

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 312 642

CS 212 098

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 TITLE Presidential Initiatives and Foreign News Coverage: The Carter Human Rights Policy's Effect on U.S. Coverage of Central and South America.  
 PUB DATE Aug 89  
 NOTE 31p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (72nd, Washington, DC, August 10-13, 1989).  
 PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)  
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.  
 DESCRIPTORS \*Civil Liberties; Content Analysis; Foreign Countries; \*Foreign Policy; Mass Media Role; \*Newspapers; \*News Reporting; Presidents of the United States  
 IDENTIFIERS \*Carter (Jimmy); Carter Administration; Central America; Journalism Research; \*Media Coverage; South America

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine what, if any, effect President Jimmy Carter's human rights policy had on American newspaper coverage of Central and South America. The "New York Times," "Washington Post," "Christian Science Monitor," and "Los Angeles Times" during the years of 1975, 1977, 1978, and 1982 (when the policy had been replaced by the Reagan Administration) were used for the study. Each story was coded and then subjected to content analysis. Coverage was divided into four categories: human rights topics that mentioned human rights; human rights topics that did not mention human rights; not primarily about human rights but did mention human rights; and not human rights topics and did not mention human rights. Results indicated that a connection did exist between the Carter human rights policy and coverage of Central and South America. Human rights and overall coverage increases, both by volume and number, support the thesis that the presidential initiative, implemented in the first year of the Carter presidency, had a significant impact on coverage of the region. (Ten tables of data, three figures and 29 notes are included; 32 references are attached.) (MG)

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PRESIDENTIAL INITIATIVES AND FOREIGN NEWS  
COVERAGE: THE CARTER HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY'S EFFECT  
ON U.S. COVERAGE OF CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA

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Presented to the International Division of the  
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INTRODUCTION

In 1976, the Washington Post had a bureau in Buenos Aires and it was from there that Karen DeYoung covered all of Central and South America.<sup>1</sup> By the mid-1970s, large papers across the country had cut back their foreign staffs and Latin America was not a priority coverage area.<sup>2</sup> But that would change. By 1978, DeYoung recalled, the Carter human rights policy of tying U.S. aid and assistance to the observance of individual human rights had shifted the spotlight of U.S. media attention to the region.

DeYoung found herself in the right place at the right time. The Post allocated more resources to the region and created a second bureau. Given her choice, DeYoung took up the new post and made a name for herself reporting from Central America.<sup>3</sup> DeYoung's perceptions of those events prompted the questions from which this research project grew: Had a single presidential foreign policy initiative been responsible for a major shift in coverage of an albeit sporadically-covered continent? And, if that were the case, what were the effects on coverage of the region? Had coverage improved, had the increased coverage been restricted to human rights issues, or had increased media attention to one subject triggered increased coverage across the board?

Research indicates that U.S. media coverage of the region had ballooned during the late 1970s or early 1980s, but produced no

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Karen DeYoung at the Washington Post London bureau, Upper Brook Street, August 6, 1986.

<sup>2</sup>John A. Lent, "Foreign News in American Media," Journal of Communication 27 (Winter 1977), p. 49; and, Mort Rosenblum, "Reporting from the Third World," in Crisis in International News: Policies and Prospects, Jim Richstad and Michael H. Anderson, eds., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), p. 227.

<sup>3</sup>DeYoung interview.

explanations.<sup>4</sup> In the late 1970s strife had grown in Central America, but both Central and South America have had their share of social upheaval over the last twenty years and coverage has been erratic. If media attention had already been focused on the region when conditions in El Salvador and Nicaragua heated up in the late 1970s, perhaps that might account for the increased volume of coverage. If correspondents are on the spot, or near, a nation's problems are more likely to become news in American newspapers.<sup>5</sup>

Central and South America have traditionally received erratic coverage in the U.S. press.<sup>6</sup> Critics have charged that where there has been coverage, the issues involved have frequently been misunderstood and misrepresented.<sup>7</sup> Had the United States no long-term interests or involvements in the region, the lack of quality coverage might be less critical. U.S. political and economic investments in the region, however, are long-standing and complicated.<sup>8</sup> In light of the U.S. press record in Central and South America, it becomes important to study how changes in coverage come about and how the quality of the coverage may have been affected by those changes. If the Carter human rights policy had directed the powerful beam of the U.S. media spotlight onto Central and South America, the evidence should exist in the media record of the period.

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<sup>4</sup>Emile G. McAnany, "Television and Crisis: Ten Years of Network News Coverage of Central America, 1972-1981," Media, Culture and Society 5 (1983), pp. 199-212. ; and, Catherine Cassara, "Land Reform: The Missing Issue," an unpublished paper.

<sup>5</sup>Rosenblum, in Crisis, p. 229.

<sup>6</sup>Landrum R. Bolling, ed., Reporters Under Fire: U.S. Media Coverage of Conflicts in Lebanon and Central America (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), pp. 100-109; and, Emile McAnany, "Television and Crisis: Ten Years of Network News Coverage of Central America," Media, Culture and Society 5 (1983), pp. 199-212.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid; and, Georgie Anne Geyer, "Latin America: The Making of an 'Uncontinent,'" Columbia Journalism Review, Winter, 1969-1970, pp. 49-53.

<sup>8</sup>Roger Morris, "Through the Looking Glass in Chile: Coverage of Allende's Regime," Columbia Journalism Review, November-December, 1974, pp. 15-26; and, Schoultz, Human Rights, passim.

As a result, the research centered on a content analysis of newspapers referred to by journalists and policy makers alike for in-depth foreign coverage.\*

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the literature indicates substantial evidence of an interaction between press coverage and foreign policy, but that there are no easy answers about how that interaction works. From Cohen to Chang, the researchers found the press to be an active participant in the process of foreign policy formulation and explication.<sup>10</sup> But none found the press to be an independent actor in the process. Chang particularly notes that it is necessary for research to look separately at the press role in domestic and foreign policy issues. While the press may play a more independent, agenda-setting function in domestic issues, when it comes to foreign policy the press role is much less certain.<sup>11</sup> Factors ranging from presidential control of foreign policy to the indifference of the public to foreign policy affairs and press reliance on government information, may tilt the agenda-setting balance away from the press and toward the president.

