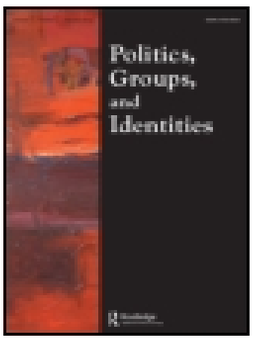

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Politics, Groups, and Identities

ISSN: 2156-5503 (Print) 2156-5511 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rpgi20

# Framing, identity, and responsibility: do episodic vs. thematic framing effects vary by target population?

Jessica T. Feezell, Rebecca A. Glazier & Amber E. Boydstun

**To cite this article:** Jessica T. Feezell, Rebecca A. Glazier & Amber E. Boydstun (2019): Framing, identity, and responsibility: do episodic vs. thematic framing effects vary by target population?, Politics, Groups, and Identities, DOI: 10.1080/21565503.2019.1584751

**To link to this article:** https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2019.1584751

POLITICS, GROUPS, AND IDENTITIES
https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2019.1584751



# Framing, identity, and responsibility: do episodic vs. thematic framing effects vary by target population?

Jessica T. Feezell[a], Rebecca A. Glazier[b] and Amber E. Boydstun[c]

[a]Political Science Department, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM, USA; [b]School of Public Affairs, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Little Rock, AR, USA; [c]Political Science Department, University of California, Davis, Davis, CA, USA

**ABSTRACT**

Extensive political communication research shows that people respond differently to the same policy problem depending on how it is portrayed, or "framed." Specifically, Iyengar [1991]. *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press] finds that when news coverage about a policy issue is framed *episodically*, citizens tend to attribute responsibility to the individual, whereas when news is framed *thematically*, they attribute responsibility to government/society. But how might these framing effects be conditioned by the identity of the individual/group portrayed in the news? Here we examine whether episodic vs. thematic framing effects vary when the target population is "Muslim American," compared to "American." We do so both in the context of poverty (following Iyengar's original study) and also in a context where the difference between "Americans" and "Muslim Americans" might prove especially salient: religious radicalism. Using data from an online survey experiment ($N = 1655$), we find that participants treat both groups similarly and in line with episodic vs. thematic framing effects when the issue is poverty. But in the case of religious radicalism, framing effects disappear. Instead, participants consistently attribute responsibility to the people who radicalize rather than to government/society. Yet importantly, the substance of these individual-level explanations is significantly more likely to involve religion when the person portrayed is Muslim American.

**ARTICLE HISTORY**
Received 27 June 2018
Accepted 15 February 2019

**KEYWORDS**
Communication; experiments; identity; religion

The framing literature has repeatedly demonstrated that issue frames can have politically significant consequences. Framing helps people simplify complex information and establish a causal relationship between an actor and an outcome – a connection known as responsibility attribution (Heider 1958; Iyengar 1991; Scheufele 2000). In his canonical study of framing and responsibility attribution, Iyengar (1991) demonstrates how episodic and thematic frames affect how people perceive the cause of a policy problem. He finds that episodic frames, which highlight event-centered information and describe issues in terms of "concrete instances," lead citizens to attribute responsibility to the individual(s) portrayed in the story. For example, a story about poverty might focus on

**CONTACT** Jessica T. Feezell jfeezell@unm.edu

a specific family that is unable to pay their heating bill during the winter. In response to this episodic frame, viewers are more likely to attribute responsibility to the family for their circumstances than to the government and society. Thematic frames, by contrast, place an issue in a broader, more general context. For example, a story on poverty might instead highlight national poverty trends and state-based subsidies for utility costs for low-income families. Stories framed thematically lead citizens instead to attribute responsibility to the government and society for the issue at hand. Nearly 30 years after Iyengar first conducted this research, we replicate – and extend – this important study using Iyengar's original codebook.

Despite the established importance of episodic vs. thematic frames, we know relatively little about how the identity, or personal characteristics, of those portrayed in the news might influence the way that people reading the news experience the frame and attribute responsibility. Specifically, Social Identity Theory (SIT) posits that our attitudes and behaviors are conditioned by whether we perceive a subject to be a member of our own in-group or a member of an out-group, often ascribing more positive evaluations towards those of our in-group (Tajfel and Wilkes 1963; Tajfel and Turner 1979; Tajfel 1981). And while framing effects are known to have several moderating factors such as political knowledge (Brewer 2003), partisanship (Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013), predispositions (Chong and Druckman 2007), and source credibility (Druckman 2001), to date, studies have not specifically examined the moderating influence of SIT on emphasis frames as they impact responsibility attribution. It may be that the personal characteristics of the subject and the particular nature of the policy featured in the story may interact in meaningful ways that remain unclear.

Knowing that Muslim Americans are often considered both cultural and religious outsiders in the United States (Kalkan, Layman, and Uslaner 2009), we not only replicate but also extend Iyengar's study of episodic and thematic framing by incorporating an additional variable: "Muslim American" vs. "American" identity.[1] We assess how responsibility attribution may change based on the target population's religious identity. While some studies of episodic and thematic framing effects have examined how racial or ethnic identity conditions those effects (Hannah and Cafferty 2006; Gandy et al. 1997), we know of no studies that look explicitly at religious identity.

Of course, it is possible that identity may condition the effect of episodic vs. thematic frames in some policy areas but not others. For instance, we know that the race of the target population in Iyengar's (1991) experiments mattered more when they were described as unemployed than when they were described as poor. We thus examine framing effects in the case of two policy areas: poverty and religious radicalism. Unlike the case of poverty, religious radicalism is a policy problem where we might expect people to have different expectations and perceptions of "Muslim Americans" as opposed to "Americans."

Our experimental study thus includes a total of eight news conditions in a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ design that varies frame type (episodic vs. thematic), religious identity ("Muslim American" vs. "American"), and issue area (poverty vs. religious radicalism). As such, our experimental design makes it possible to assess not only whether responsibility attribution changes when the identity of the target population portrayed in the news story changes, but also when the policy area changes. Although there are limitations to the inferences we can make from a single experiment, the relatively large number of participants in

our study (1,655) allows us to offer both a replication of Iyengar's original study and an informative extension to another target population and another policy issue context.

Our findings reveal that participants treat "Muslims Americans" and "Americans" quite similarly with regard to responsibility attribution. In the case of poverty, our results replicate Iyengar's: people who received the episodic frame were more likely to attribute responsibility to the individual, whereas people who received the thematic frame were more likely to attribute responsibility to government and society. These findings alone are valuable, as they demonstrate the consistency of framing effects, found through a similar research design and using the same codebook, nearly 30 years after Iyengar's study. Indeed, increasing concern over a "reproducibility crisis" in the social sciences makes replication efforts valuable in and of themselves (Achenbach 2018; Schooler 2014; Camerer et al. 2018). But moving beyond this replication, we also find that these framing effects hold whether the poor person is described as "American" or "Muslim American." When it comes to the issue of poverty, responsibility attribution does not appear to change based on the religious identity of the poor.

In the case of religious radicalism, however, we find different results. The episodic vs. thematic frames did not have the same influence on responsibility attribution as in the case of poverty. No matter the framing condition, more people attributed responsibility to the individual than to government/society, perhaps in part because radicalism is viewed as more of a personal choice than poverty (Iyengar and Westwood 2015). Furthermore, there was no difference in responsibility attribution for religious radicalism based on identity. Individual "Muslim Americans" and individual "Americans" were similarly attributed more responsibility for religious radicalism than was government/society. However, a close look at the types of responsibility participants attributed to the individual indicates that although the religious identity of the target population may not influence whether people attribute responsibility to the individual vs. government/society, identity may influence the reasons *why* people hold the individual more responsible. Specifically, participants were significantly more likely to mention religion as a cause of religious radicalism when reading about "Muslim Americans" radicalizing than when reading about "Americans" radicalizing.

## Who is responsible?

Since Iyengar's publication of *Is Anyone Responsible?* in 1991, episodic and thematic frames have become an important part of the literature on framing effects. The episodic vs. thematic framing paradigm has been shown to significantly influence how people attribute responsibility when considering policy problems and how they think those problems should be addressed. Specifically, episodic framing can lead to increased attribution of responsibility to individuals rather than to government and society. In the poverty example above, people who read news stories about individual poor people are more likely to believe the impoversihed are personally responsible for their troubles. Thematic frames, by contrast, can lead to higher levels of societal responsibility attribution. While Iyengar (1991) points out that most stories are not purely episodic nor thematic, he identifies that most stories do have one dominant frame.

