

Content Analysis of the Media Coverage of Road Safety in Africa



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Acknowledgments

This study marks a significant milestone in using the media to promote road safety campaigns and minimize deaths and injuries caused by negligence, governmental inaction, and policy gaps. The first of its kind, the study focused on an area insufficiently covered by the media. It provided the impetus for new approaches and a paradigm shift in public communication.

Science Africa is immensely grateful to the World Health Organization (WHO) for granting us the opportunity to conduct the study and for giving us the rare responsibility of pioneering a road less traveled. We are grateful to Mathew Taylor, Media Engagement and Capacity Development, Safety and Mobility, WHO, for the trust and confidence bestowed upon us to undertake the multi-country study. The guidance and professional support were incredible. We also wish to thank our colleagues Sharon Atieno, Anthony Rume, Gift Brighton, Joyce Ojanji, Otula Owuor, Leo Ogwago, George Kabongah, and Edin Hussein for their invaluable contributions and logistical support throughout the study.

Conducting the study involved interacting with many players and institutions. Science Africa is grateful to the individuals, organizations, and institutions that gave support in one way or another. Internally, Science Africa deployed its key staff to execute the project, which they did with remarkable dedication. The result is out for everyone to see. We are greatly indebted to all those who worked on the project.

We hope this study will contribute to minimizing carnage on Africa's roads by creating a new direction and influencing the shape and substance of media coverage of road safety issues.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	i
List of Figures	iii
List of Tables	iii
Abbreviations & Acronyms	iv
Executive Summary	v
INTRODUCTION	vi
PURPOSE, OBJECTIVE AND RATIONALE OF THE PROJECT	vii
Purpose of the Project	vii
Objectives of the project	vii
Rationale of the project	vii
1. METHODOLOGY	1
1.0. Scope of the study	1
1.1. Sampling techniques	1
1.2. Methods of data collection	2
1.3. Type of media	3
1.4. Data Coding	3
1.5. Content analysis	4
1.6. Study limitations	5
2. FINDINGS ON MEDIA COVERAGE OF ROAD SAFETY	7
a. Headline focus of the story	7
b. Focus of the story	8
c. Episodic vs Thematic Framing of Stories	9
d. Genre of road crash stories.	10
e. Causes of road crashes as reported by media houses	11
f. Counterfactual statements	12
g. Object-based and person-based language	12
h. Human Element Suffering	13
i. Keywords used in road crash stories.	14
j. Sources quoted in road crash stories	15
k. Number of deaths due to road crashes reported by media.	16
l. Number of deaths reported by Genre of the story	17

m. Number of injuries due to road crashes reported by media	18
n. Number of injuries reported by Genre of the story	19
o. Framing of road crashes as a public health crisis	19
p. Context of road crash stories	20
q. Visuals used in road crash reportage	21
r. Solutions provided in road crash stories.	22

3. RECOMMENDATIONS **25**

4. CONCLUSION **27**

5. REFERENCES **28**

6. ANNEX **29**

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Distribution of news story per country	1
Figure 2: Distribution of news per media house	2
Figure 3: Focus of the road crash stories	8
Figure 4: Episodic VS Thematic Framing of Stories	9
Figure 5: Genre of road crash stories	10
Figure 6: Causes of road crash as reported by media	11
Figure 7: Attribution of Blame to Victim's Behavior	12
Figure 8: Object-based and person-based language	13
Figure 9: Human element suffering	14
Figure 10: Keywords used in road crash stories	15
Figure 11: Sources quoted in road crash stories	16
Figure 12: Number of people killed and injured as reported in road crash stories	17
Figure 13: Number of deaths reported by Genre of the story	18
Figure 14: Number of injuries by Genre of the story	19
Figure 15: Framing of road crashes as public health crisis	20
Figure 16: Context of road crash stories	21
Figure 17: Visuals used in road crash reportage	22
Figure 18: Solution provided in road crash stories	23

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Type of media	3
Table 2: Headline focus of the story	7
Table 3: Number of injuries due to road crashes reported by media	18



ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
eNCA	eNews Channel Africa
GBC	Ghana Broadcasting Corporation
KBC	Kenya Broadcasting Corporation
NTA	Nigerian Television Authority
NTSA	National Transport and Safety Authority
SABC	South Africa Broadcasting Corporation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
WHO	World Health Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report details selected media outlets' coverage of road safety in Africa between September 2021 and September 2024. The study is part of the World Health Organization's (WHO) efforts to support African media in five Anglophone countries by educating the public and boosting accountability for road safety actions rooted in evidence-based approaches to reducing road traffic deaths.

Using the content analysis method, the study interrogated the number and types of stories covered, reporting formats used, topics covered, and sourcing of the stories. Findings from the study reveal several critical insights in reporting road safety news in Africa. Key among these are:

- Pedestrian deaths are framed as individual failings rather than systemic problems like unsafe roads or inadequate enforcement.
- The majority of the stories reported by the media were predominantly news articles, and only a limited number appeared on the front pages.
- Victim-blaming is prevalent in all five countries, with Nigeria (65 percent) leading and South Africa (55 percent) showing relatively less tendency to blame victims
- Media reports on road crashes overwhelmingly attribute the primary cause to poor driver behavior, which accounts for 44.5 percent of cases.
- "Accident" is the most commonly used keyword in media road crash stories, appearing in 52.2 percent of cases.

The report concludes that the press in Africa can play an essential role in promoting safety and injury control by increasing the media's role in injury prevention through improved dialogue between public health and media practitioners.

The study, therefore, proposes a raft of recommendations aimed at helping the project meet its objectives. Among the key recommendations are:

- To improve road safety reporting in Africa, journalists should investigate systemic issues more thoroughly rather than just focusing on individual road users like drivers or pedestrians.
- Professional capacity building for reporters and editors should be enhanced through targeted training to better report on road safety.
- Incorporate follow-up investigations on causes of crashes/collisions like road conditions or vehicle maintenance failures.

INTRODUCTION

Road traffic death rates in the past decade have increased significantly in the African region, with almost 250,000 lives lost on the continent's roads in 2021 alone. Conversely, global rates fell by 5 percent during the same period, a World Health Organization (WHO) report shows.¹ The report attributes the rise to multiple factors, including inadequate road safety laws and standards. No country in the region currently has laws that meet the best practice standards for the five key road safety behavioral risk factors: speeding, drink driving, non-use of motorcycle helmets, seatbelts, and child restraints.

Although research shows that effective news media reporting can positively impact road safety campaigns and decisions, road safety in Africa has a narrative problem because of how the media cover it.

Even though the media have an essential role in helping shift societies from a 'traditional' paradigm that focuses on individual road user responsibility to a safe systems mentality that takes a more comprehensive, societal approach to reducing road death, few studies have been undertaken in Africa to assess the quality and impact of news reports on road crashes and road safety.²

Thus, content analysis of media coverage of road safety issues in the most affected countries - Nigeria, Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana - provides critical insight into what needs to be done to improve such coverage and help meet the global road fatality reduction targets in the UN Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021-2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The analyses spotlight the imbalanced editorial and linguistic patterns in news reporting that contribute to victim-blaming and act as distractions from more systematic issues and solutions.

The study identified and selected the relevant stories, collected and coded them, analyzed and interpreted them, and wrote country-based reports coding, analysis, interpretations, and report writing. It analyzed how road crash stories were reported between September 2021 and September 2024, and 932 datasets were collected from media organizations.

“The analyses spotlight the imbalanced editorial and linguistic patterns in news reporting that contribute to victim-blaming and act as distractions from more systematic issues and solutions.”

¹ [Road traffic deaths rise in the African region, but down globally, WHO report | WHO | Regional Office for Africa](#) last accessed on 27 November 2024.

² [ACME Media Coverage on road safety Final Draft Pages 2](#) last accessed on 27 November 2024

PURPOSE, OBJECTIVE AND RATIONALE OF THE PROJECT

Purpose of the Project

The study aimed to assess the quality, depth, tone, and focus of news reporting on road collisions and safety in five Anglophone African countries. Therefore, it involved conducting a content analysis of news reports covering road traffic crashes in the five countries. Specifically, it used qualitative content analysis to focus on meanings and interpretations rather than the numerical counting of the articles.

Objectives of the project

The content analysis aimed to assess the quality, depth, tone, and focus of news reporting on road collisions and safety in five Anglophone Countries: Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa. The specific objectives of the project were to:

1. Identify and analyze 200 national media reports published between September 2021 and September 2024 on road collisions and safety from each of the five countries (1000 media reports).
2. Undertake content analysis for all five Anglophone countries based on the set criteria.
3. Produce a report of the content analysis with clear recommendations.

Rationale of the project

Africa is the only continent where road crash deaths and serious injuries are on the ascendancy. The media always cover traffic collisions or crashes that lead to such fatalities and injuries. Even so, the quality and effect of such reporting on public attitudes and public policy decisions remain unknown. The agenda-setting media theory and many media studies have shown that news coverage can shape public opinion on an issue for better or worse. Yet, just a single study³ Has assessed whether road crash coverage influences public attitudes.

Therefore, the study was critically important not only because it would bridge the knowledge gap in that area but also because it would be the first-ever study done on the continent. The findings will inform the WHO's efforts to support African Media in educating the public and boosting accountability for road safety actions rooted in evidence-based approaches to reducing road traffic deaths and critical injuries.

³ Does news coverage of traffic crashes affect perceived blame and preferred solutions? Evidence from an experiment. Tara Goddard et al. Transportation research, interdisciplinary perspectives. Vol 3. December 2019.



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No country in the region currently has laws that meet the best practice standards for the five key road safety behavioral risk factors: speeding, drink driving, non-use of motorcycle helmets, seatbelts, and child restraints.

1. METHODOLOGY

1.0. Scope of the study

The research study examined the reporting of crash stories across 25 media houses in five African countries: Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, and Tanzania. It analyzed how road crash stories were reported between September 2021 and September 2024, and 932 stories were collected from media organizations. The media outlets were also considered to influence the national conversation significantly.

1.1. Sampling techniques

The study adopted a purposive sampling technique. This method was appropriate because it allowed us to select a sample with specific characteristics and attributes vital to answering the research questions. These attributes included broad reach, publications in English, and online presence. So, the study identified five top media organizations in each country (and those with a significant online presence). The selection was guided by rankings by reputable institutions such as Reuters and BBC.

