

Protests in the News, 2019-2026: Attention, Geography and Tone of Global Protest 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 protests were covered in a global news index from January 2019 to July 2026, using 897,888 de-duplicated protest articles, and set that coverage beside 20,173 research papers on protest and social movements and 977 patent families on protest and riot control. Six results stand out:

1. **A falling share.** Protests took 96.18 of every 10,000 news articles in 2019 and 47.19 in 2025, a 50.9% fall in share, while raw counts rose.
2. **Peaks and troughs.** The largest monthly share was June 2020, the month of the George Floyd protests, at 295.85 per 10,000. The smallest was March 2020, at 29.14, the month COVID-19 lockdowns began.
3. **Geography.** India's share of located protest news is 1.69 times its share of all news. The United States, the largest source of located protest articles (30.23%), is under-represented at 0.62. Among the 20 leading countries, Nepal (9.66), Bangladesh (9.15), Iran (6.51) and Palestine (6.37) are the most over-represented. Within India, Manipur (5.12), Ladakh (4.23) and West Bengal (3.06) lead; within the United States, Minnesota (4.42) and Oregon (2.24).
4. **Shifting attention.** Protests took 1,457.77 of every 10,000 Nepal-located articles in 2025, 11.48 times the 2023 level, the largest rise among leading countries, ahead of Indonesia (4.46 times). In Bangladesh the share reached 940.73 in 2024, and in Iran 1,983.09 in 2022.
5. **Tone and urgency.** 92.5% of protest articles are negative in tone (all news: 33.6%), and 81.5% are rated critical priority (all news: 42.6%).
6. **Research and invention.** Papers on protest fell from 2.65 to 2.38 per 10,000 papers between 2015 and 2025, after a peak of 3.26 in 2020. Protest and riot-control patent families peaked at 173 in 2021, and China's office held 817 of the 977 families published in 2015-2024.

Findings stated for citation

- **F1.** Protests' share of news fell 50.9% between 2019 and 2025 (96.18 to 47.19 per 10,000 articles).
- **F2.** June 2020 was the peak month for protest news, at 295.85 articles per 10,000, 3.08 times the 2019 share.
- **F3.** March 2020 was the lowest month, at 29.14 articles per 10,000, down from 70.91 in February 2020.
- **F4.** India's share of located protest news (22.25%) was 1.69 times its share of all news. The United States' (30.23%) was 0.62 times.

- **F5.** Among the 20 leading countries, Nepal (9.66), Bangladesh (9.15), Iran (6.51) and Palestine (6.37) were the most over-represented.
- **F6.** 92.5% of protest articles were negative in tone, 2.75 times the all-news share.
- **F7.** A machine priority rating put 81.5% of protest articles at critical priority, 1.91 times the all-news share.
- **F8.** Columbia University was named in 6,822 protest articles; campus safety had a lift of 30.1.
- **F9.** Protest papers fell 10.2% as a share of all papers between 2015 and 2025.
- **F10.** Protest and riot-control patent families peaked at 173 in 2021; 817 of the 977 families of 2015–2024 were filed in China.
- **F11.** Within India, Manipur (5.12), Ladakh (4.23) and West Bengal (3.06) had the most over-represented protest coverage.
- **F12.** Within the United States, Minnesota (4.42), Oregon (2.24) and Arizona (1.88) had the most over-represented protest coverage; New Jersey (0.1) the least.
- **F13.** Protest coverage as a share of Nepal's news rose 11.48-fold from 2023 to 2025, the largest rise among leading countries.
- **F14.** Protests took 940.73 of every 10,000 Bangladesh-located articles in 2024, 7.09 times 2023.
- **F15.** Protests took 1,983.09 of every 10,000 Iran-located articles in 2022, the highest annual share of any leading country.
- **F16.** Crowd-control methods appeared in 2.28% of themed protest articles, 48.05 times their rate in all news.

1. Introduction

Protests are one of the main ways in which people press claims on governments, employers and institutions. News is often the main public record of a protest: who took part, where, what they wanted and how the authorities responded. Coverage also shapes how a protest is seen. Studies of protest and the media have long argued that attention is uneven, and that the tone of reporting matters as much as its volume. Yet coverage is rarely measured as data in its own right across many countries and years.

This paper and its dataset measure that attention. 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 (74,920 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, a machine-assigned 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 protests when its opening text contains *protest*, *protests*, *protesters*, *protestors*, *demonstrators* or *protest march* as whole words. We did not use the

broad word *demonstration*, which also names product and technology showcases. Several other senses of "protest" are excluded:

- bid protests over public contracts and property-tax or appraisal protests;
- payments made "under protest", formal or diplomatic protests lodged by one government with another, and protest votes;
- protests lodged with sports referees, umpires or race stewards.

