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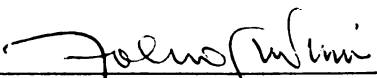
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Analysis of the Coverage of the Issue as Reported in
THE TIMES, THE GUARDIAN and THE DAILY MAIL

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**THE OUSTING OF MARGARET THATCHER: AN ANALYSIS OF THE
COVERAGE OF THE ISSUE AS REPORTED IN *THE TIMES*, *THE GUARDIAN*
AND *THE DAILY MAIL***

By

Danielle Morris-Jones

A THESIS

Submitted to
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ABSTRACT

THE OUSTING OF MARGARET THATCHER: AN ANALYSIS OF THE COVERAGE OF THE ISSUE AS REPORTED IN *THE TIMES*, *THE GUARDIAN* AND *THE DAILY MAIL*

By

Danielle Morris-Jones

The aim of this research is to examine the news coverage during the month that Margaret Thatcher resigned. This study examines how three British newspapers: *The Daily Mail*, *The Guardian*, and *The Times* covered the month of November 1990.

The research asks three questions:

1. Was the political coverage in these three newspapers during November 1990 biased?
2. What were the dominant issues pertaining to Thatcher's resignation in the press coverage?
3. What are the implications for press performance and party politics as a result of this research?

The research is both a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the three newspapers.

The main conclusion is that one main issue dominated the coverage of Thatcher during this time.

The main implication for British politics and the press is that the various newspapers report the same issues but for different reasons depending on their political allegiance.

I dedicate this thesis to the survivors of my furies, the lovers of my passions, the comforters of my sorrows, the financiers of my studies, the supporters of my worries, the audience of my life.

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My gratitude to the members of my thesis committee, Professor Steve Lacy, Professor Frederick Fico, and to my chairman, Folu Ogundimu.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis will examine the ousting of Margaret Thatcher as Britain's Prime Minister and Leader of the Conservative Party, in November, 1990. The research will examine the coverage of the issues which resulted in Thatcher's departure as were reported in *The Daily Mail*, *The Guardian* and *The Times*.

British newspapers have a reputation for being partisan. This is one criteria which determines the newspaper which a person will buy.¹ This research will re-address the issue of newspaper partisanship. The study will look at the press performance in Britain and the interaction of the press and the party political process.

This thesis will examine three research questions, within the theoretical framework of British press performance and party politics. The first aim is to examine the nature of the political coverage during November 1990 in *The Daily Mail*, *The Guardian* and *The Times*. The second research aim is to determine the dominance of specific issues, which led to Margaret Thatcher's resignation, in the three newspapers. The final aim of the thesis is to examine the implications to British press performance and party politics as a result of

¹ Miller, B.

Sun Burned, Star Struck
New Statesman and Society, February 21 1992
Volume 5, Number 190

the press coverage of the Prime Minister's ousting. Stated in question terminology, the three research questions are:

1. Was the political coverage of the three newspapers biased?
2. What were the dominant issues during the last month of Thatcher's premiership?
3. What, if any, are the implications to press performance and party politics as a result of the study?

Partisanship can affect the choice of newspaper a person buys. People make voting decisions based upon reports in the press. It is to the press the people turn to for political guidance. It is important for newspaper readers to be aware of political bias.²

By analysing the content of news reports in *The Daily Mail*, *The Guardian* and *The Times* one could discern the extent of their political allegiance, if one exists. Traditionally, *The Times* and *The Daily Mail* are considered to be pro-Tory newspapers. Since Rupert Murdoch bought *The Times* in the 1980s the newspaper has had a reputation for being a pro-Thatcher newspaper.³ *The Guardian* has always been thought of as a left-of-centre

² Miller, B.

Hearts and Minds

New Statesman and Society, October 26 1990

Volume 3, Number 124

³ Campbell, D.

The Thatcher Government Versus the British Press

Columbia Journalism Review, May-June 1989

Volume 28, Number 1 p36

liberal newspaper.⁴ This research will attempt to discern the nature of the newspapers' political orientation.

The content of *The Daily Mail*, *The Guardian* and *The Times* will be analysed for the month of November 1990. It was during this month that Margaret Thatcher resigned. This month specifically has been chosen because it is the period in which the newspapers substantially covered the disunity of the British Conservative Party. It was in November 1990 when speculation began that there should be a challenge to Margaret Thatcher's leadership of the Conservative Party.

At this time of disunity within the Conservative Party coverage of the related issues was extensive. By examining the stories written in *The Times*, *The Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* one can clarify the nature of political partisanship of the three newspapers. The issues the newspapers chose to report concerning the party disunity, the reasons the newspapers considered there was party disunity and how the stories were reported will allow for this clarification.

This thesis will examine the length and the number of stories written on Conservative Party disunity. Moreover, the study will show whether the stories were pro-Thatcher, or anti-Thatcher. By analysing the newspapers' reporting on the issue and how much was

⁴ Seymour-Ure, C.

The British Press and Broadcasting since 1945
London: Basil Blackwell (1991) p22

reported, one can conclude what the press considered to be the important factors during the leadership challenge.

This research will be both a qualitative and quantitative analysis of *The Daily Mail*, *The Times* and *The Guardian* newspapers' content. The quantitative examination will be a content analysis of the month of November 1990 of *The Daily Mail*, *The Guardian* and *The Times*. The content analysis will be measuring the length of paragraphs of the pertinent issues to Mrs Thatcher's resignation. It will also measure the number of stories which the newspapers published about Conservative Party disunity and the relevant issues involved. The length of stories and number of stories published about all other national issues on the same pages will be measured.

This type of measurement will illustrate which political issues the newspapers considered important at this time. This will be illustrated by the total number of stories written on each issue. Previous research has shown this type of measurement can be used in such an examination. Erica King's study of the 1988 presidential primaries as covered by *USA Today* and the *New York Times* used the system of identifying thematic categories. Her research was to determine which of five topics: 'horse race', 'campaign issues', 'personal qualities' or 'policy issues' dominated the front page stories written about the presidential primaries in the *New York Times* and *USA Today*.

King identified five thematic categories which were relevant to news stories about presidential primary races. The study then counted the number of sentences, from the relevant stories, which should be put into each thematic category. This study found that the 'horse race' theme dominated the coverage of the presidential primaries in the two newspapers.⁵

Finally, this measurement will illustrate whether the newspapers focused on the Conservative Party during this month as opposed to all other news issues which were occurring at the time. For this part of the analysis 'other' news issues have been given thematic categories. The 'Other' categories which will be examined are news issues in the newspapers which are not included in the categorisation of the Thatcher issues. They are: EEC - any stories about the EEC other than the definition offered in the category of Britain and the EEC; Crime or Accidents - that is, stories about crimes committed, alleged criminals, and any accidents; National Government and Politics - any stories written about British politics not included in the five 'Thatcher' thematic categories; International - any story written about foreign countries other than the EEC; Human Interest - anything about ordinary people who do interesting things, celebrities, and the Royal family; Sport - any story written about sport; Miscellaneous - any stories which do not fit into the above categories, for instance, the collapse of Barings Bank, or religious stories.

⁵ King, E.G.

Thematic Coverage of the 1988 Presidential Primaries: A Comparison of USA Today and the New York Times
Journalism Quarterly, Spring 1990
Volume 67, Number 1

A qualitative analysis is necessary to make a textual determination of what was being written in the news stories that the content analysis is measuring. This qualitative method will complement the quantitative method. Where the content analysis measures the stories as an indication as to their partisanship and which issues the newspapers considered to be important at the time, a contextual analysis will offer an insight into the newspapers' interpretations of Conservative Party disunity and the events leading up to the prime minister's resignation.⁶ The qualitative analysis attempts to see if a judgement can be made as to the political bias of the British press.

The next chapter will examine the main issues which surrounded Margaret Thatcher's ousting. It will be a brief overview of her premiership, indicating the policy areas which drew the most controversy during her time in office.

⁶ Singletary, M.

Mass Communication Research: Contemporary Methods and Applications
NY: Longman Publishing (1994) p273

CHAPTER 1

THE OUSTING OF MARGARET THATCHER

This chapter is a review of Margaret Thatcher's time as Prime Minister in Britain. It specifically focuses on her resignation and the issues which were relevant to this happening. This overview is important in order to identify the issues which led to the leadership challenge in the Conservative Party, and which resulted in Thatcher's resignation.

Thatcher's economic and social philosophy, her personal determination and shrewdness, and her political instincts combined to make her a political phenomenon in Britain.⁷ Thatcher dominated British politics and government in a fashion reminiscent of Churchill's leadership of Britain during World War II.⁸ Thatcher and the Tories swept into power in 1979. She served as Britain's prime minister for eleven and a half years, resigning from office on 27 November, 1990.

Thatcher's political good fortune began to unravel in 1988. This signalled the onset of a series of events that led her to withdraw from the contest for the selection of the

⁷ Geelhoed, E.B.

Margaret Thatcher: In Victory and Downfall 1987 and 1990

NY: Praeger (1992) pxi

⁸

What John Major has Inherited: Thatcher Leaves a Legacy of Paradoxes

World Press Review, January 1991

Volume 38, Number 1 p16

Conservative Party leader on 22 November, 1990. These developments, resulting in Conservative Party disunity, revolved around four factors: the downturn in the British economy, the poll tax, the Prime Minister's attitude towards British participation in European integration (a development which related to her economic policies), and the increasing negative perception of her personal style of leadership.

Scholars disagree about the factors which, ultimately, led to Thatcher's resignation. R.K. Alderman and Martin J. Smith believe that what led to Thatcher's resignation was Conservative Party reaction to Thatcher's personal style, the issue of the poll tax, the questions over European monetary union, and the downturn in the economy.⁹ Peter Clarke agrees with the view that it was a combination of all four factors.¹⁰ E. Bruce Geelhoed does not believe that the poll tax was such a central issue in the cause of her departure.¹¹ Neil Carter says that the main cause of Thatcher's resignation was the poll tax.¹² David Marsh and R.A.W. Rhodes concluded that the poll tax fiasco was indeed the catalyst to Thatcher's fall from grace.¹³ Barry Winetrobe says that it was the combination of the poll

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- ⁹ Alderman, R.K. & Smith, M.J. Can British Prime Ministers be given the Push by Their Parties?
British Journal of Parliamentary Affairs, July 1990
Volume 43, Number 3 p269
- ¹⁰ Clarke, P. Margaret Thatcher's Leadership in Historical Perspective
British Journal of Parliamentary Affairs, July 1990
Volume 45, Number 1
- ¹¹ Geelhoed, E.B. Margaret Thatcher: In Victory and Downfall 1987 and 1990
NY: Praeger (1992) p173
- ¹² Alderman, R.K. & Carter, N. A Very Tory Coup: the Ousting of Mrs Thatcher
British Journal of Parliamentary Affairs, April 1991
Volume 44, Number 2, p126
- ¹³ Marsh, D. & R.A.W. Rhodes Implementing Thatcherism: Policy Change in the 1980s
British Journal of Parliamentary Affairs, January 1992
Volume 45, Number 1 p46

tax and the European question which led to the leadership challenge.¹⁴ Philip Norton says that it was Thatcher's stance on Europe which was ultimately responsible for her downfall.¹⁵

By 1988 the Thatcher government began to suffer from the "London bus effect: no problems for ages and then several coming along at the same time."¹⁶ First, the economy which had performed so well in 1987 quickly overheated following the Tory victory in June of that year. As Chancellor of the Exchequer, Nigel Lawson succeeded in reducing the basic rate of income taxes to 25 percent in 1988, but this action served only to fuel the embers of inflation that had been smouldering for several months. Inflation grew from 4 percent in 1987-88 to double digits by the beginning of 1990, driven at first by an upsurge in imports and later by British decisions about its currency's place in an emerging European currency rate system.¹⁷

Lawson responded by calling for a rise in the interest rates to act as a damper on the inflationary pressures at work in the economy and also to stabilise the value of the pound in international currency markets. In turn, the rise in the interest rates jeopardised the growth of Britain's housing market and contributed to a reduction of growth in the

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- ¹⁴ Winetrobe, B.K. A Tax By Any Other Name: the Poll Tax and the Community Charge
British Journal of Parliamentary Affairs, July 1992
Volume 45, Number 3 p426
- ¹⁵ Norton, P. Choosing a Leader: Margaret Thatcher and the Parliamentary Conservative Party
British Journal of Parliamentary Affairs, July 1990
Volume 43, Number 3 p252
- ¹⁶ibid p250
- ¹⁷ Geelhoed, E.B. op cit. p174

economy as a whole. High interest rates put home ownership out of reach of thousands of Britons and undermined one particular strength of Thatcher's domestic programme. By 1990, the economy was tilting towards recession, a fairly logical consequence of a period of sustained increases in interest rates.