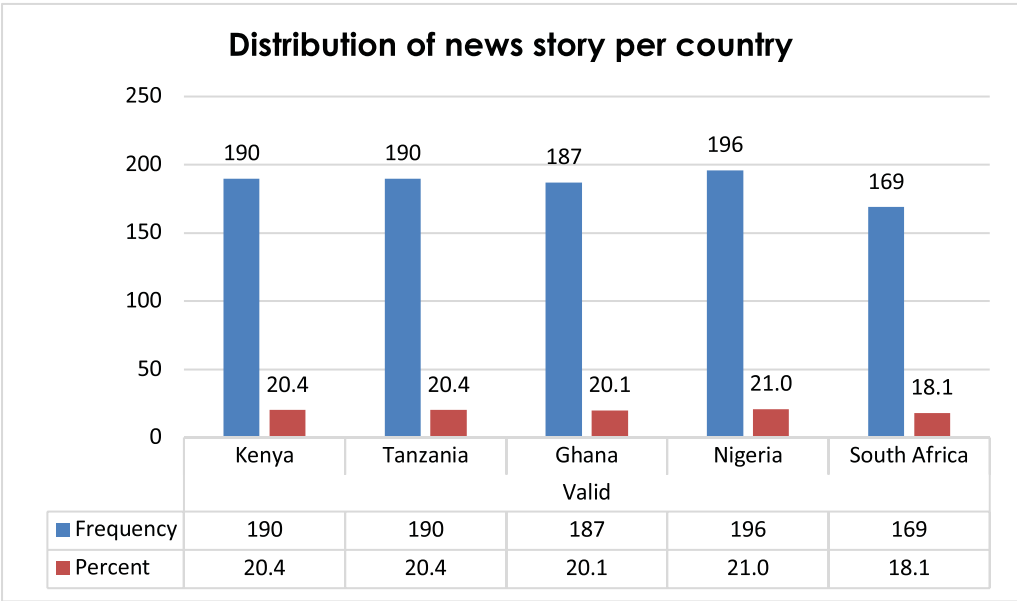


Figure 1: Distribution of news story per country

The distribution of news stories across the five countries showed a relatively balanced representation. Nigeria recorded the highest frequency at 196 stories (21 percent), and South Africa the lowest at 169 stories (18.1 percent). Kenya and Tanzania each contributed 190 stories, accounting for 20.4 percent each, while Ghana followed closely with 187 stories (20.1 percent). Overall, the variation in

the percentage distribution is minimal, ranging from 18.1 percent to 21 percent, indicating a fairly even spread of news coverage among the countries.

1.2. Methods of data collection

The study employed competent data collection teams who used content analysis to examine the selected media houses' coverage of road safety issues.

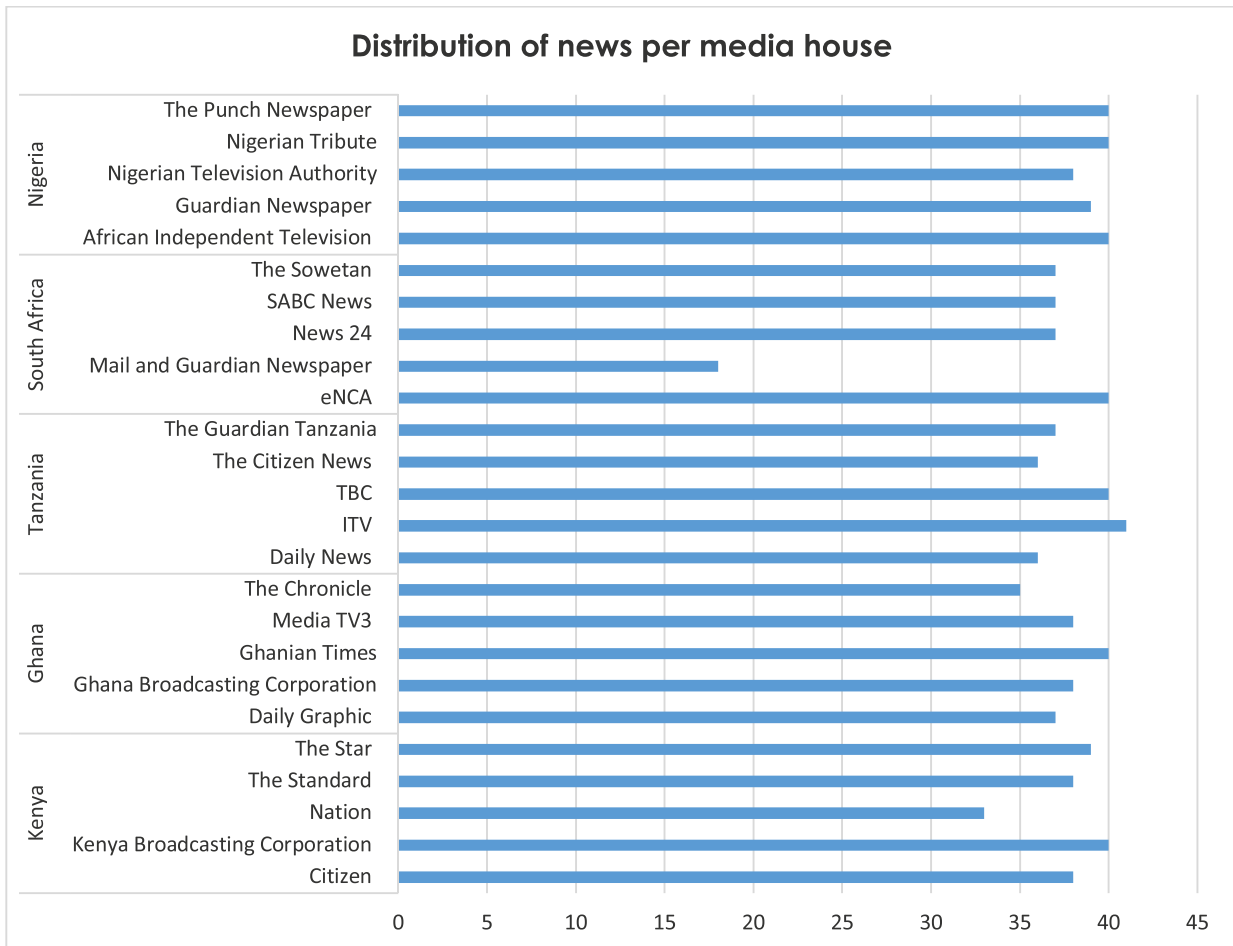


Figure 2: Distribution of news per media house

The distribution of news stories across media houses shows a relatively even spread, with most outlets contributing between 3.5 percent and 4.4 percent of the total news coverage. Tanzania's ITV recorded the highest frequency at 41 stories (4.4 percent), while South Africa's Mail and Guardian Newspaper contributed the lowest frequency at 18 stories (1.9 percent). Several media houses, including Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), Ghanaian Times, eNCA, African Independent Television, Nigerian Tribute, and The Punch Newspaper, contributed 40 stories (4.3 percent). Other prominent contributors include Citizen (Kenya), The Standard (Kenya), Media TV3 (Ghana), TBC (Tanzania), and the Nigerian Television Authority, each providing 38 stories (4.1 percent). Nine hundred thirty-two stories were reviewed across the listed media outlets, reflecting a balanced yet diverse representation of news coverage among different organizations.

1.3. Type of media

Print media comprised the most significant percentage of the dataset, 70.3 percent, while broadcast media contributed 29.7 percent.

Table 1: Type of media

	Country					Total
	Kenya	Tanzania	Ghana	Nigeria	South Africa	
Broadcast Media	8.4%	8.7%	0.0%	8.4%	4.3%	29.7%
Print Media	11.8%	11.7%	20.2%	12.8%	13.8%	70.3%
	20.2%	20.4%	20.2%	21.1%	18.1%	100.0%

To ensure the reliability of the results, inter-rater reliability (IRR) for the main study variables was calculated and found to be high.

1.4. Data Coding

Stories were coded according to the codebook with nine thematic areas in the headline focus of the story categorized as below:

- a. **Severity:** Whether the headline conveys the severity and impact of the crash. This category examined whether the headline presented the level of impact, including details of casualties and property damage, which emphasized urgency.
- b. **Location:** Did the headline include the location of the crash to enhance its relevance?
- c. **Type of crash:** Whether the headline included the type of crash, such as a head-on collision or a multi-car pileup.
- d. **Number of cars or people involved:** Does the headline have information about the number of vehicles or people involved?
- e. **Results of the crash:** Does the headline present information on the results of the collision, such as traffic delays or road closure?
- f. **Response to the crash:** Does the headline present information on emergency response or rescue efforts?
- g. **Sensational, emotional tone:** Whether the headline uses sensational language to evoke strong emotions (such as “horrific crash,” “tragic crash,” etc.).
- h. **Sympathetic or shock emotional tone:** Whether the headline presents a sympathetic or shocking tone such as “Family mourns loss” or “Driver fights for life,”
- i. **Call to action or preventive message:** Whether the headline presents a call to action on road crashes, information about the challenge of road crashes, and mitigation strategies such as legal, policy, or infrastructure implications.

1.5. Content analysis

Content analysis was used to get an all-around sense of the nature of coverage in terms of quantity and quality. Stories were coded and exported to Excel sheets and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 18.0. Univariate and bivariate analyses were conducted for all variables from 2021 to 2024. Univariate data analyses included standard descriptive statistics (frequencies), and bivariate analysis compared all the variables using a column proportion test to describe the essential characteristics of the data and to answer the following questions:

- Which road users appear to be blamed the most in crash reports?
- Do the reports use the word ‘accident’? [this word implies road deaths may be unavoidable, but certainly not preventable].
- Do the reports use thematic framing – such as comparing the number of road deaths with deaths from diseases or the number of deaths over time in a particular location?
- Do reports use quotes and information from road safety professionals such as traffic planners, traffic engineers, safety advocates, or public health professionals?
- Do reports use input and quotes from more than one expert source?
- Do the reports mention potential solutions or responses?
- Do reports and headlines frame crashes as part of a systemic public health crisis?
- Do reports mention road infrastructure quality? Laws and regulations such as speed limits or other factors beyond the role of individual road users?
- What pictures and illustrations are used to accompany the stories?
- Where are the stories placed, and how are they treated?

