

# Global study: Leading broadcasters present balanced view of international violence

LONDON, UK: Media Tenor and the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) recently announced the results of *Peace & the Media*, the first study into the accuracy of international TV news programmes with regards to violence, conflict and peace issues. The study reveals that while a majority of broadcasters present an accurate view of violence levels\*, key UK and US broadcasters devote more than 50% of their time to topics of violence.



- US, UK broadcasters dedicate most coverage to violence
- Middle Eastern broadcasters more positive than US, European counterparts
- Al Jazeera providing broadest coverage on Afghanistan war

The study analysed 37 TV news and current affairs programmes from 23 networks in 15 countries\*\* and cross-referenced this with measured levels of violence from the 149 countries ranked in the Global Peace Index (GPI). Broadcasters such as CNN International, the BBC and Al Jazeera were examined in the study, and a total of 197 649 reports were analysed by Media Tenor. The coverage from BBC 2 Newsnight in the UK, *ZDF Heute Journal* in Germany and CBS Evening News in the US was most aligned with the rankings of the GPI

*Peace & the Media* also includes a case study on Afghanistan, which shows that coverage of the country's violence is accurately portrayed in volume terms. Unfortunately, a disproportionate amount of coverage is focused only on defence and crime, and neglects to highlight the critical issues of corruption, the economy and human rights.

Encouragingly, there are 20% more stories on topics related to the structures of peace - well-functioning government, sound business environment, equitable distribution of resources, free flow of information, low levels of corruption, acceptance of the rights of others, high levels of education, good relations with neighbouring states - than stories that focused on conflict.

Of the outlets included in the study, the majority of programmes reported on violence less than 40% of the time.

## Key comparisons:

- Four programmes included in the study devote more than 50% of their time to topics of violence: CBS Evening News, Fox Special Report and ABC World News from the US and ITV News at 10 from the UK

- The 10 TV programmes reporting the most violence dedicate an average 48% of total reports to violence
- The 10 TV programmes reporting the least violence dedicate an average 24% of total reports to violence
- 8 of the top 10 programmes with the most violence coverage are from the US or UK
- The group of programmes with the lowest percentage of violence reports comprises mostly South African and Middle Eastern programmes.

"The media's ability to influence attitudes is well known, and it's reasonable to assume that focusing on peace will have an influence on future outcomes. If coverage focuses on the structures that are necessary to create peaceful societies, there is a better chance of building a safer global economy, and would go far to help conflict-ravaged countries like Afghanistan," said Steve Killelea, founder of the IEP. "This is regardless of whether the tone of the coverage was positive or negative. This is simply because attention would be brought to important areas of nation building that have not been covered in the past; thereby increasing the focus on what is important for nation building."

## **Case study: Afghanistan**

CNN International, BBC World Service and Al Jazeera English were called out for specific comparison in terms of coverage on Afghanistan. While all three TV networks had a similar number of reports on the topics receiving the most total coverage - warfare, elections, crime and international politics- Al Jazeera's coverage brings a greater focus on the structures that create peace. Al Jazeera English had the broadest coverage with 22 out of a possible 33 topics covered. This was four more than BBC World Service "The News" and CNN International Desk, which covered 18 topics each. Furthermore, Al Jazeera also reported the highest number of positive stories.

"Informing the public on what will build long-term peace and stability, regardless of whether the tone of the coverage is positive or negative, is highly beneficial and in the best traditions of a free press," said Roland Schatz, CEO of Media Tenor. "What is challenging is to determine how to reframe the news coverage so that it is appealing to the audience but still includes the structures of peace. If a TV network succeeded in achieving this, it would create a unique differentiation from other networks that should result in an increased market share."

## **Lack of diversity in conflict coverage restricting change in most violent nations**

With the exception of Zimbabwe and Afghanistan, all the countries with the most coverage are the leading economies of the world. While this points to wider reporting for countries with geopolitical influence, diversity in coverage on peace and conflict issues is critical to ensuring that countries are not stereotyped. Covering various aspects of a war provides viewers - domestic and international - with greater insight on tackling the most critical issues.

"It's human nature for us to feel more empathy for people and societies we know more about," said Killelea. "If we don't know the issues, all of the issues, that are factors in a conflict, it is impossible to achieve a lasting resolution."

Positive-peace stories - those documenting active steps to rectify violent situations - make up just 1.6% of the total number of media stories covered in the study. This may be partly related to what is considered newsworthy with dramatic, high-impact, violent or controversial events being considered the most relevant. International broadcaster Al Jazeera and Germany's ARD Tagesschau ranked highest on this factor, with both dedicating 8% of their conflict coverage.

