Media Portrayals of Minorities Project

Report on Media Portrayals

2018 Newspaper Coverage of African Americans, Asian 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 minority groups. For more information, see *mediaandminorities.org*.

Table of Contents

Summary of 2018 Findings

In this Report, we examine 2018 coverage of five significant American racial, ethnic, or religious groups: African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, Jews, and Muslims. Latinos and African Americans are the largest of these groups, constituting approximately 16% and 13% of the US population, respectively. Asian Americans are the next most numerous, at roughly 5%. Jews and Muslims make up much smaller proportions of the American population, at approximately 2% and 1%, respectively.

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 2018 compare to earlier years in terms of the amount and the tone of coverage? What themes are present in the reporting of all five groups, and which were distinctive to each in 2018?

In brief, our analyses show that coverage of Muslims stands out as being both the most frequent and the most negative by a wide margin. This is principally due to reporting on foreign conflict zones. Articles mentioning Asian Americans are also distinctive for their relative rarity and for their association with more positivity than any other group, although by a small margin. Across our five groups, politics and education tend to be the most prevalent themes of coverage, culture is associated with the most positivity, and law and order is most closely linked to negativity.

This report reveals patterns of coverage that are embedded in the American media landscape. Our aim is to provide readers with a better understanding of articles related to minorities, 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.
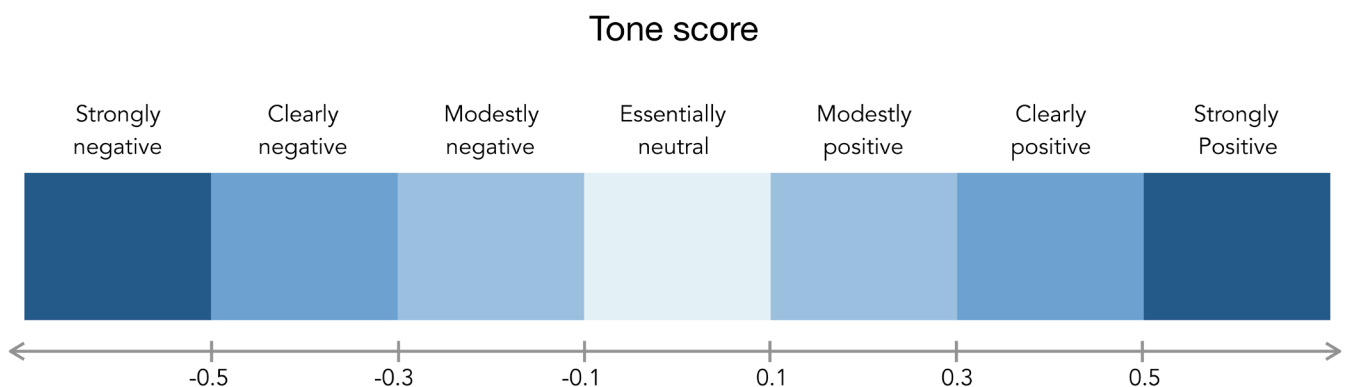
How We Do Our Research

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, Latinos, Jews, and Muslims in *The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal,* and *USA Today*, the four American newspapers widely read beyond their local or regional homes. All told, there were 26,626 articles about these five groups published in 2018. Since most of these articles touch on a group just once or twice, we also take a closer look at articles that contain at least three mentions of the root words, as these are more likely to be articles "about" each group.

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 2018 at *mediaandminorities.org/reports*.

Topic modeling identifies clusters of words found across multiple articles. The results help reveal distinct and recurring themes of coverage. This process allows us to distinguish five 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. 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 2018, such as *immigration* for Latinos or *anti-Semitism* 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 *education* tend to be positive and that 51% of Muslim articles and 78% of Asian American articles contain education 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

Tone score

Strongly negative	Clearly negative	Modestly negative	Essentially neutral	Modestly positive	Clearly positive	Strongly Positive

-0.5   -0.3   -0.1   0.1   0.3   0.5

of positive and negative words to determine the tone of each article. In essence, the more positive words an article contains, the more positive its score. In contrast, if the article has more negative words, it will have a more negative score. This allows us to get an overview of all articles about 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 to assess whether the presence of different themes tends to be associated with greater positivity or negativity. 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 online Appendix, because the themes 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 five 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 five groups. Our methods are designed to make it easy for readers to understand how newspapers cover racial, ethnic, and religious minorities relative to one another, and to understand what is distinctive about this coverage in 2018 compared to earlier years.
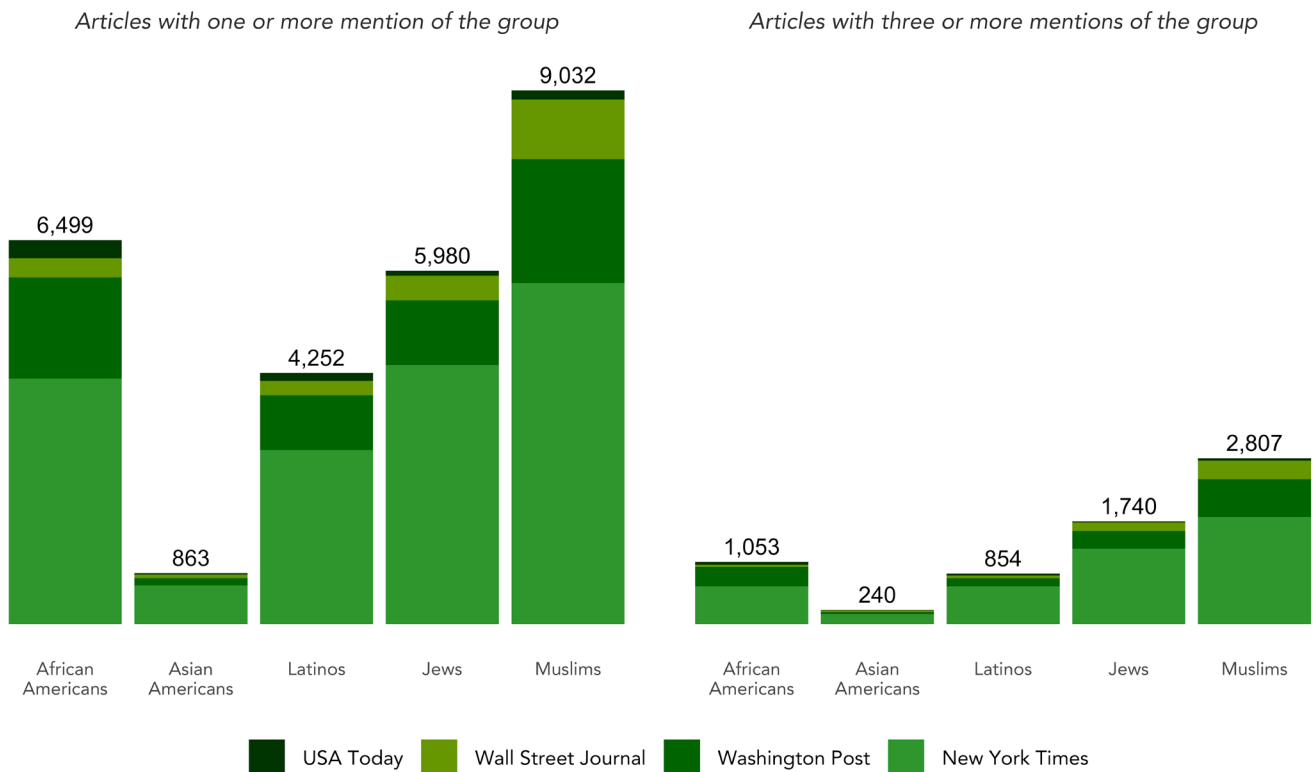
Comparative Overview

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 2018 in our four national newspapers range from a low of under 900 that mention Asian American to a high of over 9,000 referring to Muslims. The largest proportion of articles by far is drawn from *The New York Times*, which accounts for approximately two-thirds of the stories about each group. Over a fifth of our articles come from *The Washington Post*, while *Wall Street Journal* stories make up about eight percent and *USA Today* articles under three percent of all articles.

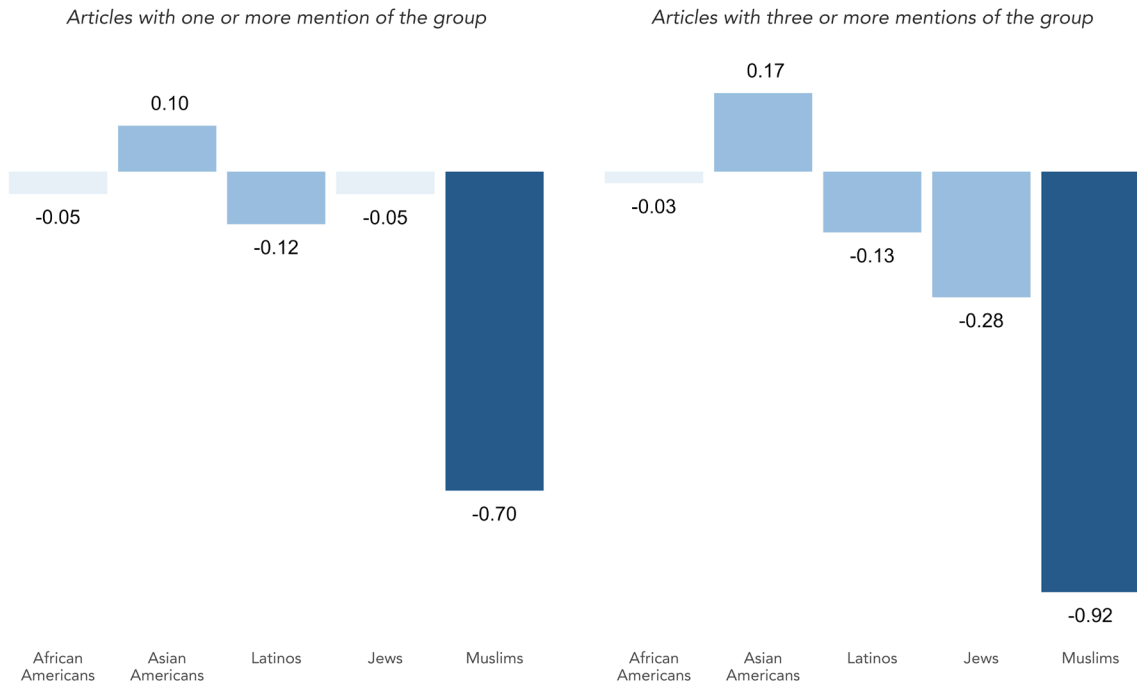What if we focus on the subset of articles that mention our groups three or more times? This sub-

set contains many fewer articles for each group: only 31% of Muslim articles, 29% of Jewish articles, 28% of Asian American articles, 20% of Latino articles, and 16% of African American articles contain three or more mentions of each group.

How positive or negative are articles associated with each group? The tone of the average article from 2018 mentioning African Americans and Jews is quite similar to that of the average article in the US print media. Articles touching on Latinos are modestly negative and those referring to Asian Americans are modestly positive overall. Muslim articles are notably different; the average tone of -0.70 is strongly negative, and far more negative than the average for any other group. Looking at articles containing three or

Article count by group and publication, 2018

Articles with one or more mention of the group

Articles with three or more mentions of the group

Average tone by group, 2018

Articles with one or more mention of the group

0.10

-0.05

-0.12

-0.05

-0.70

| African Americans | Asian Americans | Latinos | Jews | Muslims |

Articles with three or more mentions of the group

0.17

-0.03

-0.13

-0.28

-0.92

| African Americans | Asian Americans | Latinos | Jews | Muslims |

more mentions of each group, the results remain virtually the same for African Americans and Latinos, become a bit more positive for Asian Americans, and drop more substantially for Jews and Muslims. In other words, the more often an article mentions these groups, the (slightly) more positive they are for Asian Americans, and the more clearly negative they are for Jews and Muslims.