Students of foreign policy agree that human rights had been on the foreign policy agenda prior to the Carter campaign, but only assumed center stage when Carter took office. Journalists agree that human rights reporting assumed a new prominence in the

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\*Bernard C. Cohen, The Press and Foreign Policy (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 41, 59-62, 129, 133-139; and, Carol H. Weiss, "What America's Leaders Read," Public Opinion Quarterly 38 (Spring 1974), p. 5-7.

<sup>10</sup>Cohen, The Press and Foreign Policy; David L. Altheide, "Media Hegemony: A Failure of Perspective," Public Opinion Quarterly 45 (Summer 1981), pp.143-163; Tsan Kuo Chang, "The Press and U.S. Foreign Policy: Some Theoretical and Methodological Considerations," a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Gainesville, Fla., August 1984; and, Chang, "Press Coverage of Reagan's China Policy: A Study of Agenda and Treatment," a paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Dallas, May 1983.

<sup>11</sup>Chang, "The Press," pp. 3-5.

mid- to late 1970s.<sup>12</sup> Researchers looking at coverage of Central and Latin America have found that over the period in question coverage of the region blossomed.<sup>13</sup>

The literature suggests several reasons the American press would find human rights an attractive topic, especially in coverage of those countries where the most basic individual rights were being violated by governments receiving American aid.<sup>14</sup> The common philosophical bases for American human rights concerns and the press's vision of its own role would tend to enhance coverage. Not only would the press be championing the individual's rights, it would be doing so in spite of heavy governmental opposition. Altheide contends that journalists' coverage does not bolster the balance of power, but rather questions the legitimacy of the interests upon which the prevailing system is based.<sup>15</sup> The Carter policy in essence challenged the legitimacy of the repressive governments in Central and South America. At the same time then, the press could follow the president's lead as Chang suggests and still challenge the status quo.

Human rights topics have the additional appeal for journalists and public alike that they are in essence deviant, and thus would have newsworthiness value according to several of the criteria established by Shoemaker, et al.<sup>16</sup> Human rights topics would qualify under all three of the deviance dimensions Shoemaker outlined. For American readers rights violations are odd and unusual, and thus statistically deviant, and also, threaten the status quo and are thus are pathologically deviant. And, even in some of their most mild forms rights violations break U.S. norms

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<sup>12</sup>Mort Rosenblum, Coups and Earthquakes: Reporting the World for America (New York: Harper & Row, 1979) p. 193-202; and, Bolling, Reporters Under Fire.

<sup>13</sup>McAnany, "Television and Crisis."

<sup>14</sup>Rosenblum, Coups, p. 196.

<sup>15</sup>Altheide, "Media Hegemony."

<sup>16</sup>Pamela J. Shoemaker, et al. "Testing a Theoretical Model of Newsworthiness: Coverage of International Events in the U.S. Media," a paper presented to the International Communication Association, Montreal, 1987.

and thus could be argued to represent normative deviance at its height.<sup>17</sup>

The literature supports content analysis as a means of approaching the question, and backs the selection of the press elite as the place to seek an interaction between foreign policy formulation and foreign coverage.<sup>18</sup> There are also indications that studies of coverage of a specific issue can add to something to understanding of foreign policy coverage in general. The literature supports the need for continued study of U.S. coverage of Central and South America.

Significantly, Rosenblum records the effect of the change of administrations on human rights coverage, noting particularly that the Carter Administration ordered U.S. embassies to pay close attention to the subject, and that official criticism of rights abuses gave reporters "legitimate (news) pegs" to write at length on the subject.<sup>19</sup>

Given the newsgathering constraints facing correspondents writing on the subject, the impact of the fact that the U.S. government under Carter was required to monitor rights abuses and issue reports cannot be underestimated. Those reports not only focused attention of the region, but also gave the correspondents the quotable facts and attributable sources they had been missing.

On the basis of those findings, this study of coverage in the New York Times, Washington Post, Christian Science Monitor and Los Angeles Times was approached with three hypotheses:

1. The number of newspapers stories devoted to coverage of Central and South America increased as a result of the Carter human rights policy

2. The space devoted to newspaper coverage of Central and South America increased as a result of the Carter human rights policy

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<sup>17</sup>Shoemaker, "Testing a Theoretical Model of Newsworthiness," p. 4.

<sup>18</sup>Chang, "The Press and U.S. Foreign Policy."

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 202.



3. The depth of newspaper coverage of the region increased as a result of the Carter human rights policy.

#### METHOD

Five papers were selected from among the papers commonly referred to as the prestige press.<sup>20</sup> Three of the papers chosen are among the media relied on by decision makers and journalists alike as the standard for foreign coverage--the New York Times, the Washington Post, and the Christian Science Monitor.<sup>21</sup> The other papers chosen, the Los Angeles Times and the Miami Herald, also generally included on the list of prestige papers, were selected because of their location closer to the region being studied and their large populations of Central and South Americans, both reasons for journalistic sensitivity to the subject matter.<sup>22</sup> It became necessary to eliminate the Miami Herald when it proved impossible to obtain all of the issues required for the study.

The four years -- 1975, 1977, 1978, and 1982 -- were chosen to obtain a longitudinal perspective on topic. The first, 1975, was selected because it was the last year before the campaign in which Carter won the presidency. Human rights were not a priority foreign policy concern under the Nixon and Ford presidencies, but because they became an issue during the 1976 presidential campaign it was felt that year should not be chosen for study in case the campaign affected coverage.

