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**Fear and Loathing in Post 9/11 America: Public  
Perceptions of Terrorism as Shaped by News Media  
and the Politics of Fear**

**By**

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**DISSERTATION**

**Submitted to the University of New Hampshire  
in Partial Fulfillment of  
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**In**

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**May 2020**

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## **DEDICATION**

To my Grandpa Ben Beattie, who passed shortly before my dissertation defense at the age of 92.

Thank you for helping me develop a sense of curiosity about the world, encouraging me to question the structures that we take for granted, and teaching me that all people are deserving of human dignity.

I would also like to all thank those who helped me reach this point – family, friends, professors, and mentors. I could not have done it without your support.

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## ABSTRACT

The politics of fear have deeply divided the United States of America. Decades of propaganda portray Muslims as a terrorist threat to the dominant US culture and society. The War on Terror and its consequences, including the rise of ISIL and the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis, resulted in the destabilization of democracy in both the US and Europe. I argue that the US public's fear of terrorism is not just a fear of violence but instead reflects racial tensions and anxieties in a rapidly changing world. These tensions and anxieties are fueled by media coverage leveraging a general fear and distrust of non-white foreigners. The result of this is a pervasive fear of violent victimization at the hands of minorities, shaped by mass media content, which politicians capitalize on for their own gain. In this dissertation, I study the media effects of agenda setting, framing, and reinforcing spirals on public fear of terrorism with data from the Granite State Poll (GSP), Gallup's Most Important Problem (MIP), and a content analysis of broadcast news transcripts from NexisUni. I expand on current research by examining the fear of terrorism from the perspectives of criminological theory, critical media studies, and racial formation theory.

Keywords: *Terrorism, Fear, Mass Media, Politics, Immigration, Race, Islam*

Word count: 64,629 (inclusive)

## CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Today the United States of America stands deeply divided. Arguably the social and political divisions seen in 2020 are the deepest that they have been since the US Civil War. While many factors have contributed to the current social-political climate the War on Terror, started in 2001 in response to the Al Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, was the catalyst for a long series of events which has resulted in the destabilization of democracy in both the US and Europe. The War on Terror not only prompted multiple wars and fundamentally changed American life, but also stoked racial tensions and revived age-old xenophobic tendencies in American culture.

In this dissertation, I argue that fear of terrorism is not simply a response to the threat of violence, but a reflection of racial, cultural, and other identity-based tensions and anxieties felt by traditionally powerful groups in the US (i.e. whites, men, Christians, etc.) who are facing a globalized world and a rapidly diversifying society which threatens their perceived status, power, and social domination. These anxieties are in large part the result of global structural changes occurring as a result of the forces of Globalization and the Digital Revolution and are frequently misattributed as a foreign or non-white threat to a traditional culture and way of life. Rather than emphasizing the real, measurable economic changes which have occurred in the US and other wealthy nations, some populist politicians have seized on these cultural anxieties and campaigned on issues of identity and belonging. The result is a populist narrative that blames perceived social problems on foreigners, whether it be Latin American immigrants, Muslims, or China, ignoring powerful domestic actors who hold more responsibility.

The ubiquity of mass media in the digital age stokes these anxieties to the benefit of elites who seek to expand their power and wealth. Mass media decides what is newsworthy and shapes how individuals view issues that society faces (Altheide 2006, 2009, 2017; Entman 1993; McCombs and Shaw 1993; Glassner 2009; Herman and Chomsky 1988; Woods 2007, 2011). Members of the US public selectively consume propaganda which not only reinforces their beliefs but can also push them towards extremes (Slater 2007, 2015). In the case of this dissertation, I pay attention to two decades of propaganda disseminated through US news outlets portraying Muslims as a terrorist threat to US culture and society. The result of this is a fear of violent victimization at the hands of non-White foreigners, specifically “Muslims” and other minority groups, shaped by mass media content, which politicians capitalize on for their own gain. Popular narratives about Muslims and the terrorist threat directly contributed to the election of Donald Trump to the Presidency in 2016 and the UK’s decision to leave the European Union. Both campaigns saw unprecedented distribution of misinformation in digital media (McCombie et al 2020), heated rhetoric about immigrants and refugees (Debarael et al 2019; Washington Report on International Affairs 2015), and revived the politics of fear (Altheide 2006, 2017) by invoking the threat of terrorism by the Islamic State group (Albertson and Gadarian 2016; Brogan et al 2020). Discussions of issues of immigration, refugees, and terrorism frequently involve racialized language.

Race and ethnicity have long been used as a means of dividing people in the US (Feagin 2007, 2013, 2015; Omi and Winant 2015). In the wake of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks, political leaders seized on the public’s fear to build support for the wars in the Middle East, expansion of surveillance capabilities, stricter enforcement of immigration laws, and the creation of a robust drone warfare program. This was accomplished in part by playing on the US public’s

historical xenophobic tendencies, now focused on people of Middle Eastern, North African, and Central/South Asian backgrounds (i.e. “Muslims”). The recent wave of anti-Muslim sentiment in the US which developed out of this period, encouraged by political leaders and media outlets, culminated in the 2016 Presidential race in which Donald Trump famously called for a ban on Muslims entering the US. The present dissertation argues that public fear of terrorism is a proxy measure for racial and other identity-based anxieties and one of many perceived threats to the dominant culture in America posed by non-white foreigners. This is fueled by nearly two decades of propaganda efforts and media portrayals of terrorists as a foreign, Arab, Muslim threat to the US homeland and way of life.

Specifically, I argue that members of the public develop and reinforce their perceptions of terrorism by consuming mass media and interacting with political parties, that fear of terrorism in the US is shaped by media coverage and attention from political elites as much as it is influenced by actual terrorist attacks, and that the content of news coverage of mass violence is racially biased, focusing on violence perpetrated by Muslims. I employ a mixed-methods design to address my research objectives, drawing on New Hampshire survey data, publicly available national polls, and broadcast news media stories about suspected terrorists and the propaganda efforts employed to capitalize on this fear.

My dissertation research points to politics and mass media as the primary social institutions which shapes the public’s perception about issues such as terrorism. Mass media does this by setting agendas and deciding what is newsworthy, by framing events and providing the language and imagery used to understand what is happening in society, and increasingly by reinforcing previously existing beliefs through selective media exposure. Media effects, and

specifically the promotion of the fear of Muslims as a terrorist threat to Americans, have far reaching consequences in how the behavior of institutions and individuals have been shaped over the past 20 years. This includes the US wars in the Middle East, erosion of civil liberties domestically, and the decline of Western democracy. I also refute the notion that economic insecurity is the primary cause of support for anti-immigrant and anti-minority policies, instead asserting that support for these policies is primarily motivated by a perceived status threat. This position is supported by other recent scholarship (see Mutz 2018).

The current research also examines power: the power of media and elites to shape conversations, to construct enemies, and to influence attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. I conceptualize a model of power articulated by C. Wright Mills in *The Power Elite* (1956). Mills viewed power as being held by a class of people in the separate spheres of government, the military, and big business. While the goals of these spheres do not always align, they frequently do. More than this, membership in these spheres is not mutually exclusive, with a great degree of overlap. Similarly, the relationship between societal elites and mass media is not one of domination, but of separate but of shared goals. Neither societal elites nor mass media are having necessarily more power to influence the public than the others. The driving force of public opinion depends on a particular social context, i.e. in some situations politicians may be pushing their narratives, while in others media owners (who are also societal elites) may have more control. Beyond this, media legitimates power and the dominant social structures which support those in power.

In chapter 2, I use data from Gallup's Most Important Problem poll, and compare it with data from the Global Terrorism Database on terrorist attacks in the US, news media coverage

data from Lexis Nexis, and presidential addresses from the American Presidency Project. I examine the trends in these data sources using a qualitative time series approach to give context to the long-term national trends in the US public's worry about terrorism as the most important problem facing the nation. This allows me to look at the long-term effect of media and political attention to terrorism on the public's perceptions, while also accounting for terrorist violence that is occurring. In this chapter, I find that a larger share of the US public identify terrorism as the most important problem facing the US when mass media and political elites are devoting more attention to terrorism as a topic, regardless of the number of terrorist events which recently occurred in the US or the number of individuals killed or wounded in terrorist attacks in the US. I also find that economic insecurity factors, i.e. unemployment rates, are negatively associated with perceptions of terrorism as a social problem. Additionally, my analysis points to two key time periods which shaped discussions and perceptions of terrorism: the September 11, 2001 attacks, and the ISIL-related attacks in Europe and North America in 2015 and 2016. While previous work such as David Altheide's *Terrorism and the Politics of Fear* (2006, 2017) investigated the fear of terrorism in the years following 9/11, I seek to add to a new body of research into the social and political dynamics of the politics of fear leading up to and following the 2016 election.

Then, in Chapter 3, I examine the content of news stories about suspected terrorists, by collecting data on the characteristics of terrorist attacks in the US and their suspected perpetrators, as available from the Global Terrorism Database. I then collect broadcast news transcripts through NexisUni by searching the suspects' names and performing a quantitative content analysis approach. I hypothesize that suspected perpetrators of terrorist attacks, as defined by the GTD, who are Middle-Eastern/North African in origin, associated with radical



Islam, and foreign born are more likely to be called a terrorist by news media, even controlling for other characteristics of the attack. Tests using multi-level logistic regression techniques reveal that individuals associated with “radical Islam” are most likely to be framed as terrorists for the same behavior as non-Muslims. This demonstrates that the race/ethnicity/religion of the suspected terrorist is a key factor in how the public understands terrorism, rather than the violence itself.

Following this, in Chapter 4 I address the public’s fear of a terrorist attack compared with the public’s fear of a mass shooting in the Granite State Poll. These intersecting types of mass violence have occupied much news airtime and political debate in recent years. I find that selective exposure to partisan mass media sources is associated with what respondents are more worried about. Listeners to New Hampshire Public Radio (NHPR) reported being more fearful of a mass shooting and listeners to Conservative Talk Radio (CTR) reported being more fearful of a terrorist attack, even when controlling for background characteristics and prior political beliefs. Additionally, respondents who watch WMUR non-partisan local TV news more frequently report being more fearful of a mass shooting, but not a terrorist attack. If the public is simply worried about the violence of these events, then there should not be a statistically significant difference between reported fear/worry about a terrorist attack and reported fear/worry about a mass shooting. The differences which exist along political lines and are amplified by selective exposure to partisan mass media demonstrate that violence is not the only criterion by which individuals are estimating their risk of victimization, rather that fear is shaped also by interactions with social institutions, and suggests that the framing of violence as a “Terrorist Attack” or a “Mass Shooting” evokes distinct meanings, images, and threats to respondents.

Taken together, the above data sets and analyses aim to link the fear of terrorism among individuals in the public more directly to the propaganda and institutional biases which have used and exacerbated these xenophobic tendencies in American society. Racial tensions have been a fact of American life since the founding of the nation, and newer immigrant groups often bear the brunt of hostility from the dominant majority. In the case of US Muslims, I do not find support for the popular hypothesis that economic insecurity is motivating racist sentiments and policies. Instead I, along with Mutz (2018), assert that anti-Muslim and anti-Immigrant sentiment and policies that propelled Trump's 2016 campaign represent a perceived status threat to dominant American culture posed by non-white foreigners. This threat has been leveraged and exacerbated by powerful social actors seeking to enrich and benefit themselves rather than address the underlying inequalities in US society.

## **Background**

Knowledge is constantly developed through a process of social interactions between individuals and institutions, commonly known as “the social construction of reality” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In the study of social behaviors such as crime and terrorism, this perspective aids our evaluations by emphasizing that: (1) any given issue has connected to it socially developed meaning (e.g. Islamic radical terrorists are a national security threat); (2) said meanings are constructed and reinforced in social interactions (e.g. news media portrayals of terrorism), and (3) these understandings assist in socially defining said issue as a “problem” in need of resolution (i.e. Islamic radical terrorism is a problem that threatens our way of life and must be addressed).

Mainstream criminology recognizes terrorism as a socially constructed concept and not a categorically objective act (see Turk 2004). With that in mind, I do not intend to explicitly or definitively characterize what terrorism is or isn't in the content of this dissertation, a debate which is not likely to be settled easily. Instead, my focus is on how the general public reacts when terrorism is portrayed as a problem facing society, how suspected perpetrators of mass violence are portrayed as terrorists (or not) in US news media, and how selective news media exposure enhances individual beliefs about the risk of mass violence victimization. In short, this project is about demonstrating that the effects of the "terrorism" label – including the messages surrounding the nature of the terrorist threat who is portrayed as a "terrorist" – is largely responsible for the public's views about terrorism, and by extension Muslims, rather than the actual violence.

The rest of this chapter provides an overview of key concepts and findings which are utilized throughout this dissertation research project. These include sociological approaches to the study of terrorism, literature on the fear of crime and fear of terrorism, literature on media effects, terrorism and the politics of fear, and the social construction of race. All of these are used to integrate the theoretical and empirical approaches of traditional sociological criminology, critical media analysis, and the racial formation perspective in examining the causes and consequences of the fear of terrorism in modern American society.

### *Defining and Studying Terrorism*

From bombs in downtown Belfast, to the arson burning of ski resorts, to coordinated attacks in Paris and Brussels, terrorist violence has become a reality of life in the modern world. Despite the relatively low prevalence of terrorist type violence in the United States (see FBI

2005; LaFree et al 2009), following the attacks of September 11, 2001, terrorism emerged as the chief national security concern in the US and the world. How do we make sense of these seemingly random acts of violence? Terrorism has been referred to as the “conflict of our time”, and a form of violence which is increasing in prominence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, while also rooted in history and social context (Black 2004; Smelser 2007; Turk 2004).

Currently, the study of terrorism is constrained by a lack of definitional consistency about what constitutes a terrorist act and a terrorist group with some scholars arguing for some consistency in criteria, others using ideal-types of terrorism, and others still arguing that these debates are ultimately unfruitful (see Black 2004; Phillips 2015; Schinkel 2009; Smelser 2007; Turk 2004). The labelling of terrorism and terrorists is a highly politicized process in which institutions and individuals subjectively interpret events involving power dynamics, political agendas, and stereotyping of violence (ibid.). This has posed difficulties for researchers seeking to unravel the causes and consequences of terrorist violence and the mechanisms through which terrorism occurs. Practical issues aside, the inconsistencies and politicization of terrorist labelling speaks to the socially constructed nature of the problem.

As such, classifying an act as terrorism is highly dependent on contextual factors (Turk 2004). Though there is no one universally agreed upon definition of terrorism, most definitions agree on a basic concept. Terrorism is commonly classified as “violence or the threat of violence against persons or property to intimidate a government or civilian population in pursuit of a political, social, economic, or religious goal” (see FBI 2005). Additionally, terrorist violence frequently targets civilians outside the context of legitimate warfare and is intended to convey a

message and inspire fear in a group larger than the immediate victims (Black 2004; Rosenfeld 2004; Schinkel 2009; Turk 2004).

Because of the fluid nature of this definition, incidents of terrorism often overlap with hate crimes, organized crime, insurgencies, and other related behaviors. Moreover, perpetrators of terrorist-type violence often do not self-identify as terrorists. Instead, the label of “terrorist” is typically applied to individuals and groups after the fact (Turk 2004). Acknowledging that defining terrorism is difficult and that violence is socially constructed, sociological research has made progress in understanding the problem.

In this dissertation, I rely on data from *The Global Terrorism Database* (GTD) and consequently, adopt their definitions and standards of terrorism. The GTD is a popular open-source database used by academics and policy researchers alike (Sandler 2011). The GTD defines terrorism as “*The threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation*” (START 2019). Within this blanket definition, the GTD also specifies that the act must be intentional, must involve some level of violence or threat of violence against persons or property, and that perpetrators must be sub-national actors<sup>1</sup>. In addition, the GTD includes three criteria which can be required or not, allowing for researchers to specify the strictness of their definitions:

1. The act must be aimed at pursuing political, economic, religious, or social goal.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see the Global Terrorism Database Codebook at <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/downloads/Codebook.pdf>

2. There must be evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some message to a larger audience than the immediate victims.
3. The action must be outside the context of legitimate warfare activities.

Like traditional crimes and other conflict behaviors, terrorism is a fundamentally sociological phenomenon. Terrorism is inherently a social interaction, involving multiple actors (perpetrators, victims, and audience) and a threat or act of violence carried out in pursuit of a goal beyond the immediate targets. Terrorist violence can be understood sociologically above and beyond the individual motivations and dispositions of the actors involved, embedded in social structure, and social/historical context. This is not to say that individuals do not matter in the sociological research on terrorism, rather that the role of the individual is conditioned by social reality.

The causes and consequences of terrorism are inherently situated in the social and historical context in which terrorist events occur (Smelser 2007). In 2001, President George W. Bush declared a “war on terror” after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. After the “war on crime” and “war on drugs”, the “war on terror” constitutes the third time that US politicians have ‘declared war’ on criminal behaviors since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century. This time the “war” is on a global scale, and was subsequently used to justify numerous policy, law, and social agendas including the USA Patriot Act and military invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq by US and coalition forces (LaFree 2009). Certainly, the creation of the war on terror was not arbitrary or whimsical, but a calculated response to the attacks of September 11, 2001 and the perceived risk of future attacks against the United States (ibid.). This illustrates that both the causes and consequences of terrorism are rooted in social conditions.

Emile Durkheim (1898) asserts that sociology is the empirical study of social facts – that is to say manners of acting, thinking, and feeling that are shaped by social forces external to the individual, which exert influence over members of a society and constrain behaviors within society. This approach has been the dominant way of doing sociology and criminology in North America, with over 60 percent of research conducted using quantitative, positivist approaches which compare trends between discrete groups, relying on a priori assumptions (LaFree and Freilich 2012). This approach has largely been adopted in the study of terrorism as well, as researchers apply statistical techniques used in the study of traditional crime (ibid).

Conversely, Weber (1945) defines sociology as a science concerned with the interpretive understanding of social action, or behaviors of individuals which influence or are influenced by other actors and social situations. This line of thought assumes a complexity of explanations to any given social phenomenon, from which it has been argued that terrorism can be understood not merely as a single behavior with a single cause, but a type of action which arises as the result of the convergence of certain historical and social conditions (Smelser 2007). Some social theorists have also asserted that terrorism in its ideal type, another concept originated by Weber, is a form of collective violence which arises out of a specific set of social and structural conditions, where social and cultural distances are great, but technological advancements have closed the physical distances which made terrorist violence historically less likely (Black 2004). For example, the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks against the World Trade Center and Pentagon are perhaps as close to this concept of terrorism as any, where civilians from one society attack civilians from a distinct society on the other side of the world using advanced modern technology (ibid).

Concepts from sociology have been used in theorizing terrorism by researchers in several disciplines (Turk 2004), typically relying on theories of collective action (Smelser 2007). Other researchers have suggested that theories of crime and deviance can be usefully leveraged to illuminate the causes of terrorism (LaFree and Dugan 2004; Rosenfeld 2004). LaFree and Dugan (2004) argue that although there is a set of conceptual similarities between terrorism and crime, the presence of key differences is an obstacle to the direct application of criminological theory to terrorism. For instance, terrorism is not a specific crime that exists within the criminal statutes of many countries and therefore terrorists are typically prosecuted for the multiple crimes such as murder, arson, kidnapping or extortion that constitute their terrorist act (ibid.). Additionally, unlike common crimes, definitions of terrorism typically conceptualize terrorism as a means to broader political and social ends (ibid.).

Like other crimes, incidents of terrorism, perpetrators, and methods of terror are not equally distributed across societies. Rather, terrorism varies greatly from place to place, across time, and is embedded in the particular social/historical context (Black 2004; LaFree et al 2009; Phillips 2015; Rosenfeld 2004; Schinkel 2009; Turk 2004). The patterning of terrorism across time and space speaks not only to the social construction of terrorist violence but to the social, not individual, nature of terrorism which occurs as a result of social-structural conditions. For example, incidents of terrorism appear to cluster in places where political oppression and exclusion fall along social group divides, such as race, ethnicity, and religion, as well as in conflicts in which means and power are asymmetrically distributed (ibid).

Terrorism also tends to occur in waves, in response to conflict cycles, and largely occurs around political and social conflicts which may involve other forms of collective action and



violence including protest, state repression, war, and insurgency (Schinkel 2009). Further, terrorist groups are constrained by social and situational conditions, typically attacking targets close to their operational base. This holds true even for high-profile groups such as Al Qaeda, for whom the overwhelming majority attacks occur against local, more immediate targets, and appear to be motivated more by local and regional grievances rather than by anti-Western ideologies as is popularly believed (LaFree et al 2009). Additionally, terrorists and terrorist groups may move in and out of terrorist behavior as situational factors change, switching to or from insurgent tactics to terrorist tactics, and escalating or desisting terrorism campaigns (Moghadam 2009).

The lens of sociological theory and methods can be easily and effectively applied to the study of terrorism. Terrorism is socially constructed. It is not an absolute but defined by institutional forces and interpreted by individuals and groups (Turk 2004). Terrorism is also patterned behavior, not random or the result of individual psychological factors. Understanding terrorism as a sociological phenomenon requires linking contemporary events to core sociological thought, such as Durkheim's concern with manners of acting, thinking, and feeling external to the individual, and Weber's interpretive understanding of social action (Smelser 2007). From this, terrorism is the result of structural conditions, social and historical contexts, and cannot be explained simply by individual dispositions or motivations. Sociologists consider the broader social patterns underlying terrorist violence rather than individual motivations or dispositions (Black 2004; Rosenfeld 2004).

### *Fear of Crime and Fear of Terrorism in Criminology*

Individuals' perceived vulnerabilities due to gender, age, or race, have typically been shown to influence fear of crime victimization (see Henson and Reyns 2015 for a review), and likely influence fear of terrorism as well. However, terrorism is unique because victims are often chosen randomly and rarely know the perpetrator, it involves broader political, social, religious goals (other than personal gain), its rare occurrence, and the intent to cause fear beyond immediate victims (Turk 2004). The media is a key element to understanding not only how the "problem" of terrorism is being portrayed, but also where our biases lie as a society. Additionally, I argue, as other scholars have before, that media and political institutions are key to shaping perceptions of threat and that creative use of language and metaphors by political elites shapes the way other social institutions view terrorism (Altheide 2006, 2009; Shoon, Meltzer, and Reese 2008; LaFree 2009).

Like the fear of crime, fear of terrorism can be understood on multiple levels of analysis such as perceived risk of victimization to the individual, perceived risk to the community, and even perceived risk to society as a whole. For some time, criminologists sought to explain the heightened fear of crime in the US, which has endured into recent years despite significant decreases in actual crime rates. Some scholars (Glassner 2009) have attributed this to increased media exposure of crime and continued attention to crime as a social problem by US political elites. Others have examined the fear of crime and perception of victimization risk among individuals. This literature has generally found that certain social characteristics such as age, race/ethnicity, and gender significantly influence these perceptions (see Henson and Reyns

2015), with older individuals and women most consistently reporting greater fear of crime victimization.

Theories regarding fear of crime have attributed these findings to respondents' perceived vulnerability and decreased ability to resist crime victimization, and fear of specific types of victimization, particularly fear of sexual assault among women which is reflected in a general fear of crime (ibid.). The theoretical mechanisms by which individuals perceive their vulnerability likely influences fear of terrorism, though the specific individual factors which influence these perceptions are likely different from the general fear of crime. For instance, it is illogical to presume that an individual's fear of sexual assault would translate to a heightened fear of terrorism. Other factors, such as exposure to terrorism in news media and proximity to potential targets has been shown to influence perceptions of terrorism risk (Nellis and Savage 2012; Woods et al 2008).

Fear of terrorism can also be conceptualized as an issue of risk management similar to other national and global security issues (e.g. nuclear proliferation, climate change). Ulrich Beck's *Risk Society* thesis (1992) posits that modern societies have produced a great number of risks, many of which exist as the result of the material reality of modernity such as the negative effects of industrialization. As a result, society has become preoccupied with these risks and the strategic management of these risks, many of which are attributed to human activity. Sociologists have used these ideas to help explain why, in a world with seemingly infinite risks, some are given more attention than others. This approach has been embraced by environmental sociologists, where the bulk of risk society scholarship lies, and has influenced terrorism researchers as well, though to an admittedly lesser extent. Any analysis of fear of terrorism

should take Risk Society into account, particularly when exploring how this fear is portrayed by media and politicians and interpreted by the public. Previous research has suggested that societal levels of risk perception are heavily influenced by societal elites, particularly those in the media (Altheide 2006, 2009, 2017; Clarke and Chess 2008; Nellis and Savage 2012; Woods 2007; Woods and Arthur 2014).

### *Studying Media Effects*

The study of media effects on society and individuals has covered a wide range of topics including warfare, vaccines and other medical interventions, politics, climate change, immigration, crime, and terrorism to name a few. In this dissertation, I draw primarily on the traditions of critical media studies, a field of study dating back to the Frankfurt school in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (see Horkheimer and Adorno 1944). This field of scholarship examines our relationships to and interaction with indirect sources of information, or media, and how media serves to benefit powerful groups in society and reproduce systems of social inequality. Hermann and Chomsky (1988) more recently articulated a propaganda model of news media. David Altheide's *Terrorism and the Politics of Fear* (2006, 2017) then takes us to the current day, examining how public fears are created and leveraged by social elites in mass media and politics to pursue political office, policy agendas, and make profits. Media effects have been shown to operate in three primary ways: 1. Agenda setting; 2. Framing events; and 3. Reinforcing spirals.

#### 1. Agenda Setting

Mass media decides what is newsworthy and promotes certain topics as deserving of the public's attention over others. This is known as *Agenda Setting* (McCombs and Shaw 1993), a

theory which asserts that mass media drives large-scale trends in public opinions, attitudes, and beliefs. As an example, FOX News is a very influential media source for many Americans. If FOX News devotes a great deal of attention to illegal immigration, then according to Agenda Setting Theories, FOX News viewers are more likely to be concerned about illegal immigration than other potential issues.

## 2. Framing Events

Broadly speaking, *Framing* refers to the use of words, phrases, and imagery to describe and portray events to the public in a certain way. Consider the use of terms such as “illegal immigration” compared to “undocumented immigration”. The former is often accompanied with imagery of the southern US border and typically discussed in terms of illegal border crossings. It evokes a law enforcement narrative of how to deal with the issue as well, painting all illegal immigrants as criminals. The latter is a more sympathetic phrase used to describe migrants, discussed in terms of problems in the US immigration system. In fact, most undocumented immigrants entered the US legally and simply overstayed their visas (Warren 2019). Each of these phrases refers to the same sets of behavior, however the language, imagery, and ideas surrounding these phrases suggests different ways to view the phenomenon. By framing a topic in a certain way, using particular words, phrases, and images, mass media contributes to how the public perceives issues.

Framing is a somewhat contentious topic among scholars, and consequently one of the most critically studied topics in communication literature. Entman (1993) described framing as a “fractured paradigm”. While some researchers do not go into detail to define what ‘frames’ and ‘framing’ are, assuming that these are widely understood concepts (Entman 1993), others

interpret framing in different ways, even when the terms are explicitly defined. Some researchers see framing as a cognitive process and element of discourse (Gitlin 1980), others conceptualize frames as an internalized mental structure (Scheufele 1999), and further still, framing can refer to the substance of communication (Woods 2007). Though the exact definition of framing varies across disciplines, framing is theorized as a process frequently used by political elites and media sources to influence perceptions and shape the social world (Altheide 2006, 2009, 2017; Herman and Chomsky 1988). In framing an issue, the use of fearful language or imagery can be used to persuade and gain support for social and political objectives (Altheide 2006, 2009, 2017; Herman and Chomsky 1988). Most academic literature examining the use of fear in social life, particularly regarding terrorism, has highlighted mass media coverage.

### 3. Reinforcing Spirals

Recently, social scientists have turned their attention to the role of selected media exposure – i.e. choosing partisan news sources such as FOX News or MSNBC. The *Reinforcing Spirals Model* (Slater 2007, 2015) articulates how attitudes and beliefs are largely responsible for media choices, and also contribute to the development and maintenance of identities, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors in a reciprocal fashion. Essentially, this model does not propose a strict cause and effect of attitudes/beliefs/behaviors, and media exposure/media effects, rather it argues that these tend to reinforce each other.

#### *The Structure of Mass Media and Society*

In the information age, mass media is more influential and more easily manipulated than ever before. The collection and dissemination of information through mass media outlets is used

to exert social influence and persuade people to behave in certain ways. While this is not a fundamentally new process, the scale of daily data collection and dissemination, and ubiquity of mass media exposure in modern, digitally connected societies is astounding. The average person is also no longer simply a consumer of mass media, but an active participant in mass media and even a producer of content. As scholars and as citizens, we have only begun to understand the effects of constant interconnectivity and bombardment of media messages on societies and individuals. Information has become both the most valuable commodity to the largest businesses – think Google, Facebook, and Amazon – but has also been weaponized by actors seeking to sow discord, spreading misleading or outright false information through the veneer of authenticity provided by mass media platforms (McCombie, Uhlmann, and Morrison 2020).

Businesses, politicians, and governments using mass media to influence populations and spread potentially false or misleading information is not a new phenomenon. In many ways, the current political climate is rehashing decades old battles, and tech giants are primarily concerned with making profits, as any other business is. What is new is the structure of mass media, the scale and presence of digital media, and how individuals interact with mass media as an institution. At the dawn of internet age, hopeful tech entrepreneurs talked about an era of unprecedented understanding, empathy, and peace facilitated by instantaneous communication between anyone around the world who had an internet connection (Morozov 2012). At the very least, it was hypothesized that if a large portion of the population had access to the breadth of human knowledge and experience through the internet that society would become more informed, individuals would consider a wider range of sources and perspectives, and that critical evaluation of the information that we receive would become the norm (*ibid.*). It was even posited by the most hopeful that the internet, by providing free access to information, could defeat

authoritarianism around the world and usher in a new era of freedom. Instead, the opposite has occurred (ibid.).

Media consumers did not embrace a broader range of opinions when given access to the wealth of human knowledge. Nor did they become more educated about issues that they and society face. In fact, many social scientists have documented an effect where individuals seek out news sources that support and confirm their previously held beliefs, while rejecting those that challenge their beliefs. The channels of information on the internet have become more restrictive rather than more open. This has been mirrored in traditional news media with the growth of partisan news outlets. Outlets such as FOX News, owned by billionaire Rupert Murdoch's News Corp., and conservative talk radio shows hosted by controversial figures such as Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity, are little more than propaganda machines (Conway, Grabe and Grieves 2004). In 2020, even these traditional news media sources contribute to the spread of biased or outright false information.

Over the past thirty years, while a wealth of media sources permeates the average consumer's landscape, they are controlled by relatively few entities. In the United States alone, ninety percent of television and film media is currently controlled by only six companies, compared with over thirty companies in the 1980's (Lutz 2012). This enormous shift in homogenization is due to changes in the structure and laws of mass media which began in earnest following telecom deregulation in the 1990's (McCabe 2016). The subsequent decades of mergers and acquisitions by the largest mass media companies have led to a news and entertainment media landscape that is increasingly dominated by a few points of view. Walt Disney alone controlled an estimated 38% of all North American Box office earnings in 2019



(Coyle 2019). In other words, while we have expanded the number of media outlets that can meet anybody's preconceived notions, we have also simultaneously concentrated ownership of mass media into fewer hands and moved toward a less publicly-oriented model of news media production and consumption.

Digital media, on the other hand, has been controlled by a few giant corporations for most of its' history. Despite the openness and freedom of the internet, companies such as Google, Amazon, Facebook, Reddit, and Twitter control a disproportionate amount of information that the average internet user encounters on a daily basis. These websites exert a great deal of control over the content that appears in people's news feeds and search results, and at the same time offer little in the way of verification of information or fact checking. Ironically, although these companies have demonstrated repeatedly that they are capable of censoring content, they have facilitated the spread of false information, and in some cases, been complicit in its dissemination (Iosifidis and Nicoli 2020). This came to a head during the 2016 election cycle and gave rise to the "fake news" moniker (Moretto Ribeiro and Ortellado 2018; Tandoc, Jenkins, and Craft 2019). All the while, internet users' information is constantly collected by both private and government entities (Bauman et al 2014; Munro 2018).

In addition, nefarious actors have used the internet for personal gain at the expense of others, eroded the democratic institutions and rule of law in the US, propped up authoritarian regimes, and covered up crimes against humanity. A few examples of this include the election of Donald Trump to the US Presidency, mass surveillance conducted by US intelligence agencies under the veneer of counterterrorism, actions taken by authoritarian states such as Russia and Iran to suppress dissent and silence activists, and the genocide of minority groups in China and

Myanmar. In addition, the spread of misinformation on the internet played a major role in the rise of the terrorist group Islamic State, the 2016 Brexit campaign and subsequent weakening of the EU, the 2016 election of President Trump and his subsequently disastrous policies at home and abroad, the resurgence of ethno-nationalism, ascension of far-right parties and emboldening of neo-Nazis/white supremacists in both Europe and North America, the bolstering of authoritarian-style leaders in theoretically democratic societies such as Viktor Orban in Hungary, Erdogan in Turkey, Putin in Russia, and Trump in the United States, the weakening of the NATO alliance, global inaction on the issues of catastrophic climate change, and the resurgence of previously eliminated diseases such as measles in developed nations. Taken together, the structure of modern mass media, and its exploitation by nefarious actors, has contributed to nothing less than the undermining and collapse of Western Liberal Democracy and the post-Cold War social order.

### *Terrorism and The Politics of Fear*

Most academic literature examining the use of fear in social life, particularly regarding terrorism, has highlighted mass media coverage. In his 2006/2017 book *Terrorism and the Politics of Fear*, David Altheide documented the techniques and social processes by which political elites and news media constructed terrorism as the chief national security threat, relying on the public's perceptions about danger, risk, and feelings of fear to gain support for policy measures such as the USA PATRIOT Act and military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq (Altheide 2006, 2009, 2017). This is considered the definitive work examining the nexus of mass media propaganda, political manipulation, and portrayals of terrorist violence.

In framing and packaging terrorism as a social problem for the US public, the use of fearful language or imagery has been used to persuade and gain support for social and political objectives (Chomsky and Herman 1988; Altheide 2006, 2009). For instance, David Altheide (2006) found that post 9/11 media coverage of terrorism closely resembles earlier coverage of crime. Both use fear of victimization and ethnocentric ideologies to reinforce ingroup-outgroup hostilities and employ a process of “othering”. This process involves construction of an inferior group by the dominant group through the establishment of symbolic boundaries and membership (Schwalbe et al. 2000).

In the post-9/11 era, othering through discourses of fear and ethnocentrism have been central to building support for the war on terror (Kam and Kinder 2007). Mass media, however, is not the only social institution involved in the framing of terrorism and use of fear in social life. Political leaders often shape and define the problem initially. Media then filters and further interprets their statements and presents these re-constitutions to the public (Chomsky and Herman 1988). Media has presented fear inducing messages from politicians to promote many social, legal, and political agendas in the United States including the “War on Drugs” (Inciardi and McElrath 2015) and the USA PATRIOT Act (Altheide 2006). In this manner, leaders of social and political movements may invoke fear and construct moral panics which appeal to the values and beliefs of dominant social groups while also drawing on the group’s anxieties (Shoon, Meltzer, and Reese 2008).

The War on Terror has left its mark on the US and the world. Through ongoing wars in the Middle East, changes in domestic law enforcement priorities, the reorganization of the US national security apparatus, more restrictive and harsher immigration laws and policies, the

erosion of civil liberties, resurgence of nationalist groups in US and Europe, increased hate crime targeting of “Muslims”, Brexit and election of Donald Trump in 2016. While mass media has devoted a great deal of attention to extremist violence over the past 20 years, other social issues such as climate change, growing inequality, and public health issues may pose greater threat to most Americans than terrorism. Yet news coverage of violence, particularly racially charged violence, sells newspapers, and gets viewers to keep tuning in. When the public is fearful of an issue such as terrorism, societal elites can, and do, take advantage of the public’s fear. Recently, Donald Trump proposed a ban on travel from Middle Eastern countries and building a wall along the southern US border to combat the perceived threat from non-white foreigners who are presumably coming to commit violent crimes in the US.

Donald Trump’s “Muslim Ban” is not simply the action of one person, but a logical extension of a worldview promoted by mass media which equates terrorists with foreign, Middle Eastern, Muslims intent on striking the US homeland. The promotion of Muslims as a national security threat, simply because of their ethnicity, nationality, and religion, is based in long standing and systemic racism in the US. Biased media coverage constitutes a racial project which defines the “Muslim” race as the enemy, emphasizes some threats while minimizing others, and is tied to deeper issues of who belongs – who is American and who is not. It is no coincidence that a resurgence of white nationalism followed the largest refugee crisis since the second world war, which was portrayed as an invasion of Europe and North America by non-white Muslims.

### *The Terrorism Label: Framing Mass Violence*

Terrorism, by most definitions, involves the use of violence to inspire feelings of fear or dread in a population larger than the immediate victims (see Global Terrorism Database 2017;

Turk 2004). Before the September 11, 2001 attacks, terrorism did not occupy the US public's attention for prolonged periods of time, nor was it considered the chief domestic and foreign policy concern of the US. After the attacks, terrorism consistently occupied the list of top 10 problems facing the US (Woods 2007). Following 2015 attacks in Paris linked to the so-called Islamic State group of Iraq and Syria (commonly referred to as ISIS) polls conducted by Gallup in December 2015 (McCarthy 2015; Swift 2015) found that in the US, forty seven percent of US adults were worried about being a victim of a terrorist attack, close to the all-time high (Swift 2015). Additionally, trust in government to protect US citizens against terrorist attacks reached an all-time low, with sixty seven percent of respondents believing that a terrorist attack on US soil was likely, and only fifty five percent of respondents had confidence that the US government could protect against future acts of terrorism (McCarthy 2015).

Empirical research and official statistics show that incidents of terrorism on US soil are rare, typically committed by domestic actors rather than international, and only a minority of such attacks are associated with Islamic radicals (LaFree, Yang, and Crenshaw 2009). Anti-US attacks by Islamic radical groups overwhelming occur against US interests abroad rather than on US soil (ibid). Nevertheless, since the attacks of September 11, 2001, terrorism has remained as a top issue concerning the US public (Swift 2015; Woods 2007), members of the general public report greater fear of terrorism victimization than other forms of mass violence (Swift 2015), and Muslims in the west continue to be targets of retaliatory hate crimes (Byers and Jones 2007)<sup>2</sup>. One thing is clear, this is an enduring fear which does not fully represent the objective threat as measured by academic research and official statistics.

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<sup>2</sup> For more information, visit the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Statistics on Hate Crimes 1996-2016 at <https://ucr.fbi.gov/ucr-publications#Hate>

Within the context of US news media, the word terrorism itself is used to convey a specific threat that is distinct from common crimes or political upheaval (Kunda 1999). This specific threat has also been constantly framed as a “new” form of violence in US mass media (Norris et al. 2003). Similar to other crimes, terrorism is framed in a particular way in political and media communications. Political discourse, media portrayals, and popular sentiment associates terrorism almost exclusively with Islamic radicals, especially since the attacks of September 11, 2001 (Altheide 2006, 2009; Papacharissi and Oliveira 2008; Nagar 2010; Powell 2011; Woods 2011). However, the majority of terrorist acts executed in the United States are committed by internal actors rather than foreign aggressors. The FBI classifies approximately two-thirds of all terrorist plots between 1980 and 2001 as “domestic.” That figure rose to 95 percent between 2002 and 2005 (FBI 2005).

The “terrorism” label has both broad and specific implications when it is applied. Altheide (2006) found that terrorism goes beyond a simple narrative, rather when an incident is labelled as terrorism, it becomes the “definition of the situation”. This framing of violence creates a sense that all Americans are potential victims of evil terrorists, and the military are portrayed as our protectors against terrorist violence. Terrorists are portrayed as faceless clandestine actors who strike from the shadows, as a foreign threat to our way of life, they use weapons of mass destruction, and are almost exclusively shown as Muslim radicals in the modern era (Kunda 1999; Papacharissi and Oliveira 2008; Nagar 2010; Powell 2011; Woods 2011, 2014). The threat of terrorism is therefore both vague and specific at the same time, portrayed as a threatening outgroup, or an “other” which demands a swift military response.

Terrorism, like most crimes, is also stereotyped as a masculine behavior. Female terrorists are portrayed as transgressing traditional gender boundaries (Berko, Erez, and Globakar 2010). In news media female terrorists are depicted as exceptional cases (Nacos 2005) and portrayed as subverting their “natural” sexuality and role as mothers (Hamilton 2007). In short, depictions of female terrorists are shaped by notions of masculinity and gendered understanding of deviance which emphasize women as either passive participants or a rare exception (ibid), a bias which has been seen in the academic research into the gender-terrorism relationship (Jacques and Taylor 2008).

Mass media coverage promoting the fear of terrorism is known to have negative effects both individuals and society (Altheide 2006; Atkinson and Young 2012; Farook Malik 2014; Iglarsh 1987; Nellis and Savage 2012; Pat-Horenczyk et al 2007; Toohey and Taylor 2008). Many scholars assert that the risk of terrorism has been overstated in the U.S. by news media and other societal elites (Altheide 2006, 2009; LaFree 2009; McCarthy 2015; Papacharissi and Oliveira 2008; Nagar 2010; Powell 2011; Swift 2015; Woods 2007, 2011). Since September 11, 2001, terrorism has been ranked in the top 10 of Gallup’s “Most Important Problems” national survey (McCarthy 2015; Swift 2015; Woods 2007). The effects of this heightened fear are not yet fully understood, however existing research has found that negative effects include changes in behavior, i.e. information seeking and avoidance (Nellis and Savage 2012), economic costs in reduced travel (Iglarsh 1987), support for questionable policy agendas such as the Iraq war (Altheide 2006; Wolfendale 2006), and a number of negative effects associated with increased anxiety (Atkinson and Young 2012; Farook Malik 2014; Pat-Horenczyk et al 2007; Toohey and Taylor 2008) including post-traumatic stress and negative coping strategies (ibid.). This study may help identify who is most likely to experience these negative effects of terrorism on society,

and under which conditions fear is able to proliferate through the U.S. public. Potentially, findings could support targeted public policy efforts in the future.

Additionally, scholars have also argued that stereotypes of Muslims as radicals and terrorists is harmful to minority populations (Byers and Jones 2007; Gottschalk and Greenberg 2008). The stereotyping of Muslims in western media has also been used as a recruitment tool by violent organizations such as ISIL/ISIS (Stern and Berger 2015). US political discourse have demonized Muslims as a social problem (Byers and Jones 2007; Gottschalk and Greenberg 2008; Norris et al 2003), promoting the image of Muslims as potential terrorists by describing terrorism almost exclusively in relation to Islamic radicals. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, hate crimes directed against Arab- and Muslim-Americans, or those perceived to be, rose dramatically. This change has been directly linked to the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks by scholars (Byers and Jones 2007).

### *Constructing “Muslims” as the Enemy*

Understanding how the US political and media elites frame terrorism is pertinent when radical groups such as ISIS, the so-called Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria, are known to recruit members using the argument that Western powers – particularly the US – demonize, oppress, and alienate Muslims (Farwell 2014; Stern and Berger 2015). A notable example of this is then candidate Donald Trump’s response to ISIL/ISIS inspired attacks in 2015: calling for a ban on all Muslims entering the US (Zurcher 2015). ISIL/ISIS is known to use media clips of US politicians such as Donald Trump discussing ISIS, the Middle East, and Islam in recruitment and propaganda materials (Farwell 2014; Stern and Berger 2015). Theoretical and empirical research has also shown that individuals who join radical organizations often experience feeling of



alienation, isolation, and resentment towards a mainstream society which rejects and stigmatizes them (Cottee 2011; Hamm 2009; McCauley and Moskalenko 2011; Sageman 2004).

Omi and Winant's *Racial Formation Theory* (1986, 1994, 2015) provides the basis of analyzing the fear of terrorism and the framing of terrorism as "Muslim" violence as a racial project. It is a long-established social fact that racism is embedded in US social institutions. This bias is reflected in popular beliefs about crime and violence, and institutional behavior. This dissertation research explores the fear of terrorism in US society through the lens of institutional racism. While the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks changed American's awareness of terrorism, racialized perceptions of crime and suspicion of foreigners have existed in the US for a long time. Fear of terrorism then is in large part a measure of racial tension in the US. Fear of terrorism is also a surrogate for fear, distrust, and animosity that Americans have about foreigners, particularly non-white foreigners, beyond any objective risks posed by terrorist attacks. The perceptions that the US public have about terrorism are shaped by both pre-existing beliefs about non-white foreigners (on a social-psychological level) and by social institutions (on a macro-level), namely mass media and political leadership. Additionally, *Racial Threat Theory* (Blalock 1967) suggests that minority groups pose a threat to the majority when they increase in size and compete for political power and economic resources. The majority group uses various methods of social control, both legitimate and illegitimate, to reinforce dominance over minority groups.

In the wake of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks, political leaders seized on the public's fear to build support for the continuing wars in the Middle East, expansion of surveillance capabilities, stricter enforcement of immigration laws, and the creation of a robust drone warfare program. This was accomplished in part by playing on the US public's historical

xenophobic tendencies, which was now attentive to people of Middle Eastern, North African, and Central/South Asian backgrounds (i.e. “Muslims”). The recent wave of anti-Muslim sentiment in the US which developed out of this period, encouraged by political leaders and media outlets, culminated in the 2016 Presidential race in which Donald Trump famously called for a ban on Muslims entering the US. The present dissertation argues that public fear of terrorism is a proxy measure for racial anxieties and one of many perceived threats to the dominant culture in America posed by non-white foreigners. This is fueled by nearly two decades of propaganda efforts and media portrayals of terrorists as a foreign, Arab, Muslim threat to the US homeland and way of life.

Conflating race with religion and nationality has a long history in the US. I argue, as have others, that Islamophobia in Western societies is racial in nature, rather than a primarily religious discrimination (Constadine 2017; Dunn, Klocker, and Salabay 2007; Taras 2013). This is prominently on display in the changing U.S. Census categories. Over time, the US Census denoted Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and other nationalities as distinct “races” and called “Hindu” a race in 1920, 1930, and 1940, illustrating the muddled nature of our racial thinking (Pew Research Center 2020). Islamophobia also plays on historical constructs of Orientalism similarly to how Jews were portrayed in Europe and the US in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Skenderovic and Späti 2019). and Islamophobic attitudes are more prevalent in those who favor Right-Wing Authoritarianism (Beck and Plant 2018). Muslims are also viewed less favorably and deserving of legal protections than other religious minorities in the west (Meer and Modood 2009). Some scholars have linked new racialization, such as Muslim racialization in the US and Europe, to increases in the movement of population groups globally, which prompts reactions from dominant social groups in destination countries to maintain status (Gans 2017).

Similar arguments have been made in Samuel Huntington's controversial book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996), which articulates an argument that in the post-Cold War world is characterized by civilizations which share a common cultural heritage rather than nations-states. Furthermore, according to his analysis, Western civilizations (which includes primarily The United States and Europe) are declining in importance, influence, and power. The future of global politics, as Huntington sees is, will be characterized by struggles between the eight great civilizations, primarily focused on the conflicts between Western, Islamic, and Sinic (Chinese) civilizations.

Perhaps the most prominent, and controversial, cultural argument within academic and policy circles as well as the general public is the role of Islamic extremism in explaining terrorism. Since the attacks of September 11, 2001 terrorism has almost exclusively been associated with radical Islam in Political discourse, media portrayals, and popular opinion, despite mainstream academic research showing a diversity in terrorist groups (Altheide 2006, 2009; Papacharissi and Oliveira 2008; Nagar 2010; Powell 2011; Woods 2011). Nevertheless, scholars have proposed that certain cultural forces – such as radical Islam - may make groups more likely to engage in terrorist violence during a conflict.

### *Outline of the Following Chapters*

The following chapters use three related datasets to examine the influence that media and politics exert on public perceptions of terrorism and mass violence. I also address the social construction of race, and the “Muslim” race more specifically. Table 1.1, below, provides an outline of the questions, data, samples, methods, and measures in the following chapters.

**Table 1.1 Summary of Dissertation Research Questions, Data, Sample, Methods, and Measures**

Chapter and Focus	Research Question	Data Source	Sample	Methods	Dependent Variable	Independent Variables
II –Agenda Setting	When is the public most worried about terrorism?	Gallup’s Most Important Problem (also GTD; ProQuest; APP; BLS)	240 Months	Descriptive and Correlational Analyses	Percent of public identifying “terrorism” as the MIP	Number of terrorist events and casualties; number of newspaper articles and Presidential remarks about “terrorism”; unemployment rate
III – Framing Effects	Who is labelled as a terrorist?	NexusUni (also GTD)	312 Transcripts (clustered around 57 incidents with 65 suspects)	Mixed-Effects Logistic Regression (Multi-Level Modelling)	Use of the “terrorism/terrorist” frame in broadcast news transcripts	Date of incident; expert guest; number killed in incident; weapons used; suspect race/ethnicity; suspect birthplace; suspect ideology/religion
IV – Reinforcing Spirals	Who is worried about terrorist attack compared to a mass shooting?	Fall 2017 Granite State Poll	506 New Hampshire Adults	Survey Weighted Logistic Regression	Reported fear of a terrorist attack; reported fear of a mass shooting	Sex; age; gun ownership; religious attendance; vote in 2016 election; selective media exposure

First, in Chapter 2, I examine public opinion data over time to assess how occurrence and characteristics of terrorism events, media coverage, and other macro-level factors influence changes in public perception of terrorism as a problem facing the US. I find that, at least in bivariate analyses, public concern about terrorism is not related to occurrence of violence, but to the amount of attention given to terrorism by news media and politicians. I then work to deconstruct the terrorist frame/label by analyzing how suspected perpetrators of mass violence are labelled as “terrorists” by the US news media. While the other data sets both found strong evidence of media effects on public opinion, this dataset examines racial/ethnic biases in the

content of news reporting on terrorism. I find that the “terrorist” label is applied based on a suspect’s race/ethnicity, and/or religious/ideological affiliation, even when controlling for characteristics of the attack such as weapons used and number of casualties. Finally, I analyze the relationship between political beliefs and selective media exposure on members public perceptions of their risk of mass violence victimization in a representative NH survey. I find that controlling for sociodemographic factors, lifestyle factors, and prior political beliefs, individuals who selectively consumer partisan media are more likely to report elevated levels of worry about victimization in a terrorist attack compared to a mass shooting.

