

# COVERAGE OF BURMA IN SIX ELITE NEWSPAPERS

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To: *Internews* for showing me the power of information to change the world

and

To: Julian Robertson for giving me the opportunity to explore my passions

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## **ABSTRACT**

This project compares the United States, United Kingdom and Thailand's print media coverage of Burma. Examining six newspapers' coverage of Burma in 2008 and 2010, the project studies how newspapers frame Burma differently in international coverage. For each newspaper, news coverage of Burma is driven by politics, with an emphasis on the political role of Aung San Suu Kyi. Aside from instances when a specific event demands international engagement with Burma, news organizations rely on policy elites to reduce the cost of reporting news about Burma.

## **INTRODUCTION**

International news organizations serve an integral role in countries with limited press freedom (Chouliaraki 2008). One of the more repressed countries in the world with no freedom of the press, Burma has been largely isolated from the foreign community since its transition into harsh military rule in 1962. From 2008 to 2010, due to building pressure by the international community, the country was promoting a foreign policy strategy of economic stability through trade and investment, peaceful cooperation with trade partners and allies and progress towards democratic governance (James 2004). Despite recent advancements towards engagement with other countries and towards democratization, Burma remains what Steinberg terms a "sotto voce" issue in the international community. With so many other conflicts that the reporting countries prioritize over Burma, Burma receives sporadic international attention at best (Steinberg 2007).

While prior research has examined the determinants of international coverage of news in countries with partial freedom (Wu 2000; Rotheray 2010), Burma's closed environment has not been studied at great length. The primary research question for this project is: what are the similarities and differences between U.S., U.K. and Thai print media coverage of Burma? Additionally, how do different types of newspapers frame

issues? This project focuses on how international newspapers (*The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Guardian*, *The Financial Times*, *The Bangkok Post* and *The Nation*) cover Burma and identifies major trends in framing. Shedding light on differences in coverage across newspaper outlet and country can further determine how the media frames Burma and how international news consumers obtain information about the repressed country. This project further focuses on the differences between Western (U.S. and U.K.) coverage of Burma versus Thai coverage to compare how demand for information and supply incentives to cover the costs of reporting meet to produce information about Burma.

## **BURMA<sup>1</sup> BACKGROUND**

A country of around 54 million people, Burma is comprised of more than 30 minority ethnic groups and approximately 95 percent of the population is Buddhist. With public health expenditures totaling less than one percent of government spending, poor health and living conditions are rampant across the country. In 2009, the United Nations Develop Program's Human Development Index ranked Burma 138 of 182 countries in adjusted real income, life expectancy and educational attainment. Due to dramatic human rights violations by the governing military junta such as killings, torture, rape and political detentions, more than two million citizens of Burma have migrated to countries such as China, India, Bangladesh and Indonesia (US State Department 2010).

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<sup>1</sup> Although the ruling military junta changed the name of the country from Burma to Myanmar in 1989, many individuals and countries such as the United Kingdom do not accept the legitimacy of the military regime to change the official name of the country and still refer to the country by its original name. This study will refer to the country by its original title.

Burma is largely defined in the international community by its political struggle towards democracy against a relentless military junta unwilling to forgo power (Scheufele 1999). The military body in power has continually refused to give in to the desires of its own people to transition into a democratic government. In 1990, despite the National League for Democracy (NLD) being elected by an overwhelming margin to establish a new government, the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC)<sup>2</sup> ignored the results and continued its strict rule. In September of 2007, political protests led by Buddhist monks famously referred to as the “saffron” protests led to widespread crackdown by government troops and took the lives of 31 individuals. This is just one of many examples that illustrate the government’s refusal to listen to the political aspirations of its citizens.

Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of Burma’s leader who saw the country through independence from Britain in 1947, is considered the leader of the democratic movement in Burma. The former leader of the NLD, Aung San Suu Kyi was detained for 15 of the past 21 years before 2010 for various expressions of political opposition towards the military junta. In 1991, the political dissident was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her nonviolent efforts toward freedom and democracy. Aung San Suu Kyi’s ultimate goal is simple: to achieve a free Burma where its citizens have access to basic human rights. Some scholars argue that this clearly understood goal is the reason why she is so widely associated with the democratic movement both by the Burmese and foreigners alike (Scheufele 1999).

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<sup>2</sup> In 1997, the military junta renamed itself the State Peace and Development Council despite very limited restructuring on the parliamentary cabinet itself.

In 2009, Freedom House rated Burma as the 10<sup>th</sup> worst country in the world for press freedom based on the confines under which the independent press works, the limited access to unbiased information and the forms of repression used to punish media dissenters (Karlekar 2009). The most significant publication laws plaguing the Burmese and international press right now are: 1) The Printers and Publishers Registration Act which prohibits publications or materials that go against the interests of the government, 2) The Computer Science Development Law, 1996 and 2002 which limits freedom of expression, especially in the context of Internet technology development, and bans the operation of unlicensed computer networks connected with overseas networks and 3) The TV and Video Law of 1985 which imposes harsh limits on the access of Burmese people to TV and video technologies.

## **THEORY AND HYPOTHESES**

### **Supply and Demand in International News Markets**

The benefit to society of having informed citizens and the personal benefit of consuming news are incommensurable to the cost of producing news. This makes it difficult to submit news to a strict cost-benefit analysis (Hamilton 2010). However, gaining a general understanding of how demand for information about Burma meets with the supply incentives of media producer to generate news about Burma is integral to this analysis.

#### *Supply*

Media outlets produce information based on varying incentives such as subscription costs, advertising revenue, nonprofit ends or expression of ideals. Facing a

scarcity of resources to produce news abroad, more newspaper publications are reducing the size of their international staff (Russo 2009). The closing of international bureaus forces newspapers to make the financial decision to use wire services like Reuters and BBC to obtain news despite a lack of differentiation in its product. Given the low demand in international markets for news about Burma, it is safe to assume that news organizations will devote fewer resources to produce news about Burma as staff sizes shrink and international bureaus are closed.

This lack of resources creates what H. Denis Wu describes as the discrepancy between the “real world” and the “news world” (Wu 2000). Although the “real world” contains all the information about the day-to-day events in Burma, the “news world” is a mere snapshot of events in Burma based on what international news organizations decide to report. In a qualitative content analysis of *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*, it was found that the difficulty in cross-source analysis of news coverage is that no external factor can serve as the “real world” indicator that Wu alludes to in his analysis (Hopple 1982). Thus, Hopple’s study concluded that the two newspapers had a significant amount of material during the six month period of analysis that was covered by one newspaper but not the other. This supports the argument that based on different supply incentives for coverage, two elite newspapers can present a dramatically varied world view to their respective readership. Hill and Fenn conducted a similar study of *The London Times* and *The New York Times* that demonstrated more overlap between the two newspapers during period of conflict, than during periods of nonconflict (Hill and Fenn 1974). This theory leads to Hypothesis 1:

**HYPOTHESIS 1: There will be a larger similarity of coverage amongst newspapers during times of disruption (e.g., natural disaster) vs. times of no disruption.**

How accessible a story is directly correlates to how costly it is to report. Burma's harsh policies towards the media 1) make getting information out of Burma difficult and 2) hinder international and domestic reporters ability to report objectively and accurately (Davis 2009). Despite the potential power international journalists can have in motivating international action for a better tomorrow for Burma, local and foreign journalists alike are restricted in their ability to cover news in the country and only a small number of foreign reporters are allowed to enter Burma on special visas (Chouliaraki 2008). This creates not only a costly environment for media producers, but a life-threatening environment as well.

*Demand*

Demand in newspaper markets is driven by who cares about information and what they are willing to pay to find it, both in opportunity cost and subscription cost. Four main functions contribute to people's demand for information: consumption, production, voting and entertainment (Downs 1957). Consumption news pertains to information that will affect news consumer's future purchasing decisions, production information will affect their occupation and voting information will affect reader's future voting decisions. Entertainment information does not typically affect any future decisions and is read for pleasure. The cost of acquiring information forces consumers to weigh the marginal costs and benefits before deciding to read a specific piece of news (Hamilton 2004). Due to the large gap created between what people need to know as informed citizens and what they

want to know as informed consumers, there is a shrinking of the market for hard news as the market for soft news grows (Hamilton 2010).

Demand for news about Burma varies by the country covering news in Burma. However, consuming news about Burma, particularly in the Western market, comes at a high cost to consumers. For the average reader, there is a small chance that information about Burma will affect their future decisions in any of Downs' three main categories. The only readers whose future decisions will regularly be affected after reading news about Burma are 1) foreign investors in Burma from all three countries and 2) voters in Thailand whose opinions of elected officials may change after reading how they handle Burma-Thai relations. This leaves the only category constantly available to the average reader when consuming news about Burma to be entertainment. Thus the audience interested in consuming news about Burma is relatively small and consists mostly of business readers, policy actors and educated consumers.

### **International Determinants of News Markets**

The global system of foreign news gathering and distribution is predicated on political, economic, cultural and systematic factors (Wu 2000). Wu points to concrete empirical traits such as political relationships and interactions and relatedness between the country of coverage and the country its covering. These factors have been determined to be essential in shaping the international media landscape.

The United States, United Kingdom and Thailand each enforce strict policies in opposition against Burma and its system of governance. The U.S.'s current policy in Burma is to promote a democratic country that respects the human rights of its citizens (US State Department 2011b). The Obama administration implemented a policy of

“practical engagement” with the foreign power including closer engagement and dialogue with the ruling military junta to further promote progress toward more democratic practices. Additionally, the U.S. holds an embassy in Rangoon to monitor the political situation in Burma (US State Department 2011a).

The U.K. is similarly concerned with the human rights of Burma’s citizens and has an embassy in Rangoon that oversees human right violations as well as works with agencies affiliated with the United Nations to address the issue (British Embassy Rangoon 2011). In addition, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) and United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) have passed many resolutions denouncing human rights violation in Burma (Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2011).

The diplomatic relations between Burma and Thailand are generally more cooperative and less restricted than those between Burma and the U.S. or U.K. As one of the largest investors in Burma, Thailand is focused on economic issues and trade with Burma. Despite recent encouragement by political officials in Thailand for political change in Burma, Thailand does not wish to submit Burma to economic sanctions to accomplish this goal (US State Department 2011b).

Interactions and relatedness refers to proximity of the two countries and the language spoken in each of the countries. With respect to the U.S and U.K, Burma is far removed from the two countries in geographical distance. In addition, there is a severe language barrier as neither country has a significant population fluent in Burmese or any of the many ethnic dialects. Contrastly, Thailand borders Burma and is the most incentivized to promote economic stability and human rights in Burma due to its proximity to the country, its allegiance with Burma in ASEAN, as well as its position as

the new home of over 150,000 Burmese refugees (US State Department 2011b). Also, at least 80 percent of migrant workers in Thailand's factories are from Burma (Beatty 2010). In the past, Thailand and Burma's relationship has been stressed by the smuggling of methamphetamines and other drugs from Burma into Thailand. In the post-September 11 eras, Thailand and Burma have worked together in anti-terrorism campaigns to protect their shared border from conflict. Thailand's political relatedness and physical proximity to Burma leads to Hypothesis 2:

**HYPOTHESIS 2: Thai newspapers will cover events and issues in Burma not covered by either U.S. or U.K. newspapers due to proximity and relatedness to Burma.**

In addition, post-Cold War, Wu states the international news landscape is not one predicated on East-West relations, but rather is based on economic interactions among nations and economic determinism related to cost-effectiveness of international news production. A study of the major factors that influence news flow, including language, physical location, population and political freedom, confirms that economic development of the country being covered is the most significant (Kim and Barnett 1996). The U.S. and the U.K. have promoted strict sanctions against Burma that have significantly limited economic interactions between the countries (US State Department 2010). However, as the second largest investment source for Burma behind Thailand, the U.K. is intimately tied to Burma's economy and also has incentives to encourage the growth and development of Burma as a nation. Of all three countries, Thailand is the most economically tied to Burma. It is estimated that Thailand has invested around \$7.41 billion in Burma between 1988 and 2009, which makes it the top investor in the country

in terms of overall investment value. 81.7 percent is invested in business with 8.33 percent and 3.1 percent invested in the manufacturing and hotel and tourism sectors respectively (The Thailand Times). Currently, Thailand and Burma's foreign ministers hold annual economic meetings.

