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# LABELING TERRORISM: MEDIA EFFECTS ON PUBLIC POLICY ATTITUDES

by

VALENTINA GARZON

Under the direction of Anthony Lemieux, Ph.D.

## ABSTRACT

When is an attack perceived as terrorism? Anecdotally, violent events in the media are more often labeled terrorism when the perpetrator is Muslim. The media has profound effects on the public's perception of issues such as terrorism. However, public views on labeling terrorism have not been tested empirically. This research aims to explore how the public perceives a violent event depending on the context. Using a 2 (Muslim vs. Christian perpetrator) x2 (male vs. female perpetrator) x2 (unknown vs. political motive) experimental design, participants were presented with varying conditions of an attack. They were asked to report their perceptions of the attack and perpetrator, as well as their attitudes towards different policies. Findings show that attacks with Muslim perpetrators were more likely to be labeled terrorism, and the terrorism label is correlated with support for policies negatively affecting Muslims.

INDEX WORDS: Terrorism, Media, Violence, Muslims, Public attitudes, Public policy

LABELING TERRORISM: MEDIA EFFECTS ON PUBLIC POLICY ATTITUDES

by

VALENTINA GARZON

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

Undergraduate Research Honors

in the Honors College

Georgia State University

2016

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## Introduction

Many violent events are labeled “terrorism” by the media, but there is no definite agreement as to what characteristics of an attack render it terrorism (Hoffman, 2013; Simmons & Mitch, 1985). There is, although disputed, a general consensus about several characteristics which define terrorism. Using these characteristics, terrorism can be defined as violence or threat of violence perpetrated by an organized non-state entity, commonly a subnational group, designed to evoke fear and intimidation in a target audience separate from the immediate victim, in order to further political goals, where the political dimension is normally a distinctive aspect (Hoffman, 2013; Horgan, 2014).

Some events fit the definition of terrorism, but they are not labeled terrorism (Lemieux, 2014; Nagar, 2010) For example, the perpetrator of the June 2015 shooting in Charleston, South Carolina, in which African Americans were shot in a church, admitted that his actions were politically-aimed and meant to spread fear in the community. Though both are distinct qualities of terrorism, the perpetrator was not charged with terrorism (Butler, 2015). So what impacts the label given to a violent event? When is the event a terror attack versus a hate crime? When is a shooter mentally ill versus a terrorist? Lemieux (2014) posits that the identity of the perpetrator, including his or her religion affects the labeling of the attack as terrorism. When the perpetrator of an attack is a white male, he more quickly labeled mentally ill, but when the perpetrator is a minority, he is labeled a thug or a terrorist (Butler, 2015). It may be that the perpetrator’s identity has become more important in applying the terrorism label than the motivations or the act itself.

The media has a large influence on what the public views as terrorism. Western news media tends to frame Islamic violence as terrorism more often, as compared to Christian or Jewish violence (Nagar, 2010). More specifically, based on media reports, it seems that events

with a Muslim perpetrator are more likely to be labeled terrorism. In comparison to the Charleston shooting, where 9 people were killed by a white male, during the July 2015 shooting in Chattanooga, Tennessee, a Muslim perpetrator shot and killed 5 people, and the event was labeled as domestic terrorism (Hanrahan, 2015).

### **Terrorism in the Media**

Terrorists have been known to seek media attention for publicity, which enables them to spread their message and intimidate their intended audience (Hoffman, 2013). Although advances in technology mean terrorist groups no longer need to rely on traditional media outlets to spread their message, the media still reports incidents of terrorism, frequently capitalizing on these events to write sensationalist stories, attract more viewers, and make more money (Seib & Janbeck, 2010). Media coverage frames the public's perceptions of events (Nagar, 2010). As a basic example, coverage of terrorist acts in the news gives people negative attitudes towards terrorists, effectively giving terrorism a negative connotation (Hoffman, 2013). Exposure to negative media about a particular group creates schemas or ingrained ideas about that group in the mind of the public. News stories about African Americans, for instance, tend to heighten the public's negative perceptions and racial attitudes towards African Americans (Dixon, 2008). Similarly, video game stereotypes can prime negative and aggressive attitudes towards Arabs (Saleem & Anderson, 2013).

### **Muslims in the Media**

Because of the recent surge of Islamic terrorist activity, Muslims have received very negative news coverage. Arab Muslims are also portrayed negatively in movies, and these images affect the public's perception of Muslims (Shaheen, 2009). Muslims are regarded as a

cultural outgroup, which leads Americans to develop more negative perceptions of them (Huesmann et al., 2012; Kalkan et al., 2009). As a result, Americans consider Muslims to be violent, fanatical, and supportive of terrorism. The American public often associates Islam with terrorism (Park, Felix, & Lee, 2009; Saleem & Anderson, 2013). Additionally, many Americans have adopted a sentiment known as Islamophobia. Islamophobia is a form of cultural racism that includes hostile attitude or behavior towards Muslims and is used to justify exclusion, discrimination, prejudice, and even violence against Muslims (Ciftci, 2012).

### **Female Terrorists in the Media**

Gender is another variable which may impact the labeling of terrorism. Women have been participating in terrorism for a long time (Bloom, 2011; Weinberg & Eubank, 2011). For example, in the late 1800's, Vera Zazulich was an active member of People's Will, a small terrorist group in Russia (Bloom, 2011). The infrequent appearance of female terrorists in the media compared to that of males may affect their perception by the public. Women are not commonly thought of as terrorists. However, they can be more dangerous than their male counterparts. Because they do not fit the terrorist profile, female terrorists more easily evade detection and reach their targets, yielding higher success rates than males in their attacks (Bloom, 2011). Terrorist organizations recognize this fact and exploit it, making the recognition of female involvement in terrorism critical to counterterrorism strategy (Lavina, 2015; Nacos, 2005).

