

GLOBAL

MEDIA INDEX FOR AFRICA

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24



Main Report



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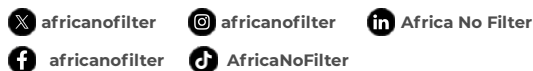
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About Africa No Filter

Africa No Filter exists because many stories about Africa still lazily revolve around the single story of poor leadership, poverty, corruption, disease, and conflict. These stories fail to portray the other more progressive side of Africa and collectively perpetuate the narrative that Africa is broken, dependent and lacks agency. The result? Harmful stereotypes that continue to paint a rigidly negative picture of the continent, despite the massive strides we are making. Our mission at Africa No Filter is to shift these stereotypes because they impact the way the world sees Africa and how Africa sees itself. Through research, grant-making, community building and advocacy, we support storytellers to help shift the stereotypical narratives about Africa one story at a time.



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The Africa Center is a multidisciplinary 501c3 nonprofit institution helping to shape a vision of Africa's future. Serving as a gateway to engagement with contemporary Africa, and as a platform for the exchange of ideas around culture, business, and policy as related to the African continent, The Africa Center advances thought and action around Africa's global influence and impact on our collective futures. Learn more at www.theafricacenter.org. Follow The Africa Center on [X.com](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [YouTube](#) @TheAfricaCenter.



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Executive Summary

The *Global Media Index for Africa* is the only index that tracks how the world's most influential news providers cover the continent. It was created in response to the fact that global news coverage about Africa continues to shape perceptions about the continent. The impact of these persistent stories about conflict, corruption, poverty, poor leadership, bad politics, and disease continues to have an outsized influence on investment, tourism, global policy on Africa and the cost of money for the continent.

The *Global Media Index for Africa* assesses and ranks *online news stories of the 20 leading news providers that offer primary coverage of Africa for the world. It is also a tool that aims to provide much needed regular 'health checks' on how Africa is framed in the media. The outlets selected are the digital platforms of: *CNN, Deutsche Welle, Russia Today, Bloomberg, Xinhua, Le Monde, The Guardian, Wall Street Journal, Associated Press, Al Jazeera, The Economist, New York Times, VOA News, AFP, Reuters, BBC, CGTN, Financial Times, RFI, and Washington Post.*

Over 1 000 news articles were collected over a six- month period, and evaluated across four key indicators, making the *Global Media Index for Africa* the largest manual study of media analysis ever conducted for an African media index. The indicators against which the content was assessed include:

- The **diversity of topics** covered in the stories against a curated list of 28

possible topics that included issues such as corruption, poverty, disease, and politics as well as innovation, culture and business.

- The **range of sources** interviewed and quoted in direct citations in each story.
- The **number of African countries** covered over the period of analysis, calculating the percentage against the total number of 55 countries that make up the African continent.
- The **depth of coverage** measured by the context and balance provided as well as the framing and stereotypes used.

The overall score for each outlet is based on an average of each individual media's performance across the four broad indicators. The results suggest there is a need for both change and continuity in how global media covers Africa.

The general performance across the online news content from all 20 media outlets falls within the category of 'medium', suggesting that coverage of Africa in terms of new, more progressive narratives leaves room for improvement.

On the positive side most media organisations scored high on the 'depth of coverage' indicator which assessed balance, context, stereotypes, and framing; proving that the most well-funded media organisations in the world, who make up this index, are aware of the tenets of a good news story.







Key Highlights

Below is a summary of key highlights from the *Global Media Index for Africa*.

- *The Guardian* is in first place on the index for its overall coverage of the continent, with a score of 63%. It was also number one for the diversity of topics covered, with a score of 57%.
- At second and third places overall on the index are *AFP* and *Reuters* agencies, with scores of 61% and 60%, respectively. *AFP* also came in first place for covering the most African countries of the outlets assessed, with a score of 56%.
- Three leading American powerhouse media organisations came in at the bottom of the index at 18th, 19th and 20th positions. They were the *New York Times* (51%), *Wall Street Journal* (48%), and *Washington Post* (47%).
- Without exception, the global media organisations in this study devoted disproportionate space to powerful men — from politicians and businesspeople to experts — as primary news sources in their stories about Africa; showing that men still dominate news in and about Africa.
- Most of the global media in the index only covered a handful of African countries in depth in their reports, showing that global media still largely treats Africa as a country. *Wall Street Journal* came in at the bottom of the index in the 20th position for the limited number of countries it reported on, with a score of 31%.
- There were no high performers in the 'diversity of topics' reported on, with the lion's share of news about Africa being about politics, poverty, corruption and related negative subjects. There was scant attention to topics such as culture, the arts, innovation, technology, and other positive developments in the continent found in the online stories.
- The *Washington Post*, with a score of 29%, ranked lowest for the 'diversity of topics' covered, representing a continuity of previous patterns found in many media of framing Africa through the lens of its stereotypes.
- The voices of ordinary Africans were missing in the stories because global reporting still privileges the voices of powerful elites, both local and international. These include experts, politicians, national leaders, international organisations and others. Very little attention is given to ordinary citizens and other traditionally marginalised voices like young people, women, traditional leaders etc. Once again, *The Guardian* is in first place with a score of 62% for the range of diverse voices in its articles. *Russia Today* ranked at number 20 with a score of 36%.
- For the 'depth of coverage' on their stories, overall, all 20 outlets generally performed well across the four sub-indicators of balance, context, framing, and avoidance of stereotypes.
- Balance — the only outlet that scored below 75% is *CGNT*, which is in the 20th place with a score of 68%. *Deutsche Welle* and *Le Monde* share the first place with a score of 94%.
- Context — most outlets offered detailed information to aid reader



comprehension, including hyperlinks and context sections within news stories. *Le Monde's* score of 95% put it ahead of the rest in first position. Once again *Washington Post's* score of 69% puts it in 20th place.

- Stereotype avoidance was generally good across outlets despite some variance. Coming in at number one is *Xinhua* with a score of 97%. *The Economist* is in the 20th position with a score of 80%.

The *Global Media Index for Africa* is more than just a ranking; it is a much needed

monitoring tool that aims to hold a mirror up to global media, allowing them to critically examine their storytelling about Africa and understand its impact.

It is our hope that the *Global Media Index for Africa* will contribute to a larger discussion about the role of global media in perpetuating and sustaining stereotypical narratives about Africa. The tool is not intended to be a punitive mechanism for media who find themselves at the bottom of the rankings, rather, its launch should be viewed as a reflective learning moment for media.



Picture credit: DC Studio on Freepik



1. Introduction

Africa's representation in the global media has been a topic of concern in academic research for at least two decades, especially following Beverly Hawk's seminal book, *Africa's Media Image* (Hawk, 1992), revisited in 2016 in *Africa's Media Image in the 21st Century: From the 'Heart of Darkness' to 'Africa Rising'* edited by Bunce et al. Popular media discourses about Africa, exemplified by *The Economist's* infamous 'The Hopeless Continent' issue, later revisited as 'Africa Rising' have been widely critiqued. Although in the recent past the proliferation of digital communication has spawned increasingly participatory media flows (in the process, enabling the continent to present itself more autonomously), the dominant global media narratives that frame Africa continue to attract currency and attention among policymakers, civil society, corporates and others within and outside the continent itself.

Globally, the mainstream media have witnessed a decline in newspaper circulation and plummeting audience and viewership figures for news broadcasters. At the same time, global media still play key roles in informing and influencing citizens, particularly in terms of coverage of Africa and the developing world. Scott (2009) for example, argues that both United Kingdom and United States newspaper coverage is typically one-dimensional and reliant on stereotypes. The negative portrayal of Africa in the Western media, argues Ebo (1992), is a deliberate and systematic process to portray Africans as savage and uncivilised, and this is done via their over-emphasis on disease, war and famine. Africa has generally been considered less newsworthy, with greater media coverage of countries perceived to be politically

significant; and a narrow stereotypical focus on a continent immersed in war and ethnic violence.

Global media coverage of the continent has high international relevance as the international community bases its views and impressions of the continent on media coverage. However, African engagement with global media also influences the everyday lives of Africans. Moreover, global media coverage of Africa holds the potential to influence foreign policy. The 'CNN effect' (Robinson, 1999) refers to the possibilities for mainstream media to influence the decisions taken by policymakers, and ultimately the outcome of political events.

Much of the research into media coverage of the continent is either dated or has been conducted in the Global North. This reality renders continued research and exploration of global mediations of the continent (and ramifications thereof) from the vantage point of Africa itself imperative.

The brief of this project is to develop an annual media index against which to measure, weigh and assess the performance of selected global media coverage of Africa. This is based on a sample of 20 global and most influential media organisations that provide primary coverage of the continent. Primary coverage in this context refers to dedicating substantial resources to on-the-ground coverage (for example, having bureaux or correspondents) as opposed to carrying news from wire services and/or other third parties, which would constitute secondary coverage. In developing the index, we identified particular indicators which, in our view, constitute the key pillars of any rigorous



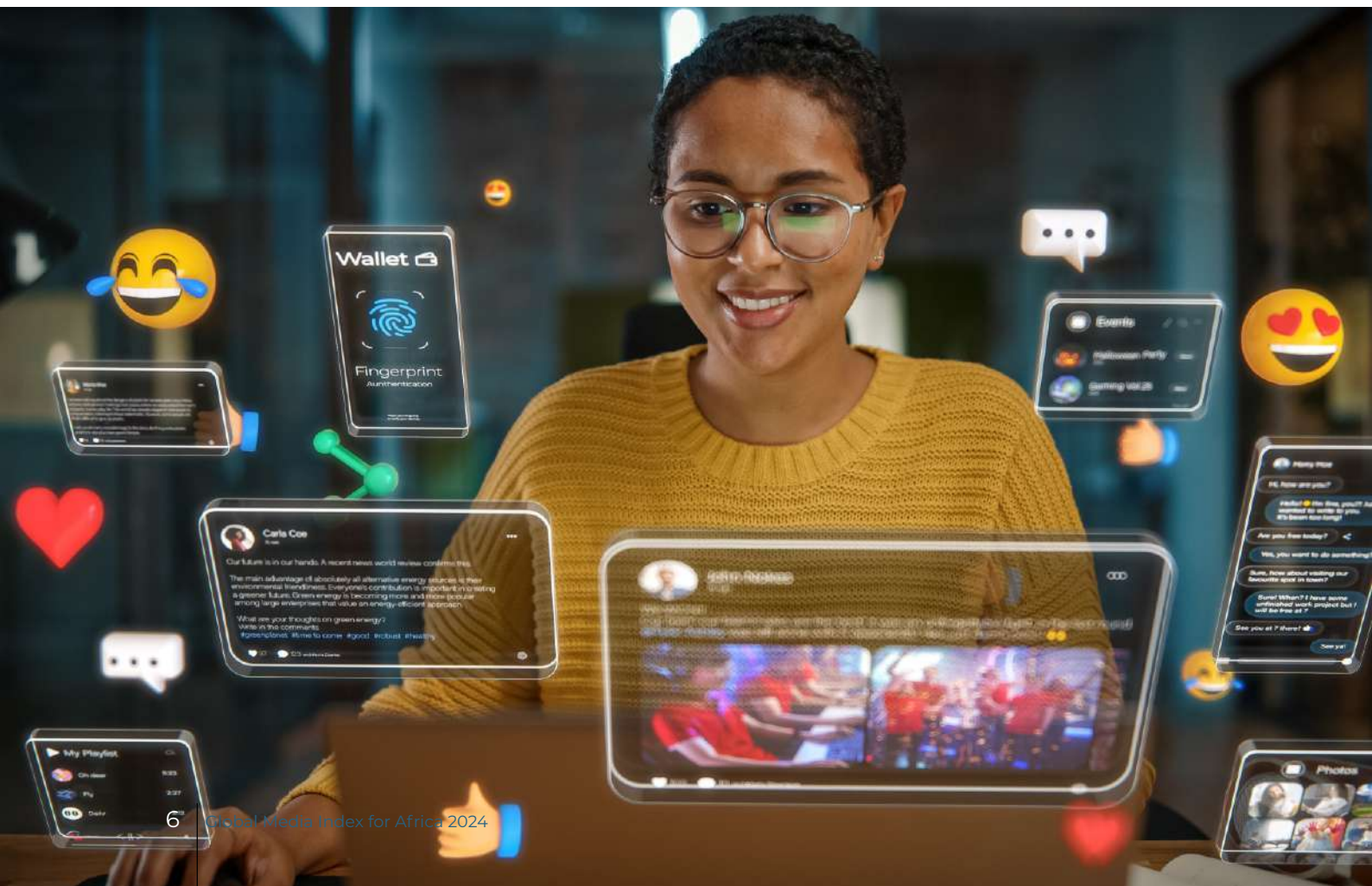
media coverage. These indicators include the following:

- **Diversity of topics on Africa covered**, with the assumption that a greater diversity of stories is favourable and provides a more nuanced picture of a continent, as opposed to a disproportionate focus on a handful of predictable topics;
- **Diversity of news sources**, again with the assumption that the greater diversity the better. News sources are primary definers of news. They are neither neutral nor value-free. Who gets to tell the African story? On the sources indicator we look at the gender of a source, as well as their social status – politicians, businesspeople, citizens, ordinary people.
- **Depth of news coverage** – here we focus on sub-indicators that, taken together, provide a picture of the

quality and depth of coverage. These include the context, balance, stereotype and frame in the news stories.

- **Diversity of African countries covered** – this speaks to the scope of coverage. We seek to establish the extent to which global media focus on Africa not a 'country' but a continent of 54 countries, and the extent to which news stories reflect that diversity.

The aim of the index is not to contribute to an uncritical normative view of 'positive' or 'sunshine' coverage of Africa, but to establish how Africa's image continues to be constructed in global media, to what extent this image is diverse and complex, and to what extent such coverage may contribute to a better understanding of African societies, politics and culture within a globalised world.





2. Literature Review

We conducted a literature review of how global media covered Africa and other non-Western societies, highlighting its significant impact on shaping perceptions, policy discussions, and international investment. The aim was to examine the nuances of Africa's media portrayal and compare it with coverage of other regions. The review suggested that global media often used negative frames in covering Africa, reflecting colonial legacies. It raised questions about whether this pattern was unique to Africa or inherent in journalism practice overall. Key themes from the literature included the prevalence of negative framing and colonial influences in media coverage.

Reflections on global media coverage of Africa and other non-Western societies were centred on the intersection of contemporary geopolitics, conventions of newsworthiness, and race and class dynamics. Global media, operating on values that privilege power holders, tended to recycle frames and stereotypes

to maintain familiarity with their audiences. This skewed coverage, influenced by geopolitical realities and historical colonial relations, extended to other former colonies in the Global South.

