

# The geographic frame matters (too): How journalistic role performance varies in domestic, foreign, and mixed news

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## Abstract

The growing body of comparative studies on journalistic role performance has generally neglected the geographic frame of the news. Based on a content analysis of 145,817 news items published in 365 outlets (print, online, radio, and television) in 37 countries, we compare the performance of six journalistic roles in four geographic frame categories: domestic, foreign, and mixed news (domestic news with foreign involvement and foreign news with domestic involvement). Findings show that the level of the four news categories is equal for the watchdog and civic roles but varies for the others: the service role is more dominant in domestic news; the infotainment role is higher in foreign news; and the interventionist and loyal-facilitator roles are more prevalent in mixed news than in purely domestic or foreign news. These results are moderated by the level of country freedom, which facilitates or constrains the journalists' performance of the various roles in these news categories. Thus, our study connects the geographic frame to the political contexts of reporting countries, providing a more accurate picture of how journalistic role performance varies in the four news categories. The discussion presents possible explanations for, and theoretical implications of, the findings.

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## **Keywords**

Journalistic role performance, domestic news, foreign news, mixed news, domestication, foreignization, country freedom

## **Introduction**

Understanding how journalists perform their professional roles is key to grasping their place and function in society. In *Assessing journalistic roles*, scholars have devoted considerable attention to the political dimension: the political context of news production, such as the media system (Mellado and Hallin, 2024) and the level of country freedom (Mellado et al., 2024a); news genres and topics, notably politics and “hard” news versus infotainment and “soft” news (e.g., English, 2017; Mellado et al., 2024b); and political framing of the news content itself (see, for instance, Boukes (2022) on the effects of episodic and thematic framing on the attribution of political responsibility). A study by Hanitzsch and Mellado (2011) shows that journalists themselves perceive economic and political influences to have the stronger impact on news work across countries.

Less attention, however, has been given to the influence of the geographic frame, beyond the traditional and broad contrast between Global North and Global South (Mutsvaire et al., 2024), which is mostly connected to the notions of political and media systems. We are unaware of studies that have measured the impact of the geographic frame of the news on journalistic role performance: Do journalists perform certain roles more (and other roles less) when the news is about foreign countries than when it deals with their home country (or vice versa)? Answering this may have important implications on the role of journalists in society and the impact of their work at home and abroad. For instance, what does it say about journalists’ place in society if they are more inclined to put those in power accountable (thus performing the classic “watchdog” role) when reporting on an event occurring abroad than at home? Overlooking the distinction between foreign and domestic news coverage would result in misconceptions about the relationships between journalists and their national elites. Similarly, an overall low level of the infotainment role may hide important disparities between domestic news and foreign news, which would prevent us from seeing that journalists communicate information to the audience differently depending on whether the event occurred abroad or at home.

These questions become even more complex when news items do not “fall” into the binary categories of “domestic” versus “foreign,” and journalists decide to frame the news somewhere in between, thus creating two kinds of “mixed” news: by providing a broader international frame to an event that occurred at home or, conversely, by domesticating a foreign news item. Our study thus compares journalistic role performance in domestic, foreign, and mixed news, across countries, media platforms and news outlets. Based on content analysis of 145,817 news items published in 365 outlets in 37 countries around the world, we measured the performance of six roles identified in the literature: interventionist, watchdog, loyal-facilitator, service, civic, and infotainment.

The major contribution of our study lies in the assessment of the impact of the four geographic frame categories on journalists' performance of these six roles. However, political factors, in particular the level of freedom that journalists enjoy in each country, may facilitate or constrain their ability to perform certain roles in certain news categories. For instance, criticism of political elites (which is a key component of the watchdog role) may be significantly more limited for the coverage of domestic than foreign news in countries where journalists' freedom is constrained. Therefore, we added a measure of country freedom as a moderating variable to further refine our findings and present possible explanations in the Discussion section.

## Theoretical framework

### *Journalistic role performance: definition and typology*

A plethora of studies on journalistic roles (Donsbach, 2008; Hanitzsch and Vos, 2018; Mellado, 2015; Standaert et al., 2021) propose various typologies based either on professional standards and norms (what is expected of journalists and how they conceive their role) or on observed practices (what journalists actually do and how they perform their roles). Our study focuses on role performance, as evaluated through content analysis of news items.

There is also abundant literature on the definition and typology of journalistic role performance. Based on a synthesis of this literature, Mellado (2015)'s study has identified six main roles according to three dimensions. The first dimension is the presence of the journalistic voice (active or passive), which identifies the journalists' interventionist role. The second dimension, power relations, pinpoints two roles: the watchdog (meant to put those in power accountable) and the loyal-facilitator (which supports the political elite and promotes national interests). Finally, the third dimension, audience approach, refers to three roles: the service role, which defines the audience as customers looking for tips and advice impacting their everyday life; the civic role, which defines the audience as citizens, and aims at providing information on citizen activities and movements, and contributing to educating citizens on their rights and duties; and the infotainment role, which plays on the emotional and sensational cord.