This effect – that episodic frames tend to prompt individual responsibility attribution while thematic frames tend to prompt government/societal responsibility attribution – has

been found across a number of policy areas. From poverty (Kim, Shanahan, and Choi 2012) to crime (Iyengar 1996) to Hurricane Katrina (Ben-Porath and Shaker 2010), episodic vs. thematic framing has been shown to impact responsibility attribution.

However, episodic vs. thematic framing effects are far from a truism. There are many factors that may condition their influence. For instance, these framing effects are especially strong when considering a dependent variable of responsibility attribution. But Hannah and Cafferty (2006) find that when the dependent variable is willingness to take action – through spending more tax money to help the poor or personally volunteering – episodic and thematic frames do not yield significantly different effects. It may be that episodic and thematic frames are particularly well-suited for influencing how responsibility is assigned for a policy issue, but less relevant in shaping people's willingness to do something about that issue. The effects of episodic vs. thematic framing may also be conditional on the emotional strength of the frames themselves. Gross (2008) finds that episodic frames are more emotionally engaging than thematic frames, and Aarøe (2011) demonstrates that the relative strength of episodic or thematic frames is contingent on the emotional response that the frame generates.

## *Identity*

Of particular relevance to our enterprise, it is possible that the identity of the individuals portrayed in the news stories (i.e., the target population of the stories) also conditions the effect of episodic vs. thematic framing. Chong and Druckman (2007) outline that in order for framing effects to take place, the frame must be available, accessible, and applicable for a receiver. Building on this work, Cacciatore, Scheufele, and Iyengar (2016) seek to clarify that framing effects are really a function of the applicability of a frame for a receiver rather than salience-based availability and recall. Emphasis frames call to attention particular aspects of a story that activate knowledge structures and schemas that receivers use to interpret the story and can alter the applicability of a frame for the receiver (Cacciatore, Scheufele, and Iyengar 2016; Price, Tewksbury, and Powers 1997). As a result, we propose that cueing a social identity such as "Muslim American," may trigger the application of a social identity-based schema which interacts with the frame – here episodic and thematic frames – to moderate the effect and ultimate attribution of responsibility.

Social Identity Theory (SIT) demonstrates that attitudes about and behaviors toward another person are often strongly influenced by whether that person/group is seen as a member of one's own in-group or an out-group (Tajfel and Wilkes 1963; Tajfel and Turner 1979; Tajfel 1981). Based on SIT, we might expect people to be more inclined to attribute responsibility to the individual, rather than to government/society, when that individual is from an out-group. In-group/out-group categorizations do not have to be based on major or even meaningful differences (Tajfel and Turner 1979), but they are often a result of identity-based evaluations of readily observable traits like ethnicity, gender, and religion. People identify with groups they perceive as their own in-group and tend to view them more favorably, in contrast to an out-group of which they are not a part and therefore view less favorably. The psychological predisposition to attribute responsibility to dispositional, as opposed to situational, factors is known as the fundamental attribution error (Ross 1977). Pettigrew (1979) famously extended this concept from individual attributions to in-group/out-group attributions. Calling it the ultimate

attribution error, Pettigrew finds that in-group members are more likely to attribute negative out-group behavior to dispositional causes. Support for this finding is somewhat mixed, but generally supported (Miles 1990).

Thus, it makes sense that personal prejudices or stereotypes about the people portrayed in news stories may condition framing effects. Indeed, we see such stereotypes play out in Iyengar's research on race and crime. In one experiment, Iyengar (1991) varies the identity of the target population of a news story on crime as either black or white and finds that people were twice as likely to attribute responsibility to the individual (vs. society) when the story involved a black criminal compared to a white criminal (43). In this case, it appears that prejudices against African-Americans led respondents to attribute responsibility to black criminals more so than white criminals. Gross (2008) similarly finds that the race of the individual in an episodically framed news story impacted opinions about mandatory minimum sentencing laws.

Although there are reasons to believe that this racial disparity in framing effects may be specific to the issue of crime (e.g., Hurwitz and Peffley 1997; Quillian and Pager 2001; Peffley, Shields, and Williams 1996), news coverage of poverty also often has a racial bias (Drakulich 2015; El-Burki, Porpora, and Reynolds 2016) and differences in the effects of episodic vs. thematic framing are also found in the case of poverty. Looking at television news framing of poverty, Hannah and Cafferty (2006) find that when the poor person portrayed was white as opposed to black, respondents felt more strongly that too little was being spent on programs to alleviate poverty and were more likely to take a flyer about volunteering with a poverty charity.

Other policy issues associated with specific stereotypes may also experience similar frame conditioning. In their study of framing effects pertaining to immigration policy, Knoll, Redlawsk, and Sanborn (2011) conclude that "ethnic cues persist in their effectiveness in shifting how people view certain contentious public policies like immigration" (433). Identity and policy issue areas may thus work together to change how people attribute responsibility.

The account of how identity may condition framing effects is not always simple or straightforward. Boukes et al. (2014) find that when television news stories contain human-interest elements, responsibility for the policy problems are attributed to the government rather than the individual. And research shows that perspective taking – one way of putting oneself in the same group as another – can reduce racial bias (Todd et al. 2011). Thus, it might also be the case that when human interest stories establish a sense of connection between the audience and the person featured in a news story, the in-group/out-group identity of the person in the story becomes less relevant. Adding another identity wrinkle, Hannah and Cafferty (2006) find *both* white and black study participants were more willing to help the poor person in the news story when they were portrayed as white instead of black.

The story becomes even more complex when we turn to an ethnically-charged international issue like terrorism. In an experiment on the impact of thematic vs. episodic framing, Iyengar utilizes seven terrorism conditions, varying episodic and thematic frames as well as the identity of the perpetrator (Middle Eastern, Central American, Irish Republican Army, etc.). In this experiment, he finds that people showed high levels of individual responsibility attribution when the condition used an episodically-framed story about "Irish Republican Army terrorists," but high levels of societal

responsibility attribution when the condition used an episodically-framed story about "Sikh Saboteurs." In this case, the nationality of the news story target population seems to change the way respondents assign responsibility.

In discussing this finding, Iyengar writes:

> contextual antecedents of terrorism – such as governmental instability and economic and social deprivation – do not apply so readily to a stable Western society like Great Britain. In other words, societal elements may be prominent elements of individuals' 'knowledge' about the causes of terrorism so long as the terrorists are from non-western or less-developed countries. (37)

Thus, beyond stereotypes and assumptions based on race, national political considerations may also come into play.

In short, whether in the context of race and crime or nationality and terrorism, varying the identity of the target population in a news story can impact the framing effects observed. Social and cultural relationships between groups and concepts (e.g., linking minorities with crime or unstable societies with terrorism) can shape the way people interpret information and assign responsibility.

How might the influence of episodic vs. thematic frames change when the target of the news story is a cultural and religious outsider and identity-based schemas are called to the fore? To address this question, we vary the identity of the framing target in our experiment from "American" to "Muslim American." Will knowing that the person struggling with poverty (in the episodic poverty condition) or the community plagued by radicalism (in the thematic radicalism condition) is "Muslim American" as opposed to "American" change how people attribute responsibility?

## *Framing Muslim Americans*

Muslim Americans are regularly depicted as both religious and ethnic outgroup extremists (von Sikorski et al. 2017; Sides and Gross 2013; Kalkan, Layman, and Uslaner 2009), making them a fitting target population to represent a common out-group identity. In our study, discussed below, participants in half the treatments read about "Muslim American" target populations, thus giving a religious cue with no ethnic identity information, whereas the other half read about "Americans." When the identity-based cue ("Americans" vs. "Muslim Americans") is given to non-Muslim American respondents, we may see episodic vs. thematic framing effects, even for an issue like poverty, which is not clearly associated with Muslim American stereotypes. Extensive research by Nacos and Torres-Reyna (2007) on Muslim stereotypes in US media and society reveals that news coverage tends to reinforce stereotypes of Muslim violence, abuse of women, and religiosity; however, they find no affiliation of Muslims with poverty.

