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Shaping the Islamic Threat:
The influence of ideology, religiosity, and media use on U.S.
public opinion toward Islam and Muslim Americans

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the influence of Christian religiosity, ideology, and mass media use on specific American perceptions of Islam and Islamic peoples, and the impact of these influences and perceptions on public support for restrictions on Muslim American civil liberties. Employing data collected from a national survey conducted in November 2004 and structural equation modeling (SEM), we demonstrate how Christian religiosity, conservative ideology, and Republican party affiliation either directly promote public support for restrictions on Muslim Americans, or indirectly by strengthening the belief that Islam is inherently more violent than other religions. The analysis also demonstrates that exposure and attention to television news negatively impacts perceptions of Islam and strengthens public support for restrictions on civil liberties while newspaper use has little or no effects in general. The effects of TV news also vary by news source, with exposure to *Fox Cable News* promoting negative perceptions of Islam and Muslims, and thus increasing support for restrictions on Muslim Americans more so than other information sources such as *CNN* or network broadcast news (i.e. ABC, NBC, CBS). Lastly, ideology and religiosity also interact with specific news sources, with exposure to *Fox Cable News* amplifying the impact of Christian religiosity while exposure to *CNN* further widens the gap in perceptions between liberals and conservatives.

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Scholarly research examining the determinants of public support for democratic civil liberties and political tolerance has been abundant since Stouffer's (1955) seminal work on support for civil liberties (see for example, Altemeyer, 1996; Marcus, Sullivan, Theis-Morse, & Wood, 1995; Sullivan, Marcus, Feldman, & Piereson, 1981; Sullivan, Pierson, & Marcus, 1982; Wilson, 1994). Summarizing a range of previous research, Sullivan and Transue (1999) note that at the abstract level there is considerable public support and consensus for the general extension and application of civil liberties and political tolerance, but that this public consensus quickly evaporates when applied to difficult and specific cases. Though they admit that the variability of public opinion toward civil liberties and political tolerance is somewhat "constrained" by internalized democratic values and culture, within these broad boundaries public opinion may be quite "malleable" depending on perceptions of threat stemming from the information environment (i.e., mass media or elite cues) and individual predispositions (i.e., ideology or religiosity).

Recent scholarship has highlighted the role mass media use in shaping public opinion toward domestic civil liberties (Scheufele, Nisbet, and Ostman, 2005) after September 11th as well as the role the mass media has played in the ongoing conflict between the United States and global terrorism (Kull, Ramsay, & Lewis, 2004). Building upon previous work examining how the information environment and individual predispositions may affect judgments regarding civil liberties and political tolerance (see Marcus, Sullivan, Theis-Morse, & Wood, 1995; Sullivan and Transue, 1999), Scheufele et al. (2005) examined how television media use and ideological predispositions interact to heighten public support for restrictions on civil liberties. Turning to the U.S. War on Terror, Kull and colleagues (Kull, Ramsay, & Lewis, 2004) examined how

misperceptions regarding the U.S. War on Terror and invasion of Iraq were associated with the use of different media sources such as *Fox Cable News* or *National Public Radio*.

Due to the September 11th attacks, the invasion and ongoing insurgency in Iraq, and the continuing U.S. War on Terror, no other ethnic group of Americans has been the focus of so much political, legal, and media discourse regarding possible limits on civil liberties since the debate about Japanese Americans during WWII. Thus, combining these different strands of scholarship, this paper focuses on how individual predispositions such as ideology and religiosity combine with media information sources to directly and indirectly effect perceptions of the Islam, Muslims, and the likelihood of and danger from terrorist attack within the United States, which in turn impact the level of public support for restricting Muslim American civil liberties. Furthermore, we also examine how religiosity or ideology may interact with specific TV news sources such as *CNN* or *Fox Cable News*.

Mass media and perceptions of threat. As Sullivan and Transue note, the information environment previously has been identified as one of the strongest factors shaping public opinion on restricting civil liberties of particular groups (Sullivan et al., 1982, 1985; Gibson, 1987; Marcus et al., 1995). Previous research also has shown that if the “information environment portrays such groups as violating normative expectations with regard to orderly behavior and proper procedures, many citizens – even those not particularly predisposed toward intolerance – will refuse to tolerate the group and its activities” (Sullivan & Transue, 1999, p. 632). Thus, in the case of Muslim Americans, mass media use may lead to greater public support for restrictions on Muslim Americans by increasing the general fear or threat of terrorist attack and by promoting negative stereotypes or perceptions of Islam and Muslim Americans specifically.

Cho et al. (2003) and Scheufele, Nisbet, and Ostman (2005) have explored how mass media use may be associated generally with threat perceptions after the September 11th attacks,

and how these perceptions are more likely to be associated with television media use rather than print media use. Television as a medium provides a more vivid, interactive, stimulating information environment than print, and thus is more likely to elicit emotional responses from audiences in comparison to print (Cho et al., 2003). This is especially the case for television news coverage of war and terrorism that is live, elicits higher levels of prolonged attention from audience members (Friedlander, 1982; Krauthammer, 1986), and has strong compelling visuals “including carnage of injury and death, property and environmental wreckage, heightened emotional reactions, and disruption of routine” (Scheufele, Nisbet, & Ostman, 2005, p. 200). Furthermore, Scheufele et al. (2005) note that in comparison “print media have limited capacity to depict terrorism visually and no capacity aurally. Print media reports tend to be more static, more expansive, more analytical and logical, more staid, and less immediate than those of broadcast media” (p. 200).

Beyond differences in form and presentation, Cho et al. (2003) and Scheufele et al. (2005) both note that television and print media tend to have important differences in terms of news framing. "Episodic" framing is event-oriented news reporting that portrays public problems or topics in terms of tangible instances has been found to be more prevalent in television news than print news (Iyengar, 1991). It has also been shown to more likely lead to attributions of individual responsibility for social problems rather than systemic or institutional attributions (Iyengar, 1991). Thus, in the case of restrictions on civil liberties, television news that is more episodic may be associated with a tendency to attribute responsibility for actions or threats to specific types of individuals or groups rather than to an overall situation. In addition, previous scholarship has shown that in times of crises or war the mass media, and in particular television news content and frames, are more likely to generate support for the political regime and expanded government powers, including support for limiting public dissent and other

restrictions (Brody, 1994; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Reese & Buckalew, 1995; Scheufele, Nisbet, Ostman, 2005)

The extent of content analysis and audience surveys regarding the relationship between mass media use, perceptions of threat, and public opinion toward civil liberties since the September 11th attacks is limited. However, findings from Cho et al. (2003), Rosentiel et al. (2002), and Scheufele, Nisbet, & Ostman (2005) support the general assertions discussed above, especially the differences between television and newspaper content. Cho and colleagues conducted a content analysis of post-September 11th television and newspaper content and found that television content of the attacks and aftermath was more highly emotional than newspaper content based on linguistic differences, especially in terms of “blame” for the attacks. Also, conducting a two-wave survey panel study to examine possible audience responses to these content differences, Cho et al. found that “heavier television news users sustained a higher level of negative emotional reactions to the terrorist attacks than heavier newspaper users” (p. 322). Rosentiel et al. (2002) found a similar difference between television and newspaper coverage of the war in Afghanistan, in which print media assertions were 44% more likely to be factual, rather than emotional, compared to television news reporting of the war.

Scheufele and colleagues (2005) directly examined the association between different forms of mass media use and support for restrictions in civil liberties utilizing a community survey conducted shortly after the September 11th attacks. Their analysis found that television news viewing and time-spent watching television were associated with support for expansion of police powers and limits on privacy and information (Scheufele et al., 2005). Conversely, newspaper reading was negatively associated with support for restrictions on civil liberties.

Beyond differences between television and print news media, there may be important differences *within* media types, especially television news. For example, Kull and colleagues (2004) found in a national study that individual misperceptions regarding links between Iraq and

Al Qaeda and possible threats from weapons of mass destruction (WMD) found in Iraq varied by primary news sources, even after controlling for demographics, political ideology, and news attention. For example, *Fox Cable News* viewers were most likely to misperceive that WMD had been found in Iraq as compared to other television, print, or radio news sources. Kull et al. (2004) conclude that “higher levels of attention to news did not reduce the likelihood of misperception, and in the case of those who primarily got their news from *Fox Cable News*, misperceptions increased with greater attention” (p. 594). Furthermore, a higher level of misperception was positively associated with increased public support for President Bush and his administration’s goals and political agenda.

Event-driven news coverage of terrorism or military conflict is not the only manner in which the mass media may influence public opinion toward civil liberties. As Scheufele et al. (2005) note, general public opinion toward restricting the civil liberties may be “pre-shaped” by previous mass media exposure. For example, previous cultivation research has demonstrated how heavy television exposure is associated with more conservative, authoritarian, and law-and-order attitudes among viewers (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorelli, 1984; Morgan & Shanahan, 1991; Shanahan & Morgan, 1999). Thus, heavy television viewers may be more apt to support restrictions on civil liberties, especially toward “out groups” in times of crises or conflict.

