Terrorism:
Exaggerated Fear
Or Valid Threat

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Background

Introduction

Perception plays a huge role in today's society. We as a society see how the media controls the hearts and eyes of people. What we see, hear, and know, all is controlled by media sources. In today's society one can even argue that news is not really news anymore; it is commentary. At times it is good, but can also be dangerous because that is how biased ideas are spread. News reporters each have their own set of unique opinions and values that these reporters take with them when giving us updates in the news. Biased ideas being spread is good when the idea is supported and is valid to society. For example, if a news reporter is biased towards people getting paid at a higher wage, than that reporter may constantly drop hints of that. But the question is what happens when the bias being spread is negative or not the full depiction of what is actually happening? Violence in many cases is interpretated in many different ways. A minor situation can be blown out of proportion and a major situation can be brought down. Media coverage has the ability to turn a mass shooting with several casualties into simply just "letting off steam" or to turn a minor altercation into a terrorist attack. We as society are prone to the media and its coverage. And in today society it is made worst with social media and influencers. Influencers are users on social media with a large fan base that can control the perspective of their fans in the same way reporters can. So, within a simple tweet, Instagram or Facebook post thousands of people can change their perspectives on something.

Violence usually is something that many people just assume based on what is said and what is seen. Whatever the media says is what we will accept. If it is mental breakdown we accept, minor altercation we accept, terrorism we accept with no hesitation. But the problem with these news reports on violence is the image given. Some attacks of violence based on the identity

of the perpetrator will be given a label. And based on those labels generalizations and assumptions are made. Based on those assumptions more attention and focus are given to certain attacks based on the identity of the perpetrator.

Literature Review

How people perceive different actors (Muslims and white supremacists for example) in attacks determine a lot of whether or not they consider that actor or actors to be terrorists. This could be something that stems back from France in the 1970s where it was believed that "Muslims and non-whites are 'invaders' imported by a cosmopolitan elite to replace ethnic Europeans" *(No safe places; White nationalist terrorism*). How these types of people were perceived back then is still very common today. With regards to terrorist attacks, many consider Muslims to be terrorists over white supremacists. For example, Islamic terrorists were often "portrayed as barbaric 'gunmen', who warranted torture to discover their evil plans" while white supremacist terrorists were considered to be angry, vengeful, and 'letting off steam' (Altheide 303). Islamic terrorists are often portrayed in a negative light while white supremacist terrorists are not.

There is proof that there is a difference between how these groups are portrayed/viewed. A study was conducted to compare how Muslims and white non-Muslims were portrayed as terrorists when implementing negative actions. The study was conducted on a group of 60 people from England who were white non-Muslims to read almost identical newspaper articles on an attack by a white non-Muslim and an attack by a Muslim. The researchers found that these participants "were more likely to identify a crime as terrorism when it was perpetrated by a Muslim" (Lloyd, West 2017). This difference in how the groups are viewed could also be seen from a study that was done to see how the media portrays Islamic terrorists over white American

terrorists by analyzing articles on different attacks by main media sources like the *New York Times, Washington Post, USA Today,* etc. For instance, the study found that the media portrays "domestic terrorism as isolated incidents of troubled individuals and 'Islamic' terrorism as a larger problem from Muslims connected to international terrorist groups – who are also U.S. citizens" (Powell 2018).

Language portrays different terrorists in different ways, which has an effect on influencing others' views/belief on terrorism. Researchers studied how the language used to describe terrorism (especially by the media) influences how viewers perceive different attacks as terrorism through how these attacks are done (individuals vs. groups). Terrorism that is considered to be done by a group is 15% more likely to be classified as terrorism than terrorism that is performed by an individual (Huff, Kertzer 2018). This could also be seen of how the media instills fear on its viewers in which a study found that when one followed the news (especially news on terrorism), they are more likely to be fearful of terrorism.

All of these studies look at how different types of groups are portrayed but these studies don't look at the difference in the terrorist attacks between Islamic and non-Islamic groups whether it be the number of attacks, who perpetrated the attacks, and what the fatalities and casualties were for each attack. So, does the public have a valid reason to be more fearful of one type of terrorist group over the other? Or is it just an exaggerated fear that has been caused by the media? Therefore, we will be looking at the number of terrorist attacks Islamic and non-Islamic groups have caused in the United States and the number of casualties/fatalities that were caused by each to see if the public has a valid reason to be more afraid of attacks being implemented by Islamic terrorist groups over non-Islamic terrorist groups.

