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Jasmine Skye Taudvin

University of New Hampshire - Main Campus

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The Newsworthiness of Increasingly Expected Murder: Foreign Press Coverage of the Parkland Shooting

By

Jasmine Taudvin

A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors Department and Department of International Affairs
University of New Hampshire
May 2022
INTRODUCTION

Along with a value of individualism, a desire to be on the global frontier, and an ability to ‘pull yourself up by the bootstraps,’ the national identity of the United States is often coated in an ideal of exceptionalism. This partially mythical, usually glowing review of the country is accurate on at least one count: the United States is the only country in the world to have fairly regular school shootings that have resulted in hundreds of children’s lives lost. Despite the numb horror that the regular murders of children bring, a handful of massacres stand out as turning points in the public discourse on school shootings. Along with Columbine and Sandy Hook, the Valentine’s Day shooting of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida is one such historic tragedy. The Parkland shooting sparked an enormous cry for change, leading to nation-wide protests and consistent news coverage for many months. New articles are still being published as recently as 2022, informing the newspaper’s readership on updates in the shooter’s legal case and the lives of survivors.

But past the borders of the United States, how did newspapers react? From what angles did foreign papers write about this important instance of a uniquely American phenomenon? How did major newspapers around the world cover the Parkland shooting of 2018, and along which cultural, political, social, and economic lines was the style and quantity of reporting split? Does nationality impact the way a specific news event is reported to any meaningful degree?

As the polarizing debate over gun control rages on in the United States, these are the questions that need to be asked. While internal analyses of the paradoxes of freedom are needed, the fact stands that school shootings are not a problem other nations have outside isolated events or war. Even in war, attacks on schoolchildren are especially heinous crimes. In order to
understand this terrible phenomenon, it must be examined not only from the environment in which it occurs but also how those outside react.

Horrific as the Parkland shooting may have been, there are tragedies occurring every day around the globe, many with higher fatality rates and greater emotional, economic, and property loss. In the week following the Parkland shooting alone there was the death of the Prince of Denmark, a deadly crash that involved the President of the Democratic Republic of Congo’s car, a state of emergency in Ethiopia, the highest 24-hour death toll in Syria since 2013, a deadly bus crash in Peru, a deadly bomb in Myanmar, and a Boko Haram attack on a Nigerian school that resulted in two student deaths and many students kidnapped and missing (Beech; Denmark’s Prince; DR Congo; Ethiopia; More Bombs; Reuters; Rochabrún). American journalist and university professor Susan D. Moeller wrote that “there must be something beyond a death toll to compel coverage” in her academic article “‘Regarding the Pain of Others’: Media, Bias and the Coverage of International Disasters” (Moeller, 174). Although school shootings are especially terrible tragedies, they are unique to the United States; the long-lasting outcry that gave the Parkland shooting its infamy may not have reached the threshold of shock for foreign audiences. In *The World* article titled “How foreign correspondents in the US cover mass shootings for their overseas audiences,” reporter for French news agency *Agence France-Presse* Leila Marcor commented on the exhaustion many readers feel about United States shootings. Marcor said foreign readers are “tired of hearing the same news over and over again, and they are actually not that interested.” Despite this, Marcor said the Parkland shooting was garnering more interest than usual, due to the massive activist push led by survivors that followed the shooting (How Foreign). The call for gun control was not new, but the endurance and scale of the movement was.
Research that studies what qualifies foreign tragedy for coverage in a local newspaper is not particularly hard to come by, and many of these works reference Galtung and Ruge’s influential 1965 work (Galtung). However, the news sources are usually of limited number, and the research often limited to a handful of countries. Few include mass aggregate data from a high number of countries, and even fewer look inwards at a massive structural problem within the country with a major developed economy in which the researcher resides. The Parkland shooting research addresses this lacuna, while using common techniques in foreign press analysis for consistency. The research offers a new, unbiased, data-centered light in which to view one of the contentious debates currently polarizing the United States. It will not attempt to solve any problems or suggest solutions. Instead, the results gained through the Parkland shooting research are merely a tool in which to gain a broader, multilateral understanding of a uniquely American problem.

Researching the coverage of the February 14, 2018, Parkland, Florida mass shooting in foreign papers of record is important because the Parkland shooting is a historic example of a uniquely American problem, and learning how other nations process the tragedy can, through comparison, help us better understand this national phenomenon.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For analyzing foreign press coverage, Galtung and Ruge’s 1965 *The Structure of Foreign News: The Presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus Crises in Four Norwegian Newspapers* is well known and well cited. Galtung and Ruge’s work focused on qualities of newsworthiness that exceed cultural, political, and geographical boundaries (Galtung). While their article was
looking outwards (national papers covering foreign topics) and the Parkland research looks inward (foreign papers covering a national topic), the qualities of newsworthiness still apply.

