TESTING THE POWER OF A MEDIA CONSENSUS: A COMPARISON OF SCOTS AND ENGLISH TREATMENT OF THE FALKLANDS CAMPAIGN

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TREATMENT OF THE FALKLANDS CAMPAIGN

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Recent research has confirmed the view that the press is
powerless to mould the political attitudes of its readers or,
more strictly, that one paper is powerless to mould the attitudes
of its own readers. Yet the launch of the SDP, the decline of
Alliance support when it quarreled over seat allocations, and the
outburst of jingoism over the Falklands suggest that the
collective power of a media consensus is very great indeed. But
it is particularly difficult to test the power of a media
consensus just because consensus destroys the opportunity for
comparison. We need to compare media consensuses, not individual
papers or television programmes. While this is difficult it may
not be totally impossible. The existence of a largely separate
media system in Scotland provides the conditions necessary for
testing the power of a media consensus but, paradoxically, only
when that consensus is focused on issues which have no special
relevance to Scotland.

Problems in Testing the Power of a Media Consensus '

Descriptive polemic and anecdotal accounts of politics consistently stress the power of the mass media to mould mass political attitudes and behaviour. Indeed there are those on the left who see the media as the real 'commanding heights' of our society. Yet since the classic studies by Lazarsfeld and Berelson analytic studies of media influence have seldom uncovered evidence of any powerful media effects and often they imply that the media has no influence at all. Blumler, McQuail and Nossiter (1975) described the "notion of a political communication effect as a concept with a chequered career in the history of mass media research". They were able to point to very few studies which showed any media effects. In Britain the one recurrent survey finding of a media effect established by the Leeds Centre for Television Research has been the tendency for media exposure to improve the standing of the Liberal Party during each successive election campaign. Yet in all the campaigns between the fifties and the seventies in which this finding was established, the Liberal Party still ran a very poor third. I do not think that left wing revolutionaries would be unduly disturbed or excited by a mass media whose political influence was so limited.

Since the media appeared to have so little influence on

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determining party choice, since it had so little persuasive effect, media researchers turned their attention to a variety of other possible effects of mass communication. In a sense, even the media's effect on Liberal performance was one of these. If they could detect no media influence on the most central political choices of the day, perhaps they could detect some influence on attitudes and decisions that cross-cut the dominant cleavage. So they focused on the switch to third parties (ie the Liberals), or the switch between voting and non-voting. They focused on non-decisions, on the "cognitive perspectives on the situations in the surrounding social and political environment with which political actors have to cope". For example, they focused on interest, knowledge, perception and issue-priority; on the "agenda-setting function of the mass media" and on the creation of political images. Quoting Blumler, McQuail and Nossiter (1975) again, they concluded their study of media effects in the 1970 election as follows: "none of the major outcomes of the 1970 campaign was straight forwardly attitudinal in the sense of reflecting some swing of evaluative sentiment towards or away from one of the competing parties or their leaders. Instead they included such phenomena as information gain, altered issue saliences, a more coherent realignment of the perceptions that comprise party leader images, and a readiness to bestir oneself to go the the polls and vote".

Survey oriented media researchers also tried restricting their analysis to small subsets of the population who might be especially susceptible to influence – self confessed "vote-guidance seekers", or new entrants into the electorate, or even young vote-guidance seekers.

Those who are not media specialists may feel that while these strategies are legitimate research strategies in themselves they avoid the basic question of the overall extent of media influence. No doubt media specialists would reply that they go beyond a basic question which had already been answered, and answered negatively. Just as the question "Is issue-voting important?" prompts the reply "some issues, some times, for some people", so the question of media influence might be answered in terms of specific media, specific situations and specific people.

But even with these restrictions the findings on media influence still appear surprisingly slight. The Leeds team found that knowledge gain in 1970 was virtually uncorrelated with levels of media exposure both amongst the old and amongst the young. Echoing the original findings of the 1940 American Presidential study, the only substantial correlations they found with knowledge gain were with family discussion (not mass media exposure) and only then amongst young, vote-guidance seekers.