Exploring the thematic content of articles provides another way to compare coverage. We examine the percentage of articles associated with each of the five general themes: *culture, education, economics, politics,* and *law and order*. This is particularly telling because there are striking differences in the tone associated with these themes within our 2018 articles.

Themes and tone scores, 2018

Culture
+0.52

Education
+0.31

Economics
+0.08

Politics
-0.17

Law and order
-0.56
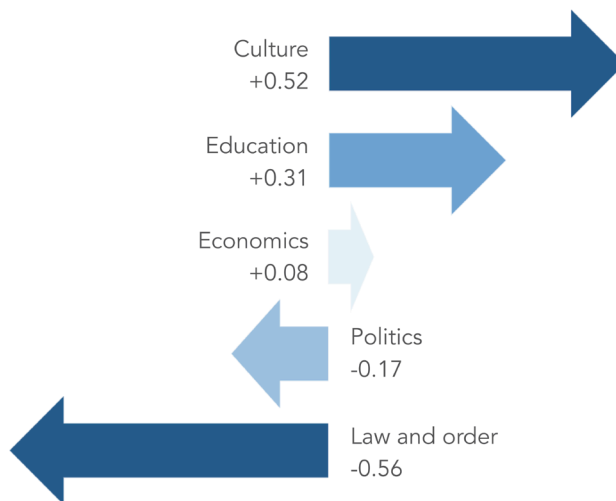
- *Culture* articles are over 0.5 more positive than articles that do not include any culture words.

- *Education* articles are just over 0.3 more positive than articles containing no education words.

- *Economics* articles are less than 0.1 more positive than non-economics articles.

- *Politics* articles are roughly 0.2 more negative than non-politics articles.

- *Law and order* articles are over 0.5 more negative than non-law and order articles.

The upshot is that *culture* articles tend toward strong positivity, and *law and order* articles toward strong negativity. The same is true to a lesser extent for *education* and *politics* 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. *Economics* articles have an essentially neutral association overall.

Muslims stand out immediately as having the lowest percentage of articles associated with *culture* and *education* and the highest percentages associated with *politics* as well as *law and order*. This provides initial insights into the striking negativity linked with Muslims. Among the other groups, Latino articles were less likely to contain *culture*

words and more likely to be associated with both *politics* and *law and order*. This relative imbalance may account for Latino articles having the second most negative tone among our groups. Finally, Asian American articles were tagged for *education* more often than any other group, and were second lowest for both *politics* and *law and order,* which may help us grasp their relative positivity. To develop a more comprehensive understanding of these relationships, however, we turn now to examining coverage of each of our five groups.

Percentage of articles that contain words from the five general themes

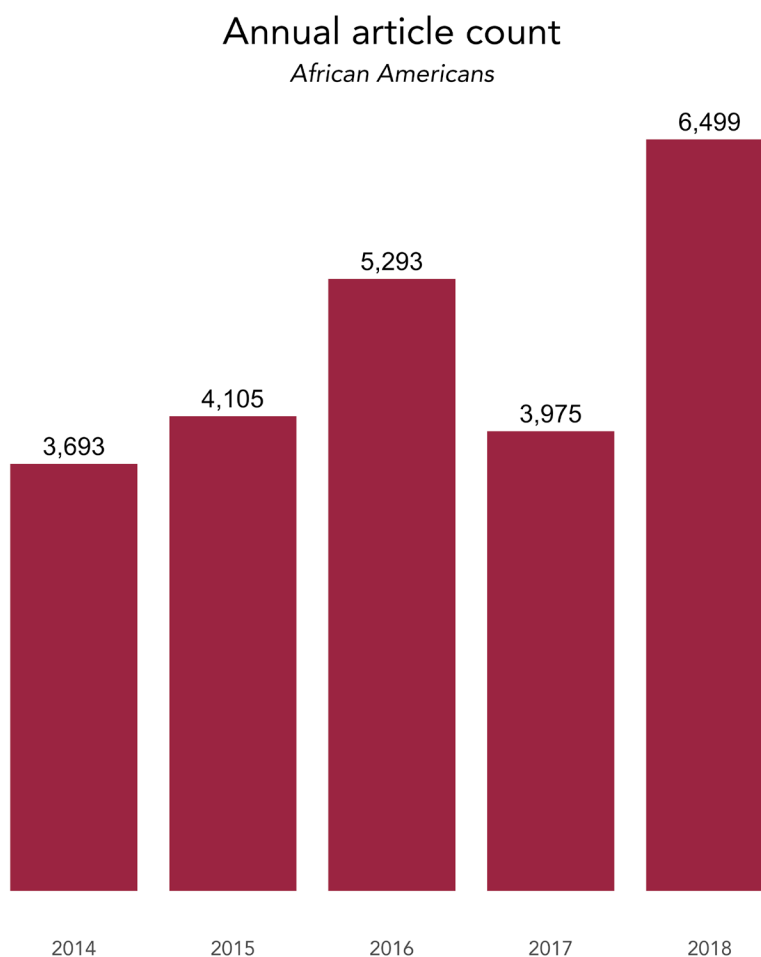|	African Americans	Asian Americans	Latinos	Jews	Muslims
Culture	45%	42%	31%	44%	21%
Education	71	78	73	68	51
Economics	62	63	69	51	60
Politics	71	69	75	65	84
Law and order	63	60	65	57	71

African Americans

Coverage of African Americans rose significantly in 2018, spotlighting not only ongoing social and institutional injustices, but also notable achievements. In September, a white police officer fatally shot an African American man in his own apartment, sparking protests against racial profiling and police brutality and ultimately resulting in the officer's termination from the Dallas Police Department. On the other hand, the resounding success of the Marvel blockbuster film *Black Panther* at the beginning of the year brought black culture to center stage. Such increased inclusion of African Americans was not only confined to the entertainment industry; in November, more African American women were elected to Congress than ever before. Other significant topics in the news included NFL athletes' protests against police brutality, and calls to remove Confederate monuments.

An analysis of media coverage of African Americans over the past five years shows that the number of articles mentioning African Americans was similar in three of those years at approximately 4,000 per year, with spikes in 2016 and especially in 2018. In 2018, there were 6,499 articles—over 60% more than in 2017.
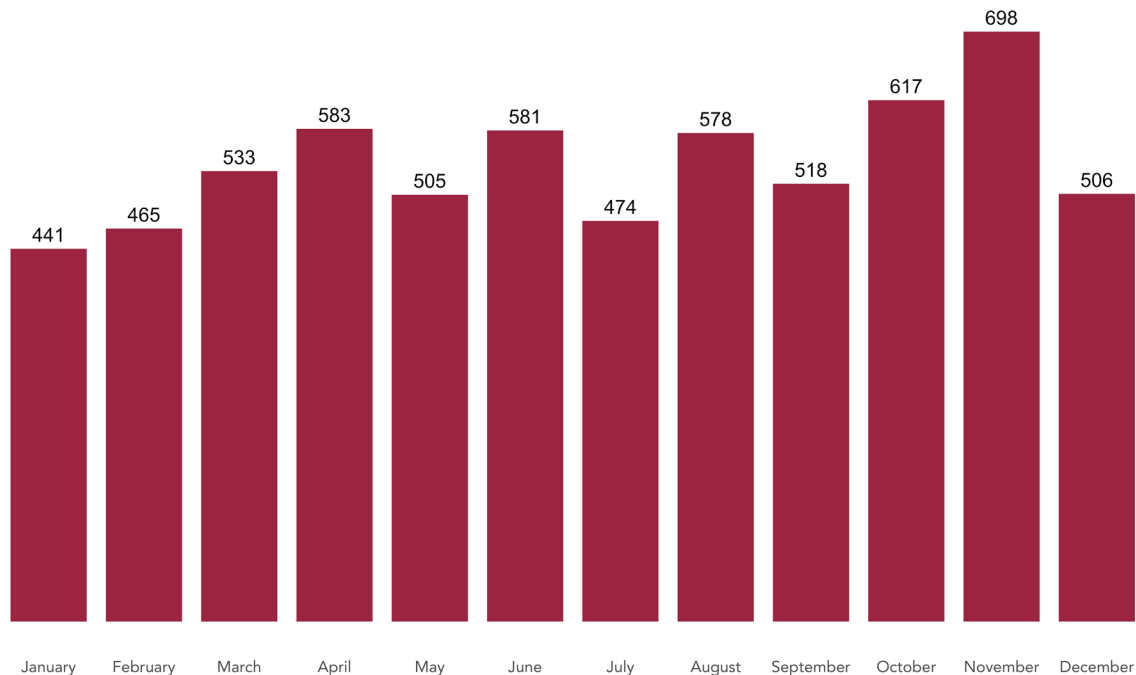
The jump in articles in 2018 is in large part related to the midterm elections. A closer analysis of 2018 shows that October and November contained the largest number of articles mentioning African Americans over the entire 60-month period between 2014 and 2018. November 2018 generated 698 articles mentioning African Americans, almost double the amount published during the previous midterm election in November 2014. It is also higher than the amount during the presidential election month of November 2016. The count then dropped by over 25% in December 2018.

In terms of tone, the average African American article from 2018 is essentially neutral at -0.05. Looking at month-by-month variations over the past five years, there has been a very slight downward trend. The month with the most negative tone across this time period was July 2016, marked by the consecutive deaths of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile. A review of articles within our dataset shows that this month also contained news relating to that year's congressional and presidential elections as well as to the general topics of politics and voting rights. In 2018, there were fewer strong fluctuations than in previous years, with February standing out for its

Annual article count
African Americans

Year	Count
2014	3,693
2015	4,105
2016	5,293
2017	3,975
2018	6,499

Monthly article count, 2018
African Americans

Month	Count
January	441
February	465
March	533
April	583
May	505
June	581
July	474
August	578
September	518
October	617
November	698
December	506

modestly positive tone of 0.16, corresponding to the release of the blockbuster film *Black Panther.*

When articles mention African Americans, what do they cover? Among our five general themes, the most prevalent in 2018 were *education* and *politics,* each appearing in approximately 71% of all articles. *Law and order* and *economics* words were also quite common, as they were included in 63% and 62% of all articles, respectively. While the *culture* theme was only present in 45% of African American articles in 2018, this is an uptick from an annual average of 41% between 2014 and 2017.

Articles that include *law and order* words are quite revealing, as they reflect sustained attention to instances of police brutality, hate crimes, and gun violence. One article from March 30 from *The Washington Post* opens by recounting the funeral of Stephon Clark, an unarmed African American man who was fatally shot by police officers in his grandmother's backyard:

> Hundreds of mourners joined black and Muslim leaders at a church in California's capital on Thursday for the funeral of Stephon Clark, a black father of two whose shooting death by police 11 days ago touched off protests across the country and opened a new rift of public anger about

police use of force and treatment of minorities.

In addition, there are certain themes that were specifically relevant to articles about African Americans in 2018, such as the *NFL, confederacy,* and *housing*. Often, articles related to these specific themes overlap with references to the five general themes. For example, an article from May 24 in *USA Today* explores the ways in which protests against police brutality have roiled the NFL and blurred the line between sports and politics. These kinds of stories are explicitly connected to the *law and order* theme:

> Like President Trump achieved during a rally in Alabama last fall when he urged to 'get the son of a (expletive) off the field' as the answer for addressing protests, the NFL has merely added fuel to the fire. Kaepernick ignited this whole discussion when he took a knee during the 2016 season as a protest of the police brutality and other social injustices inflicted against African Americans. And now the NFL feels a need to set the record straight on what it will or won't allow during the anthem.

