SEEDS OF SUSPICION: THE PERPETUAL CYCLE OF ANTI-MUSLIM STEREOTYPES, MIDDLE EAST INTERVENTION, AND TERRORISM

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SEEDS OF SUSPICION:
THE PERPETUAL CYCLE OF ANTI-MUSLIM STEREOTYPES, MIDDLE EAST
INTERVENTION, AND TERRORISM

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By

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Lexington, KY

Director: Dr. D. Stephen Voss, Professor of Political Science
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2019

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

SEEDS OF SUSPICION:
THE PERPETUAL CYCLE OF ANTI-MUSLIM STEREOTYPES, MIDDLE EAST INTERVENTION, AND TERRORISM

The central theory guiding my research is that interstate conflict, at least as covered in mass media, leaves residual cultural attitudes that can shape the political context in which elites formulate policy. Specifically, U.S. interventionism in the Middle East has given rise to fundamental hostilities, founded on misguided biases, that shape involvement in the region today. I focus on one step within that broader theory, to test it empirically: the hypothesis that anti-Muslim stereotypes, when activated, will shape an individual’s foreign-policy preferences. I begin by considering competing accounts that link 1) ethnocentrism or 2) targeted stereotypes with support for the use of military force in the Middle East. After careful review of the group-based and social-identity theories that undergird the two accounts, I synthesize them.

My more-complete theory can be summarized as: Someone will exhibit an ethnocentric response toward an out-group when negative stereotypes about the group combine with an individual’s in-group identity to result in perceived threat. Applying the logic of that hypothesis to Muslims and American foreign policy, I argue that, for American whites, Muslims are uniquely situated to be perceived as realistic and symbolic cultural threats to their core national identity because they may differ in terms of ethnicity, culture, and religion. Mass media portray Muslims as violent and encourage Americans to evaluate them in terms of such cultural dissimilarity. On the other hand, Muslims present little identity threat to blacks, whose core in-group identity typically revolves around their status as a racial minority in the United States. Even blacks who identify with the nation will not view Islam as incompatible with their national identity because that identity is typically not predicated on looking, living, or believing a certain way.

I develop these ideas into testable hypotheses and investigate how anti-Muslim attitudes shape opinion about important contemporary Middle East issues. Using survey and experimental data, I find compelling evidence linking anti-Muslim attitudes — among whites — to support for using military force (rather than diplomacy) against Iran and against Islamists. Those attitudes also predict opposition to accepting Syrian refugees. Finally, I turn from this narrative of negativity to argue that the anti-Muslim stereotypes many
citizens bring to bear when forming judgments of Middle East policy can be shifted. I base this optimistic expectation on media framing theories, which suggest that issue frames can shift opinion when they emphasize strong and credible arguments. After constructing frames from debate statements during the 2016 Presidential Election, and an original frame that affirms counterstereotypes of Muslims, I expect and find evidence that strong frames emphasizing the obligations of American identity and factual counterstereotype-affirming information can shift those who oppose accepting refugees to more moderate positions.

Broadly, my research offers a theoretically-grounded schematic for how stereotypes and identity construction operate together cognitively to shape public opinion. My methods offer leverage to those endeavoring to explain how these idea elements shape opinion in other issue domains. I also divulge important nuances about how specific actors (i.e., whites) propagate a cycle of anti-Muslim attitudes, warfare, and terrorism. I contribute to rivalry theory in international relations by explaining how cultural biases shape an enduring rivalry of the grandest scale: the perpetual U.S.-Middle East conflict. My framing research offers both academic and practical contributions by providing evidence on behalf of existing theory and by suggesting how media and political elites – by describing issues in unbiased ways – could knock off course the perpetual cycle of American interventionism, retaliatory terrorism, and resulting anti-Muslim stereotype generalizations.

KEYWORDS: Ethnocentrism, Stereotypes, Public Opinion, Framing, Middle East

Christopher William Ledford
April 11, 2019
Date
SEEDS OF SUSPICION:
THE PERPETUAL CYCLE OF ANTI-MUSLIM STEREOTYPES, MIDDLE EAST
INTERVENTION, AND TERRORISM

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This project focuses on the consequences that anti-Muslim prejudices have for American political behavior, public opinion, and foreign policy. In writing about these subjects, I would be remiss to not mention my own relationships with dozens of Muslim friends, schoolmates, and colleagues – all of which have been uniformly positive personal experiences. My earliest knowledge of Islam and its practitioners trace to experiences with Muslim friends and classmates, as well as their parents, in my small Kentucky school system. As my friends and I got old enough to start driving and staying away from home, the house of our classmates from Egypt quickly became a favorite hangout spot during the Summer. When I was there, I was most interested in perfecting my cannonball, no doubt about it. However, I could not help taking an interest in the religious and cultural artifacts in their house and, as a result, in Islam itself. Many years later, I can say that I have visited mosques, read parts of the Quran, and learned about a religion that teaches values not especially different from my own Christian values. My personal interests in Islam were not developed as a student or academic, but rather during the summer days I spent with friends that truly espouse the Golden Rule of Islam: kindness to others.

Most of my Muslim friends of now 25+ years are the children of people who, as civic leaders, serve on the frontlines of our local Muslim community, and who as doctors have invested countless hours of time and service to revitalizing and growing the capacity for first-rate medical care in our little town. On the former point, I have always held great admiration for the ways in which my friends’ parents have constantly put forth efforts to involve non-Muslim families in community discussions and events at the local mosque. On the latter point, my parents, an uncle and aunt, and I have all at some point been under
the care of the patriarch of that family, a prominent local doctor, and any of us would readily use terms like “kindness,” “friendliness,” and “excellence” to describe our care. When my father was in the hospital just a few weeks after the events of 9/11, we never once made linkages between that tragedy and the good doctor.

My relationships with these friends and their families were not exceptions or unique. After leaving my hometown to attend two major research universities, I frequently found myself working as a college instructor and in various university service capacities with Muslims. When I think about the many Muslim friends I have from Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Pakistan, and India, I cannot recall any instance where I have felt uncomfortable, threatened, or unsafe. In fact, in most of those circumstances, I have worked with Muslim friends and colleagues of various backgrounds to create and promote cultures of inclusion in our mutual workplaces and learning environments. I spent many nights at my college job discussing politics, religion, and life with my Iraqi friend, who formerly served in Saddam Hussein’s Republican Guard and, later, served the regime as a translator. I vividly recall going to work on Monday, May 2, 2011, the day after justice had been served on Osama bin Laden, and my friend toasting Mountain Dews with me. For him and dozens of other friends of Muslim faith, I am very grateful. I am thankful to them for sharing their experiences — good and bad — with me, for never “othering” me, and for never holding against me the hostilities that they have endured from people who look like me. They provided my initial inspiration for this dissertation research.

As I have developed this research from its early stages to its present form, I have had the good fortune to be advised by Drs. D. Stephen Voss, Horace Bartilow, Jim Hertog, Aiyub Palmer, and my appointed member, Dr. J.S. Butler. From the time Dr. Voss first
agreed to be my dissertation chair, he was available, ready to help, and enthusiastic about the project. His pleasant disposition made the dissertation phase a really enjoyable part of my doctoral career. Further, the balance Dr. Voss struck between advising me and encouraging my creativity helped me to thrive as a researcher and writer. As long as I could justify an idea or direction that I took, I was given the freedom to do so. Dr. Voss also worked tirelessly to read drafts and offer professional edits and suggestions. To say the least, I hope that someday I can reach the standards Dr. Voss set as both a mentor and an academic professional. Drs. Palmer, Hertog, and Bartilow have helped me focus on big-picture questions. It is for this benefit that I first asked each of them to serve on the advisory committee. When I looked at the themes throughout my work, I wanted advice from experts in each of those fields: race politics, methods, political communications, Islam, and Middle Eastern politics. That’s just what I got: thoughtful, expert advice. Equally important, they helped me focus on little things like making clear figures, clearly explaining diagnostics, and so forth. These are the vehicles that move written ideas to comprehension, credibility, and critique. They worked hard to leave no stone unturned. I am also grateful to my appointed outside examiner, Dr. J.S. Butler, who offered thoughtful comments and methods advice that helped with the final revisions.

I am particularly thankful for my personal and professional relationships with Dr. Jason Gainous and Dr. Laurie Rhodebeck. While their undergraduate student, I became quite interested in teaching politics, political research, and the substantive content of their work. They encouraged me to pursue a Ph.D. I went on to develop some of the ideas in this project with them as a Master’s student. After I went on to the Ph.D. program, both stayed engaged with me and interested in my work. As I developed my ideas and formed
new ones, they were always willing to look things over for me and offer constructive feedback. They played a big part in keeping me motivated through the long-haul of getting a Ph.D. Sadly, Dr. Rhodebeck passed away in 2016. Although I miss her, I look at this research project and find much happiness in knowing that she would have enjoyed reading it – after covering it in her infamous red ink – and seeing me complete the Ph.D. Hundreds of her former graduate students could say the same.

I am grateful for helpful comments and revisions suggested by participants at the 2019 Kentucky Political Science Association Meeting. Two chapters of this dissertation benefitted from suggestions offered by Dr. John Heyrman, Dr. Benjamin Knoll, and Dr. Jasmine Farrier.

I am grateful for my parents – Robyn and Mike Baker and James Ledford – and grandmother, Paula Burkett. They have provided the requisite number of snacks and feelgood thoughts needed to get through a dissertation. More importantly, my folks are among the most open-minded, tolerant, and kind people that I know. If not for them, I doubt I would have such a broad interest in other peoples and cultures or quite the respect for others and others’ ideas that I do. Of course, I am also thankful to them for countless constructive discussions and for always being on-hand to read drafts.

I am thankful for a long list of aunts, uncles, and cousins who have supported me. I am especially thankful for the families of Steve, Jerry, and Charlie Ledford for looking after me while I was living on my own throughout college and graduate school.

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Finally, I am thankful for my grandparents – Gerry and Carl Ledford and Jim Burkett – who have passed on from this life. I am blessed to have known all my grandparents and I remember them well. They taught me to laugh and love. They taught me to work with integrity, to work hard, and to aim high. I hope that the ethic and effort behind this research would make them proud.
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Chapter One - Introduction

The Middle East has come to define foreign policy in the American mind. Younger generations of Americans can see video footage from Syria and Iraq daily. They hear reports of alleged Iranian nuclear development, the destruction of Aleppo, the refugee crisis in Turkey, and the deployment of U.S. troops against groups with names like Al-Qaeda and ISIS. Despite the conflicts in Southeast Asia after World War II, even the oldest generations may tend to conceive of foreign policy as a “clash of civilizations” between Christianity and Islam: They came of age when the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) began supporting regime changes in Syria and Iran in the late 1940s, and U.S. involvement in the region has been continuous since then (Wilford 2013; Bacevich 2016).

U.S. intervention in the Middle East did not begin as part of a cultural struggle, at least not one growing out of religious differences. The CIA initiatives of the late 1940s mostly aimed at Soviet containment or they grew from economic motives (such as maintaining friendly relations with major oil-producing states). Historian Andrew Bacevich summarizes that, “just as the American Revolution was about independence and the Civil War was about slavery, oil has always defined the raison d’être of the War for the Greater Middle East” (2016: 1). Nonetheless, those initiatives set the tone for three decades of interventionism, not to mention what many understand as short-sighted military and intelligence operations (Fisk 2005; Blaydes and Linzer 2012; Johnson 2015).

U.S. relations with Iran are a case in point of interventionist policies that some may define as short-sighted or opportunistic. When Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq attempted to nationalize the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (now part of British Petroleum) in 1953, which he saw as exploiting Iran unfairly, the CIA staged *Operation Ajax* to
overthrow the Iranian leader (Wilford 2013: 3, 160-162; Bacevich 2016: 13). Rather than sit idly by as the West lost its controlling interests in Persian oil, the U.S. government installed the staunchly anti-communist and pro-American Mohamed Reza Shah Pahlavi. In the years after the coup, the United States had no qualms about selling the Shah billions of dollars in arms and nuclear technology, so long as Iran provided a buffer against Soviet encroachment from the north (Bacevich 2016: 13-14). However, *Operation Ajax* caused unforeseen consequences that endure to this day: the Iranian Hostage Crisis, U.S.-Iran hostilities during the Iran-Iraq War, the formation of the Iranian-sponsored Hezbollah, and tense diplomatic relations over alleged Iranian nuclear development. Robert Fisk, a British journalist who amassed over three decades of experience as a Middle East foreign correspondent, summarizes the outcome of *Operation Ajax*:

“The return of the young Mohamed Reza Shah Pahlavi was the ultimate goal. It cost a couple of million pounds, a planeload of weapons and perhaps five thousand lives. And twenty-five years later, it all turned to dust [foreshadowing the Iranian Revolution]” (2005: 94).

Rather than pursuing clear goals that might have been understandable to the American electorate, U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East likely comes across as a muddle. Time and again, the United States intervened to support regime changes in Middle Eastern countries — other examples include Iraq and Syria — only to reverse course and condone coups d’état against those regimes (Fisk 2005; Wilford 2013). Dr. Bassam Haddad argues that, after nearly eighty years of intervention in the Middle East, U.S.
policymakers must spend much of their time correcting their many previous policy failures and destabilization of the region (Johnson 2015).

The research presented here will probe the domestic consequences of those interventions to portray the serious implications they have had, and will continue to have, for American attitudes toward Muslims and U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. The overarching theory guiding my investigation is that interstate conflict, at least as covered in the mass media, leaves residual cultural attitudes that later can shape the political (and especially electoral) context in which policymakers formulate foreign policy. Specifically, previous U.S. involvement in the Middle East has given rise to fundamental hostilities, founded on misguided biases, that shape involvement in the Middle East today.

This research will focus on one step within that broader theory, to test it empirically: the hypothesis that anti-Muslim stereotypes, when activated, will shape an individual’s specific foreign policy preferences. To test the hypothesis, I utilize survey and experimental data collected on public opinion about several important contemporary issues in the Middle East, such as public support for (1) various policies intended to deter Iranian nuclear development, (2) the use of military force to combat global terrorism, and (3) allowing embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States. In doing so, I employ a variety of analytical techniques, including structural equation modeling (SEM) and multiple regression, to determine the influence that respondents’ anti-Muslim stereotypes have in shaping opinion about these issues.

---

1 Haddad is the Director of the Middle East Studies Program at George Mason University. His comments are taken from a forum and debate in 2015 at Cornell University, entitled “American Foreign Policy in the Middle East: Success or Failure?”
The news media play a central role in my narrative. I argue that concurrent (and arguably biased) media coverage of these interventions, of terrorism, and of political debate over U.S. policy in the Middle East gave rise to anti-Muslim stereotypes among the American public (Hammer and Safi 2013; Sides and Gross 2013; Pennington and Kahn 2018). Not only would it prove difficult for most ordinary Americans to think about U.S. policy without imagining intervention in the Middle East, but decades of biased media coverage have primed many Americans such that they are unable to think about these issues without subconsciously retrieving anti-Muslim considerations (Kumar 2012; Iftikhar 2016, 2018; Gottschalk and Greenberg 2007, 2018). Hilary Kahn summarizes the consequences of negative coverage of Muslims:

“Large swaths of the general public only encounter Islam and Muslims in news stories when something tragic or terrifying happens, such as the 2017 attacks in London and Istanbul and the 2016 Orlando nightclub shooting. The representation of Muslims in these stories often portrays them as radicalized, irrational, and uncontainable terrorists or depicts their suffering in a desensitized and inhumane way. While a story will occasionally be found in which Muslims are humanized or their faith contextualized, the typical narrative people find in news media is one that distances Islam and Muslims, decontextualizes the faith and its believers, misrepresents the religion as a security risk, and presents a community that is, quite simply, not us” (2018: 1).

Throughout this project, I offer an argument – and present strong evidence – that anti-Muslim stereotypes shape public support for military operations in the Middle East (and specifically the killing of Muslims). This correlation persists even after accounting for other political attitudes that might shape foreign policy opinions (e.g., political ideology and party identification). The evidence I find that links anti-Muslim stereotypes to support for the use of American military force in the Middle East suggests dire consequences for the bigger picture of U.S. foreign policy and the global war on terrorism. Anti-Muslim
stereotypes, the foundations of support they lend for the use of American military force in the Middle East, and the interventions themselves risk conflict in the future, due to the seemingly irreversible and demoralizing nature of cultural conflict. Indeed, Western attitudes help create a feedback loop. Foreign policy rooted in ethnic or religious antipathy naturally gives rise to anti-American and anti-imperialist orientations abroad, of a sort able to foment modern Islamist extremism and perhaps even fuel terrorism: a “perpetual cycle of intervention, terrorism, and anti-Muslim stereotypes,” once those extremist acts in turn shape American attitudes (Tessler 2003; Tessler and Robbins 2007; Blaydes and Linzer 2012; Gerges 2016; Iftikhar 2016).

An important caveat in my narrative is that the cognitive linkages between perceived threat from Muslims, anti-Muslim stereotypes, and justifications for using military force in the Middle East are stronger among white Americans compared to black Americans, what I call an “asymmetric ethnocentric response” toward Muslims across American racial groups. In two studies herein, I find compelling evidence that, among whites, anti-Muslim stereotypes structure support for: the use of military force rather than diplomacy to deter Iranian nuclear development (Chapter Four) and restrictive policies toward the emigration of embattled Syrian refugees (Chapter Six) to the United States. In a third study, I find evidence in a survey experiment that, when ordinary Americans are exposed to news stories about various terror groups, they are more likely to support the use of preemptive force against Islamist groups compared to non-Islamist groups even if they make equal threats against the United States (Chapter Five). When I dig deeper, I find that support for using military force against Islamists is highest among white participants compared to black participants.
These differences in how whites and blacks think about Muslims have the potential to cause severe policy consequences (e.g., invading or bombing other countries, turning away refugees). Whites typically make up 70% of the electorate and even larger proportions of most survey samples, which means that both the electorate and representative polls will be driven by any subcultural norms found among that portion of the population. Further, whites form the vast bulk of the Republican electorate (approximately 90%), meaning that their perspective will dominate national leadership when the GOP governs.

I conclude this narrative of negativity with a bit of optimism by offering a theoretically-grounded argument that media and political elites can cover issues in the Middle East in ways that uproot the deep-seated biases that set the current context for American foreign policy. Specifically, I investigate how different news frames (i.e., arguments) of varying strength and quality influence public opinion surrounding the Syrian refugee crisis. I find strong empirical evidence suggesting journalists can mitigate the influence that unfounded anti-Muslim stereotypes exert on American public opinion and U.S. foreign policy by affirming counterstereotypes of Muslims in coverage of issues in the Middle East. My investigation of the political potential of fair reporting and counterstereotype-affirming approaches is both timely and important, a point which several scholars make in their collaborative volume entitled On Islam: Muslims and the Media. Hilary Kahn summarizes the volume’s overarching purpose:

“This responsibility and ability to rescript the narratives around Islam and Muslims comes at no better time. Tides of anti-immigrant, antidifference, anti-Islam, and antiglobalism sentiment are swelling, and a public response of exclusion and nationalism is a global and complicated issue that requires more nuanced understanding (2018: 5).”
Chapter Two - U.S. Intervention in the Middle East

This chapter presents a cursory review of the historical context that precipitated today’s commonplace anti-Muslim stereotypes. The discussion must start there in order to put the current research and its contributions into perspective. My narrative thus begins with a summary of nearly eighty years of continuous and seemingly muddled U.S. interventionist policies in the Middle East, the context in which current American opinion formation takes place.

*Realpolitik in the Middle East*

After supporting Middle Eastern regime changes in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the U.S. government entered the Cold War looking to develop diplomatic relations with several states in the region. U.S. policymakers and diplomats approached their Arab and Muslim counterparts in Middle Eastern states with contempt, based on a perception of their “backwardness, lack of democracy, and abrogation of women’s rights” (Said 1978: xix; 1997; 2004). According to Said, who popularized Orientalism theory, U.S. policymakers felt they had an obligation to intervene in the Middle East to civilize and democratize the primitive Muslims and protect them from Soviet communism. These “demeaning generalizations,” inherited through centuries of European conquest and literature, led to U.S. intervention in the Middle East and planted the seeds of anti-Muslim attitudes (Said 1978, 1994, 2004; Kumar 2012). Said (2004: 871) summarizes the consequences of the Orientalist worldview:

“It is quite common to hear high officials in Washington and elsewhere speak of changing the map of the Middle East, as if ancient societies and myriad peoples can be shaken up like so many peanuts in a jar. But this has often happened with the ‘Orient’, that semi-mythical construct which since Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in the late eighteenth century has been made and re-made countless times by power...
acting through an expedient form of knowledge to assert that this is the Orient’s nature, and we must deal with it accordingly. In the process the uncountable sediments of history, that include innumerable histories and a dizzying variety of peoples, languages, experiences, and cultures, all these are swept aside or ignored, relegated to the sand heap along with the treasures ground into meaningless fragments that were taken out of Baghdad’s libraries and museums. My argument is that history is made by men and women, just as it can also be unmade and rewritten, always with various silences and elisions, always with shapes imposed and disfigurements tolerated, so that ‘our’ East, ‘our’ Orient becomes ‘ours’ to possess and direct.”

The United States initiated the Baghdad Pact (also known as the Central Treaty Organization or CENTO) in 1958 with the intention of uniting Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey against Soviet expansion from the north. Just four years later, however, Prime Minister Abd al-Karim Qassim withdrew Iraq from CENTO, as part of a broader agenda to nationalize the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) for the benefit of his own state economy (Fisk 2005: 148). Qassim demanded that Western corporations share IPC ownership and profits with his government.

Qassim’s strategy proved to be the downfall of his regime’s relations with the United States and, ultimately, the downfall of Qassim himself. U.S. officials began colluding with revolutionary Baathists in Iraq — namely a young Saddam Hussein — to overthrow Qassim (Fisk 2005; Mansfield 2013; Wilford 2013). Within a year of withdrawing Iraq from CENTO, Qassim and his Syrian counterpart, President Nazim al-Kudsi, were ousted by American-backed Baathists. Both countries emerged from the 1960s with strong Baathist governments rooted in Arab nationalism and authoritarian socialism. While the CIA-backed coups initially proved beneficial for the United States, the unanticipated rise of Arab nationalism over the next decade deteriorated the new regimes’ relations with their American counterparts.
One particular event catalyzed the sharp decline in diplomatic relations between the United States and Iraq: The Six Day War of June 1967 (or the Third Arab-Israeli War). After alleged threats and attacks by Palestinian organizations inside Israel, the Israelis launched strikes against Palestine, Syria, Egypt, and Jordan (Bowen 2017). Israel tripled its land territorial claims and killed nearly 15,000 Arabs, including 10,000 Egyptians and 2,500 Syrians (Bowen 2017). The United States supported Israel, which flew directly in the faces of those who trumpeted Arab unity and strength. Arabs and Muslims in the region saw the United States as complicit in Israel’s conquests and, in response, the Iraqi government severed ties with the United States and instead sought to improve relations with the Soviets. By the early 1970s, the U.S. government again was colluding with local factions to promote regime change. This time, U.S. officials supplied ethnic Kurdish rebels (the peshmerga) with resources to help them overthrow the now-standoffish Iraqi government that the CIA helped bring to power just a decade earlier.

Around the same time, Islamist extremism – at the core of modern terrorist group ideologies – was taking root in the Middle East under two major political revolutions. U.S. involvement in regional politics resulted in unforeseen consequences that endure to this day. In Iran, for example, the Shah had “always [been] seen as a tool of the United States and Britain” after his installation with CIA help in 1953 (Fisk 2005: 98). The Americans profited from relations with his regime while underwriting its corruption (Fisk 2005: 98; Bacevich 2016: 15). Growing unrest with the inhumane and corrupt Shah dictatorship finally exploded in 1978 – with riots, protests, and calls for a new Islamist regime – forcing the Shah to flee the country. Growing anti-American sentiment reached a fever pitch when the U.S. government allowed the exiled leader into the country for cancer treatment in
1979. In retaliation, members of an Islamist student group overtook the U.S. embassy in Tehran and held 52 Americans hostage for fifteen months. To this day, the incident remains the longest hostage crisis in recorded history.

Media coverage and imagery out of the 1979 Iranian Hostage Crisis changed how many ordinary Americans perceive Muslims. This period – which I discuss at greater length in Chapter Four – marked a shift from the typical Orientalist view of Muslims held by many Americans to the pervasive anti-Muslim stereotypes that exist today. By the end of the crisis, many Americans no longer just saw Muslims as primitive and patriarchal savages, but instead saw an immediate national security threat posed by turbaned, AK-47-toting, brown men living in the Middle East (Elba 2018). Elba (2018) summarizes the development of anti-Muslim stereotypes during the late 1970s and early 1980s:

“The hostage crisis demonstrated the early stages of the development of the modern Muslim terrorist. You saw these turban-clad, beard-wearing Iranian men carrying rifles handling these ambassadors and statesmen who were largely white. And remember, it was around the clock coverage at the time. People came home and were watching for updates, it was on the front pages of the New York Times and the Washington Post. News anchors were building careers off of this. The ratings for coverage of the hostage crisis were through the roof….The sheer scale of the event and that political moment led to the permeation of this male, Muslim, brown, bearded threat, which becomes the modern prototype for how we think about the Muslim terrorist. In addition to that, it had a major psychological impact in that American hegemony isn’t as strong as we might think. It was a moment of vulnerability, that these guys can really do harm if they want.”

In Afghanistan, another coup d’état brought the pro-Soviet and communist People’s Democratic Party to power in 1978. When the Soviet Union began sending troops to defend the new government against Islamists, the United States again began funneling resources to insurgents. The United States sent billions of dollars in arms and aid to mujahideen fighters in Afghanistan as an indirect way to combat its Cold War nemesis. It
also may have been a direct attempt to make up for the lost strategic partnership with Iran by brokering new power relationships in the region, thereby undermining Soviet influence and preventing their encroachment on U.S. oil interests in the Persian Gulf. President Carter’s national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, wrote that the Shah’s overthrow had shattered the “protected tier shielding the crucial oil-rich region of the Persian Gulf from possible Soviet intrusion” (Bacevich 2016: 23). Fisk summarizes the U.S. government’s predicament in the late 1970s:

“America had just lost its very own ‘policeman of the Gulf’,” Shah Mohamed Pahlavi, in favour of that most powerful of Islamic leaders, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini...Now it was in the process of ‘losing’ Afghanistan — or at least watching that country’s last pitiful claim to national independence melt into the Kremlin’s embrace” (2005: 41).

With aid and resources from the United States, the mujahideen eventually drove the Soviets from Afghanistan. However, in several later interviews, Osama bin Laden was often quick to point out that, regardless of any account of U.S. aid, the Americans were enemies (Fisk 2005). Specifically, when asked about his contempt for the United States, bin Laden referenced American imperialism, crusades for oil, and support for the illegitimate state of Israel that was partitioned out of Muslim holy lands after World War II: “For us, there is no difference between the American and Israeli governments or between the American and Israeli soldiers” (Fisk 2005: 22-31, quoting Osama bin Laden).

Any positive relationships that were forged between the U.S. government and the Afghan rebels quickly deteriorated after the Soviet evacuation. Many in Afghanistan viewed the U.S.-supported postwar regime as corrupt and out of sync with traditional Islam. Furthermore, when the United States withdrew its presence, a power vacuum was created that led to an outbreak of violence between tribal war lords. Many Afghans, living
amid a brutal civil war, felt abandoned (Fisk 2005: 5). Consequently, most of the fighters once trained and funded by the United States channeled their intensifying anti-American views into the founding of the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan (Gerges 2016: 20).

“Once the Russian bear had burned its paws and the Soviet Union was on its way to perdition, the Americans and their Arab and Pakistani suppliers abandoned Afghanistan to its fate and ignored the thousands of Arabs who had fought there,” Fisk explains (2005: 90).

Contemporary Confusion

American attitudes hardened during the “confusion and incoherence,” not to mention the “shortsighted opportunism,” that characterized U.S. foreign policy in the 1980s and 1990s (Bacevich 2016: 87). This period marked the beginning of the abandonment of covert intervention by the U.S. government in favor of directly using its military power in the Middle East. It is likely that ordinary Americans were confused by their government’s intervention in the Middle East – which lacked a clear articulation of motives and goals – and also wondered, in retrospect, why the stakes were enough to justify risking American lives (Bacevich 2016: 11). No survey data exist to document this confusion, but a rather unimpressive list of achievements in the Middle East – where all U.S. military casualties since 1980 have occurred – motivates my supposition about American confusion over Middle East policy. That list includes: a hostage crisis, a scandal, four Gulf wars, a failed regime change, hundreds of terror attacks, the birth of the most formidable terror group to date, and a refugee crisis.

This story of confusion over U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, with the (likely) added component of concern for the loss of American life, begins with the U.S. use
of its military might during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988). Iraq and Iran were at war over border disputes and Saddam Hussein’s fears of uprisings among Iraq’s Shi’ite factions (encouraged by their religious brethren to overthrow Hussein, just as they had overthrown the Shah in Iran). The U.S. military intervened, with its unparalleled naval power, to protect Iraqi and Kuwaiti oil tankers travelling through the Persian Gulf. Not only did the Americans have a vested interest in protecting the oil on which they depended, but the Iranian regime’s support of the student hostage-takers in 1979 was still a sore spot for U.S. leaders.

What was seemingly a clear direction in foreign policy, however, became muddled when the U.S. government was exposed for funneling weapons to Iran through Israel in hopes of securing the safe return of American hostages held by Hezbollah in Lebanon. These events, which became known as the Iran-Contra Affair, cast a dark cloud over the second term of one of America’s most beloved presidents, Ronald Reagan. These conflicting policies also seemed to cause many Americans to have ambivalent attitudes toward Reagan and his policies, which was understandable, given how the military served a double-agent role in that war. On the one hand, an overwhelming majority of Americans stood against the actions of the Reagan administration: 80% disapproved of the decision to sell weapons to Iran and 70% were bothered “a lot” by Reagan’s decision to contradict the will of Congress (Saad 2016). On the other hand, many of those same Americans still approved of President Reagan. His job approval only fell to 47% after the scandal became public in November 1986 and rebounded back to 60% by the end of his term. Further, 75% of Americans maintained that they still liked Reagan as a person (Saad 2016).
The United States’ policy in the Middle East only became more muddled from there. After essentially saving Saddam Hussein from the Iranians – who enjoyed the advantage of superior U.S.-made technology purchased by the Shah before his downfall – the U.S. twice deployed military force against Iraq in the years following the ceasefire (Bacevich 2016). First, after Saddam Hussein invaded oil-rich Kuwait in 1990, the United States quickly drove the Iraqi forces from Kuwait (Bacevich 2016). Then, in 2003, the United States again invaded Iraq as part of a coalition force, under the pretenses that Hussein was exterminating Kurds and Shi’ites, harboring weapons of mass destruction, and supporting al-Qaeda terrorists responsible for the 9/11 attacks.

According to Fawaz Gerges (2016), U.S. leaders’ lack of foresight in the 1990 and 2003 interventions created many of the conditions that led to the birth of ISIS and, to this day, present challenges to stable and legitimate governance in Baghdad. The U.S. military dismantled most of the Iraqi Republican Guard in the first war, and in the subsequent occupation, what was left of the military and the ruling Baathist party was excluded from ever serving the state again. These policies sparked centuries-old sectarian divisions and, when American fatigue with the occupation led the U.S. government to withdraw troops, the movement known today as ISIS arose to fan those sparks until they blazed into chaos and violence:

2 The U.S. intervention against Iraq was somewhat of a “final straw” for Osama bin Laden. The United States used Saudi Arabia as its headquarters and base of operations for the offensive against Iraq, which outraged bin Laden. To him, disputes between Arabs and/or Muslims should be settled without outside interference. Furthermore, bin Laden saw it as disgraceful to allow infidels to occupy the most holy of Islamic lands in Saudi Arabia. Osama bin Laden protested the Saudi government, which led to his exile and the revocation of his citizenship. Just two years later, radicals linked to bin Laden carried out the bombing on the World Trade Center and the ambush of American troops in Mogadishu, Somalia.

3 Fawaz A. Gerges is Emirates Professor in Contemporary Middle East Studies at the London School of Economics and Political Science.
The United States “caused a rupture in an already fractured Iraqi society. America’s destruction of Iraqi institutions, particularly its dismantling of the army and the ruling Baathist party, unleashed a fierce power struggle, mainly along sectarian lines, creating fissures in society. These growing ruptures provided the room necessary for non-state actors and armed insurgent militias, including Al Qaeda, to infiltrate the fragile body politic in post-2003 Iraq” (Gerges 2016: 24).

In conclusion, this historical review has set the context during which biased media coverage of terrorism and issues in the Middle East gave rise to anti-Muslim stereotypes in the United States. My cursory review also describes the history of American interventionism in the Middle East and provides a background for the anti-U.S.-imperialist and anti-U.S.-interventionist ideologies that motivated terror attacks (of which September 11 is one of hundreds to take place throughout the United States and Europe). It theorizes a chain of causality that creates a perpetual cycle: stereotypes lead to intervention, which lead to terrorism, which reaffirms stereotypes. Others have documented how U.S. intervention encourages such backlash (Tessler 2003; Blaydes and Linzer 2012; Gerges 2016). My task, in subsequent chapters, will be to test for the first link in this cycle: anti-Muslim stereotypes shaping support for military interventions in the Middle East. In the next section, I summarize the theoretical perspective I will employ when testing for that linkage.