Similarly no media exposure measure was much correlated with

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increasing salience for any issue: "it must be acknowledged that at best communication variance explained only a tiny part of the 1970 upsurge of voters' interest in bread-and-butter issues and failed entriely to account for their increasing appreciation of the more underlying difficulties facing the British economy".

Again there was "no evidence of an association between frequency of exposure to the campaign in any channel and the tendency for young voters' images of the party leaders to become internally more homogeneous."

The Leeds group did succeed very well in predicting which Labour and Conservative vote intenders would carry that intention through to an actual vote. They could explain 38% of the variance in Labour intenders actual turnout behaviour, 67% of the variance in Conservative intenders turnout behaviour and 74% of the variance in the undecideds turnout behaviour. But mass communication variables carried very little of the weight in these highly successful prediction schemes. A combination of various so-called "communication" variables explained 13% of the turnout variance amongst Labour intenders and 28% amongst Conservative intenders. However these "communication" variables included the frequency of political discussion in the respondent's family, and unfavourable assessments of the campaign. The only clearly mass-communication effect was the influence on turnout of reading a paper whose partisanship

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conflicted with the respondent's own partisanship, and that mass-media effect explained only six per cent of the turnout variation amongst Conservatives and none of the turnout variation amongst Labour intenders.

Consequently, although the authors may have been correct to claim that "the role of communication proved powerful" as an influence on turnout, their own analysis showed that the role of the mass-media was not a powerful influence.

My own more recent study of the influence of the press on its readers confirms these overwhelmingly negative findings.

I took advantage of the facts that readership of the Scottish Daily Express collapsed by half during the late seventies; and our 1974-79 Scottish Election Survey Panel spanned the critical time period. The panel element of our 1979 Scottish Election Survey unfortunately comprised only 364 respondents, only 131 of whom had read the Express in 1974. By 1979 the 131 had divided almost exactly down the middle into 62 who still read the Express and 69 who did not. (The Express gained very few new readers by way of compensation).

Political attitudes in 1974 proved very good predictors of who would drop the Express and who would stay with it: 67% of those Express readers who identified with the Conservative Party in 1974 kept on reading the Express for the next five years, but

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only 33% of those Express readers who had identified with Labour in 1974 stayed with the Express through to 1979. And 1974 partisanship not only predicted future defections from Express readership, it also predicted which alternative papers the defectors would take up. Labour defectors chose the Record rather than the Herald by a margin of 6 to 1; Conservative defectors chose the Herald rather than the Record by a margin of 7 to 1. Clear evidence surely, that at least in the Scotland of the late seventies, political partisanship strongly influenced choice of newspaper.

But the converse was not true. Political attitudes amongst Express loyalists and Express defectors were different in 1974 before the defectors quit the Express. However they were no more different in 1979 by which time the two groups were reading different newspapers.

Trends in class identity and political partisanship amongst the two groups of former Express readers (loyalists and defectors) did not diverge. Nor did attitudes towards decentralisation, north-sea oil revenues, devolution, or the importance of Scottish government. The general image of the SNP (not votes for it) declined much more sharply amongst Express loyalists than defectors and Express loyalists became marginally (no more than that) less favourable to devolution than Express defectors. That is the only evidence consistent with newspaper

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readers adopting the attitudes of their papers, and it is
contradicted by other evidence: Express loyalists became more
favourable to the redistribution of wealth and (relatively) more
favourable towards a Scots bias in the distribution of oil
revenues - both of which trends suggest readers moving against
their papers' views rather than towards them.

But while all the micro-evidence gathered from surveys
suggests that the media has little or no influence over important
political attitudes, and especially no influence on partisanship,
the macro-evidence suggests the very opposite conclusion.
Butler and Stokes found that in 1969 more people blamed the
(Labour) government of the day for Britain's economic
difficulties than blamed the preceeding (Conservative)
government. Nothing unexpected in that. But by the next year,
1970, more people now blamed the 1959-64 government for current
economic difficulties than blamed the 1964-70 government. It
seems impossible to explain that reversal in terms of changing
realities. Instead, it seems more plausible that attitudes were
influenced by the media on economic affairs during the run up to
the 1970 election.

