



# You are what you read?

How newspaper readership is related to views

BY BOBBY DUFFY AND LAURA ROWDEN

MORI's Social Research Institute works closely with national government, local public services and the not-for-profit sector to understand what works in terms of service delivery, to provide robust evidence for policy makers, and to help politicians understand public priorities.

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# Summary and conclusions

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There is disagreement about the extent to which the media reflect or form opinions. Some believe that they set the agenda but do not tell people what to think about any particular issue, some (often the media themselves) suggest that their power has been overplayed and they mostly just reflect the concerns of the public or other interests, while others suggest they have enormous influence.

It is this last view that has gained most support recently. It is argued that as we have become more isolated from each other the media plays a more important role in informing us. At the same time the distinction between reporting and comment has been blurred, and the scope for shaping opinions is therefore greater than ever. Some believe that newspapers have also become more proactive, picking up or even instigating campaigns on single issues of public concern, such as fuel duty or Clause 28. This study aims to shed some more light on newspaper influence, by examining how responses to a key question – what people see as the most important issues facing Britain – vary between readers of different newspapers.

It may seem strange to focus on the impact of newspapers at a time when most attention is on the new crises they are facing, with the proliferation of news sources, falling advertising revenues and declining circulation. However, we still have one of the largest and most diverse newspaper markets in the world, with over 60% of people (some 35 million) still regularly reading a daily or Sunday newspaper. Newspapers still have a huge reach, and their influence leaks into other sections of the media.

Overall, our analysis suggests that newspapers do have some influence on what people think – but that this depends on the issue. While we see huge variations in concerns between readers of different papers, a lot of this is because of differences in the profile of readers, and the direct relationship with newspaper readership appears to be only really notable with race/immigration, and to an extent crime. This relationship with views of immigration in particular should not be surprising, given that people are more likely to rely on the media where their direct experience is limited, which is likely to be the case for this issue for most people.

Of course, showing a relationship between readership and views does not necessarily show that newspapers are influencing views, rather than people choosing newspapers that reflect already formed opinions. This is just about impossible to prove or disprove using the type of survey data available here, but there is at least some evidence of a newspaper effect when we look at how views vary over time. For example, looking at immigration, while patterns of concern over the last year do share some common features across newspapers, readers of some papers do show different trends.

A further conclusion from looking across issues, is that it is Guardian readers who are most consistently different from the average, even when we control for differences in the demographic profile of readers. Again, it is not possible to say definitively the extent to which this is a cause or effect of reading the paper, but this and other work suggests that it is likely to be a mixture of the two.

### ***The analysis***

This analysis focuses on the top five most important issues facing Britain in 2004. The data shown are derived from an open-ended question which first asks respondents “What is the most important issue facing Britain today?”, followed by the probe question, still open-ended, asking “What are the other important issues facing Britain today?”. The answers are then combined and analysed by people’s regular (three out of five issues) newspaper readership, firstly just by comparing responses, then by more sophisticated analysis techniques.

But one of the most notable patterns is from simple analysis of how concerns vary by readership – which shows those who do not read any newspapers tend to be much closer to the average view, with readers of particular papers showing wide variations. This does imply a newspaper effect – and it could be said if you are really interested in finding out what people think, you may be best off not reading any papers. Of course, this will be partly because the demographic profile of non-readers on key factors such as age and social class is similar to the country as whole – we attempt to control for this type of influence when we look at each of the top five issues in turn.

### ***Defence/terrorism***

The top issue of 2004 was defence/terrorism, and this was a particular concern for readers of the Guardian and Independent, with, for example, 52% of Guardian readers selecting this, compared with a national average of 37%. But, as noted, this could be partly because of differences in the demographic and political profile of readers of different papers. We can control for this using a statistical technique called regression analysis, which identifies which factors are most influential in forming views.

When we run the model for defence/terrorism, the most important factors seem to be political sympathies, with Labour and Liberal Democrat voters more likely to see this as a key issue, while those who are satisfied with Tony Blair are less likely to select it as a priority. Once we have controlled for these types of factors the only newspaper that comes out as being a key driver of its readers’ attitudes is not the Independent, which has been most vocal on the issue of Iraq since the invasion, but the Guardian – Guardian readers are more likely to see defence/terrorism as a key issue, even after controlling for profile differences.

## ***Health care/NHS***

The NHS, on the other hand was a fairly universal concern, with the proportions selecting it fairly constant across newspapers – except for among Star readers, who are less concerned about most issues. The factors most associated with selecting this issue were all demographic and political; no newspapers came out as a key driver of views. It is worth noting that the NHS is more likely to be a concern for those who say they will vote for each party, as opposed to non-voters. This is a key message for politicians in each party – the NHS is a priority for those most likely to vote.

## ***Race/immigration***

Race and immigration were seen as the third most important issues on average in 2004 – but it is here that we see widest variation, with at one extreme nearly half of the mid-market papers' readers, 48% of readers of the Express and 46% of readers of the Daily Mail, saying this is one of the most important issues, compared with 19% of Guardian readers. There are a couple of important caveats to note before we ascribe these differences to sensationalist reporting in the Mail and Express. Firstly, Guardian readers are as far away from the average level of concern as readers of these papers – so in one sense it is not clear who is most out of step. More importantly perhaps, readers of the FT, which is not known for sensationalising stories, are nearly as likely to consider immigration as a key issue facing Britain (44%).

Having said that, there are strong indications that it is on this issue that newspapers have the greatest impact. When we use statistical techniques to identify what the key drivers of opinions are from a range of demographic and behavioural variables (including political views), it is with this issue that newspaper readership come out most clearly as the best explanation of variations.

Even though this is the case, we cannot immediately say that the reporting in papers causes these views, as opposed to people selecting papers that reflect their views. However, there is evidence of at least some direct media effect when we look at trends through 2004. These show some common patterns across the year, with in particular a rise in concern across readers of most papers in March/April when focus was greatest on the possible increase in immigration as a result of EU expansion. This suggests some general media influence, particularly given that we do not see a similar peak among those who do not read any papers. Further, the trends show that levels of concerns do follow a somewhat different pattern for readers of some papers, with readers of the Mail in particular bucking the trend, and seeing peaks of concern at the start and towards the end of the year.

## ***Education/schools***

Education was the next most important issue, and here newspaper readership appears to be much less of a factor than social class, as concern basically runs from “quality dailies” down through “mid-market” to “red-tops”. Again Guardian readers are most likely to be concerned about this issue, even after controlling for key demographic factors, but this is likely to also partly reflect the relatively high proportion of readers who work in the education sector.

## ***Crime/Law & Order***

Crime is the fifth most important issue on average, and here it is Telegraph readers who are most concerned (despite being more likely to live in the relatively low crime East and South East), with Guardian readers least concerned (despite the fact that a third of all Guardian readers live in higher crime London). When we control for variations in profile through statistical techniques, there is still some relationship with newspaper readership (with, for example, Mail readers more likely to be concerned and Guardian readers less likely), but this issue is particularly related to age and ethnicity, with Black people more likely to see this as a key issue, and young people less likely.

## ***What MPs read***

Alan Milburn recently suggested that it will be vital to the success of Labour’s election campaign for the party to pay less attention to the media and get out and meet real people. The analysis here suggests this is only half right. While it appears from our data that the influence of papers across a wide range of subjects can be overplayed, there does remain an important impact on some of the key election issues. And, when we look at the newspaper readership of MPs, if anything it would be better to encourage them to draw from more widely across the range of sources available. For example, two thirds of Labour MPs regularly read the Guardian, but fewer than three in ten read the Telegraph and only around a quarter read the Mail or Sun. Similarly, while around eight in ten Conservative MPs read the Telegraph or Times, fewer than one in five read the Guardian. Politicians should be encouraged out of their Guardian or Telegraph bubbles, to help them understand the large influence newspapers still seem to have on some key opinions.

## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank a number of colleagues for comments and suggestions, in particular Roger Mortimore, Alex Bollen, Sarah Sanderson, Tim Burns, Mike Everett and Bob Worcester.

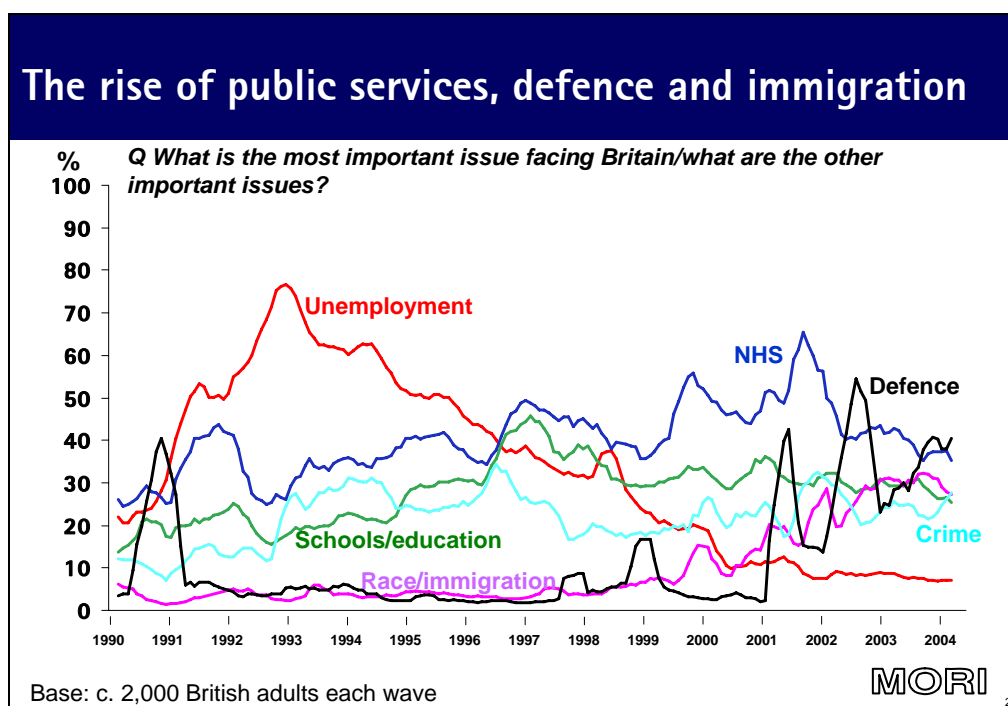
# National priorities

Alan Milburn recently warned against the government basing their priorities on what they see in the news media. This reflects a wider concern about politicians losing touch with people, with high profile exercises like the “Big Conversation” designed to get ministers out of their Westminster and media bubbles to meet real people.