Articles referencing the NFL tend to mention Colin Kaepernick, who first began kneeling to protest police brutality in September 2016. An analysis of articles within the five-year dataset reveals that mentions of the *NFL* theme in-

Average monthly article tone, 2014-2018
African Americans
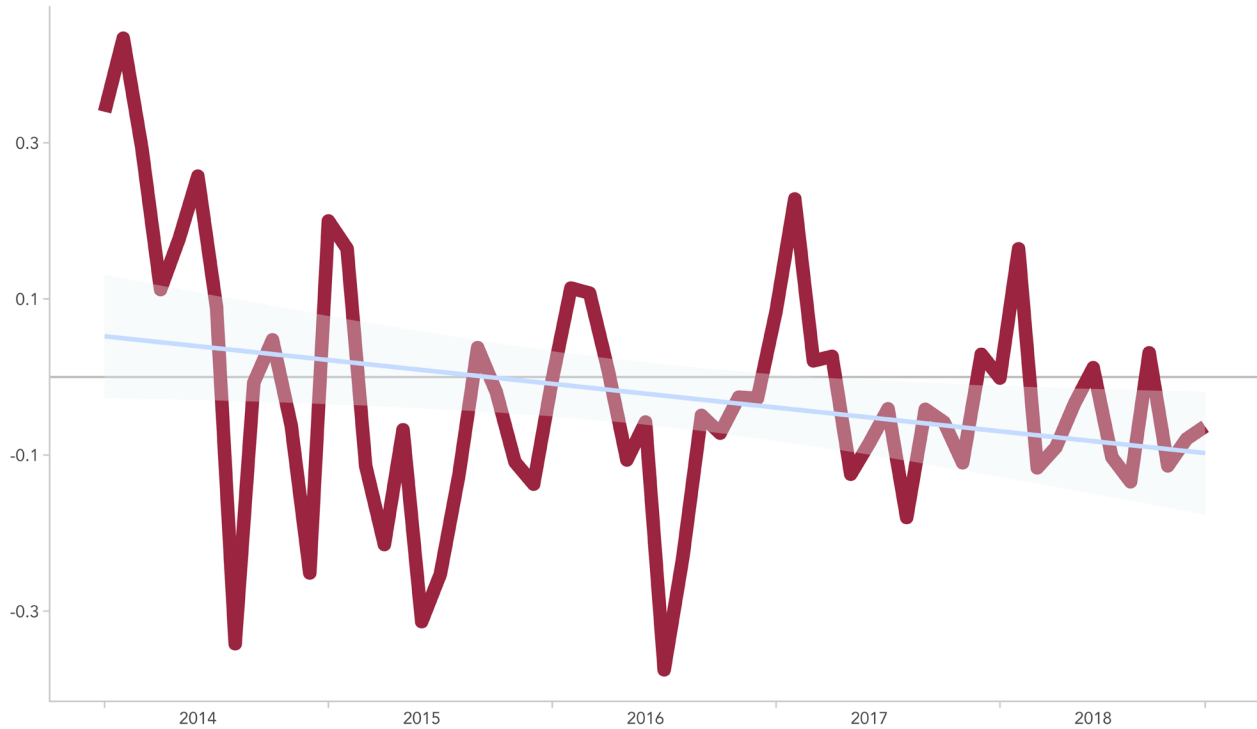
creased by a little over 3% within the first year of the protests, and that coverage of this theme in 2018 remained consistent with the new uptick.

Two other themes specific to African Americans are *confederacy* and *housing*. Stories related to the confederacy theme reflect opposition to the Confederate flag and Confederate monuments. References to *confederacy* fluctuate throughout the five year period, hitting a peak of nearly 19% of all articles in 2017 before declining modestly to nearly 15% in 2018. One *Washington Post* article from February 4 tagged for the *confederacy* theme explains how some feel that Trump's rise to power has emboldened white supremacists:

> The first unpleasant tug of history came before the election, when the yards around Dexter Trogdon Jr.'s house started blooming with Confederate flags. Then last spring, the Ku Klux Klan announced plans to burn a cross in town. A man apparently irked with his black neighbors hung a noose in his yard, and Trogdon started hearing a disturbing new view from some white people: that slavery wasn't so bad for African Americans. The 49-year-old bail bondsman knew racial division would be part of the picture when he moved back to this rural, majority-white

town where he grew up. But there was one factor he did not expect: the presidential election.

The *housing* theme appeared in nearly 27% of all articles in 2018. Articles included in this theme typically touch upon the housing market, affordable housing plans, and perceptions of discrimination in housing policy for black versus white neighborhoods. Other articles tend to briefly reference the housing realities of African Americans and then focus primarily on other themes, such as *politics* or *education*. A *Washington Post* piece from August 8, for example, discusses the nomination of now Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh: "But [Rakim Brooks, a former clerk for Kavanaugh], who grew up in public housing in East Harlem and was the first in his family to attend college, is concerned about the future of civil rights."

The language associated with topics of police brutality, hate crimes, and gun violence carries a strongly negative tone, with the potential to drive down the tone of articles within the African American dataset. This does not, however, imply that African Americans themselves are portrayed negatively by the media. Rather, these findings illustrate the ways in which media coverage of

often controversial issues affecting African Americans has expanded over the years. Along the same vein, articles that include words from the *culture* theme tend to drive positivity within the African American dataset, but a review of such articles reveals that while many reference galleries, museums, and other modes of artistic expression, they do not always explicitly link these art forms with the African American community.

Interestingly, articles in 2018 that mention African Americans three or more times have virtually the same characteristics as those in the larger set. The prevalence and intensity of the strongest drivers of tone, namely the *culture* and l*aw and order* themes, does not change significantly between the more focused and the overall African American dataset.

2018 marked a year of increased media coverage of African Americans, with a particular emphasis on the themes of *education* and *politics*. African Americans in politics and film generated additional attention. At the same time, the *law and order* theme captured topics that distinctly affect the African American community: racial profiling, police brutality, and hate crimes. Other themes particular to this demographic—NFL protests against gun violence, housing issues, and Confederate monument controversies— were also highly relevant in 2018. And yet, the tone of all articles referencing African Americans is essentially neutral, demonstrating that coverage of African Americans is, in fact, more nuanced than may be assumed at first glance.

Asian Americans

2018 was notable for its shift in the representation and visibility of Asian Americans in US newspapers. In Hollywood, *Crazy Rich Asians* was one of the year's blockbuster movies, often remarked upon for its predominantly Asian and Asian American cast. In addition, a major affirmative action lawsuit brought against Harvard University drew sustained attention. Together with these specific events, election year coverage of Asian Americans as a voting bloc generated substantially more media coverage of the group than in previous years.

In fact, coverage of Asian Americans almost tripled in 2018 compared to preceding years: there were just under 900 articles published in 2018 and only approximately 300 articles published per year, on average, between 2014 and 2017. Looking at monthly coverage across 2018, the greatest number of articles appeared in October, August, and June. These spikes can be explained by the peak of the Harvard affirmative action trial in October, the release of *Crazy Rich Asians* in August, and recognition in June of Asian Americans graduating, becoming alumni, and generally succeeding in the academic arena.

2018 articles mentioning Asian Americans are modestly positive on the whole, making them an outlier among the five groups discussed in this report. Despite the increase in coverage about Asian Americans, the tone of articles published in 2018 remained similar to that of the previous four years. Although the overall trend appears to be slightly downward, it is not dramatically so; over time, the tone of Asian American articles fluctuates quite a bit, and this apparent decline is mostly driven by a small drop in early 2018. A review of articles from that month indicates a concentration on a relatively small number of routine crime reports and legal cases, which tend to be negative in nature.
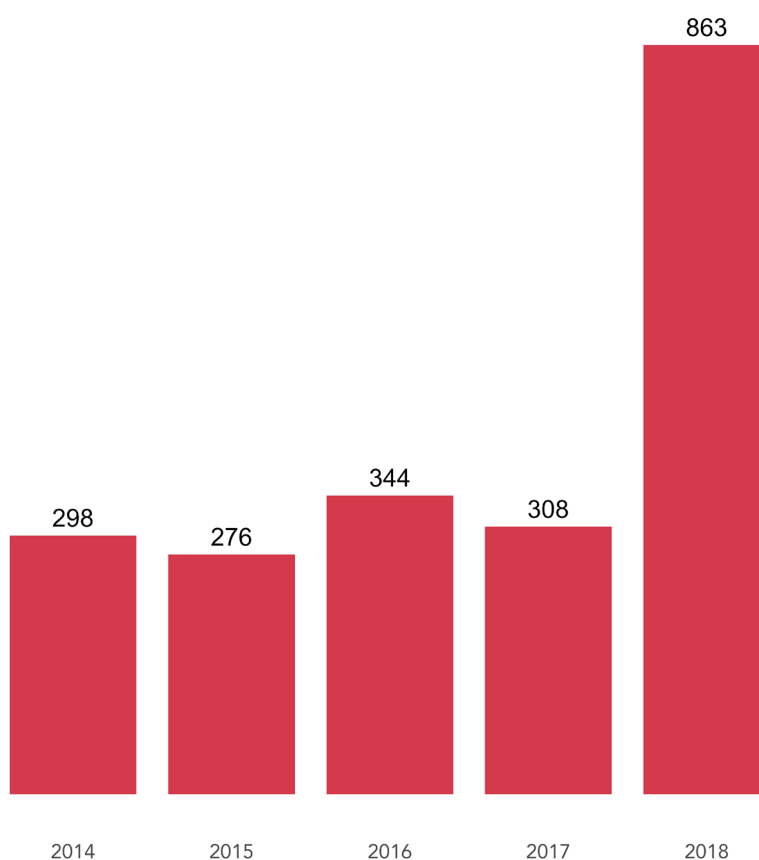
The Asian American community is discussed in a slightly more positive manner than other groups, but what are these articles actually about? As outlined in the comparative section above, the most prevalent theme in 2018 articles about Asian Americans was *education*. 78% of articles about Asian Americans touched upon *education* and included terms related to the topic, while 69% of articles used politics words, 63% of articles used *economics* words, 60% of articles included words related to *law and order*, and only 42% of articles included *culture* words.