These removed 5,682 of 903,570 raw matches (0.63%). One reviewer read 40 randomly drawn matched openings. 39 used protest in the sense of public collective dissent (precision 97.5%), and in 33 (82.5%) a protest or protest movement was the main subject. The one false match was a news-site navigation menu that listed a protest headline above an unrelated story.

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. Geography, tone, priority and themes use January 2023 – July 2026. Geography is expressed as lift: a country's share of protest articles divided by its share of all located articles. For states, the denominator is all located news from that country. Place tags derived from ordinary words (714 words such as "Congress", "Earth" and "Winter") 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 *protest*, *protester*, *protestor*, *demonstrator*, *social movement* or *civil disobedience* in the title. Repository deposits, bid and tax protests, and the engineering and clinical senses of "demonstrator" (technology demonstrators, demonstrator trials) are excluded. Patent families (2005–2024) match *protest*, *riot control*, *anti-riot*, *crowd control*, *crowd dispersal* or *tear gas* in the title, are counted once per filing office, and exclude amusement, queueing and livestock uses of crowd control.

3. Results

3.1 How much and when

The index holds 897,888 protest articles from January 2019 to July 2026. Raw counts rose from 113,566 in 2019 to 127,370 in 2025, but the share of all news halved: 96.18 per 10,000 in 2019, 92.03 in 2020, 60.13 in 2021 and 47.19 in 2025 (Table 1). The share fell 34.66% from 2020 to 2021 alone. The highest monthly share was June 2020, at 295.85 per 10,000 (Figure 1). That is 3.08 times the 2019 annual share, in the month of the George Floyd protests. The lowest was March 2020, at 29.14, down from 70.91 in February, in the month lockdowns began in many countries. Late 2019 was also high: December 2019 reached 171.24 per 10,000.

Year	Protest articles	All articles in index	Per 10,000
2019	113,566	11,807,177	96.18
2020	149,370	16,230,014	92.03
2021	103,906	17,281,220	60.13
2022	105,697	19,115,515	55.29
2023	106,255	20,484,506	51.87
2024	123,774	23,311,896	53.09
2025	127,370	26,990,006	47.19

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

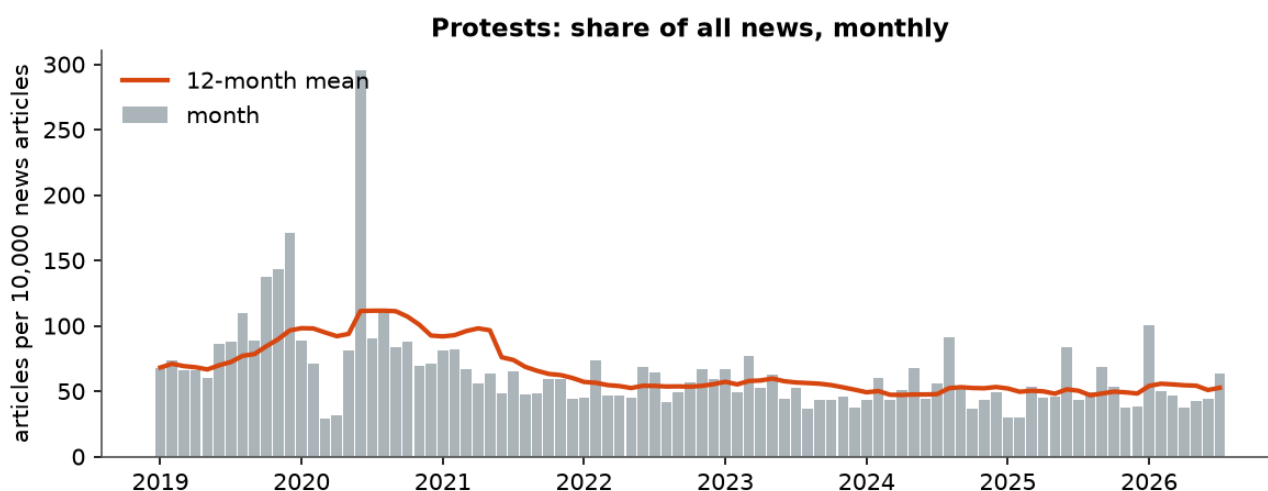


Figure 1. Protest coverage as articles per 10,000 news articles, monthly, January 2019 – July 2026. Bars are months; the line is the 12-month mean.

Unlike weather hazards, protests have little seasonal pattern (Figure 2). June holds 10.53% of a typical year's protest articles, against 8.3% for an even spread, but that average is driven by June 2020. April is the quietest month (6.63%).

