that informed the research are as follows:

1. Over time, the volume and prominence of campaign coverage will decrease as similar trends in other 'hard' news reporting reflect the increasing application of 'tabloid' news values.
2. There will be a reduction in the coverage of substantive policy information as campaign coverage is increasingly concerned with 'horse-race' aspects of the campaign, while campaign coverage will become more adversarial and more interpretive.
3. There will be a progressive shortening of soundbites by political actors, coupled with increasing focus on party leaders. This will be mirrored by a growth in the direct speech of journalists in political news.
4. The form and structure of television news items will change over time as a result of changing newsgathering and editing technologies and practices, in a way that equally affects campaign and non-campaign output.

In Chapter 2, these hypotheses will be re-evaluated on the basis of how they fit in to the unique properties of the British political communication context over the period of study.

1.3 Methodology

For this thesis, a large-scale quantitative content analysis exercise was conducted in order to generate a wealth of empirical data from which the hypotheses about changes in news output could be tested. A major determining factor of the adoption of this approach was the scope of the project. To generate meaningful and wide-ranging conclusions about the changing nature of a subject as multifaceted as television news (and over a relatively large timescale), it was necessary to adopt a purely quantitative methodology.

The methodological core of the research component of the thesis is the investigation of certain quantifiable aspects of news output, outlined above. While each of these aspects are connected and measured in similar ways, there is enough contextual difference to warrant separate detailed descriptions in each of the techniques and methods of analysis in their respective chapters. This section will deal with the sampling and coding techniques relevant to the thesis as a whole, and will outline in particular the unit of analysis adopted here – the news item – and its centrality to the majority of the empirical analysis throughout the thesis.

Scope of Inquiry

Due to the space and time allocated in a research project of this type, a conscious decision was made in the formulation of the aims and methods of the project that, while there is a definite and well-documented relationship between media content and media effects, the thesis would be concerned with measuring changes in the former, but not the latter. News output is by its very definition a source of information – a resource from which audiences can draw when making sense of the world beyond their direct experience, and – in the political context – a contributor to calculated political action. There is, therefore, some relationship between the composition of news information, and the subsequent effects on individual behaviour.

Quantifiable media effects are notoriously difficult to establish (Gauntlett, 1998), yet there have been several outstanding collections of the various aspects of media – particularly television – effects as they relate to political communication (Bryant and Zillmann, 1991, 1994), and particularly in the role of agenda-setting (McCombs and Shaw, 1972), the 'priming' of audiences (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987), cultivation analysis

(Signorelli and Morgan, 1990), and specific studies of political learning from news (Graber, 1984; Gamson, 1992; Neumann, Just and Crigler, 1992; Norris et al., 1999; Norris, 2000).

This thesis touches on the effects debate in several ways. In Chapters 3 and 4 respectively, the questions of the potential effects of depoliticised news agendas and potentially cynicism-inducing framing of campaigns are explored, and directly linked to the relation between news output and the normative function of journalism in democracy. The research project undertaken in this thesis is, however, necessarily limited by constraints of time and space to an acceptance of the fact that, although the study of effects is required to make a quantifiable evaluation of the impact of trends in election news output on democratic life, it is sufficient (provided causal conclusions are restricted accordingly) to state that the research makes a valuable contribution towards ascertaining the changing nature of information that is placed before the audience, from which – logically – political behaviour will to some degree be modified by the addition of information. In short, while it is beyond the scope of this project to make definitive statements about the measureable effects of trends in election news output, the research provides a consistent account of the political and journalistic processes up to the point at which the influence of these processes on the physical constitution of news ends, prior to its reception.

Sampling and Data

The timeline of analysis was chosen for both practical and theoretical reasons. As will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 2, the 1979 UK general election is of critical significance for both UK politics in general and the development of the political communication and campaigning techniques adopted by British political and media actors. Briefly, the Conservative campaign that propelled the party to power in that year marked something of a sea-change in the interactivity between politicians and the media, after which point the role of the media became more prominent in the campaigning process, while television increasingly came to the fore as a medium of political communication (Butler and Kavanagh, 1980; Franklin, 1994; Kavanagh, 1995; Scammell, 1995; Childs, 1997). The 26-year period also constitutes a significant length of time over which to chart trends in aspects of news, allowing robust conclusions to be drawn about directional change – or its absence – in the variables under analysis. As a result, this analysis here represents the longest single analysis of UK election news at present. In practical terms, the 1979 election was the earliest election for which sufficient amounts of archived materials could be obtained, at least in a format that could realistically be analysed in a project of

this scope (although, as will be shown, there were still significant difficulties in obtaining the desired materials from 1979). This combination of factors made the 1979-2005 timeframe the most suitable period of analysis for this thesis.

For each election, it was decided that the four weeks prior to the day of each election would comprise the sampling period. Because of the differing lengths of the campaigns at each election, this would both cover the vast majority of official campaign days, and facilitate the comparison of variables between the different elections. The bulletins sampled were the nightly bulletins on BBC 1 and ITV (*News at Ten* on ITV, *Nine O'clock News – Ten O'clock News* during the 2005 election – on BBC 1). These were the only nightly news bulletins in existence throughout the entire period of study, which begins prior to the creation of Channel 4 in 1982; they also allow comparisons to be drawn between a major public service broadcaster and a popular commercial rival (albeit in the PSB-oriented environment of UK television news).The nightly bulletins were selected in part due to their unique position in allowing journalists to summarize the events from that day of campaigning, although by 1992 the 24-hour-news cycle had begun to play a part. Nonetheless, the ability of these bulletins to offer a daily roundup of campaign events was still evident in the 2001 and 2005 samples. Weekend bulletins were omitted from the sample due to the differing lengths of the bulletins, the large amount of sport included in Saturday bulletins, and the differing scheduling times of weekend bulletins even within a single election sample. Changes in the style and priority of campaigning at weekends combined with these factors to undermine the comparability of weekend bulletins with those aired during the week.

The bulletins used for the analysis were obtained from three sources: the majority of bulletins from 1992 to 2005 were gathered with permission from the archives of the Glasgow University Media Group at the University of Glasgow; bulletins from 1979 to 1987 were accessed at the Edward Boyle Library Election Broadcast Archive at the University of Leeds; and the remaining missing bulletins were viewed and coded at the British Film Institute in London. Although every effort was made to obtain a full sample, a total of ten bulletins from the 1979 election campaign sample could not be located or had deteriorated to the point of being unwatchable. Fortunately, the missing ten bulletins were evenly spread across BBC and ITV, resulting in equal samples for each channel. Overall, the ideal sample was intended to be 280 bulletins (20 each on BBC and ITV across seven elections). This was amended to 270 as the 1979 samples were reduced to 15 on each channel. Where absolute values are compared across the different elections (e.g. total

number of seconds devoted to foreign news), the 1979 results have been recalculated at four-thirds of the initial value to allow comparability.

Coding Frame and Technique

The coding frame used has been created especially for this project, although it draws some characteristics from a previous study by Oates (2006). The frame in that study was based on the subdivision of news bulletins into a series of discrete units referred to as 'items'. This unit of analysis was retained for this study due to its representation of broadcast news bulletin content as comprising a series of mutually exclusive and comparable units. This circumvents the ambiguity of the notion of news 'stories', which in broadcast form may consist of several separate reports related to a single event or topical theme. More nuanced subdivisions of bulletins exist in similar content analysis studies, such as the designation of 'news items' (Cushion, Lewis and Groves, 2009; Cushion, Lewis and Ramsay, 2010), which further breaks down bulletins into 'types' of item. However, it was felt that the conceptual clarity of a single comparative unit of analysis would benefit this study. The term 'item' here is defined as a news report with a clearly-defined subject and narrative, presented by a single journalist, often with a contextualizing introduction by a news anchor. Items are distinguished in terms of subject focus, journalist (where several items are linked without a return to the studio) or, where items are thematically linked (e.g. a link between party economic policy and a report on market performance or unemployment figures), reorientation of the narrative by returning to the anchor in the studio.

The coding frame is presented in Appendix I, and consists of a cover sheet for the running order of the bulletin, and the frame applied to each item. Each bulletin was analysed in two stages: firstly, the running order and lengths of all items (in seconds) in a given bulletin were established, and items were categorised in terms of whether or not they were relevant to the election campaign; secondly, each item then had a corresponding coding frame sheet filled in using the categories outlined in the codebook (Appendix II), in accordance with the coding instructions outlined in Appendix III. This two-stage approach allowed screening of the total news content to identify potentially problematic items that may require special attention. The coding exercise was designed to break all subject content down into mutual exclusive categories within each item, and generic catch-all categories were viewed as a last resort should a particularly anomalous subject arise. All timing of soundbites and party footage was undertaken using a stopwatch with a multi-split function that allowed for accurate measurement of rapidly-edited footage. An aspect of the coding exercise which is worthy of further explanation is the designation of 'campaign

focus' and 'news subject focus' for each item. This practice allows for the unambiguous designation of a primary subject focus for each item, and the main campaign-related theme for each item that deals with campaign phenomena. In the vast majority of instances, the focus was clearly discerned. Where, however, a number of subjects were dealt with in a single item, the subject with the most time devoted to it was chosen by stopwatch calculation.

Data Analysis

The resulting data from the coding exercise was input into a specially-constructed database in SPSS. All numerical information provided in this thesis have been calculated using SPSS, although Microsoft Excel was used where pictorial representations of data are provided.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The remainder of the thesis comprises the continuation of the literature review in Chapter 2, where the research framework laid out in this chapter is placed in the specific context of the UK in the period 1979-2005, followed by the four tests of news provision during general elections in Chapters 3-6. Chapter 7 summarises the observed trends, and discusses the value of the 'crisis' and 'convergence' hypotheses as accurate depictions of the changing nature of news coverage in the UK.

Chapter 2 begins with a look at the contextual variables that influence change in political communication. The systemic approach to political communication relies heavily on an understanding of the context in which communication occurs. As typological models have made clear, certain aspects of national political and media systems determine how they operate. Therefore, if conclusions can be drawn about change in British news, it must be made clear how susceptible the British political communication system is expected to be on the basis of its constitutive characteristics. It will be argued that the peculiarities of the British broadcast news environment, and the strength of Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) principles, provide a sufficient bulwark against major changes in the professional norms and techniques of television journalism during the time period of the study. Likewise, certain regulatory measures concerning political campaigning insulate against the worst predicted excesses of modern campaigning; the American model of campaigning is not a serious potential outcome in Britain as things stand. The chapter continues with a

summary of the relevant changes in the British political and media systems, providing an account of the changing context within which election news was created and broadcast, and finishes with a survey of existing research into change in British television election news provision.

The following empirical chapters deal with the different analyses of election news coverage. They cover, respectively: the extent of 'tabloidisation' in British news and the maintenance of 'sacerdotal' editorial orientations in election reporting; evidence of 'Americanised' election output, including 'horse-race' coverage, interpretive and adversarial journalism; 'sound bite' news, and the prevalence and volume of political speech in election news; and a general summary of news coverage over the period of study, including a comparison between campaign and non-campaign news stories. A full discussion of each will be included at the beginning of the relevant chapter, as will the methodological approaches applied in measuring trends in each component of news coverage.

Chapter 2: Political Communication in the UK: Context and Change

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has established two points. The first is that measurements of the extent of change in an aspect of political communication must take account of the systemic context in which change takes place. The second is that prevailing theories of change in political communication stress the negative impact on the normative function of the media in politics. To explore the nature of change in television election news, it is therefore necessary to identify the changing context in which news is made, and the norms, regulations and pressures that act upon the production of television journalism in the UK. It is also necessary to conceptualise how the changing political context may be expected to affect television election news. As the review of British television news studies undertaken in this chapter shows, there is no systematic longitudinal evidence to build the analysis contained in this thesis upon; only fragmentary reports of conditions at single elections, and a handful of variables measured across multiple elections, but lacking a consistent research focus.

Methodologically, this thesis is therefore being written on something of a blank slate. It is important, then, to establish a coherent research framework on the basis of the current evidence of change in the national context in which television news exists. In this chapter, it is argued that certain contextual factors underpinning the British political communication system – the dominant public service broadcasting (PSB) ethos, a 'sacerdotal' approach to political and especially election reporting, relatively strong broadcasting and campaign regulation – insulate against the negative effects of the 'crisis' and 'convergence' hypotheses ('dumbing down', adversarial journalism, a disenchanted electorate). At the same time, it is contended that certain aspects of those hypotheses are evident over the course of the period of study, 1979 to 2005, namely professionalised campaigning, and commercialisation and deregulation of the broadcast media environment. Establishing a direct causal relationship between the changing context and the exact nature of television news composition is beyond the scope of this project (and probably any project) Instead, the analysis of the changing context is used to inform the aspects of television election news content measured in the empirical portion of the thesis, generating specific research questions from observations of the changing political communication environment in the UK.

The analysis that follows consists of three sections. In the first, the particular aspects of the British political and media system context, as they directly relate to television political and election news content, are outlined. In the second, changes to these and other aspects of the system are charted over the period of study to give a fuller picture of the changing context in which television news production has operated. The third section contains a comprehensive review of previous research into British television news content, in order to identify the gaps that this project fills, and to identify evidence of change between 1979 and 2005. The chapter ends with a brief review of methods employed in the empirical chapters that follow.

2.2 Contextual Factors in British Political Communication

With regards to the nature of election coverage, say Strömbäck and Kaid, "political systems matter" (2008: 6). Oates (2008) places the 'political environment' at the beginning of a causal 'news production model' determining the factors affecting news production in different countries, while Hallin and Mancini define their media system models on the basis of the relationship between national media and politics. Blumler and Gurevitch's (1995: 5) systemic approach to political communication names 'communication-relevant aspects of political culture' as a defining component of a national system. Politics and media are therefore interlinked, but in the context of election campaigning and reporting, the characteristics of a national political system are all the more relevant.

At the most fundamental level, the United Kingdom, as a parliamentary (liberal) democracy is free, and so promotes a broad range of freedom of speech and expression (Oates, 2008: 35) and freedom of the press. There are some direct governmental restrictions, however, on news content on national defence and intelligence grounds (Tunstall, 1983: 4), and where the infringement of individual privacy is deemed not to be in the public interest, for example. The electoral system is majoritarian (Lijphart, 1999), and elects local constituency candidates on a first-past-the-post basis. As a result, the system favours two larger parties – Labour and Conservative – with a significant third party in the Liberal Democrats who, over the course of this study, have contested elections as the Liberal Party (1979), the SDP-Liberal Alliance (1983 and 1987), and then the Liberal Democrats. The British electoral system works to the disadvantage of smaller parties, including the Liberal Democrats, but in doing so simplifies election coverage due to the smaller number of candidates to follow. The combination of a traditionally strong

two-party system and the investment of executive power in single-party cabinet governments discourage coalition government and the need to cooperate with other parties, making adversarial politics the norm (Norris, 2004).

In terms of media system characteristics, the UK is classified by Hallin and Mancini (2004) as belonging to the "North Atlantic" typology, but this is highly questionable, given the unique features of the British case. While the press in Britain is highly commercial and self-regulated, broadcasting consists of a mixed model, with a large publicly-owned and funded public service broadcaster, and commercial rivals (terrestrial, satellite and digital). Therefore, Britain is something of a 'hybrid' model, mixing commercial and public service broadcasting (PSB) elements (Scammell and Semetko, 2008: 74). While the press has traditionally been fiercely partisan (another reason for the inadequacy of Hallin and Mancini's "North Atlantic" categorisation), television news coverage is required by law to be impartial, accurate and balanced[5], with statutory bodies in place to regulate and monitor output and enforce standards: the BBC Trust (formerly the Board of Governors) for the BBC, and a regulatory body for commercial broadcasters (the ITA from 1955-1972; the IBA from 1972-1990; the ITC from 1991-2003; currently Ofcom). At the beginning of the period of study here, television broadcasting (and therefore all of news and current affairs broadcasting) was carried on three channels: BBC 1 and 2, and ITV (Goodwin, 1997). This fact set the range of the sampling for the empirical research in this thesis, and so it narrows the scope of analysis here to conditions concerning and affecting the two main (formerly terrestrial) television news providers: the BBC and ITV.

The BBC has dominated the landscape since television broadcasting began (solely on the BBC) in earnest after World War II (Seymour-Ure, 1996). The original blueprint for the BBC was conceived by its founder, John – later Lord – Reith to consist of an organisation isolated from political and commercial interests, operating in a monopoly position over broadcasting, with a sense of moral obligation and a strong public service philosophy (McDonnell, 1991; Negrine, 1994). This conception of a large, monopolistic, publicly-funded, universal national broadcasting organisation with a strong commitment to public service was in part an expedient response to technological and organisational pressures (Crisell, 2002: 19), and in part due to the personal philosophy of its founder

[5] See Ofcom's Broadcasting Code, at: http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/broadcasting/broadcast-codes/broadcast-code/ and the BBC's Editorial Guidelines, at http://www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/guidelines/

(Curran and Seaton, 2003: 110), but it set forth a template for broadcasting in Britain that still remains in place, for the most part.

Following intense lobbying, the BBC's monopoly was breached by the introduction of a commercial rival via the Television Act of 1954. This set up the Independent Television Authority (ITA) to oversee "a federal structure of commercially funded television companies, each serving a different region or market" (Negrine, 1994: 85), with some measures in place to minimise the influence of advertisers on programme or editorial content (Crisell, 2002: 91). Oversight of the new company (Independent Television – ITV) by the ITA was based on the model of the BBC's Board of Governors, and a separate company, Independent Television News (ITN) was created to provide news for the different franchise holders, the cost of which was shared among them (Harrison, 2005: 121-122). The particular arrangement of the creation of ITV protected against two fears about the effect of competition on British broadcasting. First, by ensuring that the BBC and ITV drew funding from different sources – licence fee for television ownership and advertising, respectively – there would be no direct economic competition between the two broadcasters and a drive towards lowest-common-denominator programming, a perceived weakness of the American broadcasting system (Negrine, 1994: 85). Second, instituting ITN as a single news provider shared among franchise-holders, a more manageable and more easily regulated news provider was created that – crucially – could act as an effective competitor against the incumbent BBC News (Harrison, 2005: 122). The 'comfortable duopoly' that followed for 27 years until the establishment of Channel 4 was a period of stability in British broadcasting, a situation not without its critics (Lambert, 1982; Goodwin, 1997). This marks the broadcasting environment during which the measures employed in this thesis begin. Notably, the period of relative stasis in broadcasting between the introduction of ITV and the beginning of this study is similar in length to the period of upheaval between 1979 and 2005.

The television news environment has been dominated by the BBC and ITN, which provides national and regional news programming for ITV and Channel 4 and, from 1997 to 2005, Channel 5. Sky News began broadcasting by satellite in 1989, and the development of cable and digital broadcasting multiplied the amount of news on British screens as several 24-hour rolling news channels joined Sky (Crisell, 2002). Regulation of news provision is, as already intimated, relatively strong in Britain, and is split between the BBC's own regulatory body and the main commercial regulator. The overarching principle of British television news production and regulation is the public service ethos, which has

remained in place from the founding of the BBC through to the present day, and has been enshrined in the BBC Charter and in the Broadcasting Code set forth by the commercial regulator.

Public service broadcasting is, according to Tracey, "a structure of ambition, a belief that the sheer presence of broadcasting within all our lives can and must be used to nurture society, to proffer the opportunity for society and its inhabitants to be better served than by systems which primarily seek consumers for advertisers" (1998: 18). It is seen by its defenders as a bulwark against cultural commercialisation and tabloidisation (Tracey, 1998) and by its detractors as an anachronistic, utopian ideal no longer suited to a modern media environment (Jacka, 2003), but regardless of the financial or cultural costs and benefits of such an approach to broadcasting in general, it has had a profound effect on the structure and composition of British television journalism, and hence on political communication as a whole. The public service orientation of the commercial regulator has traditionally determined that the terrestrial channels that fall under its remit (ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5) maintain a certain amount of news programming in primetime slots[6], Meanwhile, the enforcement of rules of due impartiality, accuracy and balance on BBC and ITN means that television news has consistently enjoyed high levels of trust among the British public (Negrine, 1994; Ofcom, 2008), and ensured that the partisan press is balanced by a more even-handed and objective treatment of public affairs.

As well as promoting the journalistic norms of objectivity in reporting, the public service journalistic ethos in British television news production is credited with fostering a 'sacerdotal' approach among journalists towards political coverage. An ingrained aspect of political and journalistic culture, this approach entails a belief that certain political stories – particularly during election campaigns, are worthy of inclusion and coverage on their own right. "[Practitioners] of the so-called sacerdotal style of campaign programming tended to think of themselves as providing a 'service' and of an election as an intrinsically important event which entitled it to substantial coverage as of right" (Blumler, 1969: 100). While this is a case of personal attitude rather than strict interpretation of editorial guidelines, the sacerdotal approach was continuously observed as the dominant disposition in the BBC newsroom during election campaigns, overruling the 'pragmatic' approach, whereby election stories were left to 'fight their way in' to news bulletins (Blumler, 1969; Blumler,

[6] The fragmentation of the television audience following the introduction of digital broadcasting has, however, created tensions regarding this policy

Gurevitch and Nossiter, 1986)[7]. The relationship between public service broadcasting and the sacerdotal approach was investigated by Blumler and Gurevitch's (in Semetko et al., 1991) comparison of campaign journalism at the BBC, and at the commercially-funded NBC network in America. They found that sacerdotal attitudes were far more likely to prevail in news agenda-related decisions at the BBC than at the commercial broadcaster. The sacerdotal approach to campaign coverage has obvious implications for political communication. Its presence in British television journalism is a key factor in the style and prominence of campaign coverage.

The relatively robust regulation of campaign reporting on British television is also an important factor in defining the British system. The normal public service requirements of balance and impartiality have been interpreted strictly regarding elections (Scammell and Semetko, 2008: 79). Balance in covering the main three parties (Conservative, Labour, Liberal/Alliance/Liberal Democrat) was traditionally interpreted by the 'stopwatch balance' where parties were allocated screen time on the basis of the ratio that determined their Party Election Broadcast (PEB) allocation, namely their proportional vote share at the previous election. This measure was dropped by ITN prior to the 1992 election, in partial recognition of the fact that 'coverage' didn't necessarily mean 'balance' where a certain policy was positively or negatively associated with a particular party, but also because the quest to maintain balance often resulted in the need to include meaningless 'makeweight' items – usually photo-ops (Tait, 1995). The Representation of the People Act (1983) also placed restrictions on constituency reporting by stipulating that a constituency report featuring any local candidate required the inclusion or acceptance of all other candidates in order to be fit for broadcast, effectively granting power of veto to any uncooperative candidate[8]. This was relaxed in the 2001 versions of the Act, in part because the significant growth in numbers of minor party candidates at the 1997 election made it unworkable for journalists. However, constituency reports must still list the names of all candidates at the end of the item, and reporters are obliged to seek the permission of all candidates prior to broadcast. In addition, there are further restrictions on the inclusion and analysis of polling data, which is most notably banned on polling day itself.

[7] While no research has been conducted observing newsrooms at ITN during election campaigns, a function of the research in Chapter 3, below, is to measure the commitment to prominent campaign coverage on BBC and ITV

[8] Mitchell (1998) and Gaber (1998) supply arguments in favour of, and against the 1983 Representation of the People Act

Finally, the regulation of election campaigning in British media has a significant effect on political communication. While legal independence from political or governmental interference is a core component of British broadcasting, and the strictly-applied rules of balance and impartiality prevent a single party dominating the news agenda, the most significant regulation concerning political campaigning is the illegality of paid political advertising on television (Semetko, 2000; Plasser and Plasser, 2002). Instead, political parties are allocated free airtime in the form of party election broadcasts. This measure is seen as instrumental in preventing the exponential rise of campaign spending as noted elsewhere (particularly the USA), as do relatively tight restrictions on constituency spending in UK elections.

2.3 Changes in British Media and Politics, 1979-2005

2.3.1 Campaign Professionalisation

The origins of the 'crisis' of public communication are laid at the door of the professionalisation of political campaigning, and the adoption of media management and manipulation techniques among political actors. Variously described in notable works on British political communication as 'Designer Politics' (Scammell, 1995), the 'packaging' of politics (Franklin, 2004), or the centrality of being 'On Message' (Norris et al., 1999), the theme emerges that a centrally important aspect of political communication since the Conservatives' 1979 campaign has been the systematic use of the media by politicians to achieve their goals: "During the 1980s and 1990s, enthusiasm became obsession as politicians tried to influence and regulate the flow of political information and messages via mass media to an unprecedented degree" (Franklin, 2004: 5). The rise of politicians' use of the media was discussed in Section 1.2.3 above, in the context of the 'mediation' of politics, whereby the activities and techniques of politics, particularly election campaigning, are increasingly performed in accordance with an abstract 'media logic'.

Evidence of the increasing use of manipulative, media-centric communication strategies is not a particularly new phenomenon in British politics, but the level of sophistication displayed by the Thatcher government marked something of a structural break with what had gone before (Scammell, 1995). The strategic use of photo-opportunities and other pseudo-events (Franklin, 2004) on the campaign trail bemused broadcast journalists, who openly criticised the attempts at subterfuge (Harrison, 1982), a prelude to the forthcoming tensions between politicians and the media. Thatcher enjoyed a

sympathetic press, and it was the perception that mastery of the media was crucial to electoral success that saw an overhaul of the Labour campaigning and communications apparatus, and the systematic use of campaign experts in the 1987 campaign, combined with an intricate, micromanaged campaigning framework (Gould, 1998; Negrine, 2008). Labour's loss in 1987, followed by a narrow defeat in 1992 which prompted the pro-Conservative *Sun* to claim ultimate responsibility for victory, were deeply imprinted on the psyche of the party, and prompted a Marshalling of resources, assiduous courting of the press, the appointment of experts from the fields of marketing, the broadcast and print media and opinion polling (Negrine, 2007: 57). Labour's victory in 1997 achieved legendary status, not least due to the novel use of consultants, and the adoption of techniques gathered from abroad (Norris et al., 1999).

The impact of the professionalisation of campaigning and increasingly aggressive attempts to exert power over the news media is seen as the catalyst for a 'journalistic fightback' (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995), a process that sees an increasingly adversarial and interpretive approach to political reporting. This stance is assumed in an attempt to reassert some form of control over the professional norms and practices of journalism, and the function of holding powerful interests, particularly in government and politics, to account. As observed in other countries, this is seen to result in a widespread negative effect on the democratic process (Patterson, 1993; Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). As Section 2.4 points out, research of television coverage of elections is an underdeveloped aspect of the British political communication literature, so a function of this thesis is to investigate the presence of adversarial and strategic journalism over time in UK electoral politics, as set out in Chapter 4.

2.3.2 Commercialisation in British Broadcasting

The convergence thesis has its roots, as shown in Section 1.2.4 above, in the homogenisation of national media systems. More specifically, according to Hallin and Mancini (2004), it is driven by a process of secularisation throughout society and – more importantly for this study – in the commercialisation of media systems. The end result in news output terms is a product that is geared more towards audience maximisation than with the provision of important social and political information. Put simply, commercialisation and public service broadcasting diverge on fundamental issues. As a mixed-model broadcasting system, the British configuration in 1979, of the 'comfortable duopoly' was that of a publicly-funded BBC and commercial ITV free from any significant

competitors. The Conservative Party prior to the 1979 election had shown little interest in media policy (Goodwin, 1997: 22). By 2005, however, the television landscape had changed beyond all recognition, ITV had become a much more belligerently commercial network (Tunstall, 1997: 252), and both channels were under pressure due to fragmenting audiences – the BBC due to its need to justify a licence fee for a decreasingly dominant service, and ITV through the watering down of its potential advertising revenue to the nascent digital channels and the internet.

While much of Western Europe in the early 1980s instituted commercial broadcasting alongside their publicly-owned state broadcasters – the 'commercial deluge' (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 274), Britain did not follow suit, indicative of the traditionally slow process of change in media policy in the UK (Tunstall, 1997). The early years of the Thatcher government showed no indication of antagonism towards the BBC beyond the appointment of sympathetic figures to the BBC's Board of Governors (Barnett and Curry, 1994; Goodwin, 1997). Following clashes with the BBC over reporting of the Falklands Conflict, Thatcher had made it clear that she felt that the BBC should be more commercially-minded, although the 1983 Conservative manifesto contained no mention of potential changes to the BBC (O'Malley, 1994: 7). The events that followed, however, reshaped British broadcasting, but in an unexpected fashion. The 1986 Peacock Committee, appointed with the expectation of recommending the commercialisation of the BBC, reported the opposite, and rejected the concept of an advertising-funded BBC, declaring that the licence fee should remain in place, but recommending that changes be made to commercial television, notably an auction of the ITV franchises, and the requirement that Channel 4 should sell its own advertising. The Peacock Committee, says Crisell (2002: 235) "was a gun which the government fired at the BBC but which wounded ITV" (p235).

Following the 1990 Broadcasting Act, changes to ITV, and particularly ITN, greatly increased the financial pressures facing the main commercial news provider (Harrison, 2005). This was compounded by the gradual encroachment on the advertising market of satellite television and, in some regions, cable television (Crisell, 2002: 227). By the mid-1990s, "ITV fought hard to reduce its already diminished public service obligations; in seeking to hold on to a 38-40% audience share ITV in 1994-5 was trying to move its main evening *News at Ten* into a lower audience time slot" (Tunstall, 1997: 252). When ITV finally succeeded in doing this in 1999, it was viewed as a mortal blow to public service broadcasting in Britain (Semetko, 2000), in conjunction with the beginning of a major fragmentation of the television market following the provisions for digital

broadcasting in the 1996 Broadcasting Act. However, by 2005, although with a reduced audience share, both BBC and ITN were still the main news outlets on television; more importantly, at the 2005 election, the Electoral Commission found that four-fifths of people claimed to use television as their main source of news, and it still garnered high levels of trust (2005: 39). Overall, however, the changes to the television market in the UK mean that the analysis of television news that follows in Chapters 3-6 must take note of the potential effects of commercialisation.

2.4 UK Television News Analysis: A Review

Given the importance of television news in the modern political and electoral process in Britain, the shortage of longitudinal analyses of news content is both a cause for concern and a genuine puzzle. The majority of large-scale studies of content have been funded by regulatory or independent governmental bodies rather than conducted solely by scholars, and have been more common in the past decade than at any time before, although this may be attributable to storage and maintenance issues surrounding pre-digital recording media. Regardless, the small amount of research that does tackle changes in television news content, or any aspect of campaign coverage, renders the present study timely, and necessary to build an understanding of how trends in election coverage in Britain have been measured. This section reviews the present state of research in British television news content both during election campaigns, and during normal broadcasting.

The relevant literature falls into three categories. The first, single-election analyses of one or several aspects of television news coverage, is the most popular, with the landscape dominated by the television chapters in the Butler and Kavanagh studies at each general election (Pilsworth, 1980; Harrison, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1997, 2002, 2005), and the *Political Communications* series, which included similar reviews of campaign coverage (Harrison, 1982; Axford and Madgwick, 1989; Tait, 1995; Nossiter, Scammell and Semetko, 1995; Goddard, Scammell and Semetko, 1998) and the influential newsroom analyses of Blumler, Gurevitch and Nossiter (1986, 1995; Blumler and Gurevitch, 1998). These studies are rich in detail, but lack any forward- or backward-reaching longitudinal focus; collectively they do not offer a sustained or consistent methodology from which an account of change in news coverage can be reliably inferred. Their findings are, however, of interest here in building a picture of news coverage of British elections. Notable other single-election studies are: Semetko et al. (1991), in which campaign agenda formation in

television newsrooms is studied; Miller et al. (1990; see also Miller, 1991); Norris et al. (1999 – which also contains some comparisons between data at the 1992 and 1997 elections); Deacon et al. (2001); Bartle (2005) and Gaber (2006). The study of the 2005 election by Deacon et al. (2005; see also Deacon, Wring and Golding, 2006) on behalf of the Electoral Commission is of special significance because it combines data longitudinally to measure trends in a couple of areas across four elections.

The second category of relevant news content research consists of large-scale studies of television news commissioned by regulatory bodies, usually containing some element of longitudinal content analysis in the shape of a content comparison across a relatively short time period (Hargreaves and Thomas, 2002; Ofcom, 2007a, 2007b; Lewis et al., 2008; Cushion, Lewis and Ramsay, 2010). These provide little information that is of direct use for a longitudinal comparison of election content, but develop the practice of news content analysis in Britain. Finally, the most important category –studies dedicated to a longitudinal analysis of trends in television news in the UK, with or without an election focus – is also the least developed, consisting of Barnett, Seymour and Gaber's (2000) analysis of tabloid and broadsheet news content in broadcast news from 1975 to 1999 (the methodology was also replicated for a ten-week analysis in 2002 as part of the study by Hargreaves and Thomas, 2002); Esser's (2008) comparison of soundbites at the 2001 and 2005 elections; a comparative content analysis of similar samples from 1975 and 2001 by Winston (2002), and two analyses focusing on trends in election coverage: by Scammell and Semetko (2008; some of the data was previously available in Semetko and Scammell, 2005) and supplemented by trend analysis of selected variables in Deacon et al. (2005). The field is surprisingly sparse, given the significance of the subject matter, and the changing environment since 1979.

In the following sections, the role of these studies in developing an understanding of trends in television election news will be assessed. Special attention will be paid to the studies in the third category, as they shaped the construction of the methodology employed in this study through their contributions and omissions, defining the measures and techniques described in Section 1.3 (above) and exposing the gap in trend analysis that this thesis fills.

Single-Election Studies

The landscape of news analysis during single elections between 1979 and 2005 is dominated by the Nuffield Election Studies of Butler and Kavanagh, and the *Political Communications* series (edited by various authors over the 26-year period). Each consists of an edited volume of thematic studies released after each general election, and contains one or more chapter on television news coverage of that election (a list of the relevant chapters from 1979 to 2005 have been cited above). The chapters in each study tend to consist of a thorough account of television news coverage, or one of its aspects, providing excellent snapshots, but containing no methodological consistency between studies, and little or no direct comparisons of data. Frustratingly, these studies – alongside Semetko et al's (1991) study of campaign and news agendas at the 1983 election and the research featured in Miller et al. (1990) and Miller's (1991) news issue agenda analysis of 1987 – provide the total amount of quantitative research of television election news coverage between 1979 and 1992. Without a consistent research agenda, figures relating to news composition can only be pieced together, and care must be taken in identifying trends, as the differing methods employed compromise the reliability of most of the comparisons. The lack of consistent analysis for this period in British political communication makes understanding the nature of change difficult.

Yet these studies are not entirely without merit as sources of information on trends in election news coverage. The depth of analysis is often such that significant threads in campaign coverage can be located and followed. The tensions noted between party campaigning tactics and journalists' desires to focus on substantive issues were evident in 1979, as the Conservative Party's sophisticated media-oriented campaign manifested itself, and Labour actively pushed their more avuncular speakers – Callaghan and Healey – in front of the cameras (Pilsworth, 1980). Concern about "presidentialisation" was a theme of coverage, but editors, fearful of missing a significant event, deployed considerable resources to following the party leaders: both Pilsworth and Harrison (1982) note the percentage of footage devoted to party leaders in each party as ranging from 50-60% of all party footage. By 1983 this had dropped to 40-50% (Harrison, 1984), but the common theme of inconsistency arises here, as this included radio as well as television, so a direct comparison is impossible (though Harrison does describe an active resistance among journalists against party efforts to influence coverage and advance their leaders. There was evidence – at the BBC at least – of the sacerdotal approach to campaign coverage among television journalists (Blumler, Gurevitch and Nossiter, 1986; Semetko et al., 1991), and

over half of bulletins were dedicated to the campaign on both channels (Harrison, 1984), while ITN's adoption of electronic newsgathering (ENG) technologies marked a subtle decentralisation of editing and more leeway afforded to reporters in the field, in stark contrast to the BBC (Harrison, 1984: 157).

For the 1987 election the continuing lack of comparative data is still in evidence, although the introduction of soundbite coverage is introduced, with Harrison (1988) noting that leader speech made up 56.7% of Labour, 46.5% of Conservative, and 63.8% of Alliance coverage (made more complicated by the dual leadership of the Alliance Party). Similarly, polling data and speculation of party prospects was more prominent, taking up approximately 10% of campaign news – although the nature of the speculation or the manner in which it was presented was not noted. Axford and Madgwick (1989) identified a sharp increase in political coverage during election campaigns: a rise from 2.1 items per bulletin during normal broadcasting to 5.8, but their classification of 'political' is not clear, neither is the extent of their sample. The research by Miller et al. (1990) and Miller (1991) took a more critical approach to television analysis, noting that party and leader coverage was unrealistically positive, the public's issue agenda was ignored, and that there were broad similarities between the BBC and ITV news agendas.

By 1992 there was more emphasis on quantitative analysis of news coverage, new techniques were applied, and so more information about the composition of television election news emerges. 65% of bulletins on BBC, and 59% on ITV, focused on the campaign, indicating an increase from 1983. A first figure in Britain of average leader soundbites (18 seconds) is interesting, but includes radio soundbites as well (Harrison, 1992), while Nossiter, Scammell and Semetko more closely analysed content, noting that polls and 'horse race' (though they do not explain their definition of 'horse race') coverage took up 18.4% of BBC coverage and 31.6% of ITV coverage of the campaign, indicating an increase in the campaign itself, as opposed to substantive policy content. This represented a continual development over time, according to Harrison (1992), as the constant coverage of leaders' campaign behaviour led to an increase in coverage that was entirely policy free to around 15% of the total, despite ITN's abandonment of the stopwatch measure, supposedly to combat this inclusion of photo-opportunity stories to maintain balance (Tait, 1995). More significantly, the increased propensity of journalists to evaluate and decode the professionalised campaigns was observed: "Revealing the reality behind the scenes was also a feature in the *regular* daily reports from the campaign trail...

normal coverage of the 1992 election went deeper into the issue of manipulative campaign techniques than in previous campaigns" (Nossiter, Scammell and Semetko, 1995).

Studies of the 1997 election looked more deeply at this evidence of a more interpretive and analytical style of broadcast journalism. The increased use of two-ways, in which senior correspondents summarise the main campaigning events of the day were identified as a major development in campaign coverage, and not necessarily a beneficial one. Coverage of the election was more heavily structured and 'framed' by journalists (Harrison, 1997: 145), and Goddard, Scammell and Semetko (1998: 170) identified more evaluation *within* stories, and Blumler and Gurevitch observed greater encouragement at the BBC for 'more robust' commentary (1998: 186). This is seen as a valid response to disciplined party communication and attempts by politicians to influence news (the 'journalistic fight-back' of Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995), but the increasing interpretive nature of British election coverage was viewed as potentially inducing cynicism among viewers, despite the relative absence of outright negativity on the part of journalists (Goddard, Scammell and Semetko, 1998: 170). The increasingly prominent role of journalists was accompanied by an observed shortening of average political soundbites, to 16.5s on the *Nine O'Clock News* and 14.7s on *News at Ten*, reflecting a reduction of long soundbites (less than ten over 50 seconds long) and an increase in shorter fragments of speech (Harrison, 1997: 142). This was partly ascribed to the editing process, and the use of politicians' speech to illustrate a narrative: "Longish utterances were liable to be chopped mid-sentence. Substantial statements were reported salami-style – thin slices of actuality linked in reported speech" (ibid: 142). The net result was that senior political correspondents were heard "as often and at greater length than the party leaders" (ibid: 145).

The 2001 and 2005 elections curiously contained less forensic coverage of television broadcast coverage in the Nuffield and *Political Communications* studies. Deacon et al., (2001) observed in that campaign that "strong vestiges" of the sacerdotal approach to campaign coverage remain, in the consistency of campaign coverage throughout the campaign on BBC and ITV. They also found that 'election process' was a major factor in campaign coverage (45% of items, although they did not differentiate between press and broadcast journalism. Evidence of further shrinkage in political soundbites is offered by their comparisons between the average speech per campaign item in 1992, 1997 and 2001, from 26.5s in 1992 to 20.3s in 2001 on BBC bulletins, and 22.3s-17.6s on ITV. The reduction for party leader soundbites alone was more pronounced: 37.1-

24.8s on BBC; 32.0-21.2s on ITV. These figures, however, represented total speech within a campaign item, and not average lengths of soundbites, so comparison is not possible with any previous data. There was also more evidence of the greater intrusiveness of journalists in the process of reporting the campaign, including "repeated examples" of journalists 'writing themselves into the story' (Deacon et al., 2001: 673), and increased mediation of political soundbites, which are usually "topped and tailed" by the correspondents (ibid: 672). This indicates a trend from the 1997 election studies, and the conclusions are the same: viable responses to party manipulation, and a potentially cynicism-inducing treatment of political motives: "The more [journalists] claimed to decode the strategies and straighten the spins, however, and the more they moved centre stage on the news bulletins, the more the politicians appeared as diminished figures, whose words cannot be trusted" (ibid: 673). By 2005, it was stated the continuing commitment on both BBC and ITV to place special emphasis on covering the campaign in terms of volume and prominence, soundbites had grown slightly on average (although only recorded as item totals, not average soundbites: Deacon et al. 2005; 2006), and the continuing interpretation of political actions was still a stifling influence: "as informative as these [two-ways] were, it appeared that journalists were acting as both 'gate keepers' and 'nannies', selecting words and telling voters what they 'really' meant. Voters were often simply not trusted to work things out" (Bartle, 2005: 709).

In all, the single-election studies provide a wealth of information on the specific elections they cover, but offer little insight into measurable significant changes in election news coverage on British television. We are left with a few areas in which interesting phenomena have been flagged at a point in time, such as the average leader soundbite in 1992 (Harrison, 1992), or the increase in political coverage during elections in 1987 (Axford and Madgwick, 1989), but these measures are simply not replicated, or are covered in ways that do not allow for comparison. However, these studies do allow us to identify things that continually arose in the studies, such as the rise of interpretive and critical campaign journalism, independently verified across different elections and viewed as an increasing problem. At the same time, the different measurements of soundbites and speech indicate a directional change. Deacon et al., 2001; 2005; 2006) show an overall decline, but their method is ultimately unsatisfying; they identify from their viewing of bulletins that soundbites are commonly chopped and shaped around journalists' speech, but their analysis only indicates the average length of political speech within items. The growth of 'horse race' coverage of elections is also raised on several occasions, but is not satisfactorily identified beyond polling data and a vague definition of coverage of the

processes of campaigning. The role of technology is flagged in the early (1979 and 1983) elections as a potential reason for differences in reporting styles and story focus, but this is not developed in later studies. Overall, these studies do not reveal much about trends in election coverage in the UK, but they do provide clues as to where such a study should look.

Longitudinal Analyses of British News

Far less in number, but considerably more useful for the present study are those studies that measure trends in news content over time. Non-election longitudinal analysis of UK news consists of four studies, all published during or after 2000, and all but one (Winston, 2002) commissioned or conducted by the main regulators, the BBC and the ITC (latterly Ofcom). Barnett, Seymour and Gaber's (2000) study of changing trends in British television news between 1975 and 1999 (measured at 5-yearly intervals) remains the only study of comparable length to the research undertaken in this thesis, and although their project only investigates content agendas in non-election news, it is still relevant for the current project both in its findings and the methods it deployed. The study focuses on the accusations that British television news has gone 'downmarket' in recent decades, following a more tabloid agenda. The question is relevant to election studies, as the 'sacerdotal' approach to campaign coverage, long observed as an enduring trend in British campaign news, is linked to the PSB ethos of television journalism and the commitment to provide informative, accessible and analytical news. A change in editorial orientation towards story selection on the basis of more 'tabloid' news agendas – as the 'tabloidisation' argument goes (see Chapter 1 above) – would be expected to have some influence on the volume and prominence of campaign coverage, or at least of non-campaign content. The organisational and regulatory changes that affected both the BBC and ITV/ITN also provide a rich environment in which to investigate the nature of change as economic and political pressures on journalism fluctuate.

The study looked at all bulletins that were broadcast on terrestrial channels at each point in time (i.e. *Channel 4 News* after 1982 and *Five News* after 1997), configuring the sample so that election years were avoided and separating the dates so that large event-based news stories didn't influence the sample. Each news story was assigned a subject category on the basis of the topic of the story, and the subjects were subdivided into 'broadsheet' and 'tabloid' categories. The assignment of 'tabloid' status to a news story is

not uncontroversial, but the longitudinal nature of the study means that the results are sufficiently reliable that robust conclusions can be drawn. Finally, as an indicator of the commitment of news resources to challenging journalism and the dedication to providing complex and serious news topics to news bulletins, they also measured the amount of foreign coverage. Their findings overall indicated that British television news moved from a relatively uniform news agenda in 1975, when BBC and ITV comprised the traditional 'duopoly' to a considerably more diverse array of news programmes, both across and within channels, as the evening and nightly news agendas differed on BBC and ITV. "Television", they state, "no longer speaks to the nation as one" (2000: 12). This is most apparent between 1990 and the end of their study in 1999, when BBC and ITV agendas diverged, with BBC bulletins maintaining a decidedly 'broadsheet' agenda, high foreign coverage, and low 'tabloid' coverage – which actually dropped between 1975 and 1999. ITV agendas, on the other hand, became noticeably more 'tabloid' between 1990 and 1999, rising from 10.9% of total coverage, to approximately 33% in 1999[9].

The concern with the tone of news content and the 'tabloidisation' argument continued through other longitudinal studies, given the need for analysis over time to assess change in such a phenomenon. Winston (2002) compared news bulletins in 2001 with those sampled in 1975 for the *Bad News* studies by the Glasgow University Media Group (1976, 1980), and while maintaining that the broadsheet agenda generally remains, found a decrease in political coverage accompanied by a substantial increase in stories on crime (2002: 11). His methodological approach in this count has been criticised due to its sample coming from a single week, and is thus susceptible to the distorting effects of a major – possibly crime – story (Barnett, 2011). However, his analysis of the composition of news stories is enlightening, finding that news items tend to have become longer and more complex, using more advanced techniques and – tellingly – greater use of the two-way, or 'standupper'. In conjunction with the analyses of television campaign news in the previous section that pointed to the increasing use of journalists to analyse and interpret events and the potential effect on viewer cynicism, it is significant that this style of reporting is prominent in normal news coverage, indicating a substantial change in

[9] In 1999, *News at Ten* on ITV was changed to *ITV Nightly News* and moved from its traditional slot in February 1999, during the sampling period. The figure given above is a figure for the *Nightly News* bulletins which comprised the vast majority of the sample, adjusted to remove the 6% devoted to a review of the following day's papers, which has been removed from the 'tabloid' category for the forthcoming update of the study.

techniques of broadcast journalism with potential implications for the informational content of election news.

The remaining studies of television news in the UK with longitudinal elements are Hargreaves and Thomas' (2002) report for the ITC (shortly before it became part of Ofcom), and Ofcom's own review of television news prior to the forthcoming switch to purely digital terrestrial broadcasting (2007a, 2007b). Hargreaves and Thomas' report was an audit of the changing composition and consumption of news in the UK. Their comparative component again focused on the supposed shift from 'serious' to 'lighthearted' news, and while they employ a different means of defining a story as 'tabloid' or 'broadsheet' – matching headlines in newspapers belonging to those categories with leading stories on television bulletins – their conclusions are more or less in line with those of Barnett, Seymour and Gaber. In 2002, they found that the BBC's nightly news only matched the tabloid agenda on 1.5% of occasions, while on ITV the corresponding figure was 10.4%, indicating that the divergence between the channels' news agendas noted in Barnett et al remains. Again, their conclusion was one of increasing diversity in terms of content and style across all terrestrial news bulletins. The Ofcom report updated some of the measures of this report to 2006, finding that both BBC and ITV bulletins demonstrated an increase in political and international stories between 2002 and 2006 (2007b: 103). They also noted extremely low proportions of 'tabloid' coverage, although their definition of 'tabloid' was so restrictive that these results are not comparable with those of Barnett, Seymour and Gaber.

Longitudinal Studies of Election News

Finally, there are four studies that contain elements of analysis of television election news coverage in Britain across two or more elections. Norris et al. (1999); Deacon et al., (2001); Deacon et al., (2005; data also used in Deacon et al., 2006); and Scammell and Semetko (2008; data also used in Semetko and Scammell, 2005). The first, Norris et al's *On Message* is a comprehensive study of the 1997 general election which contains some comparable data on news issue agendas in 1992 and 1997, indicating a decline in stories with a substantive policy focus, to the extent that, in 1997, 60% of all relevant BBC stories were classified as dealing with 'campaign issues' rather than policy issues, rising to 66% on ITV (1999: 75). Deacon et al., (2001), as shown above, therefore has the distinction of being the first study to reliably apply a measure of television news content across different

elections (1992, 1997 and 2001), containing within their analysis of the 2001 election a single longitudinal measuring of the shrinking of political soundbites over time, finding that the average amount of speech per campaign story (excluding interviews) had declined from 26.3s in 1992 to 20.3s on BBC nightly bulletins, and from 22.3s to 17.6s on ITV. Taking leader-only speech, the decline was more pronounced: 37.1-24.8s on BBC; 32.0-21.2s on ITV. This indicates not only that levels of political speech have declined significantly across two parliaments, but that there is a substantial difference in the lengths of leaders' and all other politicians' speech.

This data was extrapolated to take in the 2005 election by Deacon et al. (2005; 2006), where it was noted that levels of political speech per story had levelled off, both in total and for party leaders between 2001 and 2005. The merit of using total speech within items as a measure of soundbites is, however, questionable. The negative effect of shrinking soundbites is attributed to the fact that shorter soundbites (taking Adatto's (1990) and Hallin's (1992) definition of 'an uninterrupted bloc of speech') convey less information to the viewer, and result from the chopping of speech by journalists to better fit a preconceived narrative. The measure employed by Deacon et al. proves neither of these: hypothetically, a story with one 20-second soundbite would measure the same as one where 20 seconds of speech was split into four 5-second bites, each contextualised by the reporter. A more thorough means of measuring soundbites is necessary to demonstrate the incidence of 'shrinking soundbites' in campaign news in the UK. Other measures in Deacon et al. (2005; 2006) demonstrate that the amount of coverage – in absolute terms – of the campaign has declined on both BBC and ITV, in part due to the ending of the policy of lengthening bulletins especially for the campaign on the BBC, but nonetheless signifying that less time has been devoted to recent elections, a potentially worrying trend.

