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HOW EIGHT WEEKLY NEWSMAGAZINES COVERED ELECTIONS IN SIX COUNTRIES

By Robert T. Buckman



This study of how eight newsmagazines in six countries covered the same events – elections in the six countries – found that geographic proximity was an important newsworthiness factor, but that other cultural, political, and economic ties also affected coverage. The study showed no support for the often-held belief that news is carefully defined by East-West or North-South relationships.

It is a truism that the revolution in telecommunication has made the world smaller. News of events in other countries can be received as quickly as news of a holdup at a local grocery store. What has occupied the attention of more than a few communication researchers in recent years is what the gatekeepers of this information flow do with it.

Researchers have busily analyzed newspaper content, wire service files, and television news programming, often posing hypotheses that news flows unevenly between developed and developing countries. But two areas have remained relatively less explored: the content of newsmagazines and the comparative attention, or “play,” assigned to specific news events as opposed to twenty-odd categories of news.

This researcher examined how eight weekly newsmagazines on three continents balance national and international news and, more specifically, how they covered recent national elections in their own as well as in the other five countries. Included in this event analysis were *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report* of the United States; *Macleans* of Canada; *The Economist* of Great Britain; *L’Express* of France; *Proceso* of Mexico; and *Ercilla* of Chile. Subsequent to this study, *Ercilla*, which was founded in 1933 and was the oldest weekly newsmagazine in Latin America, ceased publication with its issue of November 5, 1991.¹

The events chosen were the British parliamentary election of June 11, 1987; the French presidential runoff of May 8, 1988; the Mexican presidential election of July 6, 1988; the Chilean plebiscite on the continuance in power of General Augusto Pinochet on October 5, 1988; the U.S. presidential election on November 8, 1988; and the Canadian parliamentary election of November 21, 1988.

Theoretical Context

In approaching this analysis, the researcher was drawn toward Galtung’s and Ruge’s twelve factors in the selection of foreign news. Not all factors came into play insofar as the six elections were concerned, but the key factor for hypothetical purposes was their fourth: that foreign news that is

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more "meaningful," defined as having the attributes of ethnocentric cultural proximity and relevance for the reader, is more likely to appear as a news item. But at least four other factors were evident: the sixth, news that is unexpected; the ninth, news that concerns elite nations; the tenth, news that involves elite people, and the eleventh, news that can be viewed in personal terms as the action of specific individuals.²

Studies of international news flow invariably question whether there is an imbalance between developed and developing countries. In his classic, although anecdotal, assessment of U.S. gatekeepers, AP reporter Mort Rosenblum argued the imbalance in news flow between North and South was due largely to the ethnocentrism of U.S. wire editors. News from the Third World, he charged, is primarily "bad news," i.e., coups and earthquakes.³

Even before Rosenblum, Lent identified four factors that affected foreign news coverage by U.S. media: international diplomacy, crises, censorship and image-building policies of other countries, and a "dwindling corps of adequately trained correspondents abroad."⁴ In another study, published simultaneously with Lent's, Rosengren warned that Galtung and Ruge's selection theory was "largely psychological," and that factors such as "strength" and "cultural proximity" were "diffuse concepts." To test four selection factors of his own, Rosengren examined how *The Times* of London, *Dagens Nyheter* of Stockholm, and *Neues Deutschland* of East Berlin covered elections inside and outside Europe. He looked at imports and exports, population of the country holding the election, and the geographic distance between the city where the newspaper is published and the foreign country. His findings, which have some relevance to this study, suggest that import and export figures between the countries where the newspapers were published and the country holding the election were the major determinants of election coverage.⁵

In her study of gatekeepers, Peterson administered a sixteen-item questionnaire to editors, foreign correspondents, and stringers of *The Times* of London to determine their criteria for newsworthiness. Her findings supported all but one of Galtung and Ruge's selection factors. She also noted differences, however, between the selection values of British editors and correspondents, who hail from a "competitive" and conflict-oriented Western culture, and Third World stringers, whose cultures were characterized by adherence to authority.⁶

