

# Exploring national culture through international media

## The publication of a viral pro-LGBT image compared against a nation's wealth, level of religion, and democracy

*Linda Jean Kenix*

University of Canterbury

### Abstract

Gay marriage is now legal in 22 countries around the world. However, homosexual acts remain punishable by death in 10 countries and are now illegal in a further 65 countries. Thus, there appears to be very clear national cultural distinctions in how local cultures consider the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. In 2016, an image of a 12-year-old boy who stood against a sea of anti-LGBT marriage protesters in Celaya, Mexico went 'viral' around the world as an icon for LGBT rights. This research will examine newspapers from a sample of 17 countries to see where this particular pro-LGBT image was used. This research asks the question, what is the relationship between the publication of this image and a country's level of democracy, wealth and religion – socio-economic factors that have been found to be correlated to the acceptance of LGBT rights. The findings of this research could potentially suggest the presence of ideological biases at the national level in regards to how international news stories are told and also which news stories are even addressed. These factors may help to coalesce into a cultural perspective unique to each country examined

**Keywords:** *Viral image, democracy, wealth, religion, ideology, international news*

### Introduction

This study examines how a select group of countries around the world visually framed one particular protest in Mexico, which was related to LGBT rights. The research then compares that visual media representation – as a framed ideological, cultural construction – to the wealth, religion and democracy of a particular country, three factors that have been suggested to be related to LGBT acceptance (Encarnación, 2014; Pew Research Center, 2013). In doing so, this study interrogates the cultural factors that may be influencing the use of a particular digital image during an informational age where electronic images circulate around the world in lightning speed.

Few topics elicit such a globally divisive response as gay marriage. Earth's inhabitants appear to be effectively split to the prospect of homosexual unions. It is now legal in 22 countries around the world, but homosexual acts remain punishable by death in 10 countries and are now illegal in a further 65 countries following relatively recent international legislation. Thus, there appears to be very clear national distinctions in how local cultures consider the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. Mexico as a country reflects that division: gay marriage is legal in Mexico City as well as several Mexican states, but in September of 2015, 100 cities in all 32 Mexican states hosted a march entitled "March for the Family" to protest against President Enrique Peña Nieto's proposal to legalise gay marriage. His proposal came after a Supreme Court ruling declaring that a ban on same-sex marriage was unconstitutional. Thus, while gay marriage is now legal in Mexico, only a very small percentage of Mexican states allow gay people to be married.

In 2016, at one of the "March for the Family" protests organised by National Family Front (Frente Nacional por la Familia), a photojournalist snapped an image of a 12-year-old boy who stood against a sea of anti-LGBT marriage protesters in Celaya, Mexico. In the week that followed, the image went 'viral' around the world as an icon of ideological support for LGBT rights. This research will examine media outlets from a sample of countries to see first, which countries covered this anti-gay protest and second, which countries included this particular pro-LGBT image rather than the images depicting the anti-LGBT marriage march. This research asks the question, what is the relationship between the publication of this image and a country's level of democracy, wealth and religion – socio-economic factors that have been found to be correlated to the acceptance of LGBT rights. The more wealthy and the more secular a country is, the more likely that country is to favor LGBT rights (Pew Research Center, 2013). Therefore, the level of religion and wealth for each country sampled in this study will be examined. Encarnación (2014), a Professor of Political Studies at Bard, has argued that democracy should also be considered as a third component to the acceptance of LGBT rights given that "although gay

rights are not found in all democracies, gay rights are virtually nonexistent in nondemocracies” (p. 91). Based on the work of Encarnación, the level of a nation’s democracy will be the third variable to be included in this study.

In examining the data analytically, this research will first review academic studies that examine the power of media frames in relation to public opinion at the national level. This section of the paper explores how media frames influence public opinion and how the representation of a particular image might be related to public opinion. This study is unique in that it examines the use of one particular image as representative of a framed ideological construction, rather than the use of specific text-based keywords. However, previous framing theory research will help to contextualize and carry out the analysis of these results from around the world. In addition, as this is an image connected to LGBT rights, it is endemically linked to a nation’s culture: how a people views the LGBT community, if it is acceptable to be part of that community, and how others outside of that community position themselves in relation to the LGBT community, is central to a nation’s culture. All of these factors are intrinsically tied to heteronormative and homonormative identity, which is central to how a culture understands itself. This linkage is not direct, rather it is a peripheral but essential component in understanding how people think of themselves in relation to ‘the other.’

The findings of this research could potentially suggest the presence of cultural biases at the national level in regard to how international news stories are told and also which news stories are addressed at all. Results from this study should also help to elucidate whether democracy is a third factor relating to the international acceptance of LGBT rights. Any emergent patterns could suggest an interconnection between mediated communication, public opinion and cultural norms.

## The image

In Celaya, Guanajuato, Mexico, on 10 September 2016, a large anti-gay marriage march was organised by Mexico’s Frente Nacional por la Familia, or National Family Front. This group helped to organise marches in 19 states across Mexico, all of which were focused on opposing a proposed constitutional amendment legalising same-sex marriage across the country. At the protest march in Celaya, a photo journalist from *Al Momento Celaya*, Manuel Rodríguez, took a photo of a 12-year-old boy who appeared to be standing against a sea of protesters that were walking in his direction (Figure 1). The boy’s arms were outstretched and he appeared to be signalling the symbolic anti-gay markers to stop. According to the secondary reports that were filed in the days following the march, the image was first published in *Regeneración* on 11th September (Administrador *Regeneración*, 2016a). However, the article in *Regeneración*, which is hyperlinked by countless news outlets, is not about the march itself, but about the iconography of the image. In that cited article, the photographer was asked about his thoughts on the image. He is quoted in *Regeneración* saying, “en principio pensé que el niño solo jugaba” (at first, I thought that the boy was playing). The photographer then explains how he approached the child who said “tengo un tío que es gay y no me gusta que lo odien” (I have an uncle who is gay and I don’t like that they hate him). Rodríguez then is quoted stating that there were “poco más de 11 mil personas” (a little more than 11,000 people) at the march. The article concludes by drawing comparisons between the image and the famous 1989 photograph of a lone protester in Tiananmen Square in China, standing against a sea of tanks. A reproduction of the image from Tiananmen Square is posted alongside the image of the young boy.

