

# COVERAGE OF INDIA ON THE ABC, CBS AND NBC EVENING NEWS PROGRAMS, 1969–2000

## ОСВЕЩЕНИЕ ИНДИИ В ВЕЧЕРНИХ НОВОСТНЫХ ПРОГРАММАХ ТЕЛЕКАНАЛОВ ABC, CBS И NBC, 1969–2000

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*This paper examines the coverage afforded India between 1969 and 2000 on the U.S. evening news programs disseminated by ABC, CBS, and NBC. These years were selected because they allowed for an analysis of network television coverage spanning the final six administrations that served the United States through the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century. Four of those administrations were led by Republicans (Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan and George Bush), and the other two were led by Democrats (Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton). Some presidents (Carter, Reagan, Clinton) enjoyed good relations with the Indian government, while others (Nixon, Ford, Bush) often were frustrated in their dealings with the Indian leadership.*

*The analysis shows that a strong majority of stories suggested India was either not safe or not stable; thus, bad news dominated, regardless of whether the U.S. administration had favorable or unfavorable relations with its Indian counterpart.*

**Key words:** *India, U.S. television news, international news coverage.*

*Статья рассматривает освещение Индии в период с 1969 по 2000 гг. в вечерних новостных программах американских телеканалов ABC, CBS и NBC. Выбор временного периода был продиктован стремлением проанализировать специфику освещения телеканалами этого вопроса в период нахождения у власти шести президентских администраций в конце XX и начале XXI века. Четыре из этих администраций возглавляли республиканцы (Ричард Никсон, Джеральд Форд, Рональд Рейган и Джордж Буш), а еще две – демократы (Джимми Картер и Билл Клинтон). У некоторых президентов (Картер, Рейган, Клинтон) были хорошие отношения с правительством Индии, в то время взаимоотношения других (Никсон, Форд, Буш) с индийским руководством были не самыми простыми. Исследование показало, что в большинстве проанализированных материалов Индия была представлена как небезопасная страна с нестабильной обстановкой; негативная трактовка преобладала в СМИ вне зависимости от того, какие у американского руководства были отношения с индийским правительством – благоприятные или неблагоприятные.*

**Ключевые слова:** *Индия, телевизионные новости США, международное освещение событий.*

## **Introduction**

This paper examines the coverage afforded India between 1969 and 2000 on the evening news programs disseminated by ABC, CBS, and NBC. These years were selected because they allowed for an analysis of network television coverage spanning the final six administrations that served the United States through the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century. Four of those administrations were led by Republicans (Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan and George Bush), and the other two were led by Democrats (Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton). Some presidents (Carter, Reagan, Clinton) enjoyed good relations with the Indian government, while others (Nixon, Ford, Bush) often were frustrated in their dealings with the Indian leadership. More importantly, these years allowed for an examination of U.S. policy toward India through the end of the Cold War and the subsequent post-Cold War era. Additional details about the scope of coverage are supplied in the methodology section.

The author employed the Vanderbilt University television abstracts in this study. Each abstract provided a brief sketch of that story. The information included who reported the story, what the story was about, and who, if anyone, delivered a sound bite. These abstracts can be accessed online through the Vanderbilt University Television Archive website.

### **The India-U.S. Political Relationship in the Final Decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

The political relationship between the United States and India has had a “rollercoaster character,” dating to India’s independence

in 1947 (Chary, 1995: 3). Perhaps more importantly, for most of the second half of the twentieth century, India assumed a “secondary place” in the minds of American government officials (Cohen, 2001: 1), because the United States was determined to derail the expansion of communism, and India was unwilling to acquiesce to the U.S. view of the threat communism posed to the world. Graebner added that India and the United States had distinct differences of opinion about the “the meaning of the Cold War, the Korean War, and the presence of Communist regimes in China and Indochina” (in Chary, 1995: ix). He said that because the nature of their differences was not rooted in the fundamental structure of their societies, India and the United States were able to enjoy sustained periods of positive relations. Meanwhile, according to Cohen, “of the major powers, only the Soviet Union developed a broad appreciation of India as a major power” (2001: 26).

The Americans continually were frustrated by Jawaharlal Nehru, who ruled India from its independence in 1947 until his death in 1964, because he was determined not to take sides in the Cold War world. Key described him as the “high priest of non-alignment” (2000: 516). “India will follow an independent policy,” Nehru said in 1946, “keeping away from the power politics of groups aligned against the other” (in Chary, 1995: vii). Moreover, he rejected the American view that the Kremlin sought the expansion of communism into South Asia (Chary, 1995).