Since 1965, the process of news dissemination and journalism have changed dramatically in a landscape of technological advancements. Social media and online news sources overthrew the reign of daily newspapers, and news went rather quickly from being announced each morning to being immediate, constant, and copious. This changing landscape of news dissemination has likely been a contributing factor to the declining public trust in newspapers over the last few decades. Brighton and Foy point out these weaknesses in the Galtung and Ruge theory of newsworthiness in their 2007 book *News Values* (Brighton). Even 2007 works are outdated for a 2022 news environment, due to how quickly technology continues to change the industry.

Although the Brighton and Foy critique was not written in the 2020s, the points made are as relevant today, if not more relevant, then their points were in 2007. With these changes come differences in newsworthiness. Tik Tok and Snapchat news dissemination arguably will be guided by different principles and balance goals than print journalism. Brighton and Foy mention citizen journalists, who follow an instinctive sense of newsworthiness rather than an academic one. Citizen journalists today can be seen on social media. Brighton and Foy also bring up opinion and editorial pieces in newspapers (Brighton, 10). Just as op-eds and letters to the editor do not necessarily follow the rules of newsworthiness laid out by Galtung and Ruge, neither do Instagram videos that educate followers on white privilege, the history of the Black Lives Matter movement, or stigmatized mental illnesses. Still, these videos are undeniably a form of modern news.
Nevertheless, it is useful to view the Parkland shooting coverage through the lens of Galtung and Ruge’s 1965 qualities of newsworthiness. Terms similar to Galtung and Ruge’s are being taught in university journalism classrooms to this day. The titles might not be exact—professors might use oddity and celebrity instead of unexpectedness and reference to elite people—but the core concepts remain the same.

The twelve qualities of newsworthiness identified by Galtung and Ruge in 1965 Norway were frequency, threshold, ambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, reference to persons, and reference to something negative (Galtung, 70). All of the Parkland articles included in this research have at least one of Galtung and Ruge’s qualities of newsworthiness. Some, however, stand out.

The descriptions of unexpectedness and continuity in The Structure of Foreign News are both particularly relevant for the Parkland coverage research. On unexpectedness, Galtung and Ruge write that “what is regular and institutionalized, continuing and repetitive at regular and short intervals” is less newsworthy than the unexpected (Galtung, 67). Therefore, people will generally pay more attention to the unexpected than to the expected.

The first few major school shootings covered in the media were unexpected. When Columbine high school students died, nobody would say it was a regular occurrence. When the town of Sandy Hook was traumatized by a shooting in 2012, the senseless death of children was still shocking. These horrors were treated as such, with extensive news coverage that threw the nation off-balance and in tears. By 2018, this reaction was no longer the case. By the time students in Parkland died; by the time of the shootings in Norfolk, Virginia; Great Mills, Maryland; Santa Fe, Texas; and Santa Clarita, California; school shootings had become regular
and, if not expected, then no longer unexpected. With each new shooting, the public grew more numb. The Parkland shooting prompted protests around the country, but as the protests fizzled out, the tragic news alerts became something to read, let sink with your heart, then put away to move on with the day. There may not be significant data to back up this public feeling, but growing up from a pre-teenager to a young adult as school shootings became common in my nation proved these feelings true. I slowly watched as peers, teachers, relatives, and I moved from horror that lasted for days and filled discussions to a quick glance at our phones and forgetting it had happened by the end of the week. News coverage grew shorter and shallower. While Sandy Hook and Parkland were in the news for weeks and months, the latest school shooting (as of May 15, 2022) in the parking lot of Heights High School in Houston, Texas had so little coverage it is likely that much of the public is not even aware that it happened. 

Unexpectedness no longer applies to school shooting news stories. 

Therein lies the relevance of continuity. Galtung and Ruge write that once something has been defined as news, it will continue to be news “even if the amplitude is drastically reduced” (Galtung, 67). This, they claim, is because it justifies the story being defined as news to begin with, and because “what was unexpected has now also become familiar” (Galtung, 67). 

By the time of the Parkland shooting, school shootings had become expected and familiar. What still brought horror and trauma to those affected was viewed with a depressing numbness by much of the country. Today, school shootings are still in the news. The story cycles are considerably shorter and more superficial than the news cycles of the Columbine, Sandy Hook, and Parkland shootings. Despite this, it is unimaginable for a school shooting to be ignored by the news entirely. Although they are now familiar, school shootings were once unexpected, and the precedent has been set. Numb horror is still horror. While the tragedies are
no longer viewed with the shock of a terrorist attack, they are seen perhaps at the same level of shock as a terrorist attack in a foreign country; routine but terrifying, shuffled into the horrors of “unfixable” human misery.

THEORY, METHOD, AND SOURCES

In order to answer the research question, I have chosen major English- and Spanish-language newspapers from 14 countries around the world to analyze. I am a native English speaker, and after 12 years studying Spanish, I have reached an intermediate level decent enough to read the average Spanish newspaper article. My skills in other languages are too poor to utilize for research purposes. Despite the increased accuracy of online automatic translation services, all newspapers in languages other than English or Spanish were excluded to avoid any translation errors in the data. Expatriate newspapers were also excluded, due to their different biases and requirements for newsworthiness than major national newspapers with a native readership.