Thus, because poverty is not an issue strongly associated with Muslims identity, we expect the established framing effects to hold. Hypothesis 1*: Episodic vs. thematic framing effects in the case of the poverty news stories will persist when the identity of the target population is that of a religious outgroup*.

In the case of religious radicalism, however, we expect to see framing effects play out differently for "American" vs. "Muslim American" target populations, in part because Muslims are often linked to terrorism in the news and in pop culture (Gerges 2003; Ahmed and Matthes 2017). The common association of the Muslim culture with

religious radicalism and violence should cause our American respondents to prioritize the identity-based schema used to interpret the story and potentially override the established framing effects for this issue area.[2] We posit that people may be less surprised to hear news stories about "Muslim Americans" radicalizing and thus more likely to attribute responsibility to society (vs. to individuals/groups), compared to when they hear stories about "Americans" radicalizing. Put another way, it may be the case that respondents will view "Muslim Americans" as disadvantaged by a violent culture, like Iyengar's Sikh saboteurs, and thus be more likely to hold society responsibile rather than the individual/group.

Thus, when it comes to the issue of radicalism specifically, much of the literature leads us to expect respondents to treat "Muslim Americans" and "Americans" differently. Hypothesis 2: *The effects of episodic vs. thematic framing in the case of the radicalism news stories will be significantly larger when the target population is "American" than when the target population is "Muslim American," with respondents who receive the episodic frame attributing more responsibility to individuals/groups (vs. government/society) for "American" target populations vs. "Muslim American" target populations.*

## Materials and methods

Data were collected through a survey experiment using the Qualtrics interface. The survey was completed by 1674 U.S. participants recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk. The survey was posted on MTurk on 4 November 2015.[3] The title of the post read, "Take a brief public opinion survey (~10 min.)." The job description gave no indication of content, stating: "Respond to a short, 10–15 min. survey including questions about your opinions on certain issues and about yourself."[4] The data presented here were collected from those who responded to the survey through 12 November 2015.[5] We dropped 19 respondents who self-identified as Muslim from the analysis, leaving a total *N* of 1655 participants.

Although the sample is not random, MTurk provides a diverse and relatively representative sample that is increasingly used by social scientists and others (Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012). Indeed, researchers comparing MTurk to other survey modalities have found benefits in sample diversity (Casler, Bickel, and Hackett 2013) and no statistically significant differences in responses (Bartneck et al. 2015). Some have argued that MTurkers are different from the general population because of they are willing to work for so little, and will therefore be different on important topics like political ideology (Kahan 2016). Clifford, Jewell, and Waggoner (2015), however, compare the personality and value-based motivations of political ideology between a large MTurk sample and the American National Election Study and find very similar distributions. Research by Levay, Freese, and Druckman (2016) similarly concludes that the MTurk population is not significantly different, in unmeasurable ways, from the general population.

Research evaluating outcomes across student samples, nationally-representative adult samples, and MTurk convenience samples have found mixed results. Although Krupnikov and Levine (2014) find different results with MTurk, more recent studies by Mullinix et al. (2016), Arechar, Gächter, and Molleman (2018), and Coppock (2018) lend confidence to the use of convenience samples, finding little or no significant differences over dozens of replicated studies.

Additionally, web-based surveys help mitigate social desirability bias for sensitive topics (Kreuter, Presser, and Tourangeau 2008). We also protected against bias by assuring anonymity and allowing participants to skip questions. Although neither a representative nor a random sample, the MTurk respondent pool provides an appropriate forum for testing the framing effects of interest here.

In short, our study offers as robust a replication of Iyengar's original study – and, importantly, a test of whether the same framing effects hold in the case of a different target population and a different policy context – as we can hope to obtain from an online survey experiment using a platform like MTurk. That said, the inferences we can draw are inherently limited by the fact that our results rely on a single study, without its own replication. Our results should thus be treated not as definitive, but rather as compelling evidence that motivates future research, including replication of the study presented.

Survey respondents were first randomly presented with one of eight potential news stories, representing eight experimental conditions. In addition to replicating Iyengar's episodic vs. thematic framing conditions, we also included a target population condition ("American" vs. "Muslim American") for the issues of poverty and, separately, religious radicalism, where the individual/group "radicalized … and left to join a terrorist organization overseas." This set-up resulted in a 2 (frame: episodic vs. thematic) × 2 (target population: "American" vs. "Muslim American") × 2 (issue: poverty vs. religious radicalism) design. Within each issue, the treatments were identical other than the episodic vs. thematic and target population cues (using the terms "Cindy Williams" and "Americans" vs. the terms "Fatima al Anbari" and "Muslim Americans").[6] Balance *t*-tests performed on each conditioning variable (frame, target population, issue) show no statistically significant differences between each pair of groups with regard to participants' partisanship, race, or sex, further confirming the sample's suitability for evaluating differences in experimental treatments. The full news condition wording is available in the Appendix. Table 1 shows an overview of the eight conditions.

Following the news story, each respondent was asked "In your opinion, what are the most important causes of poverty/religious radicalism? Feel free to identify multiple causes; please write each item on a new line." Each open-ended response was then coded by a team of two trained coders at two levels, following Iyengar's original methodology. First, each response was coded for the specific substance of the cause provided. For the poverty condition, Iyengar's original codes were followed as closely as possible,

**Table 1.** Eight experimental news conditions (2 × 2 × 2 design); total $n = 1655$.

| | Poverty | | Religious radicalism | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Episodic | Thematic | Episodic | Thematic |
| "American" target population | Cindy Williams suffering poverty ($n = 233$) | Americans suffering poverty ($n = 216$) | Cindy Williams' son joining a terrorist group overseas ($n = 190$) | Americans' children joining a terrorist group overseas ($n = 181$) |
| "Muslim American" target population | Fatima al Anbari suffering poverty ($n = 231$) | Muslim Americans suffering poverty ($n = 217$) | Fatima al Anbari's son joining a terrorist group overseas ($n = 196$) | Muslim Americans' children joining a terrorist group overseas ($n = 191$) |

Note: See Appendix for full text of the news vignettes.

resulting in a codebook of 93 specific codes, including "capitalism," "welfare," "taxes," and "laziness." Codes that were specific to data collection in the 1980s (e.g., Reagan) were converted to more general categories (e.g., President).

Without a codebook from Iyengar to use for coding the open-ended radicalism responses, we created a radicalism codebook following the structure of Iyengar's poverty codebook as much as possible. In the radicalism condition, there were 47 specific codes for the causes of radicalism, including "religion," "poverty," "revenge," and "the Internet." We worked with two graduate student coders over 10 months to code a total of 4672 open-ended responses about responsibility attribution. Intercoder reliability scores were at or above acceptable standards for high quality (Cohen's kappa = 0.78 for poverty 0.89 for radicalism).[7]

Once each open-ended response was assigned a code, the specific responsibility codes were then nested under Iyengar's original four categories of responsibility attribution: government, society, individual, or other. This method follows Iyengar's original analysis. Illustrative examples of how codes were assigned at these two levels are provided in the Appendix. The categorized responses were used to calculate the dependent variable of responsibility attribution in the analysis that follows. Participants in the poverty condition identified an average of 1.63 causes (standard deviation = 1.83), and participants in the radicalism condition identified an average of 1.19 causes (standard deviation = 1.58).

The government codes were applied to responses that attributed responsibility to the government. For example, in the case of poverty: "not enough city or state aide for people who need it" and "policies of the Democratic party." Government attributions in the case of religious radicalism include mentions of disenfranchisement, a lack of order in the government, and government interventions overseas.

The society code was applied to responses that put the responsibility for the problem outside of the individual, but not necessarily with the government. For instance, automation of jobs or not having enough jobs for the population were two society causes provided in the poverty conditions. Society cause examples from the religious radicalism conditions include: "colonialism," "a lack of other options," and "a changing social landscape."

The individual code was applied to responses that attributed responsibility to the individual. Responses for the poverty conditions included a lack of initiative on the part of the poor person, bad financial habits, and a lack of education. Individual causes of radicalism were responses like alienation, incorrect religious beliefs, and being young and naïve. All responses not falling into these three categories of government, society, and individual were coded other. These "other" responses were statements like "wow" or "I have no idea." Only 3% of the poverty condition responses and 2% of the religious radicalism responses were coded as "other."

