LOCAL TV NEWS IN THE LOS ANGELES MEDIA MARKET:

Are Stations Serving the Public Interest?

Principal Investigators:

Martin Kaplan, Ph.D.
Norman Lear Professor of Entertainment, Media & Society
Director, The Norman Lear Center
USC Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism

Matthew Hale, Ph.D.
Associate Professor and Chair,
Department of Public and Healthcare Administration
Seton Hall University

March 11, 2010

The Norman Lear Center
USC Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism
3502 Watt Way
Los Angeles, CA 90089-0281
www.learcenter.org

USC ANNENBERG

The Norman Lear CENTER

LOCAL TV NEWS IN THE LOS ANGELES MEDIA MARKET

"When it comes to local news, more people" – 68% -- "say they get that news from local television stations than any other source," says a recent Pew poll[1]. Internet news is rapidly gaining consumers, but independent city-specific Web sites mainly link to stories from local TV and newspapers; they rarely report original hard news (only 3.6% of the time, according to one study)[2]; their audience is often in the thousands, compared to the millions watching TV news; and that audience "is very transient, stumbling upon the site once, and never returning."[3] That's why, despite the rise of blogs and citizen journalism, the quality of local TV news remains so important to democracy.

When local TV stations receive their free broadcast licenses from the government, they promise to serve "the public interest, convenience and necessity." But as FCC Commissioner Michael J. Copps has observed, FCC license renewal is today "a paper tiger." In response, Copps and others have advocated that "every time a media company comes in to renew a license, it should have to prove it is serving the public interest."[4]

But stations are not required to archive and analyze the local news they broadcast. The Public Files they keep are often inadequate for anyone – from Congress and the FCC to citizens of local communities – to assess whether the content of their public affairs programming fulfills their public interest obligations. Bridging that gap with empirical evidence rather than anecdotes is the purpose of this research report, the most recent in a series of studies of local television news conducted since 1998 by the USC Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism's Norman Lear Center.[5]

These are the initial findings from an ongoing study of all local TV news broadcast in the Los Angeles media market – the country's second largest – on 14 randomly selected days between August 1 and September 30, 2009. All local news on the 8 LA stations that program it was captured: KABC, KCAL, KCBS, KNBC, KTLA, KTTV, KCOP (which airs only one half-hour of news a day) and the Spanish-language station KMEX. The 11,253 news stories contained in those 980 half-hours were analyzed. A content analysis of the *Los Angeles Times* on those same days was also performed. Descriptions of topics used for coding can be found at the end of this report.[6]

---

[1] Pew Research Center, March 12, 2009. http://is.gd/9o1Rj

[2] Adam Lynn and Mark Cooper, "Traditional Content is Still King as the Source of Local News and Information," International Communication Association Montreal, Quebec, Canada, May 21, 2008. http://is.gd/9o2gD

[3] S. Derek Turner and Mark Cooper, "Independent Local News Web Sites Lack Original Content and Do Not Significantly Contribute to Source or Viewpoint Diversity," FreePress study submitted to FCC, 2007. http://is.gd/9o2sy

[4] Michael J. Copps, USC Annenberg Walter Cronkite Awards for Excellence in Television Political Journalism, April 19, 2007. http://www.learcenter.org/pdf/CronkiteCopps.pdf

[5] The Lear Center Local News Archive, http://www.localnewsarchive.org/

[6] The principal investigators thank the Los Angeles Civic Alliance for their support of this research.