## **Middle Eastern broadcasters more positive than European, US outlets**

Of special interest is how the three regions cover each other. European TV is balanced between coverage of the Middle East (27%) and North America (29%), while US programmes are more concerned with the Middle East (40%) than Europe (24%). Middle Eastern coverage suggests a much stronger interest in European affairs (36%) than events occurring in North America (21%). The BBC World Service was the broadcaster with the most international scope of coverage.

Of the three regions, US programmes are the least likely to be of a positive nature, while Middle Eastern programmes are more likely to be positive, and also the least likely to be negative. Although there was a high level of negative reporting on

Africa, it did also receive a higher level of positive coverage from the Middle East compared to Europe or the US. Both the US and European TV programmes devote more than 60% of their coverage of the Middle East to violence, while the level of coverage of violence for the US is well below what would be expected given its GPI score.

Both European and Middle Eastern TV programmes were more likely to report positively on North America than other regions, which mirror their low levels of coverage of violence issues in the US. By contrast, coverage of the Middle East, by both European and American TV programmes, had both a high level of violence reporting and a high level of negative coverage.

*\*Correlation of  $r=.56$ ; figure would be higher if a few notable outliers are removed; outliers are cases where the media reporting does not match the level of peacefulness of the countries. For example, Finland ranked as the 9th most peaceful country in the 2010 GPI, but 64% of international coverage on the country was violence related due to the spate of school shootings.*

**\*\*Table 1. TV programmes included in analysis**

Media Network	TV Programme	Country
ABC	ABC World News	USA
Al Arabiya	Al Arabiya News	Saudi Arabia
Al Jazeera	Al Jazeera News	Qatar
Al Manar	Al Manar SAT	Lebanon
ARD	ARD Tagesschau	Germany
ARD	ARD Tagesthemen	Germany
BBC	BBC1 10o'clock	UK
BBC	BBC2 Newsnight	UK
BBC	BBC World Service The News	UK
CBS	CBS Evening News	USA
CCTV	CCTV1 News Hour	China
CNN	CNN International Desk	USA
Dubai TV	Dubai TV	UAE
FOX	FOX Special Report	USA
ITV	ITV News at Ten	UK
LBC	LBC News	Lebanon
NBC	NBC Nightly News	USA
Nile TV	Nile News Panorama	Egypt
RAI 1	RAI TG1	Italy
RTL	RTL Aktuell	Germany
SAT1	SAT1 18:30	Germany
SF	SF Tagesschau	Switzerland
TF1	TF1 Le Journal	France
TRT1	TRT1 Ana Haber Bülteni	Turkey
TVE	TVE1 Telediario2	Italy
ZDF	ZDF Heute	Germany
ZDF	ZDF Heute Journal	Germany
SABC	SABC News @One	South Africa
SABC	SABC News @10	South Africa
SABC	SABC Afrikaans News	South Africa
SABC	SABC English News	South Africa
SABC	SABC Africa News Update	South Africa
eTV	eTV Prime Time	South Africa
SABC	SABC Zulu/Xhosa	South Africa
SABC	SABC SiSwati/Ndebele	South Africa
SABC	SABC Venda/Tsonga	South Africa
SABC	SABC Sotho	South Africa

**Table 2. Examples of 'Violence,' 'Peace' and 'Other' issues**

Violence issues	Peace issues	"Other" issues
Demonstrations/Protests	Parliamentary work	Stock markets
Politically motivated crime	Legislative procedure	State visits
Suicide bombing	Education policy	Court cases
Assassinations	Education and demographic development	Conferences/summits
Terrorism	Positive economic outlook	National elections
Kidnapping	Human rights	Currency market
Murder	Peace negotiations	Human interest
Nuclear weapon development	Co-operation of political parties	Animal stories
Conflicts in general	Co-operation of parliament	Awards/ prizes
Negative coverage media freedom	Treaties, agreements	Appointments
Social unrest	Arms control, non-proliferation	Domestic policy
War activities	Positive fiscal policy	Economic situation
Civil war	Positive monetary policy	Music
Negative coverage on human rights	Positive local conditions for investments	Campaigning
Failed elections	Economic development projects	International politics
Air strikes	Improvement of economic policy	Foreign policy
Oppression of the people by state	Positive labour legislation	Resignations
Insurgency	Positive economic restructuring	Film/cinema
War crimes	State incentives for innovations	Committees, events
Violent crime	Positive tertiary education	Economic policy

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