Putting Rosenblum – and indirectly Galtung and Ruge – to the empirical test, Gaddy and Tanjong content-analyzed news coverage of 102 earthquakes in 1982 and 1983 to determine whether the *New York Times*, *The Times* of London, ABC, NBC, and CBS were more inclined to report Third World earthquakes than those in the First World. They concluded that these five media were even-handed and that coverage was dependent less on geographic location or on magnitude on the Richter scale than on the human and physical losses incurred.⁷

In a related study, Adams measured the amount of airtime the three major U.S. television networks devoted in their evening newscasts to thirty-five natural disasters from January 1972 to June 1985. There was a high correlation among the networks in terms of airtime accorded to specific disasters. But when he used a score of seconds of airtime per 1,000 deaths, Adams found that West Europe scored a 9.2, East Europe a 3.6, Latin America 1.02, the Mideast .87, and Asia .76. Unlike Rosengren, Adams concluded that the three most important variables for determining news

selection were (1) the number of U.S. tourists that visit a given country, (2) the severity of the disaster, and (3) the distance in miles from New York City to that country. Together, these three variables accounted for 61 percent of the variation in coverage among the networks, though he cautioned that competition from other breaking stories was an incalculable variable. Still, Adams argued that "the death of one Western European equaled three Eastern Europeans equaled five Latin Americans equaled 11 Middle Easterners equaled 12 Asians."⁸

Shoemaker, Danielan, and Brendlinger, meanwhile, examined 355 world events occurring during 1984 and 1985 and found that only 28 percent were covered by the *New York Times* and only 12 percent by the three U.S. television networks. They determined, like Galtung and Ruge, that the "cultural significance" of the events for the U.S. audience played a role in the selection criteria, but so did the political significance of the event to the U.S. audience, the economic significance, and the "event characteristic," to include the degree of U.S. involvement, the degree of "social deviance" for the country where the event occurred, and the degree of "normative deviance," or how the event deviated from U.S. norms. Like Galtung and Ruge, they concluded that the more of these factors that are at work in a given event, the more newsworthy it is to the four U.S. elite media they analyzed.⁹

The foregoing studies, with the exception of Rosengren, examined elite British and American newspapers and television networks. They scrutinized both content and agenda-setters, and analyzed coverage of different types of news events. Missing from any of these agenda-setting studies, obviously, are weekly newsmagazines. Also absent, again except for Rosengren, are truly multinational, as opposed to binational, comparisons of similar media. Here is where this study breaks new ground, examining how eight newsmagazines in six countries covered the same events – the elections in those same countries.

Review of the Literature

The preponderance of magazine studies in recent years has focused on advertising content or news photographs. At the same time, most have been confined to the three U.S. newsmagazines. Rich, for example, calculated the "comprehensiveness" of coverage by these three media of two major science stories of the 1970s: the outbreak of Legionnaire's disease and the conception and birth of the first test-tube baby. By his gauge, he found *Time* the most comprehensive, followed by *Newsweek*.¹⁰ Simmons and Lowry analyzed 185 articles dealing with terrorism in the three newsmagazines between 1980 and 1988 and isolated thirteen distinct "labels" used for terrorists.¹¹ Yu and Riffe, meanwhile, examined the three magazines' comparative coverage of Mao Tse-tung and Chiang Kai-shek from 1949 until 1976, after both leaders' deaths, and concluded that coverage of both had been objective, although Mao's "press" had become increasingly favorable over time.¹²

One of the more pertinent projects for this study was Moriarty and Popovich's examination of photographic coverage of the 1988 U.S. election by *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report*, in which they concluded that Bush and Quayle received more visual and more favorable coverage than did Dukakis and Bentsen. But their study did not scrutinize textual coverage.¹³ Also relevant to this discussion is Perry's test of Galtung and Ruge's "threshold factor" – that the greater the magnitude of an event the

greater its coverage. He compared *Time's* and *Newsweek's* coverage of foreign industrial disputes from 1966 to 1973, concluding that an ongoing event in another country will continue to receive coverage up to a point, then it will fall off parabolically. However, that study focused exclusively on British strikes, so there was no effort to gauge whether coverage would vary according to geographic or cultural proximity.¹⁴

