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A democratic approach to religion news: Newspaper coverage of Christianity and Islam in the UK and Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces and utilizes a systematic and unified four-dimension democratic approach to the study of newspaper religion reporting to examine the coverage of faith, particularly Christianity and Islam, in the British and Turkish national press. While the research employs a sample from 2014 and uses framing analysis through content analysis of 1,022 news articles supplemented by qualitative examples, *this democratic approach crosses time and country boundaries*. The findings reveal that, in both countries, alongside the contrasting portrayals of the minority religions, even the dominant religions had disproportioned employment of the four dimensions: *spiritual*, *world life*, *political*, and *conflict*. The *spiritual* dimension had limited use in both countries, particularly in the UK. There was significantly less employment of context for putting faith in action in the reporting of Christians in the *world life* dimension in the UK compared to the coverage of Muslims in Turkey. The results suggest a potential, though untested, application of this approach as a democracy index against which the press can improve its faith coverage. *This study's theoretical and methodological contribution to scholarship outweighs its empirical findings* in the fields of religion in the news, comparative journalism studies, and empirical research on news media's democratic performance.

KEYWORDS

British press; Christianity; democratic approach; Islam; religion news; Turkish press

Introduction

Recent large compilations of cutting-edge scholarly work on “mainstream” news and journalism continue to lack a dedicated chapter on religion and the news (e.g., Allan, 2023; Eldridge et al., 2024 [forthcoming]; Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2020), with the exception of Trifonova Price et al. (2022), which includes discussions on the ethics of reporting on religion. This broad absence highlights how religion remains a neglected topic in journalism studies, if not in the wider fields of communications, humanities, and social sciences, and is still overlooked by both journalism scholars and practitioners (Mitchell, 2012), despite growing scholarly interest. The widespread absence of dedicated

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academic attention to religion in mainstream news and journalism contrasts sharply with religion's prominence in public debates in the UK and Turkey (Davie, 2014; Ertit, 2018) and its importance in daily life for many people worldwide (Hackett & McClendon, 2017; WIN/Gallup International, 2014), including for many Turkish citizens, though for a diminishing proportion of British citizens (WIN/Gallup International, 2015b). To compound this issue, the news media and scholars, in their efforts to understand faith, are preoccupied with religious fundamentalism, violence, terrorism, and scandals (Maier, 2021; Turner, 2011). This study¹ addresses this discrepancy because (1) it leaves spiritual aspects and everyday practices of religion as an essential part of daily life for religious citizens under-examined and remarkably under-reported in the mainstream news media in a secular world (Baker et al., 2013; Greene-Colozzi et al., 2023; Mitchell, 2012) and (2) the news coverage of religion is important and influential (Cohen, 2018; Greene-Colozzi et al., 2023; Stout & Buddenbaum, 2003).

This research develops and utilizes a four-dimension democratic approach to newspaper religion reporting to examine and compare the framing of religion and to what extent its four dimensions – *spiritual*, *world life*, *political*, and *conflict* – are covered in the British and Turkish national press. The main rationale for this research design is to investigate and compare how the national press report religion overall, particularly Christianity and Islam as the dominant religion and as a minority religion in two distinct countries with working democracies in 2014: the UK and Turkey.

This paper has four sections. Section One discusses the rationale for the democratic approach, its four dimensions, and the research questions (RQs). Section Two outlines the methodology, includes brief country profiles to justify this research design and provide a context for discussing the findings, and explains the sampling and coding process. Section Three presents and analyzes the key findings. Section Four further explores the findings and highlights this research's main contribution to the field of religion and the news.

Literature review and research questions

What is the point of this democratic approach to the study of religion in the press in today's context? Precisely, the current context of rising populism, post-truth politics, and fake news demonstrates that democracy cannot be taken for granted (Gagnon et al., 2018; Media Diversity Institute, 2019). Democracy may not be a panacea, but this context highlights the need to be preserved and, more importantly, developed. Democracy is, in

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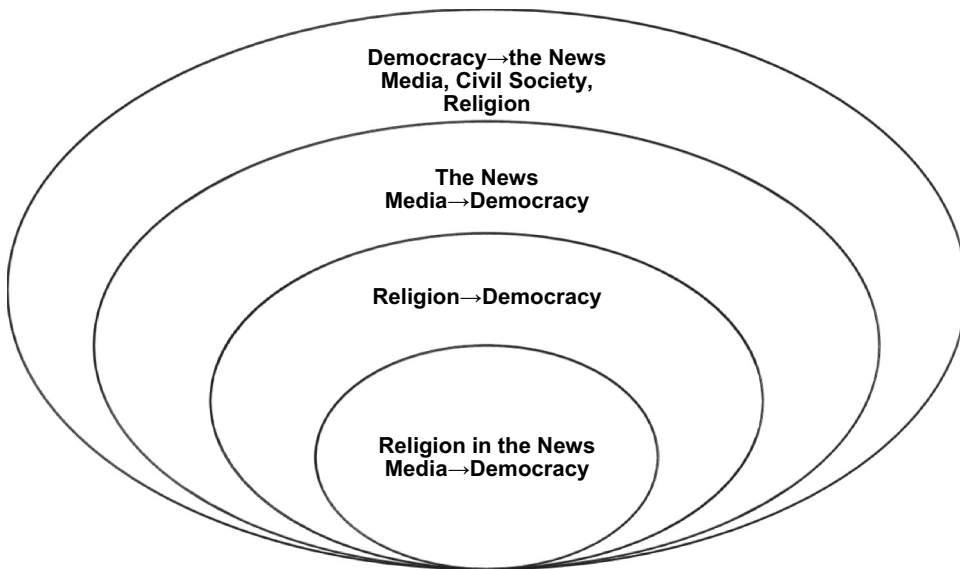


Figure 1. A four-layer rationale for the democratic approach.

part, about inclusivity and recognition of all views and values. It is arguably the only way forward to provide and sustain peaceful coexistence of our contemporary culturally and religiously diverse societies. While this context alone serves as strong motivation, I further provide a four-layer rationale for developing and utilizing the democratic approach, which can be visualized as a Venn diagram (see [Figure 1](#)). Its wider legitimacy is based on 1) the attitude of democracy to the news media, civil society, and religion; 2) the news media's relationship to democracy; and 3) the way religion and religious citizens treat democracy.

In the first layer, my examination of the place of civil society, religion, and the news media in ideal and hybrid democratic models (Cunningham, 2002; Held, 2006) led me to make a case for Keane's (2010) monitory democracy as the most developed contemporary and hybrid model of democracy that provides the widest and deepest, though not unproblematic, participation opportunities for religion as part of civil society in democratic decision-making. Held's (2006) exploration of five democratic models characteristic of the twentieth century demonstrates that religion has a place in democracy as part of civil society, but political scientists do not say much about it – let alone recognize its positive contributions to society and democracy in scholarly debates. Importantly, Keane's (2010) monitory democracy shows both recognition of religion's positive contributions to and scrutiny of its extreme interpretations that threaten to undermine democratic society, which lays a solid, broader framework for the democratic approach. Moreover, in today's world of monitory democracy, democracy is not only about politics, but it is

now also expanding into all spheres of life (Cunningham, 2002; Held, 2006; Keane, 2010). This expansion makes it possible to examine religion in the news media more explicitly and vigorously in relation to their democratic performance.

In the second layer, I argue that the news media have a clear and well-known democratic function: to provide citizens with information to make well-grounded judgments (e.g., Anderson et al., 2007; Christians et al., 2009; Golding & Murdock, 2023; Håkansson & Mayerhöffer, 2014; Keane, 2010; Zelizer et al., 2022). Additionally, news sources are considered an essential indicator of the extent to which citizens are allowed to participate in the decision-making process and, thus, to which the news media fulfill their democratic function (Cottle, 2000; Lewis et al., 2005). Like Müller (2014) and Aalberg and Curran (2012), my review of the literature also suggests that although the news media's democratic role has been extensively debated and theorized, there is limited empirical research that directly compares the news media's democratic performance across different countries.

In the third layer, like the attitude of democracy to religion, the attitude of religion to democracy also confirms that faith can both enhance and undermine democracy (Bloom & Arikan, 2013; Stepan, 2001). Furthermore, most followers of all major world religions, including Christianity and Islam, endorse democracy as the best form of government (Rafiqi, 2019; WIN/Gallup International, 2015a). Moreover, following Struhl (2007) and Keane (2018), I argue that democracy is a universal value, our common value, meaning that it can be established in any religious or cultural majority nation.

The fourth layer, or the core of the democratic approach, is built on the investigation of:

- (1) The key arguments in the broader field of religion, media, and culture, including their digital forms (Helland, 2005; Hjarvard, 2008; Kołodziejska, 2018);
- (2) The prevalent approaches to religion and the news media (Mitchell, 2012; Perreault, 2019; Stout & Buddenbaum, 2008);
- (3) The influence and weight of news values on general news (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001, 2016) and religion news (Dahinden et al., 2011; Mitchell, 2012);
- (4) The importance of different sociological factors in making general and religion news: economic structures (McNair, 2009; Mitchell, 2007); political structures, including press-party parallelism (Baker et al., 2013; Haede, 2013; Hallin & Mancini, 2004), geopolitical ideologies such as orientalism (Lewis et al., 2009; Nickerson, 2019; Said, 1997, 2003) and occidentalism (Haede, 2013; Hungerford, 2006), political cultures or news as culture that also recognize religion's significant

- imprint on dominant cultures (Cunha, 2018, 2021; Evolvi, 2018; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2013); news audiences (Buddenbaum, 1998; Cottle, 2008, 2010; Hoover, 1998; Mitchell, 2007, 2012; Schudson, 2003); and the professional-organizational routines, including newsroom practices and demographics (Cohen, 2018; McNair, 2009; Mitchell, 2007, 2012, 2015; Schudson, 1989);
- (5) the literature on religion and the news (see this section and the *Discussion* section below for a range of relevant research).

