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Loughborough University

**Rural Areas in the UK  
Impartiality Review:  
A Content Analysis for  
the BBC Trust**

Loughborough Communication Research Centre



May 2014

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## Executive Summary

This report outlines the findings of a quantitative content analysis of the BBC's coverage of rural issues on selected days from September 2012 to December 2013. The study analysed selected news, current affairs and factual programming on radio and television as well as BBC online news, indigenous minority language news programmes, and a range of non-BBC news output. The analysis focused on three areas:

1, the BBC's coverage of three so called 'hot button' rural issues, namely, the badger cull, fracking, and rural planning and wind farms.

2, the rural proofing of BBC news and the extent to which rural concerns are taken into consideration when covering the key national issues of health, education and employment.

3, the BBC's responsiveness to trigger events that specifically concerned rural issues, such as the cost of living, access to resources and services, and wildlife and woodland management and protection.

In assessing the coverage of 'hot button' rural issues the content analysis focused on determining whether coverage reflected a breadth and diversity of opinion across output. The content analysis found no evidence of any systematic partiality in BBC treatment of the badger cull, fracking, or wind farms/rural planning, in terms of the three chosen measures: 'stopwatch balance'<sup>1</sup>, 'directional balance' and 'agenda balance'. That said, there was little diversity evident in terms of the range of actors<sup>2</sup> accessed. Citizens and cause groups tended to play a prominent role in coverage. However, they only occasionally initiated coverage, which was most commonly the province of officials and government ministers.

The content analysis also assessed whether the coverage of 'hot button' issues had due regard for the devolved nature of government policy in the UK. It found very few

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<sup>1</sup> Defined as the relative prominence and quotation time achieved by those who appear in coverage. See chapter one for more details.

<sup>2</sup> Actor in this context refers to those who appear in coverage.

references were made to the differences in responsibilities and policies of the devolved national governments on these matters.

The content analysis also documented the key visuals that accompanied television coverage of the three 'hot button' issues. It found that badgers were by far the most dominant visual motif in coverage of the badger cull, accounting for more than 50 percent of coded visuals in BBC and non-BBC coverage. In contrast, images of cows and cattle appeared far less. In the coverage of fracking, protests and demonstrations were the most frequently featured visual. Their prominence was proportionally far greater than protests against the badger cull. However, in coverage of wind farms and rural planning there were no clearly dominant images.

Further, the analysis examined whether broadcast coverage of 'hot button' issues made reference to additional related information which audiences could access on the BBC news website. It found there were few mentions of additional relevant material on the BBC news website.

In its examination of the 'rural proofing' of the BBC's coverage, the content analysis focused on whether coverage of three national issues education, employment and health considered the 'unique challenges and perspectives of rural people, communities and businesses'. It found that these challenges and perspectives were rarely considered, and where they were considered, it was almost exclusively in news from the devolved nations and English regions.

It also found a striking difference between the BBC indigenous minority language programmes and the English language programmes. Twice as many education, employment and health items had a rural angle on BBC Alba's *An La* news and BBC Radio Cymru's Breakfast Show compared to English Language output.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, the research considered the BBC's responsiveness to events that specifically concerned rural issues and communities and which might trigger coverage. It found that the BBC network news was responsive to such triggers. Of eight trigger events identified in the report the BBC news covered them all. That said, there were some differences between BBC news outlets. Coverage by BBC network news bulletins concentrated mainly on one issue: wildlife and woodland management and protection. BBC online news, in comparison, covered a wider spread of trigger events,

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<sup>3</sup> In this context, English regional and devolved nations' news programmes

including those associated with the cost of living in rural areas and access to resources and services in the countryside.

## Introduction

This report presents the findings of a wide-ranging content analysis of the BBC's coverage of rural matters over a defined sample period. The authors assess whether 'the BBC's coverage of rural areas taken as a whole, presents a partial view of the nature of those areas and the role that rural communities and areas play in the whole of the UK'.<sup>4</sup> It is designed to provide accurate and robust data on the content of the BBC programmes (including news, current affairs and factual programming on radio, television and online and indigenous minority language programmes) over a defined sample period.

Any analysis of media coverage of rural matters faces a number of specific challenges. One of the key challenges is to determine what is meant by rural in terms of news, current affairs and factual coverage. While there are working definitions of what constitutes rural (such as areas outside settlements with more than 10,000 resident population)<sup>5</sup> none is specifically relevant to broadcast and online coverage. Deciding what a rural issue is, is not a simple matter of measuring the population of where a report is situated, although that might be important, nor is it a matter of counting the number of times the word rural might be mentioned. Importantly the issue itself also has to be of some significance to rural areas and those who live in them. In addition, the rural nature of an item may be implicit and not neatly labelled in reports as 'rural'. To complicate matters further, rural issues are far from homogenous. Concerns that occupy one corner of the United Kingdom might be absent from others and are not going to be found uniformly across all output. It might be unexpected, for example, to find UK-wide coverage of an isolated agricultural accident in the Scottish Highlands. On the other hand, an event that takes place in one rural geographical location may have UK-wide implications. Such challenges cannot be ignored and were a key consideration in research design. Against this background this report focuses on assessing three aspects of BBC coverage of rural matters:

- 1, The extent to which a wide range of significant opinions is included in coverage of controversial rural matters. In particular, the extent to which a diversity of voices featured in coverage of the badger cull, fracking, and wind farms and rural planning.

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<sup>4</sup> BBC Trust (2013) Rural Areas Impartiality Review - Brief for Content Analysis

<sup>5</sup> Statistical Digest of Rural England, 2012. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.



The BBC Trust noted, in 2007 that the 'seesaw' idea of impartiality as balance between two sides of an argument has been replaced by a 'wagon wheel' capturing a diversity of perspectives 'bringing extra perspectives to bear, rather than limiting horizons or censoring opinion'.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the BBC's Editorial Guidelines suggest that impartiality means that the BBC must consider 'the broad perspective and ensuring the existence of a range of views is appropriately reflected'. Does its coverage of controversial rural matters reflect a breadth and diversity of opinion across output?

How much quotation time was achieved by those who appeared in BBC output? How frequently did certain actors<sup>7</sup> appear? How were those who appeared in the news treated? What issues did they speak about? What prominence was given to specific issues associated with each of the 'hot button' topics? In addition to these matters, the authors were keen to examine the evaluative language journalists used in relation to actors and events. Did the journalist make any caveats about any claims, statements or motives of a quoted actor, whether as a preface or subsequent to an appearance? Did the journalist challenge the claims of the speaking actor via questions?

2, The extent to which rural concerns are taken into consideration when covering the key national issues of health, education and employment. Many national issues, such as health, energy and transport are particularly pertinent to those audience members living in rural areas, but the impact on rural communities may be overlooked or not explored in depth. For example, with proportionally more elderly people living in rural areas compared to urban areas, long-term issues connected with aging, such as health provision, are a particularly important matter in rural areas.

3, The extent to which issues important to rural areas of the UK and those that live in them are examined by BBC network news. While some rural issues clearly receive widespread coverage such as the badger cull in England, other salient rural issues may attract less attention. How responsive was BBC UK network news? To what extent do certain trigger events lead to coverage of selected important rural issues?

Further to the above points, it is also important to note the changed political landscape of the UK means that rural issues may be specifically related to particular

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<sup>6</sup> *From Seesaw to Wagon Wheel: Safeguarding Impartiality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. BBC Trust. p.6.

<sup>7</sup> Actor in this context refers to those who appear in coverage.

National government policy. Previous research has shown the challenges posed by devolution for the reporting of issues such as the environment, local government, social care and education which are the responsibility of the devolved nations and not Westminster.<sup>8</sup> Does output, in particular, coverage of 'hot button' issues, have due regard for the devolved nature of policy in the UK?

In addition, in the digital age BBC output is increasingly spread across different platforms. Events covered in the main national news bulletins on television and radio are often explored in more detail on the web and in other news, current affairs and factual programmes. However, in this environment the challenge is often to ensure that audiences can follow stories across platforms. One technique has been to refer audiences to the BBC news website. To what extent did broadcast output on the badger cull, fracking and wind farms/rural planning refer audiences to the BBC news website to examine the issue further? Finally, the authors were interested in the nature of the visuals that accompanied television coverage of the hot button issues. For example, was coverage of the badger cull accompanied by images of healthy badgers rather than sick cattle? Was coverage of fracking dominated by images of protest?

### *Report structure*

The three substantive chapters of the report focus on each of the main areas identified above.

Chapter 1 examines BBC and non-BBC coverage of three 'hot button' or controversial issues: the badger cull, fracking, and rural planning – focusing on wind farms and rural planning matters. The chapter gauges the impartiality of coverage for each 'hot button' issue according to three criteria.<sup>9</sup> (1) Stopwatch balance – the relative prominence and quotation time achieved by competing actors in coverage; (2) Directional balance – the distribution of positive or negative treatment of political issues and actors; (3) Agenda balance – the relative prominence given to specific issues associated with each of the 'hot button' topics.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Stephen Cushion (2012) *Television Journalism*. London: Sage

<sup>9</sup> Norris, P., Curtice, J., Sanders, D., Scammell, M. and Semetko, H. (1999) *On Message: Communicating the Campaign*. London: Sage.

<sup>10</sup> The sample dates were selected purposively to ensure the necessary material was gathered and to maximise the amount of potential output to analyse. See Chapter 1 for more details.

Chapter 2 looks at the 'rural proofing' of BBC and non-BBC news coverage. Rural proofing of news is taken to mean the extent to which the coverage of issues *properly considers the unique challenges and perspectives of rural people, communities and businesses*. The chapter examines the extent to which coverage of education, employment and health, three substantive national issues, is rural proofed. In other words, to what extent does coverage of these issues in mainstream news programmes take into account the unique challenges and perspectives of rural people, communities and businesses?

Chapter 3 explores the extent to which BBC UK-wide news is responsive to trigger events that specifically concerned certain salient rural issues. The chapter examines coverage of eight trigger events associated with: the cost of living in rural areas; access to resources and services in rural areas; and wildlife and woodland management and protection.

Given the time constraints of the study it was decided to adopt a mixed sampling strategy, the coverage of 'hot button' issues was deliberately selected from a sample period 17 September 2012 to 4 December 2013. For the examination of the rural proofing of national news a three-week period was selected at random between 18 November and 8 December 2013; and the trigger events, examined in Chapter 3, were also deliberately selected out of the same sample period 17 September 2012 to 4 December 2013. More details can be found in the appendix. Of course such a sampling strategy does not guarantee the presence of coverage and undoubtedly there were important programmes broadcast outside the sample days but this was deemed the most effective way to gather the relevant output in the available time.

All that said, to the best of our knowledge we believe this report to be one of the most comprehensive examinations of media coverage of rural matters in the UK to date. Loughborough Communication Research Centre (LCRC) researchers by the end of this project had examined around 1500 hours of BBC news output broadcast over 106 days, as well as a number of select current affairs programmes; the websites of the BBC news and three national newspapers; and a sample of the broadcast output of ITV network news and Channel Four News. In total, nearly 1700 relevant news items were identified and coded.

# 1

## Coverage of 'Hot Button' Rural Issues

This chapter provides an overview and comparison of the amount of coverage devoted to three so-called 'hot button' rural issues, i.e. particularly contentious rural topics that might be expected to feature prominently in the sampled media in this study.

The 'hot button' issues selected were the badger cull, fracking, and wind farms together with rural planning. These issues were carefully selected in liaison with the BBC Trust as significant controversial rural issues (see appendix 1 for further information). The findings of this chapter are based on a non-randomly selected sample of news programmes, current affairs and factual programmes over 62 days<sup>11</sup> between September 2012 and December 2013. Sample days were chosen on the basis that they were likely to attract significant levels of any or all of the 'hot button' issues (for further details see Table 4.1 and 4.2 in appendix 1). Table 1.1 compares the amount of coverage given to these three issues across the entire media sample. It also breaks down this distribution by media sector and indicates which programmes and websites fell within each sector category. The results show that 'wind farms and rural planning' was the least frequently reported 'hot button' issue across the sample. This may indicate that wind turbines and green belt developments were considered less newsworthy than badger culling and shale gas exploration, or it could indicate that our sample period coincided with particularly contentious periods for the latter two 'hot button' issues. It is important to appreciate that this is a snapshot of the coverage of controversial rural issues and we cannot discount the possibility that wind farms and rural planning have attracted considerable news attention in the past (and may again in the future).

When differences between the various media sampled are explored in greater depth clear variations are apparent in the proportional emphases of different media sectors.

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<sup>11</sup> In addition, seven alternative days were used where there were problems gaining some news programmes, and eight different days were used for non-news programmes.

Fracking was the most prominent issue in BBC UK news bulletins (accounting for nearly half of all the items coded). This may reflect an editorial judgement that this energy related controversy has the greatest long-term implications for the UK as a whole, or it may simply have been a particularly current news story during this period.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 1.1: Number of Items<sup>13</sup> per Hot Button**

	Issue			Total
	Badger Cull	Fracking	Wind Farms and Rural Planning	
<b>BBC UK News Bulletin:</b>	84	115	33	232
BBC1 <i>Breakfast</i> ; BBC1 <i>News at Six</i> ; BBC1 <i>News at Ten</i> ; BBC2 <i>Newsnight</i> ; BBC News Channel 5-6pm; R4 <i>Today</i> ; R4 <i>World at One</i> ; R5 <i>Breakfast</i>	36.2%	49.6%	14.2%	100.0%
<b>BBC Online News:</b>	71	77	46	194
<i>bbc.co.uk/news</i>	36.6%	39.7%	23.7%	100.0%
<b>BBC Regional and devolved Nations News:</b>	50	32	20	102
BBC1 <i>Reporting Scotland</i> ; BBC1 <i>Wales Today</i> ; BBC1 (Northern Ireland) <i>Newsline</i> ; BBC1 <i>South Today</i> ; BBC1 <i>Points West</i> ; Radio Scotland <i>Newsdrive</i> ; Radio Wales <i>Good Evening Wales</i> ; Radio Ulster <i>Evening Extra</i> ; Radio Gloucestershire <i>Drive</i> ; Radio Somerset <i>Breakfast</i> ; Radio Somerset <i>Phone-in 9am</i> ; Radio Somerset <i>Drive</i> ; Radio Sussex <i>Drive</i>	49.0%	31.4%	19.6%	100.0%
<b>BBC R4 – Farming Today</b>	39	1	3	43
	90.7%	2.3%	7.0%	100.0%
<b>BBC R2 – Jeremy Vine Show</b>	12	18	6	36
	33.3%	50.0%	16.7%	100.0%
<b>BBC UK Current Affairs and factual</b>	4	4	3	11
BBC1 <i>Panorama</i> ; BBC1 <i>The One Show</i> ; BBC1 <i>Countryfile</i> ; BBC2 <i>The Planners</i> ; BBC2 <i>Autumnwatch</i> ; R4 <i>The Report</i> ; R4 <i>Material World</i> ; R4 <i>Inside Science</i>	36.4%	36.4%	27.3%	100.0%
<b>Newspapers Online:</b>	85	177	84	346
<i>Telegraph.co.uk</i> ; <i>Daily-mail.co.uk</i> ; <i>Guardian.co.uk</i>	24.6%	51.2%	24.3%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	345	424	195	964
	35.8%	44.0%	20.2%	100.0%

<sup>12</sup> It might also be reasonably expected that the energy related controversy is likely to be the kind of perennial issue that the badger cull is not, in that the latter occurs at particular times of the year and hence the coverage can be expected to be more limited to specific weeks and months.

<sup>13</sup> Please see appendix for more details on what constitutes an item.

Row percentages

The leading BBC specialist farming programme, Radio 4's *Farming Today*, was overwhelmingly concerned with the implications and implementation of the badger cull policy (accounting for more than 90 percent of its coverage of the three 'hot button' issues analysed), and made next to no reference to fracking.

The badger cull also attracted proportionally greater levels of coverage in BBC regional and devolved nations news<sup>14</sup>, but these aggregated figures obscure some important regional and national variations (see Table 1.2). We looked at specific local radio services because we were aware that certain subjects were of particular salience in those regions. The badger cull was by far the most significant issue for Somerset and Gloucestershire based BBC TV and radio stations (fracking was not covered by any of these programmes).

**Table 1.2: Regional/Devolved Nations Coverage of 'Hot Button' Issues**

	Type of Hot Button Issue			Total
	Badger Cull	Fracking	Wind Farms and Rural Planning	
BBC Radio Somerset, Breakfast	12	0	5	17
	70.6%	.0%	29.4%	100.0%
BBC Radio Somerset Phone in 9am	4	0	0	4
	100.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
BBC Radio Somerset, Drive	8	0	0	8
	100.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
BBC Radio Gloucestershire, Breakfast	9	0	0	9
	100.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
BBC Radio Gloucestershire, Drive	4	0	0	4
	100.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
BBC 1 Points West 6.30	12	0	0	12
	100.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
BBC Radio Sussex, Breakfast	0	19	0	19
	.0%	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
BBC Radio Sussex, Drive	0	9	0	9
	.0%	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
BBC Radio Scotland, Breakfast	0	0	2	2
	.0%	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
BBC Radio Scotland NewsDrive	0	0	3	3
	.0%	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
BBC 1 Reporting Scotland 6.30	0	0	1	1
	.0%	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
BBC Radio Wales, Breakfast	0	0	2	2
	.0%	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
BBC 1 Wales Today 6.30	0	0	3	3
	.0%	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
BBC Radio Wales, Good Evening Wales	0	0	4	4
	.0%	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
BBC Radio Ulster, Breakfast	0	1	0	1

<sup>14</sup> Here we mean news of English regional news programmes and those of the devolved Nations.

