

The worlds of “the others”? Czech television’s agenda of world news coverage



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ABSTRACT: World news coverage is an important source of information about the worlds of “the others” for television audiences. Its production is connected with the hidden logic in the selection of issues, geographical areas, and actors. International news flows are influenced by news values, cultural and geographical contexts, and historical backgrounds. This article presents a study of foreign affairs coverage in Czech television news programs based on a quantitative content analysis. It deals with questions such as: which countries or continents are included in the television news agendas? What is the frequency of their coverage? How is the news flow affected by the news values?

KEYWORDS: world news coverage, television news coverage, agenda



INTRODUCTION

News coverage, with its manifested function to inform, belongs to the type of media content, which the study of mass communication, from the start of its institutionalized form in most Western democracies with the first half of the 20th century, is intensively looked into. The research of news production was gradually broadened from research for the foundation of sociology of news coverage¹ introduced in the 1950s in the USA, after an in-depth research of news report content. News content research presents a range from the simple quantification of topical agenda coming later (particularly after the turning point of the 1960s and 1970s) from the logic that the media agenda influences which topics circulating will be important to the public, after qualitative analysis of the representation of various social groups, including minorities, social effects up till after the case study of the representation of concrete events in news coverage. A series of research at the same time is connected

¹ This includes, for instance, David Manning White’s *Gatekeeping* (1997) and Warren Breed’s *Social Control in the Newsroom* (1997).

with the normative view and application of the image, as the potential production of news coverage differs from the ideal look of the news coming from the normative expectations of the given media system, the public, and several of their components.² The normative principle is used especially in the news, which typically presents the constant battle of opinions,³ particularly the news from domestic policy. World news coverage, on the other hand, is a reflection of international information flow. A more intensive interest about the contents of world news was started by the study of Galtung and Ruge (1965), which resulted in the listing of twelve news values which, according to the authors, mark the factors influencing the selection of world news to the media content and started to finally be used in media studies as an explanation of the selection of news in general.

LITERATURE OVERVIEW

World news coverage and the selection of areas, which are being reported on, are to a certain degree reflections between cultural informational exchanges and often are related to political or economical flows between given geographical areas. Older studies have already pointed to the interconnection of world news coverage and economy (see for instance Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 1998). A further study by Westerstahl and Johansson (1994), defining five factors used during the selection of world news, was an influential contribution to the research of international flows. The first of them is the meaning (importance), which Westerstahl and Johansson see as a national characteristic measurable, e.g. by information about the size of the population or gross national product, a further news value is the closeness defined as a connection between the two countries. According to the authors, it concerns the relative value, which is possible to be seen as the closeness geographically (measurable according to the distance of the capital cities), economically, and culturally. The selection of world news also influences drama, which "concerns the events rather than the countries, and which comprises a series of news values tied both to the event and the presentation of the event" (Westerstahl & Johansson, 1994, p. 74). According to Westerstahl and Johansson, these three values are basic. Two additional factors can further influence their exertion (Westerstahl & Johansson, pp. 73–75) — of the ideological value and the value of approach.

The research of international information flows has intensified since the 1980s. One of the reoccurring conclusions of these studies was the confirmation of the existing hierarchy and disproportion among countries of the international system influencing the content, direction, and extent of information flows among countries, especially between developed countries and less developed ones (Chang, 1998). This

² See, for instance, the large amounts of research from the media group at Glasgow University: Eldridge (1993), Philo (1995), Eldridge (1995), Philo (1999).

³ See for instance Hallin (1986).

the global news system is still very hierarchical; a small amount of global agencies deliver world news to the consumers worldwide, including the national news agencies, the hierarchy nevertheless, is maintained by the accumulation of advantages arising from the position on the market than the formal agreement by the key players.

A real formal agreement among the first international agencies (including Havas, Reuters, Wolff) played a role in the division of world regions at the turn of the 20th century. According to Jeremy Tunstall, the global influence of the USA peaked in the mid-20th century and is now in decline, whereas India, China and other states had become important players within their regions. Tunstall estimates that the non-US world audience devotes roughly 10 per cent of its media consumption time to US media product (Tunstall, 2008). Interstates dependencies of the contemporary world are depicted also by Thomas McPhail's "Theory of electronic colonialism" (ECT), which is described as an unequal relationship, as developing nations become dependent on the West for "communication hardware and software, along with engineers, technicians, and related information protocols, that establish foreign norms, values, and expectations" (McPhail, 2002, p. 14).

