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INTERNATIONAL TV NEWS, FOREIGN AFFAIRS INTEREST AND PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

A comparative study of foreign news coverage and public opinion in 11 countries

Toril Aalberg, Stylianos Papathanassopoulos, Stuart Soroka, James Curran, Kaori Hayashi, Shanto Iyengar, Paul K. Jones, Gianpietro Mazzoleni, Hernando Rojas, David Rowe, and Rodney Tiffen

This article investigates the volume of foreign news provided by public service and commercial TV channels in countries with different media systems, and how this corresponds to the public's interest in and knowledge of foreign affairs. We use content analyses of television newscasts and public opinion surveys in 11 countries across five continents to provide new insight into the supply and demand for international television news. We find that (1) more market-oriented media systems and broadcasters are less devoted to international news, and (2) the international news offered by these commercial broadcasters more often focuses on soft rather than hard news. Furthermore, our results suggest that the foreign news offered by the main TV channels is quite limited in scope, and mainly driven by a combination of national interest and geographic proximity. In sum, our study demonstrates some limitations of foreign news coverage, but results also point to its importance: there is a positive relationship between the amount of hard international news coverage and citizens' level of foreign affairs knowledge.

KEYWORDS commercial television; foreign affairs; information environment; international news; media systems; news interest; public broadcasting; public knowledge

Introduction

Several recent studies have demonstrated that US media outlets give relatively little attention to foreign affairs, and particularly that foreign coverage has been significantly reduced during and after the Cold War period (Norris 1995; Shanor 2003; Schudson and Tiftt 2005). Hamilton (2010) argues that it is predominantly market influence that has pushed the US media system towards this reduction in international news coverage. Because international public affairs stories are more costly to create and yet receive low interest from the audience, this type of news tends to lose out in editorial meetings. Scholars have thus expressed concern about the future of this important area of news coverage; indeed, some have even predicted that international news is an "endangered species" (Emery 1989; Kalb 1990).

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Within the research community there is simultaneously a strong assumption that globalization is making the world's media systems increasingly similar. Media outlets in many countries are becoming increasingly market-oriented and entertainment-centred (Hallin and Mancini 2004)—essentially, more similar to the US media. This is a product of fierce competition, in particular through the rise of global media corporations at the expense of local and national media companies, and public service broadcasting in particular. There is some disagreement about the likely outcome of this trend. While some scholars fear that the result will be a deterioration of information quality and political disengagement in many nations (see Bennet 2004), others are less worried and believe the increased competition and deregulation trends will expand information choice and enable citizens to find their preferred level of political engagement (Norris 2000). There are also those who argue that a convergence towards the US model, or globalization, is largely exaggerated (Tunstall 2007; Aalberg and Curran 2012).

Against this background, the purpose of this paper is to study the supply of and demand for international television news across 11 countries with different media systems. We ask if market-oriented media systems marginalize foreign affairs coverage more than media systems dominated by regulation and public service broadcasting. Moreover, we explore whether international foreign news reflects mainly national interests, or whether there is a more general (pan-national) pattern of foreign news coverage. Finally, we examine the relationship between the supply of international news and the public's foreign affairs interest and knowledge.

Supply of International Television News

Most people have limited personal experience of diverse countries and continents. In order to know about the world, then, we depend on the representations provided by various agencies of information brokerage. Foremost among these are the news media.

Even if news media have the *potential* to turn people into cosmopolitans, however, it is not at all evident that they do. As a matter of fact, several US scholars argue that there is no evidence of such a trend, and that foreign news reporting will not automatically grow with increased globalization. Hamilton (2010) argues that structural changes of the media markets have reduced international and foreign affairs coverage available to the broader public. Self-selection also matters. Even if new information technology now provides an almost infinite number of websites from all over the world, it is mostly those with particular interests who seek out such sources. Most regular news consumers simply expect that they can rely on their mainstream (national) news media to provide what they need.

International news is expensive to produce. Trying to uncover information from various sources, on subjects where secrecy is often an issue, can be very costly even in a domestic setting. Keeping a network of foreign correspondents who speak the native language and understand the culture is also expensive; and maintaining a constant presence in a country, even when that country's events do not make international news headlines, requires an ongoing investment that does not consistently pay off. (That said, one might argue that international news is only expensive when supplied by travelling reporters, and that it is comparatively inexpensive when it comes from the international

agencies. But news coverage from foreign correspondents, less aware of national news interests, has costs as well.)

As a response to corporate demands for larger profits and an increasingly fragmented audience, the coverage of international news by US media has declined significantly over the years. According to one estimate, US television news executives have reduced the space and time devoted to foreign coverage by 70 percent since the end of the Cold War (Shaw 2001). Moisy (1996) suggests that while national networks devoted 45 percent of the time to foreign news in 1970, this share was down to 13.5 percent in 1995. Similarly, Norris (1995) shows how the end of the Cold War seemed to be a turning point in Americans' interest in the outside world. She demonstrates how the end of the Cold War brought a sharp increase in the number of foreign news items on American television (CBS and ABC) for a brief transition period (1990–1991), followed by a “dramatic fall” starting in 1992. From an all-time high of 41 percent of all news stories on network television in 1991, it went down to 29 percent in 1992 and 24 percent in 1993.

Evidence of a similar decline in foreign news coverage has also been found in Europe. National TV networks throughout Europe seem to have gradually given less priority to international news. This happens regardless of the fact that the number of news programs has increased over the same period (Papathanassopoulos 2002). In a British study by the Media Standards Trust, researchers found that while 20 percent of each paper was reserved for foreign news coverage in 1979, this figure had fallen to just 11 percent by 2009 (Moore 2010).

