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Perceptions of Terrorism and Muslim Identity in the News Media

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Bachelor of Arts

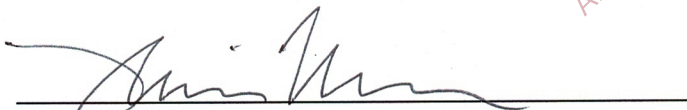
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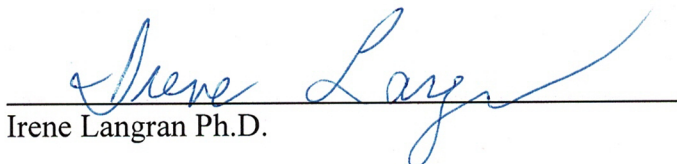
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May 1, 2017

Perceptions of Terrorism and Muslim Identity in the News Media

By objective, terrorist acts are meant to be impressive. Terrorists calculate them as an attention-grabbing activity and the audiences are the ones they aim to impress. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines terrorism as the “unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives” (Terrorism 2002/2005, 2010). The epitome of terrorism is captured in the book *Islamic Terrorism: Myth or Reality* when author Ahmed Syed (2002) writes,

The objective of terrorists is not to kill or to destroy property but to break the spirit of the opposition. As such, to most of the victims, acts of terrorism come as unexpected, unprovoked and unjustified... Terrorists know the limits of acceptability in a social order. They consciously flout these limits and norms of acceptability and this gives them the desired impact and resonance (p. 237).

There is a sense of prejudice in news coverage where terrorist acts carried out by Muslims are covered intensively with more depth in contrast to terrorist acts carried out by non-Muslims, where news coverage is limited. The purpose of this research study is to assess how the demographic nature of the perpetrator affects the journalistic process and in extension how the news affects public policy attitudes towards people of that demographic.

Terrorists have been petrifying nations and leaving a trail of havoc behind, has been a threat throughout history and has even succeeded in bringing about change. History has shown that terrorism is a concept that is challenging to eradicate. In combatting terrorism, one of the difficulties is that the martyrs may usually be well trained and brain-washed extensively. The martyrs may feel they have nothing to lose and may be motivated by their ideologies and driven

by their aggression. A theory to consider is deterrence which is generally applied in an *quid pro quo* situation. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, more commonly known as NATO, describes deterrence as “the threat of force in order to discourage an opponent from taking an unwelcome action by denying the opponent’s war aims” (Deterrence: What It Can (and Cannot) Do, 2016). In the journal article “A System Approach to Deterring and Influencing Terrorists,” Paul Davis and Brian Michael Jenkins (2004), write that the concept of deterring terrorism runs into many problems due to the mismatch with U.S. Policy where it is necessary to work with a handful of Muslim-majority countries for national interest purposes but also brand others as countries that support Terrorism and that deterrence should be a component in current counter-terrorism efforts. Certain groups in the Arab-Islamic world seemingly has a long-lived reputation with violence which includes terrorism as a component of maintaining power within the nation. In his article, “Terrorism and Deterrence”, author Johnathan Stevenson (2004) writes that since the September 11 attacks, there has been a nationwide temptation to pronounce deterrence through methods of threatening punishment-perhaps death-even though these measures do not seem to faze ideologically motivated terrorists (p. 181).

Since the 1920s, newspapers have become a prominent platform of media and have made their way into a majority of households across the world, bringing entertainment and news to its readers. As the terrorist acts in history indicate, regardless of the geographical location of the crime, terrorists attempt to abuse the media for their own benefits. These benefits include recruitment, the efficiency of their operations, publicity, fund raising, information gathering and other schemes. Whether it is a fairly insignificant incident of arson caused by an environmental group or mass destruction caused by a network of terrorists, the perpetrator’s goals for exploiting the media tend to be the same: attention, acknowledgement and perhaps even a degree of validity

among their audience. In return for reporting acts of terrorism, the media gets attention from the public, which proves to be essential for the broadcast network existence and benefits by attaining high volumes of sales via an increased number of audiences. In the journal article “Communicating about the Risks of Terrorism,” Baruch Fischhoff (2011) writes that terrorists threaten nations when there is an instrument or a force of power, creating a vacuum in that nation, and the terrorists strategically occupy that space. In other words, terrorism seems to originate or dominate nations that are fragile. In this context, a fragile state is one that has weak infrastructure which leaves its citizens in a state of vulnerability (p. 521). However, the concept or ideology of terrorism cannot spread without proper exposure and communication. In other words, terrorism has to be communicated to have effect. Carrying the responsibility of covering incidents that are of national interest, the news media has contributed to society’s awareness and to increase eagerness about terrorist attacks. This power that the media holds has also unfortunately become a service harnessed by terrorism making it an indispensable carrier of terroristic messages. As a result, terrorism and media have a steady yet dangerous symbiotic relationship (p. 522).

