

Homelessness in the News, 2019-2026: Attention, Seasonality, Geography and Tone of Global Coverage, and How It Compares with Research

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

If you or someone you know is struggling, contact local emergency services or a crisis line.

Abstract

We measure how homelessness was covered in a global news index from January 2019 to July 2026, using 127,861 de-duplicated homelessness articles, and set that coverage beside 22,357 research papers on homelessness. All results are measures of coverage, not of the number of people who are homeless. Six results stand out:

1. **Falling attention.** Homelessness took a 36.5% smaller share of news in 2025 than in 2019: 6.99 against 11.01 articles per 10,000 news articles.
2. **Peaks and seasons.** The largest monthly share was December 2019, at 17.27 per 10,000. April 2020 was second, at 15.35. On average 19.58% of each year's coverage appears in December and January.
3. **Geography.** The United States holds 67.5% of located homelessness news, 1.39 times its share of all news. Ireland (2.43), New Zealand (2.12) and Canada (1.68) are the most over-represented countries, and India (0.21) is strongly under-represented. Within the United States, Oregon (4.63), California (2.9) and Arizona (2.62) lead; within India, Uttarakhand (2.1), Delhi (1.77) and Tamil Nadu (1.13).
4. **Tone and urgency.** 65.3% of homelessness articles are negative in tone (all news: 33.6%), and 78.2% are rated critical priority (all news: 42.6%).
5. **What the stories are about.** Emergency shelter programmes appear in 18.18% of themed articles and prevention programmes in 29.79%. Eviction prevention and veteran housing are small but highly specific themes.
6. **Research.** Homelessness papers rose from 1.62 to 2.19 per 10,000 papers between 2015 and 2021, then fell back to 1.73 in 2025. The most-cited papers concern health.

Findings stated for citation

- **F1.** Homelessness took a 36.5% smaller share of news in 2025 than in 2019 (6.99 vs 11.01 per 10,000 articles).
- **F2.** December 2019 was the peak month for homelessness news, at 17.27 articles per 10,000; April 2020 was second (15.35).
- **F3.** Between 2019 and 2025, 19.58% of each year's homelessness news appeared in December and January, against 16.67% for an even spread.
- **F4.** The United States' share of located homelessness news (67.5%) was 1.39 times its share of all news. India's (2.82%) was 0.21 times.

- **F5.** Ireland (2.43), New Zealand (2.12) and Canada (1.68) were the most over-represented countries.
- **F6.** 66.4% of US-located homelessness articles were negative in tone, 2.01 times the share for all US-located news (all countries: 65.3% against 33.6%).
- **F7.** A machine priority rating placed 78.2% of homelessness articles at critical priority, 1.84 times the all-news share.
- **F8.** Emergency shelter programmes appeared in 18.18% of themed articles, 927.93 times their frequency in all news.
- **F9.** Eviction prevention services appeared in 3.02% of themed articles (lift 645.67).
- **F10.** Veteran housing support appeared in 1.94% of themed articles (lift 697.8).
- **F11.** Exclusion rules aimed mainly at disaster or war displacement and homeless animals removed 3.0% of raw matches.
- **F12.** Homelessness papers rose 1.35-fold as a share of all papers between 2015 and 2021.
- **F13.** The three most-cited homelessness papers since 2010 appeared in Lancet journals and concern health.
- **F14.** Within the United States, Oregon (4.63), California (2.9) and Arizona (2.62) had the most over-represented coverage.
- **F15.** Within India, Delhi held 22.98% of located Indian homelessness news (lift 1.77).
- **F16.** Homelessness coverage as a share of New Zealand's news rose 1.83-fold from 2023 to 2025; Ireland's fell to 0.24 of its 2023 level.

1. Introduction

Homelessness is a long-running social issue in many countries. It is shaped by housing costs, eviction, health, family breakdown and public policy. News is one of the main ways the public meets the subject: through counts of people sleeping rough, shelter openings, budget decisions and court rulings. Coverage also shapes which responses are debated. Yet coverage is rarely measured as data in its own right. Official counts record people. Bibliometric studies record research. Few sources record attention, meaning how much of the news homelessness takes, and when, where and in what tone.

This paper and its dataset do that. They combine a global news index with research papers on the same topic. 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 (31,809 rows) and full coverage tables, so every figure here can be re-derived. The [Prism News API](#) serves the full history.

The topic is sensitive. We report coverage only. We name no individual, and we give no location or detail of any individual case.

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 homelessness when its opening text contains *homeless*, *homelessness*, *unhoused*, *rough sleeping*, *rough sleeper(s)* or *sleeping rough* as whole words. *Homeless* carries most matches (93,441), followed by *homelessness* (37,575) and *unhoused* (4,443). Three families of matches are excluded:

- reports of people left without shelter by floods, earthquakes, storms or armed conflict ("left thousands homeless"), which describe displacement rather than homelessness as a social condition;
- homeless animals ("homeless dogs and cats");
- figurative uses such as "politically homeless".