On an international level, this researcher included nine Latin American news and feature magazines in a content analysis of cultural articles that indicated daily newspapers and magazines in Latin America show preference to the domestic culture, with European culture in second place and U.S. culture third.¹⁵ But few studies can be found that place U.S. newsmagazines in an international perspective. An exception is that of Grube and Boehme-Duerr, who employed the Galtung-Ruge theory in analyzing AIDS-related articles in *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The Economist*, *L'Express*, and *Der Spiegel* in 1985 and 1986. They found, among other results, that the "élite person factor" did not seem to be at work in AIDS coverage.¹⁶

Focus of the Study

Weekly newsmagazines are an inviting target for research. They must be approached differently from newspapers not only because of the obvious differences in format, but also because of the weekly rather than daily deadline and the difference in the nature of the newsmagazine audience. A subscriber to the *New York Post* or *San Antonio Express-News* may or may not know who Brian Mulroney or François Mitterand are, let alone be familiar with the issues in their re-election campaigns. Subscribers to *Time* or *L'Express* have invested extra money and time to supplement knowledge already gleaned from newspapers and broadcast media. To put it another way, the newsmagazine subscriber is looking more for the "why" and "how" of a story than for the "who," "what," "when," and "where." Finally, the gatekeepers of newsmagazines are among the élite members of their profession.

There is an almost monotonous homogeneity in format of the eight magazines studied. All are 8x11 inches in size, all have slick covers with state-of-the-art graphics, and all have three columns with the exception of *L'Express*, which went from three to four columns with its issue of June 3, 1988. With the exception of Mexico's *Proceso*, all have slick pages with crisp color photographs. The average number of pages of the issues analyzed ranged from 110 for the monstrous *Economist* to 50 for *Ercilla*, but the other six clustered between 66 and 95 (see Table 1). All but *Proceso* were heavily laden with advertising.

It is raw historical coincidence that the national elections of the six target countries occurred within such a short time span; five of the six took place within a six-month period from May to November of 1988. Obviously, differences in coverage from one election to another could be explained by differences in newsworthiness, or "amplitude," within the Galtung-Ruge or Shoemaker frameworks. It is important, then, to review each of the elections to demonstrate that each, in its own way, possessed considerable international news value that put them on roughly equal footing, thus rendering moot the "threshold" factor. All the elections also involved "élite persons."

In the British general election of 1987, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of the Conservative Party was running for a third consecutive term, something no other British prime minister had achieved in this century. She

already was one of the best-known world leaders of her time, and her nickname, "The Iron Lady," was used in all three languages of the sampled magazines. Her principal opponent was Labor Party leader Neil Kinnock, although an alliance of the old Liberal Party and the new Social Democratic Party was trying to break the stranglehold of the two major parties. At issue in the election was whether Britain would continue along the road toward free-market capitalism on which it had embarked when Thatcher was first elected in 1979. Polls predicted another Tory victory, which the voters confirmed on election day by giving Thatcher a comfortable, although reduced, majority.

The first round of the French presidential election on April 24, 1988, had attracted considerable international attention because of the strong showing in the polls of ultra-rightwing candidate Jean-Marie LePen of the National Front. But in the end LePen placed fourth in a field of five, and Socialist President François Mitterand, seeking a second seven-year term, was thrust into a runoff with his conservative prime minister, Jacques Chirac. The suspense surrounded whether the aging Mitterand could increase his 34.1 percent first-round showing into a majority. Moreover, the conservative parties had won control of Parliament two years before, so Mitterand's 1981 mandate had evaporated. Although there was some pre-election excitement when Chirac won the release of some French hostages in Lebanon, polls indicated a Mitterand victory; they were correct.

