

Media Portrayals of Minorities Project

Report on Media Portrayals

2020 Newspaper Coverage of African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, Jews, and Muslims

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About the Media Portrayals of Minorities Project

The Media Portrayals of Minorities Project is a non-partisan research group based at Middlebury College in Vermont. We use digital sources to understand depictions of minorities in the media. This allows us to track and explain variation in media representations of groups over time, across locations, and compared to one another. We analyze large quantities of media data using a combination of computer-assisted and human coding techniques. Our approach provides a new way to understand how the media establish, reproduce, and influence the portrayals of marginalized groups. For more information, see mediaandminorities.org.

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Summary of 2020 Findings

In this Report, we analyze 2020 coverage of six significant American racial, ethnic, or religious groups: African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, Jews, and Muslims.* Latinos and African Americans are the largest of these groups, constituting approximately 19% and 13% of the US population, respectively. Asian Americans are the next most numerous, at roughly 6%. Native Americans, Jews, and Muslims each make up approximately 1-2% of the American population.

We address key questions about media coverage of these groups: Are some mentioned more frequently in US newspapers than others? How positive or negative is coverage of these groups, and why? How does 2020 compare to earlier years in terms of the amount and tone of coverage? What themes are present in the reporting of all six groups, and which were distinctive to each in 2020?

In brief, our analyses show that coverage of African Americans stands out as being the most frequent and that of Muslims as the most negative, both by a wide margin.

African American articles spiked in 2020 principally in the aftermath of the May 25 homicide of George Floyd, a signal event that rippled through coverage of almost all groups as the country grappled with longstanding issues of racism and police brutality. Overall article counts also jumped by notable margins for Asian Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans, not only given discussions about racism but also because of the inequalities associated with the coronavirus pandemic as well as stories about politics in the run-up to the November election.

Muslim articles were strongly negative largely in light of heavy reporting on foreign conflict zones, where war and extremism are common topics of coverage. Articles mentioning Jews three or more times were more negative than those touching on the group in passing, partly because of foreign coverage, but also given anti-Semitic attacks and discussions about the Holocaust.

Across our six groups, politics was the most prominent theme in a year marked by a consequential election. Education, law and order, and economics were also touched on in a majority of articles for all groups. Culture was associated with the most positivity across all groups, and law and order stories were most strongly linked to negativity.

This report analyzes patterns of coverage in major American newspapers. Our aim is to provide readers with a better understanding of articles related to marginalized groups, as well as to encourage journalists to reflect on their production of stories about these groups. This coverage influences not only public and political debates, but also day-to-day attitudes about people in our workplaces, our neighborhoods, and our lives.

* These group names are often politically or socially contested. We opted for these terms because they are the most common ones used by American newspapers.

How We Do Our Research

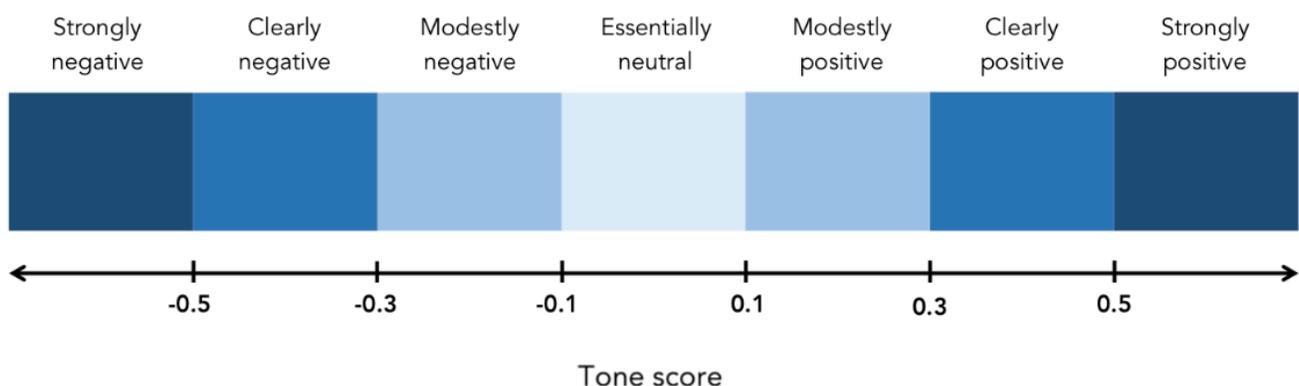
The Media Portrayals of Minorities Project uses newspaper databases to download every available story that contains variations on root words most closely associated with African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, Jews, and Muslims. We draw articles from *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*, the four English-language American newspapers widely read beyond their local or regional homes. All told, these papers published 40,027 articles related to these six groups in 2020. Since most of these touch on a group just once or twice, we also take a closer look at articles that are more likely to be specifically “about” each group by virtue of mentioning it at least three times.

We rely on three main tools for analyzing our articles: topic modeling, sentiment analysis, and regression analysis. Readers don’t need to be experts in any of these methods to follow our report, but it is helpful to grasp a few key aspects to understand our results. For those seeking a detailed discussion of our methods as well as citations of sources, please see the Appendix to the Report on 2020 at mediaandminorities.org/reports.

Topic modeling identifies clusters of words found across multiple articles. The results help reveal dis-

tinct and recurring themes of coverage. This process allows us to distinguish six general themes present in articles about each group. *Culture* articles contain words such as art, museum, or dance. The *education* theme includes words like university or school. *Economics* articles mention words like employment, markets, or wages. *Politics* stories touch on elections, voting, campaigns, Congress, and other aspects of the political system. Articles related to *bigotry* contain words such as racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, or discrimination. Finally, *law and order* articles include words like crime, courts, and felony. Topic modeling also helps to identify a small number of specific themes associated with each individual group in 2020, such as sport-team *renaming* for Native Americans or *Holocaust* for Jews. If an article contains one or more words related to a theme, we “tag” the article for that theme. This allows us to examine the tone of articles containing thematic words and the relative frequency of each theme in articles about our groups. For example, knowing that articles tagged for *culture* tend to be positive and that 25% of Muslim articles and 43% of Jewish articles contain culture words provides an immediate sense of how these two groups are covered differently.

The Media Portrayals of Minorities Project has



developed a highly reliable way to identify the tone of articles compared to the average article in US newspapers. We use eight separate dictionaries of positive and negative words to analyze the sentiment score of each article. In essence, the more positive words an article contains, the more positive its score. Conversely, if the article has more negative words, it will have a more negative score. This allows us to obtain an overview of all articles linked to a specific group to see if they are positive or negative on average when compared to a large sample of randomly selected articles from US newspapers. Our method is uniquely suited to provide information about how different groups are covered with respect to one another. To quickly grasp our measure of tone, we break it down into blocks of significance. Any score between 0 and 0.1 is close enough to 0 to be essentially neutral. If it is between 0.1 and 0.3, it is modestly positive; between 0.3 and 0.5, clearly positive; and over 0.5, strongly positive. We use the same adjectives on the negative side of the spectrum.

We also use regression analysis in our comparative overview to assess whether the presence of different themes tends to be associated with greater positivity or negativity across all of our articles taken together. For example, if we want to know whether articles tagged for the *culture* theme are more positive than those that aren't, we are interested in whether the presence of words like art, museum, or film mean that articles tend to

contain positive words. Of course, some culture articles have a negative tone. But regression analysis shows us that articles that mention culture words are likely to be substantially more positive than similar articles that don't contain any culture words. While there are caveats that we describe in the Appendix, because the thematic words we identify are either present or absent in each article, it is possible to interpret the coefficients—the scores associated with articles that mention each theme—similarly to how we interpret tone scores in our data. Values between 0 and 0.1 indicate an association that is likely to be essentially neutral; those between 0.1 and 0.3 are likely to be modestly positive; if they are between 0.3 and 0.5, they are likely to be clearly positive; and over 0.5 means the theme is likely to be strongly positive in its association with article tone. The mirror image holds when the values are negative.

The bottom line is this: we collect all articles mentioning these six groups from four national newspapers; we assess how positive or negative these articles are relative to the average US newspaper story; we identify the types of stories that are more likely to be positive or negative, and how common it is for newspapers to associate each type of story with the six groups. Our methods are designed to make it easy for readers to understand how newspapers cover racial, ethnic, and religious groups relative to one another, and to understand what is distinctive about this coverage in 2020 compared to earlier years.

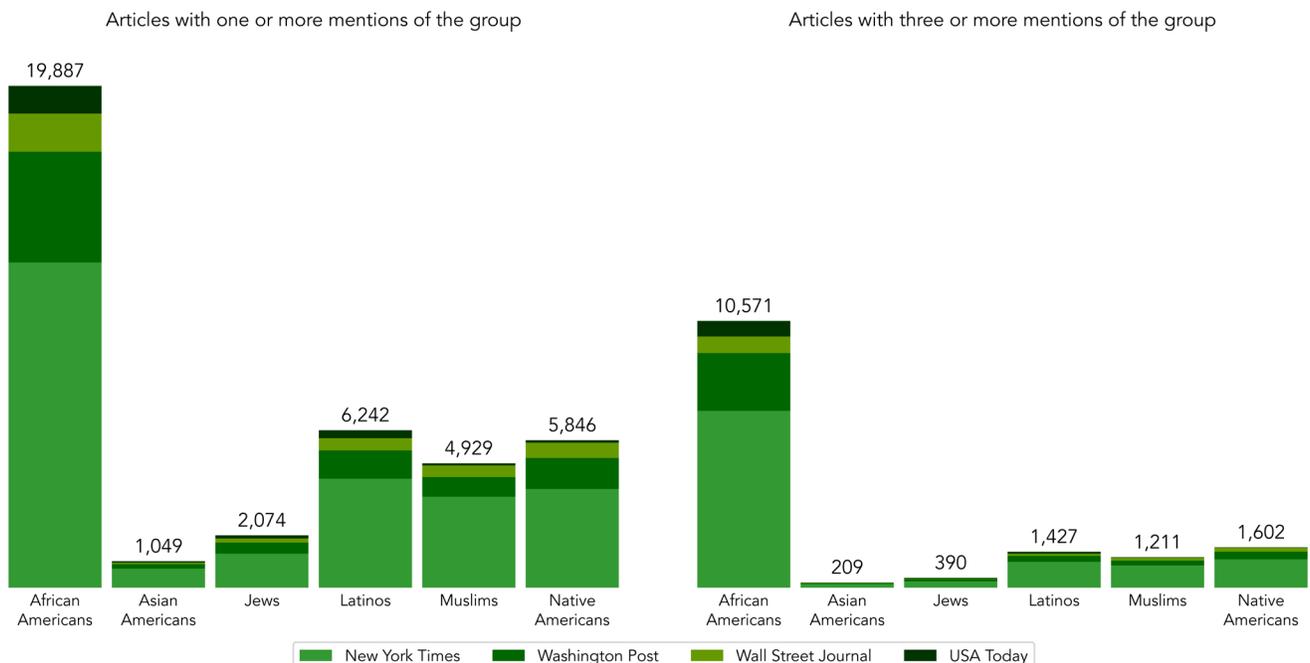
Comparative Overview

Before we look more closely at each group, we first compare them in several ways. The number of articles touching on the individual racial, ethnic, or religious identity groups varies widely. Articles published in 2020 in our four national newspapers range from a low of just over 1,000 that mention Asian Americans to a high of just under 20,000 referring to African Americans. The largest proportion of articles by far is drawn from *The New York Times*, which accounts for over two-thirds of the stories about each group. Just over a fifth of our articles come from *The Washington Post*, while *Wall Street Journal* stories make up about 8% and *USA Today* articles just under 5% of all articles. Part of this difference is due to the relative number of articles per year in each paper, given that the *Times* produces roughly twice as many articles as the *Post*, which generates about twice as many as the *Journal*, which publishes about two and a half times the number in *USA Today*. Even so, *The New York Times* stands out as devoting substantial coverage to racial, ethnic, and religious groups compared to the other newspapers.