Even through the awareness of the magnitude of the influence of news agencies on the final look of news content, we did not analyze the reality in the presented research, particularly due to the technical difficulty in analyzing the element of television news production and the necessity of researching it by studying the conditions of production in media organizations, rather than through a survey of final television news content. The presented study is directed on the basis of the achieved findings of numerous studies about international information flows. It aims at analyzing how much selected economic indicators, their distance from one other, and business exchange(s) play a role in the question of which country gets the space concerning world news coverage of Czech television stations.

METHODOLOGY

In the research of state representation in world news coverage, we have chosen traditional quantitative content analysis. There were multiple levels of pattern construction. The support of the selection was news programs of television stations from all over the Czech Republic: CT1's *Události* [Events], TV Nova's *Televizní noviny* [TV News], and Prima TV's *Zprávy* [News] broadcast in 2010. These stations were chosen from a proposal of television broadcasts because of their full format focus. Secondly, they were included in the research because of their market share, since the selected television stations have been the most watched for a considerable period of time.⁴

⁴ For more actual data on viewership, see the websites of the Association of television organisations (ATO) which unifies public service broadcaster and private broadcasters and runs continuous research of television viewership — <http://www.ato.cz/>.

The turnover of international trade in the Czech Republic is defined in line with documents issued by the Czech Ministry of Industry and Trade as well as the Czech Statistical Office.⁶

In this study we mostly aim at answering the following research question: What countries did *Události*, *Televizní noviny*, and *Zprávy TV Prima* report on in 2010? In line with this, the following hypotheses are being addressed:

H1: The leading news programs on Czech television stations often report on economically and politically well developed countries with a global influence. Furthermore, attention is given to neighboring countries where economic cooperation, as well as cultural and linguistic closeness, is strongly tied to the Czech Republic.

H2: The bigger the geographical area of the country, the more often it appears in world news of Czech television stations.

H3: The bigger the population of the country, the more often it is mentioned in world news.

H4: The higher the economic performance of the country measured by gross domestic product (GDP), the more often Czech television stations refer to it.

H5: The shorter the geographical distance of the given country to the Czech Republic, the more often it is found in world news.

H6: The bigger the turnover in international trade of the Czech Republic with the given country, the more often Czech television stations report on it.

CONTINENT AND COUNTRY REPRESENTATION IN WORLD NEWS OF CZECH TELEVISION STATIONS

The position of individual countries and continents in the communication flows directed towards the Czech media is significantly uneven. The main news programs on television stations, namely CT1, TV Nova, and Prima TV, reported on events in 106 out of nearly 200 countries around the world in the observed pattern from 2010.⁷ In nearly half of the countries, the Czech television station's *Události* did not find it important enough to even mention anything about them. The most diverse view on international events was given the following year by public service broadcaster's *Události*, which reported on events in 92 countries (see Figure 1).

⁶ The Ministry of Industry and Trade. The Department of Economic Analyses; The Czech Statistical Office, The Department of Foreign Trade Statistics. Foreign Trade of the Czech Republic 2009; Prague: Ministry of Industry and Trade CZ, Department of Information Technology, 2010. Retrieved March 20, 2011 from <http://download.mpo.cz/get/42109/47026/562340/priloha001.pdf>.

⁷ The number of countries is only roughly stated, since several countries, such as Kosovo, Taiwan, or Palestine, are only acknowledged as sovereign and independent by part of the international community. In accordance with Czech foreign policy, Kosovo, the State of Palestine, and the Vatican are regarded as independent countries in this research.