The summarized data was then analyzed through manifest content or “what is explicitly stated and (to) draw on the objective and replicable qualities of quantitative methods” (Hilton and Hunt (2010)⁴ The unit of analysis consisted of words, themes, characters, items, and concepts. Secondly, where appropriate and necessary, the study analyzed latent content qualitatively.⁵ To emphasize the following:

- a. Using the words *accident*, *crash*, *collision*, *incident*, or another word for a road crash.
- b. The use of *episodic framing* [implying a single event] or *thematic framing* [providing a more comprehensive or longer-term context].

4 Hilton, S. & Hunt, K. (2010). UK newspaper representations of the 2009–10 outbreak of swine flu: one health scare not over-hyped by the media? Research Report, J Epidemiol, Community Health

5 See, Krippendorff, K. (2004). Content analysis: an introduction to its methodology. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

- c. The *focus* in sentence structures and headlines [such as an emphasis on a pedestrian or the oncoming vehicle or driver when describing a crash].
- d. The use of *agentive* or *non-agentive* language [non-agentive language can mask the role of a human actor, as in this example: A pedestrian was hit and killed.]
- e. The human elements [such as quotes and explanations of crashes' impact on individuals, families, and communities to illustrate the personal, broader impact].
- f. The responses by those in authority, such as police officers, engineers, courts, police, and decision-makers.
- g. The use of *counter-factual statements* [that may imply individual blame or causes of crashes if things had been done differently, such as 'the pedestrian ran into the road.']
- h. Types of pictures and illustrations used.

1.6. Study limitations

There were some limitations to the study. First, the articles analyzed were identified purposively. They were those that mentioned or were relevant to the World Health Organization for Global Road Safety's partners and work, particularly addressing speed management, which means they may have been more likely than the average road safety article to use best practices and may not be representative of the entire universe of road safety coverage. However, this helped ensure the relevance of the articles, and our findings of increased incorporation of best practices over time suggest an independent effect of the journalists' training.

Secondly, the study design made it impossible to determine with certainty the total number of injuries or deaths in the five countries during the study period. This was because not all injuries or deaths were reported in the media and also because newspaper articles did not follow up on those who were injured, whether they ended up dying or recovering from the injuries.

Finally, the study could not definitively establish a direct correlation between the journalists' training and improved writing in road safety articles, as it did not examine articles published before and after the training or compare articles written by trained journalists with those of their untrained counterparts.



The unit of analysis consisted of words, themes, characters, items, and concepts. Secondly, where appropriate and necessary, the study analyzed latent content qualitatively.



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The most emphasized element is location, which accounts for 22.8 percent of the focus, followed by the severity of the crash at 20.2 percent. Calls to action or preventive messages are highlighted in 15.5 percent of headlines, while 10.1 percent focus on the number of vehicles or people involved.

2. FINDINGS ON MEDIA COVERAGE OF ROAD SAFETY

The study's findings are presented thematically and organized according to the research objectives. The data are presented in narratives, tables, and charts.

a. Headline focus of the story

The most emphasized element is location, which accounts for 22.8 percent of the focus, followed by the severity of the crash at 20.2 percent. Calls to action or preventive messages are highlighted in 15.5 percent of headlines, while 10.1 percent focus on the number of vehicles or people involved. Other aspects, such as the type of crash (8.5 percent), sensational, emotional tone (7.0 percent), cause of the crash (6.8 percent), and sympathetic or shocked emotional tone (6.0 percent), are moderately covered. The least emphasized elements are the results of the crash (1.7 percent) and response to the crash (1.4 percent), suggesting a stronger focus on informing and engaging readers rather than providing updates or detailed aftermath information.

Table 2: Headline focus of the story

Headline focus of the story	Country					Total
	Kenya	Tanzania	Ghana	Nigeria	South Africa	
Location	10.3%	9.6%	6.1%	8.5%	16.2%	22.8%
The severity of the crash	12.0%	9.2%	8.0%	10.7%	5.1%	20.2%
Call to action or preventive message	8.1%	9.9%	1.2%	12.0%	3.3%	15.5%
Number of vehicles or people involved	3.3%	7.1%	0.2%	3.8%	8.0%	10.1%
Type of crash	0.7%	4.2%	0.6%	8.8%	4.4%	8.5%
Sensational Emotional tone	1.5%	2.1%	2.3%	2.7%	7.0%	7.0%
Cause of crash	0.8%	2.1%	0.4%	7.0%	4.7%	6.8%
Sympathetic or shocked emotional tone	5.8%	1.2%	2.2%	2.3%	1.8%	6.0%
Results of the crash	0.0%	0.8%	0.1%	0.0%	2.9%	1.7%
Response to the crash	0.1%	1.0%	0.1%	0.0%	1.8%	1.4%

South Africa's and Nigeria's media focused heavily on the severity of crashes (20.2 percent and 10.7 percent, respectively) and incorporated emotional tones, with a notable sensational portrayal (7.0 percent). Nigeria's media also reported more

frequently on the cause of the crash (7.0 percent) and included calls to action or preventive messages (12.0 percent), reflecting a proactive approach. In contrast, Kenya’s and Ghana’s media prioritized location and severity but reported less on the cause (0.8 percent and 0.4 percent, respectively), with Ghana’s media notably lacking preventive messaging (1.2 percent). Tanzania’s media similarly focused on location and severity but with a lower emphasis on causes or preventive actions. Overall, while the severity and location of the crash dominated reporting across all countries, South Africa’s and Nigeria’s media stand out for their focus on emotional impact and proactive safety messaging. In contrast, Ghana’s and Kenya’s media provided more factual, less emotionally driven coverage.

b. Focus of the story

The data indicates that media houses primarily allocate low-focus⁶ Regarding road crash stories, 38.8 percent of reports feature less than two minutes of broadcast or under 300 words in print. Medium focus⁷, comprising two to three minutes of broadcast or 300 – 600 words in print, accounts for 36.8 percent of the coverage, suggesting a balanced level of attention for a significant portion of stories.

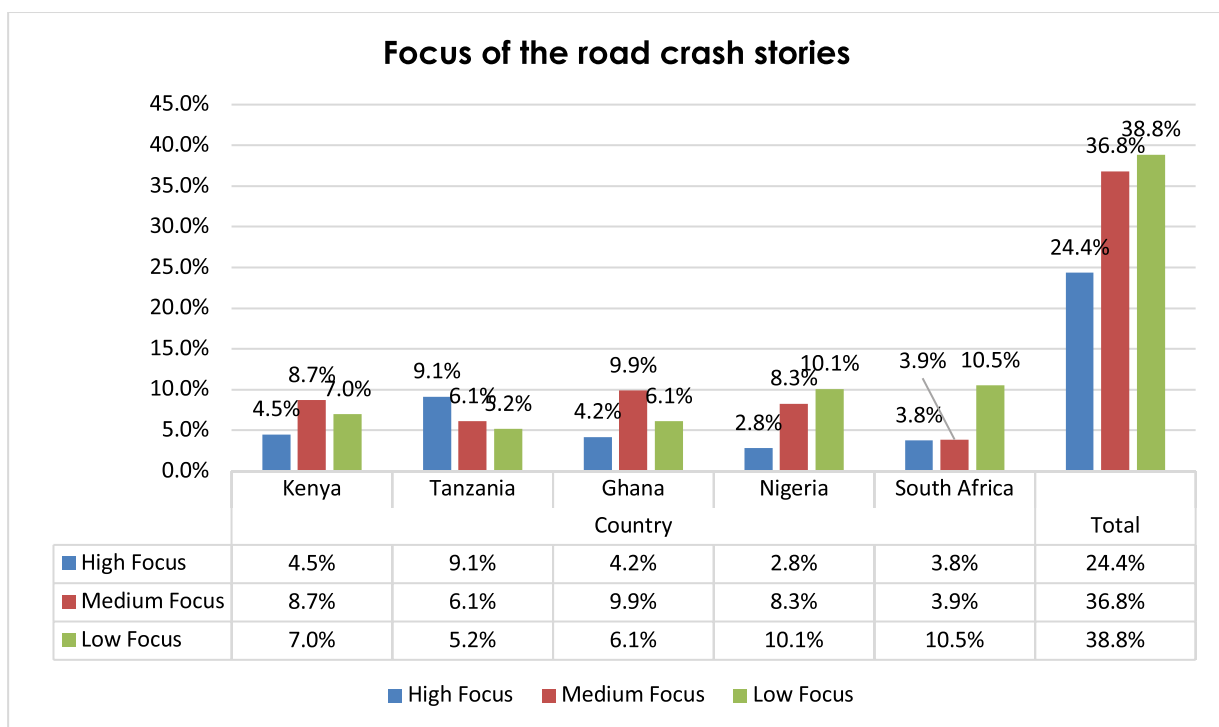


Figure 3: Focus of the road crash stories

Meanwhile, high-focus⁸ Stories involving more than three minutes of broadcast or more than 600 words in print represent 24.4 percent of the coverage, showing that

6 The story has less than 2 minutes of feature on the broadcast or The story has less than 300 words in print.

7 The story has between 2 – 3 minutes’ feature on the broadcast or The story has between 300 to 600 words in print.

8 The story has more than 3 minutes’ feature on the broadcast or more than 600 words in print media.

fewer crashes receive in-depth reporting. This distribution highlights a tendency to provide brief coverage for most crashes while reserving detailed attention for select, high-impact incidents.

The media in different countries showed varying levels of focus on road crash stories. South Africa had a notably high proportion of low-focus (10.5 percent) and medium-focus (3.9 percent) stories, suggesting less overall emphasis on crashes. Kenya and Ghana have similar patterns, with medium focus at 8.7 percent and 9.9 percent, respectively, and relatively low high-focus stories (4.5 percent and 4.2 percent), indicating a more moderate approach to coverage of road collisions. Tanzania reported the most in-depth coverage, with 9.1 percent high focus and 6.1 percent medium focus, reflecting a stronger emphasis on road crashes. Conversely, Nigeria had the lowest high-focus stories (2.8 percent) and a significant portion of low-focus stories (10.1 percent), indicating a more detached approach to the issue. Overall, the findings suggest that Tanzania had the most focused reporting, while South Africa and Nigeria showed less attention to the problem.

c. Episodic vs Thematic Framing of stories

Episodic framing dominates all five countries, accounting for over 65 percent of crash story coverage. Ghana had the highest episodic framing (75 percent), followed by Tanzania (73 percent) and Nigeria (72 percent). South Africa showed the highest percentage of thematic framing (35 percent), indicating a more balanced approach to reporting.