Allen and Hamilton (2010) are, however, skeptical towards sweeping arguments of a general and massive decline. These authors argue that putative lapses in foreign news coverage is the norm; it is the increases, which occur particularly during wars, that are exceptional. Allen and Hamilton thus argue that the proportion of foreign news is relatively small in times of peace—and it is this low level of peace-time coverage that should serve as the benchmark. (Another concern when discussing the benchmark for foreign news reporting is whether the US benchmark is applicable for the level of foreign news in other countries.)

It is certainly a global trend that television is becoming more market-driven and entertainment-centered, in that there has been a large increase in the number of privately owned television channels, facilitated by the growth of cable and satellite TV, and that positive program requirements on commercial channels have tended to be reduced. These trends are apparent in Europe (Hardy 2008; Jakubowicz and Sukosd 2008; Iosifidis 2007), in Latin America (Lugo-Ocando 2008), in south Asia (Kitley 2003; Page and Crawley 2001), and indeed across four continents (Chadha and Kavoori 2005). In short, it appears to be the case that television systems in many parts of the world are becoming more like the US model (Hallin and Mancini 2004).

There are nevertheless still important differences in the ways in which different countries have arranged their television systems. At one end is the market-based television system of the United States, where public television accounts for less than 2 percent of audience time, and where a more entertainment-oriented commercial television system is no longer under any legal obligation to inform the public (Hamilton 2004). At the other end of the spectrum is Norway, where public channels in 2006 accounted for 44 percent of viewing time, and where the principal commercial television channels still are extensively regulated (Aalberg, van Aelst, and Curran 2010). Situated between these polarities are the many countries with “dual” television systems: they have significant public as well as

private sectors, and the latter still have some public obligations. Some of these intermediate systems tilt towards the market pole (as in Australia) and some towards the public service pole (as in Japan).

According to Kolmer and Semetko (2010), one cannot make generalizations easily from the US case, because the structure of the television system matters. They show how foreign news reporting is much higher in Germany than the United States, for instance; and argue that German public broadcasting, for a long time supported by state subsidies, provides the news audience with a relatively high level of foreign news (approximately 45 percent). As the market decides more of the US news diet, the share of foreign news reporting is much lower (Kolmer and Semetko 2010, 709). Equally important, there has been no general decline in foreign news coverage on the four main German channels, while even the private channels devote a relatively high share of their news programs to foreign news. Similar patterns were found by Curran et al. (2009) and Brekken, Thorbjørnsrud, and Aalberg (2012), each of whom demonstrates that the share of international news in the United States is generally lower than the share in many European countries. It thus seems like the supply of international news is higher in public service-oriented television systems, while more market-oriented television systems give less attention to this news category.

But the question of media reporting and globalization is not all about number of minutes spent on foreign affairs coverage, it is also a question of what the international news consists of. Ever since Galtung and Ruge's (1965) study based on the Norwegian press, it has been evident that some events and/or countries are more likely to make it into the news, because foreign news coverage is partly determined by economic, political, social, and geographical relationships. Galtung and Ruge demonstrated that there is a bias towards presenting events and news that fit the machinery of selection and retransmission. This favors events that occur near the reporting facilities, often in cosmopolitan centers with good communications, or where news editors expect major events to happen. Galtung (1986) also explained the global media pattern in terms of a "center-periphery" model, according to which the world's nations can be classified as either central and dominant or peripheral and dependent, with a predominant flow of news from the former to the latter. Newer studies confirm this trend, finding that the central and dominant countries tend to originate news that is distributed to the periphery (Shoemaker, Danielian, and Brendlinger 1991; Wilke, Heimprecht, and Cohen 2012). (Basically, the United States and the larger countries of Western Europe are typically seen as more central, while countries in Africa are most peripheral.) Still, closeness to home is often considered a news value in its own right; so both geographic proximity and national interest should also be important factors in explaining the regional focus of foreign news.

The Demand for and the Consequences of Foreign Affairs Coverage Among the Public

It is often assumed that the TV audience is generally uninterested in international news. One of the reasons for this is that foreign news is not always seen as immediately relevant. Hamilton (2010) argues that the lack of audience demand for foreign news is caused by lack of education and familiarity with the complexities of foreign institutions,

cultures, and conflicts. But which comes first? Does the audience have to be highly educated to demand more international news, or will more extensive TV coverage of foreign affairs also trigger more interest among the public? We believe that the causality runs both ways.

There has been mixed support for the view that news selection is guided by an expert editorial assessment of what would interest the news audience. Research comparing audience interest in news topics and editorial judgments of the same matter has shown wide mismatching (see e.g. Hargrove and Stempel 2002). A comparison between editors' and readers' "top stories", as polled in the United States for 1995–1999, showed 48 percent agreement and no correlation between audience interest in news and actual coverage (Tai and Chang 2002). This study suggests that news editors do not necessarily give audiences what they want, and that other forces may have a stronger influence on the news agenda.

What are the likely consequences of foreign affairs being marginalized in mainstream news coverage? It certainly represents a major challenge to the ideal of the informed citizen, as citizens need relevant and up-to date information about current affairs, domestic as well as international, in order to have (and act on) informed political preferences.