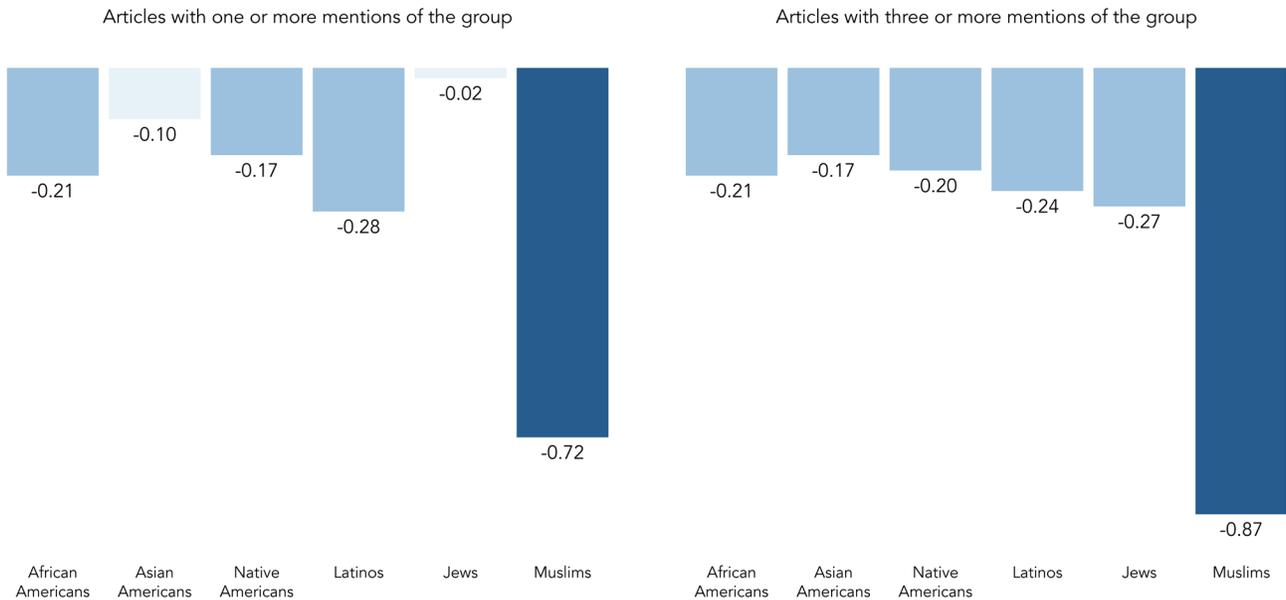
What if we focus on the subset of articles that mention our groups three or more times, and that are thus more likely to be “about” each group? This subset contains many fewer articles for most groups: only 27% of Muslim articles, 25% of Jewish articles, 23% of Latino articles, 20% of Asian American articles, and 19% of Native American articles contain three or more mentions of each group. The striking exception to this pattern is for African American stories, where 53% of all articles mention the root words “African American” or “Black” three or more times, indicating, perhaps unsurprisingly, a particularly high proportion of articles not just mentioning but actually about this group in 2020.

How positive or negative were stories associated with each group in 2020? The tone of Jewish articles was quite similar to the average tone of all articles in the US print media, while Asian American stories were just on the essentially neutral side of -0.10. Articles touching on Native Americans, African Americans, and Latinos were modestly negative, ranging

Article count by group and publication, 2020



Average tone by group, 2020



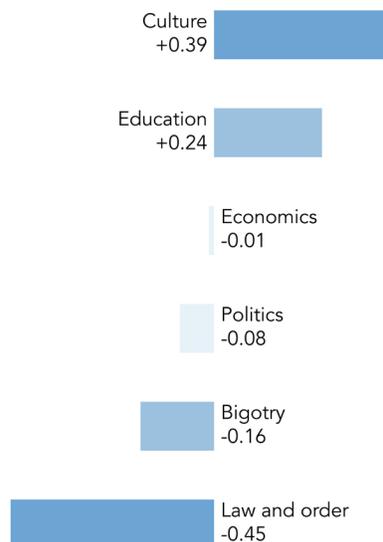
from -0.17 to -0.28. Those referring to Muslims were notably different: their average tone of -0.72 is strongly negative, and far more negative than the comparable score for any other group.

What about articles that contain three or more mentions of each group? The results remained similar for African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos. The tone dropped more substantially for Jews and Muslims. In other words, articles that mention these groups more frequently and are thus more strongly associated with them became even more strongly negative for Muslims and moved the average article mentioning Jews from the essentially neutral to the modestly negative category.

Exploring the thematic content of articles provides another way to compare coverage. We examine the percentage of articles associated with each of six general themes: *culture*, *education*, *economics*, *politics*, *bigotry*, and *law*

and *order*. This is particularly telling because there are striking differences in the tone associated with these themes within our 2020 articles.

- *Culture* articles are almost 0.4 more positive than articles that do not include any culture words.



- *Education* articles are almost 0.25 more positive than articles containing no education words.

- *Economics* articles are essentially the same in tone as non-economics articles.

- *Politics* articles are just under 0.1 more negative than non-politics articles.

- *Bigotry* articles are just over 0.15 more negative than articles not mentioning bigotry words.

- *Law and order* articles are almost 0.45 more negative than non-law and order articles.

The upshot is that *culture* articles tend to be most positive and *law and order* articles are linked with the greatest negativity. A smaller nudge is also present for *education*, *politics*, and *bigotry* articles: the more often each group is associated with these factors, the more frequently the tone about those groups is likely to be positive or negative. Articles that contain economics words are no more positive or negative than those not mentioning such words.

Muslims stand out immediately as having the lowest percentage of articles associated with *education* and *culture*, the two themes linked with the greatest positivity, and the highest percentage associated with *law and order*. This provides initial insights into the striking negativity of Muslim articles.

Among the other groups, Jews are distinctive for their high percentage of *culture* articles and low proportion of *law and order* articles, perhaps helping to account for the relative neutrality of articles with one or more mentions of this group. *Law and order* is strongly connected to African Americans articles in 2020 given the racial justice protests surrounding issues of police brutality. Asian American articles stand out for the elevated relationship with *bigotry* in a year of COVID-related hate crimes. And there are fewer *culture* articles associated with Latinos than with any group other than Muslims. While these proportions provide initial information about how different groups are covered, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of these relationships, we must examine coverage of each of our six groups more closely.

Percentage of articles that contain words from the six general themes

	African Americans	Asian Americans	Native Americans	Latinos	Jews	Muslims
Culture	36%	34%	42%	26%	43%	25%
Education	68	76	73	73	67	57
Economics	65	69	65	74	57	65
Politics	72	75	72	76	60	81
Bigotry	41	55	38	32	30	24
Law and order	70	62	62	60	56	71

African Americans

Media coverage of African Americans was significantly higher in 2020 compared to levels of reporting in the previous four years. In the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd, police brutality and associated protests largely dominated narratives about African Americans in 2020. Stories touching on the Black Lives Matter movement and specifically mentioning George Floyd were particularly important components of 2020 coverage. Looking beyond this signal event and its aftermath, articles relating to the coronavirus pandemic also drove discussions in African American articles.

An analysis of the past five years shows that the number of articles mentioning African Americans varies widely. From 2017 to 2018, there was a jump of almost 6,000 articles, followed by a slight decrease the following year. 2020 saw the largest rise in reporting on African Americans in recent history, with approximately 7,500 more articles. Coverage in 2020 has more than doubled compared to 2016, marking a significant spike in the prominence of African Americans in print media.

In 2020, coverage reached its peak in June due to the increased discussion of police, protests, the Black Lives Matter movement, and George Floyd,

as well as stories about coronavirus outbreaks across the country. 3,806 articles were published in June, whereas the preceding months did not see article counts rise above 1,200. July and August followed a similar pattern, with 2,523 and 2,185 articles published, respectively. The remaining months saw a decrease in coverage, although counts still remained higher than the first five months of the year.

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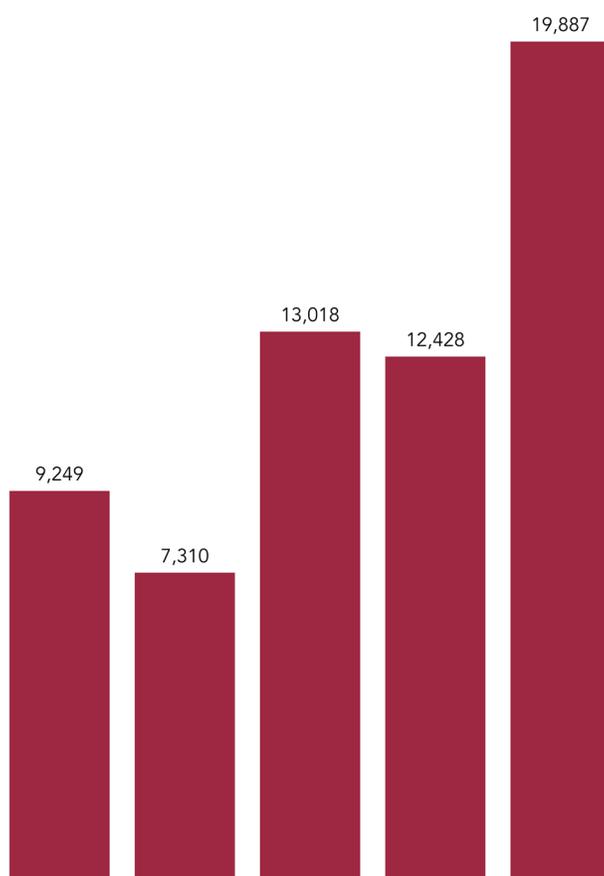
In terms of tone, the average article from 2020 was modestly negative at -0.21. This was the most negative year of coverage within the past five years and marked a notable drop in tone compared to 2019, which had an average score of -0.07. Monthly coverage of African Americans remained essentially neutral until April, when the valence was a modestly negative -0.22. In the following months of May and June,

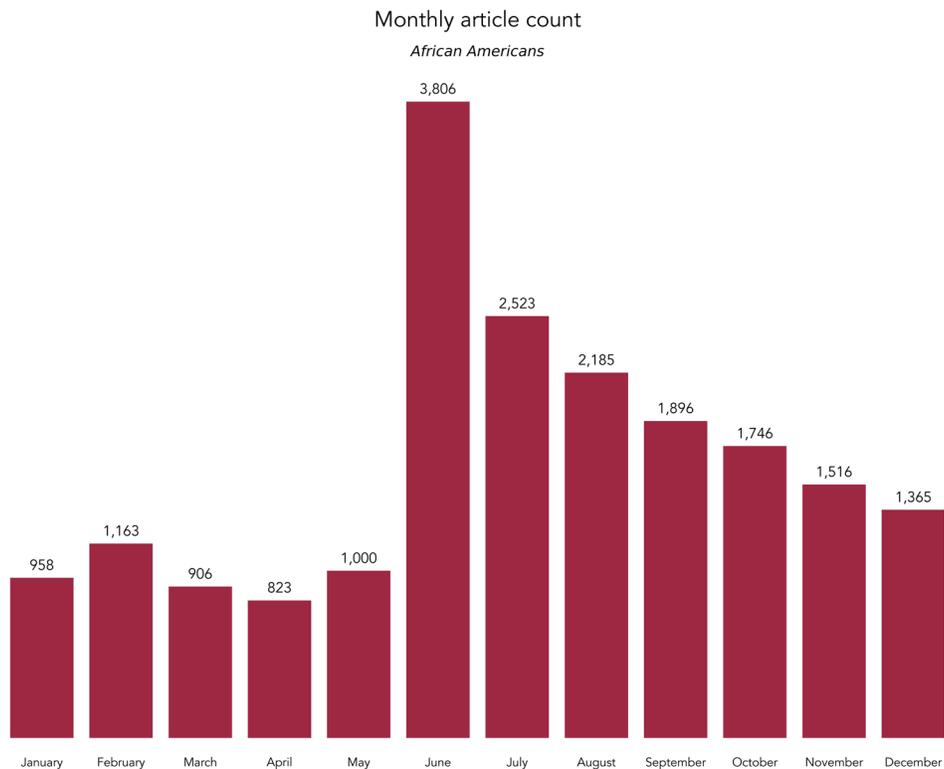
average valence continued to decrease, reaching its lowest point in June with a strongly negative tone -0.51. These significant declines were largely due to the prevalence of the *police* and *protest* topics, associated with the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement.

Of the six general themes identified in the comparative overview, the most prevalent topics in 2020 were *politics* and *law and order*. The *politics*

Annual article count

African Americans





theme appeared in 72% of all African Americans articles, while *law and order* was present in 70%. The next most-covered themes were *education* and *economics*, at 68% and 65%, respectively. Finally, *bigotry* and *culture* were the least covered topics relatively speaking, present in 41% and 36% of 2020 African American articles. Notably, articles mentioning African Americans contained more *law and order* words than those touching on any group except for Muslims (71%), and articles containing *bigotry* words were more prominent for African Americans than for any other group except Asian Americans (55%).