Given these parameters, the research data includes the following newspapers: the BBC and The Guardian in the United Kingdom, The New York Times in the United States, the Toronto Star in Canada, The Straits Times in Singapore, the Sydney Morning Herald in Australia, The Irish Times in Ireland, El País in Spain, Al Jazeera in Qatar, the New Zealand Herald in New Zealand, the Times of India in India, Granma in Cuba, The Mainichi in Japan, El Diario in Bolivia, and Mail & Guardian in South Africa. These papers are located on every continent except Antarctica, including two from North America, four from Europe, two from South America, one from Africa, four from Asia, and two from Oceania.

Each newspaper is a paper of record in its country. Papers of record are often the biggest newspaper in their country of location, and hold high standards of writing, rigorous editorial
processes, and generally high levels of trust from local populations of all political leanings. Additionally, all the papers have centrist, if slightly left-leaning, political biases. The Ad Fontes Media Media Bias Chart places The New York Times, the BBC, and The Guardian in this sweet spot of political leaning (Muller, Brandon). The Media Bias Chart is not perfect, but it provides confirmation of general public opinion. The sources represented in the Media Bias Chart are all based in the United States or England, so for most papers included in the Parkland research, political leaning and trustworthiness was based on size, history, and national acclaim.

There is also the issue of paper type. With the exception of Mail & Guardian and Al Jazeera, all papers are published daily. The South African paper, Mail & Guardian, is published weekly, and Al Jazeera, an international news source located in Qatar, publishes articles online at all hours of the day. These differences should not affect the data in any meaningful way because zero Mail & Guardian articles were written about the Parkland shooting, and quality, fact-checked articles published when they are fully edited in Al Jazeera are not significantly different in quantity to articles published daily.

All the papers included are primarily print or online newspapers, except for the BBC and Al Jazeera. Both are news broadcasting channels that also publish written articles online. I only included written articles in this research. Al Jazeera was included because it is a major international news network and is unique as an international paper of record generally trusted and read by people around the world. The BBC was included because of The Guardian’s audience. The Guardian is a United Kingdom paper that also has a United States version. Although there are different journalists writing for each version, the same articles appear online when searching “Parkland” in either paper. Therefore, it would be unreasonable to claim that articles in The Guardian represent a purely English perspective on the tragedy. However, The
Guardian is undeniably the English paper that best fits the requirements. It is a paper of record, only slightly left of center politically, is widely read, and generally regarded as trustworthy. To ensure the data from England is more accurate, I decided to include BBC articles. Like Al Jazeera, the BBC is well-respected, trusted, and read worldwide. Combined, the BBC’s online written articles and The Guardian articles that cannot be teased apart from The Guardian US articles provide accurate English data. The New York Times also has international editions and is globally respected, but due to the uniquely American topic of school shootings the data will not be affected greatly but the paper’s more global audience. Ultimately, the New York Times is still writing for Americans. Al Jazeera, the BBC, the New York Times and The Guardian are the only papers included that write for a wider, international audience.

The Mainichi, Al Jazeera, and the Times of India are the English-language papers located in a nation that does not have English as an official or unofficial national language. Al Jazeera’s audience is an international one, and since English is a worldwide language of business the choice of language makes sense. English is also commonly spoken throughout the nation, so the news source is for a local readership as well as a global one (Qatar). English is the second most widely spoken language in India after Hindi, and the Times of India is written for locals rather than expats (India). English is not commonly spoken in Japan, where The Mainichi is located. However, the English version of the paper is not meant for only English-speaking immigrants. Meant for locals who want to practice their English, bilingual locals, and English-speaking expats, The Mainichi is not an expat newspaper. Additionally, as one of the largest national papers in Japan, The Mainichi is relevant to the Parkland shooting data.

Another difference found between newspapers is how many articles are written by local journalists versus how many are from the Associated Press (AP). Some papers covered the
Parkland shooting almost exclusively with AP articles, some purely with local journalists, and many with a mix of both. Ultimately, these differences are not meaningful enough to exclude any of the papers from the data. Even the papers which relied heavily on AP articles still had local editors choosing which AP articles to include, and they were still structuring their newspaper for their regular readership.