This is clearly good advice and, at first glance, is backed up by new analysis of MORI data that shows how strongly newspaper readership appears to be related to what people think are key issues for government. The analysis is based on over 10,000 interviews conducted between January and October 2004, and is a unique resource for looking at how opinions and readership are related.

In particular MORI regularly asks people what they think the most important issues facing Britain are. We have been tracking this for decades and it provides a key insight into changing priorities.

Trends in priorities over the last fifteen years show concern about unemployment peaking in the early 1990s then declining steadily since. Public services (the NHS and schools/education), on the other hand have been steadily rising over this period. Until around 2000 and 2001, defence/foreign affairs/terrorism and race/immigration remained fairly static priorities with approximately 5% of the population seeing them as important issues facing the country. However, since then both have been increasing in importance, race/immigration in a fairly steady way and defence clearly related to key events, notably September 11<sup>th</sup> and the Iraq war.





Given the large sample sizes built up over time, we can analyse these data in some detail, looking at how views vary by key sub-groups. One of the most important analysis variables is newspaper readership – more than other countries, in Britain it is possible to predict opinions from knowing only what newspaper people read regularly.<sup>1</sup>

It may appear strange to focus on the importance of newspapers now, when many feel they face one of the more severe crises in their history, given the proliferation of news sources, falling advertising revenues and declining circulation, particularly among younger groups. However, at present we still have one of the largest and most diverse newspaper markets in the world, with over 60% of people (some 35 million) still regularly reading a daily or Sunday newspaper. Newspapers still have a huge reach, and as pointed out by Alastair Campbell, their influence bleeds into other elements of the media:

*With 24 hour news you must talk...Usually talk radio is talking about one thing: what's in the papers. So the media are constantly feeding off each other.*<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Do newspapers influence or reflect views?

There is still disagreement about the extent to which the media reflect or form views. This is clearly partly because it is such a difficult process to unpick, with individuals themselves unable to reliably identify where their opinions come from and analysis techniques limited in definitively separating cause from effect. Even with the rich data source we have here it is not possible to say with certainty the extent to which newspaper coverage forms views or reflects existing opinions. To do this we would need to randomly assign people to read different papers in a full experimental design, and track how their attitudes develop, controlling for other factors – not feasible in practice.

Until relatively recently, the most common arguments were that the media may not have the influence that they and others think they do. This is seen, for example, in the “agenda-setting” theory of Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw.<sup>3</sup> From studies following US presidential campaigns, they concluded that while the media were instrumental in determining which issues people focused on, they did not play a significant role in what people thought about these issues. Similar points have been seen in other studies that question the impact of the media on some key opinions and actions, particularly election outcomes.<sup>4</sup> There have also been fairly recent examples of where media coverage does indeed correlate with public opinion, but seems to lag behind it – suggesting that in some cases the media follows rather than leads.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> We have not included the Daily Record or any regional papers such as the Evening Standard as these are not commonly available nationally.

<sup>2</sup> *What the media are doing to our politics* Lloyd, J (2004) London

<sup>3</sup> *The agenda-setting function of the mass media* McCombs, M and Shaw, D (1972) Public Opinion Quarterly

<sup>4</sup> See for example *Does it matter what the papers say*, Curtice and Semetko (1994), which questions, among other things, whether it really was “the Sun wot won it”

<sup>5</sup> See for example *News that matters* Iyengar and Kinder (1987) Chicago

However, many (including McCombs) have started to raise whether this underplays the influence of the media, and more common these days are arguments that the media are the most important influence on many opinions, and the actions of government in particular. These views have been recently put forward in separate studies by John Lloyd and Ian Hargreaves:

*Today the news media appear to many to have become the first estate, able to topple monarchs and turn Parliament into a talking shop which ceases to exist if they turn their backs.<sup>6</sup>*

*Their themes dominate public and private lives. Their definitions of what is right and wrong, true or false, impose themselves on politics and the public domain. Their narratives construct the world we don't immediately experience – which, for nearly all of us, is most of the world... They have gone from being enfolded in or even marginalised by the more powerful institutions of the state...to enfolding them.<sup>7</sup>*

A recent study by Kirsty Milne also suggests that the pressure from falling circulation has forced newspapers to be more proactive, joining with single issue campaigners (on fuel duty, Clause 28, even school dinners) to promote particular causes. Of course this is partly just newspapers picking up on existing concerns, but it is clearly a dynamic system, where their coverage in turn helps develop concerns – as Milne says:

*In each case the protest blew up abruptly, startling politicians with its intensity. In each case there was vigorous newspaper backing, often sliding from editorial endorsement into outright instigation.<sup>8</sup>*

And indeed, there are sufficient indications from a range of previous studies to suggest a significant direct influence on views from press coverage. This has been seen, for example, in work by MORI's media evaluation partners Test Research, where by plotting attitudes against newspaper coverage over time, it appears that views of the NHS, fear of crime and rating of party leaders can all be linked to the amount and slant of coverage.<sup>9</sup> Similarly an ESRC study shows how views of personal economic optimism are influenced by the media, which in turn affect voting intentions.<sup>10</sup> A more extensive study of MORI data and review of other evidence by Lacey and Longman (1997) provide numerous similar examples across a range of issues and from both the UK and the US.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Journalism – truth or dare?* Hargreaves, I (2003) Oxford

<sup>7</sup> Lloyd, J (2004) *ibid*

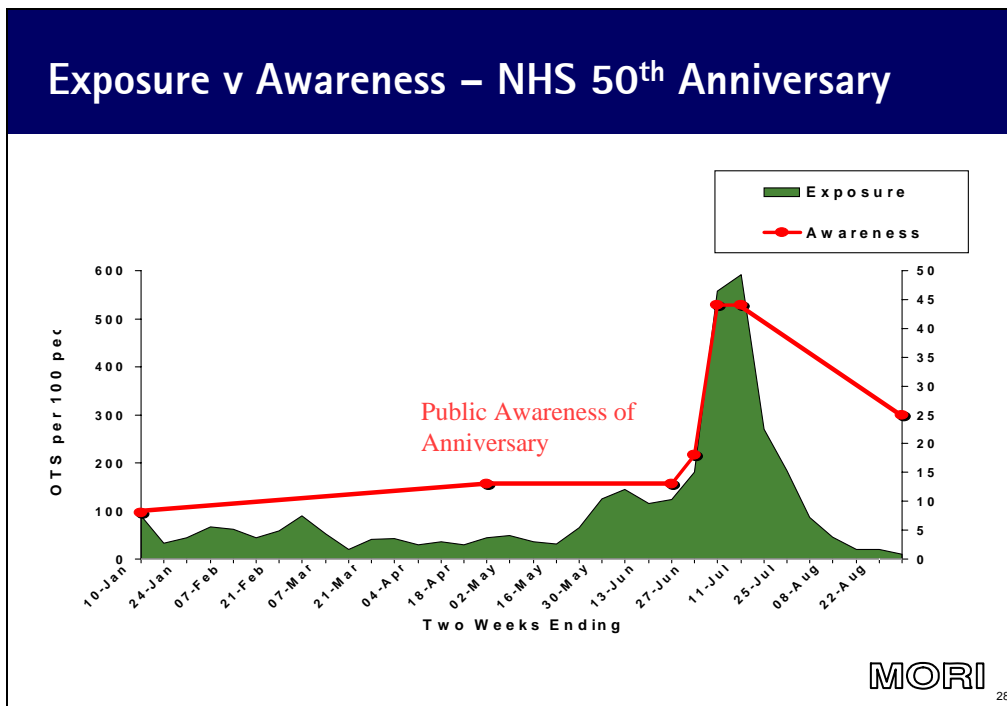
<sup>8</sup> *Manufacturing dissent – single issue protest, the public and the press* Milne, K (2005) London

<sup>9</sup> See Test Research website: [www.testresearch.co.uk](http://www.testresearch.co.uk)

<sup>10</sup> *Press, television and political and economic opinion in Britain*, ESRC 2003

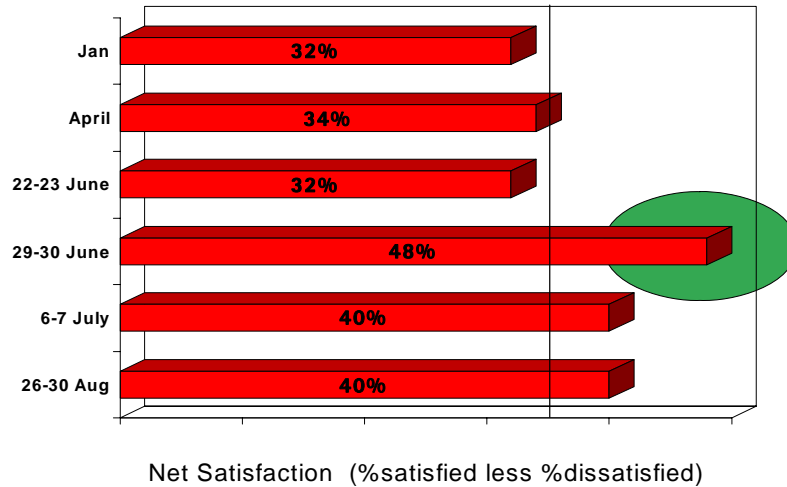
<sup>11</sup> *The press as public educator* Lacey, C and Longman, D (1997)

An example from our own work on attitudes to the NHS illustrates this. The first chart below shows the amount of media exposure of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NHS in 1998. It also shows that awareness of the anniversary closely tracks the level of coverage, peaking in late June and early July. This is clearly not that surprising, but what is more notable is the influence this seems to have on attitudes towards the NHS. At the peak of coverage (which tended to be positive, focusing on the pioneering nature of the service and how health care has advanced) satisfaction levels increased markedly, and then stayed somewhat higher for a few weeks after. This increase in satisfaction clearly does not reflect any sudden improvement in the quality of services, but rather shows the influence the media can have on perceptions.



## Overall Satisfaction with NHS

**Q. How satisfied are you with the way the NHS runs nowadays?**



MORI

Perhaps the most realistic view of media influence is that seen in some more recent theories, which describe a complex dynamic system with various points of feedback between media and audiences, and a number of different messages taken, depending on the subject area, the characteristics of the reader and their level of knowledge of the subject.<sup>12</sup> This picture is supported by the analysis here, with a significant relationship between newspaper readership and views apparent with some issues, but not others.

