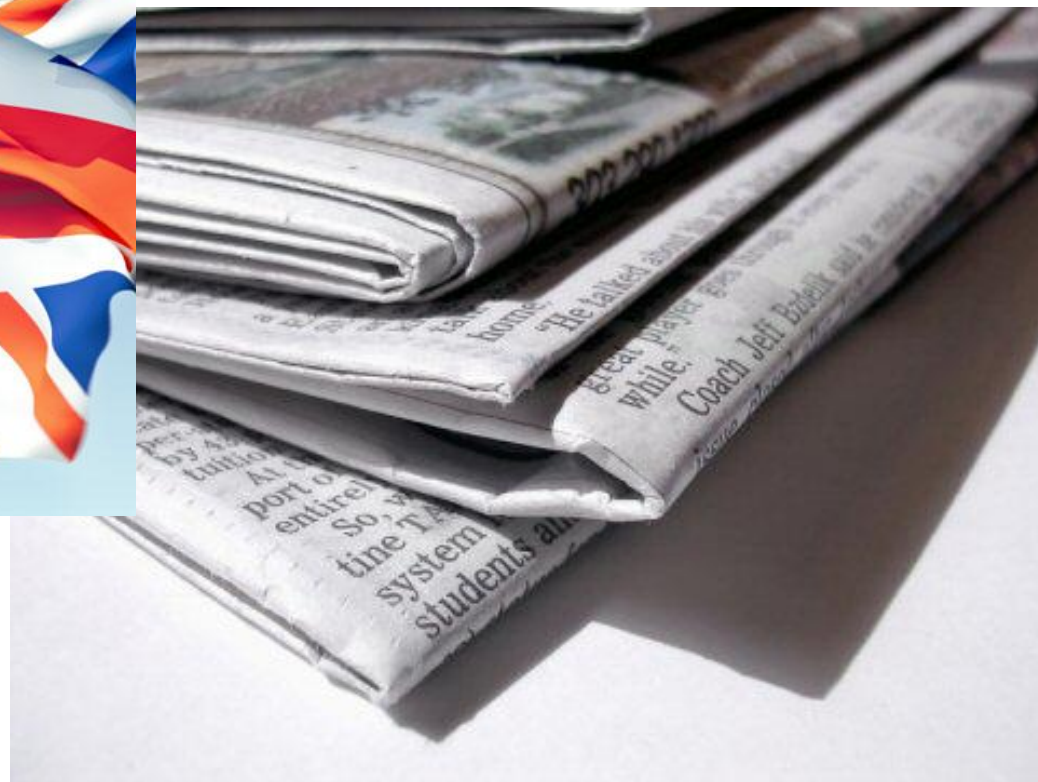


The importance of the national press

The two types of national newspaper





Newspaper publication is dominated by the **national press**, which is an indication of the comparative weakness of regional identity in Britain.

Nearly **80%** of all households buy a copy of one of the main national papers every day.



