

Valuing Victims: A Comparative Framing Analysis of *The Washington Post's* Coverage of Violent Attacks Against Muslims and Non-Muslims

MOHAMMED EL-NAWAWY
Queens University of Charlotte, USA

MOHAMAD HAMAS ELMASRY
Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, Qatar
University of North Alabama, USA

This study examines *The Washington Post's* framing of five terrorist attacks taking place in four countries—Turkey, France, Nigeria and Belgium—during a five-month period in 2015 and 2016. Attacks in Turkey and Nigeria were perpetrated against mostly Muslim victims, while France and Belgium attacks were carried out against mostly non-Muslims. Results suggest meaningful differences between the way *The Post* framed attacks against Western European targets, on the one hand, and attacks against Muslim-majority communities, on the other. In covering attacks on France and Belgium, *The Post* used “terrorism frames” to structure coverage while consistently humanizing victims and drawing links between European societies and the Western world more generally. Attacks against Turkey and Nigeria were covered less prominently and were primarily framed as internal conflicts.

Keywords: framing, terrorism, The Washington Post, humanization, Muslims

Following a series of 2015–2016 terrorist attacks victimizing both Muslims and non-Muslims, several commentators suggested disparities in Western news attention to the events. Writers like Anne Barnard (2016) and Haroon Moghul (2016) claimed Western news outlets were more concerned with Western, non-Muslim victims of terror than with Muslim victims. An informal analysis by Johnson (2016) seemed to support the accusations. His analysis, based on newspaper articles and video news reports, found that American news media were 19 times more likely to cover European victims of terrorism than Middle Eastern victims. Although media scholarship has yet to address this specific issue, a significant body of research has spoken to larger issues of alleged Western news disparities in coverage of conflicts and human tragedies affecting people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds as well as Westerners and non-Westerners. A separate body of literature about American news coverage of terrorism suggests that American coverage has overrepresented Muslims as terrorists (Dixon & Williams, 2015); demonized

Mohammed el-Nawawy: nawawym@queens.edu

Mohamad Hamas Elmasry: mohamad.hamas@dohainstitute.edu.qa

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Muslims and avoided context about the root causes of terror (Ismail & Berkowitz, 2009; Roy & Ross, 2011); and been characterized by a bipolar us versus them approach (Hutcheson, Domke, Billeaudeau, & Garland, 2004). Said (1981) suggested Western media exacerbate cultural divides between Muslims and non-Muslims, often focusing on cultural differences and ignoring overwhelming cultural similarities.

This is the first of two studies the authors will undertake comparing American newspaper coverage of Muslim-perpetrated terrorist attacks committed against Western-majority and Muslim-majority societies, respectively. The current study uses qualitative framing analysis to examine *The Washington Post's* framing of five terrorist attacks taking place during a five-month period in 2015 and 2016. The five attacks were committed in Ankara, Turkey (two attacks); Paris, France; Maiduguri, Nigeria; and Brussels, Belgium. A subsequent study will use quantitative content analysis to examine coverage of the same five attacks in elite American newspapers. One inherent assumption of this research plan is that both kinds of approaches—qualitative and quantitative—are needed to fully examine this issue.

Background

Over the past several years, terror attacks perpetrated by Muslim extremists have hit several countries. While some attacks have been covered intensely by major Western media outlets, others have gone uncovered (Kealing, 2016).

The five attacks that are the subject of this study took place in four countries—Turkey, France, Nigeria, and Belgium—over the course of late 2015 and early 2016. The attacks in Turkey and Nigeria were perpetrated against mostly Muslim victims, whereas the France and Belgium attacks were carried out against mostly non-Muslims. All five attacks fit the textbook definition of terrorism: targeting civilians for political reasons (Ganor, 2007).

Turkey Attacks

Two attacks took place in the Turkish capital, Ankara, on October 10, 2015, and March 13, 2016, respectively. In October, two bombs detonated near the city's central railway station, killing 97. Victims were participating in a pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party peace rally. No party claimed responsibility, but the Turkish government accused the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Kurdish rebel groups ("Nearly 100 dead," 2015). In March, car bombs detonated near a central bus stop, killing 37. A Kurdish group named TAK, an offshoot of the Kurdistan's Workers Party (PKK), claimed responsibility ("Ankara blast," 2016). The PKK is considered a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States, and NATO (White, 2011).

Domestically, Turkey has witnessed tensions with its ethnically Kurdish minority, exemplified by a bloody conflict since the PKK's formulation in 1978 (Stempel, 2014).

Nigeria Attack

A Nigerian village, Maiduguri, witnessed a bloody attack on January 30, 2016, when members of the Boko Haram militant group set the village ablaze, killing at least 86. Among the victims were children who were burned alive (Karimi, 2016).

Boko Haram, whose violent insurgency in northeastern Nigeria started in 2009, condemns Western education and is trying to impose Sharia law. The group has thousands of members equipped with advanced weapons imported from Libya and Mali (Jacob, 2013). Boko Haram is affiliated with the Al-Qaeda terrorist group (Smith & Parker, 2014).