Together these removed 3,983 of 131,844 raw matches (3.0%). One reviewer read 40 randomly drawn matched openings. 34 used the words for people without stable housing (precision 85%), and in 26 (65%) homelessness was the main subject. The 6 false matches were entertainment and fiction (3), disaster and conflict displacement that the patterns missed (2), and vague political rhetoric in translation (1).

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. Seasonality uses each year's within-year month shares, averaged over the complete years 2019–2025. Geography, tone, priority and themes use January 2023 – July 2026; 61.4% of articles in that window carry a primary country. Geography is expressed as lift: a country's share of homelessness articles divided by its share of all located articles. State lift uses the same ratio within a country. Place tags derived from ordinary words (714 words, such as "Congress", "Earth" and "Winter") were treated as unlocated in every location field, which removed 15.3% of city-tagged articles.

Research and patents. Research papers are de-duplicated articles and reviews (2000–2025) with *homeless*, *homelessness*, *unhoused* or *rough sleeping* in the title. Repository deposits and papers on stray or shelter animals are excluded. Patent families use the same title rule; only 19 were published from 2015 to 2024, too few to analyse, so the patent figure is omitted.

3. Results

3.1 How much and when

The index holds 127,861 homelessness articles from January 2019 to July 2026. Raw counts rose from 12,997 in 2019 to 18,879 in 2025, but the share of all news fell: 11.01 per 10,000 in 2019, 9.57 in 2023 and 6.99 in 2025 (Table 1). The 2025 share is 36.5% below 2019. The highest monthly share was December 2019, at 17.27 per 10,000, 1.57 times the 2019 annual share. The next highest were April 2020 (15.35) and March 2020 (13.81), the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe and North America (Figure 1).

Year	Homelessness articles	All articles in index	Per 10,000
2019	12,997	11,807,177	11.01
2020	17,009	16,230,014	10.48
2021	15,516	17,281,220	8.98
2022	16,753	19,115,515	8.76
2023	19,596	20,484,506	9.57
2024	19,941	23,311,896	8.55
2025	18,879	26,990,006	6.99

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

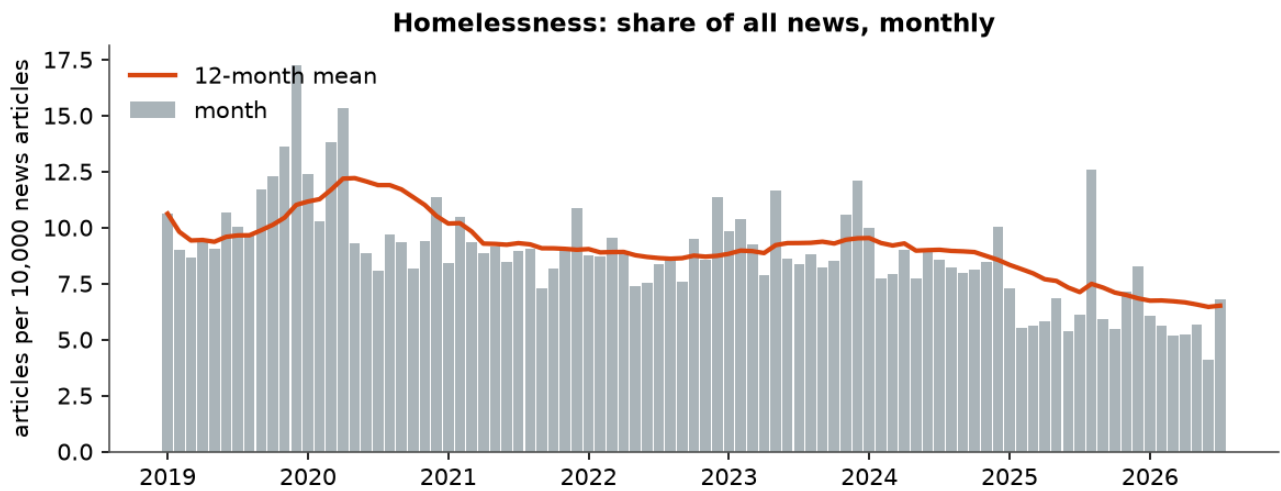


Figure 1. Homelessness coverage as articles per 10,000 news articles, monthly, January 2019 – July 2026. Bars are months; the line is the 12-month mean.

Coverage has a mild winter peak (Figure 2). December (10.05%) and January (9.53%) together hold 19.58% of a typical year's homelessness articles, against 16.67% for an even spread. June is the quietest month (7.08%). The peak falls in the northern winter, when cold-weather shelters open and several countries hold annual street counts; no cause is tested here. The seasonal swing is much smaller than for weather-driven topics.

