Middle Eastern Terrorist Stereotypes and Anti-Terror Policy Support: The Effect of Perceived Minority Threat

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Abstract
Tests of the minority threat theoretical perspective have established that the common association made between crime and Black and Hispanic males is manifested, to some degree, in harsh approaches to crime control. Particularly since 9/11, a close association is also being made by the public between terrorism and those perceived to be of Arab or Muslim descent—a phenomenon coinciding with the implementation of intense social controls aimed at preventing terror attacks and punishing suspected terrorists. Using a national sample, this research is the first to explore the micro-level minority threat hypothesis in relation to those who are perceived to be Middle Easterners. Results of multivariate analyses indicate that those who typify terrorists as Middle Eastern are more likely to support punitive anti-terror techniques and that this relationship is more influential among those for whom the danger of terrorism is less salient. These findings not only suggest that the effects of minority threat extend beyond the racial and ethnic groups previously found to be stereotyped as law violators to others whose minority status is not as distinctly delineated, but that they also operate beyond the criminal justice institutions research has demonstrated are influenced by them. Policy implications are discussed.

Keywords
minority group threat, criminological theories, stereotypes, terrorist profiling, terrorism, terrorist era policing, race and policing

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Introduction

Pervasive portrayals of Middle Easterners as terrorists have some important similarities with entrenched criminal stereotypes frequently applied to Black and Hispanic males (Cole, 2003a; Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund [LCCREF], 2003; Simon, 2007). Specifically, they have all been the subject of threat-related stereotypes. It seems that in contemporary American society, Middle Easterners, and “those who look Arab or Muslim” (Grewal, 2003, p. 541), have become “the new racial other” (Grewal, 2003, p. 546), resulting in many who “equate Arab or Muslim male with ‘terrorist’” (Cole, 2003b, p. 49). Moreover, because the terrorist stereotype is not just limited to race, ethnicity, nationality, or religion (Chen, 2010), the profile of a terrorist has been applied to individuals who are neither Middle Eastern, Arab, nor Muslim (Kaplan, 2006; LCCREF, 2003).

These stereotypes are not inconsequential. Public attitudes affect public policy (Green, 2006). Just as racial and ethnic criminal stereotypes have been shown to contribute to increased punitiveness toward crime (Chiricos, Welch, & Gertz, 2004; Welch, Payne, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2011) and to the disproportionate number of Black and Hispanic convicts who are under some form of correctional control, it is plausible that stereotypes related to those perceived to be Arab, Muslim, or Middle Eastern are partially responsible for some degree of punitiveness toward terrorism and for the diminished civil liberties and harsh treatment of suspected terrorists.

This research is the first to apply a micro-level minority threat theoretical explanation for increased social control in the context of terrorist criminality and those who are perceived to be of Middle Eastern descent. Traditionally applied to Blacks and Hispanics in relation to criminal punitiveness, this study uses multivariate analyses of national survey data to examine whether individuals who typify terrorists as Middle Easterners are more likely to endorse punitive policies aimed at reducing terror and punishing suspected terrorists.

Terrorism and Intensified Social Control

Formal Social Controls

Since the terror attacks on September 11, 2001, the United States has become increasingly punitive toward terrorism. However, the enactment of intense security measures intended to thwart terrorism is not new. Various terrorist acts in the decades preceding the 9/11 attacks (including various plane hijackings, the Iran hostage crisis, the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, and the bombing of the USS Cole) resulted in several notable anti-terror measures. Among them were the “Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act” and the “Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act,” both of which were implemented in 1996 to limit opportunities for domestic acts of terror. These policies granted extraordinary authority to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), now the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, in order to locate and deport immigrants that were determined to present a
potential threat to U.S. security (Welch, 2003). It is noteworthy that many anti-terror policies were designed to target immigrants from Middle Eastern or predominantly Arab countries because of the ethnic and national affiliations of many notorious terrorists, despite the fact that most terrorists and acts of terrorism do not originate from these regions (LaFree, Morris, & Dugan, 2010; Shaheen, 2000).1

Pursuant to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, however, the U.S. response to terrorism reached unprecedented levels of punitiveness. In the days and weeks following these attacks, there were reports of airline passengers—particularly those of Middle Eastern descent—experiencing humiliation and abuse during the course of intrusive security screening procedures (Cole, 2003a; LCCREF, 2003). Further, many passengers who were successfully screened by transportation security were subsequently ordered off flights by crews responding to passenger complaints and to their own concerns about the apparent Arab or Muslim appearance of those passengers—often with the support of those same security officials who had already passed them through security (LCCREF, 2003; Verhovek, 2001). These and similar incidents lead to the recognition that “flying while Arab” was a convenient, albeit highly questionable, proxy for potential terrorists and one that could be especially precarious for travelers who appeared to be of Middle Eastern descent (Davila, 2001; Fiala, 2003; Harris, 2001).

The well-known USA Patriot Act was quickly made into law by both houses of Congress and the president by October 26, 2001, and is one of several sweeping policies that expanded the government’s ability to track and manage potential terrorists. So urgently did government leaders want to respond to the 9/11 attacks that it is widely acknowledged that most members of Congress who voted in favor of it did not even read the legislation before it was passed (Simon, 2007). Specifically, the Patriot Act increased surveillance capabilities of law enforcement agencies and lifted various due process restrictions on the accumulation of foreign intelligence, both inside and outside U.S. borders. One result of the Patriot Act was that law enforcement and government officials could access personal documents, such as telephone records, e-mail correspondence, medical records, and financial reports of citizens and non-citizens without obtaining warrants. Some have argued that this initiative has violated civil liberties (ACLU, 2015), while others have maintained that the law, itself, does not (Kerr, 2003; Ryan, 2005; Whitehead & Aden, 2002).

Another outcome of the Patriot Act and its “unprecedented assertion of executive authority” (Simon, 2007, p. 266) is that thousands of Middle Easterners, South Asians, and those from predominantly Muslim countries living in the United States and abroad were detained in both state and military jails in response to voluntary registrations with INS, without allowing their families to be notified of their whereabouts (Chen, 2004; Cole, 2003a; U.S. Department of Justice, 2003). A sizable number of individuals were interrogated about potential terrorist associations, tried for months, and were not granted access to lawyers or to the evidence that contributed to their secret detentions (Chen, 2004; Cole, 2003a; U.S. Department of Justice, 2003). The conditions under which suspects were held and interrogated became a subject of strong international controversy (Onwudiwe, 2005; Simon, 2007), as there was substantial evidence of verbal abuse, psychological and physical torture, and sexual humiliation of detainees,
particularly those at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay (Salaita, 2006; U.S. Department of Justice, 2003). Other harsh provisions allowed for the deportation of foreign detainees without an opportunity for appeal (Cole, 2003a). Further, because the ethnic and nationality-based proxies employed to represent potential terror supporters were so inexact, most of the individuals detained or deported had either not been convicted of wrongdoing or been proven innocent altogether (Cole, 2003a).

