

Investigating status hierarchies with media analysis: Muslims, Jews, and Catholics in *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* headlines, 1985-2014

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Abstract

Media analyses can help expand our understanding of how hierarchies are expressed and of how they evolve across time and place. In this article, we compare coverage of Muslims, Jews, and Catholics in *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* headlines over a 30-year time period. In aggregate, our data show that media portrayals of groups are relatively stable over the span of decades rather than highly sensitive to the impact of events at any given point in time. In keeping with the findings of surveys, Muslims are generally associated with more negativity than Catholics or Jews. At the same time, our data also reveal information that nuances what traditional surveys have shown. For example, Jews are portrayed consistently more positively than Catholics in our analysis; in addition, while headlines about Catholics are more positive than those about Muslims in *The New York Times*, the tone of headlines about the two groups is indistinguishable in *The Guardian*. The methods and the findings introduced here contribute to the research agenda of scholars concerned with identifying, tracking, and understanding status hierarchies.

Keywords

Catholics, Jews, media analysis, Muslims, newspapers, status hierarchies

Status hierarchies can have a powerful impact on individuals' life experiences. Being a member of a low-status group can make someone the target of violent hate crimes; it can lead to discrimination in jobs, housing, and services and it can result in persistent stigmatization that inflicts what Lamont

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et al. (2016) call ‘wear and tear’ that has consequences for mental health (Kessler et al., 1999). It can also affect inter-group relations, structure political alliances, and shape policy outcomes (Song, 2004: 859). Scholars have long studied status hierarchies and social distance because of these consequential effects on individuals and societies (Bogardus, 1925; Hagendoorn, 1995; Parrillo and Donoghue, 2005).

Research on status hierarchies traditionally relies primarily on data collected through surveys that measure respondents’ attitudes toward other social groups at a particular point in time. While this methodological approach has advantages, it also has several key limitations. Because they are periodic and typically geographically limited in scope, surveys cannot easily discern whether hierarchies are susceptible to significant short-term fluctuations based on real-world events, whether they are stable across years or decades, or how they compare across countries. The limitations of prevailing methods therefore leave a great deal unexplored.

Media analyses can help expand our understanding of how hierarchies are expressed and of how they evolve across time and place. Studies of the media regularly seek to capture and to analyze the valence of portrayals of different societal groups. Scholars have closely examined coverage of African-Americans and Latinos in the United States (Entman and Rojecki, 2000; Santa Ana, 2002), of migration and immigration (Haynes et al., 2016; Innes, 2010; Watson and Riffe, 2013), and of Muslims (Ahmed and Matthes, 2017; Nacos and Torres-Reyna, 2007). For researchers like Domke et al. (2003), for example, ‘news coverage is thought to be instrumental in the construction and reinforcement of a racial hierarchy in U.S. society’ (p. 608). While many such studies demonstrate that the media cover status minorities quite negatively, relatively few explicitly contribute to broader theorizing about how the media reflect and reinforce status hierarchies over time and across country.

In this article, we use media analysis to contribute to the study of group hierarchies. We compare coverage of Muslims, Jews, and Catholics in *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* headlines over a 30-year time period. Each of these three groups constitutes an ethno-religious minority vis-à-vis the Protestant majority in the United States and Great Britain. We follow existing work on hierarchies in selecting these socially relevant and theoretically comparable groups for analysis, even though we recognize the varied constructions of these groups within each country. We examine headlines about each group in a prominent left-leaning mainstream broadsheet newspaper with a commitment to civil and human rights and that typically avoids portraying minorities in exaggerated or negative terms (Joseph et al., 2008: 229; Poole, 2002: 56). Identifying a systematically different tone of coverage associated with Muslims, Jews, and Catholics in these outlets suggests that examining media data can help us analyze status hierarchies in a way that complements traditional surveys. In addition, it allows us to gauge how durable or malleable the tone of coverage is across time, and whether the expression of status hierarchies is similar or divergent across two comparable countries in ways that surveys are unable to address.

We proceed by reviewing the scholarly foundation for investigating status hierarchies and social distance. We identify some of the limitations of existing methods and argue that media analysis can contribute a deeper understanding of status hierarchies. We then focus on the status of Muslims, Jews, and Catholics based on evidence from scholarship on status hierarchies and on media portrayals. In the following section, we outline our data and methods for analyzing newspaper headlines. We then assess how each group is portrayed relative to the others, whether there are fluctuations across time, and whether particular topics of coverage help us understand the systematic differences in media tone related to the three groups. We conclude by highlighting the implications of our findings for the study of status hierarchies.

Studying status hierarchies and social distance: strengths and weaknesses of the existing literature

Status hierarchies can manifest themselves in spheres such as political power, socio-economic standing, and interpersonal and public perceptions. Because they may differ across these and other domains, there can be no single, unified metric for gauging hierarchies within or across societies. Instead, it is important to understand their presence and evolution across different institutional spheres. Following Song (2004), we recognize that building a full picture of status hierarchies requires careful attention to ‘more delimited hierarchies which position groups on the basis of specific indicators of well-being or disadvantage’ (p. 873). In this article, we focus on status hierarchies among and between identity groups as reflected in individual attitudes and in media discourse.

Scholars in the social sciences have long been interested in assessing how groups are ordered within societies. As early as the 1920s, Emory Bogardus developed a Social Distance Scale to measure the degree to which individuals are willing to interact with people from different social groups. Bogardus’ method asks respondents to consider the most intimate relationship they are willing to accept with a member of a particular group along a 7-point scale ranging from ‘close kinship by marriage’ to ‘bar from my country’ (Bogardus, 1925, 1933). The Bogardus scale is considered a fundamental measure of social distance that has been applied across disciplines into the contemporary era (Kleg and Yamamoto, 1998; Parrillo and Donoghue, 2005; Wark and Galliher, 2007).

Bogardus scale quantification of social distance yields a map of relations between groups that can be conceived either across a horizontal plane or in terms of a social hierarchy (Axt et al., 2014; Bessudnov, 2016). A wide variety of scholarship utilizes variations of the Bogardus scale to argue that hierarchies are formed almost exclusively on the basis of social distance (Hagendoorn, 1995; Snellman and Ekehammar, 2005; Verkuyten and Kinket, 2000). For example, Hagendoorn (1995) demonstrates that ethnic hierarchies persist in Dutch society despite fluctuations in the ordering of specific groups. Verkuyten and Kinket (2000) confirm the trend for pre-adolescents, showing they ‘share a cumulative hierarchical pattern of ethnic group preferences that forms an ethnic hierarchy’ (p. 84).