Society depends on newspapers and other outlets of media as their form of news, and what is published in these outlets-shapes the consumers’ ideas and opinions about these issues. The book *Inside Terrorism*, by Bruce Hoffman (2003) states that “there is no evidence that the portrayal of terrorism in the media leads to the public’s increase in sympathy towards those perpetrating the terrorist act or their cause” (p. 238). Hence, it is important to carry out investigative research to assess the degree of influence the media has on society’s policies. However, media portrayal of the perpetrator may lead to the formation of stereotypes and biases against the perpetrator’s entire race, ethnicity and religion as a whole. During recent years,

specifically after 9/11, there have been certain societal attitudes towards Muslims and violence carried out by Muslims. Per the article “Pragmatic Counter-Terrorism” written by Johnathan Stevenson (2007), even though non-Muslims make up the majority of terrorists in America, if the perpetrator is a Muslim, crimes are more likely to be reported as acts of terrorism and this shapes public policy attitudes towards Muslims. The current trend in mainstream media is that people who are a part of this faith are generally portrayed as violent, fanatical or extremists. This causes Islamophobia which has been intensified since the September 11 attacks. In this context, Islamophobia is described as the hatred against Islam and those who follow this faith.

In addressing the eradication of Islamophobia, it is worthwhile to investigate criteria as to when an act of violence can be dubbed “terrorism.” This simply deceiving question may be a fundamental one but is one that is often looked over without adequate attention in current routine journalistic practices. After the destruction and havoc caused by events on September 11th, President George W. Bush declared a nationwide “war on terrorism” and it has become important to identify who is a terrorist and who is not. In the book *Exchanging Terrorism Oxygen for Media Airwaves: The Age of Terroredia*, author Eid Mahmoud (2002) cites experts to make claims that terrorism is a socially constructed label which is given to a certain action. “It becomes difficult to treat it in a value-neutral manner” (p. 52). Before the September 11 attacks, Muslims in America remained under the radar but since the attacks, this group has been inadvertently thrust in to the spotlight. This attack signaled a shift in American perception of Muslims and thus created prejudice. Due to this prejudice, it is challenging to treat recent Muslim-related incidents without a bias, in a neutral manner.

After determining the definition of terrorism, it is essential to assess the news coverage of such events. After choosing several terrorist acts using a method of sampling, investigations

were carried out as to how frequent the follow-up news stories are and the typical length of news reports about terrorism. Once the news coverage is examined, existing research on media effects will be included.

Literature Review

Islam remains one of the most misunderstood religions in the West. This may be due to the cultural barriers in the Global North and the fact that Islam is a newer member of Western cultural tradition. There is a long list of negative connotations that are associated with Islam and those who are a part of this religion. These negative perceptions that exist in the West are heightened by hateful practices that are committed by a handful of Muslims. According to the article, “The West, Islam and the Muslim: Islamophobia and Extremism” by Abdul Rashid Moten (2017), using the terms Islamophobia and extremism have created hatred and provokes society and created prejudice. In this context, Islamophobia is considered as the dislike or prejudice against Islam and people who are a part of the faith. With the increasing number of Muslim citizens and asylum seekers in the West, there is an increased intensity towards people of the Muslim faith. Moten identifies eight components in Islamophobia some of which include views that Islam is seen as a substandard to the Global North because it is considered primitive, sexist and barbaric, Muslims are violent and aggressive. Muslim criticisms of the West are rejected and Anti Muslim hostility is seen as a part of the faith. In short, Muslims have been alienated, discriminated against and rejected by the West. Western perceptions have been moulded in a certain way that it is hard to notice or recognize the cultural diversity that is present in Muslim culture and [Muslims’] respective societal, financial and human conditions (p. 3-5).

The article “Islam and Western Culture,” written by Abdullahi Gallab and Allen Palmer (2016), contrary to what society in the Global North believes, “Muslims have suffered the most in wrongful and violent practices” (p. 3). Such stories are under-reported in the news. According to *BBC News* (2015) attacks carried out on the Charlie Hebdo offices in 2015 resulted in eleven deaths (“Charlie Hebdo attack: Three days of Terror”). In contrast, *CNN* (2016) states that the members of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) performed executions on more than 1,800 people in the year 2014 (“ISIS Facts”) and Boko Haram has claimed over 1,800 lives in Nigeria (“Boko Haram Facts,” 2016). Clearly the deaths in Muslim countries are far greater than the attacks in Paris, but as they have not received as much attention from the West as the Charlie Hebdo attacks, it is seen that the victimization of Westerners are emphasized. This heightens Muslims’ anti-Western views which may contribute to Islamophobia. In the end, it increases the radicalizations of Muslims and elevates the confrontation between Muslims and the West. The article “Cliff-Clavin: Determining Geographic Focus for News Articles” by Ethan Zuckerman, Catherine D’Ignazio, Rahul Bhargava and Luisa Beck (2016) notes that has been a change in the global news coverage due to the increase in diversity of news sources that are available to the public. The study claims,

When geographic information, demographic data and news content are combined, they create a picture of how that particular geography is represented in a longitudinal way across many news stories. This can provide powerful insight into patterns, trends and biases of news coverage that are hard to see otherwise (p. 3).

News media have a responsibility to make their audience aware of global crisis and situations and have always been interested in reporting terroristic acts. However, the problem does not lie in the reasons why media covers terrorism but *how* it covers terrorism. Per the publication, “Theoretical Perspectives to Terrorism and the Media,” published by the Media Policy Center (2014) the author states that “terrorism has many aspects that make it a very

attractive subject for the media, as it has the elements of drama, danger, blood, human tragedy, miracle stories, heroes, shocking footage, and action” (p. 8). News media tend to cover terror acts by writing large anecdotic stories which are sensation-seeking while displaying the same image repeatedly which remain in the minds of the audience.

