

Media analysis of industrial meat and climate change

March 2023

Executive summary

Coverage by top-tier global media of industrial meat production's contribution to climate change is extremely limited, underrepresenting its real-world impact. Despite livestock accounting for 14.5% of all climate emissions, it receives less than .5% of coverage on climate change among mainstream newspapers, newswires and digital media in the UK, US, and the EU between 2020 and 2022.

News articles on the climate impact of meat production highlighted numerous other harms of industrial meat production such as health impacts, deforestation, and zoonotic diseases. This suggests an opportunity to bring in communities of professionals such as health experts, nutritionists and forest defenders to discussions on meat/livestock emissions given the innate link between the different harms of production.

The media coverage analyzed largely cited industrial meat companies for being at fault for the emissions of livestock production. Additionally, articles predominantly emphasized government-led solutions to industry-caused emissions. In particular, government regulation of the meat industry was the most common solution cited, indicating broad support for government mandates for industry change, as opposed to voluntary company-led action.

The second-most common solution cited is increasing the availability of alternative proteins. The emphasis on scaling alternative proteins as a solution stands as an important finding, indicating a new narrative that recognizes these novel products as one of the most important climate solutions. It also stands out that the priority industry-led solution was scaling alternative proteins, as opposed to voluntary company action to mitigate emissions.

Overall, the media analysis reveals an urgent need to improve understanding and awareness of the climate impact of meat production. Media attention among elite outlets stand to better cover the outsized emissions of livestock production and industrial meat as a key means to putting meat/livestock emissions on the radar of key decision makers throughout private sector, finance sector, and public policy. To robustly address livestock emissions in line with 1.5C climate goals, stakeholders across these sectors must fully recognize the contribution from industrial meat production and take immediate action.

Methods summary

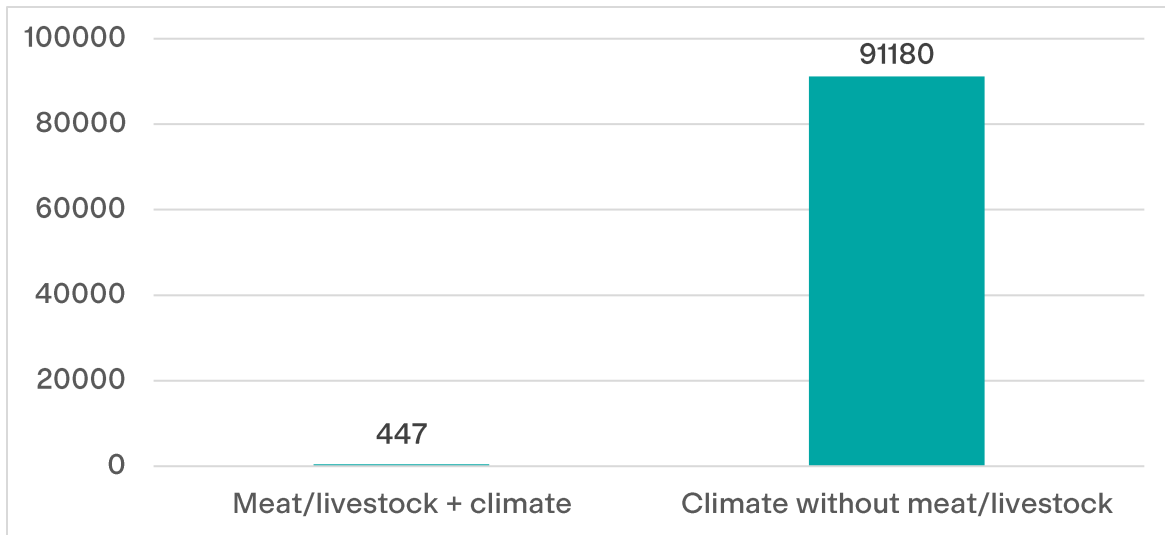
Articles were queried on media monitoring tool Factiva using climate search terms (see Annex). The search was limited to English language media coverage of terms related to meat/livestock and climate. The media monitoring covered articles appearing between January 1, 2020, and June 30, 2022. Geographically, the analysis focused on new outlets in the UK, US, and Europe.

Findings

How much of the media coverage on climate features the impact of meat/livestock?