Further evidence of increased social control in relation to terrorism includes the creation of several new institutions that focus on preventing terrorism, including the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, with its color-coding system, and the Transportation and Security Administration (TSA), which uses a range of technologies, including explosive-detecting technology and full-body scanners (TSA, 2015). The establishment of new government offices has led to extensive hiring. Even U.S. governmental institutions that existed prior to 9/11, such as the Central Intelligence Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Federal Aviation Administration, have hired more employees to facilitate greater emphasis on discovering and thwarting terrorist plots (McRoberts, 2001). Of course, the United States is not the only country that expanded its anti-terror laws to address terrorism.2

Public Punitiveness and Support for Formal Social Control

Anti-terror punitiveness has gone beyond the actual implementation of policies. Since 9/11, the public has demonstrated considerable support for harsh national policies aimed at preventing terrorism and punishing suspected terrorists (Council on American–Islamic Relations Research Center [CAIRRC], 2006; Panagopoulos, 2006; Sullivan & Hendriks, 2009). When the Patriot Act was first proposed, the public overwhelmingly endorsed its passage (Dietz, 2002; Locy, 2004), despite the considerable criticism it has since encountered. In the year after the attacks, over half of Americans felt that immigration laws should be tightened, 42% felt the government should have more power to monitor Muslims more closely than other groups, and one third of Americans supported placing Arabs and Arab Americans in the United States under special surveillance (Panagopoulos, 2006). Additionally, polls showed that 44% of the public supported restricting civil liberties of U.S. Muslims and those with Middle Eastern heritage to promote security (Nisbet & Shanahan, 2004). Further, 17% of the public believes it is acceptable to incarcerate Muslims “just in case they are planning terrorist acts” (CAIRRC, 2006, p. 5).

Although public support for racial and ethnic profiling at airports has been longstanding (Gabbidon, Penn, Jordan, & Higgins, 2009), it also increased after 9/11. A U.S. poll taken before the attacks showed that only 20% of the public approved of airport profiling (Gallup Poll, 1999), but after 9/11, support increased to between 25% and 60% in public surveys (Cole, 2003a; Gabbidon, Higgins, & Nelson, 2012; Johnson et al., 2011; Verhovek, 2001). Airline passengers’ concerns about appearances or behaviors of other passengers (such as those wearing long beards or headscarves) also led to numerous unsubstantiated requests that the individuals in question be removed from flights—some of which were met with success (Associated Press, 2009; LCCREF, 2003). Additionally, although there is controversy about the appropriate
degree of screening that should be undergone by passengers at airports, there has been long-standing public support for screening young Middle Eastern men more carefully than others (Forst, 2009; Ghareeb, 1983), with 53% of Americans favoring the requirement that Arabs and Arab Americans undergo more intensive security checks (Saad, 2006) and 60% of Americans believing that racial profiling at airports has been occurring (Gabbidon et al., 2009).

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the incidence of hate crimes and “backlash violence” against individuals perceived to be of Middle Eastern descent, which often includes Arabs, South Asians, North Africans, Persians, Sikhs, and Muslims from various countries, sharply rose (American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee [AAADC], 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2002; Kaplan, 2006; Panagopoulos, 2006, p. 609). Law enforcement agencies and the CAIRRC (2006) received many more reports of beatings and death threats directed toward “persons appearing Arab or Muslim” than the previous year, and the federal government received 17 times as many reports of harassment and physical attacks in the year following 9/11 than the year before (Human Rights Watch, 2002). There was also an increase in reports of threats and hate speech against perceived Middle Easterners since 9/11 (AAADC, 2008; Cole, 2003a), which has frequently resulted in feelings of humiliation and fear (Merskin, 2004; Peek, 2003). In addition, there were a number of “racial-” type hoaxes related to perceived Middle Easterners that involved false allegations of terrorist activity (Altheide, 2006).

Although the number of hate crimes committed against those perceived to be of Middle Eastern origin rose dramatically, the incidence is somewhat limited relative to other forms of public punitiveness toward these individuals. Widespread reports of public religious bias (Armour, 2005), anti-Arab discrimination (Cole, 2003a; Macfarquhar, 2006), and prejudice against perceived Middle Easterners and Muslims (CAIRRC, 2006; Gabbidon et al., 2012) have been made since 9/11. Workplace discrimination against Muslims, South Asians, and Arab Americans became more prevalent and is actually the second most common context (after government) for a discriminatory incident (Armour, 2005). Children who are perceived to be Middle Eastern have even reported prejudice and humiliation by other students in schools, which has contributed to greater academic discrimination (Merskin, 2004). Defense lawyers have expressed concern that jurors view their clients who “look Middle Eastern” more negatively than others, thus influencing case outcomes (Marvasti & McKinney, 2004, p. 154). One British study found significant increases in negative experiences related to ethnicity and religion among Muslims as well as both subtle and overt racism and religious discrimination (Sheridan, 2006).

Although the government and public interests in being protected from terrorist victimization are legitimate (Logan, 2007), many have expressed concern that anti-terror efforts have disproportionately and negatively affected racial, ethnic, and religious minorities (Cole, 2003a; Harcourt, 2007). Specifically, Arabs, Muslims, and certain Middle Easterners are experiencing the greatest burden of harsh anti-terror policies, terror-related public fear, prejudice, and discrimination (Braman, 2004; Macfarquhar, 2007).
Middle Eastern Terrorist Stereotypes

As with the racial and ethnic stereotyping of criminals as Black and Hispanic, “a face has also been put on terror, and it is Arab” (Merskin, 2004, p. 157). Ethnic and religious stereotypes linking terrorism to certain Middle Easterners are ubiquitous (Blasing, 1996; Jenkins, 2003; Said, 1997) and may be at least partially responsible for fueling some degree of punitiveness toward terrorism. Those of Middle Eastern descent, including many Arabs, Muslims, and others, are often believed to be full of “hatred” (CAIRRC, 2006, p. 2), “violent” (Marvasti & McKinney, 2004, p. 53) and “disproportionately prone to violence” (Deane & Fears 2006, p. 1). They are characterized as “dangerous” (Kamalipour, 2000, p. 89), “machine-gun-toting” (Blasing, 1996, p. 107) “terrorists” (CAIRRC, 2006, p. 2; Marvasti & McKinney, 2004, p. 53; Said, 1997), and “savage fanatics” (Jenkins, 2003, p. 150), who are intent on “destruction” (Kamalipour, 2000, p. 89). It is notable that while these stereotypes were certainly exacerbated by the 9/11 attacks, they flourished long before then (Ahmad & Szpara, 2003; Akram, 2002; Blasing, 1996; Said, 1997).

