Deviant Acts, Risky Business and U.S. Interests: The Newsworthiness of World Events

By Pamela J. Shoemaker, Lucig H. Danielian and Nancy Brendlinger

Significant events happen daily around the world, but only some of these are reported in the U.S. news media. A content analysis of the New York *Times*, and ABC, CBS, and NBC found that the *Times* covered only about a fourth of a sample of world events and the networks mentioned only about a tenth. This study finds that events which are deviant in certain ways from U.S. national values and which occur in nations of political and economic significance to the United States are more likely to be covered in the news.

➤One of the most elusive concepts in mass communication research has been newsworthiness. Although everyone seems to recognize newsworthy events and people when confronted with them, much of the research on newsworthiness has centered on strategies for identifying indicators of the newsworthiness concept (e.g., timely, proximate and interesting events) without providing satisfactory theoretical explanations for why such items should be considered newsworthy.

As Sigal has indicated, socialization to a news organization's policies results in "a context of shared values" among journalists,[1] and news values have been popular topic for study. Sometimes research on newsworthiness has centered on strategies for recognizing news,[2] and sometimes it has investigated the role that news selection plays in social change.[3] The purpose of this study is to continue the investigation of the newsworthiness concept by elaborating some theoretical predictors of how prominently U.S. news media cover international events.

Much has already been written on international news coverage,[4] with the U.S. media frequently being accused of ignoring or distorting the image of Third World countries. Scholars of the "New World Information Order"[5] have accused Western media of devoting only a minimal amount of news space and time to coverage of Third World countries, disproportionate to the Third World nations' representing nearly three-fourths of the world's population. When Third World coun-

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➤Pamela Shoemaker is professor and director of the School of Journalism at Ohio State University. Lucig Danielian is assistant professor in the Department of Communication at SUNY-Albany and Nancy Brendlinger is assistant professor in the Department of Journalism at Bowling Green State University.

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tries are not ignored, such critics say, the Western news media tend to cover crisis or conflict-laden events, thus reinforcing the stereotype of instability of these countries.

Such a predilection toward "bad" news is not limited to coverage of international events, however. One need only look at any major U.S. newspaper to discover that crime, violence and sensationalism represent a large proportion of the total day's news, or at least of the news which is displayed most prominently. Yet the number of empirical studies supplying evidence in support of the Third World's argument of imbalances of news exchange and an emphasis on bad news is impressive.[6] Most of the empirical studies have focused on the performance of the U.S. news media, resulting in the impression that the American media may "lead the way of Western news media" in their coverage of the Third World.[7]

This "leadership role" implies that Western media have modeled American conceptions of newsworthiness, but it is also possible that journalists worldwide have developed similar news values as a result of newsgathering constraints or the demands of the audience, to name only two of the many possible influences on news content.[8] Similarity in news values was reported in a study of 29 countries' news media by UNESCO,[9] which found similarity in the focuses of the stories reported and in the sources interviewed. While such studies suggest that journalists may at least partially share conceptions of what is newsworthy, there are also some cultural differences in newsworthiness: Peterson found differences in news values between stringers to the London *Times* who were from Western and non-Western cultures.[10]

