

UW Madison Student's Knowledge and Perceptions of Global Conflicts

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine whether students' demographic and personal characteristics affect their knowledge, opinions, and perceptions of global violent conflicts. A total of 144 students participated in the survey, in which they were asked to answer 18 questions about their background, media use, and understanding of global conflicts. Our hypothesis is that students who are majoring in social sciences and other globally oriented areas of study possess a better understanding of contemporary world issues than those who do not. The results revealed that our preconception is correct. This study reveals the importance of media usage as well as individual study in learning about the world today.

Introduction

Conflicts can be found all around the world; in offices, between couples, or even at a football game. Conflicts of all types are nothing new as humans have been exposed to them on a daily basis. We can therefore say that conflicts are a part of human life that according to Wilmot and Hocker, can be defined as a “felt struggle between two or more interdependent individuals over perceived incompatible differences in beliefs, values, and goals, or over differences in desires for esteem, control, and connectedness.” (Wilmot & Hocker, 2001, 11).

Conflicts can range from small scale debates to full out war between opposing nations. What is necessary in either case is a grounded framework of the subject in order for an individual to take an accurate stance that is reflective of their personal

beliefs. Perception and knowledge of a topic is important to understand when analyzing any given conflict. Moreover, the things influencing a person's perception and knowledge of a topic are equally as important. The factors influencing a person's decision making and frame of reference is crucial to their argument of right versus wrong. Because of this, we are looking to define which attributes are associated with an individual's perception and knowledge of global conflicts. Granted, there are many violent conflicts happening within the United States, but expanding our concern beyond the domestic is an indicator within itself of the level of importance international issues hold over domestic ones. Determining if the students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison have some sort of knowledge of the conflict in Gaza, the Ukraine, or issues relating to ISIS, will gauge the overall knowledge students have pertaining to international conflict.

Relevant Literature

Gender and Race

Race as a mode of identity is crucial in understanding perception of conflict. Carlton-Ford et al. (2004), tackle the issue of personal identity and interpretation of the Iraq war by adolescents living in Iraq during the 2004 US-Iraq war. This study was done to see if age, religion, ethnicity, or gender play a role in the way which these adolescents interpret the Iraq war; and in order to see if self-esteem relates to the amount of perceived threat war poses. The authors of this article use the Social Identity Theory, which explains how and why individuals aim to feel positive about themselves and the people around them (Carlton-Ford et al., 2004). An aspect of this theory is that people select to be in social groups in order to distinguish themselves from other

groups. This can influence what they believe to be important and, for the purpose of our study, what conflicts they consider to be important.

The authors here make the case that threats to their identity can influence Iraqi adolescent's probability of engaging in activities that will raise their self-esteem. To do this research, the authors of the article interviewed a thousand Iraqi adolescents, with permission from their families to enter their homes and ask questions relating to their religion affiliation, ethnicity, age, gender, family size, job security, friends, self-regard, and self-derogation. They also ask the adolescents if they feel there is a present threat to their family and if they feel there is a present threat to their nation (Carlton-Ford et al., 2004).

In regard to the questions for national safety, the scope of the questions expand from the safety for themselves, safety for their family, safety for their neighborhood, safety for Baghdad, all the way to safety for Iraq. There appears to be a correlation between the threat to the nation and the self-esteem of the adolescents in Baghdad in 2004. Adolescents from the more privileged parts of society, being male, Arab, Muslim, show a higher self-esteem and have a higher perception of threat for themselves and the nation.

From this study we can see that personal identities do in fact influence our views of conflict and safety. Thus finding out which personal or demographic characteristics like race and gender are influential in our perceptions of global conflicts is our task. This study also seems to suggest that a person's social group can influence the way we interpret safety and conflict.

Clements did two studies, one in 2011 and one in 2014, to determine which characteristics played a role in British citizens' support of their country's involvement in global conflicts. Clements uses data collected during the face-to-face surveys of the 2009-2010 British Election Studies (BES). These surveys are done both pre-election and post-election. From his research Clements determined that those with a higher level of education were more likely to support British involvement in the war in Afghanistan. He also determined that men in general were more likely to support British involvement in the war. In contrast, to this Clements (2011, 68) determined that those who were more economically insecure were less likely to support conflicts overseas. He hypothesize that this was because they may have seen it as a waste of economic resources which could be put to better use at home. Finally Clements decided that while there was a slight variation of support when divided among religious beliefs it was not enough to be conclusive. After reading this article, and similar articles, our group determined not to include religion in our research but to base our questions on the other characteristics discussed here such as gender and education.

Research done by Allison (2011) also focused on citizens' support of their country's involvement in global conflict. This study, however, was done in Chicago and was about the US involvement overseas (Allison, 2011, 672). This analysis focuses on the race and gender gap found in relation to individuals' support of US involvement. The study in Chicago found that there was a large gap between men and women when it came to supporting the US war effort; men expressed more support (Allison, 2011, 680). There were several reasons suggested for this such as maternal emotions and gender identities created by the society we grow up in.

This study also found a gap between black and white individuals and their support for US involvement overseas. White people, men especially, tended to support the war effort more whereas black people tended to be against US involvement. The reasons Allison gives for this are political affiliation and social status. More whites are republican than blacks, who tend to be democratic. Republicans tend to support the war whereas democrats tend not to. The other reason suggested is social status, such as economics or educational level. In both cases it suggests that lower levels are less likely to support US involvement in global conflicts.

Education

According to a study by Burks (2010) it was found that students' education and universities' missions greatly influenced their attitudes towards war (Burks, 2010, 173). The author used the concept of "moral disengagement" to calculate student support towards war. Moral disengagement can be defined as a justification for a person to act detrimentally by associating an action to a moral good (Burks, 2010, 173). According to Grussendorf (Burks, 2010, 173) students from 21 nations were surveyed about their support towards war using a similar survey to the one used in Burks research. A strong correlation was found between the Gross National Product (GNP) spent on military spending and students moral disengagement score. In the United States, students were more likely to agree that "War is necessary" compared with students from other nations. A total of six colleges are involved in this study. Two of them are Christian colleges, two are Quaker colleges, and the other two are public colleges (The University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1988). According to the author, the results show that students from Quaker colleges have less moral disengagement than in the other surveyed colleges

and are therefore more pacifist than other colleges (Burks, 2010). The author argues that the pacifist and non-conflictual nature of the Quaker colleges' mission statement may be the reason that students are more of pacifists compared to other universities. He argues that the reason that students are more pacifist than in other universities is that the Quaker colleges have a statement about peace and conflict resolution in their mission statements (Burks, 2010: 173). The University of Wisconsin-Madison in comparison does not have a statement about peace and conflict resolution in their mission statement. However, the university aims to educate their students about the world around them by asking students to "Strengthen cultural understanding through opportunities to study languages, cultures, the arts and the implications of social, political, economic and technological change and through encouragement of study, research and service off campus and abroad." (The University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1988).

The United States is a country that is considered as a superpower because of its dominant position in international relations and its influence in the world (Caruson & Johnson, 2003, 5). As a result, one might expect that most Americans would be knowledgeable about the world and its events. However, multiple studies over the years have shown that Americans have a lack of knowledge about the world. Multiple surveys over the years have illustrated the general ignorance of the American youth regarding global events. In a 1988 survey led by Wilke, people between the ages of 18 and 24 were asked to locate on a map locations such as the Persian Gulf, where at that time the U.S. Navy were gathered to protect commercial shipping vessels (Wilke, 2014). Three fourth of Americans could not locate the Persian Gulf. In another survey, only 5

percent of first-year college students who were asked to locate Vietnam on a map did so accurately. Reforms throughout the American education system is necessary in order to increase the amount of knowledge and culture of future Americans. Courses such as geography, history and foreign languages should be mandatory and should focus on world history and current events in addition to American history.

A recently published article in the Washington Post by professors from Dartmouth University studied the correlation between the knowledge that Americans have of the Ukrainian conflict and their knowledge of the location of the conflict (Dropp et al, 2014). Between March 28 and March 31st, the authors surveyed more than 2,000 Americans through the Internet. The questions on the survey ranged from foreign policy attitudes to standard demographic characteristics. In addition, a map of the world is provided to test respondents' knowledge of Ukraine's location. Through this setup, the authors could calculate a correlation relationship between one's knowledge of an event and one's knowledge of the location of that particular event. In an article published in *Gallup*, it was found that 68 percent of the 1,048 adults surveyed were following "somewhat closely" the events happening in Ukraine. More precisely, 49 percent of the individuals aged between 18 and 29 years old answered that they were following the events "somewhat closely" (Wilke, 2014). However, according to the authors of the article published on The Washington Post, only 16 percent (1 in 6) of Americans located Ukraine correctly - somewhere between its borders. Most people thought that Ukraine was in Europe or in Asia, including some who thought that Ukraine was in Greenland. The median respondent was about 1,800 miles off from the true location of the Ukrainian conflict (about the distance between Chicago and Los Angeles). It was shown

that the respondents who were somewhat accurate in locating the Ukraine were more informed than those who had been strongly inaccurate in locating the Ukrainian conflict. It was found that respondents that did not know where Ukraine is located were more likely to want the U.S. to intervene militarily. Based on this study we can see it is advisable to have some geographic questions on the survey and which is why students in our study are provided with an interactive map.

