

The Small World on the Front Page

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My interest in international relations mixed with my passion for journalism encourages me to look into covering international politics. The *New York Times* is a well-known publication with a huge circulation and a good reputation. I wanted to investigate the amount and type of world coverage makes its way to the front page of this publication. From April 24 to May 23, 2011, I studied the front page of The *New York Times*.

My two research questions focused on how many international stories are on the front page and of those, what types of stories are thought to be important enough to go on the front page. I believe that this will show what one of the largest newspaper in the U.S. considers as newsworthy to the general public. As the world becomes more globalized, economically and socially, it will be even more important to understand what is going on outside of your own country. This study will also show if the American public is informed about what is going on around the globe that may not affect them but their fellow man. To differentiate between stories that focus on the U.S. or outside of it, I looked at the main ideas. If most of the story came from U.S. sources and/or had an angle towards how an event will focus on the U.S., I did not count it as an international story. Stories about war, such as the war in Iraq, that focus on the United States and their actions will not count as an international story.

My 15 categories for the U.S. and international stories were the same. Natural disasters, war, trade, oil, economics, politics, crime, social, science, education, business, medical, obituary, environment and sports were all categories that I found on the front page.

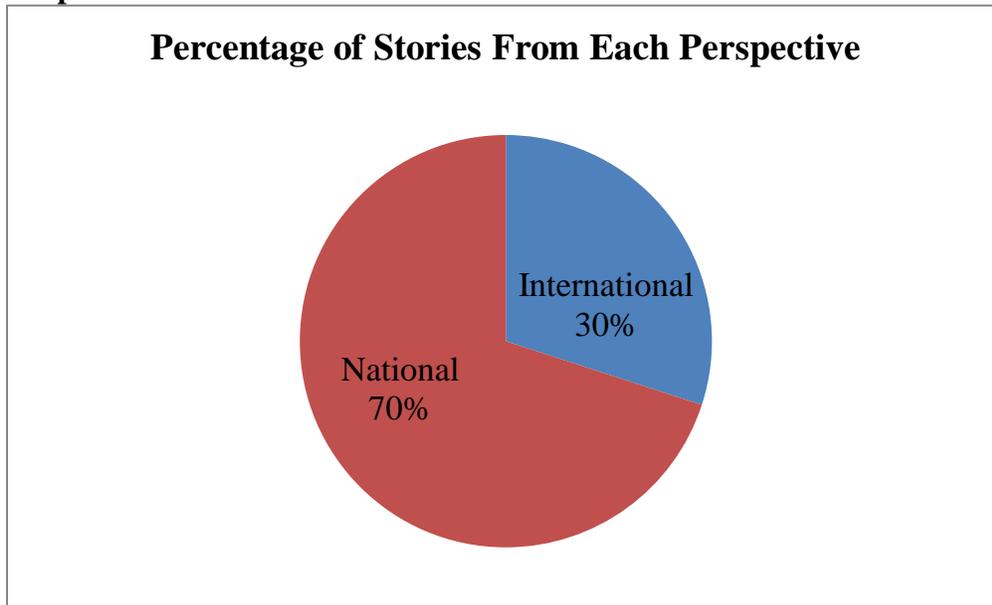
I did not create a separate category for the Middle Eastern uprising because I felt that they could be placed in the war or politics categories. If the story concerning the uprising focused on violence, whether from protestors burning down buildings or police attempting to crush the revolt, I would categorize this as war. When people in their own country are hurting

their fellow citizens, I believe that this counts as civil war. If the story was focused upon talks between protestors or peaceful protests that did not end in bloodshed, this was categorized as part of politics. A peaceful protest and discussions between leaders and their people are basics of politics and therefore should be counted under this category.

The social category included stories that were more like features, were a focus on a societal change or had to do with the entertainment industry without a focus on business. Stories that I felt could be counted in this category include coverage leading up the royal wedding, a story on how women's clothes sizes have changed throughout history and gender roles in society.

The "oil" category was not often found during my study. The single story that focused on oil was printed on May 13 and explained how international economists fear that the crisis in Libya could spread further to oil rich states. This would push the price of oil up even further and affect the whole world. This was surprising to me as I thought that this issue would be on everyone's mind as prices go up at the pump.

