

Media Portrayals of Minorities Project

Report on Media Portrayals

2019 Newspaper Coverage of
African Americans, Asian Americans,
Native Americans, Latinos, Jews, and
Muslims

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About the Media Portrayals of Minorities Project

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

Table of Contents

Summary of 2019 Findings	1
How We Do Our Research	2
Comparative Overview	4
African Americans	7
Asian Americans	11
Native Americans	15
Latinos	19
Jews	23
Muslims	27

Summary of 2019 Findings

In this Report, we analyze 2019 coverage of six significant American racial, ethnic, or religious groups: African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, Jews, and Muslims.* Latinos and African Americans are the largest of these groups, constituting approximately 18% and 13% of the US population, respectively. Asian Americans are the next most numerous, at roughly 6%. Native Americans, Jews, and Muslims make up approximately 1-2% of the American population.

We address key questions about media coverage of these groups: Are some mentioned more frequently in US newspapers than others? How positive or negative is coverage of these groups, and why? How does 2019 compare to earlier years in terms of the amount and tone of coverage? What themes are present in the reporting of all six groups, and which were distinctive to each in 2019?

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 distinctive for their relative rarity and for their association with more positivity than any other group, although by a small margin. Across our six groups, politics, education, and law and order 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 analyzes patterns of coverage in American newspapers. Our aim is to provide readers with a better understanding of articles related to marginalized groups, as well as to encourage journalists to reflect on their production of stories about these groups. This coverage influences not only public and political debates, but also day-to-day attitudes about people in our workplaces, our neighborhoods, and our lives.

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

How We Do Our Research

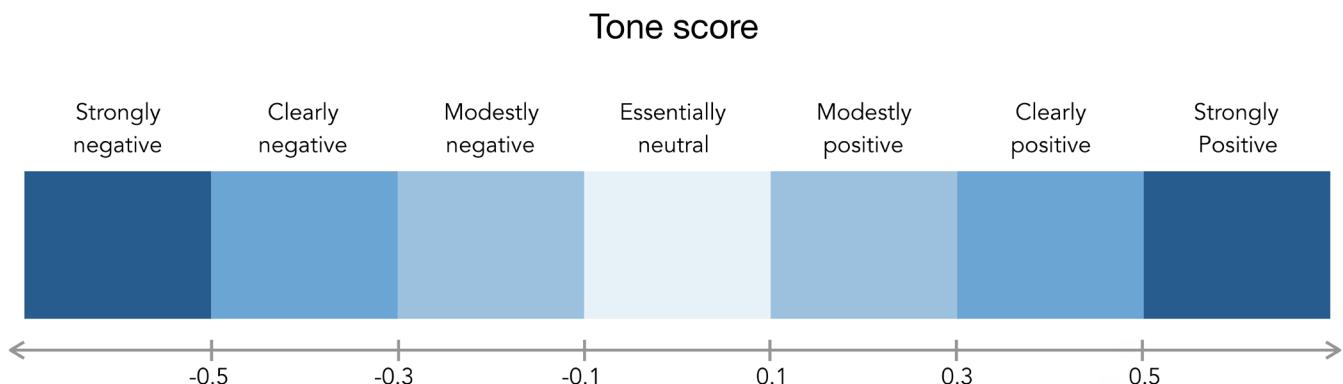
The Media Portrayals of Minorities Project uses newspaper databases to download every available story that contains variations on root words most closely associated with African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, Jews, and Muslims. We draw articles from *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*, the four American newspapers widely read beyond their local or regional homes. All told, these papers published 27,541 articles related to these six groups in 2019. Since most of these touch on a group just once or twice, we also take a closer look at articles that are more likely to be specifically "about" each group by virtue of mentioning it at least three times.

We rely on three main tools for analyzing our articles: topic modeling, sentiment analysis, and regression analysis. Readers don't need to be experts in any of these methods to follow our report, but it is helpful to grasp a few key aspects to understand our results. For those seeking a detailed discussion of our methods as well as citations of sources please see the Appendix to the Report on 2019 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 six general themes present in articles about each group. *Culture* articles contain words such as art, museum, or dance. The *education* theme includes words like university or school. *Economics* articles mention words like employment, markets, or wages. *Politics* stories touch on elections, voting, campaigns, Congress, and other aspects of the political system. Articles related to *bigotry* contain words such as racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, or discrimination. Finally, *law and order* articles include words like crime, courts, and felony. Topic modeling also helps to identify a small number of specific themes associated with each individual group in 2019, such as *immigration* for Latinos or *Holocaust* for Jews. If an article contains one or more words related to a theme, we "tag" the article for that theme. This allows us to examine the tone of articles containing thematic words and the relative frequency of each theme in articles about our groups. For example, knowing that articles tagged for *education* tend to be positive and that 50% of Muslim articles and 81% 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 of positive and negative words to analyze the sentiment score of each article. In essence, the more positive words an article contains, the more positive its score. Conversely, if the article has more negative words, it will have a more negative score. This allows us to 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 in our comparative overview to assess whether the presence of different themes tends to be associated with greater positivity or negativity across all of our articles taken together. For example, if we want to know whether articles tagged for the *culture* theme are more positive than those that aren't, we are interested in whether the presence of words like art, museum, or film mean that articles tend to contain positive words. Of course, some cul-

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

The bottom line is this: we collect all articles mentioning these six groups from four national newspapers; we assess how positive or negative these articles are relative to the average US newspaper story; we identify the types of stories that are more likely to be positive or negative, and how common it is for newspapers to associate each type of story with the six groups. Our methods are designed to make it easy for readers to understand how newspapers cover racial, ethnic, and religious groups relative to one another, and to understand what is distinctive about this coverage in 2019 compared to earlier years.

Comparative Overview

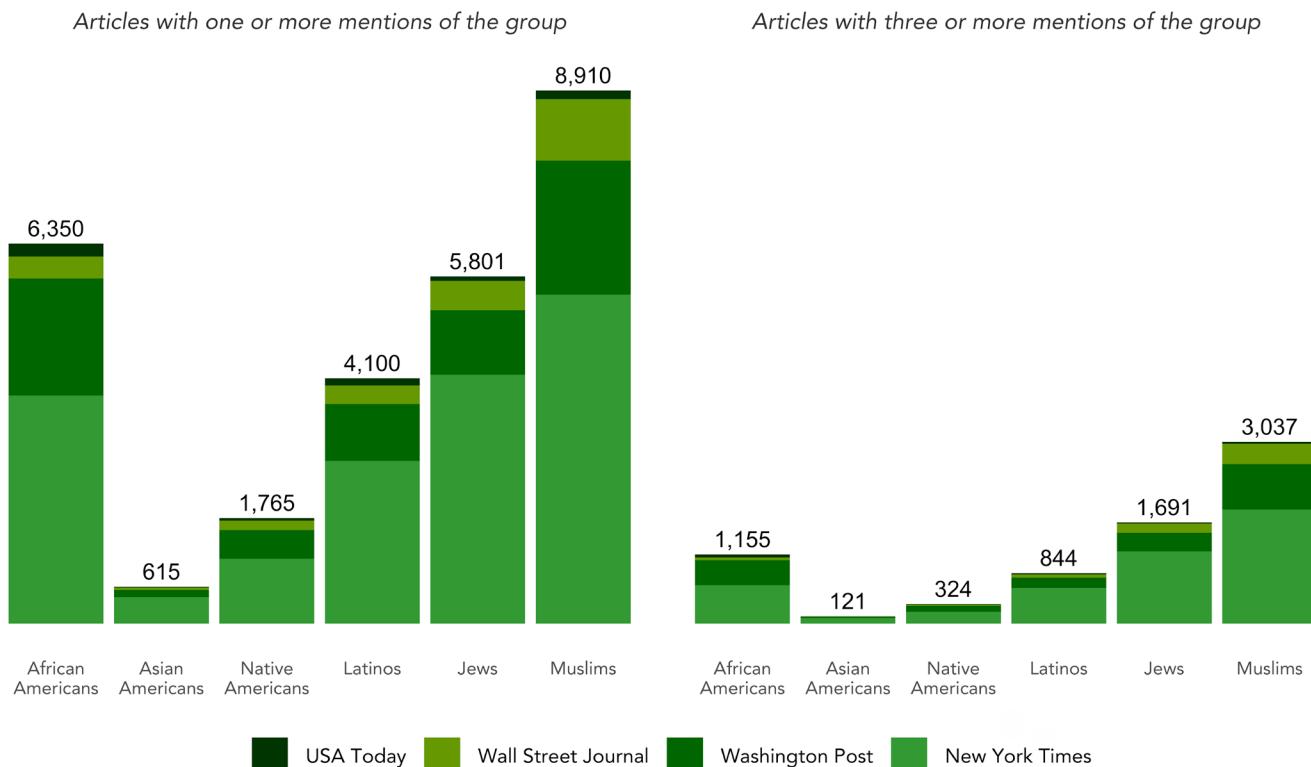
Before we look more closely at each group, we first compare them in several ways. The number of articles touching on the individual racial, ethnic, or religious identity groups varies widely. Articles published in 2019 in our four national newspapers range from a low of just over 600 that mention Asian Americans to a high of just under 9,000 referring to Muslims. The largest proportion of articles by far is drawn from *The New York Times*, which accounts for almost two-thirds of the stories about each group. Nearly a quarter of our articles come from *The Washington Post*, while *Wall Street Journal* stories make up about 9% and *USA Today* articles just over 2% of all articles.

What if we focus on the subset of articles that mention our groups three or more times, and

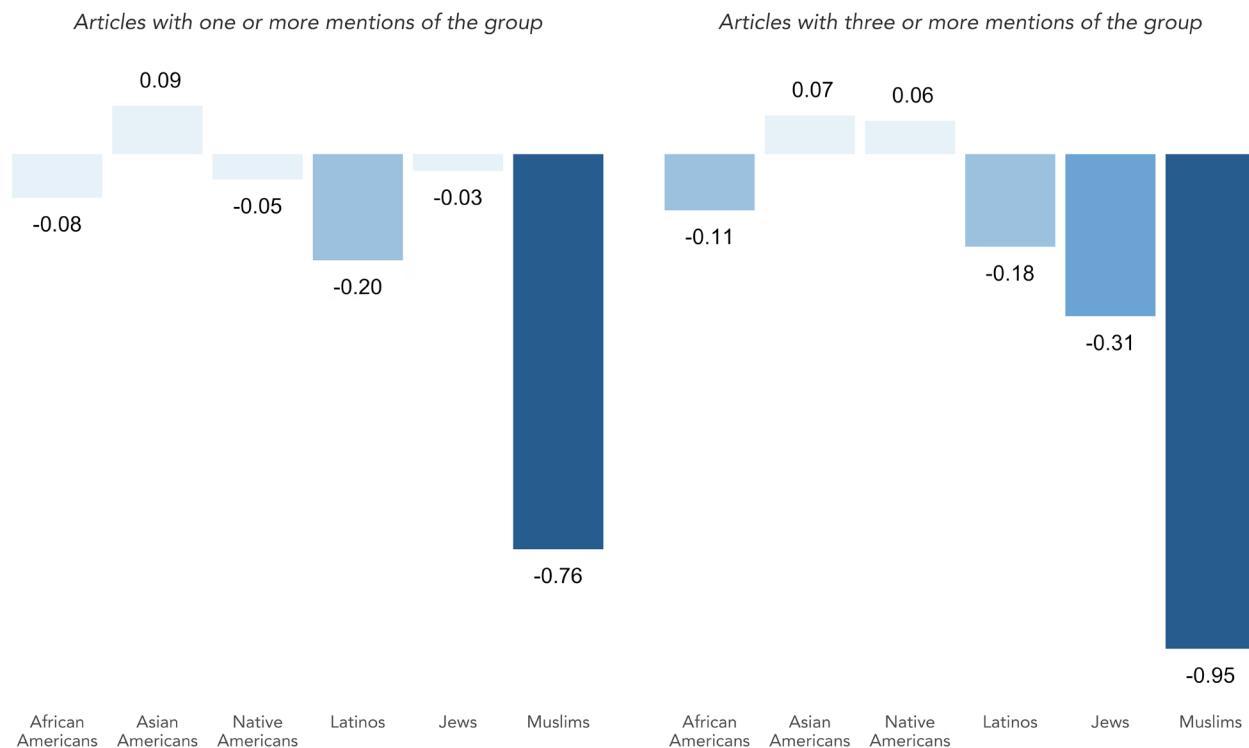
that are thus more likely to be “about” each group? This subset contains many fewer articles: only 34% of Muslim articles, 29% of Jewish articles, 21% of Latino articles, 20% of Asian American articles, 18% of Native American articles, and 18% of African American articles contain three or more mentions of each group.

How positive or negative are articles associated with each group? The tone of the average article from 2019 mentioning Native Americans and Jews is quite similar to that of the average article in the US print media, while that of African Americans falls closer to the outer bounds of the essentially neutral classification. The tone of the average Asian American story is also essentially neutral, though it is more positive than

Article count by group and publication, 2019



Average tone by group, 2019



that of any other group. Articles touching on Latinos are modestly negative. Those referring to Muslims are notably different: the average tone of -0.76 is strongly negative, and far more negative than the average for any other group.

What about articles that contain three or more mentions of each group? The results remain virtually identical for Asian Americans and Latinos. The same is true for African Americans, though the average article crosses the boundary from being essentially neutral to modestly negative. Articles become a bit more positive for Native Americans, and they drop more substantially for Jews and Muslims. In other words, articles that mention these groups more frequently and thus are more strongly associated with these groups become (slightly) more positive for Native Americans, and more clearly negative 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 six general themes: *culture*, *education*, *economics*, *politics*, *bigotry*, and *law and order*. This is particularly telling because there

are striking differences in the tone associated with these themes within our 2019 articles.

