

## **Whose Voices Count?: Sourcing U.S. American Television News about the World**

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The current study examines the extent to which U.S. coverage of world news events relies on White and Western sources as well as the role that journalists' race, story type, and interview type have in the selection of news sources. Furthermore, this study examines whether such sourcing biases exist across commercial and public networks, namely ABC, NBC, CBS, and PBS. Relying on a critical media effects approach, we drew connections between indexing theory and critical race and postcolonial studies to conduct a content analysis of more than 200 news stories and more than 600 sources in 2019 and 2020. The findings reveal significantly more sources from Western countries than non-Western countries in the coverage of international news stories with some variance with reporters, story type, and network type. Implications of the disproportionate presence of Western sources are further discussed.

*Keywords: sources, broadcast news, race, indexing, international news*

There is an abundance of research that argues that international news coverage is ethnocentric (Yang, 2008) and consistent with national interests (Lee & Wang, 2016; Seo, 2009). Although this may be generally true as a "universal" rule of thumb, the impacts are uneven and favor the nations with the most powerful global institutions and media systems. This would be especially true, then, for the United States, which has a disproportionate ability to shape public understanding not only within its national boundaries but around the world (Choi, 2009). For this reason, it is particularly important to understand how U.S. news represents the world. Our focus is on whether U.S. newsrooms rely primarily on U.S./Western sources or

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Date submitted: 2021-10-19

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whether they provide space for local sources to speak for themselves. To do this, we have studied the networks' coverage of international news that is posted to their websites.<sup>1</sup>

We understand that newsrooms shape news in three layered processes. At the first level, newsrooms select which stories to cover (i.e., agenda setting; see McCombs, 1997). Then, reporters and editors decide how to "frame" the story. To set the frame, they need sources to provide the substance of the story (see Liebler, 1993). Because of the practice of objectivity in U.S. newsrooms, the journalists' selection and inclusion is critically important to the meaning of the story (Gans, 1979). Further, "international events are framed by national television news media according to dominant political, economic, and cultural discourses about the rest of the world" (Riegert, 2011, p. 1568). Television not only legitimizes particular points of view, but because of the medium's visual nature, it legitimizes whose voices and images count. Thus, the purpose is to analyze the extent to which U.S. news coverage of international stories includes local sources and their perspectives about issues that directly affect their nations. How does a racial/national difference matter in broadcast television news's inclusion of sources in international stories? Is there greater inclusion of local sources when the sources are from Western nations or from predominantly White nations? Conversely, is there less inclusion of local sources when they are from the Global South and from predominantly non-White nations?

This is important for three major reasons. First, although there was a wealth of research on news sourcing in the 1980s and 1990s (Bennett, 1990; Gans, 1979; Liebler, 1993; Martin, 1988; Massey, 1998), there is little contemporary research that is specific to sources with the notable exception of work by Zeldes, Fico, and Diddi (2005, 2010; Zeldes & Fico, 2007, 2012). Though other studies have examined sources as one of several variables, there is a paucity of research that is specifically focused on news sourcing. That research has also predominantly focused on print news; televisual news research offers knowledge of who is included and who audiences see represented. Second, the literature tends to focus on news's overreliance on official sources. Finally, our interest is specific to race and source location. To the best of our knowledge, only Zeldes and colleagues (2005, 2010; Zeldes & Fico, 2007, 2012) have examined the ways race matters in source inclusion with their research on domestic U.S. politics. The reason for so few articles on race and news sources is likely, in part, because only a few studies on news sources have studied television. Thus, this project adds new directions to research on sources that can build upon existing scholarship on sourcing to include the ways racial logics matter in the coverage of international news.

### **Literature Review**

The most productive way to understand sourcing choices is Bennett's (1990) indexing hypothesis. In essence, he argues that mass media viewpoints are "indexed" to official governmental positions (Bennett, 1990, p. 104). The clearest way in which journalists unwittingly constrain the range of viewpoints is through the well-documented overreliance on official governmental sources (see Bennett, 1990; Carpenter, 2008; Douai & Lauricella, 2014; Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Y. Kim & Jahng, 2016; Martin, 1988; Owens, 2008; Seo, 2009;

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<sup>1</sup> The reason for studying broadcast news coverage posted on the networks' websites is described in the Methods section. It was largely because of the paucity of international news coverage during live captures of news broadcasts.

Wang, 2017; Watts & Maddison, 2014). This is not to say that journalists are conspiring with the government; rather, indexing guides reporters' sense of newsworthiness. Especially when covering culturally distant places, Bennett (1990) argues that indexing is more likely to hew closer to U.S. governmental viewpoints. Indeed, Tuchman's (1978) work on the "news net" is informative as it should be expected that newsrooms in the United States would likely turn to available sources who can speak in languages journalists and editors can understand, who share similar cultural frameworks, and who work in similar time zones. As Martin (1988) concludes, the closer a newsroom is to a story, the more likely it is to be less dependent on official sources and to have diverse source selection. This is likely to be compounded further as newsrooms are closing international bureaus in the context of media "monopolization" and decreasing profits (Bagdikian, 2000).