The review emphasized case studies illustrating global media's tendency to use negative stereotypes and frames, particularly regarding Africa. Research indicated that media coverage was shaped by limited knowledge, geopolitical factors, and journalistic norms favouring certain news values. This portrayal raised broader questions about the differential treatment of the Global South in global news coverage and underscored the contested nature of media representation, inherently tied to power dynamics. Without doubt, in global news coverage of Africa, a combination of all these factors conspire to present the continent in 'othered' frames, at the centre of which are tropes of conflict and war, politics and crisis, poverty and corruption, and other related tropes.



For a comprehensive examination of the literature on global media coverage of Africa and other non-Western societies, please refer to the complete literature review provided in Appendix 2.



3. Methodology

The research methodology relied on quantitative content analysis, a systematic approach to objectively examining the explicit content of communication. This method, as defined by Berelson (1952:147), involves a detailed and quantitative description of textual content. It aims to uncover insights into media representation, contributing to broader theories about the media, as emphasized by Hesmondhalgh (2006:141). The focus of content analysis was the manifest meaning of texts.

In this study, we selected a sample of 20 global news media and agencies for analysis. This approach allowed us to thoroughly investigate how media outlets portray information, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of their representation practices.

These media are global brands and produce news and information that arguably reaches much of the entire globe, and in different languages. In addition to traditional Western media such as New York Times, The Washington Post, The Economist, BBC and CNN, which are considered critical sources of information for policymakers around the

globe, we included in the sample relatively newer but increasingly global brands from the Global South, such as Al Jazeera, which is not only global in reach but also 'alternative' in terms of its reporting line. We also included the state-owned Chinese news giant Xinhua, because, among other things, it has a substantial reach, does primary coverage of Africa (where it has allocated substantial resources), and reflects shifts in geopolitics – which shapes news reporting, including reporting of Africa. As noted above, all the media selected have correspondents covering the African continent.

The Global Media Index for Africa is based on news articles published in online versions of the major global media between June and December 2022. We are aware of the fact that online content is not necessarily the same as live broadcasts, yet it also reflects the broad editorial positions of the same media. Similarly, while a six-month period may not reflect the entire picture of coverage in a given year, it is indicative of the broad patterns of coverage by the global media selected.

Media outlets





Building the Index

We started the study with a thorough literature review that uncovered prevalent negative framing and a reliance on predominantly male and powerful voices in media coverage of Africa and the Global South. Following this, we did a preliminary analysis of news content from 20 media outlets by selecting an average of 50 articles per outlet published between July and December 2022. We used purposive sampling of stories published in the first, middle and last week of each month which arguably gave a representative snapshot of the type of coverage.

The preliminary reading of news stories helped us develop a codebook for content analysis. This guide helped us identify frequently covered topics, predominant sources, and gender representation. Additionally, we aimed to identify less commonly covered subjects and voices, contrasting with established stereotypes.

With over 1,000 news stories analysed, two trained coders ensured reliability through intercoder tests, achieving a final score of .80 on the Krippendorff's kappa. The coded data was subsequently analysed and interpreted using the R software system. The results of the content analysis were used to build the index.

The results of the content analysis were used to build the index. Based on the earlier literature review, we identified four critical news coverage aspects, which form the basis for fair/unfair coverage. Diversity emerged as a central theme as the literature suggested that prevailing coverage tended to be one-dimensional rather than multi-dimensional. These coverage aspects informed the formulation of our indicators:

- Diversity of topics – assessed media outlets' coverage of news stories against a curated list of 28 possible topics. Observing the global media's tendency to narrowly focus on Africa, particularly highlighting issues such as corruption, poverty, disease, and politics, we aimed to determine whether the media outlets followed or diverted from this trend.
- Diversity of news sources – assessed the representation of voices in mainstream global media by examining direct citations in single stories. Our literature review showed the tendency to prioritize male, pale voices such as experts, politicians, and government leaders, while overlooking ordinary people, even on topics directly affecting them, hence our aim to assess the extent of diverse voices represented.
- Diversity of countries/places covered - examined how many African countries each media outlet covered during the period, calculating the percentage out of the total 55 countries on the continent.
- Depth of coverage – assessed how news outlets covered news stories using combined sub-variables, which include context, stereotype, frame and balance. We examined how news outlets covered news stories, the depth of the research and provision of information in the story, the extent of balance and context also constitute important measures of the quality of coverage.

We computed the four indices for the index on a 3-point scale and normalized the final results to a 0-1 scale where 1 = maximum diversity. We present the results from the index as a percentage, therefore, a score of **0.80/1** is represented as **80** out of **100** or **80/100**.

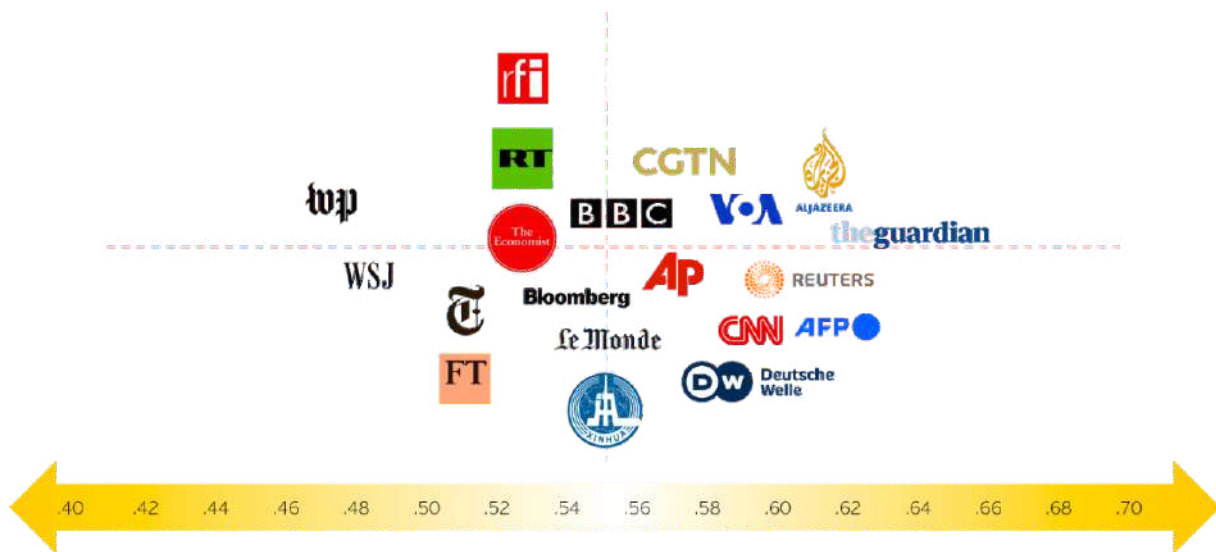
For detailed information on the methodology employed in this study, please refer to the complete methodology section provided in Appendix 3.



4. The Global Media Index for Africa: Results

Here, we present the results from the Global Media Index for Africa, showcasing the average score and overall rankings of all 20 media outlets based on their performance across all four indicators. Following that, we detail their performance in each of the four categories (indicators).

Figure: Single Axis Logo “Scatter” Plot: Overall Index of Media Outlets

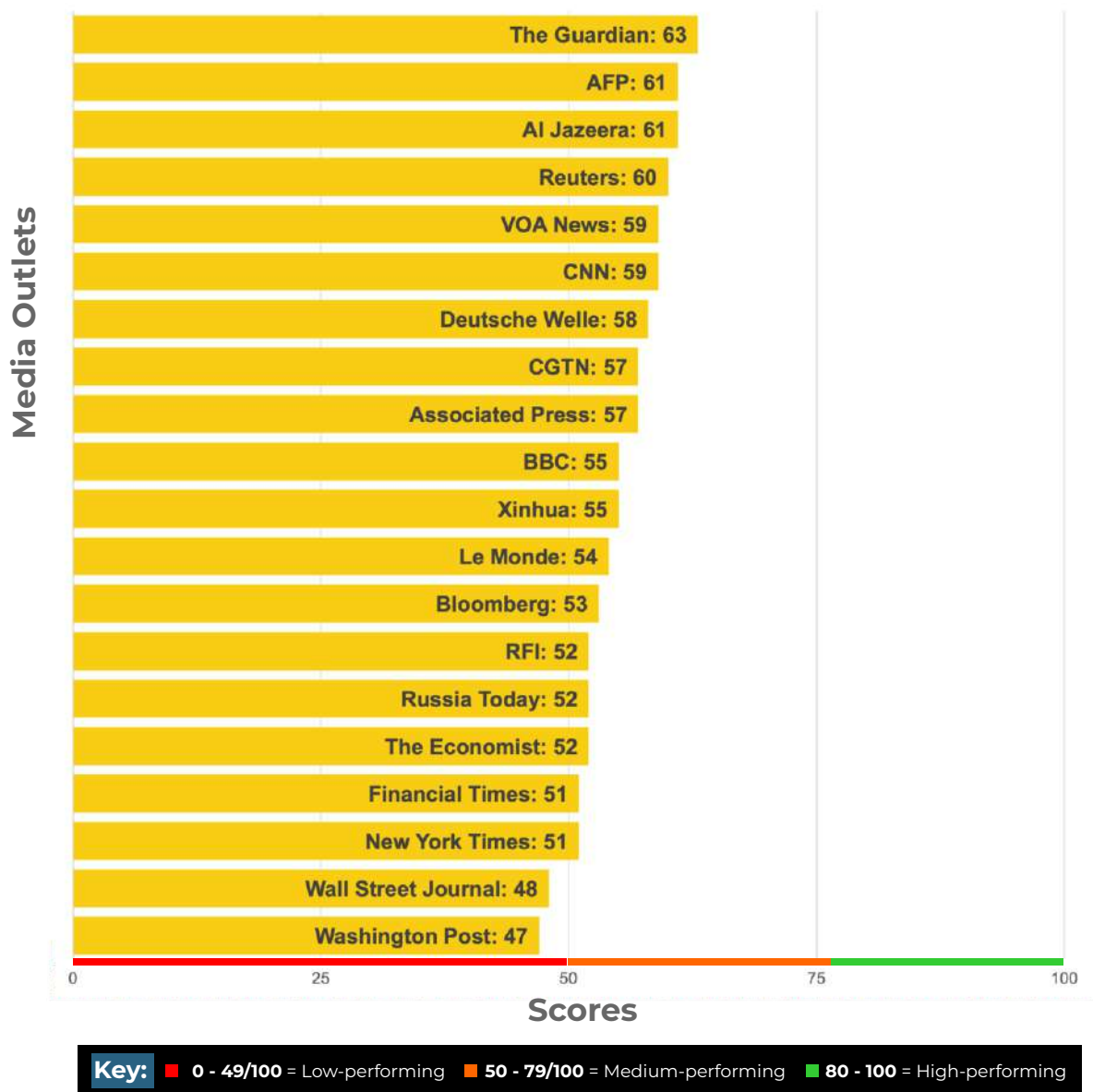


The average score for the Global Media Index for Africa is 52.55 out of 100 which puts the collective performance of all 20 media outlets just above low-performing.





Figure: Global Media Index for Africa: Media Outlets Ranked



The overall score is based on an average of the individual media performance across the four indicators. The Guardian tops the rest, with a total score of 63, while The Washington Post records the lowest score of 47. The general performance of the media outlets falls within the category of 'medium' suggesting that coverage of Africa still needs to improve. As results on performance in individual indicators show, there are high points in terms of depth of coverage, which perhaps reflects global media awareness of the criticism against superficial, stereotyped and de-contextualised coverage of Africa, which has been a feature of global media for decades.

At the same time, it is clear from the results that the coverage of Africa still lacks diversity of voices and diversity of topics. Here all media outlets performed lowly. This suggests that there is still a continuation of the media obsession with the old tropes of an ailing continent where (bad) politics, poverty, corruption, crime and war are the main newsworthy events, and where powerful men (politicians, businesspeople, 'experts') play central roles as primary definers of news worth quoting.



4.1 Outlet scores on Indicator 1: Diversity of topics

Figure: Diversity of Topics by Media Outlets



As highlighted earlier, diversity of topics of coverage constitutes a significant indicator of the quality of media coverage given to any place. As the literature review has shown, the global media image of Africa has been historically confined to predictable and limited negative topics. We set out to establish the extent to which this has changed in contemporary coverage. As the results show, this remains a huge challenge, with the highest scoring media outlet, the *Guardian*, recording only 57. *The Washington Post* is placed at the bottom with 29. Granted, news media specialise in particular ‘beats’ as their primary focus, but without exception they cover a range of topics about the places they focus on. This range seems to be quite narrow in coverage of Africa.