In a search of all articles discussing climate change using selected search terms (see annex), only 447 articles mentioned meat or livestock out of 91,627 articles – equivalent to .5% of all articles. Despite livestock production standing as one of the single largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions at [14.5%](#), it receives notably less attention than other contributors to climate change with smaller emissions.

Figure 1. Livestock: 14.5% of the climate problem, but .05% of the media coverage



The media analysis suggests that meat/livestock are not widely established as a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions, and media attention has skewed to focus on other causes of climate change regardless of the actual level of emissions. Academia, government agencies, civil society and other key knowledge producers have an opportunity, and responsibility, to better institutionalize the role of meat as a leading source of emissions, and to drive improved coverage by elite media outlets. In turn, improved media coverage will help raise awareness on the importance of meat and livestock production, and urge action by policymakers, industry executives and investors.

What drives the coverage on meat and climate?

The peak of climate coverage around meat and livestock took place on 24 October 2021, in the lead up to the 26th UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP-26). Compared to 2020, the cumulative coverage of climate articles citing meat/livestock increased by 34% in 2021.

Even though COP-26 drove the peak in coverage (see Fig 2) in the 2.5 years of media coverage analyzed, most articles citing the role of meat/livestock in climate emissions

pertain to new government policies, report findings, or company/product launches, such as new alternative protein products, not major climate events such as COP-26 (see Fig 3).

Figure 2. Coverage over time

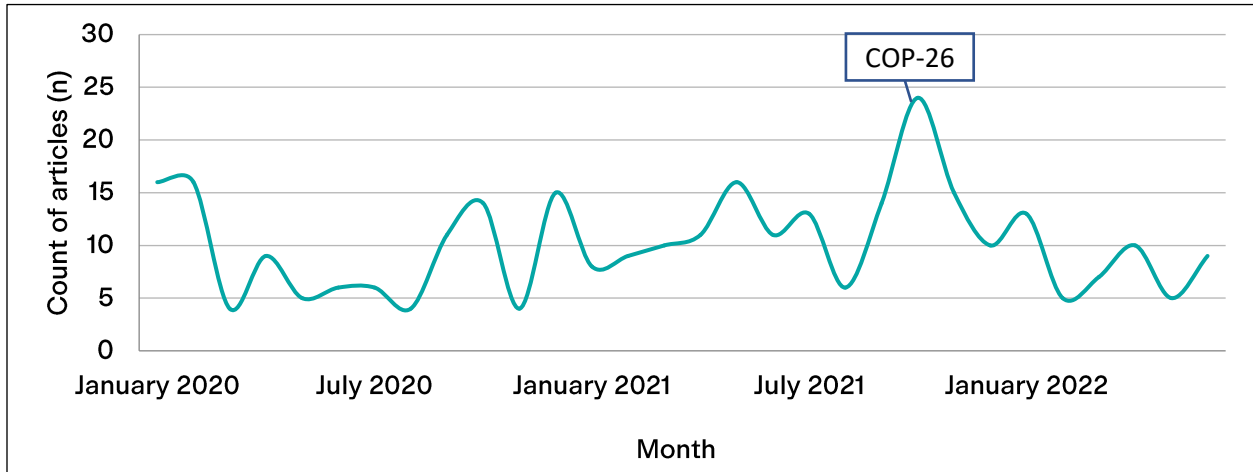
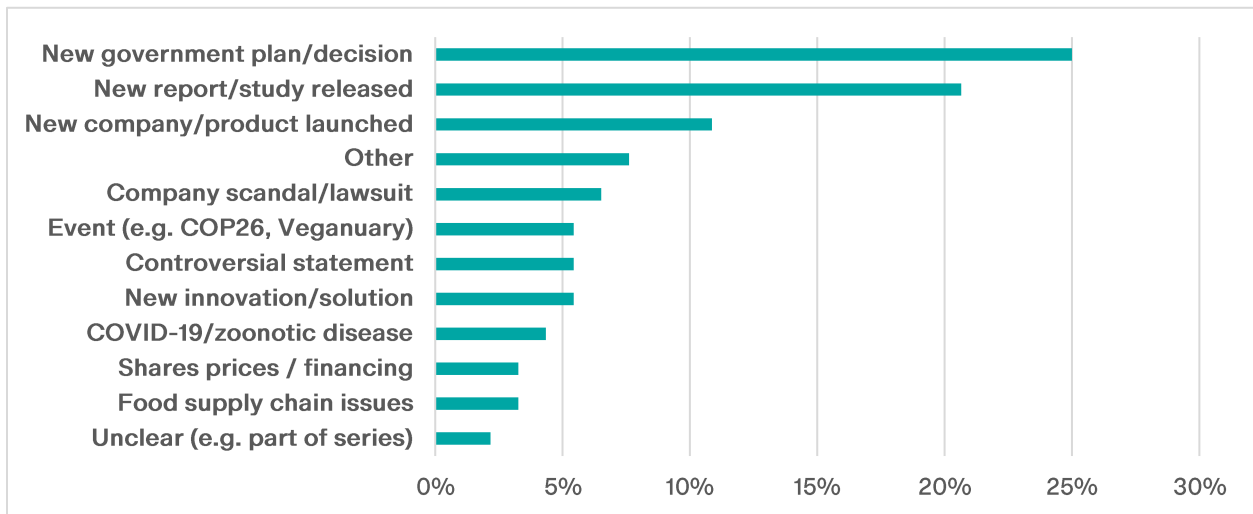


