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# Net Zero and Climate Scepticism: Attitudes to Environmental Policy in British Right-Wing Media

UNIVERSITY of York

Maya Chinnappa

## Aims

- To understand the sceptical and non-sceptical frames of Net Zero targets in right-wing media in the UK
- To understand the differences between tabloid and broadsheet attitudes towards Net Zero
- To assess the changes in scepticism over time, and whether political leadership changes have affected Net Zero's portrayal

## Background

Climate scepticism in the media is well studied, but its association Net Zero less so, despite having become an increasingly contentious issue. Van Rensburg's framework [1] in Figure 1 lays out what each type of scepticism is oriented towards.

News platforming sceptical views can create space for governments to delay policy and shirk responsibility [2], but impactful, accurate journalism can influence pro-climate behaviours and attitudes [3]. Despite periods of cross-party support for climate mitigation policies, right-wing media has often remained in opposition, reinforcing the idea of environmentalism as a partisan issue [4].

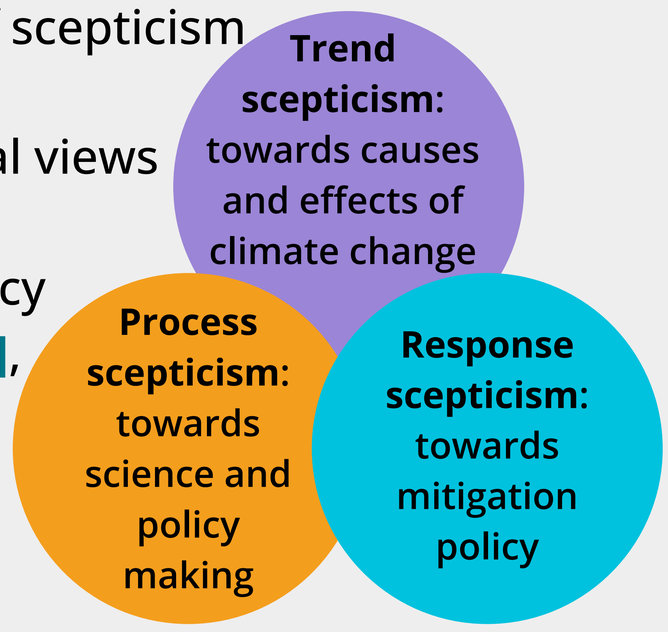



***Figure 1**: Van Rensburg's three "scepticism centres"*

## Methods

News articles containing "Net Zero" in the title from 2019-2025 were sampled from The Times (118), The Telegraph (206), The Daily Mail (154) and the Sun (73).

A quantitative content analysis was performed by coding articles based on sentiment, scepticism type, stakeholders affected and newspaper section.