Another example is the 1978-79 Winter of Discontent during
which opinion moved sharply against the Callaghan government, and
against Callaghan in particular. There was considerable
industrial action by private sector and then public sector

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workers intent on beating the pay guidelines set by the government. But the political response was so out of proportion to the realities of the industrial action, that it seems more plausible to interpret the political response as a reaction to media coverage and commentary rather than to the industrial action itself. Moseley (1982) produces evidence to suggest that even on economic matters such as inflation, which are more widely, directly and persistently experienced than industrial action, mass political responses correlate better with media coverage than with official statistics.

More recently still, the enormous reaction to the media launch of the SDP and to the Liberal/SDP Alliance's byelection successes (when they occurred) suggests that media coverage conditions political responses. In most of the byelection campaigns themeselves, non-media channels of communication have apparently been very significant - these campaigns have seen not only saturation canvassing but a revival of the public meeting. My own panel survey evidence from Hillhead, at least, provides clear evidence of the strongly persuasive effect of local public meetings held by the Alliance. However in Bermonsey especially, there must be a strong suspicion that the mass media also played a critical role.

Finally, public reaction to the Falklands Affair - which again had little direct effect upon most British residents,

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provides a further indication that the media, in some way, exert a powerful influence not only over public reactions towards the Argentine but over political choices between Labour and Conservative parties.

Blumler, McQuail and Nossiter list several possible reasons why they might fail to detect powerful media influences even when such influences exist:-

> (1) measures of communication exposure may be faulty
>
> (2) measures of political reaction may be faulty
>
> (3) relationships may not be linear
>
> (4) other influences may be so superimposed upon media effects as to make their detection difficult
>
> (5) people may make up their own minds in response to communication instead of being swayed by it _ a position which can shade over into a rejection of the effects perspective itself".

Later they point to another problem. One reason why media effects failed to show up in their analysis of the 1970 election might have been because of "the nearly total saturation of the 1970 campaign channels with economic issue content (which) create a situation in which this type of message penetrated the electorate more or less indiscriminately and consequently obliterated any sign that the more highly exposed audience members were more open to influence". Kraus and Chauffee (1974)

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gave a similar reason for the failure of American analysis to
uncover evidence of the impact of the televised Watergate
hearings. McLeod, Becker and Byrnes (1974) argue that a
"technical precondition for effectively testing the agenda-
setting function of the mass media is a situation in which one
channel with a more or less distinct audience is projecting a
particular issue orientation, in contrast to a tendency for some
other channel with a different audience to transmit other issue
emphases. Such a condition certainly did not exist during the
British General Election of 1970". (quoted by Blumler, McQuail
and Nossiter).

     I can summarise this explanation for a failure to detect
media influence as:-

          (6) media influence cannot be detected in conditions of
          media consensus.

     Of these 6 reasons for failure to detect media influence the
Leeds team concentrated upon (2) and (4). They redefined
political reaction in such a way as to focus on the most easily
influenced aspects of political attitudes and behaviour - third
party support and turnout. And they took account of other, non-
communication influences by using multi-variate analysis (with
40 predictors!)

     Too much media analyis has been in terms of quantitative
exposure to media output, neglecting the quality, content and

political direction of that output. The Leeds group did at least categorise papers by their overall partisanship, but they made no such content oriented measure of media output. So one must have a suspicion that the media measures (i.e. fault (1)) were biased towards an analysis of participation/non-participation political responses rather than political choice.

Fault (3), non-linearity, seems to me to be a technicality which might degrade an analysis somewhat but which is unlikely to account for the massive cumulation of negative findings.

Faults (5) and (6) seem much more significant and much more difficult to overcome - which may explain why these obvious faults have been so often ignored.

Let me start with fault (6). This really is a colossal irony: media influence cannot be detected with existing methodology when there is a media consensus. Yet all our instincts must tell us that media influence is at its greatest, at its most powerful, precisely when and where there is a media consensus. That is precisely the condition for that, 'psychological monopoly' which Lazarsfeld and Merton described as the precondition for powerful media effects. So, with traditional methods of analysis we can measure media effects when, and only when, they are most likely to be weak or non-existant. If that is really true, then we need a new

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methodology.