	.0%	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
BBC 1 South Today	0	1	0	1
	.0%	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
BBC 1 Newsline	1	1	0	2
	50.0%	50.0%	.0%	100.0%
BBC Radio Ulster, Evening Extra	0	1	0	1
	.0%	100.0%	.0%	100.0%

Row percentages

However, in Sussex, fracking dominated the agenda, and the badger cull was completely absent. In the devolved nations output (Scotland, Wales, NI), badger culling and fracking received little or no coverage, but there was some coverage of wind farms and rural planning. As we anticipated, at first sight this seems to suggest that geographic proximity is a major factor in determining levels of regional and other national news attention to these issues. (NB Somerset and Gloucestershire were near to two of the cull zones, West Sussex is the site of potential shale gas exploration, and the policies of the devolved national governments mean that neither of these issues have specific localised relevance). Such an interpretation needs to be treated with caution, as these different distributions of coverage could simply reflect the sampling strategies used for regional and devolved nations' broadcast content, which targeted fewer specific days where we assumed programmes would give particular coverage of one or more of the three 'hot button' issues (see appendix 1 for more details).

**Table 1.3: Broadcast Coverage of Hot Button Issues by Time/Proportionally**

Media	Issue	Seconds	% of total
BBC UK National News	Badger Cull	13497.00	37
	Fracking	17196.00	47
	Wind Farms and Rural Planning	5865.00	16
	Total	36558.00	
BBC R2 Jeremy Vine Show	Badger Cull	1539.00	26
	Fracking	3227.00	55
	Wind Farms and Rural Planning	1109.00	19
	Total	5875.00	
BBC R4 Farming Today	Badger Cull	7526.00	91
	Fracking	251.00	3
	Wind Farms and Rural Planning	533.00	6
	Total	8310.00	
BBC UK Current Affairs and Factual	Badger Cull	3254.00	32
	Fracking	3307.00	32
	Wind Farms and Rural Planning	3678.00	36
	Total	10239.00	
BBC Regional and Devolved Nations News	Badger Cull	9467.00	54
	Fracking	4803.00	28

	Wind Farms and Rural Planning	3165.00	18
	Total	17435.00	
Total	Badger Cull	35283.00	45
	Fracking	28784.00	37
	Wind Farms and Rural Planning	14350.00	18
	Total	78417.00	

Column percentages.

Fracking and wind turbines were far more prominent issues in the online newspapers sampled compared with the BBC Online news website. This may be explained by the coverage of these issues in media like the *Telegraph* which includes a very well developed section dedicated to a topic it regards as highly controversial.<sup>15</sup> Counting the number of items in different programmes is just one way of reviewing the overall emphasis within the sampled coverage. This study also measured the *duration* of broadcast coverage in seconds. Table 1.3 charts the differences using this measure and shows that the duration of issue coverage closely replicates the distribution of items and programmes.<sup>16</sup>

## Stopwatch, Directional and Agenda Balance

The measures provided so far offer an overview of the relative newsworthiness of these three 'hot button' issues during the sample period. The analysis utilizes a tri-partite distinction suggested by Norris et al<sup>17</sup> between:

- (1) **Stopwatch balance** – the relative prominence<sup>18</sup> and quotation time achieved by competing actors in coverage
- (2) **Directional balance** – the distribution of positive or negative treatment of issues and actors
- (3) **Agenda balance** – the relative prominence given to specific issues associated with each of the 'hot button' topics

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<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/energy/windpower/>

<sup>16</sup> Pearson's  $r=0.991$ .

<sup>17</sup> Norris, P., Curtice, J., Sanders, D., Scammell, M. and Semetko, H. (1999) *On Message: Communicating the Campaign*. London: Sage.

<sup>18</sup> Prominence in the context of this chapter refers to the amount of coverage.



Collectively, these measures allow us to chart the evaluative and interpretative dimensions of rural coverage.

## **Stopwatch Balance**

The following three sections examine 'Stopwatch balance' in relation to each of the three 'hot button' issues. Our assessment of 'stopwatch balance' relied on three measures. The first assessed which 'actors' and events most 'triggered' coverage. The second measured news presence of actors, which involved counting the frequency of appearance of individuals, groups, businesses and institutions found to have an active role in coverage (referred to hereafter as 'actors')<sup>19</sup>. The third related to news access, which involved measuring the amount of direct quotation time actors were given in coverage. This latter measure is an indicator of those 'actors' who may be of greatest significance for the story. Although it should be noted that there can be reason to allow those with less significance more time to speak – for example a government minister making a fresh statement of policy can be more practised in talking to the media and so need less time to make a point than a member of the public (who has never dealt with the media before) giving a response to what has been said.

There are limitations to the stopwatch method which must be borne in mind. For example, an interview may be a robust interrogation of an actor in which the fallacies of the actor's position are exposed and in such a case the length of air time is not indicative that 'that side' of the argument has been 'favoured' with more air time. Content is important as well as the length. Impartiality can never be measured on length of contribution alone. We will turn to content later in this report

### **Stopwatch Balance: Badger Cull**

Table 1.4 lists the events that initiated BBC coverage of the badger cull issue. It shows that the dominant prompts for stories were UK government announcements or initiatives. The second most significant trigger was the various kinds of protest

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<sup>19</sup> Actors can be directly quoted or feature by way of a mention. There may be a range of actors who, though featured by way of a mention, get little to no direct opportunity to speak.

that were mounted against the badger culls. By comparison, media initiated stories were rare, as were those initiated by other civil, political, judicial or corporate sources.

**Table 1.4: Triggers for BBC Coverage of the Badger Cull**

	Frequency	Percent
UK government announcement/initiative	125	48.1
Public demonstration/protest	26	10.0
Other public body announcement/initiative	23	8.8
Other event/action	20	7.7
Media initiated investigation/report	14	5.4
Voluntary sector/NGO announcement/initiative	8	3.1
Other citizen activism (petitions, complaints)	7	2.7
Corporate sector announcement/initiative	7	2.7
House of Commons/Lords debates	5	1.9
Official inquiry	4	1.5
Response to media coverage/debates	4	1.5
Other judicial process/outcome	3	1.2
Research publication – other	3	1.2
Celebrity pronouncement	3	1.2
Northern Irish government announcement/initiative	2	.8
Welsh government announcement/initiative	1	.4
Opposition party announcement/initiative	1	.4
Publicity campaign - charity/voluntary	2	.8
Research publication - charity/voluntary	1	.4
Unclear	1	.4
Total	260	100.0

Column percentages.

Table 1.5 groups together the actors for all BBC as well as the other media sampled. It is important to appreciate that this is not a strictly like-for-like comparison, as the BBC category combines broadcast and online coverage and the other category solely focuses on online newspaper content. For this reason, any differences identified need to be seen as suggestive rather than definitive.

In the combined coverage, 'cause' groups were the most dominant category in relation to the reporting of the badger cull. Furthermore, proportionately more members of cause groups featured in BBC coverage than in the non-BBC media. (NB. The cause related category included 'protestors' because although they might not obviously belong to a constituted entity as such, they clearly had something in common with those that did. Given this, it was decided it would be more appropriate to group these activists in this way rather than the alternative one made up of 'citizens'.)

The most prominent body within the cause groups featured in both BBC and other coverage was clearly the National Farmers' Union (NFU, see Table 1.6). This may reflect the nature of this particular debate and the crucial role played within it by this

major sectional interest. It is a long established formally constituted organisation, that represents many of those in the farming industry and as a consequence some of the keenest supporters of the culling measure. Furthermore the NFU clearly had established networks of contacts within the media at UK, national and regional level<sup>20</sup>. By contrast opposition to culling was more disparate and consisted of a sectional interest organisation, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), as well as a myriad of pressure groups, some of which were of the ad hoc, less established kind and therefore might be expected to be characteristically resource poor when compared to the more familiar representative entities.

UK government actors are the next most prominent category, although they featured less than twice as frequently as 'cause group' actors. These findings offer a striking contrast with those found for the 'triggers' of coverage (where 'government announcement/ initiative' was by far the most prominent instigator of badger cull coverage) and offers an important qualification to any conclusions one might draw about the extent of definitional advantage 'cause groups' may have achieved through the frequency of their appearance in coverage. In the main, these groups are newsworthy in a reactive way, that is, they are 'agenda responders' rather than 'agenda setters'.

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<sup>20</sup> See <http://www.nfuonline.com/about-us/our-offices/>

**Table 1.5: Actors in Coverage of the Badger Cull**

	Media		Total
	BBC	Newspapers Online	
Cause groups	255	94	349
	38.9%	31.6%	
UK Government	113	59	172
	17.3%	19.9%	
Citizens	85	23	108
	13.0%	7.7%	
Experts	56	24	80
	8.5%	8.1%	
Other public sector	45	27	72
	6.9%	9.1%	
Labour Party	19	22	41
	2.9%	7.4%	
Celebrities	18	20	38
	2.7%	6.7%	
Police	20	4	24
	3.1%	1.3%	
Business	10	7	17
	1.5%	2.4%	
Media	12	4	16
	1.8%	1.3%	
Conservative Party	9	5	14
	1.4%	1.7%	
Other political parties*	4	3	7
	.6%	1.0%	
Local Government	3	1	4
	.5%	.3%	
Legal sources	1	2	3
	.2%	.7%	
Northern Ireland Government	2	0	2
	.3%	.0%	
Religious	0	2	2
	.0%	.7%	
Welsh Government	2	0	2
	.3%	.0%	
Liberal Democrats	1	0	1
	.2%	.0%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>655</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>952</b>

\*Includes 4 appearances by Caroline Lucas MP, 1 other Green Party and 2 independents. Column percentages.

**Table 1.6: Cause Groups in Coverage of the Badger Cull**

	Media		Total
	BBC	Newspapers Online	
National Farmers' Union (NFU)	64	24	88
	25.1%	25.5%	
Protestor general	66	14	80
	25.9%	14.9%	
RSPCA	17	15	32
	6.7%	16.0%	
Stop the Cull	14	4	18
	5.5%	4.3%	
Other pro-badger groups (i.e. anti-cull)	11	4	15
	4.3%	4.3%	
Badger Trust	3	2	5
	1.2%	2.1%	
Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust	4	0	4
	1.6%	.0%	
RSPB	2	1	3
	.8%	1.1%	
Irish Wildlife Trust	2	0	2
	.8%	.0%	
Countryside Alliance	0	1	1
	.0%	1.1%	
Animal Liberation Front	1	0	1
	.4%	.0%	
League Against Cruel Sports	0	1	1
	.0%	1.1%	
Scottish Wild Land Group	1	0	1
	.4%	.0%	
Other	70	28	98
	27.5%	29.8%	
Total	255	94	349

Column percentages

After the UK government and cause groups, citizens were the next most prominent category of actors. The BBC gave them nearly twice as much prominence than did the other non-BBC media. 'Farmers' have been included in this category and this has inflated its size (53% or 63 out of the 108 'citizen' related items were farmers). Farmers might have been included in the category of cause groups for a similar reason to the decision to include protestors in the latter, specifically that a large majority of farmers support the cull. However, there is a marked diversity of opinion within the agricultural community as to the costs and benefits of the policy and so a decision was made to include them with citizens. Having said that, farmers

overwhelmingly support the cull and it is their opinions rather than those of the general public that mostly accounts for this category.

The issue of the badger cull was overwhelmingly presented as a contentious one. On the side of the UK government was the NFU, the influential lobby representing many in the agricultural community. Opposing this powerful alliance were a range of opponents, including some farmers. Interestingly, the highly divisive matter of culling did not appear to be a particularly partisan one in party political terms. Party political actors (in a non-executive context) accounted for just 5 percent of all actors in BBC coverage of the cull. This is of some interest, because the previous Labour administration had adopted a policy of opposing the cull of badgers.<sup>21</sup>

If party political perspectives were less relevant to the media debate, scientists clearly had a greater role as opinion formers. Editors and journalists appeared keen to give space to experts in order to explore and explain some of the intricacies of the debate. Here, there was a focus on understanding the merits and drawbacks of the policy in relation to its supposed efficacy, as well as cruelty, as a measure of controlling the badger population.

Some of the most noteworthy public opponents of the policy included 'celebrities' (for example, Brian May and Bill Oddie). Although they might have conceivably been included with 'cause groups', the famous were worthy of a category on their own, not least because of their appreciably greater visibility in non-BBC coverage.

### **Presence/Access: Badger Culling**

In this section aggregate figures for the BBC coverage are broken down according to their constituent media outlets. In each table, measures of *news presence*, (how many times an actor or actors appeared) will be combined with *news access* (how much speaking time the aforementioned protagonists were granted).

Table 1.7 reviews BBC UK-wide news coverage. Here there is a very strong correlation between number of appearances and quotation time. That said there were some slight anomalies. For instance although the proportion of items featuring celebrities is low (4%) their proportion of quotation time is comparatively high (12%). This testifies to the small number yet relatively lengthy appearances by a select

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<sup>21</sup> NB: Politicians who are members of the ruling coalition were only coded in their party political category when they were clearly not acting as official representatives of the government and/or were manifestly appearing in a party political capacity (e.g. representing the views of their constituencies).

number of famous people. By contrast the experts featured were quoted proportionally less than they appeared. Turning to the more formal partisan sources, Labour politicians had slightly more presence and access than did their Conservative counterparts. This, however, is not so surprising given the Conservatives share responsibility for speaking on behalf of their Coalition government and defending or explaining its culling policy. (See our previous explanation about when politicians were coded according to their governmental status or party political membership.)

**Table 1.7: Actor Prominence in BBC UK News Coverage of the Badger Cull**

	Appearances	Quotation Time
<b>Actors</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Cause groups	39	36
UK Government	20	27
Citizens	15	8
Celebrities	4	12
Media	5	5
Labour Party	3	5
Experts	7	3
Northern Ireland Government	1	0
Legal sources	0.5	0
Police	1	4
Conservative Party	0.5	0
Other public sector	4	0
Business	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>211 Actors</b>	<b>5964 seconds*</b>

Pearson's  $r=0.946$ . Column percentages. Excludes BBC Online.

Table 1.8 compares the appearances of actors as well as the quotation time afforded some of them on the prominent BBC Radio 2 *Jeremy Vine Show*. In line with its format a much smaller range of protagonists featured in this programme when compared to other outlets. Representatives of the UK government were especially prominent in terms of their presence although not necessarily their access. Rather the forum debated the issues by hosting various concerned citizens to articulate and/or advocate their case for or against the cull. The programme also eschewed the use of the kinds of expert arbiters who featured prominently in other kinds of media coverage.

**Table 1.8: Actor Prominence in the Jeremy Vine Show's Coverage of the Badger Cull**

	Appearances	Quotation Time
Actors	%	%

Citizens	48	64
Business	4	0
Cause groups	22	36
UK Government	26	0
Total	<b>23 Actors</b>	<b>561 Seconds*</b>

\*Pearson's  $r=0.81$  and not statistically significant. Column percentages.

Table 1.9 examines the relationship between the number of appearances and quotation time in respect of BBC Radio 4's *Farming Today*. Here again there is a strong correlation between appearances and speaking time but it is weaker compared to both the BBC UK news and the *Jeremy Vine Show*. This is because experts appear less frequently than cause groups, but when they do feature are given more time to set out information.

**Table 1.9: Actor Prominence in BBC Farming Today's of the Badger Cull**

	Appearances	Quotation Time
<b>Actors</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Experts	17	30
Cause groups	35	27
Citizens	18	18
UK Government	14	14
Celebrities	3	5
Police	4	2
Conservative Party	1	1
Labour Party	1	1
Other political parties	1	2
Other public sector	4	0
Business	1	0
Total	<b>77 Actors</b>	<b>4537 Seconds</b>

\* Pearson's  $r=0.889$ . Column percentages.

Table 1.10 compares differences in appearances and quotation time for BBC Current Affairs outputs such as *Panorama*. Caution needs to be applied in interpreting these results because the number of actors is fairly low at fifteen in total. There is a more limited range of voices in what might be categorised as this potentially more expansive form of programming: experts get most speaking time, despite appearing less frequently than cause groups. Furthermore, although UK government representatives appear less frequently than citizens they do nonetheless get more speaking time. The data would suggest that this category of programming was primarily concerned with interrogating the validity of competing positions on badger culling with recourse to scientific opinion.



**Table 1.10: Actor Prominence in BBC Current Affairs Coverage of the Badger Cull**

	Appearances	Quotation Time
<b>Actors</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Experts	27	49
Citizens	20	11
Cause groups	33	21
Central Government	13	16
Other Public Sector	7	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>15 Actors</b>	<b>1265 seconds</b>

Column percentages.

Table 1.11 compares the pattern in BBC regional and devolved nations' coverage of actors. Cause groups and their representatives were particularly prominent in this sector. Citizens also commanded more appearances than experts (10% compared to 6%) but enjoyed less speaking time (6% versus 15%). Significantly representatives from the devolved administrations in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast were absent, perhaps reflecting the fact that badger culling is very much an 'English' story. In light of this point, it is interesting to note that the various branches of English local government (other public sector) were only rarely featured. The debate, it would appear, is largely framed as a controversy involving assorted cause group critics of what is seen to be Whitehall, that is UK government, initiated policy.

**Table 1.11: Actor Prominence in BBC Regional and Devolved Nations Coverage of the Badger Cull**

	Appearances	Quotation Time
<b>Actors</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Experts	6	15
Citizens	10	6
Business	4	4
Cause groups	45	44
Celebrities	1	0
UK Government	16	16
Police	7	2
Conservative Party	1	1
Liberal Democrats	1	0
Labour Party	3	10
Other public sector	7	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>134 Actors</b>	<b>3035 Seconds</b>

Column percentages.

Table 1.12 provides insight into how the BBC Online service reported on the badger cull. Comparable figures are also offered for the websites of the opinion-forming newspapers sampled. Quotation time was not measured and so the Table only reviews the frequency of the differing actors' appearances.



