

The Belt and Road Initiative in global media: Comparing news coverage in 30 (28) nations

Dani Madrid-Morales, PhD

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Outline

1. Scholarship on **global news about China** as background
2. Computational methods using two **large corpora**
3. Findings
 1. **Overview** of BRI in the news media
 2. **Evolution** of news coverage of BRI over time
 3. **Comparison** between BRI in Asia and BRI in Africa
 4. **Factors** explaining differences in coverage
4. Revisiting dominant **academic narratives** on global news about China

Reporting China in global media

- For decades coverage about China in global media was **predominantly negative**, focused on a **limited range of topics** (e.g. human rights, underdevelopment) and **framed in limited ways** (e.g. “China as a threat”, “China as an opportunity”...)
- From 2008 onwards, coverage has been shown to be a lot **more diverse and not predominantly negative**. However, older representations prevail in popular discourse.
- There has been a predominance of studies based on the US –but **the US does not represent** the so-called ‘West’ or the World.

BRI in the media

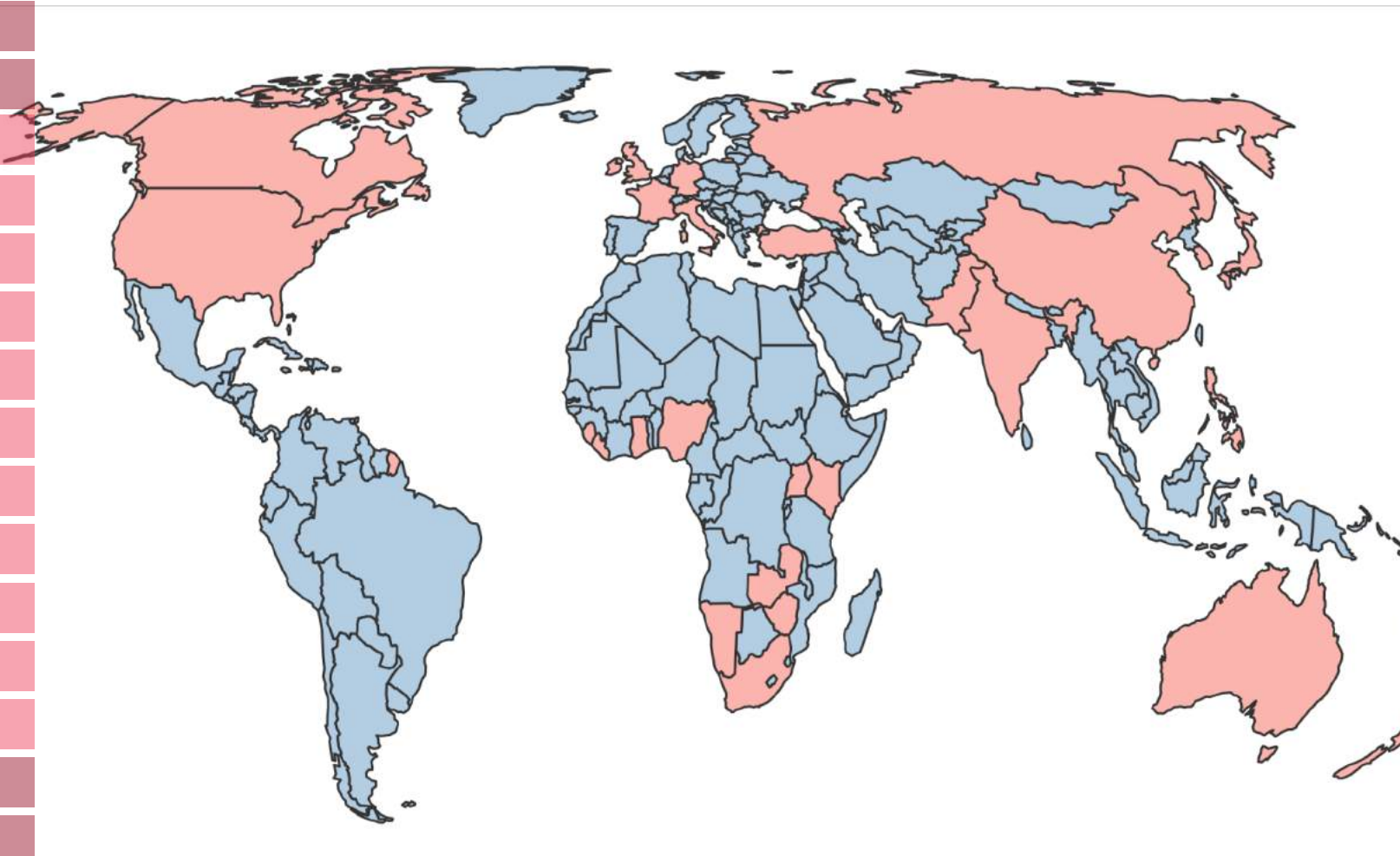
- As we heard in the panels this morning:
 - There are many **problems** related to the way the Africa-China relationship in recent years has been reported in Chinese, African and European/North American media.
 - Cultural, economic & geopolitical frames can be identified in the coverage of BRI, but in Kenya and Ethiopia **coverage is weak**.
 - Global Chinese media appear to be having a **limited impact** on global narratives of BRI due to issues of credibility and trust.
- The few studies that have looked at BRI in the media (Russia, India and Afghanistan) are **limited in scope and difficult to compare**.