The next day, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September, *Regeneración* ran another article about how the image itself went viral (Administrador *Regeneración*, 2016b) and lists eleven publications that had used the image in their reports of the protest. However, neither of these *Regeneración* articles addressed the march itself – both were about the image, so it is unclear if the publication actually did run the image when covering the march. Repeated searches of the *Regeneración* website on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of September could not locate any story with the accompanying image. In addition, both *Regeneración* and Rodríguez were approached via Facebook and email for further comment as to the copyright of the 12-year-old boy protest image. However, these requests did not result in any response.

On the day when *Regeneración* first ran their story with the 12-year-old boy protest image, Rodríguez posted the same image to his personal Facebook page. Rodríguez’s page, which was open to the public, ran the image with the caption: “Me dio náuseas ver tanta homofobia reunida, pero me quedo con la imagen de un niño intentando "detener" a los "manifestantes". Translated, this reads “I felt nauseous when I saw so much homophobia all together, but I’d rather take with me the image of the child trying to ‘stop’ the ‘protesters’” A website called Unicorn Booty, which amalgamates and reports on LGBT-oriented news stories from around the world, stated that Rodríguez “posted the image to his personal Facebook page rather than submit it to his publication since he is personally opposed to the protestors’ anti-equality sentiment” (Villarreal, 2016). A BuzzFeed article on the 13<sup>th</sup> quoted Rodríguez directly saying “I didn’t think that the photograph would strike such a chord. In fact, I uploaded it to my personal profile to share it with my friends. I’m against this protest organized by the National Family Front, but as a journalist I cannot take a stance, so I uploaded it to my personal profile” (Agis & Brown, 2016).

Rodríguez’s personal Facebook page showed 683 shares as of 15 November. However, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2016, the image spread to exponentially more individuals than the 683 indicated. In the days following the publication of this image – and the spread of this image around the globe - *The Gay Times* reported that Rodríguez was “subjected to homophobic abuse and even death threats since the picture went viral” (Whithey, 2016). These threats have also been directed to his

home, according to *The Gay Times* article. While the virality of the image online appears to have had personal ramifications for the photojournalist, this research is interested in exploring how the ‘official’ virality of the image in mainstream news organizations may or may not correlate to a nation’s wealth, level of democracy, and role of religion in public life. Such a correlation would indicate a strong ideological bias at the national level - in not only the reporting of news but the selection of which news stories to address in the first place. Such correlations are important when considering the state of gay marriage around the world.

## **LGBT rights by country**

Gay marriage has become legal in 22 countries since 2001. Of these countries, nine were randomly included in this study (the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Uruguay, Iceland, Denmark, Sweden, South Africa and Argentina). However, it is important to note that in ten countries, homosexual acts remains punishable by death and homosexual acts are illegal in 65 countries. Of these countries where homosexuality is illegal and/or only allowed in some jurisdictions, seven countries were randomly included for this study (Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, and Ghana). Gay marriage has become legal in 23 countries since 2001 at the time of this writing. Of these countries, nine were randomly included in this study (the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Uruguay, Iceland, Denmark, Sweden, South Africa and Argentina). However, it is important to note that in ten countries, homosexual acts remains punishable by death and homosexuality continues to be criminalised in 75 countries. Same-sex marriage is illegal in 169 countries and legal in only some jurisdictions in Mexico. Of the countries where same-sex marriage is illegal, seven countries were randomly included for this study (Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, and Ghana).

The withdrawal of same-sex rights in some countries can be traced to historical legislation, but many countries have passed legislation against homosexuality only in recent years (Cameron & Berkowitz, 2016). For example, Chad made same-sex relations punishable by 15 to 20 years in prison in 2014. India reinstated a ban on same-sex relationships in 2013 and Brunei adopted the death penalty, although has not implemented it, for homosexual acts in 2016. In 2013, Uganda passed a law which mandates life imprisonment for homosexual acts and in that same year Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a federal law titled “for the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating for a Denial of Traditional Family Values,” which made it illegal to ‘promote’ homosexuality (Encarnación, 2014). The state of gay rights around the world is very much in flux and extremely uneven from nation to nation.

At the heart of the global divide on homosexuality are two variables that often go hand in hand: wealth and the role of religion in public life (Pew Research Center, 2013). At the heart of the global divide on homosexuality are two variables that often go hand in hand: wealth and the role of religion in public life (Pew Research Center, 2013). The richer and more secular the country, the higher the level of acceptance of homosexuality is likely to be; conversely, the poorer and more religious the country, the less likely it is that homosexuality will find acceptance among the public and acceptance in the law. These findings mirror some dramatic changes in religious patterns observed in several parts of the world. Across Western Europe and Latin America, a much-discussed ‘fade’ of Catholicism has taken place in recent decades. Spain and Argentina are among the most extreme cases. In these traditionally Catholic societies, only 3 percent of people consider religion as one of their three most important values (Eurobarometer, 2008). Thus, understanding how this image was disseminated around the world must be ideologically considered in tandem with all three variables under exploration (democracy, religion, and wealth) and not just one variable in isolation.

