

Drones in the News, 2019-2026: Growth, Geography and Tone of Global Drone Coverage, and How It Compares with Research and Invention

Fliar BI · Prism Research Layer · Working paper, October 2026 · Dataset and code: github.com/fliarbi/prism-news-api · Licence CC BY-NC 4.0

Abstract

We measure how drones were covered in a global news index from January 2019 to July 2026, using 304,574 de-duplicated drone articles, and set that coverage beside 95,785 research papers (2015-2025) and 106,495 patent families (2015-2024) on drones and unmanned aerial vehicles. Six results stand out:

1. **Growth in attention.** Drones took 24.73 of every 10,000 news articles in 2025, against 15.33 in 2019, a 1.61-fold rise in share. Most of the rise came after 2022.
2. **Peaks fall in months of conflict.** The highest monthly share was March 2026, the month of the 2026 Iran war, at 62.93 per 10,000. Before 2026 the peak was April 2024 (42.63), the month of Iran's missile and drone attack on Israel.
3. **Geography.** Ukraine (26.75), Yemen (19.88) and Russia (19.53) are the most over-represented countries by lift. Russia and Ukraine together hold 29.08% of located drone news. The United States holds 27.34% but a lift of only 0.56. Europe (2.27) and Asia (1.46) are over-represented; North America (0.39) is not. Within India, Punjab (5.1) and Jammu and Kashmir (4.73) lead; within the United States, Virginia (2.91) and Alaska (2.22).
4. **Tone and urgency.** 62.1% of drone articles are negative in tone (all news: 33.6%), and 81% are rated critical priority (all news: 42.6%).
5. **Shifting attention.** Drone coverage as a share of Poland's news rose 15.15-fold between 2023 and 2025, the largest rise among the countries with the most drone coverage. South Korea's share fell to 0.59 of its 2023 level, and Iran's and Nigeria's to 0.6.
6. **Research and invention.** Drone papers grew from 4.95 to 24.88 per 10,000 papers between 2015 and 2025 (5.03-fold). Drone patent families published per year grew 13.56-fold from 2015 to 2024, and China's office held 80.4% of office-family records.

Findings stated for citation

- **F1.** Drones took 24.73 of every 10,000 news articles in 2025, against 15.33 in 2019 (1.61-fold).
- **F2.** March 2026 was the peak month for drone news, at 62.93 articles per 10,000.
- **F3.** Before 2026, the peak month was April 2024, at 42.63 articles per 10,000.
- **F4.** Russia and Ukraine held 29.08% of located drone news, with lifts of 19.53 and 26.75. The United States held 27.34%, with a lift of 0.56.
- **F5.** Among the 30 countries with the most located drone news, Ukraine (26.75), Yemen (19.88) and Russia (19.53) were the most over-represented, followed by Iran (8.57), Sudan (8.46), Lebanon (7.63), Iraq (6.71) and Israel (6.13).

- **F6.** 62.1% of drone articles were negative in tone, 1.85 times the all-news share.
- **F7.** 81% of drone articles were machine-rated critical priority, 1.9 times the all-news share.
- **F8.** Anti-drone technology appeared in 1.91% of themed drone articles, 270.31 times its frequency in all news.
- **F9.** The Federal Aviation Administration was named in 5,512 drone articles.
- **F10.** Drone delivery (lift 279.01) and agricultural monitoring (257.47) were the leading civil themes.
- **F11.** Drone papers rose 5.03-fold as a share of all papers between 2015 and 2025.
- **F12.** Drone patent families published per year grew 13.56-fold between 2015 and 2024; China's office held 80.4% of office-family records.
- **F13.** Within India, Punjab (5.1) and Jammu and Kashmir (4.73) had the most over-represented drone coverage; West Bengal (0.31), Bihar (0.32) and Kerala (0.37) had the least.
- **F14.** Within the United States, Virginia (2.91), Alaska (2.22) and Texas (1.96) led; New Jersey had the lowest lift, 0.34.
- **F15.** Drone coverage as a share of Poland's news rose 15.15-fold from 2023 to 2025.
- **F16.** Europe's lift in drone news was 2.27, Asia's 1.46 and North America's 0.39.

1. Introduction

Drones, or unmanned aerial vehicles, have moved in a few years from hobby products and specialist military systems to everyday tools of war, policing, delivery and farming. The news is where most people meet that change. It records attacks and interceptions, new rules, new products and new uses. Yet news coverage of drones is rarely measured as data in its own right. Market studies count sales. Bibliometric studies count papers. Few sources count attention, meaning how much of the news drones take and when, where and in what tone.

This paper and its dataset do that. They combine three records for one topic: a global news index, research papers and patents. Each comparison uses a denominator, so that growth in the index or in publishing is not mistaken for growth in interest. The companion dataset publishes an article-level sample (76,075 rows) and full coverage tables, so every figure here can be re-derived. The [Prism News API](#) serves the full history.

2. Data and methods

News. The Prism news index holds articles from outlets worldwide; non-English articles are indexed in English translation. Each article carries its opening text (the first few sentences), a primary location, a graded tone label, an editorial priority rating (1–9), themes, keywords and named organisations. We count unique article identifiers; repeated rows for the same article are removed. When this release was built, 92.88% of the index was readable, so all counts are lower bounds.

