



# Framing ISIL: the media's photograph discrimination between Africa, Europe, and the United States

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## Abstract

In January 2019, *The New York Times* sparked internet outrage after publishing photographs from an attack in Kenya that included dead bodies. Readers drew comparisons between these images and images posted from attacks in the west, reaffirming that the mass media play a vital role in agenda-setting. We ask how American and European News websites use images to frame attacks connected to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIL) on domestic soil compared to attacks in Africa. Do news websites differ in their image frame usage across geographical boundaries? We analyzed elements in images of ISIL attacks in Africa, Western Europe, and the USA published by American, European, Middle Eastern, and African media outlets to answer these questions. We expect the American and European press to use more feminine, weaker frames when reporting on African events and more “responsibility” and “consequence” frames for domestic. We use a sample of all reported ISIL attacks in Africa, Western Europe, and the USA beginning in 2015 to the end of 2018. This research demonstrates an implicit framing bias within media outlets, impacting international relations and public opinion.

**Keywords** Africa · Images · ISIS/ISIL · Media · Framing · Europe · USA

## Introduction

In January 2019, *The New York Times* published photographs of dead bodies following an extremist group attack in Nairobi, Kenya, before the families of the deceased were notified (Freytas-Tamura 2019). Soon after, the *Times* removed the image amid backlash from the public on social media, including many people questioning whether similar images would be posted after an attack in the USA. Some readers drew upon examples of photographs published after the Orlando nightclub shooting in June 2016 to exemplify how the images portraying this event included fewer conflict frames.<sup>1</sup> In an article published after the controversy, Editors from *The New York Times* stated that they considered the story's newsworthiness before posting it, insinuating that because the attack took place in Africa, a shocking image

was necessary to garner attention from their predominantly western readers (Takenaga 2019). Closing their statement, the Editors asserted that they consider the image's importance before deciding whether to post it on their affiliated website or social media page, implying that they are cautious of an image's optics and its impact on public opinion and policy. Based on this, we use the feminist critical theory in collaboration with agenda-setting and media framing theories to answer how much Western media differ in their visual framing of African attacks versus domestic?

Considering this question, many scholars have reaffirmed that the mass media play a vital role in constructing countries' images in international relations through published photographs, i.e., who is a powerful versus a weak actor (Saleem 2021). The Western media often paint a picture of an ally or a malign actor through images they choose to share online, creating an enhanced or diminished opportunity for Western military or diplomatic intervention (Powlick and Katz 1998). These portrayals of strength or allyship often follow the feminist international relations theory as they depend on stereotypical social constructs (Blanchard 2003). These media constructs create alliances, but they can also develop empathy or apathy towards another country and its people (Powlick and Katz 1998). Hence, the press

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influence foreign policy and public opinion and can demote non-Western citizens as less than their western counterparts, furthering separation.

The *New York Times* Editors highlight the media's influence on international relations and public opinion, saying it "contributes to national and global discussions on national security, foreign policy, America's role in international conflict, gun violence, and terror" (Takenaga 2019). Considering this, we return to our questions, do the western media create a weaker, more feminine image (i.e., "conflict" or "morality" frames) of non-Western nations? And is this in contrast to how non-Western press (Middle Eastern and African) report on affairs in the west and Africa?

To answer whether Western news websites have an implicit framing bias when reporting on terror attacks from different countries and to better understand the need for consistent reporting standards, this article is structured as follows. First, we outline the prior scholarship on the impact of images and dichotomies in the global press. Second, we situate the literature in the feminist and constructivist international relations theories to understand how perceptions of other countries influence global affairs. We then create a sample of all reported and claimed attacks by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) that occurred in the USA, Western Europe, and Africa from 2015, the year that ISIL garnered more media attention following the Paris attacks, through the end of 2018 (see list of attacks: Lister et al. 2015). Next, we content analyzed images about these events published by American, European, Middle Eastern, and African news outlets. Then, drawing on Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) framing typology, images are coded based on five master frames: "human interest," "consequence," "conflict," "morality," and "responsibility." In addition, images are systematically coded for elements called sub-frames, including destruction, visible weapons, injured persons, and mourning. We conclude with our findings that there are systematic differences in the global media's framing of international and domestic events.

## Images bleed and lead

On news websites, images now lead. When landing on a news website's homepage, the viewer sees a grid-based layout filled predominantly with photographs, videos, ads, and titles. A click on an article takes readers to an image that often fills their screen. This image gives an immediate impression of the story's textual content.

In a digital world where information circulates rapidly on social media platforms, the public has heightened its scrutiny of how it gathers, packages, and reports the news. As visuals are now the backbones of digital packaging, an essential part of digital packaging is selecting these visual

cues. Therefore, journalists who choose the visuals to portray a news story ultimately frame a country, government, or people. In addition, these visuals capture a moment or event, often fueling controversy and conversation, mainly when images "go viral," without viewers necessarily understanding the whole story.

Over the last decade, research shows that visuals in news coverage have become more powerful than text, mainly due to their memorability (Coleman and Banning 2006; Fahmy et al. 2014; Graber 1990). Several studies report that citizens learn about other cultures and foreign events through visual media (Perlmutter 1998), influencing their public opinion on foreign policy (Arpan et al. 2006). Further, according to feminist critical theory, optical frames can depict countries as more powerful or weak (Baaz and Stern 2009; Ruiz 2005). Since journalists are selecting the images, the assumption is that the mass media have a foreign policy agenda to convey, and agenda-setting occurs via news websites' images. The photographs selected to portray a story can influence public opinion, according to agenda-setting theory (Brantner et al. 2011; Brinson and Stohl 2012; Dunaway et al. 2010; Kühne and Schemer 2015; Lecheler et al. 2015; McCombs 2005; Scheufele 2000). Following these prior studies, we content analyze images from media websites to examine if the media employ frames and gendered frames to portray countries as stronger or weaker.

## The privacy dichotomy

What images are used to preface a news story was debated long before the rise of social media. In 2009, the USA lifted a photograph ban on military coffins (Bumiller 2009). For the prior eighteen years, the USA had not allowed photographs to be taken of deceased soldiers' coffins, stating privacy concerns for the soldiers' families. This ban had multiple controversies, including a connotation that the USA covered up the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars' realities and why the same courtesy of privacy was never extended to foreign lands and peoples. Why could journalists publish photographs of dead bodies and gruesome atrocities from other countries if a coffin could not be photographed in America?

## Media framing theory: visual framing of war and conflict

It is well known that journalists use different frames and information when reporting on events and that these factors can influence public opinion (Chong and Druckman 2007; Druckman 2001; Iyengar and Kinder 2010; Saris and Sniderman 2004; Schuck and de Vreese 2006). A "frame" defines "the essence of an issue" and explains "what the controversy is about" (Gamson and Modigliani 1987, 143), ultimately determining the ethos of the message (Entman



1993; Iyengar 1994; Nelson et al. 1997). Journalists frame or structure events to make their stories easier for a broader audience to understand or to tell a packaged story in a small space, taking into account the culture of their readership.

According to Entman (1993, 52) to frame is: "To select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to prompt a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and or treatment recommendation for the item described." Essentially, framing is a central organizing idea to make sense of an event or an issue (Gamson 1989, 157; Gamson and Modigliani 1987, 43; Gitlin 2003). Goffman (1986) asserts that media reports of an event help individuals understand and interpret what is happening around them. By "helping" readers understand events, media framing can change the way people feel about an issue, extending to people's overall opinion of the country in which the event took place (Weaver 2007).

