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From Outrage to Opportunity:

How to Include The
Missing Perspectives
of Women of All Colors
in News Leadership
and Coverage

The third in the series of Missing Perspectives reports

Trends in the news coverage about leadership, women and the news industry

At a glance

Despite some decline in the last five years, the discourse in news coverage about leadership in general can still be viewed as substantive. However, references to women in coverage about leadership, the news industry, or news leadership form only a small part of that conversation in all the countries examined. Kenya has experienced a remarkable growth in references to women across these three topics, whereas in India news coverage hardly mentions women at all in these contexts. Although women's global share of voice as protagonists, sources, or experts remains significantly marginalized in news coverage relating to leadership, the news industry, or these two aspects together, it has nevertheless increased in the last five years from approximately a fifth to a fourth of all voices.

Introduction

News provides a clear window on society and its biases, manifested in the topics it covers and those it omits or misses. News coverage measures a nation's pulse rate, the issues that different societies worry and care most about,

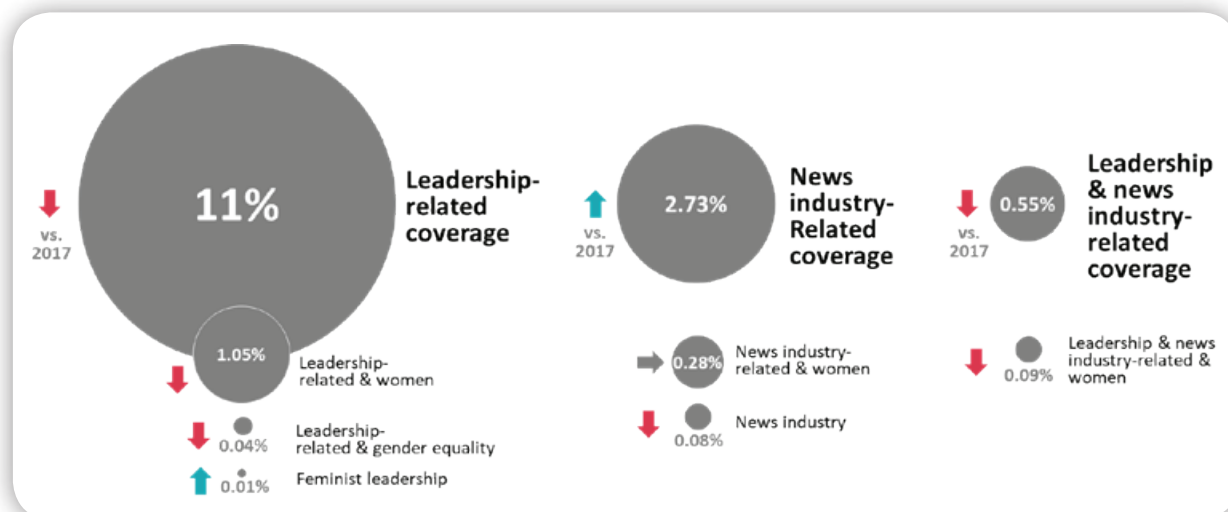
where the country is heading, and what the key challenges it faces are. AKAS mined the GDELT database, which contains over 900 million news stories from 2017 onwards in 65 different languages from global news providers, to size the global conversation about leadership. We also explored the extent to which articles about leadership¹ or leadership in news focus on women or gender equality. Finally, AKAS examined women's share of voice in online news articles about leadership, the news industry, and leadership in news.

1 in 10 online news articles globally features at least one reference to leadership. The discussion about leadership has contracted slightly in the last five years

11% of all global online news coverage in 2021 contained a leadership reference, as shown in Figure 1. This is a substantive proportion, which is almost certainly driven by mentions of political leaders and political leadership issues. However, the proportion of articles referencing leaders and leadership has declined from 12.3% in 2017. Additionally, only 1.05% of all online news coverage for 2021 referenced women and leadership issues, declining from 1.3% in 2017.