The second year, 1977, was selected because Carter took office during that year and began to formulate and implement his human rights policies. Thus, it was expected that 1977 and 1978 -- the third year chosen for study -- would represent the climb and peak of the policy's effect on coverage. It was expected also that

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<sup>20</sup>John C. Merrill and Harold A. Fisher, The World's Great Dailies: Profiles of Fifty Newspapers, (New York: Hastings House, 1980), p. 20; and, John D. Merrill, "The World's Elite Newspapers," World Press Encyclopedia (London: Mansel Publications Limited, 1982), pp. 37-56.

<sup>21</sup>Cohen, The Press, pp. 59, 137, 139; and, William A. Henry III, "The Ten Best U.S. Dailies," Time, 30 April 1984, pp. 58-63.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.



looking at two consecutive years of the Carter presidency at the height of the policy's potency would compensate for any time lag in the policy's implementation and effectiveness. The two-year span provides some picture of what, if any, effect that lag might have had on coverage.

The fourth year, 1982, was chosen because it is the second year of the Reagan administration. By then, the Carter policy was no longer in force. Any fleeting effects the Carter policy might have had on coverage under Reagan should have disappeared, and the study's results could then be taken as an indicator of more permanent coverage changes.

The unit of analysis was the individual news story from or about countries in Central and South America. The stories were found in the new sections of two randomly-constructed weeks of each paper. The 14-day sample size could not be adhered to in the case of the Christian Science Monitor, however, because the Monitor prints only five days a week. As a result, only 10 issues of the paper were reviewed. Stories were sought in those sections of each newspaper where regular readers would expect to find international news.

Coding was conducted by a single coder working with a pretested coding instrument. Each story was measured in square inches and coded according to thirteen coding categories.<sup>23</sup> In order, as they appeared on the coding sheet, those categories were: prominence; topic country; dateline; picture and or map; byline--whether it originated with staff or wire correspondents; international interaction; the type of international interaction, whether it was a human rights topic; whether there was a human rights mention; whether there was man-made violence involved; topic; and, the number of sources cited. A story's prominence was

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<sup>23</sup>Square inches were used since they take into account the column width of the story which varies from paper to paper and story to story.

determined according to an index assigning points for story placement and play.<sup>24</sup>

Human rights topics were defined as anything like massacres, torture, political prisoners, the "disappeared," or death squads - violations of human rights as defined at the start of this study. A human rights mention was noted separate from the topic and could involve either "human rights" or similar phraseology which called attention to the concept of human rights. Man-made violence was also noted separately and included anything from rebels blowing up a building to a shootout. Topic categories ranged from diplomacy to domestic politics, religion, and economics.

Coverage was divided into four categories. The first included those on a human rights topic that also mentioned human rights. The second included those stories on human rights topic that did not mention human rights. The third category was stories that were not primarily human rights topics but did mention human rights. And, the fourth was those stories that were not on human rights topics and did not mention human rights. These four categories figure prominently in the analysis of the data collected from the study. The idea behind the breakdown was that not all stories on human rights topics mentioned human rights. If the Carter human rights policy focused attention on human rights issues, it might be particularly true of stories written before and after the policy's heyday. At the same time, topic alone was not enough of a measure of human rights coverage since in-depth reporting on a country's political conditions might also mention human rights, though not as the central topic for coding purposes.

#### FINDINGS

The purpose of this research was to determine what if any effect the Carter human rights policy had on American newspaper coverage of Central and South America. The study sought an explanation of the connection between an American presidential

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<sup>24</sup>Richard W. Budd, "Attention Score: A Device for Measuring News Play," Journalism Quarterly 41 (Spring 1964), pp. 259-262.

foreign policy initiative and changes in prestige press coverage of a region the policy affected.

As could be expected, the study results support parts of the hypotheses, suggested connections not proposed by the hypotheses, and raised questions the hypotheses had not addressed. The study findings will be reviewed first as they address the stated hypotheses, and then in terms of the other coverage issues that need to be addressed.

1. The number of newspapers stories devoted to coverage of Central and South America increased as a result of the Carter Human Rights policy.

There is no question that the number of stories run about the region increased over the period of the study, rising sharply between the first and second year of the study and even more dramatically between the third and fourth years (see figure 1). Between 1975 and 1977 the number of stories in the sample increased 135 percent, from 48 stories to 65 (see table 1). From 1977 to 1978, the number of stories the newspapers ran about the region remained level, while between 1978 and 1982, the number of stories in the sample increased from 65 to 136, an increase of 207 percent.

At the same time that the number of stories overall increased, the number of stories about human rights topics with human rights mentions were also increasing (see table 1). Those stories increased from two in 1975 to 16 in 1977, an increase from 4 percent of coverage in 1975 to 24 percent in 1977. The number of stories on human rights topics with no human rights mention held level at 7 between 1975 and 1977, but their percentage of the whole dropped from 15 percent to 11. At the same time the number of stories on non-human rights topics which addressed human rights issues increased from none in 1975 to 4 in 1977, when they represented 6 percent of the total. The number of non-human rights stories with no human rights mention dropped from 39 in 1975 to 38 in 1977, a decrease from 81 percent of all stories the first year to 59 percent of the total in 1977.

While the number of stories overall held level between 1977 and 1978, the number of stories on human rights topics with human rights mentions decreased from 16 to 7, or from 24 percent of the year's stories to 10 percent. The number of human rights stories with no human rights mention decreased from 7 to 2, or from 11 percent of the whole for the year to 3 percent. The number of non-human rights stories with a human rights mention dropped from 4 to 1, or 6 percent of the whole to 2 percent. At the same time, the number of non-human rights stories with no human right mentions increased from 38 in 1977 to 55 in 1978, a jump from 59 percent of the total to 85 percent (see table 1).

As the number of stories from the region increased again between 1978 and 1982, human rights coverage also increased. The number of stories on human rights topics reach a peak at 19, though that was nonetheless only 14 percent of the total and thus less than the 24 percent of total for 1977 (see table 1). The number of human rights stories with no human rights mention increased to 21, or 15 percent of the whole on par with its 1975 position. The number of non-human rights topics with human rights mentions, 8 stories, represented 6 percent of the total for the year, equal to 1977. And while the number of non-human rights stories with no mention of human rights increased to 88, that represented only 65 percent of all the stories run that year.

