

REFLECTIONS ON POLARISATION AND INEQUALITIES IN BREXIT PANDEMIC TIMES

Fractured Lives in Britain

*Edited by Katharine Tyler, Susan Banducci,
and Cathrine Degnen*

First published 2025

ISBN: 978-1-032-59313-5 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-59315-9 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-45413-7 (ebk)

Chapter 11

**EVERYDAY ENGAGEMENTS WITH THE
BBC ACROSS LEAVE AND REMAIN
IDENTITIES, DRAWING ON SURVEY
ANALYSIS, ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWS,
AND ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDIES**

*Janice Hoang, Deirdre Patterson, Susan Banducci,
Katharine Tyler, Daniel Stevens, Joshua Blamire,
Cathrine Degnen, and Laszlo Horvath*

(CC-BY) 4.0

DOI: 10.4324/9781003454137-14

Funding Body: UKRI



Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK



Do you want to see red?

11

EVERYDAY ENGAGEMENTS WITH THE BBC ACROSS LEAVE AND REMAIN IDENTITIES, DRAWING ON SURVEY ANALYSIS, ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWS, AND ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDIES

Janice Hoang, Deirdre Patterson, Susan Banducci, Katharine Tyler, Daniel Stevens, Joshua Blamire, Cathrine Degnen, and Laszlo Horvath



11.1

DOI: 10.4324/9781003454137-14

This chapter has been made available under a (CC-BY) 4.0 license.

Introduction

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) holds a privileged place in the contemporary British political landscape. Along with the National Health Service (NHS), it is considered to be one of Britain's "national treasures". It is the most often cited news source by the British public and its central role as a source of information is especially salient at times of global crisis, such as the pandemic, or national political turmoil including Brexit. The role of public service broadcasters is more important now in a fragmented media landscape – characterised by a proliferation of diverse sources of information where audiences are increasingly segmented and exposed to disparate narratives – that has the potential to underpin a polarised political landscape (Kubin and Von Sikorski, 2021). Some argue that the BBC news coverage can be viewed as an antidote to such polarising debates on social media (Polonski, 2016). It is not immune, however, from criticism. The critique of "biased" news coverage comes from all sides of the political spectrum. Boris Johnson's "empty chair" strategy, whereby he attacked the BBC without allowing the institution to defend itself, and his government's attacks on the BBC license fee reflect right-wing populist leaders' anti-elitist ideology, while also needing the media stage (Holtz-Bacha, 2021). However, the BBC is also attacked from the left for being beholden to governments of the day.

As set out in the introduction to this volume, this study forms part of two large ESRC-funded projects, *'Identity, belonging and the role of the media in Brexit Britain'* and *'Identity, inequality, and the media in Brexit-COVID-19-Britain'*. One of the aims of these projects was to examine the resonances and contrasts in the ways in which the inequalities of the covid-19 pandemic and Brexit era have been framed by the media, and how they reflect people's everyday identities and experiences. In this chapter, we will focus on the ways in which Leave and Remain identities mediate individuals' differing media practices, especially their engagement with and trust in the BBC, and the extent to which these practices reflect social and political polarisation and division.

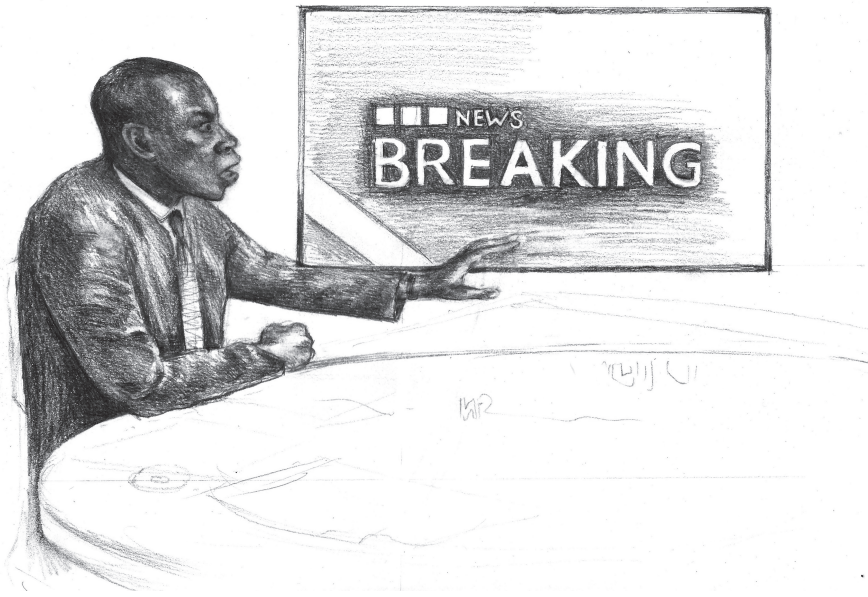
When brought together, our diverse methodological approaches and differing scales of analysis offer a unique insight into the convergent and contrasting ways in which Leavers and Remainers engage with the BBC. Our combined approach adds complexity to any straightforward idea that Leavers' and Remainers' seek out news stories online or shared on social media that confirmed their own positions. This bifurcated engagement with the media is thought by some social commentators to be the driving, polarising engine for the increasingly entrenched social and political division within the UK more generally (see Kubin and Von Sikorski, 2021, for an overview of these debates).

Our analysis provides a contrasting narrative about media use. First, in today's information ecosystem, the media landscape is fragmented. Citizens have a vast (perhaps overwhelming) number of sources to turn to for news or that is shared with or pushed to them online. Increasingly, with news

produced and disseminated across so many platforms during a never-pausing news cycle, individuals must actively engage in “news avoidance” (Toff and Kalogeropoulos, 2020). In this fragmented landscape, where national broadcasters are competing with so many different sources of news, it is increasingly challenging to create a shared experience about the important issues of the day. Instead, the fragmentation and the architecture of social media contribute to news experiences that are more individualised than previously possible with people actively shaping their own experiences rather than being solely directed by news outlets (Westlund and Färdigh, 2012).

In our analysis that follows, we discuss the implications of everyday engagements with the BBC for articulating social and political divisions in Britain across Leave and Remain identities and in the face of Brexit and the covid-19 pandemic. Our analysis of a large-scale opinion survey examines how the BBC can still act as a shared experience for citizens and that citizens turn to the BBC even in a climate of low levels of trust in the media. Second, our in-depth interviews uncover a more complex picture of this shared experience. That is to say, while our large-scale survey analysis reveals the BBC is a primary source of news during the pandemic, consistent with other research that Leavers and Remainers engaged with the BBC (Newman et al., 2021), our in-depth interviews demonstrate how both Leavers and Remainers perceive the BBC to be ‘biased’ towards the other side.

Brexit, the EU, and the BBC in the British Media Landscape



The British media landscape is characterised by both a partisan press and a co-existing strong public service broadcast ethos in the BBC. Lord Reith's summary of the purpose of the BBC to "inform, education and entertain" has become the principle of public service broadcasting across Europe. The BBC is recognised as an authoritative and comprehensive news service around the world. Since 1925, the BBC has been the UK's national publicly funded broadcaster and is the most nationally recognised and trusted public service news brand both online and offline (Cushion et al., 2019; Ofcom, 2019). According to recent in-depth reviews of BBC news by Ofcom and Reuters Institute (Newman et al., 2021; Ofcom, 2019), the BBC has been evaluated as the UK's primary source for news and has maintained its prestige among most people for trusted and precise news.