Matching. An article is about drones when its opening text contains *drone*, *drones*, *UAV*, *UAVs*, *unmanned aerial vehicle(s)*, *unmanned aircraft* or *quadcopter(s)* as whole words. Several families of matches are excluded:

- other senses of the word: rocket-landing "drone ships", honeybee drones, drone music and "to drone on";

- templated or non-news items: market-research reports, research abstracts indexed as news, shop listings, quiz items and page furniture ("this advertisement has not loaded yet");
- photo captions that use a drone only as the camera ("aerial drone photo taken on...").

Together these removed 4,072 of 308,646 raw matches (1.32%). One reviewer read 40 randomly drawn matched openings. A first draw, before the last exclusion round, scored 35 of 40. After it, 39 of 40 used drone in the sense of an unmanned vehicle (precision 97.5%), and in 26 (65%) drones were the main subject. The one false positive was a company-litigation story with no drone in its opening.

Measures. Coverage over time is expressed per 10,000 articles in the index that month or year, because the index grew from 11,807,177 articles in 2019 to 26,990,006 in 2025. Year comparisons use the complete years 2019–2025; 2026 covers January–July only. Geography, tone, priority and themes use January 2023 – July 2026. Geography is expressed as lift: a place's share of drone articles divided by its share of all located articles. State lifts are measured against all located news from the same country. Place tags derived from ordinary words ("Congress", "Earth", "Winter", "Cloud", "Mobile", "Hurricane"; 714 words in all) were treated as unlocated in every location field, which removes 15.3% of city-tagged articles.

Research and patents. Research papers are de-duplicated articles and reviews (2000–2025) with a drone term in the title. Repository deposits and the biological senses of "drone" (honeybee drones, drone flies) are excluded. Patent families (2005–2024) use the same title rule, are counted once per filing office, and exclude beekeeping.

3. Results

3.1 How much and when

The index holds 304,574 drone articles from January 2019 to July 2026. Raw counts rose from 18,100 in 2019 to 66,744 in 2025. The share of all news rose too, but less: from 15.33 per 10,000 in 2019 to 24.73 in 2025, a 1.61-fold rise (Table 1). The share was flat until 2022 (15.63) and grew 1.58-fold from 2022 to 2025. The low point was 2020, at 11.96 per 10,000, 22% below 2019. The partial 2026 figure (38.99) is the highest annual value, but it covers seven months and the index thins after May 2026.

Year	Drone articles	All articles in index	Per 10,000
2019	18,100	11,807,177	15.33
2020	19,406	16,230,014	11.96
2021	22,475	17,281,220	13.01
2022	29,884	19,115,515	15.63
2023	40,414	20,484,506	19.73
2024	56,378	23,311,896	24.18
2025	66,744	26,990,006	24.73

Table 1. Drone articles per year and as a share of the index. 2026 (January–July) is partial and omitted.

Monthly shares rise in sharp spikes (Figure 1). The highest was March 2026, the month of the 2026 Iran war, at 62.93 per 10,000, 2.54 times the 2025 annual share. Before 2026 the highest was April 2024, the month of Iran's missile and drone attack on Israel, at 42.63. Earlier spikes fall in June 2019 (29.38), September 2019 (31.75) and January 2020 (23.74), months of drone incidents in the Gulf region, and in September 2025 (39.88), the month of

the drone incursion into Poland. These are coincidences of timing; the index does not record why a month peaks.

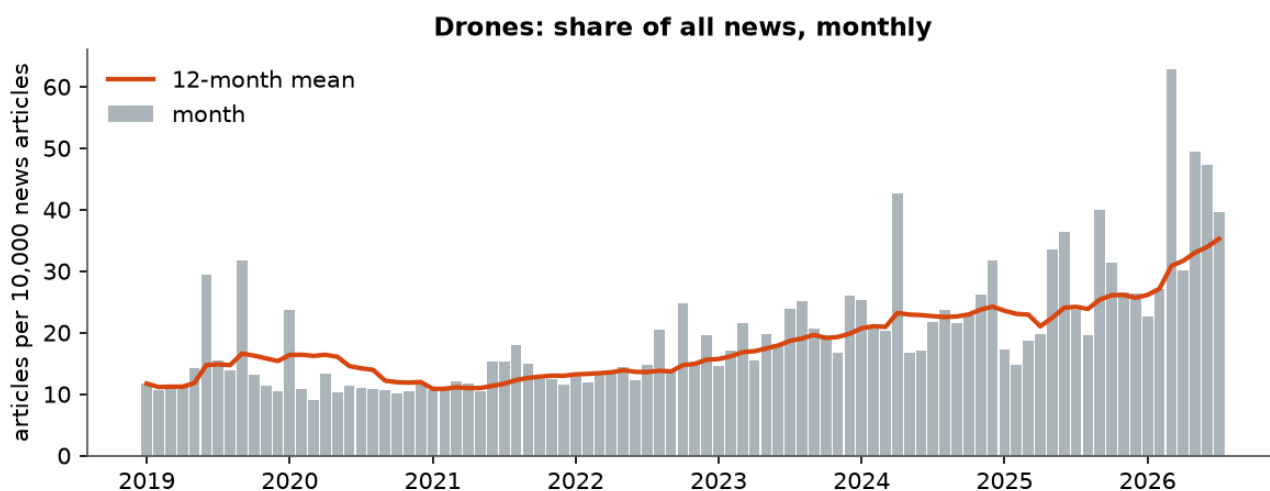


Figure 1. Drone coverage as articles per 10,000 news articles, monthly, January 2019 – July 2026. Bars are months; the line is the 12-month mean.