Theoretical Explanations of Newsworthiness

Recent studies of U.S. coverage of world events have looked at the

1. Leon V. Sigal, *Reporters and Officials: The Organization and Politics of Newsmaking.* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Health, 1973), p. 3.
2. Ralph S. Izard, Hugh M. Culbertson and D.A. Lambert, *Fundamentals of News Reporting* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 1973); J. Harriss, K. Leiter and S. Johnson, *The Complete Reporter* (New York: Mcmillan, 1977); M. Stephens, *Broadcast News* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1980); Everett E. Dennis and A. H. Inmach, *Reporting Processes and Practices* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1981).
3. J. Galtung and M. H. Ruge, "The Structure of Foreign News," *Journal of Peace Research*, 2: 64-91 (1965); F. L. Kaplan, "The Plight of Foreign News in the U.S. Mass Media: An Assessment, "*Gazette*, 25: 233-243 (1979); J. A. Lent, "Foreign News in American Media," *Journal of Communication*, 27:46-51 (1977); J. G. Larson, "International Affairs Coverage in U.S. Network Television," *Journal of Communication*, 29: 136-147 (1979); F. Bergsma, "News Values in Foreign Affairs on Dutch Television in G. C. Wilhoit and H. de Bock, eds., *Mass Communication Review Yearbook* 1 (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1980), pp. 641-656.
4. For example, see: Galtung and Ruge, op.cit.; E. Ostgaard, "Factors Influencing the Flow of news," *Journal of Peace Research*, 2: 39-63 (1965); J. A. Hart, "Foreign news in U.S. and English Daily Newspapers: A Comparison," *Journalism Quarterly*, 43: 443-448 (1966); R. F. Smith, "U.S. News and Sino-Indian Relations: An Extra Media Study," *Journalism Quarterly*, 48:447-458, 501 (1971); O. Sande, "The Perception of Foreign News," *Journal of Peace Research*, 3:221-237 (1971); A. Hester, "An Analysis of News Flow from Developed and Developing Nations," *Gazette*, 17:29-43 (1971); R.G. Hicks and A. Gordon, "Foreign News Content in Israel and U.S. Newspapers." *Journalism Quarterly*, 51:639-648, 676 (1974); George Gerbner and G. Marvanyi, "The Many Worlds of the World's Press," *Journal of Communication*, 27:52-66 (1977); Lent, *op.cit.*; A. K. Semmel, "The Elite Press, the Global System, and Foreign News Attention," *International Interactions*, 3:317-328 (1977).
5. M. Maamoudi, "The New World Information Order," *Journal of Communication*, 21:172-179 (1979)
6. For example: Hester, *op. cit.*; Kaplan, *op.cit.*; Lent, *op.cit.*; Larson, *op.cit.*; Bergsma, *op.cit.*; S. Peterson, "Foreign News Gatekeepers and Criteria of Newsworthiness," *Journalism Quarterly*, 56:116-126 (1979); Emile McAnany, J.F. Larson, and J. Douglas Storey, "News of Latin America on Network Television, 1972-1982: Too Little Too Late?" Paper presented at the annual conference of the International Communication Association, Boston, Mass.
7. Tsan-Kuo Chang, Pamela J. Shoemaker and Nancy Brendlinger, "Determinants of International News Coverage in the U.S. Media: A Discriminant Analysis," *Communication Research*, 14:396-414 (1987).
8. For a discussion of these, see: Pamela J. Shoemaker with Elizabeth Kay Mayfield, "Building a Theory of News Content: A Synthesis of Current Approaches," *Journalism Monographs*, 103 (1987); Pamela J. Shoemaker and Stephen D. Reese, *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content* (New York: Longman, 1991).
9. A. Sreberny-Mohammadi, K. Nordenstreng, R. Stevenson and F. Ugboajah, *Foreign news in the media: international reporting in 29 countries* (Paris: UNESCO Publications. 1985).
10. S. Peterson, "Foreign News Gatekeepers and Criteria of Newsworthiness," *Journalism Quarterly*, 56:116-125 (1979).

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theoretical bases of the newsworthiness concept.[11] Prior research has shown that the typical newsworthiness indicators (timeliness; proximity; importance, impact or consequence; interest; conflict or controversy; sensationalism; prominence; and novelty, oddity, or the unusual) may be broken down into three general theoretical dimensions of newsworthiness: the deviance dimension is composed of novelty/oddity/unusual (statistical deviance), prominence (normative deviance), sensationalism (normative or pathological deviance) and conflict or controversy (normative deviance).[12] The social significance dimension consists of importance/impact/consequence and interest, both of which are often positively correlated with deviance.[13] The contingent conditions include timeliness and proximity.[14] The revised model resulting from prior research[15] predicts that events of high deviance and high social significance should receive the most prominent coverage.

Figure 1
Theoretical Newsworthiness Model to Predict the Prominence with which Events Will Be Covered by the U.S. Mass Media

Social Significance Level of the Event	Deviance Level of the Event: Low — Is the event timely or proximate? No	Deviance Level of the Event: Low — Is the event timely or proximate? Yes	Deviance Level of the Event: High
Low	No coverage	Coverage of low prominence	Coverage of medium prominence
High	Coverage of medium prominence		Coverage of high prominence

11. Pamela J. Shoemaker, "The Communication of Deviance," in Brenda Dervin and M. Voight, eds., *Progress in Communication Sciences*, 8 (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1987b), pp. 151-175; Pamela J. Shoemaker, Tsan-Kuo Chang and Nancy Brendlinger, "Deviance as a Predictor of Newsworthiness: Coverage of International Events in the U.S. Media," in Margaret McLaughlin, ed., *Communication Yearbook*, 10 (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1987); Chang, Shoemaker, and Brendlinger, *op.cit.*; Nancy Brendlinger, Lucig H. Danielian and Pamela J. Shoemaker, "The Role of Deviance and Social Factors in the Theoretical Construct of Newsworthiness in International News." Unpublished paper presented to the Texas Women Scholars Annual Symposium, Austin, Texas, May 1987; Pamela J. Shoemaker, Nancy Brendlinger, Lucig H. Danielian and Tsan-Kuo Change, "Testing a Theoretical Model of Newsworthiness: Coverage of International Events in the U.S. Media." Unpublished paper presented to the meeting of the Mass Communication Division of the International Communication Association, Montreal, Canada, May 1987; Lucig H. Danielian, Pamela J. Shoemaker and Nancy Brendlinger, "Deviant Acts and Risky Business: U.S. Coverage of World Events." Unpublished paper presented to the Communication Theory and Methodology Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, San Antonio, Texas, August 1987.

12. "Statistical deviance: is defined as the extent to which the event is unusual, given the context of how common such events are in the world. An event is coded as extremely deviant statistically if the number of times the event occurs proportionate to the number of times it could conceivably occur is extremely small. "Pathological deviance" (referred to as "potential for social change deviance" by Shoemaker, Chang and Brendlinger, *op.cit.*,) is defined as the extent to which the event threatens the status quo in the country in which the event occurs. When applied to societies, the older "pathological" perspective assumes an organic analogy, comparing the health of a person to the health of society. Shoemaker, Chang and Brendlinger used the term "potential for social change" to indicate a more functional analysis that attempts to assess the extent to which the country may be changed by the event. "Normative deviance" is defined as the extent to which the event, if it had occurred in the United States, would have broken U.S. norms. The contextual reference is to the United States and not to the country in which the event occurred, because the study at hand involves coverage of the event in the U.S. media, not in the country's own media.