In the following chapters, examine a social issue which has become particularly salient in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Terrorism. This is a risk which has been promoted as a grave threat by the media and political elites (Altheide 2006, 2009; Woods 2007); threat that is feared by Americans not because they are likely to experience it, but due to the foreignness of the perpetrators and the extreme consequences of this violence (Black 2004; LaFree, Yang, and Crenshaw 2009; Woods 2011), a typology of violent behavior that is welded to specific groups and ideologies in our minds following a galvanizing event (Nagar 2010; Norris, Kern, and Just 2003; Powell 2011), and a phenomenon which has fundamentally altered the institutional structure of the United States, if not the entire world, over the past 19 years (Altheide 2006, 2017; Kam and Kinder 2007; LaFree 2009; Woods and Arthur 2014). In short, this project examines the causes and consequences of the *fear of terrorism* as a fear of “Muslims” in the United States. Specifically, I focus on the fear of terrorism in the tumultuous social period in the US leading up to the 2016 Presidential election. I do so with three data sources and methods. These data sources are drawn from national public opinion polls from Gallup’s Most Important Problem (MIP), broadcast news transcripts from NexisUni and the Fall 2017 wave of the Granite State Poll (GSP). I expand

on current research by examining the fear of terrorism from the intersecting perspectives of criminological theory, critical media studies, and racial formation theory.

In terms of broader impact and policy implications, this research addresses the role of mass media coverage on fear of terrorism, which is known to have negative effects to individuals and society. Scholars have also argued that stereotypes of Muslims as radicals and terrorists is both harmful to minority populations (Byers and Jones 2007; Gottschalk and Greenberg 2008), and can be used as a recruitment tool by violent organizations such as ISIS (Stern and Berger 2015). I attempt to better understand how US news media portrayals of terrorism perpetuate bias against Muslims, while suggesting how these depictions can be modified to increase security of minority groups and counter extremist narratives.

In conclusion, this dissertation examines the fear of terrorism in the US as a reflection of racial and other identity-based anxieties which is framed and communicated to the general public via mass media and leveraged by politicians to achieve power. In modern society, there are many risks, and terrorism is only one of them. In the case of the terrorism, the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York and Washington, D.C. constitute a galvanizing event which fundamentally altered the perception of terrorism as a problem in the United States, both within US institutions and individual perceptions. The subsequent media coverage and politicking around terrorism amplified historic xenophobic attitudes in the US and contributed to the racialization of Muslims as a group that poses an existential threat to the US way of life. This has had far reaching consequences not only for the US, but the entire world, and contributed to the collapse of the post-Cold War social order.

## **CHAPTER II. MEDIA, POLITICS, AND PUBLIC OPINION OF TERRORISM AS THE MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEM FACING THE US**

Since the events of September 11, 2001, terrorism has become a central discussion in US and global politics. Members of the US public have reported heightened fear of terrorism following these attacks, and concerns of terrorism as one of the top problems facing the United States have endured well past the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon (Swift 2015; Woods 2007). Combatting these groups has been the primary justification for the US-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the continued presence of US forces in the Middle East (LaFree 2009).

The rise to prominence of the group *Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant* or *ISIL* to in 2014, and attacks carried out by ISIL-trained groups in Europe and ISIL-inspired individuals in the US, reignited public concerns of terrorist violence in the US. In combination with the refugee migrant crisis in the Middle East and Europe precipitated by the escalation of the Syrian and Iraqi Civil Wars, this culminated in then-candidate Donald Trump proposing a “total ban” on Muslims entering the United State following the ISIL-Inspired San Bernardino, CA attack in December 2015, and the eventual signing of Executive Order 13769 in January 2017. Many scholars have argued that the threat posed by terrorist groups to the US homeland is overstated, and that the fear of terrorism has been intensified by continued attention from mass media and politicians (Altheide 2006, 2009, 2017; LaFree 2009; Woods 2007, 2010).

This chapter explores the agenda setting (McCombs and Shaw 1993) role of mass media and political elites by examining the relationship between mass media and political elite attention to “Terrorism” as a topic, and the US public’s perception of Terrorism as a social problem facing the US. Specifically, I hypothesize that increased coverage of and attention to “terrorism” by

politicians and mass media will be associated with increased worry about terrorism as a problem facing the US, even when accounting for actual terrorist violence. I do this with a mixed-method analysis of Gallup's *Most Important Problem* survey, the newspaper articles about "terrorism" from Pro-Quest, and Presidential public remarks about "terrorism" from the American Presidency Project. Additionally, I examine other factors which may influence public opinion such as the number of terrorist attacks in the US, casualties resulting from terrorist attacks in the US, and the unemployment rate. Finally, I explore specific events which coincide with "peaks" in the trends of public worry about "Terrorism" as the Most Important Problem facing the US.

Politicians and mass media both play a central role in shaping the discussion surrounding terrorism and influencing public opinion (Altheide 2006, 2009, 2017; Woods 2007). In these conversations, Islamic radical groups such as Al Qaeda have dominated the thoughts of politicians and media narratives alike (Kunda 1999; Norris et al 2003; Papacharissi and Oliveira 2008; Nagar 2010; Powell 2011; Woods 2011, 2014). Consequently, "radical Islam" and "terrorism" have become practically interchangeable terms in the US discourse (ibid). Combatting these groups has also been the primary justification for the US-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the continued presence of US forces in the Middle East (LaFree 2009).

## **Background**

The relationship between the media, politics, and the public has been explored in many different disciplines and perspectives. Three works have been particularly influential in critical media studies and sociology: Edward Hermann and Noam Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988), Barry Glassner's *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans are Afraid of the Wrong Things* (2000, 2009), and David Altheide's *Terrorism and*



*the Politics of Fear* (2006, 2017). Taken together, these works assert that 1. Mass media is profit-driven and functions as propaganda and manipulates public opinion; 2. Politicians and mass media incite fear by overstating risks and directing the public's attention to particular topics; and 3. Politicians capitalize on fear to win office and pursue policy objectives. Altheide (2006, 2009) examined this process in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, highlighting how the fear of terrorism was instrumental in the passage of the USA PATRIOT Act and related legislation, restructuring of the US federal government, the continuing occupation of Afghanistan, and the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The second edition of *Terrorism and the Politics of Fear* (2017) also examines the emphasis on terrorism in the 2016 Presidential campaign, and support for then-candidate Trump's proposed ban on Muslim's entering the US.

Additionally, terrorism has been increasingly tied to domestic law enforcement issues (LaFree 2009) and immigration policy (Woods and Arthur 2014). And while Islamic radical groups are portrayed as primarily having anti-US grievances, criminological research suggests that they may have more significant local or regional grievances than those that they are purported to have against the United States (LaFree Yang, and Crenshaw 2009; Stern 2009). Moreover, most terrorist attacks occur in close geographical proximity to the operational base of the group. This means that the overwhelming majority of attacks against US interests by groups such as Al Qaeda occur abroad, not on US soil (LaFree, Yang, and Crenshaw 2009). Among terrorist groups with alleged anti-US stances and grievances, only 3 percent of attacks carried out actually targeted US interests (ibid).

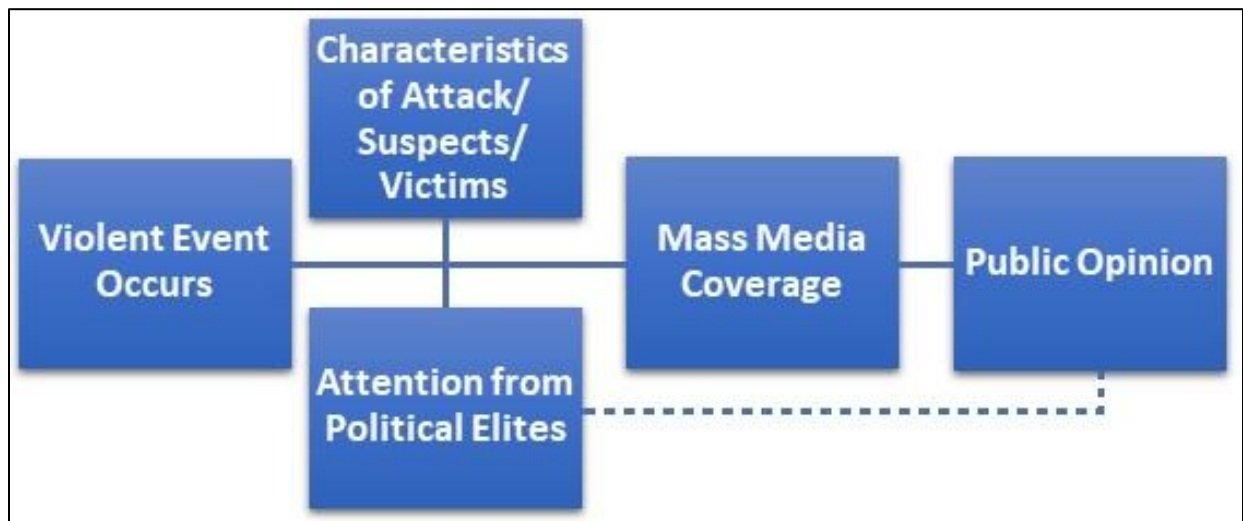
Currently, through a variety of methods, the literature has established that after the attacks of September 11, 2001 terrorism has been portrayed as the chief national security threat

by US policymakers and media outlets (Altheide 2006, 2009; LaFree 2009; Papacharissi and Oliveira 2008; Nagar 2010; Norris et al 2003; Powell 2011; Woods 2007, 2011; Woods and Arthur 2014). Additionally, this body of literature has found that “terrorism” has become almost exclusively associated with Islamic radicals, and that counterterrorism policy has increasingly been discussed alongside domestic law enforcement and immigration policy (ibid). Survey data and some peer reviewed studies have also demonstrated that gender, age, media exposure, and geographical location are all significant predictors of individuals’ fear of terrorism (Brück and Müller 2010; Nellis 2009, Nellis and Savage 2012; Woods et al 2008). Additionally, previous studies have suggested that societal elites and media coverage of terrorism may influence perceptions of risk more than actual terrorism incidents, similar to news coverage of crime (Altheide 2006, 2009; Clarke and Chess 2008; Nellis and Savage 2012; Woods 2007).

Within the context of US news media, the word terrorism itself is used to convey a specific threat that is distinct from common crimes or political upheaval (Kunda 1999). This specific threat has also been constantly framed as a “new” form of violence in US mass media (Norris et al. 2003). Similar to other crimes, terrorism is framed in a particular way in political and media communications. Political discourse, media portrayals, and popular sentiment associates terrorism almost exclusively with Islamic radicals, especially since the attacks of September 11, 2001 (Altheide 2006, 2009; Papacharissi and Oliveira 2008; Nagar 2010; Powell 2011; Woods 2011). However, the majority of terrorist acts executed in the United States are committed by internal actors rather than foreign aggressors. The FBI classifies approximately two-thirds of all terrorist plots between 1980 and 2001 as “domestic.” That figure rose to 95 percent between 2002 and 2005 (FBI 2005).

The “terrorism” label has both broad and specific implications when it is applied. Altheide (2006) found that terrorism goes beyond a simple narrative, rather when an incident is labelled as terrorism, it becomes the “definition of the situation”. This framing of violence creates a sense that all Americans are potential victims of evil terrorists, and the military are portrayed as our protectors against terrorist violence. Terrorists are portrayed as faceless clandestine actors who strike from the shadows, as a foreign threat to our way of life, they use weapons of mass destruction, and are almost exclusively shown as Muslim radicals in the modern era (Kunda 1999; Papacharissi and Oliveira 2008; Nagar 2010; Powell 2011; Woods 2011, 2014). The threat of terrorism is therefore both vague and specific at the same time, portrayed as a threatening outgroup, or an “other” which demands a swift military response.

**Figure 2.1 Theoretical Model – Influence of Violent Events on Politics, Mass Media, and Public Opinion**



Based on previous literature, I propose a theoretical model in which a violent event occurs, is discussed by politicians and mass media (the content of which is dependent on characteristics of the attack, suspect, and victims), and is then communicated to the public, influencing their perceptions of risk, visualized in figure 2.1. The public gets most of their

information about violent events from mass media. A violent event may be deemed terrorism under particular circumstances (e.g. if the suspect is Muslim). The public learns about events, and the language used to describe events, from mass media. Politicians may also draw attention to events and offer their own interpretations. This is typically mediated by mass media, however in the digital age politicians may also communicate directly with supporters. Information flow is broader now than ever before, and many people are directly or indirectly informed by internet sources that politicians and traditional mass media outlets don't control. In many cases, internet sources can respond very quickly to spread rumors, which traditional mass media and others may pick up. Misleading and false information can spread more widely than later corrections. Social media companies such as Google and Facebook, which are increasingly used as primary news sources for Americans (Mitchell, Holcomb, and Weisel 2016), have made attempts to mediate the flow of information on their platforms with varied degrees of success. The success of the Russian Intelligence US election interference campaigns of 2016 in spreading misinformation to the US public demonstrate the pitfalls of relying on social media for accurate information about world events (McCombie, Uhlmann and Morrison 2020). Ultimately, both traditional mass media and digital outlets act as a "filter" between events, politics, and the public with some more able to tailor the message presented to the public than others.

## **Data and Methods**

In this chapter, I analyze public opinion and perceptions of terrorism as a problem facing the US using monthly observations from a variety of data sources. I employ descriptive and bivariate statistics analyses, and qualitative interpretation of data and graphics. All data used in this chapter are either (a) publicly available, or (b) available through UNH Library subscription.

All data will either be available to the general public, reported in aggregate form, or sufficiently anonymized by the original organization. This data does not require an IRB application per UNH Policy. Table 2.1 reports variables and relevant descriptive statistics.

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**Table 2.1 Description of Variables – Monthly Observations**

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*Terrorism as Most Important Problem*: Percent of Respondents Identifying “Terrorism” as the Most Important Problem Facing the US from Gallup’s Most Important Problem Poll (N = 258)

Range: 0-24.24

Mean: 3.77

Std. Dev.: 5.32

Skewness: 1.91

*Terrorist Attacks in US*: Number of terrorist attacks in the US 1995-2016 from the Global Terrorism Database (N = 264)

Range: 0-13

Mean: 1.99

Std. Dev.: 2.36

Skewness: 2.03

*Terrorism casualties in US*: Number of US terrorism casualties 1995-2016 from the Global Terrorism Database (N = 264)

Range: 0-17840

Mean: 74.38

Std. Dev.: 1098.90

Skewness: 16.10

*Newspaper Articles about “Terrorism”*: Mean number of US newspaper articles about “terrorism” across six major US newspapers 1995-2016 from ProQuest (N = 264)

Range: 14-1180.33

Mean: 116.13

Std. Dev.: 130.32

Skewness: 4.98

*Presidential Remarks about “Terrorism”*: Number of Presidential public remarks about “terrorism” 1995-2016 from American Presidency Project (N = 259)

Range: 0-53

Mean: 10.93

Std. Dev.: 7.92

Skewness: 1.86

*Unemployment Rate*: Percent of workers counted as “unemployed” 1995-2016 from US Bureau of Labor Statistics (N = 264)

Range: 3.8-10

Mean: 5.92

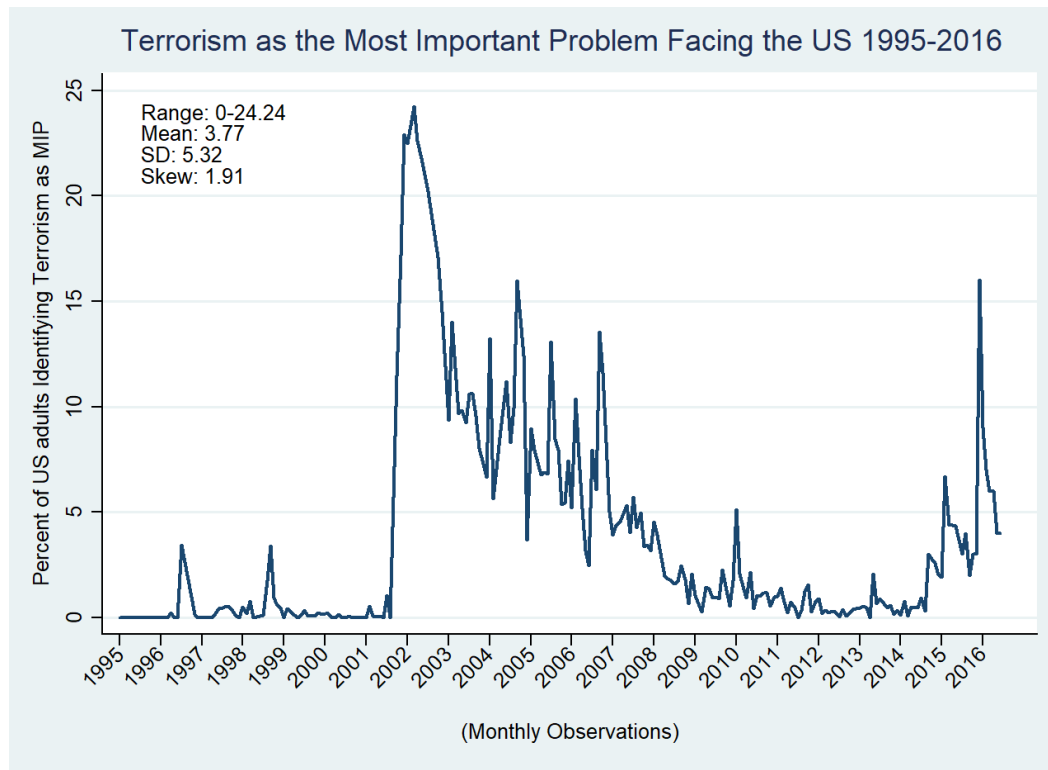
Std. Dev.: 1.66

Skewness: 1.08

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*Gallup's Most Important Problem (MIP)* In September 1935 Gallup began asking American citizens about the “most important problem” facing the nation and the question has appeared on almost 200 Gallup surveys since (Smith 1985). According to Smith (1985:264), “the most important problem question provides a grand overview of social change, describes history from the perspective of the participants, and helps to define distinct historical periods and identify turning points.” Although the wording has varied, the MIP question has asked, “*What are your chief worries these days – what things bother or upset you the most? What do you fear the most?*” or “*What bothers you or angers you the most about America today?*” Respondents are then asked to rank-order a list of possible problems in both foreign and domestic affairs. Included in the list of domestic problems are economic issues ranging from inflation and unemployment to job concerns, trade, and labor (Smith 1985). The MIP variable records the average yearly percentage of individuals ranking economic concerns as the most important problem facing the US. Figure 2.2 graphs the monthly percent of respondents selecting terrorism as the most important problem. This graph shows a mean of 3.8 percent of respondents reporting terrorism as the most important problem facing the US. This figure also shows a skew of 1.9 with a minimum of 0 percent, and a maximum of 24.2 percent reporting terrorism as the most important problem facing the US. The high spike in late 2001-early 2002, of course, reflects the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon 9/11. A secondary spike in 2016 reflects high-profile ISIL-related attacks in Paris, France, San Bernardino, California, and Brussels, Belgium.

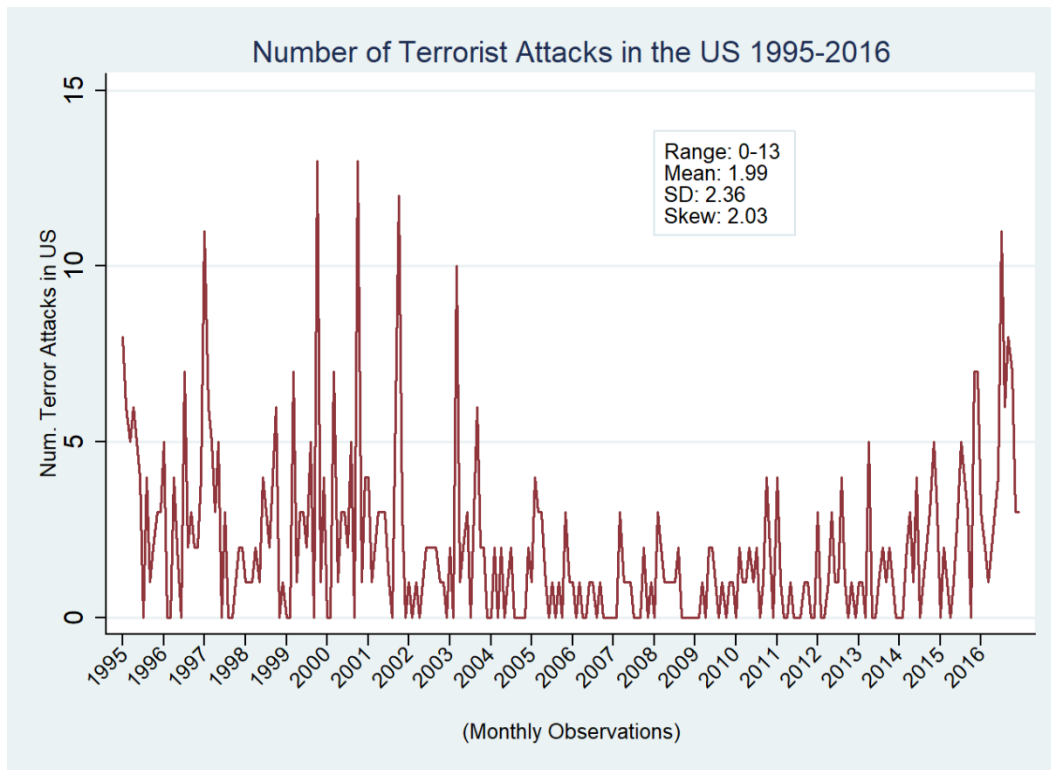
**Figure 2.2 Monthly Percent of Respondents Saying Terrorism is the Most Important Problem Facing the US (Gallup) 1995-2016**



*The Global Terrorism Database (GTD)* collects detailed information about terrorist incidents, and currently includes over 100,000 incidents worldwide. Data is collected on the perpetrators, attack type, weapons used, target, location, date, casualties, and more. This also includes a description of the event, and up to three news stories referencing the incident. Figure 2.3 graphs the number of terrorist attacks per month in the US from 1995-2016. This graph shows averages of 1.99 attacks, with a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 13 attacks in a month. From this graph, more terrorist attacks occurred between 1995 and 2003, terrorist attacks decreased in frequency from 2004 to 2014, and dramatically increased again in 2015-2016. Figure 2.4 graphs the number of terrorism casualties – both fatalities and wounded – per month in the US from 1995-2016 using an ordinal measure for ease of interpretation. This graph shows

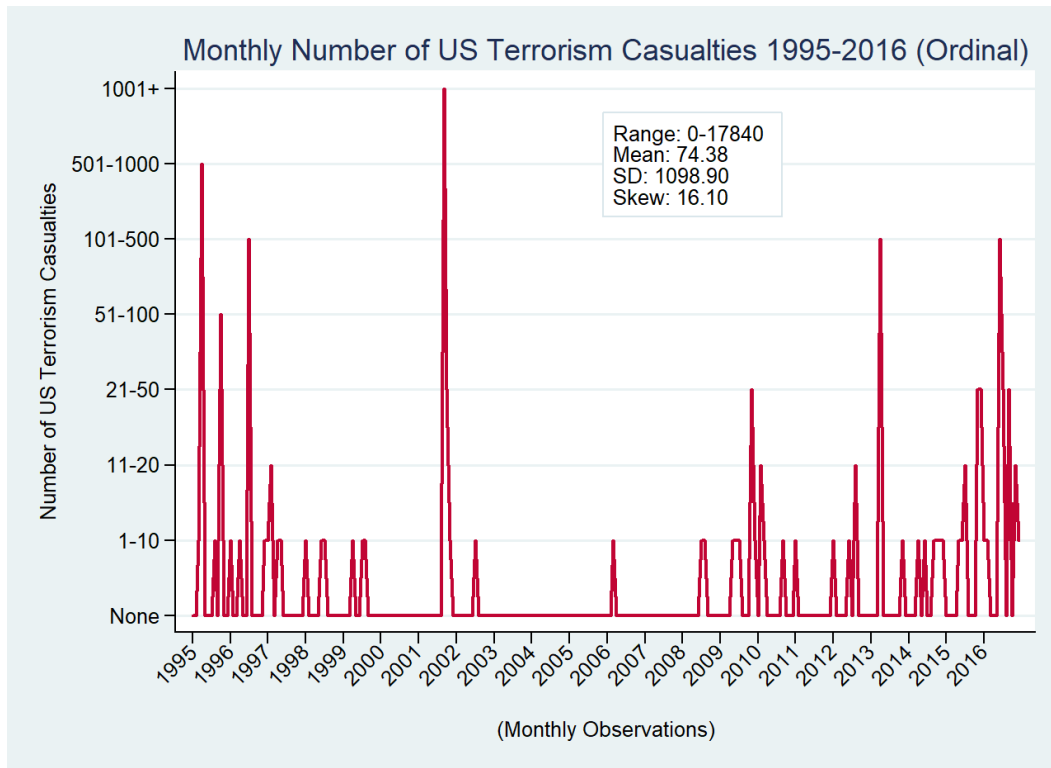
a mean of 74.4 terrorism casualties in the US per month. The number of terrorism casualties in the US per month is extremely skewed at 16.1, with a minimum number of casualties of 0 and a maximum 17,840 terrorism casualties in a month: September 2001. The second highest casualty terrorist event is the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. Other notable, high-casualty terrorist attacks in the US include: the 1996 Centennial Olympic Park bombing; the 2009 Fort Hood shooting; the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombing; 2015 San Bernardino ISIL-Inspired attacks; and 2016 Pulse Nightclub shooting.

**Figure 2.3 Number of Terrorist Attacks in the US 1995-2016 (Global Terrorism Database)**





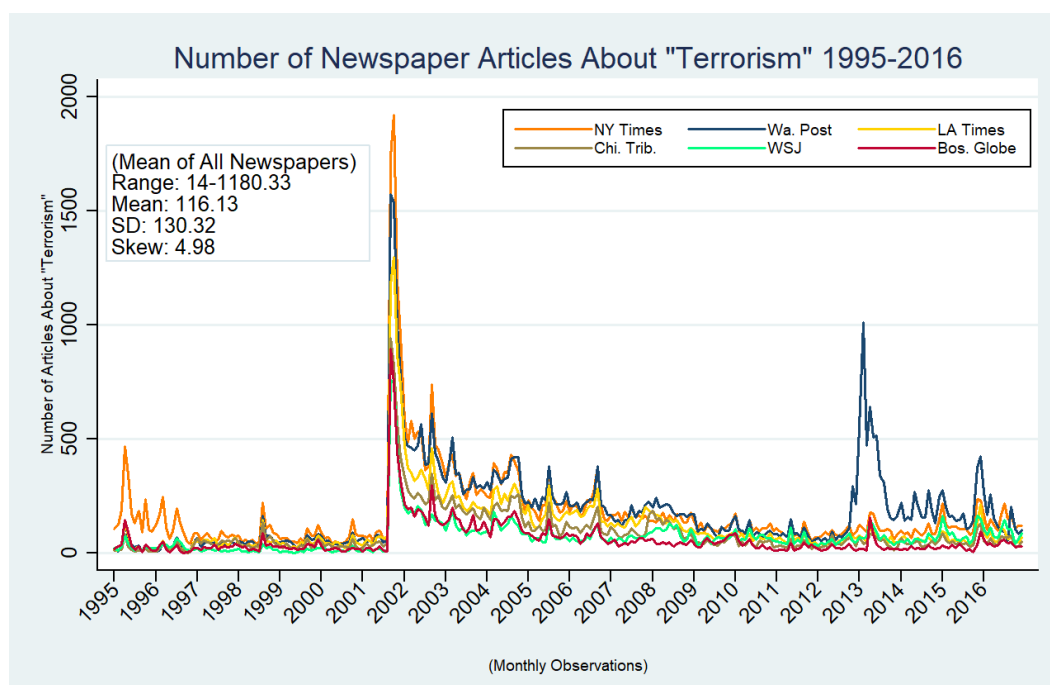
**Figure 2.4 Number of Terrorist Attack Casualties in the US (Ordinal) 1995-2016 (Global Terrorism Database)**



*ProQuest* and *Nexis Uni* Are search engines that allow users to search print news articles and broadcast transcripts from around the world. Sampling is possible by searching for keywords in broadcast transcripts. Monthly counts of news article about terrorism in newspapers such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Fox News*, etc. can provide an estimate of how much attention news organizations are devoting to terrorism. Figure 2.5 graphs the number of newspaper articles about “Terrorism” per month from 1995-2016 for six major US newspapers: The *New York Times*; *Washington Post*; *Los Angeles Times*; *Chicago Tribune*; *Wall St. Journal*; and the *Boston Globe*. The mean number of articles per month for all six papers is 116.1, with a minimum of 14 and maximum of 1180.3 mean articles per month. A spike in reporting is seen starting in 1995, especially in the *NY Times*, representing coverage of the 1995 Oklahoma City Bombing. The largest spike corresponds with the September 11, 2001 attacks. The spike in

articles in the Washington Post during 2012/2013 primarily reflects increased news coverage of the 2012 Benghazi attacks and subsequent congressional hearings, as well as coverage of the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombing. The subsequent, smaller spike in late 2015 reflects coverage of the ISIL-related Paris and San Bernardino attacks.

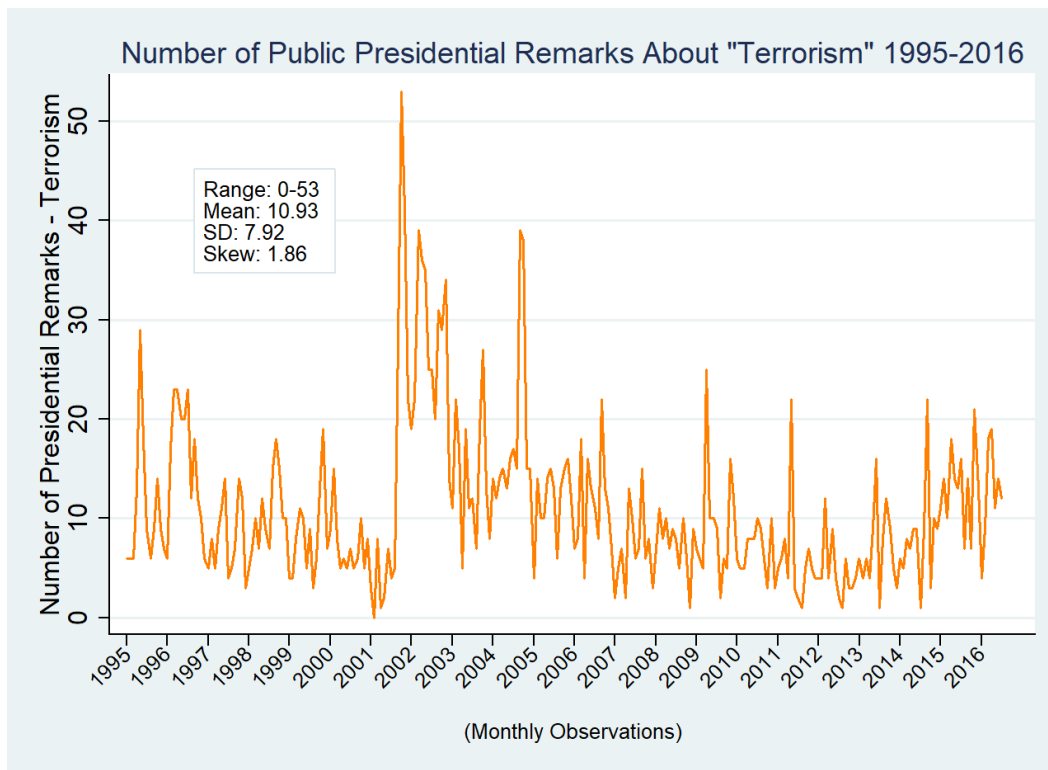
**Figure 2.5 Number of Newspaper Articles About “Terrorism” 1995-2016 (ProQuest: NY Times, Washington Post, LA Times, Chicago Trib., Wall St. Journal, Boston Globe)**



*The American Presidency Project* is a publicly accessible collection of over 110,000 communications transcripts including letters, documents, and public remarks made by the President of the United States. Time periods of document coverage range from 1789 to present day (Woolley and Peters 2019). The dataset was founded as a collaborative project by John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters of the University of California, Santa Barbara. The number of presidential remarks discussing terrorism during a certain time period can provide an estimation of how much attention political institutions are devoting to terrorism. Figure 2.6 graphs the

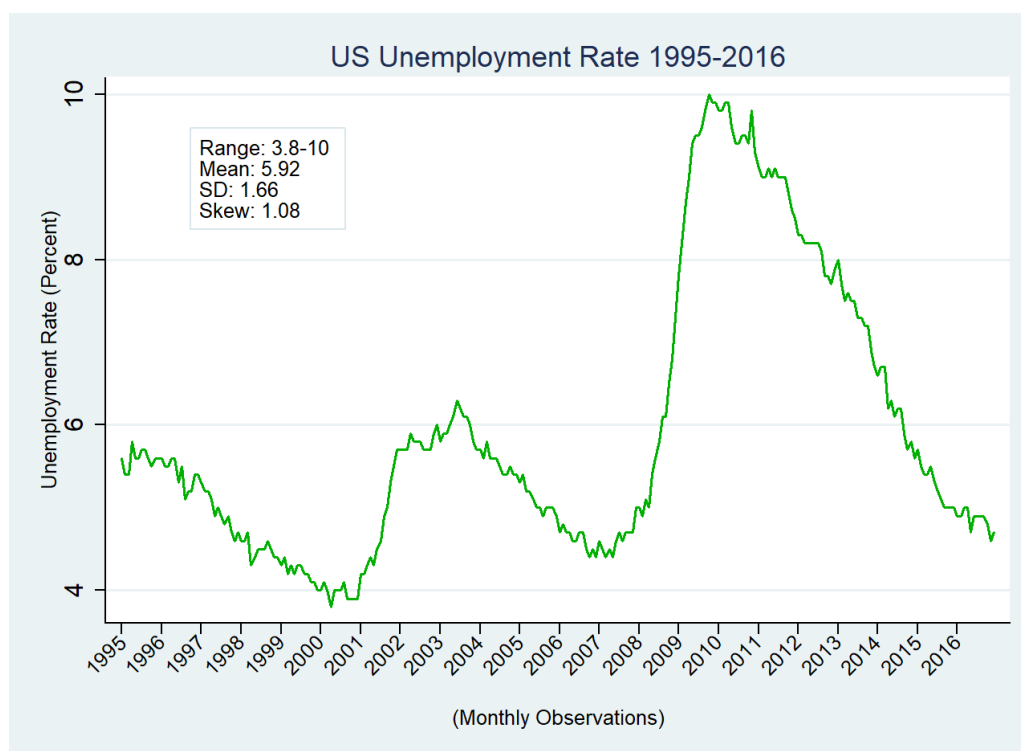
number of Presidential public remarks about “terrorism” from 1995-2016. This graph shows a spike during President Clinton’s tenure reflecting the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing and 1996 Centennial Olympic Park Bombing. President Bush’s term shows a particularly large spike following the September 11, 2001 attacks, with a subsequent spike reflecting the 2004 Beslan School Siege and his 2004 reelection campaign. President Obama’s tenure saw spikes in 2009 which correspond to shooting at military recruitment centers in Arkansas, the National Holocaust Museum shooting, the FT Hood shooting, and attempted underwear bombing of an airliner. Additional spikes in 2011 correspond with the killing of Osama bin Laden by Seal Team Six in 2011, the rise to prominence of ISIL in Iraq and Syria in 2014, and the 2015 Paris and San Bernardino ISIL-related attacks.

**Figure 2.6 Number of Presidential Remarks about “Terrorism” 1995-2016 (American Presidency Project)**



The *Unemployment Rate* data for each month is sourced from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. Officially, the *unemployment rate* is a measure of persons actively seeking gainful employment as a percentage of all workers in the United States. As defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, “persons are classified as unemployed if they do not have a job, have actively looked-for work in the prior 4 weeks, and are currently available for work. Persons who were not working and were waiting to be recalled to a job from which they had been temporarily laid off are also included as unemployed. Receiving benefits from the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program has no bearing on whether a person is classified as unemployed.” (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019). Figure 2.7 graphs the US unemployment rate from 1995-2016, showing a mean of 5.92 percent, minimum of 3.8 percent and maximum of 10 percent unemployment in each month. This graph also shows prominently the 2008 recession, which is responsible for the 10 percent unemployment rate high.

**Figure 2.7 US Unemployment Rate 1995-2016 (Bureau of Labor Statistics)**



## Analysis

Based on the graphics produced in Figures 2.2-2.7, Terrorism as the Most Important Problem appears to be most influenced by the September 11, 2001 attacks, and increases again following the ISIL-Related attacks in Europe and North America in 2015. News coverage of “terrorism” and Presidential remarks about “terrorism” follow a similar pattern. The number of terrorist attacks in the US increased slightly from 1995-2000, declined from 2001-2005, and began to increase again around 2013. The number of terrorism casualties (including dead and wounded) rose from 1995 to 2001. This has a first peak in the 1995 Oklahoma City Bombing, which resulted in over 500 casualties, and then a second peak in the September 11, 2001 attacks with nearly 3000 fatalities, and thousands more wounded directly and indirectly. Terrorism casualties and the overall number of incidents in the US dropped dramatically after 2001 until about 2014. After 2014, casualties and incidents began to increase again as US politics became increasingly contentious, and the Islamic State (ISIL) group began to inspire terrorist attacks around the world. While this partly mirrors overall violent crime statistics in the US, anti-police and ISIL-related attacks spiked in 2015 and 2016. Not included in this data set is a subsequent spike in White Nationalist/White Supremacist terrorist attacks in 2017 and 2018<sup>3</sup>.

Prior to the Oklahoma City Bombing, Gallup’s Most Important Problem survey was not coded for “Terrorism” as an answer. Following this attack, researchers began to include “Terrorism” as an option. From 1995 to 2000, only two small spikes in July 1996 (from 0% to 3.4%) and September 1998 (0.1% to 3.4%) occurred. These correspond to the Centennial Olympic Park Bombing in Atlanta, GA, and the bombings of US Diplomatic Facilities in East

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<sup>3</sup> For more information, visit the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s 2018 Hate Crime Statistics reports at <https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2018>

Africa by Al Qaeda. The biggest spike in Terrorism as the Most Important Problem Occurred following the September 11, 2001 attacks. Between August 2001 and March 2003, the percent of respondents identifying “terrorism” as the most important problem increases from approximately 0 percent to 24.24 percent, marking the highest observed increase in US history. Perception of Terrorism as the Most Important Problem declined after March 2003, with a few notable spikes.

Between August 2007 and January 2015, Terrorism as the Most Important Problem remained under 5 percent monthly, with the exception of a spike to 5.13 percent in January 2010, following an attempted airline bombing using explosives smuggled in underwear. In 2015, the public’s attention returned to terrorism following the rise of the groups Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Following attacks in Paris and San Bernardino in November and December 2015, Terrorism as the Most Important Problem increased again to approximately 16 percent.

Table 2.2 reports correlation coefficients between variables (Pearson’s  $r$ ) and statistical significance. Bivariate statistics reveal support for the proposed path model. Terrorist incidents in the US are somewhat positively and significantly correlated with Presidential remarks ( $r=.122$ ), but not Terrorism as MIP. Terrorism casualties in the US are strongly positively and significantly correlated with both Newspaper articles ( $r=.507$ ) and somewhat positively correlated and significant with Presidential remarks ( $r=.136$ ) but not Terrorism as MIP. Terrorism as the MIP is strongly positively and significantly correlated with Newspaper articles ( $r=.650$ ) and Presidential remarks ( $r=.634$ ), and somewhat negatively and significantly correlated with the Unemployment rate ( $r= -.148$ ). Additionally, to account for delays between events and changes in public opinion, Terrorism as MIP with a 1-month lag was also examined. With a 1-month lag, Terrorism as MIP is strongly positively and significantly correlated with Newspaper

articles ( $r=.722$ ) and Presidential remarks ( $r=.646$ ). Due to non-normality in measures and differences between predicted values and observed values, more sophisticated statistical and Time-Series analyses such as ARIMA are not possible at this time. Figures 2.8-2.12 visually compare trends and correlations in terrorism as the most important problem and independent variables.

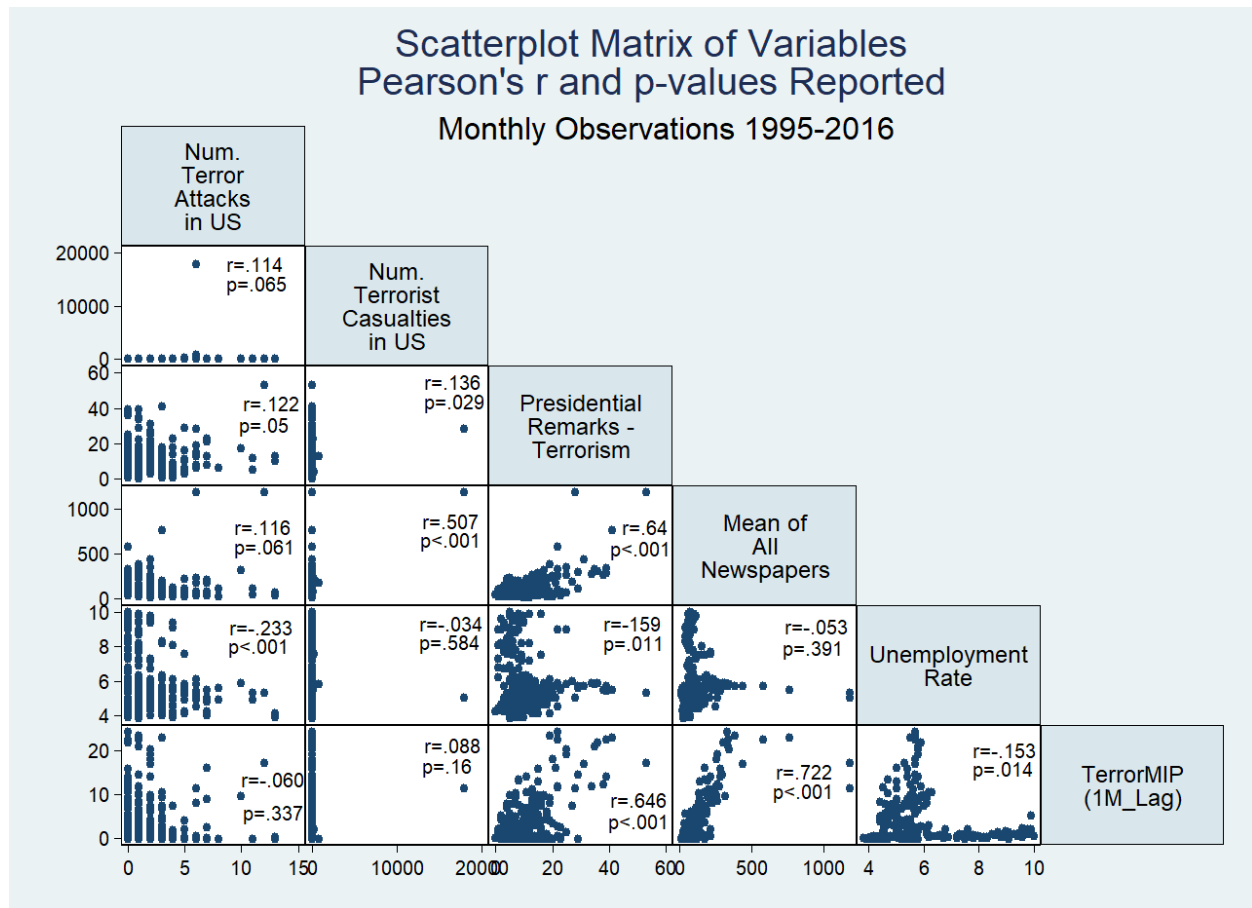
**Table 2.2 Correlation Matrix (Pearson's  $r$ ) with Statistical Significance**

	Num. US Terror Attacks	Num. US Terror Casualties	Num. Presidential Remarks	Num. Newspaper Articles	Unemploy- ment Rate	Terror MIP (1 mo. lag)
<b>Num. US Terror Attacks</b>	1.0	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Num. US Terror Casualties</b>	.144	1.0	-	-	-	-
<b>Num. Presidential Remarks</b>	.122*	.136*	1.0	-	-	-
<b>Num. Newspaper Articles</b>	.116	.507***	.64***	1.0	-	-
<b>Unemployment Rate</b>	-.223***	.034	-.159*	-.053	1.0	-
<b>TerrorMIP (1 mo. lag)</b>	.060	.088	.646***	.722***	-.153*	1.0

\* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$ , \*\*\* $p<.001$

Figure 2.8 visually depicts the correlations shown in Table 2.2. The low correlation coefficients between Terrorism as the Most Important Problem and the number of terrorist attacks in the US, as well as number of terrorist casualties in the US is demonstrated by the lack of clear trend lines in either correlation. Those that do have significant correlation coefficients with Terrorism as the Most Important Problem – the number of presidential remarks about terrorism, number of newspaper articles about terrorism, and the unemployment rate, do show scatterplot relationships. However, the scatterplot also shows that these relationships, even when relatively linear, are oddly shaped. Even the highest correlation coefficient between Terrorism as the Most Important Problem and Mean Number of Newspaper Articles ( $r=.722$ ;  $p<.001$ ) shows several outliers in the scatterplot.

**Figure 2.8 Scatterplot Matrix of Variables**

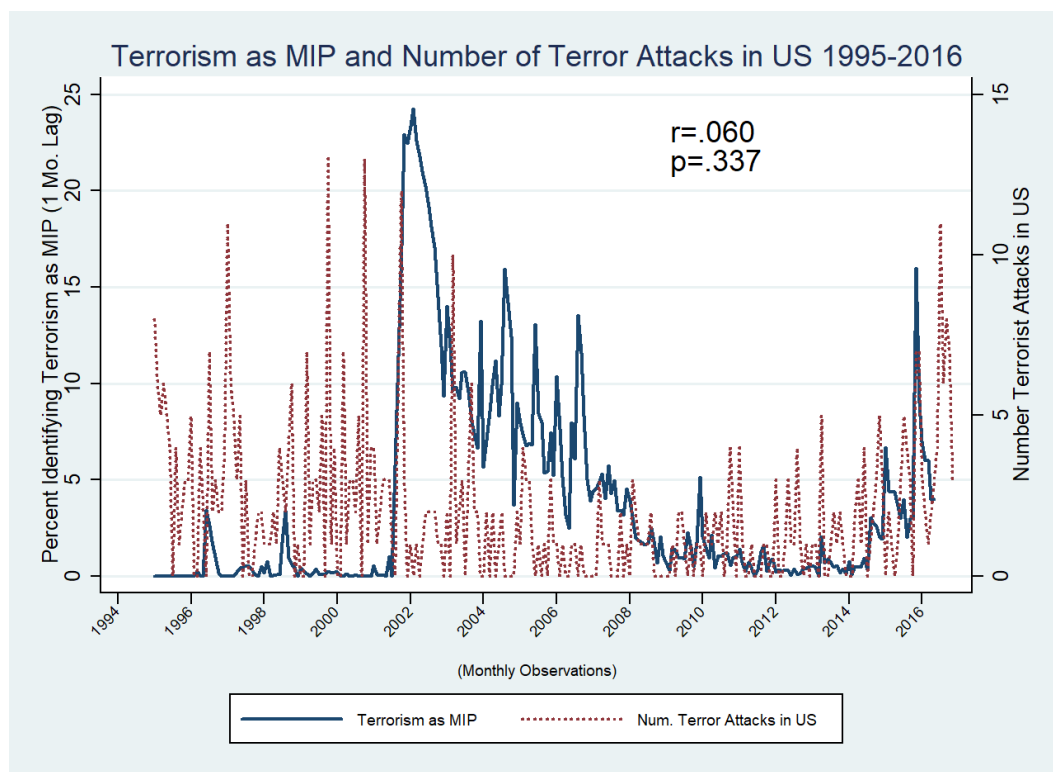


Figures 2.9 through 2.13 graph trend lines of terrorist incidents in the US, terrorist casualties in the US, newspaper articles about “terrorism”, presidential remarks about “terrorism” and the unemployment rate against the percent of US adults identifying “terrorism” as the most important problem facing the US monthly from 1995-2016. These graphs also visually show the strength of associations between measures. For example, both Figures 2.9 and 2.10 show weak, not statistically significant correlations of the number of terrorist attacks ( $r=0.060$ ) and number of terrorist casualties in the US ( $r=0.88$ ), respectively, with the percent of

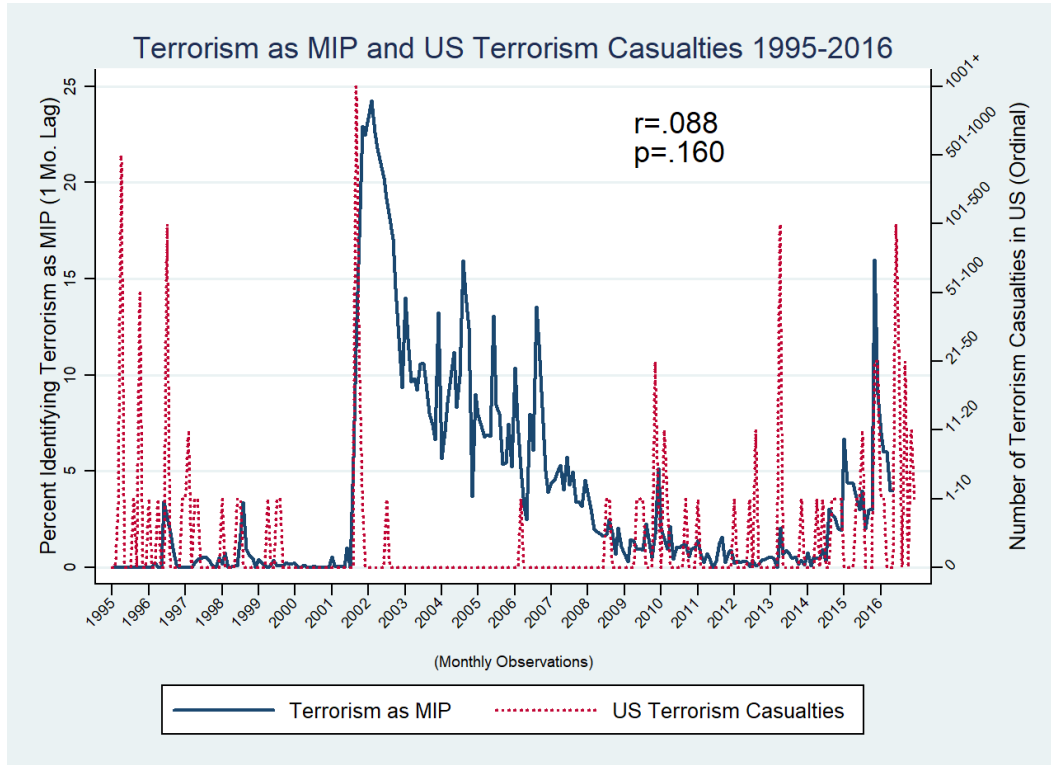


respondents who identify “terrorism” as the most important problem facing the US. These weak relationships suggest that the US public is not simply responding to the occurrence of terrorist events, or the lethality of terrorist events when they report how concerned they are about terrorism.