These role definitions of journalistic performance enable cross-national comparative research since they all are manifested in varying degrees in different political, economic, and media systems, and are impacted by them. Thus, the current study is based on Mellado (2015)'s conceptualization and operationalization of these six journalistic roles, each defined by several indicators. It compares the performance of the six roles in four news categories: domestic, foreign, and mixed (domestic/foreign and foreign/domestic) news. These four categories constitute the geographic frame on which we focus our research. However, we do not ignore the importance, stressed in previous research, of the national political context on the performance of the six roles, especially the watchdog role, more prominent in democratic countries (e.g., Márquez-Ramírez et al., 2020; Van Dalen et al., 2012), and the loyal-facilitator role, prominent in non-democratic countries (Mellado et al., 2024a). We therefore add a measure of country freedom as a moderating

variable, thereby connecting the extensively researched political context with the more neglected geographic frame.

### *Refining the geographic frame: Domestic, foreign, and mixed news*

We are unaware of any systematic or large-scale comparison of several journalistic roles involving domestic versus foreign news. Typically, comparisons between domestic and foreign news have focused on one or two roles – generally the watchdog versus the loyal role – and were limited to specific news genres or categories (particularly foreign conflicts) within a small number of outlets, in one or only a few countries (e.g., [Liebes, 1992](#); [Nossek, 2004](#)).

As the news media represent, for the public, the main source of information on events occurring abroad, foreign news has potentially an important impact on public perceptions of foreign countries and on what happens in the world ([Morales, 2021](#); [Semetko et al., 1992](#); [Wanta et al., 2004](#)). Despite its importance, foreign news represents a relatively small and shrinking share of the news hole (e.g., [Enda, 2011](#); [Riffe et al., 2018](#)). This situation, observable across news media platforms, is mostly due to economic factors as foreign news is more costly to produce, notably in comparison with domestic news ([Hamilton, 2010](#)). Consequently, many outlets have reduced the number of their foreign correspondents, and some have closed their foreign bureaus altogether ([Murrell, 2019](#)).

This phenomenon is correlated with a relatively low audience interest in foreign news since the end of the Cold War ([Lee et al., 2012](#)). Research shows that audiences are generally less interested in foreign than in domestic news ([Cohen, 2013](#); [Tai and Chang, 2002](#)). However, studies have also emphasized considerable variation in interest in foreign news among countries. [Cohen \(2013\)](#) found that the difference between audience interest in foreign and domestic news is less prominent in non-Western countries and/or small and culturally diverse countries.

To maintain or increase audience interest, news outlets often domesticate foreign news, thus blurring the distinction between the foreign and domestic news categories. Domestication ([Clausen, 2004](#); [Gurevitch et al., 1991](#)) involves framing foreign news to make it more relevant, understandable, and/or interesting to the home audience. According to [Cohen \(2002\)](#), this is accomplished in three main ways: by comparing the situation in the foreign country where the event occurred to the audience's home country; by drawing a connection (e.g., political or cultural) between the two countries; or by presenting the possible impact that the reported foreign event may have on the home country and its citizens.

The foreign/domestic lines are also blurred by a reverse process, which we call *foreignization* of domestic news. It consists of providing an international frame to a domestic story by connecting an event occurring at home to one or more other countries. It can take the form of a comparison with specific foreign countries or a reference to a global phenomenon, such as climate change or a pandemic. With the emergence of such global issues, [Olausson \(2014\)](#) even suggests that the domestic versus foreign dichotomy has become “more or less obsolete” (p. 711).

Rather than dismissing the domestic and foreign categories, however, we refine the geographic frame of news work by adding two mixed categories<sup>1</sup> to reflect domestication and foreignization. First, “domestic news with foreign involvement” (henceforth “domestic/foreign”) designates news items dealing with events or issues taking place in the home country that include reference to some kind of involvement of one or more foreign countries (e.g., a report in the home country on the visit of a foreign dignitary). Second, “foreign news with domestic involvement” (henceforth “foreign/domestic”) refers to reports about events or issues in one or more foreign countries that relate to some form of involvement of the home country (e.g., a report on the visit of the home country’s president to another country). Our comparison of the journalistic roles in four categories (“purely” domestic, domestic/foreign, foreign/domestic, and “purely” foreign) provides an empirical justification for the mixed categories that we use to refine, rather than reject, the distinctions between foreign and domestic news.

### *Journalistic roles in domestic, foreign, and mixed news*

For each journalistic role, we formulate a research question or hypothesis regarding its relative prevalence in the four news categories. For the interventionist role and the watchdog role, we could not posit formal hypotheses but instead pose research questions because our literature review led us to anticipate that, unlike for the other four roles, there would be no significant differences between the news categories. For the loyal-facilitator role, the service role, and the civic role, the literature is also indecisive or scarce regarding the geographic frame, but we were able to offer hypotheses based on the role definitions provided by Mellado (2015), who conceptualizes the six roles on the basis of an extensive literature review (which is also used as the core of the coding scheme for our data). Finally, the definition of the infotainment role is not helpful in indicating a preference for domestic or foreign news, but the literature was more useful than for the other roles.