Mexican elections traditionally have been as suspenseful – and consequently as newsworthy – as football games between Ohio State and Texas Christian. Since 1929 the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) had monopolized the presidency, the governorships and the Senate. When its popularity began to wane in local elections, the PRI resorted to fraud to maintain its dominance. But the 1988 presidential election was different, or "unexpected." The PRI candidate, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, the hand-picked successor of President Miguel de la Madrid, faced two strong challengers – Manuel Clouthier of the conservative National Action Party (PAN), and an even stronger challenge from the left by Cuatemoc Cárdenas of the newly formed Social Democratic Party. Cárdenas is the son of the popular former president, Lázaro Cárdenas, who nationalized foreign oil companies in 1938. Both opposition parties attacked the PRI's record and its reputation for corruption, and suspense arose over whether the PRI would win by less than a majority of the vote for the first time or, even more unthinkable, would actually lose the election. Because of this, the election drew more international press attention than in the past. The preliminary election results gave Salinas a slight majority, but both opposition parties presented compelling evidence of widespread vote fraud. It wasn't until September that Salinas' victory for the six-year term officially was ratified.

The Chilean plebiscite was unique in that there was only one candidate: General Pinochet, who had ruled Chile as dictator since he led the September 11, 1973, coup that toppled the Marxist government of President Salvador Allende. Most Chileans had welcomed the coup, and in 1980 had overwhelmingly approved Pinochet's new constitution. One provision of that constitution was that Pinochet must subject himself to a plebiscite by 1989 to determine whether he would remain in power until 1997. Because of an economic recession and weariness with a dictatorial system virtually unknown to Chileans in living memory, Pinochet's once-prodigious popularity had begun to wane by 1988. In the plebiscite, Chileans had to vote either "Sí," to keep Pinochet in power, or "No," to return to elected civilian

rule. As the "No" forces began showing strength and the outcome appeared uncertain, international media began following the story with greater interest. The stunning victory of the "No" forces, 54 percent to 43 percent, was a genuine newsmaker and the only true upset in any of the six elections studied – again, the "unexpectedness" factor.

Aside from the election in Mexico, where re-election of the president is constitutionally prohibited, the U.S. presidential election between Republican George Bush and Democrat Michael Dukakis was the only one of the six in which there was no incumbent facing re-election. Because of this, and because of the unique role of the United States as titular leader of the Western world, the U.S. election inevitably drew the attention of the world media. As with the British and French elections, however, there was little suspense, as the magnitude of Bush's victory was almost exactly what the polls had predicted.

In the Canadian parliamentary election, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney of the Progressive Conservative Party was seeking a second mandate after coming to power in a sweeping landslide in 1984. Once again, his principal rival was John Turner of the Liberal Party, though the strength of the socialist New Democratic Party often determines which of the two major parties leads the voting. The overriding issue in the campaign was the free-trade agreement that Mulroney had negotiated with the United States and which the Liberals and the NDP opposed. Polls indicated that Mulroney would prevail, as he did with a reduced majority, though there always is some suspense in Canadian elections because the voters often confound the pollsters.

Two hypotheses were tested in this study. H1 held that the sampled newsmagazines would show significantly more coverage of national rather than international events. The number of column inches each magazine allocated to these two categories was compared with a chi-square test.

H2 contended that significant differences would occur in the amount of international newshole devoted to the coverage of specific foreign elections by the eight magazines because of geographic proximity and/or linguistic and cultural ties. In other words, *The Economist* would show greater interest in the United States and Canada than in Mexico or Chile, *L'Express* would follow the British election more closely than the Chilean, and so forth. The number of column inches each magazine dedicated to the various elections also was analyzed using chi-square. Coupled with this hypothesis was the research question of whether there would be marked differences among the eight magazines in the percentage of their international newsholes devoted to the elections in the other five countries.

A second research question asked whether there would be differences among the magazines in the percentage of national newshole devoted to their own national elections. Because of the greatly varying sizes in newshole among the eight magazines, a chi-square comparison of the number of column inches allocated to national or foreign elections would have been misleading.

The unit of measurement for the study was the column inch, and the measurement of election-related articles included the headlines and any accompanying photographs, graphics or cartoons. Covers were not included in the measurement, however. All the magazines but *L'Express* had identical three-column-by-10-inch formats, as did *L'Express* until after the French

Hypotheses and Method

election. The total number of inches in the articles in the four-column issues of *L'Express* was simply multiplied by .75 to put it on a par with the other seven magazines.