Although less explicitly theoretical, feeling thermometers are also used to identify group standing within societies. Originally adapted from political science research concerning election studies, feeling thermometers are useful tools for quantifying survey respondents’ attitudes toward particular categories of people. Such surveys ask respondents to rate their feelings toward other groups on a numerical ‘thermometer’, where a score from 0 to 49 indicates cool feelings, a score from 51 to 100 indicates warm feelings, and a midpoint of 50 is reserved for neutrality (Nelson, 2008: 275–277). For example, one question in the 2010 British Social Attitudes Survey asks for respondents’ ‘feeling toward a number of different ethnic and religious groups’ and encourages them ‘to use the entire extent of the scale’ (Park et al., 2010: 78). Similarly, a Faith Matters Survey in the United States asks about ‘feelings toward a number of well-known groups’ like Jews, Muslims, and Catholics (Putnam et al., 2007: 287–297). Aggregating the results from feeling thermometer surveys allows researchers to identify a hierarchic ordering based upon how warmly certain groups are perceived relative to other groups.

As multifaceted as the established scholarly literature is, existing measures of group hierarchies remain limited. Most importantly, because they indicate how respondents feel at a particular moment, social distance scales and survey questions cannot easily measure hierarchies continuously across time.¹ Nor is it possible to estimate hierarchies retrospectively, or to gauge the standing of social groups that were not the object of research during earlier studies. Moreover, it is impossible

to know whether hierarchies that prevail in one geographic location hold in other places where there was no methodologically comparable measure of social distance, ethnic hierarchies, or feeling thermometers. These limitations hamper our ability to understand whether and how social hierarchies evolve in light of short-term events, whether they are fundamentally local or are instead international or even global in scope.

Examining media representations of different groups provides a way to address several of these challenges. In particular, because media are produced and recorded on a daily basis, media analysis permits continuous and retrospective studies spanning longer time periods. It also offers an opportunity to gauge the tone of depictions of groups that were not included in earlier studies. By introducing a measure that is consistent and comparable across space and time, it can thus expand our understanding of status hierarchies. Media analyses apply most straightforwardly to groups that are the subject of significant coverage over extended periods and when there is a long-term digital track record. It is also important to recognize that while the media both reflect and reinforce perceptions about societal groups, they do not constitute a direct measure of public attitudes. Yet, precisely because hierarchies can manifest themselves in different ways across different institutions, studying media representations of minorities complements existing methodologies for assessing group hierarchies. The distinctive strengths of media analyses allow us to gauge the robustness of more traditional metrics. They also allow us to explore a new set of questions about status hierarchies, namely: How stable are they over time? Are they subject to short-term fluctuations based on events? And, how similar are they in different national settings?

Hierarchies of Muslims, Jews, and Catholics: what we know

To understand the status of our three groups, we first review research that explicitly gauges social distance and group hierarchies among Muslims, Jews, and Catholics. Scholars frequently compare these ethno-religious groups given their social significance in many individual countries and in global affairs. Multiple studies in a variety of geographic settings demonstrate that Muslims are a low-status group when directly compared to Jews or Catholics. For example, Hagendoorn (1995) examined data from numerous countries in the 1980s and early 1990s and found that Jews were consistently higher in the hierarchical structure than 'Islamic' groups from the Middle East, North Africa, and the southern portions of the former Soviet Union (pp. 205–211). In the United States setting, Kleg and Yamamoto's (1998) replication of the Bogardus study showed that predominantly Muslim ethnic groups (Turks and Arabs) remained near or at the bottom of the comparative hierarchy, and that Jews were above them, but generally below ethnic groups associated more clearly with Christianity (including Catholic groups such as Poles, Italians, and French) (p. 186). These results were reinforced by a 2000s study that explicitly included 'Muslims' in the list of ethnicities for the first time (Parrillo and Donoghue, 2005: 263). In addition, using large-scale online surveys of the general public instead of the more typical smaller-scale surveys of teachers or college students, Axt et al. (2014: 3–6) found that respondents consistently rated Christianity highest, followed by Judaism, with Islam always ranked the lowest.²

Feeling thermometer surveys that explicitly ask questions about Muslims, Jews, and Catholics also support the finding that Muslims are consistently perceived as having a lower status than Jews or Catholics. As Tables 1 and 2 illustrate, respondents in both the United States and Great Britain typically express warmer feelings toward Catholics and Jews and cooler feelings toward Muslims.³ There is variation in the ranking of Catholics and Jews (both within and across countries), which makes it difficult to establish a clear rank order between those groups.

If surveys frequently compare these three groups, media analyses focus almost exclusively on coverage of Muslims. Taken as a whole, this literature is congruent with hierarchy studies and

Table 1. Feeling thermometer results – United States.

Year	Poll name	Catholics	Jews	Muslims
2007	American Faith Matters Survey	62	57	42
2011	American Faith Matters Survey	61	58	44
2014	American Trends Panel Survey	62	63	40

Sources: Putnam et al. (2007), Putnam et al. (2011), and Pew Research Center (2014).

Table 2. Feeling thermometer results – Great Britain.

Year	Poll name	Score	Catholics (%)	Jews (%)	Muslims (%)
2008	British Social Attitudes Survey	Cool (0–49)	10	13	35
		Neutral (50)	43	47	39
		Warm (51–100)	46	37	23
2010	British Social Attitudes Survey	Cool (0–49)	9	13	34
		Neutral (50)	43	47	40
		Warm (51–100)	45	36	23
2015	ICM/Channel 4	Cool (0–49)	11	9	23
		Neutral (50)	37	43	39
		Warm (51–100)	51	49	38

Sources: National Centre for Social Research (2010: 79), Park et al. (2010), and ICMUnlimited (2015).

feeling thermometer surveys that find Muslims are a low-status group. Studies document the Western media's common tendency to portray Muslims predominantly in a negative light (Abrahamian, 2003; Ahmed and Matthes, 2017; Baker et al., 2013; Joseph et al., 2008; Poole, 2002). Even authors who stress a greater level of nuance view portrayals of Muslims as neutral or mixed rather than positive (Alsultany, 2012; Bowe et al., 2015; Nacos and Torres-Reyna, 2007). There is no comparable body of sustained scholarship on portrayals of Jews or Catholics in the media.⁴ The few media studies that directly compare portrayals of Muslims, Jews, and Catholics (or Christians) find that Muslims are the lowest-ranked group, with the other two groups ranked higher (Bleich et al., 2015; Media Tenor, 2014).

