

# Reporting on civil society

An assessment of how  
the media portrays the  
activities of civil society  
in Northern Ireland

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## Table of contents

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Background</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Methodology</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3. Findings</b>	<b>9</b>
3.1 Background	9
3.2 How much coverage?	9
3.3 Subject-matter of civil society coverage	11
3.4 Who shapes civil society coverage	11
3.5 A positive image?	13
3.6 Summary	14
<b>4. Case Studies</b>	<b>15</b>
4.1 Introduction	15
<b>4.2 Hate Crimes</b>	<b>16</b>
4.3 Key features of the coverage	17
4.4 Depersonalisation	18
4.5 The role of civil society	19
4.6 Belittling the problem	20
4.7 Journalistic initiative	21
4.8 Summary	22
<b>4.9 Water Charges</b>	<b>23</b>
4.10 Coverage of the government's announcement	23
4.11 Coverage of the issues	24
4.12 Summary	25
<b>5. Conclusion</b>	<b>26</b>
Appendix 1: Civil society organisations	28
Appendix 2: Further analysis	29
Appendix 3: Coding manual	37

## Tables and figures

Table 1: Proportion of substantive coverage devoted to political talks and related items	10
Table 2: Proportion of substantive coverage devoted to civil society items, excluding political talks items	10
Table 3: Primary sources for civil society items (excluding political talks items)	12
Table 4: Primary sources for <i>prominent</i> civil society items (excluding political talks items)	12
Figure 1: Proportion of prominent civil society coverage, excluding political talks	10

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## **Executive summary**

This report investigates media coverage of civil society organisations in Northern Ireland. It was commissioned by the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action as part of an international study supervised by CIVICUS, the global umbrella body for the voluntary sector.

The research had two aspects. First, a content analysis was conducted of selected output from the main public-service broadcaster, its commercial rival, the principal regional daily and five local weeklies, during September and October 2004. Secondly, this quantitative research was complemented by a mainly qualitative assessment of coverage of two topical items: hate crime and water charges.

The content analysis revealed that, while there were variations between media organisations, civil society organisations received a reasonably 'good show'. This was true in terms of the volume of coverage and the positive light in which such organisations were by and large cast.

It was, however, true that the prominence accorded to the round of talks between the British and Irish governments and the Northern Ireland parties during the period investigated had a 'crowding out' effect on coverage of other civil society organisations.

The study of hate crime showed again substantial and often sensitive coverage of the issue by Northern Ireland media. There was, however, a tendency to present the problem as if it were merely the work of criminal individuals. While ethnic-minority and anti-racist civil society organisations were drawn upon for the material, few ethnic-minority individuals had their voices directly heard. Attention was thus not drawn to the wider social problem of racism and intolerance, and the issue was presented in a rather impersonal way.

Given its topicality, it was surprising that there was not more coverage of the issue of the introduction of water charges. Within that, it was also surprising that more attention was not paid to the distributional aspect — the impact on low-income households — especially given the high incidence of poverty in Northern Ireland. Coverage appeared to be driven by government statements, with little critical analysis or reportage of the potential impact on individuals affected.

In both cases, a more proactive and investigative editorial approach would have avoided these pitfalls. The issues would have been subjected both to more adequate analysis for the reader/viewer/listener, while a more personal dimension could have been injected into the stories.

From the perspective of civil society organisations, the quantitative research indicates that a reasonably fair media wind can be expected for those who produce professional media releases and associated material. And they can perhaps help remedy the deficiencies identified in the case studies, by supplying the media with background facts and analysis, as well as offering (where feasible) individual stories that can add a human face to the issue.

## 1. Background

This report has been prepared for the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) as part the Civil Society Index (CSI) research project, co-ordinated by the CIVICUS global alliance of civil society organisations and individuals. The CSI project is assessing the state of civil society in over 60 countries throughout the world.

The first question any project of this nature must ask is what exactly is 'civil society'? In many ways, it is easier to define what civil society is not: it does not include the state, business or individuals, when the latter are simply acting within the private, personal domain of home, family, private consumption and leisure activities. However, it is very much about the representation of the needs and wishes of ordinary citizens through the processes of parliamentary democracy, where this exists, and through a host of voluntary and other organisations and individuals who act as advocates or providers of services outside of both the state and the private sectors. Civil society does include associations which represent business interests, but does not include private companies operating for profit.

The global CSI project uses the following as its working definition of civil society and it forms the basis for this study:

**The arena between family, government, and market, where people voluntarily associate to advance common interests.**

A more detailed and very illuminating definition of civil society has been produced by the Centre for Civil Society at the London School of Economics:

*Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organisations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations, community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trades unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups.<sup>1</sup>*

The above definition is very much in accord with the approach adopted by the authors of this study. A full list of the types of organisation which were included within the CIVICUS definition of civil society is available in Appendix 1. In addition to a wide range of organisations and groups, the working definition adopted by this study also included individuals who were campaigning on a particular issue or who offered services similar to those offered by voluntary or community groups. An example of the latter might be a voluntary community worker not attached to any organisation.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/what\\_is\\_civil\\_society.htm](http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/what_is_civil_society.htm)

CIVICUS places great emphasis on the role of civil society as a voice of ordinary people. Its stated broad goals are as follows:

- Civic Existence – to promote the rights of citizens to organise and act collectively towards defined goals for the public good;
- Civic Expression – to increase the effectiveness and improve the governance of civil society organisations, as well as their capacity to set and achieve their individual and collective goals; and
- Civic Engagement – to foster interaction between civil society and other institutions in order to increase the voice of citizens in public life.<sup>2</sup>

In the United Kingdom, the role of civil society has developed and changed, as more public services have been delivered by voluntary and community groups on behalf of the government. In 2001, almost a third of the income of such organisations in the United Kingdom was derived from the provision of such services.<sup>3</sup> In Northern Ireland, political and social conflict and unrest has distorted the democratic process, leading to a political vacuum in terms of government and policy. This has created the opportunity for civil society institutions to play a more significant advocacy role than is probably the case in the rest of the United Kingdom. However, this role has been played out in a climate of great uncertainty.<sup>4</sup>

The largest component of civil society in Northern Ireland comprises its voluntary and community sector. NICVA's database indicates that there are 4,500-5,000 voluntary organisations in the region.<sup>5</sup> These are mainly engaged in education/training, economic/community development/employment, and advice/advocacy/information services.

Perhaps surprisingly, only three in 20 are controlled from outside Northern Ireland, so that the voluntary sector within the region is largely self-contained. By contrast, the main business associations, the Confederation of British Industry and the Institute of Directors, are branches of organisations headquartered in London, and while there is a Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, ICTU is Dublin-based. One solution to Northern Ireland's constitutional conundrum is provided by the regional student movement which, while having an autonomous existence, is affiliated to both the British and Irish 'national' student organisations.

These organisational issues are of wider public and political interest because, at its best, civil society has considerable capacity to help reduce the 'democratic deficit' caused by years of direct rule from Westminster and the predominance of sectarian politics. In accordance with the guidance for this study issued by CIVICUS, political parties were treated as part of civil society in this study. Yet, in Northern Ireland, there are many arguments for separating out political parties from civil society when undertaking this type of analysis. In a more 'normal' society, much of the idealism that fuels many civil society organisations would be channelled into liberal or left-wing political parties. The absence of a meaningful left-right political spectrum in Northern Ireland blocks this route and prevents a

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<sup>2</sup> [www.civicus.org/new/default.asp](http://www.civicus.org/new/default.asp)

<sup>3</sup> HM Treasury 'The role of the voluntary and community sector' at: [www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spending\\_review/spend\\_ccr/spend\\_ccr\\_voluntary/spend\\_ccr\\_voluntary.cfm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spending_review/spend_ccr/spend_ccr_voluntary/spend_ccr_voluntary.cfm)

<sup>4</sup> See Oliver, Quintin (1992) 'The role of non-profit organizations in a divided society: the case of Northern Ireland' in McCarthy, Kathleen et al. (eds.) *The Non-profit Sector in the Global Community* (San Francisco: Jossey-Basi), pp. 176-89.

<sup>5</sup> Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (2002), *State of the Sector III*, Belfast: NICVA.

productive relationship between voluntary organisations and trade unions, and their usual liberal-left political allies being established; indeed, few prominent civil society figures reveal their party political affiliations.

Two further important factors must be borne in mind. First, there is the shifting constitutional set-up with which civil society has had to engage—the on-off-on-again-off-again nature of the devolved institutions established by the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Secondly, the still ghettoised nature of working-class life in Northern Ireland and its infiltration by paramilitaries has exacerbated tensions between (stereotypically working class and unpaid) ‘community’ and (stereotypically middle class and employed) ‘voluntary’ organisations. All this has led to a bigger cultural gap between political parties and the rest of civil society than might otherwise have been the case. It also means that civil society itself is not homogenous, but reflects the class and ethnic tensions which permeate society in Northern Ireland.

## 2. Methodology

One of the main strands of the global CSI project is a programme of media monitoring. This has enabled researchers around the world to undertake comparable studies, utilising a common coding template for the quantitative content analysis of news media devised by the CSI team. For the purposes of this Northern Ireland study, the coding template was adapted slightly to better suit the territory's political and social environment, and to ensure that some additional information could be collected. The coding template and associated guidelines produced by CIVICUS are available on request from NICVA. A copy of the coding manual, which provided more detailed guidelines for the Northern Ireland research team, is appended (Appendix 3).

The items monitored for this project were all substantive general news items and pictures occurring in selected media outlets during the eight-week period from 6 September to 30 October 2004 inclusive. The output of the following media outlets were chosen for this study: *UTV Live at Six* (Mondays to Fridays), BBC Radio Ulster 07:00 hours radio news bulletin (Mondays to Fridays), *Belfast Telegraph* Belfast final edition (Mondays to Saturdays), and the front pages of the following local weekly or bi-weekly newspapers: *Ballymena Guardian*, *Derry Journal* (weekend edition) and the *Impartial Reporter*, and pages 1 and 2 of the *Down Recorder* and *Tyrone Courier* which are tabloid in format.<sup>6</sup>

Funding constraints for this project made it impossible to carry out a comprehensive review of all the main regional news media outlets in Northern Ireland. The regional media outlets selected were chosen because they all attract large audiences from both the Protestant and Catholic communities. Particular care should be exercised in any assessment of the figures for the Radio Ulster news bulletins presented in this study. The bulletin is very short, lasting no more than six minutes. A similar updated bulletin is broadcast at 08:00 hours. However, the bulletins form only a small part of the daily morning current affairs programme *Good Morning Ulster* which runs from 06:30 hours to 09:00 hours each morning. Moreover, much of the material included in the bulletins relates to national and international stories. Thus, many local stories are included in the main body of *Good Morning Ulster*, but not in the news bulletins. Other stories receive much more in-depth treatment in the main part of the programme.