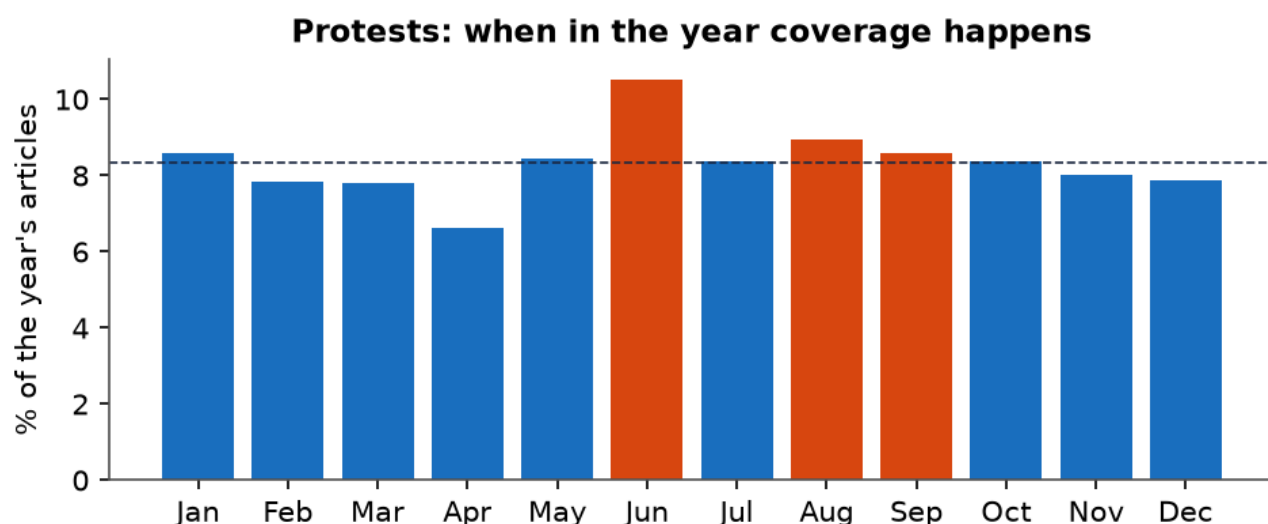


Figure 2. Share of each year's protest articles published in each month, averaged over 2019–2025. Dashed line = an even spread (8.3% per month).

3.2 Where

Between January 2023 and July 2026, 229,946 protest articles carried a primary location. The United States holds the largest raw share (30.23%), but its lift is 0.62: protests take a smaller share of American news than of news overall. India's share (22.25%) comes with a lift of 1.69. Among the 20 leading countries the most over-represented are Nepal (9.66) and Bangladesh (9.15) in South Asia, Iran (6.51), Palestine (6.37) and Israel (5.27) in the Middle East, and Kenya (6.04) in East Africa (Table 2, Figure 3).

Country	Located protest articles	Share %	Lift vs all news
United States	69,505	30.23	0.62
India	51,154	22.25	1.69
United Kingdom	10,138	4.41	0.76
Israel	6,795	2.96	5.27
Nigeria	6,616	2.88	2.1
France	6,497	2.83	1.43
Bangladesh	5,452	2.37	9.15
Pakistan	4,615	2.01	4.43
Iran	4,470	1.94	6.51
Nepal	4,006	1.74	9.66
Australia	3,153	1.37	0.64
China	3,073	1.34	0.51
Kenya	3,049	1.33	6.04
Palestine	3,029	1.32	6.37