Nehru welcomed economic aid from the United States, but he refused to link it to the domestic and foreign agendas of his country (Chary, 1995). In line with this idea, he sought to establish India as a country “based on justice rather than profit, rational planning rather than the blind operation of the market, and forced economic growth and industrialization as opposed to the orientation of the economy to the production of raw materials for the profit of foreign

enterprises” (Chary, 1995: 58). He also “held a sympathetic, even romantic image of the economic and social accomplishments of the Soviet Union, although he rejected Soviet totalitarianism, and he admired the way that Moscow stood up to Western pressure” (Cohen, 2001: 38). Collectively, these actions and sentiments led the Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower administrations to question whether Nehru and India should be considered friend or foe. The situation improved under President John Kennedy, because of his “flexible approach and efforts to secure aid for India despite its non-aligned status” (Chary, 1995: 123).

Lal Bahadur Shastri succeeded Nehru, and his short term as leader also was marred by inconsistent relations with the United States. India’s war with Pakistan and its disagreement with the growing U.S. presence in Vietnam eroded much of the goodwill that had been built under Kennedy. Shastri collapsed and died in 1966.

Indira Gandhi, Nehru’s daughter, became the next leader of the country, and she quickly added her voice to the growing discontent with U.S. involvement in Vietnam. President Lyndon Johnson responded by cutting off almost all food aid to India. The cooling in relations continued under President Nixon, who had a “personal preference for Pakistan,” India’s political nemesis (Chary, 1995: 132).

In 1971, India and the Soviet Union signed a twenty-year pact of friendship, which led many in the United States to conclude that India had abandoned its nonalignment policy. India disagreed (Chary, 1995). Chari [*sic*] added that the U.S. decision made that same year to send one of its naval aircraft carriers into the Bay of Bengal during the Pakistan-India conflict ensured that the relationship between the Americans and the Indians had reached their lowest point in the post-World War II period (in Bertsch et al.: 1999).

In 1974, India successfully tested a nuclear bomb, which it had developed in response to China's acquisition of nuclear technology ten years earlier (Tahir-Kheli, 1997). The choice, despite the protests that came from the United States and elsewhere, did not violate any international non-proliferation agreements (Chari, in Bertsch et al.: 1999). Beginning in the 1970s and carrying through to the end of the 1980s, the "dominant strategic theme" to India's foreign policy was that force (in its myriad forms) could and should be used (Cohen, 2001: 58). Gandhi was at the forefront of this attitude, and going nuclear was consistent with this.

Jimmy Carter's inauguration in 1977 ushered in another shift in the India-U.S. relationship, which in part was due to a corresponding change in leadership in India. Morarji Desai was elected prime minister that same year and immediately set out to increase private sector and foreign investment opportunities. Food aid increased, and the two countries began discussing scientific and technical cooperative deals (Chary, 1995). Unfortunately, Desai's government fell after only two years. Charan Singh was another short-term leader; he remained in power less than a year before Mrs. Gandhi was reelected prime minister. Meanwhile, the hostage crisis in Iran and a ratcheting up of tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union because of the latter's invasion of Afghanistan (which India criticized privately not publicly, *Ibid.*) ensured that Carter could not devote the time and energy he had hoped to in order to make human rights a hallmark of his foreign policy.

President Reagan initially enjoyed poor relations with India because of his interest in arming Pakistan, which was supposed to act as a deterrent to Soviet expansion in South Asia, and the continual aid, estimated at \$2 billion annually, that India received from the Soviet Union (*Ibid.*). Only later did he approach India with substantive economic assistance. Gandhi visited the United States

in 1982; it was described as an “outstanding success” (ibid: 166) and led to additional economic, military, and cultural agreements. In the words of Tahir-Kheli, “Gandhi saw no reason why a more robust relationship between the world’s two largest democracies could not be fashioned” (1997: 5).

Mrs. Gandhi was assassinated by two of her bodyguards in 1984. Her older son, Rajiv, reluctantly succeeded her (Keay, 2000). He adopted a much-more Western-style approach to economics, and he enjoyed a strong relationship based on “personal chemistry” with Reagan (Tahir-Kheli, 1997: 43). Chary noted that “productivity, technological modernization, and competitiveness became the catchwords of Rajiv Gandhi’s regime” (1995: 168). Substantial financial deals between India and the American government and India and American corporations followed (Ibid.). At the same time, the Reagan administration commended India for playing a “pivotal” role in the advancement of peace in South Asia (ibid: 62).