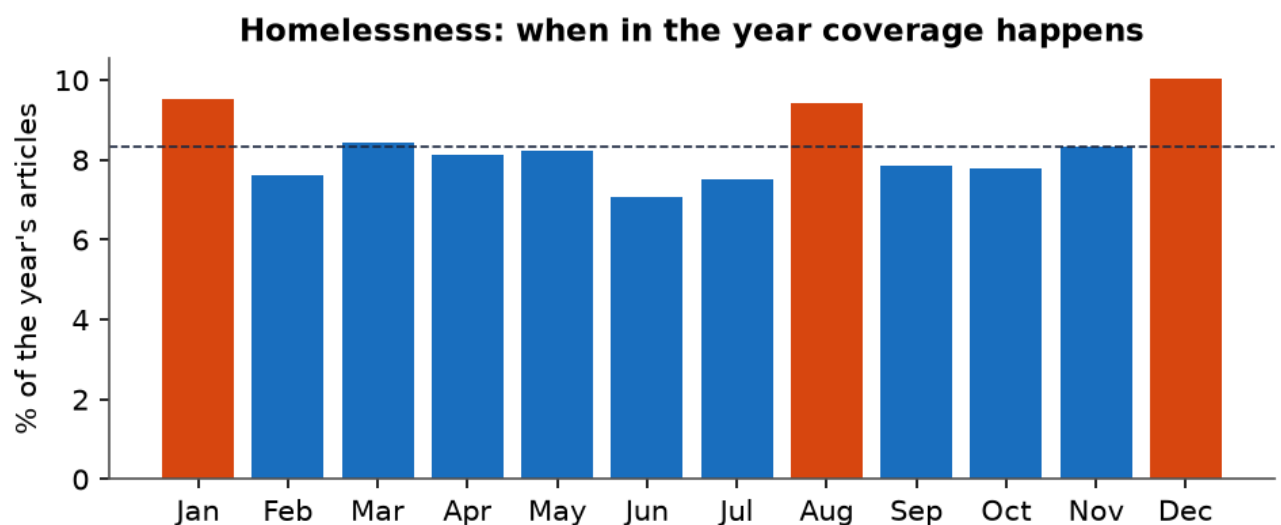


Figure 2. Share of each year's homelessness articles published in each month, averaged over 2019–2025. Dashed line = an even spread (8.3% per month).

3.2 Where

Between January 2023 and July 2026, 40,290 homelessness articles carried a primary location. The United States holds 67.5% of them, with a lift of 1.39: homelessness takes a larger share of American news than of news overall. The United Kingdom (8.63%, lift 1.48), Canada (3.6%, 1.68) and Australia (2.95%, 1.37) follow. India holds 2.82% with a lift of 0.21, and Nigeria (0.27), Spain (0.34) and France (0.43) are also well below their weight in the index (Table 2, Figure 3).

Country	Located articles	Share %	Lift vs all news
United States	27,197	67.5	1.39
United Kingdom	3,478	8.63	1.48
Canada	1,451	3.6	1.68
Australia	1,187	2.95	1.37
India	1,136	2.82	0.21
Ireland	705	1.75	2.43
New Zealand	553	1.37	2.12
Brazil	452	1.12	1.3
France	343	0.85	0.43
Germany	288	0.71	0.61
South Africa	212	0.53	1.16
Italy	205	0.51	0.53