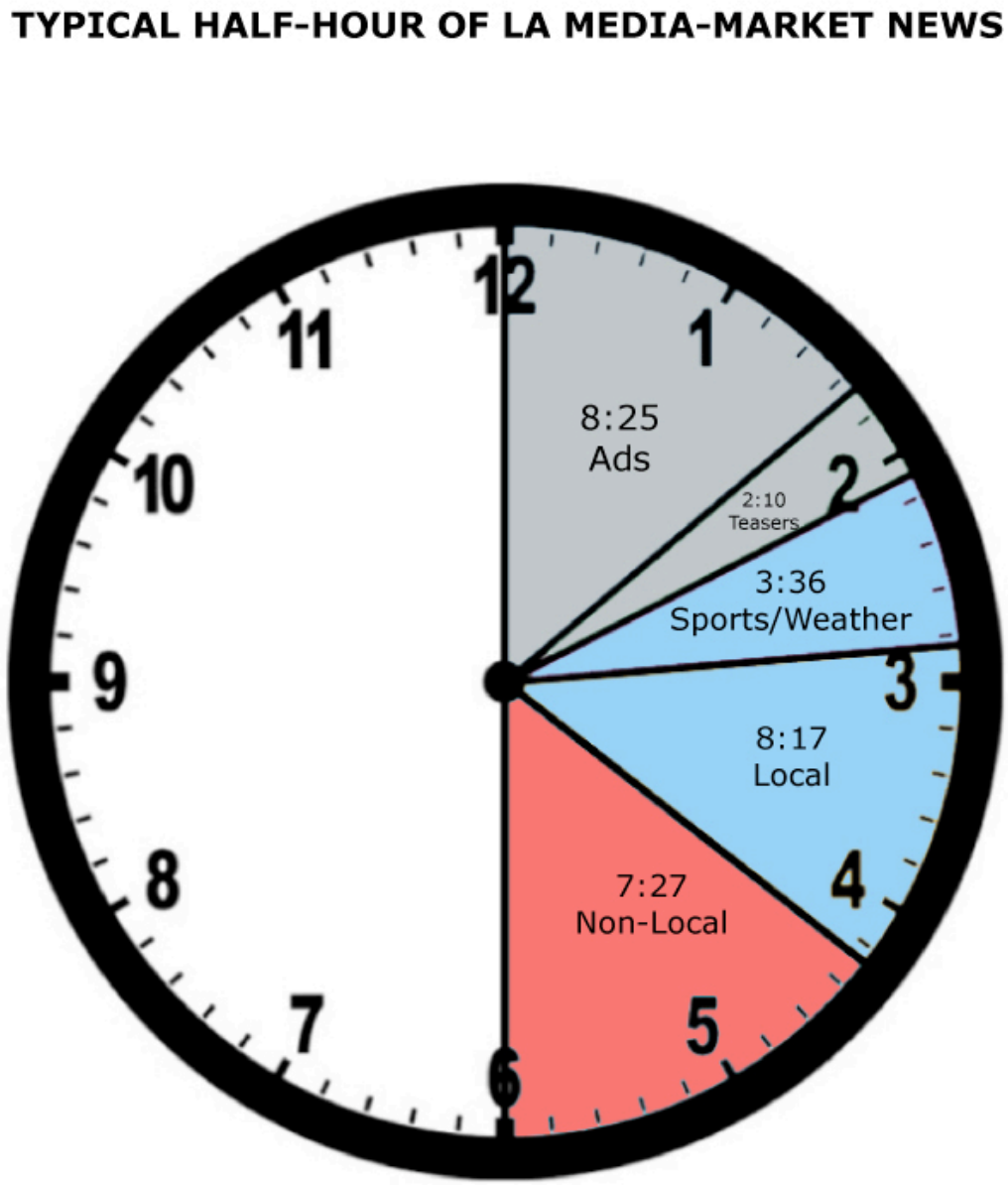
TYPICAL HALF-HOUR OF NEWS

If all of the coverage analyzed were condensed into a single half-hour of news, what would it look like?

A composite half-hour of LA local TV news contains 8:25 of ads; 2:10 of teasers ("stay with us – there's a story you won't want to miss"); 3:36 of sports and weather; and 15:44 for everything else. So besides sports and weather, only about half of a half-hour of news is news.

How much of that 15:44 is about events that happened in the Los Angeles media market?

Local news takes up 8:17; non-local news gets 7:27.



LEAD STORIES

What kind of stories led the news at the top of the half-hour?

The most common topic by far was crime. One out of three broadcasts led with it. Nearly half of those were about murder, robbery, assault, kidnapping, property crime, traffic crime and other common crime. A fourth of the crime leads were about celebrity crime. And nearly a fourth of the crime leads were about crimes that didn't take place in the Los Angeles media market.

When the broadcasts didn't begin with crime, what did lead the news?

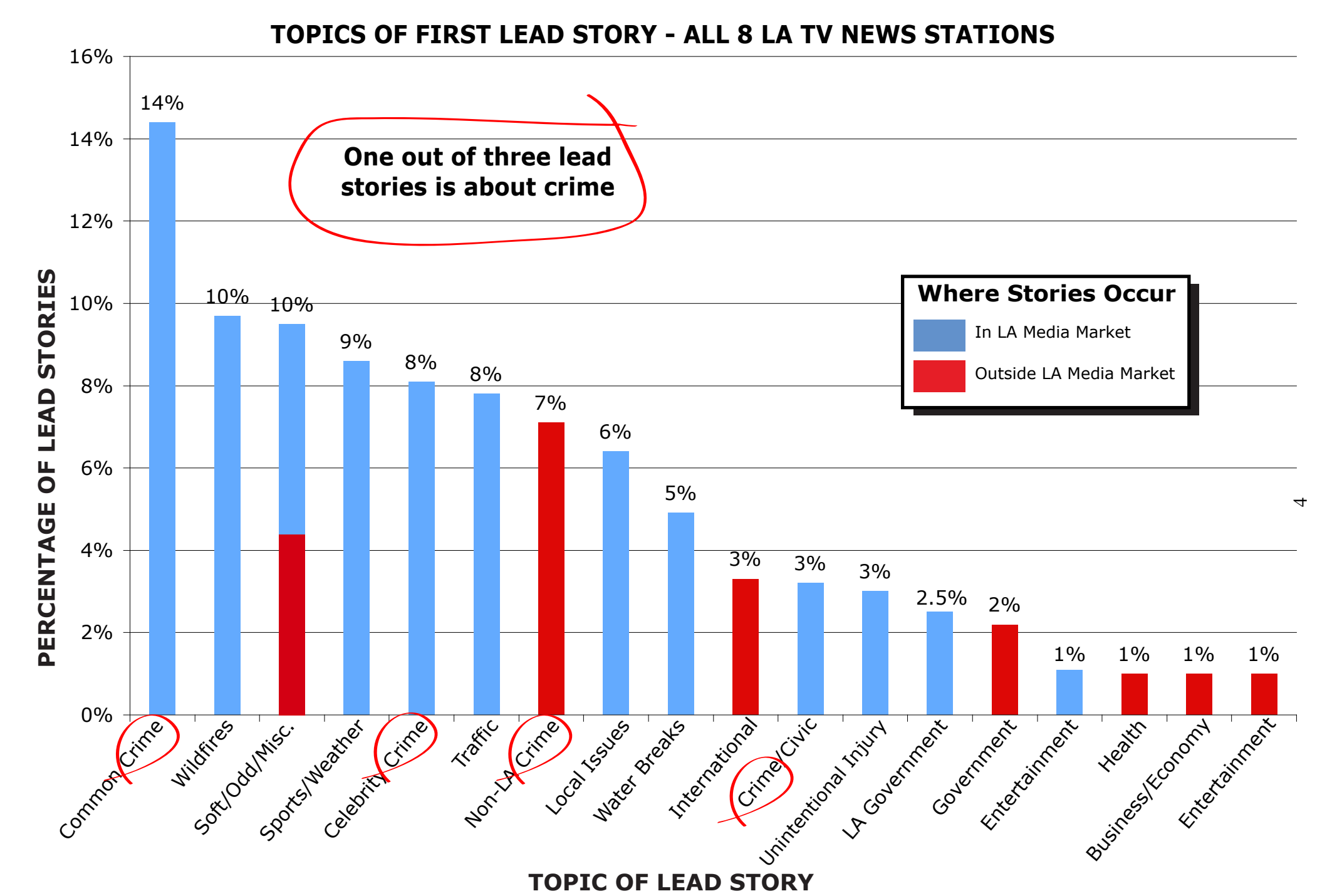
Nearly two out of 10 broadcasts led with sports/weather or traffic. One out of 10 led with a story about the Los Angeles area wildfires, which occurred during the sample period.

