

Global News on YouTube: Platform Logics and the Restructuring of Media Flows

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Shandong Normal University, 7 April 2026

Key Ideas

#1

“New” international news actors are increasingly present on platforms like YouTube, but they **do not fundamentally change** which parts of the world receive the most attention.

#2

Online platforms such as YouTube, which is an increasingly **popular source of information**, provide space for a wider range of perspectives, including critical views on global politics and the media.

#3

For “new” international new actors, platforms like YouTube act as a kind of “**muzzled megaphone**”: they make it easier to speak and be heard but still limit how far that visibility travels.

Outline



**Overview of
theoretical
perspectives on
media flows and
contraflows**



**YouTube as an
example of the
impact of new
platform logics on
media flows**

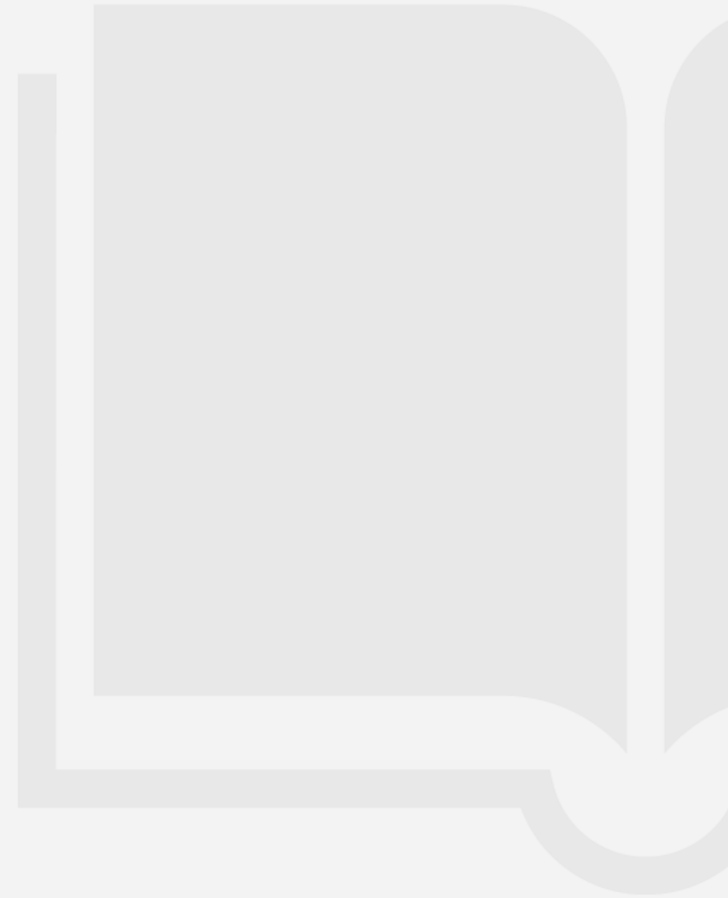


**Analysis of news
on YouTube to
evaluate changes
in platformed
news flows**

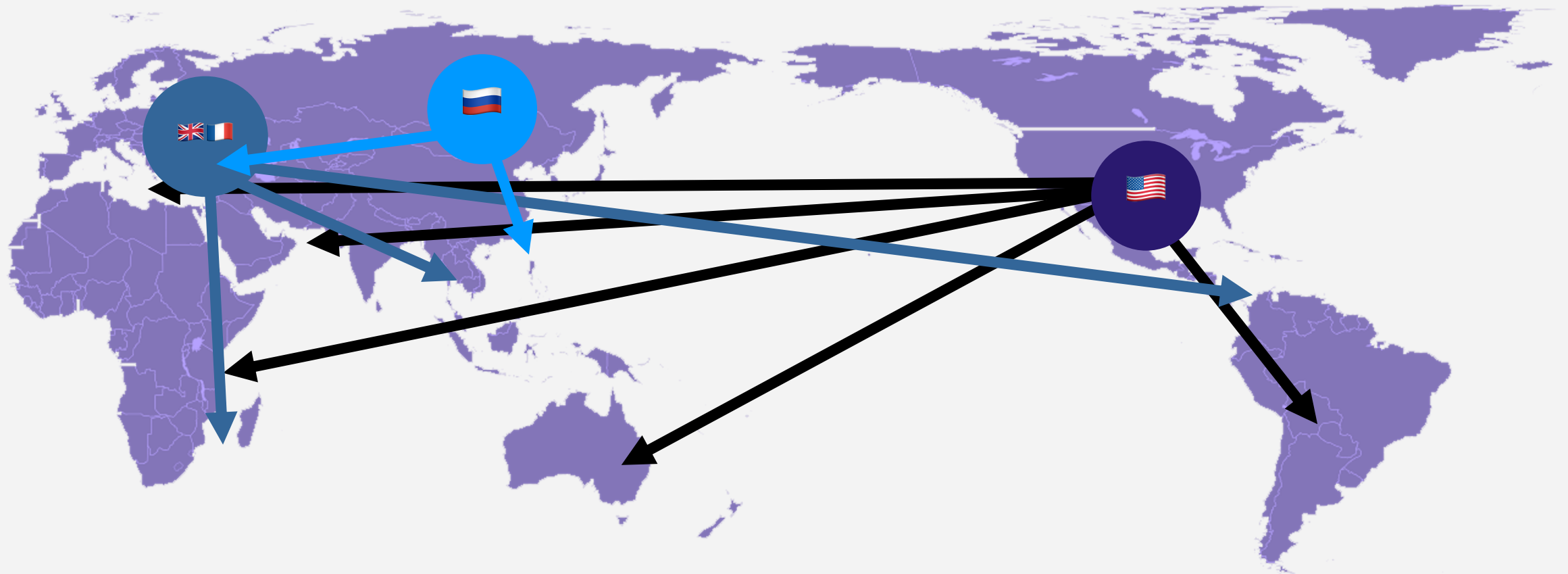


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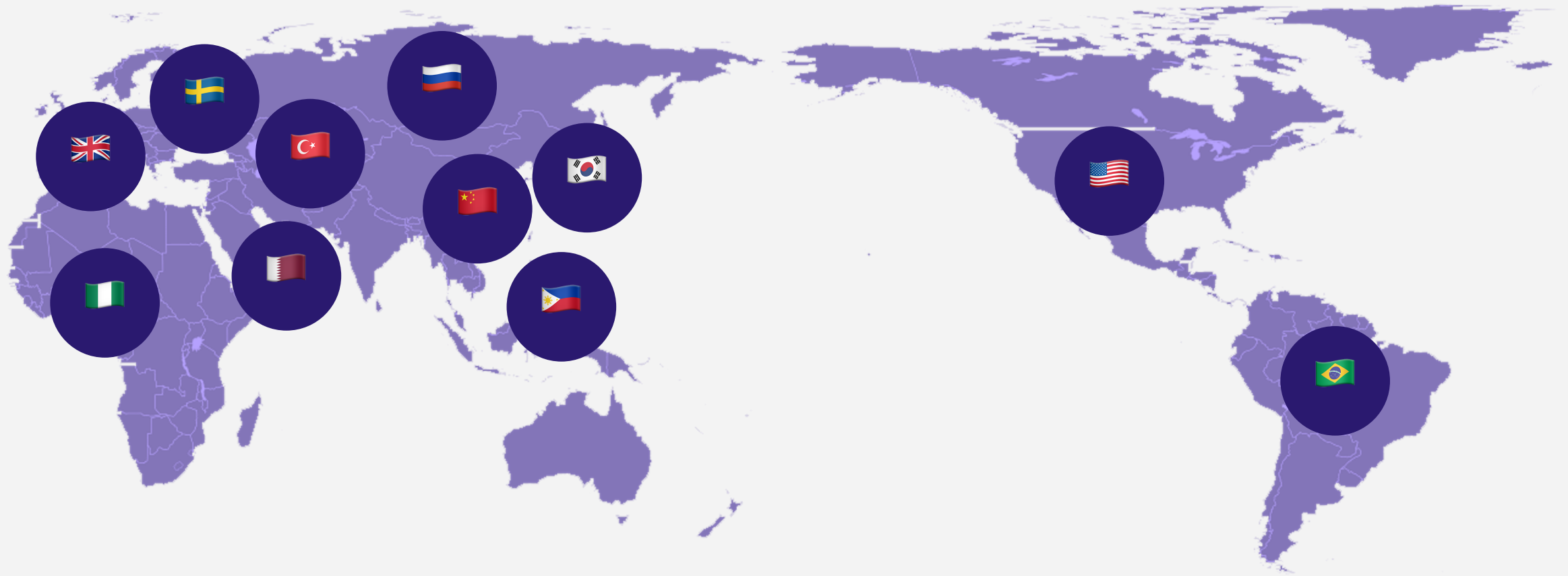
Media Flows



Global Media & Information Flows – 20th Century



Global Media & Information Flows – 21st Century



Thinking of (news media) flows – I

Society “is **constructed around flows**: flows of capital, flows of information, flows of technology, flows of organizational interaction, flows of image, sounds and symbols” (Castells, 2000, p. 442)

Flow is **a useful construct** “since it suggests a multidirectionality of movements; linear and circular, top-down and bottom-up, engineered and spontaneous” (Hamelink, 2015, p. 4)

Thinking of (news media) flows – II

Hamelink's (2015) defines global communication as “a complex multi-layered process in which dominant and counter-stories **flow across the globe.**”

Two decades ago, Thussu (2007) described the global media landscape as a “complex terrain of multi-vocal, multimedia and **multi-directional flows,**” facilitated by “digital technology, and the growing use of online communication, partly as a result of the deregulation and privatisation of broadcasting and telecommunication networks” (p. 12).

Thinking of flows is not new - I

During the 1970s and 1980s, discussions about the consequences of an **unbalanced flow of information** were taken into the halls of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Countries in the Non-Aligned Movement called for a “**fair flow**” of information. As opposed to the “**free flow**” doctrine, the “fair flow” was expected to facilitate the creation of a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO).

Thinking of flows is not new - II

Proponents of the need for a NWICO suggested that it be led by four principles, **the four “Ds”**:

- democratizing information flows
- decolonisation
- de-monopolising transnational communications
- development of journalism and national communication.