Purpose

Our purpose behind this experimental analysis is to determine whether or not the prevailing media narrative, which has been well documented as we explain earlier, is accurate: is there a greater threat of Islamic terrorist compared to terrorist of other groups which are non-Islamic? The role of a free press is to inform the people of events both domestic and global, making sure that corruption gets exposed, threats are identified and wrongdoing is held accountable. If in fact they are failing to accurately inform the public about different terrorist threats, this is not only a disservice to the public but could result in doubt on their other findings. For this reason, it is imperative to examine whether or not the threat posed by Islamic terrorist is worth the attention it garners on a factual basis as opposed to stoking fears for other reasons such as increased viewership.

Hypothesis

We predict that when comparing Islamic and non-Islamic terrorist attacks from the years 2010 to 2020, (chosen for being the most recent as well as excluding the severe statistical outlier of the 9/11 terrorist attack) there will be a similar number of terrorist attacks from both groups as well as a similar number of fatalities and casualties caused by these attacks.

It is important to note what this hypothesis aims to conclude and what should not be derived from the results. For starters the difference in number of attacks for the Islamic and non-Islamic categories which could be attributed a disparity in fatalities and casualties on a per attack basis. This must be kept into consideration when dawning conclusions, we plan to take into account the total number of casualties and fatalities caused by each type of attack to assess simply which category yields more because the different attack types may not be equally likely

to occur. Non-Islamic is a very broad category when it comes to terror. There are a multitude of other terrorist attack categories clumped together in this category, but we will identify a common one. From this we will compare the number of attacks committed by Islamic terrorists to the most common type of non-Islamic terrorist attacks to help assess if non-Islamic terrorist is a category made up of numerous smaller scale terrorist attacks and as such, they do not garner enough media attention or if the largest type of non-Islamic terrorist is comparable to Islamic terror.

We predict that when comparing faculty/infrastructure terrorist attacks to Islamic terrorist attacks from the years 2010 to 2020, there will be a greater number of fatalities and casualties committed by Islamic terrorist attacks.

Statistical Plans and Methods

The dataset for our project was obtained from the Global Terrorism Database. In its raw form, there are 191,464 cases and 135 variables. Each case represents a single terrorist attack. We managed to clean and condense the data into its final form of two separate data sets each containing eight cases and four variables.

A case in these new datasets represent either Islamic or non-Islamic terrorist attacks in the United States within a year between 2010 and 2020. By method of manual and R-based filtering, we were able to locate all the Islamic terrorist groups and filter them into the first data set. The rest of the terrorist groups were labeled non-Islamic and filtered into the second data set. Below is a short documentation of the variables within each data set.

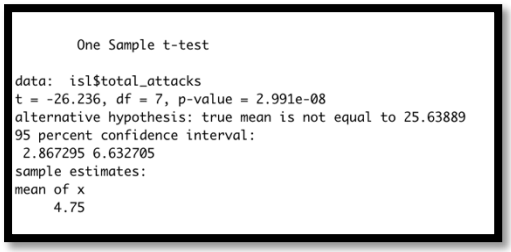
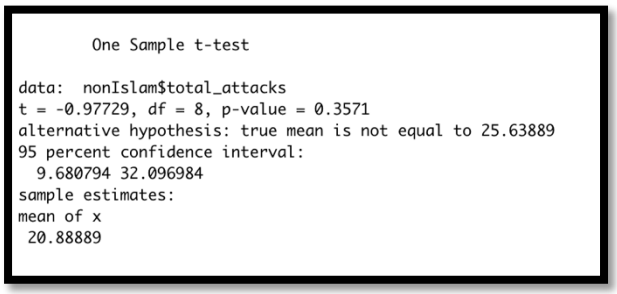
	Variable Name	Type	Values	Description
Islamic Terrorist Attacks	*iyear*	Str	All Str	Year of incidents
	total_attacks_isl	Int	All Int	Total number of terrorist attacks
	total_killed_isl	Int	All Int	Total number of fatalities in the incident
	total_wounded_isl	Int	All Int	Total number of wounded in the incident

	Variable Name	Type	Values	Description
Non-Islamic Terrorist Attacks	*iyear*	Str	All Str	Year of incidents
	total_attacks_nonisl	Int	All Int	Total number of terrorist attacks
	total_killed_nonisl	Int	All Int	Total number of fatalities in the incident
	total_wounded_nonisl	Int	All Int	Total number of wounded in the incident