These findings are consistent with the hypothesis. Over the four years of the study the number of stories the newspapers ran about Central and South America increased. And, as coverage increased, the amount of coverage of human rights issues also increased. Human rights coverage peaked in 1977, the first year of the Carter presidency. Even the coverage drop between 1977 and 1978 can, which at first glance appears inconsistent with the hypothesis is not, and will, be explained later in this chapter.

2. The space devoted to newspaper coverage of Central and South America increased as a result of the Carter human rights policy.

Though the number of stories increased, between 1975 and 1977, the overall length of coverage actually dropped, from

1,096.7 square inches to 1,036.5 (see table 2). By 1978, the amount of coverage had increased to 1,245.9. Between 1978 and 1982, the length of coverage jumped by just over 2,000 square inches to 3,295.1 (see figure 2).

Though overall coverage decreased between 1975 and 1977, the amount of coverage given over to human rights which mentioned human rights directly increased from 5 to 27 percent (see table 3). And though the amount of coverage given same topic in 1978 decreased to 17 percent, the length of coverage fell less radically to 207.7 square inches, more than three times the amount of coverage given the same category in 1975. While the coverage of human rights topics with human rights mentions increased slightly, from 17 percent of the whole in 1978 to 18 percent in 1982, it did not return to 1977 levels (see figure 3).

From 1978 to 1982, the number of stories about human rights topics which did not mention human rights increased to 18 percent of overall coverage, up substantially from 4 percent in 1977 and 1 percent in 1978, and higher even than the 15 percent found in 1975 (see table 3). Coverage of non-human rights topics which mentioned human rights was highest in 1982, at 9 percent of overall coverage.

The study findings on the length of coverage support the hypothesis that the human rights policy increased the amount of space devoted to the newspapers' coverage of Central and South America. As human rights coverage increased, overall coverage increased. When it declined, overall coverage declined (see figure 3). Again though the 1978 findings might appear inconsistent at first glance, they follow a pattern in the implementation of the policy, which will be dealt with later.

3. The depth of newspaper coverage of the region increased as a result of the Carter human rights policy.

If coverage of the region increased over the period of the study, which it did, and part of that increase is accounted for by a marked increase in human rights reporting, which it was, then the depth of reporting increased. For, while the most common story in the study was the 4 square-inch brief and the average story

length was about 20 square inches, the staff-generated human rights story averaged 38 square inches (see table 4).

An important finding to point to increased depth of reporting is the coverage of non-human rights topics that included mention of human rights (see table 5). Averaging longer stories even then the human rights topics with human rights mention, this coverage offers the human rights mention as context for other issues. It is important to note that this category of stories was not present in the 1975 coverage and was at its highest percentage of overall coverage in 1977 and 1982, the two years when coverage of human rights topics peaked. There are also distinct differences in the average length of stories about non-human rights topics that did not mention human rights and those that did. Staff-generated stories about the former averaged 33 square inches and about the latter averaged 43 square inches (see table 6). Overall, stories about non-human rights topics without a human rights mention averaged 19.5 square inches, while those with a mention averaged 33.7 square inches (see table 7). The study findings offer strong support for a connection between the length of a story and the level of human rights involvement. If length is accepted as a measure of depth, then the findings support the hypothesis that the depth of coverage of the region increased as a result of the human rights policy (see table 8).

All three hypotheses address issues which are better understood in context of the issues involved. To begin to grasp some of the explanations behind coverage changes, it is necessary to review them in light of the history of the human rights policy.

Coverage changes coincided with Jimmy Carter's election and his implementation of the human rights policy. Attention to human rights concerns did not begin with the Carter administration, and rights activists on Capitol Hill and elsewhere were already concerned about violations, particularly in Chile and Argentina. For the first time, however, human rights had been placed high on the American foreign policy agenda. South American countries were on the list of the first countries denied aid because of their rights records.

To establish a causal link between the presidential human rights initiative and the coverage changes, it is necessary to establish that the policy change preceded the changes in coverage, that there is a connection between the two, and, that no other factor could be responsible for the change. The military regimes responsible for the most systematic and far-reaching human rights violations in Central and South America were in place before Carter assumed the presidency, as were the economic and social strife which gave rise to them and fed the cycle of human rights violations.

According to Amnesty International, death squads and paramilitary right-wing gangs emerged in Argentina in 1973. Directing their efforts against students, lawyers, journalists and trade unionists, they were responsible for a large proportion of the approximately 1,500 assassinations in Argentina in the 18 months following Juan Peron's death in 1974.<sup>25</sup> Between the 1976 coup which overthrew Peron's wife and the end of 1976, Amnesty International reported that at least 6,000 people "disappeared."<sup>26</sup> In 1975, an Amnesty report on torture noted "a marked difference between traditional brutality and the systematic torture which has spread to many Latin American countries within the past decade." Costa Rica was the only country in Latin America from which the organization could report that it had received "no torture allegations of any kind."<sup>27</sup> Thus human rights violations in the region definitely predate the change of administrations, and the Nixon-Ford administration did not consider human rights in its foreign policy dealings.

When Carter administration attention to human rights violations in the Soviet Union backfired and began to interfere with superpower relations, the policy's focus shifted to countries in Central and South America. With that shift in focus came the first U.S. government reporting of rights violations in countries

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<sup>25</sup>Amnesty International, Political Killings by Governments, (London: Amnesty International Reports, 1983), p. 51.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>27</sup>Amnesty International, Report on Torture (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), p. 191.



receiving American aid. Diplomats were put on notice that human rights were an important policy concern. Serious human rights violations had been occurring in the countries of Central and South America for years, but where correspondents had earlier been struggling to find reliable sources willing to provide the material they needed for stories, they now had diplomatic and bureaucratic sources both in Washington and abroad. The new attention to human rights issues put Amnesty International and other rights monitoring groups on the map as reliable sources of information. The presidential initiative both attracted attention to the topic and provided the regular and reliable sources correspondents needed to cover the issue.