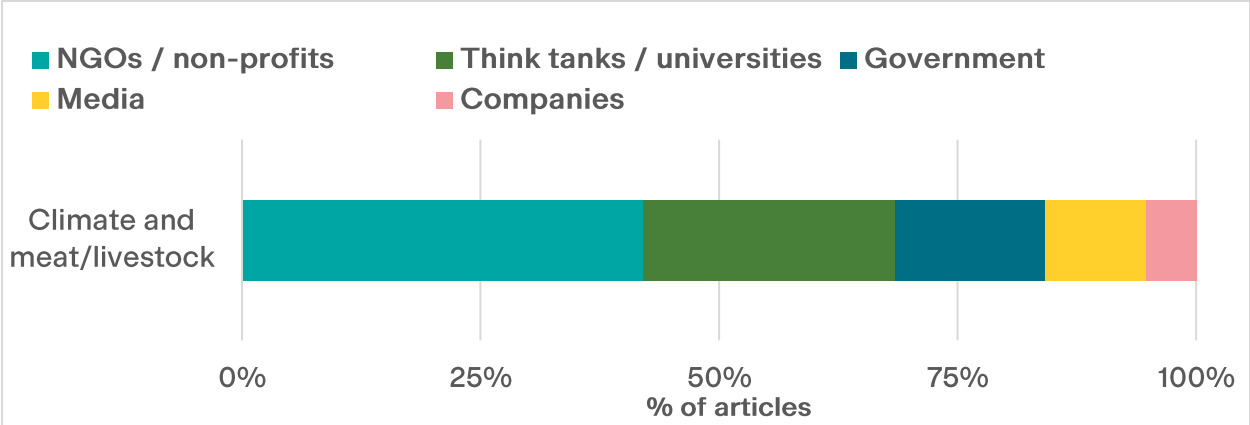
Figure 3. Triggers for coverage



The limited number of news stories on meat/livestock and climate emissions related to COP-26 is indicative of the omission of meat/livestock from multilateral climate discussions, and the global narrative on climate solutions. As noted above, an urgent opportunity exists to further embed and emphasize the outsized role of meat/livestock emissions in driving climate change. The media analysis was conducted prior to COP-27 held last year in Egypt, in which emissions from food production played a more central role, however.

The media analysis also suggests that new investigations and NGO reports on meat/livestock emissions are likely to get media attention (Fig 4). As such, greater investment in broadening the research and investigations fueling these reports stands as an important opportunity to garner greater media coverage.