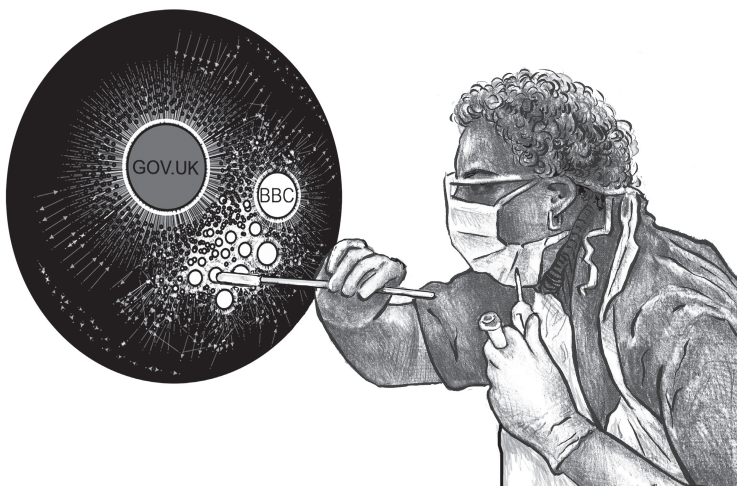
The relationship between British media and the EU, however, has not been as easy. Our contemporary study of media practices in Brexit Britain has been shaped over the decades by how the media has reported on, reflected on, and interacted with the sociopolitical forces at play in the debate over membership with the European Union. This relationship provides a necessary backstory to understanding the contemporary place of the BBC in the Brexit-pandemic era. For most scholarly observers there was little question that the press, and particularly the tabloid (e.g., popular) press contributed to Euroscepticism taking hold in Britain (Leconte, 2010).

This uneasy relationship between the media and the EU – the UK had one of the most Eurosceptic presses in the EU (De Vreese et al., 2006) – that existed prior to the growth of social media. Daddow (2012: 1219) describes the British media as a permissive consensus that "has given way to a vigorously partisan hostility bordering on a nationalist and in some arenas xenophobic approach to the coverage of European affairs". Many have found that the British press focused on the undemocratic aspects of the EU and concerns about the lack of British sovereignty (Leconte, 2010). In other words, the British public has been subjected to a Eurosceptic press for decades. In perhaps one of the most persuasive accounts exploring how the British tabloid press, in particular, has been responsible for pushing the public to be more critical of the UK's relationship with the EU, Foos and Bischof (2022) show that the 30-year boycott of the most Eurosceptic tabloid, *The Sun*, in Merseyside after the Hillsborough football disaster, led to less Eurosceptic attitudes relative to other areas of the country. Indeed, they show that because *The Sun* – which played a major role in the EU referendum campaign and strongly backed Leave – was boycotted, it led to a lower-than-expected Leave vote in Merseyside.

The BBC during the Brexit campaign was operating in a media environment where coverage of the EU has tended to be negative. Generally, scholarship has shown that the BBC has been less negative than the press (de Vreese et al., 2006). At the time of the EU Referendum campaign, the BBC and other broadcasters focused on the issues of the economy and immigration giving roughly equal time to the Leave and the Remain campaigns (Cushion and Lewis, 2017). However, scholars have noted a shift in the BBC reporting of the EU overtime

that reflects shifts in wider political attitudes towards the EU overtime. For example, Daddow (2012) recounts how the BBC was generally seen as impartial by the public at the time of the 1975 Referendum on EEC membership. In contrast, an analysis of a five-year period before the 2016 EU Referendum vote, between 2007 and 2012, shows that there was scant coverage of the EU on the BBC. Indeed, when there was BBC coverage, they focused their reporting on key summit events and the conflict amongst party elites; this focus of attention led to conflictual and negative coverage of the EU (Berry et al., 2021). The BBC's increasingly negative approach to the EU reflected the general absence of any pro-EU voice in the British news media before the EU Referendum. Moreover, the general lack of enthusiasm for the EU by the BBC and the media more widely can also be attributed to the lack of a pro-European faction in the British political party space which provided a case for the UK's membership of the EU (Copeland and Copsey, 2017). Rather, as was evident during the EU Referendum campaign and in the years that followed, there was a vocal anti-EU faction within the Conservatives. Moore and Ramsay (2015) concluded from their analysis of the front pages during the Referendum campaign: “[t]he implications of a divisive, antagonistic and hyper-partisan campaign – by the campaigners themselves as much as by many national media outlets – is likely to shape British politics for the foreseeable future” (2015: 168). Our point here is that even if the BBC presented “both sides” of the Referendum debate it would be a hard task for this type of “balanced” BBC coverage to undo the 10–15 years of scant and conflictual coverage on the EU by the BBC themselves (Berry et al., 2021), the largely anti-EU coverage on the front pages, and to counteract the Eurospectic media and political culture that has become pervasive in the UK at this time.

BBC and Media Trust



There is a dual nature to media in democracies. Impartial news on important issues of the day and on the political actors making decisions is necessary for citizens to make informed decisions. But, for the news media to play a role in informing citizens, it is not enough to provide the news, they also need to be a trusted source for the news to be effective (see Newton, 2017, as an example of this point). Given the importance of a well-informed citizenry to the functioning of democracies, there is considerable interest in levels of trust in the news media. Indeed, there is considerable evidence of a decline of trust in the media in the UK and globally. For example, Newton (2017) reviews existing reports that survey the public and their levels of trust in media and journalists to show that the UK, relative to other countries, has high and increasing levels of distrust in the media. Between 2003 and 2012, trust in BBC journalists fell from 81% to 44%, similar to other broadcast journalists, such as ITV. At the same time, trust in broadsheet journalists fell from 65% to 38%. Thus, the decline in trust was not as great for broadsheet journalists, but levels of trust are marginally higher for broadcast journalists. However, 2012 may have been a low point. By March 2020, the proportion of respondents in a similar YouGov poll who said they trusted BBC journalists to tell the truth was still at 44%, compared to 40% for broadsheets and 8% for tabloid journalists.

What are the sources of this distrust? Newton (2017: 357) explains that many people “believe their media are open to influence by powerful individuals and organizations, are biased, tend to lie, are too critical, inaccurate and contain too much bad news, and that government interferes with them too much”. In this vein, the top criticism of the news media in the UK was that it “sometimes, frequently or always tells lies” (73%), and 58% thought “the government interfered too much”. The claims of bias or government interference are particularly salient for the publicly funded BBC, whose executives are government appointees. Trust may be linked to how the public views the impartiality of the BBC in a way that is not true of other media outlets. For example, in March of 2023, BBC’s *Match of the Day* (a popular football programme) presenter Gary Lineker was taken off air after posting on social media a statement criticising the Conservative government’s bill on the treatment of asylum seekers. Critics of the BBC claimed his post broke impartiality rules. However, others argued that because Lineker was a freelance sports broadcaster tweeting from his private account, rather than a member of BBC’s news staff, the impartiality rules did not apply. They argued instead that the BBC had caved to government pressure and was itself being impartial. Eventually, the BBC reversed his suspension, and Lineker returned to hosting duties.

Cushion and Lewis (2017) argue that the notion of impartiality in broadcasting is nuanced. They suggest the need for editors to not only consider

how much time is devoted to each side of the debate and sources used but also the necessity for editors to critically evaluate claims made by each side and to interrogate the competing claims “within” each side. The notion of impartiality is also often interpreted as “balance” – giving equal time to both sides, usually political parties or Leave and Remain, of a debate. However, there are issues with this expectation of “both-sideism” – both sides of a debate may not be supported by factually accurate positions, which may be particularly true in a media landscape characterised by misinformation and false claims by political leaders (Hughes et al., 2023). However, if citizens view the impartiality of the BBC through the lens of equal time given to both sides of a debate, this also reflects and mirrors how the BBC themselves has tended to approach impartiality (Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2017). In light of the complexity and debate around impartiality and balance of BBC content, we seek to understand how viewers interact with the BBC and the way trust and perceptions of bias shape these interactions.

Our aim in this chapter is to understand more fully the relationship between citizens and the BBC by providing a detailed analysis of the centrality of the BBC within everyday media practices and to explore the extent to which BBC content provides a common space in a fragmented and polarised news media ecosystem. The BBC celebrated 100 years of service in 2022, and its centrality to public life embedded over four generations often goes unexamined when scholars focus on the polarising Brexit debates. Hence, our research aims to address this question by using an innovative and comprehensive approach. We integrate multiple methods in order to provide an account of everyday engagements with the BBC through an examination of media practices and perceptions of trust. We examine these dynamics across the identities of Leave and Remain during the Brexit transition period (2018–2019) and the covid-19 pandemic lockdowns (2020–2021).