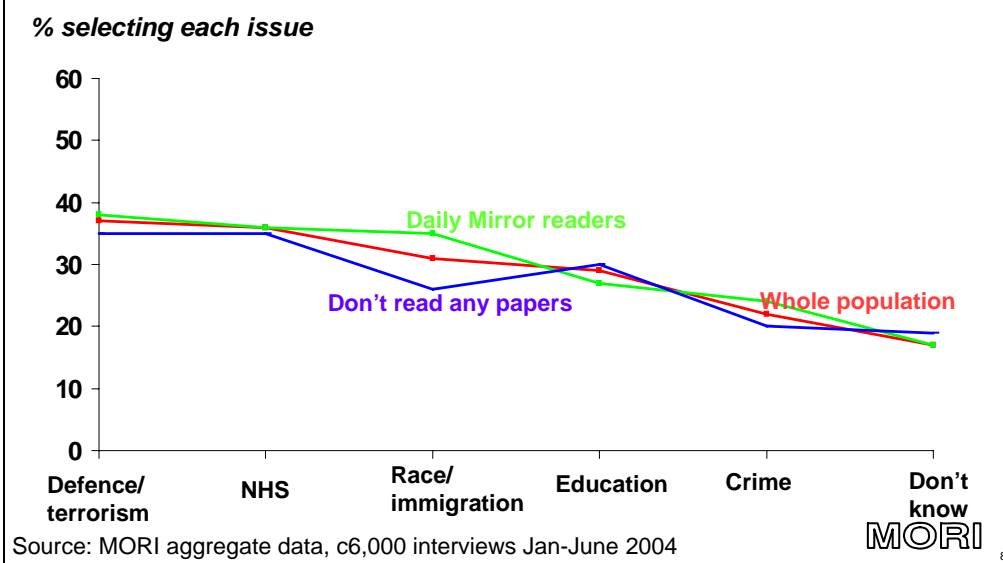
## 2. Non-readers - unbiased?

Having said all that, it could be argued that if a government minister really wants to get in touch with what the country as a whole thinks, she/he should stop reading papers altogether. People who don't regularly read any papers have very similar views on what are the most important issues facing Britain as the whole population, while readers of particular papers show heavy slants in concerns. At a push, you could keep reading the Daily Mirror – those who do are much closer than other readers to the national average on this question, as seen in the chart below.

It is also notable that the only issues that those who do not regularly read newspapers view as less important than the country as a whole are race/immigration. This point, that the influence of newspaper coverage appears to be greatest on this issue, is seen throughout the analysis.

<sup>12</sup> See for example *Television and Society* Abercrombie, N (1996), Cambridge, Polity Press

## Don't read anything...



### 3. The top five issues

This section looks at these top five most important issues in more detail, examining how views vary between the readers of different papers.

#### 3.1 2004 – a focus on security

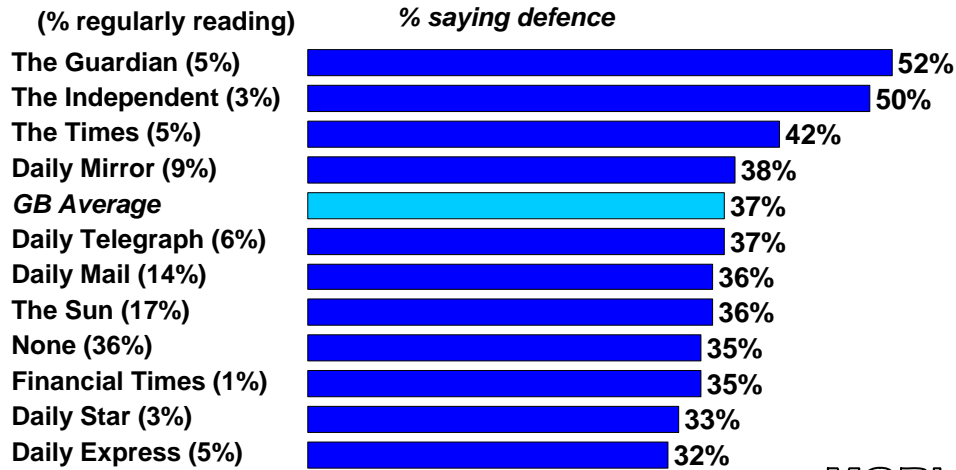
Defence, foreign affairs and terrorism were the top overall concerns last year. But these were much more of a focus for readers of the Guardian and the Independent, as seen in the chart below. Of course, this will to an extent reflect the characteristics of readers, and their pre-existing concerns, as outlined above. So, for example, this variation in concern about the war is likely to be partly because the Guardian and Independent are the most popular papers for Liberal Democrat voters, although Guardian readers are more likely to support Labour (half of Guardian-reading voters do).

As we will see in later chapters, when these and other demographic factors are controlled for using statistical techniques, there still remains a “newspaper effect”, but this is only really the case for Guardian readers.

The percentages in brackets in the chart show the proportion who say they regularly read each paper – which emphasises how low the penetration is for some individual papers, particularly the quality dailies, and how high it is for the Mail and the Sun in particular.

## Defence/Foreign Affairs/International Terrorism

Q What is the most important issue facing Britain/what are the other important issues?



Source: MORI aggregate data c10,000 interviews, Jan-Oct 2004

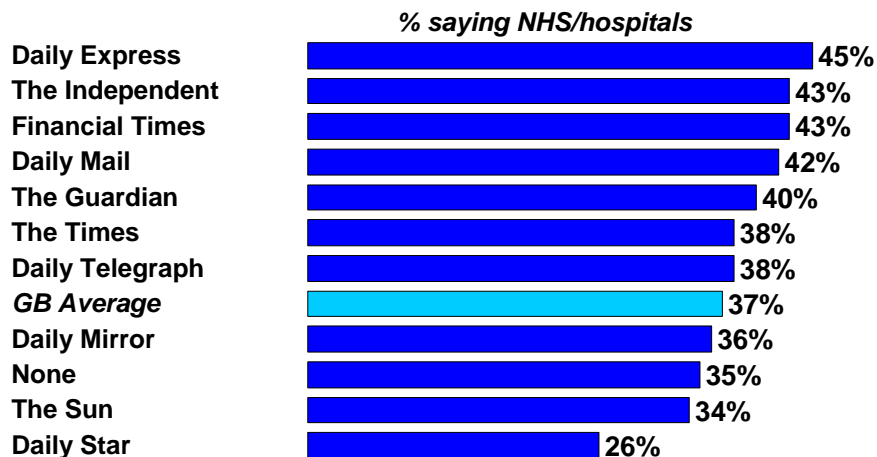
MORI <sup>3</sup>

### 3.2 The NHS – a universal concern

The NHS closely follows the war/terrorism as a priority, and is seen as a key concern by readers of just about all papers. This is slightly less true for Star readers – but they are generally less likely to view any issues as important. Again, we are not saying this is caused by reading the Star, as it will partly reflect the other characteristics of Star readers (covered in the next chapter). Overall there does not seem to be much influence on views of the NHS from newspaper readership – it is a fairly universal focus.

## NHS/Hospitals

Q What is the most important issue facing Britain/what are the other important issues?

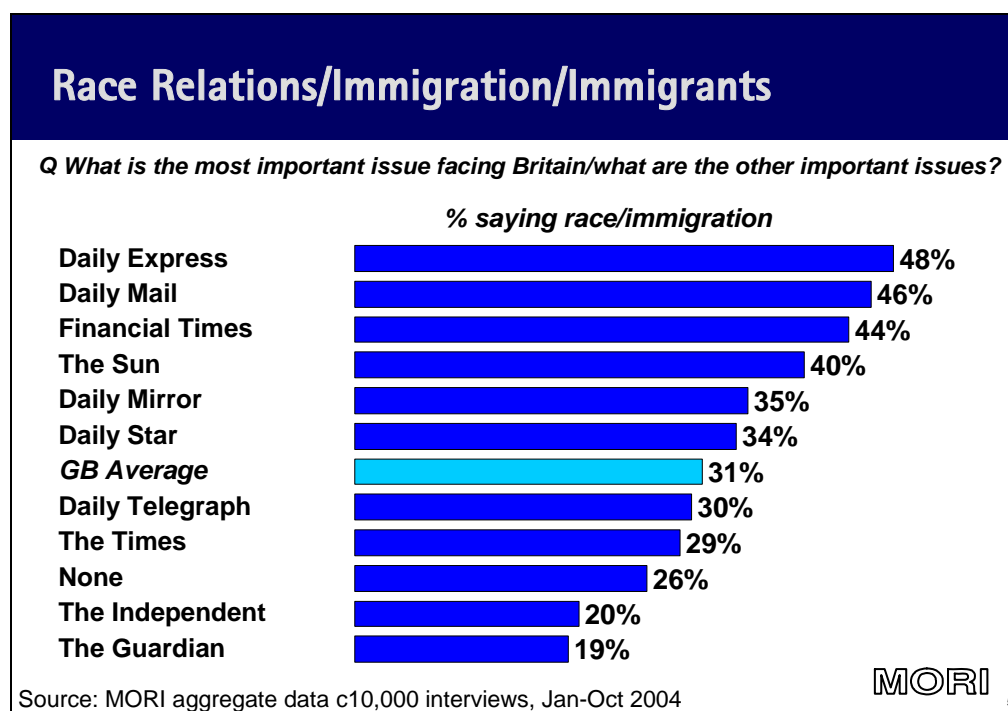


Source: MORI aggregate data c10,000 interviews, Jan-Oct 2004

MORI <sup>4</sup>

### 3.3 Race and immigration – the most polarised opinions

The variation in views between readers of different papers is clearest on race relations and immigration. These are the most important issues facing the country for readers of the Express, the Mail and the Sun – but Guardian and Independent readers are less than half as likely to choose these as important.