1. The conversation about leadership was tested using the terms "leadership", "leaders" or "leader".

Figure 1: Proportion of global news coverage in 2021 which references the topics of leadership, the news industry, and leadership in news



Source: AKAS analysis of GDELT²

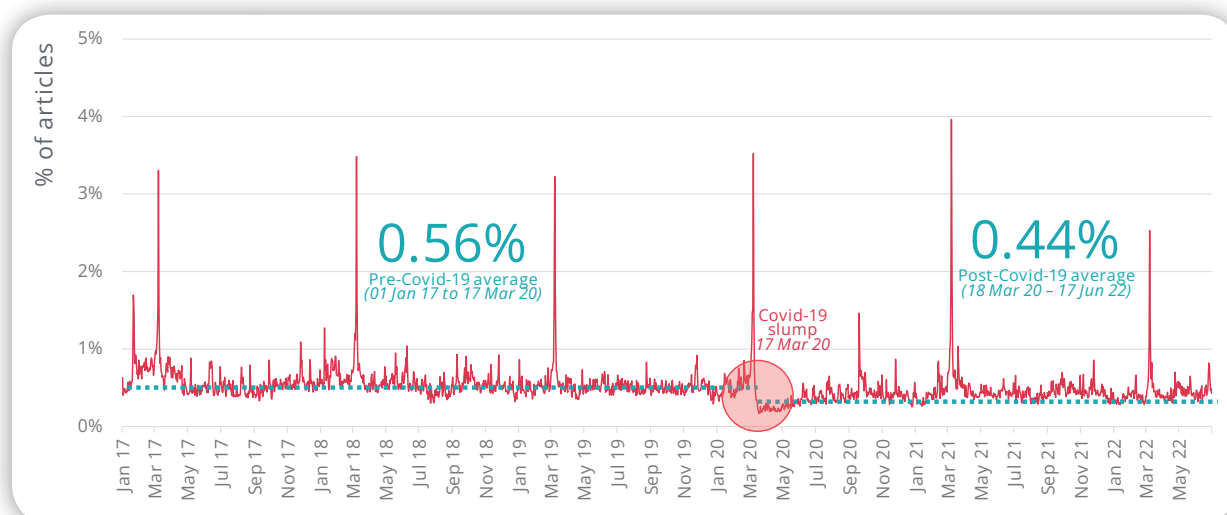
To put this topic in context, AKAS compared the proportion of coverage containing a leadership reference with other topics covered in news in 2021.³ The most frequently covered topic related to business issues, which featured in 24% of news coverage. Coverage referencing politics-related terms was the second most covered topic area at 19%, followed by crime, violence, and police-related terms, which featured in 15% of all coverage globally. Hospitals/healthcare attracted the same amount of coverage (15%) and COVID-related coverage appeared in 13% of articles. Topics which featured in less than 5% of news coverage in 2021 included unemployment, tax, inflation, immigration/refugees, interest rates, climate change, corruption, inequalities, poverty, recession, renewable energy, energy security, and energy transition.

There has been a structural decline in the coverage of gender equality issues since the COVID-19 pandemic story broke. The war in Ukraine also had a negative impact on the coverage of women in leadership on International Women's Day in 2022

GDELT analysis of online news coverage between 2017 and June 2022 uncovered a structural decline in the coverage of gender equality issues⁴, which started during the first wave of the pandemic (see Figure 2). Prior to March 2020, the global online news coverage of gender equality issues averaged 0.56%, but dropped after the pandemic to average 0.44%. *The Missing Perspectives of Women in COVID-19 News*, which was written during the first wave

- Leadership-related coverage consists of the terms "Leadership" or "Leaders" or "Leader"; News industry-related coverage consists of the terms "news industry" or "journalism" or "journalists" or "news sector" or "newsroom" or "news manager" or "news editors".
- Data extracted from AKAS' iitracker which analyzed GDELT data from 2021 and January-May 2022
- Gender equality-related issues consist of the following terms: "gender equality" or "gender inequality" or "gender bias" or "gender balance" or "gender gap" or "gender equity" or "feminism" or "feminist" or "women's rights" or "women's issues" or "women's concerns" or "sexist" or "sexism".