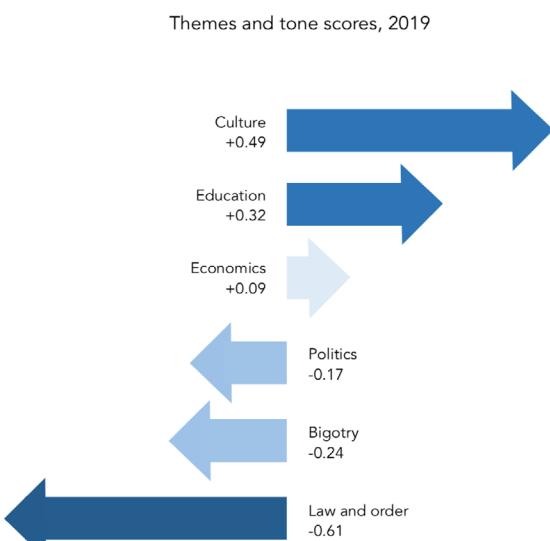
- *Culture* articles are almost 0.5 more positive than articles that do not include any culture words.
- *Education* articles are just over 0.3 more positive than articles containing no education words.
- *Economics* articles are less than 0.1 more positive than non-economics articles.
- *Politics* articles are just under 0.2 more negative than non-politics articles.
- *Bigotry* articles are almost 0.25 more negative than articles not mentioning bigotry words.
- *Law and order* articles are over 0.6 more negative than non-law and order articles.

The upshot is that *culture* articles tend to be most positive and *law and order* articles are linked with strong negativity. A smaller nudge is

also present for *education*, *politics*, and *bigotry* articles: the more often each group is associated with these factors, the more frequently the tone about those groups is likely to be positive or negative. *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 relatively more likely to be associated with both *politics* and *law and order*. This imbal-

ance may account for Latino articles having the second most negative tone among our groups. Asian American articles were tagged for *education* more often than any other group, which may help us grasp their relative positivity even though they contained *bigotry* words at a higher rate than articles touching on any other group. Finally, Native American articles contain more *culture* words and fewer *law and order* words than those about any other group, which may account for the tip toward positivity in articles containing three or more group references. To develop a more comprehensive understanding of these relationships, however, we must examine coverage of each of our six groups more closely.



Percentage of articles that contain words from the six general themes

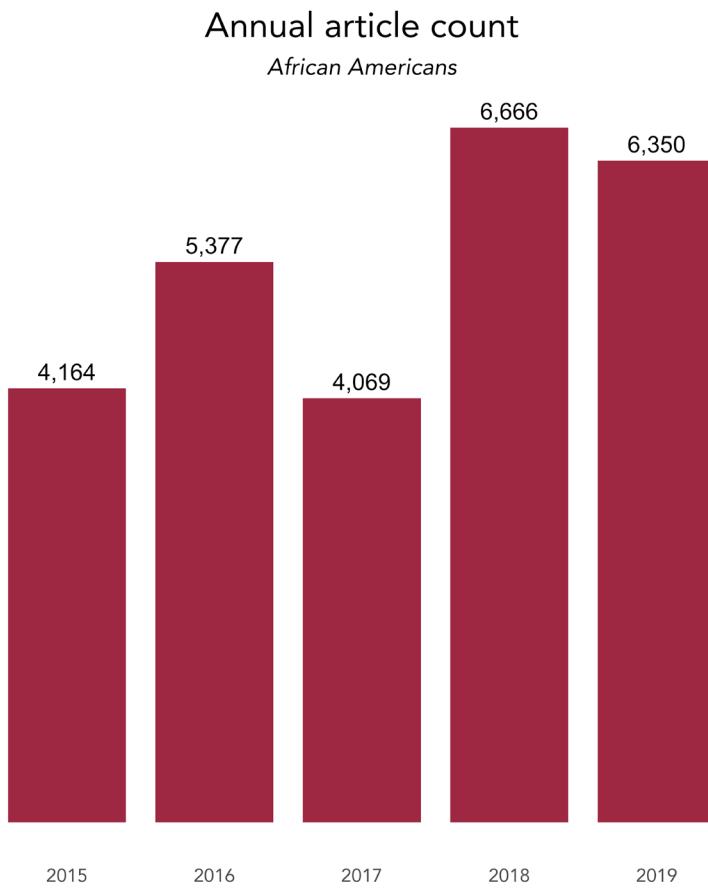
	African Americans	Asian Americans	Native Americans	Latinos	Jews	Muslims
Culture	43%	43%	48%	29%	45%	21%
Education	74	81	73	69	67	50
Economics	62	58	59	64	52	61
Politics	72	67	68	73	62	83
Bigotry	41	48	31	36	36	24
Law and order	65	59	57	65	58	72

African Americans

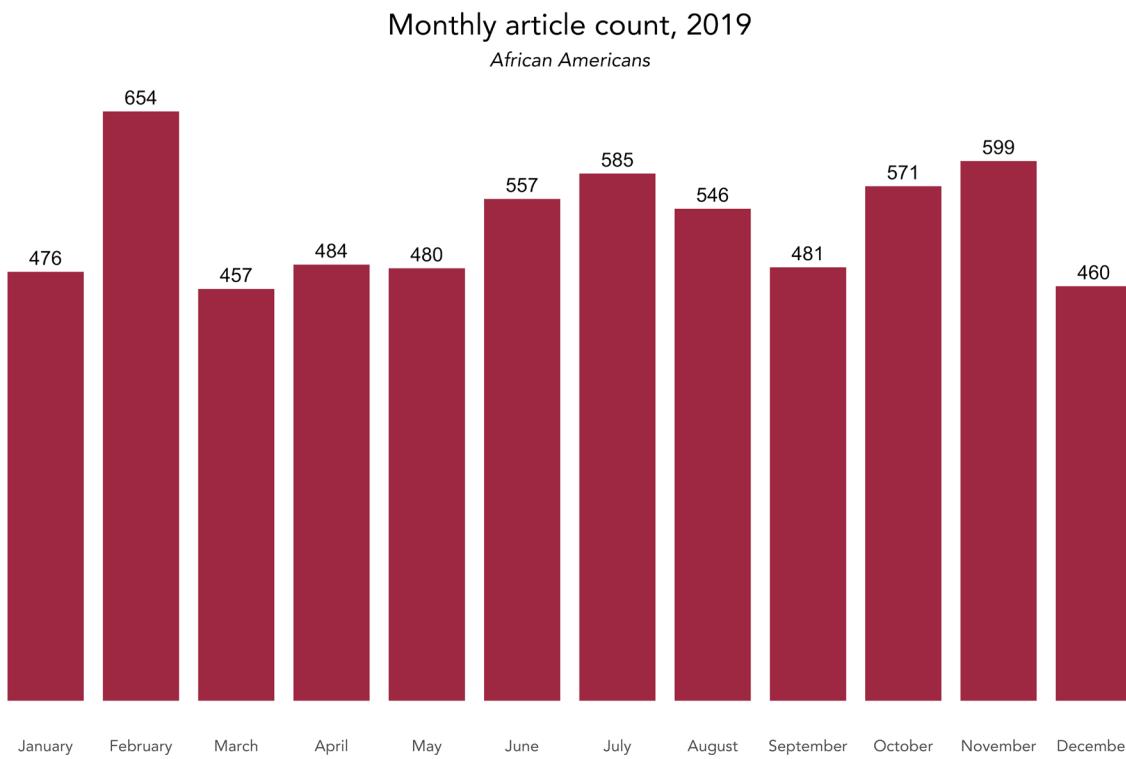
Coverage of African Americans remained nearly as high in 2019 as it was in 2018. Newspapers covered concerns of racism and injustice, but also reported on positive milestones for the African American community. In February, a racist photo believed to depict Virginia Governor Ralph Northam in blackface surfaced. Just one month later, three black churches in Louisiana were burned down in the span of 10 days. On a more positive note, Kamala Harris and Cory Booker joined the ranks of Democrats making presidential bids early in the year, emerging as the most successful African American candidates in the race. Other important topics included access to healthcare, protests over discriminatory policing, and *The New York Times'* "1619 Project," an initiative with the goal of reframing the "country's history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of our national narrative."

An analysis of newspaper coverage over the past five years shows that the number of articles mentioning African Americans has fluctuated substantially. In 2015 and 2017, coverage of African Americans was relatively low, with approximately 4,000 articles per year. Yet this number rose in 2016 and especially in 2018, when it surpassed 6,000 articles. In 2019, the number remains above that threshold with a total of 6,350 articles. This marks a 5% decrease in coverage of Afri-

can Americans compared to the previous year. If newspaper coverage in 2018 was primarily driven by the midterm elections, months with the greatest coverage in 2019 were instead correlated to sporadic, newsworthy stories. The only month in 2019 with a notable jump is February, when the case of Virginia Governor Northam broke, Cory Booker announced his presidential bid, and two African American women from Chicago went head-to-head in a historic mayoral race. On average, there were around 500 articles per month in 2019.



In terms of tone, the average article from 2019 is essentially neutral at -0.08. This marks a minimal drop compared to 2018, which had an average score of -0.05. The most negative month was July, with a tone of -0.26. A review of articles from that month shows that there was no single event that drove the negativity, but rather two main news developments. Early in the month, Joe Biden and Kamala Harris disagreed on the politics of busing during a Democratic presidential debate; a few weeks later, President Trump created a storm of coverage after tweeting that "'Progressive' Democrat Congresswomen" should "go back" to the countries they came from. President Trump's clash with the "The Squad" led to a number of articles accusing the president of escalating racial tensions. A July 30 *New York-Times* story showcases some of this negativity:



For three weeks President Trump has engaged in the sort of racial divisiveness unseen from a national political figure since the days of George Wallace, pushing forward with grievance-based attacks against Democrats of color that he is convinced will energize his base of rural white voters.

Conversely, two of the most positive months of coverage came just a few months later, in September and November, with a number of articles on museums, operas, and art in the African American community.

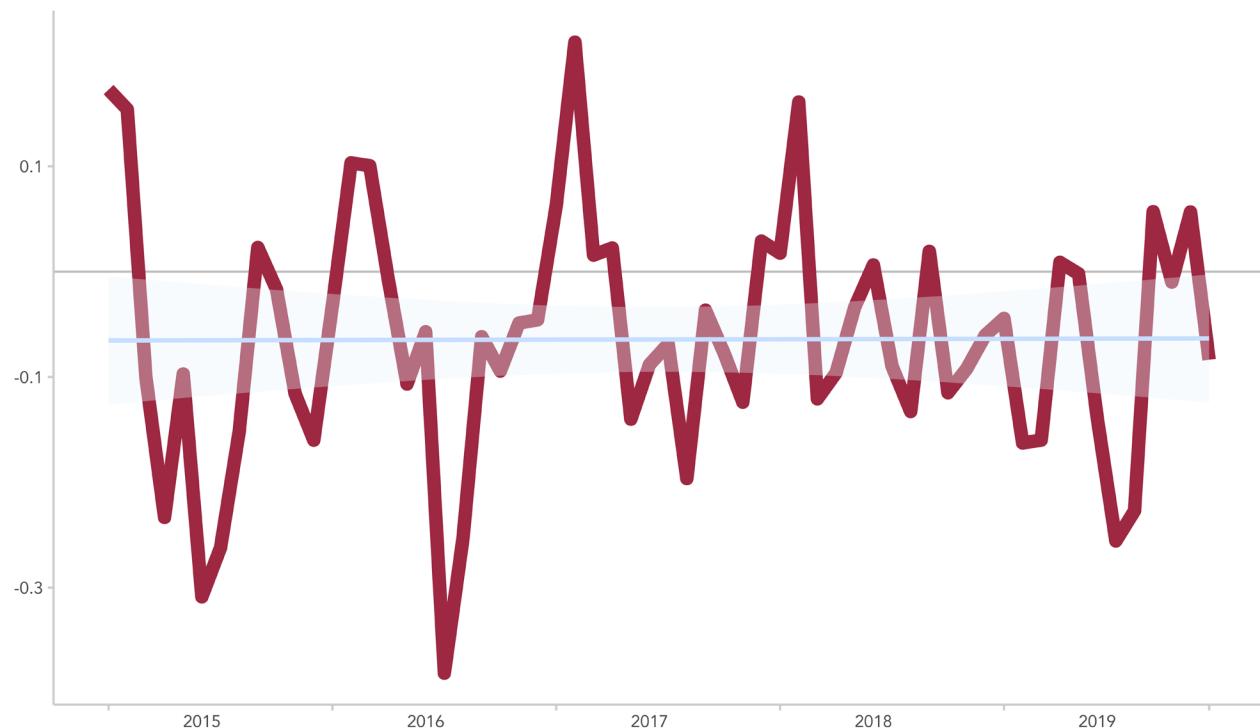
Looking at the bigger picture, when articles mention African Americans, what do they tend to cover? From our six general themes, the most prevalent topics in 2019 were *education* and *politics*. The *education* theme appeared in 74% of all articles about African Americans, while *politics* was present in 72%. The next most-covered topics were *law and order* and *economics*, at 65% and 62% respectively. Finally, *culture* and *bigotry* were the least covered themes, making up 44% and 41% of 2019 coverage of African Americans. These percentages are exceptionally close to those from 2018, meaning that there has not been a great change in the main themes covered when these newspapers write about African Americans.

Moreover, there are specific themes that were particularly prevalent in articles about African Americans in 2019. These include stories about *policing*, *health*, and *slavery*. Policing has been a concern in the African American community for years, and continued to be a prominent theme of newspaper coverage in 2019. There are references to *policing* in 23% of all African American articles. This topic is one of the most negative of the features we analyzed, as articles tagged for policing words had an average tone score of -0.53. Not only is *policing* a subset of the *law and order* theme, it is also related to *politics* and *bigotry*. Increased coverage of policing may be due to the reemergence of former New York City Mayor Mike Bloomberg in the news. His controversial "stop and frisk" policy from his mayoral tenure was criticized as racially discriminatory during his presidential bid. An op-ed from *The New York Times* on November 10 showcases the sort of negative criticism Mayor Bloomberg received on the campaign trail:

Stop-and-frisk, pushed as a way to get guns and other contraband off the streets, became nothing short of a massive, enduring, city-sanctioned sys-

Average monthly article tone, 2015-2019

African Americans



tem of racial terror. This system of terror exploded under Bloomberg, with his full advocacy and support.

The re-emergence of the stop-and-frisk debate highlights that policing practices in the African American community remain a point of contention and a mainstay of media coverage.

The topic of *health* also came to the fore this year. Health-related words include terms like patient, opioid, healthcare, and medicine. Often, articles about African Americans in relation to health also involve questions of inequity and discrimination, connecting them to the *bigotry* theme. Articles linked to the *health* theme are more negative than the average article in the African American data set, with a tone score of -0.20. For example, one July 29 *Washington Post* article focuses on the “black mental health crisis” caused by racial discrimination:

The consequences of a system that overlays race with criminality is a lack of funding for mental health services where people need them and a continued belief that there is something biologically wrong with African Americans.