Two Accounts of Support for the War on Terror: Ethnocentrism vs. Stereotyping

The emergence of global terrorism paralleled technological developments that enable scholars to study public support for the war on terrorism. Specifically, the rapid

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4 Survey data provide evidence of the “fatigue” I describe. In March 2003, days after the invasion, only 23% of Americans agreed that it was a mistake to send troops into Iraq. That number climbed steadily to around 60% at the end of Bush’s second term and hovered there until the troop withdrawal in December 2011.
development of the Internet and file-sharing capabilities during the late 1990s and early 2000s led data consortiums to start digitizing public opinion – some dating back to the 1930s – for easy storage and sharing. As technology and Internet speeds have continued to improve, universities and polling organizations are increasingly forming partnerships with these popular consortiums to increase data accessibility. Today, researchers from partner organizations can search and access data from these consortiums – like the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan – for free and on almost any topic. Further, data are typically available in file formats for nearly every data analysis program and can be downloaded in a matter of seconds.

With these advances, researchers sought to understand American public opinion about U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East using recurring national survey data collected on those topics. Two mainstream theories have emerged to describe American public opinion toward Middle Eastern affairs: an approach built on general ethnocentrism and an approach built on targeted stereotyping. Rather than adjudicating between those two approaches, my theoretical perspective will synthesize them.

*Ethnocentrism*

One approach to explaining the foundations of American support for anti-terrorism policies focuses on the influence of *ethnocentrism*. Ordinary Americans were more likely to support the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as President Bush’s handling of those wars, if they exhibited ethnocentric attitudes (Kam and Kinder 2007). In this research, ethnocentrism is defined as a broad worldview guided by the “commonplace inclination to
divide the world into ingroups and outgroups, [where] the former [are] characterized by virtuosity and talent, the latter by corruption and mediocrity” (Kam and Kinder 2007). That is, if you think your in-groups stand out in a positive way, or you think other out-groups stand out in a negative way, then you are more likely to support actions against people of from the latter groups. The researchers believe this ethnocentric impulse applies to support for the War on Terror:

“To most Americans, the adversaries in this war are unfamiliar. They come from far away and exotic places. Their language, religion, customs, and sheer physical appearance: all of it is strange. And after 9/11, not just strange, but sinister. Americans who are generally predisposed to ethnocentrism...should be especially likely to lend their support to the new war on terrorism” (2007: 323).

Think of an ordinary American citizen. Let’s suppose the citizen rates in-groups – such as the citizen’s own racial and religious groups – very highly and has warmer feelings toward members of those groups compared to outsiders. According to the authors, the strange and shadowy enemy in the war on terrorism, from far away and exotic lands, should present this individual with a particularly appealing target for out-group hostility. Kam and Kinder (2007) indeed find evidence that their measure of the ethnocentric predisposition predicts support for several policies related to the “new war on terrorism,” including increased spending on Homeland Security, border control, and defense, as well as support for military action in Iraq. The authors’ empirical evidence is thought-provoking, especially considering that their findings are robust when accounting for a wide array of political dispositions and demographic factors that might influence support for military action (e.g., partisanship, perceptions of the state of the economy, etc.).
Targeted Stereotyping

Sides and Gross (2013), on the other hand, focus on a much more proximate cause: targeted stereotyping. They suggest that ordinary Americans rely on their specific anti-Muslim stereotypes – in particular, that Muslims are “violent” – when forming judgments of support for the wars in the Middle East. According to the authors, the media climate portrays potential enemies in the Middle East as barbaric and violent – a perception that shapes foreign-policy attitudes (Sides and Gross 2013). Their quantitative analysis confirms the relationship between anti-Muslim views and support for military intervention in the Middle East, a pattern that is robust even when accounting for other political factors that might explain respondent preferences toward Middle East policy.

This thesis will synthesize the stereotyping explanation with the preceding, and arguably competing, ethnocentrism explanation. In doing so, I advance several key arguments that come together to form a new account of American support for the use of military force in the Middle East. They are sketched out briefly below, then elaborated in Chapter Three.

A New Account of Support for the Use of Military Force in the Middle East

The first step taken in this research is to explore previous accounts of American support for the use of military force in the Middle East. I do so by revisiting the foundational group-threat and social-identity theories that are central to both the ethnocentrism and stereotype explanations. Through this undertaking, I develop a theory that could explain the rise of out-group hostility (or an ethnocentric response) toward Muslims. The theory may be summarized in this way: Someone will exhibit an
ethnocentric response toward Muslims (e.g., support for the use of military force against a majority-Muslim country) when anti-Muslim stereotypes combine with an individuals’ in-group identity to result in perceived threat. In other words, I differ from accounts that emphasize either generalized ethnocentrism or specific stereotypes about Muslims, because my theory links the two as part of a subconscious causal process. I elaborate on this thinking in Chapter Three.

After outlining this cognitive process, my research turns to asking why these idea elements might become linked for some people but not others – because that is the key to explaining when individuals will be more prone to adopt an ethnocentric response. Social identity research traces differential in-group identity attachments to an individual’s personal background and experiences. It logically follows that two people with differing in-group identity attachments might view outsiders in different ways, with some perceiving them as threatening while others do not (Huddy and Khatib 2007; Theiss-Morse 2009; Masuoka and Junn 2013). This logic guides the development of my second key argument in Chapter Three: Because whites and blacks often have differing life experiences in the United States, Muslims are more likely to be perceived as a threat by whites, and as a result, whites are more prone than blacks to exhibit an ethnocentric response toward Muslims.

For American whites, Muslims are uniquely situated to be perceived as realistic and symbolic cultural threats to their core national identity attachments – because they may differ from other Americans in terms of ethnicity, culture, language, and religion.\(^5\) Biased media coverage of issues in the Middle East reinforces this perceived threat by portraying

\(^5\) In a similar vein, Shryock (2013) posits that Islamophobia is more than fear and hatred of Muslims; rather it is grounded in the vagueness of our hegemonic models of what it means to be an American and how our national identities are formed.
Muslims as violent, emphasizing cultural differences, and encouraging Americans to evaluate Muslims in terms of such cultural dissimilarity. Even worse, biased media coverage also tends to espouse the idea that Muslims are hell-bent on conquering the West and imposing their religion and culture on Americans.

On the other hand, I argue that Muslims present little identity threat to blacks, whose core in-group identity typically revolves around their status as a racial minority in the United States. Even blacks who strongly identify with the United States – a commonality with white Americans – will not view Islam as somehow incompatible with their national identity because black membership with the nation is typically not preconditioned on looking, believing, or worshipping “like me.” Absent such a rigid understanding of national identity, I argue that blacks should be less likely than whites to view Muslims as a threat.

To recap, my theory of Asymmetric Ethnocentric Response (AER) posits that (1) differing core identity attachments will cause whites and blacks to experience different levels of perceived threat, and (2) because they differ in how threatened they feel, whites will be far more likely than blacks to support the use of military force in the Middle East – or, more generally, the killing of Muslims. I will test observable implications of this theory rigorously in the chapters to come, including empirical investigations of support for allowing Syrian refugees into the United States and of support for various policies to deter Iranian nuclear development. In each case, my analyses find compelling evidence supporting AER theory.
Isolating Anti-Muslim Impulses from Anti-Terrorist Impulses

So far, I have discussed how different constructs operate together in cognition to produce ethnocentric response, but my focus on Muslims as the target group of ethnocentric response has been consistent. Understandably, this reflects a general trend in political science research: Given the constant challenges the U.S. military faces abroad and constant political debate over the Middle East, few would dispute the importance of understanding the factors that shape American public opinion about those issues. However, by only investigating public opinion about issues concerning Muslims and Islamist terrorism, researchers run the risk of confounding what they are measuring: attitudes about terrorism or attitudes about Muslims. The next step of this research is to address that issue.

The narrow focus on Muslims and Islamist terrorism in the literature derives, in part, from the skewness and negativity of media coverage of Muslims: Most Americans do not have accessible considerations of non-Islamist groups because they typically are not exposed to news about these groups, even though groups operating outside of the Middle East also commit acts of terror against U.S. installations, troops, and citizens. In fact, groups like the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in Central Africa use terror tactics very similar to those employed by Islamist groups like ISIS, such as: kidnapping, rape, sex trading, and murder. Perhaps as a result of selective news coverage, political scientists typically do not investigate attitudes about non-Islamist groups like the LRA. My dissertation will probe how ordinary Americans would react to such groups if actually exposed to them, to understand the differences in how Americans think about Islam and terrorism.
After carefully considering news coverage of terrorism and extant research on stereotype processes, I develop a third key argument (explicated in Chapter Five): The same cognitive processes and stereotype generalizations that characterize how Americans, particularly whites, think about Muslims also shape how they think about terrorism. Whereas I expect that it is difficult for many ordinary Americans to think about Muslims without thinking about terrorism and violence, I contend that many also evaluate terrorist threats relative to their anti-Muslim attitudes. In other words, I expect that stereotype generalizations about Muslims lead white Americans to perceive threat from Islamists and justify the use of military force against them, in addition to leading white Americans to perceive a greater threat from Islamists and to be more likely to justify the use of lethal force against them relative to non-Islamist groups. I find evidence in an original survey experiment supporting this argument: When subjects are exposed to news about terrorism, they are more likely to support the use of force against Islamist groups compared to non-Islamist groups. I also find that support for the use of military force against Islamists is substantively and significantly higher among whites compared to blacks. The take-home point is that ordinary Americans’ perceptions of and reactions to terrorism operate in a “tunnel vision of terrorism,” wherein they are structured first and foremost by anti-Muslim attitudes.

Shifting the Tide

So far, I have outlined my arguments, and later provide evidence, that anti-Muslim stereotypes exert strong influence on support for the use of military force against Iran and restrictive policies toward Syrian refugees, as well as shape how ordinary Americans evaluate and form judgments of support for the use of force against terror groups. These
cumulative findings motivate my fourth and final argument (Chapter Six): Anti-Muslim stereotypes that individuals bring to bear when evaluating issues concerning Muslims or foreign policy in the Middle East can be shifted. I make this argument after careful consideration of research on media framing and mass media effects, which suggests that strategic issue frames can shift considerations of issues and public opinion when they emphasize strong and credible arguments (Chong and Druckman 2007b).  

I apply these insights to explain how real-world elite framing of the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis shapes public support for allowing refugees into the United States. After constructing frames from statements made in debates and speeches during the 2016 Presidential Election, I expect and find compelling evidence that strong issue frames emphasizing the obligations of American identity, such as helping others in need, can shift anti-refugee opponents to a moderate position. Similarly, by developing an original issue frame that advocates for allowing Syrian refugees into the United States by emphasizing factual counterstereotype-affirming information, I investigate how exposure to this type of information would influence opinion surrounding the Syrian refugee issue if it were part of the elite debate. I expect and find compelling evidence that strong counterstereotype-affirming narratives produce similar moderating influences on negativity toward Syrian refugees underwritten by anti-Muslim attitudes.

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6 Throughout this project, I use the terms “framing” and “framing effects.” Frames are strategic alterations to the presentation (e.g., words, titles, etc.) of news or information intended to influence opinion about the subject matter (Chong and Druckman 2007a). Framing effects, then, refer to changes in opinion that result from changes in the presentation of an issue and the considerations of an issue on which the presentation of the issue focuses and bring to mind (Chong and Druckman 2007a).
Contributions

This dissertation does not only contribute to scholarship through the theoretical refinements it offers. The specific empirical explorations in later chapters contribute both to political science and (at least potentially) to public discourse in more immediate ways as well. I end the introduction by outlining what those contributions will be.

This research offers a theoretically-grounded schematic for how stereotypes, identity construction, and other group-based attitudes operate together cognitively to shape public opinion. In Chapters Three and Four, I employ an appropriate and feasible method – structural equation modeling – to investigate how these related idea elements structure support for the use of military force to deter Iranian nuclear development. In Chapters Five and Six, I employ similar methods to investigate how these related idea elements structure: 1) support for the use of preemptive military force against Islamist and non-Islamist anti-U.S. terrorist groups that threaten the United States; and, 2) opposition to allowing Syrian refugees to enter the United States.

Although this research focuses on a specific topic – how anti-Muslim stereotypes shape American foreign-policy preferences – both the theoretical and methodological developments herein offer leverage to scholars endeavoring to understand more broadly how group-oriented idea elements and identity attitudes can shape public opinion. It applies to numerous issue domains – not just other areas of foreign policy, but also immigration issues, racial issues, LGBT issues, and so on.

While this research investigates American public opinion, it also makes contributions to research on American foreign policymaking and theory in international relations. While I am not the first to suggest that anti-Muslim stereotypes structure support
for the use of American military might in the Middle East, or the idea that this process is part of a larger system of perpetual bias-driven warfare (Said 1978; Kumar 2012; Little 2016), the current research does provide several pieces of evidence that corroborate the theorized linkages between anti-Muslim stereotypes and support for the use of American military force in the Middle East. This research also divulges important nuances about specific actors propagating the cycle of anti-Muslim attitudes, warfare, and terrorism: Anti-Muslim stereotypes are more likely to be held by American whites, compared to blacks, and these biases tend to shape whites’ preferences for anti-Muslim policies and the use of military force against Muslims rather than diplomacy.

Together, my empirical findings and the broader scholarship on “Orientalism” – or the notion that American hegemonic worldviews and cultural biases fuel support for militarism – are also useful in explaining over thirty years of U.S. intervention in the Middle East. This contribution offers some perspective to theories about rivalries in the international relations literature. International relations scholars typically conceptualize rivalries as prolonged interstate disputes that tend to arise from competition over materials, resources, or territory (Goertz and Diehl 1993, 1995; Hensel, Goertz, and Diehl 2000; Klein, Goertz, and Diehl 2006). This framework is limited insofar as its ability to help us understand consistent conflict between states in an entire region (i.e., the Middle East) and a much larger, geographically-distant state (i.e., the United States). However, the theory and findings advanced herein, and the broader discussion on American Orientalism, explain how cultural biases shape an enduring conflict of the grandest scale: the perpetual U.S.-Middle East rivalry.
The findings from my Syrian refugee framing experiment offer important contributions, both academic and practical. From an academic perspective, my experiment provides evidence on behalf of existing framing theory by replicating outcomes observed in studies of how issue frames shift opinion in other policy domains (Chong and Druckman 2007b). On a practical level, the results imply that journalists, media elites, and public officials – by describing issues in unbiased ways – could disrupt the perpetual cycle of American military interventions, retaliatory terrorism, and resulting anti-Muslim stereotype generalizations.

Recognition of how framing matters could become particularly useful when considering recent research that sheds light on why news coverage of foreign conflict is so biased. A recent study of news coverage of the Arab Spring from 113 countries finds that biased reporting of foreign armed conflict is often a reflection of political context (Baum and Zhokov 2015). In market-based democracies like the United States, reports of armed conflict tend to focus on what sells: the sensational, the dramatic, and major events that typically correspond with casualties of war (Baum and Zhokov 2015). What this means is that most of the issue coverage from the Middle East focuses on catastrophes and casualties, and Americans understand that such events usually were caused by Muslims and sometimes targeted Americans. They do not hear reports that distinguish between terrorists and ordinary citizens, or how terrorist ideologies distort what the Quran says. They do not understand that “Islamic extremism” is a fringe political movement, not merely a religious belief system. Alongside research that helps us understand why typical news coverage of American interventions in the Middle East might excite anti-Muslim attitudes, the current project offers empirically-grounded evidence of how journalists and
elites can report on issues in ways that mitigate the influences that anti-Muslim stereotypes have on Americans’ (particularly whites) preferences for ethnocentric policies in the Middle East and on discrimination Muslim-Americans face here at home (O’Connor and Jahan 2014; Green 2017; Collingwood, Lajevardi and Oskooi 2018).7

Conclusion

At a normative level, it is troublesome that unfounded biases about Islam are generalized to billions of its practitioners, such that those biases can exert a strong influence on American public opinion and policy preferences. In fact, large proportions of Muslims in many countries have favorable attitudes toward Americans and Western culture and they loathe violence and terrorism undertaken by terror groups like ISIS (Tessler 2003; Blaydes and Linzer 2012; Gerges 2016). What is worse is that whites typically make up 70% of the electorate and even larger proportions of opinion polls, and they form the vast bulk of the Republican electorate, meaning that often there is opportunity for these anti-Muslim biases to dominate national leadership and policymaking. To put it another way: It is bad enough that so many Americans harbor unfounded vitriol toward Muslims, but the worse reality is that so much unfounded vitriol can enter the foreign policymaking process and shape how and when the U.S. military is deployed: This can only serve as fuel to the perpetual cycle of intervention, terrorism, and stereotypes (Iftikhar 2016). Although the primary purpose of this research is to make scientific contributions to the research literature, I hope that in the long run these scientific insights help lay the groundwork for

7 On the latter point, a recent study by the Pew Research Center finds evidence that anti-Muslim assaults and anti-Muslim intimidation in recent years surpassed 2001 levels (Kishi 2017), despite 92% of sampled Muslim Americans expressing proudness to be an American (Lipka 2017).
breaking that perpetual cycle, a development that would represent change on a moral level in addition to an academic one.
Chapter Three - Anti-Muslim Stereotypes: Asymmetric Ethnocentric Response across Race and the Political Potential of Affirming Counterstereotypes

The central goal of this chapter is to provide theoretical clarity to extant accounts of American support for the use of military force in the Middle East – specifically, those emphasizing the roles of anti-Muslim stereotypes and ethnocentrism. The first milestone on the way to that goal is to illuminate how stereotypes and ethnocentrism operate together in the subconscious mind and how we can measure this cognitive process. Later, this research applies that cognitive map to understand how anti-Muslim stereotypes and other related idea elements help predict opinions about Iranian nuclear development, policies toward terrorism, and the Syrian refugee crisis.

Reaching the first milestone of disentangling stereotypes and ethnocentrism requires two important steps:

1) **Theoretical**: Presentation of a working definition of ethnocentric response that links in-group identity to out-group hate, resulting from perceived threat that can produce an ethnocentric response toward outsiders (Brewer 2001);

2) **Research Design**: Formulation of a structural equation modeling strategy to help draw a schematic for these linkages and explain how they shape public opinion (Hoyle 1995; Kline 1998; de Carvahlo and Chima 2014).

Different explanations for how stereotypes and consequent out-group hostility might arise lead to different observable implications within survey data. In particular, the United States includes an African-American minority that might resist some forms of ethnocentric response while being susceptible to others. The second milestone to reach on the way to theoretical clarity, therefore, requires developing a more nuanced understanding of how the intensity of anti-Muslim stereotypes can have differential implications across
American racial groups. I offer a theory of Asymmetric Ethnocentric Response (AER) to explain how anti-Muslim stereotypes and ethnocentric response could become linked for American whites but not for American blacks. This distinction may not show up in a simple analysis of policy preferences, because whites comprise the largest single group within opinion-poll samples. However, that distinction could matter for public policy. Whites form the vast bulk of the Republican electorate, so depending on electoral outcomes, these negative perspectives might dominate national leadership. The core hypotheses of the AER theory are:

- Muslims are more likely to be perceived as threatening (expressed as stereotypes) by whites compared to blacks;
- Whites are more likely than blacks to politicize this sense of threat by supporting the use of military force against Muslims.

The next objective of this research is to put the AER theory through rigorous empirical testing. Much of the analysis in the next two chapters focuses on understanding how anti-Muslim stereotypes among whites and blacks shape support for the use of military force in the Middle East. In Chapter Four, I investigate predictors that might shape support for the use of military force intended to deter alleged Iranian nuclear weapons development; in Chapter Five, I do the same to predict support for preemptively striking Islamist terror groups. The AER theory also helps to explain the deleterious effects that anti-Muslim stereotypes have on whites’ support for allowing embattled Syrians to seek haven in the United States, as presented in Chapter Six.

The final, and perhaps most important, objective is to provide an explanation for how journalists can promote narratives that would mitigate the influence that anti-Muslim stereotypes have on American policy preferences. Perhaps shifting issue frames also would
shift public opinion about an on-going political issue in the Middle East? I develop a theory to explain why frames that target considerations or ideas with which consumers of political news are familiar, understand, and deem relevant to a given political issue would be most likely to influence public opinion. In Chapter Six, I test that possibility using the example of the Syrian refugee crisis. The take-home point is that journalists can appeal to the obligations of American identity (e.g., helping others) and can emphasize factual counterstereotypes of Muslims to mitigate the role that misguided biases play in perpetuating cycles of intervention, terrorism, and stereotypes.

Throughout every part of this project, the consistent conclusion is that ideas of threat, stereotypes, and identity are the prime considerations that ordinary Americans bring to bear when thinking about issues in the Middle East and concerning Muslims. News coverage that accentuates those fears increases endorsement of the use of force; framing that accentuates other considerations can deflate that preference. In the following section, I embark on the central goal of this chapter: understanding and reconciling extant accounts of how anti-Muslim stereotypes and ethnocentrism encourage support for the use of military force in the Middle East.

**Ethnocentrism, Anti-Muslim Stereotypes, and Middle East Policy Preferences**

Two rival approaches attempt to explain why Americans support using military force in the Middle East. Both draw on group-identity theory, just as my approach will. The first account maintains that *ethnocentrism* – defined therein as a general propensity to favor one’s in-groups and to dislike out-groups – exerted strong influence on support for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Kam and Kinder 2007; Kinder and Kam 2009).
Americans predisposed to ethnocentrism find Muslims, in particular, to be appealing targets because they are typically associated with strange lands, cultures, and a strange religion – making it easy to define them as an out-group and carry that negative predisposition over to foreign policy preferences. Kam and Kinder (2007) find strong evidence supporting their theory, using multiple policy measures related to the “new war on terrorism,” including: increased spending on Homeland Security, border control, and defense, as well as support for military action in Iraq.

The second account proposes that specific stereotypes of Muslims (e.g., as violent) are powerful predictors of support for the use of military force in the Middle East (Sides and Gross 2013). The crux of this argument is that specific anti-Muslim stereotypes speak directly to public attitudes about Middle Eastern affairs, thereby predicting policy preferences independent of broader orientations toward in-groups and out-groups. Sides and Gross assert that decades of biased media coverage have made anti-Muslim stereotypes readily accessible considerations that many ordinary Americans can and do apply to their judgments of support for foreign policies in the Middle East. This coverage could shape the opinions of people with no special predilection for ethnocentric thinking.

These studies, although using different canvases, both paint clear pictures tracing political opinion to group-based attitudes. However, they disagree as to how specific stereotypes and group attitudes are linked cognitively. Stripping down to the essentials, the first approach emphasizes generalized group attitudes (which they call “ethnocentrism”) as a driving cause, while the second emphasizes specific group attitudes (stereotypes). One of my contributions will be to explore how specific stereotypes produce ethnocentrism. In doing so, however, I will make a second contribution, which is to specify
more clearly what ethnocentrism is and, therefore, how ethnocentrism ought to be measured. Finally, neither approach focuses on the question of whether the dynamic they describe might function differently among various groups of individuals, leaving open the possibility that a diverse survey sample would obscure some of the effects they wish to examine. Thus, differentiating racial groups will be a third contribution to extant literature.

**Ethnocentrism**

Recent studies by Kinder and Kam rejuvenated research on the political implications of ethnocentrism (2009; Kam and Kinder 2007; 2012). To recap, the authors define ethnocentrism as the commonplace inclination to divide the world into virtuous in-groups and contemptuous out-groups. Their research provides convincing evidence of the role that generalized group attitudes play in shaping public opinion about several contentious issues (e.g., candidate choice, gay rights, foreign aid spending, immigration, and support for the war on terror). There is no mistaking the impact of their research: As of this writing, their cumulative research on ethnocentrism has been cited a total of 785 times by other investigations (Google Scholar 2019).

**Some Conceptual Issues**

Despite the popularity of this research agenda, however, scholars still lack a universal definition and measurement of ethnocentrism. Some conceptualize ethnocentrism as *in-group bias* (Hammond and Axelrod 2006) or *out-group negativity* (Pettigrew et al. 1998), while others argue that ethnocentrism arises at the intersection of both (Sumner 1906; Kinder and Kam 2009). Brewer (1999; 2001; 2010), who popularized
group- and social-identity theory, ultimately takes issue with all three approaches: She asserts that generalized group attitudes are not alone a sufficient explanation for hostility. For example, individuals can be prideful about their in-groups without necessarily hating outsiders (or the reverse). In another example, individuals might rate out-groups lower than their in-groups, but that does not necessarily mean they want to engage in hostilities or violence toward specific outsiders. In light of these possibilities, Brewer would argue that equating in-group bias, or a gap in the favoritism shown to the in-group as compared to the out-group, with hostile ethnocentrism is theoretically suspect.

Defining Ethnocentric Response

How, then, can we reconcile all these different approaches to the study of ethnocentrism? Two sets of studies help us better understand the cognitive process that produces ethnocentrism and provide a framework that can be used to develop expectations about the factors and contexts that might produce ethnocentrism. These studies are discussed here and will guide my own research throughout this dissertation.

First, digging deeper into Brewer’s work helps with the important theoretical task of defining ethnocentrism. Researchers have to consider when a specific out-group presents a threat (or is perceived as a threat) to in-group identity, resulting in hostility toward that out-group (what I will call the ethnocentric response). She summarizes that:

“Understanding the relationship between in-group identification and outgroup hostility requires understanding how the interests of the ingroup and those of the outgroup come to be perceived as in conflict...we need to reconsider the fundamental motivations underlying ingroup attachment and the path from in-group identity to outgroup threat” (underline emphasis added; Brewer 2001: 28).
Brewer is not the only one to suggest the important role that (perceived) threat plays in linking in-group attachment to out-group hostility. Nor is she the first to recognize that in-group attitudes and out-group attitudes can vary independently of each other. For example, Berry (1984) argues that an in-group favoritism based on a sense of confidence and security in one’s group identity could generate an attitude of tolerance and acceptance toward out-groups, whereas out-group intolerance might be engendered by threats to one’s social identity. Kam and Kinder (2007) also recognize that ethnocentrism alone did not fuel their results. Rather, perceptions of threat – and, in particular, fear of terrorism – arose among the American public after 9/11 and activated that ethnocentrism. What I will add to those background insights is an attempt to specify the cognitive calculus that converts that perceived threat from terrorism into support for the use of military force against Muslims.

What Kind of Threat? Who Has a Stake in It?

To this end, a second set of research builds on Brewer’s advice and provides additional theoretical guidelines that will direct my investigation. Cumulatively, research by Stephan and Stephan (2013) and Voss (1996a; 1996b; 2000; 2001) suggests that understanding intergroup conflict requires digging deeper than simply treating out-group prejudice as a purely psychological reaction that is universal across members of an in-group. Such an approach would be naïve, Voss would argue, because psychological reactions to outsiders often derive from perceived threats that have rational or materialist roots and, therefore, understanding these reactions requires investigating how “any given divide is arranged politically, economically, culturally, and geographically” (2000: 298,
305). Simply, good research should evaluate: 1) what is presumed to be threatened; and, therefore 2) who has a stake in it.

Stephan and Stephan (2013), who popularized *integrated threat theory*, provide a framework that helps with these two objectives. The authors explain that there are four basic types of threats that might lead a group to be prejudiced toward another group. The authors’ framework distinguishes types of threat based on the consequences presumed by the in-group:

- **Realistic threats**: Threats to the very existence of the in-group (e.g., warfare), the political and economic power of the in-group, and/or to the physical or material well-being of the in-group or its members.
- **Symbolic threats**: Symbolic threats primarily involve perceived group differences in morals, values, standards, beliefs, and attitudes. Symbolic threats are threats to the worldview of the in-group.
- **Intergroup anxiety**: Intergroup anxiety arises when people feel personally threatened in intergroup interactions because they are concerned about negative outcomes for the self, such as being embarrassed, rejected, or ridiculed.
- **Negative stereotypes**: Almost all out-group stereotypes embody threats to the in-group because one of the functions of stereotypes is to serve as a basis for expectations concerning the behavior of the members of the stereotyped group.

In their empirical investigations, both Stephan and Stephan (2013) and Voss (1996a; 1996b; 2000; 2001) find evidence supporting the nuances of group-threat and prejudice about which they theorize. Stephan and Stephan (2013) apply the integrated threat framework in a series of path analyses and structural equation models – similar to the models I construct in Chapter Four – and find that each of the different types of perceived threats play significant roles in shaping prejudice toward the same out-groups, across a variety of contexts, including: American whites’ attitudes toward beneficiaries of affirmative action, Mexicans’ attitudes toward Americans and vice versa, Spaniards’
attitudes toward Moroccan immigrants, Israelis’ attitudes toward Russian immigrants, and Americans’ attitudes toward immigrants in the United States. On each of these issues, some individuals’ prejudicial impulses toward an out-group are guided by perceived realistic and symbolic threats to their in-group, while others’ are guided by stereotypes and anxiety. The main takeaway is that, though perceptions of threat tend to produce similar prejudicial attitudes toward outsiders, the presumed consequences that shape those perceptions are hardly uniform. Simply, perceptions of threat and prejudicial attitudes are not universal ideas that operate in a cognitive vacuum. Those who are inclined toward prejudice usually have different rational bases for their attitudes.

Voss’ and his colleagues’ empirical research challenges an “old hypothesis” about race relations in the South (1996a; 1996b; 2000; 2001; Voss and Lublin 2000, 2001; Voss and Miller 2001). That “old hypothesis” argues that whites who live in racially heterogeneous areas in the South are more likely to perceive political and economic threats from blacks and, thus, are more likely to vote for candidates who would presumably preserve white superiority (e.g., segregationists) (Key 1949; Blalock 1967; Giles and Buckner 1993). Voss and his co-authors, however, expect that racially conservative attitudes in the South are not uniform but, rather, have been shaped over time by cultural and geographic factors.

On the one hand, Voss argues that “improving civil rights and economic changes” afforded to blacks during the Civil Rights Movement have shifted racial conflict from that described by earlier studies (2000: 300). He argues that, in urban areas, blacks have come to share political and economic demands with their white neighbors rather than pose a threat to them. Indeed, after analyzing data at the precinct, county, state legislative, and
congressional district levels – across four southern states – Voss and his co-authors consistently find evidence that the “white backlash” effect has reversed in the urban landscape (1996a; 1996b; 2000; 2001; Voss and Lublin 2000, 2001; Voss and Miller 2001).8

On the other hand, Voss also expects and finds evidence that white racial conservatism still thrives in rural areas. Voss argues that predominantly white suburbs and rural areas feature a middle-class subculture that is idiosyncratic to the South and generally at odds with minorities, especially when they reside close enough to appear threatening but not close enough to for cultural exchange (2000: 4). An exogenous shock to that way of life – such as an affirmative action program that introduces black workers to an area where they were previously absent – would therefore be more likely to discomfit the rural white compared to the urban white (Voss 2000: 301-302). The rural white would likely perceive the program as a symbolic threat to his or her culture norms and way of life, based on the stereotypes that blacks violate traditional values such as self-reliance, work ethic, and discipline (Kinder and Sears 1981; Ledford 2018). In these rural areas, where ignorance trumps knowledge and outweighs any tolerance promoted by intergroup contact, the perceived cultural threat is more likely to guide a racially conservative response toward blacks and, thus, toward the program.

8 For a specific example, Voss (1996a) finds that whites living in racially heterogeneous Louisiana parishes were no more likely than those living in less-diverse locales to support former Ku Klux Klansman David Duke in three early-1990s campaigns for statewide office.
Putting it All Together: Identity Formation across Race in the United States

As I unpack my arguments and expectations, a key goal will be to explain how different types of perceived threat might lead ordinary Americans to develop negative attitudes toward Muslims and lead them to justify ethnocentric policy preferences – including the use of military force – against Muslims or majority-Muslim countries. Rather than assuming that perceptions of threat from Muslims and consequent ethnocentric reactions to Muslims are purely psychological reactions that are universal among Americans, I will be paying careful attention – like Brewer, Stephan and Stephan, and Voss et al. – to why and among whom perceptions of threat from Muslims are likely to develop.

To recap, the cognitive process theorized in social identity research maintains that mere in-group positivity is not a sufficient explanation for active hostility against an out-group: Antipathy toward a specific out-group becomes linked to in-group identity through a perception of threat that may arise from political, economic, or cultural sources (Voss 2000; Brewer 2001; Stephan and Stephan 2013). The individual must believe that outsiders threaten their interests, goals, values, group cohesion, or even their very existence (Brewer 2001). They will develop negative stereotypes about the out-group as a method of counteracting that perceived threat, and armed with those hostile stereotypes, they will exhibit a willingness to engage in intergroup conflict: a willingness that, when expressed in survey data, I will call the “ethnocentric response.”

I apply these insights to develop expectations about how this cognitive process produces ethnocentric response toward Muslims. I also rely on insights from the race-relations literature discussed above and research on the identity politics of immigration – focused on explaining how identity and threat intersect to shape attitudes about Latinos and
immigration – to guide theory development and expectations as I investigate how parallel
cognitive processes shape attitudes about Muslims and foreign policy in the Middle East.