It is also important to note the different types of newspaper ownership structure. Papers owned by a large media conglomerate may have some conflict of interest when reporting on certain topics. For the most part, this issue only affects The Guardian and the New York Times, because the 15 papers are based in different countries all around the world. The New York Times, however, is located in the United States, where the Parkland shooting occurred and where the gun control debate is contentious. Luckily, the New York Times is owned by The New York Times Company, which is publicly traded. Unlike politicians, the New York Times does not accept money from the National Rifle Association (NRA) and has reported negatively on the NRA multiple times in the past. Of all 15 papers, The Guardian has the greatest conflict of interest on the Parkland shooting topic. With a United Kingdom version and a United States version, and online Parkland shooting articles impossible to separate from each other, United States gun politics may have affected the content of the United Kingdom articles. Since The Guardian is such an important paper in England, this potential conflict of interest is another reason why the BBC articles are in the data as a secondary English source.

According to data from Schema Design, Google Trends, and Axios, the average lifespan of a news story is two weeks (The Lifespan). The Parkland shooting story lasted significantly longer than the average news story, and there are Parkland articles that were written as late as early 2022. To keep the data set contained and consistent across all newspapers included, I
decided to expand the average lifespan of a news story and include all Parkland articles written within two years from the shooting. This brought the date range of all the articles included in this research to between February 14, 2018 and February 14, 2020. Due to the pervasive nature of the topic of school shootings, I was concerned with being consistent and conscious about which articles on gun control I included in my data. Therefore, I didn’t include any gun control articles written after April 14, 2018 unless the headline or lede specifically mentioned the Parkland shooting or school shootings writ large. All the articles that fit these constraints and loaded on the online newspaper websites under the search term “Parkland” are in the data.

The collection of articles from each newspaper was further broken down into seven categories, these being Attacks/Conspiracies; Culture/Politics; Law/Facts/Updates; News Coverage; Personalization; Shooter; and Survivors/Victims, Activism, Remembering. Each article was sorted into only one category, with the exception of Personalization. Many articles in Personalization were also sorted into a second category.

*Attacks/Conspiracies* includes articles about attacks on survivors of the Parkland shooting, and conspiracy theories about survivors and the movement.

*Culture/politics* includes articles about politicians and famous people making comments about the shooting or the movement, survivors getting awards or attending fancy events, books and films about the shooting, events and products capitalizing on the tragedy, connections to other shootings around the country, and gun control. The category does *not* include gun control protests.

*Law/facts/capitalization* includes articles about legal updates, an unbiased account of what happened at the shooting, and surveillance video. This category does *not* include gun control laws that changed or were passed about school safety or arming teachers.
News coverage includes articles about how school shootings are covered in the news.

Personalization includes articles that connect the story to their country in some way that would be relevant to their paper’s readers. Not all articles in this category had local personalization of the story as a main angle, but instead personalized a story focused on a different angle. Personalization should also be distinguished as separate from Galtung and Ruge’s reference to persons, which is sometimes referred to as personification in their 1965 work (Galtung, 68).

Shooter includes articles about the shooter’s life, about perceived or real slights on the shooter, the shooter’s mental health, and the shooter’s brother. This category does not include updates on his trail, evidence found that the shooting was premeditated, or tips about the shooter that weren’t followed up on.

Survivors/victims, activism, remembering includes articles about individual survivors, victims and family members, protests and movements, ‘one-year-on’ style remembering, memorials, what parents and survivors are doing, the mental health of survivors, and gun control suggestions offered by survivors and protests.

Articles about body cam footage and how the police operate were also excluded from all categories.

The category of Culture/Politics was further divided into Gun control and Not gun control. These subcategories are self-explanatory.

RESULTS

The results will begin with number of articles written, then move on to angles, and finish with the sub-angle Gun control within Culture/politics. Analysis of the results will be mixed in
throughout the results.

The first two graphs show the average number of articles written in nations based in various continents and in nations with varying levels of English spoken.

**FIGURE 1:** The average number of articles written about the Parkland shooting in newspapers of record based in nations with varying amounts of the English language spoken.

![Graph showing average number of articles written](image)

**FIGURE 2:** The average number of articles written about the Parkland shooting in newspapers of record based in each of the continents (excluding Antarctica).

![Graph showing average number of articles written by continent](image)

Seen in Figure 1, papers based in nations where English is the ‘main’ language wrote more than twice the number of articles than the next highest amount: papers in nations that are English-speaking but multilingual. Papers based in nations where English is not a common language wrote the fewest articles, totaling just under half the amount written in English-speaking but multilingual nations. This is a clear indicator that the more common English is in a nation, the more articles the nation’s paper of record published about the Parkland shooting.

Of course, many languages are spoken in many nations, and some of the nations included in *English as a ‘main’ language* do not have English as a national language. The languages spoken were based on external perception and statistics. *English as a ‘main’ language* includes
the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, and Ireland. Although
the United States has no national language, Ireland’s national languages include Gaelic, and New
Zealand’s national languages include Māori, English is the predominant language in all of these
countries (Australia; Canada; Ireland; New Zealand; United Kingdom; United States). English-
speaking but multilingual includes India, where 22 different regional languages are spoken;
Singapore, where the four official languages are Malay, English, Tamil, and Mandarin; and
Qatar, where the official language is Arabic, but English is commonly spoken (Qatar). English is
not a common language includes Spain, Cuba, and Japan. The South African and Bolivian
newspapers did not write any articles on the shooting and are therefore not included in the graph.