Although they provide useful insights, existing media studies are limited in several respects. Because analyses of religious groups focus nearly exclusively on Muslims, it is impossible to discern whether portrayals of that group are significantly more negative than those of other religious groups. Moreover, media research tends to analyze articles clustered within relatively narrow time periods. Domke et al.'s (2003) study of media-constructed hierarchies of ethnic groups in the United States, for example, compared only the 5 months before and after 11 September 2001. While this sampling strategy can effectively gauge the impact of a single event, it does not provide perspective on media portrayals over the long term.

Given existing scholarship on status hierarchies and media representations of minorities, we expect Muslims to be portrayed more negatively in the media than Jews or Catholics, on average. By contrast, the mixed findings of surveys and the lack of media studies on Jews and Catholics precludes strong expectations about the relative standing of those groups compared to one another. By providing information across time, across group, and across country, our method allows us not only to identify whether media portrayals are consistent with what we know about hierarchies among these groups but also to explore the nuances behind these portrayals in more depth than can

be achieved through a survey approach. It allows for a qualitatively different type of insight into where different groups stand on status hierarchies and how this evolves over time and differs across country.

Data and methods

We compare Muslims, Jews, and Catholics in the United States and Great Britain. Demographically, Catholics are the largest of the three groups we examine in each country, representing approximately 21 and 9 percent of the American and British population, respectively. Muslims are the next largest group in Britain at 6 percent, with Jews comprising 0.5 percent of the population. Jews are almost 2 percent of the US population, while Muslims are approximately 1 percent.⁵ While the United States and Britain differ in terms of total population, they each have Protestant majorities and share historical moments of anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism that became significantly less intense in recent decades. They have substantially different histories of colonization, especially of Muslim-majority territories, but each is a Western liberal democracy in an era where Islam and Muslims are perceived in negative terms. Although we recognize that these identity groups diverge across national contexts and that these identities overlap considerably with ones based on perceived race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, we build on existing studies that compare these three groups by assessing whether media portrayals reflect and contribute to perceived hierarchies in two broadly comparable societies.

Drawing our data from *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* allows us to control for a number of factors likely to influence media portrayals. The newspapers are each broadsheets in countries with relatively similar media market types (Chalaby, 1996; Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Both newspapers are also considered 'authoritative news media' in their respective countries due to their considerable social and political impact (Peterson, 2014: 6–8). They are each highly influential, even if they are not representative of the newspaper industry as a whole. Their left-of-center ideological placement is associated in each country with a generally favorable orientation toward minorities (Baker et al., 2013: 9; Joseph et al., 2008: 229; Poole, 2002: 55–56). We thus deliberately selected outlets that were least likely to reflect significant differences across groups in comparison with right-leaning newspapers or tabloids that studies show have a tendency to associate Muslims with more negative coverage, particularly in Britain (Bleich et al., 2015; Mertens and de Smaele, 2016).

Our unit of analysis is the article headline. We focus on the headline rather than the article for several reasons. Readers spend more time scanning headlines than reading the full text of the article because headlines serve as cognitive shortcuts that often summarize the article as a whole (Andrew, 2007; Dor, 2003). Moreover, research shows that headlines impact the reader's perception of events independent of the full-text article (Althaus et al., 2001; Andrew, 2007; Dor, 2003; Ifantidou, 2009). In addition, while readers who are knowledgeable about a topic are more likely to read the entire article, the tone of the article will be less likely to change their preconceived notions about a group due to confirmation bias. Less engaged readers, on the other hand, are both more likely to read only the headline (Dor, 2003: 717–19) and to have the tone of the headline sway their opinion toward a particular group or issue. For these reasons, headlines are likely to influence how readers form their perceptions about groups.

We used Lexis-Nexis searches to extract headlines about Muslims, Jews, and Catholics in *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*. We selected headlines containing the root words 'Muslim', 'Islam', 'Moslem', 'Jew', 'Judai', and 'Catholic', manually removing duplicate and accidental headlines (e.g. Islamabad, Yusuf Islam, and jewelry). We eschewed a more expansive set of terms such as 'mosque', 'synagogue', 'hijab', and 'Bible' because not all readers would unequivocally

Table 3. Distribution of *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* headlines, 1985–2014.

	Final dataset		Final sample	
	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>The New York Times</i>	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>The New York Times</i>
Muslims	4054	3974	506	497
Jews	1778	3603	222	451
Catholics	1330	1480	167	185
<i>N</i> (headlines)	7162	9057	895	1133

associate each with the religious group as a whole, and because we sought to avoid arbitrary decisions about which additional words to include and exclude.

We chose 1 January 1985 as our start date and 31 December 2014 as our end date, allowing for a 30-year continuous analysis. We then employed a systematic sampling technique of coding every eighth headline chronologically to ensure that our sample is representative of the overall distribution of headlines in each newspaper for each group. Table 3 provides the number of headlines in the final dataset and the final sample.

There are two fundamental approaches to coding a body of text like our headline corpus. Computer-assisted methods such as machine-learning and lexical sentiment analysis provide exceptional reliability (Grimmer and Stewart, 2013; Hopkins and King, 2010; Young and Soroka, 2012). Once a computer is trained on human-coded texts or is programmed to seek words found in an established lexicon, it reliably produces the same codes for each headline. Computer-assisted procedures are best suited to corpora that contain large numbers of words; however, if context-sensitive elements like metaphors, irony, or telegraphic phrases are common in each unit of analysis (as is true in our headline corpus), interpretive validity is a greater challenge for computer-assisted methods. Because our headlines are short and are particularly prone to ambiguities and misinterpretation, we opted for human coding by a trained team of researchers in order to maximize the validity of our findings.