It is here worth expanding on my exploration of key approaches to the broader field of religion and the media, particularly its subfield of religion in the news media, aiming to identify an approach that is as comprehensive and universally applicable as possible – one that can be applied to distinct countries. Stout and Buddenbaum (2008) identify three approaches to the study of religion and the media, including religion and the news: the proliferation of mediated religion, religious audiences as interpretative communities, and religion and media criticism. Although these three approaches encompass most research on religion and the media – including religion in the news – in and beyond the West, I propose two additional approach categories to complement Stout and Buddenbaum’s (2008) typology, which are still developed from theirs: first, an eclectic approach that uses and fits in more than one of their categories – e.g., combining framing analysis or content analysis with audience analysis; second, a comparative approach that compares the depictions of two or more religions in the news or other media in one or more countries. Thus, this typology will also encompass other research on approaches to religion in both the media and news, such as Mitchell (2012), Perreault (2019), and even Hoover’s (2002, p. 33) qualitative, “interdisciplinary” and “necessarily eclectic,” cultural studies approach to the study of religion in the media, including news. Although no specific common or unified approach to religion and the news is discussed, scholars encourage more sophisticated examination (Stout & Buddenbaum, 2008) and the search for a shared approach that can be used in different media systems (Khroul, 2014).

The gap in the field of religion and the news this research identified is that different types of studies, including issue-specific studies, one-religion studies or general religion studies, find common problematic issues such as the over-employment of orientalist and occidentalist frameworks (Haede, 2013; Hungerford, 2006; Lewis et al., 2009; Lövheim, 2021; Nickerson, 2019; Said, 1997, 2003), different degrees of hostility to religion (Gill, 2012; Haede, 2013; Richardson, 2011), stereotyping, reductionism, and absences in the news about religion (Baker et al., 2013; Bantimaroudis, 2007; Chen, 2003; Kerr & Moy, 2002; Mitchell, 2012; Pepinster, 2012). Furthermore, all these similar issues or democratic bits are typically revealed and tackled in the broader context of democracy, democratic society and news media, but are dispersed

across different related studies (Baker et al., 2013; Bantimaroudis, 2007; Buddenbaum, 1998; Campbell, 2021; Hoover, 1998; Hutchings, 2021; Kodrich, 2005; Lövheim, 2021; Richardson, 2004). Moreover, the improvements that these studies suggest are possible only in the presence of democracy and its decent functioning (e.g., Bantimaroudis, 2007; Dahinden et al., 2011; Gill, 2012; Haede, 2013). This research addresses exactly this gap and brings together, in a systematic and unified approach, all these dispersed democratic fragments that collectively contribute toward constructing a full picture of faith in the news.

After explicating the four-layer rationale and emphasizing the gap in the field of religion and the news, I propose the democratic approach to the study of religion in the press, which aligns with the category of religion and media criticism in Stout and Buddenbaum's (2008) typology of approaches to media and religion, and its four dimensions: *spiritual*, *world life*, *political*, and *conflict*. It is here appropriate to clarify that there is no direct connection between the "four-layer rationale for the democratic approach" and the "four dimensions of the democratic approach." Whereas the "four-layer rationale" concerns the motivation behind proposing the democratic approach or its outside, "the four dimensions" deal with its internal structure.

The four dimensions conceptualize religion, drawing inspiration from Hoover (2002) and Woodhead (2011). The *spiritual* dimension concerns the essentials of religion, such as faith in God (gods or supranatural force), faith in the hereafter, religion as belief and meaning, religion as a necessity, and religion as practice – all necessarily based on a religion's primary sources or sacred texts (e.g., Dahinden et al., 2011; Vultee et al., 2010; Woodhead, 2011). The *world life* dimension encompasses religion as a daily practice, social engagement, and interreligious dialogue, including non-religious values and principles at a civil society level. Whereas the *spiritual* dimension reflects the theological foundations of religions, the *world life* dimension focuses on their practice (e.g., Buddenbaum, 2006; Mattingly, 2009; Pulliam, 2007; Woodhead, 2011). The need to distinguish the *spiritual* from the *world life* dimension arises because the sacred scriptures of religions can have differing and even conflictual interpretations. Thus, the *world life* dimension also incorporates cultural differences in religious practices. Both the *spiritual* and the *world life* dimensions are more likely to capture coverage, showing mainly recognition of, and occasionally indifference to, all views on religion and non-religion (atheism, agnosticism, humanism, and secularism), corresponding to monitory democracy's (Keane, 2010) recognition element.

The *political* dimension covers the inevitable interaction between religion and politics (e.g., Campbell, 2021; Dahinden et al., 2011; Gürçan & Ünlü, 2012; Haede, 2013; Hwang, 2016; Kerr & Moy, 2002; Kodrich, 2005; Stepan, 2001; Taira et al., 2012; Winston, 2021; Woodhead, 2011). It

captures the news about elections, policymaking involving religious matters, politicians employing religious rhetoric or participating in religious events, the instrumentalization of religion for political gain, religious leaders or people's participation in democratic decision-making (as something necessary), and their involvement in politics (as something undesired). The *political* dimension can be seen as a mix of recognition and scrutiny of religion, depending on the nature and context of the coverage. I differentiate the *political* dimension from the *spiritual* and *world life* dimensions to make it possible for politics-free and conflict-free coverage of religion. The *conflict* dimension incorporates 1) news, in which religious and non-religious people are covered as villains and scrutinized for injustice, irregularities, and scandals in which they are or might be involved; 2) news, in which religious and non-religious people are portrayed as victims of injustice, irregularities, and scandals. It reflects the dominance of conflict as a news value and framework (e.g., Dahinden et al., 2011; Pepinster, 2012), corresponding to monitory democracy's (Keane, 2010) scrutiny element. It can also be seen as a mix of mostly scrutiny and occasionally a different type of recognition.

Thus, this research seeks to answer the following four RQs.

RQ1: How much are religion in general, Christianity, and Islam covered, overall and in the three distinct weeks², in British and Turkish newspapers?

RQ2: To what extent are the four dimensions of the democratic approach employed in the coverage of religion in general, Christianity, and Islam, overall and in the three distinct weeks, in British and Turkish newspapers?

RQ3: What dimensions of the democratic approach are absent from the coverage of religion in general, Christianity, and Islam, if any, overall and in the three distinct weeks, in British and Turkish newspapers?

RQ4: Who speaks for religion in general, Christianity, and Islam, and frames the four dimensions of the democratic approach, overall and in the three distinct weeks, in British and Turkish newspapers?

Methods

To answer these RQs, this research employs framing analysis through content analysis supplemented by qualitative examples.

²This sampling approach is explained and justified in the section on *Sampling Techniques and Timeframe* below.

Data analysis techniques

Content analysis

The rationale for employing content analysis is based on three of its strengths. First, it is best suited to provide an overall picture by quantitatively mapping key trends, patterns, and absences over large text collections within a given period, which allows researchers to make broader inferences about the wider social significance of the research topic (Hansen et al., 1998). Second, it is most appropriate for comparative studies (Berger, 2000). Third, it can be combined with framing analysis (Deacon et al., 2007).

Framing analysis

As framing may influence “political socialization, decision-making, and collective actions” (Vreese, 2005, p. 52) and how certain religious groups are treated (Stout & Buddenbaum, 2003), it is critical to analyze how newspapers frame different religious groups. The most appropriate method to do that is framing analysis. Six of its strengths benefit this study. First, unlike agenda-setting research, which explores “what people talk or think about,” framing analysis goes beyond it and examines “*how* they think and talk about issues in the news” (Pan & Kosicki, 1993, p. 70 [emphasis in original]). While recognizing that audiences can interpret news frames differently (Mitchell, 2007), I am concerned with the construction and employment of these news frames in religion coverage rather than examining audience perceptions or effects.