We acknowledge that a wealth of prior literature examines how the news media frame war and conflict. Indeed, in-depth literature reviews reveal a discipline focusing largely on how western media frame foreign conflicts (literature reviews: Saleem 2021; Sultan 2016; Vladislavjevic 2017). We build on more recent works that examine how the press frame terrorism and other acts of violence (i.e., Altheide 2007; Brown 2011; Dunn et al. 2004; Norris et al. 2004; Woods 2007), particularly studies that conduct comparative analyses of press coverage. For example, Mahony (2010) compares the words used in Indonesian and Australian coverage of the 2002 Bali bombings, the 2004 Australian Embassy bombing in Jakarta, and the 2005 Bali bombings. The author finds that Indonesian news articles framed Islam positively—more moderate and balanced on racism and cultural hegemony—than Australian media (Mahony 2010). Likewise, following the September 11th attacks in the USA and the subsequent Iraq War, studies compared how the war was framed in Western and non-Western media, with evidence of American media using a more positive "liberation" frame while non-Western outlets relied on "conflict," "violence," and "invasion" frames (Dimitrova and Connolly-Ahern 2007; Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2008; Powell 2011; Smith 2013).

News outlets increased coverage of ISIL-related events as the group developed in the decades following. Examining this coverage, Mohamed Al Majdoub and Hamzah (2016) compared CNN and Al-Jazeera's news articles on ISIL in 2014–2015, concluding that both outlets employed the "conflict frame," although with different subframes. For instance, CNN framed ISIL beheadings as "brutal" and "savage," whereas Al-Jazeera framed the beheadings as "revenge" and "retribution" against the USA. Similarly, (Boyle and Mower 2018) found significant differences in how *The Daily Mail*, *The New York Times*, and *Asharq Al-Awsat* framed

ISIL, with *The Mail* framing ISIL as "rebels" and "militants" and *The Times* offering more balanced coverage that included policy responses. Meanwhile, *Asharq Al-Awsat* avoided the "conflict" frame, instead framing ISIL-related events as merely regional unrest between actors (Mahan and Griset 2008).

While words play a large part in how terrorism and violence are framed, how events are framed with images is also essential. The latter is particularly true when comparing visual coverage of events across different outlets (i.e., magazines, newspapers, and television) and geographic borders (Bruce 2014; Bruce and Conlin 2016; Fahmy 2010; Schwalbe, Silcock, and Keith 2008). Examining visual framing of the US invasion and occupation of Iraq in three US magazines from 2003 to 2004, (Schwalbe, Silcock, and Keith 2008) revealed that magazines presented an American-centered perspective with visual framing that did not change throughout the period. The "conflict" frame was the most prevalent, followed by "politicians," "human interest," and "violence of war." Focusing on visual narratives of September 11th and the Afghanistan War employed by English- and Arabic-language international press, Fahmy (2010) concluded that Arabic-language newspapers employed more visual "anti-war" frames while the English-language newspapers used the "pro-war" frame.

These frames, found in magazines and newspapers, particularly "conflict" and "human interest" frames, are also found in television coverage of terrorism, war, and violent events. For example, when comparing CNN and Al-Jazeera's coverage of the US war in Afghanistan, Jasperson and El-Kikhia (2003) content analyzed the governance, military, and humanitarian frames, finding stark differences in television outlets framing of the war. CNN used a military lens, showing images and analyses of US bombings. In contrast, Al-Jazeera employed the human-interest frame, focusing on how the war impacted the Afghan people (Youssef 2009). Other scholars have observed similar outcomes regarding the varying tone and objectivity of war coverage across television news outlets in the USA and abroad (Aday et al. 2005) and differences in the overall quality of television coverage (Pfau et al. 2005).

## A constructivist and feminist approach

To set the consequences of framing in the context of international relations, we lean on the international relations theories of feminism and constructivism to understand how constructions of gender attributions influence international affairs. For constructivists, countries develop an understanding of what their roles are, providing "scripts" of how to act (Wendt 1992, 397–98). Based on this, countries define their interests, defining what they want and what is acceptable for them to want based on social constructs (Wendt 1992,



398–99). From this, institutions of collections of social norms, identities, and interests are formed (Wendt 1992, 399). These institutions can change, even by just one great power altering their identity (Wendt 1992, 422). The idea that only one power has to change for a systematic change to occur sets the stage for how media salience and framing in powerful countries can have a large impact on global affairs.

Feminists in international relations see gender as a social construct. While constructivism and feminism have different ideas of power, feminism has sought to add to constructivism by emphasizing that power is “an integral element of processes of construction” (Locher and Prugl 2001, 113). According to feminist critical-theory scholars, countries’ relations and perceptions of each other revolve around the positive view of masculinity, strength, rationality, and independence, which stem from gendered language (Tickner 2005). Meanwhile, this verbiage increases women’s subordination, as international responses are legitimated through hegemonic, masculine characteristics, as wars and acts of strength are seemingly brought on by men alone (Tickner 2005). Further, these discourses perpetuate gender inequality by delegitimizing the role of women as actors in international relations and gendered violence that takes place (Prugl 2004).

Gendered language plays a role in removing women as actors in international affairs and constructs gendered notions about individual countries, their strengths, weaknesses, and capabilities. These notions are formed because most key individual actors in international relations (i.e., policymakers, diplomats, heads of government) are men. Therefore, international relations are shadowed by a lack of consideration of women’s role in politics, society, and government. Meanwhile, “strength” continues to be defined by masculine qualities (Ruiz 2005). This constraint bleeds over into the power dynamics of countries gendered by the media through frames. Through the eyes of feminism, the press use frames reinforced by gender myths to define power dynamics, leading to further promotion of the patriarchal society and the need to be masculine to effectively handle crises (Hardin et al. 2014).

These power dynamics also transpire in the news framing of terrorism. Countries are gendered through visuals as more feminine or masculine, following ideas of weakness and strength. This theory of looking at the world is a form of feminist constructivism. The international system is constructed through human-made identities that rely on positive views of masculinity (Tickner 2005). Consequently, the media are taking part in the gendered construction of countries through visual frames that use traditionally masculine or feminine constructs (Ruiz 2005).

In addition to gendered power struggles, women’s political and criminal agency is taken away (Sjoberg 2009, 69). For example, war is associated with masculinity, portrayed

through soldiers’ images protecting women, children, and other vulnerable peoples. Meanwhile, the enemy is “othered” through feminine qualities, representing them as weak. The use of gendered language and treating femininity as weak and inferior is common in international security (Tamang 2013, 235). For instance, a good male soldier is seen as a protector, someone who kills the enemy (Baaz and Stern 2009, 499). In contrast, women need to be protected because they are peaceful and, therefore, weak, subordinate, and easy to trick (Baaz and Stern 2009, 499). Another example of gendered language in security studies is the contrast between peacekeeping missiles versus village pacification, the former being a masculine concept and the latter feminine (Blanchard 2003, 1294).

Following this idea, the international system winners are defined using “masculine” traits (e.g., strength, rationality, independence). In contrast, the losers find themselves stuck in the systematic discrimination through feminine myths defined using negative connotations (e.g., weakness, emotionality, protected) (Baaz and Stern 2009, 509–10).

By using media framing, agenda-setting, and feminist theories in collaboration, we can understand how media frame governments as effective or not effective in mitigating conflict and why they may do so, and how the public has been led to believe constructed ideas of strength in governance. By understanding the connections between visuals and power representation, we can better understand the consequences of western narratives of foreign affairs.

## Research questions and hypothesis

Considering the media framing literature above, which suggests significant differences in how the press textually and visually frame terrorism, war, conflict, women, and power across geographical boundaries, we systematically examine ISIL terror attacks in the USA, Western Europe, and Africa.

