

Research Findings

Race, Local Press and the General Election, 2005 West Yorkshire Case Study

There has been persistent concern about the representation of migrants, refugees and minority ethnic groups in press coverage during General Election campaigns. With the leader of the extreme right British National Party standing for election in the Keighley Constituency, a team of researchers from the University of Leeds and Leeds Metropolitan University carried out a study in West Yorkshire. This project sought to evaluate local newspaper coverage of a wide range of issues, including multiculturalism, migration and race politics, during April and May 2005. The research entailed scanning every issue of the Keighley News, Bradford Telegraph and Argus, the Yorkshire Post and the Yorkshire Evening Post from 4 April to 14 May 2005 and analyzing all relevant items.

- During the General Election period, 433 items in which race or ethnicity was clearly identified appeared in four local newspapers in Yorkshire. These were mainly news items, but they also included editorials, comment pieces and letters. This level of coverage indicates a significant focus on the **newsworthiness of race related matters**.
- **Minority groups appearance in the local press differed widely.** Muslims frequently appeared, being specifically identified in a quarter of items, asylum seekers were identified in 12% of items, but groups such as the Chinese, Afro-Caribbeans, Jews and Travellers rarely appeared in press items during this period.
- **Three key groups of stories** were identified: firstly, items linking race and the General Election (36%), secondly, items linking race, minorities and crime (34%) and thirdly minority groups and engagement in community activities (30%).
- The long-standing link between **race and crime remained a key feature** of race-related coverage in the news. However, this did involve reporting racial violence and harassment incidents, and showing minorities as victims of crime as well as showing minorities as perpetrators of crime.
- **Only 10% of items related to coverage of the British National Party (BNP)** with the bulk of coverage displayed opposition and very few indicating any support.
- **Over 75% of all items printed were either neutral or positive** in displaying a pro-ethnic minority stance. Positive items included many examples of minority community engagement in such fields as charity work, education, health matters and business. **A quarter of articles were identified as negative** including those portraying an anti-ethnic minority stance.

Minority groups in the local press

The four papers used in this study covered a wide variety of news related to race issues and ethnic minorities. Many of the stories noted race or ethnicity by description of an individual or of a group (45%), such as this example from the *Yorkshire Post*:

“Mr. Singh added that he hoped the police probe into allegations of vote-harvesting from the Asian community in Bradford by candidates and party workers last year would now be pursued ‘with a renewed vigour’” (*Yorkshire Post* 5 April, 2005, p. 2).

Other stories did so by naming or showing photos of individuals (14%):

“Mumtaz Khan, chairman of Mumtaz Food Industries Ltd. and the third richest Asian businessman in Yorkshire, will fund Yorkshire Air Ambulance to the tune of £2000 a month – for the foreseeable future” (*Yorkshire Evening Post* 20 April, 2005, p. 9).

Whilst 19% of the stories used both names and descriptions of individuals and groups to make reference to race and ethnicity:

“No drugs were found during the 20-minute raid, but Mrs. Ali-Khan, a practising Muslim wearing traditional dress was taken into her living room...” (*Yorkshire Post* 4 April 2005, p. 6)

Further categories were established by examining the racial or ethnic group referred to in the newspaper items. A large number of stories made reference to Asians in general (19%), however, there were more stories that focussed specifically on Muslims (24%). But many minority groups were relatively invisible in the local press with stories including a focus on: Africans and Afro-Caribbeans (4%), Sikhs (2%), and Travellers (2%).

Race and the General Election

The primary theme identified in the stories was related to the linking of the General Election with race issues (36% of all ‘race’ stories printed).

These stories were further categorized as stories discussing election issues (28%) or postal voting (8%). Coverage of election issues considered a wide range of topics with the highest number of articles found in the *Yorkshire Post* (51 - 12%) and the *Bradford Telegraph and Argus* (31- 7%). Evidence of a clear link between race and election issues was also found in the *Yorkshire Evening Post* (21 – 5%) with articles such as, “Mums hold the key but are they willing to turn it?”, featuring interviews and photos of Asian women and their views on political parties (*Yorkshire Evening Post* 2 May 2005, p. 5).

The second issue linking race and the election was that of postal voting (35 – 8%) with some of the articles in the four newspapers centring on the investigation of a Bradford Tory Councillor accused of postal vote fraud. Front page titles, such as the ones below, detailed other issues related to postal voting but were significantly linked to the on-going investigation:

“VOTING FRAUD PROBE LAUNCHED” (*Telegraph and Argus* 26 April 2005, Front Page).

“SWAMPED 348 sign up for postal votes as Council admits: We can’t check them all” (*Telegraph and Argus* 26 April 2005, Front Page).