Mass media portrayals of Islam and Muslim Americans. Beyond general perceptions of threat and fear of a terrorist attack, mass media use may specifically promote political intolerance toward small minority groups (i.e. Muslim Americans) with whom most of the populace has little or no firsthand contact since the “television world” is the primary reference point regarding perceptions and beliefs about the group rather than “real world” experience (Gross, 1984). In this way news and entertainment media portrayals of Islam and Muslim Americans also may

“pre-shape” individual perceptions that increase the likelihood of supporting restrictions on Muslim Americans by promoting negative and threatening stereotypes, symbols, and images of Muslims and Islam. Such a symbolic information environment sets boundaries for political and social discourse and provides a political and cultural schema through which events and news may be interpreted (Shanahan & Jones, 1999).

Shaheen (1984, 1997, 2000, 2001) has done extensive research and content analysis on how the American entertainment media has portrayed Arabs, Muslims, and Islam over time. Examining Arab and Muslim characters on television, Shaheen has found that the common qualities that form a standard “tool kit” for entertainment portrayals of Arabs and Muslims include untrustworthiness, a propensity to commit violence and bloodthirstiness, and generalized “dark” and “swarthy” physical traits (Shaheen, 1984). Furthermore, reviewing recent television programs and motion pictures from the 1990s, Shaheen (2000) found that they “effectively show all Arabs, Muslims, and Arab-Americans as being at war with the United States” (p. 31). Palestinians, who are often conflated with all Muslim and Arabs, are especially targeted by Hollywood movies and are “characterized by Hollywood as religious fanatics, threatening our freedom, economy, and culture. Producers portray the Palestinian as a demonic creature without compassion for men, women, or children” (Shaheen, 2000, p. 27).

Said (1997) argues that these stereotypes and clichés found in entertainment media also are representative of a general negative “orientalist” schema employed by journalists when covering Islam and the Near East. Mortimer (1981) echoes this view writing that this journalistic Orientalism promotes the view that Muslims “are inscrutable, irrational savages whose behavior is governed by an arcane yet primitive moral code, and who are incapable of feeling normal human emotions” (p. 495). Mortimer argues that this schema often provides ideological and psychological justification for violence and repression toward Muslims.

Bajwa (2003), Mousa (1984), and Sheikh, Price, and Oshagan (1995) all conducted content analyses of news media coverage of Arabs, Muslims, and Islam that reaffirmed several stereotypes discussed above. Mousa examined newspaper coverage of Arabs in the *New York Times* from 1917 to 1947 in order to explore how early media coverage may have formed the basis for common journalistic stereotypes and portrayals in contemporary media coverage. His findings demonstrated that most news coverage during the period, especially in later years, was conflict-oriented, episodic, and conflated Palestinians with all Arabs and Muslims.

Sheikh, Price, and Oshagan (1995) conducted a content analysis of newspaper coverage from three newspapers (*LA Times*, *NY Times*, *Detroit Free Press*) from 1988 to 1992. They determined that most news stories involving or mentioning Muslims or Islam primarily focused on foreign affairs rather than domestic, focused on crises events and military conflict, and used the terms Muslim or Islam “in such a way that it gave the impression that the story referred to all Muslims, when actually referring only to a certain group of Muslims” (Sheikh, Price, & Oshagan, 1995, p. 142). Though the authors did not find a strong negative bias against Islam or Muslims in the news reporting, the significant frequency of such negative terms as “fundamentalist,” “militant,” “fanatic,” “terrorist,” etc. embedded in much of the news content did offer modest support for the conclusion that a majority of news stories portraying Muslims was negative in tone (Sheikh, Price, and Oshagan, 1995).

Bajwa (2003) replicated Sheikh et al.’s study and examined news coverage of Muslims from 1992 to 2000 across the same three newspapers. Bajwa’s findings were similar. Most news stories involving Muslims were of foreign context rather than domestic, crises events and military conflict dominated the news coverage, and most Muslims were represented collectively rather than as individuals or members of sub-groupings. Regarding tone, half the news stories examined by Bajwa were explicitly negative compared to only twenty-four percent explicitly

positive, with the remainder neutral in tone. The most frequent terms used in the news stories examined by Bajwa to describe Muslims were “militants,” “terrorists,” and “fundamentalists”. Unfortunately, extensive content analysis of the how Islam and Muslims have been portrayed since September 11th within the American has not been conducted. However, we speculate that many common entertainment and news media practices, stereotypes, “tool kits”, and symbols present in media content prior to September 11th have only been amplified due to the extensive media coverage of the terrorist attacks, war in Afghanistan, invasion and ongoing conflict in Iraq, and the continuing U.S. War on Terror at home and abroad.

Individual predispositions and civil liberties.

Beyond the information environment, previous research has demonstrated that individual predispositions such as political ideology and religiosity may be associated with support for restrictions on civil liberties and political intolerance toward specific groups (see for example Altemeyer, 1996; Beatty and Walter, 1984; Karpov, 2002; McClosky & Brill, 1983; McClosky & Zaller, 1984; Reimer & Park, 2001; Sniderman, Fletcher et al., 1991; Sullivan & Transue, 1999; Sullivan, Marcus, Feldman, & Piereson, 1981; Stouffer, 1955; Wilcox & Jelen, 1990).

McClosky & Brill (1983), McClosky & Zaller (1984), Stouffer (1955), Sullivan et al. (1981), and Altemeyer (1996), and most recently Davis & Silver (2004) in a post-September 11th survey on civil liberties, all found negative associations between conservative ideology and/or dogmatism and support for civil liberties and political tolerance. Furthermore, in the specific case of Muslim Americans, we may surmise that conservatives generally will be supportive of the President Bush’s conservative administration, and thus generally supportive of expanded government powers or restrictions on civil liberties on this specific group.

However, more central to the to the case of Muslim Americans is the role of religiosity in influencing public support for restricting Muslim American civil liberties. Some Christian and

Muslim adherents within and outside the United States have framed the September 11th attacks, the invasion of Iraq and ongoing insurgency, and the continuing U.S. War on Terror as a fundamental religious conflict between Christianity and Islam. Thus, the role of religion in this case is more salient than other types of individual predispositions such as ideology, race, social status, etc.

Linkages between religion and support for civil liberties or political tolerance have been made across three dimensions of religiosity: denomination, church attendance, and doctrinal belief. Early research by Stouffer (1955) noted a connection between religiosity and political tolerance, and found that Jews were the most tolerant followed by Catholics and then Protestants. Nunn, Crocket, and Williams (1978) demonstrated varied level of support for civil liberties across religious denominations, but later work by Sullivan, Pierson, and Marcus (1982) found that when target groups are accounted for in the analysis, gaps in support between denominations close.

However, Beatty and Walter (1984) found significant differences in political tolerance and support for civil liberties between Catholic, mainline Protestant, and Conservative Protestant denominations even after controlling for different “out groups.” They also found that a second dimension of religiosity, frequency of church attendance, was significantly associated with increased intolerance across *all religious denominations* (Beatty & Walter, 1984). Stouffer (1955) and Fislinger (1976) also found a negative relationship between church attendance and support for civil liberties.

Strength of doctrinal belief, either in terms of Biblical literalism or evangelical orthodoxy, also has been found to have a negative association with support for civil liberties. Ellison and Musick (1993) and Wilcox and Jelen (1990) found Biblical literalism to be negatively associated with political tolerance and support for civil liberties with the explanation that “Biblical literalism encourages the rejection of, and intolerance for, un-Biblical ideas or

lifestyles” (Reimar & Park, 2001). Wilcox and Jelen (1990) and Karpov (2002) also found that evangelical doctrinal orthodoxy was a strong predictor of intolerance and support for restriction on civil liberties.

Lastly, past research has also shown that religiosity and media coverage of terrorism may interact to create higher levels of anxiety among highly religious individuals (Slone, 2000). Using an experimental design, Slone (2000) demonstrated that highly religious individuals exposed to media coverage of terrorism demonstrated higher anxiety levels than less religious respondents exposure to the same stimuli. Furthermore, there were no differences in anxiety levels between individuals with high and low religiosity within the control group. This greater anxiety may in turn lead to greater perceived threat from terrorist attack, and thus increased willingness to restrict civil liberties and political intolerance.

In conclusion, though previous research has shown general links between religiosity and political intolerance, in the case of the current continuing conflict between the United States and global terrorism that is often framed in religious terms, we may expect individuals with high levels of religiosity, measured in terms of church attendance and Biblical literalism across denominations, to perceived a greater sense of threat and to be more supportive of restricting civil liberties, especially those of Muslim Americans.