Media

In Bloch-Elkon's study (2007) focusing on the relationship between media, public opinion, and foreign policy in international crises; the author describes the difference in types of media. Bloch-Elkon states that there is a difference between elite, or quality press and popular press (2007, 30). In the article these types of media are said to reach different publics and relay different information framed in varying ways. Elite media is said to be geared toward an audience which has interest in global affairs and presents more factual knowledge. Popular press on the other hand is geared toward the average individual and is framed in a way so as to interest them, which usually involves violence, danger, or sad stories. Both these types of media will frame their news in a specific manner so as to create a specific reaction.

From this study we can see that there are not only different types of media but also that each type of media can portray news in a certain framework so as to produce the desired response. Thus it is necessary to determine which types of media an individual follows. Once we have determined this we can attempt to determine whether or not these media sources have specific biases or framings which may influence students' views of global conflicts.

Since Bloch-Elkon (2007) showed that media can reach different publics we next must know what exactly is a public. In their article Gillespie and O'Loughlin (2009) define a public as a connection of individuals who are concerned and or responding to an issue. Thus publics are not geographically limited nor are they static. However, you must have a way for the public to express itself or it cannot exist. This way of expressing itself and talking about an issue is also a way in which the public legitimizes an issue according to this article. It states that it is "in media and in talk about media that struggles over legitimacy are largely conducted" (Gillespie & O'Loughlin, 2009, 672).

Through our research we hope to provide a forum for the public, the student population, to express itself and declare whether they think the conflicts we are discussing are legitimate. Understand how "publics" act is important if we are to do this. Thus this article provides important understanding into how we should view a public and their responses to a given issue.

We must also understand that all media has at least some bias. Our group has come across many articles which discuss media bias. Bloch-Elkon (2007), whose article was discussed previously, mentions this when talking about media framing. Also a study by Tome Francis Simiyu demonstrates how media plays an influential role in individual's perceptions and their outlook on political candidates for the 2013 general election in Kenya. Simiyu (2014) focuses on the 2013 election in Kenya and is looking to see if there is a correlation between the trust viewers have on their preferred media outlets and whether or not these media outlets are influenced by the company's owners. Simiyu questions the journalistic independence and integrity of various media outlets by administering two surveys.

In the first survey, Simiyu (2014) asks the public if they believe that journalists during the 2013 election are honest in their representation of the candidates. Simiyu asks the public whether or not they believe they are being presented with an unbiased viewpoint of what the platforms of the candidates are. Overall, whether or not the journalists reporting the news are conducting themselves in a way that provides their audiences with the most accurate information. In the second survey, Simiyu (2014) questions the other side of the news, the journalists themselves, and whether or not they believe that media ownership influences what they are able to report and the stance they can report from. These two surveys provide insight to both the producers and consumers of media news and whether media news can be considered a reliable source of news regardless of ownership (Simiyu, 2014, 128).

The use of the Media Ownership Theory (Simiyu, 2014, 116) provides Simiyu with a framework to use for the basis of this study. In Kenya, there is a growing problem where political powers and groups are becoming large parts of the ownership of media outlets. Because of this, the media on these perspective channels tends to be skewed to reflect the owner's views and political affiliation. In regards to American news outlets, it can be similar to FOX being a channel which reflects a majority of its viewpoints with the Republican Party. The Propaganda Model developed by Chomsky and Herman (2002) traces the path by which finance and power are able to constrain viewpoints of controversial issues and provides content that best serves the interests of its owners (Simiyu, 2014, 118). The Media Ownership Theory developed by Shoemaker and Reese (1991) states that owners of a media organization have the definitive power over

the news content of papers (Simiyu, 2014, 118). Because of this, news content is more likely to be reflective (Simiyu, 2014, 118).

A longitudinal study by Danny Hayes (2008) discusses the role journalism plays in the appearance and reputation of political parties in America over the presidential elections from 1992, 1996, and 2000. Focusing on the Democratic Party as well as the Republican Party, Hayes (2008) emphasizes that these two parties provide news coverage over the topics their constituents favor heavily, for example; Democrats and social programs like food stamps or Republicans and their outlook on taxes. Hayes (2008) collects articles on political stances for various topics over the many years and realizing an overarching theme in the way media portrays the topics discussed by political parties. "Issue ownership" (Petrocik: 1996) refers to the parties' reputational advantages in different policy domains and influences the presentation of candidates on media outlets and their reputation on their campaign (Hayes, 2008, 378). As such politicians tend to focus on issues which make them appear more favorable. For example, Democrats appear to be more helping and understanding when it comes to social welfare issues while Republican candidates have a strong presence when it comes to national defense and taxes. The way these two political parties are perceived by the general public is associated with the issues that they present to be of the utmost importance. Because of this, Hayes (2008,380) finds that the amount of time politicians spend talking about their opponents strong points is considerably lower than the amount of time they spend talking about the topics they know their constituents and the larger public in general agree with.

The shying away from topics by the members of these political parties has an effect on the way these issues are covered in journalism. Because of the distinct separation between favorable topics for these political parties, journalists for a Republican favoring news source are less likely to inform their viewers or readers about issues that Republicans steer away from. The same thing can be said about the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party provides their audience with the information related to topics they can defend strongly, rather than those which favor Republicans.

For our study, Hayes' (2008) research articulates the importance of the resources students make use of. If what is being broadcasted is influenced by the political affiliation of the channel, website, podcast, or any other mode of receiving information, this can have a lasting effect on the interpretation of an issue. Picking these double sides issues like the Ukrainian conflict, will test the stance and knowledge of a student and their view along with seeing if similar responses of a conflict are linked with similar uses of media.

Some of these conflicts have been heavily mediatized in the United States because of the country's direct, and/or indirect, involvement in them. This heavy mediatization, as well as the development of digital communication technologies and the Internet, has resulted in better access to news from around the world. However, even though news accessibility is easier and faster than before, a survey about whether or not people aged between 18 and 24 had been following the news the day prior showed that 31 percent of them had not, it has been found that for people aged between 18 and 24, 31 percent of them did not access any kind of news the day before being surveyed (The Pew Research Center For The People & The Press, 2010, 14).

Similar results were also found in another research which states that about 44.1 percent of students that were surveyed said that they followed international news and or events less than three times a week (Taha, 2006, 4). It was also found that people aged between 18-29 tended to get their news from “news satire” programs such as the Colbert Report (53 percent) and/or the Daily Show (41 percent), in which the primary means of reporting news is through the use of irony and humor (The Pew Research Center For The People & The Press, 2010,66).

All these articles make it clear that there is bias in the media. We therefore need to account for which medias are being used to gain knowledge of global conflicts. Knowing the medias used and learning their biases will be important when analyzing the specific data we receive showing students’ knowledge and perceptions of the conflicts we have chosen,

In a study done by Gaudelli (2010, 590) high school students’ knowledge of the world is compared to the types of media they view. In this study students were presented with various types of media and then given time to discuss what they had learned. The article argues that knowledge about the world is gained not just through the process of viewing media. Rather knowledge is gained through discourse about media and how it relates to other media stories we have seen. In order to learn from media we must sort through our uncertainties through discussion with the public and become critical viewers of media.

This is important to keep in mind when we analyze our results. Media sources such as social media may in fact be very important to an individual’s knowledge about global conflicts since these forms of media allow general discussion among the public

about what they have learned. These sources therefore should not be disregarded simply because they are informal sources of news.

All studies seem to agree that knowledge plays a significant role in being informed about global events. Furthermore, the process of being informed regarding global news can be greatly enhanced through a knowledge of the world's history.

Methods

The survey used in this study is included in the appendix of the paper. This survey was distributed by e-mail using Qualtrics, a web-based survey service, to students across campus. It was distributed through listservs which the researchers are a part of as well as by asking people in person to participate in the study. In person surveys were also done using Qualtrics on a researcher's tablet or computer. Most in person surveys took place in classroom settings or at student organizations. The survey was open to participants for 21 days, from October 28th until November 17th. During that period, 144 participants took part in our study. Students were not rewarded in any way for completing the survey.

The survey contained 7 demographic questions asking the participants for their current class standing, major, gender, race, nationality, area where they grew up in, and their international travel frequencies. Next the survey asks 4 questions about students' media usage, which sources are most important to them, what is their favorite, how often do they follow international news, and what conflicts they follow. Finally the survey asks seven questions relating to students' knowledge and perceptions of conflict. These questions begin with students being asked to locate the Israeli-Palestinian, the Ukrainian, and the Syrian conflict on a map (their selections can be seen on page 37).