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Events of either low deviance and high social significance *or* of high deviance and low social significance should be given moderate prominence. The least prominently covered events should be of low deviance and low social significance, and these should be covered only if they are timely and/or proximate to the media organization's headquarters. Events of low deviance and low social significance that are neither timely nor proximate should not be covered at all.

Event Characteristics

Some characteristics of an event may influence how newsworthy U.S. journalists rate an international event. These include the normative and social change deviance of international events, [16] as well as whether the U.S. was directly involved as a participant in the event.

Preliminary empirical tests support the role of deviance in predicting event coverage and newsworthiness, assuming that covered events are more newsworthy that noncovered events.[17] Why should deviance be a basis for newsworthiness? People pay a lot of attention to deviant people and events. The work of cognitive psychologists suggests that human beings have an innate interest in deviance, with attention to media content being highest when the content deviates from the individual's existing schemata.[18] Not only do deviant events get more attention that nondeviant events, but such events are probably cognitively processed more deeply and remembered better than nondeviant events.[19]

The inclusion of U.S. involvement in the event as a predictor of newsworthiness reflects the important role which this variable has played in prior analysis.[20] It makes intuitive sense that direct U.S. involvement in an event would make it more newsworthy to U.S. journalists, since the U.S. government's participation in an event reveals U.S. vested interests in the event.

Country Characteristics

We have identified three dimensions on which an event country [21] may be socially significant to the United States. We offer several indicators for each dimension; we would have offered even more indicators, but we were limited by our ability to find reference sources for each.

Economic significance is defined as the business-dominated links between the United States and the event country. We will use five indicators of the event country's economic significance to the United States:

13. "Social significance" is defined as the extent to which the event is important (or has impact or consequence) to the United States. We assume that U.S. journalists, writing for U.S. audiences, will use the United States as the referent for judging the social significance of world events. Thus, many of our measures of social significance will assess the United States' vested interests in the event country, including economic and military ties.

14. "Timeliness" and "proximity" are also assumed to vary according to the location of the medium and the event being considered for news coverage. In this study, proximity was assessed as the distance between countries, i.e., between the U.S. capital and the capital of the event country.

15. Danielian, et al., *op.cit.*

16. Statistical deviance was eliminated from these analyses because it failed to differentiate among covered and noncovered events in a previous study (Shoemaker, Chang and Brendlinger, *op.cit.*).

17. Shoemaker, Chang and Brendlinger, *op.cit.*

18. See, for example, D. Anderson and E. P. Lorch, "Looking at Television: Action or Reaction?" in J. Bryant and D. R. Anderson, eds., *Children's Understanding of Television* (New York: Academic Press, 1983), pp. 1-33; D. G. Bobrow and D. A. Norman, "Some Principles of Memory Schemata," in D. G. Bobrow and A. Collins, eds., *Representation and Understanding: Studies in Cognitive Science* (Orlando, Fla.; Academic Press, 1975), pp. 131-149.

19. Bobrow and Norman, *op.cit.*

20. See, e.g., Chang *et al.*, *op.cit.*

21. If more than one country were involved in the event, the "primary" country was designated as the country in which the event occurred. One "secondary" country was also included in some analyses (see theoretical definitions for the country-based variables above). If more than two countries could be designated as "secondary" countries, then the first one mentioned was selected. The United States was never designated as a primary or a secondary country.

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gross domestic product, the number of U.S. businesses, U.S. direct investment abroad, foreign imports to the U.S. and U.S. exports to foreign countries. Countries with substantial economic ties to the United States (or those which may be important markets for U.S. goods) may be considered more important because of U.S. vested interests than do countries with few economic ties.[22] The more economic significance a country has for the U.S., the more newsworthy events occurring there should be judged.

Political significance is defined as those government-dominated links between the United States and the event country. Four indicators of the political significance of a country for the United States are identified: U.S. military presence in the event country, the number of military alliances which the event country participates in with the United States, U.S. economic aid to the country and U.S. military aid to the country. Countries which have substantial political ties to the United States may be considered more important because of U.S. vested interested (e.g., in the form of economic aid given to the country) than countries which have few ties.[23] There more political significance the event country has for the United States, the more newsworthy events occurring in that country should be.

Cultural significance is defined as those linkages between the U.S. and the event country which are a function of similarities among the people of the two countries. Two indicators of cultural links between the United States and the event countries were identified: ethnic similarity to the United States population and religious similarity to the United States population.

Countries which have cultural similarities to the United States may be considered more important and more interesting than those that are dissimilar.[24] The more culturally similar an event country is to the United States, the more newsworthy events occurring in that country should be.