The five local newspapers were selected to try to provide a reasonably representative sample in terms of both geographical spread, and Protestant and Catholic readership. However, the authors of this study make no claims that the relevant data on local papers collected for this study can be taken to be representative of the total aggregate output of local papers in Northern Ireland. It should also be noted that it was only possible to monitor the front pages (or equivalent) of each local newspaper. This means that the data on local papers are not directly comparable with the data collected on regional media.

The category 'general news items' was defined as excluding the following: articles on newspaper feature pages, articles in any specialist news sections in newspapers (for example, politics, business, sport and agriculture), and items in any sports or weather sections in broadcast programmes.

For newspapers, *substantive* items were defined as items which were at least ten paragraphs long. News items which comprised or included a photograph or other

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<sup>6</sup> As these latter two newspapers are tabloid in format, it was felt that the 'front page' analysis should be extended to include page 2 to provide an analysis which was more directly comparable with the larger front pages of the other newspapers.

illustration, and all front-page items, were also categorised as substantive items. News briefs or short trailer items on the front page were not included. The newspaper items monitored also included all newspaper photographs, cartoons and graphic illustrations appearing in newspaper pages or sections which focused on general news or, in the case of local papers, on the front page.

For TV, substantive items were defined as all general news items except items of under one minute with presenter voiceover. Where a recorded or live interview followed a report or package on the same topic, it was only defined as a separate item if it lasted at least a minute. Where it lasted less than a minute, it was treated as part of the preceding item. Durations included any introduction or link into an item. For radio, substantive items were defined as all general news items which lasted at least 30 seconds, including the introduction or link.

The items actually coded for this project as 'civil society items' were those substantive general news items and photographs/illustrations in which a Northern Ireland-based civil society actor(s) and/or a topic of direct relevance to civil society in Northern Ireland was a major subject. Further detail on the selection of items can be found in the appended coding manual.

In addition to the quantitative analysis, the researchers also conducted two pieces of qualitative content analysis. One of these focused on coverage of hate crimes and related issues, while the other focused on media reporting of the government's proposals for the introduction of water charges in Northern Ireland.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1 Background

During the eight-week period covered by the study, intensive talks took place between the main political parties in Northern Ireland, and the British and Irish governments. These continued and intensified previous efforts to reach an agreement which could form the basis for the resumption of devolution, which was suspended in October 2002. The new round of talks began with set-piece discussions at Leeds Castle in Kent from 16 September to 18 September 2004. The two governments stated that they hoped a settlement might emerge from these talks, but this was not to be. However, they did provide the basis for negotiations which continued during the period of the study.

The CSI project includes political parties and politicians in its definition of civil society. However, the authors of this study felt that it was more useful to focus on media coverage of stories other than the political talks, as reporting of the latter merits its own separate analysis. In general, therefore, the statistics provided below refer to media coverage of civil society, including political parties and politicians, but excluding items related directly to the political talks.

It is first important to consider the ability of each of the outlets examined to provide comprehensive coverage of news and current affairs in Northern Ireland. Both the broadcast outlets examined, UTV *Live* and Radio Ulster's 07:00 hours bulletin, have very limited scope, given the time-limits faced by their editors. About 20 minutes of UTV *Live at Six* is taken up with news, the rest being devoted to sport.<sup>7</sup> On average, the programme carries between seven and eight substantive news items. Radio Ulster's 07:00 bulletin is normally about six minutes long. On average, it broadcasts four substantive news items. Unlike UTV *Live*, much of its output is devoted to national and international stories. By contrast, the *Belfast Telegraph* carries an average of 32 substantive news items every day. Some of these items relate to national and international stories but the proportion is lower than for the Radio Ulster bulletin.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the *Telegraph* has much greater potential than do the other two outlets to cover a wide variety of regional stories.

#### 3.2 How much coverage?

If one excludes the political talks, about a third of the substantive news items carried by UTV *Live* and the *Belfast Telegraph* featured civil society organisations or individuals in Northern Ireland, or were of direct relevance to civil society groups in Northern Ireland (see Table 2). It is of note that UTV *Live* carried such a high proportion of relevant stories, given the fact that it is able to cover far fewer news stories than the *Telegraph*. By contrast, just one in five of the substantive items broadcast on Radio Ulster's 07:00 hours bulletin were civil society stories. This reflects the short duration of the bulletin, and the fact that much of the bulletin is devoted to national and international stories.

Stories related to the political talks accounted for 10% of UTV *Live*'s substantive output, 7% of substantive stories on the Radio Ulster bulletin and just 4% of such

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<sup>7</sup> UTV broadcasts a half-hour programme called UTV *Live*, prior to UTV *Live at Six*. This consists of studio interviews and features, some of which would be related to news stories, and the weather. However, UTV *Live at Six* is presented as the main news section of the whole UTV *Live* offering. For the sake of brevity, UTV *Live at Six* is generally referred to as UTV *Live* throughout this report. The quantitative study did include the lighter news stories and occasional news feature which are often carried towards the end of the *Live at Six* programme.

<sup>8</sup> The actual proportion was not measured for the purposes of this study.

stories in the *Belfast Telegraph* (see Table 1). There was a significant increase in such stories during the actual week of the Leeds Castle talks (Week 2 of the study) and the two following weeks, when hopes of an imminent deal remained fairly high. The two broadcast outlets devoted much more space proportionately to coverage of the talks during these three weeks than did the *Belfast Telegraph*. The proportionate increase in broadcast coverage of the talks during these three weeks was also much greater than in the *Telegraph*. As can be seen from Table 2, each of the outlets devoted less space to other civil society matters during these three weeks. The extent to which the talks ‘crowded out’ other items appears to have been greatest on UTV *Live* where just 30.5% of items were related to other civil society stories during the three main weeks of talks coverage, while an average of 42.5% of its output was devoted to other civil society items during the rest of the relevant period.

**Table 1: Proportion of substantive coverage devoted to political talks and related items**

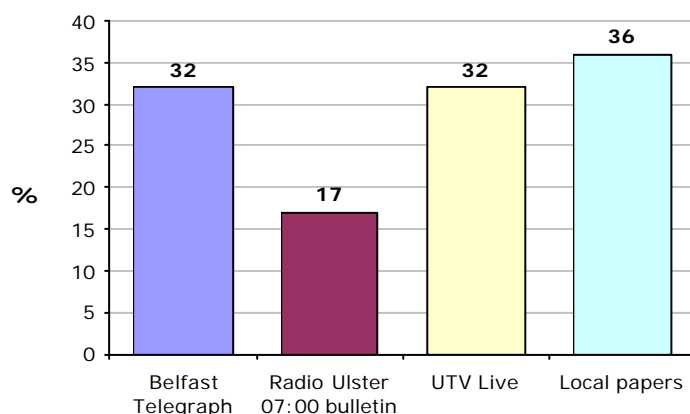
Average proportion of political talks items carried (%)			
Outlet	Weeks 2-4	Weeks 1 and 5-8	Overall
<i>Belfast Telegraph</i>	4.5	2.5	4.0
Radio Ulster 07:00 bulletin	14.0	4.0	7.0
UTV <i>Live</i>	18.0	6.0	10.0

**Table 2: Proportion of substantive coverage devoted to civil society items, excluding political talks items**

Average proportion of civil society items carried, excluding political talks items (%)			
Outlet	Weeks 2-4	Weeks 1 and 5-8	Overall
<i>Belfast Telegraph</i>	29.5	35.5	33.0
Radio Ulster 07:00 bulletin	20.5	18.5	19.0
UTV <i>Live</i>	30.5	42.5	37.0

The study also analysed the content of *prominent* (substantive) news items, defining these as the first three items on each of the television and radio programmes, and the main three items featured on the front page of the *Belfast Telegraph*. The same definition was used to examine the content of prominent items in the local press.

**Figure 1: Proportion of prominent civil society coverage, excluding political talks**



The amount of prominent coverage devoted to civil society matters, excluding the talks, is surprisingly similar to the overall proportion (see Figure 1). This demonstrates that civil society stories are not necessarily relegated to down-bulletin slots or to the inside pages. About a third of prominent stories in the *Telegraph* and UTV *Live* fell into this category, while a similar proportion of prominent items in the local papers were also devoted to civil society matters. Radio Ulster's 07:00 bulletin devoted 17% of its prominent stories to such items, again similar in proportion to its overall coverage. However, for this bulletin, the first three stories generally comprise most of the substantive content of the bulletin.

### **3.3 Subject-matter of civil society coverage**

CIVICUS asked media researchers to compile data on the subject-matter of civil society items. The data does not reflect any very marked patterns. Education and training, and health were the two topics covered most frequently by the *Belfast Telegraph* and UTV *Live*. Together, these subjects accounted for 18% of the items carried by the *Telegraph* and 20% of the items broadcast by UTV *Live*. Education and training was also one of the most common subjects covered by the Radio Ulster bulletin; 16% of stories featured this topic. The other subjects which appeared most frequently on the Radio Ulster bulletin were conflict resolution and poverty. It should be noted that, as this study only examined civil society coverage, this data should not be interpreted as being representative of the attention given to a particular subject in the overall output of a media outlet.

However, it is one thing to make it into the news and another to obtain prominent coverage. Both UTV *Live* and the Radio Ulster bulletin were more inclined to give prominence to civil society stories related to conflict and crime, than were either the *Belfast Telegraph* or the local press.<sup>9</sup> 30% of Radio Ulster's prominent civil society items and 24% of UTV *Live*'s top civil society stories fell into these categories, compared to just 15% of comparable items in the *Telegraph* and 19% of comparable items in the local press.

Many subjects hardly featured in the prominent civil society coverage of the media outlets monitored. These included poverty, environmental issues, transport, human rights, and sexuality and sexual rights. None of these topics achieved any more than one prominent civil society item across the media outlets monitored. Environmental issues and sexuality/sexual rights did not feature at all in the prominent civil society coverage of any of the regional media outlets. It must be remembered that this does not mean that these subjects were not given prominence by the media *per se*, as this study only examined items relating to civil society. It must also be borne in mind that the total number of relevant prominent stories for each outlet was relatively small. In order to obtain a more reliable and accurate picture with regard to the pattern of prominent civil society coverage, one would need to monitor media output over a longer period.

### **3.4 Who shapes civil society coverage?**

The most useful way to ascertain the relative credibility accorded to different types of sector and organisation by the media is to examine who gets used as the main source for each story. Thus, this line of enquiry was pursued during this study. It was not always possible to discern the primary source for a particular item. Where it was not clear, the researchers did not attempt to guess the main source. A 'primary source' category was only assigned to items where it was obvious from direct or indirect quotation, or where the content and presentation

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<sup>9</sup> This category includes stories related to political violence, conflict resolution and crime.

of the item made the primary source reasonably obvious. A source was considered to be the 'main source' where their information and/or views appeared to have shaped the item. Thus, if an item began 'Protestors have hit out at the government over education cuts...', the primary source would be the protest group concerned.