Considering the prevalence of media depictions of terrorists as apparently Middle Eastern (AAADC, 2008; Archbold, Dahle, Fangman, Wentz, & Wood, 2013; Said, 1997; Suleiman, 1988, 1999), it is not surprising that “the vast majority of Americans—and many Europeans—do have a stereotype in mind when [they] think of terrorists, and that stereotype is of someone of Arab descent” (Ervin, 2006, p. 1; Shaheen, 2003) or a Muslim (Said, 1997). However, the truth is that this stereotype is far from accurate: While it is clear that most Middle Easterners, Arabs, and Muslims are not terrorists (Forst, 2009; LCCREF, 2003), it is also true that the greatest source of terrorist threat does not originate in the Middle East or from Muslims (Nance, 2008; U.S. Department of State, 2014). Media portrayals and the fact that all 19 of the 9/11 hijackers were Arab may contribute to the popular perception that the most frequent and dire acts of terror are committed by Middle Easterners (Archbold et al., 2013; Jenkins, 2003) and Muslims (Mass, 2009), even though more terrorist acts are committed by Latin Americans, Africans, citizens of former Soviet territories, and Communists (LaFree et al., 2010; Mass, 2009; U.S. Department of State, 2014). Although race, ethnicity, and religion are often used as proxies for terrorist involvement, most suspected of it have been found innocent (Hashad, 2004).

Minority Threat Theoretical Perspective

Just as racial and ethnic stereotypes have been shown to contribute to increased punitiveness toward crime, it is plausible that minority stereotypes related to those perceived to be Middle Eastern are partially responsible for some degree of punitiveness toward terrorism. The minority threat theoretical perspective was initially rooted in the belief that racial prejudice that results in discrimination and increased social control is a group-based, and not individual level, occurrence (Blumer, 1958). From this idea, the power threat hypothesis was developed, which suggests that as the
proportion of racial or ethnic minorities increases in relation to Whites, intensified measures of social control—particularly in the form of criminal justice responses—will proliferate as a result of perceived economic and political competition presented by the growing minority group (Blalock, 1967). This theory was further advanced by the inclusion of perceptions of Black crime as an additional influence on social control that is galvanized by a larger minority in what has been called social threat (Liska, 1992) and racial threat (Chiricos, McEntire, & Gertz, 2001) because of the strong associations made between Blacks and crime, and, more recently, the effects of Hispanic threat on criminal controls (Eitle & Taylor, 2008). Although these studies have focused nearly entirely on responses to traditional criminal threat, it is not unreasonable to suppose that punitive support for anti-terror policies is similarly linked to the threat of terrorism often associated with individuals perceived to be of Middle Eastern descent (LCCREF, 2003; Simon, 2007). However, no minority threat research has yet examined this possibility.

One way to test for the presence of minority group threat is by assessing the effects of the racial or ethnic composition of place, which is the typical macro-level proxy for threat that has been associated with a variety of punitive criminal justice outcomes, including rates of arrest (Mosher, 2001), resources allocated to and the size of law enforcement (Kent & Jacobs, 2005) and corrections (Jacobs & Helms, 1996), rates of incarceration (Carmichael, 2005), and executions (Baumer, Messner, & Rosenfeld, 2003). Because it is likely that “perception is, indeed, at the heart of the matter” (Blasing, 1996, p. 108), a limited amount of minority threat research has also gauged the effects of micro-processes that mediate the relationship between minority composition and the implementation of powerful social controls. Among these studies are those that assess individual attitudes surrounding minority compositional measures. Findings from this research indicate that demographic composition influences not only negative views of Blacks (Fossett & Kiecolt, 1989; Taylor, 1998) and the perception of higher neighborhood crime (Quillian & Pager, 2001) but also fear of crime perpetrated by Blacks (Quillian & Pager, 2001) and by Hispanics (Eitle & Taylor, 2008), public support for the death penalty (Baumer et al., 2003), and overall punitiveness by Whites (King & Wheelock, 2007).

Other micro-level studies have used perceptual measures of threat, rather than aggregated compositional data, to assess effects on preferences for social control, because they may be a more direct and valid representation of threat than actual minority composition. Perceptions about minority population size should be more meaningful than the true percentages or characteristics of minority groups, since the public may not accurately gauge the actual size of minority groups (Welch, 2007). It does appear that perceptions about the relative size of Black populations are just as influential as actual percentages on perceived risk of crime (Chiricos et al. 2001). Other studies using perceptual measures of threat find that the proportion of crime perceived to be committed by Blacks (Chiricos et al., 2004) and by Hispanics (Welch et al., 2011) is consequential for the degree to which the public supports punitive crime policies. Moreover, when the public believes that Blacks as a group are more prone to violence, they are likelier to favor various crime reduction expenditures (Barkan & Cohn, 2005).
Racial stereotypes of drug criminals have also influenced the manner with which individual sentencing decisions are made (Steen, Engen, & Gainey, 2005).

**Nonlinear and Contextual Effects of Threat**

It is also possible that minority threat has nonlinear or contextual effects on punitive social control as first suggested by Blalock (1967, p. 31) who noted that “different kinds of persons will not be similarly motivated by the minority percentage variable.” Since then, research has corroborated that the relationship between minority threat and punitive social control is not always linear and not equally consequential in all social contexts (Conklin, 1971; Tolbert & Grummel, 2003). Assessments of perceptual minority threat show that individual punitiveness is influenced by regional variation on the Black (Chiricos et al., 2004) and Hispanic (Welch et al., 2011) typification of crime and the Black composition of place (Taylor, 1998), such that the influence of minority threat on harshness is greater in nonsouthern states and the Midwest. Racial prejudice also moderates the effects of perceived threat on general punitiveness as does high- and low-crime salience (Chiricos et al., 2004) and political conservatism (Baumer et al., 2003). One’s occupational prestige also affects the relationship between racial threat and negative attitudes about minorities by Whites (Taylor, 1998).

It appears that racial and ethnic threat are more influential, particularly at the individual level, in circumstances in which crime is less salient, punishment less severe, and attitudes toward various policies less harsh, and therefore where one might expect less public punitiveness toward criminals (Barkan & Cohn, 2005; Chiricos et al., 2004; Taylor, 1998). It is possible that greater effects of minority threat are likelier when the effects of other factors on social control are less powerful (Oliver & Mendelberg, 2000). This type of “ceiling effect,” or “threshold effect,” connects the actions of individuals to population processes and suggests that minority threat has less opportunity to influence policies and policy support among the public in contexts in which other factors are already more compelling. Further there is substantial opportunity for threat to influence policy and policy support when punitiveness is not already so high (Oliver & Mendelberg, 2000).³

Overall, studies indicate consistent support for the minority threat theoretical explanation for increased social control in relation to Black and Hispanic crime in both compositional and perceptual tests as well as in linear and circumstance-specific analyses. Yet there is no research testing the applicability of the minority threat theoretical perspective in relation to perceived Middle Easterners and public support for punitive “war on terror” policies.