Needless to say, media coverage is an attractive benefit for terrorism. According to the article, “Threatening Symbiosis of Mass Media and Terrorism,” the authors Karina Gareeva, Anrey Bolshakov, Andrey Ivanov and Elena Teryoshina (2016) consider the symbiosis of mass media and terrorism transformation processes. Methods employed in this study were a structurally functional analysis and the content analysis. Results showed that mass media has a large impact on initial growth of terrorism. For example, terrorist organizations had high numbers of recruits through the indirect publicity they have gained through news media. Although the article extensively talks about the degree of influence that terrorism can have on news media, it does not classify the acts of terror by perpetrator demographics such as religion, age or gender. Terrorism thrives in the media because it is reported in a way that does not necessarily focus on the amount of destruction inflicted, but the number of lives threatened and the amount of fear generated. In the book, *Terrorism and the Media*, the author Brigitte Nacos (2002), discusses the relationship of terrorism to the media and how it thrives on it. The author discusses that news media has a responsibility to make society aware of all incidents, but in doing so, provides the terrorist organizations with exposure and help their agenda in propaganda funding and recruitment (p.41).

To truly understand how the media portrays terrorists, one should take a closer look at the methods the media employs. The media subconsciously employs agenda setting and framing to highlight and make sure that there is more coverage of certain incidents than others. In the

publication “An Overview of Agenda Setting Theory in Mass Communication” by Amber Freeland (2012) “agenda theory, suggested that the media sets the public agenda by telling you what to think about, although not exactly what to think.” (p. 2). Another theory in use, framing theory is one that is generally used to understand media effects. Dennis Chong and James Druckman (2007) write that “framing refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue” (p. 104). Framing may affect the process of making decisions when certain aspects of news coverage are highlighted more than others. For example, when the media repeatedly has news coverage about terror acts induced by heavy racial bias may change the views and opinions of terrorism among viewers. In the article, “The Framing of International Media on Islam and Terrorism,” Sofia Yusof, Fauziah Hassan, Selleh Hassan and Mohd Osman (2013) conducted a study which involved analyzing content of two international news magazines that looked at possible patterns in labeling terrorism as associated with Islam after the death of Osama Bin Laden (p. 117). The authors make the claim that the media not only present and depict information and images in the news, they also have the ability to shape society’s opinion. Regardless of all positive contributions that are made by news media in creating and increasing awareness of terrorism, it also leads to an increase in hatred against Muslims among society. News outlets are said to be able to provide publicity to terrorist political agenda and question their legitimacy based on mistakes made by the government; this is how terrorists exploit the media. Due to these claims, it is clear that the news media plays a key part in the people’s opinions and that negative framing (of terrorism) can have a significant impact on people.

In addition to looking at how particular news stories are reported in the media, it is also important to look at how it impacts the audience. There have been many studies conducted to

analyze the impact on public policy attitudes and opinions as shaped by news media. However, less information is known about how these attitudes decipher into tangible actions. In the article “Changes in Public Opinion and the Occurrence of International Terrorism” authors Jitka Malečková and Dragana Stanisic (2014) claim that public opinion can affect terrorism in various ways. There are two extremes of terror acts in relation to how they are perceived by the viewer. One extreme includes the legitimization of terror acts and therefore lead to new recruits and the other not only frightens the viewer but creates a degree of hatred for that group and the ethnicity, race, citizenship of the people in that group (p. 647). In addition, the study also revealed that these perceptions can affect a nation’s economy. For example, if a certain country is associated with terrorism, foreigners may refrain from travelling to these countries and the host country will lose revenue in the tourism industry. The overlap in religion versus ideology has made it difficult for news viewers to differentiate who a terrorist is. When there is no clear criteria, people who are of the same faith, appearance, and religious background are subconsciously labeled as terrorists.

Another study was conducted to examine the attitudes and reactions of individuals towards media coverage of terrorist attacks. The method for this study included asking people to fill out a survey that evaluated their attitudes and responses to media’s coverage of a series of severe terrorist acts in Israel. In “Attitudes and Reactions to Media Coverage of Terrorist Acts” Giora Keinan, Avi Sadash and Sefi Rosen (2003) show that even though there is a considerable portion of media that covers terrorism, when horrifying images were included, people were less prepared to receive this information. A similar yet more ethnicity—focused study revealed the role that ethnicity and its affiliation to terrorist groups that gains exposure in the news media. In their article “Through the Looking Glass: The Role of Ethnicity and Affiliation in Responses to

Terrorism in the Media,” Anat Shohani and Michelle Slone (2016) show that there was a “significant increase in anxiety, anger, and negative adversary perceptions in the terrorism exposure group compared to only anxiety increases in the criminal violence exposure” (p. 18). There were two groups of adults—Jewish and Arab Israelites - who identified certain people as Muslims and directly associated them with terrorism. Findings of this study state that there is a relationship between ethnicity and outgroup affiliation and media exposure to terrorism images. This study establishes the fact that in addition to media can create Islamophobia in the viewers’ mind.

