

Prime Minister Boris Johnson – the first 28 days

Media insight and analysis from Boris Johnson's first 28 days as Prime Minister.

Before becoming prime minister, Boris Johnson was well known for his media profile both through his Telegraph column and when delivering regular headline-grabbing statements on his predecessor's policy choices.

As prime minister, Johnson's own policy agenda is now available for media scrutiny. In his first 28 days in office, there were 14 announcements, all of which received a reaction in the media.

In order to understand possible challenges Johnson may face in his premiership, Vuelio has analysed the media reaction to all 14 announcements. This work highlights key observations that provide insight into his media reputation and where he may face opposition progressing his agenda in the new parliamentary session, or where the battlegrounds lie should he call a general election.





24 July

In his first speech as Prime Minister, Johnson presented his policy priorities: giving more funding to crucial public services and delivering Brexit.



25 July

In his first speech to Parliament, Johnson spoke of what his Government will set out to achieve, which included investment in 5G, becoming the home of electric vehicles, revitalising coastal communities and delivering Brexit.



26/31 July

The announcement that 20,000 police officers will be recruited over the next three years. This is to allow more police officers to be seen in the streets and to help cut crime.



27 July

The Prime Minister announced a new rail route between Manchester and Leeds with the intention of increasing regional growth and prosperity. Johnson reiterated that he wants the whole of the UK to achieve its potential not just London and the South East.



28 July

In his visit to Scotland, Johnson announced new growth deals that will deliver funding to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to ensure no corner of the UK is left behind.



29 July

The announcement of the newly created Office for Veterans' Affairs marks the first time this issue has been overseen by Cabinet Office ministers. Its creation is intended to see the whole of Government work on the issue.



30 July

Johnson said he will revitalise forgotten communities and focus on all parts of the UK. He spoke of the importance of farming and food and drink to the Welsh economy.

A letter from the prime minister to Donald Tusk where he sets out the UK's commitment to leaving the EU on the 31 October. Johnson hopes to leave with a deal. The main focus of the letter is Johnson's opposition to the 'backstop'.

The Prime Minister called for urgent action to improve the vaccination uptake.

Announcements relating to prisons that saw £2.5 billion allocated to creating modern prisons, 10,000 more prison places and a new prison. We also saw the announcement of the introduction of cutting-edge technology to tackle crime in prisons.

This announcement gave more than 8,000 officers the ability to authorise enhanced stop and search powers. These powers allow officers to stop and search anyone in a designated area without needing reasonable ground for suspicion if serious violence is anticipated.

Johnson announced visa changes that allow the UK to attract elite researchers and specialists in stem fields.

The announcement gave the NHS a new £1.8 billion cash boost to see improvements in patient care. Twenty hospitals will share £850m to upgrade old facilities and equipment.

The Prime Minister met leaders of the Northern Ireland's five main political parties to hear the progress being made to restore the Northern Ireland Executive.