**Figure 2.9** Terror as MIP (1 Mo. Lag) and Number of Terror Attacks in US Overlay

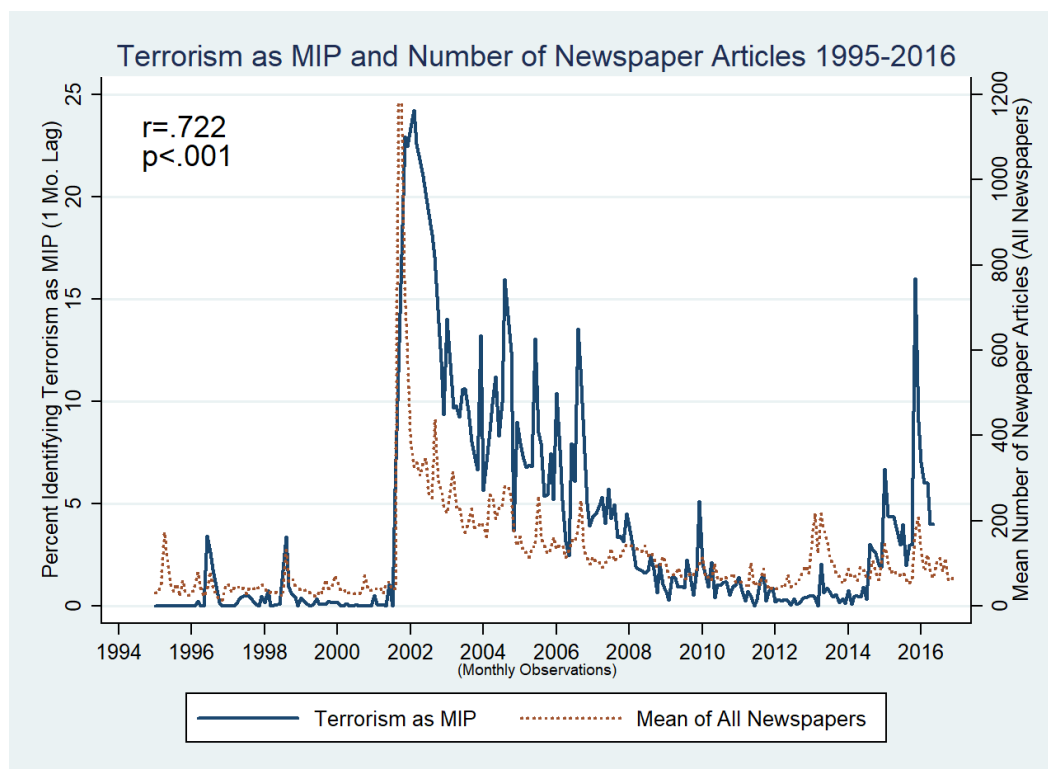


**Figure 2.10 Terrorism as MIP (1 Mo. Lag) and US Terrorism Casualties (Ordinal) Overlay**



Figures 2.11 and 2.12 show support for the agenda setting power of mass media and political elites. Elite cues, as shown here through newspaper articles and presidential public remarks, are the most highly correlated with the percent of respondents identifying “terrorism” as the most important problem facing the US. Graphed in Figure 2.11, the mean number of newspaper articles across six major US newspapers has a very strong positive correlation of .722 which is statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). This means that as the number of newspaper articles per month about “terrorism” increases, so does the percentage of respondents identifying “terrorism” as the most important problem increase.

**Figure 2.11 Terrorism as MIP (1 Mo. Lag) and Mean of Newspaper Articles Overlay**



Similarly, Figure 2.12 graphs the number of Presidential public remarks about “terrorism” against the percent of respondents identifying “terrorism” as the most important problem facing the US, showing a statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), fairly strong positive correlation ( $r = .646$ ). Essentially, as the number of Presidential public remarks about “terrorism” increases, so to do the percent of respondents identifying “terrorism” as the most important problem facing the US. Much of this may be accounted for by the large spikes following the September 11, 2001 attacks, however these correlations do find evidence to support the key role that societal elites and mass media outlets play in shaping the public’s perceptions about terrorism. Interestingly, as shown previously in Table 2.2 and Figure 2.8, the number of newspaper articles about “terrorism” and the number of Presidential public remarks about “terrorism” are fairly strongly and positively correlated with each other ( $r = .64$ ,  $p < .001$ ) as well.

As one increases, so does the other. This lends some support to the path model proposed in Figure 2.1.

**Figure 2.12 Terrorism as MIP (1 Mo. Lag) and Number of Presidential Remarks Overlay**

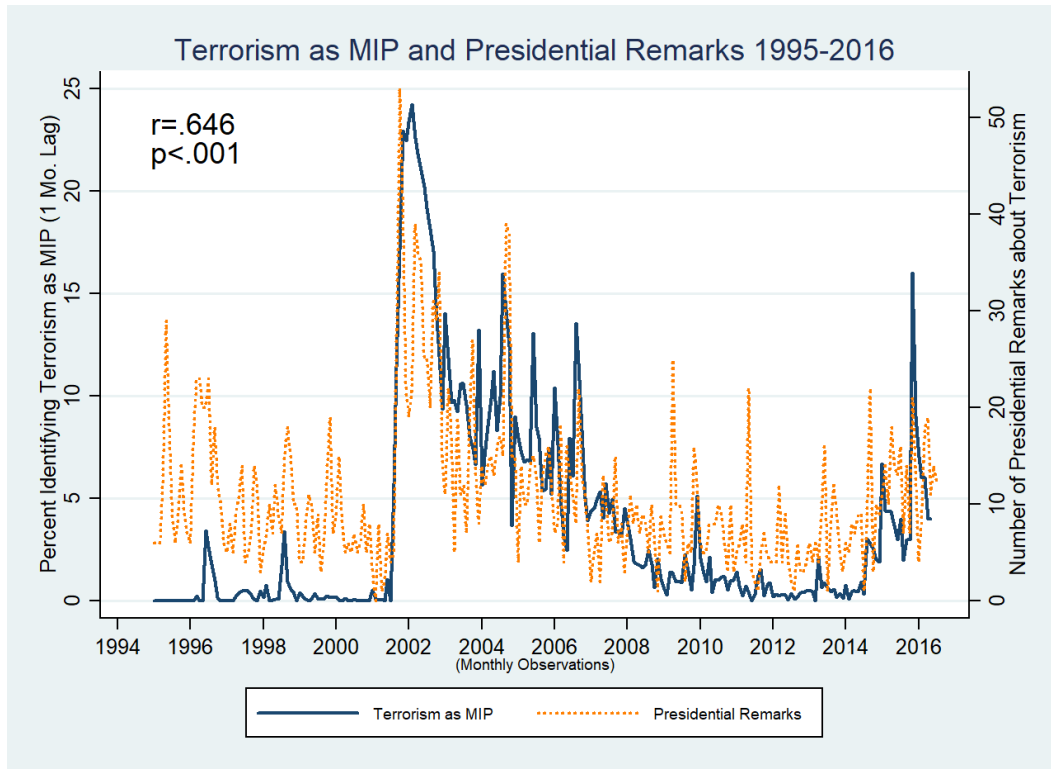
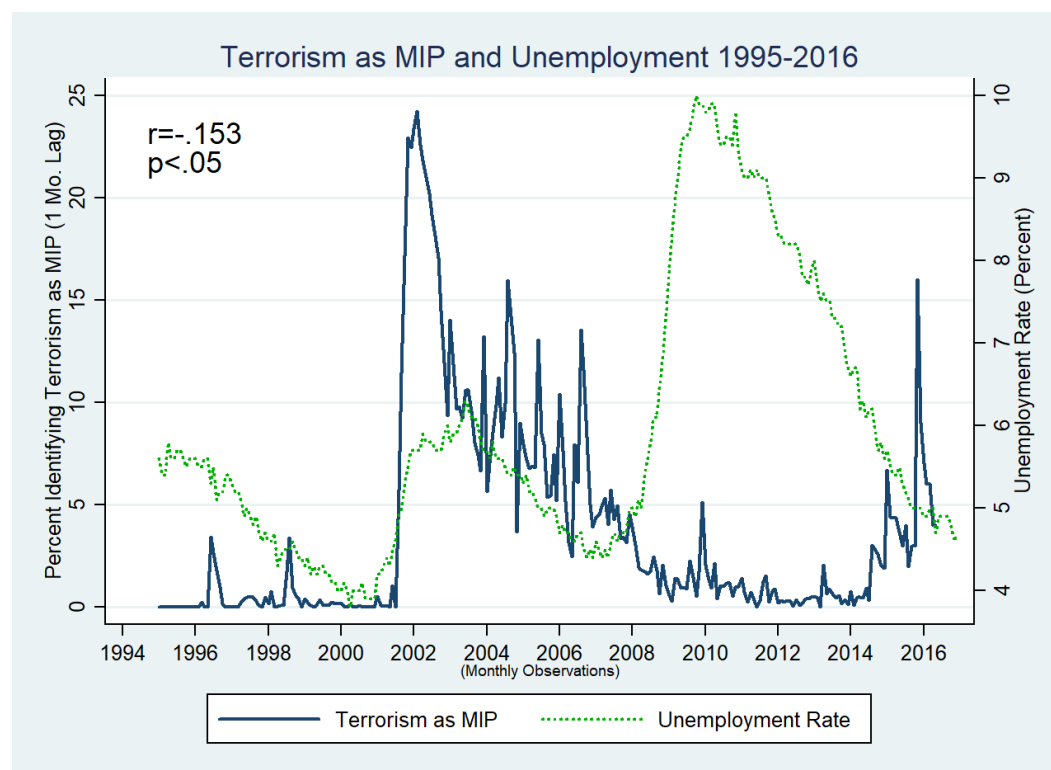


Figure 2.13 graphs the monthly US unemployment rate against the percent of respondents identifying “terrorism” as the most important problem facing the US from 1995-2016. These measures have a statistically significant and negative relationship ( $r = -.153$ ,  $p < .0\%$ ) albeit the correlation coefficient is weak. This means that as the unemployment rate increases, the percent of respondents identifying “terrorism” as the most important problem decreases. This is likely the result of immediate economic concerns associated with high unemployment overriding all other perceived social problems. Once our ability to put food on the table is threatened, all other concerns are secondary, as day to day survival takes precedence. The 2007/2008 global economic recession likely contributed to the relatively low percent of respondent’s identifying

“terrorism” as the most important problem between 2007 and 2014, despite counterterrorism remaining a priority for the US government during this period.

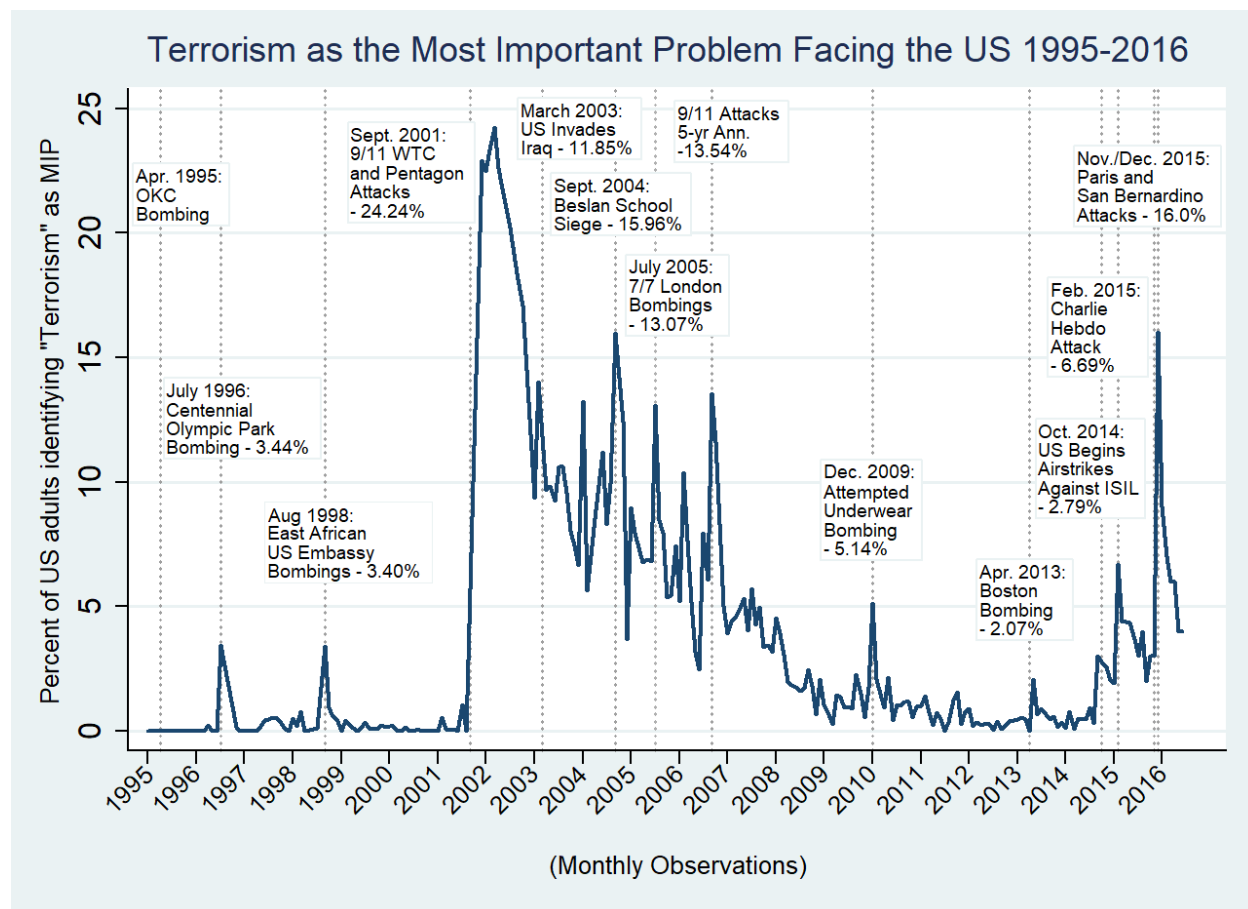
**Figure 2.13 Terrorism as MIP (1 Mo. Lag) and Unemployment Rate Overlay**



Again, Figure 2.14 graphs the percent of respondents indicating “terrorism” as the most important problem facing the US from 1995-2016, with markers added relating spikes in the trend line to specific incidents which occurred around the same time. Fourteen key events which correspond to peaks in the trend were identified from the Global Terrorism Database. These include: the 1995 Oklahoma City Bombing; the 1996 Centennial Olympic Park Bombing; the 1998 US Embassy Bombings in Kenya; the September 11, 2001 attacks, the build up to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, the 2004 Beslan School Siege; the 2005 7/7 London Bombings; the five-year anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks; the 2010 attempted “underwear bombing”; the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombing; the beginning of US airstrikes against ISIL in Iraq in 2014, the

2015 Charlie Hebdo Attack; 2015 Paris Attack by ISIL, and 2015 San Bernardino Attack by ISIL-inspired individuals.

**Figure 2.14 Terrorism as MIP and Major Events**



## Discussion

Of the fourteen events which correspond to peaks in the trend line of the percent of respondents who identify “terrorism” as the most important problem facing the US, ten are terrorist attacks. The most notable of these attacks are the September 11, 2001 attacks by Al Qaeda, and the 2015 ISIL-Related attacks in Paris, France and San Bernardino, CA. All but two attacks were carried out by Islamic Radicals. Two were carried out by far-right

organizations/individuals. Below is a description of the ten terrorist events which are associated with peaks in the graph in Figure 2.14.

On the morning of April 19, 1995, the deadliest domestic terror attack in the US occurred when a truck bomb of more than 300 pounds of fertilizer-based explosives detonated outside the Alfred P. Murrah building in Oklahoma City, OK. The OKC Bombing, as it is commonly known, resulted in 168 fatalities and approximately 650 wounded (see GTD Incident 199504190004). Timothy McVeigh was eventually convicted of the bombing, saying the bombing was in retaliation for what he perceived as government overreach in its handling of the Branch Davidian standoff at Waco, TX, and the standoff at Ruby Ridge, ID. McVeigh, who was known to associate with individual of various far-right ideologies, was executed for the bombing in 2001. The bombing resulted in renewed attention to terrorism by academics and the US Government and Law Enforcement agencies. Just over a year after the bombing, President Clinton signed the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act into law. The law was partly designed to give law enforcement agencies greater authority in counterterrorism investigations and also adopted harsher punishments for individuals convicted of terrorism.

In July of 1996, Eric Rudolf, a member of the far-right organization Army of God planted and detonated a pipe-bomb at the Centennial Olympic Park in Atlanta, GA. The bombing resulted in the death of 1 victim and wounding of an additional 111, including several law enforcement officers (see GTD Incident 199607270003). Authorities famously mistook the individual who found and reported the explosive device for the perpetrator. Eric Rudolf was apprehended years later in North Carolina, and subsequently convicted of the bombing.

In August of 1998, Al Qaeda operative conducted coordinated attacks against the US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The US Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya was attacked by suicide bombers who detonated a truck bomb outside. The truck bomb killed 12 Americans claimed the lives of 224 victims in total. It is estimated that an additional 4000 people were wounded in the attack. The attack in Tanzania also involved a vehicular bomb. Suicide bombers detonated explosives outside the US Embassy in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, killing 11 people and wounding 85 more (see GTD Incidents 199808070002, 199808070003).

On the Morning of September 11, 2001, nineteen members of the terrorist organization Al Qaeda, mostly from Saudi Arabia and Egypt, hijacked four planes with the intent of crashing them into the World Trade Center in New York, The Pentagon Arlington, VA, and the US Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. Three of the four attacks were successful. The planes bound for New York destroyed the World Trade Center, killing approximate 2,770 people, and wounding over 21,000 more victims. The plane bound for Arlington was successful in striking the Pentagon, which resulted in approximately 190 fatalities and another 106 wounded. The fourth plane, bound for Washington D.C., was forced down over Shanksville, PA and resulted in at least 44 deaths and 9 additional wounded. Commonly known as the September 11, 2001 attacks, or simply 9/11 attacks, the attacks carried out by Al Qaeda are the deadliest terrorist incidents in history (see GTD Incidents 200109110004, 200109110005, 200109110006, 200109110007). The effects of the 9/11 attacks on both the US and the world are profound and continue nearly twenty years later. Most notably, the USA PATRIOT Act and related legislation are still largely in effect today, and the Global War on Terror has resulted in the continued presence of US Troops in Middle Eastern conflicts.



In September of 2004, a large group of Chechen and Ingush rebels, estimated to be between 30 and 35 in number, seized control of a school in Beslan, Russia. The suspects took approximately 1200 children, parents, and teachers hostage in the school gym. The standoff and subsequent confrontation with Russian police and military forces resulted in at least 344 deaths and over 727 additional wounded (see GTD Incident 200409010002).

In July of 2005, Al Qaeda operatives carried out a series of attacks commonly known as the London 7/7 Bombings. Four suicide bombers detonated explosives aboard four different trains in London at approximately the same time. These attacks killed 56 People and wounded at least 784 more (see GTD Incidents 200507070001, 200507070002, 200507070003, 200507070004). These bombings were the deadliest terrorist attacks in the UK since the end of the Northern Ireland conflict in 1998.

Attempted Underwear Bombing. 25 December 2009. A Nigerian national associated with Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) attempted to detonate an explosive device on Northwest Flight 253 from Amsterdam to Detroit. The explosive device failed; however, an intervening passenger was wounded in an altercation (see GTD Incident 200912250024). The attempted bombing was subsequently used as justification for use of controversial body scanners in US airports.

A series of attacks from 15-19 April 2013 in Massachusetts commonly known as the Boston Marathon Bombing were carried out by brothers Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. The brothers were immigrants from the Dagestan region of Russia, a predominantly Muslim area that was highly impacted by the Chechen wars. The initial incident involved setting off improvised explosives near the finish line of the 2013 Boston Marathon, killing 3 and wounding at least 132

others. The brothers later killed an MIT police officer, and a subsequent bombing attempt was thwarted by police. A gunfight between police and the suspects resulted in the death of Tamerlan, Tsarnaev and 16 additional injuries. One of the responding officers later died from wounds sustained. Dzhokhar Tsarnaev was apprehended after surrendering to police shortly thereafter (see GTD Incidents 201304150001, 201304150002, 201304180001, 201304190009).

Responsibility for the Charlie Hebdo attack of January 2015 was claimed by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and carried out by two assailants who were born and raised in France: Cherif and Said Kouachi. The attack was carried out as revenge for the paper's depiction of the Prophet Muhammad in a political comic and resulted in 11 deaths and another 11 wounded, including the suspects (see GTD Incident 201501070001).

On November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015, a series of coordinated attacks were carried out in Paris, France, and the Paris suburb Saint Denis. A total of 13 assailants trained by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL, killed 137 people and wounded at least 413 more in eight highly organized attacks. This included a suicide bombing at Comptoir Voltaire restaurant, a bombing and shooting in Bataclan concert hall which killed 93 and wounded 217, as well as shootings at the terrace of La Belle Equipe bar Cafe Bonne Biere, Le Carillon and Le Petit Cambodge restaurants, all in Paris, and three suicide bombers at a football (soccer) match in the Paris suburb of Saint Denis near the Stade de France. This was the deadliest series of terrorist attacks ever in France and was intended as retaliation for US led allied airstrikes against ISIL in Iraq and Syria (see GTD Incidents 201511130002-201511120009).

San Bernardino attack by ISIL-Inspired individuals Syed Rizwan Farook, a US-born Pakistani-American and Tashfeen Malik, a naturalized US citizen from Pakistan used firearms

and explosives in an assault against coworkers which ended in a pursuit and shootout with police. 16 people were killed in the incident, including the suspects, and another 17 were wounded in the attack (see GTD Incident 201512020012). The ISIL-Related attacks in Paris and San Bernardino prompted Donald Trump's proposal of a "Muslim Ban" to combat terrorism.

The data analyzed in this chapter generally support the previous theoretical and empirical literature examining the relationship between mass media and public perceptions of terrorism. It does appear that mass media coverage and attention from politicians has the strongest correlation with Terrorism as the Most Important Problem. This supports both the *Agenda Setting* and *Elite Cues* theories of media effects and public opinion. I also find support for theories which assert that societal elites and media coverage of terrorism influences perceptions of risk more than actual terrorism incidents, similar to news coverage of crime (Altheide 2006, 2009; Clarke and Chess 2008; Nellis and Savage 2012; Woods 2007).

Additionally, qualitative evidence examining trends in the public perception of terrorism as the most important problem facing the US points to the importance of key events in shaping public opinion. The two major spikes in the data following the September 11, 2001 attacks and 2015 ISIL-Related attacks demonstrate that first, public perceptions of terrorism in the US were permanently altered following the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, and second, that the public does appear to respond with greater fear and worry to attacks carried out by Radical Islamic groups than those carried out by individuals and groups with other ideologies.

In the case of the most important problem, I find evidence that both the President and prominent news outlets exert an influence on the public's perception of social problems facing the US, and that they influence each other. Politics and mass media are key in telling us what a

social problem is and controlling the broad conversation. This supports both a model of power articulated by Mills (1956) and Hermann and Chomsky (1988) propaganda model of mass media. This states that media is used by social elites that build support for policy objectives among the public. This was written as a rebuttal to the popular notion that mass media is often at odds with politics and able to hold politicians accountable. In the modern era, mass media has largely not held the current administration accountable for their disastrous policies. In fact, one could argue that almost all mass media outlets prefer a Trump Presidency because it directly increases their viewership and revenue. Trump sells newspapers and gets people to tune in to the news.

Additionally, I do not find support for the economic threat hypothesis (Blalock 1967). Instead, based on recent research such as Mutz (2018), status threat is likely driving the fear of terrorism and associated anti-Muslim sentiments. Interestingly, I find that the public is less concerned about terrorism during economically challenging times. If economic insecurity does amplify feelings of racial threat, it does not do so in an easily measurable way, at least not with the data that is currently available. Immigration research has additionally found that anti-immigrant politics are pursued in both good and bad economic times, and that social institutions are primarily responsible for engendering anti-immigrant attitudes (Tichenor 2002). This is supported by other research which has found that fears and concerns about labor market competition are not associated with anti-immigrant sentiment (Heinmueller et al 2015).

This analysis does have limitations, namely in that the data cannot be analyzed with more sophisticated regression or time-series techniques as it is currently available. Therefore, it is not able to formally test hypotheses about these relationships, or control for the influence of multiple

variables. Other data sources may perhaps be better able to assess the theories outlined in this and previous works. At the end of this analysis, it can be said that it does appear that public opinion on issues such as terrorism is most influenced by mass media coverage and attention from political elites. This is further supported by data analyzed in other parts of this project. The following chapter examines the content of news media stories about terrorist events, focusing on news media's role in framing events. I add to the existing literature on the framing of terrorism by examining how terrorist suspects are portrayed on US television news. Then, I examine the influence that selective exposure to partisan mass media has on individual members of the public and their worry about victimization in either a terrorist attack or a mass shooting.

### **CHAPTER III. QUANTITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF BROADCAST NEWS MEDIA FRAMING OF SUSPECTED TERRORIST PERPETRATORS**

Why are some people labelled as terrorist and others are not, even when they commit the same acts? The overall focus of this chapter is to evaluate the extent to which socially constructed meanings applied to similar behaviors at different times and places affect the public's perceptions of mass violence. What it is, how it affects individuals and society, how individuals and social institutions respond to perceived violence all differ greatly by which label is used to describe the incident. More specifically, this dissertation examines the role that mass media plays in shaping our ideas and beliefs about violence.

The previous chapters demonstrated that mass media shapes public perception by setting agendas and drawing attention to certain topics as newsworthy and that elite cues do reflect differences in opinion among members of the public. The following chapter finds that selective partisan media exposure can amplify one's existing beliefs in a measurable way. This chapter is focused on the content of those media messages and examines how mass media frames terrorism and contributes to how the public conceives of terrorism. Specifically, to add to the body of literature on the topic of media framing of terrorism, I assess whether media coverage is racially biased in its framing of terrorist suspects in a quantitative content analysis of broadcast news transcripts from NexisUni. With data from the Global Terrorism Database, I find that when controlling for characteristics of the attacks such as weapons used and number of people killed, that Muslim suspects are more likely to be labeled terrorists. In short, Muslims suspects are more likely to be framed or labelled as terrorists by news media for the same behavior.

Max Weber's (1945) concept of the "Ideal Type" as a proverbial yardstick for understanding social action has a particular utility in understanding why some acts of mass violence are labelled as "terrorist attacks" and why other, similar acts of mass violence are not labelled as "terrorist acts". The ideal type of a terrorist attack is perhaps best exemplified by the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon carried out by the al Qaeda organization. This attack involved civilian, sub-state actors from one society and culture inflicting extreme violence on other civilians in another society and culture (Black 2004). These attacks occurred far outside the norms of conventional warfare, were conducted by covert actors, and based on communication from al Qaeda leadership, were intended to strike fear into the population of the United States. When using this concept of the ideal type to analyze media content, it can be presumed that a suspect is more likely to be labelled as a "terrorist" when he or she more closely conforms to the constructed ideal type of what a terrorist attack is and/or who a terrorist is: i.e. a Middle Eastern, Muslim male.

Race and ethnicity have long been used as a means of dividing people in the US (Feagin 2006, 2013; Omi and Winant 2015). In the wake of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks, political leaders seized on the public's fear to build support for the continuing wars in the Middle East, expansion of surveillance capabilities, stricter enforcement of immigration laws, and the creation of a robust drone warfare program. This was accomplished in part by playing on the US public's historical xenophobic tendencies, which was now attentive to people of Middle Eastern, North African, and Central/South Asian backgrounds (i.e. "Muslims"). The recent wave of anti-Muslim sentiment in the US which developed out of this period has been encouraged by opportunistic political leaders and media outlets. The present dissertation argues that public fear of terrorism is a proxy measure for racial, cultural, and other identity-based anxieties and one of

many perceived threats to the dominant culture in America posed by non-white foreigners. This is fueled by nearly two decades of propaganda efforts and media portrayals of terrorists as a foreign, Arab, Muslim threat to the US homeland and way of life.

When a mass violence event occurs in the US, most people will learn about the event through mass media. Mass media does not only report on events, but also offers interpretations of events and contributes to individuals' views. The other analyses present in this dissertation both found that media effects play a significant role in the public's perceptions of mass violence. The earlier studies addressed two important aspects of media effects: agenda setting – or how topics become “newsworthy” and reinforcing spirals – or how selective media exposure can strengthen pre-existing views. This portion of the study focuses on another critical piece of media effects: framing - i.e. the use of words, phrases, and images to portray particular messages. Specifically, I examine the content of broadcast news media to determine who is portrayed as a terrorist.

In this project, I argue that among suspected perpetrators of terrorism in the US, individuals who are Middle Eastern, foreign born, or associated with radical Islam are more likely to be framed or labelled as terrorists by US news media, controlling for characteristics of the event. The terrorist label is embedded with racialized meaning. In effect, terrorism is treated interchangeably with “Muslim” violence. If fear of terrorism is reflective of fear of “Muslims”, then among suspected perpetrators of terrorist violence, individuals who are “Muslim” – i.e. Middle Eastern or associated with Radical Islam – are more likely to be framed or labelled as terrorists by news media. Previous literature has not looked specifically at how individual suspects are portrayed, instead focusing on groups and ideologies. This research has focused almost exclusively on newspapers, while most people get their news from television. Previous



treatment of the connection between radical Islam, race, and ethnicity has also been flawed. While many have examined the connection between Islam and portrayals of terrorism, race, ethnicity, and religion have been treated as interchangeable in this literature. I argue that this may not be the case – i.e. appearing to be Middle Eastern is just as important – if not more – than an alignment with radical Islam, or the individual’s immigration status.

## **Background**

Terrorism, by most definitions, involves the use of violence to inspire feelings of fear or dread in a population larger than the immediate victims (see Global Terrorism Database 2019; Turk 2004). After the September 11, 2001 attacks, terrorism has frequently occupied the list of top 10 problems facing the US (Woods 2007) and remains a top issue that the US public wants the Government to address. Following 2015 attacks in Paris linked to the so-called Islamic State group of Iraq and Syria (commonly referred to as ISIS or ISIL) polls conducted by Gallup in December 2015 (McCarthy 2015; Swift 2015) found that in the US, forty seven percent of US adults were worried about being a victim of a terrorist attack, close to the all-time high (Swift 2015). Additionally, trust in government to protect US citizens against terrorist attacks reached an all-time low, with sixty seven percent of respondents believing that a terrorist attack on US soil was likely, and only 55 percent of respondents had confidence that the US government could protect against future acts of terrorism (McCarthy 2015).

Empirical research and official statistics often paint a different picture about the risk of terrorism than what is popularly believed. This research shows that incidents of terrorism on US soil are rare, typically committed by domestic actors rather than international, and only a minority of such attacks are associated with Islamic radicals (LaFree, Yang, and Crenshaw

2009). Anti-US attacks by Islamic radical groups overwhelming occur against US interests abroad rather than on US soil (ibid). Nevertheless, since the attacks of September 11, 2001, terrorism has remained as a top issue concerning the US public (Swift 2015; Woods 2007), members of the general public report greater fear of terrorism victimization than other forms of mass violence (Swift 2015), and Muslims in the west continue to be targets of retaliatory hate crimes (Byers and Jones 2007)<sup>4</sup>. One thing is clear, this is an enduring fear which does not fully represent reality. Below, I discuss the research questions which guide this analysis, the broad contributions of the study, the theoretical background, and the research design of each part of this dissertation.

Media coverage on fear of terrorism is known to have negative effects to individuals and society (Altheide 2006; Atkinson and Young 2012; Farook Malik 2014; Iglarsh 1987; Nellis and Savage 2012; Pat-Horenczyk et al 2007; Toohey and Taylor 2008). The War on Terror has been used to justify disastrous policies domestically and abroad – including the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Many scholars assert that the risk of terrorism has been overstated in the U.S. by news media and other societal elites (Altheide 2006, 2009; LaFree 2009; McCarthy 2015; Papacharissi and Oliveira 2008; Nagar 2010; Powell 2011; Swift 2015; Woods 2007, 2011). Since September 11, 2001, terrorism has been ranked in the top 10 of Gallup’s “Most Important Problems” national survey (McCarthy 2015; Swift 2015; Woods 2007). The effects of this heightened fear are not yet fully understood, however existing research has found that negative effects include changes in behavior, i.e. information seeking and avoidance (Nellis and Savage 2012), economic costs in reduced travel (Iglarsh 1987), support for questionable policy agendas such as the Iraq

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<sup>4</sup> For more information, visit the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reporting Statistics on Hate Crimes 1996-2016 at <https://ucr.fbi.gov/ucr-publications#Hate>

war (Altheide 2006; Wolfendale 2006), and a number of negative effects associated with increased anxiety (Atkinson and Young 2012; Farook Malik 2014; Pat-Horenczyk et al 2007; Toohey and Taylor 2008) including post-traumatic stress and negative coping strategies (ibid.). This study may help identify who is most likely to experience these negative effects of terrorism on society, and under which conditions fear is able to proliferate through the U.S. public. Potentially, findings could support targeted public policy efforts in the future.

Additionally, scholars have also argued that stereotypes of Muslims as radicals and terrorists is harmful to minority populations (Byers and Jones 2007; Gottschalk and Greenberg 2008). The stereotyping of Muslims in western media has also been used as a recruitment tool by violent organizations such as ISIL/ISIS (Stern and Berger 2015). US political discourse have demonized Muslims as a social problem (Byers and Jones 2007; Gottschalk and Greenberg 2008; Norris et al 2003), promoting the image of Muslims as potential terrorists by describing terrorism almost exclusively in relation to Islamic radicals. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, hate crimes directed against Arab- and Muslim-Americans, or those perceived to be, rose dramatically. This change has been directly linked to the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks by scholars (Byers and Jones 2007).

Understanding how the US political and media elites frame terrorism is pertinent when radical groups such as ISIS, the so-called Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria, are known to recruit members using the argument that Western powers – particularly the US – demonize, oppress, and alienate Muslims (Farwell 2014; Stern and Berger 2015). A notable example of this is then candidate Donald Trump's response to ISIS inspired attacks in 2015: calling for a ban on all Muslims entering the US (Zurcher 2015). ISIS is known to use media clips of US politicians

such as Donald Trump discussing ISIS, the Middle East, and Islam in recruitment and propaganda materials (Farwell 2014; Stern and Berger 2015). Theoretical and empirical research has also shown that individuals who join radical organizations often experience feeling of alienation, isolation, and resentment towards a mainstream society which rejects and stigmatizes them (Cottee 2011; Hamm 2009; McCauley and Moskalenko 2011; Sageman 2004). I attempt to better understand how US news media portrayals of terrorism perpetuate bias against Muslims, while suggesting how these depictions can be modified to increase security of minority groups and counter extremist narratives.

### *Framing Theory*

My research project takes a minimalist approach to framing, as articulated by Woods (2011). ‘Frames’ can be described as *“identifiable characteristics of mass-mediated news content that are of interest to scholars. While frames may have a range of causes and effects, they exist first of all as words, images and symbols that appear on paper and in other media. News frames may be found in a variety of communication outlets. Taking many different forms, they may appear as phrases such as ‘the cold war’, single words such as ‘communist’, images such as a photo of the Berlin Wall or particular patterns or styles in which words, phrases and images appear in news content (Woods 2011, p. 201).”* With this research, I apply this concept by examining the use of certain “frames”, i.e. the words, images, and symbols used to portray a particular message. I focus on how, when, and why particular frames such as “Terrorism” and “Mass Shooting” are used by US news media and understood by the general public.

Framing is a somewhat contentious topic among scholars, and consequently one of the most critically studied topics in communication literature. Entman (1993) described framing as a

“fractured paradigm”. While some researchers do not go into detail to define what ‘frames’ and ‘framing’ are, assuming that these are widely understood concepts (Entman 1993), others interpret framing in different ways, even when the terms are explicitly defined. Some researchers see framing as a cognitive process and element of discourse (Gitlin 1980), others conceptualize frames as an internalized mental structure (Scheufele 1999), and further still, framing can refer to the substance of communication (Woods 2007). Though the exact definition of framing varies across disciplines, framing is theorized as a process frequently used by political elites and media sources to influence perceptions and shape the social world (Chomsky and Herman 1988).

The importance of framing in studies of news media has been articulated from scholars in many disciplines. David Altheide (2006; 2009) documented how political elites and news media constructed terrorism as the chief national security threat, relying on the public’s perceptions about danger, risk, and feelings of fear to gain support for policy measures such as the USA PATRIOT Act and military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Benford and Snow (2000) argue that framing processes are an essential aspect of social movement formation. Chomsky and Herman (1988) articulated a propaganda-model of news media and asserted that media framing is frequently used to influence public opinion and used as a tool by political elites to further specific political goals.

In framing an issue, the use of fearful language or imagery can be used to persuade and gain support for social and political objectives (Chomsky and Herman 1988; Altheide 2006, 2009). Most academic literature examining the use of fear in social life, particularly regarding terrorism, has highlighted mass media coverage. For instance, David Altheide (2006) found that recent media coverage of terrorism closely resembles previous coverage of crime. Both use fear

of victimization and ethnocentric ideologies to reinforce ingroup-outgroup hostilities and employ a process of “othering”. This process involves construction of an inferior group by the dominant group through the establishment of symbolic boundaries and membership (Schwalbe et al. 2000). In the post-9/11 era, othering through discourses of fear and ethnocentrism have been central to building support for the war on terror (Kam and Kinder 2007). Mass media, however, is not the only social institution involved in the framing of terrorism and use of fear in social life. Political leaders often shape and define the problem initially. Media then filters and further interprets their statements and presents these re-constitutions to the public (Chomsky and Herman 1988). Media has presented fear inducing messages from politicians to promote many social, legal, and political agendas in the United States including the “War on Drugs” (Inciardi and McElrath 2015) and the USA PATRIOT Act (Altheide 2006). In this manner, leaders of social and political movements may invoke fear and construct moral panics which appeal to the values and beliefs of dominant social groups while also drawing on the group’s anxieties (Shoon, Meltzer, and Reese 2008).

### *Racialization of Muslims*

Since the September 11, 2001 attacks, increased attention to “Muslims” a previously overlooked group of recent immigrants has resulted in the racialization of a diverse group of people, who mostly originate in the Middle East and North Africa. Racialization refers to the social process by which new racial/ethnic groups are defined and set apart from other groups (Omi and Winant 1986, 1994, 2015). In this way, the defining of groups from the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia as racialized “Muslims”, and the framing of Terrorism as “Muslim” violence constitutes a “Racial Project” as defined by Omi and Winant (1986, 1994,

2015). *Racial projects* are the activities that assign meaning to race, how racial constructs and ideas are used in language, thought, imagery, and interactions, and the process by which racial constructs and ideologies are reified and situated within social structures. Essentially, racial projects connect socially constructed meanings of race to the organization of society and day to day life along racial lines (ibid.)

I argue, as have others, that Islamophobia in Western societies is racial in nature (Constadine 2017; Dunn, Klocker, and Salabay 2007; Taras 2013). Some scholars have linked racialization to increases in the movement of population groups globally, which prompts reactions from dominant social groups in destination countries to maintain status (Gans 2017). Others have linked Islamophobic attitudes to specific political orientation in the US, specifically those who favor right-wing authoritarianism (Beck and Plant 2018). Additionally, scholars have found that Islamophobia plays on historical constructs of Orientalism, similar to how Jews were portrayed in Europe and the US in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Skenderovic and Späti 2019).

In the case of US and European Muslims, much of the increase in Islamophobia has occurred since the 1990's, especially following the 9/11 attacks (Skenderovic and Späti 2019), when national security and law enforcement agencies around the world struggled to grapple with the fallout of those attacks (Nebhan 2017). Islamophobia is fundamentally a racial process (Dunn, Klocker, and Salabay 2007; Constadine 2017; Garner and Selod 2015; Taras 2013), even if the intricacies of race, ethnicity, religion, racialization, and racism involved with Islamophobia are difficult to disentangle (Taras 2013), and not always based on skin color (Dunn, Klocker, and Salabay 2007; Galonnier 2015; Moosavi 2015; Selod 2015). Despite the difficulties in disaggregating the intersection of race, ethnicity, and religion when studying Islamophobia other

scholars have emphasized that racialization theory is a good way to understand it (Garner and Selod 2015).

While constructions of race and racism are central to Islamophobia, the relationship is complex, due to the diversity of Muslims in the real world. Anti-Muslim rhetoric plays on negative stereotypes of Islam, as well as perceptions of threat and inferiority (Dunn, Klocker, and Salabay 2007). The racialized perceptions that Muslims do not belong are not necessarily based on skin color, but many ethnic markers (ibid.) Additionally, Muslims are viewed less favorably and deserving of legal protections than other religious minorities in the west (Meer and Modood 2009). Instead they perceived more as a threat than a disadvantaged group (ibid.). Studies indicate that Muslims of many skin colors and nationalities experience discrimination across Western societies including the US (Galonnier 2015; Herda 2018; Mansson McGinty 2020; Selod 2019), the UK (Moosavi 2015), Canada (Wilkins 2018), Ireland (Carrand Haynes 2015), and Australia (Dunn, Klocker and Salabay 2007).

Even white privilege appears to be unable to fully override Islamophobia (Selod 2015). While studies have found that whiteness can lend Muslim converts respectability, it is precarious in the face of the association between Islam and race (Moosavi 2015). This can also vary on social contexts. A study by (Galonnier 2015) comparing the experiences of white converts to Islam in the US and France found that French and American converts report different experiences with race, implying that the racialization of Muslims and the meanings attached to the intersection of race and religion vary in different social contexts.

*The Terrorism Label: Framing Mass Violence*



Currently, through a variety of methods, the literature has established that after the attacks of September 11, 2001 terrorism has been portrayed as the chief national security threat by US policymakers and media outlets (Altheide 2006, 2009; LaFree 2009; Papacharissi and Oliveira 2008; Nagar 2010; Norris et al 2003; Powell 2011; Woods 2007, 2011; Woods and Arthur 2014). Additionally, this body of literature has found that “terrorism” has become almost exclusively associated with Islamic radicals, and that counterterrorism policy has increasingly been discussed alongside domestic law enforcement and immigration policy (ibid). Survey data and some peer reviewed studies have also demonstrated that gender, age, media exposure, and geographical location are all significant predictors of individuals’ fear of terrorism (Brück and Müller 2010; Nellis 2009, Nellis and Savage 2012; Woods et al 2008).

Additionally, previous studies have suggested that societal elites and media coverage of terrorism may influence perceptions of risk more than actual terrorism incidents, similar to news coverage of crime (Altheide 2006, 2009; Clarke and Chess 2008; Nellis and Savage 2012; Woods 2007). Furthermore, mass violence events with a higher number of casualties receive a greater amount of media attention (Lankford and Madfis 2018). White offenders are seldom discussed in terms of their race in news coverage of mass shooting events (Mingus and Zopf 2010). However, news coverage over-emphasizes the race/ethnicity of non-white offenders (Chuang 2012; Mingus and Zopf 2010) and frames them in terms of their “foreignness” (ibid.)

These studies do leave some substantial gaps. For example, these studies have mostly focused on narratives and how terrorism is linked ideologically driven portrayals groups. Little empirical research has explicitly investigated how individuals are portrayed as terrorists or non-terrorists in mass media, and this research has overwhelmingly used analyses of print newspapers

to the neglect of other sources. These studies also typically equate race/ethnicity, religion/ideology, and foreignness or rely on one measure, i.e. adherence to the Muslim religion, as a proxy for all three concepts. I assert that this may be over-simplifying the relationship, although I also acknowledge that these concepts are difficult to disentangle in the real world.

Within the context of US news media, the word terrorism itself is used to convey a specific threat that is distinct from common crimes or political upheaval (Kunda 1999). This specific threat has also been constantly framed as a “new” form of violence in US mass media (Norris et al. 2003). Similar to other crimes, terrorism is framed in a particular way in media communications. Political discourse, media portrayals, and popular sentiment associates terrorism almost exclusively with Islamic radicals, especially since the attacks of September 11, 2001 (Altheide 2006, 2009; Papacharissi and Oliveira 2008; Nagar 2010; Powell 2011; Woods 2011). However, the majority of terrorist acts executed in the United States are committed by internal actors rather than foreign aggressors. The FBI classifies approximately two-thirds of all terrorist plots between 1980 and 2001 as “domestic.” That figure rose to 95 percent between 2002 and 2005 (FBI 2005).

The “terrorism” label has both broad and specific implications when it is applied. Altheide (2006) found that terrorism goes beyond a simple narrative, rather when an incident is labelled as terrorism, it becomes the “definition of the situation”. This framing of violence creates a sense that all Americans are potential victims of evil terrorists, and the military are portrayed as our protectors against terrorist violence. Terrorists are portrayed as faceless clandestine actors who strike from the shadows, as a foreign threat to our way of life, they use weapons of mass destruction, and are almost exclusively shown as Muslim radicals in the

modern era (Kunda 1999; Papacharissi and Oliveira 2008; Nagar 2010; Powell 2011; Woods 2011, 2014). The threat of terrorism is therefore both vague and specific at the same time, portrayed as a threatening outgroup, or an “other” which demands a swift military response.

Media is the primary institution that conveys messages about risk to the public (Altheide 2006, 2009), and television is still the preferred news medium for most Americans (Mitchell and Weisel 2016), with over half of US adults reporting that they often get news from television sources. The first part of this study will examine how suspected perpetrators of terrorism are portrayed in US news media using quantitative content analysis techniques. Specifically, I first generate a sample of terrorism suspects from a list of terrorism incidents in the United States with identifiable perpetrators as defined by the *Global Terrorism Database*. Then, with that list of names, I sample broadcast news transcripts from *Lexis Nexus Academic* that discuss the suspect and then code transcripts for use of the “terrorism” label, i.e. assigning a 0/1 value to a transcript. This allows me to test hypotheses about whether characteristics of the attack or the suspect predict the labelling of terrorism using multilevel modelling techniques, i.e. mixed-effects logistic regression. Incidents are used as a clustering variable, and transcripts are the unit of analysis. I hypothesize that controlling for characteristics of an attack, a suspect’s ethnicity, immigration status, and religious/ideological affiliation will significantly predict use of the terrorism label by broadcast news programs. Additional coding is done for the number of times “terrorist” or “terrorism” are used in a transcript, whether a transcript mentions race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin of the offender.

Previous research has found that since the September 11, 2001 attacks, terrorism has been associated almost exclusively with Radical Islam in the US news media (Altheide 2006, 2009;

Papacharissi and Oliveira 2008; Nagar 2010; Powell 2011; Woods 2011). Inaccurate stereotypes regarding terrorism and terrorists have dominated political discussions and mass media, as well as public perceptions. A number of empirical studies in conjunction with official statistics have demonstrated that elements of Islamophobia, i.e. fear of Muslims as a constructed “other”, play an increasingly prominent role in shaping US discourse. A content analysis of US news coverage of terrorist incidents since 9/11 showed that media outlets consistently tried to attribute terrorist incidents to radical Islamic terrorist, even if this was not actually the case (Powell 2011). Additionally, previous studies have suggested that media coverage of terrorism may influence perceptions of risk more than actual terrorism incidents, similar to news coverage of crime (Altheide 2006, 2009; Woods 2007).

Another content analysis looked at US news media portrayal of politically violent groups that mostly target civilians across the globe (Nagar 2010). They found that Islamic groups were more likely to be labeled as terrorist groups, and that conservative-leaning sources are more likely to use this frame. Interestingly, they did not find a significant difference in rates of portrayal of terrorism before and after 9/11, suggesting that framing of terrorism over time in US news media has relied on the same stereotypes of terrorism. In contrast, a mixed-methods study compared framing of terrorism in two US based and two UK based newspapers showed that terrorism is consistently associated with al Qaeda, the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, national security, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Papacharissi and Oliveira 2008).

An experimental study by Woods (2011) tested the social-psychological effects of news media framing of terrorism, finding that news stories that associated terrorism with radical Islam resulted in higher perceived threat, increased fear, and feelings of dread than stories about

terrorism alone. In fact, terrorism not linked with radical Islam did not have any significant effect on perceptions of threat. A frame incorporating both radical Islamic terrorism and the threat of a nuclear attack provoked the highest level of fear and dread. This suggests that not only are incidents involving Islamic terrorism perceived as more threatening, but also that the type of attack and the scale of the attack also importantly influences the public's perceptions and media's framing of violence as terrorism.

### **Data and Methods**

This study addresses when the “terrorist” frame is applied to suspects/perpetrators of mass violence, focusing only on incidents which occurred in the United States. To investigate this, I employ a quantitative content analysis of broadcast news transcripts from 1992-2016, exploring why certain violent perpetrators are framed as terrorists. Media is a key social institution in communicating risks to the public (Altheide 2006, 2009; Glassner 2009; Woods 2007) and how violence is framed can influence the public's perception of danger (Woods 2011). Sampling is limited to US media sources and will focus on incidents of *mass violence* considered terrorism by the Global Terrorism Database, an open source academic collection of terrorist incidents around the world from 1970-2018 run by the University of Maryland. This database includes a wide range of violent incidents such as mass shootings, bombings, arson, vehicular attacks, chemical/biological/nuclear attacks, etc. (GTD 2019). Incidents are coded to capture a variety of information on the incident including type of attack, casualties, characteristics of the suspect, and transcripts are coded for use of framing words such as ‘terrorist’ and ‘terrorism’, whether the transcript discusses the suspects race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin.

A quantitative content analysis is not particularly different from a survey. In a traditional survey, the researcher creates a questionnaire and checks boxes based on the respondents' answers to questions. In quantitative questionnaires, these questions are close-ended, and answers are mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories. In quantitative content analysis, the researcher creates a questionnaire using the same strategies and standards that they would use for any other survey. However, in this case the researcher checks boxes in the questionnaire based on the content of a document or communication (see Riffe, Lacy, and Fico 2005).

Using a suspect-based approach to investigate media frames essentially means that search terms reference a particular individual who is believed to be involved in a terrorist attack. For example, search terms follow this style by using terms such as "Timothy McVeigh" or "Rizwan Farook". Currently, most studies of framing terrorism have focused on the processes of developing frames – i.e. the social construction of the terrorism frame and the processes and motivations for framing terrorism in a particular way. Alternatively, studies of how the terrorism frame is deployed have focused on when groups/organizations and general ideological motivations are framed as terrorism by news media. Expanding the framing of terrorism literature, my content analysis focuses on the social characteristics of specific offenders rather than a group or organizational analysis. Moreover, this study examines the characteristics of attacks, such as weapons used, and targets chosen and their effect on how violence is framed as terrorism – or not. This study also incorporates a new data source – broadcast news transcripts - as previous studies tend to focus only on major newspapers. This is particularly important, as in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, newspaper readership has significantly declined and most people get their news from television, with social media rapidly increasing as a primary news source (see Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, and Shearer 2017; Mitchell, Holcomb, and Weisel 2017). Analysis uses

mixed-effects logistic regression techniques to model the effects of suspect race/ethnicity place of birth, and religious/ideological affiliation on the use of the term(s) “Terrorism” “Terror Attack(s)”, or “Terrorist(s)” in broadcast news transcripts, while controlling for characteristics of the attacks and the transcripts.