**The Present Study**

It is plausible that terror-related Middle Eastern threat contributes to public punitiveness much in the same way that crime-related racial and ethnic threat have fostered public support for various harsh criminal justice policies. It has been argued that the common association made by much of the public between individuals perceived to be of Middle
Eastern descent and certain salient terrorist attacks has facilitated the government passage of sweeping laws limiting immigration, restricting civil liberties, diminishing due process rights, and punishing terrorist suspects (Cole, 2003a; LCCREF, 2003; Simon, 2007). Due to the strong potential for public attitudes to affect the implementation of public policy (Green, 2006), as well as some substantial negative consequences of intense war on terror policies, an exploration of the possibility that the Middle Eastern stereotyping of terrorists is related to anti-terror punitiveness is important.

This research is the first to apply the minority threat theoretical perspective to perceived Middle Easterners. Specifically, it uses a micro-level measure of the Middle Eastern typification of terrorists (individual responses to questions gauging these stereotypes) to test for an impact on preferences for stringent anti-terror prevention and punishment policies (individual responses about favored legal actions). These analyses assess the extent to which the association of terrorism with those believed to be Middle Eastern enhances support among the public for intensified anti-terror efforts, as has been previously assessed with relation to racial and ethnic stereotypes and crime punitiveness. Thus, this study will examine the following primary hypothesis: (1) those who stereotype terrorists as Middle Easterners are more likely to support harsh terror prevention and punishment tactics.

Moreover, as suggested by the findings of research gauging individual manifestations of stereotype-induced punitiveness, this study will explore whether the primary relationship articulated in Hypothesis 1 is affected by nonlinear (or interaction/moderating) and contextual (or conditional) influences that differentially affect subgroups of respondents according to certain characteristics (Iversen, 1991; Jaccard & Turrisi 2003). These differential effects will be assessed according to the ceiling effect hypothesis, which suggests that there will be less room for terrorist stereotypes to have an effect on people’s policy preferences when there are already other, stronger influences on those anti-terror policy preferences. Thus, stereotypes would be expected to affect individuals differently according to those other influences. Prior research and initial analyses indicate that those who are expected to already be quite punitive include those for whom terrorism is a salient problem, political conservatives, those who are prejudiced against Middle Easterners, and Whites. Therefore, this study assesses the following hypotheses testing for the presence of these ceiling effects: (2) effects of the Middle Eastern typification of terrorists on support for punitive anti-terror policies are stronger or significant only among individuals for whom support for these policies is expected to otherwise be lower, including individuals (2a) for whom terrorism is less salient, (2b) who are not ideologically conservative, (2c) who are less prejudiced against Middle Easterners, and (2d) who are not White.

**Methodology**

**Data Collection and Sample**

Data for this research were obtained for this specific study by surveying a U.S. national sample of adults from November 2006 through January 2007 at the Research
Network based in Tallahassee. A two-stage semi-stratified Mitofsky-Waksberg telephone sampling technique was used, ensuring that phone numbers randomly generated by computer were stratified to most accurately reflect the geographic distribution of the population and enhance representativeness of the sample, as described by the American Association of Public Opinion Research standards. The final sample of 425 adults has the following characteristics, which are compared (in parentheses) with contemporaneous U.S. demographics: 53% (51%) female, 81% (83%) White, 8% (12.1%) Black, 8% (14.5%), Hispanic, and 5.9% of Middle Eastern descent, and the average respondent was 49 (37) years old. The generalizability of this study’s findings is addressed in the Discussion section.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this study is represented by eight questions gauging support for policies aimed at preventing and punishing terrorism, such as the use of torture, withholding due process rights from detainees, and wiretapping phones domestically, as detailed in Table 1. Using an 11-point scale, respondents indicated support for each measure, with an overall mean level of 4.93. A factor score was then created using the maximum-likelihood approach with varimax rotation to ensure proper weighting in the Anti-Terror Punitiveness index, which has an $\alpha$ reliability coefficient of .91.

Independent Variable

The primary independent variable, Middle Eastern Typification of Terrorists, is represented by responses to a single question gauging the extent to which respondents stereotype terrorists as people of Middle Eastern descent and is modeled after perceptual indicators of threat in prior research. Respondents were asked, “When you think about people who actually commit acts of terrorism, approximately what percentage would you say are Middle Eastern?” Considering the great variability of geographic and ethnic backgrounds represented among terrorists globally, the mean of 54.6% is a likely overestimation of the involvement of Middle Easterners in terrorism. Table 2 describes this study’s variables.

Control Variables

The remaining independent variables were selected as controls because of their known influence on support for punitive crime policies rather than terror policies, since there is only very limited previous multivariate research that has examined predictors of punitiveness toward terrorism. Among the demographic characteristics controlled is gender, which is coded with a binary variable for female ($= 1$), and is predicted to be negatively associated with punitiveness (Welch, 2011). Age is a continuous measure that tends to be associated with less punitiveness (Rossi & Berk, 1997). Education represents respondents’ level of academic achievement, ranging from some high school ($= 1$) to postgraduate work or degree ($= 6$), and has also been negatively
related to punitiveness (Costelloe, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2009). Race is controlled by a measure of whether one is White (= 1) and ethnicity is controlled by a measure of whether one is Hispanic (= 1), because Whites and Hispanics are generally more punitive than others (Chiricos et al., 2004). In addition, a variable representing whether respondents were of Middle Eastern descent (= 1) is included, because those with this background might be less inclined to adopt a stereotype of terrorists based on that trait. Residents in the U.S. South have had a consistent tradition of punitiveness (Borg, 1997), so the effects of being Southern (= 1) are controlled.10

### Table 1. Punitive Support for Specific Anti-Terror Policy Proposals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anti-Terror Punitiveness (0–10 scale, 10 = most punitive)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
<th>r MEtyp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holding prisoners indefinitely without being charged for an offense</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>.742</td>
<td>.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detaining terrorist suspects without notifying their families or embassies</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>.782</td>
<td>.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using stressful interrogation techniques to get confessions</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>.777</td>
<td>.105*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holding trials that do not involve Bill of Rights protections</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>.789</td>
<td>.107*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executing more terrorists</td>
<td>6.31</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>.600</td>
<td>.129*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiretapping phones in the United States</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>.782</td>
<td>.110*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercepting emails and other personal electronic information</td>
<td>5.31</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>.780</td>
<td>.157*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting searches and seizures of individuals and their belongings without proper warrants</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>.769</td>
<td>.057</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Factor loadings based on individual contributions to 8-item Anti-Terror Punitiveness Index. MEtyp = Middle Eastern Typification of Terrorism.

*Significant at .05 level. **Significant at .01 level.

### Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Variables in Analyses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>r Punitiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent variable</strong></td>
<td>Anti-Terror Punitiveness</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-1.72–1.79 n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent variables</strong></td>
<td>M.E. Typification of Terrorists</td>
<td>54.62</td>
<td>31.19</td>
<td>1–100 .125*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>0–1 .049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>49.19</td>
<td>16.05</td>
<td>19–90 .125*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1–6 –.110*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>0–1 .104*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>0–1 –.075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Middle Eastern</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>0–1 –.124*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>0–1 .137**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>0–1 .267**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Terror Salience</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-2.24–1.17 .477**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Middle Eastern Prejudice</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-1.30–3.43 .290**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05. **p < .01.
Among the dispositional or attitudinal influences controlled is conservative political ideology, which is represented by a dichotomous variable indicating whether respondents consider themselves politically liberal or moderate (\(= 0\)) or Conservative (\(= 1\)). Since terror salience may also increase support for anti-terror policies (Davis & Silver, 2004; Huddy, Feldman, Taber, & Lahav, 2005), concern about terrorism is gauged by an 11-point scale of how concerned respondents reported being about terrorism, and fear of terrorism (also using an 11-point scale) is represented by how fearful respondents were that they or someone they cared about would become a victim of terrorism (Leone & Anrig, 2007). Because preliminary analyses of variance inflation factors (VIFs) and tolerance levels indicated the presence of multicollinearity between these two salience measures, principle component varimax rotated factor analysis created a single Terror Salience factor score, with an \(\alpha\) of .81, indicating a high degree of reliability of each item representing the larger construct. Prejudice, which increases support for harsh crime policies (Borg, 1997), is represented by an index of two items based on the degree to which respondents felt it would be okay if a Middle Eastern family with an income similar to theirs were to live nearby and if a person of Middle Eastern descent were to marry into their families. The factor score of Middle Eastern Prejudice has an \(\alpha\) of .72.

**Analytic Strategy**

Table 2 provides means, standard deviations, and value ranges for the variables in the analyses, as well as bivariate correlations of each independent measure with the Anti-Terror Punitiveness index. As presented, the bivariate correlation of Middle Eastern Typification of Terrorists with Anti-Terror Punitiveness is .125 and is significant at the .05 level. The highest correlations are with Terror Salience (.477, \(p < .01\)), Middle Eastern Prejudice (.290, \(p < .01\)), and Conservative (.267, \(p < .01\)).

Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression is used to examine the effects of Middle Eastern Typification of Terrorists and the control variables on Anti-Terror Punitiveness in the test of the first hypothesis. No tolerance values were smaller than .809, and no VIFs were larger than 1.2, thus eliminating the possibility of multicollinearity (Freund & Littell, 2000). Tests for linearity show that this regression assumption is not violated, and a Modified-Glesjer test indicates there is no problem of heteroskedasticity. Due to the directional nature of the hypotheses, one-tailed \(t\)-values are used to determine statistical significance (Henkel, 1976; Mohr, 1990).

Next, to test the second hypothesis, a series of multivariate OLS regression models are estimated to assess moderating effects of the relationships between Middle Eastern Typification of Terrorists and the variables that have the highest \(b\) values in the initial regression model and that have had significant moderating or conditional effects on punitiveness in prior research (Jaccard & Turrisi, 2003). Interaction terms were created by separately multiplying Terror Salience, Conservative, Middle Eastern Prejudice, and White by Middle Eastern Typification of terrorism.\(^{11}\) Anti-Terror Punitiveness is then regressed on each product term in separate analyses, along
with all control variables, to determine if the terms are statistically significant. There were no apparent violations of regression assumptions in these models.\textsuperscript{12}

Finally, to evaluate the specific effects of the statistically significant interactions on all variables, models with interactive effects on \textit{Anti-Terror Punitiveness} are disaggregated according to the median value of the moderating variable to assess possible conditional effects (Iversen, 1991). To test for significant context-specific differences of the primary relationship analyzed, \textit{z}-tests are conducted using unstandardized coefficients and standard errors.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{Results}

The test of Hypothesis 1 is estimated in Model 1 in Table 3, where unstandardized coefficients, standardized bs, and standard errors are reported. As predicted, \textit{Middle Eastern Typification of Terrorists} is significantly and positively related to \textit{Anti-Terror Punitiveness} ($b = .003, p < .05$), indicating that those who stereotype terrorists as Middle Easterners are more likely to support harsh terror prevention and punishment tactics. Also significantly more supportive of these punitive national security policies—and in accordance with expectations—are Whites, individuals not of Middle Eastern origin, Southerners, ideological conservatives, those for whom terrorism is more salient, and individuals who are prejudiced against Middle Easterners. \textit{b} values suggest that the variables influencing anti-terror punitiveness most strongly are \textit{Terror Salience}, \textit{Conservative}, \textit{Middle Eastern Prejudice}, \textit{White}, and \textit{Middle Eastern Typification of Terrorists}. The $R^2$ (.324) demonstrates that this model explains nearly one third of the variance in support for severe anti-terror policies, which is relatively high for research assessing punitive attitudes.

The next stage of analysis involves examining possible moderating influences on the relationship between \textit{Middle Eastern Typification of Terrorists} and \textit{Anti-Terror Punitiveness}. Model 2 presents the regression estimate testing Hypothesis 2a, which assesses moderating effects of \textit{Terror Salience}. The coefficient for the product term is significant and negative ($b = -.004, p < .001$), which indicates that among those for whom terrorism is less salient, the Middle Eastern typification of terrorists is more likely to increase anti-terror punitiveness, and among those for whom terrorism is more salient, the Middle Eastern typification of terrorists is less apt to increase the endorsement of harsh anti-terror tactics.\textsuperscript{14} As in Model 1, \textit{b} values indicate that only \textit{Terror Salience}, \textit{Conservative}, \textit{Middle Eastern Prejudice}, and \textit{White} have a stronger influence on \textit{Anti-Terror Punitiveness}. The only variable no longer retaining significance from the first model is \textit{Middle Eastern}. The $R^2$ of .341 indicates that this model explains over 34\% of the variance in \textit{Anti-Terror Punitiveness}.

Model 3 specifies the equation gauging moderating effects of ideological conservatism on the relationship between terrorist typification and punitiveness in the test of Hypothesis 2b. The coefficient for the product term is not statistically significant, indicating that the effects of the \textit{Middle Eastern Typification of Terrorists} on \textit{Anti-Terror Punitiveness} are not conditioned by \textit{Conservative}. Similar results are found in Models 4 and 5 that test Hypotheses 2c and 2d, which examine possible interactions...
### Table 3. Regression of Anti-Terror Punitiveness on Middle Eastern Typification of Terrorists.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M.E. Typification</td>
<td>.003*</td>
<td>(0.001) [.086]</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.003*</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.001) [.085]</td>
<td>(.002) [.066]</td>
<td>(.001) [.086]</td>
<td>(.001) [.088]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.084</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>.090</td>
<td>.082</td>
<td>.084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>-.002</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>-.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.003) [-.023]</td>
<td>(.003) [-.031]</td>
<td>(.003) [-.024]</td>
<td>(.003) [-.024]</td>
<td>(.003) [-.023]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>.256*</td>
<td>.259*</td>
<td>.260*</td>
<td>.261*</td>
<td>.256*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.121) [.098]</td>
<td>(.120) [.099]</td>
<td>(.122) [.099]</td>
<td>(.122) [.100]</td>
<td>(.122) [.098]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>.052</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td>.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.168) [.014]</td>
<td>(.166) [.014]</td>
<td>(.168) [.014]</td>
<td>(.168) [.017]</td>
<td>(.168) [.014]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle Eastern</td>
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<td>-.276</td>
<td>-.300</td>
<td>-.311</td>
<td>-.307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.228) [-.058]</td>
<td>(.225) [-.052]</td>
<td>(.228) [-.057]</td>
<td>(.228) [-.059]</td>
<td>(.229) [-.058]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>.158*</td>
<td>.155*</td>
<td>.156*</td>
<td>.161*</td>
<td>.158*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.089) [.075]</td>
<td>(.088) [.074]</td>
<td>(.089) [.074]</td>
<td>(.089) [.077]</td>
<td>(.089) [.075]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>.478***</td>
<td>.457***</td>
<td>.477***</td>
<td>.479***</td>
<td>.478***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terror Salience</td>
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<td>.436***</td>
<td>.433***</td>
<td>.433***</td>
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</table>