ISIL in Europe: Paris and Brussels Attacks

On November 13, 2015, ISIL-affiliated youth carried out bombings and shootings in the French capital, Paris, killing 130. Investigations showed that six of the assailants were Europeans with North African origins. They had traveled to Syria in the months preceding the attacks (Higgins & Freytas-Tamura, 2015).

On March 22, 2016, the Belgian capital, Brussels, witnessed three suicide bombings—two at the city's main airport and one at a central metro station—that killed 32 civilians. ISIL claimed responsibility for the attacks, carried out by five suspects, several of whom were born and raised in Brussels, but had North African origins (Hume, 2016).

ISIL and other extremist groups have been able to recruit some young Muslims from France and Belgium "due to those states' staunch secularism, coupled with a sense of marginalization among immigrant communities" (Malsin, 2016, para. 4).

Western News Media and the Relative Value of Human Life

A number of studies have assessed the relative weight allotted to human life by Western news media, with some studies focusing on coverage of natural disasters and humanitarian crises, and other studies focused on reportage of violent conflict. Overall, these lines of research suggest that Western news media humanize Western victims and cover them more prominently than non-Western victims, who are stereotyped and "Othered."

Most of the research into Western news coverage of disasters and humanitarian crises suggests that Western media value Western lives more than non-Western lives (Adams, 1986; Hanusch, 2008, 2012; Hawkins, 2002; Joye, 2009, 2010; Moeller, 1999; Simon, 1997; Van Belle, 2000). In relatively few instances, researchers have found Western news media to prominently cover disasters and crises in the non-Western world (see Hachten & Beil, 1985; Singer, Endreny, & Glassman, 1991), but this research also suggests that Western coverage of Third World disasters is stereotypical, serving to exoticize non-Western victims as "Other" (Campbell, 2012; Chouliaraki, 2006; Fair, 1993; Franks, 2005; Gerbner & Marvanyl, 1977).

Research into Western news coverage of violent conflicts suggests that while Western war reporting is increasingly sanitized in general (see Aday, 2005; King & Lester, 2005; Silcock, Schwalbe, & Keith, 2008), non-Western victims of war are often ignored in Western reportage. For instance, Youssef (2009) found CNN “downplayed” Iraqi civilian casualties associated with America’s 2003 invasion of Iraq. Griffin and Lee (1995) found that while American magazine coverage of the 1991 American war in Iraq rarely showed dead American soldiers, dead Iraqis were almost never displayed, despite there being many more Iraqi casualties. Much of the research on American news coverage of violent foreign conflicts suggests American news media follow the official American government line. Herman and Chomsky (1988) argued that American news media outline two kinds of victims in their coverage: “worthy” and “unworthy.” Worthy victims suffer at the hands of governments opposed to the United States, whereas unworthy victims are repressed either by the United States or an American ally.

Research into American news treatment of the Israel–Palestine conflict seems to support the basic “worthy and unworthy victims” hypothesis. Research shows American news media strongly support Israel, an American ally, over the Palestinians. Elmasry (2009) found that *The New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune* covered Israeli deaths more prominently than Palestinian deaths and that Palestinian-perpetrated killings were more likely to be condemned by the newspapers than Israeli-perpetrated killings, which were often legitimated. Other studies (see Ackerman, 2001; Dunsky, 2008; Friel & Falk, 2007; Ross, 2003) have produced similar results.

Framing Theory

Framing is a theoretical framework for understanding the meanings of texts and how they are packaged to reflect specific elucidations. Framing is the process of highlighting dimensions in a text “in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

Communicators can make aspects in a message more salient by choosing words, phrases, images, symbols, sources, and associations (Entman, 1993). Pan and Kosicki (1993) posited that sentence arrangement and organization, information gathering, source material, and types of images can be key drivers of frames. Also, individual-level and organizational-level phenomena and constraints—including personal backgrounds, political preferences, and editorial policies—can affect the way journalists frame issues (Scheufele, 1999). The way journalists frame events can affect audience perceptions (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

A news frame can be issue-focused, delving deeply into a particular event or subject (in which case it cannot be generalizable to other similar issues), or it can be generic, as when it deals with a broad sociopolitical field (de Vreese, 2005). Regardless of the specific or generic nature of the news frames, journalists have to adopt a pluralistic and comprehensive approach that allows for sufficient understanding of the contextual circumstances surrounding an event (D’Angelo, 2002).

Method

This research employs qualitative framing analysis to examine *The Washington Post's* print news articles covering five terrorist attacks—in Ankara, Turkey (two attacks); Paris, France; Maiduguri, Nigeria; and Brussels, Belgium—occurring over a five-month period in late 2015 and early 2016. The print edition was selected because in the United States, print continues to be by far “the most common way of reading newspapers” (Barthel, 2016, para. 5).

The authors chose *The Post* because of its status as an elite American newspaper based in America’s capital city. The five aforementioned attacks were chosen because they took place successively, were perpetrated by Muslim extremists, inflicted major civilian fatalities, and represented diversity between Muslim and non-Muslim victims.

