

Thirty Years of Broadcasting Africa on U.S. Network Television News

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This study examines the coverage of Africa by the U.S. television networks over a 30-year period, to determine whether the evening news broadcasts pay equal attention to Africa compared to South America and Europe. Also assessed is whether incidents of wars, famine, and public health crises and the increasing importance of Africa's oil, gold, and diamonds on the international market, continue to dominate the U.S. television network evening news coverage of the continent. A content analysis of ABC World News, NBC News, and CBS Evening News shows that coverage of Africa has steadily decreased more than coverage of other regions. The majority of international stories were about Europe while coverage of Africa on all three networks was far less when compared to other regions. Also, conflicts and crises dominated Africa's coverage throughout the 3 decades and stories linked a considerable amount of the news events to a particular U.S. interest. More results and their implications are discussed in detail.

Developing nations generally receive less attention in the U.S. media than industrialized nations, unless they either have natural resources such as oil or are engulfed in deadly crises (Golan, 2003; Knickmeyer, 2005; Schnurman, 1986). Many African countries are particularly less covered by the U.S. television news media (Golan, 2008) and what is shown is almost all bad news (Knickmeyer, 2005; Schnurman, 1986). Kalyango (2011b) also determined that in the 1990s, the Associated Press and Reuters dedicated less than 5% of their entire world news coverage to African news and events. This study presents data which support those arguments, with the assessment of the total number of stories reported on the three major network evening news broadcasts featuring Africa compared with the stories which featured European and South American countries.

Twenty years ago, Ebo (1992) concluded that Americans generally had a distorted image of Africa primarily because much of what they knew about the continent was

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the “negative and misguided images of Africa portrayed in American media” (p. 16). He also concluded that the coverage of Africa in the U.S. media only increased when something dramatic occurred. Thereafter, news about the continent was totally sidelined. Along the same line of argument, Knickmeyer (2005) determined that U.S. citizens’ perception of Africa was about “bad news . . . with problems that [are] unsolvable and thus a waste of tears and newsprint” (p. 114).

The central purpose of this study is to examine the coverage of Africa on the U.S. television network evening news broadcasts over a 30-year period, to provide new findings and depth to the following pertinent questions. Has this pattern of U.S. television network evening news coverage of Africa changed or remained the same over the years, given the expansion in television media space for news coverage? Do the U.S. network evening news broadcasts pay more attention to Africa in the aftermath of 9/11 and the attendant U.S.-led fight against international terrorism in Africa and other regions of the world? Do incidents of wars, famine, and health scourges such as HIV/AIDS and the increasing importance of Africa’s oil, gold, and diamonds on the international market continue to dominate the U.S. television network evening news coverage of the continent?

A content analysis of *ABC World News*, *NBC News*, and *CBS Evening News* was undertaken. Although a number of studies have addressed the issue of U.S. media coverage of Africa, no known study has specifically conducted a longitudinal study spanning 30 years (1980–2010) of coverage of Africa in newscasts by the three U.S. television networks. Despite CNN’s international reputation (Kalyango, 2011a), the global news cable network was excluded because this particular study focuses on evening newscasts on terrestrial television stations. In addition, Guskin, Rosenstiel, and Moore (2011) recognized the declining audience base of the evening news over the years, but noted that network evening news remained an important source of news for a large number of Americans. They noted that four times as many people watch the evening newscasts on ABC, CBS, and NBC than watch the three cable news channels (CNN, FOX News and MSNBC) in prime time. Even with the declines, almost twice as many people watch the lowest-rated evening network newscast than watch the highest-rated cable news program.

Although international news is increasingly available on the Internet, social media and several 24-hour news television networks, television is still one of the primary sources of news in the US. While fewer people in the US read books and newspapers in 2009 than before, they still spent on average 142 hours a month watching television and 27 hours a month on the Internet; and 31% of the time on the Internet “watching” television news content (Stross, 2009).

The Gatekeeping Process and Newsworthiness

Gatekeeping takes place during the news production process when decisions must be made regarding the prime news of the day. Gatekeeping therefore involves

the conscious and systematic selection of news items which the editors (gatekeepers) consider newsworthy for their audiences (Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim, & Wrigley, 2001). Although this process appears relatively simple, the consequence of gatekeeping has far-reaching ramifications for audiences, as their world view is impacted and shaped by what the editors select for them (Bagdikian, 1983; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

Gatekeeping is interwoven with the concept of newsworthiness, but the rationale for choosing what is newsworthy remains enigmatic and varies from one media organization to another (Reinemann & Shulz, 2006). Conventionally however, stories that get published are said to have “news value”—a nebulous concept that is generally attributed to Lippmann (1922). The characteristics of “news value” include sensationalism, proximity, novelty, news-room routines, national interest, and organizational imperatives (Eilders, 2006; Graber, 2010; Kim, 2002; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Despite the factors that constitute “news value” Clayman and Reisner (1998) saw news editorial conferences where editors and reporters negotiated what gets published, as the primary influence in the gatekeeping process.

