



April 2006 Bulletin



The Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies

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About the Prison Media Monitoring Unit

INTRODUCTION

The Prison Media Monitoring Unit (PMMU) is based at the School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, Cardiff University and scrutinizes British media coverage of prison and prisoners. Its monthly bulletins highlight errors, misinformation and distortion about prison issues which, the Unit believes, may have a significant effect on government policy and public attitudes towards prison, punishment and social control.

METHODOLOGY

PMMU Bulletins are based upon data collected from the nineteen UK national newspapers using the online database Lexis Nexis¹. The following search terms were used: 'prison', 'prisoner', 'jail', 'punishment', 'inmate' and 'detention'. The terms were applied to three Lexis Nexis criteria – words appearing in the headline, a major mention or three or more times in the article.

Stories were then further sorted to remove any which did not relate to UK prisons, coded for eleven variables² and processed through SPSS software. The results of this analysis form the statistical section of the bulletin.

Stories were also explored using discourse analysis, using elements of the critical discourse analysis tradition³, and based upon Roger Fowler's position that:

News is a representation of the world in language; because language is a semiotic code, it imposes a structure of values, social and economic in origin, on whatever is represented; and so inevitably news, like every discourse, constructively patterns that of which it speaks⁴.

The paper also considers what Martin Conboy has termed 'an identifiable range of textual strategies'⁵ in the printed press's account of prison and the prisoner.

¹ Available at <<http://web.lexis-nexis.com/xchange-international/>>

² See Appendix I

³ Fairclough, N. (1992) *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press; Fairclough, N. (1995) *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. London: Longman; Fairclough, N. & Chouliaraki, L. (1995) *Discourse In Late Modernity: Rethinking Critical Discourse Analysis*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; and Wodak, R. & Meyer, M. (2001) (ed.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, London: Sage.

⁴ Fowler, R. (1991) *Language in the News*. London: Routledge, p.4.

⁵ Conboy, M. (2006) *Tabloid Britain: Constructing A Community Through Language*. London: Routledge, p.9.

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April Summary

STATISTICAL OVERVIEW

- **Distribution.** There were 108 prison stories in UK national newspapers in April. This was an increase of 23% from March. 15 of the UK's national newspapers carried at least one story about prison. For the second month running, *The Times* ran the most stories with 16, and accounted for 15% of all prison stories for April. The leading Sunday newspaper was, like March, the *Sunday Mirror* which contained 5 stories. Prison coverage in Sunday newspapers made up 10% of the total sample, with only 11 stories. Daily tabloid newspapers printed 58 stories, just over half the total sample (54%), while the daily broadsheets contributed exactly a third of the sample with 36 stories.
- **Content.** A third of all prison news stories concerned penal policy. This is unsurprising given the questions about the early release of foreign nationals from prison and the pressure upon the Home Office and Charles Clark in particular. Echoing previous PMMU bulletins, stories about prisoners' rights were prevalent in April, accounting for 17% of the sample. However, the majority of these stories (94%) re/presented prisoners' legal rights as outweighing those of the more deserving victim. In particular, there were a number of stories which framed prisoners' civil cases against the prisoner service as evidence of a compensation culture in the UK. Similarly, prison overcrowding, which constituted 13% of all prison stories, was recontextualised within a preferred discourse of building more prisons, and the risk of early release.
- **Sources.** The most quoted source in prison stories in April was current prisoners, who were used 18 times by journalists, comprising 17% of all sources quoted in April. Distribution of prisoners' quotes was uneven, concentrated in only four national newspapers, nearly 40% of which were printed in *The Guardian*. With the foreign nationals story in April dominating news reports on prison, the then Home Secretary, Charles Clarke and Shadow Home Secretary David Davis featured prominently. As with previous months, criminal justice system sources were heavily used by journalists in prison stories. 9 of the top 20 sources used were from the criminal justice system, and these accounted for 32% of all individuals quoted in April

MAIN PRISON-RELATED STORIES IN APRIL

- **Prison Overcrowding**

Many papers carried stories about the crisis of overcrowding in British prisons. However, the coverage was markedly different across the eight newspapers reporting the story. The Prison Reform Trust's (PRT) press release, which highlighted the need for meaningful

rehabilitation, was used by several reports but the PRT's principal thrust – a reduction in custodial sentences - was ignored and/or undermined. News reports shifted the agenda away from the government's over-dependence on a failed form of punishment, to a discourse centred on the early release of dangerous prisoners. In other papers, the PRT's argument was directly criticized. The *Daily Telegraph* argued for the building of more prisons on the simplistic and discredited argument of the existence of a higher crime rate. The *Express* too used the PRT's report to call for an extended prison building programme in a similar leader to the *Daily Telegraph* - THE SOLUTION'S SO SIMPLE: JUST KEEP BUILDING MORE PRISONS (4th April).

Other reports constructed the problem of prison overcrowding within a "soft on crime" frame, emphasizing public fear of crime, invoking the murders of John Monckton and MaryAnn Leneghan and the subsequent convictions of men released from prison on probation or parole to justify their argument.

- **A Government In Crisis**

Most of the daily newspapers covered the Home Office's failure to deport over 1,000 foreign prisoners who had been released, having served their sentence. This was reported around the theme of 'home office crisis' and, then Home Secretary Charles Clarke's admission of the mistake – CLARKE ADMITS UNACCEPTABLE FAILURE (*The Guardian*, 26th April). Most striking in news coverage was the emphasis on escape, danger and public safety. This, despite the prisoners in question having served their sentences.

Such reporting jumped from a narrative concerning the failure to deport prisoners *after they have finished their sentence* to one around escape. Secondly, there was rampant speculation woven into supposed 'facts'. For example, the *Mirror* noted that there was no information forthcoming on possible reoffending. Yet, the presence of such speculation was built upon a supposition that more crimes *have been* or *will be* committed, further underscoring the threat to the community. Thirdly, most of the stories remained silent on, or at least gave minimal coverage to, the root cause of the problem faced by Charles Clark and the Home Office. Namely, the rise in foreign nationals given prison sentences in the UK and their treatment by the Immigration service

- **The Threat of the Dangerous Prisoner**

As in previous months, the construction of prisoners in April's newspapers was regularly framed around a discourse of dangerousness. Reports of prisoner on prisoner violence were and appeared to serve two purposes. First, to further underscore the discourse of perceived dangerousness of Britain's prison population as a whole; and secondly to engage in retributive and vengeful narratives, albeit suggested rather than overtly stated. For example, *The Sun*'s story on 24th April headed ANTHONY KILLER BATTERED IN JAIL and MURDERER KNIFED IN JAIL ATTACK in *The Express*.