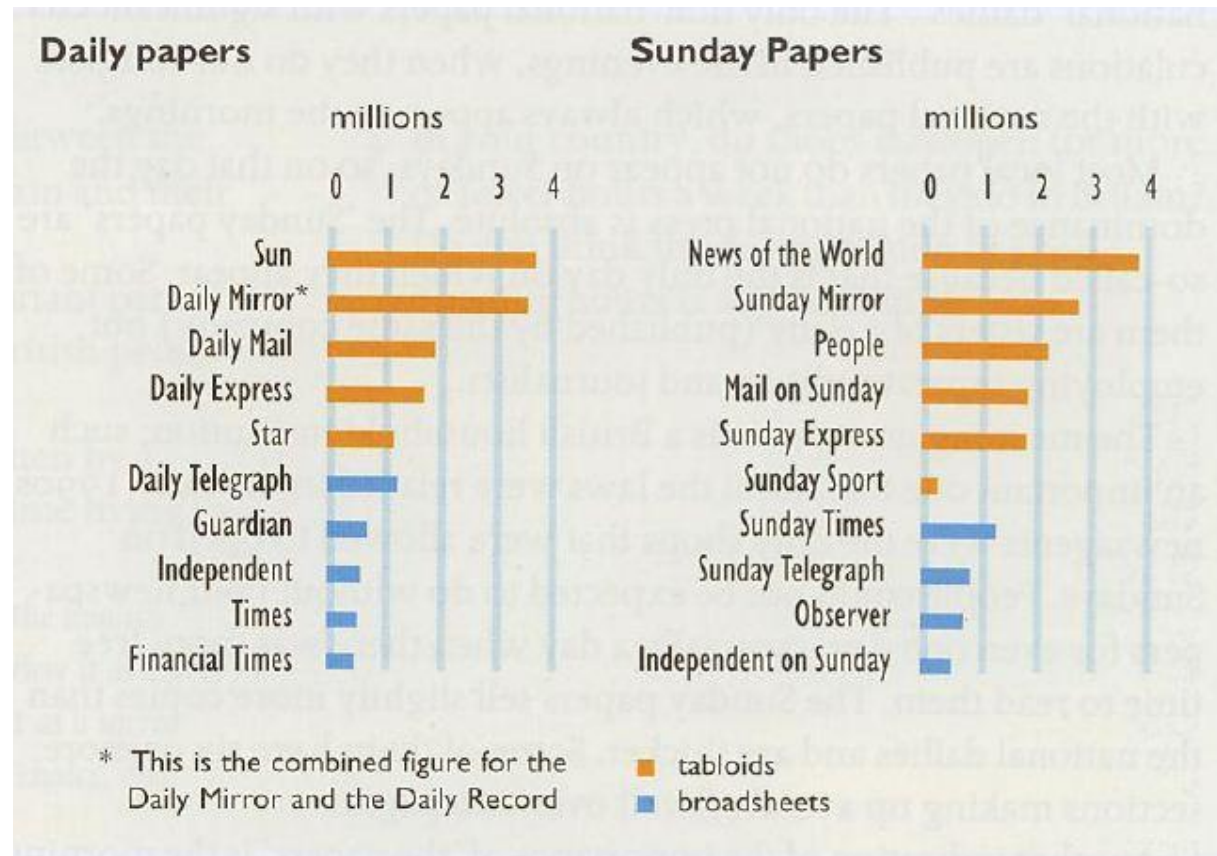
There are more than eighty local and regional daily papers; but the total circulation of all of them together is much less than the combined circulation of the national 'dailies'.

The only non-national papers with significant circulations are published in the evenings, when they do not compete with the national papers, which always appear in the mornings.



Most local papers do not appear on Sundays, so on that day the **dominance of the national press is absolute**.

The 'Sunday papers' are so-called because that is the only day on which they appear. Some of them are sisters of a daily (published by the same company) but employing separate editors and journalists.



The **morning newspaper** is a British household institution; such an important one that, until the laws were relaxed in the early 1990s, **newsagents were the only shops that were allowed to open on Sundays.**

People could not be expected to do without their newspapers for even one day, especially a day when there was more free time to read them.



The Sunday papers sell slightly more copies than the national dailies and are thicker. Some of them have six or more sections making up a total of well over 200 pages.



Another indication of the importance of "the papers" is the **morning 'paper round'**. Most newsagents organize these, and more than half of the country's readers get their morning paper delivered to their door by a teenager who gets up at around half-past five every day in order to earn a bit of extra pocket money.



Each of the national papers can be characterized as belonging to one of two distinct categories. The 'quality papers', or 'broadsheets', cater for the better educated readers.



The 'popular papers', or 'tabloids', sell to a much larger readership. They contain far less print than the broadsheets and far more pictures. They use larger headlines and write in a simpler style of English .



While the **broadsheets** devote much space to politics and other '**serious**' **news**, the **tabloids** concentrate on '**human interest**' **stories**, which often means **sex and scandal**!

However, the **broadsheets do not** completely ignore sex and scandal or any other aspect of public life.



Both types of paper devote equal amounts of attention to [sport](#).

The difference between them is [in the treatment of the topics](#) they cover, and in which topics are given the most prominence.



The reason that the quality newspapers are called broadsheets and the popular ones tabloids is because they are **different shapes**. The broadsheets are twice as large as the tabloids.