When they are shown in the media, female terrorists are portrayed without agency- as victims of the situation instead of willing participants. For example, in explaining the Abbottabad raid, media reports described Osama bin Laden's wives as being innocent bystanders when, in fact, they actively resisted the Navy SEALs who invaded the compound (Poloni-Staudinger & Ortals, 2014). Just as females are typically given less agency in media than males,

female terrorists are also shown in the media through stereotypical frames, with an emphasis on their physical appearance and femininity, which decreases their semblance of legitimacy compared to that of male terrorists (Nacos, 2005; Poloni-Staudinger & Ortvals, 2014). While the media may not accurately depict women's involvement in terrorism, the finding that Muslim women are vulnerable to violence based on Islamophobia indicates that the public may consider them to be connected with terrorists (Perry, 2014). There has not been a sufficient amount of research conducted in this area, but this study will explore whether or not the public labels females as terrorists.

### **Media's Effect on American Public Policy Attitudes**

The biased media coverage associating Muslims with terrorist attacks impacts the way events are labeled as terrorism by encouraging the continuation of the same biased labeling pattern and creating a negative feeling among Americans towards Muslims (Shaheen, 2009). Media framing not only affects the public's perceptions, but also their attitudes towards public policy. Because of the prevalence of terrorism in the media, the public feels threatened and, in turn, supports particular policies that may counter the threat (Brinson & Stohl, 2012; Davis & Silver, 2004; Gadarian, 2010). Media images of terrorism promulgate fear, so when policymakers present policies to counter the threat, the public is apt to support those policies. For example, there is a lot of media coverage about the Islamic State (IS). As a result, Americans feel threatened by IS and support military strikes in the Middle East (Gadarian, 2014).

Media coverage of terrorism influences the public's support for policies including military action, civil liberties, and punishment of terrorists. Exposure to negative media images about a particular group leads to increased public support for policies against that group and decreased support for policies that potentially help that group (Brinson & Stohl, 2012; Johnson et

al., 2009). Due to media representations, Muslims are widely considered by Americans to be terrorists. Now, even without explicitly considering terrorism, an unfavorable view of Muslims leads to support for public policies that target Muslims (Ciftci, 2012). Americans with negative stereotypes of Muslims are more likely to support increased spending on foreign wars, defense, and border security. They are also more likely to support decreased spending on foreign aid and approve of the president's handling of the situation (Sides & Gross, 2013). Media coverage with frightening visuals about terrorism also leads to more public support for military action and increased defense spending than neutral terrorism coverage (Gadarian, 2010).

The public's support for civil liberty restrictions depends on how threatening they perceive terrorists to be, as security is deemed more important than civil liberties. Attacks labeled homegrown terrorism versus international terrorism, for example, lead to greater fear and greater support for restricting the civil liberties of Muslims (Brinson & Stohl, 2010). Using the terrorist label then, the government can prime the public to support a decrease in civil liberties and gain powers such as monitoring email and phone lines and conducting home searches (Robinson, 2008). However, the correlation between sense of threat and support for civil liberty restrictions interacts with public trust in the government. Lower trust in government makes the public less willing to trade off civil liberties, regardless of the threat level (Davis & Silver, 2004). Some civil liberty restrictions may be specifically directed at Muslims. For example, the public may support the racial profiling of Muslims, restrictions on the building of mosques, and special security screening at airports for Muslims.

Americans consider terrorism a serious problem and favor both strong measures to prevent terrorism and strong penalties to punish offenders (Simmons & Mitch, 1985). As with the other policies, greater fear leads to greater support for more aggressive punishment of

terrorists (Brinson & Stohl, 2012). Additionally, in selecting an appropriately severe punishment, people's judgment is influenced by anchoring effects; the perceived severity of a sentence depends on its rank with other available sentences (Aldrovandi, Wood, & Brown, 2013).

Certain characteristics about the perpetrator also affect how the public prescribes punishment. Presumably as a result of the attraction leniency-effect, unattractive people tend to receive more severe punishments than their attractive counterparts (Stewart, 1985). Women are more likely to avoid charges, pretrial custody, convictions, or incarceration, and are given shorter sentences than men (Mustard, 2001; Spohn, 2013; Starr, 2012). Nonwhites are more likely than whites to be charged, convicted, and sentenced (Stewart, 1985). Minorities are also more likely than whites to be held in custody before adjudication and to receive longer sentences for the same crimes (Mustard, 2001; Spohn, 2013). Larger than the minority-white punishment gap is that between citizens and non-citizens. Non-citizens are charged with crimes more often and are given harsher sentences for those crimes (Light, 2014).

A proposed explanation for this phenomenon is the minority threat perspective, claiming that a growing number of minorities in the population threatens whites, who act to maintain social control, and therefore alter sentencing patterns (Wang & Mears, 2010). In particular, a larger Black population (racial threat) seems to lead to increased prison sentences and decreased jail sentences. Similarly, a larger Hispanic population (ethnic threat) leads to more jail sentences and fewer prison sentences or non-custodial agreements (Wang & Mears, 2010). Support for the idea that punishment varies according to population demographics can be found even in schools. Bekkerman and Gilpin (2016) found that schools which do not report misconducts to local law enforcement give more severe punishments when the student body has a higher proportion of

minorities and students of lower socioeconomic status. Clearly then, the characteristics of an offender will influence the public's preference of punishment.