Unlike weather topics, drone coverage has no strong season (Figure 2). September is the largest month (10.64% of a typical year's articles) and February the smallest (6.24%), against 8.3% for an even spread.

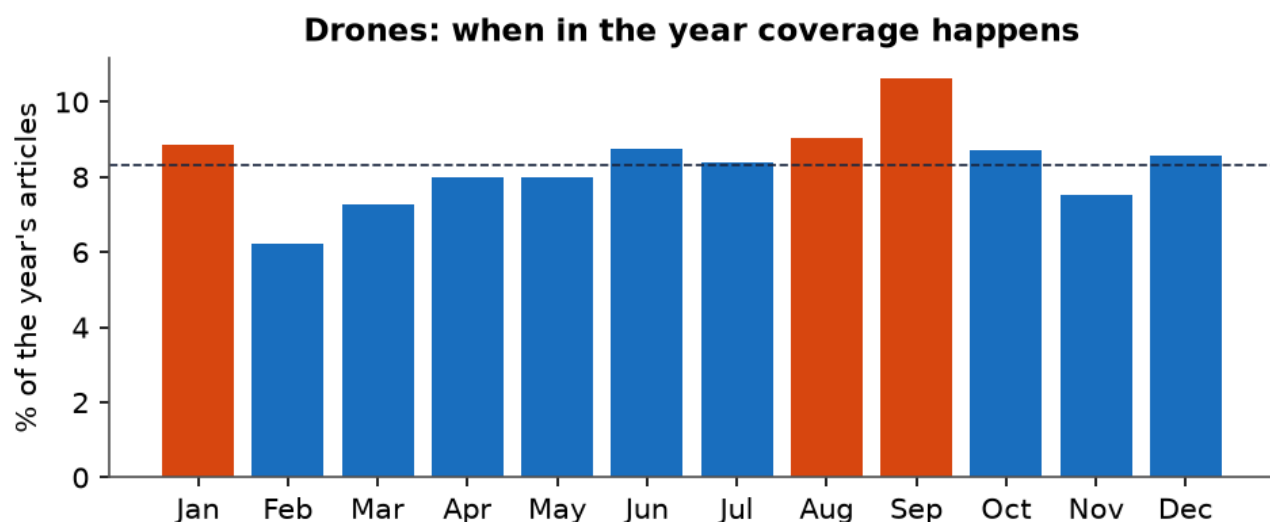


Figure 2. Share of each year's drone articles published in each month, averaged over 2019–2025. Dashed line = an even spread (8.3% per month).

3.2 Where

Between January 2023 and July 2026, 113,947 drone articles carried a primary location. The United States holds the largest raw share (27.34%), but its lift is 0.56: drones take a smaller share of American news than of news overall. Russia (14.71%) and Ukraine (14.37%) together hold 29.08%, with lifts of 19.53 and 26.75. India holds 10.6% with a lift of 0.8. Among the 30 countries with the most located drone articles, the most over-represented are Ukraine (26.75), Yemen (19.88) and Russia (19.53), followed by Iran (8.57), Sudan (8.46), Lebanon (7.63), Iraq (6.71) and Israel (6.13) (Table 2, Figure 3).

Country	Located drone articles	Share %	Lift vs all news
United States	31,148	27.34	0.56
Russia	16,767	14.71	19.53
Ukraine	16,371	14.37	26.75
India	12,083	10.6	0.8
Israel	3,913	3.43	6.13
United Kingdom	3,478	3.05	0.52
China	3,036	2.66	1.01
Iran	2,916	2.56	8.57
United Arab Emirates	2,531	2.22	3.41
Pakistan	1,216	1.07	2.35
Turkey	801	0.7	2.21
Yemen	583	0.51	19.88
Lebanon	494	0.43	7.63
Poland	493	0.43	4.09

Table 2. Leading countries in located drone news, January 2023 – July 2026, with lift against all located news.

