

US Media Find European Terror Deaths 19 Times “More Interesting” Than Middle East Terror Deaths

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Global Research, July 24, 2016

[FAIR](#) 23 July 2016

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

A survey conducted by FAIR of US media coverage of ISIS or ISIS-inspired attacks in Europe and the Middle East reveals a disparity of coverage, showing that European deaths are roughly 1,800 percent more newsworthy than deaths in the Middle East.

For the purposes of this survey, both articles and video reports were included. We chose the three most-circulated “traditional media” newspapers and BuzzFeed, one of the most popular newsites for “Millennials,” to get another perspective. The list was compiled using a combination of the Nexis news database and Google.

Building on a survey of media mentions from March (AlterNet, [3/31/16](#)) of mass attacks on civilians that are either connected to or perceived to be connected to ISIS (note: The Nice attack has yet to be confirmed as an ISIS-inspired attack), one finds that a death in Europe, broadly speaking, is seen as 19 times more newsworthy as one in the Middle East. Setting aside Baghdad, which one could categorize as a “war zone” (unlike Turkey or Lebanon), deaths in non-Western attacks are nine times less likely to garner news coverage.

	Brussels bombings	Paris attacks	Nice attack	Baghdad bombings	Beirut bombing	Ankara bombings	Istanbul bombing
	03-22-2016	11-13-2015	07-14-2016	07-03-2016	11-12-2015	10-10-2015	06-28-2016
<u>Deaths</u>	31	129	84	309	43	103	45
<u>Media Mentions</u>							
NYTimes	40	120	95	13	12	8	21
Washington Post	73	416	101	16	23	14	28
Wall Street Journal	91	340	57	8	22	10	17
Buzzfeed	43	163	15	6	7	6	8
Total mentions	247	1039	268	43	64	38	74
Mentions per death	7.97	8.05	3.19	0.14	1.49	0.37	1.64
Total ISIS Terror Mentions - EU			1329	Total ISIS Terror Mentions - MENA			219
Total ISIS Terror Deaths - EU			160	Total ISIS Terror Deaths - MENA			500
Deaths/Mentions Ratio			8.31	Deaths/Mentions Ratio			0.44
How many more mentions per death Europe - MENA							18.96

But why? American pundits like Max Fisher (Vox, [11/16/15](#)) and Brian J. Phillips (Washington Post, [11/16/15](#)) have dismissed those concerned over this discrepancy as “tragedy hipsters,” a pejorative used to describe people who feign outrage over imbalanced

coverage.

Some commentators today honestly sound like tragedy hipsters, “Bro- I care about suffering and death that you’ve never even heard of”

— Jamiles Larthey (@JamilesLarthey) [14 November 2015](#)

Did the media ignore the Beirut bombings? Or did readers?

Updated by Max Fisher on November 16, 2015, 1:30 p.m. ET [@Max_Fisher](#) [max@](#)

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Max Fisher in Vox (11/16/15): “I have never really succeeded in getting readers to care about such bombings that happen outside of the Western world.”

Those like Fisher who dismiss such concerns largely chalk up the difference in coverage to a gap in reader interest, which Fisher supports with a personal anecdote. This argument ignores the extent to which audience interest is shaped by media priorities. Phillips blames the “man bites dog” factor—meaning the attacks in France have more news value by virtue of the fact that attacks there are “more unusual.” While this could be said for Baghdad (and to a lesser extent Turkey), there have actually been three times as many terror attacks in France as there has been in Lebanon over the past year and a half, yet France merited over

five times the coverage.

Not surprisingly, Fisher's former publication Vox had only one passing mention of the Baghdad attacks, while dedicating nine articles to the Nice attack, despite it having one-third as many victims. As another point of reference, Vox dedicated [three times](#) as many articles to the Taylor Swift-Kanye West controversy as it did the worst terror attack in Iraq's post-invasion history.

Recent reports by Public Radio International ([7/16/16](#)) and the New York Times ([7/5/16](#)) attempted to answer why, despite being the worst terrorist attack since the US-led invasion in 2003, media coverage of the ISIS Baghdad bombings earlier this month that left over 300 dead was largely absent but came up short, alluding toward the obvious but not really noting it with certainty.

The elephant in the room, and one the media doesn't seem willing or able to address, is racism—sometimes gestured toward with the vague catch-all “shared cultures,” but more often simply ignored. While it's possible that proximity and frequency, or a general lack of reader interest, is the culprit, it can't account for such a wide gap. (It's worth noting that there are more people in the US of Lebanese than Belgian descent—488,000 vs. 378,000, according to the [US Census](#).)

Occam's razor suggests that institutional white supremacy (often manifesting with orientalist assumptions about a “cycle of violence” in the Middle East) heavily influences the disparity of coverage. France isn't any more the United States than Turkey or Lebanon are, but France and the US do share a majority white population. Without at least recognizing this factor, how can newsmakers accurately assess their editorial priorities? Doing so doesn't make one a hipster, it means one acknowledges reality — a trait that should be encouraged rather than glibly mocked.

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