Within the overall data set, there are specific stories or topics that significantly contributed to coverage of African Americans in 2020. Notably, there was a cluster of articles largely (but not exclusively) related to *law and order* that focus on *police*, *protest*, and *BLM*, with relation to the George Floyd homicide. After the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, the Black Lives Matter movement led protests against police brutality across the country. These events contributed to an overwhelming number of articles on the topic compared to previous years and made articles much more negative, given that they included words such as “brutality,” “destruction,” and “violence.” There were

references to police in 44% of all African American articles, with a strongly negative valence of -0.57. *Protest* was mentioned in 40% of coverage, with a clearly negative tone of -0.49. In particular, the combination of *police* and *protests* generated a strongly negative tone of -0.64. An August 28 *New York Times* article demonstrates the negative rhetoric about police in relation to protests:

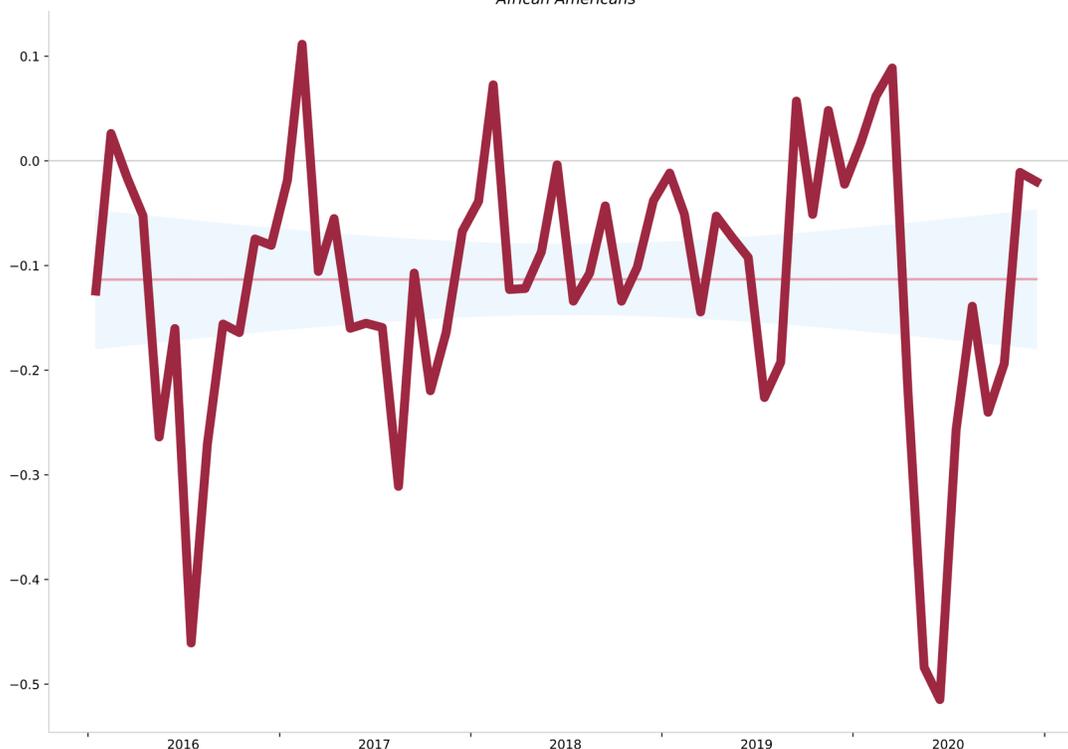
There was another demoralizing shooting of a Black man by the police, another angry outcry in the streets, another disturbing trail of destruction that had the potential to overshadow the message of the need to end police violence and racism.

Articles associated with the murder of George Floyd decreased the overall tone of coverage. 52% of *protest* articles and 47% of *BLM* articles contain explicit mentions of George Floyd. *Protest* articles that include his name have a tone of -0.66 and are clearly more negative than those that don’t, which have an average tone of -0.31. A June 7 *New York Times* article illustrates the connection through its focus on police brutality and demands for change within policing:

Police Departments across the United States are re-examining their use-of-force policies

Average monthly article tone, 2016-2020

African Americans



as protesters continue to express outrage over such tactics in the wake of George Floyd’s death as Democrats in Congress plan expansive legislation to address police brutality and racial bias.

weekend, embracing fringe conspiracy theories claiming that the coronavirus death toll has been exaggerated and that street protests are actually an organized coup d’état against him.

As these examples make clear, the strong negativity within articles touching on *protest*, *police*, *BLM*, and *George Floyd* is not primarily focused on African Americans as a group. While some stories cover riots and violence perpetrated by BLM protesters, many highlight ongoing and endemic violence by police officers and the injustices faced by the African American community.

In this case, *coronavirus* narratives involving Donald Trump speak to his negative views in regard to both protests associated with the Black Lives Matter movement and the pandemic, ultimately decreasing the tone of coverage.

The *coronavirus* topic was present in 50% of all articles, which together had a modestly negative average tone of -0.22. 41% of these articles also mentioned Donald Trump, and those that did had a clearly negative tone of -0.38. This effect reflects the former President’s negative rhetoric within coverage of African Americans. An August 30 *New York Times* article illuminates former President Trump’s involvement both with Black Lives Matter protests and the pandemic:

The substantial coverage of *politics* in African American coverage was linked to a wide variety of topics. Among the more positive were the presence of Senators Kamala Harris and Corey Booker as candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination, and then Harris’ historic selection as Biden’s Vice Presidential running mate and eventual election in November. If articles containing *politics* words had a tone of -0.26, the 10% of all African American stories that mentioned Kamala Harris tempered this modest negativity with an essentially neutral tone of -0.04.

President Trump unleashed an especially intense barrage of Twitter messages over the

To gain a better understanding of how African Americans were portrayed in 2020, we narrowed down our data set to include only articles that

mentioned the group three or more times, as these stories are more likely to focus on African Americans in a sustained way. Strikingly, this set contained 10,571 articles, comprising 53% of the overall data set—that makes African Americans the only group in our report where more than half of all articles contain three or more mentions of the group. This statistic confirms just how central the African American racial identity was to coverage in 2020. The more focused set of articles has a modestly negative tone, similar to that of articles mentioning African Americans one or two times. Each of the six general themes is more prominent in this set of articles as well. Specifically, *police* and *protest* saw greater coverage in the focused set, encompassing 52% and 47% of all articles with three or more mentions of the topic, respectively. The rise in the presence of the *police* and *protest* themes in the smaller set corroborates the vital importance of African American coverage in the demand for systemic

changes in policing. Similar to trends in overall coverage, stories that mention the group three or more times were most negative in May and June in response to the murder of George Floyd. This contributes to the overall impact of the *law and order* theme, which proved to be a significant component within African American articles in 2020.

In sum, coverage of African Americans saw a striking spike in article counts and a significant decrease in average tone in comparison to previous years. A number of these articles discussed systematic issues of inequality, with specific reference to racial discrimination in police practices. These articles included mentions of police, protests, and the Black Lives Matter movement in response to the murder of George Floyd. The negative rhetoric of these topics contributed to the modestly negative tone of African American articles and marked 2020 as a historic year for coverage of African Americans.

Asian Americans

Newspaper coverage of Asian Americans nearly doubled in 2020 compared to 2019, reaching the highest number of annual articles in the past five years. The year brought increased reporting on anti-Asian racism and xenophobia due to COVID-19, including the former president's use of pandemic descriptors that contained racial-ly, nationally, and culturally charged language. Asian Americans also drew greater coverage in the political sphere. Two Asian American candidates, Kamala Harris and Andrew Yang, made unsuccessful bids for the presidency, and Harris was selected and ultimately elected as Joe Biden's running mate.

The number of articles touching on Asian Americans jumped to 1,049 in 2020 from the 615 published in 2019. Coverage has varied substantially over the past five years, with 2020 marking a high point, greatly surpassing the number of articles in 2016 and 2017. Overall, national newspapers are clearly writing many more stories that mention Asian Americans in recent years compared to the earlier time period.

Looking just at 2020, 131 articles were published in August, when Democratic Party presidential nominee Joe Biden announced Kamala Harris as his running mate. This is 50% above the aver-

age of 87 articles per month throughout the year. November and June were other months of relatively heavy reporting, linked, respectively, to the election and to racial justice activism following the homicide of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

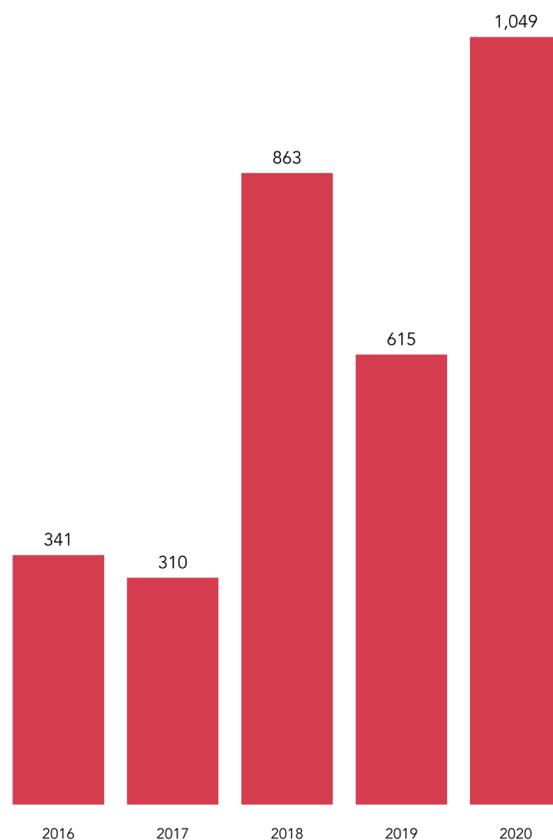
Articles covering Asian Americans had an average tone just slightly more positive than

-0.10 in 2020, the second least negative of any of the groups studied in this report. This value marks a notable drop from the previous year, when the average score was 0.09. June featured the most negative average tone for articles at -0.39, which corresponds with coverage of racial justice protests following George Floyd's murder at the end of May. The modestly negative average valence in 2020 is also related to the pandemic: roughly 55% of articles included words related to the *coronavirus* topic—in-

cluding "COVID-19," "coronavirus," or "pandemic"—and the tone of those articles was -0.37. The average valence of articles that did not contain terms related to the pandemic was modestly positive at 0.14.

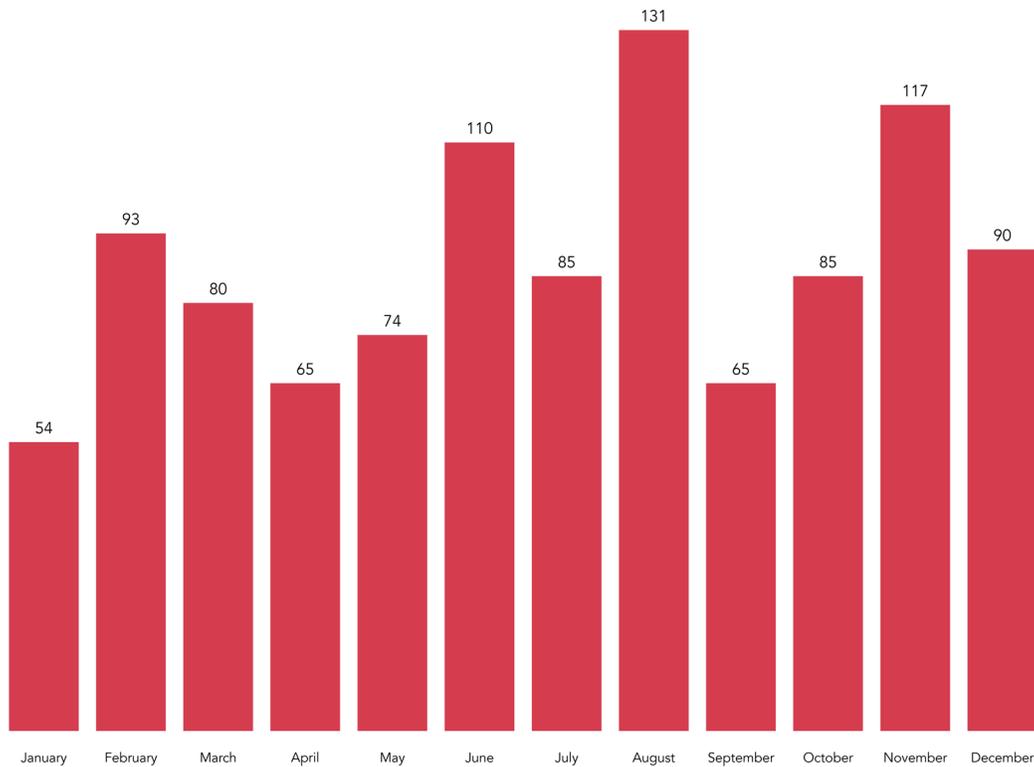
Similar to the previous year, *education* was the broad theme present in most Asian American articles published in 2020, occurring in 76% of coverage. This is a decrease from 2019, when education words were mentioned in 81% of

Annual article count
Asian Americans



Monthly article count

Asian Americans



all articles, but it remains in line with the proportion over the last five years. In addition, the *politics* (75%), *economics* (69%), *law and order* (62%), and *bigotry* (55%) themes were present in a majority of Asian American articles.

Coverage of Asian Americans contains the highest percentage of articles tagged for the *education* theme of any group studied in this report. Although articles associated with this theme—including words such as “school,” “professor,” and “university”—have generally been fairly positive in the past few years, this year’s articles made the overall data set more negative. In fact, at -0.13, 2020 is the only year in which the average tone of *education* articles for Asian Americans has been negative in the past five years.