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

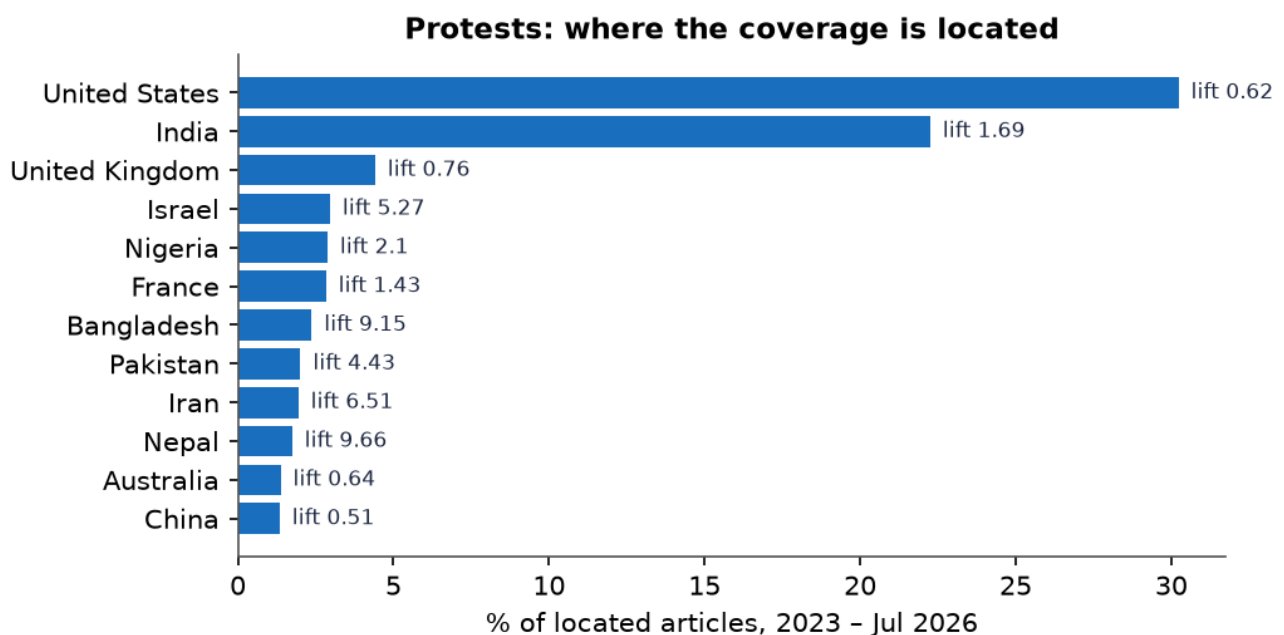


Figure 3. Leading countries by share of located protest articles, 2023 – Jul 2026, labelled with lift against all located news.

3.3 Geo intelligence: continents, states and shifting attention

The world map (Figure 4) shows the pattern at a glance. Protests are over-represented in the news of South Asia, the Middle East, East and West Africa, parts of South America such as Peru (4.15) and Venezuela (3.35), and parts of south-eastern Europe such as Serbia (12.97), and under-represented in North America, Oceania, China (0.51) and Japan (0.32). By continent, Africa (1.91), Asia (1.74) and South America (1.17) are over-represented, while Europe (0.91), Oceania (0.71) and North America (0.6) are not (Figure 7, left).

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

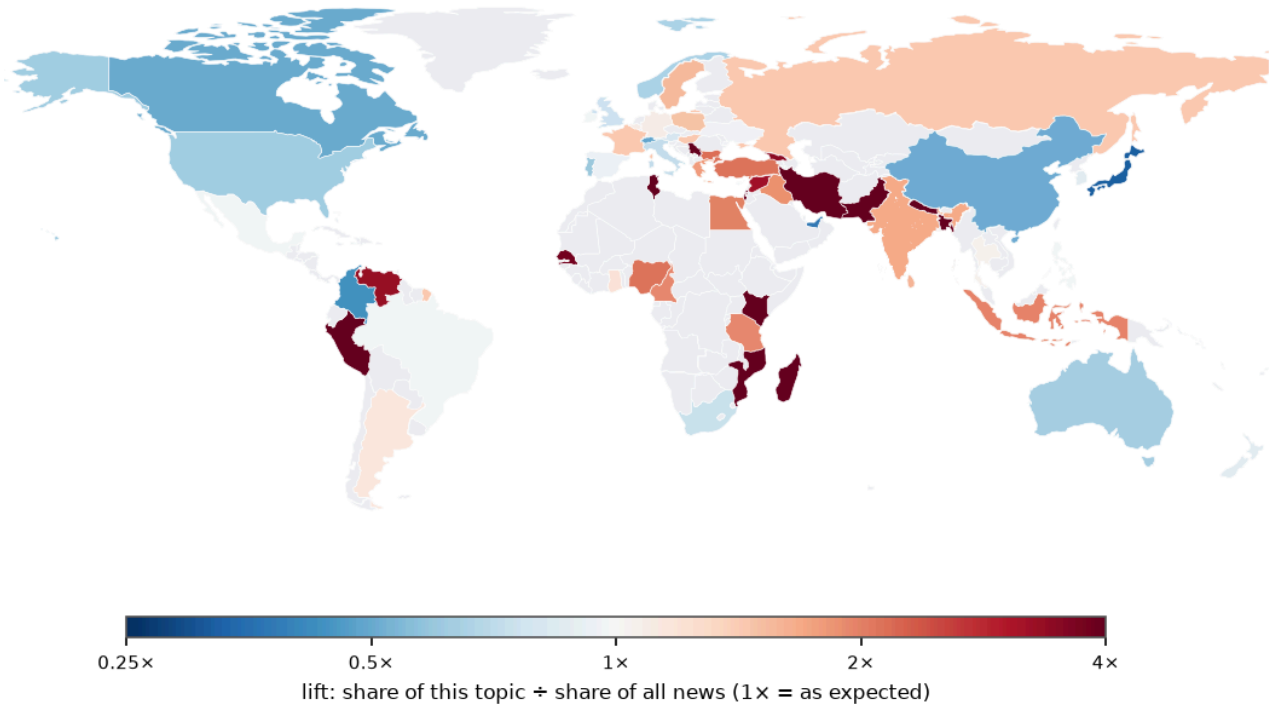


Figure 4. Lift of each country's share of located protest articles, January 2023 – July 2026 (red = over-represented, blue = under-represented, grey = fewer than 100 articles). India is drawn with its official outline.