Closely related to the representations of prisoners as violent, was the continued threat of “early release”. The cases of the John Monckton and Mary-Ann Lenaghan, both killed by men released before the end of their sentence still resonated in the newspaper coverage of prison in April.

- **Prisoners’ Rights**

Stories such as PRISON EGGS FURY in *The Mirror* on 14th April were typical of how the rights’ of prisoners are exaggerated and then compared with the lack of rights for victims in news accounts. The story concerned Easter eggs given out to prisoners’ children who were visiting, but was described by the only source in the story, a prison officer “an insult to the victims”.

Several stories combined the notions of excessive prisoner rights with their dangerousness, in reporting on the increased use of mobile phones in prison. Prisoners were constructed as a constant threat to the public, even when in prison. There were further suggestions that prisoners’ rights equated to an increase opportunity for harm to the public. Such stories, apparently driven by Prison Officer Association PR, were in stark contrast to stories of prisoners civil claims against the prison service represented as a drain on taxpayers’ money.

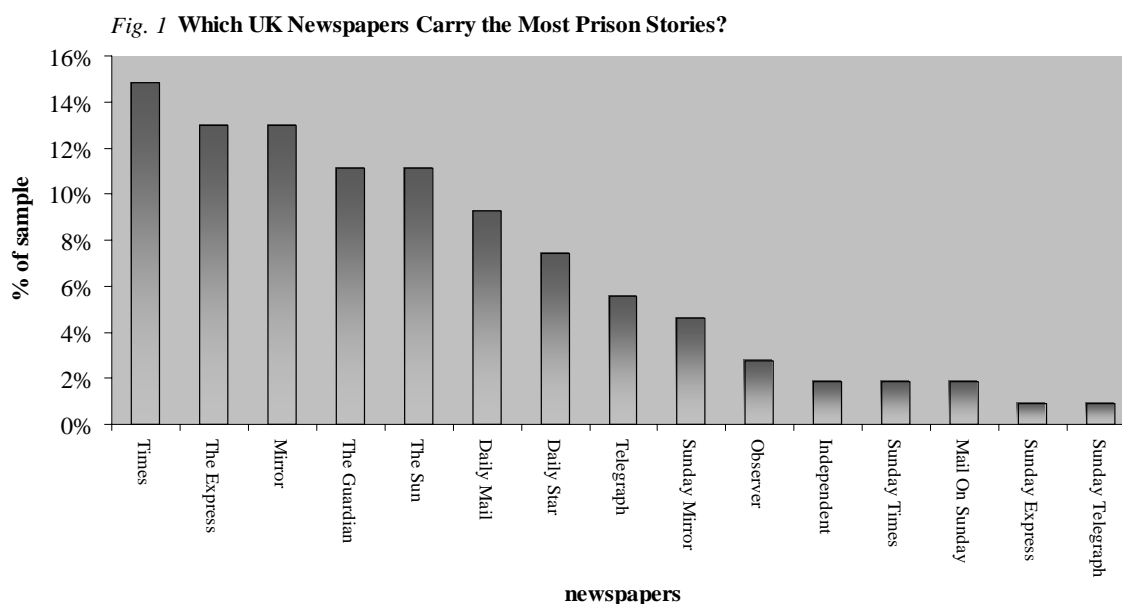
- **Prison Criticism**

There were only a handful of stories which criticized the institution of prison explicitly, and half of these related to the same report by the Chief Inspector of Prisons report on HMP and YOI Doncaster. The articles all quoted the Report directly in its criticism of the private company running the prison as displaying ‘institutional meanness’ in its practices.

Statistical Analysis

1. Stories and Newspaper Distribution

[1.1]. There were 108 prison stories in UK national newspapers in April. This was an increase of 23% from March. Their distribution across all national newspapers is illustrated in *Fig. 1* below.



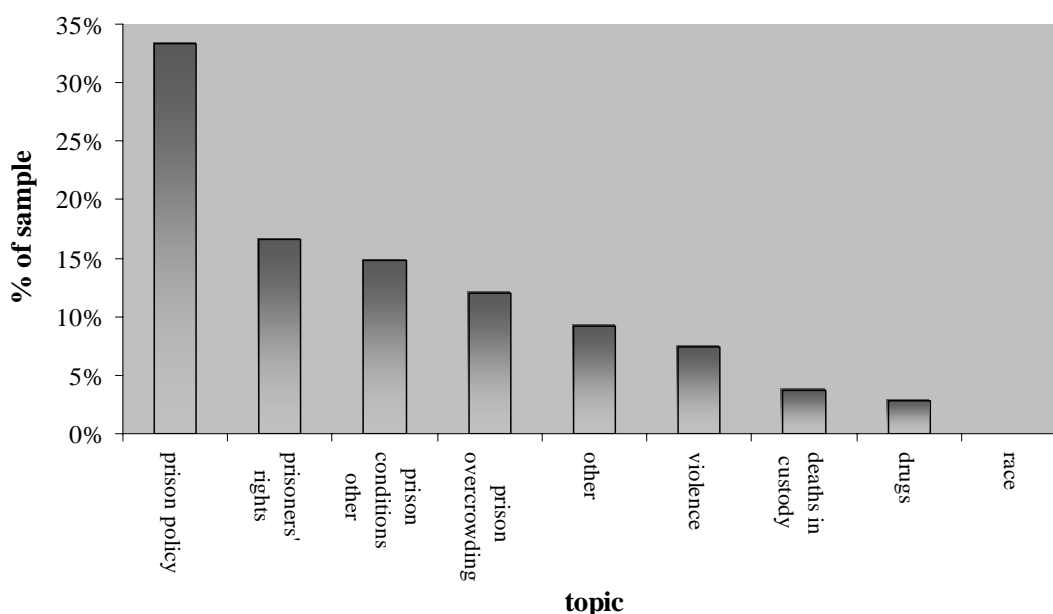
[1.2] 15 of the UK's national newspapers carried at least one story about prison. The four that contained no prison reports were the *Financial Times*, *News of the World*, *The People* and the *Independent on Sunday*. For the second month running, *The Times* ran the most stories with 16, and accounted for 15% of all prison stories for April. *The Express* and *The Mirror* were the next two newspapers with the highest total of prison stories, both with 14. The leading Sunday newspaper was, like March, the *Sunday Mirror* which contained 5 stories. Prison coverage in Sunday newspapers made up 10% of the total sample, with only 11 stories. Daily tabloid newspapers printed 58 stories, just over half the total sample (54%), while the daily broadsheets contributed exactly a third of the sample with 36 stories.