### **Which Factors Affect Terrorism Labeling?**

Along with religion, there are other factors which could affect the labeling of an attack as terrorism. For example, the modality of attack, the number of victims, the gender of the perpetrator, and the motivations behind the attack potentially impact how an attack is perceived. The goals of the current research are to empirically test the perceptions of the American public concerning a perpetrator's religion, gender, and motive, how these factors affect the labeling of attacks as terrorism, and the public's policy attitudes as a result of the perceptions that they hold. The first two factors (religion and gender) concern the perpetrator's identity, while the last factor (motive) utilizes of a defining trait of terrorism. Considering the facts that terrorism is prompted by a political motive, Muslims have a negative media image, and female terrorists are not credited with the same agency as male terrorists, how does the public apply the "terrorism" label?

H1: Attacks with a male perpetrator are more likely to be labeled terrorism, compared to the same attack by a female perpetrator.

H2: Attacks with a Muslim perpetrator are more likely to be labeled terrorism, compared to the same attack by a Christian perpetrator.

H3: Attacks with a political motive are more likely to be labeled terrorism, compared to the same attack without a stated motive.

H4: Use of the terrorism label is more likely to make public more supportive of policies such as civil liberty restrictions, military action, and more severe punishment for terrorists.

By presenting members of the American public with an attack scenario that varies in terms of perpetrator gender, perpetrator religion, and the presence of a motive, we examined which factors make an event more or less likely to be labeled terrorism. These same factors, as well as the label given to the attack, were examined in relation to the public's resulting policy attitudes, including support for military action, civil liberty restrictions, and punishment of terrorists.

## **Method**

### **Amazon Mechanical Turk**

The participants were 1200 Americans recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) platform. Amazon MTurk is an online service that provides a large pool of participants available for many different tasks at an affordable rate (Kittur, Chi, & Suh, 2008; Mason & Suri, 2012). MTurk is therefore being increasingly used in the social sciences (Barger et al, 2015; Mason & Suri, 2012; Paolacci & Chandler, 2014). The samples obtained through this service are more representative of the U.S. population than samples of college students, which are frequently used for studies (Barger et al, 2015; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010; Behrend, Sharek, Meade, & Wiebe, 2011; Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, & John, 2004; Buhrmeister, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010).

The main concern about MTurk is that participants may not pay full attention to their task (Chandler, Mueller, & Paolacci, 2013). They may, for instance, multitask while completing a survey. However, recent studies have shown that MTurkers actually perform better than college students and provide data of same or slightly better quality than that of traditional subjects (Barger & Sinar, 2011; Behrend et al., 2011; Buhrmester et al., 2011; Klein et al., 2014). High

quality data can be encouraged by including attention questions, which filter out those participants who are paying attention to the survey versus those who are simply entering answers (Oppenheimer et al., 2009; Goodman et al., 2013; Paolacci et al., 2010) Another way to promote data accuracy is to recruit only “high reputation” workers on MTurk, whose previous work has been evaluated as satisfactory (Berinski et al., 2012; Paolacci et al., 2010; Goodman et al., 2013). Both the inclusion of an attention question and the recruitment of high reputation workers were utilized in this study.

Participants opted to participate in the current study on the basis of a short description of the task they would be completing over approximately 30 minutes. They were offered a compensation of \$1 for their participation. The invitation to the study linked participants directly to the Qualtrics site where they completed a survey.

## **Survey Measures**

### **Attack Labeling**

In the first section, participants were presented with one of eight possible vignettes of a news story depicting an attack (see Appendix A). The vignettes build on previous research which provides empirical support for this approach and established a proof of concept (Lemieux, Masyn, Betus Karampelas, Saleem, and Garzon, 2016; in preparation).

The news story, following a 2x2x2 design, varied key factors of the perpetrator's identity: the perpetrator's gender, the perpetrator's religion, and the presence of a motive for the attack. The perpetrator was either male or female, Christian or Muslim, and politically motivated or without a motive. After reading the news story, participants answered a series of questions to determine how they would spontaneously describe and label the attack and the perpetrator.

## **General Attitudes**

Participants then answered questions concerning their exposure to news about Muslims, attitudes towards Muslims, attitudes towards Christians, attitudes towards Muslim-Americans, attitudes towards Christians in America, foreign prejudice, and female involvement in terrorism. For these sections, each participant's responses were compiled to form a scale score of his or her attitude about that particular subject (see Appendix B).

*Exposure to news about Muslims.* Participants indicated their agreement with 6 statements (e.g. How often have you seen news stories about terrorism perpetrated by Muslims?) on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Almost every day) to 5 (Never).

*Attitudes towards Islam.* Participants indicated their agreement with 6 statements (e.g. The religion of Islam supports acts of violence.) on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree).

*Attitudes towards Christians.* Participants indicated their agreement with 7 statements (e.g. Would you feel comfortable or uncomfortable in welcoming a Christian Fundamentalist into your home?) on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree).

*Attitudes towards Muslim-Americans.* Participants indicated their agreement with 10 statements (e.g. Muslim-Americans are just like any other ethnic/religious group in America.) on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree).

*Attitudes towards Christians in America.* Participants indicated their agreement with 10 statements (e.g. Christian-Americans have America's interest at heart.) on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree).