Second, framing stands out among the other approaches to religion and the news as a pragmatic approach with the potential to facilitate more sophisticated research (Stout & Buddenbaum, 2008). Third, Vreese (2005), p. 51 shows that generic news frames, like the ones developed in this research, can be “used to understand cross-national differences in news coverage.” Fourth, recognizing the importance of what is omitted from religion news frames (Giltin, 1980), I ask what dimensions of the democratic approach are absent in the British and Turkish press, incorporating this element into my framing analysis. Fifth, this framing approach can facilitate the real-life applicability of the four meta-frames integrated into the democratic approach, as “framing is a useful and necessary tool for journalists” (Mitchell, 2007, p. 67) to effectively process and package information for their audiences (Giltin, 1980). Likewise, Stout and Buddenbaum (2008), p. 229 consider that “[p]ragmatically, this [framing] research might be helpful to journalists as they strive for optimal coverage of religious groups.” Six, framing analysis can be conducted through content analysis (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

Methodologically, following Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) and Van Gorp (2010), I constructed the four dimensions or meta-frames – *spiritual*, *world life*, *political*, and *conflict* – and the frames within them both deductively and inductively. Scholars use two main approaches to content analyze news

frames: deductive and inductive (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Van Gorp, 2010). The deductive approach employs predefined frames to determine the extent of their presence in the news (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Van Gorp, 2010). The inductive approach uses post-defined news frames; it first analyzes news stories with an open mind to uncover and identify a variety of ways in which they could be framed and then defines these frames (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Van Gorp, 2010). However, as Van Gorp (2010) argues, it is best to combine deductive and inductive approaches to analyzing news frames to minimize subjectivity (e.g., Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

This combination allows each of the meta-frames to accommodate deductively developed (pre-defined) frames and inductively developed (post-defined) frames, as well as an infinite number of frame categories (see Table 1). In other words, while the four meta-frames remain constant, the frames within each meta-frame can be adapted or replaced to reflect various real-life manifestations of religion in the news within any specific context. Deductively, I developed the four dimensions from discussions of wider social processes, the four-layer rationale, and different sociological perspectives when conceptualizing religion. Inductively, these four dimensions were confirmed in the religion newspaper coverage when piloting and coding the actual sample. Integrating these four generic meta-frames into the proposed democratic approach produces a pragmatic approach that preserves all religious complexities in the news, as Stout and Buddenbaum (2008) suggest. To capture the spirit and focus of news items, these four meta-frames also make it possible and necessary to use identical frames in all four meta-frames across different contexts.

Research design and country profiles

In this section, I elaborate on the main motivation for this research design briefly mentioned in the introduction, providing context for analyzing and discussing the findings.

The UK represents the North Atlantic or Liberal Model of politics and media (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). The Conservative Party and the Labour Party have traditionally dominated British politics, though smaller parties regularly win parliamentary representation (Freedom House, 2015c). Following the 2010 parliamentary election, “a rare coalition government” was formed between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, which governed until the next regular general elections in May 2015 (Freedom House, 2015c). In 2014, notable political debates pertinent to this research included immigration and the rise of the populist and Eurosceptic United Kingdom Independence Party (Freedom House, 2015c).

Although the UK’s changing and complex contemporary religious landscape is increasingly becoming as “less Christian, more secular and more

Table 1. List of all the frames in the four meta-frames.

	<i>Spiritual</i> Meta-Frame	<i>World Life</i> Meta-Frame	<i>Political</i> Meta-Frame	<i>Conflict</i> Meta-Frame
1	Faith in God	Faith in God	Religion in elections	Terrorism
2	Faith in Prophets	Faith in Hereafter	Religion in domestic-foreign policy matters	Terrorism consequences-protests/terrorists as victims
3	Faith in Hereafter	Worship	Religion-politics relationship	Wars against terrorist forces
4	Worship	Other essentials of faith	Political instrumentalization of religion	Extremism
5	Faith in Holy books	Holy days-nights-months	Politicians, shown observing religious prescripts	Wars-military conflicts
6	Faith in Angels	Education-knowledge about religion	Holy days-nights-months	The Israeli-Palestinian military conflict
7	Faith in fate	Personalization	Involvement-participation of religious leaders in politics	The AKP v. Hizmet: Hizmet is the problem
8	Pilgrimage-Holy places	Interfaith-intrafaith dialogue	Terrorism-related issues	The AKP v. Hizmet: both are sinister powers
9	Holy days-nights-months	Social responsibility-relationships	The Israeli-Palestinian military conflict	The AKP v. Hizmet: AKP is the problem
10	Charity-almsgiving	Religion-politics relationship	Solution to military conflicts	Controversy over Holy days-nights-months
11	Learning-teaching about religion	Faith in action	Politicians-martyrdom-religious nationalism	Controversy between secular and religious groups
12	Personalization	Temples-relics-buildings	Policy-making/regulating religious matters	Religion constrains freedom
13	Interfaith-intrafaith dialogue	Clergy appointments-religious services	Charity	Women issues
14	Social responsibility-relationships	Funerals	Interfaith-intercultural dialogue	Sexual abuses-scandals
15	Faith in action	Women matters	General rhetoric for and against religion	Interfaith hostility-tensions-conflicts
16	Religion supports human rights	Religion in movies-music-theater-arts-culture-literature	Tackling social issues-persecution	Intrafaith conflicts-tensions
17	Religion-science compatibility	Social matters and contribution of religion to society		Church-mosque-faith employees-matters
18	Spreading information-news	Terrorism-/war-related issues		Scandals-conflicts, involving politicians-politics-religion
19	Other	Religion in history-archeology-modernity		Controversial religious elements in movies-music-theater-arts-culture-literature
20		Entertainment-commercialization of religion		Stereotyping-discrimination-racism
21		Religion in fashion-sport		Law-human rights-persecution
22		Spreading information-news		Personalization
23		Religion in health		Wider social-business-media-health-educational matters
24		Law		Commercialization-culturalization of religion
25				Other

religiously plural” (Weller, 2018, p. 88), Christianity remains the dominant religion due to the status of the Church of England (CoE) and the Church of Scotland as established churches, giving them privilege in public life (Modood & Calhoun, 2015). The freedom of belief is protected in law and practice (Freedom House, 2015c). However, religious minority groups, especially Muslims, report cases of discrimination and Islamophobia (Freedom House, 2015c). In June 2014, following a police investigation into attempts to spread an extremist Islamist agenda in Birmingham schools, the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills placed some of these state schools under special measures “to promote secularism” (Freedom House, 2015c). Reports on religious freedom highlight a sharp rise in anti-Semitic incidents in both Britain and Turkey during the Israeli-Palestinian military conflict that escalated in July 2014 (U.S. Department of State, 2015a, 2015b).

Bek (2010) argues that Turkey’s political and media system aligns closely with Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) Mediterranean or Polarised Pluralist Model. She highlights explicit political polarizations in the media sector, particularly between supporters of Islamic/Islamist values and supporters of Kemalist/secular values. Currently, politics, the news media, and society are further polarized into two major camps, pro-Erdoğan/AKP and anti-Erdoğan/AKP; strikingly, both camps include supporters of all political and religious views (Akyol, 2014).

In 2013, two major events marked the “illiberal turn” of Turkish democracy under the rule of President Erdoğan’s Islamist AKP since the end of 2002 to the present: the Gezi Park protests that began in Istanbul in May and spread across the country throughout the summer, and the corruption scandal that broke in December (Bechev, 2014). This corruption scandal, implicating government ministers, the then PM Erdoğan, and his family, “cast a shadow over Turkish politics throughout 2014” (Freedom House, 2015a). Other major events in 2014 include two elections – local and presidential (Freedom House, 2015a).

In 2014, the aggressive use of the newly adopted “harsh, broadly worded antiterrorism law” led to increased deterioration of the constitutionally guaranteed freedoms of expression, the press, and religion (Freedom House, 2015b). Sensitive topics include the Kurdish issue, the description of massacres of Armenians during World War I as genocide, and “subjects deemed offensive to Islam or the Turkish state” (Freedom House, 2015b). Experts criticize the AKP government for having “a religious agenda favoring Sunni Muslims, citing the expansion and alleged use of the Directorate of Religious Affairs for political patronage and to deliver government-friendly sermons in mosques” (Freedom House, 2015a). Although three religious minority groups – Orthodox Christians, Armenian Christians, and Jews – have formal state recognition, they continue to face significant unresolved issues concerning their property, bans on training their own clergy, and “increased hate speech in the media” (Freedom House, 2015a).

Alawis, a branch of Shia Islam, “lack protected status” and “state support,” unlike Sunni mosques; they have historically been targets of violence and discrimination, including in 2014 (Freedom House, 2015a). Likewise, the government has taken action against the “faith-based Hizmet movement,” including raids on associated media outlets, profiling of its sympathizers, and the closure of some of its schools (Freedom House, 2015a). This case may pose something of a paradox, as the AKP government – associated with Sunni Islam – has been cracking down on a civil society movement (CSM) also associated with Sunni Islam.

Keneş (2014) argues that grasping the binary opposition between “Islamic” and “Islamist” is crucial for understanding the current political context in Turkey. The Islamic approach is described as the indigenous understanding of Islam that emanated from Anatolia’s “heritage of multiculturalism, inclusiveness and tolerance of diversity;” its social dimension is expressed in the existence of CSMs, religious communities and orders (Keneş, 2014). The Islamist approach was externally sparked and influenced by political Islamist movements that emerged in response to the West’s occupation and colonization of Muslim-majority countries like Pakistan, India, Egypt, and other African nations (Keneş, 2014). The Islamists in Turkey consider themselves political movements, use the state as an instrument of repression, and consequently “impose their values on society in a top-down manner” (Keneş, 2014).

Overall, Christianity nevertheless remains the dominant religion in Britain. Although the country’s democratic development has gradually deteriorated throughout and beyond 2014, Turkey was certainly more democratic in 2014 than it is today, if at all. Despite evidence suggesting how much the instrumentalization of religion for political gain can harm faith and moving-away-from-religion trends in Islam-dominated Turkey (Girit, 2018), Turkish people remain significantly more religious than British people.

Sample details

Newspaper selection

Although the convergence of traditional journalistic media and new communications media has significantly transformed technological and economic news environments in recent years (McNair, 2009), expert reports and scholars have demonstrated the continuing importance of newspapers in daily life (Cushion et al., 2016; Henriksson, 2016; Schudson, 2023; Yanatma, 2016). To construct a representative sample, I followed Hansen et al. (1998) by considering the circulation figures, market variations, political, and religious affiliations of the sampled British and Turkish national newspapers. The UK sample includes eight newspapers and their Sunday equivalents (see Table 2). I excluded the *Daily Star* & *Daily Star Sunday* and the *Daily Express* & *Sunday Express* because of the right-wing bias in the British press (Cushion

Table 2. Profiles of the sampled UK newspapers.