Jerit, Barbaras, and Bolsen (2006) argue that the quality of the information environment is responsible for much of the political ignorance many scholars traditionally have attributed to individual-level factors such as education and socio-economic status. A number of recent studies also suggest that various media systems produce different information environments. Dimock and Popkin, for instance, show that Europeans were very much better informed about world events than Americans, and suggest that this is due to "substantial differences between countries in the communication of knowledge by TV" (1997, 223). Dimock and Popkin (1997) were not able to specify the nature of these differences, nor did they seek to explore whether there was a systematic relationship of the kind they suggested. But some attempts to pursue a comparative empirical analysis of the information environment and levels of political knowledge have been undertaken (Iyengar et al. 2009; Curran et al. 2009; Aalberg and Curran 2012). Generally these studies suggest that there is a negative relationship between the level of commercial media and general news knowledge. Based on these previous studies we also expect to find a strong relationship between the level of *international TV news* and *public knowledge about foreign affairs*. Moreover, it is likely to assume that geographical proximity also influences public awareness, the same way as it is expected to influence news selection.

Data

In order to study the supply, demand, and the consequences of international television news, we draw on two types of data sampled across 11 countries with different media systems. As most previous research has been focused on Anglo-American and Western countries, an important extension in this study is to include non-Western democracies in our sample. The countries included in this study are Australia, Canada, Colombia, Greece, India, Italy, Japan, Norway, South Korea, United Kingdom, and United States.

To investigate the supply of international TV news we draw on a quantitative content analysis of major broadcast news sources during three pre-determined, non-sequential weeks (excluding weekends) in May and June 2010. The only exception was Australia, where two weeks of news was sampled. The TV sample consisted of the principal evening news bulletin on two leading TV channels in each country. In all countries except the United States and Colombia, this gave us a sample of one public service news program and one news broadcast offered by the leading commercial broadcaster in the country. Only the main section of the newscast was coded, indicating that separate local news segments and weather reports etc. were excluded.

A team of trained coders in each country coded the news items according to a set of predefined categories. Relevant for this study are the variables measuring whether the news story concerns the nation where the story is published (domestic news) or other nations (international), or whether the story must be regarded as a combination of the two. Throughout this analysis, international news stories are stories that focus exclusively on foreign country/ies, international stories that mention the home country, or stories from an international location where location is incidental to the story, for instance the site of an international summit or organization. Domestic news stories, on the other hand, are stories that focus exclusively on the home country, but also include stories that are domestic-based but which might mention a foreign country, for instance a parliamentary debate about the country's military funding.

If the news story referred to a country or several countries, coders were also asked to identify which countries were mentioned in the news story. Based on the primary international location of the news story, we were able to identify geographically where the foreign news stories originated. Finally, coders also identified which news organization presented the story (i.e. if it was a public service or a commercial broadcaster).

To investigate the demand for international television news as well as the consequences of the level of foreign affairs coverage on the public, we administered a survey to a quasi-representative sample of the population (of not less than 1000 adults) shortly after the period covered by the content analysis. In all countries save for Colombia, Greece, and South Korea, the survey was conducted online by YouGovPolimetrix. The sample used by this polling organization attempts to minimize sampling bias through the use of sample matching, a methodology that featured dual samples—one that was strictly probabilistic and based on an offline population, and a second that was non-probabilistic and based on a large panel of online respondents. Thus, each of the online respondents was selected to provide a mirror image of the corresponding respondent selected by conventional random digit dialing (RDD) methods. In essence, sample matching delivers a sample that is equivalent to a conventional probability sample on the demographic attributes that have been matched (for a more technical discussion and comparison of online and offline samples and digital divides, see Iyengar and Vavreck [2011] and Strabac and Aalberg [2011]). The two developing countries in the sample departed partly from this approach. In the case of Colombia, the sample was confined to urban areas in a population where 76 percent live in urban areas. Within this sample, there was a random selection of households predetermined by size of urban population, housing district, and strata. In India, the stratified sample was restricted, for reasons of cost, to urban areas in a country that is still predominantly rural. The results for both India and Colombia should thus be viewed with some caution.