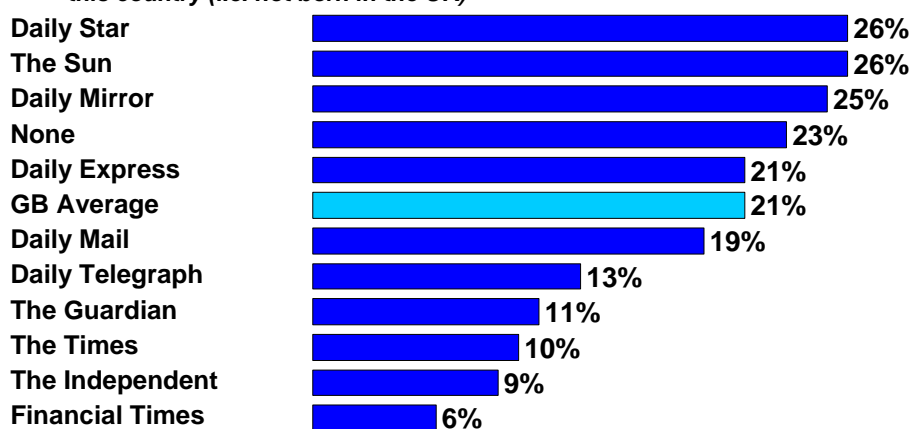
While not providing any evidence of a direct causal link, this does add weight to the view that the negatively slanted coverage of asylum and immigration in certain newspapers<sup>13</sup> has had a real influence on attitudes. However, it is worth noting a couple of caveats. Firstly, Guardian readers are nearly as far from the average view on this issue as Mail and Express readers – although they are much closer to the views held by those who do not read newspapers at all, which can be thought of as a more useful “control” group for the influence of newspapers. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the high level of concern among FT readers suggests that this is not just all media hype – this paper is not known for its sensationalist reporting.

We have also asked what proportion of the population people think are immigrants, and it is possible to look at this by readership (as seen in the chart below, using data from 2003). The first point to note is that people in general overestimate the numbers – the average estimate is three times the actual level (21% compared with around 7%). But the pattern by readership is not what we might expect from the level of concern. In particular, overestimation tends to be most associated with readers of red-top papers, rather than mid-market readers, who are most likely to be concerned. This suggests that other factors such as social class and level of education could be more important than readership in explaining these particular variations.

<sup>13</sup> See for example ICAR’s study of three weeks of newspaper articles in 2004

## Proportion of immigrants

Q. What percentage of the British population do you think are immigrants to this country (i.e. not born in the UK)



Source: MORI 2,057 interviews, January 2003

MORI <sup>20</sup>

However, the point remains that when we use statistical techniques in later sections to identify which factors are most associated with viewing race and immigration as top issues, newspaper readership is among the key drivers of concerns. This has also been echoed in more straightforward studies, where people are asked directly what affects their views. As noted above, the results from these need to be treated with a good deal of caution, as people find it notoriously difficult to identify what has formed their views on issues such as this.<sup>14</sup> However, findings from our study for Stonewall in 2001 show that people themselves do identify the importance of the media in forming their views of refugees/asylum seekers and other minority groups, with the second and third most important influences seen to be television and newspapers (after parents, but well ahead of personal experience and friends).<sup>15</sup> This is not surprising, given that personal or even indirect experience is likely to be very limited.

### 3.4 Education – a middle class issue

There is less variation in views of the importance of education, although again Guardian and Independent readers see it as more of a concern. This will of course partly reflect that readers of some papers are more likely to have children – but, for example, Guardian readers with children are still much more likely to view education as key, with 63% saying it is the most important issue facing Britain, compared with 37% of those with children in the country as a whole. Of course this will also to an extent reflect the relatively large proportion of Guardian readers who work in the education sector, who are naturally likely to view this as a key concern.

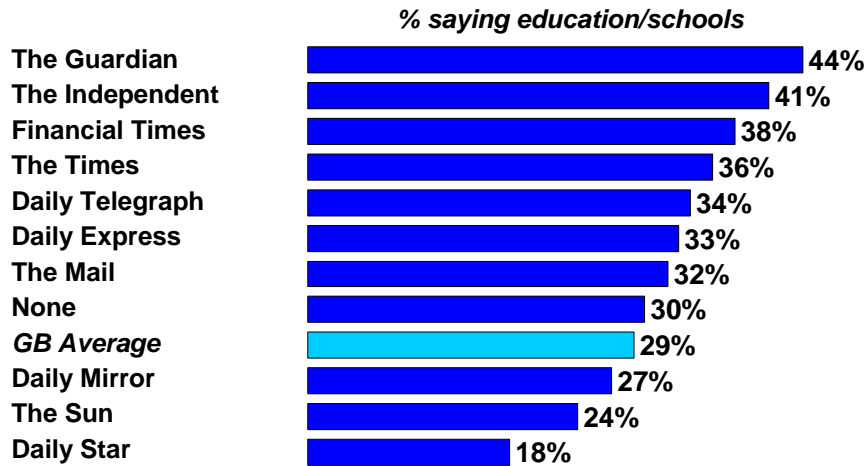
<sup>14</sup> *The diffusion process: who leads whom to think what about politics in Britain?* Worcester, R (1995)

<sup>15</sup> See [www.mori.com](http://www.mori.com) or [www.stonewall.org.uk](http://www.stonewall.org.uk)



## Education/Schools

Q What is the most important issue facing Britain/what are the other important issues?



Source: MORI aggregate data c10,000 interviews, Jan-Oct 2004

MORI <sub>6</sub>

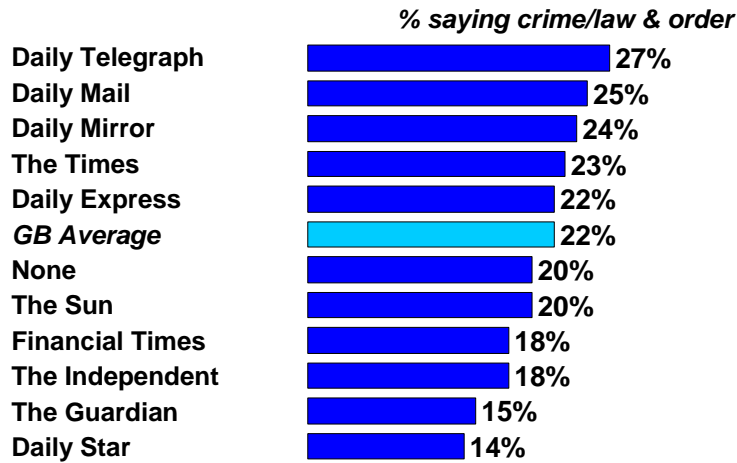
### 3.5 Crime – fear not reality

Crime is the fifth most important issue on average, and here it is Telegraph readers who are most concerned (despite being more likely to live in the relatively low crime East and South East), with Guardian readers least concerned (despite the fact that a third of all Guardian readers live in higher crime London).<sup>16</sup> However, as we will see in later sections, this issue is particularly related to age and ethnicity, with Black people more likely to see this as a key issue, but young people less likely.

<sup>16</sup> Recorded crime data for burglary and muggings, Home Office 2004

## Crime/Law and Order/Violence/Vandalism

Q What is the most important issue facing Britain/what are the other important issues?



Source: MORI aggregate data c10,000 interviews, Jan-Oct 2004

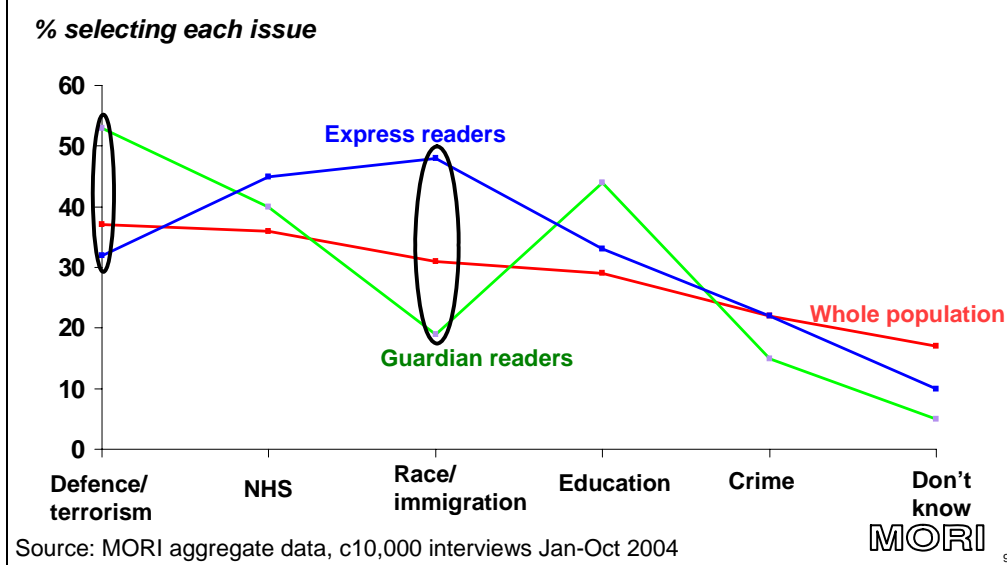
MORI <sub>7</sub>

### 3.6 Comparing the extremes

The huge divergence in views on certain issues between readers of different newspapers can be best seen when we bring the ends of the spectrum together in one chart, as shown below. Guardian and Express readers are not in fact that different in their focus on the NHS and crime, but Guardian readers are much more concerned about defence and terrorism, while the biggest gap is on race and immigration.

Of course this will be partly explained by who reads different papers (which we look at in the next section), but the scale of the differences suggest there is at least some direct newspaper effect.