Our methods allow us to identify not only broad general themes, but also particular elements within those themes. For example, we isolated
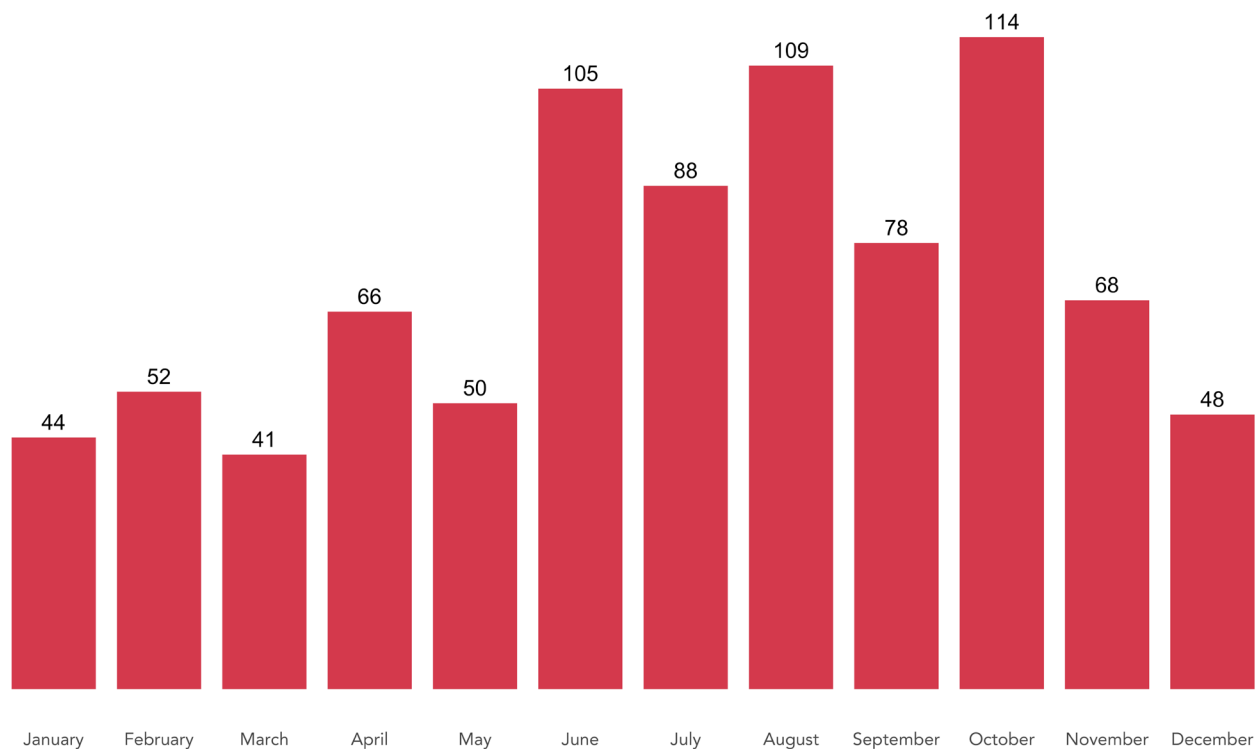
Annual article count
Asian Americans

Year	Count
2014	298
2015	276
2016	344
2017	308
2018	863

Monthly article count, 2018
Asian Americans

Month	Count
January	44
February	52
March	41
April	66
May	50
June	105
July	88
August	109
September	78
October	114
November	68
December	48

articles that mention President Trump within the overarching *politics* theme, affirmative action within the *education* theme, and the Harvard lawsuit within the *law and order* theme. We also pinpointed themes that were specific to Asian Americans in 2018 like *model minority* stories about achievement and success, or articles that specifically mention the movie *Crazy Rich Asians*.

The Harvard affirmative action trial, in particular, seemed to spark extensive discussions across all newspapers, and was linked to coverage of the legal sphere, President Trump, affirmative action, and college admissions. Between 2014 and 2017, only 35% of Asian American articles mentioned words about law (such as attorney, prosecutor, and lawyer), while in 2018, 60% of all Asian American articles talked about this topic. In 2017, after Trump had taken office, only 21% of articles mentioning Asian Americans referenced Trump, while in 2018, 27% of Asian American articles mentioned the President, an increase possibly due to the administration's involvement in this high-profile case. Similarly, in 2017, only 9% of Asian American articles talked about affirmative action and 16% talked about

college admissions, while in 2018, 17% of articles about Asian Americans mentioned affirmative action and 26% mentioned college admissions.

Excitement surrounding the release of *Crazy Rich Asians* was also reflected in 2018 coverage. Over 10% of all stories touching on Asian Americans that year specifically mentioned the film. A review published in *The Wall Street Journal* on August 16th, for instance, highlights Asians' and Asian Americans' roles:

> *Crazy Rich Asians*, a movie about people who have it all, succeeds in having almost all on its own ambitious terms. Bright, buoyant and hilarious, though far from flawless, this romantic comedy, directed by Jon M. Chu and based on the popular novel by Kevin Kwan, is also a cultural milestone. It's the first major studio film since *The Joy Luck Club* opened almost a quarter-century ago in which an Asian filmmaker has told an Asian-American story with Asians in all of the leading roles.

Beyond these major events, media coverage of Asian Americans is disproportionately focused on education, and specifically on stories linked to academic excellence.

Average monthly article tone, 2014-2018
Asian Americans
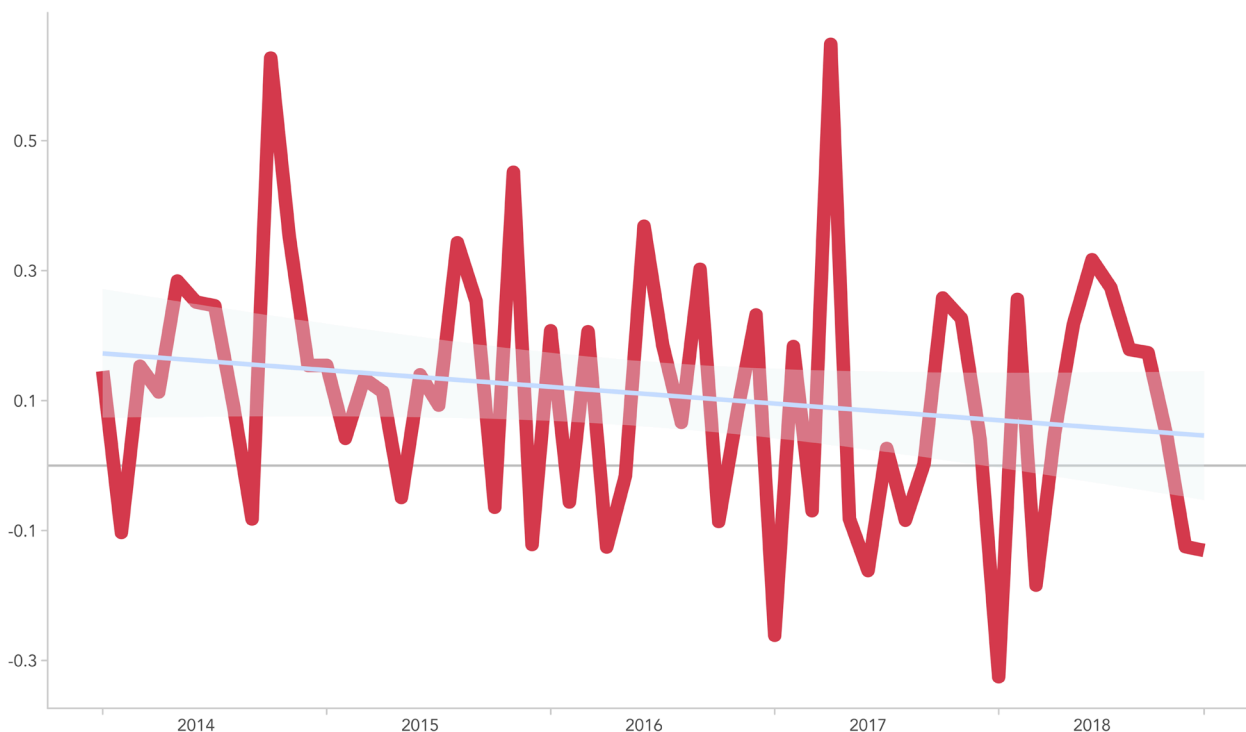
Asian Americans have long been depicted as a "model minority"—as successful, especially in the academic realm, due to presumptions about the group's ingrained hard work ethic and cultures that emphasize education and discipline. In the 2018 Asian American articles, those using words like "prominence," "success," or "achievement" are modestly more positive with a tone that is 0.14 higher than those not mentioning any of these terms. More than half of the articles about Asian Americans published in 2018 contain words linked to the *model minority* theme, an increase of 10% when compared to the average over the previous 4 years. A *New York Times* article from June 1, for instance, highlights the familial bond of Asian Americans using mostly positive language:

> Is there something about South Asian values or families that explains success in spelling? To me, the key is how much these families believe in the idea of family. And how much spelling is a family sport. They believe in working together as a family unit.

While the prevalence of general themes such as *education* and *culture* as well as specific themes like *Crazy Rich Asians* and *model minority* drive the overall tone of articles in a positive direction,

articles about Asian Americans are only modestly positive, on average. This raises a question about the topics that offset these sources of positivity. Although relatively less common than for other groups, at least 60% of Asian American articles contained words related to the *law and order* theme as well as to the *politics* theme. Articles that touch on crime and arrests have a negative impact on the overall tone of articles, even if an article involves, for example, a report about an Asian American store manager intervening during a violent assault. In general, Asian American articles that mention *law and order* words are clearly more negative, with a tone 0.38 lower than articles that don't mention those words. Within the broader theme of *politics*, articles mentioning President Trump are also a significant driver of overall negativity. One article published in *The Wall Street Journal*, for example, asks, "Are Asian-Americans entitled to be outraged?" and mentions that "complex interactions of outrage from both parties' bases conjured up the presidency of Donald Trump."

To further investigate how Asian Americans were discussed in 2018, we narrowed down our body of articles to include only those that mentioned the group more than three times. This

set of articles confirmed and even amplified our overall findings. The *affirmative action* theme, for instance, was present to an even greater extent: in the more focused set, over 43% of articles mentioned the topic, compared to 17% of all Asian American articles published in 2018. And in this smaller set of articles, *education* words were present in a striking 95% of our articles; in other words, only one in 20 articles that mention Asian Americans three or more times did not include a word related to our *education* theme.

In short, although Asian Americans make up 5% of the American population, stories that specifically name Asian Americans as a group are relatively rare. Even with notable events such as the release of *Crazy Rich Asians* and the Harvard affirmative action trial resulting in increased visibility in 2018, Asian Americans still had the lowest number of articles published about them in comparison to the other groups in this report. When Asian Americans are mentioned, however, it is more often in the context of *education* and less often connected to *politics* or *law and order*. This unusual balance in coverage of Asian Americans helps explain the relative positivity of articles about the group.

Latinos

Media coverage of Latinos jumped between 2017 and 2018, with stories about politics and immigration accounting for a significant proportion of the spike. Immigration proved to be a particularly contentious topic throughout the year, from the expiration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in March and legal debates over its phase-out, to the emergence of the Trump administration's family separation policy in June, to the Central American migrant caravan's journey to the US border during October and November. Politically, Latino voters were critical in midterm races in Florida, Texas, and Nevada, among other states. As candidates, Latinos made history in congressional elections: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez became the youngest woman ever elected, and Veronica Escobar and Sylvia Garcia became Texas's first Latina representatives.

had more articles than any of the previous years.

The monthly article count for 2018 illustrates the importance of the midterm election, but also the role of other events. In June 2018, 528 articles mentioned Latinos, the highest number of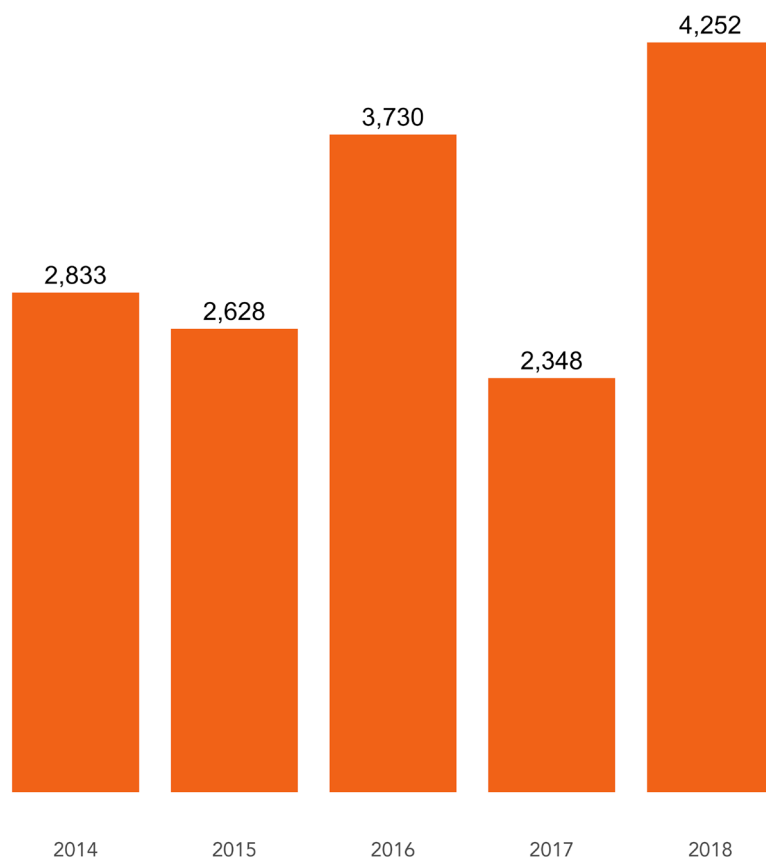 articles in the five-year period and more than twice as many as the five-year monthly average of 263. This spike corresponds to news of the Trump administration's family separation policy, but other factors were also at play. New York City mayor Bill de Blasio announced a plan that would incorporate more black and Latino students into the city's specialized high schools on June 2, and on June 26, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez won the Democratic Party's primary election for New York's 14th congressional district. Monthly article

