

Road Traffic Accidents in the News, 2019-2026: Attention, Geography and Tone of Global Crash Coverage, and How It Compares with Research and Invention

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Abstract

We measure how road traffic accidents were covered in a global news index from January 2019 to July 2026, using 257,106 de-duplicated road accident articles, and set that coverage beside 10,521 research papers and 4,217 patent families on road crashes. Six results stand out:

1. **Attention, not occurrence.** Road accidents took a 44.47% smaller share of news in 2020 than in 2019. The lowest month was April 2020, at 7.05 articles per 10,000. The share has not regained its 2019 level (19.99 per 10,000 in 2019, 16.93 in 2025).
2. **No strong season.** Unlike floods or heat, crash coverage is spread almost evenly. January (9.34%) and December (9.16%) are the busiest months, June (7.44%) the quietest.
3. **Geography.** India's share of located road accident news is 2.09 times its share of all news. The United States, the largest source (38.42%), is under-represented at 0.79. Austria (4.2), Portugal (3.27), Kenya (2.98), Nepal (2.85) and Bangladesh (2.6) are the most over-represented of the 25 leading countries. Within India, Chhattisgarh (1.96), Uttarakhand (1.84) and Jharkhand (1.76) lead; within the United States, Connecticut (2.7), Florida (1.88) and South Carolina (1.77).
4. **Tone and urgency.** 88.1% of road accident articles are negative in tone (all news: 33.6%), and 82.3% are rated critical priority (all news: 42.6%).
5. **Measurement.** 2.32% of raw matches were law-firm marketing pages or figurative uses. One batch of such pages, published on a single day, produced a false January 2024 peak before it was excluded.
6. **Research and invention.** Road crash papers grew from 1.18 to 1.7 per 10,000 papers between 2015 and 2025 (1.44-fold). Patent families grew 2.31-fold from 2015 to 2024, and China's patent office held 69.7% of them.

Findings stated for citation

- **F1.** Road accidents took a 44.47% smaller share of news in 2020 than in 2019 (11.1 vs 19.99 per 10,000 articles).
- **F2.** April 2020 was the lowest month for road accident news (7.05 per 10,000); December 2024 the highest (22.85).
- **F3.** January (9.34%) and December (9.16%) together held 18.5% of a typical year's coverage.
- **F4.** India's share of located road accident news (27.61%) was 2.09 times its share of all news. The United States' (38.42%) was 0.79 times.

- **F5.** Of the 25 countries with the most located articles, Austria (4.2), Portugal (3.27), Kenya (2.98), Nepal (2.85) and Bangladesh (2.6) were the most over-represented.
- **F6.** 88.1% of road accident articles were negative in tone, 2.62 times the all-news share.
- **F7.** 82.3% of road accident articles were rated critical priority, 1.93 times the all-news share.
- **F8.** The legal consequences of drunk or drugged driving were a theme of 0.64% of themed articles, 27.07 times their frequency in all themed news.
- **F9.** 2.32% of raw road-crash vocabulary matches were law-firm marketing pages or figurative uses.
- **F10.** Road crash papers rose 1.44-fold as a share of all papers between 2015 and 2025.
- **F11.** Road crash patent families grew 2.31-fold from 2015 to 2024; China's patent office held 69.7%.
- **F12.** Within India, Chhattisgarh (1.96), Uttarakhand (1.84) and Jharkhand (1.76) had the most over-represented coverage.
- **F13.** Within the United States, Connecticut (2.7), Florida (1.88) and South Carolina (1.77) had the most over-represented coverage.
- **F14.** Road accident coverage as a share of Portugal's news rose 12.09-fold from 2023 to 2025.
- **F15.** Asia (1.42) and Africa (1.18) were over-represented by continent; North America and Europe (0.84 each) were under-represented.

1. Introduction

Road traffic crashes are among the leading causes of death worldwide, and most of them are reported, if at all, in local news. A crash report is often the only public record of where it happened and who was involved. Coverage also shapes what the public and policy-makers treat as a problem. Yet road crash coverage is rarely measured as data in its own right. Police and health statistics record crashes. Bibliometric studies record research. Few sources record attention, meaning how much of the news road crashes 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 (64,612 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 road accidents when its opening text contains one of 23 terms as whole words: *road accident(s)*, *road crash(es)*, *traffic accident(s)*, *road traffic accident(s)*, *traffic collision(s)*, *car crash(es)*, *car accident(s)*, *road deaths*, *road fatalities*, *traffic deaths*, *traffic fatalities*, *hit-and-run*, *bus accident*, *truck accident*, *motorcycle accident* and *head-on collision*. Two families of matches are excluded:

- law-firm marketing pages, such as "were you injured in a car accident in..." or "what to do after a truck accident";
- figurative uses ("a political car crash", "like watching a car crash", "a head-on collision between technology and...").

Together these removed 6,119 of 263,225 raw matches (2.32%). Without them, a single day of marketing pages from Texas in January 2024 created the highest month of the period. One reviewer read 40 randomly drawn matched openings, and a second reviewer re-judged them. 37 used the term for a road traffic crash in a news report (precision 92.5%), and in 32 (80%) a crash or road safety was the main subject. The three false positives were a listicle about "predicting car accidents", a "hit-and-run attack" that was not a road crash, and an injury-lawyer marketing page that escaped the exclusion patterns.