Similarly, whether using indexing theory to study source selection or as part of a larger framing project, scholars, who have empirically analyzed Western-produced international news (e.g., the *New York Times* coverage of Latin America), conclude an indexing effect. In coverage of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member nations' air strikes on Kosovo, Yang (2003) argued that national interest predicts framing and source selection. Similarly, a study of five newspapers representing five different nations—China, Japan, the United States, Germany, and France—found that in the dispute over the Daiyu/Senkaku island (Chinese and Japanese names, respectively), Chinese and Japanese sources leaned toward their respective countries' interests, while the United States and France leaned toward the Japanese position (Wang, 2017). All of the above interests suggest that source indexing occurs as a combination of national interest, routine, and reporters' situated worldview.

With this project, we seek to extend indexing theory by connecting it to critical race and globalization research. In the critical effects model, Ramasubramanian and Banjo (2020) argue that connections to critical theory in social scientific work are "important for media effects theorizing to go beyond the individual to also consider how structural, institutional, and societal influences shape media experiences" (p. 2). As such, we connect indexing theory to theories of media globalization and critical race theory in media studies. Our point is that, not only are stories indexed to the originating nation through the use of its official sources, but rather, we argue that inequalities in nation's global power as well as racial logics matter in the news's understanding of a credible or valued source.

Though we do not endorse a straightforward cultural imperialist argument, we understand that globalization is unequal (Kraidy, 2005). One consequence of which is that news will often feature primarily Western sources. Lee and Wang (2016), for instance, find that Associated Press wire stories about the North Korean missile crisis are indexed nearly exclusively to U.S. and allied sources. In the coverage of the six-party nuclear talks, survey results indicate that Western journalists believe U.S. sources—government officials, experts, and media—have the most source credibility (Seo, 2009). For instance, coverage of Islam relies primarily on U.S. and Western governmental sources (Douai & Lauricella, 2014), and coverage of Africa feature Europeans about two-thirds of the time with Nigerians representing one-quarter of the sources (Malaolu, 2014). This is because journalistic routines do not regularly source from the "Third World" and because of a preference for a colonial vision of Nigeria (Malaolu, 2014). Similarly, in stories about Somali "pirates," news rarely interviews Somali sources, including officials and ordinary citizens; instead, Somalis are portrayed as distant others, constructing an us-versus-them Orientalist binary (Way, 2013). This

legitimizes Western points of view rather than follow norms for balance (Way, 2013). Even when foreign sources are used, they are much less likely to be named (Sheehy, 2008).

*RQ1: To what extent are sources' identities indexed to U.S. news coverage of international news?*

### ***Ethnocentrism and Racism in News***

Despite claims by television journalists that international news is highly important, it is diminished in the newscast (H. S. Kim, 2002). When international news is covered, it carries a distinctly U.S. American perspective (Chang, Shoemaker, & Brendlinger, 1987; Moeller, 1999). A former journalist, Susan Moeller (1999) claims, "News values are not universal; they are culturally, politically and ideologically determined" (p. 17). In the social scientific legacy literature, this is manifest in two ways: the U.S. news preference for Western Europe and for news in which the United States has a direct stake. For instance, a recurrent theme is the overemphasis of Western Europe, the relative lack of attention to the Middle East and Asia, and the near invisibility of Latin America and Africa, except in cases of crisis (Gonzenbach, Arant, & Stevenson, 1992; Larson, McAnany, & Storey, 1986). Recent studies have shown that this is still true for Africa (Golan, 2008). When nations outside the West are covered, the coverage is primarily crisis news (Gonzenbach et al., 1992). Chang and colleagues (1987) argue that this is because deviance is a predictor for increased news coverage. On the other hand, Moeller (1999) claims that it is because of "compassion fatigue," a state of being in which the news audience becomes bored with international news that prompts news organizations to find increasingly sensationalistic coverage that is violent, dramatic, and/or emotional.

H. S. Kim (2002) finds that along with timeliness, the most important determinant of coverage is the role of the United States. When the United States is directly involved, for instance, with the threat of ISIS, then U.S. news dedicates space and time for those stories (Sui, Dunaway, & Sobek, 2017). Even for news of COVID-19 that affected all nations, U.S. news created a sonic soundscape that demonstrated Western bias with stories of music from Milan balconies in contrast to the amplified sounds of coughing in the coverage of Tehran and the ghostly silences in the coverage of Wuhan (Deaville & Lemire, 2021). The reason for this Western European preference is that culturally and geographically distant places seem too disconnected from U.S. Americans' lives (Larson et al., 1986; Moeller, 1999). Using a center-periphery conceptual framework, Chang (1998) argues that coverage is explainable by world-systems theory. In other words, it is not U.S.-specific interests, but rather, the influence and power of nations that lead to disproportionate coverage. More recently, Golan (2008) concludes that world-systems theory is explainable but in ways that are at least partly connected to the United States (i.e., magnitude of trade with the United States and GDP).