American perceptions of Islam and Muslims

We have discussed media coverage of Islam and Muslims, as well as some of the ideological or religious influences on perceptions, but in order to understand how mass media and individual predispositions may impact perceptions of Islam and Muslims, as well as support for restricting Muslim American civil liberties, we also need to review the climate of opinion toward Islam and Muslims that has developed since September 11th. The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press has conducted some of the most extensive polling on American

attitudes toward Islam and Muslim Americans since 2001 (see <http://people-press.org/>). For example, figure 1 provides the unfavorability ratings of Islam and Muslim Americans in comparison to other major U.S. religious groups (Catholics, Jews, and Evangelical Protestants) over the last four years. Overall, unfavorability ratings for both Islam and Muslim Americans are much higher in comparison, with approximately 35% of Americans unfavorable towards Islam in general, and 25% unfavorable toward Muslim Americans in particular, over the course of the last four years.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

The Pew Research center has also regularly queried Americans regarding specific perceptions toward and knowledge of Islam since 2001, with the most recent results from 2004 and 2005 presented in Table 1. The collective results of these Pew Polls suggest that a sizable number of Americans hold strong negative perceptions of Islam and see Islam generally as a possible threat. For example, nearly one-third of Americans (29%) believe the terrorist attacks within the United States and Europe represent a major conflict between the Western world and Islam as a whole, rather than conflict with a small radical element of Islam. Furthermore, nearly half (46%) of respondents believe that Islam is generally more likely to promote violence than other religions, and four out of ten (42%) believe that half or more of Muslims around the world are anti-American. In addition, within the Pew results, more Evangelical Christians are more likely to believe that Islam promotes violence more so than Catholic or more secular respondents. These perceptions are also consistent with the fact that 59% of Americans believe that their own religion is very different from Islam.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

These specific perceptions of Islam are paired with a relatively low level of knowledge regarding Islam within the American public. Nearly seven out of ten (66%) Americans reply that they know “nothing at all” or “not very much” regarding the Muslim religion and its practices. Likewise, only about half of all Americans could answer correctly basic knowledge questions about Islam, specifically the Islamic word for “God” (Allah) or the Islamic equivalent to the Bible (Koran) (48% and 51%, respectively).

The Pew polls paint a portrait of an American public that is polarized and ambivalent toward Islam and Muslim Americans, with strong feelings of disfavor, distrust, and a perception that Islam is likely to promote violence. In addition, even though Islam has been featured prominently in media coverage since September 11th, Americans report a low level of knowledge regarding Islam upon which to form factual, deliberative evaluations. Within such an opinion environment and low levels of personal interaction or knowledge to base judgments and evaluations upon, the influence and impact of the mass media on public opinion may be amplified and strengthened.

Explaining how predispositions and media shape public opinion. Theoretically, public opinion has been commonly conceived as a “marriage” between the information environment and individual predisposition (Lippman, 1922; Zaller, 1992). Thus, the accessibility or “memory-based” model of opinion formation (Hastie & Park, 1986; Iyengar, 1990; Moy, Scheufele, Eveland, & McLeod, 2001; Scheufele, 2000; Zaller, 1991, 1992) is a useful theoretical model for explaining how the information environment and predispositions discussed above may influence judgments and evaluations regarding the restriction of Muslim American civil liberties. Within the “memory-based” model of opinion formation, individuals form judgments and evaluations based upon the overall valence of available and accessible considerations. Thus, individuals will form opinions based upon the range of messages and cues available to them within the

information environment (i.e., mass media). Alternatively, previous research also has also portrayed individuals as cognitive misers, using predispositions such as ideology as mental shortcuts or heuristics to process new information, form opinions, and reach decisions (Downs, 1957; Popkin, 1991). Thus, individuals may use ideology or religiosity as cognitive shortcuts to determine their views and make judgments about an issue, especially in situations where the individual has a low level of knowledge (as the Pew polls suggest in the case of Islam and Muslim Americans) about the topic or question at hand.

In addition, previous research has shown that mass media use may amplify or buffer the influence of predispositions on opinion formation, as predispositions may interact with “message content magnifying or diminishing the strength (potency) of effect,” commonly termed a “moderation” of the media effect (McLeod, Kosicki, & McLeod, 2002, p.239). The basic premise of this moderating effect is that individual predispositions direct selective exposure or attention toward messages in the media that are consistent with those predispositions. Those messages that are consistent with an individual’s predisposition are accepted, while those that are inconsistent are resisted (Zaller, 1992). Thus, again employing the “memory-based” model of opinion formation, we can understand how this interaction between mass media use and individual predispositions can influence an individual’s opinions by making certain messages more salient than others, and therefore more accessible, when an individual is asked to make an evaluation or judgment.

Beyond the main effects of attention to TV news and prime-time TV exposure being associated with increased support for restrictions on civil liberties, and attention to newspaper news being associated with decreased support, Scheufele et al. (2005) found that the type of mass media use did have a moderating effect on the association between ideology and support for restrictions. Prime-time television exposure moderated the effect of ideology, increasing support for restrictions on civil liberties among liberal viewers and increasing public support for

restrictions overall. Conversely, attention to newspaper news also moderated the effect ideology on support for restrictions, amplifying support among conservative readers and decreasing support among liberal readers.

In addition to type of media use moderating the role of individual predispositions, previous research also has shown that the specific news source or TV channel may have a moderating role on public opinion. For example, Nisbet et al. (2004) found that Anti-American sentiment among overseas Muslim populations varied significantly by primary news channel of choice, with exposure to Pan-Arab Satellite TV News stations amplifying negative perceptions of the United States in comparison to other news sources.

In summary, we argue that the mass media, especially television, may generally promote negative emotional responses and increased perceptions of threat during times of crises, be associated with threat perceptions based on differences in content across news sources, and interact with individual predisposition to promote general negative stereotypes and perceptions of particular groups that may further amplify threat perceptions or “out group” status. In the specific case of Muslim Americans, these perceptions stemming from both individual predispositions and information environment may lead to increased public support for restrictions on Muslim American civil liberties.

Building a model of opinion formation toward Islam and Muslim Americans

Based upon the previous scholarship reviewed thus far, we may hypothesize several direct and indirect relationships between individual predispositions such as ideology or Christian religiosity, various forms of mass media use, perceptions of Islam, the likelihood and danger of terrorist attack, and support for restricting Muslim American civil liberties. First, in regards to individual predispositions, we hypothesize the impact of ideology and Christian religiosity on public support for restrictions on Muslim Americans will be mediated by political party

affiliation, types of media use, perceptions of Islam, and the likelihood of terrorist attack.

However, in terms of political party affiliation, we hypothesize that it will directly impact support for restrictions as political partisans will restrictions as politically linked to the current administration's "War on Terror".

H1a: Ideology (conservative) and Religiosity (Christian) will indirectly promote public support for restrictions on civil liberties.

H1b: Strength of Party Affiliation (Republican) will directly promote public support for restrictions on civil liberties by promoting negative perceptions of Islam.

Turning to mass media use, based on our discussion on previous research regarding the differential effects of newspaper and television coverage in times of conflict and on general support for civil liberties, we expect variations between different forms of media use, such as attention to TV news and attention to newspaper news, on perceptions of threat and support for restrictions. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H2a: Attention to TV news about the U.S War on Terror and international affairs will directly promote public support for restrictions on Muslim American civil liberties.

H2b: Attention to TV news about the U.S War on Terror and international affairs will indirectly promote public support for restrictions on Muslim American civil liberties by promoting negative perceptions of Islam and increased perceived likelihood of terrorist attack.

H2c: Attention to Newspaper news about the U.S. War on Terror and international affairs will negatively impact public support for restrictions on Muslim Americans.

Furthermore, previous research suggests that mass media use may moderate the influence of individual predisposition on opinion formation, and that perceptions and opinion may vary by specific TV news channel (Kull et al., 2004; Nisbet et al., 2004). Thus, we hypothesize:

H3a: The influence of ideology on public support for restrictions on Muslim Americans will be moderated by exposure to specific TV news sources (*Fox Cable News*, *CNN*, *Network Broadcast News*, *Network Broadcast News*).

H3b: The influence of religiosity on public support for restrictions on Muslim Americans will be moderated by exposure to specific TV news sources (Fox Cable News, CNN, Network Broadcast News, Network Broadcast News).

However, lacking clear indicators of content differences between news and information sources, we cannot hypothesize how different news sources may impact perceptions of Islam, the threat of terrorist attack, and public support for restrictions on Muslim American civil liberties.

Therefore, we ask the following research question:

R1: How do different information sources' impact on perceptions of Islam, perceived likelihood of and danger from terrorist attack, and public support on restricting Muslim Americans vary in strength and valence?