This negativity is likely due in part to the overlap between *education* and *coronavirus* articles. About half of all *education* articles also included *coronavirus* topic words. Articles at the intersection of the two themes were slightly more negative than overall *education* coverage and nearly 0.2 more negative than articles that did not contain *coronavirus* words. There is also significant overlap between ar-

ticles tagged for both *education* and *bigotry*—449 articles touch on both themes. In *coronavirus* and *bigotry* stories, the negativity is partly a function of quotations or citations of professors, who share their expertise on topics such as racism, xenophobia, or public health. For example, an April 4 *Washington Post* article with a valence of -2.20 cited a professor’s perspective on online anti-Asian racism:

Charissa Cheah, a psychology professor at the University of Maryland at Baltimore County who is leading another study examining discrimination against Chinese Americans during the pandemic, said anti-Chinese language such as kung flu and bat soup have their roots in historically racist tropes that have long been used to denigrate Asian Americans and cast them as foreigners no matter how long they have lived in the United States.

Although such articles do not necessarily focus on education, “professor” appears in 24% of *coronavirus* coverage and 26% of *bigotry* coverage. Given their average valence of -0.34, the 277 articles including the word thus contribute to the overall negative valence for *education* articles this year.

In addition, nearly 50% of *education* articles also

Average monthly article tone, 2016-2020

Asian Americans



contained *model minority* words. The concept of the “model minority”—sometimes called the “model minority myth”—refers to the stereotype that Asian Americans place a cultural emphasis on education, hard work, and discipline. Words included in the *model minority* theme are generally positive, contributing to an essentially neutral tone of 0.06 for articles tagged for both the *education* and *model minority* themes. *Education* articles that are not also tagged for the *model minority* theme are clearly negative, with a tone of -0.31.

Politics was also an important theme in 2020 coverage of Asian Americans, with three Asian American candidates vying for the presidential or vice presidential nomination on the Democratic ticket. Kamala Harris and Andrew Yang both campaigned for president before dropping out of the race in December 2019 and January 2020, respectively. Harris and Illinois Senator Tammy Duckworth, who is Thai American, were later in the running for Biden’s vice presidential pick.

Of the 1,049 articles touching on Asian Americans, 122 mentioned Kamala Harris. Yang’s name appeared in 48 articles, and Duckworth’s in 28. Overall, the three candidates were mentioned

in 17% of coverage of Asian Americans in 2020.

The large proportion of articles that fell into the *politics* theme is perhaps unsurprising given that 2020 was an election year. Every one of the 426 articles tagged for the *politics* theme contained at least one mention of voting. Georgia was also frequently mentioned in coverage of Asian Americans, which aligns with the overall level of media attention the state received due to its important role in the 2020 elections. Some of these articles mentioned Asian Americans in the context of an overall push to register voters of color in Georgia, while others, such as this November 29 *Washington Post* article, referred to their role in the presidential election:

Georgia's hand recount and vote certification confirmed that Asian American and Pacific Islander voters—who make up the fastest-growing demographic in Georgia—helped swing the state for the Democrats for the first time since 1992.

Articles containing words related to the COVID-19 pandemic also figured prominently in 2020 coverage of Asian Americans. The pandemic was a major topic in the media in general, but more

so for Asian Americans than for all but Latinos among the groups included in this study. The pandemic also brought an increase in coverage of anti-Asian racism. 2020 was the first year in the past five in which more than 50% of all coverage mentioning Asian Americans contained words associated with *bigotry*. Out of 577 articles that mention the pandemic, 58% were also tagged for *bigotry*. Coverage at the intersection of *coronavirus* and *bigotry* included references to hate crimes or other acts of racism, exemplified by this line from an August 7 *Washington Post* article: "Even Asian American doctors and front-line health care workers fighting coronavirus have reported enduring racist tirades."

Some of the articles at the intersection of *coronavirus* and *bigotry* were among the most negative published all year. For example, one *New York Times* article published on March 23 had the headline "Spit on, Yelled At, Attacked: Chinese-Americans Fear for Their Safety" and carried an extremely negative tone of -1.5.

To further analyze coverage of Asian Americans in 2020, we examined the articles that contained three or more mentions of Asian Americans. Only 20% of all articles were included in this more focused data set, and they had a more negative

average tone of -0.17. The large percentage of articles tagged for *bigotry* likely contributed to the negativity among articles that mention Asian Americans three or more times. 76% of the articles in this focused data set include *bigotry* words, marking a 21-percentage-point increase from the overall data set. These articles also had a clearly negative valence of -0.37.

Despite increased reporting on Asian Americans during the pandemic and leading up to the elections, the group remained the least covered of the six studied in this report. Even though the overall tone of coverage of Asian Americans was negative for the first time in the past five years, it is still among the least negative compared to the other groups in this study. It is important to note, however, that articles touching on "Asian Americans" do not necessarily include all mentions of specific groups such as Chinese Americans, Korean Americans, or Indian Americans. As a broad category, Asian Americans remain closely linked to the *education* theme, though the overall tone of these articles was negative for the first time in five years. Despite the prominence of this theme, coverage related to *bigotry* had the strongest impact on the average tone of articles about Asian Americans in 2020 given the rhetoric and actions targeting this group in a year dominated by the coronavirus.

Native Americans

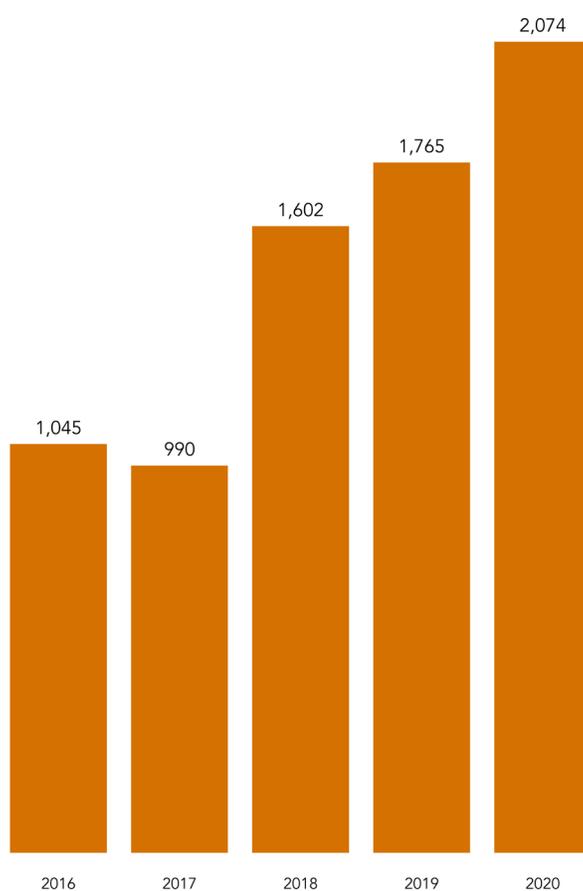
The number of articles mentioning Native Americans jumped 18% from 2019 to 2020, reaching the highest level in the last five years. A nationwide reckoning with race relations following George Floyd's murder in late May caused a rise in articles in June and July that drew attention to injustices towards Native Americans. These stories included coverage of controversial statues and the renaming of sports teams that use Native American terms and slurs. COVID-19's impact on Native American communities as well as political topics also motivated a substantial number of articles in 2020.

Coverage of Native Americans has varied over the last five years. There were around 1,000 articles published in 2016 and again in 2017. Since then, the number has risen each year, surpassing 1,500 in both 2018 and 2019, and peaking at over 2,000 in 2020. This shift likely indicates a broader pattern of increasing attention to Native Americans within the US media landscape.

There was significant variation in the number of articles mentioning Native Americans per month during 2020. June and especially July stood out in terms of their high article count. In July, 344 articles mentioning the group were

published, compared to a monthly average of 173. 215 articles were written in June, which also topped the number of articles per month from any previous year. The increase is in part due to reports of racism in America in the wake of George Floyd's murder, which also highlighted injustices towards Native Americans.

Annual article count
Native Americans

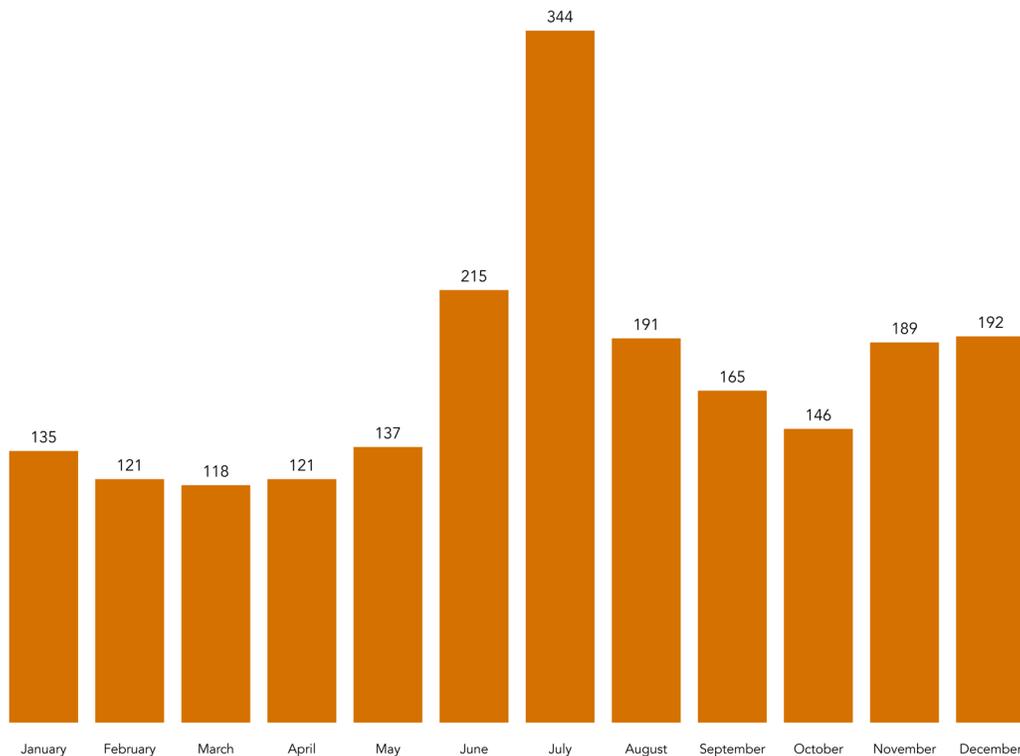


Not only did the number of articles mentioning Native Americans rise this past year, their tone also shifted from prior years. While the average article tone in the four years leading up to 2020 fluctuated somewhat, it was essentially neutral in each year between 2016 and 2019. 2020, however, saw a modestly negative average valence score of -0.17, reflecting the effects of stories about COVID-19 and racial injustices, each of which contributed to this decline in tone. Overall, valence by month in 2020 was very inconsis-

tent—the year began with a neutral score of 0.06 in January, dipping all the way down to a clearly negative score of -0.48 in June when coverage related to the George Floyd homicide peaked. It rose to modestly negative scores in the following months and returned to an essentially neutral tone at the end of the year, when President-elect Biden announced the nomination of Deb Haaland to serve as Secretary of the Interior, the first

Monthly article count

Native Americans



Native American nominated to a cabinet post.

Our common theme of *politics* was a significant driver of coverage regarding Native Americans, with *politics*-related words mentioned in 72% of articles. Looking more specifically within this category, words linked to *elections* (such as *elect*, *election*, and *elected*) were mentioned in 28% of articles. 2020 was a record year for Native Americans chosen for Congress—six Native American candidates were elected, more than in any other year. As noted above, Deb Haaland’s appointment as the Secretary of the Interior also contributed to political coverage in 2020. All together, the terms “vote” or “voting” were mentioned in 28% of articles, as a North Dakota tribe scored a voting rights victory in February and a high Native American voter turnout helped to flip Arizona to the Democrats in the 2020 presidential cycle.