*Foreign Prejudice.* Participants indicated their agreement with 10 statements (e.g. People from other cultures are a threat to our own culture and habits.) on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree).

*Female involvement in terrorism.* Participants indicated their agreement with 9 statements (e.g. Women willfully engage in terrorism.) on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree).

### **Policy Attitudes**

In the next section, participants answered questions concerning their support for some social and political policies, including civil liberty restrictions, military action, and punishment (see Appendix B).

*Muslims' civil liberties.* Participants indicated their agreement with 9 statements (e.g. Suspected Muslim terrorists should have no constitutional rights, even if they are U.S. citizens.) on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree).

*Military action.* Participants indicated their agreement with 6 statements (e.g. I would support the use of U.S. military to reduce the influence of Islam in some countries.) on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree).

*Criminal Sanctions.* Participants indicated their agreement with 19 statements (e.g. Terrorists deserve the same legal rights as everyone else.) on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree).

*Media Events.* Participants answered 9 questions about their knowledge of recent attacks shown in the media.

## Demographics

In the final section, participants reported their demographic information, including gender, age, religious preference, education level, and race/ethnicity.

Because some participants began, but did not complete the survey, 1215 participants provided information for the initial variables (i.e. the labeling of the event and perpetrator). However, 1200 participants provided information for all variables reported in the current study, accounting for the difference in sample size that is reported in subsequent analyses.

## Results

Participants' responses to the spontaneous labeling questions were coded for the use of the terms "terrorist," "terrorism," and relevant variants such as "terror act." An aggregate variable was made to account for the use of a terror label in describing either the event or the perpetrator. This aggregate variable (terrorism label) was used for further analyses.

**Table 1** *Terrorism Label (aggregate)*

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Yes</b>	503	40.2
<b>No</b>	748	59.8
<b>Total</b>	1251	100.0

In order to assess the participants' attitudes, scales were compiled from relevant items (see Appendix B). Each scale was assessed for reliability using Cronbach's alpha. The negative attitudes towards Islam scale consisted of 5 items ( $\alpha=.90$ ). The negative attitudes towards Christianity scale consisted of 7 items ( $\alpha=.88$ ). The negative attitudes towards Muslim-

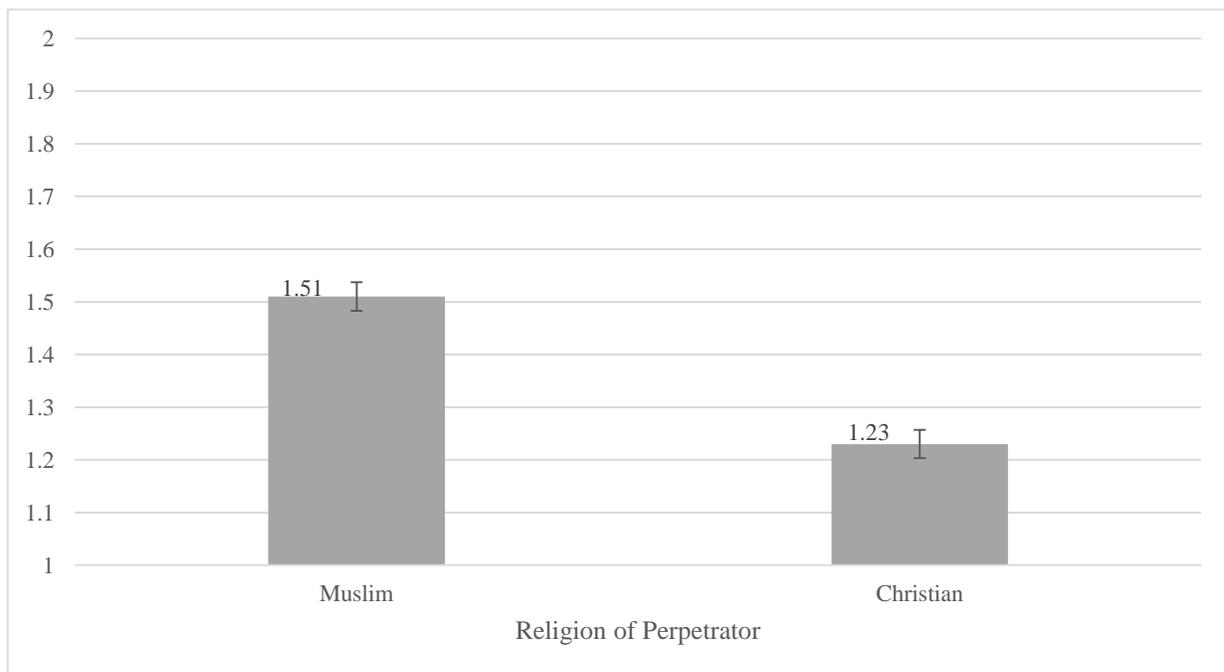
Americans scale consisted of 9 items ( $\alpha=.92$ ). The negative attitudes towards Christian-Americans scale consisted of 10 items ( $\alpha=.72$ ). The foreign prejudice scale consisted of 10 items ( $\alpha=.88$ ). The attitudes towards women were divided into two subscales. The attitudes towards women in terrorism subscale consisted of 2 items ( $\alpha=.75$ ). The attitudes towards women in the workplace subscale consisted of 4 items ( $\alpha=.60$ ). The policy attitudes towards Muslims scale (measured support for domestic policies that disadvantage Muslims) consisted of 9 items ( $\alpha=.91$ ). The policy attitudes towards military action scale (measured support for military action in predominately-Muslim countries) consisted of 6 items ( $\alpha=.84$ ). The policy attitudes towards harsh criminal sanctions scale (measured support for harsh criminal sanctions on terrorism) consisted of 10 items ( $\alpha=.87$ ).