The method for analyzing election coverage was to scrutinize four consecutive issues of each magazine – the three issues immediately preceding the election and the issue that reported the outcome. Thus, for the six elections, twenty-two issues of each magazine were analyzed – not twenty-four, because the U.S. and Canadian election campaigns had a two-week overlap among the sampled issues. These same twenty-two issues also were analyzed for the breakdown of international and national news coverage.

Because the analysis focused only on election coverage, the researcher did not employ formal reliability testing. The coding of articles as national or international also was straightforward for the most part, as all the magazines have separate national and international sections. But the researcher had to set specific criteria for the coding of certain articles in other sections, such as sports and art.¹⁷

Results

Data reflected in Table 1 support H1. Seven of the eight magazines showed significantly greater coverage of national than international events, although *L'Express* was more evenly balanced than the others. Only *The Economist* carried a preponderance of international news, apparently because the magazine has tended to appeal to an international audience. In each issue of *The Economist*, the first section of news was entitled "American Survey," which contained news of the United States and averaged about seven pages. Next came "Asia," followed by "Europe," then "International," and only then "Britain." The section on British news was no greater, and often smaller, than "American Survey." It is possible that the edition of *The Economist* to which U.S. libraries subscribe puts more focus on international events. At the opposite end of the spectrum was *Proceso*, which contained a minuscule international section. It is interesting to note, however, that the three U.S. magazines were not far ahead of *Proceso* in terms of foreign coverage.

The answer to the research question on comparative coverage of national elections is depicted in Table 2. Great discrepancy appeared among

TABLE 1
National and International Newsholes in Column Inches over 22 Sampled Issues

	Total Newshole	National Newshole	Pct.	Internat'l Newshole	Pct.	p.<	Av. Pages
<i>Economist</i>	39,055	9,009	23.1	30,046	76.9	.001	110
<i>Ercilla</i>	21,170	13,352	63.1	7,818	36.9	.001	50
<i>L'Express</i>	36,920	20,648	55.9	16,272	44.1	.001	77
<i>Macleans</i>	29,580	18,313	61.9	11,267	38.1	.001	95
<i>Proceso</i>	34,220	28,289	82.7	5,931	17.3	.001	66
<i>Newsweek</i>	31,260	25,455	81.4	5,805	18.6	.001	88
<i>Time</i>	32,645	24,588	75.3	8,057	24.7	.001	94
<i>USN&WR</i>	32,270	24,942	77.3	7,328	22.7	.001	77

TABLE 2

Coverage of National Elections in Column Inches and as a Percentage of National News

	Col.. Inches	Percentage
<i>Economist</i>	1,125	66.18
<i>Ercilla</i>	1,380	57.40
<i>L'Express</i>	1,770	43.66
<i>Macleans</i>	2,826	65.61
<i>Proceso</i>	2,476	47.59
<i>Newsweek</i>	2,857	48.40
<i>Time</i>	1,455	28.31
USN&WR	1,243	26.27

the magazines in terms of the "play" given to coverage of their own elections, ranging from two-thirds of the national newshole for *The Economist* and *Macleans* to slightly over a fourth for *Time* and *U.S. News*. *Newsweek*, however, devoted its entire postelection issue of November 21 to election coverage; it carried no international news in that issue. *The Economist's* high score is partly explained by its relatively small national newshole.