Thatcher refused to embrace the completion of British integration into the European economic community. Thatcher's scepticism and hostility to Europe was rooted in a complex series of explanations, among which were her suspicions about a Europe dominated by an economically unified and revived Germany; her fears that a single European currency and European central bank would result in loss of national sovereignty; concern that her socialist counterparts on the continent, primarily President Francois Mitterrand of France and Jacques Delors, the Head of the European Commission (EC), would attempt to undo the Conservative reforms she had instituted in Britain.¹⁸

These misgivings about Britain's participation in Europe, and particularly the manner in which Thatcher expressed them to her fellow heads of state, created serious problems for both Sir Geoffrey Howe, Britain's Foreign Secretary, and Nigel Lawson, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Their task involved the management of Britain's economic and political entry into the new Europe on the best possible terms for the country. Thatcher's frequent overbearing opposition to their efforts created major problems within the Cabinet.¹⁹

¹⁸ *ibid*

p175

¹⁹ *ibid*

p177

Late in July 1989 Howe and Lawson fell out of Thatcher's favour after the European Economic Summit where the British failed to receive what the Prime Minister considered to be the best arrangement for the introduction of the pound sterling into the European exchange rate structure. Thatcher removed Howe from his post as Foreign Secretary and replaced him with John Major. Consequently, Howe received a demotion to leader of the Conservative Party in the House of Commons, and deputy leader of the party. Lawson resigned over these issues on 29 October, 1990. Howe followed on November 1, 1990.²⁰

In the late winter and early spring of 1990, Britain experienced wave after wave of protest over the hated community charge, or poll tax, that the government had instituted to fund services provided by the local councils. The poll tax provided that each individual would be assessed a flat rate charge to cover the costs of local government. Previously, these charges were assessed on the basis of property. The grand purpose behind the scheme was to place limits on the ability of Labour-dominated local councils to institute higher spending programmes and then rely on the upper-middle class and upper class to pay for them. In late March, the anti-poll tax sentiment culminated in a violent, bloody riot in London, a demonstration which convinced virtually every politician in Britain that this measure required some serious revision.²¹

²⁰ Alderman, R.K. & Carter, N.

A Very Tory Coup: The Ousting of Margaret Thatcher
British Journal of Parliamentary Affairs, April 1991
Volume 44, Number 2 p126

²¹ Winetrobe, B.K.

A Tax by Any Other Name: The Poll Tax and the Community Charge
British Journal of Parliamentary Affairs, July 1992
Volume 45, Number 3

By May, both Thatcher and the Tories were headed for certain electoral defeat in any future general election. The Conservatives were losing in virtually every by-election held to fill vacancies in the Commons, even in constituencies which were regarded as 'safe' Tory seats. A growing number of Tory MPs now regarded their Prime Minister as an electoral liability, not an asset.²²

The crisis in the Gulf could not reverse the Conservative Party's political fortunes. The Tories' annual conference in mid-October was less than successful although Michael Heseltine's popularity increased; Heseltine was Thatcher's long-term rival who many believed to be in preparation for a direct challenge to her leadership.²³

The triggering event that led to the final act of the Tory leadership crisis was the resignation of Sir Geoffrey Howe.²⁴ His resignation caused the Conservative members of Parliament to examine Thatcher's leadership style and the state of their government and its performance over the last year. Thatcher herself admitted that her the nature in which she governed the country and her cabinet was, "with executive style less than consultative style."²⁵ Unfortunately, her colleagues were tired of being told what to do as opposed to being asked to discuss the best course of action.

²² Geelhoed, E.B. op cit. p176

²³ Alderman, R.K. & op cit. p127
Carter, N.

²⁴ Geelhoed, E.B. op cit. p179

²⁵ Thatcher, M. Margaret Thatcher: The Path to Power
London: Harper Collins Publishers (1995), p165

Howe's resignation was a blow in that he was the only member of the Conservative Party who had remained in the Cabinet while Thatcher held office of prime minister. Many began to look in Heseltine's direction to see if he would mount a challenge to Thatcher's leadership. Heseltine launched his campaign for the leadership of the Conservative Party on November 14, 1990.

As has been illustrated, the economic and European issues were very much intertwined. The onslaught of recession and Thatcher's mixed feelings about Europe split the Conservative Party and caused the Tories to question their leader and her tactics. With the party already divided, the controversy over the poll tax and the effect it was having on local government elections, it was apparent that the Conservative Party would have to jettison Margaret Thatcher if the party was to stand a chance of winning the next general election which was due in 1992.

To summarise, I have reviewed the political history of the British Conservative Party politics during the latter days of Margaret Thatcher's leadership. This was done in order to show the significant issues involved in her ousting as British premier in November 1990. These issues are: controversy over Britain's membership of the EEC, and the entering of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism; the decline of the economy; the issue of the poll tax; Margaret Thatcher's personal leadership style; and the resulting party disunity which occurred as a result of the aforementioned factors. These issues have been identified as the

main factors of Thatcher's downfall by the previous research which has examined her premiership.

In doing a content analysis of the newspapers' coverage of this period, therefore, I intend to examine how three British newspapers - *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mail* - covered the last days of Margaret Thatcher as the British premier. The analysis will be examining especially, the five key issues which have already been identified.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE BRITISH PRESS

The World Press Encyclopaedia categorises the British press into four groupings: the morning populars, the morning qualities, the Sunday populars, and the Sunday qualities.²⁶

The categorisation, according to the encyclopaedia, between quality and popular, began with the publication of *The Daily Mail* in 1896. The populars, or tabloids, are designed for those who want news of a more entertaining or sensational nature presented in a concise manner, while the qualities attract those who desire full information on a broad range of topics.

The encyclopaedia states that the British press' political and cultural expression is unfettered and that the press is often outspoken in its criticism of the government. Many newspapers unmistakably express a certain political and editorial viewpoint or philosophy. Lloyd Tataryn writes that: "Wise readers in Britain still carefully check the political spin on news before accepting their veracity."²⁷

²⁶ Julian G.T.(ed)

World Press Encyclopaedia
London: Mansell Publishing (1982), p923

²⁷ Tataryn, L.

The Pundits: Power, Politics and the Press
Toronto: Deneau Publishers (1985),p95

According to *The Economist* most papers are right-wing. In the 1980s, the press, in the majority, was pro-Thatcher, more so than being close to mainstream Toryism.²⁸ William Miller does not believe that the issue of newspaper partisanship is open for debate. The British press is partisan, and that is the fact.²⁹

Most of Britain's daily newspapers partisanship lies to the right-of-centre. Colin Seymour-Ure says that during the 1980s the press appeared to be pro-Thatcher because of her government's industrial relations legislation. This legislation limited the unions' power, and allowed press barons to undermine their workers' power.³⁰ Miller agrees with this conclusion. David Morgan too submits to the industrial relations argument as a reason for a Tory bias in the press: "By the 1980s the newspapers were disproportionately in the hands of a few property and communications magnates who had little interest in biting the governmental hand which fed them."³¹

Like any press system, British reporters get a lot of their political information from press releases. In Britain reporters get their parliamentary and political party news through daily, 'unofficial' briefings from the government. This is the Lobby system. The Lobby is based

²⁸

Tabloids versus Tories
The Economist, 24 October, 1992
 Volume 325, Number 7782 p66

²⁹ Miller, W.

Sun Burned, Star Struck
New Statesman and Society, 21 February, 1992
 Volume 5, Number 190 p29

³⁰ Seymour-Ure, C.

The British Press and Broadcasting since 1945
 London: Basil Blackwell Ltd. (1991) p24

³¹ Morgan, D.

Media-Government Relations: the Right to Manage Information Versus the Right to Know
British Journal of Parliamentary Affairs, October 1991
 Volume 44, Number 4 p533

on informal rules and is run on a committee basis, membership being restricted to one reporter per paper.³² Prime Ministers vary in their direct contact with the Lobby. Margaret Thatcher had little contact, choosing to rely on her Press Secretary, Bernard Ingham, to organise the meetings. Ingham would normally have twice-daily briefings and be available for inquiries at all times.³³ The Leader of the Commons and the Leader of the Opposition would each have weekly briefings. Departmental ministers have briefings as appropriate. All that is said to reporters at these briefings is off the record; officially, the Lobby does not exist because Parliament reserves the right to hear all government news first.³⁴

To a limited extent, the Lobby system allows the politicians, especially members of government, to manage the political correspondents. There is always an implicit threat of informational withdrawal and this makes the reporters, and their employers, much more manageable. As David Morgan describes it: "More, much more, the Lobby tied journalists to the Number 10 Press Office as the fountain of certified news."³⁵

The overview of the press illustrates the relationship between British politics and the press. The main assumption is that British newspapers are partisan. It is within this

³² Boyd-Barrett, O. Studies on the Press
Seymour-Ure, C. London: Royal Commission on the Press (1977)
& Tunstall, J. p118

³³ Harris, R. The Media Trilogy
London: Faber & Faber (1994) p317

³⁴ Boyd-Barrett, O. Studies on the Press
Seymour-Ure, C. London: Royal Commission on the Press (1977)
& Tunstall, J. p119

³⁵ Morgan, D. Media-Government Relations: the Right to Manage Information Versus the Right to Know
British Journal of Parliamentary Affairs, October 1991
Volume 44, Number 4 p533

theoretical framework that the analysis for this thesis will be undertaken. By examining the nature of the coverage of the issues in *The Daily Mail*, *The Guardian* and *The Times* the results should illustrate if the newspapers were partisan; that is, were they biased towards Mrs Thatcher and the Conservative Party.

THE PRESS, POLITICS AND POWER IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

The research which has been written on the subject of British newspapers and politics is limited. Little, at the time of writing this research, has been written about Thatcher, the Conservative Party under her and the relationship with the press. No doubt, with time comes retrospect, and more research.

David Morgan researched party politics and the Lobby system. According to Morgan, any political party's ability to manage the press is limited. The fact is that if information in itself is not power it is sometimes very near to it. Morgan suggests that whoever is in possession of information he will have be a source of influence because of it. He explains that although this is the case, most political news in the mass media is beyond the capacity of the government to mould.

During the 1980s newspapers were: "disproportionately in the hands of a few property and communications magnates who had little interest in biting the governmental hand that fed them." The way that the commercial and BBC media sector worked, the commercial sector could never forget its franchises and the BBC its dependence on a government-fixed licence fee. Therefore, dissent had a price. But, managing the press became

increasingly difficult as European institutions created greater openness and provided a steady flow of contrary information to that which the government provided to the press.