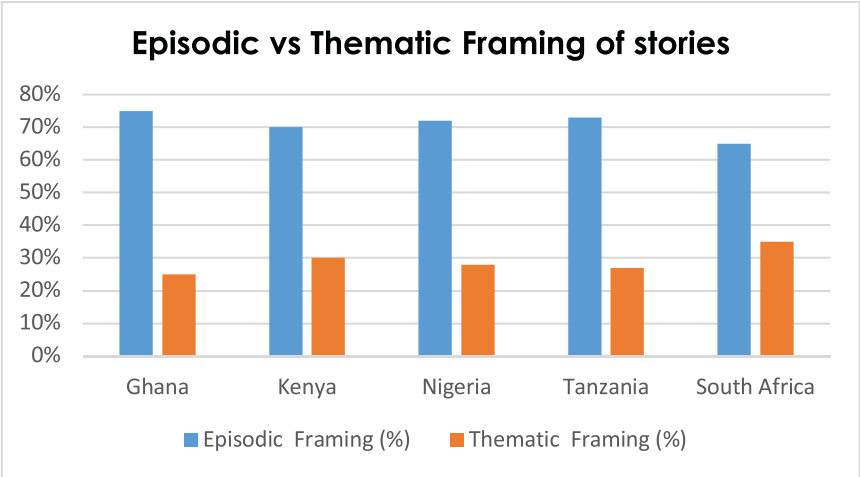


Figure 4: Episodic VS Thematic Framing of Stories

Ghana had the lowest thematic framing, at only 25 percent, followed closely by Tanzania and Nigeria. This suggests systemic causes, such as road infrastructure and policy failures, were underreported.

d. Genre of road crash stories

The findings indicate that most road crash stories published by media houses were presented as news articles, making up 67.1 percent of the coverage. A smaller proportion, 29.8 percent, are featured as in-depth reports or human-interest pieces, while opinion articles account for just 3.1 percent of the total coverage. This suggests that media outlets prioritize delivering factual, immediate news over commentary or feature-driven narratives when reporting on road crashes.

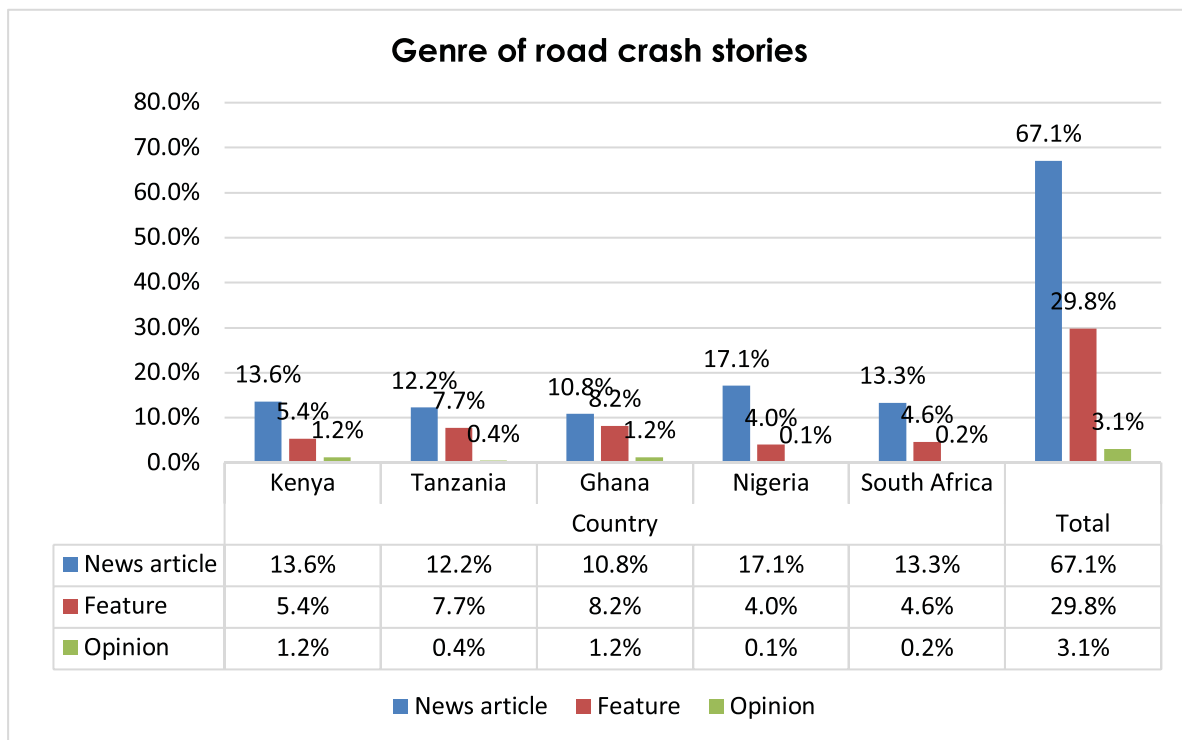


Figure 5: Genre of road crash stories

The media in the five countries presented road crash stories through different genre types, with news articles being the most common form of coverage. Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa had a relatively high percentage of news articles, with 13.6 percent, 17.1 percent, and 13.3 percent, respectively, reflecting a strong focus on reporting road crashes as news events. Tanzania (12.2 percent) and Ghana (10.8 percent) also presented road crash stories mainly through news articles, though at slightly lower rates. Feature articles were more common in Tanzania (7.7 percent) and Ghana (8.2 percent), suggesting a deeper exploration of the topic in these countries, while Kenya and South Africa have fewer features. Opinion pieces were less frequently used across all countries, with Nigeria (0.1 percent) and South Africa (0.2 percent) showing the lowest use. Meanwhile, Kenya, Tanzania, and Ghana had slightly higher percentages but remained low, indicating that road crash stories were rarely presented as opinion-based content. Most road crash stories were presented as news articles, while features and opinion pieces were fewer.

e. Causes of road crashes as reported by media houses

The data reveals that media reports on road crashes overwhelmingly attributed the primary cause to poor driver behavior, which accounted for 44.5 percent of cases. Other significant contributing factors included vehicle-related issues (10.5 percent), poor road infrastructure (6.7 percent), and a lack of law enforcement and traffic monitoring (5.4 percent). Environmental and weather conditions and pedestrian and cyclist-related problems were less frequently cited, comprising 1.1 percent and 3.1 percent, respectively. Remarkably, 24.8 percent of reports did not specify a cause, and only a tiny fraction (0.3 percent) mentioned high traffic volume. Additionally, 3.7 percent of cases were attributed to causes not explicitly categorized, indicating a focus on driver behavior as the dominant factor in road crashes.

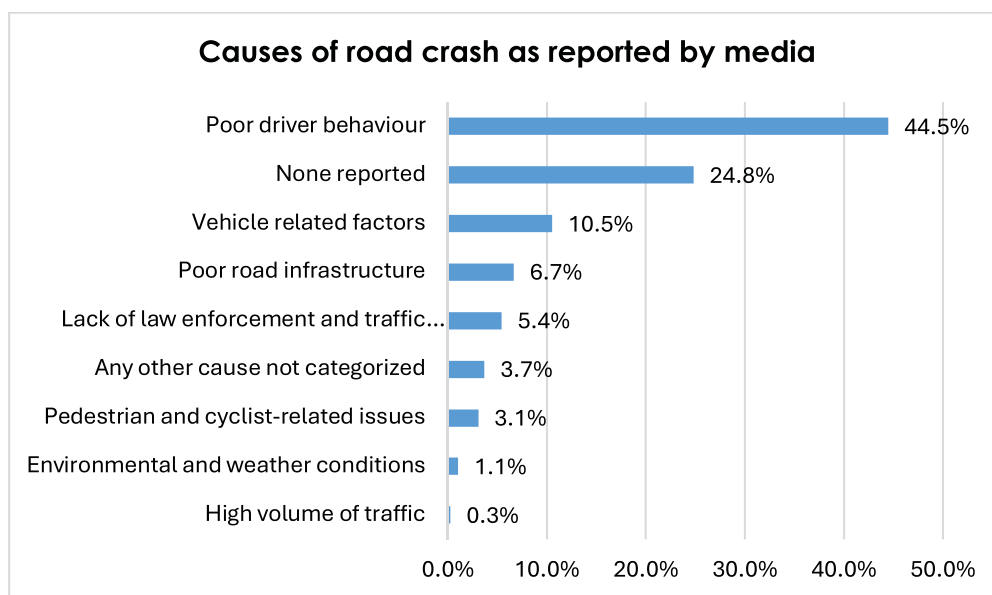


Figure 6: Causes of road crash as reported by media

In Kenya, Tanzania, Ghana, and Nigeria, poor driver behavior accounted for 10.3 percent to 12.0 percent of the reports, while South Africa reported it at 8.5 percent. Vehicle-related factors were also highlighted, with Kenya (3.6 percent) and Tanzania (3.5 percent) reporting the highest frequencies, although the percentage dropped in South Africa (1.3 percent). Poor road infrastructure was highlighted as a contributing factor, with Kenya (1.4 percent) and Tanzania (2.3 percent) showing the most frequent mention, while South Africa reported the lowest (0.9 percent). Pedestrian and cyclist-related issues were underreported primarily, particularly in South Africa, where they were not mentioned. Environmental and weather conditions were minimally addressed across all countries, with South Africa and Tanzania having the lowest percentages (0.1 percent). Additionally, issues like law enforcement and traffic monitoring, high traffic volume, and uncategorized causes were mentioned sporadically. Finally, many road crash stories in all countries either did not specify a cause or failed to mention any reason, with South Africa reporting

the highest percentage of such cases (7.5 percent). The media focused the most on poor driver behavior, vehicle-related issues, and poor road infrastructure.

f. Counterfactual statements

The focus on individual actions over systemic failures, such as poor road infrastructure or enforcement of traffic laws, was consistent across the countries. Nigeria showed the highest rate of victim-blaming, at 65 percent. In comparison, South Africa has the lowest, at 55 percent, with statements implying that a victim could have avoided death or injury if they had behaved differently.