The attacks in Paris and Brussels represent attacks on key European, non-Muslim-majority cities. The attack in Maiduguri, Nigeria, was perpetrated in a Muslim-majority section of Africa’s most populous nation and offers an important point of comparison—in terms of geographic distance, race, and dominant victim religious identity—with both Paris and Brussels. Given the vast cultural and geographic distance between Western Europe and Africa, the decision was made to also analyze two attacks occurring in a society—Ankara, Turkey—that is closer, both geographically and culturally, to France and Belgium. Ankara is located in Europe but also represents a Muslim-majority society.

The authors aimed to study the most prominently placed *Post* print news article published on the two days immediately following each attack. For example, since the Paris attack occurred on November 13, 2015, the November 14 and November 15 print editions of the paper were searched, and the most prominently placed article about the attack in each edition was identified. The same strategy was used for each of the five attacks; however, since *The Post* covered the Maiduguri, Nigeria, attack with only a single article (on February 1, 2016), only one article about that event was analyzed. The authors thus examined a total of nine articles: two each written about the Paris, Brussels, Ankara-October, and Ankara-March events and one about the Maiduguri event.

Following Entman (1993) and others, this study assumes that news frames represent the most important meaning-making and organizing formula for news texts. A qualitative analysis was selected because such an approach facilitates in-depth exploration of the meaning of texts (Pauly, 1991). The study’s methodological approach, qualitative framing analysis, “involves repeated and extensive engagement with a text and looks holistically at the material to identify frames” (Connolly-Ahern & Broadway, 2008, p. 369). The authors opted for an inductive approach—the close reading(s) allowed for frames to emerge from the articles. After first reading articles independently, the two researchers came together to discuss both general content directions and frames. In the analysis, attention was paid to keywords, phrases, ordering of material, inclusion and exclusion of information, sources, quotes, associations, and the presence and content of images.

Results

Washington Post coverage of the five terrorist attacks examined here differed markedly by event and, in particular, type of victim targeted. In the two attacks affecting predominantly Western European victims—Paris and Belgium—coverage was prominent, employed “terrorism frames,” and humanized victims and mourners. Attacks against Ankara, Turkey, and Maiduguri, Nigeria—both Muslim-majority societies—were covered less prominently. In coverage of Ankara and Maiduguri, *The Post* generally avoided a terrorism frame, talked about the violence as part of internal domestic conflicts and, in the case of Ankara, highlighted criticisms of the Turkish government.

The First Ankara Attack

The first terrorist attack in Ankara targeted civilians attending a large peace rally on October 10, 2015, and killed at least 97 people. *The Post* covered the attack prominently on October 11, 2015—a front-page article, “Blasts Hit Peace Rally in Turkey,” featured a photo of a grieving man kneeling by bodies draped in flags. This article, which continued on an inside page, was long (25 paragraphs). On an inside page, *The Post* also included a second, 20-paragraph article about the attack. On October 12, the paper devoted a single, relatively short (13 paragraphs) article to the aftermath of the attack. The most prominently placed of the two October 11 articles and the lone October 12 article about the attack were analyzed.

October 11, 2015

In its October 11, 2015, front-page story about the Ankara attack, *The Post* used the word *terrorism*, but the usage was not prominent enough to warrant a terrorism frame per se. Rather, “conflict” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000) and “geopolitical” (Douai & Lauricella, 2014) frames emerged from this analysis. Also, a “humanization” frame was used to describe the victims. Topical emphasis, specific word choices, and sources (Entman, 1993) dictated frames.

Conflict Frame. The reporter who wrote the October 10, 2015, story did not use the word *terrorism* to describe the attack—although the words *terror* and *terrorism* were used by a pair of sources, a political analyst, and the American government.

Rather than discuss the attack as terrorism, *The Post* referred to the attack alternatively as “blasts,” “explosions,” “twin bombings,” and “a fiery explosion.” Importantly, the article describes the perpetrators as “separatists,” not terrorists. Later, the piece refers to violent Kurdish activists as “militants” and “militias” and “fighters.” The use of “separatists,” “militants,” “militias,” and “fighters” rather than “terrorists” fed into the larger conflict frame at play in the piece. A conflict frame is one which “emphasizes conflict between individuals, groups or institutions as a means of capturing audience interest” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 95). Frames that focus on terrorism and criminality, in contrast, explain violence as senseless aggression and serve to delegitimize specific acts of violence (Elmasry, 2009). Warlike terms such as *fighters* and *militias* suggest a war or conflict frame rather than a terrorism frame (Elmasry, 2009).

The October 10, 2015, attack on Ankara was described as an act of war committed by one warring faction against another. From the outset, the article provides an important backdrop—grounded in an explanation of the historical conflict between the Turkish state and Kurds—for the attack. The subhead referred to continued “violence between security forces and Kurdish separatists,” while the lead described the attack as “a reminder of the growing conflicts Turkey faces.” The second paragraph also referenced violence “that has flared [recently] between Turkish security forces and Kurdish separatists.” Later, the article describes “Turkey’s decades-old struggle with the Kurds.” Near the article’s end, several paragraphs discuss the historical rift.

