

What's In A Face: A Content Analysis of TIME

Magazine's Person of the Year Since 1927

by

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## Abstract

TIME Magazine is widely renowned for its coverage of societal issues from foreign politics to technology to global movements. The title “Person of the Year” is given to an individual every December, and sometimes a concept or group of people, who has had the largest influence on history in the previous year. This study set out to determine what exactly it takes to become a “Person of the Year” demographically speaking. By a quantitative content analysis method, results show that a wealthy, white, American politician, age 56, who is also a U.S. President is the most likely candidate to receive the title. Only three women have won the award as individuals raising many questions about equal gender representation in the media.

## Table of Contents

List of Figures-----	4
Chapter 1: Introduction-----	5
Chapter 2: Literature Review-----	6
Chapter 3: Methodology-----	9
Chapter 4: Results-----	11
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations-----	15
References-----	17

## List of Figures

Categorical Breakdown -----	11
Racial Breakdown-----	12
Gender Breakdown-----	13
Age Breakdown-----	14

## Chapter 1

### **Introduction**

TIME Magazine has had a long history of documenting and commentating world events during its 92-year history. Time's motto, "the faces of Time have been the faces of the world," rings true. Individuals who are pictured on the cover of TIME are never new to the audience reading it. Oftentimes the reason someone make it to the cover of TIME is because the world deems him or her worthy of that place. It is the public that decides if a person is important, not the magazine. The title "Person of the Year" is not an award, it is an honor and sometimes it is a hard one to bear. TIME prides itself in its wide range of coverage, both the good and the bad.

In 1927, the magazine created an award to recognize the biggest newsmaker of the previous year. A "Person of the Year" is chosen not for likability but for their impact on history. Politicians, religious leaders, scientists, abstract concepts and business tycoons have all received the title. While some recipients have been highly controversial, TIME insists that the title is not an award, it is an honor given by the world for the recognition of creating history. This study sets out to discover what demographics make up a "Person of the Year" and to see what the most common trends among recipients.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Even in today's digital era TIME Magazine still has a place in the minds of readers in the Western world. The cover of TIME has been referred to as "post-Christendom's most notable stained glass window" for its commentary on current events. The people chosen to be on the cover of TIME are often "the faces of the world" for the mark they made on history, for good or for bad (Christ 1985). The cover of TIME Magazine has long been where historians look to see who will be remembered and who will not.

The magazine even says what is inside is worth knowing. The iconic red border is the confines of what is important and what is not. In 2010, TIME had a weekly circulation of 40 million around the world. TIME's mission is to give those 40 million people a "front-row seat to the most important stories of our time and to tell you not just the *what* of the news but the *how* and the *why* too." TIME Magazine strives to challenge its readers with different ways of thinking and looking at the world (Stengel 2010).

TIME has been known to surprise its readers by recognizing a movement or group of people that has played a major role in that year's news. Several controversial individuals have been chosen as well. Iranian rebel leader Ayatollah Khomeini was chosen in 1979, the year the Iranian Hostage Crisis occurred, causing a massive pro-American outcry. Since 1979, the choice of non-Americans, specifically those unfriendly to the United States, has been a more rare occurrence. In 2001, after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, some considered Osama bin Laden to be a stronger candidate for selection but Rudolph Giuliani was

ultimately chosen. The selection process analyzes people who had the biggest impact on history and who best represented the year (Walker 2013).

Stephen Bates (2011) writes in his piece about the lack of public intellectuals recognized by TIME that the covers of the magazine have “formed a portrait of history” and have showed the world who swayed public opinion and who held authority. Bates continues by saying that TIME is one of the most intensely researched publications in the world. Countless studies have analyzed the covers and issues that cover a wide range of world events.

In recent years the discussion has shifted from occupational diversity to the lack of equal gender representation. Though the Magazine changed the name of the annual award in 1999 from “Man of the Year” to “Person of the Year” there has been no real change in more equal representation of male and female. In her thesis, Krystle Anttonelli analyzed the representation of women on the covers of the “Man of the Year” and “Person of the Year” covers to determine how feminine ideals are portrayed on magazine covers, specifically those of TIME. Anttonelli found that TIME and its editors had not made an effort to portray society as a whole more fairly. Further, she found that the great majority of those given the “Person of the Year” and “Man of the Year” titles were wealthy white men in a political field. TIME also made no significant change in diversity after the title was changed from “Man of the Year” to “Person of the Year” in 1999. The magazine is highly respected among readers and has been since it began in 1923. In 89 years, the magazine has helped “write the rough draft of history” and began a new form of journalism with the news magazine. Anttonelli concludes by stating that TIME Magazine is incredibly highly respected and strives to represent the interests of society. It should depict society in a more equal way (2012).