To aid my theoretical discussion, I develop a map (Figure 3.1) of the hypothesized
causal patterns between threat, identity attachments, and ethnocentric response toward
Muslims. Later, in Chapter Four, I embed that cognitive map within a structural equation
model (SEM) and apply it to data collected during the 2012 American National Election
Study about American preferences for policies intended to deter Iranian nuclear
development. Two characteristics make the Iranian nuclear issue a suitable test of the
expectations I develop:

1) Iran is an Islamic theocracy and Muslims make up over 99% of its population, and;

2) The prospect of a nuclear Iran is a salient and potentially threatening issue for
many ordinary Americans.

Put those two features together, and Iran becomes an ideal case for investigating the
linkages between anti-Muslim stereotypes and foreign-policy opinion, allowing those
stereotypes are likely at work in shaping policy preferences.

Two issues concerning the coming statistical models are important to note here. First, I do not assume causal directions, contrary to the impression my map might give: I will test them. Specifically, although the models are specified in a way that assumes a causal or structural flow of attitudes, from each level down to the next, it will allow for the possibility that structural relationships may have a feedback loop. For example, authoritarianism increases the likelihood that one forms core identity attachments, but those attachments in turn might give rise to more authoritarian tendencies.
Second, the actual statistical models to come will include control variables not portrayed in the map outlining my theoretical narrative. Specifically, I account for the likelihood that certain exogenous demographic and societal factors may influence important outcomes in the model. For example, education and attention to politics likely decrease generalized out-group negativity, as individuals learn about and become more tolerant of outsiders (Solt 2011). Also, differences in expressions of anti-Muslim stereotypes and “ethnocentric expressions” might emerge as a function of whether respondents were interviewed via the internet or face-to-face; it is possible that those who were interviewed in person gave socially desirable responses compared to those interviewed online. Finally, I account for the likelihood that men are less reluctant than women to deploy the use of military force for political purposes (Conover and Sapiro 1993). Later models can control for exogenous influences such as those resulting from gender, education, attention to politics, and survey mode. To start us off, however, Figure 3.1 offers a map of the causal patterns I will be describing.
Figure 3.1 | Theoretical and Operational Approaches in Extant Research on Ethnocentrism

**Previous Approaches**

*Variables in Single-Dimension Approaches*

- In-Group Bias + Authoritarianism  →  Public Opinion
- Out-Group Negativity + Authoritarianism  →  Public Opinion

*Variables in E-Scale Approach* (e.g., Kinder and Kam 2009)

- (In-Group Rating – Out-Group Rating) + Authoritarianism  →  Public Opinion

*Multiple Variables Approach* (e.g., Sides and Gross 2013)

- Ethnocentrism + Authoritarianism + Stereotypes  →  Public Opinion

**New Structural Approach**

[Diagram showing relationships between variables such as Authoritarianism, Base Personality Orientation, Patriotism, National Identity, Linked Fate, Ideology, In-Group Favorability, Out-Group Negativity, Intergroup Preference, Activated Hostile Stereotypes, Policy Preference (e.g., support use of military force), and Ethnocentric Response.]

Base Personality Orientation
Core Identity Attachments
Intergroup Attitudes
Perceived Threat
Ethnocentric Response
Base Personality Orientation: Authoritarianism

Cognitive factors shape the strength and content of in-group identity attachments. In particular, extant research suggests that a base personality orientation toward authoritarianism – a rigid need for order that develops early in life – serves as a fundamental backdrop for group identity (Adorno et al. 1950; Stenner 2005; Feldman and Stenner 2007; Hetherington and Weiler 2009, 2018). As individuals’ social and political worlds become more important and complex with age, authoritarians will sort themselves into social in-groups that achieve, maintain, and affirm the understanding of order developed during their formative years (Adorno et al. 1950; Stenner 2005; Hetherington and Weiler 2009, 2018). I include authoritarianism at the top of my cognitive schematic to illustrate my expectation that attachments to the nation, the racial group, and the political group all should be stronger among authoritarians than among those who tolerate a messier social situation (Huddy and Khatib 2007; Osborne, Milojev, and Sibley 2017). Therefore, at the top of the “New Structural Approach” in Figure 3.1, authoritarianism is specified as a predictor of the strength of core in-group identity attachments.

**Hypothesis 4.1:** Authoritarianism will predict stronger core identity attachments.

Core Identity Attachments: National ID, Patriotism, Linked Fate, and Political Ideology

Social-identity research consistently roots group-based attitudes in core attachments to the nation, the country, the racial or ethnic group, and the political group (whether defined by party or ideology). Absent a strong sense of those groups existing as meaningful constructs, an individual would struggle to develop loyalty toward or stereotypes about the categories in question. Here, I consider how different individuals
develop loyalties to those categories, with the ultimate goal of explaining how these ideas shape perceptions of Muslims.

*National identity* (i.e., the subjective or internalized sense of belonging to a nation) and *symbolic patriotism* (i.e., pride in being a citizen of a country) are not as distinct in the United States as they are when relatively unified ethnic or tribal groups span country borders. Nevertheless, both represent expressions of group awareness that ordinary Americans might use to orient themselves when relating to others on a global scale (Huddy and Khatib 2007; Theiss-Morse 2009; Wong 2010). They can define social groups as being part of the nation or not, good for the country or not.

*Racial linked fate* is an expression of group awareness reflecting the perception that one’s own life chances depend heavily on the status and fortunes of the racial group as a whole. Such a perception leads individuals to substitute racial group utility for individual utility in political and social decision-making (Dawson 1994; Gay, Hochschild, and White 2016).

This stage in the cognitive model serves as the basis for my belief that blacks and whites will behave dissimilarly in an empirical analysis. Attachment to the country or to the racial group can be important sources of identity and belonging for white and black Americans, but the strength and conceptualization of these identities differ quite a bit across race (de la Garza, Falcon, and Garcia 1996; Citrin et al. 2007; Huddy and Khatib 2007; Masuoka and Junn 2013). For example, whites are far more likely than blacks to express their in-group identities vis-à-vis national attachments and to place very strict conditions on membership in the group: For many whites, to be an American means (implicitly if not explicitly) to be white and English-speaking; their racial identity is
subsumed by their identification with the country and/or nation. The connection between that identification and authoritarian tendencies therefore should be strongest among whites.

On the other hand, race has been the predominant factor in the African-American experience. Black political and social homogeneity derives from their historical and contemporary lack of status within the broader American nation, which has resulted in disadvantage and discrimination that the country has been slow to redress (Dawson 1994; Gay, Hochschild, and White 2016). Their relationship to the country or the nation quite rightly might be ambivalent. Blacks are more likely to express their social identities in terms of racial linked fate. If authoritarianism is going to prompt a black respondent to express a strong group identity, it would be more likely to manifest itself as a perception of in-group linked fate, and it is the presence or absence of that core identity among black respondents that should shape policy preferences. The most obvious influence of racial identity on black political homogeneity – put another way, how a perceived linked fate unites blacks – is partisan identification: Over 80% of blacks identify with or lean toward the Democratic Party, an identification that spans education levels and economic classes. Johnson (2015) summarizes the important role that attachments to the racial group play in structuring political attitudes and opinions among blacks:

“Linked fate, in a political context, suggests that black voters approach elections with one simple question: Which candidate is better for the African American population? The analysis begins at the most fundamental level by ascertaining which party or candidate is most likely to protect civil rights and support equal access to economic opportunity for blacks. Everything else is secondary. For example, a politician’s stance on renewable energy, free market economics, abortion, immigration, national debt, and role of the military in regional conflicts all pale in comparison to basic considerations of liberty.”
**Hypothesis 4.1a:** The connection between authoritarianism and national identity and symbolic patriotism will be stronger among whites compared to blacks.

**Hypothesis 4.1b:** The connection between authoritarianism and racial linked fate will be stronger among blacks compared to whites.

**Intergroup Attitudes: In-Group Favoritism, Out-Group Negativity, and Intergroup Preference**

The next step along this theoretical journey is to explain when perceptions of threat are likely to emerge from core identity attachments, laying the groundwork for ethnocentric response. Thinking about this graphically, the next task is to illuminate which series of arrows in Figure 3.1 stand out as the most likely paths from broader In-Group Identity Attachments – which, as Brewer warns, may or may not result in hostile stereotypes – to an active commitment to protecting the border between in-group and out-group.

Earlier, I discussed theoretical and empirical inconsistencies with how previous research has treated *in-group favoritism, out-group negativity,* and *intergroup preference.* The theoretical mapping in Figure 3.1 helps illustrate those issues. First, consistent with Brewer’s assertion that appreciation for one’s own group does not necessarily lead to out-group negativity or significant preferences for one group over another, those three constructs appear on the same row with no arrows among them. On the other hand, those group-based orientations might result from national or racial identities, so they appear under such core identity attachments in the causal flow. Summarized as formal hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 4.2a:** Core identity attachments will have a positive relationship with intergroup preference and in-group bias.

**Hypothesis 4.2b:** Core identity attachments will have no relationship with out-group negativity.
Putting it All Together: The Role of Media in Driving Threat and Activating Hostile Anti-Muslim Stereotypes

The key goal of this section is to describe anti-Muslim stereotypes harbored by many ordinary Americans and how those attitudes are shaped by actors in the news business and political elites. In the following section, I will develop these ideas to explain when anti-Muslim attitudes might intersect with in-group identity attachments to produce an ethnocentric response.

Lack of Contact

A majority of Americans report that they have no Muslim friends, no Muslim colleagues, and no contact with Muslims, and nearly sixty percent report that they do not have a basic understanding of Islam (Gottschalk 2018: 27, 32; see also Chapter Six). So, how do ordinary Americans form opinions about Muslims? Rather than having personal experiences with Muslims, most Americans instead only encounter Islam and Muslims in the news.

In general, extant research suggests that media and political elites can have a great deal of influence on public opinion about issues by dictating what issues are covered (agenda setting), what issues are important (priming), and how to think about those issues (framing; see Chong and Druckman 2007a). However, when ordinary citizens form judgments about complex issues or issues about which they have little prior information (e.g., Muslims or Islam), they are even more likely to depend on media and elite cues to impute otherwise missing information (Downs 1957; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991). Therefore, media and elite discourse about Muslims has likely played an even
greater role in shaping ordinary citizens’ attitudes about Muslims, compared to other issues, since most citizens only have a minimal amount of personal and social experience with Muslims upon which to draw. So, how can we describe typical portrayal of Muslims in American news?

Negative Media Coverage

The short answer is “bad.” Most news stories about Muslims are produced in the wake of tragedies or terrorist attacks in the Middle East. In fact, this has been the trend in the United States for four decades, as coverage of Muslims has been overwhelmingly negative since the rise of political Islam in the 1970s (Kalkan, Layman, and Uslaner 2009; Elba 2018; Kahn 2018). Worse yet, most stories use “catch-all” terms to describe Muslims—instead of distinguishing ordinary Muslims from Islamist terrorists—and employ negative images of Muslims (Shaheen 2009; Jackson 2010; Iftikhar 2016, 2018). Imagery in news media often portrays terrorists or fundamentalists in stereotypical attire. On the big screen, the common depiction of an Arab or Muslim is that of a man who lives in the desert with his “curved dagger, scimitars, magic lamps, giant feather fans, and nargelihs” (Shaheen 2009; see also Gottschalk and Greenberg 2007; 2018). Kahn (2018: 1) summarizes that these stories often portray Muslims as radicalized, barbaric, and violent or depict them in a way that is desensitizing and inhumane. In a similar vein, Iftikhar asserts that:

“One of the many things that keeps me awake at night is our Western media’s inability to view Islam and Muslims as anything more than a static monolithic entity [by] perpetuating the societal falsehood that ‘all Arabs are Muslims and all Muslims are Arabs’ to the catch-all term ‘terrorism’ being co-opted to only apply to acts perpetuated by Muslims...” (2018: 18).

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9 I investigate how affirming counterstereotypes of Muslims impacts opinion about the acceptance of Syrian refugees in Chapter Six.
Not only is news content about Muslims typically sensationalized, but the coverage is also skewed. Muslims are also more likely than other religious persons to be the subjects of religion stories. For example, a 2012 Pew Research Center Project for Excellence in Journalism study finds that Islam was the subject of more religion stories (31.3%) than any other religion. The study also finds that six of the top ten religious news stories in 2012 were about Muslims and that these stories often featured accusations of extremism (Pew Research Center Project for Excellence in Journalism 2012). A more recent study examines news coverage of all terror attacks in the United States between 2006 and 2015 and finds that attacks by Muslim perpetrators received, on average, 357% more coverage than other attacks (Kearns, Betus, and Lemieux 2019). Together, these studies provide evidence of a media climate that not only reinforces anti-Muslim stereotypes, but likely drives the generalization of those stereotypes by making it seem as though Muslims are more likely to perpetuate acts of terrorism and violence than members of other religious groups.

Negative Elite Rhetoric

So far, this narrative of negativity has discussed the grave consequences of biased news coverage and lack of contact with Muslims. It gets worse. Recent political discourse moves beyond out-group negativity to the realm of hostile stereotypes and perceived threat. Recent electoral campaigns in the United States offered even stronger levels of vitriol toward Muslims compared to the general news cycle. Negativity expressed by the political elite may be more powerful than biased media coverage, insofar as ordinary Americans take heuristic cues from their co-partisan political elites when forming issue opinions.
(Taber and Lodge 2006). The worst of anti-Muslim rhetoric emerged during the recent 2016 Republican primary, as contenders competed over their willingness to pursue negative policies toward Muslims and Muslim-dominated countries. Gottschalk (2018: 36) summarizes the election:

“Herman Cain alleged ‘shariazation’ of government, Ben Carson declared that no true Muslim should serve as president, Ted Cruz called on U.S. law enforcement to ‘patrol and secure Muslim neighborhoods before they become radicalized’……Rand Paul argued that building a mosque near Ground Zero was equivalent to a Ku Klux Klan march, and Marco Rubio denied discrimination against Muslims in the United States.”

Furthermore, during the election, eventual President Donald Trump frequently made generalized inflammatory comments about Muslims. Then-candidate Trump publicly contemplated closing mosques in the United States, declared that Muslim immigrants have hostile attitudes, accused Islam of “hating us,” and campaigned on imposing a ban on refugees from a handful of Muslim countries (Johnson and Hauslohner 2017). The latter was delivered just seven days into the Trump presidency, in the form of an executive order known as the “Muslim Ban.”

At least among the many Americans who have experienced limited or no contact with actual Muslims, news media bias and vitriolic elite rhetoric might serve to strip Muslims of their humanity (Kahn 2018; see also Herrmann 2013). That process would aid stereotype formation, encouraging Americans to evaluate Muslims in terms of their power and cultural dissimilarity – that is, in terms of ways they might produce a perceived threat – with the more-fearful Americans coming to view Muslims as “monolithic and united, making it easier to imagine the whole population as blameworthy” (Herrmann 2013: 350). This process of activating anti-Muslim perceptions becomes especially consequential when
ordinary Americans evaluate the use of military force in the Middle East, because it “allows people to question whether there really are any ‘innocent civilians’” (Herrmann 2013: 350; see also Herrmann, Tetlock, and Visser 1999).

What Kind of Threat? Who Has a Stake in It?

Based on my review of the identity formation literature, I expect that constant biased media coverage and elite rhetoric about Muslims have had divergent implications for how American whites and blacks perceive Muslims and react to issues involving majority-Muslim countries. In this section, I will explicate that expectation more clearly.

Earlier, I noted how whites are likely to formulate their in-group identities in terms of normative cultural ideas. For many whites, it is important to be an American and, specifically, a white American. The content of the white American identity also carries with it a set of norms, such as civic liberalism (i.e., basic respect of freedoms) and ethnoculturalism (i.e., being white and Protestant) (Huddy and Khatib 2007; Schildkraut 2007; Masuoka and Junn 2013). On the other hand, some might argue that attachments to the nation through symbolic patriotism are more surface-level orientations or short-term political expressions. For example, feelings of symbolic patriotism might lead some to display the American flag or rally around the President after a terrorist attack as an expression of solidarity, whereas a deep-rooted attachment to the American identity would be more likely to shape feelings of dominance and hostility toward an out-group (Skitka 2005). The presence or absence of that core identity among whites should shape perceptions of outsiders and policy preferences toward outsiders, based on whether they are presumed to meet or violate those ideas and norms.
Blacks, on the other hand, are likely to formulate their in-group identities in terms of racial linked fate or concerns with the upward socioeconomic mobility of the racial group. In other words, black political and social homogeneity derives from their historical and contemporary lack of status within the broader American nation and the discrimination conferred by that marginal status (Dawson 1994; Gay, Hochschild, and White 2016). The presence or absence of that core identity among black respondents should shape perceptions of outsiders and policy preferences toward outsiders, based on whether they are presumed to share or harm the goals of black advancement.

I expect that Muslims are more likely to be perceived as a threat by whites rather than blacks. To many whites, I expect that Muslims – at least as purported by the media and political elites – represent the antithesis of every core idea underlying the white American national identity. At a foundational level, Muslims comprise a group that spans nationalities, ethnicities, cultures, and religion, all of which make Muslims vulnerable to sensationalized news stories and political rhetoric stereotyping them as uncivilized, violent, and barbaric brown men. Even more troubling, sensationalized coverage and rhetoric portray Muslims as a monolithic group trying to impose their – albeit, grossly misrepresented – religion and way of life on the West. I expect that whites who have stronger national identities will be more likely to perceive non-white “violent” Muslims as realistic and symbolic threats to their core identities and to develop anti-Muslim stereotypes.

On the other hand, I expect that blacks are less likely than whites to perceive Muslims as threatening. On a practical level, Muslims present little threat to the social mobility of African Americans as a whole, given that only about 1% of the American
population identifies as Muslim and 20% of those also identify as black. Further, blacks have little cognitive motivation to “other” Muslims, because of their collective identity that is represented by the achievements of Islamic black nationalist groups and prominent black Muslims like Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X (Turner 2003). Social-identity theory explains that this collective identity should invoke collective values of tolerance and promote positive in-group relations between blacks and Muslims (Brewer and Gardner 1996). Recent survey data support this idea: Blacks are more likely than other U.S. racial/ethnic groups to hold favorable views of Muslims and Muslims (both black and of other races) are more likely than Americans overall to say that more should be done for blacks to have equal rights with whites (Pew Research Center Religion and Public Life 2014; Diamant, Mohamed, and Sciupec 2017).

Finally, with the intergroup attitudes, or what others call “ethnocentric expressions,” included in the model, I can develop expectations about how intergroup attitudes fit into my story of individual cognition. I expect that linkages from core identity attachments to stereotype-threat are moderated by intergroup attitudes. The linkage connecting perceived threat to a core identity will be pronounced among whites who express higher levels of intergroup preference. For example, a white survey respondent inclined toward a strong national identity would be more likely to perceive Muslims as threatening if that individual shows a subjective favoritism toward the morals, values, and lifestyles of their in-group versus others.10 The cumulation of these expectations are formally stated:

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10 The items used in the intergroup preference measure in the models in Chapter Four does not specify an out-group against which the individual judges their own set of morals or values. The question simply asks the respondent to evaluate his or her morals and values versus those of others.
Hypothesis 4.3: Stereotype threat is more likely to result from in-group attachments to the American identity and intergroup preference among whites than among blacks.

Putting it All Together: Asymmetric Ethnocentric Response

The final task in constructing theory is to integrate into the cognitive puzzle the question of when perceptions of threat from Muslims are likely to guide an ethnocentric policy response. In this section, I draw insights from extant research on how core identity attachments structure American public opinion about Latinos and policy preferences toward Latinos to find that remaining puzzle piece. Much research has been dedicated to understanding the identity politics that shape public opinion about immigration and Latinos – a group responsible for 50% of population growth in the U.S. since 2000 (Flores 2017) – and theoretical developments therein will be helpful in explaining how the same identity-based idea elements shape opinion toward Muslims and policies in the Middle East.

Lessons from the Identity Politics of Immigration

Research on the identity politics of immigration and public opinion toward Latinos suggests that the strength of national identity attachments among whites typically structures ethnocentric policy preferences toward Latinos. As perceptions of typicality, the strictness of criteria placed on American identity (e.g., must be white and speak English), and the strength of national identity increase, whites are more likely to favor restrictive immigration policies (Masuoka and Junn 2013). To whites who strongly identify with the nation and place strict criteria on membership, Latino immigration presents a symbolic
cultural threat to the authentic American national identity and is therefore an existential threat to the nation. Additionally, whites who express an acculturation fear or intergroup preference – measured by a belief that others’ lifestyles, moral standards, and family values are breaking down society – are more likely to believe that immigration should be decreased (Branton et al. 2011). Whites exhibit an investment in protecting “white America” not only from peripheral members in the American racial hierarchy (i.e., blacks; see Lipsitz 1995; 2006), but also from outsiders who violate the American way.

On the other hand, strong national attachments seem to attenuate anti-Latino attitudes and support for restrictive immigration policies among blacks. Unlike whites, blacks typically do not understand the American identity as requiring the prototypical American to be someone who looks like them: Aware of their own peripheral status in the United States, blacks who strongly identify with the nation instead exhibit an unwillingness to marginalize other minority groups (Masuoka and Junn 2013). In these examples, we see variation between white and black Americans’ attitudes toward Latinos as a function of their differential understandings of national identity.

In certain contexts, ethnocentric policy preferences might arise among blacks when their racial group’s upward socioeconomic mobility is threatened by Latinos (Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Bobo and Johnson 2000; Cain, Citrin, and Wong 2000). For example, Vaca (2004) finds that perceptions of diminished political power in black neighborhoods strongly influence opposition to bilingual policies seen as a prioritization of Latino needs over black needs. Gay (2006) finds that where Latinos are economically advantaged relative to blacks at the neighborhood level, blacks are significantly more likely to
stereotype and be unwilling to share policy benefits with Latinos. Note that a parallel situation rarely would arise with Muslims.

The Final Piece: Asymmetric Ethnocentric Response toward Muslims

Quite similar to the differences that researchers observe in how whites’ and blacks’ perceptions of Latinos structure opinions and policy preferences toward immigration, I expect that opinion and policy preferences toward Muslims, as well as issues involving majority-Muslim countries, also diverge across race. I expect that, because whites are more likely than blacks to perceive Muslims as a threat to their in-group identities, whites are also more likely than blacks to be invested in preventing that threat from being realized. For example, just as whites who perceive Latinos as a symbolic cultural threat oppose the immigration of outsiders who violate the American way, I expect that whites who perceive a threat from Muslims will be more likely than blacks to oppose Muslim immigration.

I also expect that whites are more prone than blacks toward ethnocentric response toward Muslims when using lethal military force is an option. News stories and elite rhetoric not only attempt to remind Americans that Muslims are culturally different, but also constantly depict Muslims as violent barbarians hell-bent killing Americans and conquering the West. In other words, the media culture likely influences whites to perceive Muslims as a symbolic cultural threat, but also as a realistic threat to the white way of life. Simply, if dealing with Muslim threat comes down to using lethal military force – rather than other means – to protect that way of life, whites are more likely than blacks to justify killing Muslims. Even blacks who perceive a threat from Muslims will be less likely than their white counterparts to respond with out-group derogation or hostility toward Muslims,
because doing so would not have a personal or practical benefit for black identity (i.e., affirming or benefitting black social status in the United States). The cumulation of these expectations are formally stated:

**Hypothesis 4.4:** Ethnocentric response is more likely to result from stereotype threat among whites rather than among blacks.

A secondary justification for my expectations derives from recent and provocative research that discusses “how politics became our identity” (Mason 2018). Mason explains that “social sorting” has caused individuals’ social identities – religious, racial, and other – to grow increasingly aligned with a partisan identity, thereby reducing social cross-pressures on their political behavior (2016; 2018a; 2018b; Mason and Wronski 2018). As a result, a growing divide between socially homogenous parties has generated a progressively reactive and emotionally polarized electorate. In sum, Americans have grown increasingly 1) attached to their party and 2) less tolerant of the other party due to the psychological effects of identity alignment captured by these sorting mechanisms (2016; 2018a; 2018b; Mason and Wronski 2018).

Applying this research to the current investigation, the social sorting approach would explain how white, middle-upper class, Christian social identities have become increasingly aligned with the Republican party and caused many whites to be uniformly opposed to policies (that are typically Democratic) perceived to benefit brown, bearded, violent men of a different religion. Social sorting would also explain that blacks (who are overwhelmingly Democratic) have become more uniformly favorable to policies that could benefit a non-threatening, non-white, marginalized group like Muslims and would resist
(typically Republican) opposition to those policies. Further, the social sorting approach would explain how polarization between Republicans and Democrats – between whites and blacks – has occurred without much cognitive expenditure about issues. As social sorting has encouraged distrust of the other party, Republicans have become emotionally and diametrically opposed to Democratic policies (including those that are favorable to Muslims) simply because they are supported by Democrats (and the inverse).

*American Tunnel Vision of Terrorism*

The sum of media effects and stereotype theories is that considerations of Muslims and considerations of terrorism are likely inextricably linked among those who hold anti-Muslim stereotypes. The social psychologists and journalists cited above make critical points that I expect provide key insights into how Americans perceive and react to terrorist threats in general. Specifically, the authors point out that hostile stereotypes are more than just unfavorable attitudes; they are attitudes that evolve into blanket generalizations that promulgate hostility and violence toward members of the stereotype target. I expect that this stereotype generalization, in addition to media and political reinforcement of anti-Muslim stereotypes, influences many ordinary Americans to evaluate terrorist threats relative to their accessible negative considerations of Muslims: a tunnel vision of terrorism. Put another way, whereas a wealth of extant research posits that many ordinary Americans associate Islam with terrorism, I expect that the consequences of stereotype threat and stereotype generalization also influence many Americans to associate terrorism with Islam.

From this theoretical discussion, I derive two primary hypotheses to be tested in Chapter Five. I expect that ordinary Americans are more likely to support the use of
military force to preempt Islamist terrorist groups relative to equally threatening but explicitly non-Islamist groups. I also expect to find evidence of asymmetric ethnocentric response, as a function of anti-Muslim stereotypes, when comparing support for the use of military force against Islamist FTOs and non-Islamist FTOs across race. Formally stated:

**Hypothesis 5.1:** Ordinary Americans are more likely to support the use of military force against Islamist groups compared to equally threatening non-Islamist groups.

**Hypothesis 5.2:** Whites are more likely than blacks to support the use of military force against Islamist terrorists.

**What Can Be Done about This?**

For the remainder of this chapter, I turn my attention to developing a theoretical framework that can be applied to understand how actors in the news business and political elites both help frame issues involving Muslims and majority-Muslim countries, as well as to the question of when frames are most likely to influence opinion about these issues. My theory will explain how these individuals might frame issues to drive support for anti-Muslim policies, but a key goal is to also explain how issues might be framed in ways that mitigate the influence that anti-Muslim stereotypes have on support for ethnocentric policy preferences. In particular, I will develop my theoretical argument with a keen eye toward understanding how counterstereotype-affirming information about Muslims would influence public opinion about these issues.

**The Framing Process and Competitive Framing**

*The framing process* is a phrase broadly used to describe how journalists strategically structure news stories – by adjusting headlines, word usage, and narration –
to influence opinion about an issue (Cappella and Jamieson 1997). Accordingly, research on issue frames often seeks to explain how the strategic presentation of news on specific issue shifts public opinion about that issue (Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson 1997; Gross and D’Ambrosio 2004).

In addition to actors in the news business, political elites also seek to frame issues in ways that are politically advantageous by employing persuasive messages and cues (Zaller 1992; Druckman 2001; Sniderman and Theriault 2004; Brewer and Gross 2005). Since politicians are constantly debating issues and trying to encourage support for their issue positions, perhaps to get a bill passed or to garner votes, ordinary citizens are often exposed to competing frames of salient political issues (Sniderman and Theriault 2004).

The media-effects literature suggests three main psychological processes that determine the extent to which the framing process will be successful – in other words, when frames will shift public opinion in the direction of the argument. These psychological processes are:

- **availability** (i.e., considerations emphasized by a frame must be available for cognitive retrieval and use; Eagly and Chaikin 1993);
- **accessibility** (i.e., people who often think about political issues are more likely able to retrieve considerations emphasized by a frame; Fazio 1995), and;
- **applicability** (i.e., conscious evaluation of the applicability of accessible considerations, particularly when exposed to frames of opposing considerations; Fazio 1995; Kuklinski et al. 2001; Druckman 2004).

Strong argument frames – or frames that are most likely to alter opinion – are those that emphasize available and applicable considerations (Chong and Druckman 2007b; 2013). The more news consumers are exposed to frames emphasizing available and applicable considerations, the more accessible those considerations become (Chong and
Weak argument frames, on the other hand, focus on either unavailable or inapplicable considerations and are less likely to alter opinion. In one-sided conditions, where opposing arguments are not in competition, both strong and weak frames may shift opinion, although strong frames should exert stronger influence on opinions than their weaker counterparts. The most likely scenarios in which weak frames will be effective are when the consumer has lower levels of political knowledge and cannot make accurate judgments of the weak frame’s applicability to the issue.

In unbalanced competitive contexts – where strong frames oppose weak frames – the strong likely will dominate the weak, in terms of influencing opinion toward their respective positions, because they will be judged as more applicable to the issue. In unbalanced competitive contexts, weak frames might even backfire if the reader possesses higher levels of political knowledge and can deliberate effectively over the alternatives (Martin and Achee 1992; Chong and Druckman 2007b). In balanced, two-sided conditions, where strong frames oppose strong frames, deliberation is likely to occur over emphasis on considerations deemed applicable to the issue, and individuals’ opinions should shift to more intermediate positions.

Competitive Framing of Issues Involving Muslims and Majority-Muslim Countries

I expect that elites attempt to frame antipathy toward Muslims and opposition to policies favorable to Muslims by primarily emphasizing threat-based considerations. As noted throughout this research, perceptions of threat from Muslims are available and accessible considerations for many ordinary Americans. Therefore, emphasizing threat should offer a particularly effective or strong way for those with anti-Muslim biases and/or
opposed to pro-Muslim policies to frame these issues and shape opinion. On the other side, I expect that elites attempt to frame positivity toward Muslims and support for policies favorable to Muslims by primarily emphasizing obligations to the national identity. As discussed in earlier sections, in-group identity attachments – particularly to the nation – exert powerful influences on ordinary Americans’ policy preferences across several issue domains. Appealing to obligations of the national identity should offer a particularly effective or strong way for those who support pro-Muslim policies to frame issues and shape opinion. I also expect that elites attempt to frame issues involving Muslims and policies in the Middle East by focusing on pragmatic ideas, such as those related to economic considerations or diplomatic considerations. However, I expect that such frames – that is frames unrelated to in-group identity or threat idea elements – should be relatively weak. Of particular interest is how counter-stereotype information might influence opinion. If that information fits into a strong frame, it might counterbalance even relatively strong inclinations toward perceived threat.

Summarizing these ideas:

**Hypothesis 6.1a:** Most frames will correspond to shifts in opinion under one-sided conditions.

**Hypothesis 6.1b:** Strong frames will have substantively larger influences on opinion than weak frames.

**Hypothesis 6.2a:** In competitive conditions, strong frames will dominate weak frames.

**Hypothesis 6.2b:** Weak frames, when competing against opposing strong frames, will backfire, moving opinion away from their respective positions – especially among individuals with greater political knowledge.

**Hypothesis 6.3:** Exposure to strong opposing frames will lead to moderate positions.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I have laid out a multi-layered theoretical understanding of how core identities associated with authoritarianism might lead to ethnocentric policy preferences – including support for the use of military force – against an out-group like Muslims. As I developed that theoretical framework, I did so with careful attention to advice suggested by several scholars regarding how perceptions of threat might cause core identities to become linked to ethnocentric response.

This effort helped to identify and propose solutions to some conceptual issues surrounding the definition of ethnocentrism and the cognitive process that produces ethnocentric response. I also considered extant research suggesting that investigations of the linkages between group-threat and out-group hostility should pay careful attention to the various ways that individuals might come to perceive an out-group as threatening, as well as how these differences might shape responses toward the out-group. In sum, much effort has been put forth in this chapter to develop a clear and synthesized theory that explains the cognitive calculus that produces ethnocentric response toward outsiders.

The key contribution of this chapter was the development of the theory of Asymmetric Ethnocentric Response (AER), which argues that whites are more likely than blacks to perceive Muslims as realistic and symbolic threats, to develop anti-Muslim stereotypes and, consequently, to justify ethnocentric responses against Muslims and majority-Muslim countries. In the pages ahead, I will apply that theoretical framework to investigate how core identities across racial groups in the United States shape ethnocentric responses toward Muslims. In the following chapter, I predict how different core identities shape ordinary white and black Americans’ preferences for policies intended to deter
Iranian nuclear development. In Chapter Five, I do the same to predict support for preemptively striking Islamist terror groups. The AER theory also helps to explain the deleterious effects that anti-Muslim stereotypes have on whites’ support for allowing embattled Syrians to seek haven in the United States, as presented in Chapter Six.