Research Questions

- The goal of this **ongoing study** is to **systematically analyze** news coverage of BRI in multiple countries.
- Four research questions are put forward:
 - RQ₁: What **differences**, if any, exist in news coverage of BRI in Chinese and non-Chinese media?
 - RQ₂: how has news coverage of BRI **changed** from the unveiling of the project in 2013 to the end of 2018?
 - RQ₃: in what ways, if any, do news stories about **BRI in Africa** differ from those about **BRI in Asia**?
 - RQ₄ what factors can be of use in trying to **explain differences** (and similarities) in news coverage between countries/regions?

Sampled countries

United States
Canada
Sierra Leone
The Gambia
Nigeria
Liberia
Kenya
Uganda
Zambia
Namibia
Zimbabwe
South Africa
Ghana
Australia
New Zealand



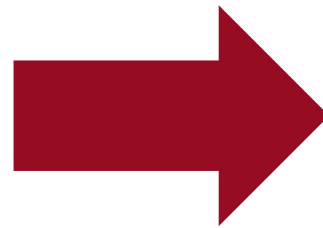
United Kingdom
Ireland
France
Germany
Italy
Turkey
Russia
Pakistan
India
Singapore
Philippines
South Korea
Japan
Hong Kong
China
United States
United States

Dataset 1 – Full text news in 30 countries

Raw Dataset Lexis Uni Database

All articles mentioning Belt and Road, Silk Road Economic Belt, New Maritime Silk Road and One Belt, One Road from 2013 to 2018

N = 64,580



Processed Dataset

All articles mentioning keywords at least 3 times and with a wordcount of at least 100. Repeated articles were excluded.

N = 28,282

Dataset 2 – GDELT (www.gdeltproject.org)

- The Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone (GDELT) monitors news published online in 65 languages in real time.
 - There are approximately **300 million records per day**.
 - The entire dataset includes several trillion data.
- Data is available since January 2017 and is updated in 15 minute intervals. Data for this analysis covers the **period 2017-2018**.
- This data help us get a general snapshot of news coverage that avoids some of the problems in previous studies.