We do not live in a politically atomised society.   There is
a lot of evidence from the 1940s to the 1970s highlighting the
power of personal contact and personal communication to transmit
information,   perceptions   and   attitudes.   Because   of
interpersonal contacts the readers of one paper are brought into
contact with the readers of other papers and therefore with
information and ideas printed in those other papers.   Many
people read more than one paper themselves.   Many more read a
paper and also listen to the radio and television.   So each
individual· has a multiplicity of direct and indirect links to
several channels of mass communication.   As long as these
channels disagree with each other,   contradict each others
opinions,   select differently biased subsets of news,   or give
different degrees of emphasis and priority to the same items of
news, so long does their conflict reinforce the freedom of the
individual to establish his own priorities and chose his own
position on the issues.   An Express reader does not live in a
communication world which is dominated to any significant extent
by the principles and priorities of the Express.   At most, his
media intake is biased a little in the direction of the Express.
If the Express takes a line which is too much at variance with
the views of its readers it runs the risk of losing readers as
much as converting them.   If it suppresses major items of

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information that are publicised through other media channels, it
will just make the paper appear ill-informed. If it puts
forward strong views which are supported neither by the innate
prejudices of its readers, not by their simultaneous promulgation
through other media channels, then it will damage its own
credibility.

But if all, or most, of the media channels present the same
item of news, establish the same priority, or advocate the same
cause, then people will need very strong prejudices, very
personal experiences, or very deep knowledge of affairs if they
are to withstand the onslaught of a media consensus.

This is why the micro and macro analyses so consistently and
so flagrantly contradict each other. Survey based analyses have
categorised individuals by their most distinctive channel of mass
communication - even though that most distinctive element of
their media input (their 'own' paper) has been but a small part
of their total media input. The macro analyses, by contrast,
have categerised times (not individuals) by the consensual
element of overall media output at the time. Unfortunately the
macro-analyses have generally been anecdotal rather than truly
analytic: the degree of connection they have established between
media output and political response has usually been slight -
frequently, based on no more than a rough coincidence in time
between the two.

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I would argue that Blumler, McQuail and Nossiter are unnecessarily defeatist when they dismiss the 'effects' or 'persuasion' approach to media research, substituting a cognitive focus in place of an evaluative focus. What is required however, is a change of methodology so that we can measure the influence of variations in the media consensus, rather than continuing to focus on measuring the influence of media-consumption variations within a media dissensus.

That is a difficult task. Almost impossible, perhaps, but not quite. I can think of three ways in which it might be done - there may be others.

First, we can contrast political responses at different times, when the media consensus varies. But it is not enough merely to note the crude coincidence during the Winter of Discontent of persumed adverse media coverage and a swing against the government. A swing against Labour in 1978/79 could have been caused by a variety of other factors unconnected with industrial troubles. It was, after all, a particularly severe winter. We need something analogous to the Leeds Team's multivariate analysis procedures to ennumerate, and hopefully discount, the other circumstances of 1978/79 which could also have influenced people against the government.

More subtly, we need to distinguish between

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(A) people's direct response to the industrial troubles,

(B) people making up their own minds in response to a purely
     neutral (however defined) news reportage of the industrial
     troubles and

(C) the effect of the media's actual coverage of the events, as
     distinct from its mere transmission of the basic facts.

I can foresee all sorts of practical problems in
distinguishing (B) from (C), but the distinction is necessary and
is the one encompassed in media analysis fault number (5) defined
by the Leeds group.

I doubt whether such a time-based analysis would be fully
convincing unless we could apply it to a variety of times. That
might allow us to distinguish between the existence of strikes
and media coverage of the strikes; between balance of payments
problems and media coverage of them; between inflation rates and
media coverage of inflation. Moseley's time series analysis is
one example of how this might be done, though he uses a content
analysis of a single paper, the Daily Mirror, as an index of the
media consensus. This approach is also implied by Butler and
Stokes when they correlate government popularity with
Unemployment in 1959-1964, yet with Balance of Payments in 1964-
70 and then with Inflation after 1970. Realities continue, but
the focus of attention may be shifted by media coverage. Precise
measures of media priorities could be compared with the

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correlations between those priorities and political responses. Reactions to events which were ignored by the media could be compared with reactions to those which were highlighted in the media.