International news presents additional problems in making gatekeeping decisions. Ostgaard (1965) proposed that foreign political news appealed more to editors, while Galtung and Ruge (1965) believed that local audiences preferred “negative news” such as disasters, wars, and famine. Hester (1973), and Kim and Barnett (1996) suggested that editors often selected news about economically powerful nations, while Wu (1998) found that trade relations between nations and proximity of nations were significant determinants of international news flow. Shoemaker (1991) also suggested that shared social systems influence gatekeeping (in Western nations), and Shoemaker and Reese (1991) found that these shared values and social systems include the capitalist economic system, individualism, and democracy.

In relation to this study, it appears that each country’s relationship with the United States largely impacts the gatekeeping process by U.S. media. For instance, coverage of world news by U.S. press increased after the September 11, 2001 bombings although some scholars suggested that “quality” decreased (Coghlan et al., 2006; Lichter, Butterworth, & Amundson, 2004). Major world problems still go unreported in the post 9/11 period. For instance, more than 3.9 million people have died as a result of the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, but there was very little coverage of the crisis (Coghlan et al., 2006). For stories about natural disasters, Van Belle (2000) found that the only determinant for their coverage by U.S. media was proximity to the United States. Golan (2008) determined that the strongest predictors of the coverage of Africa in the U.S. press were trade with the United States and the strength of the country’s economy.

The foremost challenges to the gate-keeping perspective appear to be the Internet and the rapidly increasing developments in communication technology, factors which now allow citizens to produce, share, and have unlimited access to information. The developments in media technology and their use by audiences have threatened to pull down the gates since the early 2000s (Williams & Carpini, 2004), thereby increasingly making the functions of the gate-keepers redundant. Media

technology has for decades provided the audience greater interaction with the media than the news gatekeepers of the traditional media were willing to cede (Abramson, Arterton & Orren, 1988; Katz, 1997).

Despite these current developments in communications technology, news that appears on U.S. network television stations, the channels which this study is concerned with, is still determined by editors and producers who act as the gatekeepers with various criteria for news selection. This reality in part assures the relevance of this study.

U.S. Television Coverage of Africa

Africa is not a priority zone in the coverage area of most U.S. television news media. In the 1980s for instance, none of the three network television news stations had a permanent correspondent covering sub-Saharan Africa (Ebo, 1992). Knickmeyer (2005) who was the West Africa bureau chief for the Associated Press from 2000 to 2005 noted that the crisis in Sudan's Darfur region was the largest humanitarian crisis globally, yet because of the U.S. war in Afghanistan and Iraq, U.S. media resources were pulled from Africa. News agencies acknowledge the newsworthiness of events such as genocide in Darfur but prioritized other coverage (Hamilton, 2011). Gilboa (2003) asserted that budget constraints force news directors to prioritize their coverage, but Thussu (2004) concluded that reduction in the coverage of international crises in developing nations was related to resources being shifted to coverage of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. He argued that for reasons of national interest, the coverage of "threats to the Western lifestyle," religious fundamentalism, national security, and international terrorism replaced coverage of issues of poverty and disease in Africa and the rest of the developing world (Thussu, 2004, p. 59).

Overall, U.S. news coverage of issues concerning developing nations is limited, superficial, simplistic, and event-driven (Kalyango, 2011b; Thussu, 2004). Issues such as poverty are not often addressed; instead, stories about Africa and other developing nations focus on harrowing events or other politically conflict-ridden and disastrous topics (Knickmeyer, 2005).

South Africa is probably one of the few Sub-Saharan African countries covered frequently in the American news media because of its political and economic stability. Moeller (2000) however noted the insufficient coverage of the AIDS crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa until Nelson Mandela held a conference in Durban, South Africa, and proclaimed that "AIDS today in Africa is claiming more lives than the sum total of all wars, famines, and floods, and the ravages of such deadly diseases as malaria" (p. 89). Golan (2008) found that despite the presence of wide-scale disease, war, famine, and disputed elections, Africa received very little coverage by U.S. television networks between 2002 and 2004 and suggested that the visual images linked to these problems were not as engaging as war footage.

Rosenbloom (1979) also found that American television often ignores the less economically powerful nations, although whatever happens to the natural resources and economy in these developing nations impacted the global economy. For instance, poor coffee harvest in Brazil can negatively affect business in U.S. cafes or a war in oil-rich Angola will impact gas prices in the U.S.

Research Questions

To assess the U.S. television networks' coverage of Africa from 1980 to 2010, through the lens of ABC, NBC, and CBS, it is important to examine the nations and regions that received the most coverage as well as the issues or topics that were considered salient and worthy of coverage:

RQ₁: What were the most frequently covered nations, regions, and topics in Africa by the U.S. television networks, ABC, CBS, and NBC, on their evening newscasts?

This longitudinal study provides an opportunity to examine whether the frequency of coverage of Africa in the U.S. television networks, as well as the types of issues covered, changed over a 30-year period:

RQ₂: How did the frequency of the U.S. television networks' news coverage of Africa in general change over time?

RQ₃: How did the U.S. television networks' news coverage of the issues in Africa change with time?

