

Social Identity and Perceptions of Terrorism in the United States

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Senior Honors Thesis Submitted to the Political Science
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April 2, 2018

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank Professor Scott Desposato, whose guidance has been crucial throughout the entire process of crafting my thesis, from developing my survey experiment to submitting it to the UC San Diego IRB to finally sifting through the results.

I would also like to thank Professors Karen Ferree and Sebastian Saiegh, whose advice in the POLI 191 research seminar helped me refine my survey and get the ball rolling during the early stages of writing.

Another individual to whom I would like to extend my gratitude is Ph.D. candidate Brandon Merrell, the teaching assistant for the 191 research seminar. He somehow found a way amidst all of his own studies to remain available to assist me—and other students—with our projects in general, and with statistics programs in particular.

Lastly, I would like to thank my parents and my partner, Nicole, for their support and their love, without which none of this would be possible.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In post-9/11 America, multitudes of studies have been conducted on representations of Muslims/Arabs in the United States¹ (note: I will frequently pair the Islamic faith and the Arab ethnicity in this paper because the negative stereotyping that these groups face typically does not distinguish between the ethnic and religious designation). These studies have found that the Muslims/Arabs-as-terrorists stereotype is frequently recycled by the entertainment industry, while another particularly recent study shows that real-life acts of terrorism committed by Muslims receive 449% more media coverage than other terrorist attacks (Kearns 2017). People in the United States are constantly bombarded—through both a multitude of fictional representations and a disproportionate amount of exposure to certain real-world events—with images and stories in which Muslims/Arabs are terrorists. Of course, there is no evidence that actually suggests that Muslims/Arabs in the United States are more likely to commit acts of terrorism than people of any other religious/ethnic group. Regardless, the effect of Muslim/Arab representation in mass media on how these groups are perceived by people in the United States is significant.

Opinion polls show that the American public views Muslims/Arabs rather negatively. A “feeling thermometer” poll conducted by the Arab American Institute in 2014 showed that Arabs

¹ Lerma, R., Jr. (2013). The purposeful demonization of muslims and arabs by the mass media (Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I).

Merskin, Debra (2009) The Construction of Arabs as Enemies: Post-September 11 Discourse of George W. Bush, *Mass Communication and Society*, 7:2, 157-175.

Saleem, M., & Anderson, C. A. (2013). Arabs as terrorists: Effects of stereotypes within violent contexts on attitudes, perceptions, and affect. *Psychology of Violence*. 3(1)

These three articles are a just a sample that only scratches the surface of the research that has been done on this topic in the United States.

and Muslims were the *only* ethnic/religious groups (of those included in the poll) that were more often perceived unfavorably than favorably by Americans (Arab American Institute 2014); furthermore, a 2017 poll by the same organization shows that favorability of Muslims and Arabs has been declining since 2010 (Arab American Institute 2017). Cultivation theory (a theory more widely used in communications research, but still highly relevant to political science) would suggest that these downward trends in perceptions of Muslims/Arabs are at least partly a result of their negative representation in mass media. Yet, the idea that constant exposure to Muslims/Arabs as terrorists in news media and entertainment would lead to high levels of prejudice against them is intuitive and not so novel. What I wonder is whether the perpetuation of the stereotype of Muslims/Arabs as terrorists has led to a distortion in the way that people in the United States *subconsciously define terrorism itself*. In other words, does the social identity of the perpetrator of an act of mass murder play a role in determining how people in the U.S. perceive such acts, and are people in the U.S. more likely to identify the perpetrator of an act of mass murder as a “terrorist” if they are Muslim or Arab?

While research exists on people’s perceptions of and reactions to terrorist attacks² (I will cover existing research on this topic in greater detail in Chapter 2), little to no attention has been given to people’s perceptions of what does or does not constitute terrorism, and whether social identity is a factor in this determination. In a country where the label of “terrorist” significantly influences the punishment for a crime and the overall response of the government, this topic is

² Kimhi, S., Canetti-Nisim, D., & Hirschberger, G. (2009). Terrorism in the eyes of the beholder: The impact of causal attributions on perceptions of violence. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 15*(1), 75-95.

This study focuses on the differing perceptions of Jews and Palestinians regarding the possible motivations of the perpetrators of terrorist acts.

one of crucial importance. Furthermore, as the threats of right-wing terrorism increase³, the potential existence of a social-identity-based frame for terrorists within the minds of Americans presents a two-pronged issue: 1) Muslims/Arabs in the United States will face unwarranted, unfair, and unjust scrutiny from the government and from other citizens; 2) the American public and law enforcement agencies will not be adequately prepared to react to acts of terrorism coming from groups besides Muslims/Arabs. For these reasons, I sought to answer through an original survey experiment the question of whether the social identity of the perpetrator of an act of mass murder would affect whether or not that individual is perceived by people in the United States as a terrorist. I hypothesized that it would, and that a perpetrator who is identifiable as probably being Muslim or Arab will be more likely to be described as a terrorist than a perpetrator who is identifiable as probably being white.