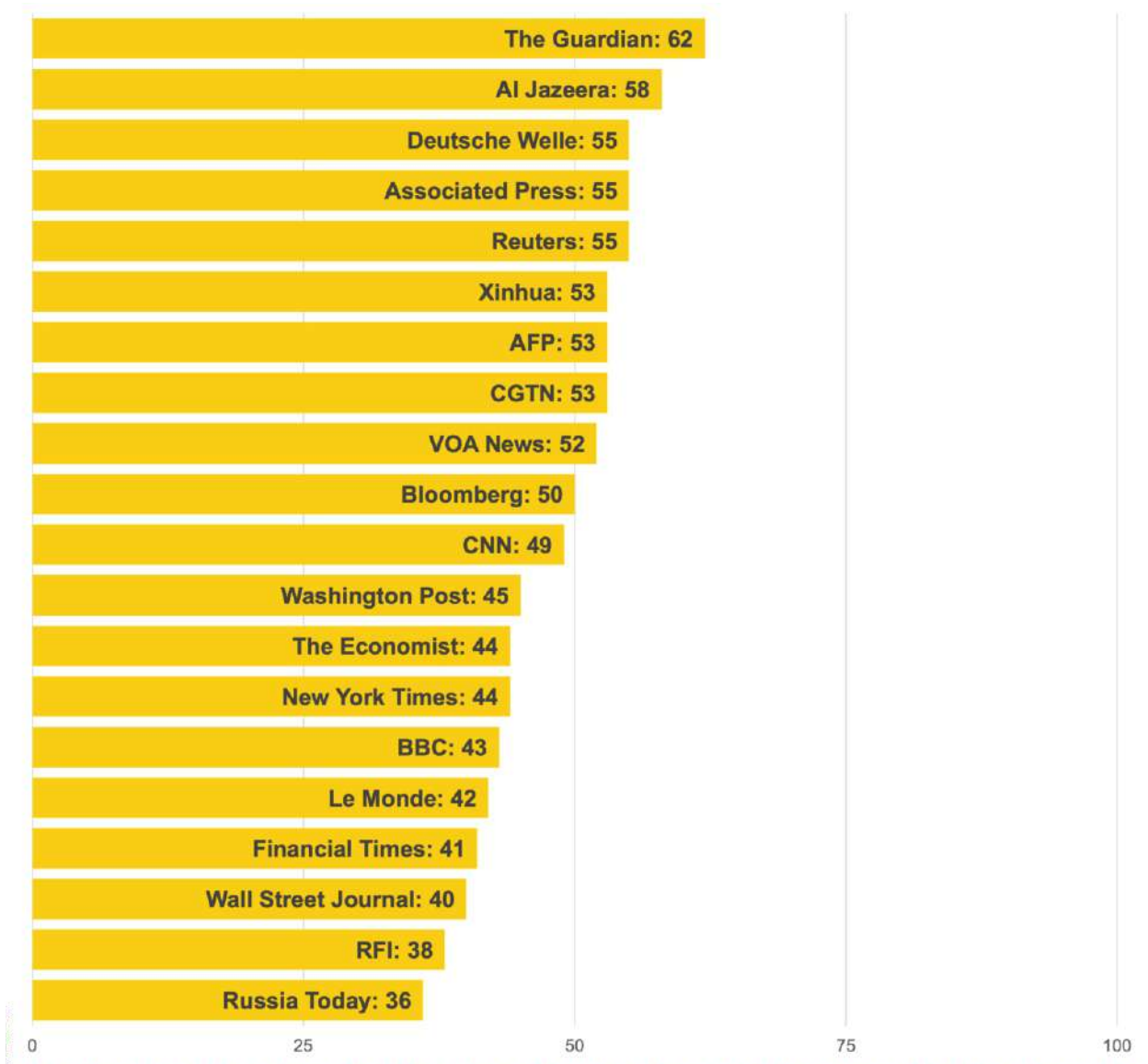
Figure: Heat map: Topics by Media Outlets





4.2 Outlet scores on Indicator 2: Diversity of sources/voices

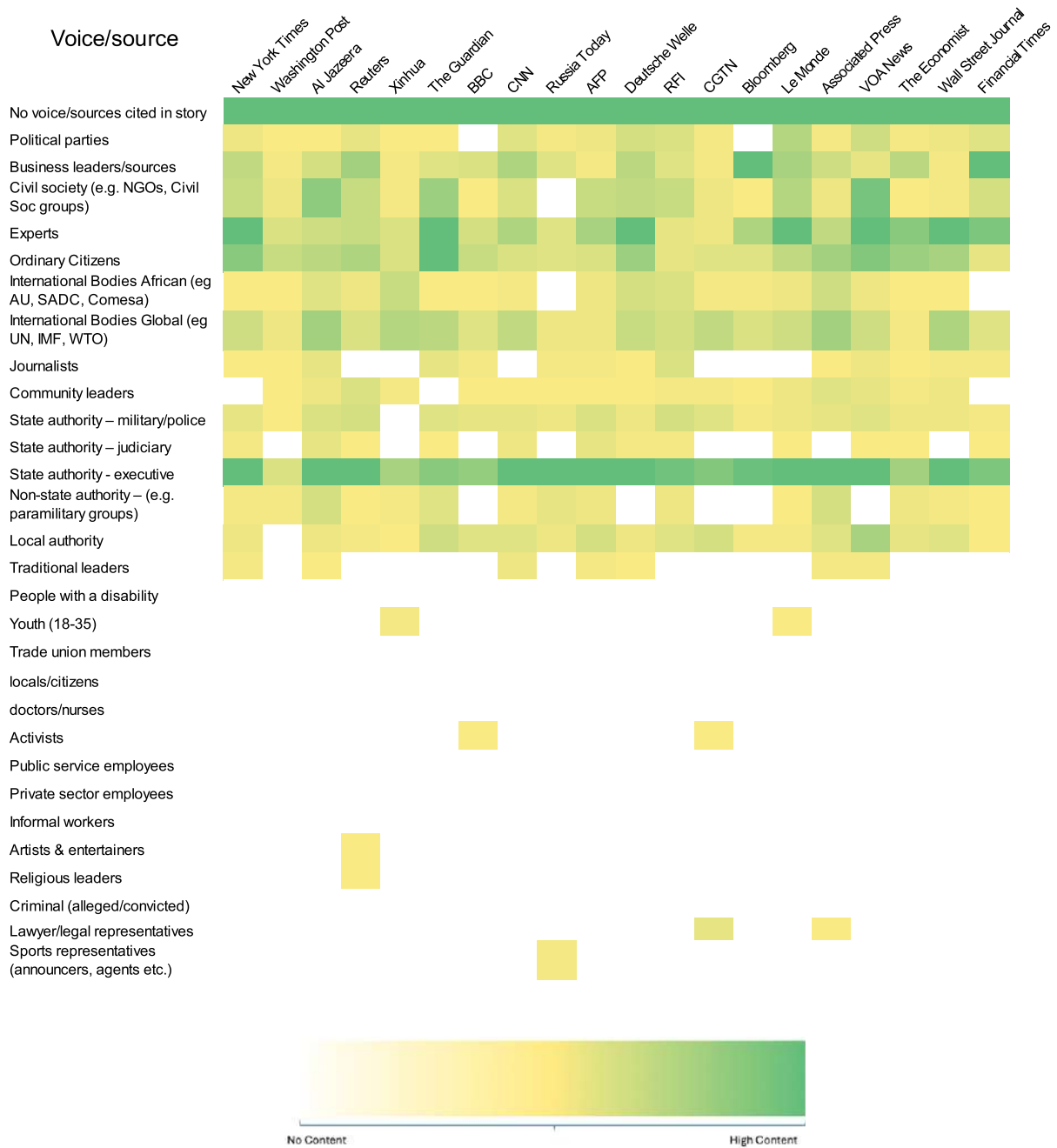
Figure: Diversity of Sources by Media Outlets



As highlighted earlier, the diversity of voices as sources of news matters substantially. Who gets to tell the African story via direct quotes in the global media? What is their gender and status in society? This is an important indicator of the quality of media coverage. As the results show, there was limited diversity of voices across the board, with the highest score (*The Guardian*) being only 62.



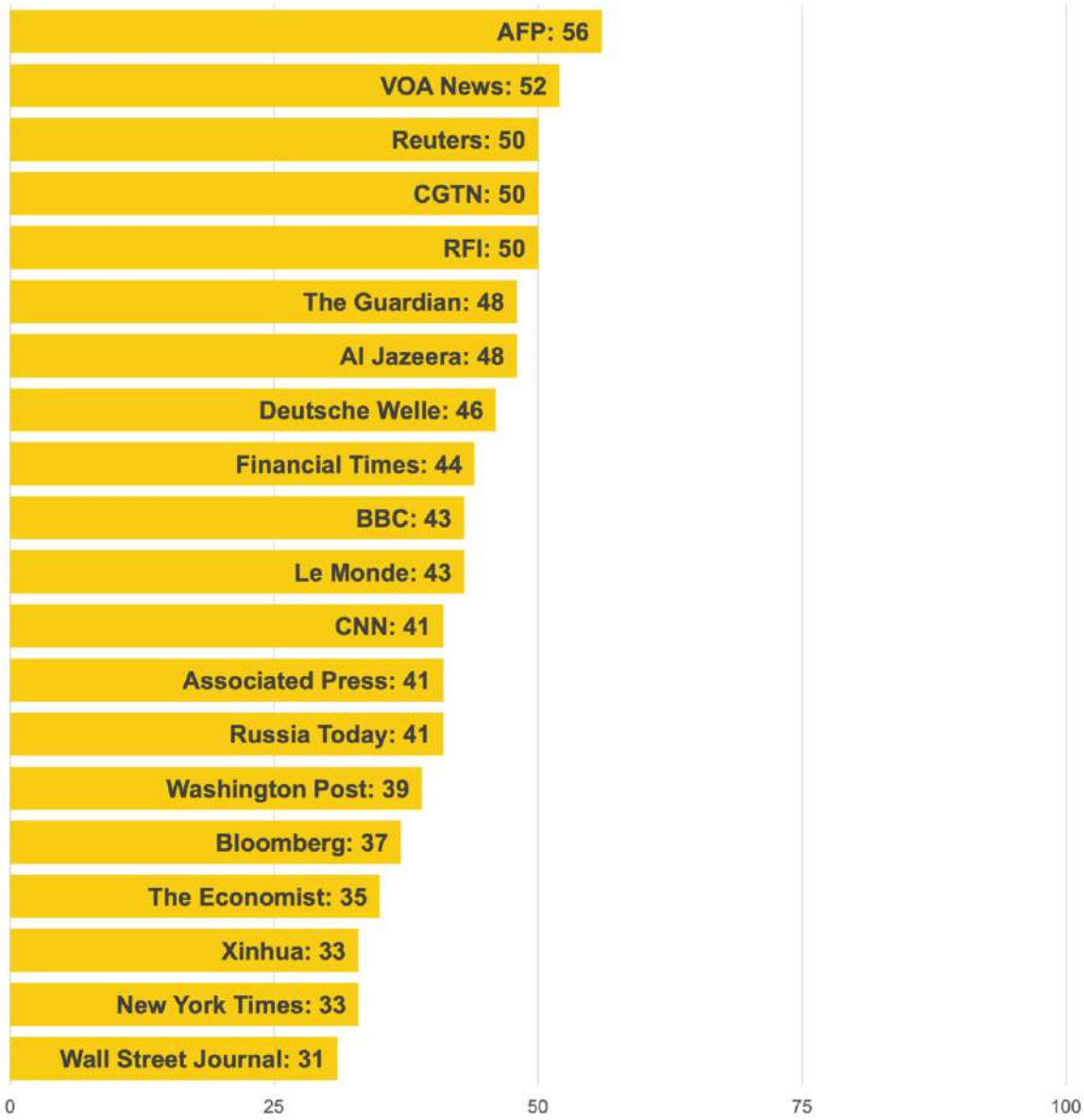
Figure: Heat map: Voices/Sources by Media Outlets





4.3 Outlet scores on Indicator 3: Diversity of countries

Figure: Diversity of Countries by Media Outlets



Officially, the African Union reports that Africa has 55 states (African Union, 2020). This fact was taken into consideration on assessing the health of the coverage on the continent because it reflects that Africa has a diverse population with different ideas, cultures, issues and voices. A healthy coverage would be indicated by news coverage of the majority of the countries on the continent – or a score of 80. However, the results revealed that, across all media outlets, significantly fewer than half of the 55 countries are given coverage in global media (an average score of 40), with the exception of AFP, which scored just over the 50 mark. Regardless, the news coverage of African countries is not representative of the diversity of countries on the continent, and this has potential implications for how the rest of the world understands the continent.



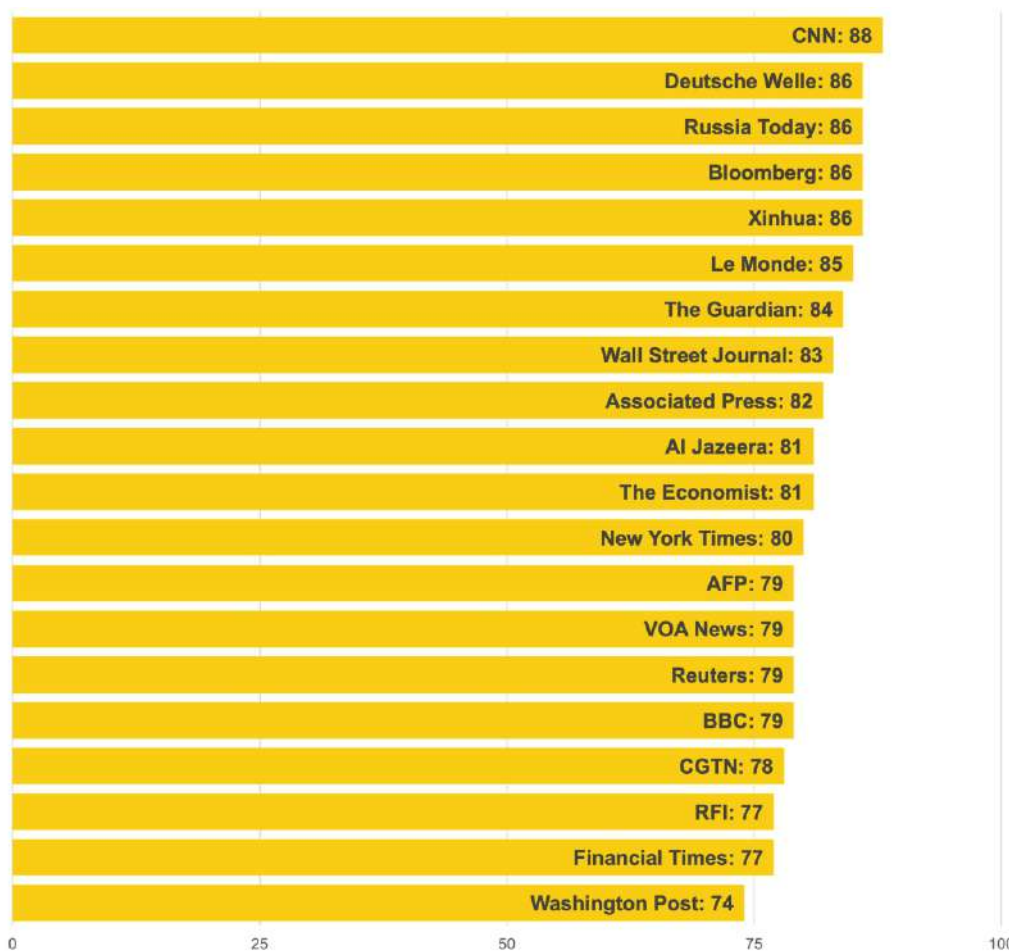
Figure: Heat Map: Countries by Media Outlets





4.4 Outlet scores on Indicator 4: Depth of coverage

Figure: Depth of Coverage by Media Outlets



All outlets performed relatively well in the ‘balance’, ‘context’, ‘frame’, and ‘stereotype’ sub-indicators. In the ‘balance’ indicator, 95% of outlets scored over 75; and only one outlet scored below 75. This shows that, on the basis of the sample, most media outlets deployed a balanced approach to writing news stories by giving different sources a right of reply, at the very least.

