INTERNATIONAL ELECTIONS ON US NETWORK NEWS
An Examination of Factors Affecting Newsworthiness

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Abstract / A content analysis examined factors that could predict coverage of international elections on US newscasts. All 138 elections held between 1 January 1998 and 1 May 2000 were included in the analysis. Many of the results run counter to previous findings. Countries with few ancestral ties with the US, with nuclear arms or developing nuclear arms, with close relations with China, with low trade with the US and in regions with conflicts were more likely to receive election coverage than other nations. In general, while the elections offer the news media the opportunity to show positive news – democracy in action – coverage continues to concentrate on the negative by highlighting elections in those countries that pose potential threats and are relatively unknown to the US.

Keywords / coverage / determinants / elections / international / television

Few Americans experience world news events first-hand. Instead, Americans must rely on the news media, and especially television news, for information about important happenings around the world. The news media, however, have time and space limitations and thus must make value judgments regarding what international news events are important enough to receive coverage. Thus, only a small portion of international events ever get through the media gatekeepers.

The flow of international news into the US has received extensive attention from researchers. A consistent finding has been that US news media usually limit coverage of international news to events involving natural disasters and scandals. In other words, Americans learn about mainly negative news from foreign lands (Masmoudi, 1979).

Of course, not all international events are negative. Positive events, such as national elections, offer news media the opportunity to positively highlight foreign countries by demonstrating democracy in action.

The current study attempts to expand research in international news flow by examining the newsworthiness of major elections from around the world. Through a content analysis of the newscasts of CNN and the three national networks, our study investigates what factors transform an international election into an event that is newsworthy enough to warrant media coverage.

Whether a country's election gains coverage is an important consideration. If a country receives only negative coverage dealing with disasters, scandals and wars, American news consumers would link negative attributes to the country

through the second level of agenda-setting (see McCombs et al., 1997, 2000). This theory posits that individuals link attributes to newsmakers based on the attributes mentioned in news media coverage. Thus, negative coverage would lead to negative attributes linked to the country. However, if the news coverage involves more positive aspects of a country – such as a national election – the media consumers will link positive attributes to the nation.

In addition, most people get their news from television. According to a 1999 survey by the University of Connecticut, more Americans depend on television as a news source than any other mass media; 65 percent of respondents named television as the source for most of their news compared with 21 percent for newspapers and 9 percent for radio (University of Connecticut, 2000). Therefore, if the second level of agenda-setting takes place, and viewers link attributes to newsmakers based on news media coverage, then this effect should be most strongly pronounced for television news – the main source of news for individuals.

The present study, then, will identify the attributes that make an international election newsworthy to the network news programs. It compares the coverage patterns for 138 international elections from 1 January 1998 to 1 May 2000, and examines what factors can best predict whether an election is newsworthy enough to pass through the newscast gates.

Literature Review

As Wu (2000) notes, the flow of international news has been one of the most highly researched areas in mass communication (see, for example, Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Stevenson and Shaw, 1984). This is perhaps in reaction to the fact that international news receives a considerable amount of airtime on newscasts. Larson (1982), for instance, found that 40 percent of the news time of ABC, CBS and NBC in the late 1970s was devoted to international affairs. Adams (1982) similarly found 45 percent of television news time dealt with foreign affairs. Clearly, international news is an important part of the daily diet of news content offered up through the news media.

However, there is debate on how well the media cover international news. Larson (1982), for example, is critical of correspondents who lack linguistics, cultural or political knowledge about the nations on which they report. Peterson (1979) noted that story selection tends to vary with the cultural background of the reporters.

Of concern here are factors that could affect newsworthiness of international elections. Several factors have been shown to influence the flow of news reports between the US and other countries. As Chang and Lee (1992) note, many studies have examined contextual variables, those that investigate the origins of news. A number of contextual factors are especially pertinent to the present study.