This survey—which I disseminated via Amazon Mechanical Turk—consisted of a vignette in which a hypothetical act of mass murder was described to respondents and some information was given about the perpetrator. Respondents were then prompted to answer whether or not they would describe the perpetrator as a terrorist. To test the effect of social identity on their determination, respondents were randomly selected into one of two survey versions: in the first version, the perpetrator was given an Anglo/European name (“Bill Fellers”); in the second version, the perpetrator was given an Arab name (“Muammar al-Said”). The rest of the survey was identical, which means that any difference in the aggregate response between the first and second survey versions is almost surely a result of the name provided, and by extension,

³ Office of Intelligence and Analysis Assessment. “Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment.” *U.S. Department of Homeland Security*. 7 April 2009. fas.org/irp/eprint/rightwing.pdf.

This report insightfully notes that “The current economic and political climate has some similarities to the 1990s when rightwing extremism experienced a resurgence fueled largely by an economic recession, criticism about the outsourcing of jobs, and the perceived threat to U.S. power and sovereignty by other foreign powers.”

a result of the perceived social identity of the perpetrator. Further details about research design will be addressed in Chapter 4.

I hypothesized that survey respondents would be more likely to label “Muammar al-Said” as a terrorist and less likely to label “Bill Fellers” as a terrorist. Furthermore, I suspected that certain demographic groups (white people, Republicans, and respondents above the age of 40) would exhibit a difference in response between survey versions that would be greater than the aggregate difference. Details about the rationales behind these hypotheses will be explained in Chapter 3.

The results of my survey indicate that the name of the perpetrator significantly affected whether or not respondents labelled him a terrorist: about 49% of respondents said they would describe “Bill Fellers” as a terrorist; about 64% of respondents said they would describe “Muammar al-Said” as a terrorist. In Chapter 5, I will provide further details about the results (including breakdowns of response by gender, age, political affiliation, and race/ethnicity) as well as a statistical analysis of those results.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: in Chapter 2, I will discuss existing literature that engages with social identity and perceptions of terrorism and explain what my research contributes to the academic conversation; in Chapter 3, I will outline my hypotheses and the rationales behind them; in Chapter 4, I will explain the design of my survey experiment; in Chapter 5, I will provide the results of my survey experiment and an analysis of my findings; in Chapter 6, I will conclude with the implications of my study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Delving into the academic literature on the relationship between social identity and perceptions of terrorism, I found that research on these topics generally falls into two main categories: 1). Effects of “terrorist stereotyping” in mass media on perceptions of certain social identity groups (primarily Muslims/Arabs); and 2). Effects of survey respondent/perpetrator ethnicity on respondent reactions to acts of terrorism. Also relevant to my study is a third category of research that touches on these issues but does not directly address the relationship between them: this category consists of research on bias in America law enforcement agencies regarding differences in responses to acts of terrorism that are contingent upon the social identity of the perpetrator. In this section of my paper, I will explain how these categories of research have shed light upon the crucial relationship between social identity and perceptions of terrorism, and how the existing research on these topics has led to the development of my hypotheses and research study.

Many studies exist on the power of mass media/politicians to create/perpetuate certain social identity stereotypes. In the following three paragraphs, I will be discussing, in order, three levels of stereotyping that Muslims/Arabs are subjected to in the United States: 1). Stereotyping in entertainment media; 2). Reinforcement of stereotypes in news coverage; and 3). Reinforcement of stereotypes in political rhetoric.

Multitudes of studies have been conducted on the representation of Muslims/Arabs in American entertainment, and findings are typically that Muslims/Arabs are frequently stereotyped and usually portrayed as villains and terrorists (in American TV, movies, and video games). In the article *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, Jack G. Shaheen, a

professor in mass communications, opens by discussing how “moviegoers are led to believe that all Arabs are Muslims and all Muslims are Arabs” (Shaheen 2003). This assessment speaks to the issue which I brought up earlier, about how stereotypes of Muslims/Arabs seldom acknowledge any difference between the ethnic and the religious categorizations. Moreover, Shaheen’s study of over 900 American films finds that “Only five percent of Arab film roles depict normal, human characters” (Shaheen 2003). This is a staggeringly low portion. Furthermore, beyond dehumanizing Muslims/Arabs, the entertainment industry often presents their stories in ways that presume a causal link—or at least a strong relationship—between Islam and terrorism; this is reflected in the graduate research of former communications student Rafael Lerma Jr., who wrote in his dissertation: “The dangerous Muslim and Arab representation shown is complimented by showing them praying and/or reading from religious books such as the Qur’an before a terrorist attack. Thus, creating the impression that terrorism and Islam are one in the same as these individuals are represented as being both a terrorist and a Muslim” (Lerma Jr. 2013). Compounding upon these studies is the research of Professors Muniba Saleem and Craig A. Anderson, who co-wrote the article *Arabs as Terrorists: Effects of Stereotypes Within Violent Contexts on Attitudes, Perceptions, and Affect*. The authors of this article explain an experimental study they conducted, in which participants played one of three video games (there were two violent ones—one in which Arabs are terrorists and one that is terrorism-themed but does not include Arab villains—and one non-violent game in which there are Arab characters). The effects of exposure to Arabs in different contexts was measured through a multi-part post-treatment survey. Saleem and Anderson write that “Results suggest that video game stereotypes can prime negative and aggressive perceptions, attitudes, and affect toward the stereotyped group” (Saleem & Anderson 2013). Thus, the Arabs-as-terrorists stereotype in video games, as in

movies and television, negatively affects perceptions of Muslims/Arabs. However, perhaps the most telling result of Saleem and Anderson's research is their finding that "playing a terrorism themed game even without Arab characters led to higher anti-Arab attitudes, suggesting the presence of a strong associative link between terrorism and Arabs in the sampled population" (Saleem & Anderson 2013).