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. Geography is expressed as lift: a country's share of road accident articles divided by its share of all located articles. The same rule gives state lift within India and the United States. Place tags derived from ordinary words (714 words such as "Congress", "Earth", "Winter", "Cloud", "Mobile" and "Hurricane") were treated as unlocated in every location field (15.3% of city-tagged articles).

Research and patents. Research papers are de-duplicated articles and reviews (2000–2025) with a road crash term in the title, such as *road accident*, *traffic crash*, *road traffic injury* or *motor vehicle collision*. Network, air, rail and maritime senses of "traffic" are excluded. Patent families (2005–2024) match *traffic accident*, *road accident*, *car accident*, *vehicle accident*, *vehicle collision* or *car crash* in the title, are counted once per filing office, and exclude aircraft, rail, ship, robot and network senses.

3. Results

3.1 How much and when

The index holds 257,106 road accident articles from January 2019 to July 2026. Raw counts rose from 23,601 in 2019 to 45,690 in 2025, but the share of all news did not: 19.99 per 10,000 in 2019, 19.56 in 2024 and 16.93 in 2025 (Table 1). The low point was 2020, at 11.1 per 10,000. That is 44.47% below 2019; 2020 was the year of the first COVID-19 lockdowns. The data do not show why the share fell. The lowest month was April 2020, at 7.05 per 10,000; the highest month between 2019 and 2025 was December 2024, at 22.85 (Figure 1). The 2026 values look higher, but they rest on a thinning index and are not compared.

Year	Road accident articles	All articles in index	Per 10,000
2019	23,601	11,807,177	19.99
2020	18,013	16,230,014	11.1
2021	24,283	17,281,220	14.05
2022	31,326	19,115,515	16.39
2023	33,976	20,484,506	16.59
2024	45,602	23,311,896	19.56
2025	45,690	26,990,006	16.93

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

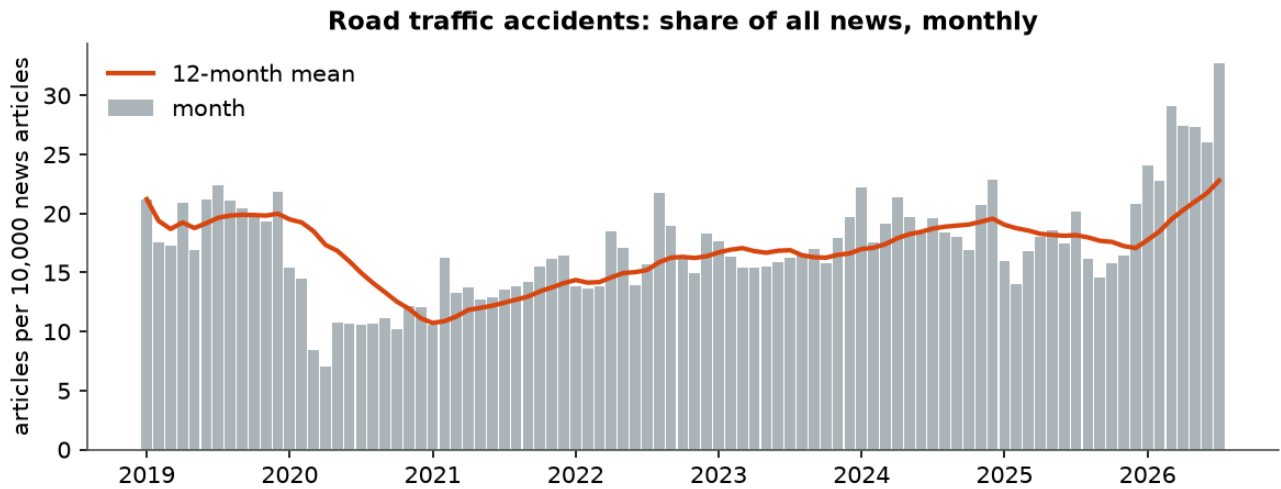


Figure 1. Road accident coverage as articles per 10,000 news articles, monthly, January 2019 – July 2026. Bars are months; the line is the 12-month mean.

Road crashes happen all year, and so does their coverage (Figure 2). January (9.34%) and December (9.16%) are the busiest months and together hold 18.5% of a typical year's articles. June is the quietest (7.44%). The difference between the busiest and quietest month is small next to seasonal hazards. The winter rise falls in the holiday season of the Northern Hemisphere, whose outlets dominate the index; the data do not test whether holiday travel explains it.