	Daily & Sunday newspapers	Circulation ³	Market orientation	Political affiliation	Secular-religious affiliation
1	Daily <i>The Sun</i> Sunday <i>The Sunday Sun</i>	2,213,659 1,800,830	red-top	right-leaning	pro-Christian
2	Daily <i>The Daily Mail</i> Sunday <i>The Mail on Sunday</i>	1,690,569 1,512,339	mid-market	right-leaning	pro-Christian
3	Daily <i>The Daily Mirror</i> Sunday <i>The Sunday Mirror</i>	962,256 918,754	red-top	left-leaning	in the middle
4	Daily <i>The Daily Telegraph</i> Sunday <i>The Sunday Telegraph</i>	544,546 429,285	quality	right-leaning	most pro-Christian
5	Daily <i>The Times</i> Sunday <i>The Sunday Times</i>	364,899 807,111	quality	right-leaning	in the middle
6	Daily <i>The Financial Times</i> Sunday	210,173	quality	politically neutral	see the main text
7	Daily <i>The Guardian</i> Sunday <i>The Observer</i>	207,958 225,474	quality	left-leaning	most secular
8	Daily <i>The Independent</i> ⁴ Sunday <i>The Independent on Sunday</i>	49,751 48,729	quality	politically neutral	most secular
		Sources: Guardian (2014a, 2014b)	Sources: McNair (2009), Baker et al. (2013), British Newspapers Online (2018)	Source: Taira et al. (2012)	

et al., 2016). The secular-religious affiliations of the sampled UK newspapers are based on Taira et al. (2012), p. 41) “pro/anti-religious continuum” of the British press. Although this study does not address the *FT* explicitly, in another publication, the same scholars conclude that the newspaper “represented Britain as secular first, then Christian” (Knott et al., 2013, p. 46) in the reporting of the 2009 Geert Wilders case. While Taira et al. (2012) rightly state that these findings should be considered with due caution and viewed as hypotheses rather than generalized results, it is also appropriate to note that they do suggest particular patterns in the coverage of religion in the British press. The Turkish sample comprises eleven newspapers with diverse politico-religious affiliations (see Table 3). The print versions of both British and Turkish newspapers were examined.

Sampling techniques and timeframe

As I was interested in specific timings of religion coverage, I sampled three continuous (Monday-Sunday), but distinct weeks from 2014: Week One (10–16 February 2014) as a religiously neutral week, Week Two (21–27 July 2014) as an Islam or Ramadan-related week, and Week Three (15–21 December 2014) as a Christianity- or Christmas-related week. Week One was chosen to avoid any religious festivities and capture routine coverage of religion, particularly Christianity and Islam. It was

³The circulation figures of the sampled British national newspapers are for January 2014 (without bulks).

⁴*The Independent* and *Independent on Sunday* ceased their print publications in March 2016 and now exist online only (Thurman & Fletcher, 2018).

Table 3. Profiles of the sampled Turkish newspapers.

Daily newspapers	Circulation ⁵	Circulation ranking	Political affiliation	Secular-religious affiliation	Pro-/anti-AKP government
1 <i>Zaman</i> [Time] ⁶	1,182,860	1	Center-right	Islamic (civil Islam), supporting secularism, pro-Western	Anti-AKP government
2 <i>Posta</i> [Mail]	418,381	2	Center-right	Ataturkist tabloid (pro-Western secularist)	Both critical and supportive of the AKP government
3 <i>Hürriyet</i> [Freedom]	399,965	3	Center-right	Ataturkist (pro-Western secularist)	Both critical and supportive of the AKP government
4 <i>Sözcü</i> [Spokesman]	366,395	4	Left-wing	Kemalist (anti-Western secularist)	Anti-AKP government
5 <i>Sabah</i> [Morning]	322,208	5	Center-right	Formerly secular, since 2007 a media organ of the Islamist government	Pro-AKP government
6 <i>Milliyet</i> [Nationality]	167,386	11	Liberal	Formerly secular, but now a media organ of the Islamist government	Pro-AKP government
7 <i>Yeni Şafak</i> [New Dawn]	127,199	13	Right-wing	Islamist (political Islam)	Pro-AKP government
8 <i>Taraf</i> [Side]	75,245	18	Liberal	Secular, pro-Western	Anti-AKP government
9 <i>Yeni Akit</i> [New Covenant]	64,498	19	Strongly right-wing	Islamist (political Islam), anti-Western	Pro-AKP government
10 <i>Cumhuriyet</i> [Republic]	52,574	23	Left-wing	Kemalist (anti-Western secularist)	Anti-AKP government
11 <i>Türkiye'de Yeni Çağ</i> [New Era in Turkey]	50,884	25	Strongly nationalist right-wing	A mixture of Kemalism (anti-Western secularism) and a Turk-Islam synthesis (in which Turkishness stands out)	Anti-AKP government

Sources: Medya Dünyası (2014), Medyatava (2014), Hof (2014), Panayırca et al. (2016), Keneş (2014), Akyol (2014), Gürcan and Ünlü (2012), Uysal (2017), and Çömlekçi (2009).

⁵The circulation rankings of the sampled Turkish newspapers are provided because there were 38 national daily newspapers in Turkey as of 20–26 January 2014 (Medya Dünyası, 2014; Medyatava, 2014).

⁶Known for their criticism of the AKP government, two of the newspapers included in the sample, namely the largest daily *Zaman* and the liberal *Taraf*, were shut down by a state of emergency decree on 27 July 2016 (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 2016), in the aftermath of the staged coup (Rubin, 2017).

also expected that Christianity and Islam would get not only more coverage in terms of volume during Weeks Two and Three, but also the possibility of more reporting of religion that recognizes its important role in people's daily life. This sampling timeframe's main purpose is to examine and compare the newspaper coverage of religion during three distinct weeks in the UK and Turkey.

I employed a non-random purposive sample (Deacon et al., 2007), within which I applied systematic random sampling to construct a manageable sample. These three purposefully chosen weeks simultaneously cover all days of the week and reflect different seasonal changes during the year, as Hansen et al. (1998) suggest. Despite not being constructed weeks, they span the beginning, middle, and end of the year. Consequently, this sample enables the comparison of these three distinct weeks. Niemelä and Christensen (2013) used a similar purposive sample to examine the impact of religious festivities on newspaper religion coverage in five Nordic countries during 1988, 1998, and 2008. Overall, this sample generates nationally valid data for the three specific weeks only, not for the entire year of 2014. However, the provided and analyzed data can be considered illustrative of patterns of newspaper religion coverage in both countries.

Search query, sample size, and inter-coder reliability

I used two comparable online newspaper databases – Nexis UK and the Turkish Media Monitoring Centre, both of which allow Boolean search queries. My search query included eleven keywords: religion, God, secularism, atheism, Christianity, Jesus Christ, church, Islam, Muslim, Allah, and mosque. To construct an equivalent sample, I selected every fifth article from Turkish newspapers and every other news item from British newspapers. In total, I sampled 1,022 news items, with 478 from Britain and 544 from Turkey.

The main researcher served as the primary coder regarding the coding and the inter-coder reliability test. Following Lombard et al.'s (2002) recommendations, it is important to note a few key details about it. The test was conducted on a 10% sample of both British and Turkish newspapers. The secondary coder, a postgraduate student proficient in both English and Turkish, underwent 16 hours of training over two weeks. The inter-coder reliability check was established at .86 across all variables, calculated using Holsti's (1969) formula. Specifically, the inter-coder reliability for the *meta-frames* variable was .93, while it was .81 for both the *frames* and *sources* variables. The categories in the *frames* variable required more precise operational definitions to minimize overlap further, the *sources* variable needed additional training.

Findings

Contrasting framing of Christianity and Islam between British and Turkish newspapers

Whereas the first key finding shows that religion received two and a half times more coverage in Turkey compared to the UK, the most striking finding is the contrasting framing of Christianity and Islam between British and Turkish newspapers that all the data show. First, in both countries, the examined religious holidays led to a significant rise in the reporting of the dominant religions but had no impact on coverage of the minority religions (see [Table 4](#)).

Table 4. Weekly variations in the volume of coverage of Christianity and Islam in British and Turkish newspapers.

Row Responses %	Week 1 Religiously Neutral Week	Week 2 Islam-Related Week	Week 3 Christianity-Related Week	Total
	Britain			
Christianity (all) <i>n</i> = 239	28.0	20.9	51.0	100.0
Islam (all) <i>n</i> = 247	18.6	38.9	42.5	100.0
	Turkey			
Christianity (all) <i>n</i> = 33	42.4	39.4	18.2	100.0
Islam (all) <i>n</i> = 532	27.4	45.9	26.7	100.0

The spike in the coverage of Islam in British newspapers during Week Two requires explanation. It was not related to Ramadan or Eid'ul Fitr but was prompted by the extensive coverage of two major news events: the Israeli-Palestinian military conflict and the Trojan horse scandal in Birmingham. Likewise, the continued rise in the reporting of Islam in Week Three in British newspapers resulted from the significant coverage of two terrorist attacks – one in Australia and one in Pakistan.