In the remainder of the chapter, we describe our large-scale public opinion survey and ethnographic fieldwork, detailing how we integrate these data thematically. Our contention is that the integration of multiple methods allows us to examine the media practices of referendum voters across different macro, meso, and micro scales of experience. In the first empirical section, we report our results from the survey, focusing on the centrality of the BBC to the media practices of British citizens’ perceptions of trust and accuracy. We then pick up these themes in the in-depth interviews, exploring how perceptions of the BBC across the Leave Remain divide provide a more nuanced understanding of the feelings citizens bring with them to their engagements with the BBC. Finally, we provide some concluding thoughts on the BBC in a seemingly polarised Britain.

Mixed-Methods Study Design: Everyday Experiences as Represented in Surveys and Ethnographic Fieldwork



11.4

In this chapter, we draw on evidence generated by our ethnographic fieldwork and a large-scale representative survey. Our qualitative data deployed in this chapter comprises of conversational and ethnographically situated interviews and two ethnographic case studies drawn from these interviews. As set out in this book's introduction, by the time of the first national lockdown in March 2020, the ethnographers, Blamire, Degnen, and Tyler, had conducted 180 in-depth conversational-style interviews with residents from across ethnic, racial, class, migrant, national, generational, and gender identities between September 2018 and January 2020. We selected 60 interviews to analyse – 20 from each of the project's three regions of the North East, South West, and East Midlands. Between October 2020 and July 2021, each ethnographer conducted further interviews with 30 of their original interlocutors from each of their fieldwork sites totalling 90 interviews. From these, we selected 30 to analyse in this chapter. The first set of interviews were conducted within diverse settings, including community centres, cafes, and pubs, as well as within people's homes and workplaces. The second set of interviews were conducted online due to national lockdown restrictions. The fact that the ethnographers already knew their interlocutors made these online interviews congenial despite the difficult circumstances some people found themselves in due to the pandemic and lockdowns. The interviews explored people's experiences of Brexit and the pandemic in relation to their sense of belonging (or lack thereof) to their local place, the nation, and the EU, as well as their views on politics and

politicians, the media including the BBC, and their everyday media practices. Overall, interviews lasted from one to three hours. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data were anonymised, shared with the wider team, and analysed manually by hand and through NVivo.

The second, quantitative source of data comes from a large-scale online survey – a four-wave panel survey drawn from the On-line Research Bank panel (ORB) dates between July 2020 and December 2021. For this chapter, we draw insight from the first wave of the panel conducted in July 2020, so between the two periods of fieldwork for the in-depth interviews. The survey explored similar themes and questions to those discussed with participants in the conversational style interviews. Respondents are UK citizens over 18 years old and the diversity of respondents aimed to be representative of the UK's 2011 census demographic in terms of age, gender, education, ethnicity, religion, and location (UK regions). We used a sample of respondents across one wave of data collection. The first wave of surveys was completed by 5000 respondents in July 2020. Included were representatives of nine region groups, namely East of England, East Midlands, London, North East, North West, South East, South West, West Midlands, and Yorkshire and Humberside. In parallel with the ethnographic interviews, the questionnaire included questions about media use and practices, trust in the media including the BBC, and attitudes towards politics including Brexit and the pandemic.

Our analysis begins by uncovering distinct profiles of media practices and the news and information consumption behaviours among respondents. Descriptive and latent class analysis (LCA) were performed to identify the media practice of our samples. LCA is a statistical technique employed to identify hidden, or “latent”, subgroups within a group of respondents (Collins and Lanza, 2009; Goodman, 1974). This method clusters individuals based on patterns in their responses to a series of observed characteristics, which, in this study, are questions related to media usage – the frequencies of media consumption behaviour on nine different platforms including, (1) all national television news, (2) newspapers, (3) BBC news (i.e., any type of BBC news online or broadcast), (4) local television news, (5) local newspapers, (6) radio, (7) Facebook, (8) WhatsApp, and (9) Twitter in any formats (online, papers, or podcasts), were selected as independent variables in predicting latent classes of media practice.

By analysing the responses to these questions through LCA, we can categorise individuals into unique classes that represent different media usage patterns. For example, one latent class might consist of individuals who frequently consume news from social media platforms, while another class may represent those who prefer traditional media outlets like newspapers and local TV. The resulting profiles are not directly observed but are inferred from the data, providing us with a nuanced understanding of the diverse ways in which people interact with and rely upon different media sources for their news consumption.

Because we do not have a priori expectations about how individuals cluster into distinct groups for news use, we needed to test different models and compare to see which fit the data best and which make sense. Thus, we tested four models namely three, four, five, and six class models, and then were evaluated. As we present below, a five-class solution fit the survey data well and overlapped to some extent with our analysis of the interview data.

Analysis of the interviews took several steps. Hoang, Patterson, and Banducci undertook a thematic analysis to inductively identify themes within a sample of the interview data drawn from 60 of the 180 interviews conducted during the Brexit transition period, and a sample of 30 of the 90 interviews conducted during the pandemic. Then, in conversation with the ethnographers who had carried out their own analysis of the data, they created a thematic framework for classifying media practices and how interviewees engaged with the BBC through the notions of trust and bias. The thematic analysis consisted of five related steps: familiarisation, coding, thematic framework development, defining themes, and reporting. Interview transcripts were reviewed during the process of familiarisation, and all sections of the interviews relating to media practice were analysed.

A diagram of the study design is provided in Figure 11.1. In implementing the convergent design, quantitative (an online survey), and qualitative

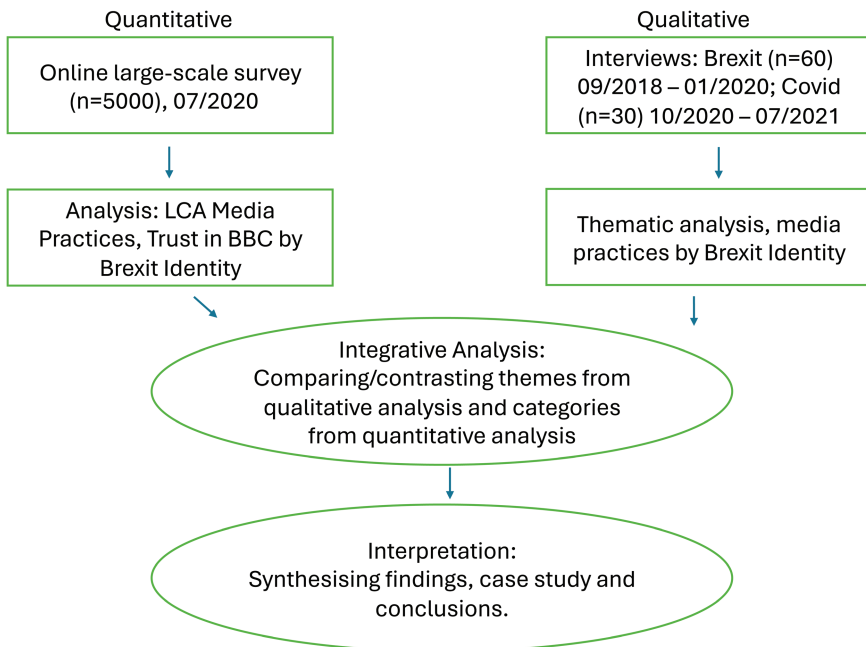


FIGURE 11.1 Integrating data from large-scale surveys and in-depth interviews.

(semi-structured interviews) data collection and analysis occurred separately but within a concurrent timeframe. To bring our two data sources together, we applied a parallel analysis for our convergent mixed-methods design (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Both data sets were analysed independently and then interpreted together. This analytic approach enables us to not only triangulate our data to explore emergent ideas/points of analysis in complementary bodies/forms of data but it also provides more depth and texture to our findings than any one method would alone. This becomes apparent in our analysis and conclusions that add depth and richness to any straightforward idea that Leavers and Remainers have opposing media practices and views on the legitimacy of the BBC in these Brexit pandemic times.

Leavers' and Remainers' Engagements with the BBC

News Practices

We first present the analysis that draws on the survey data to construct profiles of news practices. We then use these profiles to examine how news practices vary across Leave and Remain identities and how they shape trust in the BBC. We report the outcomes of the LCA that identified five distinct classes of news consumers based on their news consumption habits across different media outlets. Respondents were asked how many days a week they spent following politics across a range of nine sources with five categories of responses possible: not at all, 1–2 days, 3–4 days, almost every day or every day.¹ The LCA reveals diverse patterns of news consumption among the population, ranging from moderate overall consumption to preferences for traditional news sources, televised news, highly engaged news following, and a strong inclination towards news consumption through social media platforms.