19 August



18 August



11-13 August



11 August



8 August

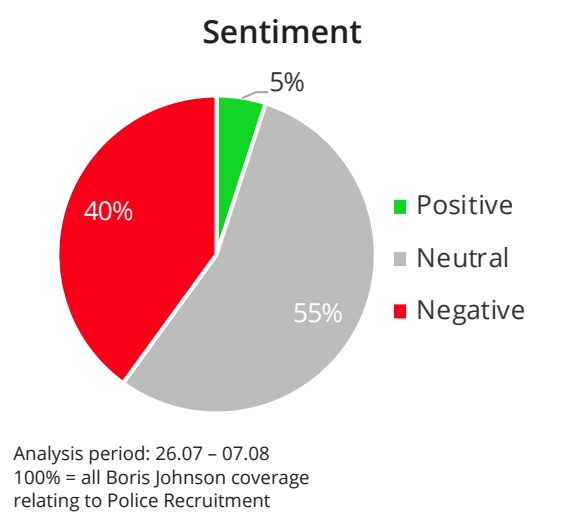


5 August



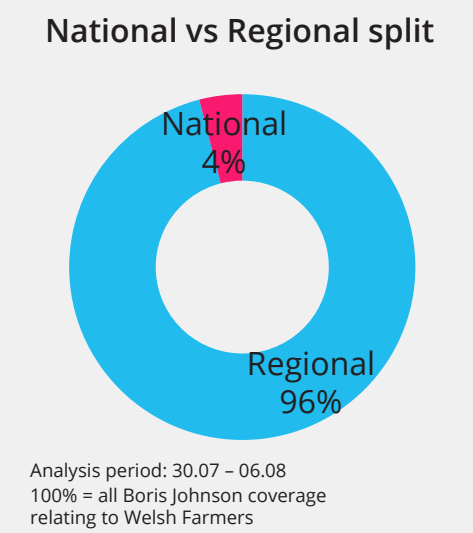
31 July

Police Recruitment



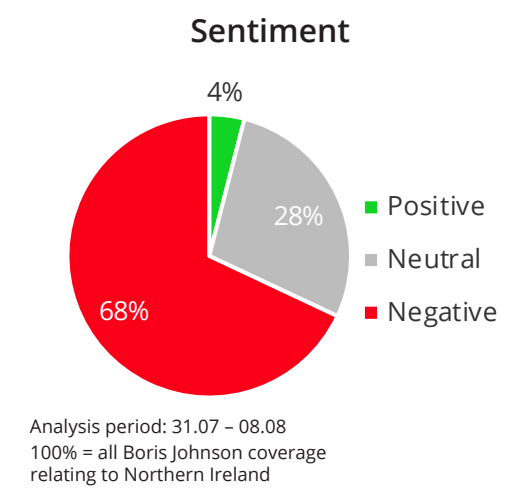
As one of the more neutrally discussed topics, content was focused on the number of officers to be recruited. Negativity was fuelled by the reality of recruiting police in relation to the attractiveness of the job and ‘problems with millennials’. A lack of trust was also evident; Boris proactively cut police as mayor of London in 2016, even boasting about it in his column for The Telegraph.

Welsh Farmers



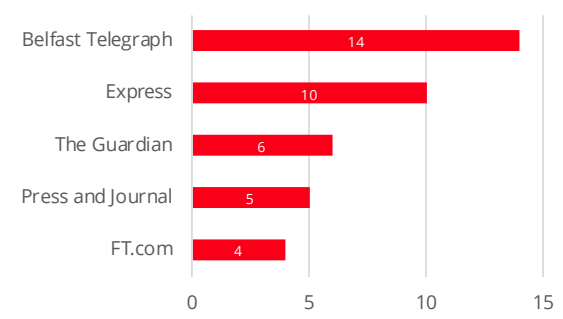
Naturally, regional announcements were more prominent in regional outlets. This resulted in a high share of factual coverage about the Prime Minister visiting a farm in Newport and ‘posing with chickens’. However, criticism continued due to the ‘clash’ with the Welsh leader over a no-deal Brexit and headlines reporting on the falling GBP during the same time period.

Northern Ireland

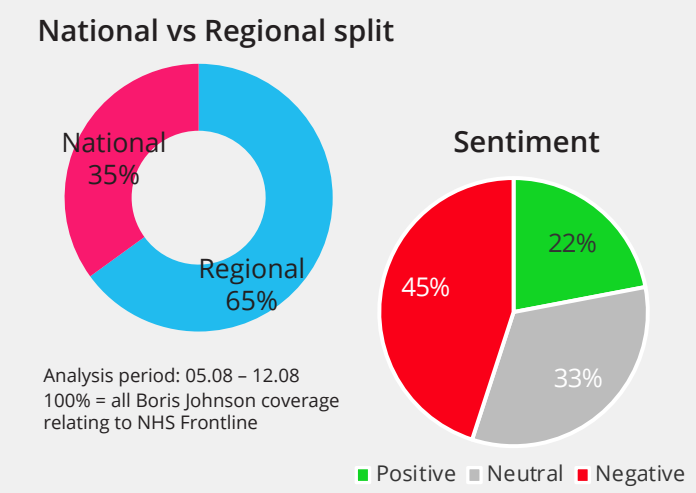


The most negative announcement, the Prime Minister was accused of ‘threatening Irish peace’ while Sinn Fein demanded Britain offer a referendum.