Both of these front page stories, and others like it, featured a photo of the Tory Councillor and made reference to his case. Other stories focussed on the high numbers of postal vote applications in Bradford, drawing connections between postal vote increases and the Asian community.

Race and crime

The research shows that links between race and crime remained a key feature of race-related coverage in the newspapers, appearing in 34% of all the ‘race’ stories during the election period. Although many of these stories reported minorities as perpetrators of crime (64 – 15%), other stories also showed minorities as victims (32 – 7%):

“A Muslim woman, Tasweer Begum Husayn Ali-Khan has received a four-figure sum from police after being subjected to a ‘humiliating’ strip search in her home in Firshill Road, Burngreave in February 2003” (*Yorkshire Post* 4 April 2005, p. 6).

A number of stories looked at racial violence (24 – 6%), particularly between groups of local youths, such as a stand off between white and mixed-race youths in Beeston (*Yorkshire Evening Post* 13 April 2005, Front Page).

The research also found a small percentage of stories linking race, specifically Asians and Muslims, with postal vote fraud (20 – 5%).

Positive coverage of minority groups and community engagement

30% of stories dealt with community issues. A pro-ethnic minority stance was detected in 31% of these stories with a focus on Asians in general (34 – 8%), Muslims (27 – 6%), and asylum seekers (19 – 4%).

Many of these stories focussed on the way in which ethnic minority groups were positively engaged in community activities. The most significant theme in these stories was that of education and educational needs (31 – 7%), such as the story below:

“Blind Asian children in Bradford are learning to read Arabic and Urdu Braille thanks to a blind teacher who travelled here from Pakistan” (*Telegraph and Argus* 12 April 2005, p. 14).

Other areas of focus included: business (4%); charity (3%); entertainment (3%); health (2%); police (2%); and sport (1%).

The greatest number of positive articles on the links between racial or ethnic groups and the larger community are found in the *Bradford Telegraph and Argus* (66 – 15%), followed by the *Yorkshire Post* (31 – 7%), the *Yorkshire Evening Post* (27 – 6%), and the *Keighley News* (11 – 3%).

Anti-ethnic minority items

Some of the stories displayed an anti-ethnic minority stance (25%), with a focus on Muslims (39 – 9%), asylum seekers (27 – 6%), and Asians in general (13 – 3%), with the majority of negative articles found in the *Yorkshire Post* (57 – 13%) and the *Bradford Telegraph and Argus* (39 – 9%).

The research shows that terms such as asylum seeker and immigrant are perceived as descriptive of a racial or ethnic group suggesting that such terms now function as racial or ethnic identifiers.

“Children of immigrants will be taught to master English in a return to traditional teaching methods under a Tory government, Michael Howard promised yesterday” (*Yorkshire Post* 15 April 2005, p. Front Page).

Asylum seekers

The research shows that 53 articles (12%) on asylum seekers appeared in the four newspapers and two articles appeared on refugees. Over half of articles on asylum seekers were negative (28 – 7%), with some being positive (19 – 4%) and the remainder neutral (7 – 2%).

Although a large majority of articles on asylum seekers were news items (28 – 7%), the research also shows that views on asylum seekers were also found in letters to the editor (12 – 3%), and opinion columns (8 – 2%), of which half were negative.

The greatest number of negative articles found on asylum seekers was in the *Yorkshire Post* (20 – 5%), followed by the *Telegraph and Argus* (6 – 1%), however the *Yorkshire Evening Post* contained no negative articles on asylum seekers with the majority of stories showing a positive stance (8 – 2%).

British National Party

Stories on the BNP were divided into three sub-categories looking at election issues (11%), court cases (2%), and other unrelated stories (2%), such as those relating to other crimes:

“A Yorkshire Parliamentary candidate for the extremist British National Party has appeared in court on several counts of Class A drugs offences” (*Yorkshire Evening Post* 4 May 2005, Front Page).

A large number of articles displayed opposition to the BNP (37 – 9%) as demonstrated by the examples below.

“Former Cabinet minister Robin Cook visited Dewsbury and urged people not to vote for the British National Party” (*Yorkshire Evening Post* 14 April 2005, p. 5).

Other articles showed a more neutral position (23 – 5%), whilst four items showed support of the BNP. These items appeared mainly in the Keighley News and were letters to the editor, including one from a BNP councillor.

References

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Further Information

Journal articles examining the results of this study in detail, together with relevant literature, are planned for completion in 2006. Further information on this project ‘Race, Local Press, and the General Election, 2005: a West Yorkshire Case Study’ by I. Law, M. Farrar, and JKT. Basi is available from either:

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