## Guardian and Express readers



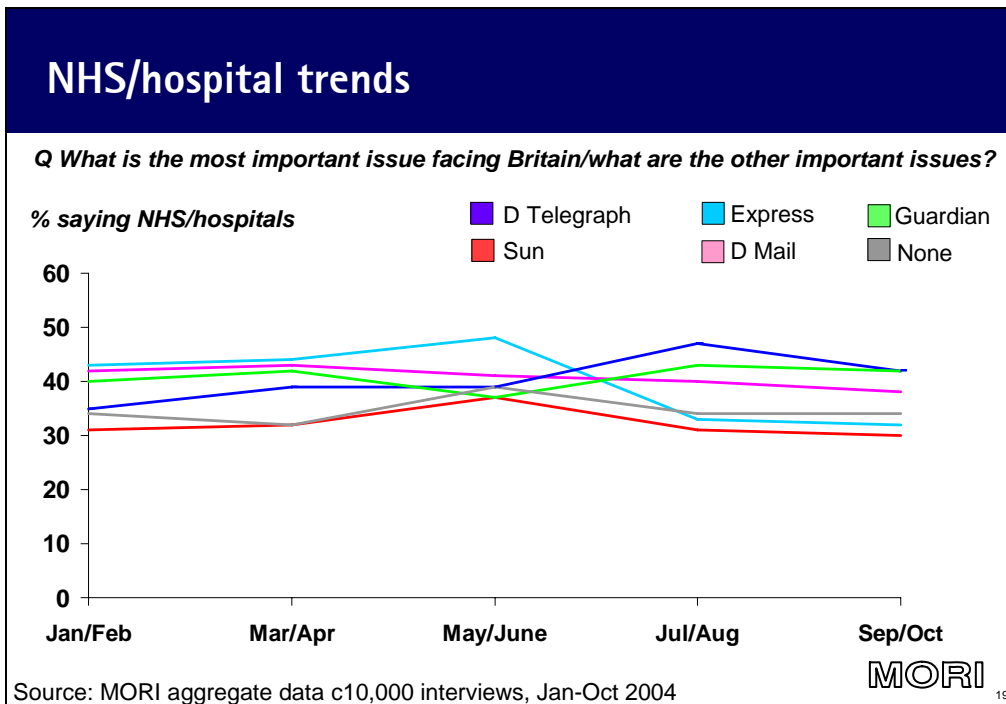
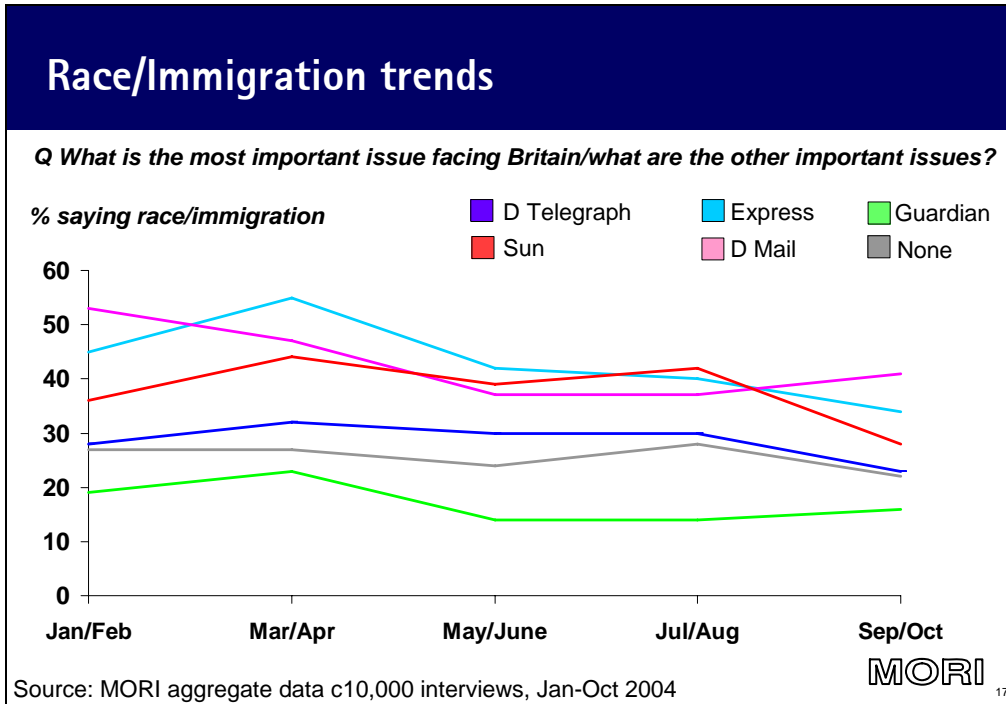
### 4. Recent trends – influence depends on the issue

The two charts below show how concerns about the NHS and race/immigration varied throughout the year between readers of different newspapers. Comparing these two patterns gives some indication of the impact of newspapers as a whole and individually. Looking firstly at race/immigration, the chart suggests that there are some common patterns between readers of different newspapers, with, in particular, concern about immigration greatest for most readers in March/April – when there was most focus on the potential scale of immigration from new EU countries. This does suggest that there is some general media and newspaper influence, particularly given that we do not see the same pattern among those who do not regularly read newspapers, who in fact remain very consistent in their views through the year.

Further, some papers follow different patterns, with the Mail particularly bucking the trend and seeing upturns in concern at the beginning and then again towards the end of the year. This suggests not only a general media effect, but some specific influence from individual papers.

This contrasts with the patterns seen on the NHS, which are much more consistent throughout the year, with smaller variations between newspapers and over time. This again suggests that media influence will depend on the issue, with issues that are furthest from everyday experience more subject to any newspaper affects. As Martin Kettle points out, there is an interaction between the public, politicians and the media that seems particularly powerful for issues related to immigration:

*The hardening of views against immigration certainly coincides with an increase in media coverage, which in turn has encouraged an increase in government pronouncements on the subject. Since most of these pronouncements are negative in content and tone...and are in turn reported in even more pronounced negative terms in many media, it is not surprising that attitudes have shifted. The public, the politicians and the press all affect one another. In this case, it takes three to tango.<sup>17</sup>*



<sup>17</sup> Martin Kettle in the Guardian 8<sup>th</sup> February 2005

# Who reads what

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The previous sections show that concerns do vary markedly between readers of different newspapers. However, this could be as much to do with differences in the profile of readers of different papers as any influence from the newspaper itself. This section therefore simply presents the profile of readers of different newspapers on key political and demographic factors, before we go on to control for these differences in the next section to attempt to identify an independent “newspaper effect”.

## 1. Voting and satisfaction with the government

While voting intention follows the patterns you might expect (with for example the Daily Mirror having the most regular readers who vote Labour and the Daily Telegraph the most readers voting Conservative), large proportions of readers do not vote the way you might predict, with for example 27% of Express readers and 21% of Mail readers saying they intend to vote Labour.

Similar points have been seen in other studies.<sup>18</sup> In particular, as suggested by more recent theories of media impact, people do not always get the messages from the media that the media are trying to convey. Most famously, in a MORI survey on the weekend following the 1979 election day, regular readers of the Sun were asked which party their newspaper supported. The results showed that a third thought the paper supported the Conservatives, a third said Labour and a third said they didn’t know – despite the front page headline on polling day being VOTE TORY. More recent elections show readers are perhaps getting better at picking up on stances, but there are still significant proportions who do not get the message.

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<b><i>Newspaper readership by voting intention</i></b>			
	<b>Labour</b>	<b>Conservative</b>	<b>Liberal Democrat</b>
<b>GB (%)</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Daily Mirror (%)</b>	60	16	17
<b>Star (%)</b>	53	18	15
<b>Guardian (%)</b>	46	6	37
<b>Sun (%)</b>	41	32	13
<b>Independent (%)</b>	35	13	39
<b>Express (%)</b>	27	46	17
<b>Times (%)</b>	27	39	28
<b>Financial Times (%)</b>	25	43	24
<b>Mail (%)</b>	21	55	16
<b>Daily Telegraph (%)</b>	16	63	16
<b>None (%)</b>	35	28	26

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Source: MORI aggregates 2004. Base: c9,000 interviews with GB residents 18+

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<sup>18</sup> Worcester *ibid*

Satisfaction with the Government is, perhaps surprisingly, highest amongst Guardian readers, closely followed by Daily Mirror, Star, Independent and FT readers – although significantly more are dissatisfied than satisfied in each case. There is then a fairly significant break to the Sun, with Daily Telegraph and Mail readers most dissatisfied with the government.

<b><i>Newspaper readership by satisfaction with government</i></b>			
	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Net satisfied</b>
	%	%	±%
<b>GB (%)</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>-34</b>
<b>Guardian (%)</b>	36	58	-22
<b>Daily Mirror (%)</b>	34	57	-23
<b>Star (%)</b>	34	57	-23
<b>Independent (%)</b>	33	62	-29
<b>Financial Times (%)</b>	33	62	-29
<b>Sun (%)</b>	27	61	-35
<b>Times (%)</b>	28	66	-39
<b>Express (%)</b>	24	70	-46
<b>Mail (%)</b>	19	76	-58
<b>Daily Telegraph (%)</b>	19	77	-58
<b>None (%)</b>	30	57	-27

*Source: MORI aggregates 2004. Base: c9,000 interviews with GB residents 18+*

## **2. The demographic profile of readers**

The age profile of readers is much as you might expect, and is in line with findings from the National Readership Survey.<sup>19</sup> The Daily Star and the Sun have the highest proportion of readers aged 15-24, while a quarter of Daily Mail and The Daily Mirror readers and a third of Daily Express and Daily Telegraph readers are aged over 65. The Financial Times has the highest proportion of readers aged 25-34, while readers of the Times cover a fairly even spread of age groups, over the age of 25.

<sup>19</sup> See NRS average issue readership data from October 2003 to September 2004. There are differences of 5-6 percentage points on some demographic characteristics, but this will be partly explained by the differences in definitions of readership.

<b>Newspaper readership by age</b>						
	<b>15-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>65+</b>
<b>GB (%)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Daily Star (%)</b>	28	27	20	12	7	6
<b>The Sun (%)</b>	25	25	17	13	9	11
<b>The Daily Mirror (%)</b>	16	17	14	15	15	24
<b>The Guardian (%)</b>	14	24	19	19	12	13
<b>The Independent (%)</b>	12	22	22	22	12	10
<b>Financial Times (%)</b>	12	31	22	16	9	9
<b>The Times (%)</b>	11	22	17	17	15	18
<b>Daily Express (%)</b>	9	11	15	18	16	31
<b>Daily Mail (%)</b>	9	14	16	18	17	26
<b>Daily Telegraph (%)</b>	7	11	13	15	19	35
<b>None (%)</b>	16	20	22	17	10	15

*Source: MORI aggregates 2004. Base: c10,000 interviews with GB residents 15+*

Men are more likely than women to say they regularly read each paper, except the Daily Mail. The biggest difference between the proportion of male and female readers is seen with the Financial Times and the Daily Star – more than twice as many men than women read these papers. Again these patterns are very much in line with what we see in the National Readership Survey.

<b>Newspaper readership by sex</b>		
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>GB (%)</b>	49	51
<b>Financial Times (%)</b>	72	28
<b>Daily Star (%)</b>	70	30
<b>The Times (%)</b>	59	41
<b>The Independent (%)</b>	59	41
<b>Daily Telegraph (%)</b>	56	44
<b>The Guardian (%)</b>	56	44
<b>The Sun (%)</b>	55	45
<b>Daily Express (%)</b>	51	49
<b>The Daily Mirror (%)</b>	51	49
<b>Daily Mail (%)</b>	48	53
<b>None (%)</b>	45	55

*Source: MORI aggregates 2004. Base: c10,000 interviews with GB residents 15+*

The three tiers of the newspaper market are very clear when we look at the class profile of readers. As you might expect, the large majority of “quality daily” readers belong to white collar social classes, ABC1. In fact, the class profile of each is very similar. “Mid-market” Daily Mail and Daily Express readers also have very similar class profiles, and actually come from a fairly even spread of social classes. “Red-top” readers (of the Daily Mirror, the Sun and the Daily Star) again have pretty similar class profiles, and have much greater proportions belonging to social classes DE.