Some social scientists argue for a universalist explanation of ethnocentrism in news coverage. Studying the coverage of the Iraq War, Yang (2008) finds that the Chinese and U.S. presses both rely primarily on their nations' sources. Similarly, H. S. Kim and Lee's (2008) study of the Korean Air crash in Guam find that the U.S. press tended to blame pilot error and to rely nearly exclusively on sources from the National Transportation Safety Board and Federal Aviation Administration, both U.S. investigative agencies. Korean news, on the other hand, blamed faulty navigation equipment on the Boeing-made aircraft, and

reporters felt compelled to provide counter-representation and sources because of what they believed to be unfair coverage that demonizes Korean pilots (H. S. Kim & Lee, 2008).

In addition to the social scientific literature, the critical scholarship also makes similar conclusions while centering power in its explanations—structures and ideologies. The best-known critique of U.S. foreign coverage comes from the propaganda model of Herman and Chomsky (2002). In the model, there are five filters that lead to the ideological orientation of news. Most germane to this conversation is the third filter, sourcing. According to the model, U.S. news stories' reliance on official sources and perspectives creates a de facto propaganda system in which the news becomes mouthpieces of the government, particularly in foreign coverage (Herman & Chomsky, 2002). Though the model is sometimes derided as alarmist, it fits with other critical and social scientific studies in journalism that claim foreign news coverage is ethnocentric and Western-centric. Because international news is dominated by U.S. and British corporations, there is little interest in culturally distant lands in Asia and Africa, much less its accurate representation (Riegert, 2011).

Applying international flow theory, Angela and Stella (2011) argue that because of imperialistic impulses in the West, "Third World" countries are overwhelmingly portrayed as conflict- or disaster-ridden. Other scholars claim that the coverage of the Middle East, Africa, and Asia reflects a neo-Orientalist framework (al-Saud, 2009; Ban, Sastry, & Dutta, 2013; Douai & Lauricella, 2014; Way, 2013). This includes the presentation of the Middle East and Africa as hostile threats (Douai & Lauricella, 2014; Way, 2013) and the intentional elisions of sociohistorical context that would reveal Western colonial legacies (Sabido, 2015). Neo-Orientalism also is manifest in the *New York Times's* coverage of China as valuable for U.S. commercial exploitation and stories that represent the United States as knowing what is best for China, including the admonition that China should create a consumer capitalist system modeled after the United States (Ban et al., 2013). In a revealing study of foreign correspondents' "fixers," local freelance journalists that facilitate international news gathering, Palmer (2018) found that they are bothered by foreign correspondents, who seek sources merely to flesh out story angles they have already concluded before their arrival and news gathering.

### ***Sources' Race and U.S. News Coverage***

The literature on news and race demonstrates persistent problems with racial representation in the news on the page, on the screen, and in newsrooms (see Campbell, 1995; Dixon & Linz, 2000; Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Gandy, 1998; Heider, 2000; Shah, 1995). It is, thus, beyond the scope of this study to fully review the literature; instead, the focus of this section is on sources' race. While the research is predominantly about domestic coverage, this literature is informative because the existing research on international news sourcing only implicitly references race. This is perhaps because of the disproportionate study of print news media, particularly newspaper coverage, which only occasionally visualizes sources' races. Through studying television news, we are able to examine the relationship between race and sourcing. In a global context, if international news reflects ethnocentrism and even Orientalist reasoning, then domestic racial logics can be understood to be constitutive of, in the case of this study, a U.S. worldview that is reflected in news.

Sourcing practices demonstrate a racial hierarchy that legitimates White authority (Domke, Garland, Billeaudeau, & Hutcheson, 2003). The news landscape is White-dominated (Gandy, 1998;

Poindexter, Smith, & Heider, 2003), and White people are the dominant source in all types of stories (except for foreign news) and across every type of source (e.g., official, private citizen, expert; Owens, 2008). Elite sources, in particular, skew mainly White (Owens, 2008). Sources of color are largely ignored (Poindexter et al., 2003), especially as experts (Owens, 2008). Even in stories about the Civil Rights Act of 1990, news largely excludes Black American sources (Liebler, 1993). When Black American sources are included, they are often presented as dissenters (Domke et al., 2003), as sports and entertainment figures, or as victims of discrimination (Owens, 2008). Asian American sources, on the other hand, are presented primarily as small business owners, scholars, or resources to understand Chinese or North Korean relations (Owens, 2008). Arab Americans are indexed to hegemonic political practices, supporting dominant institutions and not challenging racial profiling (Domke et al., 2003).

*RQ2: To what extent does U.S. coverage of international news use White sources?*

*RQ3: To what extent does U.S. coverage of international news's use of direct interviews vary by the source race and location?*

*H1a: U.S. coverage of Western nations will use local sources more frequently than U.S. coverage of non-Western nations.*

*H1b: U.S. coverage of non-Western nations will include more White, foreign sources than local people of color.*

*H1c: U.S. coverage of non-Western nations will more prominently feature White, foreign sources than local people of color.*

H1a predicts that U.S. broadcast news will use more local sources (sources in the country about which the story is reported) because in a White racial framework, the West is defined for this project as Europe, Australia/New Zealand, and North America. Local sources are imbued with authority, in part, because they are White. H1b and H1c are based on the U.S. racial hierarchy in which people of color are not legitimated as sources even when the stories reported are about largely non-White nations. This does not preclude sources of color but generally predicts that White sources will be featured more prominently.