U.S. news coverage on acts of terrorism also reflects and reinforces the stereotype of Muslims/Arabs as terrorists. A 2017 study titled *Why Do Some Terrorist Attacks Receive More Media Attention Than Others?* posits that "social identity is the largest predictor of [volume of] news coverage" on acts of terrorism (Kearns, Betus & Lemieux 2017). Specifically, these researchers' analysis of U.S. media coverage found that "Controlling for target type, fatalities, and being arrested, attacks by Muslim perpetrators received, on average, 449% more coverage than other attacks" (Kearns et al. 2017). The article also emphasizes that acts of domestic terrorism in which the perpetrator is not Muslim are "often portrayed as a minor threat committed by mentally ill perpetrators," as opposed to "a hostile outside force" (Kearns et al. 2017). This means that social identity, in addition to being a primary factor in determining which acts of terrorism receive coverage, also affects how the stories are framed.

Muslim/Arab stereotypes that are perpetuated by American entertainment and news media are further reinforced by political rhetoric, as demonstrated by Debra Merskin, a professor of media studies, in an academic journal entry titled *The Construction of Arabs as Enemies: Post-September 11 Discourse of George W. Bush*. Merskin's article "links stereotypes of Arabs, enemy image construction, and ideology to the rhetoric of President George W. Bush as delivered during five speeches and a memorial service subsequent to the September 11, 2001, attacks" (Merskin 2009). The conclusion of Merskin's linguistic analysis of these speeches was

that “historical as well as current popular culture portrayals of people of Arab/Middle Eastern descent were coupled [by then-President Bush] with a rhetoric that was able to draw upon collective consciousness to revivify, reinforce, and ratify the Arab as terrorist stereotype” (Merskin 2009). Also, this sort of rhetoric is experiencing a revival under current U.S. President, Donald Trump, who has advocated for broad-based policies that target Muslims/Arabs, such as increased police presence in Muslim neighborhoods and a “Muslim registry.”

Here, I will move on to the second category of research on social identity and perceptions of terrorism, which consists mostly of experimental studies on the link between ethnicity and reactions to terrorism. Many scholars have studied through survey experiments the effects of ethnicity on individuals’ responses to terrorist acts. These sorts of studies typically ask respondents of different ethnicities to conjecture about the motivations behind terrorist attacks—such studies also measure other sorts of reactions to terrorism, such as anger, anxiety, and stereotyping. In particular, I will be discussing two survey experiments that focus on the way that Israeli Jews and Palestinians perceive acts of terrorism; the studies are titled *Terrorism in the Eyes of the Beholder: The Impact of Causal Attributions on Perceptions of Violence* (2009) and *Through the Looking Glass: The Role of Ethnicity and Affiliation in Responses to Terrorism in the Media* (2016)

In *Terrorism in the Eyes of the Beholder*, psychology professors Shaul Kimhi and Gilad Hershberger teamed up with political science professor Daphna Canetti-Nisim to “[examine] the effect of attributions on attitudes toward terrorism” (Kimhi, Hershberger & Canetti-Nisim 2009). They set out to answer three main questions through a survey experiment with a sample of 202 Israelis (111 Jews and 91 Palestinians). I will not go into great detail regarding the specifics of these questions—it will suffice to say, however, that each of these questions has to do with the

effects of ethnicity on respondents' reactions: the researchers sought to determine, through answering these questions, whether shared vs. non-shared ethnicity between respondents and perpetrators of terrorism would affect various reactions of respondents. One interesting result of the study was that "participants believed that Jewish perpetrators were more motivated by internal, psychological reasons than were Palestinian perpetrators" (Kimhi et al. 2009). Recent discussions in the United States about the mainstream media's tendency to label white mass shooters as "lone wolves" and Muslim/Arab mass shooters as "terrorists" form an eerie echo of these results. Moreover, while ethnicity did not affect all of the factors tracked in this study, researchers noted that Palestinians demonstrated an in-group bias when it came to their willingness to denounce the perpetrator. Lastly, the researchers noted that "Israeli Jews tend to think of terrorism as a dispositional characteristic that is deeply ingrained in Palestinian culture" (Kimhi et al. 2009). Ultimately, on some level, both Israeli Jews and Palestinians demonstrated some degree of favorable bias towards perpetrators of terrorism with whom they share the social identity trait of ethnicity.

In *Through the Looking Glass*, Professors Anat Shoshani and Michelle Slone "examined whether attitudinal and emotional responses to broadcasts of images of terrorist events differ according to ethnic group" (Shoshani & Slone 2016). Where the study discussed in the previous paragraph analyzed whether shared ethnicity between respondents and perpetrators of terrorism affected perceptions, this study focused only on the ethnicity of survey respondents. Through a survey experiment conducted on a sample of 228 Israelis (118 Jews and 110 Arabs), these researchers found that "Arab Israelis showed less increases [than Jewish Israelis] in stereotype attributions and negative adversary perceptions" (Shoshani & Slone 2016) after being exposed to terrorism broadcasts. The researchers posit that these lower rises in stereotype attribution may

have occurred because Arab Israelis, as members of a cultural minority, could be formulating “different ingroup-outgroup categorizations than their Jewish Israeli counterparts” (Shoshani & Slone 2016). Relating this to the situation in the United States, these results suggest that members of ethnic minorities might not internalize Muslim/Arab stereotypes the same way that members of the ethnic majority (white people) might.