Using this measure, the two most influential categories of civil society actor in shaping media coverage about civil society were political parties and politicians, and the voluntary and community sector; taken together, actors from these sectors were the primary source of 36% of Radio Ulster 07:00 news bulletin items, 27% of *Belfast Telegraph* items and 26.5% of items on UTV *Live* (see Table 3). Although the government was the main source for 10% of items carried in Radio Ulster's news bulletin, it was the primary source for just 4.5% of UTV *Live*'s items and 3.5% of items in the *Belfast Telegraph*. The security forces also constituted the main source for a number of items on each outlet. However, much of this coverage related to a controversial announcement about cuts in the Reserve force of the Police Service of Northern Ireland which occurred during the period covered by the study.

**Table 3: Primary sources for civil society items (excluding political talks items)**

Proportion of civil society item in which source type was primary source (%) in:			
	<i>Belfast Telegraph</i>	Radio Ulster	UTV <i>Live</i>
Political parties/ politicians	17.0	10.0	12.0
Voluntary and community sector	10.0	26.0	14.5
Civil society individuals	2.0	6.5	8.0
Individuals	6.0	0.0	2.5
Trade unions	4.0	10.0	6.5
Church/faith-based groups	4.0	6.5	7.5
Government	3.5	10.0	4.5
Security forces	2.5	6.5	7.5
Other/mixed	24.0	14.5	20.5
Not obvious or none	27.0	10.0	16.5

**Table 4: Primary sources for prominent civil society items (excluding political talks items)**

Proportion of prominent civil society items in which source type was primary source (%) in:				
	<i>Belfast Telegraph</i>	Radio Ulster	UTV <i>Live</i>	Local papers
Political parties/ politicians	13.0	5.0	5.0	28.0
Voluntary and community sector	0.0	15.0	10.5	0.0
Civil society individuals	2.0	5.0	18.5	0.0
Individuals	8.5	0.0	2.5	2.5
Trade unions	4.5	10.0	0.0	2.5
Church/faith-based groups	8.5	10.0	5.0	0.0
Government	2.0	10.0	5.0	0.0
Security forces	2.0	10.0	15.5	4.5
Other/mixed	31.5	20.0	25.0	18.5
Not obvious or none	28.0	15.0	13.0	44.0

While it is one thing for an organisation to be the primary source of a news item that falls somewhere in a newspaper or bulletin, it is much more difficult to be the main source for an item which has considerable prominence. An examination of

the primary sources of prominent items provides a good indication of the relative credibility accorded to different types of source by the media.

Taking, as previously, the definition of 'prominent' as constituting the 'top three' items in any newspaper, bulletin or programme, Table 4 shows the proportion of prominent civil society stories for which each sector was the primary source. It will be seen that the voluntary and community sector failed to attain this status with regard to any prominent items in either the *Belfast Telegraph* or the local papers, although it was used reasonably extensively as a primary source by the Radio Ulster bulletin and UTV *Live*. This pattern suggests that these print media outlets accord less credibility to the voluntary and community sector than do the broadcast outlets. However, it should be noted that the total number of relevant prominent items within each media outlet during the period of the study was relatively small. To form any conclusive judgement on this question, one would need to replicate this study for a further period.

The largest single primary source category for prominent civil society stories in the local papers was political parties and politicians; this sector was the main source for 28% of relevant stories in the local press. This sector did not feature so heavily as a primary source of prominent stories for the other regionally-based outlets. As can be seen from Table 4, the government was not used extensively as a primary source for prominent civil society stories in any of the outlets.

One of the most notable features of the civil society coverage monitored was the extent to which space was provided for individuals to put their case publicly. In this study, those individuals acting in an advocacy capacity or providing an individual service similar to that of a civil society organisation were classified as 'civil society individuals'. Other individuals were categorised as 'individuals'. If one takes these two categories together, individuals constituted the primary source for between 6.5% and 10.5% of relevant items within each outlet. Most notably, however, civil society individuals were the primary source of 18.5% of relevant prominent stories on UTV *Live*. The programme showed a commendable willingness to accord credibility and space to individual campaigners.

A caveat must be entered at this point, however. When considering the findings relating to primary sources, it is vital to bear in mind that this study only examined coverage relating to civil society. Thus, the above findings do not provide any indicator of the relative credibility of the various source categories accorded by the media across *all* its news coverage. If one was to examine the overall picture, it is obviously likely that the government would feature as a primary source of a much higher proportion of items.

### **3.5 A positive image?**

The coverage accorded to civil society organisations and individuals was generally positive; the media provided space for civil society representatives to get across their message effectively and the overall image of civil society conveyed in the relevant items tended to be a positive one. This applied to 80% of items on Radio Ulster, 62% of UTV *Live*'s relevant output, 60% of stories in the *Belfast Telegraph* and 65% of items on the front pages of the local press. The higher figure for the Radio Ulster bulletins is explained by the brevity of the items; often, it was evident that items featuring civil society organisations were drawn solely from material which originated from that particular group, such as a press release and interview.

There was hardly any negative coverage. The only significant exception was a story concerning a court case involving two care workers who had been employed

by the Barnardo's children's charity. The former workers were jailed for 29 years for abusing children at a home near Belfast which was run by the charity.

### **3.6 Summary**

The findings from the quantitative analysis show that civil society in Northern Ireland is accorded space by key regional and local media outlets to get across its views, and to let the public know about its activities and services. Of the outlets whose output was examined for this study, *UTV Live* is particularly notable for the proportion of substantive news items which it devoted to civil society stories. Moreover, the proportion of prominent civil society coverage was similar, in the case of each type of media outlet, to the proportion of general coverage of such matters. This indicates that civil society items are not automatically relegated to a down-bulletin slot or to the inside pages by news editors and journalists.

The findings show that the political talks did have an adverse impact on the amount of coverage relating to other civil society matters during the week of the key Leeds Castle talks and the two weeks following those discussions. This finding is not a surprising one but it is important when considering the Northern Ireland context; over the past few years, the British and Irish governments have made many attempts to find a lasting political solution in the territory, and political developments of a constitutional nature often dominate the news agenda, leaving less space for other 'bread and butter' issues.

Most civil society coverage presented a positive image of civil society groups, and enabled them to get across their message in an effective way. Again, *UTV Live* was particularly notable in this regard. *UTV Live* was also notable for the extent to which it accorded space and credibility to individual campaigners, although individuals were given space in all the regional media outlets examined.

## 4. Case studies

### 4.1 Introduction

In addition to the quantitative analysis, it was felt that it would be useful to provide more in-depth, nuanced analysis of the coverage of two specific topics. The analysis used for these case studies was a mixture of quantitative and qualitative analysis, with a focus on the latter. The subjects chosen were the broad area of what has been termed 'hate crimes', and the government's plans to introduce water charges in Northern Ireland.

In order to provide a more comprehensive and rounded analysis of media coverage of the relevant issues, the qualitative case studies included an evaluation of *all* substantive news items and features carried during the period covered by the study. This meant the analysis was not limited to items featuring civil society organisations and individuals, and items of very direct relevance to them. This approach enabled this part of the wider study to assess the impact of civil society on all relevant news output. It also allowed for a fuller and fairer assessment of the way the media handled the issues covered by the case studies.

In addition to the news output of the *Belfast Telegraph*, this analysis also included the news output of Northern Ireland's other two regional daily newspapers, the *Irish News* and the *News Letter*. The evaluation also included analysis of editorials and opinion-piece articles in the main body of each of these newspapers. Supplements and specialist sections, such as the *Business Telegraph* and agricultural pages, were not evaluated. The case study analysis also evaluated the output of the news section of UTV *Live at Six*. Resources did not permit the extension of this analysis to UTV *Live's* counterpart on BBC Northern Ireland, BBC *Newsline*.

Two types of outlet whose news output was evaluated for the quantitative part of the study were not included in the case studies. In both instances, it was felt that a fair and balanced analysis of the coverage of the specific issues relating to these case studies could not be obtained by limiting the analysis to the output monitored in the quantitative study. The relevant outlets were BBC Radio Ulster's 07:00 news bulletin and the five local newspapers monitored in the quantitative study. As noted previously, the news bulletin forms a short part of the *Good Morning Ulster* programme; the programme often covers stories which fail to make the bulletin or which are only given brief treatment on the bulletin. Resources did not permit the extension of this case study analysis to include *Good Morning Ulster*, however. Likewise, the quantitative study only examined the front pages or equivalent of the sample of five local newspapers. While this provides a valuable indication of prominent coverage of civil society for the purposes of the quantitative study, it would have provided an insufficient basis for the evaluation of coverage of the specific topics dealt with in the case studies. Again, resources did not permit an extension of the analysis of local papers.

It should be noted that the analysis below employs exactly the same definition of 'substantive news item' as the quantitative study. However, the qualitative analysis utilises a broader definition of 'prominent' for the purposes of newspaper coverage. It has been defined as covering any front page item and any substantive item on pages two and three. This has been done primarily for the purposes of a comparative analysis of the output of the three newspapers.

## 4.2 Hate crimes

During the period covered by this study, new legislation relating to 'hate crimes' came into force in Northern Ireland. The Criminal Justice (No. 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 2004 allows courts to give out heavier penalties when certain offences are motivated by hostility based on religion, race, sexual orientation or disability. It also extends existing legislation on incitement to provide protection against those of a particular sexual orientation or with a disability, in addition to the existing protection on the grounds of religious belief and ethnic origin.<sup>10</sup>

The new Order came into effect on 28 September 2004. At the same time, there were a number of other developments relating to the issue of hate crimes. This case study is confined to coverage of the issue of hate crimes in general, and coverage of attacks and discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnic origin, sexual orientation and disability. It does not provide an analysis of media reporting of sectarianism, or of any other violence or discrimination on the grounds of religious belief. Sectarianism has been a central feature of the problems experienced in Northern Ireland since the 'Troubles' began 35 years ago. The authors of this study wished to focus on the issues relating to hate crimes which have only emerged as issues of public debate in recent times.

There can be little doubt that racism is an issue which should be of considerable concern to civil society in Northern Ireland; there is a higher proportion of racist attacks in Northern Ireland than in England and Wales, relative to the size of the minority ethnic population in each territory.<sup>11</sup> The number of racist incidents reported to the police in Northern Ireland doubled in the year to March 2004.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, racial prejudice appears to be twice as common as sectarian prejudice.<sup>13</sup> Gay people and people with disabilities also face intimidation: the number of homophobic incidents reported to the police in Northern Ireland doubled in the year to March 2004, while one group representing people with disabilities says 90% of people with learning difficulties have experienced harassment.<sup>14</sup>

During September and October 2004, there was considerable news coverage of hate crimes, and issues relating to the problems covered by the term. This is not surprising when one considers the various relevant developments which took place during that period. The main developments were as follows:

- A police warning that members of minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland were the subject of a threat to attack them on the anniversary of September 11.
- An inquiry into hate crimes in Northern Ireland, undertaken by the parliamentary Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee.
- A government announcement in late September confirming details of the new legislation referred to above.
- A rethink by the Northern Ireland Chinese Welfare Association (CWA) about the location of its planned new community centre, after opposition to a planned site from some local people.