There is some evidence, however, that reporters' race and the type of television news affect the diversity of sources used (Zeldes & Fico, 2005, 2010; Zeldes et al., 2007, 2012). For the literature review, only findings specific to racial representation are discussed. For political stories, the findings indicate that reporters of color include more noncandidate sources of color and more nonofficial sources in their coverage and also provide more time to sources of color in their reports (Zeldes & Fico, 2005; Zeldes et al., 2012). However, the differences are fairly small because reporters of color also abide by the same journalistic conventions as their White peers (Zeldes et al., 2007). In addition to the race of the correspondent, the diversity of the market also includes more diverse sources (Zeldes et al., 2007). Further, the type of broadcast also leads to differences in sourcing because of the time pressures and different financial structures of public, broadcast, and cable news (Zeldes et al., 2012). Of the three different types, public television has the most racially diverse coverage, broadcast news has the second most diverse coverage,

and cable news has the least diverse coverage (Zeldes & Fico, 2010; Zeldes et al., 2012). Though journalists of color generally provide more diverse source use, the findings have been inconsistent for public television, and there is only the 2010 data for cable news since only three reporters of color were coded covering the 2008 presidential election.

*H2a: PBS will use local sources more than the commercial broadcast networks.*

*H2b: PBS will use sources of color more than the commercial broadcast networks.*

*H3a: Journalists of color will interview local sources more than White journalists.*

*H3b: Journalists of color will interview sources of color more than White journalists.*

Based on the previous research (Zeldes & Fico, 2010; Zeldes et al., 2012), it is expected that public broadcasting will produce the most diverse use of sources. Though their research is specific to domestic politics and race, specifically, similar patterns are likely to emerge in international coverage because of the structural and mission differences between broadcast and public news. Though it is unclear whether reporter race matters differently between commercial and public broadcast news coverage, generally, it is expected that journalists of color will use more racially diverse and non-U.S. sources; thus it can be inferred that journalists of color are more sensitized to considerations of difference, including national and racial difference.

### **Method**

To study sources, we conducted a content analysis of broadcast news coverage on PBS, ABC, CBS, and NBC. Initially, CNN, MSNBC, and FOX were also included to make comparisons between broadcast and cable networks, but there were so few international news packages that included a reporter or sources on camera that the cable news networks were eventually removed. Because of shifting modes of news consumption online (Walker, 2019) and the difficulties of recording and coding live broadcast coverage, the analysis included stories posted on the networks' Web pages. Attempts to capture live broadcasts for future study proved difficult. Because the various networks cover so few international stories, it would require recording nearly the entire broadcast day's news. When limited to only a single broadcast program, this often led to no international stories to code.

To find stories, we searched the networks' "world news" pages. In all cases, the stories with video reflected what was aired on the newscast. There were additional print stories on the respective websites, but because we analyzed only news with anchors, reporters, and sources on video, the stories reflect what was broadcast, and the additional benefit was that more stories were discovered than recording individual broadcasts. The stories that were analyzed include only reporter packages, anchor voice-over with sound-on-tape of at least 30 seconds in length, and interviews with foreign dignitaries or experts. In addition, only international stories that are based at least in part in other nations are included. Stories about U.S. policy toward a foreign country, as such, are not included because these stories are about a U.S. policy and its

domestic political and social implications. However, such a story would be analyzed if it covered the impacts of U.S. policy in the foreign nation itself.

### ***Sample***

The sample includes 240 stories and 669 sources collected during a six-month time frame. On average, each story includes 2.79 sources. To choose the stories, constructed weeks were used as the sampling procedure. Based on recommendations in Luke, Caburnay, and Cohen (2011), six constructed weeks were put together from September 2019 to February 2020. Each month included a single constructed week that randomly sampled days of the week (e.g., a randomly selected Sunday, a randomly selected Monday). Overall, 42 days of news coverage were studied (i.e., six constructed weeks). During coding, three of the 42 days had to be exchanged with a similar day of the week during a different time during the month. In other words, if a Tuesday was missed, then another Tuesday later in the month was used as a replacement. One of the dates was replaced because of a conflict with the coder's schedule, and two dates were replaced because of human error.

### ***Variables***

The unit of analysis is the news source. To code the source, a coding guide was developed with nine variables (available at <https://osf.io/k9q4f>). The variables related to the source include source race, gender, location, affiliation, interest, and interview type. To identify the nations being covered and to distinguish the type of story, variables were developed for the classification of the story (e.g., political, economic, human interest), and the region of the world a story covered in the news story.

Race was coded for reporters and news sources. In both cases, race was coded as Black, Asian, Middle Eastern, Indigenous, Latinx, Multiracial, White, or undetermined. Race was determined by visual cues and background research on the source and reporter, when available. Visual representations were also relied upon to determine gender. The gender of the source was coded as woman, man, intersex, or unknown. For this study, perhaps because of news conventions about who is on camera, all sources were coded as woman or man.