How often did stories about Los Angeles-area government lead the news?

Two-and-a-half percent of the time. One out of a hundred leads was about the unfolding budget crisis.

Did other stories about Los Angeles local issues lead the news?

Yes, stories focused not on government, but on people dealing with local issues, led the news, but only about 6 times out of 100. In addition, stories about water main breaks led the news 5% of the time.



Note: Lead story topics less frequent than 1% are omitted, accounting for a total of 4.0%. Numbers do not add to 100% because of rounding.

STORY TOPICS

Besides ads, teasers, and sports/weather, what topics got the most of the 15:44 left?

Crime, at 2:50.

The next-highest amount of time (2:26) was taken up by soft news, oddball news, human interest stories, contests, make-overs, world record attempts, fashion, travel, cooking, animals going wild, weddings etc. After that came entertainment, at 2:02. These three topics took up 7:18.

How was the remaining time divided?

There were four main topics fighting for the remaining time. Each got about the same amount of attention.

Business/Economy stories took 1:20. Business/Economy stories about the Los Angeles area took up 29 seconds of that.

Catastrophe stories took 1:19, of which 1:05 was about the wildfires, and most of the rest about water main breaks.

Stories about people in the Los Angeles area dealing with local civic issues like transportation, community health, the environment, education and taxes, activism, fundraisers, vigils, changes in services provided by local organizations, etc. took up 1:16.

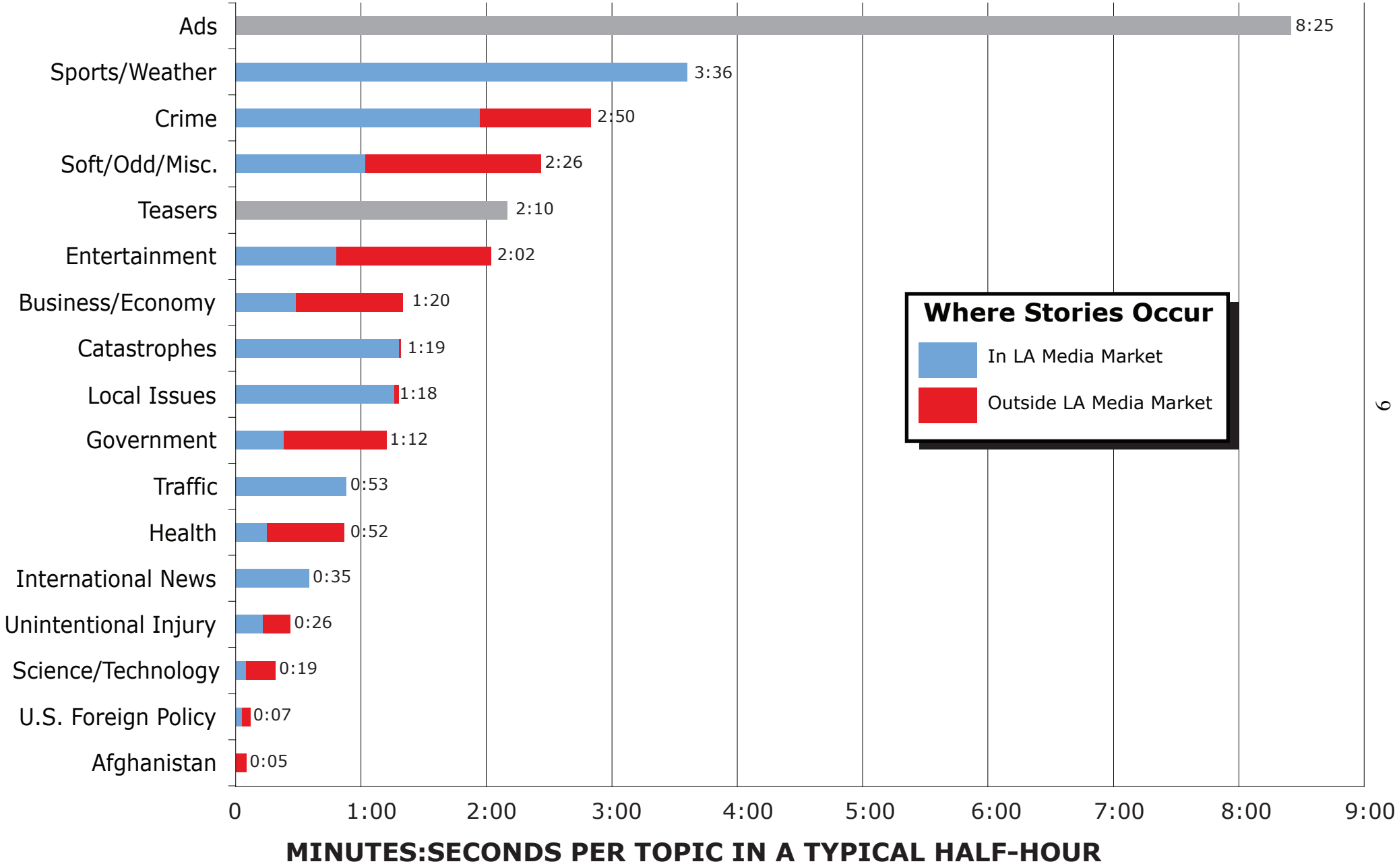
Stories about government actions on topics like education, health care and law enforcement took up an additional 1:12. The majority of this time (0:49) was devoted to government actions taking place at the federal level or in other states.