Two of the newspapers under consideration, *The Financial Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, are financial-interest newspapers writing to an audience concerned specifically with economic information. This assumes that issues that pertain to Burma's economic development will be prioritized in coverage in these two newspapers. The audience demand in financial-interest newspapers for information about Burma combined with Thailand's extensive economic relationship with Burma leads to Hypothesis 3:

**HYPOTHESIS 3: 1) Financial-interests newspapers will have a higher incidence of economic frames than general-interest newspapers to fulfill audience producer demand. 2) Thai newspapers will have the most economic coverage overall given its economic relatedness to Burma.**

In studies specific to the U.S. news market, two of the distinguishing factors between events covered and events not covered are potential for social change and normative deviance of an event (Chang, Shoemaker, and Brendlinger 1987). Four newspapers under analysis, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Bangkok Post* and *The Nation* are general-interest newspapers writing to an audience that is interested in consuming news when it holds entertainment value. This includes news about Burma when it relates to 1) the actions or statements of a reader's own country and 2) when an event of interest deviates from normal day-to-day events in Burma. The audience

demand in general-interest newspapers for international news about Burma leads to

Hypothesis 4:

**HYPOTHESIS 4: General-Interest Newspapers with have a higher incidence of human rights frames than financial-interest newspapers to fulfill audience entertainment demand.**

### **Framing Effects and Newspaper Coverage**

News consumers are particularly reliant on how the media chooses to frame Burma in international reporting due to how far removed the U.S and U.K. are from the country. Framing is defined as a news source's ability to select an angle of a story and make it more noticeable to allow audiences to define the problem, make interpretations and consider recommendations (Entman 1993). With a specific frame, a news source displays certain information prominently, while suppressing other information. This leads to a specific classification of the issue (Edelman 1993). By calling attention to some aspects of a story while obscuring others, frames inevitably affect a viewer's knowledge of the issue at hand. Entman argues that an analysis of media frames is necessary to understand how a specific audience is capable of interpreting events (Entman 1991) .

By reinforcing basic frames over time through the use of keywords, metaphors, concepts and symbols, news organizations help viewers create a basic understanding of the issue. Relating this theory to Burma, it is particularly challenging for news organizations to assume their audiences has any background knowledge on the issues. Thus, reporters have a tendency to reinforce basic frames over time to ensure a fundamental knowledge of Burma. Analyzing the framing of foreign news specifically, Entman asserts that the frame must 1) be accepted as the dominant line of thinking and 2)

be easy to process and understand (Entman 2004) . After the disappearance of a clear battle of ideological issues after the Cold War, journalists began to look for ways to frame an issue in order to properly define the problem and solicit responses from their readers (Bloch-Elkon 2007; Evans 2010). This made the framing function of news coverage more important to reader's understanding of current events. The importance of emphasizing basic frames and Aung San Suu Kyi's important role in determining international relations with Burma leads to Hypothesis 5:

**HYPOTHESIS 5: Aung San Suu Kyi will consistently serve as a frame in the U.S. and U.K markets in order to help viewers create a basic understanding of the issues.**

A new world order after the Cold War also raised the power of political elites to influence media organizations and the public (Malek and Wiegand 1997). Entman describes framing under a “cascading activation model” starting with administration officials and opinion elites who communicate to journalists that pass down information to the general public (Entman 2003). Policy elites are seen as the primary “sponsors” of news frames due to politicians desire to seek support and work with journalists to gain news frames over other elites (Entman 1993). Due to framing's ability to highlight specific aspects of a story, political elites are able to structure the information that affects agenda setting and public opinion (Entman 2007). Often, the information the public receives from newspaper content is an overgeneralized explanation of what elites determine to be important (White 2004). In addition, one of the ways to reduce the cost of a story and to avoid the hostile environment is to base coverage on the actions of domestic policy elites. This information is then relayed to the media to obtain

international coverage. The high cost of reporting news on Burma combined with the policy elites power in framing effects leads to Hypothesis 6:

**HYPOTHESIS 6: Newspapers will use the statements and actions of policy elites to frame coverage of Burma.**

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Country Selection**

The literature demonstrates that coverage of international news is intimately connected to 1) the political and economic relationships between the country of coverage and the country its covering and 2) the physical proximity and relatedness of the two countries. The actions with Burma made by domestic policy actors are considered important determinants of international news coverage as well. The United States, the United Kingdom and Thailand were chosen given the differences in the countries relationships with Burma. The three countries will be analyzed separately to determine when these differences affect coverage.

### **Newspaper Selection**

The six newspapers under analysis are *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Guardian*, *The Financial Times*, *The Bangkok Post* and *The Nation*. One paper with a general-reader audience and one with a financial-interest were chosen in the U.S. and U.K. markets whereas the Thailand newspapers were chosen based on consensus of the more reputable English national newspaper sources in Thailand. See Appendix A for further explanation of the producer and consumer composition of each newspaper.

### **Time Period Selection**

2008 and 2010 were chosen as the two years to analyzed based on 1) their proximity to the present to gain an accurate picture of print newspaper coverage of Burma as it pertain to current relationships between Burma and the chosen countries and 2) the variety of different events of interest that occurred in Burma in 2008 and 2010. See Appendix B for a description of major event in Burma during the chosen time frames.

### **Data Collection**

Newspaper data came from a series of searches through the Factiva Database, which is owned and operated by Dow Jones. The terms used to search were “Burma” or “Myanmar” for each newspaper during the entire year of 2008 and 2010 respectively. Articles with at least 5 mentions of Burma or Myanmar were aggregated and imported into Nvivo 9 to complete a qualitative content analysis and exported into Stata and Excel. The stories were limited to those with at least 5 mentions of Burma or Myanmar to eliminate stories where Burma was not the main focus of the entire story.

### **Coding and Frame Selection**

Initially, all articles were coded for length, date of publication, author, byline and section of the newspaper in which the article appeared. Subsequently, the articles were coded qualitatively in the qualitative data analysis software Nvivo 9 into eight main news frames: political, Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK), economic, human rights, humanitarian aid, ethnic groups, border issues and other. Frames were not mutually exclusive as multiple stories could contain multiple frames. Stories were also coded for specific involvement or mention of policy elites from the home country of coverage as a sub-node for the human

rights, humanitarian aid, and economic and political frames. See Appendix C for further explanation of coding criteria.

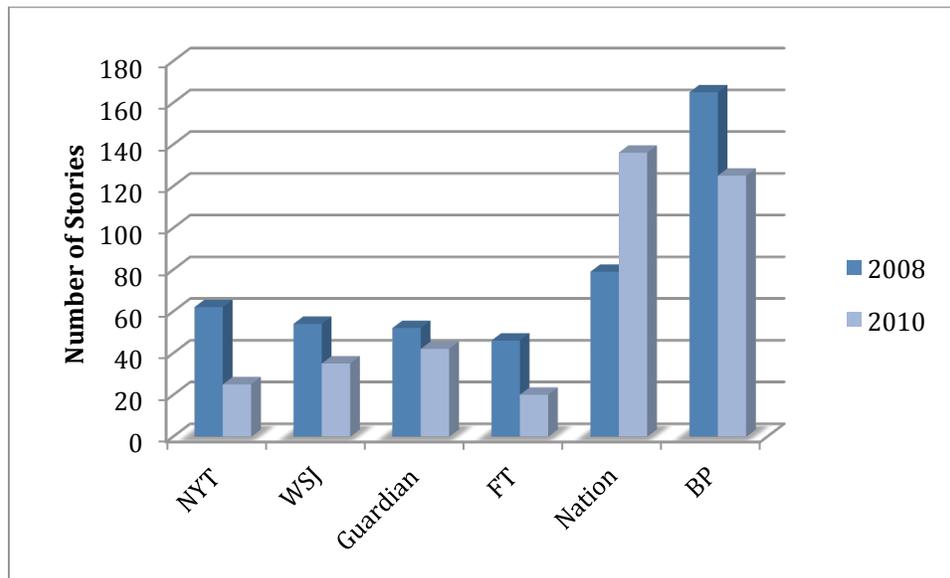
## **LIMITATIONS**

Due to the laws in place in Burma against foreign media coverage and the danger placed on the reporter when reporting in or about Burma, many articles in my study only included a byline of the publications' name and no specific reporter or the location of publication. In addition, *The Bangkok Post* and *The Nation* included very limited information about the section of the paper that the story appeared in as well as if the story was written by a reported of the publication, a freelance reporter or an outside source. This made it difficult to do any substantive analysis of the resources allocated by each country to coverage of Burma.

## **DATA OVERVIEW**

841 articles with at least 5 mentions of Burma or Myanmar came from the newspapers in 2008 and 2010. Of the 841 articles, 60 percent came from the Thai newspaper market, with *The Nation* and *The Bangkok Post* producing 505 articles collectively. This can be attributed to the lower cost of producing news about Burma from Thailand as well as the higher audience demand for news about Burma in the Thai market. The larger amount of stories coming out of the Thai market supports Hypothesis 4, that given the relatedness and proximity of Thailand to Burma, coverage is more broad and in-depth in the Thai newspaper market than in the U.S. or U.K. markets. 2008 received slightly more overall coverage by the 6 newspapers than 2010 with 453 of 828 articles studied coming from 2008. See Figure 1.

FIGURE 1: COVERAGE OF BURMA BY PAPER PER YEAR



The two major events in Burma in 2008 and 2010 drove coverage for every market. In May of 2008, Cyclone Nargis increased coverage significantly from only 24 articles collectively written by all newspapers in April to 214 total articles in May. The severity of Cyclone Nargis pulled in more readership demand in 2008 from every audience newspaper, particularly given the entertainment function that natural disaster provide in the media. The increase in coverage across each newspaper supports Hypothesis 1 that there will be a larger overlap of coverage amongst newspapers during times of disruption. In November of 2010, the first official elections in 20 years followed by the freeing of Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest created a spike in coverage from 38 articles collectively written in October to 112 articles written in November. The event not only appealed to the entertainment demand for information about the famed political dissident, but also pulled in more audience demand for information about political conflict in Burma. All three markets appear to have followed the same pattern in coverage for each

year with the Thai market showing more variability in pattern than the U.S. or U.K. markets respectively. See Figure 2a and 2b.

FIGURE 2A. OVERALL COVERAGE IN 2008

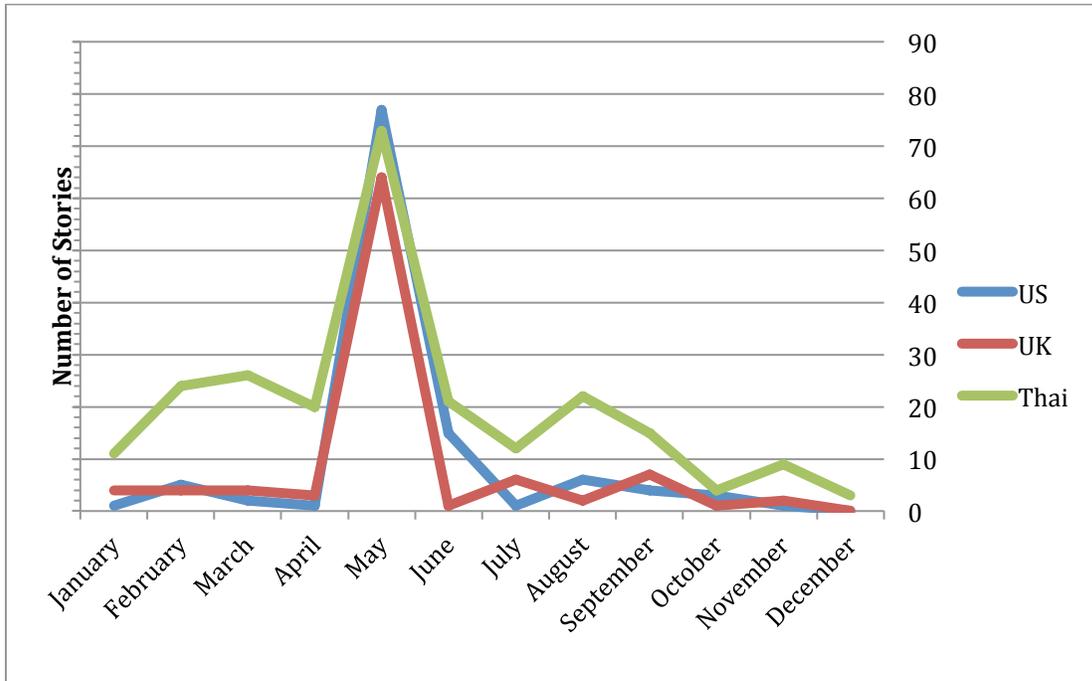
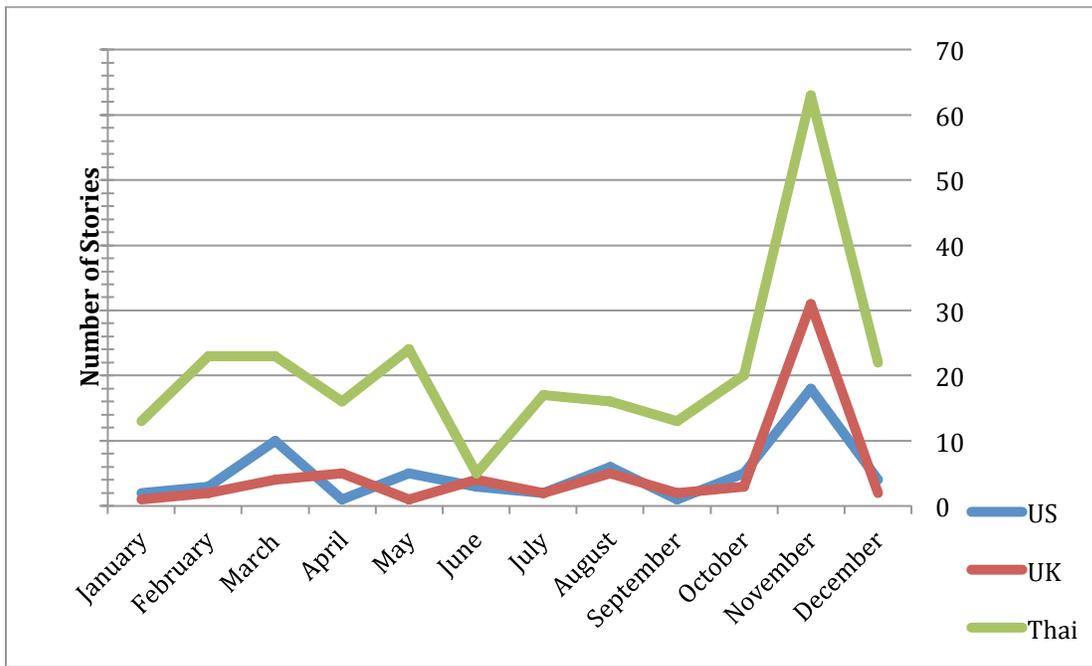