Geopolitical Frame. To describe the attack, *The Post* also used a geopolitical frame, which can be used by news outlets to emphasize “geopolitical calculations” (Douai & Lauricella, 2014, p. 15). The story’s lead paragraph refers to Turkey’s dilemma “across the border in . . . Syria,” while the third paragraph describes Turkey’s geopolitical alliances and considerations—specifically, this paragraph notes that Turkey is a NATO member, a “key U.S. ally,” and that it “shares borders with Syria, Iraq and Iran.” The paragraph also describes Turkey’s conflict with Russia over Syria. The article goes on to explain that Syrian refugees in Turkey have been a “source of political instability.”

Humanization Frame. Contrary to patterns of previous coverage (see literature review), *The Washington Post*’s October 11, 2015, article did humanize Muslim victims in Ankara. A front-page photo showed a mourner kneeling near bodies, and a pair of photos on the inside page (onto which the article continued) showed wounded victims. The text also used humanizing language, describing “dazed and bloody demonstrators clinging to one another” and “bodies, some of them dismembered, lay on the street.”

October 12, 2015

Several frames emerged from the analysis of the *Post*’s October 11 article about the aftermath of the Ankara attack. Specifically, terrorism, blame, and conflict frames emerged from the close readings.

Terrorism Frame. In contrast to *The Post*’s October 11, 2015 article about the Ankara attack, the newspaper’s October 12, 2015, coverage of the aftermath of the attack clearly describes the October 10, 2015, event as a “terrorist attack.” The article also quotes the Turkish government, which said it was investigating the attack as an act of terrorism, and also a political analyst who suggested extremists returning to Turkey from Syria could be to blame.

Blame Frame. However, rather than spend significant time describing the attack or its victims, the article focuses primarily on criticisms of the Turkish government. The article’s most prominent frame may be characterized as a blame frame, focusing on pinning blame against Turkish authorities. This frame is significant, especially given that Turkish authorities were a target of the attackers.

The article’s headline, “Mourners Denounce Turkish Authorities in Wake of Attack,” sets the tone for what follows. The lead describes “crowds of angry mourners” marching to “denounce Turkish authorities.” The second paragraph notes that the opposition “condemned the authorities for failing to

protect the demonstration." The third paragraph documents a protester chant, which called Turkish President Recep Tayeb Erdogan a "murderer." Late in the article, a Kurdish official is quoted speaking about the philosophy of the ruling government, which he describes as "not based on the idea of citizenship; they divide the population between us and them." The Kurdish official goes on to say, "They don't see our party offices or our members . . . as things that should be protected." The story also features a statement from a leftist opposition group, which suggests that Erdogan was attempting to "sow chaos ahead of elections to gain more votes."

Conflict Frame. *The Post's* October 12, 2015, article also employed a conflict frame, although to a lesser extent than the October 11 article. "Tensions between Turkey's government and the country's 14 million Kurds" were described, as were previous violent attacks perpetrated by both Kurdish factions and the government.

The Paris Attack

The Washington Post's coverage of the November 13, 2015, Paris attack differed significantly from the paper's coverage of the first Ankara attack. In terms of sheer prominence, coverage of the Paris attack dwarfed coverage of the Ankara attack. The November 14 edition of *The Post* featured three large news stories about the attack, including one prominently placed front-page story. Two of the three articles were long—29 and 28 paragraphs—while the other was fairly short (12 paragraphs). The November 15 edition featured five more news stories, including three on the front page. The articles were all relatively long: 30, 23, 46, 29, and 27 paragraphs long.

November 14, 2015

Three dominant frames emerged from the reading of the November 14, 2015, front-page article: a terrorism frame, a "Western values" frame, and a humanization frame.

Terrorism Frame. *The Post's* November 14, 2015, article framed the November 13 attack on Paris as an act of "terrorism." The terrorism frame was highly prominent, and a more specific form of terrorism—religious terrorism—was also highlighted.

Words and phrases are key drivers of frames (Entman, 1993). Variations of the word *terrorism* were used in the article's subhead and again in the article's second paragraph. The word was also used in multiple quotes by sources, while other, similar phrases—"terrified fans," "extremist groups," "suicide bombers," "massacre," and "mass murder"—were also used. Superlatives, such as "deadliest day" and "worst terrorist attack on Western soil," were also employed.

A vivid description of terrorism was provided when *The Post's* article compared the attack to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States: "The assaults represented the deadliest day of attacks in France since World War II and one of the worst terrorist strikes on Western soil since September 11, 2001." Association is an important driver of frames (Entman, 1993). The religious dimension of the attack was highlighted by phrases such as "Islamist extremism" and "Islamist gunmen"

and several mentions of “the Islamic State,” a reference to ISIL, which the article implicated in the attack. The story also mentioned that Muslim extremists celebrated the attack online.

The article also spoke to a sense of terror in Paris and across Europe. The subhead said France “tightens border controls” while the lead spoke of “scenes of horror.” Other parts of the article spoke of security measures, including “heavily armed security forces,” the declaration of a “state of emergency,” the “deployment of the army,” and multiple mentions of “border controls.”