The data also supported H2, as shown in Table 3, but even so there were some surprises. The answer to the research question on the comparative play the eight magazines give to foreign elections is reflected in Table 4. Perhaps the most intriguing finding in Tables 3 and 4 was the overwhelming coverage that *Proceso* devoted to the Chilean plebiscite. Not only was its coverage greater than that *Proceso* gave to any other international event in the twenty-two sampled issues, but its coverage was greater than that given by any of the magazines to any of the elections. True, *Proceso* has the smallest international newshole of the eight magazines, but even so the raw number of inches it devoted to Chile was exceeded only by *Macleans'* coverage of the U.S. election. Why? Culture, language, and geography no doubt played a part, but note that *Ercilla* did not reciprocate with disproportionate coverage of the Mexican election. Politics played a role here. *Proceso* has a decidedly left-wing editorial slant, and its coverage of the Chilean plebiscite was replete with negative references to Pinochet. Indeed, the plebiscite was the cover

TABLE 3

Coverage of Foreign Elections in Column Inches

	BR	FR	MEX	CH	USA	CAN	p.<
<i>Economist</i>	—	169	103	82	460	76	.001
<i>Ercilla</i>	49	210	51	—	135	20	.001
<i>L'Express</i>	160	—	18	227	218	20	.001
<i>Macleans</i>	180	91	15	62	595	—	.001
<i>Proceso</i>	0	39	—	537	206	0	.001
<i>Newsweek</i>	120	62	80	80	—	70	.001
<i>Time</i>	270	120	90	60	—	60	.001
USN&WR	58	41	203	60	—	56	.001

TABLE 4
*Coverage of Foreign Elections as Percentage of International Newshole
 over Four Sample Issues*

	BR	FR	MEX	CH	USA	CAN
<i>Economist</i>	—	3.28	1.88	1.43	8.25	1.36
<i>Ercilla</i>	2.81	14.04	3.00	—	10.32	1.57
<i>L'Express</i>	5.81	—	0.47	7.42	8.20	0.78
<i>Macleans</i>	9.33	4.24	0.87	2.88	25.30	—
<i>Proceso</i>	0	3.57	—	44.12	18.99	0
<i>Newsweek</i>	9.17	6.89	9.57	5.65	—	8.31
<i>Time</i>	16.07	11.24	7.31	2.82	—	4.26
<i>USN&WR</i>	5.08	2.37	15.23	4.43	—	5.30

story of *Proceso*'s October 10 issue, which carried the headline, "Otoño del Tirano" ("Autumn of the Tyrant"). The issue also included a full-page cartoon of Pinochet flushing himself down a toilet, which bore little trace of objectivity. The slant of the coverage in the other magazines was more pro-democracy than anti-Pinochet, though *L'Express* left little doubt as to its disdain of the military strongman.

Another surprise was the extensive coverage that *Ercilla* and *L'Express* gave to the elections in each other's countries, which cannot be explained by geography and only tangentially by their common Latin culture.

Culture and language are the likely explanations for why *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Macleans* were the leaders in British election coverage, considering that France also may be considered an "élite nation." Though *Ercilla* gave apparently meager attention to the British election in terms of inches, the outcome was, nonetheless, the cover story of its June 17, 1987, issue under the banner headline, "Razones por un Triunfo" ("Reasons for a Triumph"). *Ercilla*'s conservative leaning was evident in its coverage. Curiously, *L'Express* gave less attention to its cross-channel neighbor than it did to Chile or the United States, although it did carry a pre-election cover story on Margaret Thatcher in its issue of June 5, so geographic proximity was not evident in this case. Perhaps geography, culture, and ideology taken together explain why *Proceso* ignored the Thatcher victory altogether.

Geography apparently did play a role in the coverage of the Mexican election, with the three U.S. magazines well out in front. *U.S. News* had far more pre-election coverage than did its two rivals, with a six-page spread in its July 4, 1988, issue. But *U.S. News* carried only twenty-three inches on the election results as part of its "Currents" section, while *Time* and *Newsweek* made the Mexican election outcome the lead story of their respective international sections.

What else but geography can explain the fact that *Macleans* and *Proceso* led in the coverage of the U.S. election? *Macleans*' 25.3% score was second only to *Proceso*'s obsessive coverage of Chile. It can be argued that cultural proximity played a role in Maclean's coverage, but not *Proceso*'s. Language, culture, and competition also explain why *The Economist* devoted 460 raw inches to the U.S. election, including a 133-inch cover story in the October 29, 1988, issue, though the Bush-Dukakis contest still accounted for only 8.25% of its prodigious international newshole over the four sample issues. *L'Express* carried respectable coverage of the U.S. election, which was the cover story,

"Le Choix des Américains" ("The Choice of the Americans"), of its November 11 issue; it reported the results in its November 25 issue.