## **The importance of culture, ideology, and media**

Ideology is a fundamental component of culture – it is how the ideas of a culture are framed and communicated. Certainly culture has many different ideologies embedded within it – culture is heterogenous and formed by a collection of ideologies. However, there is now an understanding that cultural values and ideologies and belief systems are inextricably linked (Michaud, Carlisle, & Smith, 2009). An ideology is a system of beliefs whereas a culture is a shared understanding of how to behave, how to live and how to operate in society, what is seen as right and wrong. Ideology is necessary for the existence of culture but culture could not exist without competing ideologies. In line with this, Brummett’s definition of ideology as an “interrelated system of meanings that are generated by the system of artifacts that comprise a culture” helps to guide this work (1994, p. 25).

This inherent complexity and multimodality extends to media as well. Media are not one monolithic voice. Rather, media are ubiquitous, dynamic and multi-directional in approach. However, the elite, powerful news media predominately shape how the public interprets issues and events (Sotirovic, 2000). Consequently, the public’s main understanding of social issues is largely derived from a framed construction provided by the elite news media, which is intrinsically from a distinct perspective (i.e. Altheide, 1976; Gamson, 1992; Gitlin, 1980; Ryan, Carragee, & Schwerner, 1998; Tuchman, 1978). Although from a distinctly elite ideology, news media create purposefully framed images after a complex negotiation of contributing forces that can also be seen to be politically motivated (Street, 2001). This is not a structurally deterministic process whereby media simply disseminate elite, dominant messages. Rather, “there is an interaction within the media, who operate as both structures and agents, not passively disseminating dominant ideologies (as suggested by structural

accounts) but playing an active role in their creation, construction articulation and communication” (Allen & Savigny, 2012, p. 280).

Actively constructed and co-created messaging coalesces to form a broader cultural perspective, which then provides researchers with a framework to better understand similarities across large groupings (Thompson, 1990). The inclusion or exclusion of particular information, on a national scale, can have profound ideological implications.

Given such complexity in examining culture, ideology, and media, previous research has argued that scholars must assess several media types and genres, as well as geographic distinctions to assess media pluralism (Valcke, 2009). This encouragement has come after decades of research examining objectivity in news with conflicting results (i.e. Fedler, Smith, & Meeske, 1983; Merrill, 1965). These contradictions exist because fundamental understanding of words such as objectivity –key to understanding a democratic media- is itself a contested term complicated by assumptions embedded in high-level abstractions like “justice, democracy, freedom, mankind, communism, peace with honour, and law and order” (Severin & Tankard, 1997, p. 97). These high-level abstractions are transmuted through mediated content in the same way that they are communicated through verbal communication – through words, phrases, emphases on particular aspects of a shared narrative and the specific framing of current events. The larger public associates meaning to these symbolic political identifiers (Conover & Feldman, 1981) and feels the “relative” esteem of cultural conventions communicated by elite media (Schiffer, 2000). This process is difficult to define but easier to discern when one thinks of an icon or object that is important within their culture. Given this previous research suggesting transference of the “relative” esteem of cultural conventions from political elites to the broader public, the culturally embedded coverage of any particular sustained event in mass media could have profound implications on policy, political identification and the range of ideological debate available within a culture.

The high-level abstraction of culture can be seen in the micro-level framing of news stories. Gitlin (1980) long ago defined frames as “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organise discourse” (p. 7). While framing as a theoretical construct has been unevenly implemented in the field (Entman, 2004), this early definition has continued to hold scholarly attention as it alludes to both the pragmatic process of framing and the power of frames in forming culture within society. Media define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies through frames, “which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Frames are formed through the repeated use of an extensive interconnected nexus of lexical choices, as well as the recurrent selections of news sources (Manning, 2001), that combine to form a thematic impression.

Public understanding of the social world derives, in large part, from a selectively framed construction of meaning provided by media over time (Ryan et al., 1998). This framed construction has been found to favour elite, official, authoritative sources (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Cottle, 2000; Domke, Watts, Shah, & Fan, 1999; Westlund, 2013; Williams, Wardle, & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011), which tends to omit the average citizen as a source for news (Reich, 2015) for a host of circumstantial, logistical and evaluative reasons. While some research has challenged the importance of non-elite voices in the media (Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, & Rucht, 2002), the weight of research has consistently linked framing to power and ideology embedded in shared cultures (Dahlberg, 2001; Gitlin, 1980; Singer et al., 2011; Tuchman, 1978). This linkage is due to the intrinsic relationship between framed representations in the media and societies’ general understanding of the cultural world. Carragee and Roefs (2004) argued that framing studies must examine their results within the “contexts of the distribution of political and social power” (p. 214) because a media frame determines what is “relevant” (Hertog & McLeod, 1995, p. 4) and “suggests what the issue is” (Tankard Jr., Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss, & Ghanem, 1991). “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman & Rojecki, 1993, p. 52). Frames are “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (Reese, Gandy Jr., & Grant, 2001, p. 11).