After years of negotiations, a commission of international experts published the MacBride report (*Many Voices, One World*) which included a set of recommendations for the advancement of NWICO.

Thinking of flows is not new - III

The report acknowledged that...

News reporting in the 1980s **was problematic** as it reflected priorities of “Western nations” and “Western media”

The flow of information is **unbalanced (one-sided)**, and this is largely driven by technological issues

Developing nations need their own voice (“**news from the South**”)

The US and UK withdrew from UNESCO in 1984/1985 following the Report (they later re-joined).

The main objection was that the report was **limiting press freedom** by allowing state resources to fund propaganda.

Flows and contraflows - I

DOMINANT FLOWS

GLOBAL

Hollywood
MTV
CNN
Discovery
BBC
Google
CNBC
Wall Street Journal
Japanese animation

TRANSNATIONAL

'Bollywood'
Al-Jazeera
Telenovelas
TV5 Monde
Telesur
CGTN
RTTV
M-Net
Korean films

CONTRAFLOWS

GEO-CULTURAL

Phoenix
Zee TV
TRT International
Al-Hayat
Baidu.com
MBC
NHK World TV
Islamonline.net
Roj TV

Flows and contraflows - II

Contraflows are “alternative messages and images [e]manating from a wide range of actors” (Thussu, 2007, p. 11)

The relationship between flows and contraflows is **dynamic**:

- Contraflows are defined in opposition to (dominant) flows

- Contraflows differ across geographic settings (i.e. Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya)

- Contraflows can be affected by changes in the media environment and regulations affect power positions

Flows and contraflows - III

DOMINANT FLOWS

CONTRAFLOWS

GLOBAL

TRANSNATIONAL

GEO-CULTURAL

FLOWS OF CAPITAL

FLOWS OF CONTENT

FLOWS OF VALUES

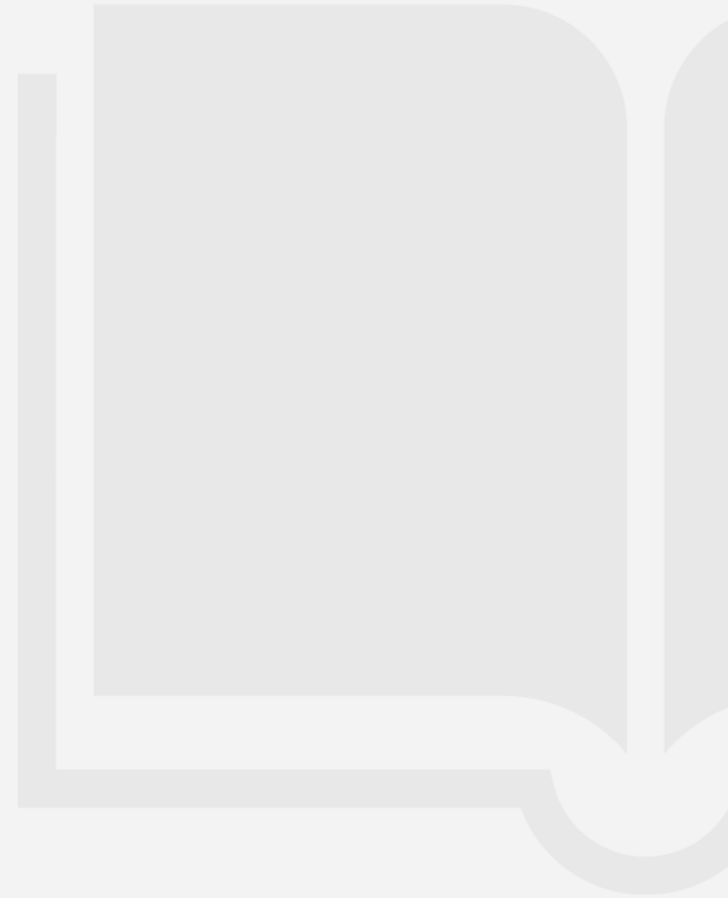
Flows and contraflows - IV





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Platformed Flows



Platform Logics - I

As Poell and colleagues have argued, platform logics reshape how news is **produced, distributed** and **made visible**. News is increasingly structured by platform infrastructures, including algorithms, metrics and data extraction.

Social platforms are also dialogical spaces, where actors compete to **influence attention**, narratives and flows of information.

In these spaces, audiences are not just receivers but **participants**, shaping visibility through engagement, while also interacting with (and sometimes contributing to) bots and coordinated inauthentic behaviour.

Platform Logics - II

PLATFORM INFRASTRUCTURES

DOMINANT FLOWS

CONTRAFLOWS

GLOBAL

TRANSNATIONAL

GEO-CULTURAL

FLOWS OF CAPITAL

FLOWS OF CONTENT

FLOWS OF VALUES

YouTube & Platform Logics - I

The screenshot shows the YouTube search results for the query "london". At the top, there is a search bar with "london" entered and a "Sign in" button. Below the search bar, a video titled "London: Still the Center of the World?" by CoolVision is featured. The video has 380k views and was uploaded 5 months ago. The description reads: "London — the city everyone thinks they know. Big Ben, red buses, black cabs... but when you actually walk the streets in 2025, ... 4K". A summary link is provided: "Explore London in 2025, beyond typical tourist spots. CoolVision's cinematic vlog journeys through histori...".

Below the main video, there is a "Shorts" section with five video thumbnails:

- London and its accents**: 416k views. Thumbnail shows a woman in a green coat.
- Unspoken London rules every tourist should know...**: 1.7m views. Thumbnail shows a man walking on a street.
- Top 10 London Attractions (You MUST try!)**: 850k views. Thumbnail shows Big Ben.
- 107 years ago in London!**: 243k views. Thumbnail shows a man in a cap.
- What £285k Buys You in London | Property London...**: 1.1m views. Thumbnail shows a man walking in a residential area.

The left sidebar contains navigation options: Home, Shorts, Subscriptions, You, History, Sign in, Explore, Music, Movies & TV, Live, Show more, More from YouTube, YouTube Premium, YouTube Kids, and Report history.

The screenshot shows the Bilibili homepage. At the top, there is a navigation bar with icons for Home, Drama, Live, Game Center, Membership, Comics, Events, Download Client, and a search bar. The search bar contains the text "逆天加强 无敌20秒的来". Below the navigation bar, there is a large banner for Bilibili. Below the banner, there is a grid of content categories: 动态 (Dynamic), 热门 (Popular), 电影 (Movies), 电视剧 (TV Shows), 纪录片 (Documentaries), 游戏 (Games), 音乐 (Music), 影视 (Movies/TV), 知识 (Knowledge), 资讯 (News), and 更多 (More). Below the categories, there is a "音乐" (Music) section with several video thumbnails:

- 徐良**: 2026 "时间折角" 巡回演唱会 深圳站官摄 1站独家长线. [B站独家] 徐良深圳演唱会4K官摄. 688.2万 views, 4.6万 likes, 01:20 duration.
- 当大课间的小曲配上Phonk..... 2.0**: 是泽少捏 · 2025-12-07. 688.2万 views, 4.6万 likes, 01:20 duration.
- 唐僧西天取经学会迈克尔杰克逊神作《比利金》**: 斌斌唱杰克逊 · 02-24. 132.6万 views, 1164 likes, 01:19 duration.
- 每日[funk]分享 唱FUNK空耳猜FU NK 依旧京中有善口技者**: 忘特斯理普 · 03-01. 220.3万 views, 108 likes, 02:48 duration.
- 【HOME FREE】Big Brev 和 Home Free 演唱 Josh Turner 的...**: HomeFree · 03-17. 46.4万 views, 154 likes, 01:15 duration.
- 西蒙·拉特尔《贝多芬：第七交响曲》柏林爱乐**: Rigel口袋音乐 · 04-01. 1637 views, 0 likes, 40:29 duration.
- 循环歌单 | 【无人之岛】 | “离别的小曲”**: 心刚音乐库 · 03-29. 9.6万 views, 101 likes, 40:54 duration.

YouTube & Platform Logics - II

YouTube (and other social media) operate as sites of **contestation**, where multiple actors compete to shape narratives about the world. Those using YouTube as a platform, can simultaneously **disrupt** and **reproduce** global news hierarchies, reshaping flows without fundamentally rebalancing them.

Platformed Tensions

disrupting

Content

Sources and formats

Community and spaces

conforming

YouTube & Platform Logics

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YouTube (and other platforms) **lower infrastructural barriers** to entry, allowing both established organisations and new actors to produce and distribute news at scale. However, these dynamics can **amplify** existing biases and inequalities, privileging certain actors, formats and narratives over others.