Western Values Frame. The article framed the attack not as an assault on a group of people, but rather on Paris as a whole. Importantly, France was linked to the rest of the Western world, and the attack was described as an assault on the West more generally.

The headline spoke of an “Assault on Paris.” The suggestion that an entire city was the target of the attack represents a departure from coverage of the Ankara attack—the headline of *The Post’s* most prominent article about the Ankara attack said that violence from that incident was carried out against “a peace rally.” The second paragraph highlighted other attacks on Western soil, and the fifth paragraph highlighted condemnations from “World leaders”—later in the article, American President Barack Obama is quoted underscoring Western values: “He said the wave of violence was not just an assault on France but ‘an attack on all of humanity and universal values we share.’”

Humanization Frame. A humanization frame also emerged from the close reading of *The Post’s* November 14, 2015, article. The article described “carnage” and explained how civilians were gunned down while carrying out normally safe activities—“where tourists and residents had been enjoying the sort of experiences . . . that define Friday night in Paris. . . . Soccer games, concerts and evening meals.”

Four separate photographs displayed either wounded victims or people fleeing violence, with each photo including a caption describing scenes in detail. Also, the article noted that “People . . . fled in panic” and that there were “piles of bodies in the street.” There was also specific mention of victims—one section said victims were “wrapped in gold-colored heat blankets” and “had blood splattered on their clothing.” One sentence noted that some victims “cried.” The article also featured multiple quotes from victims and eyewitnesses describing scenes of violence.

November 15, 2015

On the second day of coverage of the Paris attack, *The Post* covered the event prominently. The most prominently placed articles were three front-page stories placed side-by-side. To facilitate fair comparison, just one of these articles was selected—the longest of the three, headlined “From Typical to Terror in a Half-Hour.” The article was dominated by a terrorism frame and a humanization frame.

Terrorism Frame. The headline invoked the word *terror*, while the rest of the article described—in vivid detail—specific scenes of violence. For example, one section reads, “At 9:20 p.m., an explosion boomed through the stadium. A suicide bomber [blew] himself up outside, killing one passerby.” Another

section reads, "Moments later, at 9:25 p.m., two gunmen stepped out . . . in front of Le Carillon, a modest café-bar . . . and started shooting."

The beginning of another paragraph says, "The shooters then walked across the street and opened fire at a restaurant." Later, the article reads, "Gunmen with assault weapons stepped out . . . and opened fire at an Italian restaurant . . . a nearby café . . . and a laundromat." Other suicide bombings are described later in the article in similar detail.

The article also features several quotes from eyewitnesses describing scenes of violence. One eyewitness was quoted as saying that the gunmen opened fire at one location for "at least three minutes," and another said that "a lot of people started screaming . . . some of them were running." One person at the scene of one shooting said, "We were lying down on the floor, trying not to move, pretending we were dead . . . we could hear gunshots, screaming." Later in the article, a political motivation was provided by one eyewitness, a woman named Jasmine: "[The attackers] said, 'What you've done to Syrians . . . you're paying for it.'"

Humanization Frame. Much of the article discusses victims and witnesses of the attack. Personalization is one key component of victim humanization (Elmasry, 2009). Importantly, personal details, including names, ages, and occupations, are provided. Also, and as detailed above, several citizen eyewitnesses were quoted in the story.

Details are provided about Stefano—"a 30-year-old Brazilian citizen working in Paris as an artist"—and his involvement in the event. The article says, "Stefano saw his friend Gabriel lying on the sidewalk covered in blood." Stefano's wife, Laurine Durand, was also quoted.

Other civilians quoted include a 32-year-old woman named Juliette, a technician named Louis H., a 49-year-old American named Helen Jane Wilson, and two citizens—Jasmine and Mary Sheridan—identified only by their names. Some of those sourced were quoted in detail and provided information about the scenes they witnessed, including lucid descriptions of both violence and fears. Details about one of the deceased—a 23-year-old American California State University student, Nohemi Gonzalez—were also provided.

The Maiduguri, Nigeria, Attack

The Maiduguri, Nigeria, attack was covered scantily by *The Washington Post*. Only a single eight-paragraph article on page A10 of the February 1, 2016, edition was devoted to the incident. No photographs or other images were published.

February 1, 2016

The Post's article employed both "senseless aggression" and humanization frames.

Senseless Aggression Frame. Although Boko Haram was identified as the perpetrator of the attack, *The Post* did not use any variations of the word *terrorism* in its coverage. *The Post* covered the violence in detail, describing it as senseless aggression committed by “extremists.” The article did not provide background on Boko Haram, mention that the group is an Al-Qaeda offshoot, or discuss the violence as part of the problem of international terrorism. These omissions are meaningful. Importantly, the piece framed the event as an internal, domestic problem and attributed it to “homegrown Islamist extremists” and a “six-year Islamist uprising” that has resulted in the deaths of “20,000 people.” Overall, then, the senseless aggression frame was characterized by an emphasis on local instability, rather than global terrorism.

Humanization Frame. The article goes to some length to humanize victims, beginning with a narrative lead describing, in vivid detail, an eyewitness account of the violence. The lead mentions “the screams of children burning to death.” The lead is followed by a description of “charred corpses and bodies with bullet wounds littered [in] the streets.”