Method

The main three U.S. network television newscasts, *ABC World News*, *NBC News*, and *CBS Evening News*, were analyzed for coverage of Africa from 1980 to 2010. Data were obtained from the Vanderbilt Television News Archive between February and June 2009 and February 2011 for the purposes of comparing international news coverage of 53 countries in Africa over a 30-year period. Abstracts of reports on each of the countries were collected. Searches were conducted using the terms "Africa" and each country individually. Edy, Althaus, and Phalen (2005) compared the use of the Vanderbilt Archive abstracts and news transcripts and determined that the content of news can be successfully represented in the abstracts for use in communication research.

Data included a sample of all 6:30 p.m. U.S. Eastern Time newscasts, every day of the week. For this study, news items included all mentions of Africa, an African nation, or a city in Africa, but the story had to be focused and must have happened on the African soil. For instance, if a story was, hypothetically, about an Egyptian

art exhibition somewhere in the United States, then such a story was excluded because the event took place on U.S. soil. The unit of analysis was a single story about Africa or a segment about Africa, within a news broadcast. A story of any length was included, and story lengths ranged from ten seconds to more than nine minutes. Two coders recorded the dates and television networks on which the stories appeared. The length of each story, in seconds, was coded as well. The stories were coded for the country that was mentioned. If multiple countries were mentioned or no country but rather the continent was mentioned in the story, that was coded separately.

The countries were divided by regions as designated by The Corporate Council on Africa (De Villiers, 2007a, 2007b; Van Gelder, 2007) and coded for the region to which the country belongs. The regions are central, eastern, northern, southern, and western; both the country and region were coded. This increased the accuracy of the results for comparison by region. In addition, the news category was coded, using a modified category set based on the studies by Golan (2008) and Groshek (2008), which examined African and international news coverage by topic. The issues or categories assessed were internal politics, foreign relations, war/conflicts, terrorism, business/economics, health issues, humanitarian crisis, religion/culture, natural disasters, sports/human interest/entertainment, and other.

Stories were then condensed into broader news issues to explore the major themes of television coverage of Africa. The category "Conflicts and Crises" included coverage of war, terrorism, internal political protests, crime, and accidents/natural disasters. "Foreign and Bilateral Relations" included coverage of foreign relations and business/economics. "Cultural Influence" included coverage of religion/culture, sports/entertainment, and other. The presence of U.S. involvement in the story was recorded as well as the type of involvement. This included political and governmental involvement, for example legislation, diplomatic visits, and elections and military involvement. The category of "International Aid" included funds given to aid countries in Africa as humanitarian assistance, U.S.AID/government funds and aid through Non-for-Profit Organizations from the U.S. Then, other stories about U.S. citizens included in coding are those that covered U.S. celebrities' involvement in Africa. Only direct U.S. involvement was coded. For instance, stories about the Queen of England's visit or singer Bono holding a benefit concert, for example, were not included as U.S. involvement.

In all, 6,108 stories matched the general search description in the 30-year period examined in this study, while a systematic random sampling produced 1,520 stories from the universe, after the data were arranged in chronological order. A random number was selected to begin sampling the stories from all three television networks. Thereafter, every 10th story was chosen from the list to assemble a sample that represented 25% of the universe. Of the sampled 1,520 news stories, 540 stories appeared on ABC, 449 on CBS, and 531 on NBC. Inter-coder reliability was tested by two independent coders who were trained, with detailed information about each category and definitions of each news topic as well as how to determine U.S. involvement. Each of the two independent coders completed a sample of 152

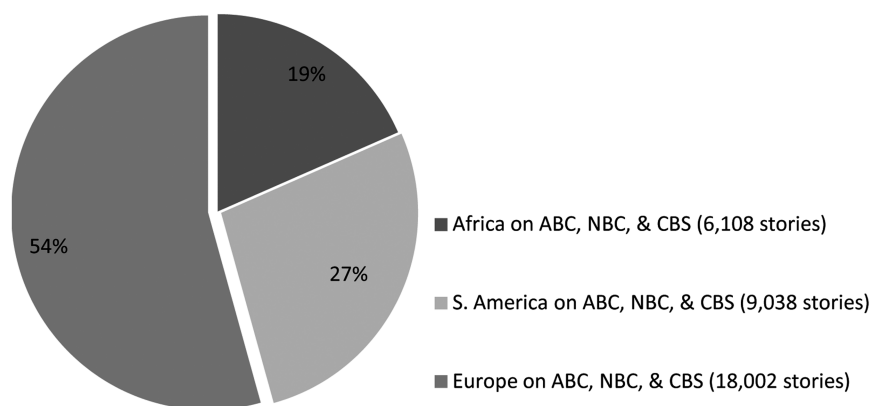
identical stories. A Cohen's Kappa intercoder test yielded a reliability coefficient of .878 overall.