2. Content

[2.1] Each prison story in the sample was categorised as falling into one of nine topics as follows:

- deaths in custody
- prison overcrowding
- prison conditions other – including stories about prison regimes, exercise, education and work opportunities
- violence – carried out by prison staff on prisoners, prisoners on staff or prisoners on each other
- escape - actual or attempted
- prisoners' rights - both 'positive rights', for example the right to vote; and rights denied, suspended or withdrawn, such as pregnant women transportation
- race
- prison policy - government penal policy, legislation, white papers and so on
- other

Fig. 2 What Topics Do Prison Stories in UK National Newspapers Concern?



[2.2] The distribution of these topics is illustrated in *Fig. 2* above. A third of all stories concerned prison policy. This is unsurprising given the questions about the release of foreign nationals from prison early and the pressure upon the Home Office and Charles Clark in particular. This is dealt with further below.

Echoing previous PMMU bulletins, stories about prisoners' rights were prevalent in April, accounting for 17% of the sample. However and also reinforcing previous months' findings, the majority of these stories (94%) re/presented prisoners' legal rights as outweighing victims' rights. In particular, there were a number of stories which framed prisoners' civil cases against the prison service as the problem of compensation culture,

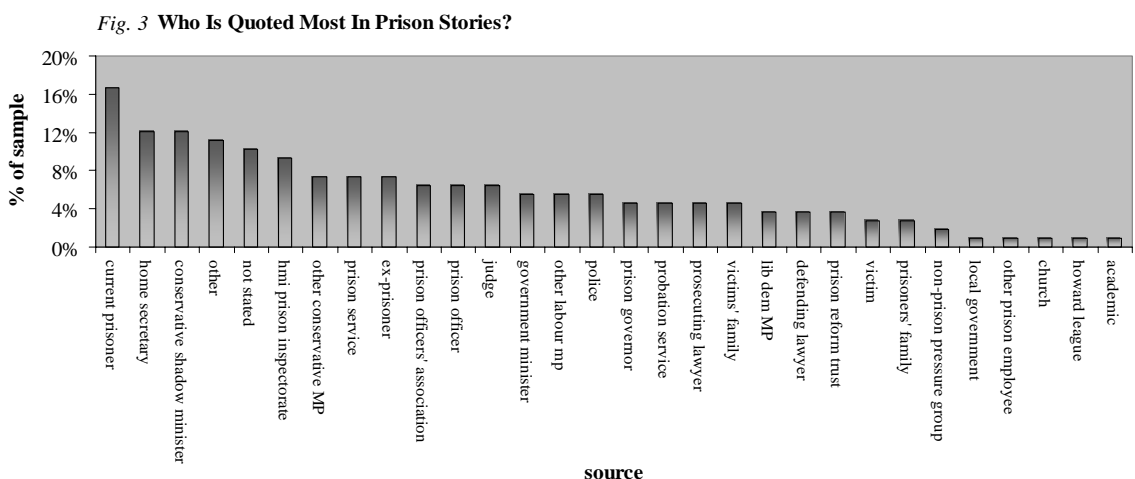
in which seemingly trivial cases were being brought by prisoners at the taxpayers' expense.

[2.3] Similarly, the number of stories about prison overcrowding is somewhat misleading. Accounting for 12% of all prison stories, it would appear that British national newspapers were concerned about the excessive number of men and women in prison. However, the discourse analysis in Section 4 below demonstrates how such stories were recontextualised, within a preferred discourse of building more prisons, and the risk of releasing prisoners early.

[2.4] Once more, important stories about prison and prisoners were under-reported in the national press in April. There were very few stories about deaths and self harm in custody, despite the Prison Reform Trust's *Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile* being released in April (PRT 2006) and detailing such matters. Despite the Briefing noting that 1 in 5 people sentenced to custody was from a minority ethnic group, there were no news stories about prison and race in April.

3. Sources

[3.1] Prison stories were also monitored for sources quoted, directly or indirectly. These were categorised into thirty nine categories (See Appendix 1) and *Fig. 3* below illustrates their distribution across stories in April. It shows the number of times a source from each of the defined groups was quoted.



[3.2] The most quoted source in prison stories in April was current prisoners, who were used 18 times by journalists, comprising 17% of all sources quoted in April.

Distribution of prisoners' quotes was uneven in the national newspapers, and was concentrated in only four. Nearly 40% of which were printed in *The Guardian*. This is illustrated further in *Fig. 4* below.

With the foreign nationals story in April dominating news reports on prison, the then Home Secretary, Charles Clarke and Shadow Home Secretary David Davis featured prominently. Both share 12% of the sample of all sources quoted, suggesting - statistically at least - an even-handed approach to the political reporting of the story.

[3.3] As with previous months, criminal justice system sources were heavily used by journalists in prison stories. 9 of the top 20 sources used were from the criminal justice system, and these accounted for 32% of all individuals quoted in April. This is perhaps all the more striking given the foreign nationals story that dominated late April's coverage of prison. The 'Home Office in crisis' discourse used in the foreign nationals story unsurprisingly led to more quotes from political parties than usual in prison stories: 50 in total, 27% of the sample. It is interesting to note that the prison service and the POA combined were quoted more times (14) than any other source, including the Home Secretary.

[3.4] Voices from the prison appear more even. The prison institution, calculated here as quotes from the Prison Governor, HM Prison Service, prison officers and the POA accounted for 15% of all quotes used in April's stories. Prisoners and ex-prisoners quoted made up 14% of the sample. There are however more qualitative differences which are discussed further below in Sections 6 and 7.