Old Players, New Players



BBC
NEWS



CGTN



AP



TRTWORLD



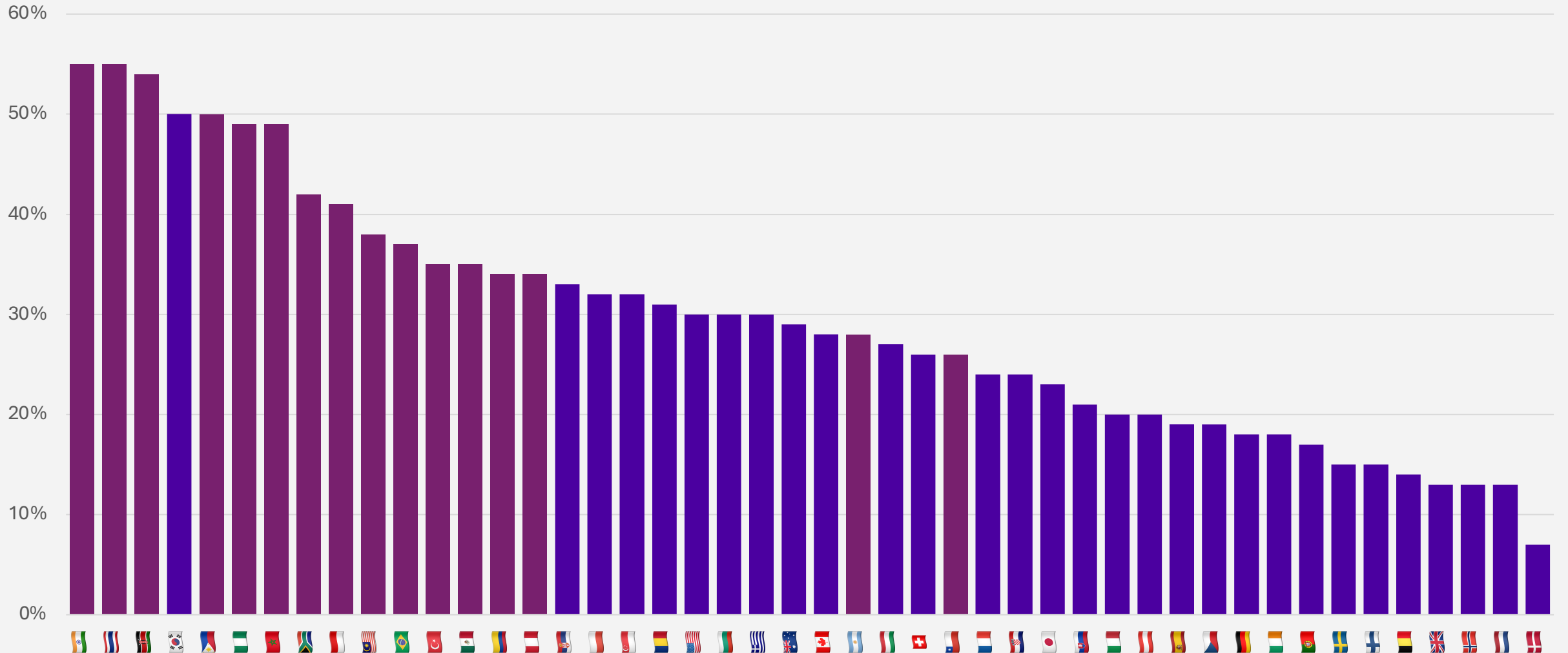
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Audiences are central to platformed news flows because **clicks, watch time** and other forms of **engagement** shape what YouTube recommends and, therefore, what becomes visible.

People who use YouTube to get news (%)



Methodological Approach

1

API YouTube Data
Collection ($N = 716,000$)

2

Sample of $n = 50,000$

3

Dictionary Analysis for
Country Detection

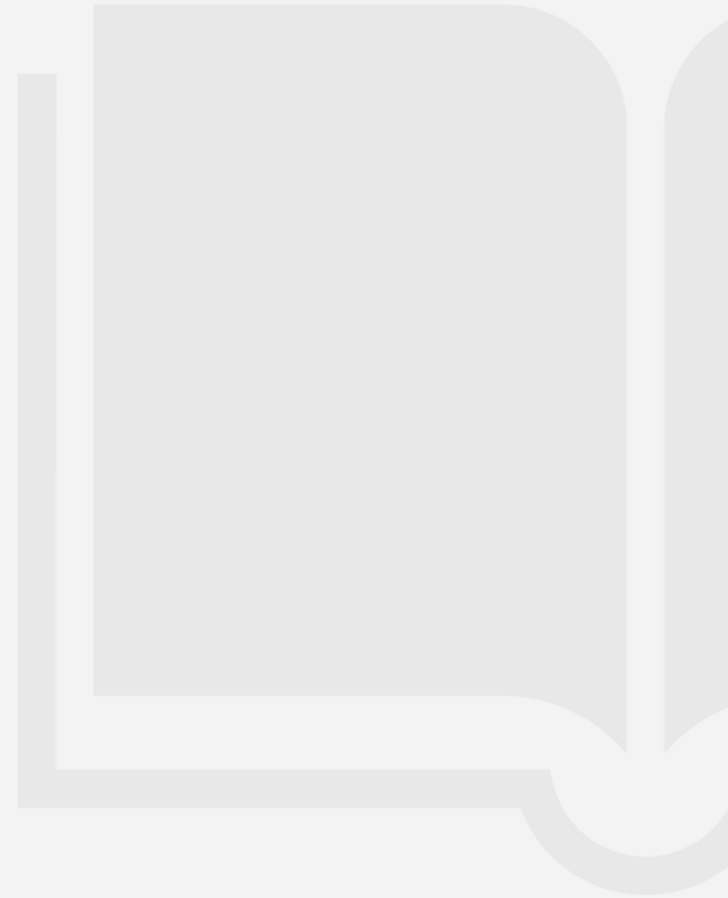
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Seeded LDA for Topic
Analysis

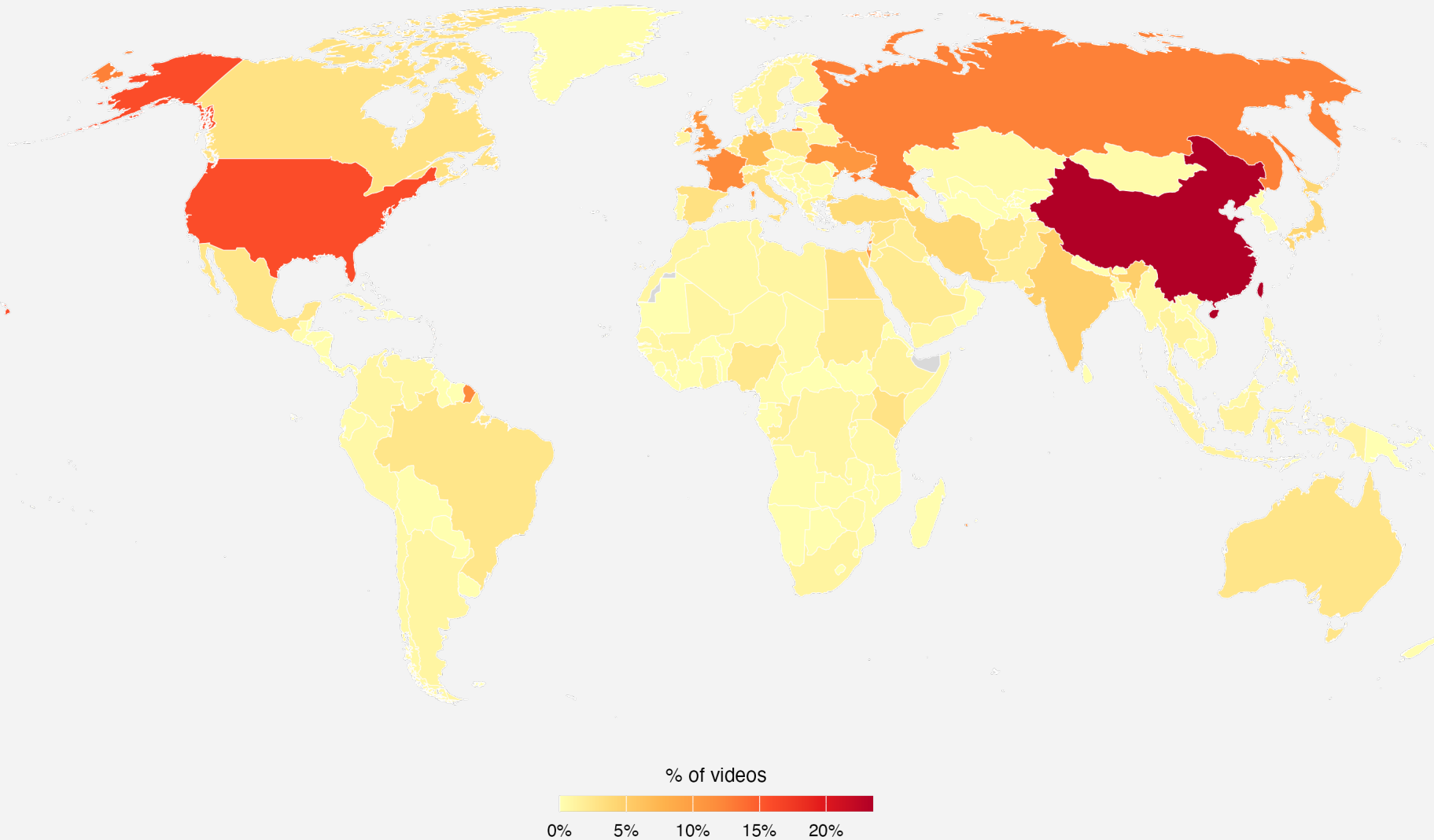
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LLM-based Annotation of
Subsample of Comments

Geographic Diversity



The World According to YouTube

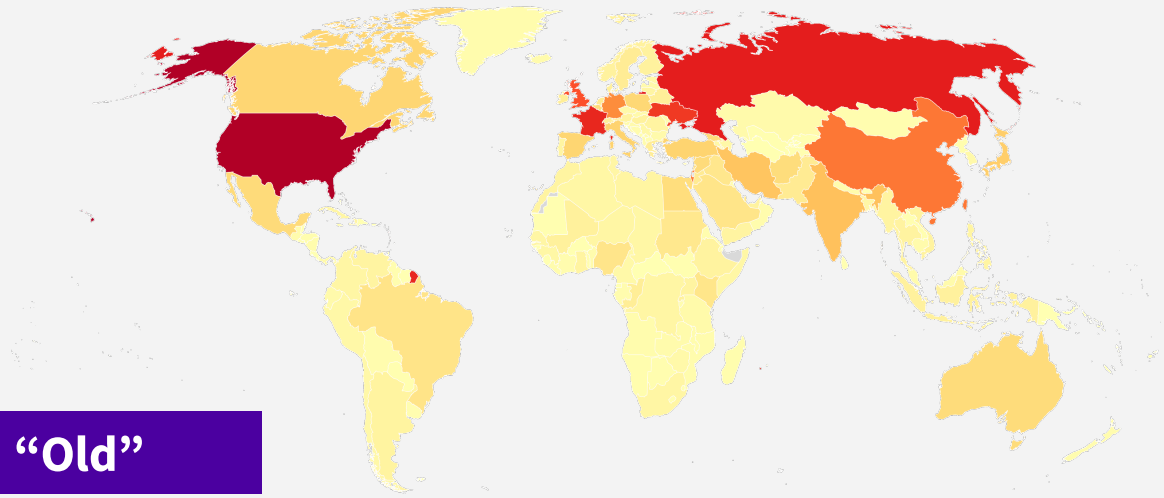


Large Powers Dominate News Coverage

The arrival of “new” international broadcasters has not substantially transformed the “geography of news”. China (28%) and the United States (16%) dominate news coverage across the 12 channels surveyed for this study.