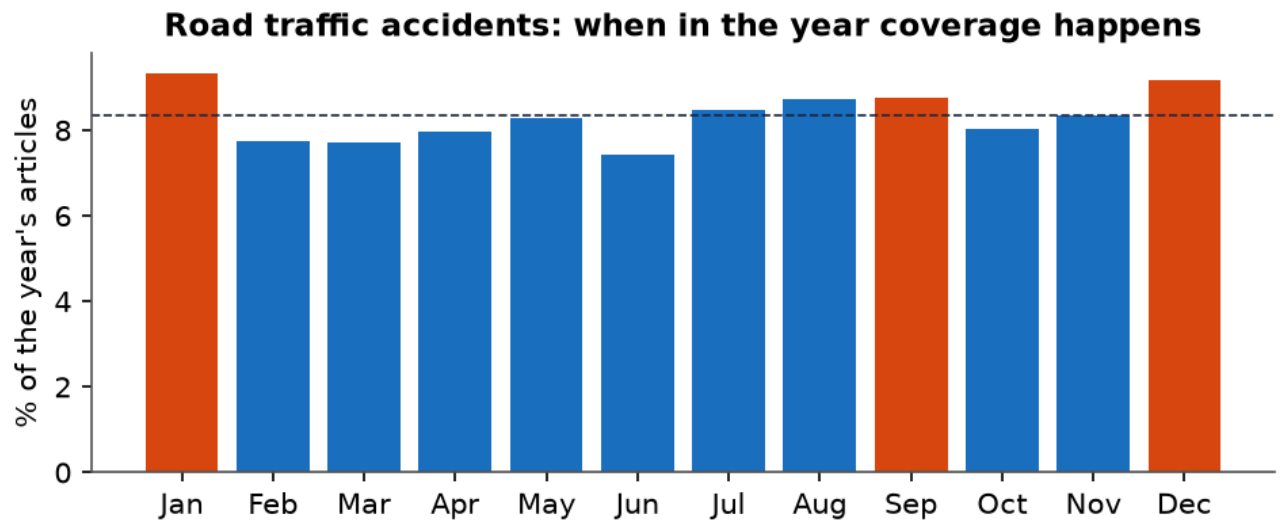


Figure 2. Share of each year's road accident articles published in each month, averaged over 2019–2025. Dashed line = an even spread (8.3% per month).

3.2 Where

Between January 2023 and July 2026, 66,232 road accident articles carried a primary location (41.43% of the 159,875 articles in that window). The United States holds the largest raw share (38.42%), but its lift is 0.79: road crashes take a smaller share of American news than of news overall. India's share (27.61%) comes with a lift of 2.09. Among the 25 countries with the most coverage, Austria (4.2), Portugal (3.27), Kenya (2.98), Nepal (2.85) and Bangladesh (2.6) are the most over-represented, and China (0.17), Canada (0.47) and France (0.51) the most under-represented (Table 2, Figure 3). Outside that group, the Central African Republic also shows a high lift (2.81), but its tag appears to come from the word "car" and is not interpreted.

Country	Located articles	Share %	Lift vs all news
United States	25,446	38.42	0.79
India	18,287	27.61	2.09
United Kingdom	3,381	5.1	0.87
Australia	1,300	1.96	0.92
Germany	1,282	1.94	1.65
Nigeria	975	1.47	1.07
Japan	866	1.31	1.23
Ireland	850	1.28	1.78
France	669	1.01	0.51
Canada	662	1.0	0.47
Austria	654	0.99	4.2
Bangladesh	447	0.67	2.6
Kenya	433	0.65	2.98
Portugal	408	0.62	3.27
Nepal	341	0.51	2.85

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

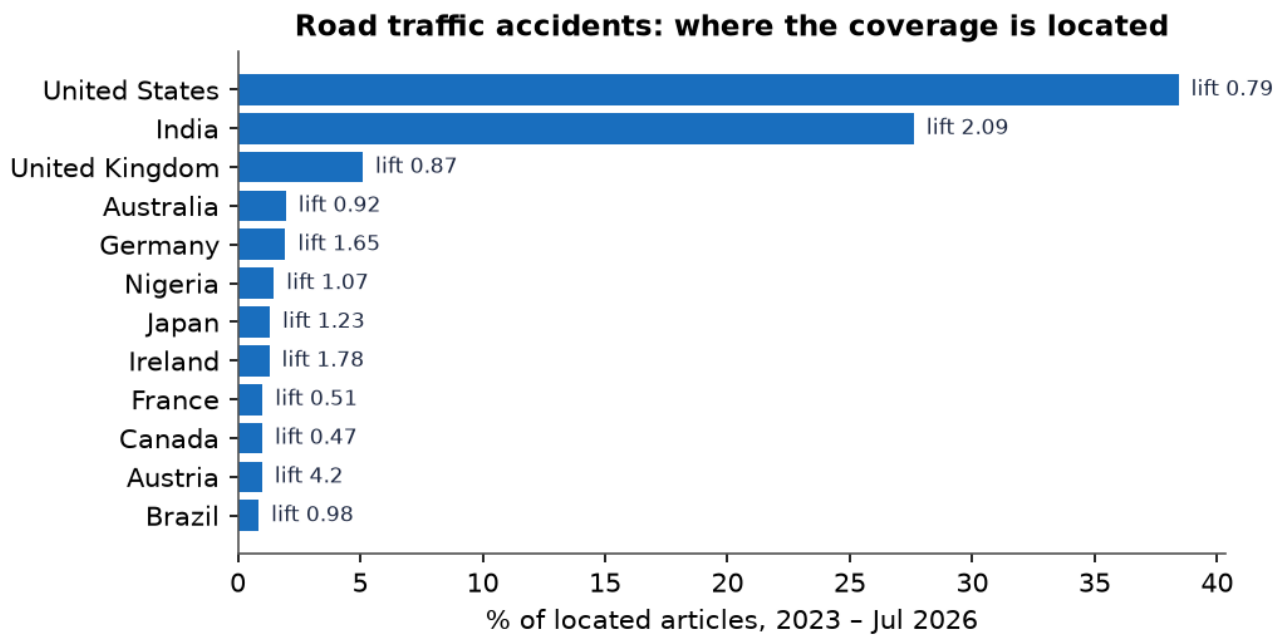


Figure 3. Leading countries by share of located road accident articles, 2023 – Jul 2026, labelled with lift against all located news.