In terms of ‘context’, generally media outlets provided greater detail to assist readers with understanding what led to the facts of the news story being read. This was demonstrated through hyperlinks to previous stories as well as a context section within the news story itself. However, this is based on manifest reading of the content, whereas a qualitative approach that includes latent meanings of stories is likely to identify elements of stereotype as well identify balance as just a veneer.

All media outlets recorded high scores (all scoring just over 80) in terms of using fewer stereotypes in language, narratives and descriptions when reporting news about countries in Africa. However, *RFI*, *Financial Times*, *BBC* and *The Economist* held lower scores than other outlets on the use of stereotypes to frame news stories. Nevertheless, the scores across all the outlets did not show grave disparities between higher and lower scores – with the highest being 97 and the lowest being 80.



Figure: Stacked bar chart (horizontal): Depth of Coverage Comparison Across Outlets

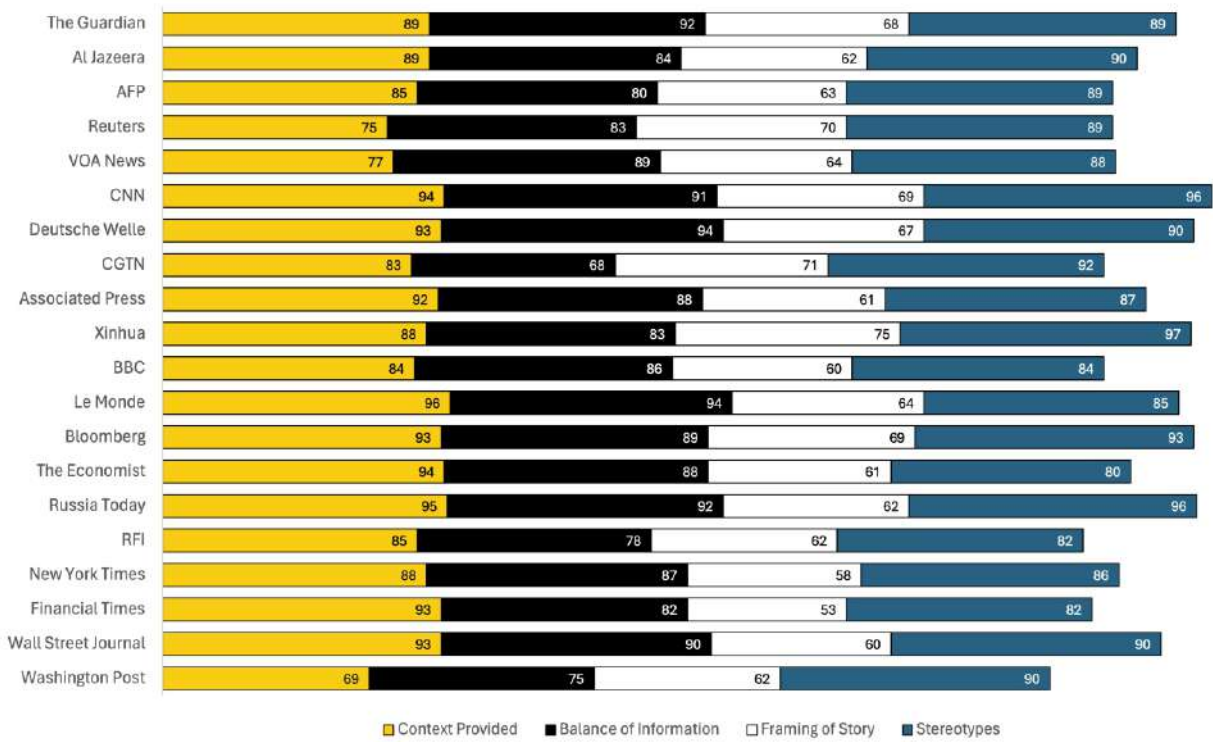
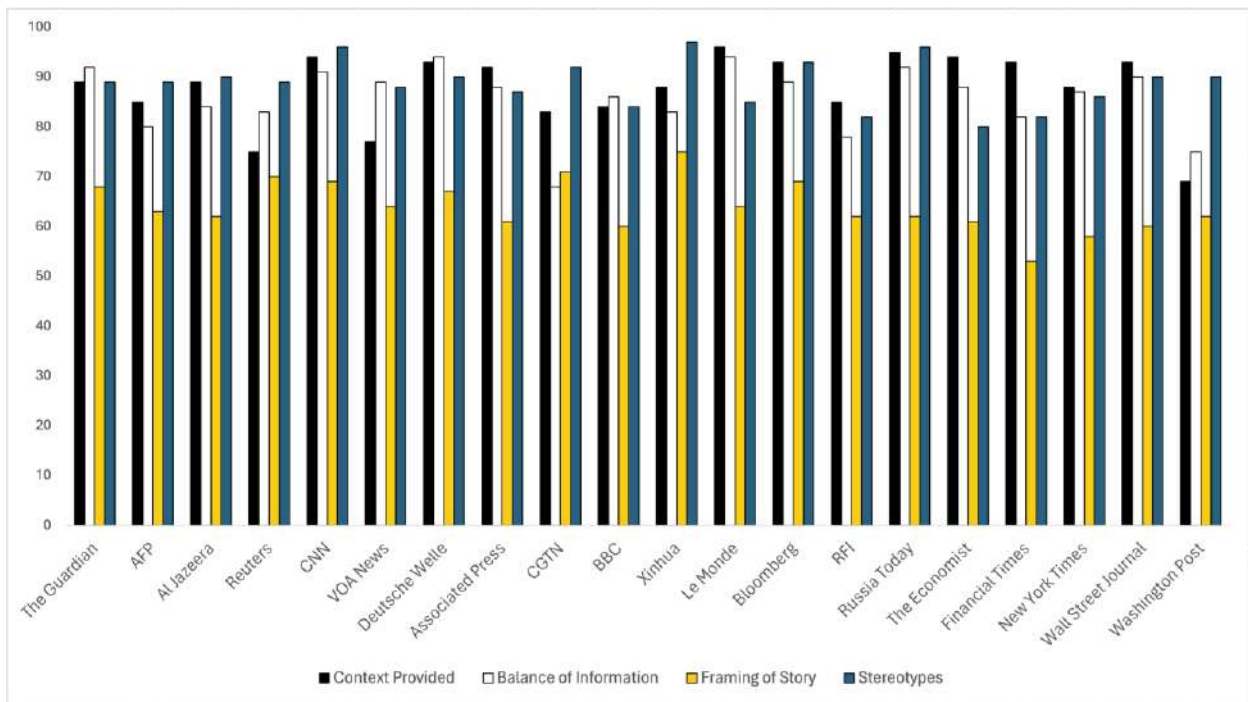


Figure: Grouped Bar Chart: Depth of Coverage Comparison Across Outlets





4.5 Media outlet performance across the four indicators

The table below outlines each media score in respect of each of the four indicators. As highlighted earlier, nearly all the media outlets scored highly in terms of the depth of coverage, incorporating context, balance, frame and stereotype. However, across the board, there were low scores for country diversity, source/voice diversity, and topic diversity.

Figure: Stacked bar chart (vertical): Index Comparison Across Media Outlets

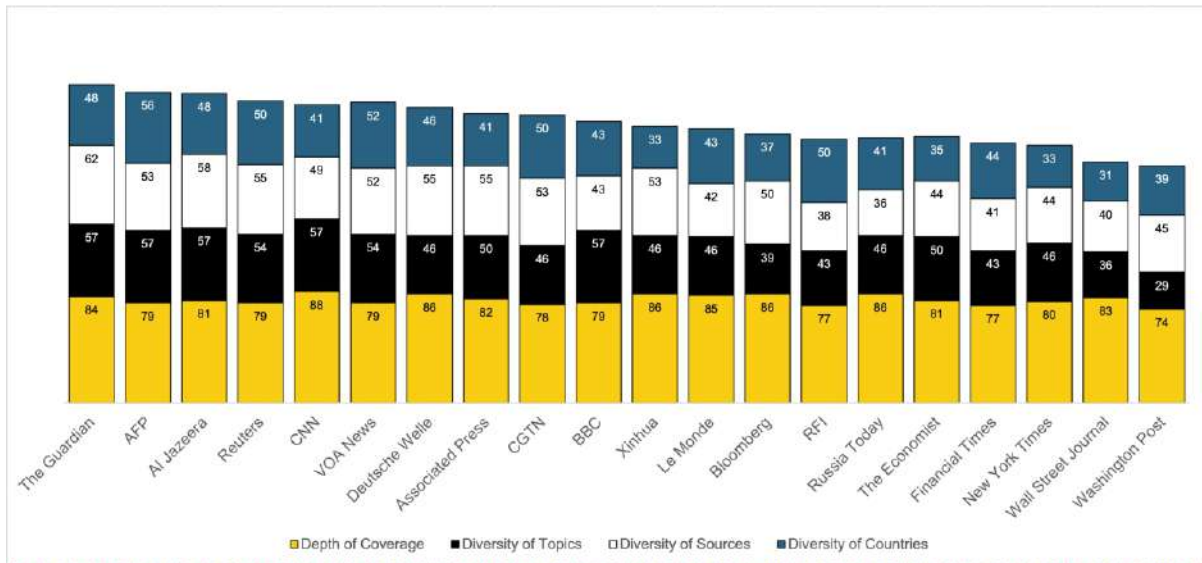
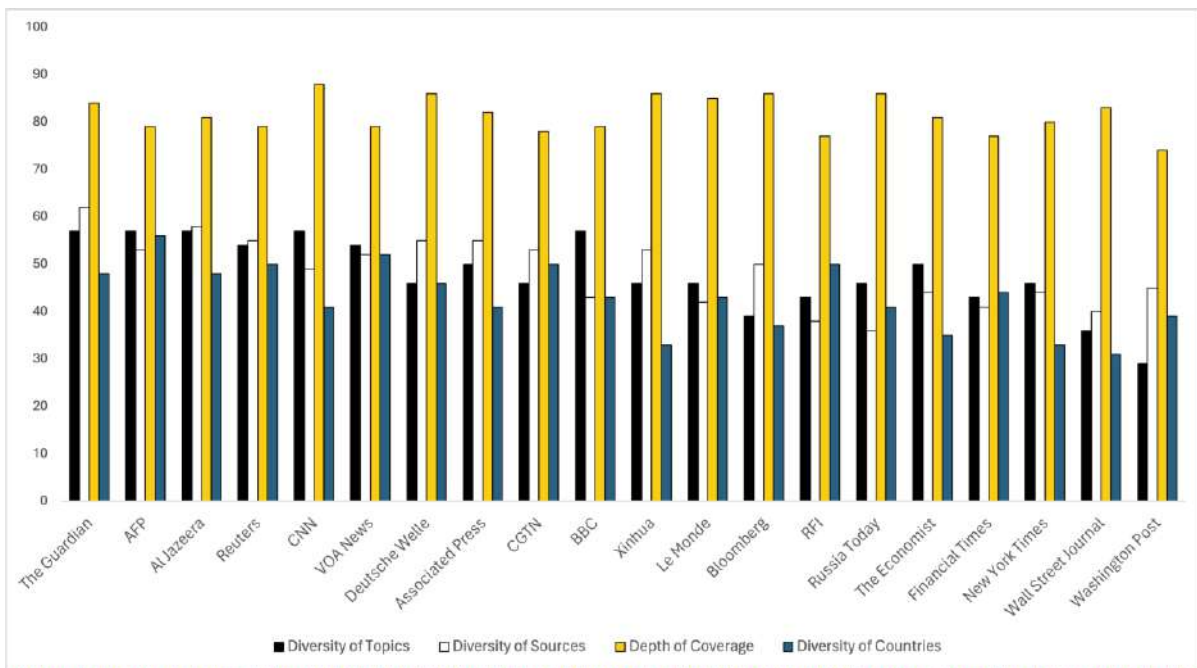


Figure: Grouped bar chart: Index Comparison Across Media Outlets





5. Conclusion

Global media coverage of Africa today displays both limited changes and substantial continuities. From the sample of the top global media outlets selected in this project, it is clear that coverage is still predominantly limited, in terms of focus, to the 'tried and tested' negative tropes and topics; remains predominantly male and elite in terms of sources, and therefore how it is defined; and remains very limited in terms of the number of African countries covered. At the same time, there is also evidence that the coverage has become more

contextualised and less stereotyped. By developing an index against which to score individual media outlets, it is possible to monitor performance in each of the different spheres of coverage that constitute best practice. As indicated in the introduction, this does not constitute the full story, but an invitation to a bigger discussion about the global media narratives about the African continent, and how these can shift to reflect a more nuanced and changing continent and people.





6. Recommendations

Based on the results of this index, we propose the following policy recommendations for media organisations, funders, regulatory bodies amongst other stakeholders to consider:

1: Invest in Media Diversity and Gender Equity

We urge media organisations to prioritise and invest themselves in creating diversity in the newsroom - with a focus on gender equity. We also ask media funders to consider funding initiatives and training programs that increase diversity in newsrooms.