The source location variable was used to code the regional location of the source roughly, but not exclusively organized by continent. The sources' location was coded as Europe, North America (United States and north), Latin America, Oceania, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, the Pacific Islands, and extraterritorial spaces like Antarctica. Similarly, the story location variable used the same codes.

To code for source affiliation, 18 categories were developed to account for the varying types of sources in a broadcast (e.g., government officials [United States, non-United States but Western, non-Western], experts, elite sources, nongovernmental sources, private citizens, news media, and anonymous sources). At a later point, we collapsed some of the codes to combine expert and elite sources by type.

Interview type was also coded as either being a direct interview, a press conference, or b-roll. Given the limitation of resources in contemporary news, the presentation of sources varies, especially as it



pertains to international news stories, and, as such, the purpose is to understand for which sources more resources are dedicated.

Last, source interest was coded to identify the perspective of the source. This variable accounts for whether the source presented a view that is U.S.-centric, the international nations' interests, any other nations' interest, or balanced for all parties involved.

Story classification includes a range of news types, including political government news, economic, sports, science and technology, education, human interest, entertainment, business, religion, and crime. In addition, the story location was coded and followed the same format as the source location.

### ***Coding Reliability***

After several rounds of coder training, the codebook was constructed. Two of the authors coded four days of news coverage in August 2019, which is roughly one-tenth of the overall number of dates sampled. This is consistent with other studies' intercoder reliability tests. Overall, intercoder reliability for individual variables ranged from 82.6% to 100%. The Scott's pi for individual variables ranged from .71 to 1 (reporter race = .92, source race = 1.00, source gender = .81, source location = 1.00, story location = .87, source affiliation = .95, interview type = .71, source interest = .84, story classification = .87). Most variables had exceptional Scott's pi scores, and even the lowest variable, interview type, sits above the acceptable standard of 70%. After establishing strong reliability, the primary author coded all of the news stories.

### **Results**

Across the 239 news stories, 668 news sources were identified. More than half (57.5%) of the 668 sources are located in Europe (29.2%) and North America (28.3%), followed by Asia (16.9%), the Middle East (10.2%), Latin America (6.7%), Oceania (5.1%), and Africa (3.5%). Subsequently, more than two-thirds of the sources are White (62.9%), followed by Asian (13.6%), Middle Eastern/Arab (11.2%), Latinx (6.1%), Black (4.8%), and multiracial (1.3%). Most sources were interviewed directly (67.1%), followed by coverage of press conferences (24.0%) and the use of b-roll (9.0%). The most commonly cited sources are government officials (38.8%) and private citizens (35.2%). The remaining source affiliations include experts and elite sources (19.7%), news agencies (3.1%), nongovernmental sources (1.8%), and intergovernmental organizations (1.3%).

To answer the first research question about source indexing, analyses were conducted about source location, nongovernmental and governmental sources, and race of sources. Western countries are identified as ones in Europe, North America (Canada and the United States), and Oceania. Non-Western countries included Latin America (Mexico, Central America, and South America), the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Pacific Islands. Governmental officials from the United States, non-U.S. Western, and non-Western regions were grouped together with the remaining affiliations being grouped as nongovernmental.

First, for source location, just more than a quarter (28.3%) were from North America (Canada and the United States), while more than half (62.6%) were from Western countries. Second, there are far more nongovernmental sources ( $n = 409$ ) than governmental sources ( $n = 259$ ) in U.S. news coverage of international news. Further, there were far more governmental sources (72.6%, 188) from the West than non-Western regions (27.4%, 71;  $\chi^2(1, N = 668) = 18.1, p < .01$ ). Finally, there are far more White sources (62.9%) than sources of color (37.1%). Of the 420 White sources, most (85.5%) were from Western countries. More than three-fourths of the White sources (77.6%) are from Europe (41.4%) and North America (36.2%). To understand whether indexing has taken place or whether the percentages simply correspond to the percentage of stories by region requires a comparison with the percentage of story sources from different regions. Because only 41.7% of sources were for Western stories, this means that Western sources are overrepresented 20.9%, and White sources are overrepresented 21.2%.

For Western countries, the race of sources is predominantly White (see Table 1). This is also true for coverage of the Middle East. For other non-Western countries, most sources' race matches the majority race of the country being covered; however, there are far more White sources for Western stories than there are Black sources for African stories, Asian sources for Asian stories, and Latinx sources for Latin American stories. Generally, the findings suggest that sources' identities are indexed to their countries of origin insofar as race acts as a proxy for their countries of origin.

White and non-White sources were examined for the second research question about the use of White sources. To strengthen the power of the analysis, the race of the source was coded into a binary of White and non-White.