3.3 Geo intelligence: continents, states and shifting attention

The world map (Figure 4) shows the pattern at a glance. Road crashes are over-represented in the news of South Asia, East and West Africa, Austria and Portugal, and under-represented in North America, France, Russia, China, South Korea and much of Southeast Asia. By continent, Asia (1.42) and Africa (1.18) are over-represented. Oceania (0.98), South America (0.93), North America (0.84) and Europe (0.84) are close to or below their weight (Figure 7, left).

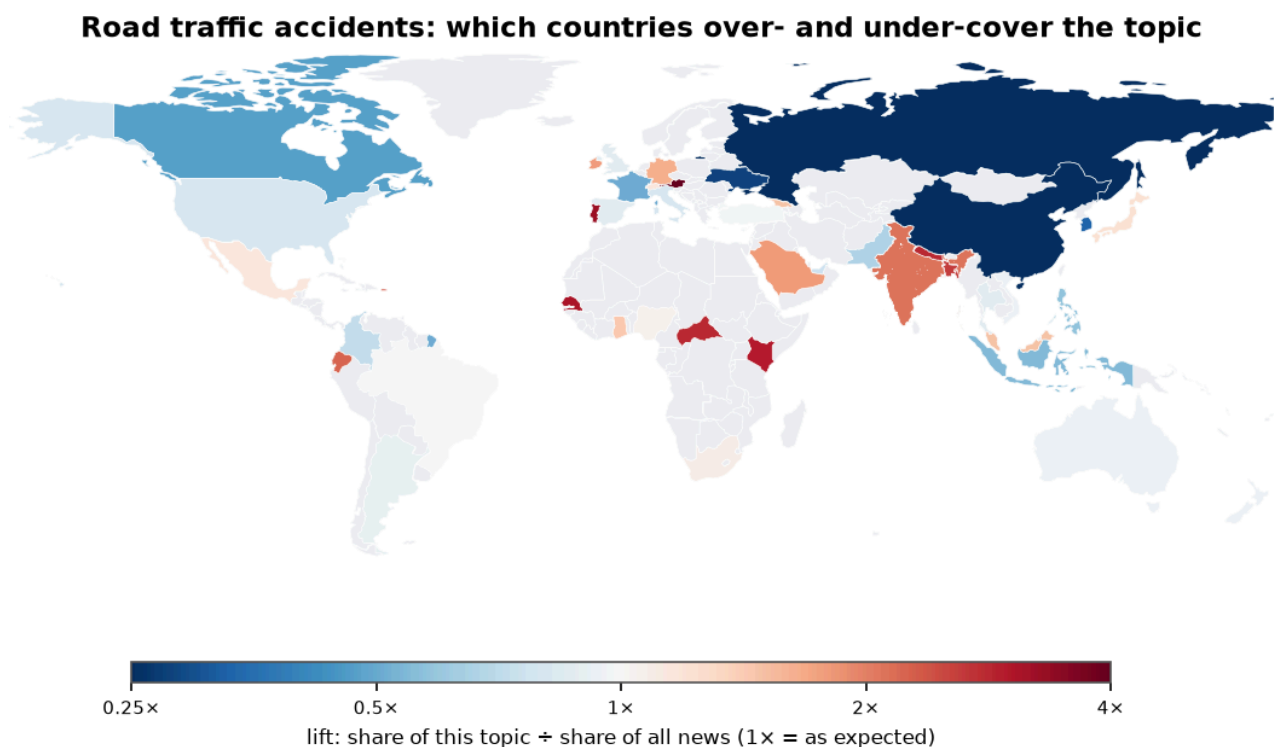


Figure 4. Lift of each country's share of located road accident articles, January 2023 – July 2026 (red = over-represented, blue = under-represented, grey = fewer than 100 articles). India is drawn with its official outline.

Within countries, the spread is narrower than for weather hazards, but clear (Table 3). In India, road accident coverage is concentrated in the hill states and in central and eastern states. Measured against each state's share of Indian news, Chhattisgarh (1.96), Uttarakhand (1.84), Jharkhand (1.76), Himachal Pradesh (1.6) and Madhya Pradesh (1.56) are the most over-represented. West Bengal (0.39), Gujarat (0.57), Delhi (0.59) and Tamil Nadu (0.6) are under-represented. Uttar Pradesh has the most articles (2,915) and a lift of 1.31 (Figure 5). In the United States, among states with at least 150 articles, Connecticut (2.7), Florida (1.88), South Carolina (1.77), Colorado and Louisiana (1.76 each) lead by lift, and California, with the most articles (3,993), has a lift of 1.71. New Jersey (0.14), Pennsylvania (0.58) and New York (0.6) are far below their weight in American news (Figure 6). In the first build, Maryland had the highest lift of any state (6.25) because the index read the word "accident" as the town of Accident, Maryland; with ordinary-word place tags treated as unlocated, Maryland's lift is 1.38. New Hampshire (2.35) and Nebraska (2.1) also show high lifts, but most of their sampled rows are crashes elsewhere, tagged through shared place names (Derry, Portsmouth, Lincoln) or personal names, so they are left out of Table 3 and are not interpreted.