We also hypothesize that perceptions that relate to the threat environment, specifically how Islam and Islamic peoples are perceived and the likelihood of and danger from terrorist attack will all directly affect public support for restrictions on Muslim Americans. Therefore, we state:

H4a: Negative perceptions of Islam and Islamic peoples will directly promote public support for restrictions on Muslim American civil liberties.

H4b: Increased perceived likelihood and danger from terrorist attack will both directly promote public support for restrictions on Muslim American civil liberties.

Lastly, within our analysis, we included several additional possible influences that may be impact public perceptions of Islam and public support for restricting the civil liberties of Muslim Americans such as basic socio-demographics (i.e. race, education, etc) and additional media exposure and attention measures (i.e. attention to religious programming, general television exposure). Therefore, we ask a general research question:

R2: What additional factors directly or indirectly effect public perceptions of Islam, perceptions of terrorist attack, and public support for restrictions on Muslim Americans?

METHOD

The data analyzed for the study are from a national telephone survey conducted between October 25, 2004 and November 30, 2004 conducted by the Survey Research Institute at Cornell University. The sampling frame included U.S. citizens who were at least 18 years of age from randomly selected households. Within each household, respondents were randomly selected by asking for the household member with the most recent birthday. A total of 715 interviews were completed. The response rate was 25.7% and the cooperation rate 54.5% according to AAPOR standards.

We tested the relationships among independent and dependent variables by employing a hybrid latent variable structural modeling technique with the structural equation modeling software package LISREL (Jöreskog, 1993). In contrast to other multivariate techniques, structural equation modeling allows for the simultaneous estimation of all parameters in a model. Due to limitations sample size and the ratio of the total number of parameters to be estimated within the model (see Nachtigall, Kroehne, Funke, and Steyer, 2003), and the combination of single and multiple measures of latent constructs, a hybrid latent variable model was used to account for measurement error rather than a full latent variable model (see Joreskog & Sorbom, 2001, Chpt. 5 and Stephenson and Holbert, 2003 for discussion of appropriate modeling techniques under these conditions). In this type of latent model, measurement error is estimated and fixed for each constructed latent variable based upon reliability measurement of constructed measures and/or other estimations of measurement error within the model.

In a structural equation model any given coefficient therefore represents the relationship between two variables, controlling for all other relationships and variables in the model. By treating endogenous variables as both independent and dependent variables, structural equation modeling allows for the estimation of direct and indirect effects. A “model generating”

approach (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2001) was followed. According to this approach, the researcher develops an initial theoretical model and tests it with empirical data. If the model does not fit, the researcher can free or fix some of the paths based on the Lagrangian Multiplier (LM) test (Bollen, 1987). All parameters that are added based on the LM test should be meaningful and substantively interpretable. Several measures of goodness-of-fit are calculated in order to evaluate whether the final model fits the data.

Exogenous Variables. The exogenous variables within the models include a set of four socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, education, and race). Age was measured as a continuous variable with a respondent range of 18 to 95 years of age (M=45, SD=17.1). Gender was coded with men coded high (48%). Education was measured by total number of completed years of schooling, with a respondent range of 0 to 22 years (M=14.7, SD=3.0). Race also was coded as a dichotomous variable between white and non-white respondents, with white coded high (69%).

Antecedent Endogenous Variables. Twenty antecedent endogenous measures were included in our models across three general categories of a) individual predispositions b) measures of media attention and exposure c) measures of perceptions and knowledge Islam, Muslims, and the likelihood of and danger from a terrorist attack.

The three measures of individual predispositions were ideology, political party affiliation, and Christian religiosity. Ideology was measured by asking respondents two questions. The first asked respondents to self-identify on a seven-point scale, ranging from “very liberal “to ”very conservative” on economic issues. The second asked respondents to self-identify on a seven-point scale, ranging from “very liberal “to ”very conservative” on social issues. Both measures were combined to create a fourteen-point measure of ideology (M=8.2, SD=3.0, $r=.62$) with

conservative ideology coded high. Political party affiliation was tapped with a single measure asking respondents to self identify on a five-point scale as a “strongly Democrat”, “leaning toward Democrat”, “political independent”, “leaning toward Republican”, or “strongly Republican” (M=3.0, SD=1.4), with Republican affiliation coded high.

Christian religiosity was tapped by asking respondents two questions measuring both church attendance and individual’s level of Christian doctrinal conservatism, or to what degree a person subscribes to a literal interpretation of biblical scripture (Ellison & Musick, 1995; Nisbet, 2005). Church attendance was measured on a six-point scale ranging from “never” to “more than once a week” (M=3.5, SD=1.7). Biblical interpretation was measured utilizing a three-point scale asking respondents whether they believed Bible was the actual word of God, the Bible is the Word of God but not everything should be taken literally, or the Bible was written by men/women and is not the Word of God, with a more literal level of interpretation coded high (M=2.1, SD=.74). Both measures were standardized and added together to form one overall measure of Christian religiosity ($r=.47$) (Kohut et al., 2000; Layman 2001).

The measures of media use included five measures of media exposure and three measures of media attention. Prime-time television exposure was measured by the number of minutes spent watching television after 5p.m. on an average weekday (M=153.1, SD=98.8). Newspaper exposure was measured by the number of days a week on average a respondent read a newspaper (M=3.8, SD=2.8). Exposure to Evening National Network News on ABC, CBS, or NBC was measured on ten-point scale ranging from “never” to “all the time” (M=5.0, SD=3.9). Two separate scales of respondents’ exposure to CNN/CNN Headline News and Fox Cable News were measured on similar ten-point scales (M=3.6 and 3.5, SD=3.4 and 3.5, respectively).

The two measures of respondent’s attention to news were split between television and newspaper. Respondents were separately asked their attention to TV news about the War on Terror and their attention to TV news about international affairs utilizing an eleven-point scale

ranging from “never pay attention” to “very close attention” (M=7.2 and 6.4, SD=2.8 and 2.9, respectively). These two measures were combined into a single additive index of attention to TV news ((M=13.6, SD=5.1, $r=.55$). Likewise attention to newspaper news about the War on Terror and attention to newspaper news about international affairs were each measured separately using an identical scale (M=6.0 and 5.3, SD=3.7 and 3.5, respectively) and were combined into a single additive index of newspaper attention to news (M=11.3, SD=6.8, $r=.79$). A third attention measure tapped attention to TV Christian religious programming (M=1.7, SD=2.7).

In addition to the possible main effects of predisposition and media variables included in the model, our hypotheses in this study state expectations about interactive effects between individual predispositions and media stimuli. In order to provide for a stringent test of these interactive relationships in a multivariate context, it is necessary to build a SEM model that enters both the main effects and interaction terms as separate endogenous variables. In addition, in order to avoid multicollinearity problems between the product term and its components, the main effect variable was centered (put in deviation score form) when creating the interaction term. Interactions between each individual predisposition, Christian religiosity, party affiliation, and ideology, and each measure of exposure to specific news channels were tested (i.e. *CNN*, *Fox Cable News*, network broadcast news). In SEM, if the product terms remain significant after controlling for the two main effects components, as well as other third variable influences in the model, then the interactions are significant (Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen & Cohen, 1983; Cronbach, 1987; Eveland, 1997). Within our model, two interaction terms were significant, an interaction between Christian Religiosity X Fox Cable News, and between Ideology X CNN. Both terms were included in the final structural equation model.

Our six measures of knowledge, perceptions, and schema were: 1) basic knowledge about Islam, 2) perceived likelihood of terrorist attack within the United States, 3) perceived personal danger from a terrorist attack 4) the perception of Islam as more violent than other religions, 5) the degree of perceived hostility toward the U.S. within the Muslim world, and 6) perceptions of Islamic countries and peoples. Basic knowledge of Islam was assessed by two measures asking respondents “what name Muslims use to refer to God” (65.2% correct) and the name of the Islamic equivalent of the Bible (63.5% correct). Both measures were dichotomized and added together to form a three-point knowledge scale ranging from zero to two ($M=1.3$, $SD=.84$, $r=.56$). Perceived likelihood of terrorist attack was assessed by asking respondents how much they agreed or disagreed on a ten-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree with the statement “a future terrorist attack somewhere in the United States is likely within the next 12 months” ($M=5.2$, $SD=2.8$). Likewise, perceived personal danger from a terrorist attack was assessed by asking respondents how much they agreed or disagreed on the same ten-point scale with the statement “I am personally in danger of being a victim of a terrorist attack” ($M=3.1$, $SD=2.7$).