**Table 1. Race of Source and Journalist by Country Covered.**

Country	Source/Journalist	Race					
		Black	Asian	Middle Eastern	Latinx	Multiracial	White
Europe	Source ( <i>n</i> = 193)	3.6% (7)	0.5% (1)	3.1% (6)	0.0% (0)	2.1% (4)	<b>90.7% (175)</b>
	Journalist ( <i>n</i> = 170)	0.0% (0)	3.5% (6)	0.6% (1)	0.0% (0)	3.5% (6)	<b>92.4% (157)</b>
N America	Source ( <i>n</i> = 46)	13.0% (6)	2.2% (1)	17.4% (8)	13.0% (6)	2.2% (1)	<b>52.2% (24)</b>
	Journalist ( <i>n</i> = 43)	7.0% (3)	18.6% (8)	0.0% (0)	30.2% (13)	0.0% (0)	<b>44.2% (19)</b>
Oceania	Source ( <i>n</i> = 40)	0.0% (0)	2.5% (1)	2.5% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	<b>95.0% (38)</b>
	Journalist ( <i>n</i> = 40)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.5% (1)	12.5% (7)	<b>85.0% (34)</b>
Latin America	Source ( <i>n</i> = 44)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	<b>68.2% (30)</b>	0.0% (0)	31.8% (14)
	Journalist ( <i>n</i> = 39)	0.0% (0)	2.6% (1)	0.0% (0)	28.2% (11)	0.0% (0)	<b>69.2% (27)</b>
Middle East	Source ( <i>n</i> = 158)	0.0% (0)	1.3% (2)	36.7% (58)	1.3% (2)	0.0% (0)	<b>60.8% (96)</b>
	Journalist ( <i>n</i> = 138)	5.1% (7)	2.9% (4)	0.7% (1)	4.3% (6)	0.0% (0)	<b>87.0% (120)</b>
Africa	Source ( <i>n</i> = 25)	<b>52.0% (13)</b>	4.0% (1)	8.0% (2)	4.0% (1)	8.0% (2)	24.0% (6)
	Journalist ( <i>n</i> = 23)	0.0% (0)	26.1% (6)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	<b>73.9% (17)</b>
Asia	Source ( <i>n</i> = 162)	3.7% (6)	<b>52.5% (85)</b>	0.0% (0)	1.2% (2)	1.2% (2)	41.4% (67)
	Journalist ( <i>n</i> = 148)	3.4% (5)	26.4% (39)	1.4% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	<b>68.9% (102)</b>

Across story type, which include political/government (49.3%), human interest (35.0%), economic (5.5%), crime (4.8%), science and technology (3.6%), entertainment (1.6%), and sports (0.1%), significant differences are noted. Stories about politics/government (62.0%), human interest (70.1%), entertainment (81.8%), and crime (71.9%), sources were significantly more likely to be White than non-White ( $\chi^2(6, N = 668) = 35.1, p < .01$ ), while stories about economics (70.3%), and science and technology (66.7%) were significantly more likely to be non-White ( $\chi^2(6, N = 668) = 35.1, p < .01$ ). Sports stories only had one source, who is White.

Concerning source affiliation, significantly more U.S. sources, regardless of status, were White (89.9%), while there were significantly more non-U.S. sources that were non-White (48.5%) than expected ( $\chi^2(1, N = 668) = 88.05, p < .01$ ; see Table 2). Among government official and nongovernmental official sources, government official sources were more likely to be White (69.9%); ( $\chi^2(1, N = 668) = 8.91, p < .01$ ), and nongovernmental official sources were more frequently non-White (68.5%; see Table 2).

For the third research question, the interview type and the location of the source were examined. For interview type, overall, there are 448 sources who were interviewed directly, 160 sources in press conferences, and 60 in b-roll (Table 4). By race, White sources are most frequently interviewed directly, accounting for 57.4% of all direct interviews; however, White sources appear more frequently in press conferences and b-roll than expected ( $\chi^2(10, N = 668) = 34.5, p < .01$ ). Asian and Latinx sources were significantly more likely to be interviewed directly and less likely to be shown at a press conference than expected (Table 3). Finally, Middle Eastern sources appeared more in b-roll than expected (Table 3).

**Table 2. Source Location, Status, and Interests by Binary Source Race (Non-White/White).**

Source	Binary Source Race	
	Non-White	White
Location <sup>1</sup>		
U.S.	10.1% (20)	89.9% (178)
Non-U.S.	48.5% (228)	51.5% (242)
Status <sup>2</sup>		
Government Official	30.1% (78)	69.9% (181)
Nongovernment official	68.5% (170)	56.9% (239)

<sup>1</sup> =  $\chi^2(1, N = 668) = 88.05, p < .01$

<sup>2</sup> =  $\chi^2(1, N = 668) = 8.91, p < .01$

In terms of location, there is quite a bit of variability by interview type (Table 3). More sources from Asia and Latin America were directly interviewed, while fewer sources from Oceania and North America were directly interviewed than expected ( $\chi^2(12, N = 668) = 55.7, p < .01$ ). Only sources from Oceania are more likely to appear in press conferences than expected; sources from North America, Latin America, Africa, and Asia were all less likely to appear in press conferences than expected. Finally, more sources from Africa, the Middle East, and North America are covered through b-roll, and fewer sources from Europe and Latin America are covered in b-roll than expected (Table 3). In fact, no sources from Latin America are covered in b-roll at all.