[3.5] *Fig. 4* below illustrates the distribution of the eight most used sources across the 15 newspapers which carried prison stories in April. For example, of the quotes attributed to the Home Secretary, 38% were printed in *The Guardian*. The highest proportion of prisoners' quotes also appeared in *The Guardian*, which has consistently been the case in 2006 prison stories. Less obvious perhaps is the concentration of ex-prisoners' comments in just three papers. The *Daily Mail*, *Mail on Sunday* and *The Sun* accounted for 75% of all ex-prisoners' quotes. However, and consistent with Section 6 below, rather than offering a discursive space for prisoners, the use of ex-prisoners is used to further underscore the papers' preferred discourse of representing prison as a lax regime, incapable of controlling dangerous prisoners.

[3.5] *Fig. 5* below shows those sources that journalists used first in prison stories. The distribution was reasonably even, although the first two sources most quoted first - current prisoners and the HM Prison Inspectorate at 12% and 10% of the sample respectively - were slightly higher. The percentage of prison stories in which the Prison Inspectorate appears as the first quote was relatively high due to the release of several reports and their subsequent news coverage, such as HMP and YOI Doncaster (HMI 2006).

[3.6] The Prison Officers' Association and prison officers were both quoted first in prison stories regularly. This is partly due to the extensive coverage of the foreign nationals

story, but also the growing ability of the POA to define and influence the prison agenda in the British press. Stories relating to prisoners' rights, violence and falling prison resources demonstrated prison officers' capacity to primarily define news reports.

Fig. 4 Which papers do a source's quotes appear in most?	source							
	home secretary	conservative shadow minister	other conservative MP	prison service	hmi prison inspectorate	ex-prisoner	current prisoner	not stated
newspaper								
<i>The Guardian</i>	38%	8%	0%	0%	40%	13%	39%	9%
<i>The Express</i>	15%	15%	13%	0%	10%	0%	11%	9%
<i>Daily Mail</i>	8%	15%	25%	13%	0%	25%	11%	9%
<i>Mirror</i>	8%	23%	13%	38%	0%	13%	0%	0%
<i>Times</i>	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	9%
<i>Telegraph</i>	8%	8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	18%
<i>Independent</i>	15%	8%	13%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<i>Daily Star</i>	0%	8%	0%	13%	0%	0%	22%	0%
<i>Sunday Express</i>	0%	0%	13%	0%	0%	0%	0%	9%
<i>Sunday Mirror</i>	0%	0%	0%	13%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<i>Sunday Times</i>	0%	0%	0%	0%	10%	0%	0%	0%
<i>Observer</i>	0%	15%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	18%
<i>The Sun</i>	8%	0%	13%	13%	20%	25%	17%	9%
<i>Mail On Sunday</i>	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	25%	0%	0%
<i>Sunday Telegraph</i>	0%	0%	13%	13%	0%	0%	0%	9%
total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

[3.7] When looking at what percentage of a source's quotes appeared first in a prison news story; there are marked differences between the most used sources illustrated in Fig. 5. In Fig.6 below, the principle sources used in prison reports are shown, with the proportion of first quotes expressed as a percentage. The table includes the 12 most quoted source, as shown in Fig. 3 above. For example, the table shows that where an ex-prisoner was quoted in a story about prison, the quote was the first source that appeared in that story 63% of the time.

Fig. 5 Who Is Quoted First In Prison Stories?

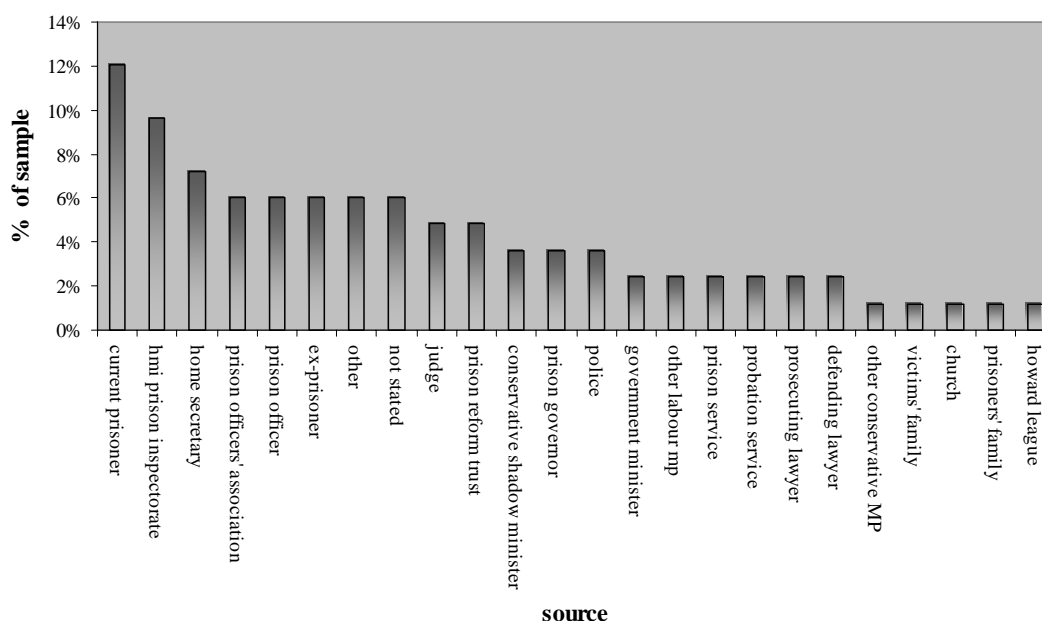


Fig. 6 – What % of a Source’s Quotes Appear First in a Prison Story?

source	%
hmi prison inspectorate	80%
prison officers' association	71%
prison officer	71%
ex-prisoner	63%
judge	57%
current prisoner	56%
home secretary	46%
not stated	45%
other	42%
prison service	25%
conservative shadow minister	23%
other conservative MP	13%

Although the HM Inspectorate of Prisons and current prisoners were quoted first the most number of times in prison stories in April, as a percentage of all the quotes used for each source, there are significant differences. 80% of the Prison Inspectorate’s quotes appear first in news stories, compared to 56% of current prisoners.

[3.8] As noted in 3.5 above, there were a number of Inspectorate reports released in April, and as a result, Anne Owers was quoted first in these stories. The reporting of Inspectorate's findings in UK prisons however is variable, as shown in previous PMMU bulletins, and discussed qualitatively below.

