



# The Asserson Report

The Israel-Hamas war and the BBC

by Trevor Asserson

with RIME data science

**“The need for impartial and trusted news  
with no agenda has never been greater.”**

BBC Annual Report 2023/24

## SUMMARY

The report is a landmark analysis investigating whether the BBC has adhered to its legal obligations concerning accuracy and impartiality in its coverage of the Israel-Hamas war.

Almost the entire news output across television, radio, web and podcasts in the opening months of the war has been subjected to rigorous analysis by data scientists using AI and other tools.

The dataset comprises almost 9 million words of BBC content from October 7, 2023, to February 7, 2024 (the cut-off point chosen to allow time for in-depth comprehensive analysis).

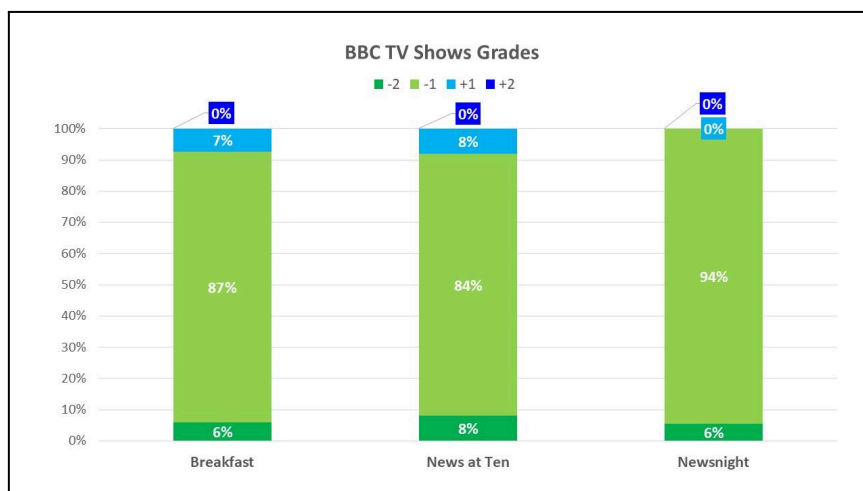
The findings reveal the BBC has materially breached its obligations in both its English and Arabic-language content, raising serious concerns about the BBC's role as a trusted news source.

## AUTHORS

Trevor Asserson<sup>1</sup> 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.

## 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 (green colours) vastly outstripping sympathy for Israelis (blue colours) , even shortly after the massacre of October 7th, 2023.<sup>2</sup>



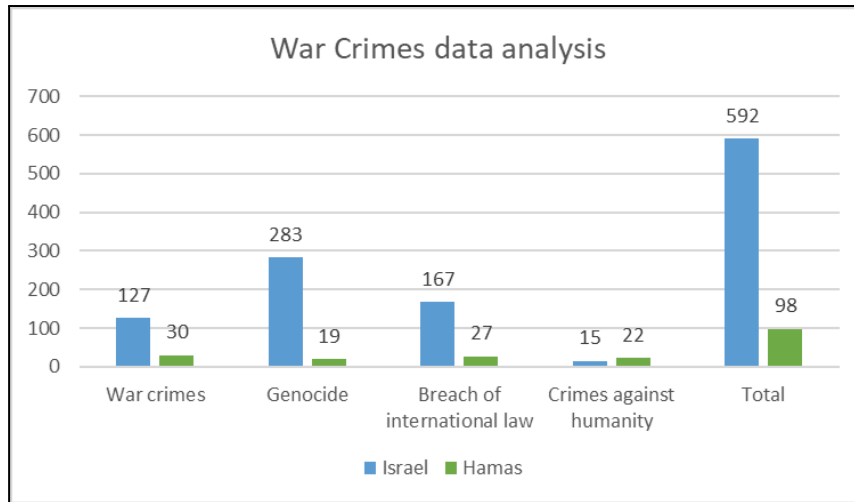
<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trevor\\_Asserson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trevor_Asserson)

<sup>2</sup> Sections 4-6

## THE ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR AND THE BBC

- 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.<sup>3</sup>
- 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%.<sup>4</sup>

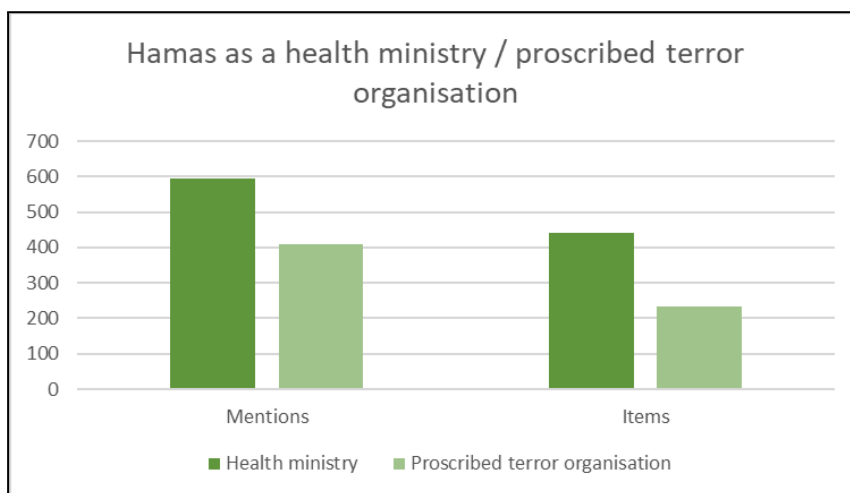
### Israel more likely to be accused of war crimes than Hamas:



