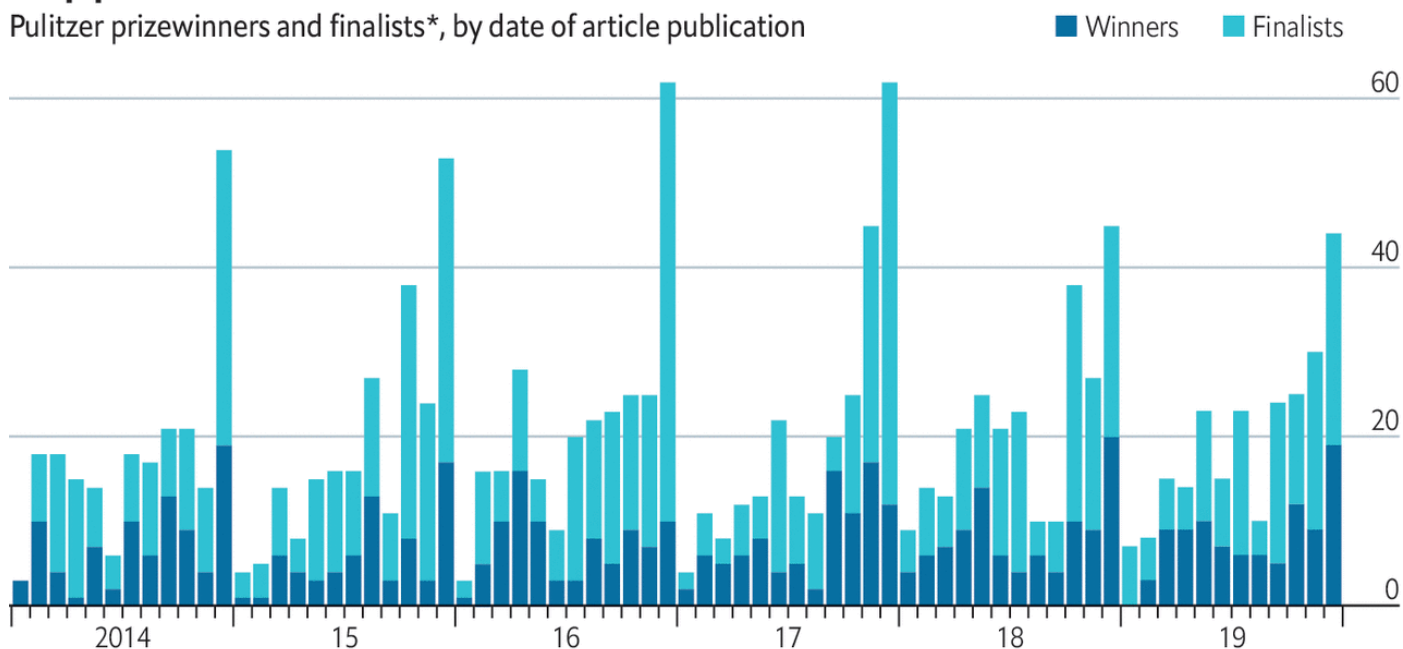


Graphic detail

Stop press

Pulitzer prizewinners and finalists*, by date of article publication



Source: pulitzer.org

*Excluding breaking news, cartooning and photography categories

The Economist

Daily chart

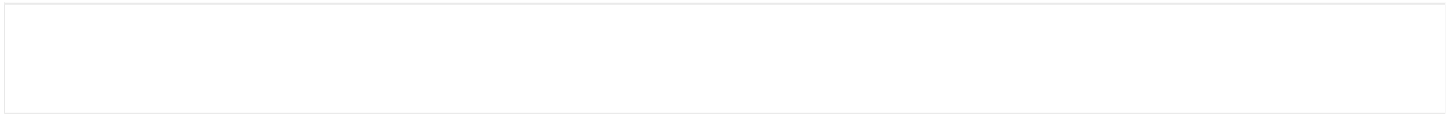
Why is America's best journalism published at the end of the year?

Pulitzer prize-winning articles are more than twice as likely to come out in December as in any other month

May 4th 2020

THE WINNERS of this year's Pulitzer prizes, the most prestigious in American journalism, were announced on May 4th. Established more than a century ago by Joseph Pulitzer, a newspaper publisher, the awards are given for 15 categories of journalism—such as investigative reporting, feature writing and public service. There are also seven others, for letters, drama and music.

This year's winners were not surprising: the New York Times won three; the New Yorker took home two. The timing of the stories was fairly predictable, too. Pulitzer-winning articles tend to cluster around the end of the year, near when submissions are due (the deadline was recently moved from December 31st to the fourth Friday in January). Between 2014 and 2018, nearly a quarter of winners and finalists—excluding breaking news, cartoons and photography—hit news-stands and home-pages in December. In 2019 18% were published in the last month of the year (see chart).



Journalism is not the only field in which this occurs. To be considered for Oscars, films must open on big screens by New Year's Eve. Every year, a glut of hopeful contenders is released in December. The hope among film-makers is that their movies will be fresh in voters' minds as they cast their ballots, a phenomenon known as "recency bias". Sure enough, in recent years most of the films that have taken home the "big four" Academy Awards—best picture, director, actor and actress—were released in the fourth quarter of the year.

Are journalists, like film-makers, strategically timing their work? Perhaps. Alternatively, prizewinning publications might argue that they publish Pulitzer-worthy pieces all year round—and that their most recent projects, being the freshest, are just the likeliest to be submitted.