Morgan says that few Prime Ministers showed more interest in managing the mass media than Mrs. Thatcher. Thatcher's resignation, however, illustrates that even her influence was limited. That is, although it appeared that she had the backing of press barons, this did not prevent the reporters writing negative comments about her and her leadership: "Her [Thatcher's] political demise suggests that any Prime Minister's capacity to manage party and popular opinion has strict limitations."³⁶

This opinion is reflected in the work of other scholars. One must, however, take into consideration that it is a very limited reason in explaining the downfall of Margaret Thatcher. Admittedly, the press has some power in influencing the populace. It would be exaggerating the power of the press, however, to assume that critical comments about Thatcher read in the newspapers were enough to force her to resign.

Philip Norton examined Margaret Thatcher and her government for the years of 1989 through to 1990. The study looks at the problems that Thatcher faced during this year which caused her position as leader of the Conservative Party and prime minister to be vulnerable. In this work, Norton is sympathetic to the ideas that Morgan put forward in his own study. For example, Norton suggests that the power of the press lay in its ability to fuel speculation as to Thatcher's position and her possible rivals. Norton, however,

³⁶ Morgan, D.

op cit.

p358

takes his reasoning one step beyond that of Morgan. Norton suggests that it was inevitable that Michael Heseltine would ultimately challenge Thatcher (especially at a time when Thatcher was politically weak).³⁷ As Norton said: “A battle between Margaret Thatcher and Michael Heseltine is to the mass media what a honey pot is to bees.”³⁸ Norton is explaining that the press coverage of Heseltine encouraged the voters to believe that Thatcher would be challenged by him for the leadership. This in itself caused a crisis of confidence and led to Thatcher’s resignation.

Norton’s analysis is a lot more conservative in the view of press power, than that of Morgan. Undoubtedly, the large amount of stories written about Heseltine as Thatcher’s competitor during November was an element in Thatcher’s demise. But, again, it would be over-simplifying the matter to conclude that the press’s fascination with Heseltine and Thatcher was the only reason for Thatcher’s resignation. The machinations of politics and the press are not that simple.

As Thatcher’s difficulties increased during November 1990, the press became increasingly preoccupied with Heseltine. Geelhoed says that the press had built up this potential conflict to such proportions that Heseltine would have almost appeared cowardly if he had

³⁷ Heseltine resigned from the government in 1986 but his ambition was to lead the Conservative Party. Heseltine and Thatcher were two people who had a personality clash. Heseltine was also one of Thatcher’s staunchest critics, even though they were members of the same party. Moreover, Heseltine, like Thatcher is a strong orator.

³⁸ Norton, P.

Choosing a Leader: Margaret Thatcher and the Parliamentary Conservative Party
 British Journal of Parliamentary Affairs, July 1990
 Volume 43, Number 3 p252

failed to make a run for the party leadership.³⁹ This conclusion certainly gives credence to Norton's arguments. Moreover, it suggests that the press coverage during November 1990 was an element in Thatcher's decision to resign.

There was a considerable amount of controversy during the 1980s about the influence of the media on political attitudes and voting in the United Kingdom. Dunleavy and Husbands wrote a book about political situations when they reached a cross-roads. That is they examined what happened when a serving government was perceived to be in crisis for one reason or another. They observe that newspapers exerted a very clear effect on voting patterns during the 1983 general election:

"The Conservative vote is some 30 percentage points lower amongst people primarily exposed to non-Tory messages than it is amongst readers of the Tory press, a high level of association that has few parallels amongst either social background or issue influences."⁴⁰

The work of Miller⁴¹ and Miller *et al*⁴² is equally assertive. Miller, and Miller *et al* looked at voting patterns in Britain over the years. Miller examined whether certain press coverage had any effect on the way that people voted. The study done by Miller *et al* shows that between 1986 and 1987 support for the Conservatives rose by 7 percent among readers of 'intellectual' newspapers (*Daily Telegraph* or *The Guardian*) and 12 percent among readers of 'middle brow tabloids' (*Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* or *Daily*

³⁹ Geelhoed, E.B.

op cit. p181

⁴⁰ Dunleavy, P. & Husbands, C.

British Democracy at the Crossroads
London: George Allen and Unwin (1985) p115

⁴¹ Miller, W.

Media and Voters
Oxford: Clarendon Press (1991)

⁴² Miller, W., Clarke, H.D How Voters Change

Harrop, M., LeDuc, L. & Whiteley, P.
Oxford: Clarendon Press (1990)

Mirror). Among those who read the quintessential low-brow tabloids, *The Sun* and *The Star*, the Conservative lead increased by about 34 percent.⁴³

The work of Miller *et al* also suggests that neither the prior partisanship of the paper nor that of the reader made any difference to the changes in the support reported. Miller *et al* present strong evidence that newspapers had more influence than television on those voters who did change their opinions. Finally, Miller suggests that the influence of the tabloid press was particularly strong on the uncommitted voter.⁴⁴

What the work of Miller *et al* does not take into account is the political manoeuvres that are taking place during the period in question. This is a serious flaw in the work. To highlight the fact that Tory support is increasing as a result of the Tory press is legitimate. But, this must be shown to be independent of what is happening in the country as a whole. It is naive to conclude that newspapers hold the only key to political achievement. Miller *et al* give no indication of what the main political stories were at the time. For instance, if unemployment was at an all-time high, and inflation was up, but newspaper readers were increasingly becoming sympathetic to the government, this would be strong evidence of the Tory press power.

⁴³ *ibid*

⁴⁴ Miller, W.

p88

Hearts and Minds

New Statesman and Society, October 26, 1990

Volume 3, Number 124, p13

Harrop, in contrast, takes a more circumspect view. He too was examining the influence that the press has over political manoeuvrings and election results. He argues that although papers can influence the party preference of those readers who have none, the main effect of the press is limited to the reinforcement of existing voting intentions.⁴⁵ Harrop's conclusions in this context alludes to a major analytical problem: whether there is any way of definitely establishing how far newspapers influence their readerships and how far readers buy newspapers that reflect their political views.

Paul Mosley attempted to further Harrop's studies but using a more limited subject field. He investigated the role of the popular press in the reporting of economic events. Mosley examined the extent to which changes in government popularity could be explained by actual and by popularly-communicated levels of inflation and unemployment. For the period 1970-1978, he found that:

If the official estimated value of inflation is replaced in the regression by the highly unofficial estimate of the *Daily Mirror's* Shopping Clock, and if officially estimated unemployment is replaced...by the value last published by the *Daily Mirror*, the proportion of the government's popularity lead that can be explained by economic...variables rises from about 35 percent to about 47 percent.⁴⁶

David Sanders, David Marsh and Hugh Ward refined and extended Mosley's study. They examined the proposition that, in Britain, the connections between macro-economic change and public perceptions of the government are mediated by the way in which

⁴⁵ Seaton, J. & Pimlott, B.

The Media in British Politics
Aldershot: Avebury (1987)

⁴⁶ Mosley, P.

'Popularity Functions' and the Role of the Media: A Plot Study of the Popular Press
British Journal of Political Science, January 1984
Volume 14, Part 1, p124

national daily newspapers cover economic news. Sanders *et al* studied a larger sample of newspapers than that considered in Mosley's study and investigated press coverage across a wider range of economic issues.

The studies cited above specify that some voters get some of their impression of the government's policies from the press. An analysis of the newspapers during Thatcher's departure will illustrate the factors the newspapers considered important during this time. If the press argues in its coverage that Thatcher has failed in respect of the government's policies (specifically, the economy, the poll tax, the issue of Europe and Thatcher's leadership) this will imply that press coverage could have helped oust Thatcher. This being the case the implications are that the existing theory that newspapers influence readers will be corroborated.

Colin Seymour-Ure examined national daily papers and political parties. He studied the influence of newspapers on political parties, and vice versa. He found that there was a general picture of decreasing party commitment from the newspapers. Seymour-Ure looked at the history of British newspapers. He states that since 1945 there were four consistently loyal papers: *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Daily Express* and *The Daily Mail* which were loyal to the Conservatives, and *The Daily Mirror* which was loyal to the Labour Party.⁴⁷ He also suggested that today there were too many national newspapers which were Conservative.

⁴⁷ Boyd-Barret, O., op cit. p171
 Seymour-Ure, C. &
 Tunstall, J.

Mark Hollingsworth also examined the influence of the press on politics. He researched the historical political allegiance of newspapers and the changes of newspaper ownership which caused a change in the political slant of these papers. His studies also drew the conclusion that the majority of newspapers were right-wing in their political loyalty:

At the very time when politics is becoming more open, fissiparous and diverse, the press becomes more narrow, monolithic and doctrinaire. There are valuable exceptions, but they are becoming fewer. While political life, from far Left to the middle of the Tory Party, teems with uncertainty and debate, it is to the remaining fragment of the spectrum, on the heavy Right, that most papers are now unflinchingly committed.⁴⁸

One other aspect which is worth considering is Seymour-Ure's results that showed that *The Times* valued principles above the party, while *The Guardian* was more committed to radicalism.⁴⁹ Seymour-Ure's use of 'principles' mean journalistic principles of fairness and balance. And 'radicalism' suggests non-party affiliation, reporting from a more liberal perspective.

By researching the nature of the coverage in *The Times*, *The Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* during Margaret Thatcher's departure the study will give an impression of the existence of bias in the newspapers' reporting.

An analysis of *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mail* will illustrate the partisanship of the newspapers. In this case, if the stories are pro-Tory, or pro-Thatcher,

⁴⁸ Hollingsworth, M. *The Press and Political Dissent*
London: Pluto Press (1986) p3

⁴⁹ Boyd-Barret, O.,
Seymour-Ure, C. &
Tunstall, J. op cit. p178

then the theory that the *Daily Mail* and *The Times* are Conservative will be reflected. An analysis of *The Guardian's* stories will illustrate if, as the previous research shows, the newspaper is liberal, or radical in its approach. If the newspaper is unsympathetic to the Conservatives or Margaret Thatcher then this theory will be supported.

The theoretical framework which is presented puts the research of this thesis into context. By examining the research which has gone before this provides a context from which this study can base itself. The existing studies offer the theories that the press is partisan, and that the press influences voters.

This existing theory focuses research which will follow. From what has gone before, new studies can test the assumptions which have been made and forge into new areas of discovery. Using the research which has been reviewed offers specific questions which can be asked and issues which can be re-addressed in this study. Having analysed the existing research, there are three research areas which this study will address:

1. **Was the political coverage of the three newspapers biased?**
2. **What were the dominant issues during the last month of Thatcher's premiership?**
3. **What, if any, are the implications to press performance and party politics as a result of the study?**

The next section of this study will explain the method which will be used to research the answers to these questions. It will describe in detail the qualitative and quantitative systems which will be used in the analysis. The chapter will illustrate how the analysis will try to discover an answer to each of the research questions set forth.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

This study will adopt content analysis as one of the key methods. The other method is a textual analysis, a qualitative technique used for examining the narrative interpretation of content.

The content analysis will be a systematic examination of the nature of the coverage of the last days of Margaret Thatcher's leadership in *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mail*. The study will also examine which of five issues - poll tax, economy, Britain and the EEC, Thatcher's leadership style, Conservative Party disunity - pertaining to Thatcher's resignation was most dominant in the press coverage. Furthermore, the research will examine whether the Conservative Party and Margaret Thatcher dominated press coverage comparatively with all other news issues. Finally, the research will indicate whether the newspapers were supportive of Thatcher by calculating the number of pro, and anti, Thatcher sources used in each news story written under the five 'Thatcher' thematic categories.

The study is a source design. I am examining how the different newspapers vary by content.

SOURCE 1**SOURCE 2**

Content (a) <-----> **Content (b)**

In this study the **independent variables** are the newspapers. The **dependent variables** are: the thematic categories⁵⁰ which are being studied - the poll tax, the economy, Britain and the EEC, Thatcher's leadership style, Conservative Party disunity.