Gandhi was voted out of office in 1989 and assassinated two years later. Seven leadership changes followed in the 1990s with only one government (headed by P.V. Rao) lasting a full-term. According to Keay, it was under Rao that the pace of economic liberalization quickened. “The shoddy goods and drab austerities of the Nehru age gave way to conspicuous expenditure on consumer durables, imported luxuries and foreign travel” (2000: 531). Tahir-Kheli added, “The U.S. reaction was highly positive” (1997: 99). Immediate benefits could be seen: Exports rose by 20 percent in 1992 and another 18 percent one year later, and foreign investment inside India increased tenfold in the early 1990s (1997: 101–103). India’s economy also grew by 6 percent each year between 1990 and 1998 (Cohen, 2001).

Cohen added that India’s on-going dispute with Pakistan, which including both countries testing nuclear weapons, ensured that

America's interests in securing worldwide nuclear non-proliferation was stymied (2001). Moreover, in 1998 India tested five nuclear bombs in the span of three days. Bertsch, Gahlaut, and Srivastava noted, "The U.S. response was harsh," including a number of sanctions (which remained in effect until late 2000) and another erosion in Indian-American relations (1999: xiv). The collapse of the Soviet Union, which had been an ally, the close relations between Pakistan and China, and Japan's unwillingness to become more allied with India contributed to the decision to conduct the nuclear tests (Cohen, 2001).

At about the same time the sanctions were lifted, President Clinton visited India, becoming the first U.S. president to do so in more than two decades.

This brief summation was designed to allow the reader a better understanding of U.S. – Indian political relations dating from India's independence in 1947 through the end of the Clinton administration. It might seem unusual to those people with a casual or lack of interest in India that it did not enjoy a more robust and positive relationship with the United States, recognizing that each country is a democracy. Moreover, this summary allows the reader to better understand the research questions associated with this exploration of U.S. media reporting from and about India. Those research questions are outlined in the methodology section.

## **Literature Review**

### *Coverage of Threatening Nations*

Hester (1973) suggested political leaders need to recognize and understand the events taking place around them in order to ensure their government's long-term vitality. He added that information about those nations that are believed to be real or potential threats are especially

sought out, and journalists unconsciously can assist in this effort by reporting more stories about alleged threatening nations. Chang and Lee (1992) supported Hester's contention. They reported that editors considered the threat that some event posed to the United States to be of paramount importance when they chose the stories that appeared in their newspapers. Wanta, Golan, and Lee (2003) argued that the more media coverage a foreign nation received, the more survey respondents considered that nation to be vitally important to United States' interests. Perhaps more importantly, their research determined that the more negative coverage a nation received, the more respondents exhibited negative thoughts about that country. Tehranian (1990) provided another example of this threatening world effect on news coverage, by claiming that neither Japan nor the Middle East would have attracted significant amounts of Western media attention had they not been considered economic or strategic threats to the United States. Cooper-Chen (1999) found that coverage of Japan changed over a thirty-year period in a major American newsmagazine. The dissemination of information about Japan reached its zenith – and demonstrated its most negative tone – during the 1980s, a period in which Japan's post-World War II economic success was viewed harshly in the United States.

Finally, Galtung and Ruge (1965) and Salwen and Garrison (1989) are among those who argue that cultural attributes help define societies, and people with similarly-held attributes tend to understand and relate better to each other. By extension, those that are considered “not to be like me” could easily be classified as threatening.

### *Framing*

Entman (1991) suggested that frames are constructed from and embodied in the keywords, metaphors, concepts, symbols, and visual images that are emphasized within news narratives. Hall (in Curran, Gurevitch, & Wallacott, 1977) argued that over time the selection

and repetition of certain codes become accepted as the dominant explanation for events that need definition. Gitlin (1980) defined frames as patterns of thought, analysis, delivery, choice, inclusion and omission, allowing for an organized discourse to occur. Hackett (1984) added that framing the news might not be a conscious act by journalists, arguing instead that assumptions are made about the world and information is disseminated in accordance with that world's view. Weinberger, Allen, and Dillon (1984) added that visual images can heighten the negative reaction that some audience members will have to a story. Perry argued that news that was not representative of developing countries reduced the knowledge that people had of those countries but increased their confidence in making judgments about the people in those nations. He concluded, "By focusing upon unusual and extreme events, much news is by definition non-representative ... Perhaps news persons should make a special effort to balance coverage of unusual events in developing countries with information about what is typical" (1987: 421).