Finally, Scammell and Semetko's (2008) summary of election coverage in British media contains a section on television news, applying some measures across the 1992, 1997 and 2001 elections, with some stand-alone measures for 2005. They present longitudinal data indicating a gradual decline in the percentage of all stories mentioning the campaign, from around 60% on both BBC and ITV in 1992, to around 40% in 2001 (2008: 84); a striking conclusion, but one which is unsatisfactory on three counts: first, as Winston (2002) noted, British television news items have tended to become longer over time; second, if the aim is to demonstrate a flight from British screens of election coverage, the 'percentage of all stories' measure masks the fact that campaign stories could be considerably longer (or, admittedly, shorter) than non-campaign stories; third, they do not

specify how they delineate 'stories'[10]. However, they also provide further evidence corroborating claims elsewhere that the total volume of speech by political actors has declined substantially between 1992 and 1997, with the largest fall on BBC coverage, albeit due to the fact that the specially-extended bulletins in 1992 and 1997, but not 2001, would contain more news items, and thus more instances of candidate speech.

Taking Stock

The distinct lack of cohesion in the corpus of empirical analysis of trends in election coverage in British television news bulletins means that, at present, only fragmentary conclusions can be drawn about the nature and degree of change. While it is true that recent years have seen an increase in studies, even the most extensive measurements of single variables only span four elections, and from 1979 to 1992 (and almost certainly prior to 1979) there is no empirical research into changes in the content of television news, during the period when it is charged with being a key player in the transformation of political communication. There is also a lack of uniformity in the measures used to evaluate news content, preventing definitive assertions being made. Taking all of the studies covered in this section, though, some evidence of trends has emerged: news agendas during non-campaign news have remained relatively devoted to serious news, although ITV has demonstrated movement towards a more 'tabloid' agenda; campaign coverage has become more 'process'-oriented, with more interpretation on the part of journalists; and overall speech by politicians has declined (although actual soundbite data is sparse). These provide some guidance in constructing an analysis of trends in television news coverage of elections in Britain.

2.5 Analysing Election News on Television: A New Framework

The purpose of this thesis is to measure change in British election coverage on television. It is also intended to evaluate the existing theories about longitudinal trends in political communication in the UK. The analysis that follows in Chapters 3-6 in employed in order to fulfil both of these aims. Four main themes are tackled, each insinuated in the existing

[10] More recent studies (see Oates, 2006; Lewis et al, 2008; Cushion, Lewis and Ramsay, 2010) have taken care to distinguish between 'stories', i.e. events often covered by two or three reporters, with live reports attached to recorded packages in the broadcasting schedule, and 'items', in which each represents a separate treatment of an event, and is thus viewed as a separate unit.

literature on British election coverage on television, and each related to the assertions that the predictive theories of change have made. By applying a consistent research framework to news bulletins across seven elections, the research unites some of the evidence of change in news coverage identified in previous empirical studies, and in most cases employs more appropriate measures for identifying trends and their implications. Where previously-employed methods are sound, these are extended to cover the full length of the study.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the maintenance of the core defining feature of British television journalism since its early years – the public service ethos. The unique broadcasting environment in the UK has fostered a 'sacerdotal' approach to election coverage within news organisations: a commitment to high volumes of campaign reporting, bypassing conventional news values (Blumler, 1969; Blumler, Gurevitch and Nossiter, 1986; Semetko et al., 1991; Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995). The result – not always popular with audiences – is a larger amount of information being made available to regular consumers of news that is non-partisan and generally well-trusted. It is proposed that during election campaigns, the provision of increased levels of political coverage is a valuable resource to citizens, and so consistent measures are applied to identify the nature of change in the volume and prominence of campaign news, changing news agendas, and party and leader coverage. Existing research suggests that, although campaign coverage is comparatively high in both volume and prominence in British television election news, there has been a decrease in coverage over the past decade – a statement that requires clarification. The research in Chapter 3 also analyses the truth of the 'crisis' and 'convergence' hypotheses. The volume and prominence of campaign coverage can be used as both an indicator of the maintenance of the unique characteristics of British broadcast journalism contrary to the market logic that commercialisation imposes on news values and news provision. It also provides a measure – irrespective of content – of the disposition of news organisations towards contributing to a healthy public sphere and the cultivation of an informed and engaged electorate.

Substantive content is the focus of the research in Chapter 4, where two frequently-identified trends in the existing literature are re-tested using consistent longitudinal measures. The rise of 'process-oriented' news coverage of elections allied with a decline in substantive policy coverage has been noted by several studies (Harrison, 1984; Nossiter, Scammell and Semetko, 1995; Norris et al., 1999; Deacon et al., 2005, 2006), while speculation on the more adversarial and interpretive role of journalists has been widespread

since the 1992 election (Nossiter, Scammell and Semetko, 1995; Goddard, Scammell and Semetko, 1998; Blumler and Gurevitch, 1998; Deacon et al., 2001; Bartle, 2005). Both of these trends are identified with a move away from the traditional model of British broadcast journalism, and increases in competitive and commercial pressures. They are also linked with the rise of campaign professionalism and the need for journalists to unmask and identify manipulative party communications on one hand, and the inculcation of voter cynicism and the stifling of independent evaluation and analysis on the part of viewers, on the other. While the causal link between campaign behaviour and strategic/process/interpretive journalism is difficult to establish, such change in television campaign journalism in the UK requires clarification. The rise of adversarialism and interpretive journalism have long been identified as excesses of the 'American Model' of political communication (Patterson, 1993; Plasser and Plasser, 2002), and evidence of their increased presence in Britain should be a central concern of longitudinal analysis.

Chapter 5 provides a comprehensive account of political speech, soundbites, and the presence of journalists as active speakers in campaign coverage. The review of previous studies above shows that, while soundbite research has been a recurring theme in television news analysis, the lack of clarity in defining 'soundbites', and the application of different methodologies means that the conclusions that have been forwarded regarding a shortening of political soundbites – a key theme in studies of American campaign coverage (Adatto, 1990; Hallin, 1992; Bucy and Grabe, 2007; Farnsworth and Lichter, 2008) – require further research. In Chapter 5 a new method of soundbite analysis in the UK context is applied between 1979 and 2005 to provide a comprehensive picture of change over time. Alongside the political soundbite measurement, the total volume of political speech is recorded, to investigate assertions by Scammell and Semetko (2008) that there has been a progressive decline in recent decades. Finally, the presence of journalists will be ascertained in a similar fashion to discover whether accusations of the replacement on-screen of politicians by progressively prominent journalists are true.

Chapter 6 places the claims of previous studies about changes in campaign coverage in the context of British television news bulletins as a whole. The composition of bulletins: the number, length and contents of items – campaign and non-campaign oriented – is analysed in order to gain a more complete picture of how election coverage has changed within general trends in news reporting. This analysis also takes into account the potential impact of technology on campaign reporting – an issue generally acknowledged, but under-research in the campaign news context. Finally, an analysis of non-campaign

soundbites in television news explores the extent to which trends of increasing journalist prominence are unique to campaign coverage, or a developing aspect of television news as a whole.

Chapter 3: News Agendas and Campaign Coverage – The Endurance of the Public Service Ethos

3.1 Introduction

British television news has traditionally been defined by its adherence to the public service broadcasting (PSB) principles enshrined in the BBC Charter and, for ITV, the commercial regulatory body of the day. "The concept of PSB" in British broadcasting "is rooted as much in culture and convention as statute and, until the 1990 Broadcasting Act, had been shared by the BBC and ITV alike" (Nossiter, Scammell and Semetko, 1995: 85). The substantially-increased competitive and economic pressures applied to ITN as a result of the Act amplified their need to take steps to maximise ratings for news programming and to compete with the then-ascendant BBC News (Harrison, 2000, 2005; McNair, 2003a). Meanwhile, the BBC, mindful of the threat to the licence fee funding structure under the Conservative government during the 1980s, increasing political apathy during the 1990s and 2000s, and diminishing audience share as a result of digital fragmentation, has also faced pressures to maintain genuinely popular news provision. Added financial stresses have faced BBC journalism following the launch of BBC *News 24* and the BBC News website in 1997. Because of the centrality of PSB principles in British television journalism, evidence of a decline over time in measures indicating a commitment to PSB would be highly significant. As a result, much of the empirical data generated so far in relevant studies has been related to the volume of coverage of the election within bulletins, and on television as a whole, reflecting the belief that high-volume coverage is both beneficial in itself, and indicative of the traditionally 'sacerdotal' approach to election coverage deployed in British television news rooms (Blumler, 1969; Semetko et al., 2001).

This chapter measures three facets of British television news provision to determine whether PSB principles have been upheld. The first is the volume and prominence of campaign coverage in BBC and ITV bulletins[11]. This approach broadly follows the existing attempts to measure the commitment to PSB/sacerdotal campaign coverage (Harrison, 1984, 1992, 1997; Goddard, Scammell and Semetko, 1998; Norris et al., 1999; Scammell and Semetko, 2008) of focusing on change in the total length of election news broadcast, the proportion of available time in bulletins devoted to campaign coverage, and the placing of campaign news in the running order. Higher absolute and proportional amounts of campaign coverage indicate, it is argued, a propensity to cover campaign

[11] All data relating to 'BBC' and 'ITV' coverage is – unless otherwise stated – based on the nightly bulletins contained in each sample, and not BBC and ITV news provision as a whole.

events in favour of other news events during the period in the run-up to the election, while the placing of campaign items prominently in the running order similarly indicates that campaign events are given preference. Combined, these signify the sacerdotal ethos observed in BBC journalism prior to and during the period of this study. The second, related, measure is an analysis of the balance of 'hard' versus 'soft' news agendas that has so occupied longitudinal studies of election news. The aim is to augment the absolute and proportional measures of news volume with evidence of trends in the commitment to a more serious news agenda in British television journalism, and also to look in particular depth at the ITV news agenda, following conclusions in Barnett, Seymour and Gaber (2000), Hargreaves and Thomas (2002) and Ofcom (2007a; 2007b) that ITV has progressively deviated from the BBC's more serious news agenda since 1990. The purpose of this is, by replicating the longitudinal studies but using an election sample, to see if ITV's levels of campaign coverage have changed accordingly.

The trend analysis of these aspects of campaign coverage on British television is also significant for the broader hypotheses about the nature of change in British news. PSB principles of high-volume, high-prominence campaign reporting and the allocation of news resources to campaign coverage are at odds with the commercial imperative and the 'pragmatic' journalistic disposition by which political news items must 'fight their way in' to news bulletins by fulfilling the same criteria as all other items (Semetko et al., 1991). The maintenance of high levels of campaign coverage is therefore taken to be indicative of a continuation of the sacerdotal approach. Higher levels of campaign coverage also provide the public with more information during election campaigns, a central attribute of a healthy public sphere, and a precious resource for the electorate. The findings of this chapter indicate that PSB principles have generally remained high in campaign coverage in British television news. The ending of the practice of extending bulletins for the campaign on both BBC and ITV – in response to substantial viewer protests at the perceived excessive levels of coverage – has reduced the total volume of coverage, but the proportion of bulletins devoted to the campaign has remained generally steady at between 50% and 70%, making the campaign easily the single most important subject on the nightly British bulletins during election campaigns. Significantly, news agendas have consistently been geared more towards 'hard', rather than 'soft' or 'tabloid' news, considerably more than has been indicated in longitudinal studies of 'normal' news. A rise in 'soft' news in ITV bulletins has not been at the expense of campaign news. Finally, although there is some evidence that campaign coverage has become more leader-oriented, minor party coverage has

remained consistent, indicating that these remain valid topics for news bulletins on the basis of their intrinsic worth to democratic coverage rather than their popular interest.

3.2 Volume and Prominence of Election Coverage

3.2.1 Volume[12]

The purest indicator of the commitment to high-profile election coverage by a broadcast news outlet is the simple measurement of the length and proportion of the finite news hole devoted to campaign matters, at the expense of all other content. To uncover the proportion of news on BBC and ITV devoted to the election, the length in seconds of all campaign coverage (that is, all items that were coded as having some relevance to the election campaign) was recorded, as was the total length of all news broadcast over the 20 weekdays in the run-up to each election. From this data, the average length of time per bulletin on each channel devoted to the campaign could be discovered, as could the percentage of all news coverage that concerned the election. In order to more accurately measure this percentage, the recording of 'total news coverage' was not taken from the length of the bulletin (e.g. approximately 30 minutes, or 1800 seconds), but instead from the total number of seconds in each bulletin devoted to news coverage, and not procedural parts of the bulletin such as the introductory sequence, headlines, weather, and so on. This modified measure was calculated from the total lengths of all news items in all bulletins on a given channel at each election. So, Table 3.1 contains the total amount of news coverage in seconds, divided by the total number of bulletins in each election sample (forty[13]). To illustrate generally the changes in the total average amount of campaign coverage on UK television, Table 3.1 and Figure 3.1 show the total average amounts of news and campaign coverage on both BBC and ITV nightly bulletins during the run-up to each election featured in the study.

There has been an overall decline in both the overall volume of coverage on average, as well as a corresponding decline in the average amount of campaign coverage. The BBC's practice of extending bulletins for the 1983, 1987, 1992 and 1997 elections (by 10-15, 25, 20, and 25 minutes respectively), and ITV's allowance for minor extensions in 1987 and 1992 (not always taken up by ITN) contribute significantly to the 'hump'

[12] All data included in Sections 3.2 and 3.3 can be found in the 'Bulletin Characteristic' data tables in Appendix VII (a). Specific data tables for each measure employed throughout this chapter are located in Appendix VII(b)

[13] In 1979, only 30 bulletins were available for analysis, so the figures are adjusted to maintain parity

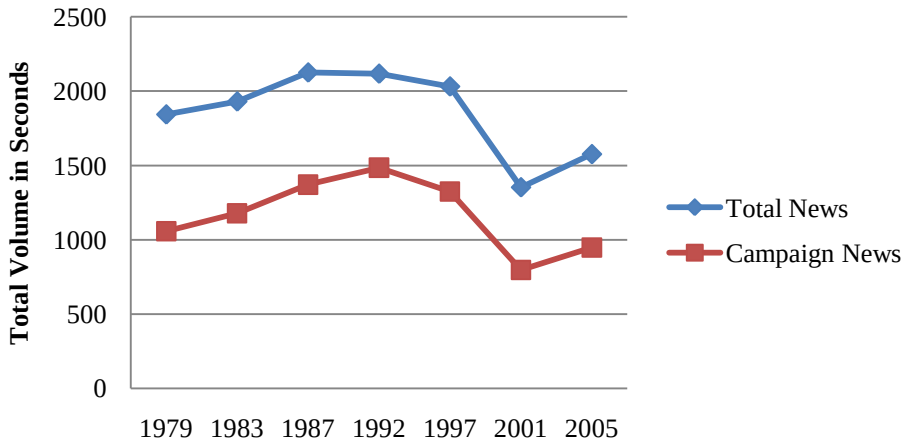
between 1983 and 1997. The decision to extend bulletins in this manner was not always popular with audiences who tired of excessive election coverage. The 1997 election, with its six-week official campaign caused significant viewer fatigue (Harrison, 1988), resulting in the measure being dropped in 2001. The low point of 2001 in terms of coverage is an interesting case. Overall, bulletins were as short as they had ever been during the time frame of the study (25-30mins on BBC, approximately 20mins on ITV, who had by that point incorporated regional news into the main timeslot of the nightly bulletin). The 2001 election also presented a unique context: the result, perhaps more than any other in the sample, was relatively certain even prior to the campaign, which had already been disrupted by an outbreak of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Butler and Kavanagh, 2001), as the Conservative Party, in a period of transition and under threat from the eurosceptic UKIP and Referendum Parties, struggled to mount a competent challenge to New Labour (Price, 2001). A reduction on the basis of more robustly-enforced news value judgements would be expected in a more pragmatically-minded news environment. Yet, as Table 3.1 shows, there was not a clear change in the proportion of campaign coverage to total news coverage, which remained above 60% overall.

Election	Average Total News in Seconds	Average Campaign News in Seconds	Campaign News as % of Total News
1979	1843	1057	57.68
1983	1930	1178	61.01
1987	2125	1371	64.53
1992	2117	1485	70.14
1997	2031	1324	65.20
2001	1353	797	58.92
2005	1576	948	60.14

Table 3.1: News and Campaign Coverage on BBC and ITV, 1979-2005[14]

[14] The sample for this measure, as for all other quantitative measurement in the thesis is taken, unless otherwise stated, is the total number of bulletins. There are 270 in all: 30 from 1979, 40 from each other election. Each election sample is equal for each channel: 15 each in 1979, 20 each in 1983-2005. Where absolute values are calculated, 1979 values have been adjusted to represent a full sample of 20 bulletins.

Figure 3.1: Average Total News and Campaign News per Bulletin, 1979-2005

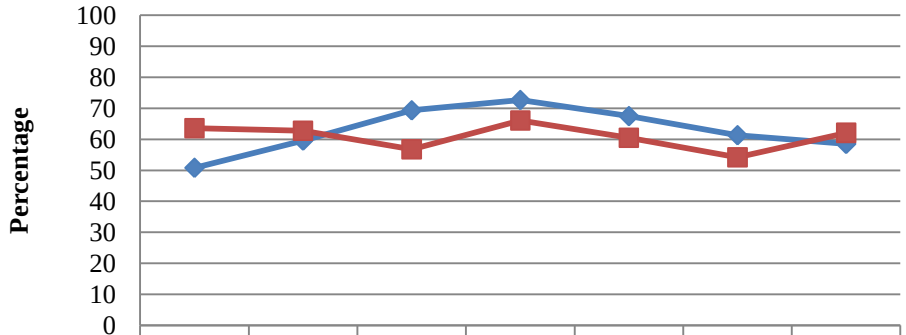


The reduction in total news output is significant, indicating as it does less commitment to providing the public with political information during elections, but continuing complaints regarding the volume of campaign coverage indicates the taking into account of popular feeling on this matter. Public Service news broadcasters tread a fine line between providing content for the public that goes against what is simply popular, but cannot risk alienating popular support, given the basis of funding and regulation. The ending of the extension of BBC nightly bulletins especially for the campaign would appear to be a major factor in the average decline, with a 34.3% drop in average news per BBC bulletin between 1997 and 2001 matched by a 40% drop in average campaign-related news per bulletin[15]. Overall, comparing the extremities of the study, 1979 and 2005, there has been a slight rise in total news and campaign coverage by approximately 26 and 146 seconds respectively, and a corresponding fall on ITV of 538 and 364 seconds, reflecting a substantial shortening of nightly news bulletins on that channel. However, Figure 3.2 shows that, despite the reduction in the total amounts of news and campaign coverage in British television news, the proportion of bulletins on each channel devoted to the campaign has remained steady over time. Over seven elections, it can be seen, over half of all news coverage has been devoted to the campaign, with the figure rising to almost three-quarters on the BBC in 1997. To reiterate the coding approach that allocated items 'campaign' status, and thus eligibility for inclusion in these figures, items in which the campaign was mentioned, or parties, candidates or events were mentioned in the context of the campaign were included. Items that contained political and governmental figures acting in official capacity as government spokespeople, opposition shadow ministers or

[15] See Appendix VII(b)

government critics or in a diplomatic or foreign affairs role were not counted unless the campaign or an aspect of party policy was conspicuously mentioned[16].

Figure 3.2: Proportion of BBC and ITV Bulletins Devoted to Campaign



	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005
BBC	50.81	59.59	69.37	72.70	67.50	61.33	58.52
ITV	63.58	62.80	56.76	66.07	60.52	54.21	62.08

The most striking evidence presented is the similarity on both channels over the 26-year period of bulletin space given over to the campaign. While the reduction of coverage on ITV in the context of shortening news bulletins, and the abandonment of extended bulletins on the BBC certainly indicate that there is less news by volume broadcast in nightly bulletins than during the 1983, 1987, 1992 and 1997 elections, British television election news is characterised by very high levels of campaign coverage as a percentage of all news during election campaigns. If the campaign is characterised as a single issue, in which various types of items are included – polling figures, constituency reports, leader campaign updates – then it is clear that it absolutely dominates the television news landscape during election campaigns. In terms of the low levels of coverage in 2001, the historically short bulletins on both channels have in part been rectified, and ITV contained considerably more news and campaign coverage in 2005 than in 2001. This is, however, a trend that requires continuing analysis in subsequent elections, as BBC news output fell slightly during the same period, indicating converging bulletin lengths on both channels.

3.2.2 Prominence

To complement the analysis of the volume of election coverage on both channels, three related measures were employed to ascertain the prominence of campaign coverage in the

[16] For example, a non-election economic story featuring a governmental spokesperson, minister or secretary that contained references to party economic policies would be coded as campaign-related because of the inclusion of policy content and the linking of a pressing issue to the upcoming election.

relevant bulletins. Combined, these test whether election news has become less prominent progressively on British television news on both channels[17]. The method employed here was to measure the number and proportion of bulletins on each channel at each election where:

1. The first item in the running order was devoted to the campaign;
2. Two of the top three items concerned the campaign
3. All three of the top three items concerned the campaign.

This shows how prominent election news has been on BBC and ITV during official campaigns over the period of study, while taking into account the effect that occasional high-profile non-campaign stories can have on the running order of the news.

Table 3.2 shows that, from lows of just 5 and 4 bulletins in 1979 on BBC and ITV respectively (where a smaller sample of 15 bulletins was used for each channel, instead of the usual 20), there have been fairly consistent amounts of bulletins on both channels in which the top story concerned the election campaign. The proportion on BBC rose steadily from 1983 to 1997, from 12/20 to 18/20 bulletins. This subsequently dropped to 17/20 in 2001 and 15 in 2005, although it should be taken into account that, whatever the other factors at play in 2005, the death of Pope John-Paul II accounted for 3 of the 5 bulletins on BBC (and 3 of the 7 on ITV) in which non-campaign coverage accounted for the top story in the running order. On ITV, slightly more top stories concerned the campaign than on BBC in 1983, 1987 and 1992. Thereafter, there has been a slight decline in numbers, both in total, and in comparison to the BBC. The emergence of particularly important stories during the election campaign was a feature of several elections covered in the study: terrorism in Northern Ireland and civil war in Uganda in 1979; the expulsion of British diplomats from Tehran in 1987; terrorism and the military response in South Africa in 1983; the trial for perjury of Jeffrey Archer in 2001. However, the number of bulletins in which the top story is campaign-related has remained high across all elections since 1983 on both channels.

[17] Initially, it was assumed that the mean of the combined places in the running order of campaign stories in each bulletin would be the best measure for this, but this was obstructed by the BBC practice of devoting two sections of each bulletin to the campaign during the 1992 and 1997 elections (see Blumler and Gurevitch, 1998), which distorted this measure for those elections.

	Top of Bulletin		Two of Top Three Stories		Top Three Stories	
	BBC	ITV	BBC	ITV	BBC	ITV
1979	5	4	7	9	3	4
1983	12	14	16	17	12	14
1987	13	13	17	16	13	13
1992	17	18	19	19	17	17
1997	18	16	20	19	15	16
2001	17	14	19	19	17	12
2005	15	13	15	18	12	11

Table 3.2: Prominence of Campaign Stories in Bulletins[18]

Allowing for the fact that occasionally a particularly big story can emerge that can justifiably supersede campaign coverage, the number and proportion of bulletins in which any 2 of the first 3 items concerned the campaign is also measured (naturally, there is some overlap of bulletins across the three measures). Again, not including the low scores in 1979, the results of this measure have been consistently above three-quarters of bulletins on each channel since 1983. Between 1992 and 2001, 115 out of 120 bulletins on both channels contained two campaign-related items in their top three stories. ITV output has matched the BBC's in this measure as well, indicating that, while a bulletin may be slightly less likely to have the campaign as its top story on ITV, campaign coverage is still prominent.

Finally, the number of bulletins on each channel in which all of the first three items in the running order are related to the campaign demonstrates that, as expected, the frequency of bulletins matching this condition is not as high. However, in every election between 1983 and 2005, more than half of all bulletins on either channel have had campaign-related items occupying the first three positions in the running order (although it should be noted that there was a substantial decline on BBC between 2001 and 2005, and on ITV between 1997 and 2005). In 1992 – the high point – 85% of all bulletins fulfilled this condition. Perhaps surprisingly, from the 1983 election through to 1997, ITV scored slightly better than the BBC, although thereafter there has been a significant decline in bulletins beginning with at least three campaign items. Overall, however, it is evident that there has been consistency in the amount of bulletins in which the first three items concerned the campaign, albeit with a decline between 2001 and 2005, while in only one of the sampled elections (2001) has there been a substantial difference in the number of such bulletins on either channel.

[18] For 1979, sample size for both BBC and ITV was 15 bulletins; for all other elections, 20 bulletins on each channel were sampled

3.2.3 Volume and Prominence: Summary

Together, these measures provide a clear picture of trends in the volume and prominence of campaign coverage in British television news bulletins. Overall, the proportion of coverage within news bulletins has remained comparatively high, and has neither dropped below 50% on either channel, nor given any indication of doing so. It is clear that the 'sacerdotal' motivations of campaign coverage have remained high on both channels, regardless of the apparent newsworthiness of the circumstances of the election, or the organisational context in which news bulletins are constructed. In terms of prominence, the campaign is consistently and overwhelmingly given primary status in bulletins. On both channels, the campaign is usually top of the running order, and more often than not occupies at least the top three positions in bulletins on both BBC and ITV. Not accounting for the substantive content of election coverage, which is covered in Chapter 4 (below), it is nonetheless clear that television journalism in Britain is orientated towards high-volume, high-prominence coverage of election campaigns.

Taking as an example the nightly news on ITV during the 2001 election: despite a campaign relatively lacking in suspense as polling indicated a Labour victory and no credible threat to the Conservatives' second-placing, and despite continuing economic and commercial pressures facing ITN during the expansion of rival digital channels at the turn of the century, over half of all news coverage was devoted to the campaign, while in 19 out of 20 bulletins the campaign occupied two of the first three slots. It would appear that whatever the context, on both channels campaign coverage is treated as a special case, and is actively included on the basis of its subject matter, rather than any particular newsworthiness.

However, while journalists may apportion extra time and resources to campaign coverage, the same cannot be said for the organisations themselves. Due to the ending of the practice of campaign bulletin extension on the BBC, and the declining space allocated to nightly news on ITV, there has been a decline, of the total volume of news and of campaign coverage. This indicates that, while campaign coverage within bulletins remains as highly valued as it was in 1979, news itself is not. The trend of decline, evident on both BBC and ITV, is worthy of further attention, given the requirement for visible and informative news coverage in modern democratic life.

3.3 News Agendas – 'Hard' and 'Soft' News in Election Campaigns

3.3.1 Analysing News Agendas

The coverage of news agendas has been a common topic in the existing longitudinal studies of British television news content. As well as providing enlightening information about changes in news coverage, news agenda analysis can also measure whether there has been a noticeable shift 'downmarket' in coverage. The landmark study of Barnett, Seymour and Gaber (2000) provides the only longitudinal analysis of news over a similar timeframe as that investigated in this thesis, and so their analysis is of interest here. More importantly, however, the theme of 'tabloidisation' is central to debates about the commercialisation of news media, and also the trivialisation of news and the reduction of information relevant to the political public sphere made available to citizens (see Chapter 1, above). It is, therefore, related to the hypotheses of 'crisis' and 'convergence' in national political communication in recent decades.

Previous studies have focused specifically on non-election news, due to the distorting effect of the campaign on news reporting in the UK (as shown in Section 3.2), and have found a general change in terrestrial news agendas in the UK towards more 'tabloid' coverage (Barnett, Seymour and Gaber, 2000; Winston, 2002; Hargreaves and Thomas, 2002; Ofcom, 2007), more pronounced on ITV than on BBC. Prior to 1990, it was noted, news agendas in BBC and ITV bulletins were broadly similar, but thenceforth diverged, with the BBC favouring a more 'serious' news and foreign affairs agenda, while ITV increasingly covered 'softer' topics (Barnett, Seymour and Gaber, 2000). As noted previously in Chapter 2, above, there are inconsistencies in both the sampling and categorisation used in these studies (Barnett, 2011). The measurement here is accordingly based on Barnett, Seymour and Gaber's methodology, which applies equally across each of the sampling periods they include at regular intervals in their 24-year study – though with a substantially different sampling method, the implications of which are considered in any comparative judgements.

Although the approach is the same, this is not a straight comparison with the previous study, not least because the election campaign focus here renders direct comparison invalid. The justification here is the fact that, while a softening of news agendas may be of definite concern for observers of the principles of Public Service Broadcasting in the UK, during election campaigns the assumed negative effect is amplified, providing the increase in 'tabloid' coverage comes at the expense of campaign

information. While there may be no definitive grounds for dictating an 'ideal' level of campaign coverage – just as there is no absolute preferred value for the balance of 'hard' versus 'soft' news in normal television bulletins – evidence of a reduction of campaign coverage allied with a rise in 'soft' coverage would provide evidence of a decline in the tenets of PSB as applied to news. Distinguishing between 'hard' and 'soft' news in an election context requires the application of certain normative assumptions about the benefits of a more serious news agenda during campaigns. These are:

- 'Hard' news is more conducive to political learning in general, as it provides the citizen with information about issues that concern government, governance, and wider aspects of civil society;
- During election campaigns, it is important that citizens are presented with the greatest amount of information from which – in part, at least – their electoral choice will be formulated;
- 'Soft' news in the broadcast news bulletin inhibits, through its presence in a finite news hole, the amount of 'hard' news made available to the audience.

It must immediately be acknowledged that these principles taken to their extremes make technically unrealistic demands on both the news organisations that must balance political news reporting with audience ratings, and the desire and stomach of the electorate for a constant diet of campaign news. As news standards they would fail Zaller's (2003) test of being a realistic option on which a news organisation could base its approach to political coverage. However, this highlights the tension between PSB news providers' orientations towards campaign coverage, and the proposed encroachment of economic and commercial pressures on news organisations.

Methods

The division of news items into 'hard' and 'soft', or 'broadsheet' and 'tabloid' categories necessarily involves some linguistic difficulties regarding the inherent superiority of one style of coverage over the other (Barnett, Seymour and Gaber, 2000: 4). The divisions between content types employed here is not intended to establish a hierarchical relationship between categories, and follows previous methods of delineating between 'hard' and 'soft' news. With this in mind, all of the news codes used in the content analysis of the samples

across different elections[19] were divided into four categories, which encompassed all items broadcast across all elections studied:

1. ***'Campaign'***, denoting whether an item directly concerns the General Election campaign;
2. ***'Foreign'***, or those items that deal with foreign news;
3. ***'Tabloid'***, where the subject of a given item concerns one of the categories designated as relating to an aspect of 'tabloid' news, listed below; and
4. ***'Other'***, meaning those remaining items that do not concern the election campaign or foreign news, but which are still considered hard news, due to their not corresponding to the tabloid categories.

By designating all items as such, it is possible to calculate the proportion of all coverage dedicated to each of the four categories. There are reasons to explore the balance of all four, but the final analysis of 'hard' and 'soft' groups categories 1, 2, and 4 as 'hard' news, with category 3 denoting 'soft' news. This categorisation adapts Barnett, Seymour and Gaber's (2000) analysis of trends in television news coverage. In their study, all news is divided into 'broadsheet' or 'tabloid' coverage. However, to take into account the election focus of this study, and the vastly greater number of item subject categories in the current coding frame, the four-way division of news items shown above was adopted here.

The terms 'hard' and 'soft' news applied here are dependent on the concept of what constitutes 'soft' news, since the categorisation broadly splits between items which are designated as 'tabloid' in nature, and those which are not. Item subjects designated as 'tabloid' were as follows:

- ***Crime*** (Single incidences of crime, trials, organised crime, drug crime)
- ***Sport*** (Daily round-ups, or stories of corruption, sporting events)
- ***Entertainment/Celebrity*** (Coverage of celebrities, film / music launches, film/ TV/music industries, programmes, deaths)
- ***Humour*** (Humorous or 'quirky' stories)
- ***Human Interest*** (Sympathetic / interactive coverage of person / group of people)
- ***Expeditions/Adventure*** (Either by an explorer or by a reporter, where there is no foreign politics dimension)
- ***Tragedy*** (Stories of single or multiple loss of life or hardship, i.e. deaths at sea or traffic accident; disability / disease; financial ruin. Does not include natural disasters or significant man-made disasters such as mining / bridge collapses)
- ***Consumer*** (Consumer news, not including corporate fraud or crime)

[19] See Appendix II for the full coding category list

- ***Royalty*** (Any stories involving royalty, not including political issues such as constitution)

This list is fairly comprehensive, and although the designation of the above terms as 'tabloid' requires some subjectivity in judgement, it is closely based on that compiled by Barnett, Seymour and Gaber, developed from observations of certain repeating forms of news item, and allowing for some level of comparison with the longitudinal findings of that study.

As with the rest of this study, the unit of analysis is the news item, which has been defined elsewhere in the report. Each news item was allocated a 'news focus', derived from the main topic of the item. 'Campaign' items could be calculated separately, since the content analysis also noted whether an item was relevant to the election campaign. All broadcast items were then grouped according to their story focus, and the total number of each type of items, their combined amounts in seconds, and the proportion of the total amount of news devoted to each category was calculated for every bulletin at each election. Averages for each measure were then calculated, giving results for each channel at each election[20]. This expands on the accuracy of those measures of campaign prominence used in the previous section, and gives three measures of the balance of Campaign, Foreign, Tabloid and Other coverage. The total number of seconds per bulletin was calculated from the combined lengths in seconds of all news items included in the bulletin, and not the length of the programme as a whole.

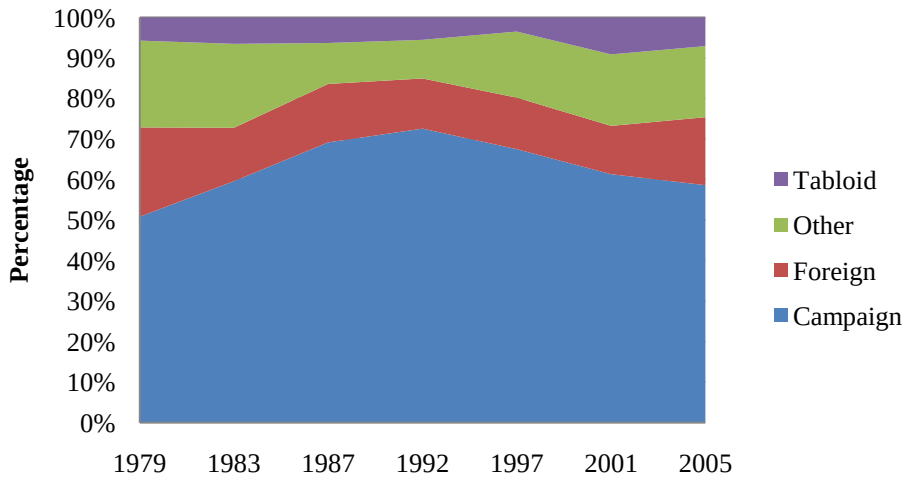
Results[21]

Figures 3.3 and 3.4 demonstrate changing proportions of BBC and ITV bulletins devoted to the different types of news category. The proportions, as in Section 3.2, are based on the total volume of news broadcast (in seconds), rather than the length of the bulletins as a whole. The figures for campaign coverage as a proportion of news output on each channel match, as expected, those revealed in Section 3.2 (above). Taking the channels separately, foreign coverage on the BBC, with the exception of the 1979 election, consistently accounted for around 12-15% of total coverage, and 'Other' coverage fluctuated between 21% in 1979 and just less than 10% in 1992. The coverage marked as 'tabloid', that is,

[20] All data available in Appendix VII(a)
[21] Data tables available in Appendix VII(b)

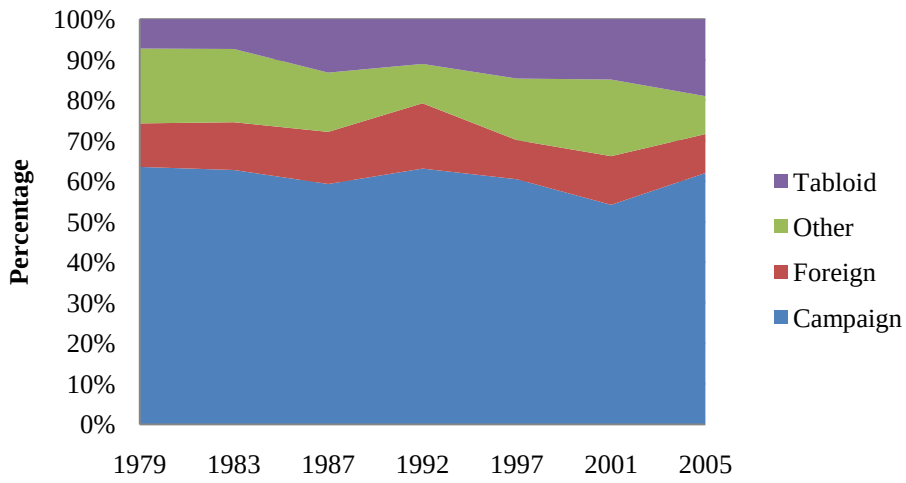
concerning one of the categories outlined above, therefore accounts for a small amount of election news coverage on the BBC at every election in the study, from a low of just 3.48% in 1997, to a high of 9.11% in 2001. By extension, this indicates that, for every election analysed, over nine-tenths of the coverage (calculated in seconds) has been devoted to 'hard' news: either the election campaign itself; foreign affairs; or other important topics. There has also been no discernible trend of growth in tabloid coverage – a slight drift towards the ten percent mark in 2001 was corrected by 2005.

Figure 3.3: News Agendas (BBC Bulletins)



The data presented in Figure 3.3 shows that there has been some more consistency on ITV in terms of the proportion of news devoted to the campaign, although this has been discussed in Section 3.2, and is attributable, at least in part, to the differences in bulletin length during the 1987, 1992 and 1997 elections. Otherwise, there have been fluctuations in both 'Foreign' and 'Other' coverage, with both recording their lowest percentages in 2005. At the same time – and at odds with the BBC coverage over the same period – there has been a steady increase in the amount of time devoted to 'Tabloid' news, indicative of an upwards linear trend in the proportion of news devoted to more trivial topics. There has been a steady rise in tabloid coverage, culminating in almost one-fifth of the 2005 election coverage relating to such topics. This is also substantially different to the BBC coverage; almost three times as much of the ITV coverage is categorised as 'tabloid' than on the BBC. Despite this trend, however, it should be noted that over 80% of all coverage could still be termed 'hard' news in 2005.

Figure 3.4: News Agendas (ITV Bulletins)



3.3.2 Summary

There are two overarching findings that can be inferred from this data. The first is that, generally, both news bulletins have followed, and continue to follow, similar news agendas during election campaigns. Most significantly, 50% to 70% of bulletins on both channels have been devoted to campaign coverage. Whatever else can be said about changing agendas in British television election news, it is clear that any tabloidization does not affect the volume of campaign coverage. In comparison with the data presented by Barnett, Seymour and Gaber, 2000, it is clear that foreign coverage is substantially reduced during election periods, vindicating the assertion by Scammell and Semetko (2008: 82) that media coverage of British elections is primarily domestic-oriented.

The second finding is that there has been, as demonstrated elsewhere, a divergence between BBC and ITV news in terms of the 'tabloid' or 'soft' content in average bulletins. This divergence is noted as early as the 1987 election, when 12.59% of ITV coverage was devoted to 'soft' news topics – almost exactly double that of the BBC (6.32%). It has been shown that there was a steady climb in the 'soft' news content of ITV bulletins over the period of study, from 7.23% in 1979 to 18.99%, a significant rise, and one which replicates the findings of Barnett, Seymour and Gaber (2000: 9). However, if the longitudinal 'tabloid' scores for their content analysis are compared with the findings here, on the basis of a similar methodology (similar category lists and 'item' definition; measurement of agendas as a percentage of total news time), then it is clear that levels of 'tabloid' coverage in bulletins during election campaigns are significantly lower than in 'normal' news bulletins. In other words, while tabloidisation may be an increasing feature of British

television news, the effect is less pronounced during election campaigns, indicating a reassertion of PSB journalistic values at election times.

3.5 News Agendas and Campaign Coverage on BBC and ITV

The main conclusion that can be drawn from a comparison of BBC and ITV election news bulletins in terms of the volume and prominence of coverage, and the 'hard' and 'soft' news agenda, is that coverage on both channels bears striking similarities. In both cases, a high proportion of coverage has been devoted to the campaign, typically between 50% and 70% - always the majority of news broadcast at each election. At the same time, campaign items are given considerable prominence in campaigns; their inclusion is not restricted to a brief roundup, but they usually make up the lead story in each bulletin on both channels, and almost always take up two of the top three slots. Finally, although there has been an increase in 'tabloid' coverage in news agendas on ITV during official election campaigns that has not been matched on the BBC, both channels still consistently broadcast an overwhelmingly serious news agenda. Typically, 90% or more of bulletins broadcast during election campaigns concern the campaign, foreign coverage, or other 'hard' news topics. It should be noted again that this measure is expressed as the proportion of time devoted to each type of news, rather than the number of items.

Any attempt to distinguish between the two channels on the basis of the measures above would be purely cosmetic. In general, both BBC and ITV have presented news bulletins that contain:

- A large amount of time devoted to the campaign
- Campaign items generally towards the top of bulletins
- A strong focus on 'hard' news agendas.

3.6 Conclusions

There is a further conclusion that can be drawn from the analysis above, and that is that there appears to be a strong and consistent 'sacerdotal' approach to news on both channels. Recalling Barnett, Seymour and Gaber's (2000) results about news agendas, it can be recalled that, between 1990 and 1999 – in the time between the imposition of the 1990 Broadcasting Act and the end of their study, there was a significant agenda divergence between the nightly news bulletins on BBC and ITV. Not only that, but 'tabloid' coverage

had begun to take up more news time on ITV than any either 'hard' news or foreign coverage – over one-third of all coverage. On the basis of those results, it would have been quite reasonable to assume that the effects of commercialisation had led ITV to abandon serious news topics in favour of a lighter agenda designed to maximise viewers rather than to concentrate on major political, economic and social issues. That was, of course, at the time when ITV had successfully lobbied to move its flagship news programme from its primetime slot to shore up advertising revenue in the face of increasing competition.

What is clear here, though, is that there has been no such movement during election campaigns. It can be safely said on the basis of the evidence presented above, though, that and 'tabloidisation' of news agendas on ITV during election campaigns does not happen at the expense of campaign coverage. Indeed, both BBC and ITV news bulletins have shown entirely different news agendas during election periods than during normal politics. Regardless of the context of the election or, evidently, the organisational news values that govern reporting generally, a sacerdotal approach kicks into gear when an election is announced, and news resources are deployed in favour of high-profile election coverage. The different contextual conditions affecting each channel render this conclusion more interesting. It could be speculated that the changing competitive environment would have resulted in a divergence of the provision of election coverage on both channels, yet this has not been the case.

What of the 'crisis' and 'convergence' hypotheses; the predictions that news coverage will have become demonstrably 'worse' at fulfilling the functions expected of them during election campaigns? There doesn't seem, on the evidence above, to be an indication of their presence through the reduction of political coverage, as 'tabloidisation' would demonstrate, or the rise of the commercial imperative in broadcasting predict. The undoubted presence of elements of commercialisation and increased competition in the UK television market has not affected the output of ITN during election campaigns in a way that could prompt accusations of a flight from British screens of campaign coverage. Indeed, if high-volume and high-prominence campaign coverage is considered to be a positive force in democratic politics, then on the measures above, ITV and BBC bulletins performed at least as well in the chaotic post-digital revolution environment of 2005, as they did during the "comfortable duopoly" of 1979, if not better.

Chapter 4: Contextualising the Campaign – Changing Reporting Styles, 1979-2005

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter it was established, in quantitative terms, that public and commercial television news in the UK has consistently devoted large portions of airtime to campaign coverage, and has tended to push campaign items to the front of news bulletins at the expense of other events. Even less popular (in the sense of being relevant to fewer members of the electorate) campaign-related phenomena are guaranteed a place in bulletins between 1979 and 2005. But, of course, more important than the space which campaign items are given is their actual content. As the discussion of the normative arguments for the role of news in democratic society outlined in Chapter 1 set out, the information-providing function of journalism is vital to civil society and the upkeep of an interested and informed citizenry. Where news is highly trusted as an authoritative source of information on politics, it is all the more important that news output performs this function. It can be proposed, then, that it is better where news during election campaigns – as it is at any time – provides audiences with information on key issues. In particular, the policy platforms of those candidates vying for support, or important social, political or economic issues requiring governmental action are subjects worthy of the public's attention.

However, there is a considerable body of evidence confirming that political and election coverage is becoming less policy-oriented, and more concerned with reporting on strategy-oriented aspects of campaigning, not only stifling the amount of policy information reaching the electorate, but also damaging levels of public trust in politics and political figures (Robinson and Sheehan, 1984; Patterson, 1993; Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). The literature originated in the US – where these trends have long been identified as a prominent and growing aspect of campaign journalism – and the idea is central to Plasser and Plasser's (2002: 72) 'American Model' of political communication, a hypothetical endpoint of converging trends in journalism, commercialisation, campaigning and voter behaviour (or lack of). Journalism in the American Model, it is proposed, is game-centred, strategy-centred, journalist-centred, adversarial regarding politicians, and negative in tone. The previous studies of election news in the UK have uncovered some evidence that coverage more concerned with aspects of campaigning and candidate behaviour than with policy information has become evident in television campaign news coverage, as has a more interpretive role-conception adopted by BBC and ITV journalists.

This chapter investigates whether there has been an increase in strategic, horse-race journalism in British campaign coverage, in line with that observed in the USA. This is prompted by fragmentary empirical evidence in previous election news studies in the UK that there has been an increase in strategic, interpretive journalism in the UK, and also a desire to investigate whether this supposedly damaging trend in journalism has become more visible in the PSB-oriented environment of UK election journalism. Two broad approaches are deployed here. The first measures trends in policy-based and strategic coverage in British television news, while the second takes a more descriptive qualitative look at styles of reporting in certain types of campaign item. The methods employed in these measures are set out in Section 4.2 below. The analysis is rounded off with a summary of the prevalence of polling data and 'campaign two-way' items in British election news. The results show that, by several measures, campaign coverage on UK television has become less policy-oriented and more concerned with campaign strategies and behaviour. Journalists have become more central to the 'story', injecting themselves into the campaign and adopting an aloof and highly interpretive tone. These developments raise questions about the quality of information made available to British voters, on both BBC and ITV.

4.1.1 Strategy-Centred Journalism: Theory and Evidence

Election reporting is by necessity concerned at some level with winning and losing. On polling day the relative goals of parties and candidates are fulfilled or squashed by the will of the electorate – filtered through the particular electoral system in place. As much as the simple arithmetic of success and failure, however, elections are based on the considered judgements of a multitude of voters, formulated through opinion, knowledge, personal disposition and rational motivation. Focusing on the dramatic events of an election campaign where candidate actions have a concrete effect on the context of the campaign, or on the complex issues surrounding social and political life at the moment of an election, is a tension facing all campaign journalists. This is particularly the case in an environment where campaigning by ideologically-similar mass-based parties is professional, scientific, media-oriented, and negative. Where parties would rather not focus on the issues, journalists are presented with a problem.

Strategic framing, or game-centred coverage, has been identified by Patterson (1993) and Cappella and Jamieson (1997) as a central and growing phenomenon in US political journalism, with its effects more pronounced during the higher-stakes

environment of election campaigns. It is allied with a move towards a more adversarial and interpretive role among journalists. Such coverage is composed of (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997: 33):

- A central concern with 'winning' and 'losing';
- Liberal use of the language of wars, games, and competition;
- Treatment of the campaign as a story with performers, critics and audience (voters);
- Centrality of performance, style and perception; Heavy weighing of polls and candidate attributes;
- The electorate reduced to spectators, and removed from the process.

"The dominant schema for the reporter," says Patterson "is structured around the notion that politics is a strategic game" (1993: 57). In such a game, politicians are seen to be strategic actors, with all actions directed towards achieving instrumental goals. The adoption of such a journalistic stance must be ascribed in part to the adoption of more competitive and goal-oriented campaigning techniques, but there are more subtle driving forces behind the growth of strategic framing in US campaign coverage.

First, the adoption of a strategic or game frame allows journalists to parcel campaign phenomena as discrete events: horse-races 'happen' (Robinson and Sheehan, 1984); polling data is unambiguous; gaffes damage credibility. This has the significant benefit to the journalist of being easy to interpret and report, and conducive to 'good' television or copy; it also projects drama into occasionally dull campaigns and – theoretically – maintains viewer interest. Indeed, Iyengar, who identifies this type of coverage as 'episodic framing' (1991), claims that commercialisation and the need to maximise ratings makes event-based campaign coverage an attractive proposition to news organisations. Hallin (1992) claims that professional norms may exert influence on coverage. Objectivity and impartiality rules place journalists in a difficult position when interpreting campaigns: "Hence, television journalists feel most comfortable making essentially technical judgements about campaign performance, judgements that can be interpreted as nonpartisan and verified by polls and the judgement of other political professionals" (1992: 21).

The effects of strategic coverage are seen by these authors as detrimental to electoral politics. In the first case, it diverts attention, and news space, away from substantive policy issues. In the second, continual emphasis of the game schema drives down voters' levels of trust in candidates. The framing of all political acts as instrumental

damages the potential for trust in politicians, and is seen to increase levels of voter cynicism (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; Goddard, Scammell and Semetko, 1998). Thirdly, journalists tend to change from being impartial purveyors of information to audiences, to interpreters of political behaviour, and more active participants in the political process.

The professionalisation of campaigning undoubtedly plays a part in this. As campaigns in mediated political environments seek more and more to use news media as a direct channel of communication with the public, so they increasingly try to manipulate news content. This lies at the very heart of the 'crisis' hypothesis as articulated by Blumler and Gurevitch (1995), whereby the inevitable 'journalistic fightback' results in adversarial journalism and a disposition towards reporting specifically what politicians are perceived not to want – Zaller's (2001) 'rule of product substitution': "As television journalists became increasingly wary of being manipulated, they responded by taking a more adversarial stance towards the candidates, dissecting their arguments... and de-bunking their image-making strategies" (Hallin, 1992: 14).