The **units of analysis** are the news stories which are being used in the research.

The first research question asks if the political coverage of the three newspapers was biased during the month of November 1990.

To answer this question, the first measurement used will be a count of the number of sources in each story written under the five 'Thatcher' thematic categories. For each story the bias will be determined by calculating the total number of pro-Thatcher and anti-Thatcher sources which are used in the story. The bias of the source will be identified by who the source is (for example, which political party he belongs to) and by reading what the source actually said. Whichever there are more of, pro-Thatcher or anti-Thatcher sources will illustrate the bias of the story. The cumulative result will tell us the extent to which each newspaper supported Thatcher. For example, if a story has 8 anti-Thatcher sources and only 3 pro-Thatcher sources the story will be categorised as an 'attacking' story against Thatcher.

⁵⁰ King, E.G. op cit

The second question being asked is what the dominant issues were in the three newspapers during November 1990.

The first method is to determine which of the five themes - poll tax, economy, Britain and the EEC, Thatcher's leadership style, Conservative Party disunity - dominated the press coverage during November 1990. This will be illustrated by counting the number of stories which were written about each theme.

This question is also answered by measuring the length of stories written about the five 'Thatcher' themes compared to the length of stories written on all other issues on the same pages. Also, the number of stories written about the 'Thatcher' thematic stories will be compared to the number of stories published about everything else.

The universe of newspapers for this content analysis is all weekday copies of *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mail* newspapers. The content analysis covers the period from November 1 to December 1, 1990. This month has been chosen because it is the month in which Thatcher resigned; she left office on November 29, 1990. The specific dates have been picked because, according to the majority of the research on Thatcher's ousting, Howe's resignation on November 1, 1990 marked the catalyst which resulted in Thatcher's departure. Thatcher's leadership had been in jeopardy before. In 1989 there had been a direct challenge to her leadership by Sir Anthony Meyer. Like any premier,

Thatcher had periods where her government was less popular than at other times. Research has illustrated Thatcher's departure as a result of both long term and short term effects. This thesis is interested in the short term reasons for Thatcher's departure. This month has been specifically chosen because it was not until Howe's resignation that speculation began about a possible challenge to her leadership. Howe's resignation, "reawakened deep divisions within the Conservative Party."⁵¹

This study is conducting a **census** because all editions of the newspapers are to be analysed. There are, however, limits which are included within the method to specifically focus the study on certain parts of the newspaper.

It is only editions of the newspapers which are published from Monday through to Friday which will be included in the study. This is because the format of the weekend editions of the newspapers are different. For example, more in-depth, investigative stories are printed. Moreover, the weekend editions of these newspapers are produced by a different newspaper company, although the weekend editions are owned by the same group of newspapers. If these sections of the newspapers were included, total average length of stories would be much longer and this would alter the results of the study. Moreover, with weekend editions of the newspapers being separate newspapers from the week's publications it would mean that six newspapers were being compared as opposed to only three. I have taken this method from research conducted by Erika King which compared

⁵¹ Alderman, R.K. & op cit.
Carter, N.

the content of *USA Today* and *The New York Times* during the presidential primaries of 1988.⁵²

Another limitation to the study is that only the front page and the national news sections of *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mail* will be examined. To determine which section of the newspapers are national news I will follow the newspapers' own sub-headings. Each newspaper labels the pages. It is normally the front section of the papers which are devoted to national news. This is equivalent to the 'A' section of American daily newspapers. The newspapers label the separate sections of their newspapers. The speciality pages will not be included in the research. For example, the newspapers have a specific 'economy' section. Again, to include these specialised sections of the newspapers would increase the total number of stories on a specific theme. This study is interested in the stories which the newspapers were reporting as national news, it is not interested in the lengthy insights that the newspapers may offer.

The Guardian often has a 'sketch' article on its front page. These articles are satires, not the reporting of the news events. For this reason, these articles are not included in the analysis. The articles are clearly labelled and, therefore, easy to identify.

Another limitation is that in the measurement of the stories, illustrations, headlines, pictures or tables are not to be included. Such pictorials greatly expand the length of an news story. If these were included in the measurement, paragraph length would be

⁵² King, E.G.

op cit

expanded and this would give a misleading result as to the actual length of the written paragraph.

The Daily Mail include editorial leader articles and small editorial comment on the front pages. Where this is the case, these articles will not be included in the content analysis. These particular articles are clearly labelled in the newspaper. Moreover, as an editorial suggests, these sections are not stories reporting the news, but journalistic opinion on an issue. For this section of analysis, we are only interested in the 'news' stories.

There are five thematic categories which have been designed to encompass the issues which relate to Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party. These are the five 'Thatcher' thematic categories. These themes have been decided by the political research which studied the ousting of Thatcher. They are:

1. The poll tax
2. The economy
3. Britain and the EEC
4. Thatcher's leadership style
5. Conservative Party disunity.

Operational definitions have been given to each of these thematic categories.*

The poll tax category is coded as either **poll tax** or **community charge**.

* See Appendix for coding protocol

The coding for the economy are stories dealing specifically with the **economy, inflation, unemployment, balance of payment.**⁵³

Britain and the EEC is a much more difficult area to define because it includes such a wide range of topics. For this study, the operational definition is: stories which are concerned with European monetary union and the problems which exist between Britain and her fellow Europeans. Any of the following, as long as they relate to the monetary union, and British and European relations are relevant: **Europe, Jacques Delors, exchange rate mechanism, EEC, EC, and monetary union.**

Thatcher's leadership style is coded as any news story written about **Thatcher** and her role as **prime minister**. If Thatcher appears, but then the news story refers to one of the other thematic categories it will depend what the news story is specifically referring to in determining which category the news story belongs in. For instance, if a story was written about a European summit and the content of the news story concentrated on Thatcher's handling of the summit then the news story would belong in this category; if, however, the news story mentioned Thatcher but was more interested in the problems of monetary union then the news story would be categorised under Britain and Europe.

⁵³ Sanders, D., Marsh, D. The Electoral Impact of Press Coverage of the British Economy, 1979-1987
& Ward, H. British Journal of Political Science, January 1993
Volume 23, Part 1

The coding to illustrate the thematic category of Conservative Party disunity is: stories specifically labelled as **Conservative Party disunity**, and references made to problems within the Conservative Party or a possible leadership contest.

Thematic categories have also been made for other stories which appeared in the newspaper during November 1990. These thematic categories are used when the comparison is made between how much newspaper coverage was given over to the Conservative Party and Margaret Thatcher compared to other news issues. The categories are:

1. EEC - the coding of which includes any news story about the EEC other than the definition offered in the category of Britain and the EEC.
2. Crime or Accidents - that is stories about crimes committed, alleged criminals, and any accidents.
3. National Government and Politics - any stories written about British politics not included in the five 'Thatcher' thematic categories.
4. International - the coding of which is any news story written about foreign countries, other than the EEC.
5. Human interest - this category incorporates anything about ordinary people who do interesting things, celebrities, and the Royal family.
6. Sport - any story written about sport.

7. Miscellaneous - any story which did not fit in one of the categories above and was an isolated report, for instance, the collapse of Barings Bank, or religion.

In coding the material we are looking at the overall context of the news story. The result will be to show the dominant themes that the newspapers concentrated on in November 1990.

To determine operational definitions on such topics is relatively difficult in so far as many of the issues are intertwined. The definitions have been decided with a knowledge of the research which has been done on the ousting of Margaret Thatcher and the characters who were involved in the politics of the issue. The definitions have also been devised using previous studies on similar issues.⁵⁴ It is for this reason that a coder reliability test must be done. Because the study has thematic categories it is possible to do a Scott *pi* coder reliability test*.

As has already been suggested, to make the system more precise the news story will be categorised once the whole story has been read. It is necessary to make this qualification because a news story which is headlined as referring to party disunity may focus primarily on the economy as the main factor and this would cause difficulty in the coding of the

⁵⁴ McDonald, D.G. Media Orientation and Television News Viewing
Journalism Quarterly, 1990

* Scott *pi* coder reliability test

$$pi = \frac{\% \text{ observed agreement} - \% \text{ expected agreement}}{1 - \% \text{ expected agreement}}$$

news story. Furthermore, an news story may be discussing an issue which is not relevant to the research, such as the liquidation of a company, and if this company had made donations to the Conservative Party this could be mentioned. This would make the news story a 'red herring' and would cause coding complications.

The content analysis is to measure the space given to each of the reports. Measuring the amount of space which allocated to each news story will illustrate the dominant issues which each newspaper reported.⁵⁵ This goes towards answering research question two, that is what were the dominant issues reported in *The Guardian*, *The Daily Mail* and *The Times* for the month of November, 1990. Once this has been established, the results will have implications to the press coverage of Thatcher's ousting in Britain. For instance, if the longest stories in *The Daily Mail* were on the issue of the poll tax this would imply that there is a lot to report on the issue. From here, one could tentatively conclude that the issue is more controversial, or more important than the other four issues because so much space has been given over to it. Moreover, the average length of stories in each thematic category can be compared in each newspaper. This would illustrate the different priorities of each newspaper. For example, *The Guardian's* lengthiest stories are on the economy, while *The Times* devotes more space to the Conservative Party disunity. This would suggest that *The Guardian* considers the economy to be the most important national issue, while *The Times* believes that the party disunity is what its reader's should be more informed about.

⁵⁵ Al-Enad, A.H.

Counting Items Versus Measuring Space in Content Analysis
Journalism Quarterly, Winter 1991
Volume 68, Number 4

The number of stories in each thematic category, for each newspaper will be counted. These results will offer the same implications as the results of the length of stories will. For example, *The Times* may have written the most stories on Europe during the month of November 1990, while *The Daily Mail's* majority of stories have been written on the party disunity. This would suggest that the priority of *The Times* is on the issues of Britain and Europe, while *The Daily Mail* believes that the country's most important news is the Tories' disunity. Ideally, the longest stories in each newspaper will also be the themes about which they have written the most. This would offer corroborating evidence, making the results more significant. Of course, the results might not be as accommodating as that. Not all the results from the different methods being used will necessarily reap the same results. Perhaps the *Times* has more stories about party disunity, but has written longer reports on Europe. This would suggest that the newspaper thinks that the European issue is more controversial, while its readers must also be kept abreast about the Conservative party disunity.

The results will be tabulated showing a comparison of story length and the relative attention devoted to the five story themes in the three British newspapers.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

According to Michael Singletary, qualitative research is the study of what something means to, and how it affects, a person.⁵⁶ This type of study is therefore intrinsic to this thesis. The first research aim is to examine the nature of the coverage in *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mail* of the last days of Thatcher's premiership. Measuring paragraphs and counting the number of stories on a particular issue will not alone answer this question.

This qualitative analysis is to be a descriptive, textual analysis of *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mail*. The aim of this qualitative study is to examine the issues which the newspapers carried under the thematic categories. It is a systematic study of all the news stories which are measured in the content analysis.

The stories will be studied under the same thematic categories as used in the content analysis. For the textual analysis, however, only the themes relevant to Thatcher and the Conservative Party will be studied: poll tax, economy, Britain and the EEC, Margaret Thatcher's leadership, and Conservative Party Disunity (as operationalised in the

⁵⁶ Singletary, M.

Mass Communication Research: Contemporary Methods and Applications
NY: Longman (1994) p268

quantitative method). This is because the aim of this method is to determine the nature of the newspaper coverage of Margaret Thatcher's turbulent days which resulted in her resignation. We are interested in what the newspapers were writing about Thatcher and the Conservative Party.