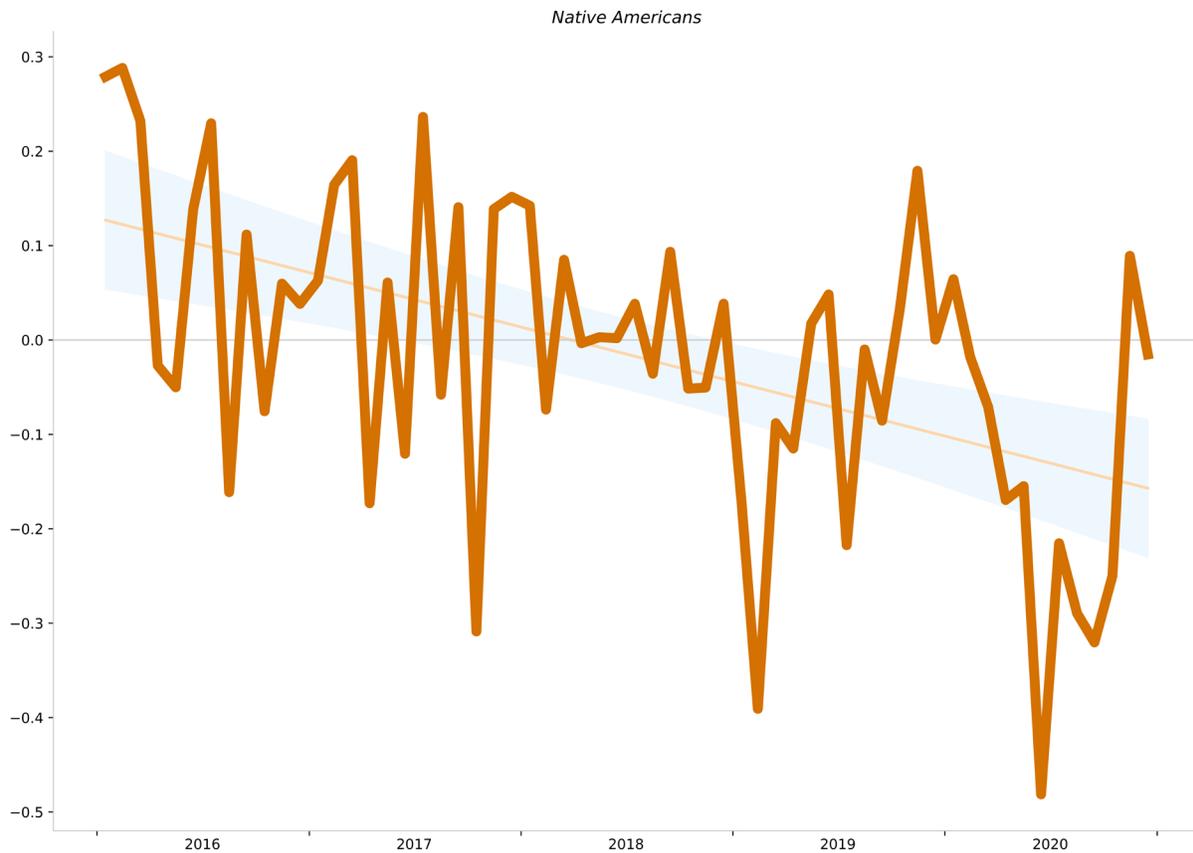
The valence of *culture* articles declined in 2020, compared to previous years. In 2019, the average valence of culture-related articles, which include words like “sculpture,” “exhibition,” and “museum” was 0.18; this dropped to 0.04 in 2020. Looking specifically at the *museum* topic, the tone fell

from 0.37 in 2019 to 0.16 in 2020. While coverage was still positive, it shifted in a way that drove the tone of *culture* articles downward. This trend was likely related to a movement to remove statues and monuments of historical figures following George Floyd’s murder in May. The 38% of articles in June that referenced *statue*-related words carried a strongly negative tone of -0.58. Many of these memorialized figures, such as Christopher Columbus and Andrew Jackson, have been linked with the genocide of Native Americans, and the value of honoring them has increasingly been called into question. A similar critique of sculptures and statues is highlighted in a July 1 *New York Times* article about Mount Rushmore:

Native Americans have long criticized the sculpture [Mount Rushmore], in part because it was built on what had been Indigenous land. And more recently, amid a nationwide movement against racism that has toppled statues commemorating Confederate generals and other historical figures, some activists have called for Mount Rushmore to close.

Museums have also been criticized for individual displays. A June 21 *New York Times* article about

Average monthly article tone, 2016-2020



removing a statue of Theodore Roosevelt from the Museum of Natural History also noted that “Gunfire broke out during a protest in Albuquerque to demand the removal of a statue of Juan de Oñate, the despotic conquistador of New Mexico.” Words like “gunfire” referenced in articles about museums contribute to the lower valence score of this typically positively-reported topic.

The conversations about racial injustices also brought attention to the use of slurs as sports team mascots, which contributed to the uptick of articles in July. In that month, the Washington Football Team, formerly known as the Washington Redskins, announced that they would retire their mascot and team name after facing harsh criticism for years. A July 13 *New York Times* article summarized the owner’s decision this way:

Snyder’s shift from total resistance to grudging acceptance in just a few weeks has been remarkably swift in a league that often moves forward deliberately, if at all. But after the killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis in late May, much

of the country has moved rapidly to confront historical representations of racist symbols.

31% of articles in July referenced team *re-naming*-related words. This topic has an overall average valence score of -0.18; however, this score dipped down to -0.26 that month. The negative scores can be attributed to coverage of teams such as the Washington Redskins, Cleveland Indians, Atlanta Braves, Chicago Blackhawks, and Kansas City Chiefs, all of which faced scrutiny for mascot names viewed by many as demeaning and offensive.

Unsurprisingly, COVID-19 was a prominent topic in 2020 coverage. 46% of articles mentioning Native Americans contained *coronavirus* words, such as “COVID-19,” “pandemic,” or “vaccine.” The virus had devastating effects on Native American communities, highlighting deep-rooted problems of the medical infrastructure on Native American reservations. The average valence score of *coronavirus* articles was -0.23, as illustrated by this November 29 *New York Times*

article reporting the high rates of death that swept through Native American communities:

The virus has killed more than 500 people in the Navajo Nation in the southwest United States, giving it a death rate higher than New York, Florida and Texas. It has infected more than 10 percent of the small tribe of Choctaw Indians in Mississippi.

Further, coverage of the pandemic also impacted articles about *economics*, a topic that was referenced in 65% of articles. 76% of articles mentioning economic terms also referenced *coronavirus* words. Not only did the pandemic take a devastating toll on the health of Native Americans, it also forced the shutdown of casinos, a vital source of revenue for many tribal nations. A May 11 *New York Times* article captures this dynamic:

Tribal nations around the United States are facing their most severe crisis in decades as they grapple simultaneously with some of the deadliest coronavirus outbreaks in rural America and the economic devastation caused by the protracted shutdown of nearly 500 tribally owned casinos.

To gain a better understanding of how Native

Americans are represented in the media, we focus on articles that mention the group three or more times, as these 390 articles are likely to be more centrally about Native Americans. The valence of this focused data set is slightly lower at -0.20. There is a notably larger proportion of articles related to the *bigotry* theme in the focused set of articles than in the overall data set (47% compared to 38%), indicating that intense coverage of Native Americans was more prone to discuss racism and discrimination. Reporting on education was also higher, with *education*-related words referenced in 80% of the focused data set. Much of the coverage related to education concerned Native American studies and history courses in schools, student activists, and derogatory school mascots.

Coverage of Native Americans in 2020 diverged from that in previous years, largely due to the unprecedented circumstances that defined the year. In 2020, the number of articles mentioning Native Americans rose by 18% from 2019, and articles were more negative than typical. Topics like the coronavirus pandemic and responses to racial injustice were the main factors increasing article counts while lowering the tone of articles in 2020.

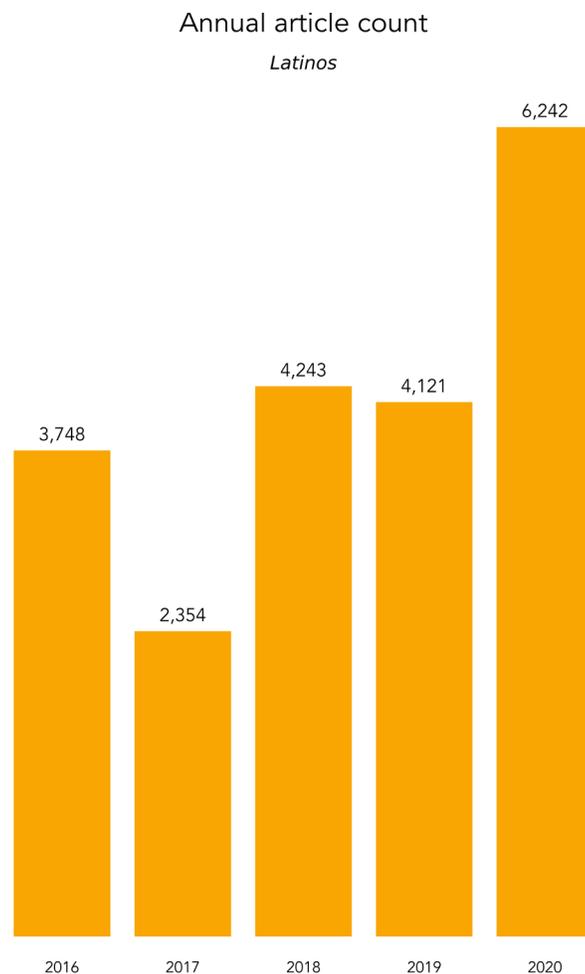
Latinos

Media coverage of Latinos saw an increase in 2020, hitting its highest point in the last five years. Articles about the presidential election were most responsible for driving coverage. The power of the Latino vote was a major theme, given that Latinos were the largest group eligible to vote among those covered in this report. In addition, support for certain candidates like Bernie Sanders was a major driver of coverage in the political realm. Outside of politics, stories about the coronavirus pandemic's effects on the Latino community constituted a large portion of articles. In the wake of George Floyd's murder, Latino involvement in protests over police brutality was also a central topic.

The past five years have not seen consistent levels of media coverage about the Latino population, with significant increases coinciding with election years. The number of articles rose from under 2,500 in 2017 to over 4,000 in 2018, and then jumped from approximately 4,000 in 2019 to a historic high of over 6,200 in 2020.

Looking more specifically at 2020, monthly coverage reached its peak in June and July due to protests over police brutality and stories about the coronavirus's disproportionate effects on Latino communities: 720 arti-

cles were published in June alone, compared to an average article count of 520 for Latinos that year. In addition, October and November featured high article counts related to Latinos, as presidential candidates vied for the Latino vote leading up to the November election.

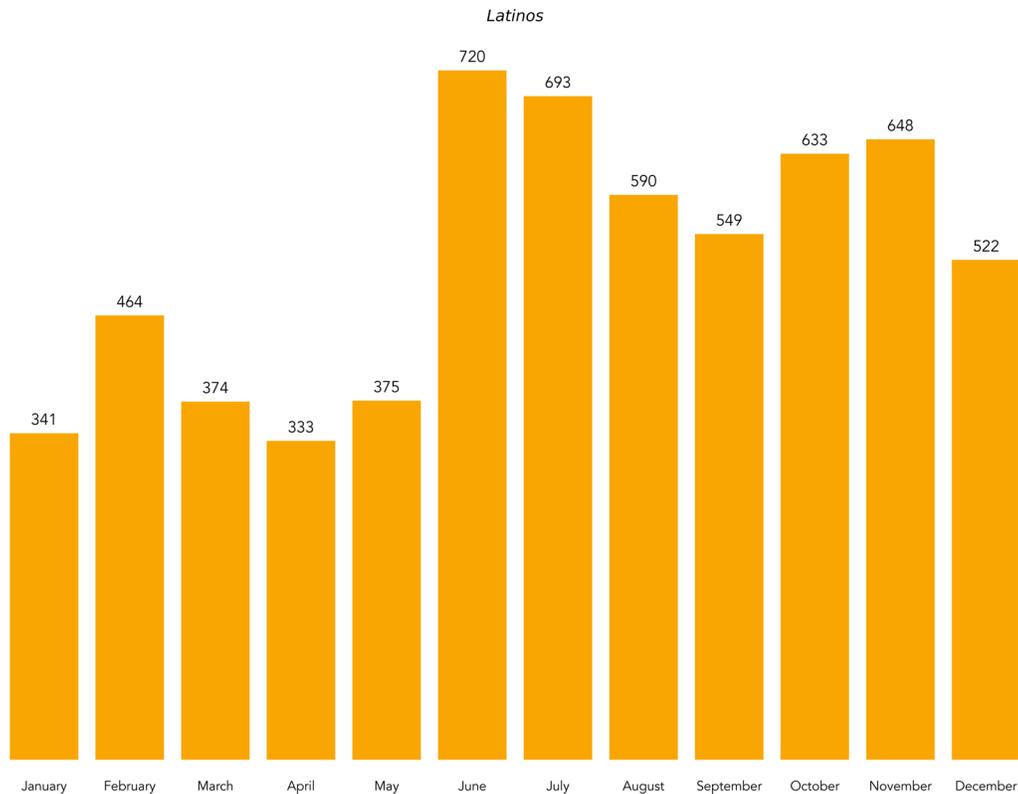


The tone of articles referencing Latinos over the last five years has trended downward, largely because of sharp temporary drops in both 2019 and 2020. In 2016, the average tone of articles mentioning the group was -0.12—modestly negative—however, this decreased to -0.28 in 2020, though the average monthly tone for 2020 articles was not consistent. While remaining negative throughout the year, the average tone of articles mentioning Latinos dipped by more than 0.3

from March to April. Specifically, articles touching on *disparities* in how the pandemic affected Latino communities compared to other groups were particularly negative in April, with an average tone of -0.84. In addition, article tone was at its lowest in June, due to a spike in stories about police brutality coupled with a relatively elevated number of articles about the ongoing effects of the coronavirus.