Another reason the number of articles on health in relation to African Americans was so high this year may be because the photo of Governor Northam originally appeared in his medical school yearbook. A number of articles in *The New York Times* used the case of this photo as an impetus to investigate implicit bias in medical practices.

The *slavery* theme appeared in 19% of all articles about African Americans and emerged as a new topic in 2019. *The New York Times’ “1619 Project”* may not be entirely responsible, as “1619” itself only came up in around 1% of all articles in the data set. However, the project’s mission was in part to change the conversation about America’s past, and it is possible this reshaping of history seeped into other newspaper coverage after the project’s release. In fact, 60% of the articles that mention slavery were published after the 1619 Project was launched in mid-August. This supports the proposition that this journalistic endeavor had a sizable impact on overall coverage of African Americans.

Additionally, there is a notable link between the *culture* theme and *slavery*, with 59% of all articles about *slavery* mentioning a culture-related term. Several of these articles referenced the

National Museum of African American History and Culture, a key location for historical archives, which opened in 2016. Articles that mentioned both *slavery* and *culture* also at times noted specific artists working on African American history, as did this May 5 *Washington Post* story:

A panel run by the National Endowment for the Arts advises the State Department, which chose Puryear, an African American artist whose work has for decades touched gently but insistently on race, the legacy of slavery and the elusive ideal of freedom.

The strong overlap between *culture* and *slavery* showcases the way that the arts and specific artists are deliberately grappling with a difficult and violent portion of American history.

What about articles that mention African Americans three or more times, suggesting that the story might be more centrally about this group? Interestingly, in this more focused set of articles, the themes of *slavery* and *health* are amplified,

with *slavery* appearing in 36% of the articles, for example, up from 20% in the overall data set. This may contribute to the slightly more negative tone score of -0.11 for articles mentioning African Americans multiple times as opposed to -0.08 in those where they are mentioned just once or twice.

In sum, media coverage of African Americans remained high in 2019. A number of these articles included a historical component. A notable proportion viewed systemic issues of disparity—such as healthcare discrimination and racial bias in police practices—through a retrospective lens. Moreover, *slavery* came to the fore as coverage of African Americans wove this fundamental part of American history into daily reporting. Yet despite these difficult topics, the overall tone of articles about African Americans remains essentially neutral, with articles related to *culture* counteracting the negativity of other themes. This underscores the point that the coverage of African Americans is more nuanced than any individual theme or tone score alone can indicate.

Asian Americans

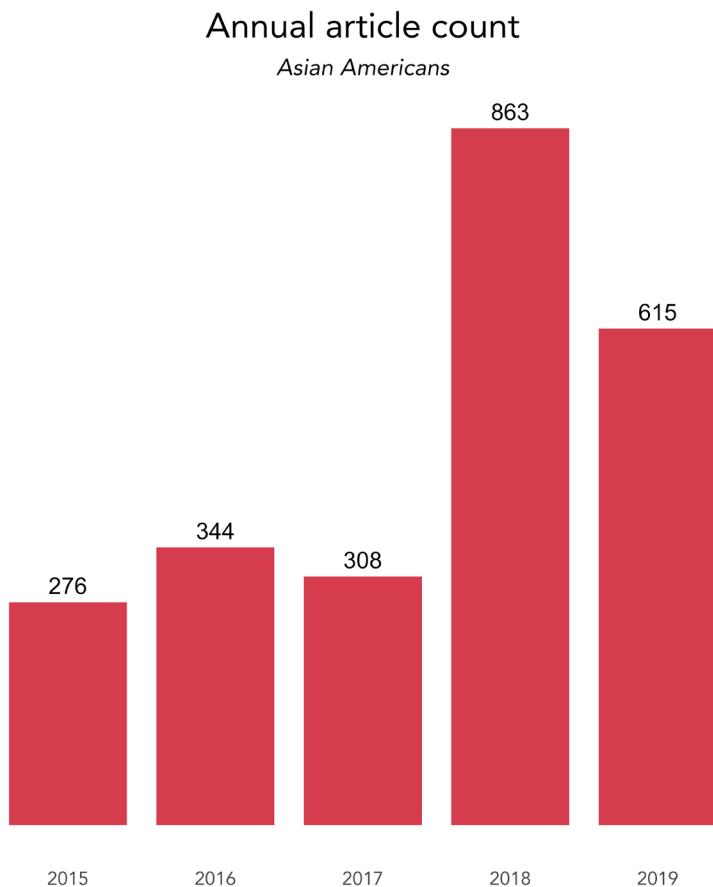
Newspaper coverage of Asian Americans decreased in 2019 compared to 2018, though it still remained significantly higher than in previous years. Specifically, the Harvard University affirmative action case received continued attention given accusations that the university intentionally discriminated against Asian American applicants. Also, Stuyvesant High School, one of New York City's most selective public schools, garnered a fair amount of coverage for its higher admission rates of Asian American students compared to other racial groups. In addition to these specific events, stories related to the general themes of *education* and *bigotry* drove much of the coverage for 2019.

Coverage of Asian Americans dropped by almost 30% from 2018 to 2019, from just under 900 articles to just above 600 articles. It is important to note, however, that this decrease is not part of a longer-term trend, since 2019 coverage remains significantly higher than that of 2015, 2016, and 2017. In fact, the article count in 2019 is almost double that of each of those three earlier years. At a monthly level across 2019, the greatest number of articles appeared in September, corresponding with rising attention to the Harvard affirmative action verdict that was handed down in October.

Overall, the average article from 2019 mentioning Asian Americans is essentially neutral at 0.09.

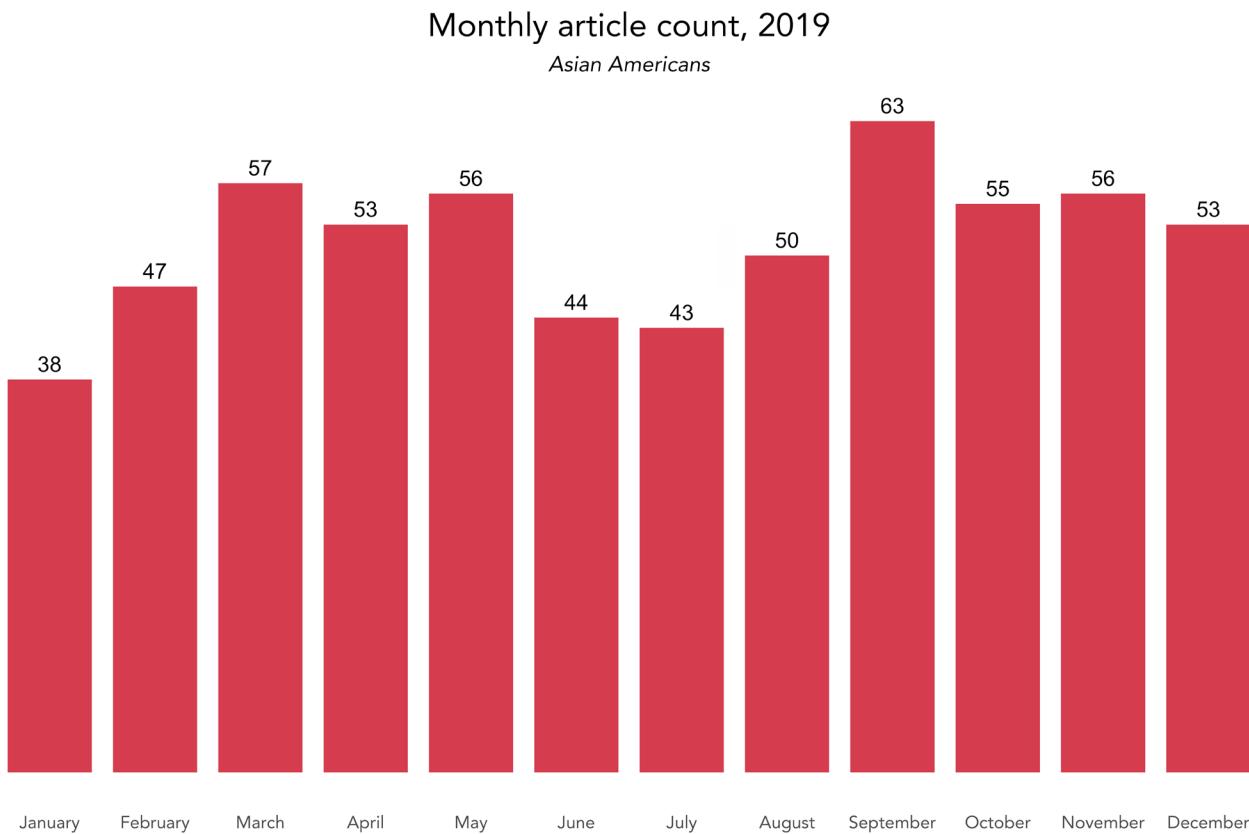
It is important to note, however, that this score is more positive than that for any of the other five groups we examine in this report. This tone marks a minimal decrease from 2018, in which the average Asian American article had a tone of 0.10. At a monthly level, the variations in tone across 2019 are similar to the general pattern from the previous five years, where coverage of

Asian Americans typically fluctuated by no more than 0.30 in either direction from the overall average.



As discussed in the comparative section, *education* was the most common general theme for Asian Americans, present in 81% of articles in 2019. The next most prevalent themes were *politics* (67%), *law and order* (59%), *economics* (58%), *bigotry* (48%), and finally, *culture* (43%). The *education* and *bigotry* themes stand out in the broader context, as they appeared more frequently in Asian American coverage

than they did for any other group. Although *education* was the most prevalent theme within Asian American coverage, such stories were rarely purely related to education; in fact, they were often also linked to *law and order*, *politics*, or *bigotry*. The presence of multiple, overlapping themes dilutes the inherent positivity associated with education words that we found in our comparative overview. For instance, a November 18 *Wall Street Journal* article describes the opposition of Asian Americans to racial preferences, specifically referring



to both the *education* and *law and order* themes while using a number of clearly negative words:

There, Asian-Americans proved instrumental in killing a law that would have overturned a two-decade-old ban on racial preferences in public education, employment and contracting. To do this, Asian-Americans successfully rallied to force the law onto the ballot—and then defeated it.

Beyond the general themes outlined above, there are group-specific themes that were prevalent in articles about Asian Americans in 2019. These include stories about the *Harvard affirmative action case*, *Stuyvesant High School*, Mayor *Bill de Blasio* of New York City, and stories related to the term *model minority*, a stereotype typically associated with Asian Americans. The majority of these group-specific themes are also linked to the general *education* theme, which further accounts for its dominant presence in Asian American coverage.

Asian Americans have long been portrayed as a “*model minority*” based on their presumed work ethic and cultural emphasis on education and discipline. In 2019, 54% of coverage mentioned

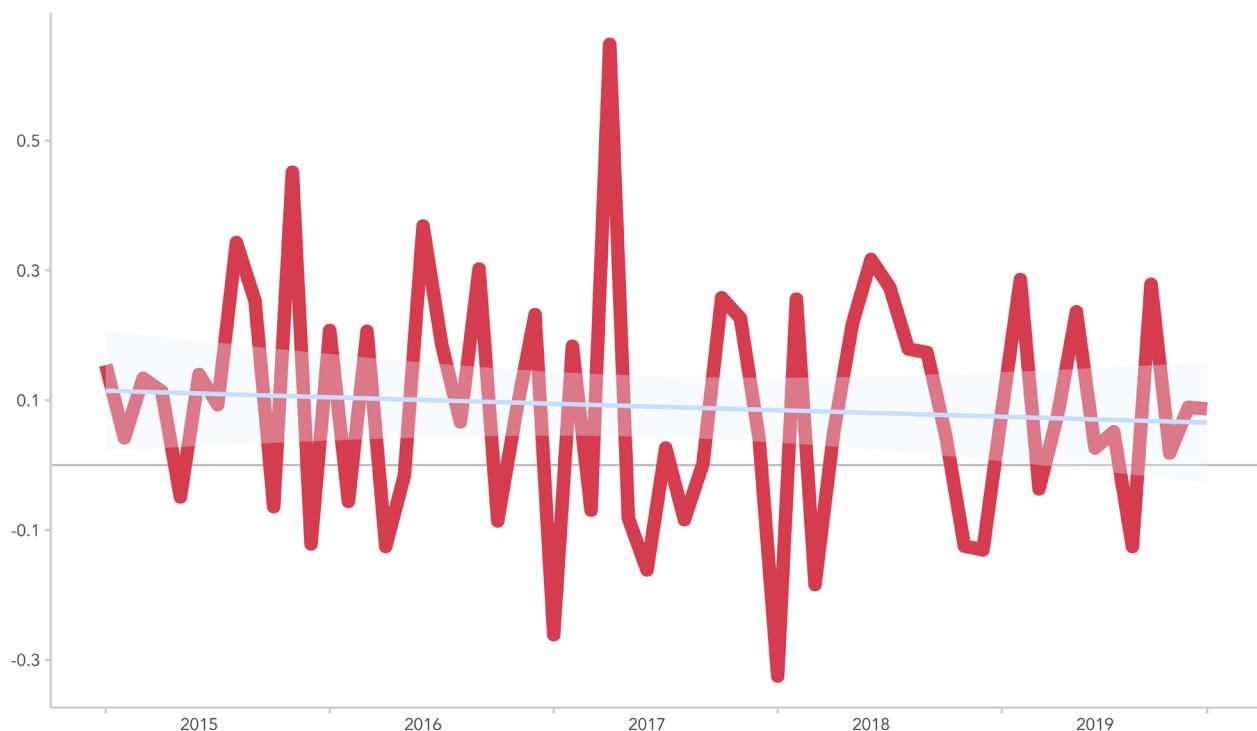
terms relating to *model minority*, including “prominent,” “elite,” or “success,” most often in the context of education. In fact, 48% of articles mentioned *model minority* and *education* words together. Along with the overwhelming use of the *model minority* stereotype in 2019 coverage, the topic is associated with a modestly positive tone, which offsets some of the negativity when *education* articles are more explicitly linked with politics, bigotry, or law and order. A *New York Times* article from January 15, for example, notes the influence of the *model minority* stereotype on young Asian Americans using mostly positive language:

Teachers tend to give Asian-American students higher grades and funnel them into advanced programs, the researchers found. Often, lower-performing students have risen to meet these expectations of them, an effect social scientists refer to as stereotype promise.