Communication Constraints. Communication constraints are defined as those characteristics of the event country that may hinder (or help) communication about newsworthy events to the United States. Six indicators of communication constraints have been identified: language similarity, literacy rate, newspaper, television and radio diffusion and proximity. Countries that are far from the United States, that have limited communication channels and that have populations with whom English-speaking journalists communicate poorly may be covered less frequently by the U.S. media simply because of constraints in getting the information back to the U.S.

Event Prominence in the U.S. Media. The event and country characteristics described above are used to predict how prominently an event will be covered in the U.S. media. We assume that the prominence with which an international event is covered in the U.S. media is positively related to how newsworthy U.S. journalists judge the event to be.

22. R. Miliband, "The Process of Legitimation," in R. Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), pp. 179-264.
23. M. Parenti, *Inventing Reality* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986); Herbert I Schiller, *Who Knows; Information in the Age of the Fortune 500* (Norwood, N.J.; Ablex, 1981).
24. E. Ostgaard, "Factors Influencing the Flow of News," *Journal of Peace Research*, 2:39-63 (1965); Galtung and Ruge, *op.cit.*
25. Shoemaker, Chang and Brendlinger, *op.cit.*

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Although previous research[25] has used a dichotomous covered/not covered measure of prominence, an operational definition that takes into account the amount of coverage (space in the print media and time in the broadcast media) and where that coverage is placed in the newspaper or broadcast will more precisely measure the prominence of coverage.

Hypotheses

The purpose of this study is to assess the relative contribution of the event and country characteristics described above in predicting prominence of coverage in four elite U.S. media—the New York *Times* and the CBS, NBC and ABC evening national newscasts. The results will be used to further refine the model in Figure 1 by assessing the relative importance of the event characteristics, of the four types of country characteristics and of their interactions in determining coverage.

Therefore we tested the following hypotheses:

1. The more deviant a world event is, the more prominently it will be covered by U.S. media.

2. The more political, economic and cultural significance a country has for the U.S., the more prominently its events will be covered in the U.S. media.

3. There is an interaction between deviance and measures of political, economic, and cultural significance, as predicted by Figure 1.[26]

4. The more constraints there are on U.S. journalists communicating with another country, the less prominently an event will be covered.

Method

"Event" is the unit of analysis in our study. The dependent variable in the study is how prominently an international event in our sample is covered in the New York *Times* or by the combined CBS, NBC and ABC national newscasts. The independent variables include characteristics of the event (deviance variables plus whether the U.S. is involved in the event) and the country (cultural, political and economic significance, as well as the communication constraints).[27]

International events were sampled from Keesing's *Contemporary Archives: Record of World Events*. Rosengren has advocated the use of extra media data from indexes such as Keesing's, which collects information about events from world media, government and other sources.[28]

Event Characteristics. We randomly sampled 200 events each from the 1984 and 1985 Keesing's indexes.[29] Events that occurred inside the United States were not included. Photocopies of the descriptions of each event were acquired, and the deviance of each event was coded independently by two of the authors, using operational definitions of

26. Timeliness, although still considered a contingent condition like the other communication constraints, is not included in this study because of methodological constraints — the information is simply not available for the international events sampled from Keesing's index. See the method section for more information on how events were selected.

27. For events that involved more than one country, the country in which the event occurred was designated the "primary" country. Data were also collected on one "secondary" country—the event did not occur in this country, but its representatives were involved in the event.

28. Karl E. Rosengren, "International News: Methods, Data and Theory," *Acta Sociologica* 13:96-109 (1970).

29. Only one hundred sixty-six 1984 and one hundred eighty-nine 1985 events were included in the final analysis. We eliminated sampled events in which the U.S. was the dominant actor and that occurred in colonies or protectorates. Only events occurring in independent countries were included, because our sources of information about country characteristics generally gave the parent country's characteristics rather than those of the colony or protectorate.

30. Shoemaker, Change and Brendlinger, *op. cit.*

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deviance from previous research. [30]

"Potential for social change deviance" was operationalized by a four-point scale relating the extend to which the event threatens the status quo in the country in which the event occurred: (1) not at all threatening, (2) somewhat threatening, (3) dangerous to the status quo, (4) extremely dangerous to the status quo.

"Normative deviance" was operationalized by a four-point scale relating the extent to which the event, if it had occurred in the United States, would have broken U.S. norms: (1) would not have broken any norms, (2) would have somewhat violated U.S. norms, (3) would have violated existing U.S. norms, (4) would have seriously broken U.S. norms.

"U.S. involvement" was operationalized according to the Keesing's description of the event. An event was coded as directly involving the United States if the Keesing's description of the event mentioned the United States as a participant in the event.

Intercoder reliability was assessed by using Pearson's correlation coefficient between ratings of the two coders; the value of r ranged between .85 and .90.