Evidence of more process-oriented, adversarial and interpretive journalism has been recorded in studies of British television campaign news. While earlier election news studies largely ignored the subject of strategic reporting, by the 1992 election it was noted that polling and 'horse-race' coverage was accounting for around a quarter of all election news, while 18.6% of BBC and 24.5% of ITV election news was devoted to 'campaign conduct' (Nossiter, Scammell and Semetko, 1995). By 1997, Harrison (1998) reported an increase in issue coverage, however, citing the proliferation of minor party candidates and the stipulations of the Representation of the People Act (1983) as creating a uniquely difficult environment for political journalists to cover constituency-level campaigning.

The 1997 election saw studies focus more on the interpretive qualities of reporting on the campaign. The increasing use, in television reporting, of the live campaign two-way – an evolution from studio-based commentary – which provided journalists with a platform from which to evaluate campaign events: "They provided a valuable and necessary service. Yet their commentaries... and the interpretive touches of spin from reporters linking soundbites, cumulatively added up to a style of coverage heavily structured or 'framed' by journalists and experts" (Harrison, 1997: 145). This sentiment was shared by Goddard, Scammell and Semetko, who also observed a more evaluative, 'framing' role for correspondents (1998: 168), and a shift towards "a more interpretive model of reporting" on British television (ibid: 170). Within the BBC, Blumler and Gurevitch (1998: 186) witnessed greater encouragement for journalists to express professional judgements, and a

growing adversarial feeling among journalists towards politicians as competing would-be persuaders. This translated, in terms of news output, to a drop in substantive policy focus on British television news (Norris et al., 1999: 75).

The 2001 and 2005 elections saw a continuation on this theme. Deacon et al. (2001) noted that political soundbites (a topic dealt with in detail in Chapter 5 below) were usually "topped and tailed" by contextualising speech by journalists "as if the words of the politicians cannot be transmitted unmediated" (2001: 672). The increased use and interpretive content of campaign two-ways was also accused of diminishing the role of politicians in the campaign:

> "On all channels there are repeated examples of journalists 'writing themselves into the story' and in doing so telling us what the 'real' strategy was behind all the politicians' talk. The paradox is that these specialists are often true enthusiasts of the political process. The more they claimed to decode the strategies and straighten the spins, however, and the more they moved centre stage on the news bulletins, the more the politicians appeared as diminished figures, whose words cannot be trusted" (ibid: 673)

By 2005, these observations were commonplace, and the forecast was similar. Journalists' "analytical mediation" – combining the personae of both 'gate keepers' and 'nannies' was seen as stifling the ability of voters to decode events on their own terms, by presenting them with pre-packaged interpretations (Bartle, 2005: 709). The result is a style of coverage that leans more towards 'processes' than issues (Harrison, 2005; Deacon et al., 2005; 2006).

The evidence indicates a shift towards more interpretive reporting in British television news coverage of elections. This links to the previous chapter, as the continuance in news output of a high proportion of campaign coverage in news bulletins on both BBC and ITV is, it would appear, juxtaposed with increasingly interpretive journalism and a reduction in substantive issue coverage. The purpose of the present chapter is to apply a consistent methodology to determining the extent of this change over time.

4.2 Methods

The central concern of this chapter is to ascertain how campaign reporting has changed in both its treatment of the issue agenda of a given campaign, and in the tone and style in which news is transmitted. In order to measure this, two separate methods have been

employed, to give a fuller picture of the extent and nature of change. The first is a quantitative content analysis of campaign coverage, assessing the balance of foci of campaign-oriented items, with special emphasis on the coverage of less substantive, more horse race-related, aspects of the campaign. Also investigated by the quantitative study is the prevalence of a more adversarial reporting style within election reporting over time. This first strand of investigation addresses the broader concern with the news media's use of a style of reporting that, whilst illustrating and reflecting the analytical ability and insider-knowledge of the journalist of the campaign process, may not adequately serve the electorate's need of a clear and informative representation of the policy agenda during elections. The second area of analysis here is a more in-depth comparative study of the presentation of certain types of news item prevalent during election news. These are: correspondent reports on particular issues; reports on party or candidate campaigning activities; manifesto launches, with special emphasis also on 'campaign two-way' items in which senior correspondents summarise the day's or week's campaign events. This method of analysis was chosen specifically to provide richer information about how reporting style and language has changed, and also to allow comparison between the BBC and ITV coverage at each election. Broadly, its aim is to address the concern that the content of news items reflects changing roles adopted by journalists in presenting election and campaign news to the audience.

Quantitative Analysis: Sampling and Methodology

For the quantitative analysis, each of the total number of campaign items on BBC and ITV nightly news during the four-week period at each election were recorded. This gave a total of 2265 items[22]. In line with the rest of the content analysis of the main dataset, items were designated as 'campaign' if they contained any reference to, or coverage of, the campaign. The categorisation in this way was rarely ambiguous, as very few politically-themed stories were not overtly linked to the campaign, although some exceptions were recorded when foreign policy-related incidents occurred in which campaigning cabinet members were included or interviewed purely as government spokespeople. In recording campaign coverage, each item was allocated one or several 'campaign codes' and 'news codes', up to a total of eight campaign codes (to ensure that none were missed) and, due to the large amount of data involved, four news codes (see Coding Instructions in Appendix III).

[22] Data available in Appendix VIII

Eleven campaign categories were created to deal with all aspects of campaign coverage, including a relatively catch-all category (12.1: 'Strategy'), which was recorded in a slightly different manner, as will be shown. Codes were allocated where: they were referred to either in the language within the news item; by an actor speaking in front of the camera; or (less often) if the images on screen explicitly referenced a subject pertaining to a given category. The codes of particular significance for this study are: 11 'Party Characteristics'; 12.1 'Strategy'; 12.2 'Campaign Behaviour'; 12.3 'Rational Motivation', and 18 'Negative Statements by Media'. The codes were allocated as follows:

> **Party Characteristics** – refers to any coverage of party policy platforms and positions, and is linked to the news codes, as where a policy issue was referenced (e.g. Health/NHS), both code 11 (Party Characteristics) and code 62 (NHS) would be recorded in the coding scheme (See Appendix I(b) for the coding sheet, and Appendix II for the full list of categories).

> **Strategy** – This code is allocated where there is explicit mention or coverage of the campaign. So, for example, an item dedicated to covering a candidate's campaign schedule would attract this code, as would discussion or commentary within the item concerning campaign tactics, behaviour or activities as a significant theme. For example, referring to 'target seats' or 'marginal constituencies' would invite this categorisation, due to the reference being made in terms of tactical campaigning.

Both of these codes are 'subject' codes, in the sense that 'policy' or 'campaign'-related content is either present or is not within this coding scheme (although both can be, and often are, present together). This allows for measurement of the instances in which either occurs in election coverage, and also of the prevalence of items in which there is a policy focus entirely independent of campaign-relevance and, more importantly, in which there is a campaign-based focus with no policy content. The following relevant codes are linked not to the item as a whole, but to instances of types of reference, language or image that are linked to a more strategic or cynical type of coverage within the news content. As such, these could be coded several times within the same item.

Campaign Behaviour – This code was recorded where the story included overt reference by journalists or images to parties' and candidates' use of the media during the campaign. In particular, this code was concerned with overt references to 'photo-opportunities', 'walkabouts', the coverage of political stunts or the unveiling of image-based publicity. It was also recorded if there was explicit acknowledgement of image-management or the use of events or backdrops to influence coverage. Finally, it was also employed where there was direct reference made of the appearance or construction of rallies or press events, where the aim was to draw attention to the intent by political parties to project favourable images.

Rational Motivation – This code deals with the more cynical coverage and statements by journalists. Visual coverage could not be categorised in this way on its own, due to the high dependence on contextual language to portray campaign activity in this way. This was deployed to record instances of language referring to cynical manipulation by political actors; the use of 'spin' or 'spinning' of information; sceptical contradiction of political actors' statements; and interpretation of statements or campaign activities with the apparent intent of uncovering 'hidden meaning', or cynical tactical manoeuvring.

Negative Statements by Media – was allocated whenever journalists directly criticised candidates or their actions, and where joking or ridiculing remarks were made, with the effect of trivialising political actors or their campaign activities. These were recorded firstly due to the problematic nature of the presence of antagonism or negativity in journalists' coverage of politics, and secondly due to the linkage of critical remarks about the campaign to a specific understanding of the campaign as an activity that can be assessed in relation to particular goals related specifically to victory either in relation to rivals, or to electoral success. As such, negative statements related to campaigning reflect an inclination towards adversarial reporting by journalists, and the framing of the campaign in both cynical and horse race-oriented terms.

Complementing this characterisation of instances of certain types of statements, the 'focus' of the campaign coverage for each item was also recorded. This involved noting the aspect of campaign coverage (from the full category list) that was most prominent within the item[23]. Where there was some doubt, stopwatch measurement was used to determine which type of coverage was allocated the most time. Overall, the purpose of the quantitative study is to determine, over a significant time period and a large number of campaign items, trends in the balance of issue-based and campaign-driven coverage of election news, and also to track the instances of the use of language or coverage that may cause cynicism or alienation among the electorate.

Qualitative Analysis: Sampling and Methods

Quantitative analysis of such a rich source of information as televised news is limited in terms of the conclusions it can make as to the overall tone of coverage. Although evidence may be presented showing clear trends in the balance of news towards more or less conflict- or competition-themed coverage, the complexity of news coverage is such that it is beneficial to subsidise any such analysis with a more in-depth study of the changing presentation and language used in election coverage. To do this, a sample of 50 campaign stories was studied in terms of their structure, length, use of images and graphics, and the language used, particularly where it corresponds to one of the codes denoting 'Campaign Behaviour', 'Rational Motivation' and 'Negative Statements by the Media' measured in the first part of this analysis. The categories of items chosen are those that have a strong relation to the practice of campaign reporting, in that they perform a function unique to election news, and therefore have endured (although, as we will see, in varying form) throughout the period of study, allowing direct comparison over time. There is one important exception in the form of the 'campaign two-way' items, which have become common during and after the 1992 campaign. However, their importance to an analysis of campaign reporting style is such that their inclusion is necessary, as is an investigation of their impact and justification as a 'new' type of campaign-related story.

The types of item selected for analysis were:

[23] Although it is not possible to code the *magnitude* of the focus on a particular issue using this coding scheme (i.e. placing within the item, use of graphics), the coder's discretion was to favour the stopwatch measurement. Indeed, it was rare for the opening theme of an item not to be the focus by volume as well.

***Specialist Correspondent stories**:* These are stories in which a particular policy area is considered in some depth, and where there is some specialised journalistic input beyond simply voice-over or narration. This type of item was included in the analysis to ascertain in what ways the quality and style of reporting on particular policy issues has changed. But, as will be shown, the greatest differences were often between the two channels.

***Campaigning Reports**:* Naturally, items based around campaigning are central to election coverage, so those that cover candidates' activities in the field are included due to their importance for this analysis. Careful attention was focused on the language and framing of reporting on the actions of campaigning politicians.

***Campaign Two-Ways**:* Live campaign summary reports, where a senior correspondent or editor engages with the newsreader in a discussion of the day's campaign events (also occasionally the week's events, or a summary of the campaign so far), were included for analysis due to their unique position in election reporting. The increasing prevalence of items entirely devoted to summarising the events of the campaign is significant in itself, given their existence being owed to interpretation of the campaign in terms of success or failure. Further, the evolution of these items is of interest to the analysis of journalist language and focus within campaign-centric coverage.

***Manifesto Launches**:* These provide an opportunity to assess the balance of policy platform-based information and campaign- or strategy-oriented coverage within the presentation of the main policy documents of the political parties. For each election, the manifesto launches covered were the same for each channel, so as to allow further comparison between BBC and ITV coverage.

The overall purpose in this part of the analysis is to conduct a comparative analysis of each type of item, allowing for generalisations to be drawn for the totality of news content on the basis of the cumulative results of the study. This approach reflects a belief that *what* is broadcast is at least as – if not more – important than *why* it has taken that form. As such, the analysis views changes in the style and tone of campaign reporting as having intrinsic effects on the information being transmitted, and is accordingly set up to investigate the prominence of framing in terms of the conduct of the campaign, as well as the volume and substantive policy information included in the news.

The two main areas of inquiry reflect this approach. The language used by journalists was analysed for instances of strategic framing, cynicism, references to the horse race-related aspects of the campaign and adversarialism. The amount and

prominence of policy information was also taken into account. In a deviation from the more rigid quantitative nature of the rest of this thesis, no bespoke coding frame was adopted for this part of the study: the comparative focus compliments the complexity of news content as a source of data as well as the longitudinal structure of the thesis. The qualitative analysis here was not, however, conducted entirely at random. The codes given special attention in the first part of the analysis acted as a guide for the study of content, and where language or focus within an item corresponded to one of these codes, the language was transcribed. This reflects the aim of this part of the study: to illuminate the manifestation of instances of language in news coverage that can be construed as being potentially harmful to the democratic process. The cases specifically chosen were those that were over a certain length – thus containing a substantial amount of visual and language material – and representative of the coverage of that particular election. Therefore, items that dealt with a very specific incident, such as Labour Deputy Leader John Prescott's fight with a heckler during the 2001 campaign, were not considered for analysis.

4.3 Quantitative Analysis: Results

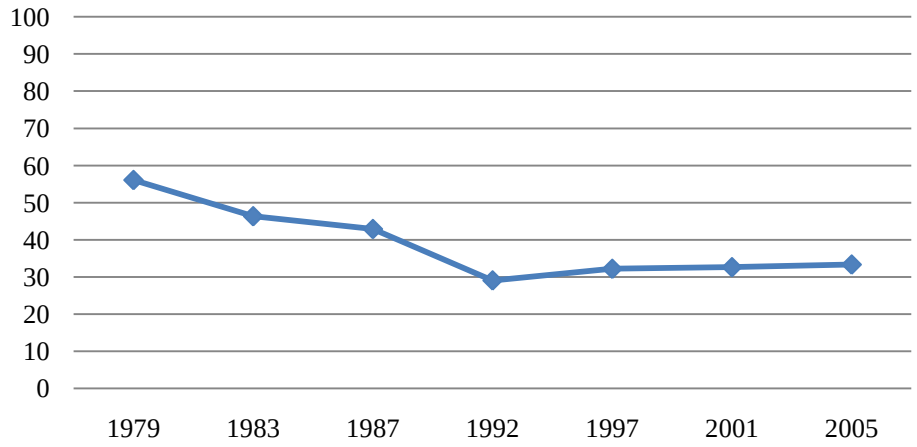
The quantitative analysis employed here is concerned with two aspects of campaign coverage. The first is the balance of news that is devoted to the description of salient policy issues during each election campaign compared with the proportion of coverage that focuses on the campaign as a strategic or tactical activity. The second is the prevalence over time of campaign coverage that advances a cynical or strategic representation of the behaviour of candidates seeking election. In combining these measurements, the study is able to draw robust conclusions about the changing balance of substantive content and tone in election coverage, and the extent to which the British electorate has been served enlightening and important information by the televised news media during recent election campaigns. At the same time, it is able to uncover whether a more adversarial or potentially cynicism-inducing style of campaign reporting has emerged in British television news coverage of election campaigns. The data analysed also allows comparison between BBC and ITV coverage at each election and over time, adding a further dimension to the analysis: whether there has been correspondence or divergence in the balance of coverage on each channel.

4.3.1 Policy Information vs. Campaign-Themed Coverage

The first aspect of coverage to be considered here is the balance between campaign coverage that contains policy information only, with no reference to campaigning at all, and coverage that is in some way concerned with the campaigning activities and behaviour of the parties and candidates. This measurement offers a useful preliminary analysis of the prevalence of campaigning coverage within the totality of news broadcast at each election on each channel, and is a strong indicator of the focus of election news with respect to the changing campaign environment. As elsewhere in the thesis, the unit of analysis is the news *item*, and so the measurement here is based upon those items that contain a reference to policy areas relevant to the election ('Party Characteristics'), and those that contain some reference to the campaign ('Strategy', 'Campaign Behaviour', 'Rational Motivation' and 'Negative Statements by Media'), including those campaign-related items where there is a policy focus as well. The aim here is not to delineate between policy information and the campaign, but instead to investigate how much the two strands of election coverage have become increasingly intertwined between 1979 and 2005.

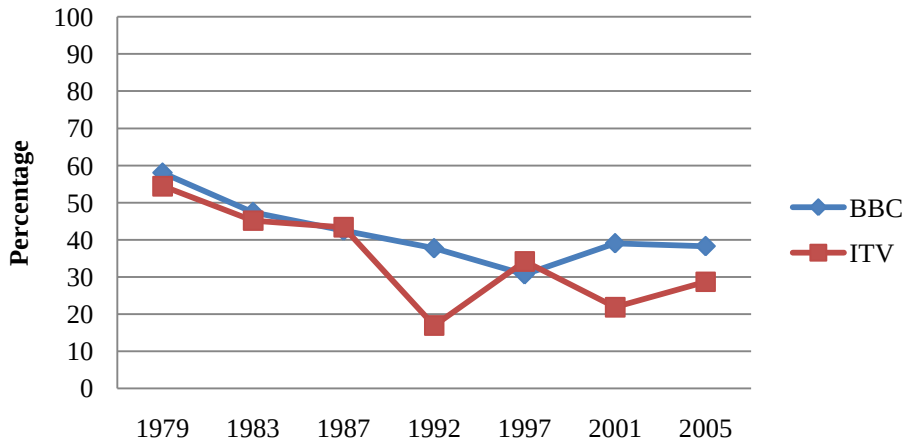
The first measure conducted is of the prevalence of election news coverage that contains no reference to the campaign as defined in the campaigning-themed codes listed above. Naturally, it would be impossible for an item to be deemed campaign related and not contain some sort of reference to the election campaign. The codes, it will be remembered, represent references to the campaign as a game-centred competitive activity rather than a choice between competing policy platforms. Following this, the first measurement looks at the percentage of campaign items broadcast at each election that contain no such references to the campaign (Figure 4.1). Items corresponding to this classification would be those that deal with a particular policy area explicitly, or those covering a candidate's speech or statement on a policy area, where no attention is drawn to instrumental motives or campaigning tactics elsewhere in the item. A greater volume of items of this type is indicative of an approach to election news construction by the news programmes that separates substantive policy information from the ephemera of the campaign, attributable either to lower absolute levels of game-centred campaign framing, or due to a stricter delineation between campaign-based coverage and policy content.

Figure 4.1: Percentage of Items with No Campaign Reference



As the figures show, there has been a substantial decline in the rate of items that contain no game-centred references to the campaign, from 56.1% in 1979, to 33.33% in 2005, a decline of 40.59%. The trend shows, however, that this decline has not been linear, with the largest fall in between the 1979 and 1992 campaigns, after which there has been a modest recovery, of 3% between 1992 and 1997, and 1% between 1997 and 2005. When the differences between the coverage on BBC and ITV are taken into account, the general trends are broadly similar, with some significant differences at the 1992 and 2001 elections (Figure 4.2). Again, there has been a significant decrease for each channel (58.01% - 38.26% for the BBC, 54.41% - 28.69% for ITV), with ITV's coverage changing the most: a decrease of 47.27%, compared to 34.05% on the BBC. Put simply, the percentage of election-related news stories in televised election news that contain no reference to campaign activities has declined by an average of just over 40%, comprised of a fall of approximately one-third on BBC1, and by slightly under half on ITV.

Figure 4.2: Percentage of Items with No Campaign Reference, by Channel



Two conclusions can be drawn from this data. Firstly, there has been an overall decline in the amount of election coverage that deals with policy in isolation from the campaign strategies and tactics. Secondly, the trends of decline for both channels follow a broadly similar path, indicating that there is some relation between how the different channels construct their news. To further illustrate the growing prevalence of campaign-oriented coverage, figures 4.3-4.5 show the changing trends in three measures of news content. The first measure is the percentage of all relevant campaign items that contain a policy focus and at least one clear reference to the campaign-as-horse race. Primarily, these references are categorised under the codes 12.1-12.3[24], but also incorporate polling data (13.1-13.3) and negativity (18). A very small number correspond to the remaining codes (14-17). The second and third measures, included for comparative purposes are, respectively, the percentage of campaign-free items (previously seen in figures 4.1 and 4.2 above), and its opposite: the percentage of items that contain some specific references to the campaign. On each channel, and in total, the trends are similar: a steady decline in the rate of items with no campaign-oriented coverage is complemented, on both channels, with a steady rise in the percentage of items that include both policy and campaign focus. In 2005, of BBC election items, 38% contained no reference to the campaign, compared with 35% featuring both policy focus and references to campaign activities. On ITV, the order is reversed: 29% compared with 38%. Again, the results show firstly that there has been a steady intertwining of horse-race campaign coverage throughout all election coverage on both channels, and secondly that there has been similarity in the evolution of this balance on each channel.

[24] See Appendix II for full list of campaign codes

Figure 4.3: Combined Campaign and Policy Coverage

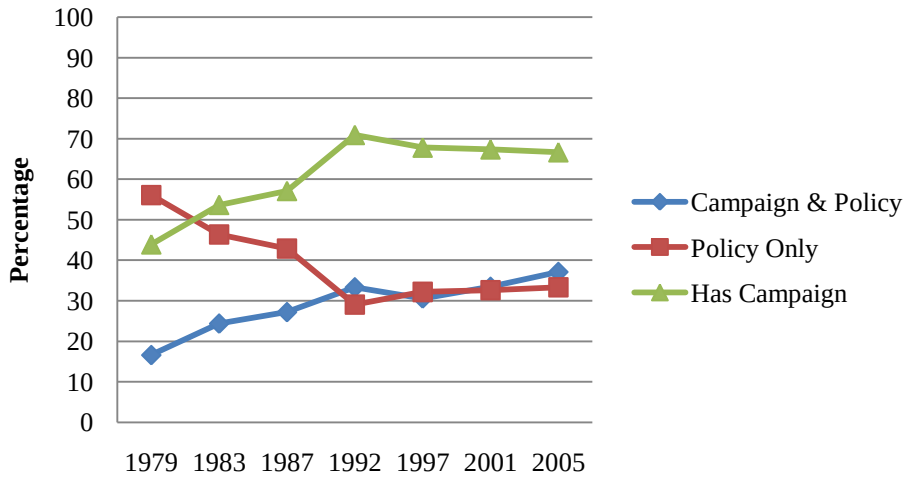


Figure 4.4: Campaign and Policy Coverage, BBC

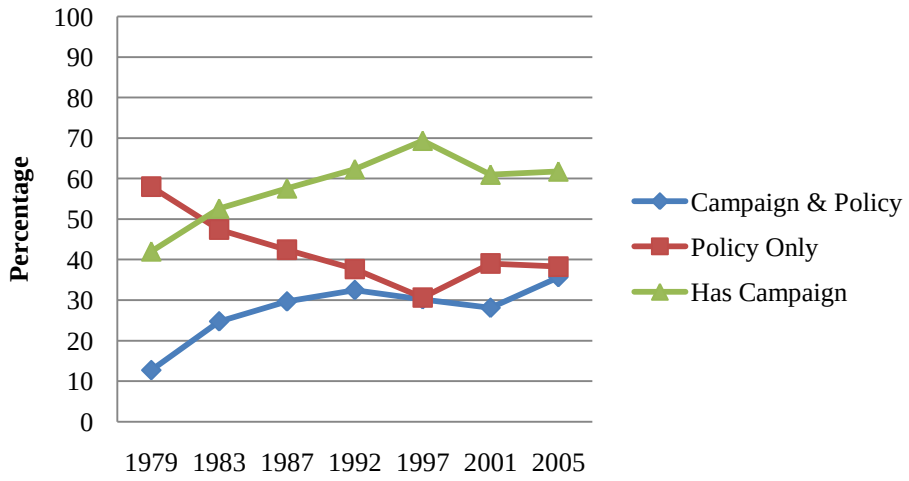
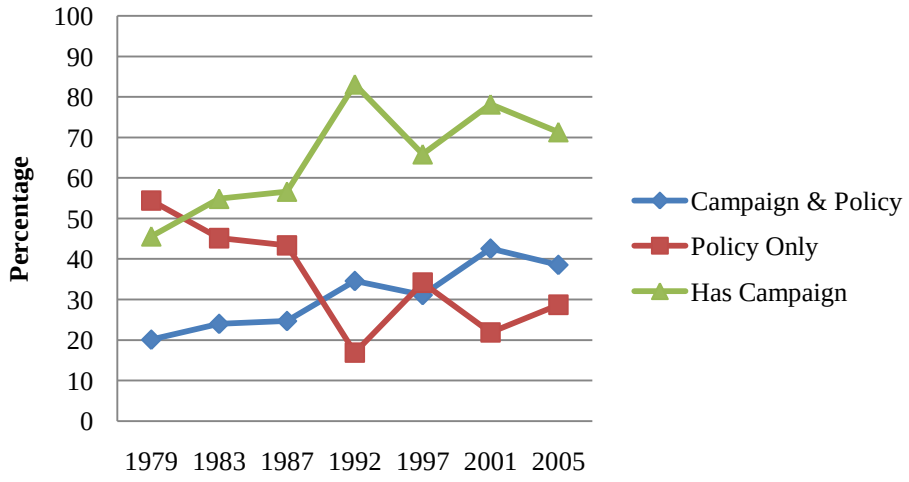
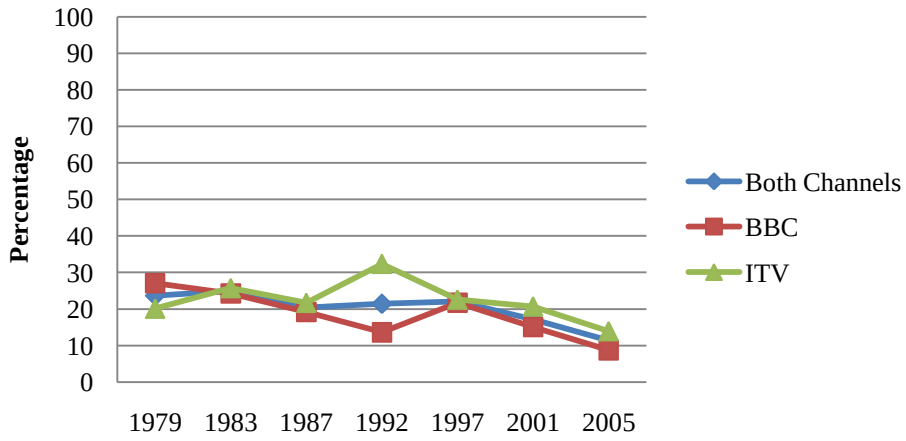


Figure 4.5: Campaign and Policy Coverage, ITV



The final measure of this balance is an analysis of the amount of items that contain no policy content at all, in other words, items that covered some aspect of campaigning, but no reference to any policy areas within the entirety of the item (Figure 4.6). The overall trends in this measure show a steady decline in this type of item on both channels, with anomalous results in 1992. This can in part be ascribed to the volume of polling data-based threads on ITV in 1992 that had no policy content as part of the coverage. This data shows that there has been a decline in campaign-based items that have no policy content at all, indicating that there has been a gradual infusion of policy and campaign-related content over time.

Figure 4.6: Proportion of Campaign Segments with No Policy Content



These results show quite clearly that there has been an increase in campaign-related election news content over the period of study, most notably in the sense that there is less coverage that deals specifically with the party policy platforms put forward at each election. However, it should be noted that the amount of policy-based coverage on both channels is still reasonably high, accounting for approximately one-third of all news items. It is not the case either that there has been an increase in coverage that is concerned only with the ephemera of the campaign; the opposite is true. It is apparent, instead, that there has been a convergence in the style of coverage: over two-thirds of items have some reference to the campaign, but there is also a growing amount of coverage that covers policy and the campaign, as well as the continually quite high levels of policy based news. Despite this, the trends cannot be ignored: it is clear that there is, overall, a greater preponderance with the campaign and campaign-related activities in election news than there was in 1979.

4.3.2 The Prevalence of Strategy-Centred Journalism

At least as important as the balance of campaign-related and policy-oriented coverage is the *type* of campaign-related content in election news. Of the categories of content under analysis, several are selected due to their inherent relation to the more negative aspects of horse-race journalism: strategic framing, interpretation of motives, and criticism of political actors with regard to the campaign. While it has been seen that there has been an increase in campaign-related news content, it is important to establish the changing nature of this content. To do this, measurement was taken of the rate of occurrence of the three categories of horse-race coverage that are deemed to be detrimental to the tone and quality of the coverage. These are: 'Campaign Behaviour', which indicates references to parties' manipulation of the media to control the issue agenda and influence voters; 'Rational Motivation', which indicates references to potentially untrustworthy or cynical acts by political actors to influence the campaign; and 'Negative Statements by Media', which indicates overtly critical statements and appraisals of campaign activities and the actions of candidates.

Since the unit of analysis is the election-related political news item, the analysis concentrates on the prevalence of instances of these three categories within such items, in other words, the percentage of items that contain these categories. The measurement of each code was conducted in terms of the existence of the code or not in a given item, so that there is no interference due to multiple coding in particular items. The results are shown in figures 4.7 – 4.9:

Figure 4.7: Percentage of Items with Strategic Content, Both Channels

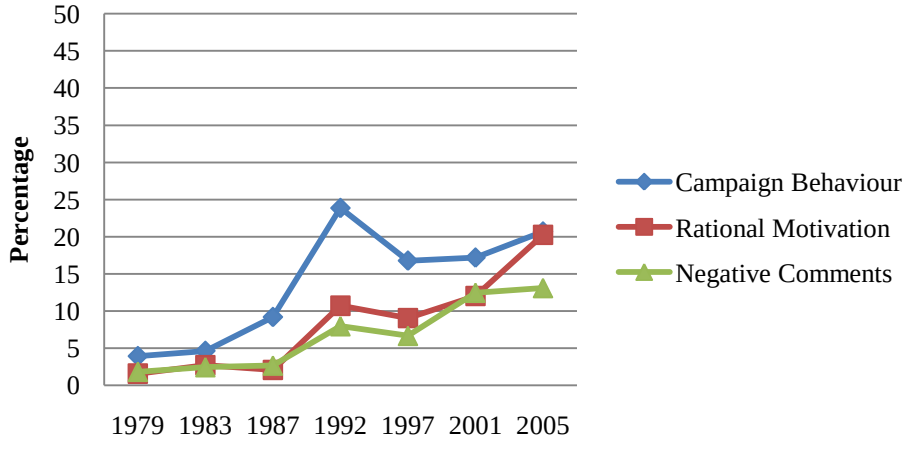


Figure 4.8: Percentage of Items with Strategic Content, BBC

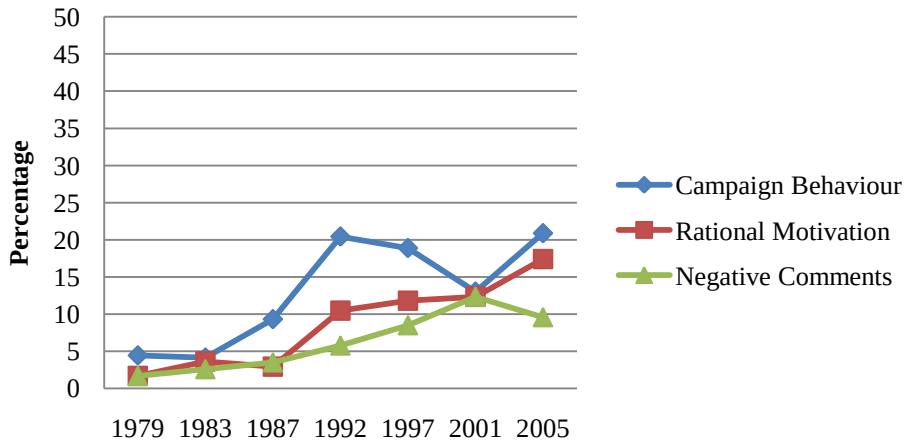
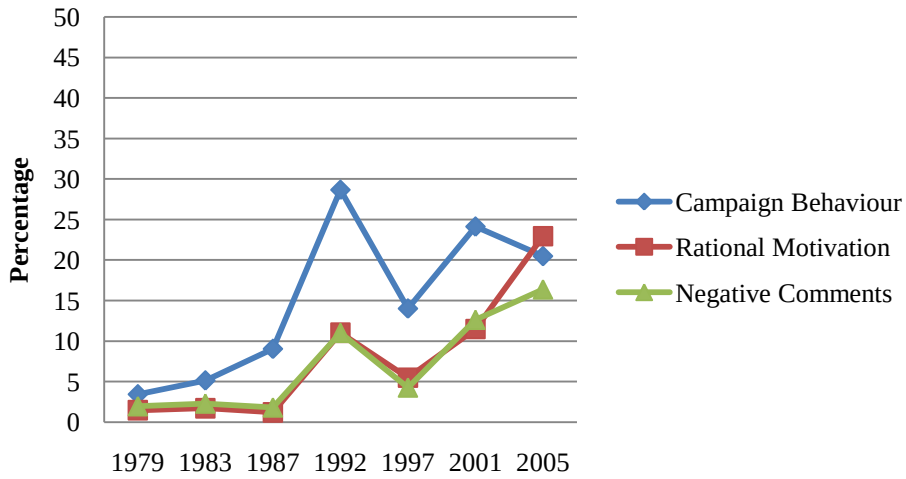


Figure 4.9: Percentage of Items with Strategic Content, ITV



The results here show that there has, in each case, been a substantial increase in the occurrence of each code, and that there have been similar trends in both BBC and ITV coverage:

Campaign Behaviour: The most common of these categories of horse-race journalism, until 2005. From a rate of occurrence of 3.9% of items in 1979, to 20.68% in 2005, there has been a substantial and sustained increase in the presentation of candidates' activities as being geared towards manipulation of the media for image-serving purposes. The trends for BBC and ITV coverage are strikingly similar, with early peaks in 1992 on each channel arresting a fairly steady increase over time.

Rational Motivation: The greatest increase for each of these indicators is in the rate of items containing coverage or statements that allude to cynical actions and

motives in campaigning behaviour by political actors. In total, there was a rise from 1.56% in 1979 to 20.68% of items in 2005, meaning that over one-fifth of items at the 2005 election contained one or more references to cynical behaviour by parties and candidates. There was some difference in the 2005 results for BBC and ITV, with 17.39% and 20.25% respectively, but overall both channels saw a substantial increase in this type of coverage over the period of study.

Negative Statements by Media: Again, instances of negativity towards the campaign behaviour of candidates, and of the candidates themselves, increased steadily on both channels between 1979 and 2005. From being observed in 1.66% of items in 1979, by 2005 this had increased to 13.08% in 2005. There was some difference between the two channels, and from relative parity in 2001 (12.33% against 12.64% for BBC and ITV respectively), there was a drop in the BBC figures, whilst the rate on ITV rose to 16.39%.

Overall, the instances of each of these measures of horse-race and adversarial coverage rose significantly over the period of study, compounding the evidence noted in the earlier part of the study that there has been a substantial increase in the amount of campaign-centric coverage in British televised election news over the period of study.

4.4 Qualitative Results

The purely quantitative analysis of news codes and item focus, while providing clear evidence in changes in election news content that indicate growth in the volume of coverage that is concerned with the horse-race aspects of election coverage, doesn't provide information on the form that this content actually takes. To provide this, the analysis now looks at the changing tone and journalistic stance within the coverage on BBC and ITV over the period of analysis.

4.4.1 Correspondent Stories

'Correspondent' stories, as stated above, are those which cover a particular election issue, with journalists acting as a guide to the issue. These were included as a barometer of the presentation of informative, policy-based coverage, and also of the role of the journalist as a mediator of policy information. This story-type proved to be the most problematic of those studied, due to the vastly different evolutionary paths it followed on each channel, but this in itself is a significant development. The critical election in terms of coverage of

this type is 1992, after which the prominence of journalists became more acute, and the channels diverged strongly in their coverage, with the BBC favouring specially created information-rich policy issue summaries, and ITV downplaying the reporting of discrete policy areas in favour of more issue-centric coverage. Although there is an appreciable trend in the change of correspondent stories, 1992 marks something of a structural break.

At the 1979 election, and in reflecting evidence in Chapters 5 and 6 below showing more politician-centric and relatively simplistic coverage technologically, the coverage on both channels was both highly informative, and heavily geared towards policy-speech content by party leaders or senior spokespeople. In fact, neither channel used any external reporter material at all, instead bookending speech coverage with information about the policy areas under scrutiny, provided by the newsreader or a studio-based campaign correspondent. While this can be attributed to the technological circumstances of that election, the outcome is a style of news markedly different to that broadcast in recent years. However, the implications go beyond style, and point to an attitude to news production that is preoccupied with information provision, yet deferential to the wishes of political actors in allowing them to convey their particular policy platforms. To illustrate, sampled the correspondent item broadcast on ITV on Thursday 19th April, 1979, dealt with Margaret Thatcher's speech outlining Conservative economic policy, with further explanation of tax and defence policy. The structure of the item comprised the introductory statement of the newsreader, outlining the policy areas Thatcher was addressing, and then cut straight to the speech itself. The speech footage was 2 minutes and 44 seconds long, comprising 2 minutes 20 seconds of actual speech, with brief pauses for applause interspersed throughout. On the BBC, there was considerably more speech time for journalists, but their input was heavily weighted towards summarising the policy platforms of parties. For instance, on Monday 30th April 1979, the BBC bulletin included an item summarising the public spending policies of Labour and the Conservatives. On either side of a piece of footage of the Chancellor and Shadow Chancellor outlining aspects of their respective policy, were summaries by the studio correspondent of, firstly, the detailed manifesto commitments of each party, and, secondly, a breakdown of the practical challenges facing the implementation of either strategy, and the ideological background to the formulation of each. In this second summary, the correspondent also listed the hypothetical counterarguments to the parties' policies. Finally, the Liberal Party's policy was examined separately, complimented by a short policy speech by their Treasury Spokesperson. The most striking aspect of this coverage is the level of prior knowledge assumed of the audience in the fields of public spending and the relation of public sector wages, taxation

and inflation, which go considerably beyond the level of technical language found in later bulletins. The major themes of policy / correspondent coverage in election news during the 1979 campaign, in relation to later election coverage, are the conveyance of highly informative coverage of salient policy issues, and the passive role of the journalist in offering a non-evaluative and non-judgemental account of policy, with the major input being ceded to the politicians themselves.

During the 1983 and 1987 election campaigns, the sampled items show that over this period there was a measure of continuity from 1979 in issue-based coverage. The BBC introduced their chief political correspondent – John Cole – as a summariser, assessing policy positions, in particular party manifestos. This was in effect an embryonic form of the 'campaign two-way' items that would later become prevalent during election coverage, and was coded as such (see Section 4.5 below). There was also clear evidence of increased technological ability in the construction of items, which is a theme of the election coverage as a whole. The elevation of John Cole to the position of 'summariser' of campaign output by the major parties did not, as may have been expected, lead to a substantial increase in commentary or interpretation of party behaviour; there was no evident change in the presentation of policy positions in a strategic or instrumental manner. Occasionally, the language evoked militaristic or conflict-based connotations: "…battle was ultimately joined on unemployment" (BBC 18/05/83), yet this was not a central theme, and was tame relative to later campaign-related coverage (see below). Otherwise, these items included a significant amount of information on the nature of policy promises, with no overly critical analysis of campaign success or failure. On ITV, technological developments were reflected in the use of campaigning footage in the sampled items covering policy information. In 1983 (ITV 25/05/83), discussion of a speech by former Prime Minister and Labour leader Jim Callaghan on Labour's nuclear defence strategy was illustrated by both footage of Callaghan delivering a speech on the topic, and then a short report on Neil Kinnock (then Shadow Education Secretary) campaigning in public. An incident in the report highlights the different attitude to election coverage during that period. Footage of Kinnock addressing a handful of supporters in an empty street from a car-mounted PA system would, by later standards, have invited ridicule on the basis of the apparently ineffectual campaigning technique, and the image of a senior politician struggling to command a large audience. Instead, the reporter alludes to the fact that Kinnock is less well recognised by the public than his party stature warrants. In this instance, at least, it is apparent that the more adversarial journalistic stance anticipated by the Americanization thesis is largely absent from the coverage of British elections in the 1980s. By 1987, the

ITV coverage was considerably more complex, and the coverage of Labour's defence policy on 28th May 1987 involved seven different jumps to different sources of footage, including the live studio feed. This item involved juxtaposition of speeches by Kinnock and Thatcher on defence, a representation of the discourse on that topic at the 1987 election. This hints at an aspect of what Hallin (1992) termed 'mediation': where the words of candidates are used as the raw materials from which journalists construct stories. Otherwise the essence of issue-based coverage on both channels was still informative, and with no evidence of the campaign-as-horse-race schema that is deemed so damaging to public engagement in politics.

From 1992 onwards, however, there was both a further divergence in the focus of correspondent-led issue-based coverage on each channel, and – on ITV – a substantial increase in language by journalists that fostered a more strategic and cynical portrayal of the campaign behaviour of candidates. In the case of the BBC, a new form of item was introduced – entitled 'Election Briefing…' – which comprised a template of reporting for the rest of the elections covered in the thesis. The 'Election Briefing' (latterly 'Focus On…' in 2001) items employed the Social Affairs editor to discuss a policy issue separately from the campaign, and with little or no input by candidates. Ubiquitous throughout the campaigns, a variety of policy areas were covered by these items in an informative manner, often dealing in-depth with the causes and possible solutions to problems in the chosen field. For instance, the 'Election Briefing…Health' item within the 26th March 1992 bulletin begins with a long and graphics-illustrated summary of NHS spending since its creation, followed by a description of the British Medical Association's grievance concerning underfunding at that time. The rest of the item assesses the veracity of this claim, accompanied by a summary of the different party platforms put forward during the 1992 campaign. Much the same holds for the BBC's issue coverage in 1997, which continued in identical style. The 14th April 1997 bulletin contained an 'Election Briefing…Education' item, in which an exchange between the newsreader (Michael Buerk) and the Social Affairs editor (Niall Dickson) hints at the approach to campaign-framing in BBC coverage (at least in their issue-themed provision):

BUERK: "Does education play as an election issue? Is it a vote-winner?"

DICKSON: "It will be a vote winner for some people, but I think if you take health, education, crime, all these issues form in people's minds before they move their cross from one candidate to another, It's unlikely for most people to be one thing; it's likely to be a number of things, the most important of which is trust".

It is instructive that there was a need here to reaffirm the reality of voter behaviour in the face of strategic interpretation of the campaign and its issues. However, the analysis of campaign-related coverage below shows that this attitude was not widespread within campaign coverage at this time.

This is illustrated most clearly be policy-based coverage on ITV at this time. From 1992 to 2001, campaign coverage on ITV contained no consistent correspondent-led issue-oriented items, instead extending its campaigning coverage, and occasionally focusing on a particular policy embedded within. This is indicative of a stronger concern with campaign-based reporting, and strategic interpretation of policies and motives among campaign coverage on that channel. The 19th March 1992 report on economic policy focused almost exclusively on a Labour rally, with a speech by leader Neil Kinnock outlining economic policy. The correspondent (Tim Ewart), however, injected several highly strategy-oriented phrases into the coverage, for instance:

> "The campaign so far has been kind to Mr. Kinnock. His programme has been designed to keep him in friendly surroundings, and a series of poor economic indicators have allowed him to raise the emotional tone of his appeal".

As such, this is fairly strategic coverage of a major policy area, but it is also demonstrative of the increasing campaign-based framing prevalent within campaign coverage. Later in the same item, Tim Ewart summarises the item with a speech that entirely ignores the economic policy focus, and instead concentrates on the campaign:

> "The sort of occasion we have seen here in Birmingham tonight will be carefully recreated throughout the rest of this campaign. Mr. Kinnock thrives on a devoted audience, and a well-rehearsed formula is in place to show him at his best on big set-piece occasions like this. In between, on the evidence so far, will be a series of photo-opportunities designed, it would appear, to minimise the risks, and keep Mr. Kinnock away from any impromptu encounters with members of the general public"

Here is a prime example of a statement that, in the content analysis outlined in the first part of this study, would have been coded under 'Campaign Behaviour' ("…a series of photo-opportunities designed…") due to its strong focus on the image-building and maintenance by the Labour/Kinnock campaign. Although not directly comparable, viewed in juxtaposition with the BBC's issue coverage in 1992, there is significant difference in the substantive content, and in the tone of issue coverage by the respective correspondents.

This difference remains throughout 1997 and 2001, where the BBC retained its 'Election Briefing' ('Focus On…' in 2001) items in identical format to 1992, and ITV had no appreciable equivalent policy-oriented coverage. Indeed, in the 1997 and 2001

campaigns, there were few items on ITV's nightly news that could be classified as policy-based, excepting where the policy was highlighted in a lead story featuring party conflict over the issue on that day. By 2005, however, the situation had changed. The BBC's focus remained similar, but for this campaign Economics Correspondent Evan Davies introduced various policy areas, explained using a technologically advanced graphics studio. The amount and tone of the policy content was similar to that of earlier elections, but the placing of the correspondent as the focal point of each story, combined with his more light-hearted and conversational coverage of the issues, belies a more journalist-centric approach. Supplementing this coverage, the BBC also included a 'My Britain…' series of items shown daily, in which members of the public made their own short reports for the programme on a policy issue relevant to them, adopting a non-journalistic and non-party political approach to salient policy areas. ITV in 2005 introduced a similar form of policy item to those shown on BBC news, but with an entirely different focus. The 'Unspun' series of items, of which thirteen were shown throughout the twenty campaign days covered in the study. The 'Unspun' items represent a move towards highly cynical reporting of a magnitude that is a concern to any viewing of the normative functions of election reporting in civil society. The aim and structure of these items is to 'decode', using experts, and the instrumental motives behind the respective policy positions of the major parties. The 'Unspun' item on Conservative immigration policy aired on 22nd April 2005 featured the senior political correspondent Tom Bradby claiming at the outset: "We are going to unspin Tory election strategy itself", immediately setting the role of the journalist as set against the mendacity of politicians. The language used also heavily emphasises the game-centric campaign frame:

> "The truth is, [the Conservatives] have done a pretty good job setting the agenda";
>
> "Earlier this week, though, the message was looking a bit tired";
>
> "It does seem clear that the Tory strategy isn't really working".

So, while ITV's coverage of policy issues was similar in form to the BBC's provision, there was an entirely different focus in terms of journalistic stance towards the nature of the campaign and the behaviour of political actors in it. While there was no overt focus on the campaign in the BBC's policy-oriented stories, the campaign as a strategically motivated activity was the central theme of the ITV coverage.

This raises important issues about the nature of policy coverage across the period of study that will be considered below. However, viewed in isolation, the evolution of

correspondent policy reports does represent some significant changes in the focus, tone and output of British televised election coverage since 1979. The 1992 election campaign is the critical point, during and after which there is an increasing divergence between BBC and ITV policy coverage.

4.4.2 Campaigning Reports

Whereas analysis of correspondent-led policy stories tests the hypothesis that there has been a decline in the amount of campaign-free policy-oriented content in election coverage as indicated in the quantitative analysis above, the study of campaign reports addresses the concerns that coverage of the campaign has become more game-centric, cynical, and adversarial. 'Campaigning' stories are those that follow or report on one of the parties or candidates during the election campaign, and are central to any election in recent decades. There is a tension, however, between covering a candidate or party's actions as they travel the country or engage in 'pseudo-events', and presenting all actions as in some way instrumental and designed for cynical gain. Similarly, statements that are hypercritical of politicians or their campaigns, or attempt to decode behaviour into actions designed for electoral gain are detrimental to political discourse at an election, categorising all statements as either, in the first instance focusing entirely on the campaign as the major issue during the election or, in the second place, reducing all political acts to calculated vote-winning devices. The negative consequences of such a situation are outlined above. Analysing the content of campaigning reports helps to shed light on the extent to which this situation has arisen in British election coverage. The data outlined in Section 4.3 above shows that there has been a steady increase in instances of language that present the candidates as manipulative of the media for electoral gain (Code 12.2), or cynically motivated (12.3), or are critical of the campaign tactics of parties (18). While this is informative, it doesn't illustrate how this is manifested in the content of the news items as they are broadcast. To investigate this, campaigning reports at each election were analysed.

During the 1979 election, as we saw with correspondent stories, the coverage on both channels was quite simplistic, heavily weighted towards uninterrupted speech by political actors, and – significantly for campaign reports – entirely free of horse race-centric journalism. This marks a significant change from the later campaign coverage, as will be seen. Two items on BBC and ITV illustrate both the structure of campaigning reports at that election, and the similarities of coverage on both channels. The BBC bulletin on 27th April 1979 focused on the Conservative leader (Thatcher) delivering a speech on

industry, followed by a short piece of footage depicting both Thatcher and the Prime Minister (James Callaghan) campaigning at a rally, and visiting a factory respectively. Following a short introduction by the newsreader in which he outlined the key points of Thatcher's speech, a 112 second clip, of which speech accounted for 101 seconds, showed Thatcher outlining Conservative industry policy in the light of the microprocessor revolution. Another very short studio link then introduced a sequence of footage of Thatcher addressing a crowd of supporters, then Callaghan visiting a tobacco factory. Commentary was provided by a voice-over that narrated on-screen events. The ITV bulletin of 25th April 1979 was broadly similar in structure. A short summary of the forthcoming speech by Callaghan on industrial relations and union policy was followed by the speech itself – 130 seconds uninterrupted. This was followed by another short studio link introducing a short (18 seconds) sequence of Callaghan visiting Walsall. The voice-over for this sequence factually narrated on-screen events. Though the degree of cosmetic similarity between these two reports is interesting, what is of greater concern is the distinct lack of analysis by journalists on either channel, either of the policies or of the campaigning, combined with the lack of any instances of interpretive or evaluative language pertaining to the campaign.