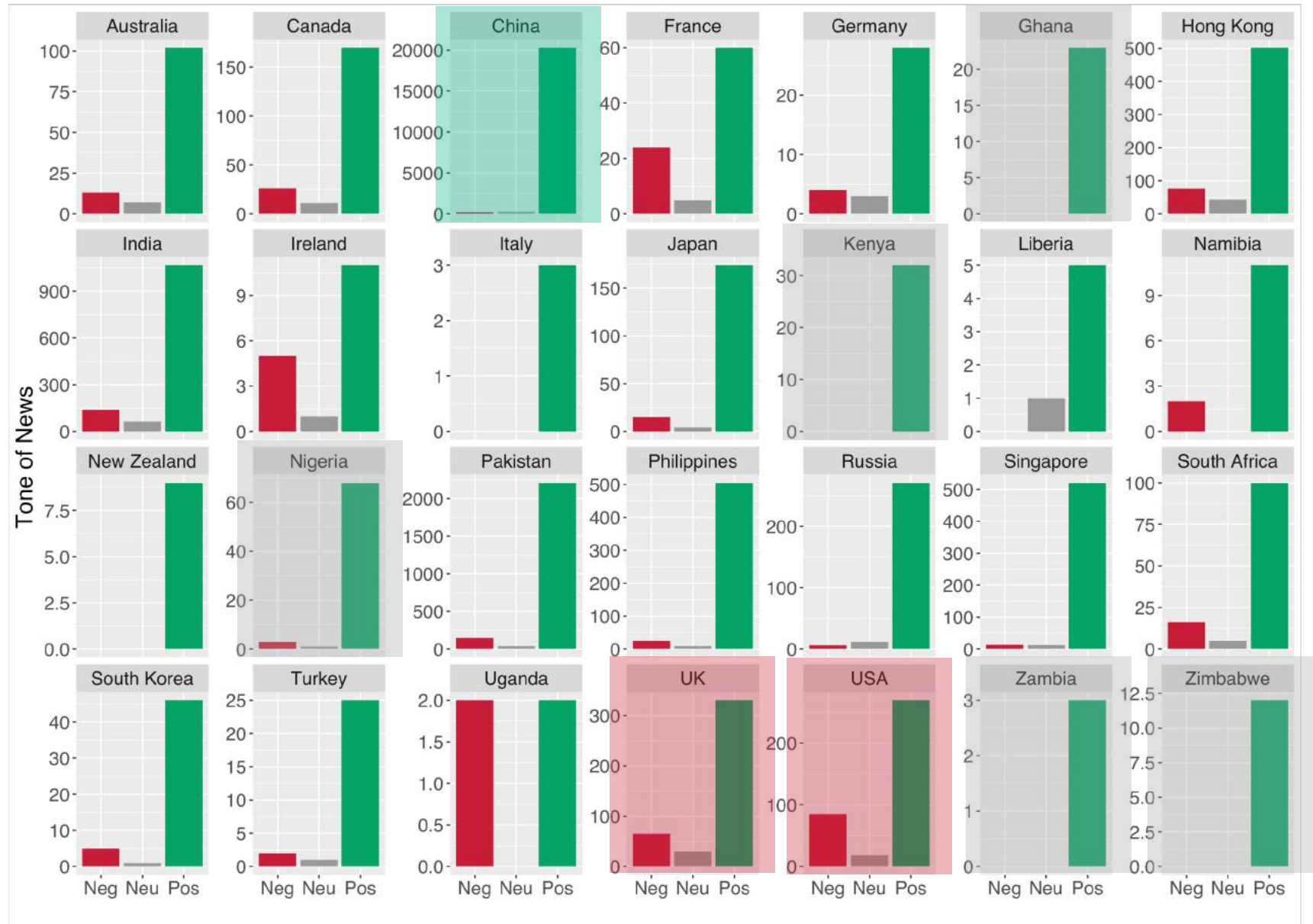
RQ₁

What differences, if any, exist in news coverage of BRI in Chinese and non-Chinese media?

Table 1. Mentions of BRI in the news in 30 countries (2013 to 2018)

Country	News items	Sources	Country	News items	Sources
Australia	122	21	Nigeria	72	12
Canada	210	16	Pakistan	2,391	18
China	20,766	9	Philippines	538	5
France	89	6	Russia	289	15
Germany	35	3	Sierra Leone	0	0
Ghana	23	2	Singapore	546	6
Hong Kong	622	1	South Africa	121	22
India	1,272	30	South Korea	52	2
Ireland	17	4	The Gambia	0	0
Italy	3	1	Turkey	28	2
Japan	193	5	Uganda	4	2
Kenya	33	6	UK	425	27
Liberia	6	3	USA	388	51
Namibia	13	5	Zambia	3	1
New Zealand	9	4	Zimbabwe	12	3