<sup>10</sup> Explanatory memorandum appended to the legislation at: <http://www.northernireland-legislation.hmsso.gov.uk/si/si2004/04em1991.htm>

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Police Service of Northern Ireland. Press release, 13.05.04.

<sup>13</sup> Connolly, Paul and Keenan, Michaela (2000) *Racial Attitudes and Prejudice in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency), p. 44.

<sup>14</sup> Figure for homophobic incidents is from Police Service of Northern Ireland, *op. cit.* The figure relating to harassment of people with learning difficulties is quoted in the *Irish News*, 29/09/04, p. 10, and was taken from a briefing paper produced by the Diversity Matters partnership.

- The release of police figures which showed a doubling of reported incidents of racist and homophobic abuse or violence in north Belfast.
- Two anti-racism demonstrations, organised by the Anti-Racism Network (ARN).

### 4.3 Key features of the coverage

Of the four media outlets examined for this case study, UTV *Live* provided proportionately the most substantive news coverage of the relevant issues, taking into account the relatively limited number of items which the programme can carry. UTV *Live* broadcast 11 substantive news items dealing with these issues during this period which represented 0.038% of its total substantive news output. This compares with the *Belfast Telegraph* which carried 13 substantive news items which represented only 0.0085% of its total substantive news output. UTV *Live* also gave the greatest prominence to hate crime and other related stories: 6 of its 11 items were among the first three in the running order, and two of these led the programme.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to compile percentage figures for the proportion of total substantive news coverage provided by the *Irish News* and the *News Letter*. However, the *Irish News* carried 16 substantive news items relating to these issues, while the *News Letter* carried 15. The *News Letter* gave least prominence to such issues, with just two substantive news stories making it to the paper's first three pages.

That said, both the *Irish News* and the *News Letter* ran relevant stories as front-page leads. In the case of the *News Letter*, the item related to a court fine imposed on a DUP councillor who was found guilty of harassing a gay colleague (13/10/04, pp 1-2). The *Irish News* also ran a front-page lead story on homophobia. This highlighted a talk given by the mother of a gay man to a Catholic congregation which was aimed at tackling homophobic attitudes (21/11/04, p1). The *Irish News* also carried a front-page lead on a story which it originated concerning allegations of racist practices among estate agents (30/10/04, p1). The paper presented evidence that some estate agents were discouraging minority ethnic tenants from moving into certain properties and areas.

Most of the stories carried by each media outlet related to racist attacks and racism. Taking the aggregate substantive news output of each outlet (55 items), 36 of those items (65%) related to racism, while homophobic attacks and attitudes were the main subject of six stories (11%). The *Belfast Telegraph* was the only outlet to carry a story on hate crimes related to disability (28/09/04, p9). The new legislation on hate crimes was featured in six substantive items, while the Select Committee's inquiry into hate crimes attracted just three substantive stories.

The above figures undoubtedly reflect a taste by the media for the dramatic and sensational, rather than the drier matter of legislative detail and official inquiries. Certainly, there was no shortage of dramatic subject-matter during the period covered by this study. There were numerous racist and homophobic attacks in addition to the developments, referred to previously, regarding the 11 September threat, the location of the Chinese Welfare Association's (CWA) community centre, and anti-racist rallies.

In general, the coverage did not employ sensationalist language. The exceptions related to comments made by politicians about particular incidents which were picked up and included in the headline of each story: "*Animals*" carried out racist

attacks' (*News Letter*, 16/10/04, p5) and 'Racist gang branded pathetic bigots' (*Irish News*, 16/10/04).

The story referred to above involved attacks on the homes of two families in Comber, County Down. Racist slogans and images of swastikas were daubed on the walls of two homes, and the windows of cars belonging to both families were smashed. The politician who labelled the attackers 'animals', Alderman Jim Shannon, was also reported in the *News Letter* (16/10/04, p5) as questioning whether they were from the local community:

**"The people involved are in no way representative of the constituency of Ards borough and personally I wonder if they are even from this area."**

Such sentiments are very understandable. However, they do highlight one of the problems in focusing on violent racist acts, rather than on the pervasiveness of racist attitudes and the extent of institutionalised racism in society. The publicity about racist violence can encourage people to see racism as a problem perpetrated by others and something for which ordinary individuals bear no responsibility.<sup>6</sup>

Certainly, many of the relevant news items monitored for this study focused on racial attacks or the issue of such attacks. One theme evident in some of the reporting was the theory that loyalist paramilitaries were behind some of the attacks, and that they displayed hostility towards minority ethnic groups. If this was true, it was clearly worthy of media attention and of investigation by the police. However, there is a danger that the highlighting of alleged paramilitary involvement takes the spotlight off the existence of racism in the rest of society.

#### **4.4 Depersonalisation**

At the same time, the portrayal of minority ethnic groups in media coverage was generally depersonalised. Very few items actually interviewed ordinary people from minority ethnic groups. A similar pattern could be seen in the reporting of anti-gay hate crimes and homophobia. There were exceptions of which two items are particularly notable as they were both given prominence by the media outlets in question. One was an interview carried by *UTV Live* with one of the victims of the Comber attack, referred to above (15/10/04), while the other was the item in the *Irish News* highlighting a talk given by the mother of a gay man (21/10/04, p1). This featured an interview with and photograph of the woman. However, her son was not pictured.

There is no doubt that journalists have to work harder to obtain interviews with members of minority ethnic groups and the gay community. For the first group, language is often a hurdle and one can well understand those who have been subjected to violent attacks being reluctant to talk about them. Obviously, gay victims of attacks are probably also reluctant to be interviewed for fear of reprisal. Moreover, with the exception of a few spokespeople for relevant organisations, ordinary gay people are hardly ever featured in the Northern Ireland media talking about their experiences. For example, during the period covered by the study, there were a number of items concerning the issue of the legal recognition of gay partnerships. However, there were no 'case study' examples featuring real individuals in Northern Ireland. A greater number of interviews with ordinary individuals from minority ethnic groups and the gay

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<sup>6</sup> See Fawcett, Liz (1998) 'Ethnic minorities and the news media' in Hainsworth, Paul (ed.) *Divided Society: Ethnic Minorities and Racism in Northern Ireland* (London: Pluto), pp 117-8.

community would have considerable benefits; such a move would help dispel prejudice and would encourage public interest in and awareness of the relevant issues.

#### **4.5 The role of civil society**

There is no doubt that the role of civil society organisations is considerable in shaping the coverage accorded to hate crimes, racism, homophobia and hostility towards people with disabilities. 62% of relevant substantive news items appeared to have a civil society group or individual as their primary source. Politicians and political parties formed the main source for 20% of items, while other civil society groups, principally organisations representing minority ethnic groups, were the primary source of 42% of stories. While the police were only the primary source in 13% of stories, they were often the source of shorter news stories about hate crimes. Despite the government's announcement on hate crimes, it rarely featured as the main source; it was the primary source in just 9% of items.

Moreover, civil society groups were given credibility. The Anti Racism Network and the CWA, for example, were frequently quoted and clearly regarded as credible sources. However, there was one instance in which the CWA was, in effect, 'downgraded' in terms of credibility, despite the fact that it was the focus of the relevant story. This treatment happened in a studio interview, broadcast by *UTV Live* (6/10/04) which followed on from an item on the dispute over the location of the CWA's planned community centre, referred to above. The item had focused on a claim by Sinn Féin that loyalist paramilitaries were dictating how many minority ethnic families could live in the area containing the proposed site for the centre. In the item, the reporter stated that the CWA suspected that some of the opposition to the planned location came from loyalist paramilitaries. However, no representative from the CWA was interviewed in the item.

A CWA representative was one of two people who took part in the studio interview which followed. The other was Michael McGimpsey, a local UUP MLA. The interviewer, Paul Clark, turned first to Michael McGimpsey, who rubbished Sinn Féin's allegation. Only after Mr McGimpsey had been speaking for some time and had answered other questions did Mr Clark turn to the CWA spokesperson, Anna Lo. Moreover, he first asked her about other relevant issues before asking her to comment on the alleged 'ceiling' on minority ethnic numbers in the area. Ms Lo then confirmed that the CWA believed this to be true. She was not asked and did not comment on whether loyalist paramilitaries were behind this intimidation. Mr McGimpsey, looking embarrassed, then said he condemned any such pressure, but maintained that it was a 'gross exaggeration' to suggest that Chinese people were not welcome in Donegall Pass.

It is not at all clear why Paul Clark put the central assertions to Mr McGimpsey first, rather than to the interviewee who was clearly in a position to provide an authoritative answer. Given the fact that Mr McGimpsey did have to backtrack on his initial denial of Sinn Féin's claim, there is no doubt that Anna Lo came across as the more credible of the two interviewees. Moreover, she remained calm and eager to show understanding of the reasons for opposition to the community centre site, while Mr McGimpsey appeared flustered and keen to score political points against Sinn Féin, accusing the party of 'playing politics'. Nevertheless, by turning to Mr McGimpsey first, Mr Clark implicitly treated the politician as the more important of the two interviewees when, in this instance, there can be little doubt that Anna Lo was the more significant of the two interviewees.

#### 4.6 Belittling the problem

Almost all coverage was sensitive in its nature, presented the victims of hate crimes and their communities in a positive light, and was framed in a way which made it clear that racism and homophobia are unacceptable. There were two exceptions, however. Both items were carried in the *News Letter*. The first was what was doubtless intended to be a light hearted 'throwaway' comment by the *News Letter* journalist and columnist, Ian Starrett. His regular 'Londonderry in focus' page included a piece about a civil rights rally which had just been held in the city to mark a similar event held in 1968 which ended in violence and is often seen as the beginning of the 'Troubles'. Mr Starrett's piece bemoaned what he saw as the lack of attention given to sectarianism against Protestants in Derry. This was how he described the attention given to other types of discrimination at the civil rights rally (*News Letter*, 5/10/04):

**A procession of speakers went on at length about the *alleged* hatred that exists against gay people in Londonderry, Muslims in British custody, Iraqis, etc. etc. They all deserved their civil rights, in 2004, just as others had back in '68, the rain-sodden Guildhall Square gathering of about 200 was reminded by speakers.** [author's italics added]

**I waited in vain, through, for some activist to take the inaudable [sic.] hand-held megaphone and talk about the hatred directed at Protestants...**

While Mr Starrett clearly did not intend the first sentence above to be read as serious comment on the problems to which he refers, his words trivialise the very real problems experienced by the groups he mentions. The use of the word 'alleged' casts doubt on whether such problems actually exist. Yet, just days before Mr Starrett's article, golf balls and bricks were thrown at the home of two gay men in Londonderry (*Irish News*, 29/09/04, p6). The mother of the gay man referred to previously had been invited to address a Catholic congregation in the city by a priest who hoped it would address the problem of homophobia and homophobic attacks in the area (*Irish News*, 21/09/04, p1). Mr Starrett's comments are, therefore, at best ill-informed and insensitive, and at worst prejudiced.

