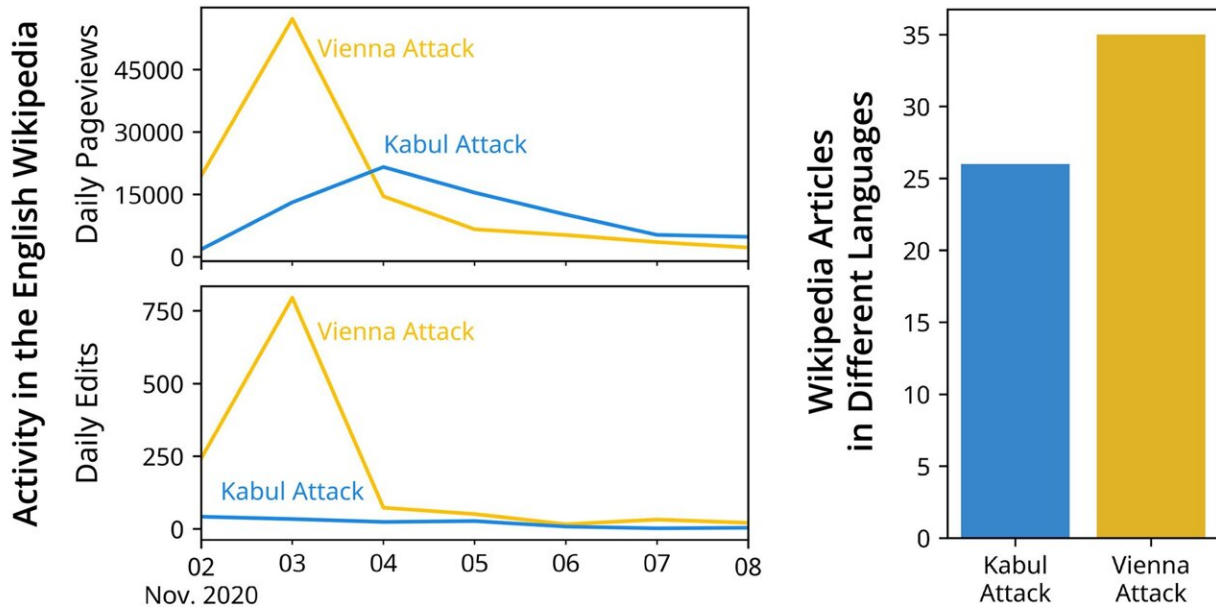


Wikipedia pays more attention to events in richer countries, say data scientists

November 9 2023, by Bob Yirka



On November 2, 2020, two terrorist attacks occurred: One in Vienna, Austria and one in Kabul, Afghanistan (top). Although both events gained many page views and edits on the English Wikipedia (bottom left), the attack in Austria

received much more attention than the one in Afghanistan, including coverage in more Wikipedia language editions (bottom right). Maps retrieved from Wikimedia Commons (top left) and OpenStreetMap (top right). Credit: *PLOS ONE* (2023). DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0289325

A trio of data scientists, two with Graz University, in Germany, the other with the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, has found that Wikipedia gives more attention to events that happen in richer countries than those in poorer countries. In their [study](#), reported in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE*, Thorsten Ruprechter, Denis Helic and Keith Burghardt analyzed thousands of articles posted on the free online encyclopedia, looking at the amount of coverage on events in different parts of the world.

Wikipedia is a free, collaborative online encyclopedia maintained by a community of volunteers. It is also the largest reference work ever compiled. In this new effort, Ruprechter, Helic and Burghardt show that content in Wikipedia is more representative of events happening in advanced countries than in those that are less economically developed.

The work involved analyzing 17,490 articles across four Wikipedia language editions posted over the years 2016 and 2020. Their analysis involved counting and comparing the number of events with the economic status of the country where they occurred. They also noted the geographic region and the amount of attention the events received in other venues.

They found that events that occurred in more highly developed countries were better represented in Wikipedia than events that happened in less well-developed countries. As an example, they noted that a terrorist attack on civilians in Vienna in 2020 received considerably more

attention than a [terrorist attack](#) on civilians in Afghanistan the same year even though there were far more casualties in the latter attack. They also found that as a rule, the poorer a country was, the less attention it received.

The researchers did not find any evidence of intentional bias in their analysis, and suggest that such differences in coverage are more likely due to resources. Poor countries have fewer people willing and able to volunteer to write and edit entries on Wikipedia. They also note that people across countries differ on what they deem newsworthy. Wikipedia writers in Afghanistan, for example, may find terrorist activities less newsworthy than those in Vienna because they happen more frequently.

More information: Thorsten Rupprechter et al, Poor attention: The wealth and regional gaps in event attention and coverage on Wikipedia, *PLOS ONE* (2023). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0289325](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0289325)

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