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

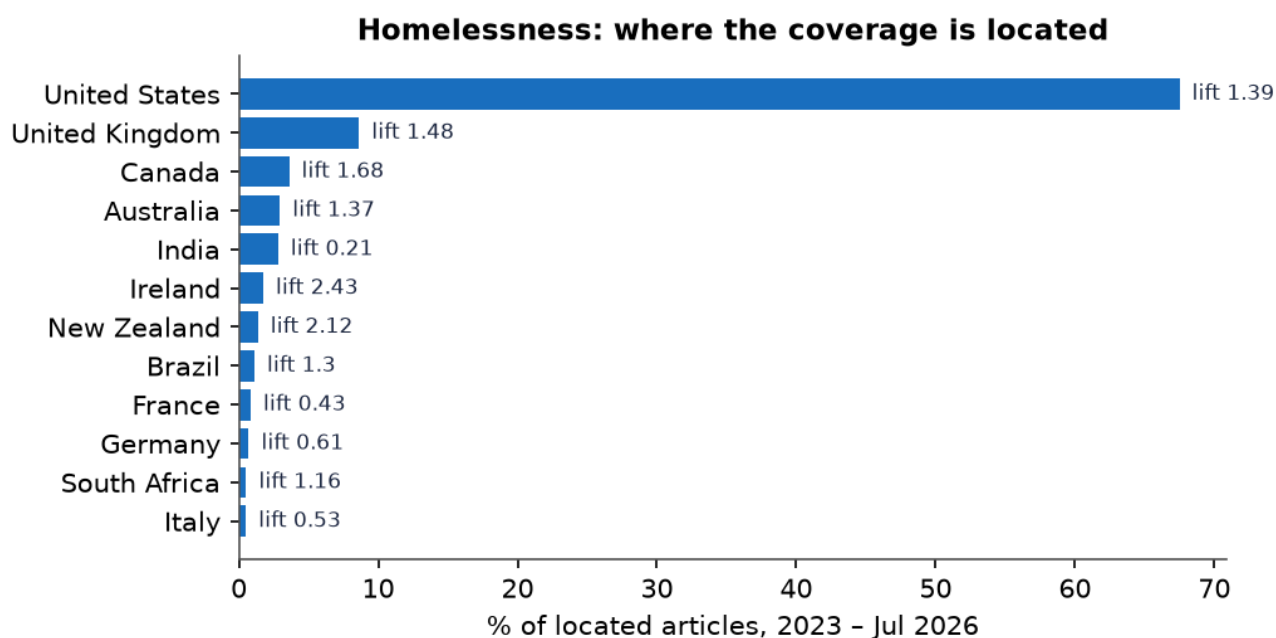


Figure 3. Leading countries by share of located homelessness articles, 2023 – Jul 2026, labelled with lift against all located news.

3.3 Geo intelligence: continents, states and shifting attention

The world map (Figure 4) shows the pattern at a glance. Homelessness is over-represented in the news of English-speaking countries with high housing costs: the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand. Among countries with enough articles to map, it is under-represented in India, Nigeria, France, Spain, Italy and

Germany; most of Asia and Africa has fewer than 100 articles and is shown in grey. By continent, Oceania (1.63) and North America (1.48) are over-represented, while South America (0.86), Europe (0.81), Africa (0.39) and Asia (0.23) are not (Figure 7, left). Part of this gap reflects vocabulary: the terms are English, and countries that report the issue in other words, or frame it as slum housing or street children, are matched less often.

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

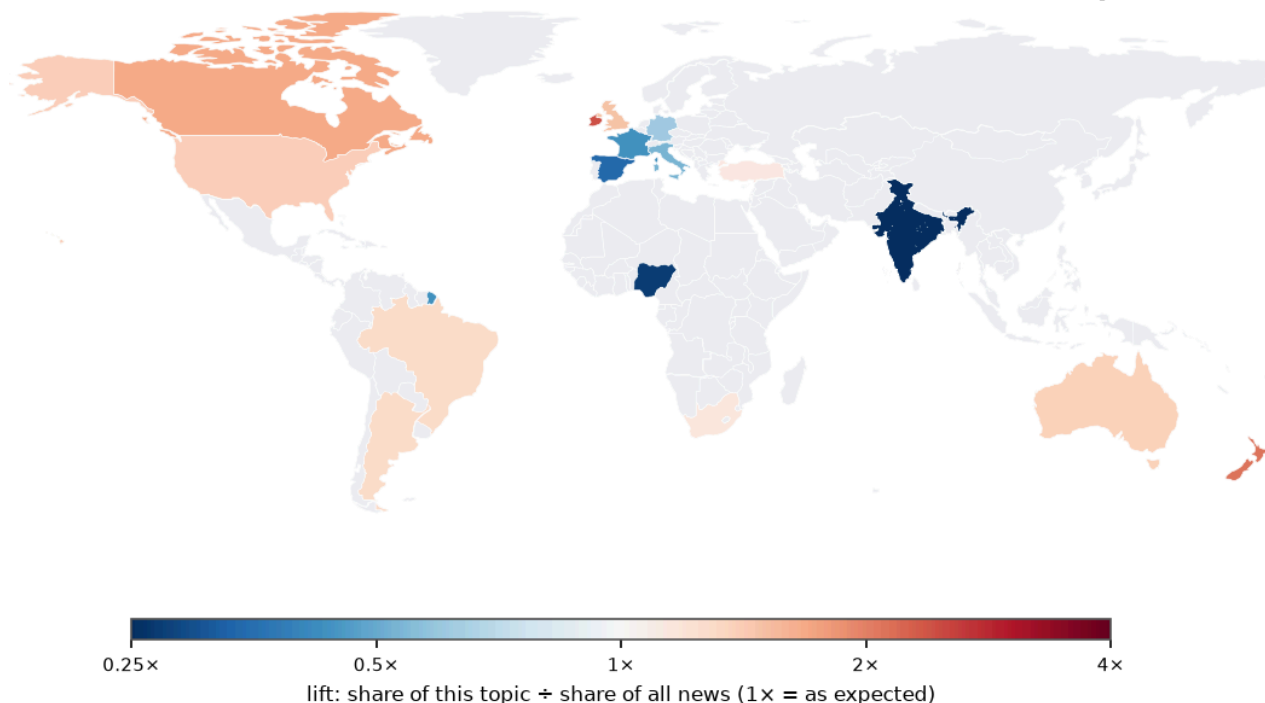


Figure 4. Lift of each country's share of located homelessness articles, January 2023 – July 2026 (red = over-represented, blue = under-represented, grey = fewer than 100 articles). India is drawn with its official outline.