Although accessing media frames is now easier than it has ever been in history, and many audiences are now far more ethnically and culturally diverse than they have ever been in the past, news organizations continue to focus on issues that directly affect only those in their geographic region (Fenton, 2005; Vasil, 2003). The long held axiom in journalism is that proximity determines newsworthiness (Mencher, 2000). However, ascertaining that proximity requires value judgments informed by assumptions about one’s audience (Gasher, 2007). For example, the percentage of a country’s population that is deemed foreign is a key factor to that country’s prominence in the news (Segev, 2015). However, news organisations must constantly determine the ‘relevance’ (Harcup & O’Neill, 2001) of news stories to their audience in accordance with perceived cultural proximity, viewed through a social, political and ideological lens (Segev, 2016). Thus, examining patterns of coverage around the world may help to uncover the cultural importance of an issue to those who attend to that message.

The simple use of this particular image has been framed in a deterministic pro-gay perspective in this study. This is because there is no plausible reason to show this particular image unless one wishes to demonstrably show the protest of this child against the anti-gay marriage movement. The choice to display this particular image is intertwined within the culture from which that decision arises. As is commonly understood, the news is a result of many value-laden decisions which happen in the process of news gathering (Holton, Coddington, & Gil de Zuñiga, 2013; Schultz, 2007). Just as

resultant discourse is viewed as a series of lexical choices (Matheson, 2005), the decision to portray a particular image is made after also examining a series of choices. The results of this study, if found to be consistent across these selected socioeconomic national factors, would suggest an ideological-level series of decisions that ultimately lead to an issue being framed in the press according to cultural values. Similarly, the wholesale absence of this viral online image demonstrates ideological framing as well. In addition, although not the stated purpose of this research, it should be noted that a discourse analysis of corresponding text in the articles sampled, was simply not possible because of the various languages used in this sample. Hence, similar to other recent studies (Jewitt, 2016; Machin, 2016), this research attempts to examine multimodal methodological approaches to culture and ideology that exist beyond text.

## Methodology

An inventory of all the 195 countries in the world was divided into two lists: ‘passed gay marriage’ and ‘have not passed gay marriage.’ These two lists were further delineated according to seven geographic continents. Thus there were 14 lists of countries at this point. These lists were randomized so as not to be in any particular order. Every 3<sup>rd</sup> country from each list was then selected until the first country was located that did not have any results for found content. At that stage, the selection of content stopped. In total, this study examined 17 countries. The nine countries included in the study that had passed a same-sex marriage bill at the time of writing this article were: the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Uruguay, Iceland, Denmark, Sweden, South Africa and Argentina. The seven countries included for study that had not passed same-sex marriage bill at the time of this writing were: Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, and Ghana. Mexico was also examined as it was the country which had hosted the protest march. At the time of this writing, Mexico had not yet passed a same-sex marriage bill, although same-sex marriage is performed in certain regions of the country. This study examined content from the 11th of September to the 16th of September – a date range that included the march date.

Each country was located on the website *w3newspapers*, which is an online database of newspapers and magazines in each country. A total list of newspapers was then amassed, based strictly on the newspapers available on the website. Searches were then conducted through each individual newspaper website with the eight keyword combinations: Mexico and march, Mexico and protest, Mexico and gay, Mexico and homosexual, Mexico and Manuel Rodriguez, Mexico and anti-gay, Mexico and same-sex marriage. These searches were conducted both in English and the local language, if not English. There were several languages in this pool so a simple Google search for the correct language usage was relied on for each country’s search. Two searches were conducted, one in English and one using translations (found through the Google Translator website) of above terms. Mexico was the only country whose search was done completely using Google News because there were simply too many newspapers to research individually which would have meant an inefficient use of time. Unlike other countries with a long tabulation of newspapers, such as Spain, Mexico was suited to Google News search, because the country being searched was the same as the location of the news - Mexico and gay march in Mexico - which Google News can easily search for. The newspapers that were clearly duplicative of another newspaper already sampled or those that did not have a search function were excluded. In total, this study examined 535 newspapers in search of this image and also Google News for Mexico (Table 1).

When a relevant search result was found, a screenshot was taken of the newspaper article, the title of the newspaper, and the title of the article. Two annotators then examined the screen shots to separately code the country, the name of newspaper, the article’s attitude towards LGBT in general, and the images present: confirmation that one of the images was in fact the viral picture, the number of supportive anti-gay march photos, and the number of against anti-gay march photos including the viral image. The intercoder reliability for the coding was very robust at .956.

A nation’s level of democracy was derived from a formulation first created by Campbell, Pözlbauer, Barth, and Pözlbauer (2015). There is not one theory or model of democracy, but this concept of democracy was used for this paper. Authors measure the quality of democracy by aggregating the following weights: political dimensions (50 percent of total measure) and performance of non-political dimensions, each measured at 10 percent: gender, economy, knowledge, health, and the environment. A series of quantitative indicators are assigned to every dimension. All indicators fall in value range of 1 to 100 and are then tabulated for an aggregate score. For example, participation, competition, freedom, vertical and horizontal or accountability, and the rule of law, are all quantitative indicators for politics. A nation’s level of religiosity was measured by a 2009 Gallup poll conducted internationally that simply asked ‘Is religion important in your daily life?’ (Crabtree, 2010). Given that these data are somewhat older, they were juxtaposed with an incomplete 2013 dataset, which asked ‘How important is religion in your life?’ (Pew Research Center, 2013). The two datasets taken together gave a reasonable estimation of the importance of religion in a certain country. Finally, a country’s wealth was measured by gross domestic product per capita, adjusted for relative purchasing power (Gregson, 2017) (Table 1).