Following Iyengar's methods, the dependent variable used in the analysis below was calculated for each participant as *the proportion of responses holding the government or society responsible* (both external factors) out of the total of government, society, and individual cause responses provided (thereby excluding any "other" responses). Thus, each respondent received a score between 0 and 1 indicating the degree to which they attribute responsibility to a cause outside of the individual(s) in the news vignette for the problem at hand – either poverty or religious radicalism – which we then convert to percentages in the figures below for ease of interpretation. Note that this measure is a zero-sum calculation

between government/society factors and individual factors; if the dependent variable for a participant is 40%, that means that 60% of the causes the participant listed (excluding other) were about the individual(s).

Creating this dependent variable was a resource-intensive process, but we chose this method for two reasons: First, it replicates the approach Iyengar took in his original study. Second, it provides us with open-ended response data, which make it possible to distinguish among different reasons respondents provide for attributing responsibility to individuals or government/society. We utilize this fine-grained data below.

## Results

We begin by replicating Iyengar's (1991) test of framing effects in the case of poverty. Our poverty conditions involving "Americans" substantively match his original poverty conditions, where the target population in both episodic and thematic conditions was presumably either identified as American or not identified at all.[8] Thus, our first test is to see if the same episodic vs. thematic framing effects Iyengar found nearly 30 years ago still hold today. Are participants who read about "Americans" suffering from poverty more likely to attribute responsibility to the government/society rather than to the individual if the news is framed thematically? Our findings replicate Iyengar's: participants exposed to the thematic/American/poverty condition identified significantly more government/society causes of poverty than participants exposed to the episodic/American/poverty condition. Figure 1 shows the mean percentages of causes participants identified as being attributable to government/society, and on the left of the graph (the "American" target population) we see confirmation of Iyengar's finding of modest but statistically significant effects.

These effects are confirmed by a two-sided independent samples *t*-test comparing the two framing conditions (episodic vs. thematic), which revealed that participants in the thematic condition listed a significantly higher percentage of government/society causes ($M = 0.683$, SD = 0.382) compared to participants in the episodic condition ($M = 0.602$, SD = 0.394), $t(387) = 2.056$, $p = .040$.

But do these framing effects remain when the target population of the news story is identified as "Muslim American"? Because there is not a strong association between Muslim Americans and poverty, H1 predicted that the thematic/episodic framing effects would hold in this condition, which they do, as we can see on the right side of Figure 1. A two-sided independent samples *t*-test confirms the significance of this difference, revealing that participants who read about impoverished "Muslim Americans" are significantly more likely to attribute responsibility to government/society when the news is framed thematically ($M = 0.646$, SD = 0.371) compared to episodically ($M = 0.570$, SD = 0.514), $t(373) = 1.917$, $p = .056$. Thus, in support of H1, our second major finding is that episodic vs. thematic framing effects of poverty persist even when the identity of the target population changes to that of a religious out-group.

As we can see by comparing the left and right sides of Figure 1, study participants are not more likely to attribute responsibility to individual "Muslims Americans" for their poverty than they are to attribute responsibility to individual "Americans" for their poverty. A two-sided independent samples *t*-test confirms that, in the case of poverty (combining both framing conditions), participants do not attribute responsibility to

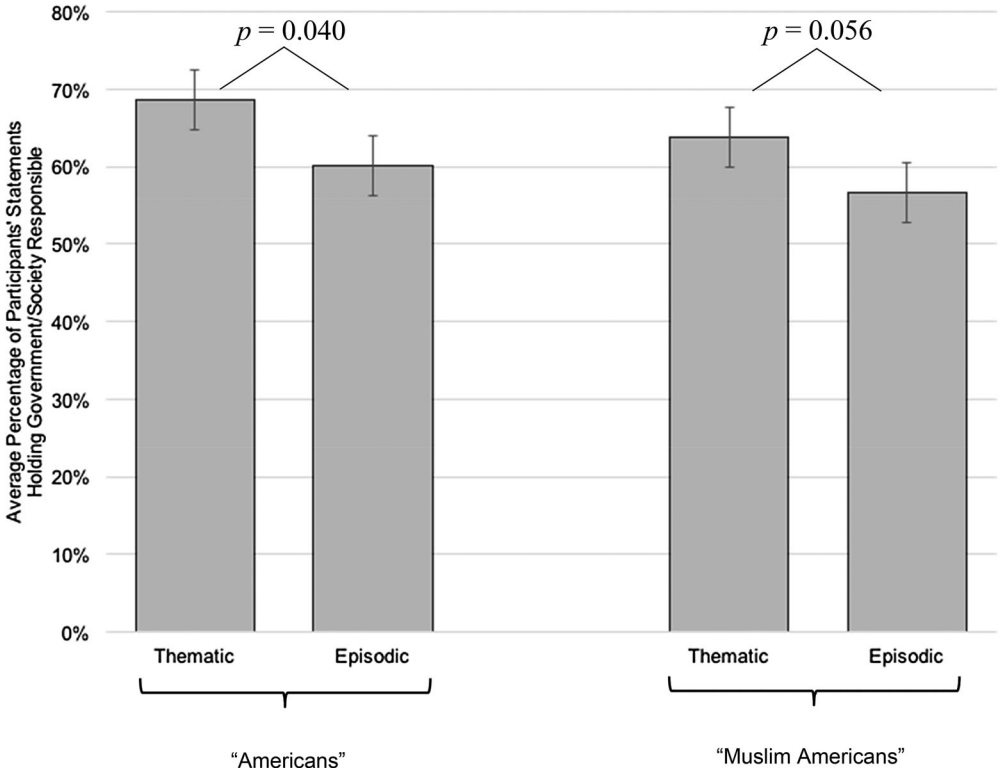


**Figure 1.** Responsibility attribution of government/society for poverty, by frame, within target population.

Note: Error bars indicate the 95% confidence interval above and below the mean.

government/society more when the impoverished person/people are "Muslim Americans" ($M = 0.606$, SD = 0.383) compared to "Americans" ($M = 0.640$, SD = 0.390), $t(760) = -1.207$, $p = .228$.[9]

But what happens when we change the policy issue from poverty, which has little or no stereotypical connection to Muslims, to religious radicalism, which is often associated with Muslims in the media and pop culture? Here, Hypothesis 2 predicted a difference in framing effects depending on whether the target population is "American" or "Muslim American." Turning to the comparison of episodic and thematic frames in the case of religious radicalism, presented in Figure 2, we first find that the framing effects disappear. As Figure 2 shows and *t*-tests confirm, participants in the thematic condition did not identify a significantly higher proportion of government/society causes than participants in the episodic condition, regardless of the target population in question (for "Americans": $M = 0.255$, SD = 0.399 thematic vs. $M = 0.228$, SD = 0.339 episodic, $t(268) = 0.604$, $p = .547$; for "Muslim Americans": $M = 0.317$, SD = 0.392 thematic vs. $M = 0.251$, SD = 0.352 episodic, $t(307) = 1.557$, $p = 0.120$). Again, combining the framing groups within the issue of radicalism, there is no significant difference between participants' tendencies to attribute responsibility to government/society when the radicalized person/people are "Muslim Americans" ($M = 0.283$, SD = 0.372) compared to when the person/people are