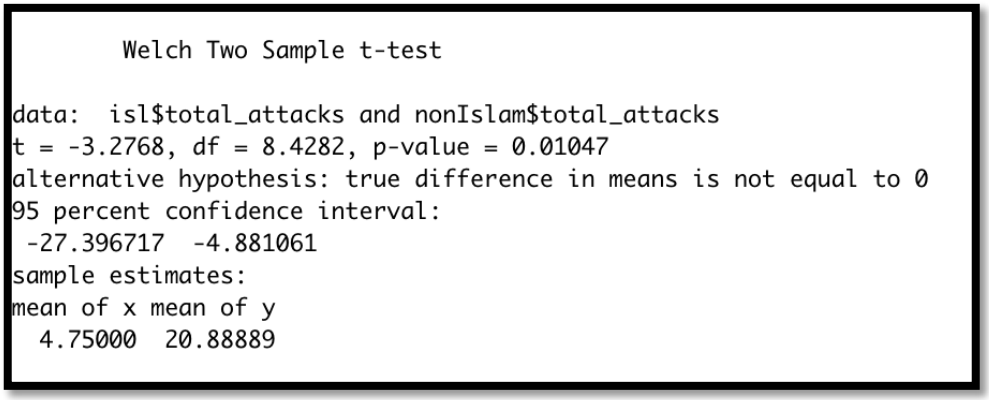
We will be hypothesis testing using one and two sample t-tests. Our hope is that after we establish (or not establish) a relationship between variables, we will have a solid foundation to substantiate the patters found in the visual aids.

Research Design

We want to see if the number of terrorist attacks conducted by either Islamic and Non-Islamic terrorist groups truly differ from the average of the total number of terrorist attacks overall. Again, all the experiments will be within the frame of the United States.

HYPOTHESES	**$H_0 : \mu = 25.63889$** *(The number of Islamic terrorist attacks do <u>not</u> differ from all the terrorist attacks.)* **$H_A : \mu \neq 25.63889$** *(The number of Islamic terrorist attacks do differ from all the terrorist attacks.)*	**$H_0 : \mu = 25.63889$** *(The number of non-Islamic terrorist attacks do <u>not</u> differ from all the terrorist attacks.)* **$H_A : \mu \neq 25.63889$** *(The number of non-Islamic terrorist attacks do differ from all the terrorist attacks.)*
T-TEST	 ***Figure 1.***	 ***Figure 2.***
P-VALUE	The p-value is 2.991e-08.	The p-value is 0.3571.
RESULT	Since p-value ≤ 0.05, we can reject the null hypothesis.	Since p-value > 0.05, we <u>cannot</u> reject the null hypothesis.

We are now more confident that the number of Islamic terrorist attacks do differ from all terrorist attacks (Figure 1) while non-Islamic terrorist attacks do not differ (Figure 2). Next, we will compare the number of Islamic terrorist attacks to the number of non-Islamic terrorist attacks against each other to see if they truly differ from each other.

HYPOTHESES	**$H_0 : \mu = 0$** *(The number of Islamic terrorist attacks do <u>not</u> differ from non-Islamic terrorist attacks.)* **$H_A : \mu \neq 0$** *(The number of Islamic terrorist attacks differ from non-Islamic terrorist attacks.)*
T-TEST	 ***Figure 3.***
P-VALUE	The p-value is 0.01047.
RESULT	Since p-value ≤ 0.05, we can reject the null hypothesis.

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        Welch Two Sample t-test

