

# Support for Paris

On November 13, 2015, Paris, France faced the deadliest attack on its own soil since World War II. Three teams of terrorists attacked in six different locations, including cafes, a concert, and a soccer game. 129 people died, and at least 352 more were wounded, according to French officials.<sup>1</sup>

In the aftermath of these attacks, many people from around the world expressed strong support for Paris. For example, many Facebook users changed their profile pictures to include the colors of the French flag.<sup>2</sup> And President Obama stated, "The attack is not an attack on Paris, it's an attack on all of humanity."<sup>3</sup> However, many other people expressed frustration that this level of support and outrage is so selective, given the many other tragedies occurring around the world. For example, on the day before the Paris attacks, suicide bombings in Beirut killed 43 and injured 200.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, on the day of the Paris attacks, a suicide bombing in Baghdad killed 18 and injured dozens of others.<sup>5</sup> Yet Beirut and Baghdad received relatively little global attention or support in the aftermath of these attacks.

Some people believe that this kind of selective outrage is reasonable. For example, journalist Pamela Hobart notes that many Americans have a personal connection to France that they do not have to Beirut or Baghdad: "There are many Americans who speak French, and even more French who speak English. Many of us, and our friends and family, have visited France...Their culture of baguettes and wine is familiar to us." She also claims that since we cannot possibly empathize with everyone at all times, "selective outrage is natural."

However, other people believe that this kind of selective outrage is not reasonable. After all, they argue, the mere fact that many Americans care more about Paris than about Beirut or Baghdad does not make it morally acceptable for Americans to support Paris more than Beirut or Baghdad in times of crisis. If anything, they argue, we should express more support for Beirut or Baghdad, since people in these cities are suffering more overall, and they are also receiving less support overall.<sup>6</sup>

Of course, even if we accept that this kind of selective outrage is not reasonable, it is a further question whether we should be making this point in the immediate aftermath of an international tragedy, when millions of people are grieving.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Is it hypocritical for Americans to express support for Paris but not for Beirut or Baghdad? Why or why not?
2. If we cannot express support for all people all the time, how should we prioritize? Are we morally permitted to prioritize people we care about more, or are we morally required to prioritize people who are suffering more (assuming these categories conflict)? Explain your answer.
3. Is the aftermath of a tragedy a good time or a bad time to raise ethical concerns about common reactions to that tragedy? Explain your answer.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/paris-terror-attacks/paris-attacks-isis-claims-responsibility-france-vows-merciless-response-n463441>.

<sup>2</sup> [http://mashable.com/2015/11/14/facebook-paris-filter/#WOQEm4\\_yGmqH](http://mashable.com/2015/11/14/facebook-paris-filter/#WOQEm4_yGmqH)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03860t>

<sup>4</sup> <https://newmatilda.com/2015/11/14/paris-attacks-highlight-western-vulnerability-and-our-selective-grief-and-outrage/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.bustle.com/articles/123892-selective-outrage-is-natural-after-the-paris-attacks-but-remember-that-horrible-things-happen-elsewhere-too>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03860t>