<b>Newspaper readership by social class</b>				
	AB	C1	C2	DE
<b>GB (%)</b>	24	27	21	28
<b>The Times (%)</b>	53	30	8	8
<b>Financial Times (%)</b>	53	33	8	6
<b>Daily Telegraph (%)</b>	52	30	10	9
<b>The Guardian (%)</b>	52	31	7	10
<b>The Independent (%)</b>	46	36	8	10
<b>Daily Mail (%)</b>	26	33	21	19
<b>Daily Express (%)</b>	23	32	24	21
<b>The Daily Mirror (%)</b>	11	23	27	39
<b>The Sun (%)</b>	8	22	29	41
<b>Daily Star (%)</b>	5	17	35	42
<b>None (%)</b>	22	28	21	29

*Source: MORI aggregates 2004. Base: c10,000 interviews with GB residents 15+*

An above average proportion of Telegraph and Times readers live in the East and the South East. The Guardian, the Independent and particularly the Financial Times have a high proportion of London readers. The highest proportion of Daily Mirror and Star readers live in the North, while Sun readers are actually the most evenly spread across the country.

<b>Newspaper readership by region</b>								
	S. West	East/South East	London	Midlands	Wales	Yorks & Humber	North	Scotland
<b>GB (%)</b>	9	23	13	17	5	9	16	9
<b>Daily Telegraph (%)</b>	12	36	13	15	3	8	12	2
<b>Daily Express (%)</b>	9	24	9	13	4	11	22	8
<b>Daily Mail (%)</b>	9	29	15	16	4	6	16	5
<b>The Times (%)</b>	9	32	23	14	3	6	11	3
<b>Financial Times (%)</b>	8	23	40	12	2	6	6	5
<b>The Sun (%)</b>	7	22	14	18	4	9	14	12
<b>The Guardian (%)</b>	7	23	33	11	3	6	13	3
<b>The Independent (%)</b>	7	26	31	13	3	5	12	3
<b>The Daily Mirror (%)</b>	6	18	16	14	7	11	25	2
<b>Daily Star (%)</b>	4	13	7	12	5	18	32	9
<b>None (%)</b>	10	25	9	19	6	9	17	5

*Source: MORI aggregates 2004. Base: c10,000 interviews with GB residents 15+*



# Explaining why attitudes vary

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Given the large differences in the demographic profile of readers of different newspapers, we need to take the analysis a bit further to help understand the extent to which it is these profile differences or choice of newspaper that is related to the wide variations in attitudes.

We can unpick the relative influence of different factors on views using a statistical technique called regression analysis. This helps identify what factors are most related, controlling for other influences – that is, what would the effect of newspaper readership be if we made the profile of all readers the same?<sup>20</sup> As noted earlier, this cannot identify a direction of causality, but it does give a very good indication of likely levels of influence, particularly when we look across different issues.

With this type of regression approach the amount of variation explained by the models is often low, and this is the case here, with values typically around 5-9%. This leaves a great deal of variation not explained by any of the fairly extensive list demographic and behavioural variables included in the analysis, and suggests that there is a strong influence from values and beliefs not captured here. However, each of the relationships considered below is still statistically significant and worth noting.

## 1. Defence/Foreign Affairs/Terrorism

Voting intention comes out strongly as a predictor of whether someone will view defence/foreign affairs/terrorism as important issues facing the country, as shown in the chart below. The chart shows those factors that are most associated with choosing this as a key issue (in green on the left), and those that are least associated (in red on the right). The chart also gives an indication of the strength of each relationship, with the “odds ratio” showing the chances of each group thinking that this is a key issue facing Britain. In general terms, the higher this number the better the chances are that someone in this group will select this issue, and the lower the number the lower the chances.

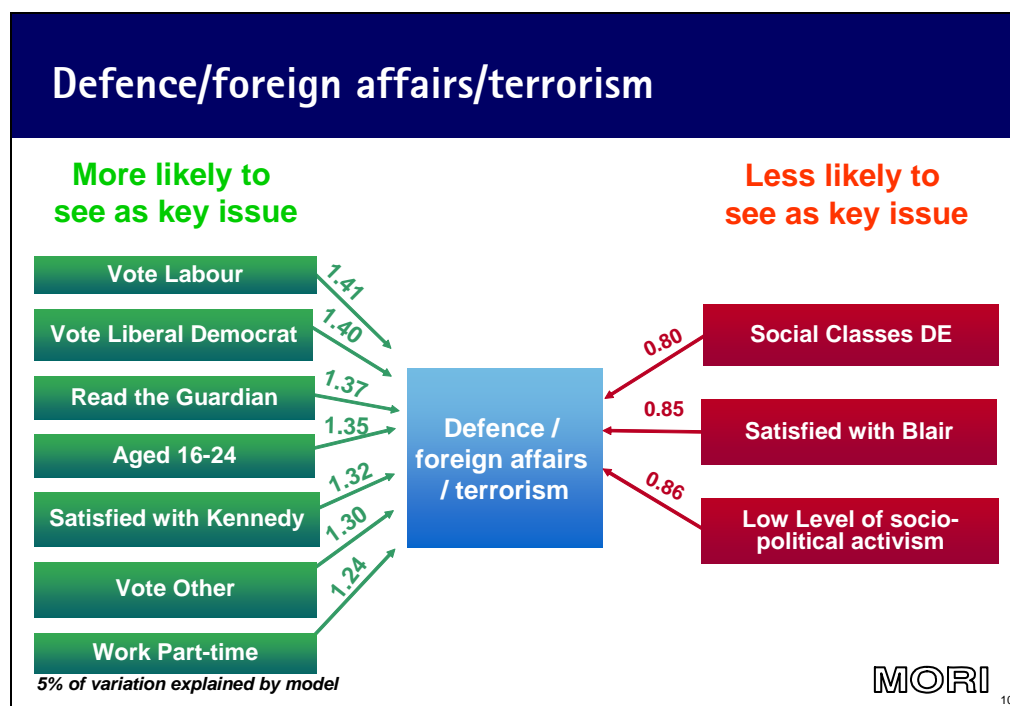
So in this case, we can see both Labour and Liberal Democrat voters are more likely to see defence as a key issue. In contrast, those who are satisfied with Tony Blair are less likely to choose this as a key concern – underlining how this issue polarises Labour support.

Overall, there is a fairly clear picture of defence/foreign affairs being a key concern of those who are younger (16-24 in particular), in higher social classes (not in social classes DE) and more politically active or aware (not those who score low on our socio-political activism scale).

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<sup>20</sup> The regression approach used is binary logistic regression, as the dependent variables being examined are dichotomous (ie whether defence is selected as a key national priority or not).

The Guardian is the only newspaper to come out in the model, with Guardian readers more likely to see this as a key problem for the country, even *after* controlling for differences in the profile of readers.

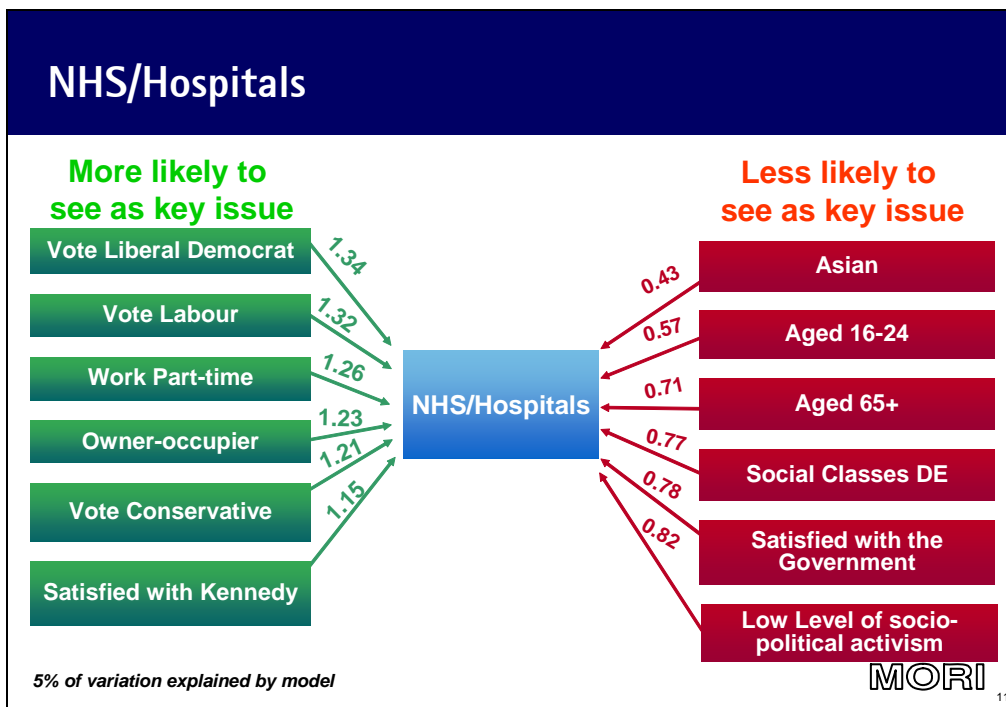


## 2. NHS/Hospitals

Again, voting intention is a key predictor of viewing the NHS/hospitals as an important issue facing the country. Indeed, those who say they will vote for each of the three main parties are all likely to view this as a major issue, in contrast to non-voters. This is a key message for politicians in each party – concern about the NHS is highest among those more likely to actually vote, irrespective of party allegiances.

Asian groups are less likely to highlight the NHS as a particular issue, which echoes our tracking research on attitudes to the NHS, which shows generally lower levels of dissatisfaction among Asian residents. Age is also a strong predictor, with those at either end of the age range (aged 16-24 or over 65) less likely to view the NHS as a key issue. It may initially seem surprising that older groups do not focus more on the NHS, given their higher levels of use – but we generally find they are the most satisfied with NHS services, which is likely to be at least partly explained by lower expectations.

Once we control for demographics, political views and behaviour there is no relationship between newspaper readership and whether people see NHS/Hospitals as key issues. This reflects what we saw in the first chapter, and suggests that there is no independent impact from variations in the amount and slant of coverage of NHS issues in different papers.