## Results

A nation’s level of democracy was derived from a formulation first created by Campbell, Barth, Pözlbauer and Pözlbauer (2015). These authors measure the quality of democracy by the degree of freedom (50 percent of total measure) and performance of non-political dimensions, each measured at 10 percent: gender, economy, knowledge, health, and the environment. A nation’s level of religiosity was measured by a 2009 Gallup poll conducted internationally that simply

asked ‘Is religion important in your daily life?’ (Crabtree, 2010). Given that this date is somewhat older, it was juxtaposed with an incomplete 2013 dataset, which asked ‘How important is religion in your life?’ (Pew Research Center, 2013). The two datasets taken together gave a reasonable estimation of the importance of religion in a certain country. Finally, a country’s wealth was measured by gross domestic product per capita, adjusted for relative purchasing power (Gregson, 2017). (Table 2)

The amount of available newspapers to search across the sample of 17 countries ranged from the lowest amount of newspapers in Iceland (10) to the highest amount of newspapers, which were in Spain (94). The median amount of newspapers was 33. When the highest and lowest countries were removed, the median remained at 33 suggesting a high level of normality across the sample. This also suggested that any difference found between countries would likely be significant given the uniformity of sample size. It is important to note that statistical significance could not be ascertained given the small sample size. However, some interesting conclusions could still be drawn from the data. For example, there were 223 articles sampled from countries that did not legalise same-sex marriage and a relatively consistent 312 articles were sampled from countries that did legalise same-sex marriage. There were 73 articles addressing the anti-gay march from ‘same-sex marriage’ countries. There were only 8 articles that addressed the anti-gay march from countries that did not legalise same-sex marriage (Table 1). Thus, over 90 percent of the found articles that addressed the anti-gay marriage march came from countries that have passed same-sex marriage.

The measures of democracy, religion and wealth also correlated with one another and with the presence of same-sex marriage in a particular country (Table 1). This relationship was more readily visible when measures were relationally ranked against one another (Table 1) and particularly striking when presented in a visual figure (Figure 2). All of this information details the strong relationship between a country’s level of democracy, its adherence to religion as part of daily life, and its wealth. Countries that had passed gay marriage had a relative average democracy ranking of 5.6 (out of 16) whereas countries that had not passed gay marriage had a relative democracy ranking of 11.4 (out of 16). This pattern was replicated with the relative ranking of religion (5.75 for gay marriage countries and 11.2 for non-gay marriage countries) as well as wealth (6.33 for gay marriage countries and 12 for non-gay marriage countries).

The level of support for gay marriage was demonstrated through the use of this particular image, or pro-gay marriage images, coupled with a lack of other images that might have shown anti-gay marriage sentiments. The overwhelming majority of articles had only this viral pro-LGBT image alone, or pro-gay marriage images, combined with no other images. Over 92 percent of articles were thus coded as ‘positive’. However, that support was drawn disproportionately from countries that had passed gay marriage. Only 12.5% of 8 articles from countries that had not passed a same-sex marriage bill actually showed the viral image, while over half (58 percent) of the 73 articles from countries that passed gay marriage used the viral image.

## Discussion

This was a preliminary study that could and should be extrapolated further. There was evidence to suggest that the ideology of a country’s policy influences the use of an image, which can be read as having an ideological and cultural intent. However, the use of this image was limited across the entire sample. This research examined 535 newspapers and only 81 articles were found that dealt with the march in Mexico. Further, among those 81 articles only 52 showed the image of the boy. Thus, that is not enough from which to build any statistically significant conclusions. However, there were some general findings in relation to the focus on this issue and the passage of gay marriage. For example, over 90 percent of the articles that addressed the anti-gay marriage march came from countries that have passed same-sex marriage. This suggests a recodification of culture whereby readers are assured of their cultural choices. Certainly, media are ubiquitous and dynamic, but such a monolithic finding suggests a distinct perspective, as has been suggested by previous framing scholars. This level of framing is a complex process that can be viewed through a politically motivated lens, which can have profound ideological implications. The “relative” esteem of LGBT rights as an ideological convention could be framed and packaged from political elites to the broader public. Such framing, repeated over time, provides a cultural embeddedness of coverage that could have profound implications on policy, political identification and the range of ideological debate available in democracies. It is impossible to know, from this research, whether there is a causal relationship between these two factors, but this level of indicative findings certainly suggest that future research is warranted. As stated in the literature review, media frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies. This process transmutes over time to answer the culturally collective question as to whether being gay is a problem, and if so then what are the causes and how society should morally respond.

The enmeshed usages of religion, democracy, and this particular image, recodify popular conceptions about how religion and a lack of democracy are precursors to anti-LGBT positions. It is impossible to know from this research which came first, but the framing of this image in accordance to a country’s level of religion and democracy, certainly reconfirm popular conceptions about how religion, democracy and LGBT rights are intertwined.

Media are not one monolithic voice and not all media sampled here reflected one perspective. Media are ubiquitous, dynamic and multi-directional in approach. However, if indeed the elite, powerful, news media shape how the public interprets issues and events (Sotirovic, 2000), then these findings suggest that media helped to create a reinforcing bubble