While Mr Starrett is a *News Letter* journalist, the other item which lacked sensitivity towards the problem of racism was written by a regular guest columnist. In a piece entitled 'Why I am in defence of Donegall Pass' (*News Letter*, 16/10/04, p18), Christopher Stalford set out to justify the concerns of some local residents in the Donegall Pass district of south Belfast who had objected to the CWA's proposal to locate a community centre there. Mr Stalford began his column thus:

**To be accused of being a racist is by our modern standards the moral equivalent of being accused of a serious criminal offence.**

Again, this sentence belittles the problem of discrimination, this time against minority ethnic groups. To be fair to Mr Stalford, most of the article was devoted to making two points — that the site earmarked for the CWA centre could be used for badly-needed housing, and that it was unfair to label all the area's residents racists. However, it did not acknowledge either the existence or significance of

racist attitudes throughout society. Instead it focused on the problem of what Mr Stalford saw as the incorrect labelling of certain opinions as racist:

**In this milieu, people dare not air their views for fear of being branded with the dreaded "r" word, and turned into a social pariah.**

It must be emphasised, however, that the above examples were not typical of the coverage evaluated for this report. The *Belfast Telegraph*, for example, gave considerable space to an opinion-piece by Belfast's Lord Mayor, Tom Ekin, in which he acknowledged and condemned the widespread existence of racism and other forms of prejudice, and called on citizens to celebrate the city's ethnic and cultural diversity (11/10/04, p13).

#### **4.7 Journalistic initiative**

While the four media outlets which formed the subject of this case study did show a willingness to engage with the issues related to hate crimes and related attitudes, there were relatively few items which appeared to have been the result of proactive investigation on the part of journalists. The only piece which fell into this category was the investigation by the *Irish News* into the allegedly racist practices of certain estate agents, referred to above (30/10/04, p1). This was a commendable piece of journalism, not only because it displayed considerable skill and endeavour on the part of the journalist or journalists involved (unnamed in this instance), but also because it focused on a form of racial discrimination which did not involve violent attacks, and which demonstrated the widespread and institutionalised nature of racism in Northern Ireland society.

Two newspapers carried special features to mark the fact that the new hate crimes legislation had come into force. The *Belfast Telegraph* (28/09/04, p9) devoted most of a page to the relevant issues. This included interviews with a victim of racism and a victim of intimidation against people with mental health difficulties. Both were interviewed at some length and their photographs were published alongside their stories. The *Irish News* (29/09/04, p10) carried a feature on the same issues the following day. This drew on statistics presented in a briefing paper produced by a voluntary sector partnership called Diversity Matters. It also carried brief interviews, without photographs, with three representatives of relevant voluntary groups, including one of the individuals interviewed in the *Belfast Telegraph*. Both these special features pulled no punches in their acknowledgement of the widespread nature of racism, homophobia and discrimination against people with disabilities. In the *Telegraph*, the first of three articles began as follows:

**Earlier this year, The Guardian newspaper, on its front page, boldly declared that Northern Ireland is 'fast becoming the race-hate capital of Europe'.**

**For anyone familiar with the race riots in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley in 2001 this claim would be regarded as alarmist and exaggerated.**

**However, it demonstrates that in the past 12 months, hate crime has come to be acknowledged as an endemic problem in our society.**

The features in both newspapers undoubtedly show a degree of journalistic initiative, in that it appears that the journalists in question contacted various

organisations to find suitable interviewees. However, it also appears that the interviews were relatively easy to obtain, given that they were all with representatives of the groups in question. The *Irish News* lead story, referred to above, was the only story which appeared to have been the result of considerable time, effort and individual initiative on the part of the journalist or journalists involved.

One of the headlines used in the *Telegraph's* feature spread on hate crimes was 'Reported attacks "tip of iceberg"'. The headline referred to the widespread nature of racism in Northern Ireland. Certainly, the evidence seems to suggest that that headline is absolutely accurate and that there is much for journalists to investigate, should they and their editors wish. However, it does require that editors give journalists the time to carry out investigations, rather than simply filling editorial space in what may be regarded as the more cost-effective, reactive manner.

#### **4.8 Summary**

During the two month period covered by this study, there was considerable coverage of hate crimes and related issues. UTV *Live* carried the highest proportion of relevant items. The media showed greatest interest in racism and racist attacks, and much less interest in the details of the new hate crimes legislation and the parliamentary inquiry into hate crimes. This reflects the taste by the news media for dramatic, sensational stories and is reflective of news values found across the western world. However, despite the dramatic nature of many of the relevant events and incidents covered, the language employed by the media was rarely sensationalist.

The vast majority of the coverage presented racism, homophobia and discrimination against people with disabilities as a serious problem. The only exceptions were two opinion-piece articles carried by the *News Letter*. However, many of the items on racism focused on racist attacks. This pattern can provide a worldview which allows 'ordinary people' to dissociate themselves from such extreme acts, and thus fail to acknowledge the pervasive and deep-rooted nature of racist attitudes and practices in society.

Civil society organisations and individuals clearly played a considerable role in shaping the coverage accorded to hate crimes and related issues: most of the relevant stories appeared to have a civil society group or individual as its primary source. In general, civil society organisations were given credibility and treated as authoritative sources. However, the relevant issues were generally presented in a depersonalised way, as few stories included interviews with actual individuals who had experienced racism, homophobia or discrimination against people with disabilities. There was also little proactive, investigative reporting on the part of the media outlets examined in this study.

The *News Letter* carried two opinion-piece articles which contained comments which trivialised the problem of certain types of discriminatory attitudes and behaviour. One of these was written by a *News Letter* journalist. While both these articles were quite atypical of the coverage given to hate crimes, racism and homophobia elsewhere in the *News Letter* and in the other media outlets examined, they are a cause for concern. The article written by the newspaper's own journalist ran the risk of suggesting to readers that the newspaper itself shared such views. While the other opinion-piece article was written by a regular guest columnist, it would have been useful if the *News Letter* could have published a counter viewpoint from a group representing ethnic minorities alongside his column.

## 4.9 Water charges

The government's plans to introduce water charges in Northern Ireland, details of which it announced in September 2004, have proved to be deeply unpopular. Moreover, while many measures taken by the government in connection with the peace process have displeased either nationalists or unionists, the proposed introduction of water charges has united nationalists and unionists, young and old, rich and poor. No less than 99% of callers told the unionist *News Letter* they were opposed to the water charges plan in a telephone poll carried out by the newspaper.<sup>15</sup> As nationalist politicians are as vociferous in their opposition to the current plans as unionist representatives, one can safely assume that a poll of nationalists would achieve similar results.

It is therefore something of a surprise that the issue only achieved a modest amount of news coverage in most of the media outlets monitored for this case study. Moreover, there was little analysis or proactive investigation on the part of journalists: most of the coverage appeared to rely largely on press releases. UTV *Live* was a notable exception in this regard. However, none of the newspaper or TV coverage monitored made any attempt to investigate the actual impact on low-income households in Northern Ireland, despite the fact that both campaign groups and politicians have highlighted this issue. At the same time, civil society organisations were given space to articulate their viewpoints. The government only had a limited influence on the way in which the media outlets reported the water charges issue.

### 4.10 Coverage of the government's announcement

The government made two simultaneous announcements on water charges on 13 September, 2004. One of these dealt with reform of the system for charging business and industry. The other dealt with the introduction of water charges for domestic households, and included estimates of the scale of those charges for properties of different rateable value. The relevant government minister, John Spellar, also said that certain low-income households would be eligible for a 25% discount. This latter move was condemned as inadequate by many campaigning organisations, including the Northern Ireland General Consumer Council.

These announcements coincided with a major breakthrough in the high-profile campaign for a public inquiry into the controversial killing of a Belfast solicitor, Pat Finucane. A person who was standing trial accused of Mr Finucane's murder changed his plea to guilty. This greatly increased the prospect that the government would allow a public inquiry.

The development came on the same day as the water charges announcement. It undoubtedly had a negative impact on the amount and prominence of the news coverage of the water charging plans. That said, the story was still the third substantive item on UTV *Live* that evening. The programme returned to the story the following evening with a follow-up item which was further down-bulletin. The *Belfast Telegraph* carried the story as its second front-page lead on the day, and followed it up with two news stories, one on page two, the following day.

However, neither the *Irish News* nor the *News Letter* gave the story prominence: it was carried on page four of the *Irish News* and page five of the *News Letter* the day after the announcement. The *News Letter* (14/09/04) led on an 'exclusive' concerning DUP fears of what it saw as further concessions to republicans during the political talks, while the *Irish News* (16/09/04) led on the fact that a man had

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<sup>15</sup> *News Letter*, 18.09.04, p.8.

been found shot dead in County Londonderry, a story carried on page two of the *News Letter*. The *Irish News* gave greater prominence to a story about thieves raiding a couple's home before their wedding – carried as the lead item on page three – than to the water charges story.

Both the *Belfast Telegraph* and the *News Letter* did consider the issue worthy of their main or only editorial the day after the announcement. While the *Irish News* also carried a leader that day, it was only run as the second of two editorials. The main leader called for a public inquiry into the solicitor's murder, referred to above.

#### 4.11 Coverage of the issues

The greatest sustained interest in the water charges issue was shown by UTV and the *Belfast Telegraph*. *UTV Live* carried four substantive news items on the story during the period covered by this study. The regional press obviously has far more space to fill and each newspaper could have been expected to have carried many more substantive news items than *UTV Live* during the same period. The *Belfast Telegraph* carried seven substantive news items during this period, including one on its business news pages. It also carried a lengthy feature article by the Northern Ireland General Consumer Council. However, the *News Letter* carried just three substantive news items, while the *Irish News* published four substantive news items.

The government was the main source of the initial coverage given to the issue by all the media outlets, except the *News Letter*. The main source of the *News Letter's* first item on the story was the Northern Ireland General Consumer Council and it focused on the council's concern for the impact of the charges on low-income households under the headline 'Water charges will hit the poor' (14/09/04, p5). The other outlets all led on information and quotes emanating from government. However, all subsequently ran stories in which political parties or campaign groups were the primary source.

The most coherent and original coverage was provided by *UTV Live*. The four substantive items it devoted to water charges all featured the programme's Business Correspondent, Jamie Delargy. Mr Delargy clearly made an effort to initiate material, rather than simply using press releases. He also provided an element of original analysis. However, none of his pieces investigated the likely impact of the charges on low-income households.<sup>16</sup> Two focused on the impact on small businesses. One of these highlighted the plight of well-off middle-class households which might have to cut out luxuries, such as eating out, to the possible detriment of restaurateurs and others in the upper end of the services sector. During the period covered by the study, the UTV current affairs programme, *Issue*, carried a studio debate which included discussion of the impact of water charges on low-income households (4/10/04). However, it is an issue which should have been examined in greater depth in UTV's mainstream news output.