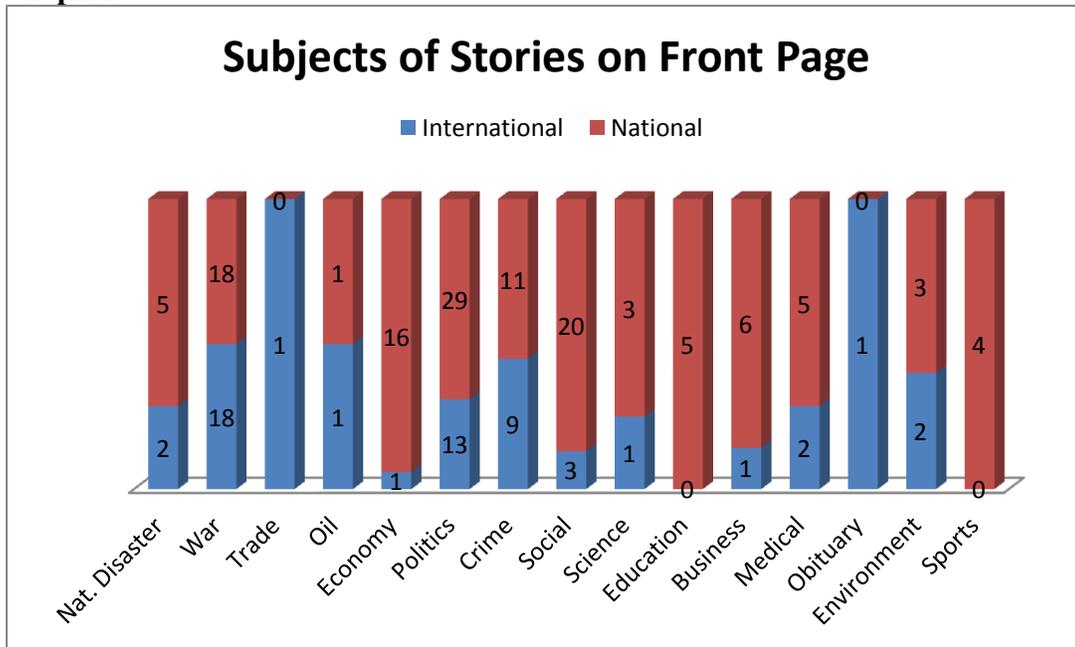
I found that the amount of front page coverage of international issues is less than half of that concerning the U.S. (graph 1, page 3). Although it is understood that *The New York Times* is an American-based publication, the U.S. bias on issues concerning the international is not keeping up with the changing world. The Internet allows people from all over the globe to interact. Out of 180 stories total, only 54 focused on international issues. The 126 stories focused on the U.S. were also much more prevalent on the page.

Graph 1

Out of 180 stories printed on the front page from April 24 to May 23 only 54 were international stories while 126 were based on the U.S. This shows a huge focus on national stories rather than international perspectives, even on issues that affect other countries such as war and economic issues.

The majority of stories concerning international issues were war which was 33 % of the total of international coverage (graph 2, page 4). May 14 was the only day that there were more international stories than U.S. Out of seven stories on this day, four had to do with issues outside of the United States. These stories included a story on how the international community is raising awareness of terrorists, Ceasar Chavez's children attempting to enter politics, parakeets let loose in London and insiders look at the state of the Libyan army. Two of these stories were focused on war. This encourages a negative outlook on countries outside of the U.S. Especially those in the Middle East. If the only news that is arriving in the U.S. is that of war, the people involved in these uprisings can be made to look barbaric and cruel, which could lead to further racist actions against those of Middle Eastern decent.

Graph 2



National news is not only covered more, but has more stories involving political aspects and the economy. Rather than focus on writing stories on the global recession or inter-state wars from a global perspective, the *New York Times* writes about issues using limited viewpoints.

The war category was also dominant for the U.S. and was also 18 stories total. However, all of these stories were focused on American goals and victories. The Osama Bin Laden coverage may have also skewed these numbers. On May 2, three of the four stories on the front page concerned the United States victory in killing the terrorist leader. The fourth story was an obituary with a focus on Osama Bin Laden’s life as an international figure. On May 3, all four of the front page stories focused on Bin Laden. The stories of U.S. war are not those of struggle but often focus on strategy and victories.

Ethical issues with the *New York Times* and its international coverage include justice, media credibility confidentiality, the right to know and economic concerns. The lack of perspectives on war coverage does not uncover what the U.S. could be doing wrong. The wars in the Middle East have not been popular and it is up to the media to find out what the truth is behind us invading any other country. Are we in Libya because we want to be good global

citizens or is it perhaps because they are the largest producer of oil for our European allies? The news coverage so far has failed to bring up that point, especially in the last month.

This lack of perspective and use of confidential sources can hurt the media's credibility. Americans would be more interested in global issues if the newspaper did a complete job of tying the U.S. to other countries without approaching it completely from an angle listing all the positive aspects of this country. It is also important to avoid using anonymous sources in stories concerning war that a reporter did not witness first hand. Coverage of Osama Bin Laden's death is a perfect example of how this can happen. Now that the truth about the incident is coming out, the public has even less faith in this publication. *The New York Times* has to recover from Judith Miller's false coverage of the so-called weapons of mass destruction and should not be relying so heavily on anonymous government officials.

