

# New report finds increase in media coverage of synthetic biology

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Press coverage of synthetic biology in the United States and Europe increased significantly between 2008 and 2011, according to a report released today by the Synthetic Biology Project at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

The report, [Trends in American and European Press Coverage of Synthetic Biology: 2008 – 2011](#), builds on the project's earlier study of US-EU press coverage between 2003 and 2008. Synthetic biology, an area of research focused on the design and construction of new biological parts and devices, or re-design of existing [biological systems](#), is an [emerging technology](#) that is just beginning to garner coverage in the mainstream press.

"Journalistic narratives and imagery can drive [public perceptions](#) of any scientific endeavor, so it is important for scientists, universities and funders to understand how the field is being represented in the press," said Eleonore Pauwels, a public policy scholar at the Wilson Center and coauthor of the report.

The report highlights a number of key trends seen over almost a decade of press coverage of the technology. First, the last three years have seen a significant increase in the sheer number of articles about synthetic biology. For example, coverage in the [United States](#) almost tripled between the 2003-2008 period and the 2008-2011 period. In the European Union there was a six-fold increase between these two periods.

The coverage also remains largely driven by events like the May 2010 announcement by the J. Craig Venter Institute of the creation of the first synthetic self-replicating cell and, immediately following that, the Obama administration tasking the Presidential Commission for the Study of [Bioethical Issues](#) to examine the implications of that discovery.

Finally, the analysis shows that earlier discrepancies between the portrayal of risks and benefits in the press in the United States and the European Union – with the U.S. media focused more on benefits – have almost disappeared. There is also increased similarity in the types of concerns that were covered in the United States and Europe. Ethical concerns garner the most coverage in Europe, followed by biosafety and biosecurity issues. In the United States, biosafety is the top concern; in the 2003 period, the top concern was biosecurity.

**More information:** The full report can be downloaded here:  
[www.synbioproject.org/library/...ations/archive/6636/](http://www.synbioproject.org/library/...ations/archive/6636/)

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