Within countries, the picture is sharper (Table 3). In India, protest coverage concentrates in the north-east, the Himalayan north and West Bengal. Measured against each state's share of Indian news, Manipur (5.12), Ladakh (4.23), West Bengal (3.06), Punjab (1.84) and Tripura (1.73) are the most over-represented. Gujarat (0.38), Goa (0.6), Maharashtra (0.61), Andhra Pradesh (0.65) and Odisha (0.65) are under-represented, and Uttar Pradesh (0.8) is below its weight despite 4,927 articles (Figure 5). Delhi holds the most articles (7,619) at a lift of 1.21.

In the United States, Minnesota leads by lift (4.42, 3,956 articles), followed by Oregon (2.24, 1,254 articles), Arizona (1.88) and California (1.69). Vermont's lift of 2.16 rests on 128 articles, and about half of its sample rows are stories from elsewhere tagged to Vermont, such as Windsor in England, so it is not ranked. New Jersey (0.1), Hawaii (0.3), Nevada (0.37) and Pennsylvania (0.46) are far below their weight in American news (Figure 6). Before ordinary-word place tags were treated as unlocated, Arizona topped this ranking because Indian stories about the Congress party were tagged to the town of Congress, Arizona, and Mississippi and Kentucky also ranked high. With the rule applied, Arizona's sample rows are mostly tagged to Phoenix and Tempe, Mississippi falls to 0.85 and Kentucky to 1.46.

India: state	Articles	Lift	United States: state	Articles	Lift
Manipur	1,400	5.12	Minnesota	3,956	4.42
Ladakh	489	4.23	Oregon	1,254	2.24
West Bengal	5,175	3.06	Arizona	632	1.88
Punjab	2,271	1.84	California	9,445	1.69
Tripura	194	1.73	Maryland	953	1.67
Mizoram	105	1.38	Tennessee	2,084	1.63
<i>Lowest: Andhra Pradesh</i>	718	0.65	<i>Lowest: Pennsylvania</i>	1,558	0.46
Maharashtra	4,717	0.61	Nevada	211	0.37
Goa	160	0.6	Hawaii	51	0.3
Gujarat	612	0.38	New Jersey	1,039	0.1

Table 3. States with the highest and lowest lift in protest coverage, January 2023 – July 2026, among states with at least 50 located articles. Lift = the state's share of the country's located protest articles ÷ its share of all located news from that country. Place tags derived from ordinary words count as unlocated. Odisha ties Andhra Pradesh at 0.65. Vermont (2.16, 128 articles) is left out because about half of its sample rows are stories from elsewhere, such as Windsor in England, tagged to Vermont.

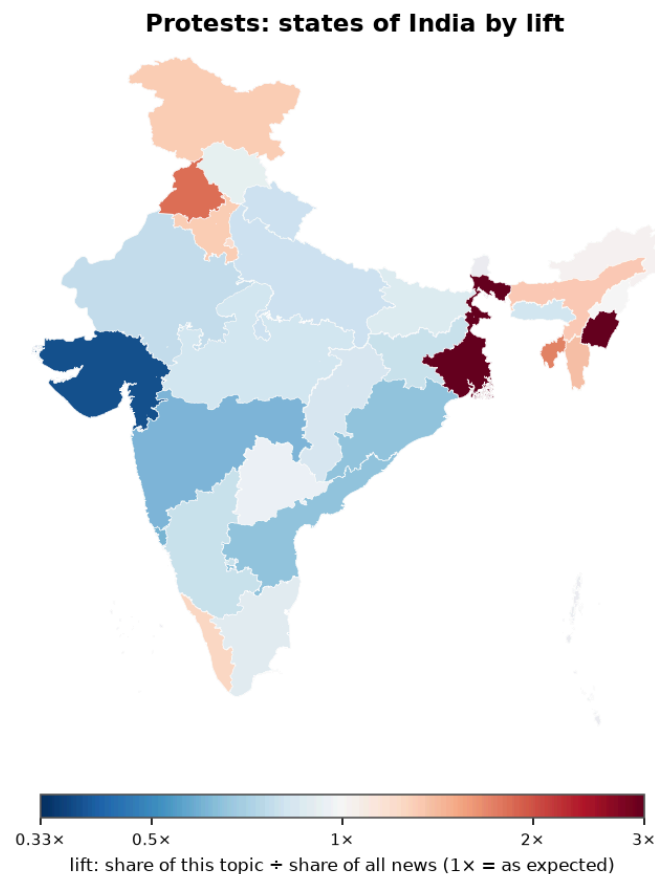


Figure 5. Lift of each Indian state's share of located protest articles against its share of all located Indian news, January 2023 – July 2026. Official outline; Ladakh is drawn within Jammu and Kashmir in the boundary file used.