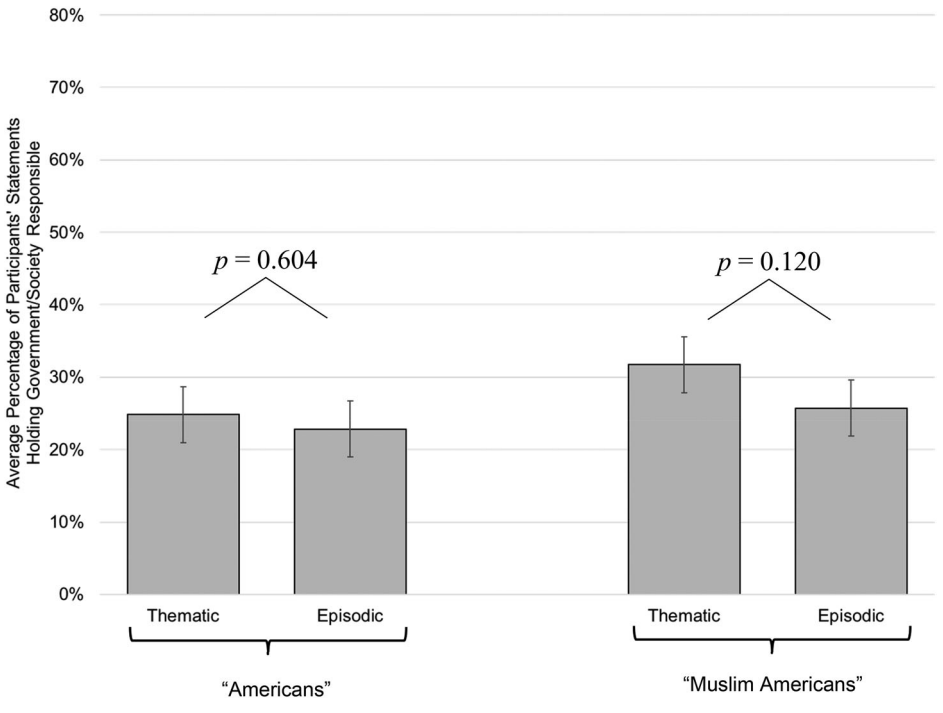


**Figure 2.** Responsibility attribution of government/society for religious radicalism, by frame, within target population.

Note: Error bars indicate the 95% confidence interval above and below the mean.

"Americans" ($M = 0.241$, SD = 0.356), $t(575) = 1.374$, $p = .170$. We note that the framing effects approach significance where the target population is "Muslim American" in this context of religious radicalism, suggesting that future work might find interesting variance in framing effects with different target populations in different issue contexts.[10]

Thus, regardless of the policy area, we see no statistical difference in how respondents attribute responsiblity to "Americans" vs. "Muslim Americans." However, Figure 3 shows that respondents attribute responsibility differently between the two policy issues. Figure 3 combines the target population groups (both "American" and "Muslim American"), revealing that episodic vs. thematic framing has a significant effect in the case of poverty but not in the case of religious radicalism. In particular, Figure 3 shows that participants in the radicalism condition are more likely to attribute responsibility to individuals for the problem of radicalization – in both the "Muslim American" and "American" conditions.

One explanation for this finding is that respondents view any type of "Americans," including "Muslim Americans," differently from foreigners, meaning that thematic frames are not enough to lead them to attribute responsibility to society. In an individualistic culture in a stable country, the decision to radicalize may be consistently seen as a matter of personal choice, similar to party affiliation (Iyengar and Westwood 2015), regardless of whether the individual/group in question is identified as "American" or "Muslim American."

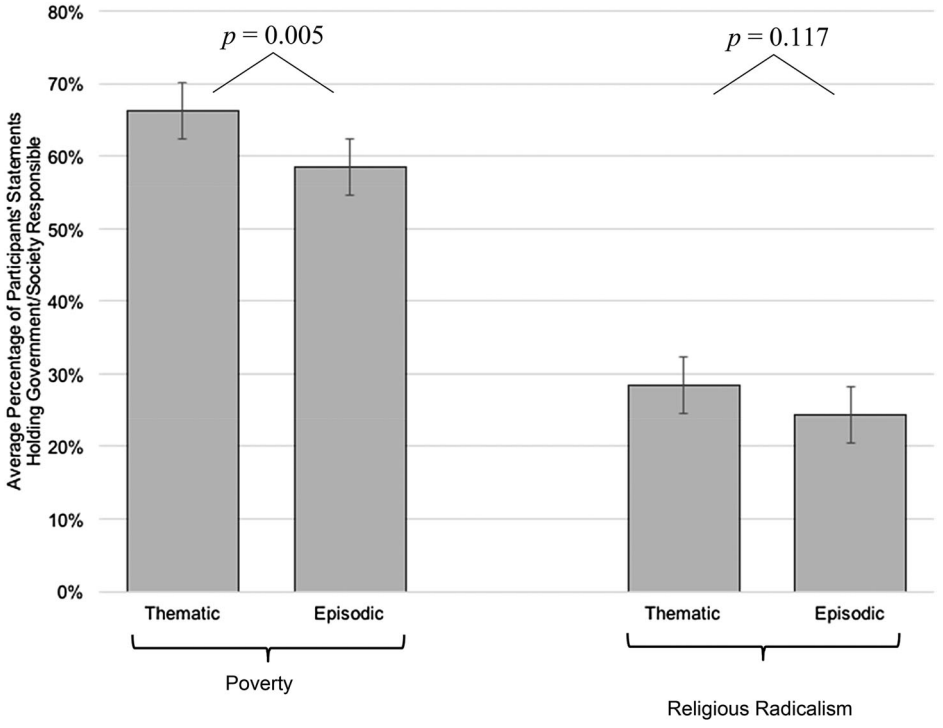


**Figure 3.** Responsibility attribution of government/society, by frame, within policy issue (both target populations combined).

Note: Error bars indicate the 95% confidence interval above and below the mean.

Yet, while it is clear that participants do attribute responsibility to the individuals in these stories more than to government/society, regardless of how the individuals are identified, it is not clear exactly *why*. Because the failure to support H2 is surprising, given the extant literature, we further probe this finding by looking at whether people tend to attribute responsibility to "Americans" and "Muslim Americans" in the same way. We do so by examining people's specific responsibility attribution responses, which, as described above, we coded by substance. In the religious radicalism condition, there were seven codes related to religion that placed responsibility upon the individual.[11] Using these codes, we created a dummy variable for the mention of religion in any of the respondent's open-ended responses on the causes of radicalism. In a two-sample *t*-test, we find that those in the Muslim American condition were more likely ($M = .34$, $SD = .47$) than those in the American condition ($M = .25$, $SD = .43$) to mention religious causes when attributing responsibility for religious radicalization, $t(756) = 2.83$, $p = .004$. In other words, despite similar stories about mothers losing their sons to terrorist organizations overseas, and despite respondents in both conditions similarly holding individuals responsible for the problem of radicalism, religion was mentioned significantly more often when the family/families of the radicalized youth/youths were identified as Muslim American. This finding suggests that, although responsibility attribution may be similar across target populations in terms of whether responsibility is placed upon individuals or government/society, by looking only at this level of analysis, we may miss important differences

driven by group identity. Even among those who attribute responsibility to individuals for their circumstances, *why* they hold individuals responsible can vary based on the identity of the person in question.

## Discussion

Our findings confirm Iyengar's (1991) conclusion that how a policy problem is framed, whether episodic or thematic, can impact how the public attributes responsibility for the issue (in this case, the issue of poverty). As more research emerges to support the importance of replicating experimental findings (e.g., Camerer et al. 2018), this outcome alone is a significant contribution.

Additionally, we extend this classic finding by showing that these episodic vs. thematic framing effects hold in the case of poverty regardless of whether the person/group in question is identified as "American" or "Muslim American." This finding is important because it suggests that, at least in the context of poverty, social identity is not strong enough for participants to treat "Muslim Americans" differently from "Americans." This null finding may be due to the fact that in our news vignettes we used the term "Muslim Americans" rather than "Muslims." In doing so, perhaps we cued participants to focus enough on the "Americans" portion of the identity to treat the target population as part of their own in-group. Had we used the term "Muslims," perhaps we would have found significant differences. Yet the current results are nonetheless meaningful, since "Muslim Americans" is a common identity descriptor for the estimated 3.3 million people who identify as such (Mohamed 2016).

Although the effects of episodic vs. thematic frames hold in the case of poverty, in the case of religious radicalism, episodic vs. thematic frames fail to produce a significant effect on people's tendency to hold government/society responsible for the problem. We believe this finding is due to the fact that a social predisposition to attribute responsibility to the individual overrides the potential episodic vs. thematic framing effects. But especially interesting is the fact that this null finding persists regardless of whether the target population is "American" or "Muslim American." Whereas there is no reason to expect that the Muslim American identity is particularly cued when thinking about the issue of poverty, it may be cued when thinking about the issue of religious radicalism. It is thus comforting, from the point of view of combatting stereotypes, to find that people similarly attribute responsibility to the individual radicalized person, regardless of their identity. As Rosenberg and Wolfsfeld (1977) describe, when one can see themselves as the actor in a story, their "field of vision is usually occupied by the environment" (78), leading causal attribution to be cast on the situational environment rather than the actor. It may be that it is easier to envision one's self as poor than as a religious radical, thus leading to higher levels of individual responsibility attribution for radicalism regardless of the subject characteristics.