Foreign Relations: Geographic, Cultural and Economic Proximity

Logically, countries with close physical, cultural and economic ties should be more newsworthy than countries that are distant. If a country shares a close

relationship with the US, then the US news media would likely believe that news from within that country's borders would be of interest to US news consumers.

Research has generally found support for the notion that cultural and economic proximity are factors in the news selection process. Much less support has been found for the influence of geographic proximity.

Cultural proximity has consistently been found to influence the amount of coverage a country receives in the US. Hester (1971), for instance, suggested that cultural affinities between countries are strong determinants of foreign news coverage. Cultural affinity makes a country more relevant to the media consumer, thus raising the country's newsworthiness. The meaningfulness of a particular story to the readers, in turn, increases the chances for it to be broadcast.

One indicator of cultural ties with the US is the number of individuals from a country who have immigrated there. Stories about countries with high immigrant populations in the US should have a greater chance of being covered by the media (Burrowes, 1974). Overall, then, cultural ties have been strongly associated with the amount of news coverage a country receives.

Another factor that has consistently been found to influence the amount of coverage a country receives is foreign trade. Ahern (1984) looked at economic and political factors that could influence news coverage in US newspapers. The analysis revealed that a country's GNP, trade and political relations with the US influenced the amount of coverage the country received, accounting for almost 60 percent of the variance. Economic interest, thus, may spur viewers' interest and in turn motivate the networks to broadcast more stories about those countries that impact US markets.

Rosengren and Rickardsson (1974) also looked at this consideration and found that indeed trade is a very important variable when news media determine newsworthiness. Atwood (1985: 2), however, found that 'news does not necessarily follow trade'.

Geographic distance, meanwhile, has produced mixed results. McLean and Pinna (1958) found that the farther the physical distance between the viewer and source country, the less interest and news coverage that viewer would receive, thus offering some support for an influence of geographic proximity. Larson and Hardy (1977), on the other hand, reported that Canada was not in the top 20 of countries receiving network television coverage in the US. Chang et al. (1987) also found geographic distance from the US was not a factor in how much coverage a country received.

Nonetheless, physical distance from the US could influence whether a country's election receives media coverage. A country in North or South America may be more likely to receive coverage than a country further from the US, in Asia for example.

Cultural affinity, economic ties and geographic distance, then, are three variables that could influence the amount of coverage that a country receives in the news media. Nations with strong ties with the US culturally, economically and geographically should receive more coverage than nations with weak links to the US.

Importance: Impact, Deviance

Two other factors that would likely influence the amount of media coverage that a country would receive are impact and deviance. Logically, if a country has a large population and is a recognized world power, the nation would be highly newsworthy. Likewise, if a country has a reputation as being radically deviant, its elections would hold high interest among US news consumers. Thus, the size of a country and its political climate should influence the amount of coverage that it would receive.

Larson (1982) found support for the influence of impact. His findings show that news of the world powers dominated network television newscasts. Chang (1998) found that western industrialized nations form a 'core zone' of a world news system and act as filters through which other nations must pass. Thus, close ties to a world power should make a nation newsworthy.

A recent study (Ishii, 1996), meanwhile, found that population was a significant predictor of the quantity of international news in a Japanese newspaper. Population was the second most powerful predictor – after 'eliteness' of nations – in an analysis conducted by Kariel and Rosenvall (1984).

The type of election also can influence its relative impact. Presidential elections should have greater impact on a nation than legislative elections. Thus, presidential elections should receive more extensive coverage than legislative elections.

The political climate within a nation and its region also play a role in the news selection process, as Chang et al. (1987) found. Employing a discriminant analysis, Chang et al. examined several factors that determined whether or not foreign news events were covered in the US news media. They found that relevance to the US and the level of deviance of the event were the best predictors for news coverage.

The level of negativity also increases the chances of a story being aired as well. As Yu and Luter (1964) found, the more conflict in the story, the more coverage it will receive.