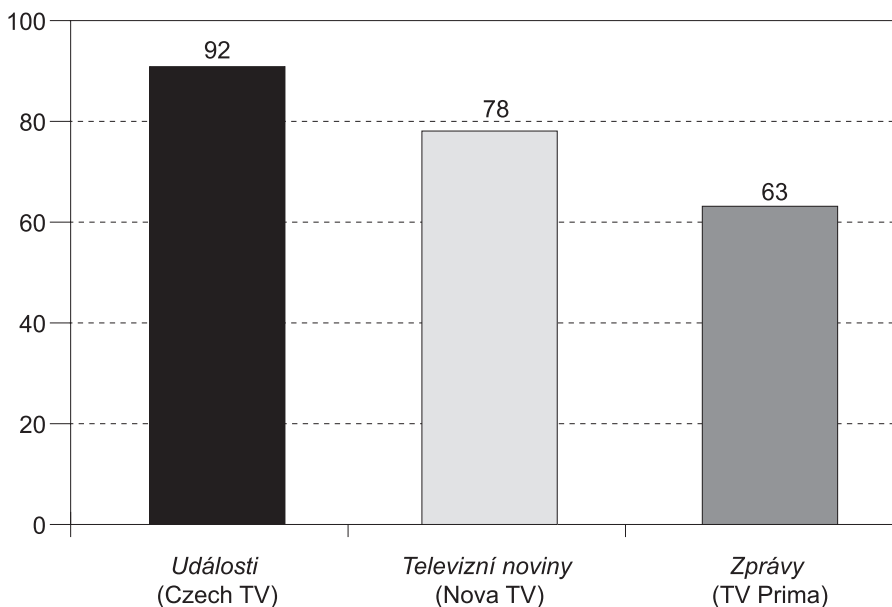


Figure 1. The number of countries appearing in *Události*, *Televizní noviny*, and *Zprávy TV Prima* in 2010

Source: authors.

Televizní noviny paid attention to events in 78 countries, while *Zprávy TV Prima* referred to 63 countries, and became the least diverse on this issue. Some countries, e.g. the geographically distant, such as Ethiopia, Benin, or French Polynesia, but even Slovenia, Latvia, and FYR Macedonia only appeared once in world news coverage. Other countries, such as the USA, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (hereinafter Great Britain), and Russia, on the other hand, appeared in nearly every researched news program. Generally, European countries received the most attention, with more than half of the news titles (see Figure 2).

European countries appear in 58 percent of all world news stories in the researched patterns of *Události*, *Televizní noviny*, and *Zprávy TV Prima*. The dominant position of Europe in the approach to Czech world news coverage is not only given by economic interconnection and geographical closeness, but also the connection of television stations to a system of news exchange with more European TV stations. Public service Czech Television is a member of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), and thus protects the system of television exchange within Eurovision. TV Nova is connected with a similar commercial television project, European News Exchange (ENEX), which European and American private television stations contribute to.

Moreover, TV Nova even takes advantage of the exchange of news stories with other television stations, which are owned by CME (also called CME portal).

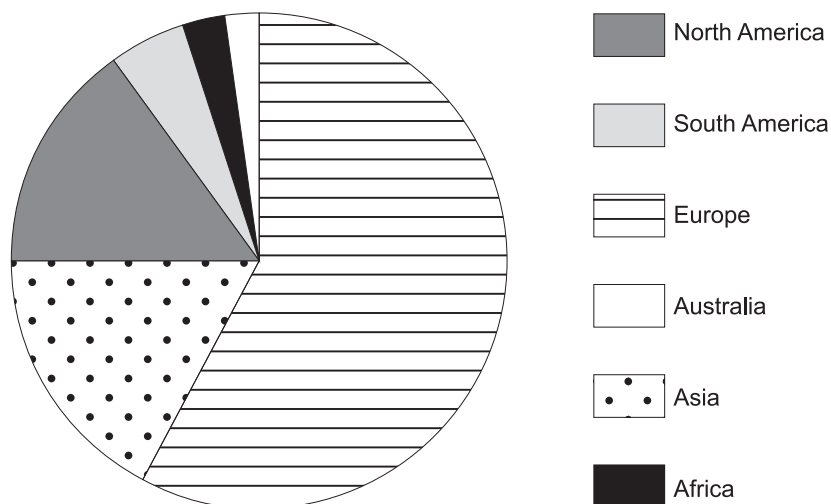


Figure 2. Continent representation in world news of the television stations CT1, TV Nova, and Prima TV

Source: authors.