The use of a terrorism label was positively correlated with negative attitudes towards Islam ( $r=.11$ ), negative attitudes towards Muslim-Americans ( $r=.08$ ), support for domestic policies disadvantaging Muslims ( $r=.08$ ), support for military action policies ( $r=.09$ ), and support for harsh criminal sanctions on terrorism ( $r=.08$ ). Importantly, negative attitudes towards Islam showed a strong positive correlation with negative attitudes towards Muslim-Americans ( $r=.80$ ), support for domestic policies disadvantaging Muslims ( $r=.65$ ), support for military action policies ( $r=.58$ ), and support for harsh criminal sanctions on terrorism ( $r=.52$ ). Negative attitudes towards Muslim-Americans also correlated strongly with support for domestic policies disadvantaging Muslims ( $r=.71$ ), support for military action policies ( $r=.63$ ), and support for harsh criminal sanctions on terrorism ( $r=.58$ ). In contrast, negative attitudes towards Christian Fundamentalists were negatively correlated with support for all of these policies.

Because of the link between the terrorism label and the negative attitudes towards Muslims, an ANCOVA was used to determine under which of the conditions of perpetrator

identity participants were more likely to use the terrorism label, while holding these attitudes constant. There were no main effects of either gender or motive. Holding constant the negative attitudes towards Islam and Muslim Americans, an analysis of covariance revealed a significant effect of religion the labeling of the event of terrorism,  $F(1, 1215)= 104.07, p<.001; \eta^2 =.079$ . As shown in Figure 1 below, post hoc comparisons using the Fisher LSD test revealed that participants were more likely to label the event terrorism when presented with a Muslim perpetrator ( $M= 1.51, SD= .50$ ) as opposed to a Christian perpetrator ( $M=1.23, SD=.42$ ).

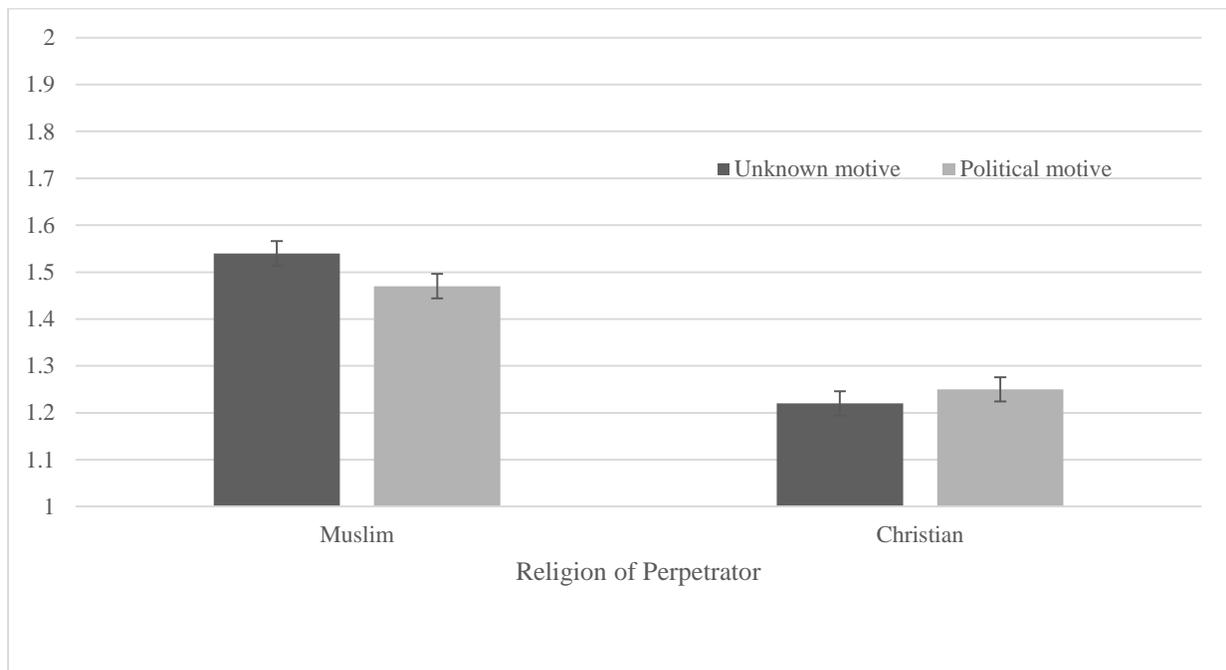
**Figure 1** *Effect of Religion on use of Terrorism Label*



The ANCOVA also revealed a significant interaction between the religion of the perpetrator and the motive,  $F(1,1215)= 4.175, p<.05; \eta^2 =.003$ . As shown in Figure 2 below, the effect of religion on the terrorism label depends on the motive of the perpetrator. When the perpetrator was Muslim, participants were more likely to label the event terrorism when the motive was unknown ( $M=1.54, SE=.026$ ) than when the motive was political ( $M=1.47, SE=.027$ ).

When the perpetrator was Christian, participants were more likely to label the event terrorism when the motive was said to be political ( $M=1.25$ ,  $SE=.027$ ) than when the motive was unknown ( $M=1.22$ ,  $SE=.026$ ).