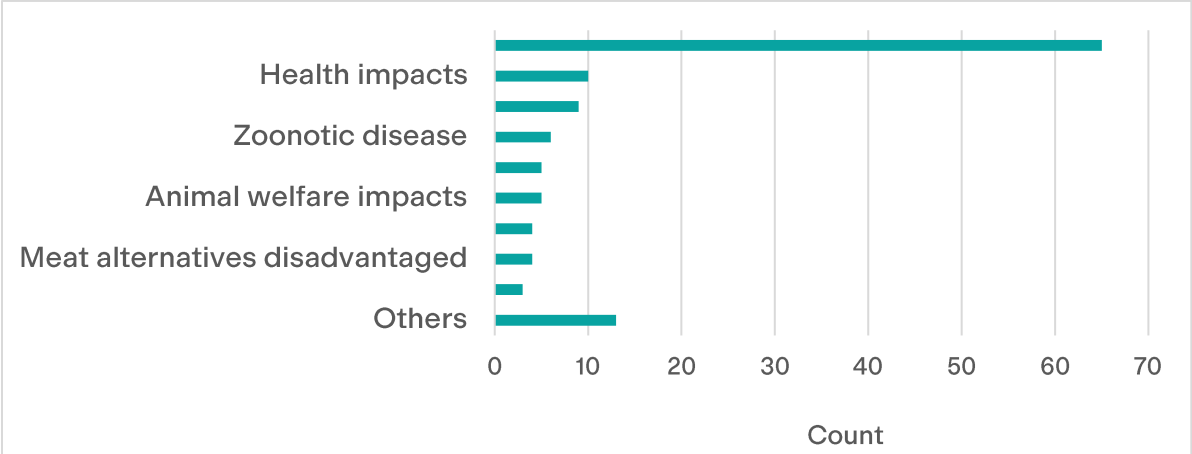
Figure 4. Sources of new report/studies featured in articles



What harms of meat/livestock production received the most media attention?

As one would expect when querying articles based on meat/livestock and climate search terms, the majority of articles emphasized the impacts of meat/livestock for climate change and environmental damage. However, these articles also noted a myriad of other harms of meat/livestock production, including human health, animal welfare, or labor. The most common issues referenced alongside climate included health impacts, deforestation, and zoonotic diseases (infectious diseases caused by a virus, bacteria or parasite that is transmitted from animals to humans such as swine flu, avian flu or salmonellosis). On the other hand, negative impacts such as farmer livelihoods, supply chain issues, and antibiotic resistance were among the least referenced impacts.

Figure 5. Main issues mentioned in articles on climate and meat/livestock



Given that many of these additional harms are centered on human health and animal welfare, an opportunity exists to better bring in health and animal welfare organizations to discussions on meat/livestock emissions. Although this media analysis focused on search terms related to climate, it is apparent that the harms are inextricably linked, and aligning efforts across communities of practice would be beneficial.

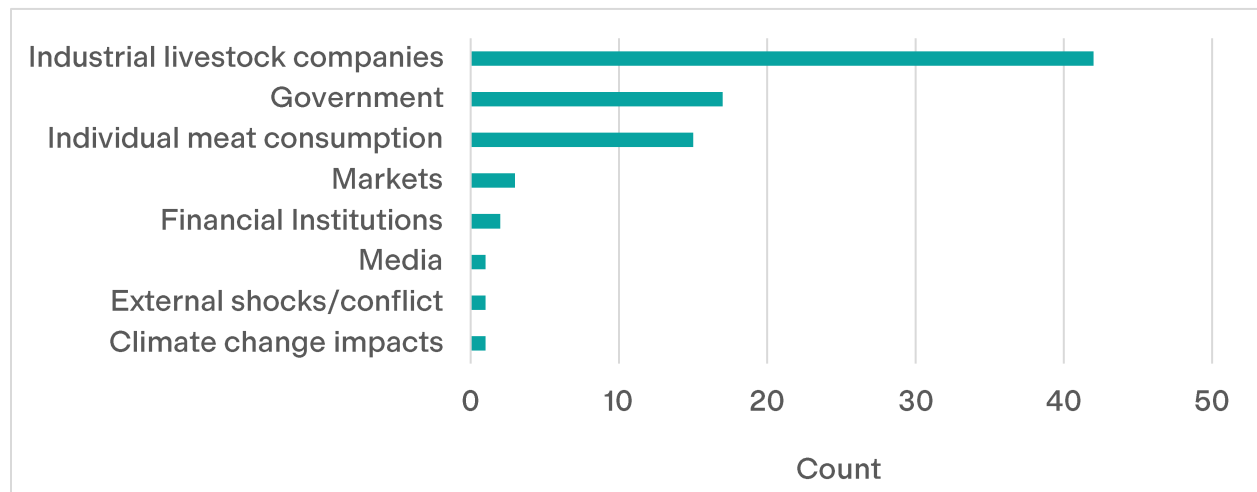
Moreover, coverage is highly split across numerous impact areas. Outside of climate impacts, the additional eight impacts queried have roughly equal coverage that can obscure focused attention on a fewer number of priority issue areas. While meat/livestock production does have numerous types of impacts, narrowing attention to a few key issues – and in turn a few key solutions – may help drive greater action.