All of the stories which have been measured in the quantitative analysis will be read and a summary of the news story will be noted. By reading the news stories any bias which exists will be pointed out. I believe that there will be commonalities of the issues being discussed. The results will illustrate the context in which the topics under the thematic categorisation were discussed. Quotes will be used to demonstrate points. Where the different newspapers offer conflicting evidence, or reports, these will be highlighted. Just as if the newspapers all offer the same judgement on an issue this too will be examined.

This study will illustrate the nature of the newspapers' coverage on the thematic categories involved in the last days of Margaret Thatcher's premiership. The evidence will imply why certain issues were dominant in the newspapers for the month of November 1990, something that a content analysis can not do. It is an attempt to discover why the five 'Thatcher' thematic categories are considered integral to Thatcher's ousting from the point of view of the newspapers. A qualitative analysis will help to imply the partisanship of the newspapers.

This chapter has illustrated the method which is to be used for the research. It describes the quantitative method, which is to be a content analysis. It has been shown how the stories will be measured and what will determine which news stories are to be used. The chapter also shows how the qualitative analysis will be carried out and the merit in using such a descriptive method. As has already been explained, the use of both the quantitative and qualitative methods will improve the research as each method complements the other. Together they provide a better overall picture of the issues being researched and therefore, more precise results.

The next chapter in this research is the analysis itself. The chapter will describe the results of the research and tabulate the outcomes.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

The first research question was an examination of the press coverage during the month of November, 1990. That is, were the news stories that were written about Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party biased in their reporting.

To establish the bias which may exist in the news stories which were written in the *Daily Mail*, *The Times* and *The Guardian*, the number of sources in each story were counted. The news story was then categorised as being 'pro-Thatcher', 'anti-Thatcher', or 'equal'. Each newspaper's bias was then calculated according to the number of news stories which were under each category. The results are cumulative, the results offering an answer, therefore, only in relative terms.

Obviously, bias is relative and everybody sets a different limit to measure it. For this research, the average number of balanced stories for all the newspapers was taken. Anything above that, that is, if the newspapers printed more balanced stories than the average, was considered to be a very balanced newspaper. For the newspapers that printed less balanced reports than the average this newspaper was considered to be possibly biased. If the newspaper printed 10 per cent less balanced stories than the average the

newspaper had a slight bias. 20 per cent less and the newspaper definitely had a bias. 30 per cent less and the newspaper was very biased.

Table 1 - An Illustration of the Number of Anti-Thatcher and Pro-Thatcher News Stories in each of the Three Newspapers (in percentages).

	The Guardian	The Daily Mail	The Times	Total
Anti-Thatcher Sources	46	6	12	21
Pro-Thatcher Sources	0	40	9	13
Equal Number of Sources	54	54	79	65
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

In respect of this table, *The Daily Mail* was found to be, generally, a fair newspaper but only in so far as the majority of stories offered an equal number of pro-Thatcher and anti-Thatcher quotes. Over half of the stories that were printed were found to have an equal number of pro-Thatcher and anti-Thatcher sources. Of the *Daily Mail's* biased stories, the large majority were supportive of Thatcher.

The Guardian, similar to *The Daily Mail*, produced mainly an equal number of pro-Thatcher and anti-Thatcher quotes in its reports. What is significant, is that the stories which were biased were all anti-Thatcher; the *Guardian* published no news stories which had more pro-Thatcher quotes than anti-Thatcher quotes.

Comparatively with *The Daily Mail* and *The Guardian*, *The Times* newspaper was the most balanced and unbiased. Of 130 stories, 79 per cent of the papers' stories were equal, in that they contained the same number of pro-Thatcher and anti-Thatcher quotes. Moreover, there were a similar number of anti-Thatcher and pro-Thatcher stories.

Each newspaper produced more equally argued reports in terms of sources quoted than biased reports. 54% of the stories written by *The Guardian* contained an equal number of pro-Thatcher and anti-Thatcher quotes. *The Daily Mail* also had 54% of its stories giving an equal number to both anti-Thatcher and pro-Thatcher quotes. What is significant, however, is that a large proportion of the stories in *The Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* were unequal. In *The Guardian* newspaper, any stories which were not balancing the number of pro-Thatcher and anti-Thatcher quotes were all stories containing far more quotes which were unsympathetic towards Thatcher compared to quotes which complimented her. 40% of the stories in *The Daily Mail* offered opinions in favour of Thatcher, while only 6% of the stories quoted more opinions disparaging Thatcher than complimenting her.

In contrast to *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mail*, 79% of the stories which appeared in *The Times* offered as many pro-Thatcher as anti-Thatcher quotes in their coverage. Of the stories which were unequal in giving the same number of quotes from supporters and critics of Thatcher, 12% of the stories were unbalanced quoting more people who

disagreed with Thatcher. 9% of the stories which appeared in *The Times* quoted Thatcher's supporters more than her critics.

Bias is relative in all cases. For this element of the research we can ascertain bias by taking the total number of balanced stories and comparing them against each newspaper's performance. Of all three newspapers 76 per cent of all the stories were balanced. Only 54 per cent of the reports which appeared in *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mail* were balanced. Although, of itself a total of over 50 percent balanced news stories being written is reasonable, when compared to the total of all the newspapers 54 percent is well below this figure of 76 per cent. It is from this point that it can be suggested that *The Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* were biased in their reporting of the events in November 1990. *The Daily Mail* concentrated on sources which were in favour of Margaret Thatcher, while *The Guardian* preferred to quote more people who criticised Margaret Thatcher.

In all three cases, the number of balanced stories out-numbered the stories which were biased. Overall, *The Times* offered the most extensive coverage of Thatcher which was balanced. *The Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* definitely paid more attention to one side of the Thatcher debate than the other.

The second research question was to examine the dominant issues in the coverage of Margaret Thatcher's departure from political office and all other news stories which were in the newspapers during November 1990.

The first part of this question was to examine the amount of newspaper coverage the issues directly related to Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party received, compared to the space given over to all other news issues.

To determine which categories relating to Margaret Thatcher received the most attention two procedures were used: the first procedure was to count the number of stories which were written under each of the five thematic categories - poll tax, economy, Britain and the EEC, Thatcher's leadership style, Conservative Party disunity; the second procedure was to measure the total length of print which was written under each theme.

The first stage of the procedure was to see which subjects in the newspapers got the most space; this procedure included the stories which were not related to Thatcher and the Conservative Party.*

The results for *The Daily Mail* newspaper show that the stories which received the most attention in its issues during November 1990 were stories connected to the Conservative Party disunity. Total length (in inches) given over to this issue was 495.5. The issue which ranked second in the amount of space that the *Mail* devoted to it for this period is stories about 'crime'. The third on the list is joint between stories about Margaret Thatcher and her leadership style, and national government and politics issues.

* See Table 2

Table 2 - An Illustration of the Length of Stories for all Topics as they appeared in the Newspapers (in percentages).

	The Guardian	The Daily Mail	The Times
Story Themes	Total Length	Total Length	Total Length
Poll Tax	4	1	2
Economy	3	1	5
Britain and the EEC	2	1	5
Thatcher's Leadership Style	6	11	7
Conservative Party Disunity	16	16	17
EEC	10	8	9
Crime or Accidents	11	14	14
National Government and Politics	13	11	15
International	10	9	12
Human Interest	8	10	5
Sport	8	8	3
Miscellaneous	9	10	6
Total	100%	100%	100%

From the data that was gathered, one can see that the issues about Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party were given a lot of attention in the pages of the *Daily Mail*. Of all the issues connected to Thatcher and her government *The Daily Mail* paid most attention to the Conservative Party disunity. In total 30% of *The Daily Mail's* coverage during November 1990 was devoted to the Thatcher issues.

Like *The Daily Mail*, *The Guardian's* pages concentrated on the Conservative Party disunity. 879.5 inches were written on this topic. The second most written about theme in this newspaper was 'national government and politics'. The topic which ranked third in space was 'crime'.

The theme of Conservative Party disunity was *The Guardian's* most important topic during November 1990, if importance is ranked by the number of inches written. Similar to *The Daily Mail*, *The Guardian* devoted 31% of its coverage to categories referring to Thatcher.

The Times like the other two newspapers, paid most attention to Conservative Party disunity during the month of November 1990. This issue had 924.5 inches devoted to it. The second most important topic was again about 'national government and politics'. The third topic to receive the most space in this newspaper were stories related to 'crime'. In *The Times* 36% of the content was stories relating to Thatcher and the Conservative Party.

In all three newspapers, *The Daily Mail*, *The Guardian* and *The Times*, a large percentage of their daily coverage was given over to Margaret Thatcher, and the Conservative Party. For all three newspapers, around 30% of their news stories that month were given over to the topic. *The Times* newspaper paid most attention to Thatcher and the issues of Conservative Party disunity, her own leadership style, Europe, the economy and the poll tax. In all, 36% of the newspaper's coverage was devoted to these issues. *The Guardian* was not far behind, having 31% of its news stories focusing on these issues. *The Daily Mail* paid the least attention to the issues of Thatcher and the Conservatives. But, even so,

30% of its news stories for November 1990 were concentrated on Thatcher and her government.

Conservative Party disunity was the topic which all three newspapers paid the most attention to for the month of November 1990. This issue ranked as number one for having the most amount of space given over to it in *The Daily Mail*, *The Guardian* and *The Times* newspapers. The newspapers also gave a lot of space to the issues of national government and politics, and crime. In all three newspapers the topics of national government, and crime were either second or third in the ranking as the amount of paragraph space given to each topic.

To determine which issues relating to Margaret Thatcher received the most attention the number of stories written about each theme were counted. The second procedure was to measure the amount of space which was given to each theme. The results of these measurements are tabulated below.

Table 3 illustrates the story lengths of the thematic categories, and the number of news stories which were written on each theme which were published in *The Daily Mail*, *The Guardian* and *The Times*, during November 1990.

Story length is an indicator of the depth of information which is included in an news story. Using this information we can calculate which issue relevant to Thatcher and the Conservative Party was most reported on and frequently explained in the newspapers.

Table 3 - An Illustration of Space Given to The Thematic Categories

	The Guardian	The Daily Mail	The Times	All Three
Story Themes	Total Space	Total Space	Total Space	Total Space
Poll Tax	12	4	5	7
Economy	9	3	16	9
Britain and the EEC	7	3	13	8
Thatcher's Leadership Style	20	35	19	25
Conservative Party Disunity	52	56	47	51
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

The most simple way to disseminate the results are by ranking the story themes. For this study the ranking order will be determined by the number of inches which appeared under each thematic category in each of the newspapers for November 1990. The thematic category of 'Conservative Party Disunity' was the number one issue for all three newspapers. It was number one, having more inches than any of the other themes, and more stories written on the issue than any other issue. *The Times* devoted most space to topic of the Conservative Party disunity with a total of 924.5 inches, 58 stories. This amounted to being 47% of all the coverage related to Thatcher and her government which appeared in *The Times* in November 1990. Although the other two newspapers devoted

less space to the issue of the Conservative Party disunity, as a proportion of the coverage they did of the Thatcher issue as a whole it was greater than that of *The Times*.

As a proportion of length given to all the five story themes in *The Daily Mail*, the Conservative Party disunity accounted for 56% of the inches. There were 34 stories written on this subject, with a total of 495.5 inches.

Proportionally, *The Guardian* gave 52% of its total coverage on the Thatcher issue over to the topic of the Conservative Party disunity.

All of the three newspapers printed more inches on the subject of the Conservative Party disunity than any other theme. The theme which is second in priority as far as column inches are concerned is that of Margaret Thatcher's leadership style. *The Guardian* printed 345 inches, 18 stories on the subject. *The Daily Mail* published 24 news stories about Thatcher's leadership style. This totalled 308 inches on the subject. *The Times* newspaper wrote 367 inches about the leadership style of Margaret Thatcher. This equalled 20 news stories.