The divide between genders was once again brought into the spotlight for the 2014 “Person of the Year.” George Arnett from The Guardian makes the observation that more abstract ideas have received the title than women. Even if the female concepts such as The American Women in 1975 are included there are only nine versus the 77 for men. No woman has won the award twice whereas every U.S. President since 1927 have except for Herbert Hoover, Calvin Coolidge, and Gerald Ford (Arnett 2014).

By choosing primarily only men to represent the year is history, TIME’s publishers and editors, in their role as a media gatekeeper, are perpetuating and continuing a cycle of skewed gender representation that has far reaching consequences. Though her thesis analyzed *Rolling Stone*, Rebecca Binns states that this one-sided representation is seen all over mass media (2006). Editors of major magazines and news outlets have immense power to control what their audience thinks. In a way, they are the ones making history, not the individual on the cover.



## Chapter 3: Methodology

### **Content Analysis**

Jim Macnamara defines content analysis several different ways but the one that most closely defines this studies approach to the technique is a systematic and objective identification of variables within a certain set of mass distributed form of text or content followed by making inferences of those variables implications. Macnamara also raises some questions about the accuracy of the technique. He states that it is impossible for a study to be completely objective due to the fact that each person interpreting the same content with have different results simply because every person values some variables over another. He also compares quantitative vs. qualitative content analysis. This study uses a quantitative approach by counting the occurrences of specific characteristics. Macnamara addresses the fact that though quantitative is extremely useful to find the number of times a message is conveyed it does not give credit to the fact that the data collected is interpreted out of context. He states “it is not valid to assume that quantitative factors such as size or frequency of media messages equate to impact.” Qualitative analysis seeks to recognize the meaning the same content has to different audiences. Qualitative research is much more time intensive to execute and generally involves smaller samples of media. It also heavily relies on predicting what an audience may think and thus does not produce any reliable, measureable date. Quantitative analysis is generally thought to be more scientific because it is recordable. However, within media research Macnamara claims that qualitative data does have its place because it is required to learn the deeper meaning of content.

Steve Stemler summed up content analysis in his definition: “Content analysis has been defined as a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer

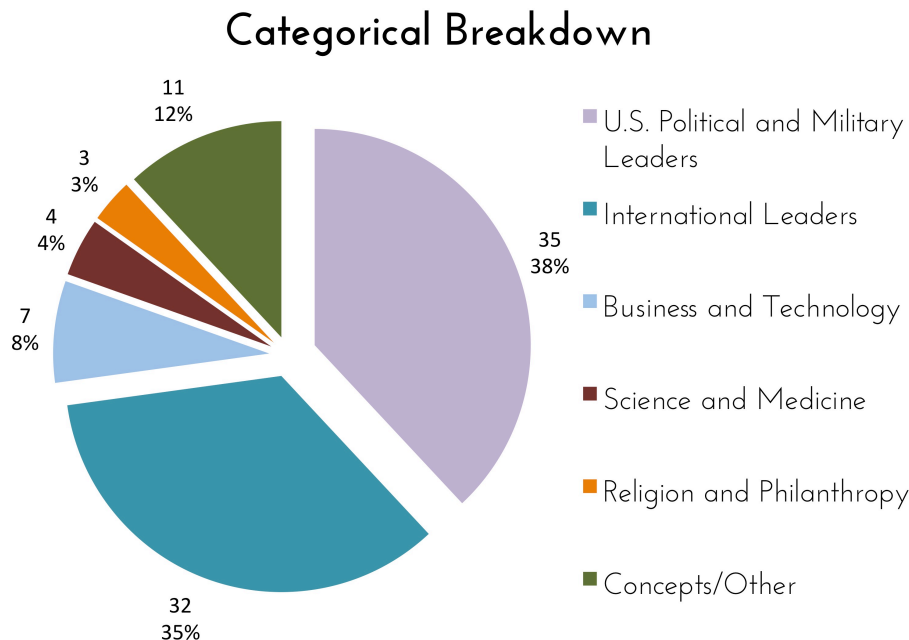
content categories based on explicit rules of coding.” This approach to research allows researchers the ability to sort through large amounts of information in a quick way. Stemler also states that content analysis can be used to observe trends within a subject. He also raises questions about the method’s reliability. A content analysis done by one person, according to Stemler, is difficult to completely reproduce by another. Stemler defines two separate types of coding, emergent and *a priori*. Emergent coding has categories established after an examination of the data. *A priori* establishes categories prior to examination of the data. This study uses an emergent approach to coding.