The perception of Islam as more violent was assessed by asking respondents whether they agreed or disagreed on a ten-point scale with the statement “The Islamic religion is more likely than others to encourage violence among its believers” ($M=5.8$, $SD=3.3$). The degree of perceived hostility toward the U.S. within the Muslim world was assessed by asking respondents to provide their estimation of what percentage of overseas Muslims were hostile to the United States ranging from zero to one-hundred percent ($M=46.0$, $SD=30.6$).

The last antecedent endogenous variable measured respondents’ general perceptions of Islamic countries and peoples. Respondents were asked how much on a ten-point scale, with one equal to “very little” and ten equal to “a great deal” how much the following four traits applied to Islamic countries and peoples: hateful, violent, fanatical, and dangerous. The scores for each

were combined into an overall additive index of negative perceptions toward Islamic countries/peoples ($M=23.5$, $SD=8.7$, $\alpha=.86$).

Consequence endogenous variable.

Our consequence endogenous measure, support for restrictions on Muslim Americans, was measured by assessing respondents' agreement on a ten-point scale with four statements regarding possible restrictions on Muslim Americans. Specifically, respondents were asked whether all Muslim Americans should be required to register their whereabouts with the federal government, whether mosques should be closely monitored and/or surveyed by U.S. law enforcement agencies, whether U.S. government agencies should profile citizens as potential threats based on being Muslim or having Middle Eastern heritage, and lastly whether Muslim civic and volunteer organizations should be infiltrated by undercover law enforcement agents to keep watch on their activities and fundraising. The four measures were combined into an additive index scale ranging from four to forty ($M=15.5$, $SD=10.5$, $\alpha=.86$).

Generating the model.

As mentioned above, a latent hybrid structural equation model was employed for the analysis. In these models, the amount of measurement error for each constructed latent variable is assigned and fixed based upon external estimators of error such as reliability scores. Table 2 provides the list of exogenous and endogenous latent variables included in the model and the fixed variances for each variable. For latent variables with three or more component items, the Cronbach's Alpha was used to estimate the assigned variance, for two items the zero-order correlation was used, and for single items the estimated amount of error from the survey measurement was used for the analysis. Overall, the developed model had a high level of fit with a CHI-Square statistic of 155.40, ($df=161$, $N=715$), a non-significant P-value equal to

0.60963, CFI=1.00, AGFI=.97. The model accounted for 31% of the variance for the consequential endogenous variable (support for restricting Muslim American civil liberties), 23% of the variance for negative perceptions of Islamic countries/peoples, 20% of the variance for basic knowledge regarding Islam, 12% of the variance for the belief that Islam is more violent than other religions, 10% of the variance for perceived likelihood of terrorist attack, and 8% of the variance for perceived personal danger from a terrorist attack.

[INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

RESULTS

Exogenous Variables

Table 3 provides an overview of the influence of the exogenous variables on the endogenous variables within the model, with standardized estimates reported. Of the four exogenous variables, education exerted the most direct and indirect influence on the endogenous variables, especially on basic knowledge of Islam ($\gamma = .23$, .30 total effects), perceived Muslim hostility ($\gamma = -.10$), perception of Islam as more violent than other religions ($\gamma = -.13$), and support for restriction on Muslim Americans ($\gamma = -.11$, -.22 total effects). Most of the indirect effects of education flowed through its negative relationship with Christian religiosity ($\gamma = -.10$), prime-time television exposure ($\gamma = -.24$), and attention to Christian religious TV programming ($\gamma = -.16$ total effects). Age also played a substantial, though indirect role, in promoting negative perceptions of Islamic countries/peoples ($\gamma = .08$) and support for restricting Muslim Americans ($\gamma = .09$), primarily through increasing the perceived likelihood of terrorist attack ($\gamma = .11$, .15 total effects) and the degree of perceived Muslim hostility ($\gamma = .09$).

[INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Endogenous Variables

Table 4 provides an overview of the significant relationships between endogenous variables, including standardized estimates for direct, indirect, and total effects. As previously mentioned above, the variables included in the model fall within three general categories: a) individual predispositions b) mass media exposure and attention c) perceptions of Islam and of threat.

[INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

The role of individual predispositions.

Christian religiosity and political party affiliation, and to a lesser extent ideology, all played significant roles in directly or indirectly shaping public opinion toward Islam and consequently public support for restricting Muslim American civil liberties. Christian religiosity had the strongest direct effects on basic knowledge regarding Islam ($\gamma = -.09$) and perceiving Islam as more violent ($\gamma = .11$, $.19$ total effects). Primarily through these variables, as well as effecting political party affiliation ($\gamma = .24$) and ideology ($\gamma = .34$), Christian religiosity indirectly promoted negative perceptions of Islamic countries/peoples ($\gamma = .09$) and support for restrictions on Muslim Americans ($\gamma = .12$).

Political party affiliation more directly effected perceptions of Islam and support for restrictions than Christian religiosity, with political party affiliation directly promoting perceptions of Islam as more violent ($\gamma = .11$, $.12$ total effects), negative perceptions of Islamic peoples / countries ($\gamma = .10$, $.13$ total effects), and support for restrictions on Muslim Americans ($\gamma = .14$, $.19$ total effects). Ideology primarily directly effected perceptions of Islam as violent ($\gamma = .12$, $.13$ total effects) and negative perceptions of Islamic countries/peoples ($\gamma = .08$, $.12$ total effects), and indirectly promoted support for restrictions on Muslim Americans ($\gamma = .05$).

In addition, individual predispositions had noteworthy effects on directing individuals toward specific types and sources of media information. Beyond the aforementioned impact of

Christian religiosity on attention to TV religious programming, political party affiliation and ideology directly ($\gamma = .20$ and $.17$, respectively), and Christian religiosity indirectly ($\gamma = .09$), increased exposure to *Fox Cable News*. Conversely, party affiliation directly decreased exposure to *CNN* and broadcast network news ($\gamma = -.11$ and $-.12$ respectively), and Christian religiosity strongly impacted exposure to *CNN* ($\gamma = -.15$ total effects). The ramifications of this selective attention will be discussed below.

The influence of media exposure and attention.

Surprisingly, the results of the model demonstrate an almost complete lack of influence for newspaper exposure and attention to newspaper news about the U.S War on Terror and international affairs. The only noteworthy effect is the direct promotion of basic knowledge regarding Islam by newspaper exposure ($\gamma = .07$). Otherwise, exposure and attention to different television information sources drive all the media effects within the model.

Exposure to prime-time television had a series of direct and indirect effects on perceptions and knowledge of Islam, fears regarding terrorist attack, and support for restrictions on Muslim Americans. Higher levels of exposure to prime-time exposure directly decreased knowledge regarding Islam ($\gamma = -.12$) and directly increased perceived likelihood of terrorist attack, negative perceptions of Muslim countries, and support for restrictions on Muslim Americans ($\gamma = .10, .08, .08$, respectively). However, it conversely directly decreased the amount of perceived Muslim hostility and perceptions of Islam as more violent ($\gamma = -.08$ and $-.10$, respectively).

Of the three main types of news channels included in the model, *Fox Cable News* had the strongest impact on perceptions of Islam and support for restrictions in comparison to *CNN* and broadcast network news. Exposure to *Fox Cable News* directly promoted perceptions of Islam as more violent ($\gamma = .07$) and support for restrictions on Muslim American civil liberties ($\gamma = .09, .13$

total effects). Indirectly, exposure to *Fox Cable News* also slightly increased the perceived likelihood of terrorist attack and negative perceptions of Islamic countries/peoples ($\gamma=.05$ and $.04$, respectively). Exposure to broadcast network news had a negative direct effect on knowledge about Islam ($\gamma=-.16$), but also directly decreased the perceived likelihood of terrorist attack ($\gamma=-.08$). Overall, it had a very weak indirect positive effect on support for restrictions on civil liberties ($\gamma=.03$). Exposure to *CNN*, in contrast to the other two sources of news, had no direct effects and a negligible indirect impact on other endogenous variables within the model.

In addition to measures of exposure, the model also included a measure of attention to TV news regarding the U.S War on Terror and international affairs. This attention measure had a strong direct positive effects on several key variables within the model, including knowledge about Islam ($\gamma=.16$), the perceived likelihood of terrorist attack ($\gamma=.20$), negative perceptions of Islamic peoples / countries ($\gamma=.07, .09$ total effects), and support for restrictions on Muslim Americans ($\gamma=.08$).