Second, unlike the dominant religions, which were predominantly covered through the prism of home news, the minority religions Islam in Britain and Christianity in Turkey were not reported as part of the home society in British and Turkish newspapers (see [Table 5](#)).

Third, the findings reveal contrasting sourcing patterns in the coverage of religion overall, Christianity, and Islam between British and Turkish newspapers, evident in the different dominant voices in their reporting. [Table 6](#) shows that, in both countries, while the voices of the dominant religions were prominent, the religious minority voices were rarely employed – Muslim sources constituted 2.2% in British newspapers and Christian sources comprised only 0.6% in Turkish newspapers. Three other findings are also worth highlighting. First, in British newspapers, there was higher employment of *public figures-celebrities* than Christian voices – albeit by only a 1.3% difference – in the reporting of Christianity. One possible explanation is that, in Britain, Christianity was significantly

Table 5. Crosstabulation of Christianity and Islam by geography of main topics in British and Turkish newspapers – overall.

Responses %	Christianity		Islam	
	Britain <i>n</i> = 292	Turkey <i>n</i> = 68	Britain <i>n</i> = 409	Turkey <i>n</i> = 821
Home (for Britain)	62.0	0.0	22.0	0.0
Home (for Turkey)	0.0	30.9	0.0	48.7
Turkey (foreign for Britain)	1.7	0.0	3.2	0.0
Britain (foreign for Turkey)	0.0	1.5	0.0	1.3
Israel	0.3	4.4	11.0	9.3
Palestine	0.3	4.4	11.0	9.5
the United States of America (USA)	8.6	5.9	7.1	5.0
Syria	1.0	2.9	7.8	3.2
Iraq	1.7	5.9	5.6	3.7
Pakistan	0.0	0.0	6.6	0.5
Australia	0.0	0.0	5.9	0.2
the West-Europe-European countries	16.4	26.5	8.8	5.1
Other Middle Eastern countries	1.7	5.9	4.2	3.9
African countries	5.5	8.8	3.9	1.1
Other Asian countries	0.7	0.0	2.4	1.5
Muslim-majority countries (as a collective geolocation)	0.0	2.9	0.0	1.3
Other countries	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.2
Not applicable	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

reported through the prism of movies and music – especially in Week Three, where sources often included movie directors, actors, actresses, music directors, composers, and celebrities, which, following the code-book, were coded under the category of *public figures-celebrities*. Second, in the UK, *political* sources had a small presence (5.4%) in the coverage of Christianity but were dominant (20.8%) in the reporting of Islam. Third, in Turkish newspapers, *political* sources dominated the coverage of both Islam and Christianity.

The crosstabulation of sources by meta-frames helps explain how news sources were used, revealing a close correlation between sources and meta-frames (see Table 7). It further reinforces the contrasting sourcing patterns in the reporting of Christianity and Islam between British and Turkish newspapers. First, sources from sacred references primarily constructed the *spiritual* meta-frame. In British newspapers, the main reason for the very limited use of the *spiritual* meta-frame in the coverage of Christianity is the very small number of news sources from Christian sacred texts. Second, religious leaders and individuals were among the dominant voices in the *world life* meta-frame. In both countries, the use of religious sources generally resulted in coverage, recognizing religion's important role for religious citizens – that is, in the *spiritual* and *world life* meta-frames – mostly for the dominant religions and exceptionally rarely for the minority religions. Third, *political* sources dominated both the *political* and *conflict* meta-frames. This correlation also reveals that, in both countries, more political sources mean less recognition of religion's

Table 6. Crosstabulation of news sources by Christianity, Islam, and religion overall in British and Turkish newspapers.

Column Responses %	Britain			Turkey		
	Christianity (all) <i>n</i> = 1,542	Islam (all) <i>n</i> = 2,348	Religion overall <i>n</i> = 4,024	Christianity (all) <i>n</i> = 146	Islam (all) <i>n</i> = 3,367	Religion overall <i>n</i> = 3,436
No source/Unattributed	1.0	0.5	0.7	4.1	1.4	1.5
Christianity-Christian (all)	25.2	1.0	9.8	13.0	0.5	0.6
Islam-Muslim (all)	0.4	3.7	2.2	2.7	21.2	20.8
Other religions-religious (all)	0.3	0.9	0.8	0.0	0.2	0.2
Atheist-Secular	0.5	0.2	0.5	0.0	0.1	0.1
Political (all)	5.4	20.8	14.4	36.3	27.6	27.6
Police-Counterterrorism- Intelligence	1.2	10.1	6.0	0.7	1.5	1.5
Military (including NATO)	0.3	4.0	2.4	4.1	1.3	1.3
Laws-Court Decisions-Justice Professionals	1.6	5.3	4.0	0.0	4.1	4.0
Polls-Documents-Publishers	1.4	1.4	1.5	0.0	0.3	0.3
Media-Journalists	1.7	4.9	3.8	5.5	10.3	10.1
Experts-Professionals	10.0	6.7	8.9	6.8	6.5	6.6
Public Figures-Celebrities	26.5	4.1	14.6	16.4	5.2	5.5
Businessmen-Businesses	2.5	0.7	1.4	0.7	1.5	1.5
Interest Groups-Protesters	2.9	5.5	4.6	0.7	4.1	4.3
Citizens-Ordinary People	9.1	10.2	9.2	0.7	3.6	3.5
Terrorists-Extremists-Radicals	0.7	8.0	4.7	0.0	0.5	0.5
Social Media (Accounts)- Whistle Blowers	0.1	0.4	0.3	0.0	1.2	1.2
Controversial sources (radical political, militant, terrorist, fundamentalist religious or religious hardliners)	0.3	4.4	2.8	6.2	1.2	1.3
Readers	6.4	3.8	4.4	0.0	4.3	4.2
Anonymous	2.1	1.1	1.5	1.4	2.8	2.8
Other	0.6	1.9	1.3	0.7	0.4	0.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

constructive role in society. The data in [Table 7](#) indicate that the voices from the dominant religions, Christianity in the UK and Islam in Turkey, were predominantly employed in the *spiritual* and *world life* meta-frames. However, in both countries, the use of religious minority voices was not only limited overall, but they were also mainly employed in the *conflict* meta-frame.

The findings show that particularly the way the religious minority voices were employed in Britain and Turkey aligns with Richardson's (2006, p. 115) conclusion that, in British broadsheets, "Muslim sources are overwhelmingly only included and only quoted in reporting contexts critical of their action and critical of their religion." Framing Muslim voices predominantly around negative or controversial issues, such as the Trojan scandal in Birmingham, terrorist attacks in Australia and Pakistan, the military conflicts in Iraq and Syria, and the Israeli-Palestinian military conflict, reinforces imperial and colonial-era stereotypes and biases against Muslims in British newspapers (Said, 1997, 2003).

Table 7. Crosstabulation of news sources by meta-frames in British and Turkish newspapers.

Column Responses %	Britain: all weeks (n = 4,024)				Turkey: all weeks (n = 3,436)			
	World				World			
	Spiritual meta-frame	life meta-frame	Political meta-frame	Conflict meta-frame	Spiritual meta-frame	life meta-frame	Political meta-frame	Conflict meta-frame
No source/Unattributed	0.0	1.8	1.4	0.3	1.0	2.5	1.1	1.4
Christianity-Christian (all)	85.7	25.2	1.4	4.8	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.9
Islam-Muslim (all)	0.0	3.1	0.0	2.0	85.0	37.7	4.5	9.7
Other religions-religious (all)	0.0	0.2	0.0	1.0	2.0	0.1	0.0	0.1
Atheist-Secular	0.0	1.1	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.2
Political (all)	0.0	3.6	62.2	15.6	0.3	3.4	71.2	26.0
Police-Counterterrorism-Intelligence	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.4	0.0	0.0	0.8	2.6
Military (including NATO)	0.0	0.1	2.1	3.2	0.7	0.6	1.6	1.5
Laws-Court Decisions-Justice Professionals	0.0	0.7	2.1	5.2	0.0	0.1	0.8	7.2
Polls-Documents-Publishers	0.0	0.9	0.7	1.7	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.4
Media-Journalists	0.0	1.5	4.2	4.5	0.3	3.6	6.1	15.5
Experts-Professionals	0.0	11.4	4.9	8.3	5.3	21.7	1.9	2.9
Public Figures-Celebrities	0.0	34.1	0.7	8.8	1.7	8.2	2.2	6.3
Businessmen-Businesses	0.0	1.8	0.0	1.4	0.0	4.0	0.8	1.1
Interest Groups-Protesters	7.1	1.1	9.8	5.5	0.0	1.8	4.0	6.1
Citizens-Ordinary People	0.0	7.6	0.7	10.3	1.7	4.0	0.6	4.6
Terrorists-Extremists-Radicals	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.5	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.9
Social Media (Accounts)-Whistle Blowers	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.9	0.2	1.8
Controversial sources (radical political, militant, terrorist, fundamentalist religious or religious hardliners)	0.0	0.0	4.9	3.7	0.0	0.0	1.0	2.0
Readers	0.0	3.4	2.8	4.9	0.0	9.0	0.0	4.6
Anonymous	7.1	2.1	0.0	1.4	1.7	1.6	2.2	3.6
Other	0.0	0.1	2.1	1.7	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

This finding also holds for the sourcing patterns of Christian voices in Turkish newspapers, where they mainly featured in coverage of contentious issues such as military conflicts and political controversies. Thus, in both countries, the employment of the minority religious voices in the reporting of religion overall and their faith is not conducive to the newspaper recognition of their values and to their participation in the wider democratic decision-making process. However, in British newspapers, the Christian and other voices employed in the reporting of Christianity are not very helpful either in recognizing the importance of the Christian faith and values in daily life for its followers.