The Old/New Geographic Divide

“Old”



% of videos
0% 5% 10% 15%

“New”

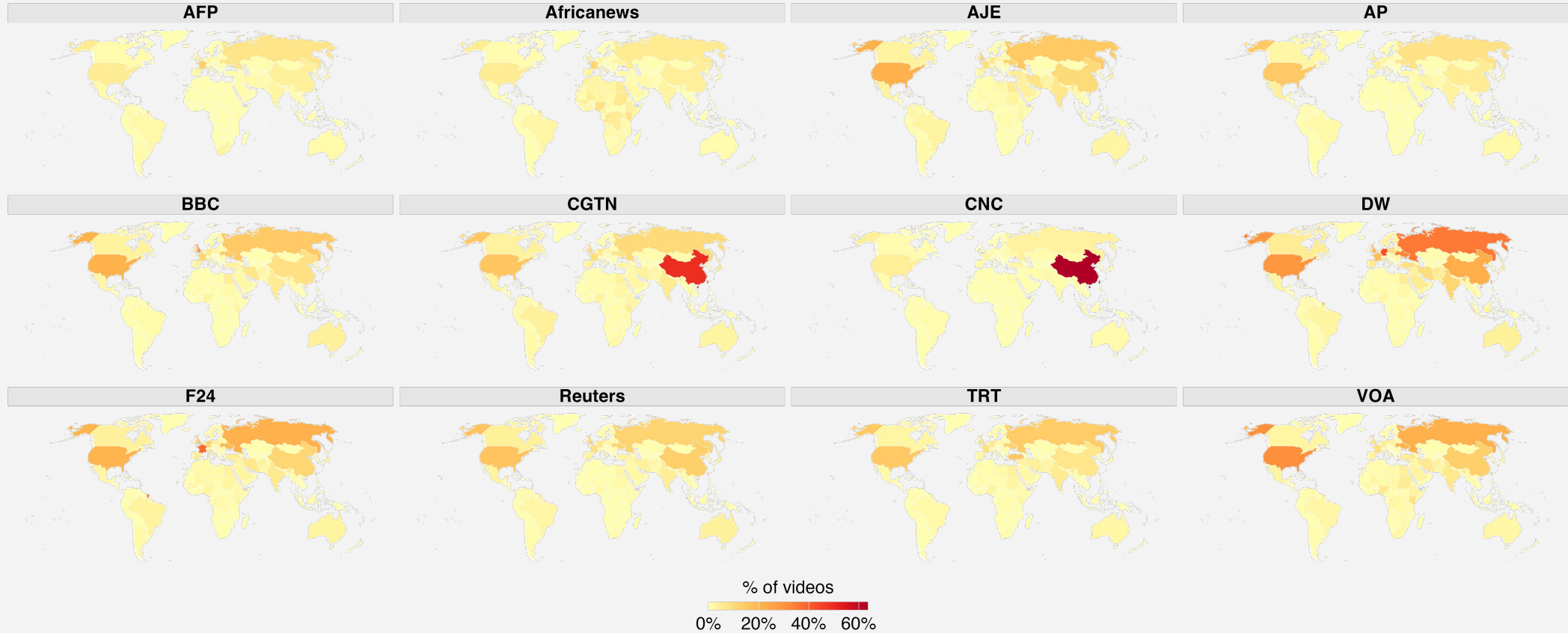


% of videos

Divisions Persist between ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Actors

Some actors, particularly those based in China (e.g., CGTN and CNC) are very active on YouTube and skew the overall metrics. In other words, China is discussed extensively, and Chinese media have a lot to say.

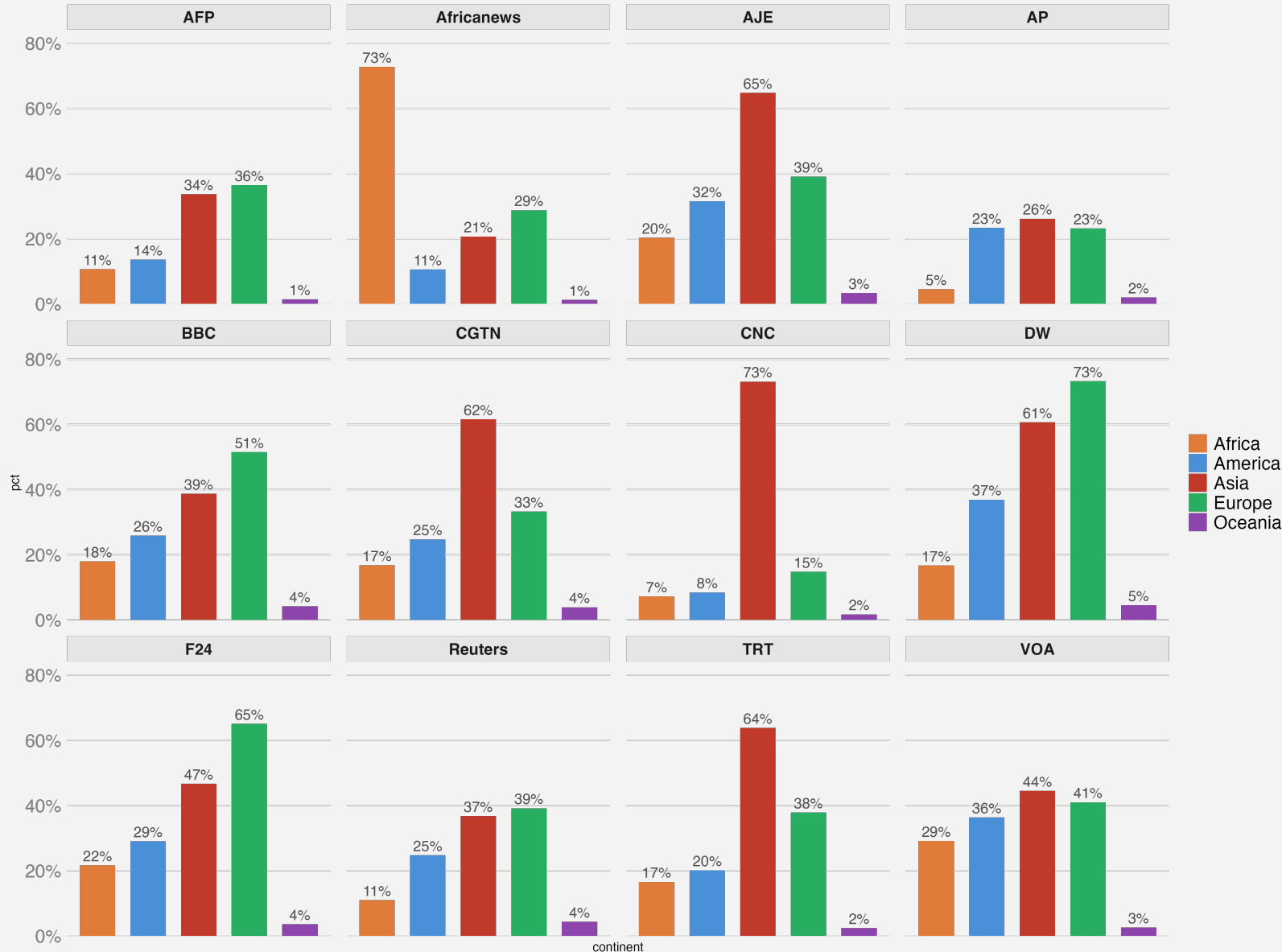
Parts of the World Remain in the Shadows



Large Swaths of the World (namely, the Global South) Remain Underreported On

Latin America and Africa receive comparatively scant coverage, even by “new” players, thus limiting the scope for transformational contraflows.