One problem that remains in this approach is the extent to which media priorities reflect rather than cause public interest. It could be that the media give extensive coverage to those concerns which are politically motivating the electorate just in order to satisfy a public demand for information, or to show sympathetic interest in the problems of their readers and viewers. That problem of causal direction requires careful attention to timing, and could also be helped by some investigative work within the media. Did journalists consciously focus on certain events and issues because of prompting from their readers, the parties, the government, their shareholders, academic and other 'experts', their competitors, or their consciences?.

A second way of studying the totality of media effects upon the individual would not require such a wide-ranging strategy, nor indeed would it require the identification of a media consensus. Instead of measuring the totality of media output at a variety of times, we might measure the totality of media inputs to a variety of individuals. This differs from the traditional Leeds methodology in two respects: there would have to be more

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attention given to media content, and we should measure the multiplicity of the individual's connections to the media rather than simply his principal paper and television programmes. So we should have to identify his close associates and find out their primary media sources and possibly estimate from local aggregate characteristics the media mix amongst his wider geographic and social milieu. Individually the members of that milieu might be insignificant, but collectively they and their media sources might be highly influential.

In practice it might not be necessary to use snowball sampling and direct interviews with the respondent's associates. Respondents themselves might not recall offhand the media sources of their associates but might prove willing to collect such elementary and non-sensitive information - indeed they might be more willing to do that than subject their friends to the attention of a survey agency. The media mix in the social and geographic milieu could be estimated from local press-circulation figures.

Any measure of influence, of cause and effect, almost necessarily requires some over-time element in the study design. So a panel study would be required. Leeds has traditionally used panel designs however, both campaign panels and inter-election panels; so there would be nothing new in that requirement.

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The third possibility for studying a media consensus is to find two groups of people of much the same kind, but subject to a different media consensus. It is possible that a detailed analysis of respondents' extended media contacts (through self and associates) would allow us to extract subsets of respondents whose overall media contacts were so different that we could describe them as being subject to a different media consensus. But it is more likely that we should find most individuals more or less linked to all the media, distinguished by the quantitative strength of these various links rather than by their presence or absence. I suspect that class would structure media contacts more than partisanship: middle class individuals would be well connected, at first or second hand, to the high-brow press, working class individuals to the tabloid press, and both to television. Those who read the Sun would probably have associates who read the Star, Express and Mirror; while those who read the Guardian would probably be on fairly close terms with friends and workmates who read the Times. I doubt whether the lines of personal contact would run from Sun to Telegraph and from Guardian to Mirror. Consequently sub-cultural media styles might exist, but not sub-cultural media consensuses on political issues.

However there is one important exception to this. Partly because of national sentiment, but more perhaps because of

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geographic problems which affect production, distribution, news relevance, sports relevance, and advertising relevance, the Scottish press is very largely separate from the papers which circulate in England and Wales. And this press separation is reinforced by a large output of Scots produced news and current affairs on radio and television. In 1979 the circulation figures for the top selling papers in Scotland and England were:-

England (thous)		%	Scotland (hundreds)		%
3855	Sun	27	7250	Record	41
3623	Mirror	25	2750	Express	15
2447	Express	17	1500	Sun	8
1963	Mail	14	1350	Courier	8
1441	Telegraph	10	1200	Herald	7
880	Star	6	1150	Press & Journal	6
327	Guardian	2	950	Scotsman	5
		____	600	Star	3
		100	400	Mail	2
		____	300	Telegraph	2
			250	Mirror	1
			100	Guardian	1

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Note: To compensate for population differences the figures
show circulation in thousands for England (British fig's) and in
hundreds for Scotland. That makes them roughly comparable cross-
nationally.

The Express provides the only point of similarity between
these two press mixes, and even then it is published in different
editions which on occasion take different political positions.
The English press is a mixture of Sun and Mirror with smaller
contributions from Express, Mail and Telegraph. The Scots press
is dominated by single paper, the Record modified by a relatively
small contribution from the Express.

On television, BBC - Scotland's political programme Agenda
has a larger audience than BBC - London's Panorama, while Radio
Scotland offers an alternative morning radio news programme to
that put out by Radio 4.