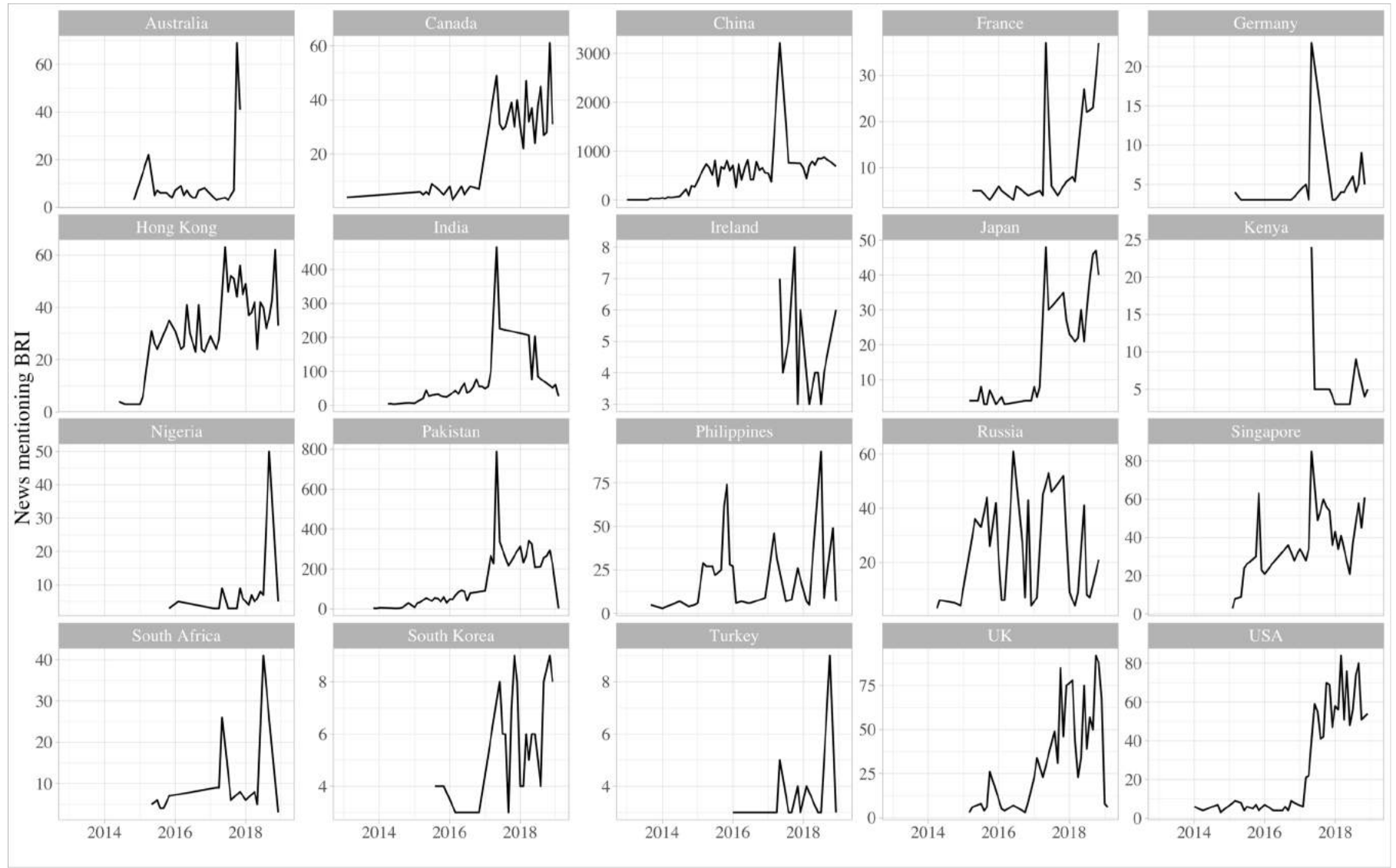
Figure 1. News tone of BRI related stories in 28 countries (2013 to 2018)



RQ₂

How has news coverage of BRI changed from the unveiling of the project in 2013 to the end of 2018?