**Figure 2** *Interaction of Religion and Motive*



## Discussion

Clearly, there is some bias in the way the media depicts terrorism. Attacks with Muslims perpetrators are more likely than those with non-Muslim perpetrators to be labeled terrorism. The effect of religion on labeling terrorism in this study suggests that media depictions have influenced the public, generating an association between Muslims and terrorism. This effect can be observed in the increased likelihood of participants to use the terrorism label when presented with a Muslim perpetrator, regardless of other variables, confirming the initial hypothesis.

The correlations between the terrorism label and negative attitudes toward Islam and Muslim-Americans imply that this “Muslim-terrorist” association may also create negative feelings among Americans towards Muslims. These negative feelings may strengthen the “Muslim-terrorist” association and continue to perpetuate this perception. This negative attitude toward Muslims is extremely important because, as predicted by previous research (Brinson & Stohl, 2012; Johnson et al., 2009), the present results also show it is associated with support for military action in predominately-Muslim countries, domestic civil liberty restrictions for Muslim-Americans, and harsh criminal sanctions on terrorism (see Appendix B for more specific policies in each of these categories).

Interestingly, the gender of the perpetrator had no significant effect on the labeling. This result does not support the initial hypothesis that a male perpetrator would be more likely to be labeled a terrorist than a female perpetrator. This finding may suggest that, contrary to past research findings, the public does recognize women as terrorists. More recent events, such as the two women arrested in New York for an ISIS-related bombing plan or the involvement of the woman with her husband in the San Bernardino attacks, may have made women’s involvement more salient to the public.

The motive, by itself, also had no effect on the labeling of the attack. While this result does not support the initial hypothesis, there may be a difference if participants are given a definition of terrorism. Being in the field of terrorism studies, one knows about the inherently political component of terrorism, whereas the general public may not. Another explanation may be the difficulty that law enforcement may have in obtaining a motive in the aftermath of attacks. A motive, whether reported or unknown, is therefore not seen as important for determining a terror attack.

The interaction between religion and motive is interesting. The effect of religion on the terrorism label depends on the motive of the perpetrator. When the perpetrator was Muslim, participants were more likely to label the event terrorism when the motive was unknown than when the motive was political. When the perpetrator was Christian, participants were more likely to label the event terrorism when the motive was said to be political than when the motive was unknown. Perhaps a terror motive is automatically attributed to Muslims, but for Christians, the act may be considered terrorism only when the motive is specified as political.

### **Limitations**

Although we acquired a large sample, because the survey was taken online, it is difficult to ensure that the sample was representative of everyone. Some demographic information can be obtained from the dataset. However, some people began the study and never finished. They may have quit the survey selectively, upon seeing that it involved violence, religion, etc.

### **Future Directions**

The survey contained many measures in addition to those analyzed in this paper. Other variables were measured, such as the prevalence of labeling the attack a hate crime, prevalence of labeling the perpetrator as crazy, and the knowledge participants had of the Charleston and San Bernardino attacks. Further analyses can be used to determine whether attacks with White or Christian perpetrators are more likely to be labeled hate crimes. Alternatively, these attacks may be more likely to have the perpetrator labeled mentally ill.

Another study by Lemieux et al. (2016, in preparation) concerns the terrorism label. However, it included different variables of the attack such as modality, number of victims, lone wolf v. group, and target of attack. Comparing the results of the present study with their findings

may yield a bigger picture of the factors affecting the use of the terrorism label. Exploring these aspects of the terrorism label is important because of the implications for both the depiction of violence in the media and the formulation of public policies affecting Muslim-Americans.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A Survey Vignettes

*Template of the vignette used in the survey:*

“Five people killed in local attack”

A brutal attack on a local government building early Monday afternoon killed five maintenance workers who were cleaning the facility. Witnesses say that a **man/woman** later identified as **Robert Smith/Jane Smith; Fadil Azeem/ Fatimah Azeem** burst through the doors of City Hall in Centerville, and open-fired in the lobby, right after shouting “**Heil Hitler/Allahu Akbar.**” All five staff members were pronounced dead at the scene. The community was shocked that this type of attack could occur in such a quiet, peaceful neighborhood. The mayor confirmed that they had never had a single threat and that the brazen act came as a great shock. “My condolences go out to the families of the victims and we are fortunate that no more people were killed in this senseless attack,” he said in a statement released on Tuesday morning. At this time, investigators **believe the suspect had a political motive/ say the suspect's motive is unknown,** and **he/she** is thought to be active in the **Fundamentalist Christian/ Fundamentalist Islamic** community. The suspect is currently at large and the police are asking for the public’s help in apprehending **him/her**.

*Conditions of the vignettes:*

“Five people killed in local attack”

A brutal attack on a local government building early Monday afternoon killed five maintenance workers who were cleaning the facility. Witnesses say that a man later identified as Robert Smith burst through the doors of City Hall in Centerville, and open-fired in the lobby, right after shouting “Heil Hitler.” All five staff members were pronounced dead at the scene. The community was shocked that this type of attack could occur in such a quiet, peaceful neighborhood. The mayor confirmed that they had never had a single threat and that the brazen act came as a great shock. “My condolences go out to the families of the victims, and we are fortunate that no more people were killed in this senseless attack,” he said in a statement released on Tuesday morning. At this time, investigators believe the suspect had a political motive, and he is thought to be active in the Fundamentalist Christian community. The suspect is currently at large and the police are asking for the public’s help in apprehending him.