The *interventionist* role refers to the performance of journalists who explicitly voice their opinions and sometimes act as advocates for a given position. Previous studies have found that the performance of this role might depend more on the national journalistic culture than other factors. For instance, scholars have contrasted the American model of objectivity (which implies a low level of interventionism) with the French model shaped by literary and political traditions, implying more interventionism in the coverage of domestic and foreign news alike (Benson, 2005; Boudana, 2010). Since, as noted, there is no sufficient evidence regarding the relationship between interventionism in the news and our domestic/foreign/mixed news categories, we posit the following *formal* research question (RQ1): Are there significant differences in the performance of the interventionist role among domestic, foreign, and mixed news across countries?

Next is the *watchdog* role, which involves questioning and critiquing those in power. According to Skovsgaard et al. (2024), performance of this role is dependent upon the “dynamics in audience expectations” (p. 1). On the one hand, considering the watchdog role as meant to “provide publics and officials with timely information on issues of public

concern” (Bennett and Serrin, 2005; cited in Skovsgaard et al., 2024: p. 3), journalists may find it to be more relevant and impactful for domestic news than for foreign news. This assumption is confirmed by Dorman and Farhang (2023) who, when focusing on the American press coverage of Iran, contend that journalists feel more compelled to hold national leaders accountable compared to foreign leaders. On the other hand, as the audience is more knowledgeable, interested, and polarized regarding domestic than foreign issues, journalists may limit the performance of the watchdog role when covering domestic issues in order to reduce the risks of antagonizing parts of the home audience. Conversely, they would be more likely to perform this role in the coverage of foreign news, for which the audience is more nonchalant (Tai and Chang, 2002). This is supported by Gans’ (1980) observation that U.S. journalists allow themselves more interpretations and value judgments when covering foreign news compared with domestic news. Following this rationale, our second *formal* research question (RQ2) is similar: Are there significant differences in the performance of the watchdog role among the four news categories across countries?

For the loyal-facilitator, the service, and the civic roles, we base our hypotheses on the definitions of the roles proposed by Mellado (2015).

The *loyal-facilitator* role deals with supporting the political establishment and promoting patriotism and national success, often in comparison with other countries. Based on this definition, we hypothesize that this role is more applicable to domestic and mixed news than to purely foreign news (H1).

The *service* role leads journalists to provide tips and advice on matters that impact everyday life. According to this definition, we expect this role to be more related to issues concerning the home audience. Thus, we hypothesize that the service role is more prevalent in domestic news than in the other news categories (H2).

The *civic* role emphasizes the citizen perspective, and informs them on their rights and duties. This definition suggests that the civic role is also more related to the home audience. Thus, we hypothesize that the civic role is more prevalent in domestic news than in the other news categories (H3).

Finally, the *infotainment* role prompts journalists to produce news that is relatively more sensational and emotional, emphasizing morbidity, personalization, and private life. Our hypothesis (H4) is that the infotainment role would be found more in foreign news than domestic news. Boukes and Boomgaarden (2015) contend that the generally lower level of interest of audiences in foreign news, and the decrease of interest over the years, prompt foreign news producers to make their programs more appealing to their home audience. As a consequence, journalists may sensationalize and personalize foreign stories more than domestic news. Reinemann et al. (2012) provide indirect support for this hypothesis by showing that the less a news item is politically relevant for the audience, the more journalists cover it in an emotional and personal style.

## Method

Our study is based on a content analysis of news published in four platforms – newspapers, television, radio and online – carried out during 2020 as part of the Journalistic

Role Performance (JRP) study (<https://www.journalisticperformance.org>). The 37 participating countries include North and South America, Eastern and Western Europe, Asia, Oceania, Africa, and the Middle East, and represent a broad spectrum of political and media systems.

### Sampling

In each country, two to four news outlets per platform were selected. The investigators in all countries chose outlets that best represented the media system in their respective locations, based on audience size, media ownership, political orientation, and language diversity. The total sample contained 365 news outlets (102 newspapers, 96 TV newscasts, 74 radio news programs, and 93 news websites).

The sample consisted of two stratified constructed weeks (14 days) during 2020: the first between January 2 and June 30, and the second from July 1 to December 31. The start dates for the first month in both composite weeks were randomly selected, followed by a fixed skip interval for the other 6 days. The sampling unit for each of the 14 days across all outlets in the four platforms was as follows: for newspapers, the full morning edition; for television, the complete main evening newscast; for radio, the newsreel with the largest audience; and for online news, due to its dynamic nature throughout the day, two “captures” (at 11:00 and 23:00, local time) of the entire homepage of the websites including their respective links.