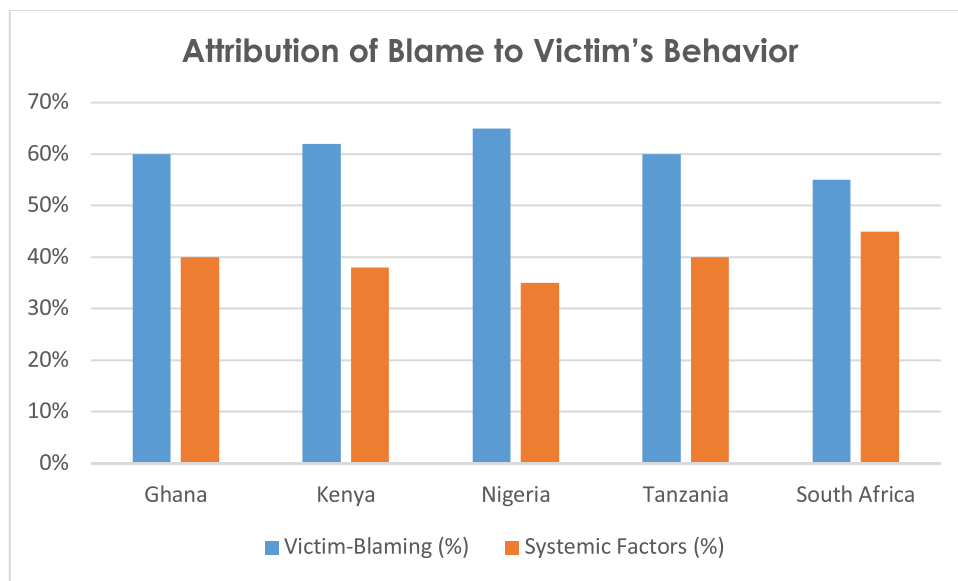


Figure 7: Attribution of Blame to Victim's Behavior

South Africa also had the highest percentage of reports (45 percent) focusing on systemic factors, suggesting a less counterfactual reporting approach than other countries.

g. Object-based and person-based language

All countries leaned towards person-based language (over 60 percent), emphasizing the individual actions of drivers or victims over systemic issues. Ghana had the highest percentage of person-based language, at 70 percent, followed by Nigeria (68 percent) and Tanzania (66 percent). South Africa had the lowest use of person-based language, at 63 percent, with a slightly higher focus on systemic, object-based descriptions (37 percent).

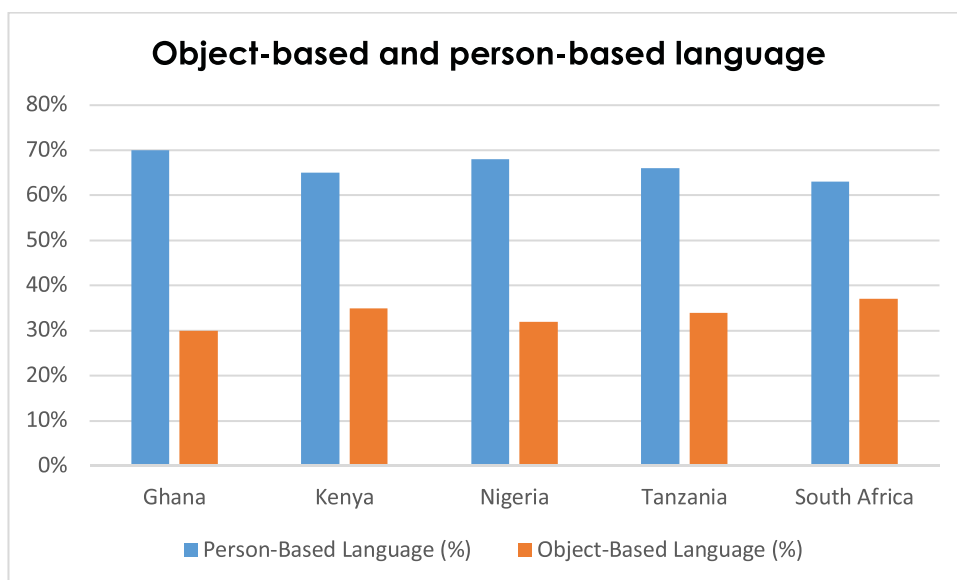


Figure 8: Object-based and person-based language

South Africa had a more balanced approach, with higher percentages of object-based language (37 percent) and systemic framing (45 percent). Object-based language reduces emotional engagement and shifts focus toward technical or environmental causes rather than individual responsibility. Person-based language, on the other hand, creates emotional engagement, but it can lead to individual blame while sidelining systemic issues.

h. Human Element Suffering

The section analyzed whether the crash stories depicted human element suffering, including deaths, injury, or no suffering reported. The data indicates that most road crash stories (65.8 percent) did not report any human suffering, suggesting a focus on other aspects of the incident, such as the causes or aftermath. Of the stories that do address human suffering, 19.0 percent reported both deaths and injuries, while 11.6 percent focused solely on fatalities. A smaller proportion, 3.6 percent, reported only injuries. This suggests that while the human impact of road crashes was acknowledged in many stories, many reports did not delve into the details of suffering, potentially emphasizing other crash elements instead.

“Object-based language reduces emotional engagement and shifts focus toward technical or environmental causes rather than individual responsibility.”

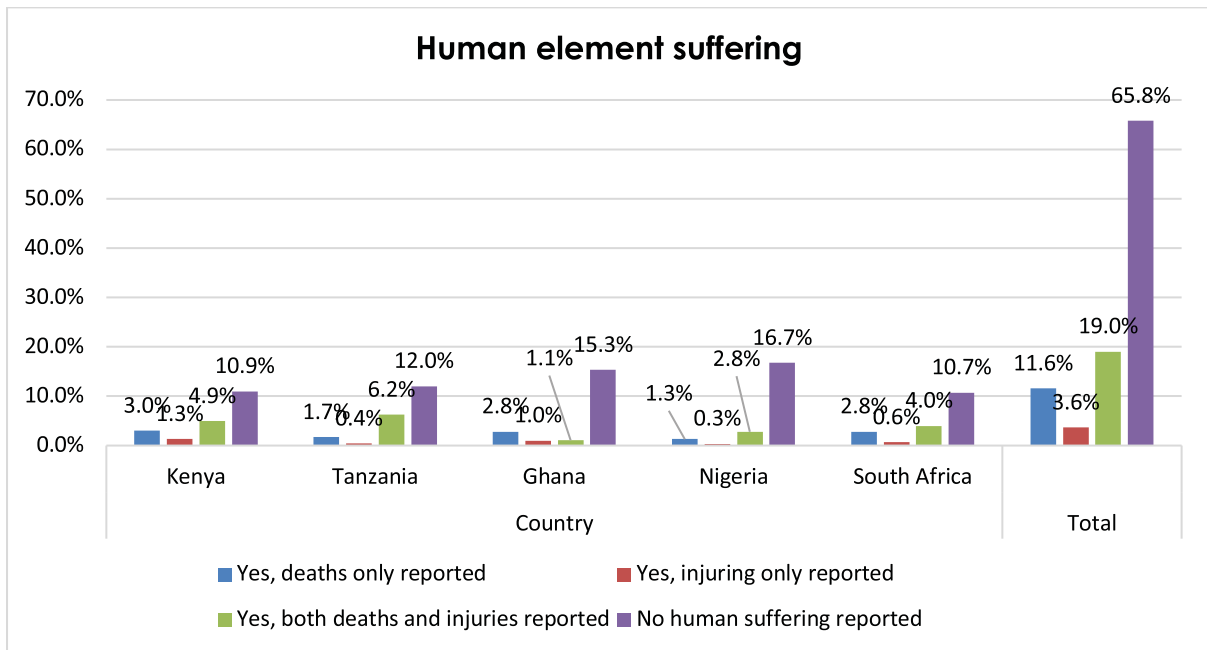


Figure 9: Human element suffering

South Africa and Kenya reported deaths only in 3.0 percent and 2.8 percent of the stories, respectively, while Tanzania and Nigeria reported even lower percentages (1.7 percent and 1.3 percent). When both deaths and injuries were reported, Kenya (4.9 percent) and Tanzania (6.2 percent) led in including both aspects. In comparison, Ghana (1.1 percent) and Nigeria (2.8 percent) reported less frequently on both. Injuries only were mentioned in a smaller proportion of reports, particularly in Kenya (1.3 percent) and South Africa (0.6 percent). Notably, no human suffering was reported in many stories, especially in Nigeria (16.7 percent) and Ghana (15.3 percent). Kenya (10.9 percent) and South Africa (10.7 percent) also showed significant figures. Overall, while some countries reported on deaths and injuries, a considerable number of stories, particularly in Nigeria and Ghana, did not include any mention of human suffering.

i. Keywords used in road crash stories

The data reveals that “accident” was the most commonly used keyword in media road crash stories, appearing in 52.2 percent of cases. “Crash” was the second most frequent term, used in 26.8 percent of stories, while “collision” was less common, appearing in 4.8 percent of the reports. Other keywords, such as “incident” (4.1 percent) and “ramming” (0.3 percent), also made an appearance but were far less prominent. A small proportion of stories (4.5 percent) did not use any specific term, and other terms like “smash” and “hit” were very rarely used, each appearing in less than 1 percent of the stories. This suggests a clear preference in the media for the more common or widely recognized term “accident” over other descriptors.