The *Belfast Telegraph* originated one important follow-up story to the announcement; it revealed the contents of an internal government memo which suggested that the introduction of water charges could be delayed for up to a year (*Belfast Telegraph*, 13/10/04). However, the rest of its news coverage

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<sup>16</sup> The first of the four items did carry an interview with the General Consumer Council in which its Chief Executive, Eleanor Gill, expressed the Council's concern about the impact on low-income households. However, *UTV Live* did not carry out any pro-active investigation on this issue.

appeared to emanate from press releases or similar material.<sup>17</sup> One news item was based on a lengthy feature article by the Northern Ireland General Consumer Council which was carried by the *Telegraph* a week after the government's announcement (22/10/04, p1 and p14). This did contain some useful analysis and did highlight the impact of the charges on low-income households. Overall, the *Telegraph's* coverage did convey the sense that the newspaper wished to provide reasonably intelligent reporting of a serious and significant issue.

However, the coverage of the *Irish News* and *News Letter* appeared to be based entirely on press releases produced by various politicians and organisations. Their reporting was entirely reactive, piecemeal and often highlighted a campaign in a local area. There was no attempt at analysis, no effort to investigate pertinent issues and no sense that either newspaper regarded water charging as an issue that merited in-depth, serious coverage.

While the Northern Ireland General Consumer Council's comments with regard to low-income households were carried in all the media outlets, it is surprising that none of the four outlets chose proactively to investigate the likely impact of the charges on this particular group. As Eleanor Gill of the Northern Ireland General Consumer Council pointed out in her *Telegraph* article, it is a sizeable group: 43% of households in Northern Ireland live on less than £250 a week, compared to 33% of households in the UK as a whole.<sup>18</sup> What would have been most welcome would have been interviews with 'real life' low-income individuals and families on how the water charges were going to affect them. The lack of any such material depersonalised the issue. Moreover, none of the outlets evaluated for this study undertook any research to estimate the actual financial impact on low-income households in Northern Ireland.

#### **4.12 Summary**

Given the widespread unpopularity of the government's plans to introduce water charges in Northern Ireland, it is surprising that the issue did not attract more coverage, and more prominent coverage, in the media outlets monitored. Neither the *Irish News* nor the *News Letter* gave prominence to the story in their news pages, even on the day after the government's announcement. UTV *Live* was the only outlet which attempted any analysis and investigation of the issues, although the *Belfast Telegraph* did obtain an 'exclusive' on a possible delay in the government's plans. The coverage in the *Irish News* and *News Letter* was reactive and piecemeal. Crucially, none of the outlets carried out their own investigation into the likely impact of the charges on low-income households.

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<sup>17</sup> One story was based on revelations made by the BBC *Spotlight* programme, but this news item was too short to be counted as 'substantive' under the criteria adopted for this study.

<sup>18</sup> Figure from Causer, Peggy and Virdee, Dev (2004) *Regional Trends No. 38 2004 edition* (London: National Statistics), Table 8.5, p123. Ms. Gill quoted a slightly different statistic in her article.

## 5. Conclusion

Taken together, the findings of the quantitative and qualitative studies indicate that civil society is accorded space and prominence in the media outlets examined. Civil society groups and individuals are provided with the opportunity to get across their messages in an effective way, and the relevant coverage tends to portray them in a positive light.

However, the findings of the qualitative studies suggest that media interest in issues of widespread importance can be relatively superficial if there is no dramatic element to sustain the media's attention. This seems to most likely explanation for the difference between the considerable amount of coverage devoted to hate crimes and related issues, on the one hand, and the very modest proportion of coverage of the water charges issue, on the other. During the period covered by the study, there were many racist attacks and incidents, and these undoubtedly helped to sustain the media's interest in racism and in the subject of hate crimes more generally. In contrast, the government's announcement on water charges centred around proposals which will only impact on individuals in future years, as the charges are introduced. Media interest in this story is likely to grow if a significant number of people refuse to pay the charges, or if the government's proposed new water company starts cutting off water supplies to those who cannot afford the charges.

Given the potentially serious and widespread impact which water charges could have on lower-income households in Northern Ireland, it was an issue which merited greater attention by the media outlets examined. Specifically, the lack of any proactive investigation into the impact on poorer households was a regrettable omission. This weakness reflected a more general lack of proactive, investigative reporting relating to the issues relevant to the topics of both the qualitative case studies.

Both the qualitative studies also found a tendency by the media outlets examined to present issues in a depersonalised way. There were relatively few interviews with 'ordinary individuals' who had suffered from hate crimes or related discrimination, and no case study examples of real individuals who might be affected by the proposed water charges. Doubtless, many victims of racism, homophobia or intimidation against people with disabilities are reluctant to be publicly identified in the media. However, it seems unlikely that journalists would have had much trouble finding individual 'case studies' with regard to the impact of water charges.

It is impossible to generalise on the basis of two case studies relating to specific issues. However, if the lack of investigative reporting and the lack of individual case study examples do reflect a more general pattern, this should be of concern to editors. It suggests that editors in the relevant media outlets may not be giving their journalists sufficient time and encouragement to produce good quality reporting which goes beyond press releases and event-driven coverage. At the same time, there is a lesson in these findings for civil society organisations; the more 'journalistic' work these organisations can do – through offering 'ordinary' interviewees to the media to serve as case studies and through carrying out their own investigative work – the more likelihood there is that media coverage will rise beyond superficial and piecemeal treatments of topics.

If one was to single out one media outlet for praise, based on the findings of both the quantitative and qualitative studies, it must be UTV *Live*. It carried a relatively high proportion of civil society coverage, it gave space and prominence to individual campaigners, and it generally presented civil society groups and

individuals in a positive light. It also gave the most coverage and prominence to hate crimes and related issues of those media outlets analysed, and provided the most innovative coverage of the water charges issue.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Civil society organisations**

The sectors highlighted in bold below are those which, for the purposes of this study, will be regarded as part of 'civil society'. Those not highlighted were not included.

#### **Voluntary and Community Sector**

Central Government

**Charitable Trust**

**Church/Faith Based**

**Consumer Association**

**Co-operative**

**Credit Union**

**Cultural Identity Groups**

**Experts/academics**

**District Partnership**

**Housing Association**

Individual

Local Government

**Media**

**Political Party**

Private sector/Business

**Professional organisation** (*includes organisations representing business interests*)

Public Sector

**School/University**

**Sports club/assoc**

**Trade Union/Guild**

Paramilitaries

Security Forces

## Appendix 2

**Table 1: Substantive news items counted**

Medium	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Total
Belfast Telegraph	183	202	197	204	198	212	175	167	<b>1,538</b>
Local weeklies	32	24	30	26	28	30	26	28	<b>224</b>
Radio Ulster	24	20	19	19	20	20	20	19	<b>161</b>
UTV Live	36	36	40	39	38	38	37	35	<b>299</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>2,222</b>

**Table 2: Substantive news items coded (as relating to a civil society organisation)**

Medium	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Total
Belfast Telegraph	61	63	62	92	73	78	74	69	<b>572</b>
Local weeklies	10	10	8	10	9	13	10	9	<b>79</b>
Radio Ulster	5	7	9	4	4	3	6	5	<b>43</b>
UTV Live	20	19	19	19	15	21	11	18	<b>142</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>836</b>

...and as % of total number of substantive news items

Medium	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Total
Belfast Telegraph	33	31	31	45	37	37	42	41	<b>37</b>
Local weeklies	31	42	27	38	32	43	38	32	<b>35</b>
Radio Ulster	21	35	47	21	20	15	30	34	<b>27</b>
UTV Live	56	53	48	49	39	55	30	51	<b>47</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>38</b>

**Table 3: As above, excluding 'political talks' items (from the numerator)**

Medium	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Total
Belfast Telegraph	52	46	51	81	69	76	68	67	<b>510</b>
Local weeklies	10	10	7	10	9	13	9	9	<b>77</b>
Radio Ulster	4	5	6	1	3	2	5	5	<b>31</b>
UTV Live	16	10	13	12	12	19	10	17	<b>109</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>727</b>

and % figures as % of total number of substantive news items

Medium	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Total
Belfast Telegraph	28	23	26	40	35	36	39	40	<b>33</b>
Local weeklies	31	42	23	38	32	43	35	32	<b>34</b>
Radio Ulster	17	25	32	5	15	10	25	26	<b>19</b>
UTV Live	47	28	33	31	39	50	27	49	<b>37</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>33</b>

**Table 4: Total number of substantive *prominent* news items coded for whole period and for each of the eight weeks** (i.e. those which relate to civil society as per coding manual)

Medium	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Total
Belfast Telegraph	7	5	7	12	4	3	5	10	<b>53</b>
Local weeklies	7	5	4	5	4	6	7	6	<b>44</b>
Radio Ulster	4	5	7	4	3	3	3	3	<b>32</b>
UTV Live	9	6	8	9	5	6	3	8	<b>54</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>183</b>

...and as % of prominent substantive news items

Medium	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Total
Belfast Telegraph	39	28	39	67	22	17	28	56	<b>37</b>
Local weeklies	47	33	27	33	27	40	47	40	<b>37</b>
Radio Ulster	27	33	47	27	20	20	20	20	<b>27</b>
UTV Live	60	40	53	60	33	40	20	53	<b>45</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>36</b>

**Table 5: As above, excluding 'political talks' items (from the numerator)**

Medium	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Total
Belfast Telegraph	6	1	7	10	4	3	5	10	<b>46</b>
Local weeklies	7	5	4	5	4	6	6	6	<b>43</b>
Radio Ulster	3	4	3	1	2	2	2	3	<b>20</b>
UTV Live	7	1	7	4	4	5	3	7	<b>38</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>147</b>

**...and as % of prominent substantive news items (excluding political talks)**

Medium	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Total
Belfast Telegraph	33	6	39	56	22	17	28	56	32
Local weeklies	47	33	27	33	27	40	40	40	36
Radio Ulster	20	27	20	7	13	13	13	20	17
UTV Live	47	7	47	27	27	33	20	47	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>29</b>

**Table 6: Items coded under each of the possible topics, excluding political talks (counts)**

Topic 1	BT	Weeklies	UTV	RU	Total
Other	61	12	6		79
Health	56	4	11	2	73
Education/training	36	15	11	5	67
Crime	31	3	8	2	44
War (includes political violence)	30	2	8		40
Conflict resolution	20	5	7	4	36
National politics	32	2			34
Local government	22	6	2		30
Labour, unemployment	14	2	10	2	28
Racism/sectarianism	15	1	10	2	28
Policing	13	3	10	2	28
Arts, entertainment, lifestyle	20	2			22
Sustainable development	16	2	3		21
Politics (international)	17	1	1		19
Children	15			3	18
Culture, tradition, religion, language	10	4	2	2	18
Sport	14	2	2		18
Justice system	6		9	2	17
Transport	11	3	2		16
Business	11	1	3		15
Service delivery / welfare	11	2			13
Housing	10	1			11
Poverty	3	1	2	4	10
Personalities and profiles	8				8
Corporate Social Responsibility	7				7
Economy	5	1			6
Human rights	4		1		5
Advocacy	2			1	3
Corruption	3				3
Agriculture	2				2
Migration/refugees	2				2
Sexuality / sexual rights	1	1			2
Media & ICT	2				2
Natural disasters			1		1
Gender issues		1			1
					<b>727</b>