Our model also included two significant interaction terms, ideology X *CNN* and Christian religiosity X *Fox Cable News*. The interaction between ideology and *CNN* directly resulted in an increase in the perceived likelihood of terrorist attack ($\gamma=.12$) and amplified support for restrictions on Muslim Americans ($\gamma=.12$). The interaction between Christian religiosity and *Fox Cable News* was somewhat weaker, only directly resulting in a marginal increase in support for restrictions on Muslim Americans ($\gamma=.06$). In order to understand the full nature of the interactions, however, figures 2, 3, and 4 plot each of the above effects. Figures 1 and 2 illustrated the interaction between ideology and exposure to *CNN* on support for restricting civil liberties and the perceived likelihood of terrorist attack, respectively. Both these interactions are *polarizing* interactions, widening the perception gap between liberals and conservatives, with liberals less likely to support restrictions at higher levels of exposure to *CNN* compared to conservatives who are more likely to support restrictions as exposure to *CNN* increased, for

example. In this case, liberals and conservatives selectively attend to content within *CNN* that reinforces their individual predispositions and orientations, thus the valence of the effect for *CNN* is contingent upon individual ideology. In contrast, the interaction between Christian religiosity and *Fox Cable News* illustrated in figure 3 is a *resonating interaction*. In this case, *Fox Cable News* has a strong main effect on all respondents, with support for restrictions increasing for all respondents as exposure to *Fox Cable News* increases. However, for highly religious respondents, this effect is further amplified with the content of *Fox Cable News* resonating with Christian religious predispositions, resulting in a widening of the gap between respondents with high and low levels of religiosity.

[INSERT FIGURES 2, 3, 4 ABOUT HERE]

Perceptions of Islam, threat from terrorist attacks, and support for restricting civil liberties.

How do knowledge of Islam, perceptions of threat from terrorist attacks, and perceptions of Islam relate to each other and impact public support for restrictions on Muslim Americans? Basic knowledge of Islam directly impacted both perceived Muslim hostility ($\gamma = -.09$) and support for restrictions on Muslim Americans ($\gamma = -.14$, $-.16$ total effects). Perceived likelihood of a terrorist attack increased perceived danger ($\gamma = .27$), as well as directly impacted negative perceptions of Islamic countries/peoples ($\gamma = .12$). However, it did not directly lead to increased support for restrictions. Rather, perceived personal danger from a terrorist attack directly led to increased support for restrictions ($\gamma = .14$).

Perceiving Islam as more violent than other religions led to increased negative perceptions regarding Islamic peoples / countries ($\gamma = .24$) as well as increased support for restrictions on Muslim Americans ($\gamma = .14$, $.17$ total effects). Lastly, negative perceptions regarding Islamic countries/peoples also directly impacted support for restrictions ($\gamma = .14$).

DISCUSSION

Limitations. Before discussing some of the implications and conclusions from the results of our study, some limitations should be mentioned. First and foremost, when examining the association or influence of mass media use on public opinion or perceptions, a clear understanding and quantification of related mass media content is a key component of any analysis. In this case, we have reviewed research that has generally addressed mass media content in times of crises or that features terrorism, as well as identified previous trends in the mass media coverage of Islam and Muslim Americans. However, detailed content analysis of mass media coverage of the continuing U.S. War on Terror, and in particular how Islam and Muslim Americans have been featured in the media coverage of the conflict, are not yet available. In addition, from a measurement perspective, additional measures of religiosity, such as the amount of guidance religion provides in one's life, and additional measures of perceived threat directly from Muslim Americans, would add to the analysis.

Implications of the study.

The implications of the study divided across the three main sets of variables within our model, individual predispositions, mass media use, and perceptions of Islam and threat, and the consequences for public support for restrictions on Muslim Americans.

First, in regards to Christian religiosity, since the September 11th attacks many scholars, policy-makers, and pundits have highlighted and criticized the role of "fundamentalist" Islam and religion within the Muslim World in creating and perpetuating the ongoing conflict that has become known as the "U.S. War on Terror", including the continuing insurgency within Iraq. However, the results of this study suggest that religion plays an equally strong role within the United States either directly by increasing perceptions of Islam as more violent, or indirectly by

directing individuals toward certain media sources or political/ideological orientations that heighten negative perceptions of Islam and Muslims, and in turn increase public support for restrictions on Muslim American civil liberties. These findings illustrate the need for policy-makers and scholars to further examine the role that *both* Christian and Islamic religiosity play in shaping the continuing conflict between the United States and the Muslim world and the role of the Muslim community within the West.

However, on a more positive note, education, and by extension basic knowledge regarding Islam, both play significant roles in reducing the perception that Islam is more violent than other religions, the perceived hostility of the Muslim world, and support for restricting Muslim American civil liberties. The fact nearly that approximately 50% of Americans do not know the most basic facts about Islam, and yet this basic knowledge is strongly predictive of more moderate attitudes toward the religion and its adherents, highlights the opportunity for basic educational programs to shape public opinion and perceptions toward Islam and Muslim Americans. Furthermore, the results also highlight the need for greater interfaith dialogue, as more highly religious Christians demonstrate significantly less knowledge regarding Islam than more secular respondents.

From a mass media perspective, this paper also reinforces and replicates the findings of Scheufele et al.'s observations regarding the independent role of the mass media in influencing public opinion and attitudes toward civil liberties in times of conflict and crises. Several forms of media exposure and attention directly and indirectly led to higher levels of perceived threat from terrorist attack, negative perceptions of Islam and Muslims, and support for restrictions on Muslim Americans. A second component of this observation is the power of television among users to shape and drive these attitudes in comparison to newspaper use. Newspaper exposure and attention were not significant predictors in the models except for increasing basic knowledge regarding Islam, whereas prime-time television exposure, attention to TV news about the U.S.

War on Terrorism and international affairs, exposure to *Fox Cable News*, and attention to TV Christian religious programming were all significant influences within the model on perceptions of terrorism, Islam, and support for restrictions on Muslim Americans. However, prime-time television exposure also did have a positive role in reducing the degree of perceived Muslim hostility and the perception that Islam is more violent than other religions. This positive role of television exposure is somewhat at odds with previous research on the content of entertainment television conducted by scholars such as Shaheen. However, in absence of quantitative data on entertainment content since 2001, we may speculate that in response to the September 11th attacks, entertainment television may have taken steps to represent more balanced and nuanced portrayals of Islam and Muslim Americans rather than traditional negative stereotypes. This may represent a fundamental shift in the impact of the media on perceptions of Islam in the aftermath of September 11th attacks, with the flood of news coverage on the U.S. War on Terror, the invasion and ongoing conflict in Iraq, and terrorist attacks overseas driving negative perceptions and stereotypes of Islam and Muslims more so than entertainment television in comparison to the period prior to the attacks whereas entertainment portrayals of Islam and Muslims played a greater role.

In addition to the main effects of the media, the results of our model also illustrated some interesting patterns of differential effects and interactions between media sources and predispositions. Exposure to *CNN* had no main effects, with the strength and direction of its effects contingent upon individual ideology. Liberals and conservatives each selected content from *CNN* that reinforced their pre-existing orientations, which implies an availability of heterogeneous content from which individuals from both ideological poles may select. In contrast, even after controlling for ideology, party affiliation, and religiosity, exposure to *Fox Cable News* did have a main effect by increasing perceptions of Islam and violent and public support for restrictions on Muslim Americans. Furthermore, the interaction between religiosity

and exposure to *Fox Cable News* was resonating in nature, with both religious and secular viewers moving the same direction, simply at different slopes. Thus, these findings suggest homogeneity of content within *Fox Cable News* as compared to *CNN* that does not allow individuals with different predispositions to select content that reinforces their predispositions to the same degree as a news source such as *CNN*.

These observed differential effects between *CNN* and *Fox Cable News* is consistent with some recent research on the content of each news channel. A recent study entitled “State of the News Media 2005” by the Columbia School of Journalism (Rosenstiel, 2005) conducted a content analysis of the 2004 news coverage across major TV news channels including *Fox Cable News*, *MSNBC*, *CNN*, and network broadcast news. The television content of *Fox* was found to be unique compared to other channels, both in form and content. For example, when it comes the preponderance of individual journalist opinion within newscasts the report states, “in the degree to which journalists are allowed to offer their own opinions, *Fox* stands out. Across the programs studied, nearly seven out of ten stories (68%) included personal opinions from *Fox*'s reporters -- the highest of any outlet studied by far “ (Rosenstiel, 2005). In comparison, only 4% of *CNN* broadcasts and 17% of network evening TV news broadcasts had any form of journalistic personal opinion within the news coverage (Rosenstiel, 2005). Furthermore, the report found that the opinions offered by journalists were not explicitly labeled as commentary, but rather were embedded in the news coverage in the form of questions or as asides.