Although there is no difference in individual vs. government/society responsibility attribution for radicalism, regardless of whether the target population is "Muslims American" or "American," there are significant differences in *why* participants attributed responsiblity to individual "Muslim Americans" vs. individual "Americans." Specifically, religion is significantly more likely to be a part of the individual-attributed responsibility when the person portrayed in the news story is "Muslim American." By leveraging vignettes that describe scenarios that vary only by the religion of the Americans portrayed, we

can isolate the role of this religion cue in people's attributions of responsibility. Future research should continue to examine how framing can lead to differentiation in the reasons underpinning responsibility attribution, as this line of research would help to further elucidate variation in framing effects.

The controlled nature of our experiment and the large national (though non-representative) sample we used both underscore the strength of these findings. There are, of course, limits to the scope of how we can interpret these findings. In particular, we expect that further varying the issue context and target population would produce interesting variance in the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of episodic vs. thematic framing. This area of framing research certainly warrants further investigation. For instance, it would be especially interesting to see how non-Latinx participants perceive Latinx vs. non-Latinx target populations in the dual issue areas of poverty (where Latinx stereotypes might be more strongly associated with the issue) and undocumented immigration (where Latinx stereotypes are certainly associated with the issue). Since it is arguably easier to mentally put one's self into the position of an undocumented immigrant than a terrorist, examining whether the episodic vs. thematic framing effects hold equally for Latinx and non-Latinx target populations in the case of immigration would be an easier (and more generally applicable) test case of the idea that social identity interacts with issue context to condition framing effects.

More broadly, we hope our study motivates future research at the intersection of framing effects and identity. Such work might not only vary the target population in question (Latinx, African American, etc.) but also the dependent variable in question. Responsibility attribution – the dependent variable Iyengar used and, thus, the one we employ here – is an important metric of how citizens respond to media frames. But other outcome variables, including policy opinions, empathy, and political behaviors, would be important to study as well.

When and why people attribute responsibility to individuals for their circumstances varies in important and consequential ways. Episodic vs. thematic framing effects matter for how people attribute responsibility and the extent to which they hold government accountable for social problems. Our findings here indicate that different policy issues may be more or less susceptible to episodic vs. thematic framing. At a broad level, identity does not appear to have a significant influence when it comes to attributing responsibility to the individual as opposed to government/society. However, different reasons driving individual-level responsibility attribution based on identity do persist when we take a close look at the open-ended responses. It is possible that stronger identity cues combined with issue areas more susceptible to episodic vs. thematic framing effects may yield different results.

## Notes

1. We put these terms in quotation marks to reinforce the fact that this distinction was the one we used in our experimental treatments, recognizing that Muslim Americans are, of course, Americans.
2. A 2016 poll conducted by Pew Research Center, for instance, finds that 41% of Americans say that the Islamic religion is more likely than others to encourage violence among its believers (Pew Research Center 2017).

3. Respondents were asked to supply a zip code and zip codes were checked to ensure respondents were in the United States. Respondents' longitude and latitude were input into a reverse geocoding tool to produce a zip code for any respondents not supplying one and those with longitude and latitude outside of the USA were excluded from the sample.
4. The average time it took a participant to complete the survey was 9.58 min (SD = 7.7 min).
5. More people participated after November 12, and we utilize that data elsewhere (Boydstun, Feezell, and Glazier 2018). But since the Paris terrorist attacks occurred on 13 November 2015, for this paper we only analyze data through November 12 to avoid the potential problem of participants after November 13 being cued to think about religious radicalism.
6. We chose these names by using a focus group of students ($N = 18$) wherein we asked participants to rate the probability that a person with a given name was Muslim. From a list of 13 names, Cindy Williams scored the lowest (definitely not Muslim) and Fatima al Anbari scored the highest (definitely Muslim).
7. We thank Iyengar for providing us with his original codebook.
8. Iyengar used video clips of real television news stories.
9. We can also test whether the episodic vs. thematic framing effects differ depending on whether the target population is "American" or "Muslim American" by regressing our dependent variable (the proportion of responses holding the government or society responsible out of the total of government, society, and individual cause responses provided) on the frame experienced (episodic or thematic), the target group experienced (American or Muslim American), and an interaction between frame and target group. If the episodic vs. thematic framing effects were significantly different depending on the target population, the interaction term would yield a significant coefficient. Yet, in the case of poverty, the interaction term is insignificant ($p = 0.922$) and we cannot reject the null hypothesis.
10. As with the case of poverty, we can use a regression to directly test whether the episodic vs. thematic framing effects differ depending on target population. Again, the interaction term is not significant ($p = 0.515$) and we are unable to reject the null hypothesis in this case.
11. These specific codes (in abbreviated version) are: violent religion, religious indoctrination, manipulation by religious leaders, misunderstanding religion, a lack of religion, absolutist religious views, radicals target religious people, and religion in general.

## Acknowledgments

We are grateful to Jared Clay, Mia Livaudais, and Hannah Dillman for excellent research assistance; to Kim Gross and Shanto Iyengar for valuable feedback; and especially to Iyengar for unearthing his original codebook from his file drawer and sharing it with us.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Funding

This work was conducted as part of the University of New Mexico Women in STEM Faculty Development Fund. Research support was also provided by a faculty research grant from the Middle Eastern Studies program at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

## References

Aarøe, Lene. 2011. "Investigating Frame Strength: The Case of Episodic and Thematic Frames." *Political Communication* 28 (2): 207–226. doi:10.1080/10584609.2011.568041.

Achenbach, Joel. 2018. "Researchers Replicate Just 13 of 21 Social Science Experiments Published in Top Journals." *Washington Post*. Washington, DC.

Ahmed, Saifuddin, and Jörg Matthes. 2017. "Media Representation of Muslims and Islam from 2000 to 2015: A Meta-analysis." *International Communication Gazette* 79 (3): 219–244.

Arechar, Antonio A., Simon Gächter, and Lucas Molleman. 2018. "Conducting Interactive Experiments Online." *Experimental Economics* 21 (1): 99–131. doi:10.1007/s10683-017-9527-2.

Bartneck, Christoph, Andreas Duenser, Elena Moltchanova, and Karolina Zawieska. 2015. "Comparing the Similarity of Responses Received From Studies in Amazon's Mechanical Turk to Studies Conducted Online and with Direct Recruitment." *PLoS ONE* 10 (4): 1–23.

Ben-Porath, Eran N., and Lee K. Shaker. 2010. "News Images, Race, and Attribution in the Wake of Hurricane Katrina." *Journal of Communication* 60 (3): 466–490. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2010.01493.x.

Berinsky, Adam J, Gregory A Huber, and Gabriel S Lenz. 2012. "Evaluating Online Labor Markets for Experimental Research: Amazon. Com's Mechanical Turk." *Political Analysis* 20 (3): 351–368.

Boukes, Mark, Hajo G. Boomgaarden, Marjolein Moorman, and Claes H. de Vreese. 2014. "Political News with a Personal Touch." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 92 (1): 121–141. doi:10.1177/1077699014558554.

Boydstun, Amber E., Jessica T. Feezell, and Rebecca A. Glazier. 2018. "In the Wake of a Terrorist Attack, do Americans' Attitudes Toward Muslims Decline?" *Research & Politics* 5 (4): 205316801880639. https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168018806391.

Brewer, Paul R. 2003. "Values, Political Knowledge, and Public Opinion about Gay Rights: A Framing-Based Account." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 67 (2): 173–201.

Cacciatore, Michael A., Dietram A. Scheufele, and Shanto Iyengar. 2016. "The End of Framing as we Know it … and the Future of Media Effects." *Mass Communication and Society* 19 (1): 7–23. doi:10.1080/15205436.2015.1068811.

Camerer, Colin F., Anna Dreber, Felix Holzmeister, Teck-Hua Ho, Jürgen Huber, Magnus Johannesson, Michael Kirchler, et al. 2018. "Evaluating the Replicability of Social Science Experiments in Nature and Science Between 2010 and 2015." *Nature Human Behaviour* 2 (9): 637–644. doi:10.1038/s41562-018-0399-z.