News media tends to give a spotlight to Muslim perpetrators of crimes in comparison to their non-Muslim counterparts: it is also important to go further in this investigation. So what? So what if the media creates, increases and instills islamophobia in American minds? One of the outcomes is anti-Muslim stereotypes created by the media may influence society’s support for public policies that have an aspect of prejudice against Muslims. In a study done by researchers Muniba Saleem, Sara Prot, Craig A. Anderson and Anthony F. Lemieux called, “Exposure to Muslims in Media and Support for Public Policies Harming Muslims,” (2015) conducted three separate research studies. The first study revealed that “exposure to news portraying Muslims as terrorists is associated with support for military action in Muslim countries” (p. 13) . The second study found that the same exposure is associated with “support for public policies that harm Muslims domestically and internationally; this effect was fully mediated by perceptions of Muslims as aggressive. Experimental results from [the third study] showed that exposing participants to negative Muslim media footage, [in relation] to neutral or no-video footage, increased perceptions of Muslims as aggressive. [This also] increased support for harsh civil

constraints of Muslim Americans, and increased support for military action in Muslim countries as well” (p. 16).

In the study “Reliance on Direct and Mediated Contact and Public Policies Supporting Outgroup Harm”, researchers Muniba Saleem, Grace Yang and Srividya Ramasubramanian (2016) found a correlation between people who rely on media depictions of Muslims and having negative attitudes, versus those with direct interactions who were less likely to view Muslims negatively. One of the authors, Srividya Ramasubramanian comments, “[their] findings show that individuals who rely on the media for information on Muslims have greater negative emotions toward Muslims and increased perceptions of Muslims as aggressive, which in turn leads to support for civil restrictions against Muslims and military actions against Muslim countries” (p. 614). This study also showed that most news viewers rely on media as a direct source of information about Muslims and believed that what was on the news was completely accurate. Stereotypes about Muslims have been created and instilled in the news media consumers’ minds which lead to stereotypic beliefs and negative emotions. The study emphasized on the finding that the current mainstream media and the news media have a great influence in their support of civil restrictions for Muslim Americans. In addition, these perceptions instill prejudice and bias against Muslims.

Several solutions have been put forward in order to solve the problem of media instilling prejudice and bias against Muslims. Polyculturalism is one such solution that has been recognized as one of the most successful, practical and impactful approaches. In the article, “Polyculturalism and Attitudes towards People from Other Countries” authors Allen Bernado, Lisa Rosenthal, Sheri Levy (2013) define Polyculturalism as “a belief system that involves a focus on recognizing that throughout history different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups have

interacted, influenced, and exchanged with each other, constantly shaping and changing cultures and making cultures connected to each other through shared histories, and that these dynamics continue today” (p. 7). Although not widespread, this is a concept that needs to be endorsed in order to not only view cultures as dynamic and constantly changing but also that all ethnic and religious groups have shared histories. According to the article, “Polyculturalism and attitudes toward Muslim Americans,” (2015) it is mentioned that “endorsement of polyculturalism is associated with less support for social inequality, more positive attitudes toward diversity, and lower racial/ethnic-, gender-, and sexual identity-based prejudice” (Rosenthal, L., Levy, R., Katser, M., & Bazile, C. p. 538). There are intensified levels of prejudice against Muslims in the United States and as a solution, the concept of polyculturalism has been put forward since it is associated with more progressive opinions as well as positive behavioral practices toward Muslims.

Method

This study analyzed reported acts of domestic terrorism reported specifically in the United States. For this, the Terrorism 2002/2005 report published by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was used. This report included a comprehensive list of domestic and international terrorist acts that occurred on US soil during the years 2002-2005. This specific FBI report was chosen due to personal interest in looking at news coverage soon after 9/11. In order to collect unbiased and ethical data, a stratified sampling method was used. For this, every fifth incident was analyzed. Since this list includes both domestic and international terrorism, in the case where the fifth crime was an international one, the next domestic crime would be chosen. The list also consists of terrorist plots that were prevented which were excluded as well. The

mentioned list was not classified or categorized in any way-based on severity, perpetrator, casualties etc.

Once the crimes were selected, their media coverage was analyzed by looking at three national newspapers. An extension of PR Newswire, Agility PR Solutions ranks all national newspapers in the United States based on the number of audience. This list puts *USA Today* as the most popular newspaper with seven million readers daily. *Wall Street Journal*, the largest newspaper paid by circulation came at second with 2.2 million readers (Top 15 U.S. Newspapers by Circulation). The *New York Times* was ranked third. Articles from these newspapers were accessed through Lexis Nexis, an online academic research database which provides access to newspaper articles from around the world.

These newspapers were comprehensively analyzed with regards to the length, detail and depth of news coverage about the previously selected crimes. By systematically examining these news reports, the research question of how crimes are being reported based on the perpetrator's ethnicity and religious background was investigated. In addition to the news coverage analysis, the number of articles published about an act of terrorism and the number of words used in each news story were tabulated in a pre-prepared table. Lexis Nexis was used in obtaining data relating to the total number of news stories and number of words in articles. For this, two tables were created where one showed data about the total number of news stories published about that particular terrorist act and the second table included the average number of words used in articles. This average number was achieved by the addition of the number of words in each news report and was then divided by the total number of articles published.