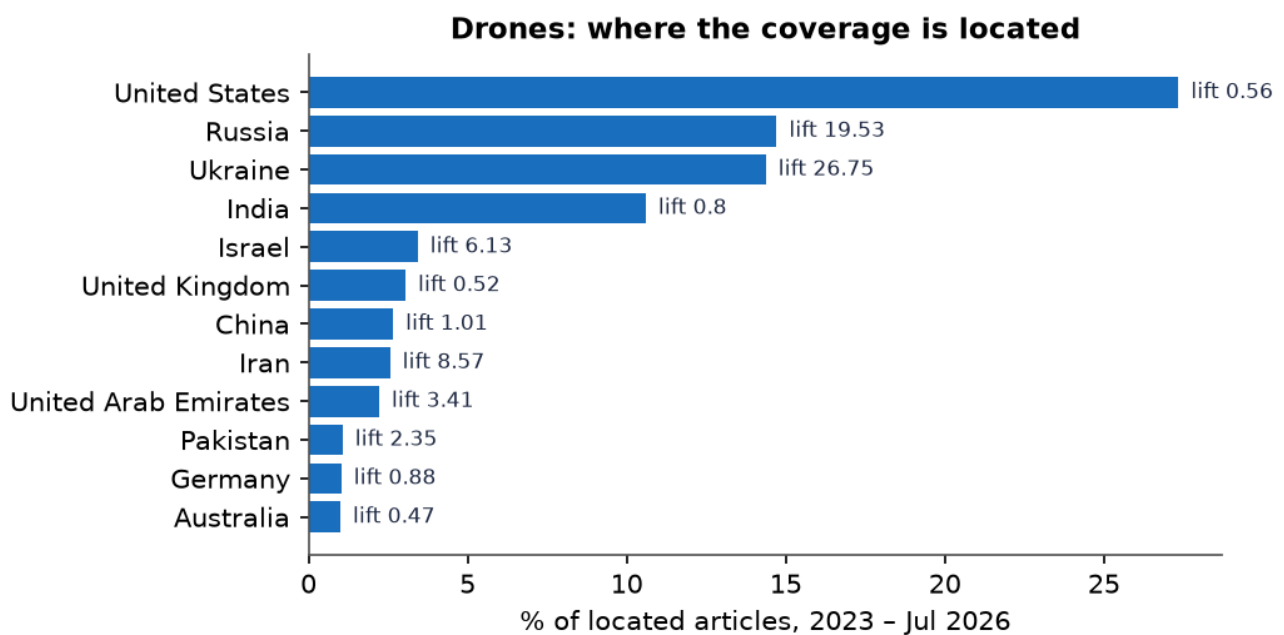


Figure 3. Leading countries by share of located drone articles, 2023 – Jul 2026, labelled with lift against all located news.

3.3 Geo intelligence: continents, states and shifting attention

The world map (Figure 4) shows the pattern at a glance. Drones are over-represented in the news of Eastern Europe and the Middle East, and under-represented in North America, Western Europe, Africa, Oceania and South America. By continent, Europe (2.27) and Asia (1.46) are over-represented, while Africa (0.46), Oceania (0.45), North America (0.39) and South America (0.28) are not (Figure 7, left). Europe's lift rests on Ukraine, Russia and Poland; large Western European countries such as France (0.47) and the United Kingdom (0.52) are under-represented.

Drones: which countries over- and under-cover the topic

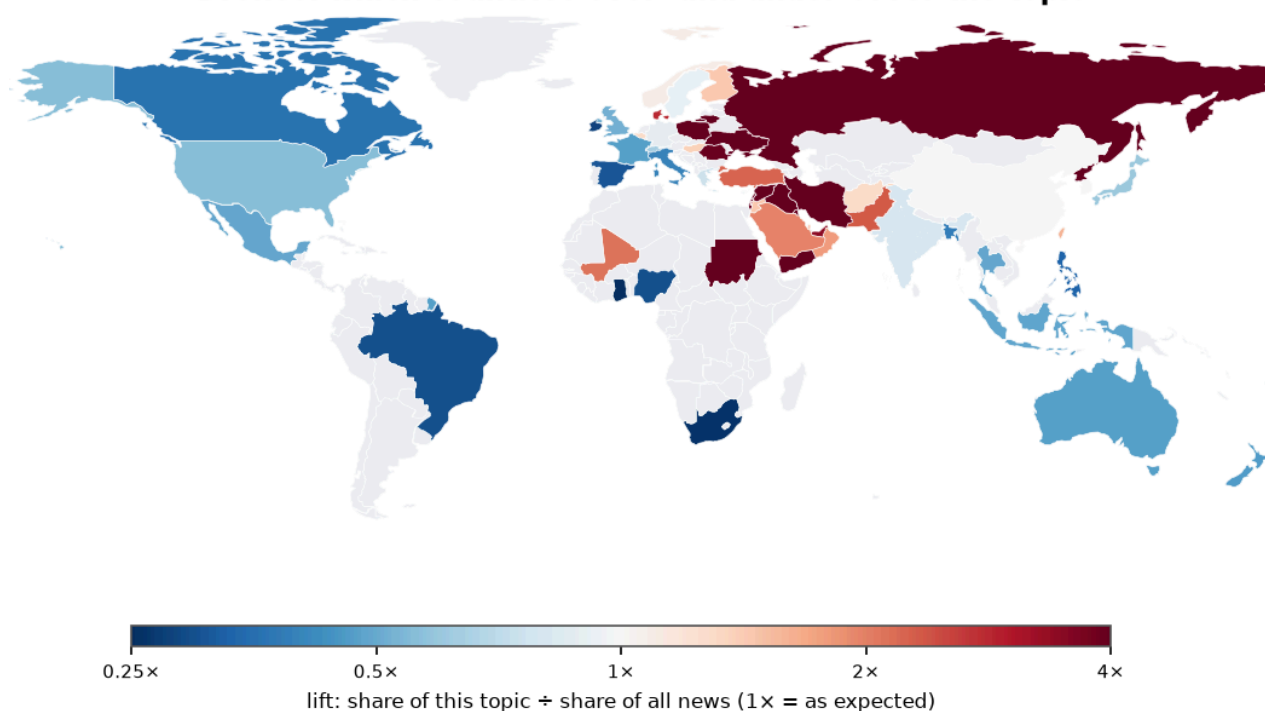


Figure 4. Lift of each country's share of located drone articles, January 2023 – July 2026 (red = over-represented, blue = under-represented, grey = fewer than 100 articles). India is drawn with its official outline.

Within countries, the picture is sharper (Table 3). In India, 9,569 drone articles carried a state. Measured against each state's share of Indian news, drone coverage concentrates in the border regions of the north and north-east: Punjab (5.1), Jammu and Kashmir (4.73), Ladakh (3.99) and Manipur (3.43). Uttar Pradesh (0.91) is close to its weight despite 1,106 articles, and Maharashtra (0.58) and Delhi (0.68) fall below it (Figure 5). In the United States, 17,550 articles carried a state. Virginia (2.91), Alaska (2.22) and Texas (1.96) lead by lift. Texas and California (1.36) hold the most articles and are both above their weight. New Jersey holds 1,140 articles but a lift of only 0.34 (Figure 6). Washington (2.66) and Tennessee (2.15) also rank high by lift, but their rows in the sample show tagging artefacts: stories about the US capital tagged with Washington state, and stories about the country Lebanon resolved to Lebanon, Tennessee. Arizona (2.13) is left out for a similar reason: half of its sample rows carry the beverage brand "Arizona" as a place tag, and others are places outside the state resolved to Arizona towns. All three are left out of Table 3 and of the findings.