Coverage of Los Angeles-area government took up just 0:22. Of that, news about the budget averaged 7 seconds; law enforcement and legal issues, 5 seconds; education, 3 seconds.

Anything else?

The remaining portion of the half-hour (3:19) was spread across international coverage (including war coverage and U.S. foreign policy), health-related stories, traffic reports, science and technology, and unintentional injuries, such as car crashes.

TYPICAL HALF-HOUR OF LA MEDIA MARKET TV NEWS (8 STATIONS)



STATION DIFFERENCES

Were there differences among stations in how they allocated time in a typical half-hour?

Outside of ads, every station gave the most time to sports/weather or crime.

In a composite-half-hour of news …

- The most *sports/weather* was on KCOP (4:27) and KNBC (4:22). The least sports/weather was on KTTV (2:49) and KMEX (2:32). The average sports/weather was 3:36.

- The most *crime*, by a substantial amount, was on KCOP (5:03), followed by KMEX (3:35). The least crime was on KCBS (2:15) and KNBC (2:01). The average crime was 2:50.

- The most *entertainment* news, almost double the average, was on KTTV (4:02), followed by KTLA (3:22). The least entertainment news was on KCBS (0:59) and on KCAL (0:42). The average entertainment news was 2:02.

- The most amount of *soft/odd/miscellaneous* news – oddball, human interest, make-overs etc. – was on KTTV (3:26), followed by KTLA (3:11). The least was on KABC (1:52) and KCBS (1:31). The average was 2:26.

- The most coverage of people in the Los Angeles area dealing with *local issues* was on KCOP (2:02) and KCBS (1:55). The least was on KMEX (0:54) and KNBC (0:50). The average was 1:16.

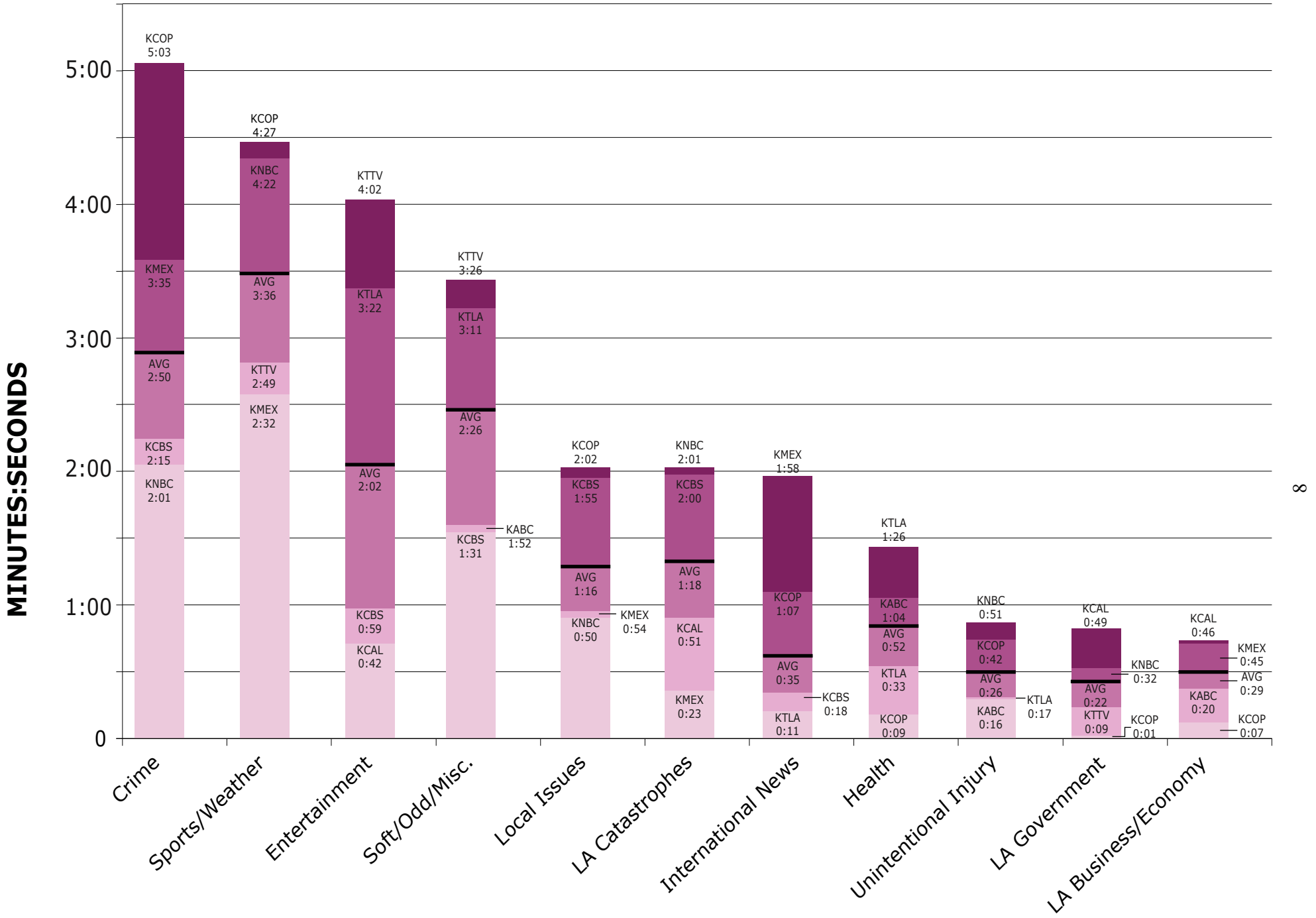
- The most coverage of the LA *fires* and *water main breaks* was done by KNBC (2:01) and KCBS (2:00). The least was done by KCAL (0:51) and KMEX (0:23). The average was 1:18.