Annual article count

Latinos

Newspapers wrote more articles mentioning Latinos in 2018 than they had in any of the previous four years. The root words "Latino," "Latina," and "Hispanic" appeared in 4,252 articles in 2018, up 81% from 2017 and up 14% from 2016, the next highest year in our five-year data set. While the increase in 2018 can be partially attributed to the midterm election (the three election years in our data set also represent the years with the highest article counts), that alone does not explain why 2018

counts dropped in July, before rising again in October and November, largely because of the election, but also given significant coverage of the Central American migrant caravan. There were thus several interrelated factors contributing to the elevated number of articles in June, October, and November and to the overall higher number of articles in 2018 compared to earlier years.
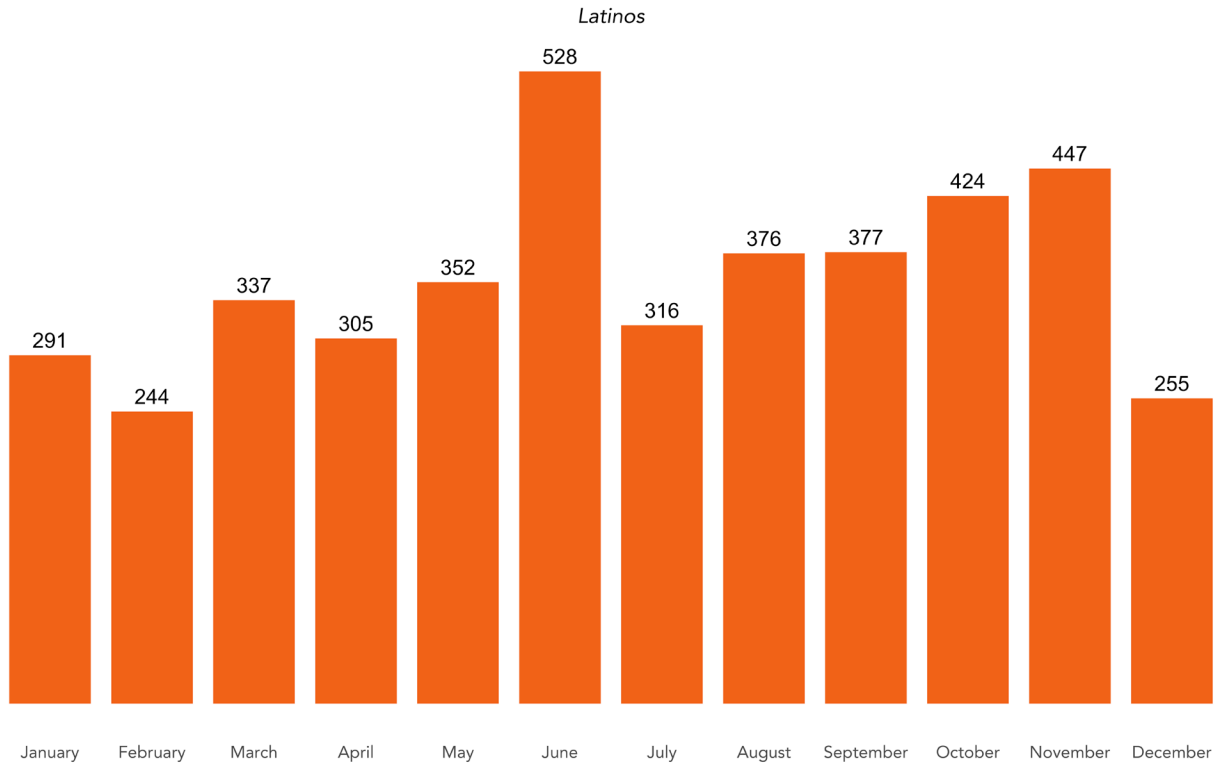
There has been a modest decline in the tone

Monthly article count, 2018
Latinos

Month	Count
January	291
February	244
March	337
April	305
May	352
June	528
July	316
August	376
September	377
October	424
November	447
December	255

of articles mentioning Latinos over the past five years. The average tone of articles in 2014 was 0.05 but by 2018 it was -0.05, the lowest of any of the five years in our analysis. While previous years were sometimes characterized by dramatic shifts in tone, the average monthly valence was fairly consistent in 2018. Over the course of the year, the tone got somewhat less negative, and was even marginally positive in December.

Although it may seem plausible to expect a drop in tone during June given extensive coverage of the family separation policy, articles published in June were more positive than the 2018 average. Changes to New York City's specialized schools admission process and the positive tone of articles about Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez may have counteracted some of the presumed negativity. For example, an article from *The New York Times* on June 14 noted that "black and Hispanic students make up only 67 percent of the city's public school population, but only 10 percent of the incoming students at elite schools." The prevalence of words like "student," "elite," and "schools" may contribute to the positive valence of these articles, even if the news about Hispanics is not itself completely positive. Another *New York Times* article

from June 27 that is unvarnished in its positivity describes Ocasio-Cortez as a "political rock star" who has stayed "cheerfully on a progressive message that has energized the Democrats left wing."

As noted in the comparative overview, *politics* was the most frequent general theme for Latinos, present in 75% of articles in 2018. The next most common themes were *education* (73%), *economics* (69%), *law and order* (65%), and finally, *culture* (31%). Articles about Latinos contained fewer *culture* words and more words linked to *politics* and *law and order* than articles about any group except Muslims. In terms of their tone, the general themes tend to behave similarly for the Latino data set as they do for other groups: articles tagged for *culture* are clearly more positive than those not linked to that theme; likewise, those tagged for *law and order* are strongly more negative, on average, than those containing no *law and order* words.

Looking across time, the *education* theme rose in importance in 2018. The 3,083 education articles in 2018 represent nearly a 9% increase from the average of the previous four years. As previously noted, conversations about diversity in the New York City specialized school

Average monthly article tone, 2014-2018
Latinos
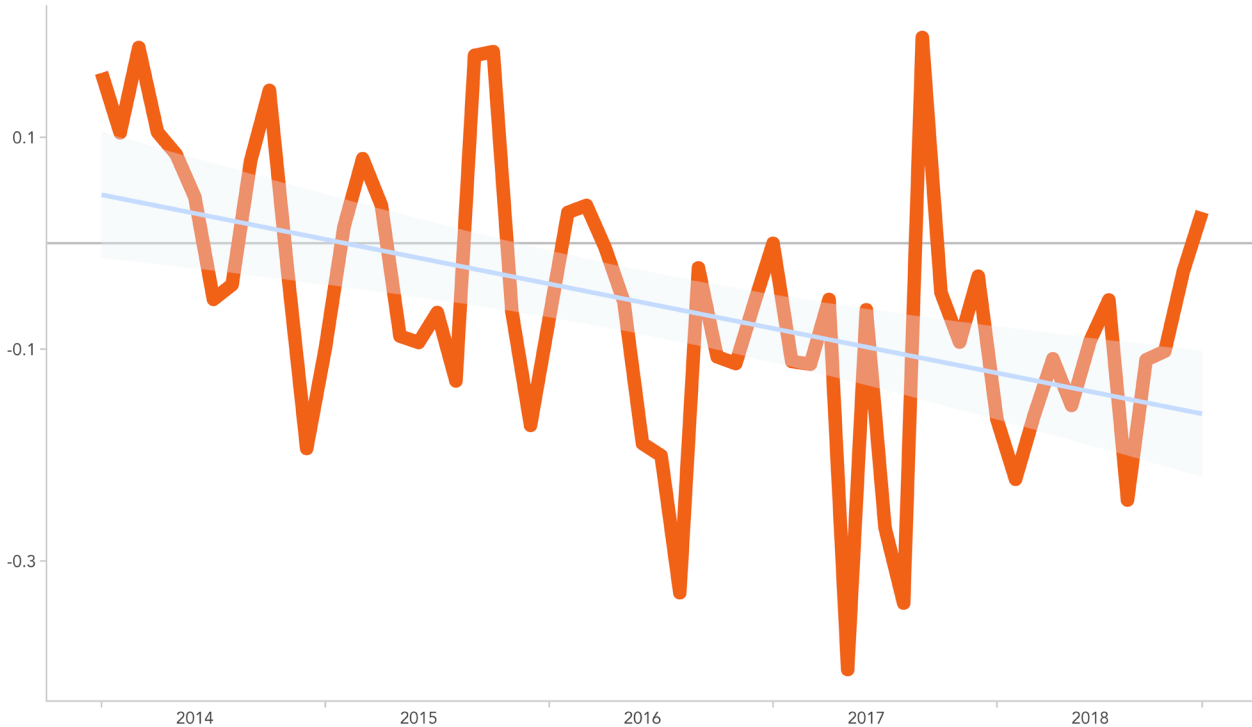
system helped to spur this rise of *education* articles. Furthermore, although the Harvard affirmative action lawsuit dealt with the college admissions process for Asian Americans, it had far-reaching implications for Latino and African American students as well. Accordingly, newspapers discussed affirmative action at a higher rate in 2018 compared to previous years: the percentage of articles mentioning affirmative action nearly doubled to almost 3% in 2018 compared to the 2014-2017 average of 1.5%. Through all of this increase in coverage, the tone of *education* articles remained modestly positive.

Immigration was one of the most important themes specific to Latinos in 2018. Although the media has long focused on immigration, the coverage increased substantially compared to earlier years. Between 2014 and 2017, 37% of Latino articles mentioned the root words "immigration," "migrant," "refugee," or "asylum," while in 2018, 44% did. In general, articles about immigration—including ones about DACA, family separation, the border, and the border wall—tend to be modestly negative. However, much of that negativity comes from articles linked to the *law and order* theme. For example, a *Washington Post* article from Oc-

tober 28 remarks that "[President Trump is] raising the alarm about dark-skinned immigrants crossing the southern border to kill white people." In this case, as in others, the *law and order* frame of illegality is the primary driver of negativity.

When setting aside articles about immigration that overlap with the *law and order* theme, articles tagged for *immigration* were essentially neutral, with an average valence of -0.05. In other words, a substantial number of immigration articles were positive. One such example is a February 12 *New York Times* story that discussed portrait paintings of people of color:

> Aliza Nisenbaum, who was among the most prominent artists in last year's Whitney Biennial, looks at undocumented immigrants from Latin America in her work… she recognized that painting these people's pictures would be one way to address their erasure in other areas of life.

Articles about Latino candidates in the 2018 midterm elections were another source of positivity. Those that mentioned Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez were clearly positive, with an average tone of 0.37.

Furthermore, articles that touched on any one or

more of thirteen other notable Latino candidates tended to be positive. Although fewer than 6% of all Latino articles mentioned these politicians, they were nonetheless a source of positivity within a *politics* theme that otherwise tended to be negative.