India: state	Articles	Lift	United States: state	Articles	Lift
Punjab	1,243	5.1	Virginia	500	2.91
Jammu and Kashmir	1,063	4.73	Alaska	79	2.22
Ladakh	91	3.99	Texas	2,026	1.96
Manipur	185	3.43	New Mexico	113	1.84
Andhra Pradesh	305	1.4	Nevada	326	1.81
Rajasthan	428	1.29	New Hampshire	79	1.57
Odisha	236	1.19	Utah	229	1.47
Himachal Pradesh	148	1.15	Oregon	253	1.44

Table 3. States with the most over-represented drone coverage, January 2023 – July 2026 (states with at least 50 articles; Washington, Tennessee and Arizona left out as tagging artefacts). Lift = the state's share of the country's located drone articles ÷ its share of all located news from that country.

India: state	Articles	Lift	United States: state	Articles	Lift
West Bengal	105	0.31	New Jersey	1,140	0.34
Bihar	146	0.32	Pennsylvania	408	0.39
Kerala	87	0.37	Mississippi	59	0.51
Chhattisgarh	53	0.41	Iowa	93	0.63
Jharkhand	106	0.46	Wisconsin	149	0.64

Table 4. States with the most under-represented drone coverage, same window and rule.

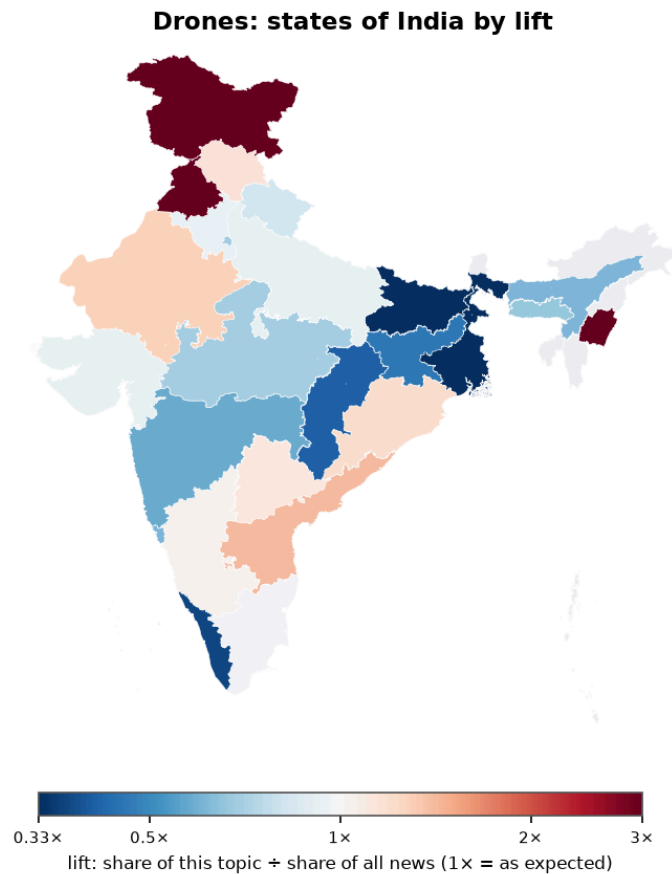


Figure 5. Lift of each Indian state's share of located drone articles against its share of all located Indian news, January 2023 – July 2026. Official outline; Ladakh is drawn within Jammu and Kashmir in the boundary file used.