The unit of analysis was a news item, defined as contiguous verbal and, if applicable, audio and/or visual elements that refer to the same event/issue/person. All news items in the sampled outlets were coded with some exceptions: editorials, opinion columns, weather forecasts, horoscopes, movie (or other cultural) reviews and puzzles. Also excluded were supplements/magazines/special features programs and newspaper front-page headlines and headlines and promos in television and radio newscasts. Finally, only news items originating from news staff members of the various outlets were coded; thus, items from wire services and other external sources were not included in the analysis. This must be emphasized especially in the context of an analysis focusing on foreign versus domestic news since the omitted items were mostly foreign stories.

### Measures

Each journalistic role was composed of several performance indicators. Each indicator was scored as present or absent (one or zero, respectively). Following the coding, confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) were conducted for the indicators of all roles. They showed that the roles are independent from each other and can cooccur in practice. For each role a continuous scale was constructed, ranging from zero to one, based on the number of indicators present for each news item, with a higher score indicating more prevalence of the role.

The geographic frame of the news items was coded into four categories, based on the location and context of the news story. The four categories were: (1) *domestic* (the event occurs in the country of publication without any involvement of, or reference to another country as it is reported); (2) *domestic/foreign* (the event occurs in the country of

publication but with a specific reference made, in the story, to at least one foreign country); (3) *foreign/domestic* (the event occurs in another country but specific reference is made, in the story, to the country of publication); and (4) *foreign* (the event occurs outside the country of publication and does not make any reference to the country of publication). A fifth option was “not clear, cannot tell.” Of the 148,474 items in the study, coders could not determine the geographic frame of only 2657 items (1.8%); hence the present findings are based on 145,817 items. The breakdown of the items by geographic frame was: “purely” domestic – 59.8%; domestic/foreign – 12.7%; foreign/domestic – 7.4%; and “purely” foreign – 20.0%.

For country freedom, our moderating variable, we used the Freedom House Global Freedom Score, a standard-setting assessment which is applied to all countries and is considered more comprehensive and reliable than other comparable measures (e.g., [Martin et al., 2016](#); [Tunç, 2020](#)). In creating the score, Freedom House awards each country/territory zero to four points for each of 25 indicators, for a maximum of 100 points. These indicators, which are formed as questions, are grouped into two categories: Political Rights (0–40) and Civil Liberties (0–60). Political Rights refer to electoral process, pluralism and participation, as well as functioning of government. Civil Liberties refer to freedom of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, rule of law, and personal autonomy and individual rights ([Freedom House, 2021](#)). The two scores are weighted equally to determine an overall score, which is then transformed into one of three country freedom levels: “free,” “partly free,” and “not free.”

Since our content analysis data were from 2020, the freedom level for each of the 37 countries in the study was based on the Global Freedom Score of that year ([Freedom House, 2021](#)). In our data, 20 of the countries were defined as free (comprising 60.1% of all the news items), nine countries were partly free (with 23.7% of the news items), and eight countries were classified as not free (with 16.2% of all the items) (see [Table 1](#)). All news items published in a given country received the same code for the country’s freedom level.

## Data collection

In each country, the coding was done by at least two but often several native speakers, depending on the number of items and logistical concerns. The coding teams in all countries were trained extensively during 2019 to ensure a thorough understanding of the

**Table 1.** Freedom level in the participating countries.

Freedom level	Countries
Free	Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Poland, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, Taiwan, United States
Partly free	Columbia, Ecuador, Estonia, Hungary, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mexico, Paraguay, Serbia
Not free	Cuba, Egypt, Ethiopia, Qatar, Russia, Rwanda, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela



codebook, which contained the operational definitions and several examples for each variable. The coding was conducted during 2020-2021.

Intercoder reliability within and among the countries was assessed in a three-way process: prior to, during, and after the coding was completed. First, a pre-test was conducted in all countries using a common set of items that were coded by all the principal investigators. Next, leaders of each country team performed a pre-test with their respective coders using a set of items not part of the actual sample. Also, during the coding, the principal investigators in each country closely monitored the coders' work, encouraging them to ask questions if they were unsure, and the PI responded in turn. Finally, a post-test was performed in each country to establish coder reliability based on the actual dataset. Using a random sample of 3700 items (100 items in each country), Krippendorff Alpha (Ka) was calculated: the final overall intercoder reliability was 0.79; variation in Ka across roles ranged from 0.76 to 0.86, while across countries Ka ranged from 0.72 to 0.91. The overall Ka for the geographic frame variable was 0.83.