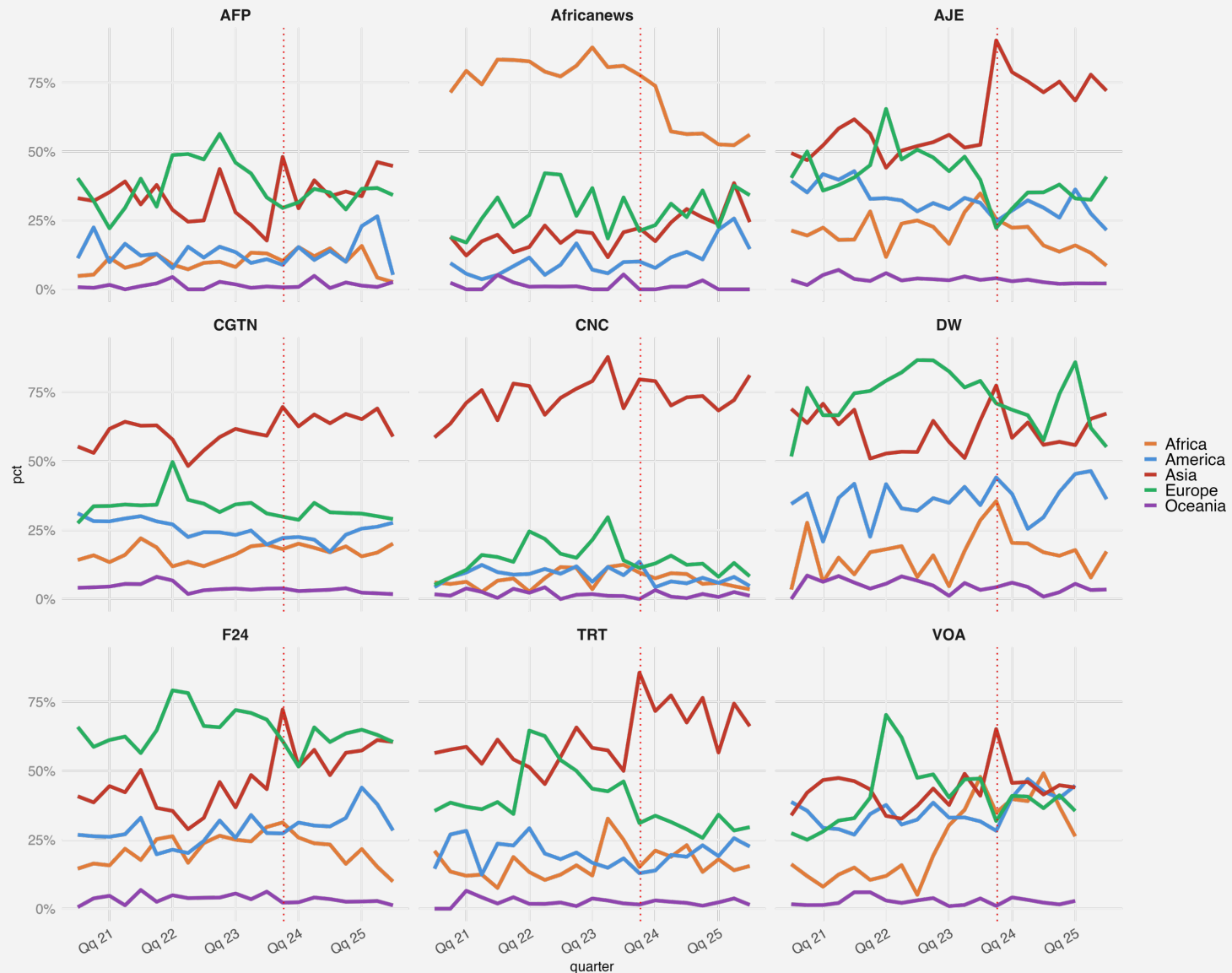
Regional Spheres of News Coverage



International Broadcasters Operate in Spheres of Influence

Despite news coverage being concentrated on a handful of countries, regional differences exist. For example, Chinese broadcasters like CGTN and CNC predominantly cover China, while Al Jazeera and TRT focus on the West Asia.

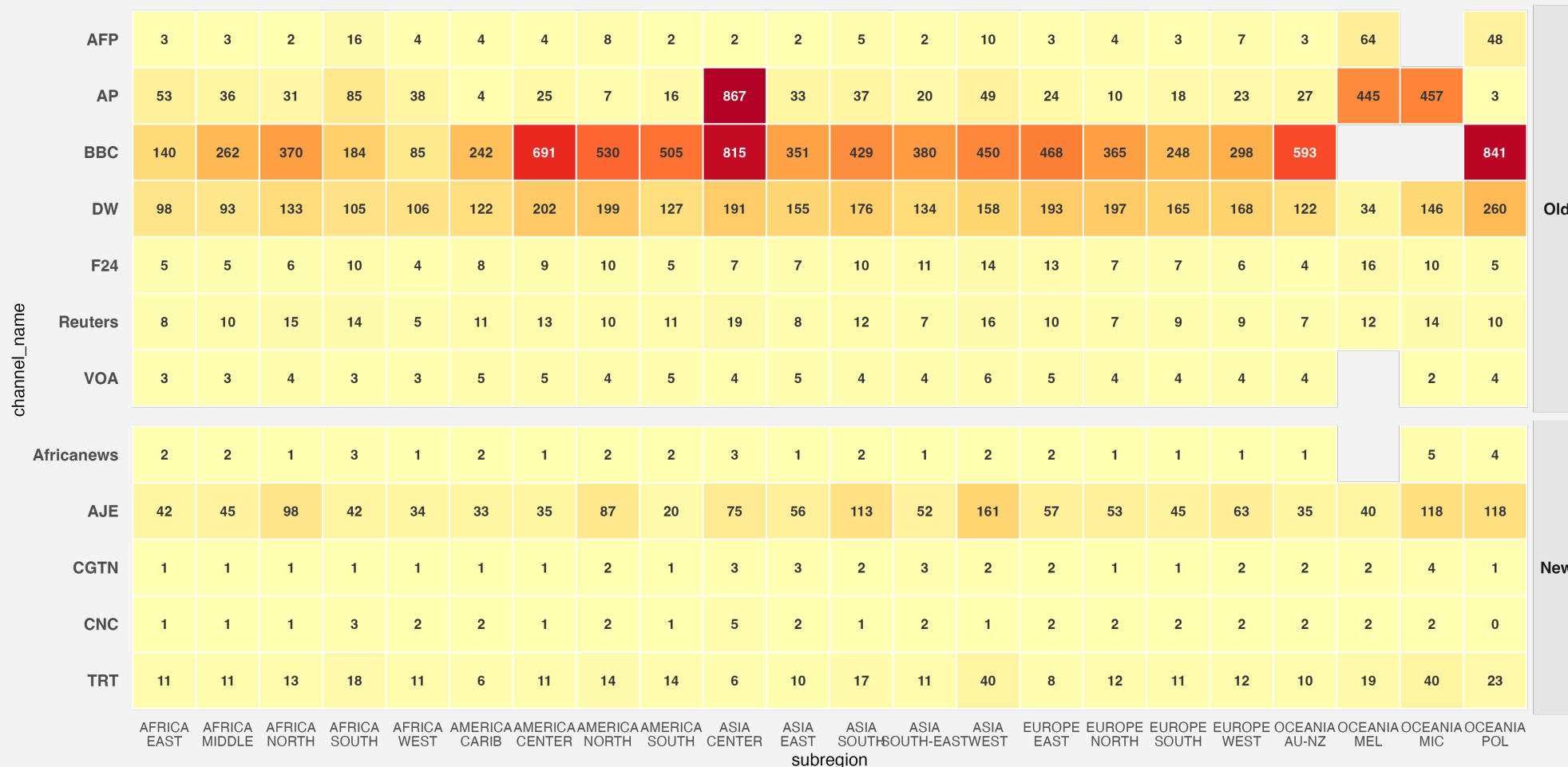
One Event can Reshape News Coverage



News Coverage in Some Areas Remains Episodic and Volatile

Previous research has shown that foreign news coverage tends to be episodic. This affects predominantly those countries that tend to be less prevalent in the news. The October 7 attack by Hamas can be clearly seen when news coverage is plotted over time.

Engagement with Geography

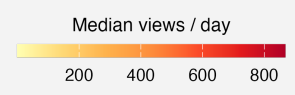


Old

New

Unequal attention

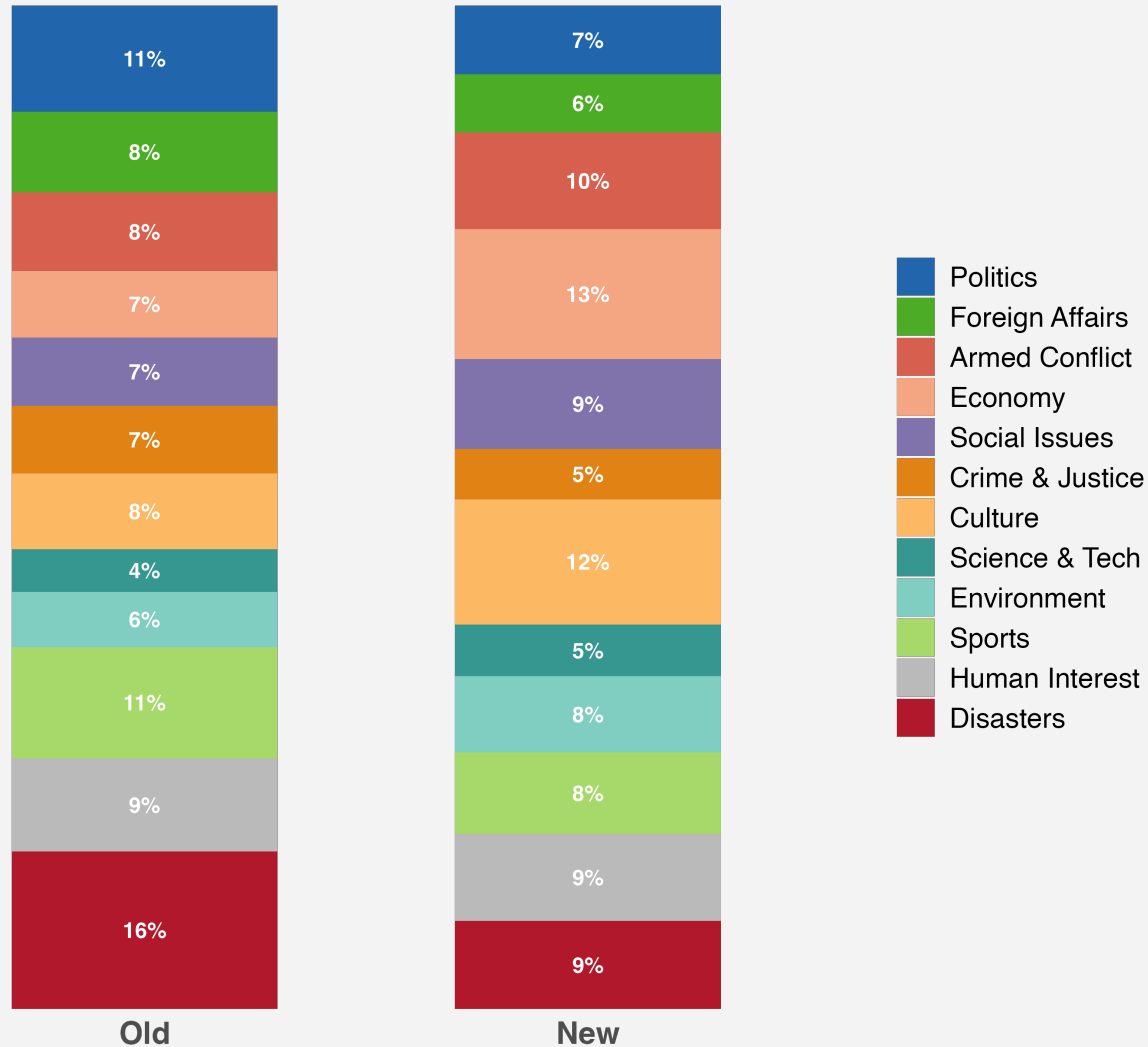
Viewership is concentrated on a small number of broadcasters. Both “new” and “old” providers, including VOA and CGTN, struggle to attract sustained audiences.