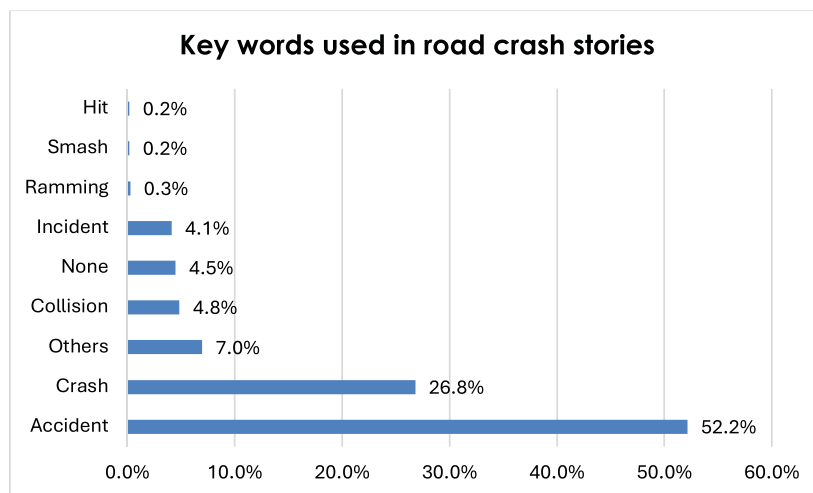


Figure 10: Keywords used in road crash stories

Kenya (14.2 percent), Tanzania (16.5 percent), and Ghana (12.1 percent) reported road crashes predominantly as accidents, while South Africa used them less frequently (7.0 percent). The term “crash” was also commonly used, especially in Ghana (10.9 percent) and Nigeria (8.8 percent), but it was less prevalent in Tanzania (2.6 percent) and Kenya (3.1 percent). Other terms such as “collision” and “incident” appeared in fewer stories, with “collision” being most prominent in South Africa (1.6 percent) and Tanzania (2.0 percent), and “incident” appearing more often in Tanzania (1.5 percent) and Nigeria (1.6 percent). Words like “smash,” “hit,” and “ramming” were rarely used, with “smash” being absent in all countries except Tanzania and South Africa. Some stories in Kenya (2.4 percent) and South Africa (2.0 percent) reported crashes without using these terms. Overall, “accident” was the dominant keyword used to describe road crashes, while other terms like “crash” and “collision” were less frequently used across the countries.

j. Sources quoted in road crash stories

The data highlights that media reports on road crashes predominantly rely on official sources, with government officials (31.6 percent) and police (30.6 percent) being the most commonly quoted. Government officials in this area included the ministries of transport, national and local government officials, and government agencies that deal with road transport, such as the NTSA in Kenya. Other sources included organizations (9.8 percent), such as emergency response, and eyewitnesses (9.1 percent), although these were less frequent. Medical personnel, drivers, and survivors were quoted in smaller percentages, at 3.8 percent, 2.2 percent, and 1.4 percent, respectively. Written reports and pedestrians were even less frequently cited, appearing in only 1.2 percent and 0.6 percent of the cases. Additionally, 5.1 percent of stories referenced sources that were not categorized, suggesting some diversity in the types of sources used, though official and authoritative voices were dominant. Only a few stories (4.5 percent) did not quote any sources.

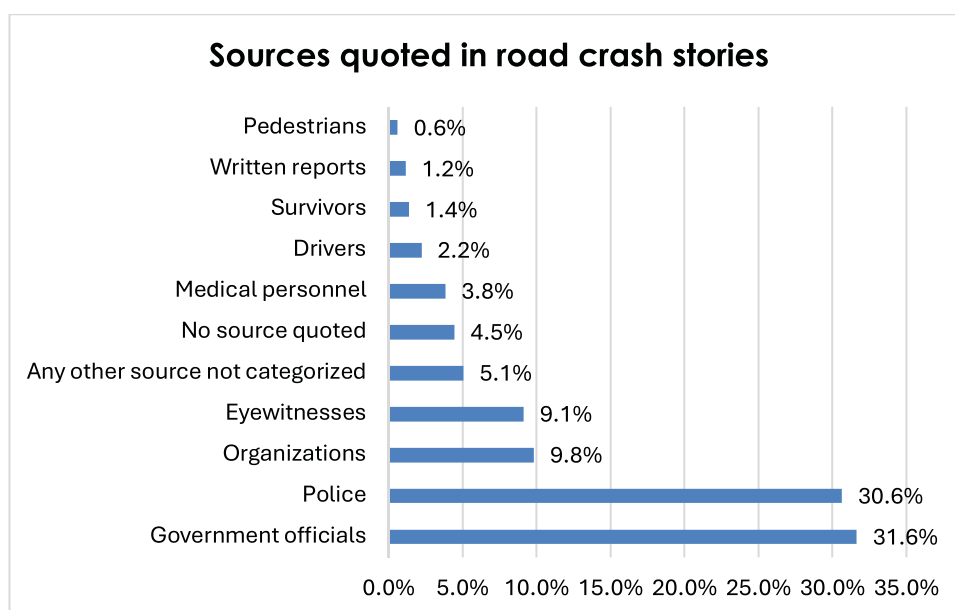


Figure 11: Sources quoted in road crash stories

In Kenya (6.2 percent) and South Africa (5.7 percent), police were cited more often, while Nigeria (13.8 percent) gave the police the highest prominence. Government officials were also widely quoted, particularly in Ghana (13.5 percent) and Nigeria (7.9 percent), with Kenya (7.6 percent) and South Africa (7.3 percent) showing similar figures. Eyewitnesses were cited in Kenya (5.2 percent) but were less prominent in other countries, particularly South Africa (0.2 percent). Medical personnel were mentioned in Tanzania (2.0 percent) and Kenya (1.2 percent), though the overall frequency was low across the countries. Drivers were rarely quoted, with the highest mention in Kenya (1.3 percent). The use of sources like pedestrians and survivors was minimal, especially in South Africa, where survivors were not quoted at all. A few stories in all countries were reported without citing any source, particularly in Nigeria (0.4 percent). Overall, police, government officials, and eyewitnesses were the key sources used by the media, with some variation in the emphasis placed on each.

k. Number of deaths due to road crashes reported by media

The data reveals that a large proportion of road crash stories did not report on the number of people killed or injured, with 58.7 percent of stories providing no information on fatalities and 65.5 percent omitting details on [injuries](#). Several factors may explain this unusual trend. First, there are [stories](#) of road collisions in which there were fatalities but no injuries and vice versa. Second, some [stories](#) analyzed for this study were commentaries/news analyses. Third, other stories analyzed were based on non-crash events, such as a government officer or local leader warning motorists against [reckless driving](#) or driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Among those that report casualty figures, the majority involve relatively small numbers, with 28.0 percent of stories reporting between one and 10 fatalities and 22.0 percent reporting a similar range for injuries. Fatalities in the range of 11-20 occurred in 9.3 percent of stories, while injuries in that range were reported in 5.8 percent.

Higher casualty numbers (more than 20 deaths or injuries) were very rarely mentioned, with only 0.6 percent of stories reporting more than 100 deaths or injuries. This suggests that while media outlets sometimes provided casualty figures, many road crash reports focused more on the event than detailed reporting on the human toll.

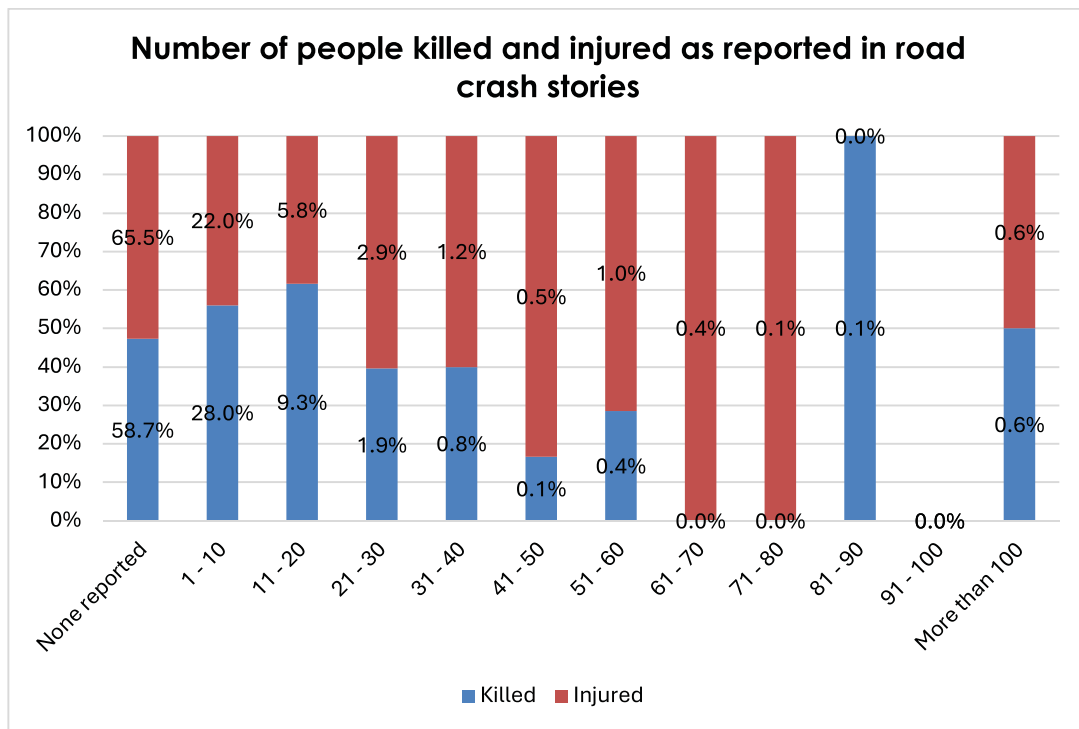


Figure 12: Number of people killed and injured as reported in road crash stories

Regarding fatalities, a significant portion of stories across all countries report no deaths, with Nigeria (13.9 percent) and Ghana (13.7 percent) having the highest percentages. In comparison, Kenya (8.7 percent) and South Africa (10.5 percent) reported fewer stories with no fatalities. For crashes involving 0-10 deaths, Kenya (7.8 percent) and South Africa (5.7 percent) reported more, while fatalities over 10 were less common, with only a few reports mentioning 11-20 deaths (such as Kenya at 2.9 percent).

I. Number of deaths reported by Genre of the story

News articles accounted for 67.1 percent of the coverage of crashes with fatalities. Features represented 29.8 percent, highlighting more detailed and descriptive accounts of fatal road crash stories. Opinion pieces were minimal at 3.1 percent, showing limited inclusion of personal perspectives or editorial content in stories reporting on fatalities.

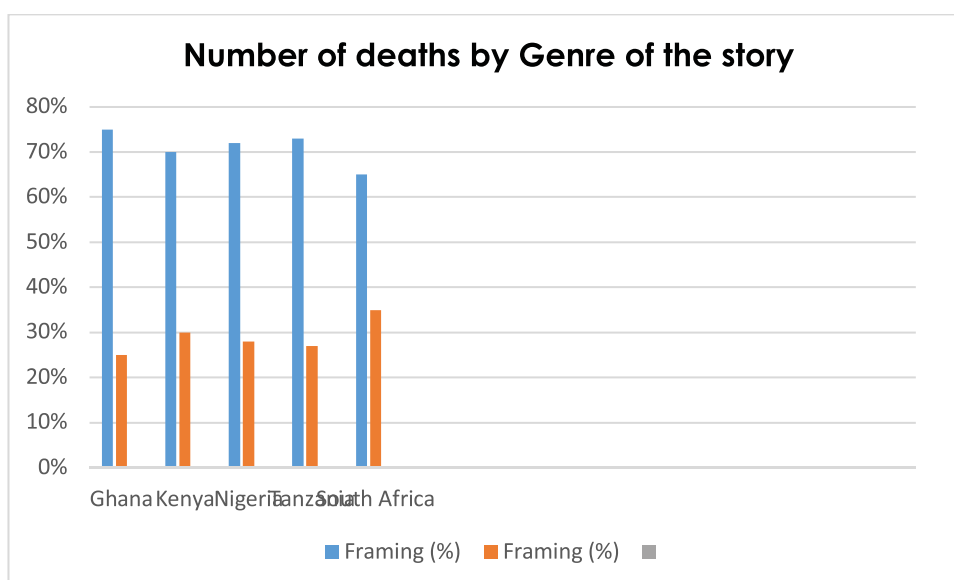


Figure 13: Number of deaths reported by Genre of the story

m. Number of injuries due to road crashes reported by media

Some stories reported no injuries, especially in Nigeria (15.6 percent) and Ghana (14.7 percent). The 0–10 injured category was most common, with Kenya (6.8 percent) and Tanzania (5.2 percent) reporting a higher percentage of stories with fewer injuries. Crashes with higher injury counted, such as 11–20 injuries or more, were less frequently reported, with South Africa and Nigeria showing the smallest percentages for more than 100 injuries.