Fourth, the meta-frame analysis also demonstrates contrasting newspaper portrayals of Christianity and Islam between the UK and Turkey. In British newspapers, the configurations of Christianity and Islam in the four meta-frames are clearly distinct (see Table 8). Conversely, in Turkey, the percentages of Islam and Christianity in the four meta-frames are not that dramatically distinct compared to Britain. Their notable differences were in the *spiritual* and *conflict* meta-frames.

Table 8. Crosstabulation of religion by meta-frames in British and Turkish newspapers.

Responses %		Britain: all weeks				
		<i>Spiritual</i> meta-frame <i>n</i> = 1	<i>World life</i> meta-frame <i>n</i> = 171	<i>Political</i> meta-frame <i>n</i> = 29	<i>Conflict</i> meta-frame <i>n</i> = 375	Total <i>n</i> = 576
Christianity (all)	<i>n</i> = 239	0.4	56.1	2.9	40.6	100.0
Islam (all)	<i>n</i> = 247	0.0	5.3	6.1	88.7	100.0
Other religions (all)	<i>n</i> = 50	0.0	20.0	10.0	70.0	100.0
Religion in general	<i>n</i> = 25	0.0	32.0	8.0	60.0	100.0
Atheism-secularism	<i>n</i> = 15	0.0	40.0	0.0	60.0	100.0
Total	<i>n</i> = 576	0.2	29.7	5.0	65.1	100.0
		Turkey: all weeks				
		<i>n</i> = 48	<i>n</i> = 139	<i>n</i> = 127	<i>n</i> = 308	<i>n</i> = 622
Christianity (all)	<i>n</i> = 33	0.0	21.9	21.9	56.3	100.0
Islam (all)	<i>n</i> = 532	8.8	23.9	19.2	48.1	100.0
Other religions (all)	<i>n</i> = 32	3.0	3.0	12.4	51.5	100.0
Religion in general	<i>n</i> = 16	0.0	18.8	25.0	56.3	100.0
Atheism-secularism	<i>n</i> = 9	0.0	11.1	0.0	88.9	100.0
Total	<i>n</i> = 622	7.7	22.3	20.4	49.5	100.0

Illustrative qualitative examples of the four meta-frames

It is here appropriate to illustrate the coverage of religion with a qualitative example of each of the four meta-frames from both countries.

Illustrative examples of the *spiritual* meta-frame

The only news item in the *spiritual* meta-frame in the sampled British newspapers, a feature by Robin Lane Fox (2014) who typically writes on gardening but not on faith, was flagged on the front page of the *House & Home FT Weekend* supplement with the headline *Growing Faith: The early Christians' view of gardening* and continued inside with another headline, saying *Sowing seeds for Paradise*. As it is broadly about the relationship between people and environment, or care for the environment, this news item illustrates the *social responsibility-relationships* frame within the *spiritual* meta-frame. The author provides examples from prominent early Christians, monks, and martyrs, such as the Clement of Alexandria, Egeria, and St Perpetua, about the place of roses in early Christianity, quotations from sacred texts (though in a figurative meaning about the topic) and other texts as well. The following citation from the news item captures its spirit:

From paragraph #7 (P7): In the most wild and forbidding landscapes they grew vegetables and fruits, inspired by the ideal of selfsufficiency and their wish to recreate the Garden of Eden. Early pilgrims to the Holy Land describe the results. The virgin-pilgrim Egeria describes how she visited the site of a great biblical wonder, the Burning Bush. The bush, she thought, was still alive but somewhat reduced since Moses saw it. Beside it, there was a “very pleasing” garden in which the resident monks gave her a vegetarian dinner. On the top of Mount Sinai, even, monks gave her fruits which they had grown in rocky ground at the mountain’s foot. Monks are the founding fathers of autumn’s boxes of apples, offered by English villagers to strangers passing by (Fox, 2014).

This news item highlights the efforts of notable early Christian figures to cultivate and sustain gardens in challenging environments and the connection between their spiritual beliefs and their environmental practices, illustrating a sense of responsibility and relationship with the natural world. It can thus be spiritually uplifting for followers of Christianity.

Faith in God was one of the frames that Turkish newspapers most frequently used in the *spiritual* meta-frame to cover Islam (general). A passage from Kırşan (2014), pp. 14–15, 17) exemplifies this frame well:

Headline: Cry my eyes and let my soul subtilize (p. 14)

From P1: Our eyes crying for the sake of Allah ran dry. . . . The warning Divine statement “And do you laugh and not weep” (An-Najm, 60) reminds us to know of those who forgot about crying and who laughed instead of crying in cases of being pitiful throughout history. (pp. 14-15)

From P2: On the heart horizon, what makes His (God’s) friends cry is love for and fear of Allah. (p. 15)

From P5: Our Prophet (peace and blessings be upon Him) tells us that, in the sight of Allah, the most beloved crying is that which is done in a secluded place without any hypocrisy and insincerity. (p. 17)

The Qur’an and Hadiths or quotations from the Prophet Muhammad are the most prominent sources and form the dominant religious basis of this news item. This example shows recognition of Islamic values and can be spiritually inspiring for followers of Islam. Religion’s positive role in daily life for religious citizens gets recognized, and the rest of society gets informed about it, which in turn leads to better-informed democratic decision-making debates and processes. However, this type of religion coverage or the *spiritual* meta-frame was not only of limited employment in Turkish newspapers and of very limited use in British newspapers, but also remained reserved for the dominant religions – Islam in Turkey and Christianity in the UK.

Illustrative examples of the *world life* meta-frame

A *Sunday Telegraph* editorial that features Christianity (general) and the CoE illustrates the *world life* meta-frame well in the UK, particularly the *Holy days-nights-months* frame and the less prominent religious elements pattern within it:

From P1: This is the last Sunday Telegraph before Christmas, so it offers a chance to meditate upon the meaning of this festive season. For most people, it can be summed up in two words: family and faith.

From P5: For whether one believes in its theology or not, the cultural and social benefits of religion are indisputable. This coming year, thousands of volunteers motivated by a variety of faiths will feed the homeless, tend to the sick and visit the lonely. The Rev Rose Hudson Wilkin, who was once tipped to be the Church’s first woman bishop,

observed that she does not have “a right” to be a priest or a bishop, but is simply “called to serve.” It is that selfless dedication to others that makes faith so miraculous.

Last Paragraph (LP)-P6: At the heart of the Christmas story is the birth of a king in a lowly manger, sent to redeem mankind. In a peculiar age that blends both austerity and consumerism, when we are all understandably concerned about putting presents under the tree, we would do well to remember that the most precious gift of all is life – and the hope that springs from it. We wish our readers and their families a Merry Christmas. (Sunday Telegraph, 2014)

This news item demonstrates recognition of Christian values and their real-life practice. It can also serve as an inspiration for followers of Christianity. However, this reporting of lived Christian practices and experiences had limited coverage even within the *world life* meta-frame in British newspapers. Simultaneously, it should be noted that Turkish newspapers cover a wider range of religious practices than British newspapers – be it for the dominant religion only.

Covering Islam (general), a *Yeni Akit* comment illustrates the most frequent frame about Islam in the *world life* meta-frame in Turkey *education-knowledge about religion*:

Headline: Start the term well and outperform yourself

P1: What would I do if I were going to start the second school term?

From P17: I used to do my studies with the love of worship because gaining knowledge, studying, and working are the Almighty Allah’s command like prayers, fasting, going on pilgrimage and zakat (compulsory systematic giving (of one’s wealth) for all Muslims who meet the necessary criteria of wealth each year to benefit the poor). I knew that the more I study, the more I learn, and the more I work, the more merit I acquire in God’s sight.

From P30: One should be optimistic, should not despair of Allah’s Mercy, should regard working as worship, studying and learning as invocation. (Kavaklı, 2014)

This item exemplifies an aspect of the Islamic faith in practice and suggests how putting faith in action can contribute to one’s personal and social development.

The above four qualitative examples of different frames within the *spiritual* and *world life* meta-frames illustrate aspects of religious groups that are primarily absent from their news reporting, such as the theological fundamentals and lived experiences of their faith, which broadly confirms the findings of prior research (e.g., Greene-Colozzi et al., 2023; Mitchell, 2012; Said, 1997; Vultee et al., 2010). These dimensions can: 1) inform news audiences why faith matters and how it positively benefits religious citizens; 2) inspire actions that benefit society as whole; 3) enhance democratic debates, contributing to a better informed democratic decision-making process.

Illustrative examples of the *political meta-frame*

This excerpt from a *Guardian* news article, featuring the CoE, exemplifies the *involvement-participation of religious leaders in politics* frame in British newspapers:

Headline: Female bishop could get next seat freed in Lords

From P1: Legislation has been tabled allowing women bishops to jump the queue and take the next available seat in the House of Lords.

From the body: In a written statement to MPs, Gyimah said: “The government’s bill, which is supported by the Church of England, proposes a modification of this rule for the next 10 years, so that if a female bishop is available when a Lords Spiritual seat becomes vacant, they will automatically be appointed.”