Topic Diversity



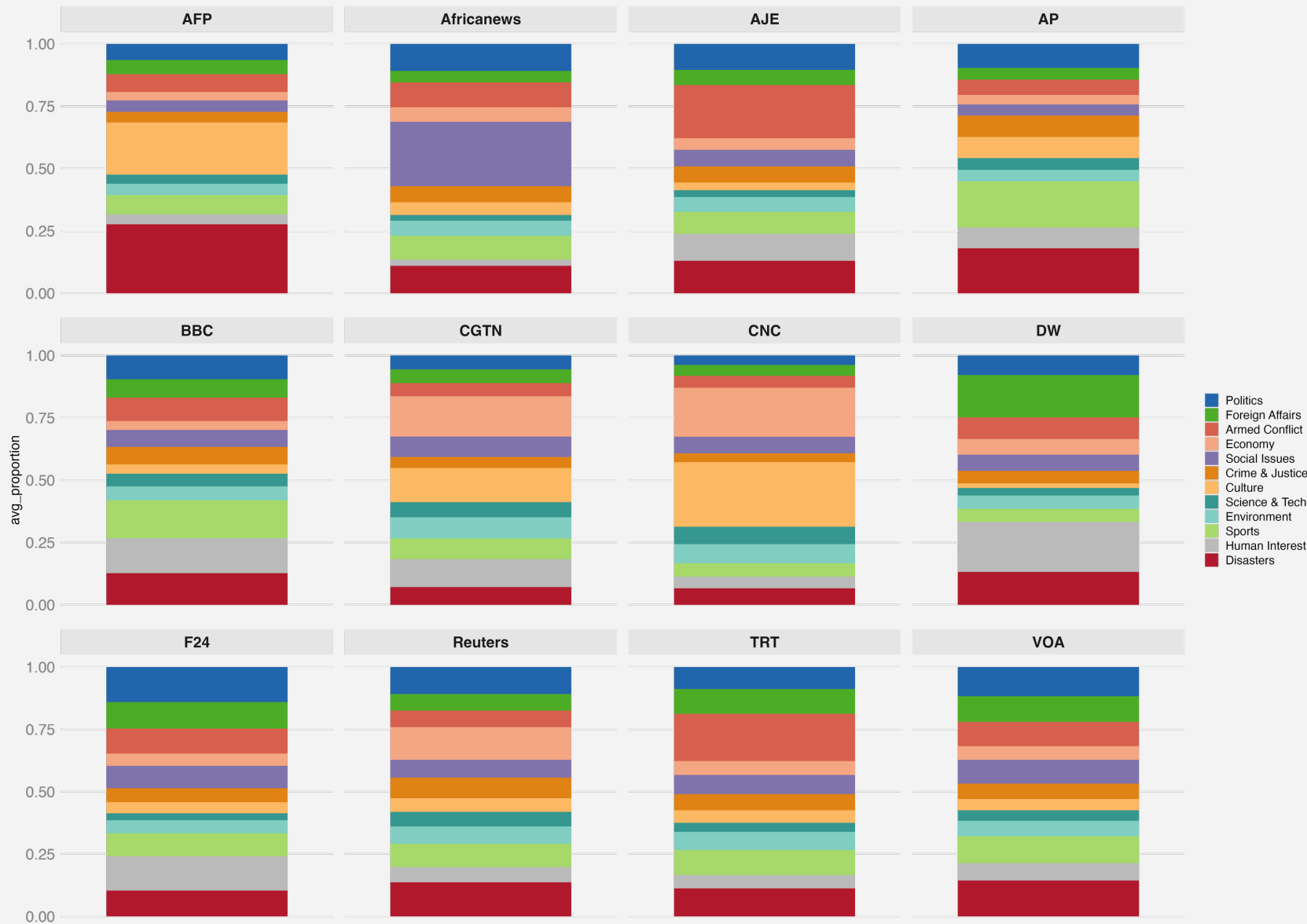
New Players Increase Topic Diversity



Old/New Divide is more prominent in topic distribution

New channels dedicate significantly more attention to Economy (13%) and Culture (12%), while legacy outlets are disproportionately driven by Disasters (16%) and Domestic Politics (11%). Sports coverage is also notably higher among old channels. This suggests new entrants may be pursuing broader audience appeal, while established outlets remain anchored to traditional hard news formats.

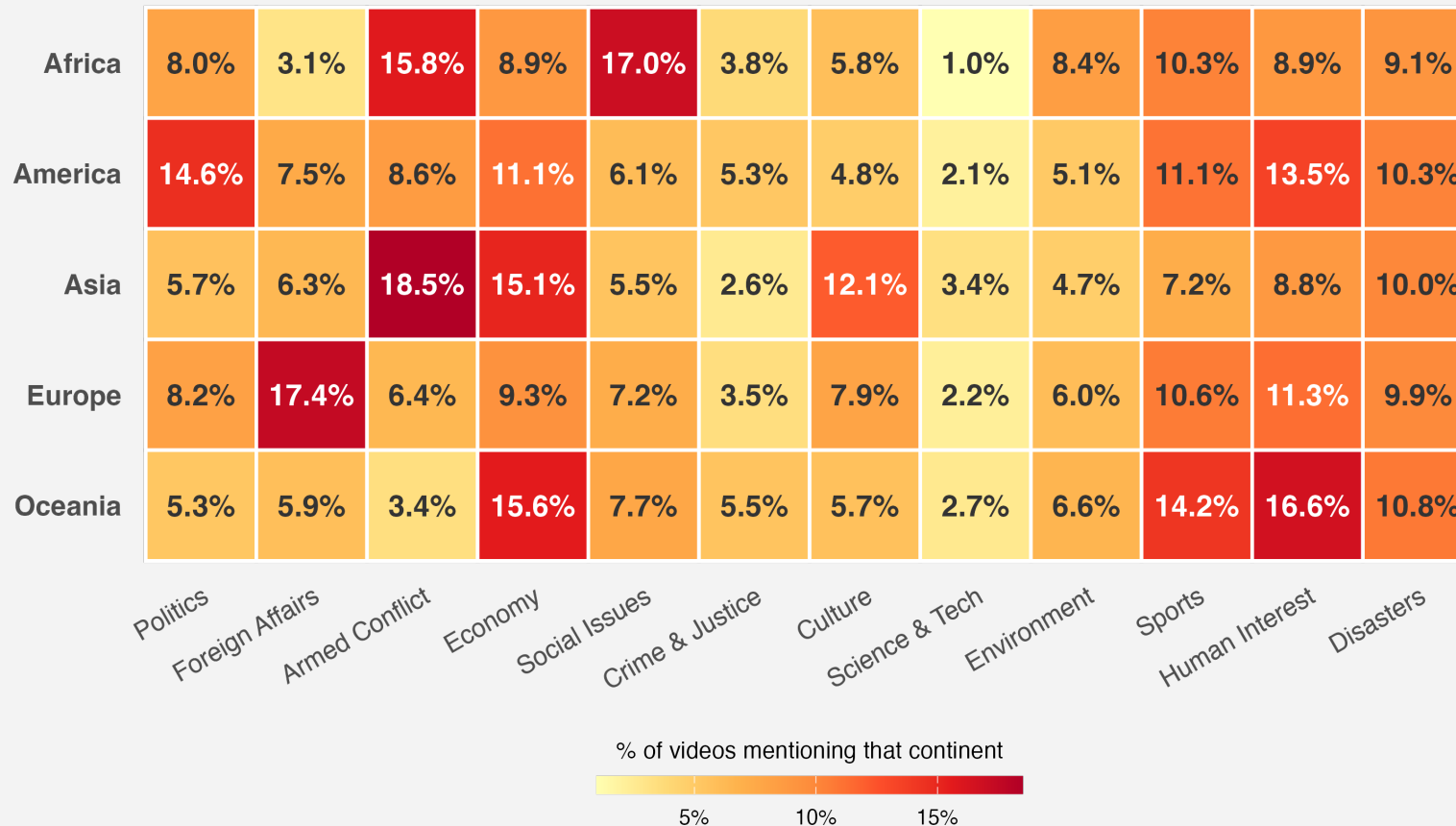
Diversity Expresses in Topic Choices



Topic profiles reflect editorial identities

No two channels cover the same mix of topics. Wire services (AFP, Reuters) show the most balanced distributions, while state-affiliated broadcasters (CGTN, CNC, TRT) are skewed toward Economy. Africanews stands out for its unique emphasis on Social Issues-