So a Scots/English contrast would go a long way towards
overcoming fault(6) of media effects analysis: there is a real
possibility of a different media consensus in Scotland and
England. However we must beware of the problem of fault(5): even
if Scots and English political reactions were different, that
difference could be the result of all kinds of other factors than
media influences. Scots as people, might just come to different
conclusions from the English even in response to identical media

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outputs.

Wherever Scots/English differences relate to a specifically Scots political issue it would be very hard to disentangle the effects of different media from those of different people. But many issues may have no overtly Scots/English dimension. In these cases different political reactions in the two nations might well be related to different complexes of media outputs. One example might be perceptions of and reactions to Britain-wide economic conditions. Perceptions of inflation, and attribution of blame for it, could reasonably be compared with Scots and English media treatment of the issue.

Another more topical example would be reactions to the Falklands Affair. The Falklands Crisis was neither Scots nor English. The troops that fought in the Falklands were both Scots and English (and Welsh and Gurkha). The Belgrano was sunk by a Clyde-based submarine. Scots Guards and Scots-based Commandos fought on land. The issue was totally irrelevant to the Scots/English dimension in British politics. Nonetheless the Scottish media treated the issue rather differently from the English and the popular reaction was markedly different.

The Scots media, like all the English except the Financial Times and the Guardian, supported a firm response to the Argentinian invasion. And popular support for the Task Force

was also high in Scotland.   However the party political
advantage to the Conservatives simply failed to materialize.
Throughout England, north as well as south, the Conservatives
staged a major recovery in 1982.   In Scotland they did not.   On
the basis of MORI polls the Falklands Factor was only half as
strong in Scotland as in England; on the basis of a much greater
number of System Three polls the Falklands Factor was entirely
non-existant in Scotland.   Even compared to the General Election
in 1979 when Scots/English voting patterns differed by more than
they had done for half a century past, the 1982 local elections
showed a further widening of the gap with Scotland moving
marginally towards Labour and England towards the Conservatives.

Yet a brief look at the Scots press shows solid support for
the British case in the Falklands and for the (quote) 'Heros' of
the Task Force.   But there was little of that 'mindless
belligerence' which Hastings and Jenkins noted as characterising
England's best-selling newspaper.

The   balance of readership between papers was   highly
significant.   The Express in Scotland not only supported the
'Heros' of the Task Force but took every opportunity to link
Britain with Mrs. Thatcher - by picture, cartoons and feature
articles.   Simultaneously, it ran feature articles attacking
moderate Conservatives, the BBC, Heath, Callaghan, Wilson and the
"pussyfoot" Foot.   But the Express only contributed one sixth of

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press circulation in Scotland as in England.

In England, Hastings and Jenkins described the Mirror's lack of enthusiasm for military victory as a 'courageous exception' to the line taken by all the other tabloids and the best selling serious papers. But the Scottish press was dominated by the Mirror group's Record which in Scotland sold over half as much again as all the rest of the tabloids put together.

So the Record's treatment of the crisis is highly significant especially since radio and television were notably moderate in tone, and even more so in Scotland than England. The Express and the Sun simply did not have the circulation to balance the Record's position, however strident their tone.

Throughout the crisis the Record supported Britain and supported the Task Force. It could reasonably be said that it was a paper which 'backed our boys'. But it did not back Mrs. Thatcher. The word Britain instead of Thatcher was used frequently in headlines. There were relatively few pictures of Thatcher and they were usually small. There were no cartoons idolising her. Carrington's resignation received the somewhat inaccurate headline: THATCHER'S FALLEN HERO. There was little or no criticism of Foot. He got little coverage at all but examples include

FOOT AND THATCHER TEAM UP (April 15th) and

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FOOT SLAMS TORY HAWKS (April 30th).

Thatcher got several critical headlines:

    THATCHER DUCKS VITAL QUESTION (7th April)

    TORY CONFUSION AFTER THATCHER AND PYM SPLIT (May 14th)

    MAGGIE ADMITS GRIM DEATH TOLL (11th June)

    MAGGIE'S IN A MESS (24th June) and

    MAGGIE'S INVASION BOOB (24th June).