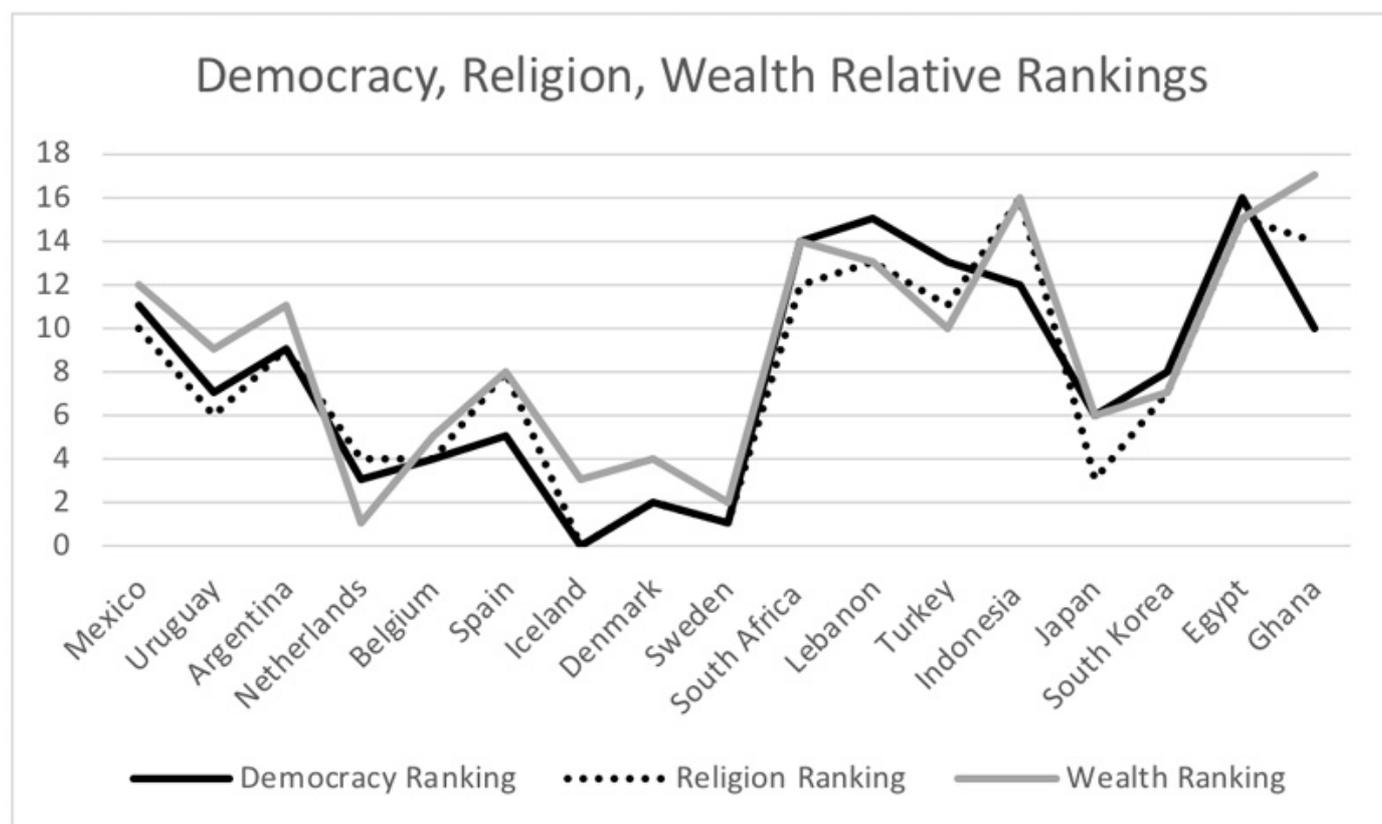
of information. The use of this image suggested that the media interpretation was one in support of gay marriage in countries where gay marriage was already supported and one against gay marriage in countries where gay marriage was banned. Thus, the public's main understanding of this social issue, drawn from media framing, was simply to reinforce what was already known. The use of this image suggests that media created a rather monolithically framed story of gay marriage after what is unquestionably a complex negotiation of contributing forces. These contributing forces could, however, be seen as politically motivated (Street, 2001) given the uniformity in results. It is impossible to say from this study whether media attempt to shape public opinion according to the state's ideology or that media simply portray public opinion. It is likely a mix of both. However, the inclusion or exclusion of particular information, on a national scale, could have profound ideological and cultural implications. This study suggests that it is very difficult to change heteronormative or homonormative cultural norms once they have been absorbed by cultural elites.

The long held axiom in journalism that proximity determines newsworthiness (Mencher, 2000) did not appear to be supported in this instance. Spain had the largest number of articles addressing this march from the other 16 countries sampled. It is worthwhile to note that Spain has always claimed a cultural closeness to Latin American countries. Next, in order of magnitude, were the Netherlands, Mexico, Belgium, Argentina, and South Africa. All were countries that had passed gay marriage, which suggests that the ideology of a country's governmental policy had far more impact than proximity. If proximity was as important as a news value, then Mexico and other Central and South American countries would dominate. News organisations must constantly determine the 'relevance' (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001) of news stories to their audience in accordance with perceived ideological proximity, viewed through a social, political and cultural lens (Segev, 2016). Again, the cultural relevance of a particular nation state appeared to be ideologically reinforcing, in this instance. Future studies should expand this sample size to find results that suggest statistical significance. This would bolster results and suggest a more direct linkage between national culture and media. An added stream of further studies would be examining the discourse surrounding a particular image. However, future research should continue to explore the power of ideology in news values and how that may serve to reinforce informational bubbles of knowledge around the world.