(continued)
<table>
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<th>Independent Variables</th>
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<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M.E. Prejudice</td>
<td>( b = 0.124^{***} ), (SE) = 0.045 [0.124]</td>
<td>( b = 0.133^{***} ), (SE) = 0.044 [0.133]</td>
<td>( b = 0.123^{***} ), (SE) = 0.045 [0.124]</td>
<td>( b = 0.130^{***} ), (SE) = 0.046 [0.130]</td>
<td>( b = 0.124^{***} ), (SE) = 0.045 [0.124]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.E. Typ x Salience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>( b = -0.004^{***} ), (SE) = 0.001 [-0.131]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.E. Typ x Conservative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>( b = 0.002 ), (SE) = 0.003 [0.032]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.E. Typ x M.E. Prejudice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>( b = -0.001 ), (SE) = 0.001 [-0.024]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.E. Typ x White</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>( b = -0.328 ), (SE) = 0.219</td>
<td>( b = -0.321 ), (SE) = 0.217</td>
<td>( b = -0.285 ), (SE) = 0.231</td>
<td>( b = -0.324 ), (SE) = 0.220</td>
<td>( b = -0.331 ), (SE) = 0.266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( R^2 )</td>
<td>0.324</td>
<td>0.341</td>
<td>0.324</td>
<td>0.324</td>
<td>0.324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( F ) statistic</td>
<td>16.855***</td>
<td>16.619***</td>
<td>15.451***</td>
<td>15.449***</td>
<td>15.410***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. \( N = 399 \). Typ = Typification; M.E. = Middle Eastern. 
\*p < .05. \***p < .001.
of prejudice and race with the Middle Eastern typification of terrorists. These product term coefficients are nonsignificant and imply the absence of differences according to levels of Middle Eastern Prejudice or being White rather than a racial minority. It is therefore not surprising that $R^2$ values for each of these estimates (.324) remain the same value as that for the initial model.

To further examine the effects of the significant interaction of Terror Salience and Middle Eastern Typification of Terrorists on Anti-Terror Punitiveness in the test of Hypothesis 2a, the data were split at the 50th percentile of Terror Salience (median = .0438), then Anti-Terror Punitiveness was regressed on Middle Eastern Typification of Terrorists, results for which are provided in Table 4. Among those expressing high terror salience, it appears that the Middle Eastern typification of terrorists no longer affects one’s willingness to endorse harsh terrorism prevention and punishment policies. Not only is this coefficient ($b = .000$) no longer significant, but its $b$ (.006) drops substantially from those produced in the nonconditional estimates. Only Middle Eastern Prejudice, Conservative, and White continue to significantly increase Anti-Terror Punitiveness in this model.

By contrast, among those falling into the low terror salience context, the coefficient for Middle Eastern Typification of Terrorists is statistically significant and positive ($b = .007, p < .001$), suggesting that the Middle Eastern typification of terrorists increases support for anti-terror policies only among those who are not already fearful of and concerned about terrorism. In fact, the bs in this model

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>High Terror Salience</th>
<th>Low Terror Salience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$b$</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Eastern Typification</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-.034</td>
<td>.128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.046</td>
<td>.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>.367*</td>
<td>.165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>.237</td>
<td>.236</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle Eastern</td>
<td>-.450</td>
<td>.284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>.160</td>
<td>.131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>.350***</td>
<td>.130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Eastern Prejudice</td>
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<td>.064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>.330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$N$</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.147</td>
<td>.218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$ statistic</td>
<td>3.269***</td>
<td>5.252***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$ p Value for Anti-Terror Punitiveness slope is .007.

$p < .05$. ***$p < .001$. 

Table 4. Regression of Anti-Terror Punitiveness on the Middle Eastern Typification of Terrorists Contextualized by Terror Salience.
demonstrate that only Conservative has a stronger influence on levels of Anti-Terror Punitiveness than Middle Eastern Typification of Terrorists ($b = .218$). Interestingly, this context is also the first instance in which Hispanic ethnicity is associated with punitiveness; Hispanic respondents were less supportive of anti-terror policies than those who are not ethnically Hispanic. No other independent measures are significant in this model. Tests for slope differences across low and high Terror Salience contexts confirm that the coefficients for Middle Eastern Typification of Terrorists are significantly different from one another ($z = 2.475, p = .007$), indicating that the Middle Eastern typification of terrorists only increases support for terror-fighting policies among those who are less fearful of and concerned about terrorism.

**Discussion**

This research is the first to apply—and support—a micro-level minority group threat theoretical explanation for social control to perceived Middle Easterners in relation to terrorism. In particular, it uses an indicator of the association between those believed to be of Middle Eastern descent and terrorism to represent minority threat in multivariate analyses, examining whether individuals who typify terrorists as Middle Easterners are more likely to endorse punitive policies aimed at reducing terror and punishing suspected terrorists than those who do not hold such stereotypes. The results of OLS regression estimates indicate support for the primary hypothesis: the Middle Eastern typification of terrorism increases anti-terror punitiveness. This relationship remained statistically significant while controlling for the effects of various traits, including gender, age, education, race, ethnicity, Middle Eastern descent, and regional residence as well as attitudinal characteristics, such as conservatism, terror salience, and, importantly, prejudice against Middle Easterners. This finding corroborates those of previous studies assessing racial and ethnic stereotypes of traditional crime on punitiveness. Accordingly, it appears that not only are perceptions of Middle Easterners influential much in the same way that perceptions of Black and Hispanic individuals affect public attitudes, but that punitive support for harsh anti-terror policies is at least partially fueled by similar forces that incite support for harsh anti-crime policies.