The third and final category of research I will be discussing consists of research that has shown that acts of terrorism committed by Islamic extremists receive disproportionate attention from the U.S. government, on both the federal and state levels. A study titled *Surveying American State Police Agencies about Terrorism Threats, Terrorism Sources, and Terrorism Definitions*, finds that Islamic extremists were perceived by state police agencies as the greatest threat to national AND state security in all four regions of the country (South, Northeast, Midwest, and West), while anti-abortion groups, anti-immigration groups, and the KKK were lower on the list of concerns (Freilich, Chermak, & Simone 2009). Furthermore, the study finds that Islamic jihadists were significantly less likely to actually be involved in legal *or* criminal activities, while neo-Nazis were found to be the most active in both categories. Crucially, the authors conclude by suggesting that the discrepancy regarding perceptions of the threat of Islamic terrorism and the actual threat of Islamic terrorism possibly reflects “current political/cultural mood and DHS’s post-9/11 priorities that focus on Islamic extremists” (Freilich et al. 2009). While this study does not tell us much about the relationship between social identity and *perceptions* of terrorism, per se, it does illustrate the ubiquity of social-identity-based bias on all levels of American society regarding the issue of terrorism, and it provides crucial context for the implications of my research.

The current body of research on social identity and perceptions of terrorism is vast, however, no author has tackled the definitional question of whether people in the United States see the label itself of “terrorist” through a social-identity-based lens. Current research that directly deals with the relationship between social identity and perceptions of terrorism focuses on reactions to acts that are pre-defined as acts of terrorism. In this paper, I seek to answer the question of whether the social identity of a perpetrator of an act of mass murder affects whether or not respondents would describe the perpetrator as a terrorist. This question is in fact much simpler than many of the other questions that researchers have investigated regarding the complex, multi-layered responses an individual might have to an act of terrorism, and yet, the definitional question—in light of the growing controversy in the U.S. regarding the role of ethnicity in determining public/media/government responses to mass shootings and other acts of mass murder—is one of crucial importance.

Chapter 3: Hypothesis

My central hypothesis is that survey respondents will be more likely to label the perpetrator of a hypothetical act of mass murder as a terrorist if they perceive the perpetrator to be Muslim/Arab as opposed to white and non-Muslim. I expect this result because of a combination of the effects of Muslim/Arab representation in American entertainment, news media, and political rhetoric. My secondary hypotheses, along with the reasoning behind them, are listed below:

1. I expect that white respondents will exhibit a discrepancy in their responses between survey versions that is greater than the overall aggregate. Implicitly, I am also assuming that white respondents will display a greater discrepancy in their responses between survey versions than non-white respondents. The reason I expect this result has to do with Kimhi's findings that shared ethnicity between survey respondents and perpetrators leads to more favorable reactions than those in cases where ethnicity is not a common trait (Kimhi et al. 2009), and Shoshani's finding that cultural minorities may react less drastically to negative stereotypes of certain social identity groups (Shoshani & Slone 2016).

2. I expect that Republican respondents will exhibit a discrepancy in their responses between survey versions that is greater than the overall aggregate. Part of the reason behind this relates to the previous point, about the effects of shared social identity between perpetrators and survey respondents: since most Republicans are white, the factor of race/ethnicity will also be affecting this subset of respondents. However, in addition, I believe that the media that Republicans tend to consume will also have some effect here. Between the rhetoric of recent Republican political leaders like George W. Bush and Donald Trump and the programming of

popular right-wing media organizations like Fox News, Republicans in particular probably receive the highest volume of stereotypical/negative portrayals of Muslims/Arabs of any demographic group in the United States. Therefore, I expect that Republicans will exhibit a discrepancy in responses between survey versions that is greater than the overall aggregate, even when controlling for whiteness.

3. Lastly, I expect that older respondents (41 and over) will exhibit a discrepancy in their responses between survey versions that is greater than the overall aggregate. I think this will be the case because they have internalized a greater volume of Muslim/Arab demonization in mass media than younger people have, simply by nature of having lived longer.

Chapter 4: Research Design

To test the effects of social identity on American individuals' perceptions of terrorism, I developed and disseminated a survey experiment in which respondents were presented a vignette which described a hypothetical act of mass murder; respondents were given some information about the perpetrator and then asked whether or not they would define the perpetrator as a terrorist. Survey respondents were randomly selected into one of two survey versions: the only difference between the surveys was the name assigned to the perpetrator. In version one, the perpetrator was given the name "Bill Fellers;" in version two, the perpetrator was given the name "Muammar al-Said." Below is the text of the vignette:

Please take your time to closely read the vignette below. The question that follows will be based on this hypothetical scenario:

*A recent news report reveals that a gunman opened fire in a crowded shopping mall in Chicago—ten people were killed and over 50 were injured. The perpetrator has been identified but has not yet been apprehended. His name is **Bill Fellers/Muammar al-Said** (33), an American citizen with no criminal history. Based on an investigation of his social media accounts and phone records, it has been found that **Fellers/al-Said** has no verified ties to any extremist organizations. His motive remains unclear.*

Based on the information provided above, would you describe the perpetrator as a terrorist?