data:  isl$total_attacks and nonIslam$total_attacks
t = -3.2768, df = 8.4282, p-value = 0.01047
alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0
95 percent confidence interval:
 -27.396717  -4.881061
sample estimates:
mean of x mean of y
  4.75000  20.88889
```

As of now, we are more confident in statement that the number of Islamic terrorist attacks differ from the number of non-Islamic terrorist attacks. Figure 4 below is a visualization of this difference.

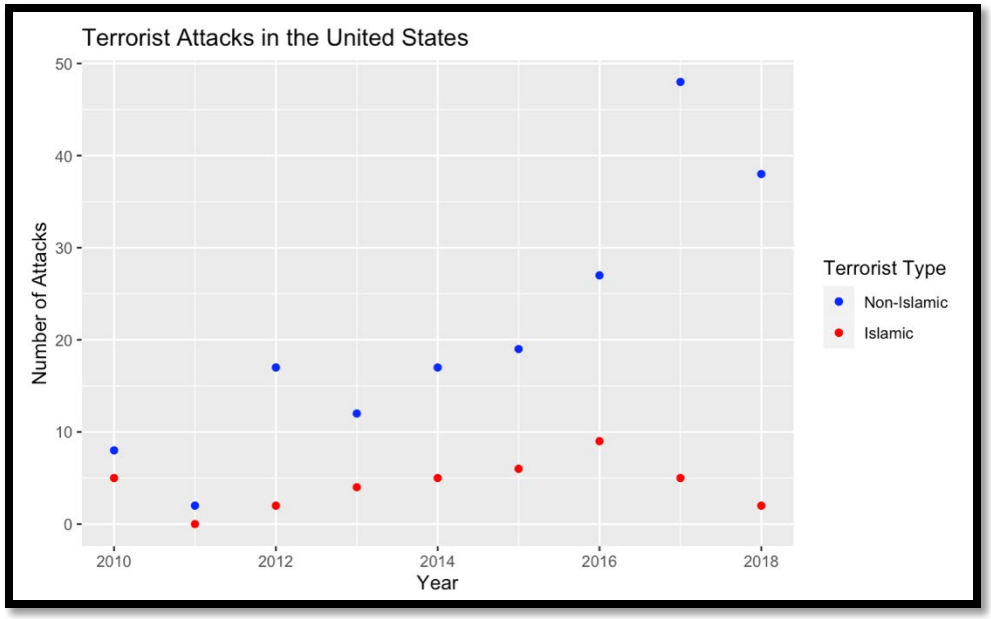
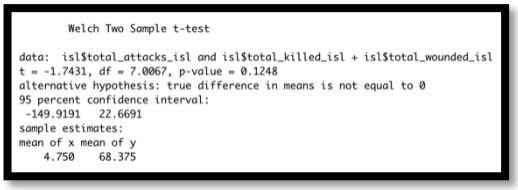
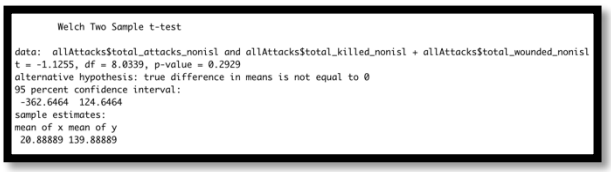


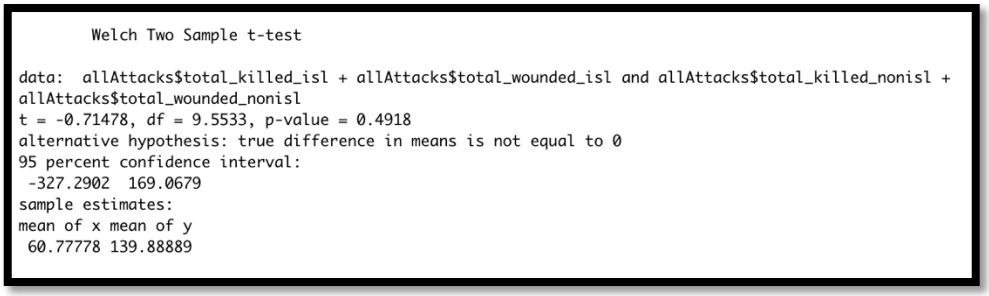
Figure 4.

Figure 4 shows that there are more non-Islamic terrorist groups each year than Islamic terrorist groups. The difference shown in the scatterplot is substantiated with figures 1, 2, and 3 above.

Unfortunately, figure 4 does not account for the number of casualties during the terrorist attacks which may warrant more news coverage. Next, we will perform two t-tests to evaluate if there is a significant difference between the number of attacks and the number of casualties for each terrorist organization.

HYPOTHESES	**$H_0 : \mu = 0$** *(The number of Islamic terrorist attacks do <u>not</u> differ from the casualties.)* **$H_A : \mu \neq 0$** *(The number of Islamic terrorist attacks differ from the casualties.)*	**$H_0 : \mu = 0$** *(The number of non-Islamic terrorist attacks do <u>not</u> differ the casualties.)* **$H_A : \mu \neq 0$** *(The number of non-Islamic terrorist attacks differ from the casualties.)*
T-TEST	 ***Figure 5.***	 ***Figure 6.***
P-VALUE	The p-value is 0.1248.	The p-value is 0.2929.
RESULT	Since p-value > 0.05, we <u>cannot</u> reject the null hypothesis.	Since p-value > 0.05, we <u>cannot</u> reject the null hypothesis.

In both cases, it looks like the number of Islamic and non-Islamic terrorist attacks do not differ from the casualties. Finally, we will examine to see if the number of casualties from Islamic terrorist attacks significantly differ from casualties from non-Islamic terrorist.

HYPOTHESES	**$H_0 : \mu = 0$** *(The number of Islamic terrorist attacks casualties do <u>not</u> differ from non-Islamic terrorist attack casualties.)* **$H_A : \mu \neq 0$** *(The number of Islamic terrorist attacks casualties differ from non-Islamic terrorist attack casualties.)*
T-TEST	 ***Figure 7.***
P-VALUE	The p-value is 0.4918.
RESULT	Since p-value > 0.05, we <u>cannot</u> reject the null hypothesis.

We can be confident in the statement that the casualties from Islamic and non-Islamic terrorist attack do not differ significantly from each other. Figure 8 and figure 9 below plot the casualties in the attacks.

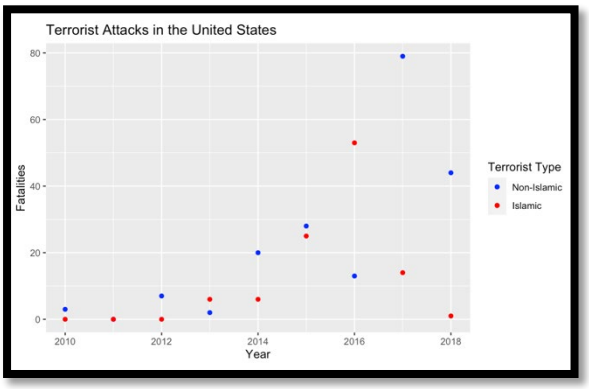


Figure 8.

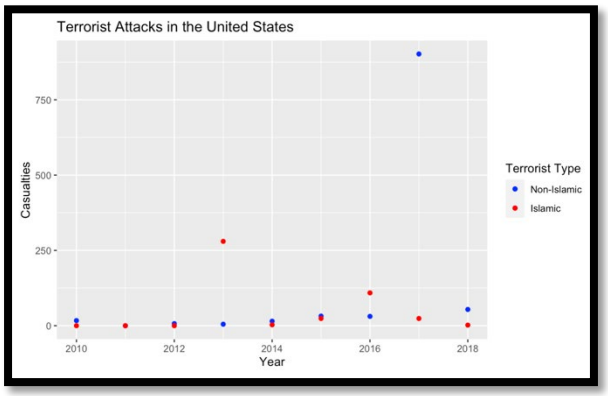
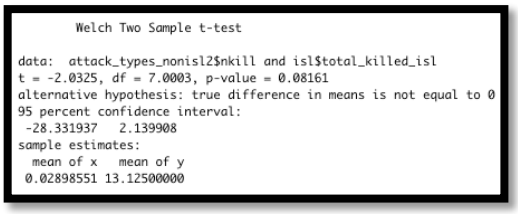
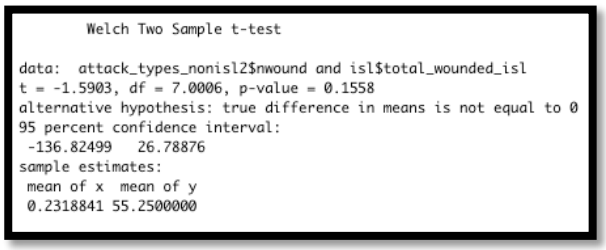


Figure 9.

Figure 8 shows that the number of fatalities for non-Islamic terrorist attacks tend to be in a greater number but that fatalities for Islamic terrorist attacks happen more frequently. Figure 9 displays that there are a lot of slight differences in the number of casualties between non-Islamic and Islamic terrorist groups.