## Findings

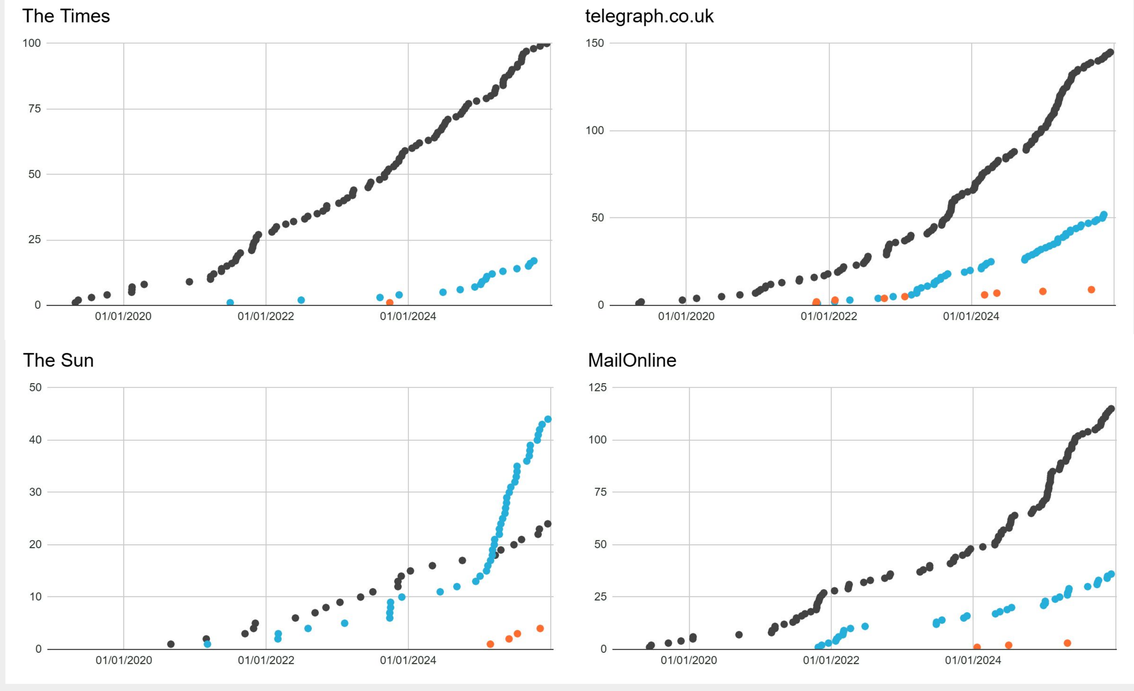



***Figure 2**: Cumulative number of articles over time by type of scepticism*

### Scepticism

- No evidence of **trend** scepticism
- **Response** scepticism is common and consistent
- **Process** scepticism has become a more common framing in tabloids since 2024

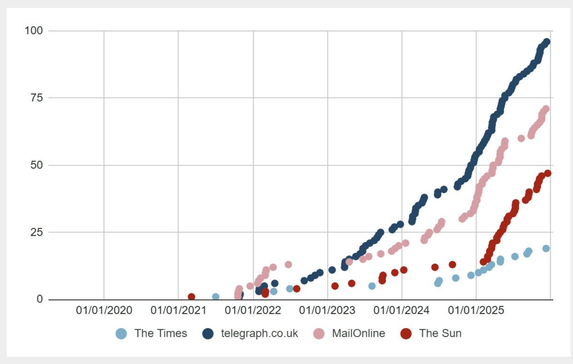



***Figure 3**: Cumulative number of negative articles over time by outlet*

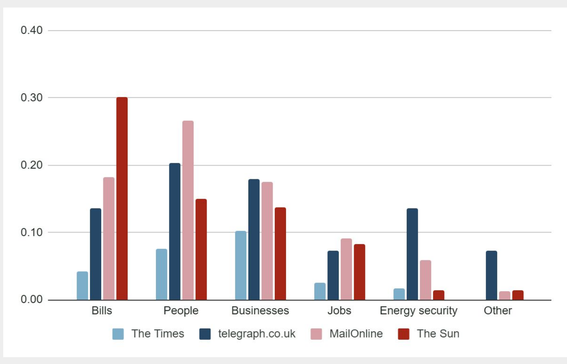



***Figure 4**: Proportion of articles framing each stakeholder as negatively affected by Net Zero*

### Sentiment and stakeholders

- All outlets had highest rate of increase of negativity under the Starmer government
- **The Times** used negative frames much less
- **Tabloids** were most concerned about impacts on bills - otherwise, **The Telegraph's** frames and discourses were largely similar to tabloids'

## Conclusions

- Tabloids exhibited patterns of scepticism and negativity but the Telegraph also fit this pattern, exposing various demographics to such attitudes
- Response scepticism and negativity towards Net Zero are on the rise - more work needs to be done to highlight its social and economic benefits

**[1]** Van Rensburg, W. (2015). Climate change scepticism. *SAGE open*, 5 (2), p.215824401557972.
**[2]** Boykoff, M. T. and Boykoff, J. M. (2004). Balance as bias: global warming and the US prestige press. Global environmental change: human and policy dimensions, 14 (2), pp.125–136.
**[3]** Boykoff, M. T. and Timmons Roberts, J. (2007). Media Coverage of Climate Change: Current Trends, Strengths, Weaknesses. *Human Development Occasional Papers (1992-2007)*.
**[4]** Garrard, G. (2019). Climate scepticism in the UK. In: *Climate Change Scepticism: A Transnational Ecocritical Analysis*. Bloomsbury Academic.