Next the survey asks three questions related to these specific questions, then asks if students' believe some type of resolution can be found, which conflicts need more coverage, and whether domestic or international conflicts should take precedence. The combination of these questions provides us with grounds to see if there is a correlation between demographic or personal characteristics and students' knowledge, opinions, and perceptions of global violent conflict.

Below are the comparisons and relationships which we found most important or interesting, especially when compared to our prior research on the subject.

Results

Gender and Race

In this section, we look at how gender or race might affect students' knowledge about global conflicts. In our survey, 53% (76) of the respondents were women, 46% (66) were men and 1% (2) were "Transgender or Others". The gender proportion in our survey is very similar to the proportion found at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. We decided to look at how well students located the three given countries using the provided map in our survey. We found that on average, men located countries better than women did. 66% (44) of men, 50% (1) of transgender/ other, and 49% (37) of women located the given countries correctly. It was also found that men were better than other genders at answering 2 out of the 3 general questions about global conflicts, as seen in *Figure 1* and *Figure 2*.

(Note that in all figures relating to the ISIS conflict the answer "Germany" was left out as no respondents selected that country.)

Our findings are similar to those of Clements (see page 4) and Allison (see page 4-5) in that we found gender did influence our results. Here we can clearly see that men were statistically different than women or other genders just as they were in the two studies mentioned above.

We then looked to see if there was any relation between race and the accuracy of answering questions as there was in the studies done by Clements and Allison (see page 4-5). However we could not find any significant difference between the race of participants and the accuracy at which they answered our questions on knowledge of global conflicts.

Country and Area of Origin

In this section we first discuss our findings which relate to whether a student is an international student or a student from the United States. We then break students' origin down even further by discussing our findings relating to whether a student is from a rural, suburban or urban background. Both of these characteristics are drawn from our survey in which we ask students their nationality, or country of origin, as well as how they would define the area in which they grew up (rural, suburban/exurb, or urban)

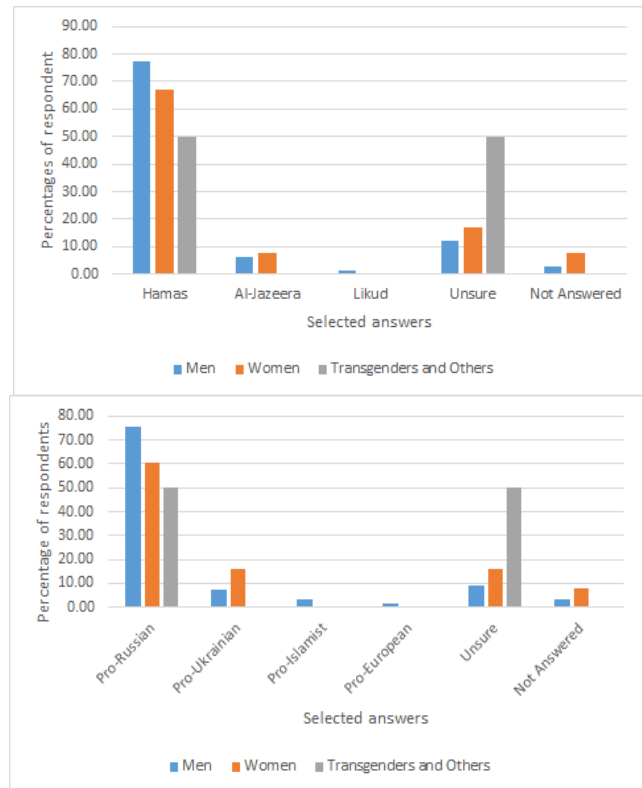


Figure 1 (Top): Answers to the question: "What is the name of the Palestinian organization in charge of Gaza?"

Figure 2 (Bottom): Answer to the question: "What rebel group wants the secession of Eastern Ukraine?"

We compare students' status as International or American to our three conflict specific questions and our map question below. These three questions are: 1. "What is the name of the Palestinian organization in charge of Gaza?" 2. "What rebel group wants the secession of Eastern Ukraine?" and 3. "In which countries is ISIS currently fighting? Select one or more." (These are questions 13, 14, and 15 respectively on our survey) The map question asks that students locate these three conflicts on a map marked only by region.

In *Figure 3* we look at the relationship between students' status as International or American and their responses to the first conflict specific question focusing on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Here we can see that a significantly higher percentage of American students answered this question correctly than did international students. In contrast international students tended to answer it incorrectly, state that they were unsure, or simply leave the question blank.

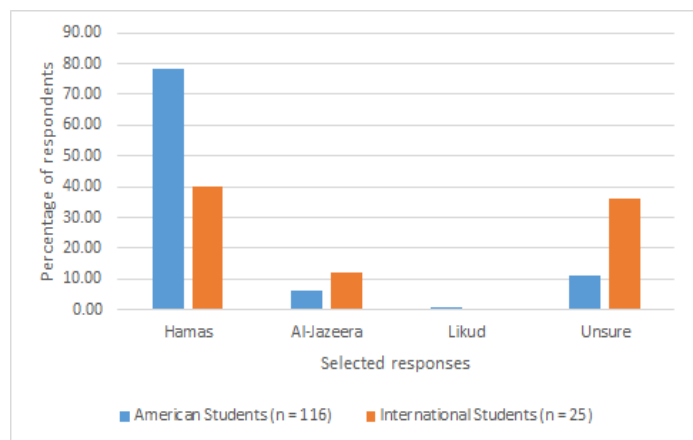


Figure 3: Answers to the question: "What is the name of the Palestinian organization in charge of Gaza?" when divided among International and American students.

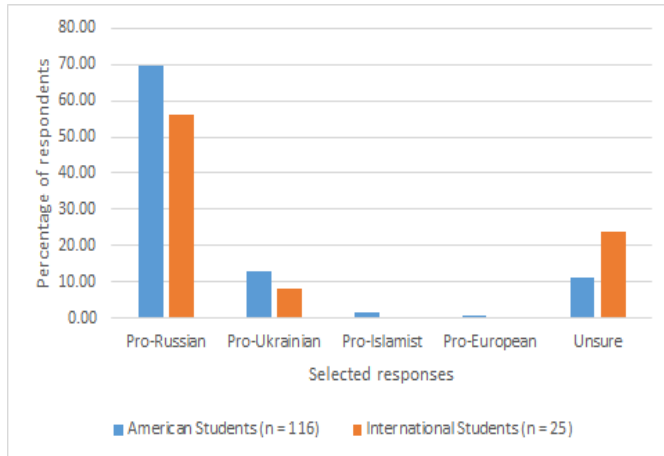


Figure 4: Answers to: “What rebel group wants the secession of Eastern Ukraine?” when divided among International and American students.

that American students answered incorrectly more often than international students. Once again international students were more likely to mark that they were unsure.

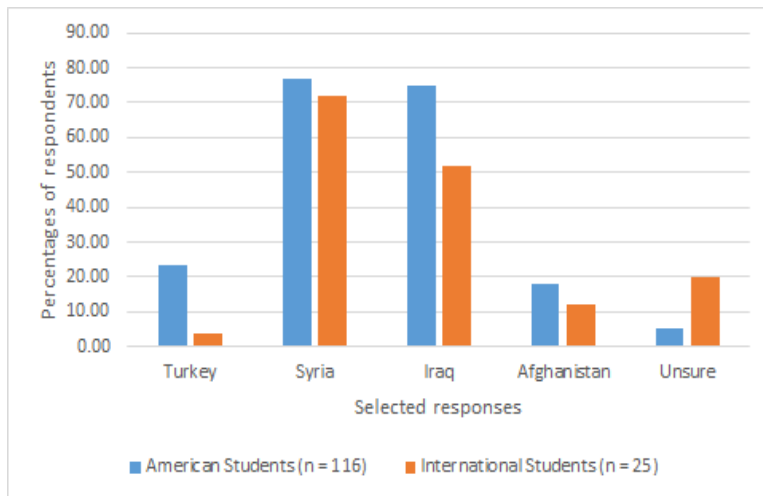


Figure 5: Answers to: “In which countries is ISIS currently fighting? Select one or more.”

answers. International students on the other hand were twice as likely to mark that they were unsure.

Finally, Figure 6 compares the percent of international and American students who were able to locate these three countries (the locations of the conflicts on which we

Next we compare responses to the question on the Ukrainian conflict to students’ status as International or American students (Figure 4). Again we find that American students answered correctly (Pro-Russian) more often than international students.