**Table 1.12: Actor Prominence in Online Coverage of the Badger Cull**

	Website				Total
	<i>BBC Online News</i>	<i>Telegraph.co.uk</i>	<i>Dailymail.co.uk</i>	<i>Guardian.co.uk</i>	
Cause groups	76	59	20	15	170
	38.8%	33.5%	31.3%	26.3%	
UK Government	31	29	12	18	90
	15.8%	16.5%	18.8%	31.6%	
Other public sector	23	20	3	4	50
	11.7%	11.4%	4.7%	7.0%	
Experts	17	11	6	7	41
	8.7%	6.3%	9.4%	12.3%	
Citizens	12	12	8	3	35
	6.1%	6.8%	12.5%	5.3%	
Labour Party	9	14	4	4	31
	4.6%	8.0%	6.3%	7.0%	
Celebrities	7	14	5	1	27
	3.6%	8.0%	7.8%	1.8%	
Police	6	2	2	0	10
	3.1%	1.1%	3.1%	.0%	
Conservative Party	5	5	0	0	10
	2.6%	2.8%	.0%	.0%	
Religious	0	0	2	0	2
	.0%	.0%	3.1%	.0%	
Business	0	2	0	5	7
	.0%	1.1%	.0%	8.8%	
Other political parties	3	3	0	0	6
	1.5%	1.7%	.0%	.0%	
Media	2	4	0	0	6
	1.0%	2.3%	.0%	.0%	
Local Government	3	0	1	0	4
	1.5%	.0%	1.6%	.0%	
Welsh Government	2	0	0	0	2
	1.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	
Legal sources	0	1	1	0	2
	.0%	.6%	1.6%	.0%	
Total	196	176	64	57	493

Column percentages.

Cause groups and the UK government were the most featured actors in the BBC News online coverage. By contrast experts did not feature so prominently. When comparing BBC web coverage to that of the newspapers sampled it could be seen that the BBC and *Telegraph* included a similar number of actors compared to the *Guardian* and *Daily Mail* online coverage. However, it should be noted that as shown

in Table 1.13 the latter two sources covered this story less frequently than the BBC or the *Telegraph*.

**Table 1.13: Number of Items in Online Coverage of the Badger Cull**

	Frequency	%
BBC Online News	71	45.5
Telegraph.co.uk	56	35.9
Dailymail.co.uk	15	9.6
Guardian.co.uk	14	9.0
Total	156	100.0

Column percentages.

### Stopwatch Balance: Fracking

Table 1.14 shows the triggers for coverage in relation to the 'hot button' issue of fracking. By contrast with the equivalent figures for badgers, it would appear UK government announcements have less significance in terms of stimulating stories (22.3% as opposed to 48.1% for badgers). As one might expect, corporate sector initiatives were far more prominent when the same comparisons are made (19.4% versus the 2.7% for badgers). But the largest single trigger is 'public demonstration/protest' and here again these levels are markedly higher for this stimulus than for culling (30.4% versus 10%).

**Table 1.14 Triggers for BBC Coverage of Fracking**

	Frequency	Percent
Public demonstration/protest	75	30.4
UK Government announcement/initiative	55	22.3
Corporate sector announcement/initiative	48	19.4
Media initiated investigation/report	13	5.3
Other event/action	10	4.0
Research publication – other	9	3.6
House of Commons/Lords debate	5	2.0
Unclear	5	2.0
Research publication - business sector	4	1.6
Speech	3	1.2
Celebrity pronouncement	3	1.2
Response to media coverage/debate	3	1.2
Official enquiry	3	1.2
Other citizen activism (petitions, complaints)	3	1.2
Opposition party announcement/initiative	2	.8
Other public body announcement/initiative	2	.8
Voluntary sector/NGO announcement/initiative	2	.8
Northern Irish government announcement/initiative	1	.4
Research publication – UK Government	1	.4

Total	247	100.0
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Column percentages.

Table 1.15 (below) considers the prominence of actors by comparing BBC with the other kinds of coverage. The UK government is far less prominent in the former compared to the latter forms of news sampled. Business actors have, however, relatively greater presence in BBC reporting of fracking when compared with that of badger culling. Citizens also featured marginally more in BBC coverage although their presence was almost in the same proportion to the levels identified in the figures for badger culling. However, there is no single core vested interest group within this category.<sup>22</sup> Ninety three percent of the actors coded as citizens in BBC coverage were 'members of the general public' while 100 percent were categorised in this way in the other media reporting. Cause groups are prominent but less so than in the coverage of badger culling. Party political sources did not feature much, and this reflects a trend already established in relation to the animal related controversy. Here certain minority groups had slightly more of a presence than Labour Party spokespeople. Taking the data concerning the triggers for these stories together with the figures relating to presence, it is plausible to conclude that the coverage portrays the debate as essentially a binary conflict. On one side are the businesses supported by the UK government exploring the possibilities afforded by fracking and, on the other, various groups of environmentally motivated activists. Perhaps predictably coverage tended to be precipitated by one or other of these parties with the resulting reportage focusing on contrasting attitudes over the desirability of fracking.

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<sup>22</sup> 'Farmers' were included in the category for the coverage of badger culling.

**Table 1.15: Actors in BBC and Other Coverage of Fracking**

	BBC	Newspapers online	Total
	Business	178 27.9%	
Cause groups	161 25.2%	102 19.2%	263
UK Government	61 9.5%	116 21.8%	177
Citizens	81 12.7%	41 7.7%	122
Experts	53 8.3%	39 7.3%	92
Police	25 3.9%	18 3.4%	43
Conservative Party	15 2.3%	25 4.7%	40
Media	15 2.3%	12 2.3%	27
Religious	6 .9%	19 3.6%	25
Other political parties*	14 2.2%	4 .8%	18
Local Government	10 1.6%	6 1.1%	16
Labour Party	3 .5%	10 1.9%	13
Other public sector	3 .5%	11 2.1%	14
Celebrities	9 1.4%	2 .4%	11
Non-UK political source	0 .0%	10 1.9%	10
Legal sources	2 .3%	5 .9%	7
Liberal Democrats	0 .0%	6 1.1%	6
Northern Irish Government	3 .5%	1 .2%	4
Welsh Government	0 .0%	1 .2%	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>639</b>	<b>532</b>	<b>1171</b>

\*Includes 12 appearances of Caroline Lucas MP, 4 other members of the Green Party and 2 independents.  
Column percentages.

Table 1.16 identifies which cause groups featured most prominently in the covering of the fracking controversy. Generally speaking what are termed protestor groups dominate coverage of the subject. Friends of the Earth have a noticeable, albeit minority presence here and enjoy a higher profile in BBC coverage when compared

with Greenpeace, a like-minded organisation. This was not, however, the case with the other media sampled. Overall the pattern was similar to that for the badger coverage in that many of the oppositional, anti-fracking protest groups were, like the anti-cull lobby, a somewhat diffuse movement of single-issue organisations. This then presents a potential challenge for the journalists involved in reporting on controversial issues and who need to source comments from the most authentic sources.

**Table 1.16: Cause Groups in Coverage of Fracking**

	BBC	Newspapers Online	Total
	Protestor general	70 43.5%	32 31.4%
Other groups	45 28.0%	28 27.5%	73
Friends of the Earth	21 13.0%	13 12.7%	34
No Dash for Gas	13 8.1%	8 7.8%	21
Greenpeace	6 3.7%	12 11.8%	18
Campaign to Protect Rural England	1 .6%	5 4.9%	6
Frack Free Sussex	4 2.5%	2 2.0%	6
National Trust	0 .0%	1 1.0%	1
RSPCA	1 .6%	0 .0%	1
Taxpayers Alliance	0 .0%	1 1.0%	1
Total	161	102	263

Column percentages.

Table 1.17 (below) demonstrates the clear dominance of the energy firm Cuadrilla as the leading business actors with over half of the coverage in both the BBC and other news sampled. This is perhaps predictable given the firm has ten fracking site licences around the UK and has already begun operations in Lancashire. It is also contemplating developing the Balcombe site, an area in West Sussex.

**Table 1.17: Business Actors in Coverage of Fracking**

	BBC	Newspapers Online	Total
Cuadrilla	108	55	163
	60.7%	52.9%	
Energy – other company	17	15	32
	9.6%	14.4%	
Other business	24	15	39
	13.5%	14.4%	
IGAS	18	6	24
	10.1%	5.8%	
Energy – industry general	8	11	19
	4.5%	10.6%	
Business person	1	2	3
	.6%	1.9%	
Contractors	2	0	2
	1.1%	.0%	
Total	178	104	282

Column percentages.

### **Presence/Access: Fracking**

Following on from similar figures for the badger culling issue, this section includes Tables that provide more detailed comparisons and breakdowns of both news presence (frequency in appearance of actors) and access (speaking time afforded them).

**Table 1.18: Actor Prominence in BBC UK News Coverage of Fracking**

Actors	Appearances	Quotation Time
	%	%
Cause groups	25	21
Business	29	20
Central Government	12	16
Experts	8	13
Citizens	10	7
Conservative Party	4	11
Celebrities	1	5
Media	2	3
Local Government	1.5	2
Northern Irish Government	0.4	0
Legal sources	1	0
Police	3	1
Labour Party	0.4	0
Religious	1	0



Other political parties	2	0
Other public sector	0.4	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>272 Actors</b>	<b>6162 Seconds</b>

Column percentages. Most percentages are rounded and total percentages may exceed 100. Excludes BBC Online.

There is near parity in speaking time afforded to both business and cause group actors in the BBC UK-wide news coverage. The latter category encompasses many of those activists opposed to fracking (NB 'cause groups' in relation to this issue can be principally defined as opposed to the policy. This is not the case with the badger cull coverage, where the category of 'cause groups' encompasses 'pro' and 'anti' cull campaigners.) Interestingly although appearances by Conservative politicians are infrequent (4%) they nonetheless account for 11% of the related talk time. Other parties are mentioned less frequently and none was directly quoted in any coverage. UK government representatives accounted for 16% of the time devoted to speakers. Experts also commanded a significant amount of speaking time, commenting either on the environmental or economic consequences of fracking.

In Table 1.19 it is not surprising to see the dominance of cause groups and citizens, in Radio 2's *Jeremy Vine Show*. In this format citizens tend to talk to experts mediated by Jeremy Vine and so there is a near absence of business voices. As a result of this format the expert quotation time, is nearly half, of the quotation time.

**Table 1.19: Actor Prominence in the Jeremy Vine Show's Coverage of Fracking\***

	Appearances	Quotation Time
<b>Actors</b>	%	%
Experts	11	47
Citizens	55	37
Cause groups	9	14
Religious	2	0
Business	7	0
Media	2	1
UK Government	9	1
Police	2	0
Other political parties	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>44 Actors</b>	<b>1708 Seconds</b>

Column percentages. Most percentages are rounded and total percentages may exceed 100. \*There was a total of 18 items.

In terms of BBC UK Current Affairs and Factual coverage, experts are once again the dominant voices reported according to Table 1.20, in part reflecting the inclusion of several science programmes in this category. Business actors are the second most prominent group here.

**Table 1.20: Actor Prominence in BBC UK Current Affairs and Factual Coverage of Fracking**

	Appearances	Quotation Time
Actors	%	%
Experts	36	47
Business	11	25
Cause groups	14	16
Citizens	21	5
Media	11	4
UK Government	7	3
Total	28 Actors	709 Seconds

Column percentages. Most percentages are rounded and total percentages may exceed 100.

Table 1.21 shows coverage by BBC regional and devolved nations news is largely driven by protests. Here cause groups get more appearances as well as talk time when compared to business sources. The police also emerge as a distinctive category of actor due to their commentaries on the nature and conduct of the anti-fracking protest activities. BBC regional and devolved nations' coverage appears more focused on the 'here and now' of the demonstrations and protests. The kinds of more in-depth forms of investigating found elsewhere are limited here as are the distinctive voices of expert opinion-formers. Having noted this, we need to consider also the impact our sampling strategy may have had on these results. As noted, we focused particularly on days where there was a spike of interest on the various issues. This may have artificially accentuated the presence of cause groups and protestors at the expense of other actors.

**Table 1.21: Actor Prominence in BBC Regional and Devolved Nations Coverage of Fracking**

	Appearances	Quotation Time
Actors	%	%
Cause groups	41	40
Business	29	24
Police	6	13
Experts	5	8
Citizens	13	8
Religious	0	0
Celebrities	2	2
Conservative Party	1	0
Other political parties	3	5
Total	85 Actors	2454 Seconds

Column percentages. Most percentages are rounded and total percentages may exceed 100.

Table 1.22 reviews the coverage online provided by both BBC and the other media websites sampled. The former devotes more attention to business than it does to

the various cause groups. By contrast the *Telegraph* gives more prominence to UK government actors as well as Conservative politicians. Furthermore the latter also featured more items on fracking than the BBC online news service.

**Table 1.22: Actor Prominence in BBC and Other Online Coverage of Fracking**

	Website				Total
	<i>Telegraph.co.uk</i>	<i>BBC Online News</i>	<i>Dailymail.co.uk</i>	<i>Guardian.co.uk</i>	
Business	42	68	38	24	172
	16.0%	32.9%	26.8%	18.9%	
Cause groups	36	49	38	28	151
	13.7%	23.7%	26.8%	22.0%	
UK Government	69	21	25	22	137
	26.2%	10.1%	17.6%	17.3%	
Citizens	21	13	7	13	54
	8.0%	6.3%	4.9%	10.2%	
Experts	11	13	13	15	52
	4.2%	6.3%	9.2%	11.8%	
Police	5	12	5	8	30
	1.9%	5.8%	3.5%	6.3%	
Conservative Party	21	2	2	2	27
	8.0%	1.0%	1.4%	1.6%	
Religious	16	3	3	0	22
	6.1%	1.4%	2.1%	.0%	
Media	8	4	2	2	16
	3.0%	1.9%	1.4%	1.6%	
Other public sector	7	2	0	4	13
	2.7%	1.0%	.0%	3.1%	
Local Government	1	6	3	2	12
	.4%	2.9%	2.1%	1.6%	
Labour Party	5	2	2	3	12
	1.9%	1.0%	1.4%	2.4%	
Other political parties	2	6	0	2	10
	.8%	2.9%	.0%	1.6%	
Non-UK political source	7	0	2	1	10
	2.7%	.0%	1.4%	.8%	
Celebrities	2	4	0	0	6
	.8%	1.9%	.0%	.0%	
Liberal Democrats	4	0	1	1	6
	1.5%	.0%	.7%	.8%	
Northern Irish Govt	1	2	0	0	3
	.4%	1.0%	.0%	.0%	
Legal sources	4	0	1	0	5
	1.5%	.0%	.7%	.0%	
Welsh Government	1	0	0	0	1
	.4%	.0%	.0%	.0%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>739</b>

Column percentages.

**Table 1.23: Number of Items in Online Coverage of Fracking**

	Frequency	Percent
Telegraph.co.uk	96	37.8
bbc.co.uk/news	77	30.3
Dailymail.co.uk	38	15.0
Guardian.co.uk	43	16.9
Total	254	100.0

Column percentages. All percentages are rounded and totals may exceed 100.

Overall the fracking story was presented as a conflict between environmental activists who were in turn critical of those businesses with interests in this form of energy source. Expert opinion was used to adjudicate upon the likely consequences of measures. The UK government was present in the coverage but it was also noteworthy that, unlike other controversies of significant public interest, there was an absence of party political viewpoints not to mention the contrasting opinions of various elected representatives of one kind or another. Here there are clear parallels between the way the fracking and badger culling stories were reported.

### **Stopwatch Balance: Wind Farms and Rural Planning**

This section reviews coverage of two distinctive controversies that have been combined to form the third and final so-called 'hot button' issue, namely the development of wind farms together with changes in rural planning policy. Table 1.24 details the various triggers for coverage of this 'hot button' issue. It is particularly noteworthy that here there was less reference to protest based stories when compared to the other two 'hot button' issues but more on other forms of citizen activity. Rather, UK government announcements and initiatives were the most significant trigger with twice as much prominence as any other factor.

**Table 1.24: Triggers for BBC Coverage of Wind Farms and Rural Planning**

	Frequency	Percent
UK Government announcement/initiative	34	30.6
Other event/action	15	13.5
Other public body announcement/initiative	14	12.6
Corporate sector announcement/initiative	10	9.0
Other citizen activism (petitions, complaints)	8	7.2
Unclear	8	7.2
Other legislature debate	4	3.6
Other judicial process/outcome	4	3.6
Scottish Government announcement/initiative	3	2.7
Research publication - local government	3	2.7
Public demonstration/protest	2	1.8
Research publication - other	2	1.8
Welsh Government announcement/initiative	1	.9
Media initiated investigation/report	1	.9

Research publication - charity/voluntary	1	.9
Research publication - business sector	1	.9
Total	111	100.0

Column percentages. All percentages are rounded and totals may exceed 100.

Non-BBC coverage placed most emphasis on UK government originated sources. Table 1.25 (below) details this as well as other noteworthy trends, including the BBC giving greater prominence to business actors and, to a slightly lesser extent, citizens together with cause groups, than the other media sampled. That said, reporting of the activist oriented organisations (reflecting and involving citizens and cause groups) was comparatively less than with the other 'hot button' issues. By contrast, all three devolved administrations also featured, having not been part of the coverage in relation to the two alternative 'hot button' topics. Arguably this is understandable in relation to badgers, as the Scottish and Welsh governments have not pursued the culling issue, but less explicable in relation to fracking, which has UK-wide implications.