We have illustrated the profiles of news practices in Figure 11.2 uncovered by the LCA. The figure shows the five profiles and then the average news consumption for each type of news by each of our five profiles of users. We have labelled the first profile (“class”) “News Avoiders” as relative to other groups they have lower news consumption across all outlets, but it is important to note with the highest consumption for the BBC. We use the term News Avoiders only to reflect that this group has the lowest on average news consumption in our sample of respondents. With the exception of BBC that they follow regularly, News Avoiders who make up 29.5% of our sample report following news between not at all and 1–2 days a week across all sources.

The second profile we call “National Newspapers”, making up 13.5% of our sample, shows varied interest, with notably high consumption of newspapers. We have termed these national newspaper readers as they report reading national newspapers almost every day while other news sources,

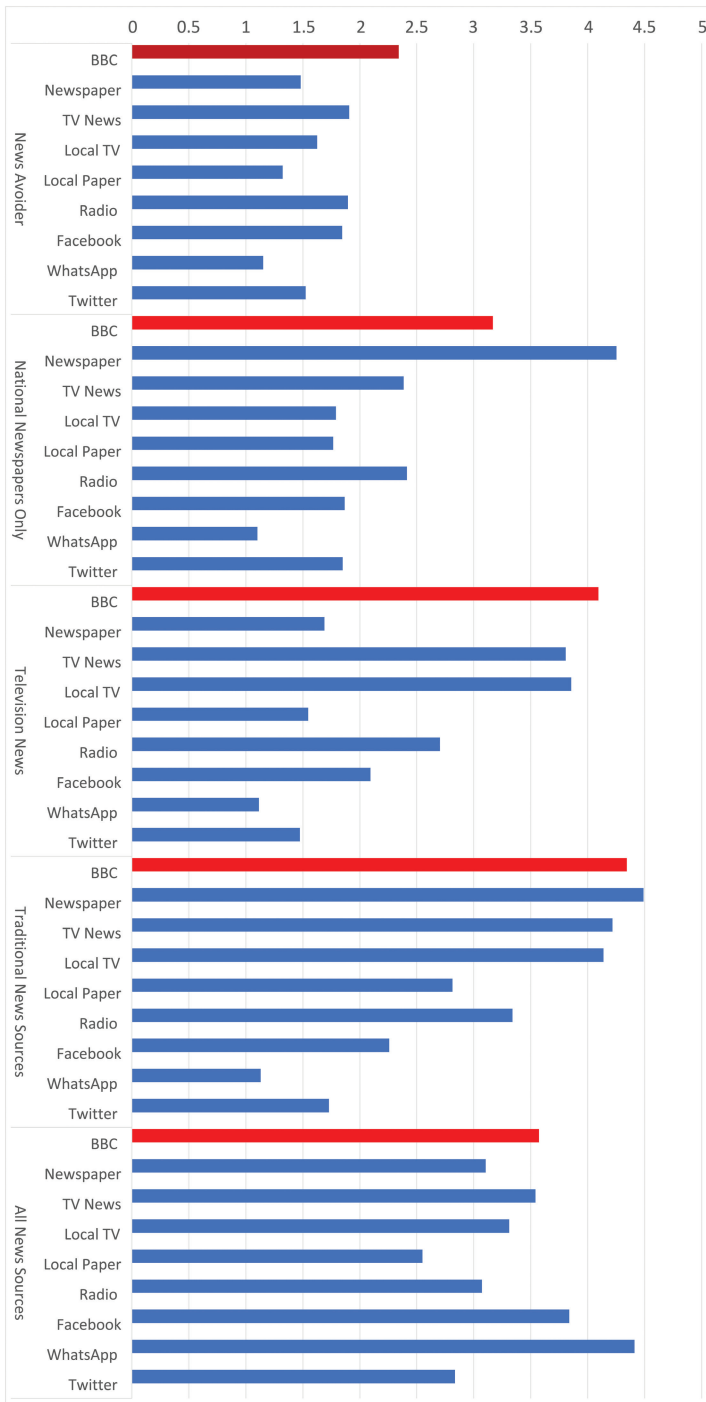


FIGURE 11.2 Profiles of news practices – news and information sources and their use.

other than the BBC, are significantly less used. While National Newspaper group did not turn to local sources, a third profile we label “Mostly BBC, but other Television News” demonstrates a high consumption of the BBC but also national TV news and local TV news, indicating a preference for televised news sources as they are relied on almost every day or every day. This group comprises 20.5% of our respondents.

Our fourth group “Traditional News Sources” has the highest consumption levels across traditional news sources including the BBC, local TV, and newspapers but not social media. This group comprises 17.1% of our sample and they rely on newspapers and national TV news pointing towards a highly engaged news audience. We label our fifth group as “All News Sources”, comprising 19.3% of our sample, as these respondents reported using all sources including social media with high interest in WhatsApp news, and high levels of Facebook news consumption suggesting a preference for news consumption through social media platforms.

One of our main findings, as illustrated in Figure 11.2, is the centrality of the BBC to individual news practices, as noted above including all outlets related to BBC News whether online or broadcast. If we accept that news experiences in the contemporary news environment have the potential to be more fragmented, our examination of news profiles shows that consumption of the BBC is a common practice across all our profiles even among those who are heavy social media users or news avoiders. In other words, even among News Avoiders, the BBC was reported as being used between 2–3 and 3–4 days a week. Among all groups, except for All News Sources, the BBC was the most or second most used source of news. For All News Sources, where Facebook and WhatsApp are the most favoured sources for following news, the BBC is the third most used source. Thus, while the BBC can come under criticism, it is from a shared national position of familiarity across all the census demographic profiles we describe above and which the survey participants represent. Given the timing of the survey, during the pandemic lockdowns and their immediate aftermath, it shows individuals were likely to turn to the BBC for updates and coverage of official government briefings during this exceptional time of national crisis. We next turn to how these news practices vary across Leavers and Remainers and underpin trust in the BBC.

The distributions of the five profiles by Brexit identities are shown in Table 11.1. We asked the participants in our survey which side they felt closer to – Leave, Remain or allowed the option of “not close to either side”. At the time our survey data were collected, Remainers were slightly more likely to be “News Avoiders”. Among Remainers 30% were classified as News Avoiders while among those who reported supporting Leave only 26% were classified as News Avoiders. Overall, more respondents fit into this “News Avoider” profile than any of the other profiles, especially among those who do not feel close to either side of Leave or Remain (see Table 11.1). Of those

TABLE 11.1 News practices among Leave and Remain supporters

<i>Profile</i>	<i>Leave</i>	<i>Remain</i>	<i>Do not feel closer to either side</i>
1. News Avoiders	25.6	30.2	40.2
2. National Newspapers Only	13.6	14.7	9.8
3. Mostly BBC, but other TV News	23.5	17.2	22.5
4. Traditional News Sources	20.3	15.7	12.4
5. All News Sources	17.1	22.3	15.1
Total	2,041	2,279	635

who do not feel close to Leave or Remain, our analysis has determined that 40% fall into the “News Avoider”. We should be clear that we use the term “news avoiders” to capture a lower level of news use across all outlets, relative to other group’s reported news use rather than actively resisting the types of news sources that dominate the media landscape (Toff and Nielsen, 2018). In our analysis of the in-depth interviews, we also capture significant instances of this type of news avoidance. We also reiterate our point that even though “News Avoiders” are low on news consumption, they still report using the BBC more than other news sources.

BBC Trust

Trust, as we have argued, anchors the relationship between news media and citizens. When citizens trust news media, they are more likely to believe and act on information, which is especially important during crises. In this way, cross-cutting public dialogues that counter the forces of polarisation are fostered. We would expect citizens to turn to news sources that they trust, especially during the pandemic lockdowns, but we are particularly interested to know whether levels of trust vary across Leavers and Remainers. In our survey, we asked our respondents to indicate their level of trust in a range of institutions including the BBC. They gave responses on a 10-point scale with 10 representing the highest levels of trust and 0 indicating no trust. Most respondents expressed a neutral perspective on how much they trust BBC resources throughout the pandemic lockdowns and their aftermath. On average, “News Avoiders” had the lowest level of trust in the BBC with average level of trust at 4.9 – just below the midway mark on the trust scale. The highest levels of trust on average were among those who relied “Mostly on BBC, but Other TV News” (5.7) and those who used all news sources including social media (5.6).