Top Negative Publications

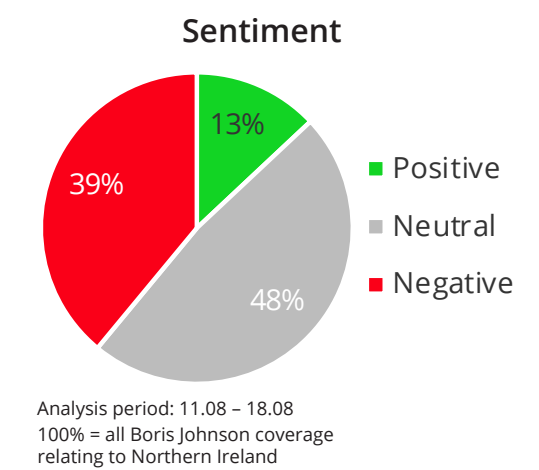


NHS Front Line



While negativity surrounding questions over where the money for the NHS cash injection will come from, criticism from Labour for it not being ‘enough’ and headlines that the announcement was misleading drove significant negativity, this was still the second-most positive announcement. This is thanks to a high share of regional coverage, which highlighted where the investment will help e.g. ‘Manchester to get new adult mental health care unit under NHS investment plans’ (Manchester Evening News, 05.08).

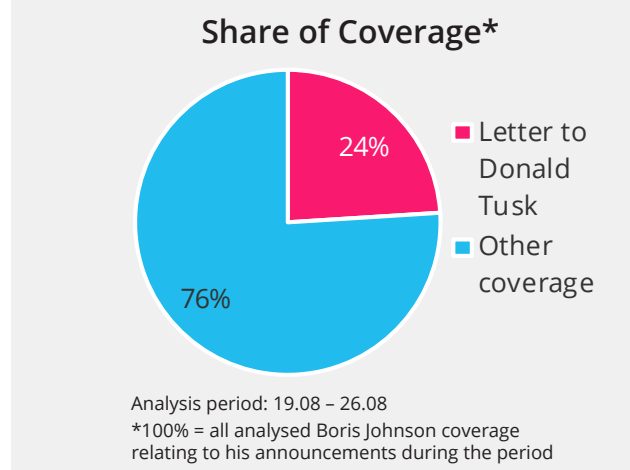
Stop and Search



Neutral coverage largely emanated from the announcement being mentioned in passing in articles about the 16 year old boy that was stabbed in August.

Focused features were critical as the announcement was referred to as ‘hot air’ or a distraction from Brexit.

Letter to Donald Tusk



By far the most discussed topic during the 28 days, it was also one of the main drivers of negativity. The Prime Minister was criticised in both national and regional media for ‘blaming the EU for mistakes’ – the Express was most vocal, while The Guardian was particularly critical in an opinion piece that opened, ‘If there is any fragile encouragement to be squeezed out of Boris Johnson’s letter to the European Union this week, it is perhaps the fact that he wrote it at all.’

Conclusion

The shadow of a general election, a tiny parliamentary majority and Brexit appear to have influenced Johnson's choice of policy announcements. Law and order and the NHS are often flagship election manifesto policies, so it is no surprise they accounted for five of the announcements.

Announcements on devolved investment were not received as positively as Number 10 may have hoped. The lack of positive sentiment shows a scepticism towards the early announcements, with coverage often questioning the timing, where the money would come from or the agenda behind the investment.

The first 28 days tell us that this prime minister has a lot of work to do in order to earn credibility with the media. The question now is whether the media will receive the policy detail and transparency it seeks, in order to scrutinise the executive on behalf of the public.

Methodology

This study analyses the media impact of announcements made by Prime Minister Boris Johnson in his first 28 days. The study analyses key national, regional and political UK online titles, to identify key trends. Analysis took place from 24 July 2019 to 27 August 2019 and each announcement was analysed for one week after the initial news broke.

This study was created by the Vuelio Political Services and Vuelio Insights teams.

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