**Table 1.25: Actors in Coverage of Wind Farms and Rural Planning**

			Total
	BBC	Newspapers online	
UK Government	31	77	108
	11.2%	29.3%	
Business	66	31	97
	23.7%	11.8%	
Cause groups	49	35	84
	17.6%	13.3%	
Citizens	39	19	58
	14.0%	7.2%	
Experts	16	23	39
	5.8%	8.7%	
Other public sector	11	23	34
	4.0%	8.7%	
Local Government	33	6	39
	11.9%	2.3%	
Conservative Party	5	23	28
	1.8%	8.7%	
Scottish Government	11	1	12
	4.0%	.4%	
Labour Party	6	5	11
	2.2%	1.9%	
Welsh Government	6	1	7
	2.2%	.4%	
Liberal Democrats	3	3	6
	1.1%	1.1%	
Media	1	4	5
	.4%	1.5%	
Legal sources	0	4	4
	.0%	1.5%	
Other political parties*	0	4	4
	.0%	1.5%	
Police	0	2	2
	.0%	.8%	
Celebrities	0	1	1
	.0%	.4%	
Northern Irish Government	1	0	1
	.4%	.0%	
Non-UK political source	0	1	1
	.0%	.4%	
Total	278	263	541

Column percentages. All percentages are rounded and totals may exceed 100.

\*Includes 1 SNP MSP and 3 independents.

It should also be emphasised that reporting of wind farms and regional planning in relation to the devolved governments was not particularly extensive and almost solely the preserve of the BBC. Similarly, it was largely BBC outlets that gave a limited amount of attention to local government actors. More generally this meant

the BBC appeared more willing to report on elected authorities other than the UK government, reflecting the myriad of official bodies responsible for policy and implementation of the policy areas covered by the third 'hot button' issue.

Ultimately the complexity of the wind farming and rural planning controversies was reflected in the diverse range of actors that featured in the reporting.

Table 1.26 demonstrates how diffuse and multi-faceted coverage was over wind farms and rural planning. There was comparatively little reporting of the sectional interests and pressure groups familiar from the previous discussions of culling and fracking. Again this reflects, to an extent, the differing nature of the debates over energy and planning policy and the kinds of groups motivated to try and influence decision-making in this particular domain.

**Table 1.26: Cause Groups in Coverage of Wind Farms and Rural Planning**

	Newspapers		Total
	BBC	Online	
Other groups	26	19	45
	53.1%	54.3%	
Protestor general	19	5	24
	38.8%	14.3%	
Campaign to Protect Rural England	0	4	4
	.0%	11.4%	
Greenpeace	1	3	4
	2.0%	8.6%	
Friends of the Earth	1	2	3
	2.0%	5.7%	
National Farmers' Union (NFU)	1	1	2
	2.0%	2.9%	
RSPB	1	1	2
	2.0%	2.9%	
Total	49	35	84

Column percentages. All percentages are rounded and totals may exceed 100.

Table 1.27 (below) explains the different business actors who appeared in the coverage and shows that the BBC reporting included mention of a more varied range of corporate sources than the other media.



**Table 1.27: Business Actors in Coverage of Wind Farms and Rural Planning**

	BBC	Newspapers online	Total
	Energy - other company	36 54.5%	
Other business/company	16 24.2%	9 29.0%	25
Energy – industry general	6 9.1%	3 9.7%	9
Business person	4 6.1%	4 12.9%	8
Contractors	3 4.5%	0 .0%	3
Energy - Cuadrilla	0 .0%	2 6.5%	2
Energy - IGAS	0 .0%	2 6.5%	2
Chamber of commerce	1 1.5%	0 .0%	1
Engineering firm	0 .0%	1 3.2%	1
Total	66	31	97

Column percentages. All percentages are rounded and totals may exceed 100.

### **Presence/Access: Wind Farm and Rural Planning**

As with previous sections, the following discussion identifies the frequency with which certain actors appeared (their *news presence*) together with their amount of speaking time (their *news access*). Table 1.28 demonstrates that business sources gained slightly more prominence than representatives of the UK government representatives (although, note the impact that the small number of cases will have had on these percentages) in BBC UK news bulletins' coverage of wind farms and rural planning. But UK government representatives had a dominant presence in terms of quotation time, accounting for 45 percent of the speaking time in coverage of these issues. Expert opinion also featured prominently, particularly when measured in terms of direct quotation time. There was, however, a range of actors who, though featured by way of mention, got little to no direct opportunity to speak about their concerns and these included citizens as well as cause group representatives.

**Table 1.28: Actor Prominence in BBC UK News Coverage of Wind Farms and Rural Planning**

	Appearances	Quotation Time
<b>Actors</b>	%	%
UK Government	20	45
Business	22	15
Experts	12	17
Local Government	10	9
Citizens	12	5
Cause groups	7	2
Scottish Government	3	1
Conservative Party	3	0
Liberal Democrats	3	4
Labour Party	6	2
Other public sector	3	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>73 actors</b>	<b>1983 Seconds</b>

Column percentages. All percentages are rounded and totals may exceed 100. Excludes BBC Online.

Table 1.29 relates to a limited amount of coverage given to these issues in the *Jeremy Vine Show* and it is clear this particular forum enabled a range of different cause groups and citizens to debate and discuss their concerns.

**Table 1.29: Actor Prominence in the Jeremy Vine Show's Coverage of Wind Farms and Rural Planning**

	Appearances	Quotation Time
<b>Actors</b>	%	%
Cause groups	15	53
Citizens	69	45
UK Government	8	0
Liberal Democrats	8	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>13 actors</b>	<b>742 seconds</b>

Column percentages. All percentages are rounded and totals may exceed 100

Table 1.30 details the prominence of the limited range of actors who featured on Radio 4's *Farming Today*. These figures are of limited interest, due to the very small number of actors mentioned and quoted in relation to this issue (see our previous observations about the very small amount of coverage of this 'hot button' issue in this programme).

**Table 1.30: Actor Prominence in BBC Farming Today's Coverage of Wind Farms and Rural Planning**

	Appearances	Quotation Time
<b>Actor</b>	%	%
Experts	33	63
Citizens	33	18

Other public sector	17	19
UK Government	17	0
Total	6 actors	397 seconds

Column percentages. All percentages are rounded and totals may exceed 100.

Table 1.31 demonstrates how citizens, business and cause groups were to the fore in BBC Current Affairs coverage. The UK government was largely absent although representatives were in evidence from the public sector as well as local government and at least one of the devolved administrations, the Northern Ireland Government

**Table 1.31: Actor Prominence in BBC Current Affairs and Factual Coverage of Wind Farms and Rural Planning**

	Appearances	Quotation Time
<b>Actors</b>	%	%
Citizens	45	35
Business	10	27
Other public sector	15	29
Experts	5	2
Cause groups	5	0
Local Government	15	6
Northern Irish Government	5	0
Total	20 actors	1090 seconds

Column percentages. All percentages are rounded and totals may exceed 100.

Table 1.32 shows that coverage of this 'hot button' issue in BBC regional and devolved nations' coverage featured a considerable amount of coverage involving the devolved administration in Edinburgh. Although spokespeople for the Scottish government appear approximately half as much as the various cause groups, they nonetheless contribute slightly more by way of actual commentaries. Local councils are also a significant feature in this coverage as is arguably to be expected given the particular policy dimensions involved.

**Table 1.32: Actor Prominence in BBC Regional and Devolved Nations' Coverage of Wind Farms and Rural Planning**

	Appearances	Quotation Time
<b>Actors</b>	%	%
Scottish Government	11	26
Cause groups	21	23
Local Government	11	20
Experts	4	4
Citizens	2	0

Business	19	6
Welsh Government	13	0
UK Government	17	5
Other public sector	2	16
	100 actors	1210 seconds

Column percentages. All percentages are rounded and totals may exceed 100.

Table 1.33 turns to online coverage of 'hot button' issues. A wide range of actors appeared in BBC and non-BBC coverage. This perhaps reflects availability of space to incorporate perspectives of various kinds. It should also be noted that the BBC online news site was comparatively limited in the attention given to UK government sources, compared to business and cause groups as well as local authorities in its coverage. By contrast the other online news services appeared more reliant on conventional Whitehall sources.

**Table 1.33: Actor Prominence in Online Coverage of Wind Farms & Rural Planning**

Actor	Website				Total
	<i>BBC Online News</i>	<i>Telegraph.co.uk</i>	<i>Dailymail.co.uk</i>	<i>Guardian.co.uk</i>	
UK Government	6 5.0%	49 27.5%	18 36.7%	10 27.8%	83
Business	39 32.8%	21 11.8%	5 10.2%	5 13.9%	70
Cause groups	31 26.1%	21 11.8%	6 12.2%	8 22.2%	66
Citizens	9 7.6%	17 9.6%	2 4.1%	0 .0%	28
Other public sector	4 3.4%	16 9.0%	2 4.1%	5 13.9%	27
Conservative Party	3 2.5%	16 9.0%	7 14.3%	0 .0%	26
Experts	2 1.7%	15 8.4%	2 4.1%	6 16.7%	25
Local Government	18 15.1%	3 1.7%	3 6.1%	0 .0%	24
Celebrities	0 .0%	1 .6%	0 .0%	0 .0%	1
Labour Party	2 1.7%	3 1.7%	2 4.1%	0 .0%	7
Media	1 .8%	2 1.1%	0 .0%	2 5.6%	5
Scottish Government	4 3.4%	1 .6%	0 .0%	0 .0%	5
Other political parties	0 .0%	4 2.2%	0 .0%	0 .0%	4
Legal sources	0 .0%	3 1.7%	1 2.0%	0 .0%	4
Liberal Democrats	0	3	0	0	3

	.0%	1.7%	.0%	.0%	
Police	0	1	1	0	2
	.0%	.6%	2.0%	.0%	
Welsh Government	0	1	0	0	1
	.0%	.6%	.0%	.0%	
Non-UK political source	0	1	0	0	1
	.0%	.6%	.0%	.0%	
Total	119	178	49	36	382

Column percentages.

## Directional Balance of Coverage of the Three Hot Button Issues

While stopwatch balance gives insight into whose voices are presented and whose are not, we should not assume that media presence, or even access, demonstrates political advantage. In some instances, the prominence of an individual or institution may be because of public and media opprobrium. Not all publicity is necessarily good publicity.

Therefore, further measures are needed to assess the impartiality of coverage of these 'hot button' rural debates. It is important to ascertain whether particular news sources are more routinely presented in a defensive stance, responding to criticism from other actors rather than asserting their own views and position. For this reason, this section will provide measures of directional balance.

Directional balance assesses to what extent issues and individuals are dealt with positively or negatively. This is difficult to measure in a reliable way in content analysis as judgements about media bias tend to be affected by audiences' own political viewpoints<sup>23</sup>. For this study, our principal measures of directional balance concerned the manifest treatment of actors by the journalist within the coverage. For any of the following indicators of positive or negative treatment of an actor in coverage to be coded, the journalist needed to use explicitly evaluative language about the speaking actor (i.e. criticisms made by one actor against another actor were not counted).

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<sup>23</sup> D'Alessio, D. (2003) 'An Experimental Examination of Readers' Perceptions of Media Bias', *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* June 2003 vol. 80 no. 2 282-294.

The four measures were

1. **Favour** – did the journalist use manifestly positive or negative evaluative language about the actor?
2. **Use of key words** – did journalists use evaluative terms to describe, understand or seek to explain events? Up to three phrases could be coded, using a pre-selected list determined by selecting keywords used by actors in a sample of the coverage (coding of an item for keywords ended when three of them had been used. Keywords used by news actors were not coded.)
3. **Caveat** – did the journalist make any caveats about any claims, statements or motives of a quoted actor, whether as a preface or subsequent to an appearance?
4. **Challenge** – did the journalist challenge the claims of the speaking actor via questions? These challenges could range from a direct refutation of a claim as wholly or partially false to invoking a counter argument or competing claim to questions as to whether aims are legitimate or achievable.

As with the previous section on stopwatch balance we will assess patterns of manifest editorial support, criticism and comment for each of the three ‘hot button’ issues. Table 1.34 compares the number of occasions journalists provided manifestly favourable or unfavourable assessments of news actors.

**Table 1.34: Number of Instances of Favourable/ Unfavourable Treatment of News Actors in BBC and Non-BBC coverage of All ‘Hot Button’ Issues**

		Type of Hot Button Issue			Total (Number)
		Badger Cull (Number)	Fracking (Number)	Wind Farms and Rural Planning (Number)	
BBC	Favourable	2	2	0	4
	Neutral	648	628	274	1550
	Unfavourable	6	8	4	18
Other	Favourable	3	5	6	14
	Neutral	282	516	249	1047
	Unfavourable	11	10	9	30

The key conclusion to draw from this table is that BBC journalists overwhelmingly avoid using favourable or unfavourable language to describe actors when reporting contentious issues.

To explore this issue in greater depth we looked at the keywords used by journalists to report on each of the 'hot button' issues (see Table 1.35 below). We sought to capture the analytical, descriptive and evaluative terminology used by journalists in reporting these issues.

## Keywords

Table 1.35: Key Words in Coverage of the Badger Cull on BBC and Non-BBC output

								Total
	BBC National News Bulletin	BBC Discussion and Talk	BBC National Specialist News Bulletin	BBC Other National Current Affairs	BBC Regional and home nations	BBC Online	Newspaper Online	
ghastly disease						1		1
						100.0%		
marksmen	21	2	8	1	24	19	28	103
	20.4%	1.9%	7.8%	1.0%	23.3%	18.4%	27.2%	
slaughter (cattle)	11		1	3		8	19	42
	26.2%		2.4%	7.1%		19.0%	45.2%	
humane	9	1	6		2	5	12	35
	25.7%	2.9%	17.1%		5.7%	14.3%	34.3%	
inhumane	6	2				6	4	18
	33.3%	11.1%				33.3%	22.2%	
eradication (TB)	0	1				4	4	9
	0.0%	11.1%				44.4%	44.4%	
slaughter (badgers)	2					1	3	6
	33.3%					16.7%	50.0%	
extermination		1				1	3	5
		20.0%				20.0%	60.0%	
reservoir of disease	3						1	4
	75.0%						25.0%	
bloody war						1	2	3
						33.3%	66.7%	
gunmen	1		1					2
	50.0%		50.0%					
scapegoat (badgers)							1	1
							100.0%	
saving (badgers)							1	1
							100.0%	
saving (cattle)	1							1
	100.0%							
Total	54	7	16	4	26	46	78	231

Row percentages. More than one word per item possible.

As the numbers are small here we should avoid drawing conclusions apart from saying that there is little evidence that journalists used emotive and obviously evaluative language when reporting on the badger cull. For example, the single use of the emotive 'gunmen' to describe the people tasked with shooting the badgers contrasts with the use of 'marksmen'. From the perspective of anti-cull groups, of course, marksmen may well be perceived as a positive evaluation of the conduct of the cull as it implies precision and hence the 'humaneness' of the culling process.



**Table 1.36: Key words in coverage of fracking on BBC and non-BBC output**

	BBC UK News Bulletin	BBC UK Discussion and Talk	BBC UK Specialist News	BBC Other UK Current Affairs	BBC Regional and Devolved Nations	BBC Online News	Newspaper Online	
tremors/ earthquakes	34	6	1	3	1	3	55	103
	33.0%	5.8%	1.0%	2.9%	1.0%	2.9%	53.4%	
pollute	16		1		3	1	28	49
	32.7%		2.0%		6.1%	2.0%	57.1%	
contaminated	4	1		3	2	3	32	45
	8.9%	2.2%		6.7%	4.4%	6.7%	71.1%	
dangerous	3				1	2	5	11
	27.3%				9.1%	18.2%	45.5%	
anarchists (fracking)				1			2	3
				33.3%			66.7%	
blight	1						2	3
	33.3%						66.7%	
nimby(ism)							2	2
							100.0%	
destruction of livelihoods							1	1
							100.0%	
noise							1	1
							100.0%	
Total	58	7	2	7	7	9	128	218

Row percentages. More than one word per item possible.

As with the reporting of badgers, there is little evidence here to suggest that BBC journalists used evaluative and emotive language in their reporting of fracking. Table 1.37 compares the use of keywords in relation to wind farms and rural planning and finds BBC journalists also avoid the use of evaluative and emotive language when reporting these matters (NB mention of tremors and earthquakes relating to wind farms occurred in items also reporting fracking.)

**Table 1.37: Key words in coverage of wind farms and rural planning on BBC and non-BBC output**

	BBC UK News Bulletin	BBC UK Specialist News Bulletin	BBC Other UK Current Affairs	BBC Regional and Devolved Nations	BBC Online News	Newspaper Online	
blight		1		1	0	9	11
		9.1%		9.1%	0.0%	81.8%	
noise					2	4	6
					33.3%	66.7%	
tremors/earthquakes	2					4	6
	33.3%					66.7%	
nimby(ism)			2		1	2	5
			40.0%		20.0%	40.0%	
contaminated						3	3
						100.0%	
pollute						1	1
						100.0%	
Total	2	1	2	1	3	23	32

Row percentages. More than one word per item possible.

Editorial caveats made in relation to claims made by actors were also very rare (see Table 1.38), either before or after an appearance. That does not mean to say, however, the views of actors are not challenged and tested. This can occur via questioning by journalists (thus giving actors an opportunity to respond) or through presenting the claims of competing actors (either indirectly through the journalist outlining the competing position or directly through the news presence of a competing actor).