Under the current rules, the archbishops of Canterbury and York and the bishops of Durham, London and Winchester automatically take seats in the Lords. There are 21 further seats based on length of service. (Press Association, 2014)

This example shows how the participation of religious institutions in politics is legally permitted and regulated.

Featuring Syrian Orthodox Christianity, a brief *Milliyet* news article illustrates the dominant *religion in elections* frame about Christians within the *political meta-frame* in Turkey:

Headline: Syriac Christian to be nominated as co-mayor of Mardin

P1: Making ambitious preparations for the local elections in Mardin, the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) will nominate one Assyrian (Syriac Christian) for a co-mayor candidate instead of Hafize Aymelek, who was earlier announced a nominee for the same post along with Ahmet Türk’s co-mayor candidacy.

LP-P2: BDP Mardin MP Erol Dora, who is himself an Assyrian, confirming that the BDP wants to put up one Assyrian for a co-mayor, said that the name of that candidate had not been finalised yet. It was learned that Abdullah Öcalan who had met and told the BDP and the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) delegation in İmralı that he wanted the BDP to include names from the religious minorities in the local elections and that, in this respect, it would be appropriate to nominate an Assyrian name for a co-mayor candidate along with Ahmet Türk’s candidacy. (Durukan, 2014)

This news shows how Christians are made part of wider political debates in elections and particularly how one religious minority group in Turkey is offered political representation at a local level. It also demonstrates that the interaction between religion and politics is sometimes unavoidable and necessary.

These two qualitative examples of frames within the *political meta-frame* from British and Turkish newspapers illustrate and confirm the prominent news reporting of religion in political frames (e.g., Campbell, 2021; Dahinden

et al., 2011; Gürcan & Ünlü, 2012; Haede, 2013; Hwang, 2016; Kodrich, 2005; Taira et al., 2012; Winston, 2021).

Illustrative examples of the *conflict* meta-frame

Reporting Christianity (general), a *Daily Mail* news article exemplifies one of the most employed frames about Christianity within the *conflict* meta-frame in Britain – *sexual abuses-scandals*:

Headline: Suicide of girl, 14, who couldn't face telling her Christian parents: I think I'm gay

P1-P2: A TEENAGE girl killed herself because she was worried about telling her deeply religious parents that she might be a lesbian, an inquest heard.

Elisabeth Lowe, 14, had also told friends she was struggling to reconcile her feelings with her strong Christian faith.

From P7: One said she was finding it hard to connect with God as she thought she was lying to him. (Taylor, 2014)

This example shows how Christianity (general) is reported as limiting people's choices and constraining their freedom in relation to sexuality-wise issues.

Covering Islam (general), a *Taraf* news article illustrates the third most frequent frame about Islam in the *conflict* meta-frame *the AKP v. Hizmet: AKP is the problem* in Turkish newspapers:

Front page headline: That's how Hitler started (Taraf, 2014, p. 1)

Front page subheadline: First they came for the Jews. I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the communists and the trade unionists. I did not speak out because I was not a communist and a trade unionist. Then, they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me . . . (Taraf, 2014, p. 1)

P1 on page 9: Yesterday morning, Turkey woke up with the news about the operation against media organizations close to the Gülen religious community. Last Thursday, the Twitter phenomenon Fuat Avni put forward the allegation that the government was about to launch an operation against the media. Yesterday morning this allegation became a reality. (Taraf, 2014, p. 9)

Although terrorism- and war-related frames were prominent in Turkey, the dominant conflict frame was distinct from that in the UK, focusing on a domestic issue: the so called the AKP-Hizmet confrontation – a mainstream political, media, and social issue in Turkish newspapers. This segment illustrates one of the three frames employed to report this confrontation in Turkey (see Table 1). However, it is important to note that the Hizmet movement does not see it as a conflict between the ruling Islamist AKP and the civil society movement or as a “[Gülen] movement-government rivalry,” but rather as “an attack on democracy” (Dumanlı in Trew, 2014).

The above two qualitative examples of frames within the *conflict* meta-frame further confirm the dominance of conflict as a news value and framework in the coverage of religion (e.g., Dahinden et al., 2011; Laferrara et al., 2024; Maier, 2021; Pepinster, 2012). All provided illustrative qualitative examples together validate the need for the four distinct dimensions – *spiritual*, *world life*, *political*, and *conflict* – in a systematic and unified approach, aiming to integrate all dispersed democratic elements into a fuller picture of faith in the news.

Explaining unexpected findings

It is also important to highlight and explain three unexpected findings. First, the most surprising finding is that even the dominant religions Christianity in Britain and Islam in Turkey had a disproportioned configuration of the four meta-frames, too – though to a significantly lesser extent than the minority religions (see Table 8). Another aspect of this finding is that although Islam's coverage in Turkish newspapers is more balanced than the reporting of Christianity in British newspapers, even in Turkey the most frequent meta-frame for Islam was the *conflict* meta-frame. One explanation is the AKP-the Hizmet confrontation that allegedly involves the ruling Islamist political party and an Islamic CSM, which was widely reported in the sampled newspapers, offering a whole spectrum of perspectives on this conflict – from secular and Kemalist to Islamist and Islamic. While in the near past, as Gürcan and Ünlü (2012) suggest, there were other conflicts between secular and religious groups in the press, I expected that in Turkey the *conflict* meta-frame would not dominate the reporting of Islam *as the dominant religion*.

Second, further to the very limited employment of the *spiritual* meta-frame for Christians in the UK, in British newspapers there was also significantly less use of everyday religious elements or context for practicing faith in daily life in the reporting of religion overall and particularly Christianity in the *world life* meta-frame, which was dominant in their coverage, compared to the coverage of Islam in Turkish newspapers. It suggests that disproportionately dominant newspaper portrayals of a religion, like Christianity in the UK, in the *world life* meta-frame may not show a clear recognition of that faith, its values, and importance in real life. This is because of the topics covered in the reporting of Christianity and the corresponding sourcing patterns, such as religious leaders discussing gender equality, homosexuality, and organizational-institutional matters, and celebrities talking about movies and Holy Days. Thus, although I expected much more about Christianity as the dominant religion in the *spiritual* meta-frame and its daily practices in the *world life* meta-frame in British newspapers, the sourcing routines

in the coverage of Christianity are not related to understanding and recognition of everyday Christian practices and values in Britain.

Third, a further key aspect of the meta-frame analysis shows less hostility to Christianity in Turkish newspapers than to Islam in British newspapers. This finding can be linked to Gill (2012) and Haede's (2013) results on different degrees of hostility to particular religions and religion overall. This argument is supported by the predominant use of the *conflict* meta-frame in British newspapers for Islam at 88.7%, contrasting with 56.3% for the coverage of Christianity in Turkish newspapers; likewise, when considering the *world life* meta-frame, the coverage of Islam in the UK is at 5.3%, while Christianity's presence in Turkey stands significantly higher at 21.9%.

Discussion

Factors in the contrasting framing of Christianity and Islam between British and Turkish newspapers

A few factors can best explain why the favorable coverage of the dominant religions contrasts the unfavorable reporting of the minority religions in British and Turkish newspapers: the concept of a dominant religion, orientalism and occidentalism as geopolitical factors, and news values.

The dominant religion factor

The contrasting framing of Christianity and Islam between British and Turkish newspapers confirms that the dominant political and general culture of news, particularly the dominant religion factor, or the environment in which journalists operate, privileges the home religions at the expense of the minority religions and thus permeates the news in general (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Schudson, 2003) and news about faith (Cunha, 2018, 2021; Evolvi, 2018; Khroul, 2018; Kodrich, 2005; McDonnell, 2003; Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2013). Previous studies show how, as the Established Church in Britain, the CoE was privileged in the news (McDonnell, 2003) or it was “newsworthy in and of [itself]” (Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2013, p. 30), how the dominance of Roman Catholicism in Brazil (Cunha, 2018) and the Russian Orthodox Church in Russia (Khroul, 2018) resulted in privileged news reporting in those countries.

Geopolitical factors: orientalism and occidentalism

As geopolitical ideologies orientalism and occidentalism (Said, 2003) can further explain the contrasting pictures of Christianity and Islam between British and Turkish newspapers.

My findings that in British newspapers Islam as a minority religion was newsworthy overwhelmingly in relation to terrorism, military conflicts, and

controversies confirm existing scholarship and fit the results of many researchers who have written about the dominance of these portrayals of Muslims in British and other Western news media – e.g., Said (1997), Richardson (2004), Karim (2006), Korn (2006), Manning (2006), Lewis et al. (2009), Gill (2012), Taira et al. (2012), Baker et al. (2013), Wahl-Jorgensen et al. (2013), Nickerson (2019), Al-Azami (2021), Lövheim (2021), Greene-Colozzi et al. (2023), and Koch and Hüsser (2023). However, my results not only confirm the link that British newspapers have repeatedly portrayed between Islam and terrorism, but also develop these portrayals, showing apparent trends in this respect. First, Sunni Islam, practiced by approximately 90% of all Muslims in the world (Pew Research Center, 2012), was repeatedly associated with terrorism in the UK’s both foreign (e.g., Iraq and Syria) and domestic news (e.g., the Trojan horse scandal). Second, Muslim women were now portrayed as backing terrorists or being terrorists themselves – e.g., the *Guardian*’s news story *Police pull over plane on runaway to stop girl joining Syria jihadists* (Tran, 2014). Third, a new characteristic of terrorism, the so-called “lone wolf” terrorist attacks were also connected to Islam – e.g., the *Daily Telegraph*’s news story entitled *Rise of “lone wolf” terrorists who seek to kill wherever they can* (Moore, 2014).