All figures drawn from the survey highlighted that Remainers trusted the BBC much more than Leavers. The mean of trust in the BBC was roughly 7 for Remainers, while the figure for Leavers was around 5.5, a gap of over 2 points. Because we are interested in whether Brexit identities are polarised

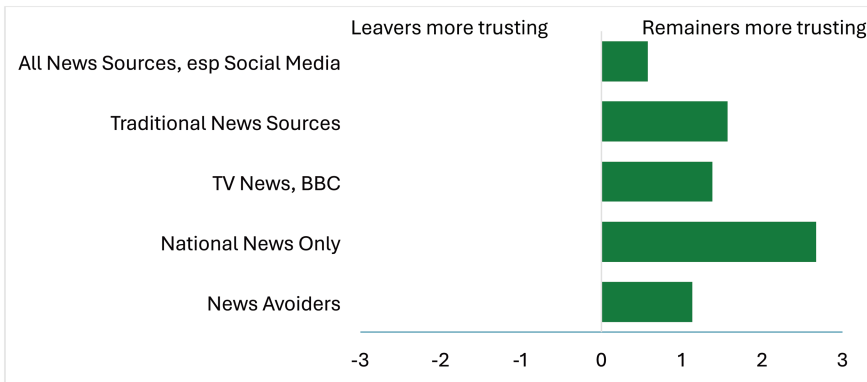


FIGURE 11.3 BBC Trust by classes of media practice and referendum identities.

in relation to the BBC, in Figure 11.3, we show the trust gap, the difference between the average trust of Leavers and the average trust of Remainers, by media practices profile. The largest gap is among those who rely on national news sources. This group read a national newspaper almost every day and comprised the smaller profile group. The gap in trust between Leavers and Remainers in this group is almost 3 points on the 10-point scale, which is around a quarter of the scale and suggests a substantial gap in trust of the BBC. However, there is no similar polarisation on trust across the other news practice profiles. The smallest gap is where both trust and news use are among the highest – among those who draw on all news sources including social media.

We next turn to our in-depth interviews and ethnographic case studies to understand how engagement and trust are represented in individual’s everyday conversations about the BBC in contrast with the survey data.

Our Interlocutors’ Perspectives on the BBC

By contrast to the five types of media practice identified via LCA of the survey data, we identified just three distinctive types of media practice in our textual analysis of the interview data. These were as follows: “News Avoidant”, “Newsreader”, and “News Neutral Reader” based on interviewees’ news consumption habits (see Table 11.2):

- “*News Avoidant*”: People avoid accessing any news resources from the news media, and have recently turned away due to Brexit or covid-19.
- “*Single source Newsreader*”: People access a few news resources that they really like and trust.
- “*Balanced News, News Neutral Reader*”: People access multiple news resources including different media platforms and organisations to gain what they understand to be a “balanced news” perspective.

TABLE 11.2 Example quotations of different typologies of media practice

<i>Typologies of media practice</i>	<i>Example quotations</i>
<i>News avoidant habitual news avoiders and those who recently turned away due to Brexit or Covid-19 pandemic.</i>	‘I really do not watch any news...Never bought a newspaper in my life. Never ever. No never ever. Selling them when I was a kid. Sold <i>News of the World</i> to people, I sold all the papers when I was a bairn. However, never bought it. Never bought the media. If there is any big sporting event, I will buy <i>the Times</i> , will not read the paper.’ (<i>Participant from the North East, Degnen</i>)
<i>Single Source Newsreader</i>	‘Mostly on BBC, I use the BBC News like just BBC home page in general.’ (<i>Participant from the North East, Degnen</i>)
<i>Balanced News, neutral reader</i>	‘I try to read them all. It is only fair, just not great for my mental health!’ (<i>Participant from the East Midlands, Blamire</i>) ‘So, I am very, very balanced media as much as I can in that however, I tend to just kind of like go with everything. If there is a particular point, I want to know more about I will do as much research as I can into it, and then probably stick with something roughly in the middle, and you might you know as I said everyone has an agenda.’ (<i>Participant from the South West of England, Tyler</i>)

The “News Avoidant” maps onto the profile of “News Avoiders” from the LCA with low use of all media. However, from the interviews, we are able to get a sense of actively disengaging from new media use either habitually as exemplified in the quote from Table 11.2 or due to Brexit or covid-19. The single source “Newsreader” is loyal to one media outlet, which we do not really see an example of in our survey profiles, except perhaps with the exception of the “National Newspaper” readers, although in this case the single source can vary. Similarly, the balanced “News Neutral Reader” reflects our profile of “All News Sources”. Significantly, and like the data we report in Table 11.1, these differing types of media practice cut across Leave and Remain identities.

Trustworthiness

We now turn to our interviews to understand how conceptualising trust in the BBC varies across our interlocutors from across our fieldwork sites. Table 11.3 illustrates our main points with quotations. First, it is worth highlighting that, in parallel with our survey findings, Leavers and Remainers

TABLE 11.3 Example quotations of different typologies of media practice by referendum identity

<i>Types of media consumption</i>	<i>Leave</i>	<i>Remain</i>
News avoidant, these are habitual news avoiders and those who recently turned away due to Brexit or Covid	<p><i>'How can you ever trust the mainstream media ever again? ... the BBC isn't doing it [telling the truth]'</i> (Participant from the East Midlands, Blamire)</p> <p><i>'but for me I've always trusted the BBC to be impartial. I think as a company it wants to remain impartial but some of the people that they put in these programmes to interview like to express their own personal view or get it to go the way that they would like it to go, and that frustrates me.'</i> (Participant from the East Midlands, Blamire)</p>	<p><i>'More recently I have been avoiding, I mean television I watch Sky and CNN for some of the American stuff. I watch the kind of BBC stuff, but I am just finding it so arguing about Brexit stuff. I just get depressed.'</i> (Participant from the South West, Tyler)</p> <p><i>'I am always annoyed when the BBC is bad for this when they say when they mention that snap election and say that that proves that the will of the people is still to leave. I do not think that is what it proves. Not from my perspective anyway.'</i> (Participant from the South West, Tyler)</p>
Single Source Newsreader	<p><i>'BBC, I do not know about the BBC, I know that there are issues with the BBC like the way that they do not include like the small parties... If I had to guess I'd say the BBC is left-leaning but what it seems is that the BBC seems to upset both sides, like the Conservatives seem to think it's left-leaning and the Labour seem to think it's more right-leaning but my understanding is that most of the BBC buy the Guardian and so I'd say it was more left-leaning...'</i> (Participant from the East Midlands, Blamire)</p>	<p><i>'BBC are a bit anaemic for me, a bit twee, BBC News, I think. And I do not buy...I have thought about this, I do not buy Rupert Murdoch newspapers'</i> (Participant from the East Midlands, Blamire)</p> <p><i>'I trust the BBC [because] they're not backed so much by people in high finance. I think you know I think there are people like that like Mr Murdoch you know Sky and things like that I like to watch Sky sometimes, but I don't trust, I don't trust anything you know'</i> (Participant from the North East, Degnen)</p>

(Continued)

TABLE 11.3 (Continued)

<i>Types of media consumption</i>	<i>Leave</i>	<i>Remain</i>
Balanced News neutral reader	<p><i>‘Yeah, well the BBC has always been, it is a government station, so it has always been [do you reckon?] Yes, they are puppets of the state the BBC, they always have been. And that was always very elite.’</i></p> <p><i>(Participant from the North East, Degnen)</i></p> <p><i>‘I mean it is like the propaganda. The BBC is into fake news big time except no one calls it that it is just brain-washing article to the thinking that Remain is the only way.’</i></p> <p><i>(Participant from the South West, Tyler)</i></p>	<p><i>‘Well, I’ve been not the only one and you have probably come across who has been appalled and shocked by the BBC. And no to me you know they have, they have such a bias a clear bias but also, knowing things like.... I cannot engage in the same way as I used to be because of the lies... the way that the BBC just, it’s like they gave a forum to Fascists and racists and it sort of in the interests of well that’s their truth, that’s their, nobody challenged them.’</i></p> <p><i>(Participant from the South West, Tyler)</i></p>

engaged in diverse media practices. Second, also similar to the survey data, during the pandemic lockdowns our interviewees turned to the BBC as a source of information as one might expect in a time of national crisis, whereas during the transition period Leavers and Remainers turned away from the BBC due to its perceived bias. Third, across both Leave and Remain identities and media practices the idea of trust in the BBC is strongly linked to notions of impartiality. Fourth, it is the need for impartiality that was part of the reasons why Leavers and Remainers across media practices did not trust the BBC. Fifth, this lack of trust within the BBC is positioned within individuals’ own political worldviews on Brexit. Sixth, it is also worth pointing out that several participants across Leave and Remain and across media practices stated that the BBC is a “balanced/non-biased” news source that checks “facts” and tries to represent oppositional sides.