**Table 1.38: Number of Caveats Linked to Claims Made by News Actors in BBC and Non-BBC coverage**

		Type of Hot Button Issue			Total
		Badger Cull	Fracking	Wind Farms and Rural Planning	
		(Number)	(Number)	(Number)	(Number)
BBC	Caveat(s) made	4	11	2	17
	no caveats made	652	627	275	1554
Other media	Caveat(s) made	7	11	11	29
	no caveats made	289	519	253	1061

Table 1.39 shows the extent to which journalists challenge actors through posing questions. Challenge through posing questions is far more prevalent than the use of either evaluative language use or caveat. It is part and parcel of journalism and we would not wish to see it as an indicator of directional bias. Challenges invite the viewer or reader to assess source credibility, by assessing the adequacy of the responses given and the challenged actor may perform well or badly in the eyes of the audience. As the table shows challenge is far from ubiquitous. We can say that the more common journalist practice in the majority of news programmes (the exceptions would be flagship programmes such as *Today* and *Newsnight*) is not to question actors directly but to present the views of competing actors side by side without use of evaluative language and/or caveat on the part of journalists.

**Table 1.39: Number of Journalistic Challenges Made to Claims Made by News Actors in BBC and Non-BBC Coverage**

		Type of Hot Button Issue			Total (Number)
		Badger Cull (Number)	Fracking (Number)	Wind Farms and Rural Planning (Number)	
BBC	Actor challenged	46	40	15	101
	not challenged	610	598	263	1471
Other	Actor challenged	6	12	4	22
	not challenged	290	519	260	1069

It is important to appreciate that the low frequencies in the preceding tables may to some extent be a product of the large numbers of actors that were coded in TV news and current affairs programmes. For example, it may be that these rare instances of challenges, caveats and (un)favourable evaluations are widely distributed across content, rather than clustered around particular pockets of the sample. To check this we have also calculated the proportion of items or programmes that contained at least one actor being challenged (we concentrate on challenging here because it is by far the most prevalent type of intervention uncovered but we should still warn of the dangers of jumping to conclusions from such a small sample). As we would expect those programme formats with more time to give greater depth of coverage (current affairs, specialist news) included more direct journalistic challenges to actors.

**Table 1.40: Proportion of Items/ Programmes within Badger Cull Coverage Containing at Least One Editorial Challenge**

	actor challenge present	no actor challenge	Total
BBC UK News Bulletin	11	73	84
	13.1%	86.9%	100.0%
BBC Jeremy Vine Show	2	10	12
	16.7%	83.3%	100.0%
BBC Farming Today	13	26	39
	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
BBC UK Current Affairs and Factual	2	2	4
	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
BBC Regional and Devolved Nations	9	41	50
	18.0%	82.0%	100.0%
BBC Online News	1	70	71
	1.4%	98.6%	100.0%
Newspapers Online	6	79	85
	7.1%	92.9%	100.0%
Total	44	301	345
	12.8%	87.2%	100.0%

Row percentages

**Table 1.41: Proportion of Items/ Programmes within Fracking Coverage Containing at Least One Editorial Challenge**

	actor challenge present	no actor challenge	Total
BBC UK News Bulletin	15	100	115
	13.0%	87.0%	100.0%
BBC Jeremy Vine Show	4	14	18
	22.2%	77.8%	100.0%
BBC Farming Today	0	1	1
	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
BBC UK Current Affairs and Factual	3	1	4
	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%
BBC Regional and Home Nations	7	25	32
	21.9%	78.1%	100.0%
BBC Online News	1	76	77
	1.3%	98.7%	100.0%
Newspapers Online	10	167	177
	5.6%	94.4%	100.0%
Total	40	384	424
	9.4%	90.6%	100.0%

Row percentages

**Table 1.42: Proportion of Items/ Programmes within Wind Farms and Rural Planning Coverage Containing at Least One Editorial Challenge**

	actor challenge present	no actor challenge	Total
BBC UK News Bulletin	4	29	33
	12.1%	87.9%	100.0%
BBC Jeremy Vine Show	3	3	6
	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
BBC Farming Today	1	2	3
	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
BBC UK Current Affairs and Factual	1	2	3
	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
BBC Regional and Devolved Nations	4	16	20
	20.0%	80.0%	100.0%
BBC Online News	0	46	46
	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Newspapers Online	4	80	84
	4.8%	95.2%	100.0%
Total	17	178	195
	8.7%	91.3%	100.0%

Row percentages

Taken together, these tables show that, even with this more generous measure of 'Challenge', it remains a relatively infrequent feature of all different types of media (Badger Culling – 12.8% of items contained at least one challenge, Fracking – 9.4% and Wind farms – 8.7%) It is also pertinent to note how infrequent challenge was in BBC Online coverage compared to all other categories (including Other Newspaper Online). Again we may conclude that format determines to a large extent journalistic style and that challenges predominantly occur in those programmes where there is time for extended interviews with actors.

Of course, these measures do not mean that disputation and controversy is not a feature of the coverage (in the BBC and elsewhere), but this aspect is provided by the actors presented and quoted. This in turn provides insight into the relative value of 'stopwatch balance' as a measure of impartiality. As we have noted, just because an actor attracts a large share of media coverage we cannot assume that this proves they have achieved some sort of advantage. It could be the case that a large proportion of this coverage is critical or negative. The findings on directional balance, however, show that this was only very rarely the case in the coverage of these three 'hot button' issues. It follows, therefore, that on this occasion, stopwatch balance can be taken as a robust, if partial, measure of the degree of impartiality of coverage.



## **Hot button issues: agenda balance, key visuals and key words**

Agenda balance is concerned with the interpretative level of coverage – i.e. what aspects of an issue or policy are rendered visible, named and promoted. In other words, what is an issue mainly seen to be about? Tables 1.1 – 1.3 have already provided some general insight into this aspect, by comparing the relative news value of the three selected topics. This section extends this analysis examining the sub-issues foregrounded under each of the headline topics. Agenda balance represents another way in which imbalance and partiality may manifest itself in coverage. For example, if badger cull coverage was predominantly focused on the direct costs of the cull rather than the costs of the spread of tuberculosis, one could legitimately argue that one interpretative frame of reference had been privileged over a competing frame.

It is necessary to provide some background about coding procedures before presenting the findings from this analysis. This section will provide analysis of editorial themes, key visual images, key words and references to policy differences. The coding procedures and protocols were as follows:

**Editorial themes:** Coders could code up to three themes per news item and up to six for longer news and current affairs programmes. Judgements for inclusion were made according to three criteria (1) the use of headlines or studio introduction leads to flag the most salient aspect of the piece, (2) the prominence of a theme in an item/ programme, and (3) the amount of space given to the theme in the coverage. We did not code subtle, imputed or passing references made by journalists or their sources. We also adopted a 20 second rule for standard length news items, i.e. the issue had to occupy at least 20 seconds of coverage to be counted as a theme.

**Key visual images:** The key visual references within TV and online coverage were also coded. Once again, up to three of the lengthiest and most prominent visuals used in items could be coded.

**Policy Differences:** The responsibility for rural planning, fracking and the prevention of bovine TB in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales is with the respective national governments. This measure was used to identify the extent to which journalists acknowledged this in their commentaries.

## **Badger Cull themes, visuals and key words**

Table 1.43 (below) outlines the sub-themes that emerged in relation to badger cull coverage. The following main points emerge

- The cull process<sup>24</sup> was the most prominent subtheme across all news coverage (BBC and non-BBC), but was appreciably more prominent in BBC coverage, accounting for just under a third of all themes coded.
- The cost of the cull did not prove very newsworthy by comparison, which suggests the principal focus of news coverage was on what was happening in the cull zone rather than its expense.
- 'Other badger issues' was the second most prominent issue but this provides little analytical insight, as it is a residual category that captures all other disparate badger and cull issues not covered by the categories listed in Table 1.43 (aside from signalling the diffuse newsworthiness of badgers).
- The protests and protestations of civil actors received more than twice as much coverage as official policy pronouncements and actions.
- In terms of impact, coverage of the impact on badgers slightly exceeded coverage of the impact on local communities in the BBC output (the reverse was the case for non-BBC Online output).
- There was very limited coverage about the pathology of bovine tuberculosis
- Little history or context was given to the development of the cull

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<sup>24</sup> The theme 'the cull process' is an aggregated category including a number of subthemes. Coders could code up to three themes per news item and six for current affairs and factual programmes. These comprised of information on: whether the mass killing of badgers would be possible; cull zones – their general size and location etc; cull numbers - badgers killed; badger vaccination as an alternative; biosecurity of infected farms; cattle movement restrictions; cattle slaughter; scientific evidence on effectiveness of culls.



**Table 1.43: The main themes in coverage of the badger cull on BBC and non-BBC output**

	BBC	Other Online Newspaper
The cull process	210 32.3%	58 24.5%
Other badger issues	145 22.3%	48 20.3%
Protest/opposition	115 17.7%	48 20.3%
Policy and actions of governments	45 6.9%	34 14.3%
Impact on badgers	55 8.4%	15 6.3%
Impact of cull on farmers and communities	36 5.5%	19 8.0%
Cost of Cull	27 4.1%	5 2.1%
Nature of the disease	10 1.5%	5 2.1%
Context/ historical and national	8 1.2%	5 2.1%
Total	651	237

Column percentages. All percentages are rounded and totals may exceed 100.

Table 1.44 (below) breaks down the agenda balance of badger cull coverage by different categories of BBC output and reveals some variation in the coverage.

- The cull process was most dominant in BBC UK-wide national news coverage and BBC UK-wide Current Affairs (although note the small number of cases involved in the calculation of the latter).
- There was an appreciably greater spread of issues in the coverage in *Farming Today*. For example, nearly three times as much coverage was given to the 'policy and actions of government' in this programme, compared with UK news bulletins. This programme also gave most attention to the costs of the cull.

- Coverage of ‘Protest and opposition’ was most prominent in BBC regional and devolved nations’ coverage.
- But programmes falling in this category gave almost no coverage to the impact of the cull on farmers and local communities. (These issues had a minority presence in all other media sectors.)

**Table 1.44: The main themes in coverage of the badger cull on BBC output**

	BBC UK News Bulletin	BBC UK Jeremy Vine Show	BBC UK Farming Today	BBC UK Current Affairs and Factual	BBC Regional and devolved nations	BBC Online News
The Cull Process	40.1%	25.0%	22.1%	47.1%	32.0%	27.9%
Other badger issue	19.4%	25.0%	19.5%	11.8%	24.6%	27.9%
Protest/opposition	15.4%	15.6%	17.7%	11.8%	24.6%	16.4%
Impact on badgers	8.8%	12.5%	7.1%	5.9%	7.4%	9.3%
Policy and actions of gov'ts	4.8%	9.4%	12.4%	11.8%	7.4%	4.3%
Impact of cull on farmers and communities	7.9%	6.3%	7.1%	0.0%	0.8%	5.0%
Cost of Cull	1.8%	3.1%	8.8%	0.0%	2.5%	6.4%
Nature of the disease	1.3%	3.1%	3.5%	5.9%	0.0%	0.7%
Context/ historical and national	0.4%	0.0%	1.8%	5.9%	0.8%	2.1%
Total	227	32	113	17	122	140

Column percentages. All percentages are rounded and totals may exceed 100. More than one theme per item possible

## Key visuals

The visual trends in coverage tend to confirm the agenda focus discussed above. Badgers were by far the most dominant visual motif in coverage (see Table 1.45), accounting for more than 50 percent of coded visuals in BBC and non-BBC coverage. By contrast, cows and cattle had far less prominence. One can speculate on the reasons for this (such as the photogenic qualities of the badger) but it does raise

interesting questions about agenda balance in the visualisation of the controversy and, in particular, the identification of the principal victims. The story would have looked very different (literally and figuratively) had images of cows sick with TB or animals slaughtered as a preventative measure achieved greater media prominence, and unwitting, healthy looking badgers, less.

Protests and demonstrations also achieved a sizeable minority presence in coverage.

**Table 1.45: Key visuals in coverage of the badger cull on BBC and non-BBC output**

	<b>BBC</b>	<b>non-BBC</b>
badger(s)	53.0%	51.9%
anti-badger cull protestors/demonstration	24.8%	37.0%
cows, cattle general	19.5%	11.1%
badgers(s) being vaccinated	2.7%	0.0%
Total	149	27

Column percentages. More than one visual per item possible.

### References to national policy differences

The responsibilities for dealing with bovine TB (as with fracking and rural planning) are with the respective national governments in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. For example, the national Executives across the UK have very different positions on whether to pursue the culling of badgers as a means of controlling the spread of bovine TB. Tables 1.46 and 1.47 examine the extent to which these national policy differences were mentioned in news and current affairs coverage. They both show these were only referred to in a minority of instances, with a higher incidence evident in BBC coverage compared with non-BBC.

The most noticeable finding from Table 1.47, which breaks down the general distributions by media category, is that these national differences were hardly mentioned in *Farming Today*, despite the greater diversity of this programme's agenda balance noted in Table 1.44.

**Table 1.46: Reference to Any Devolved Nations' Policy Differences in Coverage of the Badger Cull on BBC and non-BBC output**

			Total
	Differences in devolved national government stance/policies mentioned	Not mentioned	
BBC	36	224	260
	13.8%	86.2%	100.0%
Newspaper Online	8	77	85
	9.4%	90.6%	100.0%

Row percentages based on number of items and programmes

**Table 1.47 Reference to Any Devolved Nations’ Policy Differences in Coverage of the Badger Cull on BBC and non-BBC output by media category**

	Differences in devolved national government stance/policies mentioned	not mentioned	Total
	Newspaper Online	8 9.4%	77 90.6%
BBC UK News Bulletin	15 17.9%	69 82.1%	84 100.0%
BBC Online News	14 19.7%	57 80.3%	71 100.0%
BBC Regional and Devolved Nations	1 2.0%	49 98.0%	50 100.0%
BBC UK Farming Today	1 2.6%	38 97.4%	39 100.0%
BBC UK Jeremy Vine Show	3 25.0%	9 75.0%	12 100.0%
BBC UK Current Affairs and Factual	2 50.0%	2 50.0%	4 100.0%
Total	44 12.8%	301 87.2%	345 100.0%

Row percentages based on number of items and programmes

## Mentions of the BBC website

Time constraints are an inevitable factor in broadcast news and current affairs and these will constrain the range of issues that can be addressed in any given context. However, BBC broadcast journalists have the opportunity to refer viewers to the BBC website to find out more about a particular story. However, our content analysis only identified two occasions when this occurred with respect to bovine TB and badger culling (out of 189 potential opportunities to do so).

## Fracking themes, visuals and key words

Table 1.48 outlines the sub-themes that emerged in relation to coverage of the fracking controversy. The following main points emerge:

- Public protests and opposition were the most prominent topic in coverage.
- There were no major differences between BBC and non-BBC in their identification of the main topics related to the Fracking debate.
- Coverage of the impact of fracking on the countryside and communities exceeded coverage of the ‘benefits of fracking’. The BBC gave more prominence to the benefits than non-BBC.
- Government decisions and policy making were once again relatively marginalised.

- ‘Explanations of the fracking’ was the second most prominent category across all media, being slightly more prominent in BBC coverage. This explanatory dimension was not as apparent in coverage of bovine TB and badger culling.
- Historical and contextual information was, however, similarly marginalised.

**Table 1.48: The main themes in coverage of the Fracking on BBC and non-BBC output**

	Media	
	BBC	Other Online Newspapers
Protest/opposition	174 27.9%	97 21.2%
Explanations of fracking	140 22.5%	91 19.9%
Impact on countryside/ communities	122 19.6%	67 14.7%
Other fracking issues	48 7.7%	64 14.0%
Policy and actions of governments	33 5.3%	63 13.8%
Benefits of Fracking	59 9.5%	27 5.9%
Context/ historical and nations	27 4.3%	27 5.9%
Costs of Fracking	20 3.2%	21 4.6%
Total	623	457

Column percentages. More than one theme per item possible

Table 1.49 disaggregates the agenda balance of BBC coverage by media category. The following main points emerge:

- Protests and opposition were particularly prominent in BBC regional and devolved nations’ coverage, accounting for more than half of the theme categories coded.
- UK current affairs coverage gave greatest coverage to historical and contextual matters.

**Table 1.49: Main Themes in Coverage of Fracking on BBC output**

	BBC UK News Bulletin	BBC UK Jeremy Vine Show	BBC UK Farming Today	BBC UK Current Affairs and Factual	BBC Regional and Devolved Nations	BBC Online News
Protest/ opposition	24.1%	25.5%	0.0%	14.3%	54.8%	24.2%

Explanations of fracking	23.8%	23.4%	33.3%	19.0%	17.9%	22.5%
Impact on countryside/ communities	16.2%	23.4%	33.3%	33.3%	15.5%	24.2%
Benefits of Fracking	13.1%	2.1%	33.3%	4.8%	2.4%	9.0%
Other fracking issue	6.9%	12.8%	0.0%	4.8%	4.8%	9.6%
Policy and actions of governments	6.6%	6.4%	0.0%	4.8%	1.2%	5.1%
Context/historical and national	4.8%	2.1%	0.0%	14.3%	1.2%	4.5%
Costs of Fracking	4.5%	4.3%	0.0%	4.8%	2.4%	1.1%
Total	290	47	3	21	84	178

Column percentages. More than one theme per item possible

## Key visuals

Table 1.50 presents the findings for the main visual references evident in fracking coverage. The following points emerge from this analysis:

- Protests and demonstrations were the most frequently featured visual references in coverage of fracking. Their prominence was proportionally far greater than found in badger cull coverage.
- Depictions of the industry in operation also featured in approximately a third of instances.
- On a couple of occasions, visual references were made to wind turbines/ farms in fracking coverage (reflecting isolated instances where the two 'hot button' issues overlapped in specific items).
- Visual trends in BBC and non-BBC coverage were very similar.

**Table 1.50: Key visuals in coverage of fracking on BBC and non-BBC output**

	BBC	Newspapers Online
anti fracking protestors/demonstration	63	24
	41.2%	43.6%
drill/fracking	54	18
	35.3%	32.7%
map/diagram of fracking process	34	13
	22.2%	23.6%
wind turbines/farm in rural location	2	0
	1.3%	0.0%
Total	153	55

Column percentages. More than one visual per item possible.