However on this graph we also find

The same general trend can be seen in Figure 5 which compares students’ answers to the question about ISIS. American students were more likely to answer correctly (Syria and Iraq) and they were also more likely to mark the incorrect

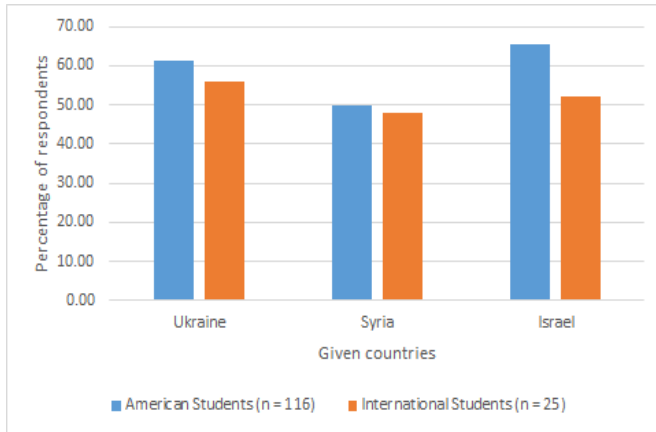


Figure 6: Shows the accuracy of students locating the three specific conflicts on a map marked only by regions.

focused) on the map we provided.

Again American students were more accurate than international students when locating each country.

From analyzing the four figures above we can clearly see that American students are more knowledgeable than international students when it comes to

answering questions about these global conflicts. However we also find that American students are more likely to mark an incorrect answer while international students are more likely to mark that they are unsure.

One possible explanation for the trend seen above is shown in Figure 7. We asked students how frequently they follow international news. Here you can see that American students follow international news much more frequently than international students and 20 percent of international students stated that they did not follow international news at all.

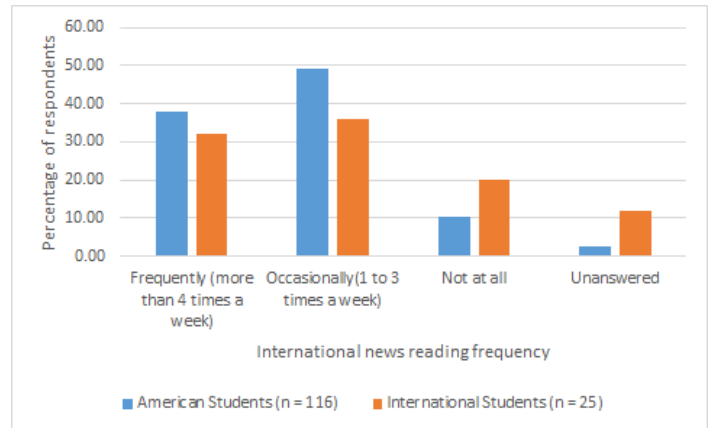


Figure 7: Students' response to: "How often do you follow international news each week?"

In this section we will look at the comparison of students' knowledge of global conflicts and tentative reasons behind it, when compared to the area in which they grew up. The majority of students, 56 percent, seem to have grown up in a predominantly

suburban/exurban area while only 44 percent of them lived in predominantly rural or urban areas (22 percent each). It is important to note that suburban areas usually represent a higher economic status than either rural or urban areas. This is important as studies by Carlton-Ford et al and Allison (see pages 2-3 and 4-5 respectively) find that an individual's status, whether social, economic, or privileged, influence the way in which they perceive the importance of conflicts. Keeping these distortions in mind, we examine possible relationships below.

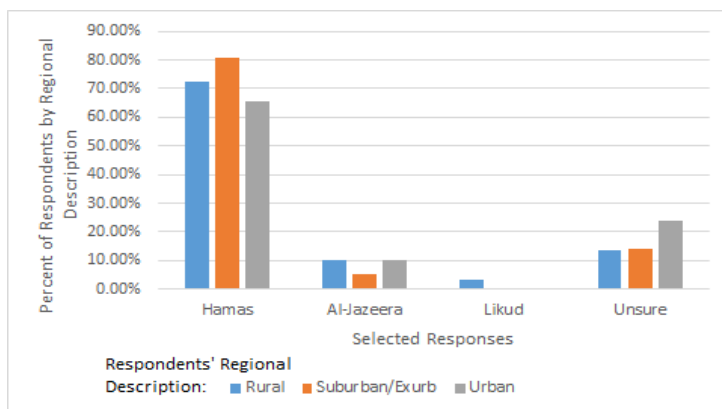


Figure 8: Answers to: "What is the name of the Palestinian organization in charge of Gaza?" when divided among rural, urban, and suburban students.

Here (Figure 8) we examine the responses to the Israeli-Palestinian question when we divide respondents by their selected regional description. We can see that Suburban students had a higher percentage answer the question correctly while they

also had a lower percentage answer it incorrectly. Rural students came next in selecting the correct answer most often followed by urban students whom were most likely to be unsure.

In Figure 9 we look at students' responses to the Ukrainian conflict question once they are divided by their selected

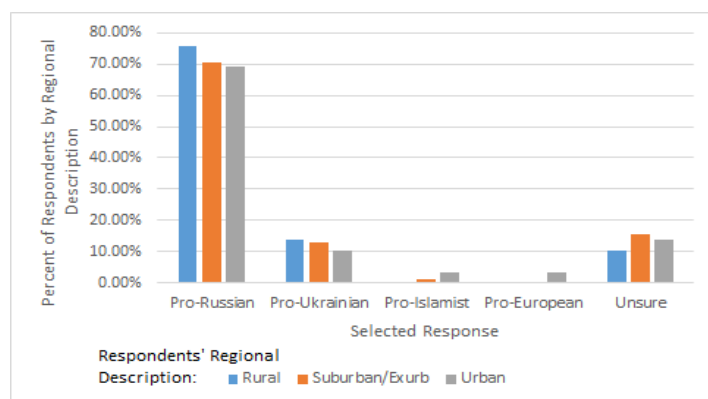


Figure 9: Answers to: "What rebel group wants the secession of Eastern Ukraine?" when divided among rural, urban, and suburban students.

regional description. We do not see as much of a relationship here as we did for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In fact rural students had a slightly higher percentage of correct answers. However once again urban students have the lowest percentage of correct answers.

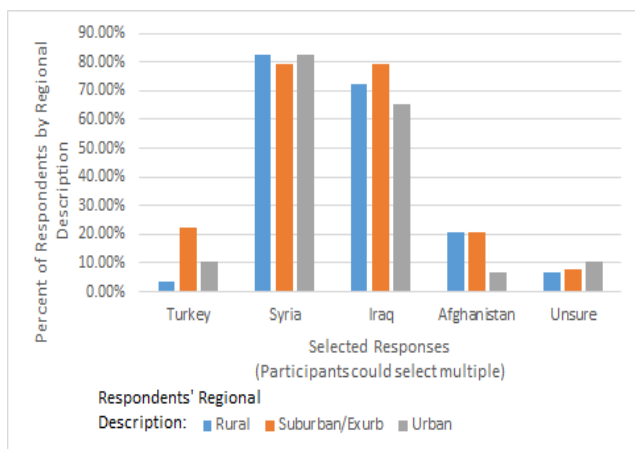


Figure 10: Answers to: “In which countries is ISIS currently fighting? Select one or more.” when divided among rural, urban, and suburban students.

Figure 10 further breaks apart our previous relationship. Here we see that not only did rural students chose Syria more often than suburban students, but urban students also chose it more often. The original trend recurs with Iraq however; suburban, rural, and finally urban students by degree of accuracy

respectively. Interestingly enough though suburban students also had more incorrect answers. This graph distorts any explanation of students’ knowledge which is based on their selected regional description.

Education

Several of the studies we found which were similar to ours discuss education’s influence on knowledge and perceptions of conflicts. Breaking down these studies we decided to focus on two elements of education, class standing, or the level of an individual’s education, and their major. Carlton-Ford discusses how an individual’s group, or in our case their major, influences what they believe to be important (see pages 2-3). Similarly both Clements and Burks find that the level of education an individual receives influences their attitudes toward war (see pages 4 and 5

respectively). Burks also finds that a University’s mission influences these attitudes, as such it is important to recall that UW Madison’s mission is essentially to educate students about the world around them (see page 6).

In this section we look at the effects class standing or a student’s major has on their knowledge of these specific conflicts. We will compare this in the same order as we did for the regional characteristics above. First the three conflict specific questions, the map question, and finally any possible sources of explanation.