Finally, I have laid out a theoretical framework that explains how actors in the news business and political elites might frame issues in ways that encourage or discourage support for anti-Muslim policies. Importantly, my theory explains the conditions under which issue framing might undermine – by drawing on perceived obligations to the nation or emphasizing counterstereotypes of Muslims – the cognitive process that links perceived threats from Muslims and anti-Muslim stereotypes to ethnocentric policy preferences toward Muslims. In Chapter Six, I apply my framing theory to investigate and predict support for allowing embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States. Chapter Seven concludes with a recap of the cumulative contributions and implications of the research.
Chapter Four - Anti-Muslim Stereotypes and Ethnocentric Response toward Iran

What factors influence American support for different policies – such as diplomacy, sanctions, or the use of military force – intended to deter Iranian nuclear development? How does support for these policies diverge across American racial groups?

For fourteen months between November 1979 and January 1981, many Americans sat on the edges of their seats anxiously watching news about the Iranian Hostage Crisis. Indeed, the crisis coincided with one of the darkest periods in recent U.S. history. In Tehran, 52 Americans were tortured and kept in isolation by Islamist extremists for 444 days. In the United States, anxiety was high and rumors of war against Iran’s new post-revolution theocracy circulated widely. Iranians living in the United States – mostly college students – were subject to discrimination and harassment (NPR 2006; Brunner 2018).

The fear and suffering felt by those hostages and students notwithstanding, changes in the expediency of international news coverage during the Iranian Hostage Crisis had the most significant political consequences—some immediate and some enduring. Technological advances in video recording and satellite capability developed concurrent with the crisis; many Americans living in the late 1970s and early 1980s were, for the first time, able to get real-time news from around the world by simply turning on their TVs. Accordingly, the average audience of televised evening news spiked from 45 million viewers in October to 57 million viewers in December 1979, when the Iranian Hostage Crisis was front and center on the national news agenda (Mosettig and Griggs, Jr. 1980). The stark increase in foreign news stories reported from the Middle East on major cable networks helps illustrate how the news agenda shifted concurrent with the streamlining of
international news coverage: In 1977, the number of foreign stories from the Middle East carried on *NBC Nightly News* totaled 415 and, by 1979, that number doubled to more than 800 stories (Mosettig and Griggs, Jr. 1980).

Unfortunately, most of the coverage coming from Iran was negative. Video feeds from Tehran constantly showed blindfolded American hostages being paraded in front of news cameras. Correspondents and journalists put those images in context by framing the crisis in ways that made ordinary Americans feel empathetic and relatable to the hostages. The more Americans felt proximate and relatable to the hostages – and the more cynical they became about the idea of the hostages returning safely – the more they wanted news from Tehran. As the situation persisted, cable networks scrambled to keep up with the increasing demand for real-time news updates. Many of those networks developed programming to cover the crisis 24 hours a day, a model of news programming that evolved into the 24-hour news stations that we watch today (Feuerherd 2017).

In the short-run, the streamlining of international news coverage had serious consequences for public attitudes about the government’s handling of the crisis, of which President Jimmy Carter took the brunt (Rosenfield 2016). In fact, the constant cycle of negative news coverage from Iran probably cost President Carter his re-election. Whether explicitly or implicitly, the American public was constantly reminded that President Carter had been unable to secure a diplomatic solution to free the hostages. To make matters worse, President Carter had to issue a live statement in April 1980 about a failed covert military operation that he authorized to rescue the hostages. The plan was for U.S. forces to rendezvous at a desert location in Iran, prepare fuel and supplies, and then launch an assault on the embassy to free the hostages. However, *Operation Eagle Claw* failed before
it ever got off the ground. A desert sandstorm caused a helicopter to crash into a transport aircraft carrying troops and fuel. The crash killed eight U.S. servicemembers. In the eyes of many Americans, President Carter had not only been weak in foreign affairs and in securing the release of more than four dozen Americans, but now he had American blood on his hands. President Carter’s failures to resolve the crisis and to reverse economic woes caused by the 1979 Iranian oil embargo helped lead to the largest Electoral College defeat – 489 to 49 – for an incumbent president in U.S. history (Encyclopedia Britannica 2019).

Media coverage of the Iranian Hostage Crisis also watered the seeds of anti-Muslim stereotypes that continue to sprout up to this day (Feuerherd 2017). During those fourteen months, Americans frequently were exposed to dramatic stories and video footage depicting the suffering of their fellow citizens and statesmen at the hands of bearded and turbaned non-white foreigners (Elba 2018). According to Elba (2018), the crisis and the broader Islamic Revolution were a real “moment of vulnerability” for many Americans. Like the Viet Cong during the quagmire in Vietnam, a handful of Islamist students and a fledgling government in Tehran challenged the hegemonic power of the United States and U.S. citizens began to think “that these guys can really do harm if they want” (Elba 2018). Seemingly overnight, the traditional Orientalist view of Muslims as primitive, desert-dwelling savages found on comic strips was replaced by a new stereotype of Muslims – as threatening, bearded, brown, rifle-carrying terrorists (Said 1987; Gottschalk and Greenberg 2007, 2018; Elba 2018). Recurring surveys measuring public opinion about Iran, which began in 1980, provide evidence of the endurance and pervasiveness of anti-Muslim stereotypes caused by the Iranian Hostage Crisis: In every poll since 1980, at least 80% of Americans have reported unfavorable views of Iran (Gallup 2019).
What Lies Ahead

In this chapter, I investigate the influences that anti-Muslim stereotypes among U.S. citizens continue to have for their policy preferences toward Iran. Specifically, I aim to answer the questions posed at the beginning of the chapter by conducting an analysis of public support for polices aimed at deterring Iranian nuclear development. The issue has been at the center of tensions between the United States and Iran since the end of the Iranian Hostage Crisis. The key hypothesis that I developed in Chapter Three and test here is that anti-Muslim stereotypes – the seeds of which were planted in the late 1970s – play a significant role in shaping preferences for policies intended to deter Iranian nuclear development. An important implication of my theory why this pattern will appear is that, because American whites and blacks often have differing life experiences in the United States, whites are more likely to perceive Muslims as a threat and to justify an ethnocentric response (i.e., support for using military force) against Iran. At times, I summarize these differential outcomes across race as asymmetric ethnocentric response toward Muslims.

As this chapter progresses, I will briefly discuss U.S.-Iranian foreign relations (or the lack thereof) since the Iranian Hostage Crisis to put the conclusions of my research into perspective. Then, I will recap my theoretical arguments from Chapter Three and enumerate the specific hypotheses to be tested in this chapter. I will then test my expectations using data on policy preferences (e.g., diplomacy, sanctions, bombing, invading) for deterring Iranian nuclear development collected during a large-sample national survey and an experiment. Finally, I present clear and compelling evidence, drawn from a variety of statistical methods, that links targeted anti-Muslim stereotypes to respondent support for the use of military force to deter Iranian nuclear development.
My findings offer several important contributions, both academic and practical. I undertake a lot of careful theoretical development to clarify and synthesize previous accounts of the roles that group-level attitudes and anti-Muslim stereotypes play in shaping support for the use of military force in the Middle East. In doing so, I provide a clear cognitive schematic to explain how these and other related idea elements might operate together to shape issue opinions. I also add a theoretically-grounded explanation of when stereotypes, identity attachments, and threat might become linked for some, but not others, to produce out-group hostility (e.g., support for the use of military force).

My findings also have significant implications for U.S. foreign policymaking. Whites make up the vast bulk of the Republican electorate, meaning that we will likely continue to see GOP candidates running for high offices on nationalist and anti-Muslim platforms. This also means that whites’ views will dominate national leadership when the GOP governs. Cumulatively, these electoral and political mechanisms allow white anti-Muslim stereotypes to enter the policymaking process, suppressing support for diplomatic discussions with Iran, specifically, and driving support for U.S. intervention elsewhere in the Middle East. Worse yet, the influence of white anti-Muslim stereotypes on U.S. foreign policy will likely continue to sustain the perpetual cycle of stereotypes, interventions, and terrorism (Tessler 2003; Tessler and Robbins 2007; Iftikhar 2016).

U.S.-Iranian Foreign Relations Since the Hostage Crisis

Many Americans recall the events of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, when Islamist students seized the U.S. embassy in Tehran and held over four dozen Americans hostage for fifteen months. Those students saw the U.S. government as guilty of imperialism in the region and culpable for the brutality Iranian citizens were suffering under the
dictatorship of Shah Pahlavi (recall that the CIA helped the Shah seize power nearly thirty years prior). Although the hostages eventually were released, the U.S. government severed ties with Iran and listed the post-revolution Iranian theocracy as a state sponsor of terrorism (Reuters 2010; 2016). Tensions between the United States and Iran have never settled.

The Iran-Iraq War

Hostilities boiled over again, less than a decade later, during the Iraq-Iran War. Although the U.S. government publicly supported Iraq throughout the war, it opted to keep its military on the sidelines during the early stages of the conflict. However, that policy stance changed in 1987, after the U.S. government was exposed for secretly selling weapons to Iran in exchange for hostages held by Hezbollah in Lebanon. The United States quickly stepped up its military support of Iraq in the wake of the scandal.

To help Iraq in 1987, U.S. naval forces began re-flagging Kuwaiti oil tankers sailing in the Persian Gulf, which the Iranians had been firing upon to prevent trade with Iraq. Should Iranian ships attack the wrong vessel, the United States would have a reason to respond with force. Two American ships were lost soon thereafter – one to Iranian attack and another to Iranian mines – and the United States had its “reason.” In late 1987, U.S. forces began destroying Iranian oil platforms and warships and, the following year, the U.S.S. Vincennes shot down an Iranian passenger plane and killed all 290 passengers.\(^\text{11}\) In 1988, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein began threatening large-scale offensives in Iran –

\(^\text{11}\) The U.S. government claimed that the Vincennes mistook the civilian airliner for an Iranian fighter jet, but the incident had little military consequence as a ceasefire was signed soon thereafter (Hammond 2017). The Iranian government sued the United States in the International Court of Justice, but the case was eventually settled out of court in 1996 with the U.S. agreeing to pay $62 million to the victims’ families (Hammond 2017).
including the use of chemical weapons – and, combined with the uptick in U.S. operations, Iran was forced to accept a ceasefire.

Throughout the 1990s, conflict between the United States and Iran faded. Instead, the United States was preoccupied with its own fight with Iraq in the First Gulf War. The U.S. government did, however, frequently accuse Tehran of sponsoring terrorism and seeking to acquire nuclear weapons (Reuters 2010; 2016). After Iran signaled its intent to sign a contract with Russia to complete a nuclear power plant in 1995, President Clinton signed a bill that imposed crippling sanctions on Iran and on any foreign companies investing in Iran (Reuters 2010). These trends continued until 2001, when Iran was again thrust into the spotlight as one of America’s primary enemies.

The Axis of Evil and Nuclear Sanctions

After the September 11 attacks, President George W. Bush famously declared Iran, Iraq, and North Korea as an “axis of evil” in his 2002 State of the Union Address (Reuters 2010; 2016). Specifically, Bush claimed that Iran was exporting terror and aggressively pursuing nuclear weapons. Relations continued to deteriorate afterward. That same year, an Iranian exile group revealed that Iran had undisclosed nuclear facilities under construction and, within a few months, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported that it had found highly-enriched weapons-grade uranium at the sites (Reuters 2010; 2016). A few years later, in 2005, President Mohammed Khatami declared that the Iranian government would never give up its nuclear technology or uranium-enrichment programs (Reuters 2010). The president also struck a nuclear fuel supply deal with Russia to help build its first atomic power plant (Reuters 2010; 2016).
From then until 2008, U.S. and Iranian officials met on several occasions to try to mend diplomatic relations, but no serious progress was ever achieved. In 2009, the United States, Britain, and France again publicly accused Iran of building a secret uranium-enrichment site (Reuters 2010; 2016). Such accusations continued to swirl and, as a result, U.S. lawmakers passed legislation in 2012 that gave President Obama the power to sanction foreign banks and the central banks of U.S. allies if they failed to reduce their imports of Iranian oil (Reuters 2010; 2016). This had a devastating impact on Iranian oil exports and caused a serious decline in the Iranian economy (Reuters 2010; 2016).

The “Iran Deal”

For a brief period, beginning in 2013, diplomatic relations between the United States and Iran seemed to be on the uptick following the election of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani. Rouhani was elected on a platform of improving Iranian foreign relations and, later that year, he and President Obama spoke by telephone in the most significant discussion between the two states in nearly thirty years (Reuters 2010; 2016). Near the end of 2013, Iran reached an interim pact – with the United States, Britain, France, China, Russia, and Germany – to curb its nuclear programs in return for sanctions relief (Reuters 2010; 2016). In 2015, those seven states struck another long-term agreement, under which Iran agreed to reduce its number of centrifuges and disable certain parts of reactors in return for easing of U.S., U.N., and E.U. sanctions.

However, the U.S. government’s participation in the agreement was anything but “long-term.” The 2016 U.S. Presidential Election spelled doom for the so-called Iran deal. Throughout the primary season, then-candidate Donald Trump chided outgoing President
Barack Obama on the campaign trail for being “weak with Iran.” Trump asserted that the agreement allowed Iran to continue enriching uranium for weapons and he promised that, if elected, he would withdraw the United States from the “terrible deal.” After he was elected, President Trump asserted that if the United States did not withdraw from the deal, “the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorists will be on the cusp of acquiring the world’s most dangerous weapons” (Rizzo and Kelly 2018). Just a year after his inauguration, President Trump delivered on his popular campaign promise and pressed the “reset button” on three years of progress and amicability with Iran.

As a result, crippling sanctions waived under the 2015 agreement have been reinstated against Iran and domestic partisan debate over Trump’s policy continues. In general, Trump’s co-partisans in Congress and large swaths of his Republican base support the decision and his claims about the one-sidedness of the deal. Trump supporters also claim that the President’s tough stance with Iran afforded him leverage and made him stronger going into diplomatic talks about denuclearization with Chairman Kim Jong-un of North Korea. Opponents of Trump’s policy (mainly Democrats) argue that the decision to leave the Iran deal was unfounded because the Iranian government was and is complying with the terms of the agreement. They also argue that Trump’s decision has severely tarnished the U.S. government’s credibility on the world stage. They express fear that Iran will retaliate against Israel – a United States ally – in response.

With the recent withdrawal of the United States from that 2015 agreement, elite partisan debate over U.S. foreign policy toward Iran is at a fever pitch. It is not my intention in this chapter to “take a side” in that debate. In fact, it is worth noting that reports from news media and the International Atomic Energy Agency to this day offer a mixed
bag of conclusions about Iran’s compliance with the deal. Rather, the purpose of this research is to demonstrate how attitudes about this ongoing and divisive issue depend on an individual’s view of Muslims. The conventional wisdom among foreign policy analysts is that, just as it has for the past forty years, the direction of U.S.-Iran relations will have serious implications for U.S. policy and intervention in the greater Middle East. My investigation into public opinion and policy preferences toward Iran is therefore both important and timely, providing a generalizable and nuanced understanding of American public opinion about Muslims and policy preferences toward predominantly Muslim countries.

**Identity, Threat, and Ethnocentric Response**

In Chapter Three, I developed a theory to explain how multiple cognitive factors – like identity, perceived threat, and other group-level attitudes – might become linked to shape ethnocentric response toward Muslims. As I developed the theory and the cognitive map that accompanied it (reproduced below), I kept a keen eye on explaining how these related idea elements become linked as part of a causal process. As such, my discussion began with the role authoritarianism plays in shaping the proclivity of individuals to form strong group attachments. I will recap the theory briefly below before testing it in the analysis ahead.
Base Personality Orientation: Authoritarianism

Authoritarianism is not an outlier personality orientation, but one that instead describes the worldview of many ordinary Americans (Dean 2018; Hetherington and Weiler 2018). Authoritarians are predisposed to need order and tend to sort themselves into social in-groups that maintain that order. Therefore, I expect that attachments to identity groups – the nation, the racial or ethnic group, and the political group – should be stronger among those with a base personality toward authoritarianism.

**Hypothesis 4.1:** Authoritarianism influences stronger core identity attachments.

Core Identity Attachments: National Identity, Patriotism, Linked Fate, and Ideology

Extant social identity research suggests that patterns of core identity attachments diverge across American racial groups in predictable ways. This serves as the basis for my
belief that blacks and whites will behave dissimilarly in an empirical analysis of their perceived threat from Muslims and, consequently, their policy preferences toward deterring Iranian nuclear development. Whites are far more likely than blacks to express their in-group identities vis-à-vis national attachments and their racial identity is likely to be subsumed by their identification with the country or the nation. On the other hand, race has been the predominant factor in the African-American experience. Black political and social homogeneity derives from their longstanding lack of status in the broader American nation, which has resulted in disadvantage and discrimination that the country has been slow to redress (Dawson 1994; Gay, Hochschild, and White 2016). If authoritarianism is going to prompt a respondent to express a strong in-group identity, it will be likely to manifest as a perception of national identity among whites and in-group linked fate among blacks. The presence or absence of those core identities that should shape perceptions and policy preferences regarding outsiders.

Hypothesis 4.1a: The connection between authoritarianism and national identity or symbolic patriotism will be stronger among whites compared to blacks.

Hypothesis 4.1b: The connection between authoritarianism and racial linked fate will be stronger among blacks compared to whites.

Intergroup Attitudes: In-Group Bias, Out-Group Negativity, and Intergroup Preference

Core identity attachments are likely to shape biases toward in-groups. For example, an individual who has strong identity attachments is also likely to feel positively about his or her in-groups and express a preference for them. However, there is no theoretical basis to expect that core in-group attachments encourage generalized out-group negativity because one can have strong in-group attitudes without hating outsiders.
**Hypothesis 4.2a:** Core identity attachments will have a positive relationship with intergroup preference and in-group bias.

**Hypothesis 4.2b:** Core identity attachments will have no relationship with out-group negativity.

*Perceived Threat from Muslims and Iran*

Different sources of core identity attachments might lead some, but not others, to perceive Muslims and Iranians as threatening. I expect that Muslims are more likely to be perceived as a threat by whites compared to blacks. At a foundational level, Muslims comprise a group that spans nationalities, ethnicities, cultures, and religion, all of which encourage journalists and other elites to stereotype Muslims as monolithic brown men trying to impose their religion and way of life on the West. News coverage of Iran likely encourages many whites to perceive the Islamist leadership of Iran and the country’s predominantly Muslim population as especially threatening. News stories rarely distinguish Iranian citizens from their government, which is typically described as “terroristic” and “fundamentalist” (Jahedi, Abdullah, and Mukundan 2014). The Iranian government’s “Islamist character” is constantly presented as a threat to regional peace in the Middle East and to the interests of the United States and Israel – countries the Iranians are purported to only know as “Great Satan” and “Little Satan” (Jahedi, Abdullah, and Mukundan 2014). Moreover, political cartoons in the media lexicalize the actions of Khomeini and Iranian leaders as “crazy,” “backward,” “violent,” and “irrational” because of their association with Islam (Gottschalk and Greenberg 2008).

I expect that whites who have stronger national identities will be more likely to perceive Iran and its non-white “violent” Muslim citizens as realistic and symbolic threats to their core identities and to develop stereotypes. I expect that blacks are less likely than
whites to perceive a threat from Iran or its Muslim citizens. On a practical level, Iran and its citizenry present little threat to the social mobility of African Americans. Many blacks will have little cognitive motivation to “other” Muslims – and, by extension, Iranians – considering that Islam has been a positive force in black communities for centuries and has fostered a collective identity that encourages positive intergroup relations between blacks and Muslims.

Further, I expect that linkage connecting perceived threat to a core identity will be pronounced among whites who express higher levels of intergroup preference. For example, a white survey respondent inclined toward a strong national identity would be more likely to perceive Muslims as threatening if that individual shows a subjective favoritism toward the morals, values, and lifestyles of their in-group versus others. The cumulation of these expectations are formally stated:

**Hypothesis 4.3:** Stereotype threat from Muslims is more likely to result from in-group attachments and intergroup preference among whites than among blacks.

*Asymmetric Ethnocentric Response toward Muslims*

Social-identity theory explains that when individuals perceive a group-based threat, they will respond with out-group derogation or hostility to bolster and protect their social identity in the face of that threat (Brewer 2001; Stephan and Stephan 2013). Therefore, I expect that the cognitive factors that encourage whites to be more likely than blacks to perceive Muslims as a threat will also shape their ethnocentric policy preferences toward Iran. Whites are not only more likely than blacks to perceive Muslims as a symbolic cultural threat, but also as a realistic threat to the white way of life. If dealing with threatening Muslims or a threatening nuclear Iran comes down to using lethal military force
rather than other means, whites will be more likely than blacks to justify killing Muslims to protect their way of life. Even blacks who perceive a threat from Muslims will be less likely than their white counterparts to respond with out-group derogation or hostility toward Muslims, because doing so would not have a personal or practical benefit for black identity (i.e., affirming or benefitting black social status in the United States). The cumulation of these expectations are formally stated:

**Hypothesis 4.4:** Ethnocentric policy response toward Iran – in the form of support for sanctions or the use of military force – is more likely to result from stereotype threat among whites rather than among blacks.

**Support for Policies to Deter Iranian Nuclear Development: 2012 ANES Survey**

I test my hypotheses using data from the 2012 American National Election Study (ANES). The ANES data are an ideal source to test my expectations for at least two reasons. First, survey respondents were asked questions about their identity attachments, intergroup attitudes, stereotypes of Muslims, and support for various policies intended to deter Iranian nuclear development. These data are an excellent resource that can be used to develop and test a comprehensive schematic of how various related attitudes become linked to shape opinion and policy preferences toward Iran. Second, the study features a large oversample of blacks that permits rigorous testing of the asymmetric ethnocentric response theory.12

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12 Prior to estimating the SEM model with the 2012 survey data, I replicated Kinder’s and Kam’s (2009) models as a preliminary test. Although just a quick test, I subsampled their models by race and found that their e-scale measure is more likely to predict support for policies related to War on Terror almost exclusively among whites rather than blacks (see Chapter Four Appendix, Table A4.1). Still, I test the cognitive schematic developed above as a more appropriate test of the asymmetric ethnocentric response theory.
Methods

I test the cognitive schematic of policy preferences toward Iran by inputting measures from the ANES data into the Structural Equation Model (SEM) Builder program in Stata 14. It is important to note here that, while I specify the SEM to estimate the relationships between different idea elements according to theorized causal directions, I also estimate all direct and indirect linkages in both directions. For example, I estimate how authoritarianism structures core identity attachments and how core identity attachments structure intergroup attitudes, while also accounting for the direct effects of authoritarianism on intergroup attitudes. I also account for the possibility that some attitudinal structures have feedback loops (e.g., core identity attachments → anti-Muslim stereotypes → core identity attachments). These feedback linkages and controls for several demographic and social factors (e.g., age, gender, education, income, and Muslim contact) are not pictured for the sake of simplicity but are discussed in the written text below. Finally, each linkage in the model is estimated as an interaction with a dichotomous race variable to permit explicit testing of the asymmetric ethnocentric response theory.

Variables

Authoritarianism refers to a rigid need for order and norms, developed early in life, that influences individuals to form an identity and in-group attachments. Using the traditional four-item child-rearing traits battery (Hetherington and Weiler 2009; 2018), I
include an additive index measuring authoritarianism (scaled 0-1) in the top tier of the structural model.\footnote{Measurement of this indicator and others are described in greater detail in the Appendix to this chapter (see Chapter Four Appendix, Structural Equation Model Measures). However, it is worth noting here that recent research is inconclusive about whether the child-rearing battery – typically reflecting conservative authoritarianism – is an appropriate measure of authoritarianism across racial groups. For example, Perez and Hetherington (2014) argue that blacks and whites construe the child-rearing items differently and, in their analysis of immigration attitudes, they find that authoritarianism correlates highly with the things it should for whites, but rarely so for blacks.” On the other hand, (MacWilliams 2016) employs the child-rearing battery and to predict several attitudes among African Americans and Dusso (2017) finds a strong connection between right-wing authoritarianism and black support for liberal candidates. In my case, the child-rearing battery is the only measure of authoritarianism found in the ANES, so despite my awareness of its potential limitations, it is the measure I must employ in my SEM model.}

At the second level, I include four measures to estimate how core identity attachments to the country, nation, racial group, and political group might structure intergroup attitudes and anti-Muslim stereotypes (perceived threat). \textit{Symbolic patriotism} is a five-point measure of love for country. \textit{National identity} is a five-point measure of the importance placed on being an American. \textit{Linked fate} is a three-point measure of how much one’s life is affected by what happens to the racial group. \textit{Conservatism} is a seven-point measure ranging from extremely liberal to extremely conservative.

At the third level, I include three measures to investigate how core identity attachments structure intergroup attitudes and how intergroup attitudes moderate the linkages between identity and perceptions of threat from Muslims. \textit{In-group bias} is an additive index of respondents’ ratings of their racial, religious and denominational, sexual orientation, and social class groups on thermometers that range from 0 to 100. The index is rescaled from 0-100. \textit{Out-group negativity} is an additive index that I construct following the same method as before, with the exception that I subtract each group rating from 100 such that higher scores reflect more negative assessments. \textit{Intergroup preference} is an
additive index of four different items measuring agreement (on five-point scales) with statements measuring preference for existing cultural norms.

At the bottom two levels, I estimate how targeted stereotypes of Muslims as violent might structure public support for various policies to deter Iranian nuclear development. *Stereotypes of Muslims* is a five-point measure indicating respondents’ level of agreement with how well the word “violent” describes most Muslims. Four separate three-point measures indicate respondents’ support for diplomacy, sanctions, U.S.-led bombing, and U.S. troop invasion as policies to deter Iranian nuclear development. At a first glance, these measures offer suitable variation worth predicting – in particular, a sizable contingent of potentially ethnocentric responses. Roughly 30% of respondents favor U.S. bombing and 20% favor invasion as policies to deter Iranian nuclear development (Figure 4.2).

**Figure 4.2 | Percent Supporting Various Policies to Deter Iranian Nuclear Development**

Source: 2012 American National Election Study
Several additional variables, all conventional in public-opinion models of this sort, serve as controls. Male is a binary variable indicating whether a respondent is female (0) or male (1). Age is a continuous variable that ranges from 18 to 99 years.\textsuperscript{14} Household income is an eleven-point measure recoded in $10,000 increments with “$100,000+” as the highest category. Education is sixteen-point measure of respondents’ level of education and ranges from 1\textsuperscript{st} grade to professional degree. Attention to politics is a five-point self-reported measure of how often respondents pay attention to politics and elections. Survey mode is a binary indicator of whether respondents were interviewed face-to-face or over the internet, included to account for the likelihood that socially desirable responses were given to sensitive questions (e.g., out-group ratings, stereotypes of Muslims, etc.) in the face-to-face interviews. I estimate the direct effects on each of these control variables on every variable pictured in Figures 4.3 and 4.4.

Finally, a proxy measure of contact with Muslims is included to account for the possibility that higher levels of intergroup contact promote tolerance and reduce prejudice and hostility toward outsiders (Allport 1954). To capture contact with Muslims, I first obtained from the Census Bureau the number of foreign-born individuals living in each congressional district originally born in six predominantly Muslim countries: Iran, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, and Sudan. I then matched those data to the congressional districts of respondents in the ANES. Because congressional districts are so large, this measure is far from ideal as a way of capturing intergroup contact – really, it is more a measure of potential contact – but those districts represent the lowest level of aggregation available in the standard ANES. The resulting measure varies greatly between observations – ranging

\textsuperscript{14} I also estimate the direct effect of age on anti-Muslim stereotypes to account for likelihood that older Americans are more likely to hold anti-Muslim stereotypes (Ogan et al. 2018).
from 1 Muslim and as many as 2000 Muslims – which makes it difficult to interpret the substantive relationship between Muslim contact and the intensity of anti-Muslim stereotypes. Therefore, the next step I take is to recode the measure into quintiles or five manageable categories that represent the lowest 20% of the data, the highest 20% of the data, and the three equal groups in between.\(^{15}\)

\textit{Analysis}

After estimating my SEM, I first consulted three diagnostic statistics intended to capture the fit of the model, customarily used to assess whether the model is adequately specified: the comparative fit index, the root mean square error of approximation, and the standardized root mean square residual. Each indicate a strong overall model fit for my SEM.\(^ {16}\)

Having confirmed that I likely am using a properly specified model, I turn to a discussion of the estimates from the SEM and the strong evidence I find supporting my hypotheses. Figures 4.3 and 4.4 are provided below to aid the textual discussion. These figures are derived from one model with racial interaction terms; however, I display the results separately by race (whites in Figure 4.3 and blacks in Figure 4.4) to depict important

\(^{15}\) The cutoff points represented by the five categories are: 1 = 0-341; 2 = 342-657; 3 = 658-1161; 4 = 1162-2263; 5 = 2263+.

\(^{16}\) Extant literature seems to lack a convention on which model-fit statistics to report, so I estimate and report three different statistics. The \textit{comparative fit index} (CFI) compares the fit of the SEM to the fit of a null model (Bentler 1990). The standard threshold for a properly fit SEM is a CFI statistic ≥ .90 and my model reports a CFI of .99. The \textit{root mean square error of approximation} (RMSEA) is a parsimony-adjusted index that indicates whether the model fit is better than the degree of fit specified by a cutoff value (Browne and Cudeck 1993). The standard threshold for a properly fit SEM is an RSMEA statistic < .08 and my model reports an RSMEA of .06. The \textit{standardized root mean square residual} (SRMR) measures the square-root of the difference between the residuals of the sample covariance matrix and the hypothesized model (Mueller and Hancock 2008). The standard threshold for a properly fit SEM is an SRMR statistic < .08 and my model reports a SRMR of .02.
nuances in the attitudinal structures of policy preferences toward Iran across race. Finally, it is important to note key differences between the figures and the discussion: In the figures, I report multiple regression coefficients except where ordered logistic estimation is required and in the text I use the model estimates to make specific predictions that help us to understand the substantive effects of various relationships I describe.

Starting at the top of the model, I estimate that both whites (0.59) and blacks (0.64) score moderately high on the authoritarianism index (0-1). Looking at the Core Identity Attachments and Ideology tier of the model, I find evidence that those with stronger authoritarian orientations are more prone to form strong core in-group identity attachments (Hypothesis 4.1). However, authoritarianism shapes the strength of core identity attachments for whites and blacks in different ways. Specifically, authoritarianism encourages stronger attachments to the country and national identity among whites (Hypothesis 4.1a) but shapes stronger attachments to the racial group among blacks (Hypothesis 4.1b). Authoritarianism, interestingly, correlates with conservatism among whites but liberalism among blacks, suggesting that it might tend to push people to more-extreme ideological stances rather than to push them in a particular direction.

Both whites (4.62 out of 5) and blacks (4.51) on average report high levels of symbolic patriotism in the survey. However, the most authoritarian whites express higher levels of symbolic patriotism (4.67) compared to the average white, while the most authoritarian blacks express similar levels of symbolic patriotism (4.53) compared to the average black. Both whites (4.40 out of 5) and blacks (4.29) also self-report strong national identities. Authoritarian thinking strengthens these attachments for both racial groups, but the influence is much stronger among whites. The most authoritarian whites score about
4.62 and the most authoritarian blacks score about 4.38. Blacks (2.28 out of 3) self-report stronger expressions of *linked fate* than whites (2.10) and this gulf grows as a function of authoritarian thinking. The most-authoritarian blacks report the highest score on linked fate about 37% of the time and the most-authoritarian whites score highest in linked fate about 24% of the time. Finally, whites self-report higher *conservatism* (4.06 out of 7) than blacks (2.55) on the seven-point ideology measure. This gap grows as a function of authoritarian thinking: The most authoritarian whites jump up to a 4.64 and the most authoritarian blacks drop to a 2.37.
Figure 4.3 | Cognitive Schematic of Whites’ Support for Policies to Deter Iranian Nuclear Development

Figure Key

Significant +

Significant -

Note: N = 4143 | Coefficients estimated by maximum likelihood | *** p < .01 ** p < .05 * p < .10 | Structural equation model estimates computed in Stata 13 | Model fit statistics: RSMEA = .06; Comparative Fit Index = .99; Standardized Root Mean Square Residual = .02 | Higher values indicate higher levels of authoritarianism, symbolic patriotism, importance of national identity, conservatism, in-group bias, outgroup negativity, intergroup preference, agreement that Muslims are violent, and support for diplomacy/sanctions/site bombing/invasion to deter Iranian nuclear development.

Source: 2012 American National Election Study.
Figure 4.4 | Cognitive Schematic of Blacks’ Support for Policies to Deter Iranian Nuclear Development

**Authoritarianism**
- .31***
- .48***
- .37***

**Symbolic Patriotism**
- 1.80*
- 1.55*
- 1.62**

**National Identity**
- 1.62*

**Linked Fate**
- -.45*

**Conservatism**
- .12***
- .12**

**In-group Bias**
- -.45*

**Out-group Negativity**
- .02***

**Intergroup Preference**
- .05***

**Muslims Violent**
- .02***

**Diplomacy**

**Sanctions**

**Nuke Sites**

**InvaDe**

**Figure Key**

Significant +

Significant -

Note: N = 4007 | Coefficients estimated by maximum likelihood | *** p < .01 ** p < .05 * p < .10 | Structural equation model estimates computed in Stata 13 | Model fit statistics: RSMEA = .06; Comparative Fit Index = .99; Standardized Root Mean Square Residual = .02 | Higher values indicate higher levels of authoritarianism, symbolic patriotism, importance of national identity, conservatism, in-group bias, out-group negativity, intergroup preference, agreement that Muslims are violent, and support for diplomacy/sanctions/site bombing/invasion to deter Iranian nuclear development.