After 1979, however, both the complexity of coverage, and the prominence of strategic framing grew in both BBC and ITV news provision. 1983 saw increased focus on campaign activities, if not so much on the possible tactical ramifications of the actions of parties and candidates. On 27th May 1983, the BBC bulletin's item of Thatcher's campaigning consisted of a feature on the daily arrangements of the Prime Minister's campaign schedule, with frequent references to the roles of her public relations advisors, and the justification of the activities for the purposes of the media: "[her] television image is vital". The second half of the item analyses all of the preparations that had gone into the arrangement of that evening's rally, including detailed explanation of the operation of the autocue machine that Thatcher would use. However, the tone of the item was not cynical, as typified by the final line of the item summary: "Thatcher herself would agree that it is the issues that count". In this item, then, there is an example of an almost naïve analysis of campaign behaviour, perhaps testament to the newness of the techniques adopted by Thatcher's campaign team at that election. Yet the most important aspect of this coverage is that there is no element of cynical or adversarial coverage. The tone is neutral, and there is no interpretation of tactics or motives. During the 1983 election the ITV coverage of candidate campaigning was of a similar style to that on the BBC. Indeed, campaigning items have remained similar in form and format over the period of study on both channels.

The 6th item on the ITV bulletin on 31st May 1983 covered campaigning by the SDP-Liberal Alliance leaders, Roy Jenkins and David Steel. In contrast to the 1979 coverage, there are a number of references to the campaign and the 'campaign styles' of the candidates. The majority of the item consists of speeches by Jenkins and Steel, and again there is nothing in the way of strategic framing of campaign behaviour.

The 1987 election sees the advent of a type of campaign coverage that corresponds closely to Patterson's (1993) concept of a 'game schema': coverage of the campaign, and all aspects of campaigning behaviour as part of a contest, the conduct of which providing the context in which reporting is carried out. The contrast with earlier elections is stark, with a considerably stronger focus on campaign tactics, and the 'success' and 'failure' of the activities and actions of the campaign. There is a sharp increase in language of warfare and conflict: Labour's "assaults" on "Thatcher's weak point" (BBC: 21/05/87); "The Conservative assault has failed" (BBC: 20/03/92); Ashdown "weighing in" over Europe (ITV: 26/03/92), which remains in place through to 2005. Indeed, an increasing amount of the language used in the description of campaigning behaviour from 1987 onwards is interpretive of motive or evaluative of tactics:

> "Labour end the week with a sense of relief that their most vulnerable period is over. They took a calculated risk in exposing their tax plans to Conservative attack. They believe that the Conservative assault has failed, and Labour can now push their own plans more boldly" (BBC: 20/03/92)
>
> "Whilst straying from his agenda on Scottish devolution tonight, Paddy Ashdown was still insisting that his long-term tactics won't change, neither will his priorities" (ITV: 26/03/92)
>
> "The Liberal Democrats have been campaigning relentlessly on education and health. Getting them to talk about anything else today was difficult" (BBC: 21/04/97).
>
> "What's different about this campaign is just how little time Paddy Ashdown has spent talking about proportional representation. The party has learned from mistakes in 1992, and believes that health and education are far more likely to motivate voters" (BBC: 21/04/97)
>
> "Today the Tories are trying to appeal to business leaders. The trouble is that many of them are already thought to be Tory supporters. And it's fueling speculation that this campaign is intended to appeal to the party faithful, rather than floating voters" (ITV: 21/05/01)

Allied with this change in tone is the increasing prevalence after 1987 of focus on marginal seats. This, of course, mirrors changes in party campaigning strategy, but the net result between the 1987 and 2005 campaigns is a style of election reporting on campaigning behaviour that relentlessly concentrates on the horse race aspects of the campaign.

The 2005 campaign saw the culmination of these trends. Within the sampled campaigning items, there was minimal allusion to the policy ramifications of party campaigning. The daily report on Liberal Democrat campaigning on 19th April 2005 bulletin on BBC1 contained next to no coverage of policy despite the introduction, which stated that (leader) Charles Kennedy was campaigning on health policy. The journalist's (Gavin Hewitt) opening statement was:

> "There is a laid-back feel to Charles Kennedy's campaign. Not so much 'barnstorming', more 'dropping by'. Yet today, despite no signs of a breakthrough for the party, I found the Liberal Democrat leader sniffing opportunity as the campaign unfolds"

The narrative continues over footage of Kennedy arriving at his destination, and is concerned entirely with questions of whether turnout to meet him reflects on the efficacy of his campaign in the 'must-win' constituency. This portion of the item ends with the journalist quizzing Kennedy on the effectiveness of his campaign style. The to-camera summary of the item by Hewitt reads:

> "So far, the Liberal Democrats have remained fairly static in the polls. Their major hope as we enter this second part of the campaign is that if the Tories fail to show any real progress, the anti-Labour voters might just turn towards them".

It is difficult to see what the benefit of such an item is to the audience. The overwhelming majority of the information transmitted by the journalist is concerned with appraisal of the campaign strategy of the Liberal Democrats and, by extension, Charles Kennedy. Yet it is not even authoritative as an appraisal, as the main evaluative statements are little more than speculation. The net result is an item that contains very little substantive information about Liberal Democrat party platform, and some vague statements about the possible success of Kennedy's campaign behaviour. The ITV coverage at this election follows much the same tone. A similar item on Liberal Democrat campaigning broadcast on 02/05/05 begins with the statement:

> "Charles Kennedy keeps talking about trust in government because he wants to harvest the votes of Labour supporters who feel let down by Tony Blair because of the decisions he made in the lead-up to the war in Iraq".

Again, the focus of the item, and the questioning of Kennedy, is framed entirely in terms of possible electoral success on the basis of campaigning tactics.

It must be remembered that campaigning items do not resemble 'normal' political coverage, and haven't done so since before the period of study of this thesis. However, comparatively it has been shown here that, where items deal with the campaign behaviour

of parties and candidates, there has been a sharp change since 1987 in the tone and focus of this type of item to a more interpretive, horse race-obsessed summary of campaigning success and failure.

4.4.3 Manifesto Launches

By comparing the coverage of party manifesto launches across the seven elections studied here, and across BBC and ITV coverage, it is possible to further analyse the changing style and focus of election news. There are two issues to consider, which correspond to the studies of correspondent-led policy items, and to campaigning reports. The first is the prominence and quality of the policy information contained within manifesto launch coverage; the second is the extent to which the framing of manifesto pledges is game-centric and interpretive. As the analysis below shows, while there is an increasing element of strategic campaign-oriented language in manifesto launch items at the expense of policy description and analysis, the trend is not as severe as that noted in other types of item. The format of items covering the launch of party manifestos reflects their function, and so there is a significant level of continuity in style. However, this has changed in recent elections.

The BBC and ITV coverage of the Liberal Party's manifesto launch at the 1979 election indicates clearly the style and format of this type of coverage in the earlier elections of this study. The manifesto was launched on 10th April, and both bulletins outlined and explained a long list of policy proposals, interspersed with speech fragments by senior Liberals. The BBC item began by listing approximately twenty policy areas, with in-depth discussion of several. Following a speech by the Liberal Party's Treasury Spokesman John Pardoe, the item then gave special focus to the party's tax proposals, and investigation of the probable means of payment for such policies, and finally a discussion of the Liberals' electoral reform policies. The ITV manifesto launch item is broadly similar. Coverage of the same speech was followed by a list – with accompanying graphics – of the major policy areas, analysed by the election correspondent, Glyn Mathias. Again, the language and focus of the item is entirely descriptive, with informative instruction on how policies would be implemented and paid for. The lack of any interpretive analysis of the policy promises corresponds to the overall tone of the coverage.

This style of reporting was maintained throughout the 1983 and 1987 manifesto launches on both channels, with the major developments being improvements in the quality of the graphics used for illustrative purposes, and an increase in the amount of

external footage of the manifesto launches themselves. Also present from 1983 onwards is the presence – for the purpose of balance – of the opportunity for rival parties to comment on the manifesto in question. The theme of these items remains the listing of manifesto pledges, with accompanying graphics, juxtaposed with clips of politicians speaking on the relevant issue. Throughout these elections the overall focus of items dealing with manifesto launches is to convey information on the various policy platforms of the major parties. While this rule held true in essence during 1992 and 1997, however, there is evidence of an increase in the degree of more strategic language and campaign framing in the presentation of party manifestos, at the expense of hard policy content, particularly on ITV. The ITV coverage of the simultaneous Labour and Conservative 1992 manifesto launches (18/03/92) sees the introduction of polling data as the framing element of the manifestos – strongly implying that the manifesto pledges were chiefly important as a means of maintaining or reversing electoral fortunes. This phenomenon was also present on the BBC's coverage in 1992, though was discontinued for later elections, largely as a result of the poor predictive power of polling data in relation to the 1992 result. Otherwise, this campaign saw the advent on both channels of speculation and focus on the visual and image-related aspects of the manifesto launches as major parts of the respective items:

> "The launch of these manifestos is as much about creating the right image as putting forward new policies… It's a slick act, all designed to give the impression that [Labour] will be able to run the country, and in particular the economy, better than the Conservatives" (ITV: 18/03/92).

This represents the beginning of the creeping of strategic framing into manifesto launch coverage. A further development is the gradual decline in the amount of policy-based coverage. The practice of listing the parties' significant policy platforms, accompanied by analysis of the operation and feasibility of the policies, had declined – by 1997 – to a summary of a few major policy positions, usually selected due to their contentiousness with respect to other party platforms.

Prior to 2001, however, it could at least be stated that manifesto launch coverage provided a diet of relatively serious informative content listing the relevant party policy promises for each election. During and after 2001, however, even these items were largely concerned with game-centric framing of party behaviour. At the same time, the role of the journalist in reporting the manifesto became more visible. The BBC's coverage of the Conservative manifesto launch on 10th May 2001 shows clearly the change in tone and focus. After beginning with a standard list of policy promises, the report shifts to a package

by the journalist Andrew Marr, whose narration over footage of the leader (William Hague) at the launch rally begins with the statement:

> "Here he comes… the man with the hardest job in Britain over the next four weeks – to overturn Tony Blair's huge poll lead. And how? First, by moving past the political class to scare ordinary voters with the thought of four more years under Labour".

Following a 33-second speech by Hague attacking Labour's tax record, the narration resumes:

> "But the plum in the manifesto was a tax cut, carved out of figures the other parties hotly dispute, and meant to remind voters of the great autumn petrol tax revolt".

These statements are indicative of the language and attitude expressed throughout the manifesto coverage. Each of the major policies were scrutinised in terms of their strategic utility, and the motives were speculated upon in terms of their instrumental use. The sequence then shows Marr at the launch Q&A session with journalists attempting to trap Hague on one of his policy promises on resistance of the single currency, and ends with the statement: "These first few days have gone as smoothly for William Hague as his barber's blade". Finally, the item itself ends with Marr's summary, which reads:

> "They've been very quick off the mark, but the early release of the Conservative manifesto is a bit of a gamble. It gives everybody who's interested plenty of time to read [it] and think about it before the rival parties' versions hit the streets next week. "Yes, that's true," say the other parties, "but it also gives us more time to attack it"".

The ITV coverage of this manifesto launch is also of concern, but for different reasons. There are references to the image of the launch, and the Conservatives' desire "to launch their manifesto in style", but the majority of the footage of the party launch consists of speech by Hague. The problem here is that, like the item itself, the speech and coverage is extremely short. The totality of the speech by the Conservative leader in the item covering the manifesto launch for that election consists of two soundbites of 15 and 14 seconds in length. Coverage of party policy is sparse, and shorter than at any previous election covered in this study, and a significant portion of the sequence is made up of criticism of the manifesto by other party leaders.

At the 2005 election, there was little change in this department. The BBC's coverage of the Labour manifesto launch is couched entirely in strategic language, drawing particular attention to the minutiae of the rally in which the manifesto is launched. Soundbites by party members and the Prime Minister are very short, and, like 2001, the listing of party policy pledges is rather short and consists of a simple list of statements

lifted from the manifesto, with no deeper discussion. The summary by the journalist, Mark Mardell, is also comprised solely of interpretation of Labour's motives:

> "Here, at the roadshow, as elsewhere, the message isn't just delivered in words. Think of the things that people say they don't like about New Labour: the spin; the glossiness. Well, Tony's little red book – the new manifesto – seems almost designed to counter that. In fact, it seems designed in another decade. Lots of thick text, and only one picture, in black and white" (BBC: 13/04/05).

The ITV coverage follows a similar theme:

> "Lights… camera… action… Is it a game show? Is it a sales conference? No – it's team Labour's antidote to anger with that man [Blair]" (ITV: 13/04/05)

Perhaps more significant than this tone of coverage is the central substantive theme that both channels chose to concentrate on: the absence of a pledge on National Insurance in the manifesto. Of the sections of these items comprising footage of the manifesto launch, much of the questioning and narrative is on the fact that, since Labour made no promises on this issue at the last election, but raised the tax during the course of the Parliament, this may be the case again. The entire justification for this focus is based upon the potential mendacity of Labour in its manifesto construction and presentation, and is indicative of the infusion of the strategic frame into coverage of manifesto launches in a similar form to other campaign-based stories.

The most significant aspect of manifesto launch coverage in the period 1983-1997 is that there was a resistance to the practice of strategic framing and game-centred coverage that had become prevalent in campaigning coverage from 1983, and in correspondent coverage from 1992 (on ITV). However, since 2001, there has been a significant turn towards the presentation of party manifestos as calculated acts geared towards relative electorate success, and an increase in the interpretation of motives at the expense of impartial relation of policy stances.

4.4.4 Campaign Two-Ways

The advent of items in which senior correspondents speak live on the campaign events of the day – or in some cases, the week – heralded a significant change in the televised media's self-appointed role in election coverage. On the one hand it elevates senior journalists to a position where they can condense a variety of complicated events into a single, relatively short, summary. On the other, it increases the opportunity to report in a way that treats the campaign as a process best presented by a form of running commentary,

contributing to its image as a horse race. It must also be remembered that this style of election reporting reached maturity – there had been an embryonic form of this on the BBC in 1983 and 1987 – at a time when the average length of political soundbites and total amount of speech time for political actors had diminished substantially.

The form and content of live campaign summary reports changed very little over the election campaigns from 1992 to 2005. The nature of the item is to report on the campaign, and so it is to be expected that since the justification of the existence of the report is expressed in terms of analysis of the sequence of events that occur in the campaign, there is a strong focus on the justification, consequences, and efficacy of actions. Unsurprisingly, the focus and language used reflects this, with strategic framing being ubiquitous throughout. For a typical example, on 3rd April 1997, Robin Oakley's campaign summary began with the statement being put to him by the newsreader (Michael Buerk): "Labour seem to be trying to pull of the difficult trick of saying absolutely nothing new and making a virtue of it". Oakley's response stated that "the Tories are trying to attack labour for being a leap in the dark", so Labour's lack of new statements was "more comfortable" for them in the face of opposition tactics. The entire focus of that item was based around the tactical jousting of the two parties, and, towards the end, assessment of the "slickness" of the party campaigns. Michael Brunson's campaign report on ITV (17/04/97) interprets the party campaigning focus on a day when the major theme of the campaign has been Conservative "difficulties" over the issue of Europe:

> "[Labour and the Liberal Democrats] are genuinely trying to get onto other agendas… But I'm afraid the fact of the campaign is that they find it irresistible when they see that kind of thing going on, to not get back onto the European issue and want to run with it"

BBC Newsreader Huw Edwards to Andrew Marr in 2001:

> "Now the Tories seem unable to turn public dissatisfaction with public services… and disquiet over Europe where they lead in the polls, into some sort of breakthrough in the basic intention to vote. Do they have any theories why?" (BBC: 24/05/01)

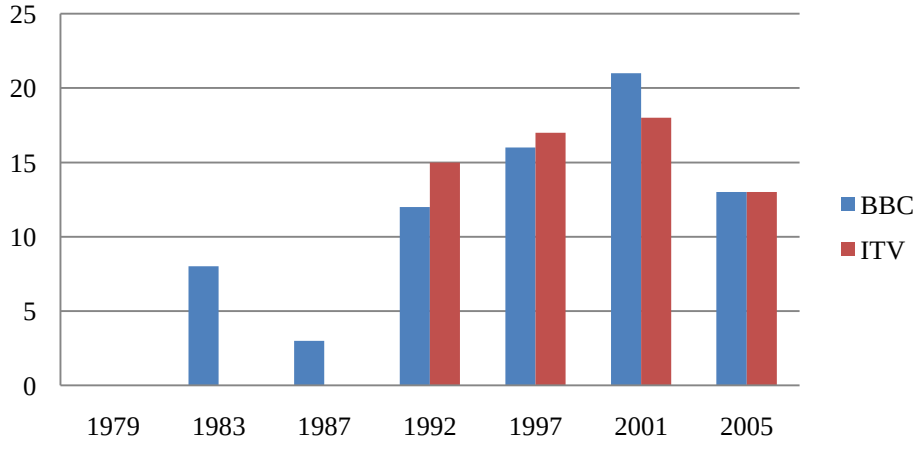
This type of language and campaign focus represents both the content of these items, and their justification. The increase in their number so that they appear almost daily on both channels during the 2001 and 2005 campaigns is an indication of their centrality as a staple of election coverage on BBC and ITV indicates that the campaign frame and horse-race journalism is a significant part not just of the content found within the totality of election coverage, but a central justification for the inclusion of a type of item that is now central to election news. The placing of live campaign items at the end of the campaign-related

content for each day (with occasional exceptions in the BBC's 1997 coverage that offered two blocks of campaign news per day) also indicates a predisposition towards game-centric journalist-led analysis of the campaign on both channels.

4.5 Two-Ways and Polling: The Framing of Strategy

This chapter ends with a look at the prevalence of two of the main types of campaign coverage most closely associated with strategic and interpretive journalism – the campaign two-way, and polling data. Figure 4.10 shows the number of two-way items across elections on both BBC and ITV. While the practice began in earnest during the 1992 campaign, BBC bulletins had previously contained a slot for Political Editor John Cole to provide a summary of daily or weekly events. Although these were set in the studio, and delivered straight to camera rather than as part of a manufactured conversation with the presenter, the function of these items was exactly the same: to provide an authoritative and evaluative account of the campaign. From 1992 onwards, however, the conventional two-way was adopted more or less equally on both channels. By 2001, it was a feature on average in all BBC bulletins, and nearly all of ITV's. In fact, due to the occasional inclusion of more than one live campaign summary, there were more two-ways than there were bulletins in the BBC's 2001 nightly campaign coverage. Although there was a decline on both channels by 2005 of the prevalence of this type of item, they remain a core component of television election coverage, as they have since 1992.

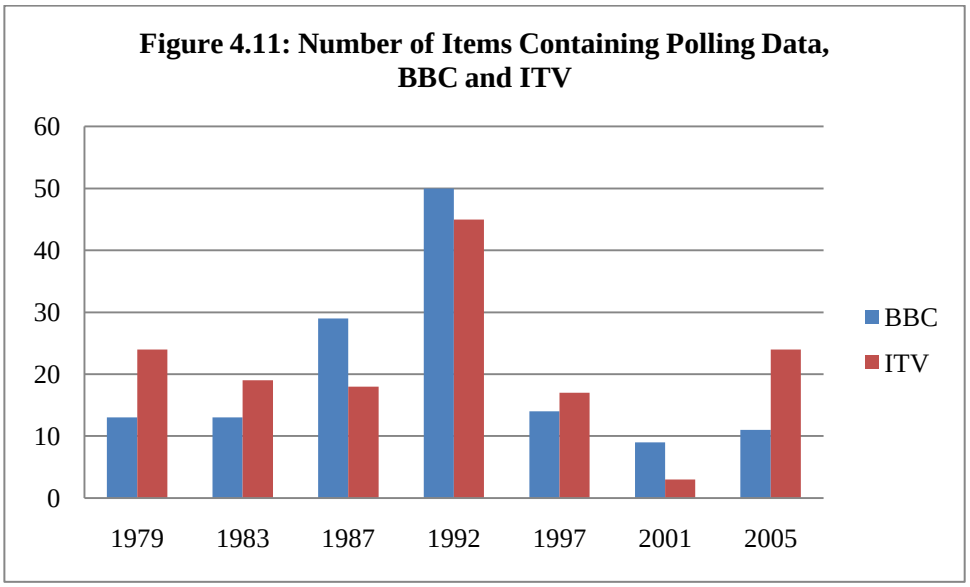
Figure 4.10: Number of Campaign 'Two-Way' Items, BBC and ITV



Polling data has been a feature of election coverage for far longer, and as Figure 4.11 shows, the number of items on both channels containing polling data is almost

identical in 1979 and 2005. Conspicuous among the elections is 1992, where a massive upsurge in the usage of polling data by the broadcasters was – possibly permanently – tempered by the abject failure of data to forecast the correct result; since then, incidences of its use have fallen sharply and remained low. Election circumstances seem to have an influence on the uptake of polling data, as the relatively certain Labour victory in 2001 was matched by a lack of focus on party polling fortunes. Overall, there has not been a substantial trend in increasing use of polling data in British television election news between 1979 and 2005.

Figure 4.11: Number of Items Containing Polling Data, BBC and ITV



4.6 Summary and Conclusion

The evidence presented here hints very strongly at a shift in the disposition of journalists towards reporting the campaign in British bulletins. In the first group of measures, it was shown that the election campaign as a 'thing-in-itself' has become a more dominant aspect of coverage. Increasing focus on aspects of the campaign have not, however, led directly to a drop in policy coverage – more and more, policy and campaign elements were woven into the same item. Perhaps most significantly, the proportion of campaign items with no policy content whatsoever actually fell over the course of the study, to well under 20% on both channels. While the coding frame employed in this research was very sensitive to policy category inclusion, the measure was employed consistently over time, and so the results can be seen as a reliable indicator of a decline in purely horse-race coverage of election campaigns in British television news.

The second group of measures showed that, over the period of study, journalistic coverage of the campaign became increasingly strategy-oriented and, through the use of critical or negative remarks, increasingly adversarial in tone as well as in disposition. It should be noted again, however, that the proportion of items with a strategic element is still relatively low – around 20-25% on both channels in the later elections of the sample. It is no coincidence that the greatest increase in the prevalence of strategic frames used in campaign items is during and after the 1992 election. One of the most consistent findings in the in-depth election studies in the Nuffield and *Political Communications* series' was the growth in 1992 of an increasingly interpretive style of journalism in British television news. The 'campaign two-way', a summary of the day's or week's campaign events, began to be used regularly on both channels in 1992, as Figure 4.10 shows. Yet interpretive journalism was not isolated in these items, but was evident in other campaign items, as the qualitative summary in Section 4.4 outlines. The nature of the change in tone, and the evidence of growth of interpretive and adversarial journalism should be tempered, however, by recognition that in the majority of campaign items journalists do not approach the subject in this way.

In contrast with the findings of the previous chapter, this seems to show some evidence of a more American style of campaigning. While it is impossible on the basis of the results in this chapter to link changes in campaigning directly to the changes in journalism, it can be tentatively stated that an increasing preoccupation of journalists in election coverage is to decode for the viewer the behaviour of politicians and the meanings behind their statements – a core component of the 'crisis' hypothesis, representing a journalist 'fightback' against media manipulation by the parties. The move towards the American Model, of game-centred strategic coverage, adversarialism and interpretation, is linked to the expected stifling of viewers' ability to process events for themselves, and the potential for the growth of voter cynicism. This does, however, depend on adopting a view that the decoding of political messages is damaging to political learning, rather than an understandable and necessary desire to unmask the manipulation behind the words. Either way, however, this chapter has demonstrated that, over the period of study, journalists have become more prominent and more active in the coverage of elections. This is investigated further in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5: Sound Bites and Speech in Campaign News

5.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters have provided interesting but mixed results on the nature of change in election coverage in British television news. On one hand, the provision of information is high, and there is evidence that viewers of television news have consistently received a high volume of serious news and campaign coverage. On the other, a larger portion of politics is framed as a 'strategic game', and more time is devoted to unpacking the layers of meaning behind political statements. A significant development, backed up by newsroom analyses and election studies (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1998; Bartle, 2005) is that journalists have become more prominent in the campaign reporting process, situated directly and conspicuously between events and the audience. This chapter continues the theme of speech in campaign coverage, by looking at changes in political soundbites, journalist soundbites, and balances of speech. It builds upon some fragmentary evidence in previous British studies (Deacon et al., 2001; 2005; 2006; Esser, 2008; Scammell and Semetko, 2008), and the more developed methodology used in American studies (Adatto, 1990; Hallin, 1992; Bucy and Grabe, 2007; Farnsworth and Lichter, 2008), to provide a comprehensive analysis of speech during campaign news. The results indicate two things: firstly, and most significantly, there is a dramatic shortening of political soundbites, from over 45 seconds for party leaders in 1979, to less than 15 seconds in 2005. Tellingly, the results are broadly the same on both channels. The second finding is a corresponding increase in the number and length of soundbites, and the total speech of, journalists. The 'rise of the journalist' in campaign news is again confirmed as, by 2005, journalists look set to overtake party leaders in terms of total speech if trends continue. Given the interpretive and adversarial content of journalist speech shown in Chapter 4, this suggests that there is also more space for journalists to analyse and question campaigning motives.

5.2 The 'Shrinking Soundbite' and The Disappearing Politician

The analysis of news, and its provision, involves a paradox. On the one hand, the output of a given news report represents the apex of a pyramid comprising the dense interconnections of institutional processes, professional conventions, technological arrangements, human agency and outside influence, each of which in some measure determines which information is transmitted and in what form. On the other, a news report

is, in a sense, an end in itself. Any effect or outcome, intended or otherwise, resulting from public reception of news is derived entirely from the presented information. Because of this, any analysis of the content of news must engage at some level with both of these issues. The following sections of this chapter outline the measurement of soundbites and speech in British televised election news, and the subsequent results and their connotations. These results are, however, meaningless without an understanding of the underlying factors governing news content, as they relate to the concept of the soundbite.

The pre-existing quantitative studies of speech in political news emphasise the efficacy of the soundbite as an indicator of change in television news style (Adatto, 1992; Hallin, 1992). The average soundbite length, it is argued, acts as a measure of both the importance and prominence afforded to political actors within campaign news on the one hand, and of the physical composition of news reports more generally. There is a strong normative undercurrent present in these assumptions: that there is a relationship between the average soundbite, and the functional role of campaign news in providing a desired quality of topical political information during an election campaign. This study shares this perspective; the provision of political news is central to the democratic process for a number of reasons, and any indicator of qualitative decline in political news is of concern, particularly in a campaign environment characterised by increasing media-centricity.

The effectiveness of the average soundbite and related measurements of speech in election news lies in their ability to describe both the communicative aspects of speech in news, and the composition of the bulletins themselves. The former engages with the quantity of information imparted by different actors during a news item; the latter with the editorial decisions and conventions that govern the construction of news. For this reason, it is an ideal measurement of the overall 'quality' of news, particularly in an analysis of long-term trends. Here, the relevance of a longitudinal analysis of soundbites in British news is investigated, with special emphasis on the potential ramifications of change, and the existing theoretical explanations for the changing broadcast news environment that such changes indicate.

The main precursors to a study of this type are the separate analyses in the early '90s by Hallin (1992) and Adatto (1992) of average soundbites in US presidential elections between 1968 and 1988. Both of these studies noted a substantial decline in the length of soundbites over this period, from slightly over 43 seconds in 1968, to 8.9 seconds in

Hallin's study, and 9.8 seconds in Adatto's.[25] Though they ascribed somewhat different causes to this change, these studies clearly outlined a trend of decline in candidate soundbites during presidential campaigns, with significant impact on the processes of political communication. More importantly, they highlight the role of soundbite analysis in measuring the quality of broadcast news output during election campaigning. More recent studies demonstrate that the shortened soundbite has remained the norm in US campaign coverage (Farnsworth and Lichter, 2008) and show that the shortened soundbite has been observed in Western Europe, including Britain, as well as in the US (Esser, 2008). Although longitudinal analysis of soundbites in the British context is rather sparse, Scammell and Semetko (2008) have shown that, overall, political actors have been afforded progressively less time to speak over the 1992, 1997 and 2001 British general election campaigns. Deacon et al., in a series of studies (2001; 2005; 2006) have also shown a decline in political leader soundbites. Frustratingly, the British studies have tended to use a less than satisfactory measure of soundbites – the total amount of speech by the relevant actor in an item. This, however, can cover a multitude of sins: for example, is 25 seconds of speech one uninterrupted bloc, or several shorter ones?

A more comprehensive explanation of the measurement and definition of soundbites in this study is included below. Broadly, though, this study uses a similar definition to that of Hallin (1992), with some revisions: here, a soundbite is any instance of uninterrupted speech by a political actor or journalist (not including the anchor) within a given news item, where the speaker is featured on-screen during at least part of the speech (i.e. narration and voice-overs not included). The use of the term 'soundbite' follows the convention of the earlier studies, and does not contain any of the pejorative connotations normally attached to the term in its more colloquial use in describing a short, media-friendly statement designed to condense complex information into an easily accessible fragment of speech (although, as will be seen, this definition is not altogether irrelevant). Of the many outcomes of soundbite analysis, 'who gets to speak' during news coverage - and for how long - is the most pertinent. From this, a number of observations can be made. The first is that the composition of a news item and the role and prominence of political actors within it is of significance for the political communication process and, by extension, democratic politics. Secondly, there is some relationship between the length of time that

[25] It appears that the difference between Adatto's and Hallin's final results is due to methodological differences when dealing with atypical cases (see Hallin, 1992: 6).

individuals are given to speak, and the quality of information that is available to the public during an election campaign. Thirdly, this concerns normative questions about the functional role of the broadcast news media during election campaigns as a means for politicians to communicate with the electorate. By addressing these questions, soundbite analysis is a valuable indicator of the potential impact of changes in campaigning and news provision during elections on the information available to the electorate.

The increasing interconnection between political parties and the broadcast media has been a prominent feature of British politics since the advent of televised news, and most notably since the 1979 general election (Kavanagh, 1995). The classification of election campaigning in Britain into distinct 'ages', or structurally different types defined by changes in certain institutional arrangements has been used to highlight how changes in the relationship between political and media institutions can redefine how the democratic system works. Both Blumler and Kavanagh (1999) and Norris et al (1999), although the focus of their research is different, divide campaigning in Western democracies into three 'ages': pre-modern, modern and postmodern. The 'modern' age of campaigning was heralded by the growth of television as a means of mass communication, which allowed unprecedented access to the public for campaigning politicians. With the potential for instantaneous and regular communication with the entire electorate, the main concern of campaigns became the construction and dissemination of coherent and consistent messages. As the traditional modes of campaigning diminished in importance, so they were replaced by an increasingly media-centric approach (Plasser and Plasser, 2002). As the media became more central to the process of political communication, however, their relative power increased.

The increasing role of the media in political campaigning is related to wider trends in the political environments of Western democracies in the latter half of the twentieth century. The decline in depth of ideological divisions, and the related decline in intensity of political affiliation, weakened the connection between the electorate and political parties (Kirchheimer, 1966), resulting in increasingly volatile electoral partisanship. As this trend increased, the primary objective of political candidates became the persuasion of optimum levels of unattached voters, as well as the mobilization of a diminishing number of core supporters. For this purpose, the mass media was the natural means, particularly the instantaneous, universal and - in Britain - impartial nature of televised news. The weakening of traditional forms of campaigning simultaneously increased the reliance of the electorate on the news media for political and campaign information. More

comprehensive accounts of these processes are available elsewhere (McNair, 1999; Negrine, 1996), but the key point to consider is that, while there are a number of intertwining social and political trends governing the changing nature of political campaigning, the net result is an increase in the importance of the media in the process, and so the potential effect of changes in the self-ascribed role of political reporting is magnified.

Here lies the value of news content analysis in assessing the qualities of news output during elections. Where the news media provide both the key channel of communication between campaigns and the electorate, and where the electorate increasingly rely on media sources for knowledge about the campaign, media output plays a more significant role in the democratic process. This is especially the case where levels of party attachment are low and the electorate is more likely to respond to the 'short campaign' of 4-5 weeks in the run-up to polling day. This naturally raises fundamental questions about the ideal role of the media within democracy which are beyond the scope of this study to fully address, but which influence the analysis of election news content. The first deals with the independence and impartiality of news sources, and the second with the underlying ethos of news production in general, and political news in particular, within broadcast journalism.

The televised news media in Britain under analysis here combine the principles of Public Service Broadcasting (PSB), and commercial broadcasting. The most notable aspect of news provision across these competing models in the British case is that the PSB ethos has been the enduring philosophy of both the BBC and ITV's journalism (Semetko, 2000). There are several facets to the PSB model, but the most relevant here are:

- Providing balanced and impartial information on issues of conflict;
- Having a specific concern for 'quality', as defined in different ways;
- Putting public interest before financial objectives.

(McQuail, 2005: 180).

Despite the financial imperatives of ITV at its creation via the Television Act, 1954, the popularity of the BBC's journalistic ethos at the time led to its application across both networks. Although there is some political influence over the BBC through the government's indirect control over funding through setting the value of the licence fee, in

general the influence is indirect and minimal, even during concerted attempts to intervene by the Thatcher government (Barnett and Curry, 1994; O'Malley, 1994). The replacement of the Board of Governors with the BBC Trust in 2007 also limited government influence over executive appointments. In the case of ITV, the commitment to PSB is monitored by the Office of Communications (Ofcom), the founding principles of which include a commitment to high quality in programming, and a policy of minimal regulation and intervention (www.ofcom.org.uk/about/sdrp). The institutional framework is in place in Britain to ensure, or at least to attempt to do so, that programming and journalism is both impartial and committed to high standards of quality, however defined. A study of whether this ethos has been perpetuated over time has relevance for questions of how well the public is served by journalism. This requires some engagement with the role of the processes of broadcast journalism as they relate to soundbites and speech.

That editors and journalists are ultimately responsible for the visual and audial output made available to the electorate is an underlying theme of this chapter and the next. Changing conventions in newsmaking manifest themselves in different styles of news reporting, that can be seen to be more or less conducive to political learning. Birt and Jay's influential essay on 'the bias against understanding' sought to address the impact on the public of certain modes of reporting, with the assumption that broadcast journalism can be assessed on how well it performs certain criteria central to the transmission of information to the public (Birt and Jay, 1975 [1984]). In the case of soundbites and speech in election news, it can be argued that shorter soundbites and less speech time for political actors both inhibits their ability to convey information to the electorate, and lessens the ability of the public to draw conclusions about policy in campaigning directly from politicians.

In summary, this study will look at how the composition of broadcast news reporting at elections has changed, with special focus on how any variation may be attributable to changes in journalistic convention, and how they may be expected to affect the quality of political communication in British elections. This will be achieved through a quantitative analysis of soundbites and speech, using these as indicators of how prominent political figures are in election news.

5.3 Methods

The quantitative measurement of soundbites in news is relatively straightforward, comprising a simple stopwatch measurement of certain passages of footage or sound in the

relevant bulletins. To contextualise and justify the approach employed in this study, however, requires a brief overview of some of the methodological approaches adopted in the project of which this study is an offshoot.

Sampling

The analysis here uses the full dataset of 270 bulletins, and draws the soundbites from every item designated as having a campaign focus, 2266 from a total of 4557 items (see Appendix III for the coding instructions). In this analysis, soundbites from political party leaders, senior party figures and ministers/shadow ministers, and journalists (not including presenters in the studio).

Soundbite Measurement

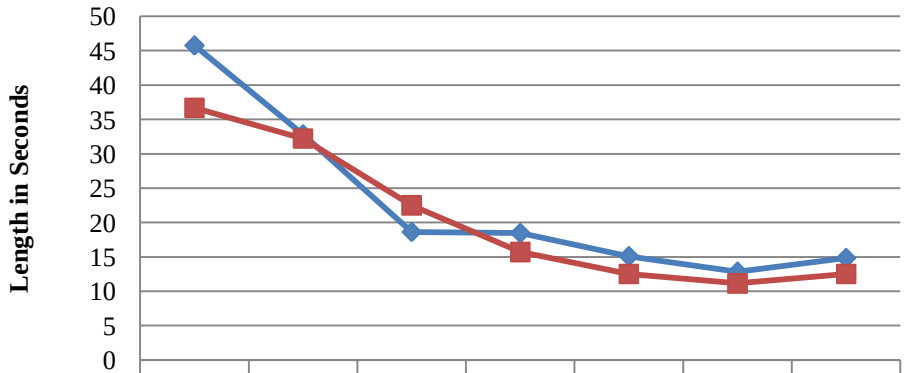
The measurement of the soundbites themselves is relatively straightforward, with some small exceptions. A 'soundbite' in this study is taken to be a period of uninterrupted speech by any actor (the list is in Appendix III), and in this sense the precedents set by Hallin (1992) and Adatto (1992) are followed. There are some minor caveats to be considered as a result of the occasionally chaotic nature of news footage. Where political actors are filmed in crowd scenes, or during visits, indistinct speech, or very short exchanges (under 4 seconds) with members of the public are excluded, as their presence within footage is not included for the content of speech, either by the politician, or by news editors, and there is no relevant issue-based content. Secondly, where a passage of speech is *unsuccessfully* interrupted, either by an active intervention (by journalist or heckler, for example), or by applause, the soundbite is considered to remain unbroken. Similarly, where a journalist takes part in a rehearsed exchange with the anchor (typically in a 'two-way' item), the soundbite is also considered unbroken, since the anchor's role in the conversation is in all cases to present a short question or statement to redirect the journalist's presentation. All soundbite analysis was conducted by stop-watch measurement.

5.4 Results: The Decline and Fall of the Political Soundbite

5.4.1 Average Soundbites

An initial glance at the average soundbite length for major political actors indicates that there has been a substantial and relatively uniform decline in length over the period 1979-2005 (see figure 5.1). Looking first at the mean length of soundbites for party leaders (LDR)[26], the overall change is a decline of over two-thirds (67.6%), from over 45 seconds in 1979, to just under 15 seconds. The sharpest decline takes place between 1983 and 1987 which, as will be seen, can be attributed to some structural changes in election reporting. Thereafter, the decline is more gradual, with a slight upturn by the 2005 election, following a low of 12.84 seconds in 2001.

Figure 5.1: Average Political Soundbite, Both Channels



	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005
LDR	45.78	32.83	18.63	18.47	15.1	12.84	14.83
SPF	36.67	32.21	22.5	15.71	12.51	11.15	12.53

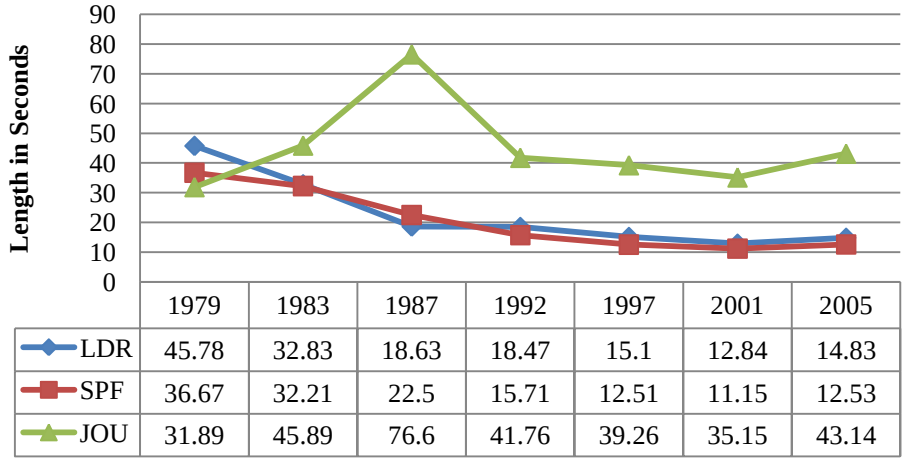
The trend for average soundbite length of senior party figures (SPF) shows a similar pattern of decline, though slightly more shallow than the dramatic drop of party leader soundbite length. From a similarly high start in 1979, ministerial soundbites have gradually become even shorter than leader soundbites on average. There has been an overall decrease in length of almost 66%, almost identical to that of party leaders. Again, the lowest level occurred in 2001, when the average soundbite lasted fractionally over 11

[26] The soundbites measured in this study have been grouped into three categories: 'leader' soundbites, comprising those of the leaders of the three main parties at the time of each election. During the period of the Liberal-SDP Alliance, spanning the 1983 and 1987 elections, the leaders of both the Liberals and the SDP were counted in this category. Secondly, 'senior party figure' soundbites consist of those of all major politicians in each of the three main parties, encompassing ministers/shadow ministers, party chairmen, and so on. 'Journalist' soundbites are those of any non-anchor journalist who speaks on-camera; narration and voiceovers are not counted.

seconds, and a slight rise by 2005 fails to mask the fact that the average soundbite by political figures then lasted approximately 12.5 seconds.

For political soundbites, then, the average length has decreased steadily over time, bearing out some of the predictions of Hallin and Adatto**.** Looking at the comparable average length of journalists' soundbites over the same period, however, displays a different trend (Figure 5.2). Over the period of study, there is something of an increase in the mean length of journalist soundbites (an overall change of 11.25 seconds, or 35.3%) with a massive peak in 1987, attributable to anomalous outliers on BBC bulletins, where items outlining polling data and special reports on policy platforms featured unusually long speech commentaries by the political editor Peter Snow[27]. This, combined with a considerably smaller number of soundbites (discussed below), has led to a considerably inflated mean for that election. Notwithstanding this atypical scenario, the average length of journalist soundbites has increased somewhat over the 22-year period of study, in direct contrast with political soundbites.

Figure 5.2: Average Soundbite Length, Including Journalists



	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005
LDR	45.78	32.83	18.63	18.47	15.1	12.84	14.83
SPF	36.67	32.21	22.5	15.71	12.51	11.15	12.53
JOU	31.89	45.89	76.6	41.76	39.26	35.15	43.14

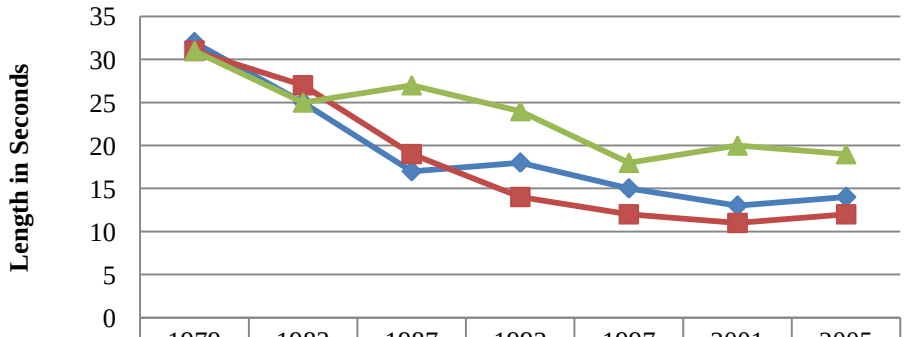
Although each of the three groups show decline in the absolute sense - albeit to varying degrees - the most striking result is the *relative* decline of political soundbites against those of journalists. In 1979, the average soundbite for party leaders and ministers was significantly longer than the average journalist's, but by 2005 this had been converted to just over 34% of the length of the average journalist soundbite for party leaders, and just 29% for party ministers. What these results indicate is that not only is the average instance

[27] The presence of op-ed commentary-style items/soundbites, referred to in this study as 'campaign two-way' items, has been discussed in Chapter 4.

of speech for political actors during the general election campaign decreasing steadily over time, but given the steadier trend since 1983 for average speech time by journalists, politicians have suffered something of a net loss in their potential to speak on television news.

As it is acknowledged, however, that certain structurally different political news items contain abnormally-long soundbites by journalists, often in an editorial capacity, it can be expected that in some cases the mean scores may be artificially high. To counter this, analysis of the *median* soundbites of each group of actors was employed, with broadly similar results. Figure 5.3 shows that the rate of change of the median length of soundbite for political actors is similar to that of the corresponding mean. From the 1987 figures onwards, the median results are broadly similar to the mean (suggesting that there were a small number of political soundbites of considerable length that affected the 1979 and 1983 mean scores), falling from a high of 32 and 31 seconds in 1983, to 14 and 12 seconds in 2005 for party leaders and ministers respectively. The median soundbite length for journalists, however, shows a significantly different pattern to that of the mean. Starting at a very similar level to political actors in 1979, peaking - like the mean - in 1987 (the reasons for which will be discussed below), then declining until 1997 after which the median remained at around the same level. The overall figures of the median journalist soundbite trend show quite clearly the distorting effect on the mean by a relatively small amount of disproportionately long soundbites. Despite this, however, it should be noted that the median for journalist soundbites remains substantially longer than those of party leaders and ministers.

Figure 5.3: Median Soundbite Lengths in Seconds



	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005
LDR	32	25	17	18	15	13	14
SPF	31	27	19	14	12	11	12
JOU	31	25	27	24	18	20	19

The initial picture given by these measurements provides some early evidence of a wider trend in the way in which political actors and journalists feature on television news during elections. The soundbite, to briefly reiterate, represents both the opportunity for the politician to speak, and simultaneously the amount of time they are allowed to speak in the context of a given news item. Considerable changes in this subsequently affect, to a degree, the process of communication between politicians and the public. The evidence provided by measurement of soundbite means suggests that there is a substantial decline in the length of time that politicians are allowed to speak on-screen during the campaign. The decline of 67% for party leaders and 66% for other major party figures is dramatic, and indicates a significant change in how political news items are constructed. Though the 2005 figures of 14.8 seconds for leaders and 12.5 seconds for ministers are not as damning as those recorded by Adatto (1992) and Hallin (1992), they still show that the average length of time a politician is allowed to speak is prohibitively short (they also match up well against Esser's figures for party leader soundbites at the 2001 and 2005 general elections (2008: 411). This is compounded when the figures for journalists' soundbites are taken into account. As there has been no appreciable decline in the mean soundbite length for journalists (not taking into account the anomalous figures for 1987), it can be seen quite distinctly that, whatever the substantive changes in the construction of political news items over time, the conventions that have led to a marked decrease in political soundbites have not similarly affected those of journalists. The net result, then, is an evolution of election news that gives less prominence to the speech of political actors relative to that of journalists, as well as significantly shortening the length of time that politicians on average get to speak.

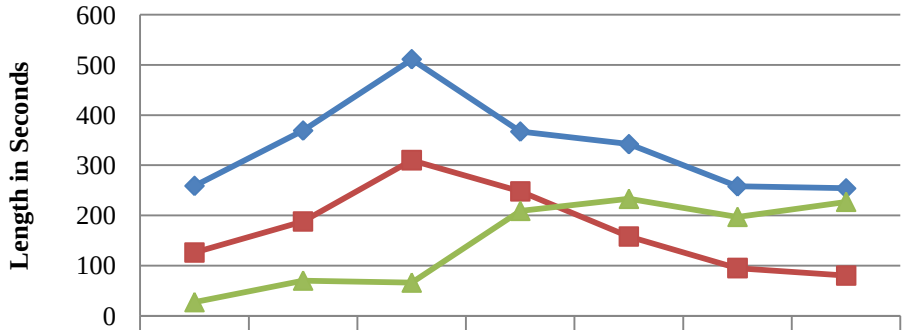
5.4.2 Number of Soundbites

There are, of course, obvious deficiencies in the use of soundbite means alone in making definitive statements about the quality of television news. The high variance found in soundbite measurement means that the major outliers are masked. To supplement the evidence provided by the mean length of soundbites, the total number of soundbites for the different groups at each election was measured, to determine how often political actors speak in comparison to journalists.

In Figure 5.4, the trend of total number of soundbites for party leaders and ministers shows a sharp rise between 1979 and 1987, followed by a steady decline between then and 2005. It should be noted that during the 1987, 1992, and 1997 elections, the

BBC's news bulletin was increased in length to accommodate the election campaign. The patterns for both are broadly the same, and it is interesting to note that the difference in the number of leader and minister soundbites at each election is fairly uniform, particularly between 1997 and 2005. The most striking feature of these trends is the sharp increase in the number of soundbites between 1979 and 1987, from 259 to 511 for leaders, and from 126 to 310 for ministers. Though initially this seems to represent a dramatic increase in opportunities to speak for political actors, it should be borne in mind that between these elections, the length of the average soundbite for leaders fell by 59.3%, while those for ministers fell by 38.6%. Therefore, while the number of political soundbites increased significantly between the elections of 1979 and 1987, their length dropped dramatically, negating this increase. Thereafter, there is a steady decline in the number of political soundbites, leveling off somewhat between 2001 and 2005.

Figure 5.4: Total Number of Soundbites, Both Channels



	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005
LDR	259	369	511	367	342	258	254
SPF	126	188	310	248	158	95	80
JOU	27	70	66	209	233	197	227

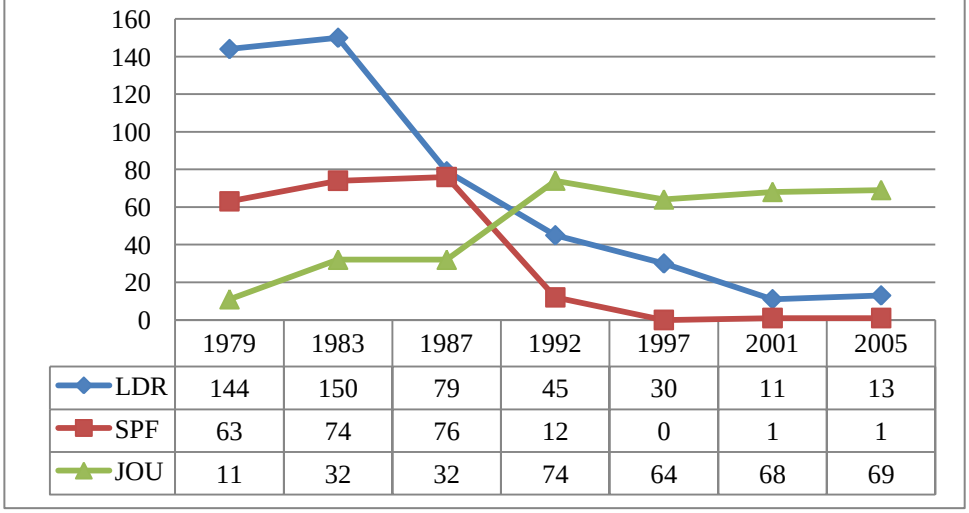
The 2005 results throw into sharp relief the decline in the amount of speech time during election campaigns. For instance, in 2005, there were 80 soundbites by ministers, meaning that, on average, there were only 2 instances in each bulletin where these actors spoke. Considering the mean soundbite length for ministers in 2005, only 25 seconds in each bulletin on average was devoted to their speech. The figures for party leaders are scarcely better: 254 soundbites across 40 bulletins gives an average of slightly over 6 soundbites for all party leaders in each bulletin, a total of 94.17 seconds of speech.