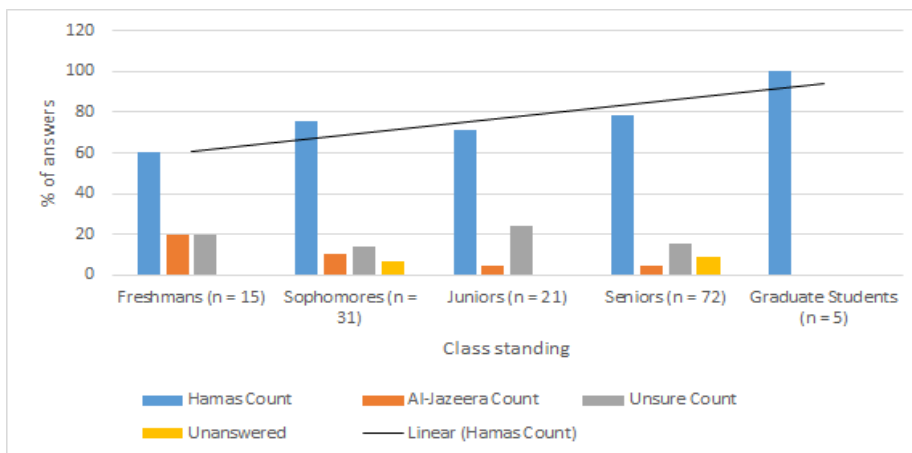


Figure 11: Answers to: “What is the name of the Palestinian organization in charge of Gaza?” when divided among class standing.

The results to the question “What is the name Palestinian organization in charge of Gaza?” can be seen Figure 11.

The correct answer to the question is

“Hamas”. We can clearly see that 60 percent or more students in all class standings responded correctly to the question. However, we can also see a clear trend (shown by the black line) in that the percentage of students who answered correctly to the question was higher as the years spent studying at the university increased.

The results to the question “What rebel group wants the secession of Eastern Ukraine?” can be seen in Figure 12. Only 53% of students answered the question correctly (Pro-Russian), with 17% thinking that Pro-Ukrainian was the correct answer.

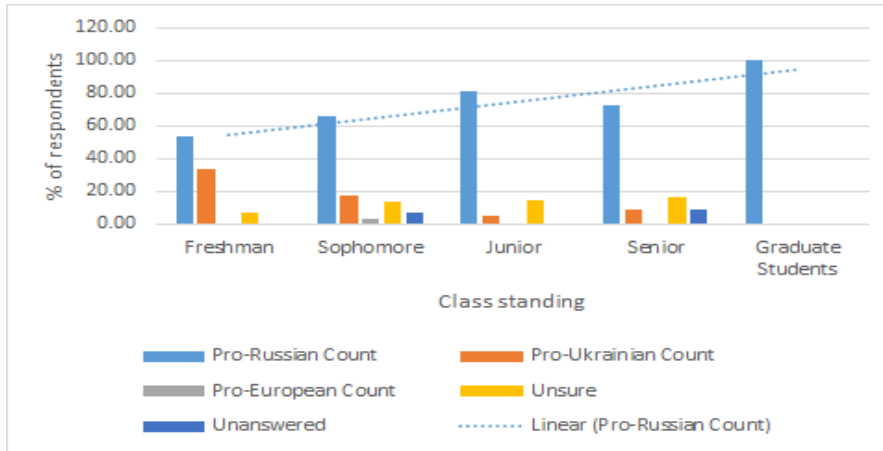


Figure 12: Answers to: “What rebel group wants the secession of Eastern Ukraine?” when divided among class standing.

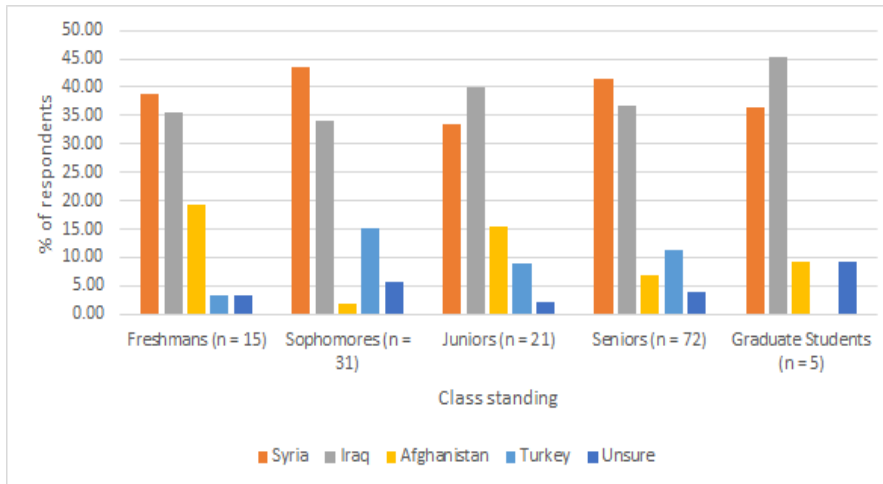


Figure 13: Answers to: “In which countries is ISIS currently fighting? Select one or more.”

Again, we see a clear trend of the percentage of students that answered correctly and the number of years spent studying at the university.

In Figure 13 we can see the results of the question “In which countries is ISIS currently fighting?” We see that most class

standings answered this question correctly. It is also noticeable that

students incorrectly choose Afghanistan fairly often, as a country in which ISIS is currently fighting. This might be because Afghanistan is a country that is familiar to the casual consumer of news as an unstable country with terrorists groups fighting constantly for the control of its territories. Turkey was also selected as a country where ISIS is currently fighting in. This is of course not true, however Turkey has been in the news quite a lot recently as ISIS was fighting for the control of a town that is just a few

hundred meters from the Turkish/Syrian border. This might have confused students. Overall however, the amount of incorrect answers declined as class standing advanced.

Next we look at the percent of students per class standing who located the three given countries correctly. This can be seen in *Figure 14*. Looking at the graph, we can

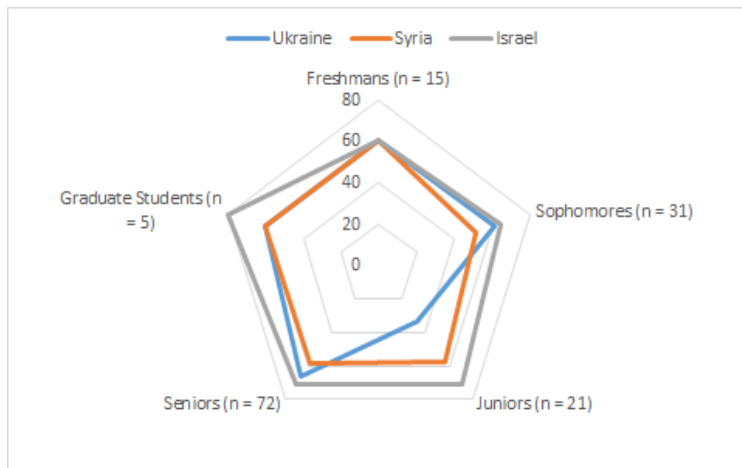


Figure 14: Shows the accuracy of students locating the three specific conflicts on a map marked only by regions.

clearly see that Syria and Israel were correctly located by more than 50% of students across class standing. We can also see that Graduate students were much more accurate when locating Israel than any other class standing. The graph also

shows that in general accuracy rises along with class standing. There is an exception to this however, juniors were proven to be very poor at locating the Ukraine.

As we can see in the figures above, there is a general trend of increased knowledge along with increased years of study. While this seems like an obvious relationship we explore more possible reason behind it than the obvious, education leads to knowledge.

When looking for alternative reasons for students increased knowledge we compared class standing to how often students follow international news (*Figure 15*). Here we can see that the percent of students who follow international news at least four

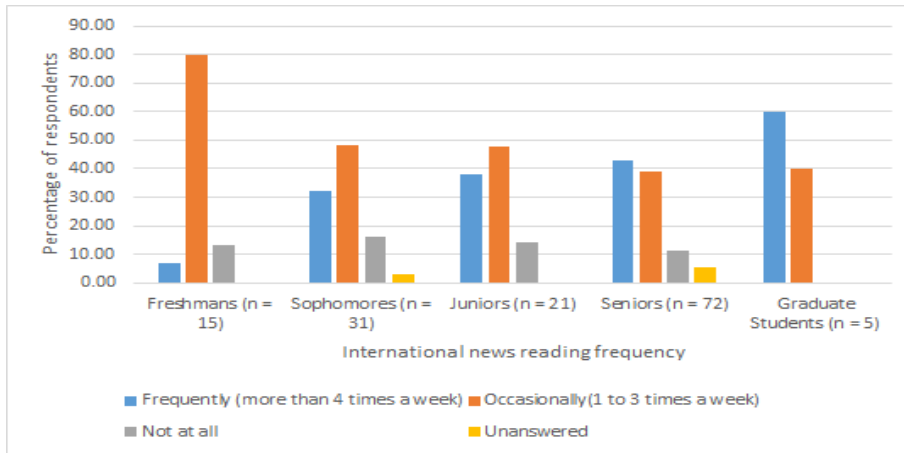


Figure 15: Shows the frequency which students follow international news.

times a week increased as students increase in years of education. As international news is the most likely source in which to find global

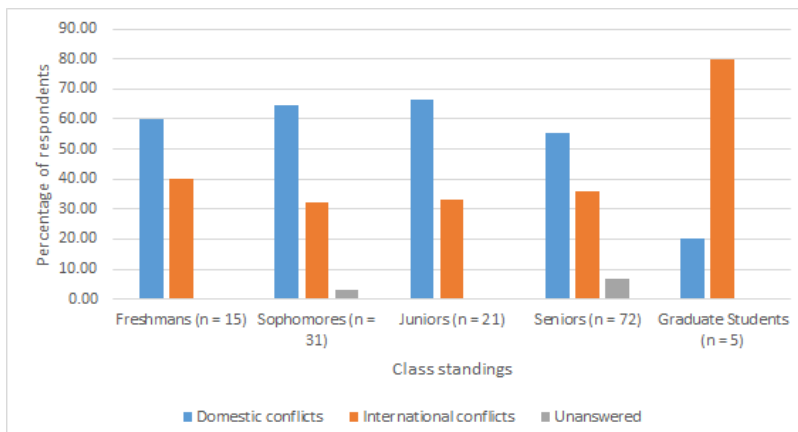


Figure 16: Answers to: “Do you believe domestic conflicts take precedence over international ones?”

conflicts discussed, this could be a factor behind the trend we see.