North America and Asia had roughly the same representation in the researched pattern in Czech world news coverage. News about events in North American countries made up 15 percent, while events in Asian countries received two more percentage points than North America. One-third of all events were dedicated to countries in these continents. Stories from South American, African and Australian countries were not that popular in news coverage by *Události*, *Televizní noviny*, and *Zprávy TV Prima*. For instance, South America was only represented with five per cent out of the 823 world news stories. The news coverage of a country in this region would probably have been even lower in a different year. However, in the 2010 research, the attention of Czech television was attracted by a strong continual event — the rescue of 33 miners in Chile.⁸ African countries scored about two percentage points lower in the news. The least attention was paid to Australia, which finished last with a mere two percent of the news. For the stories from the three least covered regions — South America, Africa and Australia, media attention was decided by attributes of individual events, such as their negativity, unexpectedness, or drama, rather than their contextual relations with the Czech Republic in the form of economic cooperation, political, cultural,

⁸ Copper and gold miners were trapped underground at the beginning of August after a mine collapsed. They spent 69 days underground before they were saved in mid-October. In the two plus months, Czech media reported on several unsuccessful attempts to free the trapped miners, their communication with their families, health status, preparations for the successful attempt, and even about their lives afterwards. This event, which immediately filled up the news values at the same time, undoubtedly raised interest in the Czech media about Chile and even all of South America.

and other things closely-related. Hence, Czech television stations, in the terminology of Chang, preferred so-called “event-oriented” news, helping to make it possible to consider them from the viewpoint of the direction of information and communication flows, as a periphery zone of the world (Chang, 1998). This claim is supported not only through the rescue of the Chilean miners, but even through further events in South America, Africa, and Australia, which Czech television stations reported on. In the case of South America, Chile came into the limelight in connection with the February earthquake, which deflected the Earth’s axis. Brazil appeared in the leading news programs because of the wars between drug gangs with strongholds in the impoverished quarter of Rio de Janeiro. *Televizní noviny* and *Zprávy TV Prima* gave attention to the landslides and flooding in Peru, which claimed the lives of at least 20 people in April. African countries were covered by the news programs through a scandal in a Ugandan newspaper, which printed photos of homosexuals with the title “Hang Them!,” or due to the political crisis in the Ivory Coast which erupted after the presidential election in December 2009, when both candidates declared victory and refused to back down. Finally, Australia mostly appeared in the news in connection to extensive floods, the election of the first female prime minister in history, or due to the rescue of a humpback whale, and a platypus that got stuck in a reservoir.

In contrast to the core and semi-peripheral countries, Czech television stations produced a large amount of news about Europe, North America, and Asia. A country’s membership to the “core countries,” in addition to the characteristics of the selected events connected to the given countries, was also strengthened by the frequency with which it was found in world news coverage. Hence, it is possible to label the USA, Great Britain, France, Germany, China, as well as Russia among the core countries in Czech television’s news coverage. However, not even “event-oriented” appearances were missing in the news coverage of these countries. One such story was the news item about a young boy who took 21 children and a teacher hostage at a preschool in Western France. The “context-oriented” news, where the contextual relations prevail over the characteristics of the events outweighed. Chang (1998) also puts Japan and Canada in the aforementioned list of core zone countries, but they rarely appear in news programs researched and from the Czech Republic’s point of view, it is not possible to consider them key in international communication flows. Therefore, they fall into the category of semi-peripheral countries.

If we compare the results of our study with the results of the already-cited Chang’s work (1998, p. 509), it would be possible, regarding the frequency and character of selected events of Czech television news coverage, to move Russia and China from the category of semi-peripheral countries to the group of “core” countries. It is possible to regard other countries from the top ten as semi-peripheral countries, such as Slovakia, Poland, and from those outside the top ten, Austria and the Netherlands.

Table 1. Ten most frequented countries in the world news coverage of *Události*, *Televizní noviny*, and *Zprávy TV Prima* broadcast in 2010

Rank	Country	Occurrences	Percentage
1	USA	186	14
2	Great Britain	96	7
3	Russia	89	6.7
4	Germany	64	4.8
5	Slovakia	53	4
6	Poland	45	3.4
7	France	37	2.8
8	EU	33	2.5
9	Afghanistan	28	2.1
10	China	27	2

Source: authors.

Although from the perspective of the continents, Europe dominated world news coverage, from the perspective of individual countries the biggest number of news events were those covered in the United States. From the 823 news stories, the USA was presented in 186 of them (a total of 14 percent). In the case of the next two most frequented countries, including Great Britain and Russia, the coverage research revealed them to be about half that of the USA. The second most often mentioned country was Great Britain, with seven percent coverage. Following in third place, with only three-tenths of a percent lower, came Russia. The position of these countries in the world news coverage of Czech television is in accordance with the theory emphasizing that the media focuses on countries with a significant political and economic influence. Without a doubt the USA, Great Britain, and Russia are economically strong and have a global influence. From the top ten, it might be also possible to place Germany, France, China, and the European Union as a whole into this group. Among the most frequented countries, even neighboring Slovakia and Poland were presented. This result fulfills the thesis about favoring countries with economic, cultural, linguistic, and further ties. One surprising thing is the coverage of news stories from Afghanistan, which came in as the ninth most often mentioned country. However, in 2010, no breaking news story appeared in this Central Asian country which caused any dramatic shift in the fight between the Allied Forces and the radical Islamic Taliban movement, and they had to wait five more months after the end of 2010 for the death of Osama bin Laden, the leader of the international terrorist network, Al-Qaeda.