[3.9] Once more, the high proportion of POA and prison officer quotes which appear first in news stories about prison in April suggests the increasing influence these groups have over prison story content. There were a number of news reports in which not only were prison officers or the POA quoted first, but they were the only source quoted. This was particularly true where the POA were seeking to shape the political agenda around prisons, such as in the reports of increased prisoner civil actions; or use of mobile phones.

Discourse Analysis

4. Prison Overcrowding

[4.1] Following the release of the Prison Reform Trust's *Bromley Briefing* in April (PRT 2006), many papers carried stories about the crisis of overcrowding in British prisons. However, the coverage was markedly different across the eight newspapers reporting the story. The PRT's press release, which highlighted the need for meaningful rehabilitation, was used by several reports, including *The Independent* and *The Times* (4th April), *The Observer* (9th April) and, perhaps surprisingly given their usual coverage of prisons and prisoners, *The Sun* (4th April).

[4.2] Although the PRT's substantive warning about the rapid increase in prisoner numbers was reported by these papers, the shameful increase in people being sent to prison was undercut by two of these papers. *The Independent* quoted Shadow Home Secretary David Davis as suggesting the government "should not seek to continue to deal with this problem by simply letting dangerous offenders out early". *The Observer* suggested that the government's sentencing proposals 'for offences such as rape and robbery are being reduced by an average of 15%'. These reports shift the agenda away from the government's over-dependence on a failed form of punishment, to a discourse centred on the early release of dangerous prisoners. Notice how one of the two offences exemplified by *The Observer* is rape, which makes up a very small proportion of crimes that have been committed by the prison population. Yet, it is ubiquitous in discussions of lower sentencing tariffs, non-custodial sentences and the aim and role of prison.

Consequently, the Prison Reform Trust's message about the current breakdown in rehabilitation and the rise in reoffending rates was replaced, or at least diluted, by an entirely different – and tangential – question about sentencing and fear of dangerous prisoners, released too soon.

[4.3] This process - of shifting from discussions about prison overcrowding to preferred agenda - was more explicit in a number of other newspapers that carried the PRT's press release. The *Daily Telegraph* was unequivocal in its leader on 4th April – FIRST, BUILD MORE PRISONS, it stated. After outlining the key points of the Trust's argument, the paper chose to take issue with a number of its contentions. It suggested that 'prison is the right place for most of the men (and some of the women)...who end up there'. Consequently, it argued for the building of more prisons on the simplistic and discredited argument of the existence of a higher crime rate⁶. The *Express* too used the PRT's report to call for an extended prison building programme in a similar leader to the *Daily Telegraph* - THE SOLUTION'S SO SIMPLE: JUST KEEP BUILDING MORE PRISONS. Its tone was one of 'common sense' – building more prisons was, it suggested, an argument 'that could be understood by a five-year-old child'. The tabloid technique of normalizing a discrete political position in line with its readers is further

⁶ For useful arguments on the myths of the relationship between crime rates and imprisonment see for example Christie (2000), Garside (2005) and Barton *et al* (2007).

underscored using the notion of ‘political correctness gone mad’ – what Martin Conboy has called ‘a self-lubricating linguistic rationale’ (Conboy 2006: 119). In its leader, *The Express* achieved this by suggesting the police were concentrating their time on undeserving causes: ‘our police these days seem to prefer to spend their time investigating thought crime or homophobia rather than catching crooks’ (4th April). As we have noted in previous bulletins, Letters to the Editor are often printed to support a paper’s stance. On the following two days, *The Express* carried letters expressing the need to ‘make criminals do serious time’ (5th April) and suggesting “those who don’t pay their TV licence or who kick the dog have more chance of being sent to prison”, (NOWHERE TO CAGE CRIMINAL GANGS IF PRISONS ARE FULL, 6th April).

[4.4] A second theme adopted by news reports, and one which also damaged the Prison Reform Trust’s message, was to construct the problem of overcrowding within a “soft on crime” frame, emphasizing public fear of crime. Similar to *The Observer*’s use of possible rape sentence reductions, the *Daily Mail* described the PRT report as contrary to ‘a growing campaign for tougher sentencing after a series of murders by offenders either released early from prison or given probation instead of a jail term’ (4th April).

Later in its report, the paper cites the murders of John Monckton (November 2004) and MaryAnn Leneghan (May 2005) and the subsequent convictions of men who had been released from prison on probation or parole, to justify their argument. It further noted that the government ‘has sent 30,000 inmates home early’ this year and suggested ‘offenders will spend as little as a fortnight in prison before being released to do unpaid work and ‘anger management classes’’. Here, the *Daily Mail* returned to familiar territory, repeating previous stories and using statistics without context to further escalating public fear of prisoners and future crime. Notice also how the paper does not explain which offences it refers to in its two week claim; and its problematising of anger management interventions, seeking to delegitimise their efficacy and deployment. Finally, the paper made a direct challenge to the Prison Reform Trust’s claim that the government cannot ‘build its way out of this prison crisis’ by quoting the Home Office: ‘The Home Office said yesterday that there is no danger that the prisons will run out of space this summer’.

5. A Government In Crisis

[5.1] In April, the Home Office failed to deport over 1,000 foreign prisoners who had been released having served their sentence. The prisoners should have been considered for deportation by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) after the Prison Service notifies the IND when a foreign national held in a British prison was reaching the end of their sentence.

[5.2] Many of the daily newspapers ran the story around the theme of ‘home office crisis’ and Charles Clarke’s admission of the mistake – CLARKE ADMITS UNACCEPTABLE FAILURE (*The Guardian*, 26th April), CLARKE APOLOGISES AFTER FOREIGN PRISONERS ESCAPE DEPORTATION (*The Independent*, 26th April). However, what was most striking in news coverage of this story was the emphasis on escape, danger and

public safety. This, despite the prisoners in question having served their sentences. The Home Office failure concerned the non-deportation of prisoners *after* they had served their sentence. Yet, this was not made clear in the reporting. Indeed, articles seemed to be suggesting prisoners were being released before or during their time in prison.

The *Mirror* headline read:

IT'S CRIMINAL; 3 MURDERERS, 2 KILLERS, 5 PAEDOPHILES, 41 BURGLARS, 83 DRUG DEALERS IN THE 1032 FOREIGN PRISONERS ALL FREE TO COMMIT CRIME ON OUR STREETS (26th April).