Figure 2: Gender equality coverage in global online news since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic



Source: AKAS analysis of GDELT⁵

of the pandemic, revealed in no uncertain terms the large extent to which women were crowded out of both decision-making at national level and news by men during the first wave of the pandemic. This intensified pro-male bias has been evidenced remarkably well in this decline in coverage exploring gender equality issues or issues relevant to women.

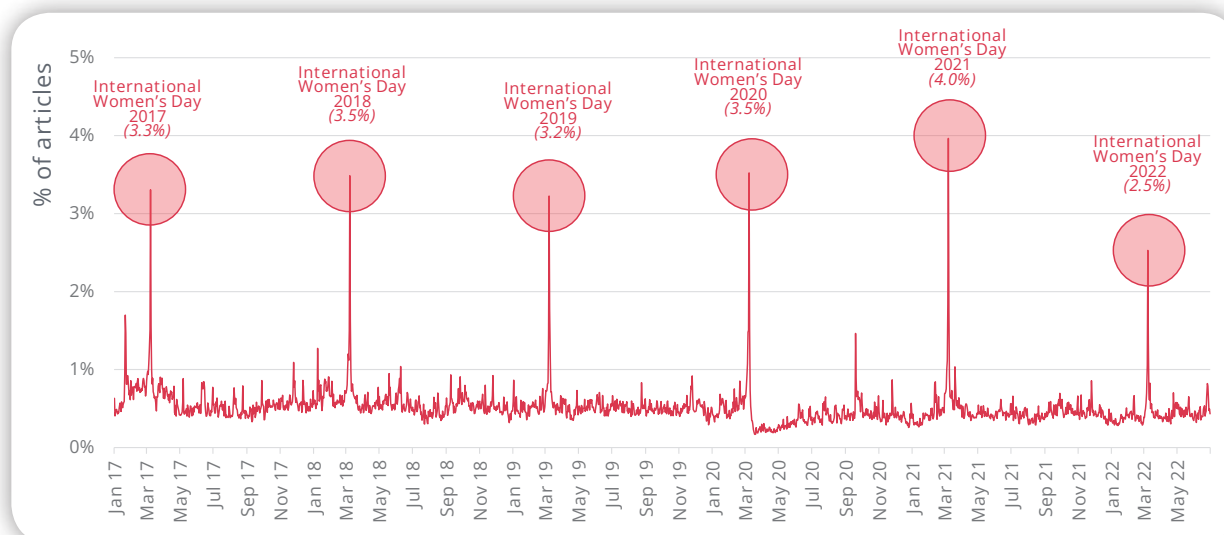
Gender equality coverage, and coverage of issues relevant to women and women in leadership, usually peaks on International Women's Day (IWD) as evidenced in

Figure 3. On IWD in 2022, gender equality-related⁶ coverage hit its lowest level since measurement began in 2017 - in part due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which had taken place less than two weeks previously. In 2022, just 2.5% of all global coverage was dedicated to women and gender equality on IWD, compared to 4% the previous year. Moreover, references in the coverage to women and leadership terms halved from 2021, dropping from 0.55% of all news coverage globally on 8th March 2021 to 0.27% on 8th March 2022.

5. Data extracted from AKAS' iitracker which analyzed GDELT data from January 2017 to May 2022, using the gender equality-related terms: "gender equality" or "gender inequality" or "gender bias" or "gender balance" or "gender gap" or "gender equity" or "feminism" or "feminist" or "women's rights" or "women's issues" or "women's concerns" or "sexist" or "sexism".

6. Terms as defined in footnote 4.

Figure 3: Prevalence of gender equality-related terms in online news (% of total global monitored articles, global, annual, Jan 2017 - Jun 2022)



Source: AKAS analysis of GDELT⁷

In the last five years, less than three percent of global news coverage has focused on the news industry⁸ itself. Women form a fraction of that discussion

In 2021, 2.7% of online news coverage made explicit reference to the news industry, an increase from 2.4% in 2017 (see Figure 1). However, only 1 in 10 articles referencing the news industry also reference women (0.28% of all articles). This proportion has remained static since 2017.