India: state	Articles	Lift	United States: state	Articles	Lift
Chhattisgarh	464	1.96	Connecticut	445	2.7
Uttarakhand	722	1.84	Florida	2,375	1.88
Jharkhand	750	1.76	South Carolina	271	1.77
Himachal Pradesh	378	1.6	Colorado	801	1.76
Madhya Pradesh	807	1.56	Louisiana	184	1.76
Andhra Pradesh	539	1.35	Alabama	410	1.53
... lowest ...			... lowest ...		
Tamil Nadu	527	0.6	Washington	433	0.71
Delhi	1,334	0.59	New York	1,635	0.6
Gujarat	332	0.57	Pennsylvania	810	0.58
West Bengal	241	0.39	New Jersey	600	0.14

Table 3. States with the most and the least over-represented road accident coverage, January 2023 – July 2026. Lift = the state's share of the country's located road accident articles ÷ its share of all located news from that country. US states with fewer than 150 articles are omitted, as are New Hampshire and Nebraska, whose tags mostly come from shared place names (see text).

Road traffic accidents: states of India by lift

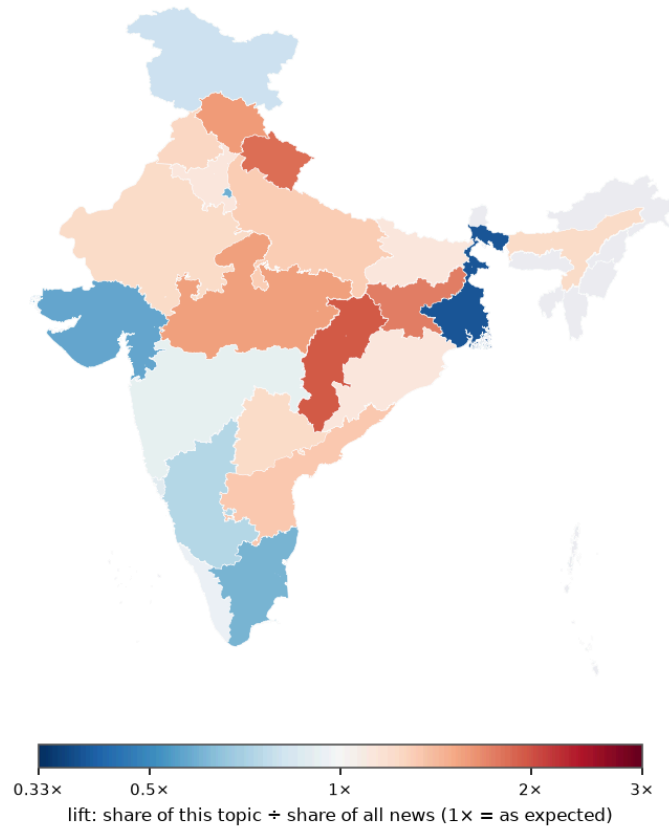


Figure 5. Lift of each Indian state's share of located road accident articles against its share of all located Indian news, January 2023 – July 2026. Official outline; Ladakh is drawn within Jammu and Kashmir in the boundary file used.