The trend in the number of journalist soundbites is almost a reverse of this. An increase between 1979 and 1987 is followed by a more dramatic, if fluctuating, increase, with a dip in 2001 being followed by a slight rise by 2005. Most significant is the fact that over time the difference in the number of party leader and journalist soundbites has

narrowed by the 2005 election to just 27. On top of this, the consistently higher average journalist soundbite length means that, per bulletin, although there are between 5 and 6 journalist soundbites in the political news items, these account for some 245 seconds, or over 4 minutes, meaning that, in 2005, journalists spoke for over two and a half times as long as all major party leaders combined.

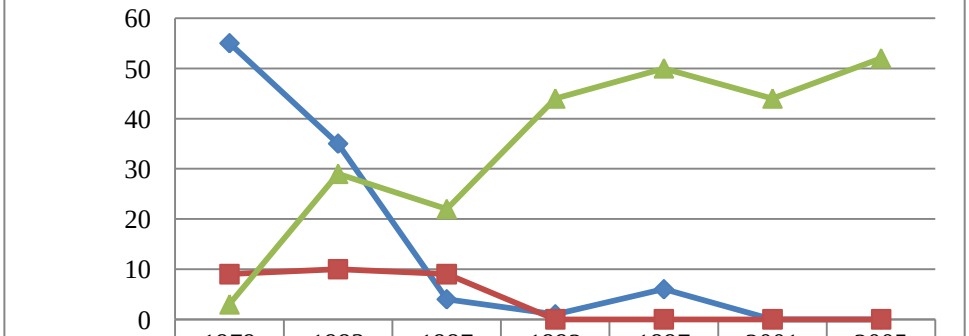
A further measure of the number of soundbites, focusing more on the detrimental effect on the communicative power of political actors where speech time is limited, is the calculation of the number of soundbites over a certain length for each group of actors. In this case the benchmarks of 30 and 60 seconds were chosen in order to differentiate between moderately and very long periods of speech. Figures 5.5 and 5.6 display the number of soundbites over 30 and 60 seconds respectively, for each group of actors.

Figure 5.5: No. of Soundbites 30s or Over



	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005
LDR	144	150	79	45	30	11	13
SPF	63	74	76	12	0	1	1
JOU	11	32	32	74	64	68	69

Figure 5.6: No. of Soundbites 60s or Over



	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005
LDR	55	35	4	1	6	0	0
SPF	9	10	9	0	0	0	0
JOU	3	29	22	44	50	44	52

Again, both graphs show a large decrease over time in both over-30 second soundbites and, consequently, over-60 second soundbites as well. In 1979 there were 144 leader soundbites over 30 seconds in length; by 2005, there were just 13. Minister soundbites over 30 seconds dropped from a high of 76 in 1987, to none two elections later in 1997, with just one during each of the elections in 2001 and 2005. In the same period, the number of journalist soundbites over this length more than doubled, from 11 in 179, to 69 in 2005, reaching a peak in 1992 with 74, after which numbers remained fairly level. Bearing in mind that journalist soundbite means have remained relatively steady over time, the fact that there has been a significant overall increase in the number of over-30 second soundbites can be put down to the large increase of journalist soundbites as a whole since 1992, as this is balanced out by a greater number of shorter journalist soundbites. What is of greater importance here, however, is the substantial decline in both leader and minister instances of speech totalling 30 seconds or more. To contextualise, in 2005, there were only 14 instances in all of the sampled bulletins of political actors speaking for this length of time or longer.

The results in Figure 5.6 continue this theme. For leaders and ministers, there were, by the 2001 election, no instances of speech of 60 seconds or more in length. This, however, is the continuation of a trend that began after the 1979 election. Then, there were 55 over-60 second soundbites for party leaders, and 9 for ministers. By 1987, however, this had fallen to just 4 for leaders, and 9 for ministers. Thereafter, there was some further fluctuation in leader soundbites, and the complete absence of any over-60 second soundbites for party ministers. In contrast, the number of journalist soundbites over 60 seconds in length has risen from just 3 in 1979, to a high of 52 in 2005, with some fluctuation in between. In 2005, then, over one-fifth, or 22.91% of journalist soundbites were over 60 seconds long. However, this figure is only marginally higher than the similar proportions since 1987.

The second branch of evidence presented here – the changing number of soundbites for political actors and journalists over time – support and complement the conclusions drawn from the mean soundbite data. The overall trend is one of an overall decline in the number of soundbites by party leaders and ministers both in absolute terms, and relative to journalist soundbites, the number of which has risen by more than three and a half times. There are a number of points here that relate to the functioning of the political communication process during elections in Britain. To begin with, evidence that political actors are given increasingly fewer chances to speak with their own voice during election

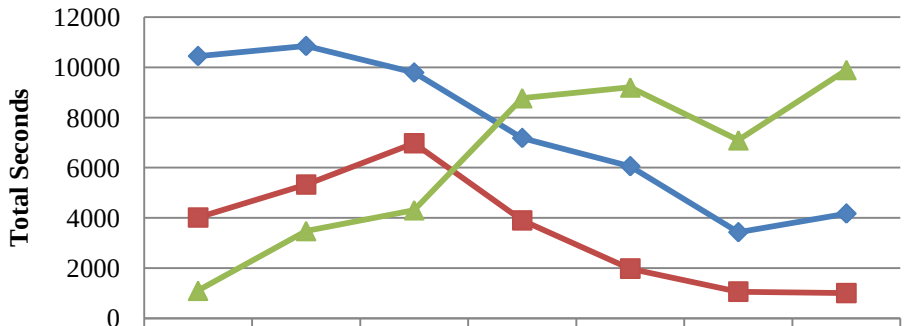
campaigns is of concern in its own right. Combined with the substantially increased number of journalist soundbites, this creates a situation where, by 2005, there were two-thirds as many journalist soundbites as there were soundbites by all other political actors from the three main parties. On its own, this is a significant statistic; it shows quite clearly that the role of journalists in election news coverage has increased over time, giving them almost as many chances to speak as party leaders, and more than twice the opportunities of other major political figures. What the overall trends display is that there has been a consistent lessening of the role of politicians as speaking figures in British televised election news coverage, at the same time as this increase for journalists.

When the soundbite means are considered as well, the evidence is starker. Not only are political figures speaking less often on television news, they are speaking for drastically shorter lengths of time. Again, for journalists the reverse is true. As the average soundbite for journalists within items has remained consistently higher than those of leaders and ministers, the number of soundbites has greatly increased. This is supported by the measurement of soundbites over 30 and 60 seconds in length, where evidence shows that while the number of instances of speech for political actors has decreased over time to the point that politicians no longer speak for over a minute, there has been a substantial increase in the number of times that journalists do so. Changing conventions in political reporting, therefore, reduce the voice of politicians, both in terms of how often and how long they speak, while the voice of journalists in election news has increased both in instance and in length.

5.4.3 Speech Totals

So far the study has outlined the changing nature of soundbites in televised election news coverage, both in length and in number. By changing the emphasis from the soundbites to the items in which they appear, and the overall totals of speech time, a clearer picture of the changing nature of speech in election news emerges, reinforcing the evidence that there has been a substantial decline of political speech relative to that of journalists.

Figure 5.7: Speech Totals in Seconds

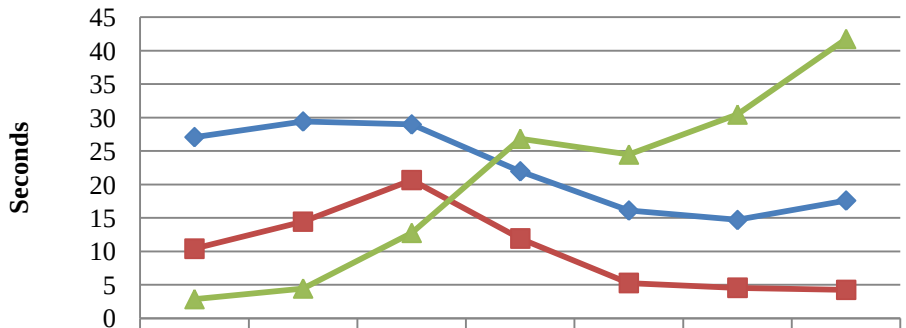


	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005
LDR	10449	10850	9790	7181	6055	3422	4166
SPF	4011	5329	6975	3896	1977	1059	1002
JOU	1098	3478	4308	8773	9201	7095	9897

Figure 5.7 shows the total speech in seconds for political actors and journalists across each election. For leaders there has been a steady decline from slightly over 10000 seconds (just under 3 hours), to 4166 seconds, (around 1 hour 10 minutes). For ministers, there was a rise between 1979 and 1987 to a high of 6975 seconds (just under 2 hours), followed by a steady decrease to just 1002 seconds (less than 17 minutes). As expected, the same data for journalist speech shows a reversal of this trend, with a steady increase from 1098 seconds in 1979 (around 18 minutes), to 9897 in 2005, slightly less than the length of time party leaders spoke on-screen in 1979. Figure 5.8 displays the mean speech length per campaign item of party leaders, ministers and journalists, showing a steady decline for both party leaders and ministers since 1987, with a slight upturn for party leaders between 2001 and 2005. Overall, journalist average speech per news item has increased steadily over time, from under 3 seconds in 1979 to over 41 seconds on average in 2005, while the average length of time that party leaders were speaking on-screen has declined significantly over the same period.

Again, this data indicates a substantial change in the balance of speech across elections, in accordance with both soundbite averages, and in the overall number of soundbites. Overall, within each political item, there is considerably less speech by the leaders of the main political parties, while the average amount of speech by journalists has grown. Most important, however, and arguably the most revealing evidence of this study, is the steady decline across each election of the total amount of time devoted to speech by political actors. In isolation, this has significant implications for the role of the news media in the political communication process, but combined with the steady increase in the length of time devoted to speech by journalists, this becomes all the more salient.

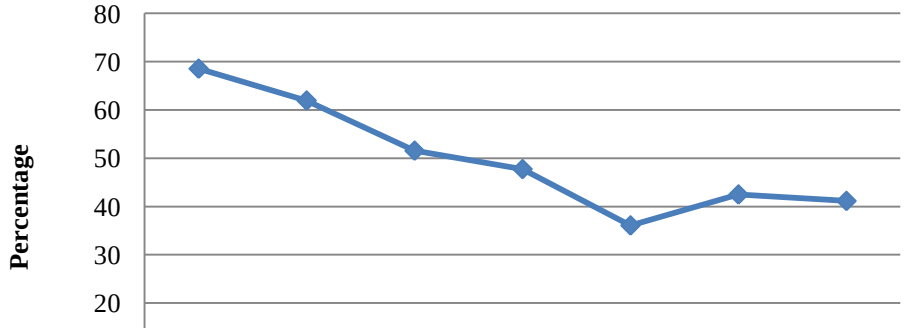
Figure 5.8: Average Speech per Campaign Segment



	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005
LDR	27.07	29.40	28.96	21.96	16.10	14.69	17.59
SPF	10.39	14.44	20.64	11.91	5.26	4.54	4.22
JOU	2.84	4.43	12.75	26.83	24.47	30.45	41.76

One final measure employed here is the percentage of film footage depicting the main three political parties that is devoted to speech by leaders and ministers (Figure 5.9). Though not uniform, evidence shows that there has been a steady decline from 1979, when over two-thirds (68.52%) of all footage of actors of the main three parties consisted of speech, to 2005, where this figure had dropped by almost two-thirds to just over 41%. This sheds some light on the changes in editorial convention in constructing news items over time. Though not in any way a definitive indicator of news values, or normative judgements in news construction, it does show that, in the creation of election news items, more contextualisation is given to footage than before, rather than allowing political actors to speak with their own voice.

Figure 5.9: Speech to Footage Ratio



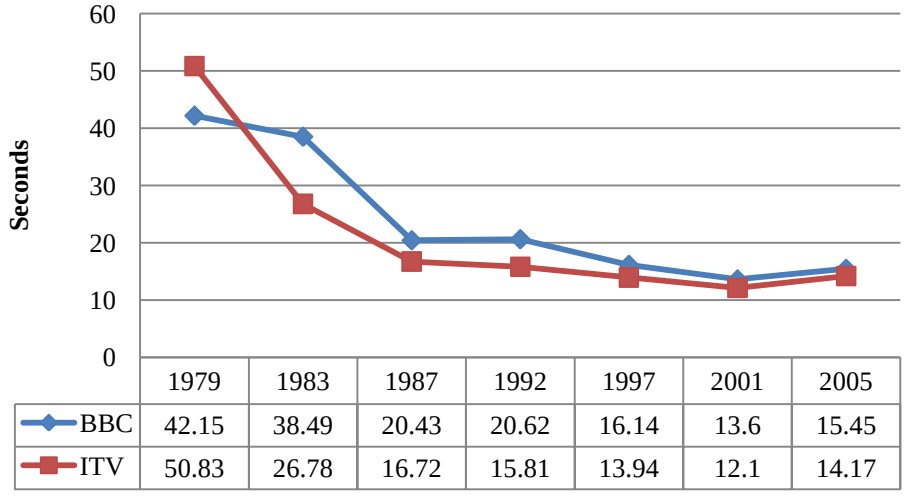
	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005
Ratio	68.52	61.93	51.55	47.74	36.08	42.49	41.15

5.4.4 BBC and ITV Comparisons

The final analysis undertaken here is a comparison of the use of political and journalist soundbites on the sampled bulletins for BBC and ITV respectively. Figures 5.10-5.12 show the mean soundbites for, in order, party leaders, senior party figures, and journalists. A glance at the trends for each indicate strong similarities on both channels, although the daily presence of Peter Snow providing in-studio polling information has inflated the BBC journalist mean at the 1987 election. Both leader and senior party figure soundbites decreased significantly between 1979 and 1987, and then declined more gradually thereafter, with a slight upturn in 2005. Soundbites by journalists have increased slightly on both channels over the period 1979-2005, and on BBC coverage average journalist soundbites have been considerably longer at each election, although the gap has narrowed since 1992.

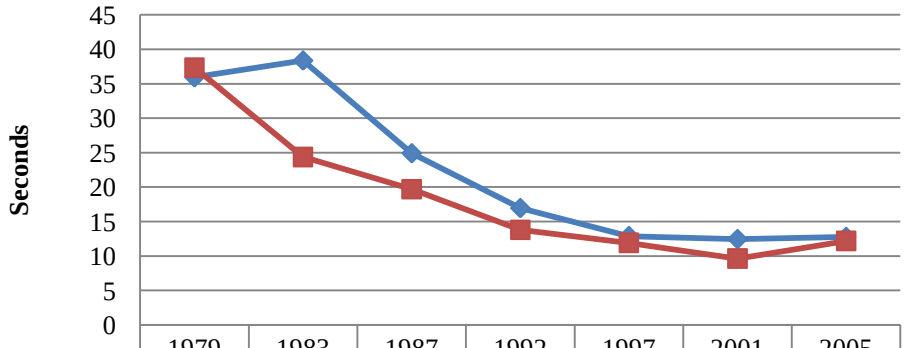
The similarities in political soundbite trends on both BBC and ITV is striking, and doesn't point to any difference on the major British public service broadcaster or a major commercial outlet facing increased market pressures (particularly since 1990). Soundbites on ITV tend to be shorter than their BBC equivalents, with the exception of 1979. However, the differences don't signify any major differences, nor do they mask the similarities in trends on both channels.

Figure 5.10: Leader Soundbite Average, BBC and ITV



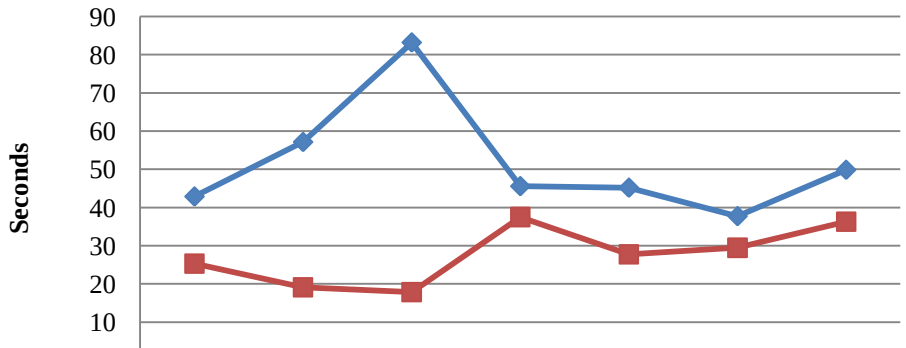
	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005
BBC	42.15	38.49	20.43	20.62	16.14	13.6	15.45
ITV	50.83	26.78	16.72	15.81	13.94	12.1	14.17

Figure 5.11: Senior Party Figure Soundbite Average, BBC and ITV



	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005
BBC	35.94	38.38	24.91	16.95	12.88	12.44	12.76
ITV	37.33	24.37	19.7	13.79	11.91	9.63	12.19

Figure 5.12: Journalist Soundbite Average, BBC and ITV



	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005
BBC	42.87	57.13	83.17	45.57	45.17	37.72	49.85
ITV	25.3	19.08	17.84	37.48	27.71	29.46	36.26

5.5 Summary and Conclusions

The evidence presented in this chapter is consistent; by every measurement, there has been a substantial decline in the speech of political actors in British election news, coupled with an increase in the role and visibility of journalists. For party leaders and prominent political figures, soundbites are shorter and fewer, leading to a large decrease in the overall amount of time political actors are given to speak within campaign-oriented news reporting. The trends show a significant decline that is of concern in its own right, but, while the 2005 figures for mean soundbite length for political actors are not as low as those recorded in Hallin's and Adatto's analyses of US election reporting, it is unlikely that, given an average of under 15 seconds for leaders, and 12.5 seconds for ministers, the communication and articulation of complex policy platforms is best served by broadcast

news. There is of course an issue of causality here. The advanced 'media logic' of modern campaigning surely makes use of the soundbite (in its pejorative sense) to ensure coverage in news bulletins, but whether this is down to the candidates' proactive strategy or a reaction to shrinking soundbites within news reporting as a whole is difficult to ascertain. There is doubtless a measure of both factors at play. What can be stated, however, is that there are certainly not fewer opportunities to obtain footage of candidates speaking in recent elections, as compared to 20 years ago. The decision to feature less speech by politicians must be made by journalists and editors themselves.

This increasing 'mediation' of political reporting was cited by Hallin as the main cause of the shrinkage in soundbites in his study, and it can be seen in the British case that as the voice of politicians decreases and that of the journalists grows, the contextualisation of campaigning is increasingly performed by the journalists themselves, taking a more active role in defining the narrative of election reporting. As seen in Chapter 4, this provides more scope for journalists to take a more active and opinionated role in the reporting of news, with important connotations for the role of the journalist in the political communication process.

In the context of the study as a whole, the results here more than back up the assertion at the end of Chapter 4 that journalists have been taking an increasingly active role in the election process in Britain due to their practice of acting as 'gate keepers', not just of the information uncovered in the normal news selection and presentation process, but also in the acceptable interpretation of the meaning of political events and messages. The pattern emerging is that not only are political journalists talking more often and for longer, but they are also playing a more assertive role as framers of campaigning events. There is a normative dimension here that relates to the provision of information during election campaigns. As soundbites grow shorter and shorter, it is difficult to imagine that viewers obtain sufficient information to form a truly rounded picture of the politicians competing for their vote. As the information directly available from politicians diminishes, then a vital link with the electorate is weakened.

Regardless of the wider normative issues here, the ultimate outcome of this study is the demonstration that the ability of politicians to speak on British broadcast election news has significantly decreased in the 26-year period between the general elections of 1979 and 2005. The outcome of this is that the British electorate, in a time of decreasing party affiliation (in both number and strength of loyalty) and increasing apathy, is ever more removed from their prospective candidates during the most important phase of the

democratic process. This must have significant repercussions on the health of political communication in Britain.

Chapter 6: Campaign Coverage in Context – Changing News, Changing Technology

6.1 Introduction

In total, the results so far have shown a strange mixture in the nature of change of television campaign news in Britain. Although the Public Service ethos remains extant (as Chapter 3 demonstrated) the considerably increased impact of journalists, and the changes in the balance of speech between politicians and journalists draws the conclusion that, although a sacerdotal core remains at the heart of television journalism, the journalists themselves have increasingly perceived their role as being more active interpreters of events, to the extent that politicians are being sidelined in the coverage. The growth of media manipulation and news management techniques among the political parties has doubtless played a part, as Blumler and Gurevitch would have predicted (1995), but the shrinking soundbite suggests another possible driving force behind change – the increased opportunity afforded to journalists to shape news by technological advances in newsmaking.

Changes in campaign news must not be viewed entirely in isolation from changes in the production and presentation of news in general within a specific media system. Although, as noted repeatedly throughout this thesis, the construction of campaign news is conducted under atypical circumstances in British newsrooms, in presentational terms it represents a variation on a fairly stable genre, while organizationally it is achieved in the most part via reallocation of human and material resources rather than substantially different production processes and techniques (Semetko et al., 1991). The soundbite and speech data outlined in Chapter 5 provide strong evidence in favour of two pessimistic theses on the potential effects of certain trends: firstly, the shrinking political soundbite – particularly of non-party leaders – suggests that news producers are at best truncating, and at worst obstructing, the communicative link between political candidates and the British electorate; secondly, the growing prominence of journalists as speakers during campaign coverage hints at an increasingly interpretive self-appointed role in the process of campaign newsmaking. On the face of it, these conclusions carry some weight. Politicians have progressively spoken less often on-screen, and on average for less time, while journalists have filled the void with their own voices, often for considerable durations while summing-up campaign events. However, to lay the blame for this squarely on the shoulders of television journalists and their desire to dominate the campaign narrative or to rail against manipulative party campaign strategies is both unrealistic in the sense that it

hints at actively antidemocratic sentiments held by media personnel, and misleading as it overrepresents the power of individual journalists to act in this way.

Unprecedented advances in communication technologies span the period that concerns this thesis, and technological advances specifically in the television news industry have changed the working practices of journalists and the range of circumstances in which reporting can be conducted. With the advent of Electronic Newsgathering (ENG), cheaper and easier satellite transmission and advances in editing software following the digitization of recording media, the means by which television news takes its final form prior to and during transmission has changed significantly since 1979. This chapter explores whether changes in the substantive content of the election news coverage analysed in this study may be influenced by wider changes in television news production and presentation as a whole. This is addressed in two ways. Firstly, the structure of news bulletins is analysed to determine whether news items have changed substantially over time and whether there have been differing trends in campaign and non-campaign news. This 'item analysis' looks at both the 'external' attributes of news items (for example, their duration, the number per bulletin, and so on), and their 'internal' attributes (the complexity of items, the number, duration and type of shots used). This provides a general overview of the structure of news bulletins and an insight into the changing construction of news reports in items, while allowing comparisons between campaign and non-campaign news. Secondly, a substantive aspect of televised campaign news is compared with its counterpart in the other parts of the bulletin. Of the three areas of analysis that have preceded this chapter, one that can be directly compared to its non-campaign counterpart is that of soundbites and speech. By comparing this variable in both types of coverage, it is possible to establish whether changes in campaign coverage associated with detrimental effects on political communication during election campaigns can be ascribed to general changes in newsmaking driven by technological change.

6.2 Changing Technology, Changing News

The aim of this chapter is straightforward: to establish whether structural trends in television news output are similar when campaign and non-campaign coverage – broadcast alongside each other in the same bulletins – are compared. If similarities are found to exist in the trends of both types of news, it may follow that changes in campaign (or other political) coverage with negative connotations for political communication in the UK are actually artefacts of general changes in the customs and formats of television newsmaking.

The comparison concerning one such change undertaken here, reflecting the restrictions of the purely quantitative data gathered in the content analysis which do not allow for comparison of language or visual presentational data, is between campaign and non-campaign item instances of soundbites and speech. The relationship between changes in news production and newsgathering technologies and the form of television news as it is transmitted is both subtle (as change represents evolution rather than revolution, augmentation rather than genre change) and profound (as the final presentation and content of news differs, so does its hypothetical impact on the political sphere).

The stability inherent in both news production practices and newsmaking technologies can be traced to their status as manifestations of the pinnacle of professional and technical developments in their own respective and related fields. Contemporary journalism and contemporary newsmaking technologies in a given historical context each represent, as does the state of the art in any field of human competence, the apex of a pyramid of accepted, tested and scrutinized methods and customs, or techniques and devices. This view corresponds to Kuhn's concept of 'normal science' (1964), where the mutual agreement of practitioners based on the rigorous and publicized testing of methods and accepted knowledge shapes conduct in a given field. Stability is the norm, and substantial changes in practice are rare. Terrestrial television news in the UK has not undergone any seismic immediate shifts in its aims and practices in the past 30 years. Instead, developments have been gradual and piecemeal, though of no less interest to scholars and journalists. Likewise, the development of new technologies that can impact directly or indirectly on the newsmaking process is dependent on the slow accretion of knowledge and technical skills in the relevant scientific and manufacturing fields, where revolutionary developments are exceptionally rare and new technologies face strong resistance (Winston, 1998). Thus at the beginning and end of the period of study covered in this thesis, there is an agreed set of norms and practices that govern the content of television news, and a contemporary array of technologies that define the parameters of how it is produced.

Before looking at the changes in the parameters of newsmaking afforded to British television journalists by technological developments in their profession, it is important to consider Winston's (1998) model of the adoption of technologies as it applies in this case, in order to dispel outright the notion of technological determinism. Although Winston's historical analysis focuses on the development of entirely new 'macro-level' communication technologies (e.g. the telegraph, television, the internet), the model he derives from his observations has some application to the present analysis. Within the

social sphere, the transformation of contemporary scientific knowledge into a specific technology is guided by the process of *ideation*, whereby the ability of science to remedy a recognized social need it transmuted into the technological potential to create a device that can solve the problem:

> ...the ideation transformation is akin to the processes whereby a transformation at the level of competence takes place in the human brain, so that utterance, performance, can be generated. Ideation occurs when the technologist envisages the device – gets the idea, formulates the problems involved and hypothesizes a solution (1998: 4-5).

The ideation process is heavily socialized, and, likewise, when such a 'solution' is created its adoption is governed by coalescing social forces that Winston denotes *supervening social necessities*. These determine the success and uptake of a given technology, while further impediments follow from conservative legal and industrial/professional interests that resist upheaval or threatened interests. His sober conclusion states that not only are communication technologies less radically altering than is usually predicted, but also that 'technological determinism' – the concept that new technological developments drive human behaviour by providing irresistible opportunities for change – is redundant where the impact of social forces on the processes of envisaging, creating and adopting a technology have been robustly demonstrated (1998: 341). Each of these conclusions has salience here, despite the shift in focus from the general (the social world) to the particular (the profession of television journalism). In the first instance, drastic changes in the format of British television news are not anticipated. In the second, the development of new newsmaking technologies alone is not viewed as the sole force of change where change is observed. Instead, it is maintained that journalists, as the practitioners of the art, play an important role in the identification and adoption of new technologies and consider the consequences of adoption, while external constraints on news production shape the context within which such decisions are made.

While this breaks the link between some hypothetical property inherent in new technologies and the outcome of news production, it is nonetheless the case that developments in camera, satellite and editing technologies have altered the landscape of possibilities available to journalists in the process of making news. As outlined in chapters 1 and 2 above, the development of lightweight cameras and recording media, the proliferation and increasing cost-effectiveness of satellite technology, advancements in computing portability and processing power, and latterly, the digitization of editing, recording and data storage have all occurred in the field of British broadcast journalism

during the period 1979 to 2005 (MacGregor, 1997; Cottle and Ashton, 1999; Harrison, 2000; Ursell, 2001; Crisell, 2002). A full recap is not necessary here, but their impact on the possibilities of making news is important. The growth of ENG has made it far easier for a small and mobile reporter and cameraman team to obtain footage from previously difficult to reach locations, while also making it easier to achieve broadcast-quality pictures and sound on the move. The linked advances in recording media mean that more footage can be obtained, as more data can be stored on magnetic tape than on film, and considerably more still in digital formats, while the dramatic reduction in mass greatly increased portability. Both magnetic tape and digital storage devices also reduce the overhead costs of gathering information, as both can be re-used. An upshot of this is that reporters gather much more audio and visual material while following an assignment, providing much more raw material from which to construct a news item (MacGregor, 1997). As camera technology allowed instant playback of footage, reporters became able to fit the story narrative around the gathered footage, which both improved the quality of news items as the resultant scripts better represented on-screen activity, and also gave the reporters greater control over the news package. Lastly, in tandem with developments in computer technology, software, and increased uniformity of digital storage media, reporters in the field gained the ability to edit their own packages on-site, and transmit a version of the constructed news package to the newsroom. This makes financial sense to newsmakers, as well as decreasing the distance between the reporter in the field and the final news content as it is broadcast (Ursell, 2001). A side-issue of this is the potential detrimental effect that multi-skilling and the related professional strains can have on the quality of journalism (Cottle and Ashton, 1999; Davies, 2008). Live reporting has also become considerably easier as satellite communications have advanced, and portable satellite relays have made it possible to do so.

To loosely follow Winston's model, each of these technologies, although heavily dependent on advances in other scientific fields, solved a pressing problem for television journalists. Each of the advancements grants greater ease for journalists in capturing physical (audio and visual) evidence of events often in locations where access is an issue, and greater immediacy in relaying packages to the newsroom in time for broadcast in fixed bulletins. They also increase the amount of footage from which news items can be constructed. However, the benign processes whereby technological advancements can influence news production provide an environment in which resulting structural changes in item structure may negatively affect the ability of news to provide the public with useful political information during election campaigns. Hallin voiced concern that politicians'

speech has become – in the US context – raw material for journalists to cut and paste (1992). The political soundbite – in the sense of a featured clip of a political actor speaking – becomes subsumed and embedded in the narrative of an intricately-edited item. Of course, Hallin's argument is guided by a fear of journalists intentionally cropping speech footage to fit their own narrative – a direct attempt to exercise power and obstruct the communicative link between political actors and the electorate. What an appreciation of changing newsmaking technology demonstrates is the idea that shortened political soundbites may be a by-product of the increasing complexity of news items made possible by easier-to-obtain and easier-to-edit raw footage. Chapter 5 provided robust evidence that soundbites in UK election news have drastically shortened over the period of study, but given that during the period the means by which news is constructed has changed in favour of easy editing and the facilitated application of the 'train of thought' to news editing (Boyd et al, 2008), news item construction may be at least partially responsible[28].

The three-pronged analysis provided in this chapter incorporates this analysis of the increasing complexity and speed of editing of news coverage during British general election campaigns. It is placed alongside an analysis of the stability or change in the structure of news bulletins and items in television news, and a comparative analysis of campaign and non-campaign coverage and the differences evident between BBC and ITV election coverage for both the 'external' attributes, and the soundbite analyses. The amount of graphical data obtained during the 'internal' item analysis exercise means that BBC versus ITV comparison is impractical.

6.3 Methods

The three areas of analysis conducted for this chapter differ in their focus and methods enough that separate descriptions of the sampling and techniques employed are necessary. The first section looks at changes in bulletin structure and the 'external' attributes of the news item. The second looks at changes in the complexity of news items – the 'internal' attributes – and uses different sampling and coding techniques than those used in the rest of the thesis. The third section measures changes in soundbites in non-campaign coverage.

[28] Again, the causal problem of whether 'soundbites' – in the sense of a calculated snappy quote intended to ensure coverage/retention – were shortened to accommodate changing patterns in news reporting cannot be resolved by content analysis. However, the issue of shortened soundbites in election news content remains important for public access to political arguments, regardless of the cause. A fuller explanation of this point is provided in Chapter 5 above.

Item structure 1 – 'External' Attributes

Firstly, the analysis of the changing nature of news items uses the same 270 bulletins that comprise the totality of the bulletins analysed in the thesis, and so the criteria for bulletin selection remain the same[29]. Again, the lower amount of bulletins gathered for the analysis of the 1979 election (15 programmes on each channel instead of the 20 gathered for each other election) means that some of the measurements have been adjusted accordingly for comparison. Where this is the case, notification is given. In all, 4568 items were used for this measurement, encompassing the totality of the information gathered in the wider study of the thesis. Again, this approach rests on the definition of 'news item' used throughout this thesis. To clarify, the approach used here is the same as that outlined in Chapter 1. A news item is differentiated by either a return to the studio anchor, a change in journalist, or a clear change of story focus. There are two further categorisations of items relevant to the analysis contained within this chapter. Firstly, items are designated either 'campaign' or 'non-campaign' status, depending on whether there is any relation to the relevant election campaign within the item. This facilitates analysis of the changing trends of item structure in both election-based coverage and 'normal' (i.e. non-campaign) news, in turn allowing comparison of the development of each type of news reporting to ascertain whether similar trends are evident. Secondly, items are differentiated by the channel they were broadcast on. This complements the 'campaign'/'non-campaign' division, by allowing a further analysis of whether or not changes are uniform regardless of the televised news outlet. Naturally, items are grouped in terms of the election at which they were broadcast. Timing of items is conducted by stopwatch and results are rounded to the nearest second, again in concert with the rest of the thesis.

As the focus here is on the basic external attributes of items, there are a relatively small number of measurements employed: firstly, the average length of items is recorded for both campaign and non-campaign news; secondly, the total number of items of each type is measured. Complementing these, the average number of items per bulletin, and the average bulletin length on each channel are also measured. Overall, this gives a full picture of the changing external parameters of the news item at each election, and allows comparison of trends for each type of item. One further measurement is of the average number of soundbites per item. Finally, the results will also be distinguished in terms of channel, to show fully the differences in the trends on both BBC and ITV.

[29] Nightly news bulletins on BBC and ITV for the 20 non-weekend days prior to polling day for each election

Item Structure 2 – 'Internal' Attributes

To analyse trends in the internal structure of news items, a supplementary content analysis of a smaller sub-sample of items was undertaken in order to look more deeply at the way items are structured in a way that the coding frame used elsewhere in the thesis could not pick up. A separate coding frame was constructed (see Appendix V), drawn from a smaller sample of 40 items from each election. Of the 40 items from each election, 20 were campaign-based and 20 non-campaign based. Of each of these categories, 10 were from BBC bulletins, and 10 from ITV. Therefore, there was equal weighting for each type of item. For each category, items were selected entirely at random, although certain types of item were excluded where they included some form of structural bias. Examples of exclusions on this basis were: interview items, due to the necessary focus on facial shots of actors and interviewers; journalist-anchor two-way items, again due to focus on particularly long single-shot soundbites; sports items, due to the extensive use of long excerpts of sports footage; polling data items, which nearly always consist of an introduction by the anchor, followed by one shot of polling graphics; and market or lottery summaries, which again invariably consist of an introduction followed by graphics. All other items were valid for sampling, corresponding more to the traditional news 'package' constructed by a reporter in the field.

Footage within items was divided into 'shots', each representing an unbroken piece of footage, with added or recorded sound or narrative. Where camera angle or camera usage changed, a new shot was logged. In this way, the whole of a given news item was divided into 'shots', providing evidence of the rapidity of editing in the construction of news stories. Following a pilot study, seven categories of shot type were created, which account for all different types of footage. These are:

- **In-studio (ST)** – Representing all in-studio footage, most often introductory speech by the news anchor;
- **Graphics (GR)** – Encompassing all use of graphics, whether advanced computer modelling, or earlier studio-produced graphs and charts;
- **Other Footage (OT) –** All instances of archive footage, and footage clearly labelled as having been obtained from another source, e.g. promotional video, PA / Reuters footage;
- **Speech / Talking Head (TH)** – Instances of close-up shots of speaking actors, not including journalists;
- **External, Actor (EA)** – External footage, where focus is clearly on a given actor, whether politician, or a named subject of the story;
- **External, Scenic (ES)** – Catch-all for all external footage not focusing on an actor;

- **External, Journalist (EJ)** – All footage of the main journalist speaking, whether addressing the camera explicitly, or shown questioning / conversing with another actor.

An example of this coding frame in use indicates how items were recorded (details of the coding sheet and instructions are available in Appendix V). A sample item is drawn from the BBC bulletin originally broadcast on Wednesday 13th April 2005. The fifth item of the bulletin concerned the Liberal Democrats giving a press conference on their education policy pledges for that election. The item was only 32 seconds long, and consisted of 3 shots. First, the introduction by the programme anchor (ST), which lasted 10 seconds, at which point footage of Charles Kennedy at the press conference was shown as the anchor continued to narrate (EA). This lasted for 8 seconds, after which the footage cut to a soundbite by Charles Kennedy for 14 seconds (TH). This demonstrates a somewhat oversimplified version of item structure breakdown. While there were no systematic restrictions on case selection apart from those outlined above, there was some care taken to minimise the use of particularly short items like the one just described.

Non-Campaign Soundbite Trends

The third analytical component of this chapter compares the patterns of speech in non-campaign news with those of campaign coverage outlined in Chapter 5. This provides a further means of comparing the trends in news coverage as a whole, and supplies evidence of the relationship between changes in election coverage on the one hand, and news coverage in general on the other. The data used for this is drawn from the same 270-programme sample employed for the soundbite analysis in chapter 3, and in the study of external item attributes in this chapter. The total number of non-campaign items from which the data is drawn is 2022.

Again, all actors who speak in the news items were assigned a category. In this case, the categories are:

- **Journalist**
- **Spokesperson** – any official speaking in a representative capacity on behalf of an institution, organization, or individual. This includes lawyers in criminal / legal cases
- **Expert** – anyone speaking in an expert capacity on any subject
- **Other** – catch-all, covering celebrities, non-political official figures, foreign spokespeople / politicians
- **Member of Public**
- **Political Actor** – any political actor who appears entirely independently of the election campaign or party politics.

As before, soundbites are calculated to the nearest second.

Additional Note on the Methodology

The methodology applied here is purely quantitative in scope, in line with, and partially derived from, the rest of the thesis. It must be noted, however, that there are substantial drawbacks in providing a full account of the changing informational content of news where visual complexity and the usage and visual or textual content of graphics and images are considered. News is, of course, a primarily visual medium, and advances in production software, satellite communications, digitised recording media etc. have exerted substantial influence on not just the *possibility* of changes in the construction of news, but also in the *actual* visual (and sound) information that is broadcast. Caldwell's (1995) concept of 'televisuality' is pivotal in understanding the driving forces behind changing news composition through the integration of images, sounds and speech, and also the implications that it can have for the presentation and legitimation of political actors and policies within news (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2007).

Likewise, technological developments and changing conventions and professional orientations and motives among broadcast journalists has amplified the drive towards 'liveness' and immediacy in reporting (Bourdon, 2000; Hoskins, 2001; Lewis, Cushion and Thomas, 2005). This is driven primarily by the impact on the news landscape of 24-hour news, which in a sense depends on – and often overemphasises (Lewis, Cushion and Thomas, 2005: 462) – the presentation of events as ongoing, even when 'present' information is unavailable, or where reiteration of graphics, images or sounds distorts the presentation and reception of news output. This has been a significant shift in modern television news, but is beyond the reception of a quantitative category-based analysis of the type deployed here. The following analysis, as a tentative step in the direction of measuring trends in news output in election news through the analysis of the architecture of news items, should be read with this in mind.

6.4 Analysis and Results

6.4.1 External Item and Bulletin Attributes

A preliminary point to note is that the time allocated to nightly news during election campaigns has changed over the period of study. The BBC lengthened its election bulletins for elections during the 1980s and 1990s. The traditional 30-minute national bulletin at 9

o'clock, and latterly 10 o'clock, was extended to 40 minutes during the 1983 election campaign, and then to 50, 45, and 50 minutes during the 1987, 1992, and 1997 campaigns respectively. Since 2001, though, there has been no extension of the bulletin on BBC1. In contrast, on ITV the nightly bulletin was 40 minutes long in 1979, dropping to 30 minutes until 2001, when the flagship nightly bulletin during the election campaign was a mere 20 minutes long. In 2005 this had risen to 25 minutes, but all this shows that there has been little uniformity in bulletin length between 1979 and 2005.

Looking initially at the totality of output on both channels, the average length of campaign and non-campaign news items over time suggests that there has been, over the period of study, an overall increase for both types of item (Figure 6.1). A 48.3% increase in the length of the average campaign item has been matched by a less severe increase of 18.7% in non-campaign news. While this difference is quite stark, and where the difference in average length reaches levels as high as 89.6 seconds in 1992, the trends displayed suggest that, although there appears to be a substantive difference between campaign and non-campaign items, similar trends of growth and decline are exhibited by both. Since 1983, the trends have been broadly similar, though less pronounced for non-campaign news. Calculation of the median length of items indicates that abnormally long political stories have inflated the mean results (Figure 6.2). Significant differences in length remain for campaign and non-campaign items, but the gap is narrowed, and the trends again appear to complement each other. It would appear, therefore, that there is some relationship between campaign and non-campaign news item structure.

Figure 6.1: Average Item Length, Both Channels

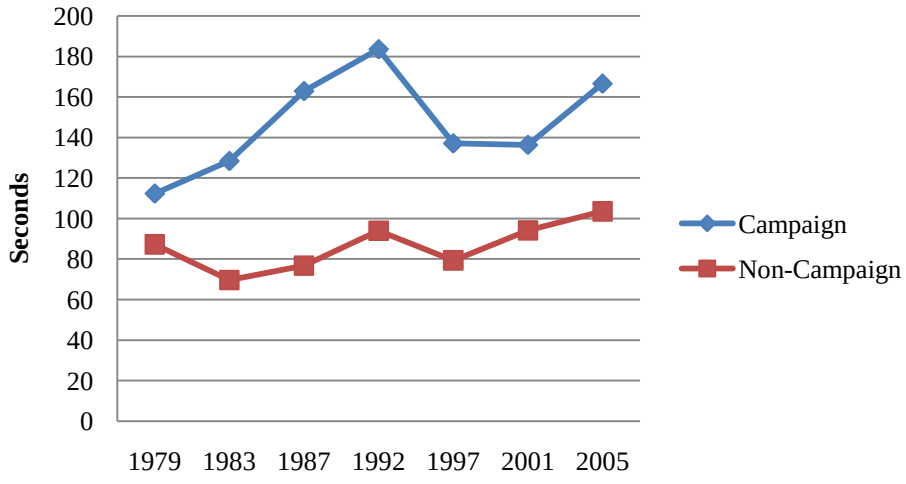
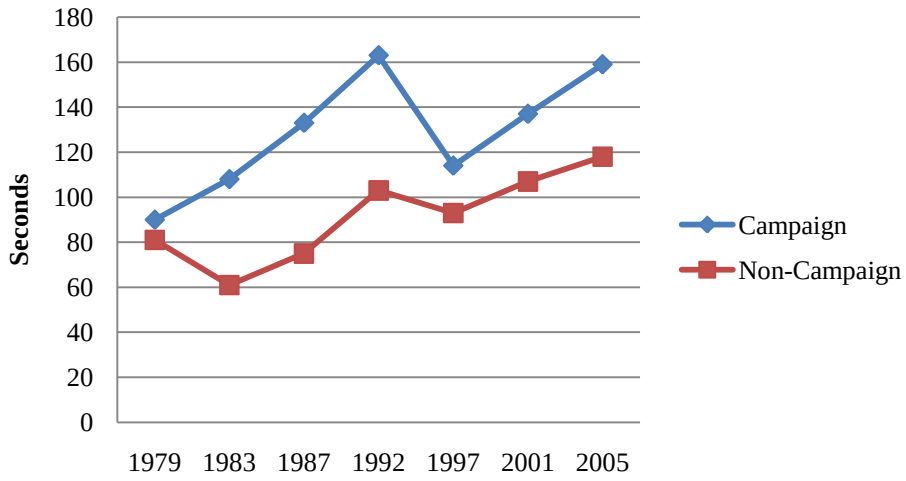


Figure 6.2: Median Item Length, Both Channels



Viewed in isolation, the evidence so far is interesting. The average length of news items has increased over the period of study, with a peak at the 1992 election being followed by a drop in length by 1997, and then an increase to 2005. Although the average campaign item is, in general, considerably longer than its non-campaign counterpart at each election, the trends of growth and decline appear to be related. The median length of campaign and non-campaign items provides similar evidence. With one exception (1979-1983), where there is a rise in campaign item median length, there is also one for non-campaign items. Lastly, with two exceptions, (1979-1983; 1987-1992), trends in the total number of items of each type have matched each other quite closely. The correlation between the trends for each type of news item should not be overstated at this point, however. The main purpose of this section is to outline how the structure of items has changed, both for each type of item, and on each channel. So far it has been shown that, on average, news items have been increasing in length since 1979, both for campaign-related news during election campaigns, and for 'normal' news, with no relation to the campaign. A consequence of this lengthening has been a decrease in the number of items broadcast, also in part due to a shortening of election bulletins on both channels.

Although the findings above specify the nature of change in news items in election coverage in general, to measure the stability of item structure across television news over time it is necessary to compare the results on different outlets. By doing so, elements of uniformity in trends can be ascertained. Figures 6.3 and 6.4 show the change in average item length between 1979 and 2005 for both the BBC and ITV bulletins, for campaign and non-campaign items respectively.

Figure 6.3: Average Campaign Items, BBC and ITV

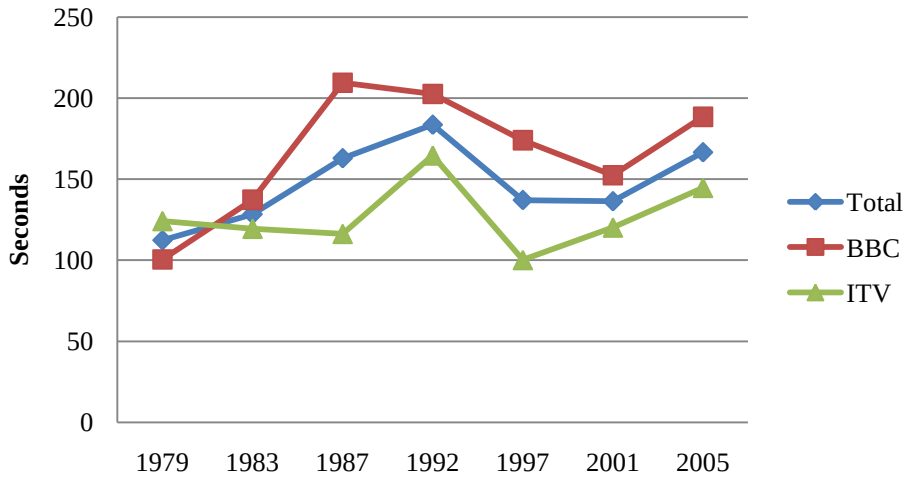
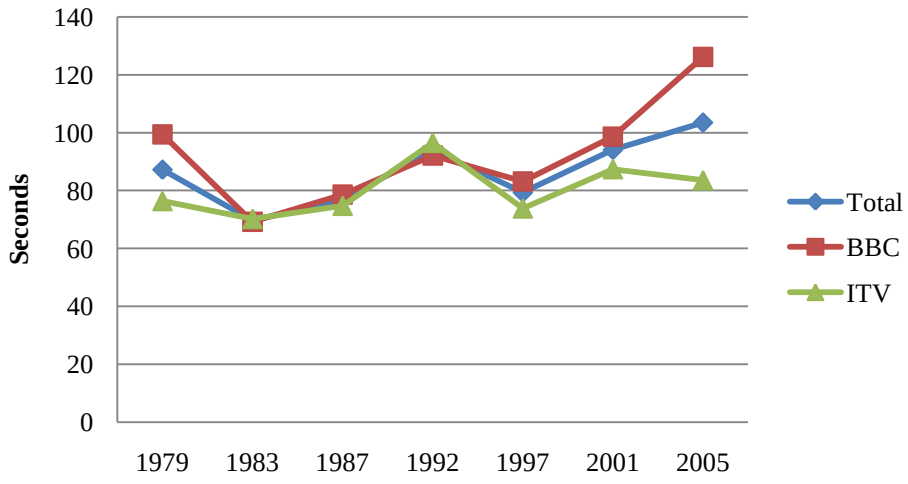


Figure 6.4: Average Non-Campaign Items, BBC and ITV



It is evident that while there is some divergence in how each channel structures its campaign reporting, there are striking similarities in the average length of non-campaign items on both BBC and ITV. This raises two points of note. The first is that there seem to be substantial differences in how the two channels structure their campaign items, with the BBC having had in most cases longer items those featured on ITV. This suggests that there are subtly different processes of news production on each channel during election campaigns. The results also suggest that the BBC conforms more closely to the 'sacerdotal' model put forward by Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) than does ITV, which is entirely understandable, given the stronger public service remit of the former. Secondly, the relative similarity of the trends in the length of non-campaign items for the two channels suggests that there is some measure of convention in non-campaign reporting. Without further analysis of the internal structuring of items, however, definite conclusions can't yet be drawn. In continuing the theme of channel-oriented convention in item structure, figures

6.5 and 6.6 show that there is uniformity in trends of the volume of both types of items on each channel, there is also a general similarity across each channel. Items are generally of a relatively similar length, and therefore appear in generally similar numbers. At the same time, however, there is much less similarity in the trends for campaign coverage across both channels.