It is important to note that the minority threat perspective is supported here in large part because this research was able to control for important terror-specific and Middle Eastern–specific influences. It is apparent that there is a residual effect of the Middle Eastern stereotyping of terrorists on anti-terror policy support even after controlling for the effect of terror salience, which was measured irrespective of Middle Eastern qualities. And, there remained an effect of Middle Eastern stereotypes of terrorists on anti-terror policy support even after controlling for Middle Eastern descent and prejudice, which were measured irrespective of terrorism. Therefore, it is clear that the Middle Eastern typification of terrorism represents something beyond bias or prejudice and beyond fear or anxiety about terrorism, and the stereotype itself appears to have an influence on policy preferences.
In testing this study’s secondary hypothesis related to a ceiling effect, the potential nonlinear and conditional influences of terror salience, political conservatism, racial prejudice, and race on the primary relationship were examined. Regression estimates show a statistically significant outcome for Hypothesis 2a, confirming a ceiling effect with regard to terror salience: Support for terror prevention and punishment policies is increased by Middle Eastern stereotypes of terrorists only among individuals who are less fearful of and less concerned about terrorism, paralleling the outcomes of previous studies that have analyzed moderating and context-specific influences of minority threat. This demonstrates that minority threat is more influential, particularly at the individual level, in circumstances in which crime and terrorism are less salient and general social control support is lower, and therefore where one would expect less punitiveness. When terrorism is perceived to be a more salient problem, support for harsh policies may already be so intense that there is less opportunity for other influences, including Middle Eastern stereotypes of terrorists, to have significant effects. Therefore, a multipronged policy response addressing stereotypes as well as saliency of terrorism may be effective in reducing negative public responses.

In addition, although Hypotheses 2b–2d predicting interactions between Middle Eastern terrorist stereotypes and conservatism, prejudice, and race were not supported in these analyses, results confirm that the effect of the Middle Eastern typification of terrorism on anti-terror punitiveness remains present, regardless of individual political ideology, prejudice, or race. This lack of consistent nonlinear and conditional effect, although contrary to this study’s secondary hypotheses, is not entirely surprising, given similar patterns of findings in prior minority threat research. However, it certainly warrants further future exploration.

The results of this study are important for a number of reasons. Notably, this research is the first to demonstrate that the minority threat explanation for punitiveness is applicable to Middle Easterners, despite the lack of a cohesive racial or ethnic dimension uniting this category. The common association of perceived Arabs, Muslims, Middle Easterners, and others with terrorism has the capacity to promote public support for certain policy initiatives above and beyond the effects of prejudice and terror salience.

Moreover, this study shows that minority threat represents a substantial influence on punitive attitudes toward terrorism, whereas most previous crime-related threat research has examined effects only in a traditional criminal justice context. It appears that minority threat is associated with both the severe treatment of criminals as well as harsh tactics aimed to prevent terrorism. It is significant that this research demonstrates not only that threat operates beyond the minority groups previously found to be stereotyped as law violators, but that it also operates beyond the institutions already shown to be affected by it.

It is also important that this research used a perceptual measure of Middle Eastern threat, rather than an objective compositional measure. First, the public very often associates individuals of many different racial and ethnic backgrounds, from a wide variety of regions and countries, and of different religious affiliations with terrorism and Middle Easterners. In this regard, this study does not fit perfectly within the
preexisting minority threat theoretical framework that links one specific group (i.e., Blacks or Hispanics) to threat. However, Middle Eastern threat encompasses a much broader and more loosely defined group of presumably threatening individuals that relies more on the perceptions of others according to appearance—as evidenced by the fact that Hispanics and Sikhs, for example, have been categorized as potential terrorist threats (Kaplan, 2006)—than actual characteristics. By using a generic question that references “Middle Eastern” individuals, this study was able to tap into respondents’ stereotypes without encountering the problems that the fluidity of those stereotypes would present.

Another reason that the use of a perceptual measure of Middle Eastern threat is preferable to a compositional one is that this type of variable is arguably more directly related to the minority threat concept. Tests using compositional measures presume a mediating influence of individual perceptions about minorities as competitively or criminally threatening; but testing minority threat with a perceptual measure that combines a stereotype of a minority with a stereotype of violence results in a more direct assessment that is likely more valid.

A final benefit of operationalizing Middle Eastern threat with a perceptual measure rather than a compositional one is that it is a more practical method of operationalizing this type of threat, since there is no publicly available data collected on populations of Middle Eastern descent living in the United States. No reliable data are collected on populations by religion, so it is not possible to create an objective Muslim composition variable.

**Study Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

One limitation of this study is that the sample does not precisely represent the national population, thus limiting the generalizability of its findings. This is an inherent weakness of telephone survey research and is attributable to who is most likely to answer the telephone and agree to participate in the survey. Further, the use of cross-sectional data precludes firm conclusions about whether Middle Eastern terrorist typifications are causally related to anti-terror punitiveness, a limitation that might be avoided through the use of longitudinal approaches.

Because there is so little multivariate research assessing punitive attitudes toward terrorism, it is not possible to know how the regression models would be most accurately specified. The measures controlled were included either because of a theoretical rationale or because of their relevance in research on punitiveness toward traditional types of crime. While this study includes those factors found to most consistently predict crime-related punitiveness, it was not able to control for every possible influence on it, such as income, religion, or prior victimization. And, it was not able to control for political or economic competition, which were relevant influences in the original “power threat” hypothesis. In addition, national measures of Middle Easterner composition are not available, which could have allowed for an examination of the mediating role of perceptual Middle Eastern threat between regional composition and support for anti-terror initiatives. Despite these limitations,
explained variance for the models specified are relatively high for telephone survey research on public punitiveness.

The use of the term Middle Eastern in this study is inexact, since terrorist stereotypes attributed to Middle Easterners are often directed at those who are not of Middle Eastern origin—partially because Americans generally do not know where the Middle East is located or which countries comprise it (Kamalipour, 2000). This study’s primary independent variable (correctly or incorrectly) likely captures perceptions about a number of categories of people often stereotyped as Middle Easterners and/or terrorists, such as Arabs, Muslims, South Asians, Sikhs, and North Africans (AAADC, 2008; Chen, 2010; Human Rights Watch, 2002; Kaplan, 2006). However, because this measure is a stereotype, the accuracy of perceptions is less relevant.

An interesting question to consider exploring in future research relates to alternative interpretations of the findings of this research. For example, respondents who identify other groups as sponsoring terrorism (such as Ukrainian rebels, White racists, or political extremists) may also be more supportive of harsh approaches to curbing terrorism. Thus, it is possible that putting a face—any face—on terror is what results in greater punitiveness, rather than a specifically Middle Eastern face. The inconsistent relevance of a ceiling effect on the primary relationship examined here also warrants further study. While it is important to have learned that terror salience has a nonlinear and context-specific influence in accord with a ceiling effect, it may also be useful to more fully understand the reasons, especially in light of the lack of this effect for conservatism, prejudice against Middle Easterners, and race. Another alternative explanation, proposed by Unnever and Cullen (2009, 2010) in relation to traditional crime, is that a racial-type animus directed toward marginalized “others” manifests in a lack of empathetic identification that facilitates the widespread support of punitive policies, and we may benefit from future research that elaborates on this possibility.

