

**TITLE:** Labeling terrorism: Effects on public policy attitudes

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**Introduction:** Many violent events are labeled “terrorism” by the media, but there is no definite agreement as to what renders an attack terrorism. Some events fit the definition of terrorism, but are not labeled accordingly. Based on media reports, it seems that events with a Muslim perpetrator are more likely to be labeled terrorism than comparable events with non-minority perpetrators. Additionally, the way the media depicts terrorism impacts public perception and policy attitudes.

**Purpose:** The identity of the perpetrator, including religion, affects the labeling of attacks as terrorism, and the biased media coverage of Muslim terrorist attacks impacts the way terrorism is perceived by the public. I tested how gender, religion, and motive of the perpetrator affect the labeling of terrorism, and the resultant policy attitudes.

**Method:** In an online study on Qualtrics, participants were randomly presented with an attack scenario that varied in terms of perpetrator gender, perpetrator religion, and presence of a motive. After being given the scenario, the participants answered a series of questions about whether or not they feel that the given scenario classifies as terrorism and what, if any, steps should be taken policy-wise as a result of the attack. These factors, as well as the label given to the attack, were examined in relation to the public’s resulting policy attitudes, such as support for military action, and punishment of terrorists.

**Results:** (The survey is live, so the data are in the process of being collected. This section will therefore be updated later). Based on the preliminary data, however, it seems that the presence of a motive is important to the public in defining terrorism.

**Conclusion:** This research provides a basis to explore which variables impact individual perceptions of terrorism. Based on previous research, I expect that the media’s framing of terrorism will produce negative attitudes towards Muslims. This prejudice may translate into support for policies targeting Muslims and Muslim-Americans, such as constraints on their civil liberties domestically. (Once the results are finalized, this section will also be expanded).