The Second Ankara Attack

The second Ankara attack studied here—carried out March 13, 2016—was not covered prominently by *The Washington Post* in the two days following the event. Although the attack targeted a busy area, included 37 civilian casualties, and represented a continuation of earlier terrorism in Ankara, just a single article was devoted to the attack on both March 14, 2016, and March 15, 2016. Both articles were published on inside pages (A8 and A10, respectively), but the March 14 article was “teased” with a short blurb on the front page.

March 14, 2016

The March 14, 2016, article was teased with a short headline blurb that read, “Violence in Ankara,” followed by a short description: “A car bomb near a busy square along a main boulevard in Turkey’s capital left at least 34 people dead.” The decision to avoid the word *terrorism* fed into a conflict frame, which emerged from the analysis. The article also employed a geopolitical frame.

Conflict Frame. The article, which, at just 13 paragraphs long, was relatively short, used variations of the word *terrorism* only twice, both near the end of the article and at neither time to describe the violent event at issue. Rather, word choices dictated a conflict frame. The article’s main headline used the word *blast* to describe the violence, while the subhead used the phrase “major bombing.” The lead paragraph described the violence as “a car bomb in the heart of the Turkish capital.” The article continued to use similar phrasing—“explosion,” “bombing,” “blast.” The article referred to the attackers as “militants” and speculated that the perpetrators were members of the PKK, or Kurdistan Workers’ Party, a group officially labeled a terrorist organization by both the United States and Turkey and which has claimed responsibility for numerous civilian-targeted bombings.

Perhaps more important, the article’s general emphasis was on the ongoing conflict between the Turkish government and Kurds. The subhead said that the bombing “raises fears that wars are spreading,”

the lead paragraph noted “that violence from the war against Kurdish militants in the southeast is spilling into Turkish cities,” and the article later spoke of “escalating violence between the Turkish government and the PKK.” The article went on to both explicitly link the PKK to the attack and describe earlier attacks carried out by the group.

Geopolitical Frame. Much of the article’s remaining topical emphasis focused on Turkey’s larger regional policies and geopolitical considerations. For instance, the article said, “The violence has unnerved Turkey, which finds itself entangled in fights on two fronts, against the Kurds in southeastern Turkey and against the Islamic State in Syria. The two wars are becoming ever more closely intertwined.” The article also noted that “the fighting between Turkey and the YPG [Syrian People’s Protection Units] has caused friction with the United States, too, which is allied with both of them in the war against the Islamic State.”

March 15, 2016

On March 15, 2016, *The Washington Post* devoted just one small (10 paragraphs) article about the March 14, 2016, attack. The article focused not on the attack per se, but mostly on the Turkish government’s response. When the article did speak to the March 14 attack, the dominant frame was, again, a conflict frame.

Conflict Frame. The article, titled “Turkey Hits Kurdish Militants’ Positions,” focused mostly on Turkey’s military response, something which fed into the dominant conflict frame that characterized the piece.

The March 14 attack was referred to as a “separatist bombing” and a “blast” and the perpetrators as “Kurdish militants,” “separatists,” and “attackers.” The attack and investigation were described, but no variations of the word *terrorism* were used at any point in the article.

The news story said the conflict between the Kurds and Turkish government could be “spreading,” and mentioned Turkish government strikes against “PKK positions.” The piece noted the PKK has “waged a violent campaign since the 1980s.” Previous PKK attacks were described, as were acts of Turkish government violence. These editorial decisions took focus away from the attack and placed focus on the larger battle between the PKK and Turkey.

The Belgium Attack

On the two days following the attack on Belgium, *The Washington Post* offered up very prominent coverage of the event. On both days, five news articles were published, including three on each front page—in all, then, there were 10 articles and six front-page articles about the attack. In addition, there were many photographs, including multiple large, half-page photographs. Most of the published articles were quite long. The three front-page articles published on March 23, 2016, measured 29, 34, and 23 paragraphs long, and the remaining two articles were 22 and 24 paragraphs long. On March 24, 2016, the three front-page articles were 34, 25, and 25 paragraphs long, and the remaining two articles were 15 and 25 paragraphs long.

The most prominently placed article on each day was analyzed. The examined articles were the longest of the published front-page reports. Both articles began above the fold.

March 23, 2016

On March 23, 2016, the most prominently placed article in *The Washington Post* about the Belgium attack was titled "Suicide Bombs at Airport, on Subway." The subhead read, "Officials had expected an attack but were stunned." The dominant frames emerging from the analysis were a terrorism frame and a humanization frame.

Terrorism Frame. A terrorism frame was established by both the headline and lead, which read, in part, "Islamic State suicide bombers brought terror, chaos and bloodshed to the city at the heart of European unity on Tuesday." Throughout the article, variations of the word *terrorism*, comparisons to previous terrorist attacks perpetrated on Western soil, and frequent links and references to the "Islamic State"—an organization universally recognized as a terrorist group—served to drive home the terrorism frame.