Road traffic accidents: states of United States by lift

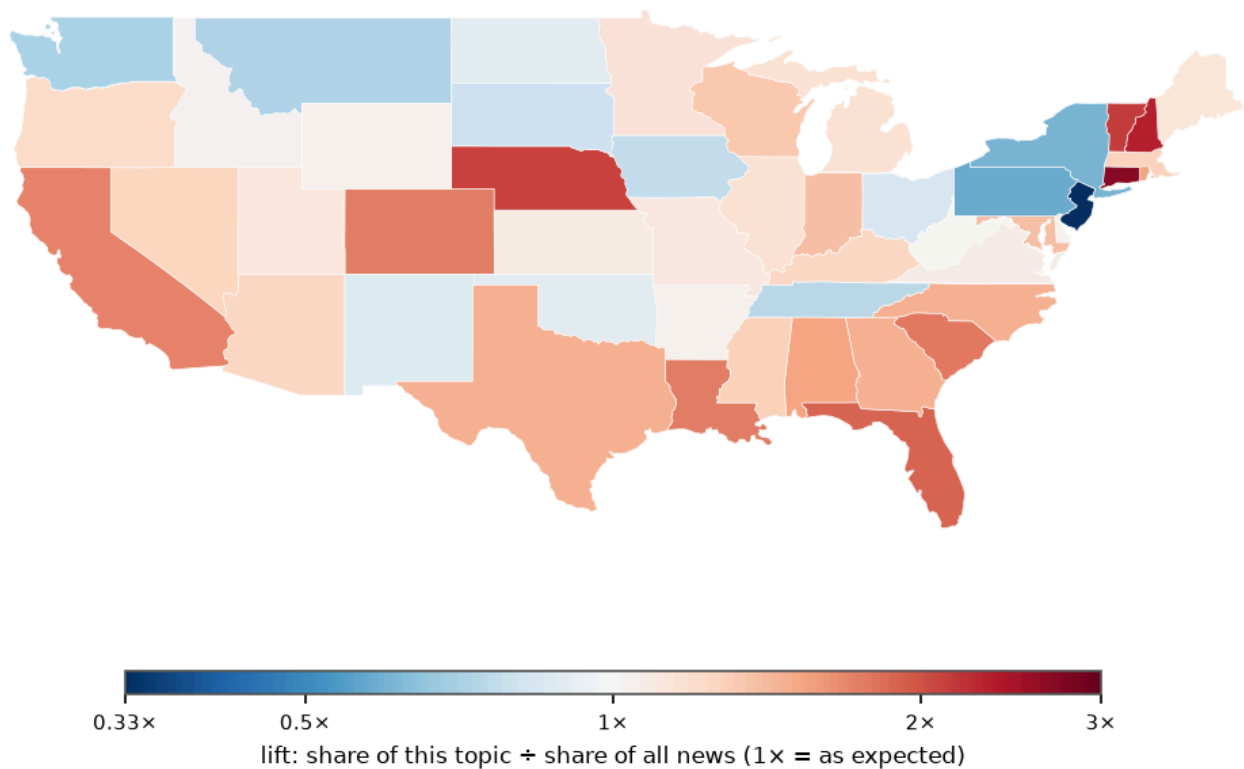


Figure 6. Lift of each US state's share of located road accident articles against its share of all located US news, January 2023 – July 2026.

Attention also moves between countries from year to year (Figure 7, right). Measured as road accident articles per 10,000 of each country's located news, Portugal rose from 9.56 in 2023 to 115.6 in 2025 (12.09 times). Most of the Portuguese articles in the 2025 sample fall in July, the month footballer Diogo Jota and his brother died in a car crash; in 2026 (January-July) the share is back at 6.9. Spain rose 4.49 times, Nigeria 2.11 times and the United Arab Emirates 1.93 times. Ireland fell from 58.54 to 13.3 (0.23 times), but the fall is concentrated in 2025 and the partial 2026 value (31.39) is higher again, which points to a change in the Irish outlets collected rather than in attention. Canada and Australia (0.62 each), Austria and France (0.65 each) also fell. India's share held almost level (32.04 to 32.88), and the United States' fell from 14.26 to 10.76 (0.75).

Road accident coverage is negative in tone everywhere, so tone is best read against each country's own news. Relative to that baseline, Japan stands out among the 15 countries with the most coverage: 83.4% of its road accident articles are negative against 23.3% of its news overall (3.58 times). Italy (93.3% against 29.4%, 3.17 times) and Canada (83.6% against 27.1%, 3.08 times) follow. The smallest gaps are France's (87.0% against 47.6%, 1.83 times), Ghana's (83.0% against 43.3%, 1.92 times) and Nigeria's (85.7% against 44.4%, 1.93 times), where all news is already more negative. India (88.4% against 41.2%, 2.15 times) and the United States (85.0% against 33.1%, 2.57 times) sit between.

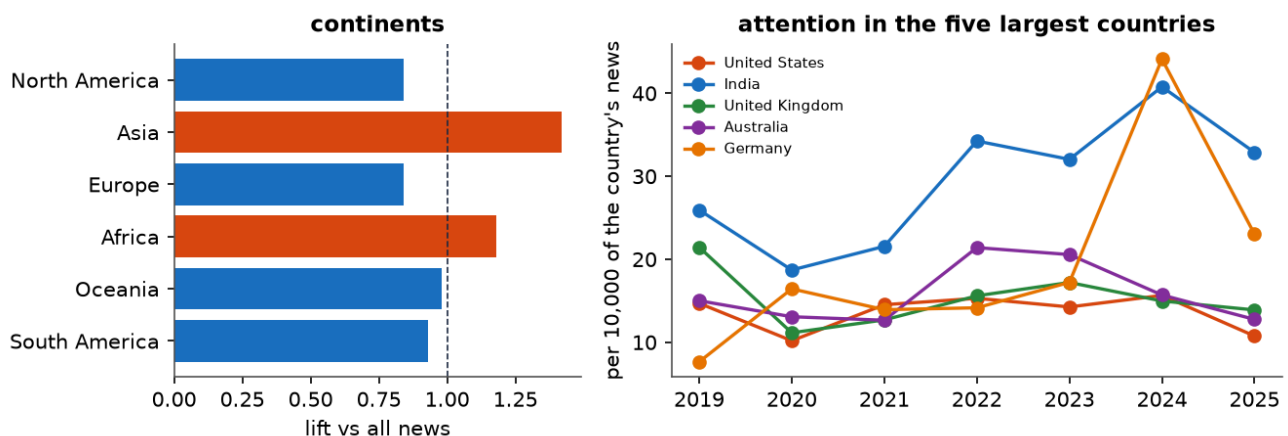


Figure 7. Left: lift by continent, January 2023 – July 2026. Right: road accident articles per 10,000 of each country's located news, 2019–2025, for the five countries with the most articles.

3.4 Tone, urgency and themes

Road accident coverage is far more negative and more urgent than news in general (Figure 8). Among articles with a tone label, 88.1% are negative, against 33.6% across the index (2.62 times). A machine-assigned priority rating puts 82.3% of road accident articles at critical level (7 or higher), against 42.6% of all news (1.93 times).