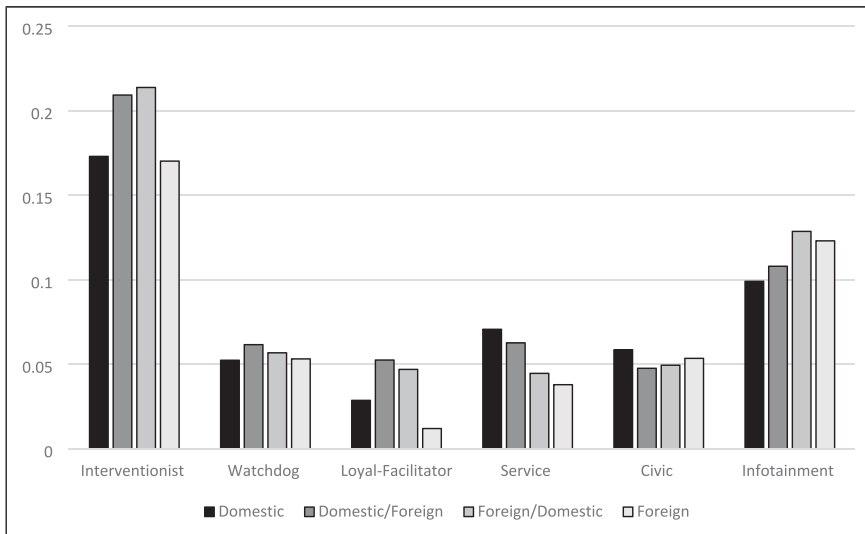
## Findings

Across the four news categories (domestic news, domestic/foreign, foreign/domestic, and foreign news), the most dominant role is interventionism (mean score of 0.177 on the continuous scale), followed by infotainment (mean score of 0.115). The other four roles are comparatively less prevalent: 0.06 for the service role; 0.053 for the watchdog role; 0.05 for the civic role; and 0.029 for the loyal-facilitator role. [Figure 1](#) shows the presence of the four news categories in each of the six roles. Due to the very large number of cases, for all six roles the differences between the four news categories were statistically significant at  $p < .001$ . However, while the size of the effect of geographic frame was substantial for the loyal-facilitator ( $F = 834.351$ ;  $df = 3$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta = 0.130$ ) and service role ( $F = 514.386$ ;  $df = 3$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta = 0.102$ ), it was only moderate for the interventionist ( $F = 243.738$ ;  $df = 3$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta = 0.071$ ) and infotainment role ( $F = 205.034$ ;  $df = 3$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta = 0.065$ ), and rather low for the watchdog ( $F = 19.481$ ;  $df = 3$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta = 0.020$ ) and civic role ( $F = 88.595$ ;  $df = 3$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta = 0.043$ ).

[Figure 2](#) presents separately the mean scores by news category and country type for each of the six roles.

### *The interventionist role*

Our research question for the interventionist role (RQ1) was whether there were differences among the four news categories. The level of interventionism presented an interesting picture: the two mixed news categories (domestic/foreign and foreign/domestic) were almost identical, and the two "pure" categories (domestic and foreign) were very similar. Moreover, the two mixed categories were significantly higher than the two pure categories (see [Figure 1](#)). As for country freedom, interventionism was higher in free countries than in partly free and not free countries (see [Figure 2a](#)). While the geographic frame by freedom level interaction was significant, the effect was very small ( $F = 157.20$ ;  $df = 11$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.010$ ).



**Figure 1.** The presence of domestic, mixed, and foreign news in the six roles.

### *The watchdog role*

Regarding the watchdog role, we asked a similar question (RQ2). No significant differences were found among the four news categories for this role (see [Figure 1](#)). However, differences were clearly marked among countries according to their level of freedom (see [Figure 2b](#)). In free countries, the watchdog role was relatively high across all four news categories. In partly free countries, it was less dominant, with a noticeable decline for foreign/domestic and foreign news. As for the not free countries, the watchdog role was extremely low for domestic and domestic/foreign news but relatively higher for foreign news. The interaction effect of geographic frame by political freedom on watchdog journalism was small but significant ( $F = 383.24$ ;  $df = 11$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.025$ ).

### *The loyal-facilitator role*

The loyal-facilitator role was more dominant in mixed news than in domestic news and was virtually nonexistent for foreign news (see [Figure 1](#)), thus H1 was only partly supported (since we expected the role to be more dominant in domestic news, followed by mixed news, and finally foreign news). In free and partly free countries, the level of the loyal-facilitator role was relatively minor and virtually identical across all four news categories. In not free countries, it was significantly higher in domestic and in mixed news, with a drop for foreign news to the level of other freedom country types (see [Figure 2c](#)). The interaction effect of geographic frame by political freedom on loyalism was high ( $F = 1277.167$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.078$ ).