FIGURE 2B. OVERALL COVERAGE IN 2010



A majority of the articles, 75 percent, fell under the categorization of news articles. The second largest article type was opinion with 13.5 percent followed by 4.35 percent editorial articles. The rest of the sample represented a combination of wire briefs (9), Question and Answers (4), Leisure, Arts and Travel (5) among other categories.

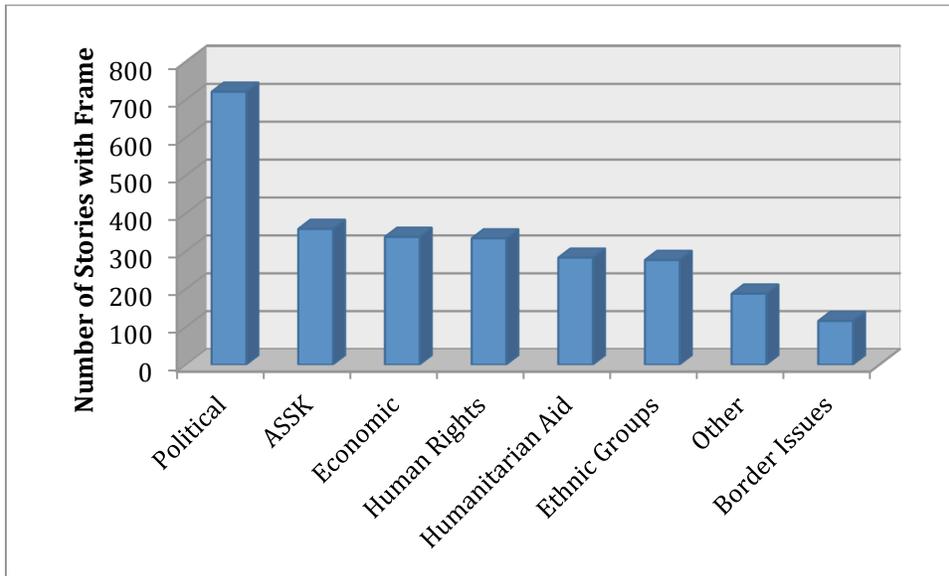
Data on location the article was written was generally inconclusive due to the Thai market rarely citing location in its articles. However, it is interesting to note that Bangkok, Thailand was the most frequently cited location (64) followed by Burma's capital city of Yangon (27).

## **RESULTS**

### **Distribution of Coverage Amongst Major Coding Areas**

The political frame dominated coverage of Burma. Of the 841 articles in the sample, 721 contained at least one political frame. In the U.S and U.K. market, political stories fulfill entertainment demand given the conflicts presented in political relationships between Burma and the U.S. and U.K. as well as producer demand for information about how the political volatility in Burma could affect foreign investments. In the Thai market, political stories about Burma also fulfill voter demand given that foreign relations between Thailand and Burma could affect the popularity of certain elected officials. Also in the Thai market, Thailand is dependent on Burma for 37 percent of Burma's total net exports fulfilling consumer demand for information. The political frame also allows journalists to reduce the cost of reporting by relying on the actions of political elites to frame Burma in the news rather than traveling to the country to gain coverage. See Figure 3.

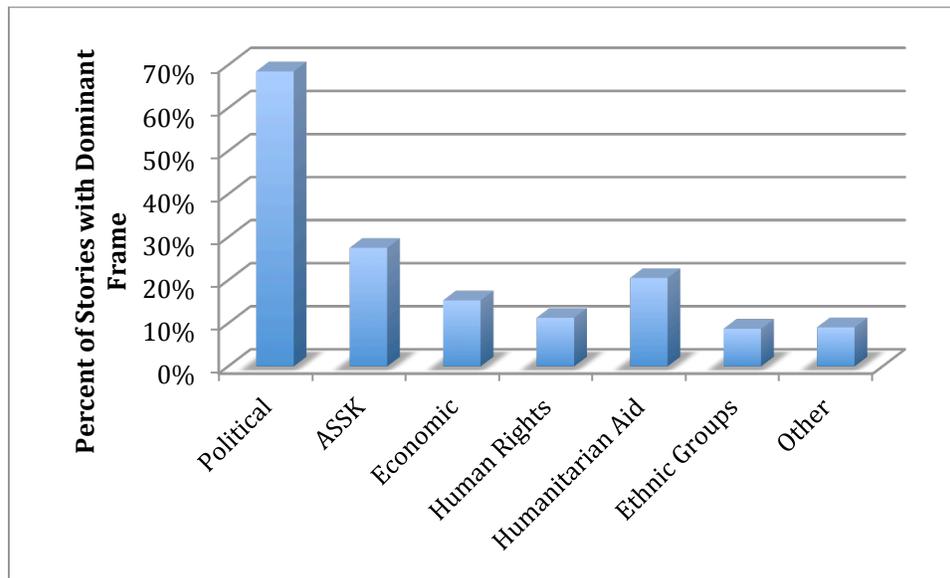
FIGURE 3: OVERALL COVERAGE BY FRAME



Frames were also analyzed to determine the dominant frame of coverage overall to account for multiple stories containing multiple frames.<sup>3</sup> The political frame was the most dominant frame of coverage as well with 89 percent of coding falling under this frame. The second most dominant frame of coverage was Aung San Suu Kyi with 41 percent of coding falling under her frame followed by economic with 23 percent of all frames. See Figure 4.

<sup>3</sup> Frame dominance was defined by the total number of words coded at a specific frame in an article divided by the total number of words coded across all frames. For example, if a 1000 word story had 500 coded words and 400 were coded under a political frame, that story's dominant frame would be political.

FIGURE 4: OVERALL DOMINANT FRAME

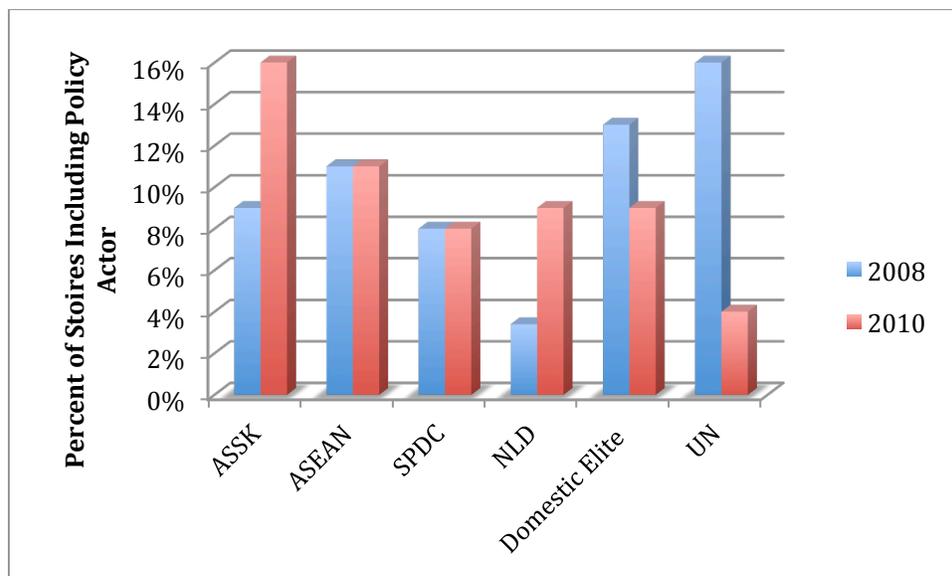


### *Political Coverage*

Given the clear dominance of political framing within newspaper coverage of Burma, the frame was further analyzed to understand its contributing factors. All three countries are in strong opposition to Burma’s military regime and its structure of government. Using a combination of diplomatic pressure and economic sanctions, the countries are currently attempting to force the Burmese government to submit to the requests of the international community. Although news producers have some say in structuring how they frame their coverage, a lot of framing is determined by Entman’s “cascading activation model” which is started by policy elites (Entman 2003). Thus, the political relationships between an international country and the host country of coverage become essential in determining coverage. This, combined with newspaper’s reliance on covering issues of tension or conflict creates a tendency to frame news about Burma around political issues and actors.

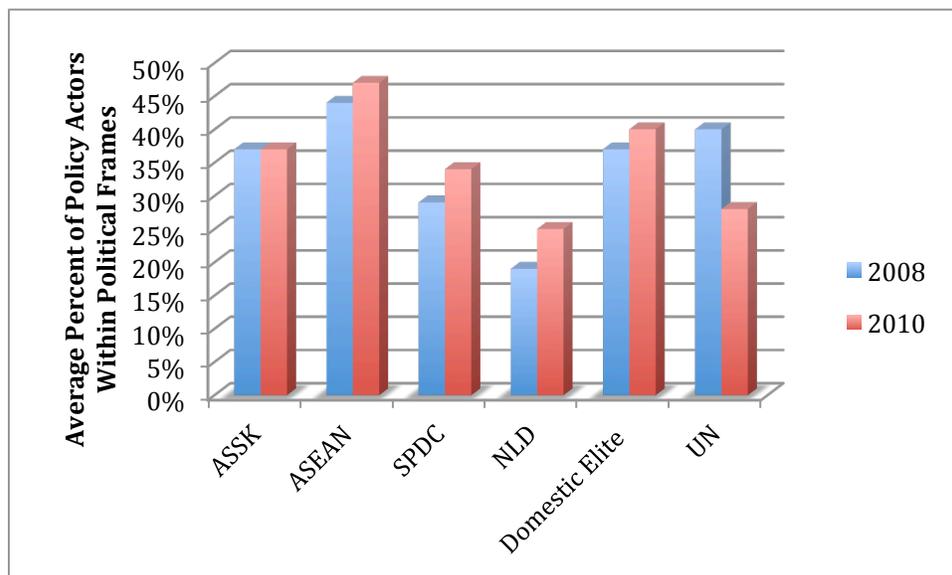
Political actors were considered to understand which key actors were driving political coverage. Given the different events driving coverage of Burma in 2008 and 2010 respectively, the data were also analyzed separately by year. In 2008, the United Nations was the largest policy actor driving political coverage with 16 percent of total political frames including members of the United Nations. This can be attributed to the large hand that the United Nations played in organizing and demanding aid from the international community in the wake of Cyclone Nargis. In 2010, the largest policy actor driving coverage was Aung San Suu Kyi with 16 percent of total words within political frames including her. This is due in large part to Aung San Suu Kyi being freed by the military junta from house arrest towards the later part of 2010. In both years, domestic policy elites—policy actors specifically from the host country of coverage—played a large part in framing coverage with 13 percent and 9 percent of total political frames respectively including domestic policy actors. See Figure 5.

FIGURE 5: POLITICAL COVERAGE BY POLICY ACTOR



The importance of political actors in determining coverage of Burma is further supported when analyzing how dominant a particular policy actor’s actions or statements were within the context of the total article. Within articles that mentioned a policy actor, as much as 47 percent of the total political frame was about the policy actor and his or her actions and statements. These data support Hypothesis 6 that newspapers will use the statements and actions of policy elites at a high frequency to frame coverage of Burma. See Figure 6.