Casler, Krista, Lydia Bickel, and Elizabeth Hackett. 2013. "Separate but Equal? A Comparison of Participants and Data Gathered via Amazon's MTurk, Social Media, and Face-to-Face Behavioral Testing." *Computers in Human Behavior* 29 (6): 2156–2160.

Chong, Dennis, and James N. Druckman. 2007. "Framing Theory." *Annual Review of Political Science* 10: 103–126.

Clifford, Scott, Ryan M Jewell, and Philip D Waggoner. 2015. "Are Samples Drawn From Mechanical Turk Valid for Research on Political Ideology?" *Research & Politics* 2 (4): 1–9. 2053168015622072.

Coppock, Alexander. 2018. "Generalizing From Survey Experiments Conducted on Mechanical Turk: A Replication Approach." *Political Science Research and Methods* 1–16. doi:10.1017/psrm.2018.10.

Drakulich, Kevin M. 2015. "Explicit and Hidden Racial Bias in the Framing of Social Problems." *Social Problems* 62 (3): 391–418. doi:10.1093/socpro/spu003.

Druckman, James N. 2001. "On the Limits of Framing Effects: Who Can Frame?" *The Journal of Politics* 63: 1041–1066.

Druckman, James N., Erik Peterson, and Rune Slothuus. 2013. "How Elite Partisan Polarization Affects Public Opinion Formation." *American Political Science Review* 107 (1): 57–79.

El-Burki, Imaani Jamillah, Douglas V. Porpora, and Rachel R. Reynolds. 2016. "When Race Matters: What Newspaper Opinion Pieces Say About Race and Poverty." *International Journal of Communication* 10 (17): 1388–1404.

Gandy, Oscar H., Katharina Kopp, Tanya Hands, Karen Frazer, and David Phillips. 1997. "Race and Risk: Factors Affecting the Framing of Stories About Inequality, Discrimination, and Just Plain Bad Luck." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 61 (1): 158–182.

Gerges, Fawaz A. 2003. "Islam and Muslims in the Mind of America." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 588 (1): 73–89.
Gross, Kimberly. 2008. "Framing Persuasive Appeals: Episodic and Thematic Framing, Emotional Response, and Policy Opinion." *Political Psychology* 29 (2): 169–192.
Hannah, Gordon, and Thomas P. Cafferty. 2006. "Attribute and Responsibility Framing Effects in Television News Coverage of Poverty." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 36 (12): 2993–3014.
Heider, Fritz. 1958. *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
Hurwitz, Jon, and Mark Peffley. 1997. "Public Perceptions of Race and Crime: The Role of Racial Stereotypes." *American Journal of Political Science* 41 (2): 375–401. doi:10.2307/2111769.
Iyengar, Shanto. 1991. *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.
Iyengar, Shanto. 1996. "Framing Responsibility for Political Issues." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 546: 59–70.
Iyengar, Shanto, and Sean J. Westwood. 2015. "Fear and Loathing Across Party Lines: New Evidence on Group Polarization." *American Journal of Political Science* 59 (3): 690–707. doi:10.1111/ajps.12152.
Kahan, Dan M. 2016. "The Politically Motivated Reasoning Paradigm, Part 1: What Politically Motivated Reasoning is and How to Measure it." In *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, edited by Robert Scott and Stephen Kosslyn. Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley & Sons, Inc.
Kalkan, Kerem Ozan, Geoffrey C. Layman, and Eric M. Uslaner. 2009. "'Bands of Others'? Attitudes Toward Muslims in Contemporary American Society." *The Journal of Politics* 71 (3): 847–862.
Kim, Sei-Hill, James Shanahan, and Doo-Hun Choi. 2012. "TV News Framing Supports Societal Poverty Solutions." *Newspaper Research Journal* 33 (1): 101–112. doi:10.1177/073953291203300108.
Knoll, Benjamin R., David P. Redlawsk, and Howard Sanborn. 2011. "Framing Labels and Immigration Policy Attitudes in the Iowa Caucuses: 'Trying to Out-Tancredo Tancredo'." *Political Behavior* 33 (3): 433–454.
Kreuter, Frauke, Stanley Presser, and Roger Tourangeau. 2008. "Social Desirability Bias in CATI, IVR, and Web Surveys: The Effects of Mode and Question Sensitivity." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 72 (5): 847–865.
Krupnikov, Yanna, and Adam Seth Levine. 2014. "Cross-sample Comparisons and External Validity." *Journal of Experimental Political Science* 1 (1): 59–80.
Levay, Kevin E., Jeremy Freese, and James N. Druckman. 2016. "The Demographic and Political Composition of Mechanical Turk Samples." *SAGE Open* 6 (1): 1–17.
Miles, Hewstone. 1990. "The 'Ultimate Attribution Error'? A Review of the Literature on Intergroup Causal Attribution." *European Journal of Social Psychology* 20 (4): 311–335. doi:10.1002/ejsp.2420200404.
Mohamed, Besheer. 2016. "A New Estimate of the U.S. Muslim Population." http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/01/06/a-new-estimate-of-the-u-s-muslim-population/.
Mullinix, Kevin J., Thomas J. Leeper, James N. Druckman, and Jeremy Freese. 2016. "The Generalizability of Survey Experiments." *Journal of Experimental Political Science* 2 (2): 109–138. doi:10.1017/XPS.2015.19.
Nacos, Brigitte Lebens, and Oscar Torres-Reyna. 2007. *Fueling Our Fears: Stereotyping, Media Coverage, and Public Opinion of Muslim Americans*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
Peffley, Mark, Todd Shields, and Bruce Williams. 1996. "The Intersection of Race and Crime in Television News Stories: An Experimental Study." *Political Communication* 13 (3): 309–327. doi:10.1080/10584609.1996.9963120.
Pettigrew, Thomas F. 1979. "The Ultimate Attribution Error: Extending Allport's Cognitive Analysis of Prejudice." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 5 (4): 461–476.

Pew Research Center. 2017. *U.S. Muslims Concerned About Their Place in Society, but Continue to Believe in the American Dream*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.
Price, Vincent, David Tewksbury, and Elizabeth Powers. 1997. "Switching Trains of Thought: The Impact of News Frames on Readers' Cognitive Responses." *Communication Research* 24 (5): 481–506.
Quillian, Lincoln, and Devah Pager. 2001. "Black Neighbors, Higher Crime? The Role of Racial Stereotypes in Evaluations of Neighborhood Crime." *American Journal of Sociology* 107 (3): 717–767. doi:10.1086/338938.
Rosenberg, Shawn W., and Gary Wolfsfeld. 1977. "International Conflict and the Problem of Attribution." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 21 (1): 75–103.
Ross, Lee. 1977. "The Intuitive Psychologist and His Shortcomings: Distortions in the Attribution Process." In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, edited by L. Berkowitz, 173–220. New York: Elsevier.
Scheufele, Dietram A. 2000. "Agenda-setting, Priming, and Framing Revisited: Another Look at Cognitive Effects of Political Communication." *Mass Communication & Society* 3 (2-3): 297–316.
Schooler, Jonathan W. 2014. "Metascience Could Rescue the 'Replication Crisis'." *Nature* 515 (7525): 9.
Sides, John, and Kimberly Gross. 2013. "Stereotypes of Muslims and Support for the War on Terror." *The Journal of Politics* 75 (3): 583–598.
Tajfel, Henri. 1981. *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Tajfel, Henri, and John C. Turner. 1979. "Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict." In *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, edited by William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel, 33–47. Monterey: Brooks-Cole.
Tajfel, Henri, and Alan L Wilkes. 1963. "Classification and Quantitative Judgement." *British Journal of Psychology* 54 (2): 101–114.
Todd, Andrew R., Galen V. Bodenhausen, Jennifer A. Richeson, and Adam D. Galinsky. 2011. "Perspective Taking Combats Automatic Expressions of Racial Bias." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 100 (6): 1–16.
von Sikorski, Christian, Desirée Schmuck, Jörg Matthes, and Alice Binder. 2017. "'Muslims are Not Terrorists': Islamic State Coverage, Journalistic Differentiation Between Terrorism and Islam, Fear Reactions, and Attitudes Toward Muslims." *Mass Communication and Society* 20 (6): 825–848.

