



Executive summary of

The Asserson Report

The Israel-Hamas war and the BBC

by Trevor Asserson



CAMPAIGN FOR MEDIA STANDARDS

Summary

The Asserson Report is a ground-breaking analysis of BBC coverage of the Israel-Hamas war holding the Corporation to account against its own standards of accuracy and balance.

The report is the product of a team of expert lawyers working with data scientists who have used AI to assess the output of the BBC across television, radio, web and podcasts in the months following the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, 2023.

The rigorous data analysis has examined some 9 million words produced by the BBC in both its English-language and Arabic services.

The team is led by Trevor Asserson, a distinguished litigation lawyer who has been opposing bias at the BBC for many years.

The findings reveal a deeply worrying pattern of bias and multiple breaches by the BBC of its own editorial guidelines on impartiality, fairness and establishing the truth.

The report is being launched with the Campaign for Media Standards, which is committed to redressing significant systemic imbalance and promoting accuracy in journalism.

“The BBC’s responsibility as a public service broadcaster is to deliver news without bias,” said Asserson.

“Our analysis reveals a significant deviation from this standard, especially in its reporting on the Israel-Hamas conflict, where the broadcaster showed a clear partiality towards one side. This bias was even more pronounced in the BBC’s Arabic content.

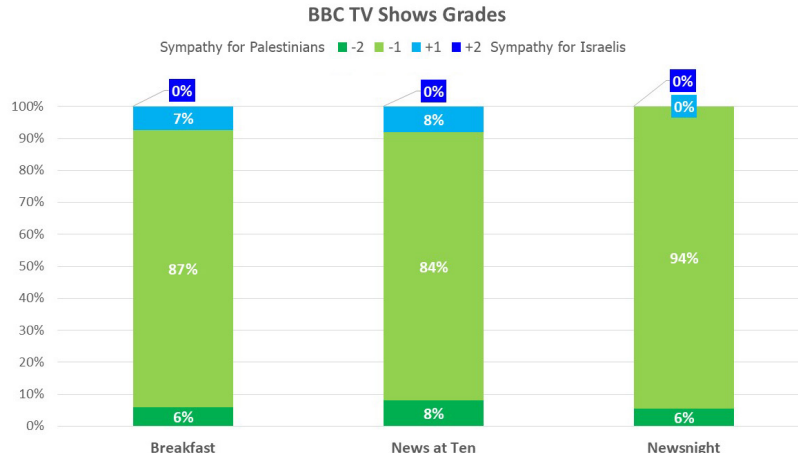
“Such conduct not only breaches the BBC’s Royal Charter but also calls into question its suitability for continued public funding.”

Authors

Trevor Asserson is a leading lawyer and long-standing campaigner against bias at the BBC. He led the Report in collaboration with Dr Haran Shani-Narkiss and other data scientists. Trevor is the founder and senior partner of Asserson Law Offices.

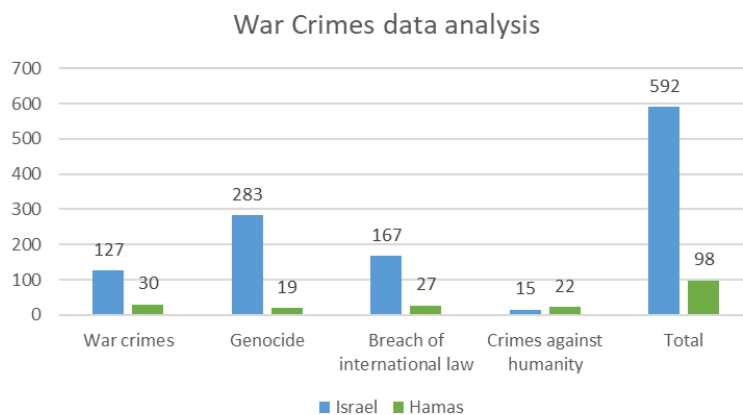
Headline findings

Using AI and other data analysis tools, the report reveals an overwhelming disparity in the perception of the two sides, with sympathy for Palestinians vastly outstripping sympathy for Israelis, even shortly after the massacre of October 7th, 2023.¹



- BBC Breakfast, News at Ten and Newsnight all showed moderate or strong pro-Palestinian/anti-Israeli sentiment in more than 90 per cent of broadcasts.²
- Across BBC English-language Web articles, sympathy for Palestinians was close to twice as high as for Israelis, with a favorability rating for Palestinians ranging from 62-66%.³

Israel more likely to be accused of war crimes than Hamas



- Israel is associated with war crimes in BBC reporting 592 times, and Hamas only 98 times – a material disparity of c. 6:1.⁴