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine how the three major U.S. television networks, ABC, CBS, and NBC, covered Africa from 1980 to 2010. We find that the duration of news stories about Africa averaged about 112 seconds but many of these stories were about 30 seconds long. The longest story was 9 minutes and 20 seconds but only 3% of all stories were longer than three minutes. Stories about Europe averaged about 135 seconds, with the majority of stories running for about 60 seconds long. Also, South America, when covered, had longer stories in runtime than African stories by about 15 second on average. Our population sample of stories show that the majority of international stories were mostly about Europe at 54% while Africa's share of coverage on all three networks was about 19% when compared to stories about Africa, South America, and Europe, as shown in Figure 1. However, 59% of all those news stories about Africa contained a reference to the United States.

The first research question investigated how frequently the U.S. television networks covered nations, regions, and topics in Africa. Results show that South Africa

Figure 1
Comparing the Coverage of Africa with Europe and South America



Note: For the coverage of Africa, about 1,900 stories still mentioned Europe and about 3,580 stories mentioned the United States, out of 6,108 stories. For the coverage of South America, about 1,120 stories still mentioned Europe and about 2,722 stories mentioned the United States, out of 9,038 stories. For the coverage of Europe, about 1,900 stories mentioned Africa and about 4,000 stories mentioned the United States, out of 18,002 stories. Source: the Vanderbilt Television News Archive.

was covered most frequently during that time frame, with almost 21% of the total coverage. Egypt and Libya followed with 17% and 14% of the total coverage respectively; thereby making the three countries the most frequently covered nations in Africa, with 52% of all the sampled stories. The fourth and fifth most frequently covered nations were Somalia and Zimbabwe, each with less than 5% of the coverage. Fourteen of 53 countries in Africa accounted for 90% of all coverage during the 30-year period. They are: South Africa, Egypt, Libya, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Algeria, Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, and Nigeria.

Several countries which were mentioned once in this sample include Burkina Faso (formerly known as Upper Volta), Comoros, Gabon, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritania, and Swaziland and several countries that were never mentioned in this sample include Benin, Cape Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, and Sao Tome and Principe.

The southern region of Africa was covered most often in 509 news stories or 33% of the sampled stories. The northern region of Africa ranked second, with 469 or 30% of the sampled stories. In that region, Egypt and Libya were covered most often, and like South Africa in the southern region, account for 70% of regional coverage. In the eastern region, which was featured in 287 news stories, the coverage was mostly about Somalia, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda, and Ethiopia. Coverage of these three regions represented 83% of the sample. The sampled stories show that the western and central regions were less covered than the other three regions. Table 1 displays the frequency of coverage of each region of Africa.

In the northern region of Africa, 469 sampled stories on all networks were about foreign bilateral relations and intergovernmental politics. War (138 stories) and terrorism (132 stories) were the next most covered issues in northern Africa. The

Table 1
Coverage of Five Africa Regions by U.S. Network Television, 1980–2010

Region	No. of Stories	Percent of Coverage
Southern	509	33.48
Northern	469	30.85
Eastern	287	18.88
Western	156	10.26
Central	91	5.98
Africa as a whole	8	.52
Total	1,520	100.0

Note. Data show frequency of sampled stories that mentioned two or more countries in each region. The network newscasts are *World News*, *NBC News*, and *CBS Evening News*. Regions were designated by The Corporate Council on Africa.

most frequently covered issue in the eastern region was the health crises with 90 news stories out of 287 that focused on that topic in the region. This was followed by stories on war and conflict (71), terrorism (41), and foreign relations (33). News coverage of southern Africa essentially dwelt on stories across four main topics: internal politics (97), foreign relations (93), war and conflict (92), and business and economy (90). For western Africa, the sample showed stories about war and conflict (42) and foreign relations (26) among others. Wars and conflicts also topped the stories about Central Africa (41 news items), followed by the health crisis (32 stories) out of a total of 91 news stories. On the whole, when the continent of Africa was mentioned without reference to any particular country or region, five stories were about HIV and AIDS health crises and the other three were about Al-Qaeda terrorist cells (Table 2).

Remarkably, the U.S. government or citizens featured in 893 out of 1,520 news stories. About a quarter of those news stories (228) dealt with government or political involvement in Africa military involvement in Africa (118), and business and others (61). Table 3 details the number of news stories that pointed to particular issues of U.S. interests in specific African nations. The second research question examined frequency changes in the coverage of Africa over 30 years. In order to determine the changes, the results were divided into four periods, with each period consisting of approximately 7.5 years. The results show a general decline in coverage from 1980 to 2010. In the first period (1980 to mid-1987) the networks collectively aired 2,176 news stories out of the universe of 6,108 stories about Africa. From mid-1987

Table 2
Frequency of Stories by Topics in the Five Regions of Africa, 1980–2010

	Eastern	Northern	Western	Central	Southern	"Africa"
Foreign Relations	33	217	26	4	93	0
War and conflicts	71	138	42	41	92	0
Health Crisis	90	101	21	32	21	5
Internal Politics	14	13	17	3	97	0
Crime/Law	6	10	5	0	56	0
Terrorism	41	132	10	2	3	3
Business/Economics	3	19	13	0	90	0
Sports/Entertainment	11	13	7	1	42	0
Natural Disasters	16	15	8	7	9	0
Religion/Culture	2	5	7	1	6	0
Total	287	469	156	91	509	8

Note. Table 2 depicts the frequency of news stories on specific issues that appeared in each region. $N = 1,520$ news stories on all three U.S. network channels. $\chi^2 = 893.97$, $df = 52$, $p < .001$. The column "Africa" represents stories that which were reported by the networks by generalizing an issue to the whole of Africa without naming a country or region.