Within countries, the picture is sharper (Table 3). In the United States, measured against each state's share of American news, Oregon (4.63), California (2.9), Arizona (2.62) and Rhode Island (2.33) are the most over-represented. California alone holds 28.91% of located US homelessness articles. New Jersey (0.11), Pennsylvania (0.47), Tennessee (0.53), Alabama (0.63) and Texas (0.65) are far below their weight in American news (Figure 6). In India, the base is small (1,062 located articles). Among states with at least 50 articles, Uttarakhand (2.1), Delhi (1.77) and Tamil Nadu (1.13) are over-represented, and Delhi alone holds 22.98% of located Indian homelessness news. Maharashtra (0.61) and Uttar Pradesh (0.82) are under-represented (Figure 5). Jammu and Kashmir, with 49 located articles, falls just below the threshold.

United States: state	Articles	Lift	India: state	Articles	Lift
Highest			Highest		
Oregon	1,182	4.63	Uttarakhand	50	2.1
California	7,395	2.9	Delhi	244	1.77
Arizona	402	2.62	Tamil Nadu	60	1.13
Rhode Island	92	2.33			
Hawaii	154	2.0			
Vermont	52	1.93			
Lowest			Lowest		
New Jersey	528	0.11	Maharashtra	103	0.61
Pennsylvania	718	0.47	Uttar Pradesh	110	0.82
Tennessee	310	0.53			
Alabama	184	0.63			
Texas	980	0.65			

Table 3. States with the highest and lowest lift in homelessness coverage, January 2023 – July 2026, among states with at least 50 articles. Lift = the state's share of the country's located homelessness articles ÷ its share of all located news from that country.

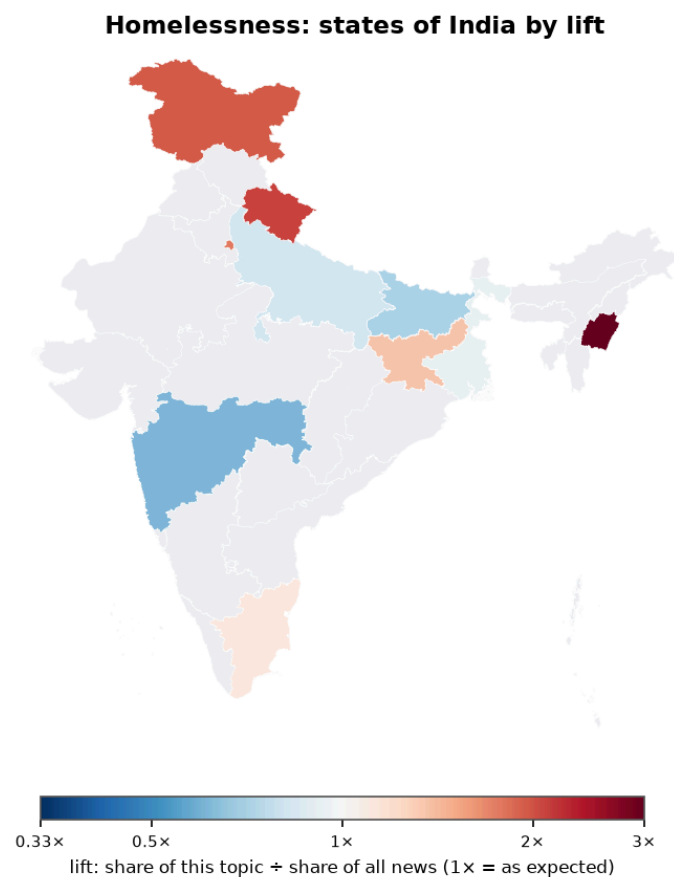


Figure 5. Lift of each Indian state's share of located homelessness articles against its share of all located Indian news, January 2023 – July 2026. Official outline. Most states have fewer than 50 articles, so their colours are unstable.