1 Sections 4-6, pp. 20-47.

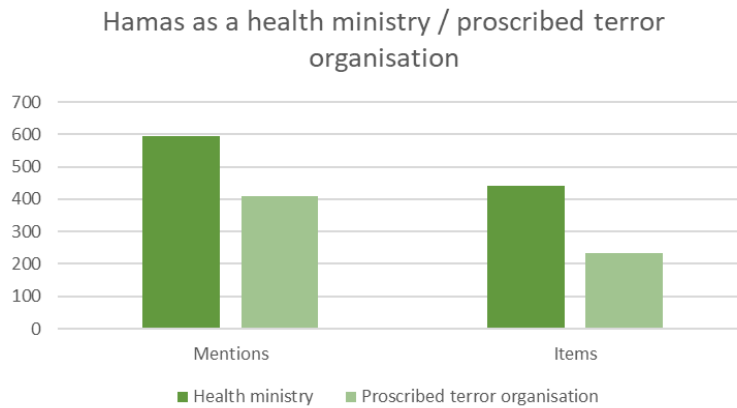
2 Section 6D, p. 41.

3 Section 6B, p. 40.

4 Section 8, Omission 5, p. 90.

Hamas more likely to be called ‘health ministry’ than a proscribed terrorist organisation

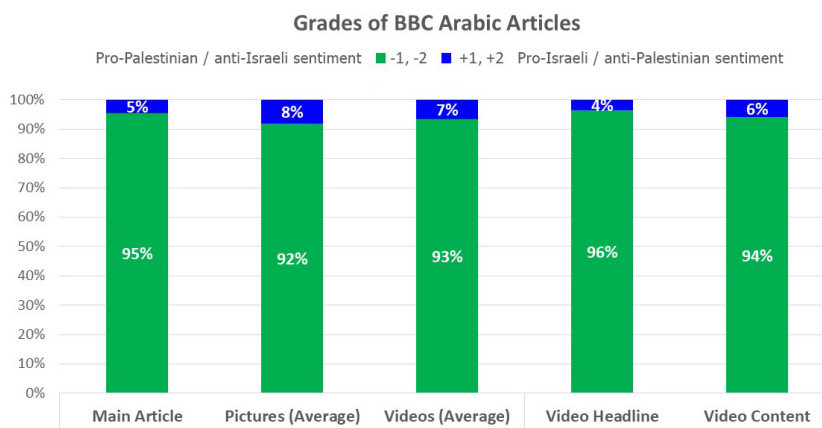
Although Hamas was responsible for the massacre of October 7 and numerous previous terror attacks, the BBC has repeatedly failed to report on it accurately.



- Hamas is referred to as a terrorist organisation in just 7.7% of instances, and is significantly more likely to be referred to as a health ministry, with 593 mentions against just 409 for proscribed terrorist organisation.⁵

The extreme bias of BBC Arabic

The imbalance and bias found across the wider BBC is grossly magnified on the BBC Arabic service.



- BBC Arabic exhibits pro-Palestinian bias in 90 per cent-plus of web articles and videos.⁶
- Even on October 7, Arabic web stories showed more sympathy for Palestinians than Israelis according to analysis of headlines.⁷

5 Section 8, omission 4iii, p. 86.

6 Section 6G, p. 44.

7 Section 5E, p. 30.

- In a random sample of 253 (of a total of 487) BBC Arabic speaking interviewees, 27% were either connected to Hamas (or affiliated terror group) and/or had also posted extreme antisemitic rhetoric via social media, including support for the 7 October attack, all undisclosed by the BBC.⁸

The Jeremy Bowen podcast problem

- Analysis of the BBC Sounds podcasts on the war presented by Jeremy Bowen and Lyse Doucet showed 84% of the content was rated as pro-Palestinian and/or anti-Israeli.⁹

Recommendations

The recommendations made in the Report call for a full review of coverage to avoid future bias and an overhaul at management level, including:

- Abandoning the myth that BBC journalists can or do leave their personal opinions at the door; only by admitting there is a problem can BBC management get a grip and find solutions.
- Implementing and enforcing a system to address breaches of Guidelines and to monitor, track and manage compliance with the BBC's legal obligations.
- Setting targets including measurable key performance indicators (KPI) for impartiality and accuracy.
- Overhauling the Editorial Complaints Unit, making it independent of the Editorial team in the BBC, and given power to express criticism.¹⁰

8 Section 7B ii, p. 59.

9 Section 6E, p. 43.

10 Section 15, p. 190.