“Five people killed in local attack”

A brutal attack on a local government building early Monday afternoon killed five maintenance workers who were cleaning the facility. Witnesses say that a man later identified as Robert Smith burst through the doors of City Hall in Centerville, and open-fired in the lobby, right after shouting “Heil Hitler.” All five staff members were pronounced dead at the scene. The community was shocked that this type of attack could occur in such a quiet, peaceful neighborhood. The mayor confirmed that they had never had a single threat and that the brazen act came as a great shock. At this time, investigators say the motive is unknown. “My condolences go out to the families of the

victims and we are fortunate that no more people were killed in this senseless attack,” he said in a statement released on Tuesday morning. At this time, investigators say the suspect's motive is unknown, and he is thought to be active in the Fundamentalist Christian community. The suspect is currently at large and the police are asking for the public’s help in apprehending him.

“Five people killed in local attack”

A brutal attack on a local government building early Monday afternoon killed five maintenance workers who were cleaning the facility. Witnesses say that a woman later identified as Jane Smith burst through the doors of City Hall in Centerville, and open-fired in the lobby, right after shouting “Heil Hitler.” All five staff members were pronounced dead at the scene. The community was shocked that this type of attack could occur in such a quiet, peaceful neighborhood. The mayor confirmed that they had never had a single threat and that the brazen act came as a great shock. “My condolences go out to the families of the victims and we are fortunate that no more people were killed in this senseless attack,” he said in a statement released on Tuesday morning. At this time, investigators believe the suspect had a political motive, and she is thought to be active in the Fundamentalist Christian community. The suspect is currently at large and the police are asking for the public’s help in apprehending her.

“Five people killed in local attack”

A brutal attack on a local government building early Monday afternoon killed five maintenance workers who were cleaning the facility. Witnesses say that a woman later identified as Jane Smith burst through the doors of City Hall in Centerville, and open-fired in the lobby, right after shouting “Heil Hitler.” All five staff members were pronounced dead at the scene. The community was shocked that this type of attack could occur in such a quiet, peaceful neighborhood. The mayor confirmed that they had never had a single threat and that the brazen act came as a great shock. “My condolences go out to the families of the victims and we are fortunate that no more people were killed in this senseless attack,” he said in a statement released on Tuesday morning. At this time, investigators say the suspect's motive is unknown, and she is thought to be active in the Fundamentalist Christian community. The suspect is currently at large and the police are asking for the public’s help in apprehending her.

“Five people killed in local attack”

A brutal attack on a local government building early Monday afternoon killed five maintenance workers who were cleaning the facility. Witnesses say that a man later identified as Fadil Azeem burst through the doors of City Hall in Centerville, and open-fired in the lobby, right after shouting “Allahu Akbar.” All five staff members were pronounced dead at the scene. The community was shocked that this type of attack could occur in such a quiet, peaceful neighborhood. The mayor confirmed that they had never had a single threat and that the brazen act came as a great shock. “My condolences go out to the families of the victims and we are fortunate that no more people were killed in this senseless attack,” he said in a statement released on Tuesday morning. At this time, investigators believe the suspect had a political motive, and he is thought to be active in the Fundamentalist Islamic community. The suspect is currently at large and the police are asking for the public’s help in apprehending him.

“Five people killed in local attack”

A brutal attack on a local government building early Monday afternoon killed five maintenance workers who were cleaning the facility. Witnesses say that a man later identified as Fadil Azeem burst through the doors of City Hall in Centerville, and open-fired in the lobby, right after shouting “Allahu Akbar.” All five staff members were pronounced dead at the scene. The community was shocked that this type of attack could occur in such a quiet, peaceful neighborhood. The mayor confirmed that they had never had a single threat and that the brazen act came as

a great shock. “My condolences go out to the families of the victims and we are fortunate that no more people were killed in this senseless attack,” he said in a statement released on Tuesday morning. At this time, investigators say the suspect's motive is unknown, and he is thought to be active in the Fundamentalist Islamic community. The suspect is currently at large and the police are asking for the public’s help in apprehending him.

“Five people killed in local attack”

A brutal attack on a local government building early Monday afternoon killed five maintenance workers who were cleaning the facility. Witnesses say that a woman later identified as Fatimah Azeem burst through the doors of City Hall in Centerville, and open-fired in the lobby, right after shouting “Allahu Akbar.” All five staff members were pronounced dead at the scene. The community was shocked that this type of attack could occur in such a quiet, peaceful neighborhood. The mayor confirmed that they had never had a single threat and that the brazen act came as a great shock. “My condolences go out to the families of the victims and we are fortunate that no more people were killed in this senseless attack,” he said in a statement released on Tuesday morning. At this time, investigators believe the suspect had a political motive, and she is thought to be active in the Fundamentalist Islamic community. The suspect is currently at large and the police are asking for the public’s help in apprehending her.

“Five people killed in local attack”

A brutal attack on a local government building early Monday afternoon killed five maintenance workers who were cleaning the facility. Witnesses say that a woman later identified as Fatimah Azeem burst through the doors of City Hall in Centerville, and open-fired in the lobby, right after shouting “Allahu Akbar.” All five staff members were pronounced dead at the scene. The community was shocked that this type of attack could occur in such a quiet, peaceful neighborhood. The mayor confirmed that they had never had a single threat and that the brazen act came as a great shock. “My condolences go out to the families of the victims and we are fortunate that no more people were killed in this senseless attack,” he said in a statement released on Tuesday morning. At this time, investigators say the suspect’s motive is unknown, and she is thought to be active in the Fundamentalist Islamic community. The suspect is currently at large and the police are asking for the public’s help in apprehending her.