Results

The FBI (2016) has defined terrorism as the “unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives” (Terrorism 2002/2005, 2010). In the topic of counter-terrorism, it is obligatory to reference the events on September 11th at some point. Two towers that stood proudly in lower Manhattan were completely brought down by two Boeing airplanes in the span of two hours. Considered to be one of the largest attacks against the United States, this event has shaped and molded the way certain crimes are reported in the media. Ever since the events on September 11th and the Boston marathon, the word “terrorism” has been used constantly and has distressed Americans. If a survey is given out to a random sample of 100 people, they may have 100 different ideas on the definition of terrorism and who is considered a terrorist. If a scientist wants funding on his research related to anthrax and he resorts to drastic measures by sending out anthrax in the mail due to lack of support by officials, is that terrorism? In the given example, if the mentioned scientist specifically sent the anthrax strictly to government officials which would have a political threat, then it would be considered an act of terrorism. If he had sent it to random people that is without having a specific agenda in mind, then it would be considered an act of violence. According to the article, “The illusion of war: Is terrorism a criminal act or an act of war,” published by researcher Andrew Majoran (2016) for an independent security think tank, there may be set definitions for terrorism and acts of violence and there may be criteria that differentiate both. However, the nature of the crime does not always conveniently fall in to one category or the other (p. 2-4). Regardless of the label given to the act, a crime is a crime; people were killed and this is tragic.

Per the Terrorism 2002/2005 report, 23 of the 24 recorded of both international and domestic terrorist incidents were perpetrated by domestic terrorists. The Federal Bureau of Investigation identifies a domestic terrorist as one who is a “citizen or permanent resident of a state that carries out attacks against their own people or property within that state without foreign intervention” (Terrorism 2002/2005, 2010). The total number of news reports about a certain terror attack and the average number of words used in each article was tabulated into two tables. It is seen that there are a higher number of articles published about attacks carried out by those of Muslim descent in contrast to Caucasian perpetrators. A higher number of words was calculated for attacks carried out by Muslims as well.

Table 1: Number of news reports published about the incident

	Incident	<i>USA Today</i>	<i>Wall Street Journal</i>	<i>New York Times</i>
1.	2002 Arson by ELF	3	1	5
2.	2002 LA Airport Shooting by Hesham Mohamed Ali Hedayat	19	5	22
3.	2003 Terror plots carried out by Muslims against the US	9	3	14
4.	2003 Chiron Life Science Center attack by Daniel Andreas San Diego	8	5	11
5.	2004 Oklahoma Synagogue bombing by Sean Michael Gillespie	4	2	5
6.	2004 Attempted arson by ELF in Lincoln, California	1	1	2
7.	2005 arson on residences in Sammamish, Washington.	3	1	3

Table 2: Average number of words about each incident

	Incident	<i>USA Today</i>	<i>Wall Street Journal</i>	<i>New York Times</i>
1.	2002 Arson by ELF	273	202	303
2.	2002 LA Airport Shooting by Hesham Mohamed Ali Hedayat	715	576	670
3.	2003 Terror plots carried out by Muslims against the US	780	720	850
4.	2003 Chiron Life Science Center attack by Daniel Andreas San Diego	215	175	208
5.	2004 Oklahoma Synagogue bombing by Sean Michael Gillespie	254	224	256
6.	2004 Attempted arson by ELF in Lincoln, California	154	142	156
7.	2005 arson on residences in Sammamish, Washington.	198	146	200

In the year 2002, the FBI recorded seven domestic terrorist incidents, one international incident and one terrorism prevention. Out of the seven recorded domestic terrorist attacks, only one was carried out by a person of Muslim descent. Several of the attacks were solely committed by ELF-Earth Liberation Front. According to the same report, between March 2002 and November 2002, there was a series of animal rights and ecoterrorism incidents that occurred in Erie, Harborcreek and Warren, Pennsylvania. It was later found that the domestic terrorist group who have named themselves ELF (Earth Liberation Front) were the perpetrators. The group set a large hydraulic crane on fire, animals who were being used for their fur were released and several farms in the mentioned areas were destroyed by arson. The article “From Tree-Hugger to Terrorist,” written by Bruce Barcott (2002), in the *New York Times*, reports that the group ELF is America’s most active and destructive domestic terrorist organization. This news story was different than a conventional one. Instead of simply reporting about the incident, the author decided to do a lengthy and detailed feature story on ELF and its creators before diving in to the

arson. This feature story goes in to the lives of the creators of the American sector of ELF, who go by the names of Critter and Jeffery Luers, how they grew up, their track record of crimes before ELF and their motivations and goals for ELF. The article talked about the organization but did not go in depth about the arson incidents and hence failed to cover the story efficiently, instead, the article was long and ineffectual (p.10). According to an FBI Testimony reported by the Domestic Terrorism Section Chief of the Counterterrorism Division states that ELF, the domestic terrorist group which is mostly operated by Caucasian males, has committed an estimate of 600 crimes which have caused 43+ million dollars in damage (Jarboe. J, 2002). The *New York Times* published five articles about this attack, *USA Today* published three and *Wall Street Journal* published one article.