Our research expands the current literature by examining which visual frames are used in events reported by Western media, American and European, versus non-western, Middle Eastern, and African press from 2015 to 2018. We focus on analyzing visual frames because images and pictures can easily portray an event in a memorable fashion (Rodriguez and Dimitrova 2011). Applying Semetko and Valkenburg’s (2000) framing typology, there are five ways the media can visually frame news stories: (a) by emphasizing the conflict between individuals or groups (conflict frame); (b) by focusing on emotions (human interest frame); (c) by assigning responsibility, blame, or credit to specific individuals or groups (responsibility frame); (d) by using religious tenets or moral prescriptions (morality frame); and (e) by focusing on consequences the event will have on an individual, group, institution, region or country (consequence frame).





These frames are also defined in Table 4. Research examining events in Western and foreign news coverage often finds that the “conflict” frame is the most prevalent. For example, Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) study of Dutch national news coverage of European politics concludes that the “conflict” and “responsibility” frames were the most prevalent.

Further, these frames can be defined as inherently masculine or feminine, showing the power constructs of countries created by the media. For example, the “human interest,” “morality,” and “conflict” frames are inherently feminine. These frames bring out inherent weaknesses within countries and individuals, defined through traditionally feminine connotations like emotionality and weakness. On the other hand, “responsibility” and “consequence” frames emphasize masculine qualities of violence, conflict, strength, and intrinsic ability to defend oneself.

We ask the following research questions: How do American and European News websites use images to frame attacks connected to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIL) on domestic soil compared to attacks in Africa? Do Western, Middle Eastern, and African news websites differ in their image frame usage across geographical boundaries? To address these questions, we propose the following main hypothesis: *Non-Western media will visually frame coverage of ISIL events across various geographical boundaries differently than Western media (H1).*

Based on the feminist framing lens literature that finds that non-Western countries are described, or portrayed, as weak using stereotypical “feminine” language, we also propose a second central hypothesis that *African nations are more likely to be portrayed by the west using more feminine frames (H2).* Based on the media framing literature and feminist theory, we propose the following sub-hypotheses:

H2a: *American and European press will use more visual human-interest, morality, and conflict frames when reporting on African events.*

H2b: *American and European press will use more consequence and responsibility frames when reporting on domestic events.*

Finally, we offer a third hypothesis that *visuals from western and non-western media will differ in descriptives present in the image (H3).*

## Method and procedure

### Event selection

Our first task was to identify and retrieve relevant media images from January 2015 to December 2018, selecting all terror attacks claimed by ISIL in the USA, Western Europe, and Africa.<sup>2</sup> The event selection was based on a summary

and timeline, compiled by Lister et al. (2015), of 143 global terrorist attacks outside Iraq and Syria publicly claimed by ISIL or affiliates. Drawing on Lister et al.'s (2015) list, we examine forty-three events, with a breakdown of fourteen African events, twenty-three Western European, and six in the USA. We use this list of terror attacks that is specifically relegated to ISIS/ISIL claimed attacks rather than lists from other databases that are only narrowed to Islamic or Jihadist extremist groups. Additionally, the CNN list is the one most likely to be seen by the average citizen, rather than a scholarly database making these attacks more salient to the public. Our objective was to retrieve and investigate news website articles with images covering these events. Overall, we had 430 total units of analysis (i.e., news articles) across the ten news sources. See Table 1 for the events we examined.

### Media outlet selection

We identified six major American and four well-known foreign media outlets (two European and two Middle Eastern/African) for analysis. See Table 2 for the list of media outlets. The news outlets included four of the top circulating newspapers in the USA, including *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal* (Watson 2020). The latter newspapers all have news websites that report breaking foreign and domestic news throughout the day. Among US television broadcast news channels, we examine the websites for one news network, *CBS*, and one cable network, *CNN*. *CBS* was selected to represent the content reported across the three main news networks, as it bills itself as the “most-watched broadcast network” in the USA. Like its sister network websites, the *CBS* website operates on a 24-hour news cycle, reporting breaking news and top stories from the USA and the world. *CNN* is included as it is widely considered an agenda-setter of foreign news, often having opinions from commentators, experts, and hosts. *CNN* also boasts more unique website visitors per month than its competitors (Watson 2020).

We examined two European press, *The BBC* and *The Guardian*, one Middle Eastern press, *Al-Jazeera*, and one African press, *EyeWitness News* to represent foreign media outlets. *The BBC* and *The Guardian* are included in our sample as they are privately owned and independent news sites that cover global events. Both *The BBC* and *The Guardian* are ranked as some of the world's most popular news websites, alongside *The NYT*, *CNN*, *WSJ*, and *USA Today*. A lesser-known news website, *Al-Jazeera*, is included in this study as it is considered the most representative of independent media in the Arab region and shows the opinions of the “Arab street” (Al-Jenaibi 2010; Dimitrova and Connolly-Ahern 2007). The Qatari government partially funds *Al-Jazeera*, but it is claimed that its journalists adhere to



**Table 1** Events

Region/country	Date	Event
Libya (Africa)	January 2015	Corinthia hotel attack
Denmark (W. Europe)	February 2015	Copenhagen shootings
Tunisia (Africa)	March 2015	Bardo National Museum attack
USA	May 2015	Curtis Culwell center attack
France (W. Europe)	June 2015	Saint Quentin Fallavier attack
Tunisia (Africa)	June 2015	2015 Sousse attacks
Egypt (Africa)	July 2015	2015 Sinai clashes
Egypt (Africa)	July 2015	Cairo bombing
France (W. Europe)	August 2015	Thalys train attack
Egypt/Russia (Africa)	October 2015	Metrojet flight 9268
France (W. Europe)	November 2015	Paris attacks
Tunisia (Africa)	November 2015	Tunis bombing
The USA	December 2015	San Bernardino attack
Libya (Africa)	January 2016	Zliten truck bombing
Egypt (Africa)	January 2016	Hurghada attack
Belgium (W. Europe)	March 2016	Brussels bombing
France (W. Europe)	June 2016	2016 Magnanville stabbing
USA	June 2016	Orlando nightclub shooting
France (W. Europe)	July 2016	Nice truck attack
Germany (W. Europe)	July 2016	Wurzburg train attack
Germany (W. Europe)	July 2016	Ansbach bombing
Belgium (W. Europe)	August 2016	Charleroi attack
USA	November 2016	Ohio State University attack
Germany (W. Europe)	December 2016	Berlin attack
United Kingdom (W. Europe)	March 2017	Westminster attack
Egypt (Africa)	April 2017	Palm sunday church bombings
Sweden (W. Europe)	April 2017	Stockholm attack
France (W. Europe)	April 2017	Champs-Elysees attack
United Kingdom (W. Europe)	May 2017	Manchester arena attack
Egypt (Africa)	May 2017	Minya attack
United Kingdom (W. Europe)	June 2017	London bridge attack
Spain (W. Europe)	August 2017	Barcelona attack
United Kingdom (W. Europe)	September 2017	Parsons green bombing
France (W. Europe)	October 2017	Marseille stabbing
USA	October 2017	New York City truck attack
Egypt (Africa)	November 2017	Sinai mosque attack
USA	December 2017	New York City attempted bombing
France (W. Europe)	March 2018	Carcassonne and trebes attack
Libya (Africa)	May 2018	Attack on the high national elections commission in tripoli
France (W. Europe)	May 2018	Paris knife attack
Belgium (W. Europe)	May 2018	Liege shooting
Egypt (Africa)	November 2018	Minya bus attack
France (W. Europe)	December 2018	Strasbourg attack

professional journalism norms and enjoy some press freedom. Our sample includes articles from the *Al-Jazeera* English-language website. *Eyewitness News* is an independent South African newspaper. The latter newspaper was chosen over other African press because it reports on international

events and included a more significant percentage of photographs while reporting on events. The media from Africa and the Middle East were limited due to language barriers, a lack of reporting on foreign affairs, and a lack of images from many regional news outlets.