The terror frame was also driven home by vivid descriptions of the violent acts. The story noted that the "magnitude" of the attack "was stunning," while descriptions such as "nail-spewing bombs," "mass killings," "explosive devices loaded with nails and chemicals" helped cement the terrorism frame.

The piece also spoke to a sense of fear among people in Belgium and across Europe, highlighting persistent fears and suggesting that people across Europe should remain scared of the possibility of future attacks. For example, the article mentioned "a renewed sense of threat that spilled far beyond Brussels," while also noting that "Tuesday's mass killings add [Brussels] to an ignominious but growing list of European capitals that have been struck in the past year by deadly attacks . . . by the Islamic State." The article referenced "evidence that more [attacks] could be on the way," and also referred to "a tide of homegrown extremism." The article went further, noting that the Islamic State "has repeatedly threatened to hit Europe at its core." A quote from the Belgian prime minister also helped establish the sense of fear: "What we had feared has happened." Near the end of the news story, further detail about larger European fears was provided: "The latest bloodshed made clear that European capitals remain perilously vulnerable." A terrorism expert was quoted at the end of the article: "This is a kind of scenario every capital in Europe feared."

The article described Belgian's terrorist threat as being derived from the Islamic State, which, the article said, is based on both "foreign fighters [from Syria]" and homegrown terrorists, those who have been "radicalized in [Belgian] cities."

Humanization Frame. The *Post* article examined here humanized victims of the Belgium attack, feeding into a dominant humanization frame. Three separate photographs of victims and rich descriptions of victim struggle were key drivers of the frame.

One photo, placed prominently on the front page, above the fold, showed two bloodied female victims. A second photo on the inside page showed a wounded man being cared for by paramedics. A third photo including the caption, "Airport workers leave the terminal. Many of those injured in the explosions lost limbs as shrapnel radiated through packed crowds."

The article body also noted that "many of the injured lost limbs as shrapnel from the blasts radiated through packed crowds," while also mentioning that "children" were seen "cowering on a bloody floor amid the maimed and the dead." A description of the subway scene said, "Footage . . . revealed desperate scenes as people dressed for a day's work stumbled from the mangled wreckage into a smoke-drenched tunnel."

March 24, 2016

The article examined from *The Post's* March 24 coverage was titled "Bombings Push a Battered Continent Even Closer to Its Breaking Point." This article represented a departure from other articles in that it focused only tangentially on the March 22, 2016, bombings. The article focused primarily on the larger consequences of terrorism for Europe. The dominant frame that emerged from the analysis of this article was an "Islamist terrorism endangers Europe" frame.

Islamist Terrorism Endangers Europe Frame. The article's headline, noting that Europe is a "battered continent" and close to its "breaking point" helped establish the article's dominant frame. The lead paragraph, meanwhile, built on the headline by associating modern-day Europe with mid-20th century Europe. Entman (1993) argued that "association" can be an important element in the framing process.

Specifically, the story used a narrative lead focusing on an elderly man, Corrado Pirzio-Biroli, who was nearly killed in the March 22, 2016, attack on Belgium. Pirzio-Biroli, the lead says, "was a wartime prisoner" as a child, while his "mother was held in a concentration camp" and his grandfather "was hanged for an aborted attempt to overthrow Hitler." The article then made the explicit link between the two eras in question and the kinds of violent crimes that characterized them: "And in the Europe of his old age, the 75-year-old with twinkling blue eyes narrowly missed being blown up on Tuesday morning as he rode the Brussels subway."

The article then referenced the "Islamic State bomber" that carried out the subway bombing, and said that "the very idea of Europe [is now] under extraordinary strain." The mentioning of the "Islamic State" and "extraordinary strain" suggested that Islamist terrorism is one of the primary reasons for Europe's trauma. The rest of the article makes this clear with mentions of an "unparalleled inflow of refugees" and "the reality of mass-casualty attacks in its largest cities." The headline on the inside page, onto which the article continues, drove the point home: "Homegrown bombings, migrant crisis paint Europe as a continent in disarray."

The article noted that Pirzio-Biroli is scared "for the continent's future," with quotes from both the French Prime Minister and a Carnegie research analyst echoing his sentiments. Pirzio-Biroli was later

quoted again: "We're in a very deep crisis," he said. The article noted that the March 22 attacks "quite literally shook the foundations of the E.U." and added to "a palpable sense that Europe can't cope with its many overlapping crises." The news story also said that European involvement in the Middle East led directly to both a "historic number of refugees" coming to Europe and the increase of "radicalization at home." Overall, the article's collective emphasis on refugees, Muslim extremism, violence, and an uncertain future worked to solidify the "Islamist terrorism endangers Europe" frame.

Discussion

Results from this analysis suggest meaningful differences between the way *The Washington Post* framed a pair of Muslim-perpetrated terrorist attacks against Western European targets, on the one hand, and three other attacks against Muslim-majority communities, on the other hand. In coverage of the Paris and Belgium attacks, *The Post* used terrorism frames to structure coverage, while consistently humanizing victims and drawing links between European societies and the Western world more generally. In contrast, attacks against Ankara and Maiduguri, which were covered much less prominently, were primarily framed as internal conflicts. *The Post* did humanize victims of both Ankara and Maiduguri, but the paper was less likely to humanize victims of these attacks than they were to humanize victims in Paris and Brussels. For example, in covering Ankara and Maiduguri, *The Post* provided fewer images of victims and did not include as much detail of victim fear and struggle, victim quotes, or personal victim details (e.g., names, ages, and occupations).