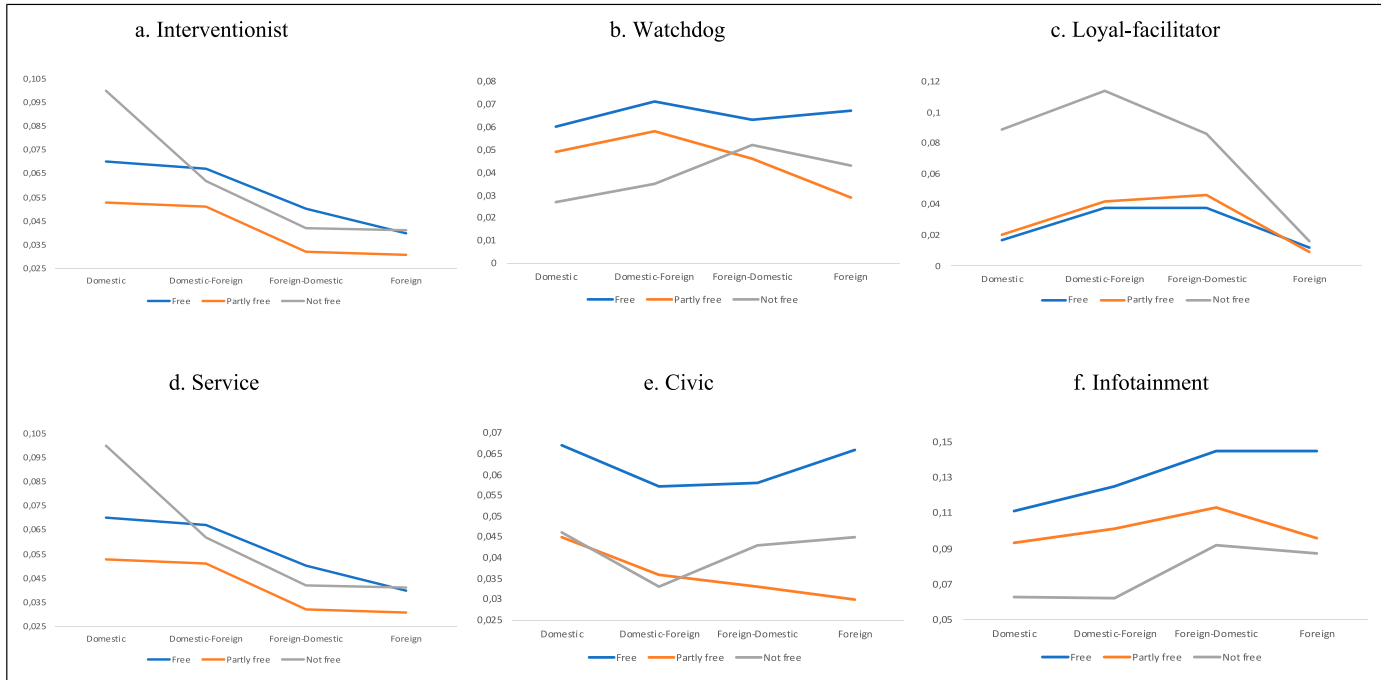


Figure 2. Mean role scores by news category and country type.

### *The service role*

As expected, the service role was more dominant in domestic news. It declined through mixed news, reaching its lowest level in purely foreign news (see [Figure 1](#)), thus H2 was supported. This pattern was observable in all country types, with an especially higher level in domestic news in not free countries (see [Figure 2d](#)). The interaction effect of geographic frame by political freedom on service role performance was very small but significant ( $F = 258.286$ ;  $df = 11$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.017$ ).

### *The civic role*

Overall, the civic role is more prevalent in domestic news, but the differences vis-a-vis the foreign and mixed news categories are very small (see [Figure 1](#)), thus H3 is only partly supported. In the free countries, the civic role is significantly higher than in other country types across all four news categories, with a relatively lower level for the two mixed categories (see [Figure 2e](#)). The case of the partly free and not free countries is more complex. In the partly free countries, the civic role declined from domestic to foreign news, whereas for the not free countries, the levels are almost the same across the news categories, except for domestic/foreign news, which is at a lower level. The interaction effect of geographic frame by political freedom on the performance of the civic role was very small but significant ( $F = 217.678$ ;  $df = 11$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.014$ ).

### *The infotainment role*

Finally, the infotainment role was more prevalent in foreign news and foreign/domestic news than in domestic/foreign news and in domestic news (see [Figure 1](#)), thus H4 was supported. This pattern was similar across all three country types (see [Figure 2f](#)), with the highest level in free countries, followed by partly free countries, and the least in not free countries. The interaction effect of geographic frame by political freedom on infotainment role performance was very small but significant ( $F = 265.498$ ;  $df = 11$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.017$ ).

## **Discussion**

While previous literature has emphasized political factors influencing the performance of journalistic roles, our study shows that the geographic frame matters, too. The variations of performed roles according to the geographic frame of the news indicate that journalists position themselves vis-à-vis their audience as well as political (and other) elites differently depending on whether they cover the news as a domestic or foreign issue or engage in processes of domestication or foreignization of the news. This nuanced understanding challenges existing monolithic views of journalistic role performance and emphasizes the need for a more flexible and context-sensitive theoretical framework.