The discourse about leadership in news is marginal and in decline. Women remain on the periphery of it

Only 0.55% of all online news coverage in 2021 contained a reference to leadership in the news industry, pointing to a very limited focus on this issue. Moreover, this marginal proportion

has been broadly static in the last five years, nudging down from 0.59% in 2017 to 0.55% in 2021. 16% of all articles that do reference the news industry and leadership contain a reference to women. This analysis suggests that women remain on the periphery of this important topic, more so than five years ago. In 2017 the proportion of mentions of women in articles touching on news and leadership was 17.3% vs. 16.2% in 2021.

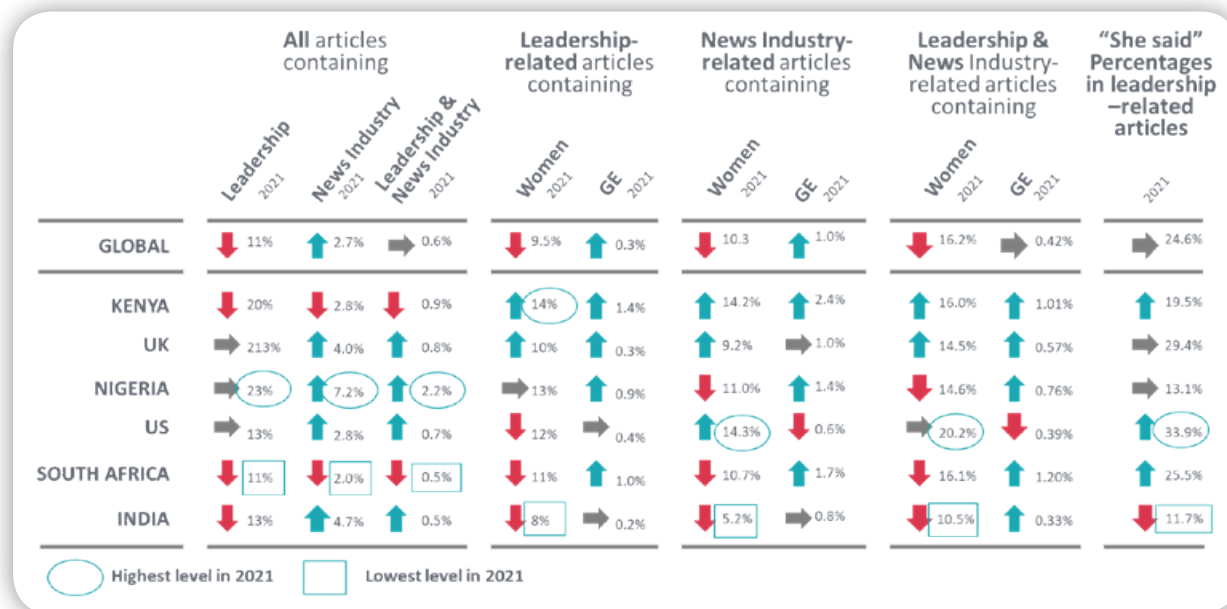
Among the six countries of focus, Kenya has seen the highest increase in references to women in news stories covering leadership, the news industry, or both

While news coverage related to news leadership, the news industry or both has declined in Kenya and South Africa since 2017, Kenya is the only country out of the six countries of focus that has seen a consistent

7. Data source and terms as defined in footnote 5.

8. To size the conversation about the news industry, the following terms were used: “news industry”, “journalism”, “journalists”, “news sector”, “newsroom”, “news manager”, and “news editors”.

Figure 4: Proportion of articles referencing different terms by country in 2021 (2017-2021 trends for proportion of articles mentioning each term indicated by arrows)