In short, framing allows for a single interpretation to dominate news coverage; all other themes become inferior or non-existent.

*Previous Research Examining the Coverage of India and U.S. – Indian Relations*

Perry, in a study of five countries that including India, reported that news consumption generally led to increased knowledge about and a more favorable attitude toward each of those nations. He concluded, "[T]he quality of news available about foreign countries often may be at least as important as its content for facilitating favorable impressions [about foreign countries and their people]" (1990: 358). By contrast, Weaver, Porter, and Evans noted that coverage of Asia (which in their study included India) on network television dropped sharply from 1977 through 1981, when compared to the previous five-year period.

Ramaprasad and Riffe (1987) reviewed the effect that U.S. governmental policy toward India had on the type of coverage “The New York Times” gave the country. They found no support for the hypothesis that Washington’s foreign policy had an effect on the newspaper’s reporting, although the number of favorably slanted and positive stories tended to be higher during Carter’s presidency, which, as mentioned above, coincided with a positive relationship between the two countries. The researchers determined that overall there were more unfavorably slanted and negative stories about India, although favorably slanted and positive stories were lengthier.

Jayakar (1997) found differences in the coverage of national elections in India and Israel in 1996. More stories were devoted to the Israeli elections, and more of them appeared on the front page. India, in a variety of ways, was portrayed as a “backward and mysterious region,” which, according to Jayakar, reinforced the image Americans had of the country. Meanwhile, Israel was portrayed as ready for an historic election that would enhance peace prospects with the Palestinians; this was an explicit aim of the Clinton administration.

Several studies have looked at how the Indian media do their job. Haque (1986) reviewed the content of seven major Indian daily newspapers and reported there was a high correlation in story selection among them. Shah (1988) noted that development news on All India Radio was sparsely reported, often lacked depth, and generally was placed in the middle of the newscast, suggesting that this news classification was not of relative importance. Thussu has noted that the impact of Western-style journalism practices can be seen in the Indian media in at least two ways. First, he acknowledged that the Indian media began to undergo a substantive change in the last two decades of the previous century. “[T]he serious and staid Indian press is already copying U.S.-style sensational journalism. Journalistic practices and training, already much influenced by Western journalism, is being

further Americanized, with greater emphasis on entertainment-oriented news agendas” (1998: 143). Thussu (2002) also discussed how the Indian government had adopted Western-based styles of controlling the media and the messages they deliver during wartime, in evaluating how the Indian media covered the 1999 conflict between India and Pakistan. Thussu stated, “The U.S. approach to news management appears to be in the process of being globalized, partly because of its effectiveness and partly because of its visibility among foreign policy establishments across the globe” (ibid: 207).

## **Methodology**

The American television networks rightfully take a place among the elite of the broadcast medium. Cable, satellite television, a host of other entertainment programming options and ever-present social media options are eroding the dominant audience share that the over-the-air networks once enjoyed; however, they remain important news and entertainment sources.

Justification for examining television coverage stems from the recognition that television has supplanted the newspaper as the primary information source to which Americans turn (Nielsen Media Research, 2002; Pew Research Center, 2001). Television news also trumps their cable news competitors. An analysis of more than thirty years of network news coverage of India offers an opportunity to examine what factors influenced the reporting from and about this country with most of those years coinciding with the highest annual ratings for these evening news programs.

The author made use of the Vanderbilt University television abstracts for this study. The author is aware of the constructive criticisms made by Althaus, Edy, and Phalen (2002) regarding the

use of the abstracts, especially regarding the authorship of abstracts between 1968 and 1972 (Ibid.: 477); that abstracts should not be surrogates for actual tapes of the newscasts (ibid: 487); and that the abstracts provide an imprecise evaluation of the tone of policy statements (ibid.: 488). However, the author believes that the type of information that was gleaned from the abstracts for this study alleviates some of the aforementioned concerns.

The author chose to code a census of all stories appearing between January 1, 1969 and December 31, 2000. As mentioned earlier, this time frame coincides almost exactly with the six men who served as president of the United States during these years. Thus, instead of generating a snapshot of network coverage and how it might have been influenced by each administration's policies and attitudes toward India, this study allows for the entirety of coverage to be content analyzed. Based on the available research and literature, the following research questions were formed:

RQ1: Would there be more coverage from and about India during those periods (1969 – 1977 and 1989 – 1993) in which relations between it and the United States were poor? This question coincides with the suggestion by Hester and others that in periods when a foreign government was considered a threat to or in discord with the United States the media spotlight would focus more on that country, its actions, and its people.