**Figure 1:**



**Figure 2:**



**Table 1:** Articles, Measures and Relative Rankings of Democracy, Religion and Wealth in 17 Countries Sampled

Country	Number of newspapers	Total number of articles	Democracy score	Democracy ranking	Percentage stating religion is very important to daily life	Religion ranking	Ranking of wealth score (out of 189)	Wealth ranking
Mexico	Google News Mexico	8	57.9	11	73	10	68	12
Argentina	35	6	69.3	9	65	9	65	11
Belgium	24	7	81.5	4	33	4	25	5
Denmark	26	2	85.2	2	19	2	23	4
Iceland	10	0	Not Rated	Not Rated	Not Rated	Not Rated	20	3
Netherlands	34	22	83.6	3	33	4	15	1
Spain	94	30	75.9	5	49	8	36	8
Sweden	41	1	86.6	1	17	1	17	2
South Africa	32	5	54.7	14	85	12	93	14
Uruguay	16	0	74	7	41	6	62	9

Egypt	40	0	40.2	16	97	15	96	15
Ghana	16	0	61.3	10	95	14	140	17
Indonesia	37	0	55.6	12	99	16	100	16
Japan	33	0	75.3	6	24	3	30	6
Lebanon	33	1	48.3	15	87	13	69	13
South Korea	30	5	70.6	8	43	7	32	7
Turkey	34	2	55.1	13	82	11	63	10

\* Grey denotes countries where same-sex marriage is legalised.

## References

Administrador Regeneración. (2016a). Niño enfrenta a multitud que protestaba contra matrimonios igualitarios. Retrieved from <http://regeneracion.mx/nino-enfrenta-a-multitud-que-protesta-contram matrimonios-igualitarios/>

Administrador Regeneración. (2016b). Se viraliza foto de niño que enfrentó a manifestantes contra matrimonio igualitario. *Regeneración*. Retrieved from <http://regeneracion.mx/recorre-el-mundo-foto-de-nino-que-enfrento-a-manifestantes-contram matrimonio-igualitario/>

Agis, K., & Brown, H. (2016). Look at this breathtaking picture of a child trying to stop an anti-gay rally. Retrieved from [https://www.buzzfeed.com/karlaagis/the-picture-of-a-child-in-front-of-pro-family-pro?utm\\_term=.iazjgOZDP#.ndZjr7MPZ](https://www.buzzfeed.com/karlaagis/the-picture-of-a-child-in-front-of-pro-family-pro?utm_term=.iazjgOZDP#.ndZjr7MPZ)

Allen, H., & Savigny, H. (2012). Selling scandal or ideology? The politics of business crime coverage. *European Journal of Communication*, 27(3), 278-290.

Altheide, D. (1976). *Creating reality: How TV distorts events*. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Brummett, B. (1994). *Rhetoric in popular culture*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Cameron, D., & Berkowitz, B. (2016). The state of gay rights around the world. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/world/gay-rights/>

Campbell, D. F. J., Pözlbauer, P., Barth, T. D., & Pözlbauer, G. (2015). *Democracy Ranking (Edition 2014): The Quality of Democracy in the World*. Vienna: Democracy Ranking.

Carragee, K. M., & Roefs, W. (2004). The neglect of power in recent framing research. *Journal of Communication*, 54(2), 214-233.

Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2007). A theory of framing and opinion formation in competitive elite environments. *Journal of Communication*, 57(1, March), 99-118.

Conover, P., & Feldman, S. (1981). The origins and meanings of liberal/conservative self-identification. *American Journal of Political Science*, 25, 617-645.

Cottle, S. (2000). Rethinking news access. *Journalism Studies*, 1(3), 427-448. doi: 10.1080/14616700050081768

Crabtree, S. (2010). Religiosity Highest in World's Poorest Nations. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/142727/religiosity-highest-world-poorest-nations.aspx>

Dahlberg, L. (2001). The internet and democratic discourse: Exploring the prospects of online deliberative forums extending the public sphere. *Information, Communication & Society*, 4(4), 615-633.

Domke, D., Watts, M. D., Shah, D. V., & Fan, D. P. (1999). The politics of conservative elites and the "liberal media" argument. *Journal of Communication*, 49(4), 35-58.

- Encarnación, O. G. (2014). Gay rights: Why democracy matters. *Journal of Democracy*, 25(3, July), 90-104.
- Entman, R. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51-58.
- Entman, R. (2004). *Projections of power: Framing news, public opinion, and U.S. foreign policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Entman, R., & Rojecki, A. (1993). Freezing out the public: Elite and media framing of the U.S. anti nuclear movement. *Political Communication*, 10, 155-173.
- Eurobarometer. (2008). Eurobarometer 69: Values of Europeans. 113. Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/eb/eb69/eb69\\_values\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/eb/eb69/eb69_values_en.pdf)
- Fedler, F., Smith, R., & Meeske, M. (1983). *Time and Newsweek* favor John F. Kennedy, criticize Robert and Edward Kennedy. *Journalism Quarterly*, 60, 489-496.
- Fenton, T. (2005). *Bad news: The decline of reporting, the business of news, and the danger to us all*. New York: Regan Books.
- Ferree, M. M., Gamson, W. A., Gerhards, J., & Rucht, D. (2002). Four models of the public sphere in modern democracies. *Theory and Society*, 31(3), 289-324.
- Gamson, W. A. (1992). *Talking politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gasher, M. (2007). The view from here. *Journalism Studies*, 8(2), 299-319. doi: 10.1080/14616700601148895
- Gitlin, T. (1980). *The whole world is watching: Mass media in the making and unmaking of the new left*. Berkley: University of California Press.
- Gregson, J. (2017). The World's Richest and Poorest Countries. Retrieved from <https://www.gfmag.com/global-data/economic-data/worlds-richest-and-poorest-countries>
- Harcup, T., & O'Neill, D. (2001). What is news? Galtung and Ruge revisited. *Journalism Studies*, 2(2), 261-280.
- Hertog, J., & McLeod, D. (1995). Anarchists wreak havoc in downtown Minneapolis: A multi-level study of media coverage of radical protest. *Journalism Monographs*, 151(June), 1-48.
- Holton, A. E., Coddington, M., & Gil de Zuñiga, H. (2013). Whose news? Whose values? Citizen journalism and journalistic values through the lens of content creators and consumers. *Journalism Practice*, 7(6), 720-737. doi: 10.1080/17512786.2013.766062
- Jewitt, C. (Ed.). (2016). *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Machin, D. (2016). The need for a social and afforance-driven multimodal critical discourse studies. *Discourse & Society*, 27(3), 322-334.
- Manning, P. (2001). *News and news sources: A critical introduction*. London: Sage Publications.
- Matheson, D. (2005). *Media discourses: Analysing media texts*. Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Mencher, M. (2000). *New reporting and writing*. Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Merrill, J. C. (1965). How *Time* stereotyped three U.S. Presidents. *Journalism Quarterly*, 42, 563-570.
- Michaud, K., Carlisle, J., & Smith, E. R. A. N. (2009). The relationship between cultural values and political ideology, and the role of political knowledge. *Political Psychology*, 30(1), 27-42.
- Pew Research Center, I. (2013). Pew Research Global Attitudes. Retrieved from
- Reese, S. D., Gandy Jr., O. H., & Grant, A. E. (2001). *Framing Public Life*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Reich, Z. (2015). Why citizens still rarely serve as news sources: Validating a tripartite model of circumstantial, logistical, and evaluative barriers. *International Journal of Communication*, 9, 2412-2433.