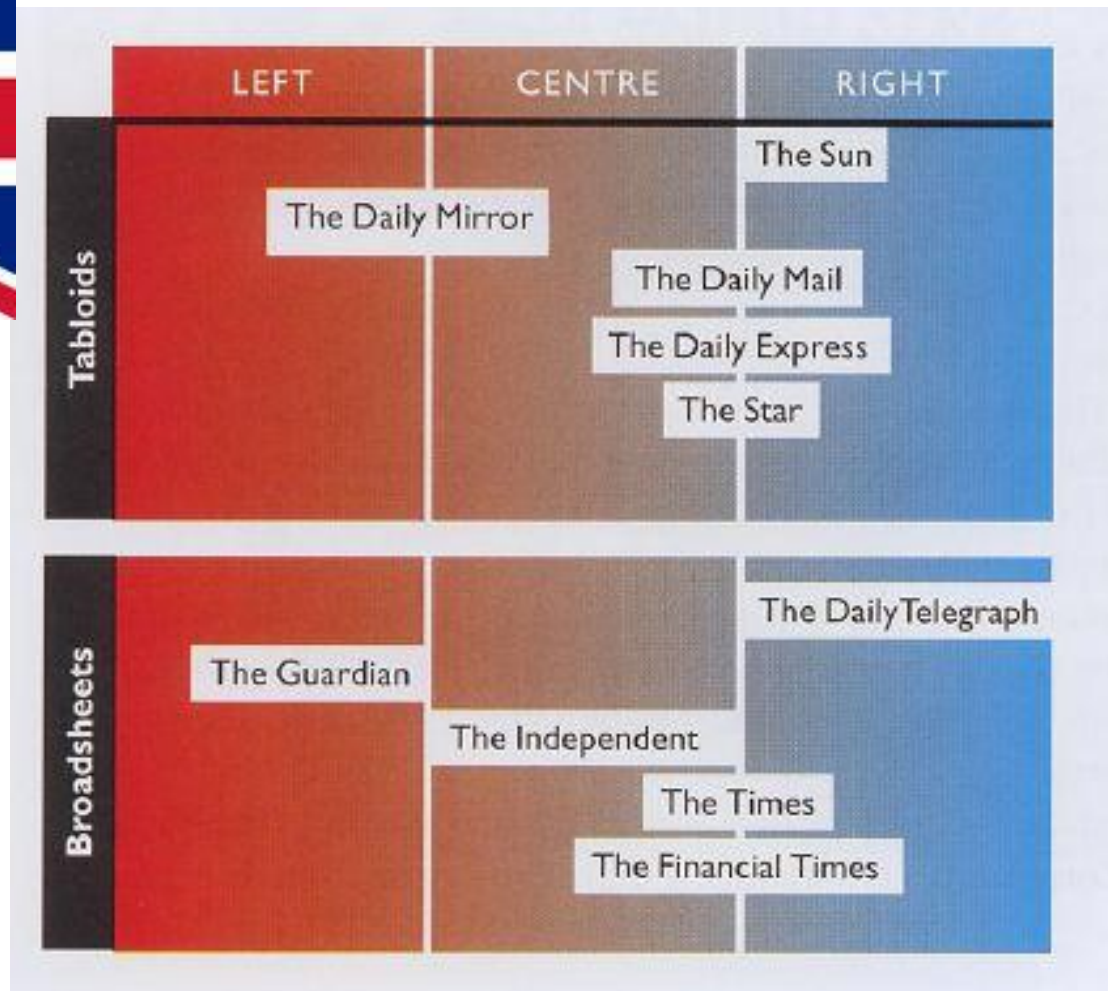




It is a mystery why, in Britain, reading intelligent papers should need highly-developed skills of paper-folding! But it certainly seems to be the rule.

In 1989 a new paper was published, the Sunday Correspondent , advertising itself as the country's first 'quality tabloid ' . It closed after one year.

The characteristics of the national press: politics



The way politics is presented in the national newspapers reflects the fact that **British political parties** are essentially **parliamentary organizations**. Although **different papers have differing political outlooks**, none of the large newspapers is an organ of a political party.

Many are often obviously in favour of the policies of this or that party (and even more obviously against the policies of another party), but none of them would ever use 'we' or 'us' to refer to a certain party.



What counts for the newspaper publishers is **business**. All of them are in the business first and foremost **to make money**.

Their primary concern is to sell as many copies as possible and to attract as much advertising as possible. They normally put selling copies ahead of political integrity. **The abrupt turnabout in the stance of the Scottish edition of the Sun in early 1991 is a good example.**

It had previously, along with the Conservative party which it normally supports, vigorously **opposed any idea of Scottish independence** or home rule; but when it saw the opinion polls in early 1991 (and bearing in mind its comparatively low sales in Scotland), **it decided to change its mind completely.**



The British press is controlled by a rather small number of extremely large multinational companies. This fact helps to explain two notable features.

One of these is **its freedom from interference from government influence**, which is virtually absolute. The **press** is so powerful in this respect that it **is sometimes referred to as 'the fourth estate'** (the other three being the Commons, the Lords and the monarch). This freedom is ensured because there is a general feeling in the country that **'freedom of speech' is a basic constitutional right.**



A striking example of the importance of freedom of speech occurred during the Second World War. During this time, the country had a coalition government of Conservative and Labour politicians, so that there was really no opposition in Parliament at all.

At one time, the cabinet wanted to use a special wartime regulation to temporarily ban the Daily Mirror, which had been consistently critical of the government.

The Labour party, which until then had been completely loyal to the government, immediately demanded a debate on the matter, and the other national papers, although they disagreed with the opinions of the Mirror, all leapt to its defence and opposed the ban.

The government was forced to back down and the Mirror continued to appear throughout the war.