RQ2: Would coverage from and about India, regardless of the state of relations with the United States, tend to focus on bad news, sensational items, or unusual events?

RQ3: Would so-called “bad news” stories (accidents, disasters, crime, etc.) be lengthier than their corresponding “good news” reports?

RQ4: Would non-Indian sources be the primary people who framed the discussion of events taking place in India or involving India and the United States?

There were 27 coded categories in this study. A brief description of each is listed here.

1. Year: The year in which the story aired.
2. Network: The network (ABC, CBS, or NBC) that aired the story.
3. Approximate length of story (in seconds): This figure was derived from subtracting the end time of a story from its beginning time and converting that figure into seconds.
4. Topic: Fourteen possible categories existed here: domestic politics and government acts; diplomacy and foreign relations; economics; war/defense; domestic crime; public health and welfare; public moral problems; accidents/disasters; transportation/travel; agriculture; science/invention; education/the arts; popular amusements; and general human interest.

(Each of the remaining categories was answered yes/no.)

1. Tone: Positive, negative, or neutral, toward India based on information provided in abstract.
2. U.S. government source used.
3. U.S. military source used.
4. U.S. business source used.
5. U.S. media source used.
6. U.S. educator/academic/think tank source used.
7. U.S. religious source used.
8. U.S. citizen source used.
9. India government source used.
10. India military source used.
11. India business source used.
12. India media source used.
13. India educator/academic/think tank source used.
14. India religious source used.

15. India citizen source used.
16. Other government source used.
17. Other military source used.
18. Other business source used.
19. Other media source used.
20. Other educator/academic/think tank source used.
21. Other religious figure used.
22. Other citizen source used.
23. Source information can't be determined.

## Results

A total of 1810 stories (see *Table 1*) were content analyzed in this study of network news coverage of India. Each network provided almost equal amounts of attention to India, when compared to their news competitors. NBC disseminated the most stories during the coding period (626). ABC presented 595, and CBS delivered 589. However, the networks appeared to not always value the same kinds of stories. As *Table 2* notes, NBC favored reporting focused on war/defense and diplomacy/foreign relations; CBS tended to highlight domestic politics and domestic crime; and ABC saw benefit especially in general human interest stories when compared to CBS and NBC.

*Table 1*

**Coverage of India on American network television; all years**

Network	No. of stories	Pct. of total
ABC	595	32.9
CBS	589	32.5
NBC	626	34.6
Total	1810	100

Table 2

**Coverage of each topic by network**

	Domestic politics	Diplomacy/ Foreign relations	Economics	War/ Defense	Domestic crime	Public health	Public moral problems
ABC	86	97	13	117	78	37	0
CBS	113	99	8	106	84	23	0
NBC	105	127	12	130	69	35	0
Total	304	323	33	353	231	95	0

Table 2

**Continued**

	Accidents/ Disasters	Transport/ Travel	Agriculture	Education/ Arts	Science/ Invention	Popular amusement	General human interest	Total number
ABC	102	1	2	0	5	3	54	595
CBS	98	3	4	2	10	4	35	589
NBC	105	1	3	0	4	1	34	626
Total	305	5	9	2	19	8	123	1810

The most attention devoted to any one topic in any one year occurred in 1971, when India and Pakistan were at war (see *Table 3*). A total of 185 stories (NBC: 73; ABC: 57; CBS: 55) relating to that event aired on the three networks.

In fact, stories relating to war/defense (354) were most often delivered to U.S. television news audiences, with diplomacy/foreign relations (323), accidents/disasters (305) and domestic politics (304) rounding out the four most used themes. These categories accounted for 71 percent (1286 of 1810) of all stories.