Its Scots edition ran a similarly toned headline on its front page on the same day: CRIMINAL BLUNDER: 1,000 FOREIGN PRISONERS FREE TO ROAM OUR STREETS INSTEAD OF BEING DEPORTED (26th April).

[5.3] This reporting has several elements. First, it jumps from a narrative concerning the failure to deport prisoners *after they have finished their sentence* to one around escape: prisoners, who have served their time, are transformed into criminals 'roaming' the streets. There was no explicit reference to sentences having been completed, punishment have been carried out, or justice (we shall leave prison as 'justice' unproblematised here) being served. Instead, the *Mirror* used phrases such as 'allowed to walk free', 'let loose in Britain' and 'freed to roam the country'.

The Independent, in its opening paragraph, fared little better, relying on the all too regular, partial and careful/less selection of particular prisoners' crimes to underline an imagined threat:

Charles Clarke has been forced to apologise for a "shocking" Home Office blunder that allowed more than 1,000 foreign prisoners – including murderers, rapists and paedophiles – to escape possible deportation after their release. (26th April).

The paper not only used similar language as the *Mirror* – foreign prisoners 'escape' deportation, but also how the report used the three most emotive crimes in its description of those who have not been deported. Even if we choose to engage with the numbers offered by the *Mirror* and *The Guardian*, the proportion of foreign national prisoners released that were convicted of these crimes is very small. An alternative headline could have read: 1,000 PRISONERS WHO SERVED SENTENCE NOT CONSIDERED FOR DEPORTATION. 0.8% CONVICTED OF RAPE, 0.4% FOR MURDER AND 0.4% FOR SEX OFFENCES AGAINST CHILDREN.

[5.4] The second element in these stories was the speculative nature of the reporting, which was woven into the supposed 'facts'. Hence, in the *Independent* story above, deportation was only a possibility, yet the tone of the article was built around the notion that these prisoners have escaped – presented with certainty. Similarly, without having any evidence, the paper chose to report that there were no figures on 'whether any had

reoffended after their release'. The *Mirror* also noted that there was no information forthcoming on possible reoffending. Yet, the presence of such speculation was built upon a supposition that more crimes *have been* or *will be* committed, further underscoring the threat to the community. The protection of the public was a theme picked up by several sources also quoted in the *Mirror* story. Shadow Home Secretary David Davis asking "how many more times must we put up with the Home Office's abject failure to protect the public?"

[5.5] Thirdly, most of the stories remained silent on, or at least gave minimal coverage to, the root cause of the problem faced by Charles Clark and the Home Office. Namely, the rise in foreign nationals given prison sentences in the UK and their treatment by the Immigration service. In 2004, the Independent Monitoring Board noted that:

The most common reasons for the delay in releasing these legally innocent men are that either they have appealed against deportation or they do not have valid travel documents. The immigration authorities, it seems, only begin to look at their situation in the last couple of weeks of their sentences. It can then take months to sort out their appeal or their documents. During this period, prisoners are, understandably, deeply distressed and not infrequently consider suicide (IMB 2004: 3).

None of the papers mentioned this systemic failure and while *The Independent* and *The Guardian* did note the rise of over 6,000 foreign prisoners since 1996, their reports remain framed within a risk/public danger discourse. Only *The Times* reported the story in some context, highlighting the overcrowding crisis in British prisons (UPSURGE IN FOREIGN CRIMINALS STRETCHES PRISONS TO THE LIMIT, 26th April) and quoted Juliet Lyons of the Prison Reform Trust on the difficulties foreign prisoners have in British prisons. *The Times* however still listed the offences committed by those prisoners released and its tone echoed the thinly veiled xeno-racism, prevalent in the *Mirror* and in tabloid discourses of immigration, refugees and asylum.(Buchanan *et al.* 2003; Lynn and Lea 2003; Mediawise 2005; Van Dijk 1993).

6. The Threat of the Dangerous Prisoner

[6.1] Prison Violence

As in previous months, the construction of prisoners in April's newspapers was regularly limited to the discourse of dangerousness. Prisoners continued to be described as 'sex monsters' (*The Sun*, JAIL FIEND QUIZZED ON RAPES, 21st April) and 'beasts' (CHILD SEX BEAST TO DIE IN JAIL, *The Mirror*, 25th April).

[6.2] Reports of prisoner on prisoner violence were prevalent in April's sample. These reports appeared to serve two purposes. First, to further underscore the discourse of perceived dangerousness of Britain's prison population as a whole; and secondly to

engage in retributive and vengeful narratives, albeit suggested rather than overtly stated. For example, *The Sun*'s story on 24th April headed ANTHONY KILLER BATTERED IN JAIL, reported that 'racist killer Michael Barton has been beaten up in jail by three black prisoners'. The suggestion that Barton has got his just desserts was clearly expressed a source the paper referred to as 'an insider':

"He is now living in fear of his life and has become a gibbering wreck. He is no longer the swaggering racist thug he was now he is surrounded by so many black faces in a closed environment. The fact he was branded a racist thug by a judge has made him a number one target for revenge attacks. The black prisoners who attacked him made it clear that they were doing it for Anthony Walker".

It is difficult to ascertain whether this source was a prisoner, an officer, or even that the source is real, but the sentiment – of violent revenge – is what drives the story. Its appeal to *The Sun*, and its news values are twofold and reflect the dual purpose of such stories noted above. The report allows *The Sun* through an unnamed and ambiguous source, to indulge in the celebration of revenge beatings; of prisoner reprisals, harking back to days of capital punishment.

[6.2] Earlier in the month, *The Sun* carried a story about "justice" being meted out on another prisoner, 'jailed baby rapist', Tanya French (3rd April). Echoing the language of the Barton story above, the paper noted that:

French, 19, is too scared to leave her cell and staff have to bring meals to her... (another prisoner said) "The place exploded when one girl spotted a story about her. There were constant threats to kill her".

The irony - that other prisoners found out about French's crime through a newspaper story - appeared to be lost on *The Sun*. It was much more concerned with constructing prisoners as brutal avengers, adopting a position the paper itself supports. This would appear to be the primary rationale for printing such a story. The headline could well have been BABY RAPIST GETS THEIR COMEUPPANCE.