- The most coverage of the Los Angeles area *business/economy* was on KCAL (0:46) and KMEX (0:45). The least was on KABC (0:20) and KCOP (0:07). The average was 0:29.

- The most coverage of *local government* in the Los Angeles media market was on KCAL (0:49) and KNBC (0:32). The least was on KTTV (0:09) and KCOP (less than 0:01). The average coverage of local government was 0:22.

- The most *ads* were on KCAL (9:22) and KNBC (9:15). The least ads were on KTTV (7:29) and KMEX (7:01). The average was 8:25.

DIFFERENCES AMONG 8 LA TV STATIONS BY TOPIC



TOPICS BY STATION: TWO HIGHEST, TWO LOWEST, AVERAGE

What were the main differences between what Spanish-language station KMEX and the 7 English-language stations covered in a typical half-hour?

KMEX had notably more international news (1:58, compared with an average of 0:24); more coverage of U.S. foreign policy (0:52, compared with an average of 0:01; and more crime (3:35, compared with an average of 2:44). It had less sports/weather (2:32, compared with an average of 3:45); less traffic (0:20, compared with an average of 0:58); and, as noted above, fewer ads (7:01, compared with an English-language station average of 8:37).

What stations had the most and least news of civic importance?

It depends, of course, on what you count in that category. Some might argue that weather and traffic belong in it. But consider, for example, these 6 categories:

- crime-related stories of civic importance (e.g., rewards offered or help needed from the public, public corruption, police shootings);
- people dealing with local issues;
- LA business/economy;
- LA government;
- citizen-related health issues; and
- wildfires and water main breaks

Taken together these 6 categories accounted for an average of 13.2% of air time. Looking at individual stations, KCBS (which gave 17.2% of its air time to those 6 categories) and KCAL (15.8%) came out on top, while KMEX (9.9%) and KCOP (9.1%) aired the least amount of this coverage.

It is important to note that KMEX carried about 70% of all the international news that aired during the time period, and that much of it could be considered local to viewers of KMEX who turn to it for information about events going on in their countries of origin.

LOS ANGELES TIMES

If the 14 days studied were condensed into a single issue, how would its topics would be apportioned?

- Ads: 44%
- Teasers: 15%
- Sports/Weather: 11%
- Entertainment/Arts/Feature Sections: 9%
- Business/Economy: 7%
- Government: 4%
- Local Issues: 3%
- Crime: 2%
- International News: 2%
- Health: 1%

Feature sections include Calendar, Image, Food, Arts & Books and Travel. Topics less than 1% are not reported. Some results also do not add to 100% due to rounding.

NEWS HOLE

When ads and teasers are removed, how is space allocated in the remaining news hole of a composite edition of the *Los Angeles Times*?

- Sports/Weather: 25%
- Entertainment/Arts/ Feature Sections: 23%
- Business/Economy: 16%
- Government: 9%
- Local Issues: 6%
- Crime: 5%
- International news: 5%
- Health: 3%
- Science/Technology: 2%
- Afghanistan: 1%
- Soft/Odd/Miscellaneous: 1%
- Iraq: 1%

- Election Politics: 1%
- Unintentional Injury: 1%

How does the *LA Times'* use of its news hole compare to what LA TV stations do with theirs?

Local TV used 1.9% of its news hole to cover government in the LA media market; the *LA Times* used 3.3%.