In the case of *Události*, Greece appeared among the top ten countries in contrast to the broadcasts of the other two commercial television stations, which Czech Television mainly reported on in connection with economic affairs. On the other hand, private media outlets did not give so much attention to economic news. Public service television also paid greater attention to affairs in the European Union as a whole, which is due to the fact that they are the only Czech television station which constantly has Brussels in its world news reports. Thanks to this, it brings more information from the representatives' talks of the European 27, which, in many cases, other television stations did not report on. *Televizní noviny*, however, gave more attention to events in France and Australia. Nevertheless, there is the biggest visible correspondence in these two leading news channels.

The greatest deviations from the overall order are shown by *Zprávy TV Prima*. Afghanistan and China are completely missing in the top ten most frequented countries. Afghanistan, where Czech Television and TV Nova broadcast their ad hoc reports in 2010, placed 25th in the amount of news stories which, compared to *Události* and *Televizní noviny*, makes a significant difference. Also, China, which ranks ninth on Czech Television and Nova news, fell to fifteenth on Prima, with a mere three news stories. Instead of these two countries, *Zprávy TV Prima* paid more attention to Austria and New Zealand. Except for the top ten most frequented countries, the individual programs differ greatly among themselves. Nevertheless, it is possible to trace the similarity between Czech Television and TV Nova news coverage. An example is the case of North Korea, which is an international community long regarded as a threat to worldwide safety. While in *Události* and *Televizní noviny* this country belongs to the top twenty countries reported the most in 2010, in *Zprávy TV Prima* it was ranked in 32nd position, with only two news stories reported.

USA, GREAT BRITAIN, AND RUSSIA — THE LEADING SOURCES OF EVENTS

As has already been stated, *Události*, *Televizní noviny*, and *Zprávy TV Prima* paid the most attention to the affairs in the USA, Great Britain, and Russia. Even though there were differences among the programs researched while ranking Great Britain and Russia, the most frequently reported country in world news coverage was the USA. In 52 researched broadcast programs of *Události* and *Televizní noviny*, 79 news stories focused on it, while the United States was also mentioned in connection with additional countries. In every broadcast of both news programs, the least amount of news about the USA was one story. But it was not an exception when the USA was found in three news stories in a single broadcast. The maximum the analysis revealed was in the broadcast of *Události* from 18 November 2010, when the United States appeared four times in the news. The USA had a significantly lower representation in *Zprávy TV Prima*, which mentioned it in only 28 news reporting on the United States appeared on average in every two broadcasts.

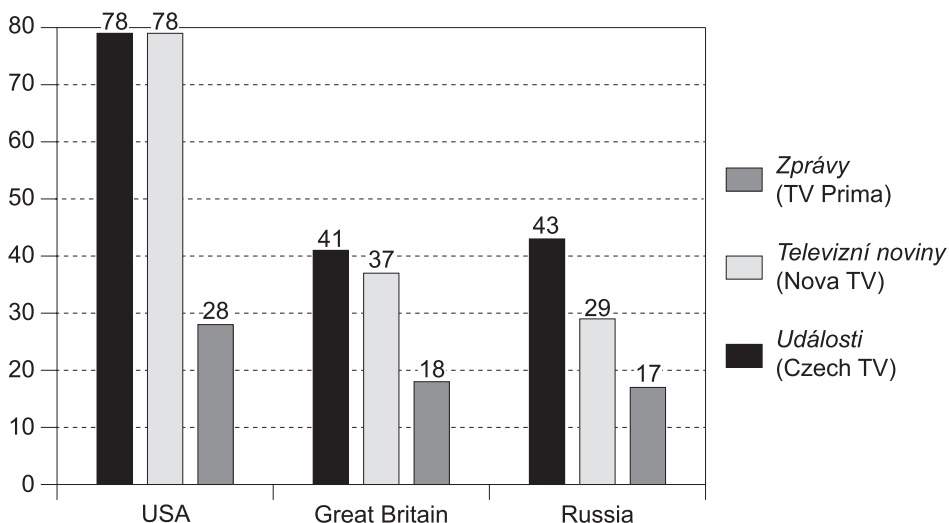


Figure 3. The number of stories which *Události*, *Televizní Noviny* and *Zprávy TV Prima* focus on in the affairs of the USA, Great Britain, and Russia

Source: authors.