Again in 1978, coverage patterns correspond to what had been happening on the policy front (see figure 3). Human rights were still a major concern of the Carter administration, but after the first flush of aid cutbacks the administration encountered problems in pushing its stance. Once the strings attached to aid had pulled, there was little concrete action the administration could take. Latin American governments chose to withdraw aid requests rather than have them rejected. And once aid had been cut, the administration lost its pull with the offenders gradually shifted its policy from one of intervention to one of disassociation.

Coverage increased in 1982 are also explainable in terms of the climate changes in Washington. When Carter left office, the Reagan administration made no secret of the fact that it would not put human rights before other foreign policy concerns. Instead, Reagan announced he would draw the line on communism, particularly in Central America. And early focus of that Reagan policy initiative was El Salvador. While coverage of El Salvador and Guatemala jumped noticeably, human rights coverage did not cease.

The Carter administration had established human rights as a serious foreign policy concern in Washington, particularly in regard to relations with the countries in South and Central America. That concern took many shapes, but one of its most effective was the creation of a bureaucratic process within the

State Department, which reviewed all aid proposals. Additionally, the four years of the Carter administration gave rights activists a strong foothold on Capitol Hill. Opponents of Reagan's policy found rights violations a powerful argument against support for oppressive regimes, thus keeping the issue alive on the foreign policy front. In addition, editors and correspondents had established patterns of reportage which included regular reference to monitoring groups' reports on rights violations.

By 1982, human rights were still a concern for correspondents, but as the Latin American governments learned to disarm the diplomats they likewise learned to counter correspondents. Where Chile had once released victims who could talk to the press, other regimes learned to leave no live victims. U.S. government and rights monitoring groups were still reliable sources, but the governments learned to bar entry to rights observers and took advantage of any opportunity to discredit correspondents by disproving their work where possible. It makes sense then, that while coverage of the region held level, less of it would have focused on human rights than previously.

Other studies support the research findings that indicate that changes in coverage occurred after Carter took office at the beginning of 1977. The changes in coverage, which include significant increases in human rights coverage, followed the Carter inauguration. Weakening in the Carter initiative may be mirrored in a reduction in human rights coverage in 1978. While the continued coverage of human rights issues after Carter argues in favor of the power of a policy initiative to establish an issue on the press's agenda. Similarly, the noticeable increases in coverage of El Salvador and Guatemala in the last year of the study, which coincide with the Reagan initiative in the area, support the argument that a presidential foreign policy changes can shift coverage patterns.

Civil and political strife is not new to the region, and plenty of events can be found in countries throughout the region which were not enough to attract steady and increasing media attention prior to the implementation of the Carter policy. At the

same time, the events which focused U.S. security concerns in the region postdate the first changes in coverage levels. The same limited security concerns that made the region a fitting testing ground for the Carter policy-- when it was found that strained relations with the Soviets preempted action in that direction-- support the argument that there were no other overriding involvements that could account for the coverage changes. Those security perceptions shifted with the overthrow of the Somoza regime in 1979, but that came after the first three years included in this study. Events in Nicaragua did not pickup until part way through 1978, when the coverage increases had temporarily leveled off. Other research which found that a shift in television coverage occurred between 1977 and 1978, noted a large increase in coverage of war-terrorism stories, likely the category in which human rights violations would fall.<sup>20</sup>

There is also support for the suggestion that if the Carter human rights policy was instrumental in bringing about the changes in coverage of Central and South America, then by definition it also increased the depth of reporting from the region. Measuring the depth of reporting by the square inches of average coverage makes sense if one understands that few facts and less context can be provided in the short news brief that was the most common form the foreign reporting from the region took. The longer the story, the more likely it is to offer the readers both facts and, one would hope, the context in which to understand them.

The research was undertaken with several assumptions, which, while not couched in the form of hypotheses, nonetheless need to be addressed. It was assumed from the start that the New York Times and Washington Post would out-cover the other papers. While that is the order in which the papers ranked in order of the amount of space given to the region, Times gave the region 2,225.8 square inches over the four years, much higher than the Post's

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<sup>20</sup>Emile G. McAnany, "Television and Crisis: Ten Years of Network News Coverage of Central America, 1972-1981," Media, Culture and Society 5 (1983) p. 201-203.

1,662.8 (see table 9). Not surprising, perhaps when it is considered that four Times staff bylines appeared regularly from the region in the sample papers from 1975 and 1977, while eight each appeared in 1978 and 1982. Two names appeared in the sample issues of the Post for 1975, four in 1977, one in 1978 and seven in 1982. The Los Angeles Times was not far behind the Post with, 1,512.2 square inches and two staff bylines in the samples for 1975 and 1978, one for 1977 and seven for 1982. The Christian Science Monitor had 1,273.4 square inches, one regular byline for each of 1975, 1977 and 1978 and three for 1982.

While all four papers showed marked increases in the volume of coverage between 1978 and 1982, the Times and the Monitor were more regular in their coverage across the period of the study. They showed percentage increases for the last year that were substantially lower than those of the Post and Los Angeles Times. It is important to note, however, that while the Monitor may have been more consistent in the volume of its coverage than other of the papers in all but the final year, that meant coverage in only two of the four human rights involvement categories -- human rights topics with mention of human rights and non-human rights topics with no mention (see table 9). Of the four newspapers, the sample coverage found in the Post and the Los Angeles Times seems the most sensitive to policy changes, and the New York Times the least. It is also possible, that with more staff available to cover the region, the Times had the resources to do a better job, and did.