Figures 10 and 11 represent a critique of other concerns between the similarities between the number of fatalities/casualties.

HYPOTHESES	**$H_0 : \mu = 0$** *(The number of fatalities from non-Islamic, facility/infrastructure terrorist attacks do <u>not</u> differ from the total number of fatalities from Islamic terrorist attacks.)* **$H_A : \mu \neq 0$** *(The number of fatalities from non-Islamic, facility/infrastructure terrorist attacks do differ from the total number of fatalities from Islamic terrorist attacks.)*	**$H_0 : \mu = 0$** *(The number of casualties from non-Islamic, facility/infrastructure terrorist attacks do <u>not</u> differ from the total number of wounded from Islamic terrorist attacks.)* **$H_A : \mu \neq 0$** *(The number of casualties from non-Islamic, facility/infrastructure terrorist attacks do differ from the total number of wounded from Islamic terrorist attacks.)*
T-TEST	 ***Figure 10.***	 ***Figure 11.***
P-VALUE	The p-value is 0.08161.	The p-value is 0.1558.
RESULT	Since p-value > 0.05, we <u>cannot</u> reject the null hypothesis.	Since p-value > 0.05, we <u>cannot</u> reject the null hypothesis.

Comparing the fatalities and casualties of most popular type of non-Islamic terrorist attack (facility/infrastructure attacks) to the total number of all Islamic terrorist attacks, we can see that the differences are not significant. Again, this will be addressed in the critique.

Statistical Results

Our null hypothesis for the first two one-sample t-tests and the first two sample t-test is that the number of terroristic attacks does not differ from that of the true mean of the non-Islamic attacks and Islamic attacks, and the alternate hypothesis was that the number of terroristic attacks does differ from the true mean. Our statistical results were not completely what we expected it to be for this hypothesis because we predicted that the number of Islamic terrorist attacks and non-Islamic terrorist attacks to be about the same but from these first 3 tests, it shows that there is a significant difference in the number of attacks caused by these groups.

The first three tests (Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3) substantiate the difference we see in the graph that depicts the year and the number of attacks conducted by either terrorist group (Figure 4). We see that each year, non-Islamic terrorist attacks have occurred at higher numbers than Islamic terrorist attacks. We are now more statistically confident in this statement.

However, another question arises as to whether the casualties due to the attacks are at fault for more media coverage. By testing to see if the number of casualties differ from the number of attacks, we see that even though there may be more attacks from non-Islamic terrorist groups the number of casualties is not independent of that group's large number of attacks. Furthermore, comparing the number of casualties caused by each terrorist group, we can see that they are similar. This will allow us to be more confident in the fact that the number of casualties may not a major concern for media attention. The graphs (Figure 8, Figure 9) show a plot of