2: Ensure Depth, Context, and Collaboration

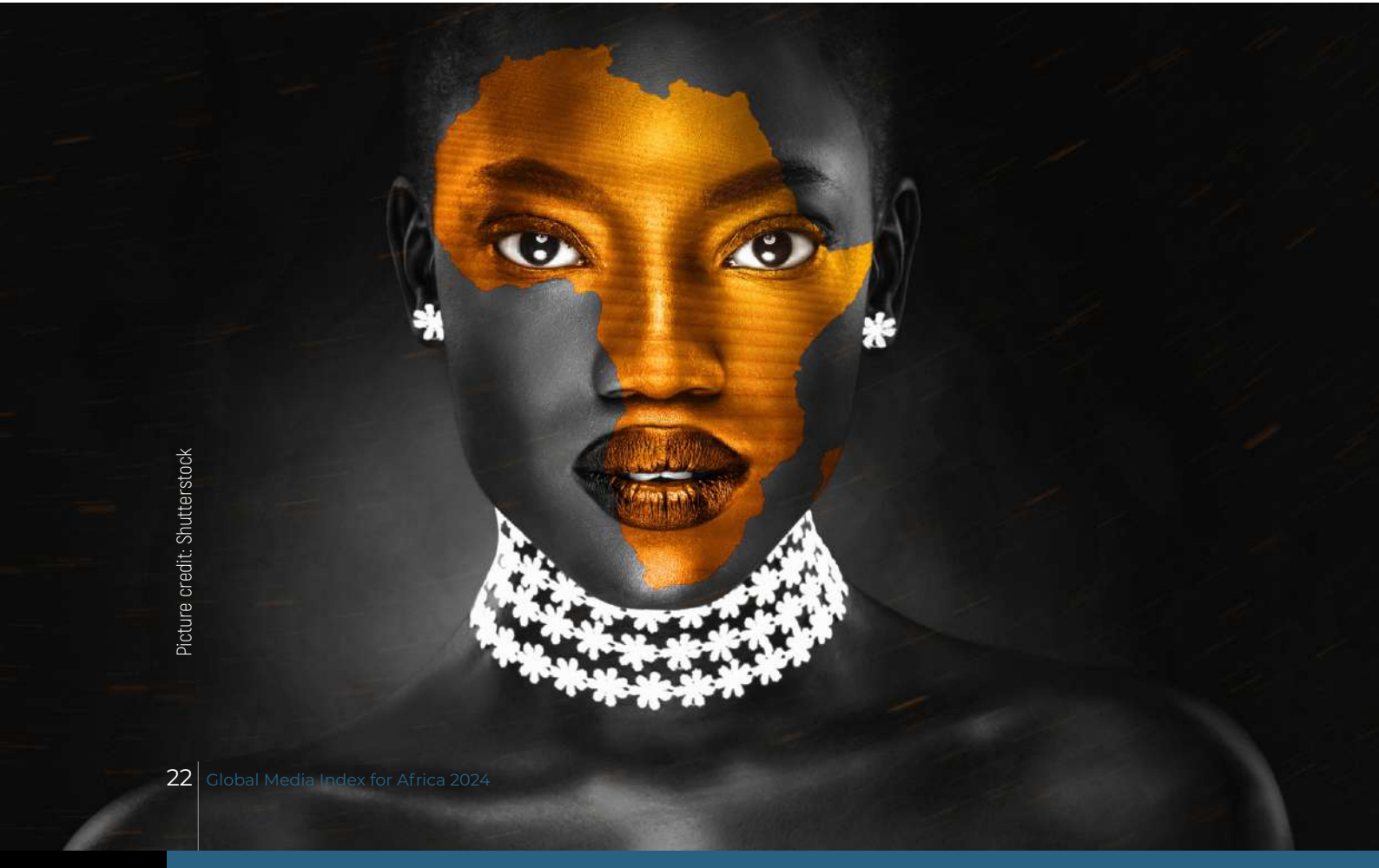
We call upon media organizations to adopt ethical storytelling principles to enhance balanced reporting, depth, and context in African coverage. We also ask for media regulatory bodies to establish guidelines that ensure that coverage of Africa adheres to ethical storytelling principles. Furthermore, we advocate for more collaboration between media outlets, regulatory bodies, researchers,

and civil society organizations to facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of African narratives.

3: Improve Media Literacy and Cross-Cultural Understanding

We appeal to education ministries, cultural exchange organizations, and international media associations to prioritize media literacy initiatives and cross-cultural exchange programs. By integrating media literacy into school curricula and launching public awareness campaigns, we can empower audiences to critically evaluate media coverage of Africa. Additionally, supporting cross-cultural exchange programs, festivals, and partnerships will contribute to fostering mutual understanding and respect between African and international communities.

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Appendix 1: Charts

Figure: Global Media Index for Africa: Media Outlets Ranked

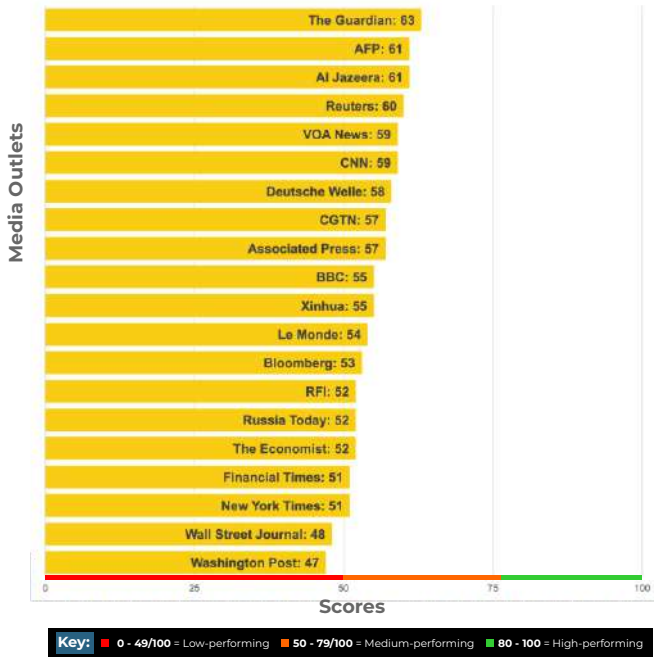


Figure: Diversity of Topics by Media Outlets



Figure: Diversity of Sources by Media Outlets

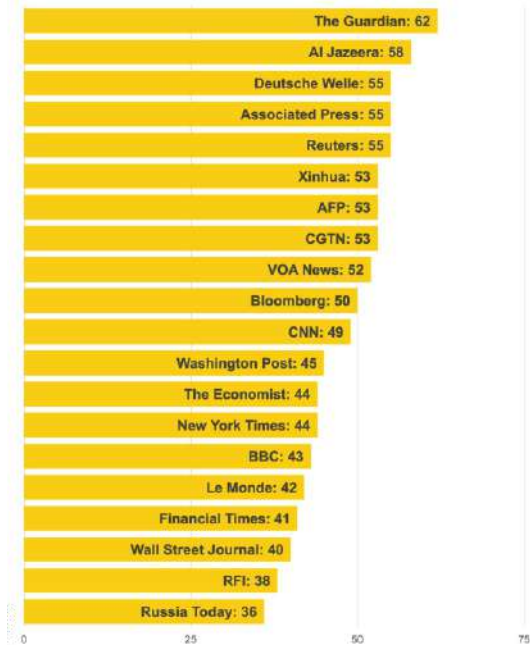


Figure: Diversity of Countries by Media Outlets

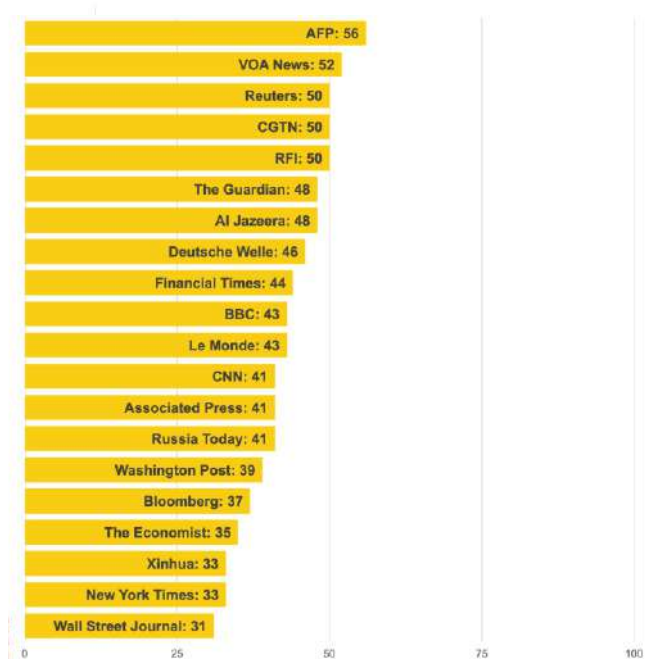




Figure: Heat map: Topics by Media Outlets

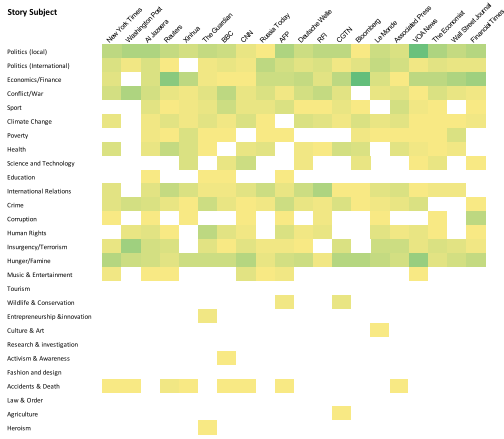


Figure: Heat map: Voices/Sources by Media Outlets

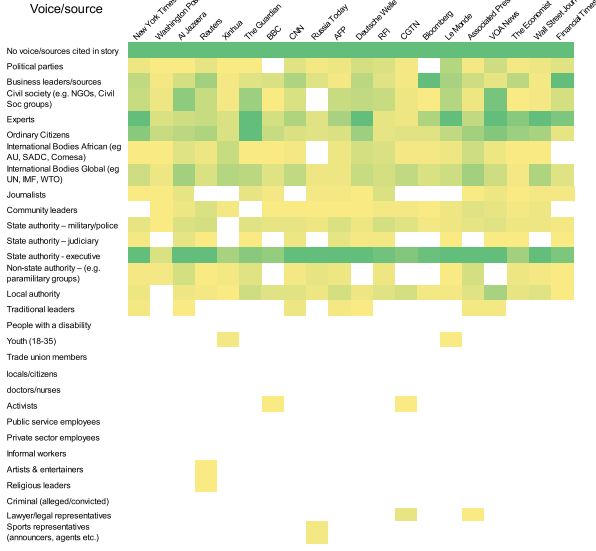


Figure: Depth of Coverage by Media Outlets

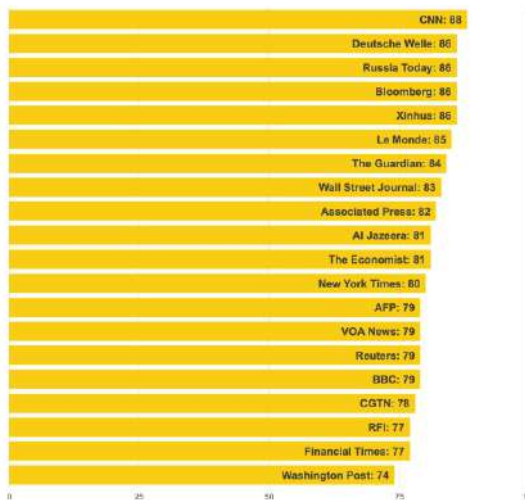


Figure: Stacked bar chart (horizontal): Depth of Coverage Comparison Across Outlets

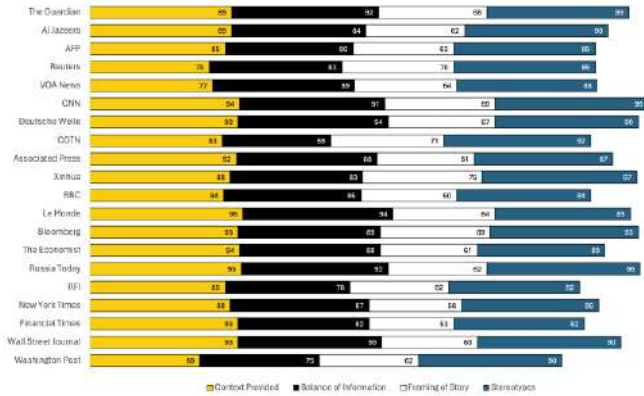


Figure: Grouped bar chart: Index Comparison Across Media Outlets

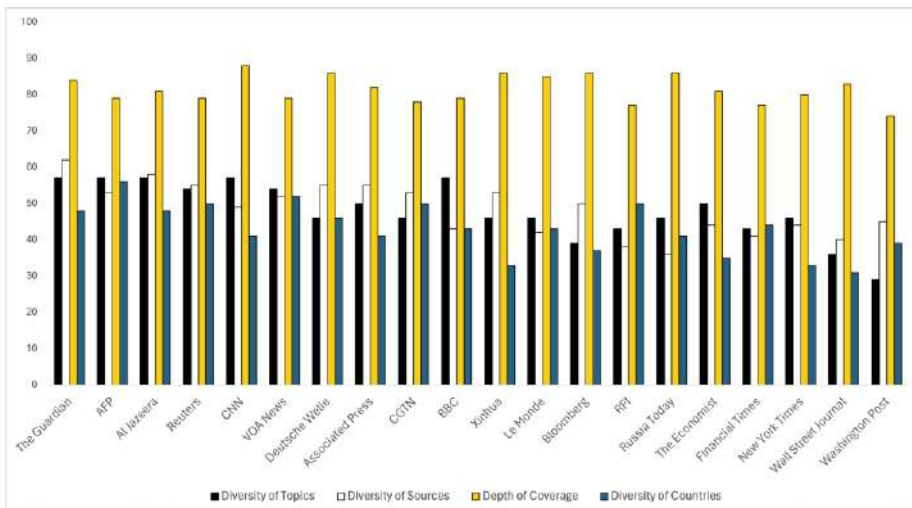




Figure: Heat Map: Countries by Media Outlets

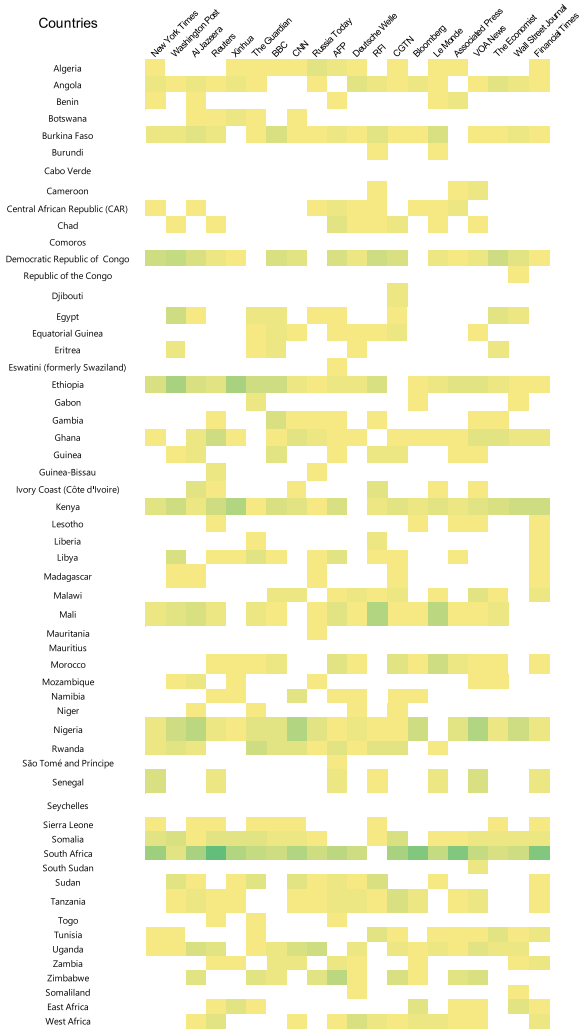


Figure: Stacked bar chart (vertical): Index Comparison Across Media Outlets

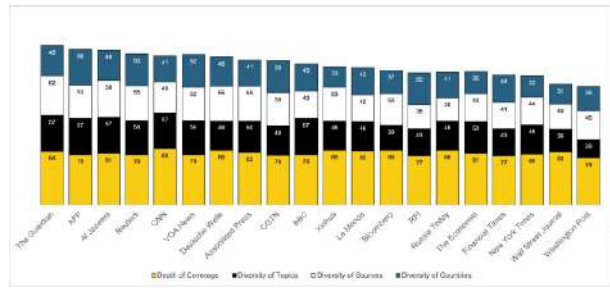
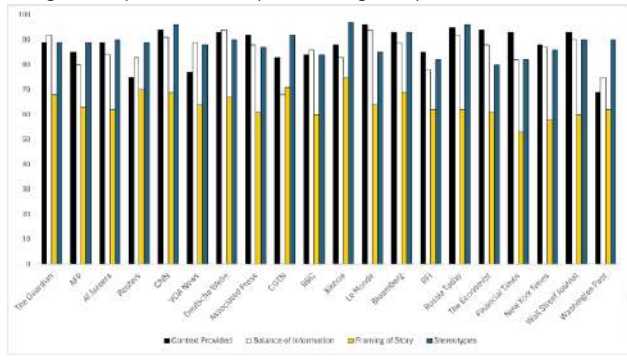


Figure: Grouped Bar Chart: Depth of Coverage Comparison Across Outlets





APPENDIX 2: Literature Review:

Reflections on global media coverage of Africa and other non-Western societies

Poor news coverage is not a victimless crime. News shapes our assumptions about one another, prescribes the symbols with which we analyse events, informs international investment, and guides policy discussion...The media image of Africa moulds many critical aspects of our lives, wherever we may live. Africa coverage provides us with the vocabulary we use in our policy discussions and identifies the issues deserving of attention in those discussions (Hawk, 2017: xvi).