Source: 2012 American National Election Study.
As I move to the *Intergroup Attitudes* tier of the model, I find that, on average, the strength of core in-group national and racial attachments increases the proclivity toward in-group bias and intergroup preference among both whites and blacks (Hypothesis 4.2a). I also find that stronger core identity attachments typically decrease expressions of out-group negativity across both groups (contrary to Hypothesis 4.2b).

To begin, blacks (75.92 out of 100) score much higher than whites (64.77) on self-reported in-group bias. Stronger core-identity attachments slightly increase expressions of *in-group bias* across both groups: Across both whites and blacks, the strongest attachment to a given identity increases in-group bias by about a point. Whites (37.18 out of 100) score slightly higher than blacks (36.80) on self-reported *out-group negativity*. Across both whites and blacks, those with the strongest attachments to the nation and country score about 1.5 points lower in out-group negativity than the average white and black respondents. That result cuts against the intuition that patriotism (and even more so, national identity) correlates with antipathy toward those who are different.

Even less in keeping with intuition is how ideology performs, when embedded within this broader model. The most conservative whites and those with the strongest attachments to the racial group also tend to score about 1.5 points lower in out-group negativity. That being said, remember that out-group negativity is not the same as having a preference for one’s own group, which I explore below; just because conservative whites do not hold more negative feelings toward other social groups does not mean that they are less likely to view society or politics in a polarized way. The link between ideology and out-group negativity performs more intuitively among black respondents. The most liberal blacks score slightly higher in out-group negativity (37.08) than the average black.
Meanwhile, those with the strongest attachments to the racial group score about the same as the average black in out-group negativity (36.75).

On average, whites (.14) score much higher than blacks (-.19) on intergroup preference. Note that this variable is measured with a factor score, which prevents the substantive interpretation from being expressed on a meaningful scale. Stronger core-identity attachments increase expressions of intergroup preference among whites. Whites with the strongest attachments to symbolic patriotism increase to about .24 in intergroup preference, those with the strongest attachments to national identity increase to about .35, those with the strongest attachments to linked fate increase to about .27, and the most conservative increase to a whopping 1.07. Stronger core identity attachments also typically increase expressions of intergroup preference among blacks, but nothing quite like the powerful influence of the national identity and conservative beliefs among whites. Blacks with the strongest attachments to symbolic patriotism increase to about -.08 in intergroup preference, those with the strongest attachments to national identity increase to about -.04, and those with the strongest attachments to the racial group increase to about .12. The anomaly in these patterns is that the most-liberal blacks score much lower in intergroup preference compared to the average black.

Moving down to the Group Specific Stereotype tier – a key level of analysis for the contributions promised by this thesis – I find that stereotype threat from Muslims is more likely to emerge from strong national identity attachments and intergroup preference among whites compared to blacks (Hypothesis 4.3). I estimate that whites (2.42 out of 5) hold moderately more intense perceptions of threat from Muslims (measured by anti-Muslim stereotypes) than blacks (2.20). I estimate that direct influence of symbolic
patriotism on the intensity of whites’ perceived threat/stereotypes is substantively small. The most patriotic whites do not diverge much from the average white in the intensity of their perceived threat/stereotypes (2.45). The influence of national identity attachments is much larger, as those with the strongest attachments score about a 2.55 in perceived threat/stereotypes. Thus, distinguishing between national identity and patriotism, concepts sometimes conflated in popular discussion, does serve a purpose, because even when they are measured relatively crudely by a single survey question, the two behave different in an analysis – with national identity, as most scholars would expect, being more closely associated with hostility to out-groups.

The influence of attachment to the racial group is also substantively large, as those with the strongest linked fate attachments score about a 2.57 in perceived threat/stereotypes. The most conservative whites are also prone to more intense perceptions of threat/stereotypes as they rate about a 2.93. Finally, higher expressions of intergroup preference have a strong mediating effect, as those who score highest in intergroup preference are also about .41-points higher (i.e., scoring around 3.06) when they have strong attachments to national identity and are the most conservative. On the other hand, the strength of blacks’ attachments to various identities has little influence in shaping their perceptions of threat/stereotypes.

Finally, looking at Policy Opinions at the bottom level – the other key level of analysis for this thesis – I find compelling evidence that justifications for ethnocentric policy responses toward Iran (i.e., support for sanctions or the use of military force) is more likely to result from stereotype threat among whites compared to blacks (Hypothesis 4.4). I estimate that the probabilities that whites and blacks, on average, express similar policy
preferences, with both groups supporting diplomacy (69% and 73%) or sanctions (76% and 69%) as policies to deter Iranian nuclear development at a far-higher level than the probabilities that they favor using military force to bomb (34% and 30%) or invade Iran (17% and 19%). However, when I trace the influences of identity attachments and perceptions of threat/stereotypes on policy opinions, I find divergent patterns. Whites with more intense perceptions of threat/stereotypes are far more likely to justify the use of military force against Iran than the average white in the sample. The probability that a white individual favors diplomacy drops 12% to 57% among those with the most intense perceptions of threat/stereotypes. The probability that a white individual favors sanctions increases 5% to 81% among those with the most intense perceptions of threat/stereotypes. Meanwhile, the probability that a white individual favors bombing increases 20% to 54% among those with the most intense perceptions of threat/stereotypes. Finally, the probability that a white individual favors invasion increases 11% to 28% among those with the most intense perceptions of threat/stereotypes. In sum, whites rely heavily on their general attitudes toward Muslims when deciding how they want the United States to behave toward Iran.

Among blacks, questions about foreign-policy toward Iran do not depend nearly as much on how they feel about Muslims more generally. True, the probability that a black individual favors diplomacy drops 11%, to 62%, if they hold the most-intense stereotype threat. However, the probability that a black individual favors sanctions drops only about 1% among those with the most intense perceptions of threat/stereotypes. The probability that a black individual favor bombing increases a miniscule 2% to 32% among those with the most intense perceptions of threat/stereotypes. And the probability that a black
individual favors invasion increases a miniscule 2% among those with the most intense perceptions of threat/stereotypes.

Clearly, anti-Muslim stereotypes play a much stronger role in encouraging ethnocentric response among whites compared to blacks. Furthermore, these effects become even more magnified when I also estimate the direct roles that strong identity attachments and conservatism play in shaping whites’ preferences for ethnocentric policies. The probability that a white individual favors diplomacy drops another 12% to 45% when attachment to the nation, conservative ideology, and perceived threat from Muslims are all strongest. The probability that a white individual favors sanctions jumps another 5% to 86% when attachment to the nation, conservative ideology, and perceived threat are all strongest. The probability that a white individual favors bombing jumps another 11% to 65% when attachment to the nation, conservatism, and perceived threat are all strongest. Finally, the probability that a white individual favors invasion increases another 7% to 35% when attachment to the nation, conservatism, and perceived threat are all strongest. Conservative white nationalists are especially likely to support an aggressive posture against Iran.

Some other important findings are worth highlighting, specifically those regarding the conceptual and empirical issues I underscored from Brewer’s research in the previous chapter. On the one hand, I find that in-group and out-group attitudes in the model are all negatively correlated. Her admonition against rooting ethnocentrism in attitudes toward out-groups seems validated. Rather, ethnocentric response primarily operates through in-group identity considerations. On the other hand, I find that in-group attitudes and generalized out-group negativity trace their cognitive sources to authoritarianism and
similarly structure hostile policy preferences. While authoritarian thinking may produce hostile attitudes toward out-groups, it does so for some by linking threat to in-group attitudes and producing an ethnocentric response (Brewer 2001) and for others by linking threat to a generalized aversion to outsiders and disruption of order (Feldman 2013). This finding highlights the risk of underestimating the significance of authoritarianism when including it as an independent variable alongside measures of in-group and out-group attitudes, because it is a cognitive source to which they trace their origins. That is, those variables will swallow up the indirect effects of authoritarianism.

Finally, I find evidence of several significant relationships that justified the inclusion of my demographic and societal control variables. After taking into account the attitudinal reasons that might lead an individual to support aggressive military posturing, I find that wealthier respondents are more likely than those with less wealth to express stronger in-group attachments and to support sanctioning and bombing Iran. Older respondents are more likely than younger respondents to express higher levels of authoritarianism, conservatism, in-group attachment, and to hold anti-Muslim stereotypes. However, older respondents also seem less hawkish than their younger counterparts, as they are more likely to support diplomacy or sanctions and less likely to support bombing or invading Iran. Respondents who were interviewed online are likely to score lower in authoritarianism, strength of in-group attachments, and intergroup preference than face-to-face interviewees (the opposite of the social-desirability effect that I feared).

The relationships between several variables, including attentiveness to politics, seem to reflect the influences that the toxic news media and partisan environments have on American attitudes toward for Muslims. Respondents who self-report higher levels of
attention to politics are more likely than the less attentive to express strong in-group attachments, higher levels of conservatism, stronger perceptions of threat from Muslims, and higher levels of support for sanctioning and bombing Iran. However, they are less likely to justify invading Iran. One possible explanation for this is that those who are attentive to politics are rarely exposed to frames that advocate for invading Iran and, therefore, invasion is not an applicable consideration that comes to mind when politically-engaged individuals formulate their foreign-policy preferences. A simpler explanation for why those who are more attentive to politics justify lobbing bombs at Iran but do not support a full-scale invasion might be that they know the latter would entail higher costs – both economically and in terms of loss of life – that they do not believe the country or the military is in a position to incur.

Male respondents are less likely than females to express strong in-group attachments but score much higher than females in generalized out-group negativity and targeted Muslim stereotypes. Males are more likely than females to support diplomacy, sanctions, and bombing as policy options to deter Iranian nuclear development but are less likely to support invasion. With the effect of attentiveness held constant, one possible explanation for why males are less likely than females to support invasion of Iran is because they have a higher average baseline of policy knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1997; Dow 2009). In other words, while also holding constant stereotype and threat impulses that lead some to justify an invasion and killing Iranians, males might be less willing than females to justify an invasion because they are more likely to consider that such an aggressive military posture would cost more dollars and lives compared to bombing or sanctioning.
The pervasive influence of education on tolerance of outsiders is evidenced by several relationships in the model. Respondents with higher levels of education are less likely than those with lower levels of education to express authoritarian thinking, out-group negativity, intergroup preference, and anti-Muslim stereotypes. Educated respondents are also less likely to support nuking or invading Iran, while being more likely to support a diplomatic approach.

I also estimate how intergroup contact (i.e., with Muslims) influences the intensity of anti-Muslim stereotypes or perceptions of threat from Muslims. I included this variable following the intergroup contact theory, which posits that higher levels of intergroup contact can reduce prejudice (Allport 1954). Consistent with Contact Theory, I find that living near higher concentrations of Muslims – serving as a proxy for intergroup contact – exerts a deleterious influence on perceived threat from Muslims.

Support for Using Military Force to Deter Iranian Nuclear Development: Framing Experiment

I also conducted a framing experiment to further investigate American opinion toward Iran. In the experiment, I examine how different versions of a news story reporting that Iran has nuclear weapons influence support for the use of military force against Iran. One story framed the issue by constantly referencing Islam, Muslims, Islamic theocracy, etc. – using stereotype-reinforcing language. Another story uses more neutral descriptions and language. I expect that whites who read the stereotype-reinforcing frame

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17 This research conducted while I was a student at the University of Louisville and is the centerpiece of my Master’s Thesis (Ledford 2012) entitled, “Ethnocentric Frames across Race: The Media’s Role in Activating Ethnocentrism and Public Support for Conflict Abroad.”
will be more likely to support the use of military force against Iran, compared to blacks (and whites who read the neutral frame). Experimentation offers two distinct advantages to my research. First, through random assignment of participants to treatments, I can overcome issues of self-selection in which individual’s attitudes might be correlated with the stories they read. Second, by controlling participants’ exposure to various stories, I can distinguish the influences of the frames to which participants were exposed.

Recruitment

Students in six undergraduate political-science courses as well as a university-wide African-American scholarship program were asked to participate in a public-opinion survey about politics. This sampling process was chosen with the explicit purpose of oversampling black students so that I could make meaningful comparisons of attitudes across race. All students who came from political-science courses were offered extra credit for their participation. My focus remains on comparing attitudes across white and black participants; however, students of different backgrounds were included in the initial sample because there was no ethical way to recruit and award incentives to only black or white students. The recruitment produced an initial sample of 194 participants, including 104 whites, 70 blacks, and 20 from other racial/ethnic groups.

Design

Once recruited to the study, participants were randomly assigned to read one of two versions of a news story describing a fictional leaked United Nations/International Atomic
Energy Agency intelligence report alleging Iran’s development of nuclear weapons. Each version of the article was printed with a fake URL, date, and what appeared to be a censored author name and source. This effort was intended to make the news story look like a real article that had been printed from an online edition of a newspaper, especially given the prominence of media coverage of Iran and its nuclear program. After reading the story, respondents were asked to answer a short battery of questions about political attitudes, demographics, and support for using military action against Iran.

Each version suggests that Iran has been using its nuclear program to develop weapons, despite maintaining for years that its nuclear program is only meant to provide fuel for medical reactors. Although the story is fictional, these allegations mirrored political debate in the United States around the time of the experiment. One version of the story featured a stereotype-reinforcing frame that used the same biased qualifiers to describe Muslims and Islam as identified in empirical studies and content analyses in the extant literature cited above. For example, the main text of the framed article repeatedly uses the word *Islamic* to describe the Iranian government (e.g., *Islamic Republic* of Iran) and the stereotyping qualifiers *rogue*, *threat*, *fundamentalist*, and *extremist* are used throughout.

The unframed version features no anti-Muslim stereotype language and simply refers to the country as *Iran* and to its government as *the Iranian leadership*. The framed article also features statements from a fictional White House correspondent and the President that are laden with enemy image constructing terms identified in the same

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18 In compliance with Institutional Review Board protocols, all participants were debriefed about the experiment and the fictitious stories they read at the end of their time in the experiment.
19 Full article versions are included in the Appendix (Chapter Four Appendix, Framed and Unframed Articles).
literature, such as *us, them, we,* and *they.* In the unframed version, I simply replace these terms with *the United States* and *Iran.* I counterbalance any partisan influence participants might infer from mentioning President Obama by including a brief statement about the on-going 2012 Republican primary campaign.

Simply, the stereotype-reinforcing frame cues a threat, the associated stereotypes, and the target of those stereotypes. With random assignment averaging out potential confounds, I expect that these cues will activate anti-Muslim stereotypes and that those who read the cues will be more likely to support the use of military force against Iran than those who read the unframed story. As another direct test of asymmetric ethnocentric response, I expect that these influences will be stronger among whites compared to blacks.

*Post-Test Measures*

To measure *support for the use of military force against Iran,* I construct an index from nine 5-point agreement questions asked in the post-test questionnaire (scaled from 0 to 5). The battery of items asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with the justification and support for the use of force, increased federal spending on defense and security, and about the justification of the president seeking authorization to deploy troops. I also measure *race* with a post-test item including white, black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, and mixed. My analysis only focuses on whites and blacks for consistency with the survey analysis and due to the costs of oversampling non-white minorities. I measure a binary variable indicating to which *frame* participants were exposed in order to test the influence of the treatment on support for the use of force compared to the unframed story.
**Findings**

I analyze the results of the experiment using ordinary-least-squares regression due to the coding of the military-force index. I regressed the military-force index on an interaction between race and the frame dummy, while holding the original race and frame variables constant (Support = Race x Frame + Race + Frame). The findings provide yet another piece of evidence supporting my theoretical expectations. Exposure to the framed version of the story significantly influences support for using military force against Iran among whites but not blacks. Whites who read the framed story also were more likely to support using military force against Iran than other whites who read the unframed story.

The substantive effects of exposure to the frame are quite telling of the relationship between anti-Muslim stereotypes and ethnocentric response among whites. I estimate that, on average, reading the framed story increased support for the use of force against Iran among whites by about 2.39-points on the rescaled five-point index. I also estimate that, on average, exposure to the unframed story decreased support among blacks by about .37-points on the five-point index. These findings provide clear evidence in support of the theory of asymmetric ethnocentric response. Either my black respondents did not hold negative stereotypes about Muslims, or not even reminding them of Iran’s dominant religion induced them to draw on such stereotypes when formulating a policy preference. In all analyses, the evidence is consistent and robust: The influence that anti-Muslim stereotypes exert on ethnocentric response toward Muslims is much stronger among whites compared to blacks.
Discussion

The studies in this chapter contribute several important theoretical and normative contributions. I began by describing two popular accounts of public support for the use of military force in the Middle East—stereotypes and ethnocentrism—and then situated them within the broader social-identity literature to illuminate how these related idea elements operate together in cognition. In the process of doing so, this research unearthed several issues—including four different definitions—involving the conceptualization and measurement of the ethnocentric construct. In sum, my comprehensive review produced a synthesized and testable theory: Targeted stereotypes and ethnocentric response are not idea elements that operate independently of one another in cognition but, instead, targeted stereotypes are the very expressions of perceived threat from Muslims that, when in conflict with in-group identity, might produce ethnocentric response toward Muslims. The Asymmetric Ethnocentric Response theory, which grows from the insight that the mechanisms contained in my theory would not apply to African Americans, explains why these various idea elements are more likely to become linked and produce ethnocentric response toward Muslims among whites rather than blacks.

From there, an SEM modeling strategy (Hoyle 1995; Kline 1998; de Carvahlo and Chima 2014) and a framing experiment were developed to test the theory. I found compelling evidence that anti-Muslim stereotypes are foundational building blocks of support for the use of military force, rather than diplomacy, as a policy option to deter Iranian nuclear development. I also found strong evidence that anti-Muslim stereotypes exert a much greater influence on support for the use of military force against Iran among
whites compared to blacks – especially when those stereotypes are activated by stereotype-reinforcing news coverage.

These theoretical and empirical contributions are not limited to studies of public opinion about Muslims or Middle East issues. Just as I drew insights from research on the identity politics of Southern racial issues and Latino immigration to inform my research, I expect that the current research will contribute to a variety of subfields in American and comparative political science in which researchers are focused on explaining the structures of public opinion about specific issues wherein group attitudes and/or stereotypes are theorized to play an important role.
Chapter Five - Anti-Muslim Stereotypes and American Tunnel Vision of Terrorism

When do ordinary Americans support the use of military force to combat equally threatening foreign terrorist groups, both Islamist and non-Islamist?

The U.S. Department of State Bureau of Counterterrorism currently designates 59 foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). To be legally designated as an FTO, the organization must: (1) be foreign and (2) engage or have intent to engage in terrorist activity (3) that threatens the security of U.S. nationals or the national security of the United States (National Counterterrorism Center; U.S. Department of State 2015). Considering how elite discourse focuses on terrorist activity in the Middle East, it likely would surprise many ordinary Americans that several groups designated as FTOs are not Islamist.

On the outside, non-Islamist FTOs look like their Islamist counterparts. They commit serious atrocities in the name of religion, anti-U.S. ideology, and anti-imperialism. However, aside from the “usual suspects” (i.e., notorious Islamist FTOs like al-Qaeda and ISIS), we know relatively little about public opinion and support for the use of force against non-Islamist FTOs. The narrow focus on Muslims and Islamist terrorism in the literature derives, in part, from the skewness and negativity of media coverage of Muslims: Most Americans do not have accessible considerations of non-Islamist groups because they typically are not exposed to news about these groups. But how would ordinary Americans react to non-Islamist FTOs if they were actually exposed to them?
Motivating Examples

In this section, I discuss two motivating examples of non-Islamist FTOs, highlighting their similarities with Islamist FTOs in terms of foundational ideology and security risk to U.S. interests. It is important to keep this discussion in mind as the chapter progresses, as I draw on these specific examples in the forthcoming empirical investigation of how ordinary Americans react to various sources of terror threat.

Revolutionary Struggle - Greece

In 2004, the Revolutionary Struggle in Greece (“EA” for Epanastatikos Agonas) published a manifesto explicitly stating its anarchist, anti-globalist, and anti-imperialist ideological aims. The group is an offshoot of N-17 which, over a period of 25 years, was responsible for the deaths of 22 people and attacks against police and military installations, tax offices, and foreign multinational corporations (Burton and West 2009). Since 2004, EA has carried out several attacks that clearly borrow from the N-17 playbook. In January 2007, EA militants carried out an attack on the U.S. embassy in Athens and fired a rocket propelled grenade at the building. Then-U.S. ambassador to Greece, Charlie Ries, told CNN that the incident was “a very serious attack” (CNN 2007). The group is also linked to several attacks against other U.S. and Greek interests, including several bank robberies and a bombing at the Bank of Greece in Athens (Office of the Director of National Intelligence 2019).
Lord’s Resistance Army - Uganda

In Uganda, the militant Christian ideologue Joseph Kony and his Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) have been engaged in looting, sex trafficking, and violence for over 25 years, as part of their mission to overthrow the Ugandan government and impose the Ten Commandments as the law of the land (Bavier 2011; Cakaj 2016). The brutality perpetuated by the group has displaced more than two million civilians and killed thousands. An estimated 65,000 children have been kidnapped to be trained as LRA fighters or used and sold as sex slaves (Bavier 2011; Cakaj 2016). The LRA is also anti-American and deplores U.S. military involvement in joint special operations – particularly in the last few years – that have significantly reduced LRA ranks. While U.S. special forces remain in the region to train local army units and police forces, remaining LRA members are still on the run throughout Uganda and the South Sudan. In some regions, the U.S. military presence is the only protection civilians have against terrorists who are still on the run and becoming increasingly violent as their organization crumbles. In practice, there is little difference between the LRA in Uganda and ISIS in Syria.

What Lies Ahead

Just as in the Middle East, FTOs in Europe and Africa are waging wars against their own governments and peoples, while citing anti-American, anti-imperialist, and religious ideologies as justification for violence. Just as in the Middle East, FTOs in Europe and Africa engage in brutal rape, sex trafficking, and the use of children as human shields. Just as in the Middle East, FTOs in Europe and Africa hold virulent attitudes toward the U.S. military for helping local forces fight against them. From both extant research and previous
chapters in this dissertation, we have a theoretical picture of factors that motivate American
support for the use of military force against Muslims and/or Islamist FTOs. *What structures American support for the use of force against non-Islamist FTOs when Americans are actually exposed to news about these groups?*

In this chapter, I investigate how ordinary Americans respond to terror threats from both Islamist and non-Islamist FTOs. I rely on extant research in political communications and social psychology – discussed in Chapter Three – to develop a theory that explains how ordinary Americans are likely to react to differential sources of terror threat and, specifically, when they support the use of military force to deter those threats.

In short, my theory holds that decades of negative media and elite coverage of Muslims – portraying them as violent and barbaric – have caused many Americans to develop targeted anti-Muslim stereotypes and have primed many Americans such that they exhibit a limited cognitive ability to distinguish considerations of terror threat from their perceptions of threat from Muslims. At times throughout this project, I summarize these cognitive processes as American “tunnel vision of terrorism.” Consequently, I expect that many ordinary Americans are more likely to support the use of military force to deter Islamist FTOs rather than non-Islamist FTOs. I also draw upon the asymmetric ethnocentric response theory, developed in previous chapters, to derive the expectation about the nature of these relationships across race. Simply, I expect that the skewness of support for using force against Islamist groups rather than non-Islamist groups is more pronounced among whites compared to blacks.

I put my theory to empirical test in a survey experiment by exposing white and black participants to one of five fictional stories about real FTOs threatening attacks against
U.S. installments and citizens abroad. I focus on whites and blacks – as in other chapters – because they are the two largest racial groups in the United States and therefore, in theory, should have the largest aggregate impacts on policymaking. To summarize what’s to come: I find compelling evidence for the baseline expectation that ordinary Americans are more likely to support the use of military force against Islamist FTOs compared to their non-Islamist counterparts. I also find evidence of an asymmetric ethnocentric response toward Islamist FTOs, as much of the variance in support for the use of military force explained by exposure to an Islamist FTO is constrained among whites rather than blacks.

My investigation into how Americans respond to terror threats from various FTOs offers both important theoretical and normative contributions. Whereas most extant research focuses almost exclusively on public support for the use of military force against Islamist FTOs, this research investigates responses to FTOs that are Islamist or non-Islamist—by “observing the counterfactual” (see Robinson, McNulty, and Krasno 2009). I am uniquely able to parse out reaction to the terrorism from reaction to the religious affiliation of the terrorists. My findings illustrate that pervasive and generalized anti-Muslim stereotypes among the American public have consequences that reach far beyond just increasing support for ethnocentric response against Muslims (i.e., the use of military force against Muslim-majority countries or Islamist terror groups). Anti-Muslim biases also seem to create a sort of tunnel vision through which ordinary citizens – particularly whites – are likely to see other potential security risks as relatively non-threatening.

My findings have important normative implications for the broader “perpetual cycle of stereotypes, intervention, and terrorism” discussed throughout this dissertation. My analysis in this chapter not only provides another piece of evidence that links anti-
Muslim stereotypes to support for the use of military force in the Middle East, but also reveals the influence that anti-Muslim stereotypes have in encouraging ordinary citizens to take other terror threats less seriously. Put another way, American whites show a tendency to support using violence only against Muslims, a bias likely to aggravate intergroup relations. These realities will likely continue to fuel the “perpetual cycle” of cultural conflict, especially if such biases are reflected in actual U.S. foreign policymaking.

Anti-Muslim Stereotypes and Stereotype Generalization

In Chapter Three, I discuss a wealth of research suggesting that the confluence of constant negative media coverage, vitriolic elite discourse, and the lack of direct contact most Americans have with Muslims has had serious implications for how ordinary citizens think about Muslims. Specifically, these factors have helped to form, crystallize, and reinforce targeted stereotypes of Muslims as barbaric, terrorist, and violent (Alexander, Brewer, and Herrmann 1999; Gerges 2003; Sides and Gross 2013; Saleem, Yang, and Ramasubramanian 2016). Even worse, recent research finds evidence that higher levels of exposure to news portraying Muslims as terrorists or in a negative light is positively associated with support for military action in Muslim countries, public policies that harm Muslims domestically and internationally, and increased perceptions of Muslims as aggressive (Saleem et al. 2015).

Often, negative discourse about Muslims is also accompanied by visuals – intended to represent Muslims – depicting a man identified as a terrorist, often in stereotypical attire worn by terrorists (Jackson 2010). When these images are employed – referred to as *implicit visual propositioning* (Abraham 2003) – alongside explicit negative statements
about Muslims, media can have an even stronger influence in activating anti-Muslim attitudes and priming stereotypes (Abraham and Appiah 2006). However, I expect that this negative media environment has far more serious implications than just setting the tone for how ordinary Americans think about Muslims.

Social psychologists explain that as stereotypes develop – particularly when the target is a distant group like Muslims – the target is increasingly evaluated in terms of their cultural dissimilarity (Herrmann 2013). For example, as an individual forms stereotypes about Muslims and those stereotypes intensify, that individual is likely to progress from thinking “Muslims are a violent threat” to thinking “Muslims are violent, different, and a threat.” It is precisely at this stage in stereotype formation that I expect that the implications of whites’ and blacks’ anti-Muslim stereotypes diverge. White Americans live in a country where dominant cultural expressions treat them as prototypical. Thus, whites are likely to attach their in-group identities to a combination of core ideas about national and racial identity, whereas blacks – who reside in a country where a large majority of the population is viewed as “different” from them – are likely to attach their in-group identities to core ideas about the upward mobility of their racial group. Viewing the sociopolitical world through these identity lenses, Muslims – who are culturally, ethnically, and religiously “other” – are more likely to be stereotyped and perceived as a realistic and symbolic cultural threat by whites compared to blacks.

As stereotypes intensify, they become generalized. At least among the many Americans who have experienced no or limited contact with Muslims, anti-Muslim stereotypes – reinforced by news media bias – serve to strip Muslims of their humanity (Kahn 2018; see also Herrmann 2013). More fearful Americans will come to view
Muslims as “monolithic and united, making it easier to imagine the whole population as blameworthy” (Herrmann 2013; emphasis added). Such an individual no longer thinks that “Muslims are violent, different, and a threat” but rather “most” or even “all Muslims support a religion that is violent, different, and a threat.” Impenetrable walls of indifference, dread, and fatigue are built (Kahn 2018), preventing the most basic human responses of concern or willingness to learn (Leyens et al. 2000; Castano and Giner-Sorolla 2006; Goff et al. 2008). This process of stereotype generalization becomes especially consequential when ordinary Americans [particularly whites] evaluate the use of military force in the Middle East, because it “allows people to question whether there really are any ‘innocent civilians’” (Herrmann 2013: 350; Herrmann, Tetlock, and Visser 1999; Kahn 2018).

**Expectations**

I expect that stereotype generalization influences many ordinary Americans to evaluate foreign terror threats relative to their accessible negative considerations of Muslims. Put another way – and echoing Iftikhar (2018) – whereas anti-Muslim stereotype threat and the generalization of anti-Muslim stereotypes encourage many ordinary Americans to associate Islam with the threat of terrorism, I also expect that these also influence many Americans to evaluate terrorism and threat conditional upon Islam—or what I describe as a “tunnel vision of terrorism.” I expect that ordinary Americans are more likely to support using military force to deter Islamist threats than they are to support using force against their equally threatening non-Islamist counterparts. Stated as a formal hypothesis:
**Hypothesis 5.1:** Ordinary Americans are more likely to support the use of preemptive military force against threatening Islamist terror groups compared to equally threatening non-Islamist terror groups.

Extending the AER theory, I expect that this relationship is largely explained by whites’ special orientation toward using military force against Islamists. As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, core national identity attachments – to which Muslims are perceived as a threat – influence a higher likelihood of ethnocentric response (i.e., support for the use of military force) against Muslims among whites compared to blacks. Formally stated:

**Hypothesis 5.2:** Whites are more likely than blacks to support the use of preemptive military force against threatening Islamist terror groups compared to equally threatening non-Islamist terror groups.

Finally, I test how the combination of imagery or implicit visual cues and explicit identifications within the stories mediate my expectations in Hypotheses 5.1 and 5.2. After considering research finding that use of stereotype-reinforcing images and language exhibits a stronger effect on activating and priming stereotypes (Abraham 2003; Abraham and Appiah 2006), my final hypothesis states:

**Hypothesis 5.3:** Exposure to stories that explicitly and implicitly identify a threatening Islamist terror group are more likely to encourage support for the use of preemptive military force against the Islamist FTO than stories using only implicit (visual) information.

**Methods**

I conducted a survey experiment to test my hypotheses regarding how ordinary Americans respond to threats from Islamist and non-Islamist FTOs. Experimentation
offers two distinct advantages to my research. First, through random assignment of participants to treatments, I can overcome issues of self-selection in which individual’s attitudes might be correlated with the stories they read. Second, by controlling participants’ exposure to various stories, I can distinguish the influences of the FTOs to which participants were exposed.

Recruitment

A total of five-hundred participants – 250 whites and 250 blacks – were recruited to take part in a “public opinion survey.” The participants were recruited from marketing research panels – featuring over 25 million panelists – operated by Ask Your Target Market (AYTM). The AYTM panels offer three distinct advantages over other modes: (1) I can oversample blacks from the thousands available on the panel to have equal amounts of whites and blacks in each condition, thereby permitting the explicit testing of Hypothesis 5.2; (2) AYTM closely monitors their panelists to maintain survey response quality; and, (3) AYTM maintains and provides demographic information about its panelists which enables me to minimize survey fatigue by omitting tedious demographic questions and focusing the survey instrument on substantive questions.

Design

During the experiment, I first measured participants’ prior support for using military force to deter FTOs threatening to attack U.S. installations and interests. Participants were then randomly and equally assigned to five experimental conditions
designed to test how they react to different FTOs making equivalent terror threats. In each condition (Table 5.1), the news stories describe a recently released (fictional) video wherein a real FTO threatens the United States and its foreign installments.

In Condition 1 (example in Figure 5.1), the byline and statements throughout the story *explicitly* describe the FTO as *Islamist* and identify the FTO as the Haqqani Network (Pakistan). The story also contains an image “from the video” that *implicitly* identifies the group as Islamist by depicting terrorists dressed in traditional thobes and ghutras (robe and headscarf). In Condition 2, the group is *implicitly* described as Islamist by including only the image of Haqqani fighters in traditional garb. These two conditions permit the explicit testing of Hypothesis 5.3. Note that it also hints at a way to parse the extent to which anti-Muslim sentiments are rooted in a general racism, or if instead Islam itself must be invoked to induce stereotype threat. If “Muslim” is just sloppy American shorthand for darker-skinned people, then the implicit threat ought to be enough, whereas if the reaction to Islam looks more like a developed “clash of civilizations” then the religious ties might need to be made explicitly.