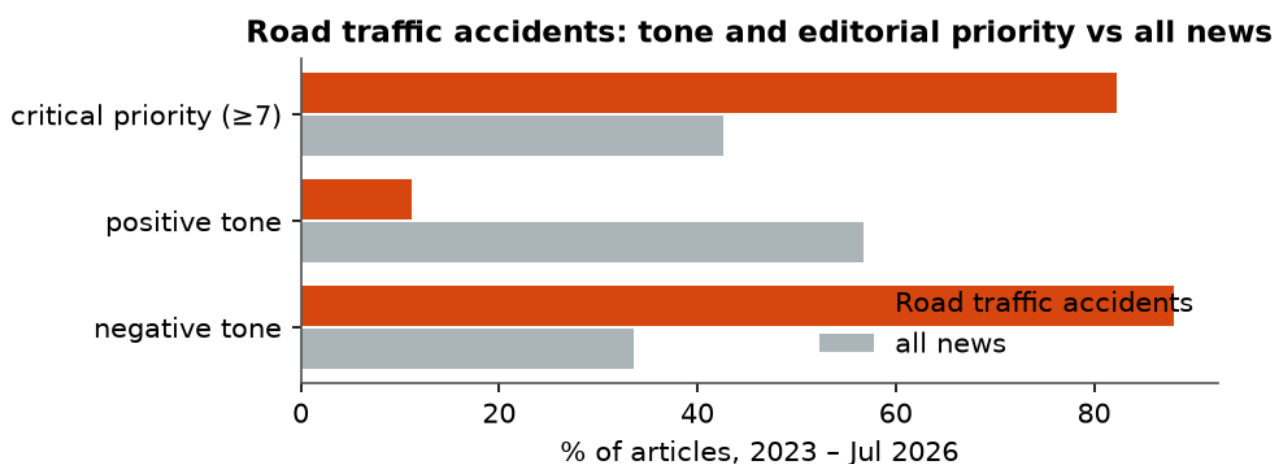


Figure 8. Tone and the share rated critical priority, road accident articles vs all news, 2023 – Jul 2026.

Themes show what crash stories are about (Table 4). Most articles carry the broad theme of transport crashes (69.61% of themed articles). Road safety issues appear in 14.14% and accidental deaths in 11.52%. Smaller themes are highly specific to the topic: duties to report an accident, liability claims, child car seats, pedestrian right of way and the legal consequences of drunk or drugged driving (0.64%, 27.07 times its rate in all themed news).

Theme	Articles	Share %	Lift
accident reporting legal obligations	726	0.67	110.9
traffic accidents and road safety issues	15,232	14.14	88.01
road safety inspection protocols	1,067	0.99	79.1
transportation-related crashes and derailments	74,991	69.61	71.08
accidental deaths and fatalities	12,406	11.52	51.27
child car seat safety laws	371	0.34	35.09
dui/dwi legal consequences	693	0.64	27.07
pedestrian right-of-way laws	534	0.5	25.79

Table 4. Themes most specific to road accident coverage (lift against all themed news), January 2023 – July 2026.

The organisations named most often are not road-safety bodies. Car makers lead (Toyota, 2,267 articles; Ford, 1,539; Chevrolet, 1,321), because crash reports name the vehicles involved, followed by social platforms that carry crash videos. The list measures reporting habits more than the policy response.

3.5 Research attention and invention

Research on road crashes grew faster than the scientific literature. Papers with a road crash term in the title rose from 1.18 per 10,000 papers in 2015 to 1.7 in 2025, a 1.44-fold increase in share, while the total literature in the corpus grew by a factor of 1.0 over the same years. Between 2015 and 2025, 10,521 such papers were published (17,289 since 2000). The most-cited include studies of the factors behind crashes [1], of drug and cannabis use as a crash risk [2, 3], of road crashes as a public-health problem, including in India [4, 5], of the pandemic's effect on collisions [6] and of the economic cost of crashes [7].

News attention does not track research attention (Figure 9). Research share rose in most years, while news share fell sharply in 2020 and was still below its 2019 level in 2025.

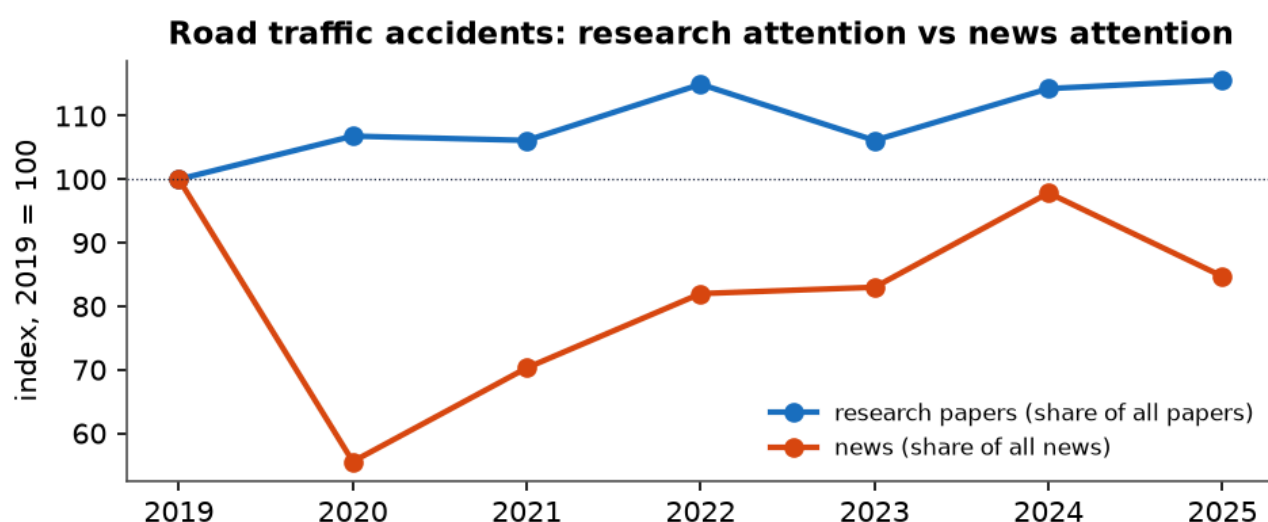


Figure 9. Research papers with road crash terms in the title (share of all papers) and road accident news (share of all news), each indexed to 2019 = 100.