Country Characteristics. The *cultural significance* variables included "ethnic similarity to the U.S. population" and "religious similarity to the U.S. population.[31] Ethnic similarity is defined as the percentage of the U.S. population that has ethnic roots in the event country. Religious similarity is defined as the percentage of the U.S. population that has ethnic roots in the event country. Religious similarity is defined as the percentage of the event country's population that has formal or informal ties to a Christian religious faith. Statistics for both variables were taken from the *Newspaper Enterprise Association World Almanac Book of Facts* and the *Information Please Almanac.* We also made telephone calls to embassies in the United States when information was not available in these sources.[32]

The *economic significance* variables included the following [33] (a) "gross domestic product" is the total market value (in U.S. dollars) of all goods and services produced within the borders of a country during one year. The most recent statistics available were used, usually from 1983. Pre-1980 numbers were not used even if they were the most recent statistics available. Sources included the *United Nations Statistical Pocketbook,* [34] *The World Almanac and Book of Facts*[35] and *The World Factbook,*[36] (b) "the number of U.S. businesses" was the number of non-bank U.S. companies and their non-bank affiliates in the event country having asset, sales or net income of at least $10 million. The source for this information was a *Bureau of Economic Analysis 1983 Survey,*[37] (c) "U.S. direct investment abroad" represents the total foreign assets (in U.S. dollars) of U.S. investors in the event country as mea-

31. Although many religions are represented in the United States, according to 1986 U.S. Census figures, 95% of the U.S. population identifies itself as Christian.

32. If an event included both a primary and secondary country, the percentage figures for ethnic and religious similarity of the primary and secondary countries were added, and the combined figure was used in analysis.

33. Each of the five economic significance variables represent the *combined* figure for both the primary and secondary countries involved in the event.

34. United Nations, *World Statistics in Brief: United Nations Statistical Pocketbook* (New York: UN Publishing Service, 1985).

35. Newspaper Enterprise Association, *The World Almanac and Book of Facts,* 1985.

36. Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook* (Washington, D.C.: Author, 1983).

37. U.S. Department of Commerce, *U.S. Direct Investment Abroad, Operations of U.S. Parent Companies and Their Foreign Affiliates* (Washington, D.C.; Author, 1985).

38. Ibid.

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sured by the *Bureau of Economic Analysis 1983 Survey,*[38] (d) "foreign imports to the U.S." is the (U.S.) dollar amount of all goods imported by the United States from each of the event countries. It was measured using 1984 U.S. dollar figures from the *Statistical Abstracts of the United States,*[39] (e) "U.S. exports to foreign countries" refers to the (U.S.) dollar amount of all goods exported by the United States to each of the event countries. It was measured using 1984 U.S. dollar figures from the *Statistical Abstracts of the United States.*[40]

The *political significance* variables[41] include: (a) "U.S. military presence" was measured by including any U.S. military installation abroad, including direct access to foreign military installations. Sources included the *U.S. World Military and Government Installations Directory Service* and *A Guide to Military Installations,*[42] (b) "military alliances"—the number of alliances (a scale ranging from 0 to 5) according to the U.S. Department of State's *Treaties in Force on January 1, 1986,*[43] (c) "U.S. economic aid to the country"—measured by adding the total dollar amounts for economic assistance programs in 1984,[44] (d) "U.S. military aid to the country"—measured by adding the total dollar amounts for military assistance programs in 1984.[45]

The *communication constraint* variables include: (a) "proximity"—the distance (in kilometers) from the capital of the country in which the event occurred to Washington, D.C.[46] (b) "literacy rate"—the percentage of the event country's population who could read and write, (c) "language similarity"— dummy coded as "1" if English is widely spoken in the country and "0" if it is not, (d) "newspaper diffusion"—daily newspapers per thousand population,[47] (e) "television diffusion"—number of television sets per thousand population,[48] (f) "radio diffusion"—the number of radio sets per thousand population.[49]

Event Prominence. Coverage of world events was measured for the New York *Times* and three major U.S. television network (CBS, ABC and NBC) news programs.[50] These media were selected because they are as likely or more likely to cover international events than most other newspapers or television news shows, and therefore they provide a stronger test of our hypotheses. To determine news coverage, we searched the 1984 and 1985 media indexes for at least one month before and after the event was estimated to occur. Any coverage of an event which may have occurred outside of this time frame was not included in this study.

39. U.S. Bureau of Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (Washington, D.C.; Author, 1986).
40. *Ibid.*
41. The following political significance variables represent the *combined* figure for both the primary and secondary countries (if any): military alliances, U.S. economic aid and U.S. military aid. U.S. military presence was coded as "0" if neither country has a U.S. military presence, as "1" if ony one country does, and "2" if both countries do.
42. *U.S. World Military and Government Installations Directory Service* (La Jolla, Calif.: Author, 1986); D. Cragg, *A Guide to Military Installations* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Stockpole Books, 1983).
43. U.S. Department of State, *Treaties in Force on January 1, 1986* (Washington D.C.: Author, 1986).
44. Statistical Annex 2: Foreign Assistance Provided by United States *(on microfiche ASI/MF/3) (1984).*
45. *Ibid.*
46. G. L. Fitzpatrick and M. J. Modlin, *Direct Line Distances,* Int'l Ed., (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1986).
47. United Nations, *Statistical Yearbook 1983/84* (New York: United Nations, 1986).
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*
50. Coders first consulted the appropriate *Television News Index and Abstracts* (Vanderbilt Television News Archive) and the *New York Times Index* to discover whether each event was covered by these media. Measurements of event prominence in the television network coverage (total number of stories, average length, and position within the broadcast—complete operational definitions are provided later in this paper) were taken directly from information available in the Vanderbilt index. Similar measurements for newspaper prominence of the events were taken by photocopying articles about the events from microfilm of the New York *Times* and by directly measuring article size, number, and position.
51. Events that were not covered were assigned a prominence score of zero.