Who is framed as responsible for meat/livestock emissions, and what solutions does media present?

In articles covering meat/livestock’s contribution to climate change, industrial meat companies were cited as the leading culprit. More than twice the number of articles cited companies compared to mention of governments or individual meat consumption.

The media analysis reveals a prevailing narrative that meat companies are at fault for climate emissions.

Figure 6. Entities framed as responsible for meat/livestock emissions



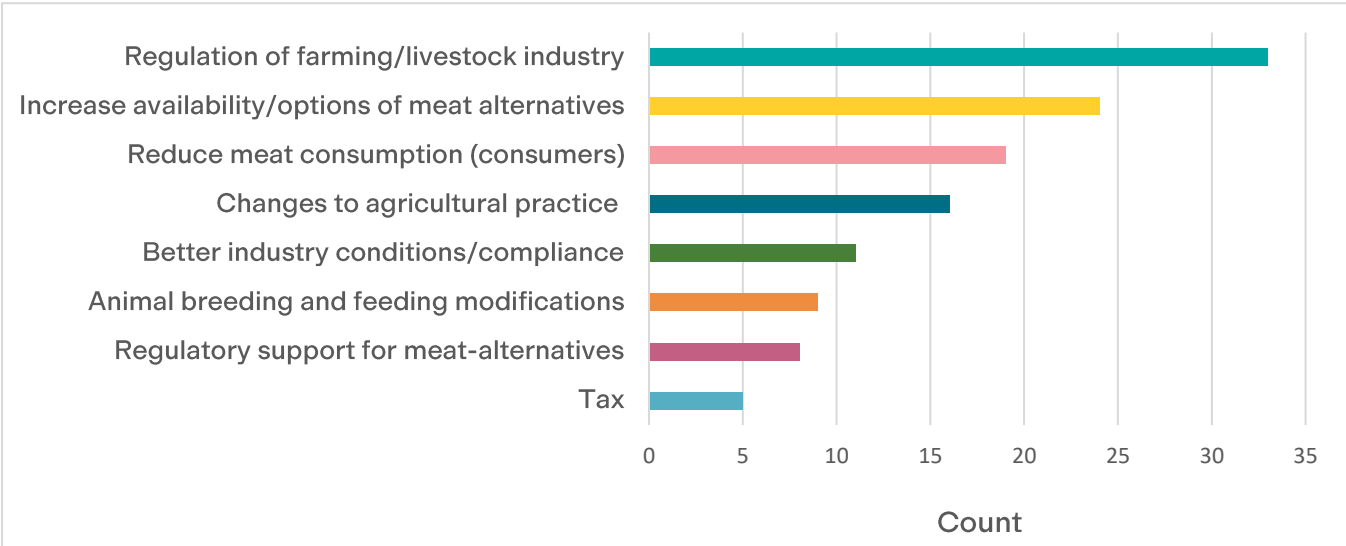
While meat companies are named as the culprits for emissions, governments are the center of solutions to meat/livestock emissions. Government action was most commonly referenced as a solution, and in particular, articles cited government regulation of the meat industry. Nearly 25% more articles cited government regulation of the meat industry as the primary solution over industry-led solutions. When industry-led solutions were mentioned, the most common solution presented was increasing the availability of alternative proteins.

The third most cited solution puts the focus on consumers and their responsibility in reducing meat intake.

The fact that increasing the availability of alternative proteins was the second most cited solution indicates new and important attention on the role of alternative proteins as a climate solution. The media analysis reveals that scaling alternative proteins is referenced more often than other solutions that have historically received more attention, such as changes to animal feeding and other production practices.

The emphasis on government regulation as a solution may suggest a disillusionment with private sector action. While emissions stem from company practices, decades of inaction and false promises from meatpackers and dairy giants, as well as companies in other sectors such as oil and gas, undermine trust in voluntary corporate action on climate change. Instead, as suggested by the media analysis, government regulation of industry actors is viewed to be a more effective means to drive change. While company action is needed, especially given the slow nature of policy change, ultimately regulation of industry is the most effective means to ensure the entirety of the private sector addresses emissions from meat/livestock emissions.