As a proportion of inches written on all five themes *The Times* and *The Guardian* newspapers gave 20% of their coverage over to the issue of Thatcher's leadership style. In contrast, *The Daily Mail* had the issue of Thatcher's leadership style taking up 35% of their total coverage of all the five themes.

As far as rank ordering goes, for the other three thematic categories, *The Daily Mail*, *The Guardian* and *The Times* newspapers did not reflect the same priorities. The issue of the economy was the third most important theme as far as inches in *The Times*. But *The Guardian* and *Daily Mail* newspapers gave more space to the issue of the poll tax.

The thematic category of the economy had 300.75 inches written about it in *The Times*. This came to 15% of the newspaper's total coverage on all the five thematic categories. *The Guardian* newspaper ranked the issue of the poll tax over the subject of the economy. This paper devoted 199.5 inches to the poll tax. This translated to proportionally 12% of its coverage of all five themes. *The Daily Mail* printed 31 inches about the poll tax; this is 3% of the coverage it devoted to all the five thematic categories.

Both *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mail* ranked, in terms of column inches, the theme of the economy as the fourth most important topic. *The Guardian* published 151 inches about the economy, which is calculated as 9% of the coverage proportionally. On the topic of the economy, *The Daily Mail* gave 29.25 inches. This is proportionally of the paper's coverage.

The Times newspaper published 258 inches about Britain and the EEC in the month of November 1990. This makes this theme the fourth in the ranking for this newspaper. Proportionally, this means that 13% of the inches that *The Times* wrote about the five

issues pertaining to Thatcher and her government were devoted to the topic of Britain and the EEC.

Using inches as the barometer for ranking importance, *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mail* believed that the subject of Britain and the EEC was the least important to Thatcher's demise during the month of November 1990. *The Daily Mail* published a total of 27.75 inches about Britain and the EEC. Once again, this is 3% of its total coverage on the five themes. *The Guardian* gave Britain and the EEC 109 inches. This is calculated to be 7% of their coverage.

The Times newspaper's bottom ranking as far as the five Thatcher themes are concerned is the issue of the poll tax. *The Times* gave 105 inches over to this topic. This is actually proportionally 6% of the coverage that the newspaper gave to all the five thematic categories.

The table shows that the news stories written about the Conservative Party disunity were the longest. All three newspapers devoted far more space to this theme than any of the other themes. Proportionally, all the newspapers gave around 50% of their total coverage on the five themes to stories about the Conservative Party disunity. *The Daily Mail* proportionally paid the most attention to the issue of the Conservative Party disunity, having 56% of its stories about Thatcher and her government being on the subject of the Conservative Party disunity. *The Times* newspaper, proportionally gave the least amount

of space to the issue of the Conservative Party disunity, compared with the other two newspapers. *The Times* had 47% on the issue of the disunity; *The Guardian* had 52% of its overall coverage about the disunity.

The high proportion of space which was given over to the theme of the Conservative Party disunity suggests that the issue of the Conservative Party disunity was the dominant theme in November 1990. It can therefore, be tentatively concluded that it was this issue which led to Margaret Thatcher's ousting.

The results of this measurement also illustrate that Thatcher's own leadership style was a dominant issue during November 1990. Again all three newspapers, in terms of inches, thought that this theme was the second most important as far as the five thematic themes relevant to Thatcher's resignation are concerned. The dominance theme is that of Thatcher's leadership style as illustrated by the length of the stories written on the subject again suggest that this was a predominant reason for her ousting in November, 1990.

The Daily Mail gave the shortest space to Britain and the EEC. This suggests that *The Daily Mail* newspaper thought that the issue of Britain and the EEC was the least significant factor in the political difficulties which Margaret Thatcher came to face during November, 1990.

This table illustrates that, similar to the *Mail*, *The Guardian* concentrated on stories involving the Conservative Party disunity, reiterating the suggestion that the issue of the Conservative Party disunity was the dominant theme in November 1990.

As has already been shown in the table for *The Daily Mail*, Thatcher's own leadership style was a dominant issue during November 1990 in *The Daily Mail*.

Like *The Daily Mail*, *The Guardian* gave the minimum space to the issue of Britain and the EEC. This suggests that the newspapers agreed about which of the issues relating to the Conservative Party disunity were the more significant after Thatcher's own leadership style. This point cannot be over-emphasised, however, because the number of stories written about the economy, Britain and the EEC, and the poll tax are very similar. What is perhaps the most important point is that Conservative Party disunity and Thatcher's leadership style were at the top of the newspapers' agendas, while the other three issues were comparatively less important and secondary. In calculating the proportion of space which was given to each theme we can see how similar the newspapers are in the amount of space that they give to each thematic category.

Like the other two newspapers, the issue of Conservative Party disunity was by far the most dominant of *The Times'* coverage. Again, secondary to that issue was Thatcher's leadership style in the total length of space. What is different about the coverage of *The*

Times is that they wrote more reports about the British economy than were written about Thatcher's style of leadership.

The issue which *The Times* covered the least was the poll tax. This difference in agenda compared with *The Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* suggests that the press had differing opinions as to which topics relating to the departure of Margaret Thatcher were the most important at the time. A lot fewer stories and a lot less space was devoted to this topic than to the others.

The qualitative analysis was included in the research in order to create a more defined view of the nature of the coverage of Margaret Thatcher's last month in office, which ended in her resignation.

The catalyst which resulted in the political trouble for Mrs Thatcher was the resignation of Sir Geoffrey Howe, the deputy prime minister. Sir Geoffrey resigned on Thursday, the 1st of November 1990.

Gordon Greig was the political editor for *The Daily Mail* at this time. He wrote in the lead story, "The resignation of the Deputy Prime Minister came out of the blue and shook the Tory party to the core." Greig blamed Howe's resignation on a "total political split over Europe." By the fourth paragraph in the story Greig wrote: "Whether or not she [Thatcher] continues as the leader of the party remains to be seen."

The Guardian newspaper's lead story was not the details of Howe's resignation; their headline said: "MPs braced for new leadership challenge." Michael White and Alan Travis wrote in this story: "Despite Sir Geoffrey Howe's categorical denial, some Conservative MPs last night remained convinced that a tide of support would make him announce a challenge to Mrs Thatcher's leadership."

Robin Oakley and Phillip Webster of *The Times* opened their story explaining that: "Sir Geoffrey Howe resigned last night at Margaret Thatcher's attitude to the European Community exposing the raw nerves and bitter divisions in the Tory party." They explained Howe's resignation as : "the most damaging of a long series of departures from Mrs Thatcher's government."

In the same news story Oakley and Webster addressed the question as to whether the resignation of Howe would lead to a challenge to Thatcher's leadership. They wrote that: "His arrival on the backbenches will open questions about Mrs Thatcher's position."

All three newspapers stated their belief, after Howe's resignation, that Thatcher was now in danger of being challenged for her leadership of the Conservative Party. All the newspapers went on to say, however, that they felt Thatcher would override the growing disunity in the party. For example, on 2 November 1990, the *Guardian* wrote: "The Party

will be shaken in a time of increasing turmoil, but will try its best, at least in public, to rally round. But the sense of a need, at last, to challenge her supremacy is likely to grow.”

At this early stage in November, it was apparent that the European issue was at the centre of Howe’s resignation and the topic over which any antagonistic feeling towards Mrs Thatcher lay because of her handling of the European issue. This suggestion was covered in the lead stories in both *The Times* and *The Guardian*.

The newspapers were already indicating where their support lay. *The Guardian* was distinctly anti-Thatcher and eager to see a challenge to her leadership. *The Daily Mail*, although decidedly critical of Thatcher’s stance on Europe, was firmly in her corner: “Margaret Thatcher is a great leader. Her constancy of purpose continues to shame the rank opportunism of a copycat Opposition [the Labour Party].” *The Times* felt that Howe’s resignation was a blow to Thatcher but said: “She will survive it.”

Already at this early stage we can see the political affiliations which have been suggested by previous research. *The Daily Mail* which is a traditionally Conservative and Thatcherite newspaper was firmly behind her in the event of a challenge to her leadership. *The Guardian*, traditionally a liberal paper was all for a challenge to her leadership. Given Thatcher’s traditional Conservative views this was a fairly predictable response. *The Times* newspaper was more wary of proffering too many conclusions only stating that the belief

was that Thatcher would survive Howe's resignation and any possible challenge to her leadership.

As events started to unfold, the newspapers were looking to Michael Heseltine as the only Conservative MP who was likely to challenge Thatcher for her position. Heseltine was a long-time rival to Thatcher, having left her Cabinet in 1986 following the 'Westland Affair'. His ambition to topple Thatcher for her leadership was publicly known and the rebel MPs were looking to him to launch the challenge.

The lead story written by Nicholas Wood in *The Times* newspaper on Monday, November 5th was headlined as: "Thatcher moves to fight off Heseltine threat." The story went on to say that: "The prime minister and her most senior cabinet ministers will this week lead a concerted effort to end mounting speculation about a challenge to her leadership." Wood quoted a Downing Street source who had said that Thatcher was: "regarding Mr Heseltine's 'naked' bid for power with 'disdain and contempt.'"

The Daily Mail's Gordon Greig also led with a story about a possible challenge to Thatcher's leadership from Heseltine. He wrote: "Michael Heseltine's new attack on Thatcher has left him facing pressure to go all the way and challenge for the Tory leadership." Greig went on to say that: "Mr Heseltine's timing, international or not, may have left him at a personal cross-roads...Both friends and enemies are suggesting that he

has no option but to put up or shut up. The question that everyone was asking was: Does he have the political courage to fight it out openly with Mrs Thatcher?"

The Guardian's main news story was also about Heseltine and Thatcher. Michael White wrote: "The prospects of a Michael Heseltine inspired challenge to Mrs Thatcher's leadership of the Conservative Party prompted a counter-attack last night...Last night, however, a challenge looked as remote as ever."

We can see from the reports that the newspaper gave their differing stances on a possible challenge to Thatcher's leadership from Michael Heseltine. Greig was in a challenging mood himself writing a story which was almost daring Heseltine to confront Thatcher. He suggested that Heseltine should "put up or shut up", and his use of language when asking the question whether Heseltine would actually do it was also an illustration of this.

Nicholas Wood for *The Times* wrote a more conservative story looking at the political manoeuvring which was occurring in order to stave off any threat of a challenge to Thatcher. The lead title of his story really is an all-encompassing statement illustrating exactly what the newspaper felt was happening. *The Guardian*, in contrast, seemed to be reticent on the point of a possible challenge from Heseltine. By suggesting that any such challenge would be "inspired" the impression is that the newspaper would like to see it happen. When White wrote that the possibility seemed remote it illustrates the idea that he is disappointed that a challenge had already not begun.

The newspapers took up the vigil to watch and follow Heseltine's movements in the next month. Initially, he denied any ambition to challenge Thatcher. But, by the end of the first week in November, the newspapers were speculating, and commenting on, the events that they would like to see unfold.

Gordon Grieg, *The Daily Mail's* political editor wrote on the day of Sir Geoffrey's resignation that: "Whether or not she [Thatcher] carries out an ambitious reshuffle of her top team remains to be seen...as does the question of her continued leadership of the Conservative Party." This newspaper was evaluating likely challengers to Thatcher's leadership, describing Heseltine as "Machiavelli." Greig went on to suggest that the whole point of Heseltine's attack was because his ultimate aim was an election challenge.