The *Harvard affirmative action case*, which was mentioned in 25% of articles in 2019, also proved to influence the tone of coverage at various moments throughout the year. For example, a decrease in positivity from September to

Average monthly article tone, 2015-2019

Asian Americans



October can be explained by the release of the verdict in early October. In fact, 60% of coverage in October mentioned the lawsuit and its consequences. The verdict was somewhat controversial, given that it upheld Harvard's admission policies and found that the university's approach to affirmative action did not discriminate against Asian Americans. Among articles that referenced the lawsuit, those that contained *bigotry* or *law and order* words were strongly more negative than those that did not. For example, in an October 2 *Washington Post* article, Yukong Zhao, president of the Asian American Coalition for Education, uses mostly negative language to argue that the verdict perpetuates discrimination in education:

Our nation has witnessed another immoral attempt by America's ruling class to continue their institutionalized discrimination against Asian American children and treat them as second-class citizens with regard to educational opportunities.

Stuyvesant High School also received attention in coverage of Asian Americans. The high school was notably mentioned for admitting a majority of Asian Americans while purportedly neglecting other populations, including African Americans.

Consequently, it was linked to legal and political debates regarding its affirmative action policies. In particular, 74% of *Stuyvesant High School* coverage mentioned Bill de Blasio, the mayor of New York. *De Blasio*, a specific theme of 2019's coverage, was often discussed in regard to his proposal to diversify elite New York City schools, including Stuyvesant High School, by eliminating entrance exams in the admissions process. The backlash to the mayor's proposal accounts for more negative coverage in *Stuyvesant High School* articles that also mentioned de Blasio. For example, a March 18 *New York Times* article touched on *law and order, politics*, and the sub-theme of *discrimination* while discussing reactions to de Blasio's proposal:

Lawmakers considering Mr. de Blasio's proposal have faced a backlash from the specialized schools' alumni organizations and from Asian-American groups who believe discarding the test would water down the schools' rigorous academics and discriminate against the mostly low-income Asian students who make up the majority of the schools' student bodies, [including that of Stuyvesant High School].

As is clear, the specific themes of the *Harvard*

affirmative action case, *Stuyvesant High School*, and de Blasio all connect not only to the broader theme of *education*, but also to *bigotry*. The focus on discriminatory structures that arguably disadvantage Asian Americans helps account for the prevalence of the *bigotry* theme in coverage of this group. Stories of Asian American success coupled with concerns about discrimination also help clarify why *bigotry*-related stories are more mixed in tone rather than consistently negative. In other words, Asian American *education* articles are not as positive as they are for other groups because they overlap with negative themes such as *bigotry*, *politics*, and *law and order*. Conversely, Asian American *bigotry* articles are not as negative because they often contain references to positive themes such as *education* and *model minority*.

To gain an additional picture of how Asian Americans were discussed in 2019, we narrowed down our body of articles to include only those that mentioned the group three or more times. Our overall findings were generally confirmed and even emphasized in this focused set of articles. For example, 79% of these articles mentioned words relating to the *model minority* topic, compared to 54% of all Asian American articles published in 2019. 45% specifically referenced the

lawsuit against Harvard University, marking an increase from 25% in the total number of articles in 2019. Most notable, however, is the prevalence of *education* words in the focused data set, which appear in 96% of the articles. This reinforces the point that *education* was a driving force in 2019 coverage of Asian Americans.

Asian Americans receive much less media coverage than other groups in this study. Despite the prevalence of their involvement in nationwide news stories, including those relating to the lawsuit against Harvard University and the affirmative action debates involving the integration of New York City schools, Asian Americans are still given relatively little attention as an overarching category within the media. "Asian American" may not be as widely used as more specific terms based on country of origin or heritage, such as Chinese American, Korean American, Indian American, etc. Regardless, it is clear that when mentioned, Asian Americans are more typically linked to the general theme of *education* than any other group. This disproportionate coverage of *education* helps to explain why the average tone of articles mentioning Asian Americans is more positive than that of the other groups in our report.

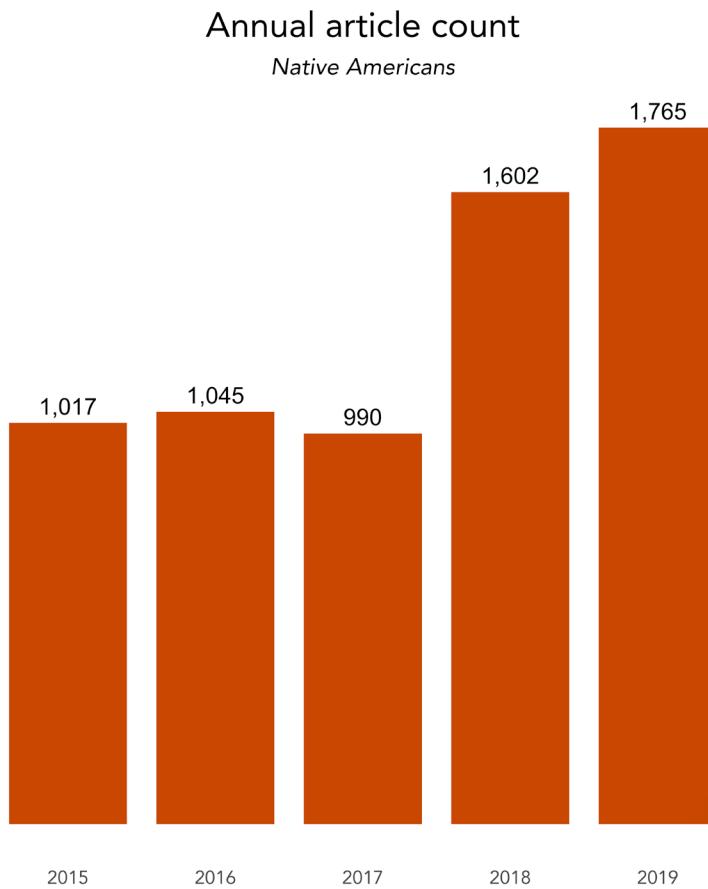
Native Americans

There were more articles about Native Americans in 2019 than in any of the previous four years. Heavy coverage of politics—such as Elizabeth Warren’s controversial DNA test as well as the January government shutdown, contributed to these numbers. At the start of the year, a standoff at the Lincoln Memorial between Native American political activist Nathan Phillips and Nick Sandmann, a high school student wearing a “Make America Great Again” hat, also drew significant coverage. Cases brought against Purdue Pharma in relation to the opioid crisis that has deeply affected Native American populations also influenced the high article count in 2019.

Native American media coverage has not followed a steady trend over the past five years. The number of articles mentioning the group stayed consistent between 2015 and 2017, with approximately 1,000 articles during each of those years. However, 2018 saw a major jump, with the count surpassing 1,500. Even this number was topped in 2019, with 1,765 articles mentioning Native Americans. The increase from 2018 to 2019 can be attributed largely to presidential election campaign coverage, with a particular focus on Elizabeth Warren.

Four months contributed most to 2019’s high article count, all with over 150 articles: January, February, May, and August. January saw the high-

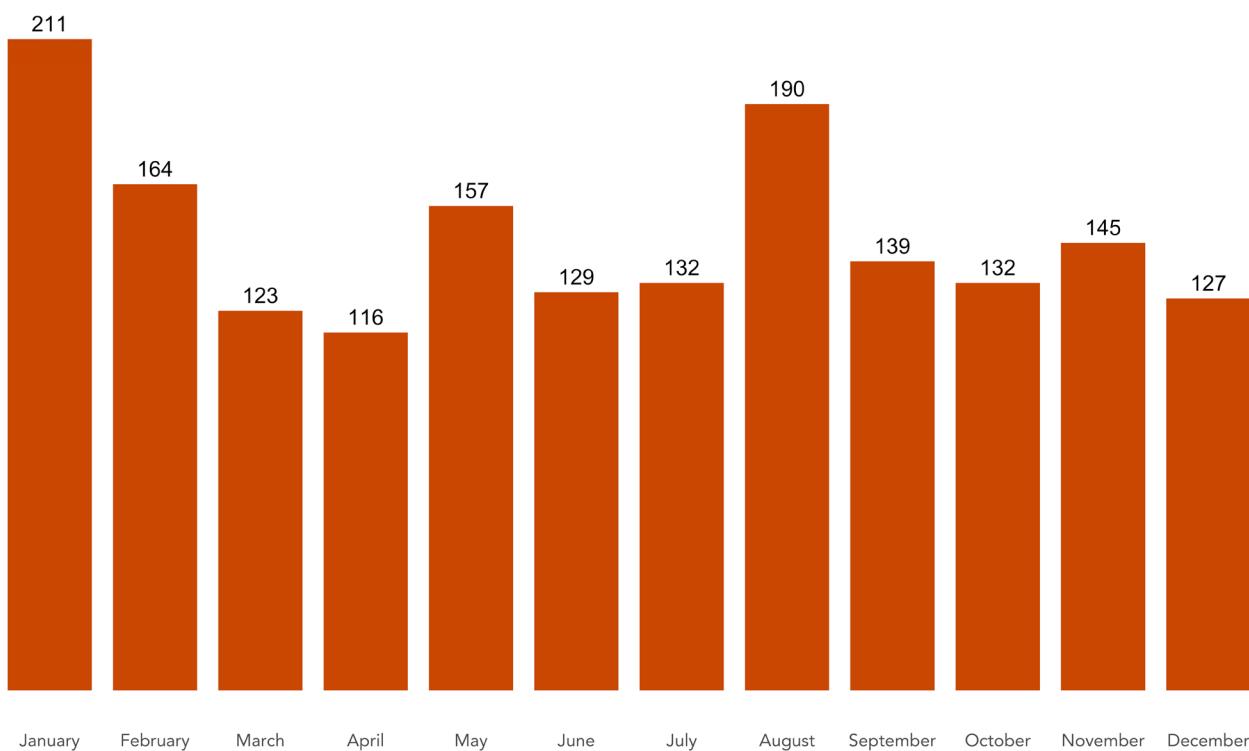
est number of articles of any month in the last five years, with 211 articles mentioning Native Americans. Substantial coverage of politics occurred in January and February, and high article counts in May and August appear mainly due to legal disputes regarding Purdue Pharma: formal litigation started in May, and in August the pharmaceutical company began to reach settlements with many plaintiffs.



lips and Nick Sandmann, both of which were significant drivers of negative coverage. February’s distinctly negative tone of -0.38 was a continuation of coverage that began in January of Senator Elizabeth Warren, whose DNA test meant to prove her Native American heritage generated criticism, notably from members of the Cherokee Nation. July saw debates over controversial murals painted by Victor Arnautoff in a San Francisco public school that many

Monthly article count, 2019

Native Americans



deemed offensive to Native Americans. While coverage of this event was light, a strongly negative tone score of -0.50 for these stories likely contributed to negativity for this month. Offsetting the negativity from these months were articles related to *culture*, and in particular to *art* and *museums*, which were clearly positive in tone. Thus, *culture*-related coverage spread out across the year counter-balanced the most prominent negative storylines, helping to account for the overall essentially neutral tone of 2019.

As noted in the comparative section of this report, we track six general themes in stories about each group. 73% of Native American articles mentioned words related to *education*, and *politics*-related words came up in 68% of articles. When comparing these percentages across all groups, however, it is clear that these themes do not stand out in stories about Native Americans. On the other hand, words related to *culture* show up in 48% of articles in the Native American data set, making this theme more prevalent than it is for any other group in our report. Of the 845 culture-related articles, 681 include the word *culture* itself, while 505 contain *art*, and 375 mention

museums. *Law and order*, *politics*, and *bigotry* all are mentioned less often in articles about Native Americans than in articles about other groups.

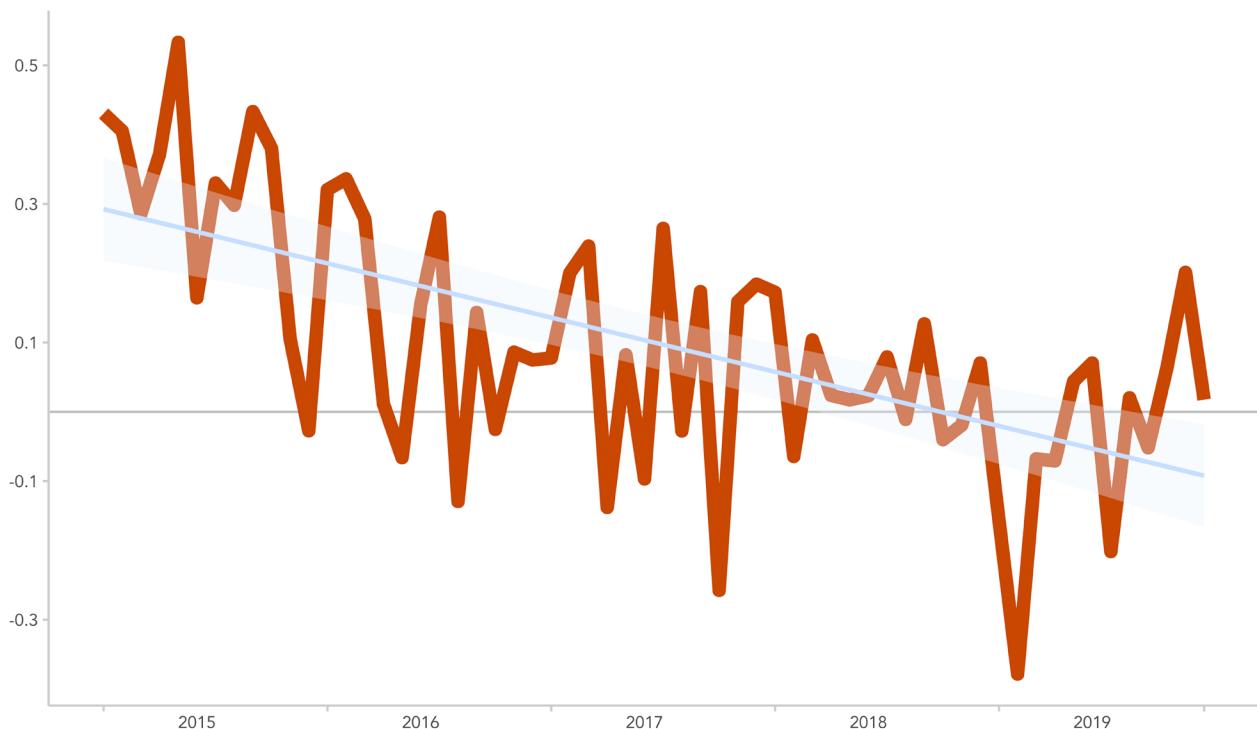
The *culture* theme played a significant role in 2019 coverage. Much of this coverage was positive, with an average tone of 0.21 for *culture*-related articles. More specifically, articles mentioning the word *museum* have an average tone of 0.42, and articles mentioning *art* average 0.37: both clearly positive. Many of these articles are commentaries on local art exhibits, or opinion pieces regarding the importance of Native American voices in the art and museum world, such as a January 15 *Wall Street Journal* review regarding a new exhibition at The Metropolitan Museum of Art:

"This is the first time that an exhibition of Native American art has been featured in the American wing," [said curator Sylvia Yount]. Indigenous art that once found its home in the museum's more anthropological settings has now properly become part of an overview of American art.