Table 3
Focus on U.S. Involvement in News about African Nations, 1980–2010

U.S. Involvement	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3	Period 4
Government/Political	6	5	5	8
Military aid or U.S. bases	8	9	7	14
Business and investment	1	0.5	3	1
U.S. Humanitarian Aid	11	10	12	7
USAID/Govt. Funding	12	13	16	11
U.S. Celebrities or Citizens	6	6	5	13
Economic Aid	10	11.5	9	6
WITHOUT U.S. Involvement	46	45	43	40

Note. *N* = 1,520 news stories from all network television channels. The figures shown in Table 3 are in percentages.

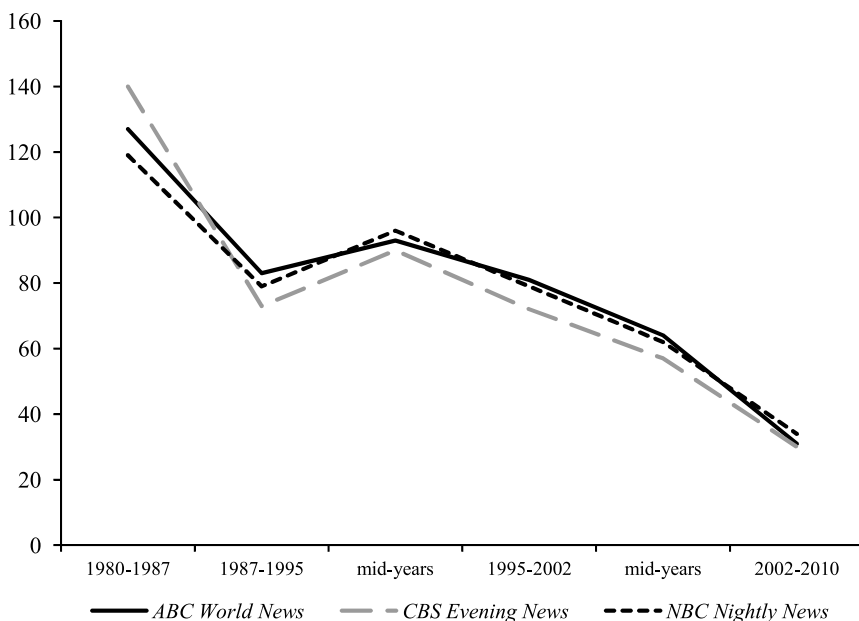
to end of 1994 they broadcast 1,781 news stories. In the third period (1995 to mid-2002) the number of news stories further decreased to 1,209. Finally, 942 stories were aired in the fourth period, from mid-2002 to end of 2010.

A breakdown of the decline in regional news coverage shows that in the first period (1980–1987), 186 stories were aired about countries in northern Africa. The coverage declined to 141 in the second period (1987–1995), then to 97 in the third period (1995–2002), with the lowest number of stories (45) being in the fourth period between 2002 and 2010. News coverage of the eastern region of Africa followed a different trend. Coverage in the first period was 94 news stories, with a decline to 68 stories in the second period. However, the coverage peaked to 103 news stories in the third period. Thereafter, a sharp decline to 22 news stories was recorded in the fourth and final period (Figure 2).

Similar to the coverage of eastern Africa, the results for southern Africa indicate two periods of time when interest in the region was disproportionately high. Of the 509 sampled stories about southern Africa, 168 stories were found in the first period. In the second period 118 news stories were aired, and then there was a peak to 147 news stories in the third period. A decline to 76 news stories was found in the last period. U.S. television networks' coverage of western Africa was infrequent whereas there were 156 news stories in the sample about this region, the data show fairly consistent figures in the number of stories aired at different periods in this study. In the first period, 39 news stories were aired with slight increases to 40 and 41 news stories covered respectively, during the two consecutive time periods that followed. Thirty-six stories were about the region were aired in the last period.

Central Africa was the least covered over time. The heaviest television coverage of the region was from 1980 to mid-1987, when the sample shows that 43 news stories were aired. In the second period, the figure was down to 24 news stories.