## Mention of devolved nations' policy differences

Table 1.51 indicates the extent to which policy differences in different national governments on fracking were mentioned or discussed in coverage. As with badger culling, instances when these occurred were rare, with only 13 examples found in all BBC coverage. Most of these were identified in BBC UK news bulletins (BBC Online was the only other BBC media sector that made reference to differences between the policies of the devolved nations).

**Table 1.51: Mention of Any Devolved Nations' Policy Differences in Coverage of Fracking on BBC and non-BBC Output by Media Category**

	Mention of Devolved Nations' Policy Differences		Total
	Differences in devolved national government stance/policies mentioned	not mentioned	
Newspapers Online	5 2.8%	172 97.2%	177 100.0%
BBC UK News Bulletin	11 9.6%	104 90.4%	115 100.0%
BBC Online News	2 2.6%	75 97.4%	77 100.0%
BBC Regional and Devolved Nations	0 0.0%	32 100.0%	32 100.0%
BBC UK Jeremy Vine Show	0 0.0%	18 100.0%	18 100.0%
BBC UK Current Affairs and Factual	0 0.0%	4 100.0%	4 100.0%
BBC UK Farming Today	0 0.0%	1 100.0%	1 100.0%
Total	18 4.2%	406 95.8%	424 100.0%

Row percentages.

## Mentions of the BBC website

As with badger cull coverage, references made to the BBC website for viewers and listeners to obtain further information on the fracking issue were extremely rare. Only four instances were identified in our sample.

## Wind Farms and Rural Planning: themes, visuals and key words

Table 1.52 outlines the sub-themes that emerged in relation to coverage of wind farms and rural planning themes. The following main points emerge:

- BBC coverage gave more attention to planning processes and issues than non-BBC coverage.
- Across both sectors, protest and opposition were far less evident in coverage of this 'hot button' issue, compared with the previous two examples.
- Non-BBC outlets gave more coverage to government policy and actions, but levels of coverage of this issue were higher overall, compared with the previous two issues.
- As with the previous two issues, historical and contextual coverage was very rare.

**Table 1.52: The Main Themes in Coverage of Wind Farms and Rural Planning on BBC and non-BBC output**

	BBC	Newspapers Online
Planning process and issues	104 39.4%	35 15.9%
Consequences of rural planning	8 3.0%	15 6.8%
Protest/ opposition	27 10.2%	10 4.5%
Cost of wind farms/ development	29 11.0%	28 12.7%
Policy and actions of govts	35 13.3%	43 19.5%
Context/ historical and national	4 1.5%	7 3.2%
Energy general	16 6.1%	31 14.1%
Other issues	41 15.5%	51 23.2%
Total	264	220

Column percentages More than one theme per item possible.

Table 1.53 disaggregates the agenda balance of BBC coverage by media category. The following main points emerge:

- 'Planning and process issues' were least prominent in coverage by BBC regional and devolved nations' programmes.
- Regional and devolved nations' programmes gave by far the greatest proportion of coverage to 'Policy and actions of government'.



- A tenth of regional and devolved nations' programmes' coverage of this issue focused on 'protest and opposition', but these themes were almost absent from UK news and current affairs coverage.

**Table 1.53: The Main Themes in Coverage of Wind Farms and Rural Planning by Outlet**

	BBC UK News Bulletin	BBC UK Jeremy Vine Show	BBC UK Farming Today	BBC UK Current Affairs and Factual	BBC Regional and Devolved Nations	BBC Online	Newspapers Online
Planning process and issues	36 46.8%	7 50.0%	2 28.6%	6 54.5%	13 26.0%	40 38.1%	35 15.9%
Other issue	13 16.9%	1 7.1%	2 28.6%	2 18.2%	8 16.0%	15 14.3%	51 23.2%
Policy and actions of govts	7 9.1%	2 14.3%	0 0.0%	2 18.2%	14 28.0%	10 9.5%	43 19.5%
Cost of wind farms/ development	9 11.7%	1 7.1%	1 14.3%	0 0.0%	8 16.0%	10 9.5%	28 12.7%
Energy general	5 6.5%	2 14.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	2 4.0%	7 6.7%	31 14.1%
Protest/ opposition	1 1.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 9.1%	5 10.0%	20 19.0%	10 4.5%
Consequences of rural planning	4 5.2%	1 7.1%	1 14.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	2 1.9%	15 6.8%
Context/ historical and national	2 2.6%	0 0.0%	1 14.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 1.0%	7 3.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>220</b>

Column percentages. More than one theme per item possible.

## Key visuals

In terms of visualisation, there were no clearly dominant images in the representation of this issue. For example, visual images of wind turbines and farms only occurred in 17 BBC items or programmes across the sample and there were only 7 instances where pictures were shown of houses being built in rural locations. Only 1 item showed a protest against the building of new houses.

## Mention of national policy differences on rural planning

As with the previous two 'hot button' issues, references to differences between the policies of the devolved nations over wind farms and rural planning were extremely rare (four occasions across the whole sample of BBC coverage).

## Reference to websites

Only one occasion was identified in BBC broadcast coverage of wind farms and rural planning where reference was made to the BBC website.

## Conclusion

The main findings of this analysis of BBC coverage of three controversial rural issues are as follows:

### Stopwatch balance

- Fracking and badger culling attracted higher levels of coverage than wind farms and rural planning. This probably reflects the contemporariness of controversial developments regarding both of the first two issues (i.e. August 2013 saw the commencement of test drilling for shale gas in Balcombe, Sussex and culling of badgers in Gloucestershire and Somerset).
- Political controversies concerning all three issues were not defined in party political terms. Parties were rarely featured and politicians principally appeared as representatives of political office. Minor political parties were particularly side-lined in coverage, including the Green Party.
- Experts achieved a notable minority presence in all three 'hot button' issues, particularly with regard to their average quotation time.
- Protestors and cause groups were very prominent subjects of coverage and sources of comment for all of the issues. Their presence was particularly evident in coverage of badger culling. Most frequently, these protestors were not linked to named, established groups. Although these actors appeared frequently, they had less impact in terms of the instigation of coverage. Here, central government sources were most evident.
- There was variation in the diversity of opinion accessed in the reporting of these issues. For example, the specialist programme *Farming Today* accessed a wider range of opinion on the badger culling issue than mainstream news bulletins.
- The proximity of shale gas and badger culling activity affected the extent to which these issues were covered in regional and 'other national' news coverage. Badger culling received high levels of coverage in Somerset and Gloucestershire based broadcasts but there was no coverage of shale gas exploration. The reverse was found to be the case for Sussex based programmes. BBC devolved nations' coverage in Scotland and Wales focused

solely on wind farms and rural planning. These apparent national and regional differences need to be treated cautiously, however, as they could simply reflect the methods used to select regional and devolved national content for analysis.

- Overall our measures of stopwatch balance (frequency of appearance of political actors and amount of quotation time they received) indicated a broad parity in the coverage of positive and negative opinion about all of the 'hot button' issues in BBC coverage.

### Directional Balance

- There was no evidence of any widespread use of emotive or evaluative phrases in the way BBC journalists reported these controversial matters. BBC journalists were most likely to challenge actor claims through questioning, but there was no evidence that certain policy positions were challenged more frequently than others.

### Agenda Balance

- The most prominent subtheme across all news coverage (BBC and non-BBC) was the badger cull process.
- Coverage of fracking gave most attention to public demonstrations and protests.
- Coverage of wind farms and rural planning gave greatest coverage to planning processes and issues.
- In terms of the key visuals that accompanied television coverage of the three 'hot button' issues, badgers were by far the most dominant visual motif in coverage of the badger cull, accounting for more than 50 percent of coded visuals in BBC and non-BBC coverage. In contrast, images of cows and cattle appeared far less. In the coverage of fracking, protests and demonstrations were the most frequently featured visual. Their prominence was proportionally far greater than protests in badger cull coverage. However, in coverage of wind farms and rural planning there were no clearly dominant images.
- Very few references were made to the devolved responsibilities and policy differences of the nations' governments in rural affairs.

- References in broadcast coverage to the BBC website occurred very infrequently.

Despite variations of these kinds, there was no consistent evidence found of partiality in any of the BBC programme categories sampled (whether with respect to measures of 'stopwatch', 'directional' or 'agenda' balance).

# 2

## The Rural Proofing of News

The term 'rural proofing' is used in relation to government policy and programmes. It means the need for 'policy makers to ensure that the needs and interests of rural people, communities and businesses ... are properly considered in the development and implementation of all policies and programmes'.<sup>25</sup> In the context of this report, rural proofing of news is taken to mean the extent to which the coverage of issues *properly considers the unique challenges and perspectives of rural people, communities and businesses*.<sup>26</sup> This chapter focuses on the extent to which coverage of education, employment and health, three significant national issues, is rural proofed. In other words, to what extent does coverage of these issues in news programmes at network level and in the English regions and the devolved nations take into account the unique challenges and perspectives of rural people, communities and businesses? It is important to note that while this analysis only focuses on these three subject areas and can say nothing about BBC coverage of other issues, the selected issues are substantive and can be seen as an indicator of overall rural proofing. This section focuses on news output only<sup>27</sup>. Non-news magazine programmes, such as *The One Show* and specialist programmes that have a rural focus, such as, *Farming Today*, *Landward*, and *Farm Gate* were excluded from this analysis.

The researchers analysed a range of purposively selected BBC and non-BBC news output over a *three-week period* from 18 November to 8 December 2013, coding all news items that focused on education, employment and health (see table 4.3 in appendix 1 for more details of output selection). These issues were carefully selected

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/rural.pdf>

A Guide to Rural Proofing: Considering the Needs of Rural Areas and Communities. DARD Rural Proofing Unit.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> BBC Radio 2's Jeremy Vine programme was also included in this analysis as, although it is not produced by news, it is an important platform for the discussion of topical issues in the news. Its inclusion does not affect the overall findings

in liaison with the BBC Trust. The coders then identified all items in this sample that had an explicit rural angle; this meant items that made reference to any *challenges and perspectives of rural people* (broadly defined) in relation to education, employment and health. This could, for example, be a story about the closure of a rural hospital or something more broadly about what national education policy might mean for those living in rural areas. To be as inclusive as possible, coders were asked to include those items where the rural angle formed only part of the item. That said, the item needed to have an explicit rural angle; a journalist conducting an interview in the countryside did not constitute a rural angle. This might be seen as quite a low threshold for rural proofing but given the time scale of the study we feel that this is a good indicator of the level of rural proofing. The findings are displayed below.

There was a total of 665 news stories on education, employment and health identified and analysed in the three-week sample period but only a total of 12.3 percent had some kind of rural angle. Further, these items were all exclusively on the BBC; none of Channel Four's or ITV's national news coverage of education, employment and health was rural proofed. Table 2.1 below shows that *only 13.2 percent of BBC* output over the sample had a rural angle – a total of 82 items.

**Table 2.1: News Items With An Explicit Rural Angle in BBC and non-BBC Programmes**

			Total
	Item has an explicit rural angle	No explicit rural angle	
BBC News	82	537	619
	13.2%	86.8%	100.0%
Ch4 & ITV	0	46	46
National News	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total	82	583	665
	12.3%	87.7%	100.0%

Row percentages

Going deeper into the data, Table 2.2 below shows the type of BBC outlet where this coverage occurred.

**Table 2.2: News Items with An Explicit Rural Angle Across BBC News Programmes**

			Total
	Item has an explicit rural angle	No explicit rural angle	
BBC regional and devolved nations news	80	314	394
	20.3%	79.7%	
BBC UK News Bulletin	2	167	169
	1.2%	98.8%	
BBC Jeremy Vine	0	5	5
	0.0%	100.0%	

BBC Online News	0	51	51
	0.0%	100.0%	

Row percentages

We can clearly see that rural proofed coverage of education, employment and health was concentrated in the BBC regional news output and that of the devolved nations with 20 percent of their output analysed having some kind of rural angle. This compared to around 1 percent of output on BBC UK-wide news bulletins and nothing in either discussion and talk or BBC online news. The output can be broken down further to identify rural proofed coverage of education, employment and health by programme. Table 2.3 shows the number of rural proofed news items and the amount of broadcast time.

**Table 2.3: News Items With A Rural Angle: Total Time Devoted by Programme (seconds)**

Length of item (seconds)		
Programme	Frequency	Sum
BBC 1 South Today 6.30	26	3887.00
BBC Alba An La 8.30	17	2220.00
BBC Radio Gloucestershire, Breakfast	10	1935.00
BBC Radio Cymru, Breakfast	15	1821.00
Radio 4 Today	1	851.00
BBC Radio Lincoln, Breakfast	5	737.00
BBC 1 Look North 6.30	1	310.00
BBC Radio Scotland, Breakfast	2	300.00
Reporting Scotland 6.30	2	216.00
BBC 1 Newsline 6.30	1	198.00
Radio 4 Six O'Clock News	1	84.00
BBC 1 Wales Today 6.30	1	48.00
Total	82	12607.00

Table 2.3 shows that the extent of rural proofing varied, the news output from the BBC devolved nations and the English regions was not uniform. While Table 2.3 provides an idea of the overall amount of coverage, Table 2.4 shows the prominence of news items containing stories with a rural angle within programmes and those without.

**Table 2.4: Location of Items with an Explicit Rural Angle Compared to Those With No Rural Angle in All BBC Programmes**

	Item has an explicit rural angle	No explicit rural angle
Lead item in a programme	14	99
	17.1%	18.4%
Other item in a programme mentioned in the programme's initial headlines	32	107
	39.0%	19.9%

Other location in a news bulletin	36	279
	43.9%	52.0%
Website (Not known)	0	52
	0.0%	9.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>537</b>

Column percentages

News items with a rural angle were slightly more likely to be mentioned in the headline but not significantly so and overall, stories on these subjects were not lead news items.

Table 2.5 provides a more detailed view of rural proofed reports as a proportion of all coverage of education, employment and health by each programme.

**Table 2.5: News Items with a Rural Angle Compared to Those with No Rural Angle: Number of Items by Regional and Devolved Nations News**

BBC regional and devolved nations news			Total
	Item has an explicit rural angle	No explicit rural angle	
BBC 1 South Today 6.30	26 68.4%	12 31.6%	38 100.0%
BBC Alba An La 8.30	17 54.8%	14 45.2%	31 100.0%
BBC Radio Cymru, Breakfast	15 12.8%	102 87.2%	117 100.0%
BBC Radio Gloucestershire, Breakfast	10 100.0%	0 0.0%	10 100.0%
BBC Radio Lincoln, Breakfast	5 12.2%	36 87.8%	41 100.0%
Reporting Scotland 6.30	2 13.3%	13 86.7%	15 100.0%
BBC Radio Scotland, Breakfast	2 18.2%	9 81.8%	11 100.0%
BBC 1 Newsline 6.30 (NI)	1 20.0%	4 80.0%	5 100.0%
BBC 1 Look North 6.30	1 4.2%	23 95.8%	24 100.0%
BBC 1 Wales Today 6.30	1 4.5%	21 95.5%	22 100.0%
BBC 1 Points West 6.30	0 0.0%	15 100.0%	15 100.0%
BBC Radio Sussex, Breakfast	0 0.0%	32 100.0%	32 100.0%
BBC Radio Wales, Breakfast	0 0.0%	25 100.0%	25 100.0%
BBC Radio Ulster, Breakfast	0 0.0%	8 100.0%	8 100.0%

Row percentages



Table 2.5 shows that while education, employment and health as issues were covered by all outlets the number of items that had a rural angle was concentrated in fewer outlets. While over two thirds of BBC 1 South Today's coverage of education, employment and health had a rural angle none of the output in these subject areas on Points West, BBC Radio Sussex Breakfast, BBC Radio Wales Breakfast and BBC Radio Ulster Breakfast had any rural angle. What these data reveal is that there are no uniform patterns across the output of the English regional news and that of the devolved nations. However, Table 2.5 shows an interesting difference between the BBC's indigenous minority language programmes and the BBC's English language programmes which is explored further in Table 2.6.

**Table 2.6: News Items with an Explicit Rural Angle Compared to Those With no Rural Angle by Outlet Language**

			Total
	Item has an explicit rural angle	No explicit rural angle	
English Language	50	467	517
	9.7%	90.3%	
Indigenous Minority Language	32	116	148
	21.6%	78.4%	

Row percentages

Table 2.6 shows that twice as many education, employment and health items had a rural angle on BBC Alba's *An La* 8.30 and BBC Radio Cymru's Breakfast Show when compared to English Language news. This arguably reflects the rural location of the audience for these shows and these stations more generally<sup>28</sup>. Finally, we looked to see if there was any difference in the level of rural proofing between subject areas.

**Table 2.7: The Thematic Focus of News Items with an Explicit Rural Angle**

	Frequency	Percent
	Health	66
Employment	62	35.6%
Education	46	26.4%
Total	174	100.0%

Column percentages. More than one theme per news item possible

<sup>28</sup> BBC Alba Annual Report 2012-13 <http://www.mgalba.com/downloads/reports/annual-report-12-13.pdf>

Table 2.7 shows that coverage of health and employment was slightly more likely to have a rural angle than education but there was no significant differences between the issues overall.