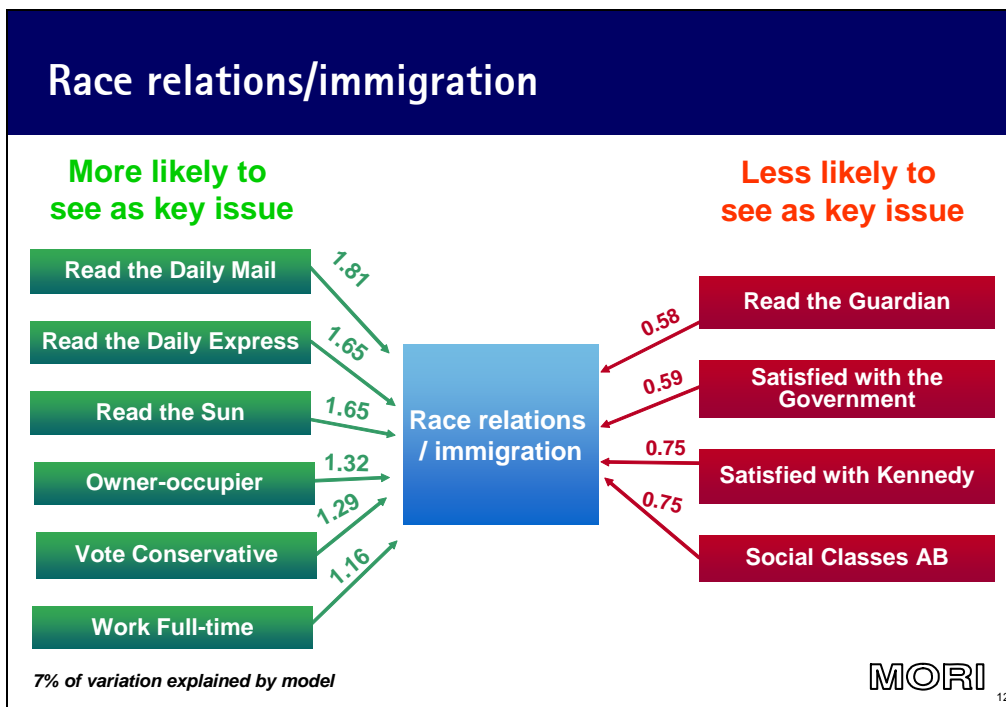


### 3. Race Relations/Immigration

In contrast, newspaper readership is very clearly related to whether or not race relations/immigration are seen as important issues, even after controlling for demographic differences. The four most important predictors are all whether people read particular newspapers – Daily Mail, Daily Express and Sun readers are all more likely to raise this as an issue, while Guardian readers are less likely.

Satisfaction with the Government also comes out as a strong predictor, with those satisfied less likely to select this issue. Those from higher social classes are also less likely to see this as a key national concern, which reflects higher levels of trust and support for diversity seen among these groups in other studies.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, Conservative voters, owner-occupiers and those who work full-time are more likely to be concerned about race/immigration, even after controlling for other profile factors.

<sup>21</sup> *Life satisfaction and trust in others*, Duffy, B (2004) MORI

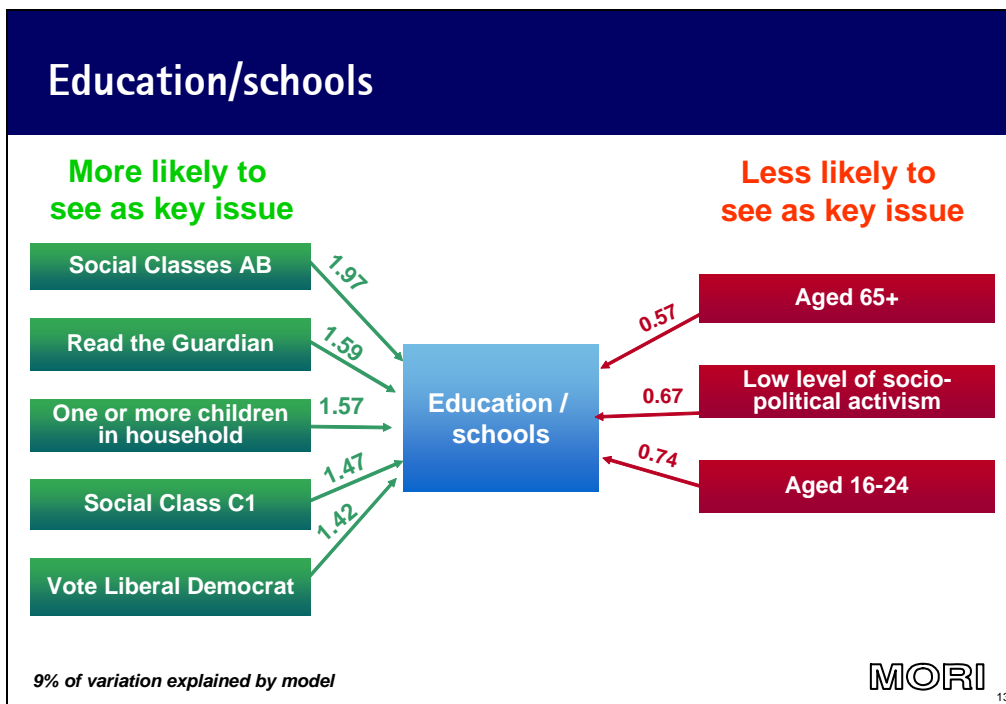


## 4. Education/Schools

Belonging to social classes AB comes out as the single strongest predictor of seeing education/schools as a key issue, which is a familiar pattern from other studies where education is generally more of a focus for higher social classes.

The Guardian is again the only newspaper to feature in this model as a strong predictor. In fact, reading the Guardian is as strong an influence on whether people see education/schools as a key issue as having a child in the household. As noted earlier, this is likely to at least partly reflect the occupational profile of Guardian readers and in particular the relatively large proportion who work in the education sector.

Age is also strongly related, with again the extremes of the age range less likely to see education as a key issue. It is understandable that older groups will have a less of a focus on education, but it may seem more difficult to explain for younger people. However, this is likely to reflect the fact that many will have just finished full-time education, and do not have their own children yet, and so are more focused on work (we generally find that concerns about unemployment are highest among these younger age groups).



## 5. Crime/Law and Order

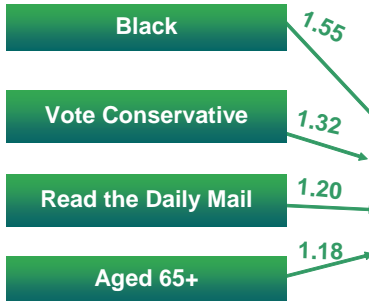
Black respondents are more likely to see crime as a key national issue, which echoes findings from our work in a number of local areas.<sup>22</sup> Age is also a very important predictor of views on crime issues, with those aged 16-34 less likely to say crime and law and order are key problems in Britain. This is again seen in other studies, as while younger age groups are more likely to be victims of crime, the experience has less impact on them than older groups. So conversely, while those aged 65 are significantly less likely to be victims, they are more likely to see crime as an issue.

After race/immigration, newspaper readership seems to have the strongest relationship with views of crime. Even after controlling for profile differences, readers of the Mail are more likely to see this as a key issue, while Guardian and Sun readers are less likely.

<sup>22</sup> See for example *Education and Minorities* Duffy, B (2003) MORI

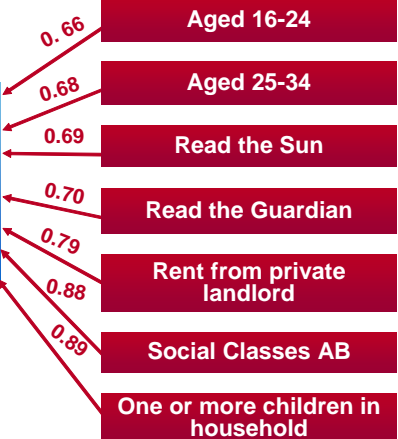
# Crime/law and order/violence/vandalism

More likely to see as key issue



Crime / law and order / violence / vandalism

Less likely to see as key issue



5% of variation explained by model

MORI

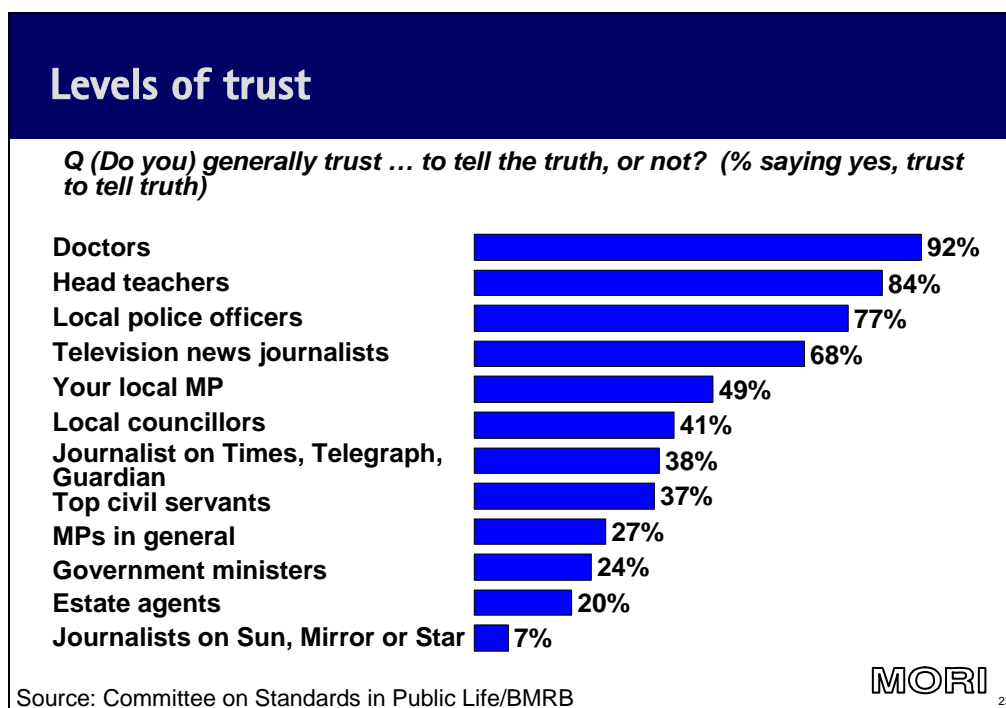
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# Trust and influence

Despite calls to focus less on what the media say and make contact with real people, in practice, the Government will continue to pay just as much attention to media coverage as they ever have – and rightly so. The influence of the media on what people see as priorities can be significant.