Table 3: Number of injuries due to road crashes reported by media

No. of people injured	Country					Total
	Kenya	Tanzania	Ghana	Nigeria	South Africa	
0	10.1%	12.8%	14.7%	15.6%	12.3%	65.5%
0–10	6.8%	3.6%	3.1%	4.4%	4.1%	
11–20	1.7%	1.9%	0.9%	0.4%	0.9%	5.8%
21–30	0.4%	1.2%	0.8%	0.3%	0.2%	2.9%
31–40	0.3%	0.4%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	1.2%
41–50	0.4%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%
51–60	0.3%	0.1%	0.0%	0.3%	0.2%	1.0%
61–70	0.1%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.4%
71–80	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
81–90	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%
91–100	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
More than 100	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%
Total	20.2%	20.4%	20.2%	21.1%	18.1%	100.0%

Overall, fatalities and injuries were reported in varying degrees, with no deaths or injuries frequently mentioned and reports involving a more significant number of fatalities or injuries being less common. This implies that most road crashes did not lead to high deaths or injuries.

n. Number of injuries reported by Genre of the story

News articles accounted for the majority of coverage, with 67.1 percent of the total focus on crashes involving injuries. Features contributed 29.8 percent, indicating a greater reliance on in-depth and detailed narratives for crash stories involving injuries. Opinion pieces were minimal, comprising only 3.1 percent of coverage, suggesting that personal viewpoints or editorials were less emphasized in injury-related road crash stories.

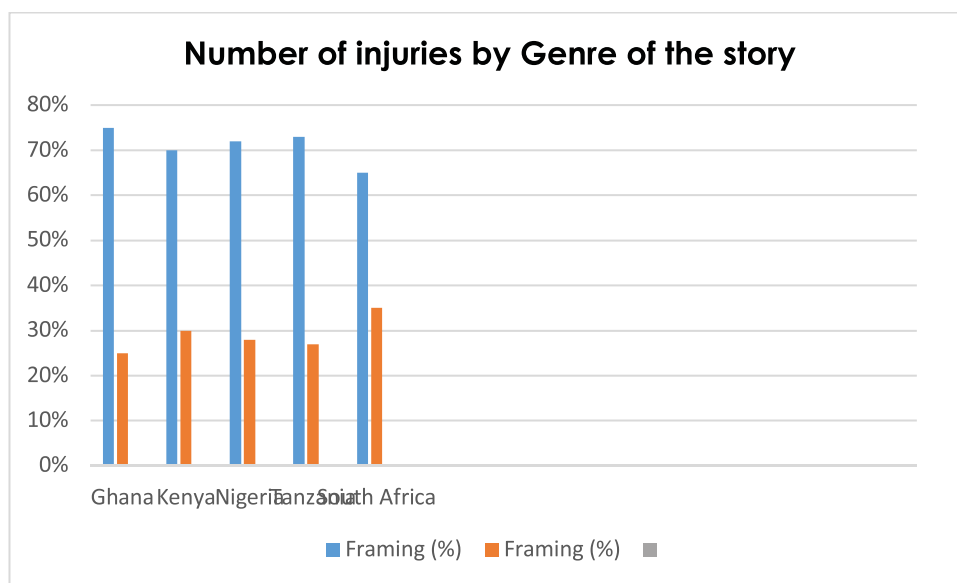


Figure 14: Number of injuries by Genre of the story

Overall, both injury-related and fatal road crash stories were predominantly covered through news articles, with features providing more comprehensive and detailed narratives. At the same time, opinion pieces remained marginal in all types of crash reporting.

o. Framing of road crashes as a public health crisis

The data indicates that media houses overwhelmingly did not frame road crash stories as a public health crisis, with 95.8 percent of the articles not reporting on the effects of the road crashes on medical facilities, personnel, and expenditures (national and households). Only a tiny minority, 4.2 percent, approached road crashes as a public health issue, suggesting that media coverage primarily treated these incidents as isolated events or focused on other aspects, such as traffic, legal, or human-interest angles, rather than addressing the broader public health implications.

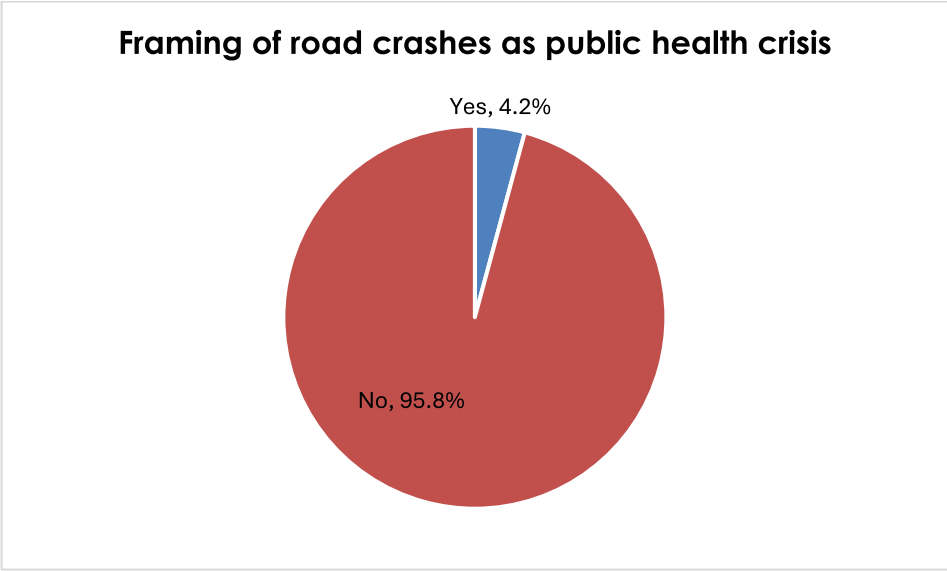


Figure 15: Framing of road crashes as a public health crisis

The percentage of stories that framed road crashes as a public health issue was low across all countries, with Ghana (1.5 percent) having the highest mention of road crashes as a public health crisis, followed by Tanzania (1.1 percent) and Kenya (1.0 percent). Nigeria (0.4 percent) and South Africa (0.2 percent) reported even fewer stories in this context. In contrast, most stories in all countries, ranging from 17.9 percent in South Africa to 20.7 percent in Nigeria, did not consider road crashes a public health crisis. Overall, while a few reports may address road crashes in the context of public health, the dominant narrative in the media focused on other aspects, with a strong emphasis on non-health-related reporting.

p. Context of road crash stories

The data reveals that media coverage of road crashes rarely delved into the broader contextual factors influencing such incidents. Many stories (65.0 percent) provided no context, focusing solely on the event. Among the few that address context, laws were the most commonly discussed factor, appearing in 14.0 percent of reports, followed by infrastructure quality (10.8 percent) and policies (6.8 percent). Only a small percentage of stories mentioned driving skills and vehicle conditions, at 1.9 percent and 1.6 percent, respectively. This suggests that while there was some recognition of systemic issues like legal frameworks and infrastructure, the broader context surrounding road crashes was often underreported in the media.

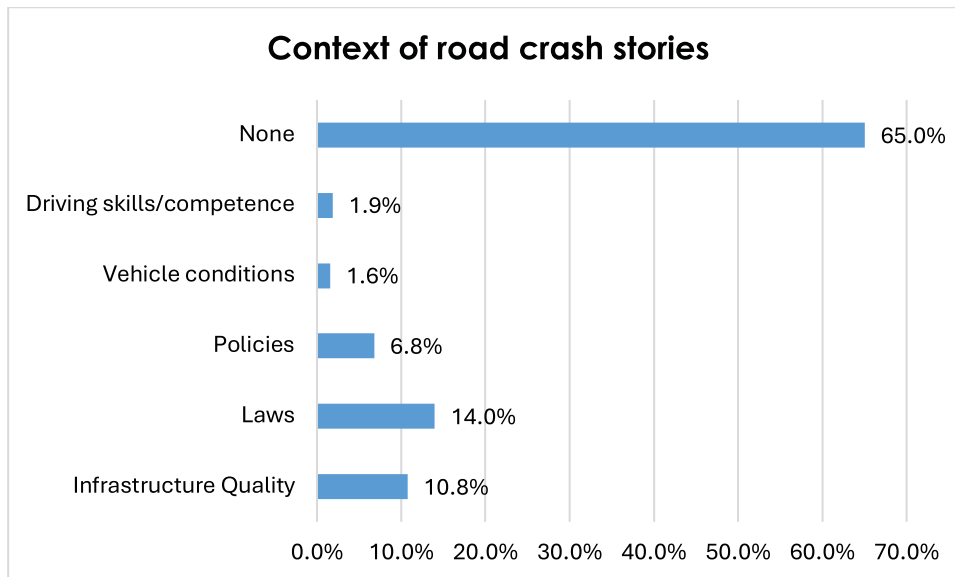


Figure 16: Context of road crash stories

In Nigeria (17.7 percent) and South Africa (14.9 percent), many stories were reported without context. When the context is provided, laws were referenced in Ghana (5.1 percent), Tanzania (3.5 percent), and Kenya (2.7 percent). The percentage was lower in South Africa (1.2 percent). Infrastructure quality was most frequently mentioned in Kenya (4.4 percent) but is less emphasized in other countries, especially South Africa (0.8 percent). Policies were mentioned in Ghana (3.3 percent) but were absent in South Africa (0.0 percent) and Nigeria (0.9 percent). There was minimal discussion of factors like driving skills/competence and vehicle conditions, with only a few reports referencing them, notably in Kenya (0.6 percent) and Tanzania (0.6 percent) for driving skills and Kenya (0.9 percent) for vehicle conditions. Overall, most road crash stories focused on the incident without framing the crashes within broader contextual factors, with laws, infrastructure, and policies being the most commonly referenced contexts when they were included.

q. Visuals used in road crash reportage

The data shows that media outlets predominantly used pictures to report road crashes, with 58.4 percent of stories featuring photographic images. This was also mainly because print media comprised 73.2 percent of the dataset. Videos were also a significant visual medium, appearing in 25.4 percent of reports, indicating the use of dynamic content to convey the severity or impact of crashes. However, 12.3 percent of stories included no visuals, while a smaller percentage incorporated illustration (2.1 percent) and graphics (1.8 percent), suggesting that more creative or abstract visual aids were less common. This highlights the media's preference for using real-life images and videos to provide a more immediate and impactful representation of road crashes.