In Conditions 3 and 4, the groups are *explicitly described* as *non-Islamist* (e.g., anarchist or Christian) in the bylines and are identified as either the Revolutionary Struggle (EA) in Greece or the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda. Each story also *implicitly* distances the terrorists from anti-Muslim stereotype threat by using real images of EA and LRA group members “from the video,” showing that they are not wearing traditional thobes and ghutras. In Condition 5, the story does not include an *explicit or implicit* description; the report maintains that the identity of the source of the threat is still unknown.

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20 In compliance with Institutional Review Board protocols, all participants were debriefed about the experiment and the fictitious stories they read at the end of their time in the experiment.

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at the time (full frames in Chapter Five Appendix, Figures A5.1-A5.5). After exposure in each condition, I again measured participant support for the use of preemptive military force to deter FTOs: this time, with participants thinking about the FTOs about which they read.

It is important to note here that, in each condition, the stories were presented as online versions of articles from the Associated Press. This design specification is intended to mitigate the potential for perceived source biases to confound responses to the stories. For example, portraying the news source as the New York Times (commonly perceived as a liberal-leaning source) or the Wall Street Journal (commonly perceived as a conservative-learning source) might have exerted ideological biases on responses to the stories. Portraying the source as the Associated Press – a balanced source known for highly factual reporting – should minimize the potential for ideology confounding the analysis (AllSides 2019). A date only a few days prior to the experiment was added to each story to make the news story look recent and to enhance credibility.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.1</th>
<th>Conditions in Threat ID Experiment</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Identity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Explicit</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Condition 1</td>
<td>Islamist (Haqqani)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Condition 2</td>
<td>Islamist (Haqqani)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Condition 2</td>
<td>Non-Islamist (EA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Condition 3</td>
<td>Non-Islamist (LRA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Condition 5</td>
<td>Ambiguous (Control)</td>
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</table>
Measures

The background questionnaire included a pretest measure of support for using military force to deter FTOs making threats against U.S. troops and installments. The pretest opinion item asks, “How strongly do you agree or disagree that the United States should use military force to preempt threats made against U.S. troops and installments by terror groups?” Response options range from 1 “Strongly disagree” to 5 “Strongly agree.”
The background questionnaire also asked questions about party ID, conservatism, and anti-Muslim stereotypes.\textsuperscript{21} AYTM provided demographic information including gender, age, marital status, income, career field, education, and zip code.

The second questionnaire, completed after exposure in the various conditions, measures post-test opinion with an item analogous to the pretest. This time, the question asked about participants’ support for the use of military force to preempt the threat about which they read. These two items are used to construct the primary dependent variable in the experimental models: change in opinion. I measure how exposure to the various news stories influenced participants’ opinions from the pretest to the posttest by subtracting pretest opinion from posttest opinion. Change in opinion ranges from -4 to 4.\textsuperscript{22}

The primary independent variables in the experimental models are five binary or “dummy” variables – EA Explicit, LRA Explicit, Haqqani Explicit, Haqqani Implicit, and Ambiguous – that indicate if an individual was exposed to a given story. The Ambiguous item is omitted to serve as a point of reference (i.e., reference or baseline category) in all models. White is a binary variable – 1 “White and 0 “Black: -- included as an interaction term in the models to test how the various frames shifted opinions across racial groups.

\textsuperscript{21} Responses on the party ID item range from 1-5 (1 – None; 2 – Democrat; 3 – Independent; 4 – Republican; 5 – Other). Responses on the conservatism item range from 1-7 (1 – Extremely liberal; 7 – Extremely conservative). The anti-Muslim stereotype item asks participants to indicate how well or not “violent” describes “most Muslims” and ranges from 0 – Not at all to 5 – Extremely well.

\textsuperscript{22} Over 70% of the sample is below the maximum (5 – “Strongly Agree”) on the pretest item, so I am confident that this measure will capture a significant amount of changes in opinion that occurred over the course of the experiment (i.e., not violating any model assumptions).
Support for the Use of Military Force against Islamist and Non-Islamist FTOs

I estimate two models to investigate how exposure to news about differential sources of terrorist threats (i.e., Islamist and non-Islamist) influences support for the use of military force to preempt those threats. First, I estimate Model 1 to get a sense of how exposure to various FTOs influences support for the use of military force to preempt the threat. I estimate Model 2 and interact each of the five binary exposure variables with the race item (i.e., white) to investigate how frames influence opinion among whites and blacks. In both models, I use ordinary-least-squares regressions to estimate the influence of exposures to the various stories. I also treat the “ambiguous” control condition as a baseline or point of comparison in both models. This allows me to measure the independent impact (relative to the control group) of receiving one type of frame while holding constant exposure to all other types of frames.

Estimates from the models offer compelling evidence in support of my hypotheses. In Model 1 (Table 5.2), I find clear evidence that, on average, increased support for the use of preemptive military force to deter terrorism is more likely to occur when the threat originates from an Islamist FTO rather than a non-Islamist FTO. To understand how exposure to various FTOs influences support for the use of force, it is helpful to first look at the predicted values for opinion change in each condition. Here, a clear pattern emerges: In all conditions, except for the Haqqani Explicit condition, the predicted values reflect decreasing support for the use of military force (Ambiguous = -.31; LRA Explicit = -.24; Haqqani Implicit = -.19; EA Explicit = -.08; Haqqani Explicit = .13). Thinking about the predictions relative to the Ambiguous condition, what this means is that support for the use of preemptive military force increases by about .44-points when the FTO is explicitly and
implicitly described as Islamist and identified as the Haqqani Network (p < .01). Although the predicted opinion change influenced by exposure to the EA Explicit condition is negative, that predicted change is still a significantly higher change – by about .24-points – than change influenced by exposure to the Ambiguous condition (p < .05). Support for the use of force against the LRA and the implicitly identified Islamist group do not differ significantly from support against the unknown FTO. These findings offer strong support for Hypothesis 5.1. Given how these other treatments differ from the ambiguous control article, it is likely that when Americans are not told identity of a terrorist group, they tend to assume that it is Islamist and behave accordingly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Predicted Change in Opinion</th>
<th>Change Relative to Ambiguous Frame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haqqani Explicit</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.44*** (.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haqqani Implicit</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>.12 (.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EA Explicit</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.24** (.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LRA Explicit</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>.07 (.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.31*** (.08)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Entries are predicted values and ordinary least squares regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses below. *** p < .01 ** p < .05 * p < .10. N = 457 R² = .04

In Model 2 (Table 5.3), I estimate the how the impact of exposure in each condition varies across race.23 I find clear evidence that whites who were exposed to news that

---

23 I estimate the impact of each interaction term separately to avoid multicollinearity and biased standard errors (Farrar and Glauber 1967).
explicitly and implicitly identifies an Islamist FTO are significantly more likely than blacks who were exposed to the same news to express increased support for the use of preemptive military force. Again, it is helpful to first look at the predicted values for opinion change in each condition—this time as an interaction across race. Another clear pattern emerges: In all conditions, except when whites were exposed to the Haqqani Explicit condition, the predicted values reflect decreasing support for the use of military force (EA*Black = -.09; EA*White = -.06; LRA*Black = -.26; LRA*White = -.22; Haqqani Explicit*Black = .00; Haqqani Explicit*White = .24; Haqqani Implicit*Black = -.05; Haqqani Implicit*White = -.33; Ambiguous*Black = -.09; Ambiguous*White = -.52). Looking at these predictions, I estimate that support for the use of military force increases by about .24-points among whites who were exposed to the Haqqani Explicit condition. This shift is quite large compared to blacks in the Haqqani Explicit condition (effectively no increase), whites in the Ambiguous condition (.76-point increase), and blacks in the Ambiguous condition (.33-point increase). These findings strongly support Hypothesis 5.2.

Further, comparing the positive shift in support among whites in the Haqqani Explicit condition to the negative shift in support among whites in the Haqqani Implicit condition seems to clearly suggest that pairing implicit stereotype-reinforcing imagery with explicit “Islamist” tags is a key factor that triggers strong ethnocentric response among whites. Not everyone wearing Middle Eastern garb will do. This finding strongly supports Hypothesis 5.3. Cumulatively, these findings also offer another piece of substantive evidence supporting the AER theory.
### Table 5.3 | Model 2 - Support for the Use of Military Force against Terror Groups in Black and White

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame * Race</th>
<th>Predicted Change in Opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Haqqani Explicit * White</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haqqani Explicit * Black</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haqqani Implicit * White</td>
<td>-.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haqqani Implicit * Black</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EA Explicit * White</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EA Explicit * Black</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LRA Explicit * White</td>
<td>-.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LRA Explicit * Black</td>
<td>-.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous * White</td>
<td>-.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous * Black</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Entries are predicted values from OLS regression. N = 457  R² = .05

### Discussion

The research presented in this chapter offers important theoretical contributions to scholarship at the intersection of public opinion, foreign policy, and terrorism literatures by painting a clearer picture of how anti-Muslim stereotypes shape American public opinion and policy preferences. Where prior research has focused almost exclusively on explaining how anti-Muslim attitudes shape American support for the use of military force against Islamist FTOs, I contribute to theory by explaining and finding evidence that anti-Muslim stereotypes also shape how ordinary Americans react to threatening FTOs in general. This novel contribution was made by stepping beyond the bias of the research
literature to investigate how ordinary citizens respond to equal threats from both Islamist and non-Islamist FTOs with similar foundational ideologies (i.e., by “observing the counterfactual”; see Robinson, McNulty, and Krasno 2009).

I found strong evidence suggesting that anti-Muslim attitudes have primed ordinary Americans such that they are more likely to support the use of military force against Islamist FTOs rather than non-Islamist FTOs. I also found another piece of evidence that corroborates the Asymmetric Ethnocentric Response (AER) theory discussed throughout this research. I found that whites are far more likely than blacks to support the use of preemptive military force against Islamists compared to non-Islamist FTOs. Finally, I found compelling evidence that ordinary white Americans are especially likely to support the use of preemptive military force against Islamist FTOs when they are exposed to information that explicitly – rather than just implicitly – describes a foreign terrorist threat as Islamist. This evidence reinforces others’ conclusions about the serious influences that actors in the news business can have in shaping biases toward Muslims and other out-groups by subtly manipulating the use of explicit textual and implicit visual cues (Abraham and Appiah 2006). Consistently ascribing acts of terror to members of a religious group – underscoring the religion of the terrorists, rather than their other traits – ultimately results in religious stereotyping.

Cumulatively, my research has thus far provided evidence that anti-Muslim stereotypes exert strong influence on white Americans preferences for using military force rather than diplomacy against a majority-Muslim country and against Islamist FTOs rather than non-Islamist FTOs. These findings reinforce the broader normative implications of my dissertation: the idea that cultural biases that fester among the white majority run the
risk of shaping American involvement in the Middle East and perpetuating cycles of intervention and terrorism. Specifically, the biases and narrow understandings of global terrorism that characterize the worldviews of many white Americans are likely to enter to foreign policymaking process via public opinion and candidate election (Goren 2012). The emergence of nationalist and anti-Muslim candidates in recent years is a good example of how anti-Muslim biases are influencing our politics and corroding political debate. Furthermore, whites often make up 70% or more of representative samples and comprise 90% of the Republican electorate, meaning that anti-Muslim biases have great potential to shape foreign policymaking when the GOP governs.

Through each of these mechanisms – mass opinion, elections, and policymaking – anti-Muslim biases and tunnel vision of terrorism will continue to shape support for the use of military force in the Middle East and for other policies disadvantageous to Muslims. To make matters worse, U.S. military interventions in the Middle East are the fundamental source of anti-imperialist and anti-American orientations at the core of Islamist FTO ideology (Tessler 2003; Blaydes and Linzer 2012). In other words, pervasive anti-Muslim attitudes among the American public will continue to provide terrorists with justification for attacking the United States and its interests and will continue to fuel a perpetual cycle of stereotypes, interventions, and terrorism. To be clear, it is not my intent to suggest that the United States should refrain from using military force when it is justified to do so. However, it should be very concerning to citizens, policymakers, academics, and journalists alike, that so much of the public’s foreign-policy attitudes can be motivated by misguided and unfounded stereotypes, rather than concrete details related to the policy question at hand.
The most important follow-up question to what has so far been a very dispiriting narrative is: What can be done about this? To answer this question, it is important that our discussion of public opinion and citizens’ policy preferences not overshadow the role that politicians and actors in the news business play in shaping negative attitudes toward Muslims. In Chapter Six, I will develop a theory that explains how these individuals frame policy issues involving Muslims and majority-Muslim countries and when those frames are most likely to influence preferences for policies concerning Muslims. Specifically, I will develop my arguments with a focus on understanding how politicians and journalists might frame issues in ways that mitigate the influence misguided stereotypes have on American policy preferences vis-à-vis the Middle East.

I believe that politicians and actors in the news business can have a strong impact on shifting negative opinions about Muslims, considering recent political communications research that suggests that arguments can influence opinion shifts when they emphasize considerations that citizens already have in mind and deem relevant to the issue (Chong and Druckman 2007b). Further, my research and the multiple studies cited herein offer insights about how Chong’s and Druckman’s (2007b) theory can be applied to understand how elite arguments influence shifts in opinion about issues specifically involving Muslims. I consistently find that identity and threat are important considerations that come to mind for many Americans when they evaluate political issues. I expect that academics, politicians, and actors in the news business could impact meaningful shifts in public opinion about Muslims by framing narratives of Muslims that appeal to the American identity and the obligations that come with it, in addition to affirming counterstereotypes of Muslims. The latter should contrast billions of ordinary Muslims – who do not condone
violence, who enjoy Western culture, and who have favorable impressions of American citizens – with Islamist terrorists who have narrowly interpreted a single religious text (the Quran) and hijacked a religion for the purposes of exporting violence around the world. The ideas motivate my investigation of news framing of issues in the Middle East in the following chapter.
Chapter Six - The Political Potential of Affirming Muslim Counterstereotypes

*How do elites and actors in the news business frame policy issues concerning Muslims and/or the Middle East? How do competing news frames influence public opinion about such issues, such as the Syrian refugee crisis? How do frames that affirm counterstereotypes of Muslims influence public opinion about these policy issues?*

In 2011, as the Arab Spring swept throughout the Middle East, pro-democracy demonstrations erupted in Syria with calls for the overthrow of the brutal dictatorship of President Bashar al-Assad. Soon thereafter, President Obama and the heads of government of other democratic world powers – including France, Germany, and the United Kingdom – began echoing the calls of the Syrian demonstrators. The Assad regime responded by using chemical weapons to suppress its dissenters. An internal sectarian conflict between state and non-state actors exploded in the years after, and the infighting has only been complicated by the presence and competing goals of rival superpowers: Russia and the United States. Now turning the calendar page on its eighth year, the armed free-for-all in Syria has displaced nearly thirteen million refugees – or about 60% of Syria’s pre-conflict population – and over half a million have been killed (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2019).

For the past four years, U.S. political elites and droves of their constituents have been entrenched in partisan debate over policy that would allow embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States. The Syria debate ramped up in 2015 as polarizing candidates vied for the Democratic and Republican nominations to the upcoming U.S. Presidential Election. Then-candidate Hillary Clinton campaigned on a pro-refugee platform that frequently emphasized to voters the dire humanitarian crisis in Syria and the moral
obligation of Americans to help and accept refugees. Then-candidate Donald Trump gained popularity with Republican voters by opposing the entry of Syrian refugees to the United States. Trump emphasized the threat of ISIS fighters infiltrating the country by posing as Syrian refugees and argued that the economic costs of accepting refugees should be shouldered by Syria’s Arab neighbors. These arguments are part of Trump’s broader nationalist-populist platform that carried him to the Republican nomination and, ultimately, to the White House.

What Lies Ahead

In this chapter, I investigate how elites and actors in the news business frame policy issues concerning Muslims and majority-Muslim countries. Specifically, I focus on the partisan debate surrounding the Syrian refugee crisis. After identifying how the issue is framed, I investigate how various arguments influence American public opinion about allowing embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States. I draw on extant framing research to develop a theory that explains when specific frames or arguments, as a function of their quality and strength, will be likely to shift opinion about issues and then apply that theory to explain when frames or arguments might shift opinion, specifically, about issues concerning Muslims or majority-Muslim countries. I then put that theory to empirical test in a survey experiment by exposing participants to various combinations of arguments about Syrian refugees and measuring changes in their opinions. I describe the various arguments and survey experiment in greater detail below, but here I will summarize the findings and give a preface about the implications of the research to guide the discussion.
I analyze data collected at the beginning of the survey experiment to first get a sense of the factors that shape opinion about allowing embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States (i.e., pretest support). Again, I find evidence linking whites’ anti-Muslim stereotypes to policy preferences unfavorable to Muslims (i.e., opposition to allowing embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States). I also find evidence supporting theories of the positive effects of intergroup contact (Allport 1954) and other research finding positive relationships between Muslim contact and preference for policies favorable to Muslims (Saleem, Yang, and Ramasubramanian 2016; Sikorski et al. 2017).

In my study, those who self-report higher numbers of Muslim friends and colleagues are more likely than those with no Muslim friends to support allowing embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States.

In the framing experiment, I find evidence that single exposures to pro-refugee arguments – specifically, frames that emphasize the moral obligation of Americans to help, the humanitarian crisis, and counterstereotypes of Muslims – influence substantive opinion shifts toward a more-supportive position. In dual-exposure competitive conditions – where participants are exposed to opposing arguments – I find that pro-refugee frames also dominate anti-refugee frames by influencing opinion shifts toward their position. The most telling conclusion from my analysis is that these framing effects are not simply influencing those already supportive of Syrian refugees to become more steadfast in their beliefs. Instead, the framing effects influenced by pro-refugee frames in both single and competitive conditions are most pronounced among those who were initially opposed to accepting refugees rather than those who were initially supportive.
My investigation into public opinion surrounding the Syrian refugee crisis offers important theoretical and practical contributions. I use existing theories of framing to explain when frames might influence public opinion about political issues. Then I apply that theory to develop expectations about when frames might influence opinion about issues involving Muslims and majority-Muslim countries. My analysis of elite frames surrounding the Syrian refugee crisis both replicate existing framing studies and adapts them to understand framing of Muslims and issues in the Middle East. My focus on the on-going Syrian refugee crisis and frames employed during the recent 2016 Presidential Election also offer important perspective about how frames of Middle East issues influence opinion in the real world (i.e., external validity). The most important and most practical takeaway from my investigation is that certain types of frames – particularly those that affirm counterstereotypes of Muslims – can shift issue opinions that are rooted in anti-Muslim biases. Although I focus explicitly on the Syrian refugee crisis in this chapter, I expect that research can offer practical ideas to politicians and actors in the news businesses for how to build unbiased narratives in reporting on Muslims and Middle East issues.

In the following section, I briefly review the history of the Syrian civil war and refugee crisis – through the lens of U.S. involvement – since 2011. I also spend some time detailing the partisan debate about the Syrian crisis in the United States. With a better contextual understanding, I then delve deeper into political-communications research to develop expectations about how the domestic partisan debate shapes public opinion about accepting Syrian refugees into the United States. Finally, I put my expectations to rigorous empirical test and conclude with discussion of the findings and implications of those findings.
The Syrian Civil War and Refugee Crisis

Most Americans have more than passing familiarity with the Syrian civil war and the ongoing refugee crisis. Although they may be unfamiliar with the circumstances that led to U.S. involvement in the conflict, many are likely familiar with partisan debate over the issue. Many might recall President Obama’s “red line” warning to President Assad at the beginning of the war, which directly set the stage for U.S. intervention in Syria. Although President Obama – along with several of his European counterparts – began issuing sanctions against the Assad regime in 2011, his “red line” remarks to reporters at an August 2012 White House press briefing were the sparks that lit the fiery political debate over Syria and ultimately led to U.S. military intervention (Chollet 2016). When asked about Assad’s alleged use of chemical weapons against his citizens – and if the United States would respond with force – President Obama responded that, “We have been very clear to the Assad regime…that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus.”

Indeed, in August 2013, the Syrian government launched a chemical attack against rebels in Damascus that killed nearly 1,500 civilians – including many children – and Obama’s “red line” was crossed (Almukhtar 2018). Political pressure for a U.S. response mounted quickly and Obama’s comments were debated on a constant loop on network news. Over the next year, U.S. involvement in the Syrian conflict rose to the top of the foreign-policy agenda. Instead of taking action, President Obama sought to share responsibility with members of Congress, asking them to authorize air strikes in Syria (Conway 2017; Associated Press 2019). When that proposal was met with skepticism from both parties – following extensive public backlash against the idea – the President resorted
to negotiating with Russia to cut a deal that would remove or destroy Syria’s chemical weapons stockpile (Conway 2017; Associated Press 2019). Within the year, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons signaled that Assad’s chemical-weapons stockpile had been removed from the country (Conway 2017; Associated Press 2019). Although this initially seemed to be a major foreign policy victory for Obama, the report proved to be inaccurate and the worst was yet to come.

Syria saw a rapid influx of non-state actors into the country – particularly ISIS and other terrorist groups – and a drastic increase in terror attacks against civilians and U.S. military personnel in 2013 and 2014 (Conway 2017; Associated Press 2019). After declaring themselves an Islamic caliphate, ISIS fighters took over the provincial capital of Raqqa in March 2013 and established the city as their own capital (Conway 2017; Associated Press 2019). ISIS continued to overtake large chunks of territory along the Syria-Iraq border over the next year and toppled the Iraqi cities of Fallujah and Ramadi (Conway 2017; Associated Press 2019). By June 2014, ISIS had seized control of Mosul, a northern Iraqi city with a population of over one million. With this serious blow to security in the Middle East, President Obama finally gained enough backing from Congress to intervene in Syria. On September 18, 2014, the President’s plan for the United States to arm and train rebels to fight against ISIS passed Congress with bipartisan support (Conway 2017; Associated Press 2019). Just four days later, the first of many airstrikes were authorized by the President and carried out against ISIS targets over the next four years (Conway 2017; Associated Press 2019).

Despite an initial plan for a limited on-the-ground presence, the U.S. troop count in Syria quickly increased from just a few hundred to over 2,000 in 2015 (where it remains
as of this writing). Much of the troop surge coincided with the establishment of a Russian military base in Latakia and a declaration of support for the Syrian regime by Russian President Vladimir Putin. If the list of combatants and their roles weren’t confusing enough already, here’s where things have stood since the end of 2015: Russia has a strong presence in Syria and, along with Iran, supports the Syrian regime against rebels; the United States and its allies support rebel groups – particularly Kurds – fighting the Syrian forces; and, all combatants are fighting ISIS.

Beginning with Russian involvement, U.S. policy in Syria starts to come across as a muddle. Rather than conveying clear policy goals, much of the news about the conflict since late 2015 reads like retaliatory playground versions of Cold War “I didn’t do it, he did it!” After the United States and Russia agreed to a ceasefire on September 12, 2016 – to allow aid to reach embattled civilians – fourteen people and nine children were killed three days later in an airstrike (Conway 2017; Associated Press 2019). The United States and Russia publicly blamed each other. Two days later, coalition airstrikes intended to target ISIS militants instead killed sixty-two Syrian soldiers and were publicly criticized by Russia (Conway 2017; Associated Press 2019). On September 20, U.S. officials blamed Russia for strikes on a humanitarian convoy that left more than twenty dead and temporarily halted the movement of U.N. convoys in Syria (Conway 2017; Associated Press 2019). The week culminated in a game of military one-upmanship when over 200 airstrikes hit Aleppo in a three-day period in what must have looked like a space battle in Star Wars (Conway 2017; Associated Press 2019).

In 2016, as the U.S. Presidential Election ramped up, much of the domestic political debate focused on the U.S. government’s role in helping displaced Syrian refugees.
Throughout the election, Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton established her pro-refugee platform by emphasizing the humanitarian crisis and evoking affect toward the suffering of women and children (Ballotpedia 2016). Clinton also frequently appealed to the sense of moral obligation that Americans should have toward helping those in the warzone (Ballotpedia 2016). Meanwhile, Republican frontrunner Donald Trump expressed concerns over the economic costs of accepting refugees and the potential threat of terrorism from ISIS fighters posing as refugees and entering the U.S (Ballotpedia 2016). At one point, he also called for a “complete and total shutdown” of Muslims entering the U.S (Ballotpedia 2016).

Trump was eventually elected and just seven days after taking office, he delivered on his campaign promise by signing Executive Order 13769 – the so-called “Muslim Ban” – which indefinitely suspended the entry of Syrian refugees to the United States and banned entries from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somali, Sudan, and Yemen for 90 days. That initial ban set off a wave of protests, many of which took place in U.S. airports. The detention of U.S. visa holders and legal residents created confusion, receiving a great deal of media coverage and prompting involvement by the ACLU of Washington. In the aftermath of the executive order, the Supreme Court has overturned the explicit “banning” of citizens from these countries but has upheld subsequent revisions that restrict entry to only those with business (B-1) and tourist (B-2) visas. As domestic political debate surrounding the refugee crisis rages on; so too does the conflict in Syria. Research at the intersection of the two is timely and will continue to be important into the foreseeable future.
In the next section, I will briefly recap our theoretical discussion from Chapter Three before proceeding with my empirical investigation into framing of the Syrian refugee crisis.

**Framing Effects**

The *framing process* is a term broadly used to describe the strategic structuring, writing, and producing of stories, with emphasis on the adjustment of headlines, word usage, rhetoric, and narration (Cappella and Jamieson 1997). Elites seek to *frame* certain political issues by making these adjustments in ways that might shift constituents’ opinions toward their position, which means that citizens in multi-party systems will often be exposed to *competing frames* or *competing arguments* about an issue (Zaller 1992; Druckman 2001; Sniderman and Theriault 2004; Brewer and Gross 2005).

Political communications research that focuses on cognitive reasoning suggests that three main psychological processes determine the extent to which issue frames produce framing effects and influence public opinion. For frames to shift opinion, they must target values or considerations that are:

- *available* (i.e., a consideration must be available for retrieval and use; Eagly and Chaikin 1993);
- *accessible* (i.e., people who think about issues are likely to have more accessible considerations; Fazio 1995); and,
- *applicable* (i.e., conscious evaluation of the applicability of accessible considerations, particularly when exposed to frames of opposing considerations; Fazio 1995; Kuklinski et al. 2001; Druckman 2004).

The impact that frames have on opinion will be congruent to their strength. Frames will be strong and most likely to shift opinion by targeting available, accessible, and applicable ideas. In contrast, weak frames will have less impact on opinion because they emphasize
unavailable or inapplicable considerations. When consumers are exposed to opposing frames that are unbalanced in strength, opinion is likely to shift toward the position of the strong argument. In some cases, the news consumer might infer that the poor quality of the weak frame is due to an indefensible position (Martin and Achee 1992; Chong and Druckman 2007b). Finally, exposure to opposing frames that are balanced in strength should influence the news consumer to moderate their position. Those who are higher in political knowledge and more attentive to issues should be especially motivated to deliberate and find the “correct position.”

From here, my research departs from other work because I do not choose frames to test experimentally based on theoretical criteria (Chong and Druckman 2007b). Instead, I let theory guide my expectations about how the Syrian refugee crisis is framed and how those arguments vary in strength. Then, I conduct two pretests to test those expectations and use the results of those pretests to develop hypotheses about how frames surrounding the Syrian refugee crisis influence public opinion about the issue. Finally, I put those expectations to rigorous experimental testing.

**Framing the Syrian Refugee Crisis**

Earlier, I noted that elites and actors in the news business attempt to frame issues in ways that influence public opinion toward their respective issue positions. Frames or arguments should be particularly effective at influencing such opinion shifts when they emphasize considerations that, for news consumers, are present in mind (available) and deemed relevant to the issue. Throughout this research, I find that considerations of threat and in-group identity are idea elements that are pivotal in shaping public opinion about
policy issues involving Muslims and majority-Muslim countries. Therefore, I expect that elites attempt to frame antipathy toward Muslims and opposition to policies favorable to Muslims by primarily emphasizing threat-based considerations. Emphasizing threat should offer a particularly effective or strong way for those with anti-Muslim biases and/or opposed to pro-Muslim policies to frame these issues and shape opinion.

On the other side, I expect that elites attempt to frame Muslims in a positive way and/or support for policies favorable to Muslims by primarily emphasizing obligations to the national identity. Appealing to obligations of the national identity should offer a particularly effective or strong way for those who support pro-Muslim policies to frame issues and shape opinion. I also expect that elites attempt to frame issues involving Muslims and policies in the Middle East by focusing on pragmatic ideas, such as those related to economic considerations or diplomatic considerations. However, I expect that such frames – that is frames unrelated to in-group identity or threat idea elements – should be relatively weak.

I identify frames surrounding the Syrian refugee crisis by reviewing speech and debate content from the recent 2016 Presidential Election. By focusing on the elite debate surrounding the Syrian refugee crisis, I can investigate my expectations about how elites frame policy issues involving Muslims and majority-Muslim countries, as well as test how those frames influence public opinion. By focusing on frames of the Syrian refugee crisis employed during the 2016 Presidential Election, my research will unearth how arguments – to which many Americans have been exposed – influence opinion in an on-going political debate and, therefore, will speak to real-world framing effects (i.e., external validity).
My review of candidate statements yields four frames of the Syrian refugee crisis constantly employed during the election:

- an *economic frame* (Trump argument that we should not accept refugees because other Middle East states need to put up the resources, not the United States);
- a *threat frame* (Trump argument that we should not accept refugees because we do not know who they are, and they could be terrorists trying to come to the United States to commit acts of terror);
- a *humanitarian frame* (Clinton argument that we should accept refugees because the United States needs to help the innocents who are suffering and dying in the Syrian conflict); and,
- a *moral obligation frame* (Clinton argument that we should accept refugees because it is not who we are as Americans to discriminate and turn away those in need.

These commonly used frames align with my expectations about how competing sides frame the Syrian refugee crisis. Throughout the election, then-candidate Donald Trump frequently framed the Syrian refugee crisis by emphasizing the threat of terrorism from ISIS fighters who will pose as refugees and enter the United States. At times, he also made pragmatic appeals to the economic costs of allowing Syrians to seek refuge in the United States. Then-candidate Hillary Clinton also frequently framed the issue by emphasizing the moral obligation of Americans to help Syrians, rather than turning them away. Clinton’s other common arguments typically focused on affective appeals, rather than pragmatic issues, by focusing on the emotional subject of suffering inflicted on Syrian women and children.

In addition to these frames, I also construct a *counterstereotype affirming frame* to examine how direct statements that affirm counterstereotypes about Muslims and refugees influence opinion in this competitive information environment. The *counterstereotype
affirming frame argues that the United States should accept Syrian refugees because “there are a lot of stereotypes out there that are wrong” and then lists several examples. Finally, I construct a neutral frame to serve as a baseline – or a control condition – against which I can compare the influence of the five directional arguments. The neutral frame does not take either side in the debate on the Syrian refugee crisis.

To recap, I will investigate how public opinion about allowing embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States is influenced by six different frames: economic, threat, humanitarian, moral obligation, counterstereotype affirming, and neutral frames. However, to draw some expectations about how these frames influence opinion, I first need to empirically test their strength. To do this, I conduct two pretests.

