

American News Coverage vs. the World

Henry North COMM 2150 Professor Carter

Friday, November 13, 2015, the date of the terrorist attacks on Paris, France, where 130 people lost their lives and another 368 people were injured. Every news network in the United States covered this incident extensively, making sure no one was left unaware of the horrors that unfolded. However, there were a few other terrorist attacks that went almost completely without notice by those same networks. Twenty one people died in a bombing on the same day in Iraq and the day before another 42 people lost their lives in Lebanon from similar attacks. Over the next couple of weeks, attacks occurred in many places, including Bosnia, Niger, Mali, Egypt, and Tunisia just to name a few. Not once did the major headlines bat an eye and these attacks were swept under the rug except for on social media and other internet sources. A similar instance happened on Tuesday, March 22, 2016 in Brussels, a terrorist attack that was covered all over the news and while more attacks happened elsewhere in the world, they were essentially ignored. Why does the mainstream media pick and choose who is important and who isn't when it comes to letting the American public know about the issues happening in the rest of the world? To find the answer, I aim to analyze the importance of the terrorist attacks on various countries as well as why news media focuses on one country versus another, gather data from the public on their views on how news media covers different events, and try to come to an understanding on ways that the news media can change how they report information to better encompass all similarly occurring events rather than a select few.

Reasons to Focus on Paris

An article in the Washington Post claims there are reasons why Paris got the attention that it did. According to the author, Brian J. Phillips, France is an odd target on the basis that it doesn't experience as much terrorism as other countries. Due to the fact that Paris is also a top tourist destination worldwide, which makes people feel as if they could have been one of the unfortunate souls who were in the attacks. The attacks were also random, in the sense that no one group of people was being targeted, rather the general populace was in danger, which is also quite strange. At the same time the attacks were also very complex and coordinated, due to the number of places within Paris that were targeted, which creates worry. While Phillips agrees that "terrorism in less-developed countries is worth our attention as well", the attack on Paris was a major focus because of how much of an anomaly terrorism is in France compared to those other countries. (Phillips, 2015)

Social Media's Response

An article on the ABC and Univision sponsored website, *Fusion*, shares my question on the lack of attention given to certain terrorist attacks by the American news outlets. Nidhi Prakash takes the time to cover the stories that mainstream news isn't, pointing out the attacks in many different cities of Turkey and Nigeria that occurred near the date of the attack in Brussels, Belgium. While news networks left these incidents unreported, there were many individuals all over social media sites like Facebook and Twitter who were expressing their concern for these countries. ABC News did admittedly at least speak a little on the attack that occurred in Istanbul, Turkey, granted they probably

only did so because two Americans were among the casualties and even then the coverage they gave was minimal. Prakash admits that “there’s no straightforward answer to how and why we cover some tragedies more than others, but it’s worth taking a second to remember that these lives meant just as much as those we lost in Paris, in Brussels, and in San Bernardino.” (Prakash, 2016)

Analysis of News Media

Anna Lekas Miller of *Rolling Stone* came up with a potential hypothesis when questioning why terrorist attacks on Beirut, Lebanon were being ignored in comparison to those in Paris. It is possible that because “bombs and violence are considered routine in the Middle East,” their appearance in Europe is more shocking to people; however, this doesn’t change the fact that these constant bombings don’t just affect the cities where they happen. Citizens of the Middle East have to flee their homes and illegally cross borders until they can eventually claim asylum (Miller, 2015). As Miller says, “all of these tragedies are ‘an attack on all of humanity.’”

The assistant professor of journalism and new media at Northeastern University, John Wihbey, also gave his insight on the various terrorist attacks that have occurred over the past months and the media’s responses to them. News media, especially in America, tends to give less attention to some countries due to cultural bias and acts of xenophobia. “Editors and reporters decide what is newsworthy ... by thinking about what directly impacts their audience.” In the case of the attacks on Paris and Brussels, the Islamic State was involved, which the US has been in constant conflict with. In response to being asked

about how to fix the imbalance in news coverage, Wihbey mentions that members of news media should be “knowledgeable enough to be able to show the connections between remote events and their audience” in regards to foreign affairs. He also notes that we “have a responsibility as news consumers. ... We need to be more self-aware about our news diet and seek out new sources of perspective and information.” (Singer, 2016)

Surveying the Populace

To further analyze how people feel about the American news networks and their current state of foreign affairs coverage, I took to social media to see how different people felt about news media. I presented people with a survey which could be filled out anonymously, a copy of which you can see [here](#).

While 100% of those surveyed knew of the terrorist attacks on Paris, only 70% were also aware of other terrorist attacks that occurred elsewhere around the same era of time. Similarly, 100% of the surveyors knew of the terrorist attacks on Brussels, but only 80% of them also knew of the attacks that occurred around the date of the Brussels attacks in other countries. Most of the surveyors claimed to have seen the Paris and Brussels attacks on the news, but as for attacks on other countries, for the ones who were aware of them, they had heard of them via social media websites.

When surveyors were asked about the current state of the US’s media coverage of global issues, many stated that it was biased and one sided. By one surveyor it was said to focus “primarily on western issues” while another claimed it was “European centric.”

When asked about the ethicality of presenting certain global issues with more importance

than others, approximately 70% of those surveyed agreed that doing such things is an unethical practice. One voice compared the news coverage to the practice of choosing what to follow in a religious text and ignoring the other parts. Another stated that there is “no such thing as objectivity in journalism. . . . Every media outlet has an agenda that they are trying to push based on audience demographics and financial gains.” Of the other 30% of surveyors, the ethicality lied in the fact that some news sources don’t have the capability to report everything that happens and must have a focus on particular concerns.

To bring back a focus on the “_____ Lives Matter” campaign that has been occurring over the past year, surveyors were asked to relate it to the issues with media coverage. A general consensus that I could grab from the results was that attentions need to be focused on what matters the most when it comes to the lives of all people, regardless of race. While the social movement was started as a way to try and stop police brutality on people of color, it still serves a purpose in representing that when a group of people are in trouble, we as a society should stand together and attempt to support and protect them in any way we can. The trouble is that the news media tends to eschew that message and distort it so that people end up wanting to fight against one another instead of standing together as a unified group.

Lastly, surveyors were asked to view a political cartoon and compare its message to what we see actually happening in news media. Most surveyors, as many as 90%, agreed that the cartoon indeed shows how news media works. One such response suggested that “the news is focused on writing headlines that they know will catch people’s attention.

People hear [what happens in] the other countries and just kind of ignore them since they seem to be common [events], even if they aren't." Another stated that "US media only cares about our allies/'first world' countries and doesn't really care about the [less-developed] countries or countries in the Middle East, unless it's focusing on the terrorist groups and not the normal citizens of those countries."

Conclusive Thoughts

As many have said, the way that American news networks present the affairs of foreign countries, specifically in relation to terrorist attacks, lacks a sense of concern for countries that are not ones that their audience should show concern for. This shouldn't be the way the news is represented, because the woes of all countries affect us equally. News networks should try to present every incident that occurs outside our borders as best as possible, because we should be made aware that there are many people suffering from acts of terrorism and not just the ones the news handpick to be the only important ones. If we really want to combat terrorism, we should start by trying to connect with our brethren in every foreign country and try to work towards a global alliance. The attacks will never stop if the news media continues to ignore their presence, they will only continue to grow and expand to other regions until they eventually bring their presence back to the United States. As a country claiming to be a global power, the US shouldn't wait until terrorism decides to knock on our backdoor again, we should be going to the places that need our help, not to fight back, but to protect and connect, so that one day we can eradicate terrorism through unified means.

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