For this study, a single pilot test was conducted to determine what factors could be easily recorded and translated into visuals. It was determined that body language and posture were beyond the scope of this study.

## Chapter 4

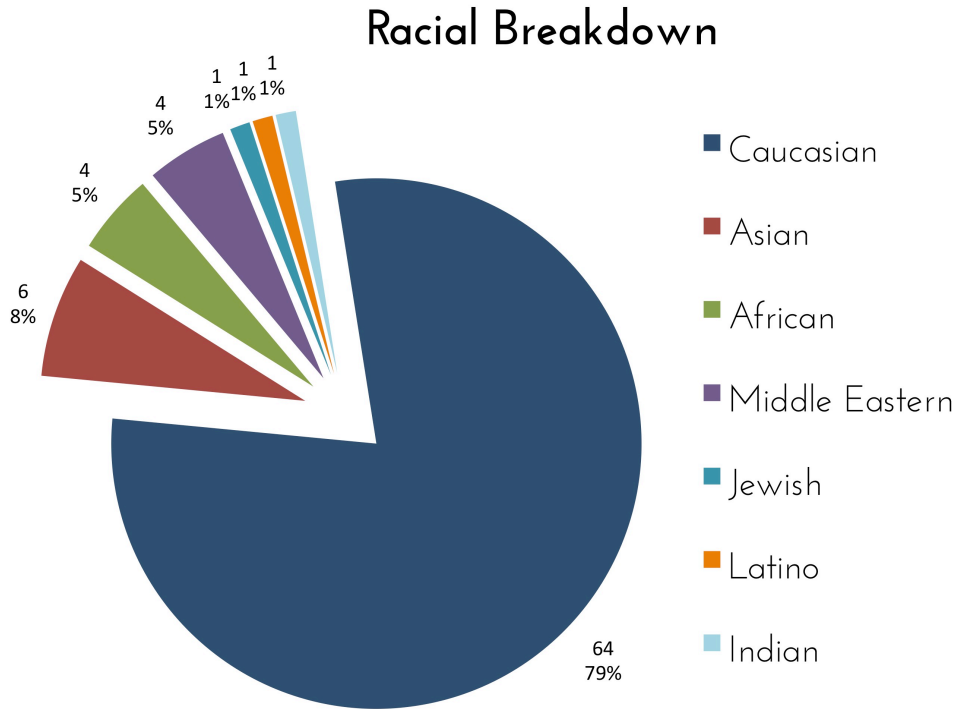
### Results

There are 87 TIME Magazine Person of the Year (formerly Man of the Year) covers analyzed. Of those 87, four issues depicted two individuals on the cover. Furthermore, 10 individuals have been given the title twice and three times. After removing the duplicate wins there are 80 different people who have been awarded the title. This study analyses the 92 instances of the title Person of the Year, including duplicate wins and multiple individuals per cover. For this study, an individual is any person who is explicitly named on the cover of the magazine. Issues that show a depiction of more than one person and who are not named as individuals on the cover (American Women or The Whistleblowers for example) were categorized as a Concept or Other.



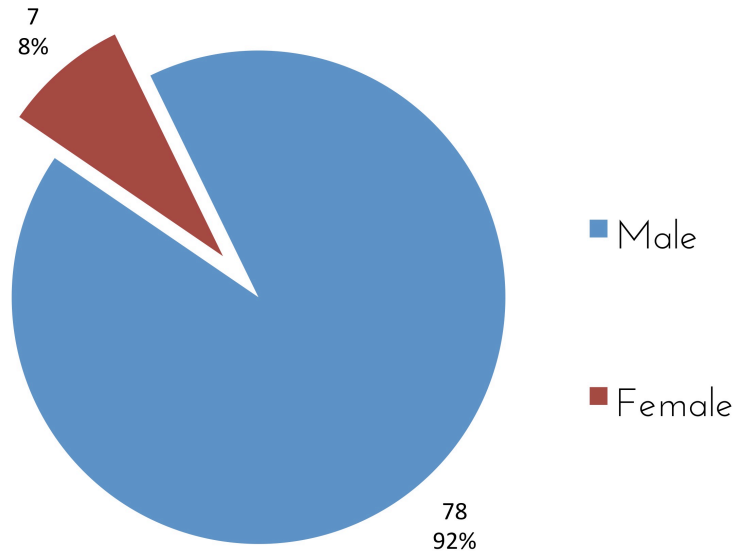
Each occurrence of the title was put into a category that best correlated with what the individual recipient was known for. These categories were taken straight from the TIME

Magazine cover archive. The magazine attributed categories based on what each recipient best fit under (TIME's).