### *Data Sources*

*The Global Terrorism Database (GTD)* collects detailed information about terrorist incidents, and currently includes over 100,000 incidents worldwide. Data is collected on the perpetrators, attack type, weapons used, target, location, date, casualties, and more. This also includes a description of the event, and up to three news stories referencing the incident. Sampling cast the widest net possible while still using strict criteria for inclusion. This not only provides us with a variety of attacks which differ greatly in style and execution, but also provides a firm null

The GTD defines terrorism as “*The threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation*” (START 2017). Within this blanket definition, the GTD also specifies that the act must be intentional, must involve some level of violence or threat of violence against persons or property, and that perpetrators must be sub-national actors<sup>5</sup>. In addition, the GTD includes three criteria which can be required or not, allowing for researchers to specify the strictness of their definitions:

1. The act must be aimed at pursuing political, economic, religious, or social goal.

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<sup>5</sup> For more information, see the Global Terrorism Database Codebook at <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/downloads/Codebook.pdf>

2. There must be evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some message to a larger audience than the immediate victims.
3. The action must be outside the context of legitimate warfare activities.

It is evident that this definition can include many incidents which are not clearly defined as terrorism. One of the main problems researchers of terrorism face is the ambiguous nature of the variable, which frequently overlaps with hate crimes, organized crime, and insurgencies. For the purposes of this research, only incidents which occurred within the United States from 1992-2016, which meet all terrorism criteria, and are considered “successful” attacks<sup>6</sup> were sampled. These search criteria include diverse incidents from the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, to the 2009 Fort Hood Shooting, to the September 11<sup>th</sup> Hijackings.

*Nexus UNI* (hereafter NU) Is a collection of published documents which can be search and retrieved for use in academic research. Lexis Nexus Academic allows users to search print news articles and broadcast news transcripts from around the world. Sampling is possible by searching for keywords in broadcast news transcripts section, focusing on major network and cable news programs, such as NBC, CNN, FOX News, etc.

### *Sampling*

Sampling for the second phase of this study will occur in two stages and involves a hybrid cluster sampling and stratified sampling technique. The first stage involves sampling from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD). The first stage also records clustering variables such as incident and suspect characteristics. To be included in the analysis, and incident must: 1. Have

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<sup>6</sup> For more information on advanced search criteria, see the Global Terrorism Database at [www.start.umd.edu/gtd/](http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/)



occurred in the United States between 1992 and 2016; 2. appear in the GTD; 3. have resulted in at least one casualty; 4. meet all three GTD criteria for classification as “terrorism”, 5. include description(s) of an identifiable suspect(s). This sampling stage yielded 57 incidents with 65 suspects for inclusion. The second sampling stage involves searching suspects’ names in Nexus Uni (NU), and then recording transcripts in a stratified according to seven broadcast news organizations. To be included in the final sample, a suspect’s name must appear in at least one broadcast news transcript from a major network – i.e. ABC, CBS, CNN, FOX, MSNBC, NBC, and PBS – returned by the NU search engine. Transcripts are then coded for their use of the “terrorism” frame. It is notable that the September 11, 2001 attacks were intentionally excluded from this analysis. Some sociologists have argued that these attacks now constitute the “ideal type” of terrorism (see Black 2004, Weber 1945). Table 3.1 below describes variables collected and summarizes descriptive statistics.

**Table 3.1 Variable Definitions and Descriptive Statistics**

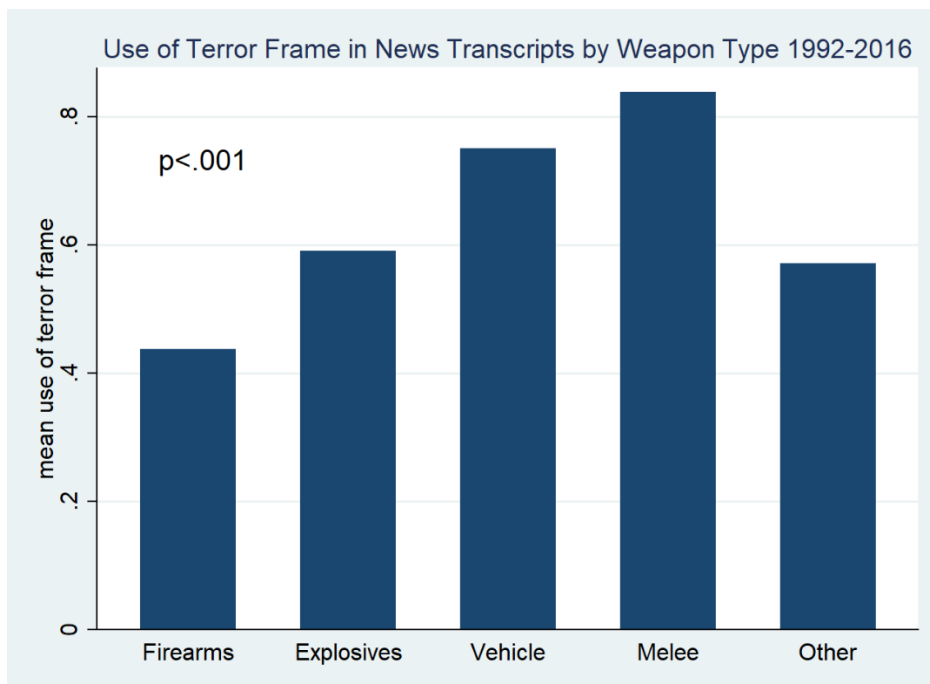
<b>Incident Characteristics</b>	<b>Suspect Characteristics</b>	<b>Transcript Characteristics</b>
<i>Number of People Killed</i> (mean = 6.32, SD = 22.90, range = 0-168, skewness = 6.46)  <i>Primary Weapon Type</i> Firearms (coded 1, 61.40%) Explosives/Incendiary (coded 2, 19.30%) Vehicle (coded 3, 5.26%) Melee (coded 4, 10.53%) Other (coded 5, 3.51%)  <i>Year</i> (range = 1992-2016)	<i>Susp. Race/Ethnicity</i> White (coded 1, 52.31%) Black (coded 2, 18.46%) MENA (coded 3, 27.69%) Asian (coded 4, 1.54%)  <i>Susp. Place of Birth</i> US Born (coded 0, 70.77%) Foreign Born (coded 1, 29.23%)  <i>Susp. Ideology</i> Radical Islam (coded 1, 47.69%) Far-Right (coded 2, 43.08%) Far-Left (coded 3, 6.15%) Other (coded 4, 3.08%)  Sex Male (coded 0, 95.38) Female (coded 1, 4.62)	<i>News Organization</i> ABC (coded 1, 17.63%) CBS (coded 2, 18.27%) CNN (coded 3, 20.19%) FOX News (coded 4, 12.50%) MSNBC (coded 5, 10.26%) NBC (coded 6, 12.82%) PBS (coded 7, 8.33%)  <i>About Incident</i> No (coded 0, 14.42%) Yes (coded 1, 85.58%)  <i>Expert Guest</i> No (coded 0, 59.94%) Yes (coded 1, 40.06%)  <i>Use of Terror Frame</i> No (coded 0, 47.12%) Yes (coded 1, 52.88%)
N = 57	N = 65	N = 312

### **Bivariate Analysis**

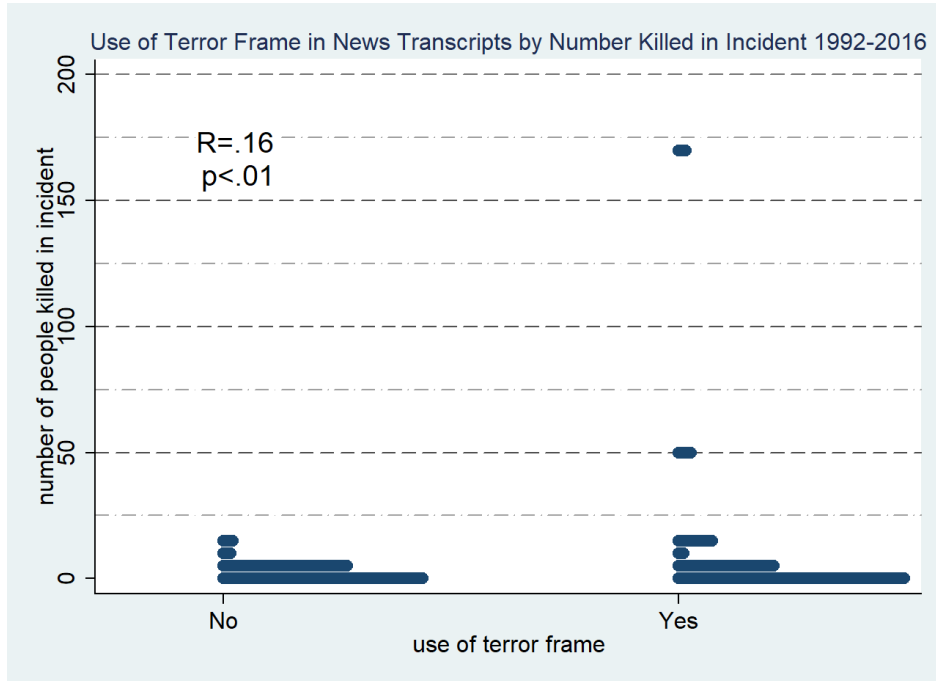
Bivariate analyses used to test association of variables found that many measures do appear to be associated with the use of the “terror frame” in broadcast news transcripts. Figures 3.1 through 3.6 chart these relationships. Chi-squared and Pearson’s *r* test results are reported as well. Figures 3.1-3.3 examines the relationship between characteristics of the attack and use of the terror frame. All variables showed statistically significant relationships. Specifically, the type of weapon used in the incident ( $p < .001$ ) is significantly associated with use of the terror frame in a Chi<sup>2</sup> test. It appears that attacks using explosives, vehicles, and melee attacks are discussed with the terror frame more frequently. Additionally, both the number of people killed in the

incident ( $r=.16$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and the year in which the incident took place ( $r=.17$ ,  $p<.01$ ) are weakly and positively correlated with use of the terror frame. This means that incidents which result in a higher number of deaths and incidents which occurred more recently are more frequently discussed with the terror frame in broadcast news transcripts.

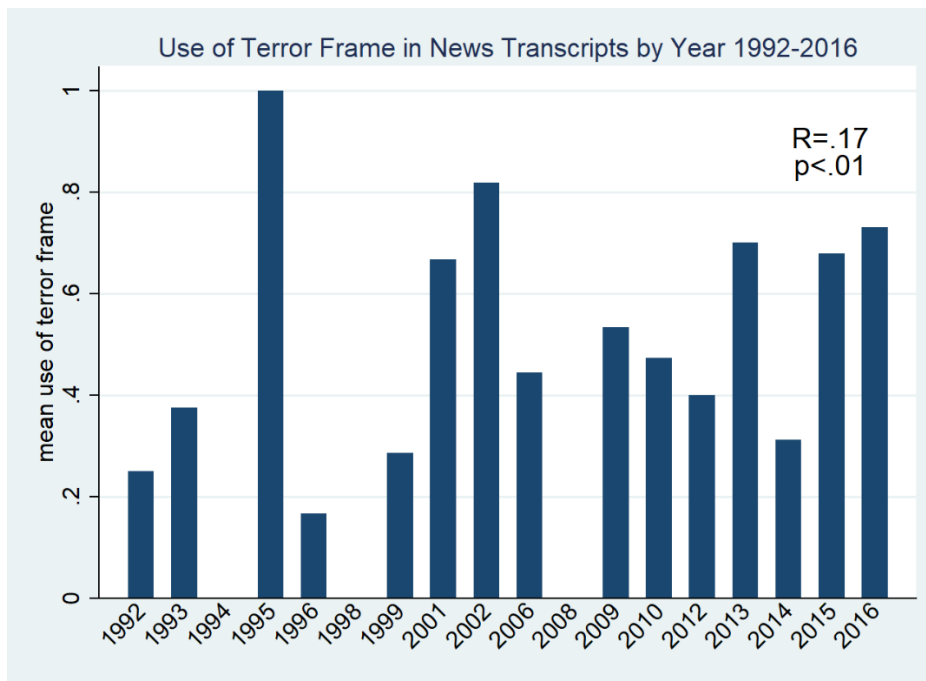
**Figure 3.1 Use of Terror Frame by Incident Characteristics (Weapon Type) 1992-2016**



**Figure 3.2 Use of Terror Frame by Incident Characteristics (Num. Killed) 1992-2016**

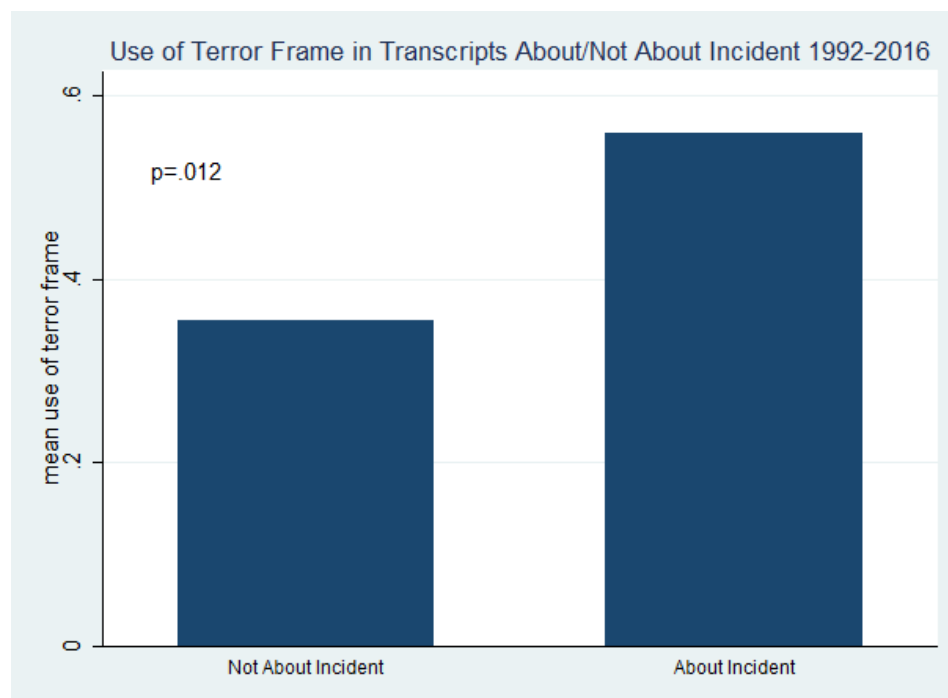


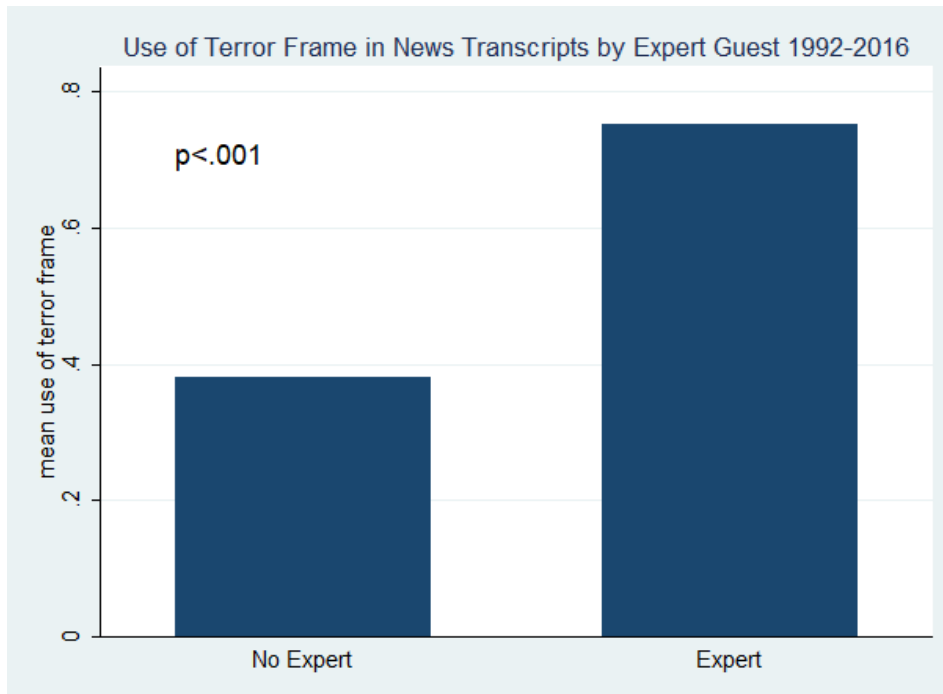
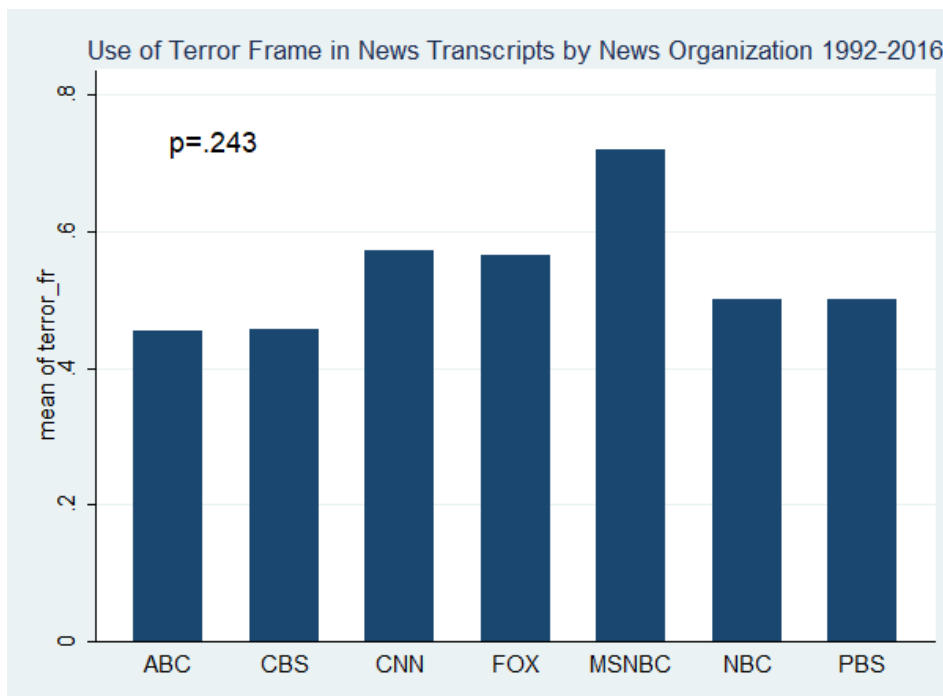
**Figure 3.3 Use of Terror Frame by Incident Characteristics (Year) 1992-2016**



Figures 3.4-3.6 charts the relationship between characteristics of the transcripts themselves and use of the terror frame, which are used as control variables in multivariate models. Results of Chi<sup>2</sup> tests are reported. Whether the transcript is about the incident or not about the incident ( $p < .05$ ) – i.e. less than 10% of transcript discusses the incident – is significantly associated with use of the terror frame. Specifically, it appears that when transcripts are about the incident, they more frequently use the terror frame. Whether or not the transcript featured and expert guest ( $p < .001$ ) is also significantly associated with use of the terror frame. Differences in use of the terror frame by news organization ( $p = .243$ ) was also tested but does not reveal a significant relationship.

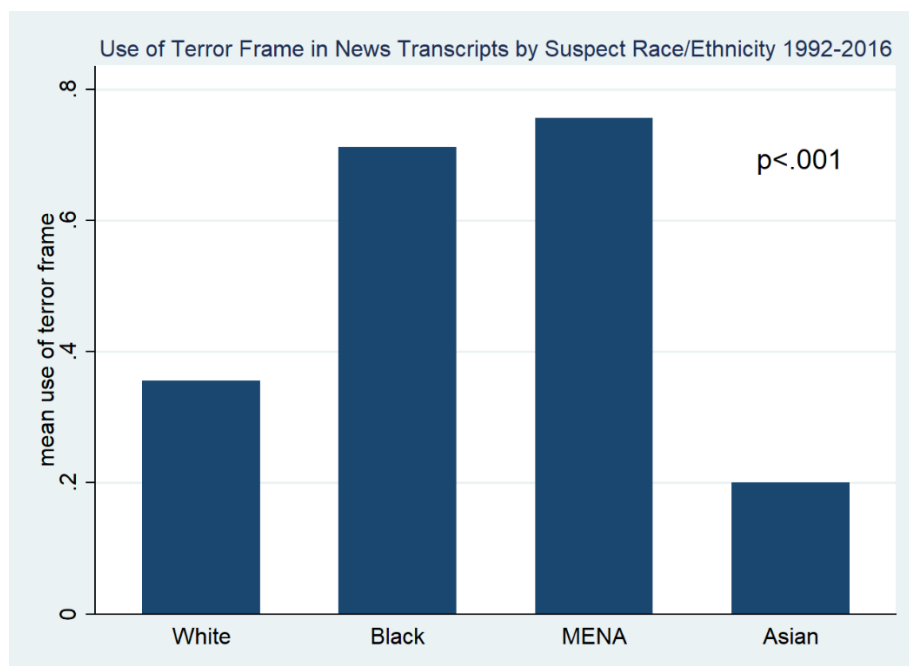
**Figure 3.4 Use of Terror Frame by Transcript Characteristics (About Incident) 1992-2016**

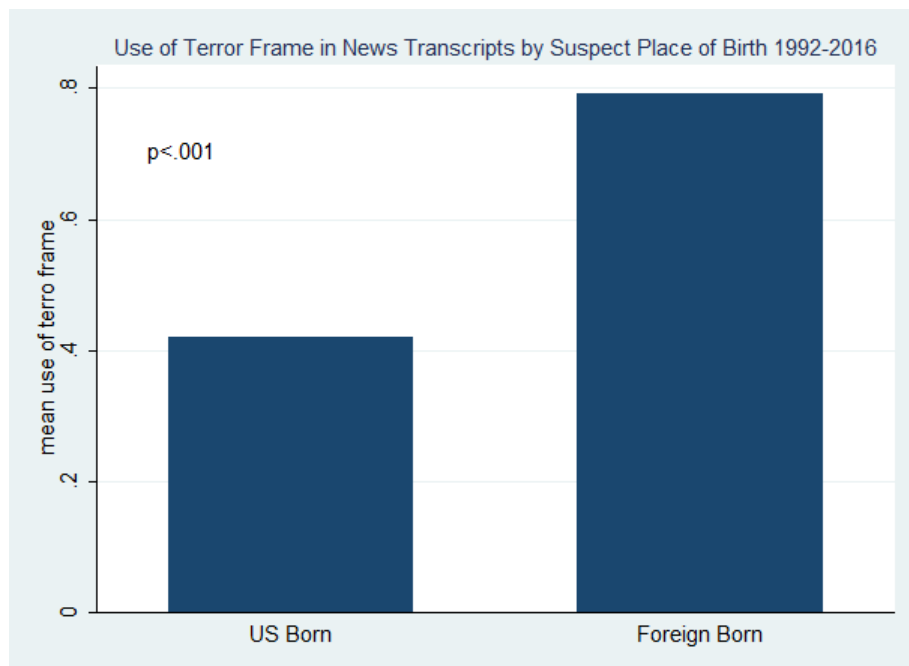
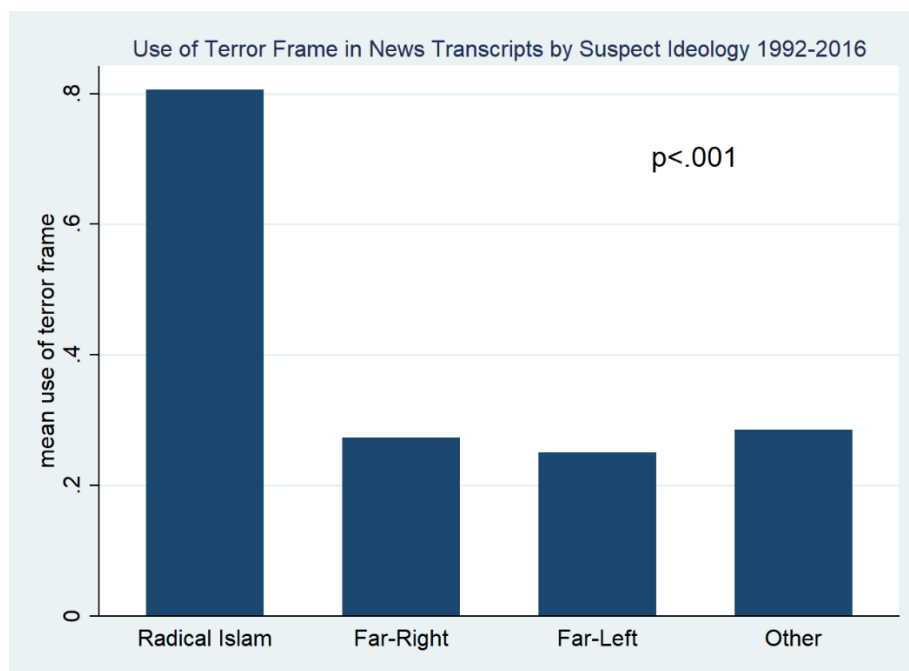


**Figure 3.5 Use of Terror Frame by Transcript Characteristics (Expert Guest) 1992-2016****Figure 3.6 Use of Terror Frame by Transcript Characteristics (News Org.) 1992-2016**

Figures 3.7-3.9 chart characteristics of suspects and the use of the terror frame in broadcast news transcripts. The results of Chi<sup>2</sup> tests are reported. The suspect's race/ethnicity ( $p < .001$ ) is significantly associated with use of the terror frame. Specifically, it appears that the terror frame is used more frequently when suspects are Black and Middle Eastern/North African (MENA). The suspects place of birth ( $p < .001$ ) is also significantly associated with use of the terror frame. Specifically, it appears that foreign born suspects are discussed with the terror frame more frequently than US born suspects. Finally, the suspect's ideological affiliation is also significantly related to use of the terror frame ( $p < .001$ ). Specifically, transcripts more frequently use the terror frame if the suspect has a Radical Islamic ideology/motivation compared to Far-Right, Far-Left, and Other ideologies.

**Figure 3.7 Use of Terror Frame by Suspect Characteristics (Race/Ethnicity) 1992-2016**



**Figure 3.8 Use of Terror Frame by Suspect Characteristics (Place of Birth) 1992-2016****Figure 3.9 Use of Terror Frame by Suspect Characteristics (Religion/Ideology) 1992-2016**



### Mixed-Effects Logistic Regression Analysis (Multilevel Modelling)

This analysis uses mixed-effects logistic regressions with a random intercept on the incident in order to estimate the effect of predictor variables on use of the terrorist/terrorism frame in broadcast news media transcripts. Because of the complicated, clustered nature of the data, a traditional logit model is not sufficient to estimate effects. Logistic regression is commonly used in social research and is appropriate for models which use a categorical dependent variable such as *use of terrorism*. These models report the logged odds (L) of the likelihood of a particular category of the dependent variable being selected.

$$Li = \ln[P(y_i = 1)/P(y_i = 0)]$$

The logged odds that  $y = 1$  for the  $i$ th observation are subsequently estimated as a linear function of independent variables.  $\beta_0$  represents the model's *Y-intercept*, while  $\beta_{1X1i}$ ;  $\beta_{2X2i}$ ; etc. represent *X-variable* predictors. This portion of the model describes the fixed-effects, or the value of  $Y$  as a function of  $X_1$ ,  $X_2$ , etc. effects that are the same for all groups. The addition of the random intercept  $U_{0j}$  term allows for the possibility that the mean level of  $y$  is systematically higher or lower among some groups.

$$Li = \beta_0 + \beta_{1X1i} + \beta_{2X2i} + \dots + \beta_{mXmi} + U_{0j}$$

*Null Hypothesis: All attacks can be considered terrorism by GTD definitions- therefore, controlling for incident characteristics, we should not expect to find significant differences in use of the terrorist frame in broadcast news media.*

*Alternative Hypothesis: Controlling for characteristics of the incident and differences between transcripts, characteristics of the suspects such as race/ethnicity, place of birth, and*

*ideological affiliation will significantly predict use of the terrorist frame in broadcast news media.*

Essentially, this is to say that based on previous scholarship, I expect to find significant bias in news transcripts use of the “terrorism frame” based on the suspects’ apparent race/ethnicity, place of birth, and ideological affiliation, even when accounting for factors such as the number of people killed, the type of weapon used when the incident occurred. Specifically, I hypothesize that transcripts will be more likely to use the “terrorism frame” if the suspect is ethnically Middle Eastern/North African (MENA), foreign born, or associated with radical Islam compared to suspects who are White, US born, and associated with other ideologies – for the same behaviors.

## **Results**

This analysis attempts to disentangle the related measures of suspect race/ethnicity, place of birth, and ideological affiliation. This proves to be a difficult task, and post results analyses reveal the need for a re-coding of race/ethnicity and ideology variables. Table 3.2 presents multi-level logistic regression results. Table 3.3 presents a crosstabulation of binary race/ethnicity and ideology measures, which are then used to recode race/ethnicity and ideology into a three-category variable, which is used to compare suspects who are not MENA, but associated with Radical Islam, and people who are MENA and associated with Radical Islam to other suspect who are neither MENA or associated with Radical Islam.

First, I begin with the analysis in Table 3.2, which shows results from 4 different mixed-effects logistic regressions. Models test whether the suspect’s characteristics, especially

race/ethnicity, place of birth, and ideological affiliation, significantly predict use of the terror frame in broadcast news transcripts, even when controlling for characteristics of the incidents and transcripts. Model 1 tests the suspect's race/ethnicity, Model 2 tests the suspect's place of birth, Model 3 tests the suspect's ideological affiliation, and Model 4 tests all variables together. Incident ID numbers are used a grouping variable ( $N = 312$ ; Groups = 57). Figures 3.4-3.6 visually depict predicted probabilities of suspects characteristics in Table 3.2, Models 1-3.

**Table 3.2 Predictors of Use of Terror Frame in Broadcast News Transcripts: Mixed-Effects Logistic Regression with a Random Intercept – Odds Ratios Reported**

	Model 1 - OR(SE)	Model 2 - OR(SE)	Model 3 - OR(SE)	Model 4 - OR(SE)
<i>About</i>	2.67(1.44)	2.44(1.31)	2.48(1.28)	2.63(1.40)
<i>Year</i>	1.08(0.04)*	1.08(0.04)*	1.06(0.03)	1.05(0.03)
<i>Expert Guest</i>	6.47(2.49)***	6.70(2.61)***	7.01(2.77)***	7.06(2.79)***
<i>Num. Killed</i>	1.03(0.03)	1.05(0.05)	1.02(0.02)	1.03(0.02)
<i>Weapon Used</i>				
Firearms	-	-	-	-
Explosives	4.56(3.18)*	2.15(1.56)	2.74(1.60)	2.17(1.34)
Vehicle	18.81(19.38)**	13.69(15.18)*	8.92(7.77)*	9.08(8.05)*
Melee	6.97(6.34)*	10.22(9.73)*	2.66(1.95)	2.21(1.73)
Other	5.24(7.01)	2.90(4.14)	26.15(39.63)*	34.51(57.20)*
<i>Susp. Race</i>				
White	-	-	-	-
Black	5.03(3.38)*	-	-	0.84(0.76)
MENA	8.41(5.11)***	-	-	0.39(0.35)
Asian	0.28(0.52)	-	-	3.21(5.80)
<i>Susp. Nat'l</i>				
US Born	-	-	-	-
Foreign Born	-	5.74(3.54)**	-	1.13(0.59)
<i>Susp. Ideology</i>				
Radical Islam	-	-	-	-
Far-Right	-	-	0.07(0.03)***	0.04(0.03)***
Far-Left	-	-	0.06(0.05)***	0.04(0.03)***
Other	-	-	0.01(0.02)**	0.01(0.01)**
<i>Cons.</i>	2.64(2.02)*	3.19(2.47)*	3.05(1.94)	2.56(1.69)
<b>Group-Level</b>				
<b>Random Effect</b>	<b>Estimate (SE)</b>	<b>Estimate (SE)</b>	<b>Estimate (SE)</b>	<b>Estimate (SE)</b>
<i>Random Intercept</i>	1.07(0.28)	1.27(0.28)	0.64(0.29)	0.60(0.30)
<i>LR Test vs Fixed Effects</i>	.000	.000	.073	.097
	N = 312 Groups = 57	N = 312 Groups = 57	N = 312 Groups = 57	N = 312 Groups = 57

Note: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

In model 1, the year in which the incident occurred, appearance of an expert guest, weapon type and race/ethnicity of the suspect are all statistically significant predictors of the use of the “terrorism frame”. With each additional year, the odds that a transcript will use the terrorism frame increase about 8 percent (multiplied by 1.08,  $p < .05$ ) showing that the terrorism label is more commonly used in recent years. The inclusion of an expert guest in a broadcast news transcript increases the odds that the terrorism frame will be used in a transcript by 547 percent (multiplied by 6.47,  $p < .001$ ) compared to transcripts that do not include an expert guest. The number of people killed did not significantly predict use of the terrorism frame. The type of weapon used did significantly predict use of the terrorism frame. Compared to attacks which primarily used firearms, an attack that used explosive or incendiary weapon(s) increased the odds of using the terrorism frame by 365 percent (multiplied by 4.56,  $p < .05$ ), an attack which used vehicle(s) increased the odds of using the terrorism frame by 1781 percent (multiplied by 18.81,  $p < .01$ ), and melee attacks increased the odds of using the terrorism frame by 597 percent (multiplied by 6.97,  $p < .05$ ). Other attacks did not significantly predict use of the terrorism frame. Finally, the suspect’s apparent race/ethnicity did significantly predict use of the terrorism frame. Compared to transcripts about white suspects, transcripts about Black suspects increase the odds of using the terrorism frame by about 403 percent (multiplied by 5.03,  $p < .05$ ), and transcripts about MENA suspects increase the odds of using the terrorism frame by about 741 percent, (multiplied by 8.41,  $p < .001$ ).

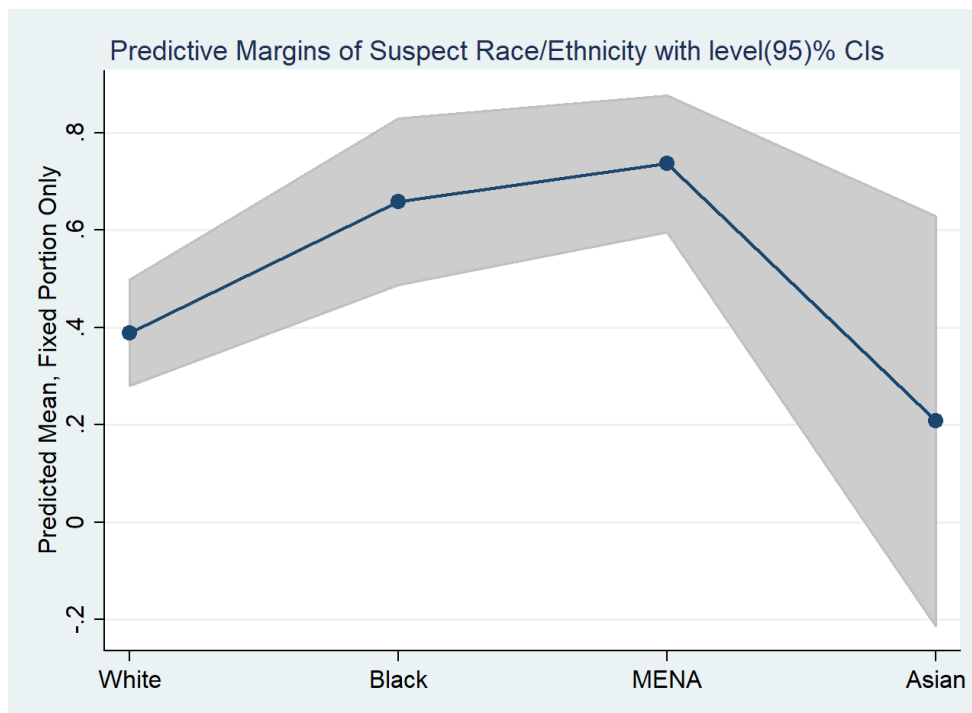
In model 2, the effect of suspects’ place of birth is assessed along with control variables instead of suspects’ race/ethnicity. Again, year is a significant predictor of use of the terrorist frame ( $p < .05$ ), adding an additional year increases the odds of transcripts using the terrorism frame by 1.08. Also, having an expert guest on the transcript increases the odds of using the

terror frame by about 570 percent (multiplied by 6.70,  $p < .001$ ). Neither whether the transcript is about the incident or the number of people killed had statistically significant effect in model 2. The type of weapon used again predicted use of the terrorism frame. Compared to attacks using firearms, vehicular attacks increased the odds of using the terrorist frame by about 1269 percent (multiplied by 13.69,  $p < .05$ ), and melee attacks increased the odds of using the terrorist frame by about 922 percent (multiplied by 10.22,  $p < .05$ ). Neither explosive/incendiary attacks or other attacks were significantly different from firearm attacks in model 2. Finally, compared to suspects who are US-born, suspects who are foreign-born increase the odds of transcripts using the terrorism frame by about 474 percent (multiplied by 5.74,  $p < .01$ ). In both model 1 and model 2, the group-level random effects, in this case incidents, are statistically significant. This means that in these models, there are significant differences between incidents not explained by the variables included in the models.

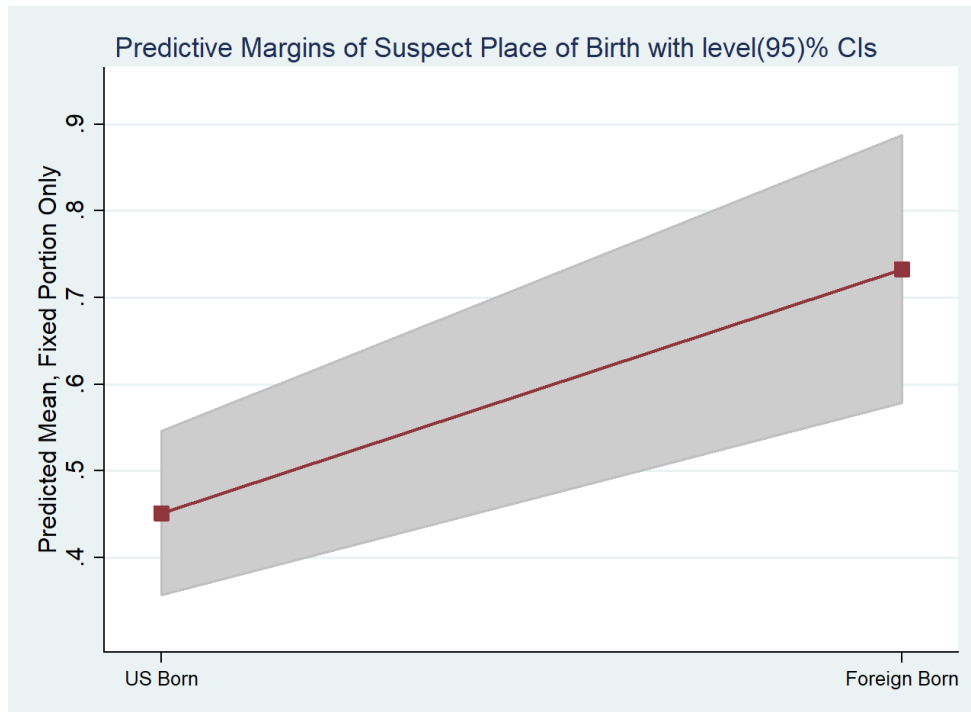
Model 3 tests the effect of suspects' ideological affiliation on use of the terrorism frame along with control variables. In model 3, whether the transcript is about the incident, the year that the incident took place in, and the number of people killed in the incident do not significantly predict use of the terror frame. The presence of an expert guest on a transcript is still significant ( $p < .001$ ), increasing the odds of the transcript using the terror frame by about 601 percent (multiplied by 7.01). The weapon used also still significantly predict use of the terror frame. Compared to firearm attacks, vehicular attacks (multiplied by 8.92,  $p < .05$ ) and other attacks (multiplied by 26.1,  $p < .05$ ) both increased the odds of transcripts using the terrorism frame. Explosive/incendiary attacks and melee attacks did not significantly predict use of the terror frame compared to firearm attacks in model 3. Suspect ideology did significantly predict use of the terror frame. Compared to suspects with radical Islamic ideologies, suspects with far-

right ideologies (multiplied by 0.07,  $p < .001$ ), far-left ideologies (multiplied by 0.06,  $p < .001$ ), and suspects with Other ideologies (multiplied by 0.01,  $p < .001$ ) all decreased the odds of the terror frame being used by broadcast news transcripts. Figures 3.10-3.12 chart the probabilities of a transcript using the “terrorism” frame by suspect characteristics in models 1-3. Interestingly, when accounting for suspect ideology, the group-level random effects are no longer statistically significant.

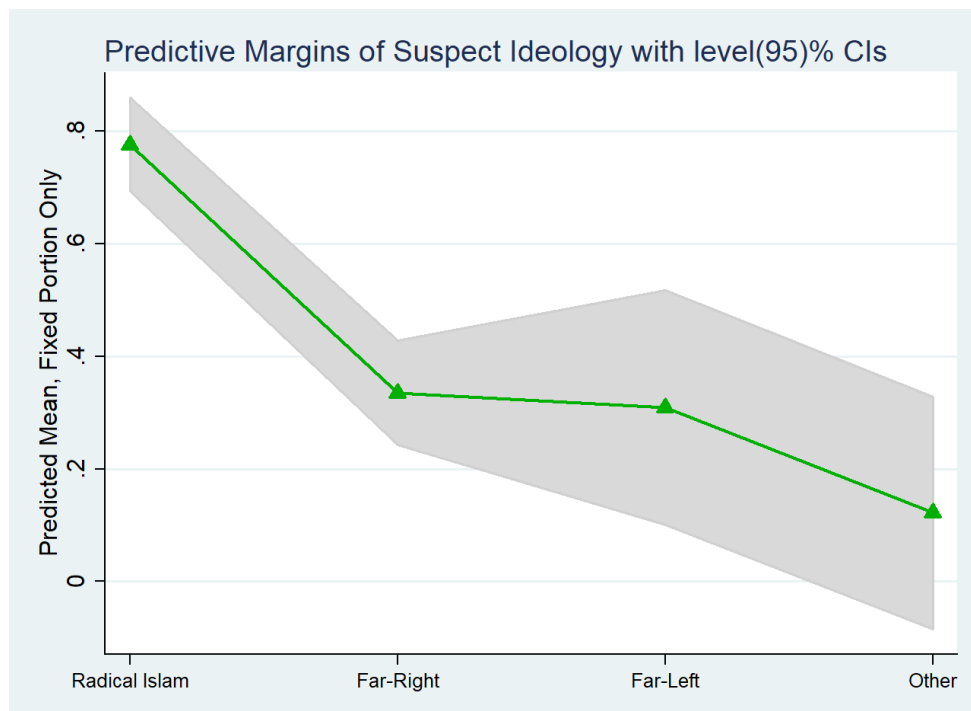
**Figure 3.10 Predictive Margins for Use of Terrorism Frame by Suspect Race/Ethnicity with 95% Confidence Intervals (Model 1)**



**Figure 3.11 Predictive Margins for Use of Terrorism Frame by Place of Birth with 95% Confidence Intervals (Model 2)**



**Figure 3.12 Predictive Margins for Use of Terrorism Frame by Suspect Ideology with 95% Confidence Intervals (Model 3)**





Model 4 then combines all variables tested in models 1 through 3, assessing the effect of suspects' race/ethnicity, place of birth, and ideology on use of the terrorism frame together with control variables. In model 4, the presence of an expert guest increases the odds of transcripts using the terror frame by about 606 percent (multiplied by 7.06,  $p < .001$ ). The type of weapon used also significantly predicts use of the terror frame. Compared to firearm attacks, both vehicular attacks (multiplied by 9.08,  $p < .05$ ) and Other attacks (multiplied by 34.51,  $p < .05$ ) increased the odds of use of the terror frame. Explosive/incendiary attacks and melee attacks were not significantly different from firearm attacks in model 4. Additionally, whether the transcript was about the incident, the year in which the incident occurred, and the number of people killed in the incident are not statistically significant in model 4. As for suspect characteristics, when race/ethnicity, place of birth, and ideology are all included together, the only variable which significantly predicts use of the terrorism frame is suspects' ideology. Suspects with radical Islamic ideologies are more likely to have the terrorist label used in a news transcript, and this mediates the effects of the suspects' race/ethnicity and place of birth. Specifically, compared to suspects with radical Islamic ideologies, suspects with far-right ideologies (multiplied by 0.04,  $p < .001$ ), far-left ideologies (multiplied by 0.04,  $p < .001$ ), and Other ideologies (multiplied by 0.01,  $p < .001$ ) all decrease the odds of transcripts using the terrorism frame, net of all other variables. Again, when accounting for suspect ideology, the group-level random effects are no longer statistically significant. Essentially, accounting for ideology/religion makes all the difference, and there are no longer significant differences between incidents beyond what is accounted for in the model.

The mediation of both the effect of race/ethnicity and place of birth is unexpected, however due to the high overlap in these categories, i.e. all MENA suspects are also associated with

radical Islam, the independent effects of these variables could be masked in this multivariate relationship. Sensitivity to model specification is addressed by refining how measures are estimated in regression models. Two additional analyses were performed as well: a crosstabulation using “streamlined” binary variables for race/ethnicity (1 = MENA; 0 = Other), and ideology (1 = Radical Islam; 0 = Other Ideology), the results of which are shown below in Table 3.3.

**Table 3.3 Crosstabulation of MENA and Radical Islam with Chi<sup>2</sup> Test**

	Not-Radical Islam	Radical Islam	Total
<i>Not-MENA</i>	162	72	234
<i>MENA</i>	0	78	78
<i>Total</i>	162	150	312

*Pearson Chi<sup>2</sup> = 112.32*                      *p<.001*

The crosstabulation results reveal that the suspect’s race/ethnicity and ideology significantly related ( $Chi^2=112.32$ ,  $p<.001$ ). In particular, the table notes that all 78 cases where the suspect is MENA are also associated with Radical Islam. The number of cases involving not-MENA suspects are split between ideologies of radical Islam ( $N = 72$ ) and other ideologies ( $N = 162$ ), and cases involving suspects associated with radical Islam are almost evenly split between MENA ( $N = 78$ ) and suspects of other race/ethnicities ( $N = 72$ ). The absence of cases in the MENA/Not-Radical Islam category ( $N = 0$ ) is likely concealing any independent effect that the suspects’ race/ethnicity may have on use of the terrorism label by broadcast news media when suspect ideology is also accounted for in the regression analyses in Table 3.2. In short, the operationalization and specification of race, ethnicity, and religion/ideology is particularly tricky.

## Discussion

The overall focus of this chapter is to evaluate the extent to which socially constructed meanings applied to similar behaviors at different times and places affect the public's perceptions of mass violence. What it is, how it affects individuals and society, how individuals and social institutions respond to perceived violence all differ greatly by which label is used to describe the incident. Who is a terrorist? Based on previous literature, the "terrorist" is portrayed most commonly as a "Muslim" man who is foreign, appears Middle Eastern, and is motivated by radical Islamic ideology.

There is research suggesting that characteristics of the attack may influence whether or not an event is labelled as terrorism, for which I find mixed support. This chapter does not necessarily find support for studies that have suggested that mass violence events with a higher number of casualties receive a greater amount of media attention (Lankford and Madfis 2018). At least, I find that events with greater casualties are not more likely to be called terrorist attacks. Interestingly, I find support for Altheide's (2006; 2017) finding that the use of "experts" is a key part of communicating the terrorist threat to the public. In this chapter, I find that when a news program features an "expert" guest, the incident is more likely to be framed as terrorism. There is also a suggestion in the literature that terrorists are perceived as using explosives or unconventional weapons (Woods 2011), for which I also find some support. Specifically, when suspects use weapons other than firearms, they are more likely to be labelled as terrorists.

Western societies and the antagonism felt toward Islam and Muslims is racial in nature (Constadine 2017; Dunn, Klocker, and Salabay 2007; Taras 2013). I find support for the assertions that in the case of US, much of the increase in Islamophobia has occurred since the

1990's, especially following the 9/11 attacks (Skenderovic and Späti 2019), and that Islamophobia is racially based (Dunn, Klocker, and Salabay 2007; Constadine 2017; Garner and Selod 2015; Taras 2013). The interaction of race, ethnicity, religion, racialization, and racism involved with Islamophobia are difficult to disentangle (Taras 2013), and I do find support for this. In my analysis, race/ethnicity, birthplace, and religion/ideology are all significantly associated with use of the terrorist label in news transcripts. Interestingly, these measures seem to act as a proxy for the construct of "Muslim". Despite the difficulties in disaggregating the intersection of race, ethnicity, and religion when studying Islamophobia, I agree with scholars who assert that racialization theory is appropriate way to understand the framing of Muslims as terrorists (Garner and Selod 2015).

The strongest findings in this chapter are that the application of the terrorist label is racially biased. Some research has found that in mass murder events, white offenders are seldom discussed in terms of their race in news coverage (Mingus and Zopf 2010). News coverage also over-emphasizes the race/ethnicity and "foreignness" of non-white offenders (Chuang 2012; Mingus and Zopf 2010). I do find support for this in my analyses of broadcast news transcripts. Non-white and foreign-born suspects are more likely to be labelled as terrorists, than white and US-born suspects. However, whiteness does not shield a suspect from the "terrorism" label if they are associated with Islam. This chapter finds evidence that "Muslims" have been racialized in the US – though this is not based entirely on nationality or skin color. Islamophobia plays on historical constructs of Orientalism, similar to how Jews were portrayed in Europe and the US in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Skenderovic and Späti 2019). White privilege appears to meet its limit when an individual is associated with Islam, which has also been found by other researchers (Moosavi 2015; Selod 2015).

Both Middle Eastern and non-Middle Eastern Muslims are more likely to be called terrorists than their non-Muslim counterparts. The effect is larger for non-Middle Eastern Muslims. This could be due to an implicit assumption that Middle Eastern suspects are “terrorists”, whereas suspects of other racial/ethnic backgrounds could have been committing another type of crime – hence clarification is needed. These suspects are Muslim, ergo they are still terrorists in the eyes of the public, despite lacking the Middle Eastern appearance. Another explanation is that Middle Eastern suspects may be presumed to have a motivation for committing terrorism. However non-Middle Eastern suspects engaging in the same behavior might be considered particularly abnormal – again requiring clarification from news media reporting on the incidents.

It is true that whites and non-whites clearly have different lived experiences and media constructions in the US. Consequently, we should understand the “Muslim” lived experience to be distinct from whiteness as well, at least in popular discourse, regardless of skin color. The data analyzed in this chapter provides evidence that “Muslims” are not considered to meet the cultural standards of “whiteness” in the US today. Analysis of media coverage of terrorism suspects reveals that even when a white person adopts Muslim ethnic markers, they find themselves facing the same media construction as a non-white Muslim.