[6.3] Secondly, such stories present the opportunity for lurid descriptions of the violent acts themselves, and to further bolster the construction of prisoners as brutal. In the *Sun*'s story concerning Michael Barton's attack, there were numerous passages describing the attack under the heading SLASHED: 'Barton screamed in terror, they beat him with their fists and slashed his face with a makeshift weapon constructed from razor blades'. *The Express* which reported the story also (MURDERER KNIFED IN JAIL ATTACK) described Barton as being 'stabbed, slashed and beaten up in the shower block'.

[6.4] Similarly, the *Mail on Sunday*'s lengthy article about Angela and Ian Gay's wrongful conviction for the manslaughter of their adopted three year old son began with the dangers Angela faced in prison from other prisoners. The article's opening paragraph

stating: 'It was a terrifying moment Angela Gay first understood the dangers she faced inside prison as a so-called baby killer'. And like other stories on prisoner violence, it detailed the (threatened, although not actual) forms such attacks might take. Angela Gay was quoted as saying: "They threatened to knife me and to pour boiling water laced with sugar so it sticks to the skin and makes nasty burns over my face".

[6.5] While the article detailed how both she and her husband coped with maintaining innocence while in prison, the *Mail on Sunday* chooses to frame the story through the violence and threat of violence of other prisoners. The paper suggested that it 'was just a taste of what the 39-year-old could expect if she was allowed to associate freely with other inmates at Buckley Hill near Birmingham'. There was no criticism of a system which allowed for innocent people to be imprisoned for so long in the article, instead the *Mail on Sunday* stressed the dangers posed by other prisoners and generalised about all prisoners. Quoting a prison officer, Angela Gay stated that "They (prison officers) said there were 360 other girls waiting to get their hands on me".

[6.6] Early Release

Closely related to the representations of prisoners as violent, was the continued threat of "early release". The cases of the John Monckton and Mary-Ann Lenaghan, both killed by men released before the end of their sentence still resonated in the newspaper coverage of prison in April⁷. *The Express* headline on April 27th being typical of the coverage BRUTAL VILE AND SADISTIC: THIS MURDERER WAS FREED FROM PRISON EARLY. MONTHS LATER HE RAPED A BOY OF 10 JUST SO HE COULD BE SENT BACK TO PRISON. The story played down the twenty years Stephen Ayre has spent in prison when he was released on life licence, and made no suggestion that cases such as these are proof of the failure of the prison system.

[6.7] Under the headline KILLER'S MOVE TO LOW-RISK JAIL SPARKS FEARS OF EARLY RELEASE (3rd April) the *Daily Mail* reported that John Shaw – 'one of Ireland's most notorious killers' had been moved from Arbour Hill prison in Dublin to Castlerea prison, County Roscommon: a distance of about 110 miles. The *Daily Mail's* description of Castlerea as 'a low risk jail' is inaccurate: Castlerea is described by the Irish Prison as "a medium security prison"⁸. The prison does have a unit known as The Grove, a separate area containing two- storey houses which are used to contain low-risk prisoners⁹. Indeed, the paper quoted the spokesperson for the Irish Prison Service explicitly stating that John Shaw was being held in the main prison at the same security level he was in Arbour Hill late in the report. The *Daily Mail* indulged in speculation about the release of a prisoner for which it had to make two inferential jumps. First, it used the specialist unit for lower

⁷ For further discussion of these cases, see February and March bulletins.

⁸ <<http://www.irishprisons.ie/prisonsItem.asp?prisonID=1>>

⁹ Irish Prisons Inspectorate (2004) *Report of the Inspection of Castlerea Prison 2nd-9th June by the Inspector of Prisons and Places of Detention 2004 - 2005*: Irish Prisons Inspectorate: Dublin at <[http://www.justice.ie/80256E010039C5AF/vWeb/flJUSQ69XK6D-en/\\$File/Castlerea.pdf](http://www.justice.ie/80256E010039C5AF/vWeb/flJUSQ69XK6D-en/$File/Castlerea.pdf)>.

category prisoners – The Grove – to describe the whole of Castlereagh prison as one ‘which is often used as a holding centre for lowrisk (sic) inmates’. Second, having established Castlereagh as a ‘low risk’ prison, it then shifted news of John Shaw’s move there to the presumption that he would be released early.

These assumptions drive the story, creating the illusion of public ‘fear’ of his impending early release. Once established, the *Daily Mail* then used several sources to denounce this release for Shaw: a release that is notional, speculative and without evidence. Consequently, the sources quoted are cleverly constructed:

‘Jim O’Keeffe, justice spokesman for Fine Gael, said he was ‘gravely concerned’ about the matter adding that Shaw and his accomplice Geoffrey Evans has committed ‘possibly the most heinous crimes in the history of the State’.

It is likely that O’Keeffe was asked to offer his views on the early release of Shaw – a hypothetical proposition – rather than the reality, which was simply the transfer of a prisoner from one prison to another. The facts, as stated by the Irish Prison Service, appeared at the end of the report. This placement by the *Daily Mail* gave the impression of a denial: a response to the ‘fears’ of early release by the prison service. It served to legitimise the paper’s concocted narrative: the prison service on the back foot having to explain and justify themselves. Of course, the effect of a 110 mile move on the prisoner’s family when visiting was not mentioned in the report.

[6.8] Letters to the *Sunday Mirror* (2nd April) offered further opportunities to construct a fear about prisoners released early. One reader, Maureen Osborne, suggests that the killers of Mary-Ann Lenaghan should ‘stay in jail until they die. That WOULD (sic) be justice’. A second letter, describes those who support non-custodial sentences as ‘the dogooders and namby-pamby social services’. There were other familiar descriptions of prisoners here, “monsters” for example, and the suggestion that the focus should be for the victims not the perpetrators of the crime. It ends with the well-worn cliché, slightly adapted for the subject matter – ‘If they are old enough to do the crime, they are old enough to do the time’

[6.9] It would seem from a report in the *Daily Telegraph* (21st April), that government policy has been shaped by the discourse of fear around ‘early release’ of prisoners. The paper reported that Violent Offender Orders would subject prisoners to further restrictions once released. Later in 2006, these proposals formed part of a Home Office review paper (HO 2006)

7. Prisoners' Rights

As in previous months, there were a significant number of stories in April about prisoners' privileges and rights: 24 stories in total, which represented over 20% of all news articles about prison in April.