In this vignette, I purposefully crafted a hypothetical act of mass murder that *would not* explicitly count as an act of terrorism under most definitions of the term. A popular academic definition of terrorism comes from Andrew Kydd and Barbara Walter’s *The Strategies of Terrorism*; they define terrorism as “the use of violence against civilians by non-state actors to attain political goals” (Kydd & Walter 2006). The FBI defines domestic terrorism as “[violence] Perpetrated by individuals and/or groups inspired by or associated with primarily U.S.-based movements that espouse extremist ideologies of a political, religious, social, racial, or environmental nature” (FBI.gov). Since both of these definitions view a political motive as an essential definitional aspect of terrorism, the act of mass murder described in my survey vignette—based on the information provided—would not be considered by most academics, or by the U.S. government, as an act of terrorism. Yet, since the motive of the perpetrator in my vignette is said to remain unclear, one cannot safely assume that his motive was not political. The ambiguity of the vignette was designed to ensure that respondents would not be in complete consensus one way or the other.

After respondents were presented with the vignette and the question about whether or not they would describe the hypothetical perpetrator as a terrorist, respondents were asked to answer demographic questions about their gender, age, race/ethnicity, political affiliation, and preferred news outlets. These questions will provide me with the data I need to test my secondary hypotheses, which will provide crucial information for the development of potential explanations for any differences in the overall aggregate response between survey versions.

Limitations of this study, mostly arising from a limited access to resources, come from selection bias and the lack of an additional control group. First of all, since respondents self-selected into the Amazon Mechanical Turk survey, my sample of the American public might

consist mostly of people who are more interested in (and/or somewhat informed about) the topic of terrorism. As a result, my sample is not entirely representative of the American public. However, all respondents in the survey are living in the United States and most of the prominent racial/political demographic groups in the country are at least somewhat represented in my sample.

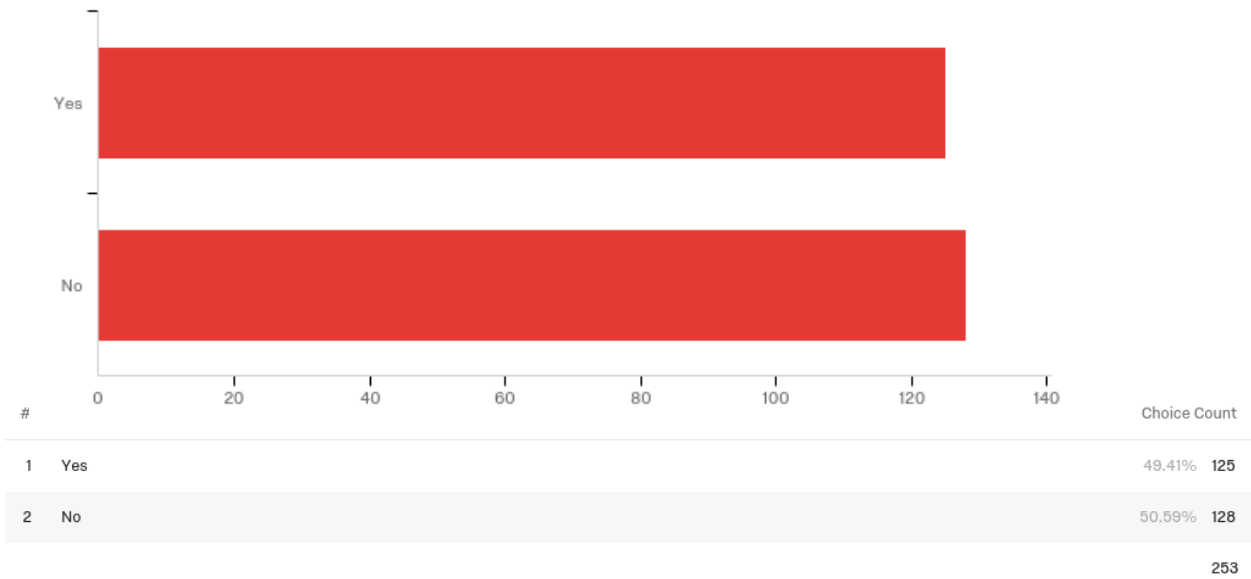
If I had more resources at my disposal, it would have been useful to add a third survey version, in which the perpetrator is given a non-white *and* non-Arab name. Including such a group would help me isolate the particular effect of perceived Muslim/Arab identity. Currently, since my study lacks such a group, it might be the case that a difference in responses between survey versions is the result of an in-group/vs./out-group effect, as opposed to a reflection of the stigmatization of Muslims/Arabs in particular.

Despite the limitations of my survey experiment, statistically significant results will still demonstrate that perceived social identity has some effect on respondents' perceptions of what does or does not constitute an act of terrorism. Results of this survey should not be taken as entirely representative of the American public, but an analysis of this 531-person sample will certainly illuminate at least the tip of the iceberg of the effects of social identity on perceptions of terrorism in the United States.