Seen in Figure 2, papers in North America wrote vastly more articles about the shooting
than papers in any other continent. Next comes Oceania and Europe, followed by Asia and South
America. The one African newspaper included, Mail & Guardian, did not write any, and no
newspapers from Antarctica were included.

Intuitively, these graph results make sense. Nations that are more similar to the United
States wrote more about a uniquely American tragedy. But what exactly does similar mean?
Research done by Jeff M. Jones in 2020 to develop the Country Similarity Index backs up this
instinctive feeling of similarity. His data equally weighs the demographics, culture, politics,
infrastructure, and geography of each nation to determine similarity, with conclusions based on
no fewer than one thousand data points. Each of the five categories are deeply analyzed, with
demographics alone including average age, average height and weight, gender ratio, race and
ethnicity, marriage and divorce rates, birth rate, household size, wealth and education,
employment rate, and typical occupation. The top five most similar nations to the United States
are, in order, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and Ireland. The five least
similar nations to the United States are, in order, Cambodia, Somalia, Niger, Eritrea, and Laos (Jones, Jeff).

Based on this data, the continents in order from most to least similar to the United States are North America, Oceania, Europe, South America, Asia, then Africa. Figure 2 shows the average number of Parkland shooting articles being written in continents in order from most written to least written as North America, Oceania, Europe, Asia, South America, then Africa.

Although the line-up of most to least written and most to least similar are not exact, they are close enough to be meaningful to the results of the Parkland shooting data. It is also possible that the only difference—South America and Asia being swapped—is due to the limited number of newspapers analyzed from South America. Four were analyzed from Asia: The Mainichi, The Straits Times, Al Jazeera, and the Times of India. Only two were analyzed from South America: El Diario and Granma. Of those two, only Granma wrote any articles about the Parkland shooting. More newspapers would have to be analyzed to be sure of the order of South America and Asia.

Still, both Figure 1 and Figure 2 show the same overall result: the more similar the nation is to the United States, the more articles its newspapers of record will have written on the Parkland shooting. With more research and considerably more data points, the idea could potentially be expanded to ‘the more similar a nation is to Nation X, the more articles its newspapers of record will write on tragedies in Nation X.’ This expanded hypothesis could not be proven, however, without further research.

Of the graphs reporting article angles, the data is slightly off on purpose. Since Personalization articles could also be in a second angle category, the total of some pie charts is slightly larger than accurate. However, it was important that personalized articles were noted.
This slight inaccuracy does not affect the overall results reported. *Personalization* takes up such a miniscule portion of each pie chart that its addition or exclusion does not change the overall results of the data. For this reason, all angle results are reported in general terms, rather than with specific percentages.

![Pie charts showing percentage of articles written from different angles](image)

**FIGURE 3**: Percentage of the total number of articles about the Parkland shooting written from a given angle in newspapers based in nations with major developed economies.

Seen in Figure 3, newspapers based in nations with major developed economies—the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, and Canada—wrote from more angles, wrote more from the *Law/facts/updates* angles, and wrote less from the *Culture/politics* angle than papers from nations with developing—Cuba, Bolivia, India, South Africa, Qatar, and Singapore—or developed—Australia, Ireland, Spain, and New Zealand—economies (United Nations). South African and Bolivian data are not included in the graphs. Papers in nations with major developed economies are the only ones that wrote any articles on the news coverage of school shootings.
Papers in nations with developing economies wrote significantly more articles from the *Culture/politics* and *Survivors/victims/families, activism, remembering* angles than papers in nations with developed or major developed economies.

Below, Figure 4 has similar results to Figure 3.

![Figure 4: Percentage of the total number of articles about the Parkland shooting written from a given angle in newspapers based in nations with varying income levels.]

**FIGURE 4:** Percentage of the total number of articles about the Parkland shooting written from a given angle in newspapers based in nations with varying income levels.

Seen in Figure 4, papers in high-income nations—the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, Spain, Qatar, Singapore, Ireland, Japan, and Canada—wrote far more from the *Law/facts/updates* angle and wrote from more angles than papers in middle-income nations—Cuba, India, South Africa, and Bolivia (World Bank). South African and Bolivian data are not included in the graph. Alternatively, papers from middle-income nations wrote considerably more about culture and politics.
Economics has always affected newspaper revenue, especially since what some might call the technological revolution. When any one industry takes a downturn economically, companies in that industry will have less representation in newspaper advertisements (What Factors). When the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic hit, newspapers across the country were decimated, with closures and layoffs happening around the United States (Covid-19). There may not have been a global pandemic at the time of the Parkland shooting, but papers were still struggling with the emergence of competition in free online news, and the local and national economic state still affected advertisement revenue. The reason for these results is likely twofold: papers in nations with lower incomes and less developed economies would want to publish the content local readership was most interest in to maintain customer subscriptions and paper revenue, and papers in nations with higher incomes and stronger, more developed economies are more similar to the United States and therefore had a readership more interested in American news.