All coders were trained on a codebook specifically designed to identify the tone of article headlines.⁶ This coding scheme was adapted from scholarship by Benson (2013) and was applied in previous research (Bleich et al., 2016, 2015). Because headlines are often imprecise and difficult to interpret, two trained coders independently read each headline. The coders and the lead researcher then reviewed each entry as a team. In the event of a coding discrepancy, if team members could not reach a consensus on the tone of the headline within 15 seconds, the headline was deemed ambiguous and coded as containing no clear tone. Even though this process resulted in additional ‘no tone’ results, it ensures the validity of headlines assigned a positive or negative tone as all coders agree on the final coding of each headline.⁷ Among headlines containing a tone, positive headlines elicit sympathy for the target group as a victim of circumstances or of the actions of others, or they portray the group as contributing to the political, social, and cultural fabric of society. Negative tone articles portray the group as a threat or danger, or as culturally incompatible with the majority values of the society. Examples of headlines with a positive or negative tone include the following:

Positive

- ‘Films About Islam Win Festival’s Top Awards’ (*The New York Times*)
- ‘Police Warned of Terror Threat to Jews’ (*The Guardian*)
- ‘Catholic Reform Group Launched for Pope’s Visit’ (*The Guardian*)

Negative

- ‘French Trial to Highlight Islamic Terror Network’ (*The Guardian*)
- ‘Ethiopian Jews Riot in Israel’ (*The New York Times*)
- ‘Catholic College Rescinds Invitation to Speaker Defending Same-Sex Marriage’ (*The New York Times*)

Headlines with ‘no tone’ do not contain a clearly positive or negative valence, either because they portray the group simultaneously in a positive and negative light or are too unclear to be attributed a valence (e.g. ‘A Jew Is Charged in Anti-Semitic Acts’ or ‘Islam and Democracy’).

The main dependent variable in this study is the net tone of headlines over a given time period. We calculated net tone by subtracting all negative-toned headlines from all positive-toned headlines in a given time period, then dividing by the total number of coded headlines in that same time period. Net tone is calculated in the following way:

$$\text{Net tone}(t) = \frac{\text{Headlines with a positive tone}(t) - \text{Headlines with a negative tone}(t)}{\text{Total number of coded headlines}(t)}$$

Net tone can range from -1 to 1 . Sets of headlines have a negative net tone if they are between -1 and 0 , are neutral if the net tone is 0 , and have a positive net tone if they are between 0 and 1 . To illustrate our method using a concrete example, we coded 55 headlines from 2014 about Muslims in *The Guardian*. Of those, 27 headlines had a negative tone, while 15 had a positive tone. The net tone for headlines about Muslims in *The Guardian* for 2014 was thus $(15-27)/55 = -0.22$.

We also coded each headline for its geographic location. We noted whether the religious group was clearly situated uniquely in the domestic context (i.e. ‘British, Muslim and want to work in PR? Brace yourself for the bumpy ride’, *The Guardian*), uniquely in a foreign setting (i.e. ‘Catholic Church and University in Peru Fight Over Name’, *The New York Times*), a combination of both (i.e. ‘Middle East crisis: British Jews: Beleaguered community torn by a distant war’, *The Guardian*), or whether there was no geographic location indicated. This allows us to identify potential associations between the setting of headlines and their tone and to explore propositions from scholarship suggesting that coverage of a given group is more likely to be positive if the setting is domestic rather than foreign (Ibrahim, 2010; Mertens and de Smaele, 2016; Nossek, 2004).

Finally, to explore the factors associated with positive or negative headlines for key groups identified during our initial round of analysis, we undertook a second round of coding that focused on ascertaining frequently recurring headline topics.⁸ The three authors worked in pairs to independently read all headlines about each religious group of interest in the two countries. Following a team discussion to ensure agreement and topic consistency, the authors assembled a codebook designed to help identify the topics most commonly associated with each religious group.⁹ These topics are presented in Table 4, with more detailed information available in Supplementary Appendix A.

Two authors independently assessed each headline for topics, using the common definitions based on the codebook. Each set of codes and any discrepancies were then reconciled by all three authors; if team members could not reach a consensus about the presence of a given topic within 15 seconds, the topic was not attributed to the headline. As with all data used in this project, therefore, two trained researchers coded each headline, and all discrepancies were reconciled by the lead author and the research team to ensure 100 percent agreement.

Table 4. Common Headline Topics for Jews, Catholics, and Muslims.

Jews and Judaism
Jewish Art & Culture
Arab-Israeli Conflict
Holocaust & Nazi Germany
Anti-Semitic Occurrences & Events
Jewish Identities, Specificities & Internal Divisions
Soviet & Russian Jews
Catholics and Catholicism
Social Issues
Papacy & Vatican
Northern Ireland
Sexual Abuse & Pedophilia Scandals
Muslims and Islam
Extremism & Violence
Political Islam
Anti-Islamic & Anti-Muslim Sentiment & Muslim Persecution
Muslim Art & Culture
Muslim Practices
Muslim Identities, Specificities & Internal Divisions
Muslim Institutions
Women & Gender
Arab-Israeli Conflict

Analysis

The combined results show that headlines about Jews are the most positive, with a net tone of +0.44. Headlines about Catholics are situated in the middle with a net-tone of +0.14. Muslims are associated with the most negative set of headlines, which have a net tone of -0.03. These differences between each pair of groups, illustrated in Table 5, are statistically significant at the 0.01 level.¹⁰ The aggregate pattern is thus consistent with the expectation from existing scholarship that Muslims are associated with the most negativity among the three groups in our study. It also shows a clear distinction between Jews and Catholics, rather than a broad similarity in the standing of these two groups as indicated in surveys.

Analyzing the results at the country level reinforces several key findings from the aggregate data. Headlines from *The New York Times* mirror the overall patterns nearly perfectly. As illustrated in Table 6, Jews are the group associated with the most positive net tone (+0.44), followed by Catholics (+0.21). Headlines about Muslims are the most negative, with a net tone of -0.07. Each of these differences is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.¹¹ Turning to *The Guardian*, Table 7 shows that Jews remain the most positively portrayed group with a net tone of +0.45, which is also statistically significantly different at the 0.01 level from the net tone of the other two groups.¹²

As Table 7 also shows, however, both the aggregate and *The New York Times* patterns do not hold when examining *The Guardian* headlines comparing Catholics and Muslims. The difference between the net tone of headlines about Catholics (+0.06) and those about Muslims (0) is statistically insignificant.¹³ The similarity between the net tone of headlines about Catholics and Muslims in *The Guardian* depicted in Figure 1 is a noteworthy feature that emerges from our data.