FIGURE 6: AVERAGE PERCENT OF POLICY ACTORS WITHIN POLITICAL FRAMES



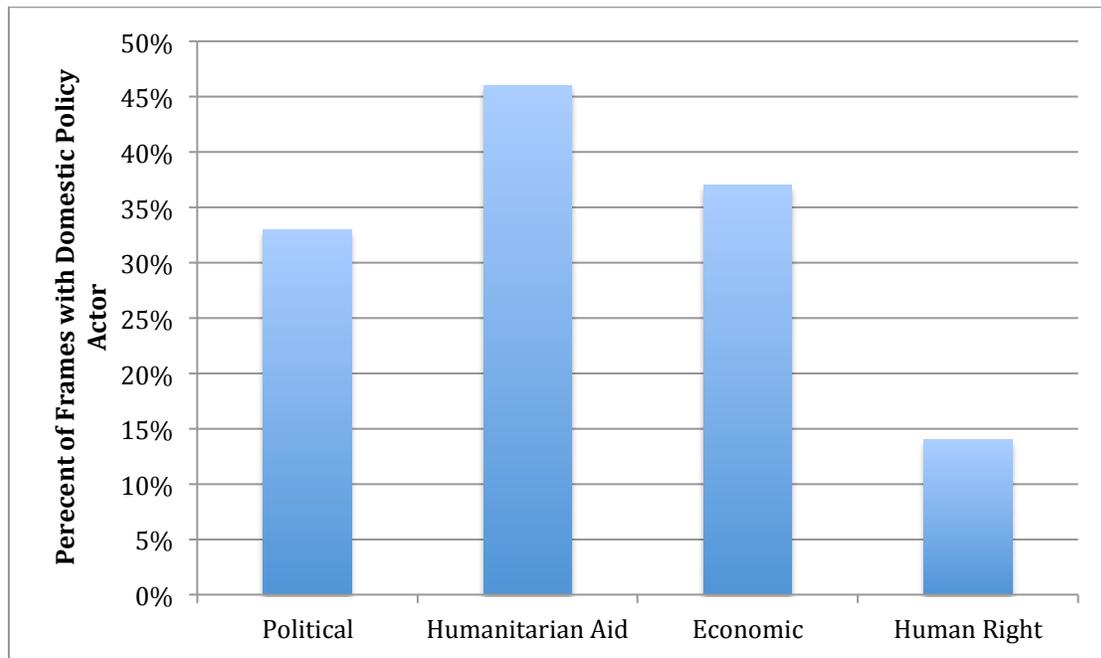
### Role of Domestic Policy Elites

The data demonstrate that all policy actors play an active role in coverage. However, domestic policy elites play a particularly strong role in international news coverage given their ability to 1) reduce the cost of a story by providing information to news outlets and 2) signal to news consumers that a particular issue is important. Although the average news consumer in the U.S. may not know who the leader of the military junta is in Burma, they do know of former First Lady Laura Bush. Thus,

domestic policy elites grab the reader's attention and personalize the story. As discussed above, foreign news frames must 1) be accepted as the dominant line of thinking and 2) be easy to process and understand (Entman 2004). Allowing domestic policy elites to frame news about Burma accomplishes this goal. In addition, previous studies have shown that ordinary news consumers respond to issues that are framed around national interests (Brewer 2006). Thus, newspapers use the actions of political officials to gain coverage of Burma across a variety of key themes such as 1) a statement by George Bush or Laura Bush for the military junta to free all political prisoners and allow in foreign humanitarian aid (Myers and Fuller August 8 2008; The Wall Street Journal May 7 2008) 2) a visit to Burma from Secretary of State Kurt M. Campbell (McDonald May 11 2010), or a meeting between Aung San Suu Kyi and Britain officials to discuss the future of the democratic movement in Burma (Johnston November 15 2010).

The data support the claim that newspapers pay particular attention to the political actions of domestic policy elites. Of the 721 stories containing a political frame present in coverage of Burma, 32 percent mention the actions of policy elites from the home country of coverage. Domestic policy elites were also mentioned in 46 percent of humanitarian aid frames, 37 percent of economic frames and 17 percent of human rights frames. These data further support Hypothesis 6 that policy elites lower the cost of the story by giving news organization a cheaper version of the story on the ground. See Figure 7.

FIGURE 7: PERCENT OF FRAMES CONTAINING A DOMESTIC POLICY ACTOR



### Role of Aung San Suu Kyi

The second largest overall frame was Aung San Suu Kyi with 359 articles—34 percent of total coverage. The political dissident was also the second most dominant frame with 30 percent of coded frames. This result is particularly striking given that more issues were framed around the Nobel Laureate than were framed around entire subjects of coverage such as economics, human rights or humanitarian aid.

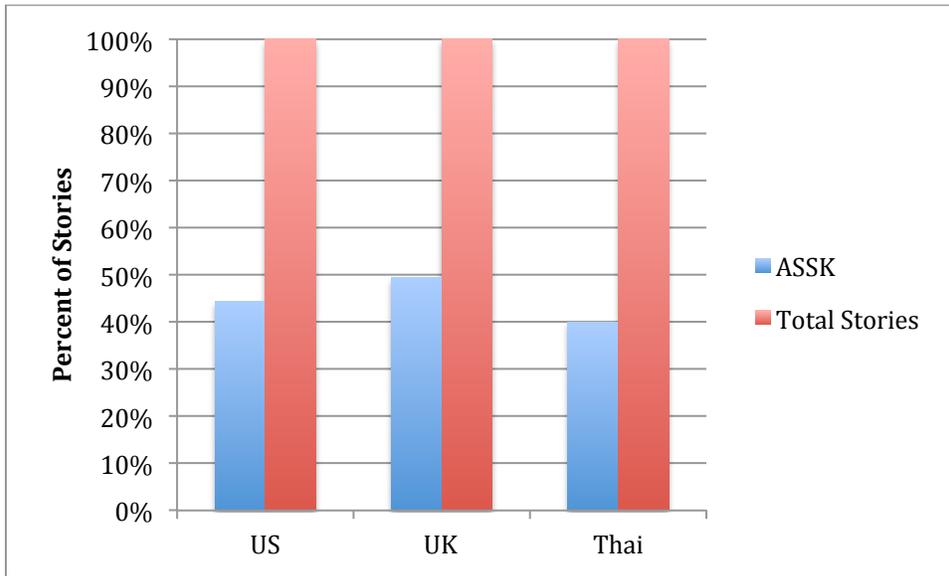
Looking closer at the framing of Aung San Suu Kyi, it is apparent that newspapers use her in order to allow the reader to maintain a basic understanding of Burma. In a majority of coverage, Aung San Suu Kyi was used by the reporter himself/herself in background information in the article in order to contextualize certain issues for the reader. Given how far removed Burma is from the average news consumer, particularly in the Western market, newspapers use Aung San Suu Kyi in order to frame multiple issues of importance in Burma such as 1) the plight of political prisoners and the

pro-democracy political movement (Zin December 26 2008; Htun November 25 2008) (Htun November 25 2008), 2) the illegitimacy of Burma's 2010 elections (Fuller February 10 2008 ; Tisdall May 14 2010), and 3) general opposition of the military junta (The New York Times November 5 2010).

In addition, it is clear policy elites align their motivations to promote democracy in Burma with Aung San Suu Kyi. This causes political actors to frame issues around the political dissident and for international coverage to reflect that framing (Nualkhair August 8 2008). Finally, the Nobel Laureate also serves an entertainment demand due to her human-interest appeal. In order to reflect that demand, international newspapers are particularly cognizant of news that specifically concerns her. When Aung San Suu Kyi is awarded the congressional medal, is barred from taking part in the 2010 election or is released from house arrest by the military junta, international newspapers devote costly resources to ensure quality coverage.

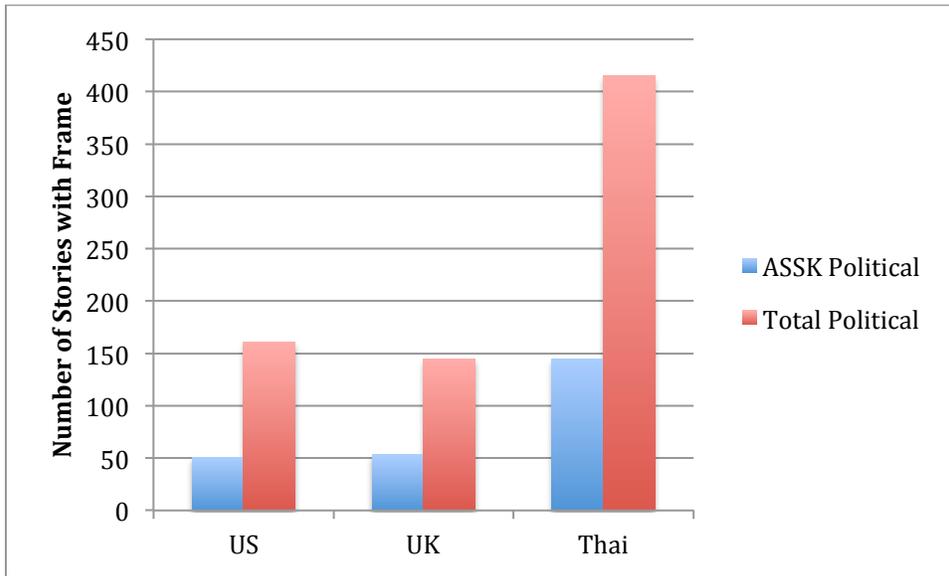
All of these supply and demand incentives meet to create coverage with a specific focus on Aung San Suu Kyi. Overall, newspaper articles mentioned Aung San Suu Kyi in as many as 51 percent of articles from *The Guardian* to 36 percent of articles from *The Bangkok Post*. This supports Hypothesis 5 that Aung San Suu Kyi will consistently serve as a frame in order to help viewers create a basic understanding of the issue. See Figure 8.

FIGURE 8: AUNG SAN SUU KYI FRAMES COMPARED TO TOTAL STORIES



Given the Nobel Laureate’s intimate relationship with the struggle for democracy in Burma and her controversial house arrest by the military junta, newspapers also frequently mention her along with any discussion of lack of political freedom in Burma. To that end, in each market under analysis, at least 32 percent of all political frames also mentioned Aung San Suu Kyi. These data continue to support Hypothesis 5 and Aung San Suu Kyi’s prevalence in international news coverage of Burma. See Figure 9.

FIGURE 9: AUNG SAN SUU KYI FRAMES WITHIN POLITICAL FRAMING



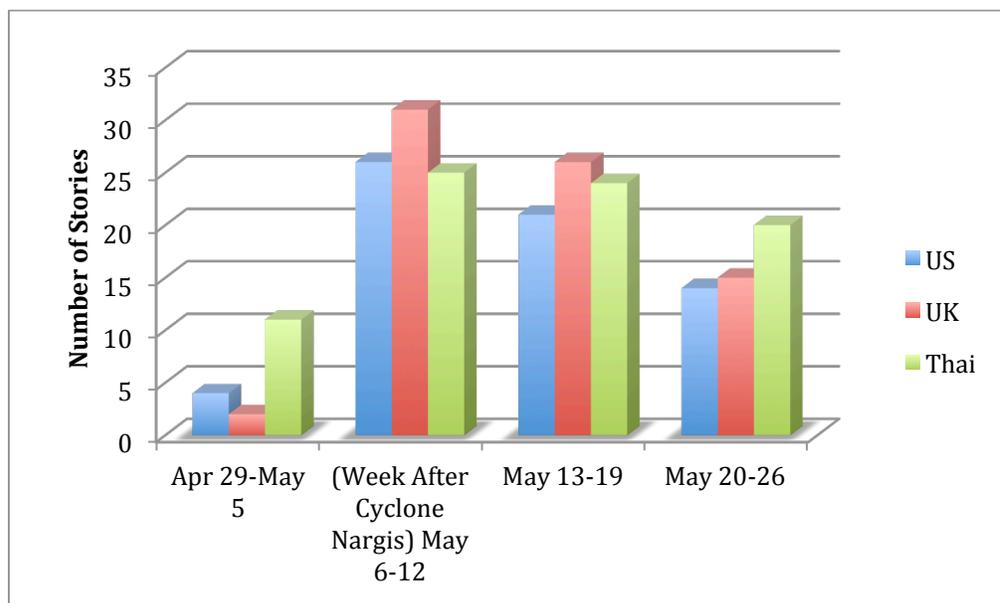
*Cyclone Nargis: A Shift in Demand, Supply and Policy Actor Incentives*

During the two years of analysis, the time period surrounding Cyclone Nargis was the only time period during which U.S. and U.K. newspaper coverage of Burma was comparable in depth (number of stories) and scope (range of issues) to that of Thai newspaper coverage. Once the severity of the disaster became apparent, foreign governments began to engage with Burma in order to help the victims of the disaster. Although Western countries were reluctant to provide Burma with any aid out of fear that it would only strengthen the hold that the military government has over the country, the severity of Cyclone Nargis forced foreign governments to at least temporarily change their political strategy toward Burma. In the wake of disaster, the international community provided more than \$343 million to Burma. More specifically, the United States gave nearly \$85 million and the United Kingdom £45 million in Cyclone Nargis related economic assistance (US State Department 2010; Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2011).