The aim of the literature review is to establish how, and the extent to which, Africa is covered by the global media. We hope by bringing out the nuances around the coverage of Africa, we can show how African coverage differs to how other regions are represented. By extension, we also show the ways in which the global media frame non-Western societies, including Latin America and Asia. What is not in doubt, and has been proven by research over the years, is that the global/international media covers African news through a series of predominantly negative frames, a practice rooted in colonialism. But is this sort of reportage unique to the coverage of Africa? Or is it

inherent in journalism practice generally? Below we highlight some key tropes that can be gleaned from available literature on the subject.

2.1 Is Africa framed differently?

Considerable studies (Bunce, 2016; Nothias, 2012; Scott, 2009; Danker-Dake, 2008; Golan, 2008; Horsti, 2008; Haule, 1984) have looked at how 'Africa' is framed through the international media lenses. These studies, by and large, conclude that 'Africa' as a continent is covered in despair and in need of a Western saviour. However, these studies are also a product of Western investigators, themselves products of the same system that produces foot soldiers who 'help' Western audiences understand the continent. The current investigation – one of the most extensive studies, conducted largely by African researchers – therefore seeks to understand, through lenses provided by African scholars, how Africa is framed by the international media.

Global media covering Africa deploy correspondents, who bring into the sphere of news production their own prejudices and lived experiences. They interpret local events and activities and file copy to the editors at home, who also infuse their perspectives into the same copy, in ways that shape the final product. This process is what Gabore (2020:300), writing on the coverage of Africa in the international media, concluded to be the “construction of reality by defining events and using some elements of the event as evidence to legitimise their interpretation”. Research on audience perceptions of foreign





correspondents in East and Southern Africa showed that they wrote their news with four particular audiences in mind: “the grandma, the tourist, the businessman, the political elite” (Nothias, 2018:75). Effectively, these four audiences or categories are a representation of Western audiences for whom the international news media ‘construct the African reality’ and who inform the nature of framing by news media.

Therefore, as Odié (2013:201) rightly observes, “reportage filed from Africa has been edited to suit Western audiences and other pecuniary interests”. The essence of framing is “selection to prioritise some facts, images, or developments over others, thereby unconsciously promoting one particular interpretation of events” (Norris, Kern & Just, 2003:11). Frames operate on repetition; media tend to frame events today as they have covered it in the past, largely in order to satisfy audiences’ prior perceptions of the same events. And keeping audiences is paramount to commercial media survival. Further, with profound budget cuts on international reporting for most media organisations, after the 2008 financial crisis, reportage has become more pared down, and in this context playing on existing frames becomes ‘normal’.

In this context, because of historical colonial encounters between Africa and the West, the creation of dominant narratives of an Africa that is poor, corrupt and war/conflict-ridden and therefore in need of saving has been a key preoccupation of ‘establishment’ hierarchies in metropolises, to justify intervention. Making a similar observation two decades ago, Mutunga (2003:2–3) noted that “unfortunately, the overall image created by the media about Africa is particularly negative in that they only reflect tribal anarchy, hunger and famine, civil war, managerial ineptitude, political instability, flagrant corruption and

incompetent leadership”. These narratives have, therefore, been passed across generations, in large part thanks to media framing. In some instances, these tropes in reporting even get rewarded through prestigious prizes, such as the 2001 Pulitzer Prize, awarded to *Chicago Tribune*’s Paul Salopek, “for his reporting on the political strife and disease epidemics ravaging Africa, witnessed firsthand as he travelled, sometimes by canoe, through rebel-controlled regions of the Congo”. Titled “Africa: The Ailing Continent”, the 2000 series by Salopek epitomises the predominantly negative framing of the continent. In turn, such coverage is what has left most Africans with the conclusion, aptly captured in a study focusing on Cable News Network International (CNNI) (Kalyango Jr, 2011:160), that Western media’s coverage is “largely biased and ill-motivated towards Africa”. As this literature review shows, this type of coverage is not unique to Africa, but extends to most, if not all, non-Western societies, and is informed by a range of factors, also discussed below.

2.2 How Africa and the Global South are covered is also about contemporary geopolitics

A large body of research shows that geopolitics is a key determinant of global media coverage of international news. Countries that are friendly to the US, UK or Europe tend to attract generally positive coverage, as opposed to unfriendly or hostile countries. This view is confirmed by Gabore’s (2020:300) comparative study on coverage of Africa by Western and Chinese media, which observes a largely negative tone from Western media, while in “Chinese media, Africa is covered mainly in Impact, Eminence and Novelty frames mostly in positive tone”. This observation is in line with the seminal study by Herman and Chomsky which advanced that the mainstream US media framed victims of dictatorial regimes outside of the US in terms of whether these regimes were



friendly to the US or not. Based on this, some victims were 'worthy' and others 'unworthy'. Media coverage based on geopolitics is not unique to Africa: case studies of Latin America and China highlighted later in this report also show how coverage was tied to existing relations between the countries and the US or Western Europe.

To a large extent, this approach has its genesis in the Cold War, where coverage tended to be Manichaeian, that is, showing a dualistic view of good and evil. However, the approach continues today; reflecting geopolitical interests, historical relations and the privileging of certain political norms (liberal democracy characterised by periodic 'free and fair' elections).

2.3 African coverage is subject to conventions of newsworthiness

According to Cazzamatta and Garcia (2021), international news coverage tends to be characterised by the following traits: 'concentration on politics, focus on elites, decontextualization, regionalism, and negativity'. Applying these news values to coverage of the Global South, argues Thussu (2004:10), has the effect of "reducing complex realities to a simplistic reporting structure".

News sources are the 'primary definers' of news. Research shows that in many instances, the mainstream media privileges 'official sources' as 'legitimised sources'. These are mostly elite males. Especially on news topics where there is consensus among the main political parties (for example, Tories and Labour in the UK or Republicans and Democrats in the US), alternative, non-elite voices are presented peripherally. This applies in the coverage of both Africa and the West. The present research, for example, shows that most of the sources in the coverage of Africa for the period under study were male politicians.

Besides elite sourcing, a focus on 'the calculus of death' is also embedded in Western journalism practice, which in turn influences media coverage of Africa. This is in line with the old journalistic cliché: if it bleeds, it leads. "Get me a murder a day" was the famous motto of Lord Northcliffe, founder of the *Daily Mail* in the UK. This approach still informs global media coverage of both home and foreign news. 'Calculus of death' is the term given to deciding how newsworthy a report is, based on how many people died. The calculation does not apply equally in all contexts. Some have argued that up to 45 people would have to die in Africa for them to get the same coverage as one person in a Western country. This explains why the Ebola pandemic of 2014, for example, initially received a muted response. As bodies piled up, it was later on framed as a "localised African crisis" (Pieri, 2019:80). The deployment of dramatic images of mass deaths in Africa feeds into the 'news values' cycle and further perpetuates the notion of a continent where loss – human and otherwise – is a daily fact of life.

2.4 Africa coverage is also a race and class issue

Studies show that factors of race and class shape global media coverage of local news in the West as well as news in Africa. In some cases, media resort to in-group designators (as opposed to 'outgroups' or outsiders) and passive verbs to emphasise the differences among the local non-white communities within the Global North. Coverage of immigration (especially by non-whites) provides another example of 'othering' by Western media. Examples include the tabloid coverage of immigration into the UK and Europe, for example, the infamous headline by the UK tabloid, *The Sun* (2/2/89): "Britain Invaded by Army of Illegals". In the US, Gillens conducted a study in 1996 on how poverty was represented in the country's leading news



magazines (*Time*, *Newsweek*, and *US News and World Report*), over five years (1988–1992). He found that, of the 550 photographs that accompanied articles on poverty, 62% featured African Americans, a representation that contrasted with official poverty stats. A reader of these news organisations is likely to develop an impression that America's poor are predominantly black...this distorted portrait of the American poor cannot help but reinforce the negative stereotypes of blacks as mired in poverty and contribute to the belief that poverty is primarily a 'black problem'. (Gillens, 1996:521)

The class and race determinants of coverage continue to be relevant today in our understanding of global media coverage of Africa and other non-Western societies.

2.5 Conclusions

Global media operates on certain values that inform selection and coverage of news. These values privilege power holders within both local and global spaces. In their coverage of Africa, global media recycle frames and stereotypes that have been used in the past to keep their familiar audiences. Global coverage of Africa is informed by geopolitical realities of the time. It is also informed by the historical colonial relations between the continent and the West. Race and class influence how Africa, a 'Black continent', is covered, compared to, say Europe, in the Global media. This skewed coverage also applies to other former colonies in the Global South.



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APPENDIX 3:

Patterns of global media coverage of non-Western societies

It is important that we reflect on some case studies that highlight the global media tendency to use negative stereotypes and negative frames in the representation of news, especially in respect of coverage of Africa. This is confirmed in an extensive study by Bleich et al. (2020) that looked at the West's coverage of Africa over a 25-year period, from 1994 to 2018. Using a sample of *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*, this study found that “articles mentioning Africa are negative on average, are even more negative during peak periods of coverage, and have not become more positive over time” (Bleich et al., 2020:1775).

well as in framing of identities, the portrayal of different countries is shaped by the topics chosen by news outlets as well as the frames used to portray those topics (Bleich et al., 2020). Moreover, the types of sources assist in solidifying the ways in which the world comes in contact with a different country (Bleich et al., 2020).

Persistently negative media coverage is not unique to Africa. Research on South America or Latin America reveals a strong propensity amongst global and European news outlets to cover disaster, crime and political instability more saliently than other topics. For example, Cazzamatta and Garcia (2021) published a study on the role of the 'negativity' factor in the German press between 2000 and 2014. Their research revealed that in Germany's key news outlets, 43.05% of the news covered on (at least) 20 Latin America countries during the period under review concentrated on negative topics.

The study acknowledges that this period witnessed several economic, political and security upheavals, which also contributed to the heavy concentration on negative news. But, at the same time, Cazzamatta notes that many positive events were sidelined and not adequately covered in German media. What created the positive balance in the news covered was “considerable interest in cultural issues” in Costa Rica, Uruguay, Chile and Cuba.

In a more in-depth study, Cazzamatta and Garcia (2021) focused on the impact of the



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Moreover, there is also a silencing of positive news and events within global media coverage. Research shows how Africa remains framed within the context of disaster, economic and political instability, health challenges and conflict (Bleich et al., 2020). Since news coverage is a crucial aspect in agenda setting as



'war on drugs' on the Mexican media image. The scholars also focused on German news outlets due to the over 400 trade and political agreements shared between Mexico and Germany. Thus, it is important to note that the way that Mexico is portrayed in German media is as a result of another relationship that Mexico shares with Germany. The findings suggest that on the surface, German media coverage of Mexico appeared fairly balanced (15.5% of stories related to the economy, and 23% related to cultural topics), creating a more positive image of Mexico. However, reporting on crime and delinquency in Mexico stood at over 33%. Scholars note that this negative reporting has increased significantly over the years, shaping a skewed representation of Mexico.

Several scholars such as Lowenthal and Baron (2015), Tiele (2010) and Wilke, Heimprecht and Cohen (2012) argue that news coverage of Latin America has not transformed to reflect the economic and geopolitical transformation that the continent has undergone since the beginning of the 21st century. Instead, there is still a tendency to privilege the developments and progress of the US and Western Europe and the crisis in the Middle East. At the same time, other regions like Africa, Asia and Latin America remain either silenced or continue to be narrated and represented within the negative frames.

According to Cazzamatta and Garcia's (2021) review of global news coverage in the years 2000–2014, "the following traits characterise international news coverage: concentration on politics, focus on elites, decontextualisation, regionalism (geographic proximity), orientation on crises and negativity". (See also Hafez, 2007; Sreberny-Mohammadi & Grant, 1985). Thus (2004) argues that applying these commercial news values reduces the Global South's complex realities to a simplistic reporting structure.

It is evident that there is a strong imbalance in news coverage of Latin American countries, especially with regards to the economic transformation and the political strides it has undergone. However, there is limited research on how Latin American countries are covered in global media outlets beyond the German press. This can perhaps be attributed to the silencing that scholars have referred to – where there is simply not enough attention paid to news taking place in the region.

Another set of reasons have been cited by scholars like Hanson (2010), Igartua, Cheng and Muñiz (2005), and Jeong and Lee (2017). The scholars argue that news coverage is determined by geopolitical interests, historical relationships, as well as based on the privileging of particular political norms, such as democratic norms. Thus, countries that deviate from these norms, or countries that have strained or positive relationships with the US and Western European nations all tend to receive higher levels of attention and coverage. For instance, Golan and Wanta (2003) found that news events from countries with a hostile relationship with the US tended to receive more journalistic interest versus those countries without much reported deviance.