Table 3

## Year-by-year coverage of all topics, all networks

Year	Domestic politics	Diplomacy/ Foreign relation	Economics	War/ Defense	Domestic crime	Public health	Public oral problems
1969	6	8	0	5	1	2	0
1970	2	5	2	1	0	0	0
1971	15	61	0	185	7	23	0
1972	2	37	2	19	0	4	0
1973	0	3	1	6	2	4	0
1974	2	18	4	11	4	8	0
1975	66	5	0	3	8	0	0
1976	12	9	2	6	3	5	0
1977	45	14	1	3	10	3	0
1978	19	9	0	10	2	0	0
1979	15	2	0	8	5	0	0
1980	17	36	1	4	4	0	0
1981	1	5	1	6	3	1	0
1982	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
1983	3	5	0	1	15	2	0
1984	31	2	2	2	49	2	0
1985	4	9	2	3	15	1	0
1986	3	23	0	1	11	1	0
1987	3	6	0	0	9	4	0
1988	2	8	0	2	6	0	0
1989	16	1	6	2	1	0	0
1990	6	2	4	6	5	0	0
1991	9	3	1	1	17	4	0
1992	1	2	0	2	10	3	0
1993	3	2	0	1	11	2	0
1994	0	4	0	1	0	12	0
1995	0	6	0	0	4	0	0
1996	3	0	1	0	5	3	0
1997	4	1	0	0	0	0	0
1998	4	16	2	46	5	4	0
1999	0	5	0	12	13	5	0
2000	0	16	0	5	6	2	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>304</b>	<b>323</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>0</b>

Table 3

## Continued

Year	Accidents/ Disasters	Transport/ Travel	Agriculture	Education/ Arts	Science/ Invention	Popular amusement	General human interest
1969	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
1970	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
1971	14	2	0	0	0	0	1
1972	4	0	1	0	0	0	1
1973	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
1974	2	0	5	0	0	0	1
1975	7	0	1	1	1	0	1
1976	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
1977	15	1	0	0	0	0	8
1978	15	0	0	1	2	0	3
1979	13	0	0	0	2	0	4
1980	5	0	0	0	0	0	2
1981	4	0	0	0	0	1	2
1982	1	0	0	0	1	1	1
1983	1	0	0	0	2	0	0
1984	41	0	0	0	8	0	3
1985	64	0	0	0	1	0	6
1986	17	1	1	0	0	0	1
1987	7	0	0	0	0	0	0
1988	10	0	0	0	0	0	0
1989	5	0	0	0	0	0	4
1990	3	0	0	0	0	0	1
1991	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
1992	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
1993	17	0	0	0	0	0	3
1994	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1995	10	0	0	0	0	0	0
1996	17	0	0	0	1	0	27
1997	3	0	0	0	0	6	35
1998	6	0	0	0	0	0	9
1999	9	0	0	0	0	0	3
2000	8	0	0	0	1	0	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>123</b>

*Research Question 1: Would there be more coverage from and about India during those periods (1969 – 1977 and 1989 – 1993) in which relations between it and the United States were poor?:* There was more coverage devoted to India during those periods in which it and the United States had a strained political relationship; however, the imbalance was not as great as perhaps thought. As mentioned earlier, the years 1969 through 1976 (Nixon and Ford presidential years) and 1989 through 1992 (Bush presidential years) were identified as times in which the relationship between India and the United States could be classified as poor. During those twelve years, a total of 748 stories appeared on the three network news programs. (See *Table 4* for a year-by-year breakdown of stories.) During the twenty years (spanning the Carter and Reagan, and then the Clinton administrations), a total of 1062 stories were disseminated by the networks. The twelve “bad” years saw an average of 62.4 stories put out by the networks, while the twenty “good” years saw an average of 53.1 stories.

Table 4

**Year-by-year breakdown of all stories by network**

<b>Year</b>	<b>ABC</b>	<b>CBS</b>	<b>NBC</b>	<b>Total</b>
1969	11	7	5	23
1970	3	5	5	13
1971	93	94	121	308
1972	19	11	40	70
1973	4	7	7	18
1974	15	18	22	55
1975	27	35	31	93
1976	10	15	14	39
1977	36	30	34	100
1978	12	29	20	61
1979	17	17	15	49
1980	22	23	24	69
1981	8	7	8	23
1982	5	0	1	6
1983	5	19	6	30
1984	40	47	53	140
1985	26	41	38	105
1986	11	20	28	59
1987	12	11	6	29
1988	11	8	9	28
1989	10	11	14	35
1990	13	8	6	27
1991	17	13	18	48
1992	8	6	5	19
1993	12	11	16	39
1994	7	5	5	17
1995	7	10	3	20
1996	33	12	12	57
1997	22	13	14	49
1998	36	29	27	92
1999	21	16	10	47
2000	22	11	9	42
<b>Total</b>	<b>595</b>	<b>589</b>	<b>626</b>	<b>1810</b>

In addition, the author coded each abstract as positive, negative, or neutral based on its tone toward India (see *Table 5*) The majority of stories (963 of 1810, 53.2 percent) were classified across all networks as having a negative tone.