Figure 2
U.S. Networks Television News Coverage of Africa, 1980–2010

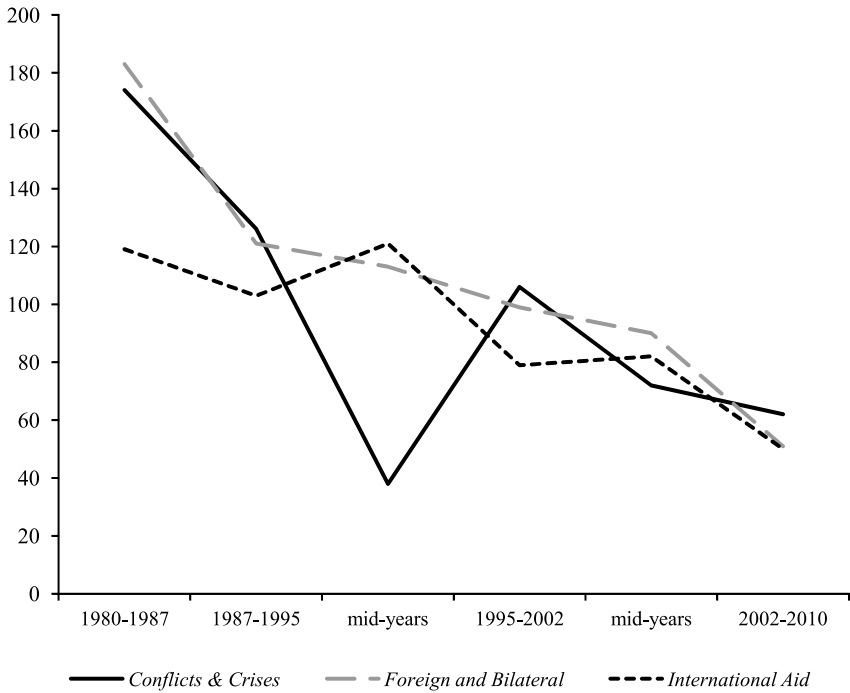


Note: Figure 2 illustrates the frequencies in network television coverage of Africa for ABC, CBS, and NBC over a period of 30 years. $\chi^2 = 378.014$, $df = 29$, $p = .043$. The Y axis represents the number stories at a given period.

The downward spiral continued with 16 news stories in the third period and finally to 8 news stories in the last period.

The third question was about how U.S. television networks' news coverage of each issue in Africa changed with time. The three U.S. television networks' coverage of foreign relations declined during each 7.5-year time period as shown in Table 3. Data also show that network television coverage of war and conflicts in Africa followed the same trend as coverage of foreign relations. War coverage declined sharply by almost 50% between 1994 and 2002 on all network evening news. On issues concerning health care and humanitarian crises, television coverage peaked by 20% in the second time period. U.S. television networks' coverage of health issues also rose in the third period by about 20%, but then declined sharply in the fourth period by 30% in number of stories on this important issue. Coverage of internal politics increased slightly during the 1990s across all three networks, while coverage of terrorism fluctuated in the mid-1990s and in the mid-2000s on NBC and ABC, but remained steadily declining on CBS. Coverage of business and economics slightly peaked in the mid 1980s. Figure 3 displays some of the

Figure 3
Issue Coverage of Africa by U.S. Network Television, 1980–2010



Note: Figure 3 data represent the number of news stories in all three networks during the clustered year-periods. $N = 1,520$ stories. $\chi^2 = 693.905$, $df = 59$, $p < .032$. The category “conflicts and crises” included coverage of war, terrorism, internal political protests, and natural disasters. “Foreign and bilateral relations” included coverage of foreign relations and business/economics. “International aid” included funds given to aid countries in Africa as humanitarian assistance, USAID/government funds and aid through Non-for-Profit Organizations from the U.S.

results in three categories to illustrate how issue coverage of Africa changed over time.

Discussion

This study examined how the three major U.S. television networks’ evening newscasts, *ABC World News*, *CBS Evening News*, and *NBC Nightly News*, covered Africa throughout the past three decades. While the news stories were mostly about Europe (54%), Africa’s portion of their attention was minimal at 19%, when compared to stories about Africa, South America, and Europe. The networks’ coverage of Africa

considerably declined throughout that period, with a sharper decline after 1989. In terms of specific countries, South Africa, Egypt, and Libya in that order received the majority of all U.S. network television coverage. Although several nations were never mentioned in the stories sampled, some countries, like Sao Tome and Principe, were not even included in the entire universe of stories about Africa over the 30-year period.

Conflicts and crises dominated the coverage of Africa by the networks. Slightly less than half of all U.S. network television coverage of Africa linked the news event to a particular U.S. interest. Most often, this coverage included U.S. government and military involvement in the nations and regions of Africa. This suggests that not only were the network television news media focused on very few countries, they were also focused on the United States' involvement in particular African countries and regions.

In general, coverage of Africa most often focused on the northern and southern parts of the continent, possibly because several countries in both regions such as South Africa and Egypt are geopolitically linked to the interests of the United States. Stories about these countries often included government activity and foreign relations. On the contrary, coverage of the rest of Africa was focused primarily on crises and war. We also learn, as shown in Figure 1, that almost half (about 45%) of the total coverage was devoted to countries in the developing world. This is a major development, but coverage was primarily on crises and war.

Southern Africa

South Africa was more extensively covered in this region. However, most of that coverage was about the country's transition from the apartheid system to universal suffrage, and around the time Nelson Mandela was released from jail after 27 years, and later elected as the first black president in 1994. He won a Nobel Prize for his influence on restoring peace in South Africa. The internal government affairs and elections in South Africa garnered the attention of the three U.S. television networks primarily due to the apartheid era regimes and Nelson Mandela's global stature.