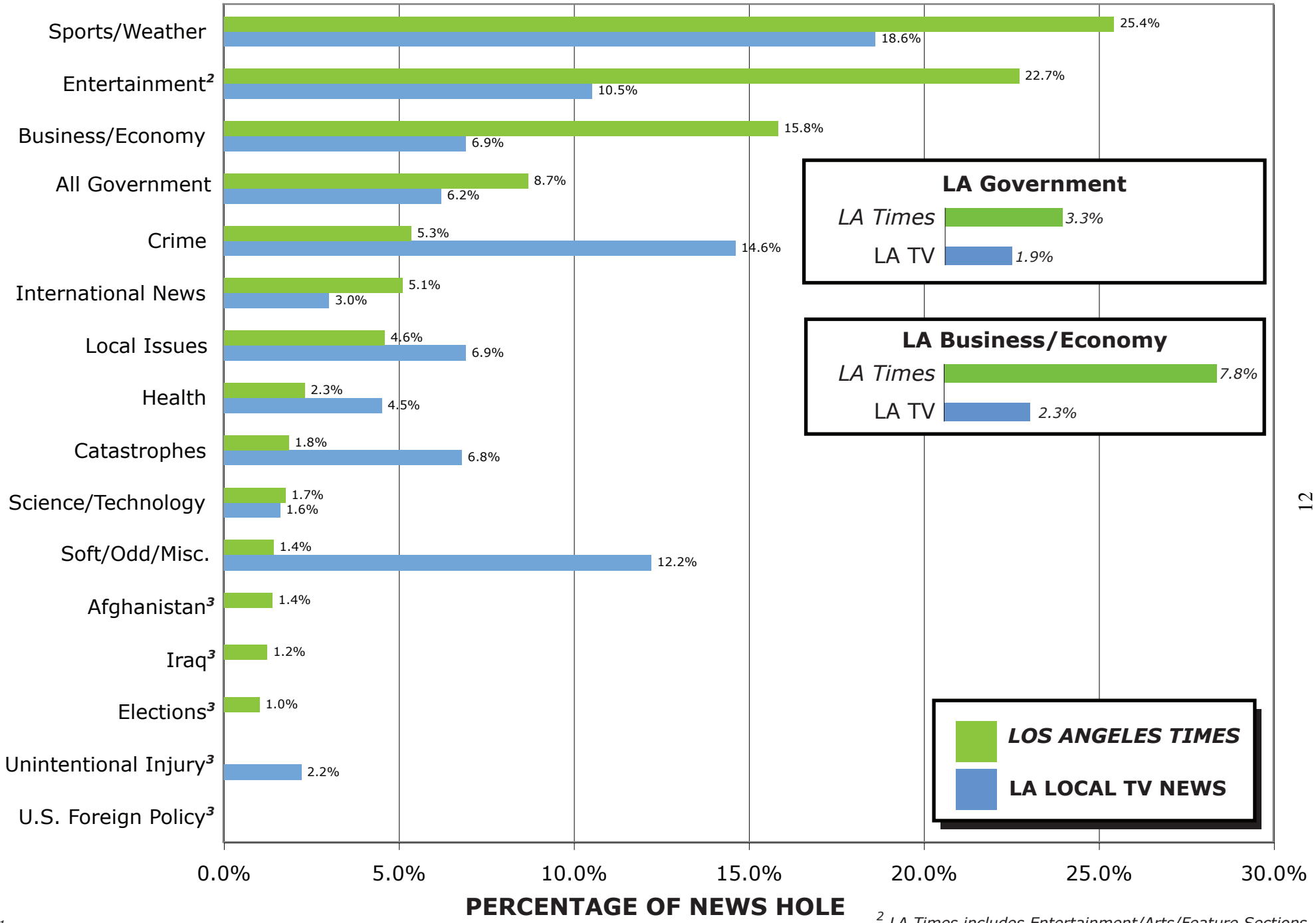
The newspaper used more than three times the amount of its news hole for covering local business and the economy than TV did.

LA TV stations allocated 9 times more of their news hole to soft, odd, and miscellaneous stories, and used almost three times more of their news hole for crime, than the newspaper did.

How much of the news hole of the LA Times covers stories that occur within the LA media market?

Stories occurring within the LA media market make up 37% of the paper's news hole. Stories from outside the media market make up 63%.

TOPICS IN TYPICAL NEWS HOLE[1]: LA MEDIA MARKET TV NEWS *VS. LOS ANGELES TIMES*



[1] *News hole of TV news = 30 minutes - (ads + teasers).*
News hole of LA Times = Composite edition - (ads + teasers).

[2] *LA Times includes Entertainment/Arts/Feature Sections.*

[3] *Absent bars indicate less than 1% of news hole.*

FRONT PAGE

Within the 14-day sample, how did the LA Times allocate the space on its front page to topics compared to lead stories on TV?

Nearly one out of every five front page articles in the sample was about non-Los Angeles government (19%). Those stories led TV news 2.2% of the time.

The next most frequent front page topic was the non-Los Angeles business/economy (14%), followed by international news (12%) and Los Angeles government (10%).

On LA TV, non-LA business/economy stories led 1% of the time; international news led 3.3%; LA government led 2.5% of the time.

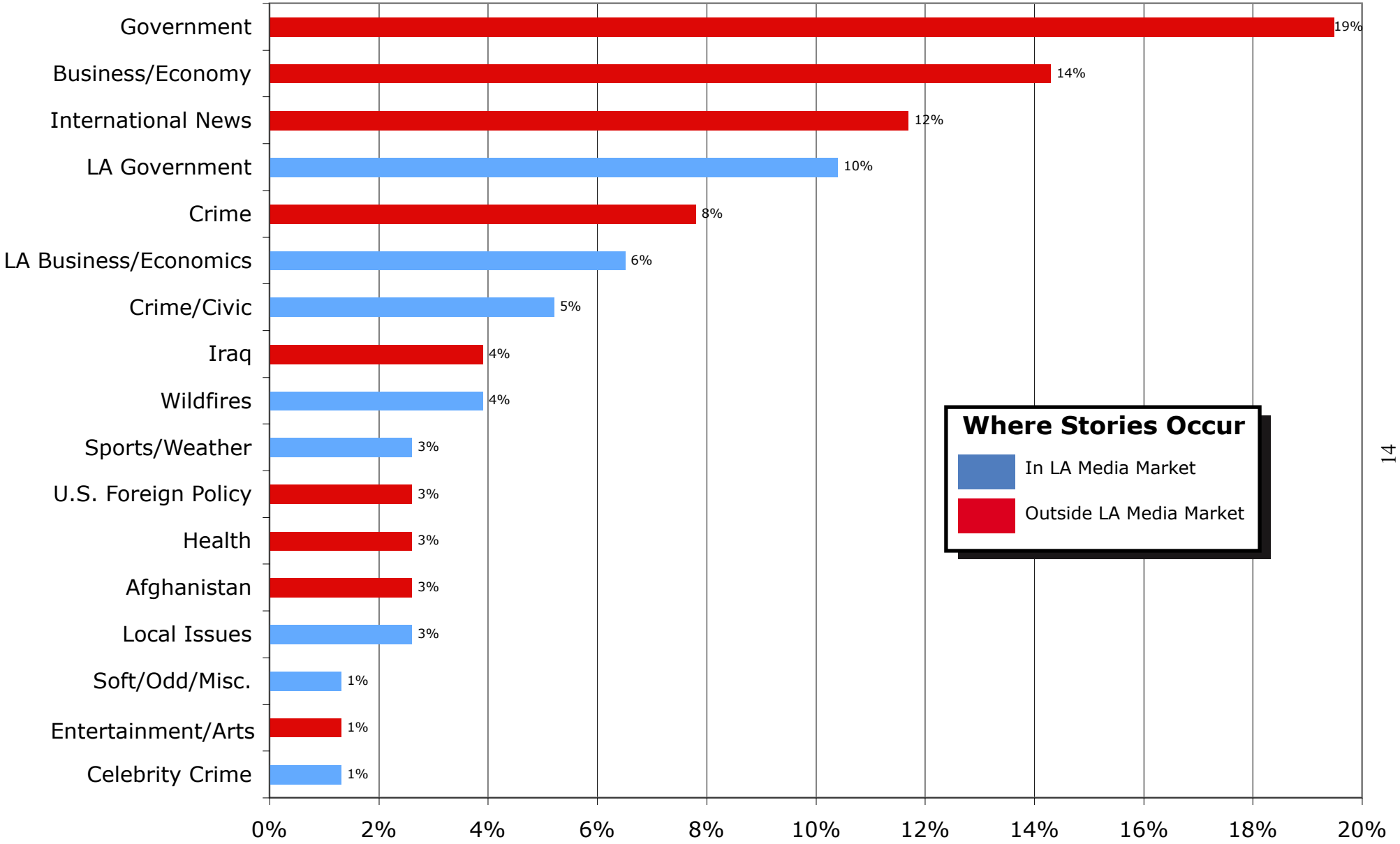
Six percent of the paper's front page stories focused on local business and economy, compared to 0.5% on TV.