These portrayals of Muslims in British newspapers were mirrored in Turkish newspapers, where Christianity was also newsworthy mainly in relation to *military conflicts-terrorism* and *politics*. Christians were primarily reported in relation to military conflicts in Week One only, when the armed and deadly conflict between Christians and Muslims in the Central African Republic received notable coverage in Turkish newspapers, whereas in Britain the terrorism and war narratives are more constant in the coverage of Islam. The news items, featuring Christianity in connection with terrorism, portrayed Christians as victims – e.g., a *Hürriyet* news story that reported the persecution and killings of Christians by terrorists in Iraq and carried the headline *Iraqi Christians fleeing IŞİD: There is no room for us in Iraq anymore* (Yezdani, 2014). The prevalent conflict-related reporting of Christianity in Turkish newspapers, which can be linked to the concept of occidentalism, aligns with the findings of previous research (Haede, 2013; Hungerford, 2006; Richardson, 2011). It is worth noting that the geopolitical and historical fractures between orientalism and occidentalism, as Said (2003) suggests, can be traced not only to the Crusades but also all the way back to early Christianity and Islam, which are today evident in the contrasting framing of Muslims and Christians between British and Turkish newspapers. These orientalist and occidentalist portrayals of Islam and Christianity in British and Turkish newspapers also confirm that different geopolitical perspectives and interests can lead to diverse appropriation or domestication of news for home audiences (Cottle, 2008).

The news values factor

Another factor contributing to the contrasting reporting of Christianity and Islam between British and Turkish newspapers is news values, specifically their contrasting employment in the coverage of the dominant religions and the minority religions. My findings confirm the continued dominance of conflict or different patterns of negativity and bad news as a news value in journalism in general (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001, 2016) and especially in religion coverage (Baker et al., 2013; Mitchell, 2012; Pepinster, 2012). Furthermore, the results show that two different patterns, "villain" and "victim," are employed in the *conflict* meta-frame. In both countries, as a different kind of recognition, the pattern of victims in the *conflict* meta-frame was primarily employed for the dominant religions rather than the minority religions. While the "victim" pattern is clearly part of a conflict-related portrayal of religion and not associated with any positive frames, it is crucial to distinguish between these two patterns, "villains" and "victims," when discussing conflict as a news value.

Simultaneously, the findings suggest that, despite the dominance and importance of conflict, other news values such as Galtung and Ruge's (1965) cultural proximity and predictability or Harcup and O'Neill (2001, 2016) relevance and magnitude do provide room for coverage, showing recognition of religion's importance in daily life for religious citizens. However, British and Turkish newspapers treat the geographical proximity and predictability of the Holy Days of both the dominant and the minority religions in a contrasting manner. Thus, the problem is not that religion has little news value, but that news values are not employed equally for the dominant and the minority religions, confirming Dahinden et al. (2011) findings.

Overall, all these findings confirm the need for the proposed democratic approach, which can minimize the adverse influence of these factors. Beyond the contrasting framing of Christianity and Islam between British and Turkish newspapers, the results also show: (1) patterns of parallelism between the press and their political-religious affiliations in both countries, but which were much stronger in Turkey's polarized media and newspaper industry; (2) how certain aspects of the professional-organizational approach to news production, such as the journalist's social background or decent religious knowledge even if outside the religion news beat, the employment of expert contributors, and the publication of supplements dedicated to religious and social matters considered from a religious perspective, when employed effectively, can enhance and expand the press coverage of religion. However, presenting and discussing these findings remain beyond the scope of this article.

The contribution of the democratic approach to the field of religion and the news

The main contribution this research makes is to the field of religion and the news, as well as to the broader fields of comparative journalism studies and empirical studies examining the news media's democratic performance. Its most important contribution lies in the development and proposal of the four-dimension democratic approach, which has enabled and illuminated, with all the empirical complexities, a systematic comparison of news coverage in the UK and Turkey. The reporting particularly of the minority religions and, to a significant extent, of the dominant religions in both British and Turkish newspapers shows that it is essential to imagine and reflect wider religious, social, political, and news media processes; piece together the fragmented components of the whole democratic picture of faith; and keep all its dimensions in focus. I do not suggest that the so-called secular mainstream newspapers report faith as church or mosque bulletins but do recognize religion as part of civil society and its important role for religious citizens, and inform the rest about it, which aligns with monitory democracy's (Keane, 2010) recognition element. This democratic approach can minimize the weaknesses and maximize the strengths of the sociological factors in making news about religion. Additionally, news values do not preclude coverage of religion beyond the dominant *conflict* meta-frame and make it possible to recognize religion's positive potential.

Whereas the four dimensions certainly allow the news media to criticize religions and their followers legitimately, they also ensure that the so-called secular mainstream newspapers recognize its importance for religious citizens – no matter how big or small the number of these people is – and inform the rest about it. Otherwise, as Buddenbaum (1998) suggests, the absence of news “showing the meaning, purpose and influence of religion in people's lives and the implications of a religion for others,” “[e]xplaining theology or quoting from religious texts” to provide “the background that helps people understand the source of people's beliefs and judge those beliefs for themselves” (p. 193):

can imply that religion is absent from the community or unimportant in spite of the significance people attach to their beliefs and the time, talent and money they invest in support of their religion. (p. 139)

This research is the first in the study of religion in the news to propose a systematic, pragmatic, unified, and “universal” approach to religion in the news. The democratic approach brings systematism, pragmatism, wholeness, and “universality.” Systematic, pragmatic, and whole in a sense that it is a specific, clear, and practice-oriented approach that brings together all bits of the democratic picture of religion in one place under one roof. “Universal”

in a sense that it can be applied to any context. Importantly, it preserves all religious complexities and manifestations within its four dimensions. In this sense, it can bridge the gap or the differences, as Perreault (2019) argues, between Buddenbaum's (2002) support for simplification and Hoover's (2002) argument for preserving its complexities in religion news reporting. The democratic approach emphasizes pragmatism rather than simplification, providing a framework in which all religious complexities can be preserved.

Democracy as an ideal is a matter of degree and may never be attained entirely (Cunningham, 2002). In the same vein, while arguing that monitory democracy is the most advanced model of democracy in modern times (2010) – be it even hybrid (2018), Keane (2010) notes that it could evolve into a different and better model of democracy, and that the adjective “monitory” could be changed. Relying on the feature of monitory democracy that democratization includes not only the sphere of politics but also all domains of social life (Keane, 2010) – including religion in the news, I make it clear that the newspapers' democratic performance in their religion reporting is also a matter of degree. Therefore, RQ2 started with “To what extent.” From this perspective, in the proposed democratic approach, the coverage of a religion requires the inclusion of all these four meta-frames. Their presence might vary, but there needs to be space for all four meta-frames. The more balanced the configuration of these four meta-frames in the reporting of a religion, the better democratic the outcome.

In the context of increasing news avoidance generally across the globe (Newman et al., 2023), innovative journalistic practices such as digital pop up newsrooms as a new way of collaborating and connecting between news media outlets and different communities that generate trust between journalists and audiences (Wall, 2023) and the growing collaboration between human rights activists, citizens, and journalists (Ristovska, 2023) are steps that could help regain the public's trust in the news in general for a lasting time. There is no reason why these promising practices should not be used in all journalistic beats, particularly the religion news beat. I consider that breaking the over-focus of journalism on conflict with news showing positive recognition of all different values and groups in society – this practice is in line with the greater interest of news avoiders in solutions-based, constructive or inspiring news (Newman et al., 2023), promoting transparency, and developing and employing democracy indices for the different journalistic beats, including religion news, could also help restore the trust between news media outlets and audiences.

As with all research, this study has its limitations. One limitation is the sampling of a larger number of newspapers for three continuous but purposefully selected weeks within one calendar year, which resulted in a smaller number of news items from some newspapers, particularly tabloids. A constraint of this research is that it examined only the print versions of

Turkish and British newspapers, as there may be differences in the news items between the print and online editions of these publications. Another drawback is the lack of broadcast news media in the sample. Examining the coverage of religion over a longer time period in a smaller number of news media outlets, including newspapers (both print and online), broadcast news, digital native news sites, and other online news outlets, would have also been valuable. These limitations alongside all core components of the full communication cycle, namely news producers, news content, and news audiences, could be addressed in more comprehensive future studies.

Overall, this approach could serve as a democracy index or as a guide against which newspapers and possibly other news media can measure up their coverage of religion. It makes explicit something that is implicit in many studies within this field. There has been cutting-edge research that bolsters confidence in the potential future applicability of the democratic approach. For instance, studies push for news media reform and their democratization (Fenton et al., 2020; Pickard, 2019). Lövheim and Stenmark (2020) demonstrate a constructive attitude to religion in secular societies. These emerging studies, which align with monitory democracy's emphasis on civil society and democratizing all fields of life, may open up new opportunities for the applicability of the democratic approach. Despite these promising trends and my best efforts to develop a realistic approach, the applicability of the democratic approach remains untested and, therefore, unknown. As framing analysis through content analysis is insufficient, further research encompassing all aspects and sides of news is needed to test and establish its real-life feasibility. This four-dimension democratic approach also constitutes a significant contribution to the theory and the methodology in journalism and mass communication research, as it could spark the development of similar systematic approaches to different journalistic beats and democracy indices against which these beats can be monitored and measured up – in theory and, possibly, practice.

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