Geography, too, is the seemingly obvious factor in the Canadian election, with the three U.S. magazines again leading the way as they did with Mexico. It must be noted that the Canadian election also was the lead item in *Time*'s "World" section in its November 7 issue, but that issue preceded the four sample issues so that sixty-inch story is not reflected in the data. *Time* ran another sixty inches, or two full pages, on the election results in its December 5 issue, though it was not the lead international story. *The Economist*'s meager coverage was surprising, given the cultural and linguistic ties, although its forty-three-inch story on the election results was the lead international item in the November 26 issue. But the geographic factor is confounded somewhat by the fact that *Proceso* ignored the election despite its geographic proximity to Canada relative to Chile or France.

In examining the individual magazines as well as the events, we see some intriguing deviations among the three U.S. magazines. *Time* gave greater play to the British election than to any other, followed by the French; score one for the "élite nation" factor. But *U.S. News* gave its greatest weight to the Mexican election, followed distantly by the Canadian; and *Newsweek* gave almost a first-place tie to the Mexican and British elections, with the Canadian a close third. *The Economist*, *L'Express* and *Maclean's* all gave top billing to the U.S. election in newshole percentage, which also lends credence to the élite nation factor, though *L'Express*' coverage of the U.S. election was virtually tied with that given the Chilean plebiscite, which actually received more raw column inches. Perhaps it could be argued that Pinochet was more of an "élite person" than Bush or Dukakis.

Discussion

The beauty of the Galtung-Ruge theory is its built-in loophole, namely, the statement that if an event is low on one factor "it may compensate for that by being high on another."¹⁸ Thus, any curiosity uncovered in agenda-setting research may be explained in terms of one factor compensating for another, i.e., the élite-person factor of Pinochet compensating for the élite-nation factor of the United States to explain why *Proceso* gave more attention to Pinochet than to Bush and Dukakis. Or perhaps it was the cultural-proximity factor. Or both. But what explains why the three U.S. magazines were so varied in their agenda? Clearly, other factors are at work. As the other studies suggest, these factors could be bilateral trade, tourism, geographic proximity, foreign policy priorities, gatekeeper biases, competition from other stories, or all of the above.

If nothing else, this study implies the importance of geographic proximity as a newsworthiness factor as well as cultural, political, and economic ties. As noted, the three U.S. newsmagazines were far and away the leaders in their coverage of the elections in Canada and Mexico, two countries that are poles apart culturally and economically. Rosengren no doubt would attribute this to the fact that these two countries are the United States' leading trade partners, while Adams would point out that they also are the most popular with U.S. tourists. But here we must ask the obvious: was the election coverage of Mexico and Canada greater in the U.S. magazines because of trade or tourism, or are U.S. trade and tourism themselves greater with those two countries because of geographic proximity? But geography cannot be isolated as the critical factor, given the fact that *L'Express* devoted more

coverage to Chile than to Britain, *The Economist* more to the United States than to France, *Ercilla* more to France than to the United States or Mexico. Here again, *Proceso's* ideological slant may have been the deciding factor.

This study also has reinforced the theory that the ideological bias of agenda setters may be a factor, as Grube and Boehme-Duerr noted in the heavy AIDS coverage by the liberal *Der Spiegel*. This could explain why *Time* led the way with coverage of the British election, while *U.S. News* placed more focus on the Mexican election than did its two rivals. The study also reminds us that ethnocentric agenda setters are not confined to the United States, as evidenced by *Proceso's* treatment of the Chilean plebiscite.

As noted in Footnote 17, the Olympics competed with the Chilean plebiscite for coverage, the 1987 economic summit with the British election, and the the downing of the Iranian Airbus and the 1988 economic summit with the Mexican election. These extraneous events were almost universally reported in all the newsmagazines, save perhaps *Proceso*, so all the gatekeepers still would have been confronted with the same selection of priorities.