Fourteen percent of the *LA Times* front page stories were about crime, compared to about a third of the leads on TV. The front page coverage of crime taking place outside of Los Angeles, 8%, was about the same as the frequency of lead TV stories, 7%. Civic crime was 5% of front page stories, and a little over 3% of TV leads.

While LA common crime took up 14.4% of TV leads, it did not appear on the newspaper's front page.

Celebrity crime was 1% of front page stories and 8% of TV leads, including frequent stories about Ryan Jenkins, the reality show contestant who committed suicide after he was accused of murdering his wife; only one story about him made it onto the *LA Times* front page.

TOPICS ON 14 *LA TIMES* FRONT PAGES



FREQUENCY OF TOPIC ON FRONT PAGE

STORY SIZE

What is the average size of stories on various topics in the *Los Angeles Times*?

Story size in the paper's e-Edition was measured in square centimeters.

- Local Issues:[7] 306 cm^2
- Entertainment/Arts/Feature Sections: 288 cm^2
- International News: 233 cm^2
- Iraq: 233 cm^2
- Business/Economy: 223 cm^2
- Government: 200 cm^2
- Crime: 163 cm^2
- Health: 159 cm^2
- Unintentional Injury: 149 cm^2
- Science/Technology: 140 cm^2
- Afghanistan: 86 cm^2
- U.S. Foreign Policy: 70 cm^2
- Soft/Odd/Miscellaneous: 68 cm^2
- Elections: 68 cm^2

PRINT JOURNALISM

Where did the news stories in the *Los Angeles Times* originate?

- *LA Times* staff: 86%
- Wire services: 9%
- Op-Eds/Letters: 5%

What types of articles appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*?

- News: 61%
- Columns, Editorials, Op-Eds & Letters: 20%
- Features: 19%

[7] See p. 21 for definition of topic.

METHODOLOGY: TV

A total of 61 days of 24-hour/round-the-clock local news programming on 8 Los Angeles stations was recorded in 2009. A scientific sample consisting of two constructed weeks (14 days) was created: August 4, 9, 14, 15, 19, 20, 22, 24 and September 3, 6, 8, 11, 15, 23. The sample contained a total of 490 hours of news aired on those days.

To our knowledge, this is one of the most ambitious samples of actual content aired in a local media market ever analyzed. Researchers usually sample the top-rated one or two half-hours of news per day, often leading stations to object that the findings fail to reflect the breadth of their news programming. This study addresses those objections.

The sample contained a total of 19,225 separately timed segments (news stories, ads, teasers, sports, weather), of which 11,253 were news stories. All timed segments were measured in seconds, and all news stories were analyzed for primary and secondary topic focus and scored for local relevance to the Los Angeles community. Primary topic means the main take-away that a viewer would get from the story. Table 3 summarizes the topics and categories used by coders, who were trained, checked for inter-coder reliability (Scott's Pi and Chronbach's Alpha ranging from 0.86 to 0.90), and monitored throughout the coding process.

Once the initial coding was completed, a principal investigator and a graduate student analyzed and re-coded story headlines written by the coders. Through this process additional subcategories were created, focusing on the relevance of each story to the citizens and civic activities of people in the Los Angeles media market.

METHODOLOGY: *LOS ANGELES TIMES*

Content from 14 e-Edition issues of the *Los Angeles Times* was analyzed using the same constructed sample: August 4, 9, 14, 15, 19, 20, 22, 24 and September 3, 6, 8, 11, 15, 23.

The sample contained a total of 3,850 separately measured newspaper components (articles, ads, teasers, etc.), of which 1,392 were news stories. All components were measured in cm^2 (including text, headlines and photos), and analyzed for primary and secondary topic focus and scored for local relevance to the Los Angeles community.

TOPICS AND TIMINGS: TYPICAL LA TV NEWS HALF-HOUR

Some subtotals do not add to totals because of rounding. Topics of 3 seconds or less are not reported here.