Since 9/11, American has been plagued by Islamophobia that has posed a threat to those of Muslim descent and has deadly consequences for those who are a part of this faith. Per “Terrorism 2002/2005” (2010) On July 4, 2002 while standing in line at the ticket counter, Hesham Mohamed Ali Hedayat randomly shot those standing close to him at the El Al Israeli National Airlines terminal in the Los Angeles International Airport (p. 4). The shooter was killed by airport security but not before he took the lives of a ticketing agent and a bystander. The FBI classified this case as an act of terrorism and determined that this attack was associated with religious and political beliefs. The *New York Times* published a total of 22 news stories related to this incident, while *USA Today* published 19 news stories. The *New York Times* published a story titled “Los Angeles Airport Gunman Slays 2 and Is Killed by Guard” written by Rick Lyman and Nick Madigan (2002), which gave explicit information about the attack. People who were in the vicinity gave detailed statements in this articles which made it unclear if this was a planned attack or an argument that became uncontrollable. The perpetrator’s Egyptian origin was

highlighted and was associated with terrorism (p.1). *USA Today* had a different take on the covering the story. The article, “Wife says Los Angeles Airport Suspect is Innocent” (2002), covers the perpetrator’s wife’s reactions to the claims made against her husband. She says that Hedayet was a victim of injustice and that “in America, they hate Islam and Arabs after Sept. 11.” Regardless of these claims, the FBI continued to refer to this as an act of terrorism prior to investigation (p. A1). *USA Today* published follow up stories titled, “Senator wants airport security change,” “Airport slaying intensify debate” and “Relocating checkpoints has risks” (2002), where the incident was repeated along with all information about the perpetrator, Ali Hedayat and his motives. The news stories also talk about updating security plans as well as increasing security at checkpoints (p. 3). All news stories included statements from eye witnesses. The *Wall Street Journal* published a short news story “US Agency Faces Dilemma after Shooting” (2002), about plans for increased security in airports (p. 6).

According to the FBI’s Terrorist act report, in the year 2003, there were six recorded terrorist incidents and five preventions. Three of the six incidents were carried out by domestic terrorists, a group called ELF-Environment Liberation Front which is an organization run by Caucasian extremists. Two suspected terror plots against the US were exposed. The suspects were of Arabic descent. One attack carried out by a lone wolf. “Terrorism 2002/2005” (2010) report on February 19, 2003, “four members of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) terrorist organization were arrested” and charged with operating a racketeering initiative that supported violence and terrorism (p. 8). They were also charged with conspiracy against the United States even though these claims were never proved. A similar incident occurred on the 28th of February where two men of Arabic descent were captured on the basis that their cigarette smuggling ring was supposedly associated with terrorist financing. The two men, Chawki Hammoud and

Mohammed Hammoud, both received 51 years and 155 years in prison respectively. Both incidents were suspected to have ties with the terrorist organization, Hezbollah. An Associated Press article titled “Brother Guilty of Smuggling and Giving Aid to Hezbollah” (2003) gives explicit details about the two men, their background, their origin, their track record of criminal activity (p. 5). At times, even though the article states that this arrest is still under investigation, the punishments are already predicted. However, the news coverage about this particular terror incident was low, perhaps due to the fact that it was a plot rather than an actual attack. The *New York Times* has 14 articles, *USA Today* nine and the *Wall Street Journal* published three articles about this incident.

Per the “Terrorism 2002/2005” report (2010), on August 28, 2003, “an improvised explosive device (IED) was detonated near the front door of Chiron Life Science Center in Emeryville, California which caused a significant amount of damage to the building. A second device was detonated in another Chiron building once the first responders arrived at the scene, which caused more damage” (p.15). The *New York Times* published an Associated Press article, “West California: Bombs at A Biotechnology Company” (2003). The entire article was one paragraph long and did not include any explicit details about the attack (p. 13). *USA Today* reported about the incident but did not have explicit details about the perpetrator. However, this incident did have a follow-up story published in October. According to the FBI’s most wanted terrorist list (2009), the perpetrator, Daniel Andreas San Diego, was not only the main suspect for this attack but was also reported to be a fugitive since the attack in 2003. *USA Today*’s follow-up story “Feds Search for Alleged Bomber of Biotech, Cosmetic Firms,” written by Paul Elias for the Associated Press (2003), says that police are investigating and looking for San Diego. The report mentions, several times, that he was not affiliated with a terrorist or militant

groups. San Diego was suspected as acting alone and simply had a “crazed” reaction to the Chiron group’s policies (p. 3). The *Wall Street Journal* posted several articles that did not explicitly explain the attack. In the short 98-word article, “US Watch, Animal-Rights Activist names a ‘Most Wanted’ Terrorist” (2009), published in the *Wall Street Journal* mentions that the perpetrator, San Diego, is a fugitive that has been included in the domestic terror most wanted list (p. 6). *USA Today*, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* published 11, eight, and five articles respectively about this incident.

According to the same FBI report analyzed through this study, in 2004 there were five terrorist incidents and five terrorism preventions. Three of the five were carried out by the Earth Liberation Front. One was an incident which involved a white supremacist firebombing a synagogue in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. “Terrorism 2002/2005” (2010) report on April 1, 2004, “Sean Michael Gillespie attacked the Temple B’nai Israel in Oklahoma City” (p. 13). The attack caused smoke damage to the synagogue. This attack was labelled as an act of terrorism and an act of violence against Middle-Easterners. He was given 39 years in prison. The sentence given to this person was far less than the sentence given to Mohammed Hammoud who was only suspected for funding Hezbollah. The *New York Times*, *USA Today* and *The Wall Street Journal* had five, four and two news reports respectively. The article, “New Face of Terror Crimes: ‘Lone Wolf’ Weaned on Hate” written by Jo Thomas for *The New York Times* mentions several attacks in the US that were carried out by white supremacists. In this article, the concept of being a ‘lone wolf’ is emphasized (p. 4). This concept of acting alone is one that is noticeably only used when attacks are carried out by non-Arabs.