Figure 6.5: Number of Items, BBC

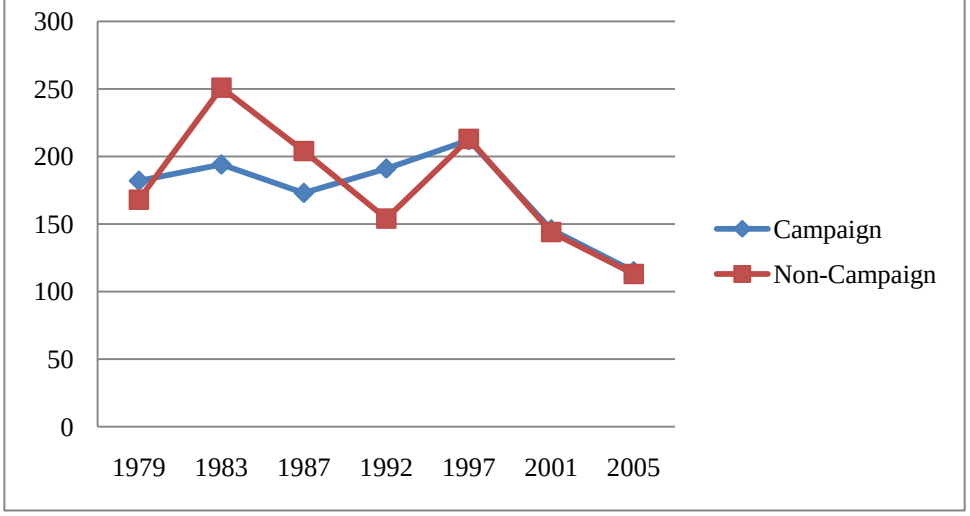
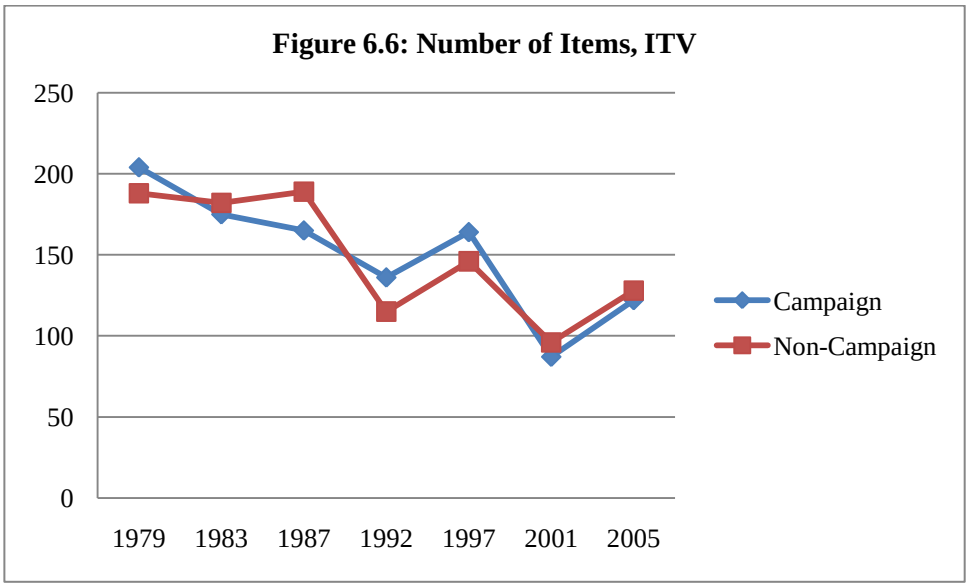


Figure 6.6: Number of Items, ITV



A further distinction between BBC and ITV is in the prevalence of soundbites in campaign and non-campaign news. Figures 6.7, 6.8, and 6.9 outline the trends for inclusion of soundbites in general, on the BBC and on ITV respectively. Figure 6.7 shows that the trends for campaign and non-campaign news are similar, although there is a difference of around 2.00 that has remained fairly constant since 1992. Figures 6.8 and 6.9 show that, while there is again some uniformity within channels, there is comparatively less across

them BBC and ITV. However, it is again striking that the general trends are reasonably similar.

Figure 6.7: Average No. of Soundbites per Item

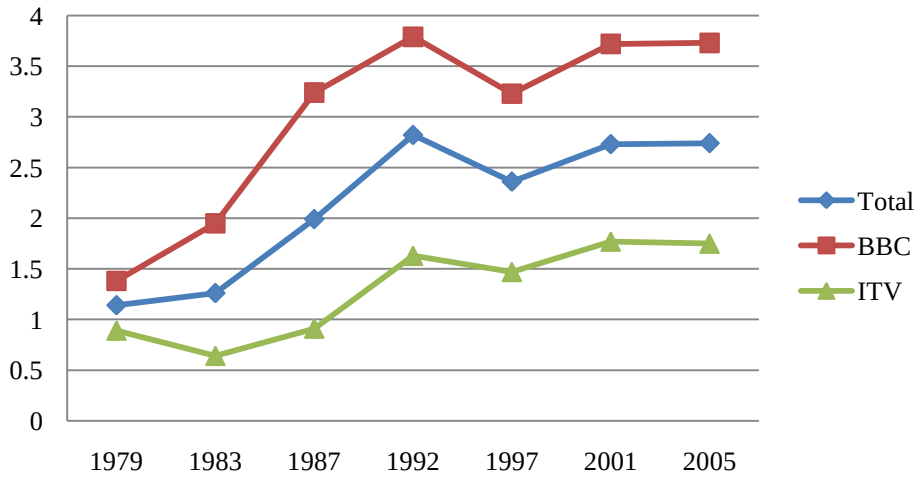


Figure 6.8: Average No. of Soundbites, BBC Items

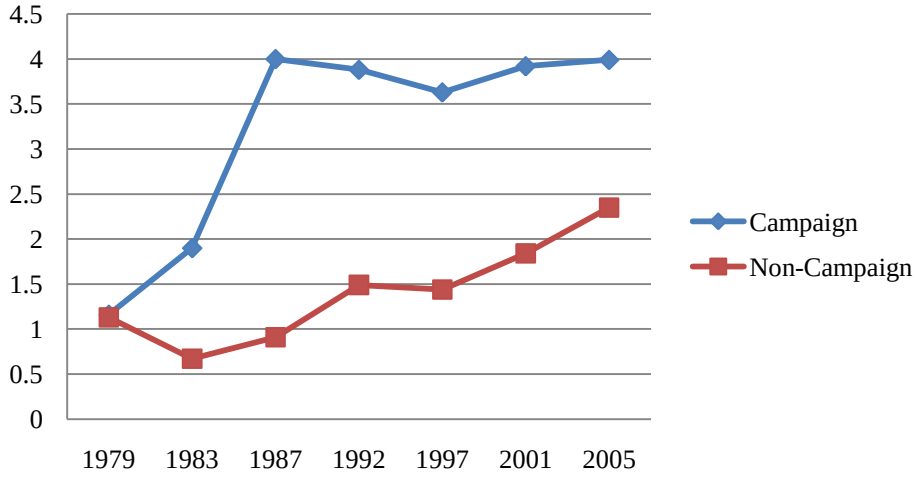
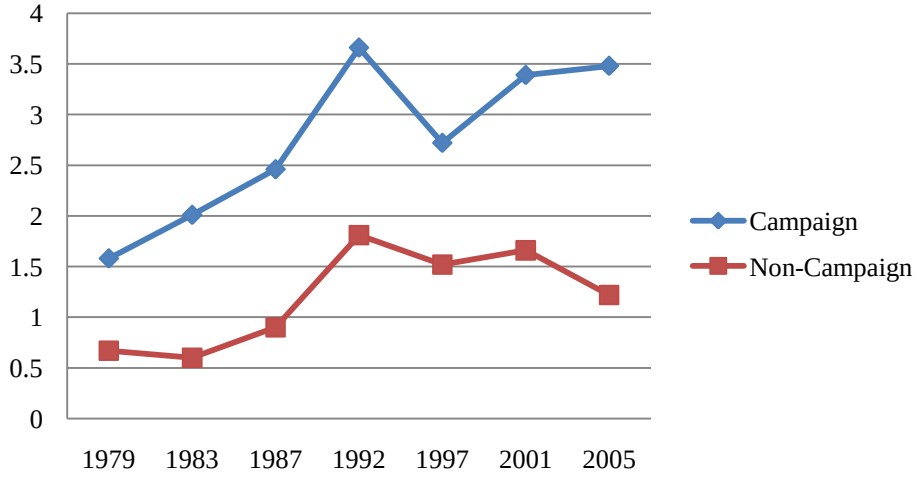


Figure 6.9: Average No. of Soundbites, ITV Items



So far, it has been demonstrated that there has been some change overall in the structure of both campaign and non-campaign items, and that there is some similarity in trends for each type of news item. Items for both campaign and non-campaign news have become longer, although, due to this and decreasing bulletin length, there are also less of them. While this may be the case, however, it has also been shown that there are substantial differences between the different channels in how they present their campaign news, if not their normal news. The BBC has tended over time to show more of both types of items (although this trend was reversed at the 2005 election), and their campaign items tend to be significantly longer than their ITV counterparts. The difference in bulletin length on each channel, particularly in the 1987, 1992 and 1997 elections, means that the BBC bulletin had the luxury of more time in which to fit more items. In normal news reporting, however, the average item lengths have been broadly similar, and have followed the same trends. Without further analysis of item construction, however, these conclusions tell us little beyond some preliminary evidence that, while the overall trends in campaign and non-campaign item structure show some similarities, there are significant differences between the two channels, both in attributes, and in trends.

6.4.2 Internal Item Attributes

While the data presented so far shows that there has been some consistency in the changes of item structure over the 26-year period of the study, there are also structural differences in how campaign and non-campaign news items are constructed. To further illuminate changing conventions in item structure, the following analysis looks at how campaign and non-campaign news is presented in terms of footage and editing. By breaking items down to the number and types of shot that have been used to illustrate the narrative of the story, it is possible to track the changes in the format of news coverage, and to compare whether similar trends have been noted in campaign and non-campaign news.

Three initial measurements outline how the internal structure of items has changed in general. Figure 6.10 outlines changes in the average number of shots per item in the sample of campaign and non-campaign news. Although there are no obvious linear trends for either genre over time, there has been a significant increase for both between 1979 and 2005, from 5.9 to 18.2 in campaign items, and from 9.45 to 13.05 in non-campaign news. The threefold increase in the average number of shots in campaign items is not matched in magnitude by the increases in non-campaign news. While this provides evidence of increasing complexity in both types of news in the sense that items contain more shots

(considerably more for campaign items), a fuller picture is provided when the data in figure 6.11 are also taken into account.

Figure 6.10: Average No. of Shots per Item

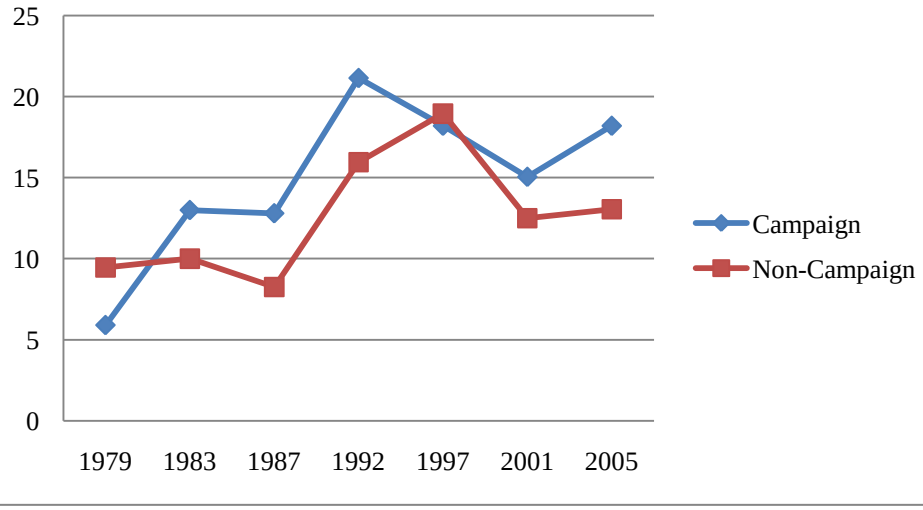


Figure 6.11: Average Shots per Minute of News

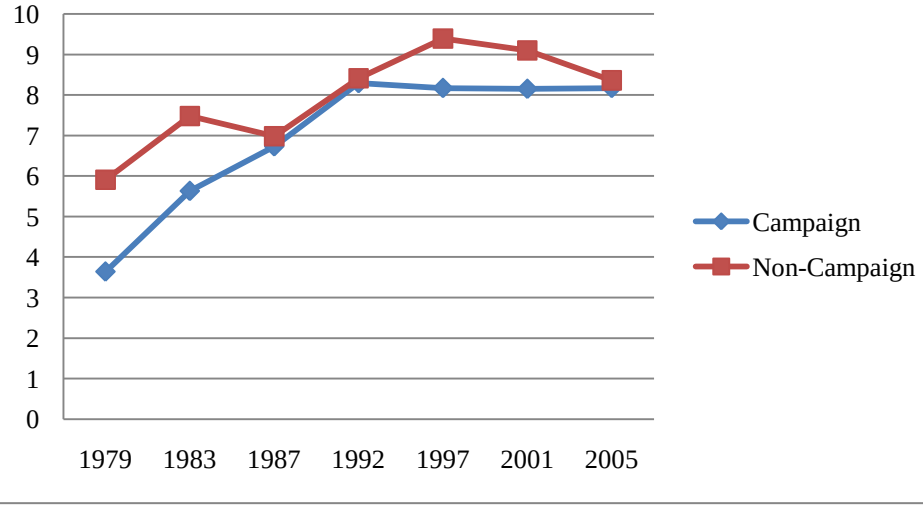
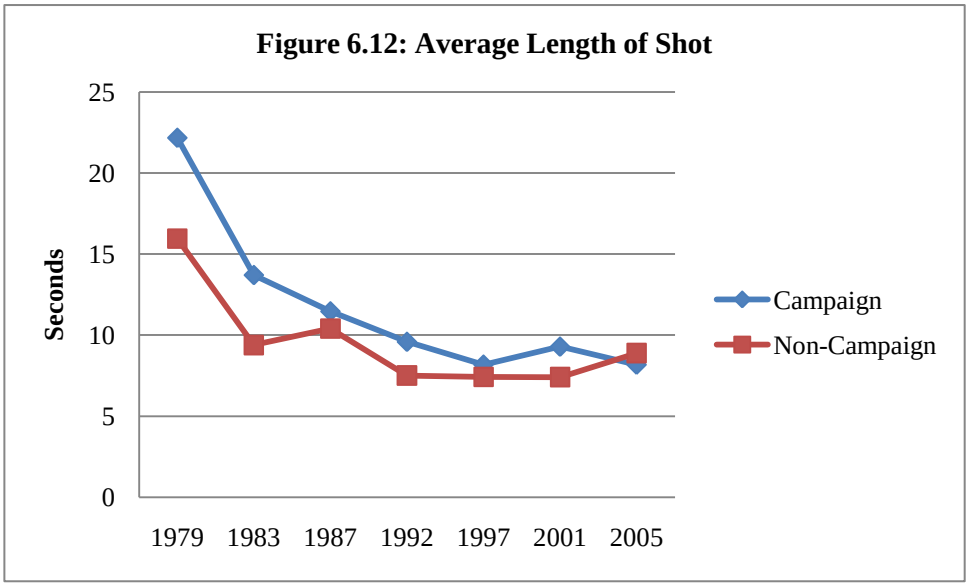


Figure 6.11 contains the average shot-per-minute ratio of each item, which divides the number of shots by the length of each item, creating a measure that accounts for differing item length. The results show that there has again been an increase in complexity of both types of news. There were 3.64 shots per minute in the campaign coverage of 1979; this had risen to 8.17 in 2005. Likewise, there were 5.91 shots for each minute of non-campaign coverage in 1979, and 8.36 in 2005. What is interesting is that, while the shot-per-minute ratio of non-campaign news has fluctuated, the ratio for campaign news increased steadily from 1979 to 1992, from which point it has remained remarkably stable, deviating by only 0.14, or 1.7% of the maximum (8.29 in 1992). The third measure of item complexity, the average length of shot in each type of coverage, is shown in figure 6.12.

The flipside of the shot-per-minute ratio, this shows that there has, over time, been a corresponding decline in the average length of shots used, indicating that on both campaign and non-campaign news, there was increasing rapidity in the editing and construction of both types of election campaign news.

Figure 6.12: Average Length of Shot



Overall, if item complexity is defined by the number of shots that go into their construction (including studio links), the length of the shots themselves and the rate at which they change during the totality of news coverage, then by all the above measures, there has been a significant increase in complexity for both campaign and non-campaign news during election coverage between 1979 and 2005[30]. The shots denoting studio links and presenter introductions (ST), graphics or computer graphics (GR), and archive or other secondary footage (OT) are of secondary importance here, although they do merit inclusion to show how they combine with the relevant categories to give a complete picture of the make-up of British television news items. Accordingly, greater focus will be placed on the remaining categories that comprise all the raw visual material that make up reporter packages for news stories. To briefly recap, these are: talking head shots, where a subject is viewed speaking either to the reporter, or in a public setting, thus comprising all speech except, as we shall see, that of journalists (TH); external shots of actors who are a main focus of the story (EA); external scenic shots in which no particular human subject is featured (ES); and external shots where the reporter providing the narrative is featured on-screen, either addressing the camera or, more rarely, featured prominently in-shot (EJ). Pictorial representations of the changing average length of these types of item are shown in figures 6.13 and 6.14.

[30] Data Tables are reproduced in Appendix IX

Figure 6.13: Average Length of Shot Type (Campaign)

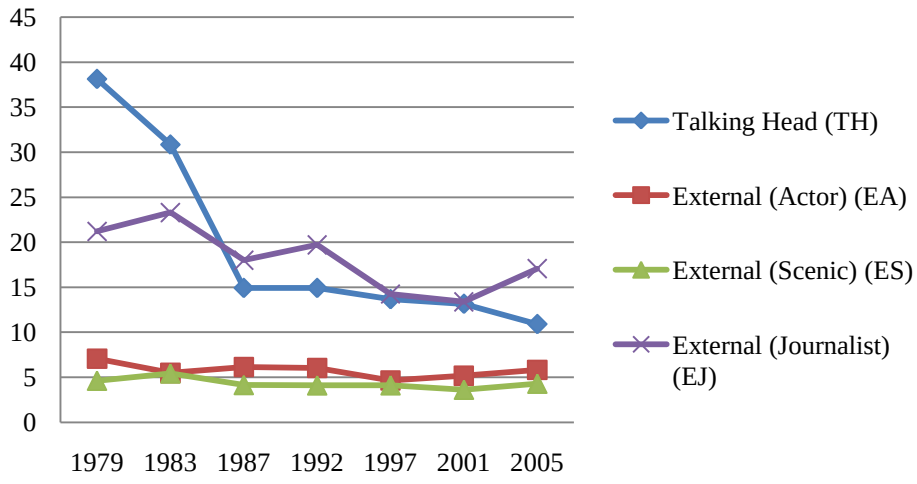
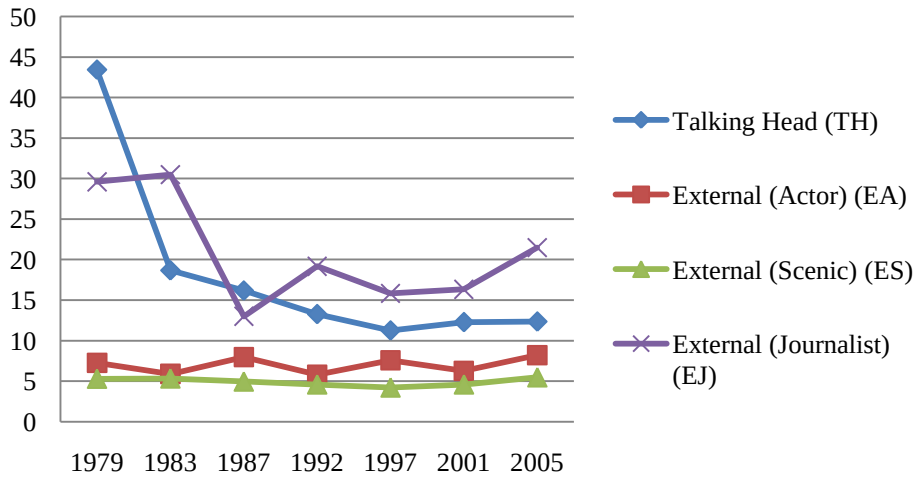


Figure 6.14: Average Length of Shot Type (Non-Campaign)



Each of these types of shot displays interesting trends concerning the structure of news production in British television news. Looking first at talking head shots featuring speech (TH), it is evident that there has been a significant reduction in the length of this type of shot in both campaign and non-campaign news. In both cases, the trends follow those found in Chapter 5: from a relatively high start, shots of relevant actors speaking have reduced in length and resolved at approximately 12 seconds. The fact that this is found to be the case in non-campaign coverage prompts questions about the coverage of political soundbites, since all instances of speech featured on British news have, on average, reduced to similar levels. The two types of shot best representing the 'raw footage' of news items (EA and ES) also provide surprising results. Most notably, there has been very little change in either across both types of news; a great level of stability in these types of shot is evident. It is quite clear, as a result of this, that there has been no major

increase in the speed of editing in shots of this type. All instances of external shots of scenery and visible actors have remained relatively steady over the 26-year period of the study. Lastly, and perhaps most surprisingly, given the data on journalists' soundbites presented in the previous chapter, the average length of external shots in which the journalist is visible have decreased slightly in length on both channels. This can partly be explained by two factors: firstly, the sampling here excluded 'Two-way' items that consist almost entirely of journalist speech in a single continuous shot; and secondly a journalist's speech to camera often consists of a shot of the journalist speaking, followed by a series of other shots for which the continuing speech provides a narrative. Overall, it is evident that there is a certain 'grammar' to item shot construction that persists on both types of news. Talking head shots have decreased in length, as – modestly in comparison – have external shots featuring journalists. External shots in general have remained almost identical in length across all news over the entire period of study.

6.3.3 Soundbites and Speech in Non-Campaign News

The final branch of research employed in this chapter is to analyse more thoroughly aspects of the content of non-campaign news. The purpose of this is to investigate two things: firstly, the trends in speech and soundbites across BBC and ITV bulletins, continuing the analysis of changing news styles. The second is whether the changing nature of speech in election news that was found in the previous chapter's analysis of campaign coverage is replicated in other news. To fulfil this task, the attributes of all soundbites in all non-campaign news across the 7 elections from 1979 to 2005 were recorded, by length and by speaker, each categorised into:

- **Journalist**
- **Spokesperson** – any official speaking in a representative capacity on behalf of an institution, organization, or individual. This includes lawyers in criminal / legal cases
- **Expert** – anyone speaking in an expert capacity on any subject
- **Other** – catch-all, covering celebrities, non-political official figures, foreign spokespeople / politicians
- **Member of Public**
- **Political Actor** – any political actor who appears entirely independently of the election campaign or party politics.

This data allows for analysis both of the nature of soundbites in general in non-campaign news, and to compare the role of journalists in campaign news with that in non-campaign news.

In Chapter 5, it was shown that in British televised news there has been a shortening of soundbites for all political actors. The special position of election news in the political communication process means that this phenomenon raises serious normative concerns, not least with the behaviour of television journalists and editors in marginalising the voice of prospective candidates. Therefore, it is instructive to investigate whether there have been similar trends across all recording of soundbites, to see if wider changes in the production of news is having a subsequent effect on campaign news. Figure 6.15 shows the average length of soundbite in non-campaign news, demonstrating that there has been an overall decline in non-political soundbites on both BBC and ITV since 1979. However, it should be noted that there is no equivalent of the extremely high levels of average soundbite for political actors in the 1979 and 1983 elections. Therefore, although there has been a decline, it has not been as severe as that experienced by political actors, and the presence of an upturn in soundbite length since 1997 shows that there has not been the bottoming-out as seen in political soundbites since that time. It is also evident that the trends for the different channels are broadly similar. A plateau of approximately 20 seconds on average for the 1979 and 1983 footage is followed by decline until 1997, followed by a gradual increase to 2005. Although this doesn't control for the possible increase in journalist soundbites, it is clear that the trends in soundbite length on both BBC and ITV follow the same approximate trajectory. The median soundbite lengths for each channel shown in figure 6.16 also show a similar pattern, albeit with some evidence that ITV, particularly in 1992 and 1997, had a larger number of particularly short soundbites.

Figure 6.15: Non-Campaign Average Soundbite Length

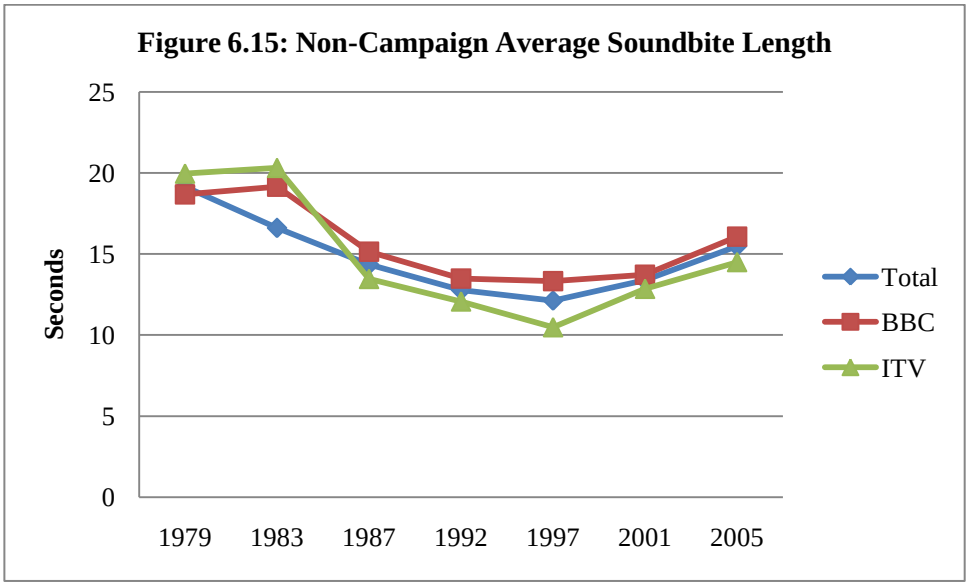
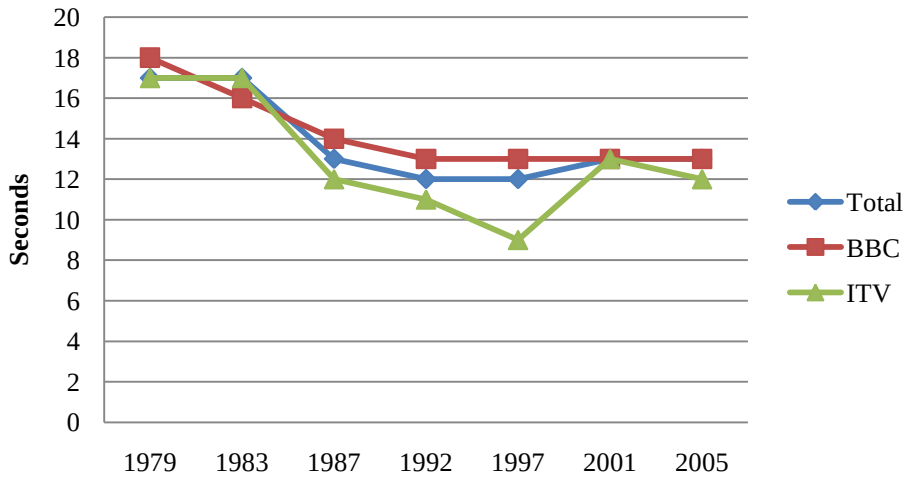


Figure 6.16: Non-Campaign Median Soundbite Length



Thirdly, the numbers of non-campaign soundbites show that there has been some similarity in trends, if not in absolute numbers (figure 6.17). Given the disparities in bulletin lengths on each channel, this is to be expected, although the similar figures for 1992, when BBC bulletins were some 15 minutes longer than those of ITV, are interesting. It should be noted that, in 2005, where BBC bulletins were only 5 minutes longer than ITV's (30 minutes to 25 minutes), there were over 100 more soundbites in non-campaign news on the BBC's nightly bulletins. A similar situation is shown in figure 6.18, showing that there was considerably more speech in BBC bulletins in the samples taken after 1997, a period when there was less difference in length between the bulletins than at the three previous elections. This is evidence of a distinct difference in priority between the two channels in using speech in non-political news.

Figure 6.17: Non-Campaign Soundbite Numbers

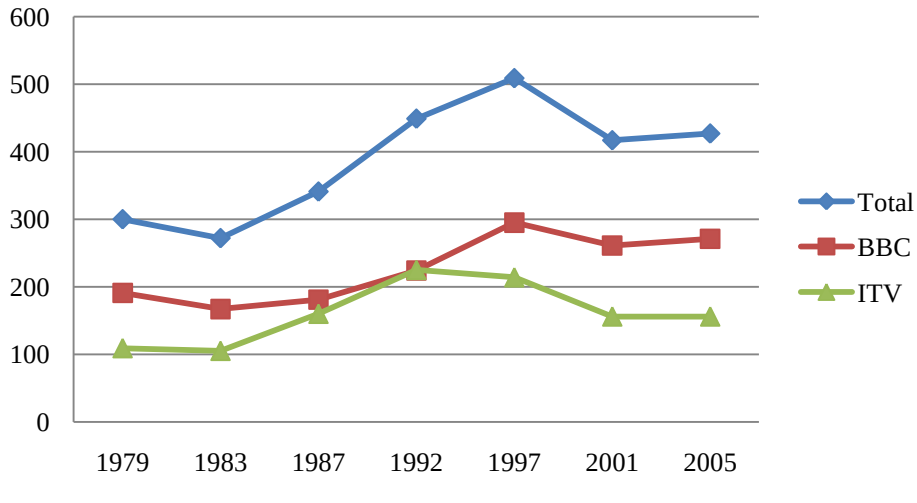
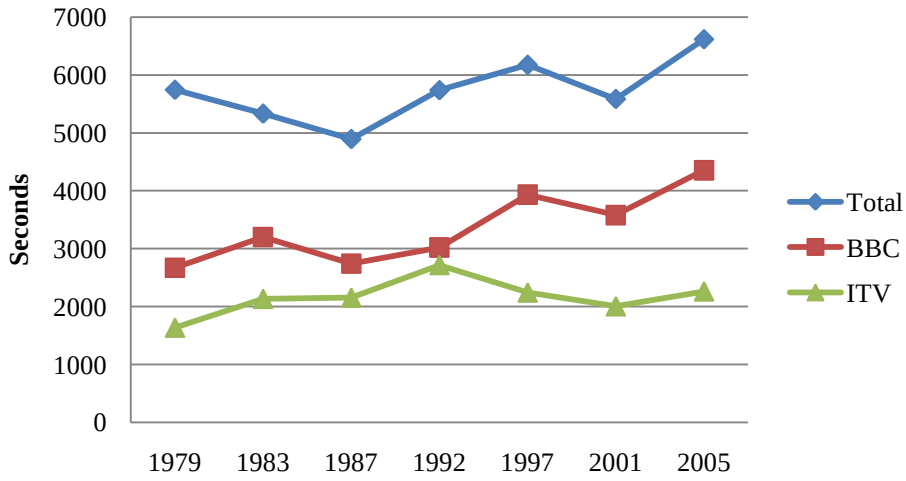


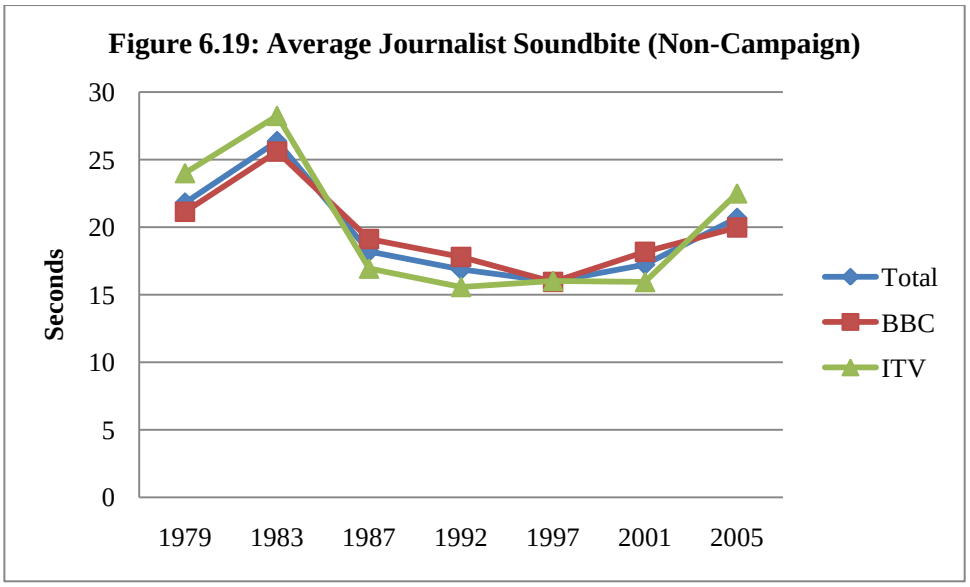
Figure 6.18: Non-Campaign Total Speech



A significant feature of the changing soundbites in political news coverage was the growth in instances and length of journalist speech direct to camera, both in absolute terms, and in relation to politicians' soundbites. In comparing the patterns of journalist speech in non-campaign coverage, it is also necessary to measure the presence of journalist soundbites, both in volume, and in relation to those soundbites of other actors given voice in news coverage. Evidence of greater visibility of journalists within news is indicative of an increasingly active journalistic role in the presentation of supposedly objective news. Figure 6.19 shows that there is no evidence of an overall or steady increase in the length of the average journalist soundbite, and again the trends on either channel are very similar. Indeed, the trajectory of the trend is also similar to that of average soundbites in general (figure 6.15, above)[31].

To summarise, there has not been the same pattern of change in soundbites in non-campaign news as there has been in campaign coverage. Soundbites as a whole have remained fairly steady in normal news coverage over time, both in general, and across both channels. Journalist soundbites have also remained generally shorter in non-campaign news than in campaign items. There is no evidence that there has been a growth in the proportion of journalist soundbites relative to other speakers, as was demonstrated in the case of the shrinking political soundbite in Chapter 5. Therefore, there is some evidence that, while there has been proof of the growing role of the journalist in political news, this has not been the case over time in normal news coverage.

[31] Data for all non-campaign item soundbites found in Appendix IX



6.4 Conclusions

This chapter shifted the focus of analysis somewhat, and looked at whether changes in campaign news coverage in British election news are in fact related to changes in news coverage as a whole, liberating journalists from hypothetical accusations that their output reflects an active subversion of democratic process, and instead laying the blame on technological advancement. The evidence supplied by the three groups of measures deployed here don't necessarily back up the argument that technological developments have altered news coverage (and by extension, campaign coverage). The fact that, where significant trends of change are encountered, they tend to occur between the early elections shows that, despite the advent of the internet, the changes to news production brought about by the 24-hour news cycle, and the early 21st Century growth of digital recording and storage, television news has remained remarkably – stubbornly – resilient in its customs and format. Acknowledging that technological advances will take time to filter through initial resistance (Winston's model again) and the budgetary nightmare of replacing an entire news organization's recording apparatus, it can be ventured that the increasing complexity of items in the early elections of the study may be traced to the adoption of ENG by both the BBC and ITV shortly after the 1979 election.

Less tangible, but still evident from the data of each of the three analyses is that there are similar trends in the structure of both campaign and non-campaign news, suggesting that – although technological advancement may not be the verifiable cause on

the available evidence, there is a relationship between changing non-campaign coverage (taken here to represent 'normal' news coverage), and coverage of the election campaign. The changes in the median item length in figure 6.2, and the average shot-per-minute ratio in figure 6.11 illustrate parallel changes in both types of news, lending evidence to the theory that changing journalistic practices affect the final output of television news. The initial hypothesis, that technological advances will uniformly affect campaign and non-campaign news alike is not confirmed by the evidence provided here, most notably in the finding in the third analysis that, in non-campaign news, no one category of actor has seen the length of their soundbites shrink with the ferocity of those of politicians, as demonstrated in Chapter 5. Overall, this chapter confirms that British television news coverage is highly stable, while the detrimental effects of the shrinking political soundbite, with its attendant negative connotations for democratic politics, can't be blamed on changing conventions in newsmaking.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

7.1 Developments in British Television Election News, 1979-2005

7.1.1 The Nature of Change

The preceding research has presented an account of trends in news provision on British television during election campaigns over a 26-year period. The overall picture is mixed, with remarkable continuity in some aspects, and strong evidence of directional change in others. Most notably, a large amount of British news bulletins during election campaigns is devoted to the campaign. This has not changed dramatically even over seven elections, and indeed the proportion rose over the period, from 57.7% to 60%. Just as significantly, the campaign retains notable prominence in the running order of bulletins, often filling the top three slots. This reflects a continuing adherence to covering 'hard' news subjects, and a consistent limiting of the encroachment of stories that can be designated as 'tabloid' in their subject matter. British election news bulletins, it is clear, continue to provide a large amount of political information during campaigns, despite growing commercial pressures on the industry. The Public Service Broadcasting ethos that infuses British television journalism remains a guarantor of relatively high political content, and Blumler and Gurevitch's conception of a 'sacerdotal' approach to election coverage remains completely relevant in the British context.

Within campaign coverage, there is change, however. The campaign, as a thing-in-itself, is more common in the framing of election coverage than it was. More items refer to campaign strategies and conduct, draw attention to the media-centricity of campaign activities, and call into question the rational motivation behind politicians' actions. In addition, more items contain critical or negative statements about politicians – evidence of a growing adversarial culture in political reporting. The rise of the two-way figures prominently here; in recent elections, and in political coverage in general, broadcast journalists, through a drive to contextualise complex political events, have come to act as unofficial 'interpreters' of events, often using critical language to describe them. The costs or benefits of this more interpretive journalism can be construed in different ways, but this is a prominent change nonetheless.

Perhaps the most significant thematic change in campaign coverage during the period of study is the 'rise of the journalist'. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 contain evidence that on-screen journalists speak more often, speak for longer, and more actively interpret events.

Between the 1979 and 2005 campaigns, there was a complete reversal in the volume (in seconds) of on-screen speech by journalists relative to that of political actors in campaign coverage, while this pattern was not replicated in non-campaign news. The rise of the two-way played a part, but the end result is that journalists address the public far more than politicians do.

Finally, changing newsgathering technology appears to have transformed news coverage of elections in ways that impact upon the function of television news as a campaigning tool of politicians. Items have remained of similar length, but have become more complex, being comprised of more quickly-edited short pieces of footage, woven into more intricate narratives. This has affected all types of news item, campaign and non-campaign, and accounts in part for the drastic shortening of political soundbites. Again, the empowerment of journalists to craft more engaging, and more varied stories raises their power and prominence in the election newsmaking process.

7.1.2 Developments in Detail

The More Things Change... PSB Principles and Election News in Britain

The 1980s were an uncertain period for the BBC; the 1990s even more so for ITV. The first decade of the 21st century has presented a series of existential crises for both organisations. However, election news has remained stubbornly unchanging in certain fundamental aspects throughout this period. The 'news item' has remained broadly similar (see Chapter 6, and Winston, 2001), while item types (polling data, campaign reports, special constituency reports, etc) have remained largely unchanged, even as studio graphics and camera technology add spectacle or complexity. Campaign news has remained prominent, and dominates bulletins on both channels. The 'sacerdotal' approach, identified by Blumler and Gurevitch (in Crewe and Harrop, 1986; and Semetko et al., 1991) as governing election news coverage in UK television news organisations, is alive and well. While the tone of coverage has changed, as will be seen below, the fact remains that election news trumps other news values more often than not. The top of the running order is usually dominated by the election, even when bespoke 'campaign report' sections are inserted into bulletins, as on the *Nine O'Clock News* on the BBC during the 1992 and 1997 campaigns. Alongside professional judgements, the public service obligations placed on both organisations play a role in this stability. Overall, the television news audience during

election campaigns has been served a large portion of political news, prominently displayed, and this continues to be the case. In lieu of a quantifiable 'good' standard of political news provision, it can be stated that the resilience of news output on this measure is encouraging for those who see high informational provision as a key role of the news media in democracy.

A Changing Tone: Interpretation, Translation and Criticism in Campaign News

As the volume and prominence of campaign news remains stable within bulletins, the informational content of election-related items has changed. Quantitative categories may hide some detail, but the results show clearly that statements framing the campaign as a contest, or 'horse-race' in which the actions of political actors are evaluated in terms of how they contribute to 'success' or 'failure' in the campaign. The number of items purely related to policy information has all but halved on both channels as the campaign is deemed worthy of coverage on its own terms. The change is not, however, solely in the direction of less policy content as 'horse-race' coverage rises. There is evidence that journalists intertwine both types of coverage, as more items frame policy positions in terms of campaign success, and less items are devoted to stand-alone polling data.

Journalists have become more critical of politicians, and of their campaigning in particular, and considerably more interpretive, reflected in the rise of the two-way item as a part of normal practice. There was an identifiable shift on the BBC, with the allocation to Political Editor John Cole of a slot in most bulletins for a summary of campaign items in 1983, which ITV soon followed. Campaign coverage suddenly included the opportunity for journalists to interpret the preceding summary of the day's campaign events. This arose from a desire to provide better context for viewers, but has resulted in – as Chapter 4 demonstrates – the prevalence of cynical and occasionally ridiculing descriptions of political actors and their actions. Of course, this is not to deny that journalists play an important role in unmasking the manipulative attempts by the political parties to dominate the news agenda and obtain favourable coverage, though it does represent a significant quantitative change in the coverage of election campaigns in British television news. Potentially just as significant, although it is only hinted at by the evidence in Chapter 4, is the relative absence from discourse of the term 'spin'. This most accusatory of campaigning terms barely featured in campaign coverage, despite its heavy usage by the British press in conjunction with the news management techniques of the New Labour

government from 1997, and its prominence in the political lexicon from the early 1990s (McNair, 2004).

Perhaps the most striking change in campaign coverage has been the drastic shortening of political soundbites, from an average of over 45 seconds in 1979, to less than 15 seconds in 2005 for party leaders, and from 36 seconds to 12 seconds for other political actors. This change was unidirectional, consistent, and strikingly similar for both channels, as Chapter 5 shows. This change almost exactly mirrors (although not quite at the same magnitude) the drop in US Presidential soundbites between 1968 and 1988, measured by both Adatto (1990) and Hallin (1992), a potentially significant development, given the negative interpretation of the trends in those studies. Politicians in UK television election news speak less often, for less time. This is more significant considering the increased attempts by campaigners to utilise the news media to communicate with voters. Journalists are certainly not offered less opportunities to cover speech by politicians. The decreased number of soundbites is in spite of the regulations on balance in broadcast political coverage, so shortened soundbites cannot be ascribed solely to the need to fit two or more counterpoint soundbites to balance those of one party. As political soundbites and speech have disappeared, so the void has been filled by journalists who now speak more often, and for longer, in campaign coverage. The rise to prominence of journalists as interpreters and conveyers of information means that in recent elections, on-screen journalists (excluding presenters) out-speak politicians by a factor of almost two-to-one.

BBC and ITV: Different Channels, Similar Stories

The presence in the UK television market of an archetypal public service news provider and a large, competing commercial channel allows for a direct comparison to be drawn between these two functionally different sources of news output. While the regulatory controls over television news output and the coverage of politics and campaigns have ensured a degree of homogeneity in British political news coverage, it is nonetheless useful to compare news output on both public and commercial news providers. The overwhelming conclusion to be drawn from the data presented in this thesis is that election news coverage on BBC and ITV has seen a very high degree of similarity across the seven elections sampled here. In composition and in trends, both sources of news have been almost identical. Differences, where they exist, tend to be in matters of degree, with the exception of the continual growth of ‘tabloid’ content on ITV between 1979 and 2005.

A large amount of coverage on both channels is devoted to the campaign, and the prominence of the election campaign remains high in the running orders of both bulletins. A look at ITV's output in 2001 – an election that among the rest of the sample presented relatively low news value due to the predictability of the result – shows that, on 14 out of 20 bulletins, the campaign topped the running order, while on 19 out of 20 days, two of the first three items related to the campaign. Clearly, there has been a strong devotion to coverage of campaigns throughout ITV's news provision. In the tone of election coverage on both channels, there have been similar rises in strategic framing of campaigning behaviour, and rises in negativity, while the now-ubiquitous campaign two-way item is a staple feature in both bulletins, with the prominence of Andrew Marr on BBC and Nick Robinson at ITN in 2005 a key feature of campaign coverage. The detailed description of campaign coverage presented in Chapter 4 shows that a growth in more interpretive and more adversarial journalism is also present on both channels. Similarly, the drop in the average political soundbite is almost identical on both BBC and ITV, particularly since 1983. In both cases, soundbite length fell sharply over the course of the study for both party leaders and for other political actors, while journalist soundbites grew slightly in length. Finally, in non-campaign news, average item length on the two channels matched each other between 1983 and 2001, and average soundbites followed the same trend. In structure as well as in content, therefore, BBC and ITV election news has been very similar over the 26-year period of study.

Although similar, the two bulletins are not identical, and BBC coverage has tended to stick closer to the PSB ideals that define British broadcast news. The practice of lengthening *Nine O'Clock News* bulletins during election campaigns – although not always popular among audiences – has meant that more campaign coverage has traditionally been available to BBC viewers. As a proportion of bulletins, the BBC has tended to supply more campaign coverage than ITV, although this was notably reversed in 2005. Coverage has been slightly more prominent in BBC bulletins as well, relative to ITV. ITV news has also tended to apply strategic interpretations of campaign events and critical comments of politicians than BBC news has. The adoption of an 'Election Unspun' feature on ITV coverage in 2005 also indicated a shift to a more interpretive role, with expert-led analysis replacing traditional reporting. Political soundbites tend to be shorter on ITV, as do campaign items, although the presence of journalists on-screen has been considerably more prevalent on the BBC.

Overall, despite the different economic and organisational models of the BBC and ITV, and between their news provision, BBC News and ITN, the news coverage on each has been similar enough to justify an analysis that treats British terrestrial television news provision on the two mass-market news programmes as contributory parts to a single 'British news' model. British television election news, regardless of the channel, has proved remarkably similar in its structure and in its content, over two-and-a-half-decades and across seven elections.

Changing Technology, Changing News: A Tentative View

The tentative conclusion generated by the research in Chapter 6, supplementary to the main coding exercise of the thesis, is that technological developments have exerted a major influence on the changing nature of election news coverage on British television. That newsgathering techniques and the construction of news bulletins have changed between 1979 and 2005 is certain. Portable camera and sound equipment, instantaneous live transmission and malleable recording media have changed the face of newsmaking, giving journalists (in any news organisation where these technologies are affordable and practical) greater opportunity to construct items in ways that represent complex events. Hallin (1992) raised concerns about the potential for journalists to cut and paste political speeches to fit pre-arranged narratives. The effect of technology observed here seems to indicate that the shortening of soundbites is in fact the result of a more benign process of newsmaking. This is reinforced by the findings in Chapter 6 that, while journalist soundbites averaged between 15 and 20 seconds in length during the period of study, camera shots featuring journalists speaking decreased in length, due to the interspersion of illustrative shots during these speeches. Professional creativity, rather than insidious manipulation, may be more likely.

However, the increased complexity of campaign items does raise concerns: the reduced informational content of shortened political soundbites does not improve the communicative channel between politicians and voters; while the treatment of politicians as 'source material' could potentially lead to Hallin's scenario of political speech heavily filtered to fit story frames. The link between technological advances and news output is certainly worthy of further research.

7.2 The 'Crisis' and 'Convergence' Hypotheses Evaluated

Chapter 1 justified the analysis contained in this thesis in terms of measuring performance of television news in accordance with normative ideals of the role of the news media in democracy. Within the systemic approach to political communication analysis, the existence of change in nationally-specific systemic conditions leads to alterations in the operation of political communication. The question of how change affects news output is an important one, given the centrality of news to the political public sphere, and so normative ideals are a valid framework for longitudinal news analysis. There exist two prominent predictions about political communication: that it has become less able to fulfil its normative objectives; and that there is transnational convergence in how it operates, with consequent normative implications. The seriousness of the allegations these positions propose render them important areas of investigation in a study of change in news over time.

7.2.1 The 'Crisis': An Overreaction?

The 'Crisis' hypothesis, as set out in Chapter 1, is an aggregation of the 'pessimistic' accounts of change in democratic politics, journalism, and civil society. Regardless of causality, the charge is that the news media are less able to perform vital fourth estate duties as growing sensationalism in coverage trivialises politics, and the increasing application of market-driven journalistic values reduces the informational content that is made available to citizens. This accusation is made at precisely the time that the news media have occupied a position at the heart of democratic politics, and thus the effects of negative developments in news provision are amplified. Television is a primary target for blame, as the proposed 'dumbing down' of coverage, and the disappearance of politics from news schedules as the result of tabloidization are seen as contributing to low levels of civic participation and trust. At the same time, increasingly adversarial journalism fosters increased cynicism, as increasingly negative interpretations of the actions of political actors lead to voters 'switching off' political news. This thesis has analysed – through quantitative measures – whether it can be said that British news has become demonstrably worse at providing political information during elections that is of value to the electorate and is not presented in a way that may be seen to lead to voter cynicism. The evidence falls into two categories: the volume and prominence of election coverage in British election news, and the presence of adversarial, negative, and strategic coverage.

On the first count, there is no empirical evidence of less political coverage in British television election news, nor has there been a reduction in the prominence of campaign coverage. Across seven elections, campaign coverage dominates news bulletins on both BBC and ITV, and the campaign has been afforded pride of place in bulletins, usually at the top of, or high in, the running order. In terms of volume, viewers in 1979 and in 2005 would witness similar proportions of campaign coverage. The volume in seconds of campaign coverage has fallen as bulletins have shortened – the BBC's lengthened bulletins in 1983, 1987, 1992 and 1997 were abandoned in the face of viewer hostility, while commercial pressures lie behind ITV's nightly news bulletin's shrinkage – but there is no evidence of a systematic decline in campaign coverage. The continuing prominence of election news, combined with the evidence of a dedication to greater resource allocation for election coverage at the BBC (Blumler, Gurevitch and Nossiter, 1986, 1995; Semetko et al., 1991; Blumler and Gurevitch, 1998) suggests that election coverage remains highly valued among journalists, and routinely trumps all but exceptional stories (the death of Pope John Paul II during the 2005 campaign being a prime example). There has not, in other words, been a shift towards the marginalisation of political coverage on British television in recent decades, but a continual commitment to high-volume, high-prominence election news.

In terms of the tabloidisation of news agendas, there has been no evidence of a major shift towards a soft news agenda during election campaigns, although there has been an increase in ITV's coverage. On BBC bulletins, 'soft' or tabloid news has remained under 10% of total coverage. On ITV, it has grown to almost 20%, but in neither case could this be described as a move to a tabloid agenda. Viewed another way, even at the lowest point of 'hard' news provision – ITV in 2005 – over 80% of bulletins on average were devoted to 'hard' news topics. British television election news, as well as being heavily devoted to the campaign, remains focused on a serious news agenda.