There is also an emerging body of work that focuses on South-South media reporting, which reveals that part of the silencing of regions such as China, and some countries in the Middle East like Qatar, has more to do with strategic choices by state-owned media, to ensure positive or limited flows of news content regarding those countries. Madrid-Morales (2021) assessed the influence of Chinese global media on news coverage of Covid-19 in 30 African countries. Based on a computational analysis of 500 000 news stories, Madrid-Morales (2021:3) found that there is evidence of "transnational intermedia agenda setting". This term refers to "(a) the ability



of news media in a given country to transfer the salience of issues associated with their own country to foreign media, thus influencing how foreign media portray the country” and (b) “the capability of a country's news media to push their perspectives on international politics outside of their own country to the world”.

In this regard, Madrid-Morales (2021) draws on Li (2017) to reveal that China tends to decrease the amount of negative attention it receives indirectly by providing African news outlets with content that is biased in favour of China. The scholar contends that an uptick in the use of content from Xinhua has also been seen on Ghanaian media. This is partly explained because of content exchanges and syndication agreements that the news agency has signed with partner African organisations. Many of these partnerships are widely publicised by the news agency itself. (Madrid-Morales, 2021)

However, this uptick is contextual. In French-speaking African countries, this influence was limited. Where present, there was an increased focus on the support provided by China through the provision of personal protective clothing and other Covid-19 relief equipment. Interestingly, Madrid-Morales (2021) notes that in all news coverage in which China was mentioned, it was only in relation to China's positive contribution to Africa, but not the dire situation in China itself. This is revealing of the fact that the rise in political and economic influence provides countries with an opportunity to open and close the lid on the attention received in global news coverage. So, while negative news coverage of Africa is not unique, its 'minimal' status in the global economy makes it low hanging fruit – a tendency seen in Latin America.

In their study, Estupinan (2017) found that news articles related to China in Latin

American media were written by European and/or American news outlets. As such, the scholars found that the framing techniques used to cover China in Latin America were influenced by the political relationship that China shares with the US and Western Europe. The scholars also reveal that news coverage of Asia in Latin America is mediated by international outlets, and thus, limits the South-South cooperation and representation within the media. However, as China's influence has grown, the news coverage of the country has been re-shaped according to China's own political interests such as the One China Policy. The scholars further argue,

The Latin American media outlets have developed in parallel to European and American media, and as the coverage of China grows in those regions, so too does it grow in the Latin media; this although there has been relatively little contact historically, culturally, and linguistically between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Latin America (LatAm). Communication in the global community [has always reflected] shifting balances of power among nations and thus changing paradigms in international affairs. (Dicken-Garcia & Viswanath, 2002)

In India, Hanson (2010) posed the question in relation to the sudden end of the Cold War, “How did the dramatic transformation in the international political environment that occurred in 1990–1991 affect the selection of the international news by the *Times of India*?” To this question, the scholar reveals that news coverage of the world was based on geographical proximity as well as cultural and historical ties. Thus, a lot of attention was paid to South Asia compared to other regions. However, with the fall of the Soviet Union, Hanson found that two years marking the end of the Cold War, 1989–1990, were actually at the low end for international news stories. The peak year for international stories was 1987,



when India became increasingly involved in the civil war in Sri Lanka and eventually sent a peacekeeping force. This finding suggests greater relative importance for regional, as opposed to global, events.

Hanson's study reveals that there was a focus on Asia but in very limited news outlets. And where those Asian countries were covered, it was often in relation to political instability, conflict, and peacekeeping.

3.1 Reflections on media coverage of South Asia

Ospina (2017) investigated the portrayal of China in Latin American media, using content analysis. They found that, despite positive coverage on economic aspects, negative sentiments prevailed in areas such as environment, copyright, democracy and military development. Latin American media rely heavily on foreign sources, and historical ties to European and North American news outlets shape their perceptions. The study suggests a correlation between media framing and public attitudes, emphasising the impact of negative news on public perception. While China was viewed favourably in economic terms, deep-rooted stereotypes and fear of communism contributed to negative representations in Latin American media. The study concluded that China's soft power campaign has limited impact, highlighting a complex relationship influenced by economic interests and historical perceptions.

In his study, Poornananda (1998) underscores the tendency of Western media to overlook significant political events in the 'Third World' unless they are sensational. The election of Benazir Bhutto as Prime Minister in Pakistan, a noteworthy occurrence in South Asian politics, received limited coverage. The focus of Western media on poverty and slums in Calcutta after Mother Teresa's

death exemplifies the prevailing emphasis on the developing world's assumed 'backwardness'. Kyungmo and Bennett's (1996) study reveals that economic development, language, physical location, political freedom and population influence international news structure. Western media, despite relative independence, tend to present foreign news through the lens of their country's foreign policy concerns, perpetuating inequalities in news flow between the centre (Western countries) and the periphery (African, Asian, Latin American and Oceania countries).

Analysing global media coverage from South Asian nations, Bennett and Kyungmo's study found that India received greater attention, comprising nearly 60% of the total stories in both the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Washington Post*. Despite more stories, the *Los Angeles Times* carried shorter news stories than *The Washington Post*. Both newspapers relied heavily on official sources, with the majority of stories authored by their correspondents. Non-official sources were more prevalent in Pakistan and other countries than in India. Crime, conflict and disasters dominated news coverage, with India standing out in economic news. Despite India's advancements in science and technology, this topic was scantily covered by these media organisations.

Natarajan and Xiaoming (2006) conducted a comparative study of Channel News Asia (CNA) and CNN to investigate the claim that Asian journalism differs significantly from Western journalism. Analysing news bulletins over a six-month period in 2000, the study found that despite CNA's aim to present an Asian perspective, it was not markedly different from CNN's. Both channels focused on crises and conflicts in their coverage of Asia. The study traced the origins of the notion of distinct Asian journalism to the New World Information



and Communication Order (NWICO) debates, highlighting efforts by Asian nations to counter Western media dominance.

The study analysed 431 news stories, and reveals that both channels heavily covered politics, wars, business, disasters and crimes. The statistical analysis did not support the hypotheses that CNA differed significantly or presented a more positive picture of Asia than CNN. The findings suggest that the attempt to counter Western bias in news coverage through channels like CNA may not be as effective as envisioned.

Yu's (2022) study employed critical discourse analysis to explore how China's state-run media responded to perceived foreign hostility during the Covid-19 pandemic. Examining 63 reports from China's English-language news media, the study identified three primary resistance strategies: enemification (54.6%), victimisation (33.7%) and heroisation (11.7%). These strategies employ linguistic mechanisms like argumentative topics, nominations, predications and metaphors. The article delves into the implications of this discourse for nationalism and humanitarianism in China, governed by the Communist Party of China. It emphasises the state-owned media's attempt to counter ideologies seen as violating China's rights and freedom. The context underscores the unique role of English-language publications within the Chinese media landscape. Using Factiva, the study collects data from outlets such as China Daily, the Global Times, People's Daily Online, Shanghai Daily, and Xinhua News Agency. The search focuses on terms that associate China with Covid-19 and reflect accusations by Western politicians and media. The article sheds light on the specific discourse strategies employed by Chinese media to shape a narrative that counters foreign criticisms during the pandemic and provides

nanced insights into China's information control efforts on the global stage.

In Ylä-Anttila, Eranti and Kukkonen's (2022) study, the authors propose that 'topics' derived from topic models serve as a valuable proxy for frames under specific conditions: when frames are defined as connections between concepts, when theme-specific data are employed, and when topics are validated using frame analysis. The research focuses on climate change frames utilised by non-government organisation (NGOs), governments and experts in Indian and US media, employing topic modelling. Methodologically, the study contributes to both topic modelling in the social sciences and frame analysis of public debates. Empirically, it enriches research on media debates about climate change.



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The analysis encompasses media coverage from India and the USA, two influential players in global climate politics, using one newspaper from each country across three six-week periods around the United Nations Climate Change Conferences from 1997 to 2011. This choice of countries is based on their hypothesised differences, emphasising methodological variety in the dataset. The study aims to understand how different speaker groups frame climate change in the media debate, focusing on experts, governments and NGOs.



In the empirical analysis, the study reveals that economic concerns take precedence in the US media's portrayal of the climate change debate, while India emphasises burden-sharing and environmental risks. This divergence aligns with the perception of climate change mitigation as an economic threat in the US and the more immediate environmental risks faced by India. Speaker groups also exhibit distinct frames in interpreting global climate change, with NGOs emphasising 'citizen participation' and 'environmental activism,' experts focusing on 'climate science' and the 'economics of energy production,' and governments addressing 'Chinese emissions' and 'negotiations and treaties.' Convergence occurs around frames like 'green growth' and 'emission cuts,' reflecting interpretive storylines that foster common ground among diverse audiences.

The data used included articles mentioning 'climate change' or 'global warming' from *The New York Times* (USA) and *The Hindu* (India). While not fully representative of national public spheres, both newspapers are considered relatively liberal and mainstream, with wide circulation. The study identified 12 word-clusters representing frames, revealing differences in framing between Indian and US media, highlighting economic framings in the US and an emphasis on environmental risks in India. The research underscores the potential of topic modelling to identify interpretive storylines that contribute to building consensus in climate change debates.

Ibrahim, Mustaffa, Peng Kee and Ahmad (2011) delve into the pivotal role of media as image carriers, particularly in the context of war and armed conflict controversies. The paper argues that media, especially mainstream outlets in Malaysia, significantly rely on both local and international news agencies, particularly Bernama, for news coverage – especially concerning major powers. The

authors assert that the majority of foreign news in Malaysian media originates from international agencies such as Reuters, Agence France-Presse (AFP), Associate Press (AP) and others, shaping the perceptions of the global powers.

Examining the transborder flow of information, the study notes foreign governments' criticism of technologically advanced nations dominating global news distribution, associating agencies like AP, United Press International (UPI), Reuters, AFP and CNN with a Western slant. Studies cited in the paper reveal a tendency for negative coverage of foreign countries, including Malaysia, by these agencies. Another study by Ibrahim and Rashim (1996) examined the coverage of human rights issues in Malaysian dailies, revealing biases in source and journalistic categories among agencies like AP, Reuters, AFP and newspapers' own staff. A local study in Malaysia by Ibrahim and Hasim (2005) found that foreign news from international agencies, particularly Reuters, AFP and AP, tends to have a negative or neutral slant, compared to having a positive or balanced slant. Local gatekeepers in the media, constrained by the superior visuals and coverage of international agencies, are compelled to use this foreign news. The paper highlights the longstanding criterion of negativity for newsworthiness. While it acknowledges recent trends of international news services hiring locals as correspondents, it notes the influence of their employers' interests.

The study concludes that images of global powers portrayed in Malaysian newspapers are largely shaped by international news agencies, notably AP, Reuters and AFP, and thus reflect a Western perspective. Despite being a government-owned agency, Bernama's influence on constructing global powers' images in mainstream newspapers is deemed marginal due to the limited intake of Bernama news by these outlets.



Nelson's (2006) comparative study focuses on the reporting of bombings (for example in Bali and Jakarta) in English language newspapers – specifically *New Straits Times* (NST) of Malaysia and *The Straits Times* (ST) of Singapore. Analysing events like the Bali bombings in 2002, JW Marriott Hotel bombing in 2003, Australian Embassy bombing in Jakarta in 2004, and the 2005 Bali bombing, the study employs a global discourse of the 'war on terror' as the overarching frame. At the same time, the study acknowledges that reporting is tailored to remain within the interests of respective governments or groups.

Methodologically, the study combined news as narrative and critical discourse analysis and concentrated on various article types related to the bombings within the first ten days of coverage. The newspapers, NST and ST, cater to both local and international readerships, but unlike ST, NST faces commercial competition from popular tabloids owned by opposition political parties. This transnational comparison provides a valuable lens for understanding the complex social practice of using internal security as a process connecting elite measures and public actions.

The coverage tone in both newspapers aligns with the dominant elite group's stance, emphasising the importance of tough laws, like the Internal Security Act, to maintain social order and investor confidence. The positive portrayal of prevention and punishment fosters self-monitoring within the population, potentially reinforcing racism and discrimination. Hegemony is evident in editorials and articles reflecting ruling group opinions, contributing to calls for the population to "unite in the fight against terrorism", fostering support for rigid security measures. The study assumes, in line with editorials, that addressing terrorism involves a combination of prevention and

punishment, despite arguments that terrorism cannot be purged through increased social discipline or surveillance.

3.2 Is the Global South covered differently in global news?

Wahutu (2018:35) intimates that "media framing is of particular relevance for the Global South, especially Africa, where world attention is frequently directed toward episodes of violence and disorder". In a journal article published in 1987, on how international news affects perceptions of various nations, Perry claims that news about developing nations is no more distorted than news originating from the developed nations (Perry, 1987). This claim, according to Perry's article, was a response to spokespersons from developing nations who had complained that the globally dominant Western news agencies cover 'Third World' nations' news in a "...sparse and unrepresentative" manner (Perry, 1987). Further, Perry states that the empirical evidence regarding the complaints was unreliable.

Of major concern to some scholars is just how much coverage about Africa exists in global media to be able to conclusively determine whether reporting on African news is disadvantaged, when compared with reporting on news from the rest of the world. Further, as asserted by Scott (2017:198), who carried out a comprehensive scoping review of existing research into US and UK media representations of Africa, there is insufficient empirical evidence to arrive at any conclusions about how Africa is covered by the major news hegemonies. Scott's article states that existing conclusions about Africa's representation in the media are based on a small number of sampled countries, events and media texts and thus, while the dominant view of Afro-pessimism in Western media may be accurate, it is not substantiated by enough evidence (Scott, 2017:197). It is therefore important that an analysis of



representation of other parts of the world in the dominant Western media be conducted in order to provide a backdrop of comparison to how Africa is covered in the same media.

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The Global North and South drift constituted a central point of discussion at United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in the 1970s and 80s, under the topic of New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) (Deuze & McQuail, 2020:202). This debate brought to light the fact that the Western powers had put themselves on a pedestal of dominion and superiority compared to the non-Western powers (Deuze & McQuail, 2020:202). Thus, the Global South, or non-Western states, were systematically marginalised in social communication and disadvantaged by being negatively framed in the global media (Deuze & McQuail, 2020:205). Further, this debate at UNESCO noted that the Western powers established themselves as the leading players in production and dissemination of both entertainment and news globally. Further according to Hafez (2007:431) a comprehensive UNESCO report concluded that international news coverage is mainly dominated by characteristics of negative political news, with the Global North receiving greater visibility in the overall coverage of news. This begs the question on how Western-led media covers the rest of the world that it considers 'other'.