Coverage of *politics* also played an important role in 2019. In January, one of the year's most

Average monthly article tone, 2015-2019

Native Americans



negative months of coverage, 20% of articles were related to the *shutdown* theme, referring to the government shutdown that was a clearly negative storyline. While Native Americans were not the central focus of these articles, a significant number covered the hardships stemming from recognized tribes' reliance on federal funds. A January 6 *New York Times* article emphasizes this point:

Native American tribes are also being hit hard by the shutdown. Their treaties with the US government guarantee funding for services like health care and education, and the work is often done by tribal employees whose salaries rely on federal money.

Politics also came to the forefront through coverage of Elizabeth Warren; the name *Warren* was found in 13% of the 1,765 Native American articles. Coverage was centered around two events: her presidential campaign, and a dispute with the Cherokee Nation over a DNA test. News regarding her presidential campaign contributed most heavily to coverage, as 180 articles contained mentions of both *Warren* and *campaign*, whereas only 84 articles throughout the year mentioned both *Warren* and *DNA*. This suggests

that many articles about Warren did not center on the DNA controversy, even if those that did are especially noteworthy for their contribution to the lowest tone scores for Native American articles in the past five years. Many in the Native American community reacted angrily to what they viewed as an attempt by Senator Warren to gain political capital without being actively engaged in their culture. After an initial apology directly to the Cherokee tribe in February, Senator Warren spoke again about her DNA test, issuing a public apology at the forum of Native American issues in Sioux City, Iowa in August, a month in which she was mentioned in 17% of all articles regarding Native Americans. A February 6 *Wall Street Journal* article regarding Warren's private apology, conveys the negativity:

Ms. Warren released the genetic test results to counter President Trump's repeated mocking of her as not truly Native American. She has long faced accusations she portrayed herself as part Native American to advance her academic career. The senator last week apologized in a private phone call with Chief Bill John Baker of the Cherokee Nation.

While the *politics* theme contributed a great deal to coverage in 2019, the theme of *bigotry* came up as well. Coverage of *Nathan Phillips* accounted for 50 articles in 2019—contributing to January’s high article count and negative tone. The interaction between Phillips and Covington Catholic High School student Nick Sandmann at the Lincoln Memorial garnered much national attention, and articles about the event averaged a strongly negative tone of -1.06. Footage of the event shows Sandmann smiling in the face of Phillips, while fellow students laugh, suggesting a disrespect for Phillips’ Native American culture and practices. Coverage of the event tended to evoke broad condemnation. A January 19 *New York Times* article, for example, reported that the Catholic Sisters of Mercy tweeted in a response to student behavior in the video that “Racism and intolerance in all forms go directly against Catholic social teaching.”

Mentions of *opioids* occurred in 16% of all Native American articles in 2019. Nationwide, many Native American tribes, municipal, and state governments sued Purdue Pharma, the producer of OxyContin, claiming the pharmaceutical company was an early driver of the nation’s opioid crisis, which has disproportionately affected Native Americans. May saw the start of formal litigation against Purdue Pharma. Trials and subsequent coverage continued until August when the company settled with many plaintiffs, including Native American tribes. While articles using the term *opioids* had a -0.38 average tone, the majority portray Native Americans sympathetically, as the negativity in this case is generally directed at Purdue Pharma’s role in the lawsuit. A February 26 *New York Times* opinion piece highlights Native Americans’ connection to the crisis:

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, between 1999 and 2015, Native Americans had the largest increase in overdose deaths compared to other groups. The C.D.C. also reported that in 2016, rates of prescription-opioid-related overdose were higher among both non-His-

panic whites and Native Americans than other groups. In response to this, several Native American tribes have filed lawsuits against the manufacturers and distributors of prescription opioids.

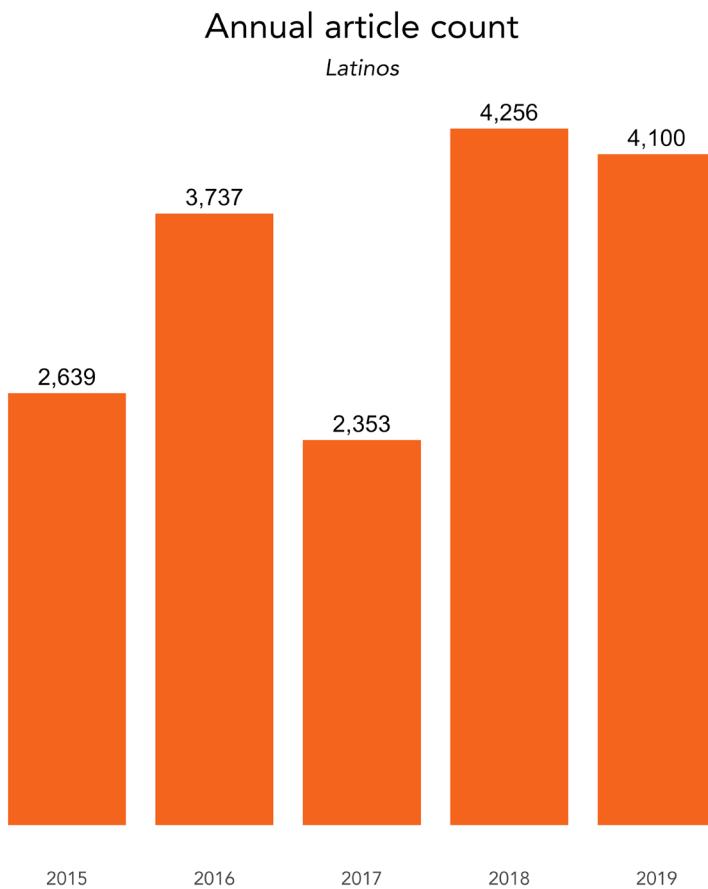
To better understand the important themes of 2019, we narrowed down Native American articles to the 18% that mention the group three or more times. We see that Warren’s DNA controversy becomes even more prevalent: 15% of articles contain both the words *Warren* and *DNA*, as opposed to 5% of all Native American articles. In addition, there was a more positive tone for *culture*, which rises to 0.37 in the more focused set of Native American articles, versus 0.26 in all articles taken together. In particular, there were more mentions of *museums*: 30% of articles in this focused data set include this word, whereas it appears in only 21% of articles in the overall data set. In short, Senator Warren’s DNA controversy and museums are more heavily featured in articles that devote greater attention to Native Americans.

Newspaper coverage of Native Americans in 2019, while lower than for many other groups, contained more articles and a less positive tone than in previous years. Stories related to *politics* influenced these changes. In particular, Senator Warren’s presidential campaign garnered substantial coverage, and her DNA testing controversy was a significant source of negativity. The January government shutdown that affected Native American tribes also contributed to the prevalence of this theme. On the theme of *bigotry*, news of the standoff between Nathan Phillips and Nick Sandmann was a big driver of high article counts in January and relatively-high negativity. May and August, two months characterized by heavy coverage, saw many articles regarding Native Americans’ connection to the opioid crisis driven by Purdue Pharma. On the other hand, positive coverage of *culture*—and especially *museums*—largely offset much of the negative coverage, which in the end made 2019 an essentially neutral year in terms of tone.

Latinos

After a notable rise in 2018, media coverage of Latinos remained similarly high in 2019. Stories linked to themes of *politics* and *law and order* made up a significant proportion of the articles. In the political realm, as the 2020 presidential campaigns took off, Latino voters were highlighted as the largest racial or ethnic minority group eligible to vote in the election. Among the candidates, Julián Castro and Spanish-speaking Beto O'Rourke joined the race, the former establishing his stance as the only Latino candidate and the latter appealing to Latino voters by drawing a contrast with President Trump's negative descriptions about immigrants and the US-Mexico border. In August, coverage of Latinos spiked after a mass shooting in an El Paso Walmart. The shooter was later found to have targeted Mexicans and was charged with federal hate crimes. Immigration was also a contentious topic, with the Supreme Court deciding that it would hear cases challenging the termination of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).

Newspaper coverage of Latinos over the past five years has fluctuated quite a bit. Fewer than 2,700 articles per year were published in 2015 and 2017, whereas the number was over 3,700 in 2016. In 2018, coverage of Latinos jumped dramatically to over 4,200 articles. 2019 saw a similarly high amount of coverage, with 4,100 articles mentioning the group.

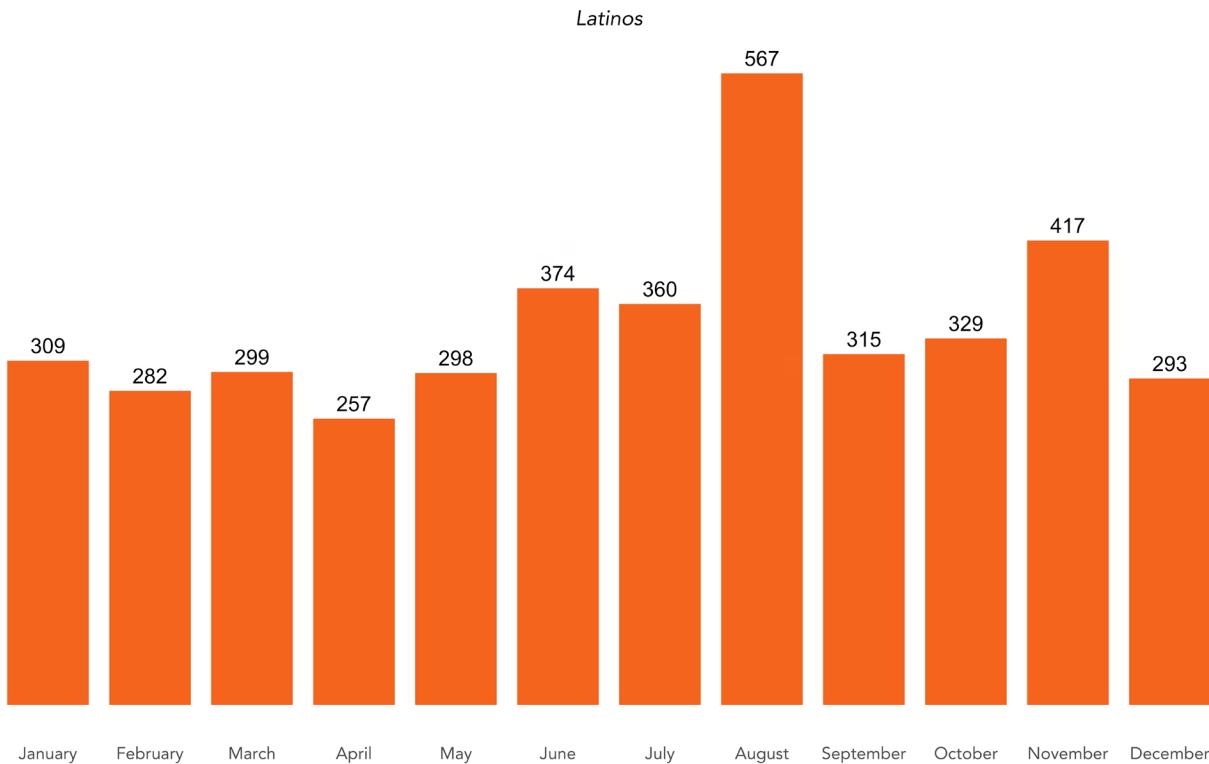


Looking at monthly coverage across 2019, the greatest number of articles appeared in August and November. August, in particular, saw a spike in coverage of Latinos, with 567 articles published that month—almost double the 5-year monthly average of 285 articles. This peak in coverage can be attributed to the El Paso shooting, which occurred on August 3rd.

While the increase in coverage in August is mostly due to this one event, coverage in November, the month with the next highest number of articles in 2019, is related to a combination of several stories. November had the highest number of articles referencing voting of any month in 2019 as well as a significant amount that mentioned Beto O'Rourke and Julián Castro. The increase in articles touching on the two candidates is likely related to the fact that O'Rourke dropped out of the presidential race on November 1st and Castro ended up missing the cut-off for a democratic primary debate scheduled for the 20th of the month. November also saw a notable rise in articles mentioning DACA, which can be attributed to oral arguments on termination of the program that were made before the Supreme Court on November 12th.

There has been a modest decline in the tone of Latino articles over time. The average valence of

Monthly article count, 2019



articles mentioning the group in 2015 was -0.01, but by 2019 it was -0.20, the lowest of the last five years. During 2019, the average monthly tone was fairly consistent other than a significant drop in August, when the Latino community in El Paso was targeted in the deadliest anti-Latino attack in American history. Due to the violent nature of this shooting and the graphic language associated with the tragedy, articles mentioning Latinos in August had an average valence of -0.63, a tone that is much lower than that of any other month during the time period we examine.