After the abolition of the apartheid system in South Africa and the elections in 1994, television coverage dropped considerably. South Africa has received very little attention in the news recently, except in 2010 during the World Cup Soccer event. Stories about other southern African countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Botswana were mostly about political and health crises, and the United States' attempts to provide aid to ailing nations in the region.

Northern Africa

Coverage of this region was mainly about Egypt, which was a staunch U.S. ally on issues regarding Israeli-Arab relations, and more specifically the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. Libya also received some attention, a substantial portion of which was about

terrorism and war. About a third of all coverage of terrorism in Africa was about Libya. Its relationship with the United States has been volatile since 1981 when Libyan jets fired on a U.S. aircraft and precipitated a conflict between both nations. Thereafter, Libya was designated a state sponsor of terrorism by the U.S. government.

Since the September 11, 2001 bombings of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the United States Department of State has spent a lot of money and military resources trying to keep members of the Al-Qaeda from having a strong presence in Libya and other North African nations, as well as other countries outside the region. The hostile relationship between the United States and Libya since the conflicts in the 1980s and after September 11, 2001, attracted negative news attention from the U.S. television networks. This perhaps explains the notion that the networks focused on negative news about African countries that have unfriendly relations with the United States. The northern Africa region also witnessed a substantial amount of coverage involving the United States' peacekeeping efforts, diplomatic relations, and joint military exercises with Egypt.

Another Northern African nation, Algeria, was among the most frequently covered nations in this study. Most coverage of Algeria focused on foreign relations and terrorism. The United States has developed a relationship with Algeria as a partner in rooting out terrorism in Africa. Following the September 11, 2001 bombing, the Algerian government condemned the attacks and supported U.S. efforts to prevent the infiltration of Al-Qaeda in the region (Schmitt, 2008). Some of the U.S. television networks' coverage coincided with the foreign activities of the U.S. administration with African nations, as exemplified in the case of Algeria.

Eastern Africa

Unlike coverage of the northern and southern regions of Africa where news coverage was focused on one or two nations, U.S. television networks' coverage of Eastern Africa was spread across several countries. Somalia, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Kenya were all among the 15 most frequently covered nations between 1980 and 2010. Coverage of this region focused most frequently on health care and humanitarian crises. Serious health problems, especially HIV/AIDS, exist in East Africa. About two thirds of all people living with AIDS live in Africa (UNAIDS, 2008) and AIDS is a leading cause of death in Africa (WHO, 2010). There is widespread chronic hunger and malnutrition particularly in Eastern Africa as a result of frequent droughts, flooding, and war (Iyob & Keller, 2006).

The statistics about the HIV/AIDS crisis show how important these health issues are in Africa, and as the poorest region on the continent, Eastern African nations have suffered because of such crises as AIDS, malaria, and malnutrition. Many nations in the region rely on monetary support from Western industrialized nations, including the United States, to deal with major health crises. Although the health crises in Eastern Africa are constantly acute, the findings indicate that ABC, CBS, and NBC's coverage was sporadic and peaked only at times of unusual severity.

The findings are consistent with Swain's (2003) conclusion that coverage of health and humanitarian issues is lower than its importance because there are no frequent events associated with the issue that would appeal to the television market.

The most frequently covered eastern African nation during the period studied was Somalia, especially in the years following a major drought in 1992, which prompted many nations, including the United States, to provide significant relief to that country. During the same period (in 1993) President Clinton cut diplomatic ties with Somalia after 18 U.S. soldiers were killed in the capital city of Mogadishu. These two events/crises were covered frequently by the network news media. However, from 1996 to 2008, only four news stories about Somalia appeared on U.S. television networks.

Almost all coverage of Rwanda focused on health care and humanitarian crises. The only event of interest to the U.S. television news media between 1980 and 2010 was the Rwandan genocide, which occurred in 1994 and lasted about 3 months. An estimated 800,000 ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed by the ruling Hutu extremists (Prunier, 1995). Most coverage, however, occurred after the massacre and dealt with the international humanitarian response.

Coverage of Sudan was also heavily focused on health care and humanitarian crises and war. Coverage increased between 2005 and 2008 and accounted for more than one sixth of all coverage of Africa in those years. Consequently, this may be an indication of the importance and severity of the current crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan. In July 2008, the International Criminal Court accused Sudanese president, Omar al-Bashir, and his government of sponsoring and abetting the genocide and other crimes against humanity in Darfur. The United States government supported this criminal action against the president of Sudan (Reeves, 2009). The United States is the largest contributor to the humanitarian effort in Sudan and has delivered food supplies to combat starvation. It is likely that this intensive coverage of Sudan by the U.S. network television news media can be attributed to the U.S. government's persistent condemnation of the regime in Sudan between 2005 and 2008, and the Sudanese government's sheltering of Osama bin Laden in the late 1990s.