In Pretest 1, my goals are to determine if consumers of the frames correctly perceive the directions of the arguments (i.e., supporting or opposing entry of refugees) and how they evaluate the effectiveness (i.e., applicability) of each argument. Note that a strong evaluation of effectiveness on the pretest might reflect strong applicability, but not necessarily availability. In Pretest 2, my goal is to evaluate the availability of the arguments by asking individuals – with no knowledge of the frames or the research – what ideas come to mind when they think about the Syrian refugee crisis and then comparing those to the considerations espoused by the frames. The results from these pretests are considered when I evaluate strong and weak frames on each side of the Syrian refugee debate and develop expectations about the influence of the frames on opinion about Syrian refugees. Finally, it is worth noting here that time and resources limited the scope of coming experiment and I did not investigate how exposure to various frames over time influenced the accessibility of certain considerations or shifts in opinion about the crisis.
Pretest 1: Direction and Applicability

In Pretest 1, I asked a student sample (N = 52) drawn from two research methods courses at a large midwestern university to evaluate the six frames – in random order and in isolation from each other – in terms of their direction and effectiveness. I presented each frame as a “statement made by a candidate for Congress next year” in order to eliminate bias that might arise from the arguments being referenced to the polarizing presidential candidates. The students had no knowledge that they were participating in an experimental pretest or of the forthcoming experiment. The full versions of these frames – used in both the pretest and in the full experiment below – are presented in Table 6.1.
### Table 6.1 | Elite Framing of the Syrian Refugee Crisis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame (Direction)</th>
<th>Argument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Threat Frame (Anti-Refugee)</strong></td>
<td>Candidate: “We can’t accept Syrian refugees. There will be attacks that you wouldn’t believe. There will be attacks by the people that are, right now, that are coming into our country. I have no doubt in my mind. Our country has enough difficulty right now without letting the Syrians pour in, and again, we don’t know that they’re Syrians. We don’t know where they come from; we have no idea. They could be ISIS. They could be who knows…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic Frame (Anti-Refugee)</strong></td>
<td>Candidate: “We can’t accept Syrian refugees. We don’t know where they’re from…we don’t know where they’re from and they have no documentation. We all have hearts and we can build safe zones in Syria. But we need to get the Gulf states to put up the money. ‘We’re not putting up the money. The Gulf states need to play a bigger role in taking the Syrian refugees.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Humanitarian Frame (Pro-Refugee)</strong></td>
<td>Candidate: “We must accept Syrian refugees. We can’t let anyone in our country that poses a risk to us. But there are a lot of refugees...women and children; think of that picture we all saw of that 4-year-old boy with the blood on his forehead because he’d been bombed by the Russian and Syrian Air Forces. There are children suffering in this catastrophic war, largely, I believe, because of Russian aggression. And we need to do our part. We by no means are carrying anywhere near the load that Europe and others are. But we will have vetting that is as tough as it needs to be from our professionals, our intelligence experts and others.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moral Obligation Frame (Pro-Refugee)</strong></td>
<td>Candidate: “We must accept Syrian refugees. We have to accept refugees from Syria. Turning away orphans, applying a religious test, discriminating against Muslims, slamming the door on every Syrian refugee; that is just not who we are. We are better than that. And remember, many of these refugees are fleeing the same terrorists who threaten us. It would be a cruel irony indeed if ISIS can force families from their homes and then also prevent them from ever finding new ones.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Counterstereotype Affirming Frame (Pro-Refugee)</strong></td>
<td>Candidate: &quot;We must accept Syrian refugees. Put yourself in their position. What if your homes and communities were being attacked and bombed by your own leader, while other countries were fighting your armed forces and each other? Plus, there are a lot of stereotypes out there that are wrong. Let's talk about facts. Many Muslims have favorable views of American people; and they overwhelmingly oppose terrorism and violence. These people are trying to escape the very same terrorists we are fighting in Syria and Iraq. Perhaps the most important fact of all...zero attacks in the United States have been committed by refugees. We need to do our part.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neutral Frame (Control Condition)</strong></td>
<td>Candidate: &quot;I’m not sure what is the best approach with the refugees. We have to closely evaluate this situation with Syria and carefully consider our options. I want to see more information and talk with our senior defense and intelligence officials. I want to see an assessment of the risks, while keeping in mind that can help these people.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I test the direction of each frame by analyzing how participants rated each frame on a seven-point directional support scale (1 = Definitely opposes; 7 = Definitely supports). My findings suggest that each frame sufficiently conveys the direction of its position. The *economic* and *threat frames* identify as arguments opposing acceptance of Syrian refugees into the United States. On the directional support scale, the *threat frame* averages a score of 1.21 (closest to “Definitely opposes”) and the *economic frame* averages a score of 2.17 (closest to “Opposes”). The remaining three directional frames also identify as arguments *supporting* the acceptance of Syrian refugees into the United States. The *counterstereotype-affirming frame* averages a score of 4.96, the *humanitarian frame* averages 4.6, and the *moral obligation frame* averages 4.88. The average score for the *neutral frame* is 4.0 – or precisely at the middle of the directional support scale – which corresponds with the idea that the candidate “neither supports nor opposes” admitting refugees. These results are depicted graphically in Figure 6.1.

I test the effectiveness of each frame by analyzing how participants rated each frame on a seven-point argument effectiveness scale (1 = Definitely ineffective; 7 = Definitely effective). In summary, all three pro-refugee frames rate – on average – as more effective arguments than the anti-refugee frames. At first glance, I was concerned that social desirability biases influenced how the frames were rated. However, in the forthcoming experiment, I find strong evidence that the influence that the pro-refugee frames have on opinion about refugees corroborate the ratings from the pretest. Social desirability bias does not seem to be a problem.

The *economic frame* averages a score of 3.54 and the *threat frame* averages a score of 3.71. The *humanitarian frame* averages 4.54, the *moral obligation frame* averages 4.68,
and the counterstereotype-affirming frame averages 4.76. These scores indicate that each pro-refugee argument is perceived as more effective than each anti-refugee argument. Specifically, the economic frame represents the least applicable anti-refugee argument and the least applicable overall argument. The counterstereotype-affirming frame presents the most applicable pro-refugee argument and the most applicable argument overall. Interestingly, the mean score for the neutral frame is 4.42 which indicates that it is perceived as a more applicable argument than each anti-refugee argument, despite not taking a position. These results are depicted graphically in Figure 6.2.

**Figure 6.1 | Pretest Direction of Syrian Refugee Crisis Frames**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threat</th>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Humanitarian</th>
<th>Moral</th>
<th>Counterstereotype</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Definitely Opposes

Definitely Supports

Question: How would you rate the extent to which this candidate opposes or supports allowing refugees from Syria? (N=52)
Pretest 2: Availability

The analysis from Pretest 1 offers some insight about the strength of the various Syrian refugee frames, but I am not able to directly interpret whether frames scores reflect their applicability or the combination of their applicability and availability. For example, the *humanitarian frame* was rated as very applicable to the issue, but this does not necessarily mean that humanitarian considerations are also available. I conducted a second pretest with an independent sample drawn from the Amazon Mechanical Turk platform (N = 64) to test whether frames that rated as (in) applicable are also (un) available.

In Pretest 2, I began by giving an impartial description of the Syrian refugee crisis to participants:

The Syrian civil war began in 2011. Still ongoing, the conflict in Syria has displaced many of its citizens and is often referred to as the Syrian refugee crisis. The Syrian refugee crisis was a focal point of the 2016 Presidential Election and remains a divisive issue today. Politicians and their constituents are very divided about what should be the United States’ role in the Syrian refugee crisis.

### Table 6.2: Pretest Strength of Syrian Refugee Crisis Frames

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>3.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat</td>
<td>3.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>4.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian</td>
<td>4.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral</td>
<td>4.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterstereotype</td>
<td>4.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Question:** How would you rate the extent to which the candidate is or is not effective in making his/her case? (N = 52).
After participants read the description, I then asked them to list the ideas that come to mind when they think about the issue. To help guide them, I gave an example of the list task – without divulging its purpose – conducted in the experimental framing research by Chong and Druckman (2007b):

Consider the following: In a recent survey, participants were asked to list ideas that came to mind when they thought about an urban growth proposal. Some examples of common ideas are “open space,” “citizen participation,” “taxes,” and “pollution.”

When you think about Syrian refugees coming to the United States, what ideas come to mind? Please list any ideas that you have. List as many ideas as you desire.

Thirty-one percent of participants listed ideas consistent with humanitarian concerns (e.g., humanitarian crisis, help those suffering), 19% listed economic concerns (e.g., we can’t take care of our own people, this will cost too much), 15% listed threat concerns (e.g., terrorism, attacks), and 15% listed moral obligations of Americans or the United States to help refugees.

These results – combined with those from Pretest 1 – strongly suggest that the humanitarian frame evokes available and applicable considerations. The economic, threat, and moral obligation frames seem to emphasize considerations that are less available, but applicable for many citizens. The counterstereotype-affirming frame scores as the most applicable argument, but this also doesn’t seem to be a function of bringing available considerations to mind: Only one response in Pretest 2 explicitly mentions a concern about anti-Muslim attitudes influencing opinion about refugees. These results are summarized graphically in Figure 6.3.
Figure 6.3 | Pretest Available Considerations about the Syrian Refugee Crisis

Expectations

In the forthcoming experiment, I investigate how six elite arguments – economic, threat, humanitarian, moral obligation, counterstereotype, and neutral frames – influence opinion about the acceptance of Syrian refugees into the United States. Results from the two pretests will guide the development of expectations about how these various frames – as a function of the variance in their availability and applicability – impact public opinion in single exposure and dual exposure competitive conditions.

Single Exposure Conditions

Evidence from the pretests suggests that each of the five directional arguments (not including the neutral frame) are clear about their positions (direction) and evoke applicable and – at least, moderately – available considerations about Syrian refugees. In single exposure conditions, I expect that each directional frame will influence opinion toward its respective position.
However, recall from prior discussion that framing effects depend, in part, on the strength of the arguments. In other words, while each frame should shift opinion toward its respective position, those opinions shifts (or the magnitude of the framing effects) should also be congruent to their applicability and availability. On the anti-refugee side of the debate, I expect that the threat frame will exert more influence on opinion than the economic frame because it scores higher in applicability and about equal in availability. On the pro-refugee side of the debate, I expect that the humanitarian frame will be more effective than the moral obligation and counterstereotype-affirming frames at shifting opinion because it scores highest in availability and applicability. Finally, I expect that all three pro-refugee frames – much higher in applicability – will be more effective than their anti-refugee frames at moving opinion toward their position. Stated as formal hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 6.1:** All frames will shift opinion toward their respective positions in single exposure conditions, but the threat frame will be more effective than the economic frame and the humanitarian frame will be more effective than the moral obligation and counterstereotype-affirming frame.

**Hypothesis 6.2:** Humanitarian, moral obligation, and counterstereotype-affirming frames will influence substantively larger shifts toward their position than threat and economic frames influence toward their position.

*Dual Exposure (Competitive) Conditions*

Extant framing theory also helps me derive expectations about how these frames might influence opinion about allowing embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States in competitive contexts. On the one hand, strong frames should dominate their weaker oppositional counterparts in unbalanced conditions – shifting opinion toward their position – because they bring available and applicable considerations to mind. On the other
hand, in balanced conditions, opposing strong arguments should cause deliberation – and, therefore, moderation of opinion – because both are available and applicable.

However, recall that the Syrian refugee crisis frames were not selected for this research based on pre-specified criteria vis-à-vis their direction and strength (i.e., roughly equivalent opposing strong and weak frames). In fact, as the pretests show, prevalent frames of the Syrian refugee crisis do not sort quite so neatly based on pre-specified criteria. Put another way, frames on opposing sides of the debate do not stand on equal ground. All three pro-refugee frames rate higher in applicability than their anti-refugee counterparts and the pro-refugee humanitarian frame rates higher in availability than all anti-refugee frames. Based on this evidence, I expect that in all dual-exposure conditions, pro-refugee frames will dominate anti-refugee frames. I expect that the pro-refugee frames will exert substantively larger influences on opinion shifts toward their position when they oppose weakest anti-refugee argument in the economic frame. Stated formally:

**Hypothesis 6.3:** Pro-refugee frames will dominate anti-refugee frames in dual exposure conditions by shifting opinion toward the pro-refugee position. These effects will be substantively larger when a pro-refugee frame opposes the economic frame.

I also expect that pro-refugee frames will have substantively larger influence on opinion among those with existing anti-refugee opinions compared to those with existing pro-refugee opinions. As the pretests suggest, those with existing anti-refugee opinions likely find little support from value-consistent weak anti-refugee frames and, therefore, I expect that they should be especially likely to shift their opinions after exposure to the much stronger pro-refugee frames. I restate Hypotheses 6.2 and 6.3 with this caveat included:
**Hypothesis 6.2a:** Humanitarian, moral obligation, and counterstereotype-affirming frames will influence substantively larger opinion shifts toward their position among those who had existing anti-refugee opinions compared to those with existing pro-refugee opinions.

**Hypothesis 6.3a:** Pro-refugee frames will dominate anti-refugee frames in dual exposure conditions by shifting opinion toward the pro-refugee position. These effects will be substantively largest among those with existing anti-refugee opinions when a pro-refugee frame opposes the economic frame.

**Methods**

I conducted a survey experiment to investigate my hypotheses about the influences that various frames have on public opinion about allowing embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States. Experimentation offers two distinct advantages to my research. First, through random assignment of participants to treatments, I can overcome issues of self-selection in which individual’s attitudes might be correlated with the messages they receive. Second, by controlling participants’ exposure to various frames, I can distinguish the influences of the content and the combinations of messages. Below, I analyze pretest data to understand what factors shape participants’ existing opinions about the acceptance of Syrian refugees. I then investigate how frames shifted those opinions during the experiment.

**Recruitment**

I initially recruited 600 adult white participants from the Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) online labor market to “participate in a survey about politics and recent statements made by candidates for Congress” (i.e., a deception used to hide the experiment). I focused on recruiting whites – rather than a representative sample – because of the consistent
evidence I find that whites are more prone than blacks to stereotype Muslims and, as a result, to prefer policies that are hostile or disadvantageous to Muslims. In other words, as I investigate how frames – particularly those that might mitigate the influence that anti-Muslim stereotypes have on public opinion – I focus my investigation on those most likely to harbor anti-Muslim stereotypes and ethnocentric policy preferences. Participants also had to agree that they lived in the United States and offered their participation voluntarily to screen into the study.

MTurk is a tool that is widely used by social scientists to recruit diverse pools of research subjects in an efficient manner and at low costs (Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012; Farrell, Grenier, and Leiby 2017; Owens and Hawkins 2018). However, recent research suggests some MTurk workers try to circumvent sample screening methods by using virtual private servers and virtual private networks that conceal their physical location (Dennis, Goodson, and Pearson 2018). This means that an unsuspecting researcher might receive fraudulent responses from outside the United States and/or multiple responses from the same individual (Dennis, Goodson, and Pearson 2018). Considering this, I aimed my initial recruitment higher than the final sample target. Once the data were collected on the 600 initial participants, I analyzed those responses for duplicate IP addresses and duplicate GPS coordinates to the fourth decimal place (i.e., accurate to 11 meters) to identify and remove fraudsters from the sample. The final sample came to 485 participants or roughly 40 in each of my twelve framing conditions — plenty to be able to make valid statistical comparisons between the conditions.
Design

After successfully screening into the study, participants were directed to the Qualtrics survey program where they completed the survey. Participants first completed a pretest questionnaire that asked about the importance of the Syrian refugee crisis and support for allowing embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States. The pretest questionnaire also included demographic questions, questions about attitudes toward and contact with Muslims, and political knowledge questions that are used to construct control variables in the pre-experimental analysis ahead. Other pretest questions were included to mask the purpose of the experiment, such as opinion questions about the confirmation of Justice Brett Kavanaugh and factual questions about the Electoral College.

After the pretest questions, participants were randomly and equally assigned to twelve experimental conditions designed to test how different frames of the Syrian refugee crisis influence opinion about allowing embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States. In each condition (Table 6.2), participants were exposed to either one or two competing arguments about accepting Syrian refugees. After reading the argument(s) in their assigned conditions, participants answered a posttest questionnaire, including questions – analogous to the pretest – about support for allowing embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States. Finally, participants were debriefed about the experiment and the purpose of the research before exiting the survey. Those who completed the survey received a validation code to enter back into the MTurk portal in order to receive compensation for participating.

24 In compliance with Institutional Review Board protocols, all participants were debriefed about the experiment and the fictitious stories they read at the end of their time in the experiment.
Table 6.2 | Conditions in Syrian Refugee Crisis Framing Experiment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Single Exposure Conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Condition 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Condition 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Condition 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dual Exposure Conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Condition 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Measures

The key dependent variable in the pre-experiment model below is *pretest opinion*. The pretest item asks, “How strongly do you support or oppose Syrian refugees coming to the United States?” Response options range from “Strongly oppose” (1) to “Strongly support” (7). The key dependent variable in the experimental model is *change in opinion*. This indicator measures how participants’ opinions shifted from the pretest to the posttest as a result of exposure to various frames. When this variable was created, twelve observations or about two percent of the sample were identified and omitted from the analysis. These observations corresponded to five- or six-point opinion shifts (on a seven-point scale) that seem unlikely to have occurred in earnest due to brief exposures to news stories, but instead due to participants shirking the survey. *Change in opinion* is simply taken as the difference in *pretest opinion* and *posttest opinion* and ranges from -2 to +2.

The primary independent variables in the pre-experiment model below are *percent of friends Muslim*, *percent of colleagues Muslim*, *intensity of Muslim stereotypes*, *age*,
party ID, male, education, political knowledge, and survey duration. The intensity of Muslim stereotypes measure is included to provide another test of the theory developed in Chapter Three: Anti-Muslim stereotypes among whites are likely to shape ethnocentric preferences toward policy issues involving Muslims or majority-Muslim countries. The contact variables (i.e., percent of friends Muslim and percent of colleagues Muslim) provide a direct test of the theory that higher levels of intergroup contact can promote tolerance and lead to positive intergroup relations (Allport 1954; Voss 2001). The demographic variables are included as standard political control variables. Finally, survey duration is intended to control for the possibility that participants may have shirked giving quality responses in the survey leading to estimates that diverge from theoretical expectations.

The primary independent variables in the full experimental model are twelve binary or “dummy” variables that indicate if an individual was exposed to a given frame or combination of frames. In the experimental model, the neutral frame variable is omitted to serve as a point of reference (i.e., reference or baseline category).

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1 The percent Muslim friends and percent Muslim colleagues items range from 0-100. The intensity of Muslim stereotype item is a five-point indicator of agreement that “violent” describes “most Muslims (1 = Not at all; 5 = Extremely well). Age ranges from 18-99+. Party ID is a four-point indicator (1 = Independent 2 = Republican; 3 = Democrat; 4 = Other, or Other). Male is a dichotomous gender variable (0 = Female; 1 = Male). Education is a six-point item ranging from 1 = No high school to 6 = Some post graduate or post-graduate degree. Political knowledge is an index of six political knowledge items. Finally, survey duration is a measure of the amount of time (in seconds) respondents spent in the survey.
Pre-Experiment Support for Allowing Embattled Syrians to Seek Refuge in the United States

I estimate a pre-experiment model (Table 6.3) to understand the factors that shape opinion opinions about allowing embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States before later experimentally testing how various frames shift those opinions. The model estimates ordinary least squares regression coefficients given the continuous nature of the dependent variable pretest opinion.

I find clear evidence – corroborating expectations and other findings presented throughout this dissertation – that, on average, anti-Muslim stereotypes among whites exert a strong and deleterious influence on support for policies harmful to Muslims. In this case, I find strong evidence that anti-Muslim stereotypes erode support for allowing embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States. I estimate that each one-point increase in the intensity of Muslim stereotypes decreases support for accepting Syrian refugees by about .75 points (p < .01). This means that those harboring the most intense stereotypes of Muslims as violent (i.e., “violent” describes “most Muslims” extremely well) are likely to register 3.75 points lower in support for accepting refugees than those with the least intense stereotypes.

I also find evidence that, on average, both forms of contact – estimated in separate iterations of the model because of high multicollinearity – increase support for allowing embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States. I estimate that a one percent increase in either the percent of one’s friends who are Muslim or colleagues who are Muslim increases support for accepting Syrian refugees by about .02 points (p < .01). I estimate that, on average, partisanship also exerts strong influences on support for allowing embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States. I estimate that Democrats are more
likely than Independents to support accepting Syrian refugees by about 1.12 points and Republicans are less likely than Independents to support accepting Syrian refugees by about .88 points (p < 01 each). Finally, I estimate that, on average, males and older participants are less likely to support allowing embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States compared to females and younger participants. I estimate that males are more likely than females to oppose accepting refugees by about .28 points and that each year increase in age decreases support for accepting refugees by about .01 points (p < .01). Survey duration – or the amount of time spent in the survey measured in seconds – seems to have no influence on responses about accepting Syrian refugees.

I should note an interesting finding regarding the influence of education on support for allowing embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States. The estimates presented in the model might suggest that education, on average, has no influence on support for accepting Syrian refugees. In a preliminary version of the model, I did find that education seems to have a strong influence on support for accepting Syrian refugees. However, most of the variance in support for accepting Syrian refugees explained by education is soaked up when I add the Muslim contact variables to the model. This evidence resonates with my discussion in Chapter Four: Those who are involved in an academic setting – either as a student or faculty member – are more likely, on average, than others to have contact with Muslims and, by extension, to be more tolerant toward Muslims and favorable toward policies that help Muslims.
Table 6.3 | Pretest Support for Accepting Syrian Refugees into the United States

| Intensity of Muslim Stereotype (Violent) | -.74*** (-.07) | -.75*** (-.07) |
| Percent of Friends Muslim | .02*** (.00) |
| Percent of Colleagues Muslim | .02*** (.01) |
| Party ID |  |
| Democrat | 1.12*** (.15) | 1.13*** (.15) |
| Republican | -.88*** (.17) | -.87*** (.17) |
| Age | -.01** (.01) | -.01*** (.01) |
| Male | -.28** (.14) | -.29** (.13) |
| Education | .04 (.04) |
| Survey Duration | .00 (.00) |
| Constant | 4.95*** (.42) | 4.96*** (.42) |

Note: Entries are OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The coefficients and SEs for “Age” might seem to be an error, but this is due to rounding. *** p < .01 ** p < .05 | N = 437 | R² = .54 |

Analysis: Framing the Syrian Refugee Crisis

With these insights, I turn my focus to estimating how exposure to various frames or arguments about the Syrian refugee crisis influences public opinion about allowing embattled Syrian refugees to seek refuge in the United States. To do this, I treat the neutral frame – or the control condition – as a baseline or point of comparison in each model. The models ahead estimate ordinary-least-squares regression coefficients given the continuous nature of the dependent variables.

In the experimental model (Table 6.4 below), I find compelling support for my hypotheses. I find clear evidence that pro-refugee arguments, on average, influence
substantive opinion shifts toward support for allowing embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States. In substantive terms, I estimate that single exposure to the humanitarian frame increases support for Syrian refugees by about .43-points (or .51-points relative to the neutral frame) on the five-point scale (p < .01). Single exposure to the moral obligation frame increases support for Syrian refugees by about .22-points (or .30-points relative to the neutral frame; p < .05). Exposure to the counterstereotype frame increases support for Syrian refugees by about .18-points (or .26-points relative to the neutral frame; p < .10). These findings strongly support Hypothesis 6.2 but offer only limited support for Hypothesis 6.1. At this point, I do not see much evidence that permits me to make inferences about the influences of the anti-refugee frames. Perhaps the threat and economic frames are influential only among those already inclined to oppose Syrian refugees. I investigate this possibility ahead.

In dual exposure competitive conditions, I find further evidence that each of the pro-refugee frames, on average, have substantial influence on public opinion about allowing embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States. I find that, in each condition pitting one of the pro-refugee frames against the economic frame, the pro-refugee frames are particularly effective. When the humanitarian frame competes with the economic frame, I estimate that the humanitarian frame dominates the latter and increases support for Syrian refugees about .28-points (or .36-points relative to the neutral frame; p < .05). When the moral obligation frame competes with the economic frame, I estimate that the moral obligation frame dominates the latter and increases support for Syrian refugees by about .18-points (or .26-points relative to the neutral frame; p < .10). I also estimate that when the counterstereotype-affirming frame competes with the economic frame, the
counterstereotype-affirming frame dominates the latter and increases support for Syrian refugees by about .34-points (or .42-points relative to the neutral frame; p < .01). Taken together, these findings offer compelling support for Hypothesis 6.3.

Table 6.4 | The Effect of Framing on Support for Accepting Syrian Refugees into the United States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frames</th>
<th>Predicted Change in Opinion</th>
<th>Change Relative to Ambiguous Frame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.51***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Obligation</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.30**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterstereotype</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.26*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic + Humanitarian</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.36**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic + Moral</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.26*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat + Humanitarian</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat + Moral</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic + Counterstereotype</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.42***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat + Counterstereotype</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Entries are predicted values and OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses below. * p < .01; ** p < .05; *** p < .10. N = 482

In a secondary analysis of the experimental model, I also investigate how frames of the Syrian refugee crisis influence opinion conditional on participants’ initial (i.e., pretest) levels of support. Here, I split the experimental sample into “opponents” (1, 2, and 3 on
the pretest measure) and “supporters” (5, 6, and 7 on the pretest measure) of Syrian refugees to gain a deeper understanding of how and among whom these frames are influencing opinion.

The secondary analysis (Table 6.5) suggests that, on average, average framing effects reported above are especially pronounced among those who oppose allowing embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States. I estimate that the humanitarian frame influences a .46-point increase in support for Syrian refugees among opponents and .40-point increase in support those already supportive. I estimate that the moral obligation frame influences a large .31-point increase in support for Syrian refugees among opponents compared to a .13-point increase among those already supportive. I estimate that the counterstereotype-affirming frame influences a large .36-point increase in support for Syrian refugees among opponents compared to a .05-point increase among those already supportive. This cumulative evidence strongly supports Hypothesis 6.2a. I find an additional piece of supporting evidence for Hypothesis 6.1, as I estimate that the threat frame has a larger substantive impact than the economic frame in shifting opponents toward lower levels of support.

On average, the impacts that pro-refugee frames have in shifting opinion in dual competitive exposures are also pronounced among opponents rather than supporters of Syrian refugees. When the humanitarian frame competes with the economic frame, the humanitarian frame dominates the latter and increases support among opponents by about .70-points. When the counterstereotype-affirming frame competes with the economic frame, the counterstereotype-affirming frame dominates the latter and increases support among opponents by about one (1.00) point. When the counterstereotype-affirming frame
competes with the threat frame, the counterstereotype-affirming frame dominates the latter and increases support among opponents by about .67-points. These findings provide strong support for Hypothesis 6.3a.

Table 6.5 | The Effects of Framing on Support for Accepting Refugees into the United States among Prior Opponents and Supporters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Opponents</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Supporters</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretest Mean</td>
<td>Posttest Mean</td>
<td>+/- Mean</td>
<td>Pretest Mean</td>
<td>Posttest Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.63</td>
<td>5.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>5.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6.09</td>
<td>6.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>6.16</td>
<td>6.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Obligation</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterstereotype</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>5.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic + Humanitarian</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>6.04</td>
<td>6.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic + Moral</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>5.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat + Humanitarian</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>5.91</td>
<td>6.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat + Moral</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>6.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic + Counterstereotype</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.85</td>
<td>5.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat + Counterstereotype</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>6.04</td>
<td>5.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Opponents are those who indicated a 1 (Strongly oppose), 2 (Oppose), or 3 (Somewhat oppose) on the pretest measure of support for allowing Syrian refugees to the United States. Supporters are those who indicated a 5, 6, or 7.

Discussion

The current research takes an important first step toward understanding how elite frames – such as those emphasizing threat or counterstereotypes of Muslims – influence public opinion about policy issues involving Muslims and/or majority-Muslim countries. Whereas conventional wisdom holds that anti-Muslim stereotypes play a significant role in shaping public opinion about Middle East issues, less attention has been paid to understanding how elite arguments might influence these cognitive linkages. This chapter aims to paint a clearer theoretical picture of these processes. As a byproduct, this research
was undertaken with a focus on explaining how typically biased elite discourse of Muslims and Middle East issues might be structured in ways that serve to mitigate the role that ill-informed biases of Muslims play in shaping ordinary Americans’ foreign policy preferences.

I find compelling evidence throughout my analyses that, in general, elite frames that support allowing embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States have positive influences on support for refugees. On average, I find that frames emphasizing the humanitarian nature of the refugee crisis, the moral obligation of Americans to help refugees, and counterstereotypes of Muslims are each effective at influencing support for refugees. I find that these effects are strong and significant when exposure to these frames occurs in isolation and in competition with elite arguments that oppose allowing embattled Syrian to seek refuge in the United States. Additionally, my findings do not seem to reflect circumstances where only existing support for accepting refugees is getting stronger. Rather, I find that pro-refugee frames are particularly effective at shifting opinion toward their position among those with anti-refugee prior opinions.

The evidence presented here contributes to extant framing theory by replicating previous studies that investigate the influence of issue frames on public opinion in competitive information environments (Chong and Druckman 2007b). This research also builds upon those previous studies by offering insights into how competing political information affects public opinion about a salient real-world foreign policy issue. Specifically, where prior experimental research develops framing theory and then tests it using frames that meet certain criteria (i.e., strength and direction), I use insights from that
research to derive expectations about how a foreign policy issue is framed and then investigate how those frames influence public opinion.

The normative implications of my findings are paramount. I find evidence that counterstereotype-affirming information about Muslims substantively increases support for a policy that might be beneficial to Muslims (i.e., allowing embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States). My findings comport with experimental social psychology research that finds evidence suggesting that affirming counterstereotypes can reduce automatic stereotype activation (Gawronski et al. 2008). I extend the normative implications of this scholarship by demonstrating that such information is effective when it is used to frame an on-going real-world issue and when it is perceived as coming from real-world political elites.

My findings that one side (i.e., pro-refugee) of the elite debate about Syrian refugees consistently dominates the other and, in particular, dominates the debate among those who oppose helping Syrian refugees is interesting. Unfortunately, the scope of my investigation into the frames surrounding the Syrian refugee crisis does permit me to explore why some arguments are more applicable and available – and ultimately, more effective – than others. Such an undertaking would likely require costly focus-groups or personal interviews wherein participants could evaluate and discuss the frames in great detail.

However, it is worth noting here the possibility that the framing effects I observe corroborate others’ findings of a “backlash effect” against the recent “Muslim Ban” (Collingwood, Lajevardi, and Oskooii 2018). These authors argue that, “an influx of new information portraying the ‘Muslim Ban’ at odds with inclusive elements of American
identity prompted some citizens to shift their attitudes” (Collingwood, Lajevardi, Oskooi 2018). Perhaps my analysis provides real-time evidence of the shifts these authors describe and of a political context that is especially ripe for narratives and demonstrations that speak out about the incongruities between American identity and othering or stereotyping others based on the violence perpetuated by terrorists. Further investigation into these topics – through the lenses of the Syrian refugee crisis and other Middle East issues – would certainly comprise a timely and fruitful research agenda.

In the same vein, future research should build upon the evidence presented here by investigating how the framing effects I observe are influenced by time and source attribution. As I mentioned earlier, previous research has found that framing effects – in particular, those resulting from exposure to strong applicable frames – become more enhanced with repetition and attribution to credible or trustworthy sources (Miller and Krosnick 2000; Taber and Lodge 2006; Chong and Druckman 2007b). The framing effects I observe in this study compete with Hillary Clinton’s relative inability to shift opinion during the 2016 Presidential Election, which begs the question of how her arguments would influence opinion when employed by a candidate not caught up in a nasty election dominated by headlines of scandals, cover-ups, and insults. Another interesting question (and potential study) is how would Republicans react to pro-Muslim frames coming from Republican candidates or conservative-leaning news sources?

These are just two potential avenues for future investigations. The take-home point is that much painting remains to be done on the theoretical canvas that I have started here. The prospect that the framing effects I observe might be magnified under certain conditions should present great normative appeal to anyone interested in offering practical,
theoretically-rooted ideas to help offset the misguided influences that unfounded anti-Muslim attitudes – perpetuated by negative media coverage – have on American public opinion and policy preferences.
Chapter Seven - The Future of U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East

If we can assume one thing about conflict in the Middle East, it is that history is likely to repeat itself. The outbreak of sectarian violence in the Middle East has led the U.S. government to intervene militarily, time after time, on behalf of its strategic and economic interests in the region. Today, several conflicts are cooking up in the region – with the same major ingredients as their forerunners – that risk the potential of drawing U.S. intervention in the future.

In Yemen, a civil war is raging much like the one in Syria. In fact, the crisis in Yemen traces its origins to the same underlying causes in the broader Arab Spring movement as the Syrian civil war (BBC News 2018). In 2014, a coup d'état forced out the authoritarian President Ali Abdullah Saleh and now jihadists and separatists are backlashing against the new United States and Saudi-supported regime (BBC News 2018). A severe humanitarian crisis is escalating while regional powers like Saudi Arabia and Iran are engaged in their own satellite war for power and influence in the country and the broader Middle East. It is built mostly on centuries-old sectarian divisions – Saudi Arabia as the leader of the Sunni Muslim world and Iran as the leader of the Shia Muslim world (Reardon 2015).

To the north, unrest is growing between Palestine and the U.S.-Israeli alliance. Many citizens in Palestine and Muslims throughout the Middle East feel that the U.S. government is alienating them in favor of Israel (Thahoor 2018). Under the Trump administration, the U.S. government has quit funding the United Nations Relief and Works Agency which has tended to the needs of Palestinian refugees for nearly seventy years. President Trump has declared Jerusalem – a holy location for Christians, Jews, and
Muslims – as the Israeli capital and moved the U.S. embassy there from Tel Aviv. Many speculate about the role Iran will play in contributing to the unrest in the region, fearing that it will retaliate against Israel because the United States left the Iran nuclear deal.

Recently, President Donald Trump abruptly declared that ISIS has been defeated in Syria and that U.S. forces will withdraw. U.S. allies assert that they will not stay in Syria should U.S. forces leave. Many speculate that a quick exit by the United States will leave a power vacuum that allows ISIS to make a comeback, much like the U.S. withdrawal in Iraq that gave birth to ISIS in the first place. Both Democratic and Republican elites have speculated publicly about the consequences of ceding control over the still volatile humanitarian crisis to Russia and Iran and enabling them to redraw the map of the Middle East’s blocs in a way that could undermine America’s and Israel’s positions in the region.

If history indeed serves as a lesson, the lesson is that there is a high probability that the United States will become increasingly involved in these issues as they unfold. In the not-so-distant future, we might be watching campaigns during the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election that are centered on American foreign policy in Yemen, the displacement of Yemeni refugees, troop levels in Syria and in the fight against ISIS, and, as always, the best approach to deterring Iranian nuclear development. What factors will influence American policy preferences toward and, ultimately, U.S. intervention in these issues?