Source: AKAS analysis of GDELT⁹

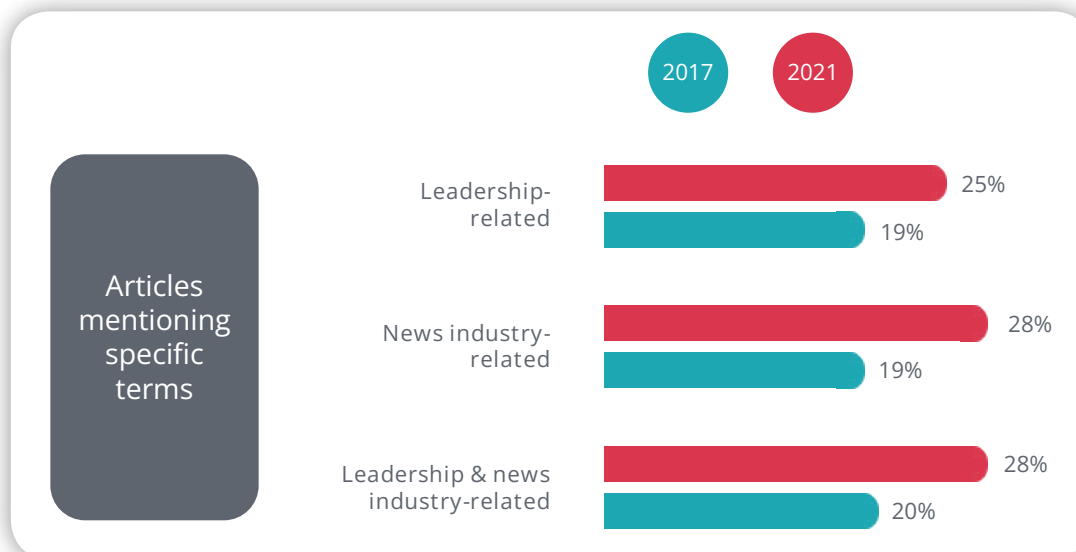
increase in the proportion of mentions of women or gender equality issues in news coverage that references leadership, the news industry or both (see Figure 4). This positive step change in Kenya has been observed from 2019 onwards. Interestingly, this was the year when Nation Media Group, the largest independent multiplatform media house in East and Central Africa which is headquartered in Kenya, launched the first Gender Desk in Kenya and Africa, dedicated to covering stories relevant to women. Kenya has enjoyed the highest proportion of references to women in coverage of leadership-related articles out of the six countries. It also ranks second in terms of the proportion of women and gender equality issues mentioned in articles referencing the news industry.

Indian news coverage performs worst in terms of mentions of women and gender equality in articles referencing leadership or the news industry

Women's and gender equality perspectives in news coverage about leadership, the news industry and news leadership were almost absent from coverage in India in 2021. Moreover, the situation has worsened in the last five years. Only 8% of leadership-related articles contained a reference to women in 2021 (see Figure 4). In India, the proportion of articles covering the news industry and news leadership was 5.2% and 10.5% respectively, much lower than that reported in the other countries in our survey, from either the global south or north.

9. Leadership-related coverage consists of the terms "Leadership" or "Leaders" or "Leader"; News industry-related coverage consists of the terms "news industry" or "journalism" or "journalists" or "news sector" or "newsroom" or "news manager" or "news editors". "She said" percentages calculates the mentions of "she said" divided by the mentions of "she said" and "he said".

Figure 5: Pronoun analysis (“she said” vs. “he said”) as a proxy for women’s share of voice in stories globally referencing leadership-related or news industry-related terms



Source: AKAS analysis of GDELT¹⁰

There is some indication that women’s share of voice in stories referencing leadership and the news industry has been slowly growing in the last five years

A pronoun analysis of feminine vs. masculine pronouns (“she said” vs. “he said”) which AKAS conducted for 2017 and 2021 revealed that women’s share of voice as experts, sources, or protagonists has increased in stories referencing leaders/leadership, the news industry, and leadership in news, as shown in Figure 5.

The growth has been most notable in stories referencing the news industry, where women’s share of voice increased from 19% in 2017 to 28% in 2021, followed by articles referencing leadership and the news industry (increasing from 20% to 28%). While still encouraging, the growth in women’s share of voice was more modest in articles referencing leadership, where it increased from 19% in 2017 to 25% in 2021.

¹⁰. Leadership-related coverage consists of the terms “Leadership” or “Leaders” or “Leader”; News industry-related consists of the terms “news industry” or “journalism” or “journalists” or “news sector” or “newsroom” or “news manager” or “news editors”.