Figure 7: Solutions proposed



Conclusion

The dearth of media coverage on the contribution of meat/livestock to climate change highlights an acute opportunity to better establish meat/livestock production as a leading source of greenhouse gas emissions. Greater investment into research and investigations, as well as embedding meat/livestock into international climate fora like COP, stands as an

important avenue to drive greater attention by policymakers, financiers and business decisionmakers.

Additionally, coverage of meat/livestock contribution to climate also mentions other harms of meat/livestock production, such as human and animal health. This suggests an opportunity to bring in other communities of practice to discussions on meat/livestock emissions given the innate link between the harms of production.

The dominant narrative among elite media is that corporates are to blame for meat/livestock emissions, and that solutions should come from government regulation of the industry. Perhaps a reflection of doubt of voluntary company action, media coverage predominantly called for government regulation of the meat industry as opposed to company action to mitigate their emissions from meat/livestock. Notably, media coverage also highlighted alternative proteins as a leading climate solution. Scaling the availability of alternative proteins stood as the second most cited solution, indicating the growing recognition of the mitigation potential of alternative proteins as meat substitutes.

Annex

Method

- A review was carried out of English-language media in five US and UK daily newspapers, as well as other European newswires, using the Factiva database (see table 3 below for outlets included in our search). The articles reviewed were published between 1 January 2020 to 30 June 2022.
- An additional review was carried out on news articles from the Financial Times.
- Two separate search terms were used to capture reporting related to (see table 2 below):
 - Coverage of climate news
 - Coverage of livestock news in relation to climate
- The search terms were quite narrow in order to capture only results where meat and climate was the main focus of the article, as opposed to articles that only included a keyword (i.e. “meat” or “livestock”).¹
- In total, the searches returned 1990 articles of which 209 articles respectively were read in detail and classified for this analysis (11% of the sample).
- The sampling frequency was about every eighth article. Articles unrelated to the topic were discarded. The sampled articles were read in detail and coded manually to identify narratives, geography, spokespeople and the other categories included in this analysis. See [spreadsheet](#) for the database.

Table 1. Search terms and count of articles

Coverage	Search terms	Total count (- duplicates)	Sample size	Total read
Climate (Factiva)	(atleast2 "climate change" or "climate crisis" or "climate impact" or "global warming" or "clean air" or (CO2 near25 climat*) or (COP near25 climat*) or emission* or (carbon near25 climat*)) NOT (update or Briefing or summary or letters or correction* or Daybook or "market talk" or "roundup" or "press release" or "results announcement" or shortage)	91,627 (with duplicates)	0	0
Meat/livestock + climate (Factiva)	((atleast2 "climate change" or "climate crisis" or "climate impact" or "global warming" or "clean air" or (CO2 near25 climat*) or (COP near25 climat*) or emission* or (carbon near25 climat*)) NOT (update or Briefing or summary or	296 (447 including duplicates)	38	38

¹ For comparison, within the climate search there were 4,095 search results (with duplicates) that included either the term “meat” or “livestock” at least once, representing 5% of the climate change search results.

	letters or correction* or Daybook or "market talk" or "roundup" or "press release" or "results announcement" or shortage)) AND (atleast2 meat or atleast2 livestock) and ("factory farming" or "meat production" or ((meat or livestock) near5 (industry or rear* or industrialized or system or sector)))			
Meat/livestock + climate (Financial Times)	Meat climate	144	19	17
Meat/livestock + climate (Bloomberg)	Meat climate	255	33	32
Meat/livestock + climate (Politico)	Meat climate	275	36	7
Total		970	126	94

Table 2. News outlets used in search

Region	New outlets
US	The Guardian, BBC, The Sun, Daily Mail, The Times, The Telegraph
UK	Fox News, New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times
Other	AP, APA, EUobserver, Euractiv, Reuters, Financial Times, Bloomberg, Politico

Limitations, and options for further analysis

- This analysis was carried out using a small sample size relative to the amount of coverage, and thus provides only a snapshot.
- This analysis was carried out by one researcher, using classification categories. However, there is an unavoidable aspect of subjectivity in reading and interpreting the articles and classifying the data.
- Basic search functions on news websites, such as Politico and Bloomberg, make it difficult to assess how many articles are actually related to a specific topic. The Politico search function also included double-ups of articles.