**Table 2** Background and characteristics of media outlets

Outlet	Country of origin	Digital audience geography <sup>1</sup>	Outlet history	Political lean (left–right) <sup>2</sup>	Alexa global internet traffic and engagement rank <sup>1</sup>
New York Times	U.S	U.S., India, Japan	Established in 1851; Est. website in 1996	Left	#113
USA Today	U.S	U.S., India, Canada	Est. in 1982; Est. website in 1996	Lean left	#453
Washington Post	U.S	U.S., Japan	Est. in 1877; Est. website in 1996	Lean left	#204
Wall Street Journal	U.S	U.S., Japan, India	Est. in 1889; Est. website in 1996	Lean right	#364
CBS	U.S	U.S., India, Canada	Est. in 1929 as a radio station, transitioned to T.V. in 1948; Est. website in 2014	Lean left	#1,185
CNN	U.S	U.S., Canada, India	Est. in 1980 as T.V.; Est. website in 1995	Left	#107
BBC	U.K	U.K., U.S. Japan	Est. in 1922; Est. website in 1997	Center	#151
The Guardian	U.K	U.S., U.K., Australia	Est. in 1821; Est. website in 1999	Lean left	#173
Al-Jazeera	Qatar	Qatar, Sudan, U.S	Est. in 1997 as T.V.; Est. website in 2001	Not rated	#2,372
Eyewitness News (EWN)	South Africa	South Africa	Est. as radio unknown date; Est. website in 2008	Not rated	#18,751

<sup>1</sup> Data obtained from [www.Alexa.com](http://www.Alexa.com)

<sup>2</sup> Data obtained from All Sides Media Bias Chart

We acknowledge that we compare media outlets with differences in cultural reporting, newsroom and journalistic norms, historical backgrounds, audiences, and ideological leanings. (See Table 2 for information on each outlet's audience, ideological leanings, and Alexa ranks). The latter factors will likely influence how these media organizations report news and events. Additionally, we include the regional news outlets *Al-Jazeera* and *Eyewitness News* to act as controls to determine if the same variances exist within non-western media.

We used the *Google Search Engine* to find publicly available news coverage on the events listed in Table 1, searching for event name, date, and news source. The *Google Search Engine* was selected because it is one of the most popular search engines. We acknowledge that *Google's Search engine*, or *Search engine optimizer*, considers specific keywords, word frequency, HTML codes, meta tags, hyperlinks, indexing, and more when conducting web searches and returning results. Simply put, the webpage with the highest rank is viewed more. Considering the latter, we used *Google* to search for news articles instead of the news outlets' search engines on their web pages because we are interested in examining images of events most likely to be viewed.<sup>3</sup> The top article was the first or breaking news report about the event in most searches.<sup>4</sup> We downloaded

the first still or static image in the article (i.e., as you scroll down the screen). If the image appeared in a slideshow, we downloaded and examined the first image in the slideshow. All images were downloaded and stored in an Excel file. Overall, our analysis included 430 units of analysis with 374 images (i.e., not all news stories had an image). A further breakdown includes ten news sources, with 43 articles from *The New York Times*, 42 articles from *The Wall Street Journal*, 41 from *The Washington Post*, 40 from *CBS*, 42 from *CNN*, 43 from *The BBC*, 43 from *The Guardian*, 40 from *Al-Jazeera*, 40 from *USA Today*, and 39 from *Eyewitness News* (i.e., not all news sources had an article for each event). Therefore, the unit of analysis was the first image of the first article that appeared for each event for each news source on the *Google Search Engine*.

## Coding and frames

Once images were downloaded, we recorded basic information, including the article's title, date, and if it contained a slideshow, video, or map.<sup>5</sup> Then, turning to the image itself, we coded descriptive information such as whether it included women, men, whites, non-whites, children, or groups of people. As described in Table 4, we employed a deductive approach, coding five master frames—human



**Table 3** Coding sheet for descriptive news article information and characteristics

News article information	Description
Date of publication	
Title of Newspaper	
Event location	Africa, USA, Western Europe
Image in article	
Video in article	
Slideshow	Photograph slideshow
Map	Map showing the location of the event
<i>Descriptive information in the image</i>	
Perceived gender of persons in the image	Male or female
Perceived race/ethnicity of persons in the image	White and/or non-white
Child (under age 18 and younger) in image	If a child was present in the image
Persons < 5	If there are less than 5 people in the image
Persons > 5	If there are more than 5 people in the image

interest, consequence, conflict, morality, and responsibility—based upon Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) framing typology. Each master frame was portrayed through subframes. For example, the “human-interest” master frame

included coding for visible explicit content such as corpses, coffins, bodies covered with sheets, full or partial nudity, starving or hungry individuals or groups, and injured persons. Master frames were not mutually exclusive (i.e., one

**Table 4** Coding for frames

Master frame	Subframe	Description
Human interest frame	<i>Explicit content in the image</i>	
	Corpse	Coffin, visible corps, a white sheet over body, tarp over body
	Nudity	Full and partial nudity
	Starving/Hungry	
	Injured	If persons are injured, on a stretcher, being placed in an ambulance
Consequence frame	<i>Objects visible in the image</i>	
	Weapon	Guns, bombs, knives
	Emergency/police vehicles	Ambulances, fire trucks, and police cars
	Military/militia vehicles	Tanks, Humvees, helicopters
	Animals	Dead or alive animals*
Conflict frame	Evidence of Destruction	Destruction of cars, trains, planes, homes, or buildings; visible smoke or fire
	<i>Uncivil behavior in image</i>	
	Protesting	
	Fighting	
	Drinking	
Morality frame	Stealing/looting	
	<i>Civil Behavior in image</i>	
Responsibility frame	Praying, vigils, candle lighting, or funeral services	
	Mourning	
	<i>Policy actors/notables in image</i>	
	CCTV footage, mugshot, security footage	
	Terrorist/Perpetrator	Military in uniform
	Military	Police in uniform
	Police	
	Medical personnel	Television news camera or media vehicles
	Media reporters/journalists	
	Border agents	Politicians, presidents
	Officeholders	

\* Only one image included a civilian dog, the rest were police dogs





image could fall into multiple sub-frames and, therefore, multiple frames). Falling under the master frame of “consequences,” we code for “objects” visible in the image, notably weapons, emergency, police, military vehicles, animals, and destruction. The “conflict” master frame focuses on the conflict between individuals, groups, institutions, or countries. Sub-frames include uncivil behaviors in images, such as protesting, fighting, drinking, stealing, and looting.

In contrast to the “conflict” master frame, the “morality” master frame was considered civil behavior and operationalized as visible mourning and vigils either in religious beliefs or in moral prescriptions. Last, the “responsibility” master frame visibly displays the event in a way that attributes responsibility for causing or solving to either the government, an individual, or a group. The latter was operationalized by coding for the presence of seven policy actors or notables, such as the terrorist or perpetrator, military, police, medical personnel, media reporters, border agenda, and officeholders.

Before the deductive content analysis, both authors preliminarily coded ten randomly selected images from the sample. Based on this preliminary analysis, any coding disagreements were discussed, and the coding sheet revised. We repeated this initial coding several times for training purposes and to ensure that the coding sheet was reliable. Any changes to the coding sheet were made in this preliminary session.

Each author coded half of the sample using the final coding sheet (see Tables 3 and 4).<sup>6</sup> The second author coded a random sample of 10% of the first author's coding to ensure reliability. The intercoder reliability was 1, using Holsti's (1969) formula. Additionally, an independent coder—a trained undergraduate student—coded a random subsample, representing 10% of the sample. Intercoder reliability was established at 0.9 overall using the Holsti method (1969) and ranged from 0.8 to 1 for each category. Finally, we run a Pearson's chi-square test for each frame to evaluate the data statistically.