With more interest in the topic and less severe economic constraints, papers in higher income nations were able to publish a broader range of articles. Meanwhile, papers in nations with weaker economies wrote less, focusing on the piece of the news story most confusing to their audiences: the Culture/politics angle, the gun culture in the United States. This idea is explored more thoroughly in the analysis of Figure 7.

Below, Figure 5 processes the data on angles written in each newspaper into average data by continent.
FIGURE 5: Percentage of the total number of articles about the Parkland shooting written from a given angle in newspapers based in the six continents that contain independent nations.

Seen in Figure 5, papers based in North America, Europe, and Oceania wrote articles from more angles and with a more even distribution of angles than papers in Asia and South America. The African paper *Mail & Guardian* did not write any articles on the Parkland shooting. Additionally, the fewer angles that were represented in a given continent’s newspapers, the more was written from the *Culture/politics* angle.
This last result is perhaps the most unexpected of the Figure 5 data results. Although the order is not exact, those continents with more angles represented in their papers of record generally wrote more articles than the continents with fewer angles represented. Referring back to Figure 1, North America and Oceania wrote the most articles, followed by Europe and Asia in the middle, and South America and Africa with the fewest articles. While Figure 5 shows Oceania having one fewer angle than Europe, a correlation can nevertheless be drawn. Given fewer angles and generally fewer articles, it might be expected that the primary angle would be Law/facts/updates, given the journalistic drive to remain unbiased. Instead, it is the Culture/politics angle that becomes the focus for the newspapers in the data set.

Like Figure 1, the results of Figure 5 can be viewed through the Country Similarity Index. Those continents which contain nations that are most similar to the United States reported on the Parkland shooting from a great number of angles. Meanwhile, papers in Asia, South America, and Africa wrote articles from very few angles, with a large percentage in the Culture/politics category.

Below, Figure 6 processes the data into aggregate data by amount of English spoken in each nation where one of the newspapers is based.
FIGURE 6: Percentage of the total number of articles about the Parkland shooting written from a given angle in newspapers based in nations with varying amounts of the English language spoken.

Seen in Figure 6, the nations where English is not spoken as predominantly had papers that wrote less from the *Laws/facts/updates* and *Attacks/conspiracies* angles. Papers based in nations where English is not commonly spoken wrote more from the *Personalization* angle than nations where English is spoken, and papers in multilingual nations that speak English wrote from fewer angles overall, focusing more on the *Culture/politics* angle.

Once again, the percentage of articles about laws, facts, and updates decreased as similarity to the United States decreased while the humanistic angle of *Survivors/victims/families, activism, remembering* increased in their coverage.

Below, Figure 7 processes data on the coverage of the *Culture/politics* angle in each newspaper, breaking it down into *Gun control* and *Not gun control*. 
- Gun control
- Other 'culture/politics'
- No data
FIGURE 7: Percentage of the total number of articles about the Parkland shooting written from the
Culture/politics angle that focus on gun control and the gun debate in the United States.

Seen in Figure 7, each pie chart represents the total number of articles published in a
given paper from the Culture/politics angle. Because the gun control debate is so central to the
Parkland shooting topic, these pie charts separate articles on gun control and United States gun
culture from the rest of the Culture/politics angle. Figure 7 shows the most striking results from
the entire research project. While there is a good range represented, only the New York Times
wrote significantly less than 50% of the Culture/politics total on gun control and gun culture.
The Times of India is the only other paper to have fewer than half of its Culture/politics total on
guns, and even then, it is only slightly under 50%.

While the results seen in Figure 7 may be striking, they are not confusing or even
unexpected. Those living in the United States—the main audience of the New York Times—are
fully inundated with the gun debate, likely have strong opinions, and understand the other side’s
argument. If they grew up in the United States, then they grew up being taught implicitly that
without freedom, the United States would be a different nation. Schools taught them the
importance of the constitution to the founding of the nation. They understood from a young age
that one of the things that most makes the United States the United States is the freedom to speak
your mind and protest authority. The nation was founded on the idea of a decentralized
government and freedom of the states and the individual. Of course, this is the ideal, not the
truth. The Three-Fifths Clause, the Importation Clause, the Slave Insurrection Clause, and the
Fugitive Slave Clause all denied freedom to Black people in the nation, and women did not
achieve suffrage until 1920. Still, those ideals of freedom and a decentralized government
continue to guide political debates, despite a modern, politically liberal push for change.

The gun debate in the United States is incredibly complicated and cannot be fully
explained or explored within the constraints of this paper. What is important to this paper
though, is that most Americans understand this complexity even if they do not have the ability to
explain it. Thus, the New York Times does not need to write as much about guns as foreign
papers.