Homelessness: states of United States by lift

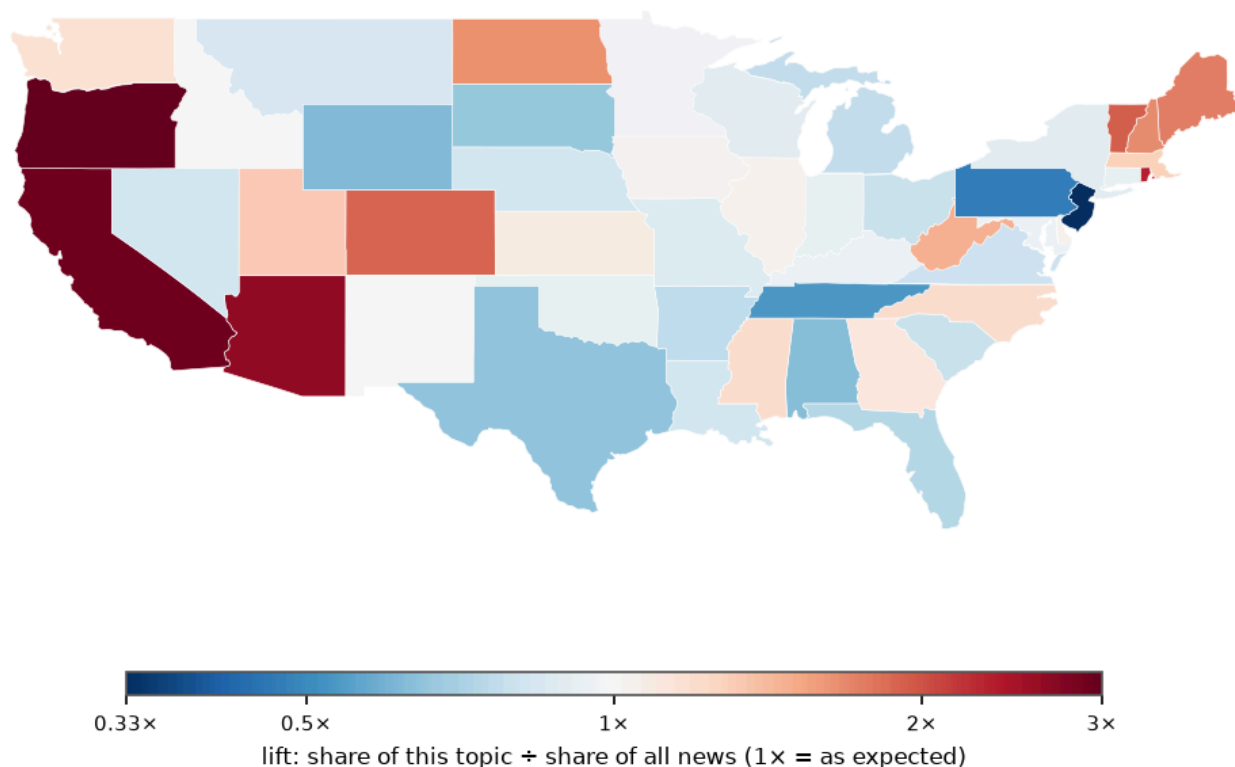


Figure 6. Lift of each US state's share of located homelessness articles against its share of all located US news, January 2023 – July 2026.

Attention also moves between countries from year to year (Figure 7, right; Table 4). Measured as homelessness articles per 10,000 of each country's located news, New Zealand rose from 16.6 in 2023 to 30.38 in 2025 (1.83 times), and Canada edged up (1.03). The other leading countries fell. Ireland, the country where homelessness took the largest share of national news in 2023 (43.64), fell to 10.47 in 2025 (0.24 times). Brazil (0.51) also fell sharply. The United States (0.74) and the United Kingdom (0.7) declined in step with the global share, and Australia (0.87) and India (0.83) fell less.

Country	2023 per 10,000	2025 per 10,000	2025 ÷ 2023
New Zealand	16.6	30.38	1.83
Canada	15.89	16.35	1.03
Australia	15.9	13.85	0.87
India	2.69	2.23	0.83
United States	17.07	12.64	0.74
United Kingdom	17.66	12.39	0.7
Brazil	19.0	9.73	0.51
Ireland	43.64	10.47	0.24

Table 4. Homelessness articles per 10,000 of each country's located news, 2023 and 2025, for countries with the most coverage.

In each of the 12 countries with the most tone-labelled articles, homelessness coverage is more negative than that country's news overall. In percentage points the gap is widest in Ireland (84.8% negative against 34.0% for Irish news, 2.49 times), Brazil (76.3% against 38.3%) and New Zealand (82.7% against 45.7%). In the United States, 66.4% of homelessness articles are negative, against 33.1% of American news (2.01 times).