On the second major aspect of the 'crisis' hypothesis – that the changing relationship between political parties and the media as a result of the 'mediation' of politics leads to more adversarial coverage – there are mixed results. On the one hand, there has been a growth in instances of strategic framing, and negativity by journalists. On the other, the growth is from a very small base (in 1979, less than 5% of campaign items contained critical references). Regardless of the magnitude of change, however, it is significant that journalists increasingly describe campaign activity in terms of the strategic motivation of political actors. As Chapter 2 demonstrated, the period from 1979 to 2005 saw a dramatic

increase in attempts to manipulate news coverage by the main political parties, through campaign activities, and through the exertion of pressure on media outlets. It appears that the 'journalistic fightback' so central to Blumler and Gurevitch's (1995) 'crisis' in public communication is in evidence here, as journalists increasingly seek to expose the manipulative behaviour of political actors, and insert themselves as interpreters or decoders of campaign events. What is not evident is a substantial shift to a pervasively negative, adversarial stance. The majority of items on both channels contain no strategic or negative interpretive language, and, while the campaign as a subject is more prominent in election coverage, an increasing percentage of items contain at least some policy information.

The practices of campaigning in the UK have changed drastically in recent decades, placing the news media – particularly television – at centre-stage. Journalists undoubtedly face a more difficult task to report on campaign events in the face of manipulative campaigning activities explicitly designed to merit media attention. At the same time, political engagement in Britain has declined, as has electoral turnout, and the economic justification (in ITV's case) to provide concentrated political coverage has diminished. The roots of the 'crisis' are in evidence. What has not occurred in the case of television news during elections, however, is a substantial reduction in campaign coverage, or a drift to a more populist, tabloid news agenda. In this case, news coverage has remained remarkably durable, despite systemic changes in British political communication. The rise in interpretive and adversarial journalism is a cause for vigilance, but not panic, leaving proclamations of a crisis somewhat exaggerated.

7.2.2 'Convergence': Change and Resilience

The 'Convergence' hypothesis is an altogether more complex account of change in political communication, and the evidence uncovered in this thesis does suggest a movement towards a more Americanised style of campaign news reporting. Yet convergence again relates to predictions arising from comparative system-level analyses of political communication, and concerns a linked group of studies claiming that transnational economic, social and political influences are diminishing the differences between national media systems. Just as certain systemic attributes indicate susceptibility to convergence, however, so – logically – should certain other characteristics insulate against change. In Chapter 2 it was argued that certain core features of the British system should insulate against convergence towards the Americanised model that several theories predict. The imperious presence of the BBC, protected from market forces, dominates the broadcasting

landscape. The legacy of its Reithian founding principles resonate throughout its journalistic practices and those of its main rivals, ITN and Sky News, signalling a pervasive PSB ethos in broadcast news in the UK. Comparatively strict regulation via the BBC's Board of Governors and the BBC Trust, alongside the commercially-funded channels' regulation by the IBA, ITC and latterly Ofcom meant that economic pressures facing organisations have been felt less in campaign news provision than in other sectors of the industry. Substantial homogenisation towards some international standard model is therefore an unlikely prospect for the British system as long as these characteristics remain, but there is some evidence here that television election news in the UK has changed in certain aspects that move it closer in composition to the 'American model' of campaign coverage described in Chapter 1.

Convergence in news output is measured in terms of increases (or decreases) in the presence of certain characteristics of news coverage. Those relevant to television news, as compiled by Plasser and Plasser (2002: 72) can be placed in two categories. Firstly, styles of campaign coverage, indicating: 'horse-race' campaign coverage; negativity; strategic interpretation; tabloidisation; soundbite journalism; minimal network coverage; and market-driven journalism. Secondly, journalism that is: game-centred; strategy-centred; journalist-centred; adversarial; and negative in tone. In the quantitative analyses applied to British election news in this thesis, there is evidence of increases in most of these measures.

Looking first at the styles of campaign coverage, British television news has become more negative, more likely to apply strategic interpretations of campaigning and more focused on horse-race coverage. Each of these measures (quantitatively-defined) increased progressively over time on both BBC and ITV, as Chapter 4 demonstrates. Likewise, soundbite journalism is evidenced by the dramatic shortening of political soundbites in Chapter 5. In other measures, however, there has been no movement towards the American model. A 'tabloid' news agenda has not arisen, although there has been a modest increase in 'soft' news coverage on ITV, and market-driven journalism is correspondingly not in evidence. Most significantly, though, there has been no move towards minimised coverage of the campaign; dominant news values place special importance on election coverage, and the sacerdotal approach continues to govern bulletin content. Evidence for 'convergence' in news coverage exists in the tone of coverage and in the use of soundbites – in other words, at the micro-level processes of newsmaking – but structurally, bulletins remain devoted to maximum campaign coverage, and serious news agendas.

In terms of the demeanour of journalists in Plasser and Plasser's aggregated American model, there has been a move towards certain characteristics. Increasingly journalist-centred coverage is apparent in many aspects of campaign coverage: journalists progressively addressed the camera over time, measured in both instances of speech and the total volume of speech; the rise of the two-way item has placed senior correspondents on BBC and ITV in the position to comment on and interpret campaign events – a direct interposition between the reported events and the viewer. Coverage has become more game-centred and strategy-centred, as the analysis in Chapter 5 shows, and there is some evidence of more adversarial, interpretive and negative treatment of the campaign.

This is not, of course, evidence of a 'convergence' in systemic terms, or an inexorable process of international homogenisation of campaign coverage What it does show, however, is some proof that British television election news coverage is increasingly displaying some characteristics of the archetypal American model. Overall, the insulating features of the British model remain – strong regulation, a public service ethos in broadcast journalism, and the strengths of the mixed model. The observed continuing similarities in both public and commercial campaign coverage indicate that there is a system-level resistance to the worst excesses of commercialisation and tabloidisation. The 'hybridisation' model seems to best illustrate developments here – change in some aspects, but not in others, and the effect of system-level characteristics in resisting change. Convergence, then, can be seen as a partial explanation of the nature of change in British election news, and a process that warrants further monitoring.

7.3 The Research Framework: Lessons Learned, and the Way Ahead

The research framework applied in this study to evaluate television news broadcasting during election campaigns has proved durable and capable of generating robust data from the sampled material. It has also, however, demonstrated that the data and results generated must be viewed as a rather narrow quantitative account of change. This is perhaps true of all attempts to measure as complex a phenomenon as news output, with its attendant social, political and economic contextual variables, but is given extra salience in the reiterative process that is a doctoral thesis. The coding exercise applied here is a first draft; the outcome of a tentative questioning of what it is possible to learn from news bulletins as they are broadcast, and how to quantify news data in such a way that the research questions could be adequately addressed. The shortcomings of the existing canon of quantitative or

longitudinal analyses of television news in the UK at the time at which the content analysis which makes up the bulk of the empirical analysis of the thesis was conducted meant that the coding frame casts its net very wide, when perhaps each of the thematic analyses that comprise Chapters 3-6 would have benefited from a more targeted analysis. There are, as a result, a number of ways in which the analyses would benefit from closer scrutiny, or from augmentation by adapting complementary research methods that were unworkable in the present study due to the size of the sample. The treatment of 'hard' and 'soft' news in Chapter 3, for example, is perhaps too narrow in determining the nature of news in accordance with the subject category of the story, ignoring the variety of ways in which a news item could be perceived as containing 'tabloid' content. Further research on the nature of 'tabloidisation' in the presentation of news is required, and a current research project (2011-2012) involving the author is seeking to develop ways of measuring the informational content of British news in this way. At the same time, the measurement, in Chapter 4, of critical and interpretive remarks by journalists covering election stories is hampered by the inflexibility of the coding categories, an artefact of the large-scale content analysis project. Deeper, more analytical research into language deployed in campaign coverage would be needed to fully explore change in this aspect of news.

The research would also greatly benefit from expanding upon the slightly insular and quantitatively-oriented foundations of the discipline of political science in which it is based, and focusing more on the qualities of television as a medium in its own right, and the attendant analyses of developments in the production of television during a period of great change in communications media. While the special case of political news may invite the slicing of news footage into discrete units (usually decided by policy area or some kind of 'special' type of political story, such as polling data, or light-hearted coverage of pseudo-events) as is undertaken in this thesis, this perhaps fails to take into account the richness of the informational content of television news, nor the processes of renegotiation and recombination that take place over time in any communications medium. Bolter and Grusin's (1999) theory of 'remediation' (see also Scott and White, 2003; Dobson, 2006) posits and articulates the interactive process by which a given medium borrows from other media in a process of constant recycling of media forms driven by – but not determined by – technological developments. Their conception of a 'dual logic' of remediation applies to changes in television news through the striving for 'immediacy' through the increased commitment to live reporting and the projection of providing a window on events – with the pretence of transporting the viewer to the scene of events through vision and sound, and for 'hypermediacy' through the increased presentation of news information on-screen,

or through conspicuous referral to other journalists or other media sources, raising the visibility of the news source as just that – a source of information conforming to accepted conventions of conveying 'news'. The quantitative analysis deployed throughout this thesis is unequipped to pick up or deal with information of this kind, making clear that a more balanced set of methodologies would benefit further study of trends in aspects of election news. This is also evident in light of the statement on page 167 of Chapter 6 about the limitations of quantitative analysis in fully explaining the shifts of informational content brought about by the construction of complex packages merging verbal, textual, sound and moving image data, and the effect that the drive to present news as ongoing, live events has had on news output.

Hindsight is, of course, a luxury not afforded to the resource-poor researcher where difficulties in accessing scattered source material exist, so these recognised shortcomings in the research project can be used as a springboard for future research. The robust quantitative data generated by the content analysis can act as a strong foundation for a more wide-ranging and analytical account of changing political communication in UK election campaigns, and such a project would benefit from expanding the scope from news content to the major actors in the processes of political communication. So, for instance, the results in this thesis indicating that journalistic practices have had a significant impact on broadcast news composition – increasing journalist speech and visibility in all news subjects, developments in editing and reporting technologies, and so on – should be explored with the aid of discussions or interviews with principal and technical actors in the formulation and execution of those practices, Greater in-depth appreciation of the goals and actions of political message-formers and campaign personnel within political parties (beyond the often somewhat self-laudatory *post hoc* justifications of their actions) would also benefit an analysis of changing political communication over the period of study. In particular, a broadened scope and interviews with important actors would link the observed changes in television news outlined here with the motives and personal interactions that govern the practical (as opposed to the theoretical) tensions behind the struggles to set the news agenda on both sides. The participant observation studies of the BBC by Blumler and Gurevitch in the Nuffield studies go somewhere towards explaining how campaign coverage is managed institutionally within television journalism, but the addition of interview data combined with the present longitudinal focus on the output of the processes of campaign communication and newsmaking would provide a far more useful and analytically-rich account of changing news within British politics.

An expanded project of this type should also be more integrated into an historical account of UK media and political development from 1979-2005. While the analysis of television news presented in this thesis is validated by the pre-eminence of television as both a campaigning medium and as a widely trusted source of political information during the period from 1979 to 2005, the systemic approach to political communication that is advocated here demands a more holistic analysis of systemic change than is possible in a study of this magnitude. System-level historical changes in certain variables are of course presented in Chapter 2 (above), and inform the analysis throughout. However, a more systematic account of political, social and media developments over the time period would allow for a more inductive approach to explaining change in news output within the UK context, rather than the evaluation of certain predictive hypotheses, such as that of decline in political information provision, or of convergence on an Americanised archetype.

The analysis that forms the core of this thesis does, however, perform the tasks that it was intended to. The nature of change in certain aspects of British television news coverage of elections is outlined, and there is no substantial evidence that the more pessimistic forecasts of campaign broadcasting have come to pass, although certain trends may concern some scholars. Nor have commercial pressures demolished the enduring regulatory and professional influences on UK broadcast news that foster prominent, informational and accessible political news during crucial moments in the democratic life of the country. It is acknowledged, however, that the explanatory power of quantitative analysis of this type can be inversely proportional to the volume of data measured and the intricacy of the coding analysis, and so this thesis can be presented as an early, confident step towards a comprehensive analysis of change in British political communication and the establishment of a valid and replicable comparative framework for studying the nature of change in national political communication systems.

7.4 The Study in Context: The Future of Television News Analysis

In 1979, at the beginning of the time period of this study, there were 3 television channels in the UK, broadcasting a small but significant amount of news and current affairs during the limited hours of daily broadcasting. Though a passive medium by nature, television news was a major component of broadcasting, and even the casual viewer would have found it difficult to avoid it completely during prime viewing hours. The transformation in the media landscape since then could scarcely have been more extreme. Some changes in

communication technologies have been referenced above (in Chapter 6) in terms of how they have impacted on news production (satellite communications and the computerisation and digitisation of recording media and broadcasting), but the majority have been treated as external to the central analysis of news bulletin content. However, the sheer revolutionary scale of changes in UK media composition and consumption raises the question of whether research focusing solely on television news remains valid. A number of developments have substantially altered the relationship between the viewing public and fixed-time bulletin news reporting, yet television news in the UK is still popular, trusted, and held in high esteem by politicians, journalists, and the organisations that produce and broadcast it. For the time period of this thesis, the salience of television as a central component in British political communication is not in doubt, but the extent to which this will remain the case is not certain. Future empirical research should be attuned to this shift.

A series of changes in the television industry and television news, the introduction of the internet as a civic tool and entertainment medium, and the threats facing the British newspaper industry all pose challenges to the role of television in political communication. In the first instance, the growth of satellite and cable providers and the development of digital broadcasting have led to a dramatic increase in the number of channels available to the prospective television viewer. This is a significant factor in a reduction, between 1994 and 2006 in the number of news hours of news on the main terrestrial channels consumed by individuals, from 108.5m to 90.8m, a decline of 16.3% (Ofcom, 2007a: 19). The average audience share held by terrestrial channels has also fallen, from 78% in 2003 to 64% in 2007 (Ofcom, 2008: 40). Even within UK terrestrial television, fragmentation in the form of the introduction of the highbrow *Channel 4 News* and the more populist and youth-oriented *Channel 5 News* has created a more diverse news environment, with different bulletins catering to different tastes, and a differentiation from the more monolithic broadcast news culture of the late 1970s and early 1980s (Barnett, Seymour and Gaber, 2000). The net result is a marginalisation of the major terrestrial television news bulletins as more news sources become available for television viewers, and more opportunities arise for the politically apathetic to avoid news altogether. In slight contradiction of this trend, however, the average viewing figures (obtained from BARB) show that the election campaign audiences for the BBC's nightly news bulletin actually grew between the 1997 and 2010 elections, from 4.12m to 4.53m. ITV viewing figures, however, dropped significantly after the end of *News at Ten's* 32-year run in 1999, and have not recovered despite its reinstatement.

The introduction of 24-hour news channels – a prime example of an American-originated technological and organisational innovation taking root overseas – most notably *Sky News* in 1989, followed by *BBC News 24* in 1997 (latterly rebranded as *BBC News* in 2007), along with a host of digital rolling-news channels from across the world and ITV's ill-fated 24-hour news channel (2000-2005) – transformed not only the news landscape, but the political news cycle and the conduct of political communication. Research into the effects of 24-hour news on politics in the UK is in its relative infancy (Cushion and Lewis, 2009, 2010; Chadwick, 2011), but the impact in news values of a constantly-emptying newshole, and the need for audio-visual footage to provide variety and context, live updates to developing stories, and quick commentary to accompany coverage of complex and often unpredictable events must have a significant effect on the news landscape. 24-hour news has been a target for criticism (Cushion and Lewis, 2009), but the more inclusive practices of allowing a measure of public input in the form of user-generated content or via email and text message contributions mark a democratic reaching-out that goes some way towards demystifying the newsmaking process and immersing the interested viewer in the news environment. In all, the opportunities for citizens to access broadcast news have grown to the point where it is no longer possible to watch it all. The traditional nightly bulletin no longer retains its primacy in such an environment, a situation intensified by the emergence in the late 2000s of on-demand television online and through digital providers, a paradigm-shifting development that breaks the physical requirement that viewers must be present to view bulletins as they are broadcast.

A more fundamental social and cultural development is the rise of the internet as an entirely new communication medium with implications for the public sphere and for journalism in general. While the measurable impact of the internet on political communication during British election campaigns remains relatively low – voters have tended on average to rely on traditional media for political learning, and parties remain reluctant to fully embrace the internet as a campaigning medium (Norris and Sanders, 2003; Bartle, 2005; Electoral Commission, 2005) – there is a keen expectation that increasing computer literacy and the geographical expansion of broadband services will encourage more engagement with political issues in this way.

The fragmentation of the television sphere and the rise of the internet pose differing challenges for the main terrestrial news providers. The BBC, given its resource base and its unique status as a fully public broadcaster, has embraced the new technologies, with respected 24-hour news provision and a large and well-funded news website (Lee-Wright,

2010). As the television channel environment fragments and the BBC's share of the total audience shrinks, the economic justification for the Corporation's insulation from market forces loses some of its potency. Support for the BBC as a unique cultural institution and a respected journalism centre overlooks the economic argument (Barnett and Seaton, 2010), but the coalition government's freezing of the licence fee in October 2010 for six years in the run-up to Charter renewal in 2016 hints at uncertain times ahead. ITV, lacking protection from the ravages of an advertising market suffering the acute effects of recession on top of the chronic leeching of potential revenue to the multitude of new digital channels and to the internet, faces a possible *de facto* downgrading from a standout nationwide entertainment and news channel to simply one among many competing for diminishing advertising money spread thinly across ever more audiences. While forecasting media developments may be a notoriously inaccurate science, it is evident that the main terrestrial fixed-time bulletins will become less, rather than more, important news sources.

It remains to be seen how television industry developments will affect party campaigning techniques, or the primacy of television as the main channel for campaigning by political actors. The internet, as discussed above, has proved stubbornly unpopular as a source of political learning for the public during campaigns. Its status as an 'active' medium, in that a user must be interested enough to actively seek out information online, inhibits its reach among citizens with low political motivations or party attachments – the 'floating voters' so sought-after in a majoritarian electoral system. Party resource allocation to the internet during the 2005 general election was more cursory than committed (Bartle, 2005: 710), but this may change if sufficient incentives to reach and persuade voters via the medium arises. The adoption of the 24-hour news cycle as a guide for political communication strategies have been noted within political parties and in government (Price, 2005, 2010; Campbell, 2008). At the time of writing, however, traditional bulletins remain of central relevance to political actors.

All of these developments are of paramount importance for future research in political communication in general, and in television news in particular. This thesis has used the systemic approach to news content research, reflecting a belief that the connectedness of inter-communicator relationships and contextual conditions surrounding national political communication demand a holistic understanding if valid conclusions are to be drawn regarding change in any aspect of the system. The proliferation of new media in the UK, and the digital fragmentation of television do not affect this theoretical

approach, but the "volatile and precarious equilibrium" (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995: 203) may resolve itself in a fashion in which television news, ascendant from 1979 to 2005, is a less important channel of political communication. Whereas, at the outset of this study, television news was the chief impartial and trusted source of news on political affairs amidst a sea of partisan newspapers, the political communication environment has become much more complicated, and saturated with competing news sources and media. Systemic analyses must take this into account if television news is the measured variable.

Of paramount importance is the international nature of most of these developments, and the regulatory and commercial changes that are facilitating change. The concerns expressed by Americanisation, and especially modernisation, theorists that economic pressures will affect news output will not be assuaged by the growing evidence of commercialisation in media systems across the world. There is already evidence that economic pressures are preventing newspaper journalists from reporting accurately and independently of tacit coercion as staff cutbacks and multi-skilling reduce the time available to effectively scrutinise source material (Davies, 2008). The roots of this are primarily economic, and reflect the fragmenting media environment and slicing of advertising revenue. The professionalisation of party communication apparatuses in the UK is matched by sophisticated public relations techniques employed throughout the business, entertainment, and political fields. Accordingly, research that measures the performance of news media in performing the vital fourth estate tasks of providing information to the public and holding powerful interests to account is of heightened importance. The systemic approach to political communication analysis will also prove an important means of monitoring change, although a more multi-faceted approach to comparing political communication systems will be required to generate meaningful conclusions about the nature of change within and across national systems.

What of television research within political communication? The proclamation of a 'golden age' in any human field is invariably a synthetic, nostalgic act, prompted more by dissatisfaction with contemporary conditions than with the inherent superiority of a previous state. The period 1979-2005 in British political communication resists the application of any glorifying epithet, but it does perhaps represent the high-water mark of the role of terrestrial television in election communication. From the novelty of the Conservatives' sophisticated media-centric campaign in 1979, to the self-reflexive, 'un-spinning' analysis of 2005, television news – particularly on BBC1 and ITV – came to play a dominant role in the political communication process, overhauling a continually-flagging

newspaper industry pushing political information further and further from the front pages, with losses in circulation matched only by losses in public trust. However, falling audience shares and changes to the political news cycle and public viewing patterns, coupled with the rise of the internet as a (potentially) truly interactive, information-rich discursive political environment, combine to attenuate the potency of television as a political communication medium. Coming elections will testify to the resilience or fragility of British television news as a key information source for voters and as a primary campaigning tool, with great significance for democratic politics and for political communication scholarship.

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Appendix I: Coding Frame Sheets

(a) Bulletin Cover Sheet

The Evolution of Televised Election News in Britain, 1979-2005			
Election Year:	Date:	Day of Week:	Channel:
Running Order:		Comments:	
Bulletin Length in Seconds:			

(b) Item Coding Sheet

The Evolution of Televised Election News in Britain, 1979-2005	
Election Year: Date: Day of Week: Channel:	
Item Number: Campaign Item?	
Headline / Summary:	
Total Time (min/sec)_____ Total Time in Seconds_____	
Item Length as Percentage of Bulletin_____	
Campaign Subject Codes:	Focus:
News Subject Codes:	Focus:
Parties Mentioned: Time Allocated to Each Party (if applicable): Con: Lab: Lib/Alln/Lib Dem: Others (Specify):	
Actors mentioned:	
Spokespeople (In Order) (Note who speaks and length)	Comments: Comments on Interpretive / Negative statements, all other comments (continue on back if necessary)
Is 'spin' referenced? _____	

Appendix II: Codebook

Campaign Codes

No.	Name	Description
11	Party Characteristics	Manifestos, policies, platforms, stands on issues, substantive information on parties' views
12.1	Strategy	Mentions of party campaign strategy in general, voter targeting, concentrating on marginals
12.2	Campaign Behaviour	Mentions of politicians' attempts to use media to advance their cause
12.3	Rational Motivation	Theorising on rational motivation of campaign behaviour
13.1	Horse race / Polling data on party leaders	Polling data on popularity or relative popularity of party leaders
13.2	Horse race / Polling data on parties	Polling data on popularity or relative popularity of parties
13.3	Horse race / Polling data on other candidates	Polling data on popularity or relative popularity of other party candidates
14	Party leader characteristics	Stories on trust and other personal qualities of party leaders. NB: TO BE USED ONLY IF NO ATTENDANT POLLING DATA
15	Voter behaviour	Speculation on turnout for the election, considerations of tactical or protest voting, voter apathy
16	Procedural issues	All procedural issues related to the campaign in general, such as postal voting, counting, overseas voting, etc.
17	Media's role in the campaign	Self-reflective stories on how the media is covering the campaign, whether descriptive or normative
18	Negative statements by Media	Explicitly critical comments on aspects of the parties' conduct of the campaign BY JOURNALISTS ONLY

News Codes

Economic Issues

No.	Name	Description
21	General Economic Issues	Catch-all code for economic subjects not covered by other codes. Includes economic policy, Privatisation, Performance of Industry, Inflation, Interest Rates, etc.
22	Taxation	Any mention of taxation
23	Government / Proposed spending	Any discussion of government or proposed spending in general or in specific public sector institution (e.g. Police, NHS)
24	Trade Unions	Stories relating to trade union behaviour (i.e. strikes) or role in society / politics
25	Trade	Multilateral / bilateral trade
26	Agriculture	All mentions of agriculture

Political Issues

No.	Name	Description
31	General Political Issues	Catch-all category. Includes constitutional Reform, Role of Monarchy, Central-Regional / Devolution Issues
32	Parliament	Reporting on parliamentary affairs
33	Prime Minister	Prime minister acting in executive capacity (such as diplomatic meetings or dealings with UN, EU/EC etc.)
34	Human Rights	Unfair imprisonment, etc
35	Ideological issues	Esp. Cold-War era, liberal-democracy vs. communism/socialism

Defence, Law and Order, Justice and Home Affairs

41	Military / Defence	All stories to do with armed forces, i.e. funding, capability, equipment, ceremonial
42	War	Relating to armed conflict involving Britain, such as the Falklands conflict, Former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan / Iraq
43	Domestic security / immigration	Includes Home Office policy, immigration & asylum
44	Terrorism	Stories relating to terrorism where it relates to Britain, i.e. IRA, Al-Qaeda
45	Crime statistics and policy	Statistics on crime, not specific crime; concerns and fear of crime, police numbers
46	General justice / home affairs	Try to avoid, specify

Foreign / International News

51	EU (or equivalent)	
52	Supranational Organizations	Stories on any supranational political organisation, i.e. UN, NATO, World Bank, IMF, NGO / International Protest Groups
53	Country (specify)	
54	Diplomacy / Relations	Stories dealing with British relations with other countries. Also includes Cold War, where actual conflict (i.e. Afghanistan) not mentioned
55	Foreign war / Civil war	Stories on foreign or overseas conflicts not involving Britain
56	Foreign Terrorism	Stories relating to foreign terrorism, where explicitly mentioned as such
57	Other foreign / international (specify)	

Other Issues

61	Education	
62	NHS / Health Spending	
63	Health / Medicine	General stories on health and medicine (including medical or pharmaceutical breakthroughs)
64	Science / Technology	All scientific / technological stories, where there is no humorous or light-hearted connotation
65	Transport	Stories on transport issues, infrastructure and policy
66	Religion	Stories dealing with domestic or foreign religious issues, i.e. Church, Vatican, Christianity, Islam, etc.
67	Natural / Man-made disasters	Stories about earthquakes, floods, bridge / building collapses, and public (i.e. ferry, bus, train) transport disasters, etc.
68	Other issue	List

'Tabloid' Issues

71	Crime	Single incidences of crime, trials, organised crime, drugs
72	Sport	Either daily round-up, or stories of corruption, events
73	Entertainment / Celebrity	Coverage of celebrities, film / music launches, film, TV, music industries, programmes, deaths
74	Humour	Humorous or 'quirky' stories
75	Human Interest	Sympathetic / interactive coverage of person / group of people
76	Expeditions / Adventure	Either by explorer or journalist (not including foreign reporting)
77	Tragedy	Stories of single or multiple loss of life or hardship, i.e. deaths at sea or traffic accident; disability / disease; financial ruin. Does not include natural disasters or significant man-made disasters such as mining / bridge collapses
78	Consumer	Consumer advice, not including corporate fraud or crime
79	Royalty	Any stories involving royalty, not including political issues such as constitution

Spokespeople

1	Conservative Leader
2	Labour Leader
3	Liberal / Alliance / Liberal Democrat Leader
4	Conservative Minister / Senior Elected Figure
5	Labour Minister / Senior Elected Figure
6	Liberal / Alliance / Liberal Democrat Minister / Senior Elected...
7	Conservative Spokesperson (non-elected)
8	Labour Spokesperson (non-elected)
9	Liberal / Alliance / Liberal Democrat Spokesperson (non-elected)
10	Government Spokesperson (in non-partisan capacity)
11	Constituency candidate(s)
12	Minor party (specify)
13	Journalist (specify capacity and name)
14	'Expert' commentator in studio
15	'Expert' commentator in field
16	Official spokesperson (e.g. business, school, hospital)
17	Member of public
18	Other (specify)

Parties

1	Conservative
2	Labour
3	Liberal / Alliance / Liberal Democrat
4	SNP
5	Plaid Cymru
6	Green
7	Other (specify)

Appendix III: Coding Instructions

Front Page

To be completed during initial watch-through of each bulletin and attached to the front of the item coding sheets after the programme is fully coded.

1. **Election Year:** Mark the year of the general election that the bulletin covers, i.e. 1979, 1983, etc.

2. **Date:** Record the bulletin date in numerals according to the day and month of broadcast in the form DD/MM, for example, 1st May would be represented by 01/05.

3. **Day of Week:** Write in full the day of the week on which the bulletin was broadcast.

4. **Channel:** Record the network on which the bulletin was broadcast. For BBC1, mark BBC; for ITV, mark ITV.

5. **Running Order:** Using 2 stopwatches with split function, record the length of each item, and the length of soundbites within each item.

   Time the entire bulletin using a stopwatch, beginning at 0.00 when the programme begins. The entire programme is recorded, including the start and end sequences, and advertisement break where applicable.

   In the 'running order' box, list the items' beginning and end times as recorded on the stopwatch. Note: item begins at the moment of the previous item's end, but latter item must begin at the next second, e.g.:

   1. 2.35-4.50
   2. 4.51-5.27

   NOT

   1. 2.35-4.50
   2. 4.50-5.27

   All items to be numbered concurrently. Non-story components to be timed also, but coded as follows:

   O: Opening sequence
   R: Roundup, including headlines, pre- and post-ad break links, summary
   A: Advertisement break
   S: Sport roundup
   W: Weather report

E: End Sequence

Example:

O 0.00-0.20
R 0.21-0.51
1 0.52-4.29
2 4.30-6.03
…

Campaign items to be marked with a C after the endtime is noted, e.g.:

2 4.30-6.03 C

This is so that the items that are to be fully coded can be easily identified for the second coding exercise.

Item times should be sufficiently vertically spaced to accommodate the contents of the 'comments' column.

6. **Comments**
The purpose of the 'comments' box is to record salient information where possible during the 'running order' bulletin timing exercise. The data gathered here is not necessarily vital, but will allow easier coding of relevant items during the coding exercise proper.

Soundbites / speakers can be recorded here using a stopwatch with multiple display split function. Where mistakes are made, this can be re-done during the item coding exercise.

Time the soundbite from the moment the actor begins to speak, and end the moment the shot ends. Use the split function to record closely edited soundbites by different actors. Note the lengths of the soundbites in seconds in the comments box, alongside the code for the actor involved (see Codebook).

NB: Journalists' speech/soundbites to be recorded only when talking to camera, or when engaged with presenter in two-way. Presenter/Anchor speech not to be recorded.

Mentions of 'spin', and item headline can be jotted down, all other data, including campaign/news codes, and actors/parties mentioned to be left until the item coding process.

7. **Bulletin Length in Seconds:** Calculate the total length of the bulletin in seconds, and record it in numerical format

Item Sheet

NB: First four items on each coding sheet are the same as those on the front sheet for a given bulletin:

1. **Election Year:** Mark the year of the general election that the bulletin covers, i.e. 1979, 1983, etc.

2. **Date:** Record the bulletin date in numerals according to the day and month of broadcast in the form DD/MM, for example, 1st May would be represented by 01/05.

3. **Day of Week:** Write in full the day of the week on which the bulletin was broadcast.

4. **Channel:** Record the network on which the bulletin was broadcast. For BBC1, mark BBC; for ITV, mark ITV.

5. **Item Number:** Mark the number of the item in the running order of the bulletin (omitting the non-story components recorded in the first timing of the bulletin).

6. **Campaign Item?** Mark yes or no, depending on whether or not the item contains any campaign-specific content.

7. **Headline / Summary:** Write a short one sentence summary of the main point(s) of the story. If on-screen text headline is provided, mark that down instead.

8. **Total Time (min/sec):** Write down the length of the item in the format M.SS, as calculated from the front sheet.

9. **Total Time in Seconds:** Convert the item length into seconds in numerical form, for ease of inputting into data analysis programmes.

10. **Item Length as Percentage of Bulletin:** Calculate the total length in seconds as a percentage of the total bulletin length in seconds recorded on the front sheet.

11. **Campaign Subject Codes:** Note down the codes of each of the campaign issues as laid out in the codebook as they arise in the item (if a campaign item). Record each code once only; do not code the same issue multiple times.

12. **Focus (Campaign Codes):** Mark the campaign code that is the main focus of the story. If the main focus is unclear, then use a stopwatch to discern which of the issues has the longest period of time devoted to it.

13. **News Subject Codes:** Record the news codes that correspond to the content of the story (see codebook), to a maximum of FOUR. Should more than four arise, record the extra, and retain only the codes of the four most salient issues. Where doubt remains

over which are the most salient, use a stopwatch to time each, and retain the four most prominent in terms of length.

14. **Focus (News Codes):** Same as with Focus (Campaign Codes) above.

15. **Parties Mentioned:** Mark down the codes (see codebook) of each party featured in the story, whether in speech, in text, or on video. Code each party only once.

16. **Time Allocated To Each Party:** Using a stopwatch, calculate the length of time allocated to each party involved in the story, to a maximum of FIVE parties. The length of time combines the length of soundbites, and of video footage of the parties. Where soundbite and footage overlap (as in a recorded speech), the length of the video footage is recorded. The party names are listed below, and the length in seconds should be recorded in the corresponding place. Where a party does not feature, 'N/A' should be marked next to that party's name.

17. **Actors Mentioned:** Note down the codes (see codebook) of each actor who features in the story, either on-screen, or mentioned by a journalist. Multiple coding allowed for code 17 (Member of Public); all other codes must be entered only once.

    Spokespeople: Note the codes (see codebook) of each individual who speaks in the bulletin, and the length (in seconds) of their speech. Some of this may have been recorded on the first page, but must be re-entered here. Use the split function on a stopwatch with multiple displays to record rapidly edited speech by different actors. Journalists' speech/soundbites to be recorded only when talking directly to camera, or when engaged with presenter in two-way. Presenter/Anchor speech not to be recorded.

18. **Comments:** Includes general comments about the item, but most importantly for comments about any interpretive or negative statements (see campaign codes in codebook) that have been recorded under Campaign Subject Codes (no. 11 above). These should take the form of short statements about the nature of the negativity of interpretation.

19. **Is 'spin' referenced?** Mark Yes or No, according to whether or not the concept of 'spin', 'spinning', 'spin doctor', or 'unspinning', or any related words are explicitly mentioned in the item.

Appendix IV: Sampling Dates and Programme Lists, BBC and ITV[32]

1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005
Thu 05/04	Thu 12/05	Thu 14/05	Thu 12/03	Thu 03/04	Thu 10/05	Thu 07/04
Fri 06/04	Fri 13/05	Fri 15/05	Fri 13/03	Fri 04/04	Fri 11/05	Fri 08/04
Mon 09/04	Mon 16/05	Mon 18/05	Mon 16/03	Mon 07/04	Mon 14/05	Mon 11/04
Tue 10/04	Tue 17/05	Tue 19/05	Tue 17/03	Tue 08/04	Tue 16/05	Tue 12/04
Wed 11/04	Wed 18/05	Wed 20/05	Wed 18/03	Wed 09/04	Wed 16/05	Wed 13/04
Thu 12/04	Thu 19/05	Thu 21/05	Thu 19/03	Thu 10/04	Thu 17/05	Thu 14/04
Fri 13/04	Fri 20/05	Fri 22/05	Fri 20/03	Fri 11/04	Fri 18/05	Fri 15/04
Mon 16/04	Mon 23/05	Mon 25/05	Mon 23/03	Mon 14/04	Mon 21/05	Mon 18/04
Tue 17/04	Tue 24/05	Tue 26/05	Tue 24/03	Tue 15/04	Tue 22/05	Tue 19/04
Wed 18/04	Wed 25/05	Wed 27/05	Wed 25/03	Wed 16/04	Wed 23/05	Wed 20/04
Thu 19/04	Thu 26/05	Thu 28/05	Thu 26/03	Thu 17/04	Thu 24/05	Thu 21/04
Fri 20/04	Fri 27/05	Fri 29/05	Fri 27/03	Fri 18/04	Fri 25/05	Fri 22/04
Mon 23/04	Mon 30/05	Mon 01/06	Mon 30/03	Mon 21/04	Mon 28/05	Mon 25/04
Tue 24/04	Tue 31/05	Tue 02/06	Tue 31/03	Tue 22/04	Tue 29/05	Tue 26/04
Wed 25/04	Wed 01/06	Wed 03/06	Wed 01/04	Wed 23/04	Wed 30/05	Wed 27/04
Thu 26/04	Thu 02/06	Thu 04/06	Thu 02/04	Thu 24/04	Thu 31/05	Thu 28/04
Fri 27/04	Fri 03/06	Fri 05/06	Fri 03/04	Fri 25/04	Fri 01/06	Fri 29/04
Mon 30/04	Mon 06/06	Mon 08/06	Mon 06/04	Mon 28/04	Mon 04/06	Mon 02/05
Tue 01/05	Tue 07/06	Tue 09/06	Tue 07/04	Tue 29/04	Tue 05/06	Tue 03/05
Wed 02/05	Wed 08/06	Wed 10/06	Wed 08/04	Wed 30/04	Wed 06/06	Wed 04/05

[32] Days with missing bulletins marked bold and in italics. The missing bulletins are:
Thu 05/04: Both bulletins missing
Fri 06/04: Both bulletins missing
Mon 09/04: ITV bulletin missing
Fri 13/04: Both bulletins missing
Mon 16/04: Both bulletins missing
Thu 26/04: BBC bulletin missing

Appendix V: Item Analysis Coding Notes and Coding Sheet

Coding Notes for Item Analysis (SPSS variables in brackets)

N.B: Since all items have been pre-chosen from the 'Campaign' or 'Non-Campaign' subsets, this data is not required at this stage of recording.

Item codes:

Election:	1979-2005 (1-7)
Channel:	BBC (1) or ITV (2)
Day of Week:	Mon-Fri (1-5)
Date: Format	dd/mm
Title of Item:	Lifted from main coding data (Text)
Item No.:	Numerical
Item Length:	Lifted from main coding data (numerical)
Foreign news:	No (0), Yes (1)

Shot type codes:

Studio:	Coded 'ST'	(1)
Ext, scenic:	Coded 'ES'	(2)
Ext, actor:	Coded 'EA'	(3)
Ext, journalist:	Coded 'EJ'	(4)
Speech/:		
Talking Head:	Coded 'TH'	(5)
Other footage/		
Library Pictures:	Coded 'OT'	(6)

Dummy Codes:

Graphics in shot:	GR (1) or (0) if not
Journalist shown (ext):	JO (1) or (0) if not
Press / cameras shown:	PR (1) or (0) if not

Item Analysis Coding Sheet: Internal Attributes

Election: _____ Channel: _____ Date: _____ Day of Week:_____

Seg. No: _____ Seg. Length: _____ Campaign/Non: _____ Foreign News? _____

Item Title: _____

Case No:

Shot breakdown and codes (Add more shots by hand if required):

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Appendix VI: Inter-Coder Reliability Testing

The Inter-Coder reliability test was conducted during November 2007, on 6 randomly chosen bulletins (3 BBC, 3 ITV) based on the then-available bulletins from 1992-2005. Bulletins previously coded by the author were then re-coded by a postdoctoral student with knowledge of research methods and content analysis. The bulletin dates were:

- BBC: Fri, 13/03/92; Thur, 24/04/97; Mon, 18/04/05 (Total: 49 items; 26 Campaign-related)
- ITV: Wed, 25/03/92; Mon, 07/04/97; Tue, 03/05/05 (Total: 46 items; 26 Campaign-related)

Results:

Variable	**% Match**
Year	100
Date	100
Day of Week	100
Channel	100
Item Number	96.8
Campaign Item?	97.9
Total Time in Seconds (+/- 5secs)	89.5
Campaign Focus	90.4
News Focus	86.3
Parties Mentioned	88.5
Time Allocation (+/- 5secs)	91.6
Actors Mentioned	78.9
Spokespeople	84.2
Speech Length (+/- 3secs)	88.7
Spin	100

Appendix VII: Chapter 3 Data Tables

(a) Bulletin Characteristic Tables, BBC and ITV

The following 14 tables contain the bulletin characteristics for BBC and ITV bulletins, including total values of the different types of news (Total, Campaign, Tabloid, Foreign, Other) in seconds, numbers of each type, and percentages for each bulletin. The rows underneath the main table contain sums and average values for each column. Overall average percentages of Campaign, Tabloid, Foreign and Other news per bulletin are calculated on the basis of the average total values. Gaps in the 1979 BBC and ITV tables represent missing bulletins, and in the 'Totals' row for 1979, values are adjusted to match a full 20-bulletin sample.

List of Tables:

1. BBC 1979
2. BBC 1983
3. BBC 1987
4. BBC 1992
5. BBC 1997
6. BBC 2001
7. BBC 2005
8. ITV 1979
9. ITV 1983
10. ITV 1987
11. ITV 1992
12. ITV 1997
13. ITV 2001
14. ITV 2005

BBC, 1979: Total, Campaign, Tabloid, Foreign and 'Other' News; total volume (seconds), no. of items, and percentages

Date	BBC Total	Total Camp	Total Tab	Total Fgn	Total Other	No. Camp	No. Tab	No. Fgn	No. Other	% Camp	% Tab	% Fgn	% Other
Thu 05/04													
Fri 06/04													
Mon 09/04	1606	604	107	441	454	6	2	4	3	37.61	6.29	27.46	28.64
Tue 10/04	1676	684	80	272	640	7	2	3	5	40.81	4.77	38.19	16.23
Wed 11/04	1418	949	0	469	0	9	0	3	0	66.93	0	33.07	0
Thu 12/04	1654	835	52	342	425	7	2	3	5	50.48	3.14	20.68	25.7
Fri 13/04													
Mon 16/04													
Tue 17/04	1758	845	106	393	414	10	1	2	4	48.62	6.03	23.55	21.8
Wed 18/04	1738	912	155	299	372	14	2	2	4	52.47	8.92	17.2	21.4
Thu 19/04	1747	822	191	443	291	10	2	3	4	47.05	10.93	25.36	16.66
Fri 20/04	1760	752	0	729	279	8	0	5	4	42.73	0	41.42	15.85
Mon 23/04	1740	1089	24	437	190	11	1	5	3	62.59	1.38	25.11	10.92
Tue 24/04	1768	903	238	400	227	8	1	3	1	51.07	13.46	22.62	12.84
Wed 25/04	1660	829	89	401	341	6	1	3	6	49.94	5.36	24.16	20.54
Thu 26/04													
Fri 27/04	1699	838	75	194	592	11	3	1	5	49.32	4.41	11.42	34.84
Mon 30/04	1691	879	65	203	544	8	2	2	5	51.98	3.84	12	32.17
Tue 01/05	1734	989	245	255	245	7	3	3	4	57.04	14.13	14.71	14.13
Wed 02/05	1735	967	22	320	426	12	1	4	4	55.73	1.27	18.44	24.55
Totals[33]	***33845***	***17196***	***1932***	***7464***	***7253***	***179***	***31***	***61***	***76***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***
Means	***1692.27***	***859.8***	***96.6***	***373.2***	***362.67***	***8.93***	***1.53***	***3.07***	***3.8***	***50.81***	***5.71***	***22.05***	***21.43***

[33] Totals are adjusted to match the full 20-bulletin samples. All totals are multiplied by four-thirds

BBC, 1983: Total, Campaign, Tabloid, Foreign and 'Other' News; total volume (seconds), no. of items, and percentages

Date	BBC Total	Total Camp	Total Tab	Total Fgn	Total Other	No. Camp	No. Tab	No. Fgn	No. Other	% Camp	% Tab	% Fgn	% Other
Thu 12/05	1376	422	172	525	257	4	2	3	4	30.67	12.5	38.15	18.68
Fri 13/05	1441	552	83	206	600	5	2	3	9	38.31	5.76	14.3	41.64
Mon 16/05	2354	1310	210	365	469	11	2	3	7	55.65	8.92	15.51	19.92
Tue 17/05	1982	995	71	388	528	6	2	4	8	50.2	3.58	19.58	26.64
Wed 18/05	1969	1103	134	148	584	12	2	3	7	56.02	6.81	7.52	29.66
Thu 19/05	1889	1145	57	126	561	6	2	2	8	60.61	3.02	6.67	29.7
Fri 20/05	2407	1424	146	203	634	9	2	2	8	59.16	6.07	8.43	26.34
Mon 23/05	2354	1310	210	365	469	11	2	3	7	55.65	8.92	15.51	19.92
Tue 24/05	2152	1279	25	620	228	12	2	8	5	59.43	1.16	28.81	10.59
Wed 25/05	2222	1345	12	137	728	12	1	4	7	60.53	0.54	6.17	32.76
Thu 26/05	2166	1259	68	358	481	10	2	6	7	57.98	3.14	16.53	22.21
Fri 27/05	2479	1741	145	198	395	12	1	5	9	70.23	5.85	7.99	15.93
Mon 30/05	1271	806	0	45	420	6	0	1	4	63.41	0	3.54	33.04
Tue 31/05	2365	1346	55	310	654	9	1	7	7	56.91	2.33	13.11	27.65
Wed 01/06	2309	1498	369	271	171	13	6	4	1	64.88	15.98	11.74	7.41
Thu 02/06	2250	1519	141	228	362	15	1	2	7	67.51	6.27	10.13	16.01
Fri 03/06	2418	1584	156	272	406	12	2	4	5	65.51	6.45	11.25	16.79
Mon 06/06	2343	1372	317	247	407	12	6	5	5	59.56	13.53	10.54	17.37
Tue 07/06	2324	1454	238	348	284	10	3	8	4	62.56	10.24	14.97	12.22
Wed 08/06	3080	2250	199	327	304	7	2	7	5	73.05	6.46	10.62	9.87
Totals	***43151***	***25714***	***2807***	***5687***	***8942***	***194***	***43***	***84***	***124***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***
Means	***2157.55***	***1285.7***	***140.35***	***284.35***	***447.1***	***9.7***	***2.15***	***4.2***	***6.2***	***59.59***	***6.51***	***13.18***	***20.72***

BBC, 1987: Total, Campaign, Tabloid, Foreign and 'Other' News; total volume (seconds), no. of items, and percentages

Date	BBC Total	Total Camp	Total Tab	Total Fgn	Total Other	No. Camp	No. Tab	No. Fgn	No. Other	% Camp	% Tab	% Fgn	% Other
Thu 14/05	1467	546	0	641	280	4	0	4	5	37.22	0	43.69	19.09
Fri 15/05	1366	534	552	159	121	4	5	4	3	39.09	40.41	11.64	8.86
Mon 18/05	2736	1986	133	365	252	10	2	3	3	72.59	4.86	13.34	9.21
Tue 19/05	2744	1927	194	433	190	9	4	7	2	70.23	7.07	15.78	6.92
Wed 20/05	2860	2090	279	372	119	10	4	4	4	73.08	9.76	13.01	4.16
Thu 21/05	2621	1970	207	204	240	12	4	8	5	75.16	7.9	7.78	9.16
Fri 22/05	2586	1899	378	178	131	9	5	2	2	73.43	14.62	6.88	5.07
Mon 25/05	1688	992	462	213	21	7	3	3	1	58.77	27.37	12.62	1.24
Tue 26/05	2879	2150	141	377	211	10	3	5	3	74.68	4.9	13.09	7.32
Wed 27/05	2934	2147	208	147	432	9	2	2	4	73.18	7.09	5.01	14.72
Thu 28/05	2894	2199	0	157	538	10	0	4	6	75.98	0	5.43	18.59
Fri 29/05	2899	1941	78	743	137	9	1	6	2	66.95	2.68	25.63	4.73
Mon 01/06	2751	1956	12	660	123	9	1	6	2	71.1	0.44	23.99	4.47
Tue 02/06	2887	1909	0	288	690	7	0	3	7	66.12	0	9.98	23.9
Wed 03/06	2861	1954	208	344	355	8	3	4	4	68.3	7.27	12.02	12.41
Thu 04/06	2789	1817	89	726	157	8	1	6	3	65.15	3.19	26.03	5.63
Fri 05/06	2784	2125	128	361	170	7	2	4	3	76.33	4.6	12.97	6.11
Mon 08/06	2657	1896	38	247	476	12	2	3	3	71.36	1.43	9.3	17.91
Tue 09/06	2707	1829	51	399	428	8	2	5	3	67.57	1.88	14.74	15.81
Wed 10/06	3257	2460	153	562	235	10	2	9	1	75.53	4.7	17.26	7.22
Totals	***52367***	***36327***	***3311***	***7576***	***5306***	***172***	***46***	***92***	***66***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***
Means	***2618.35***	***1816.35***	***165.55***	***378.8***	***265.3***	***8.6***	***2.3***	***4.6***	***3.3***	***69.37***	***6.32***	***14.47***	***10.13***

BBC, 1992: Total, Campaign, Tabloid, Foreign and 'Other' News; total volume (seconds), no. of items, and percentages

Date	BBC Total	Total Camp	Total Tab	Total Fgn	Total Other	No. Camp	No. Tab	No. Fgn	No. Other	% Camp	% Tab	% Fgn	% Other
Thu 12/03	2515	1698	320	307	190	10	4	4	2	67.51	12.72	12.21	7.55
Fri 13/03	2506	1775	0	403	328	9	0	5	3	70.83	0	16.08	13.09
Mon 16/03	2582	1980	93	442	67	11	1	5	2	76.68	3.6	17.12	2.59
Tue 17/03	2943	1745	67	863	268	9	2	10	2	59.29	2.28	29.32	9.11
Wed 18/03	2523	1906	209	195	213	13	2	2	2	75.54	8.28	7.73	8.44
Thu 19/03	2570	1706	0	267	597	9	0	4	3	66.38	0	10.39	23.23
Fri 20/03	2638	1709	200	468	261	8	1	4	2	64.78	7.58	17.74	9.89
Mon 23/03	2752	2005	197	443	107	12	2	4	1	72.86	7.16	16.1	3.89
Tue 24/03	2685	1661	0	614	410	7	0	5	5	61.86	0	22.87	15.27
Wed 25/03	2744	1960	329	132	323	9	3	2	3	71.43	11.99	4.81	11.77
Thu 26/03	2548	2004	247	147	150	8	2	2	3	78.65	9.69	5.77	5.89
Fri 27/03	2812	2210	262	219	121	10	2	2	2	78.59	9.32	7.79	4.3
Mon 30/03	2484	1800	198	162	324	8	2	3	4	72.46	7.97	6.52	13.04
Tue 31/03	2461	1762	141	259	299	7	2	2	2	71.6	5.73	10.52	12.15
Wed 01/04	2443	1866	236	138	203	8	2	1	2	76.38	9.66	5.65	8.31
Thu 02/04	2533	1942	0	375	307	8	0	3	2	76.67	0	14.8	12.12
Fri 03/04	2525	2042	172	112	199	11	2	1	2	80.87	6.81	4.44	7.88
Mon 06/04	2562	1826	62	119	555	9	3	1	4	71.27	2.42	4.64	21.66
Tue 07/04	2547	1980	55	492	20	12	2	7	2	77.74	2.16	19.32	0.79
Wed 08/04	2586	2198	83	285	20	13	1	5	1	85	3.21	11.02	0.77
Totals	***51959***	***37775***	***2871***	***6442***	***4962***	***191***	***33***	***72***	***49***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***
Means	***2597.95***	***1888.75***	***143.55***	***322.1***	***248.1***	***9.55***	***1.65***	***3.6***	***2.45***	***72.70***	***5.53***	***12.40***	***9.55***