Drones: states of United States by lift

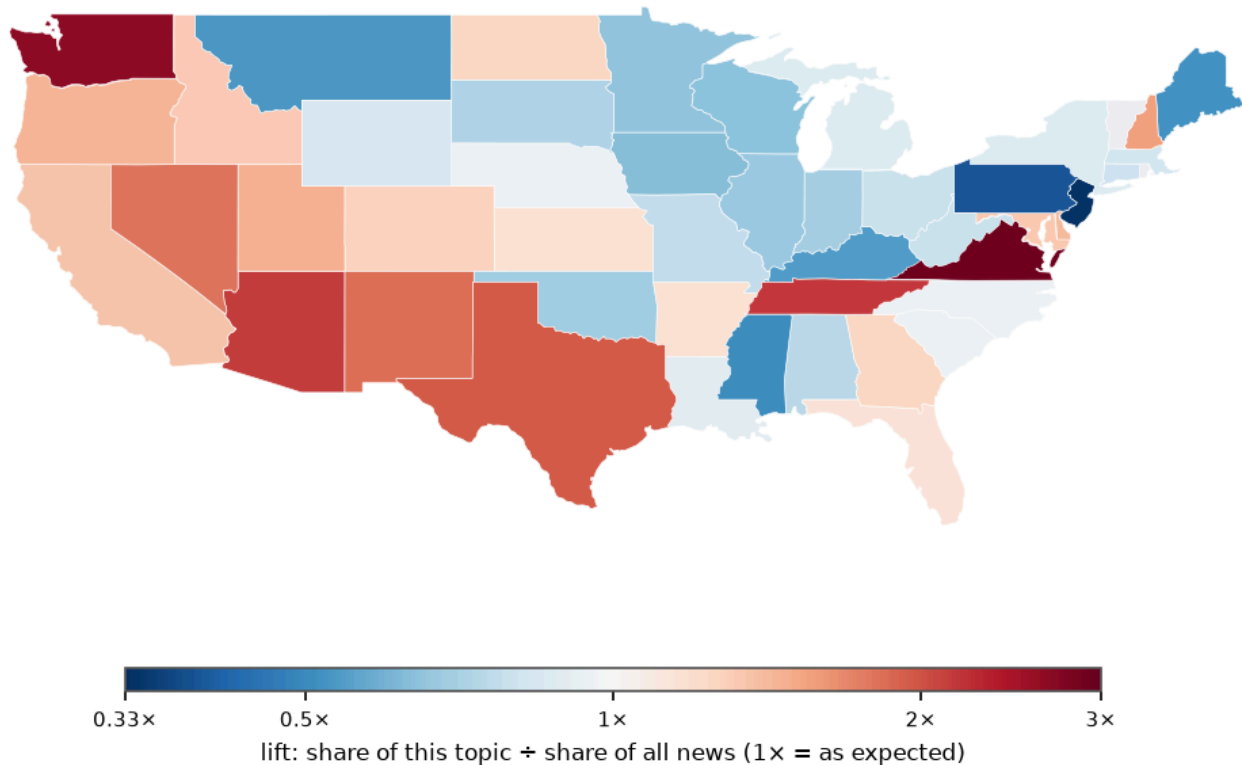


Figure 6. Lift of each US state's share of located drone articles against its share of all located US news, January 2023 – July 2026.

Attention also moves between countries from year to year (Figure 7, right). Measured as drone articles per 10,000 of each country's located news, Poland rose from 21.46 in 2023 to 325.18 in 2025 (15.15 times), Lebanon 4.71 times, Pakistan 2.3 times, Italy 2.16 times and Ukraine 2.06 times (from 539.84 to 1,111.04). Germany rose 1.69 times and Russia 1.68 times. Over the same years South Korea (0.59), Nigeria (0.6), Iran (0.6), Yemen (0.65) and France (0.7) fell.

Tone also differs by country. Drone coverage is more negative than the country's news overall in 36 of the 41 countries with the most labelled drone articles, and most of all in the United Arab Emirates (71.3% negative against 24.6%, 2.9 times), South Korea (62.9% against 25.0%), Saudi Arabia (69.3% against 27.7%) and Denmark (66.6% against 28.1%). In Russia, where news overall is already 72.1% negative, drone coverage reaches 92.7% (1.29 times). In India drone coverage is close to the national baseline (42.3% against 41.2%), and in Australia it is less negative than the baseline (22.6% against 38.4%).

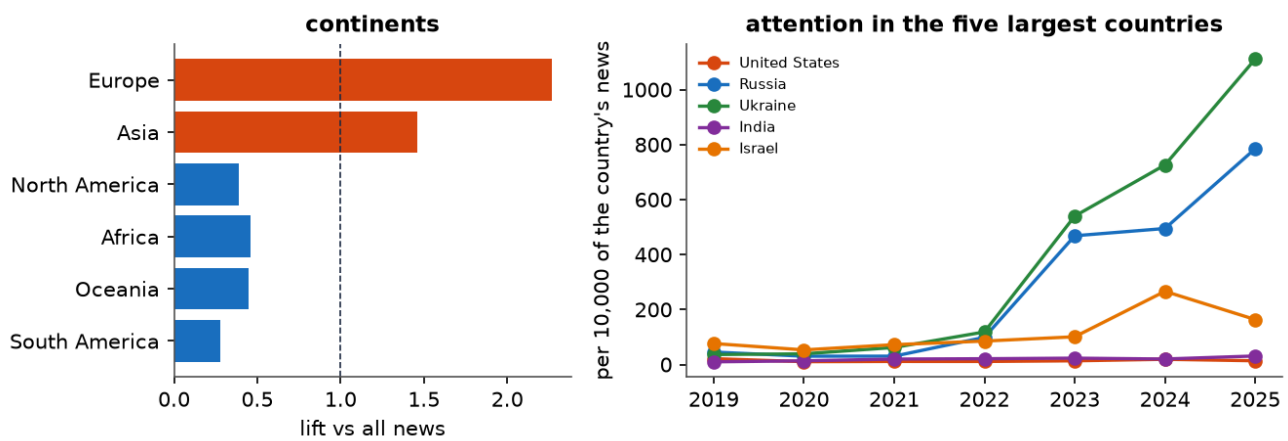


Figure 7. Left: lift by continent, January 2023 – July 2026. Right: drone articles per 10,000 of each country's located news, 2019–2025, for the five countries with the most articles.

3.4 Tone, urgency and themes

Drone coverage is more negative and more urgent than news in general (Figure 8). Among articles with a tone label, 62.1% are negative, against 33.6% across the index (1.85 times). A machine rating of editorial priority puts 81% of drone articles at critical level (7 or higher), against 42.6% of all news (1.9 times).