ADVERTISEMENTS 8:25

SPORTS/WEATHER 3:36

CRIME 2:50

- **Non-LA Crime 0:53**
- **LA Crime 1:57**
  - **Celebrity-Related Crime 0:21**

    E.g. suicide of reality show murder suspect Ryan Jenkins, Michael Jackson's doctor Conrad Murray, Lindsey Lohan's house robbed, football star charged.
  - **Common Crime 1:09**

    Includes murder, robbery, property crime, assault, kidnapping, traffic crime.
  - **Crime/Civic 0:27**

    Includes rewards offered, help needed by the public, public corruption, police shootings, new law enforcement efforts; prisons and courts, wildfire related crime, citizens taking action against crime, preventable crimes such as murder of Lily Burk.

SOFT/ODD/MISCELLANEOUS 2:26

- **Non-LA Other 1:24**
- **LA Other 1:02**

  Human interest, light side and oddball stories, including self-help and how-to, make-overs, world record attempts, offbeat contests and competitions, animals going wild, the space shuttle, cooking/food, the lottery, local celebrities, travel, fashion, sports outside the lines, weddings, news of the bizarre, heroes, stories about news anchors.

TEASERS 2:10

Bumper music, promotions of upcoming stories, anchor intros ("Coming up after the break," "stay with the Southland's best news").

ENTERTAINMENT 2:02

- **Non-LA Entertainment 1:14**
- **LA Entertainment 0:48**

BUSINESS/ECONOMY 1:20

- **Non LA Business/Economy 0:51**
- **LA Business/Economy 0:29**

CATASTROPHES 1:19

- **LA Catastrophes 1:18**
  - **Wildfires 1:05**
  - **Water main breaks 0:14**

LOCAL ISSUES 1:18

- **LA LOCAL ISSUES 1:16**

  Principal focus on people rather than government, involved in issues like traffic, community health, the environment, citizen activism, changes in services provided by local organizations, fundraisers, vigils, nonprofit awareness events.

GOVERNMENT 1:12

- **Non-LA Government 0:49**
- **LA Government 0:22**

  Includes budget, layoffs, education, law enforcement, prisons, lawsuits, new local ordinances, procedures for voting, government personnel changes, government actions on health care, transportation, immigration etc.

TRAFFIC REPORTS 0:53

HEALTH 0:52

- **Non-LA Health 0:37**
- **LA Health 0:15**

Includes swine flu, hospitals and clinics opening, new warnings or precautions.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS 0:35

UNINTENTIONAL INJURY 0:26

- **Non-LA Unintentional Injury 0:13**
- **LA Unintentional Injury 0:13**

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 0:19

- **Non-LA Science/Technology 0:14**
- **LA Science/Technology 0:05**

U.S. FOREIGN POLICY 0:07

AFGHANISTAN 0:05

TOPICS AND STORY SIZE: TYPICAL *LOS ANGELES TIMES* EDITION

The news hole is the area of the newspaper minus ads and teasers. This is how the news hole was allocated to topics.

Some subtotals and totals do not add exactly due to rounding.

SPORTS/WEATHER 25.4%

ENTERTAINMENT/ARTS/FEATURE SECTIONS 22.7%

Includes Calendar, Image, Food, Arts & Books and Travel.

- **Non-LA Entertainment/Arts/Feature Sections 14.6%**
- **LA Entertainment/Arts/Feature Sections 8.1%**

BUSINESS/ECONOMY 15.8%

- **Non LA Business/Economy 8.1%**
- **LA Business/Economy 7.8%**

GOVERNMENT 8.7%

- **Non-LA Government 5.4%**
- **LA Government 3.3%**

  Includes budget, education, law enforcement, prisons, lawsuits, new local ordinances, government personnel changes, government actions on health care, transportation, unions, immigration etc.

CRIME 5.3%

- **Non-LA Crime 2.5%**
- **LA Crime 2.8%**
  - **Celebrity-Related Crime 0.3%**

    E.g. suicide of reality show murder suspect Ryan Jenkins, Michael Jackson's doctor Conrad Murray, Lindsey Lohan's house robbed.

  - **Common Crime 0.4%**

    Includes murder, robbery, property crime, assault, kidnapping, traffic crime.

- **Crime/Civic 2.1%**

  Includes rewards offered, help needed by the public, public corruption, police shootings, new law enforcement efforts; prisons and courts, wildfire related crime, citizens taking action against crime, preventable crimes such as murder of Lily Burk.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS 5.1%

- **Non-LA International News 5.1%**

LOCAL ISSUES 4.6%

- **LA Local Issues 4.6%**

  Principal focus on people, rather than government, involved in issues like volunteerism, community health, the environment, citizen activism, changes in services provided by local organizations, fundraisers, vigils, nonprofit awareness events. Includes obituaries.

HEALTH 2.3%

- **Non-LA Health 1.4%**
- **LA Health 0.9%**

  Includes hospitals and clinics opening, new warnings or precautions.

CATASTROPHES 1.8%

- **Non-LA Catastrophes 0.2%**
- **LA Catastrophes 1.6%**

SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY 1.7%

- **Non-LA Science/Technology 1.5%**
- **LA Science/Technology 0.3%**

SOFT/ODD/MISCELLANEOUS 1.4%

- **Non-LA Soft/Odd/Misc. 0.9%**
- **LA Soft/Odd/Misc. 0.6%**

  Human interest, light side and oddball stories, including animals going wild, the comics, the lottery, local celebrities.

AFGHANISTAN 1.4%

- **Non-LA Afghanistan 1.4%**
- **LA-focused Afghanistan 0%**

IRAQ 1.2%

- **Non-LA Iraq 1.2%**
- **LA-focused Iraq 0.1%**

ELECTIONS 1.0%

- **Non-LA Elections 0.8%**
- **LA Elections 0.2%**

UNINTENTIONAL INJURY 0.7%

- **Non-LA Unintentional Injury 0.6%**
- **LA Unintentional Injury 0.1%**

U.S. FOREIGN POLICY 0.7%