*Table 5*

**“Tone” of stories relating to India**

	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Total</b>
ABC	47	315	233	595
CBS	38	321	230	589
NBC	37	327	262	626
<b>TOTAL</b>	122	963	725	1810

*Research Question 2: Would coverage from and about India, regardless of the state of relations with the United States, tend to focus on bad news, sensational items, or unusual events?:* Regardless of the political relationship between the United States and India, coverage of India focused on bad news, sensational items, or the unusual. The reader is once again encouraged to consult *Table 3*. Stories about war (353 stories), accidents and disasters (305 stories), and domestic crime (231 stories) – reports that suggest a society in turmoil – accounted for almost 50 percent (889 of 1810, 49,2 percent) of all reports from India. Not surprisingly, the tone of these stories consistently was negative (see *Table 6*). Only 19 such stories were categorized as having a positive tone, while 667 stories dealing with these three topics were considered to have a negative tone. One could argue that the combined effect of these continual negative portrayals provided a frame of reference of India being a land where “bad” things happened consistently and/or India was either unable or unwilling to control them.

Table 6

**“Tone” of war/defense, accidents/disasters, and domestic crime**

	Positive	Negative	Neutral
War/Defense	18	231	105
Accidents	1	213	90
Domestic Crime	0	223	7

*Research Question 3: Would so-called “bad news” stories (accidents, disasters, crime, etc.) be lengthier than their corresponding “good news” reports?:* Bad news stories were longer than good news stories (see Table 7). For purposes of this research, a story was considered “short” if it lasted for fewer than 30 seconds, “medium” if it aired from 31 to 60 seconds and “long” if it aired for more than one minute. Seventy-five of the 121 positive stories (62 percent) were “short,” another four (3 percent) were “medium,” and 42 (35 percent) were “long.” At the same time, 535 of the 963 negative stories (56 percent) were “short,” another 57 (6 percent) were “medium,” and the remaining 371 stories (39 percent) were “long.” Table 8 considers the amount of seconds devoted to each topic. Stories dealing with war/defense, domestic crime, and public health and welfare more often appeared as “long” reports; however, other “bad” stories – principally accidents/disasters – were more often treated as “short” stories. At the same time, while there was plenty of coverage about India’s diplomatic and foreign relations efforts, those stories overwhelmingly were treated with little substance or context: Almost two-thirds of them (66.5 percent) were no more than 30 seconds in length.

Table 7

**Length of time devoted to good and bad news stories**

	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Total</b>
Short	75 (62%)	535 (56%)	610
Medium	4 (3%)	57 (6%)	61
Long	42 (35%)	371 (39%)	413
<b>TOTAL</b>	121	963	1084

A story was considered “short” if it aired for 30 or fewer seconds. A story was considered “medium” if it lasted between 31 and 60 seconds. A story was considered “long” if it aired for more than one minute.

All percentages rounded.

Table 8

**Amount of seconds devoted to all topics, all networks**

	<b>Domestic politics</b>	<b>Diplomacy/ Foreign relations</b>	<b>Economics</b>	<b>War/ Defense</b>	<b>Domestic crime</b>	<b>Public health</b>	<b>Public moral problems</b>
Short	188	215	21	158	152	37	0
Medium	20	24	2	23	9	4	0
Long	96	84	10	172	170	54	0
<b>Total</b>	304	323	33	353	231	95	0

Table 8

## Continued

	Accidents/ Disasters	Transport/ Travel	Agriculture	Education/ Arts	Science/ Invention	Popular amusement	General human interest
Short	190	4	2	0	14	1	62
Medium	14	0	1	0	2	0	5
Long	101	1	6	2	3	7	56
Total	305	5	9	2	19	8	123

*Research Question 4 Would non-Indian sources be the primary people who framed the discussion of events taking place in India or involving India and the United States?:* The principal sources used in framing coverage from or about India were from that nation. As *Table 9* demonstrates, Indian government, military, media, religious and private citizens discussed Indian-related affairs more than their U.S. counterparts and those from other nations. (U.S. and Indian educators appeared an equal number of times – 27 – and far outpaced their colleagues from other nations, who were sources on only five occasions. U.S. business representatives (30) were the only ones who discussed a story more frequently than their Indian (18) colleagues or from those elsewhere in the world (3).