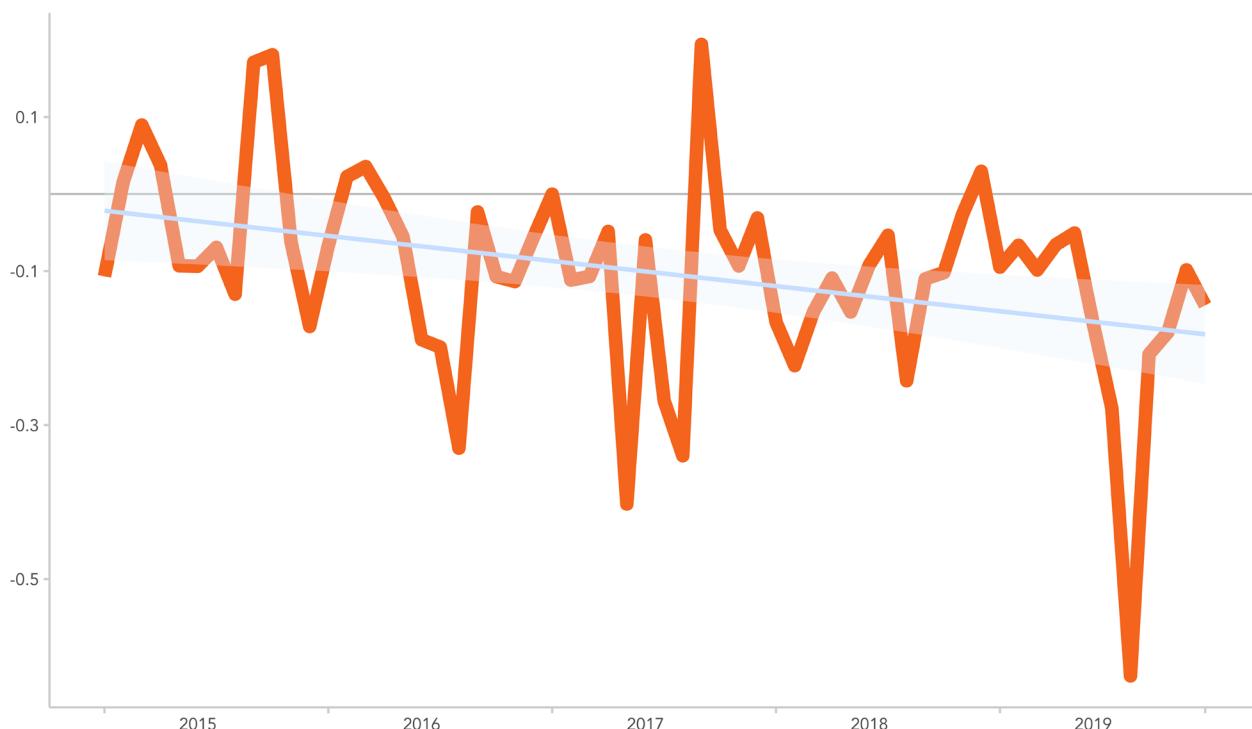
Looking at articles from 2019, what topics do newspapers gravitate toward when they portray Latinos? As noted in the comparative overview, politics was the most frequent general theme for Latinos, present in 73% of articles in 2019. The next most common themes were education (69%), law and order (65%), economics (64%), bigotry (36%), and finally, culture (29%). Articles about Latinos in 2019 included fewer culture words and more words related to politics and law and order than articles about any group except Muslims. In addition, the only other group for which coverage contained more mentions of bigotry words was African Americans.

Our methods allow us to identify not only broad general themes, but also particular elements within those themes. For example, we isolated articles that mention *voting* within the overarching *politics* theme and *shootings* within the *law and order* theme. We also identified themes that were specific to Latinos in 2019 like *immigration* and *El Paso*. As mentioned earlier, the *El Paso shooting* was one of the most important topics related to Latinos in 2019, not only because 7% of all articles mentioned it, but also because these articles were strongly negative.

It is notable that the impact of the El Paso shooting was even more negative than that of other specific crimes (like robbery, rape, manslaughter, homicide, assault, and kidnapping). What factors contribute to this disparity? Articles that mention other crimes only seem to do so in passing, while stories about the shooting tend to include more in-depth discussions of the event. In fact, looking closely at the articles containing references to the El Paso shooting, 66% of them characterize the attack as racist and tie it to immigration. An August 4 *Washington Post* article that connects the El Paso shooting to the *bigotry* and *immigration* themes highlights this intense negativity:

Average monthly article tone, 2015-2019

Latinos



A mass shooting at a Walmart in El Paso on Saturday was allegedly perpetrated by a young, white male, according to police, who appears to have posted a racist, anti-immigrant manifesto online minutes before the attack, declaring the need to fight the "Hispanic invasion of Texas." Such white-supremacist hatred isn't just a poisonous belief held by isolated individuals. It is a group phenomenon that is, according to the FBI, the greatest terrorist threat to America.

Looking beyond the *El Paso shooting*, *immigration*, even on its own terms, proved to be a significant theme specific to Latinos in 2019. Articles mentioning immigration, including those that touched upon DACA, the family separation crisis, the border, and the border wall, are modestly negative in 2019. However, a closer analysis of immigration articles reveals that much of that negativity comes from articles linked to the *law and order* theme, the *bigotry* theme, or both. In fact, while coverage of Latinos that mentioned immigration was modestly negative (with an average tone of -0.28), coverage that mentioned immigration and the *law and order* theme was clearly negative (-0.43), coverage that mentioned immigration and the *bigotry* theme was strongly negative (-0.58),

and coverage that mentioned all three themes was even more strongly negative (-0.66). An August 20 *New York Times* article about how "the similarities between Trump's language about Hispanics, immigrants and African Americans marks them as the 'other' and is mimicked by white supremacists," touches upon all three themes and showcases this strongly negative tone:

A Nazi sympathizer who threatened to butcher a Hispanic woman and boasted that President Trump would wipe out nonwhites in a "racial war and crusade" was arrested on charges of making threats, the F.B.I. said on Tuesday.... "This is a RACE WAR and ALL of you will DIE!" Mr. Lin wrote to the woman on Facebook in early June, according to a criminal complaint. The next day, he wrote, "You want to see what a real Nazi can do?" adding later that he was operating under the authority of Hitler.

In contrast, if articles about immigration that overlap with both the *law and order* theme and the *bigotry* theme are set aside, the remaining 357 articles tagged for immigration were clearly positive, with an average valence of 0.30. These tend to relate to the Latino community's achievements and culture. One such example is

a January 28 *New York Times* story that discussed Latino writers and several awards they had won:

At Monday's awards, "The Poet X" also won the Pura Belpre Author Award honoring a Latinx writer whose children's books best portray, affirm and celebrate the Latinx cultural experience. The Pura Belpre Illustrator Award went to Yuyi Morales for "Dreamers," her picture book recounting the journey she took with her young son as an immigrant from Mexico.

To further investigate how Latinos were discussed in 2019, we narrowed down our body of articles to include only those that mentioned the group three or more times. In short, when focusing on this set, which includes only 21% of the original articles, our overall findings were confirmed and, in some cases, even amplified. The tone of articles with three or more mentions was still modestly negative. In addition, five of the six general themes are seen at similar levels. One significant difference is that articles with three or more mentions of Latinos are more likely to contain references related to the *bigotry* theme. 47% of articles in the focused set of articles are tagged for *bigotry*, while only 36% in all of the Latino articles are.

Comparing these two sets, mentions of the word racism increase from 22% in the overall sample to 28% in the focused one. Specific mentions of the word discrimination also increase from 14% to 19% and references to xenophobia increase from 6% to 12%. In addition, these articles are more likely to relate to the *immigration* theme than the overall set of articles. 60% of the more focused set of articles are tagged for the immigration theme, compared to 45% in the overall one.

On the whole, newspaper coverage of Latinos in 2019 was marked by a large number of articles and a decrease in the average tone of those articles. The surge of stories published in August on the El Paso shooting, together with the strongly negative valence of these articles, was enough to drive down the average tone of coverage for 2019. In addition to the significant effect of the El Paso shooting, nearly all the negativity in Latino coverage came from other articles tagged for *law and order*, *bigotry*, or *immigration*. This negativity is somewhat—but far from completely—offset by strongly positive cultural stories that highlight the achievements and traditions of Latinos and what it means to be a Latino-American.

Jews

2019 was an important year for media coverage of the Jewish community. Stories mentioning anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, foreign locations, and arts and culture featured prominently in our Jewish articles. At the same time, the newspapers maintained many of their patterns of coverage from 2018, as there

was a high number of articles and the tone continued to decline. This two-year trend in coverage may speak to the rise in stories about anti-Semitism and politics.

In 2019, 5,801 articles mentioned Jews, the second highest count in the past five years, just behind 2018 which had 5,980 articles. Jews were the third-most covered group in our study, trailing only Muslims and African Americans. Coverage of Jews peaked in December, with 594 articles published that month. The rise can be attributed in part to the December

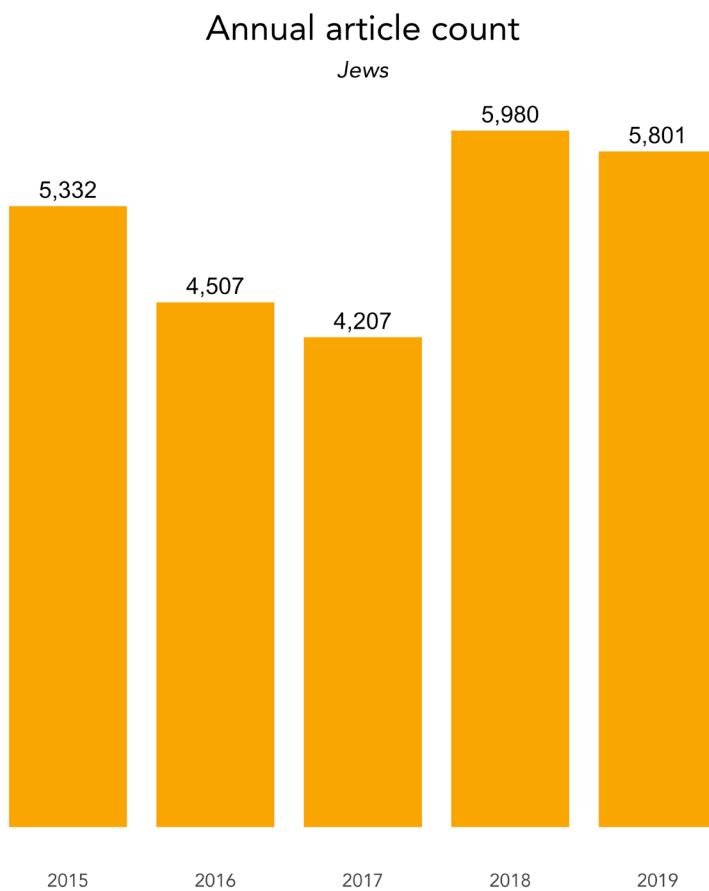
10 Jersey City shooting and the December 28 Monsey, New York Hanukkah stabbing, in which a man attacked five guests at a Hassidic rabbi's Hanukkah party. However, despite there being a notable increase in coverage in December, the number of articles published per month did not deviate drastically from the average 483 articles. For example, with 424 articles, June represents the month with the lowest article count, yet four other months also had article counts below 440.

The tone of coverage of Jews in 2019 was essen-

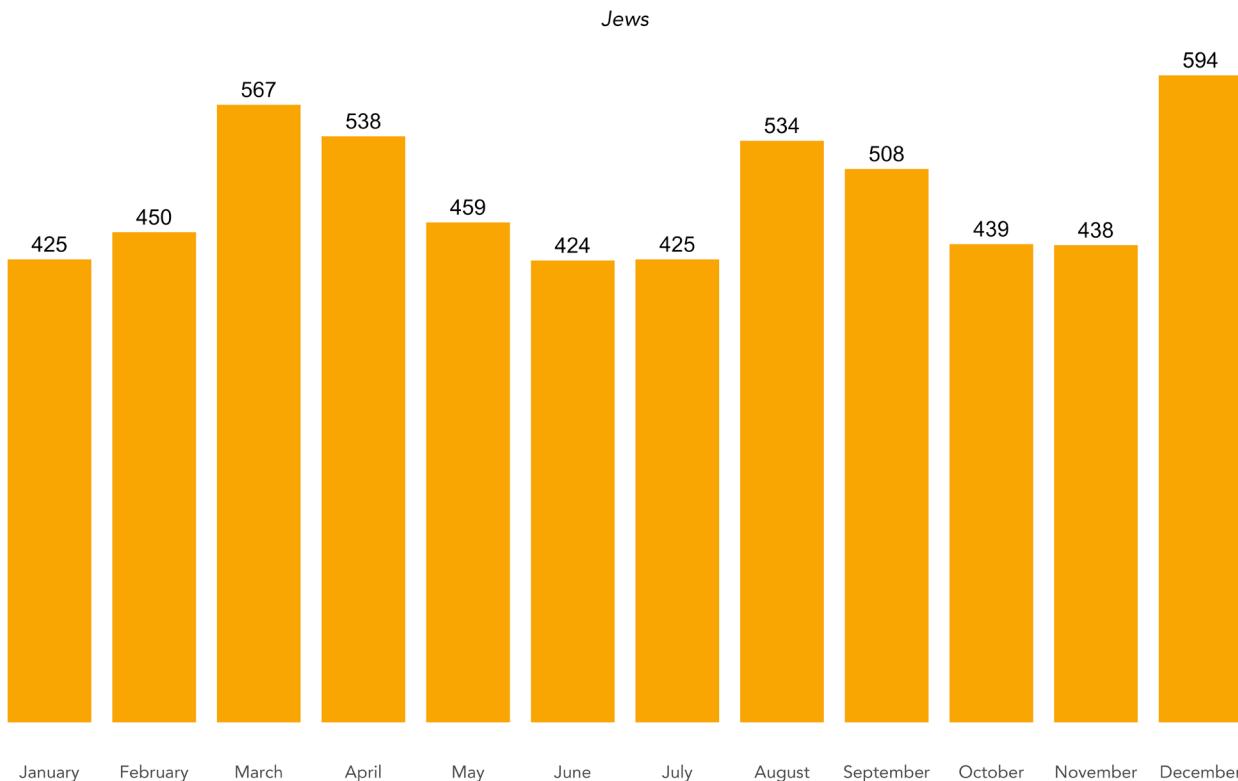
tially neutral, at -0.03. Although this represents a slight decrease from the average of 0.02 between 2015 and 2018, it is not a dramatic decline. April and August had the most negative coverage in 2019, with tones of -0.17 and -0.16, respectively, while September was the most positive month, with an average tone of 0.15. The negativity in April is due to coverage of the Poway, California synagogue shooting and the measles outbreak in Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods in New York. Although measles did not comprise an enormous subset of articles written about Jews, the coverage of the outbreak was concentrated, with a spike of 56 articles in April. Measles articles had an average tone of -0.87 that month, enough to drive down April's coverage. An April 23 *New York Times* article entitled "My Fellow Hasidic Jews Are Making a Terrible Mistake About Vaccinations" helps explain some of this negativity:

Like tens of thousands of Americans, many Hasidic Jews have fallen under the sway of anti-vaccination propaganda—spread by people within our community—and have refused to inoculate their children against measles and other diseases.