## Appendix B Attitude Scales

**Table B1** *Attitudes Towards Islam Scale*

Items
The religion of Islam supports acts of violence.
Islam is anti-American.
Islam is an evil religion.
Muslims repress their women.
Islamic history and culture are more violent than others.
Scale reliability $\alpha=.90$

**Table B2** *Attitudes Towards Christian Fundamentalism Scale*

Items
Would you say that Christian Fundamentalists have too much or too little influence in politics?
Would you feel comfortable or uncomfortable in welcoming a Christian Fundamentalist into your home?
Do you think that Christian Fundamentalists get too much or too little attention in the media?
How would you feel if a Christian Fundamentalist married into your family?
Do you think Christian Fundamentalists are too timid or too aggressive in publicly promoting their ideas?
Do you support or oppose the election of more Christian Fundamentalists to public office?
Would you feel comfortable or uncomfortable if a Christian Fundamentalist became your boss?
Scale reliability $\alpha=.88$

**Table B3** *Attitudes towards Muslim-Americans Scale*

Items
Muslim-Americans support Islamic fundamentalism.
Muslim-Americans identify themselves as “Muslims” first and “Americans” second.
Muslim-Americans are just like any other ethnic/religious group in America.
When I think of Americans I usually don’t think of Muslims.
Muslim-Americans want to change American culture.
Muslim-Americans are likely to defend America when it is criticized.
Muslim-Americans have America’s interest at heart.
Muslim-Americans are more loyal to other Muslims around the world than they are to people in this country.
Islamic values are a threat to the U.S.
Scale reliability $\alpha=.92$

**Table B4** *Attitudes Towards Christian-Americans Scale*

Items
Christian-Americans support Christian fundamentalism.
Christian-Americans have America's interest at heart.
Christian-Americans identify themselves as "Christians" first and "Americans" second.
Christian values are a threat to the U.S.
Christian-Americans are more loyal to other Christians around the world than they are to people in this country.
When I think of Americans I usually don't think of Christians.
Christian-Americans want to change American culture.
I think the relationship between Christian-Americans and non-Christian Americans will remain stable for the next few years.
Christian-Americans are likely to defend America when it is criticized.
Christian-Americans are just like any other ethnic/religious group in America.
Scale reliability $\alpha=.72$

**Table B5** *Foreign Prejudice Scale*

Items
We can learn a lot from people from other cultures.
It is desirable that a society should comprise people from different cultures.
People from other cultures are a threat to our own culture and habits.
It is better for a country when everybody shares the same habits and traditions.
Skin color says nothing about people.
Not all races are equally intelligent.
Foreigners (strangers) contribute to the welfare of our country.
Most foreigners are lazy and try to avoid all work that is demanding or tiring.
Foreigners (strangers) are a threat for the employment chances of Americans.
Foreigners can contribute positively to American society.
Scale reliability $\alpha=.88$

**Table B5** *Attitudes Towards Women in Terrorism Scale*

Items
Terrorism is a male activity.
Women are too “soft” for terrorism.
Scale reliability $\alpha=.75$

**Table B6** *Attitudes Towards Women in the Workplace Scale*

Items
Men should occupy posts of responsibility.
Some jobs are not appropriate for women.
A woman should not expect to have quite the same freedom of action as a man.

Women should assume their rightful place in business and all the professions along with men.

Scale reliability  $\alpha=.60$

**Table B7** *Policy Attitudes Towards Muslims Scale*

Items
It is important to racially profile Muslims in order to identify any potential terrorism threat.
Suspected Muslim terrorists should have no constitutional rights, even if they are U.S. citizens.
I would support any policy that would stop the building of mosques (Muslim place of worship) in the U.S.
In order to fight terrorism, it is acceptable for the U.S. government to listen to private conversations without a court order.
The U.S. government should be allowed to assassinate suspected terrorists in other countries.
Police should not have to obtain search warrants when investigating suspected Muslim terrorists.
The best way to get rid of terrorism in our current “war on terror” is to weed out Islamic fundamentalists in our country.
If we could capture or kill the terrorist group leaders we should do it, even if many civilians are injured or killed in the process.
Muslim immigrants who visit the U.S. should have to go through special security screening procedures at the airports.
Scale reliability $\alpha=.91$

**Table B8** *Policy Attitudes Towards Military Action*

Items
ISIS must be stopped by any means necessary.
The U.S. had no right to bomb Iraq.
The U.S. should not engage in any military action in Muslim countries that will kill civilians, no matter how few.
The U.S. has to take the lead in eliminating terrorism from Muslim countries; no one else could do it.
I would support the use of U.S. military to reduce the influence of Islam in some countries.
All Muslim countries are a security threat to the United States.
Scale reliability $\alpha=.84$

**Table B9** *Policy Attitudes Towards Harsh Criminal Sanctions Scale*

Items
Punishment for involvement in terrorism should be more severe than normal criminal punishment.
Terrorists deserve the same legal rights as everyone else.
Suspected terrorists should have no constitutional rights, even if they are U.S. citizens.
Secret military tribunals for terrorists are acceptable, even if those charged are U.S. citizens.
Torturing captured terrorists for information is not acceptable.
We need to make terrorists pay for their crimes.
Terrorists who kill deserve the death penalty.
Most terrorists would kill if they are not executed or killed.
The U.S. government should be allowed to assassinate suspected terrorists in other countries.
Scale reliability $\alpha=.87$