Agence France-Presse journalist Marcor told The World that the American determination
to keep possession of guns is “surreal” and “a very difficult concept to grasp for a reporter from
abroad,” (How Foreign). Estelita Carazzai, a correspondent for the Brazilian paper Folha de Sao,
also described the experience as surreal to The World. “[The social media response in Brazil is]
‘Oh my God, why are they thinking about [arming teachers]? Isn’t this enough, all these mass
shootings year after year? And they’re still thinking about giving guns to people?’” (How
Foreign).

This public response is likely also happening in nations similar to the United States that
have had shootings in the past but quickly changed the legislature surrounding guns. The 2019
Christchurch mosque shootings in New Zealand prompted Parliament to pass a gun reform bill
almost unanimously less than a month later and Prime Minister Jacinda Arden banned the sale of
assault rifles and military style semi-automatics six days after the shootings (New Zealand
Votes). In 1996, 16 school students and their teacher were murdered at Dunblane Primary School in Scotland and by the end of the next year, Parliament banned the private ownership of most handguns (Magazine, Smithsonian). Both the New Zealand Herald and the BBC referenced these shootings in their Parkland coverage, noting in writing the only major shootings their local readership would likely be able to reference while reading about Parkland.

This feeling of surrealism and confusion over United States gun culture accounts for the larger percentage of articles about gun control in papers based outside of the United States. Even The Guardian, which has the highest potential for conflicts of interest, wrote far more on the gun debate than the New York Times. This also explains the focus on the Culture/politics in nearly all the graphs, and the increase in the Culture/politics angle as fewer angles were represented in a newspaper.

Although Figures 1-7 do not include results that correlate with the 2018 Press Freedom Index, it would be ridiculous to exclude its impacts from the data analysis. The Press Freedom Index is created by Reporters Without Borders and updated annually since 2002. It measures the amount of freedom and dangers there are for and to journalists in each nation. Some of the data points included each year include number of journalist arrests and imprisonments, number of journalist deaths and murders, and number of threats against journalists, among other things.

In 2018, the United States landed at 45, due to increasing resentment, disrespect, and threats against the media under Donald Trump’s presidency. Ireland (16), Canada (18), Australia (19), South Africa (28), and the United Kingdom (40), all scored a better place than the United States. Of the nations represented in the Parkland shooting research, New Zealand had the best press freedom score, coming in at 8. Those with worse scores than the United States include Spain (52), Japan (67), Bolivia (110), Qatar (125), India (138), and Singapore (151). The nation
with the worse score represented in the Parkland research is Cuba, placing at 172 (RSF Index

Data analysis did not show any conclusive results in respect to the press freedom index. A potential reason for the inconclusive results is that press freedom does not affect how much is written or from which specific angles, but instead how strictly a paper follows the newsworthiness qualities. Depending on the topic covered, level of press freedom, and audacity of the journalists, newspapers in regions of poor press freedom might be more or less cautious when deciding to cover a particularly newsworthy story. Instinctually, it is logical that newspapers in regions with high press freedoms might report on more newsworthy stories than papers in regions with low press freedoms. With more to fear, journalists might hesitate before publishing newsworthy stories that the government, powerful people and organizations, or the public would not like or want published. Alternatively, with more to fear, journalists in regions of poor press freedoms are already taking a lot of risk simply by being in the profession. Publishing news stories with fewer qualities of newsworthiness could be a safer choice for them to make.

Regardless, this paper’s research is not extensive enough to analyze the effects of press freedom on stories chosen to publish or foreign tragedy coverage. Still, press freedom does impact newsrooms, and cannot be ignored in any analysis of news coverage.

One of the data points in the Press Freedom Index score calculations is the potency of libel laws. To sue for libel in the United States, a person’s reputation must be proven to be damaged so that their career or other prospects are tarnished beyond repair. Even then, the first amendment protects professional and citizen journalists with the right of free speech. On this count, the United States has good press freedom. England, on the other hand, is at the other
With laws strongly favoring those suing for defamation, London has been known as the libel capital of the world. Due to the nature of the job, it is not uncommon for newspapers to publish reputation-damaging information. This has led to a number of problems, including journalists deciding not to publish stories in fear of a lawsuit or seeking out immoral means of gathering information in order to prove their story as true in the case of a lawsuit (Science, London School; Bates, Stephen).

Since the early 2010s, British libel law has been attempted to be reformed multiple times. Even with updates to the legislation, it remained difficult for a journalist or newspaper to win a case in 2018, especially against high profile, wealthy plaintiffs. Libel laws vary across the nations represented in this Parkland shooting research. Like press freedom, this research is not extensive enough to present results on the effects of libel law on foreign tragedy coverage. However, there is undoubtably an impact, and to ignore it would be to leave the puzzle unfinished.