## Results

### Frames

First, we analyzed our main hypothesis that western and non-western press will differ in visually framing events across geographic boundaries (H1). As expected, the chi-square tests show several notable differences in how the media frame terror attacks across geographical boundaries, as evidence of Hypothesis 1 (Table 5), including, the human-interest frame (chi-square = 4.846,  $p = 0.089$ ), the emergency vehicle subframe (chi-square = 8.695,  $p = 0.013$ ), the military vehicle subframe (chi-square = 5.237,  $p = 0.073$ ), the

military subframe (chi-square = 5.174,  $p = 0.075$ ), and the officeholder subframe (chi-square = 5.434,  $p = 0.066$ ). However, there were some unexpected results. For example, contrary to prior literature (i.e., Schwalbe 2013), we found the conflict frame to be the least used—in less than 1% of the articles—rather than the most prevalent frame. Instead, the consequence frame was the most prevalent (e.g., around 20% of the articles displayed weapons).

Regarding differences in visual framing, in Table 6, we find that the western press uses more feminine frames when reporting African events, offering evidence for Hypothesis 2, including American press that used the human interest subframe of corpses in 16.7% of articles and the injured frame in 6% of articles. However, these results are not statistically significant. These results are likely under the feminist critical theory as western nations seek to portray non-western nations as inherently weaker through more feminine frames (Table 7).

As stated above, surprisingly, the conflict frame was the least used, contrary to prior literature. Moreover, there are no significant differences in its usage (see Tables 6 and 8, for example). The latter findings contrast with H2a, which asserts that there would be a usage difference and that the western press would use it more while reporting on African attacks.

Finally, the American media most frequently used the morality frame when reporting African events, as it was present in 17% of the articles (Table 9). Overall, two of the feminine frames are statistically significant when American media are reporting on African events. The human interest is statistically used more on average than expected, with a chi-square of 9.364 and a  $p$ -value of 0.009. Mortality shows a similarly significant relationship with a chi-square of 9.157 and a  $p$ -value of 0.010. This is consistent with H2a that the human interest, morality, and consequence frames are used more often. For example, we find that many articles display corpses (16.7%), destruction (20.2%), and mourning (20.2%). This evidence suggests that African countries are visually framed as more feminine and weaker (H2).

For the more “masculine” frames of consequence and responsibility in H2b, the differences in frames were more nuanced. For example, the responsibility frame is significant in some instances, but the variation in usage across subframes is similar. In Table 9, the first image of American news stories based on the news organization's country of origin had a chi-square of 6.677 with a  $p$ -value of 0.035. Table 11 shows that African/Middle Eastern news outlets had significant differences between Percentages and counts are calculated their actual and expected use of the responsibility frames with a chi-square of 5.357 and  $p$ -value of 0.069. The most notable difference in the responsibility frame is that the American press often use it for European events (Table 9). The subframes of

**Table 5** Frequency of items in first image of news story, based on news organization country of origin

Frames		Newspaper origins						$\chi^2$
		American News		European News		Middle East/ Africa News		
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
<i>Human interest frame</i>								
Corpse		20	238	2	84	4	82	4.846, $p = .089^*$
	% of articles	7.8	92.2	2.3	97.7	4.7	95.3	3.712, $p = .156$
Injured		14	244	3	83	2	84	1.689, $p = .430$
	% of articles	5.4	94.6	3.5	96.5	2.3	97.7	
<i>Consequence frame</i>								
Weapon		53	205	14	72	18	68	.875, $p = .646$
	% of articles	20.5	79.5	16.3	83.7	20.9	79.1	.831, $p = .660$
Emergency vehicle		42	216	10	76	24	62	8.695, $p = .013^*$
	% of articles	16.3	83.7	11.6	88.4	27.9	72.1	
Military vehicle		26	232	13	73	4	82	5.237, $p = .073^*$
	% of articles	10.1	89.9	15.1	84.9	4.7	95.3	
Destruction		27	231	9	77	12	74	.844, $p = .656$
	% of articles	10.5	89.5	10.5	89.5	14.0	86.0	
Animals		13	245	4	82	1	85	2.474, $p = .290$
	% of articles	5	95.0	4.7	95.3	1.2	98.8	
<i>Conflict frame</i>								
Protest		2	256	0	86	0	86	1.341, $p = .511$
	% of articles	0.8	99.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	1.340, $p = .512$
Fighting		2	256	1	85	0	86	.895, $p = .639$
	% of articles	0.8	99.2	1.2	98.8	0.0	100.0	
<i>Morality frame</i>								
Mourning		31	227	9	77	10	76	.151, $p = .927$
	% of articles	12	88.0	10.5	89.5	11.6	88.4	
<i>Responsibility frame</i>								
Military		25	233	9	77	2	84	1.075, $p = .584$
	% of articles	9.7	90.3	10.5	89.5	2.3	97.7	5.174, $p = .075^*$
Police/firefighters		86	172	23	63	32	54	2.223, $p = .329$
	% of articles	33.3	66.7	26.7	73.3	37.2	62.8	
Medical		45	213	14	72	9	77	2.376, $p = .305$
	% of articles	17.4	82.6	16.3	83.7	10.5	89.5	
Media		10	248	4	82	3	83	.163, $p = .922$
	% of articles	3.9	96.1	4.7	95.3	3.5	96.5	
Border agent		1	257	0	86	0	86	.668, $p = .716$
	% of articles	0.4	99.6	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	
Officeholder		2	256	4	82	2	84	5.434, $p = .066^*$
	% of articles	0.8	99.2	4.7	95.3	2.3	97.7	

$N = 430$ , not every article had an image

Percentages and counts are calculated based on: American News  $N = 258$ , European News  $N = 86$ , Middle East/Africa News  $N = 86$

\* =  $p < .1$

responsibility seem to be more significant, including the American press showing police/firefighters most often for African events and border agents for American events (see Tables 7 and 11). These results contrast

with H2b, which proposed that American and European media would use the responsibility frame the most for domestic events. The only instance of this having validity is in the American news's subframe for border agents.



**Table 6** Frequency of items in first image of African news stories, based on news organization country of origin

Frames		Newspaper origins						$\chi^2$
		American News		European News		Middle East/ Africa news		
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
<i>Human interest frame</i>								
Corpse		14	70	2	26	3	25	4.132, $p=.127$
	% of articles	16.7	83.3	7.1	92.9	10.7	89.3	1.867, $p=.393$
Injured		5	79	0	28	0	28	3.457, $p=.178$
	% of articles	6	94.0	0	100.0	0.0	100.0	
<i>Consequence frame</i>								
Weapon		13	71	7	21	3	25	3.414, $p=.181$
	% of articles	15.5	84.5	25.0	75.0	10.7	89.3	2.220, $p=.330$
Emergency vehicle		10	74	4	24	5	23	.650, $p=.723$
	% of articles	11.9	88.1	14.3	85.7	17.9	82.1	
Military vehicle		5	79	5	23	3	25	3.618, $p=.164$
	% of articles	6.0	94.0	17.9	82.1	10.7	89.3	
Destruction		17	67	7	21	5	23	.464, $p=.793$
	% of articles	20.2	79.8	25.0	75.0	17.9	82.1	
Animals		2	82	1	27	1	27	.172, $p=.918$
	% of articles	2.4	97.6	3.6	96.4	3.6	96.4	
<i>Conflict frame</i>								
Protest		2	82	0	28	0	28	.899, $p=.638$
	% of articles	2.4	97.6	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	1.354, $p=.508$
Fighting		0	84	1	27	0	28	4.029, $p=.133$
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	3.6	96.4	0.0	100.0	
<i>Morality frame</i>								
Mourning		17	67	5	23	3	25	1.299, $p=.522$
	% of articles	20.2	79.8	17.9	82.1	10.7	89.3	
<i>Responsibility frame</i>								
Military		10	74	2	26	0	28	2.537, $p=.281$
	% of articles	11.9	88.1	7.1	92.9	0.0	100.0	3.889, $p=.143$
Police/Firefighters		17	67	9	19	5	23	2.099, $p=.350$
	% of articles	20.2	79.8	32.1	67.9	17.9	82.1	
Medical		9	75	2	26	3	25	.317, $p=.853$
	% of articles	10.7	89.3	7.1	92.9	10.7	89.3	
Media		4	80	3	25	1	27	1.679, $p=.432$
	% of articles	4.8	95.2	10.7	89.3	3.6	96.4	
Border agent		0	84	0	28	0	28	
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	
Officeholder		1	83	2	26	1	27	2.745, $p=.253$
	% of articles	1.2	98.8	7.1	92.9	3.6	96.4	