As a further step in this analysis we look at whether students believe domestic conflicts or international conflicts are more important.

In Figure 16 we can see the relationship between class standing and which type of conflict (and therefore news) they find more important. As we can see the preference for international news rises as class standing rises and preference for national news declines.

One possible reason for the increase in attention paid to international news could be the amount of International Studies, Political Science, and Geography majors which make up a large portion of our upper class standing population for example out of the total 50 international Studies majors we surveyed; 30 of them are seniors.

To further explore this we next look at students' majors and how they compare to knowledge of global violent conflicts. It is important to note that more than 75 percent of students that participated in our survey were International Studies majors, Geography majors and Political Science majors. These students have an advantage over students in many other majors as they are more aware of events that are happening around the world thanks to the courses that are offered within their majors. It is also important to note that some students are double majoring in International Studies and either Political Science or Geography, and as such their responses were included in both categories.

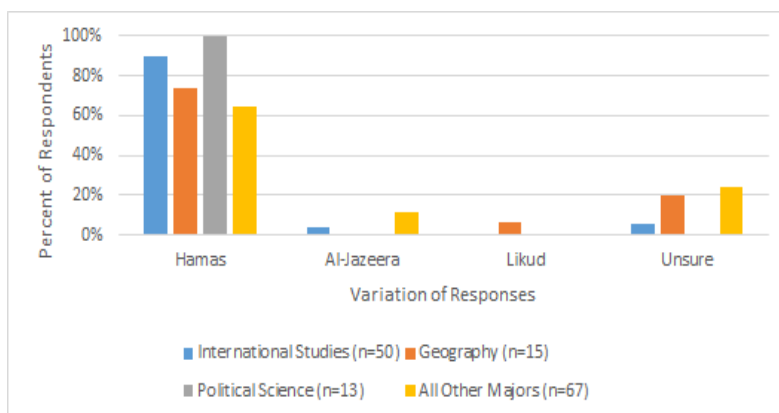


Figure 17: Answers to: “What is the name of the Palestinian organization in charge of Gaza?” when divided among majors.

In Figure 17, we can clearly see that majors other than the three mentioned above have answered less accurately to the questions related to global violent conflicts.

Here we compare the respondents' majors with their answers to the question about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this graph we see that the three most common majors (International Studies, Geography, and Political Science) had a higher percentage of correct answers than all the other majors combined. Other majors also had a higher percentage of incorrect answers.

In Figure 18 we compare students' majors to their responses to the Ukrainian conflict question. The trend again is clearly seen here with the three most common majors having a higher percent of correct answers than all other majors combined.

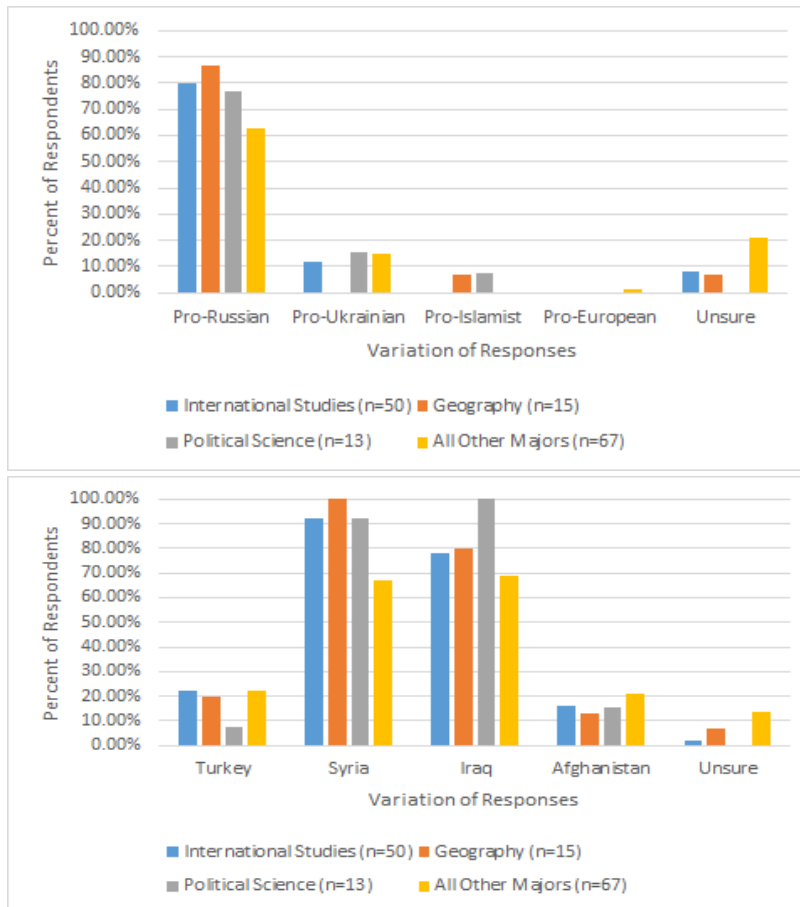


Figure 18 (Top): Answers to the question: "What rebel group wants the secession of Eastern Ukraine?"

Figure 19 (Bottom): Answer to the question: "In which countries is ISIS currently fighting? Select one or more."

In *Figure 19* we are looking to see if there is any relation between majors and how well students know the current situation with ISIS. Looking at the graph, we can see that the three majors listed above answered accurately if not perfectly. However, majors other than the three listed above did not do as well. Only 67% and 69% of them knew that ISIS was currently fighting in Syria and Iraq respectively.

We can see that a student's major does indeed affect their knowledge of global conflicts. In the case of majors such as International Studies, Political Science, and Geography this relationship is often positive.

Again the frequency which students follow international news (*Figure 20*) shows a factor behind the relationship between students' majors and their knowledge of global conflicts. As we can see the three common majors tend to follow international news more frequently than all the other majors combined. Of these three majors only Geography has a significant percentage who stated they do not follow international

news at all. Whether it is their major affecting their interest in international news, or the news they follow dictating what they major in, it is clear to see that the two are related and combined they have a significant effect on our data.

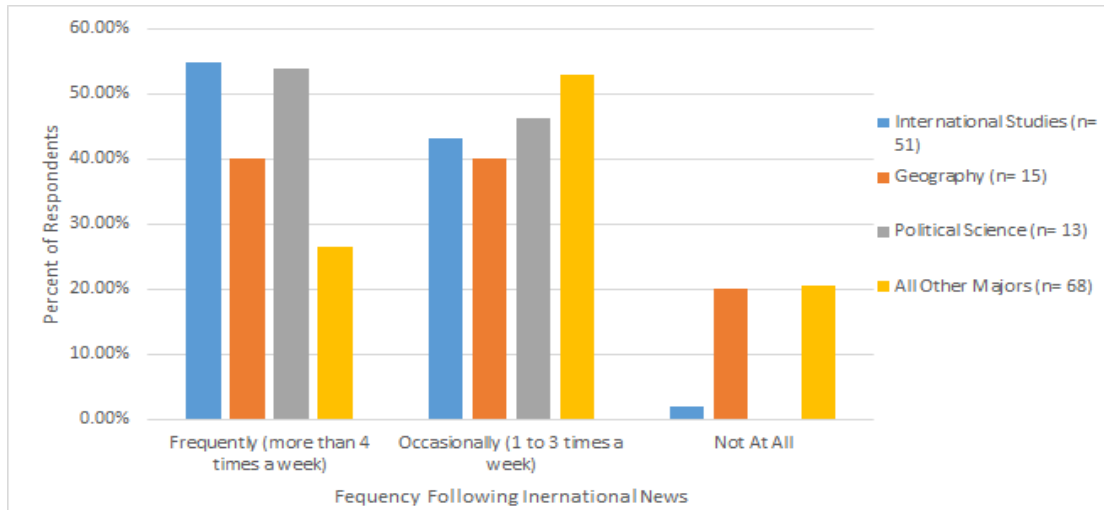


Figure 20: Shows the frequency which students follow international news per major.