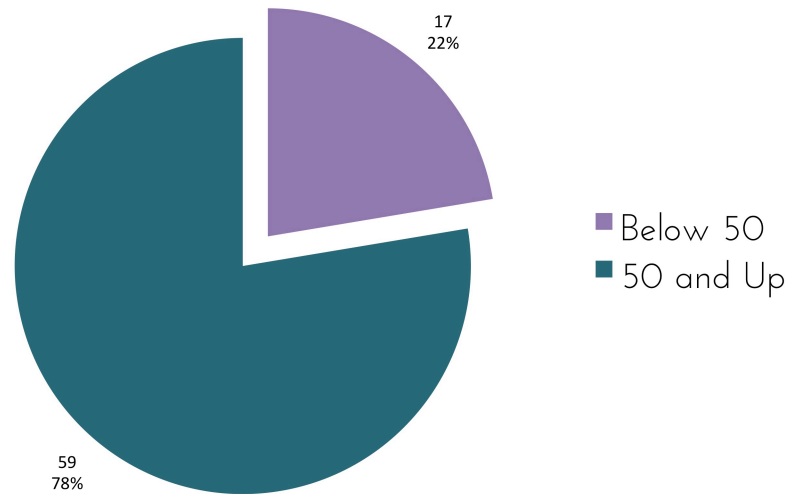
Race was determined by what the recipients most closely resembled. There were 81 individuals analyzed since 11 of the recipients were concepts or other and did not have a race. Individuals from the Pacific Islands were classified as Asian. Of the 64 Caucasian individuals, 43 of them are American.

## Gender Breakdown



In this study, seven titles were given to women. Three of those instances were given to women as individuals: Wallis Simpson in 1936, Queen Elizabeth II in 1952, and Corazon Aquino in 1986. Four other titles were given to female ideas or concepts or issues that solely depicted women on the cover. Soong May-ling was named as an individual on the cover along with her husband Chaing Kai-shek in 1937. American Women were awarded the title as a group in 1975. The Whistleblowers issue in 2002 depicted three women on the cover but did not name them individually. The Protester issue in 2011 depicted a single woman but did not name her as an individual. The title was called “Man of the Year” up until 1999 when it was changed to the more politically correct “Person of the Year.” All three women who were given the title received it before the name was changed. Also, there have been 11 concepts or abstract ideas that have won the title, greater out numbering the three individual women.

## Age Breakdown



The mean age was 56 years, the median was 56, and the mode was 57. There were 16 recipients that do not have recordable ages, leaving 76 for analysis. The youngest recipient was Charles Lindberg at the at of 25. The oldest recipient was Pope John XXII at the age of 81.

## Chapter 5

### **Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendation**

The purpose of this study was to determine the demographic breakdown of the recipients of “Person of the Year,” formerly “Man of the Year.” The goal was to find prove what I thought already to be true. I knew more men had received the award than women but the landslide difference was somewhat surprising, especially the fact that no woman has received the award as an individual since Corazon Aquino in 1987. The lack of female recipients sparked an interest in gender representation in media, specifically magazines.

My results found that the most likely candidate to a “Person of the Year” is a wealthy, white, American politician, age 56, who is also a U.S. President. That makes sense because U.S. Presidents are commonly thought of as the most powerful individuals in the world. There is a correlation between wealth and people in power positions. The TIME Magazine “Person of the Year” further reinstates that.

The red border of TIME is a powerful frame, even coveted. Whoever lies within it is important; he or she is a newsmaker and a writer of history. They may not always be popular or well received but it is undeniable that they have a place in the minds of people. Controversial or not, the title of “Person of the Year” is not an award, it is an honor given by the world for the recognition of creating history.

## **Recommendations**

In future studies that have a larger scope, I would recommend body language from cover photography be analyzed to determine the most common poses that best convey power and importance. The financial income for recipients would also play a major role in further determining what it takes to become a “Person of the Year.” I would also recommend more specific gender categories for multiple award winners and years where there would be groups of people. A greater diversity in occupation categories would give a better idea of what more specifically individuals contributed to society.



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