A variable related to negativity is the level of conflict in the host country. Arno (1984: 231) reported that conflict is a critical element of newsworthiness because the media's 'existence is defined by conflict participation'. Worthington (1971) believed that level of conflict was the best indicator of news coverage. Clyde and Buckalew (1969) conducted a survey of news editors and found that conflict was the number one predictor of news coverage.

Not only could deviance be related to an individual country, but it could be related to the election as well. Factors such as whether the election was completely free, partially free or not free at all could influence the newsworthiness of the election.

Thus, since research has found that deviance can play a role in the amount of coverage that international events received in the US news media, perhaps philosophical deviance also will influence media coverage of international elections. A country in an area with military conflicts and/or with a history of deviant actions may receive more coverage than countries not involved in conflicts.

Importance and deviance, then, should play a role in the news selection process. Variables examined here that are related to importance are: population size, links to UN National Security Council members and nuclear arms capabilities. In general, nations with larger populations, linked to National Security Council members and with nuclear arms capabilities should be perceived as being more important than other countries and thus should receive extensive media coverage.

Variables related to deviance, meanwhile, are: conflict in a region and involvement with narcotics. Nations in regions with serious international conflicts and nations that have been active in the trafficking of drugs should make the nation appear to be highly deviant. This perceived deviance, then, should make a nation more newsworthy.

Two final variables examined here are related to the perceived importance and deviance of the election, rather than the individual country. Included in the analysis will be the type of election, whether it involved a presidential, legislative or parliamentary election, or a combination of more than one type; and the nature of the election, whether the election is totally free, partially free or not free. Presidential elections should be viewed as more important, since they involve the main leader of a nation. Thus, we expect presidential elections to warrant more news coverage than other types of elections. In addition, the news media may believe that elections that are totally free are business as usual and therefore not very newsworthy. Elections with restrictions among voters, however, are more unusual and therefore potentially more newsworthy.

Previous research, then, has shown that several factors could play a role in the news selection process for international news in the US news media. The main research question of the present study is: What are the factors that influence coverage of international elections in US newscasts?

Method

To examine the nature of the coverage of international elections by the US broadcast media, we conducted a content analysis of four evening newscasts in the US. The content analysis included CNN and the three main US television networks' evening news programs – ABC, CBS and NBC. These evening news programs have the highest viewership among evening news programs. The content analysis focused specifically on the main evening news shows.

The unit of analysis was the individual election. The study analyzed all elections that took place from 1 January 1998 through 1 May 2000. Of the 138 elections, only eight received coverage on all four newscasts, 10 received coverage on more than one newscast, 18 received coverage on one newscast and 102 received no news coverage.

The dependent variable, then, was whether the election was covered by any of the newscasts. The variable was coded as 0 if the election received no coverage, 1 if it received coverage on one newscast, 2 if it received coverage on more than one newscast and 3 if it received coverage on all four networks.

Each election was coded for several independent variables.

Independent Variables: Cultural, Economic, Geographic Proximity

Cultural Affinity

Cultural affinity was measured here as the number of immigrants in the US from a foreign nation. Categories were: more than 10 million, more than 5 million, more than 1 million, less than 1 million. Data were based on the US Census Bureau, International Data Base (2000). Logically, if a country has close ancestral ties with the US, the country should be seen as more newsworthy by the news media, and thus an election from this country should receive substantial media coverage.

Economic Ties

Economic ties were measured as the ranking of the nation on the US list of trading partners. Categories included: top 20 trading partners, top 50 trading partners, not in the top 50 trading partner ranking. Data were based on the Office of Trade and Economic Analysis, International Trade Administration, US Department of Commerce (2000). Rosengren and Rickardsson (1974) found trade with the US strongly related to the amount of coverage a nation received in the US news media. If a country is a key economic partner with the US, the news media should view this country as being more newsworthy. An election from an important trading partner, therefore, should receive extensive media coverage.