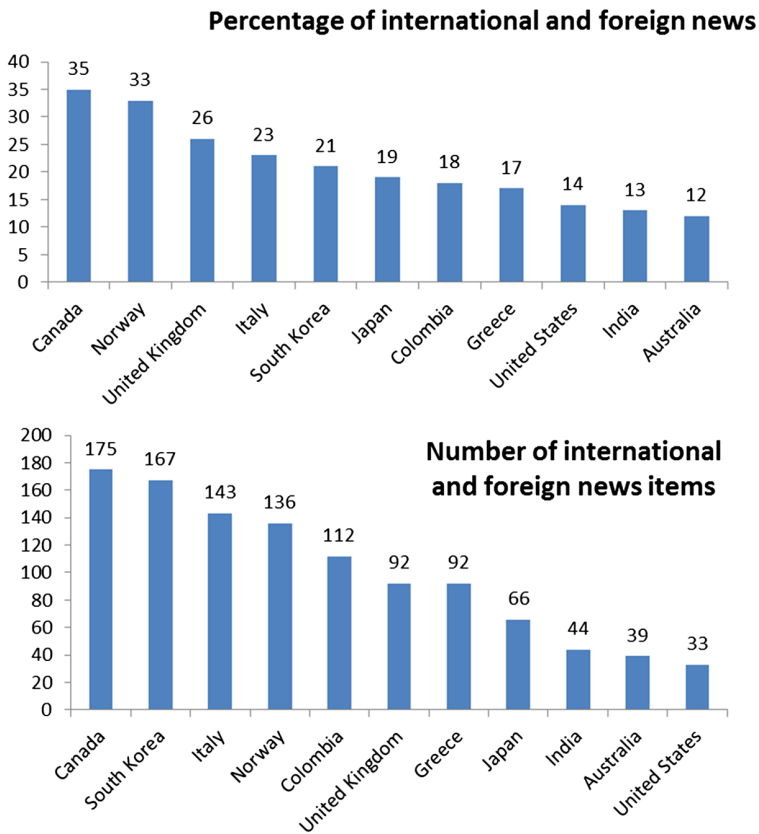
The survey mode was the same in all countries save in Greece, where interviews were conducted by phone, and in Colombia, where they were conducted face-to-face. The format and appearance of the online surveys were identical in each country. Among other things, respondents were asked about how interested they were in different types of news. The survey instruments were also designed to reflect citizens' awareness of foreign news stories. In this paper we include a set of six common questions that were asked across all countries about international events, locations, and people featured in the news in the months preceding the administration of the survey. While three of these news items were based in the West, the other three were related to locations in Asia. The items were carefully selected in order to vary the level of difficulty of the questions (reflected in how often the topic had been reported in the preceding period, and how extensively it was reported in different parts of the world). It is, however, difficult to find items that are equally salient across all the 11 countries included in this study, and we should be aware of this when interpreting the results. Question order and multiple choice options (each question had five possible answers) were randomized to avoid order effects. To minimize the possibility of respondents looking up the correct answer on these knowledge questions, each question remained on the screen for a maximum of 30 seconds before being replaced by the next question.

Analysis

Based on previous research we should not expect high supplies of international TV news on the main news broadcasts. However, more recent research also suggests that we should not use the US case as a benchmark for foreign news reporting in other countries. Indeed, there might be large variations not only across different countries, as Kolmer and Semetko (2010) suggest, but also according to how international news coverage is measured (Allen and Hamilton 2010). The absolute item frequency is not necessarily the same as the proportion of the newscast, thus we will first take a closer look at the level of foreign news applying different types of measures. The results are presented in Figure 1.

The upper panel of Figure 1 shows the share of international and foreign affairs coverage as a percentage of the total broadcast. As expected, foreign news represents a minority of the news profile among national broadcasters in all 11 countries, but there is significant variation. Canada, Norway, and the United Kingdom devote a relatively large share of their newscast to foreign affairs. In the first two countries broadcasters devote about one-third of the newscast to international news while two-thirds of the newscast focuses on domestic matters. At the other end of the scale we find Australia, India, and the United States, which clearly prioritize domestic news much more highly than international news. The US broadcasters devote 14 percent of their evening news bulletins to international events while 86 percent focus on domestic stories. Measured as the proportion of total news, the Australian broadcasters were even less concerned with foreign affairs, with only 12 percent of the newscast devoted to international news.

The lower panel of Figure 1 shows the ranking of countries according to the number of international news stories offered. This reveals a more dramatic variation between our 11 countries, and suggests that different countries have different news cultures. This is partly explained by differences in the length of the newscast and the amount of time devoted to commercials, but also reflects variations in the use of longer versus very short

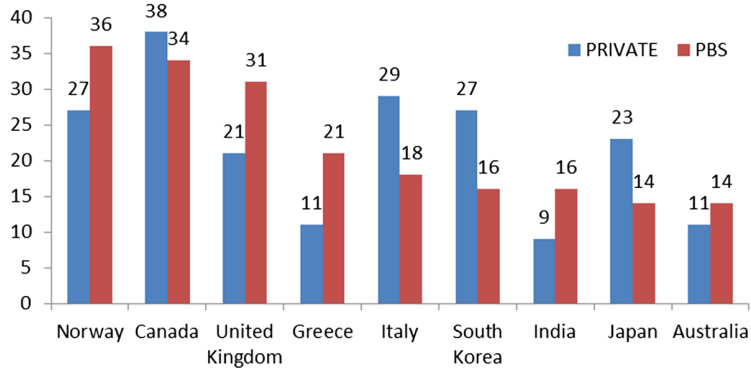
**FIGURE 1**

International and foreign affairs TV news coverage. Percentage of international and foreign news as share of total newscast. Number of news items equals number of individual news stories covering international and foreign affairs

news stories. Within the three weeks sampled in this study, the two Canadian broadcasters presented 175 stories that were classified as international news. The broadcasters in South Korea ($N = 167$), Italy ($N = 143$), and Norway ($N = 136$) also presented its news audience with a relatively high number of international news stories. On the other end of the scale we find the broadcasters in the United States who offered their news audience 33 foreign affairs stories during the 15 days of news sampling. Note that the 39 foreign affairs stories presented to the Australian public was over a two-week period.

One of the reasons behind the large differences may be related to market developments and the standing of the national public service broadcasting system (Kolmer and Semetko 2010). Generally we should expect public service broadcasters to provide more international news than their private competitors. In all countries, except the United States and Colombia, we sampled news from the main public service channel and the main private channel in the country, thus allowing us to investigate whether there are indeed systematic differences across the two types of broadcasting systems. Again, we measure this according to both the proportion of international news and the number of news stories presented during the sampled period. The results are presented in Figure 2.