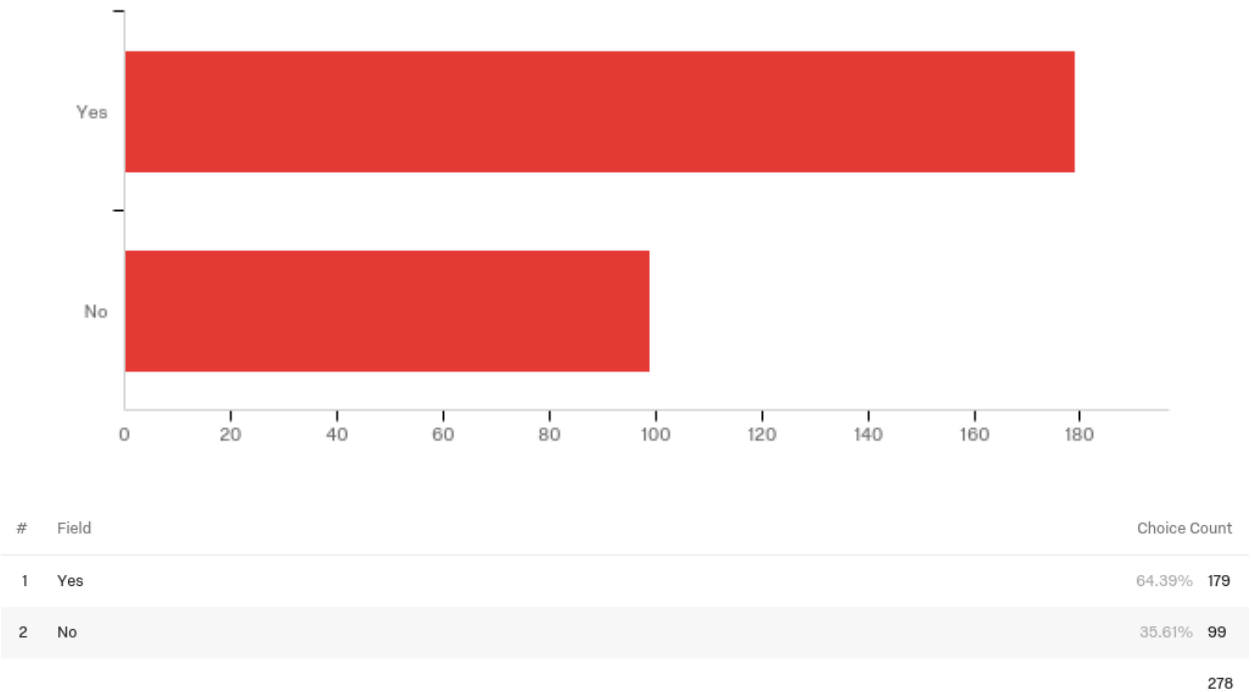
Chapter 5: Results & Analysis

The overall responses to each survey version confirm my primary hypothesis that respondents will be more likely to label a perpetrator with an Arab name as a terrorist than a perpetrator with an Anglo name. On the following page, you will find graphs of the responses to each version of the survey, starting with survey version one, in which the perpetrator is given the name “Bill Fellers” (text in [brackets] did not appear in the survey):

Based on the information provided above [refer to Chapter 4, page 17 for the full text of the vignette], would you describe the perpetrator [Bill Fellers] as a terrorist?



Based on the information provided above, would you describe the perpetrator [Muammar al-Said] as a terrorist?



Responses to the survey in which the perpetrator was named “Bill Fellers” are split down the middle, very close to 50/50. This result reflects an intended outcome of the wording of the survey: since respondents were not provided clear giveaways that the perpetrator is a terrorist, this distribution reflects the lack of a clear existing definition for terrorism within the minds of American respondents. With little information about the nature/motives of the act and limited information about the perpetrator, there was no clear consensus among survey respondents as to whether or not Bill Fellers is a terrorist.

Responses to the survey in which the perpetrator was named “Muammar al-Said” show a different picture: about 64% of respondents said they would label al-Said as a terrorist. While there is still not a consensus among respondents, a large majority were in agreement that al-Said is a terrorist. A two-proportion z-test of the data reveals a p-value of 0.00068, meaning that the result we observe is significant at a 99.9% confidence interval. This gives us clear evidence to reject the null hypothesis that the name—and, by extension, the perceived social identity—of the perpetrator of an act of mass murder does not affect the sample’s perceptions of what does/does not constitute terrorism. However, in order to develop a clearer picture of what is driving this result, we must examine four demographic breakdowns of survey respondents: 1). Race/ethnicity; 2). Party affiliation; 3. Age; and 4). Gender.

1). Race/Ethnicity

Below, you will find a table of the survey results broken down by the race of respondents. All non-white respondents were grouped together, mainly because there were not enough respondents in each individual non-white racial/ethnic category from which to draw significant results. This breakdown also makes it easier to directly assess whether treatment affected white respondents more significantly than non-white respondents.