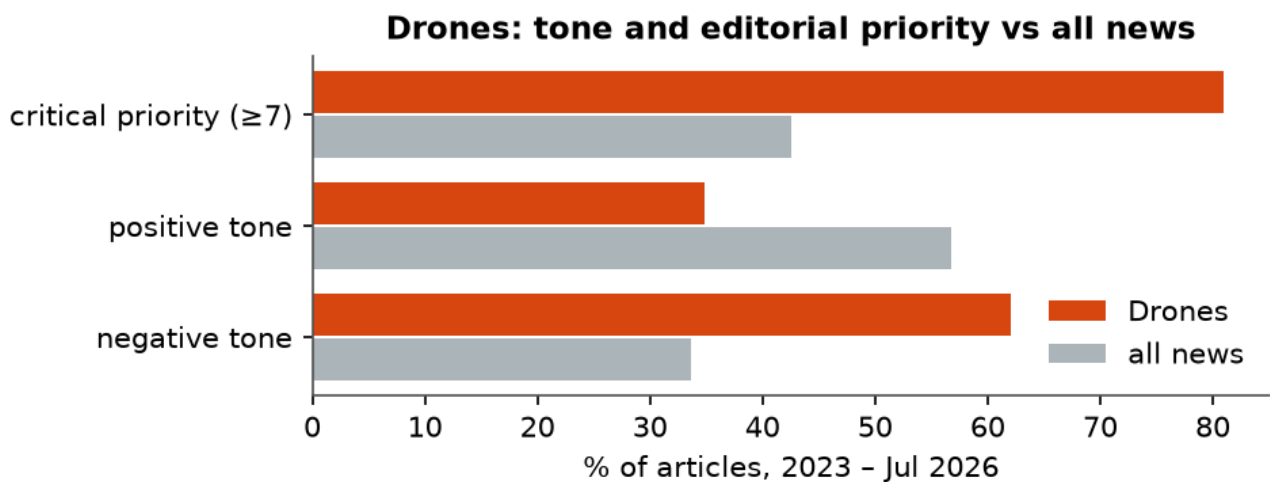


Figure 8. Tone and the share rated critical priority, drone articles vs all news, 2023 – Jul 2026.

Themes show what drone stories are about. By count, military themes dominate: military technology advancements appear in 33.2% of themed articles and naval and aerial combat operations in 31.21%. The themes most specific to drones (Table 5) are civil and regulatory: operating rules under the Federal Aviation Administration, delivery systems, pilot training, anti-drone countermeasures and agricultural monitoring.

Theme	Articles	Share %	Lift
faa regulations for drone operation	1,645	1.18	279.2
drone delivery systems	1,129	0.81	279.01
educational drone piloting courses	566	0.41	274.39
anti-drone technology and countermeasures	2,665	1.91	270.31
racing drones	327	0.23	261.15
aerial surveillance drones	337	0.24	257.61
agricultural monitoring drones	890	0.64	257.47
fpv (first person view) drones	928	0.67	249.0

Table 5. Themes most specific to drone coverage (lift against all themed news), January 2023 – July 2026.

The organisations named most often are two wire services (10,324 and 5,656 articles) and military and political bodies: NATO (9,265), the Federal Aviation Administration (5,512) and Hezbollah (4,986). The leading manufacturer named is DJI (1,831). Wire services rank high because of how conflict news is sourced.

3.5 Research attention and invention

Research on drones grew much faster than the scientific literature. Papers with a drone term in the title rose from 4.95 per 10,000 papers in 2015 to 24.88 in 2025, a 5.03-fold increase in share. Between 2015 and 2025, 95,785 such papers were published. The leading venues are the journals *Drones* (1,967 papers), *Remote Sensing* (1,608) and *IEEE Access* (1,212). The most-cited work centres on wireless communication with drones [1, 2, 6], mapping [3], delivery routing [4, 8], design [5] and precision agriculture [7].

News attention does not track research attention (Figure 9). Research share rose every year from 2015, while news share fell in 2020 and rose sharply only from 2023.

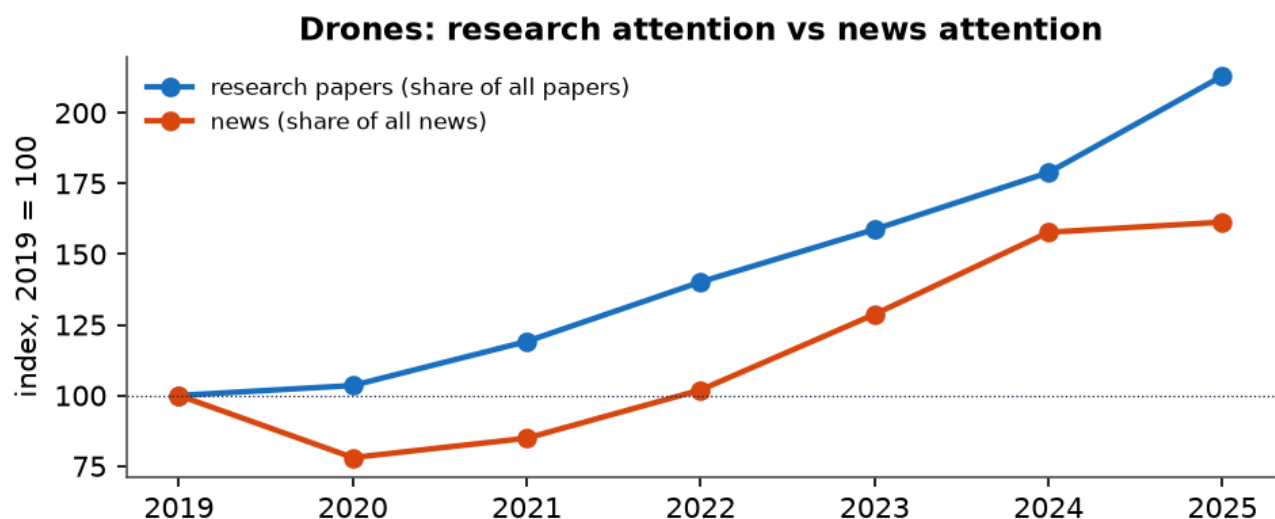


Figure 9. Research papers with drone terms in the title (share of all papers) and drone news (share of all news), each indexed to 2019 = 100.