- Ryan, C., Carragee, K. M., & Schwerner, C. (1998). Media, movements, and the quest for social justice. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 26, 165-181.
- Schiffer, A. (2000). I'm not THAT liberal: Explaining conservative democratic identification. *Political Behavior*, 22(4), 293-310.
- Schultz, I. (2007). The journalistic gut feeling: Journalistic doxa, news habitus and orthodox news values. *Journalism Practice*, 1(2), 190-207. doi: 10.1080/17512780701275507
- Segev, E. (2015). Visible and invisible countries: News flow theory revised. *Journalism*, 16(3), 412-428.
- Segev, E. (2016). The group-sphere model of international news flow: A cross-national comparison of news sites. *The International Communication Gazette*, 78(3), 200-222. doi: 10.1177/1748048515620858
- Severin, W., & Tankard, J. (1997). *Communication Theories: Origins, methods, and Uses in the Mass Media* (4th ed.). New York: Longman.
- Singer, J. B., Hermida, A., Domingo, D., Heinonen, A., Paulussen, S., Quandt, T., & Reich, Z. (2011). *Participatory journalism: Guarding open gates at online newspapers*. Maiden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Sotirovic, M. (2000). Effects of media use on audience framing and support for welfare. *Mass Communication and Society*, 3, 269-297.
- Street, J. (Ed.). (2001). *Mass media, politics and democracy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Tankard Jr., J. W., Hendrickson, L., Silberman, J., Bliss, K., & Ghanem, S. (1991). *Media Frames: Approaches to Conceptualization and Measurement*. Paper presented at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Boston.
- Thompson, J. B. (1990). *Ideology and modern culture: Critical social theory in the era of mass communication*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Tuchman, G. (1978). *Making news: A study in the construction of reality*. New York: Free Press.
- Valcke, P. (2009). From ownership regulations to legal indicators of media pluralism: Background, typologies and methods. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 6(3), 19-42.
- Vasil, A. (2003). World domination. *Ryerson Review of Journalism*, 20(2), 56-61.
- Villarreal, D. (2016). The story behind the now iconic photo of a 12-year old opposing an anti-LGBT protest. *Unicorn Booty*. Retrieved from <https://unicornbooty.com/story-behind-now-iconic-photo-12-year-opposing-anti-lgbt-protest/>
- Westlund, O. (2013). Mobile news: A review and model of journalism in an age of mobile media. *Digital Journalism*, 1(1), 6-26.
- Whitely, J. (2016). Photographer who captured 12-year-old standing up to anti-LGBT protestors receives death threats. *Gay Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.gaytimes.co.uk/news/48845/photographer-captured-12-year-old-standing-anti-lgbt-protestors-receives-death-threats/>
- Williams, A. P., Wardle, C., & Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2011). Have they got news for us? Audience revolution or business as usual at the BBC? *Journalism Practice*, 5(1), 85-99.

## About the Author

Linda Jean Kenix is Head of the School of Language, Social, and Political Sciences, which consists of six departments, at the University of Canterbury. Her book, *Alternative and Mainstream Media: The Converging Spectrum*, was recently published by Bloomsbury Academic. She has published broadly in 35 international academic journals, including *Visual Communication Quarterly*, *Journalism*, *Communication*, *Culture & Critique*, *Journalism Studies*, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *Television & New Media*, *Information, Communication & Society*, *Mass Communication & Society*, and *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. Dr Kenix is interested in the visual and textual media representation of marginalized groups, the reasons for, and the consequences of that representation. Her recent work has broadened to examine how marginalized groups use various media as tools for social change. She has been a Visiting Research Fellow at Oxford University, the University of Cambridge, Monash University and the University of Valencia.

**Author's Address**

Linda Jean Kenix  
Elsie Locke 602  
Private Bag 4800  
University of Canterbury  
Christchurch, New Zealand 8140

---

Journal of Intercultural Communication, ISSN 1404-1634, issue 49, March 2019.  
URL: <http://immi.se/intercultural>