$N=140$ , not every article had an image

Percentages and counts are calculated based on: American News  $N=84$ , European News  $N=28$ , Middle East/Africa News  $N=28$

\*= $p<.1$

However, this subframe was not one of the main visual elements present across images. Perhaps, these are the results of differing cultural norms about photographs that can be taken and shared at crime scenes.

The American press used the consequence frame most often when reporting on domestic events, providing evidence for H2b. However, the destruction sub-frame was significantly used most often when reporting on African



**Table 7** Frequency of items in first image of American news stories, based on news organization country of origin

Frames		Newspaper origins						$\chi^2$
		American News		European News		Middle East/ Africa news		
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
<i>Human Interest Frame</i>								
Corpse		1	35	0	12	0	12	.912, $p = .634$
	% of articles	2.8	97.2	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	.678, $p = .712$
Injured		1	35	0	12	1	11	1.379, $p = .502$
	% of articles	2.8	97.2	0	100.0	8.3	91.7	
<i>Consequence frame</i>								
Weapon		14	22	0	12	4	8	9.845, $p = .007^*$
	% of articles	38.9	61.1	0.0	100.0	33.3	66.7	6.561, $p = .038^*$
Emergency vehicle		9	27	1	11	3	9	1.571, $p = .456$
	% of articles	25.0	75.0	8.3	91.7	25.0	75.0	
Military vehicle		5	31	0	12	1	11	1.975, $p = .372$
	% of articles	13.9	86.1	0.0	100.0	8.3	91.7	
Destruction		3	33	0	12	2	10	2.182, $p = .336$
	% of articles	8.3	91.7	0.0	100.0	16.7	83.3	
Animals		1	35	0	12	0	12	.678, $p = .712$
	% of articles	2.8	97.2	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	
<i>Conflict frame</i>								
Protest		0	36	0	12	0	12	.672, $p = .715$
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	
Fighting		1	35	0	12	0	12	.678, $p = .712$
	% of articles	2.8	97.2	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	
<i>Morality frame</i>								
Mourning		1	35	0	12	0	12	.678, $p = .712$
	% of articles	2.8	97.2	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	
<i>Responsibility frame</i>								
Military		1	35	2	10	0	12	2.607, $p = .272$
	% of articles	2.8	97.2	16.7	83.3	0.0	100.0	4.444, $p = .108$
Police/firefighters		15	21	1	11	8	4	8.611, $p = .013^*$
	% of articles	41.7	58.3	8.3	91.7	66.7	33.3	
Medical		6	30	1	11	2	10	.523, $p = .770$
	% of articles	16.7	83.3	8.3	91.7	16.7	83.3	
Media		0	36	0	12	1	11	4.068, $p = .131$
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	8.3	91.7	
Border agent		1	35	0	12	0	12	.678, $p = .712$
	% of articles	2.8	97.2	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	
Officeholder		0	36	1	11	0	12	4.068, $p = .131$
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	8.3	91.7	0.0	100.0	

$N = 60$ , not every article had an image

Percentages and counts are calculated based on: American News  $N = 36$ , European News  $N = 12$ , Middle East/Africa News  $N = 12$

\* =  $p < .1$

events (Table 9 shows 20.2%, Table 10 shows 25%). Meanwhile, the European press use the consequence frame most while reporting African events (shown in the consequence subframes in Tables 9, 10, 11). These latter two results do not provide evidence for Hypothesis H2b.

## Descriptives

Next, to test Hypothesis 3, we compared the demographics present across the different media examined across the origin of events. Across all three press categories, women



**Table 8** Frequency of items in first image of European news stories, based on news organization country of origin

Frames		Newspaper Origins						$\chi^2$
		American News		European News		Middle East/ Africa News		
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
<i>Human interest frame</i>								
Corpse		5	133	0	46	1	45	1.311, $p = .519$
	% of articles	3.6	96.4	0.0	100.0	2.2	97.8	1.825, $p = .401$
Injured		8	130	3	43	1	45	1.114, $p = .573$
	% of articles	3.6	96.4	6.5	93.5	2.2	97.8	
<i>Consequence frame</i>								
Weapon		26	112	7	39	11	35	1.069, $p = .586$
	% of articles	18.8	81.2	15.2	84.8	23.9	76.1	1.143, $p = .565$
Emergency vehicle		23	115	5	41	16	30	9.855, $p = .007^*$
	% of articles	16.7	83.3	10.9	89.1	34.8	65.2	
Military Vehicle		16	122	8	38	0	46	7.940, $p = .019^*$
	% of articles	11.6	88.4	17.4	82.6	0.0	100.0	
Destruction		7	131	2	44	5	41	2.332, $p = .312$
	% of articles	5.1	94.9	4.3	95.7	10.9	89.1	
Animals		10	128	3	43	0	46	3.479, $p = .176$
	% of articles	7.2	92.8	6.5	93.5	0.0	100.0	
<i>Conflict frame</i>								
Protest		0	138	0	46	0	46	.670, $p = .715$
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	
Fighting		1	137	0	46	0	46	.670, $p = .715$
	% of articles	0.7	99.3	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	
<i>Morality frame</i>								
Mourning		13	125	4	42	7	39	1.427, $p = .490$
	% of articles	9.4	90.6	8.7	91.3	15.2	84.8	
<i>Responsibility Frame</i>								
Military		14	124	5	41	2	44	1.781, $p = .410$
	% of articles	10.1	89.9	10.9	89.1	4.3	95.7	1.607, $p = .448$
Police/Firefighters		54	84	13	33	19	27	2.117, $p = .347$
	% of articles	39.1	60.9	28.3	71.7	41.3	58.7	
Medical		30	108	11	35	4	42	4.420, $p = .110$
	% of articles	21.7	78.3	23.9	76.1	8.7	91.3	
Media		6	132	1	45	1	45	.777, $p = .678$
	% of articles	4.3	95.7	2.2	97.8	2.2	97.8	
Border agent		0	138	0	46	0	46	
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	
Officeholder		1	137	1	45	1	45	.901, $p = .637$
	% of articles	0.7	99.3	2.2	97.8	2.2	97.8	

$N = 230$ , not every article had an image

Percentages and counts are calculated based on: American News  $N = 138$ , European News  $N = 46$ , Middle East/Africa News  $N = 46$

were shown in images at much lower percentages than men: American press (28% women v. 60% men), European press (35% women v. 56% men), and Middle Eastern (26% women v. 49% men). In the American media, African events were the only events with more non-white people shown, as expected, showing non-whites in 53.6% of images versus

whites in 20.2%. In contrast, American events had non-whites in 55.6% of images and whites in 66.7%. For European events, non-whites were represented 37.7% of images and whites in 65.2%.<sup>7</sup> Overall, children are often not shown (in less than 16% of articles) but at different rates across outlets. Children are seen the most in American and Middle