Media

Looking at how media might affect students' knowledge of global conflicts, we found that the BBC and CNN were the most popular news sources among students, with both sources having 18% (26 respondents) accounting for more than a third of the news sources read by students.

We first decided to separate the most favored news sources among students (any news source that has more than 3 favorites) from other news sources that were least favored (less than 4 favorites). Please note that a lot of the news sources favored by students had 2 or less total favorites and there is no doubt that it is not totally representative of the reality.

The results that we got were very interesting as it seems that students getting their news from sources such as the BBC, CNN or NPR were more knowledgeable about global conflicts than students who were getting their news from sources such as ABC, NBC or YouTube. This can be clearly seen in *Figure 21*, in which students getting their news from the BBC and the New York Times all responded correctly to the question “What is the name of the Palestinian organization in charge of Gaza?” while students getting their news from NBC or others responded with less accuracy or were not sure about the correct answer. The same trend can be also be found in other questions such as “In which countries is ISIS currently fighting?” The correct answer to the question was Syria and Iraq, however we can see throughout the answers that 11% (16 respondents) thought that the conflict was also happening in Turkey, which is of course not correct. However it should be mentioned again that in the recent weeks before the survey was distributed, Turkey had been in the spotlight as a Syrian town that is located just a few hundred meters from the Turkish/Syrian border was being attacked by ISIS. This might be the reason to why students thought that ISIS was also fighting in Turkey.

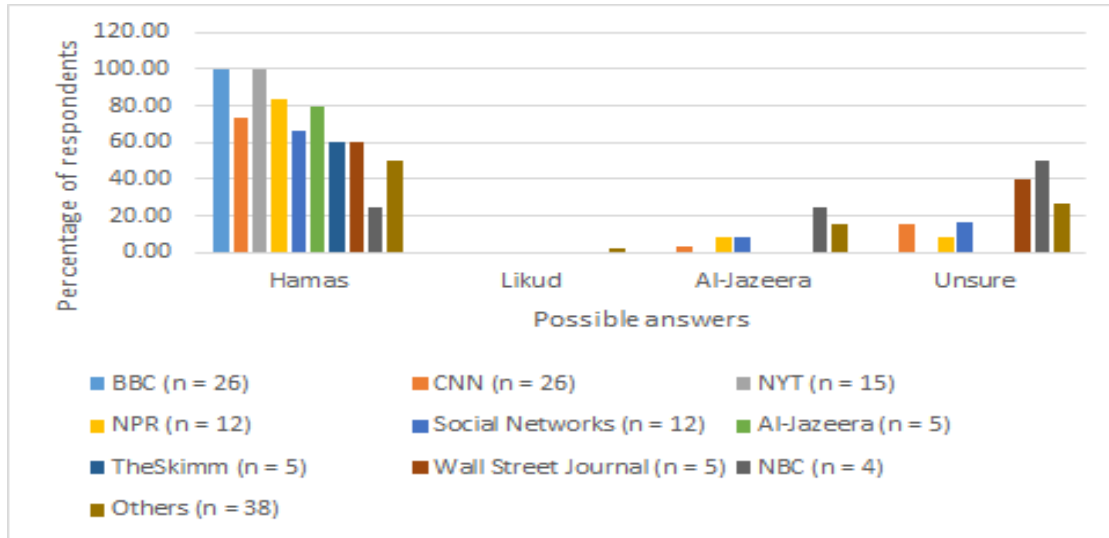


Figure 21: Answers to: “What is the name of the Palestinian organization in charge of Gaza?” when divided by students’ favorite news sources.

Discussion

Gender and Race

When conducting this study, the relationship between race and gender as it related to knowledge on global conflict was thought to exist but how it did so was uncertain. Our findings are similar to those of Clements (see page 4) and Allison (see page 4-5) in that we found gender did influence our results. We can clearly see in Figures 1-2 that men were statistically different than women or other genders just as they were in the two studies mentioned above. We started looking at our data to find a reason as to why men performed better than the other genders, however no significant relationship could be found from our results.

We then looked to see if there was any relation between race and the accuracy of answering questions, as there was in the studies done by Clements and Allison (see page 4-5). However we could not find any significant difference between the race of participants and the accuracy at which they answered our questions on knowledge of

global conflicts. This finding demonstrates that, when it comes to the students surveyed at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, race is not an indicator of the amount of knowledge individuals have on global conflicts.

Country and Area of Origin

To start off with it is important to understand the general makeup of our research population. When we remove those who did not answer the question on nationality 82 percent of our respondents are American and only 18 percent are international students. Therefore the sample size for international students may be too small to be an accurate representation of the population group. Also one potential cause of error here is that some answers were ambiguous, such as “not sure” and therefore results may be even more skewed.

At the beginning of our research we believed that international students would be more knowledgeable about the conflicts we chose, as opposed to American students, because many of them are from Asian or European countries which are geographically closer to the conflicts we are discussing. However, over the course of our research we found that this was untrue. In fact more American students answered the conflict specific questions correctly (Figures 3-5) than did international students. International students on the other hand were more likely to mark that they were unsure. We have to except that one possible reason behind what we see here is a language barrier. Our survey was written in English with no translation, as such it is possible our questions simply weren't understood correctly. Another possible explanation is that American students were found to follow international news more often than international students (Figure 7). International news of course is the way in which the most knowledge about

these conflicts can be gained and as such it is reasonable that those who follow it more often would be more knowledgeable.

After looking at nationality we chose to examine students' knowledge in relation to the area which they grew up in, whether it be rural, suburban, or urban. We focus on these three regional descriptions because of some of the generalities which can be said about them. For instance, urban centers are more integrated with the global economy and market, therefore we look to see if students from these areas have more knowledge of conflicts taking place in different parts of the world. By contrast rural areas tend to be more locally focused and therefore students from these areas may have less knowledge of conflicts taking place abroad. We also look at students from suburb like areas as these locations tend to have a higher socioeconomic status than either rural or urban areas, and this may affect a student's knowledge of global events such as violent conflicts so as to make the more knowledgeable than either rural or urban students.

However as we compared our results we could not prove any of these things to true. We found no relationship between the area students at UW Madison are from and their knowledge of global violent conflicts.

Education

When analyzing the level of education, the preconception that upperclassmen would be more knowledgeable of global conflicts compared to underclassmen was correct. Overall, graduate students had a higher percentage of correct responses when compared to the grade levels below them, which could be explained by the fact that these older students are more aware of the issues around them as their level of education increases. However, we do acknowledge that the sample sizes for each

grade level is largely skewed. Most of the respondents in this survey are seniors and juniors, with an extremely low representation of the other grade levels. In terms of graduate students, yes, they performed the best but overall there were only five of them participating.

Similarly, when it came to majors, International Students and Geography majors were the students who answered most of the questions correctly. However the same issue can be found here, being that most of the people who participated in our study are Political Science, Geography and International Studies majors. This disproportion is due to the fact that the survey was mostly distributed through listservs that are related to these majors.

Media

Looking at how news sources might affect students' knowledge of global conflicts, we first decided to separate the most favored news sources among students (any news source that has more than three favorites) from other news sources that were least favored (less than four favorites). Please note that a lot of the news sources favored by students had two or less total favorites and there is no doubt that it is not totally representative of the reality.

In our results, we found that 11 percent of students thought that ISIS was fighting not only in Syria and Iraq, but also in Turkey. This is of course not true, however it can be discussed that in the recent weeks/months before the survey was distributed, Turkey has been in the spotlight about a Syrian town that is located just a few hundred meters from the Turkish/Syrian border and that was being attacked by ISIS. This might be the reason to why students thought that ISIS was also fighting in Turkey.

It can also be noted that there are no relationship between how often students' read certain news sources and the accuracy of their answers. This may suggest that the quality of the news is what is important to a successful understanding of world events.

We then wanted to understand why students reading news from "elite" media were answering our questions better. The reasons for this trend can be found in our prior research of similar studies. Bloch-Elkon (2007) discusses the differences in media types as elite media (BBC) which is geared toward those already interested in international affairs, and popular press (Social Media or talk shows) which are geared toward the average individual (see page 7). As such we would expect to see this difference between correct responses and media use. There are also several studies which look at the importance of the frequency with which an individual follows the news and their knowledge of conflicts. Both a study done at Dartmouth University (see pages 6-7) and a study done by the Pew Research Center for the People & Press (see page 11) find that individuals who follow news less frequently are less accurate in their responses to questions on global conflict. Finally, media use is important when determining knowledge of certain issues because of the bias which media can have based on their readership (Bloch-Elkon page 7) or their ownership (Simiyu page 10, Hayes page 11).