**Conclusion**

This study supports the minority threat theoretical explanation for increased social control by finding that Middle Eastern stereotypes of terrorists contribute to public support for a range of harsh “war on terror” policies much in the same way that prior minority threat research has found that stereotypes of criminals contribute to public support for “war on crime” measures. This is true regardless of the effects of a number of influences found to increase punitiveness in prior research and which would be expected to increase punitiveness toward terrorism. In addition, this relationship is particularly strong among individuals for whom terrorism is a less salient problem, although the influence of stereotypes on public harshness does not otherwise appear to be nonlinear or dependent on contextual differences. Accordingly, minority threat by perceived Middle Easterners appears to be a compelling explanation for some portion of strong public support for many of the harsh anti-terror policies passed following 9/11.
Research has already shown that threatening stereotypes of Blacks and Hispanics as criminals has increased support for harsh anti-crime policies that have disproportionately targeted and punished minorities. It now seems as though threatening stereotypes of Middle Easterners as terrorists is similarly increasing support for harsh anti-terror policies that have not only disproportionately targeted minorities (Braman, 2004; Gabbidon et al., 2009, 2012; Huq & Muller, 2008) but also diminished the freedoms and liberties of all Americans and noncitizens living in the United States (Harcourt, 2007; Merskin, 2004; Simon, 2007). The implementation of a range of government policies to address terrorism has resulted in what some believe is an unparalleled reduction in both civil liberties and due process protections as well as a number of new measures to punish suspected terrorists more severely than ever before. The public’s endorsement of these war on terror laws may have helped facilitate the continuance of many of these policies that have resulted in what some consider social injustice and a general erosion of human rights (Harcourt, 2007; Merskin, 2004). It has been argued that “our country is in the grips of a threat greater than terrorism,” and that is a loss of democracy (BBC News, 2002; Mujahid, 2003, p. 9). While much of the response to the 9/11 terror attacks is understandable, it is concerning if certain particularly harsh policies were supported because of the influence of inaccurate stereotypes related to Arabs, Muslims, and others perceived to be Middle Eastern. Therefore, it would be valuable and important to examine the role of national security measures that do not have a clear influence on terrorism, especially because of their troubling disparate consequences for certain minorities.

Acknowledgment
The author gratefully offers sincerest thanks to Marc Gertz for assistance with data collection.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes
1. For example, although initially presumed to be committed by Middle Easterners, the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City was committed by a White American citizen. There have been fewer instances of Middle Eastern, Arab, or Muslim terrorism than terrorism committed by others (Mass, 2009).
2. In response to 9/11, the United Kingdom swiftly adopted the “Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act” (since replaced by the “Prevention of Terrorism Act of 2005”), which impedes various individual freedoms and civil liberties guaranteed by national mandates of liberty (Logan, 2007). As with the United States, the United Kingdom has attempted to protect its citizens from attacks while also trying to protect its citizens’ rights but has
ultimately limited individual freedoms—particularly those related to freedom of expression—in the interest of national security (Logan, 2007). The Canadian government also supports limits on civil liberties following the American terror attacks of 2001 (Crépu & Jimenez, 2004), and among Australia’s anti-terror policies passed in response to the attacks is one endorsing certain racial profiling tactics that target any potential illegal activity of Middle Easterners, Arabs, and Muslims (Chong, 2006).

3. Subsequent to this research corroborating the presence of a ceiling effect, other similar “models of social interaction” (Bruch & Mare, 2006, p. 668) have been applied to instances of crime and violence (LaFree, 1999), rates of teen sexuality and pregnancy (Crane, 1991), and punishment certainty (Yu & Liska, 1993).

4. The overall response rate for this research was 46.8%, the cooperation rate was 48%, and the contact rate was 83.1%. Participation rates are based on definitions provided by the American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR). Research by Pew has found that telephone response rates have been declining over time and that, using rigorous survey methods such as those in this study, a 50% response rate using AAPOR definitions is typical (Keeter, Kennedy, Dimock, Best, & Craighill, 2006).

5. While the U.S. Census Bureau does collect information on “Arab” ethnicity, this group is categorized as “White.” It does not collect data according to the broader category of “Middle Eastern” origin.

6. Although this distribution is not precisely representative of population means, it is not atypical for telephone survey research to underrepresent male, Black, Hispanic, and younger individuals.

7. The varimax rotation method was used in this instance to maximize the variance of the squared loadings for each factor and offers clearer separation of the factors. A single factor was identified after five rotation iterations. The maximum-likelihood procedure was chosen for this set of measures because it provides a method identifying population parameters with a maximum likelihood of generating the observed sample distribution and because it provides a sample significance test in samples over approximately 50 (Kim & Mueller, 1978) or 100 (Long, 1983). The \( \chi^2 \) of 258.202 indicates statistical significance (at the .001 level) of this index for the sample and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (.887) indicates there is a very high degree of common variance among the items in the index.

8. The use of the term Middle Eastern in this study is inexact, since terrorist stereotypes attributed to Middle Easterners are often directed at those who are not of Middle Eastern origin—partially because Americans generally do not know where the Middle East is located or which countries comprise it (Kamalipour, 2000). To simplify the question representing this study’s primary independent variable and because the term Middle Eastern, correctly or incorrectly, captures a number of categories of people often stereotyped as Middle Easterners and/or terrorists, such as Arabs, Muslims, South Asians, Sikhs, and North Africans (AAADC, 2008; Chen, 2010; Human Rights Watch, 2002; Kaplan, 2006), survey respondents were asked about “Middle Easterners’” involvement in terrorism and this study uses the variable “Middle Eastern typification of terrorism.” The limitations of using only a regional attribute of a concept that also often pertains to ethnicity, religion, and other regions are addressed in the discussion section.
9. As described earlier, more terrorist acts are committed by Latin Americans, Africans, citizens of former Soviet territories, and communists, therefore it is not possible that Middle Easterners commit more than 50% of terrorist acts, as estimated by this study’s respondents. And, it is likely that—based on what is known regarding the terrorist acts of non-Middle Easterners—the true figure is less than that (LaFree et al., 2010).

10. Southern includes residents of Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

11. Interaction terms were mean centered to enhance interpretation of findings (see Jaccard & Turrisi, 2003).

12. For each, tolerance values only for the interaction terms or their component parts are lower than .799 and only the variance inflation factors associated with them are larger than 1.3, as expected in tests of moderation (Jaccard & Turrisi, 2003). The estimation of various subset specifications for the models with multicollinearity for the product terms indicates that the results regarding the effects of the independent variables are stable and not sensitive to simultaneous inclusion (Jaccard & Turrisi, 2003).

13. \[ z = \frac{(b_1 - b_2)}{(SE_1 + SE_2)^{1/2}} \]

14. An examination of scatter plots for each of the hypothesized moderated relationships corroborates the table findings.

15. While the strength of specific \( \beta \) values cannot be compared across models (only within models), its relative size change is considerable.

References


Human Rights Watch. (2002). ‘We are not the enemy’: Hate crimes against Arabs, Muslims, and those perceived to be Arab or Muslim After September 11. *Human Rights Watch, 14*, 1–40.


**Author Biography**

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