Additionally, I assert that markers of “Muslim” racialization include an association with terrorism. Prior research demonstrated that when a mass shooter is white, media rarely discusses their race. Consequently, when a mass shooter is non-white, media over-emphasizes the suspect’s race in their reporting. There are precedents for defining religious groups as “races” in US history, particularly when considering how Jews were portrayed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. I

find parallels in social trends primarily occurring in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, to “Orientalism” of earlier eras in this chapter. Other research found that while white converts to Islam can still benefit from greater respect in society, their whiteness is precarious, and they can lose some of the benefits of their whiteness. My research finds that, at least in news reporting about terrorism suspects, association with Islam essentially “revokes” a suspect’s whiteness.

The case of conspiracy theories about President Obama’s religion and birthplace provide a very visible example of the racialization of Muslims and Islamophobia is in. Race was a constant factor in Obamas candidacy and Presidency (Fraser 2009). President Obama is often cited as the first Black President (ibid.). Although his father was a black Kenyan, he can equally claim white parentage from his mother. Narratives about Obama’s race shifted throughout his campaign and Presidency but always portrayed a “foreignness” that was presumed to be threatening to white voters. During the 2008 Presidential campaign, a right-wing conspiracy theory emerged that Barack Obama was secretly Muslim (Layman et al 2014). This is easily disproven, as Barack Obama to practice a Christian faith, and was also controversially his association with Reverend Jeremiah Wright (McKenzie 2011). Another far-right conspiracy theory which gained traction during Obama’s Presidency claims that Obama was not born in the United States (Hughley 2012), also known as the Birther movement. These conspiracy theories about race and foreignness endure, despite plain evidence that Obama is a Christian, and natural born citizen. These claims, however, do not come from a place of good faith (Hughley 2012). President Obama’s multiracial heritage is largely the unspoken motivation for these conspiracy theories which were embraced by conservatives (Hughley 2012; Layman et al 2014).

The previous chapter demonstrated the agenda setting power of the President and news media. I found that the public is more concerned about terrorism as a problem when more Presidential remarks and news media stories discuss terrorism as a topic. This chapter demonstrates that the content of those news stories is racially biased, and more likely to portray “Muslims” as terrorists than non-Muslims for the same behavior. The following chapter analyses how selective exposure to media messages influences an individual’s fear of a terrorist attack compared to a mass shooting, assuming that the labels have different connotations and racial meaning attached to them.

## CHAPTER IV. COMPARING PUBLIC FEAR OF TERRORIST ATTACKS TO PUBLIC FEAR OF MASS SHOOTINGS

During the 2016 Presidential Campaign the threats and realities of extreme violence in the United States – particularly terrorist attacks and mass shooting incidents – took a prominent role in candidates’ policy platforms. My dissertation investigates whether members of the public are more likely to worry about a terrorist attack or a mass shooting based on their media consumption habits and political beliefs. I also specifically account for indicators that are known to be associated with individuals’ fear of violent crime victimization. Specifically, I use data from the Fall 2017 Granite State Poll to test how selective exposure to partisan mass media predicts individuals’ expressed fears of being victimized in either a terrorist attack or a mass shooting, while controlling for individual characteristics, including background factors, and prior political leanings. I argue that fear of terrorism and fear of mass shootings is not only a response to violence, but also to the politics, messages, and meanings that surround events of extremist violence.

The rise to prominence of the group *Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant* or *ISIL* in 2014, and attacks carried out in 2015 and 2016 by *ISIL*-trained individuals in Europe and *ISIL*-inspired individuals in the US reignited public concerns of terrorist violence in the US. In combination with the refugee migrant crisis in the Middle East and Europe precipitated by the escalation of the Syrian and Iraqi civil wars, terrorism, immigration, and gun violence emerged as wedge issues during the 2016 US election cycle (Albertson and Kushner Gadarian 2016). This culminated in then-candidate Donald Trump proposing a “total ban” on Muslims entering the



United State following the ISIL-Inspired San Bernardino, CA attack in December 2015, and the eventual signing of Executive Order 13769 in January 2017.

Throughout the 2016 Presidential campaign, Donald Trump espoused a view that foreign terrorist organizations, immigrants broadly, and Muslims in particular, are a threat to the US homeland and the American way of life. Winning the Presidency using racially charged language equating Muslims and other non-White immigrants as dangerous criminals and leveraging the US public's fear of victimization in ISIL-inspired attacks, the Trump administration has subsequently pursued many controversial policies in the US and abroad under the guise of combatting terrorism and enacting immigration control. These policies include the "Muslim Ban" and southern border wall.

Conversely, candidate Hillary Clinton emphasized gun control policies as a means to curb mass shootings, an issue which became central to the democratic candidate's platform (Albertson and Kushner Gadarian 2016; Brogan et al 2020). Incidents of mass violence which occurred during the 2016 campaign season – such as the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, FL and attack on police officers at a Black Lives Matter rally in Dallas, TX – provoked very different responses from candidates Trump and Clinton according to news sources at the time (Chozick et al 2016; Nelson, Lind, and Golshan 2016). This culminated in the 2016 Democratic Convention, which included victims of the Orlando shooting speaking on gun control policy. Clearly, each candidate conceptualized the danger facing US society in 2016 differently and thus communicated distinct messages about the threat posed by violent extremists to the US public. They also proposed opposing solutions to combatting the alleged problem(s), i.e. a "Muslim Ban" versus and "Assault Weapon" ban.

These divergent views on the nature of extremist threats – and the solutions to fighting them – are not new but have been promoted to the US public through mass media outlets for decades. Political elites and news media both play a central role in shaping the discussion surrounding incidents such as terrorism or mass shootings, and subsequently influencing public opinion (Altheide 2006, 2009; Woods 2007). In media conversations about terrorism, Islamic radical groups such as Al Qaeda have dominated the thoughts of politicians and media narratives alike (Kunda 1999; Norris et al 2003; Papacharissi and Oliveira 2008; Nagar 2010; Powell 2011; Woods 2011, 2014). Consequently, “radical Islam” and “terrorism” have become practically interchangeable terms in the US discourse (ibid). Combatting these groups has been the primary justification for the US-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the continued presence of US forces in the Middle East (LaFree 2009). All of this came to a head again in 2016.

In this chapter, I examine the effect that this politicking around mass violence – and the promotion of particular in partisan mass media – have on the US public, who play an important role in selecting the country’s leadership? To assess this question, I include measured of individuals’ vote cast in the 2016 Presidential election (i.e. Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton), and how frequently individuals watch local TV news, listen to National Public Radio, and listen to Conservative Talk Radio to predict how worried respondents are about victimization in a terrorist attack or in a mass shooting. Additionally, I account for background characteristics of sex and age which have previously been shown to predict individuals’ fear of violent crime victimization, as well as lifestyle factors of gun ownership and religious attendance.

## **Terrorism and the Politics of Fear**

The traditional fear of crime literature has consistently found that certain sociodemographic factors are associated with fear of crime victimization – i.e. women and older people are more fearful of crime than men and younger people (Akers et al 1987, Callanan and Teasdale 2009, Franklin and Franklin 2009, Henson and Reynolds 2015, Lagrange and Ferraro 1989, Rader and Haynes 2011, Reid and Konrad 2004, Smith and Torstensson 1997, Stafford and Galle 1984, Warr 1984). Although these findings are consistent in the empirical literature, theoretical explanations about these findings are still debated. It has been proposed that women and older people feel less able to defend themselves against violent crime, and therefore feel more vulnerable and report being more fearful (Henson and Reynolds 2015, Smith and Torstensson 1997, Warr 1984). Additionally, some scholars have asserted that women in particular are fearful of sexual assault and related crimes, and therefore express more fear about crime generally (see Henson and Reynolds 2015, Reid and Konrad 2004), although this explanation is rejected by some scholars (Franklin and Franklin 2009). Finally, it has been proposed that through gender socialization women are more likely to express emotions such as fear and are therefore more likely to articulate fear of crime (Rader and Haynes 2011). The fear of crime literature has also examined the role of community factors, gun ownership, and media consumptions in predicting fear of crime (Adams and Serpe 2000, Callanan 2012, Carvalho and Lewis 2003, Chiricos, Padgett, and Gertz 2000, Custers and Van den Bulck 2011, Glassner 2009, Hartnagel 1979, Kohm 2009, Holbert, Shah and Kwak 2004, Williams and Dickinson 1993).

This literature is not sufficient to explain fear of a terrorist attack or fear of a mass shooting. Women and older people may be less able to resist or defend themselves in these events, but only

marginally compared to others when considering terrorist attacks and/or mass shootings. Because of the extreme and unpredictable nature of this violence, and the frequent public settings, it is unlikely that factors such as sex or age would greatly influence a victim's ability to protect themselves. Furthermore, there is no reason to believe that mass violence perpetrators are more likely to select women or older people as targets due to this perceived vulnerability. Some exceptions may exist with recent "incel" attacks, however these occurred after the Fall 2017 survey data used in this study.

In general, humans are not adept at assessing risks objectively. This is especially true for high-impact, low-probability events (Woods 2007). On the other hand, discrepancies between public perceptions and objective risks as assessed by experts has been observed on a multitude of issues. The general public often lacks information about topics, or even rejects evidence that disagrees with core beliefs. In some cases, experts may be distrusted by segments of the public. This has been demonstrated in research about public trust in the science of vaccines and climate change. Public perceptions of crime rates and prevalence of violent offenses are also frequently out of line with what official statistics reflect, terrorism and mass shootings being misunderstood in a similar vein.

To fully understand the fear of terrorism and the fear of mass shootings, I turn to David Altheide's (2006, 2017) *Terrorism and the Politics of Fear*, which outlines the social process by which politicians and mass media create propaganda and leverage the public's assumptions about risk and danger to pursue and win political office, enact policy objectives, and sell products. This work forms the theoretical backbone of this project. The existing literature in this area has

focused mostly on media effects, however quantitative investigations of the public's views and behaviors in response to mass media and politics have not been extensively studied.

### *Defining and Measuring Terrorism and Mass Shootings*

There is debate about whether incidents of mass violence such as terrorist attacks and mass shootings have increasing in frequency and severity in the US in recent years. According to a study done by the FBI, the number of “active shooter” events increased by an average of 16 percent annually in the US between 2000 and 2013 (Blair and Schweit 2014). Data available from the Global Terrorism Database also show approximately a 32 percent average annual increase in the number of terrorist incidents in the US from 2001 to 2017 (START 2019). However, it is important to note that the overall trajectory of violent crime rates in the US over the past 50 years has been downward – including gun violence and terrorist events<sup>7</sup>. The discrepancy in results found between studies and datasets are often the results of inconsistencies in the definitions and measurement of “terrorist attacks” and “mass shootings”.

No single, firm definition or set of criteria for measuring either terrorist events or mass shootings that is widely agreed upon. Additionally, incidents of mass violence vary greatly from one place to another. For example, despite the amount of news coverage devoted to terrorism over the past 20 years, terrorist events are relatively rare occurrences in the US. Conversely, terrorist events occur in comparatively higher frequency in Europe, and relatively are common occurrences in countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Beyond this, mass media coverage of violent crime has *increased* inversely to violent crime rates in the US (Altheide

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<sup>7</sup> For more information, see the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) at <https://www.fbi.gov/services/cjis/ucr> and the University of Maryland's Global Terrorism Database (GTD) <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>

2006, 2017; Glassner 2009). It appears that mass media over-emphasizes the prevalence and severity of extremist mass violence in the US. Violent events such as terrorist attacks or mass shootings can dominate news cycles for weeks or months (ibid.). In an interconnected media environment, it is nearly impossible to escape depictions of extreme violence.

While definitional criteria of terrorist attacks and mass shootings are not mutually exclusive, i.e. many terrorists commit mass murder with firearms, there are some distinctions between them. For example, terrorist attacks can be carried out with a variety of weapons, definitions of terrorism do not require a minimum fatality threshold, and many mass shooters do not have clear motivations. However, I argue that terrorism and mass shootings share common characteristics which make them appropriate for a comparison of public perception. Terrorism and mass shootings are both typically conceptualized as extreme stranger violence, involving mass murder, and usually occur in a public place (see GTD, RAND definitions). While this is not always the case, and definitional ambiguity dominates academic discussions, the messages that the general public receive about terrorism and mass shootings are similar in this respect. The risk of victimization in a terrorist attack or mass shooting is also extremely low, occurring relatively infrequently, and only representing a small proportion of deaths in the U.S. annually (see Kockanek 2019). Despite this, news media gives a good deal of attention to these events.

Both concepts share a degree of definitional ambiguity. Definitions of terrorism typically rely on motivational factors to determine if a violent act is “terrorism” or not. Many of these definitions describe terrorism as violence in pursuit of a political, social, economic, or religious goal; occurring outside the context of legitimate warfare; targeting mostly civilians; conducted by sub-state actors; and intended to influence a larger audience than the immediate victims.

Technical definitions such as this are typically developed by governments, individual agencies, and academics for a variety of purposes including prosecuting offenders, crafting public policy, and conducting scholarly research.

Mass shootings have a similar definitional ambiguity. In some ways, these definitions are more specific, i.e. specifying a weapon type, however in others there is disagreement about the criteria for an event to qualify as a mass shooting. A 2015 report from the RAND corporation on definitions and measurement of mass shootings in the United States notes that while the FBI defines mass murderer as someone who kills four or more people in a single incident, not including themselves, it does not define a mass shooting (Smart 2015). Instead, several organizations and researchers have offered their own definitions of mass shooting which often draw on the FBI definition of mass murder (ibid.). What is not agreed upon in defining mass shootings is the number of people who are killed or wounded (some definitions only count fatalities, some include all casualties), whether to include the attacker in fatality counts, the motivations of the attackers (e.g. some include gang violence and domestic violence), and the venue of the attack (i.e. only counting events which occur public versus anywhere). This ambiguity makes studying trends in mass shootings very difficult, as different data sources will often lead to different conclusions about where, when, how frequently, and ultimately why these events occur<sup>8</sup>.

Additionally, the academic and policy research on terrorism and mass shootings, where most of these definitional debates play out, do not play a significant role in the general public's understanding of what a terrorist incident/mass shooting is, what trends and patterns exist in

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<sup>8</sup> For more information, read the full report from RAND Corp. at <https://www.rand.org/research/gun-policy/analysis/essays/mass-shootings.html>

mass violence, and what risk individuals face (Altheide 1006, 2009; LaFree 2009; Turk 2004; Woods 2007). Members of the general public are not widely seeking out academic research on mass violence to investigate, weigh evidence, and form their perceptions, rather they rely primarily on news media to get information about terrorism and mass shooting events (ibid.). Media attention to both terrorism and mass shootings has increased since 2000, while research on the number of terrorist and mass shooting events has not clearly shown an increase in incidents or fatalities. Conversely, several studies have found a link between news media consumption and worry or fear of crime, including mass violence (Callanan 2012; Chiricos, Padgett, and Gertz 2000; Custers and Van den Bulck 2011; Holbert, Shah, and Kwak 2004; Lowe and Galea 2017; Nellis and Savage 2012; Williams and Dickinson 1993).

Although data sources disagree on exact numbers, by most measures the risk of victimization in a terrorist attack and the risk of victimization in a mass shooting is comparatively similar in the United States (see Smart 2018; START 2017). Both terrorist attack and mass shooting events have a low probability of affecting us as individuals, but a have high impact on victims when they do occur (Woods et al 2008). Social Psychological research has found that individuals often have difficulty evaluating the risk of low probability, high impact events, sometimes overestimating their likelihood, sometimes under-estimating (Woods et al 2008). While exact estimates on the number of people killed in terrorist attacks and mass shootings in the U.S. every year vary by data source (Smart 2018), both are far from the leading cause of accidental death, dwarfed by traffic fatalities (Olaisen et al 2019), falls (ibid.), prescription opioid overdoses (ibid.), suicide (Kochanek et al 2019), and even outnumbered by people killed by police officers (Tate et al 2020). Some scholars estimate that the likelihood of an individual dying violently – at least for citizens of wealthy, developed nations – is lower today than at any previous point in



human history (Pinker 2011). However, when a terrorist attack or mass shooting occurs, it can dominate news cycles for weeks or even months, likely altering public perceptions of the risk of violent death (Altheide 2006, 2009, 2017).

Taking the similarities into account, it is reasonable to expect that individuals would report similar feelings of fear for both terrorist attacks and mass shootings. However, I hypothesize that this is not the case, and that individuals' socio-demographic characteristics such as gender and age, lifestyle factors such as gun ownership, and interaction with social institutions such as religion and politics, and selective mass media consumption patterns all influence whether someone is more worried or fearful about victimization in both terrorist attacks compared to a mass shootings. That is to say, I assert that your politics and media consumptions habits can predict what you are worried about.

Despite this, mass media, which is the primary source of information about these events for most Americans (Altheide 1006, 2009; Turk 2004; Woods 2007), frames terrorism and mass shootings in distinct terms. This means that the labels of "terrorism" or "terrorist" and "mass shooting" or "mass shooter" are constructed around unique meanings, language, and imagery. These meanings convey a different threat to the general public. Research on the framing of extremist violence shows that the associated meanings extend to the presumed motivations of the offender, e.g. religious motivations such as radical Islam (Altheide 2006, 2009; Papacharissi and Oliveira 2008; Nagar 2010; Powell 2011; Woods 2007, 2011) vs individual motivations such as mental illness (Wilson, Ballman, and Buczek 2016), the characteristics of the offender, e.g. a radical, Muslim man (see Chapter 3) vs a troubled, White adolescent (Mingus and Zopf 2010), and how to respond to the presumed threat, i.e. national security response (Altheide 2006, 2009;

LaFree 2009; Papacharissi and Oliveira 2008; Nagar 2010; Norris et al 2003; Powell 2011; Woods 2007, 2011; Woods and Arthur 2014) vs law enforcement (Lawrence and Birkland 2004; Stroebe, Leander, and Kruglanski 2017; Schildkraut and Elsass 2016; Vizzard 2015) or public health response (Birkland and Lawrence 2009; Wilson, Ballman, and Buczek 2016).

Mass media content, political discussion, and popular attitudes associate terrorism with Islamic radicals (Altheide 2006, 2009; Papacharissi and Oliveira 2008; Nagar 2010; Powell 2011; Woods 2007, 2011). Within the context of US news media, the word terrorism itself is used to convey a specific threat that is distinct from common crimes or political upheaval (Kunda 1999). In a content analysis of media coverage of politically violent groups, Nagar (2010) found that Islamic groups were more likely to be labeled as terrorist groups in US news media, especially among conservative-leaning sources. Similarly, Powell (2011) found that media outlets consistently tried to attribute terrorist incidents to radical Islamic terrorists, even if this was not actually the case, in a content analysis of US news coverage of terrorist incidents since 9/11. Additionally, in another content analysis Woods and Arthur (2014) found that after 9/11, a variety of “foreign” threats, including terrorism, garnered increasingly negative framing in US news coverage, including immigration from non-white countries.

Mass shootings, on the other hand, are typically portrayed in a different light. Silva and Capellan (2019) identify four different types of mass shooters covered in mass media: rampage shooters, disgruntled employees, school shooters, and lone-wolf terrorists. Mass shooters have frequently been portrayed as disaffected adolescents (Muschert 2007; Silva and Capellan 2019) and were even framed as juvenile superpredators in the 1990’s (Muschert 2007). News coverage rarely highlights the race of a mass shooter, so long as they are white (Mingus and Zopf 2010).

However, when an offender is non-white, news coverage over-emphasizes their race (Chuang 2012; Mingus and Zopf 2010) and conveys messages about their foreignness to the public (ibid.). Additionally, mass shootings are frequently discussed in term of mental illness (Wilson, Ballman, and Buczek 2016) and gun policy (Lawrence and Birkland 2004; Stroebe, Leander, and Kruglanski 2017; Schildkraut and Elsass 2016; Vizzard 2015).

### **Fear of Crime, Fear of Terrorism, Fear of Mass Shootings**

Traditionally, criminological theories of the fear of crime have emphasized individuals' perceptions of vulnerability (Henson and Reyns 2015; Smith and Torstensson 1997; Warr 1984). This includes factors such as: suitability as a target, ability to physically resist victimization, and social/cultural messages about risk of victimization. This has mostly been studied in the context of "street crime" or interpersonal violence. Terrorist attacks and mass shootings, in contrast to interpersonal violence, often involve the targeting of civilians in public places, mass violence events are very difficult to predict, and the victims are selected by happenstance (Black 2004). Compared to street crimes such as robbery, terrorism and mass shootings rarely involve an economic motive, but are instead linked to ideology. While it is conceivable that some of the factors which influence fear of victimization in "street crimes" and interpersonal crimes, the very different reality of how and why these crimes take place suggests that other factors may be more influential.

Currently, most research firms such as Gallup and Pew or news organization surveys represent most research about how the public understands and interprets mass violence events. These polls are rarely reported beyond descriptive statistics, are often only available in aggregate form, and frequently have relatively small samples for their target population. There are also

several peer-reviewed studies which rely on survey data to analyze fear of terrorism. Findings in these studies have been largely consistent with previous research on fear of crime, while also casting doubts on dominant theoretical explanations.

The fear of crime literature has consistently found sex and age to be significant and robust predictors of fear of crime victimization (Akers et al 1987; Callanan and Teasdale 2009; Franklin and Franklin 2009; Henson and Reyns 2015; Lagrange and Ferraro 1989; Rader and Haynes 2011; Reid and Konrad 2004; Smith and Torstensson 1997; Stafford and Galle 1984; Warr 1984). This literature has found that women and older respondents are more likely to report experiencing fear of victimization and also report higher levels of fear than male and younger respondents (*ibid.*). The dominant theoretical explanation of this relationship rests on the self-perceived physical vulnerability of the respondent, rather than a statistical likelihood of victimization (*ibid.*). That is to say, women and older people worry about crime more not because they are necessarily likely to be victims, but because they perceive that they are more suitable targets and less able to physically resist victimization (Henson and Reyns 2015; Smith and Torstensson 1997; Warr 1984). The notable exception and debate of this finding is that women are more worried about becoming victims of sexual assault and related offenses than men, which is also reflected in statistics (see Henson and Reyns 2015; Reid and Konrad 2004). Some scholars assert that women's greater fear of victimization reflects a fear of sexual assault (Reid and Konrad 2004). Others reject this notion (Franklin and Franklin 2009), overestimation of the gender-fear of crime gap (Callanan and Teasdale 2009; Snedker 2012), or a social learning theory approach in which women, through social interaction, learn a gendered fear of crime (Rader and Haynes 2011).

Many other factors have been linked to fear of crime, or conversely, reduced vulnerability to fear of crime, particularly location, and community contexts (Adams and Serpe 2000; Carvalho and Lewis 2003; Hartnagel 1979, Kohm 2009) and mass media consumption habits (Callanan 2012; Chiricos, Padgett, and Gertz 2000; Custers and Van den Bulck 2011; Glassner 2009; Holbert, Shah, and Kwak 2004; Williams and Dickinson 1993) For example, Adams and Serpe (2000) find that social integration to one's community can reduce the fear of crime victimization. Media consumption has been shown to distort views of crime rates (Callanan 2012, Glassner 2009), amplify perceptions of risk/vulnerability (Custers and Van den Bulck 2011) and increase fear of crime (Callanan 2012; Chiricos, Padgett, and Gertz 2000; Holbert, Shah, and Kwak 2004; Williams and Dickinson 1993). General fear of crime also influences individuals' susceptibility to moral panics around particular crimes, such as terrorist attacks or mass shootings (Schildkraut and Stafford 2015).

Owning weapons such as firearms is perhaps one way that individuals may attempt to remedy perceived vulnerability to criminal victimization. Essentially, firearm ownership may act as a protective factor against fear of crime victimization. By owning a firearm, the individual may believe that they are better able to physically defend themselves from victimization (Strobe, Leander, and Kruglanski 2017; Turchan, Zeoli, and Kwiatkowski 2017; Warner and Thrash 2020). Or they may believe that gun ownership will act as a deterrent to criminal victimization (Holbert, Shah, and Kwak 2004). Alternatively, those who are most fearful of violent victimization may be most likely to own a gun. Either way, firearm ownership and perceived risk of victimization are likely related.

Then again, gun culture in the United States may influence people's views about violent crime. Individuals who own guns frequently own multiple firearms and are more likely to be involved in organization that promote gun rights (Stroebe, Leander, and Kruglanski 2017). Specifically, because mass shootings are often followed by politicians talking about gun control policies (Lawrence and Birkland 2004; Stroebe, Leander, and Kruglanski 2017; Schildkraut and Elsass 2016; Vizzard 2015), gun owners may base their opinions on mass shootings on this political belief (Joslyn and Haider-Markel 2017). Alternatively, individuals may purchase firearms to defend themselves against a perceived threat from a mass shooting (Stroebe, Leander, and Kruglanski 2017; Turchan, Zeoli, and Kwiatkowski 2017).

Previous research has suggested that when mass violence is framed as "terrorism", the general public reports more fear and anxiety than when mass violence is not framed as terrorism (Swift 2015; Woods 2011). Characteristics such as gender, age, media exposure, and geographical location are all statistically significant predictors of an individual's fear of victimization in a terrorist attack (Brück and Müller 2010; Nellis 2009; Nellis and Savage 2012; Woods et al 2008). Specifically, women are more fearful than men of both crime and terrorism (ibid.) Women who fear terrorist victimization also engage in more coping strategies, such as avoiding perceived risky situations and locations and seeking more information about terrorism (Nellis and Savage 2012). Age has been another consistent predictor of both fear of crime and fear of terrorism (Brück and Müller 2010; Nellis 2009, Nellis and Savage 2012; Woods et al 2008). Specifically, older individuals are more fearful than younger individuals (ibid.).

A Michigan study by Woods et al (2008) also found that proximity to a perceived terrorist target influenced fear of terrorism, particularly among lower socioeconomic status individuals

and racial minorities experienced. Additionally, previous studies have suggested that societal elites and media coverage of terrorism may influence perceptions of risk more than actual terrorism incidents, similar to news coverage of crime (Altheide 2006, 2009; Clarke and Chess 2008; Nellis and Savage 2012; Woods 2007). Additionally, research has suggested that the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents such as gender, age, race, class, and geographic location influence an individual's perception of terrorism victimization risk (Brück and Muller 2010; Nellis 2009; Nellis and Savage 2012; Woods et al 2008). Public opinion surveys have found similar patterns (McCarthy 2015; Swift 2015).

News media outlets often assume that audiences prefer stories about perpetrators of mass murder (Lankford and Madfis 2018; Levin and Wiest 2018). An experimental study by Levin and Wiest (2018) found that respondents are generally more interested in stories featuring heroic bystanders than perpetrators. However, they also found that individuals in their 40s and more fearful individuals were most interested in stories about mass murder (ibid.). A meta-analysis of research conducted in the aftermath of mass shooting incidents found that not only do directly affected communities experience negative psychological outcomes in the wake of mass shooting events, but communities that are not directly affected can also experience increases in social fear and negative effects on perceived safety (Lowe and Galea 2017).

### *Politics, Identity, and Selective Mass Media Exposure*

While there is frequently a link between one's political leanings and religious affiliation, some researchers assert that religious and political beliefs are closely linked, and the result of underlying psychological orientations (Friesen and Ksiazkiewicz 2015). Religious attendance can have a small effect on political participation (Ammann 2015), although once politically

active, individuals' political behavior is not impacted by changes in religiosity (ibid.). Religiosity can also limit individuals' ability to acquire and process some types of political information, particularly when it contradicts their closely held beliefs (Gaskins 2019).

Attending religious services can serve many social functions. One this religion does is provide a frame of reference for understanding world events. If terrorism is framed as a religious conflict, i.e. one of Islam vs Christianity, then it is possible that this may influence a religious individuals' perceptions of terrorism and how it relates to them personally. Additionally, many mass violence events have occurred at places of worship. Individuals who attend religious services regularly may perceive themselves to be at greater risk of victimization. Alternatively, individuals who see places of worship as potential terrorism targets may engage in avoidant behavior, not attending regularly.

Studies have also demonstrated bias against Muslims in US public attitudes. US respondents prefer that foreign aid is given to Christian-majority countries over Muslim-majority countries (Blackman 2018; Thomas 2004). A 2011 study of public attitudes of Muslims in the US suggests that Muslims are perhaps the least trusted group by highly religious Americans, and considered the definitive outsider group (Hinze, Mencken, and Tolbert 2011). Conservative Christians in particular are more likely to hold negative views of groups with religious differences (Yancy, Eisenstein, and Burge 2017). Another study found that Christians were more likely to have low levels of respect for Islam (Pevey and McKenzie 2009) compared to other groups. While this study also found that increased contact with Muslims generally improves attitudes towards Muslims and Islam, the opposite is true for Evangelicals, who show lower respect for Islam with increased contact (ibid.). Some scholars have even gone as far as arguing that adherents to



certain religious sects in the US, such as a plurality of white Evangelicals, share a worldview of white Christian supremacy (Gorski 2017). Interestingly, measures of religious affiliation have been shown to have an association with the number of hate groups in a geographic area (Goetz, Rupasingha, and Loveridge 2012).

Mass media influences the public in many ways. The primary theoretical explanations which offer insight into the influential role of American news media discuss Agenda Setting, Framing Events, and Reinforcing Spirals. *Agenda Setting* (McCombs and Shaw 1993) describes how news media shapes public perceptions of events by deciding what is newsworthy – promoting certain topics over others as deserving of the public’s attention. Theories of elite cues suggest that individuals form opinions based on cues given by societal elites with whom they identify. Additionally, media outlets can portray events in various ways with the use of certain words, phrases, and imagery. This is known as *Framing*.

*Framing* generally refers to the process by which mass media uses words, phrases, images, and symbols to portray a particular message. For example, the phrase “the cold war” and pictures of the Berlin wall are used to communicate ideas about global power relations during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. I focus on the impact of specific frames such as “Terrorist Attack” and “Mass Shooting” as used by US news media. Framing is a somewhat contentious topic among scholars, and consequently one of the most critically studied topics in communication literature. Entman (1993) described framing as a “fractured paradigm”. While some researchers do not go into detail to define what ‘frames’ and ‘framing’ are, assuming that these are widely understood concepts (Entman 1993), others interpret framing in different ways, even when the terms are explicitly defined. Some researchers see framing as a cognitive process and element of discourse

(Gitlin 1980), others conceptualize frames as an internalized mental structure (Scheufele 1999), and further still, framing can refer to the substance of communication (Woods 2007). Though the exact definition of framing varies across disciplines, framing is theorized as a process frequently used by political elites and media sources to influence perceptions and shape the social world (Chomsky and Herman 1988).

The importance of framing in studies of news media has been articulated from scholars in many disciplines. David Altheide (2006; 2009) documented how political elites and news media constructed terrorism as the chief national security threat, relying on the public's perceptions about danger, risk, and feelings of fear to gain support for policy measures such as the USA PATRIOT Act and military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Benford and Snow (2000) argue that framing processes are an essential aspect of social movement formation. Chomsky and Herman (1988) articulated a propaganda-model of news media and asserted that media framing is frequently used to influence public opinion and used as a tool by political elites to further specific political goals. In framing an issue, the use of fearful language or imagery can be used to persuade and gain support for social and political objectives (Chomsky and Herman 1988; Altheide 2006, 2009). Most academic literature examining the use of fear in social life, particularly regarding terrorism, has highlighted mass media coverage. Most recently, an emerging area of scholarship based on a theory known as the *Reinforcing Spirals Model* examines the interaction between deeply held beliefs and selective mass media exposure.

Attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors are typically thought to influence the selection of media content and the attention paid to that content. The Reinforcing Spirals model proposed by Slater (2007, 2015) elaborates a theory of how pre-existing beliefs and selective media exposure

mutually influence each other in positive feedback loops or *reinforcing spirals*. Essentially, Slater (2007, 2015) argues that over time, these feedback loops can play an important role in social identity formation and maintenance, as well as reinforcement attitudes and behaviors for political, religious, or lifestyle groups in society (ibid.). The reinforcing spirals model acts as a framework to understand how both media content and selective media exposure contribute to the development and maintenance of attitudes, beliefs, ideologies, and behavioral outcomes associated with these as well (Slater 2007, 2015).

Theories of media effects such as Agenda Setting (McCombs and Shaw 1993) and Framing Theory (Entman 1993, Gitlin 1980, Scheufele 1999) propose that attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors are shaped by interactions with social institutions such as mass media. The Reinforcing Spirals Model (Slater 2007, 2015) model also holds that this relationship is not one way, nor is it a simple model of cause and effects. In this model social identity and deeply held beliefs, such as political affiliation or religious beliefs, interact with selective media use habits to reinforce each other. Typically, this is conceptualized as identity/beliefs and media use supporting each other, i.e. individuals choose media sources that support their beliefs and this confirmation strengthens their identity and attachment. In some cases, the reinforcing spiral can lead media consumers down a proverbial rabbit hole, amplify their pre-existing beliefs, and push individuals to more radicalized views over time.

The media consumer in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has a broader choice of platforms to learn the news of the day. While television remains the favored news source for most Americans (Mitchell, Holcomb, and Weisel 2016), online news and social media sites are quickly gaining ground, having already surpassed other traditional news sources such as newspapers and radio (ibid.). In

some ways, the rapidly changing media landscape allows for exposure to a broader range or perspectives. At the same time, it is easier than ever for individuals to seek out information that confirms their previously held beliefs.

Since the 1970s, American politics experienced increasing polarization on racial, cultural, and social welfare issues (Layman et al 2006), and an increasingly compartmentalized media environment may play a role. Several studies have documented Wicks et al (2014) found that conservatives favor conservative talk radio, FOX news, and Christian radio and TV and news sources, while liberals favor PBS and Facebook. It is important to note that while NPR and PBS consumers skew toward liberal political orientation, their news coverage is decidedly non-partisan, unlike conservative news sources. A study of news media consumption by political ideology from a 2008 survey found that differences in preference do exist, however rejected the notion that a large portion of any group actively avoids information that contradicts their belief systems (Weeks et al 2016).

A recent review of four panel surveys (Stromback and Shehata 2019) found support for a reciprocal relationship between political leanings and certain types of TV news. They also acknowledge that the research in this area remains unsettled. Bolin and Hamilton (2018) find support for the reinforcing spirals model when examining issues of climate change and public opinion. Additionally, studies have found that conservatives are more prone to the effects of reinforcing spirals than liberals (McCright 2011, McCright and Dunlap 2011, Wicks et al 2014). An early study of the effects of conservative talk radio additionally found that listeners to particular programs such as Rush Limbaugh, held views that were further right than their views before they started listening to CTR (Jones 2002).

Some studies have found less consistent results. Beam et al (2016) did not find evidence for greater polarization among Facebook news users. Additionally, Mort (2012) finds that not all conservative talk radio hosts share the same outlook, finding differences in content and views expressed between so called “fiscal conservatives” such as Hannity and Limbaugh, and so called “culture warriors” such as Ingraham and Savage. However, in recent data collected by Pew Research, conservatives were found to be distrustful of most mainstream news sources, with the exception of FOX News. In contrast, liberals were shown to be more trusting of a wider range of news sources (Jurkowitz, Mitchell, Shearer, and Walker 2020). Other research has found that conservative media exposure lowers acceptance of the science of climate change, whereas the opposite was found regarding non-conservative media use (Feldman et al 2014).

Based on bivariate analyses and existing literature, several operational hypotheses are tested in logistic regression analyses in Table 4.2. These hypotheses are described below. In table 4.2, statistical significance in two-tailed hypothesis tests are indicated by one star at the .05 level, two stars at the .01 level, and three stars at the .001 level. Statistical significance at the .10 level is indicated by a cross “+”. Multivariate logistic regression results reported in Table 4.2 include Census survey weights calculated by the UNH Survey Center. First, I look at bivariate relationships between both kinds of fear, and the background factors mentioned in previous section. Then, multivariate analysis (logit regression) will be used to more formally test the hypotheses listed earlier, while checking for spurious effects.

*Hypothesis 1: Net of other variables, background characteristics of sex, age, gun ownership, and religious attendance will significantly predict fear of victimization in a terrorist attack and fear of victimization in a mass shooting.*

*Hypothesis 1a: Net of other variables, female respondents will be significantly more worried about victimization in a terrorist attack and a mass shooting.*

*Hypothesis 1b: Net of other variables, older respondents will be significantly more worried about victimization in a terrorist attack and younger respondents will be significantly more worried about victimization in a mass shooting.*

*Hypothesis 1c: Net of other variables, gun owning respondents will be significantly less worried about victimization in a terrorist attack and a mass shooting.*

*Hypothesis 1d: Net of other variables, respondents who attend religious services more frequently will be significantly more worried about a terrorist attack and a mass shooting.*

*Hypothesis 2: Net of other variables, Donald Trump voters will be significantly more worried about victimization in a terrorist attack and less worried about a mass shooting compared to Hillary Clinton and Other voters.*

*Hypothesis 3: Net of other variables, selective media consumption will significantly predict fear of victimization in a terrorist attack and fear of victimization in a mass shooting.*

*Hypothesis 3a: Net of other variables, respondents who watch WMUR News more frequently will be significantly worried about victimization in a terrorist attack and a mass shooting.*

*Hypothesis 3b: Net of other variables, respondents who listen to NHPR more frequently will be significantly less worried about victimization in a terrorist attack and significantly more worried about victimization in a mass shooting.*

*Hypothesis 3c: Net of other variables, respondents who listen to conservative talk radio more frequently will be significantly more worried about victimization in a terrorist attack and significantly less worried about victimization in a mass shooting.*

## **Data and Measures**

Data for this study was collected from the Fall 2017 Granite State Poll. The Granite State Poll is a quarterly, state-wide New Hampshire public opinion survey conducted by the UNH Survey Center. It is a representative phone survey using random digit dialing to ask questions of approximately 500 respondents on each quarterly iteration (UNH Survey Center 2017). These questions are typically a mix of background information, political opinions, and other items suggested by researchers or clients. On the Fall 2017 poll, I was able to include a question about mass violence with two versions: one about “a mass shooting”, the other about “a terrorist

attack”. One question was asked to a half of the respondents, the second to the other half in the Fall 2017 survey. Question wording is given below.

*“How worried are you that you or someone you know will become a victim of a mass shooting?  
– very worried, somewhat worried, not too worried, not worried at all”*

*“How worried are you that you or someone you know will become a victim of a terrorist attack?  
– very worried, somewhat worried, not too worried, not worried at all”*

Table 4.1 below contains information on variables of interest including definitions, coding practices, and category percentages. Each respondent was randomly assigned only one version of a question about their fear of themselves or someone they know becoming a victim of mass violence. Version A asks about fear of victimization in a terrorist attack, Version B ask about fear of victimization in a mass shooting. Only a small proportion of respondents reported being “very worried” about becoming the victim of a terrorist attack (6.05%) or a mass shooting (5.04%). A substantially larger proportion of respondents reported being “somewhat worried” about becoming the victim of a terrorist attack (27.02%) or a mass shooting (31.78%). Binary variables for both Version A and Version B are coded to reflect respondents who reported being either “Somewhat Worried” or “Very Worried” about victimization in a terrorist attack (33.47%) or a mass shooting (37.11%). These versions were created to use logistic regression techniques. Due to the relatively small sample size results are somewhat sensitive to model specification. In a previous version, Ordered Logistic Regression was used, and the results were not fundamentally different from the current analysis. However, the binary variable appears to better capture the measured relationships.

Respondents were asked about several background indicators, some of which are used in this analysis. Approximately half of the sample is female (50.79%), the age of respondents is between 18 and 92 with a mean of 52.32 and standard deviation of 17.7, and most respondents either have completed a college degree (36.4%) or pursued postgraduate education (22.4%), with the rest having completed some college (24.4%) and a minority having only completed high school or less (16.8%). An ordinal measure of age is used in this analysis for two reasons: 1, it allows inclusion of respondents who refused to answer this question, increasing sample size slightly; and 2, it is used to compare age groups to one another. Additionally, nearly half the sample does not attend religious services ever (46.84%). Those who do tend to either go less than 1-2 times per month (26.48%), or every week (18.58%), with only a small proportion attending 1-2 times per week (8.10%). Moreover, nearly half of respondents own a firearm or have one in their household (45.19%).

The Granite State Poll also asks respondents about their political leanings, including party affiliation and who they voted for in the 2016 Presidential election. Respondents' voting patterns in the 2016 presidential election were similar to national results. More than a quarter of respondents voted for Donald Trump (26.88%), the largest proportion of respondents voted for Hillary Clinton (44.07%), and the remainder voted for other candidates such as Gary Johnson or Jill Stein, did not vote, were not eligible, didn't know, or refused to answer (29.05%).

The Fall 2017 Granite State Poll also asked respondents about their media consumption habits, including local TV news, NHPR, and conservative talk radio. Over a third of respondents reported watching WMUR news every day (36.11%), while the remainder watched several times a week (16.47%), occasionally (27.98%), or never (19.44%). NHPR is popular with respondents



as well, with about two-thirds of respondents listening either every day (21.48%), several times a week (15.08%), or occasionally (29.56%), and only one-third never listening (33.93%).

Conservative talk radio has a much smaller audience, and the majority of respondents reported never listening (75.99%). Of those who do listen to conservative talk radio, only a small proportion listed every day (5.95%), with the remainder listening several times a week (5.16%) or occasionally (12.90%).

Analyses use both bivariate analyses comparing fear within and across groups, i.e. Chi-squared tests, t-tests, and multivariate tests using logistic regression techniques. These strategies are used to estimate effects of sociodemographic factors on fear of a terrorist attack and fear of a mass shooting comparatively. The **dependent variable** (DV) is self-reported *fear* – measured on a four-point Likert scale: “very worried, somewhat worried, not too worried, not worried at all” with a half sample asked about their fear of victimization in a “Terrorist Attack”, and the other half asked about their fear about victimization in a “Mass Shooting”. **Independent variables** include the respondent’s socio-demographic characteristics (e.g. sex, age, education) habits (religious attendance, gun ownership), political orientation (political party affiliation, voted in 2016 Presidential election) and media consumption habits (watch WMUR News, listen to NHPR, listen to conservative talk radio).

I hypothesize that sociodemographic factors such as sex, age, education, news consumption habits, religiosity, and political leanings will significantly predict fear of terrorist attack and fear of mass shootings. Specifically, I expect the biggest differences in reported fear to fall along political lines – with Democrats/Clinton voters being more fearful of mass shootings, and Republicans/Trump voters being more fearful of terrorist attacks.

**Table 4.1 Variable Definitions (Survey Weighted)**

<p><i>(DV Version A) Fear of Terrorist Attack:</i> How worried are you that you or someone you know will become the victim of a terrorist attack? N = 245</p> <p>Somewhat/Very worried (coded 1; 33.43%)</p> <p>Not too worried/Not worried at all (coded 0; 66.57%)</p>	<p><i>(DV Version B) Fear of Mass Shooting:</i> How worried are you that you or someone you know will become the victim of a mass shooting? N = 256</p> <p>Somewhat/Very worried (coded 1; 40.17%)</p> <p>Not too worried/Not worried at all (coded 0; 59.83%)</p>
<p><i>Sex:</i> Respondent's Sex</p> <p>Female (coded 1; 51.10%)</p> <p>Male (coded 0; 48.90%)</p>	<p><i>Voted in 2016:</i> Which presidential candidate did you voted for in 2016? (collapsed)</p> <p>Donald Trump (coded 1; 25.65%)</p> <p>Hillary Clinton (coded 2; 37.59%)</p> <p>All others (coded 3; 36.78%)</p>
<p><i>Age Range:</i> Ordinal variable of age</p> <p>18 to 34 (coded 1; 25.65%)</p> <p>35 to 49 (coded 2; 23.54%)</p> <p>50 to 44 (coded 3; 28.16%)</p> <p>65 and older (coded 4; 18.34%)</p> <p>NA/Refused (coded 9; 4.31%)</p>	<p><i>Watch Local News:</i> How often do you watch WMUR news?</p> <p>Every Day (coded 4; 35.91%)</p> <p>Several Times a Week (coded 3; 15.50%)</p> <p>Occasionally (coded 2; 27.35%)</p> <p>Never (coded 1; 21.24%)</p>
<p><i>Gun Owner:</i> Do you have a firearm in your household?</p> <p>Yes (coded 1; 43.75%)</p> <p>All others (coded 0; 56.25%)</p>	<p><i>NHPR:</i> How often do you listen to NHPR?</p> <p>Every Day (coded 4; 17.38%)</p> <p>Several Times a Week (coded 3; 13.59%)</p> <p>Occasionally (coded 2; 31.25%)</p> <p>Never (coded 1; 37.78%)</p>
<p><i>Attend Religious Services:</i> How often do you attend religious services?</p> <p>One or more times per week (coded 4; 17.66%)</p> <p>One or two times per month (coded 3; 6.18%)</p> <p>A few times a year (coded 2; 27.98%)</p> <p>Never/Don't Know/NA (coded 1; 48.18%)</p>	<p><i>Conservative Talk Radio:</i> How often do you listen to Conservative Talk Radio?</p> <p>Every Day (coded 4; 6.62%)</p> <p>Several Times a Week (coded 3; 4.92%)</p> <p>Occasionally (coded 2; 13.02%)</p> <p>Never (coded 1; 75.44%)</p>

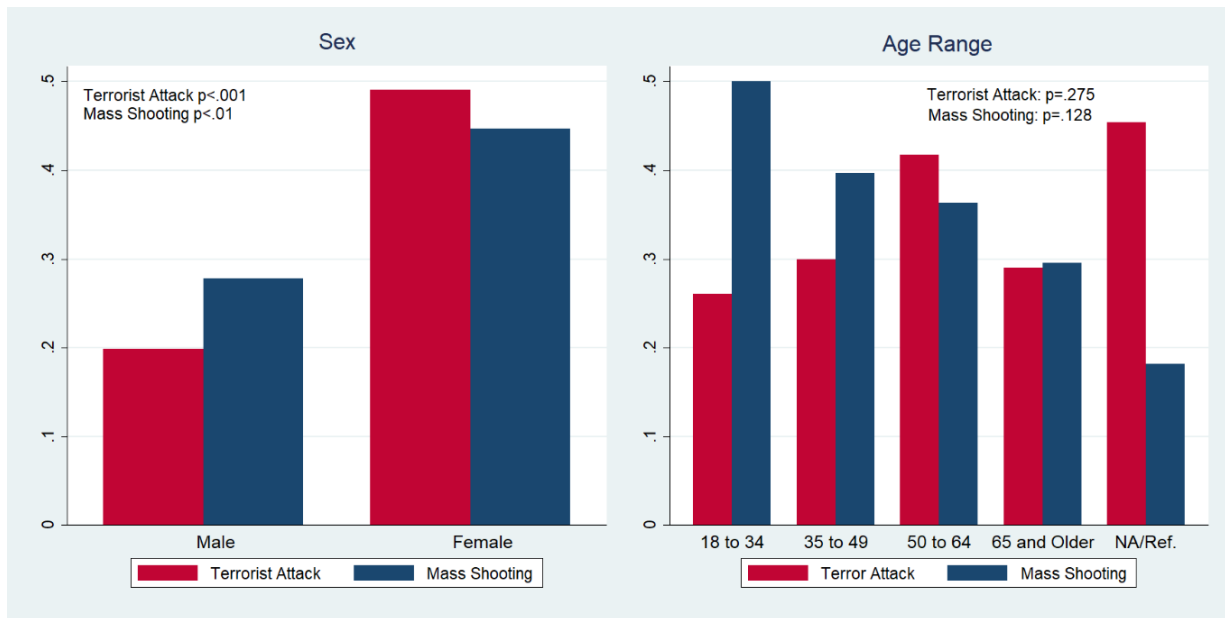
N = 501

## Bivariate Analyses

Figures 4.1 through 4.4 below chart the proportion of respondents who are “somewhat worried” or “very worried” about they or someone they know becoming the victim of a terrorist attack and compare this to the proportion of respondents who are “somewhat worried” or “very worried” about they or someone they know becoming the victim of a mass shooting. These charts also include the results of bivariate  $\chi^2$  tests, assessing whether group differences in fear of victimization can be found when respondents are given either a question about a terrorist attack or a mass shooting.

Figure 4.1 charts the proportion of respondents who are “very” or “somewhat” worried that they or someone they know will become the victim of a terrorist attack, and compares it to the proportion of respondents who are “very” or “somewhat” worried that they or someone they know will become the victim of a mass shooting against control variables of sex and age. This chart also includes the results of bivariate  $\chi^2$  tests. Bivariate tests found a significant difference in reported fear between males and females for both terrorist attack ( $p < .001$ ) and mass shooting ( $p < .01$ ). These analyses did not find a statistically significant difference in fear of terrorist attacks by age range ( $p = .275$ ) or fear of mass shootings by age range ( $p = .128$ ). Although, the graphical representation suggests that older respondents are more worried about terrorist attacks, while younger respondents are more worried about mass shootings.

**Figure 4.1 Percent Somewhat or Very Worried by Sex, Age Range, and Type of Attack (Terrorist Attack and Mass Shooting)**



Other variables now also show statistically significant relationships which did not previously. Figure 4.2 charts the proportion of respondents who are “somewhat” or “very” worried that they or someone they know will become the victim of a terrorist attack and compare this to the proportion of respondents who are “somewhat” or “very” worried that they or someone they know will become the victim of a mass shooting against gun ownership and religious attendance. This chart also includes the results of bivariate  $\text{Chi}^2$  tests.

A statistically significant difference in fear of terrorist attacks was not found by gun ownership ( $p = .609$ ), however gun ownership is significantly different for fear of mass shootings ( $p < .01$ ). Specifically, gun owners are less worried about victimization in a mass shooting than non-gun owners. Additionally, a statistically significant difference was found in fear of a terrorist attack by attendance of religious services ( $p < .001$ ). Specifically, respondents who never attend are less likely to fear victimization in a terrorist attack than those who attend weekly or more. No

statistically significant difference was found in fear of a mass shooting by religious attendance ( $p=.909$ ).