Many people across Leave and Remain positionalities and across media practices argued that the BBC were only interested in expressing “their opinion”, rather than presenting “the facts”, and that they are simply puppets of the state including the government to give airtime to misinformed people and those who present propaganda. For example, it was common for both Leavers and Remainers across our fieldwork sites and during the Brexit transition periods to state that the BBC’s political discussion programme *Question Time* was politically biased and impartial. *Question Time* is a BBC programme

that enables members of the public to ask politicians and other prominent public figures questions about current political issues and events. We found that both Leavers and Remainers were adamant that the questions asked by the public and the composition of the panel of experts were “biased” towards “the other side”. From this point of view, the BBC was considered to be biased towards Leave or to be in favour of Remain depending on what side of the debate one was positioned.

Having said this, as noted above, some of our interlocutors across Leave and Remain trusted the BBC. For those identifying as Remainers, trust was also underpinned by reliable and factual reporting. For example, a man from the South West who voted Remain argued that the ‘*BBC News is a fairly reliable news source because they have, they always corroborate and double-check and get sources confirmed*’. Similarly, another man from the East Midlands who also voted Remain said that they ‘*bend over backwards trying to represent both sides*’ of the political discussion. Compared to other mainstream media outlets, the BBC are considered by some to be publicly funded and are therefore not in the back pocket of powerful companies who might have hidden motives in their news reporting. Similarly, several people who voted Leave nostalgically saw the BBC as an irreplaceable public institution and believed that the UK would significantly suffer if it were to disappear. Regardless of their political affiliation, those who trusted the BBC did so because they are publicly funded and have historically been perceived as reliable and nonbiased by the British people. Essentially, their feeling is that if they cannot trust the BBC, then who can they trust?

Given that our findings suggest Leavers and Remainers are engaging in diverse media practices and that they can both come to trust and distrust the BBC, the question that comes to the fore is: what are the distinct political worldviews that underpin these similarities across Leave and Remain identities and practices? Our contention is that our micro-ethnographic analysis enables us to begin to address this question to which we now turn our attention.

Ethnographic Case Studies

Taking an individually focused and place-specific case study approach to our interview material enables us to explore some of the motivation and thinking informing Leavers’ and Remainers’ shared media practices and views on the BBC. It also allows us to examine and explain the ways in which individuals’ differing classed, racialised and migrant identities, biographies, political beliefs, and experiences underpin their apparently similar media practices and attitudes towards the BBC.

To illustrate this, we draw on Tyler’s informal conversations with a white working-class English Leave voting couple, and a middle-class, mixed-race American woman of Latino descent, who is a British citizen and voted Remain in the EU referendum. Tyler’s interlocutors live in a predominantly white,

coastal, and rural region of the South West of England. In what follows, we focus on how they each reflect on the BBC's perceived racial bias and representation of racial difference in the course of their conversational-style interviews with Tyler. They each brought up concerns on race and the BBC in the context of their wider discussions with Tyler about the national protests prompted by the global influence of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement during the first lockdown in Britain in the spring and summer of 2020. Our account exemplifies how these interlocutors across Leave and Remain identities have similar media practices that fit into our "News Neutral" category. In this regard, they each read and followed multiple news sources including the BBC in an attempt to find a "neutral" and "balanced" perspective on the news.

Tyler first met Clive and Dorothy at their home in a seaside town in the South West in 2019. Dorothy introduced herself as a "housewife" and Clive explained he was a retired TV "repairman". They both laughed at these descriptions of themselves suggesting that they were gendered in a traditional way and thus not "politically correct" terms. When they met Tyler online during the pandemic, she asked them about their views on the BLM movement and the recent national protest during the lockdown as follows:

CASE STUDY – CLIVE AND DOROTHY

Katharine [Tyler]: As you know the Black Lives Matter Movement hit our TV screens, it also then had an impact certainly on the way that imperial statues ... are thought about here (e.g., in the South West) and I know anyway I wanted to ask your thoughts on all of that.

Dorothy: Well, we were incandescent about the statue thing in Bristol [a city in the South West of England where a statue of Edward Colston, an English slave trader, was taken down by force by BLM protestors]. We were so angry and the police not doing anything about it [especially during a national lockdown] and we were absolutely incensed and all the time we're getting ... more black newsreaders on the BBC.

Clive: Most people of our sort of age and profile [have] exactly the same concerns about woke and issues, and the BBC not giving you the whole information, just giving you something that you should think rather than ... I wrote to the BBC and said: 'why have you got no report of the fact that 30 blacks had just been summoned' and the reply back was 'well it was covered and during a five-minute slot on'...

Dorothy: Midlands TV or something ...

- Clive:* But it was all over the newspapers and all over the online stuff and the BBC thought it was inappropriate ...
- Dorothy:* Burying it ...
- Clive:* Yes ... they were sentenced but it was completely absent from the BBC and that should be ...
- Dorothy:* It's not the first time ...
- Katharine [Tyler]:* When you say 'woke' ... can you tell me what you mean? I mean, I've got a sense.
- Clive:* Yeah, you're not allowed to say 'black'... you've got to say chalkboard paint... and all sorts of stuff like that and you, you say something and because some woman is offended by something you've said then ... you get trouble about it.
- Dorothy:* Vilified.
- Clive:* You're not, yeah, you can't say what you say ... Freedom of speech ... You know someone can complain about the fact that I said something, but I am not allowed to ...
- Dorothy:* You can't criticise them ... It's gone so much the other way that it's...
- Clive:* It's [the BBC] not valuable any more ... Because it's, I can click over to RT [Russia Today] just because not that I believe anything that's on RT at all, but it's just yeah, the BBC used to be there, and it used to be what it was. Now I am going to Al Jazeera or RT and ... getting another point of view 'cos you can't really make any sort of judgement by listening to the BBC or what effect ... You flick channels and you get different stories and think why you are getting a different story on, and you go to the BBC and it's a black presenter and they're talking about ...
- Dorothy:* ... black politicians.
- Clive:* Black action groups ...
- Katharine [Tyler]:* And then, and then how about the BBC reporting of the pandemic... you know the announcements from the Government and then there's the scientists come and you know Chris Witty, Van Tam.
- Clive:* ... Chris Witty is fine he's a hundred percent ... you accept what he says, and he wasn't putting any spin on it. He wasn't telling us [like the government were] that the tests were 150,000 a day and they turned out to be 8 or something ... And the fact that the BBC were accepting that without querying it [e.g., what the government were claiming] and not saying to us 'yeah, but no', we expected them to know about stuff and tell us ...

This conversation illustrates the active ways in which Clive and Dorothy counteract what they understand to be the racial “bias” of the BBC, though not only by reading other national and international news sources as our macro and meso scales of analysis suggest but also by writing directly to the BBC to express their concerns. Like our survey findings, Clive and Dorothy engaged with the BBC during the pandemic, but this does not mean they trusted everything that they heard and read there. Rather, their distrust of the BBC in the transition period continued into the pandemic era. Significantly, focusing on their particular micro everyday experiences reveals the ways in which their engagement with the BBC becomes entwined with their broader political and racialised views, values, and opinions, including what it means for them to live in multicultural Britain, to be “woke”, the need for “freedom of speech”, as well as their concern that the BBC should hold the government to account during the pandemic. We turn next to listen to the ways in which Flora reflects on her experiences of the BBC and its representation of black people.