Figure 3. Mentions of BRI in the news in 20 countries (2013 to 2018)



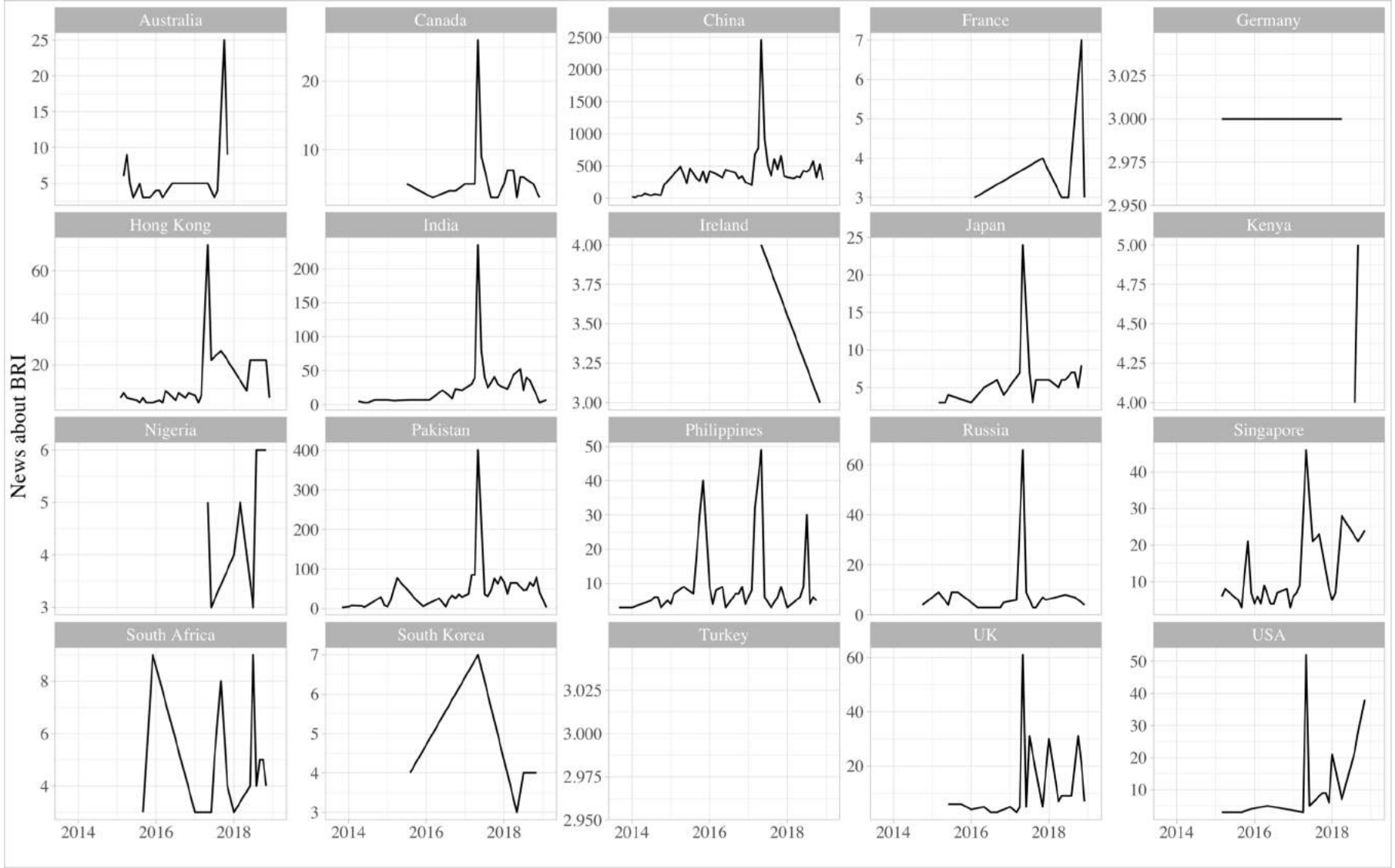
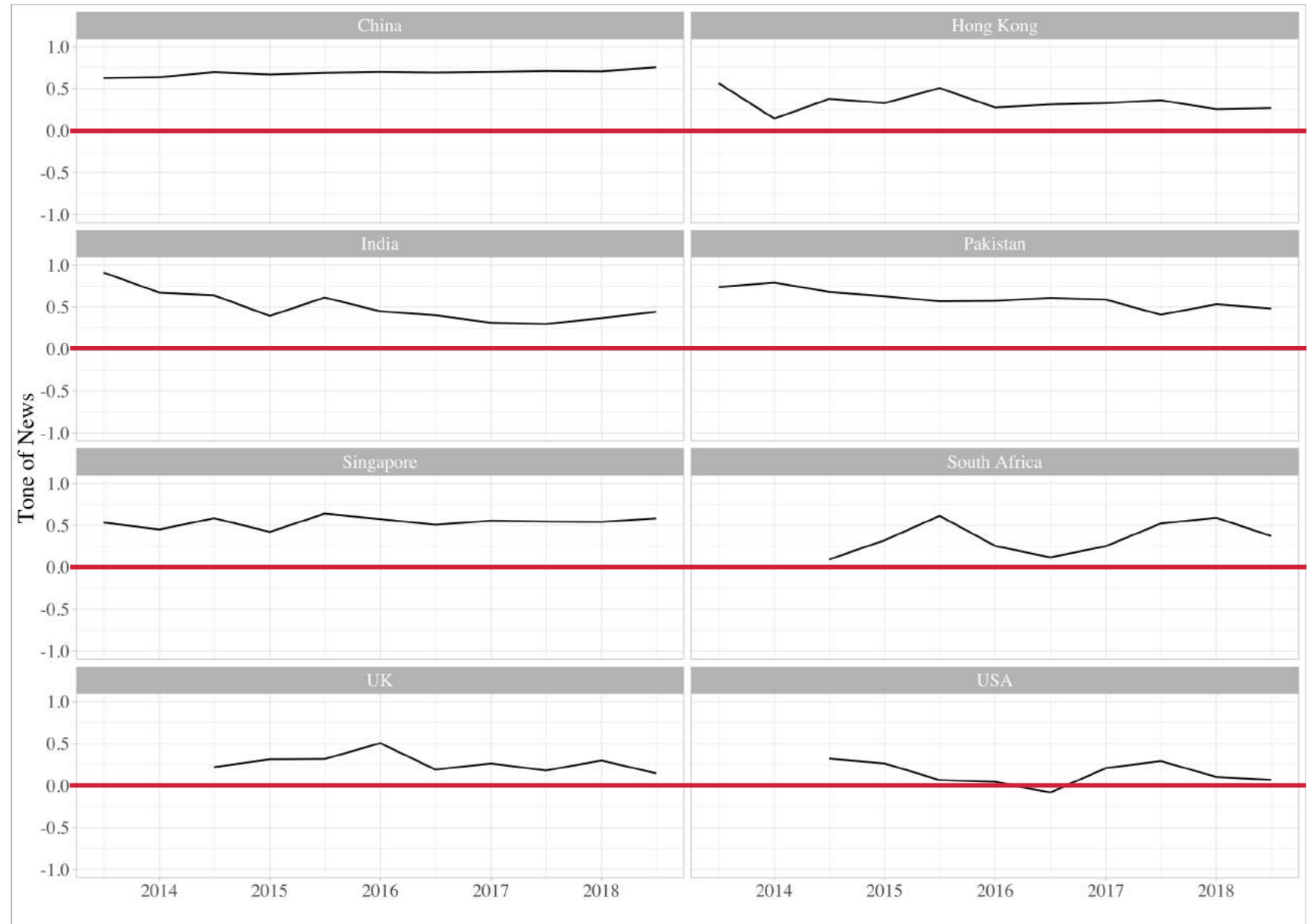