Race/Ethnicity

		Would you describe the perpetrator (Bill Fellers) as a terrorist?			Would you describe the perpetrator (Muammar al-Said) as a terrorist?		
		Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
Please select the racial/ethnic category that you feel best describes you:	White (European/White American)	96 47.06%	108 52.94%	204 100.00%	137 65.55%	72 34.45%	209 100.00%
	Non-White	29 59.18%	20 40.82%	49 100.00%	42 60.87%	27 39.13%	69 100.00%
	Total	125 49.41%	128 50.59%	253 100.00%	179 64.39%	99 35.61%	278 100.00%

Based on an initial glance, this table shows that white respondents are driving the discrepancy in responses to the “Fellers” vs. “al-Said” surveys: 47.06% of white respondents labelled Fellers a terrorist while 65.55% of white respondents labelled al-Said a terrorist (a difference of 18.49%); 59.18% of non-white respondents labelled Fellers a terrorist while 60.87% labelled al-Said a terrorist (a difference of only 1.69%). It is immediately clear that there is no significant difference between whites and non-whites in their responses to the al-Said survey (though there is a small difference), nor is there a significant difference between non-whites’ responses to the Fellers survey vs. the al-Said survey. However, there appears to be some difference between the responses of whites to the Fellers survey vs. the al-Said survey, as well as between the responses of whites and non-whites to the Fellers survey—these differences,

however, are not statistically significant. Below, you will find a table displaying the results of a logistic regression with Yes vs. No responses to the terrorism question regressed on the name treatment interacted with respondent race, which tests the difference-in-difference between the proportions of Yes vs. No responses to each survey version, comparing whites vs. non-whites.

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	Z-value	P-value
Intercept	0.37156	0.29066	1.278	0.201
Treatment (Said)	0.07027	0.38122	0.184	0.854
White Resp.	-0.48935	0.32274	-1.516	0.129
White Resp. X Treatment (Said)	0.69083	0.4315	1.601	0.109

The p-value of 0.109 shows that the result is not significant at the conventional .05 level, meaning that the difference in responses to each survey version based on the race of respondents cannot necessarily be attributed to the treatment of the perpetrator's name. However, given that the result is nearly significant and that non-white respondents exhibited almost no discrepancy in their responses to different survey versions (~59% yes for Fellers vs. ~61% yes for al-Said), it is highly possible that a larger sample size of non-white respondents would reveal a statistically significant difference in white vs. non-white response to the treatment. More data would have to be collected before any definitive conclusions could be made about the effects that the race/ethnicity of respondents might have on their response to the treatment.

2). Party Affiliation

Below, you will find a table of the survey results broken down by the party affiliation of respondents. Independent respondents were grouped together with respondents who listed their party affiliation as “Other.” The responses of Democrats and Independents are quite similar to one another, and are not significantly different than the overall aggregate responses. Respondents who identified as Republican, however, were far less likely to label “Bill Fellers” as a terrorist, and far more likely to label “Muammar al-Said” as a terrorist, than were respondents of all other party affiliations.

Party Affiliation

		Would you describe the perpetrator (Bill Fellers) as a terrorist?			Would you describe the perpetrator (Muammar al-Said) as a terrorist?		
		Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
Please select the political party you most associate with	Democratic Party	66 54.10%	56 45.90%	122 100.00%	79 62.70%	47 37.30%	126 100.00%
	Republican Party	16 34.78%	30 65.22%	46 100.00%	33 70.21%	14 29.79%	47 100.00%
	Independent/Other	43 50.59%	42 49.41%	85 100.00%	67 63.81%	38 36.19%	105 100.00%
	Total	125 49.41%	128 50.59%	253 100.00%	179 64.39%	99 35.61%	278 100.00%

It appears that Democrats and Independents/supporters of other parties responded similarly to one another in each survey version, while Republicans were a huge outlier. While both Democrats and Independents/Others were somewhat more likely to label al-Said as a terrorist as opposed to Fellers, Republicans were slightly more likely than both groups to label al-Said as a terrorist; additionally, while around 50% of Democrats and Independents/Others

labelled Fellers as a terrorist, a drastically lower proportion of Republicans labelled Fellers as a terrorist (34.78%). Below, you will find a table displaying the results of a logistic regression with Yes vs. No responses to the terrorism question regressed on the name treatment interacted with respondents' party identification, which tests the difference-in-difference between the proportions of Yes vs. No responses to each survey version, comparing Republicans vs. non-Republicans.

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	Z-value	p-value
Intercept	0.1064	0.1392	0.764	0.4448
Treatment (Said)	0.4346	0.1949	2.23	0.0258*
GOP Resp.	-0.735	0.3394	-2.165	0.0304*
GOP Resp. X Treatment (Said)	1.0515	0.4853	2.166	0.0303*

The p-value for the treatment variable (Treatment (Said)) of 0.0258 indicates that the treatment of the perpetrator's name had a statistically significant effect for non-Republican respondents. Additionally, the p-value for the interaction coefficient of 0.0303 indicates that the treatment of the perpetrator's name had a statistically significant effect for Republican respondents compared to non-Republican respondents—thus, Republican respondents were significantly more likely than non-Republican respondents to label al-Said as a terrorist and significantly less likely to label Fellers as a terrorist.

The treatment of the perpetrator's name (and presumed social identity) had a clearer effect on respondents based on their ideologies than it did based on their race/ethnicity. In the following chapter, I will go further into my interpretation of this result, but I suspect that the

particular difference in response among Republicans has to do with race compounding upon ideology: in other words, since most Republican respondents were white, it seems reasonable that the combined effect of their identity and ideology led to a statistically significant difference between their responses and those of non-Republican respondents.

3). Age

Below, you will find a table of the survey results broken down by the age of respondents. Since I sought to compare younger respondents to older respondents, I have broken down the age into two categories: respondents whose ages fall between 18 and 40, and respondents over 40. Contrary to my hypothesis, younger respondents actually displayed a greater difference in their responses to survey versions than did respondents over the age of 40.