Geographic Proximity

Geographic proximity was measured as a dummy variable determined by the location of an election. Categories included: Africa, Far East, Middle East, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, Latin America, Caribbean Islands, North America and Oceania. Previous research has found only limited support that proximity to the US may increase the likelihood that a country will receive coverage in the US media.

Independent Variables: Importance

Population Size

Population size was based on the number of people living in a nation. Categories were: less than 5 million, less than 10 million, less than 20 million, less than 50 million, less than 100 million, more than 100 million. Since the size of population is one indicator of a country's importance, we may find a positive relationship between population and media coverage. Coding was based on the US Census Bureau, International Data Base (2000).

Links to UN National Security Council Nations

This was another indicator of importance. Categories were whether a nation had relations with: US, UK, Russia, China, France or no nation. Data came from the CIA World Factbook (1999). Schramm (1964) found that 'elite' nations have a greater chance of being covered than non-elite nations. Thus, alignment with an elite nation, such as the Security Council members, should make a nation more newsworthy.

Nuclear Arms Capabilities

This indicator of importance was measured by a country's current ability to produce nuclear arms. Categories were: nuclear arms capability, developing nuclear arms and no nuclear capabilities. Variable coding was based on data from the Bureau of Nonproliferation, US Department of State (2000). Since nuclear arms pose a threat to the US, countries that have nuclear capabilities or are developing such capabilities may be more likely to receive coverage in the US media than would other countries.

Independent Variables: Deviance

Conflict

Conflict in a region was measured by the number of international conflicts in the region. Categories were: no regional conflict, ongoing regional conflict. Since conflict is one indicator of deviance, and deviance can influence media coverage (Chang et al., 1987), an election in an area of high conflict may receive more election coverage than countries in calmer areas. Variable coding was based on conflict rating scores from the National Defense Council Foundation (1999).

Narcotics

Narcotics involvement was measured by whether a nation is a known producer and/or trafficker in narcotics. Categories were: production and transport country, transport country, no drugs. Data were based on the CIA World Factbook (1999). Since involvement with drugs is another indicator of deviance, a nation involved in drugs might receive extensive media coverage.

Independent Variables: Election Factors

Type of Election

The categories here were: presidential elections, parliamentary elections, legislative elections, both presidential and parliamentary and both presidential and legislative. Since presidential elections are perceived to be more important than legislative elections, they may receive more coverage than other types of

elections. Coding of variables was based on data from the International Foundation for Election Systems (2000).

The Nature of the Election

Categories defining the nature of an election were: free elections, partly free elections and elections that were not free. Because free elections are expected in the US, elections that are not free would be an indicator of deviance and may receive more coverage than free elections. Variable coding was based on a rating scale found in the Freedom House (1999) Annual Survey of Free Country Rating.

Analyses

Regression was used to examine which of the independent variables could predict the amount of coverage that a country's election would receive on the four newscasts. The independent variables that produced nominal data (location, nuclear capabilities and ties to major powers) were recoded as dummy variables, as regression analysis requires. Each independent variable was first analyzed individually. All variables were simultaneously entered in a final analysis.

To test the reliability of the coding, 10 percent of the data were double coded and analyzed using the Holsti method (Holsti, 1969). Since most of the variables came from data lists, such as US trade partners, intercoder reliability was extremely high. Six variables produced perfect intercoder reliability scores, including the dependent variable of the amount of coverage that an election received. Intercoder reliability of all variables averaged 96.42.