Oftentimes, newspaper stories mention Latinos in passing, without necessarily focusing on them; just 20% of articles mention our search terms three or more times. So what changes when articles focus more squarely on Latinos? In short, not much. The tone of articles with three or more mentions was essentially the same as that of all articles. Each of the five general themes is roughly as prevalent in the smaller pool of articles as in the larger one. One notable difference is that articles with three or more mentions are more likely to focus on *immigration*. 60% of articles in the more focused data set are tagged for the *immigration* theme, while 48% in the overall one are. However, despite differences in the prevalence of the *immigration* theme, Latino articles with three or more mentions have similar patterns of positivity and negativity as the larger pool of all articles that mention Latinos.

Overall, newspaper coverage of Latinos in 2018 was marked by an increase in the amount of coverage and a slight decrease in the average tone of those articles. Nearly all of the negativity in the Latino data set came from articles tagged for the *law and order* theme. On the other hand, articles about *culture, education,* and specific Latino candidates in the midterm elections drove much of the positivity of Latino articles, balancing out the overall tone.

Jews

Media coverage of the Jewish community both increased and became more negative in 2018. This was in no small part due to the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting on October 27, which elicited intense reporting and a downward spike in the tone of stories. Other noteworthy events that generated coverage included political developments such as the Trump administration's decision in February to move the Israeli embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Coverage of topics related to everyday life, from weddings to art exhibitions, remained consistent with prior years, and constitutes an ongoing and important source of positive stories about Jews that offset some of the increased negativity in 2018.

In 2018, 5,980 articles mentioned Jews, making them the third-most covered group in our study. The 2018 article count was up 42% from 2017 and was the highest within the five-year period.

This increase can be attributed in large part to the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting in late October. More articles were published in both October and November than in any other month in the last five years. In October, 683 articles mentioned Jews, compared to a monthly average of 398 between 2014 and 2017. However, the spike in media coverage of Jews in 2018 cannot solely be attribut-

ed to the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting: there had already been an uptick in coverage prior to the attack. Through September, the 2018 average month saw 469 articles mentioning Jews, still well above the norm from previous years.
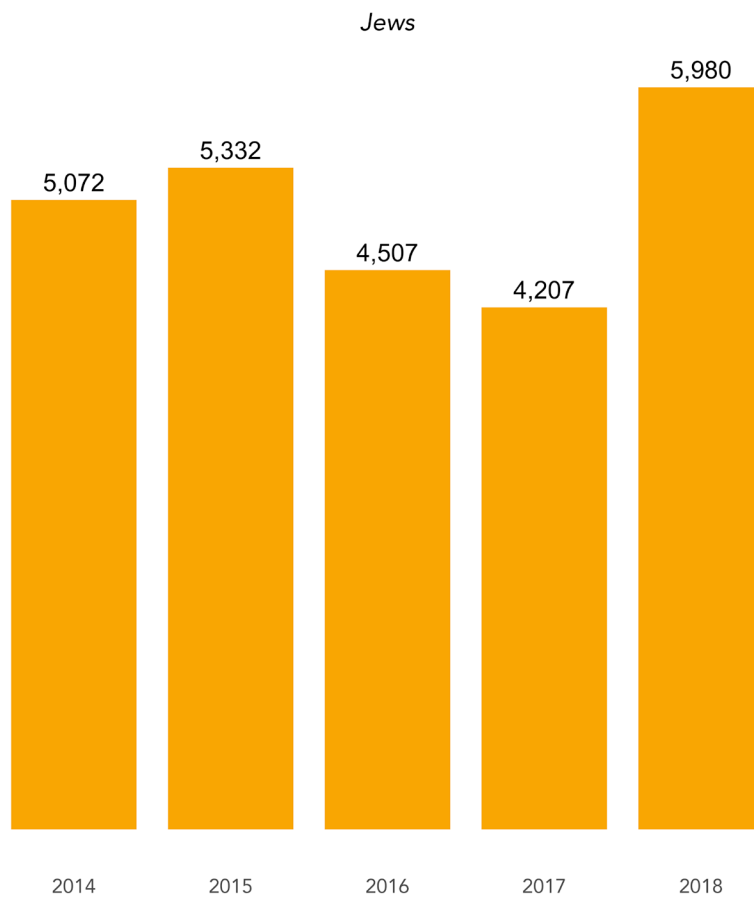
The tone of the media's coverage of Jews in 2018 was slightly more negative than in the preceding two years. The average tone in 2018 was -0.05, while between 2014 and 2015 it was 0.00 and between 2016 and 2017 it was 0.11. October and November 2018 were particularly negative months; October's average monthly tone (-0.29) was the third lowest of all months in the five-year data set and November's (-0.28) was the fourth lowest. These months are distinct in that the geographic setting of the negative stories was primarily domestic rather than foreign. Both July 2014 and January 2015 had clearly negative average monthly valances, but the main stories in those months were the 2014 Gaza War and the Hypercacher kosher supermarket siege in Paris, France, respectively. Apart from the months surrounding the Pittsburgh shooting, the tone of articles published in 2018 was similar to that of articles published in 2016 and 2017.
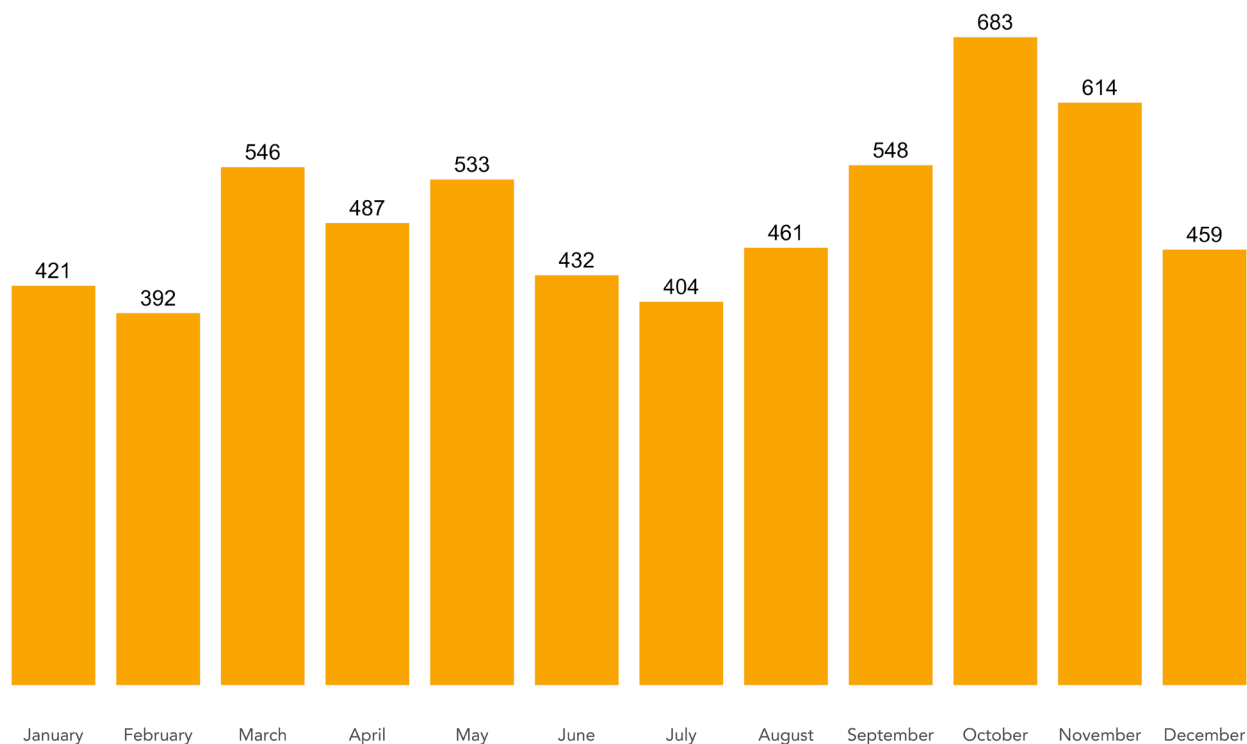
In terms of the general themes, *education* was

Annual article count

Jews

Year	Count
2014	5,072
2015	5,332
2016	4,507
2017	4,207
2018	5,980

Monthly article count, 2018
Jews

Month	Count
January	421
February	392
March	546
April	487
May	533
June	432
July	404
August	461
September	548
October	683
November	614
December	459

most commonly discussed in 2018 (68%), followed by *politics* (65%), *law and order* (57%), *economics* (51%), and *culture* (44%). This rank order for Jews roughly parallels that for other groups. Among the five identity groups, however, Jews had the smallest percentage of articles containing words about *law and order, politics,* and *economics*, a relatively high percentage of articles mentioning *culture* words, and an average percentage for the *education* theme.

The general themes tend to operate somewhat differently for Jews than they do for most other groups. For example, articles associated with the *politics* theme were noticeably more negative for Jewish articles than for other groups. Articles tagged for *politics* are modestly negative for all articles, but strongly negative for Jewish articles, which have a tone 0.43 lower than Jewish articles not tagged for *politics*. A possible explanation for this difference may be the amount of negative articles about foreign settings in 2018. 85% of articles tagged for the *politics* theme also mentioned a foreign location, and 35% of politics articles mentioned Israel/Palestine. Additionally, 43% of *politics* articles mention a word related to the group-spe-

cific *anti-Semitism* theme, which includes not only "anti-Semitism" itself but also words about the Holocaust, Nazis, and neo-Nazis. Not surprisingly, *anti-Semitism* is a substantial source of negativity.

Oftentimes, negative articles associated with a general theme did not equate to an unfavorable portrayal of the Jewish community. For example, on February 6, *The Wall Street Journal* published an article tagged for the *politics* theme about an amendment to the Polish Act on the Institute of National Remembrance*,* which "would exempt 'artistic or academic activity' but would prohibit ordinary citizens and politicians from accusing Poland of complicity in the murder of three million Polish Jews." Although this article had a strongly negative tone (-1.99), the negativity did not correspond to a distinctly unfavorable portrayal of the Jewish community.

On the other hand, two substantial sources of positivity for articles mentioning Jews were the group-specific *obituary* and *wedding* themes. While it may seem counterintuitive for obituaries to be a source of positivity—after all, they are explicitly linked to a death—most of the text

Average monthly article tone, 2014-2018
Jews
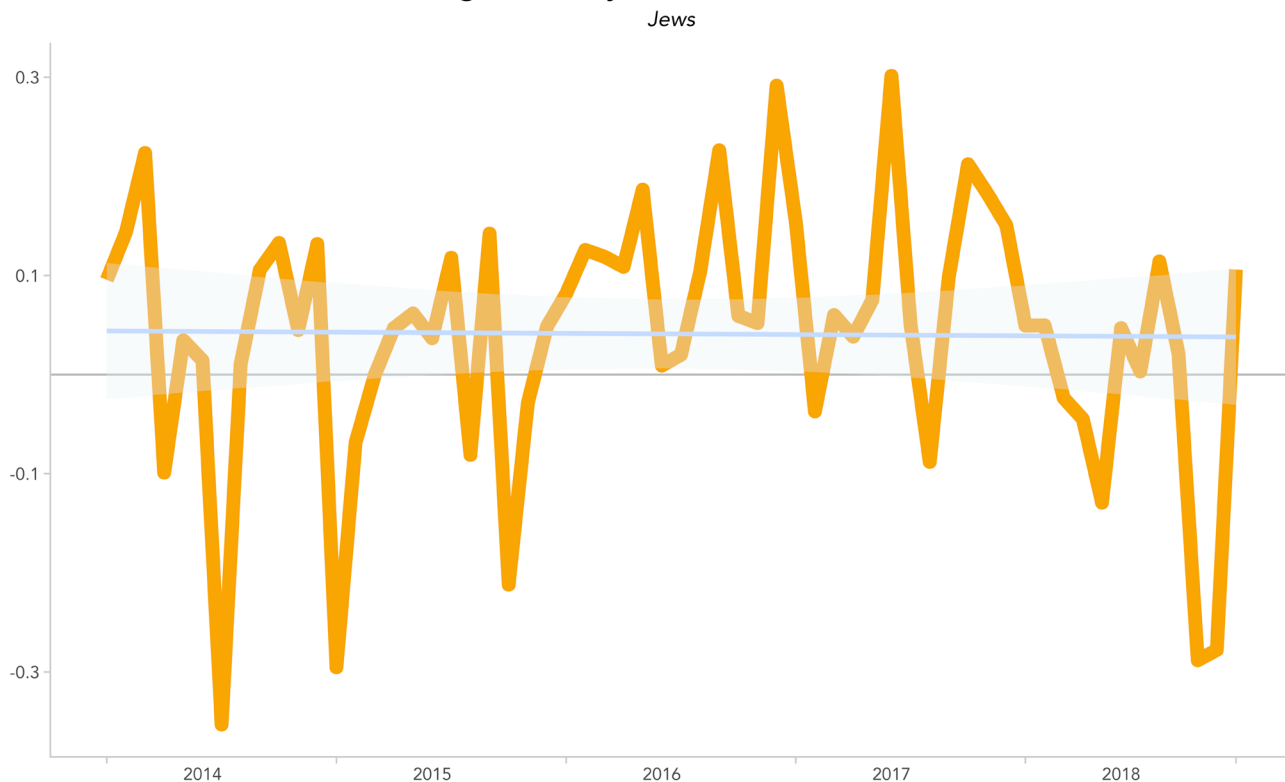
is a celebration of someone's accomplishments.