The new level of international engagement with Burma in the wake of Cyclone Nargis made the United States and the United Kingdom as involved politically and economically with Burma as Thailand. When a country begins to devote resources to another country, news consumers become more interested in information that pertains to the economic and political ramifications of the new foreign involvement. Thus, audience demand for information about Burma increased in the United States and the United Kingdom as reflected by overall coverage.

In the wake of a horrific natural disaster that had direct political or economic implications on the host country of coverage, normal patterns of coverage shifted. This is due in large part to an increase in audience demand for information based on the news values of human interest, conflict and unusualness (Jeong and Lee 2010). After Cyclone Nargis hit on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, coverage increased dramatically in the following week for each country (May 6<sup>th</sup> – May 12<sup>th</sup>). These data support Hypothesis 1 that there was a larger overlap in coverage during times of disruption. See Figure 10.

FIGURE 10: NUMBER OF STORIES AROUND CYCLONE NARGIS BY MARKET



The increase in international involvement with Burma is further reflected in the shift of news frames used in the wake of the disaster. During a trip to Burma to discuss the need for humanitarian aid following Cyclone Nargis, The United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon did not request a meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi. This decision was based on Ban's desire to separate Burma's democratic aspirations that Aung San Suu Kyi represented from the larger humanitarian implications of the cyclone. As Ban said, "This is not about politics; it is about saving people's lives. There is absolutely no more time to lose" (Hoge and Mydans May 13 2008). In the process of policy elites shifting their focus in Burma, Aung San Suu Kyi, who is mentioned on average in 43 percent of overall coverage of Burma in 2008, was only mentioned in 14 percent of total coverage during the week after Cyclone Nargis. This reduction of Aung San Suu Kyi framing can be attributed to the shift in 1) foreign strategy toward Burma in the wake of a severe natural disaster and 2) international news providers dependence on policy actors to frame the news.

However, despite the United Nation's attempt to separate politics from its foreign involvement with Burma, the political frame continues to dominate coverage of Burma. In response to Ban's statement that the severity of the disaster forced the international community to no longer think about politics in relation to Burma, *The New York Times* wrote an editorial on May 7<sup>th</sup> stating, "We wish we could also say that this is no time for politics, but that simply would not be true.... These repressive policies [of the military junta] contributed greatly to the disaster" (The New York Times May 7 2008). In this editorial, *The New York Times* is commenting on Cyclone Nargis's intimate connection to the military junta. If the military junta had proper infrastructure in place, it was

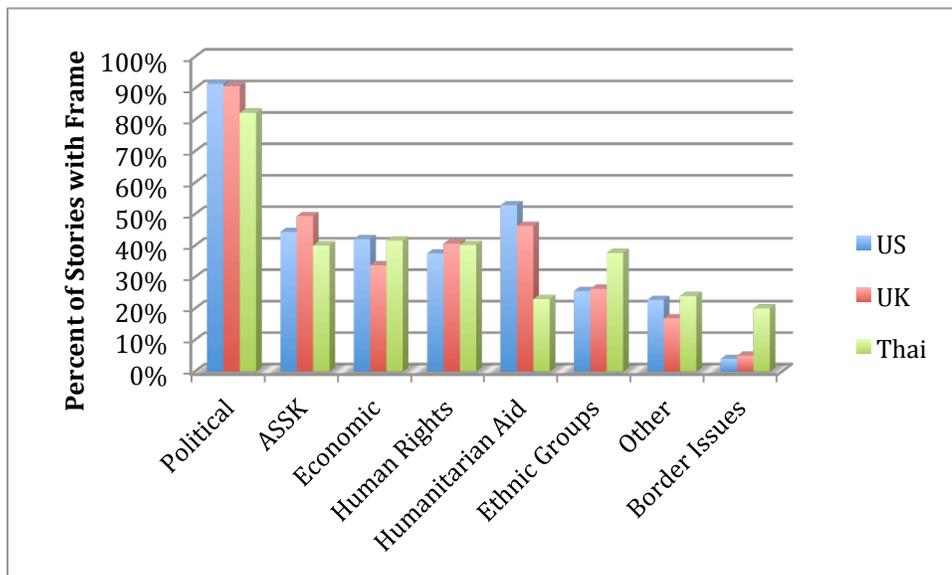
determined that much of the damage and death Cyclone Nargis caused could have been avoided. Thus, in the wake of disaster, newspapers continued to spotlight the inability of the military junta to cope with the disaster. From the refusal of the military junta to allow in foreign aid, to doubts if the military junta was allowing foreign aid to get to the right people, the actions of policy elites still drove the framing of Cyclone Nargis. Although the political frame dropped from its overall dominance of 86 percent to 75 percent in the one week after the cyclone hit, newspapers continued to frame issues around politics. See Figure 11.

|                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| Humanitarian Aid | 66% |
| Economic         | 27% |
| Human Rights     | 19% |
| Aung San Suu Kyi | 14% |

## Coverage Across Country

The eight major frames of coverage were considered and overall, the framing of all three countries followed the same pattern as the aggregated framing shown above. However, some interesting differences were discovered. Although a humanitarian aid frame was found in 53 percent and 46 percent of the U.S. and U.K. articles respectively, it was only present in 23 percent of total articles written by Thai papers. In addition, although 20 percent of coverage in the Thai market mentions issues pertaining to the Thai-Burma border, only 4 percent of the U.S. market and 5 percent of the U.K. market mentioned the same issues. This can be attributed to the larger breadth of interest of issues concerning Burma coming out of the Thai market versus the U.S. and the U.K. market and supports Hypothesis 2. See Figure 12.

FIGURE 12: COMPARATIVE FRAMING BY COUNTRY



In order to account for the effect that Cyclone Nargis had on overall coverage in the Western market, the eight major frames were further analyzed by year. Although some frames, mainly political and economic, remained true to their breakdown by

country for the entire time period under analysis, other frames differed drastically by year. Aung San Suu Kyi remained constant at 40 percent of coverage for the Thai market in 2008 and 2010. However, the political dissident was mentioned in 32 percent and 31 percent of articles in the U.S. and U.K market in 2008 compared to 68 percent and 79 percent of stories in 2010. Her constant framing percentage in the Thai market despite the change of year demonstrates that Aung San Suu Kyi has a larger framing effect in the Western market. In other words, once events that involve Aung San Suu Kyi directly such as her release from house arrest, the Western market devotes all of their resources toward coverage of those issues. However, the Thai market is not similarly swayed to abandon other lines of coverage for Aung San Suu Kyi. These data support Hypothesis 5 that Aung San Suu Kyi will consistently serve as a frame in the U.S. and U.K markets in order to help viewers create a basic understanding of the issue.

The increase in the framing of Aung San Suu Kyi from 2008 to 2010 in the Western market is juxtaposed by the decrease in humanitarian framing. 77 percent of coverage in 2008 contained a humanitarian aid frame in the U.S., but the humanitarian aid framing dropped to as low as 7 percent of coverage for the Western market. However, when examining the Thai market, humanitarian aid coverage only dropped slightly by 8 percent. This can be attributed to Thailand's ability from a cost perspective to continue to devote resources toward covering other country's humanitarian aid efforts toward Burma for a longer period of time after the disaster. These data support Hypothesis 2 that Thai newspapers will cover events and issues in Burma not covered by either U.S. or U.K. newspapers due to proximity and relatedness to Burma. See Figures 13a and 13b.

FIGURE 13A: AUNG SAN SUU KYI COVERAGE BY MARKET BY YEAR

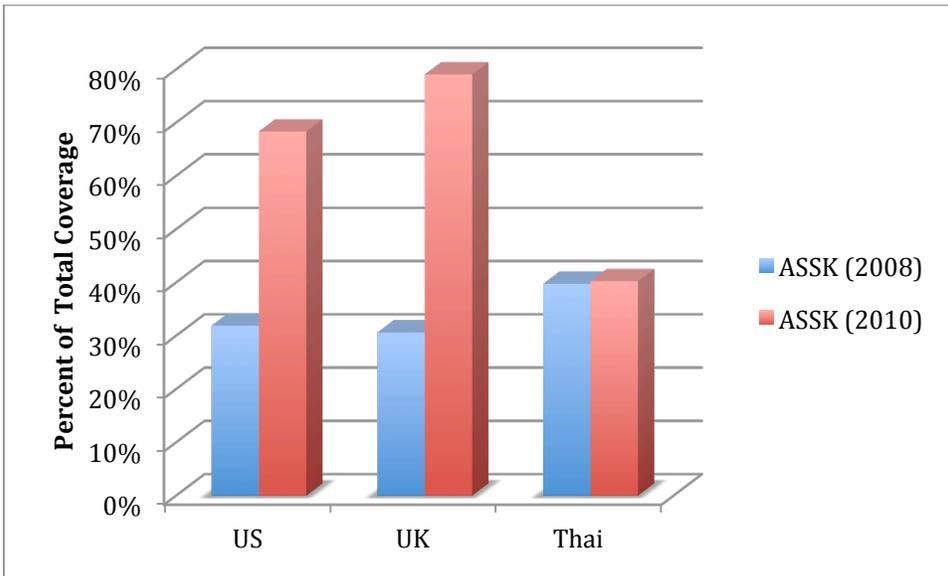
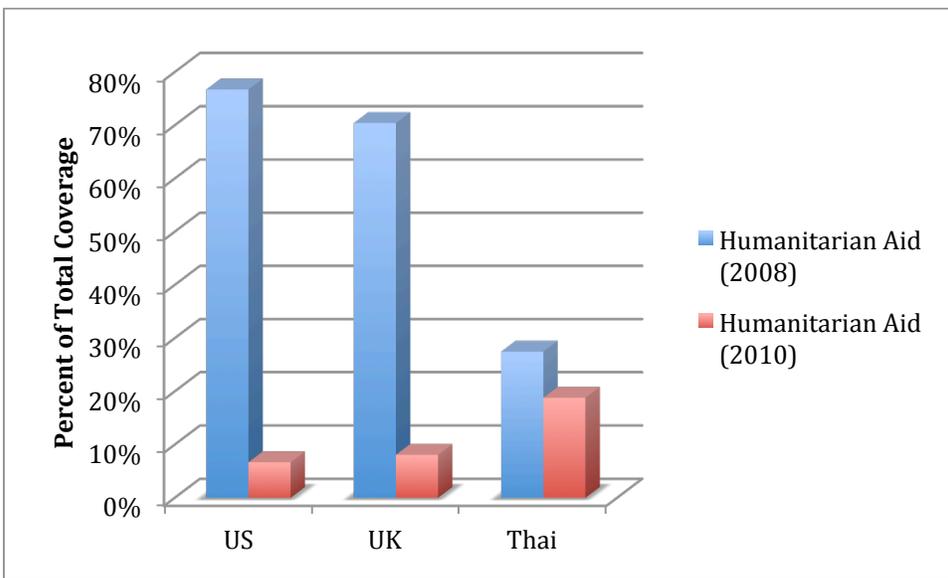


FIGURE 13B: HUMANITARIAN AID COVERAGE BY MARKET BY YEAR



*Western Newspaper Market*

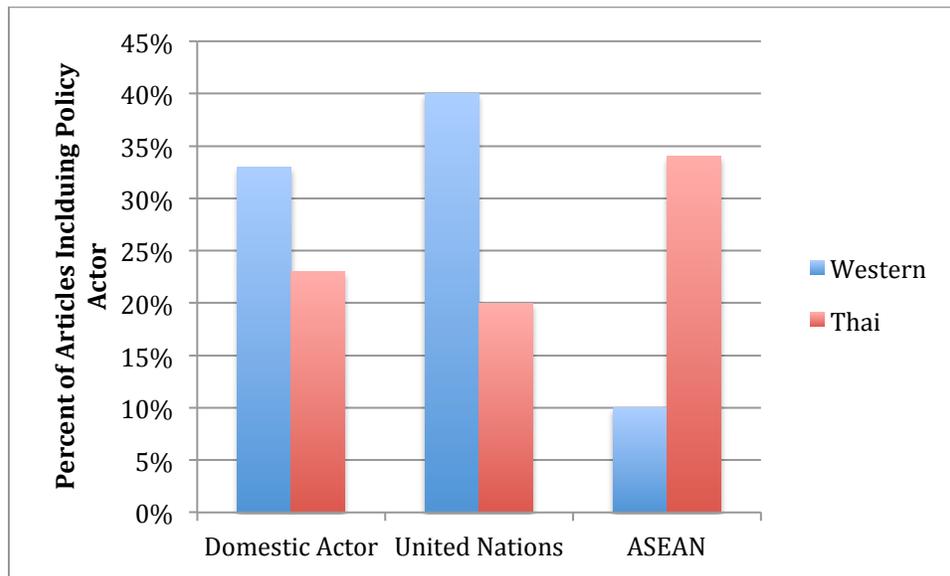
Many similarities are found between the producer costs and audience demand for news about Burma in the U.S. and U.K. market. Neither the U.S. nor the U.K. share a border with Burma and both are on separate continents. This makes it very costly for the Western producers to devote international resources to cover Burma. In addition, there is

a high cost on the consumer to process information about Burma without a high return to the reader's producer, consumer or voter interest.