Table 5. Tone, aggregated headlines, 1985–2014.

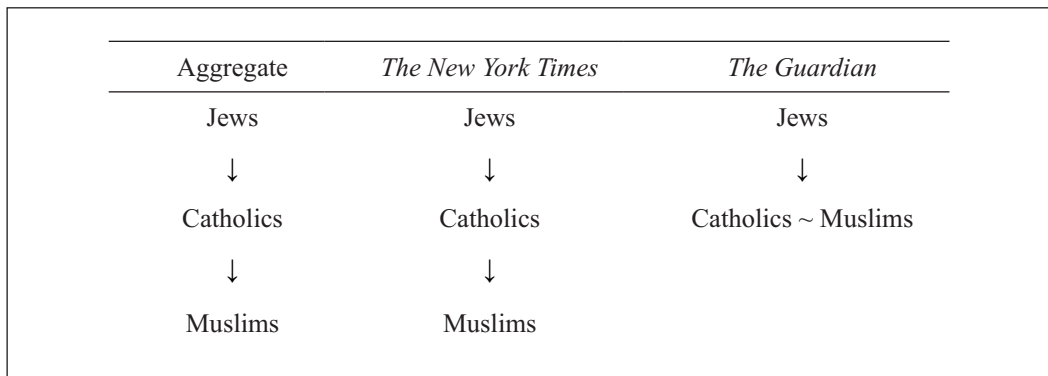
Tone	Jews		Catholics		Muslims	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Positive tone	329	49	104	30	280	28
Negative tone	32	5	56	16	313	31
No tone	312	46	192	55	410	41
Net tone	+0.44		+0.14		-0.03	
Total headlines	673		352		1003	

Table 6. Tone, *The New York Times* headlines, 1985–2014.

Tone	Jews		Catholics		Muslims	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Positive	213	47	51	28	116	23
Negative	16	4	13	7	150	30
No tone	222	49	121	65	231	46
Net tone	+0.44		+0.21		-0.07	
Total headlines	451		185		497	

Table 7. Tone, *The Guardian* headlines, 1985–2014.

Tone	Jews		Catholics		Muslims	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Positive tone	116	52	53	32	164	32
Negative tone	16	7	43	26	163	32
No tone	90	41	71	43	179	35
Net tone	+0.45		+0.06		0	
Total headlines	222		167		506	

**Figure 1.** Status hierarchy based on net tone of headlines.

In addition to breaking down our findings by country, we also examine changes across time. This allows us to retrospectively examine longer term trends in ways not possible in surveys and not typical in media analyses. We analyze our data by 5-year periods to see whether the net tone associated with each group is highly volatile or relatively stable. This allows us to gauge whether signal events within a particular country – such as 9/11 and the ensuing war on terror; or the 7 July 2005 transportation bombings in London – have a lasting effect on the tone of coverage. As shown in Figure 2, portrayals of Muslims, Jews, and Catholics in *The New York Times* are consistent across time, which indicates that individual events have little long-term impact. Jews are the most positively portrayed group in all time periods. The net tone of headlines about Catholics decreased while that of Muslims increased, but the changes between the first and last time periods for each group are statistically insignificant.¹⁴ Thus, Catholics consistently occupy the middle position in *The New York Times*, while Muslims consistently remain at the bottom.

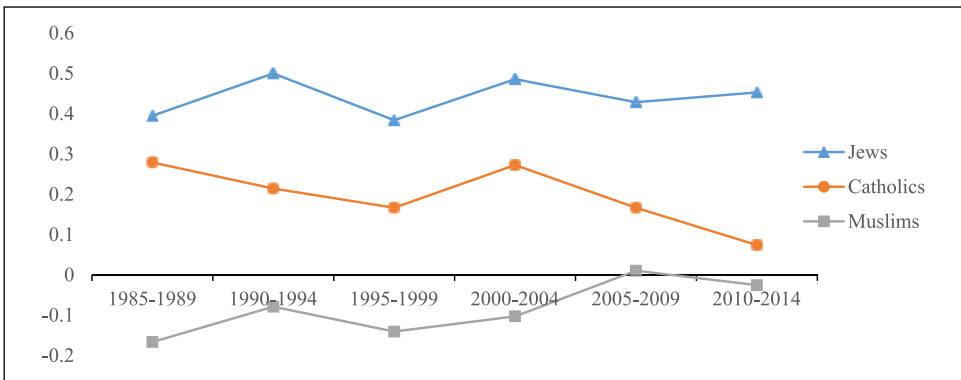


Figure 2. Net tone of *The New York Times* headlines about Jews, Catholics, and Muslims, 1985–2014.

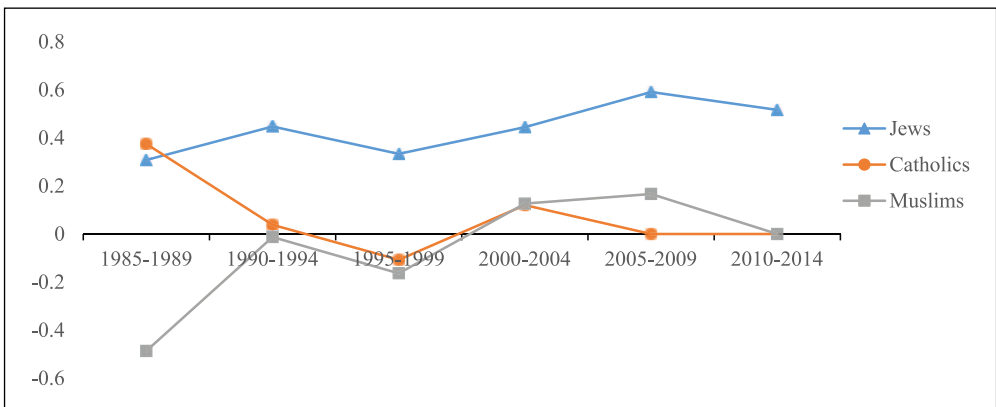


Figure 3. Net tone of *The Guardian* headlines about Jews, Catholics, and Muslims, 1985–2014.