Percentage of international and foreign news



Number of international and foreign news items

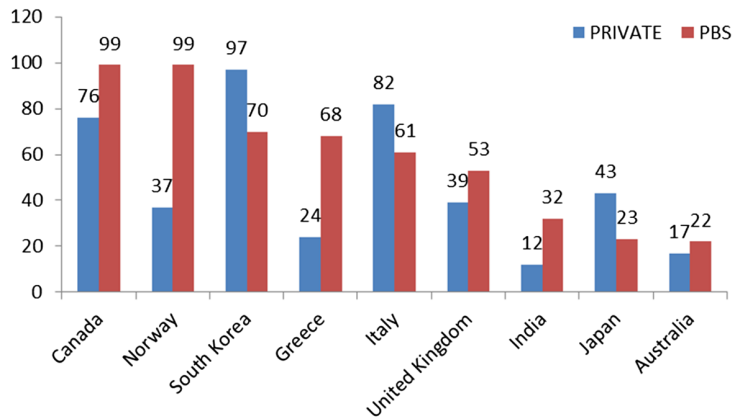


FIGURE 2

International and foreign affairs TV news coverage across different types of broadcasters. Countries are ranked according to percentage/number of international and foreign news in the public service channels. The US public broadcaster was not included in this study

The upper panel of Figure 2 ranks the countries according to the share of international news offered by the public service channels. In this case we shall, however, focus on the gap between the two different types of broadcasters. In five of nine countries included, the public service channel (PBS) devotes a larger proportion of its newscast to international news, with the greatest gap found in three of the European countries: Norway, the United Kingdom, and Greece. The public service broadcasters in Australia and India also seem to prioritize international news more highly than the private broadcaster. In a minority of the countries we find a reversed gap, indicating that it is the private broadcasters who are most dedicated in their supply of international news. The private broadcasters in Italy, South Korea, and Japan provided a much higher share of international news than the public service channel in these countries. There was also a small gap in favour of the private broadcaster in Canada. This does suggest that there may be large differences even between public service providers and between private broadcasters (see also Soroka et al. 2012). Looking at the number of news items, public

service channels offer more international news stories than their commercial competitor in six out of the nine countries.

The mixed results presented in Figure 2 are surprising given our expectations of a clear relationship between public service broadcasting and the level of international news coverage. One potential explanation may be that we have not yet controlled for the type of international news the two types of broadcasters focus on. Perhaps a more distinct pattern emerges if we separate between hard and soft news categories. Not all international news can be classified as hard news, providing insight into political affairs and policy debates in other countries. On the contrary, there is reason to believe that a substantial share of the international news also consists of soft news and crime (as would be the case for the domestic news category).

Based on the classification of the main topic of the story, we were able to separate between hard news (defined as reports about political, economic, and social issues including war and poverty), on the one hand, and soft news consisting of reports about celebrities, human interest, sport, and other entertainment-centered stories. For this analysis we decided to use a separate category for crime and accidents, as there is no accepted convention governing the classification of this type of news (for a review, see Reinemann et al. 2012). This category also includes catastrophes and disasters that are not related to policy. The share of international news that is devoted to the three different types of news categories are presented in Table 1.

It is clear that most of the international and foreign news presented to the public in our 11 countries can be classified as hard news. It is also interesting to note that, as expected, the public service broadcasters devote more of their international coverage to hard news topics. On average, 56 percent of the international public service news can be classified as hard news, while the private broadcasters on average only devote 41 percent of their international coverage to hard news. The reverse pattern holds if we look at the soft news category. Almost 40 percent of the international news supplied by the private

TABLE 1

Focus of international and foreign news across different types of broadcasters (%)

	Hard news		Crime and accidents		Soft news		Total <i>N</i>	
	Private	PBS	Private	PBS	Private	PBS	Private	PBS
America								
Canada	30	37	37	26	33	36	76	99
United States	50	–	25	–	25	–	32	–
Colombia	46	–	39	–	15	–	112	–
Europe								
Norway	65	65	24	23	11	12	37	99
United Kingdom	31	45	26	32	44	23	39	53
Italy	49	48	27	31	24	21	82	61
Greece	50	91	8	6	42	3	24	68
Asia/Oceania								
Japan	33	57	9	13	58	30	43	23
South Korea	31	51	13	11	56	37	97	70
India	33	53	17	6	50	41	12	32
Australia	29	55	24	14	47	32	17	22
Mean	41	56	23	18	37	26		

channels was soft, while only 26 percent of the international public service news was soft. If we look in more detail at the individual countries, however, there are a few important exceptions from this general rule. In both Norway and Italy, the international focus of the two types of broadcasters is remarkably similar. It is also interesting, although not very surprising, to note that the hard news focus generally is at a much higher level among the two Norwegian broadcasters while the two Italian broadcasters devote a larger share to soft news. The other small exception is found in the Canadian case, where the public service channel provides somewhat more soft news compared to the private channel, which seems to focus more of their international news coverage on crime. Thus, even if there are considerable variations across countries in the supply of foreign news, there is clear evidence that market-oriented broadcasting systems are less likely to supply their audiences with international hard news coverage.

The countries' coverage of international news might also be biased according to geographical structures and national interest. According to the so-called news criteria offered by Galtung and Ruge (1965), we should expect more foreign news from "elite" countries, neighboring countries, and countries involved in serious conflict. Thus one expectation is that countries in North America and Western Europe generally will receive a lot of focus. We also expect countries involved in international conflict to get more coverage, especially if the conflict to some extent also can be related to domestic interests. The news value which suggests that closeness to home is an important selection criteria should, however, create some systematic differences between the 11 countries in our sample. The geographical structure of the international and foreign news coverage are presented in Table 2.