**Table 9** Frequency of items in first image of American news, based on event country of origin

Frames		Event Country						$\chi^2$
		American		European		Africa		
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
<i>Human interest frame</i>								
Corpse		1	35	5	133	14	70	9.364, $p = .009^*$
	% of articles	2.8	97.2	3.6	96.4	16.7	83.3	13.871, $p = .001^*$
Injured		1	35	8	130	5	79	.574, $p = .750$
	% of articles	2.8	97.2	3.6	96.4	6	94.0	
<i>Consequence frame</i>								
Weapon		14	22	26	112	13	71	8.981, $p = .011^*$
	% of articles	38.9	61.1	18.8	81.2	15.5	84.5	8.989, $p = .011^*$
Emergency vehicle		9	27	23	115	10	74	3.203, $p = .202$
	% of articles	25.0	75.0	16.7	83.3	11.9	88.1	
Military vehicle		5	31	16	122	5	79	2.505, $p = .286$
	% of articles	13.9	86.1	11.6	88.4	6.0	94.0	
Destruction		3	33	7	131	17	67	13.020, $p = .001^*$
	% of articles	8.3	91.7	5.1	94.9	20.2	79.8	
Animals		1	35	10	128	2	82	3.030, $p = .220$
	% of articles	2.8	97.2	7.2	92.8	2.4	97.6	
<i>Conflict frame</i>								
Protest		0	36	0	138	2	82	1.341, $p = .511$
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	2.4	97.6	4.175, $p = .124$
Fighting		1	35	1	137	0	84	2.538, $p = .281$
	% of articles	2.8	97.2	0.7	99.3	0.0	100.0	
<i>Morality frame</i>								
Mourning		1	35	13	125	17	67	9.157, $p = .010^*$
	% of articles	2.8	97.2	9.4	90.6	20.2	79.8	
<i>Responsibility frame</i>								
Military		1	35	14	124	10	74	6.677, $p = .035^*$
	% of articles	2.8	97.2	10.1	89.9	11.9	88.1	2.469, $p = .291$
Police/firefighters		15	21	54	84	17	67	9.694, $p = .008^*$
	% of articles	41.7	58.3	39.1	60.9	20.2	79.8	
Medical		6	30	30	108	9	75	4.425, $p = .109$
	% of articles	16.7	83.3	21.7	78.3	10.7	89.3	
Media		0	36	6	132	4	80	1.711, $p = .425$
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	4.3	95.7	4.8	95.2	
Border agent		1	35	0	138	0	84	6.191, $p = .045^*$
	% of articles	2.8	97.2	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	
Officeholder		0	36	1	137	1	83	.474, $p = .789$
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	0.7	99.3	1.2	98.8	

$N = 258$ , not every article had an image

Percentages and counts are calculated based on: American Event  $N = 36$ , European Event  $N = 138$ , Africa Event  $N = 84$

\* =  $p < .1$

Eastern/African outlets when reporting on American events, at 16.7% and 8.3%, respectively. Contrary to European news, which shows children the most for African events, at 14.3%.

Exploring how groups and individuals are portrayed, groups of people (or crowds) are pictured more often

across all news sources: American press (41%), European press (35%), and Middle Eastern (44%). However, individuals are shown more often when reporting on American events: 47.2% in American press, 41.7% in European, and 58.3% in African/Middle Eastern press. This is likely the



**Table 10** Frequency of items in first image of European news, based on event of country of origin

Frames		Event country						$\chi^2$
		American		European		Africa		
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Human interest frame								.847, $p = .655$
Corpse		0	12	0	46	2	26	4.241, $p = .120$
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	7.1	92.9	
Injured		0	12	3	43	0	28	2.703, $p = .259$
	% of articles	0	100.0	6.5	93.5	0	100.0	
<i>Consequence frame</i>								10.066, $p = .007^*$
Weapon		0	12	7	39	7	21	3.934, $p = .140$
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	15.2	84.8	25.0	75.0	
Emergency vehicle		1	11	5	41	4	24	.345, $p = .842$
	% of articles	8.3	91.7	10.9	89.1	14.3	85.7	
Military vehicle		0	12	8	38	5	23	2.489, $p = .288$
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	17.4	82.6	17.9	82.1	
Destruction		0	12	2	44	7	21	9.553, $p = .008^*$
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	4.3	95.7	25.0	75.0	
Animals		0	12	3	43	1	27	1.022, $p = .600$
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	6.5	93.5	3.6	96.4	
<i>Conflict frame</i>								2.084, $p = .353$
Protest		0	12	0	46	0	28	
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	
Fighting		0	12	0	46	1	27	2.096, $p = .351$
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	3.6	96.4	
<i>Morality frame</i>								
Mourning		0	12	4	42	5	23	3.189, $p = .203$
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	8.7	91.3	17.9	82.1	
<i>Responsibility frame</i>								1.137, $p = .566$
Military		2	10	5	41	2	26	.830, $p = .660$
	% of articles	16.7	83.3	10.9	89.1	7.1	92.9	
Police/firefighters		1	11	13	33	9	19	2.547, $p = .280$
	% of articles	8.3	91.7	28.3	71.7	32.1	67.9	
Medical		1	11	11	35	2	26	4.238, $p = .120$
	% of articles	8.3	91.7	23.9	76.1	7.1	92.9	
Media		0	12	1	45	3	25	3.543, $p = .170$
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	2.2	97.8	10.7	89.3	
Border agent		0	12	0	46	0	28	
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	
Officeholder		1	11	1	45	2	26	1.395, $p = .498$
	% of articles	8.3	91.7	2.2	97.8	7.1	92.9	

$N = 86$ , not every article had an image

Percentages and counts are calculated based on: American Event  $N = 12$ , European Event  $N = 46$ , Africa Event  $N = 28$

\*= $p < .1$

result of cultural norms and notions that Americans are more individualistic.

The final comparison was the different media types used to report on events. Across all news sources, African affairs have the least number of videos and slideshows, with the highest rate being in European media with 67.9% of articles

including videos. European press use maps most often for African events (57.1%), while American press use them most for American events 50%). These results are consistent with Hypothesis 3, asserting that different descriptives would be used by western and non-western media when reporting on events across geographical boundaries.



**Table 11** Frequency of items in first image of African/Middle east news, based on event country of origin

Frames		Event country						$\chi^2$
		American		European		Africa		
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
<i>Human interest frame</i>								
Corpse		0	12	1	45	3	25	1.086, $p = .581$
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	2.2	97.8	10.7	89.3	3.543, $p = .170$
Injured		1	11	1	45	0	28	2.578, $p = .276$
	% of articles	8.3	91.7	2.2	97.8	0.0	100.0	
<i>Consequence frame</i>								
Weapon		4	8	11	35	3	25	.741, $p = .690$
	% of articles	33.3	66.7	23.9	76.1	10.7	89.3	3.129, $p = .209$
Emergency vehicle		3	9	16	30	5	23	2.537, $p = .281$
	% of articles	25.0	75.0	34.8	65.2	17.9	82.1	
Military vehicle		1	11	0	46	3	25	4.932, $p = .085$
	% of articles	8.3	91.7	0.0	100.0	10.7	89.3	
Destruction		2	10	5	41	5	23	.793, $p = .673$
	% of articles	16.7	83.3	10.9	89.1	17.9	82.1	
Animals		0	12	0	46	1	27	2.096, $p = .351$
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	3.6	96.4	
<i>Conflict frame</i>								
Protest		0	12	0	46	0	28	
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	
Fighting		0	12	0	46	0	28	
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	
<i>Morality frame</i>								
Mourning		0	12	7	39	3	25	2.178, $p = .336$
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	15.2	84.8	10.7	89.3	
<i>Responsibility frame</i>								
Military		0	12	2	44	0	28	5.357, $p = .069^*$
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	4.3	95.7	0.0	100.0	1.781, $p = .411$
Police/firefighters		8	4	19	27	5	23	9.275, $p = .010$
	% of articles	66.7	33.3	41.3	58.7	17.9	82.1	
Medical		2	10	4	42	3	25	.648, $p = .723$
	% of articles	16.7	83.3	8.7	91.3	10.7	89.3	
Media		1	11	1	45	1	27	1.073, $p = .585$
	% of articles	8.3	91.7	2.2	97.8	3.6	96.4	
Border agent		0	12	0	46	0	28	
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	
Officeholder		0	12	1	45	1	27	.482, $p = .786$
	% of articles	0.0	100.0	2.2	97.8	3.6	96.4	