## Conclusion

Based on the analysis of coverage of these issues in the sample period, the findings were as follows:

- The challenges and perspectives of rural people, communities and businesses were considered almost exclusively by news from the devolved nations and the English regions and received little consideration in network news bulletins. While 13 percent of the BBC's coverage of education, employment and health in the sample period had a rural angle this was almost exclusively the domain of news items on BBC devolved nations and English regions.
- At a network level, while BBC news coverage of education, employment and health rarely had a rural angle, it should be noted that this was not significantly different to the Channel Four and ITV news bulletins examined here.
- Importantly, output from the BBC devolved nations and the English regions was not uniform. While a large amount of some outlets' coverage of education, employment and health had a rural angle, in others it was absent.
- One interesting difference was between the BBC indigenous minority language programmes and the English language programmes. Twice as many education, employment and health items had a rural angle on BBC Alba's *An La* 8.30 and BBC Radio Cymru's Breakfast Show compared to English Language news.<sup>29</sup>

Again it is important to emphasize that the analysis only focuses on these three issue areas over three weeks and can say nothing about BBC coverage of other issues. Nevertheless, this three-week sample provides some insight into the extent to which output is or is not rural proofed.

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<sup>29</sup> In this context, English regional and devolved nations' news programmes

# 3

## Responsiveness to Salient Rural Issues

The attention in this chapter shifts to examining the responsiveness of BBC UK-wide news programmes to certain salient rural issues, namely, issues that are important for rural areas and those that live in them, across a sample period. There is no definitive list of issues from which to select, so as a first step a list of potential salient rural issues to examine was devised using: 1, previous opinion research on the views of those living in rural areas as to the most important issues they saw affecting rural areas<sup>30</sup>; 2, the views of Professor Darren Smith, an international expert on British rural issues and a consultant on this project; and, 3, an examination of a number of rural focused non-BBC websites, these included: Rural Services Network, National governments in the UK; Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE); Joseph Rowntree Foundation; Natural England; National Farmers' Union. From this exercise a short list of salient rural issues was produced which included: cost of living; access to resources and services; and finally, wildlife and woodland management and protection. Of course there are other issues but this selection encompasses both matters that affect people living in rural areas and wider issues about use of the countryside and wildlife.

However, the visibility of issues, as media research shows, is episodic, triggered by events<sup>31</sup> and with different aspects of an issue being covered at different times. For example, while poverty is a highly salient rural issue it consists of many sub-issues, coverage of which may be triggered by an event such as the announcement of a government initiative to help rural job creation or the publication of a research report on wage levels in rural areas of the UK. By looking at coverage of these trigger

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<sup>30</sup> BBC Governors (2003) Rural Affairs Report for BBC Governors. BBC

<sup>31</sup> Kepplinger, H M. and Habermeier, J. (1995) The Impact of Key Events on the Presentation of Reality. *European Journal of Communication*, 10(4): 371-390.

events we can gauge how much attention these salient rural issues attract<sup>32</sup>. For each of these issues the research team undertook a scoping exercise using a range of non-BBC sources to identify a number of *significant* trigger events. These events were deemed significant enough to attract coverage, such as government announcements, parliamentary committee findings, research report releases or campaign launches. The date of these trigger events was used as a guide to coding in order to assess coverage of the event and associated issues. Given the timescale of the study and the large number of potential triggers we had to be selective in deciding what events to use. In total we identified 8 different trigger events over the sample period that we *expected* would generate news coverage of salient rural issues within the sampling period; although there was of course no guarantee beforehand that any coverage would be generated by these triggers. Below is a list of the issues and triggers.

- In terms of rural *cost of living*, we chose 3 events: government announcement to extend the Petrol discount initiative for rural areas, and the publishing of two different reports on rural poverty by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.<sup>33</sup>
- For *access to resources/ services*, we chose 2 events: the release of the Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee report on the performance of Defra in championing rural issues across government; and the release of the National Audit Office report on UK government's rural broadband programme and access to broadband in rural areas.
- Finally, for *wildlife and woodland management and protection*, we chose 3 events: the publication of an academic report extolling the necessity of a large scale deer cull; the announcement of ash dieback disease in East Anglia; and the felling of 500 acres of Wentwood Forest in Wales to combat larch tree disease.

With these trigger events identified the research looked for any coverage of these events across a number of main BBC news outlets (BBC news website, BBC One *Breakfast*; BBC *News at Six*; BBC *News at Ten*; *Newsnight*; the News Channel 5 pm bulletin; Radio 4 *Today*; Radio 4 World at One; Radio 4 Six O'Clock News; BBC 1 Weekend Late Evening News) and selected non-BBC sources (Telegraph.co.uk; Daily-

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<sup>32</sup> Vasterman, P L M. (2005) Self-Reinforcing News Waves, Journalistic Standards and the Construction of Social Problems. *European Journal of Communication*, 20 (4): 508-530

<sup>33</sup> The research on minimum income standards was conducted by CPSR at Loughborough University with the help of other universities for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. The authors of this report had no association with this research nor its findings.

mail.co.uk; Guardian.co.uk). The analysis focused on the day of the event and the day after (for further details see Table 4.4 in appendix 1).

Overall, this sample of eight trigger events generated 61 news items, 21 items in BBC UK news bulletins, 21 on BBC online news and 19 in non-BBC online news (Guardian.co.uk, Dailymail.co.uk, Telegraph.co.uk) with all triggers receiving coverage. In what follows, coverage of each issue and the various triggers are explored in detail.

## **Cost of Living in Rural Areas**

*1, The Joseph Rowntree Foundation Annual report on Minimum Income Standards for the UK, 27/6/13&28/6/13, and the Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) report 'A Minimum Income Standard for Remote Rural Scotland', 4/7/13&5/7/13*

Funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), and conducted by Loughborough and other universities, the minimum income standards research has now been conducted for the UK devolved nations and urban and rural areas. Since the original research on minimum income standards in rural areas in 2010, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation have subsequently published a series of annual updates which includes data on the minimum income standards in rural areas in England. The research for the HIE has focused on minimum income standards in rural Scotland. These reports were made public in June and July 2013. They provide a detailed insight into the low wage levels experienced in rural areas.

*2, Proposal by UK government to extend the rural fuel rebate scheme to other regions in the UK, 1/8/13&2/8/13*

High petrol and diesel prices are a major cost for those living in rural areas and one reason for the high price is their high distribution costs in rural areas. The fuel discount scheme was introduced by the UK government to reduce petrol and diesel prices in designated rural areas of the UK to offset high distribution costs. The scheme was originally rolled out in March 2012 in the Hebrides, Northern Isles, islands in the Clyde and the Isles of Scilly. On the 1 August 2013 the UK government proposed widening the scheme to include other areas in the UK. While it needs EU

agreement, the UK government issued an earlier invitation to rural petrol stations in certain areas to submit data on their petrol prices<sup>34</sup> for consideration.

### Findings

Table 3.1 shows clearly that coverage of these triggers was minimal, with only 3 of a possible 10 BBC outlets examined covering these events. That said, the BBC gave more coverage to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and HIE reports and the fuel rebate scheme announcement than non-BBC outlets.

**Table 3.1 : Coverage of Trigger Events Related to the Cost of Living in Rural Areas**

	28.06.13	04.07.13	01.08.13	02.08.13	Total
	Minimum income standards report	Minimum income standards report	Petrol/diesel rebate scheme	Petrol/diesel rebate scheme	
BBC 1 Breakfast	1				1
	100.0%				100.0%
Radio 4 Today			1		1
			100.0%		100.0%
BBC News Online <a href="http://bbc.co.uk/news">bbc.co.uk/news</a>	3	1	1		5
	60.0%	20.0%	20.0%		100.0%
Dailymail.co.uk			1	1	2
			50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Guardian.co.uk	1		1		2
	50.0%		50.0%		100.0%
Total	5	1	4	1	11
	45.5%	9.1%	36.4%	9.1%	100.0%

Row percentages.

34

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/226111/rural\\_fuel\\_cfi\\_3\\_FINAL\\_3.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/226111/rural_fuel_cfi_3_FINAL_3.pdf)

Proposed Extension of the Rural Fuel Rebate Scheme: Call for More Information

The table also shows that of the outlets examined, when combined the BBC News online had the most coverage of the trigger events. The table below also shows the prominence of coverage these events received across outlets.

**Table 3.2 : Prominence of Coverage of Trigger Events Related to the Cost of Living in Rural Areas**

	Dates				Total
	28.06.13 Minimum income standards	04.07.13 Minimum income standards	01.08.13 Petrol/ diesel rebate scheme	02.08.13 Petrol/ diesel rebate scheme	
Not headline. Other location in a news bulletin	1 50.0%		1 50.0%		2 100.0%
Website (not known)	4 44.4%	1 11.1%	3 33.3%	1 11.1%	9 100.0%
Total	5 45.5%	1 9.1%	4 36.4%	1 9.1%	11 100.0%

Row percentages.

In the bulletins where it could be assessed, the table shows that coverage was not especially prominent, no items being trailed in a headline.

## Access to resources and services

### 1, National Audit Office Report on the Rural Broadband Programme, 5/7/13&6/7/13

This National Audit Office Report needs to be understood in relation to the UK government's rural broadband programme and its commitment to make 'broadband internet provision [in rural areas] a key public policy priority'<sup>35</sup>. The government 'decided to intervene in the market and make subsidy available to stimulate investment' in rural broadband infrastructure as many 'commercial providers ha[d] no plans to invest in the enhanced infrastructure required to deliver improved broadband speeds because these areas yield lower returns.'<sup>36</sup> This report was critical of the progress of the scheme, its value for money and the safeguards in place to ensure goals were achieved.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> [http://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/10177-001-Rural-Broadband\\_HC-535.pdf](http://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/10177-001-Rural-Broadband_HC-535.pdf)

National Audit Office Report on the Rural Broadband Programme, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p.5.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p.6.

*2, Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee report on Rural Communities, 24/7/13&25/7/13*

The report was the House of Commons Committee’s assessment of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and its Rural Communities Policy Unit’s success ‘at championing rural issues across government’ in achieving a ‘fair, practical and affordable outcomes for rural residents, businesses and communities’.<sup>38</sup> The report was prompted by the Government’s decision in June 2010 to ‘abolish the Commission for Rural Communities and increase the rural knowledge base within Government through a strengthened Rural Communities Policy Unit’<sup>39</sup>. The report was heavily critical of government policy, suggesting it ‘failed to take account of the challenges that exist in providing services to a rural population that is often sparsely distributed and lacks access to basic infrastructure’. The report covered a wide range of issues relevant to access to resources and services including: rural funding by government, the rural economy, housing, rural transport, and empowering rural communities. Although this report focuses on England it is an important assessment of government policy on rural matters. This section focuses on the public release of these reports in July 2013.

*Findings*

Table 3.3 below shows that only 4 of a possible 10 selected BBC outlets covered these trigger events, with BBC online news providing more coverage of the events. The release of the NAO report attracted the most attention with nearly 90 percent of coverage.

**Table 3.3 :Coverage of Trigger Events Related to the Access to Resources and Services**

	Dates			Total
	05.07.13 NAO report on rural broadband	06.07.13 NAO report on rural broadband	24.07.13 Commons report on DEFRA & RCPU	
BBC 1 News at Six	1			1

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmenvfru/602/602.pdf>  
House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Rural Communities Sixth Report of Session 2013–14 Volume I

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 5.



	100.0%			100.0%
BBC News Channel, 5-6pm	1			1
	100.0%			100.0%
Radio 4 Today	2			2
	100.0%			100.0%
BBC News Online bbc.co.uk/news	6	1	1	8
	75.0%	12.5%	12.5%	100.0%
Telegraph.co.uk	1			1
	100.0%			100.0%
Dailymail.co.uk	2		1	3
	66.7%		33.3%	100.0%
Guardian.co.uk	1	1		2
	50.0%	50.0%		100.0%
Total	14	2	2	18
	77.8%	11.1%	11.1%	100.0%

Row percentages.

Table 3.4 shows that coverage was not especially prominent. None of the news items was a headline item.

**Table 3.4 : Location of Coverage of Trigger Events Related to the Access to Resources and Services**

	Dates			Total
	05.07.13 NAO report on rural broadband	06.07.13 NAO report on rural broadband	24.07.13 Commons report on DEFRA & RCPU	
Not headline. Other location in a news bulletin	4			4
	100.0%			100.0%
Website (Not known)	10	2	2	14
	69.2%	15.4%	15.4%	100.0%
Total	14	2	2	18
	77.8%	11.1%	11.1%	100.0%

Row percentages.

## **Wildlife and Woodland Management and Protection**

### *1, Published research on the efficacy of a large scale deer cull, 6/3/13&7/3/13*

Numbers of deer have increased dramatically with an estimated 1.5 million deer in the UK in 2013. Large deer numbers can have a damaging impact on the rural habitat

and rural inhabitants. Road collisions with deer damage around 14,000 vehicles each year. Culling of deer has conventionally been left to landowners but the argument is that such piecemeal culls are ineffective. This section focuses on one specific incident, namely the publication, in March 2013, of a study in the *Journal of Wildlife Management*, which recommended half the UK deer population should be culled annually.

*2, Discovery of ash dieback disease in East Anglia, 24/10/12&25/10/12, and the felling of 500 acres of Wentwood Forest in Wales to combat larch tree disease, 4/10/13&5/10/13.*

Within the sample period a series of different pathogens have infected ash, alder, elm, larch and Scots pine, destroying millions of trees and impacting upon thousands of hectares of woodland through the UK, including some sites of special scientific interest. With no ready cures tree diseases can have a considerable impact on woodland diversity in the UK; the rural economy, especially the woodland owners and the timber industry; and the landscape and public experience of the landscape and woodlands more generally. This section focuses on two specific incidents. The first in October 2012 was the discovery of ash dieback disease in the wild for the first time in Norfolk. The second, in October 2013, concerned the announcement that a large section of ancient woodland in South Wales had to be felled in response to larch tree disease.

### *Findings*

Table 3.5 below shows coverage was widespread, with 6 of a possible 10 selected BBC outlets covering the discovery of ash dieback disease in the wild; two BBC outlets covered the felling of the Wentwood forest; and four, the deer cull report. Most of the BBC coverage was on ash dieback disease. BBC online was the only BBC outlet to cover all three trigger events.

**Table 3.5: Coverage of Trigger Events Related to Wildlife and Woodland Management and Protection**

	Dates				Total
	24.10.12 Discovery of Ash dieback	25.10.12 Discovery of Ash dieback	07.03.13 Deer cull report	04.10.13 Wentwood forest	
BBC 1 Breakfast			2	2	4
			50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
BBC 1 News at Six		1	1		2
		50.0%	50.0%		100.0%
BBC 1 News at Ten		1			1
		100.0%			100.0%
Radio 4 Today		2	2		4
		50.0%	50.0%		100.0%
Radio 4 World at One		2			2
		100.0%			100.0%
Radio 4 Six O'Clock News		2			2
		100.0%			100.0%
BBC News Online bbc.co.uk/news		2	2	4	8
		25.0%	25.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Telegraph.co.uk		1	2		3
		33.3%	66.7%		100.0%
Dailymail.co.uk		1	1	1	3
		33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	100.0%
Guardian.co.uk	1	1	1		3
	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%		100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>32</b>
	3.1%	40.6%	34.4%	21.9%	100.0%

Row percentages.

In the bulletins where it could be assessed, Table 3.6 shows that coverage of ash dieback was prominent but less so for the other triggers.

**Table 3.6 : Location of Coverage of All Triggers on Wildlife and Woodland Management**

	Dates				Total
	24.10.12 Discovery of Ash dieback	25.10.12 Discovery of Ash dieback	07.03.13 Deer cull report	04.10.13 Wentwood forest	
Not headline. Other location in a news bulletin		5	5		10
		50.0%	50.0%		100.0%
Other item mentioned in the programme's initial headlines		3		2	5
		60.0%		40.0%	100.0%
Website (Not known)	1	5	6	5	17
	5.9%	29.4%	35.3%	29.4%	100.0%

Total	1	13	11	7	32
	3.1%	40.6%	34.4%	21.9%	100.0%

Row percentages.

## Conclusion

The main findings of this chapter are as follows:

- There was a degree of responsiveness to news stories that specifically concerned rural issues and communities. Of the 8 trigger events on salient rural issues, the BBC covered all of them.
- Table 3.7 below shows the output for all triggers by the wider theme which they indexed. It reveals that the BBC UK broadcast news bulletins examined in this chapter devoted the same number of items to all trigger events as BBC online news, but the former's coverage was concentrated mainly on one issue: wildlife and woodland management and protection, especially the ash dieback disease. The BBC online news, in contrast, gave more coverage to a wider spread of trigger events.

**Table 3.7: Coverage of all themes (more than one trigger event per theme)**

	Overall Theme			Total
	Cost of living	Access to resources and services	Wildlife and woodland management and protection	
BBC UK News bulletins	2	4	15	21
	9.5%	19.0%	71.4%	100.0%
BBC Online News	5	8	8	21
	23.8%	38.1%	38.1%	100.0%
Newspapers Online	4	6	9	19
	21.1%	31.6%	47.4%	100.0%
Total	11	18	32	61
	18.0%	29.5%	52.5%	100.0%

Row percentages.

## Conclusions

This section provides a summary of what we believe to be the main findings of this content analysis of BBC coverage of rural matters, drawing together the findings of the three research sections ('hot button' issue coverage, 'rural proofing' of BBC News and 'coverage of salient rural issues').

### *Coverage of 'hot button' issues*

- The report shows that political and scientific contention over rural affairs can be highly newsworthy. That said, political controversies concerning all three issues were not defined in party political terms.
- Citizens and cause groups tended to play a prominent role in coverage of these instances. However, they only occasionally instigated coverage, which is most commonly the province of officials and ministers.
- There was not a lot of diversity evident in terms of the range of opinions accessed. In our view, impartiality was still constructed in terms of the 'see saw' model, rather than the 'wagon wheel' model.
- Very few references were made to the devolved responsibilities and policy differences of the national governments in rural affairs.
- Badgers were by far the most dominant visual motif in coverage of the badger cull, accounting for more than 50 percent of coded visuals in BBC and non-BBC coverage. In contrast, images of cows and cattle appeared far less. In the coverage of fracking, protests and demonstrations were the most frequently featured visual. Their prominence was proportionally far greater than protests in badger cull coverage. However, in coverage of wind farms and rural planning there were no clearly dominant images.
- References in broadcast coverage to the BBC website occurred very infrequently. There was no evidence of any systematic partiality in BBC treatment of badger culling, fracking or wind farms/rural planning, whether measured in terms of 'stopwatch balance', 'directional balance' or 'agenda balance'.