**Figure 4.2 Percent Somewhat or Very Worried by Gun Ownership, Religious Service Attendance, and Type of Attack (Terrorist Attack and Mass Shooting)**

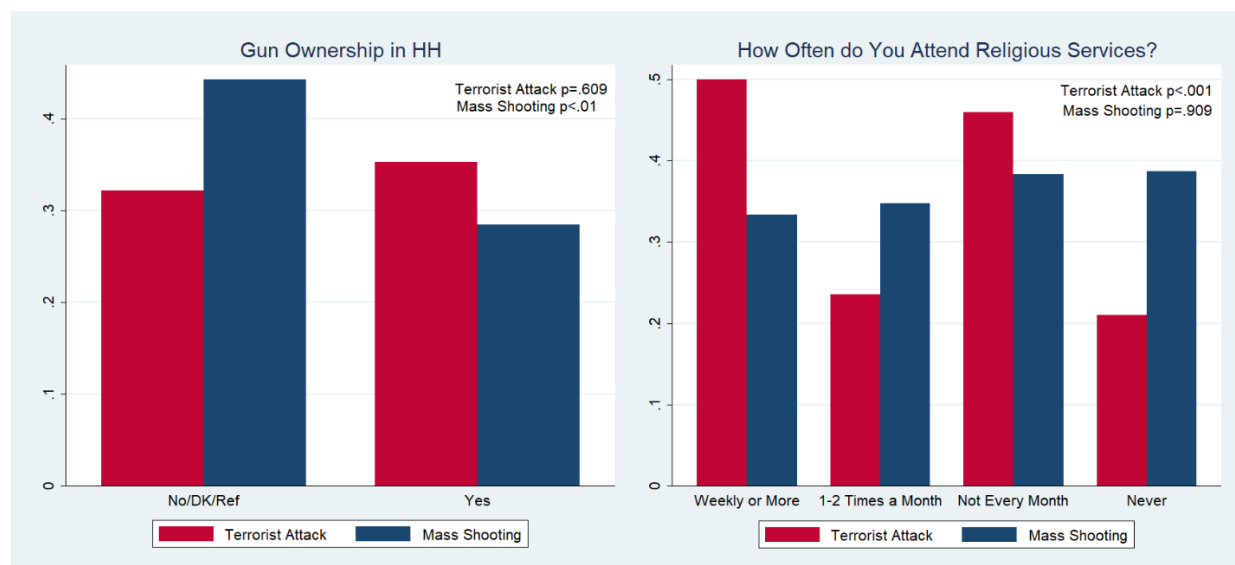
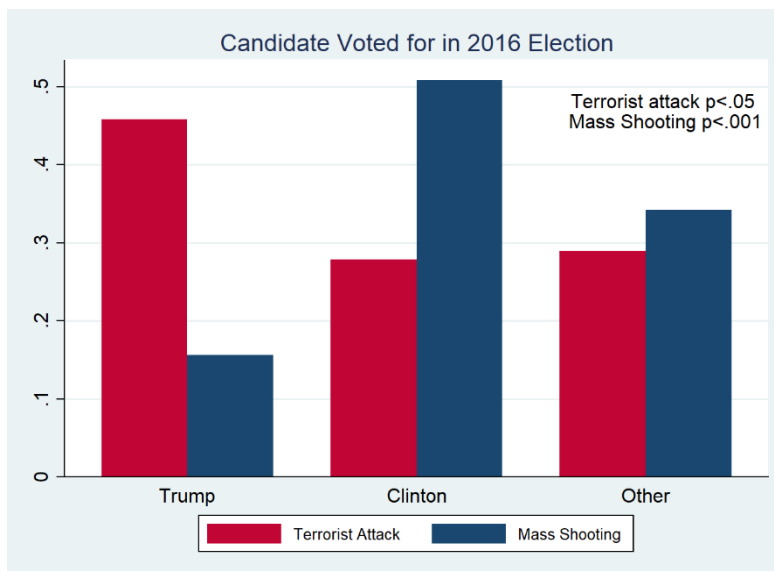


Figure 4.3 charts the proportion of respondents who are “somewhat” or “very” worried that they or someone they know will become the victim of a terrorist attack and compare this to the proportion of respondents who are “somewhat” or “very” worried that they or someone they know will become the victim of a mass shooting against the candidate voted for in the 2016 Presidential election. The results of bivariate  $\chi^2$  tests also included in this chart. A statistically significant difference in fear of victimization in a terrorist attack found by the candidate that respondents voted for in the 2016 election ( $p<.05$ ). Specifically, Trump voters are more worried about a terrorist attack than other voters. A statistically significant difference in fear of victimization in a mass shooting was also found for which candidate the respondent voted for in the 2016 election ( $p<.001$ ). Specifically, Clinton voters are most worried about mass shootings, Trump voters are least worried about mass shootings, with others in between.

**Figure 4.3 Percent Somewhat or Very Worried by Candidate Voted for in 2016 Presidential Election and Type of Attack (Terrorist Attack and Mass Shooting)**

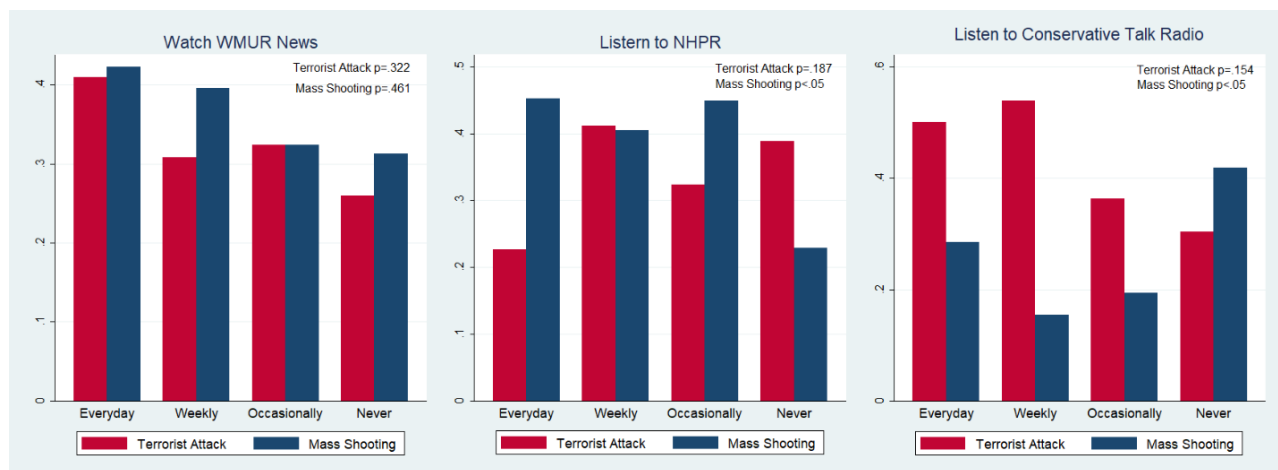


Finally, Figure 4.4 charts the proportion of respondents who are “somewhat” or “very” worried that they or someone they know will become the victim of a terrorist attack and compares this to the proportion of respondents who are “somewhat” or “very” worried that they or someone they know will become the victim of a mass shooting against mass media consumption habits. This includes watching WMUR local news, listening to NHPR, and listening to Conservative Talk Radio. The results of bivariate Chi<sup>2</sup> tests are also included. Frequency of viewing WMUR News did not show a statistically significant difference in fear of victimization in a terrorist attack ( $p=.322$ ) or fear of victimization in a mass shooting ( $p=.461$ ), although graphical data suggest that more frequent viewers are more worried about both terrorist attacks and mass shootings.

Frequency of listening to NHPR did not show a significant difference in fear of victimization in a terrorist attack ( $p=.187$ ), however it does show a significant difference in fear of

victimization in a mass shooting ( $p < .05$ ). Specifically, listeners of NHPR are more worried about a mass shooting than non-listeners. Similarly, frequency of listening to conservative talk radio did not reveal a statistically significant difference in fear of victimization in a terrorist attack ( $p = .154$ ), while it does reveal a significant difference in fear of victimization in a mass shooting ( $p < .05$ ). Specifically, listeners of conservative talk radio are less worried about a mass shooting than non-listeners.

**Figure 4.4 Percent Somewhat or Very Worried by Frequency of Watching WMUR, Listening to NHPR, Listening to CTR, and Type of Attack (Terrorist Attack and Mass Shooting)**



*Political Leanings and Selective Media Exposure*

The reinforcing spirals model plays an important role in conceptualizing the relationship between political beliefs and selective media exposure. In tables 4.2-4.4 below, I examine the relationship between selective media exposure and political candidate support in the 2016 election. Bivariate tests of association find that Trump and Clinton voters have different media preferences. Table 4.2 examines the association between candidate support in the 2016 election and frequency of viewing WMUR TV News. Tests of association do not reveal and significant

differences in watching WMUR news by candidate supported in the 2016 election ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 7.46$ ;  $p=.280$ ).

**Table 4.2 Bivariate Association Between Political Candidate Support and watching WMUR News ( $\text{Chi}^2$  Reported)**

Vote in 2016	Watch WMUR News				Total
	<i>Never</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Weekly</i>	<i>Everyday</i>	
<i>Trump</i>	33 33.00%	34 24.11%	16 19.28%	53 29.12%	136 26.88%
<i>Clinton</i>	37 37.00%	63 44.68%	39 46.99%	84 46.15%	223 44.07%
<i>Other</i>	30 30.00%	44 31.21%	28 33.73%	45 24.73%	147 29.05%
<i>Total</i>	100 100%	141 100%	83 100%	182 100%	506 100%
	$\text{Chi}^2 = 7.46$		$p=0.280$		

Table 4.3 examines the association between candidate support in the 2016 election and frequency of listening to NHPR. Bivariate tests of association do find significant differences in listening NHPR ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 44.36$ ;  $p<.001$ ). Clinton voters make up the majority of daily NHPR listeners (63.89%), while Trump voters make up the largest portion of respondents who never listen to NHPR (39.31%).

**Table 4.3 Bivariate Association Between Political Candidate Support and listening to NHPR ( $\text{Chi}^2$  Reported)**

Vote in 2016	Listen to NHPR				Total
	<i>Never</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Weekly</i>	<i>Everyday</i>	
<i>Trump</i>	68 39.31%	38 25.50%	17 22.37%	13 12.04%	136 26.88%
<i>Clinton</i>	49 28.32%	63 42.28%	42 55.26%	69 63.89%	223 44.07%
<i>Other</i>	56 32.37%	48 32.21%	17 22.37%	26 24.07%	147 29.05%
<i>Total</i>	173 100%	149 100%	76 100%	108 100%	506 100%
	$\text{Chi}^2 = 44.36$		$p<.001$		



Table 4.4 examines the association between candidate support in the 2016 election and frequency of listening to conservative talk radio. Again, this table and tests of association show significant differences in listening to conservative talk radio ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 123.19$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Trump voters make up the overwhelming majority of daily CTR listeners (80.00%). Conversely, Clinton voters represent over half of respondents who never listen to CTR (52.73%).

**Table 4.4 Bivariate Association Between Political Candidate Support and listening to Conservative Talk Radio ( $\text{Chi}^2$  Reported)**

Vote in 2016	Listen to Conservative Talk Radio				Total
	<i>Never</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Weekly</i>	<i>Everyday</i>	
<i>Trump</i>	61 15.84%	29 44.62%	22 84.62%	24 80.00%	136 26.88%
<i>Clinton</i>	203 52.73%	17 26.15%	1 3.85%	2 6.67%	223 44.07%
<i>Other</i>	121 31.43%	19 29.23%	3 11.54%	4 13.33%	147 29.05%
<i>Total</i>	385 100%	65 100%	26 100%	30 100%	506 100%
	$\text{Chi}^2 = 125.19$		$p < .001$		

Clearly, liberal leaning voters favor NHPR and conservative leaning voters favor CTR. However, the reinforcing spirals model predicts that selective exposure to partisan media contributes to the maintenance of political attitudes, and in some cases can amplify pre-existing beliefs on political issues.

### **Multivariate Logistic Regression Analyses**

These multivariate analyses use a series of logistic regressions to estimate the effects of predictor variables including socio-demographics, political leanings, and media consumption on fear of victimization in a terrorist attack and fear of victimization in a mass shooting,

respectively. Logistic regression is commonly used in social research and is appropriate for models which use a categorical dependent variable such as *binary fear of terrorist attack*. These models report the log odds (L) of the likelihood of a particular category of the dependent variable being selected.

$$L_i = \ln[P(y_i = 1)/P(y_i = 0)]$$

The log odds that  $y = 1$  for the  $i$ th observation are subsequently estimated as a linear function of independent variables.  $\beta_0$  represents the model's *Y-intercept*, while  $\beta_{1X1i}$ ;  $\beta_{2X2i}$ ; etc. represent *X-variable* predictors. This portion of the model describes the value of  $Y$  as a function of  $X_1$ ,  $X_2$ , etc.

$$L_i = \beta_0 + \beta_{1X1i} + \beta_{2X2i} + \dots + \beta_{mXmi}$$

Table 4.5 shows the results of three mixed-effects logistic regressions. **Model 1** compares logistic regression results of *fear of terrorist attack* and *fear of mass shooting* on demographic variables of *sex*, and *age*, as well as *gun ownership* and *religious attendance*. **Model 2** compares logistic regression results of *fear of terrorist attack* and *fear of mass shooting* on *sex*, *age*, *gun ownership*, *religious attendance*, and adds measures of support for political candidates *voted in 2016*. **Model 3** compares *fear of terrorist attack* and *fear of mass shooting* on *sex*, *age*, *gun ownership*, *religious attendance*, *voted in 2016*, and adds measures of mass media consumption *watch WMUR news*, *listen to NHPR* and *listen to conservative talk radio*. The 'Odds' columns give odds ratios corresponding to  $\exp(\beta)$ , interpreted as multipliers for odds of respondents reporting being "somewhat" or "very" worried about victimization in a terrorist attack. Odds ratios greater than 1.0 represent positive effects, while odds ratios less than 1.0 represent negative effects. Based on bivariate analyses and existing literature, several operational hypotheses are tested in logistic regression analyses in Table 4.5. These hypotheses are described

below. In table 4.5, statistical significance in two-tailed hypothesis tests are indicated by one star at the .05 level, two stars at the .01 level, and three stars at the .001 level. Statistical significance at the .10 level is indicated by a cross “+”. Multivariate logistic regression results reported in Table 2 include Census survey weights calculated by the UNH Survey Center.

**Table 4.5 Survey weighted logistic regression comparing fear of terrorist attack to fear of mass shooting on demographics, lifestyle, political candidate support, and selective media consumption (Odds Ratios Reported)**

Variable	Model 1 – OR(SE)		Model 2 – OR(SE)		Model 3 – OR(SE)	
	Terrorist Attack	Mass Shooting	Terrorist Attack	Mass Shooting	Terrorist Attack	Mass Shooting
<i>Sex</i>						
Male	-	-	-	-	-	-
Female	6.06(2.40)***	2.06(0.73)*	7.37(3.11)***	1.88(0.68)+	8.24(3.47)***	1.86(0.71)
<i>Age Range</i>						
18-34	-	-	-	-	-	-
35-49	0.44(0.24)	0.47(0.23)	0.40(0.21)+	0.61(0.30)	0.38(0.21)+	0.45(0.24)
50-64	1.06(0.54)	0.46(0.22)	0.90(0.46)	0.47(0.23)	0.88(0.45)	0.32(0.16)*
65+	0.50(0.27)	0.38(0.17)*	0.48(0.26)	0.34(0.16)*	0.38(0.22)+	0.23(0.11)**
NA/Ref.	0.68(0.48)	0.19(0.19)+	0.70(0.49)	0.27(0.28)	0.62(0.46)	0.22(0.19)+
<i>Gun in HH</i>						
No/NA/Ref.	-	-	-	-	-	-
Yes	1.54(0.58)	0.50(0.17)*	1.42(0.54)	0.56(0.20)+	1.49(0.56)	0.48(0.17)*
<i>Relig. Attd.</i>						
Never/NA	-	-	-	-	-	-
Few x/Yr.	2.61(1.09)*	0.68(0.27)	2.49(1.05)*	0.59(0.24)	2.57(0.56)*	0.43(0.19)+
1-2x/Mo.	0.85(0.54)	0.57(0.35)	0.65(0.40)	0.57(0.33)	0.74(0.47)	0.58(0.34)
Weekly+	3.16(1.85)*	0.70(0.30)	2.54(1.49)	0.81(0.38)	2.79(1.72)+	0.70(0.32)
<i>Voted 2016</i>						
Trump	-	-	-	-	-	-
Clinton	-	-	0.40(0.18)*	3.46(1.65)**	0.72(0.40)	2.84(1.45)*
Other	-	-	0.39(0.19)+	1.55(0.81)	0.65(0.35)	1.60(0.88)
<i>Media Use</i>						
WMUR	-	-	-	-	1.04(0.17)	1.47(0.27)*
NHPR	-	-	-	-	0.91(0.17)	1.42(0.24)*
CTR	-	-	-	-	1.73(0.44)*	0.95(0.23)
<i>Constant</i>	0.13(0.06)***	1.47(0.81)	0.26(0.15)*	0.66(0.46)	0.08(0.07)*	0.18(0.19)+
	N = 245	N = 256	N = 245	N = 256	N = 245	N = 256

Two-tailed hypothesis tests

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001, +p<.10

### Results of Multivariate Logistic Regression Analyses (Survey Weighted)

The multivariate analysis in Table 4.5 – Model 1 examines the relationship in Figures 4.1 and 4.2 more closely, confirming the relationships found in that bivariate analysis, and revealing new ones. First, when examining the *fear of terrorist attack* results, the control variable *sex* ( $p < .001$ ) is a significant predictor of fear of a terrorist attack, however *age range* is not. Specifically, for female respondents the odds of being “very” or “somewhat” fearful of a victimization in a terrorist attack increase by 6.06 times. Gun ownership is not a significant predictor of fear of victimization in a terrorist attack, however *religious attendance* is. Specifically, compared to individuals who do not attend religious services, attending religious services 1-2 times per year ( $p < .05$ ) increases the odds of being “very” or “somewhat” fearful of a terrorist attack by 2.61 times, and attending religious services weekly or more frequently ( $p < .05$ ) increases the odds of being “very” or “somewhat” fearful of a terrorist attack by 3.16 times.

Comparatively, when examining the *fear of mass shooting* results in Table 4.5 – Model 1, the control variables *sex* ( $p < .05$ ) and *age range* are both statistically significant predictors of fear of a mass shooting. Specifically, for female respondents the odds of reporting being “very” or “somewhat” worried about victimization in a mass shooting increase 2.06 times, while respondents who are 65 or older ( $p < .05$ ) decreased the odds of reporting being “very” or “somewhat” fearful of mass shooting victimization by 0.38 times compared to 18-34 year old respondents – a result which runs contrary to previous fear of crime findings. This means that younger respondents are more worried about mass shootings than older respondents. Respondents who did not answer the question about age were also less likely than 18-34 year old respondents to report being “somewhat” or “very” worried about becoming the victim of a mass

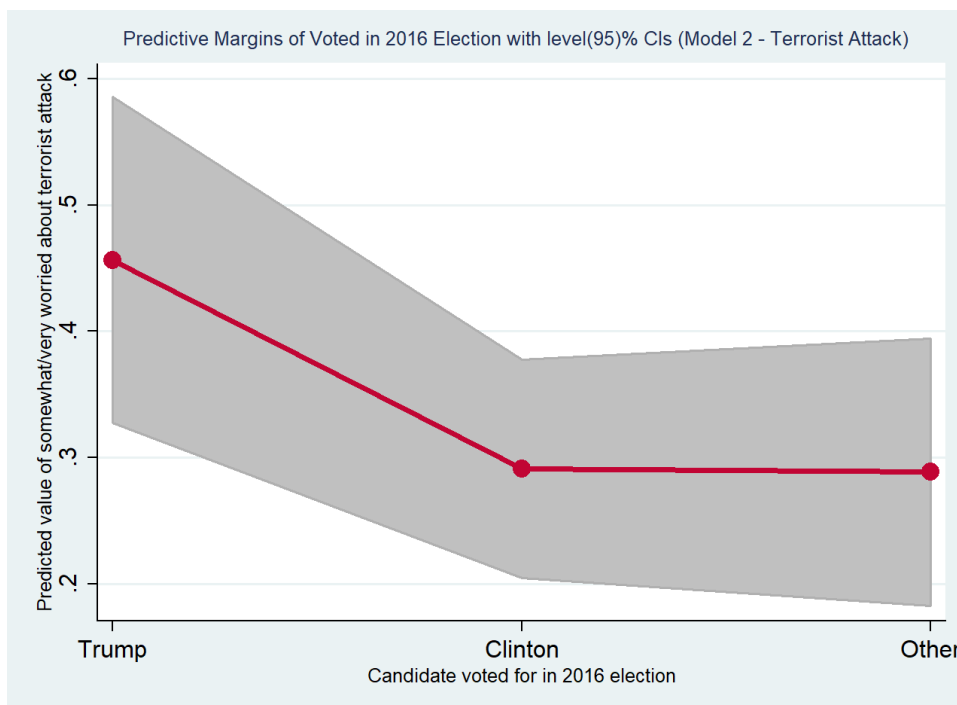
shooting ( $p < .10$ ). Additionally, *gun ownership* ( $p < .05$ ) was a significant predictor of fear of mass shooting, decreasing the odds of an individual being “somewhat or “very” worried about victimization in a mass shooting by half, however *attending religious services* was not.

The multivariate analysis in Table 4.5 – Model 2 retains the variables tested in Model 1 and adds measures of Presidential candidate support in the 2016 election, examining Figure 4.3 in detail. First, the regression results of *fear of terrorist attack* still finds that *sex* ( $p < .001$ ) is a significant predictor of fear of victimization in a terrorist attack. Female respondents are 7.37 times more likely to report being “very” or “somewhat” fearful than male respondents. *Age* is statistically significant only at the  $p < .10$  level when comparing 35-49 year old respondents to 18-35 year old respondents, decreasing the odds of reporting feeling “somewhat” or “very” worried about victimization in a terrorist attack by 60 percent. *Gun ownership* is not a significant predictor of fear of a terrorist attack. The effect of *religious attendance* ( $p < .05$ ) is partially mediated in Model 2. Specifically, attending religious services a few times per year increases fear of victimization in a terrorist attack by 2.49 times compared to respondents who never attend religious services. Respondents who attend weekly or more frequently are no longer statistically significantly different from individuals who never attend, at least in terms of how worried they are about victimization in a terrorist attack in Model 2.

Adding respondents’ support for political candidates finds that voting for *Clinton* ( $p < .05$ ) decreased the odds of fearing victimization in a terrorist attack by 60 percent when compared to *Trump* voters. Respondents who voted for other candidates, did not vote, refused, etc. ( $p < .10$ ) were also significantly less likely to fear victimization in a terrorist attack, though only at the  $p < .10$  level. Compared to Trump voters, respondents choosing the “Other” category decreased

the odds of being more fearful of a terrorist attack by 61 percent. Figure 4.5 charts the predicted values of “very” or “somewhat” worried of victimization in a terrorist attack against candidate voted for in the 2016 election with 95% confidence intervals included. This graphic does reflect that Trump voters are significantly more worried about terrorist attacks than Clinton and Other voters.

**Figure 4.5 Probabilities of Respondents Reporting Being Very or Somewhat Worried about a Terrorist Attack by Candidate Voted for in 2016 Presidential Election with 95% CI**

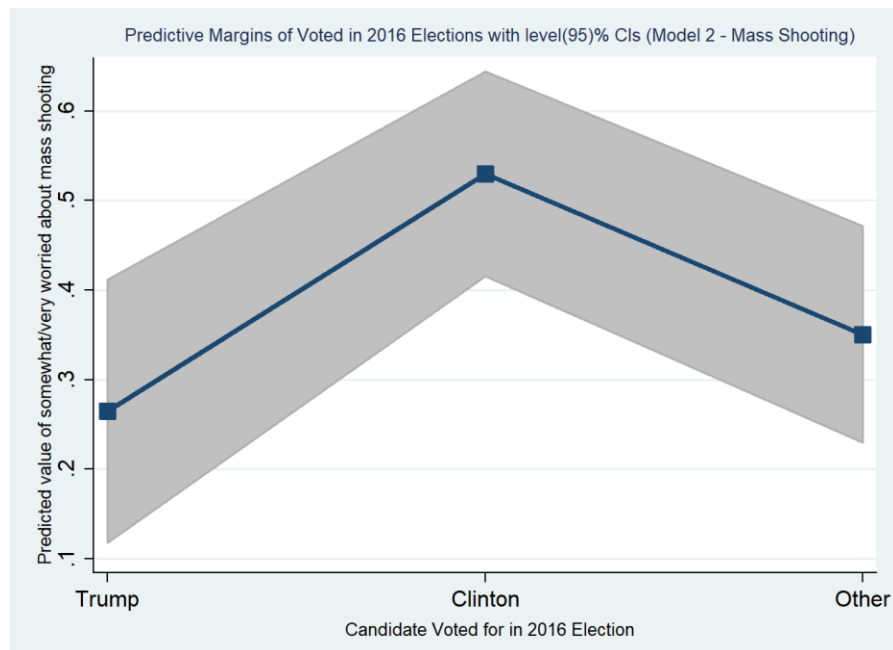


Comparatively, the *fear of mass shooting* regression results in Model 2 also maintain variables tested in Model 1, while adding measures of support for 2016 Presidential candidates. In Model 2, both *sex* ( $p < .10$ ) and *age* are statistically significant predictors of fear of victimization in a mass shooting, though Model 2 does show partial mediation of some relationships in Model 1. Specifically, for female respondents, the odds of reporting being “very”

or “somewhat” worried about victimization in a mass shooting is now 1.88 times higher than male respondents, and only significant at the  $p < .10$  level. Again, compared to 18-34 year old respondents, 65+ year old respondents are decrease the odds of reporting being “very” or “somewhat” fearful of mass shooting victimization by 66 percent. Younger respondents are more worried about mass shootings than older respondents, however they are not significantly different from respondents who refused to answer the age question in Model 2. Gun ownership ( $p < .10$ ) is still a significant predictor of fear of mass shooting, however now only at the  $p < .10$  level. Having a gun in the household decreases the odds of reporting being “very” or “somewhat” worried about victimization in a mass shooting by 44 percent. Religious attendance was not a significant predictor of fear of victimization in a mass shooting in Model 2.

Support for political candidates again revealed statistically significant relationships for fear of a mass shooting, voting for *Clinton* ( $p < .01$ ) increases the odds of reporting being “very” or “somewhat” worried about victimization in a mass shooting 3.46 times compared to respondents who voted for *Trump*. Respondents who voted for “*Other*” candidates, or did not vote, were not statistically significantly different from *Trump* voters. Figure 4.6 charts the predicted values of “very” or “somewhat” worried of victimization in a terrorist attack against candidate voted for in the 2016 election with 95% confidence intervals included. This visualization also reflects that Clinton voters are significantly more worried about terrorist attacks than Trump and Other voters.

**Figure 4.6 Probabilities of Respondents Reporting Being Very or Somewhat Worried about a Mass Shooting by Candidate Voted for in 2016 Presidential Election with 95% CI**

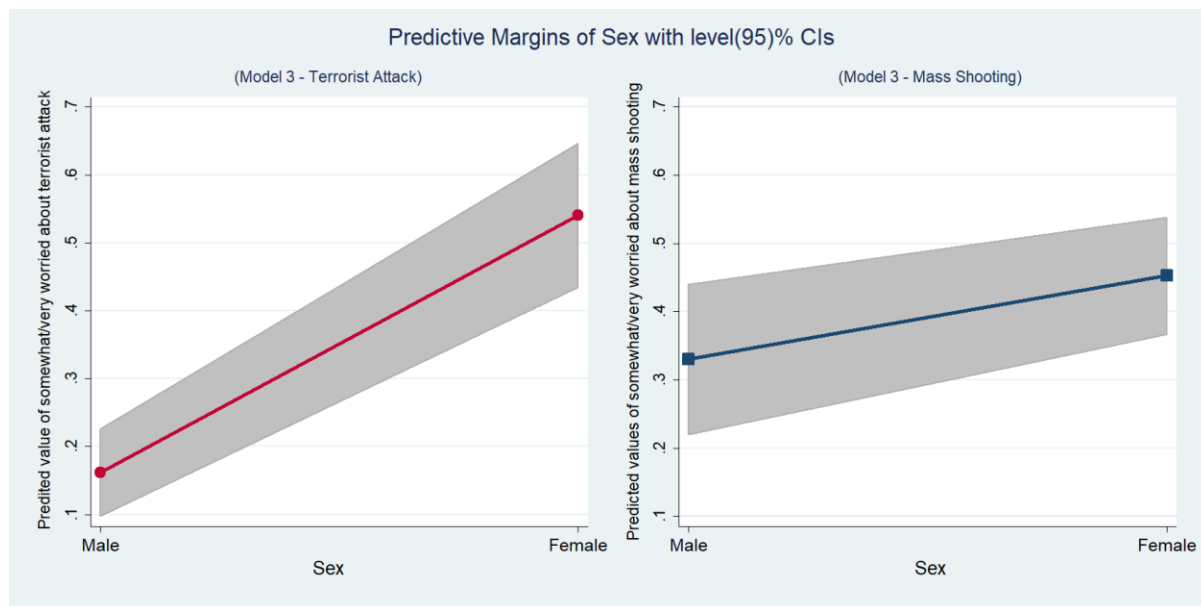


The multivariate analysis in Table 4.5 – Model 3 retains variables tested in Model 2, and adds the media consumption variables asking how frequently respondents *watch WMUR news*, *listen to NHPR*, and *listen to conservative talk radio*, examining Figure 4.4 in detail. Model 3 largely finds similar relationships to Model 2, however some effects are mediated by the addition of mass media consumption measures. First, the regression results of *fear of terrorist attack* still find that sex ( $p < .001$ ) is a significant predictor variable. Specifically, for female respondents, the odds of reporting being “very” or “somewhat” worried of victimization in a terrorist attack increase by 8.42 times compared to male respondents. Comparing the *fear of mass shooting* regression in Model 3 reveals similar patterns to Model 2, while partially mediating some relationships. *Sex* is no longer a statistically significant predictors of fear of victimization in a mass shooting. Figure 4.7 charts the predicted values of “very” or “somewhat” worried of



victimization in a terrorist attack and a mass shooting against sex election with 95% confidence intervals included.

**Figure 4.7 Probabilities of Respondents Reporting Being Very or Somewhat Worried About a Terrorist Attack and a Mass Shooting by Sex with 95% CI**

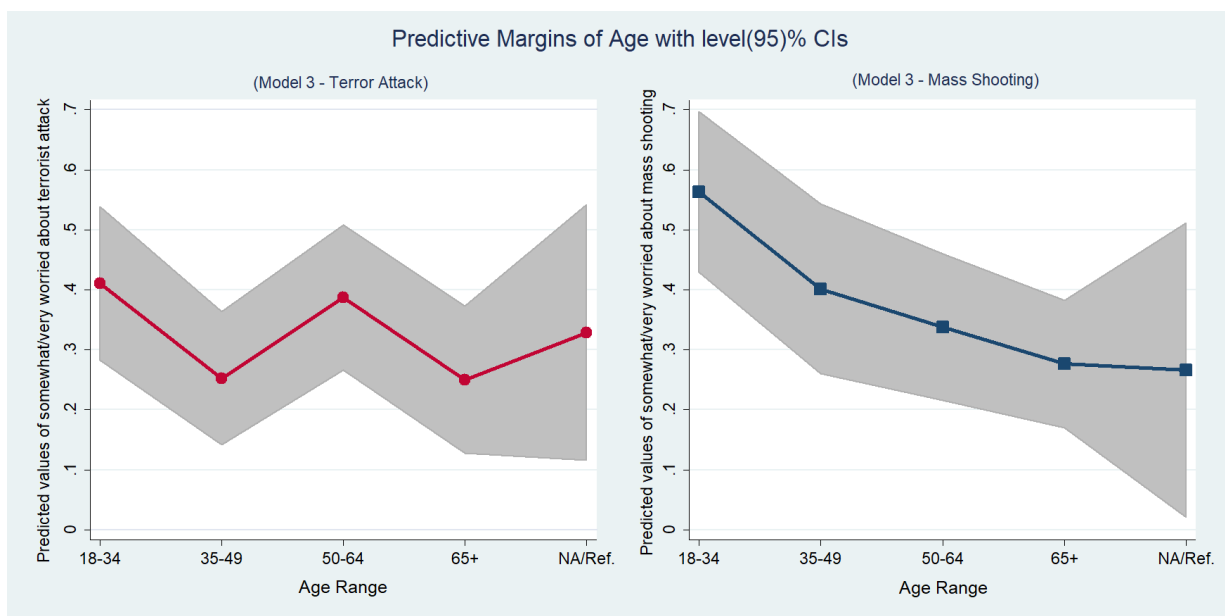


In Model 3, Age is a significant predictor of both *fear of a terrorist attack* and *fear of a mass shooting*. Compared to 18-35 year old respondents, both 35-49 year old respondents ( $p < .10$ ) and 65+ year old respondents ( $p < .10$ ) are 0.38 times less likely to report feeling “somewhat or “very” worried about victimization in a terrorist attack, although this is only significant at the  $p < .10$  level. When examining fear of a mass shooting, compared to 18-35 year old respondents, 50-64 year old respondents ( $p < .05$ ) decrease the odds of reporting feeling “somewhat” or “very” worried about victimization by 68 percent, 65+ year old respondents ( $p < .01$ ) decrease the odds by 77 percent, and respondents who refused ( $p < .10$ ) decrease the odds by 78 percent. Figure 4.8 charts the predicted values of “very” or “somewhat” worried of victimization in a terrorist attack

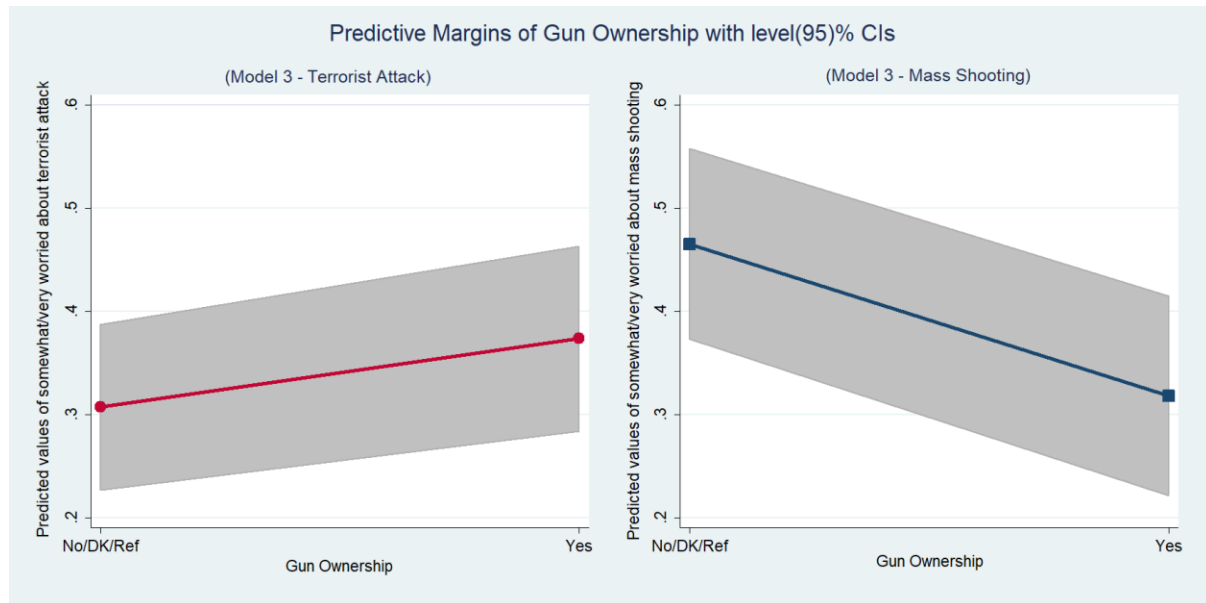
and a mass shooting against age with 95% confidence intervals included. This reflects that younger respondents are more worried about mass shootings than older respondents.

In Model 3, *Gun ownership* ( $p < .05$ ) is a significant predictor of *fear of a mass shooting*, however it is not a significant predictor of *fear of a terrorist attack*. Having a gun in the household decreases the odds of reporting being “very” or “somewhat” worried about victimization in a mass shooting by 52 percent compared to non-gun owners. Figure 4.9 charts the predicted values of “very” or “somewhat” worried of victimization in a terrorist attack and a mass shooting against gun ownership election with 95% confidence intervals included. This also reflects the decreased worry about mass shooting victimization by gun owners.

**Figure 4.8 Probabilities of Respondents Reporting Being Very or Somewhat Worried About a Terrorist Attack and a Mass Shooting by Age Range with 95% CI**

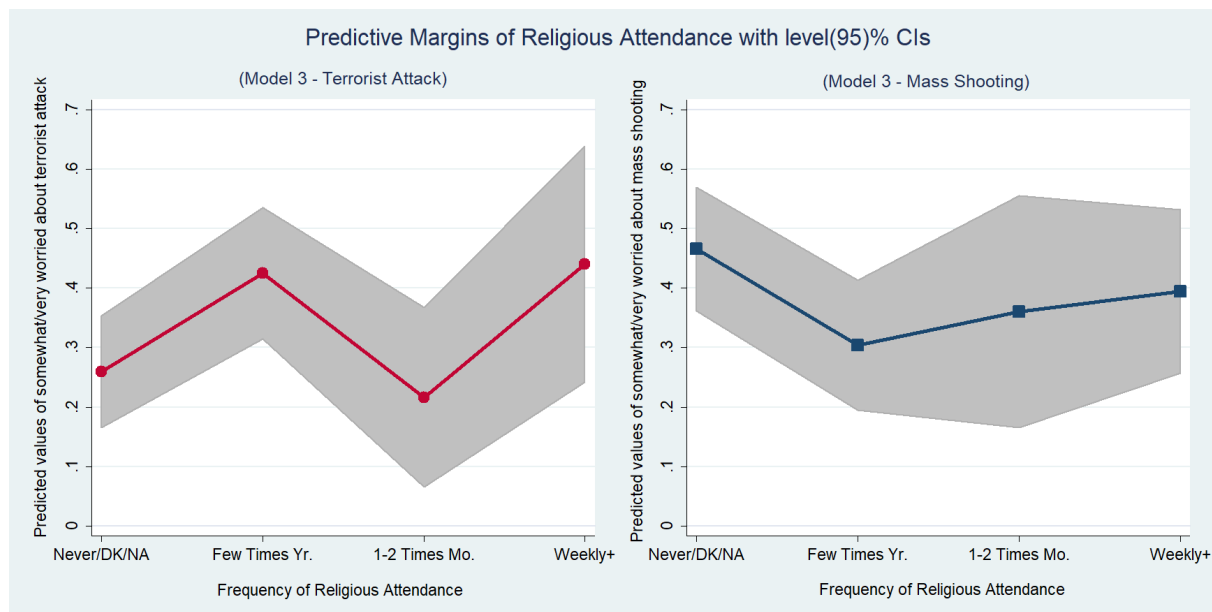


**Figure 4.9 Probabilities of Respondents Reporting Being Very or Somewhat Worried About a Terrorist Attack and a Mass Shooting by Gun Ownership with 95% CI**



*Religious attendance* is a significant predictor of *fear of a terrorist attack* as well, and for *fear of a mass shooting* at the  $p < .10$  level in Model 3. Specifically, compared to respondents who never attend religious services, those who attend a few times per year ( $p < .10$ ) are 2.57 times more likely to report feeling “somewhat” or “very” worried about victimization in a terrorist attack, and respondents who attend weekly or more frequently ( $p < .10$ ) are 2.79 times more likely to report feeling “somewhat” or “very” worried. Attending religious services a few times per year decreased the odds of reporting being “very” or “somewhat” worried about victimization in a mass shooting by 57 percent compared to respondents who never attend. Figure 4.10 charts the predicted values of “very” or “somewhat” worried of victimization in a terrorist attack and a mass shooting against religious attendance with 95% confidence intervals included, visualizing the relationships described in Model 3.

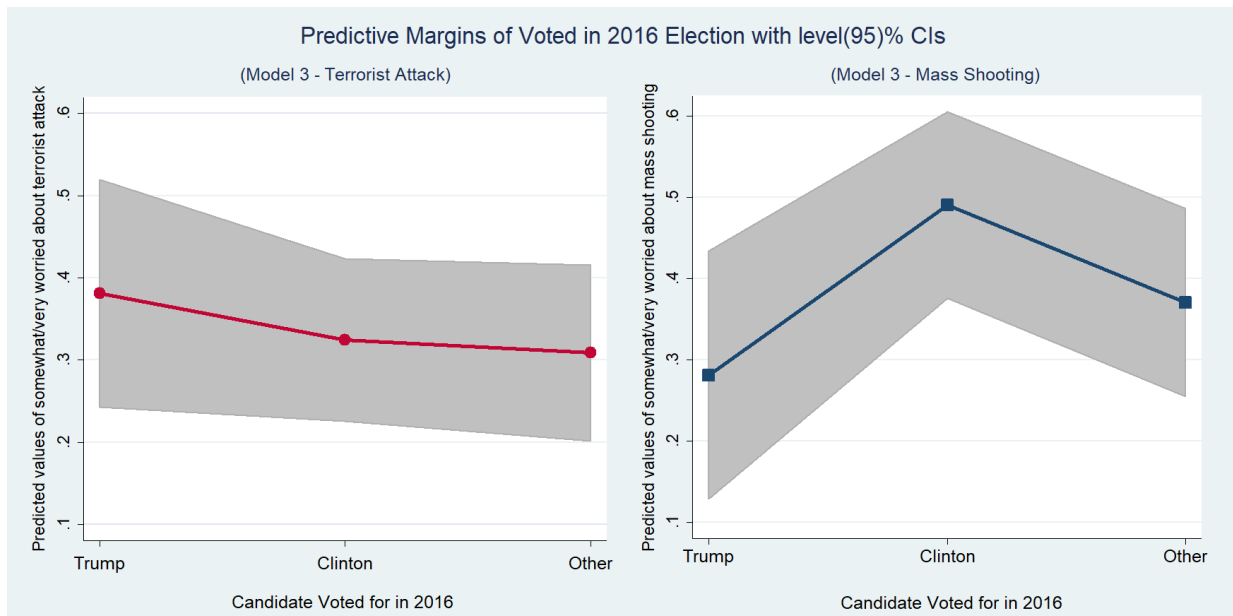
**Figure 4.10 Probabilities of Respondents Reporting Being Very or Somewhat Worried About a Terrorist Attack and a Mass Shooting by Frequency of Religious Service Attendance with 95% CI**



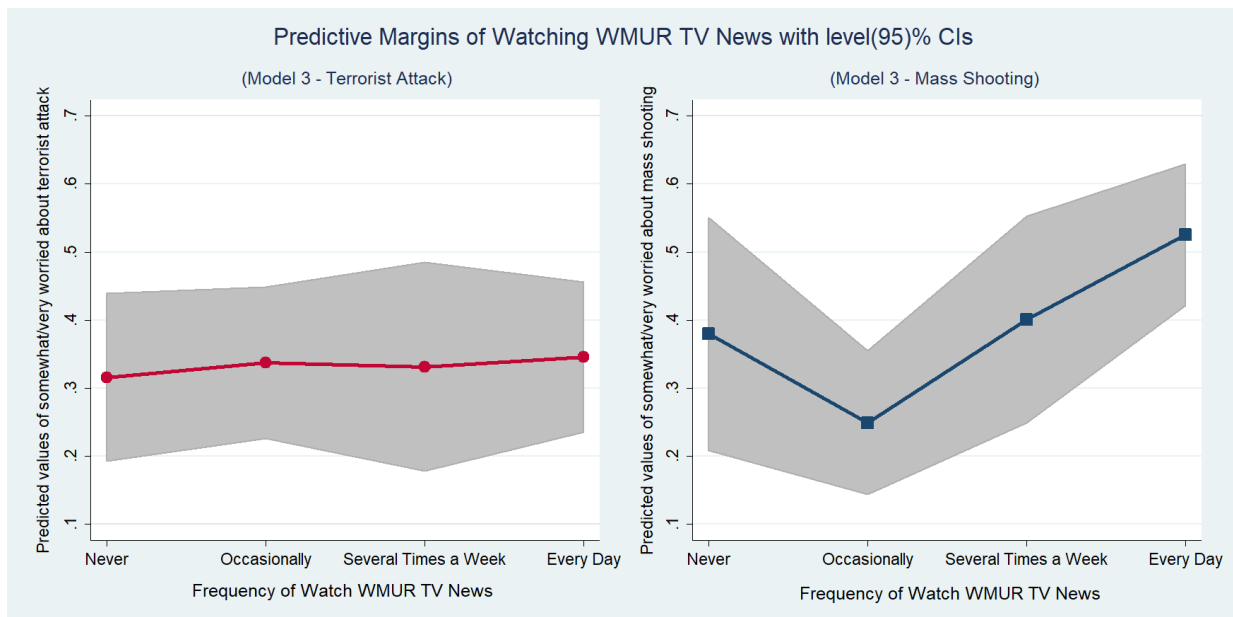
Measures of political candidate support and *fear of a terrorist attack* and *fear of a mass shooting* found in Model 2 are mediated and partially mediated by the inclusion of mass media consumption variables in Model 3, respectively. Voting for *Clinton* and “*Others*” is no longer a significant predictor of fear of a terrorist attack compared to *voting for Trump*. The inclusion of selective mass media consumption measures does mediate the effect of political candidate support on fear of a terrorist attack from Models 2 to Model 3. However, as in Model 2, voting for *Clinton* ( $p < .05$ ) is still a significant predictor of fear of a mass shooting compared to voting for *Trump*. Voting for *Clinton* increases the odds of reporting being “very” or “somewhat” worried about victimization in a mass shooting by 2.81 times, slightly less than Model 2 and representing a partial mediation effect in Model 3. “*Other*” voters are still not significantly different from *Trump* voters. Figure 4.11 charts the predicted values of “very” or “somewhat”

worried of victimization in a terrorist attack and a mass shooting against candidate voted for in the 2016 election with 95% confidence intervals included.

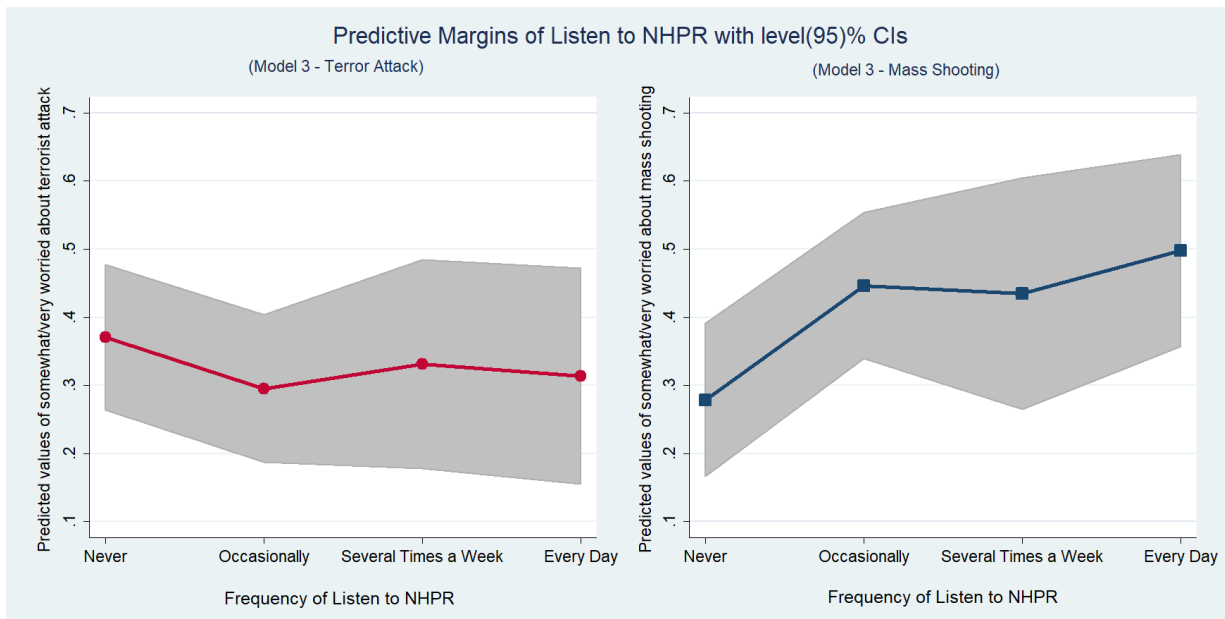
**Figure 4.11 Probabilities of Respondents Reporting Being Very or Somewhat Worried About a Terrorist Attack and a Mass Shooting by Candidate Voted for in 2016 Presidential Election with 95% CI**



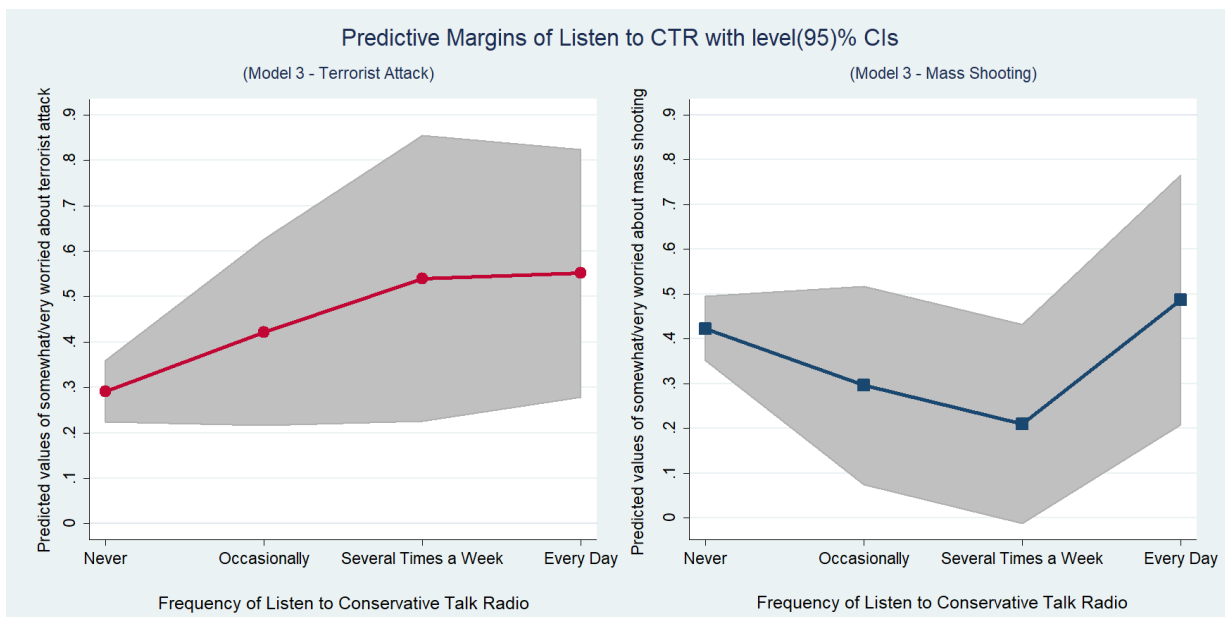
**Figure 4.12 Probabilities of Respondents Reporting Being Very or Somewhat Worried About a Terrorist Attack and a Mass Shooting by Frequency of Watching WMUR TV News with 95% CI**



**Figure 4.13 Probabilities of Respondents Reporting Being Very or Somewhat Worried About a Terrorist Attack and a Mass Shooting by Frequency of Listening to NHPR with 95% CI**



**Figure 4.14 Probabilities of Respondents Reporting Being Very or Somewhat Worried About a Terrorist Attack and a Mass Shooting by Frequency of Listening to CTR with 95% CI**



## Discussion

The study of media effects is a unique contribution to the literature examining the politics of fear. It provides clear evidence that not only does mass media influence the public's views on mass violence, but what type of media individuals choose is associated with worry about one type of violence versus another. This study set out to test whether an individual's political orientation and selective media consumption habits are associated with elevated fear of a terrorist attack compared to fear of a mass shooting. In a series of multivariate logistic regression analyses, I find that selective media exposure does significantly predict fear of a terrorist attack and fear of a mass shooting separately, and based on the media outlet chosen. More frequent listeners of conservative talk radio are more worried about victimization in a terrorist attack, and more frequent listeners of NHPR are more worried about a mass shooting. Furthermore, the effect of selective media exposure are observed even when accounting for political leanings, and mediate or partially mediate the effect of political candidate support. This finding includes controls for sex, age, gun ownership, and religious attendance.