The Western media has for a long time been accused of a skewed representation of the 'other'. As indicated by Huang and Leung (2005:305), the concept of the media 'representation of the other' shows that Western-led media is biased against 'Third World' countries as well as 'communist' states. For instance, during the Cold War, the Western media portrayed China and Vietnam in negative 'Cold War frames' Formatting... However, during the 2003 global severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS) crisis, China and Vietnam received very different forms of media representation. China was given bad press whilst Vietnam was reported in a positive light (Huang & Leung, 2005:307). The difference in representation may have been due to the approaches the two countries used to manage the SARS crisis, which resulted from both internal and external factors (Huang & Leung, 2005:307).

In a study by carried out by Bonomi and Pan (2013), about Venezuela's diplomatic relationship with the US, an analysis of major US newspapers was conducted, including the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *Christian Science Monitor*. The study sought to look at the reporting of the first hundred days of the first two of Hugo Chavez's presidential terms (Bonomi & Pan, 2013:233). While the first period analysed demonstrated a positive relationship between the Venezuela administration and the US, in the second period the tone drifted and Venezuela was portrayed through a negative lens (Bonomi & Pan, 2013:234). Moreover, in the second period, all the newspapers that were analysed consistently framed Chavez as a leftist and a military man (Bonomi & Pan, 2013:234).

The US media has often been accused of legitimising their country's foreign policy, especially when reporting on Global South relations. As noted in a much



earlier study by Dickson (1992:562) on the conflict between US and Nicaragua, between 1983 and 1987 the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* portrayed the US foreign policy as sturdy and legitimate in the Nicaragua-US conflict. The study indicated that about half the sources used in the analysed news items from both papers were government officials who portrayed the officially accepted view, hence tended to be one sided (Dickson, 1992:564). A glaring omission from the study was the use of 'Contra' officials, who represented the anti-government forces and were supported by the US, as sources of news (Dickson, 1992:564). Further, the reporting on this conflict centred on the means of achieving the "stated US goals" instead of focusing on the applicability and "appropriateness of the policy itself" (Dickson, 1992:568). MacLeod (2020:278) conclusively captured the reporting of Venezuela's conflict – the US and UK media portrayed highly contested minority opinions, framing them as facts, and largely ignoring or barely mentioning competing arguments. This showed Venezuela in a negative light and drew largely on Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model (MacLeod, 2020:278). As Carter (2013:3) stated, when media houses focus only on one aspect of an event or occurrence when communicating to an audience, they tend to construct a reality as opposed to reporting the reality.

In addition to skewed coverage of news from nations regarded as 'other' by Western hegemonies, there is a general lack of interest in news from these nations. A study to establish the determinants of US media news coverage of Latin American nations discovered that socio-economic status and power correlated with press attention from the major news outlets (Cazzamatta, 2018:18). Cuba, Bolivia and Venezuela received an

over-representation compared to the rest of Latin America, due to their position in regard to Washington decrees and policies. Notably during the period under analysis in this study, Argentina received considerable press from Western media, but only because of its economic crisis, which had an international dimension (Cazzamatta, 2018:18). Thus, except the four nations alluded to above – Cuba, Bolivia, Argentina and Mexico – the Western media generally lacked interest in covering news in any other parts of Latin America.

3.3 Conclusion

Media representation is always a contested space, not least because it is inherently about power. Research shows that, when it comes to covering news from non-Western societies, the global news media privilege 'tried and tested' frames that feature negative themes such as conflict, war, poverty and so on.

In a study, Ojebuyi (2017:12) concludes that "Foreign news media, with limited knowledge of the real situation in Africa, used negative frames to report sub-Saharan Africa as a region of crises". Research also shows that media coverage is shaped by geopolitical factors, in particular the relations between countries being covered and the US or Europe.

Journalistic norms and conventions, which dictate that certain news values (such as the death calculus, conflict and novelty) should be given salience over others, also shape coverage.

Without doubt, in global news coverage of Africa, a combination of all these factors conspire to present the continent in 'othered' frames, at the centre of which are tropes of conflict and war, politics and crisis, poverty and corruption, and other related tropes.



Appendix 4: Methodology

The research for the index employs quantitative content analysis as its central method. This form of textual analysis is defined as the “research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of manifest content of communication” (Berelson, 1952:147). One advantage of quantitative content analysis is that the method “can generate interesting accounts of media representation, involving potentially important claims...these accounts and claims can in turn contribute to larger arguments and theories about media” (Hesmondhalgh, 2006:141). The focus of content analysis is the manifest meaning of texts. In this study, a sample of 20 global news media and agencies were selected for analysis:

such as *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Economist*, BBC and CNN, which are considered critical sources of information for policymakers around the globe, we included in the sample relatively newer but increasingly global brands from the Global South, such as Al Jazeera, which is not only global in reach but also 'alternative' in terms of its reporting line. We also included the state-owned Chinese news giant Xinhua, because, among other things, it has a substantial reach, does primary coverage of Africa (where it has allocated substantial resources), and reflects shifts in geopolitics – which shapes news reporting, including reporting of Africa. As noted above, all the media selected have correspondents covering the African continent.

Media outlets



These media are global brands and produce news and information that arguably reaches much of the entire globe, and in different languages. In addition to traditional Western media

The Global Media Index for Africa is based on news articles published in online versions of the major global media between June and December 2022. We are aware of the fact that online content is not necessarily the same as live broadcasts, yet it also reflects the broad editorial positions of the same media. Similarly, while a six-month period may not reflect the entire picture of coverage in a given year, it is indicative of the broad patterns of coverage by the global media selected.

4.1 Coding

The initial stage of the study involved a literature review, which provided insight into existing research on both media coverage of Africa as well as the Global South. We identified both similarities and variations in terms of patterns of coverage and journalistic practices. With regard to coverage of Africa, we noted the general focus on negative frames and topics such as conflict, corruption, politics and poverty. We also noted the tendency to



frame Africa using predominantly male and powerful voices as sources – a feature that also characterises media coverage globally.

Following the literature review, the research team did a preliminary reading of the sampled media content, the unit of analysis. In this case, from each of the 20 media organisations, an average of 50 news articles published between 01 July and 31 December 2022 were selected. The method used was purposive sampling of stories published in the first, middle and last week of each month. This arguably gives a representative picture of the type of coverage.

The purpose of selecting was to give us an overall picture of patterns of coverage over an uninterrupted period of half a year. The preliminary reading of the news stories allowed the research team to draw a codebook to guide the analysis of the content. For example, we were able to identify the most frequently covered topics and subjects, the most frequently cited news sources and the gender voices in stories. In addition to identifying the commonly covered topics and voices in the sampled stories, we used the literature review to identify other subjects and voices rarely covered in global media coverage of Africa, as a way of checking the extent to which the selected media conformed to or challenged the stereotype.

With a total of just over 1 000 news stories from 20 publications, the coding process was undertaken by two trained coders. There were two intercoder reliability tests at the start of the coding, with the final test achieving a score of .80 on the Krippendorff's kappa. In quantitative content analysis where more than one coder is involved, intercoder reliability tests are important as they serve as quality assurance and ensure the integrity of results. The test involves the coders coding a sample of similar stories.



Picture credit: Shutterstock

A score is set based on similarities in the results of their coding, the higher the similarity the better. The Krippendorff's score measures this. The coded data was then analysed and interpreted using the software system R.

4.2 The index

The results of the content analysis were used to build the index. Based on the earlier literature review, the researchers identified four critical news coverage aspects, which form the basis for fair/unfair coverage. These include the diversity of news stories, the diversity of news sources, depth of coverage, and diversity of countries/places covered. The key word here was diversity, as the literature suggested the prevailing coverage tended to be one-dimensional rather than multi-dimensional.

4.2.1 Diversity of topics covered

This score focused on the extent of coverage of different topics in the sample we analysed. We picked up 28 topics, inclusive of both mostly and rarely covered topics. Critics of global media coverage of Africa often point to the limited and selective nature of reportorial focus, with predominant and disproportional salience on corruption, poverty, disease and politics. We tried to establish the extent to which the media organisations under study replicated or diverted from this pattern of coverage.



4.2.2 Diversity of sources

This score measured the extent of voices given expression (through direct media citation as first, second or third sources in single stories) in the mainstream global media. As Hall et al. (1978) argued, sources are 'primary definers' of news. In the news production cycle, gatekeeping is a process where certain aspects of news stories and sources/voices are either included or excluded. The inclusions and exclusions are not neutral or value-free processes. They are part of news media's editorial policy positions on given subjects. Research has shown that mainstream global media coverage of Africa often privileges male, pale voices as primary cited stories, as well as experts, politicians and government leaders. What is often missing or given scant attention are voices of ordinary people, sometimes even on subjects that directly affect them.

4.2.3 Diversity of countries covered

Granted, not all countries receive equitable media coverage by the media, and it is also not feasible – financially at least, for media organisations to devote equal coverage to all countries, African or otherwise. At the same time, literature suggests that global media only cover a handful of economically and politically powerful African countries, or those in which Western geopolitical interests are vested, while leaving out the rest. This creates the impression of a generalised 'Africa' – some sort of a unified 'country'. In the score we looked at how many African countries the organisation covered during the period under review and divided this number by the total number of African countries (55). We then calculated the percentage – the higher the better.

4.2.4 Depth of coverage

The depth of coverage of stories on Africa constitutes an important variable for the index. Merely carrying a story on a subject (including breaking news) is not sufficient. How the story is covered, the

depth of the research and provision of information in the story, the extent of balance and context also constitute important measures of the quality of coverage. On this score, we look at combined sub-variables, which include context, stereotype, frame and balance. These are discussed briefly below:

Context

It is a given that stories that contain context help develop an informed citizenry. Over the past few years, with proliferation of social media use, context helps guard citizens from disinformation and misinformation in the cybersphere. Regarding context, we categorised three levels: context provided, some context and no context.

- We categorised stories under “context is provided” to include stories that gave background, and those that provided hyperlinks (for example) directing the reader to further contextualisation of the story being reported. In some cases, the context was included in sidebars or timelines.
- We categorised stories under “some context is provided” to include stories that made partial reference to the context of the story being reported. This applied especially to stories that failed to give hyperlinks to better assist the reader in understanding the holistic story.
- The last category was for stories where “no context is provided”. These were stories that failed to mention background or provide hyperlinks. The difference between the second and third categories is that stories in the second category included some background in the body of the story.

Stereotype

The second taxonomy looked at the element of stereotype in news coverage. Stereotypes refer to how media considers a certain behaviour or way of life



belonging to a certain group of people. This group can be cultural, religious, ethnic, geographical and or racial. Research has shown that most media stereotypes about Africa include conflict, corruption, poverty, poor leadership and disease. We had three classifications, like the one above: “Story reproduces stereotypes”, “Some stereotypes” and “No stereotypes”.

- The stories coded as “containing stereotypes” needed to contain at least three of these stereotypes. We were, however, cognisant, that stories on ethnic politics in Africa may also be prevalent i.e. Nigeria and Christian/Muslim relations.
- The second category, “Stories contains some stereotypes” looked for stories containing at most two of these stereotypes articulated above.
- The last taxonomy on stereotypes looked at “Stories containing no stereotypes”.

Frame

Closely related to the issue of stereotypes, is the element of framing. Framing entails the emphasis given to a set of facts in a story and is usually meant to achieve a certain outcome. One of the contentions in the world of media has been how the African story is framed. In this study, we had three categories: positive frame, neutral frame and negative frame.

- For the “positive frame” category, we looked for stories that were framed and presented with a positive outlook, for example, Mozambique after corruption; successful transition in Kenya; Renewable energy in South Africa.
- For the “neutral frame” category, we looked for stories that gave neither a positive nor a negative outlook, such as updates and shorter stories. While these stories may have included some stereotypes, framing was fairly neutral.

- Finally, for the “negative frame” category, we looked for stories containing context that was not directly related to the story and which reinforced stereotypes. For example, a story about elections that pivoted to the theme of corruption, thus reinforcing the narrative of Africa as a continent of corruption.

Balance

Lastly, we looked at the issue of balance in the coverage of the African story. The basic definition of balance implies giving equal and fair prominence to sides being reported. This is not an easy bar to meet, especially when dealing with complex topics such as conflict, terrorism or corruption. We were awake to this reality in our coding into three categories: “balanced”, “some balance”, and “no balance”.

- Stories categorised as “balanced” contained narratives and counter narratives in the coverage. This means, journalists went out of their way to find an alternative viewpoint.
- Stories classified under “some balance” referred to stories where one side was directly quoted but the other side was quoted indirectly or refused to comment.
- Lastly, for “no balance”, we looked for stories where only one side was quoted and reported, and no other side was acknowledged or noted.

4.2.5 Interpreting the data

We computed the separate indicators which made up the index. These included diversity of story topics, diversity of voices (including gender), depth of coverage, and diversity of African countries.

a. *Diversity of topics.* We computed on a 3-point scale, but normalised to between 0 and 1, where 1 = maximum diversity (this would be where 28 out of 28 topics were covered). Note that the unit of analysis here is media outlet (for example, New York Times).



b. (1) *Diversity of 'voices'*. We again used a 3-point scale, normalised to between 0 and 1, where, in the original scale, 1 would be 29 'voices'/ 'sources'.

b. (2) *Diversity of gender of voices*. In this instance, we computed the proportion of voices that are female, which is in effect a 0 to 1 scale.

c. *Depth of coverage*

c. (1) *Diversity of context* was computed on a 3-point scale, but normalised to between 0 and 1, where 1 = good context provision.

c. (2) Presence of *stereotypes* was computed on a 3-point scale, but normalised to between 0 and 1, where 1 = no stereotypes present.

c. (3) *Framing* of story was computed on a 3-point scale, but normalised to between

0 and 1, where 1 = fully positive framing of story.

c. (4) *Balance* of story was computed on a 3-point scale, but normalised to between 0 and 1, where 1 = highly balanced story.

d. *Diversity of countries covered*. We counted the number of African countries covered per news outlet, and we normalised this to between 0 and 1 (where, in the original scale, 1 would be 55).

To summarise: we computed four indices, namely i) diversity of topics; ii) diversity of sources (itself made up of diversity of voices, and diversity of gender of voices); iii) overall depth (itself made up of context, stereotypes, framing, and balance); and iv) diversity of African countries covered.

We computed the four indices for the index on a 3-point scale and normalized the final results to a **0-1** scale where 1 = maximum diversity. We present the results from the index as a percentage, therefore, a score of **0.80/1** is represented as 80 out of 100 or **80/100**.



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