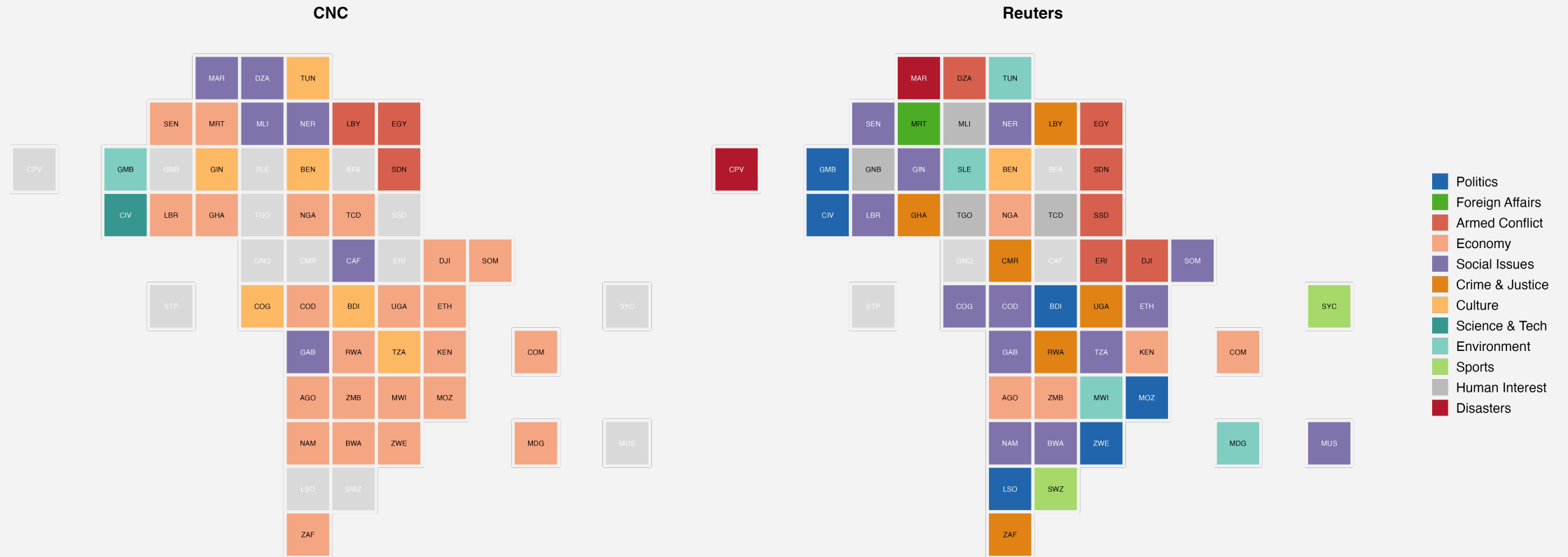
Coups, Wars and Disasters



Africa and Asia are covered through conflict

News coverage of Africa is disproportionately shaped by “Armed Conflict” and “Disasters”, reinforcing long-standing crisis narratives while underplaying political and economic complexity. Asia follows a similar pattern. By contrast, Oceania barely registers outside Sports

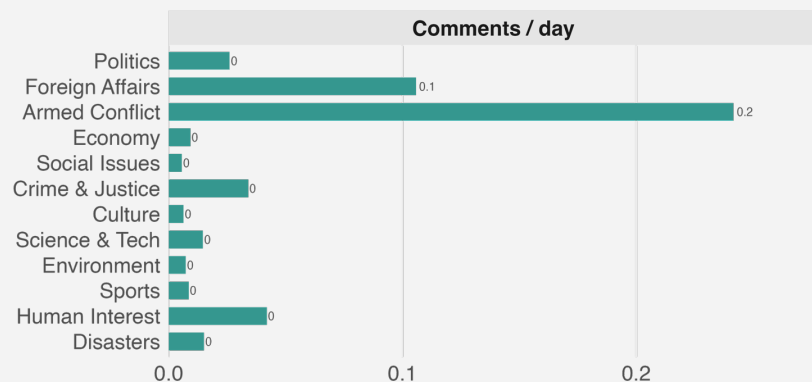
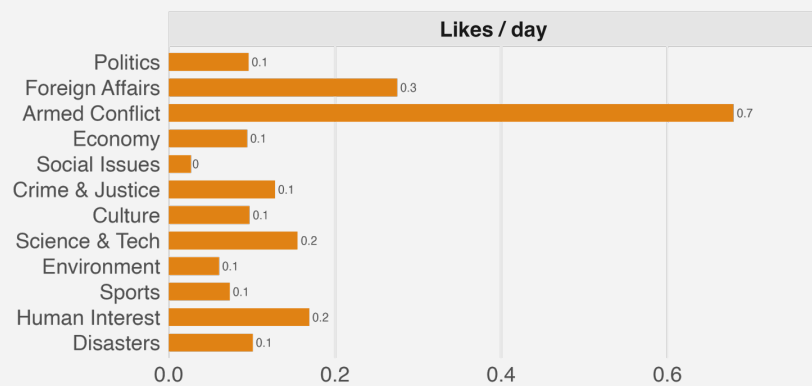
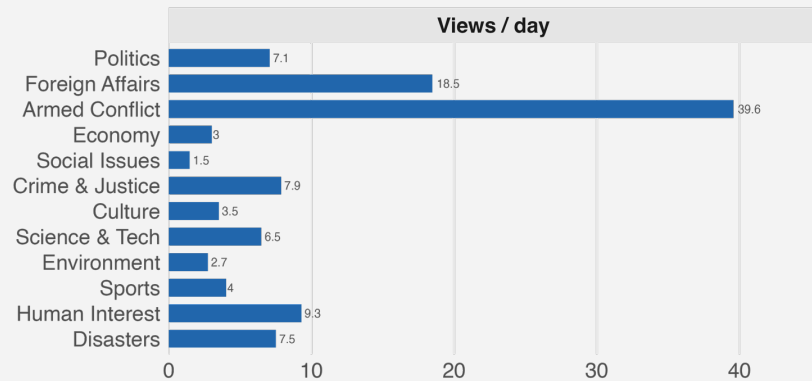
Recurring Narratives



Africa's stories are told through a narrow lens

The same countries surface repeatedly, and almost always through the same topic. Parts of the continent remain invisible, while those that do appear are reduced to recurring narratives.

War Sells



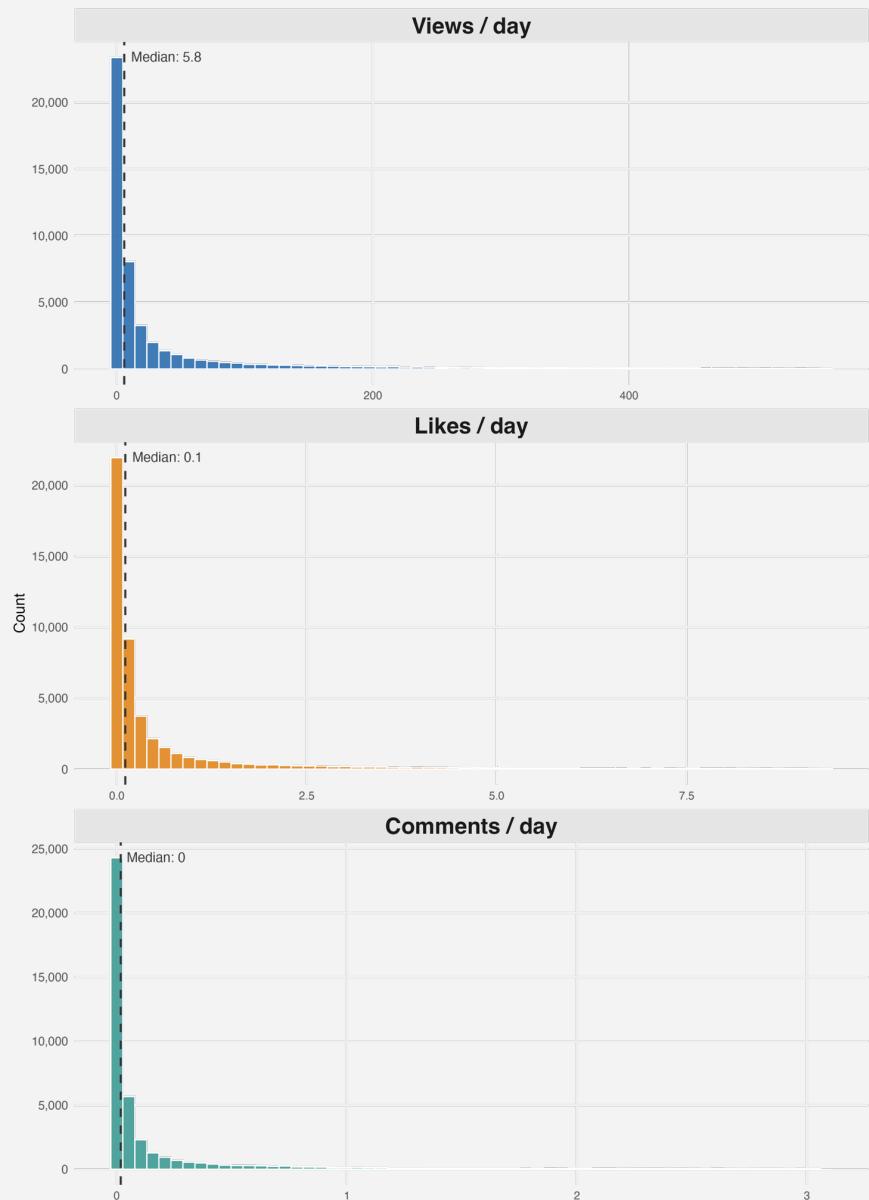
Conflict drives clicks

Armed Conflict content consistently generates the highest audience engagement across views, likes, and comments, outperforming every other topic by a significant margin. Foreign Affairs is the only other topic that approaches comparable viewership. Softer topics like Culture, Environment, and Human Interest barely register, suggesting audiences (or algorithms) strongly reward crisis-driven content.