A detailed assessment of U.S. coverage of Western and non-Western nations was executed for H1a, H1b, and H1c. To strengthen the power of the analysis, the country location of the source and the countries covered were coded into a binary of Western/non-Western. Countries included as Western are in Europe, North America, and Oceania. Respectively, countries coded as non-Western included those in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Pacific Islands, Antarctica, and Latin America.

**Table 3. Source Race and Location by Interview Type.**

Source	Direct Interview	Press Conference	b-Roll
<b>Source Race<sup>1</sup></b>			
Black	75.0% (24)	25.0% (8)	0.0% (0)
Asian	79.1% (72)	14.3% (13)	6.6% (6)
Middle East Eastern/Arab	64.0% (48)	22.7% (17)	13.3% (10)
Latinx	92.7% (38)	7.3% (3)	0.0% (0)
Multiracial	100.0% (9)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)
White	61.2% (257)	28.3% (119)	10.5% (44)
<b>Source Location<sup>2</sup></b>			
Europe	67.2% (131)	26.2% (51)	6.7% (13)
North America	55.0% (104)	33.9% (64)	11.1% (21)
Oceania	50.0% (17)	41.2% (14)	8.8% (3)
Latin America	93.3% (42)	6.7% (3)	0.0% (0)
Middle East	64.7% (44)	22.1% (15)	13.2% (9)
Africa	70.8% (17)	8.3% (2)	20.8% (5)
Asia	82.3% (93)	9.7% (11)	8.0% (9)

<sup>1</sup> =  $\chi^2 (10, N = 668) = 34.5, p < .01$

<sup>2</sup> =  $\chi^2 (12, N = 668) = 55.7, p < .01$

For local sources, U.S. coverage of Western nations is significantly more likely to have Western sources (95.3%) than non-Western sources ( $\chi^2 (1, N = 668) = 219.64, p < .01$ ). As such, H1a is supported.

H1b predicted that non-Western coverage would also have more White sources than local people of color. This is not supported. Of the 389 sources identified in stories of non-Western countries, the number of White, Western sources ( $n = 126, 32.4%$ ) was significantly lower than non-White, non-Western sources ( $n = 180, 46.3%$ ) ( $\chi^2 (1, N = 668) = 128.72, p < .01$ ). Subsequently, H2b is not supported.

For H1c, the prominence of sources was analyzed by the order in which sources appeared within the story. Distinctions were made between the first source mentioned and all subsequent sources. There were more non-Western sources as the lead source in the stories about non-Western countries (58.7%) than Western sources (41.3%). Most of the lead Western sources were White (82.3%), whereas most of the lead non-Western sources were non-White (68.2%). As such, H1c is not supported.

For H2a and H2b, PBS was compared to commercial broadcasters. For Western country coverage, there is no significant difference between the use of local sources between PBS and the commercial broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC; see Table 4). However, for non-Western country coverage, PBS (68.8%) uses significantly more non-Western sources than commercial broadcast networks (52.4%;  $\chi^2 (1, N = 668) = 10.69, p < .01$ ). As such, H2a is partially supported.

**Table 4. Source Race and Location by Station Type.**

Source	PBS	Commercial Broadcasters
Race <sup>1</sup>		
Non-White	46.5% (146)	28.8% (102)
White	53.5% (168)	71.2% (252)
Western Countries		
Western sources	97.3% (107)	94.1% (159)
Non-Western sources	2.7% (3)	5.9% (10)
Non-Western Countries <sup>2</sup>		
Western sources	31.4% (64)	47.6% (88)
Non-Western sources	68.6% (140)	52.4% (97)

<sup>1</sup> = ( $\chi^2 (1, N = 668) = 22.29, p < .01$ )

<sup>2</sup> = ( $\chi^2 (1, N = 668) = 10.69, p < .01$ )

About sources of color, PBS is significantly more likely to use sources of color (46.5%) than all other commercial broadcast networks combined (28.8%;  $\chi^2 (1, N = 668) = 22.29, p < .01$ ; see Table 4). Therefore, H2b is supported.

Finally, the race of the journalists was considered for H3a and H3b. Of the 668 sources, 601 sources were covered by a journalist who could be identified by their race. Less than a quarter (20.1%) of these sources were covered by a journalist of color. The race of reporting journalists for the 601 sources was overwhelmingly White (79.9%), followed by Asian (13.1%), Latinx (3.2%), Black (2.2%), multiracial (1.0%), and Middle Eastern (0.3%).

Of the 422 sources that were interviewed, significantly more journalists of color interviewed non-Western sources (57.3%) than White journalists did (38.19%;  $\chi^2 (1, N = 422) = 10.6, p < .01$ ). As such, H3a is supported. Similarly, journalists of color were significantly more likely to conduct direct interviews with non-White sources (57.3%) than White journalists were (36.6%;  $\chi^2 (1, N = 422) = 12.4, p < .01$ ), thus supporting H3b.