On the same issue, Michael White, of *The Guardian*, reported: "Sir Geoffrey last night delivered what may be the final blow to Thatcher's leadership when he suddenly resigned as deputy prime minister." Patrick Wintour, *The Guardian's* political correspondent wrote: "The prospects of a Michael Heseltine inspired leadership challenge to Mrs Thatcher's leadership of the Conservative Party prompted a counter-attack last night as ministerial heavy artillery was wheeled into place to try to crush a revolt before it has time to organise."

The Times was also speculating that a challenge to the Tory leadership would come from Michael Heseltine. Christopher Walker from the newspaper described Heseltine as: "Mrs Thatcher's main rival for power." The newspaper believed that Thatcher would spend the week "fighting off the Heseltine threat." Nicholas Wood wrote: "The prime minister and her most senior cabinet colleagues will this week lead a concerted effort to end mounting speculation about a challenge to her leadership."

From the passages that have been illustrated we can see that *The Daily Mail* was firmly against any challenge to Thatcher. If, in the event there was a challenge, they would support Thatcher to the end. The newspaper indicated its belief that the idea of a challenge to Thatcher was not at all farfetched, but, in the event, Thatcher should win.

The Times took a different view, stating that Heseltine should indeed challenge Thatcher for the leadership. Like *The Daily Mail* the newspaper did think that Sir Geoffrey's resignation was an indication that Thatcher's continued unopposed leadership was in doubt. At this stage there was no comment as to what result they would like to see if there was a challenge to Thatcher's leadership of the Conservative Party.

Unsurprisingly, *The Guardian* wanted to see Heseltine challenge Thatcher, and they wanted to see him win. This newspaper was certain that the resignation of Sir Geoffrey was the catalyst which would result in a leadership challenge. Wintour managed to give

the impression in this news story that Thatcher was definitely in fear of losing a battle that had yet to begin.

The Guardian's depiction that Thatcher was running scared was supported when on Tuesday, November 6, 1990, Thatcher set a deadline for a leadership challenge for Conservative leadership nominations as November 15. *The Daily Mail* described this as: "The Premier is throwing down the gauntlet to Michael Heseltine and daring him to pick it up." *The Guardian* stated that: "Mrs Thatcher is facing her loneliest month since she ever entered office."

On this day the news focused on Thatcher's stance on Europe. Her foreign secretary, Douglas Hurd, was reported in all three newspapers to be pleading with his party colleagues to remain united and not let the issue of Europe split the Tories. Paul Eastham, from *The Daily Mail* described Hurd's speech as a "dramatic plea...powerful and carefully crafted."

The Guardian described the speech as Hurd smoothing the rumour-ridden Tories with a calm Euro policy. Patrick Wintour said of the Conservative Party that they were reeling and worried about the possibility of a leadership challenge. He went on to say that: "a concerted diplomatic effort is underway," in order that Thatcher can retain her leadership without a challenge.

The Times newspaper felt that there was indeed a threat being posed to Thatcher's leadership. The news story described the support that Thatcher was receiving from her colleagues and the fact that Hurd was "steering the party through choppy waters of European policy."

The political news continued for the rest of the week to discuss the possibility of Heseltine challenging Thatcher, even though Heseltine was staunchly disregarding any such idea. There were reflections on Thatcher's performance as regard to Europe, with reports in all three newspapers that the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) was warning that the government should be more accepting; Europe was an important factor for industry and the economy.

On November 13, Sir Geoffrey Howe delivered his resignation speech in the House of Commons. Once again, the newspapers turned their attention to Heseltine - there were only two more days left for nominations to be entered for the post of the Conservative Party leadership.

The Times reported that: "Howe's resignation speech in the Commons has left Margaret Thatcher battling for survival in the Tory leadership contest, which is expected to be launched today by a declaration from Michael Heseltine that he will run." *The Guardian* stated that: "Margaret Thatcher and her embattled supporters were last night clearing the

decks for mortal battle after Sir Geoffrey Howe offered a stunned House of Commons the most damning indictment of a prime minister by a senior colleague in living memory.”

The Daily Mail took a different angle to the other two newspapers, suggesting that it was Thatcher who was in attacking, as opposed to a defending, position: “A defiant Margaret Thatcher carried the Tory leadership battle to Michael Heseltine last night, daring him to come out and fight.”

All the newspapers suggested that if Thatcher was in a weak position it was due to her style of leadership and because of her continuing, uncompromising position on Europe.

On November 15 Heseltine announced his intention to stand against Thatcher in the Conservative Party leadership election. The newspapers took their corners for the fight.

The Times was backing Thatcher, but felt that: “No lasting harm need to be done by putting that leadership to test.” *The Daily Mail* declared that: “He [Heseltine] is to joust in single combat against the greatest peacetime leader Britain has enjoyed this century,” suggesting that they did not believe Heseltine could win. *The Guardian*, however, held a different opinion: “The Prime Minister’s position is intractably hopeless. She heads a government running out of time. She looks a loser; at last.”

By November 16, the battle lines had been set. Heseltine was to fight for the leadership on the issues of the poll tax and Europe. This suggests that these two issues were the main causes of the Conservative Party disunity. Thatcher’s leadership style was fundamental to

the position which the government took on both these issues. *The Mail* described the poll tax as being Heseltine's "trump card." *The Guardian* and *Times* newspapers concentrated on the opinion polls which were published following Heseltine's declaration to stand against Thatcher. The polls showed that if Heseltine were to win the Conservatives would gain a 10-point lead in the polls against the Labour Party - at the time, the Conservatives were trailing 14 to 16 points behind Labour.

The leadership election was set for November 20. By the beginning of the week the newspapers were focusing on the campaigns of the contenders. The newspapers also began speculating about what the party would do if Thatcher lost the first election. All the newspapers proffered likely contenders who would join the contest if Thatcher failed to get an outright win. They all agreed that John Major (Chancellor of the Exchequer) and Douglas Hurd (Foreign Secretary) would enter the race if this became the case. This is because both of these men were sympathetic toward Europe, while at the same time, loyal supporters of Thatcher.

On Tuesday, 20 November, *The Times*, for the first time, came firmly down in support of Thatcher: "It would rank even higher in the catalogue of ingratitude than Churchill's 1945 election defeat." *The Daily Mail* continued to rally for Thatcher: "Margaret Thatcher has shown strength and judgement in a shifting world. And she continues to do so." In contrast, *The Guardian* suggested that Thatcher could not: "save her tottering throne."

Mrs Thatcher won the first ballot, but not decisively. A second ballot had to be scheduled. Thatcher immediately declared her determination to fight on - with a mixed reception from the newspapers. *The Guardian* claimed that she was being "ungracious" by not bowing out. *The Daily Mail* described her failure to win at the first hurdle as: "A political tragedy...may heaven forgive the engineers." *The Times* said that Thatcher fights: "inelegantly, but fiercely." They went on to say that: "She has suffered an all but lethal blow." In short, *The Times* and *The Guardian* inferred that Mrs Thatcher should resign, because even if she won the second ballot her authority had diminished. *The Mail* suggested no such thing.

The following day, Thatcher was determined to fight on, however, all the newspapers were commenting on the fact that there was decreasing support for her among the Cabinet colleagues. *The Daily Mail* described this lack of support as a mutiny: "There is the smell of personal opportunism as allegiances shifted and principles are traded in by the Tory MPs who owe so much to the beleaguered leader." *The Times* was using similar metaphors: "In went the grey suits. They laid the pistol on the table and tiptoed out." *The Guardian* was not so sympathetic in its rhetoric: "She knows the damage she is doing."

On 23 November Thatcher resigned. *The Guardian* surprisingly, did not revel in this finale. If anything, the newspaper was incredibly sympathetic. The mood of the news story was one of admiration for Thatcher bowing out of the race and in so doing allowing her loyal supporters to enter it. *The Times* continued its metaphor of the previous day: "She

picked up the pistol after all. The grey suits had their way.” The paper went on to say that: “Her going is monstrously cruel.” *The Daily Mail* was full of accolades for the resigning Prime Minister: “She did so with the magnificent class that she alone of British politicians can produce...defended her record with the speech of a lifetime.”

The brief review of the newspapers’ coverage of Margaret Thatcher during the final month of November 1990 illustrate several points. The support, or lack of support, which each newspaper gave to Thatcher was in tune with the existing theory of the bias of the individual newspapers.

The evidence supports the view that *The Daily Mail* unreservedly supported her, while *The Times* offered a more balanced view, only coming down on Thatcher’s side when the going got tough. *The Guardian* was unsupportive of Thatcher, although it never claimed to be in support of the Opposition.

Throughout this month we can see that *The Guardian* newspaper was encouraged by the idea that another politician might challenge Thatcher for the leadership. *The Guardian* believed that there should be a new Conservative leader, basically because of Thatcher’s personality. This view is a reflection of previous research indicating the newspaper’s liberal attitude to politics.

The Daily Mail resented Heseltine in this scenario and blamed him for many of the troubles which Thatcher faced. *The Times*, in contrast, was not critical of Heseltine and blamed Thatcher for the leadership battle because of her uncompromising personality - especially in the handling of Sir Geoffrey Howe.

The Times newspaper during the month of November 1990 did not appear shocked or disheartened by a possible challenge to Thatcher's leadership. Oakley even suggested that it would do the Conservative Party no harm to go through the democratic process of re-electing Thatcher. The point, however, that does come across is that when Thatcher is challenged, the paper wants Thatcher to win. This paper described the Conservatives who were in favour of a new leader as showing ingratitude to their leader. They compared her treatment to that of Churchill's when he lost the general election after the Second World War.

This qualitative analysis illustrated that although *The Daily Mail* supported Thatcher, they were critical of her stand on Europe. The two other newspapers also criticised her position on Europe but were equally critical about her whole leadership style. *The Daily Mail* is traditionally not only a Conservative paper, but during the Thatcher years it was considered a Thatcherite paper. It's obvious disdain, therefore, for anybody who challenged Thatcher's leadership was to be expected. For instance, describing Heseltine as Machiavelli for considering a challenge is evidence enough that Thatcher was a popular leader in the opinion of this newspaper.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This study began with the aim of answering three research questions:

- 1. Was the political coverage in *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mail* during November 1990 biased?**
- 2. What were the dominant issues in the newspapers during the last month of Thatcher's premiership?**
- 3. What, if any, are the implications for press performance and party politics as a result of this research?**

The aim of question one was to examine the newspapers' bias, either for Thatcher, or against Thatcher, during her last month in office. The question was not, however, simply looking to determine the partisanship of the newspapers. This question was also to study whether coverage of Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party overrode newspaper coverage of other issues. Finally, this question was asking for an analysis of what the newspapers were actually saying about Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party during this month.

The first method that was used to examine the nature of the coverage that took place in November 1990 was to look at the raw figures as to the number of pro-Thatcher, or anti-

Thatcher quotes which were used in news stories for this month. The evidence supports the research of Seymour-Ure that *The Times* values principles above party politics, while *The Guardian* is more politically liberal and *The Daily Mail* is a right-wing newspaper.

This study showed that *The Guardian* published only news stories with either an equal number of pro-Thatcher and anti-Thatcher sources quoted, or stories with more anti-Thatcher than pro-Thatcher sources. *The Daily Mail* was at the other extreme, where either most of the stories had the same number of pro-Thatcher and anti-Thatcher quotes in the text, or the majority of the other stories contained more pro-Thatcher as opposed to anti-Thatcher quotes. In contrast to both these newspapers, most of the stories in *The Times* had an equal number of pro-Thatcher and anti-Thatcher quotes. For the stories which were unbalanced, in regard to quotes, *The Times* had almost an even number of stories which had more anti-Thatcher quotes, as it did have stories which had more pro-Thatcher quotes.