TABLE 1

Effect of Cultural, Economic and Geographic Proximity on Coverage of International Elections

Variable	Standardized β	t-Value	Sig.
Cultural ties	−.399	−5.078	.000
$R = .399$; $R^2 = .159$; Adjusted $R^2 = .153$			
Economic ties	−.425	−5.482	.000
$R = .425$; $R^2 = .181$; Adjusted $R^2 = .175$			
Geographic region			
Far East	.314	3.271	.001
Middle East	.236	2.600	.010
Latin America	.188	1.989	.049
West Europe	.109	1.095	.275
East Europe	.089	0.877	.382
Oceania	.007	0.071	.943
Caribbean	−.001	−0.016	.987
$R = .354$; $R^2 = .125$; Adjusted $R^2 = .078$			

Results

Table 1 lists the results of the regression analysis for the tests of the first three variables. The results show that cultural and economic ties were significantly related to media coverage, but in the opposite direction as previous research has found. Both variables were negative predictors of media coverage. In other words, the fewer immigrants from a country in the US and the smaller the trade relationship a country had with the US, the more likely they were to receive coverage on the four newscasts examined here.

Table 1 also shows that geographic proximity to the US did not influence coverage. Rather, elections in the Far East or Middle East were more likely to receive media attention than elections in other regions closer to the US. Elections in distant regions, then, were more likely to receive coverage than other elections. Elections in Latin America also reached statistical significance.

Results of the analysis of the variables measuring importance are detailed in Table 2. Several of the variables were statistically significant. Here, the population of a country was negatively related to media coverage. In other words, smaller nations were more likely to receive media coverage than were larger nations, again opposite of what would be expected from previous research.

Whether a country was allied with China – a UN National Security Council member – also was a significant predictor of media coverage. Relations with the US did not play a role in influencing media coverage of a nation's election, nor did relationships with France, Russia or any other of the National Security Council members. Finally, whether a country had nuclear capabilities or was

TABLE 2

Effects of Nation Importance Variables and Coverage of International Elections

Variable	Standardized β	t-Value	Sig.
Population	−.484	−6.456	.000
$R = .484$; $R^2 = .235$; Adjusted $R^2 = .229$			
Ties with UN Nation			
China	.283	3.370	.001
France	−.174	−1.793	.075
US	.118	1.355	.178
Russia	.009	0.090	.928
No nation	.007	0.065	.948
$R = .364$; $R^2 = .133$; Adjusted $R^2 = .100$			
Nuclear capability			
Have nuclear arms	.295	2.853	.005
Developing nuclear arms	.254	2.848	.005
No nuclear capabilities	−.067	−0.598	.551
$R = .435$; $R^2 = .189$; Adjusted $R^2 = .171$			

TABLE 3

Effects of Deviance Variables on Coverage of International Elections

Variable	Standardized β	t-Value	Sig.
Conflict in region	.355	4.426	.000
$R = .355$; $R^2 = .126$; Adjusted $R^2 = .119$			
Narcotics involvement			
Drug transporter/			
producer	.001	0.100	.998
Drug producer	.080	0.899	.370
No involvement	−.104	−1.167	.245
$R = .150$; $R^2 = .022$; Adjusted $R^2 = .008$			

TABLE 4

Effects of Election Variables on Coverage of International Elections

Variable	Standardized β	t-Value	Sig.
Level of freedom	−.053	−0.621	.535
$R = .053$; $R^2 = .003$; Adjusted $R^2 = −.005$			
Election type			
Presidential	−.040	−0.439	.661
Legislative	.057	0.631	.529
Presidential/			
legislative	.111	1.230	.221
Presidential/			
parliamentary	−.032	−0.367	.715
Other	.013	0.144	.855

developing nuclear capabilities – coded as dummy variables – were significant predictors of media coverage.

Table 3 lists the results of the tests examining the variables measuring deviance. Conflict in the region indeed was positively related with election coverage. The more conflict in the region, the more likely a nation would receive coverage of its election. Involvement with narcotics, however, was not a significant predictor of coverage.

Neither variable measuring election factors was significant, as seen in Table 4. The type of election (presidential, parliamentary, legislative or combination) was not related to media coverage. Similarly, the nature of election (free, partly free, not free) played no role in influencing media coverage.