That most of the correspondents in the region were based in Buenos Aires becomes clear in the amount of coverage devoted to the country (see table 10). Argentina was covered regularly throughout the four years of the study, while Brazil and Chile were covered more in the first three years of the study than they were in the fourth. El Salvador and Guatemala, on the other hand, got little attention in the first years of the study but plenty at the end in 1982, while coverage of Bolivia and Nicaragua was less skewed. As things heated up in Central America in the early 1980s attention and newsgathering resources shifted there, though the

South American correspondents in Argentina continued to cover the issues there. Coverage of individual countries is hard to generalize from a two-week, constructed sample to a year, except in cases like Argentina and El Salvador where the patterns of coverage are strikingly evident. It may be worth noting, however, that the list of the six nations with the most coverage-- Argentina, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Chile and Brazil--is evenly split between Central and South America (see Table 10).

#### CONCLUSION

The research suggests that a connection does exist between the Carter human rights policy and coverage of Central and South America. Human rights and overall coverage increases, both by volume and number, support the thesis that the presidential initiative, implemented in the first year of the Carter presidency, had a significant impact on coverage of the region. Observations of American correspondents based in both Central and South America also support the premise that the Carter policy had an impact on their efforts there.

The drop in coverage from 1977 to 1978 identified by the content analysis had not been anticipated; and the study was not designed to account for the spectacular increase in coverage between the last two years of the study. Nonetheless, possible explanations have been found for both phenomena within the theoretical and practical frameworks of the study.

Both the premise of the research and the explanation of the results find a basis in existing research and theory. The appeal of human rights as a topic can be explained by Shoemaker's theories of deviance as a factor of newsworthiness.<sup>29</sup> Stories of human rights violations would be newsworthy for American media because their very subjects are outside most Americans' experiences and appeals to basic human curiosity about things which are uncommon, and which violate societal norms. The premises about the reasons for the changes in coverage also fit the

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<sup>29</sup>Shoemaker, "Testing a Theoretical Model of Newsworthiness."

Shoemaker framework, since one of the controlling variables in the deviance theory is the level of U.S. interest and involvement in an area.

Coverage increased significantly in the late 1970s and then again in the early 1980s, but a more precise plotting of the patterns of change is basic to addressing the forces at work. An analysis of coverage for a six-month period through the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s would provide the detailed information necessary to address the precise dynamics of the changes which occurred. The study findings also suggest other areas research, especially a comparison between the nature of the Carter and Reagan policies and their coverage. The especially striking coverage increases found between 1978 and 1980 suggest that an early Reagan initiative to draw the line against communism in Central America exerted its own influence on media coverage of that area.

## TABLES

**Table 1**--Number of stories for combined papers by year (% of total)

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<u>1975</u>	with human rights mention	without human rights mention	
human rights topic	2 (4%)	7 (15%)	9 (19%)
non-human rights topic	0 (0%)	39 (81%)	39 (81%)
	2 (4%)	46 (96%)	48

$\chi^2=10.37$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.01$

<u>1977</u>	with human rights mention	without human rights mention	
human rights topic	16 (25%)	7 (11%)	21 (36%)
non-human rights topic	4 (6%)	38 (58%)	42 (64%)
	20 (31%)	45 (69%)	65

$\chi^2=25.2$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$

<u>1978</u>	with human rights mention	without human rights mention	
human rights topic	7 (11%)	2 (3%)	9 (14%)
non-human rights topic	1 (2%)	55 (84%)	56 (86%)
	8 (13%)	57 (87%)	65

$\chi^2=41.5$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$



**Table 1 (cont.)**

1982	with human rights mention	without human rights mention	
human rights topic	19 (14%)	21 (15%)	40 (29%)
non-human rights topic	8 (6%)	88 (65%)	96 (71%)
	27 (20%)	109 (80%)	136

$\chi^2=27.5$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.001$

Overall Chi-square for four years:  $\chi^2=83.51$ ,  $df=7$ ,  $p<.001$

**Table 2--Human rights involvement in overall coverage, by year. Coverage in square inches/number of stories**

human rights involvement	year							
	75		77		78		82	
	sq.in.	no.	sq.in.	no.	sq.in.	no.	sq.in.	no.
HR1	62.6	2	275.3	16	207.7	7	603.5	19
HR2	161.5	7	42.7	7	9.2	2	577.6	21
HR3			86.6	4	43.9	1	308.2	8
HR4	872.6	39	631.9	38	985.1	55	1,805.8	88
Total	1,096.7	48	1,036.5	65	1,245.9	65	3,295.1	136

**Table 3--Overall coverage by percentage for each year. Percentage of coverage by length/percentage by number**

human rights involvement	year							
	75		77		78		82	
	length	no.	length	no.	length	no.	length	no.
HR1	5%	4%	27%	24%	17%	10%	18%	14%
HR2	15%	15%	4%	11%	1%	3%	18%	15%
HR3	0%	0%	8%	6%	4%	2%	9%	6%
HR4	80%	81%	61%	59%	78%	85%	55%	65%

HR1=human rights topic with human rights mention

HR2=human rights topic without a human rights mention

HR3=non-human rights topic with human rights mention

HR4=non-human rights topic without a human rights mention

**Table 4--Length of overall coverage in square inches**-----  
314 stories

Mean	21.23	Std Err	1.085	Median	14.25
Mode	2.0	Std Dev	19.228	Variance	369.715
Range	79.6	Minimum	.9	Maximum	80.5
Sum	6,674.2				

**Table 5--Average story length in square inches, by human rights involvement**-----  
human rights  
involvement

year

	75	77	78	82
HR1	31.3	17.2	26.9	31.7
HR2	23.0	6.1	4.6	27.5
HR3	0	21.6	49.3	20.5
HR4	22.3	16.6	17.9	20.5
Total	22.8	15.9	19.1	24.2

**Table 6--Coverage broken down by staff/wire origin, by square inches and the number of stories per human rights category.**-----  
human rights  
involvement

year

	75		77		78		82	
	sq.in.	no.	sq.in.	no.	sq.in.	no.	sq.in.	no.
HR1 staff	62.2	2	106.8	4	173.5	4	490.9	12
HR1 wire	0	0	36.7	3	26.4	1	56.5	5
HR2 staff	119.0	3	0	0	0		479.8	12
HR2 wire	9.0	2	21.8	2	4.5	1	94.8	8
HR3 staff	0	0	57.8	2	0	0	157.6	3
HR3 wire	0	0	16.5	1	26.4	1	21.2	1
HR4 staff	649.1	19	376.5	9	749.6	26	1,362.8	42
HR4 wire	147.2	9	71	14	152.6	17	233.4	2