BBC, 1997: Total, Campaign, Tabloid, Foreign and 'Other' News; total volume (seconds), no. of items, and percentages

Date	BBC Total	Total Camp	Total Tab	Total Fgn	Total Other	No. Camp	No. Tab	No. Fgn	No. Other	% Camp	% Tab	% Fgn	% Other
Thu 03/04	2831	1787	254	341	449	9	3	5	3	63.12	8.97	12.05	15.86
Fri 04/04	2957	2083	89	293	492	10	1	5	6	70.44	3.01	9.91	16.64
Mon 07/04	2772	1851	30	313	578	10	3	3	7	66.77	1.08	11.29	20.85
Tue 08/04	2854	2066	0	428	360	12	0	4	5	72.39	0	15	12.99
Wed 09/04	2632	1803	103	314	412	11	2	4	5	68.5	3.91	11.93	15.65
Thu 10/04	2663	1646	108	423	486	10	2	3	6	61.81	4.06	15.88	18.25
Fri 11/04	2629	1720	97	516	296	10	1	6	5	65.42	3.69	19.63	11.26
Mon 14/04	3072	1987	333	362	390	12	5	3	5	64.68	10.84	11.78	12.7
Tue 15/04	2608	1773	0	361	474	10	0	3	6	67.98	0	13.84	18.17
Wed 16/04	2601	1767	128	224	482	10	3	2	5	67.94	4.92	8.61	18.53
Thu 17/04	2668	1816	136	299	417	12	3	4	3	68.07	5.1	11.21	15.63
Fri 18/04	2968	1887	34	254	793	11	2	3	8	63.58	1.15	8.56	26.72
Mon 21/04	2610	1618	127	409	456	10	1	6	5	61.99	4.87	15.67	17.47
Tue 22/04	2772	1835	37	595	305	10	1	5	5	66.2	1.33	21.46	11
Wed 23/04	2687	1779	121	461	326	11	2	3	5	66.21	4.5	17.16	12.13
Thu 24/04	2365	1602	134	562	67	10	2	4	4	67.74	5.67	23.76	2.83
Fri 25/04	2649	1694	0	165	790	11	0	4	5	63.95	0	6.23	29.82
Mon 28/04	2605	1903	32	295	375	11	2	2	4	73.05	1.23	11.32	14.4
Tue 29/04	2644	1914	39	144	547	10	2	2	7	72.39	1.48	5.45	20.69
Wed 30/04	2887	2239	92	164	392	12	1	2	6	77.55	3.19	5.68	13.58
Totals	***54474***	***36770***	***1894***	***6923***	***8887***	***212***	***36***	***73***	***105***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***
Means	***2723.7***	***1838.5***	***94.7***	***346.15***	***444.35***	***10.6***	***1.8***	***3.65***	***5.25***	***67.50***	***3.48***	***12.71***	***16.31***

BBC, 2001: Total, Campaign, Tabloid, Foreign and 'Other' News; total volume (seconds), no. of items, and percentages

Date	BBC Total	Total Camp	Total Tab	Total Fgn	Total Other	No. Camp	No. Tab	No. Fgn	No. Other	% Camp	% Tab	% Fgn	% Other
Thu 10/05	1812	1019	220	308	265	6	2	3	3	56.24	12.14	17	14.62
Fri 11/05	1803	1000	125	287	391	8	2	3	4	55.46	6.93	15.92	21.69
Mon 14/05	1842	1147	112	261	322	9	2	2	3	62.27	6.08	14.17	17.48
Tue 15/05	1803	1259	194	156	194	7	2	2	3	69.83	10.76	8.65	10.76
Wed 16/05	1883	1466	165	0	252	8	1	0	2	77.85	8.76	0	13.38
Thu 17/05	1762	1048	122	151	441	7	1	1	8	59.48	6.92	8.02	25.03
Fri 18/05	1846	1326	0	315	205	10	0	2	2	71.83	0	17.06	11.11
Mon 21/05	1732	808	283	484	157	5	3	3	2	46.65	16.34	27.94	9.06
Tue 22/05	1792	1152	145	0	495	9	2	0	5	64.29	8.09	0	27.62
Wed 23/05	1740	1233	128	0	379	8	3	0	5	70.86	7.36	0	21.78
Thu 24/05	1880	835	400	366	279	5	3	3	4	44.41	21.28	19.47	14.84
Fri 25/05	1831	1364	138	0	329	7	2	0	4	74.49	7.54	0	17.97
Mon 28/05	1248	647	76	0	525	4	1	0	4	51.84	6.09	0	42.07
Tue 29/05	1773	1101	0	355	317	8	0	5	3	62.1	0	20.02	17.88
Wed 30/05	1798	1207	0	131	460	8	0	3	4	67.13	0	7.29	25.58
Thu 31/05	1795	1154	266	208	167	7	3	3	4	64.29	14.82	11.59	9.3
Fri 01/06	1870	861	0	466	543	5	0	4	5	46.04	0	24.92	29.04
Mon 04/06	1860	1138	258	336	128	7	3	2	1	61.18	13.87	18.06	6.88
Tue 05/06	1819	1086	112	309	312	8	1	2	3	59.7	6.16	16.99	17.15
Wed 06/06	1902	1099	515	133	155	8	4	1	3	57.78	27.08	6.99	8.15
Totals	***35791***	***21950***	***3259***	***4266***	***6316***	***144***	***35***	***39***	***72***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***
Means	***1789.55***	***1097.5***	***162.95***	***213.3***	***315.8***	***7.2***	***1.75***	***1.95***	***3.6***	***61.33***	***9.11***	***11.92***	***17.65***

BBC, 2005: Total, Campaign, Tabloid, Foreign and 'Other' News; total volume (seconds), no. of items, and percentages

Date	BBC Total	Total Camp	Total Tab	Total Fgn	Total Other	No. Camp	No. Tab	No. Fgn	No. Other	% Camp	% Tab	% Fgn	% Other
Thu 07/04	1535	834	78	434	189	3	1	5	3	54.33	5.08	28.27	12.31
Fri 08/04	1689	393	13	651	632	1	1	3	3	23.27	0.77	38.54	37.42
Mon 11/04	1786	975	98	340	373	4	1	2	2	54.59	5.49	19.04	20.88
Tue 12/04	1774	1229	96	290	159	7	1	2	1	69.28	5.41	16.35	8.96
Wed 13/04	1768	935	120	14	699	5	1	1	3	52.88	6.79	0.79	39.54
Thu 14/04	1773	1102	112	279	280	6	2	2	2	62.15	6.32	15.74	15.79
Fri 15/04	1647	794	0	358	495	5	0	3	2	48.21	0	21.74	30.05
Mon 18/04	1723	995	240	338	150	7	2	2	1	57.75	13.93	19.62	8.71
Tue 19/04	1721	727	14	650	330	5	1	3	2	42.24	0.81	37.77	19.17
Wed 20/04	1840	1258	118	464	0	7	1	3	0	68.37	6.41	25.22	0
Thu 21/04	1700	1064	125	0	511	7	2	0	5	62.59	7.35	0	3.65
Fri 22/04	1663	1173	106	150	234	6	1	1	4	70.54	6.37	9.02	14.07
Mon 25/04	1577	902	366	290	19	7	4	3	1	57.2	23.21	18.39	1.2
Tue 26/04	1761	1107	319	335	0	7	3	3	0	62.86	18.11	19.02	0
Wed 27/04	1789	1055	129	316	289	6	1	2	2	58.97	7.21	17.66	16.15
Thu 28/04	1769	925	99	359	386	5	2	2	2	52.29	5.6	20.29	21.82
Fri 29/04	1783	1169	151	256	207	8	1	2	1	65.56	8.47	14.36	11.61
Mon 02/05	1418	805	99	130	384	5	2	1	2	56.77	6.98	9.17	27.08
Tue 03/05	1798	1129	195	16	458	6	3	1	3	62.79	10.85	0.72	25.47
Wed 04/05	1853	1540	0	87	226	8	0	2	2	83.11	0	4.7	12.2
Totals	***34367***	***20111***	***2428***	***5757***	***6021***	***115***	***30***	***43***	***41***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***
Means	***1718.35***	***1005.55***	***123.9***	***287.85***	***301.05***	***5.75***	***1.5***	***2.15***	***2.05***	***58.52***	***7.06***	***16.75***	***17.52***

ITV, 1979: Total, Campaign, Tabloid, Foreign and 'Other' News; total volume (seconds), no. of items, and percentages

Date	ITV Total	Total Camp	Total Tab	Total Fgn	Total Other	No. Camp	No. Tab	No. Fgn	No. Other	% Camp	% Tab	% Fgn	% Other
Thu 05/04													
Fri 06/04													
Mon 09/04													
Tue 10/04	1529	977	165	36	351	8	2	2	4	63.9	10.79	2.35	22.96
Wed 11/04	1584	972	108	334	170	9	2	3	5	61.36	6.82	21.09	10.73
Thu 12/04	1638	864	15	446	313	8	1	4	4	52.75	0.92	27.23	19.11
Fri 13/04													
Mon 16/04													
Tue 17/04	2057	1367	102	189	399	10	2	1	4	66.46	4.96	9.19	19.4
Wed 18/04	2052	1298	293	246	215	14	4	2	3	63.26	14.28	11.99	10.48
Thu 19/04	2111	1293	52	380	386	13	1	4	4	61.25	2.46	18	18.29
Fri 20/04	1938	1170	16	206	546	8	1	3	6	60.37	0.83	10.63	28.17
Mon 23/04	2284	1724	22	220	318	12	1	1	3	75.48	0.96	9.63	13.92
Tue 24/04	2022	1133	311	268	310	11	2	3	5	56.03	15.38	13.25	15.33
Wed 25/04	2026	1120	99	270	537	8	1	3	6	55.28	4.89	13.33	26.51
Thu 26/04	2081	1462	151	0	468	12	3	0	8	70.25	7.26	0	22.49
Fri 27/04	2006	1325	118	42	521	10	4	1	4	66.05	5.88	2.09	25.97
Mon 30/04	2036	1154	233	195	454	10	3	4	7	56.68	11.44	9.58	22.3
Tue 01/05	2123	1422	263	224	214	9	4	3	4	66.99	12.39	10.55	10.08
Wed 02/05	2082	1518	191	111	262	11	3	3	4	72.91	9.17	5.33	12.58
Totals[34]	***39425***	***25065***	***2852***	***4236***	***7286***	***204***	***45***	***49***	***95***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***
Means	***1971.27***	***1253.27***	***142.6***	***211.8***	***364.3***	***10.2***	***2.27***	***2.47***	***4.73***	***63.58***	***7.23***	***10.74***	***18.48***

[34] Totals are adjusted to match the 20-bulletin samples for all other elections. All totals are multiplied by four-thirds.

ITV, 1983: Total, Campaign, Tabloid, Foreign and 'Other' News; total volume (seconds), no. of items, and percentages

Date	ITV Total	Total Camp	Total Tab	Total Fgn	Total Other	No. Camp	No. Tab	No. Fgn	No. Other	% Camp	% Tab	% Fgn	% Other
Thu 12/05	1597	594	98	374	531	6	3	2	5	37.19	6.14	23.42	33.25
Fri 13/05	1454	518	89	146	701	4	2	4	8	35.63	6.12	10.04	48.21
Mon 16/05	1790	1362	178	70	182	7	2	2	3	76.09	9.94	3.91	10.17
Tue 17/05	1674	1205	22	0	447	10	1	0	5	71.98	1.31	0	26.7
Wed 18/05	1784	1245	88	177	274	8	2	2	3	69.79	4.93	9.92	15.36
Thu 19/05	1771	1226	0	167	378	13	0	3	6	69.23	0	9.43	21.34
Fri 20/05	1679	1014	138	184	343	8	2	4	4	60.39	8.22	10.96	20.43
Mon 23/05	1745	1194	118	221	212	12	3	2	4	68.42	6.76	12.66	12.15
Tue 24/05	1785	1129	25	408	223	9	1	4	2	63.25	1.4	22.86	12.49
Wed 25/05	1794	1272	131	34	357	10	2	4	5	70.9	7.3	1.9	19.9
Thu 26/05	1778	1083	93	218	384	10	1	2	5	60.91	5.23	12.26	21.6
Fri 27/05	1640	1075	198	250	117	11	4	3	3	65.55	12.07	15.24	7.13
Mon 30/05	938	628	79	148	83	6	1	2	3	66.95	8.42	15.78	8.85
Tue 31/05	2131	1116	87	567	361	7	2	3	7	52.3	4.08	26.61	16.94
Wed 01/06	1791	1098	356	184	153	10	3	2	2	61.31	19.88	10.27	8.54
Thu 02/06	1676	1176	121	0	379	12	2	0	7	70.17	7.22	0	22.61
Fri 03/06	1600	774	259	203	364	11	3	2	5	48.38	16.19	12.69	22.75
Mon 06/06	1745	1194	118	221	212	12	3	2	4	68.42	6.76	12.66	12.15
Tue 07/06	1853	1234	227	194	198	10	4	5	2	66.59	12.25	10.47	10.69
Wed 08/06	1828	1249	71	249	259	8	2	6	3	68.32	3.88	13.62	14.17
Totals	***34053***	***21386***	***2496***	***4015***	***6158***	***184***	***43***	***54***	***86***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***
Means	***1702.65***	***1069.3***	***124.8***	***200.75***	***307.9***	***9.2***	***2.15***	***2.7***	***4.3***	***62.80***	***7.33***	***11.79***	***18.08***

ITV, 1987: Total, Campaign, Tabloid, Foreign and 'Other' News; total volume (seconds), no. of items, and percentages

Date	ITV Total	Total Camp	Total Tab	Total Fgn	Total Other	No. Camp	No. Tab	No. Fgn	No. Other	% Camp	% Tab	% Fgn	% Other
Thu 14/05	1590	856	141	80	513	9	2	3	5	53.84	8.87	5.03	32.26
Fri 15/05	1591	567	427	185	412	5	3	2	3	35.64	35.64	26.84	11.63
Mon 18/05	1665	958	235	403	69	12	4	5	1	57.54	14.11	24.2	4.14
Tue 19/05	1691	1115	109	254	213	8	2	6	2	65.94	6.45	15.02	12.6
Wed 20/05	1677	1074	117	381	105	10	2	4	2	64.04	6.98	22.72	6.26
Thu 21/05	1706	958	242	326	258	11	3	3	2	56.15	14.19	19.11	15.12
Fri 22/05	1656	919	395	251	91	9	6	3	2	55.5	23.85	15.16	5.5
Mon 25/05	803	512	134	37	120	5	1	2	1	63.76	16.69	4.61	14.94
Tue 26/05	1601	900	170	143	388	8	3	4	4	56.21	10.62	8.93	24.23
Wed 27/05	1690	1180	138	160	212	11	2	2	4	69.82	8.17	9.47	12.54
Thu 28/05	1678	1180	80	154	264	10	2	4	4	70.32	4.77	9.18	15.73
Fri 29/05	1675	829	47	538	261	5	2	5	4	49.49	2.81	32.06	15.58
Mon 01/06	1682	954	124	475	129	9	2	6	2	56.72	7.37	28.24	7.67
Tue 02/06	1679	1081	249	111	238	7	3	1	5	64.38	14.83	6.61	14.18
Wed 03/06	1683	951	234	213	285	6	2	3	7	56.51	13.9	12.69	16.97
Thu 04/06	1665	931	188	532	14	12	2	5	1	55.91	11.29	31.95	0.84
Fri 05/06	1750	928	240	318	264	7	2	3	3	53.03	13.71	18.17	15.09
Mon 08/06	1808	793	351	349	315	8	5	4	3	43.86	19.41	19.3	17.42
Tue 09/06	1735	956	215	235	329	8	3	3	2	55.1	12.39	13.54	18.96
Wed 10/06	1626	890	276	373	87	6	5	5	2	54.74	16.97	22.94	5.35
Total	***32651***	***18532***	***4112***	***5518***	***4567***	***166***	***56***	***73***	***59***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***
Means	***1632.55***	***926.6***	***205.6***	***275.9***	***228.35***	***8.3***	***2.8***	***3.65***	***2.95***	***56.76***	***12.59***	***12.30***	***13.99***

ITV, 1992: Total, Campaign, Tabloid, Foreign and 'Other' News; total volume (seconds), no. of items, and percentages

Date	ITV Total	Total Camp	Total Tab	Total Fgn	Total Other	No. Camp	No. Tab	No. Fgn	No. Other	% Camp	% Tab	% Fgn	% Other
Thu 12/03	1558	949	247	112	250	7	2	1	2	60.91	15.85	7.19	16.05
Fri 13/03	1608	891	6	417	294	7	1	3	3	55.41	0.37	25.93	18.28
Mon 16/03	1653	1159	80	217	197	6	1	2	2	70.11	4.84	13.12	11.92
Tue 17/03	1565	1029	56	276	204	6	2	2	2	65.75	3.58	17.64	13.04
Wed 18/03	1648	1299	200	135	14	9	3	1	1	78.82	12.14	8.19	0.85
Thu 19/03	1624	1064	286	79	195	9	1	1	1	65.52	17.61	4.86	12.01
Fri 20/03	1544	932	294	131	187	7	5	2	1	60.36	19.04	8.48	12.11
Mon 23/03	1544	895	125	484	40	6	1	4	1	57.97	8.1	31.35	2.59
Tue 24/03	1804	1056	37	483	228	5	1	4	2	58.54	2.05	26.77	12.64
Wed 25/03	1741	1314	260	150	17	8	3	2	1	75.47	14.93	8.62	0.94
Thu 26/03	1682	1307	148	0	227	9	1	0	2	77.71	8.8	0	13.5
Fri 27/03	1660	903	226	200	331	4	3	2	2	54.4	13.61	12.05	19.94
Mon 30/03	1554	1037	224	0	293	6	4	0	2	66.73	14.41	0	18.85
Tue 31/03	1687	1134	404	149	0	6	3	2	0	67.22	23.95	8.83	0
Wed 01/04	1644	1307	157	117	63	9	3	1	2	79.5	9.55	7.12	3.83
Thu 02/04	1680	1130	122	257	171	5	2	2	2	67.26	7.26	15.3	19.17
Fri 03/04	1640	1064	149	105	322	6	2	1	3	64.88	9.09	6.4	19.63
Mon 06/04	1675	1035	219	130	291	5	2	1	3	61.79	13.07	7.76	17.37
Tue 07/04	1515	1008	93	414	0	7	2	5	0	66.53	6.13	27.33	0
Wed 08/04	1675	1092	439	144	0	9	3	2	0	65.19	26.21	8.6	0
Totals	***32701***	***21605***	***3772***	***4000***	***3324***	***136***	***45***	***38***	***32***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***
Means	***1635.05***	***1080.25***	***188.6***	***200***	***166.2***	***6.8***	***2.25***	***1.9***	***1.6***	***66.07***	***11.53***	***16.87***	***10.16***

ITV, 1997: Total, Campaign, Tabloid, Foreign and 'Other' News; total volume (seconds), no. of items, and percentages

Date	ITV Total	Total Camp	Total Tab	Total Fgn	Total Other	No. Camp	No. Tab	No. Fgn	No. Other	% Camp	% Tab	% Fgn	% Other
Thu 03/04	1353	748	192	28	385	7	2	2	3	55.28	14.19	2.07	28.46
Fri 04/04	1271	1023	34	27	187	9	1	2	2	80.49	2.68	2.12	14.71
Mon 07/04	1344	838	227	14	265	9	4	1	3	62.35	16.89	1.04	19.72
Tue 08/04	1347	1017	40	133	157	9	3	2	2	75.5	2.97	9.87	11.66
Wed 09/04	1404	789	143	160	312	7	2	2	4	56.2	10.19	11.4	22.22
Thu 10/04	1346	720	294	114	218	6	3	2	2	53.49	21.84	8.47	9.44
Fri 11/04	1338	723	126	127	362	8	2	1	4	54.04	9.42	9.5	27.06
Mon 14/04	1340	741	456	116	27	8	6	1	2	55.3	34.03	8.66	2.01
Tue 15/04	1350	849	234	267	0	11	3	2	0	62.89	17.33	19.78	0
Wed 16/04	1363	1015	34	193	121	9	1	2	4	74.47	2.49	14.16	9.04
Thu 17/04	1339	742	351	120	126	8	6	1	2	55.41	26.21	8.96	9.41
Fri 18/04	1352	701	271	0	380	7	5	0	3	51.85	20.04	0	28.11
Mon 21/04	1404	738	87	190	389	8	2	2	3	52.56	6.2	13.53	27.71
Tue 22/04	1354	857	97	366	34	10	1	4	2	63.29	7.16	27.03	2.51
Wed 23/04	1320	752	272	272	24	7	4	2	2	56.97	20.61	20.61	1.82
Thu 24/04	1333	691	255	145	242	6	2	2	2	51.84	19.13	10.88	18.15
Fri 25/04	1338	960	194	0	184	8	3	0	2	71.75	14.5	0	13.75
Mon 28/04	1326	860	208	155	103	10	4	1	2	64.86	11.69	15.69	7.77
Tue 29/04	1309	611	148	122	428	8	3	1	7	46.68	11.31	9.32	32.7
Wed 30/04	1215	813	249	32	121	9	2	2	3	66.91	20.49	2.63	9.96
Totals	***29746***	***16188***	***3912***	***2581***	***4065***	***164***	***59***	***32***	***54***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***
Means	***1337.3***	***809.4***	***195.6***	***129.05***	***203.25***	***8.2***	***2.95***	***1.6***	***2.7***	***60.52***	***14.63***	***9.65***	***15.20***

ITV, 2001: Total, Campaign, Tabloid, Foreign and 'Other' News; total volume (seconds), no. of items, and percentages

Date	ITV Total	Total Camp	Total Tab	Total Fgn	Total Other	No. Camp	No. Tab	No. Fgn	No. Other	% Camp	% Tab	% Fgn	% Other
Thu 10/05	845	461	92	69	223	4	1	1	3	54.56	10.89	8.17	26.39
Fri 11/05	893	260	291	213	129	2	3	2	3	29.12	32.59	32.59	14.45
Mon 14/05	907	508	195	204	0	7	2	3	0	56.01	21.5	22.49	0
Tue 15/05	924	581	119	208	16	4	1	2	1	62.88	12.88	22.51	1.73
Wed 16/05	911	661	144	0	106	5	1	0	2	72.56	15.81	0	11.64
Thu 17/05	893	573	0	187	133	5	0	2	3	64.17	0	20.94	18.59
Fri 18/05	913	593	179	123	18	6	2	1	1	64.95	19.61	13.47	1.97
Mon 21/05	911	469	112	220	110	5	2	2	1	51.48	12.29	24.15	12.07
Tue 22/05	905	352	110	0	443	3	2	0	3	38.9	12.15	0	48.95
Wed 23/05	916	405	141	0	370	3	3	0	3	44.21	15.39	0	40.39
Thu 24/05	895	481	96	117	201	4	1	2	2	53.74	10.73	13.07	22.46
Fri 25/05	918	352	245	177	144	3	3	2	3	38.34	26.69	19.28	15.69
Mon 28/05	915	467	0	148	300	5	0	1	3	51.04	0	16.17	32.79
Tue 29/05	914	456	126	77	255	3	2	1	2	49.89	13.79	8.42	27.9
Wed 30/05	917	426	0	89	402	3	0	1	3	46.46	0	9.71	43.84
Thu 31/05	894	421	220	95	158	3	2	1	1	47.09	24.61	10.63	17.67
Fri 01/06	1106	783	203	0	120	5	2	0	2	70.8	18.35	0	10.84
Mon 04/06	913	502	143	156	112	4	2	1	1	54.98	15.66	17.09	12.27
Tue 05/06	915	595	99	95	126	6	1	1	2	65.03	10.82	10.38	13.77
Wed 06/06	917	586	212	23	96	7	2	1	1	63.9	23.12	2.51	10.47
Totals	***18322***	***9932***	***2727***	***2201***	***3464***	***87***	***32***	***24***	***40***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***
Means	***916.1***	***496.6***	***136.35***	***110.05***	***173.1***	***4.35***	***1.6***	***1.2***	***2***	***54.21***	***14.88***	***12.01***	***18.90***

ITV, 2005: Total, Campaign, Tabloid, Foreign and 'Other' News; total volume (seconds), no. of items, and percentages

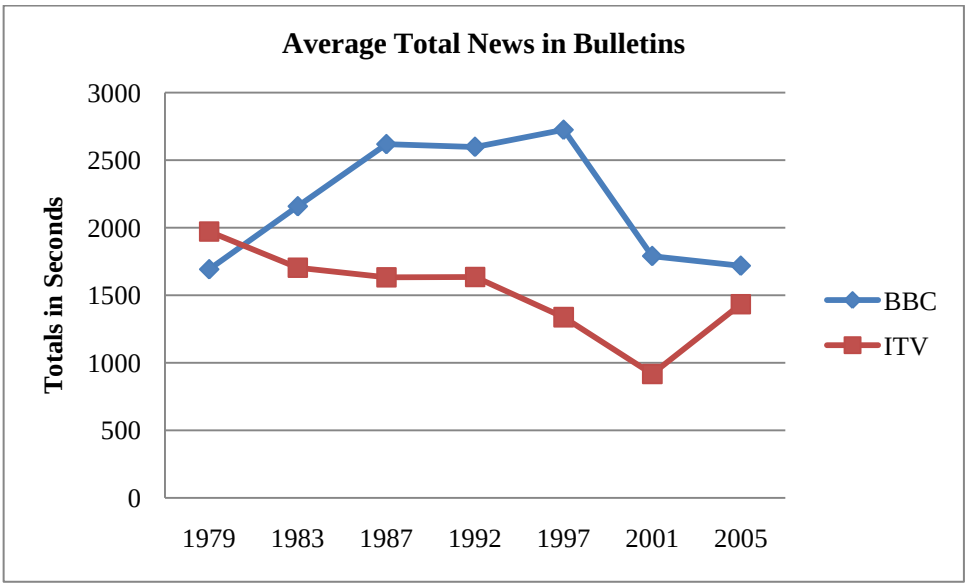
Date	ITV Total	Total Camp	Total Tab	Total Fgn	Total Other	No. Camp	No. Tab	No. Fgn	No. Other	% Camp	% Tab	% Fgn	% Other
Thu 07/04	1066	666	208	192	0	5	2	1	0	62.48	19.51	18.01	0
Fri 08/04	1076	400	195	279	202	2	2	1	3	37.17	18.12	25.86	18.77
Mon 11/04	1317	785	206	45	281	5	1	3	3	59.61	15.64	3.42	21.34
Tue 12/04	1378	840	228	140	170	6	2	1	2	60.96	16.55	10.16	12.34
Wed 13/04	1510	948	228	0	334	6	3	0	4	62.78	15.1	0	22.12
Thu 14/04	1387	942	266	25	154	5	2	2	1	67.92	19.18	1.8	11.1
Fri 15/04	1381	1042	291	28	20	9	2	2	2	75.45	21.07	2.03	1.45
Mon 18/04	1723	1100	240	161	222	7	2	1	2	63.84	13.93	9.34	12.88
Tue 19/04	1747	902	149	529	167	7	2	3	2	51.63	8.53	30.28	9.56
Wed 20/04	1617	1154	217	62	184	9	1	3	3	71.37	13.42	3.83	11.38
Thu 21/04	1599	1051	364	122	62	7	3	1	3	65.73	22.76	7.63	3.88
Fri 22/04	1413	898	342	121	52	7	2	1	3	63.55	24.2	8.56	3.68
Mon 25/04	1555	970	302	249	34	6	4	3	2	62.38	19.42	16.01	2.19
Tue 26/04	1552	839	310	183	220	6	5	1	2	54.06	19.97	11.79	14.18
Wed 27/04	1609	962	565	17	65	4	4	1	3	59.79	35.11	1.06	4.04
Thu 28/04	1528	869	310	183	183	6	3	4	2	56.87	20.29	11.98	11.98
Fri 29/04	1372	958	190	176	48	7	2	1	3	69.83	13.84	12.83	3.5
Mon 02/05	842	509	182	21	130	6	3	1	1	60.45	21.62	2.49	15.44
Tue 03/05	1582	1127	313	112	30	9	2	3	1	71.24	19.79	7.08	1.9
Wed 04/05	1401	827	336	113	125	9	3	1	2	59.03	23.98	8.07	8.92
Totals	***28655***	*17789*	***5442***	***2758***	***2683***	***128***	***50***	***34***	***44***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***	***N/A***
Means	***1432.75***	*889.45*	***272.1***	***137.9***	***134.15***	***6.4***	***2.5***	***1.7***	***2.2***	***62.08***	***18.99***	***9.62***	***9.36***

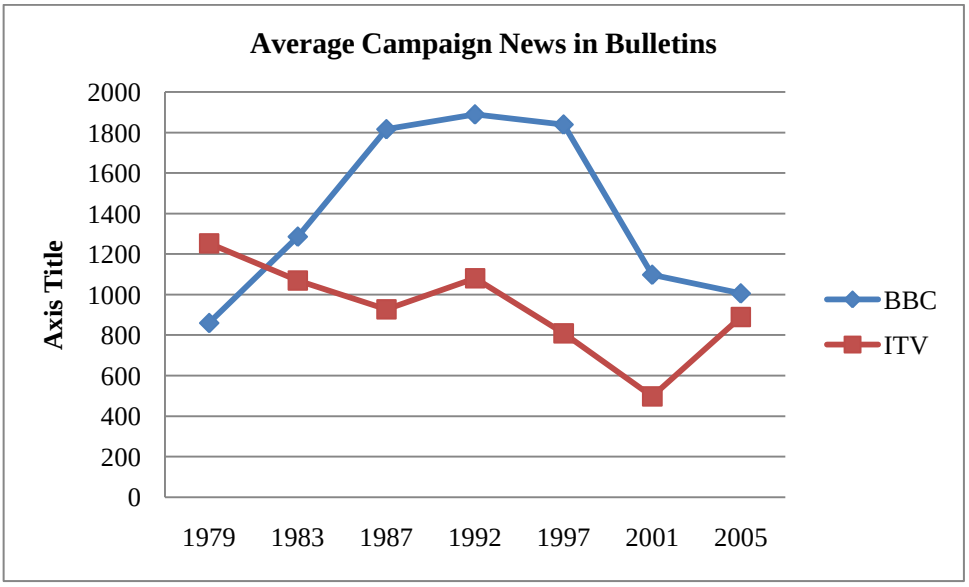
(b) Chapter 3 Data Tables and Supplementary Graph Data

Volume and Prominence (Section 3.2)

Average volumes of Total and Campaign News, BBC and ITV (with proportions)

	BBC Average	ITV Average	BBC Campaign	ITV Campaign	BBC %	ITV %
1979	1692	1971	860	1253	50.81	63.58
1983	2158	1703	1286	1069	59.59	62.80
1987	2618	1633	1816	927	69.37	56.76
1992	2598	1635	1889	1080	72.70	66.07
1997	2724	1337	1839	809	67.50	60.52
2001	1790	916	1098	497	61.33	54.21
2005	1718	1433	1006	889	58.52	62.08





Prominence of Campaign News by Percentage, BBC and ITV

	Top		Top 2/3		Top 3/3	
	BBC	ITV	BBC	ITV	BBC	ITV
1979	33	27	47	60	20	27
1983	60	70	80	85	60	70
1987	65	65	85	80	65	65
1992	85	90	95	95	85	85
1997	90	80	100	95	75	80
2001	85	70	95	95	85	60
2005	75	65	75	90	60	55

News Agendas (Section 3.3)

News Agenda Percentages, BBC and ITV

BBC				
	Campaign	Foreign	Other	Tabloid
1979	50.81	22.05	21.43	5.71
1983	59.59	13.18	20.72	6.51
1987	69.37	14.47	10.13	6.32
1992	72.70	12.40	9.55	5.53
1997	67.50	12.71	16.31	3.48
2001	61.33	11.92	17.65	9.11
2005	58.52	16.75	17.52	7.06

ITV				
	Campaign	Foreign	Other	Tabloid
1979	63.58	10.74	18.48	7.23
1983	62.80	11.79	18.08	7.33
1987	56.76	12.30	13.99	12.59
1992	66.07	16.87	10.16	11.53
1997	60.52	9.65	15.20	14.63
2001	54.21	12.01	18.91	14.88
2005	62.08	9.62	9.36	18.99

Minor Party Coverage (Section 3.4)

Minor Parties' Polling in Westminster Elections	
Election	Percentage of Votes Cast
1979	5.4%
1983	4.6%
1987	4.5%
1992	5.9%
1997	9.3%
2001	9.3%
2005	10.4%

Appendix VIII: Chapter 4 Data Tables

Campaign Item Breakdown by Channel (1979 results adjusted)

Number of Items Per Election			
	Total	**BBC**	**ITV**
1979	385	181	204
1983	369	194	175
1987	338	172	166
1992	327	191	136
1997	376	212	164
2001	233	146	87
2005	237	115	122

Appendix IX: Chapter 6 Data Tables

Shot Type Data Tables

Average length by Type (Campaign)							
	ST	**GR**	**OT**	**TH**	**EA**	**ES**	**EJ**
1979	23.83	***7.6***	0	38.14	***7.07***	4.63	***21.2***
1983	17.91	10.25	0	30.85	5.49	5.43	***23.3***
1987	15.34	37.3	***7***	14.92	6.15	4.15	***18***
1992	13.25	22.56	***5***	14.92	6.03	4.11	19.71
1997	14.76	0	5	13.67	4.65	4.12	14.25
2001	14.19	32.58	***15***	13.16	5.17	3.63	13.38
2005	15.68	14.85	9.67	10.91	5.83	4.3	17.07

Table 6.1

Average length by Type (Non-Campaign)							
	ST	**GR**	**OT**	**TH**	**EA**	**ES**	**EJ**
1979	21.84	***9.78***	***29***	***43.42***	***7.25***	5.3	***29.6***
1983	16.11	***11.23***	***21.8***	***18.67***	***5.89***	5.33	***30.5***
1987	14.39	11.29	***9***	16.18	7.97	4.95	***13***
1992	17.6	9.38	12.6	13.28	5.81	4.59	19.17
1997	15.68	6	10.88	11.26	7.58	4.21	15.83
2001	16.11	16.71	11.61	12.29	6.26	4.59	16.33
2005	19.74	8.13	16.06	12.36	8.22	5.47	21.48

Non-Campaign Soundbites by Election

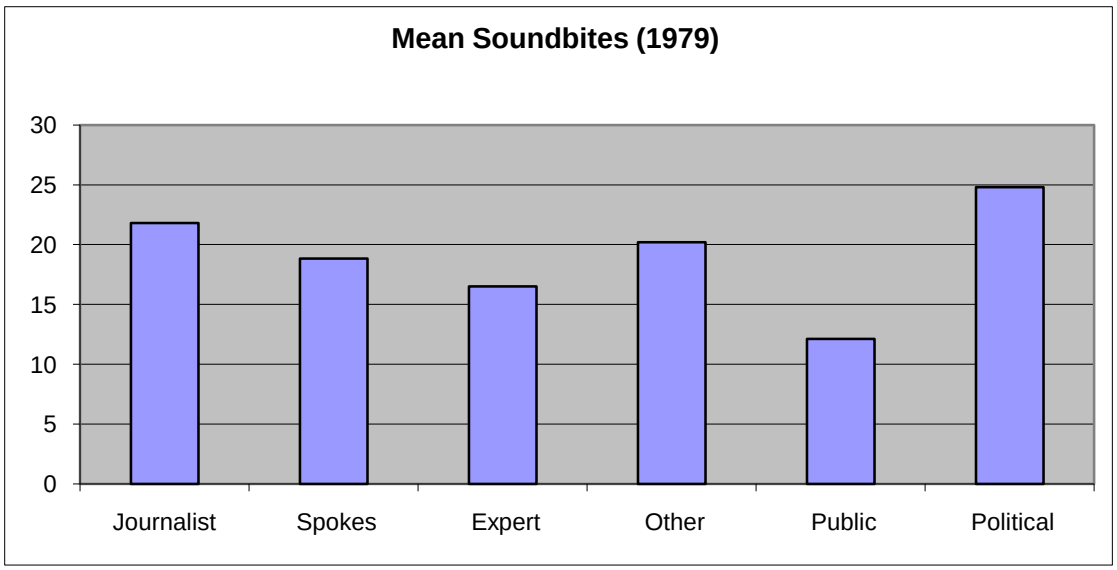


Figure 6.24

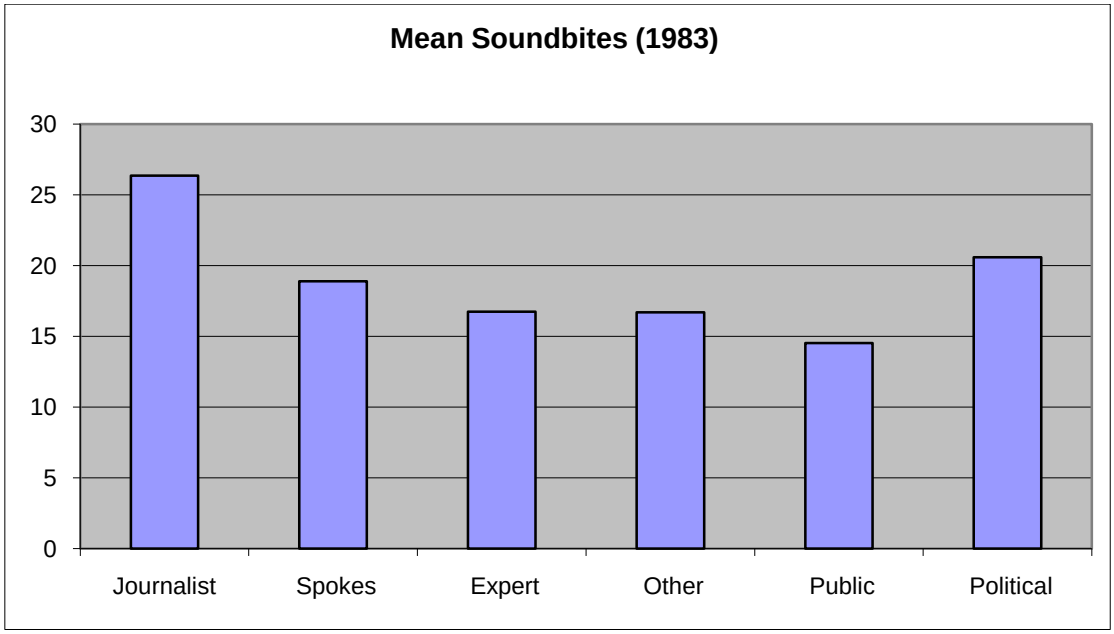


Figure 6.25

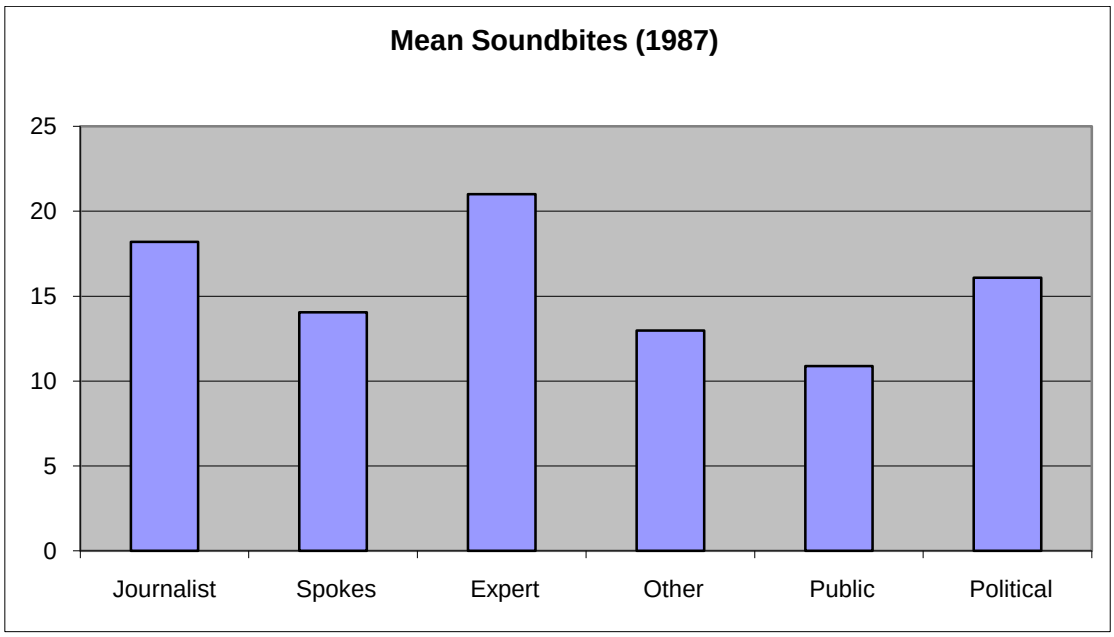


Figure 6.26

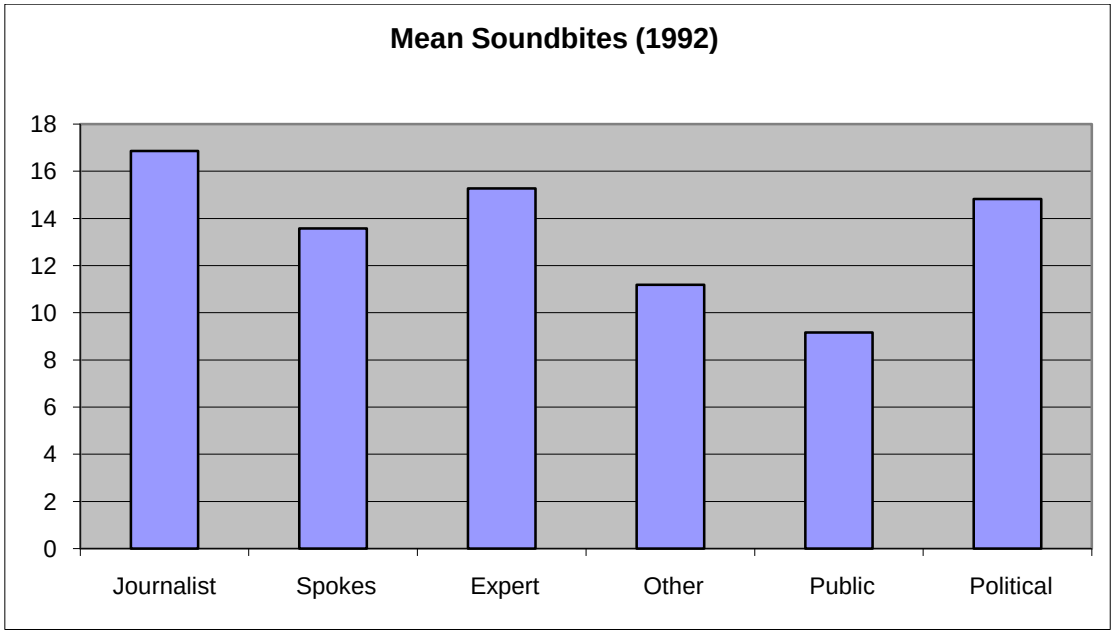


Figure 6.27

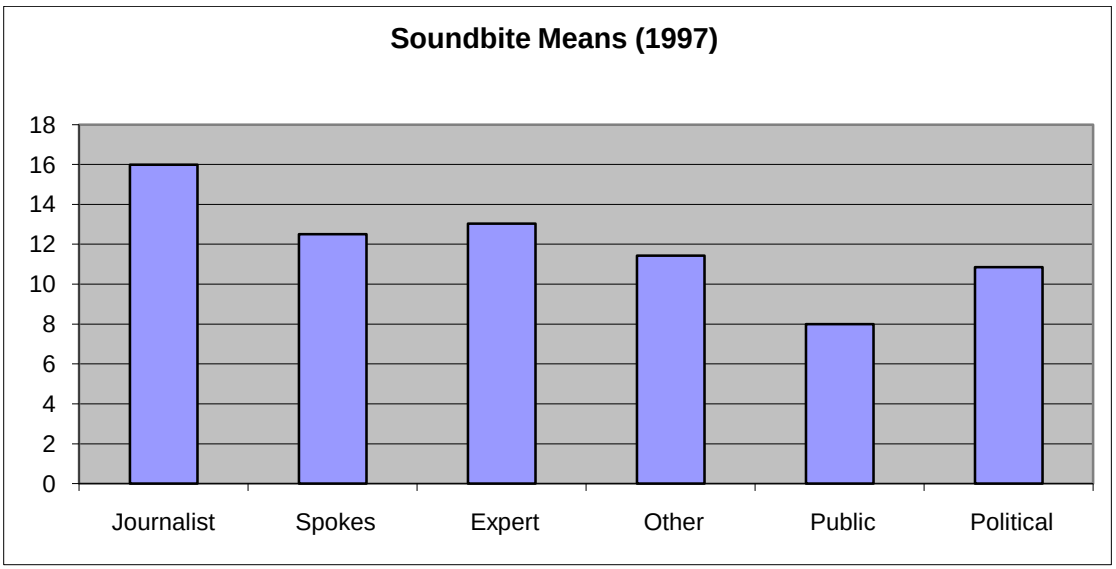


Figure 6.28

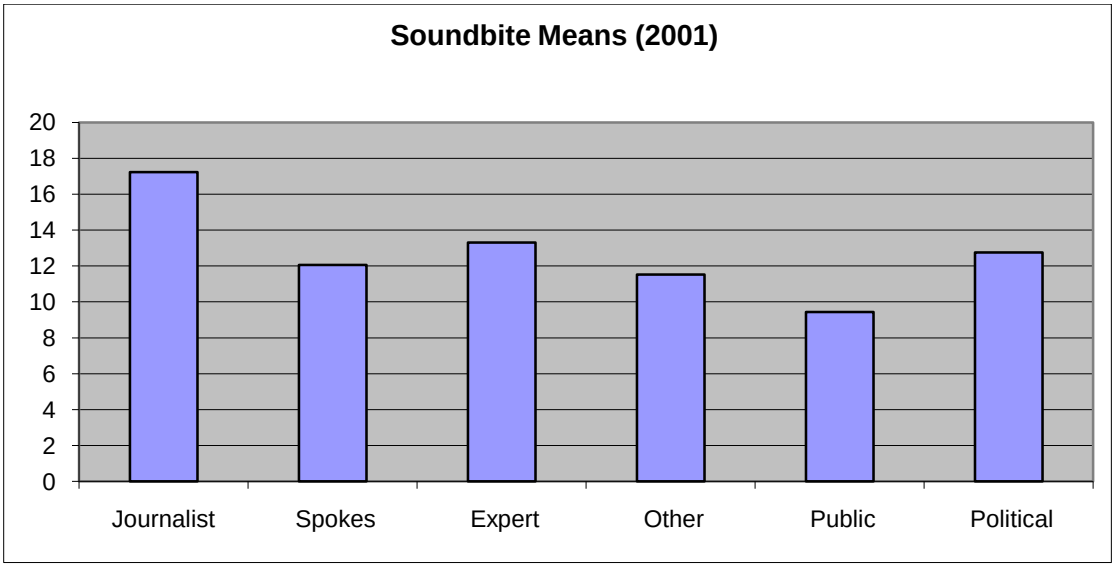


Figure 6.29

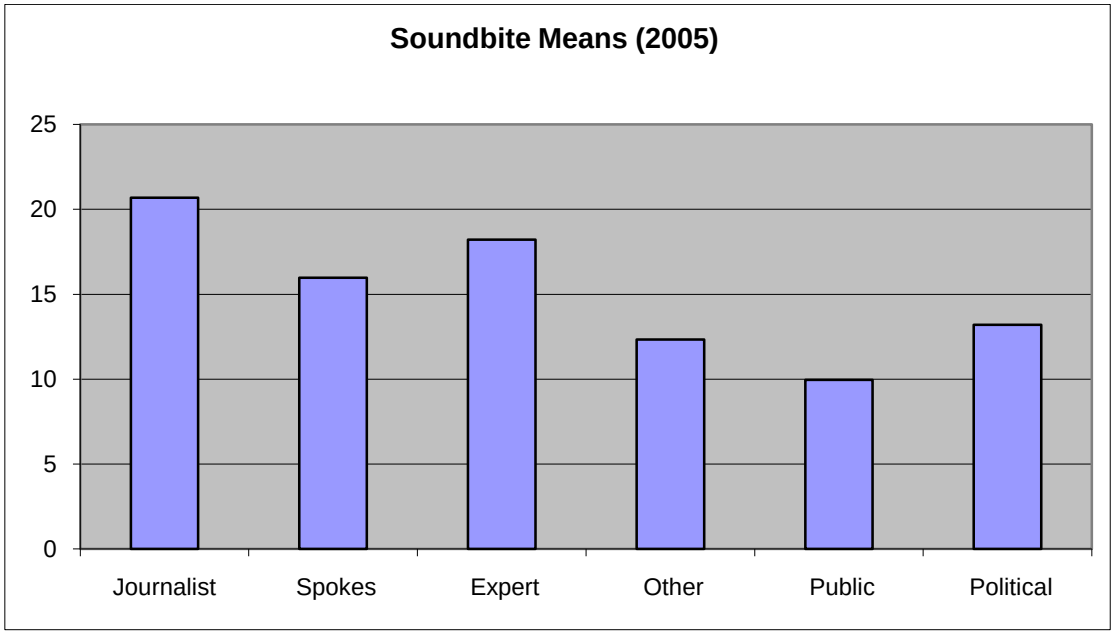


Figure 6.30