We see that three regions stand out in terms of the level of international news coverage. As expected these regions are North America, Western Europe, and Asia, and we see the predicted pattern where the greatest media focus is on neighboring countries. Moreover, when non-Asian countries do focus on Asia, there is a large degree of national self-interest involved. On US television news, 13 percent of the international news related to the war in Afghanistan, while 9 percent of British television news focused on Afghanistan. The share was considerably lower for other countries that also had troops in Afghanistan, including Canada (4 percent), Australia (4 percent), Norway (2 percent), Italy and South Korea (1 percent). The more "peripheral" regions received less attention among our sample countries. South America, for instance, seemed to be a blind spot for Asian and Australian news editors. Eastern Europe also received relatively little coverage across all our 11 countries, as did Africa, although the latter did receive some attention typically related to the conflict in Somalia (United States and United Kingdom) or to the world championship in South Africa.

Hamilton (2010) suggested that low levels of foreign affairs coverage are due to lack of audience interest. The survey data gathered for this project do confirm that citizens in all countries find domestic news more interesting than international news. Figure 3 shows the percentage of respondents who declare that they are interested in international and domestic events and issues.

In Figure 3 the countries are ranked according to public interest in international news, and looking at audience interest, the US public, compared to citizens in other countries, do not appear to be particularly disinterested in international news. On the contrary, the United States now ranks as one of the countries where people are most interested in international affairs. Recall that the United States (with 52 percent audience

TABLE 2

Geographical structure of international and foreign news coverage (%)

Media coverage of international or foreign news from countries in:											
	North America	South America	Western Europe	Eastern Europe	Middle East	Asia	Oceania	Africa	No location	Total	<i>N</i>
America											
Canada	52	5	10	1	4	16	3	8	1	100	164
United States	3	20	16	3	3	23	0	32	0	100	31
Colombia	28	23	27	1	5	10	1	5	0	100	109
Europe											
Norway	11	6	41	6	6	19	1	10	0	100	136
United Kingdom	22	12	18	0	4	29	0	15	0	100	68
Italy	19	6	40	1	6	18	1	8	1	100	140
Greece	11	2	64	7	7	7	0	2	0	100	88
Asia/Oceania											
Japan	16	0	18	2	4	39	0	20	0	99	49
South Korea	18	4	15	1	4	44	1	13	0	100	114
India	24	0	24	10	5	33	0	5	0	100	21
Australia	30	0	7	0	7	37	0	19	0	100	27
Mean	21	7	25	3	5	25	1	12	0		

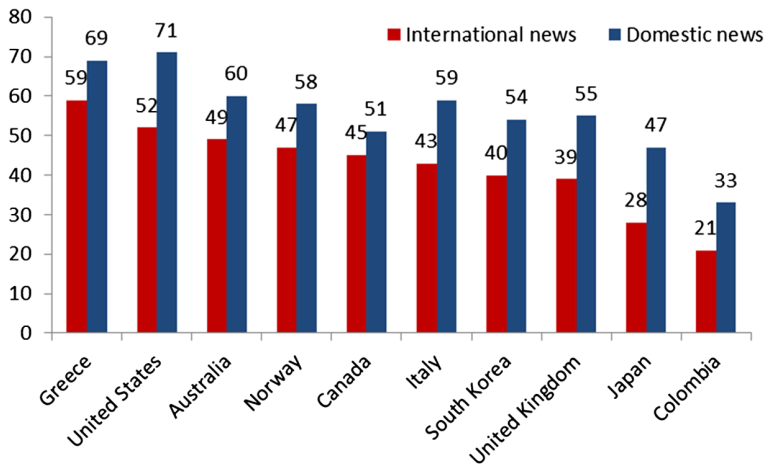
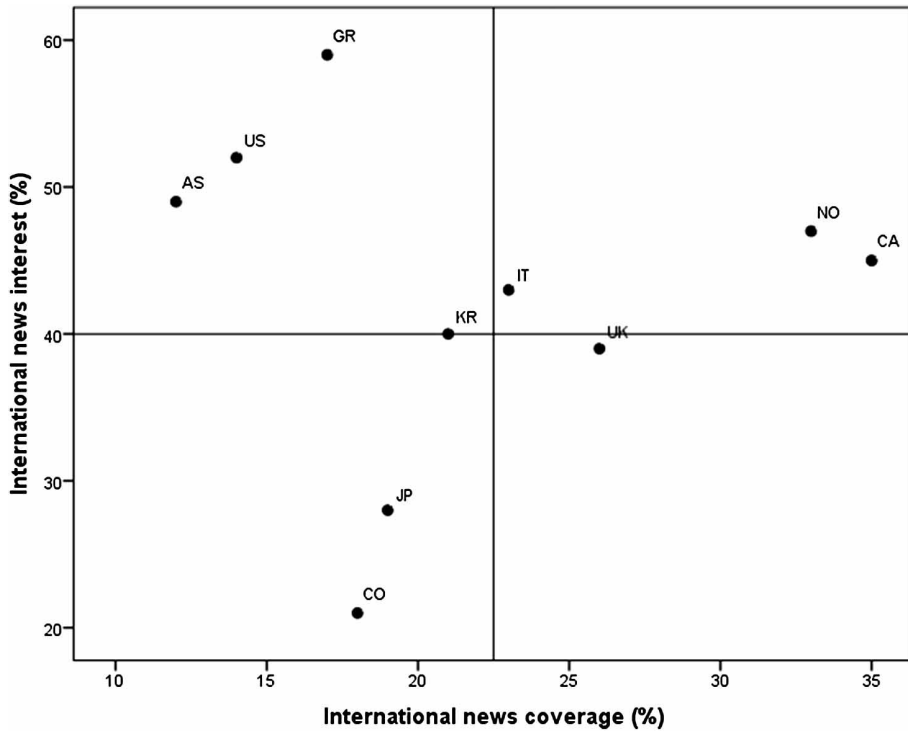