casualties from each terrorist group. Visually, there is not much of a noticeable pattern and this is substantiated by our tests.

Critique and Conclusion

As discussed earlier in the hypothesis section, merely looking at the total number of attacks, fatalities and casualties has its downsides in not taking into account the average deadliness of one attack by a particular terrorist group. That being said, the total number of casualties and fatalities does indeed represent what it is supposed to, exactly how many people have died from a certain type of terrorist attack. We aimed to look at if the fear of Islamic terrorist was justified by comparing non-Islamic terrorist to it using these metrics, and we were able to conclude there is no statistically significant difference among these groups. When comparing faculty/infrastructure terrorist attacks, a particularly deadly subgroup of non-Islamic terrorist attacks, we see that there is not a significant difference in the total number of fatalities and casualties. This leads us to conclude that even among subgroups of non-Islamic terror, we see a similar level of deadliness from such attacks when compared to Islamic terror, yet less media attention. It is also entirely possible that the media may not intend to overrepresent Islamic terrorist but underrepresent other forms of terror. Our first hypothesis was largely correct and showed no significant difference in the fatalities and casualties of Islamic vs non-Islamic terror, however we saw that there was a disparity in the sheer number of attacks between those groups. To argue on behalf of the media, as our second hypothesis did, that these disparities exist because of differences in total number of attacks is not supported by our findings where we compared Islamic attacks to facility/infrastructure attacks and did not find a significant difference in casualties and fatalities, seeing as there are fewer of these attacks than there are Islamic attacks. Nonetheless, we have to be cautious in arriving at a conclusion that the media

has acted in a fully irresponsible fashion in covering terrorist considering external factors that we could not fully account for and the disparity between Islamic terrorist and non-Islamic terrorist attacks and facility/infrastructure terrorist attacks as a further extension.

The perspective carried by most is that terrorism is more likely to be conducted by Islamic terrorist groups. However, we can see that that is untrue. This may be because news coverage is biased towards Islamic terrorist groups rather than non-Islamic terrorist groups. Moving forward we need to for one be more careful of news spreading through the media. And secondly be mindful of biases. Terrorism is a global threat, in-order to alleviate citizens unease we need to depict the full picture or what is actually going on. Perspective is everything to society; how we see things are exactly how we interact with things. Spreading such bias is detrimental to society and the fairness of this world.

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