The high cost on the producer and the low audience demand for news about Burma is reflected in the low number of stories written in 2008 and 2010 about Burma in the U.S. and U.K. markets with less than 100 articles coming out of each country respectively. Given the high cost of producing news about Burma, policy elites are capable of reducing the cost of stories by signaling to newspapers what the important issues are in Burma. Newspapers then use the statements and actions of policy elites to shape coverage of Burma.

This theory is reflected in the analysis in that 33 percent of the total stories coming out of the Western market included the political actions of a domestic policy actor. In addition, 40 percent of articles coming from the Western market mentioned actions or cited sources coming out of the United Nations. This stands in sharp contrast to only 10 percent of articles containing mention of the actions of the Association of Southeastern Nations (ASEAN) in the Western market. This can be attributed to neither the U.S. nor the U.K. being a part of ASEAN. This leads to less audience demand for information about ASEAN's relations with Burma. Conversely, 34 percent of articles mentioned the actions of ASEAN in the Thai market given Thailand's integral role in the organization. These data support Hypothesis 6 that newspapers will use the actions and statements of domestic political actors to frame coverage of Burma. See Figure 14.

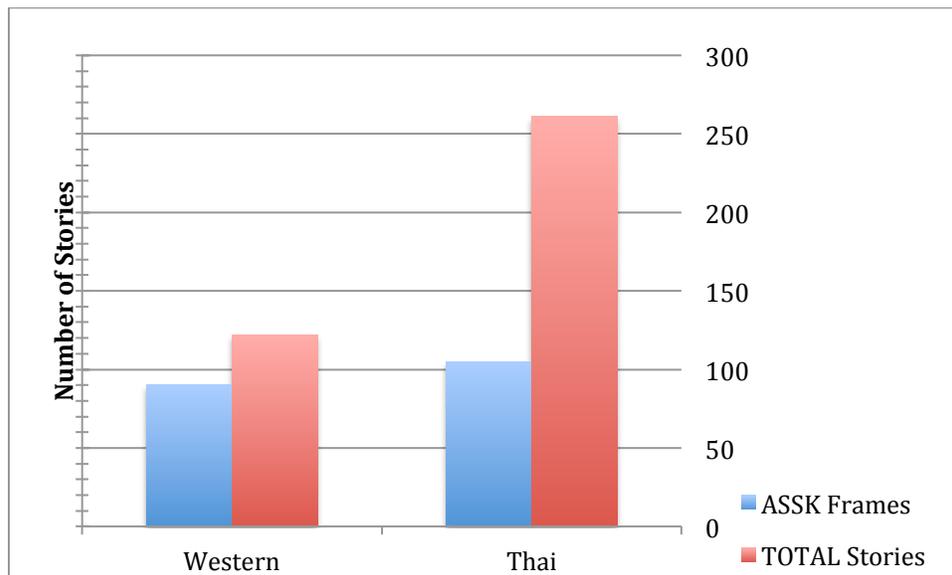
FIGURE 14: POLICY ACTOR FRAMES BY MARKET



When Burma does infrequently show up in the news, reporters are forced to familiarize their reader with reoccurring frames. This ensures the audience can comprehend the issues going on in Burma at a basic level. Constantly referring to Aung San Suu Kyi as “the Nobel laureate, “the long-detained pro-democracy leader” “the opposition leader,” “the Nobel Prize-winning NLD leader” amongst other reoccurring titles, the U.S. and U.K. are particularly dependent on Aung San Suu Kyi when framing the news (The New York Times March 18 2010; Fuller March 30 2010; Johnston January 29 2010, November 15 2010). Although domestic policy elites do often frame their discussions and policies about Burma around the figure of Aung San Suu Kyi, it is more common in the Western market for reporters to include information about Aung San Suu Kyi within analysis of the article. This supports Hypothesis 5 that the Western market is particular reliant on Aung San Suu Kyi in reporting news about Burma. In terms of absolute terms, the Thai market mentioned Aung San Suu Kyi in more overall stories (101) than the U.S. or U.K. (49, 51) market. However, this is due to the larger scope of

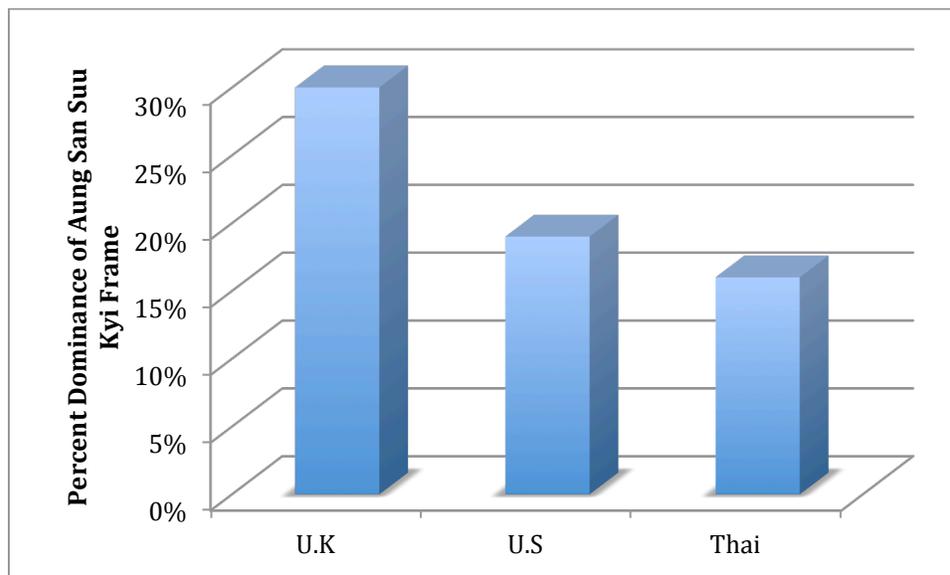
coverage in the Thai market. In order to interpret framing effects effectively, one must consider the relative framing effects of reoccurring frames in terms of overall coverage. When examining the framing of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2010, the number of Aung San Suu Kyi frames in relation to overall coverage in the Western market compared to that of the Thai market is highly statistically significant<sup>4</sup>. Aung San Suu Kyi’s large role in Western coverage is further supported by the overall dominance of her frame in coverage. Within stories that mentioned Aung San Suu Kyi in the U.S and U.K. markets, an average of 30 percent and 19 percent of framed material included her. This compares to an average of 16 percent of frame material in the Thai market. These data continue to support Hypothesis 5. See Figure 15a-b.

FIGURE 15A: AUNG SAN SUU KYI FRAMES IN 2010



<sup>4</sup> Aung San Suu Kyi frames in the Western and Thai markets in 2010 were analyzed using a chi-squared test. The test resulted in a p-value of 0.00000037 supporting Hypothesis 5.

FIGURE 15B: PERCENT DOMINANCE OF AUNG SAN SUU KYI FRAMES IN 2010



International news organization’s reliance on domestic policy elites and Aung San Suu Kyi to attain coverage of Burma illustrates the “sotto voce” role that Burma plays not only in the U.S. and U.K. international engagement, but also its “sotto voce” role in international news coverage in the Western market. With media organizations facing a scarcity of resources as well as a low audience demand for news about Burma, news organizations rely on particular framing techniques to utilize shrinking resources more effectively.

Entman discusses three main biases that contribute to bias in media coverage: news that misrepresents reality (distortion bias), news that favors one side of a debate over another (content bias) news that involves the opinions of the journalists themselves (decision-making bias) (Entman 2007). The bias towards Aung San Suu Kyi and policy actors presents a unique type of representative bias that does not necessarily fit perfect into any one of Entman’s previously discovered bias categories. It appears that the

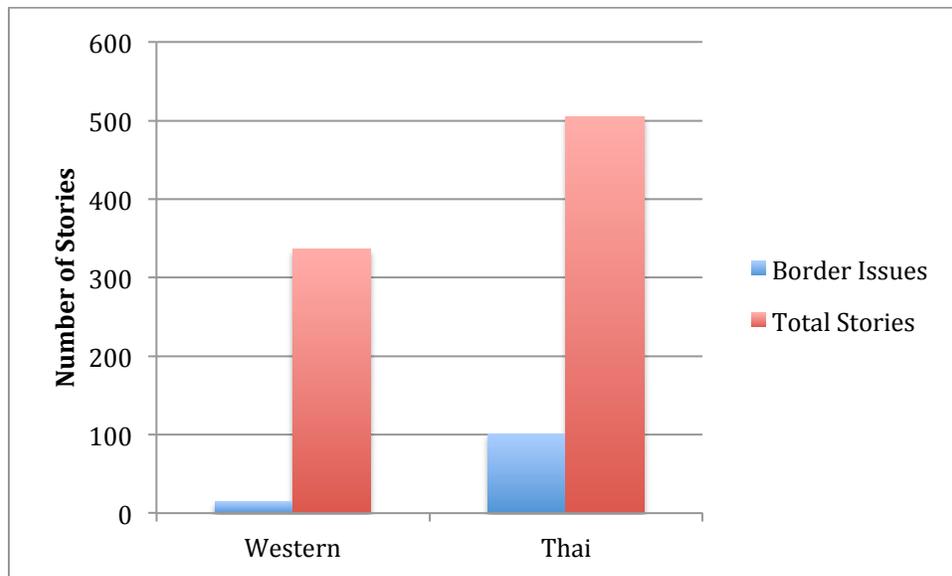
combination of 1) a high cost of producing news, 2) a low demand for information about Burma and 3) a heavy emphasis on a particular political figure on the part of domestic policy elites leads to a mix of distortion and content bias both on the parts of news producers and policy elites in international news coverage of Burma. This bias then leads to a “news world” of Burma in the Western market filled with the framing of Aung San Suu Kyi and other political actors.

### *Thai Newspaper Market*

The Thai newspaper market presents a unique set of supply and demand incentives for coverage compared to the U.S. and U.K markets respectively. Of the three countries, Thailand has the most involved political and economic relationship with Burma. This translates to high demand by newspaper consumers in all four main areas of demand (voter, consumer, producer and entertainment) for information about their neighboring country. The two Thai newspapers produced at least twice as many news stories than the four Western newspapers for each year under analysis. Consistently covering issues such as national verification of Burmese workers leading to human rights violations in Thailand and drug trafficking and instability in refugee camps, *The Bangkok Post* framed Burmese news as border issues demanding the resources of the Thai government (Ashayagachat October 3 2010; *The Bangkok Post* February 20 2010; Wechsler February 17 2008). Similarly, *The Nation* had a high frequency of articles about refugee camps and issues with Burmese immigrant identification (*The Nation* May 21 2008, February 22 2008). Although a majority of Western media frames fit into the four major frames of political, economic, human rights and humanitarian aid, 20 percent of stories coming out of the Thai market were framed around border issues. This

compares to only 4 percent of total stories coming out of the Western market. This difference was found to be highly statistically significant<sup>5</sup>. These results support Hypothesis 2 that Thai market will have a larger scope of coverage than the U.S. or the U.K. markets. See Figure 16.

