

Executive Summary

This study investigates the debate in the UK national printed media around the introduction of biometric ID cards and the creation of an ID database, the National Identity Register.

The aims of this study are to:

- 1) look at the extent to which the prevailing frames or arguments promoted in policy discourse at a certain time might be said to feature into the media coverage released over that same period;
- 2) look at the ways in which such frames or arguments might be transformed, resisted and re-framed in the coverage;
- 3) identify the frames and arguments prevailing in the newspaper coverage and analyse the strategies and expedients used to promote them.

Both UK broadsheet and tabloid newspapers have been followed, and their coverage of the debate has been collected for a period of four months, from 1st February to 31st May 2008. This period coincides with the launch of the *Delivery Plan 2008*, the revised strategy for implementation of the ID Scheme and Register, by the Home Secretary Jacqui Smith on 6th March 2008.

The report does not seek to contrast the coverage of each specific newspaper, as to do so would require following the trends in each individual paper for a longer period of time. Rather, the findings reported below offer a snapshot of general trends that can be observed in many – if at times not all – the newspapers that have been studied.

The first finding of this study is that the ID Schemes is presented in a negative light in the coverage collected over these four months. The report presents and discusses in detail the overarching frames recovered that contribute to the ID Scheme as a whole being presented as

- **not secure;**
- **lacking accountability;**
- **compulsory, rather than based on choice;**
- **universal;**
- **tough on immigration;**
- **creating an imbalance between liberty and security;**
- **one in a series of government failed IT projects.**

Together these frames contribute to **argue that the ID Scheme is illiberal and being introduced by stealth**. They do so also by corroborating other minor frames - for example the portrayal of the Scheme as too costly – as well as by resorting to strategies such as those afforded by the use of irony, humour and sarcasm, which are discussed in the report.

The report claims that **key frames and argument promoted in policy discourse are generally resisted in the media coverage**. It illustrates and discusses the strategies employed in the coverage to transform, resist and re-frame these policy-promoted arguments.