Obituaries detail a range of achievements, with headlines about extraordinary personal tales: "Polish Jew Found Love In Ruins of the Camps" (*Wall Street Journal*, May 5); intellectual achievements: "Evelyn Berezin, 93, Dies; Built the First True Word Processor" (*New York Times*, December 10); and cultural contributions: "Sy Kattelson Dies at 95; Photographer Made Art From Street Life" (*New York Times*, December 5). Indeed, we found that the *obituary* theme was the single most powerful driver of positivity; obituaries were 0.77 more positive than non-obituaries, on average. Weddings were also a significant source of positivity, and they were 0.35 more positive than non-wedding articles overall. Articles tagged for the *obituary* and *wedding* themes tended to appear in *The New York Times*, which resulted in a clearly more positive tone (0.37 higher) for *New York Times* articles than for those in the other three newspapers.

If those factors account for positivity, what about sources of negativity? Unsurprisingly, articles that mentioned *anti-Semitism* made the tone of our data set substantially more negative. Roughly 36%

of articles in 2018 mentioned a word linked to the *anti-Semitism* theme. On average, articles tagged for *anti-Semitism* were strongly more negative than other articles, with a tone that was 0.76 lower. Far more articles mentioned *anti-Semitism* in 2018 than in previous years: while 36% of articles mentioned a word belonging to the anti-Semitism theme in 2018, just 27% did in 2014-2017. Mentions of just the word "anti-Semitism" almost doubled in 2018: 17% of articles included the word, while from 2014-2017 just 9% of articles did. The increasing coverage of anti-Semitism thus helps explain the drop in average valence for 2018 compared to earlier years and particularly compared to 2017.

Another notable source of negativity is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Roughly 30% of Jewish articles mention words related to Israel or Palestine, and their average tone was modestly negative in 2018, with a score of -0.28. Overall, however, there were fewer articles published about Israel/Palestine in 2018 than in previous years and their tone was somewhat less negative. This makes sense, as one of the biggest stories about Israel/Palestine in 2018 was not about violent conflict. The Trump administration's decision to move

the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem was a major storyline during the first half of the year.

While the average tone of Jewish articles from 2018 was essentially neutral (-0.05), articles that mentioned Jews three or more times were modestly negative, with an average tone of -0.28. In other words, articles with a focus more squarely on the Jewish community tended to be more negative than ones that may have simply mentioned it in passing. This drop in average tone can be explained by the higher frequency of themes associated with negativity in articles with three or more mentions than in articles with one or more. *Politics, law and order, anti-Semitism*, and *Israel/Palestine* are all much more prevalent in the more focused data set than in the overall one. These themes also overlapped in ways that amplified their negativity, such as in this January 25 editorial in *The New York Times* about Donald Trump and anti-Semitism:

> As with other minorities, Mr. Trump is not above indulging in glib, often hurtful stereotypes, like the age-old trope of greedy Jews. There was his campaign image of the six-pointed star and cash cascading down on Hillary Clinton, and his assertion that Mrs. Clinton "meets in secret with international banks to plot the destruction of U.S. sovereignty." And there was this to Jewish Republican donors: "Is there anybody that doesn't renegotiate deals in this room? This room negotiates them—Per-

haps more than any room I've ever spoken to."

While stories associated with predominantly negative themes were concentrated in the more focused set of articles about Jews, the proportion of articles tagged for *culture* or *education* remained approximately the same, and there were fewer articles in the *obituary* theme. It is thus not surprising that the tone of articles with three or more mentions of Jews dropped modestly compared to that of the more comprehensive data set.

The media's coverage of Jews in 2018 was distinct from that of previous years, as there were more stories and a more negative tone, particularly in October and November. However, the characteristics of articles in December suggest that October and November were aberrations related to the Pittsburgh shooting, and did not set new norms for the amount and tone of coverage. There were 459 articles that mentioned Jews in December 2018, marginally below the 2018 average and only slightly above the five-year average. The average tone of December articles was 0.10, which is on par with the typical monthly average during 2016 and 2017. Thus, it appears that although 2018 was a notable year for the media's portrayal of Jews, it was different from past years because of significant events, not because of new and enduring trends.

Muslims

2018 marked a turbulent year for Muslims at home and abroad. Domestically, Ilhan Omar of Minnesota and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan became the first Muslim women ever elected to the US Congress. At the same time, anti-Muslim activities and Islamophobia continued to rise, which some attribute to President Trump's inflammatory, xenophobic rhetoric. Legal debate over the President's controversial 2017 "Muslim ban" on immigration intensified, culminating in a Supreme Court decision to uphold the Executive Order in June. In the Middle East, Palestinians experienced violence and Israeli settlement expansion while President Trump relocated the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and terminated funding to UNRWA, the main refugee agency for Palestinians. Civil conflict continued in Syria, and roughly 12 million (mostly Muslim) civilians remained refugees or internally-displaced. Further east, the Taliban launched major attacks in Afghanistan in response to an increase in American troop deployment, and security forces continued their extensive ethnic cleansing campaign against the Rohingya in Myanmar.
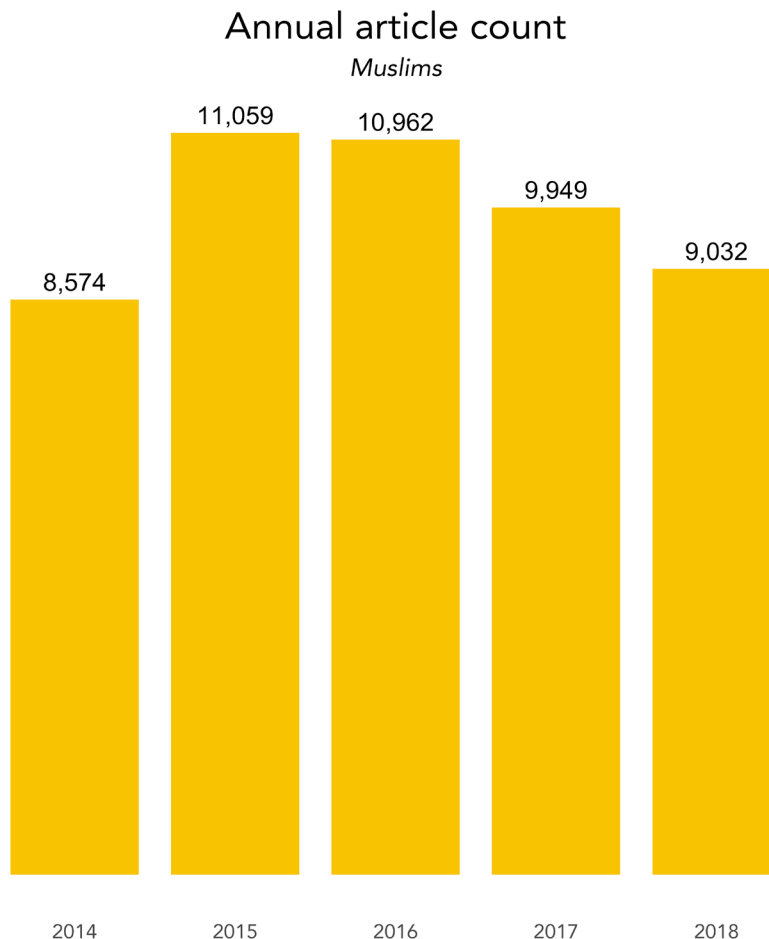
Compared with the other minority groups in our analysis, Muslims received a lot more coverage from US newspapers in 2018. It is noteworthy that almost a third of the roughly 9,000 total articles mentioned the root words Muslim or Islam more than three times, meaning they likely centered on Muslims, rather than simply touching on the group in passing. Interestingly, Muslims were discussed in fewer articles in 2018 than in previous years.

The higher article counts in 2015, 2016 and 2017 are likely due to specific newsworthy events such as the 2015 Paris terrorist attacks, in which bombers and gunmen killed 130 people and wounded more than 400 others, the worsening of the Syrian refugee crisis, and the original proposals of Trump's "Muslim ban," respectively, all of which garnered significant media coverage. In 2018, monthly article counts fluctuated between a low of 621 in September to a high of 885 in April.
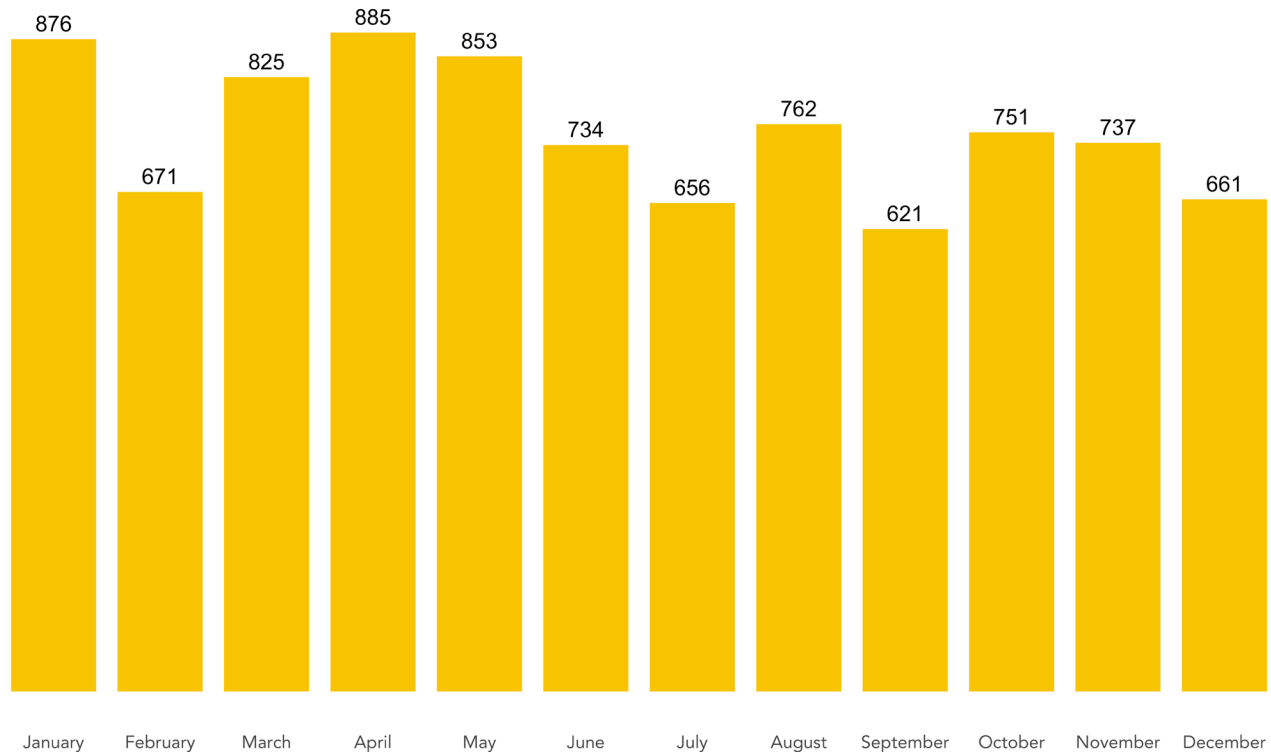
US newspaper coverage of Muslims is significantly more negative in tone than coverage of African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, or Jews. That said, the average tone of Muslim articles has become less intensely negative over the past five years. This trend is likely related to waning coverage of the Islamic State and the Syrian refugee crisis, two highly negative subjects that received sustained international attention in 2015 and 2016.