Attention also moves between countries from year to year (Table 4, Figure 7, right). Measured as protest articles per 10,000 of each country's located news, Nepal rose from 126.95 in 2023 to 1,457.77 in 2025 (11.48 times), Indonesia 4.46 times, Bangladesh 3.58 times and Turkey 3.03 times. In Bangladesh the share peaked in 2024, at 940.73, 7.09 times the 2023 level. Ireland (0.14), France (0.15), Iran (0.18) and China (0.33) fell over the same years. France and Iran fell from high 2023 levels; Iran's share had reached 1,983.09 in 2022, the highest annual share of any of the 25 leading countries between 2019 and 2025.

Table 4. Protest articles per 10,000 of each country's located news, 2023 and 2025, for the countries with the largest rises and falls among the 25 with the most protest coverage.

Protest coverage is negative in tone everywhere, so tone is best read against each country's own news. The gap is widest where news is otherwise mild. Among the 25 countries with the most protest articles it is widest in China, where 94.1% of protest articles are negative against 27.2% of all Chinese news (3.46 times). Just outside the 25, South Korea (95.5% against 25.0%) and Japan (89.8% against 23.3%) show even wider gaps. In the United States the ratio is 2.82 (93.5% against 33.1%). It is smallest where all news is already negative: Palestine (95.7% against 86.1%, 1.11 times), Israel (96.4% against 73.2%) and Iran (96.6% against 72.5%).

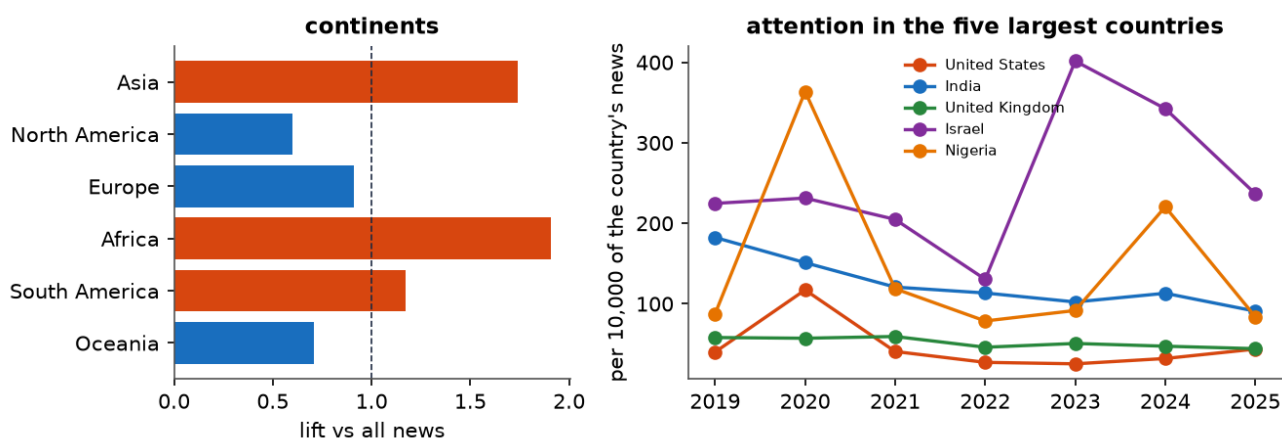


Figure 7. Left: lift by continent, January 2023 – July 2026. Right: protest articles per 10,000 of each country's located news, 2019–2025, for the five countries with the most articles.

3.4 Tone, urgency and themes

Protest coverage is far more negative and more urgent than news in general (Figure 8). Among articles with a tone label, 92.5% are negative, against 33.6% across the index (2.75 times). The machine-assigned priority rating puts 81.5% of protest articles at critical level (7 or higher), against 42.6% of all news (1.91 times).