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HR1=human rights topic with human rights mention

HR2=human rights topic without a human rights mention

HR3=non-human rights topic with human rights mention

HR4=non-human rights topic without a human rights mention

**Table 7**--Human rights involvement by square inches (average story length). All papers, all years

	with human rights mention		without human rights mention		
human rights topic	1,149.1 (26.1)	17%	791.0 (21.4)	12%	1,940.1 29%
non-human rights topic	438.7 (33.7)	6%	4,395.4 (19.5)	65%	4,834.1 71%
	1,587.8	13%	5,186.4	77%	6,774.2

$x^2=29.4$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p>.001$  (Chi square calculated for percentages)

**Table 8**--Stories by human rights involvement. All papers, all years, total number of stories (% of total)

	with human rights mention		without human rights mention		
human rights topic	44 (14)		37 (11)		81 (25)
non-human rights topic	13 (4)		220 (70)		233 (74)
	57 (18)		257 (81)		314

$x^2 = 206$ ,  $df= 1$ ,  $p<.001$

**Table 9--Human rights involvement by paper. Total Square inches, by human rights involvement, by year**

Year.....	75.....	77.....	78.....	82.....	Total
<b>NYT</b>					
HR1	32.5	89.8	144.2	76.6	
HR2	77.0	8.4	4.5	150.4	
HR3	0.0	70.1	0.0	148.2	
HR4	297.7	134.4	369.9	622.0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>407.3</b>	<b>302.7</b>	<b>518.6</b>	<b>997.2</b>	<b>2,225.8</b>
<b>WP</b>					
HR1	0.0	122.1	3.4	165.4	
HR2	81.0	16.2	4.7	227.5	
HR3	0.0	70.1	43.9	0.0	
HR4	144.5	138.2	126.1	589.8	
<b>Total</b>	<b>225.5</b>	<b>276.5</b>	<b>178.1</b>	<b>982.7</b>	<b>1,662.8</b>
<b>CSM</b>					
HR1	30.0	36.4	55.7	157.8	
HR2	0.0	0.0	0.0	15.4	
HR3	0.0	0.0	0.0	45.4	
HR4	184.3	254.6	252.9	240.9	
<b>Total</b>	<b>214.3</b>	<b>291.0</b>	<b>308.6</b>	<b>459.5</b>	<b>1,273.4</b>
<b>LAT</b>					
HR1	0.0	27.0	4.4	203.7	
HR2	3.5	18.1	0.0	184.3	
HR3	0.0	16.5	0.0	114.6	
HR4	246.1	104.7	236.2	353.1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>249.6</b>	<b>166.3</b>	<b>240.6</b>	<b>855.7</b>	<b>1,512.2</b>
<b>Combined papers</b>					
HR1	62.6	275.3	207.7	603.5	
HR2	161.5	42.7	9.2	577.6	
HR3	0.0	86.6	43.9	308.2	
HR4	872.6	631.9	985.1	1805.8	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1096.7</b>	<b>1036.0</b>	<b>1245.9</b>	<b>3295.1</b>	<b>6,674.2</b>

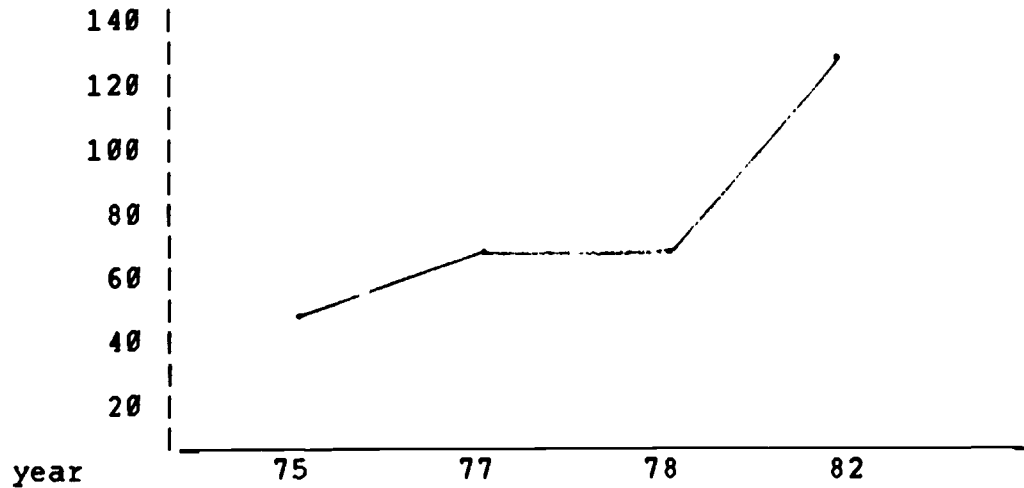
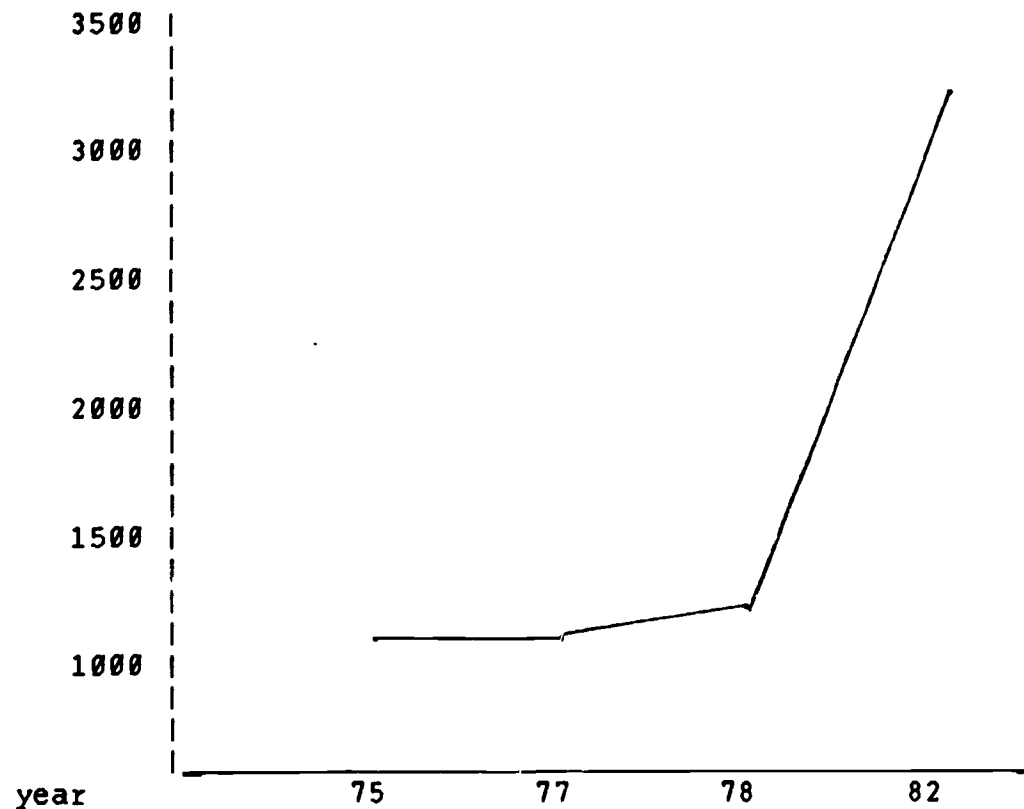
HR1=human rights topic with human rights mention  
 HR2=human rights topic without a human rights mention  
 HR3=non-human rights topic with human rights mention  
 HR4=non-human rights topic without a human rights mention