[7.1] We have noted in previous months how the rights' of prisoners are exaggerated and then compared with the lack of rights for victims. A story in *The Mirror* on 14th April illustrated this further. Under the headline PRISON EGGS FURY, the paper reported that prisoners at HMP Belmarsh and HMP Holloway were being 'treated to luxury Easter eggs at the taxpayers' expense'. The story was in fact about family fundays over Easter, with Easter eggs given out to prisoners' children who were visiting. What is interesting in the story were the sources used: prison officers. One was quoted as saying "It is an insult to the victims". This unilateral perspective is a regular occurrence, particularly in stories emanating from Belmarsh, as we noted in March's bulletin.

[7.2] Several stories combined the notions of excessive prisoner rights with their dangerousness, in reporting on the increased use of mobile phones in prison. The *Sunday Mirror* (9th April) described how 'sneaky convicts' had adapted electric shaver chargers to keep their phones charged; and later (16th April) reported that 1,400 phones had been confiscated. The paper noted that the phones were being used to intimidate witnesses and 'scare victims', as well as 'order drugs'. Here, prisoners are constructed as a constant threat to the public, even when in prison. It further suggested that prisoners' rights equate to an increase opportunity for harm to the public. *The Express* and the *Daily Star* stories on 24th April, both included lengthy quotes from POA General Secretary Brian Caton, who said "A mobile phone in jail is almost as dangerous as a loaded weapon".

It would appear that this story is another example of a press release generated by the POA to lobby for increased resources. However, to achieve their aims, the POA frame their argument around increased risk, fear and perceived danger to the public, once again reducing the prison population to an homogenous, violent other. This is further exemplified by a story in *The Mirror* on the same day which reported that 'prison officers injured on duty have cost the taxpayer 3.7million Euros over the past five years', detailing particular cases where prison offices had been assaulted.

[7.3] In contrast, prisoners who have claimed in the civil courts for prison service negligence were represented as a drain on taxpayers' money. *The Express*, for example, noted that 'the alarming rise funded by the taxpayer, showed crooks are the latest to tap into the compensation culture plaguing the country' (5th April). The paper framed the increase within familiar tabloid tropes – tax payer burden, political correctness gone mad, and so on - rather than on the increased negligence of an overcrowded and outdated prison system unable to cope with those in its care.

The Express and other papers supported their argument in two ways. First, in quoted from familiar tabloid sources in prison stories: Conservative Shadow Minister for Prisons, Edward Garnier; Matthew Elliott of the Taxpayers' Alliance and so on. Secondly, by

reporting on atypical claims made by prisoners and attempting to generalise such claims as the norm. For example, *The Express* (20th April) *Daily Mail* and *The Times* (22nd April) reported on the failed attempt by a prisoner at HMP Perth to sue for damage to his games console.

[7.4] Finally, there were still stories concerning Muslim prisoners and their alleged excessive religious rights, which came to prominence in February. Under the headline JAIL'S LOOS TURNED AWAY FROM MECCA (20th April), *The Sun* reported that toilets at HMP Brixton were being turned 90 degrees away from Mecca for Muslim prisoners. As in previous stories about Muslim prisoners, religious observance which is regulated by the Home Office (HMPS 2000) was re/presented as the law abiding majority paying for the criminal, Muslim (terrorist) other. The paper quoted a prison officer at HMP Brixton to summarise its position: "If they didn't get locked up for committing crimes they would not have this problem. Yes we have to sort out their loos. If we weren't paying for it as taxpayers I'd laugh my socks off".

8. Prison Criticism

As noted in 5 above, there was overt criticism of the Home Secretary regarding the early release of foreign nationals. There were also some stories which criticized the institution of prison more explicitly. However, these numbered only six and half of these related to the same story.

[8.1] The Chief Inspector of Prisons report on HMP and YOI Doncaster (HMI 2006) was reported in *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Sun* on 12th April. It highlighted the Report's findings that 'respect was undermined by the physical conditions in which many prisoners lived, which in some cases were squalid' (HMI 2006: 5). The paper noted that the prison was privately run and drew attention to the Report's comments that Serco, the private company running the prison, displayed 'institutional meanness' in its practices.

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Appendices

APPENDIX 1: CODING CATEGORIES

Newspapers

- The Guardian
- The Express
- Daily Mail
- The Mirror
- The Times
- Daily Telegraph
- The People
- Independent
- Daily Star
- Sunday Express
- Sunday Mirror
- Sunday Times
- Financial Times
- The Observer
- The Sun
- Independent on Sunday
- Mail on Sunday
- News of the World
- Sunday Telegraph

Prison story topics

- deaths in custody
- prison overcrowding
- prison conditions other – including stories about prison regimes, exercise, education and work opportunities
- violence – carried out by prison staff on prisoners, prisoners on staff or prisoners on each other
- escape - actual or attempted
- prisoners' rights - both 'positive rights', for example the right to vote; and rights denied, suspended or withdrawn, such as pregnant women transportation
- race
- prison policy - government penal policy, legislation, white papers and so on
- other

Sources Used

- Home Secretary
- Home Office
- Government minister
- Other Labour MP
- Conservative shadow minister
- Other Conservative MP
- Lib Dem MP
- Other MP
- Local government
- Prison Officer's Association
- Prison governor
- Prison Service
- Prison Officer
- Other prison employee
- HM Prison Inspectorate
- Probation Service
- Police
- Judge
- Magistrate
- Prosecuting lawyer
- Defence lawyer
- Victim
- Victim's family
- Victim support groups
- Church
- Ex-prisoner
- Current prisoner
- Prisoner's family
- Prison Reform Trust
- Howard League
- NACRO
- Prison pressure group other
- Non-prison pressure group
- Academic
- Resident
- Child / person under 16
- Family
- Other
- Not stated

Function

- Not stated -person's function is not clear.
- Subject - story is about this person, or about something the person has done, said
- Spokesperson - person represents, or speaks on behalf of another person, a group or an organisation
- Expert or commentator - person provides additional information, opinion or comment, based on specialist knowledge or expertise
- Personal experience - person provides opinion or comment, based on individual personal experience; the opinion is not necessarily meant to reflect the views of a wider group
- Eye witness - the person gives testimony or comment, based on direct observation (e.g. being present at an event)
- Other

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