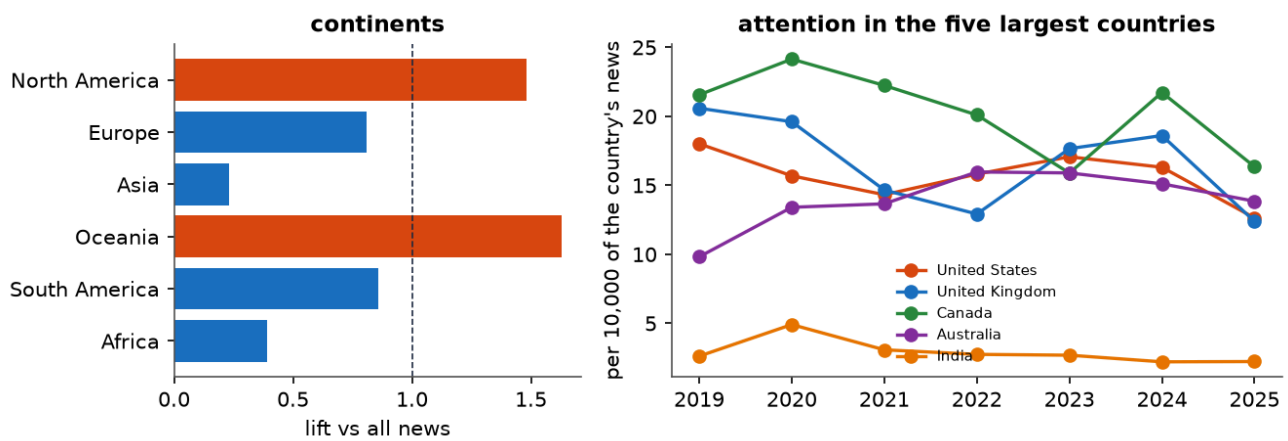


Figure 7. Left: lift by continent, January 2023 – July 2026. Right: homelessness articles per 10,000 of each country's located news, 2019–2025, for the five countries with the most articles.

3.4 Tone, urgency and themes

Homelessness coverage is more negative and more urgent than news in general (Figure 8). Among articles with a tone label, 65.3% are negative, against 33.6% across the index (1.94 times). The machine priority rating puts 78.2% of homelessness articles at critical level (7 or higher), against 42.6% of all news (1.84 times). Neutral labels are rare (0.7%); articles are framed either as a problem or as a response.

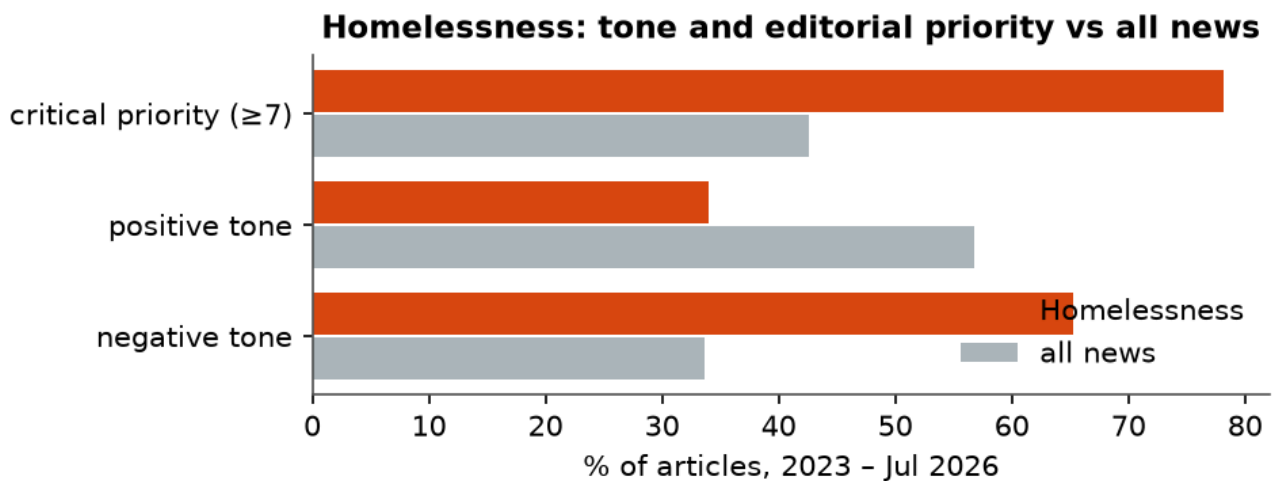


Figure 8. Tone and the share rated critical priority, homelessness articles vs all news, 2023 – Jul 2026.

Themes show what homelessness stories are about (Table 5). Prevention programmes are the most common (29.79% of themed articles), followed by housing instability (19.39%) and emergency shelter programmes (18.18%). Smaller themes are highly specific to the topic: eviction prevention services (3.02%, lift 645.67), veteran housing support (1.94%, lift 697.8) and the link between substance use and poverty (1.86%, lift 773.69).

Theme	Articles	Share %	Lift
homelessness and housing instability	6,771	19.39	946.19
emergency shelter programs	6,351	18.18	927.93
substance abuse and poverty correlation	649	1.86	773.69
mental health struggles linked to poverty	702	2.01	715.21
veteran housing support	678	1.94	697.8
eviction prevention services	1,055	3.02	645.67
homelessness prevention initiatives	693	1.98	627.48
homelessness prevention programs	10,403	29.79	560.24

Table 5. Themes most specific to homelessness coverage (lift against all themed news), January 2023 – July 2026. The organisation named most often is the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (2,111 articles), followed by wire services, broadcasters and charities such as the Salvation Army (804) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (755). Wire services and social platforms rank high, which reflects how the news is sourced.