The Guardian, on the other hand, presents a different story. As shown in Figure 3, Jews are associated with a positive tone across all periods, just as in *The New York Times*. However, the position of Muslims and Catholics evolved over time. In the 1985–1989 period, headlines about Catholics in *The Guardian* had a net tone of +0.38, while those about Muslims had a net tone of

-0.49. In the following 5-year period, the net tone of Catholic headlines dropped to +0.04, while that of Muslim headlines rose to -0.01. Since that time, the position of both groups has been relatively similar, meaning that over the 30 years of this study, the net tone of headlines about Muslims rose while that of Catholics declined.

The patterns in these newspapers suggest that hierarchies among these three groups are stable and similar across time and country, but not perfectly so. The substantial continuity suggests that any particular historical event (such as a dramatic terrorist attack like 9/11) does not have a strong impact on net tone over the long term. The findings raise two further questions. First, given that existing surveys suggest that Jews and Catholics are similarly ranked groups in the United States and Britain, what accounts for the reliably more positive net tone of newspaper headlines about Jews? Second, given that existing studies suggest that Muslims are consistently lowest on status hierarchies, what accounts for the convergence between the net tone of headlines about Muslims and Catholics in Britain?

Unlike survey data, media data allow us to more closely examine the factors that underpin the relative positivity or negativity associated with each key group over time. We draw on our headline corpus to explore whether the net tone is related to the presence of particular topics, or due to the prevalence of domestic versus foreign stories about each group.

Positive net tone of headlines about Jews

The consistently positive net tone of Jewish headlines is primarily a function of the presence of identifiable topics of coverage. In both *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*, approximately a quarter of all positive headlines were about Jewish art and culture.¹⁵ These included examples such as 'Book Awards Given For Jewish Themes' (*The New York Times*, 1986) or 'Italy: Jewish Families Prepare for Hanukkah in Rome' (*The Guardian*, 1995). An even greater proportion of positive headlines revolved around anti-Semitism, past and present. As much as 23 percent of the positive headlines in *The New York Times* and 29 percent in *The Guardian* covered Jews as victims in contemporary incidents, with headlines such as 'Venezuela: Attack On Jewish Center' (*The New York Times*, 2009). Another 12 and 29 percent of positive headlines in each paper made references to the Holocaust, World War II, or Nazi Germany, such as 'Jews Honour Holocaust Victims' (*The Guardian*, 1998). Taken together, topics of Jewish art and culture and anti-Semitism account for 61 percent of the positive headlines in *The New York Times* and 72 percent of those in *The Guardian*. While the net tone was thus not noticeably affected by any individual event, events that were related to these identifiable topics garnered significant attention in each newspaper.

The overall positive net tone of headlines about Jews is also a function of a comparative dearth of negative headlines. Negative headlines about Jews in our dataset primarily reference the Arab-Israeli conflict.¹⁶ Fully 44 percent of all negative headlines in *The New York Times* and 69 percent of those in *The Guardian* concern Israel, Palestine, or Arab-Jewish relations in the Middle East. Examples include 'Jewish Settlement Rows Prompt Worldwide Anger' (*The Guardian*, 1996) or 'Militant Jews Start Melees by Marching in Hebron' (*The New York Times*, 1998). Still, overall only 5 percent of all headlines about Jews had a negative tone, compared to the negative tone found in 16 percent of headlines about Catholics and 31 percent of those about Muslims.

In part because coverage of Jews is strongly positive overall, foreign versus domestic coverage does not have a clear-cut effect on net tone. Almost half of all stories (47 percent) in *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* were about Jews in foreign settings, while only 15 percent were located uniquely within each newspaper's own country.¹⁷ Typically, a high proportion of foreign stories would indicate a more negative overall net tone. Yet, many of the headlines in our data elicited sympathy because they referred to anti-Semitic acts abroad or to the Holocaust or Nazi Germany,

which accounts for their contribution to a positive net tone. Another way to examine the influence of foreign versus domestic settings involves comparing the percentage of positive and negative headlines associated with domestic and foreign settings. This analysis shows only a small distinction. Domestic headlines account for 18 percent of all positive headlines about Jews, while foreign headlines make up 53 percent of positive headlines. Domestic stories are responsible for 9 percent of all negative headlines, while foreign headlines account for 56 percent of all negative ones. Overall, therefore, there is no strong evidence that domestic coverage was significantly more positive than foreign coverage, suggesting that this factor played a limited role in shaping the net tone of Jewish headlines in *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*.

On the whole, the consistently high positive net tone of headlines about Jews across both countries is a function of a high number of positive headlines and a low number of negative headlines. The focus on Jewish art and culture and anti-Semitic acts (both contemporary and historical) account for the majority of the positive tone of coverage, while an emphasis on foreign coverage was not as strongly associated with negativity as it has been in other studies.

Muslim and Catholic net tone in The Guardian

Unlike in *The New York Times*, which mirrors findings about status hierarchies in survey research, *The Guardian* headlines are relatively more positive about Muslims and relatively more negative about Catholics, to the point where the net tone of the two groups is statistically indistinguishable. What factors account for this pattern? To begin to address this question, it is important to note that the upward shift in net tone of Muslims in Great Britain over time is due to a rise in positive headlines after the 1985–1989 period, as shown in Table 8. In 1985–1989, there were only three positive *The Guardian* headlines about Muslims and 21 negative headlines. In 1990–1994, the number of positive headlines about Muslims increased eightfold to 24, whereas the number of negative headlines only rose marginally to 25. Between 2000 and 2014, positive headlines equaled or surpassed negative headlines in each 5-year period, peaking at 48 in the 2010–2014 period.

Table 8. Tone, *The Guardian* headlines, 5-year periods, 1985–2014.