Secondly, the Columbia report also found that *Fox Cable News* differed significantly from other networks in the frequency of positive news coverage of the U.S. War in Iraq. Comparing overall tone in newscasts (i.e., positive, negative, neutral), only 16% of the news stories on network evening news were positive in tone toward the war in Iraq while 28% were negative (Rosenstiel, 2005). *CNN* had a similar trend, with 20% of newscasts positive toward the war and 23% negative (Rosenstiel, 2005). However, *Fox Cable News* stood out with nearly

double the percentage of positive news stories of the two other TV news sources at 38%, and with only 14% of newscasts negative in tone toward the war (Rosenstiel, 2005). Taken together, the high prevalence of journalist opinion embedded in *Fox* news broadcasts and the overall positive tone toward the conflict in the Muslim World, it is not surprising that exposure to *Fox Cable News* may have a strong main effect on perceptions toward Islam and support for restrictions on Muslim Americans by making a homogenous set of considerations more consistently salient in comparison to other TV news sources through heavily opinion laden, committed in tone, and “live, extemporaneous journalism” (Rosenstiel, 2005).

Perceptions of threat, either sociotropic in nature (i.e. likelihood of terrorist attack, perceived hostility of Muslims, Islam as a more violent religion) or personal (i.e. personal danger from terrorist attack) all had direct or indirect effects on public support for restricting Muslim American civil liberties though they varied in impact. The strongest effects on public support stemmed from perceived sociotropic threats such as degree of perceived hostility of Muslims and the perception of Islam as inherently more violent than other religions. Interestingly, a general sense that a terrorist attack is likely within the next 12 months was only indirectly related public support for restrictions. Rather, it was perceived personal danger, rather than a more general sense that an attack may be likely, that led to support for restrictions on Muslim Americans. However, as has been demonstrated by the results and discussion of the model presented in this paper, the strength and impact of these perceptions of the Islamic threat and danger terrorist attacks, and the consequences for Muslim American civil liberties, is a large part a product of individual predispositions and media content. By addressing the roots of these perceptions, either by increasing education and knowledge, increasing interfaith dialogue, or addressing media content, many of the negative perceptions of Islam and Muslims that contribute to a public support for restrictions on Muslim civil liberties may be moderated or reduced.

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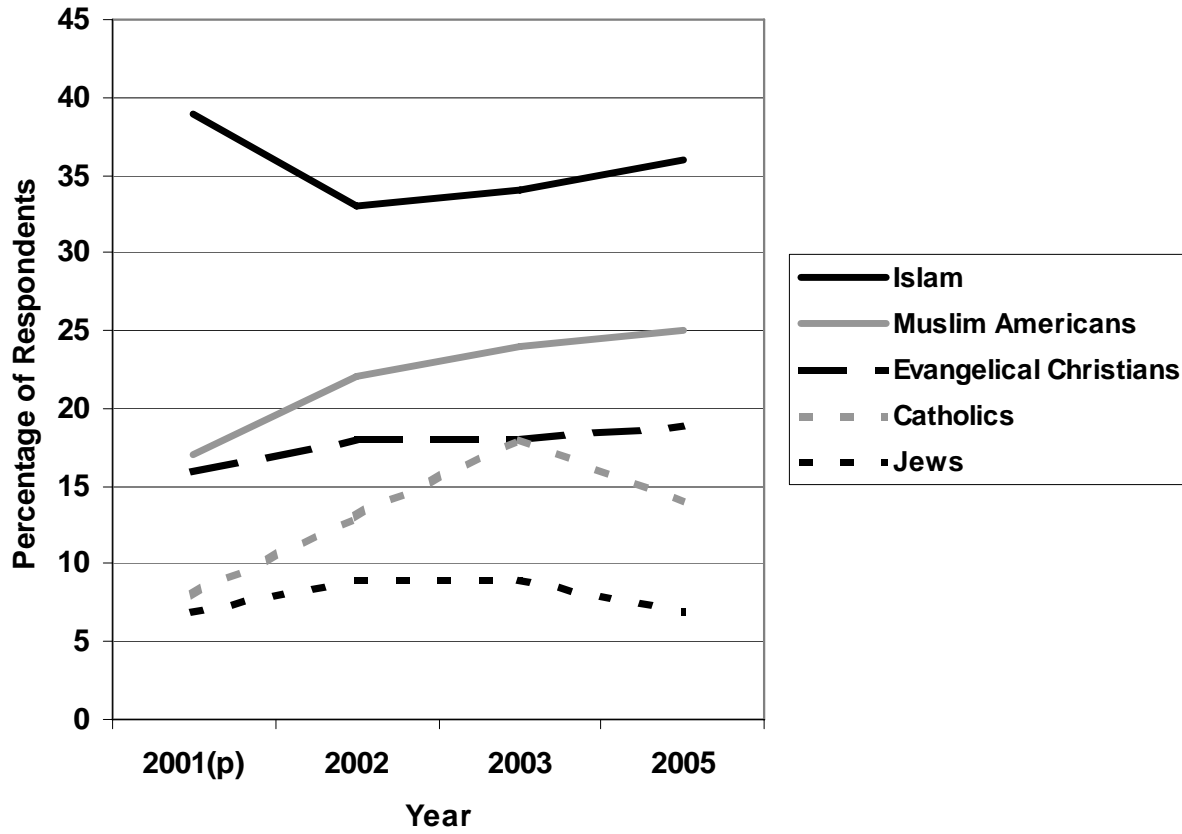
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Figure 1: Unfavorability Ratings of Islam and Muslim Americans 2001-2005



Notes: 2001(p) data is from November, after the September 11th attacks. Data from 2004 is not available. Source of data is the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press (see <http://people-press.org>).

Table 1: Current American Perceptions & Knowledge of Islam

Question	Percentage Agreement / Correct
Do you think that the terrorist attacks over the past few years are a part of a major conflict between the people of America and Europe versus the people of Islam? ¹	29
From what you know, do you think that the Muslim religion and your religion are very different? ¹	59
The Islamic religion is more likely than others to encourage violence among its believers? ²	46
What's your impression – how many Muslims around the world are anti-American? (number of respondents who replied either “almost all”, “most”, or “about half”) ²	42
Do you happen to know what name Muslims use to refer to God? (correct answer “Allah”) ¹	48
Do you happen to know the name of the Islamic equivalent to the Bible? (correct answer “Koran”) ¹	51
How much would you say you know about the Muslim religion and its practices? (number of respondents who answered “nothing at all” or “not very much”) ¹	66

Source Notes:

1: From July 2005 Poll conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

2: From July 2004 Poll conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

Table 2: Fixed Variances for Exogenous and Endogenous Latent Variables

Model Variables	Fixed Variance (measurement error)
<i>Exogenous Latent Variables</i>	
Age	1.0
Race	1.0
Gender	1.0
Education	.85
<i>Endogenous Latent Variables</i>	
Party Affiliation (Republican)	.85
Political Ideology (conservative)	.6
Christian Religiosity	.5
Exposure to Prime-Time Television	.85
Exposure to Newspaper	.85
Exposure to <i>CNN</i>	.85
Exposure to <i>Fox Cable News</i>	.85
Exposure to Network Broadcast News	.85
Attention to TV News	.6
Attention to NP news	.6
Attention to Christian TV Programming	.85
Religiosity X <i>Fox Cable News</i>	.85
Ideology X <i>CNN</i>	.85
Basic Knowledge of Islam	.6
Perceived Likelihood of Terrorist Attack	.85
Perceived Personal Danger from Terrorist Attack	.85
Islam as More Violent	.85
Perceived Muslim Hostility	.95
Negative Perceptions of Islamic Peoples / Countries	.86
Support for Restrictions on Muslim Americans	.86

Table 3: Influence of Exogenous Variables on Endogenous Variables

	Education	Age	Gender (male)	Race (white)
Political Ideology (conservative)	--	.08	--	--
	-.03	.03	-.03	--
	-.03	.11	-.03	--
Christian Religiosity	-.10	.09	-.10	--
	--	--	--	--
	-.10	.09	-.10	--
Party Affiliation (Republican)	--	--	--	.14
	-.02	.02	-.02	--
	-.02	.02	-.02	.14
Exposure to Prime-Time Television	-.24	.21	--	-.09
	.01	-.01	.01	--
	-.23	.20	.01	-.09
Exposure to Newspaper	.11	.36	.08	--
	--	--	--	--
	.11	.36	.08	--
Exposure to <i>Fox Cable News</i>	--	--	--	-.09
	-.04	--	-.01	.01
	-.04	--	-.01	-.08
Exposure to <i>CNN</i>	--	.13	-.09	-.14
	-.01	.01	.01	-.02
	-.01	.14	-.08	-.16
Exposure to Network Broadcast News	--	.16	-.13	--
	-.03	.03	--	-.03
	-.03	.19	-.13	-.03
Attention to Christian TV Programming	-.12	.12	--	-.14
	-.04	.04	.04	--
	-.16	.16	.04	-.14
Ideology X <i>CNN</i>	--	--	--	--
	--	-.01	--	--
	--	-.01	--	--
Religiosity X <i>Fox Cable News</i>	--	.12	--	--
	-.01	.01	.01	-.03
	-.01	.13	.01	-.03
Attention to NP news	.08	--	-.06	--
	.06	.21	.05	.01
	.14	.21	-.01	.01
Attention to TV News	.17	.09	.16	--
	-.01	.07	-.03	-.05
	.16	.16	.13	-.05
Basic Knowledge of Islam	.23	--	--	--
	.07	-.01	.03	.01
	.30	-.01	.03	--
Perceived Muslim Hostility	-.10	.09	--	-.13
	-.01	-.02	-.02	.01
	-.11	.07	-.02	-.12
Perceived Personal Danger from Terrorist Attack	--	--	--	-.16
	--	.04	--	--
	--	.04	--	-.16
Perceived Likelihood of Terrorist Attack	--	.11	--	--
	.01	.04	--	-.02
	.01	.15	--	-.02
Islam as More Violent	-.13	--	.12	--
	--	.01	-.02	.02
	-.13	.01	.10	.02
Negative Perceptions of Islamic Peoples / Countries	--	--	--	--
	-.07	.08	.01	-.03
	-.07	.08	.01	-.03
Support for Restrictions on Muslim Americans	-.11	--	--	--
	-.11	.09	-.02	-.06
	-.22	.09	-.02	-.06