Controlling for sociodemographic factors which have been found to generally predict fear of violent crime victimization in other studies (i.e. Sex and Age) and lifestyle factors (e.g. Gun Ownership and Religious Attendance), I find evidence for my assertion that fear of terrorism and fear of mass shootings is not simply a response to the violence of these tragic events, but also a response to the meanings, messages, and politics that are associated with the frames "Terrorist Attack" and "Mass Shooting". The framing of mass violence events is used to communicate distinct messages about the nature of risk, the threat to society, and how the general public should interpret the events. This is done in response to characteristics of the attack and

perpetrators, priorities of law enforcement and politicians, and how newsworthy mass media deems the event to be. This in turn serves to shape individuals' worldviews, opinions on political topics, and perceptions of risk and danger. However, individuals are also likely to seek out information sources and politicians that conform to their previously held beliefs. In this manner, the worldview, politics, media cycle becomes somewhat of a feedback loop. Combined with the algorithm-driven content creation and distribution systems of the internet age and the 24-hour news cycle, this makes it increasingly difficult to escape the propaganda. Essentially, the politics of fear becomes amplified in modern media systems.

Based on the analyses in this study, factors which are associated with elevated fear/worry about victimization in a terrorist attack or a mass shooting can be divided into three categories: 1. Factors which may influence Self-Assessed Perceptions of Vulnerability – i.e. Sex, Age, Gun ownership; 2. Factors which may influence respondents' World-Views and Political Views – i.e. voting patterns, party affiliation, religious attendance; and 3. Interactions with Social Institutions – particularly mass media consumption habits. It is noteworthy that these factors are also interrelated in the reinforcing spirals model (Slater 2007, 2015).

### *Perceptions of Vulnerability*

A good deal of prior criminological research has found that a respondent's sex and age is a consistent and statistically significant predictor of fear of crime, at least when examining perceptions of conventional "street crimes" (Akers et al 1987, Callanan and Teasdale 2009, Franklin and Franklin 2009, Henson and Reynolds 2015, Lagrange and Ferraro 1989, Rader and Haynes 2011, Reid and Konrad 2004, Smith and Torstensson 1997, Stafford and Galle 1984, Warr 1984). This analysis reveals similar findings, while also challenging popular theories of



why these individuals report greater fear of victimization. Specifically, female respondents are more likely to express fear of both a terrorist attack and a mass shooting in every model tested. However, female respondents are more worried about terrorist attacks than mass shootings. The significant discrepancy between this and sex differences in fear of a mass shooting are confounding. Previous research has also found that female respondents report greater levels of fear and worry about terrorists attacks (Brück and Muller 2010; Nellis 2009; Nellis and Savage 2012), which I also find. My findings also call into question dominant theoretical explanations of why previous research has consistently found that female respondents express more worry of victimization than male regardless of the crime assessed.

Several explanations have been offered as to why female respondents report higher levels of fear of violent victimization (see Franklin and Franklin 2009; Henson and Reyns 2015, Rader and Haynes; 2011; Reid and Konrad 2004; Smith and Torstensson 1997, Warr 1984). The first, is that women are generally less physically able to resist violent victimization than men, while the second emphasizes women's concern about victimization as a response to the perceived risk of sexual assault. A third possible explanation is that women are more likely to express fear than men, regardless of whether they are experiencing fear or worry at similar rates. The first explanation is the most plausibly related to the findings in this study. The second is inadequate for explaining this particular findings, as neither terrorist attacks or mass shootings typically involve sexual assault or related crimes. The third explanation is beyond the scope of what this study can test, and is better addressed by qualitative methods.

Age is the second most consistent predictor of fear of violent victimization, in the fear of crime literature which is again typically explained in terms of the victim's self-assessed ability to

resist victimization. This study did find that in some models, fear of terrorism was elevated among older respondents, as predicted. However models testing fear of mass shootings found the opposite effect. Younger respondents are more worried about mass shootings than older respondents. This is likely related to perceptions of mass shootings as occurring in places that younger people frequent – schools, concerts, etc. – and may believe that are more vulnerable to this type of violence. Age is a significant factor in an individual's fear of mass violence victimization, but not in the way that the classic fear of crime literature would suggest.

#### *World-View, Lifestyle, and Political Beliefs*

Perceptions of individual vulnerability do play a part in explaining why individuals may feel more fear or worry about victimization in a mass violence event, however in the case of this study, it does not fully explain why individuals are more likely to report elevated fear of a terrorist attack versus a mass shooting and vice versa. This study also tested factors which measure individuals' worldviews and political orientations, in the form of religious attendance and vote cast in the 2016 Presidential election.

Gun ownership was also found to be associated with a reduced fear of mass shooting victimization. Though this is a lifestyle factor, which has been somewhat controversial in its role in the fear of crime literature. Gun owners may conceivably believe that they are more able to resist victimization in a mass shooting, and that they perceive their vulnerability to be lower by having a weapon to protect themselves. Anecdotal evidence would appear to support this proposition as well. However, in this chapter I do not find evidence to support the protective factor or deterrence theories. Protection and deterrence mechanisms by which gun owners evaluate their risk of victimization would not explain the disparity of worry among gun owners

between terrorist attacks and mass shootings. Instead, I find support for the hypotheses that because mass shootings are often followed by politicians talking about gun control policies (Lawrence and Birkland 2004; Stroebe, Leander, and Kruglanski 2017; Schildkraut and Elsass 2016; Vizzard 2015).

Religious attendance was a statistically significant predictor of fear of a terrorist attack in Model 1, and approaching statistical significance in Models 2 and 3. The literature investigating the relationship between religious attendance and political attitudes is mixed in its findings. However, some studies do suggest that certain religious groups may hold overly negative views of other religious groups, especially those which they believe to be antagonistic to their own. In this case, it is possible that due to the association of terrorism with Muslims, more religious individuals may view terrorism as an inherently religious or cultural conflict. That is to say, religious individuals may subscribe to the “Clash of Civilizations” argument in how they understand terrorism and the relationship between the Islamic world and the Western world. I find support for research which has found that some Christian denominations hold antagonistic views of Muslims and Islam (Gorski 2017; Hinze, Mencken, and Tolbert 2011; Jung 2012). This is particularly pronounced among conservative Christians in the US (Yancy, Eisenstein, and Burge 2017), who may feel a greater status threat from “foreign” groups with religious differences. Again, this supports the notion that traditionalist views of the US as a white-Christian dominant society result in Muslims being reported as the least trusted group by highly religious Americans, and considered the definitive outsider group (Gorski 2017; Hinze, Mencken, and Tolbert 2011; Jung 2012; Yancy, Eisenstein, and Burge 2017).

Political orientations were statistically significant in nearly every model, for both fear of terrorist attack and fear of mass shooting. Individuals who voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 election are more likely report being fearful of terrorist attacks, while individuals who voted for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election are more likely to report being fearful of mass shootings. This result is not terribly surprising, as Trump emphasized terrorism as a threat to the US homeland throughout his campaign, and used racially charged rhetoric to win the presidency, while Clinton and other Democratic politicians have emphasized gun control as a policy objective. In the US, both political parties use the politics of fear to attempt to win office and enact policy objectives, however the effects of leveraging the fear of terrorism have proven to have much more insidious in the past two decades.

### *Media Consumption Habits*

The association between media consumption and fear of terrorism has been somewhat studied, with some research finding a link between the frequency of media consumption and the level of reported fear. The present study includes multiple measures of media consumption: frequency of watching local TV news, frequency of listening to NHPR, and frequency of listening to Conservative talk radio. In previous research, a link between the frequency or amount of news consumed was associated with higher or lower reported fear of terrorism. In the current study, watching more local TV news is associated with elevated fear of a mass shooting, but not a terrorist attack. This may be due to the timing of the survey, which occurred in the immediate aftermath of the October 2017 Las Vegas shooting.

More frequent listening to NHPR was associated with higher reported fear of a mass shooting, but not a terrorist attack, and more frequent listening to Conservative talk radio was

associated with higher reported fear of a terrorist attack, but not a mass shooting. All statistically significant media effects included control estimates for socio-demographics, lifestyle and worldview factors, and political orientations. What this demonstrates is the reciprocal siloing effect of mass media – certain media outlets promote certain views, and individuals choose media outlets which confirm their previously held beliefs. The feedback loop of mass media in the digital age is amplified by content algorithms which promote content similar to previously consumed media.

Some previous research theorizes that the reinforcing spirals effects is symmetrical, i.e. both conservatives and liberals are similarly affected by partisan media. I do not support this point with my analyses, and I assert that my findings point to an asymmetrical effect of reinforcing spirals, which are more pronounced in conservative media sources. Even though not all conservative talk radio host share the same outlook (Mort 2012), I find evidence that supports the perspective that conservatives are more prone to media reinforcing spirals (see McCright 2011, McCright and Dunlap 2011, Wicks et al 2014). It is reasonable to presume that much of the worry about mass shootings reported by WMUR viewers and NHPR listeners is in response to the October 2017 Las Vegas shooting. Given the high-profile nature of this event, it is very telling that CTR listeners are not more worried about a mass shooting but are more worried about a terrorist attack. These findings also support research that asserts conservative media pushes individuals further from reality than liberal preferred media such as NHPR. Conservative media sources frequently contradict scientific research and influence individuals' perceptions on critical issues such as climate change and public health (see Bolin and Hamilton 2018 for an example).

### *Limitations*

Several limitations to this analysis exist as well, including temporal effects, cross sectional data, and ambiguous findings. The survey used in this analysis was conducted shortly after 2017 Las Vegas Mass Shooting. This likely influenced results. Notably, evidence for this is found in the increased worry about a mass shooting – but not a terrorist attack – by more frequent viewers of Local TV news channel WMUR. While New Hampshire is physically very distant from Las Vegas, a large amount of media coverage of the event conceivably elevated public concern of mass shootings as an issue.

This analysis also relies on cross-sectional data and therefore can't determine causality. Ideally, the Reinforcing Spirals Model calls for longitudinal data to evaluate the reciprocal relationship between attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors and selective mass media exposure. This data is cross-sectional in nature, and only able to test associations at one particular time and place, New Hampshire in October 2017.

Because of the limitations, the findings in this chapter are somewhat ambiguous. It is not possible to establish which comes first, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, or selective media exposure. The Reinforcing Spirals Model does suggest that not such cause-and effect relationship exists, instead positing that the relationship is a dynamic and self-reinforcing process. What this study does demonstrate is that media effects, particularly selective exposure to partisan media, does have a measureable effect on attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors above and beyond one's core beliefs.

*Implications beyond the current study*

The politics of fear has been leveraged by both political parties in recent election cycles. The techniques for winning political office in the US differ little between parties, although the specific policy proposals and objectives pursued are vastly different in their intent and effect. The fear of terrorism has deliberately been leveraged to oppress vulnerable minority groups within the US, and as justification to continue to pursue the War on Terror in the Middle East. In the second edition of Altheide's *Terrorism and the Politics of Fear* (2017), he argues that the Trump Presidential campaign is the result of more than a decade of propaganda shaping American's perceptions and fears. Altheide very successfully outlined the process of how politicians and mass media worked together to build a case for the Iraq war in the years following the September 11, 2001 attacks. This paper agrees with this proposition and Altheide's findings, however, I will note that the Trump campaign leveraged the racist and xenophobic attitudes present throughout US history, simply directing the distrust, anger, fear, and loathing at Muslims and other recent immigrants.

The politics of fear – particularly those policies carried out as a response to the fear of terrorism – have profound consequences, even today. At the time of the writing of the paper, the War on Terror is entering its 18<sup>th</sup> year. Thousands of US Troops have lost their lives in the Middle Eastern wars, along with millions of Afghans, Iraqis, Syrians, Yemenis, Kurds, and others as effects of the war on terror spread and destabilize an entire region of the world. Countless others bear the physical and psychological scars of these conflicts. Under the USA PATRIOT Act, US intelligence and Law Enforcement agencies have sweeping surveillance

powers, and the NSA alone collects millions of private communications every day, all in cooperation with major telecom companies.

The 2016 Presidential election is perhaps the most visible way in which the racialized fear of terrorism has been leveraged by societal elites to win office, accrue power, and gain wealth. The right-wing populist politics of the current era play on blatantly racist and discriminatory policies to combat the alleged threats of terrorism and other violence committed by Muslims and immigrants. Minority groups – especially those perceived as “Muslim” – have been increasingly victimized in the wake of the 2016 populist movements and white supremacist groups have become bolder in recent years (Levin and Reitzel 2018). Additionally, the Trump administration has separated families apprehended attempting to cross the southern border and keeping asylum seekers and other immigrants in concentration camps reminiscent of the darkest chapters in human history. All the while, powerful societal elites have taken the opportunity to enrich themselves and their cronies, directing attention towards supposed threats of non-white foreigners and away from the arguable more severe threats to the long-term security of the US such as global climate change, growing income and wealth inequality, looming mass automation of jobs, skyrocketing healthcare costs, and government corruption. Whether or not the US will deal with these issues depends on a firm public voice, willing politicians, and changes to structural conditions which promote these drastic inequalities.



## CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The world has changed. Digital technology, globalization, deindustrialization, and migration have reorganized societies around the globe. Many parallels are apparent between the social and structural forces that classical sociological theorists such as Marx, Weber, and Durkheim were writing about during the Industrial Revolution and the current day. The US economy has reorganized around a post-industrial mode of production (due to the twin forces of offshoring and automation), resulting in the decline of communities once based around factory production, and the increased importation of consumer goods. At the same time, global migration, often from poorer regions to richer regions, has become a political wedge issue around the world. All the while, mass media now reaches more people than ever before and penetrates our lives more deeply due to the expansion of both traditional and digital media sources. Today we are constantly bombarded with messages from innumerable sources, and false or misleading information is increasingly prolific and difficult to distinguish from facts.

As a society we are in a state of Anomie as understood by Durkheim (1897) and Merton (1938). Many are unsure of their place in the world and feel anxious in the face of drastic change. They want answers or something to blame. So-called populist politics have emerged in wealthy nations as a response to this anomic state. Some may blame powerful actors that hoard resources and rig systems in their favor. Some may blame foreigners for their problems, i.e. Muslims are terrorists, Mexicans are taking jobs/criminals, China is unfairly trading, etc., rather than looking at how structural conditions have produced their perceived plight. Racism and xenophobia are not new to the US and have been part of our society since its inception. However, today, politicians across the globe effectively capitalize on these racist and xenophobic

feelings using the modern media landscape to speak directly to a section of the population that attributes their anomic state – caused by structural changes – to the influences of foreign non-white “others”. This includes a reality TV host who embraced the racially charged rhetoric that many people had been harboring for years and won the Presidency despite being the less popular candidate.

The structural changes that have occurred, and are still unfolding to this day, certainly have affected the lives and well-being of populations around the globe. In this case, I contend that a substantial part of the US population is afraid, anxious, and unsure of their place in the world in the face of a globalized, digital, deindustrialized, and increasingly diverse and multicultural society. When combined, these forces can produce a sense that a valued and traditional culture and way of life is under attack or in decline. This may even be partly true as factories close and shift the means of production to robots or overseas, as children grow up and move to urban areas in search of employment, and as economic inequality deepens. However, the causes of these anxieties associated with changing social structures are often misattributed to foreigners and becomes cloaked in the language of social identity.

This social construction of the foreigner-as-threat is useful for societal elites who want to rally support and make money, while deflecting blame for social inequalities on the current structures. This is plainly evident by rhetoric used regularly by President Trump who often places blame for US social problems on groups such as Muslims, Latin American immigrants, and China. Even the frenetic response to the current COVID-19 pandemic by the Trump administration has continually shifted blame to foreigners, to the neglect of effective domestic measures. The paradox of anti-immigrant sentiment is that those who are most opposed to

immigrant groups are often those who have the least contact with them and face the least actual “threat”. For instance, Republicans who live further away from the Mexican-US border are more likely to support a building a wall on the southern US border than those who live within 350 miles of the border (Jones 2017). The perception of a threat – and not necessarily the reality of the threat – fuels anxiety.

Both the bottom-up effects of anomic anxieties on the individual level, and the top-down machinations of power- and wealth-seeking elites manipulating public sentiment contribute to a distorted view of reality along a whole host of issues. For another example, public opinion research finds that people believe crime rates to be the same or increasing even when violent crime rates are going down by all official measures (Glassner 2009). Researchers have found that public perception of crime – and resulting calls for particular ill-suited policies on crime – is reflective of significant mass media attention to it (Altheide 1996, 2006, 2017; Glassner 2009). The expansion of mass media into so many aspects of life and 24-hour news has made news coverage of bad things a part of daily life more so than in previous eras; and with all the social changes taking place already, the combination turns into perceptions of reality that may not be reflective of actual things going on.

Consequently, in the study of the causes and consequences of terrorism, I assert that it is essential to evaluate what the term “terrorism” means, not just academically, but especially in common discourse. How is this term understood and used by news media, politicians, and the public? Who is labelled as a “terrorist”, and under what conditions? Why is it that Ramzi Yousef is portrayed as part of a conspiracy trying to topple the West, while Timothy McVeigh is portrayed as a quiet loner who is the unfortunate product of his circumstances? Why is Nidal

Hasan a radicalized extremist while James von Brunn is a racist old man? Why are Sayeed Farook and Tashfeen Malik ISIL sleeper agents, while Dylann Roof is a troubled kid? I argue that, in addition to the violence committed, it has to do with their race, ethnicity, birthplace, and religion. Specifically, I assert that in popular discourse, news media coverage, and political communications that Muslims are disproportionately portrayed as “terrorists”, and that this is an integral part of the racialization of Muslims in the US. Essentially, to be Muslim is to be associated with terrorism. This is part of a larger social phenomena whereby the anxieties and anomie caused by structural changes invoke a status threat, and are attributed to a grab bag of foreigners and “others” who pose a perceived threat to the dominant US culture and way of life.

In this dissertation, I study the public’s fear of terrorism not as a fear of violence, but as a fear of losing status, power, and dominance to a foreign-Muslim threat among traditionally powerful groups in the US. Based on analyses of data from multiple sources, I find evidence that fear of terrorism in the US is shaped more by media coverage and attention from political elites to terrorism as a topic than actual terrorist attacks or casualties in the US. I find that the content of news coverage of mass violence is racially biased, focusing on violence perpetrated by Muslims, and that association with radical Islamic ideology overrides racial concerns and “revokes” whiteness in media coverage of mass violence. I also find that members of the public develop their perceptions of terrorism and mass violence by selectively consuming mass media that supports and amplifies their prior political beliefs.

#### *Power, Politics, Mass Media, and Constructing the Enemy*

In many ways, my dissertation examines power: the power of media and elites to shape conversations, to construct enemies, and to influence attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. I

conceptualize a model of power based on C. Wright Mills' *The Power Elite* (1956) where the relationship between societal elites and mass media is not separate but of shared power among a class of people who move between the spheres of government, military, and big business. Neither societal elites nor mass media are dominant in their power to influence the public, and who is driving media coverage depends on a particular social context. While the specific goals of media and political elites may not always align, the ruling class generally shares the goal of maintaining and expanding their power and wealth.

To begin, I find that power constructs terrorism as a social problem worthy of significant social concern. In chapter 2 I use data from Gallup's Most Important Problem poll and compare it with data from the Global Terrorism Database on terrorist attacks in the US, news media coverage data from Lexis Nexis, and presidential addresses from the American Presidency Project. I examine the trends in this data to give context to the long-term national trends in the US public's worry about terrorism as the most important problem facing the nation. I find that, at least in bivariate analyses, the US public is most worried about terrorism when mass media outlets devote more attention to terrorism as a topic. Surprisingly, neither the number of terrorist events occurring in the US nor the number of American terrorism casualties are significantly correlated with public perception of terrorism as the most important problem. There is, however, a correlation between terrorist events and attention to terrorism as a topic by the President and news media. This suggests a complex relationship and provides evidence to support previous research that asserts the important role of mass media as an intermediary between current events, government entities, and the general public.

I find evidence that both the President and prominent news outlets exert an influence on the public's perception of social problems facing the US, and that they influence each other. Politics and mass media are key in telling us what a social problem is and controlling the broad conversation. Hermann and Chomsky (1988) articulated a propaganda model of mass media that states that media is used by social elites to build support for their policy objectives among the public. This was written as a rebuttal to the popular notion that mass media is often at odd with politics and able to hold politicians accountable. In the modern era, mass media has largely not held politicians accountable for their disastrous policies. In fact, David Altheide (2006; 2009; 2017) argue that almost all mass media outlets and politicians mutually benefit from fear-inducing rhetoric, especially around issues such as terrorism because it directly increases their viewership and revenue. Trump sells newspapers and gets people to tune in to the news.

On the other hand, considering a potential counterhypothesis, I do not find evidence that economic insecurity is driving the fear of terrorism and associated anti-Muslim sentiments. To the contrary, I find that the public is less concerned about terrorism during economically challenging times. Likewise, immigration research has additionally found that anti-immigrant politics are pursued in both good and bad economic times, and that social institutions are primarily responsible for engendering anti-immigrant attitudes (Tichenor 2002). This is supported by other research that has found that fears and concerns about labor market competition are not associated with anti-immigrant sentiment (Heinmueller et al 2015). If economic insecurity does amplify feelings of racial, foreign, or terrorist threat, it does not do so in an easily measurable way, at least not with the data that is currently available to me. Instead, I find evidence that the fear of terrorism is related to a perceived threat to the power and status of dominant groups in the US, supporting the findings of Mutz (2018).

To be more specific, I find that fear of terrorism is associated with a fear of Muslims. In chapter 3 I examine the content of news stories about suspected terrorists, by collecting data on the characteristics of terrorist attacks in the US and their suspected perpetrators, as available from the Global Terrorism Database. Then, I collect broadcast news transcripts through Lexis-Nexis by searching the suspects' names, taking a quantitative content analysis approach. While the previous chapters examined the relationship between mass media and the public, this analysis examines the content of those news media messages, and how terrorism and terrorists are socially constructed through framing of suspected terrorist perpetrators in the US. I find that suspected perpetrators of terrorist attacks, as defined by the GTD, who are Middle-Eastern/North African in origin, associated with radical Islam, and foreign born are more likely to be called a terrorist by news media, even controlling for other characteristics of the attack.

However, when analyzed together in the same model, these factors are mediated by association with radical Islamic ideology. This suggests that the construct of the suspected terrorist's race is not solely based on skin color and nationality, but on other ethnic markers associated with Islam, and that this racial construct is central to the definition of who a terrorist is, rather than the violence itself. Furthermore, by emphasizing non-Middle Eastern suspects who are Muslim or associated with Radical Islam, this points out implicit biases in news media coverage of terrorist suspects. Anyone who is Muslim or associated with Radical Islam is more likely to be called a terrorist, however, emphasis is placed on clarifying that fact when the suspect does not appear stereotypically "Muslim". That is to say, there appears to be an unspoken understanding that Middle Eastern suspects accused of committing violent acts are Terrorists, while members of other racial groups could have had other motivations. Additionally, this supports the view that "Muslim" is a racial category (Constadine 2017; Skenderovic and

Spaeti 2019; Taras 2013), even if it is not based primarily on skin color (Dunn, Klocker, and Salabay 2007) and seen as a “voluntary” one (Meer and Modood 2009), that Muslims are viewed as non-white (Galonnier 2015; Moosavi 2015; Selod 2015), and that one can lose benefits of whiteness by associating with Islam (ibid.).

My dissertation provides evidence that “Muslims” have been racialized in the US – though this is not based entirely on nationality or skin color. *Racial Formation Theory* (Omi and Winant 1986, 1994, 2015) helps address this compared to traditional concepts of race as skin-color based. Racial formation theory emphasized the role of macro-level processes and social institutions in creating and constructing racial categories. The findings in my dissertation research repeatedly point to mass media as the primary social institutions that shapes the public’s perception about issues such as race and terrorism. Mass media does this by setting agendas and deciding what is newsworthy (McCombs and Shaw 1993), by framing events and providing the language and imagery used to understand what is happening in society (Entman 1993), and increasingly by reinforcing previously existing beliefs through selective media exposure (Slater 2007, 2015). Media effects, and specifically the promotion of the fear of Muslims as a terrorist threat to Americans, have far reaching consequences in how the behavior of institutions and individuals have been shaped over the past 20 years. This includes the US wars in the Middle East, erosion of civil liberties domestically, and the election of Donald Trump to the Presidency in 2016 to start.

As we know, whites and non-whites clearly have different lived experiences and media constructions in the US. Prior research demonstrated that when a mass shooter is white, media rarely discusses their race (Mingus and Zopf 2010). Consequently, when a mass shooter is non-



white, media over-emphasizes the suspect's race in their reporting (Chuang 2012). Other research found that while white converts to Islam can still benefit from greater respect in society, their whiteness is precarious, and they can lose some of the benefits of their whiteness (Moosayi 2015). Like Selod (2015), I find that white privilege appears to be unable to overcome a connection to Islam. My research finds that, at least in news reporting about terrorism suspects, association with Islam essentially "revokes" a suspect's whiteness. Not only are Muslims racialized as terrorists, when a white person adopts Muslim ethnic markers, they find themselves facing a similar terrorist-threat construction as a non-white Muslim. This also demonstrates that "whiteness" as a social construct is fragile and not just based on skin color either. Whiteness carries behavioral expectations and standards that if not met, decrease or rescind an individual's white privilege. For example, a white man who commits mass murder is still perceived as white and upholding of whiteness so long as he is not associated with radical Islam. This person is not labelled as a "terrorist" and their actions are attributed to individual abnormalities rather than a characteristic of their social group. If that person is Muslim, or pledging allegiance to the Islamic State group, they are called a "terrorist", perhaps even more so when they are violating societal expectations and standards of whiteness. The US public popularly presumes Muslims to be predisposed to committing terrorist acts. Consequently, we must acknowledge that in the US today being "Muslim" is not only associated with terrorism but is thought of as being excluded from whiteness, despite skin color.

Perhaps the most notorious example of Muslim racialization is in the case of President Barack Obama. Race was a constant factor in Obama's candidacy and Presidency (Fraser 2009). While President Obama, whose father was a black Kenyan, is often cited as the first Black President (*ibid.*), he can equally claim white parentage from his mother. Further, from the time of

his initial 2008 campaign to the present day, rumors spread that Obama was both Muslim and foreign. He was alleged to be a secret Muslim (Layman et al 2014). This misinformation is easily disproven, as Obama attends Christian religious services and identifies with the Christian faith. Another controversy of the 2008 campaign directly challenges the notion that President Obama is a Muslim: his association with Reverend Jeremiah Wright of the Trinity United Christian Church of Chicago (McKenzie 2011). The Birther movement, championed by Donald Trump, subsequently made other claims that Obama was not born in the United States (Hughley 2012). These claims, however, do not come from a place of good faith (ibid.). President Obama's multiracial heritage, which is the basis for these conspiracy theories, are presumed to be frightening to whites and were embraced by conservatives (Hughley 2012; Layman et al 2014).

This is a key element of constructing the alleged enemy – defining who is a terrorist and building support for political agendas such as a “Muslim ban” around this conception of terrorism as Muslim violence. It is beneficial for social elites to have a foreign enemy on which to focus the US public's attention. If we do not have foreigners to blame for our problems, then the public may become conscious of and we might have to fix the issues of structural inequality that we have domestically or face up to the failed foreign policies we have pursued since World War II.

The racialization of Muslims is central to understanding both Islamophobia and the contemporary populist politics that make use of xenophobic, nativist, and white supremacist ideas. Islamophobia plays on historical constructs of Orientalism (Skenderovic and Späti 2019). Islamophobia in Western societies is racial in nature (Constadine 2017; Dunn, Klocker, and Salabay 2007; Garner and Selod 2015; Taras 2013). Like others, I have found that anti-Muslim

rhetoric plays on negative stereotypes of Islam (Dunn, Klocker, and Salabay 2007), particularly by constructing a narrative of a Muslim terrorist threat. In some ways, this iteration of racialized anti-foreign sentiment is complex, due to the diversity of Muslims in the real world. Muslim immigrants come from many different continents with many different skin colors (Dunn, Klocker, and Salabay 2007; Galonnier 2015; Moosavi 2015; Selod 2015). In others, it is deceptively simple. Despite the findings here and in other research that this is not necessarily based on skin color, the racialization of Muslims contributes to perceptions that Muslims do not belong in the US. The racial project of defining Muslims as terrorists draws boundaries around a social group as not only distinct from others, but as an enemy.

This has implications for integration and assimilation of Muslims into US society. Over time, many groups not considered “White” in the US were eventually assimilated into dominant culture, e.g. Irish and Italians. Some even argue this is true of Jews today, who were considered largely non-white in Europe and the US in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century and, who like Muslims, are associated with a religious affiliation (Hafez 2019; Skenderovic and Späti 2019). It is unclear if Muslims will be able to integrate and/or assimilate into US society in some manner. Currently, Muslims are viewed more as a threat than a disadvantaged group and are seen less favorably and less deserving of legal protections than other religious minorities in the west (Meer and Modood 2009). Numerous studies indicate that Muslims of all skin colors experience discrimination across Western societies including the US (Galonnier 2015; Herda 2018; Mansson McGinty 2020; Selod 2019), the UK (Moosavi 2015), Canada (Wilkins 2018), Ireland (Carrand Haynes 2015), and Australia (Dunn, Klocker and Salabay 2007).

Some racialized groups are perceived as un-assimilated and much research argues they are unable to do so due to specifics of their racialization and oppression, e.g. African Americans (Massey and Mullan 1984; Massey and Denton 1993). Consequently, Islamophobia and its accompanying discrimination and violence presents a barrier for Muslims to integrate and assimilate. Islamophobia has increased in the US and Europe since the 1990's, especially following the 9/11 attacks (Nebhan 2017; Skenderovic and Späti 2019) and is still used in contemporary politics. Some scholars have linked this to increases in the movement of population groups globally, which prompts reactions from dominant social groups in destination countries to maintain status (Gans 2017). While this may certainly be the case, I find more evidence in this dissertation that links Islamophobic attitudes to specific political orientations in the US, particularly those who favor right-wing authoritarianism (Beck and Plant 2018). The anti-Muslim/ anti-Immigrant populist movements that gained traction in both Europe and the US in response to the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis are almost exclusively far-right in orientation (Halikiopoulou and Vlandas 2019; Teitelbaum 2019; Vieten and Poynting 2016). These movements did not simply appear in response to a new refugee crisis but were long-standing political orientations of right-wing parties that developed throughout the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Williams 2010). Contemporary anti-immigrant, nativist, and nationalistic populism, of which Islamophobia is one expression, are rooted in large-scale social changes precipitated by globalization, deindustrialization, and technological changes of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### *Public Fear and Reinforcing Spirals*

I argue that fear of terrorism is associated with politicalized media consumption. In chapter 4 I address the public's fear of a terrorist attack compared with the public's fear of a mass shooting

in the Granite State Poll. Both of these interrelated constructs have garnered a great deal of mass media attention and political debate in recent years. Both are relatively rare in occurrence but have severe consequences when they do occur. I find that, despite the similarities and overlap in definitions and measures of “terror attacks” and “mass shootings”, fear of terrorist attacks and fear of mass shootings is predicted by an individual’s interaction with social institutions such as political parties and media consumption, even when controlling for characteristics that already influence fear of criminal victimization. I conclude that, when members of the public report that they are worried about victimization in a terrorist attack versus a mass shooting, they are responding to messages about violence communicated via mass media including who a terrorist is and who a mass shooter is. If the public is simply worried about the violence of these events, then there should not be a statistically significant difference in who reports fear/worry about terrorist attacks and mass shootings. In contrast, selective exposure to partisan mass media sources predicts likelihood of worrying about one or the other, even when controlling for background characteristics and prior political beliefs. Clearly, the labels of “Terrorist Attack” and “Mass Shooting” evoke distinct images and ideas separate from the violence that takes place, and news media is a source of those differences for the general public.

The findings in this dissertation project can be interpreted in the context of criminological research on the fear of crime victimization. My findings cast doubt on the mainstream vulnerability hypothesis. In other words, I find limited evidence that fear of violent crime victimization is the result of perceived inability to resist or defend against violence. For example, respondents who possessed a gun in the home reported less fear of a mass shooting and yet were no less worried than others about a terrorist attack. Nevertheless, sex and age are still significant predictors of fear of violent victimization in most models tested. I do find evidence to reject the

notion that women's expressed fear of crime generally is a fear of sexual assault specifically (Franklin and Franklin 2009 make a similar claim). Neither do I find support for the social learning perspective of a gendered fear of crime (Rader and Haynes 2011), or evidence to support the overestimation hypothesis (Callanan and Teasdale 2009; Snedker 2012). In other words, because female respondents were more fearful of terrorist attacks than mass shootings, I do not think that their fears can be explained by legitimated fears, gender socialization, nor statistical overestimation. My results are much more consistent with other studies of the fear of terrorism (see Brück and Müller 2010; Nellis 2009; Nellis and Savage 2012), although I find additional influence of political orientation and selective media exposure. These findings suggest a need for further research testing fear of victimization theories.

Additionally, I find a confounding relationship between age and fear of victimization. Older respondents were more likely to report being worried about a terrorist attack than younger respondents, although this is not always statistically significant. When examining fear of victimization in a mass shooting, I find that younger respondents are significantly and consistently more worried than older respondents. This suggests that individuals are evaluating their risk of victimization not in relation to their ability to resist, but in their proximity to perceived targets or to be targets. Woods et al (2008) similarly found that individuals who lived closer to presumed terrorist "targets" were more fearful of victimization in a terrorist attack. Again, additional research into perceptions of violent victimization vulnerability among age groups is prudent in light of these findings.

I also examined the role of gun ownership on fear of violent victimization. My analysis suggests that gun ownership is not simply a protective factor for violent victimization, but a

reflection of deeply held social and political beliefs. Individuals who own a firearm are not simply attempting to defend themselves against victimization as some suggest (see Strobe, Leander, and Kruglanski 2017; Turchan, Zeoli, and Kwiatkowski 2017; Warner and Thrash 2020) or deter violent victimization as others assert (see Holbert, Shah, and Kwak 2004). Instead, I find evidence that gun culture in the United States influences people's views about violent crime, particularly mass violence events. For example, in the GSP analysis I find that gun owners are not significantly different from non-gun owners in their worry about a terrorist attack; however, gun owners are significantly less worried about a mass shooting. If protection and deterrence were the primary mechanisms by which gun owners evaluate their risk of victimization, this disparity would be unlikely. I find support for the hypotheses that gun owners base their opinions on mass shootings on political beliefs (Joslyn and Haider-Markel 2017) because mass shootings are often followed by politicians talking about gun control policies (Lawrence and Birkland 2004; Stroebe, Leander, and Kruglanski 2017; Schildkraut and Elsass 2016; Vizzard 2015). Additionally, this is further supported when we consider that individuals who own guns frequently own multiple firearms and are more likely to be involved in organization that promote gun rights (Stroebe, Leander, and Kruglanski 2017). The predictability of gun ownership and fear is a reflection of the unique gun culture and politics in the US.

Relatedly, I find additional support for my hypothesis that fear of terrorism is linked to social identities as well as anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment in the GSP analysis, particularly when examining the effects of religious attendance and political leanings. There is frequently a link between one's political leanings and religious affiliation (Risen and Ksiazkiewicz 2015), however I find independent effects of religiosity and politics in my analyses. In particular, semi-frequent and very-frequent religious attendees are more worried about a terrorist attack than non-

religious respondents, however they are not more likely to worry about a mass shooting. Again, this demonstrates that these respondents are not just concerned about the violence, after all religious centers have been targets of mass shootings as well as terrorist attacks. Rather, this is reflective of a worldview that is antagonistic with Muslims and Islam and leans on traditionalist views of the US as a white-Christian dominant society (Gorski 2017). This should not be too surprising when we consider that other research found that Muslims are the least trusted group by highly religious Americans, and considered the definitive outsider group (Hinze, Mencken, and Tolbert 2011; Jung 2012).

Further, religiosity can limit individuals' ability to acquire and process some types of political information, particularly when it contradicts their closely held beliefs (Gaskins 2019). This may partly explain why a terrorist attack, which is associated with Islam, invokes more fear among religious respondents than a mass shooting. I find support for studies which have also shown bias against Muslims in US public attitudes (see Blackman 2018; Hinze, Mencken, and Tolbert 2011; Jung 2012; Thomas 2004), and among certain mainline and fundamentalist Christian sects in the US (Hinze, Mencken, and Tolbert 2011; Jung 2012). This is particularly pronounced among conservative Christians in the US (Yancy, Eisenstein, and Burge 2017), who may feel a greater status threat from other religious groups, especially when they are seen as foreign. While increased contact with out-groups is typically associated with reductions in antagonistic feelings, the opposite may be true in the case of US conservative Christians and evangelicals who are more likely to have low levels of respect for Islam (Jung 2012; Pevey and McKenzie 2009). This is consistent with my other findings that conclude that people with conservative ideologies and institutions are more likely to express fear of terrorism and, therefore, Muslims.



This is especially true of their selection in media. In my analysis of Granite State Poll data, I find support for the reinforcing spirals model (Slater 2007, 2015) in that listeners to conservative talk radio are more likely to worry about a terrorist attack than others, even when controlling for background characteristics and prior political beliefs. Conversely, NHPR listeners are more likely to worry about a mass shooting than a terrorist attack, although this was also the case in viewers of non-partisan local TV news. Further, while NHPR listeners skew toward liberal political orientation, their news coverage is decidedly non-partisan. While some previous research believes the reinforcing spirals effects to be symmetric, i.e. affecting conservative and liberals similarly, I do not argue this point. Even though not all conservative talk radio host share the same outlook (Mort 2012), I find evidence that supports the perspective that conservatives are more prone to media reinforcing spirals (see McCright 2011, McCright and Dunlap 2011, Wicks et al 2014). Just prior to the Fall 2017 GSP, a mass shooting in Las Vegas, NV occurred and dominated news media sources during the survey collection period. It is reasonable to presume that much of the worry about mass shootings reported by WMUR viewers and NHPR listeners is reflective of this single event. These findings also support research that asserts conservative media pushes individuals further from reality than liberal preferred media such as NHPR. For example, conservative media sources frequently contradict scientific research and influence individuals' perceptions on critical issues such as climate change and public health (see Bolin and Hamilton 2018). This demonstrates that the effects of the propaganda machine are targeted at a particular group of people: conservative and conservative leaning voters.

Conservative party discipline and authoritarian tendencies make the propaganda effect more pronounced. This makes sense when we consider public opinion data that shows that liberals trust a wider range of sources than conservatives, with the notable exception of FOX News

(Jurkowitz, Mitchell, Shearer, and Walker 2020). Conservatives conversely trust FOX News and a limited range of conservative media much more than sources to which liberals listen (ibid.).

The effect of reinforcing spirals does appear to be stronger on conservatives based on my findings and other related studies (McCright 2011, McCright and Dunlap 2011, Wicks et al 2014). Therefore, the effect of the reinforcing spiral is not symmetrical and not equivalent, despite the evidence that “both sides” engage in the politics of fear.

The political and social ramifications of the fear of terrorism in the US have been much more damaging than the fear of mass shootings, in so much as these are framed as separate issues in the news media. This study also demonstrates that the social construction of terrorism as a foreign, Muslim threat is not simply a top-down phenomenon where media dictates what the public think, rather it is something that involves active participation of media consumers. The type of media consumed may be chosen based on the audiences’ attitudes and beliefs while also reinforcing and amplifying their viewpoints.

#### *Broader Implications and Policy Recommendations*

This dissertation primarily deals with the issues of fear, violence, and racialization in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century by studying media effects, and contributes to theories of Agenda Setting, Framing, and Reinforcing Spirals. A wealth of research into both societal and individual perceptions of risk has found that there is often a disconnect in terms of our perceptions of risk and the risks that we actually face (Woods et al 2008). Issues such as diseases, vaccines, natural disasters, car accidents, climate change, and other threats to our well-being may be attributed far greater or far less probability of inflicting harm than is actually the case. The general public often lacks information about topics, or even rejects evidence that opposes with their core beliefs (Nickerson

1998). In some cases, experts are distrusted by segments of the public. This has been demonstrated in research about public trust in the science of vaccines and climate change (e.g. Bolin and Hamilton 2018; Hamilton et al 2015). Public perceptions of crime rates and prevalence of violent offenses are also frequently out of line with what official statistics reflect, terrorism and mass shootings being misunderstood in a similar vein. The average person is not very adept at assessing risk, particularly when it comes to these types of high-impact, low-probability events (Woods 2007). When our views are out of sync with regard to a whole host of phenomena, the consequences can be disastrous when enhanced and operating at the societal level.

Notably, I find quantitative confirmation of the theoretical and qualitative work in David Altheide's *Terrorism and the Politics of Fear* (2006, 2017). Throughout my dissertation, I find that media, politics, and fear play a significant role in the construction of Muslims as terrorists. In this conclusion chapter, I discuss how this is used for the political and economic gain of societal elites. It is important to note that the politics of fear is not new, nor is it unique to terrorism. Evidence in this dissertation points to a politics of fear around mass shootings and gun violence as well. However, these are not equivalent as the politics of fear around terrorism have much greater and more damaging consequences. These include the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, controversial legislation such as the USA PATRIOT Act, and the scapegoating of minority populations in the US and Europe.

Taken together, my research links the fear of terrorism among individuals in the public more directly to the propaganda and institutional biases that have used and exacerbated these xenophobic tendencies in American society. Racial tensions have been a fact of American life since the founding of the nation, and newer immigrant groups often bear the brunt of hostility

from the dominant majority. In the case of US Muslims, the fear of a threat to dominant American culture posed by these non-white foreigners is leveraged and exacerbated by powerful social actors. Not only has this detrimentally affected a vulnerable minority population in the US, the proliferation of fear around immigrants and Muslims have had far-reaching consequences to national security and global stability.

As of the writing of this dissertation, the efforts by the United States to combat terrorist organizations in response to the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks of 2001 – the bulk of which have been focused on the Afghanistan and Iraq wars – is now in its' 18<sup>th</sup> year, with few results to show for it. Although President Obama announced an “end” to Operation Enduring Freedom in 2014, the US Government’s official name for the War on Terror, the conflict continues to this day and US forces still operate in multiple theaters in the Middle East. Some US Troops are now fighting in a war that started before they were born – a first in American history. Nearly two decades on, the consequences of the War on Terror are disastrous for both the United States and the world.

Of the objectives outlined by President Bush during the launching of the War on Terror, the only real success is the elimination of many high-ranking members of al Qaeda. The most notable is the killing of Osama bin Laden by US Navy SEALs in 2011. The original al Qaeda organization was destroyed. However, the Taliban still operate in Afghanistan and Pakistan, many al Qaeda affiliates in the Middle East and Africa have since grown in strength, and the brutal Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL, arose out of the wars in Iraq and Syria.

In fact, the US failed to achieve most of its objectives and exacerbated many of the underlying conditions that terrorist organizations seek to exploit. The conflicts in Afghanistan

and Iraq have directly resulted in the deaths of thousands of US Troops, caused millions of civilian casualties, and cost trillions of taxpayer dollars (Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs 2020). Countless others bear the physical and psychological scars of these conflicts and will for the rest of their lives (ibid.). To this day, the mission is ill-defined, with no clear enemy, and no end in sight (Coll 2018). The extreme violence of ISIL – which was formed as a direct result of US action in Iraq – triggered the world’s largest refugee crisis since the Second World War (Stern and Berger 2015). This contributed to the destabilization of the European Union, the rise of reactionary far-right groups across Western democracies, and the 2016 Brexit decision.

The US is not winning the war of ideas either. The controversial policies enacted to combat terrorist organizations such as the drone warfare program, extraordinary rendition of terror suspects, indefinite detention of enemy combatants, and torture of prisoners squandered much of the international goodwill the US cultivated after the Cold War. This, combined with anti-Muslim rhetoric from politicians, provides a treasure trove of propaganda for anti-US organizations seeking to recruit disaffected young people (Stern and Berger 2015). Military force alone cannot defeat extremist ideologies.

Domestically, the War on Terror is just as problematic. The USA PATRIOT Act allowed for the development of a surveillance apparatus of Orwellian proportions under the pretense of protecting US citizens from terrorism. Intelligence and Law Enforcement agencies, in cooperation with telecom companies, now collect millions of private communications every day. The War on Terror also furthered the militarization of domestic police forces in the US. The

Pentagon's controversial 1033 program directly provides surplus military uniforms, weapons, equipment, and vehicles to state and local law enforcement agencies throughout the US.

The focus on foreign groups also means that the US has overlooked many domestic extremists. The FBI estimates that most terrorist attacks in the US are carried out by homegrown actors (FBI 2005). Criminologists conclude that anti-US terror groups are much more likely to attack US targets abroad than in the US homeland (LaFree et al 2009). Terrorist attacks in the US which result in fatalities are predominantly carried out by individuals espousing far-right ideologies, such as white supremacy, militia affiliation, radical anti-abortion views, and incel extremism. These domestic threats are largely ignored by the War on Terror and are now boiling over as our politics become increasingly contentious.

Nearly two decades of costly wars, heated rhetoric, erosion of civil liberties, and fearmongering have not made the US safer. If anything, we are more vulnerable while the fear of terrorism is used as a political weapon against vulnerable minorities. In response to ISIL-inspired attacks in 2015-2016, Donald Trump campaigned on banning Muslims from entering the US to combat terrorism. During his presidency, he has tried to do exactly that, and continues to vilify non-white immigrants. Recently, hate crimes targeting minorities, especially individuals perceived to be Muslim or immigrants have skyrocketed (Levin and Reitel 2018), and white supremacist groups are a resurgent menace. President Trump's foreign policies have resulted in the US becoming increasingly isolated from allies (Yarhi-Milo 2018), haphazardly participating in existing Middle Eastern conflicts, all while simultaneously courting war with Iran.

The War on Terror is a multi-generational conflict, with no end in sight (Coll 2018). The US cannot win if there is no clear-cut enemy, objectives are ambiguous, conditions of victory are ill-

defined, and thoughtful follow through is absent. To truly make the US safer, a policy shift to address root causes of terrorism is necessary rather than playing whack a mole in Middle East. The US must act humanely in the pursuit of security, both at home and abroad, or risk creating more terrorists. Careless foreign military interventions are unsustainable. The erosion of Americans' civil liberties is intolerable. The current administration's words and actions against Muslims, treatment of immigrants, and stoking of racial conflict are unacceptable and antithetical to American values. The US government's inaction in the face of growing domestic extremist violence is inexcusable. The distraction from arguably greater risks to national security such as increasing economic inequality and global climate change threatens not just the US, but the entire world.

Far-right extremist groups pose a clear and present danger to the national security of the United States. A Department of Homeland Security (2009) report warned about a grown recruitment effort by far-right extremist groups since the 2007/2008 recession. Yet, the public's attention remained focused on radical Islamic extremists in the following decade. News media consistently underemphasizes the threat posed by far-right domestic extremist groups, while also contributing to the racist ideologies that they often espouse. This threat posed by far-right domestic groups and individuals deserves at least equivalent attention to the threat posed by foreign groups and radical Islamists. Arguably, climate change, inequality, and healthcare are even greater concerns. Conservative news media is intentionally working to erode public trust in science on the issues of climate change, vaccinations, and pandemics. These distortions of fact about terrorism and extremist violence is found in this dissertation, as well as those found by others researching the acceptance of science around climate change, vaccines, and public health (see Bolin and Hamilton 2018 for an example) are dangerous, and cost human lives.

The tension exists between terrorism being framed as a foreign threat, committed by Muslims, and the academic understanding of terrorism in the US as a more complex and nuanced phenomenon. By emphasizing terrorism as something that foreigners do, specifically Muslims, the responses and actions to address the problem will be focused on foreigners. This is perhaps why terrorism frequently is also discussed alongside issues of immigration, despite official statistics reflecting that most terrorist threats in the US are primarily linked to domestic or homegrown actors. The members of the public who accept this interpretation of terrorism and its response want to blame foreigners for the problems that the US faces today, and for the anomic state that they are experiencing. Not only this, these individuals interpret the societal changes as a threat to their status, as evidenced by the heightened fear of terrorist attacks by individuals who belong to some traditionally dominant social groups.

At the same time, social elites seek to maintain and enhance their wealth and power. For many of these elites, evil foreigners are a convenient scapegoat. Often times, societal elites have overemphasized and even invented alleged threats to which they conveniently have the only viable solution. This occurs even when these solutions contradict academic research, official statistics, or do not logically fit the available evidence. For example, elites have cited a terrorist attack, such as the 2015 San Bernardino attack as a reason to restrict immigration from Muslim countries despite the fact that the attack was carried out by US citizens. Similarly, elites proposed the notion that Saddam Hussein had WMDs and ties to Al Qaeda and the only way to remedy the situation was to depose him were two claims by the Bush administration used to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq. These were based on falsified intelligence and have never proven to be factual to this day. Several politicians have claimed that Latin American immigrants are dangerous criminals, which has been thoroughly debunked by criminological research



(Barranco and Shihadeh 2015, Barranco et al 2018, Feldmeyer et al 2015, Feldmeyer et al 2018, Ferraro 2016, Harris and Feldmeyer 2013, Light 2017, Light and Miller 2018, Ousey and Kubrin 2009, Reid et al 2005, Vaughn and Salas-Wright 2018; Wadsworth 2010; also see Ousey and Kubrin 2018 for a review), and that the only solution is to build a costly and ineffective wall. We must ask why supposedly rational human beings would support a position that all available evidence suggests will be ineffective (Massey et al 2016). These strategies are useful for societal elites because a proportion of the US public already believes that these premises are true. It deflects attention away from domestic problems, or the reality of the alleged problems.

In a world that faces a multitude of risks (Beck 1992), it is important that we, as a society and a species, appropriately prioritize risks and how we will address them. In practical terms, as a global society this includes the need to prioritize what is important both objectively, as actual threats to well-being, and subjectively in terms of what kind of lives we want to live. Arguably, the biggest two threats are healthcare and climate change in an objective sense when it comes to our survival and, therefore, to most any subjectively lived good life. As we have seen in the current COVID-19 crisis, one “little” virus can cripple the world without even impacting the physical resources that are available to us in a major way. The ever-growing threat of global climate change adds in an impact on resources that could potentially unravel civilization as we know it.