Please note, all stats below to *exclude* 'political talks' items:

**Table 7: Number of items coded under each of the possible 'geographic focus' categories**

Medium	NI	GB/UK	RoI	Europe	Inter	Total
Belfast Telegraph	425	52	8	4	21	510
Local weeklies	75	0	0	0	2	77
Radio Ulster	29	0	0	0	2	31
UTV Live	108	0	1	0	0	109
<b>Total</b>	<b>637</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>727</b>

**Table 8: Number of items coded under each of the possible 'organisation type 1' categories**

Organisation type 1	BT	Weeklies	UTV	RU	Total
Voluntary and community	77	15	19	9	120
Central government	62	2	3	1	68
Media	8		1		9
Political party	54	6	14	5	79
Private sector/business	29	4	2		35
Professional organisation	9		10	2	21
School/university	31	14	7	2	54
Sports club / association	16	3			19
Trade union	8		4	2	14
Individual	5	1	6	1	13
Cultural identity groups	5	3	1		9
Paramilitaries	21		3	1	25
Experts/academics	12	1			13
Security forces	26	4	6	1	37
Local government	26	11	3		40
Public sector	44	9	7	2	62
None	5		4		9
Judiciary	5				5
Church/faith based	25	4	9	2	40
CSO individual	7		9	3	19
Consumer association	1		1		2
District partnership	2				2
Charitable trust	32				32
<b>Total</b>					<b>727</b>

**Table 9: Number of items coded under each of CSO rep A categories**

Medium	Neutral	Positive	Negative	No adjud.	Not applicable	Total
BT	268	179	42		21	510
Weeklies	43	30	1		3	77
UTV	101	3	1	2	2	109
RU	30			1		31
<b>Total</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>727</b>

**Table 10: Number of items coded under each of CSO rep B categories**

Medium	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Total
BT	141	125	2	<b>8</b>
Weeklies	15	28	0	<b>43</b>
UTV	36	63	2	<b>101</b>
RU	6	24	0	<b>30</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>442</b>

**Table 11: Number of items coded under the following indicator categories:**

Indicator	UTV	RU	BT	Weeklies	Total
2.2.1 Civil liberties	11	2	8	1	22
3.3.2 CS actions to promote tolerance	12	2	15	3	32
3.4.2 CS actions to promote non-violence	13	3	11	2	29

**Table 12: Number of items coded under each of the 'actor types' for 'primary source' – with breakdown for direct quote, indirect quote and apparent source**

Actor type	Direct	Indirect	Apparent	Total
Voluntary and community	72	3	4	79
Central government	17	2	6	25
Media	4	2		6
Political party	117	5		122
Private sector / business	16	1	1	18
Professional organisation	29	1	1	31
School/university	19		2	21
Sports club/association	11			11
Trade union	30		1	31
Individual	36			36
Cultural identity groups	3			3
Paramilitaries	2		1	3
Experts/academics	13	2		15
Security forces	9	9	7	25
Local government	6	2	4	12
Public sector	13	5	3	21
None	13		1	14
Judiciary	3	1	1	5
Church/faith-based	29		1	30
CSO Individual	19	1	1	21
Consumer association	2			2
District partnership	2			2
Charitable trust	8	1	1	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>473</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>543</b>

**As above but prominent items only**

Actor type	Direct	Indirect	Apparent	Total
Voluntary and community	6	1		7
Central government	2		3	5
Political party	21			21
Private sector	2	1		3
Professional organisation	7		1	8
School/university	4			4
Sports club/association	2			2
Trade union	4		1	5
Individual	6			6
Cultural identity groups	1			1
Experts/academics	1			1
Security forces	3	5	3	11
Local government	1		1	2
Public sector	6	5	1	12

None	4			<b>4</b>
Judiciary		1		<b>1</b>
Church-faith-based	8			<b>8</b>
CSO individual	8	1		<b>9</b>
Charitable trust	1			<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>111</b>

**Table 13: Number of items coded under each of the 'actor types' for 'secondary source' – with breakdown for 'direct quote, indirect quote and apparent source'**

<b>CSOType</b>	<b>Direct</b>	<b>Indirect</b>	<b>Apparent</b>	<b>Total</b>
Voluntary and community	42	6	1	<b>49</b>
Central government	47	7	2	<b>56</b>
Media	2	2		<b>4</b>
Political party	174	16	1	<b>191</b>
Private sector	17	6	1	<b>24</b>
Professional organisation	10	1		<b>11</b>
School/university	14	2		<b>16</b>
Sports club/association	2			<b>2</b>
Trade union	7	2		<b>9</b>
Individual	28	2		<b>30</b>
Cultural identity groups	1			<b>1</b>
Experts/academics	5	1		<b>6</b>
Paramilitaries	1	1	1	<b>3</b>
Security forces	12	9	4	<b>25</b>
Local government	4	1	1	<b>6</b>
Public sector	25	6		<b>31</b>
None	2	1		<b>3</b>
Judiciary		1		<b>1</b>
Church-faith-based	16	1		<b>17</b>
CSO individual	6	1	1	<b>8</b>
District partnership	1			<b>1</b>
Charitable trust	4	1		<b>5</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>499</b>

**Table 14: Number of items coded under each of the 'actor types' for 'primary source' – with breakdown by medium**

<b>Actor type</b>	<b>BT</b>	<b>Weeklies</b>	<b>UTV</b>	<b>RU</b>	<b>Total</b>
Voluntary and community	51	4	16	8	<b>79</b>
Central government	17		5	3	<b>25</b>
Media	4		2		<b>6</b>
Political party	87	19	13	3	<b>122</b>
Private sector / business	15	1	2		<b>18</b>
Professional organisation	20		9	2	<b>31</b>
School/university	14	5	2		<b>21</b>
Sports club/association	11				<b>11</b>
Trade union	20	1	7	3	<b>31</b>
Individual	32	1	3		<b>36</b>
Cultural identity groups	2	1			<b>3</b>
Paramilitaries	3				<b>3</b>
Experts/academics	13	1		1	<b>15</b>
Security forces	12	3	8	2	<b>25</b>
Local government	8	4			<b>12</b>
Public sector	14		5	2	<b>21</b>

None	4	1	9		<b>14</b>
Judiciary	4		1		<b>5</b>
Church/faith-based	20		8	2	<b>30</b>
CSO Individual	10		9	2	<b>21</b>
Consumer association	1		1		<b>2</b>
District partnership	2				<b>2</b>
Charitable trust	10				<b>10</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>374</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>543</b>

**As above but prominent items only**

<b>Actor type</b>	<b>BT</b>	<b>Weeklies</b>	<b>UTV</b>	<b>RU</b>	<b>Total</b>
Voluntary and community			4	3	<b>7</b>
Central government	1		2	2	<b>5</b>
Political party	6	12	2	1	<b>21</b>
Private sector / business	2	1			<b>3</b>
Professional organisation	3		3	2	<b>8</b>
School/university		4			<b>4</b>
Sports club/association	2				<b>2</b>
Trade union	2	1		2	<b>5</b>
Individual	4	1	1		<b>6</b>
Cultural identity groups		1			<b>1</b>
Experts/academics	1				<b>1</b>
Security forces	1	2	6	2	<b>11</b>
Local government		2			<b>2</b>
Public sector	5		5	2	<b>12</b>
None	1	1	2		<b>4</b>
Judiciary			1		<b>1</b>
Church/faith-based	4		2	2	<b>8</b>
CSO Individual	1		7	1	<b>9</b>
Charitable trust	1				<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>111</b>

**Table 15: Number of items coded under each of the 'actor types' for 'secondary source' – with breakdown for medium type**

<b>Actor type</b>	<b>BT</b>	<b>Weeklies</b>	<b>UTV</b>	<b>RU</b>	<b>Total</b>
Voluntary and community	21	6	19	3	<b>49</b>
Central government	38	3	12	3	<b>56</b>
Media	2		2		<b>4</b>
Political party	102	15	64	10	<b>191</b>
Private sector / business	17	3	3	1	<b>24</b>
Professional organisation	4		6	1	<b>11</b>
School/university	11		5		<b>16</b>
Sports club/association	2				<b>2</b>
Trade union	5	1	2	1	<b>9</b>
Individual	13		17		<b>30</b>
Cultural identity groups	1				<b>1</b>
Paramilitaries			2	1	<b>3</b>
Experts/academics	3		3		<b>6</b>
Security forces	9	3	12	1	<b>25</b>
Local government	4		2		<b>6</b>
Public sector	13	4	13	1	<b>31</b>
None	2		1		<b>3</b>
Judiciary			1		<b>1</b>
Church/faith-based	12		4	1	<b>17</b>
CSO Individual	2		5	1	<b>8</b>
District partnership			1		<b>1</b>
Charitable trust	5				<b>5</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>499</b>

## Appendix 3

### **CIVICUS Media Monitoring Project (Northern Ireland) Coding Manual**

This coding manual complements the guidance for this project provided by CIVICUS. For the most part, it does not duplicate that guidance and much important information relating to coding definitions being used is contained in the CIVICUS document. Thus, this manual should be read in conjunction with the CIVICUS guidance.

The items monitored for this project are all substantive general news items occurring from 6 September to 30 October 2004 inclusive in the following media outlets: *UTV Live* (from 18:00 hours) (Mondays to Fridays), BBC Radio Ulster 07:00 hours radio news bulletin (Mondays to Fridays), *Belfast Telegraph* Belfast final edition (Mondays to Saturdays), and the front pages of the following newspapers: *Ballymena Guardian*, *Derry Journal* (weekend edition), *Down Recorder*, *Impartial Reporter* and the *Tyrone Courier*. The items monitored also include all newspaper photographs, cartoons and graphic illustrations appearing in newspaper pages or sections which focus on general news or, in the case of local papers, on the front page.

'General news items' is defined as excluding articles on newspaper feature pages, articles in any specialist news sections in newspapers, eg politics, business, sport, agriculture, and items in any sports or weather sections in broadcast programmes.

*Substantive* items are defined as follows. For newspapers, they are defined as items which are at least 10 paragraphs long, unless they include a picture or feature on the front page of a newspaper. Items which comprise of or include a photograph or other illustration, and all front-page items, are included. News briefs or short trailer items on the front page are not included.

For TV, substantive items are defined as all general news items except items of under one minute with presenter voiceover. Where a recorded or live interview follows a report or package on the same topic, it will only be defined as a separate item if it lasts at least a minute. Where it lasts less than a minute, it will be treated as part of the preceding item. Durations include any introduction or link into an item.

For radio, substantive items are defined as all general news items which last at least 30 seconds, including the introduction or link.

The items which will be coded for this project are those general news items and photographs/illustrations in which a civil society actor(s) and/or a topic of direct relevance to civil society is a major subject. Below are some examples for guidance:

*Example 1:* An item featuring a government minister announcing a grant to Women's Aid would be included, even if Women's Aid was not quoted.