A closer look at articles in 2020 allows us to

Monthly article count



see what overall themes were central to media coverage of Latinos. Politics, economics, and education were all heavily-featured: 76% of articles were related to the *politics* theme, while 74% and 73% of articles touched on *economics* and *education*, respectively. *Politics* articles most often related to Latinos' role in the presidential election, while *economics* and *education*-focused articles came to the fore in stories about COVID-19's effects on Latino communities. The *law and order* theme was also significant, given its presence in 60% of all articles.

In addition to stories related to the common themes, the *coronavirus* topic was a significant driver of Latino coverage. Words such as "COVID," "pandemic," and "vaccine" were found in 61% of all articles—more than for any other group mentioned in our report—and had a clearly negative valence of -0.35. In addition, articles about *disparities*—mentioning "disparities" or "inequalities"—made up 15% of total articles, with a strongly negative tone of -0.51. This score is no surprise when reading articles touching on this topic. For example, a July 7 *New York Times* article about COVID-19's effects on marginalized communities states:

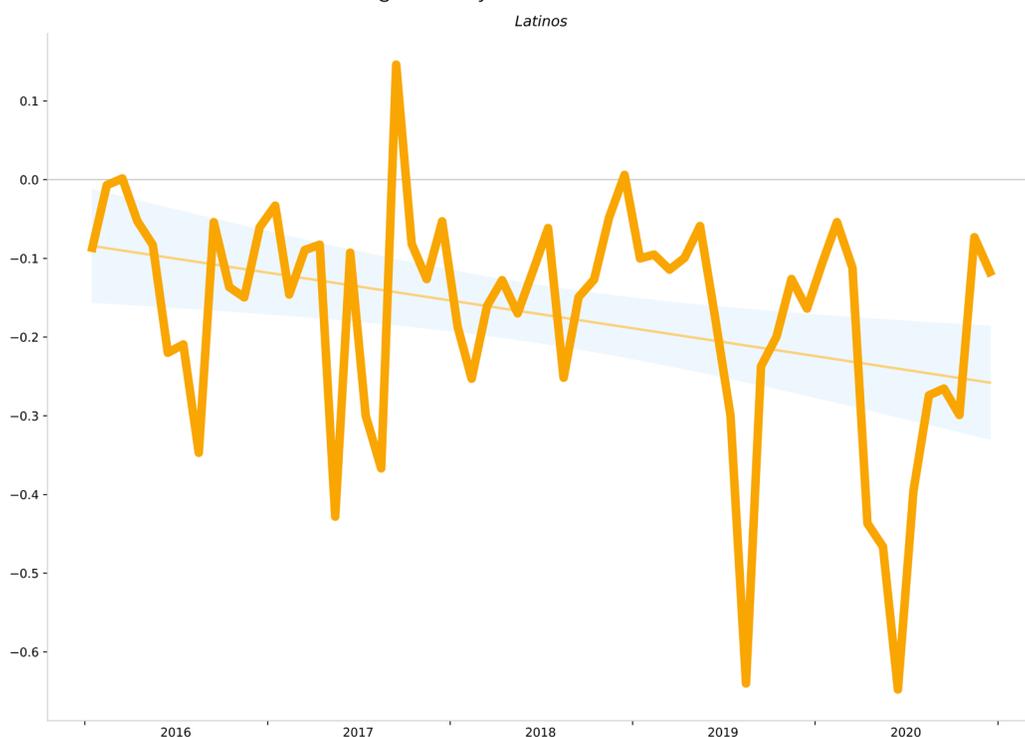
Latino people between the ages of 40 and 59 have been infected at five times the rate of white people in the same age group, the new C.D.C. data shows. The differences are even more stark when it comes to deaths: Of Latino people who died, more than a quarter were younger than 60.

While articles such as this are negative in tone, it is clear that the negativity stems from the pandemic's effects on the Latino community rather than from negativity about Latinos themselves.

Similar to coverage of African Americans in 2020, the *police* topic was also a main driver of coverage. It was mentioned in 29% of articles, with a strongly negative tone of -0.56. A July 3 *New York Times* article summarizes the relationship between the police and the Latino community:

For decades, Latinos have chafed over aggressive policing tactics, including at the hands of Latino officers. In the last several years, hundreds of Latinos, mostly men, have been killed by the police in California, Arizona and New Mexico, among other states, though national statistics are hard to come by. Now, activists are pushing for a more explicit conversation about over-policing in Latino communities.

Average monthly article tone, 2016-2020



The strongly negative tone of this theme also contributes to the clearly negative tones of *law and order* and *racism*—which are -0.37 and -0.42, respectively—given that police brutality was so central to coverage of Latinos in 2020.

Even more than coronavirus and police brutality-centered articles, politics dominated coverage of Latinos in 2020. While the six-group comparative data showed that *politics* articles tended to be more negative than non-*politics* articles, in the case of Latinos, the opposite was true. Articles related to Latinos and politics can be split up in two main ways: the importance of the Latino vote in deciding the presidential election—the aspect that likely makes *politics* articles less negative than expected—and the Latino community's support for certain candidates, especially Bernie Sanders. Overall, articles covering the Latino vote specifically were essentially neutral, with an average tone of 0.04. A November 9 *Washington Post* article illustrates the importance that presidential candidates placed on the Latino vote:

The story of Trump's performance and Biden's backslide along the Texas border, experts say, shows the importance of cultivating deep-

er relationships with a diverse Latino population that continues to claim a growing and dominant share of the Texas electorate.

Coverage of Bernie Sanders, a favorite among Latino voters, was also essentially neutral, with an average article tone of 0.06. This is noteworthy, given that the overall valence in Latino articles for politics coverage was -0.26. A February 19 *Washington Post* article discussing Chuck Rocha, a top strategist for Sanders, seeks to explain the Latino community's support for the candidate:

Rocha's Latino strategy seems to have less to do with the candidate himself than with the campaign's organic approach to communities across the country. 'We opened our offices in the Latino community. That's where we are headquartered,' Rocha explained.

To gain a better understanding of how Latinos were portrayed in 2020, we narrowed down our body of articles to include only those that mentioned the group three or more times. This set, which contains 1,427 articles, shares essentially the same tone as articles that mention Latinos just one or two times—still modestly negative. However, the *disparities* theme was mentioned in 31% of articles as op-

posed to 15% in the overall data set. In addition, the presidential election remained a major theme, with topics about the *Latino vote*, *Bernie Sanders*, and mentions of states like Georgia, Arizona, Nevada, and Florida, all making up a much larger percentage of articles in the more focused group.

Overall, 2020 media coverage of Latinos was unique in its elevated number of articles compared to previous years, and continued the trend

of being increasingly negative in tone. Some major themes were heavily responsible for driving down the average tone: articles centered around the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, and Latino involvement with protests over police brutality and racial injustice. Relatively heavy coverage of politics—in particular highlighting Latinos' preferences for certain candidates and the increasing importance of the Latino vote—offset some of this negativity in coverage of Latinos in 2020.

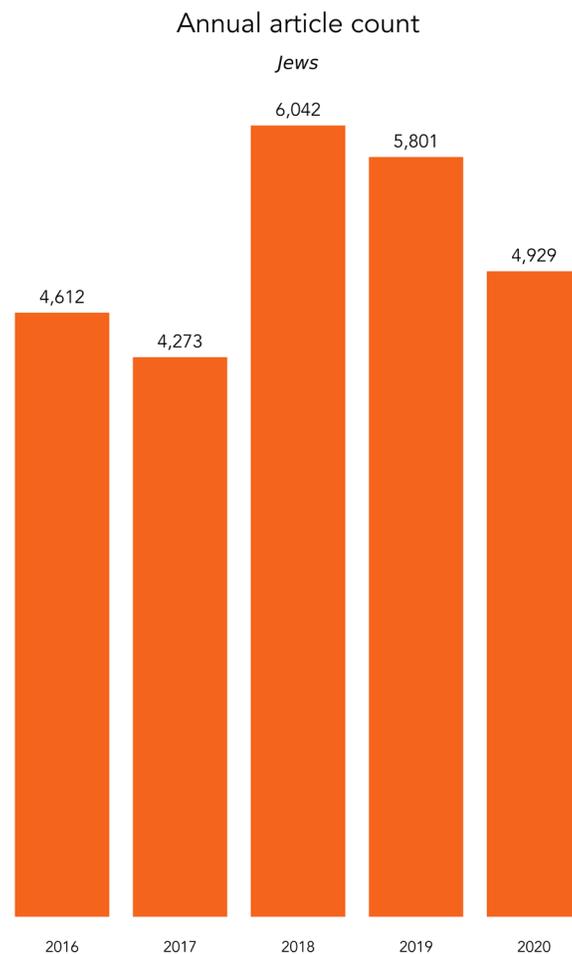
Jews

Media coverage of the Jewish community in 2020 was characterized by both a decrease in the number of articles published and a slight decline in tone. At the start of the year, Jewish articles focused heavily on anti-Semitism and foreign events, such as the assassination of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani. Stories about the coronavirus pandemic featured prominently in the spring, ranging from coverage of tensions between New York City officials and the local Hasidic community over public health restrictions to stories about socially-distant Passover celebrations. Coverage then declined in the summer. Finally, the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Israel's normalization of relationships with a number of Arab states emerged as major headlines in the fall and winter.

2020 saw coverage of Jews return to a level similar to that of 2016 and 2017, which preceded a peak in 2018. In total, 4,929 stories mentioned Jews in 2020, the median count over the past five years. January saw the highest number of articles, with a total of 513 published that month. This peak can be attributed to stories about the Hanukkah Stabbing in Monsey, New York, on December 28, 2019, and the subsequent focus on anti-Semitism.

The average tone of Jewish articles in 2020

was essentially neutral at -0.02. This represents a negligible decrease from the 2016-2019 period. Yet, 2020 marks a 0.14 decline from the five-year high of 0.12 in 2016. Articles in January had the most negative tone at -0.26, again due to the intense coverage of anti-Semitic attacks. Meanwhile, December saw the most positive coverage on average with a score of 0.22.



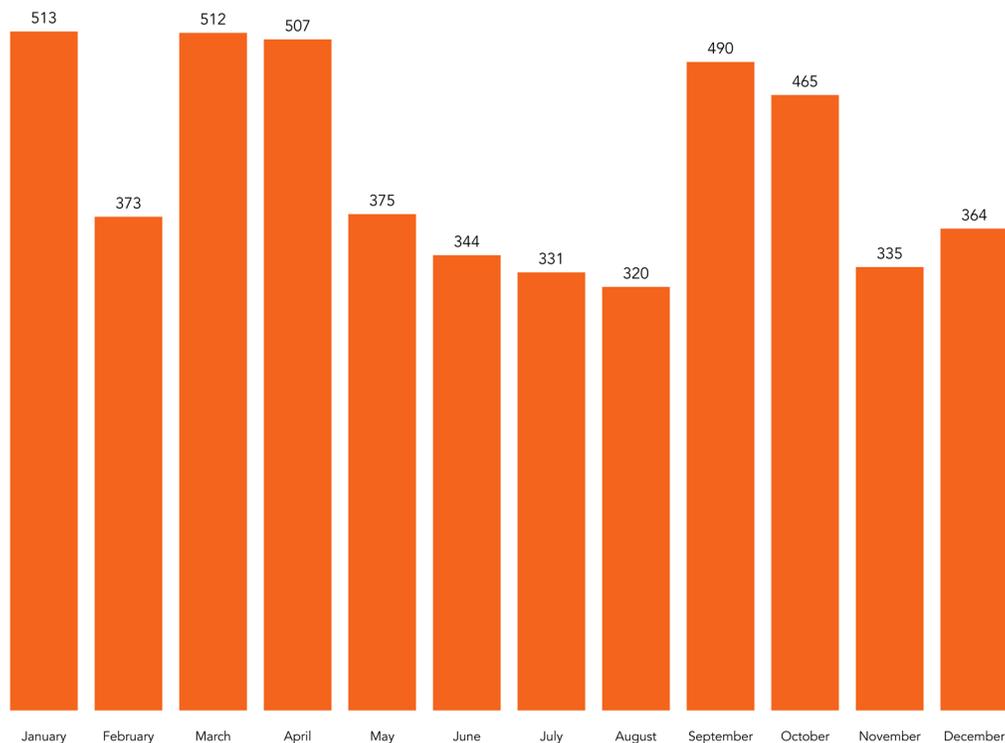
When looking broadly at stories that mention Jews in 2020, which themes garner the most coverage? Two-thirds of articles touch on *education*. Stories related to *politics*, *economics*, and *law and order* also constituted more than half of all coverage. The 43% of all articles containing *culture* words were the most positive. On the other hand, stories mentioning *politics*, *law and order*, and *bigotry* words were found to be the most intense drivers of negativity. With an average tone of

-0.49, *bigotry* articles were the most negative, even more so than *law and order* articles at -0.33, reflecting an unusual level of negativity.