Figure 4. News about BRI in the news in 20 countries (2013 to 2018)

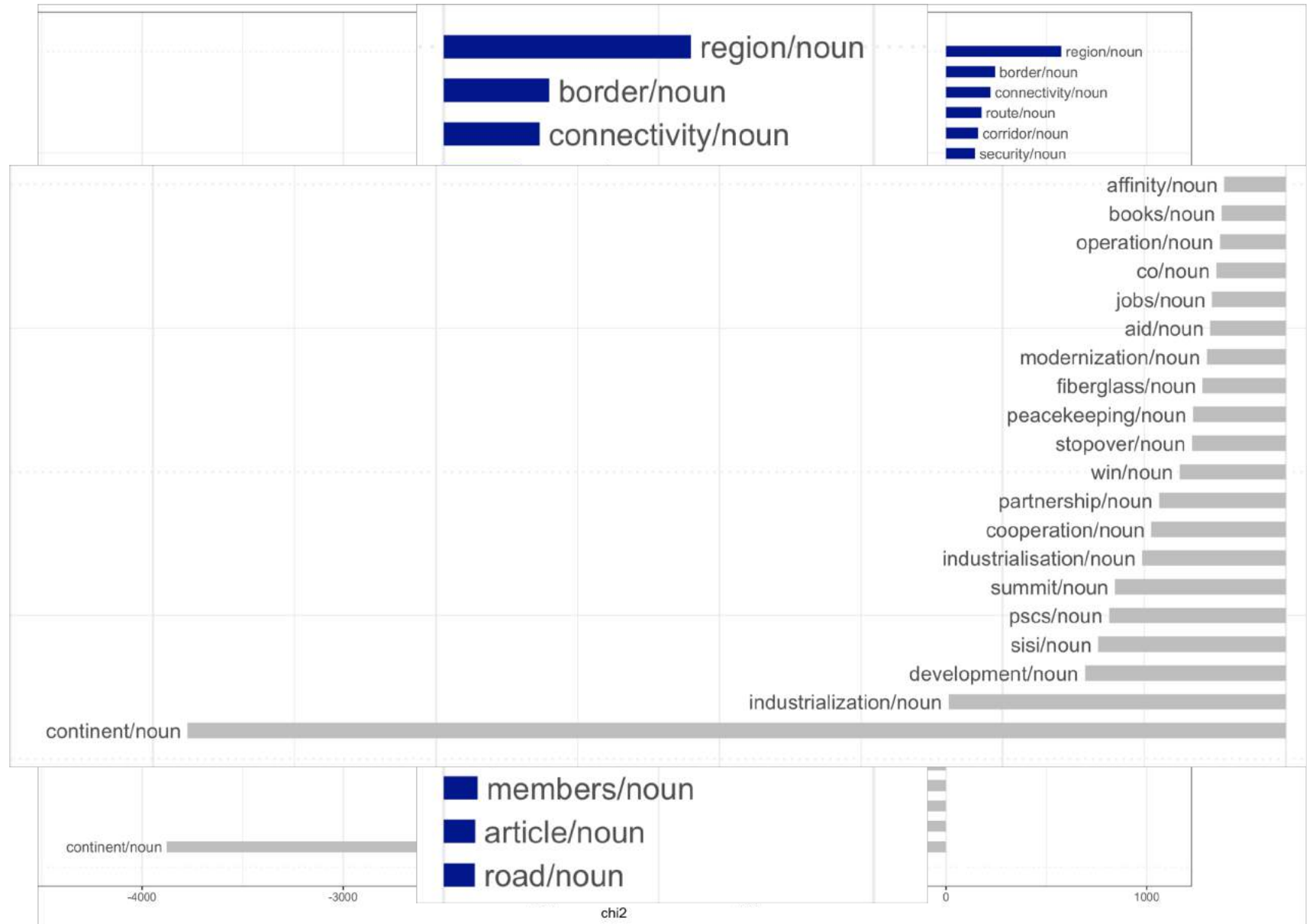
Figure 5. News tone in stories about BRI in the news in 8 countries (2013 to 2018)



RQ₃

In what ways, if any, do news stories about BRI projects in Africa differ from those about BRI projects in Asia?

Figure 6. Keyness comparing news about BRI in Asia and BRI in Africa (2013 to 2018)



RQ₄

In what ways, if any, do news stories about BRI projects in Africa differ from those about BRI projects in Asia?

Figure 13. Coverage of BRI in the news media relative to all new of 30 countries (2013-2018)