Finally, the results of the regression analysis examining all variables simultaneously closely mirror the previous tests, as shown in Table 5. The strongest predictor of media coverage was ancestry in the US, which again was a negative predictor of coverage. The more ancestral ties with a nation, the less likely the

TABLE 5

  Effects of All Variables on Coverage of International Elections

Variable	Standardized β	t-Value	Sig.
Ancestry in US	−.370	−4.523	.000
Have nuclear arms	.248	3.375	.001
Relations with China	.278	3.116	.002
Developing nuclear arms	.249	3.060	.003
Trade with US	−.250	−2.477	.015
Conflict in region	.193	2.357	.020
$R = .767$; $R^2 = .589$; Adjusted $R^2 = .482$			

nation would receive election coverage. Other significant predictors were whether a nation had nuclear arms, whether a nation had relations with China, whether a nation had low trade relations with the US and whether a nation was in a region with high conflict. The six variables explain 58.9 percent of the variance.

Several variables that were significant when examined individually were not powerful enough to be entered in the final analysis with all variables entered simultaneously. Population and the three location variables – Far East, Middle East and Latin America – all were not entered in the full analysis when other factors were accounted for.

Discussion

The present study examined the factors that make an international election newsworthy enough to warrant coverage on US newscasts. Since elections can show democracy in action, coverage has the ability to highlight positive news, linking positive attributes to foreign nations.

The results here, however, suggest that US media continue to highlight the negative – even in election coverage. Many of the significant predictors of media coverage deal with potential threats to the US: nuclear arms capabilities, relations with China and conflict in a region. Other significant predictors point to nations relatively unknown to the US: nations with little or no trade relations with the US and with few ancestral ties. Thus, even when the US media have the opportunity to concentrate on positive aspects of international news, they continue to concentrate on the negative.

Certainly, coverage of elections in areas posing a threat to the US does show democracy in action, even in these potentially threatening countries. And the news media apparently are not narrowly focusing on close political allies or on key trading partners of the US. On the other hand, by ignoring elections of nations with closer ties to the US, the news media are not painting an accurate picture of the world. Instead, newscast viewers are learning only about 'the enemy'. And according to the news reports, these elections are often marred by improprieties, further focusing on the negative.

Some of the findings here are counter to results from previous studies. For example, previous research has found that the US media provide extensive coverage of countries with substantial trade relationships with the US (Ahern, 1984). Our findings found the opposite – that close trading partners of the US were less likely to receive media coverage. Previous research also has found that media provide extensive coverage of countries with close cultural affinity to the US (Hester, 1971). Our findings again found the opposite – that countries with many ancestral ties to the US were less likely to receive media coverage.

The most plausible reason for the apparent contradictions in findings lies in the type of news reports examined in our study. Our study focused on international elections, which offered the news media the opportunity to report on positive international news. An election in the Ivory Coast or Estonia could show democracy in action in far away lands that are beyond the experiences of most US citizens.

The news media, however, must evaluate the importance of each election to their viewers. Limited airtime means that newscasts cannot include all news from every region of the world. Thus, news directors must make value judgments regarding the overall newsworthiness of each international news item. Indeed, the majority of the 138 elections included in our analysis did not receive any coverage on any of the newscasts.

According to our results, network gatekeepers apparently believe that their viewers would be uninterested in an international election unless the nation involved poses a threat to the US, either by its ties to China or its nuclear arms capabilities. The Cold War with the former Soviet Union may be over, but the US news media continue to show concern with countries that could possibly pose a military threat to the country.

Network gatekeepers similarly must believe that countries with high ancestral ties with the US, Sweden for example, are also not newsworthy. These nations should be holding regular elections, since they are a democracy with values similar to the US population. Thus, an election in Sweden is business as usual and therefore not newsworthy. The same, of course, could be happening with countries that have close trading relations with the US. Countries that trade heavily with the US would be expected to hold elections. When a country not trading with the US – Iran, for example – holds an election, it is bigger news because it is unexpected.