11.5

Like Clive and Dorothy, Flora is in her sixties. She is partially retired from her role as a professional healthcare consultant. When Tyler first met Flora in 2019, she explained, that she is “finding it [the BBC] so arguing about

Brexit stuff I just get depressed...”. Like Clive and Dorothy and our other news neutral readers, Flora tries to mitigate against her concerns with the BBC by situating BBC news within wider national and global news sources to achieve a diversity of perspectives. In this regard, she does not draw on RT, which is widely acknowledged to be a major propaganda outlet for the Russian government, but rather the liberal mainstream American news sources of CNN and the Huffington Post. When Tyler spoke with Flora about her news habits during the pandemic, she placed even greater emphasis on her practice of situating the BBC news within wider news sources, and she also stressed further the importance of global news. Indeed, Flora had now turned away from BBC Radio 4 [a BBC radio station known for its reporting of news and current affairs] in favour of the BBC World Service. She told Tyler.

CASE STUDY – FLORA

Flora: I really like the [BBC] World News ‘cos it is more diverse [than Radio 4] and that might be because it’s different people’s points of view from different countries ... It is with the BBC bias, but I have, but then I can look up stuff as well ...

Katharine [Tyler]: When you say it’s got a BBC bias what do you mean by that ...?

Flora: Well, it’s done by the BBC so, it’s going to have a, I don’t mean it in a capital letter way ... You know it’s the, it’s just the kind of being aware yes, I am getting things from other places, and it’s produced by the BBC.

Later on in their on-line conversation Tyler asked Flora about the national impact of the BLM movement during the pandemic. In her response to this question Flora gave Tyler further insight into what she means by “BBC bias” in her reflections on the representation of black people within BBC drama. Their conversation went as follows:

Katharine [Tyler]: ... during the lockdown the Black Lives Matter movement ... I felt that we were all watching it ... we were all observing ... So, just to ask you about your thoughts on that ...

Flora: Well, one answer to this is ... I experienced racism growing up ... I didn’t experience it here [in the South West of England] because people didn’t recognise me as different ... [In the USA] there would either be decisions were made on my behalf on the basis of my surname, or how I looked

and those could be about: 'oh, we're going to help you by putting you in a little bit where you actually don't get as good education ... but that's because you are disadvantaged, and we need to help you'... And it had nothing to do with that, it was about segregating That kind of pseudo helpfulness which, actually isn't helpful ... But it also meant I couldn't engage with my Latino side ... because that wasn't actually celebrated in a certain way. But, what I kind of felt with the Black Lives Matter ... is that I thought that actually really brought up an awful lot of issues ... I am having a hard time with this [and it] might sound very silly, but of how that can get expressed at times which to me strikes of racism. So, for example, most of the adverts now have to have a mixed couple, and to me that's tokenism ... and it just kind of irritates me because it feels like tokenism as opposed to real understanding, and I am having a real problem with Father Brown [a drama series aired on the BBC] at the moment. I don't know if you've ever watched Father Brown.

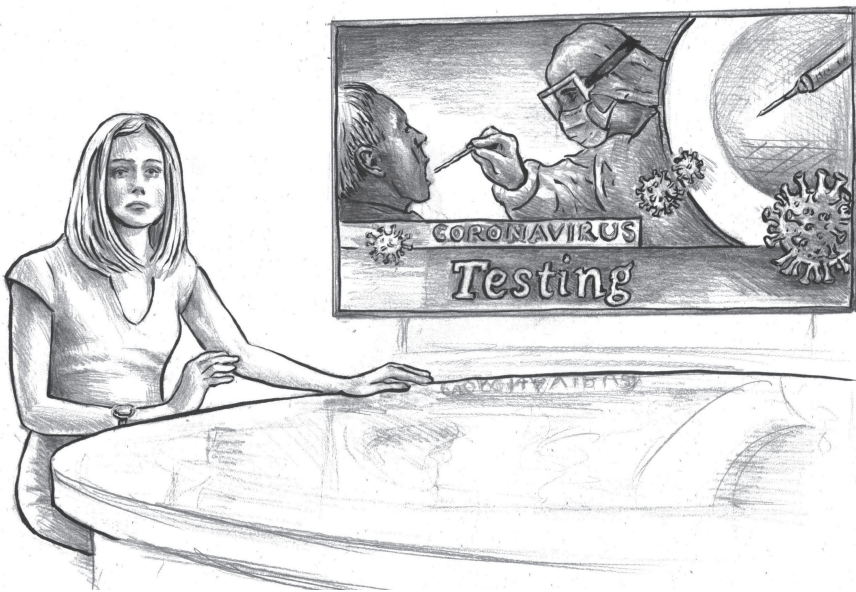
Katharine [Tyler]: No, I haven't ...

Flora: Oh ... it's a kind of murder mystery ... he solved all these murders, and which is all happening in ... only a small village ... and this all kind of 1950s class type stuff ... Except now I do find ... every story has got to have a black character in it, and it's done out of context, so it is absolutely purely tokenism ... The kind of tokenism I grew up with and makes me, as you can tell, it makes me angry ... Because that's not what the Black Lives Matter is about ... I am wanting the issues around slavery and understanding that better to be able to be talked about.

Flora's, Clive's and Dorothy's shared news practices and conclusions on the BBC are embedded within their differing racialised and national identities and lived experiences of the geographies of race, white privilege, nation, and racism. For Clive and Dorothy, the BBC's supposedly over representation of black newsreaders does not reflect their experiences of the ethnic and racial composition of Britain living as they do in this rural and coastal region of the South West of England, a region that is predominantly white and British in terms of its racial, ethnic, and national composition. Flora's acceptance by others as just 'white' in the rural South West of England means that she does not experience racism in England. Rather, it is Flora's experiences of

“racism” from “do-gooders” growing up as a mixed-race white and Latino descent child in the USA that inform her interpretation of the representation of black people on BBC drama as “bias”. From this standpoint, a BBC TV drama based on the lives of white British people living in rural England in the 1950s appears “tokenistic” in its inclusion of black people, who she knows from her experience of living in the rural South West of England would not have lived in rural England in the 1950s in any significant numbers. It is then from a minority “power aware” racialised standpoint, and not from a majority “power evasive” position of white privilege, that Flora critiques the representation of black people on the TV (see also Baker, Chapter 8 of this volume). While Clive and Dorothy think there are too many black people on the BBC, Flora thinks that they are misrepresented. What these in-depth case studies reveal, then, is the diverse ways in which individual Leavers’ and Remainers’ differing racialised majority and minority identities, their diverse experiences of white privilege, and their embodied and biographical experiences of the social geography of race, place, and nation shape the ideologically distinct ways in which they each perceive the BBC news to be ‘biased’. In this regard, they both conclude that the BBC requires situating within multiple national and global news sources in order to find a “balanced” view and an understanding of the “facts”.

Discussion and Conclusion



After the Conservative Party's resounding victory at the 2019 general election, the then Prime Minister Boris Johnson referred to the BBC as the "Brexit Bashing Corporation". Simultaneously, Remainers and those on the left questioned the broadcaster's independence from government interference. Attacked from both sides but with viewers regularly turning to the broadcaster at times of crisis, we asked: what is the BBC to British citizens, and how is it positioned in the daily lives of citizens across Leave and Remain identities during the transition period and the pandemic lockdowns?

In addressing these questions, we situated our portrayal of the contemporary ways in which individuals understand, discuss, and represent the BBC within the context of a media landscape that has been Eurosceptic and polarising on the issue of EU membership. Our macro, meso, and micro mixed-methods research captured different pictures of everyday engagements with the BBC across Leave and Remain identities during this tumultuous Brexit covid-19 era, providing a better understanding of the diverse ways in which individuals engage with the BBC during times of ongoing national crisis.

Our survey results identified the BBC as the primary news source for both Leavers and Remainers during the pandemic lockdowns and their aftermath, trusted by both groups. In this regard, our survey revealed a neutral perspective of most respondents on how much they trust reports on BBC resources. However, we found instances of critical engagement with the broadcasters among Leavers and Remainers in our interviews. In other words, our interview data suggests that Leavers and Remainers agree that the BBC strives towards "impartiality" but they disagree on how "impartiality" and "balance" are to be understood.