## Discussion

The primary purpose of the study is to understand to what extent U.S. broadcast news relies on White sources from the West in its coverage of countries outside the United States, including in countries in which White people are not the majority population. Considering the predictions of indexing theory and the findings of postcolonial and critical journalism studies, this project sought to empirically test whether U.S.

news relies disproportionately on White, Western sources in its coverage of foreign stories. In general, it has been demonstrated that there is a statistically significant overreliance on White, Western sources. As Said (1978) famously argued, the West often believes that it has the right to speak for the rest of the world. This ideological view of White expertise still extends in broadcast news. Along these lines, the first research question asked to what extent sources' identities are indexed to U.S. news coverage of international news. Though indexing theory is generally linked to the use of sources who articulate governmental positions (Bennett, 1990), this study extends indexing theory to also include global and racial positions (i.e., the West and Whiteness). In other words, there is a propensity not only to draw upon sources with U.S. positions but also on sources that are understood as more culturally proximate to "Americanness." In the research on the four broadcast networks, PBS, CBS, ABC, and NBC, we find that there is an overreliance on Western and White sources and that there is an overreliance on governmental sources.

The first research question asks to what extent U.S. coverage of international news uses White sources. It is demonstrated that across most categories of news and when choosing authoritative, official sources, the sources chosen tend to be White sources. The second research question asks to what extent news uses direct interviews of White sources versus sources of color. The understanding is that with limited resources, news organizations would value White, Western sources more than sources of color. The results are mixed, however. For instance, most direct interviews are with White sources, but White sources are also frequently represented in press conferences and in b-roll interviews so that their percentage of direct interviews is the lowest. This can be explained by the high reliance of press conference interviews for official sources. Official sources of color tend to be represented less frequently in press conferences.

For the first set of hypotheses, we predicted that U.S. international news coverage will disproportionately feature Western and White sources. Importantly, the findings demonstrate that this is somewhat true. For instance, stories about countries in the West tend to use local sources more than stories outside the West. In other words, stories about France are more likely to feature French sources than stories about Nigeria, which will use fewer Nigerian sources. However, this does not mean that Nigerian stories will feature more non-Nigerian sources than Nigerian sources. Non-Western stories still feature mostly local sources. However, relative to stories about Western countries, there is much less reliance on local sources when reporting outside the West. For stories reported outside the West, they do, however, feature a local source first almost 60% of the time. In Western coverage, this figure is much higher.

To complicate the study, we also hypothesized that there would be differences based on the type of broadcaster—public versus commercial—and the race of the journalist. Both sets of hypotheses were supported. PBS uses more local sources for stories outside the West than commercial broadcasters, and PBS uses more sources of color. Similarly, journalists of color also feature more local sources and more sources of color than their White counterparts. This, generally, confirms the findings of previous research by Zeldes and her colleagues (Zeldes & Fico, 2005, 2010; Zeldes et al., 2007, 2012). The difference is that previous research focused on domestic political news stories, so their findings were specific to race and sourcing. This study examines race and locality of sources because of its international focus. One important difference that we note is that the percentage differences in the previous research are fairly small, which is explained by the adherence to similar journalistic routines; however, in this study of international news coverage, the increased use of local sources and sources of color is quite robust. The reasons for this are unclear, but we

can speculate that this can be a combination of structure and reporter habitus. When reporting from a non-Western country, it is much easier to source non-Western sources. In the United States, on the other hand, official sources are predominantly White, which leads to fewer opportunities to source in more diverse ways. Previous research, for instance, indicates that journalists of color are more interested in featuring diverse community leaders to diversify news content (Nishikawa, Towner, Clawson, & Waltenburg, 2009) and are more aware of and frustrated by the White-centered biases of their newsrooms (Drew, 2011). This may be amplified if the journalist of color has cultural and linguistic resources to develop a network of sources (e.g., a Chinese American reporter based in Shanghai).

Overall, we conclude that U.S. news's sourcing practices abroad reproduce White, Western hegemonies of authority. The sources are disproportionately White sources, who are more prominently featured. This is problematic because of the ways it presents a parochial understanding of the world from a White Western perspective. However, there are small spaces for optimism, particularly as it is evident that journalists of color have greater cosmopolitan clarity as they more frequently include sources of color in their overseas stories.

#### *Limitations and Future Directions*

There are a few limitations to the study. First, 3 of the 42 days during the randomly sampled constructed weeks were missed and replaced. There are not obvious impacts because of these replacements, but it is possible that the stories that were coded may have had minor impacts on the data. Second, there were a few stories that had extended coverage, including the Hong Kong protests in early 2019 and the early coverage of COVID-19 in January and February 2020. The latter story had not yet dominated the news agenda, but these two ongoing stories did possibly lead to more coverage of Asia than might ordinarily be the case. Given the half-year span to collect data, however, major news events had less impact because the nature of the constructed weeks meant that only seven days a month were coded, thereby mitigating the impact of historical artifacts.

Future research should engage in cross-national comparisons to understand whether U.S. news sourcing practices are replicated in other Western nations' news coverage, which might also have similar investments in the maintenance of a White and Western hegemonic global order. Additional studies might also extend the online sampling to examine the news stories which circulate most widely on social media, an increasingly common source for U.S. Americans' news consumption. Finally, this research project engages a burgeoning area of critical quantitative studies. There are opportunities for productive dialogue between social science testing and critical theory, and it might help move the field in new directions when old questions are examined with critical perspectives.



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