Table 9

**Comparison of U.S.,  
Indian and other nation sources by category (Blank=0)**

	Domestic politics	Diplomacy/ Foreign relations	Economics	War/ Defense	Domestic crime	Public health	Public moral problems
U.S. Gov	3	48	3	62	8	5	
Indian Gov	71	50	4	77	34	17	
Other Gov	1	28	2	68	4	1	
U.S. Military				1		3	
Indian Military	1	1		10	3		
Other Military		1		8			
U.S. Business	1	2	2	1			
Indian Business	2	1	2	1	2		
Other Business		1					
U.S. Media	2			4	1		
Indian Media	9	3		4	3	1	
Other Media		1		4	6		
U.S. Educator		4	1	12	2	4	
Indian Educator	6	1		1	4	6	
Other Educator			2	1	2		
U.S. Religious							
Indian Religious	1	1			1	1	
Other Religious			5	3			
U.S. Citizen		8		12	1	3	
Indian Citizen	13	8	1	9	30		
Other Citizen	1	2		13	3	4	

Table 9

## Continued

	Accidents/ Disasters	Transport/ Travel	Agriculture	Education/ Arts	Science/ Invention	Popular amusement	General human interest	Total
U.S. Gov	8						1	38
Indian Gov	26				1		2	282
Other Gov	5							108
U.S. Military								4
Indian Military	5							20
Other Military	3							12
U.S. Business	23							30
Indian Business	5				1		4	18
Other Business	2							3
U.S. Media								7
Indian Media	1						2	23
Other Media	2						2	15
U.S. Educator	2				1		1	27
Indian Educator	4				1		4	27
Other Educator								5
U.S. Religious							4	4
Indian Religious	1						9	13
Other Religious								8
U.S. Citizen	22			1		6	8	61
Indian Citizen	16		1				19	110
Other Citizen	2					2	3	30

## Discussion

Over the final 31 years of the twentieth-century, the U.S. media tended to see India as a faraway country in which bad things happened. Whether the turmoil was domestic (akin to a natural disaster or the numerous changes in political leadership) or across borders (most obviously reports about war), more than seven out of every ten reports on ABC, CBS or NBC suggested India somehow was not safe or not stable. This theme of an absence of safety and stability was perhaps most notable in 1971, a year that saw a negative geopolitical relationship between the United States and India combined with India's war with Pakistan. Consistent with highlighting bad news from India, the three over-the-air networks spent more time discussing these negative events, and they tended to also devote less time to information that noted something good about the country, its people or its culture. Moreover, the data here validate that when the White House viewed India with suspicion, more stories about the country made it into national television news discourse (although the difference might not have been as large as previous research would have expected). In short, over the final roughly thirty years of the twentieth century, American news consumers grew accustomed to reporting about India that suggested the nation somehow was a threat to the United States (largely because it refused to kowtow to Washington's geopolitical interests) or was a place where seemingly nothing good happened. These types of stories would appear consistent with previous research conducted especially by Hester (1973); Wanta, Golan and Lee (2003); and Tehranian (1990). One is left to wonder that if India were not considered of vital interest to the United States – because of its status as a democracy and eventually as it developed a more Western-style economic philosophy – if it would have been on the news media radar at all.

The story from and about India from 1969 through 2000 was not all bad, of course. There were reports about education/arts, science, popular amusements and general human interest features, but they accounted for about eight percent (152 of 1810 reports) of the narrative about the country. In short, the American television audience was exposed to only a few bright spots in an otherwise bleak picture about a country it knew little about. Jayaker (1997) was not wrong in suggesting that India was portrayed as a “backward and mysterious region,” which reinforced the image Americans had of the country.

Of course, there were limitations to this project. The use of the Vanderbilt abstracts instead of viewing the complete broadcast report prevented a deeper exposure to the stories. A more thorough analysis could have altered how stories were coded for tone, for example. The author recognizes that the often questionable use of tone in academic research is magnified in this research because the abstract provided a limited amount of information from which to glean the tenor of the actual report. Moreover, bad news tends to pass the news gatekeeper more than good news; therefore, one shouldn't be surprised that negative images from and about India dominated America's national television news broadcasts.

To conclude, Cohen's assessment of American policymakers' attitudes toward India seem consistent with American media coverage of the country and its people.

American policymakers tend to see India in terms of a blur of favorable and unfavorable stereotypes generated by the images of the saintly Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Teresa, or of the villainous Krishna Menon [who, under Nehru, was India's ambassador to the U.N. and later its defense minister] or the 'dragon lady,' Indira Gandhi, or of the ugly scenes of saffron-clad mobs tearing down the Babri Masjid, or of India's 'untouchables' mired in human filth (2001: 5).

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