Patenting rose faster still: 1,411 drone-related patent families were published in 2015 and 19,133 in 2024 (13.56 times). China's office holds 80.4% of office-family records from 2015 to 2024, followed by the United States (5.2%) and South Korea (5.1%) (Figure 10). The leading technology classes are vehicle position and course control (G05D, 7,600 families), aircraft design (B64C, 6,274) and the dedicated class for unmanned aerial vehicles (B64U, 4,111).

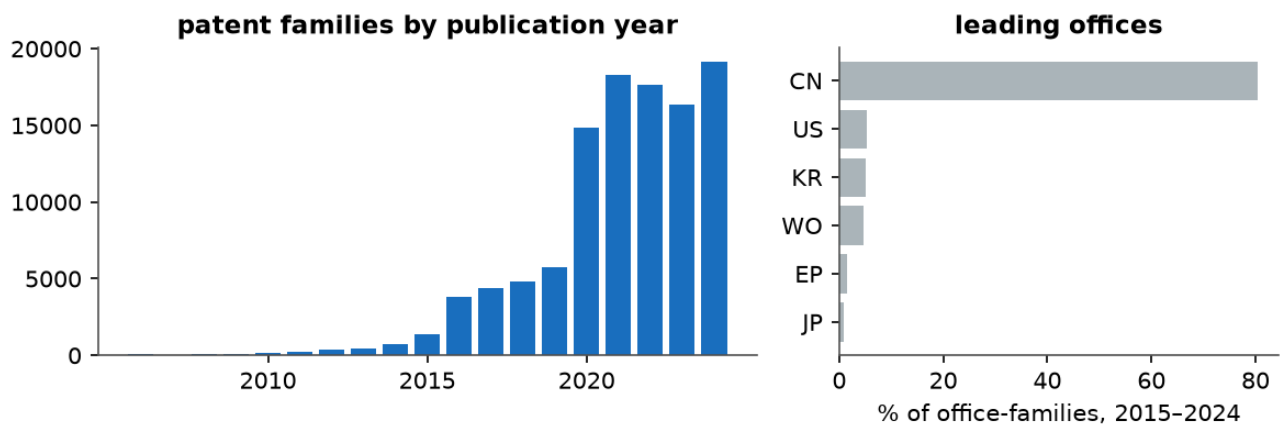


Figure 10. Drone-related patent families by publication year (left) and the leading filing offices, 2015-2024 (right).

4. Discussion

Three points matter for anyone who uses news as a record of drones. First, war is the largest part of drone coverage. The growth after 2022, the over-representation of Ukraine, Russia and the Middle East, the negative tone and the high urgency all point the same way. Second, raw shares mislead. The United States leads drone news in raw terms but is under-represented relative to its weight in the index, and the most populous Indian states, Uttar Pradesh (0.91) and Maharashtra (0.58), sit near or below their weight. Measured by lift, attention gathers at borders and front lines: Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir in India, and Poland on the edge of the war in Ukraine. Third, civil uses are where drone coverage is most distinctive. Regulation, delivery, training and farming are small themes, but they are the ones least shared with other news.

Research, invention and news run on different clocks. Research share grows steadily. Patent filings grow fastest and are concentrated in one office. News follows conflicts. The dataset lets researchers link the three, for example to test whether surges of drone coverage in a country are followed by new rules, research or patent activity there.

5. Limitations

- **Index availability.** 92.88% of the index was readable at build time, so counts are lower bounds. Shares and lifts are less affected, because the missing part is spread across topics.
- **Coverage after May 2026.** The index thins after May 2026, so 2026 is partial and is excluded from year comparisons.
- **Matching.** Matching uses the article opening. Articles that mention drones only later are missed. The word "drone" can also name unmanned boats and underwater vehicles; these are kept, and 2.5% of matches are not about drones at all.
- **Machine labels.** Location, tone, priority and themes are machine-labelled. The city field is noisy and is not analysed. Place tags derived from ordinary words were treated as unlocated, which removes 15.3% of city-tagged articles; ambiguous place names remain (Washington, and Lebanon resolved to Tennessee), so implausible states were checked against the sample before being reported.
- **Outlet mix.** The index over-represents English-language outlets. This shapes geography: lifts for countries with few indexed outlets rest on small baselines.
- **Research and patent counts.** These match titles only. Office shares reflect filing practice; utility models are numerous in China.

Data availability

The dataset (article sample, monthly, country and state tables, research and patent tables, all metrics) is released under CC BY-NC 4.0 with this paper. The sample holds 76,075 of 304,556 matched articles to 31 July 2026. Full article text, headlines, publishers, later articles and other topics are served by the Prism News API: <https://github.com/fliarbi/prism-news-api> (base URL <https://radar-api.fliarbi.com/news>). A worked query: `prism-news trends "drone" --since 2019-01-01 --until 2026-07-31 --granularity monthly`.

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