Meanwhile, much of the negativity in August was linked to politics. On August 15, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu barred US Representa-



Monthly article count, 2019



tives Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib from entering Israel at President Trump's urging. That action set off a series of conversations about American support for Israel, culminating with Trump accusing Jewish Democrats of a "great disloyalty." Finally, coverage in September was modestly positive thanks to a number of articles on the arts, cooking, and the High Holidays and because the main story offsetting those was the merely modestly negative coverage of the Israeli election.

Considering 2019 as a whole, what were some of the patterns in the media's portrayal of Jews? The most prevalent theme was *education*, included in roughly two-thirds (67%) of all articles. Next, in order of prevalence, were *politics* (62%), *law and order* (58%), *economics* (52%), *culture* (45%), and *bigotry* (36%). The figures for *economics* and *politics* are the lowest for any of our six groups.

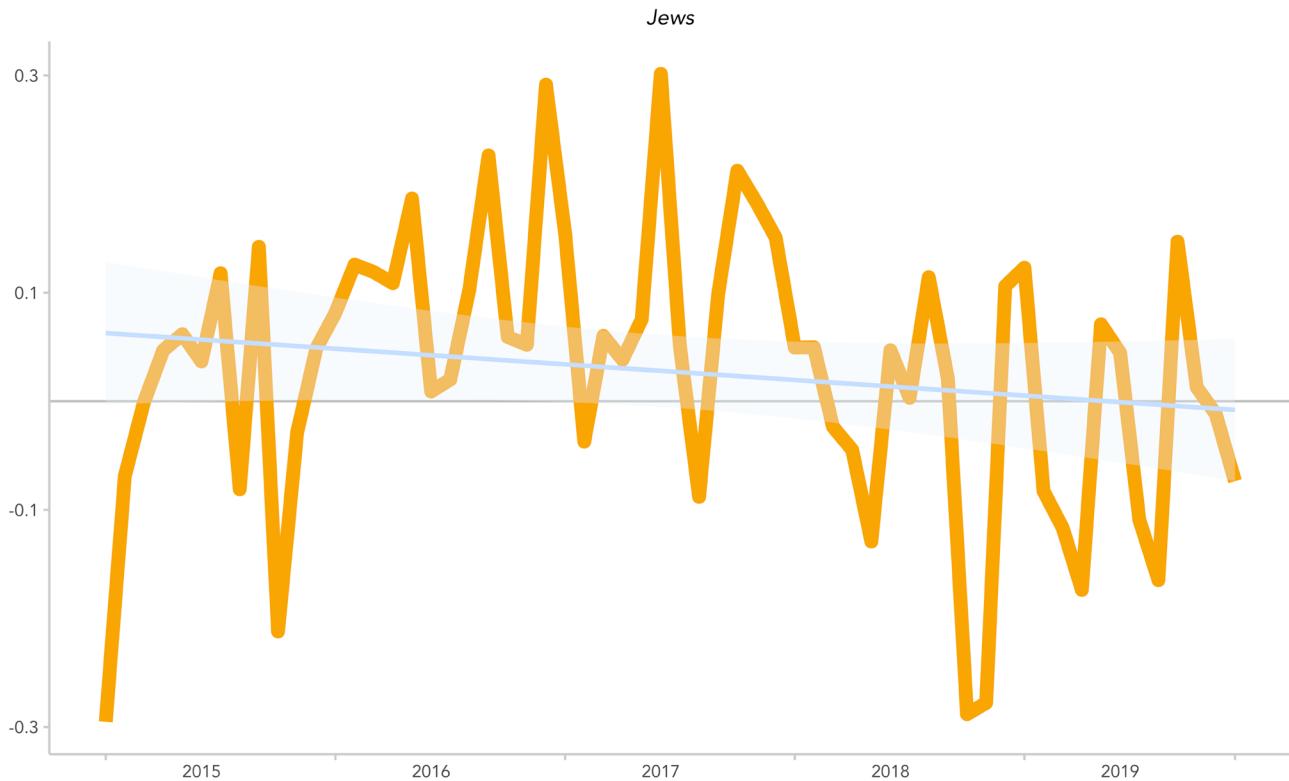
In terms of the tone associated with the general themes, Jewish articles tend to be somewhat more negative than the raw prevalence of common themes would lead us to expect. According to the findings provided in the comparative overview, we would expect *bigotry* to have a

modest negative impact on tone and for *culture* to have a clear positive impact. However, for Jewish articles *bigotry* has a strong negative impact, while *culture* has only a modest positive one.

Despite being relatively less positive on average for Jews compared to other groups, *culture* articles are still one of the main sources of positivity within the Jewish data set. Just over half of all positive articles include at least one *culture* word. Many of these articles describe exhibitions at various Jewish Museums around the world, from New York City to Berlin. Nearly a third of *culture* articles include the word "museum." Other *culture* articles touch on Jewish theater or film. Still others focus on Jewish individuals and their relation to the arts, rather than on Jewish culture as a whole. A March 24 *New York Times* wedding announcement described "a ceremony incorporating Jewish traditions" for a couple who "became acquainted with each other through the Los Angeles art scene."

Turning now to the reasons for negativity in Jewish articles, one of the main drivers is coverage of *anti-Semitism*. Indeed, the average tone

Average monthly article tone, 2015-2019



of an article that mentions the theme is -0.72. In recent years, the amount of coverage of anti-Semitism has escalated, which is consistent with a rise in reported anti-Semitic incidents. Between 2015 and 2017, under 10% of articles included the words "anti-Semitism" or "anti-Semitic." In 2018, that number spiked to 17%, in large part due to coverage of the Pittsburgh shooting. In 2019, the prevalence of the *anti-Semitism* theme rose even more, to 22% of articles.

Unlike in 2018, the reasons for the rise in coverage are multifaceted. The Jersey City and Poway, California shootings did contribute to the uptick in coverage, with 19% of all *anti-Semitism* articles mentioning shootings. However, the media also linked anti-Semitism with specific political figures. Claims that remarks made by Representatives Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib were anti-Semitic as well as the controversy over their planned visit to Israel and Palestine in August meant that a notable percentage of *anti-Semitism* articles mentioned the congresswomen—16% and 9%, respectively. President Trump was also mentioned in 37% of *anti-Semitism* articles, for varied reasons. A few characterized him as oppos-

ing anti-Semitism, such as the December 22 *Wall Street Journal* opinion piece by Ruth R. Wisse:

Donald Trump is the first president to confront anti-Semitism by recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital and by extending civil-rights protection to Jewish college students in the US. Yet some Jews and Jewish organizations condemn him as an anti-Semite and denounce his initiatives.

Other articles echoed a February 13 *New York Times* story, which argued that Republican leaders like President Trump had "trafficked their own anti-Semitic tropes and failed to renounce anti-Semitic followers." Although the *anti-Semitism* theme contributes to negativity within our Jewish articles, it is important to remember that the raw tone score does not necessarily indicate an unfavorable portrayal of a group. Indeed, many of these articles might invoke sympathy towards the Jewish community.

The media not only covered anti-Semitism in the modern context, but they also devoted a significant amount of coverage to the Holocaust. 29% of all

Jewish articles included words related to the Holocaust, and these stories tended to be clearly negative, with an average tone of -0.40. *Holocaust* articles approach the subject through a variety of angles—there were articles on Auschwitz survivors, reviews of books on the Holocaust, and discussions of whether it was fair to liken the Trump administration’s migrant detention centers to concentration camps. Notably, *Holocaust* articles form a key subset of another group of stories: those that refer to a foreign location. A third of all articles set in a foreign location mention the *Holocaust* theme.

Although the vast majority (80%) of Jewish articles contain references to a foreign location, they tend to also mention domestic settings in the same articles. Just 6% of Jewish articles are set exclusively in a foreign place, compared to 12% of Muslim articles. Why does so much coverage mention both foreign and domestic locations? For many articles, the reason is clear: American foreign policy. For example, nearly a third of all articles discuss Israel or Palestine, an area of diplomatic interest to the United States, and they often do so through a political lens; 75% of *Israel/Palestine* articles include a *politics* word. For 2019, that meant many articles touched on the Israeli elections, Israeli settlements in the West Bank, and Palestinians’ political rights. *Israel/Palestine* articles tended to be modestly negative, with an average tone of -0.25. Another portion of foreign articles are those that discuss Iran—7% of all 2019 articles that touch on Jews name the

country. Such coverage draws on tensions involving the Iran nuclear deal and Israel, connecting the *Iran*, *Israel/Palestine*, and *politics* themes.

While the average tone of all Jewish articles was essentially neutral (-0.03), stories that mentioned Jews three or more times were clearly negative (-0.31). The subject matter of these 1,691 articles explains that drop in tone. Many of the themes associated with negativity are more prevalent here than in the overall pool of articles: *anti-Semitism* appears in 43% of articles (up from 22%), *Holocaust* appears in 44% of articles (up from 30%), and *Israel/Palestine* appears in 55% of articles (up from 32%). Meanwhile, the prevalence of *culture* articles dropped slightly, and their average tone became slightly negative. In short, when an article focuses more squarely on the Jewish community, it is more likely to be negative and to mention themes typically associated with negativity.

Overall, coverage of Jews in 2019 was marked by a relatively high number of articles and a slight decrease in tone. Much of the positivity came from stories tagged for the *culture* theme. On the other hand, articles touching on *anti-Semitism*, the *Holocaust*, and *Israel/Palestine* accounted for much of the negativity, balancing out the tone across all articles. When stories mention Jews more frequently, however, they tend to focus on themes associated with a negative tone, even if some of these stories are more apt to evoke sympathy than animosity.

Muslims

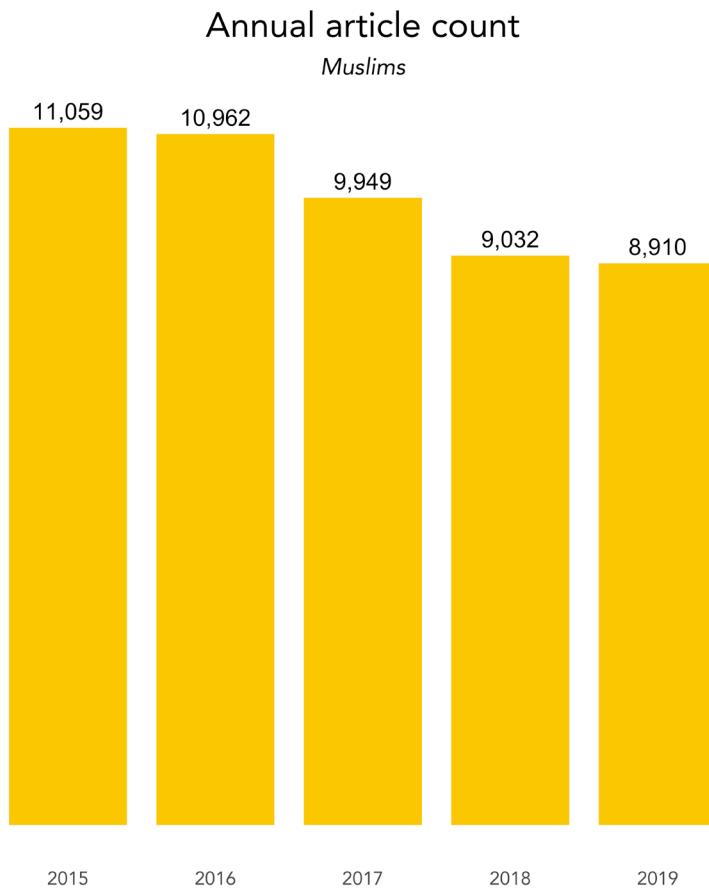
Media coverage of Muslims in 2019, although exceptional when compared to the other groups surveyed in this report, was relatively similar in article count and tone when compared to the previous four years, with a variety of major storylines emerging across the year. In February, Representative Ilhan Omar was embroiled in controversy when she was accused of publishing a series of anti-Semitic tweets.

The spring saw two international terrorist attacks garner significant coverage in the US. While the mass-shootings in Christchurch, New Zealand were perpetrated by an anti-Muslim white nationalist, the following month's Easter Sunday bombings in Sri Lanka concentrated the media's attention on Islamic extremism. After a relatively quiet summer, media coverage reached its peak in the fall as the civil war in Syria entered a new chapter. President Trump announced his intention to withdraw US troops from the region in October, reigniting American newspapers' coverage of the conflict.

Muslims were mentioned in a total of 8,910 articles in 2019, receiving more news coverage than any other group in this report. This tally, however, marked the continuation of a decline dating back to 2015. One reason for this trend—especially the drop-off in 2018 and 2019 news coverage—has been the overall decrease in coverage of the Syrian

civil war and refugee crisis, which were major stories in 2015 and 2016. President Trump's announcement of his intent to withdraw US troops from Syria in October contributed to an uptick in Muslim articles. A total of 1,027 stories (of which 55% mention Syria) were published that month, the highest in 2019. This stands in contrast to the relatively lean news coverage of Muslims over the

summer. In June and July, just over 630 stories were published each month. After experiencing a slight bump in August, September's 606 articles proved the lowest monthly article count of 2019, further accentuating the spike fueled by Syria in October.

