

 [Subscribe](#)



Fourth estate follies

Trawling through the dustbins of the UK media

Two-faced Sun shows Rupert can swing both ways if there's something in it for him

May 1, 2015 5.06pm BST



Author



John Jewell

Director of Undergraduate Studies, School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, Cardiff University

Whoever wins, Murdoch comes out in front. PA/Facundo Arrizabalaga

The front pages of the Sun and the Scottish Sun on Thursday morning provided further evidence of Roy Greenslade's recent assertion that the idea of a national press is a fallacy.

In images which appear to have left the twitterati spluttering out their skinny lattes, the “English Sun”, in reference to the imminent Royal birth, had a rather hideous picture of a set of arms cradling a shawl with David Cameron's head peeping out of the top. “Its A TORY” was the lame pronouncement.

In the *Scottish Sun*, Nicola Sturgeon was portrayed brandishing a light sabre as an eerily misshapen Princess Leia from *Star Wars*. “Stur Wars” runs the headline, “May the 7th be with you: why it’s time to vote SNP.”

The editorial said:

Scotland voted No but there can be no doubt the referendum changed the nation. And today The Scottish Sun urges our readers to continue that change and vote for Nicola Sturgeon’s SNP on 7 May.



One paper: two visions. The Sun

Those expressing surprise that the UK Sun was supporting the Tories while its sister newspaper in Scotland supported the SNP should relax a little and understand that this positioning is nothing new. In the 2010 election the Sun came out for “our only hope” Cameron whilst in the Holyrood elections of 2011 the Scottish Sun’s front page pictured a smiling Alex Salmond holding the paper above the strapline: “Play it Again, Salm.”

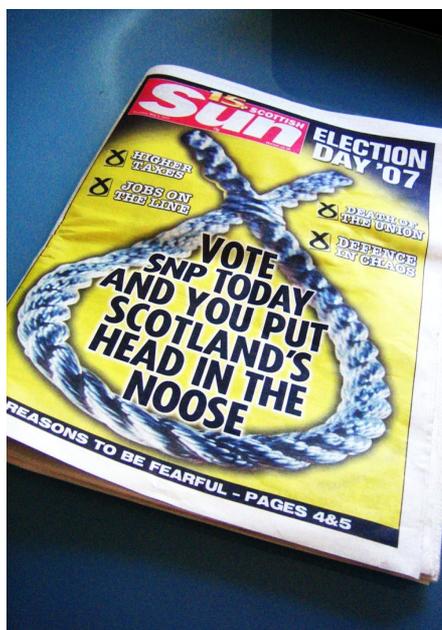
As a spokesperson for the Sun helpfully pointed out:

The Sun is written first and foremost for its readers, and the UK edition and Scottish edition have two very distinct audiences.

The Sun loves power ...

There are two other related reasons why the newspapers are different in outlook. One is economic, the other ideological.

There is **one** Conservative MP presently representing constituents in Scotland. Just one. Add to this the final Ipsos MORI poll for STV News which puts support for the SNP at 54%, compared to 20% for Labour, 17% for the Tories and 5% for the Liberal Democrats.



Sun doesn't always shine on Scotland.
Matito, CC BY

Based on these numbers the Electoral Calculus website is predicting that the SNP will take all 59 seats available in the Scotland. Under these circumstances it would be ludicrous to suppose that News UK would jeopardise losing sales and offending its readership (and the Scottish Sun is the newspaper which sells the most copies north of the border) by even hinting at support for the Tories

... but hates Red Ed

Supporting Miliband's Labour is completely unthinkable for any Murdoch newspaper. Miliband, after all, is apparently committed to the break-up of Murdoch's empire. As I've written before it was Miliband, in an interview with the Observer, who spoke out against Murdoch's influence. He said:

I think it's unhealthy because that amount of power in one person's hands has clearly led to abuses of power within his organisation. If you want to minimise the abuses of power then that kind of concentration of power is frankly quite dangerous.

From that moment on any sort of positive relationship between the Murdoch press and Miliband vanished and in his recent interview with Russell Brand he made a similar point about being willing to "stand up to powerful forces".

The other issue to consider is that the Sun has a history of backing winners. Or at least it has a history of loudly proclaiming that it backs winners. It's free-to-view website "Sun Nation General Election 2015" is as bombastic as one would imagine:

From Maggie's win in 1979, to Kinnock's defeat in 1992, and Tony Blair's 1997 victory, our iconic front pages have literally written history.

Complete control

Many sense the hand of Murdoch in all this and the stories of his interference in editorial matters at election times are legion. In 2007, a House of Lords committee tasked with examining media ownership in the UK noted that Murdoch was a “traditional proprietor” who “exercised editorial control on major issues – like which party to back in a general election or policy on Europe”.

In his memoirs, the former editor of the Sunday Times Andrew Neil wrote of how Murdoch would terrorise his tabloid editors. Kelvin Mackenzie, writes Neil, “endured almost daily bollockings” while former News of The World editors Patsy Chapman and Wendy Henry would “live in fear and trembling of his calls”.

Speaking of his 11 years at the Sunday Times Neil stated in 2008:

On every major issue of the time and every major political personality or business personality, I knew what he thought and you knew, as an editor, that you did not have a freehold, you had a leasehold ... and that leasehold depended on accommodating his views.

But whether or not one believes the 84-year-old Murdoch has any influence over his newspapers any more, we can be more certain that he sees this election as a fight for survival. **The Independent** reported that on a visit to London in February he reminded News UK executives that Labour would attempt to destroy them and “berated Sun journalists for not doing enough to attack Ed Miliband and stop him winning the general election”.

In every sense then the positions of the Scottish Sun and the Sun are entirely consistent and predictable. The aim is to keep Miliband out of Downing Street. The coming week will see more scaremongering and negative press for Labour as the Murdoch titles ramp up operations. And as former Sun editor **David Yelland**, told the Guardian, if Miliband is elected he will be the first PM for generations to “get into Downing Street knowing he owes no debts to any editor, any proprietor or any newspaper”.

This is what scares the hell out of Murdoch.

 [Rupert Murdoch](#) [UK politics](#) [SNP](#) [Conservative Party](#) [Sun newspaper](#) [UK newspapers](#) [UK elections 2015](#)

PREVIOUS POST

April 27, 2015 ‘Never mind her policies, what’s she wearing?’ Newspapers run a sexist eye over UK election

NEXT POST

May 9, 2015 Election coverage: sweet victory or a new low for UK press?