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Measurements of *prominence*[51] included: (a) "newspaper prominence" the sum of (for all articles about an event) the products of the articles' positions[52] multiplied by their size.[53] b) "television prominence"—the sum of the products of the stories' positions within the newscast[54] multiplied by their length.[55]

Results

Of the 355 events sampled from the 1984 and 1985 Keesing's indexes, only 28% were covered by the New York *Times*, and only 12% were covered by the combined ABC, CBS and NBC evening newcasts. Table 1 shows that the event characteristics were better than country characteristics at predicting how prominently international events are covered in the U.S. media.

Table 1
Zero-order Pearson Correlation Coefficients of Variable Measuring How Prominently U.S. Media Cover World Events with Event Characteristic and Country Characteristic Variables, N=355.

Independent Variables	Television Event Prominence	Newspaper Event Prominence
Communication constraints within the event country		
Proximity to U.S.	-.01	-.04
English spoken (dummy coded)	-.03	.05
Literacy percentage	-.02	.04
Newspaper copies/thousand population	.02	.06
Television sets/thousand population	.00	.04
Radio sets/thousand population	.02	.05
Cultural significance of event country to U.S.		
Percentage of event country population is Christian	-.07a	-.05
Percentage of U.S. pop. with ethnic ties to country	-.05	-.02
Political significance of event country to U.S.		
Amount of economic aid coming from U.S.	.15c	.08a
Amount of military aid coming from U.S.	.11b	.07a
Presence of U.S. military in event country	-.01	.05
Number of military alliances shared with U.S.	.00	.07
Economic significance of event country to U.S.		
Amount U.S. imports from event country	.02	.02
Amount U.S. exports to event country	.02	.06
Number of U.S. businesses in event country	.04	.08a
Number of U.S. business investment in event country	.02	.05
Gross domestic product of event country	-.01	-.02
Event characteristics		
U.S. involvement in the event (dummy coded)	.11b	.12b
Amount of social change deviance	.29d	.15c
Amount of normative deviance	.20d	.13c

a $p < .1$
b $p < .05$
c $p < .01$
d $p < .001$

All three event characteristic variables—U.S. involvement in the event, the event's normative deviance and the event's social change

52. "Location of the story within the newspaper." For each story the following scale was used and the mean position was calculated for all stories: (4) on the first page of the newspaper; (3) on the first page of any section but the first; (3) in the first section, but not on the first page; (1) any other position.
53. "Article length in the New York *Times*" is measured as the total number of squre inches of coverage about the event.
54. "Location of the television story within the newscast." For each story the following scale was used: (3) story was in first third of program; (2) story was in middle third of the program; (1) story was in last third of the program.
55. "Story length in ABC, CBS or NBC newscasts" about the event is measured as the total number of seconds about the event.

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deviance—were positively related to how prominently the events were covered in the U.S. media we studied: events directly involving the U.S. and events which are deviant were given the most prominent coverage. This supports hypothesis one.

Table 2
Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Independent Variables on the Prominence of Event Coverage in the New York *Times*, N=355.

Blocks of Independent Variables		Std. Beta	R-square change	Total R-square
1.	Communication constraints		.00	.00
	Newspaper diffusion	.05		
	English spoken (dummy coded)	-.04		
	Literacy rate	-.03		
	Television diffusion	-.03		
	Radio diffusion	.02		
	Proximity	-.02		
2.	Cultural significance		.01	.01
	Percentage Christian	-.01		
	Ethnic similarity	-.13		
3.	Political significance		.03a	.04
	Economic aid	.24b		
	Military aid	-.10		
	Military presence (dummy coded)	-.01		
	Number of alliances with U.S.	.01		
4.	Economic significance		.01	.05
	Number of U.S. businesses	29a		
	Amount of U.S. exports	23		
	Amount of U.S. imports	.07		
	Gross domestic product	.05		
	Amount of U.S. business investment	-.01		
5.	U.S. involvement in event	-12b	.01b	.07
6.	Event deviance		.07d	.13b
	Social change	.26d		
	Normative	.02		
7.	Interactions*		.11c	.24d
	Economic aid X social change deviance	1.26d		
	Military aid X social change deviance	-.57		
	Normative deviance X social change deviance	-.47		
	Number of businesses X economic aid	-.32		
	Number of businesses X military aid	.32		
	Ethnic similarity X social change deviance	-.32		
	Number of businesses X social change deviance	.29		
	Economic aid X normative deviance	-.28		
	Number of businesses X normative deviance	.20		
	Normative deviance X U.S. involvement	-.20		
	Ethnic similarity X normative deviance	.18		
	Economic aid X military aid	-.16		
	Military aid X normative deviance	.13		
	Economic aid X ethnic similarity	-.09		
	Number of businesses X ethnic similarity	.07		
	Military aid X ethnic similarity	.07		

* The following interaction variable did not enter the regression equation because their tolerance fell below .01: number of businesses X U.S. involvement, economic aid X U.S. involvement, military aid X U.S. involvement, ethnic similarity X U.S. involvement, social change deviance X U.S. involvement.

a $p < .1$
b $p < .05$
c $p < .01$
d $p < .001$

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Table 3
Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Independent Variables on the Prominence of Event Coverage in the ABC, CBS and NBC Newscasts, N=355.