$N = 86$ , not every article had an image

Percentages and counts are calculated based on: American Event  $N = 12$ , European Event  $N = 46$ , Africa Event  $N = 28$

\*= $p < .1$

## Discussion and conclusion

Despite the rise of globalization, social media, and the sharing of cultures, this study offers some evidence that significant differences still exist in how the international press covers terror attacks across geographic borders. In addition

to previous framing and agenda-setting literature, the results align with the feminist theory of international relations, as there is evidence of gendered visual frames (Prugl 2004). The latter was evident in the differences of frames employed across the three media categories examined. In particular, the differences in the feminine (human interest, morality, and



conflict) frames employed. The western media used more feminine master and subframes when reporting African events. Consistent with Hypotheses 1 and 2, international press use different frames when reporting African events and use more feminine, gendered, visual frames.

Contrary to our expectations (H2b), western press did not use more masculine frames at significant rates when reporting domestic terror attacks. Instead, there seems to be no inherent, significant difference in frames for domestic events.

Possibly, these results indicate that it is more important to the editors to portray others as weak rather than themselves as strong. If the media can use more feminine frames for Africa, making them appear less able to respond to an attack, the press can use more neutral frames for domestic attacks while still appearing stronger.

The most likely reason for the difference in coverage is rooted in inherent cultural biases and norms in each journalist's country and a foreign affairs agenda set by the elite in the respective nations. Likely, the difference in feminine frames and the indifference in masculine frames result from the conditionality of these results. The conditionality of national laws could restrict the types of photographs taken at crime scenes and other events. As *The New York Times* Editors mentioned in their response article about the Kenya backlash, certain parts of the world, namely the USA and other western countries, have more restrictions, limiting the publication of more gruesome photographs (Takenaga 2019).

However, these cultural and legal differences cannot account for all the differences seen across press. Many more feminine frames, such as morality, are not gruesome and would not be off-limits. Although, it could perhaps account for differences within the human-interest frame, particularly with the subframes of "corpse" and "injured."

These studies show that the masculine language used to promote hegemonic male characteristics (Hardin et al. 2014) is lessening in more gender-neutral visuals and language. Even if this is the case, it is not evident that this same neutralizing effect is occurring for the feminine gendered frames used to portray non-western nations as inferior and weak (Njogu and Middleton 2009). This study thus adds to the prior feminine constructivist literature that while gendered language and feminine frames are still being used to portray inferiority, it is no longer necessary for countries to use strictly masculine language to define their strength. Simply, they do not use the feminine frames to define themselves. Nevertheless, western media continue to facilitate gendered frames and definitions of strength and power in the international system.

While these results in-part provide evidence for feminist theory, which coincides with media framing theory, this study does veer away from both in some ways. For example,

Schwalbe, Silcock, and Keith (2008) found that the "conflict" frame was the most used. In contrast, our research finds that the "conflict" frame is the least used, while the "consequence" frame is the most used. Not all media used the conflict frame. However, even with the consequence frame being the most used, the frames' usage differences were not significant across media for events across geographical boundaries. It is likely because the definition of the consequence frame must shift. This study found that evidence of destruction was used most often for African events, which could be argued to be a more feminine, weaker frame—showing that the attacker impacted infrastructure. Meanwhile, the other subframes (i.e., weapons, military) are classified as masculine frames. These differences in the gendered definitions of subframes could impact the significance of the usage of the frame entirely.

Further differences from prior framing literature include the lack of the use of the conflict frame, with the Middle Eastern/African press who did not employ the "conflict" frame, contrary to Mohamed Al Majdhouh and Hamzah (2016), who found that the frame is used in both American and Middle Eastern/African press. However, this was not the only difference. For example, the Middle Eastern/African press also *did* use the "human interest" frame more than the European press, but at about the same rate as the American press. The latter contrasts with Youssef (2009), who found that the Middle Eastern/African press used the "human interest" frame significantly higher than the American press. However, our results follow the feminist literature as countries would want to use the human-interest frame when reporting attacks in other geographical areas to portray them as inferior.

Due to these differences in framing, it is vital to remember agenda-setting theory that explains how the press influences the general population's views on people and topics (Brantner et al. 2011; Brinson and Stohl 2012; Farris and Silber Mohamed 2018; Kühne and Schemer 2015; Lecheler et al. 2015). Again, through Africa being portrayed as weaker through feminine frames, people in the west view Africans as inferior, following Njogu and Middleton (2009). Therefore, it is essential to show how biases infiltrate media coverage as these stories impact foreign affairs and public opinion. In this case, as African countries are portrayed as weaker and less able to respond to terror attacks, they are described as less of a threat to European and US national security. Additionally, the idea of Africa being less secure could make Americans or Europeans more fearful of visiting Africa. In turn, this could influence the African economy and cultural exchanges.

Overall, this study shows that when it comes to events in Africa, the western press use different visual frames when reporting on ISIL attacks. Their frames to report on African events are also different from those used when reporting



domestic events. Based on this study, differences in the framing of events across geographical regions still exist and follow the notions of feminism that African countries will be portrayed using weaker descriptive visuals and frames. The importance of this study is that it shows an inherent framing bias that poses non-Western nations as more feminine and shows gendered language usage, yet the lack of women considered within the foreign affairs through the media. This bias in the media can have policy implications. It determines what Americans see as the most salient foreign affairs issues, defines their perceived notions of Africans and their government, and creates the discourse about African countries' strengths or weaknesses.

## Limitations and future research

This study examined ISIL coverage by six American and four foreign media outlets (two European, one Middle Eastern, and one African) in America, Europe, and Africa. Our study is limited because we examine only one article from each outlet linked to the event rather than the outlet's full coverage. We also acknowledge that our research centers on the most viewed image in the article rather than all images published. Analyzing all coverage and photographs may provide a more detailed and complete picture of framing ISIL coverage. The next step in expanding this research is to examine the frames in additional visual content, such as each article's videos and photograph slideshows. Future research should conduct a causal experiment, examining how these frames influence viewers' opinions and emotions.

## Notes

1. See: <https://twitter.com/justrioba/status/1085384938457845760>
2. Africa is the entire African continent, including North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa.
3. Our search for events was conducted in October 2020.
4. Editorial or opinion pieces were not included.
5. We did not record the slideshow's content (beyond the first image), video, or map, but we coded if these elements were present in the article (1 if the element was present or 0 if the element was not present).
6. Each element that was present in the image was coded, meaning no framing category was mutually exclusive.
7. These percentages do not equal 100% because they are not mutually exclusive, i.e., a photograph may have both whites and nonwhites.

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## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** On behalf of all authors, Christina Walker states that there is no Conflict of interest.

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