**Anti-Muslim Stereotypes and Ethnocentric Policy Preferences in the Middle East**

The research presented herein helps answer this important, albeit hypothetical, question. Throughout this dissertation, I argue that U.S. interventionism in the Middle East – primarily since the Iranian Hostage Crisis – has left residual cultural attitudes that shape
Americans’ policy preferences and U.S. involvement in the region today. Specifically, I expect and find compelling evidence that anti-Muslim stereotypes shape policy preferences on several important contemporary issues, such as: support for the use of military force to deter Iranian nuclear development, support for the use of preemptive military force against Islamist terror groups, and opposition to admitting Syrian refugees into the United States. Given the pervasive influence that misguided stereotypes and perceived threat from Muslims have on ordinary Americans’ justifications for ethnocentrically-grounded policies, it seems likely that public opinion about developing issues in Yemen, Israel, Syria, and Iran will no less be shaped by these misguided stereotypes. Before expanding upon these ideas and suggestions for mitigating the linkages between anti-Muslim stereotypes and ethnocentric policy preferences, in the following sections I will briefly recap the theoretical groundwork that was laid to develop these arguments and the appropriate analyses to test them.

Theory Building

I am certainly not the first to explore or posit linkages between Americans’ targeted stereotypes of Muslims and their preferences for U.S. policies in the Middle East. However, the current research was motivated by the idea that there are important nuances in this story of bias-driven warfare in the Middle East that have been left unaddressed in the literature and, more importantly, that have serious implications for U.S. foreign policy in the region.

In Chapter Three, I dug deeper into extant research to explicate these nuances and paint a more complete theoretical picture of the influence that targeted stereotypes and
perceptions of threat from Muslims have on ordinary citizens’ preferences for U.S. policies in the Middle East. I found that prior research offers two competing explanations of American support for the use of military force in the Middle East: ethnocentrism and targeted stereotypes of Muslims. I also found that these studies have potentially troubling conceptual and empirical issues that risk confusing our understanding of American public opinion about Muslims and majority-Muslim countries, such as: 1) inconsistency in defining ethnocentrism; 2) a lack of explanation for how ethnocentrism and targeted stereotypes might operate together in cognition to shape policy preferences; and, 3) a lack of clear explanation of how these factors are causally related to other idea elements (e.g., authoritarianism) to which they are shown to be correlated.

With a better idea of these theoretical hurdles, I set out in Chapters Three and Four to provide a synthesized theory of American policy preferences in the Middle East and a suitable empirical method to test the theory and account for these issues.

Asymmetric Ethnocentric Response

I adopted from Brewer (2001) a theoretically-grounded working definition of ethnocentric response that can be summarized like this: Someone will exhibit an ethnocentric response, such as hostile policy preferences on issues involving Muslims or majority-Muslim countries, when anti-Muslim stereotypes combine with an individuals’ in-group identity to result in perceived threat. I also drew from other applications of this theory to draw inferences about when identity elements and threat might become linked for some, but not others, to produce an ethnocentric response toward Muslims.
My core argument was that Muslims are uniquely situated to be perceived as a realistic and symbolic threat to the core national identity of American whites, rather than blacks, because they differ in terms of ethnicity, culture, and religion. Media encourage evaluations of Muslims in terms of their cultural dissimilarity and portray Muslims as monolithically violent group. I argued that Muslims present little identity threat to blacks, whose core in-group identity typically revolves around their status as a racial minority in the United States. Muslims present little socioeconomic threat to blacks in the United States and, in fact, Islam has typically been viewed as a positive force in black communities since the founding of the country (Davis 2006; Curtis 2012; Beydoun 2018). Even blacks who identify with the nation will not view Islam as incompatible or Muslims as threatening because that identity is typically not predicated on looking, living, or believing a certain way. My expectation was that these differential attitudinal structures make whites more prone to out-group hostility toward Muslims than blacks – or what I call asymmetric ethnocentric response (AER) toward Muslims.

Taking the Right Approach

My search for a suitable empirical method to test the AER theory led me to structural equation modeling (SEM). Outlining my cognitive schematic and then testing it using SEM proved to be an appropriate analytical approach because it allowed for the explicit testing of relationships between multiple related constructs like identity attachments, authoritarianism, targeted stereotypes, etc. Specifically, I developed the SEM to simultaneously test my expectations regarding: 1) the causal cognitive process that produces ethnocentric response; 2) the role that authoritarianism plays in this causal
process; and, 3) the potential for ethnocentric response toward Muslims diverges across race. I used the new SEM strategy to test my cognitive schematic in an analysis of support for various policies, including the use of military force, to deter Iranian nuclear development. In short, I found compelling evidence linking anti-Muslim attitudes – among whites – to support for using military force (rather than diplomacy) to deter Iranian nuclear development. The findings from the SEM were also corroborated with evidence from a framing experiment.

Theory Integration: Tunnel Vision of Terrorism and Opposition to Accepting Refugees

From there, I set out in Chapters Five and Six to build upon the AER theory by applying it in investigations of other issues wherein anti-Muslim attitudes might play a substantive role in shaping policy preferences. In Chapter Five, I integrated the AER theory with social psychology research on stereotype formation and generalization to investigate how targeted anti-Muslim stereotypes shape policy preferences for using military force against terror groups. I contributed theoretical perspective about the implications of anti-Muslim attitudes for policy preferences to deter terrorism by investigating how ordinary citizens respond to threats from both Islamist and non-Islamist FTOs with similar foundational ideologies. I found compelling evidence in a survey experiment suggesting that anti-Muslim attitudes have primed many ordinary Americans such that they are more likely justify the use of military force against a terror threat when it emanates from an Islamist group rather than an equally threatening non-Islamist group. I also found that justification for deploying military force against a terror threat is magnified when participants are informed about the threat through exposure to information
that explicitly (textual) and implicitly (visual), rather than only textually, describes the threat as Islamist. Finally, I found another piece of evidence that corroborates the Asymmetric Ethnocentric Response (AER) theory. I found that whites are substantively and significantly more likely than blacks to justify the use of military force against Islamists compared to non-Islamist FTOs.

In Chapter Six, I integrated the AER theory with extant scholarship on news framing and political communications to explain how targeted anti-Muslim stereotypes influence whites’ preferences for policies that might be beneficial to Muslims or majority-Muslim countries. Specifically, I contributed theoretical perspective about the implications of anti-Muslim attitudes by investigating the factors that shape public support for allowing Syrian refugees to come to the United States. I found compelling evidence in a survey experiment suggesting that, even when controlling for other factors, the intensity of anti-Muslim stereotypes among whites plays a substantive and significant role in shaping opposition to allowing embattled Syrians to seek refuge in the United States. On a positive note, I also found evidence supporting the positive intergroup contact hypothesis, insofar as individuals who self-report higher percentages of Muslim friends and Muslim colleagues exhibit a higher willingness to allow Syrian refugees to come to the United States.

**Contributions**

The AER theory clarifies important nuances about how anti-Muslim stereotypes shape policy preferences across race toward issues in the Middle East. It also helps us to understand why anti-Muslim stereotypes seem to be so impactful on the direction of foreign policy on these issues. In every one of my analyses, I find that the linkages between
perceptions of threat and targeted stereotypes of Muslims leads to a stronger preference for ethnocentric response among whites.

My theory also helps to explain a state of perpetual warfare between the United States and the Middle East that cannot otherwise be explained by theories of international relations. International relations scholars tend to conceptualize rivalries as prolonged interstate disputes that typically arise from competition over resources or territory. However, this approach is less helpful in explaining nearly a history of rivalry between the United States and an entire region on opposite sides of the globe, or more generally why democracies with rapidly revolving leadership would maintain a consistent stance toward another country. My research helps to fill this gap by rooting rivalry in core public attitudes, explaining how cultural biases that exist among the majority population of a major world power shape an enduring rivalry that persists on a global scale.

Some may wonder how my theory and findings are different from a more parsimonious framework such as white supremacy. White supremacy is defined as “a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white supremacy and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings” (Ansley 1997: 592). Further, Smith (2015) conceptualizes white supremacy as a system that does not operate through mere racism alone, but that is perpetuated by three “separate and distinct, but still interrelated logics” or pillars: slavery, genocide/colonialism, and orientalism. According to these conceptualizations, my theory would indeed be subsumed by a more parsimonious framework like white supremacy.
Rooting the conceptual language in color – “white” supremacy – does not fit especially well with my results. News stories that showed Muslims did not evoke the backlash that brought on when they were identified specifically as being Islamic. Nor would rooting this research in the concept of “white supremacy” adequately capture my theoretical contribution. The benefit of situating my specific investigations within social identity theory and developing an appropriate SEM modeling strategy (Hoyle 1995; Kline 1998; de Carvahlo and Chima 2014) to investigate how multiple interrelated idea elements shape out-group hostility is that my approach can be used to explain a myriad of issues at the intersection of core identity attachments and perceived out-group threat involving both whites and non-whites. For example, my approach offers an empirically tested and replicable method that can be used to investigate how multiple idea elements can become linked to perceived threat and shape public opinion about gay rights, immigration, and other divisive issues. It can be used to investigate how non-whites might come to perceive threat from whites and react with out-group hostility. In another example, my approach could be used to investigate how different identity constructions might lead whites to perceive threat from other predominantly white groups (e.g., communists or Russians). Together, my theory and empirical approach offer a package deal that is more generalizable to investigations of issues involving group-threat and identity politics than a framework like white supremacy.

The Future of U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East

The research presented here reports a dark forecast with a strong chance for targeted anti-Muslim stereotypes to have a whirlwind of consequences for U.S. policy in the Middle
Cumulatively, my findings present several pieces of evidence linking anti-Muslim stereotypes and perceptions of threat from Muslims, among whites, to ethnocentric policy responses toward Muslims and majority-Muslim countries. I have utilized a variety of survey and experimental data, analyzed with a diverse set of empirical methods, and found evidence that anti-Muslim attitudes shape asymmetric ethnocentric responses in the form of whites’ policy preferences for: 1) using military force rather than diplomacy to deter Iranian nuclear development; 2) using military force against Islamist terror groups rather than equally threatening non-Islamist groups; 3) a variety of items related to support for the War on Terror (Chapter Four Appendix, Table A4.1); and, 4) opposition to accepting Syrian refugees into the United States.

If history indeed serves as a lesson, future U.S. Presidential Election debates will more than likely center upon policy proposals for intervention in Yemen, restricting embattled Yemeni citizens from entering the United States, a troop surge against a rejuvenated ISIS, and, as always, the best way to strangle the Iranian economy. There will more than likely continue to be candidates vying for office who run on nationalist, anti-Muslim platforms that appeal to voters who harbor stereotypes and perceive Muslims as a threat.

The Political Potential for Framing Counterstereotypes of Muslims

In Chapter Six, I turned from this consistent narrative of negativity to ask a more hopeful question: Can anything be done about this? My analysis in Chapter Six contributes important theoretical perspective about the political potential of reporting and discussing Middle East issues in unbiased ways that might mitigate the influence of anti-Muslim
stereotypes on policy preferences. I found compelling evidence in a survey experiment suggesting that strong frames emphasizing the moral obligations of American identity, humanitarian concerns, and counterstereotype-affirming information about Muslims have a positive influence on opinion toward accepting Syrian refugees. I also found evidence of these framing effects when the frames were encountered in isolation or when they competed with anti-refugee arguments. Importantly, I found strong evidence that, in both single and dual-exposure conditions, pro-refugee frames were most effective at moving opinion toward pro-refugee positions among those who were previously opposed.

The research presented in Chapter Six contributes to extant framing theory by replicating previous studies that investigate the influence of issue frames on public opinion in competitive information environments. This research also builds upon previous studies by offering insights into how competing political information affects public opinion about a salient real-world policy issue. Specifically, where prior experimental research (Chong and Druckman 2007b) tested the influence of frames based on meeting certain criteria (i.e., strength and direction), I use insights from that research to identify six prominent frames surrounding the Syrian refugee crisis and test how each influence public opinion about the Syrian refugee crisis.

The normative implications of my findings are paramount. I find evidence that counterstereotype-affirming information about Muslims substantively influences increased support for accepting Syrian refugees into the United States. These effects comport with research in experimental social psychology that finds evidence of the influence of affirming counterstereotypes on reducing automatic stereotype activation (Gawronski et al. 2008). I extend the normative implications of this scholarship by demonstrating that such
information is effective when perceived as coming from real-world political elites. Like my investigation of policy preferences toward Iran, I expect that these findings might generalize to framing of other issues in the Middle East. That possibility certainly warrants further investigation.

On this latter point, it is interesting that one side (i.e., pro-refugee) of the elite debate about Syrian refugees consistently dominates the other and, in particular, dominates the debate among those with anti-refugee prior opinions. My investigation into the frames surrounding the Syrian refugee crisis does not explore why some arguments are more applicable and available – and ultimately, more effective – than others. However, it is worth noting here the possibility that the framing effects I observe corroborate others’ findings of a “backlash effect” against the recent “Muslim Ban” (Collingwood, Lajevardi, and Oskooii 2018). These authors argue that, “an influx of new information portraying the ‘Muslim Ban’ at odds with inclusive elements of American identity prompted some citizens to shift their attitudes” (Collingwood, Lajevardi, Oskooii 2018). Perhaps my analyses are finding evidence of short-term effects that competing information has on opinion among those most likely to oppose policies sympathetic to refugees and other Muslims. More importantly, perhaps the bigger picture normative possibility is that, in the wake of the Muslim Ban and widespread political protest, the current political context is especially ripe for narratives and demonstrations to speak out about the incongruities between American identity and othering or stereotyping others based on the actions of terrorists who have hijacked a religion of billions for the purposes of exporting and justifying violence around the world.
Future Research on Framing and Building Positive Narratives about Muslims

Future research should build upon the evidence presented here by investigating how the framing effects I observe are influenced by time and source attribution. As I mentioned earlier, previous research has found that framing effects – in particular, those resulting from exposure to strong applicable frames – become more enhanced with increased time and attribution to credible or trustworthy sources (Miller and Krosnick 2000; Taber and Lodge 2006; Chong and Druckman 2007b). As such, much painting remains to be done on the theoretical canvas that I have started here. The prospect that the framing effects I observe might be magnified under certain conditions should present great normative appeal to anyone interested in offering practical, theoretically-rooted ideas to help offset the misguided influences that unfounded anti-Muslim attitudes – perpetuated by negative media coverage – have on American public opinion and policy preferences.

Finally, researchers have suggested other practical ideas that can be used to supplement or complement counterstereotype-affirming narratives about Muslims. A recent collaborative volume – and a must read for anyone interested in learning about Islam – summarizes a number of these practical ideas as creative suggestions to help “news reporters better serve their communities and be able to move away from narratives about Islam and Muslims that trap them in stereotype” (Pennington 2018: 15). In her “lessons for reporters,” co-editor Rosemary Pennington (2018: 15-16) suggests that reporters can:

- Adopt a Muslim (or several): “This can be useful for reporters working in any beat, but when you are covering a marginalized group, having someone you trust to run story ideas by is invaluable.”
- Get a good translation of the Qur’an: “There are a lot of accusations about what the Qur’an sanctions. Instead of taking those verbatim, open a Qur’an and see what it says before running out to write about how Islam condones
wife beating or the slaying of indels or whatever other inflammatory thing is being said.”

- **Visit the local mosque:** “We are taught to cultivate sources. Without good sources, we can’t do our job. Look to the local Muslim community as a source for stories, not just a thing to be reported on.”

- **Follow Muslims in social media:** “Muslims from all over the world, and from all traditions, use the space to discuss politics, their identity, and their faith. There may even be Muslims in your local community using Twitter, or other social media, to write about their lives. Find these individuals. Follow them. Interact with them. Social media can be a great tool for finding sources, but also for learning more about whatever beat you are covering.”

While Pennington’s (2018) comments seem to offer logical and practical ideas, future research could also take an empirical approach to validating her ideas. It would be interesting to content analyze journalist reports of issues involving Muslims or majority-Muslim countries and investigate how the content of those stories vary as a function of a reporter’s social media connections. Though it would likely be more costly, future research could also recruit journalists and actors in the news business to focus groups (or perhaps panel experiments), wherein the content of their stories is assessed relative to exposure to images of mosques or excerpts from the Qur’an.

These ideas and those presented in this research become more important with each passing day, as conflicts throughout the Middle East continue to develop. No matter the reason, the United States will likely continue to play an important role in said conflicts. Public opinion – whether operating through polling or electoral choice or both – will influence how and when the United States next intervenes. Thus, it is of the utmost importance that ordinary Americans are informed about these issues and are presented with ideas and information – from those on whom they depend for news – that enable them to evaluate and disentangle misguided biases from relevant policy ideas. As the references
in this writing suggest, a number of researchers are invested in scholarship at the intersection of stereotypes and public opinion. We are thoughtful in offering solutions about what journalists and politicians should do to “disentangle.” However, the onus is also on us as researchers to bridge the gap between empirical research on the consequences of stereotypes and their persistence in media and elite discourse on Middle East issues. We need to be more diligent about sharing our research with non-specialists in ways that are meaningful, such as communicating with the growing number of research blog sites that operate out of newsrooms. Until then, the perpetual cycle of bombs, intervention, and terrorism is doomed to keep repeating itself unimpeded.
Re-specification Models with Race Subsamples

Table A4.1 below presents estimates from ordered probit regression models presented by Kam and Kinder (2007) that are subsampled for blacks and whites. I also re-specified their original models of support for the president but did not find any significant estimates across race.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table A4.1</th>
<th>Support across Race for the War on Terror: Protecting the Homeland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>War on Terror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnocentrism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1.62***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1.59)</td>
<td>(2.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisanship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>-.77***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1.19)</td>
<td>(1.95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>-.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1.28)</td>
<td>(1.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>.80***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1.25)</td>
<td>(1.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>443</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Entries are ordered probit regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses below. Models also control for political awareness and gender. *** p < .01; ** p < .05; * p < .10

Structural Equation Model Measures

This section details coding schemes for indicators used in the structural equation model in the full chapter. The data come from the 2012 American National Election Study.

I measure authoritarianism by constructing an index of responses to four questions about important child-rearing traits, consistent with that measurement of the construct in the extant literature (Stenner 2005; Hetherington and Weiler 2009, 2018). In each question, respondents were asked which of two traits is more important for children: 1) independence or respect for elders; 2) curiosity or good manners; 3) self-reliance or obedience, and; 4) being considerate or being well behaved. Each item was recoded such that the first trait (less authoritarian) in each pair equals 0, a response of “both” equals 1, and the second trait (more authoritarian) in each pair equals 2. The items were then combined in an additive scale (α = .60).26

26 The original ANES variables are auth_ind, auth_cur, auth_obed, and auth_consid.
Symbolic patriotism, closely aligned with national pride (Huddy and Khatib 2007), is a five-point measure of love of country, ranging from hate it (0) to love it (5). The question asks, “How do you feel about this country? Do you [hate it, dislike it, neither like nor dislike it, like it, or love it]?"27

National identity is a five-point measure of the importance placed on “being American” and ranges from “not at all important” (1) to “extremely important” (5) (Huddy 2001, 2003; Huddy and Khatib 2007). The question asks, “How important is being an American to you personally [Extremely important, very important, somewhat important, a little important, or not at all important]?"28

Linked fate is a three-point measure of how much one’s life is affected by what happens to the racial group and ranges from “not very much” (1) to “a lot” (3). The question asks, “How much is your life affected by what happens to [racial group]? Will it affect you [a lot, some, or not very much]?” Self-identified whites and blacks (i.e., race measure below) were directed to different questions with the same wording. I create a combined measure for whites and blacks by including answers to the white linked fate question if “white” was true on the race measure and by including answers to the black linked fate question if “black” was true on the race measure.29

Conservatism is a measure of ideology ranging from extremely liberal (1) to extremely conservative (7). The question asks, “Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven’t you thought much about this [Extremely liberal, liberal, slightly liberal, moderate/middle of the road, slightly conservative, conservative, extremely conservative]?”30

In-group bias is measured by adding individuals’ thermometer ratings (0-100) of their racial, religious and denominational, sexual orientation, and social class in-groups and re-scaling to 0-100.31 I measure out-group negativity by taking individuals’ thermometer ratings of out-groups following the same criteria as before, subtracting each score from 100, creating an index, and re-scaling from 0-100. I measure intergroup preference by creating an additive index of four five-point Likert items measuring agreement with the statements measuring preference for existing cultural norms.32

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27 The original ANES variable is patriot_love.
28 The original ANES variable is patriot_amident
29 The original ANES variables are link_whiteamt and link_blackamt.
30 The original ANES variables is libcpre_self.
31 To compute the in-group bias scores, demographic questions were analyzed to identify respondents’ racial (white or black), religious/denominational (Catholic, Christian, atheist, Mormon, or other), sexual orientation (straight or gay), and perceived social class (working class, middle class, upper) in-groups. The original ANES variables are identified with the prefix “ft_casi.”
32 The items measure agreement with the statements: “the world is changing, and we should adjust”; “we should be more tolerant of other moral standards”; “newer lifestyles are breaking down society,” and; “we should place more emphasis on traditional values.” Before constructing the index (α = .70), I code the first two items such that higher values indicate stronger disagreement and the latter two items such that higher values indicate stronger agreement, indicative of higher preference for the existing culture.
The *Muslims violent* stereotype measure is a five-point measure which asks respondents, “How well does the word ‘violent’ describe most Muslims [Extremely well, very well, moderately well, slightly well, or not at all]?” (emphasis added). The original item was reverse coded to range from not at all (1) to extremely well (5).33

The four items measuring *policy preferences for deterring Iranian nuclear development* begin with the same prompt, “To try to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, would you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose…” and the separate questions conclude with: “Direct diplomatic talks between the United States and Iran to try to resolve the situation”; “Increasing international economic sanctions against Iran”; “The United States bombing Iran’s nuclear development sites,” and; “Invading with U.S. forces to remove the Iranian government from power.” Responses to each item were recoded such that oppose = -1, neither favor nor oppose = 0, and favor = 1. The virtue of the way these questions are asked separately is that my analysis can focus on factors that influence support for the use of force, generally, (i.e., bombing and/or invasion) versus other preferred methods of deterrence. All remaining values, indicating “not asked,” “deleted due to partial,” and so forth were coded to missing on this item and others.

**Framed and Unframed Articles**

*Framed Article*

(Manipulations underlined)

Rogue Islamic Nation Confirmed to Have Nuclear Weapons

Washington, DC- Yesterday, a joint United Nations/International Atomic Energy Agency intelligence report was leaked confirming that the *Islamic* republic of Iran has developed and possesses nuclear weapons. The one-thousand-plus page report confirms American and European beliefs that Tehran has been secretly building nuclear weapons. For years, Iran's *Islamic* leadership has maintained that its goal in developing a nuclear program is to generate electricity without dipping into the oil supply it prefers to sell abroad and to provide fuel for medical reactors.

While the United States and other Western nations have suspected weapons development in the *Islamic* republic since 2003, a lack of concrete intelligence has subjected the United States to a decade of tense relations, disarmament negotiations, inspections, financial and trade sanctions, and potential embargos on the *Islamic* nation's goods.

The UN/IAEA report confirms that nuclear weapons are stored in a new nuclear facility, which is surrounded by anti-aircraft guns, and is in a mountainous setting ideal for making bombing campaigns nearly impossible. Top officials in the *radical Muslim* government

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33 The original measure is rtype_violmusl.
have long warned of retaliation and attack resulting from U.S. involvements in the Middle East. With the release of this intelligence, years of attempts at diplomacy will likely cease and armed conflict between the United States and the militant Islamic nation will likely become reality.

White House Correspondent Brad Hambrick reports that, "The President knows Republican presidential hopefuls are talking tough on Iran. He knows the release of the UN/IAEA report will heighten public concern. He will be meeting with top security officials this week to coordinate the best response to their nuclear developments."

In a brief press statement, the President declared, "We have suspected that they have been deliberately misleading the international community for years, regarding their nuclear ambitions. They now pose a great threat to us, as well as our allies abroad, and such rogue behavior will not be tolerated by the United States."

Even as years of deception have now been realized, Russia, China, Britain, France, and European Union foreign policy leaders still call for multilateral talks with Iran. With Republican presidential hopefuls calling for action, a stern response from the Obama administration to the Islamic fundamentalist regime seems imminent.

*Unframed Article*

Report Confirms Iran Has Nuclear Weapons

Washington, DC- Last week, a joint United Nations/International Atomic Energy Agency intelligence report was leaked confirming that Iran has developed and possesses nuclear weapons. The one-thousand-plus page report confirms American and European beliefs that Tehran has been secretly building nuclear weapons. For years, the Iranian government has maintained that its goal in developing a nuclear program is to generate electricity without dipping into the oil supply it prefers to sell abroad, and to provide fuel for medical reactors.

While the United States and other Western nations have suspected weapons development in Iran since 2003, a lack of concrete intelligence has subjected the United States to a decade of tense relations, disarmament negotiations, inspections, financial and trade sanctions, and potential embargos on Iranian goods.

The UN/IAEA report confirms that nuclear weapons are stored in a new nuclear facility, which is surrounded by anti-aircraft guns, and is in a mountainous setting ideal for making bombing campaigns nearly impossible. Top officials in the Iranian government have long warned of retaliation and attack resulting from U.S. involvements in the Middle East. With the release of this intelligence, years of attempts at diplomacy will likely cease and armed conflict between the United States and the Iranians will likely become reality.

White House Correspondent Brad Hambrick reports that, "The President knows
Republican presidential hopefuls are talking tough on Iran. He knows the release of the UN/IAEA report will heighten public concern. He will be meeting with top security officials this week to coordinate the best response to Iran's nuclear developments.

In a brief press statement, the President declared, "The United States has suspected that Iran has been deliberately misleading the international community for years, regarding nuclear ambitions. Iran poses a great threat to the international community, and such behavior will not be tolerated by the United States."

Even as years of deception have now been realized, Russia, China, Britain, France, and European Union foreign policy leaders still call for multilateral talks with Iran. With Republican presidential hopefuls calling for action, a stem response from the Obama administration to Tehran seems imminent.
CHAPTER FIVE APPENDIX

Threat Experiment Conditions

Figure A5.1 | Explicit + Implicit Islamist Story (Haqqani)

New video threatens U.S. interests abroad

Threats Made by Islamist Militant Group; Senior Defense Officials Say Video is ‘Concerning’

By ______ and ______

WASHINGTON — The Haqqani Network released a video yesterday threatening “imminent attacks” on U.S. troops and installations abroad, according to a statement released by the U.S. State Department on Friday.

Department officials, looking to deflect concerns over the safety of American posts overseas, said adequate security measures have been taken.

Haqqani is a vehemently anti-American Islamist militant group that operates primarily in Afghanistan, according to the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center, and is listed as a terrorist organization by the State Department.

The insurgency has claimed responsibility for multiple bombings of Afghan business and government buildings and attacks on Afghan and American security forces, citing anti-imperialism, anti-globalization, and opposition to the Afghan alliance with the U.S. as the foundations of its ideology.

The latest threats are “concerning,” as they come amidst “multiple security challenges” in the region, said a White House Senior Staff member. “Our intelligence and military officials are working together to thoroughly investigate this threat.”

House Rep. ______, a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said the video is yet another reminder of the threat against U.S. interests abroad. “After other attacks on American embassies, it underscores the need for a comprehensive review of security at our diplomatic posts,” he said. “The committee stands ready to assist the State Department in protecting our diplomats.”

Senator ______, who was especially critical of the State Department after previous attacks, said on Friday that she was confident in the protection of American diplomats in light of increased physical security standards in recent years.

——— and ———— in Washington contributed to this article.
New video threatens U.S. interests abroad

Threats Made by Unknown Group; Senior Defense Officials Say Video is ‘Concerning’

By [Author Name] and [Author Name]
Updated March 2, 2018 11:44 a.m. ET

WASHINGTON—A video released yesterday threatens “imminent attacks” on U.S. troops and installations abroad, according to a statement released by the U.S. State Department on Friday.

Department officials, looking to deflect concerns over the safety of American posts overseas, said adequate security measures have been taken.

While the threats are clearly based in anti-American sentiment, the exact origin of the recording is unknown. Still, intelligence officials say that some images in the video (below) yield clues about the group behind the threats. The group is believed to be responsible for multiple bombings of businesses and government buildings in Afghanistan, as well as attacks on Afghan and American security forces.

The State Department release also cites ideological language heard in the video condemning the Afghan-American alliance, American imperialism, and globalism.

The latest threats are “concerning,” as they come amidst “multiple security challenges” in the region, said a White House Senior Staff member. “Our intelligence and military officials are working together to thoroughly investigate this threat.”

House Rep. [Name], a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said the video is yet another reminder of the threat against U.S. interests abroad. “After other attacks on American citizens, it underscores the need for a comprehensive review of security at our diplomatic posts,” he said. “The committee stands ready to assist the State Department in protecting our diplomats.”

Senator [Name], who was especially critical of the State Department after previous attacks, said on Friday that she was confident in the protection of American diplomats in light of increased physical security standards in recent years.

—[Author Name] and [Author Name] in Washington contributed to this article
New video threatens U.S. interests abroad
Threats Made by Militant Anarchist Group; Senior Defense Officials Say Video is ‘Concerning’

By [Redacted] and [Redacted]
Updated March 2, 2019 11:14 a.m. ET

WASHINGTON—The Revolutionary Struggle (“EA” for Epanastatikos Agonas in Greek) released a video yesterday threatening “imminent attacks” on U.S. troops and installations abroad, according to a statement released by the U.S. State Department on Friday.

Department officials, looking to deflect concerns over the safety of American posts overseas, said adequate security measures have been taken.

EA is a vehemently anti-American anarchist group that operates primarily in Greece, according to the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center, and is listed as a terrorist organization by the State Department.

The insurgency has claimed responsibility for multiple bombings of Greek businesses and government buildings and attacks on Greek and American security forces, citing anti-imperialism, anti-globalization, and opposition to the Greek alliance with the U.S. as the foundations of its ideology.

The latest threats are “concerning,” as they come amidst “multiple security challenges” in the region, said a White House Senior Staff member. “Our intelligence and military officials are working together to thoroughly investigate this threat.”

House Rep. [Redacted], a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said the video is just another reminder of the threat against U.S. interests abroad. “After other attacks on American embassies, it underscores the need for a comprehensive review of security at our diplomatic posts,” he said. “The committee stands ready to assist the State Department in protecting our diplomats.”

Senator [Redacted], who was especially critical of the State Department after previous attacks, said on Friday that she was confident in the protection of American diplomats in light of increased physical security standards in recent years.

[Redacted] and [Redacted] in Washington contributed to this article.
New video threatens U.S. interests abroad

Threats Made by Militant Christian Group; Senior Defense Officials Say Video is ‘Concerning’

By [Authors] Updated March 2, 2018 11:14 a.m. ET

WASHINGTON—The Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) released a video yesterday threatening “imminent attacks” on U.S. troops and installations abroad, according to a statement released by the U.S. State Department on Friday.

Department officials, looking to deflect concerns over the safety of American personnel overseas, said adequate security measures have been taken.

LRA is a vehemently anti-American Christian militant group that operates primarily in Uganda, according to the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center, and is listed as a terrorist organization by the State Department.

The insurgency has claimed responsibility for multiple bombings of Ugandan businesses and government buildings and attacks on Ugandan and American security forces, citing anti-imperialism, anti-globalization, and opposition to the Ugandan alliance with the U.S. as the foundations of its ideology.

The latest threats are “concerning,” as they come amidst “multiple security challenges” in the region, said a White House Senior Staff member. “Our intelligence and military officials are working together to thoroughly investigate this threat.”

House Rep. [Name], a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said the video is yet another reminder of the threat against U.S. interests abroad. “After other attacks on American compounds, it underscores the need for a comprehensive review of security at our diplomatic posts,” he said. “The committee stands ready to assist the State Department in protecting our diplomats and troops.”

Senator [Name], who was especially critical of the State Department after previous attacks, said on Friday that she was confident in the protection of American diplomats in light of increased physical security standards in recent years.

—— [Authors] in Washington contributed to this article.
New video threatens U.S. interests abroad

Threats Made by Unknown Group; Senior Defense Officials Say Video is ‘Concerning’

By [Redacted] and [Redacted]

Updated March 2, 2018 11:14 a.m. ET

WASHINGTON—A video released yesterday threatens “imminent attacks” on U.S. troops and installations abroad, according to a statement released by the U.S. State Department on Friday.

Department officials, looking to deflect concerns over the safety of American posts overseas, said adequate security measures have been taken.

While the threats are clearly based on anti-American sentiment, the exact origin of the recording is unknown. Intelligence officials say that some images in the video yield clues as to who is behind the threats, but further analysis is required. The State Department release also cites ideological anti-American, anti-imperialist, and anti-globalist language heard in the video.

The latest threats are “concerning,” as they come amidst “multiple security challenges” in the region, said [Redacted]. “Our intelligence and military officials are working together to thoroughly investigate this threat.”

House Rep. [Redacted], a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said the video is yet another reminder of the threat against U.S. interests abroad. “After other attacks on American citizens, it underscores the need for a comprehensive review of security at our diplomatic posts,” he said. “The committee stands ready to assist the State Department in protecting our diplomats.”

Senator [Redacted], who was especially critical of the State Department after previous attacks, said on Friday that she was confident in the protection of American diplomats in light of increased physical security standards in recent years.

— [Redacted] and [Redacted] in Washington contributed to this article.
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