Coverage of Ethiopia also primarily focused on issues concerning health care and humanitarian crises. About half the news stories about Ethiopia dealt with both issues.

Central Africa

Coverage of Central Africa also focused primarily on one nation: The Democratic Republic of Congo. An early peak in news coverage focused on President Mobutu Sese Seko, who seized power in a 1965 coup d'état and ruled until 1997. During that time, Mobutu changed the name of the country from the Republic of Congo to Zaire. Another peak in coverage occurred during the two consecutive time periods between 1993 and 2000, when in 1997 rebel armies led by Laurent Kabila and backed by Rwanda and Uganda overthrew Mobutu. Kabila renamed Zaire the

Democratic Republic of Congo. In 1998, troops from Angola, Chad, Namibia, Sudan, and Zimbabwe intervened and supported Kabila's rule against troops from former allies, Rwanda and Uganda. Although there was a cease-fire in 1999, fighting continued beyond the period under study. An estimated 3 million people died as a result of the fighting, starvation, and malnutrition associated with the war (Clark, 2002).

This long-term volatility in the Democratic Republic of Congo attracted the attention of the U.S. television networks only during the two timeframes when extensive political and military actions occurred, such as the overthrow of the government and major fighting involving several countries in the area. Currently among the worst humanitarian crises in Africa, only three stories about Congo appeared between 2001 and 2008.

Western Africa

Most coverage of Western Africa was focused on two nations, Liberia and Nigeria. Coverage of these two nations was steadier than particularly the nations in Eastern Africa, where wars and famine dictated increased and sporadic attention. Coverage of Western Africa, however, was infrequent throughout the entire period. The majority of television coverage of Nigeria was focused on business and economics. Nigeria relies on oil production for over 95% of its export earnings. It is the continent's largest oil producer and a primary source of crude oil to the United States. The country is a prominent member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), therefore its natural resources attract the economic interest of the United States. Coverage of the nation from 1980 to 2010 included fluctuations in oil prices affecting the U.S. and OPEC activity. Consistent U.S. interests in oil-producing nations like Nigeria may explain the more frequent and steady coverage throughout all periods of this study.

Liberia is the only country in Africa that was once used by the United States to resettle former slaves, and the American news media maintained some interest in the nation over this period of news coverage. Almost all news stories about the nation were about war. Two peaks in coverage occurred from 1989 to 1992 and from 2001 to 2004 that dealt with the prolonged Liberian civil wars. Violence began in 1989 when rebel leader Charles Taylor and his troops overran the capital city, Monrovia, and seized power. An initial peace agreement was signed in 1995, which led to Taylor's election as president. Fighting began again in 1999 and lasted until 2003 when Charles Taylor stepped down. The fighting killed more than 250,000 people and displaced thousands more. Liberia's economy was left in ruins (Ackerman, 2009).

It is noteworthy that U.S. network television stations' coverage of the western region was quite limited, despite the numerous notable events in the period of study. For instance, the brutal war and subsequent peace efforts in Sierra Leone (1991–2002) by Ecomog (Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group) soldiers and Britain were practically ignored. Also sidelined were events in

Ghana under President Jerry Rawlings (1981–1992), and the various military coup d'états and political turmoil in Nigeria (1983–1998), the highlight of which was the ruthless regime of General Sani Abacha, which brazenly trampled on press freedom and massacred political opponents, including the environmentalist, Ken Saro-Wiwa.

Conclusion

The findings reaffirm previous conclusions that the primary enticements for U.S. television networks' coverage of Africa are incidents of crises such as coup d'états, civil wars, terrorism, and health pandemics. At the secondary level of coverage were issues pertaining to U.S. national interest such as economic and political relations with some African nations. This pattern of coverage basically remained the same over the 30-year period, continuing a gatekeeping process on the type of stories about Africa, for instance, which may make a news story about a clash between two obscure nomadic tribal groups in the Sudan to be perceived as more attractive than the election of the first female president of Liberia.

U.S. television networks' coverage of wars in Africa decreased significantly over time and incidentally after the United States entered the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. A pertinent observation here from the coverage of Africa in general by the U.S. network evening news broadcasts is the linkage between areas of U.S. foreign policy concerns and other interests. Thus, the focus of coverage on Egypt can be linked to U.S. interests in the Middle East and its proximity to Israel in particular, while attention to Libya was about terrorism and the late President Moamar Gadhafi's leadership style. In the case of Nigeria, economic interests appeared to dominate coverage since the country supplies oil to the U.S., while in Somalia, Kenya, and the Sudan coverage might have been in line with U.S. humanitarian work and combating the HIV/AIDS and other health epidemics.

Gatekeeping work by the U.S. television networks in this period of study mirrors the concerns by previous scholars that they focus on the U.S. government interests. The U.S. government gives millions of dollars annually to so many countries in need around the world, particularly those in Africa. As one of the primary sources of news for U.S. citizens, network television channels should consider increasing the coverage of Africa in order to help the public understand the culture and systems of government in this developing continent. Future research may also examine how President Obama's election affected network television coverage of Africa. He has African roots and has drawn attention to the continent since his election in November 2008.

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