Nevertheless, extremist violence has very real consequences and must be taken seriously. One clear application of these analyses from an implications and policy standpoint is that, both as individuals and as a society, we tend to over-emphasize the threats presented by some individuals or groups and under-emphasize those presented by others. Since the attacks of

September 11, 2001, counterterrorism has been made a top priority of the US government. This has involved a massive allocation of resources to combat what is perceived as a dire threat to national security. Even looking past racially discriminatory processes that may be at work, protecting public safety effectively may require a better alignment between how we frame the terrorism phenomenon and the risks that we actually face. In other words, if terrorism is a unique threat and type of mass violence that we deem worthy of targeted policies and enhanced resources, then “getting it right” is especially important. The entities charged with protecting the US homeland must consider a wide range of threats, and taking domestic groups seriously is as important as the focus on international terrorism. On a positive note, there has been a recent acknowledgement within parts of the Federal government agencies that the threat posed by white supremacist and other far right groups pose a threat to national security on par with Islamic radicals (for example, see the Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act of 2019)<sup>9</sup>.

Terrorism is a complex problem with no easy solutions. Counterterrorism is especially difficult to get right and must be done thoughtfully or risk creating more terrorists. Research shows that poorly managed counterterrorism policies that result in social exclusion, discrimination, and hate crime victimization could foster negative emotions and end up creating more terrorists in the long run (see Agnew 2010). It is reasonable to hypothesize that discrimination, both experienced and perceived, may further alienate individuals who already face the challenges of integrating into a society. By focusing on the racial characteristics and religious motivations of terrorist offenders, we ignore the historical and systemic root causes of extremist violence. More attention to these forces is needed outside of academia.

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<sup>9</sup> For more information on this proposed legislation visit <https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/s894/BILLS-116s894is.xml>

In the digital era, media consumers have not rationally taken in multiple opinions to weigh evidence when given access to the wealth of human knowledge. Nor has the average person become more educated about the social issues of the day. The alleged openness and freedom of the internet are an illusion when large companies such as Google, Microsoft, Apple, Amazon, Facebook, Reddit, and Twitter control a disproportionate amount of information that the average internet user encounters on a daily basis. The websites these companies operate censor content that appears in people's news feeds and search results to fit the messages they want to portray. Conversely, they frequently allow misinformation to spread with little in the way of verification of information or fact checking (Iosifidis and Nicoli 2020). Although the "fake news" moniker that arose out of the 2016 election is frequently misused, it is nevertheless a real issue when insidious actors such as Vladimir Putin are so easily able to stoke discord in Western democracies (Moretto Ribeiro and Ortellado 2018; Tandoc, Jenkins, and Craft 2019).

The mass media landscape is fundamentally different from what it was thirty years ago. While on the face of it, consumers have a greater wealth of media sources to choose from, they are controlled by a small number of multinational media conglomerates such as Disney, News Corp, and Comcast. In the US today, ninety percent of television and film media is currently controlled by only six companies (Lutz 2012). This enormous shift in homogenization due to changes in the structure and laws of mass media can be directly linked to telecom deregulation in the 1990's that was allowed by the Telecommunications Act, signed by Bill Clinton in 1996 (McCabe 2016). The subsequent decades of mergers and acquisitions by the largest mass media companies have led to a news and entertainment media landscape that is increasingly dominated by a few points of view. Walt Disney alone controlled an estimated 38% of all North American Box office earnings in 2019 (Coyle 2019). This must be undone. The deregulation of mass media

and the relaxing of FCC guidelines and rules have allowed monopolies to form and propaganda to masquerade as news.

Today's media landscape is one of extreme compartmentalization where news sources that support and confirm previously held beliefs are preferred over those that challenge beliefs, a phenomenon especially present in the conservative media environment (Jurkowitz 2020; McCright 2011, McCright and Dunlap 2011, Wicks et al 2014). The channels of information in the digital age have become more restrictive rather than more open. This has been mirrored in traditional news media with the growth of partisan news outlets (Jones 2002; Mayer 2004). Conservative news outlets such as FOX News are mouthpieces for billionaires such as Rupert Murdoch, owner of the massive News Corp media conglomerate. Conservative talk radio shows are barely disguised propaganda, whose hosts such as Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity regularly stir controversy and partisanship (Conway, Grabe and Grievies 2004). In 2020, even these traditional news media sources contribute to the spread of biased or outright false information.

The politics of fear are not new, and it is unlikely to go away, although it may be directed at new targets in the future. So, what is next and what can be done? Clearly, traditional mass media still exerts a significant influence on the public in the digital era. However, with the growing influence of digital media, and use of social media as a primary news source, more research is needed. The 2016 Presidential election exposed the pitfalls and perils of the contemporary mass media structures. The "fake news" problem, and the degree to which it exists and impacts us, are still heavily debated. Regardless, this demonstrates two things: 1. misinformation can be spread through populations more easily than ever before; and 2. even the most open-minded and

educated person can be impacted by media bubbles. Societal elites will continue to leverage social fear for their own gain, and their efforts can now bypass traditional media filters entirely.

In this dissertation I have demonstrated, as have others, that what we are worried about as a society is influenced by what mass media are telling us. The way we prioritize problems and issues is partly based on the information that is coming from these sources. When examining trends over the long term because perception of what is and is not the most important problem changes over time, this demonstrates a myopic view of social issues. The public tends to focus on the immediate and readily apparent concerns and not long-term causes and consequences of social issues. As a society, it is apparent that we have a fairly short attention span for issues that are rooted in structural conditions, such as terrorism or inequality or the economy or healthcare or immigration. None of those things are easy to fix in a short time but we jump from one to the other at a fairly rapid pace.

This is also concerning as I and others have demonstrated that the information and opinions presented in mass media is often not the reality that is reflected in official statistics or rigorous scientific research. Additionally, I like others, find that not all media outlets are created equally, and some are more guilty of distorting the public's views than others. The damage of this myopic, often inaccurate, and increasingly partisan media landscape is readily apparent when we examine the current state of domestic and global politics. The divisions and inequalities we face as a society are not a reflection of a natural state of the world or moral order. They are created by actors who seek to grow their own power and wealth at the expense of the common good. The politics of fear is very intentionally used to obfuscate societal elites' goals and redirect attention from social problems to a grab-bag of scapegoats.

The good news is that we do not have to buy into it. As consumers of mass media, critical media analysis, i.e. evaluating the validity, accuracy, and reliability of the media we consume, is more important than ever. Making good choices about where we get our news is critical as well. Beyond what we as individuals can do to address misinformation, structural solutions can address these problems before individuals need to take action. We, as a nation and a species, face a turning point in history when we can still avert total disaster. This requires collective action. Strong democratic institutions are an essential safeguard against the moral panics around racialized mass violence. Additionally, re-regulation of mass media, including internet media, and a reversal of nearly thirty years of failed telecommunications policy can help restore a true diversity of perspective and restrict the proliferation of false information.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 (MIP). Timeline of Major Terrorist/Mass Violence Events Impacting the US 1995-2016

<b>Date</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Location</b>
<b>19 April</b>	1995	Oklahoma City Bombing	Oklahoma City, OK
<b>24 April</b>	1995	Final Unabomber Attack	Sacramento, CA
<b>03 April</b>	1996	Ted Kaczynski Arrested	Lincoln, MT
<b>24 April</b>	1996	Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act Signed	
<b>15 June</b>	1996	IRA Manchester Bombing	Manchester, UK
<b>27 July</b>	1996	Centennial Olympic Park Bombing	Atlanta, GA
<b>30 October</b>	1996	ELF Arson of Oakridge Ranger Station	Oakridge, OR
<b>07 August</b>	1998	East African US Embassy Bombings	Kenya/Tanzania
<b>15 August</b>	1998	Omagh Bombing RIRA	Northern Ireland, UK
<b>19 October</b>	1998	ELF Arson of Vail Ski Resort	Vail, CO
<b>17 February</b>	1999	Israeli Consulate Attack by Kurdish Rebels	Germany
<b>20 April</b>	1999	Columbine Mass Shooting	Littleton, CO
<b>12 October</b>	2000	USS Cole Bombing	Yemen
<b>21 May</b>	2001	ELF Arson of University of Washington	Seattle, WA
<b>11 June</b>	2001	Timothy McVeigh Executed	Terra Haute, IN
<b>11 September</b>	2001	Al Qaeda Attacks on WTC and Pentagon	NY/VA/PA
<b>26 October</b>	2001	USA PATRIOT Act Signed into Law	
<b>October</b>	2001	US Invades Afghanistan	
<b>Oct.-Nov.</b>	2001	Anthrax Mail Attacks	NY, D.C., FL, NV, CT
<b>22 December</b>	2001	Attempted Shoe Bombing (American Airlines)	Paris, FR/Boston, MA
<b>04 July</b>	2002	El Al Israeli Airlines Shooting	Los Angeles, CA
<b>October</b>	2002	Beltway Sniper Attacks	D.C., MD, VA
<b>23 October</b>	2002	Moscow Theater Siege	Russia
<b>25 November</b>	2002	Homeland Security Act signed into Law	
<b>March</b>	2003	US Invades Iraq	
<b>11 March</b>	2004	Al Qaeda Madrid Train Bombings	Spain
<b>28 June</b>	2004	Rasul v. Bush and Hamdi v. Rumsfeld decided (GITMO)	
<b>01 September</b>	2004	Beslan School Siege	Russia
<b>07 July</b>	2005	Al Qaeda London Bombings	UK
<b>December</b>	2005	13 ELF Members Arrested	
<b>03 March</b>	2006	Vehicular Attack at UNC	Chapel Hill, NC
<b>29 June</b>	2006	Hamdan v. Rumsfeld decided (GITMO)	
<b>17 October</b>	2006	Military Commissions Act of 2006 signed into Law	
<b>16 April</b>	2007	Virginia Tech Shooting	Blacksburg, VA
<b>12 June</b>	2008	Boumediene v. Bush decided (GITMO)	
<b>27 July</b>	2008	Unitarian Church Shooting	Knoxville, TN
	2009	Attempted NYC Subway Bombing	New York, NY
<b>01 June</b>	2009	Military Recruitment Center Shooting	Little Rock, AK
<b>10 June</b>	2009	National Holocaust Museum Memorial Shooting	Washington, D.C.

<b>05 November</b>	2009	FT Hood Shooting	Killeen, TX
<b>25 December</b>	2009	Attempted Underwear Bombing	Detroit, MI
<b>18 February</b>	2010	IRS Airplane Attack	Austin, TX
<b>04 March</b>	2010	Pentagon Shooting	Arlington, VA
<b>01 May</b>	2010	Attempted Times Square Bombing	New York, NY
<b>01 September</b>	2010	Discovery Communications Hostage Taking	Silver Spring, MD
<b>Oct./Nov.</b>	2010	Series of Shootings Against US Military Buildings	VA
<b>November</b>	2010	WikiLeaks Begins Releasing US Diplomatic Cables	
<b>06/07 January</b>	2011	Mail Bombs Sent to MD Gov., US SoT, US SHS	MD, D.C.
<b>January</b>	2011	Arab Spring Protests begin in Middle East/North Africa	
<b>08 January</b>	2011	Shooting of US Rep. Gabrielle Giffords and Others	Tucson, AZ
<b>17 January</b>	2011	Attempted Bombing of MLK March	Spokane, WA
<b>15 March</b>	2011	Syrian Civil War Begins	
<b>02 May</b>	2011	Osama Bin Laden Killed in US Raid	Pakistan
<b>22 July</b>	2011	Utoya/Oslo Norway Attacks (Anders Brevik)	Norway
<b>18 December</b>	2011	US Troops Withdraw from Iraq	
<b>31 December</b>	2011	NDAAs Authorizes Indefinite Detention of Terror Suspects	
<b>01 January</b>	2012	NYC Anti-Muslim Incendiary Attacks	New York, NY
<b>20 July</b>	2012	Aurora Theater Shooting	Aurora, CO
<b>05 August</b>	2012	Sikh Temple Shooting	Oak Creek, WI
<b>11 September</b>	2012	Benghazi US Diplomatic Compound Attack	Libya
<b>February</b>	2013	Christopher Dorner Attacks and Standoff	CA
<b>15 April</b>	2013	Boston Marathon Bombing	Boston, MA
<b>19 April</b>	2013	Tsarnaev Brothers Shootout and Apprehension	MA
<b>June</b>	2013	Edward Snowden NSA Surveillance Leaks	
<b>01 November</b>	2013	LAX TSA Shooting	Los Angeles, CA
<b>12 April</b>	2014	Bundy Armed Standoff	Near Bunkerville, NV
<b>13 April</b>	2014	Jewish Community Center Attack	Overland Park, KS
<b>April-June</b>	2014	Ali Muhammed Brown Shootings	WA, NJ
<b>23 May</b>	2014	UCSB Incel Attacks	Isla Vista, CA
<b>24 May</b>	2014	ISIL Jewish Museum of Brussels Attack	Belgium
<b>June</b>	2014	Interest in ISIL Begins on Google Trends	
<b>06 June</b>	2014	Forsyth County Courthouse Attack	Cumming, GA
<b>08 June</b>	2014	Las Vegas Wal-Mart Attack	Las Vegas, NV
<b>15 June</b>	2014	US Assessment, Advising, and Surveillance of ISIL begins	Iraq
<b>07 August</b>	2014	President Obama orders airstrikes against ISIL	Iraq
<b>September</b>	2014	US Allies begin airstrikes against ISIL	Iraq
<b>11 September</b>	2014	US Rep. Cleaver Offices Attack	Kansas City, MO
<b>12 September</b>	2014	PA State Trooper Barracks Attack	Blooming Grove, PA
<b>22 October</b>	2014	Canadian Parliament Attack	Ottawa, ON Canada
<b>23 October</b>	2014	NYC Hatchet Attack	New York, NY
<b>20 December</b>	2014	NYC Police Shooting	New York, NY
<b>07 January</b>	2015	Charlie Hebdo Shooting	Paris, France
<b>03 May</b>	2015	Curtis Culwell Center Attack	Garland, TX
<b>17 June</b>	2015	Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church Shooting	Charleston, SC
<b>16 July</b>	2015	Military Recruitment/Support Center Attacks	Chattanooga, TN
<b>23 July</b>	2015	“Trainwreck” Theater Shooting	Lafayette, LA
<b>August</b>	2015	Interest in Syrian Refugee Crisis begins on Google Trends	



<b>01 October</b>	2015	Umpqua Community College Incel Attack	Roseburg, OR
<b>04 November</b>	2015	UC Merced Knife Attacks	Merced, CA
<b>13 November</b>	2015	ISIL Paris Attacks	France
<b>23 November</b>	2015	BLM Rally Attack	Minneapolis, MN
<b>27 November</b>	2015	Planned Parenthood Attack	Colorado Springs, CO
<b>02 December</b>	2015	San Bernardino Attack	San Bernardino, CA
<b>07 December</b>	2015	Candidate Trump calls for Muslim Travel Ban	
<b>02 Jan.- 11 Feb.</b>	2016	Occupation of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge	Princeton, OR
<b>07 January</b>	2016	Philadelphia Police Shooting	Philadelphia, PA
<b>11 February</b>	2016	Columbus Machete Attack	Columbus, OH
<b>22 March</b>	2016	ISIL Brussels Bombings	Belgium
<b>12 June</b>	2016	Pulse Nightclub Attack	Orlando, FL
<b>07 July</b>	2016	TN Police Shooting	Bristol, TN
<b>07 July</b>	2016	Dallas Police Shooting	Dallas, TX
<b>14 July</b>	2016	Nice Truck Attack	France
<b>17 July</b>	2016	Baton Rouge Police Shooting	Baton Rouge, LA
<b>16 September</b>	2016	Philadelphia Police Shooting	Philadelphia, PA
<b>17/18 Sept.</b>	2016	NY/NJ Bombings	NY/NJ
<b>08 November</b>	2016	Donald Trump elected President	
<b>28 November</b>	2016	OSU Vehicle Attack	Columbus, OH
<b>19 December</b>	2016	Berlin Christmas Market Attack	Germany
<b>27 January</b>	2017	President Trump Signs Executive Order 13769	

## Appendix 2 (MCA). List of Suspects Sampled from Global Terrorism Database

SUSPECT NAME	RACE/ETHN.	SEX	NATIONALITY	YEAR
ABDUL RAZAK ALI ARTAN	B	M	Somalia	2016
ABDULHAKIM MUHAMMAD	B	M	US	2009
AHMAD AJAJ	MENA	M	Palestine	1993
AHMAD KHAN RAHAMI	MENA	M	Afghanistan (Naturalized)	2016
ALI MUHAMMAD BROWN	B	M	US	2014
AMANDA MILLER	W	F	US	2014
BENJAMIN NATHANIEL SMITH	W	M	US	1999
BRUCE IVINS	W	M	US	2001
BUFORD O'NEAL FURROW JR.	W	M	US	1999
CHARLES BISHOP	W	M	US	2002
DAHIR AHMED ADAN	B	M	Somalia (Naturalized)	2016
DENNIS MARX	W	M	US	2014
DYLANN ROOF	W	M	US	2015
DZHOKHAR TSARNAEV	W	M	Russia (Naturalized)	2013
EDWARD ARCHER	B	M	US	2016
ELTON SIMPSON	B	M	US	2015
ERIC FREIN	W	M	US	2014
ERIC RUDOLPH	W	M	US	1996
FAISAL MOHAMMAD	MENA	M	US	2015
FLOYD CORKINS	B	M	US	2012
FRAZIER GLENN CROSS [MILLER]	W	M	US	2014
GAVIN LONG	B	M	US	2016
HESHAM MOHAMED HADAYET	MENA	M	Egypt	2002
ISMAAIYL BRINSLEY	B	M	US	2014
JAMES CHARLES KOPP	W	M	US	1998
JAMES LEE	Asian	M	US	2010
JAMES W. VON BRUNN	W	M	US	2009
JERAD MILLER	W	M	US	2014
JIM DAVID ADKISSON	W	M	US	2008
JOHN PATRICK BEDELL	W	M	US	2010
JOHN RAYNE RIVELLO	W	M	US	2016
JOHN RUSSELL HOUSER	W	M	US	2015
JOHN SALVI III	W	M	US	1994
JOSEPH STACK	W	M	US	2010
JUSTIN NOJAN SULLIVAN	W	M	US	2014
LARRY MCQUILLIAMS	W	M	US	2014
LUKE HELDER	W	M	US	2002

<b>MAHMUD ABOUHALIMA</b>	MENA	M	Egypt	1993
<b>MATTHEW WILLIAMS</b>	W	M	US	1999
<b>MICAH XAVIER JOHNSON</b>	B	M	US	2016
<b>MIR AIMAL KANSI</b>	MENA	M	Pakistan	1993
<b>MOHAMED BARRY</b>	B	M	Guinea	2016
<b>MOHAMMAD SALAMEH</b>	MENA	M	Palestine	1993
<b>MOHAMMAD YOUSSEF ABDULAZEEZ</b>	MENA	M	Kuwait (Naturalized)	2015
<b>MOHAMMED REZA TAHERI-AZAR</b>	MENA	M	Iran (Naturalized)	2006
<b>NADIR SOOFI</b>	MENA	M	US	2015
<b>NAVEED AFZAL HAQ</b>	MENA	M	US	2006
<b>NIDAL AYYAD</b>	MENA	M	Kuwait	1993
<b>NIDAL MALIK HASAN</b>	MENA	M	US	2009
<b>OMAR MATEEN</b>	MENA	M	US	2016
<b>PAUL CIANCIA</b>	W	M	US	2013
<b>RACHELLE SHANNON</b>	W	F	US	1992
<b>RAMZI YOUSEF</b>	MENA	M	Kuwait	1993
<b>ROBERT LEWIS DEAR</b>	W	M	US	2015
<b>RUSSELL WESTON</b>	W	M	US	1998
<b>SCOTT ROEDER</b>	W	M	US	2009
<b>SYED RIZWAN FAROOK</b>	MENA	M	US	2015
<b>TAMERLAN TSARNAEV</b>	W	M	Russia (Naturalized)	2013
<b>TASHFEEN MALIK</b>	MENA	F	Pakistan (Naturalized)	2015
<b>TED KACZYNSKI</b>	W	M	US	1993
<b>TIMOTHY MCVEIGH</b>	W	M	US	1995
<b>TYLER WILLIAMS</b>	W	M	US	1999
<b>UMAR FAROUK ABDULMUTALLAB</b>	B	M	Nigeria	2009
<b>WADE MICHAEL PAGE</b>	W	M	US	2012
<b>WASIL FAROOQUI</b>	MENA	M	US	2016
<b>ZALE THOMPSON</b>	B	M	US	2014

### Appendix 3. Media Content analyses with Alternate Measures of Religion and Race

**TABLE A.1. PREDICTORS OF USE OF TERROR FRAME IN BROADCAST NEWS TRANSCRIPTS: MIXED-EFFECTS LOGISTIC REGRESSION WITH A RANDOM INTERCEPT – ODDS RATIOS REPORTED (FOUR CATEGORY RACE/MUSLIM VARIABLE)**

	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Coefficient	Std. Err.
<b>ABOUT</b>	2.62	1.35	0.96	0.52
<b>YEAR</b>	1.07*	0.03	0.07*	0.03
<b>EXPERT GUEST</b>	6.58***	2.52	1.89***	0.38
<b>NUM. KILLED</b>	1.03	0.02	0.03	0.02
<b>WEAPON USED</b>				
<i>FIREARM</i>	-	-	-	-
<i>OTHER WEAPON</i>	4.31**	1.33	1.46**	0.47
<b>RELIGION AND RACE</b>				
<i>NOT-MUSLIM</i>	-	-	-	-
<i>MUSLIM/WHITE</i>	6.86	7.28	1.93	1.06
<i>MUSLIM/BLACK</i>	16.95***	13.03	2.83***	
<i>MUSLIM/MENA</i>	9.39***	5.74	2.24***	0.47
<b>PLACE OF BIRTH</b>				
<i>US BORN</i>	-	-	-	-
<i>FOREIGN BORN</i>	1.14	0.69	0.13	0.60
<b>CONS.</b>	1.02	6.39*	-135.84	62.97
<b>GROUP-LEVEL RANDOM EFFECT</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>Std. Err.</b>		
<b>RANDOM INTERCEPT</b>	0.88	0.27		
<b>LR TEST VS FIXED EFFECTS</b>	p=0.0059			
	N = 312			
	Groups = 57			

NOTE: \*P<.05, \*\*P<.01, \*\*\*P<.001

**TABLE A.2. PREDICTORS OF USE OF TERROR FRAME IN BROADCAST NEWS TRANSCRIPTS: MIXED-EFFECTS LOGISTIC REGRESSION WITH A RANDOM INTERCEPT – ODDS RATIOS REPORTED (THREE CATEGORY MENA/RI VARIABLE)**

	<b>Odds Ratio</b>	<b>Std. Err.</b>	<b>Coefficient</b>	<b>Std. Err.</b>
<b>ABOUT</b>	2.53	1.30	0.93	0.51
<b>YEAR</b>	1.06	0.03	0.06	0.03
<b>EXPERT GUEST</b>	6.61***	2.54	1.89***	0.38
<b>NUM. KILLED</b>	1.03	0.02	1.09	0.02
<b>WEAPON USED</b>				
<b>FIREARM</b>	-	-	-	-
<b>OTHER WEAPON</b>	2.97*	1.33	1.09*	0.45
<b>IDEOLOGY AND RACE</b>				
<b>NOT-RI/NOT-MENA</b>	-	-	-	-
<b>RI/NOT-MENA</b>	20.72***	12.95	3.03***	0.62
<b>RI AND MENA</b>	10.83***	6.13	2.38***	0.57
<b>PLACE OF BIRTH</b>				
<b>US BORN</b>	-	-	-	-
<b>FOREIGN BORN</b>	1.14	0.62	0.13	0.54
<b>CONS.</b>	1.77	1.05	-114.56	59.09
<b>GROUP-LEVEL RANDOM EFFECT</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>Std. Err.</b>		
<b>RANDOM INTERCEPT</b>	0.71	0.27		
<b>LR TEST VS FIXED EFFECTS</b>	p=0.032			
	N = 312			
	Groups = 57			

**NOTE: \*P<.05, \*\*P<.01, \*\*\*P<.001**

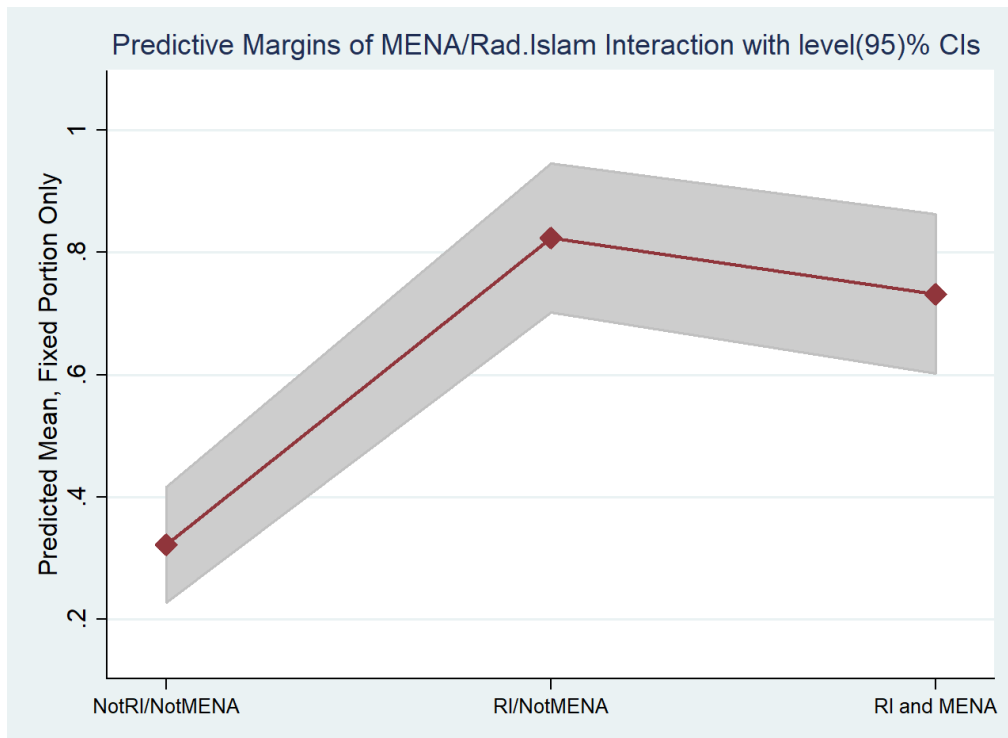
The mediation effect of race/ethnicity by ideology may be the result of previous measures not properly accounting for the overlap found in Table A.1. Therefore, I created a new three category variable from the crosstabulation in Table A.1 to more accurately assess the effects on suspects' race/ethnicity and ideology on use of the terrorism frame in broadcast news transcripts. The three-category variable is coded as: 1 = Not-Radical Islam/Not-MENA (N = 162); 2 = Radical Islam/Not-MENA (N = 72); 3 = Radical Islam/MENA (N = 78). This variable then replaces the old race/ethnicity and ideology measures. Both MENA and not-MENA categories which are associated with radical Islam are compared to cases which are not associated with either radical Islam or MENA suspects. In addition, the weapon used measure was simplified to reflect cases where the incident involved primarily firearms (coded 1, N = 192), and other weapons (coded 0, N = 120). Again, a mixed-effects logistic regression with a random intercept is used to estimate the effect of suspect's characteristics on the use of the terror frame while controlling for characteristics of the incident and characteristics of the transcripts/cases. Table 4 details the results of this analysis, reporting both odds ratios and coefficients.

The mixed-effects logistic regression with a random intercept reported in Table A.2 assesses the effect of the suspects' association with radical Islamic ideologies, MENA race/ethnicity, and place of birth on use of the terrorism frame in broadcast news transcripts. The regression also includes whether the transcript is about the incident, the year in which the

incident took place, the number of people killed in the incident and the weapon used in the incident as control variables, and a group-level random effect on the incident id number from the GTD (coef. = 0.71,  $p=0.032$ ).

Whether the transcript was about the incident or not, the year in which the incident took place and the number of people killed in the incident are all not statistically significant predictors of use of the terrorism frame in broadcast news transcripts. The appearance of an expert guest increases the odds of transcripts using the terrorism frame by 561% (multiplied by 6.61,  $p<.001$ ) compared with transcripts that did not feature an expert guest. Additionally, the type of weapon used was a significant predictor of use of the terrorism frame. Incidents which involved weapons other than firearms (multiplied by 2.97,  $p<.05$ ) were more likely to be called terrorism than incidents which primarily involved firearms. As for suspect characteristics, the newly created three category race/ethnicity/ideology variable does significantly predict use of the terrorism frame. Compared to cases where the suspect was not associated with radical Islam or of MENA race/ethnicity, cases involving individuals associated with radical Islam, both not-MENA and of MENA race/ethnicity, were more likely to be discussed in the terrorism frame. Specifically, when cases involve suspects who are associated with radical Islam but not-MENA, the odds of the terror frame being used in transcripts increased by about 1972% (multiplied by 20.72,  $p<.001$ ) when compared to cases involving not-radical Islam not-MENA suspects. When cases involve suspects who are both associated with radical Islam and of MENA race/ethnicity, this increases the odds that news transcripts will use the terrorism frame by about 983% (multiplied by 10.83,  $p<.001$ ) compared with suspects who are not associated with radical Islam. Place of birth, however, was not a significant predictor. This finding provides strong evidence for an interaction effect between ideological affiliation and race/ethnicity when broadcast news organizations discuss mass violence. Essentially, even when accounting for association with radical Islamic ideologies, suspects who are or appear to be Middle Eastern are still more likely to be discussed as “terrorists” in news media. Interestingly, the odds of non-Middle Eastern suspects associated with Radical Islam being framed as “terrorists” is even higher. Figure 7 below visually charts the finding in Table 4.

**Figure A.1 Predictive Margins for Use of Terrorism Frame by Suspect Race/Ethnicity and Ideology, with 95% Confidence Intervals – Three Category Measure**



This analysis does not, however fit as well as Model 4 in table A.2, as the group-level random effects are again statistically significant, meaning that factors outside the variables included influence variation between one incident and another. Taken together, it appears that the models presented in Table 2 are a better representation of bias in broadcast news coverage of terrorism suspects.

## Appendix 4. Granite State Poll Questions

### Questions Submitted by for Dissertation Research

05 October 2017

*Question with two versions (assigned randomly to half sample):*

Version 1: “How worried are you that you or someone you know will become a victim of a mass shooting?”

Version 2: “How worried are you that you or someone you know will become a victim of a terrorist attack?”

*Answers (flip order randomly):*

“Very worried”; “Somewhat worried”; “Not too worried”; “Not worried at all”

### Questions Typically Included in GSP

D1

“Now, a few final questions ...”

“Are you currently married, widowed, divorced, separated, or have you never been married?”

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 1    | MARRIED (INCLUDE COMMON LAW MARRIAGE & SPOUSE AWAY IN MILITARY) |
| 2    | WIDOWED   |
| 3    | DIVORCED  |
| 4    | SEPARATED   |
| 5    | NEVER MARRIED (INCLUDING ANNULMENTS)                            |
| 6    | LIVING TOGETHER NOT MARRIED (VOLUNTEERED)                       |
| * 99 | NA / REFUSED  |

D2

“Are you or any other person in your household a member of a labor union?”

- |      |                   |
|------|-------------------|
| 1    | YES               |
| 2    | NO                |
| 98   | DK (DO NOT PROBE) |
| * 99 | NA / REFUSED      |

VET

“Are you or any person in your household a member or veteran of the armed forces?”

- |      |                   |
|------|-------------------|
| 1    | YES               |
| 2    | NO                |
| 98   | DK (DO NOT PROBE) |
| * 99 | NA / REFUSED      |



## GUNOWN

"Do you or does anyone in your house own a gun?"

- |      |                   |
|------|-------------------|
| 1    | YES               |
| 2    | NO                |
| 98   | DK (DO NOT PROBE) |
| * 99 | NA / REFUSED      |

## D3

"What is the highest grade in school, or level of education that you've completed and got credit for ..." [READ RESPONSES]

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 1    | "Eighth grade or less,                  |
| 2    | Some high school,                       |
| 3    | High school graduate, (INCLUDES G.E.D.) |
| 4    | Technical school,                       |
| 5    | Some college,                           |
| 6    | College graduate,                       |
| 7    | Or postgraduate work?"                  |
| 98   | DK (DO NOT PROBE)                       |
| * 99 | NA / REFUSED                            |

## NEWS2

"Do you subscribe to or regularly read ..."

(READ LIST AND CHECK ALL SAY YES TO)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 | The Union Leader or the New Hampshire Sunday News?"                            |
| 2 | The Boston Globe?"   |
| 3 | A local daily newspaper, such as the Concord Monitor or the Nashua Telegraph?" |
| 4 | NONE OF THE ABOVE  |

## NEWS3

"How often, if ever, do you watch WMUR, Channel 9 News? Would you say everyday ... several times a week ... occasionally or never?"

- |    |                      |
|----|----------------------|
| 1  | EVERYDAY             |
| 2  | SEVERAL TIMES A WEEK |
| 3  | OCCASIONALLY         |
| 4  | NEVER                |
| 98 | DON'T KNOW/NOT SURE  |
| 99 | NA/REFUSED           |

## NEWS4

"How often, if ever, do you listen to New Hampshire Public Radio? Would you say ... everyday ... several times a week ... occasionally or never?"

- |   |                      |
|---|----------------------|
| 1 | EVERYDAY             |
| 2 | SEVERAL TIMES A WEEK |

- 3 OCCASIONALLY
- 4 NEVER
- 98 DON'T KNOW/NOT SURE
- 99 NA/REFUSED

## D4

“GENERALLY SPEAKING, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent or what?”

(IF REPUBLICAN): “Would you call yourself a STRONG Republican or a NOT VERY STRONG Republican?”

(IF DEMOCRAT): “Would you call yourself a STRONG Democrat or a NOT VERY STRONG Democrat?”

(IF INDEPENDENT, NO PREFERENCE, OR OTHER): “Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or to the Democratic party?”

- 1 STRONG DEMOCRAT
- 2 NOT VERY STRONG DEMOCRAT
- 3 INDEPENDENT, BUT CLOSER TO DEMOCRATS
- 4 INDEPENDENT--CLOSER TO NEITHER
- 5 INDEPENDENT, BUT CLOSER TO REPUBLICANS
- 6 NOT VERY STRONG REPUBLICAN
- 7 STRONG REPUBLICAN
- 8 OTHER PARTY
- \* 99 DK / NA / REFUSED

## TPARTY

"Overall would you say you support the political movement known as the Tea Party, you oppose the Tea Party, or that you neither support nor oppose it?"

IF NEITHER / DK: "Would you say you lean towards supporting or opposing the Tea Party movement?"

- 1 SUPPORT TEA PARTY
- 2 LEAN - SUPPORT
- 3 NEITHER SUPPORT OR OPPOSE
- 4 LEAN - OPPOSE
- 5 OPPOSE TEA PARTY
- 98 DK / NOT SURE
- \* 99 NA / REFUSED

## VOTE16

“Think back to the election for President in 2016. Did you vote for Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, Gary Johnson, Jill Stein, someone else, or did you skip that election?”

- 1 DONALD TRUMP - REPUBLICAN
- 2 HILLARY CLINTON - DEMOCRAT
- 3 GARY JOHNSON – LIBERTARIAN
- 4 JILL STEIN – GREEN
- 5 OTHER
- 97 DID NOT VOTE
- 98 DK / NOT SURE
- \* 99 NA / REFUSED

## D5

"We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. What about yourself--that is, in politics, do you generally think of yourself as a liberal, a moderate, or a conservative?"

(IF LIBERAL): "Would you say you are EXTREMELY liberal, FAIRLY liberal, or just SOMEWHAT liberal?"

(IF CONSERVATIVE): "Would you say you are EXTREMELY conservative, FAIRLY conservative, or just SOMEWHAT conservative?"

(IF MODERATE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD): "Would you say that you LEAN a little more toward the LIBERAL side or the CONSERVATIVE side?"

- |      |                                |
|------|--------------------------------|
| 1    | EXTREMELY LIBERAL              |
| 2    | FAIRLY LIBERAL                 |
| 3    | SOMEWHAT LIBERAL               |
| 4    | MODERATE--LEANS LIBERAL        |
| 5    | MODERATE--LEANS NEITHER        |
| 6    | MODERATE--LEANS CONSERVATIVE   |
| 7    | SOMEWHAT CONSERVATIVE          |
| 8    | FAIRLY CONSERVATIVE            |
| 9    | EXTREMELY CONSERVATIVE         |
| 97   | REFUSED                        |
| 98   | DK (PROBE: "In general . . .") |
| * 99 | NA / REFUSED                   |

## D6

"On another topic ... What is your religious preference? Is it Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, some other religion, or no religion?"

- |      |                       |
|------|-----------------------|
| 1    | PROTESTANT            |
| 2    | CATHOLIC              |
| 3    | JEWISH                |
| 4    | NONE, NO RELIGION     |
| 5    | OTHER (SPECIFY)       |
| 97   | REFUSED               |
| 98   | DON'T KNOW / NOT SURE |
| * 99 | NA / REFUSED          |

## D7

"How often do you attend religious services apart from occasional weddings, baptisms, or funerals ... more than once a week ... once a week ... once or twice a month ... a few times a year ... or never?"

- |      |                       |
|------|-----------------------|
| 1    | MORE THAN ONCE A WEEK |
| 2    | ONCE A WEEK           |
| 3    | ONCE OR TWICE A MONTH |
| 4    | A FEW TIMES A YEAR    |
| 5    | NEVER                 |
| 98   | DK (DO NOT PROBE)     |
| * 99 | NA                    |

## ABORT

"Which of the following statements BEST represents your position on abortion ... abortions should be legal in ALL circumstances ... abortion should be legal in limited circumstances, such as in cases of rape or incest or when the mother's life is in danger ... or, abortion should not be legal in ANY circumstance?" (ROTATE ANSWER OPTIONS)

- 1 LEGAL IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES
- 2 LEGAL IN LIMITED CIRCUMSTANCES
- 3 NOT LEGAL IN ANY CIRCUMSTANCE
- 98 DK/NOT SURE (DO NOT PROBE)
- \* 99 NA / REFUSED

## D8

"And what is your current age?"

\_\_\_ : \_\_\_ : (RECORD EXACT NUMBER OF YEARS OLD -- E.G., 45)  
 : \_\_\_ : \_\_\_ :

- 96 NINETY-SIX YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER
- 97 REFUSED
- 98 DK
- \* 99 NA

## D9

"How many years have you lived in the State of New Hampshire?"

IF "ALL MY LIFE" ASK – "About how many years is that?"

RECORD EXACT NUMBER OF YEARS OF RESIDENCE

- 1 ONE YEAR OR LESS
- 96 96 YEARS OF MORE
- 97 REFUSED
- 98 DK
- \* 99 NA

## MVFROM

"Have you always lived in New Hampshire or did you move here from another state?"

IF MOVED HERE ASK: "What state did you move here from?"

ENTER STATE NUMBER

- 95 ALWAYS LIVED IN NH → SKIPTO D10
- 96 CANADA
- 97 OTHER COUNTRY
- 98 DON'T KNOW
- \* 99 REFUSED

## MVTONH1

"What year did you move to New Hampshire?"

ENTER LAST TWO DIGITS OF YEAR RESPONDENT SAYS.

EXAMPLE: 1965 ENTER "65"

EXAMPLE 2004 ENTER "04"

998 DON'T KNOW  
\* 999 NA/REFUSED

#### D10

"How many of the persons who CURRENTLY live in your household are under 18 years of age, including babies and small children?"

0 NONE  
1 ONE  
2 TWO  
3 THREE  
4 FOUR  
5 FIVE  
6 SIX  
7 SEVEN OR MORE  
  
98 DK  
\* 99 NA / REFUSED

#### D11

"Including yourself, how many adults CURRENTLY live in your household?"

1 ONE  
2 TWO  
3 THREE  
4 FOUR  
5 FIVE  
6 SIX  
7 SEVEN OR MORE  
  
98 DK  
\* 99 NA / REFUSED

#### EMPLOY

"Which of the following best describes your current employment status ... Are you currently ...

READ RESPONSES. IF R GIVES 2 RESPONSES, ENTER LOWER NUMBER

1 Employed full-time,  
2 Employed part-time,  
3 Self-employed,  
4 Retired and not working,  
5 Unemployed and looking for work,  
6 Homemaker,  
7 Disabled, or a  
8 Student?"

- 98 DK / NOT SURE (DO NOT PROBE)  
 \* 99 NA / REFUSED

## D14

“Not counting business lines, extension phones, or cellular phones -- on how many different telephone NUMBERS can your household be reached?”

- 0 NO LANDLINE  
 1 ONE  
 2 TWO  
 3 THREE  
 4 FOUR  
 5 FIVE  
 6 SIX  
 7 SEVEN OR MORE
- 98 DK  
 \* 99 NA / REFUSED

## D15

“And on how many different cellphone NUMBERS can your household be reached?”

- 0 NO CELL PHONE  
 1 ONE  
 2 TWO  
 3 THREE  
 4 FOUR  
 5 FIVE  
 6 SIX  
 7 SEVEN OR MORE
- 98 DK  
 \* 99 NA / REFUSED

## D16

“How much TOTAL income did you and your family receive in 2015, not just from wages or salaries but from ALL sources -- that is, before taxes and other deductions were made? Was it ... (READ CATEGORIES)”

- |   | ANNUAL                  | MONTHLY EQUIVALENT |
|---|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 1 | Less than \$15,000,     | LESS THAN \$1,250  |
| 2 | \$15,000 - \$29,999,    | \$1,250 - \$2,499  |
| 3 | \$30,000 - \$44,999,    | \$2,500 - \$3,749  |
| 4 | \$45,000 - \$59,999,    | \$3,750 - \$4,999  |
| 5 | \$60,000 - \$74,999,    | \$5,000 - \$6,249  |
| 6 | \$75,000 - \$99,999, or | \$6,250 - \$8,333  |
| 7 | \$100,000 and over?”    | \$8,334 AND OVER   |
- 97 REFUSED  
 98 DK  
 \* 99 NA

### Appendix 5 (GSP) – Ancillary Analyses

Ancillary analyses were also conducted examining further interaction by sex and age group. Effects examined in Table 2 are present for female respondents when asked about fear of a mass shooting. But not males, or respondents asked about a terrorist attack.

**Table A.3. Analyses by Sex**

VARIABLE	TERROR ATTACK		MASS SHOOTING	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
<i>GROUP</i>				
<i>UNDER 40</i>	0.67(0.41)	2.76(1.58)+	2.20(1.22)+	3.25(1.77)*
<i>GUN OWNER</i>	1.37(0.73)	1.44(0.71)	0.88(0.49)	0.31(0.16)*
<i>RELIG. ATTEND.</i>	1.44(0.38)+	1.17(0.31)	0.94(0.19)	0.79(0.17)
<i>VOTED IN 2016</i>				
<i>TRUMP</i>	-	-	-	-
<i>CLINTON</i>	0.67(0.46)	0.56(0.38)	1.39(1.04)	4.02(2.95)*
<i>OTHER</i>	0.54(0.39)	0.67(0.49)	1.67(1.17)	1.79(1.45)
<i>WMUR NEWS</i>	1.12(0.25)	1.08(0.23)	1.27(0.31)	1.59(0.33)*
<i>NHPR</i>	0.86(0.25)	0.93(0.23)	1.42(0.34)+	1.49(0.32)*
<i>CONS. TALK RADIO</i>	1.49(0.42)+	1.59(0.63)	1.30(0.37)	0.59(0.19)+
<i>CONSTANT</i>	0.07(0.07)**	0.44(0.58)	0.04(0.06)*	0.13(0.18)+
	N = 131	N = 114	N = 115	N = 141

NOTE: \*P<.05, \*\*P<.01, \*\*\*P<.001 ONE-TAILED HYPOTHESIS TESTS

Interestingly, media effects observed in Table 2 are still present in this analysis – but only in the older cohort. This could be because younger respondents simply do not use traditional media sources tested in this analysis, instead relying on social media or similar sources for their news.

**Table A.4 Analyses by Age Group**

VARIABLE	TERROR ATTACK		MASS SHOOTING	
	Under 40	Over 40	Under 40	Over 40
<b>GROUP</b>				
<b>SEX</b>	55.46(55.60)***	4.64(1.99)***	2.07(1.33)	1.49(0.65)
<b>GUN OWNER</b>	2.68(2.08)	1.19(0.51)	0.75(0.44)	0.42(0.18)*
<b>RELIG. ATTEND.</b>	1.10(0.49)	1.33(0.26)	1.26(0.35)	0.69(0.12)*
<b>VOTED IN 2016</b>				
<b>TRUMP</b>	-	-	-	-
<b>CLINTON</b>	0.19(0.22)	0.74(0.42)	2.87(2.44)	2.29(1.31)
<b>OTHER</b>	0.35(0.36)	0.76(0.46)	1.42(1.35)	1.35(0.81)
<b>WMUR NEWS</b>	0.99(0.32)	1.17(0.21)	1.07(0.35)	1.43(0.27)*
<b>NHPR</b>	0.70(0.30)	1.02(0.20)	1.10(0.30)	1.52(0.27)*
<b>CONS. TALK RADIO</b>	1.45(0.63)	1.61(0.46)*	1.26(0.58)	0.83(0.23)
<b>CONSTANT</b>	0.12(0.14)*	0.04(0.05)**	0.13(0.21)	0.14(0.17)*
	N = 62	N = 183	N = 67	N = 189

NOTE: \*P<.05, \*\*P<.01, \*\*\*P<.001 ONE-TAILED HYPOTHESIS TESTS



Table 8. Analyses By Political Party

TABLE A.5 LOGISTIC REGRESSION COMPARING FEAR OF TERROR ATTACK TO FEAR OF MASS SHOOTING ON DEMOGRAPHICS, LIFESTYLE, POLITICAL CANDIDATE SUPPORT, AND MASS MEDIA CONSUMPTION BY POLITICAL PARTY AFFILIATION (SURVEY WEIGHTED, ODDS RATIOS REPORTED)

VARIABLE	Democrat – OR(SE)		Independent/NA – OR(SE)		Republican – OR(SE)	
	Terrorist Attack	Mass Shooting	Terrorist Attack	Mass Shooting	Terrorist Attack	Mass Shooting
<b>SEX</b>						
<b>MALE</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>FEMALE</b>	12.50(8.53)** *	4.14(2.10)**	29.66(31.73)* *	2.53(1.93)	5.54(6.62)	0.56(0.40)
<b>AGE RANGE</b>						
<b>18-34</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>35-49</b>	0.37(0.36)	0.22(0.18)+	0.33(0.33)	0.10(0.12)*	0.20(0.26)	3.57(4.50)
<b>50-64</b>	1.38(1.05)	0.17(0.12)*	0.26(0.32)	0.16(0.15)+	0.83(0.72)	0.97(0.95)
<b>65+</b>	0.32(0.28)	0.17(0.12)**	0.18(0.39)	0.04(0.05)*	0.32(0.40)	0.37(0.44)
<b>NA/REF.</b>	0.65(0.77)	-	0.33(0.50)	0.03(0.03)**	0.41(0.58)	-
<b>GUN(S) IN HH</b>						
<b>NO/NA/REF.</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>YES</b>	1.15(0.72)	0.66(0.34)	0.24(0.22)	0.05(0.05)**	5.35(4.74)+	0.60(0.50)
<b>RELIG. ATTEND.</b>						
<b>NEVER/DK/NA</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>FEW TIMES/YR.</b>	1.99(1.36)	1.20(0.82)	1.52(1.34)	0.03(0.03)***	8.13(6.58)*	0.12(0.17)
<b>1-2 TIMES/MO.</b>	0.26(0.35)	0.22(0.20)	2.11(3.39)	2.69(3.43)	2.15(2.26)	1.19(1.52)
<b>WEEKLY+</b>	2.35(2.30)	0.72(0.49)	7.17(11.05)	0.09(0.10)*	2.91(2.67)	3.75(3.56)
<b>MEDIA EFFECTS</b>						
<b>WMUR (TV)</b>	0.96(0.27)	1.13(0.27)	2.27(0.93)*	3.56(1.92)*	0.58(0.20)	1.38(0.12)
<b>NHPR (RADIO)</b>	0.68(0.19)	1.72(0.38)*	0.83(0.37)	1.46(0.69)	0.96(0.33)	1.38(0.49)
<b>CTR (RADIO)</b>	8.14(0.04)+	1.48(0.54)	1.14(0.05)	0.05(0.05)**	2.12(0.85)+	1.35(0.50)
<b>CONSTANT</b>	0.03(0.04)*	0.20(0.25)	0.03(0.05)*	15.83(28.84)	0.10(0.16)	0.04(0.06)*
	N = 102	N = 118	N = 69	N = 70	N = 74	N = 63

NOTE: \*P&lt;.05, \*\*P&lt;.01, \*\*\*P&lt;.001, +P&lt;.10 TWO-TAILED HYPOTHESIS TESTS

**Table A.6 The Effect of Fear of Terrorism and Fear of Mass Shootings on Voting for Trump in the 2016 Election**

**FIGURE X. VOTING FOR DONALD TRUMP IN 2016 ELECTION**

VARIABLE	Fear of Terror Attack		Fear of Mass Shooting	
	OR	SE	OR	SE
<b>POLITICAL PARTY</b>				
<i>DEMOCRAT</i>	-	-	-	-
<i>INDEPENDENT</i>	18.66**	18.58	4.60*	3.38
<i>REPUBLICAN</i>	74.48***	80.57	50.38***	36.68
<i>NA</i>	6.51	8.21	5.64+	5.55
<b>SEX</b>				
<i>FEMALE</i>	-	-	-	-
<i>MALE</i>	3.68*	2.12	0.41	0.23
<b>AGE RANGE</b>				
<i>18-34</i>	-	-	-	-
<i>35-49</i>	1.65	1.36	3.97+	2.82
<i>50-64</i>	5.97+	5.85	2.92	2.13
<i>65+</i>	1.47	1.28	3.26	2.67
<i>NA/REF.</i>	0.77	1.03	0.54	0.55
<b>GUN OWNERSHIP</b>				
<i>NO/NA/REF.</i>	-	-	-	-
<i>GUN OWNER</i>	1.04	0.55	8.20***	4.85
<b>FREQ. RELIG. ATTD.</b>	1.58*	0.35	1.99**	0.45
<b>MEDIA USE</b>				
<i>WMUR</i>	0.85	0.20	0.92	0.18
<i>NHPR</i>	0.56*	0.14	0.69	0.16
<i>CTR</i>	3.11***	1.01	3.91***	1.15
<b>HOW WORRIED?</b>				
<i>NOT AT ALL WORRIED</i>	-	-	-	-
<i>NOT TOO WORRIED</i>	3.78+	3.02	0.53	0.33
<i>SOMEWHAT WORRIED</i>	4.95*	3.61	0.32+	0.20
<i>VERY WORRIED</i>	3.03	2.94	0.18	0.21
<b>CONSTANT</b>	0.00***	0.00	0.00***	0.21
	N = 245		N = 256	

NOTE: \*P<.05, \*\*P<.01, \*\*\*P<.001, +P<.10 TWO-TAILED HYPOTHESIS TESTS