Time period	Muslims			Catholics		
	Positive	Negative	Total	Positive	Negative	Total
1985–1989	3	21	37	10	1	24
1990–1994	24	25	80	7	6	26
1995–1999	15	24	55	8	11	28
2000–2004	30	20	79	9	6	25
2005–2009	44	25	114	8	8	28
2010–2014	48	48	141	11	11	36
Total	164	163	506	53	43	167

Positively toned headlines about Muslims in *The Guardian* center around two topics, each of which parallels findings for headlines about Jews. References to Islamic art and culture were present in 14 percent of all positive headlines, and anti-Islamic sentiments and anti-Muslim acts were discernible in 38 percent of all positive headlines about Muslims. While art and culture references were not as common for Muslims as for Jews, *The Guardian* headlines included examples such as ‘Decorative Themes in Islamic Architecture’ (1995) and ‘Muslim Family to Appear in Coronation Street for First Time’ (2014). There was no parallel in Muslim headlines to a single historical event

such as the Holocaust, yet *The Guardian* frequently portrayed Muslims as targets of Islamophobia, with headlines like ‘China’s Muslims Face Crackdown’ (1990) and ‘Anti Muslim Bias “On the Rise”’ (2004). Finally, there was also a significant number of positive headlines related to the topic of Islamic extremism and Muslim violence. This topic was by far the most common in our Muslim data overall, represented in 42 percent of all *The Guardian* headlines. As expected, it was overwhelmingly associated with a negative tone. Yet, 21 percent of all positive headlines also related to this topic. These were primarily headlines that addressed efforts by Muslims to counter extremism and violence, such as ‘Muslims Flock to “Anti-Terror” Summer Camp: Hundreds Attend Three-Day Event to Learn how to Fight Arguments of Extremists’ (2010).

The prevalence of positive headlines was also clearly associated with coverage of domestic (as opposed to foreign) Muslims. Across all time periods, domestic coverage accounts for 28 percent of all positive headlines about Muslims, even if foreign headlines also constitute 38 percent of positive headlines. Meanwhile, domestic coverage was only present in 6 percent of negative headlines overall, while foreign headlines constituted a striking 67 percent of all negative ones. Moreover, the prevalence of positive domestic headlines increased over time. Beginning in the 2000–2004 period, headlines about British Muslims accounted for over 36 percent of positive headlines but less than 4 percent of negative headlines. Positive stories included headlines such as ‘Muslim Britain: Culture of Charity’ (2002) and ‘The Reaction to the Woolwich Murder Denies British Muslims a Political Voice’ (2013). These figures suggest that there is a greater association between domestic headlines and positivity, and between foreign headlines and negativity. They further support the proposition that increasing coverage of British as opposed to foreign Muslims over time helps account for the more positive portrayal of Muslims in *The Guardian*.

While the net tone of *Guardian* headlines about Muslims became more positive after 1985–1989, the net tone of headlines about Catholics became more negative. This downward shift is explained by a rise in negative headlines after the first time period. These headlines were primarily about two topics: Church pedophilia scandals, and Catholic stances on contemporary social issues. Specifically, Church scandals account for 30 percent of the total negative headlines from 1990 to 2014, with headlines such as ‘Catholic Bishops “Knew of 20 Sex Abuse Allegations by Priests”’ (2013). Catholic views on social issues like same-sex marriage, abortion, and contraceptives constitute 28 percent of negative headlines and include headlines like ‘Scots Cardinal Attacks Abortion “Massacres”: Catholic Leader Demands NHS Block on Terminations’ (2007) and ‘Christmas Messages: Archbishop Attacks Cameron’s Plans for Same-Sex Marriage... Catholic Cleric’s Comments Rejected by Gay Groups’ (2012).

Domestic and foreign coverage also plays a clear role in the net tone of headlines about Catholics. Domestic stories account for 58 percent of all positive headlines about Catholics, while foreign stories constitute only 25 percent of positively toned headlines. Conversely, domestic stories are only 23 percent of all negative headlines, whereas foreign stories account for 42 percent of negative headlines. There is thus a strong association between the domestic setting of headlines and their positivity, and between the foreign setting and negativity. This finding parallels the one for Muslims in *The Guardian*.

Conclusion and discussion

This article applies media analysis to the study of social hierarchies by focusing on portrayals of Muslims, Jews, and Catholics in headlines of two major newspapers in the United States and Great Britain spanning the 30-year period from 1985 to 2014. In aggregate, our data show that media portrayals of groups are relatively stable over the span of decades rather than highly sensitive to the impact of events at any given point in time. Our findings are broadly consistent with those of

prevailing scholarship on hierarchies among these groups. In keeping with the findings of surveys, Muslims are associated with more negativity than Catholics or Jews. At the same time, our data also reveal information that nuances what traditional surveys show. For example, Jews are portrayed consistently more positively than Catholics in our analysis; in addition, while headlines about Catholics are more positive than those about Muslims in *The New York Times*, the tone of headlines about the two groups is indistinguishable in *The Guardian*.

The methods and the findings introduced here contribute substantially to the research agenda of scholars concerned with identifying, tracking, and understanding status hierarchies. Drawing on media data allows researchers to probe retrospectively and continuously the depiction of a wide variety of groups. Scholars can estimate short-term fluctuations based on events, discern long-term patterns that may endure over decades, and compare groups across country. Moreover, media analyses provide an opportunity not only to gauge relative standing but also to examine the discursive topics most closely associated with a particular group. These advantages allow researchers to extend our understanding of status hierarchies beyond what can be known through surveys alone.

Notwithstanding these strengths, there are also limitations of media studies of hierarchies and of this study in particular that are important to acknowledge and to address through future research. For example, we selected two left-leaning newspapers rather than a representative sample of all headlines in each country. We did so based on the logic that our two newspapers were among the least likely to demonstrate a clear hierarchy among our three groups. Future research can investigate whether the patterns we discern hold across a wider variety of media outlets in each country, as well as in other countries.¹⁸ This may be done either through methods of human coding or through computer-assisted coding, the latter of which has distinct advantages as researchers scale up the amount of text they analyze.

In addition, it will be important to explore the causes of the different outcomes across countries. Our research design does not allow us to draw firm conclusions about our cases, but two types of variables stand out as particularly worthy of investigation in comparative studies. First, demographic differences may help account for cross-national disparities. As noted above, Muslims make up approximately 6 percent of the British population but less than 1 percent of the American population. The proportionally larger population of Muslims provides British newspapers expanded opportunities for coverage, which could explain why there are more headlines about domestic Muslims in Great Britain than in the United States. Market incentives may also influence the tone of coverage. According to Shindler (2007), for example, the '*Guardian* was a natural attraction and a sympathetic ear for many Muslim readers'; this suggests that the newspaper may focus on Muslim issues at least in part because of its consumer base (p. 167). On the other hand, Catholics are the larger group in the United States, making up just under 21 percent of the population compared to only 9 percent of the British population. *The New York Times*, with a larger Catholic readership, may be less inclined than *The Guardian* to publish articles that portray Catholics in a negative light.