**Table 10--Country coverage breakdowns**

	Topic country frequency	Dateline frequency	HR no.	sq.in.	Other no.	sq.in.
<b>Argentina</b>	62		19	448.6	43	1038.0
Buenos Aires		54	17	414.4	37	880.4
Other		6	1	33.0	5	110.4
<b>El Salvador</b>	49		21	635.5	28	477.8
San Salvador		32	12	284.4	20	367.5
Other		7	4	188.6	3	93.6
<b>Guatemala</b>	30		18	374.5	12	152.5
Guatemala City		17	9	135.9	8	109.0
Other		4	4	120.2	0	0.0
<b>Nicaragua</b>	27		6	186.8	21	342.5
Managua		14	1	40.1	13	205.5
Other		1	0	0.0	1	72.5
<b>Chile</b>	21		11	214.0	10	227.1
Santiago		9	3	113.5	6	138.3
<b>Brazil</b>	20		8	230.0	12	397.6
Brasilia		2	1	280.0	1	3.0
Rio de Janeiro		12	6	180.3		218.7
Other		4	4	0.0		172.2

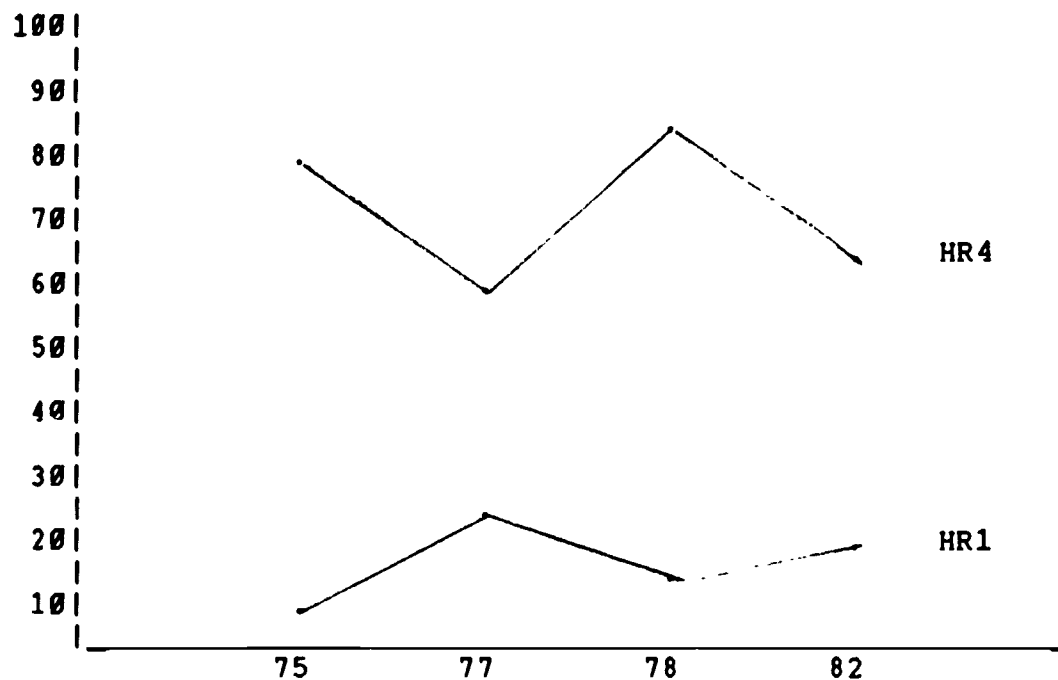
HR was a story on a human rights topic, with or without human rights mention, or on a non-human rights topic with human rights mention. Other was defined as a story on a non-human rights topic without a human rights mention.

## FIGURES

**Figure 1**--Coverage levels by story number. Combined papers**Figure 2**--Coverage levels by length. Combined papers, square inches

**Figure 3--The extremes of human rights involvement in coverage.  
Percentage of annual total square inches.**

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HR1=human rights topics with mention of human rights  
HR4=non-human rights topics without mention of human rights

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