Age

		Would you describe the perpetrator (Bill Fellers) as a terrorist?			Would you describe the perpetrator (Muammar al-Said) as a terrorist?		
		Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
Please select the age group you fall into:	18-40	87 50.29%	86 49.71%	173 100.00%	132 68.39%	61 31.61%	193 100.00%
	41+	38 47.50%	42 52.50%	80 100.00%	47 55.29%	38 44.71%	85 100.00%
	Total	125 49.41%	128 50.59%	253 100.00%	179 64.39%	99 35.61%	278 100.00%

Based on an initial look, it appears that respondents ages 18-40 displayed a greater discrepancy in their responses to each survey version (a difference of 18.1%) than did respondents age 40 or over (a difference of 7.79%). A logistic regression with Yes vs. No responses to the terrorism question regressed on the name treatment interacted with respondents'

age, which tests the difference-in-difference between the proportions of Yes vs. No responses to each survey version, comparing 18-40-year-olds vs. 41+ year-olds, revealed a p-value of 0.239, meaning that the difference between respondents aged 18-40 and respondents over the age of 40 is not statistically significant. The difference that we observe in the table on the previous page might be the result of chance. Another possible explanation may be that younger people have grown up in a world where Muslims/Arabs have been stigmatized for most of their lives.

4). Gender

Below, you will find a table of the survey results broken down by the gender of respondents.

Gender

		Would you describe the perpetrator (Bill Fellers) as a terrorist?			Would you describe the perpetrator (Muammar al-Said) as a terrorist?		
		Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
Please select your gender:	Male	56 46.67%	64 53.33%	120 100.00%	81 59.12%	56 40.88%	137 100.00%
	Female	68 51.52%	64 48.48%	132 100.00%	96 69.06%	43 30.94%	139 100.00%
	Other	1 100.00%	0 0.00%	1 100.00%	2 100.00%	0 0.00%	2 100.00%
	Total	125 49.41%	128 50.59%	253 100.00%	179 64.39%	99 35.61%	278 100.00%

Although it appears that women were more likely to label both perpetrators as terrorists—and displayed a greater difference than men in their responses to survey versions—a logistic regression with Yes vs. No responses to the terrorism question regressed on the name treatment interacted with respondents’ gender, which tests the difference-in-difference between the proportions of Yes vs. No responses to each survey version, comparing men to women,

revealed a p-value of 0.502, meaning that these differences are not statistically significant. Given that I have no logical framework which would suggest a reason for a difference between male and female respondents—and that the difference between responses is not even close to statistically significant—this comparison between respondents of different genders likely does not merit further analysis.

The results of this survey experiment confirm that there was a statistically significant difference between overall responses to the two survey versions, and that there was a statistically significant difference between the responses of Republican and non-Republican respondents—these results confirm my primary hypothesis as well as one of my secondary hypotheses. The difference between the responses of white and non-white participants was not quite statistically significant, but I believe that a larger sample size of non-white respondents would likely have demonstrated a statistically significant difference. There was no statistically significant difference between male and female respondents, or between younger and older respondents. In the next and final chapter, I will discuss the implications of these results.

Chapter 6: Implications & Conclusion

The results of this survey experiment demonstrate that the social identity of the perpetrator of an act of mass murder significantly affected the responses of a sample of 531 people living in the United States. These results confirm my primary hypothesis that a perpetrator who is identifiable in some way as Muslim or Arab (in this case, by name) will be more likely to be labelled a terrorist than a perpetrator who is identifiable by name as being white by respondents who live in the United States. Due to the limitations of potential selection bias and small sample size, this result is not entirely generalizable to the American public—however, I do expect that further research would reaffirm my conclusions.

The results regarding the differences in response between Republicans and Democratic/Independent/Other Party survey participants merits further discussion. Political affiliation is a decent predictor for media consumption and ideology, and I would posit that it is a combination of these factors (media and ideology) that led a far greater proportion of Republican respondents to label the perpetrator with an Arab name as a terrorist as opposed to the perpetrator with the Anglo name. Identity may be playing a role here, but the role of shared identity between perpetrators and survey respondents has not been confirmed by my experiment. The role of identity in determining individuals' perceptions of terrorism is a topic that should be studied further.

There is a vast body of academic literature on the stereotyping of Muslims/Arabs as terrorists, and it would be surprising, in fact, if the combined effects of stereotyping in news, entertainment, and political rhetoric did not affect the way that the public perceives Muslims/Arabs. However, equally concerning to the fact that Muslims/Arabs face harmful

stereotypes that affect the public's perceptions of them is the fact that this stereotyping and targeting of Muslims/Arabs might be distorting the way that the American public perceives terrorism itself. In response to the exact same act of violence, only about half of the respondents labelled "Bill Fellers" as a terrorist. Recalling the Department of Homeland Security report that I briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, about how there are many factors that are leading to the growth of right-wing extremism in the United States (including loss of jobs in certain labor sectors and antagonistic responses to the election of Barack Obama, America's first African American President), the perception that terrorism is only terrorism if it is committed by Muslims/Arabs might leave people in the United States uniquely vulnerable to acts of terrorism committed by white extremists. The social impacts of how people define terrorism and how social identity effects this determination are far-reaching, therefore, I would suggest that this topic should be given significant attention within the academic community.

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