### *Explanations for the impact of the geographic frame on the six roles*

For both the watchdog and civic roles, there were no significant differences among the levels of the four geographic news categories. Significant differences were found, however, among the four geographic categories for the other roles: the service role was more dominant in domestic news; the infotainment role was higher in foreign news; and the interventionist as well as the loyal-facilitator roles were more prevalent in mixed news than in purely domestic or foreign news.

For the interventionist role (RQ1) and the watchdog role (RQ2) we asked whether they were more prevalent in one or more of the four news categories. For the other four roles, we formulated specific hypotheses regarding their prevalence in one or more of the four news categories. The hypotheses were confirmed for two roles: the service role was more dominant in domestic news (H2) and the infotainment role in foreign news (H4). However, H1 regarding the loyal-facilitator role and H3 concerning the civic role were only partially confirmed.

Since our initial literature review could not lead us to make specific predictions for all six roles, we attempt in retrospect to provide some possible explanations for the findings related to our two research questions (RQ1 and RQ2) and the two partly confirmed hypotheses (H1 and H3).

Regarding the interventionist role, we asked whether there would be differences among the four news categories. We found this role to be more prevalent in the two mixed news categories. In hindsight, it seems that mixed news emanating from processes of domestication and foreignization may require more journalistic interpretation and justification – a central element in the interventionist role – dealing with such questions as: Why should a particular news story about a foreign country concern us? Why do we need to compare our country with another country?

We asked a similar question regarding the watchdog role: whether there would be differences in its prevalence among the four news categories. We found that the differences were not significant. We assume that the divergent influences referred to in the theory section balanced each other: on the one hand, journalists feel more compelled to hold national leaders accountable compared to foreign leaders (hence this role would tend to dominate in domestic news); on the other hand, journalists are exposed to a lesser risk of disapproval when performing the watchdog role in the coverage of foreign news, in which the home audience is relatively less interested, and about which it is less knowledgeable.

As for H1 regarding the loyal-facilitator role and H3 concerning the civic role, both were only partly supported. The loyal-facilitator role was more dominant in mixed news than in domestic news whereas we expected mixed news to occupy a middle position between domestic and foreign news. As for the civic role, the differences were negligible while we expected this role to be significantly more dominant in domestic news.

For the loyal-facilitator role, the fact that it was more dominant in mixed news may be due to the journalists' tendency to provide a more positive image of their home country when comparing it to other countries. By contrast, when reporting on purely foreign news, journalists have much less reasons to express loyalty to the domestic elites. The

prevalence of the loyal-facilitator role in mixed news is all the more interesting since we can assume that journalists are more active creators of these geographic frames, resulting from processes of domestication and foreignization. Through these processes which enable drawing comparisons between the home country and one or more foreign countries, journalists thus communicate a sense of patriotism to their fellow citizens and support to their national elites.

Our hypothesis regarding the civic role was also only partially supported as there were only negligible differences among the four news categories. According to its definition, the civic role emphasizes the citizen perspective and informs them on their rights and duties. We assumed that in the performance of this role, journalists would focus on the home country. But the important place that this role takes in foreign and mixed news indicates that citizen movements are also given a broader frame, including responses to events occurring abroad. They may point to the rise of global issues, such as climate change, tax evasion, and international financial scandals, for which journalists position themselves as advocates protecting citizens of the world. With the advent of the Internet and social media, new forms of international collaborative work between journalists, NGOs, and citizens have given impetus to a transnational civic approach to specific global issues (Rothenberger et al., 2023). The case of the Panama Papers, for example, represents a model of such collaboration (Heft et al., 2019), making citizens aware of important political issues and inviting them to debate and react. There is also an abundant literature on how journalists engage the public to face the challenges posed by climate change (e.g., Appelgren and Jönsson, 2021; Berglez et al., 2008; Olausson, 2014).

### *Explanations for the role played by country freedom*

Our findings also highlight the importance of country freedom as a moderating variable in the prominence of the journalistic roles among domestic, foreign, and mixed news. The interventionist, watchdog, civic, and infotainment roles were more prevalent in free countries than in not free countries while the loyal-facilitator and the service roles were more prevalent in not free countries.

The interventionist role is more prevalent in free than in partly free and not free countries, where it is equally low. These findings echo the argument by Mellado et al. (2024a) that interventionism takes different forms and functions in democratic and authoritarian systems. The prevalence of interventionism in free countries applies to all four news categories, although it is even more pronounced in the two mixed news categories.

The pattern for the civic role is similar to that of the interventionist role. The civic role emphasizes the citizen perspective and implies that journalists inform citizens on their rights and duties. This task, however, is limited in non-democratic countries. The prevalence of the civic role in free countries applies to all four news categories, although in this case it is less pronounced in the two mixed news categories.

The loyal-facilitator role presents a mirror image vis-à-vis the interventionist and civic roles. Here, loyalism was significantly more prominent in not free countries than in free and partly free countries, the two being almost identical. One explanation may be that, in free and partly free countries, journalists have more leeway to express diverse and critical

voices, and not only patriotism as in not free countries (Ward, 2010). This would be especially the case for domestic news, for which journalists in not free countries are more reluctant to depart from loyalism and express a critical voice. Our findings regarding the four news categories support this explanation: the gap between not free countries and free/partly free countries is wider for domestic news but virtually non-existent for foreign news.