Conclusion

Knowledge is essential in order to have a well-informed understanding of global events. However, the factors contributing to the reception of this information is critical to understand when looking at how this knowledge can be interpreted from one group to another. Many influences can come together, such as the experiences an individual has

with their gender, level of education, field of study, or media selection, which can shape a person's understanding or awareness of a global conflict. Our study analyzed these possible attributes and found a connection between these factors and the knowledge students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison have on global conflicts as they relate to Gaza, the Ukraine, and Syria.

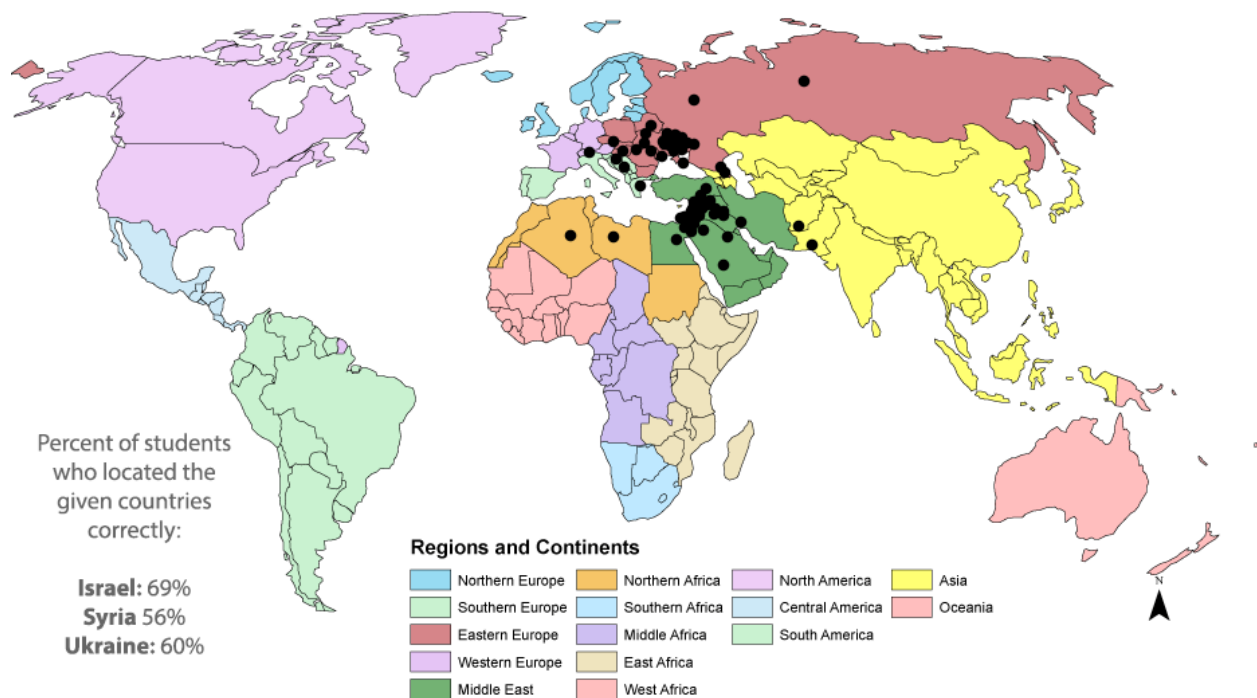
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Appendix

Students attempts to locate Ukraine, Syria, and Israel



The map above shows all the individual points selected by students when attempting to locate Israel, Syria, and the Ukraine.

Global Conflict Survey

Q0 The survey should not take more than 10 minutes to complete. Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this research survey, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdraw from participating at any time, you will not be penalized. To help protect your confidentiality, this survey does not collect personal identifying information nor will individual responses be stored.

Q1 What is your current class standing?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate Student

- Non-traditional

Q2 What is your major?

Q3 What is your gender?

- Man
- Woman
- Transgender or Other

Q4 What is your race?

- White
- Black or African American
- Asian _____
- Hispanic/Latino
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian
- Pacific Islander _____
- Some other race _____
- Two or more races

Q5 What is your nationality (country or territory of origin)?

Q6 How would you define the area where you grew up in?

- Predominantly rural
- Predominantly suburban/exurb
- Predominantly urban

Q7 How many times have you traveled internationally in the past 5 years?

_____ Number of times travel internationally

Q8 On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being not important, 5 being very important) how important are the following media to your knowledge of global events?

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, Reddit) | | | | | |
| Other internet-only | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| sources (blogs and online forums) | | | | | |
| Print media (Newspapers, magazines-- including their online forms) | | | | | |
| Network television news, such as ABC, CBS or NBC (including their online forms) | | | | | |
| Cable news channels (CNN, Fox News Channel -- including their online forms) | | | | | |
| Radio (including online sites) | | | | | |
| Public Broadcasting Services (BBC, NPR/PBS) | | | | | |
| Mobile News Service | | | | | |

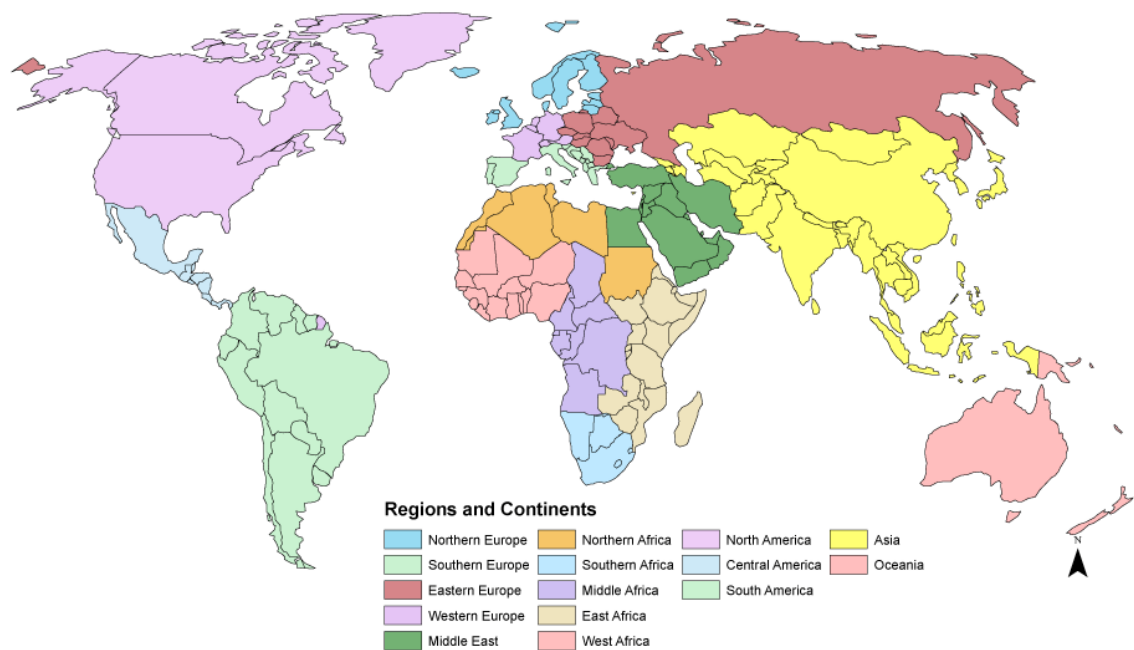
Q9 What is your favorite news source?

Q10 How often do you follow international news each week?

- Not at all
- Occasionally(1 to 3 times a week)
- Frequently (more than 4 times a week)

Q11 What global conflicts, if any, do you follow in the news?

Q12 Please locate these 3 conflicts on the map below: the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, the Syrian Conflict, and the Ukrainian Conflict. Please be as precise as possible. If you do not know their locations, still try demarcating them.



Q13 What is the name of the Palestinian organization in charge of Gaza.

- Hamas
- Al-Jazeera
- Likud
- Unsure

Q14 What rebel group wants the secession of Eastern Ukraine?

- Pro-Russian
- Pro-Ukrainian
- Pro-Islamist
- Pro-European
- Unsure

Q15 In which countries is ISIS currently fighting? Select one or more.

- Turkey
- Syria
- Germany
- Iraq
- Afghanistan
- Unsure

Q16 Do you think some kind of resolution(s) can be found for any of the given conflicts?
If so which ones?

| | Political (non-military) resolution | Military resolution | No possible resolutions |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Israeli-Palestinian Conflict | | | |
| Syrian Conflict | | | |
| Ukrainian Conflict | | | |

Q17 What conflicts need more news coverage in the U.S.?

Q18 Do you believe domestic conflicts take precedence over international ones?

- Yes
- No