FIGURE 16: BORDER ISSUE FRAMES BY MARKET



In addition, the Thai newspaper market also saw a larger incidence of coverage of distinct problems facing Burma's ethnic minorities. With over 135 ethnic groups officially recognized by the Burmese government, Burma contains eight major national ethnic groups. 37 percent of stories in the Thai market mentioned the ethnic minorities in Burma compared to 25 percent in the Western market. This difference was found to be highly statistically significant<sup>6</sup> and can be related back to 1) the lack of knowledge by the

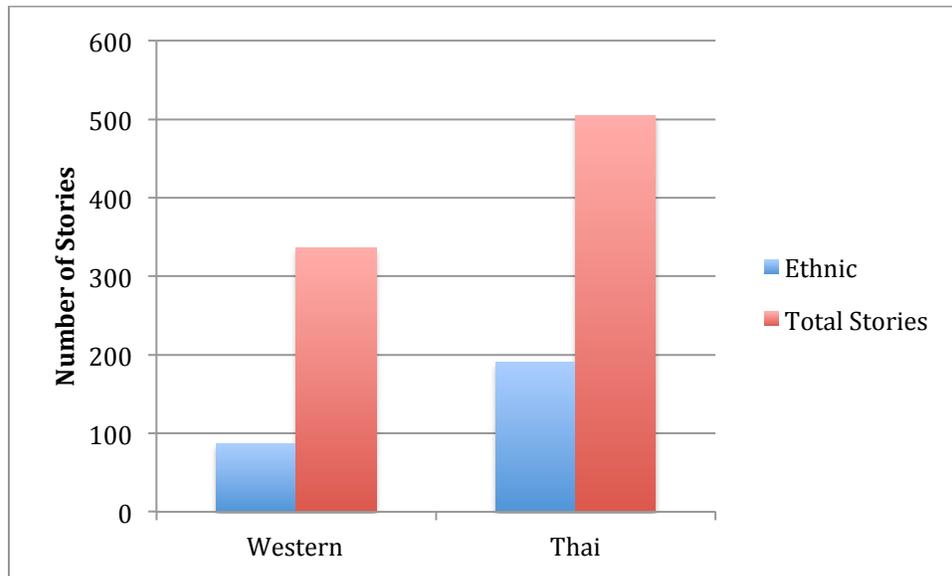
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<sup>5</sup> Border issue frames in the Western and Thai markets were tested using a chi-squared test. The test resulted in a p-value of 0.00000000 supporting Hypothesis 2.

<sup>6</sup> Ethnic group frames in the Western and Thai markets were tested using a chi-squared test. The test resulted in a p-value of 0.00000000 further supporting Hypothesis 2.

average Western news consumer of the ethnic conflict fueling political turmoil in Burma and 2) the proximity and relatedness of Thailand to Burma. See Figure 17.

FIGURE 17: ETHNIC GROUPS FRAMES BY MARKET



Although the percentages of ethnic frames between the two markets do not differ drastically, when taking a look qualitatively at the coverage, some interesting results are found. A majority of Burma's people are members of ethnic groups representing around 30 percent of the total population. In addition, the Burmese government has a combative relationship with many of the ethnic groups and many groups are in the process of fighting for independence. Although the military regime has signed ceasefire agreements with many of the ethnic groups, some are still in violent active opposition (US State Department 2010). The violence between the junta and ethnic groups and general conflict surrounding the issue has direct spillover effects in Thailand. Many refugee camps have sprung up on the Thai-Burma border and many immigrants have migrated to Thailand permanently. Thus, the average consumer of news about Burma in Thailand has a high incentive to comprehend the full range of issues that feeds into ethnic conflict in Burma.

Reflecting this demand for information, Thai newspaper coverage not only mentioned Burma's different ethnic groups, but gave a detailed analysis about the conflicts between specific ethnic groups and their individual efforts to rebel against the hegemonic Burmese population (The Nation August 7 2008; Bangkok Post July 20 2008).

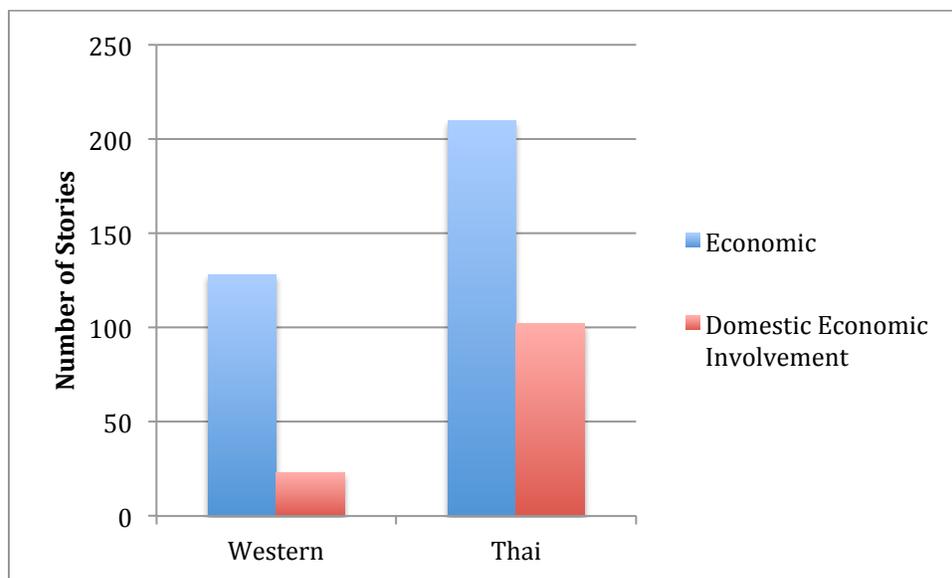
Demand incentives for information about ethnic groups in the Western market differ from Thai market demand. The average Western news consumer will not devote the resources necessary to understand the intricacies behind Burma's multi-ethnic state. Thus, if an ethnic minority is mentioned in a story in the Western market, typically it is just as a passing reference in relation to Aung San Suu Kyi and the fight for human rights (Din March 2 2010). Conversely, the reporter in the Western market would typically just mention that Burma is as a "diverse nation of 135 different ethnic groups" very generally or describe Burma as a "multi-ethnic" state (Hookway May 10 2008; Steele February 15 2010).

This observation and analysis of demand for information is supported when analyzing overall dominance of the ethnic group frame by market. In the Thai market, within the 190 articles that had an ethnic frame, the frame on average took up 20 percent of coverage. This compares to the Western market where within the 87 total articles with an ethnic frame, the frame on average took up 14 percent of coverage.

It was further hypothesized that given Thailand's less restrictive economic relationship with Burma, that economic framing would be more prevalent in the Thai market than in the U.S or U.K markets respectively. This was not supported by the data. Western and Thai coverage of Burma's economy and economic relations with Burma both roughly covered 40 percent of total coverage. However, when considering the role

that domestic policy actors have in framing economic coverage of Burma, Thailand's domestic elites are more involved in Burma's economy than those coming out of the Western market. Although only 18 percent of economic frames from the Western market included the actions or statement of domestic policy elites, 49 percent of economic frames coming out of the Thai market were framed around Thailand's direct involvement with Burma's economy. This difference was found to be statistically significant<sup>7</sup> and can be attributed to not only the lack of economic ties between the Western market and Burma. These data support Hypothesis 3 by demonstrating Thailand's larger focus on policy actors in economic coverage of Burma. See Figure 18.

FIGURE 18: DOMESTIC ECONOMIC INVOLVEMENT



<sup>7</sup> Domestic economic involvement frames in the Western and Thai markets were tested using a chi-square test. The test resulted in a p-value of 0.00000002 supporting Hypothesis 3.

## Coverage Based on Newspaper Interest

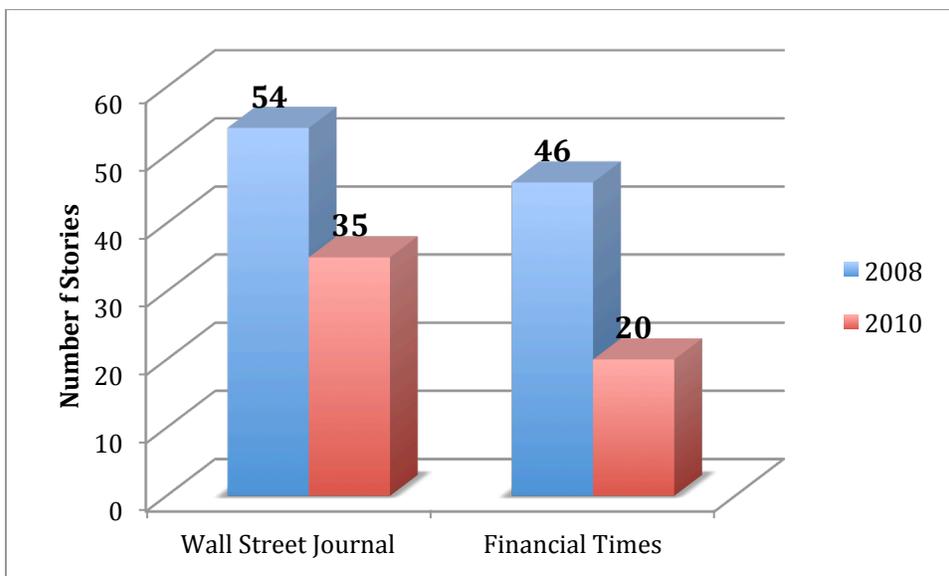
General-interest newspapers and financial-interest newspapers write to starkly different audiences with differing demands for information. While *The New York Times* writes to an audience fairly well-distributed across gender, age and level of income, *The Wall Street Journal* writes to a very specific reader: 82 percent of readers are male with an average age of 57 (The Wall Street Journal 2011; The New York Times 2011b). Of those *Wall Street Journal* readers, 56 percent come from top management positions and readers have an average income of \$257,100. Similarly, although *The Guardian* has a higher proportion of women readers between the ages of 25 to 44, its audience is more fairly distributed than that of *The Financial Times* (The Guardian 2011; The Financial Times 2011). With these varying audiences in mind, it is assumed that coverage will vary based on the newspaper interest of the paper in question.

### *Financial-Interest Newspapers*

The audience of financial-interest newspapers is generally interested in news that will affect their decisions as work to fulfill producer demand for information. With 56 percent of readers from *The Wall Street Journal* coming from top management positions and maintaining a high annual income, coverage will focus on fulfilling these specific readers' demand for information that will help them in their capacity at work. This audience includes government workers, international investors amongst others whose profession involves foreign involvement either economically or politically. With this demand theory supporting the hypothesis, it was predicted that financial-interest newspapers would have more coverage centered on economic framing.

The number of stories produced in 2008 and 2010 respectively by *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Financial Times* demonstrate a slight favoring of economic issues. Although *The Wall Street Journal* wrote a total of 54 stories with at least 5 mentions of Burma in 2008, the publication only produced 35 stories in 2010. This compares to *The Financial Times*, which reduced its coverage by over half from 2008 to 2010. This dramatic decrease in coverage can be explained by the change in events in Burma in the two years under consideration. In 2008, Western economic engagement in Burma went from very little to providing nearly \$85 million and £45 million in Cyclone Nargis related economic assistance respectively by country. In 2010, economic engagement in Burma remained relatively stable. This translates to a higher producer demand for information about Burma in 2008 and is reflected in the higher number of stories in the financial-interest newspapers. These data support Hypothesis 3 that Thai newspapers will rely the most on the economic frame. See Figure 19.

FIGURE 19: COVERAGE BY FINANCIAL-INTEREST NEWSPAPERS IN 2008 AND 2010



However, when comparing the financial-interest newspapers to the general-interest newspapers by economic frame, the financial-interest newspapers only slightly favor economic framing. 44 percent of financial-interest newspapers contained an economic frame and 33 percent of general-interest newspapers had an economic frame. When analyzing frame dominance, in articles that contained an economic frame, that frame dominated on average 25 percent of coverage. This compares to a 19 percent dominance of the economic frame from general-interest papers.

This discrepancy in theory and data results can be explained when thinking rationally about the information demand about Burma of financial-interest paper consumers. If you were to consider an international investor in the U.S. or U.K. considering the country risks associated with investing in Burma, reading information that would fall under a political frame rather than an economic frame still allows the investor to learn pertinent information about Burma as it pertains to his investment. Despite a continually growing Gross Domestic Product in Burma, the military's mishandling of the economy has created a toxic economic environment for the country. With fundamentally no rule of law, the country is considered to have very little room for economic improvement and suffers from a high rate of inflation. Thus, the political conflict in Burma is intimately connected to its economic struggle. This allows financial-interest newspapers to frame news around the political struggle in Burma, and still fulfill the producer interests of its consumers.