The findings highlighted the reflection of most people across Leave and Remain positions among three types of media practice that the BBC was biased towards the other side, untrustworthy, produced misinformation/false information, and polarised news. Meanwhile, those who did read and/or listen to a BBC outlet did so because of its reputation as a national institution, publicly funded, theoretically the "voice of the people", and was looked upon almost nostalgically as something that embodies Britishness. Significantly, even people who did not completely trust the BBC as a reliable and non-biased news source supplemented their knowledge of current events from other sources including the BBC. To many, although they were angered by what the BBC represented, and believed the BBC to be biased, reverting back to this media outlet during the pandemic for public service broadcasts was perceived as natural.

What our micro in-depth and individually focussed case study approach adds to our macro and meso approaches is nuanced insight into how Leavers and Remainers engage in similar media practices and perceive bias but defend and/or interpret this bias differently from the standpoint of their differing biographical experiences. Our case studies importantly illuminate the particular ways in which Leavers and Remainers invoke their racialised and place-based identities and biographies to come to similar conclusions on the perceived ‘bias’ of the BBC from their distinct political and racialised minority “power aware” and majority “power evasive” standpoints (see Baker, Chapter 9 of this volume). It is worth highlighting, that this critical engagement, when viewed in the context of the survey data, suggests that such criticism comes from familiarity and engagement with the news source. Indeed, we find evidence in our surveys and interviews that even those we would identify as ‘news avoiders’ are engaged with the BBC in some way or another during the Brexit and covid-19 lockdowns and their aftermath.

Contributors

The survey was designed and conducted by Susan Banducci, Dan Stevens, and Laszlo Horvath. The ethnographers, Katharine Tyler, Joshua Blamire, and Cathrine Degnen, designed and conducted the ethnographic interviews, reflecting analytically together on those findings as the fieldwork periods progressed, and in the initial stages of preparing the interview materials for this chapter. Janice Hoang, Deirdre Patterson, Susan Banducci, Katharine Tyler, and Dan Steven analysed the ethnographic and survey material together. Katharine Tyler provided the ethnographic case study. Janice Hoang, Susan Banducci, and Katharine Tyler wrote this chapter, with revision and editing contributions from Cathrine Degnen.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council [ES/R005133/1, ES/V006320/1]. We would also like to thank the ESRC for funding the open access publication of this chapter, which was applied for by the Open Access Team at the University of Exeter. We would like to acknowledge the respondents and interviewees across the UK who participated in the research. We thank Cary Kind and The Ada Lovelace Institute for recommending questions to include from their deliberative poll.

APPENDIX 1

Sample Profile in Waves 1 of ORB Survey (Figures Are Column %)

TABLE A11.1 Demographic characteristics of respondents

	2011 Census	Wave 1 (n=5000)
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	49	46
Female	51	54
<u>Age</u>		
18–24	12	12
25–34	17	16
35–44	18	17
45–54	18	17
55–64	15	16
65+	20	22
<u>Region</u>		
East of England	11	11
East Midlands	8	9
London	15	15
North East	5	5
North West	13	13
South East	17	16
South West	11	11
West Midlands	10	10
Yorkshire and Humberside	10	10

Note

- 1 The question text was “On how many days, if at all, did you follow politics or current affairs news in the following during the past week?”. The sources of news were: Newspapers (any format, e.g., paper, online, or podcast); BBC News (any format); All national television news, other than the BBC, e.g., ITV (any format); Local television news (any format); Local newspapers (any format); Radio. For social media platforms, we asked: “On how many days, if at all, did you follow politics or current affairs news on the following platforms?” for Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter. Response categories were: (1) not at all, (2) 1–2 days, (3) 3–4 days, (4) almost every day, or (5) every day.

References

- Berry, M., Wahl-Jorgensen, K., Garcia-Blanco, I., Bennett, L., & Cable, J. (2021). British public service broadcasting, the EU and Brexit. *Journalism Studies*, 22(15), 2082–2102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2021.1981154>

- Collins, L. M., & Lanza, S. T. (2009). *Latent Class and Latent Transition Analysis: With Applications in the Social, Behavioral, and Health Sciences*. Oxford: John Wiley & Sons.
- Copeland, P., & Copsey, N. (2017). Rethinking Britain and the European Union: Politicians, the media and public opinion reconsidered. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 55(4), 709–726. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12527>
- Cushion, S., & Lewis, J. (2017). Impartiality, statistical tit-for-tats and the construction of balance: UK television news reporting of the 2016 EU referendum campaign. *European Journal of Communication*, 32(3), 208–223. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323117695736>
- Cushion, S., Morani, M., Roberts, J., Nelmes, A., Cullen, A., Willmington, L., & Thurlow, C. (2019). *The Range and Depth of BBC News and Current Affairs: A Content Analysis*. London: Ofcom.
- Daddow, O. (2012). The UK media and ‘Europe’: From permissive consensus to destructive dissent. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944–)*, 88(6), 1219–1236.
- De Vreese, C. H., Banducci, S. A., Semetko, H. A., & Boomgaarden, H. G. (2006). The news coverage of the 2004 European parliamentary election campaign in 25 countries. *European Union Politics*, 7(4), 477–504.
- Fletcher, R., & Selva, M. (2019). How leave voters and remain voters use news. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://doi.org/10.60625/RISJ-YEQ6-4M46>.
- Foos, F., & Bischof, D. (2022). Tabloid media campaigns and public opinion: Quasi-experimental evidence on Euroscepticism in England. *American Political Science Review*, 116(1), 19–37.
- Goodman, L. A. (1974). Exploratory latent structure analysis using both identifiable and unidentifiable models. *Biometrika*, 61, 215–231.
- Holtz-Bacha, C. (2021). The kiss of death. Public service media under right-wing populist attack. *European Journal of Communication*, 36(3), 221–237.
- Hughes, C., Morani, M., Cushion, S., & Kyriakidou, M. (2023). Does the political context shape how “Due impartiality” is interpreted? An analysis of BBC reporting of the 2019 UK and 2020 US election campaigns. *Journalism Studies*, 24(14), 1715–1733. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2023.2173956>
- Johnson, R. B., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher*, 33(7), 14–26.
- Kubin, E., & Von Sikorski, C. (2021). The role of (social) media in political polarization: A systematic review. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 45(3), 188–206.
- Leconte, C. (2010). *Understanding Euroscepticism*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Moore, M., & Ramsay. (2015). *UK election 2015—Setting the agenda*. King’s College, London: Centre for the Study of Media, Communication and Power.
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Schulz, A., Andi, S., Robertson, C. T., & Nielsen, R. K. (2021). Reuters institute digital news report 2021. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.
- Newton, K. (2017). Political trust and the mass media. In *Handbook on political trust* (pp. 353–372). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Ofcom. (2019). Review of BBC news and current affairs.
- Polonski, V. (2016). Impact of social media on the outcome of the EU referendum. In Jackson, D., Thorsen, E., & Wring, D. (eds) *EU referendum analysis 2016: Media, voters and the campaign: Early reflections from leading UK academics* (p. 94). The Centre for the Study of Journalism, Culture and Community, Bournemouth University.

- Toff, B., & Kalogeropoulos, A. (2020). All the news that's fit to ignore: How the information environment does and does not shape news avoidance. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 84(S1), 366–390.
- Toff, B., & Nielsen, R. K. (2018). “I just google it”: Folk theories of distributed discovery. *Journal of Communication*, 68(3), 636–657. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqy009>
- Wahl-Jorgensen, K., Berry, M., Garcia-Blanco, I., Bennett, L., & Cable, J. (2017). Rethinking balance and impartiality in journalism? How the BBC attempted and failed to change the paradigm. *Journalism*, 18(7), 781–800. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884916648094>
- Westlund, O., & Färdigh, M. A. (2012). Conceptualizing media generations: The print, online and individualized generations: Observatorio (OBS*). *Observatorio (OBS*)*, 6(4), 181–213. <https://doi.org/10.15847/obsobs642012616>