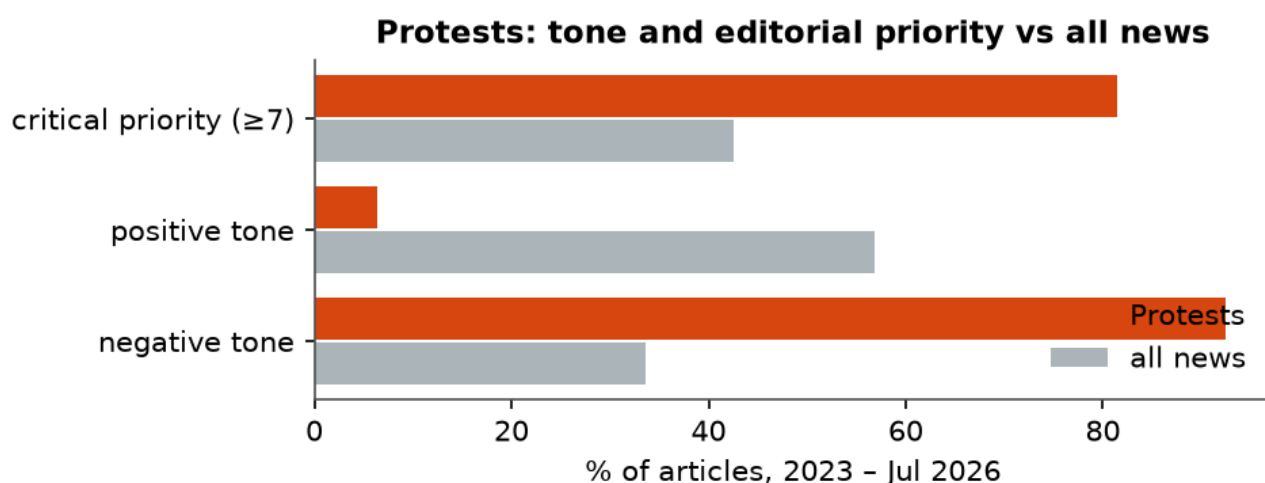


Figure 8. Tone and the share rated critical priority, protest articles vs all news, 2023 – Jul 2026.

Themes show what protest stories are about (Table 5). Political activism is the most common theme (13.6% of themed articles), followed by civil rights and liberties (11.38%). Crowd-control methods appear in 2.28%, 48.05 times their rate in all news, and campus safety in 3.83%, 30.1 times.

Theme	Articles	Share %	Lift
social justice movements and campaigns	7,734	3.87	69.86
crowd control methods	4,551	2.28	48.05
political activism and protests	27,161	13.6	34.25
campus safety and security measures	7,655	3.83	30.1
civil rights and liberties debates	22,728	11.38	23.71
revolutionary uprisings and coups	4,509	2.26	22.79
grassroots political movements	14,206	7.11	22.68
labor rights and union movements	10,629	5.32	18.17

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

Apart from news agencies, outlets and social platforms, the organisation named most often is Columbia University (6,822 articles), a centre of the 2024 campus protests over the Gaza war. It is followed by the United States Department of Homeland Security (5,860), Amnesty International (2,824), Harvard University (2,501) and the American Civil Liberties Union (2,357). Some organisation labels are entity-linking errors, so the list is not analysed further.

3.5 Research attention and invention

Research on protest did not keep pace with the scientific literature. Papers with protest or social movement terms in the title rose to 3.26 per 10,000 papers in 2020, then fell to 2.38 in 2025, below the 2015 level of 2.65 (a 10.2% fall in share, and 27.0% below the 2020 peak). Between 2015 and 2025, 20,173 such papers were published. The most-cited include reviews of emotion in social movements [1] and of the political consequences of movements [3], and studies of protest on social media [2, 5, 6].

News attention and research attention both peaked around 2020 and both fell after it (Figure 9). The news share fell further and faster.

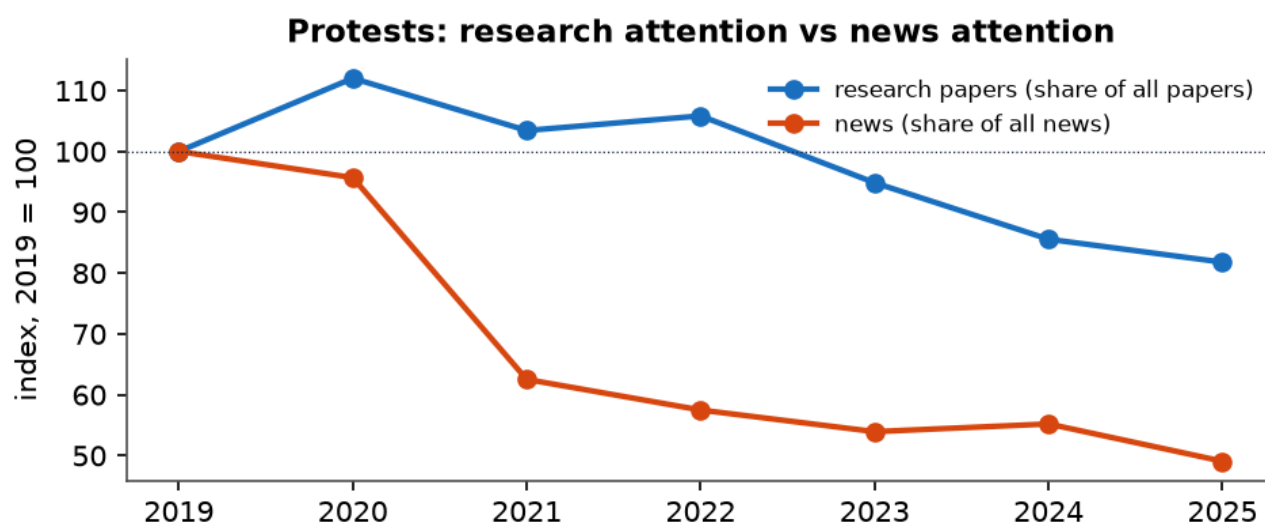


Figure 9. Research papers on protest and social movements (share of all papers) and protest news (share of all news), each indexed to 2019 = 100.