Notes: (1) All coefficients are significant at $p \leq .05$. (2) Coefficients in the first row indicate direct effects, coefficients in the second row indicate indirect effects, and coefficients in the third row indicate total effects.

Table 4: Relationships Among Endogenous Variables continued

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Basic Knowledge of Islam (14)	--	-.09	--	-.12	.07	--	--	-.16	--	--	--	.16	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	--	.01	.02	.01	--	.04	.03	.03	--	-.01	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	--	-.08	.02	-.11	.07	.04	.03	-.13	--	-.01	--	.16	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Perceived Muslim Hostility (15)	--	--	--	-.08	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	-.09	--	--	--	--	--
	--	.01	--	.01	-.01	--	--	.01	--	--	--	-.01	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	--	.01	--	-.07	-.01	--	--	.01	--	--	--	-.01	--	-.09	--	--	--	--	--
Perceived Personal Danger from Terrorist Attack (16)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.27	--	--
	.01	-.01	.01	.03	--	.01	.01	-.01	--	.03	--	.06	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	.01	-.01	.01	.03	--	.01	.01	-.01	--	.03	--	.06	--	--	--	--	.27	--	--
Perceived Likelihood of Terrorist Attack (17)	--	--	--	.10	--	--	--	-.08	--	.12	--	.20	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	.02	-.02	.01	--	--	.05	.03	.03	--	-.01	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	.02	-.02	.01	.10	--	.05	.03	-.05	--	.11	--	.20	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Islam as More Violent (18)	.12	.11	.11	-.10	--	.07	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	.01	.08	.01	.01	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	.13	.19	.12	-.09	--	.07	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Negative Perceptions of Islamic Peoples / Countries (19)	.08	--	.10	.08	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.07	--	--	.26	--	.12	.24	--
	.04	.09	.03	-.02	--	.04	.02	.01	--	.01	--	.02	--	-.02	--	--	--	--	--
	.12	.09	.13	.08	--	.04	.02	.01	--	.01	--	.09	--	-.02	--	--	.12	.24	--
Support for Restrictions on Muslim Americans	--	--	.14	.08	--	.09	--	--	.10	.12	.06	.08	--	-.14	.15	.14	--	.14	.14
	.05	.12	.05	.03	-.01	.04	.01	.03	.01	--	--	--	--	-.02	.04	--	.05	.03	--
	.05	.12	.19	.11	-.01	.13	.01	.03	.11	.12	.06	.08	--	-.16	.19	.14	.05	.17	.14

Notes: (1) All coefficients are significant at $p \leq .05$. (2) Coefficients in the first row indicate direct effects, coefficients in the second row indicate indirect effects, and coefficients in the third row indicate total effects.

Figure 2: Interaction of Ideology and Exposure to CNN on Public Support for Restrictions on Muslim Americans

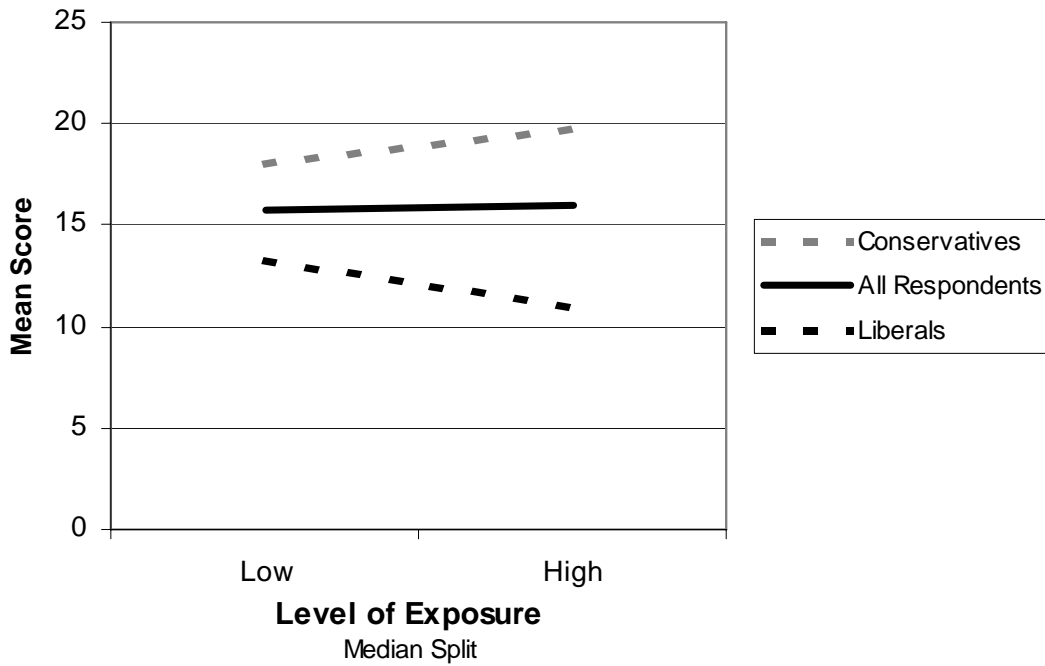


Figure 3: Interaction of Ideology and Exposure to CNN on Perceived Likelihood of Terrorist Attack

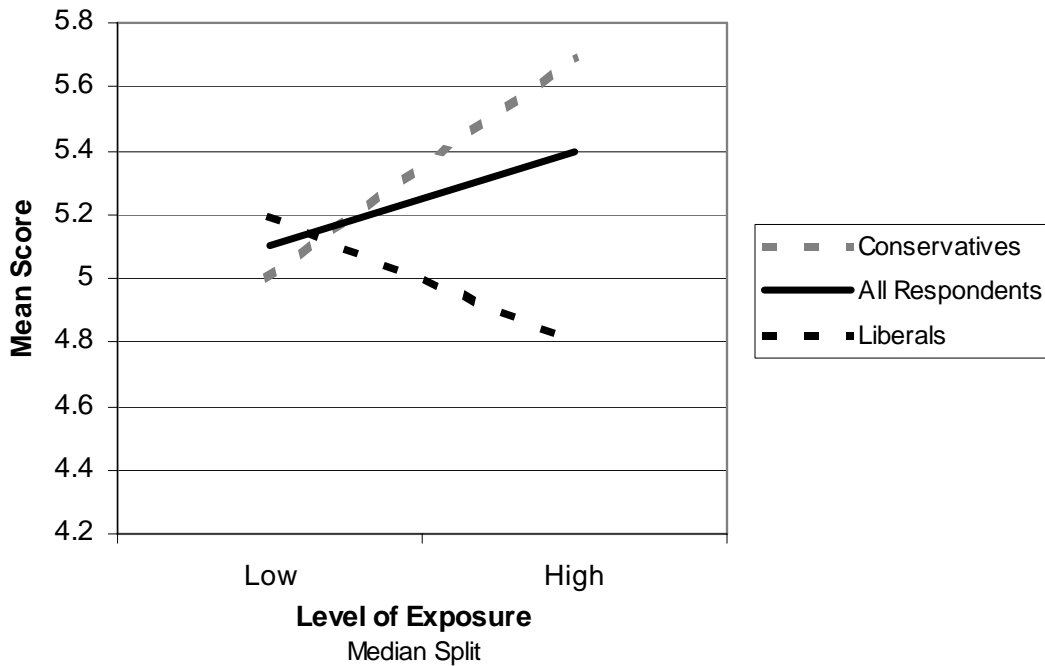


Figure 4: Interaction of Christian Religiosity and Exposure to Fox Cable News on Support for Restrictions on Muslim Americans