Blocks of Independent Variables		Std. Beta	R-square change	Total R-square
1.	Communication constraints		.01	.01
	Television diffusion	-.06		
	Radio diffusion	.06		
	Newspaper diffusion	.05		
	English spoken (dummy coded)	.05		
	Proximity	-.02		
	Literacy rate	.01		
2.	Cultural significance		.01	.02
	Percentage Christian	-.04		
	Ethnic similarity	-.13		
3.	Political significance		.01	.03
	Economic aid	.11		
	Number of alliances with U.S.	.08		
	Military presence (dummy coded)	.05		
	Military aid	-.04		
4.	Economic aid		.03	.06
	Amount of U.S. exports	.32		
	Amount of U.S. imports	-.30a		
	Number of U.S. businesses	.23		
	Gross domestic product	-.12		
	Amount of U.S. business investment	.00		
5.	U.S. involvement in event	-14c	.02c	.08
6.	Event deviance		.02b	.10b
	Social change	.12		
	Normative	.04		
7.	Interactions*		.11c	.21d
	Number of businesses X normative deviance	.75c		
	Social change deviance X normative deviance	-.48		
	Ethnic similarity X social change deviance	-.25		
	Number of businesses X economic aid	-.25		
	Economic aid X military aid	-.23		
	Number of businesses X military aid	.23		
	Military aid X normative deviance	.14		
	Economic aid X normative deviance	.13		
	Normative deviance X U.S. involvement	-.09		
	Economic aid X social change deviance	-.08		
	Number of businesses X social change deviance	.08		
	Number of businesses X ethnic similarity	.07		
	Ethnic similarity X normative deviance	-.05		
	Military aid X ethnic similarity	-.03		
	Military aid X social change deviance	-.02		
	Economic aid X ethnic similarity	.00		

* The following interaction variable did not enter the regression equation because their tolerance fell below .01: number of businesses X U.S. involvement, economic aid X U.S. involvement, military aid X U.S. involvement, ethnic similarity X U.S. involvement, social change deviance X U.S. involvement.

a $p < .1$
b $p < .05$
c $p < .01$
d $p < .001$

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Among the country characteristics, the measures of political significance were most related to event prominence. For both television and newspaper coverage of international events, the more economic and military aid going from the U.S. to the event country, the more prominently the event was covered. This relationship was stronger for television than for newspaper coverage. The number of U.S. businesses was also somewhat important in predicting event coverage in newspapers, and the religious similarity of the event country to the U.S. was weakly related to television event prominence. In that only some of the significance variables were related to prominence, hypothesis two is partially supported. None of the communication constraints was related to event prominence, thus failing to support hypothesis 4.

Tables 2 and 3 show the results of hierarchical regression analyses in which the prominence with which events are covered (in the newspaper or by the television networks) is predicted by blocks of independent variables.

We first accounted for variance associated with the communication constraints—the contingent conditions in our model (Figure 1)—as a way of holding access to the event constant for subsequent analyses. The next variable sets to enter the equations were the remaining country characteristics followed by the event characteristics and, finally, the interaction variables.

We chose cultural significance to enter the equations immediately after the communication constraints, because it is composed of two relatively stable indicators of a country's significance to the U.S. (religious and ethnic similarity). Neither the communication constraints or cultural significance variables accounted for a statistically significant portion of the variance in television or newspaper coverage.

The political significance variables added to the variance explained in newspaper coverage, but not in television coverage. Economic significance was somewhat more important for television coverage (although not a statistically significant contributor to R-square change) than it was for newspaper coverage.

The last two blocks of main-effect variables to enter the equations were the event characteristics. U.S. involvement was entered separately from the deviance variables in order to independently assess their contributions. U.S. involvement and the two deviance measures both added a statistically significant increment to the variance explained in newspaper and television event coverage.

But the most important contributors to R-square turned out to be the interaction block. Consistent with hypothesis three, it accounted for nearly half of the variance in newspaper and television coverage. A look at the standardized betas for the interaction variables, however, reveals that the results are somewhat different for the two types of media. For the New York *Times*, the most important interaction was between the amount of economic aid the U.S. gives the event country (an indicator of political significance) and social change deviance (the extent to which the event threatens the status quo in the event country). For the three television networks, the most important interaction was between the number of U.S. businesses in the event country (an indicator of economic significant) and normative deviance (the extent to which the event would have broken norms in the U.S.)