At a more theoretical level, future research may draw on media analysis to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship among distinct measures of status hierarchies within societies. Our study shows that the hierarchies expressed in the media are broadly similar to those revealed in surveys. This supports the perspective that media coverage and public opinion are mutually constitutive of one another. Yet the parallels across these two domains are not perfect. In particular, the more positive net tone about Jews in the media is partly a function of coverage of topics such as anti-Semitic acts. Such incidents may constitute a different type of measure of status hierarchies, as a group that is frequently victimized may be stigmatized within society. However, bias incidents may engender sympathetic media coverage, suggesting an inverse relationship across two measures of status hierarchies. Moreover, sympathetic reporting about hate crimes may, in turn, affect

public opinion, which may affect the likelihood of further hate crimes. In sum, it is not possible simply to aggregate different measures of status hierarchies within societies into a straightforward index of social standing. Instead, it is more productive for scholars to explore the varying and multifaceted causal relationships among such measures.

The sources of status hierarchies, their interactions across different domains, and their effects are complex. Yet, group standing has a meaningful impact on individuals' daily interactions, their life chances, and their exposure to discrimination or violence. Entrenched hierarchies can reinforce implicit biases that operate at a subconscious level, even for those who explicitly reject a worldview that ranks some groups above others. Given that the media play a key role in representing identity groups in ways that affect social constructions, public attitudes, policy preferences, and policy outcomes (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2009; Chong and Druckman, 2007; Schneider and Ingram, 1993), it is essential to develop a better understanding of how the media help to establish and to reinforce status hierarchies, how these hierarchies manifest themselves across a variety of groups and geographic locations, and why they change over time.

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Notes

1. Bogardus repeated his surveys approximately every 10 years between the 1920s and the 1960s (Parrillo and Donoghue, 2005). They were also periodically replicated since then with some adaptations. However, this process cannot identify shifts within 10-year periods, and recent changes to the observed categories limit the long-term comparability of these surveys.
2. Technically, respondents consistently rated their own group most highly; the hierarchy emerges when respondents rate groups other than their own.
3. The American Faith Matters surveys can be accessed at the Association of Religion Data Archives at www.thearda.com. The 2010 British Social Attitudes feeling thermometer data can be accessed at the UK Data Service at discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk. The data on the 2015 ICM Unlimited/Channel 4 feeling thermometer can be accessed at www.icmunlimited.com.
4. Studies that exist tend to focus on a single event, in particular sexual abuse in the Catholic Church (Donnelly and Inglis, 2010; Mancini and Shields, 2014).
5. Data on the religious population in the United States are available from the Pew Research Center's (2014) Religion and Public Life Report at http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/pr_15-05-12_rls-00/, accessed 5 January 2018. Data on the Jewish and Muslim population of the United Kingdom are available from the Pew Research Center, at <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-jew/> and <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/29/5-facts-about-the-muslim-population-in-europe/>, accessed 5 January 2018. Data on Catholics are available in Bullivant (2017: 7).
6. The codebook is available upon request.
7. A retrospective review of our entire corpus showed the Krippendorff alpha score for intercoder reliability for the 'tone' variable was 0.50 prior to the reconciliation process. This is lower than the 0.67 threshold recommended for reliability of single-coding of entries (Krippendorff, 2004) and explains why we relied exclusively on double-coding of all headlines followed by a team-based reconciling method, which resulted in 100 percent agreement among all coders regarding the final codes for each headline.
8. We specifically examined coverage of events such as 9/11 and the London transportation bombings, but they had no systematic effect on our long-term data. Some topics, such as the Holocaust, the Catholic Church pedophilia scandal, or terrorism and extremism encompass time-delimited events; however, we conceptualize these as topic categories given that they also include a substantial number of headlines that are unrelated to specific events.
9. The codebook is available upon request.

10. ($\chi^2=33.5899, p=0.000$): chi-square test of positive, negative, and no tone headlines comparing Muslims and Catholics in the aggregate; ($\chi^2=57.1067, p=0.000$): chi-square test of positive, negative, and no tone headlines comparing Catholics and Jews in the aggregate.
11. ($\chi^2=22.0687, p=0.000$): chi-square test of positive, negative, and no tone headlines comparing Jews and Catholics in *The New York Times*; ($\chi^2=40.5817, p=0.000$): chi-square test of positive, negative, and no tone headlines comparing Catholics and Muslims in *The New York Times*.
12. ($\chi^2=30.9252, p=0.000$): chi-square test of positive, negative, and no tone headlines comparing Jews and Catholics in *The Guardian*; ($\chi^2=56.1492, p=0.000$): chi-square test of positive, negative, and no tone headlines comparing Jews and Muslims in *The Guardian*.
13. ($\chi^2=3.4551, p=0.177$): chi-square test of positive, negative, and no tone headlines comparing Muslims and Catholics in *The Guardian*.
14. ($\chi^2=2.7808, p=0.249$): chi-square test of positive, negative, and no tone headlines comparing the first and last time periods for Muslims in *The New York Times* ($\chi^2=2.3184, p=0.314$): chi-square test of positive, negative, and no tone headlines comparing the first and last time periods for Catholics in *The New York Times*. In addition, the difference between headlines about Catholics and Muslims is not statistically significant in the last time period at the $p<0.05$ level, but it is at $p<0.10$ level ($\chi^2=5.3788, p=0.068$).
15. A total of 26 percent of positive headlines in *The New York Times* and 22 percent in *The Guardian* are related to this topic.
16. Headlines that mention Jews as part of the Arab-Israeli conflict constitute 18 of 32 negative headlines about Jews, or 56 percent of all negative headlines.
17. Approximately 2 percent of headlines referenced both foreign and domestic settings; the rest contained no clear geographic references.
18. Prior research based on a wider number of British newspapers suggests this is the case (Bleich et al., 2015: 955–957).

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