### *Rural proofing of news*

- Moving to more routine coverage, the research shows that the challenges and perspectives of rural people, communities and businesses in relation to

education, employment and health did not attract significant levels of coverage on BBC and non-BBC news output.

- The rural angle that was provided is almost exclusively found in BBC regional and devolved nations content. UK-wide news coverage gave almost no attention to rural dimensions concerning education, employment and health. That said, output from the BBC devolved nations and the English regions was not uniform. While a large amount of some outlets' coverage of education, employment and health had a rural angle, in others it was absent.
- BBC indigenous minority language services provided twice as much attention to the rural angle, than their English language equivalents.

#### *Responsiveness to salient rural issues*

- Having noted the rarity with which rural perspectives are included in general coverage of education, employment and health, the research showed there was a certain degree of responsiveness to news stories that specifically concerned rural issues and communities.
- Of the eight potential 'trigger events' the BBC covered all of them.
- The BBC UK broadcast news bulletins' coverage concentrated mainly on one issue: wildlife and woodland management and protection. The BBC online news, in contrast, gave more coverage to a wider spread of trigger events.

# Appendix 1

## **Content analysis and coding procedures**

The findings of this report are based on a quantitative content analysis. This is a technique that aims to provide systematic, statistical descriptions of the manifest content of media. The aim of this approach is to count what is there rather than, for example, to analyse meanings that may be implicit in the coverage. An important stage in this method is deciding what to count. Different coding manuals and schedules were developed for each of the three parts of this research ('hot button' issues; rural proofing; and the responsiveness to salient rural issues). The manuals and schedules were piloted and refined using a small sample of the coverage.

The same coding schedule was used across media (television, radio, Internet) and format (news, current affairs and factual) in order to aid comparison. The coders were recruited from the School of Social, Political and Geographical Sciences at Loughborough University. They were either doctoral students or post-doctoral researchers. Many had extensive experience of conducting content analyses of media reporting either through working on commissioned projects for the LCRC or in their own research. Inter-coder reliability checks were conducted and calculated in order to ensure consistency and reliability (see below). The data collected were analysed using SPSS, a standard statistical computer package for social sciences. For the purposes of compiling tables and presenting an overview of the data pertinent to the research certain coding schedule categories are typically aggregated. This obviously entails the exercise of judgment on the part of researchers concerning the relative importance of certain data.

### *Units of analysis*

It is important at this stage to outline what the units of analysis were. The content of a programme or website can be divided into 'items'. Different elements of these items were then coded according to a number of variables and values (length of report, themes of the report, actors in the report and so on). A broadcast item begins the moment a newsreader or presenter introduces any discussion related to the topic. In most cases, this will then lead into a filed report from a journalist or an interview.

The item ends either when the programme returns to the reader or presenter after the conclusion of the filed report/interview or another filed report, clearly authored by another journalist, follows on the end of the first report. If any subsequent report or interview is on the same subject matter as the one that preceded it, it is still treated as a separate item in our analysis. A news bulletin may therefore contain several items about the same story. Such a way of dividing up coverage corresponds to journalistic practice of news production.

*Sampling: sample dates and programme selection*

All dates were drawn from a sampling period which stretched from *September 2012 to December 2013*, but as the tables below show, *each section of the analysis had separate sample dates and included different programmes*. This complex sampling strategy was deemed necessary to capture the variety of output in the existing time frame.

**Table 4.1: Sample Dates for Each Part of the Research**

<b>1, Hot button rural issues sample days</b>
September 2012 - 17,18, 25, 26, 27, 28 October 2012 - 9, 11, 12, 23, 24, 25 December 2012 - 5, 6, 13, 14 January 2013 – 17 March 2013 – 19, 20 April 2013 - 15,16 May 2013 - 7, 8, 31 June 2013 – 1,3,5,6,11,12,25,26,27; July 2013 - 4,10,11, 15, 16, 19, 25, 26,27,30,31 August 2013 - 1,2, 3,4, 7, 8, 13,14, 16, 19, 22, 27,28 September 2013 – 4, 11 October 2013 - 9, 10, 11
<b>Hot button issues Regional and devolved Nations News sample</b>
February 14 2013, Good Morning Ulster, Evening Extra, Newsline April 30 2013, Good morning Scotland, News Drive and Reporting Scotland June 4 2013, Good Morning Wales, Good Evening Wales, Wales Today July 11 2013, Good Morning Wales, Good Evening Wales, Wales Today August 2 2013, BBC Sussex Breakfast and Drive, South Today August 16 2013, BBC Sussex Breakfast and Drive, South Today August 21 2013, BBC Sussex Breakfast and Drive, South Today August 27 2013, Good Morning Ulster, Evening Extra, Newsline (NI), BBC Somerset Breakfast and Drive August 28 2013, BBC Somerset Breakfast and Drive September 4 2013, BBC Gloucestershire Breakfast and Drive October 9 2013 BBC Somerset Breakfast and Drive, BBC Gloucestershire Breakfast and Drive December 4, Good morning Scotland, News Drive, and Reporting Scotland
<b>Hot button additional days for current affairs and magazine programmes</b>
February 2013, 14 – The One Show March 2013, 21 – The Planners (BBC 2) July, 2013, 4 – Inside Science (Radio 4) August 2013, 4 – Countryfile September 2013, 5 – The Report (Radio 4) September 2013, 26 – Inside Science



October 2013, 18 Material World (Radio 4)
October 2013, 29 Autumn Watch
<b>2, Rural proofing of news sample days</b>
November 2013 - 18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25,26,27,28,29,30
December 2013 - 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8
<b>3, Salient rural issue coverage sample days</b>
Discovery of ash dieback disease in East Anglia - 24/10/12 & 25/10/12
Published research on the efficacy of a deer cull - 6/3/13 & 7/3/13
The Joseph Rowntree Foundation Annual report on minimum income standards for the UK 27/6/13 & 28/6/13
The Highlands and Islands Enterprise report 'A Minimum Income Standard for Remote Rural Scotland' 4/7/13 & 5/7/13
National Audit Office Report on the Rural Broadband Programme 5/7/13 & 6/7/13
Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee report on Rural Communities 24/7/13 & 25/7/13
Proposal by UK government to extend the rural fuel rebate scheme to other regions in the UK 1/8/13 & 2/8/13
Felling of 500 acres Wentwood Forest in Wales to combat larch tree disease - 4/10/13 & 5/10/13

In total, 62 days of news coverage on 'hot button' issues was examined; it should be noted, 7 alternative days were used where there were problems gaining material from regional and devolved nations News, and 8 days for other non-news programmes; for rural proofing the sample period was 21 days; and for salient rural issue coverage, 16 days.

### *Sample dates*

The dates selected varied between the three sections of the report. For the analysis of 'hot button' issues and the responsiveness to salient rural issues the sample of dates was selected purposively to ensure the necessary material was gathered and to maximise the amount of potential output to analyse. If we had chosen weeks randomly it is likely that we would have collected significantly less data. This reflects the highly episodic or spotlight, rather than sustained character, of news coverage. For 'hot button' issues, the days when the issues were in the news were identified in a scoping exercise before coding began. For salient rural issue coverage, the sample days were selected after a careful examination of a range of sources (see below).

For the examination of the rural proofing of BBC news we selected a sample period of three weeks starting 18 November 2013 (see below). Given the focus on all health, employment and education coverage and the need to include regional news output (see below) this was deemed the best strategy. Of course such a sampling strategy does not guarantee the presence of coverage and undoubtedly there were important programmes broadcast outside the sample days but this was deemed the most effective way to gather the relevant output in the available time.

It should be noted that the selection of 'hot button' topics examined in the report was made in association with the BBC Trust. The 'hot button' issues selected were badger culling, fracking, and wind farms together with rural planning.

### *Programme selection*

We sought to sample across media and platforms and from flagship BBC news programmes such as *Today* to the *Jeremy Vine Show* on Radio 2. We also included in the sample BBC regional news programmes as well as news from the devolved nations. The output sample was agreed with the BBC Trust prior to the analysis beginning. The tables below show the programmes selected for each part of the report. To allow comparisons we sought to include a range of non-BBC outlets. This consisted of the online news outlets of three main national newspapers and two major commercial television news providers.

**Table 4.2: Output Selection for Hot Button Issues**

<b>Channel/Station/Website</b>	<b>Programme</b>
BBC1	Breakfast 0700-0900 (mon-fri)
BBC1	News at 6 (mon-fri)
BBC1	News at 10 (mon-fri)
BBC1	Weekend late evening news
BBC 2	Newsnight
BBC News Channel	17.00-18.00
BBC1	Look North 6.30
BBC1	South today 6.30
BBC1	Points West 6.30
BBC1	Wales Today 6.30
BBC1	Reporting Scotland 6.30
BBC1	Newsline 6.30 (NI)
<b>NATIONAL RADIO</b>	
Radio 2	Jeremy Vine
Radio 4	Today (mon-sat 07.30-08.30)
Radio 4	World at One (mon-fri)
Radio 4	6 O'Clock News (mon-fri)
Radio 5 Live	Breakfast 07.00-08.00 (mon-fri)
<b>REGIONAL RADIO</b>	
BBC Radio Gloucestershire	Breakfast Show
BBC Radio Gloucestershire	Drive

BBC Sussex	Breakfast Show
BBC Sussex	Drive
BBC Radio Scotland	Breakfast Show
BBC Radio Scotland	Call Kaye
BBC Radio Scotland	News Drive
BBC Radio Wales	Breakfast Show
BBC Radio Wales	Good Evening Wales
BBC Radio Ulster	Breakfast Show
BBC Radio Ulster	Evening Extra
BBC Radio Somerset	Breakfast Show
BBC Radio Somerset	Phone-in 9 am
BBC Radio Somerset	Drive
<b>ONLINE</b>	
bbc.co.uk/news	All stories for selected days
<b>CURRENT AFFAIRS/FACTUAL</b>	
Radio 4	Farming Today
Radio 4	Landward – select shows
Radio 4	Costing the Earth – select shows
BBC 1	Panorama – 8.30pm – select shows
BBC1	One Show – 7pm – select shows
BBC1	Countryfile – 7pm – select shows
BBC 2	The Planners episode
Radio 4	The Report – select shows
BBC 2	Autumn Watch – select shows
Radio 4	Material World – select shows
Radio 4	Inside Science – select shows
<b>NON-BBC</b>	
Telegraph.co.uk	All stories for selected days
Dailymail.co.uk	All stories for selected days
Guardian.co.uk	All stories for selected days

**Table 4.3: Output Selection for Rural Proofing News**

<b>Channel/Station/Website</b>	<b>Programme</b>
BBC1	Breakfast 0700-0900 (mon-fri)
BBC1	News at 6 (mon-fri)
BBC1	News at 10 (mon-fri)
BBC1	Weekend late evening news
BBC 2	Newsnight (mon-fri)
BBC News Channel	17.00-18.00 (mon-fri)
BBC1	Look North (Humberside/Lincoln) 6.30
BBC1	South Today 6.30
BBC1	Points West 6.30
BBC1	Wales Today 6.30
BBC1	Reporting Scotland 6.30
BBC1	Newsline 6.30
BBC Alba	An La 8.30
<b>NATIONAL RADIO</b>	
Radio 2	Jeremy Vine programmes on topic
Radio 4	Today (mon-sat 07.00-09.00)
Radio 4	World at One (mon-fri)
Radio 4	6 O'Clock News (mon-fri)
Radio 5 Live	Drive 17.00-18.00 (mon-fri)
<b>REGIONAL RADIO</b>	
BBC Radio Gloucestershire,	Breakfast Show
BBC Sussex	Breakfast Show
BBC Radio Scotland	Breakfast Show
BBC Radio Wales	Breakfast Show

BBC Radio Ulster	Breakfast Show
BBC Radio Cymru	Breakfast Show
BBC Radio Lincoln	Breakfast Show
<b>ONLINE</b>	
bbc.co.uk/news	All stories for selected days
<b>NON-BBC</b>	
ITV	ITV National News 6 pm
Channel Four	News 7pm

**Table 4.4 : Output Selection for the Responsiveness to Salient Rural Issues**

<b>Channel/Station/Website</b>	<b>Programme</b>
BBC1	Breakfast 0700-0900 (mon-fri)
BBC1	News at 6 (mon-fri)
BBC1	News at 10 (mon-fri)
BBC1	Weekend late evening news
BBC 2	Newsnight
BBC News Channel	17.00-18.00
<b>NATIONAL RADIO</b>	
Radio 4	Today (mon-sat 07.30-08.30)
Radio 4	World at One (mon-fri)
Radio 4	6 O'Clock News (mon-fri)
<b>ONLINE</b>	
bbc.co.uk/news	All relevant stories
<b>NON-BBC</b>	
Telegraph.co.uk	All relevant stories
Dailymail.co.uk	All relevant stories
Guardian.co.uk	All relevant stories

### *Programme availability*

Due to the limitations of the redux, the BBC online programme archive, a comprehensive retrospective sample of programmes was not available for analysis. The redux archive does not store regional and devolved nations news programmes for more than 6-8 weeks and gaining PABs from commercial television news providers was prohibitively expensive. For the analysis of the coverage of 'hot button' issues which was sampled retrospectively the English regional news and devolved nations news programmes were sourced by the Trust. The Trust organised the provision of two to three purposively selected days of output for each programme.

### *Is the sample 'representative'?*

Although the extent of the data collected compares very favourably to previous research in this area, whether conducted in the UK or internationally, it should be noted that the sample does not include all of the BBC network output, not to

mention all network broadcast news output. For this reason caution must be used when contemplating the representativeness of these results and whether they may be used to generalise about the BBC or about other broadcasters.

### *Inter-coder reliability*

Ensuring reliability between coders is an essential aspect of any project involving content analysis and especially so in large scale projects involving 15 coders. For the results of any content analysis to be deemed reliable there needs to be a high level of agreement between two or more coders when coding the same news item. This research ensured such levels of reliability were achieved through: rigorous coder training, a close monitoring of coders during the project, and by conducting reliability tests and addressing any areas of weakness these exposed.

Each part of the study ('hot button' issues, rural proofing and responsiveness to salient rural issues) had a specially designed coding manuals and schedules. The coders were trained on each before coding of that element of coverage began. The training involved several steps, starting with a thorough introduction to the coding manual variable by variable. Once the coders were familiar with the manual the coders independently coded some trial news items. The results of this content analysis were assessed informally then discussed with the coders and any misunderstandings rectified. All coders were then given a sample of five news items to code before a final meeting. The results were subjected to an inter-coder reliability test with the Average Pairwise Percent Agreement being calculated for each variable. There are different tests that can be employed to calculate inter-coder reliability. Average Pairwise Percent Agreement was deemed most suitable for calculating reliability amongst 3 or more coders with nominal data. The test compares agreement between the coders producing an average measure of agreement. Given the number of coders was as large as 15 the aim was to attain a minimum of a 70 percent agreement level and if possible exceed an 80 percent level. Those variables where the reliability score fell below a 70 percent level were re-examined, and the coders were given further training where necessary. It should be noted that variables where coders have to make a subjective judgement, such as identifying actors and themes, often present the greatest challenge in content analysis and require more detailed explanation. Only when the reliability level was considered satisfactory (over the 70 percent confidence level) was coding of the sample material allowed. In

addition, throughout the coding process the coders were in constant contact with each other and the project managers. Any queries that arose about coding matters were discussed by the management team and final decisions made. Tables 4.5 and 4.6 below show Average Pairwise Percent Agreement results for the analysis of 'hot button' issues and rural proofing sections of the report. The analysis of salient rural issue coverage was conducted last and due to time restrictions coding reliability was informally assessed. The results showed reliability levels were high for key variables. We do not believe this compromises the results given the amount of training the coders received and the similarity of many of the aspects of the coding sheets with the other analyses.

**Table 4.5: Hot Button Issues Formal Inter-Coder Reliability Results for Each Variable**

<b>Coding Categories</b>	<b>Average Pairwise Percent Agreement</b>
4 Story ID	NA
5 Date	NA
6 Publication ID	95.82%
7 Time and Space	95.82%
8 Medium	95.82%
9 Headline	NA
10 Story Type	90.10%
11 Location	90.10%
12 Authorship	90.10%
13 Place	90.10%
14 Trigger	89.71%
15-19 Actors	70.46%
20-24 Quote	87.06%
25-29 Gender	87.06%
30-34 Ethnicity	87.06%
35-39 Favourability	87.06%
40-44 Challenged	87.06%
45-49 Caveats	87.06%
50-54 Speak Time	NA
55-57 Themes	70.28%
58 National Policy Differences	80.57%
59-61 key words	77.59%
62-64 Key visuals	79.68%

**Table 4.6: Rural Proofing, Formal Inter-Coder Reliability Results for Each Variable**

<b>Coding Categories</b>	<b>Average Pairwise Percent Agreement</b>
4 Story ID	NA
5 Date	NA
6 Publication ID	77.07%
7 Time and Space	77.07%
8 Medium	77.07%
9 Headline	NA
10 Story Type	91.85%
11 Location	91.85%
12 Authorship	91.85%
13 Place	91.85%
14 Trigger	89.7%
15-19 Actors	70.48%
20-24 Quote	93.83%
25-29 Gender	93.83%
30-34 Ethnicity	93.83%
35-39 Speak Time	NA
40-42 Themes	71.17%
43 Angle	89.7%