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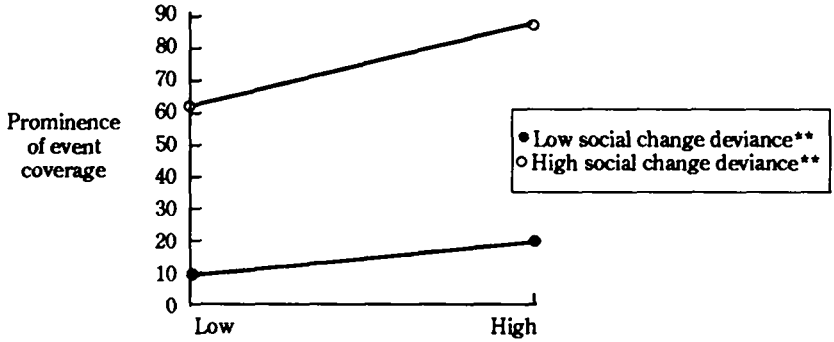
These correlation and regression analyses reveal that, contrary to our Figure 1 model, the communication constraints were not important contingent conditions in predicting how prominently international events will be covered in the U.S. media. There was support, however, for our choice of deviance and social significance dimensions to help predict event prominence: deviance variables were important for both newspaper and television coverage, with social change deviance being most important for newspaper coverage and normative deviance begin most important for television coverage. Among the three dimensions of social significance we identify, political significance (especially the amount of economic aid the U.S. gives to the event country) seems to be the most important for newspaper coverage and economic significance (especially the number of U.S. businesses in the event country) seems to be the most important for television coverage.

Figures 2 and 3 show empirical support for our model (minus the contingent conditions), using dichotomized versions of the deviance and social significance variables.

Figure 2
Interaction Between the Political Significance of the Event Country and the Social Change Deviance of the Event on Prominence with which the New York *Times* Covers Events



*Newspaper prominence was operationalized as [Σ(article positions within the newspaper) (article size in square inches)]. See the methods section for more information.
**These variables were dichotomized at the median into high and low categories.

The cells represent the mean prominence of all international events covered by the New York *Times* (Figure 2) and by the three television networks (Figure 3). The results support our Figure 1 model in that events of high deviance and high social significance received the most prominent coverage and events of low social significance and low got the least prominent coverage. Events of high deviance and low social significance received far more prominent coverage than events of high social significance and low deviance—thus emphasizing the primary role of deviance in determining coverage.

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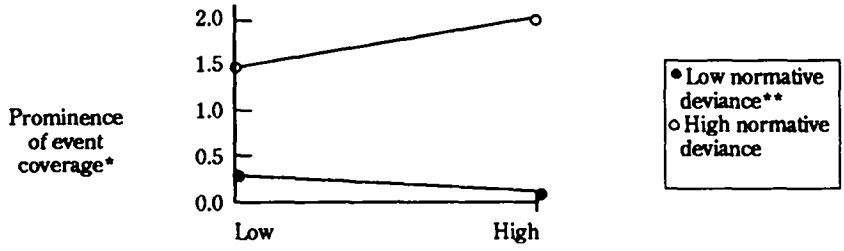
Figure 3
Interaction Between the Economic Significance of the Event Country and the Normative Deviance of the Event on Prominence With which ABC, CBS and NBC Cover World Events



*Newspaper prominence was operationalized as [Σ(article positions within the newspaper) (article size in square inches)]. See the methods section for more information.
**These variables were dichotomized at the median into high and low categories.

In summary, hypothesis one was supported—the more deviant an event is, the more prominently it was covered. Hypothesis two was partially supported. There was a weak negative relationship between religious similarity and prominence of coverage. But political significance was positively related to both newspaper and television coverage and economic significance to prominence of newspaper coverage. Hypothesis three was strongly supported. For the New York *Times*, social change deviance interacted with the amount of economic aid the U.S. gives to event countries. For ABC, CBS and NBC normative deviance interacted with the number of U.S. businesses in event countries. Hypothesis four was not supported—there was no relationship between communication constraints and coverage.

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to continue the elaboration of the newsworthiness concept. We have built on previous work which suggests that deviance variables, social significance variables and their interactions can be used to predict how prominently an international event is covered by the U.S. media. We have extended previous research by the explication of the contingent conditions as a set of communication constraints on media coverage; by the elaboration of the social significance dimension into cultural, political and economic significance dimensions; by the inclusion of two years of international events into our sample and by the inclusion of data for both primary and secondary countries.

This approach tells us that world events presented most prominently to the audiences of four elite U.S. media are those events that are deviant *and* that have economic or political significance to the United States. The next-most prominent coverage goes to deviant events that have low significance, thus confirming our prediction that deviance is an important theoretical contributor to the newsworthiness concept. The importance of news content emphasizing deviant events lies in the role of the mass media in social change. Two types of deviance were related to event coverage in this paper—the potential of the event in

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affecting social change in the event country and the extent to which the event breaks U.S. norms. Both types of deviance are potentially troublesome to the status quo, since they present clear challenges. News about events that threaten social change provides information about a breakdown of normal operations, and news about events that break norms conveys direct ideological alternatives to the status quo.

When such information about deviant events occurs in tandem with important indicators of the political or economic significance of a country to the United States, the U.S. media give such events accentuated coverage. Television points out events that threaten the stability of U.S. business abroad; whereas, newspaper coverage emphasizes actions of our political allies that deviate from U.S. norms. If the media act as agents of social control then we would expect not only that the media would emphasize deviant events, but that they would also cover deviant events qualitatively different from non-deviant events. Deviant ideas and individuals would be delegitimized and social change would be slowed.

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