FIGURE 3

Public interest in international and domestic news coverage. The percentages are based on respondents being asked the following questions: “Generally speaking, how interested are you in national events and issues?” and “Generally speaking, how interested are you in international events and issues?” The answer categories ranged on a five-point scale where 1 indicated that the respondents were “not at all interested” while 5 indicated that they were “extremely interested”. Respondents who chose 4 and 5 on this scale have been classified as interested in domestic and international news

interest) together with Australia (49 percent audience interest) were both at the bottom end when it came to the supply for international news. Greek respondents also indicate a particularly strong interest, which is understandable given that the country was facing bankruptcy due to the international financial crises at the time of the survey. Respondents in Norway, Canada, and Italy, countries who all ranked at the upper end on the news supply scale, are somewhat less interested than the US respondents, suggesting a rather weak correlation between news interest and news supply. In fact it seems as if there is a quite striking mismatch between the supply and demand of international news in the Australian and the US case, but also for the Greek case, the latter probably caused by the international financial crises (Figure 4).

The survey conducted among the 11 countries also included a set of common international hard news questions. Table 3 gives an overview of the percentage of respondents who answer these knowledge questions correctly. The three top rows are related to international news based in “the West”, while the bottom three rows are international news associated with “Eastern” countries. Respondents were asked to identify what the Copenhagen Summit was about (the then recent world conference on Climate Change), and to identify the Russian leader Vladimir Putin and the German Chancellor Angela Merkel. The “Eastern” questions asked respondents correctly to select the Korean politician Ban Ki-Moon as the current UN Secretary General, to identify who the Thai Red Shirts are and who the Taliban are. Table 3 reveals quite large variations across the 11 countries. The Norwegians were most knowledgeable about the Copenhagen Summit, but a considerable share of other Europeans as well as Americans and Australians were able to identify the purpose of this world conference. Respondents in the three Asian countries were less aware of this event. A similar expected and geographical structure

**FIGURE 4**

The relationship between supply and demand of international news. AS, Australia; CA, Canada; CO, Colombia; GR, Greece; IT, Italy; JP, Japan; NO, Norway; KR, South Korea; UK, United Kingdom; US, United States

appears when we focus on respondents' ability to identify Angela Merkel. Most Europeans are well aware of the German Chancellor, while respondents in other parts of the world were not able to identify the German leader. The Russian politician Vladimir Putin was also identified by most Europeans, and although respondents in other countries were somewhat less aware of Mr. Putin, a clear majority in all countries were able to answer this question correctly.

Turning to the questions with an Asian origin, the patterns are more mixed. Not surprisingly, almost all the Korean respondents were able to identify Ban Ki-Moon as the current UN Secretary General. A majority in Colombia and Norway were also aware of which position Ban Ki-Moon has, while approximately a third of the respondents in the other countries did. In the United States only a quarter of the respondents knew who the UN Secretary General was. Perhaps more alarming is that only 17 percent of the US respondents knew who the Taliban was, the Islamist militia group that for a long time ruled large parts of Afghanistan, and which was a central actor and reason behind the US-led "Operation Enduring Freedom" in 2001—and the ongoing war in Afghanistan. We also recall that a relatively large share of the international news in the US focused on Afghanistan (13 percent), although this only includes four news stories as the overall level of international news was so low. By comparison, it is interesting to note that more than twice as many Australian and Canadian respondents were aware of the Taliban (42 and 43 percent), while a majority in most European and Asian countries were. Finally, if we turn to

TABLE 3

International hard news knowledge

	Canada	United States	Colombia	Norway	United Kingdom	Italy	Greece	Japan	South Korea	India	Australia
Copenhagen Summit	37	43	42	77	47	36	54	19	30	39	67
Angela Merkel	36	41	69	87	71	93	97	36	29	30	34
Vladimir Putin	75	78	86	93	84	90	96	73	71	65	75
Ban Ki-Moon	31	25	75	56	51	NA	NA	34	96	37	31
Taliban	43	17	47	68	54	45	67	61	34	61	42
Thai Red Shirts	29	18	24	46	41	30	NA	39	42	13	50
Smallest <i>N</i>	970	966	404	977	980	966	780	970	989	948	961

NA, unfortunately the question about the UN Secretary General and the Thai Red Shirts were not asked in all countries.

the question of who the Thai Red Shirts are, there is also considerable variation in the awareness across countries. Respondents in India and the United States were least aware (13 and 18 percent, respectively), while a relatively high share of Australian and Norwegian respondents (50 and 46 percent, respectively) knew that the Thai Red Shirts referred to supporters of a group that are in opposition to the current government in Thailand.

Does this suggest that there is a relationship between the broadcasters' supply of international hard news and the audiences' knowledge of international hard news? To get a better idea of the relationship we calculated the average knowledge score across the knowledge items that were asked across all the 11 countries and matched this with the share of international hard news that was supplied to the audience in these countries prior to the survey. The results are presented as a scatterplot in Figure 5.