#### *General-Interest Newspapers*

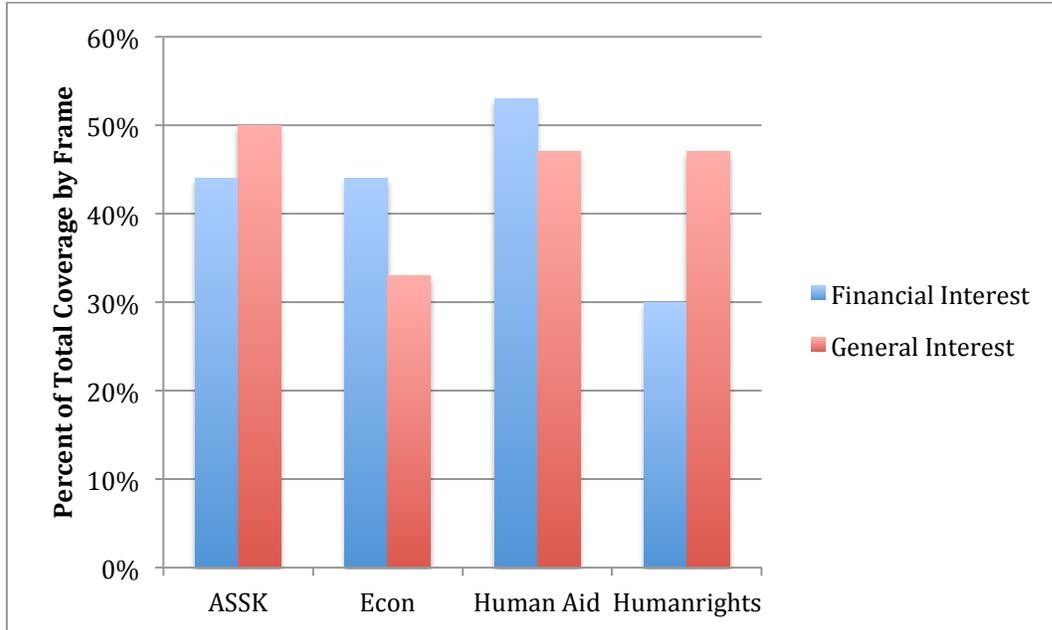
Similarly, the theory supporting general-interest audience demand did not reflect the results for general-interest framing of issues concerning Burma. It was assumed that general-interest newspapers would have more framing around human rights issues to

fulfill entertainment demand for news about Burma. The general-interest newspapers only slightly favored human rights framing. 53 percent of newspaper articles in the general-interest market contained a human rights frame versus 47 percent of total articles in the financial-interest market. When considering overall frame dominance, when an article contained a human right frame, that frame dominated on average 20 percent of coverage in general-interest newspapers. This compares to a 15 percent dominance of the human rights frame from financial-interest papers. This data slightly supports Hypothesis 4, but is not conclusive enough to assume confirmation.

The discrepancy between the theory and the data for human rights framing can again be explained by the information demand of general-interest paper consumers. If you were to consider a woman between the ages of 25 to 44 in the U.S. or U.K., information about the political struggle in Burma still fulfills a certain entertainment demand given the military junta's intimate connection to human rights issues. In addition, as discussed previously, Aung San Suu Kyi fulfills an entertainment demand for information about Burma and encompasses many of the issues that would fall under human rights framing. General-interest newspapers slightly favored framing around the political dissident with 50 percent of total stories compared to 44 percent from financial-interest papers. Finally, the humanitarian aid frame also fulfills the same audience demand for information in the general-interest market as the human rights frame. Thus, Hypotheses 3 and 4 appear to be inconclusive due to the crowding out of other frames that fulfill similar audience demand for information. See Figure 20.

C

FIGURE 20: FRAMES BY PAPER INTEREST



## CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that the six elite newspapers rely on policy actors and Aung San Suu Kyi to 1) reduce the cost of the story and 2) allow readers with no background knowledge on Burma to create a basic understanding of the issues. Aside from instances such as Cyclone Nargis, which disrupted normal patterns of news framing of Burma by increasing foreign involvement with the country, Burma's restricted political and economic relationships with the United States and the United Kingdom limit international news coverage of the country. This, combined with a low demand for information about Burma in the international media market and a large distance separating Burma and some host countries of coverage, makes reporters particularly

dependent on framing coverage around political figures to personalize Burma for its readers.

International news organizations play an important role in providing information to policy elites and shaping public opinion (Iyengar 1994). Furthermore, media framing of foreign countries can determine how public policy makers perceive a country and how they choose to engage diplomatically (Evans 2010). Previous research depicts the media as too obedient to the government and the frames it presents (Entman 2007). Coverage that is biased to particular framing techniques jeopardizes the ability of policy makers to engage effectively with foreign countries. With issues such as the severe ethnic conflict in Burma left out of coverage, the picture of Burma painted in the international news landscape is diluted down to limited policy actor action in Burma.

This study also shows a lack of understanding of Burma by certain politicians. As reported by *The Bangkok Post* in 2008, former President George W. Bush wrongly referred to the famed Nobel Laureate as “Aung Suu San Kyi” at an APEC summit in Thailand despite aligning his political strategy in Burma with hers (Zaw August 6 2008). This low level of expertise about Burma by political leaders leads to an incomplete picture of the country in international reporting by journalists who over rely on the frames politician present. Though private citizens may rely on political actors to frame complex issues for them (Druckman 2001), media organizations have a responsibility to the public to be aware of the level of understanding certain political actors hold on specific issues before presenting their ideas to the public. Continuing to wait to cover Burma until policy elites act in the country will only perpetuate the narrow views held by international news consumers about the country. Until domestic policy elites in countries

covering Burma attain a more accurate view of Burma or reporters devote more resources to cover the country, international news coverage will continue to only offer a limited view. In addition, overreliance on policy elites to begin the framing process for news about Burma could have negative effects on the media's ability to fulfill its role as an informer of key issues going on in Burma.

However, efforts by Burma's current civilian regime to increase personal liberties of Burma's citizens has the potential of shifting Burma from a low policy priority in the United States and the United Kingdom to a higher priority. In November of 2011, the regime released hundreds of prisoners, passed laws permitting public protests and allowed greater press freedoms. The relinquishing of political control by the regime led Aung San Suu Kyi to rejoin Burma's political system after over 20 years of absence. Aung San Suu Kyi's decision inspired Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton to visit the country—the highest-ranking U.S. official to visit the country in half a century (Landler November 18 2011).

Although in the past, senior level meetings between the United States and United Kingdom and Burma have been infrequent at best, the United States in particular has demonstrated an intention to increase foreign relations in the Asia-Pacific region to curb the effect of China's political system. As Western countries increase their diplomatic engagement with Burma and devote more time and resources to the issue, political elites will increase their knowledge of Burma's unique political and socioeconomic landscape. In turn, news consumers may gain a larger understanding of the country as Burma relaxes restrictions against foreign journalists to allow more coverage about Burma in international news.

## **FURTHER RESEARCH**

This project does not analyze international media coverage of other third-world countries. How might international media coverage differ in third world countries that do not have a celebrity icon like Aung San Suu Kyi? Is the political frame as consistent in coverage of other countries? Further research would be necessary of other countries before strong correlations of framing effects can be found to determine international determinants of coverage of Burma. Lastly, further analysis of framing of Burma in international news coverage after the freeing of Aung San Suu Kyi and her re-entry into politics would provide more precise conclusions about the role of the political dissident in shaping public opinion of Burma.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Newspaper Structure

| Newspapers                     | Ownership                       | Daily Print Circulation | Important Reader Demographics   |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| <i>The New York Times</i>      | New York Times Company          | 906,100                 | Employed fulltime, some college education (The New York Times 2011a, 2011b) |
| <i>The Wall Street Journal</i> | Dow Jones & Company (News Corp) | 1,678,498               | 56% hold top management positions, 82% men (The Wall Street Journal 2011)   |
| <i>The Guardian</i>            | Guardian Media Group            | 248,775                 | 80 percent from Labor Party (The Guardian 2011)                             |
| <i>The Financial Times</i>     | Pearson PLC                     | 336,590                 | 77 percent male readers (The Financial Times 2011)                          |
| <i>The Bangkok Post</i>        | Post Publishing Public Co. Ltd  | 55,000                  | Well-established English-speaking upper-class (Asia Media)                  |
| <i>The Nation</i>              | The Nation Public Media Group   | 700,000                 | Well-established English-speaking upper-class (Asia Media)                  |

## **Appendix B: Major Events in Burma in 2008 and 2010**

### **2008**

On May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2008, Cyclone Nargis hit Burma proving to be the biggest event of the year. Although some estimate the death toll to be as high as 134,000, the military junta never released an official count. Prior to the Nargis, the government published a new constitution, which would designate a quarter of seats in the parliament to the military as well as ban former political prisoners, such as Aung San Suu Kyi, from holding office. Despite the devastating natural disaster, the government proceeded to hold a vote on the constitutional referendum and said 92 percent voted in favor of the constitution. Soon after the cyclone, the Junta renewed Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest. Toward the end of the year in November, dozens of political activists were sentenced to up to 65 years in prison in a series of secretive trials. In December, the government signed a deal with four foreign firms to pipe natural gas into China (BBC 2011).

### **2010**

In March of 2010 in Burma, the military junta announced official election laws providing an electoral commission decided by the government itself. In the same month, The National League for Democracy, Aung San Suu Kyi's democratic political party, decided to boycott the elections entirely and not take part in the polls due to election laws that prevent former political prisoners like Aung San Suu Kyi from holding an official position. In October to 2010, the military junta decides to change the country's official name to The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the national anthem, and the flag. In November, after an election that is dismissed by most foreign powers as illegitimate except for China, the Union Solidarity and Development Party asserted victory in the

country's first election in 20 years. Although the junta claimed that the election signaled the end of military rule and the beginning of a civilian democracy, the entire process was deemed a sham. One week after the elections, Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest in a gesture that most foreign countries interpreted to be a way for foreign powers to pay less attention to the fraudulent election process (BBC 2011).

## Appendix C: Coding Structure

Eight major frames were used to analyze the data: political, Aung San Suu Kyi, economic, human rights, humanitarian aid, ethnic groups and border issues. These frames were determined by a list of prompt words that are listed below as well as each article was assessed manually to determine frame of coverage. Aung San Suu Kyi is self-explanatory and the “other” frame was comprised of issues that did not fit in the predetermined frames. Policy actor further broke down the political frame into subcategories. The humanitarian aid, human rights and economic frames were also broken down into subcategories to determine if host country involvement was mentioned in the frame.

| <b>Political</b>   | <b>Economic</b> | <b>Human Rights</b> |
|--------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Administration     | Economy         | (#) Killed          |
| Constitution       | Embargo         | Brutal              |
| Diplomacy          | Export          | Beaten              |
| Election           | Investment      | Destroyed           |
| NLD                | Money           | Devastation         |
| Parties            | Oil             | Murder              |
| Policy             | Rice            | Prison              |
| Politics           | Sanction        | Rape                |
| Political prisoner | Supplies        | Starved             |
| President          | Trade           | Overwhelm           |

|                |  |         |
|----------------|--|---------|
| Prime Minister |  | Terror  |
| Republican     |  | Torture |
| Security       |  | Victim  |
| SPDC           |  |         |
| Treaty         |  |         |
| Junta          |  |         |
| United Nations |  |         |

| <b>Humanitarian Aid</b> | <b>Ethnic Groups</b> | <b>Border Issues</b> |
|-------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Aid                     | Bamar                | Refugee Camps        |
| Assistance              | Chin                 | Smuggle              |
| Intervention            | Ethnic               | Thai-Burma Border    |
| Isolationist            | Kachin               | AIDS                 |
| Humanitarian            | Karen                | Drugs                |
|                         | Kayah                |                      |
|                         | Kayin                |                      |
|                         | Minority Group       |                      |
|                         | Mon                  |                      |
|                         | Rakhine              |                      |
|                         | Shan                 |                      |

## Sub-Coding Explanation

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b><i>Political Host Country Involvement</i></b>        | Any mention of policy elites from the host country of coverage engaging with or making statements about Burma within political framing        |
| <b><i>Political Aung San Suu Kyi</i></b>                | Any mention of Aung San Suu Kyi within political framing  |
| <b><i>Political ASEAN</i></b>                           | Any mention of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) within political framing  |
| <b><i>Political UN</i></b>                              | Any mention of the United Nations (UN) within political framing   |
| <b><i>Political SPDC</i></b>                            | Any mention of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), General Than Shwe within political framing                                     |
| <b><i>Political NLD</i></b>                             | Any mention of the National League for Democracy within political framing   |
| <b><i>Political Nargis</i></b>                          | Any mention of Cyclone Nargis within political framing  |
| <b><i>Economic Host Country Involvement</i></b>         | Any mention of policy elites from the host country of coverage engaging with or making statements about Burma within economic framing         |
| <b><i>Human Rights Host Country Involvement</i></b>     | Any mention of policy elites from the host country of coverage engaging with or making statements about Burma within human rights framing     |
| <b><i>Humanitarian Aid Host Country Involvement</i></b> | Any mention of policy elites from the host country of coverage engaging with or making statements about Burma within humanitarian aid framing |