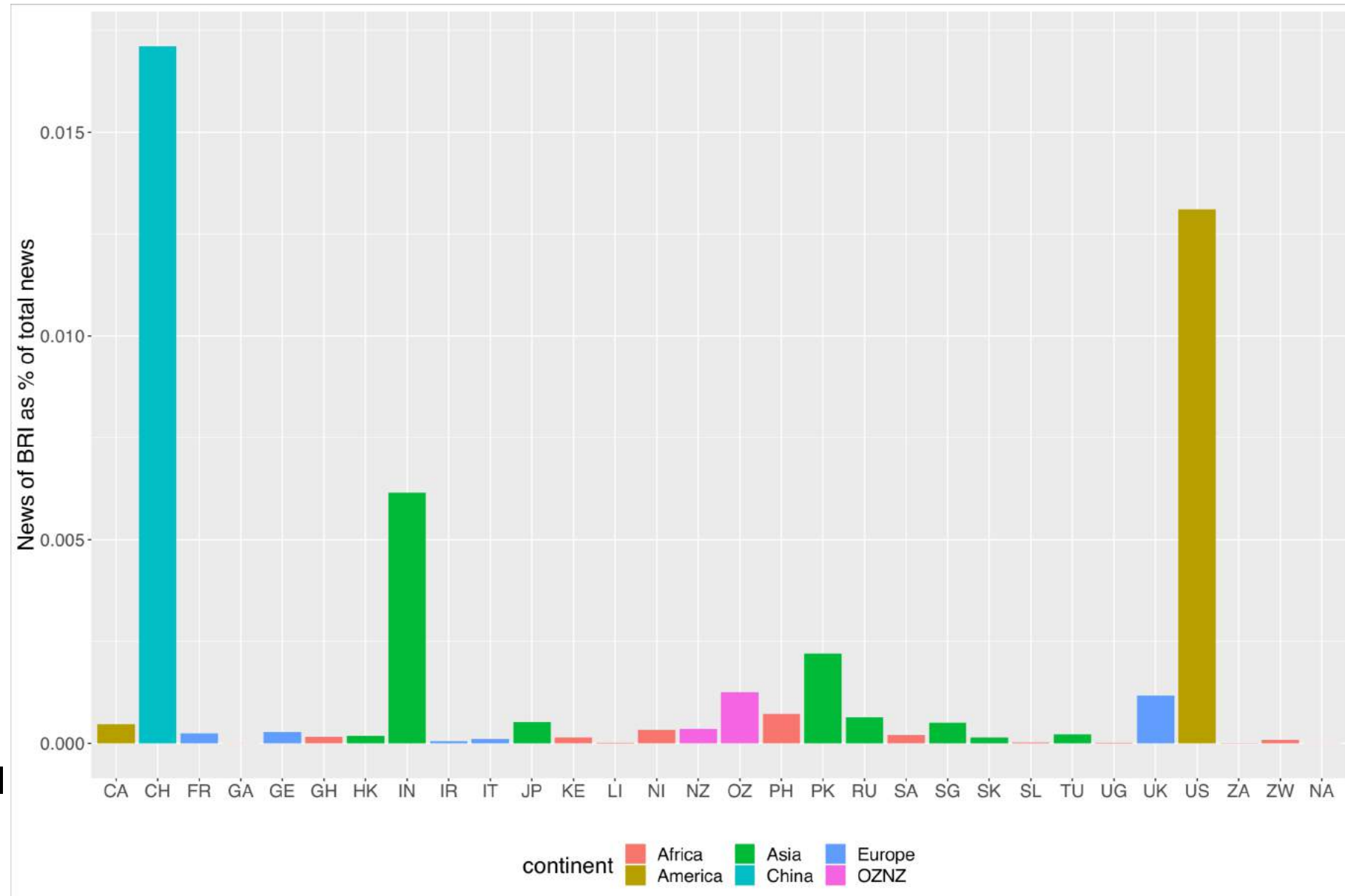


Table 1. Mentions of BRI in the news in 30 countries (2013 to 2018)

Predicting Factors	Direction
Trade Balance	↓
Geographic Proximity	↑
Joined BRI	↓
Continent	
North America	↑
Asia	↑
Europe	↓
New Zealand	↑
Import	↓

Final ideas

- Coverage of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is **relative small** when compared to the amount of coverage of China in global media.
- Chinese media efforts to promote BRI (seen in the amount of coverage) are **not matched** with the amount of coverage elsewhere, but somehow in the way BRI is talked about.
- Overall, coverage of BRI globally is **remarkably positive**. If we only look at handpicked cases the impression might be that it is predominantly negative, but it is not.
 - There's a difference between China-Africa coverage, and BRI coverage.

Final ideas

- There is not such a thing as ‘Western’ media coverage of BRI. In news about China, coverage in the United States can be very different from other liberal democracies.
- There is a discrepancy between predominant narratives (in the media in political discourse, in diplomacy) about news coverage of Africa, China and Africa-China relations, and **empirical evidence**.

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Dani Madrid-Morales | dmmorales2@uh.edu | [@DMadrid_M](https://twitter.com/DMadrid_M)