Of the groups studied in this report, Jews had the highest proportion of articles relating to *culture*. The average tone of these articles was 0.12. Stories about Jewish culture frequently touch on

Monthly article count

Jews



topics such as *art*, *food*, and *museums*. An April 6 *New York Times* book review, for example, reads:

Most of the surviving icons of Jewish-American food are delicatessens like Katz's on the Lower East Side and Langer's in Los Angeles, which serve meat—lots of it—but no cheese, at least in theory.

Just under 30% of stories about Jews in 2020 feature a term relating to the *bigotry* theme, such as "racism" or "discrimination." Although this is not the highest proportion among the groups studied here (Asian Americans 55%, African Americans 41%), these articles are notable for their profound negativity.

A subset within this broader theme, *anti-Semitism* was mentioned in 697 articles, or 14% of the Jewish data set. This represents a slight decline from the 16% of articles that mention anti-Semitism between 2016 and 2019. However, discrimination against Jews continues to be a prominent focus of US newspaper coverage. With a tone of -0.70, these articles were strongly negative.

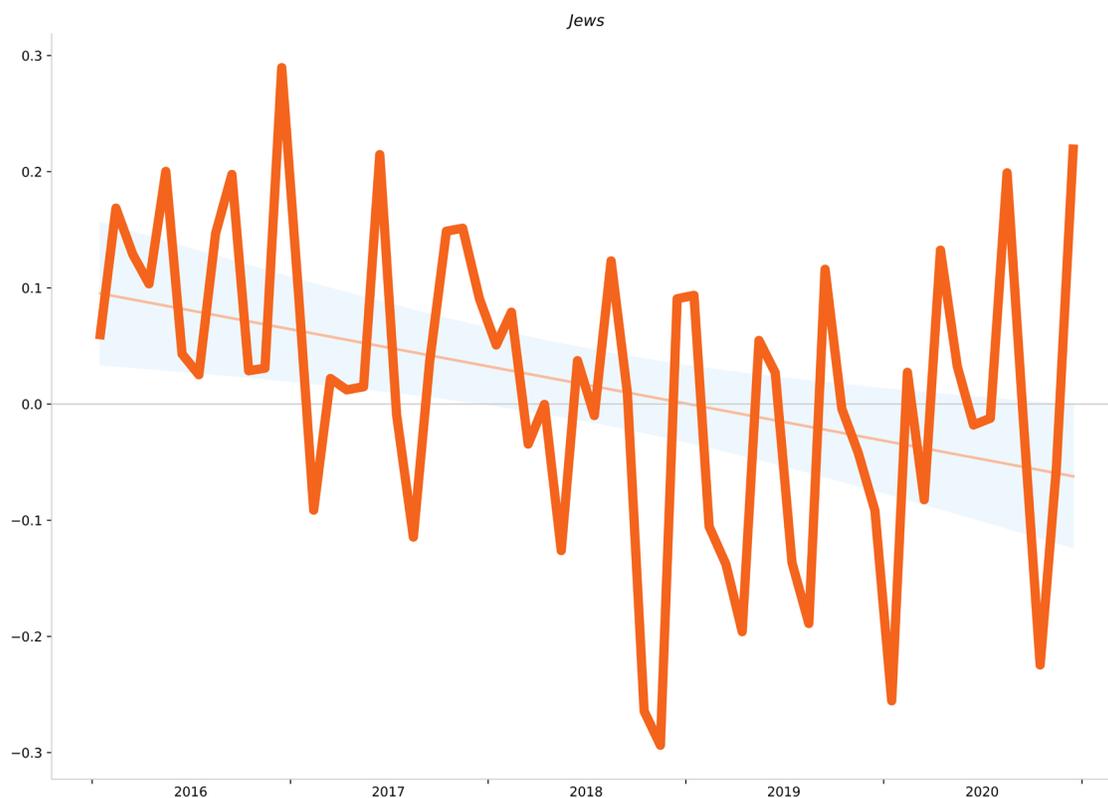
Though articles mentioned anti-Semitism through-

out the year, coverage of the topic peaked in response to certain events. For example, in January, 27% of the 513 articles published that month mentioned anti-Semitism. This focus was fueled by the December 28, 2019 Hanukkah attack at a rabbi's home, prompting coverage of violence against the Jewish community that lasted into the new year. Articles about the Hanukkah stabbing had an extremely negative average tone of -1.30. The brutal nature of the crime garnered particularly evocative coverage in a January 1 *New York Times* story:

Josef Neumann, one of five Jewish people stabbed by an attacker during a Saturday night Hanukkah celebration, was struck three times in the head, leaving a wound that penetrated "directly into the brain."

The number of stories about Jews also increased in response to New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio's announcement of COVID-19 restrictions in nine zip codes home to large Hasidic communities. This controversial policy was criticized by some as infringing on religious freedoms and exposed the friction between the ultra-Orthodox community and city government. For example, a con-

Average monthly article tone, 2016-2020



frontation with mourners at an Orthodox rabbi's funeral in Brooklyn was described by an April 29 *New York Times* piece as "one of the most fraught events of the virus crisis for Mayor Bill de Blasio" as "an estimated 2,500 ultra-Orthodox Jewish men... clearly violat[ed] social distancing guidelines."

The challenging balance between safeguarding public health and raising awareness among the insular Hasidic community also raised fears of scapegoating Jews, leaving them vulnerable to hate crimes much like those experienced by Asian Americans during the pandemic. A *New York Times* article from October 5 demonstrates this concern best, saying the virus has served as a "vector for rage."

Any inability to contain an outbreak originating in several places among a single ethnic group—in this case a religious minority, traditional in its habits, resistant to science and government intervention—was in danger of feeding existing prejudices, of escalating animosities and division.

Largely because of controversies like these, 62% of all articles that mention the word *Orthodox* also

include words related to the coronavirus topic.

Similar to previous years, Jewish articles stand out among the groups studied here in part because of a significant focus on foreign events. Foreign locations are mentioned in 87% of Jewish articles, while domestic locations are referenced in just over 94%. Differences in coverage are notable, however, when examining articles set exclusively in either a foreign or domestic context. 10% of Jewish articles mention only domestic locations and are modestly more positive than the data set as a whole, with an average tone of 0.11. Meanwhile, exclusively foreign articles, which make up just 4% of the data set, are clearly more negative than overall coverage, with an average tone of -0.47.

What accounts for these differences? When US newspapers write about foreign events, they tend to focus on negative topics—such as international conflicts or crises—rather than positive or even neutral stories about day-to-day events. In the case of the Jewish data set, we also observe a prevalence of negative historical topics, such as the Holocaust.

Consistent with trends observed in the previous

five years of coverage by US newspapers, stories relating to Israel make up a sizable portion of all articles relating to Jews. In 2020, 27% of articles mention Israel. That proportion increases to just over half—56%—of articles set exclusively in foreign locations. And, in keeping with expectations of the tone of these foreign-focused stories, they averaged a modestly negative score of -0.14.

When US newspapers write about Israel within the Jewish data set, what events do they cover? First, just under one-third of articles published in January and February mention Israel due to the assassination of Qasem Soleimani and the Trump administration's announcement of its Middle East peace plan. While the drone strike that killed Soleimani was carried out by American forces, newspapers turned towards Israel as tensions escalated in the region. A January 3 article from *The Washington Post* exemplifies this coverage:

Israelis reacted with muted satisfaction Friday to the killing of Iranian Maj. Gen. Qasem Soleimani, a man they considered the mastermind behind decades of terrorism directed against their country, even as they braced for potentially deadly retaliation by Iran and its proxies at a time of pitched tension in the region.

Second, Israel's normalization of relations with a number of Arab states, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, became the object of US newspapers' focus when discussing President Trump's Middle East peace plan. Concentrated in September, 3% of all Jewish articles—and one in 10 of those that mention Israel—are related to the topic of *normalization*. What stands out about this small subset of articles is their tone; whereas coverage of Israel and foreign events in general was found to be negative, these stories are essentially neutral, earning a score of -0.05.

Stories mentioning the Holocaust made up 26% of all articles in the data set and 36% of all exclusively foreign coverage of Jews. January 27, 2020 marked the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz, prompting

US newspapers to interview survivors, reflect on these historic atrocities, and examine the rise of anti-Semitism today. Again contributing to the unusual negativity of foreign articles and those relating to the *bigotry* theme, stories that mentioned the Holocaust were clearly negative, with an average tone score of -0.40.

The death of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg on September 18 accounted for 12% of Jewish articles that month. Though these stories only formed a small portion of the total data set—around 2% of all articles—they were clearly positive in tone, with an average score of 0.44. Newspapers celebrated her lifetime of achievements and groundbreaking role as just the second woman appointed to the nation's highest court. For instance, Justice Ginsburg was hailed in the *Wall Street Journal* on September 3 as "a pioneering figure in the fight for women's legal equality."

In 2020, roughly one-quarter of Jewish articles (1,211) mention Jews three or more times. While the tone of the overall data set was essentially neutral, this focused collection of articles was modestly negative with a score of -0.27. What explains this negativity? The prevalence of certain themes increased significantly in this focused data set. Words related to the *Holocaust* topic were found in 38% of articles in the focused data set (up from 26%). Stories touching on *anti-Semitism* likewise rose from 14% to 29%, with coverage of Israel increasing from 27% to 48%. Moreover, the tone of articles containing words related to these topics in the focused data set were more negative, too.

All told, coverage of Jews in 2020 marked a return to the lower article counts characteristic of 2016 and 2017, and conveyed an essentially neutral tone. Stories about Jewish culture emerged as the most positive topic, while those about the Holocaust, international conflict, and especially anti-Semitism contributed the most negative coverage. Finally, more than for any other group analyzed in this report, when articles specifically focused on Jews, the tone grew notably more negative.

Muslims

Although the number of stories touching on Muslims declined in 2020 compared to previous years, the average Muslim article tone remained strongly negative. In January, tensions flared between the US and Iran following the assassination of General Qasem Soleimani by a drone strike. The spring and summer saw considerable US media attention devoted to diplomacy in the Middle East. Beginning in the fall, coverage shifted to ongoing international events, for example, in France, where fears of Islamic “separatism” fomented both significant nationalistic outcry and claims of Islamophobia.

Muslims were mentioned in a total of 5,846 articles in 2020, receiving the third most coverage of any group in this report. This tally marks a nearly 35% decrease from the previous year’s sum of just over 8,900 articles, underscoring the decline in Muslim coverage since its peak in 2016. One reason for this sharp downturn in 2020 was the reduced prevalence of stories related to terrorism, extremism, and particular conflict zones. As tensions flared between the US and Iran in January, media coverage reached its zenith with a total of 833 articles, 61% of which mentioned Iran. This contrasts with the lower levels of coverage Muslims received throughout the rest of the year, with most

months falling in the 400 and 500 article range.

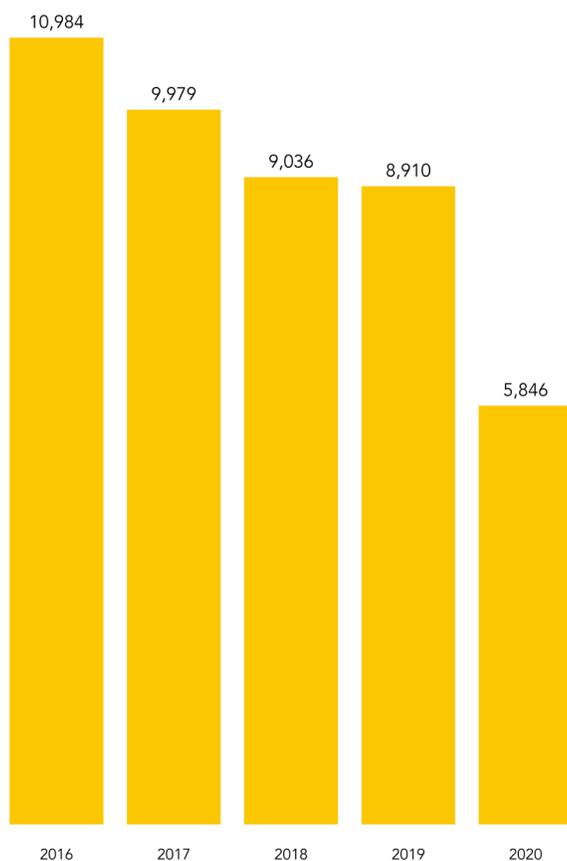
With an average tone of -0.72, US newspaper coverage of Muslims was far more negative than that of any other group. Several factors contribute to

this negativity, from a higher frequency of foreign news stories to a greater focus on themes such as *terrorism* and *conflict*. Muslim articles have trended less negative over the past five years, perhaps due to relatively fewer stories about violent episodes linked to the *Syria* and *ISIS*, two topics associated with extreme negativity. In addition, 2020 saw the total number of articles set exclusively in a foreign setting reach a five-year low, down nearly 50% from 2019. Despite these changes, the 2020 tone score remains consistently negative,

with monthly article valence ranging from a high of -0.50 in November to a low of -0.92 in January.