Annual article count
Muslims

Year	Count
2014	8,574
2015	11,059
2016	10,962
2017	9,949
2018	9,032

Monthly article count, 2018
Muslims

Bar chart showing monthly article counts for Muslims in 2018:

- January: 876
- February: 671
- March: 825
- April: 885
- May: 853
- June: 734
- July: 656
- August: 762
- September: 621
- October: 751
- November: 737
- December: 661

June was the least negative month not only in 2018, but also in the past five years (though it is still only modestly more positive than the average month in 2018, which remains quite negative). This relative positivity might be attributable to the smaller number of articles discussing ISIS and terrorism in 2018, overlapping with a higher number of articles featuring sympathetic coverage of Islam at the end of Ramadan. Additionally, June features more articles than average about Trump's Muslim ban, which went to the Supreme Court at the end of that month. Because the policy was upheld by the Court, many of these articles include words like "victory," "validation," and "political triumph"—perhaps counterintuitively nudging the tone in a positive direction despite the fact that the ban was a detrimental political development for the Muslim community.

Notwithstanding this modest shift over time, Muslim articles remained strongly negative compared to those touching on other groups. What explains this difference? As outlined in the five-group overview at the start of this report, the most prevalent general themes in 2018 Muslim articles were *politics* and *law and order*. In fact, these two themes

were present in coverage of Muslims to a greater degree than in coverage of any other group. *Politics* words appeared in 84% of articles, while *law and order* words appeared in 71% of articles. This is notable given that, across identity groups, these themes are associated with the most negativity.

One of the biggest drivers of negativity associated specifically with Muslims is the geographic location of the stories. 92% of Muslim articles published in 2018 referenced a foreign location, compared with 78% of articles touching on Jews and less than 70% of articles about Asian Americans, Latinos, or African Americans. While it may not be surprising that news about primarily domestic groups is less foreign-oriented, it is notable that Jews, the other religious group in our analysis with a strong demographic presence outside the United States, were the subject of significantly less foreign coverage. Even more striking is the fact that 10% of 2018 Muslim articles exclusively mentioned a foreign location, meaning that there were no mentions of a US location in the article. News about the four other groups, on average, exclusively discussed a foreign location in a mere 2% of articles.

Average monthly article tone, 2014-2018
Muslims
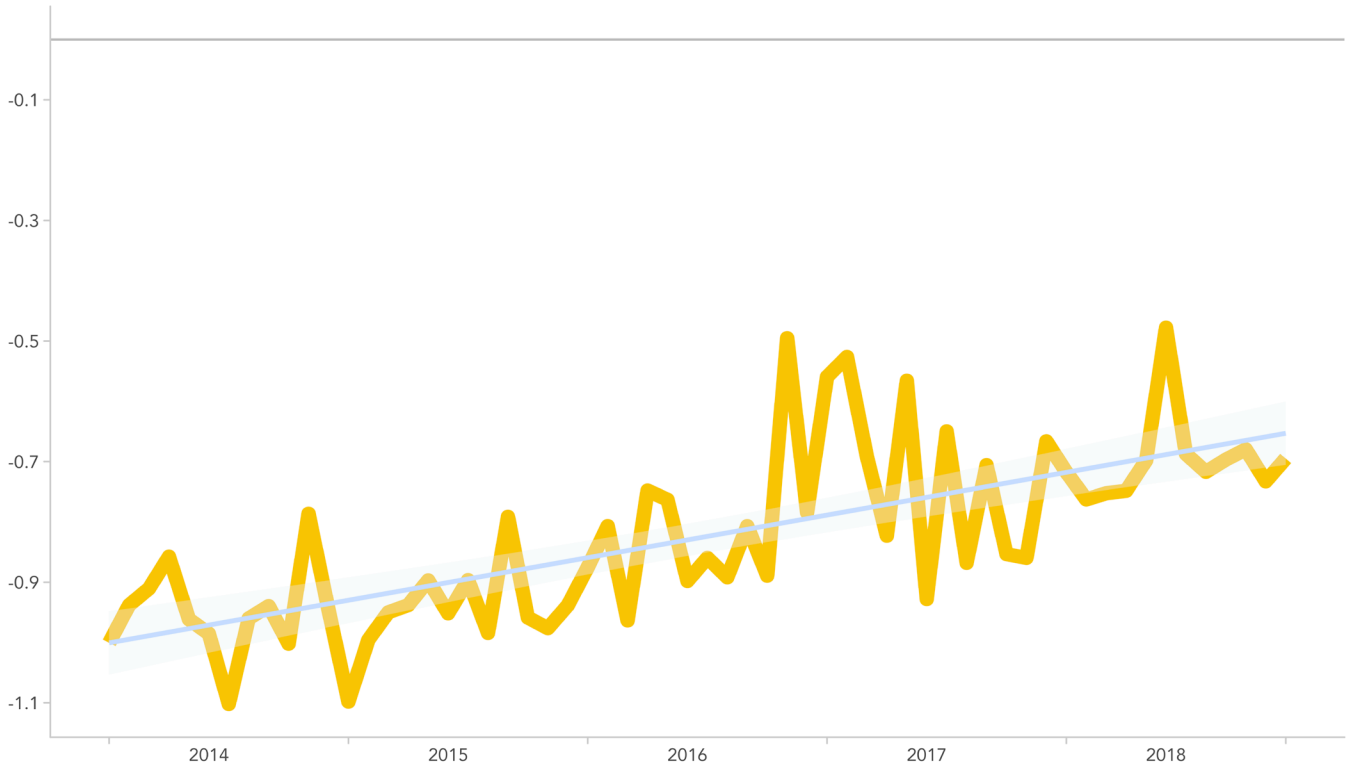
When US newspapers cover foreign locations, they tend to give more attention to crises and violence than to positive stories or mundane occurrences. In 2018 and the past five years, articles about Muslims in foreign contexts heavily focused on conflict and terrorism, two group-specific themes that we examined with respect to Muslims. *Conflict* words such as violence, combat, war, or insurgency appeared in 77% of 2018 articles, while *terrorism* appeared in 45%. The Islamic State was mentioned in more than 30% of Muslim articles in 2018. Typical foreign-oriented, conflict-focused articles include stories touching on diverse areas of the world: one *Wall Street Journal* article from March 7 notes that "Sri Lanka declared a state of emergency after violence erupted between Buddhists and Muslims," while another from June 6 mentions that "Gaza is controlled by Hamas, a terrorist organization whose charter calls for the destruction of Israel." Similarly, a January 3 article from *The New York Times* reports that "Jundullah a Sunni, the Muslim group from Iran's ethnic Baluch minority that has claimed responsibility for bombings that have killed doz-

ens of people, has been accused of having ties to the Taliban Al Qaeda and the United States."

Among all global events and foreign policy issues, the Syrian civil war was discussed in 32% of all Muslim articles, more than any other topic. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict appeared in 18% of articles, and Afghanistan in 14%. Surprisingly, the Rohingya crisis received comparatively little attention in 2018; the root word Rohingya is mentioned in fewer than 5% of our articles. This is striking, given that the UN has determined that their situation includes "genocidal acts" and labeled it "a human rights catastrophe" replete with widespread murder, mass rape, disappearances, arson, looting and torture.

Looking at domestically focused articles, a significant portion touched on *politics* and *law and order*. Among *politics* articles, less than 1% mention either Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, the newly elected Muslim congresswomen. By contrast, the theme of *immigration* was discussed in 22% of articles, and Trump's specific "Muslim ban" was

mentioned in 18%. Although 17% of Jewish articles mention anti-Semitism, only 2% of Muslim articles published in 2018 mention Islamophobia. This is the case even though many public officials view the "Muslim ban"—which barred nationals from six Muslim-majority countries from entering the US for a set period of time—as a reflection of "anti-Muslim sentiment," "institutionalized Islamophobia," and "religious intolerance." Similarly, even though *law and order* is a prominent theme in Muslim articles, only 3% of articles explicitly discuss anti-Muslim hate crimes.

Interestingly, compared with articles about other minority groups, the *culture* theme appears in a small percentage of Muslim articles. On average, just over 40% of articles about the other groups mention *culture*, versus only 21% of Muslim articles. This is significant, and helps explain the relative negativity of Muslim articles. Because the *culture* theme primarily consists of words related to art (artist, exhibition, painting, sculpture, architecture, film, etc.), it is generally associated with strong positivity, as articles discussing art often include positive words such as "beautiful" and "innovative." The following excerpt from a December 31 *Wall Street Journal* article exemplifies a positive *culture* article:

> A fabulous example of the fusion of literary and cultural traditions that characterized Mughal India in the 16th and 17th centuries, it is just one of many works of art in the British Museum's stunning, recently opened galleries featuring the art of the Islamic world that undercut visitors preconceived ideas.

It is important to note that Muslim articles *do* discuss cultural events and artifacts—just not nearly as often as they focus on *foreign conflict, terrorism,* and *politics.* It is also worth considering that there were over 9,000 articles mentioning Muslims in 2018, versus fewer than 900 mentioning Asian Americans. That is, while Muslim articles dis-

proportionately focus on negative subjects, newspaper readers were far more likely to encounter articles discussing Islamic art than articles about Asian American art, despite the fact that culture articles constitute 42% of Asian American articles.

Turning to the roughly 2,800 articles from 2018 that mention Muslims three or more times, we see that coverage focuses even more heavily on *foreign conflict, terrorism,* and *law and order.* The prevalence of other themes—such as *education, economics,* and *culture*—remains fairly constant. Articles that discuss Muslims in more depth are thus more negative than those that just mention them in passing. This means that stories centering on Muslims or Islam tend to reinforce a perception that there is a correlation between Islam and violence. Simultaneously, by giving relatively less attention to other aspects of Muslim life that are shared by all identity groups—culture, education, domestic politics—newspapers may make it harder for readers to see Muslims as part of mainstream American society.

Among our five groups, Muslims are clearly distinctive. They are covered much more than African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, or Jews, and are associated with greater negativity than any other group. Naturally, a large portion of the negativity is related to world events and to individuals and groups that engage in conflict in the name of Islam. It is sometimes possible to avoid using the words "Muslim" or "Islam"—such as when reporters substitute "Daesh" for "Islamic State"—yet journalists cannot simply stop covering incidents of violence that are significant global news stories. In the end, we hope that understanding the disparities in coverage of different groups encourages media outlets to reflect on how to provide comparable reporting on the wide range of human experiences associated with all groups in American society.