3.5 Research attention

Research on homelessness grew faster than the scientific literature until 2021. Papers with a homelessness term in the title rose from 1.62 per 10,000 papers in 2015 to 2.19 in 2021, a 1.35-fold increase in share. The share then fell to 1.73 in 2025, so the 2015–2025 growth is only 1.07-fold. Between 2015 and 2025, 13,671 such papers were published. The most-cited papers since 2010 concern health: the health of homeless people in high-income countries [1], morbidity and mortality [2], COVID-19 risk [3], unmet health care needs [4] and mortality [5]. The most-cited paper on a non-clinical subject is a study of the prevalence of youth homelessness [6].

News attention and research attention moved apart (Figure 9). Research share rose from 2019 to 2021 and held near that level until 2024. News share fell in every year from 2019 to 2025 except 2023.

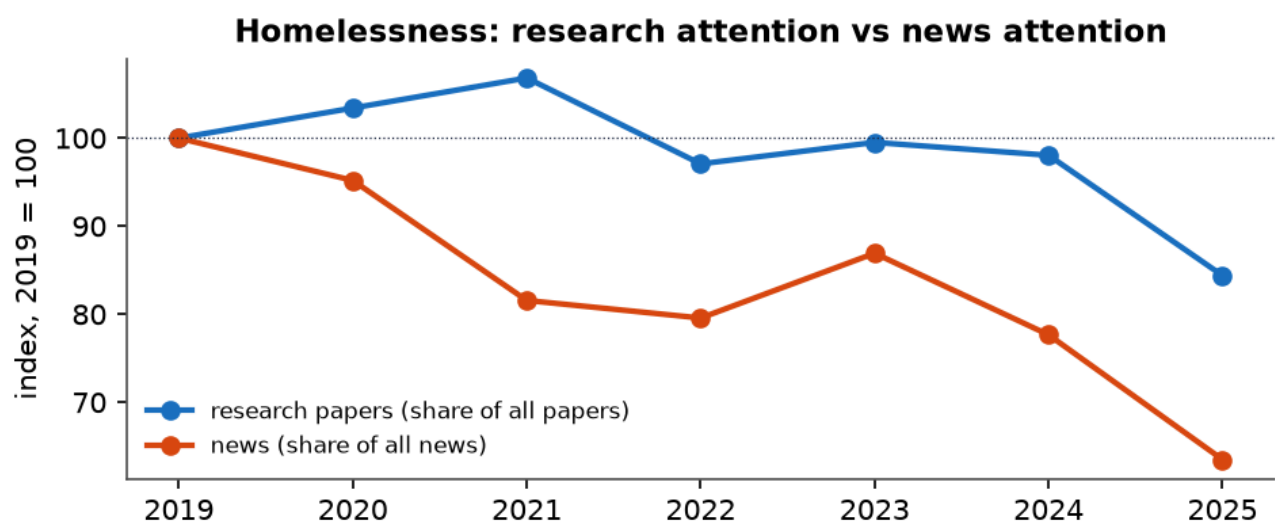


Figure 9. Research papers with homelessness terms in the title (share of all papers) and homelessness news (share of all news), each indexed to 2019 = 100.

4. Discussion

Three points matter for anyone who uses news as a record of homelessness. First, coverage measures attention. The fall in share from 2019 to 2025 does not show that homelessness

declined; it shows that the topic took a smaller part of a growing news index. Second, raw shares mislead. The United States dominates raw counts, but the most over-represented countries are Ireland, New Zealand and Canada, and attention within a country can fall by three quarters or nearly double in two years, as Ireland and New Zealand show. Third, the words are ambiguous. "Homeless" also describes people displaced by floods, earthquakes and war. Those reports belong to a different topic. Exclusion rules remove most of them, but 2 of the 40 hand-checked matches were still displacement reports.

News and research run on different clocks. Research share grew steadily to 2021 and has eased since. News share peaked in December 2019 and the first months of the pandemic, and has fallen since. The dataset lets researchers link the two, for example to test whether local coverage peaks follow annual street counts, court rulings or budget decisions.

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 and English terms. Articles that mention homelessness only later are missed, and 15% of matches are not about homelessness as a social condition. Turkey's 2023 share (31.07 per 10,000) may include earthquake displacement that the patterns missed.
- **Machine labels.** Location, tone, priority and themes are machine-labelled. The city field is noisy and is not analysed.
- **Place tags.** Place tags derived from ordinary words were treated as unlocated (15.3% of city-tagged articles). A few real places that share such a name are lost with them, and tags that survive the rule can still be wrong.
- **Outlet mix.** The index over-represents English-language and Northern Hemisphere outlets. This shapes both seasonality and geography, and partly explains the low lifts of Asia and Africa.
- **Research counts.** These match titles only, so papers that name homelessness only in the abstract are missed.

Data availability

The dataset (article sample, monthly and country tables, research tables, all metrics) is released under CC BY-NC 4.0 with this paper. The sample holds 31,809 of 127,789 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 "homelessness" --since 2019-01-01 --until 2026-07-31 --granularity monthly`.

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