People do have a right to know any information that concerns the American military. However, it is important to balance this need with a focus on the truth. Without reporting on items that are sure to be true, the publication only provides false information and can force people to look elsewhere to news. Perhaps even a source that does not admit when there is a mistake made, which could be costly to American intelligence.

The global recession has proven how interdependent all countries are on one another. This makes it even more important to cover issues of trade and the economy from an international perspective. *The New York Times* failed to do this. Only 1 story out of a total of 17 economic stories was focused on an international issue. The story concerned China's harsh limits on the amount of jasmine that can be exported due to its cracking down on the world in response to Egypt's Jasmine Revolution. In fear of an uprising, China is hurting one of its largest exports.

This was not a positive story on another country and supports the lack of focus on the global economy.

The ethical approach of teleology focuses on the greatest good for the greatest amount of people. I do not feel that the *New York Times* is accomplishing this. By focusing on war issues from a perspective embedded from the United State's view does a disservice to the rest of the world. By painting the outside world in a negative light by focusing only on war stories, this does not encourage peace. By relying on stereotypes and negative stories, the most widely read newspaper in America is creating a culture of hatred and fear. This is not a positive impact to anyone in the world, which is the greatest amount of people that can be impacted by anything.

Deontology is a focus on telling the truth. It seems that the *New York Times* is more focused on getting the story first than getting the facts correct. The coverage of Osama Bin Laden is a perfect example of this. The initial stories covering the killing of the terrorist leader were full of anonymous sources and misrepresentations. Instead of questioning the validity of these sources or searching for stories from Middle Eastern newspapers, the *New York Times* gladly ate up the lies concerning the killing. Osama Bin Laden was not armed nor did he use one of his wives as a shield, though these were reported as fact. Printing of details that could easily not be fact would not be an issue that a deontologist would take lightly.

The Golden Mean was also not used by *The Times* concerning international and U.S. news. A publication that would successfully use this ideology would have an equal number of U.S. and world news on the front page. Considering that there was only one day when there were more international stories and no days that had an equal number of both, this shows a lack of balance. Without this balance, a bias can be conceived, especially with war stories. Instead of

discussing the world impact of war, this publication focuses on the U.S. This can distort the opinion of readers who may feel that the wars are successful although may be disastrous.

The veil of ignorance was also not used. The focus on power and stereotypes are the biggest missteps of *The Times*. By focusing on U.S. views and the violent situations in certain parts of the world, this newspaper is fostering a biased America. There were no stories not on war or political upheaval for Middle Eastern countries. Stories that can be seen as positive representations, such as the U.K's royal wedding or France's increased security borders, presented a European bias. These countries can be seen as more safe, which could create a stereotype that could outlast the revolutions of turbulent states.

Guy Golan also studied the front page of the *New York Times*. His findings support my findings of the lack of a global perspective on page one. He believes that this lack of focus on international stories is based on a focus on rich and powerful nations. Golan looked at the front pages of 365 issues of the *New York Times* and found that the international content was limited. "These results clearly indicate that all three network television news programs along with the *New York Times* clearly identify a limited number of nations as more newsworthy than all other nations in the world combined. These results do not provide any explanations to what it is about the 15 nations that made them the most newsworthy" (Golan 2006). The *New York Times* had only 53% of international news on the front page. The lack of coverage of many nations and issues plus the focus on "elite countries" such as Russia, England and China show a concrete bias in the publication.

The newspaper is not following several bullets in the "Seek Truth and Report It" section of the Society of Professional Journalists code of ethics. The newspaper has a habit of relying on anonymous sources, especially for stories concerning the government. "The public is entitled to

as much information as possible on sources' reliability" (SPJ Code) and *The Times* relies heavily on sources such as these for war stories. Another aspect of this section of the code concerns diversity. It is important to report with an eye to how diverse the population is. By placing stories that are U.S. based on the front, *The Times* is failing to provide and encourage a diverse outlook.

This audit was a very disheartening one for me. I have always dreamed that it would be wonderful to work for *The New York Times* but now don't have any interest. The obvious lack of focus on international issues on the front page and bias towards negative portrayals of certain areas of the world has made me look at the publication with far more scrutiny. I am now noticing how many corrections are made and how little variety the coverage is in regards to war. The reliance on the government for information is not a positive aspect to the future of journalism. Although expensive, it is important to find a way to get international news focused on real issues that impact the world, not just the U.S. or those that wish to learn about violence.

Without a reliable source of information on issues outside the United States, it will become more difficult to make choices on decisions that could impact the whole world. The basis of democracy relies on a free press to educate the public. With a mass of citizens unable to see the whole picture when it comes to economic or political items, the United States could lose its edge in the world market. This could be damaging as Americans will have to change the way they live, as they have done during the recession. Perhaps if people had understood how tied the banks were to the whole world there would have been calls for more regulation long ago. An educated country is a strong country and a solid newspaper is the only way to accomplish this.

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