Below, Figures 8-12 process data on angles by the government type of the nation in which each newspaper is based.
FIGURE 8: Percentage of the total number of articles about the Parkland shooting in newspapers based in nations with parliamentary republics written from various angles.
FIGURE 9: Percentage of the total number of articles about the Parkland shooting in newspapers based in nations with constitutional monarchies written from various angles.

![Pie chart for AL JAZEERA, NYTIMES, GRANMA](chart.png)

**AL JAZEERA**  
- Shooter  
- News coverage  
- Attacks/conspiracies  
- Survivors/victims/families, activism, remembering  
- No data  

**NYTIMES**  
- Shooter  
- News coverage  
- Attacks/conspiracies  
- Culture/politics  
- Law/facts/updates  
- No data  

**GRANMA**  
- Shooter  
- News coverage  
- Attacks/conspiracies  
- Culture/politics  
- Law/facts/updates  
- No data

FIGURE 10: Percentage of the total number of articles about the Parkland shooting in newspapers based in nations with absolute monarchies written from various angles.

FIGURE 11: Percentage of the total number of articles about the Parkland shooting in newspapers based in nations with constitutional republics written from various angles.

FIGURE 12: Percentage of the total number of articles about the Parkland shooting in newspapers based in nations with socialist states written from various angles.

Seen in Figures 8-12, there is a correlation between the percentage of the total written from a given angle and the government type of the nation in which the newspaper is based. In general, papers based in nations with parliamentary republics published approximately 50% or more of their articles from the *Culture/politics* angle. Newspapers based in nations with constitutional monarchies published approximately half or fewer of their articles from the *Culture/politics* angle. No results can be gleaned from the papers based in nations with absolute
monarchies, constitutional republics, or socialist states because there is only one set of data for each government type.

It is hard to say why this correlation exists. Politics touches on so many aspects of life in a given nation that it would be difficult to determine where exactly the imitating factor begins. The scope of this research is too small to answer the question of why, but it would be interesting to explore this correlation further in later research.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to fill a lacuna in the foreign press coverage analysis field by using aggregate foreign press coverage to look inwards at a horrific, nation-unique phenomena. Rather than attempting to critique or find solutions for the laws, culture, or discourse surrounding school shootings in the United States, the results provide a broader, more global view of the common American tragedy. Using the lens of the 2018 Parkland shooting, understanding how other nations process and explain the horrific news story can be beneficial in framing and more deeply understanding the national phenomenon.

The results of this research can be summed up in a few main points. First, national similarity to the United States had a major impact on the coverage of the shooting. Following the Country Similarity Index with near exactness at best and generally at worst, Figures 1-7 all presented similar results on similarity: newspapers in nations similar to the United States wrote more articles from more angles than other papers, with more coverage of the Law/facts/updates angle and less focus on culture and politics comparative to newspapers from nations dissimilar to the United States (Jones, Jeff). Compared to dissimilar nations, nations similar to the United States have a newspaper readership that is more interested in reading about United States
tragedies. With more interest comes more articles, and with more articles comes more bandwidth to write from angles that are less pressing than Culture/politics, the most confusing aspect of the shooting for many foreign audiences.

Second, the newspapers on average reported more from the Culture/politics angle than any other angle. Foreign news correspondents have noted surrealism and confusion as the overwhelming emotions felt by their readership abroad, leading to a higher percentage of articles written to explain United States gun culture. Some of this confusion was rather explicitly incorporated into the articles with the Personalization angle. In particular, this was present in the New Zealand Herald and the BBC, two papers located in nations that voted for major gun restrictions after mass shootings in 1996 and 2019 respectively (Magazine, Smithsonian; New Zealand Votes). Expanding this result from the specifics of the Parkland shooting news story, newspapers will likely report most extensively on the piece of a foreign tragedy that is most confusing or difficult to understand for their local readership. In the case of Parkland, that confusion lay with the United States’ extreme reluctance to restrict gun sales and ownership in the wake of numerous deadly school shootings.

Third, the actors impacting any press coverage will not be working alone. While nation similarity and the greatest point of confusion for local readership presented as clear impactors in the results of this research, other stimuli must not be discounted. Local and national economics, press freedom, and libel laws and other legislature indubitably shape the landscape of all press coverage. Economics affects newspaper revenue, while press freedom and libel laws impact the level of caution exercised by the journalists.

These results prove the thesis. Given the results that align with the Country Similarity Index and show how coverage is built around readership confusion that stems from their cultural
surroundings, the nation and region in which a newspaper is based impacts the coverage of a given foreign tragedy. Additionally, the striking results on gun culture coverage seen in Figure 7 prove that looking at foreign coverage of the Parkland shooting will provide a broader, more global understanding of this uniquely American phenomenon. Given the Dunblane and Christchurch mass shootings in nations with a high similarity to the United States, it is not shootings, or even school shootings that are unique to the nation. It is instead the reaction to mass shootings and the historically rooted gun culture that is the uniquely American phenomenon.
### APPENDIX

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