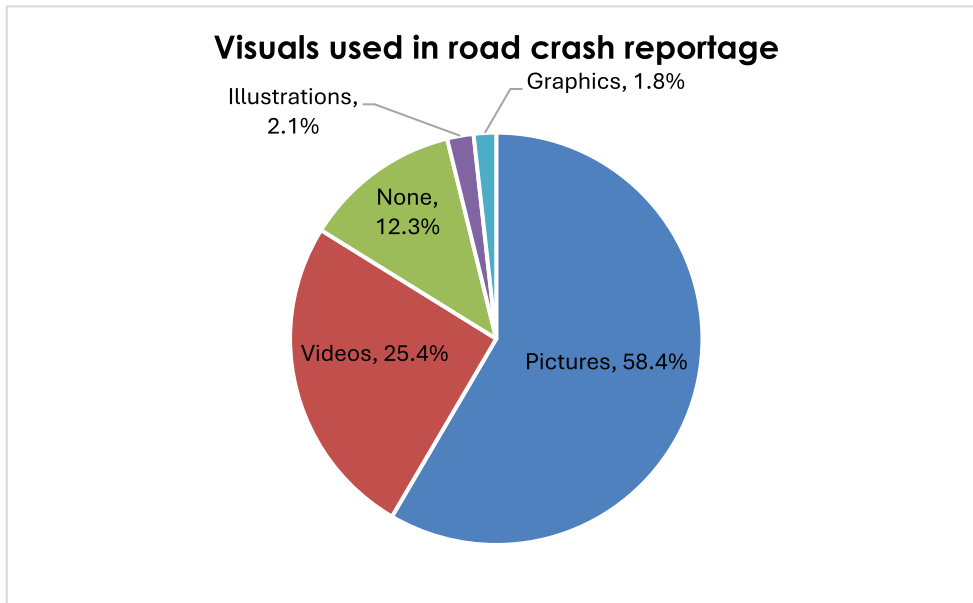


Figure 17: Visuals used in road crash reportage

Ghana (17.5 percent) reported the highest percentage of stories with pictures, followed by Nigeria (12.6 percent) and Tanzania (10.8 percent), while Kenya (10.4 percent) and South Africa (9.2 percent) used them slightly less frequently. Videos were also used, with Tanzania (7.6 percent) and Kenya (7.0 percent) incorporating them most often, while Ghana (0.4 percent) and Nigeria (4.9 percent) used them less frequently. The use of illustrations is rare, with South Africa (1.7 percent) being the most frequent user, and graphics are similarly limited, mostly appearing in Nigeria (1.2 percent). Most stories generally included visual elements, notably pictures, though videos and illustrations were less commonly employed. A small portion of stories in all countries did not include visuals, with South Africa (3.2 percent) and Kenya (2.8 percent) reporting the highest percentage of stories without visual content.

r. Solutions provided in road crash stories.

The data indicates that media coverage of road crash incidents was almost evenly split in presenting solutions to address these incidents. In 52.1 percent of the stories, solutions were discussed, suggesting that some media outlets sought to provide a constructive angle, offering potential ways to prevent future crashes or improve road safety. However, many stories (47.9 percent) did not present solutions, implying that many reports focused primarily on the event or the immediate aftermath without addressing broader preventive measures or long-term strategies.

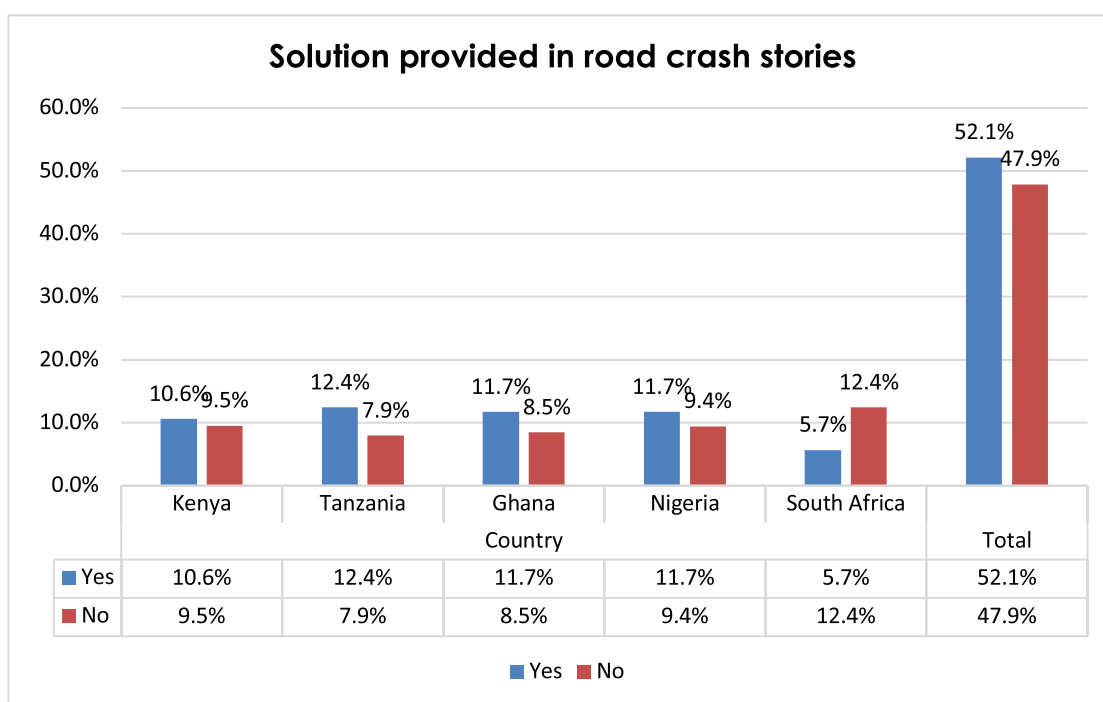


Figure 18: Solution provided in road crash stories

Tanzania (12.4 percent) reported the highest percentage of stories that offered solutions (see examples [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)), followed by Ghana ([example](#)) and Nigeria([example](#)) (both at 11.7 percent) and Kenya (10.6 percent). South Africa (5.7 percent) had the lowest percentage of stories with solutions. Conversely, most stories in each country did not provide solutions. South Africa (12.4 percent) had the highest percentage of stories without solutions, followed by Kenya (9.5 percent), Nigeria (9.4 percent), Ghana (8.5 percent), and Tanzania (7.9 percent). While some road crash stories offered solutions, they remained absent in many reports, especially in South Africa.



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This analysis underscores the importance of shifting the media narrative toward systemic accountability to promote safer roads and effective policies.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- To improve road safety reporting in Africa, journalists should investigate systemic issues more thoroughly rather than just focusing on individual road users like drivers or pedestrians.
- Journalists, editors, and media houses should avoid victim-blaming by focusing on broader systemic issues like road infrastructure and traffic regulations.
- Use thematic framing to highlight recurring trends and provide data-driven insights to improve public awareness and policy interventions.
- Journalists, editors, and media houses should be positioned to deliberately prioritize road safety stories. This will establish road safety as an essential public and policy issue.
- Conduct capacity building for reporters and editors to improve their skills and enhance reporting on road safety.
- Provide newsrooms with adequate resources, including materials and story grants, to increase their coverage of the road safety beat.
- Design a precise engagement plan with the police department, relevant government offices, and academy to improve the quality of sources for traffic crash stories.
- Propose or introduce, in conjunction with transportation authorities, a unique annual media award targeting road safety reporters and media houses.
- Embed road safety training component in media training schools to introduce journalism students to aspects of road safety reporting as a socio-economic and health issue.
- Support continuous outreach by public health and national transportation bodies in the critical aspects of road crashes as a public health concern.
- Establish and support an Africa-wide network of road safety reporters and editors.

This analysis underscores the importance of shifting the media narrative toward systemic accountability to promote safer roads and effective policies.



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The focus on individual actions over systemic failures, such as poor road infrastructure or enforcement of traffic laws, was a consistent trend across the countries.

4. CONCLUSION

This study's findings show a lack of appreciation of the importance of road safety stories to society. The media houses continue to relegate road safety stories, which continue to be driven by events (especially road crashes), covered as predominantly news and relegated to the inner pages of the newspapers.

All countries lean towards person-based language (more than 60 percent), emphasizing the individual actions of drivers or victims over systemic issues. This practice unevenly portrays agency and may implicitly assign greater responsibility to the Vulnerable Road User (VRU). South Africa had a more balanced approach, with higher percentages of object-based language (37 percent) and systemic framing (45 percent).

Victim blaming was prevalent in all five countries, with Nigeria (65 percent) leading and South Africa (55 percent) showing a relatively lower tendency to blame victims. This might lead audiences to perceive accidents as isolated incidents caused by individual negligence, overlooking systemic issues. Victim-blaming narratives hinder public discourse on sustainable solutions like better crosswalks, lighting, and education campaigns.

The focus on individual actions over systemic failures, such as poor road infrastructure or enforcement of traffic laws, was a consistent trend across the countries. Without thematic framing highlighting broader issues, there may be less public pressure for comprehensive road safety reforms.

In conclusion, this study highlighted the importance of shifting the media narrative toward systemic accountability to promote safer roads and effective policies. The predominance of episodic framing in African media's road crash reporting may influence public perception.

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ANNEX



Multi-Country_Analysi
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