Události had around half of the stories connected with Great Britain and Russia as they had for the United States. Great Britain was presented in *Události* in 41 news stories (about 79 percent of its news stories). *Televizní noviny* reported on it as the second most frequented country in 37 news stories (71 percent of broadcasts). *Zprávy TV Prima* again differed from the other two programs and gave it airtime only in 18 news stories, which made 35 percent of broadcasts. Similar statistics can also be seen when reporting on Russia. Here again the most attention of the leading news programs of Czech Television on Russia was found in 43 news stories (83 percent of broadcasts). In *Televizní noviny*, Russia was covered in 29 news stories (56 percent of broadcasts). Finally, Russia was paid the least attention by *Zprávy TV Prima*, which reported on it in 17 news stories (33 percent of broadcasts) (Figure 3).

AN ANALYSIS OF THE FACTORS DECIDING THE COUNTRY'S APPROACH TO WORLD NEWS COVERAGE

Although Czech television stations reported most often about countries with a significant global, political, and economic influence, some exceptions may apply. It is possible to conclude that the approach of the country to world news coverage decides its position in the hierarchical nations to a significant degree. It is also possible to deduce a prominent position from several characteristics. The basic factors are the area of the country, the number of population, and most of all,

its economic performance, in the form of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The tightness of the relationship dependency between the indicators and frequency of appearances of the country in Czech television stations' news coverage is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Pearson's correlation of variable GDP, population size, and area to the amount of appearances of the country in world news coverage

		Occurrences
GDP	Pearson Correlation	.644**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0
	N	106
Population size	Pearson Correlation	.228*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.019
	N	105
Area	Pearson Correlation	.503**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0
	N	106
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).		
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).		

Source: authors.

The economic performance of the country measured by GDP is used the most during the decision-making process of the country's approach to world news coverage. Pearson's correlation coefficient of the tightness of relationship dependency between the frequency of the appearance in news stories and GDP create $r = .644$, which indicates a high dependency. The area of the country is the second most important thing with the enforcing factor from the three researched. The correlation coefficient in that case comes to $r = .503$, which again indicates an important dependency.

The correlation analysis reveals a low degree of dependency between the frequency of appearance of the country and the population. The population size comes to $r = .228$ and even though there is a degree of correspondence detectable, it only has a small influence on the country's approach to news coverage. India can be an example, which has the second biggest population in the world, yet finished 18th with an overall count of 16 news stories in the list of frequency of appearances in *Události Televizní noviny* and *Zprávy TV Prima*. Yet France, which is twentieth in terms of population, in terms of appearances in world news coverage is among the top ten.

States, Great Britain and Russia, while the country's representation at individual television stations differs, as commercial stations most often place Great Britain after the USA, but public Czech television puts Russia most often after the USA. The view of the chosen factors influencing the selection of the country to news coverage shows that economic performance of the country researched by its GDP, followed by the area of the country are among the most important factors when speaking about news coverage. On the other hand, population size does not play such a significant role in the news selection. The geographic closeness of the country is shown as not too important, either. Slovakia can appear as a specific exception, as it was the fifth most often mentioned country news coverage focused on. The case of intense media coverage of Slovakia could be also caused by historical bounds of the two states. However, economic closeness was shown as a basic factor altogether, the factor with the three biggest correlations — a degree of business exchange between the Czech Republic and the given country. Research patterns showed that international information exchange to a certain degree mirrors business exchange in the case of Czech Republic. Regarding interstate information flows, different patterns of various states and other variables than those examined here, may come into play. In the case of former colonial empires, historical connections may bring intense media coverage of certain geopolitical areas and states. Therefore, the British media could be covering India more intensively, the French media could be more interested in Algeria, etc. Therefore, interstate information flows are not only influenced by the variables examined by our study, but also by historical and cultural connections, including migration flows and common language.

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