Some of the framing differences can be attributed to the different nature of the events. Although the analysis has sought an apples-to-apples comparison—by selecting prominent attacks with significant casualties carried out during the same basic time period—there are important differences between the attacks. Most important, the violence in Ankara was carried out as part of a larger context—an ongoing conflict between the PKK and the Turkish state. This backdrop may be one reason for *The Post's* alternative framing of the Ankara attacks. Similarly, a violent Boko Haram uprising has been ongoing in Nigeria for several years. However, these political differences do not completely explain such vast framing differences.

In the end, both the Ankara and Maiduguri attacks easily fit the textbook definition of terrorism (Ganor, 2007), and both the PKK and Boko Haram are considered terrorist organizations by the United States and NATO. Moreover, the attacks inflicted significant casualties—the total number of casualties from the two Ankara attacks, 140, was similar to the total number of casualties from the Paris and Belgium attacks (161). Meanwhile, the Boko Haram attack inflicted the second most casualties of the five studied attacks. The larger conflicts between the Turkish state and the Kurds, and Boko Haram and the Nigerian state, are significant details, but so is the fact that armed fighters chose to target civilians in these conflicts. The fact that *The Post* only scantily covered the Nigeria attack, which claimed nearly 100 victims, is also significant and further underscores a point that other authors (see Barnard, 2016) have made in prior writing: Some American newspapers pay less attention to non-Western, non-Christian, non-White victims.

Importantly, the frame delineations laid out here do not tell the entire story of *The Washington Post* coverage of the attacks. There was a type of bipolarity at play in all of *The Post's* coverage—localized in coverage of Ankara and Maiduguri, and globalized in coverage of both Paris and Brussels. In covering Ankara and Maiduguri, the newspaper highlighted domestic divisions and local discord. This focus on the domestic division deemphasized terrorism as a global phenomenon. This deemphasis suggested that violence against civilians in Turkey and Nigeria does not fit the standard definition of terrorism, belonging, instead, to a different category that is the byproduct of local volatility. In this way, *The Post* localized what is technically a global phenomenon. In contrast, in covering Paris and Belgium, *The Post* globalized the local, placing both attacks in the larger context of the West's "war on terror." In doing this, the paper suggested unity of Western societies, contexts, and values.

Although one could argue that the Turkish violence, in particular, was fundamentally different because it was not immediately claimed by ISIL, this argument misses the mark. First, ISIL *did* claim responsibility for one of the Ankara attacks. Second, and as noted above, both Ankara attacks fit the standard definition of terrorism, and the PKK, likely responsible for the first attack, is classified as a terrorist organization by major international entities. Third, and most important, if *The Post's* Paris and Belgium coverage was driven primarily by the fact that Islamist terrorists carried out the attacks, why did the newspaper not prominently cover the attack in Nigeria, which was carried out by an Al-Qaeda affiliate? A more plausible explanation for *The Post's* framing and attention differences, then, might lie in previous literature about Western news media coverage of non-Western human life. As described in the literature review, researchers have noted discrepancies in Western news treatment of Western and non-Western victims. The biggest difference between Ankara and Maiduguri, on the one hand, and Paris and Brussels, on the other hand, was not political or technical, but, rather, demographic—Ankara is a Muslim-majority society and Maiduguri is both a Muslim-majority and Black society. Both race and religion of victims, then, likely play some role in determination of newsworthiness.

An op-ed published in *The Post* (Phillips, 2015) immediately following the Paris attacks suggested that terrorism in Europe is covered more prominently by American news outlets because it is unusual and unexpected. But, according to the Global Terrorism Index (Institute of Economics and Peace, 2016), terrorist attacks are about as common in Turkey as they are in the United Kingdom and only slightly more common than in the United States and France. The op-ed also suggested that the Paris attacks were covered prominently because, as a European city, Paris shares cultural traits with the United States. But this is precisely the point of previous research into news coverage of Western and non-Western victims. Non-Western victims, such as those in Africa, are often ignored or exoticized because they are not "like us" (see Fair, 1993), and even victims technically located in the West—as in Turkey—are either comparatively ignored or talked about as foreign. Terrorism aside, Islam, and Muslims, in particular, have long been talked about in the West as foreign, distant, strange, and threatening (see Said, 1979, 1981).

Arguably, then, oddity and cultural similarity do not go far enough in explaining the coverage differences uncovered here and in a long line of previous research. Victim religion and race are significant. In addition to studies cited here about Western news and the relative value of non-Western human life, a long line of research suggests that American news organizations devalue black lives (see Dixon, Azocar, & Casas, 2003; Entman, 1992). Race, then, cannot be ignored as a factor in the coverage differences found here.

Future research should attempt to further parse out the issues of race, religion, geography, and cultural similarity in coverage of terrorism victims.

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