

Project Proposal for NJCA:

A community structure analysis (Pollock, 2007, 2013, 2015) compared national characteristics and cross-national newspaper coverage for access to COVID-19 vaccinations in 26 different countries, examining all relevant articles of 250+ words selected from 01/20/2021 to 08/23/2021. The resulting 525 articles were coded for “prominence” (placement, headline size, article length, and presence of graphics) and “direction” (“government responsibility”, “societal responsibility”, or “balanced/neutral” coverage of access to COVID-19 vaccinations), then combined into composite “Media Vector” scores for each newspaper, from 0.6639 to -0.0269: with a range of 0.6908. Twenty five out of 26 Media Vectors (96%) emphasized government responsibility for access to COVID-19 vaccinations. Overall, measures of communication privilege were robustly connected to media coverage supporting government responsibility for access to COVID-19 vaccinations, confirming the stakeholder hypothesis, which expects a connection between stakeholder size and favorable coverage of stakeholder concerns (Pollock, 2007, p. 172; McLeod & Hertog, 1999). Freedom of the Press was positively and significantly linked with media emphasis on government responsibility for access to COVID-19 vaccinations ($r = 0.354$, $p = 0.038$). Other indicators of resource privilege, including coal consumption ($r = 0.365$, $p = 0.043$) and length of paved roads ($r = 0.352$, $p = 0.046$) were also associated significantly with reporting emphasizing government responsibility for access to COVID-19 vaccinations. Coal production ($r = 0.355$, $p = 0.068$) was directionally linked to media emphasis on government responsibility for COVID-19 vaccination access. Additionally, other indicators of privilege that were directionally associated with media emphasis on “more” government responsibility for COVID-19, included percent of females in the workforce ($r = 0.308$, $p = 0.063$) and value added to GDP from agriculture ($r = 0.307$, $p = 0.072$). Since freedom of the press measures freedom of speech through media, it deserves considerable attention. First, freedom of the press is the assessment of the countries' press freedom records. Since freedom of the press is more prevalent in more “privileged” countries with higher levels of GDP, GDP/capita, literacy rates, and broadband subscriptions/100, the connection between freedom of the press and broad measures of national privilege confirms the stakeholder hypothesis: communication privilege associated with empathic coverage on government responsibility for the most vulnerable, in this case, for access to COVID-19 vaccinations. These findings are consistent with previous community structure research on cross-national coverage of human trafficking (Alexandre, et al., 2014, 2015) and child labor (Kohn & Pollock, 2014, 2015). Also found was the higher the Freedom of the Press score a country registers, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for women’s reproductive rights (Pollock, Buonauro, Gomez, et. al., 2017) and for food security (22.1% of the variance).(Govindarajan, et al., 2021). Regression analysis revealed that freedom of the press (43.4% of the variance), value added to GDP from agriculture (7.3%), percent females in the workforce (12.3%), coal consumption (7.2%), and length of paved roads (9.7%) collectively totaled 79.9% of the variance, all associated with media coverage emphasizing government responsibility for COVID-19 vaccination access. From a theoretical perspective, this COVID-19 vaccine access study confirmed empirical evidence from a founder of “agenda-setting” theory, asserting that agenda-setting’s “top down” perspective is robustly complemented by the “bottom-up” viewpoint of community structure theory’s community-level demographics (Funk & McCombs, 2017).