Gatekeepers also apparently believe that countries in stable regions of the world do not warrant coverage. Argentina and Chile, for instance, did not receive coverage of their 1999 elections since their elections lacked significant conflict. Northern Ireland, on the other hand, did receive coverage because of the amount of conflict taking place in the region. Because of the heated conflict in Northern Ireland, elections there could have potentially calmed the region or led to increased terrorist activities. Lives potentially were at stake. Elections in relatively stable areas, such as South America, do not have the same urgency as elections in areas with high conflict.

As important as the factors that led to coverage are the factors that played no role in influencing the amount of coverage a country's election received.

Several variables were not statistically significant either in our full model with all variables accounted for, or individually with no other factors present.

The type of election and the level of freedom in the election were not statistically significant in either data analysis. In other words, it did not matter if a country held a presidential, legislative or combination election or if the election were free, partly free or not free. None of these factors could predict whether a country's election would receive coverage in the US newscasts. Thus, election variables were unimportant. Only variables related to the nations holding the elections mattered.

The drug involvement variable – one of our measures of a country's deviance – also played no role in influencing media coverage. This could be due to our measurement of this variable: whether a country was involved in the production and transport of drugs, the transport of drugs or had no involvement with drugs. Had we used a variable with more variance – an interval level scale of drug activities within a country, for example – the results here may have differed.

In addition, location played a relatively minor role in our study. Table 1 shows that if a country was in the Far East or the Near East, it was more likely to receive coverage than if it were in other regions of the world. Latin America also was a significant predictor of coverage, though its influence only barely reached statistical significance ($\beta = .188$, $p = .049$). None of these dummy variables, however, was powerful enough to be entered in the final analysis that included all of the variables combined. In other words, other factors were much more powerful predictors than location, rendering location insignificant when these other variables were accounted for.

Finally, the population of a nation was a negative predictor of media coverage when examined individually. Smaller nations were more likely to receive media coverage than large nations. As with location, though, population was not as powerful a predictor of coverage as other variables and was not statistically significant in the full model. Thus, to the media's credit, coverage did not concentrate only on nations with large populations, such as Brazil or Japan, but included several smaller nations, such as Indonesia and Peru.

In addition, previous research has argued that the influence of population and GDP – Wu (2000) refers to these as 'clout' variables – is not uniform across countries. In his analysis of 38 different countries, Wu (2000) found population as a significant predictor of coverage in Cyprus, Gambia and Senegal, but only a modest predictor in Germany, Kenya, Nigeria, Turkey, Ukraine and the UK. Thus, population may be important in other countries or under different circumstances.

The overall picture of international election coverage, however, is marked by its negative concentrations. The results here show that US newscasts continue to focus on negative aspects of international news, even when the event being covered involves positive news, such as an election. The news media are not linking positive attributes to countries, but instead concentrate their coverage on countries that are threats or relatively unknown to the US. Thus, viewers are seeing mainly negative attributes of international countries through media coverage of the nation's elections.

Taken one step further, the coverage patterns of the newscasts could be leading viewers into linking negative attributes gleaned from the coverage to the countries, as the second level of agenda-setting argues (McCombs et al., 2000). If viewers see only international elections from countries that pose threats to the US or have few ties to the US, viewers may link these negative attributes to international countries in general. Thus, the coverage patterns may lead to a view that the world is full of threats to the US way of life. By concentrating on negative aspects of international elections, then, the news media paint a picture of the world far from reality.

International elections are just one area in which the US news media could provide positive coverage of foreign lands. Future research should continue to monitor media coverage patterns of other topics of international news.

In addition, future studies should examine the type of coverage devoted to international elections. If coverage focuses on improprieties in elections, viewers would again be exposed to mainly negative international news.

Early gatekeeping studies (White, 1950) argued that the news selection process is complex and often subjective. News directors face an imposing task of paring down the limitless news agenda into 30-minute daily segments. The gatekeeping process has been an important area of research for four decades and remains ripe for continued research.

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