Audience Dynamics



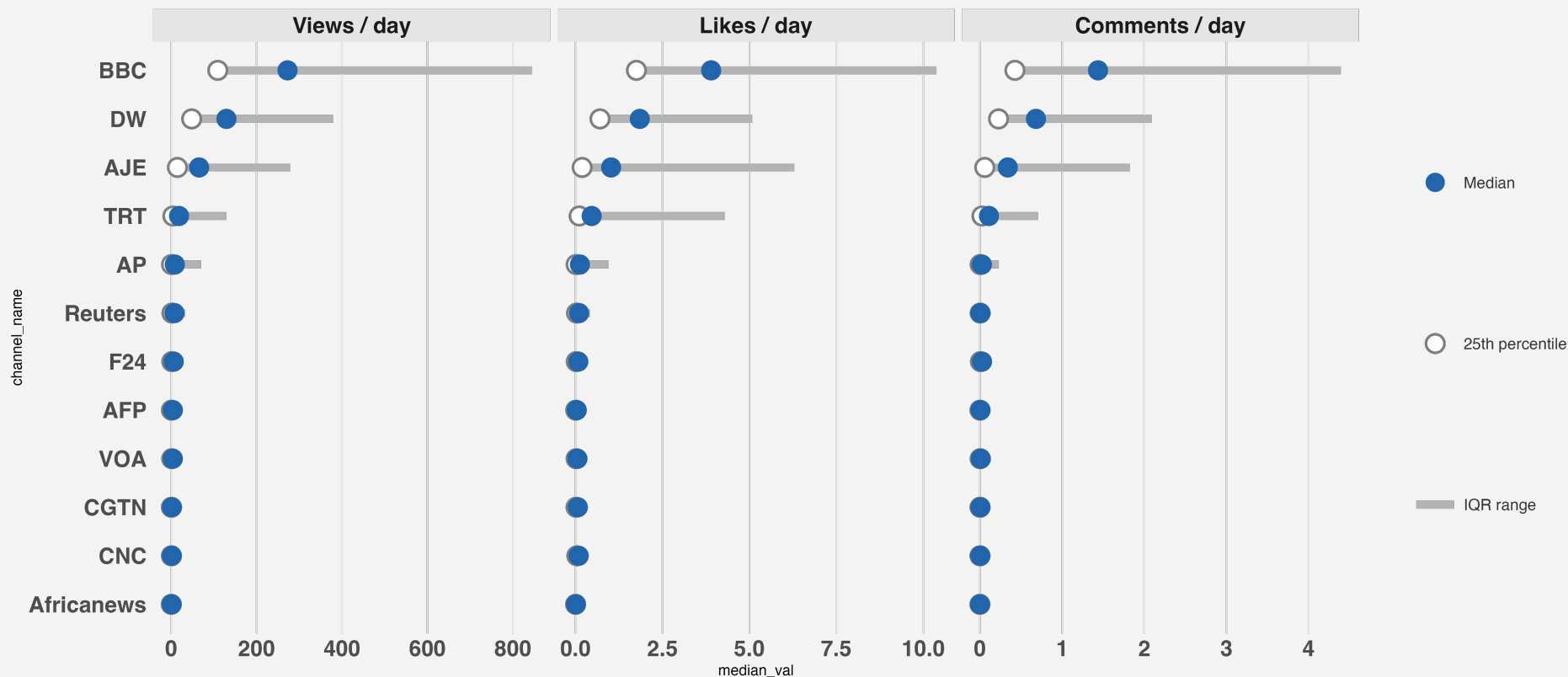
Most Videos Are Barely Watched



Engagement is low and heavily skewed

The median video receives fewer than 6 views per day, and the distribution is extremely right-skewed, meaning a tiny minority of videos account for the vast majority of all engagement. Most content published by international news channels on YouTube goes largely unnoticed.

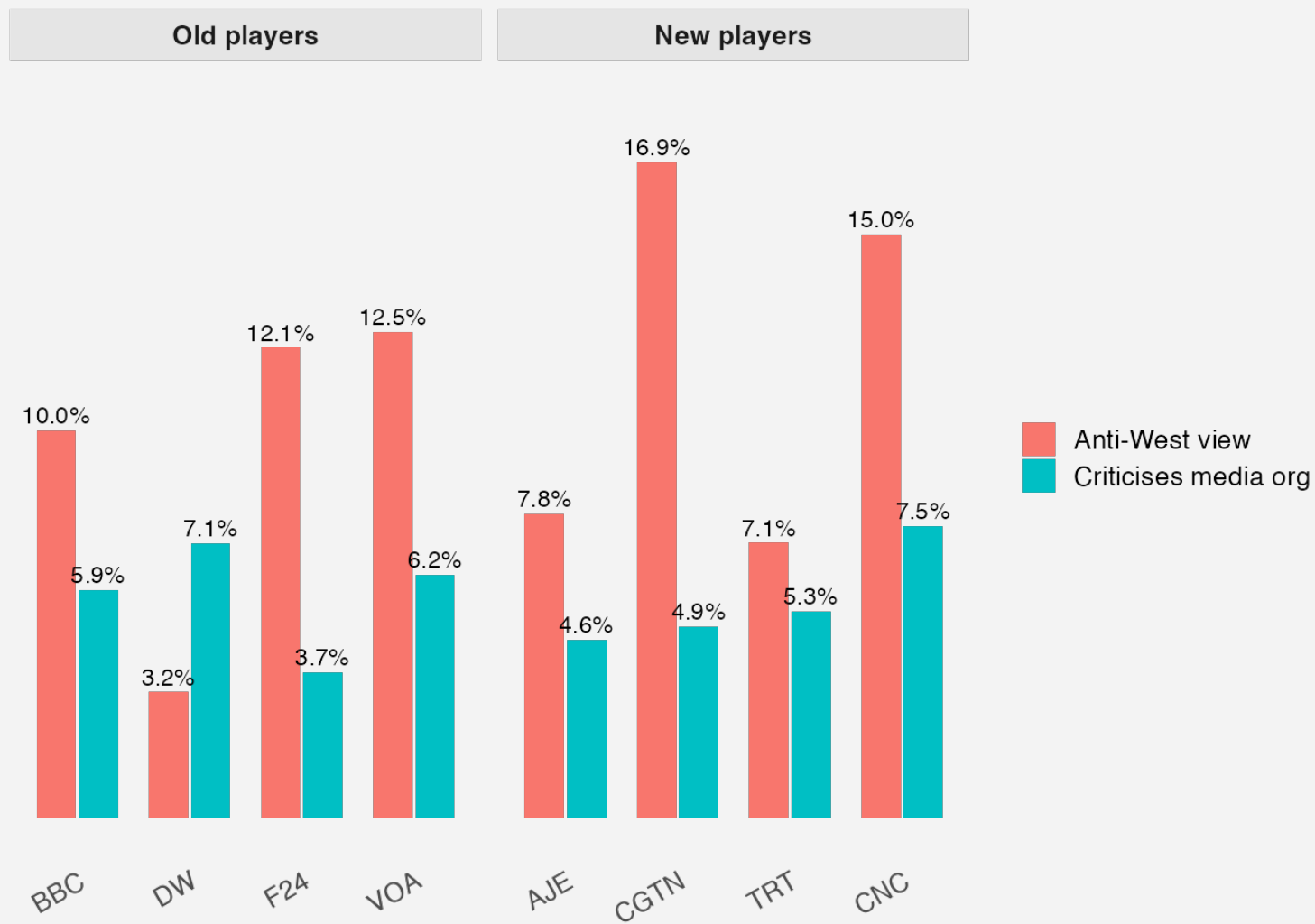
BBC Dominates, Everyone Else Competes for Scraps



A handful of channels capture most of the attention

BBC leads by a wide margin across all engagement metrics. The gap between the top three and the rest is stark. Wide IQR ranges suggest occasional viral spikes rather than consistent viewership.

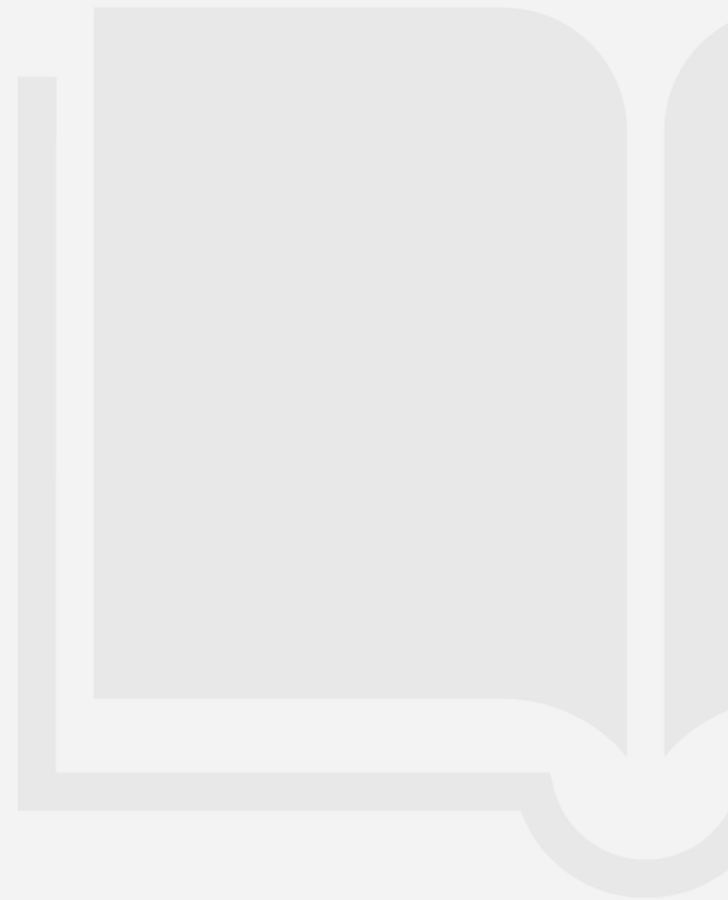
Some Channels Attract More Hostile Audiences



Anti-Western sentiment and media criticism are uneven across channels

User comments show that anti-Western sentiment and criticism of media organisations are not uniformly distributed. This may suggest that channel identity and editorial framing shape not just what content gets made, but the kind of audience it draws in.

Concluding Thoughts



Takeaway #1 – Contraflows

Some “new” actors **attempt to operate as contraflows**, but the scope of their intervention, as well as their impact remain limited.

Some of the “new” actors diversify coverage in terms of topics (and possibly framing) and therefore introduce some alternative perspectives into global news flows.

However, they do not substantially alter the **geography of attention**, which remains concentrated on a small number of countries.

On YouTube, these contraflows expand the range of voices, but they do not necessarily rebalance visibility.

Takeaway #2 – Platforming Critical Voices

The YouTube channels of “new” and “old” players provide a platform for certain **forms of critique** more visible.

For example, criticism of “Western actors” as well as broader narratives about media bias, double standards and misinformation.

These voices **circulate widely in some channels**, but their visibility is uneven and contingent on platform dynamics.

Critique is present, but it is **impossible to determine** the extent to which it is genuine, inauthentic or triggered by the content of the channels.

Takeaway #3 – Muzzled Megaphones

YouTube **lowers barriers to participation** in global news distribution.

A wider range of actors can produce and circulate content, including those outside traditional centres of news production.

However, **visibility remains structured by platform dynamics**, audience behaviour and structural inequalities.

YouTube acts as a “**muzzled megaphone**”: it expands participation but does not necessarily translate this into influence.



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