ELF, also referred to as Earth Liberation Front, is one of the most active domestic terrorist groups in America. “Terrorism 2002/2005” (2010) reports on December 27, 2004 “four

combustible devices were placed under two homes in Lincoln, California” (p. 15). Although the devices failed to be detonated, there was ELF-related graffiti on the walls of these homes. This was considered a domestic act of terrorism and an attempted arson. The *New York Times* posted four articles about the incident while *USA Today* and the *Wall Street Journal* published one news story each. Per the FBI’s 2002/2005 terrorist acts report (2005), Ryan Lewis, Eva Holland, Lili Holland and Jeremiah Colcleasure were each arrested and sentenced to two years in federal prison. The *New York Times*, *USA Today* and the *Wall Street Journal* each had two, one and one report each, about this incident.

According to the FBI’s 2002/2005 terrorist act report, in 2005, the Federal Bureau of Investigation recorded five terrorist incidents and three terrorism preventions. Three out of the five incidents were caused by the domestic terrorist group associated with the Earth Liberation Front. Responsibility for other incidents were claimed by ALF-Animal Liberation Front. On April 13, 2005, an incident of arson occurred at a residence in Sammamish, Washington. This was carried out by an incendiary device and there was graffiti with the words “Where are all the trees? Burn rapist burn. ELF” (“Terrorism 2002/2005”, 2010, p. 21). The *New York Times* publishes three news stories about this incident while *US Today* published three as well. The *Wall Street Journal* had one news report about this attack.

Distinctions among the cited examples of terrorism are all tragic but vary based on the origin of the perpetrator. In the examples where the perpetrator was Muslim, there was an extensive amount of news coverage along with regular updates of any sort of development on the story. If the perpetrator was Muslim, with or without evidence, it seemed that they were directly linked to a jihadist movement or a terrorist group. Table 1 shows that newspapers in this sample have a higher number of published articles when the perpetrator of the attack was of Arab

descent or was a Muslim. By looking at Table 2, it is evident that in the case of attacks with Muslim perpetrators, there is a tendency for there to be a higher word count in the news stories than in the news stories that cover attacks by their non-Muslim counterparts. Caucasian perpetrators also carried out heinous crimes that were considered terrorism. In these cases, there were not as many updates about the event or investigation. There were always adjectives with their names such as “crazed” and the news report would dedicate a significant amount of writing to explain to the audience that the perpetrator was acting alone and not as part of a jihadist movement or terrorist organization. In this study, most terrorist acts were carried out by ELF or ALF-but there was a visibly lesser amounts of coverage in the selected newspapers. However, the crimes carried out by Muslim counterparts, receive all the attention in the news media. As shown in the articles about the shooting at the LA Airport, Muslim perpetrators were portrayed as a force of evil acting to destroy American lives whereas the Caucasian perpetrators were portrayed as those who “snapped” and reacted aggressively to a situation. Looking at the FBI report, “Terrorism 2002/2005,” there have been more domestic acts of terrorism carried out by Caucasian perpetrators rather than Muslim or those of Arabic descent.

There were several limitations that may have affected the results of this study. The report of terrorist acts, published by the Federal Bureau of Investigation called, “Terrorism 2002/2005” is one that has terrorism acts that occurred soon after 9/11. The attacks on September 11th changed the way Americans view Muslims and those who follow Islam. Events such as the attack in 2002 may have been deemed newsworthy not only because of the suspect’s Muslim heritage, but also given the pervasive concern about airport security after 9/11. Also, the events that were covered in these years may have an aspect of bias and prejudice against Muslims due to the events on September 11th.

For future directions, this study should be replicated in terms of a compare and contrast study. The same report should be used and should be compared to a newer report that also has a comprehensive list of terrorist acts. The comparison will give data about if and how news coverage about Muslims and those who follow Islam have changed. Any trends in news coverage can be identified as well. An interesting area to study for future work is how some perpetrators are described as “mentally unstable” or having “snapped,” which is problematic rhetoric studied in news reports on “shooters” as well (gun shooters in schools, malls, and other public locations). The studies that address this issue would be interesting to review to see how they compare to what is found in this thesis and what they might provide to this research.

New America, “a think tank and civic enterprise committed to renewing American politics, prosperity, and purpose in the digital age, has conducted research that looks at statistics of the ethnicity and religious backgrounds of perpetrators of crimes” (Bergen, P., Ford, A., Sims. A & Sterman. D., n.d.) In one of their studies “Terrorism in America After 9/11,” there was research done with the purpose of examining the groups engaged in violent extremist activities. Their findings show that white extremists are by far the most dangerous. The study referenced several examples and incidents that were considered terrorism in the past decade. One of the examples was the shooting at the Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina in 2012 where the perpetrator was a 22-year-old white male who justified his shootings in court by saying “I felt like I had to do it” when he was given the chance to plead for his life. The study found that

48 people were killed by white terrorists, while 26 were killed by radical Islamists, since September 11th. The study also found that the criminal justice system judged Muslim jihadists more harshly than their non-Muslim counterparts, indicting them more frequently than non-jihadists and handing down longer sentences (Bergen, P., Ford, A., Sims. A & Sterman. D., n.d.).