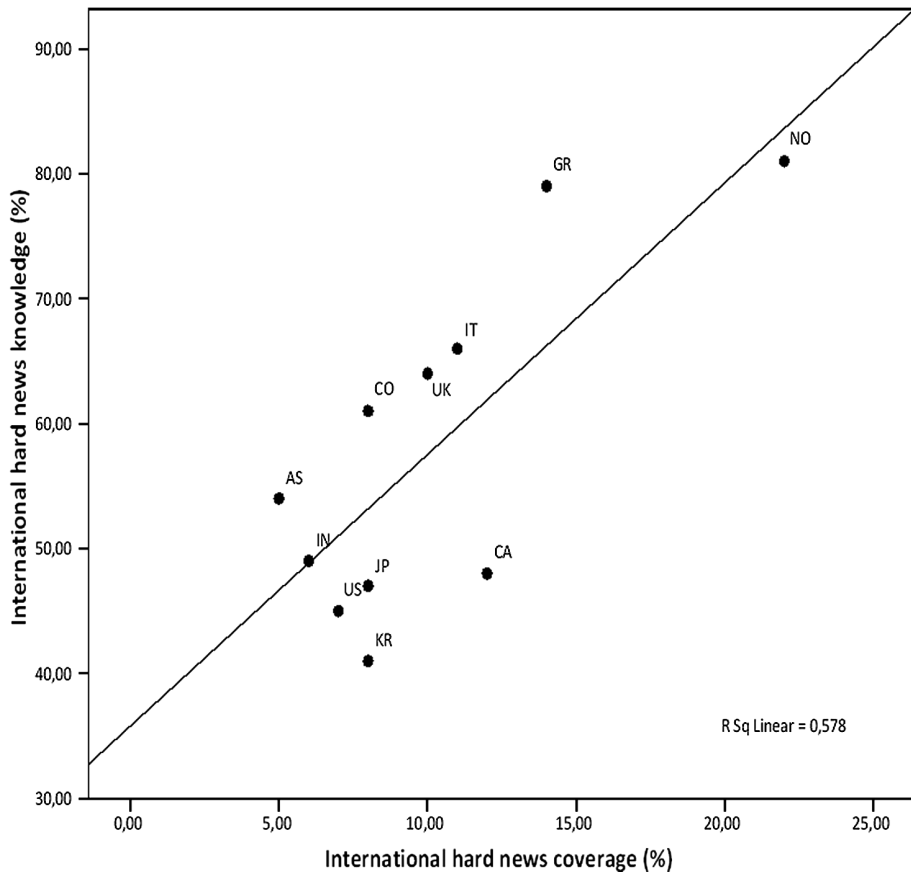


FIGURE 5

The relationship between supply and knowledge of international hard news. International hard news knowledge refers to national averages based on the four questions that were asked across all 11 countries (Copenhagen Summit, Angela Merkel, Vladimir Putin, and Taliban). International hard news coverage is measured as the percentage of total news (including international, domestic, hard, and soft). AS, Australia; CA, Canada; CO, Colombia; GR, Greece; IN, India; IT, Italy; JP, Japan; NO, Norway; KR, South Korea; UK, United Kingdom; US, United States

Although there is a far from perfect relationship, there is clearly a positive correlation between the share of international hard news coverage that is supplied by the main broadcasters in the country and the public's awareness of international events, organizations, or political leaders. Most of this is driven by the high share of international hard news knowledge and supply in Norway, but also the case of Greece contributes to the positive relationship. The Canadians seem quite unaware of international news considering the relative high share of supply, but as we recall from Table 2, a majority of Canadian "international news" is related to North America (or the United States), which might explain why the Canadian respondents were relatively little informed about news that took place in other parts of the world. Japan and Korea also "underachieve" somewhat compared to the level of international hard news supply. This might be caused by the slight Western bias in the four questions included in the calculation of the knowledge dimension. As expected, US respondents know relatively little about international affairs, and we will argue that this has more to do with the low level of hard international news as supplied by the main broadcasters, rather than a lack of interest among the US public.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study has been to investigate whether market-oriented media systems and commercial broadcasters marginalize foreign affairs coverage more than media systems dominated by regulation and public service broadcasting. We have found that more market-oriented media systems and broadcasters are less devoted to international news, and that the international news offered by the commercial broadcasters more often focus on soft rather than hard news. Considering the amount and origin of international news overall, it is also evident that the foreign representation offered by the news media is quite limited, and largely driven by national interests, that is, by political and/or geographical relationships.

When much of the mainstream news media marginalize foreign affairs, citizens are likely to suffer. They are not provided with information relevant to foreign policy decision making; and this gap is clearly reflected in their knowledge of international current affairs. Our study has demonstrated that there is a positive relationship between the level of hard news coverage offered by the news media in a country and citizens' level of hard news knowledge.

It is often assumed that the low level of international news is caused by market mechanisms: it is considered expensive to produce, and the audience is not really interested. Our study, however, suggests that some countries experience a significant mismatch between the supply and demand for international news. Even if we should be cautious about overestimation, and a likely gap between the type of programming people say they watch and what they actually watch, it is interesting to see that the gap between supply and demand is significantly higher in some countries than in others. For instance, the relatively high interest in foreign affairs reported by US and Australian respondents indicates that news editors do not always give audiences what they want. Other market forces may have a stronger influence on the news agenda. Identifying those forces is clearly an important priority for future work.

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