## Appendices

### *Appendix A. News vignette conditions*

#### *Poverty, "American" target population, episodic*

27 April 2015. Lansing, Michigan. Some average citizens are feeling the pinch of economic decline. Cindy Williams, a former fast food worker and a mother, lost her job last year and has yet to find new work. Williams, who spoke to our reporting team while wearing a t-shirt emblazoned with an American flag, is uncertain of what she will do next. "It's a daily struggle to provide for my kids and we're constantly hungry, never knowing when we will eat next" she said. "Just trying to survive from day to day makes it hard to plan ahead and think about getting a job." Like many who live in poverty, Cindy didn't plan to end up in this situation. "As an American, I just never thought this could happen to me. Jobs are competitive and hard to get lately, but I've always been a hard worker. I just want to support my family."

#### *Poverty, "Muslim American" target population, episodic*

27 April 2015. Lansing, Michigan. Some Muslim-Americans are feeling the pinch of economic decline. Fatima al Anbari, a former fast food worker and a mother, lost her job last year and has

yet to find new work. al Anbari, who spoke to our reporting team while wearing a t-shirt emblazoned with the Islamic star and crescent, is uncertain of what she will do next. "It's a daily struggle to provide for my kids and we're constantly hungry, never knowing when we will eat next" she said. "Just trying to survive from day to day makes it hard to plan ahead and think about getting a job." Like many who live in poverty, Fatima didn't plan to end up in this situation. "As a Muslim-American, I just never thought this could happen to me. Jobs are competitive and hard to get lately, but I've always been a hard worker. I just want to support my family."

### *Poverty, "American" target population, thematic*

27 April 2015. Lansing, Michigan. Average citizens are feeling the pinch of economic decline as the number of people living below the poverty line in the region continues to rise. As local companies continue to close, more and more families are finding it hard to find and keep jobs. An estimated 1053 people live in poverty locally, which is beginning to stress local work placement services. American citizens are becoming increasingly concerned about poverty generally. Our reporting team has found that many American families don't know what they will do now that they have joined the growing ranks of those living under the poverty line, some without income entirely. The local poverty rate has risen more that 2 percent over the past 6 months, which is comparable to the national average.

### *Poverty, "Muslim American" target population, thematic*

27 April 2015. Lansing, Michigan. Muslim-Americans are feeling the pinch of economic decline as the number of people living below the poverty line in the region continues to rise. As local companies continue to close, more and more families are finding it hard to find and keep jobs. An estimated 1053 Muslim-Americans live in poverty locally, which is adding to stress already felt among local work placement services. Muslim-Americans are becoming increasingly concerned about poverty generally. Our reporting team has found that many Muslim-American families don't know what they will do now that they have joined the growing ranks of those living under the poverty line, some without income entirely. The local poverty rate has risen more that 2 percent over the past 6 months, which is comparable to the national average.

### *Radicalism, "American" target population, episodic*

27 April 2015. Lansing, Michigan. At a press conference today, activist and mother Cindy Williams spoke out about the dangers of religious radicalization. Williams' son, Henry, was radicalized in 2013 and left to join a terrorist organization overseas. Williams called the press conference in response to the reported death of Henry, which was announced on social media by the terrorists it is assumed he was working with. Flanked by American flags, an emotional Cindy Williams said

> we have to be vigilant in protecting our young people against the dangers of radicalization. These terrorist groups are technologically savvy and prey on confused and alienated youth. It is our duty as Americans to fight this dangerous threat. My son was everything to me, and I lost him to radicalism.

### *Radicalism, "Muslim American" target population, episodic*

27 April 2015. Lansing, Michigan. At a press conference today, Muslim American activist and mother Fatima al Anbari spoke out about the dangers of religious radicalization. Anbari's son, Mohammad al Anbari, was radicalized in 2013 and left to join a terrorist organization overseas. Anbari called the press conference in response to the reported death of Mohammad, which was announced on social media by the terrorists it is assumed he was working with. Flanked by flags displaying the Islamic star and crescent, an emotional Fatima al Anbari said

> we have to be vigilant in protecting our young people against the dangers of radicalization. These terrorist groups are technologically savvy and prey on confused and alienated youth. It is our duty as Muslim Americans to fight this dangerous threat. My son was everything to me, and I lost him to radicalism.

### *Radicalism, "American" target population, thematic*

27 April 2015. Lansing, Michigan. At the state capital building today, activists and mothers spoke out about the dangers of religious radicalization. Since 2013, an estimated 50 American citizens have been radicalized and have left to terrorist organizations overseas. The community event held today was in response to a recent study reporting that an estimated 65% of radicalized youths who join overseas terrorist groups end up being killed. Flanked by American flags, the participants in the event presented a joint statement they developed, which said, in part:

> we have to be vigilant in protecting our young people against the dangers of radicalization. These terrorist groups are technologically savvy and prey on confused and alienated youth. It is our duty as Americans to fight this dangerous threat. Too many young people are being lost to radicalism.

### *Radicalism, "Muslim American" target population, thematic*

27 April 2015. Lansing, Michigan. At the state capital building today, Muslim American activists and mothers spoke out about the dangers of religious radicalization. Since 2013, an estimated 50 Muslim Americans have been radicalized and have left to terrorist organizations overseas. The community event held today was in response to a recent study reporting that an estimated 65% of radicalized youths who join overseas terrorist groups end up being killed. Flanked by flags displaying the Islamic star and crescent, the participants in the event presented a joint statement they developed, which said:

> we have to be vigilant in protecting our young people against the dangers of radicalization. These terrorist groups are technologically savvy and prey on confused and alienated youth. It is our duty as Muslim Americans to fight this dangerous threat. Too many young people are being lost to radicalism.

## *Appendix B. Examples of coding at two levels*

### *Poverty examples*

Question: "In your opinion, what are the most important causes of poverty? Feel free to identify multiple causes; please write each item on a new line."

Coding Level 1: specific substance (e.g., "capitalism," "welfare," "taxes," "laziness," etc.)

Coding Level 2: Iyengar's responsibility attribution categories (i.e., "government," "society," "individual," or "other")

Respondent 1

Respondent 1 Responses (different responses separated by a semi-colon): Lack of jobs; replacing jobs people used to do with machines

Respondent 1 Codes, Level 1: 21 (not enough jobs); 28 (automation/high tech. economy)

Respondent 1 Codes, Level 2: E (society); E (society)

Respondent 2

Respondent 2 Responses: government economic policy

Respondent 2 Codes, Level 1: 70 (economic policy)

Respondent 2 Codes, Level 2: G (government)

Respondent 3

Respondent 3 Responses (different responses separated by a semi-colon): Lack of education; poor life choices; drug dependency

Respondent 3 Codes, Level 1: 10 (education); 7 (bad habit/poor choices); 4 (drugs and/or alcohol)

Respondent 3 Codes, Level 2: D (individual); D (individual); D (individual)

### *Religious radicalism examples*

Question: "In your opinion, what are the most important causes of religious radicalism? Feel free to identify multiple causes; please write each item on a new line."

Coding Level 1: specific substance (e.g., "religion," "poverty," "revenge," "the Internet," etc.)

Coding Level 2: Iyengar's responsibility attribution categories (i.e., "government," "society," "individual," or "other")

Respondent 1

Respondent 1 Responses (different responses separated by a semi-colon): Adventure; Want to be part of something large

Respondent 1 Codes, Level 1: 48 (adventure, excitement, rebellion, etc.), 43 (provides a sense of purpose, meaning in life)

Respondent 1 Codes, Level 2: D (individual); D (individual)

Respondent 2

Respondent 2 Responses (different responses separated by a semi-colon): The impressionable youth; Tradition

Respondent 2 Codes, Level 1: 45 (youth and immaturity), 33 (culture, social pressure, beliefs passed through generations)

Respondent 2 Codes, Level 2: D (individual); E (society)

Respondent 3

Respondent 3 Responses (different responses separated by a semi-colon): Death of innocent people of the Islamic faith; Repression of human rights; Alienation of people within their own country; Prejudice.

Respondent 3 Codes, Level 1: 49 (revenge; response to death and suffering); 34 (lack of political freedom or rights); 42 (alienation, loneliness, disillusionment); 31 (racism, discrimination, oppression)

Respondent 3 Codes, Level 2: D (individual), G (government), D (individual), E (society)