From this evidence it can be suggested that *The Guardian* newspaper was more inclined to quote people with negative things to say about Thatcher than either *The Daily Mail* or *The Times* was. Conversely, *The Daily Mail* was more likely to quote unbalanced supportive comments about Thatcher than either *The Times* or *The Guardian*. *The Times* was the newspaper to read if you wanted to be almost sure that any story you read would be balanced as far as offering an equal number of pro-Thatcher and anti-Thatcher quotes in each item.

Of the five thematic categories which encompass the issues which were at the fore of the political agenda during November 1990 (Conservative Party disunity, Margaret Thatcher's leadership style, Britain and the EEC, the poll tax, and the economy) the issue of Conservative Party disunity was given the most space by all three newspapers. As a result of this, one can conclude that this was the pivotal issue which led to Thatcher's resignation. For all three newspapers, 50 per cent of the coverage that they devoted to Thatcher and her resignation dealt with the Conservative Party disunity.

The second most important issue, as far as the newspapers were concerned (if inches is a measure of importance) was Margaret Thatcher's own leadership style. A self-confessed executive, as opposed to consultative style leader, Thatcher alienated her colleagues by her high handed manner. The fact that *The Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The Daily Mail* ranked her leadership style as second most important issue is evidence that this was a significant factor which led to a challenge to her leadership.

The conclusion from these results also offer an insight into the question of whether the politics creates the news, or the newspapers actually create the politics. As has been shown there is a definite correlation between all the newspapers in the amount of space they gave to the issue of the Conservative Party disunity and to Thatcher's leadership style. The only explanation for this can be that the disunity actually did exist and that these newspapers were covering it. Bearing in mind what we know about how the journalists

received the majority of their political news (through the Lobby system) it must have been the fact that all the reports they were getting were hinting at a breach in Tory unity and Thatcher's own leadership style being questioned.

It is certainly fair to assume that an individual paper could create the impression of a crisis where one did not exist, but in this case it would be impossible. If, for instance, *The Guardian* had made the decision to challenge Thatcher in its paper it could well do this. It could use up a lot of its space writing about her leadership style. But, if it were just the aim of *The Guardian* the other newspapers would not cover the issue in so much depth, if at all. The fact that all three newspapers printed so many news stories about the Conservative Party disunity can only be explained by the fact that the party was indeed suffering from a split between its members. The newspapers were reporting the news.

What must not be overlooked in reaching this conclusion is the fact that each newspaper probably had a different motivation for wanting to tell its readers as much about what was going on as possible. From what we have researched in this study, and using previous research one can assume that *The Times* newspaper covered the Conservative Party disunity in so much detail because it wanted its readers to be as well informed as possible, thus retaining its reputation as the most informative and balanced of newspapers.

The Daily Mail's motivation for printing so many news stories was probably a little different. *The Mail* is a right-wing newspaper with a lot of respect for Thatcher. The paper

will have printed all the reports in order to suggest that things were not as bad as they seemed for Thatcher; and in the event that she was challenged to ensure that at least its readers would recognise the injustice and stupidity with which Thatcher's critics in her own party were behaving.

As we already know, *The Guardian* is a liberal, left-wing newspaper. To see Thatcher challenged would represent the battle of the employees over their employers. *The Guardian* wanted its readers to know that not even Thatcher was invincible. Moreover, Thatcher's policies being as right-wing as they were, *The Guardian* would gladly report the problems that right-wing politicians faced from their own colleagues if they espoused too many far-right policies.

The newspapers established an agenda when they covered Thatcher's demise in November 1990. Each newspaper gave most of its space to Thatcher's political style and to internal disunity within the Conservative Party. The Conservative Party disunity was top of the agenda. The newspapers were definitely reporting on an issue which existed. The question must be whether they managed to take that issue and turn it into a three ring circus. Just as this study shows that the newspapers had different motivations for covering the Conservative Party disunity, it also shows that these three newspapers had a common purpose. The study supports Norton's view that the press would react as soon as there was a chance of a battle between Heseltine and Thatcher. After Sir Geoffrey's resignation, when rumours of a leadership challenge to Thatcher began, all three newspapers jumped

when Heseltine criticised the prime minister. Once it was established that Heseltine disagreed with many of Thatcher's policies many of the newspaper stories debated the idea that Heseltine should or would challenge Thatcher. This suggests that perhaps the press forced an issue which might have blown over.

The ranking of the three remaining thematic categories varied in the individual newspapers. The issue of the economy was placed third in order of importance by *The Times*, while *The Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* placed this subject as fourth. For *The Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* the third most important topic was the poll tax.

This is perhaps quite a predictable result. *The Guardian* is a liberal newspaper, and the issue of the poll tax was a liberal issue. People power finally persuaded the Conservative government that its introduction was miscalculated. At the time, the people fought hard battles to convince the Tories of their error. It was also a far-right political policy, and so, understandably, an issue dear to the heart of *The Guardian*. In contrast, *The Daily Mail* is a tabloid newspaper. Its aim is to provide news at a more understandable level, to a wider readership than the quality press. Because people were rioting in the streets and holding meetings to condemn the poll tax it is understandable that *The Daily Mail* thought it a more significant issue than the economy.

The Times is a quality newspaper renowned for its level-headed reporting. The poll tax was an emotive issue, the economy a more standard political issue, therefore, it is understandable why this newspaper ranked the economy over the poll tax.

The topic given the least amount of space was Britain and the EEC. Although this was a factor in the disunity of the Conservative Party it was a long running issue with little new to report. The country and the politicians had long been split about the advantages of being a member state or getting further embroiled into the bureaucracy. This is probably why it received so little space. It is, obviously, also important to note, that being ranked last it must be concluded that it had little to do with Thatcher's resignation by comparison with the other stories. The conclusion must be that the dominant issue during the last month of Thatcher's premiership was the Conservative Party disunity, if space is used as an indicator.

Another indicator of the significance of the Conservative Party disunity was found by examining how much space was given to topics concerned with Thatcher compared to all other news stories. For all three newspapers the issue of the Conservative Party disunity ranked as the number one story. It received more coverage than any other topic. For all three newspapers around 30 per cent of their news stories were about Conservative Party disunity. This is a high proportion of newspaper content. It suggests that the nature of the coverage of Thatcher and the Conservative Party was intense.

The qualitative analysis examined in more detail the bias of the newspapers by looking at what was actually written during this month. The results enhanced what had already been found. *The Guardian* was firmly behind a challenge to Thatcher and wanted to see her defeated, while *The Daily Mail* took the opposite view. *The Times*, however, wanted to see a challenge in so far as it highlights the democratic process. And it was not until Thatcher's position became precarious that this newspaper openly supported Thatcher.

As has already been stated, the dominant issue related to Thatcher and the Conservative Party was the Party's disunity. Furthermore, when examining the evidence it became apparent that Margaret Thatcher's leadership style was at the root of the disunity, or at least, that is how the newspapers interpreted it. Tentatively, one can suggest from the evidence that it was Thatcher's leadership style which ultimately led to her having to resign as leader of the Conservative Party because this appeared to be the focus of all the newspaper coverage.

There are several implications which are made as a result of this study. The first is that the existing research is supported. Ultimately, British newspapers are partisan. *The Guardian* is a liberal paper, while *The Daily Mail* and *The Times* are right-wing. It is also true that *The Times*, as a rule, values its principles over political lobbying.

Like all studies there are limits to this one. This study examined only a small window of Margaret Thatcher's leadership. By concentrating on the month in which Thatcher's

leadership was threatened and she ultimately resigned we have been able to examine in minute detail what the newspapers said and what the most important issues of the day were. What this does limit is the examination of whether these issues had been brewing over a longer period of time, and this was just the explosion of a slow ticking time bomb. Perhaps, if the content of these newspapers was studied over the period of the year preceding Thatcher's resignation it would not be the Conservative Party disunity which finally caused Thatcher to resign but another issue. For example the disunity was largely a result of Thatcher's leadership style. But, by examining the papers for a year, perhaps we would see that it was her style of leadership concerning one specific topic which led to the disunity.

The newspapers that have been used for this study come from opposite ends of a spectrum. *The Times* is recognised as being the most balanced of British newspapers; *The Guardian* is concerned the most liberal newspapers of the quality press; *The Daily Mail* is the most respected of the tabloid newspapers but considered to be a right-wing newspaper. By using these papers we have had a broad range of evidence. What we have not done is cover all the spectrums available on the news stands. There are several more quality and tabloid newspapers. For instance, it would be interesting to see how *The Daily Mirror*, a self-admitted socialist newspaper covered the last month of Thatcher's premiership. A further study which could be done would be to take four quality newspapers, and four tabloid newspapers and study them for the month of November 1990. The comparative results would be most interesting.

The relationship between British newspapers and politics is well-founded in history. It is a love-hate relationship, both needing the other, but disliking their dependency. This study has highlighted how the difficulties of one of Britain's great leaders sells newspapers and what exactly happened to bring a premier often compared to Churchill down. The main conclusion must be that to a large extent Thatcher was her own worst enemy. Conservative Party disunity was the main issue, as far as these newspapers were concerned in the days leading to her resignation. Thatcher's own leadership style was a significant factor in her party's disunity.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

CODING PROTOCOL

Coding the Thematic Categories:

This was done using previous research that had been written about Margaret Thatcher and her time in office. Other studies pointed out the main reasons why Thatcher had resigned. Although not all scholars agreed on which themes exactly were the main cause, the five thematic categories used in this study were the only ones suggested. Moreover, it was common for existing research to mention at least two of the reasons.*

In coding the thematic categories for the themes which were not related to Thatcher, I again turned to existing research on similar issues. I looked at the categories which were used and their definitions. Before deciding on the final thematic categories I did also go through the British newspapers to see what type of news stories were written in order that I did not replicate a thematic category which was inappropriate.

* Turn to page 9 for discussion of the thematic categories.

Coding Pro-Thatcher and Anti-Thatcher Sources:

A source is somebody who is quoted in a newspaper report. This thesis measured the number of pro-Thatcher and anti-Thatcher sources who were quoted. The first way in which the sources were categorised was by reading the quote and deciding if it was complimentary or derogatory towards Thatcher. For instance, if a source was quoted as saying; "Mrs Thatcher must go," it would obviously be considered to be anti-Thatcher.

Obviously, not everybody would say such unambiguous comments. Often, irony cannot be identified being read, unless you actually know the source and their character. For instance, a source might say about Thatcher that she is: "Strong willed and stubborn." In this case, the researcher would look to who the source was. If the source was from either the Labour or Liberal Party the source would be labelled as anti-Thatcher. If the source was from the Conservative Party a third step would be taken. In the case that the ambiguous quote was from a source who was a member of the Conservative Party I would look at the way that the newspaper report introduced them. During this time of unrest the papers were quite specific about the allegiances of their sources. I would also look to previous research. Knowing what we do about Thatcher's rivals in her own party, we would know that if Heseltine were the source then it would be labelled as an anti-Thatcher quote. If the source was Major, Thatcher's Chancellor of the Exchequer, we would know that the source was pro-Thatcher because Major remained publicly loyal throughout Thatcher's difficulties.

Coding News Stories:

The news stories for this study were categorised exclusively under one theme. When first picking up the news story the first thing to be studied was the headline. This would give quite a good inclination as to the topic of the report. For instance, a story labelled “Thatcher’s Strength is Britain’s Weakness” gives the impression that the story is about Thatcher’s leadership style, and how it is causing problems. The categorisation would not stop there. The news story would then be read in its entirety. Often, a headline can be slightly misleading, and it does not necessarily tell you exactly the main topic. For instance, if you had a headline reading: “Thatcher, Disunity and Europe” you would not be able to distinguish which theme was to be the pivotal one from that statement. Even with a headline such as this, the likelihood is that one you have read the story you would know what the main theme of the report was - Thatcher, disunity, or Europe.

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