- Israel is associated with war crimes in BBC reporting 592 times, and Hamas only 98 times – a material disparity of c. 6:1.<sup>5</sup>

### 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.



<sup>3</sup> Section 6D

<sup>4</sup> Section 6B

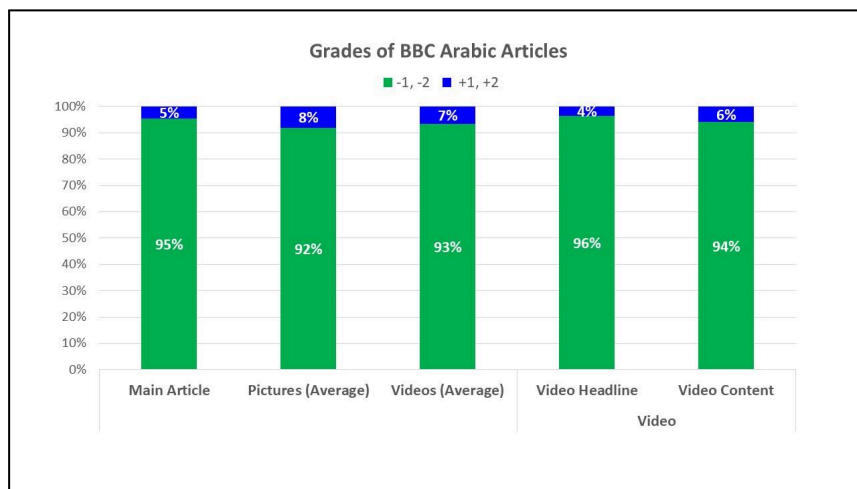
<sup>5</sup> Section 8, Omission 5

## THE ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR AND THE BBC

- 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 49 for proscribed terrorist organisation.<sup>6</sup>

### The extreme bias of BBC Arabic:

The imbalance and bias found across the wider BBC is grossly magnified on the BBC Arabic service, with green representing Pro-Palestinian/anti-Israel sentiment, and blue representing pro-Israeli/anti-Palestinian sentiment.



- BBC Arabic exhibits pro-Palestinian bias in 90 per cent-plus of web articles and videos.<sup>7</sup>
- Even on October 7, Arabic web stories showed more sympathy for Palestinians than Israelis according to analysis of headlines and text.<sup>8</sup>
- In a random sample of 253 (of a total of 487) BBC Arabic 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.<sup>9</sup>

### Corrections

- 100% of material corrections made by the BBC were of stories which were originally highly critical of Israel - anti-Israeli stories.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Section 8, omission 4iii

<sup>7</sup> Section 6G

<sup>8</sup> Section 5E

<sup>9</sup> Section 7B

<sup>10</sup> Section 9

### BBC Journalists Giving Personal Opinions

- BBC Journalists frequently give personal opinions, either directly; by use of language such as 'many will think'; and by conduct - eg using harsh questions and interrupting interviewees.<sup>11</sup>

### Omissions

- Hamas imposes heavy reporting restrictions is never mentioned in the hundreds of reports from Gaza.<sup>12</sup>
- The existence of the Hamas Charter, calling for the death of Jews and destruction of Israel, is almost entirely omitted.<sup>13</sup>
- The fact of sexual abuse /rape by Hamas, a matter confirmed by a UN Report, goes almost entirely unmentioned in BBC Arabic.<sup>14</sup>
- The fact of over 200,000 Israelis being displaced in the North and South is mentioned only 4 times in four months of BBC Arabic reporting.<sup>15</sup>

### 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.<sup>16</sup>

### Reforming the BBC - Recommendations:

The recommendations made in the Report include:

- BBC should conduct a thematic review of its coverage of the Middle East, as recommended by the Serota Report.
- BBC Management must implement and enforce a system to address breaches of Guidelines and to monitor, track and manage compliance with the BBC's legal obligations.<sup>17</sup>
- The Editorial Complaints Unit needs overhaul, making it independent of the Editorial team in the BBC, and given power to express criticism.<sup>18</sup>

TREVOR ASSERSON

September 2024

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<sup>11</sup> Section 4, trend 12iii, page 155 and Section 13B

<sup>12</sup> Section 8, omission 3

<sup>13</sup> Section 8, omission 1

<sup>14</sup> Section 8, omission 7ii

<sup>15</sup> Section 8, omission 8v

<sup>16</sup> Section 6E

<sup>17</sup> Section 15

<sup>18</sup> Section 15 5