What, then, must we conclude from this perplexing mishmash of theories and findings? In a perfect world, the gatekeepers of the international information flow would be even-handed in the attention they assign to events of seemingly comparable importance, and they would all have large newsholes of equal size. But it is an imperfect world, fraught with economic realities and with geographic, cultural, ethnocentric, and ideological biases, which explains why readers of *Proceso* were treated to extensive, though heavily slanted, coverage of the Chilean plebiscite while they had to rely on newspapers or broadcast media to learn anything of the conservative victories in non-Hispanic Britain and Canada. It also helps explain why *Time* devoted 270 inches to Margaret Thatcher's anticipated victory and only sixty inches (all after the plebiscite) to General Pinochet's unexpected defeat.

It also is indicative of U.S. isolation and insulation from the world beyond its borders that the three U.S. newsmagazines devoted a significantly smaller percentage of total newshole to international events than did their counterparts in Britain, France, Canada, and Chile. To conclude that U.S. gatekeepers are myopic in their view of the world hardly comes as a startling revelation. Gerbner and Marvany analyzed nine elite and regional U.S. newspapers in 1970 along with a sample of newspapers in eight other countries around the world. They found that U.S. newspapers devoted only 11.1% of their newsholes to foreign news, ranking them fifth on average behind West European, East European, Soviet, and Third World newspapers.¹⁹

Yet, imbalances in coverage reflected by these data do not necessarily reinforce the beliefs of the cultural neocolonialism or neoimperialism theorists, as they cannot be plotted neatly along a North-South or center-periphery line. This study contradicts what Meyer found in his study of the news flow of the Big Four news agencies to and from Europe and Africa and the United States and Latin America.²⁰

The proverbial bottom line is that discrepancies in foreign news agenda-setting are a transregional reality, like them or not, and those who seek to be truly informed must conclude that the only way to do so is through diversification of sources. Subscribers to newsmagazines in the United States and other countries no doubt believe they are diversifying their sources, but as the data indicate, they still may not be getting the full picture.

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3. Rosenblum, Mort, *Coups and Earthquakes – Reporting the World for America*. (NY: Harper and Row, 1979).
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6. Peterson, Sophia, "Foreign News Gatekeeper and Criteria of Newsworthiness." *Journalism Quarterly* 56 (Spring 1979): 116-125.
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17. For example, the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul, Korea, coincided with the Chilean plebiscite. Olympic coverage by each magazine was closely scrutinized by the researcher to determine whether the article focused on the Olympic team or personalities from that country or whether it was general coverage of a major international event. To cite one case, part of *Macleans'* Olympic coverage was general in nature and was coded as international, but coverage of the stripping of the gold medal from Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson for testing positive for steroid use was coded as national. Coverage of the same incident in non-Canadian magazines, of course, was coded as international. To cite another case, the Mexican campaign coincided with the accidental downing of a civilian Iranian Airbus by the USS Vincennes over the Persian Gulf. The three U.S. newsmagazines carried the story in their national news sections, and it was coded accordingly. Coverage of the

tragedy by the non-U.S. magazines was coded as international.

Similar coding problems arose with news coverage of the Economic Summits in Venice in June 1987, which coincided with the British election coverage, and in Toronto in 1988, which coincided with the Mexican campaign. If the articles focused primarily on the general agenda of the summits, they were coded as international, but if they focused on the position of the leader of the country in which the magazine was published, they were coded as national. Only Mexico and Chile were not participants in the summits.

A decision also had to be made on the coding of articles dealing with health, art, literature, and music. There were a number of articles dealing with health issues, particularly AIDS. If the focus was international in nature, or if the article focused primarily on foreign research, it was coded as international. If the focus was on national research, obviously it was coded as national news. Articles that reported on the exhibit in the magazine's country of works by an artist from another country, or on a domestic performance by a foreign musician, singer or group, were coded as national news. Only if a report on cultural affairs originated from another country was it coded as international. By the same token, the review of a foreign book was coded as international, but the review of a translation of a foreign book by a domestic publishing company was coded as national.

18. Galtung and Ruge, "Structure of Foreign News," 272.

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