A challenge that American society faces today is that the current presidential administration is not helpful in terms of educating the public about terrorism. Instead, there is a tendency to increase society's negative attitudes and fear against terrorists. Mainstream media and news coverage is not helping society in the elimination of these negative attitudes and fears. These fears are heightened by current laws such as the "Muslim Ban" that has been implemented by the current administration. Most news outlets have provided sympathetic coverage of people who were blocked by the initial ban; they may be more egalitarian in this regard as news coverage collectively fuels animosity against Muslims. In addition to this ban, other precautions such as the emergency amendment "Electronic Ban" by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), require that electronics larger than a cellphone are included in the checked baggage on inbound flights owned by Muslim-majority countries. At time of implementing this law, officials claimed that this was a precaution to preserve national security. The airlines affected by this ban are countries that are also included in the "Muslim Ban". Regardless of the intentions of this law, it is quite evident that there is an aspect of prejudice in play. Such measures instill prejudice against Muslims as well. In the article "Addicted to Security," Frank Harvey (2004) says that with the factors and bias in news coverage, in relation to increases news coverage about terrorism as associated to Muslims, are affecting attitudes of the society, American unilateralism is inevitable. The article claims that being concerned only about security is not sufficient. It is important to stress the importance of implementing strategies to eradicate and attack the threat at the root rather than protect one nation from terrorism. Terrorism is a globalized problem and when a nation focuses on one component of safety, the institutions involved in strategizing combatant programs begin to have patterned responses which can be predicted by potential terrorists and their attacks.

The *Washington Post* article, “Donald Trump is bringing Anti-Muslim Prejudice into the Mainstream” by Christopher Ingraham (2016), cites many studies about current American viewpoints on Muslims and terrorism. The article quotes a poll conducted by *NBC News* and the *Wall Street Journal* where it was discovered that “Americans view Muslims more negatively than members of any other religion” (p. 2). Similar polls have indicated that “over 40 percent of Americans admit to feeling prejudice toward Muslims” (p. 3). Polls conducted by Pew Research have found that “one-quarter of Americans think a special Identification card for Muslims would prevent terrorist attacks and one-third of Americans want the government to keep a closer eye on Muslim citizens” (p. 4). In addition, “half of Americans say that some or all American Muslims are anti-American” (p. 4). The article also states that the fact that the 47 percent of the Republican Party says that Islam encourages violence does not help since most Americans have gone as far as accusing Muslims for not opposing extremism.

Is Islamophobia curable? Radical Islamic groups welcome society’s hatred as a key part of their strategy which polarizes communities. Part of combatting terrorism is to find ways to reduce prejudice against those of the same ethnic and religious background as most terrorists. The reduction of prejudice may be one of the most prolific areas of research so far. The main challenge of attempting to reduce prejudice against Muslims is that while-most citizens will not even consider interacting with Muslims personally, their attitude towards them remains politically important. The article “Know thy Enemy: Education about Terrorism Improves Social Attitudes toward Terrorists,” written by Jordan Theriault, Peter Krause, and Liane Young (2017), argues that education about terrorism, via courses in schools and colleges, can positively contribute towards reducing prejudice. It points out that education is a technique for reducing prejudice and that it has the potential to overcome limitations in combatting terrorism. It also

recognizes the challenge that the two parties—society and terrorists—cannot be physically brought together but awareness of terrorist motivations and agendas can be helpful in reducing prejudice against others who share the same ethnic and religious background but has no affiliation to the terrorist groups (p. 310). Another approach would be to stress the importance of polyculturalism. The concept of polyculturalism establishes that we need each ethnicity and racial groups to survive as they have influenced each other's cultures.

Conclusion

Regardless the form of crimes and violence, terrorism is an issue that receives a copious amount of attention by being highlighted in the media. In the article, "Muslims and Islam: Key Findings in the U.S. and Around the World" Michael Lipka (2017) claims that most of the Muslim population believes that Islam is a "religion of peace" and does not support the violence conflict and extremism currently associated with it. However, due to the actions of the extreme few larger and dangerous stereotypes creates fear and prejudices against Muslims (p. 2). By looking at the news reports chosen for this sample, in reference to terrorist attacks, there is a component of underlying prejudice being spread to the audience. Crimes with Muslim perpetrators are reported more, written about in great lengths and also almost always connected to an extremist groups.

White supremacists and Caucasian perpetrators were covered in the news as well, but in comparison to their Muslim counterparts, they did not receive as much news coverage. Such perpetrators were "mentally unstable" or simply "snapped" and always worked alone instead of being affiliated with any extremist groups regardless if there is any evidence that links them to such groups. In the years from 2002 to 2005, most of the terrorist acts in the United States were

carried out by white supremacist groups or domestic terrorist networks operated by Caucasians. However, news consumers would assume that majority of terror acts in these years were caused by Muslims. This is mostly due to the media coverage of these attacks. The media is a massive component in current society. Unfortunately, in the attempt to combat terrorism, prejudices created by the media can have detrimental effects. Paired with prejudice filled news reports, Islamophobia, a concept that has plagued the American nation since the September 11th attacks, is one that needs to be addressed as well. Without battling and overcoming this fear, hopes of ridding the American nation of prejudice against Muslims will be unachievable.

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