Editorials, set in large type on page two reminded her that the issue was "the freedom of the Falkland Islanders.... not the possession of the Islands" (April 20th). They stated she was right to "mobilize the full might of Britain's military and diplomatic strength to defend the Falkland Islanders" but added "She would be equally right to mobilize the full might of Britain's economic resources to attack the evil of unemployment. That in the long term is a far greater threat than the Argentine Junta" (April 28th).

    The Record published numerous wedding photographs of dead servicemen. On 14th May there was a full colour centre page spread on the Erskine Hospital with the heading: MEN WHO PAID THE PRICE OF GLORY. And the PRICE OF VICTORY was the heading for the centre page spread after the fall of Port Stanley (16th June). Local interest was catered for by the feature on THE SCOTS WHO DIED (21st June).

    Throughout the crisis the Record succeeded in 'backing our

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boys' without backing Thatcher. The jubilant headline on 16th June, YOU'RE MAGIC referred to Jeremy Moore, not to Mrs. Thatcher.

The most remarkable issue was that on May 4th. That was one day after the third anniversary of Mrs. Thatcher's government, one day after the news of the Belgrano's destruction and one day before news of the Sheffield's. Even the Guardian's editorial that day referred to the 'luck and good judgement' of the Task Force and its 'military successes'.

The Record's editorial read:
"Today there are three candles on the Tory birthday cake. And many people are enjoying the taste of that cake as victory after victory is announced against Argentina. Yet is the taste REALLY so palatable? Win or lose, war is no cause for celebration, no cause for rejoicing. WIN OR LOSE, WAR IS ALWAYS A TRAGEDY".
The editorial was not about possible future reverses. It was not about the difficult diplomatic consequences of victory. It was simply and directly about the bad taste of victory.

Ten days after the final victory when Gallup was showing a Britain-wide swing of 6% to the Conservatives (compared to 1979), Labour retained the seat at the Coatbridge byelection with 55% of the vote and only a 2% swing against it despite a 20% fall in

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turnout.   It would seem plausible, at least, to relate the Scots
lack of enthusiasm for the Falklands Affair to the dominant line
taken by their mass media.

Plausible perhaps, but not more than that unless we could
demonstrate the direction of causality.   Why did the Scots media
take such a different position from the English?   Some leading
Scots journalists have suggested that they decided upon their
Falklands line after taking soundings of Scottish opinion.   And
it is true that during the crisis, not only the STUC but the
Church of Scotland Assembly displayed at most lukewarm support
for military victory.   This is a matter that requires further
investigation.   But I think it is significant that the Record
was echoing the line taken by its sister paper, the Mirror in
England;   The Scottish Express was consistent with the London
Express and the other tabloids were basically English papers
anyway.   So each newspaper group was following a consistent
Britain-wide Falklands line which points to internal rather than
external motivations.   What made the Mirror's position a
"courageous exception" while the Records's was the dominant norm,
was simply their previously established circulation figures.
That points to the press influencing opinion rather than vice
versa.

There remains the possibility that some other Scottish
attribute influenced reactions to the Falklands Affair.   Since

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comparison of local election results in 1981 and 1982 show that the Falklands Factor operated almost as powerfully in the North of England as the South I doubt the strength of a socio-economic explanation. Another possibility might be that the Devolution Debate had loosened Scots ties to the British state, but that too does not seem very plausible in the face of armed attack by a military dictatorship. Within Scotland, 1982 local election results also showed that the Conservatives suffered their worst swings in the areas where the Record most dominates the local media mix.

I would not suggest that I have established a finding beyond doubt. That was not my intention here. A crude comparison between Scots media output and Scots political reactions is too aggregated to carry great conviction. More detailed analyses of individual perceptions and responses in areas dominated by different media mixes would be required. And the content of the media and the content of the perceptions would have to correlate in some detail.

However, I hope I have drawn attention to the possible use of Scots/English comparisons for an analysis of media influence. The separation of the two media systems could provide us with a basis for testing more than attitudes towards specifically Scots nationalist issues. Paradoxically, the existence of a Scots media system may be most valuable for analytic purposes when the issues have nothing to do with Scotland.

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