## 1. Not trusted – but influential

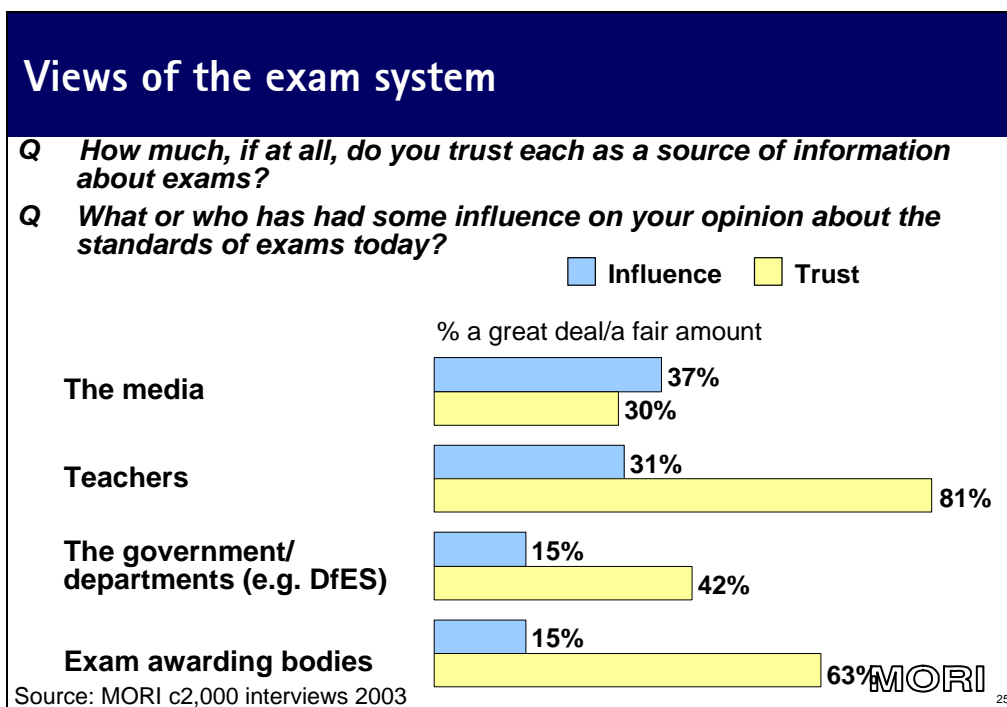
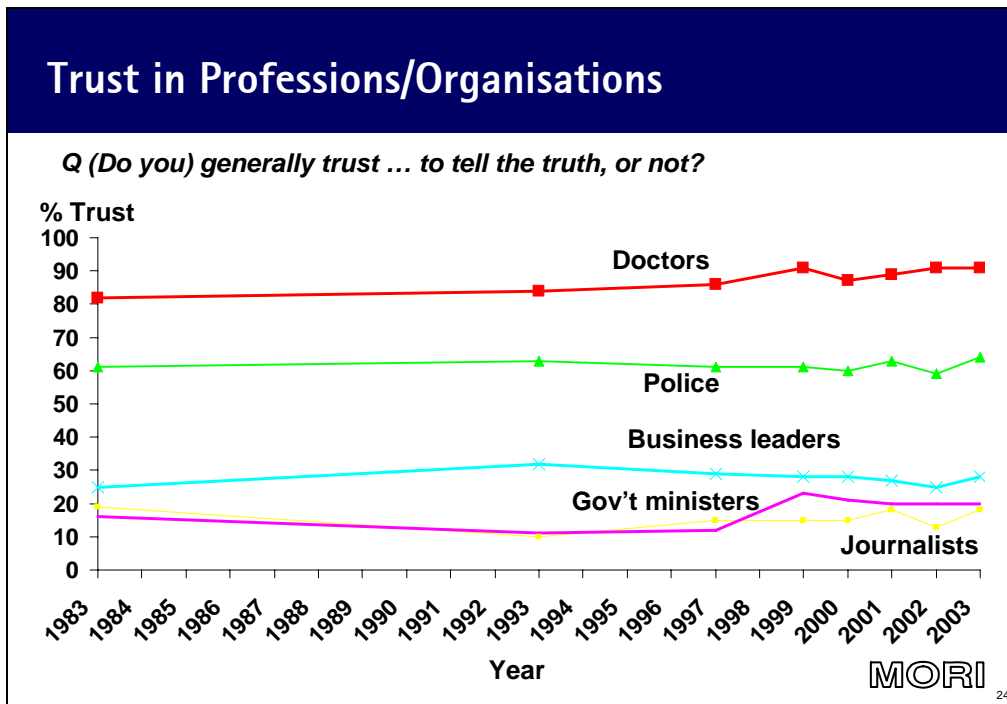
In this, it is important to note the distinction between trust and influence, and that the analysis seen here does not contradict other work that shows levels of trust in the media being as low as ever. For example, the recent report from the Graham Committee on Standards in Public Life shows journalists are among the least trusted professions, with newspaper journalists much less trusted than television news journalists, and a clear distinction between red-top and quality daily journalists.<sup>23</sup>



But this is nothing new, and people have always viewed journalists with a good deal of suspicion, as seen in years of MORI data (shown in the first chart below). So it is not surprising that, for example, when we asked people who they trust to provide accurate information on the exam system (second chart), the media came last, behind teachers, exam bodies and even the government departments. But when we asked who has had most influence on their views on exams, it was the media that people were most likely to choose, ahead of the more trusted sources – a result of the sheer weight of media coverage. As noted earlier, we need to be

<sup>23</sup> *Survey of public attitudes towards conduct in public life* Committee on Standards in Public Life, see [www.public-standards.gov.uk](http://www.public-standards.gov.uk)

Careful interpreting the results from any question that directly asks how views are formed, as people do not necessarily know. However, a forthcoming qualitative study by MORI shows that, if anything, people over-claim the influence of direct experience (as that seems most powerful and legitimate), and in fact, when we probe deeper through careful questioning, the media has a greater impact on views than people generally want to admit.



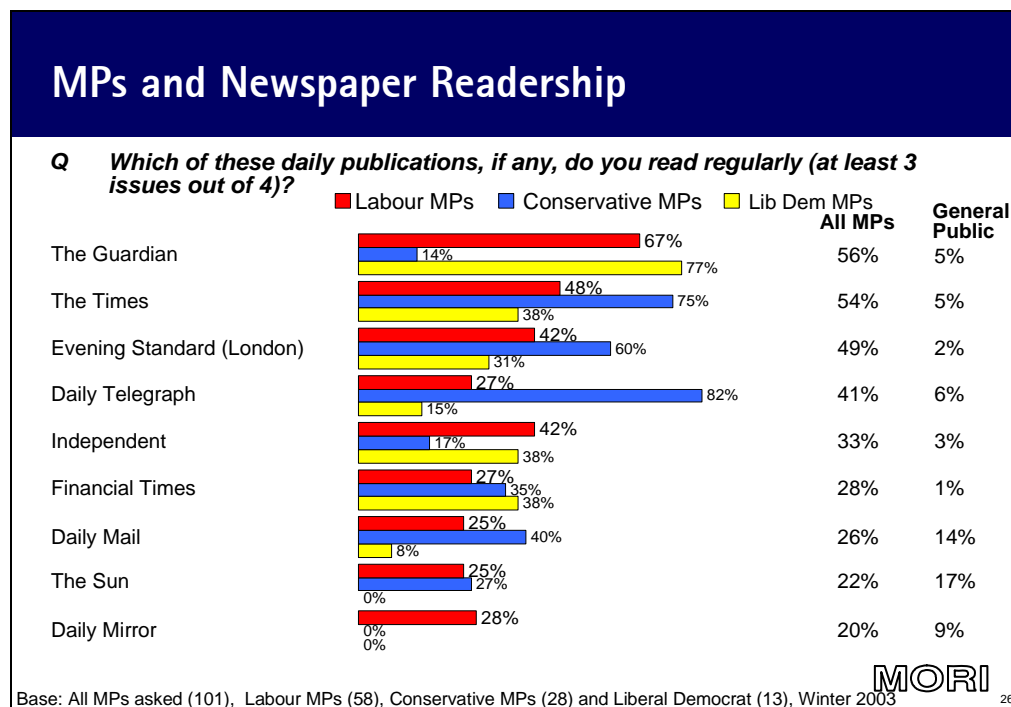


This illustrates a key point that is often confused in surveys on the role of media, as seen, for example, in a recent Yougov study among their Internet-based panellists. Discussion of a poll suggested that readers of the Mail and the Sun recognised that their newspapers were not trustworthy on news issues, and so viewed them as merely “entertainment” and gathered information to inform their opinions from other sources that are seen as higher quality, such as television news. While it is clearly true that people recognise that some sources are more trustworthy than others, it is dangerous to assume that this means news coverage in less trusted sources does not influence attitudes. They will form an important background to opinions, they will influence other media and, as analysis here has suggested, for some issues they appear to have an important direct impact.

## 2. MPs and newspaper bubbles

So perhaps one conclusion should be rather than avoid the news media the government and politicians generally need to draw from wider across it. In particular, MPs follow very similar patterns in what they read as voters, according to our regular survey among a cross-section of them. Two thirds of Labour MPs regularly read the Guardian, but less than three in ten read the Telegraph and only around a quarter read the Mail or Sun. Similarly, while around eight in ten Conservative MPs read the Telegraph or Times, fewer than one in five read the Guardian.

The government clearly has the right idea in encouraging politicians to have more direct contact with real people – but they should also be encouraged out of their Guardian or Telegraph bubbles, to help them understand the huge influence newspapers still have on some key opinions.



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## Newsletters



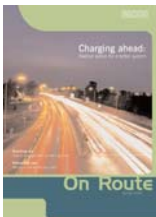
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**Health Matters**  
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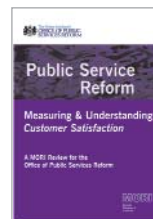


**On Route**  
One of our most talked about research areas, this magazine includes articles on congestion charging, fear of flying and local transport.

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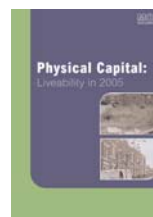
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Analyses movements in the issues MORI has been researching over the last 30 years.



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**Life satisfaction and trust in other people**  
Explores the key drivers of happiness and trust.



**Liveability in 2005**  
This forthcoming report updates our work on perceptions of liveability and in particular looks at how physical capital is related to quality of life in local areas.

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