*Example 2:* An item featuring a government minister talking about funding for the voluntary sector would be included, even if no voluntary sector organisation featured.

*Example 3:* An announcement on homelessness or on the fishing industry by a government minister would not be included, unless a civil society organisation featured in the article in a major way.

*Example 4:* An item on an official strike by a trade union would be included, even if the trade union did not feature in the item.

*Example 5:* An item on an unofficial strike would not be included, unless a trade union or other civil society organisation featured in a major way.

*It should also be noted that, in addition to the items on the main form/table to which the categorisations below refer, the researchers are keeping an Excel spreadsheet record of the total number of substantive general news items and photographs in each programme and newspaper monitored for this study.*

<b>Categorisation</b>	<b>Description</b>
Monitor	Initials of person carrying out monitoring
Date	Date on which item broadcast or published recorded as dd/mm/yyyy
Time (broadcast only)	Time at which bulletin commenced which carried item, recorded using 24-hour clock
Medium	Type of media: TV, radio or print
Medium 2	Name of programme or newspaper
Page/item	Page number of newspaper item, or place in running order (taking into account only substantive general news items) for broadcast items.
Type of item	News story or photograph. Item is coded as news story if it consists of purely text, or is accompanied by a photograph. It is coded as a photograph if it has no accompanying story, or only a caption. Radio news items are all coded as news story. TV news items are coded as either news story, news analysis or interview.
Topic 1	The predominant topic of the item. Topics on the CIVICUS list which relate to the means by which an issue is raised (e.g. advocacy) rather than the issue itself are normally not recorded under Topic 1.
Other 1	Details of the predominant topic if it has been recorded as 'Other' under Topic 1.
Topic 2	The second most predominant topic of the item.
Other 2	Details of the predominant topic if it has been recorded as 'Other' under Topic 2.
Political talks	Box is checked if the predominant topic of the item is directly connected with the inter-governmental and inter-party talks aimed at restoration of devolution.
Geographic	Geographic focus of story
Organisation type 1	Organisation or sector type for main organisation or individual featured in the item.
Organisation type 1:	All groups and representatives of groups which are part of the voluntary and community sector, with the

voluntary and community sector	exception of charitable trusts, church or faith-based organisations, co-operatives, consumer associations, district partnerships, housing associations, credit unions, and those which fall under category 'cultural identity groups'.
Organisation type 1: CS individual	Individuals who do not represent a particular group or sector, but who are featured because they are playing an advocacy or service role similar to that of a CS organisation (e.g. someone campaigning individually on an issue).
Organisation type 1: individual	Individuals who do not represent a particular group or sector, and who do not fall into the category of 'CS individual'.
Organisation type 1: cultural identity groups	Groups which celebrate or promote Ulster-Protestant and Ulster-Scots culture, traditional sport (e.g. Orange Order, Apprentice Boys), or Irish culture, language or traditional sport e.g. GAA.
Organisation type 1: paramilitaries	Includes paramilitary organisations and representatives, and organisations representing paramilitary prisoners and ex-prisoners.
Organisation type 1: experts and academics	Includes think tanks, consultants and consultancy firms, and academics speaking as individual experts rather than on behalf of their institution. Includes all reports produced by such individuals and bodies.
Organisation type 1: security forces	PSNI, Army, RIR – and equivalents in Republic and GB where relevant.
Organisation type 1: public sector	All public sector bodies which are not a central government department or agency, and which are not local government e.g. health trusts, education boards, Policing Board, Arts Council, NI Ombudsman, Ofreg (electricity regulator), Translink, NI Audit office, Housing Executive.
Organisation name	Name of organisation or individual as above. To be recorded as 'none' if no name given.
CSO type	Type of main civil society organisation featured, if any
Other	Name where 'other' recorded for 'CSO type'
Indicator	Type of issue covered in item, using list provided by CIVICUS. Only examples of CS organisation or individual 'actively and successfully' undertaking a campaign or activity should be included, where this particular wording is used in the 'possible issues' column with reference to a particular indicator.
Source: Actor	Name of organisation or individual which forms a source for the item
Source: Type	Category of organisation or individual as above (using categories as in Organisation Type 1)
Source: Level	Whether source is (or appears to be) primary or secondary source or, where there is no primary source, no apparent primary source or mixed primary sources, which of latter categories item falls into.
Prominence	<i>TV and radio:</i> 1, 2 or 3 as appropriate to indicate where item is in running order

	<p><i>Newspapers:</i> 1, 2 or 3 as appropriate to indicate instances where article is most prominent, second most prominent or third most prominent substantive news article in that edition of the newspaper.</p>
<p>CSO representation A (see examples at the end of this table)</p>	<p>Scoring referring to how CS actor or actors are portrayed in this item, taking into account aspects listed in CIVICUS guidance, but focusing mainly on the text of the report (including headlines or broadcast links/intros), comments by interviewees and (in live broadcast interviews) the questions put by interviewers and, in the case of newspaper photographs not accompanying a story, the photographic image and the accompanying caption.</p> <p>'Positive' - item clearly and unambiguously portrays CSO actor(s) as good or effective (e.g. well-managed, dynamic, benevolent etc.) or gives prominence and credibility to such a portrayal.</p> <p>'Negative' – item clearly and unambiguously portrays CSO actors(s) as poor or ineffective (e.g. badly-managed, chaotic, inconsiderate etc.) or gives prominence and credibility to such a portrayal.</p> <p>'Neutral' – item provides neither positive or negative representation as outlined above.</p> <p>'No adjudication' – item does not fall clearly into any of the three above categories.</p> <p>'Not applicable' – item does not feature a CS organisation or individual.</p>
<p>CSO representation B (see examples at the end of this table)</p>	<p>Scoring referring to how CS actor or actors, and their message(s) are portrayed in this item, taking into account aspects listed in CIVICUS guidance. All items rated 'positive' or 'negative' under CSO representation A would be rated in the same way under CSO representation B. However, some items rated 'neutral' under CSO representation A would be rated 'positive' or 'negative' under CSO representation B, due the wider criteria used.</p> <p>'Positive' – item is presented in such a way that the CS actor(s) is/are able to get across their message in an effective way, and the overall image conveyed of the CS actor(s) is a positive one. Where there is no message or it is not relevant (e.g. in a newspaper photograph featuring a CSO), the overall image conveyed of the CS actor(s) is a positive one.</p>

	<p>'Negative' – item is presented in such a way that the CS actor(s) is/are not able to get across their message in an effective way, and the overall image conveyed of the CS actor(s) is a negative one. Where there is no message or it is not relevant (e.g. in a newspaper photograph featuring a CSO), the overall image conveyed of the CS actor(s) is a negative one.</p> <p>'Neutral' – item provides neither positive or negative representation as outlined above.</p> <p>'No adjudication' – item does not fall clearly into any of the three above categories.</p> <p>'Not applicable' – item does not feature a CS organisation or individual.</p>
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CSO representation A: examples

An item in which a charity was reported as celebrating '25 years of success' would be 'positive'.

An item in which a government minister praised a church organisation for its 'unstinting efforts at reconciliation', if these remarks are given prominence in the item, would be 'positive'.

A newspaper article features the latest step by a pressure group in its campaign to persuade the government to stop a proposed railway closure. The item leads on what the pressure group is saying but also quotes 'government sources' as saying there are financial grounds for going ahead with the closure, although no decision has yet been made. The newspaper is running a 'Save the Railways' campaign and uses its 'Save Our Railways' logo underneath the headline. This would be judged 'positive' as the use of the logo suggests endorsement of the campaign by the newspaper.

A newspaper photograph features a celebrity shaking hands with a charity leader, and the caption says the celebrity praised the charity for its 'great work'. This would be judged 'positive'.

A TV interview in which an interviewer highlighted weaknesses in a particular organisation which the interviewee failed to answer satisfactorily and with credibility would be 'negative'.

An item highlighting a critical official report about an organisation in which the organisation's response was not given equal or greater prominence would be 'negative'.

A newspaper article features campaigners demonstrating against the Iraq war. Their demonstration holds up traffic, and the item gives prominence to the inconvenience caused to drivers, quoting a few complaints from drivers. This would be judged 'negative'.

CSO representation B: examples

*Example 1: Two CSO organisations are campaigning for a ban on smoking in public places.*

A radio item leads on the campaign. No opposing view is voiced. This would be judged 'positive'.

A TV item leads on the campaign. Most of the item is devoted to the case put by the campaigners and facts are quoted to support their case. A business organisation says the proposal could cost jobs, but an interview clip with its representative is only put near the end of the item, and is much shorter. No evidence is provided to back the latter's case. This would be judged 'positive'.

A newspaper article features the same CSO campaign but leads on the concern over jobs voiced about the proposal by the business organisation. This would be judged 'negative'.

A newspaper article leads on the same CSO campaign but gives roughly equal prominence to both sides. This would be judged 'neutral'.

*Example 2: Strike call by trade union representing ambulance workers..*

A TV item leads on the strike call. The Ambulance Service disputes some of the claims the union is making. However, it declines to give an interview and its comments, presented as a quote, are put towards the end of the item. No direct evidence is offered by the government to back what it is saying. This would be judged 'positive'.

A newspaper article leads on the same strike call. It highlights the potential disruption for public users of the services provided by the workers who may go on strike, and makes this the main issue of the story. This would be judged 'negative'.

*Example 3: A government minister announces new legislation to tackle racism and other 'hate crimes'. His announcement is made at the headquarters of an anti-racism body.*

A TV item leads on what the minister says and uses a clip of an anti-racism group representative welcoming the announcement. This would be judged 'positive'.

A newspaper article leads on what the minister says and uses a quote from the anti-racism group saying the government still isn't doing enough. The item does not carry a response from the minister on this point. This would be judged 'neutral' because the government was the prominent source, the CSO organisation was a lesser source but, at the same time, the latter's viewpoint was not rebutted by the government.

A TV item leads on what the minister says and uses a clip of an anti-racism group representative saying the government still isn't doing enough. The minister responds by saying he doesn't accept that criticism and emphasising the impact the legislation will have. This would be judged 'negative' as the government is the prominent source, so more credibility is implicitly given to the minister than to the anti-racism group.

A newspaper article leads on what the minister says and uses a quote from the anti-racism group representative saying the government still isn't doing enough. The minister says he can understand the criticism but doesn't feel it is entirely fair. This would be judged 'neutral'.

A TV item leads, not on the announcement itself but on the fact that the anti-racism body still doesn't feel the government is doing enough. The minister says he doesn't feel such criticism is fair and he highlights the impact the legislation will have. However, more space and prominence in the item is given to the anti-racism body and its case. No facts are reported which undermine the case in any way. This would be judged 'positive'.

*Example 4: newspaper photograph*

A newspaper photograph features a celebrity shaking hands with a charity leader and a caption which simply says 'Celebrity X with Jo Bloggs of Y Charity at a fundraising event hosted by the charity'. This would be judged 'positive'.

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