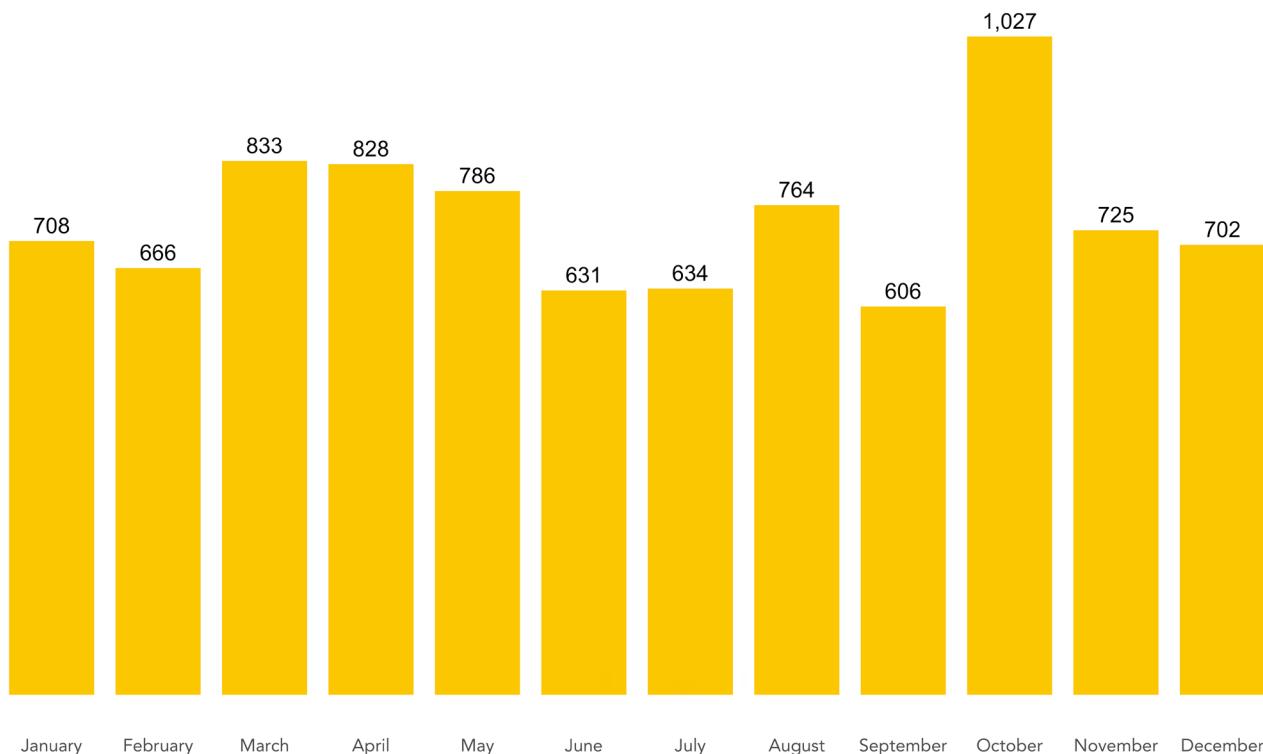


With an average tone of -0.76, US newspaper coverage of Muslims was far more negative than that of any other group. A number of factors contribute to this negativity, from a higher frequency of foreign news stories to a greater focus on themes such as terrorism and

conflict. The tone of Muslim articles has grown less negative over the past five years, reaching a high of -0.70 in 2018 before dipping in 2019. Again, this overarching pattern is likely due to the general decline in stories about the Syrian civil war and refugee crisis, two very negative topics. Despite this trend, article tone in 2019 still remains overwhelmingly negative. The monthly article valence ranged from a high of -0.61 in September to a low of -0.89 in August.

Monthly article count, 2019

Muslims



The resounding negativity of Muslim articles can be explained in part by their focus. Among the six common themes we identified in the comparative section at the beginning of this report, Muslim articles were more likely to touch on *politics* (83%) and *law and order* (72%), and less likely to contain *education* (50%) and *culture* (21%) words, compared to the other groups we study. Muslim articles were also relatively less likely to mention *bigotry* words (24%), suggesting that racism, prejudice, and discrimination are not as central a focus of US newspaper reporting about Muslims. At the same time, it is important to note that Muslims receive the most coverage of any group in this study. Therefore, even if the frequency of articles mentioning *culture* or *bigotry* may be lower for Muslims than Asian Americans, for example, readers of US newspapers are more likely to encounter these types of stories about Muslims simply due to the greater volume of articles.

Another major cause of negativity surrounding Muslims was the media's focus on foreign events. In 2019, 94% of Muslim articles mentioned at least one foreign location, and fully 12% focused exclusively on non-American set-

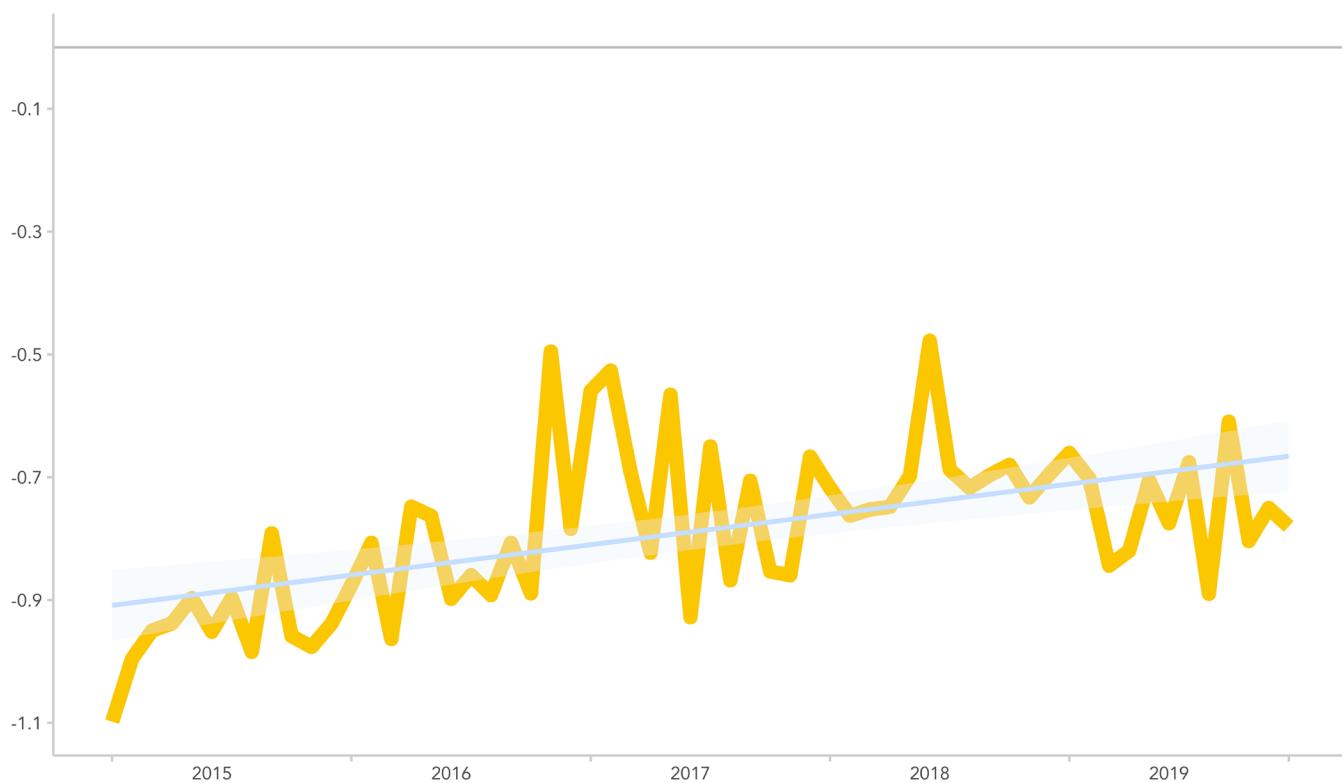
tings. The tone of stories set exclusively abroad was particularly negative, at -1.19. For comparison, articles set exclusively in the United States received a score of -0.49, making them notably less negative than the average Muslim article.

What explains this negativity in foreign news articles? US newspapers' coverage of foreign locations tends to focus more on terrorism, war, and other crises as opposed to positive or even neutral stories about more mundane occurrences abroad, as exemplified by the January 22 *New York Times* headline "Israel and Iran Exchange Blows in Syria, Ramping Up Tensions." This focus is also reflected in the prevalence of certain group-specific themes. While 81% of stories set exclusively in foreign locations contain words pertaining to *conflict* and 40% mention *terrorism*, these specific themes appear in 53% and 23% of texts set exclusively in the United States, respectively.

Politics remains the most common subject of newspaper coverage of Muslims. In 2019, 83% of articles contained words related to *politics*, such as "Trump" and "campaign." Although the *politics* theme is associated with greater negativity in gen-

Average monthly article tone, 2015-2019

Muslims



eral, it had an even more pronounced effect on Muslim articles than on those about other groups. The tone of articles containing *politics* words was strongly negative, with a score of -0.76. Heavily politicized and controversial issues frequently associated with Muslims—President Trump's "Muslim ban" or the Iran nuclear deal, for example—are among the chief causes of this negativity.

One such divisive political issue was President Trump's decision to remove US troops from Syria in October. Stories about Syria were overwhelmingly negative as they featured a number of our group-specific themes such as *conflict*, *terrorism*, and *extremism*. Additionally, many of these stories also leveled criticism at the Trump administration for jeopardizing progress made in the fight against ISIS by withdrawing prematurely. America's Kurdish allies also garnered significant media attention during this period; 45% of articles published in October reference Kurds. These stories were very negative, too, with a tone score of -0.90. Kurds themselves, however, are not necessarily the subject of this negativity. In fact, direct

references to this Muslim ethnic minority frame them in positive terms. An April 26 *Washington Post* article described the Kurds as "crucial US allies in the fight against the Islamic State." Similarly, a January 5 *Wall Street Journal* article wrote that:

Many experts and officials also fear the Turks may target Kurdish fighters, who have long provided the US with solid support in the campaign against the Islamic State militants and endured considerable loss of life.

This sentence, in particular, shows how negative words do not necessarily convey negative sentiment against Kurds, even if there is a great degree of negativity in these articles.

With an average tone score of -0.90, stories containing *law and order* words were more negative than those related to any of the other five general themes. Present in 72% of stories, *law and order* was the second most prevalent theme of coverage in Muslim articles. While *law*, *police*, and *crime* were among the most commonly

covered subjects, *terrorism* was responsible for two particularly pronounced spikes in coverage. First, in March, Muslim communities worldwide were devastated by the white-nationalist shootings at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, which claimed the lives of 51 worshippers. Then, the following month, a group of suicide bombers with links to the Islamic state carried out a series of coordinated attacks in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday, killing over 250 and wounding more than 500. Unsurprisingly, stories about these two events were very negative; the tone of articles about the Christchurch shootings was -1.03, while stories about the Sri Lankan bombings received an average score of -1.23.

Coverage of the Christchurch shootings sheds light on comparative differences in the *bigotry* theme. Carried out by a white supremacist, the attacks explicitly targeted Muslims. Yet only 17% of articles about the shootings use the term *anti-Muslim*, and an even lower percentage—just 8%—use the term *Islamophobia*. Compared to Jews, the other religious minority studied in this report, Muslims receive significantly less coverage that contains *bigotry*-related terms. Words classified under this theme were only found in 24% of Muslim articles, compared to 36% of articles about Jews. While *anti-Semitism* appears in 22% of articles pertaining to Jews, the term *anti-Muslim* is found in only 4% of all Muslim articles and *Islamophobia* in a mere 3%.

Education, typically associated with positivity, was another prominent theme of coverage, appearing in 50% of Muslim-related articles. Surprisingly, the average tone of *education* articles was strongly negative, with a score of -0.62. Although some of these stories did touch on the expected coverage of scholarship, teaching, and academic accomplishment that drive the *education* category's positivity with respect to other groups, Muslim articles feature a significant number of stories that discuss extremist ideologies, refugee and concentration camps, and a lack of access to schooling. An April 16 *New York Times* article exemplifies this clearly:

Over the past two years, the Chinese authorities have locked up in re-education camps hundreds of thousands of Uighurs, a Turkic Muslim minority whose separate culture and sometimes violent

resistance to Chinese rule have long unsettled Beijing.

Another example is a May 31 *Wall Street Journal* article titled “Center in Syria Offers Rare Effort to Rehabilitate Young ISIS Recruits: Facility Holding Former Islamic State Child Soldiers Offers Counseling and Education.” Although the focus of the article—the rehabilitation of extremist soldiers—has positive elements, the text still discusses very negative themes, documenting the facility’s “armed guards” and security measures, and describing the children’s training to perform “executions” and “suicide bombings.” Muslim articles frequently find the positivity associated with education overridden by these negative references.

Even domestically, coverage of Muslims remained negative. Since her election to Congress in 2018, Representative Ilhan Omar has emerged as a high-profile face of the Muslim community in America. Despite her historic electoral accomplishment and outspoken progressive leadership, coverage of Representative Omar was found to be both sparse and negative: only 4% of Muslim articles mention the congresswoman, and those that do receive a tone score of -0.75. Nearly 83% of stories that mention Ilhan Omar also contain words related to the *bigotry* theme, which is consistent with the fact that she has been both accused of racism and portrayed as the victim of Islamophobia. In February, for example, 92% of articles that mention Representative Omar also mention *anti-Semitism* after she published a series of tweets that many criticized for invoking Jewish stereotypes. On the other hand, President Trump’s suggestion that Representative Omar and her progressive colleagues should “go back and help fix the totally broken and crime-infested places from which they came” was seen as promoting xenophobic, racist sentiment.

In 2019, 3,037 Muslim articles—just over a third of the total articles—mentioned the group three or more times. The average tone of this focused set of articles is -0.95, making them even more negative than articles with fewer mentions of Muslims or Islam. These focused articles were more likely to mention negative themes such as *terrorism*, *extremism*, and *conflict* or to contain words linked to the *law and order* and *bigotry* themes. At the same time, they were less

likely to mention words related to the comparatively positive *culture* theme, further exacerbating the negative tone of these articles overall.

In closing, Muslim articles stand out both for their quantity and their negativity compared to those about African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, and Jews. Some groups in our study are relatively underrepresented—this is strikingly true for Asian Americans when discussed as a whole. Most groups are associated with an essentially neutral tone on average, although general coverage of Latinos and focused coverage of Jews and Latinos are linked with modest negativity. Muslims, by contrast, receive

more—and far more negative—coverage than any other group in our report. Not all of it is explicitly negative toward Muslims; some stories depict them as victims of violence, war, or oppression. Yet the vast majority of newspaper articles associate Muslims with some combination of conflict, terrorism, and extremism. Representations of minority populations are not simple reflections of newsworthy events. They help construct an image of these groups with consequences that last over the long term. For this reason, we hope that this report helps readers develop a more detailed understanding of how the media cover marginalized groups in our society.