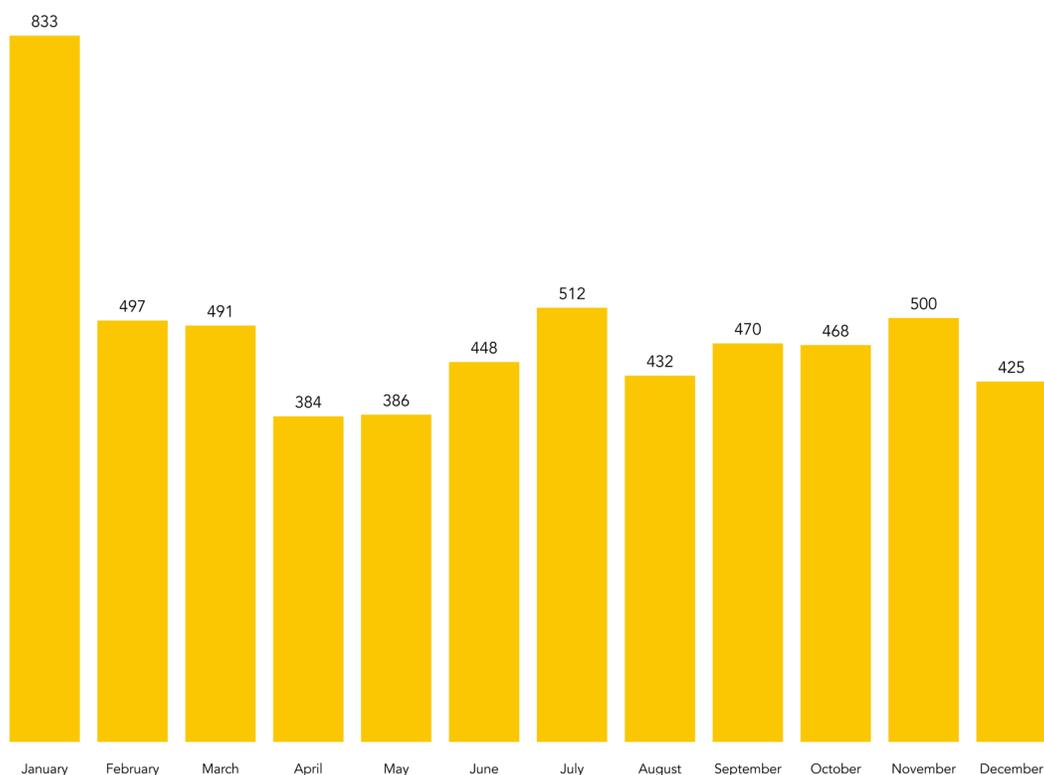
The resounding negativity of Muslim articles can be explained in part by their focus. Among the six common themes we identified in the comparative section at the beginning of this report, Muslim articles were more likely to touch on *politics* (81%) and *law and order* (71%) and less likely to contain *education* or *culture* or words (57% and 25%, respectively) compared to the other groups we study. Particular topics

Annual article count
Muslims



Monthly article count

Muslims



that stood out within the *politics* and *law and order* themes included the Trump administration's *Muslim ban*, the assassination of Soleimani, and Muslims' involvement and relationship with the Black Lives Matter movement.

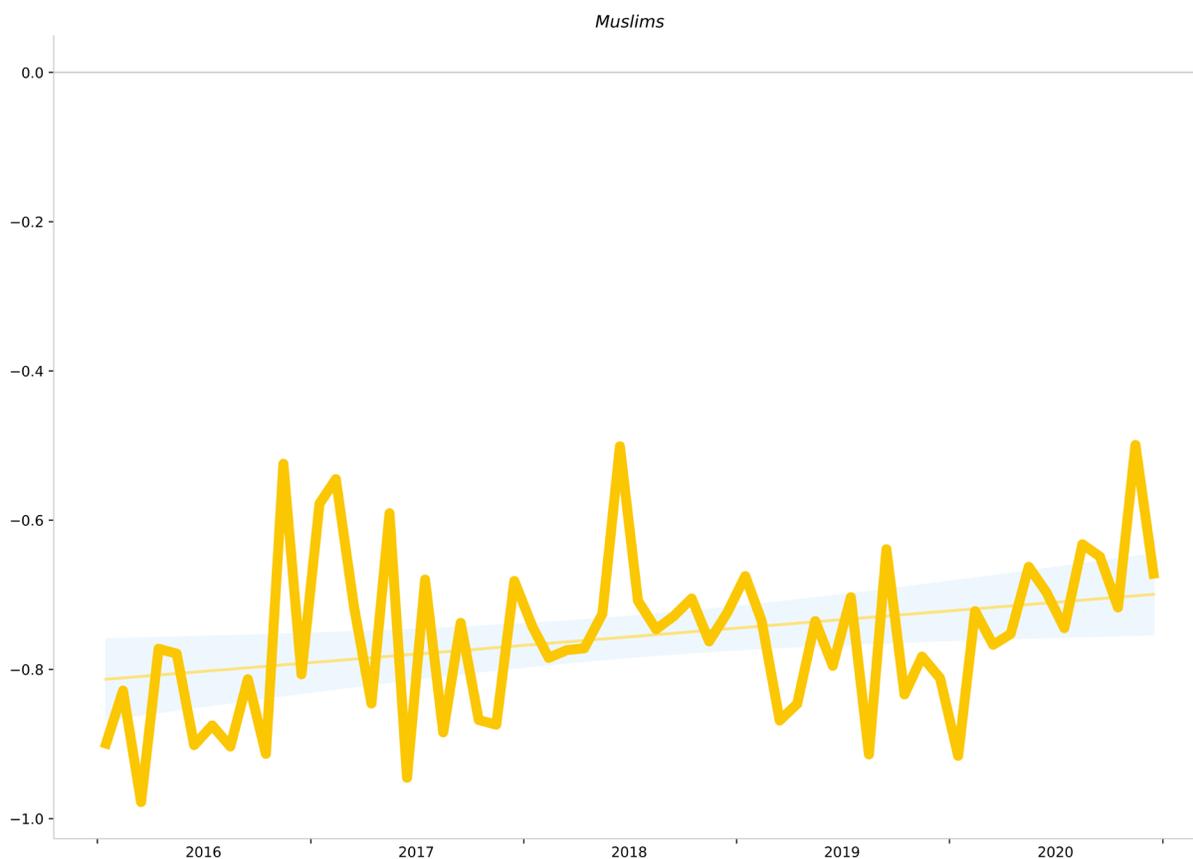
One major and distinctive cause of negativity found in Muslim articles was the media's focus on foreign events. In 2020, 97% of Muslim articles mentioned at least one foreign location, and 6% of the data set focused exclusively on non-American settings. The average tone of stories set exclusively abroad was extremely negative, at -1.33. For comparison, the 3% of Muslim articles set exclusively in the United States received an average score of -0.38, making them notably less negative than the typical 2020 Muslim article.

What explains this negativity in foreign news articles? Coverage of foreign locations tends to focus heavily on terrorism, war, and other crises as opposed to positive or even neutral stories about more mundane occurrences. This phenomenon is exemplified by an October 21 *Wall Street Journal* headline: "France Honors Beheaded Teacher As

Symbol of War on Extremism." This focus is also reflected in the prevalence of certain group-specific themes. 73% of stories set exclusively in foreign locations contain words pertaining to *law and order* compared to 63% of exclusively domestic articles; *terrorism* and *extremism* are each mentioned in around 30% of foreign stories, more than twice as often as in exclusively domestic texts.

Politics remains the most common subject of newspaper coverage of Muslims, whether in domestic or foreign coverage. In 2020, 81% of articles contained words related to politics, such as "Biden," "Donald Trump," and "campaign." The preponderance of the *politics* theme, with its strongly negative score of -0.72, largely drove Muslims articles' overall negativity. Heavily politicized and controversial issues often associated with Muslims—for example, President Trump's "Muslim ban" or his administration's handling of the Israel-Palestine conflict—are among the chief causes of this negativity. Notably, compared to the year as a whole, the tone of politics-related articles became significantly less negative in November around the presidential election. Even

Average monthly article tone, 2016-2020



those referring to former President Trump rose from an average tone of -0.63 in 2020 to -0.28.

Within the *politics* theme, foreign events were also extremely prominent and generally negative. These included stories about US diplomatic efforts, such as the Middle East Peace Deal and US negotiations with the Taliban to form a provisional Afghani government. The most prominent foreign event linked to Muslims in 2020, however, was the US assassination of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani in early January 2020. Stories about *Iran* were overwhelmingly negative in January, with an overall tone of -1.11, compared to -0.88 tone for the year as a whole; they featured topics such as *terrorism* and *extremism*, with 90% of articles containing political references.

In the aftermath of the January drone strike that took Soleimani's life, US media also frequently connected *Iran* to *Israel-Palestine*. 45% of January stories mentioned the topics in conjunction, a significant deviation from the relatively low joint cov-

erage they received throughout the majority of the year. For example, a January 10 *Wall Street Journal* article makes clear this complex relationship:

Iran's Shiite theocracy has managed, at times, to cooperate tactically with deadly Sunni extremist groups—including the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Palestinian groups Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad—against their common foes, the U.S. and Israel, even as Iran has been fighting on the front lines against the Sunni fanatics of Islamic State.

With an average tone score of -0.82, stories containing *law and order* words were more negative than those related to any of the other five general themes. Present in 71% of stories, law and order was the second most prevalent theme of coverage in Muslim articles. Specifically, *law*, *police*, and *crime* were among the most commonly covered topics, particularly during January and the summer. Heightened scrutiny and negativity during the middle of the year corresponded with Black Lives Matter's global protest move-

ment in response to the murder of George Floyd in late May. While articles discussing BLM retain a central focus on African Americans, they often also mention Muslims in passing. In the Muslims data set, for example, 28% of stories mentioned African Americans, a figure that increased to 38% in exclusively domestic articles. A June 17 *New York Times* story addresses the relationship between Muslims and African Americans:

Although Muslim Americans routinely have to deal with the bigotry of Islamophobia, many have been in denial for far too long about the anti-black racism among the believers. About a third of American Muslims are African-American and the history of Islam in the United States is deeply connected to the African-American story.

This article reflects on how a Muslim-owned restaurant in Minneapolis was responsible for initially calling the police on Floyd, initiating the contact with law enforcement. While Muslims have certainly been allies in BLM's movement for racial justice, they were thus also indirectly affiliated with the tragic beginnings of the summer's global protests.

Media coverage of the Trump administration's *Muslim ban* sheds light on aspects of the *bigotry* theme. This 2017 executive order, disproportionately targeting Muslim majority countries, involved a clearly polemic, anti-Muslim ideology. However, only 5% of Muslim ban stories used the phrase "anti-Muslim," and just 1% refer to Islamophobia. Compared to Jews, the other religious minority studied in this report, Muslims also receive significantly less overall coverage containing *bigotry*-related terms. In particular, while the theme of *anti-Semitism* appears in 14% of articles pertaining to Jews, the term "anti-Muslim" is found in only 3% of all Muslim articles and *Islamophobia* words in a mere 2%.

In 2020, 1,602 Muslim articles—roughly 27% of all stories—mentioned the group three or more times. The average tone of this focused set of articles is -0.87, making them even more negative than articles with fewer mentions of Muslims or Islam. These articles were also more likely to touch on terrorism, extremism, and conflict or to contain words linked to the *law and order* and *bigotry* themes. Articles exclusively set in foreign locations were also much more likely to mention Muslims three or more times (37%) compared to those set uniquely in domestic locations (19%), further accounting for the overall negative tone of these articles.

In closing, Muslim articles stand out for their strong negativity compared to those touching on the other groups in this report. Relative to previous years, articles mentioning African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos were relatively negative, although this tended to reflect circumstances such as police brutality or the coronavirus rather than negativity specifically about these groups. In terms of representation, there were far more articles about African Americans than in previous years, and far more concentrated on this group in depth. This reflects the prominence of stories about race relations in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd. While the raw number of articles about Asian Americans jumped in 2020, largely due to anti-Asian bigotry related to the coronavirus, Asian Americans remain the least covered group in US newspapers by a substantial margin.

Representations of marginalized populations cannot simply be reduced to the newsworthiness of stories about them. The tone, topics, and frequency of articles help construct an understanding of these groups that have long-term consequences. For this reason, we hope that this report helps readers develop a fuller picture of how the media cover marginalized groups in our society.