Patenting rose faster still: 232 traffic-accident and vehicle-collision patent families were published in 2015 and 536 in 2024 (2.31 times). China's office holds 69.7% of families from 2015 to 2024, followed by South Korea (10.9%) and the United States (7.0%) (Figure 10). The leading technology classes are traffic control systems (G08G, 718 families), vehicle driving control (B60W, 265) and data processing for administration (G06Q, 242), which reflects work on crash detection, warning and insurance handling.

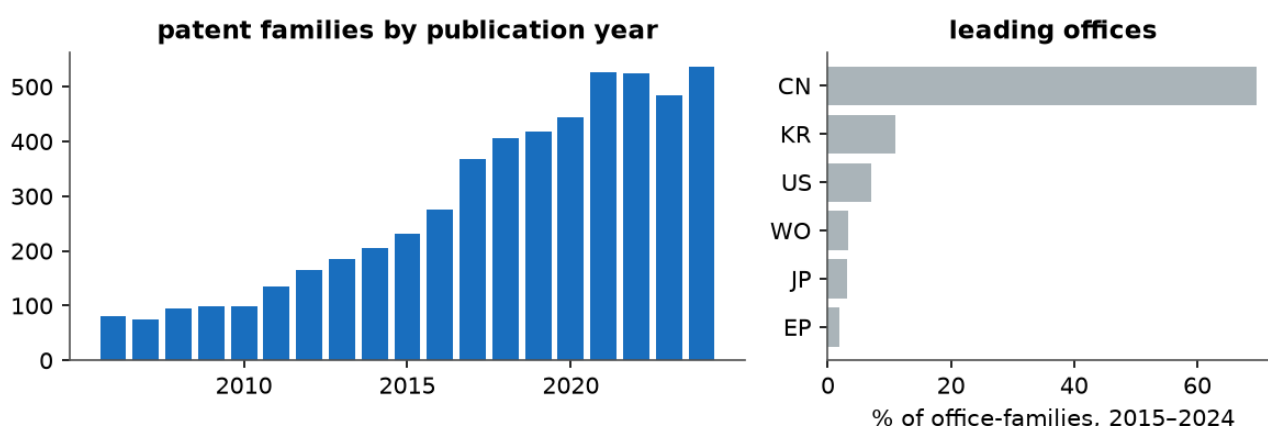


Figure 10. Traffic-accident and vehicle-collision patent families by publication year (left) and the leading filing offices, 2015–2024 (right).

4. Discussion

Three points matter for anyone who uses news as a record of road crashes. First, coverage measures attention. The 2020 trough fell in the first year of the pandemic, and the share was still below its 2019 level in 2025; the data do not show whether fewer crashes or a crowded news agenda caused it. Coverage is not a count of crashes. Second, raw shares mislead. The United States leads crash news in raw terms but is under-represented relative to its weight in the index. In India, crashes take a large share of attention, and within India the hill states and several central and eastern states stand out. Third, a keyword search for crash news returns content that is not journalism. Law-firm marketing pages are few in total, but they arrive in batches, and one batch was enough to create a false peak month.

Place tagging needs the same care. In the first build, ordinary words read as place names produced two of the largest lifts, Maryland ("accident") and the Central African Republic

("car"), and pushed Arizona to the bottom of the US ranking. Treating ordinary-word place tags as unlocated removed 15.3% of city-tagged articles, dissolved the Maryland and Arizona artefacts and moved Austria to the top of the country ranking; the Central African Republic tag remains. Any geographic use of crash news should check its top places against the vocabulary of the topic.

Research, invention and news run on different clocks. Research share grows steadily. Patent filings grow fastest and are concentrated in China and South Korea. News follows events and the news agenda. The dataset lets researchers link the three, for example to test whether heavily covered crashes are followed by policy or research activity in the affected country or state.

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 a crash only later are missed, and in the hand check 7.5% of matches were not road crash news; some law-firm marketing pages remain. Some reports use other words ("mishap", "collision") and 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 were treated as unlocated (15.3% of city-tagged articles); this lowers located counts, and a few ordinary-word tags may remain, such as "car" read as the Central African Republic.
- **Outlet mix.** The index over-represents English-language and Northern Hemisphere outlets, and Indian regional outlets are well represented. This shapes geography.
- **Research and patent counts.** These match titles only. Office shares reflect filing practice; utility models are numerous in China.
- **People.** Crash reports often name victims. The dataset carries no article text or names, and this paper reports no individual case except one already covered by an encyclopedia article.

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 64,612 of 257,052 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 "road accident" --since 2019-01-01 --until 2026-07-31 --granularity monthly`.

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