The infotainment role was more prevalent in free countries than in not free and partly free countries across all four news categories. This finding provides empirical support to previous research that has considered this role to be typical of liberal, market-oriented media systems (Jebril et al., 2013; Marinov, 2020).

The watchdog role presented a similar pattern: It is more prevalent in free than in not free countries across all news categories. This finding is in line with the notion that journalists have potentially more freedom to endorse a watchdog role in free countries (Mellado et al., 2024a), no matter if the news relates to domestic or international issues. By contrast, in not free countries, journalists tend to be cautious, and even more so when covering domestic issues in comparison with foreign news. As for the partly free countries, while they occupy an expected middle position between free and not free countries for domestic news, we have no explanation for the decline regarding foreign news.

There is little differentiation based on country freedom for the service role. For the three country types, the pattern was similar: a decline from domestic to mixed and foreign news. While the level of service role is almost the same in free and not free countries, in the partly free countries the level was consistently lower. A notable exception is the relatively higher level of this role in not free countries regarding domestic news. One possible explanation could be that in such countries, journalists address people's complaints through reporting and discussing their practical concerns and daily life issues, while avoiding high-risk political matters. Authoritarian regimes tolerate this kind of solution-oriented journalism, which they do not perceive as a threat.

### *Conclusion and directions for future research*

Our research shows that journalistic role performance varies among domestic, mixed, and foreign news, that the patterns of variation are quite different in each of the six roles, and that they are generally moderated by the freedom level of the countries in which the news was produced.

By showing that journalists adapt their roles based on the geographic framing of the news, this research advances our understanding of journalistic practice in a globalized media landscape. The study highlights that the distinction between domestic and foreign news is not merely a matter of newsroom organization and content distribution but also influences the expectations and behaviors of journalists. It underscores the dynamic nature of journalistic role performance and suggests that it is contextually driven and responsive to the nature of the news being reported.

Mixed news, which blends elements of both domestic and foreign contexts, poses unique challenges and opportunities for journalists. Traditionally, the geographic frame is

presented as a dichotomy: domestic versus foreign news. But, in a context of shrinking foreign news, processes of domestication and foreignization have blurred the lines between these categories. Rather than considering the domestic and foreign dichotomy as obsolete, we chose to include two mixed categories: domestic news with foreign involvement and foreign news with domestic involvement. Our findings reinforce the validity of this fourfold typology and reveal how journalists navigate a complex landscape where local and global perspectives intersect. The ability to seamlessly integrate these perspectives highlights the versatility and adaptability of journalists.

The implications of these findings extend beyond the newsroom, influencing how journalism is taught and understood in academic and professional settings. Traditional models of journalistic performance often emphasize static and universal roles. However, this study demonstrates that a more dynamic approach, which accounts for the variability in role performance across different news contexts, provides a richer and more accurate portrayal of journalistic practice. By recognizing the variability in roles across domestic, foreign, and mixed news, we move towards a more comprehensive and flexible understanding of journalistic practice, one that seems better suited to the demands of a globalized and interconnected world.

To better understand why a specific journalistic role is more prevalent in some news categories and not in others, it would be important in future cross-national research to achieve finer resolution of the data by relating to specific news topics and events (such as wars or pandemics). It may well be that certain topics or events tip the scales towards domestic news for the service role or towards foreign news for the infotainment role. Similarly, an analysis at the topic level would help to understand why the civic role applies to foreign news as much as domestic news, a surprising finding which we impute, in hindsight, to the rise of global issues.

As noted earlier, our sample contained roughly 60% pure domestic news as well as 20% pure foreign news; but it also included 20% of the two mixed categories. This means that one of every five news items was of the mixed type. Such a significant proportion demonstrates the importance of refining the traditional domestic/foreign news dichotomy by adding the mixed categories. It calls for further research on the journalistic uses of these mixed news across topics, countries, and time.

We cannot tell from our data which specific countries were presented as related in mixed news to the country of publication. If this were possible, we could have analyzed how the performance of the six roles was impacted by *specific* pairs or clusters of countries vis-à-vis the country of publication. Further research might make this analysis possible to enhance our understanding of how journalists conceive the world as internationalized or globalized. While domestication of news has long been documented in numerous studies, the reverse process of foreignization has been overlooked even though it seems to account for a considerable amount of news. This is another challenge for future study.

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## Note

1. These additional categories were previously used by Cohen (2013) who referred to them as “hybrid” news. We prefer the term “mixed” news, because hybrid has today a variety of meanings in journalism studies but also because we want to distinguish categories where foreign and domestic co-exist rather than blend (one category where the domestic component is dominant and one in which the foreign component dominates).

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