The patent side is small. Protest and riot-control patent families rose from 59 in 2015 to 173 in 2021 (2.93 times), then fell to 79 in 2024, 54.3% below the peak. Of the 977 families from 2015 to 2024, 817 were filed at China's office. Counting each family once per office, China holds 87.5% of office filings, followed by the United States (2.9%) and South Korea (2.8%) (Figure 10). The leading technology classes are projectile launchers and armour (F41B and F41H, 36 families each) and ammunition (F42B, 19).

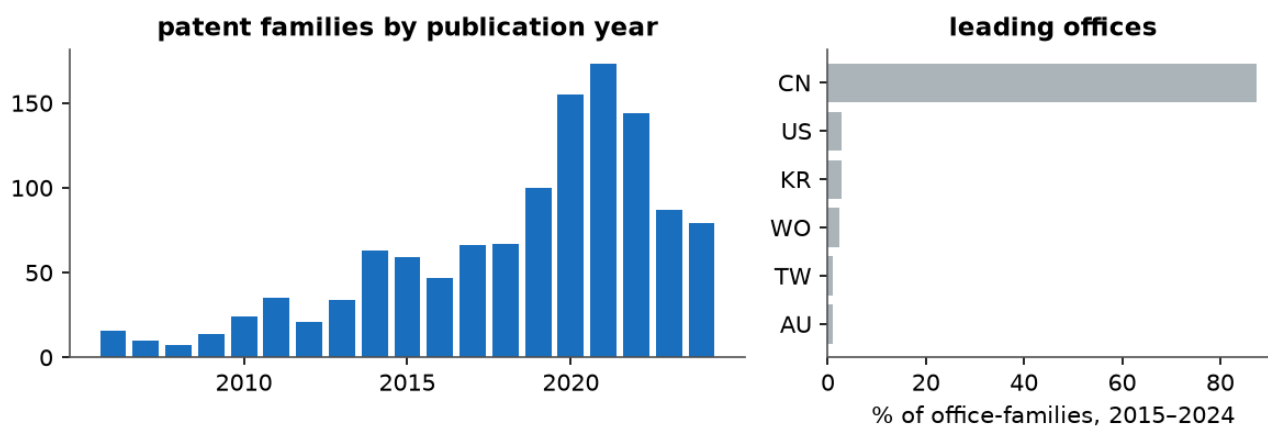


Figure 10. Protest and riot-control patent families by publication year (left) and the leading filing offices, 2015–2024 (right).

4. Discussion

Three points matter for anyone who uses news as a record of protest. First, coverage measures attention, not mobilisation. The June 2020 peak and the March 2020 trough reflect what else was in the news and where the press is dense, not a count of protests. Second, raw shares mislead. The United States leads protest news in raw terms but is under-represented relative to its weight in the index. Countries that went through large protest waves (Nepal, Bangladesh, Iran) are where protests take the largest share of attention, and the share can rise more than tenfold within two years. Third, the location tags need checking. Before place tags derived from ordinary words were treated as unlocated, Indian stories about the Congress party placed in Congress, Arizona, made Arizona look like the most protest-heavy American state. With that rule applied, Minnesota leads clearly, at 4.42, and Arizona falls to 1.88.

The long fall in protests' share of news, from 96.18 to 47.19 per 10,000 between 2019 and 2025, needs care. Part of it may come from the index adding outlets that cover business, sport and local services, which lowers every political topic's share. Part of it may be real: 2019 and 2020 were years of large protest waves in many countries. The dataset allows the two to be separated, for example by holding the outlet set fixed.

Research, invention and news run on different clocks. Research share moves slowly and fell after 2020. Patenting on riot control is small and concentrated in one office. News follows the big events. The dataset lets researchers link the three, for example to test whether heavily covered protest waves are followed by research on the countries concerned.

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 (January–July) is partial and is excluded from year comparisons. The index also grew sharply in January 2025, which lowers the monthly share for early 2025.
- **Matching.** Matching uses the article opening. Articles that mention protests only later are missed, and about 2.5% of matches are not about protests. Articles that use only "demonstration" or "rally" are missed.

- **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 (such as "Congress", once tagged to Congress, Arizona) were treated as unlocated, which removes 15.3% of city-tagged articles and lowers located counts.
- **Outlet mix.** The index over-represents English-language outlets and Indian and American outlets. This shapes geography.
- **Research and patent counts.** These match titles only. The patent side covers riot-control equipment, which is related to protest policing but is not protest itself.

Data availability

The dataset (article sample, monthly and country tables, research and patent tables, all metrics) is released under CC BY-NC 4.0 with this paper. The sample holds 74,920 of 897,548 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 "protest" --since 2019-01-01 --until 2026-07-31 --granularity monthly`.

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