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Spitting Bullets: Anger's Long-Ignored Role in Reactions to Terror: An Examination of College Students' Fear and Anger Responses to Terrorism

Cover Page Footnote

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Spitting Bullets: Anger's Long-Ignored Role in Reactions to Terror: An Examination of College Students' Fear and Anger Responses to Terrorism

One of the terrorism's primary goals is to promote a social and political agenda by inducing fear and terror in a specific population.¹ The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 (9/11) are the most well-known terrorist attacks in American history, which took the lives of over 3000 people and caused inconceivable property while the world watched on television. The 9/11 attacks spurred a shift in government and public policy, changed public opinion towards the government, and led to a marked economic decline in the United States.²

In the years since 9/11, interest in terrorism has continued to be a critical area of scholarship, and a topic of utmost government concern.³ Researchers such as Larry Gaines and Victor Kappeler argue that one of the most significant costs of 9/11 was the the American public's increased fear of terrorism, a view reflected in public opinion surveys.⁴ A recent Gallup poll, *Terrorism in the United States*, found the fear of terrorism, which peaked post 9/11 and then gradually receded, has in the last few years once again begun to spike.⁵ Furthermore, relative to fear of common street crimes (a much more likely occurrence),⁶ fear of terrorism is significantly higher in the general public.⁷

Terrorism and fear are inextricably linked in most people's minds. As previously stated, terrorists' goals, are to instill fear in a mass population. This serves as the definition of terrorism to some.⁸ While the beheadings and mass executions of ISIS broadcast for the world to see are certainly meant to instill fear, they are also meant to *provoke* Western governments into angry responses, such as clamping down on local Muslim populations or bombing distant Muslim lands. Indeed, Osama bin-Laden's plan with the 9/11 attacks was to lead America into a series of "bleeding wars" that would weaken the superpower.⁹ Even the etymology of the term "terrorism" evokes fear due to the word being rooted in the term "terror."¹⁰

This paper argues that many of the negative aspects of responses to terrorism come from the *anger* that terrorism invokes in victim populations. Anger elicits the desire for revenge in the victim population as well as distrust of the terrorists' co-ethnics. Angry responses tend to be quick and harsh; anger is rarely described as a particular or deliberate emotion. As shown time and again in both academic and mainstream works, emotional waves overtake mass publics after medium-to-large-scale terror attacks. These emotional waves can be manipulated by government leaders to justify military actions and reductions in civil liberties.¹¹

While *fear* has been repeatedly pointed to as a central component in reactions to terror attacks (a questioner asked the historian Eric Foner at a post-9/11 lecture if Foner believed that “fear conquers freedom”), *anger* has mainly been ignored.¹² The criminal justice literature clearly shows that anger—embodied by a desire for retribution—at the accused leads to harsh penalties.¹³ The terrorism literature mostly skips over anger's role in terrorists' goals and targeted governments responses. This demonstrates the need to understand further how the public responds to these attacks, which in turn calls on governments to take action.

Ideologically, democratic governments seek to reflect and represent the fears, wishes, and desires of their populaces. This study seeks to capture the responses of regular Americans to explore if the role of anger in responses to terror attacks, with the goal of answering two related questions: 1) Is anger an essential emotion in public reactions to terror attacks? and 2) What are the ramifications of including anger in a model of public reactions to terrorism? To answer these questions this study reviews the current work on anger's connection to terrorism and conducts a student survey, with the hopes of a national survey in the future, to see if anger is indeed a worthy area of study in the field of terrorism studies. This paper demonstrates that terrorists want us angry because those that are angry are prone to overreaction, which can make the terrorists

look like the real victims. As such, anger should be a central component of our understanding of responses to terrorism.

This article studies a sample of college students—an important demographic to examine—as college communities view the fear of terrorism and perceived risk of victimization as critical concerns for students, staff, and faculty.¹⁴ Furthermore, while students are not current practitioners or policymakers, they will be in the future. Understanding how a fear of terrorism shapes the emotional response of this population may provide valuable insights into how they will react in the future when they are policymakers and practitioners. The pages that follow present a review of the subject in recent scholarly works and examine empirical evidence and prior public opinion studies, all of which will be followed by the presentation of the survey, results, and policy implications.

Literature Review

Historically, the United States was geographically isolated from significant acts of terrorism. As such, many young Americans have little exposure to terrorism and political violence.¹⁵ Unlike in some other nations that have endured a lengthy history of terrorist attacks and violence, fear of terrorism is a relatively new experience for many American citizens.¹⁶ It was not until the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center and the 1996 bombings of the Alfred P. Murrah building in Oklahoma City and Olympic Park in Atlanta that terrorism hit home for many Americans.¹⁷ Since the 9/11 attacks, scholars have primarily focused their attention on the social and psychological impact of these attacks on Americans, such as stress and anxiety post-9/11,¹⁸ the role of proximity of residents to a terrorist attack, and higher levels of psychological distress.¹⁹ Before 9/11, research in the area of the impact of terrorist attacks on the public focused mostly on posttraumatic stress disorders in those present at attacks.²⁰

In the time since 9/11, ample scholarship has focused on the role of sociodemographic variables, such as age, gender, and race in response to terrorism. For example, in their 2006 study, Joseph Boscarino, Sandro Galea, and Edna Foa utilized Terrorism Management Theory (TMT) to examine preparedness for terrorist attacks. TMT is rooted in the notion that people are motivated to survive, but are also aware of their inevitable mortality—leading to anxiety—while strong attachment to a cultural worldview acts to protect against this anxiety. The authors examined more than 1,600 people who were living in New York City on the day of the 9/11 attacks to gauge their level of concern and preparedness for fear of another terrorist attack. Boscarino et al.'s findings found being African American, Hispanic, female, or having a lower level of education related to higher level of fears of terrorism, with African American and Korean Americans reporting higher levels of concern about terrorism.²¹ These findings suggest demographic characteristics influence concern and fear about terrorism. These factors could be integrated into TMT to target specific groups in regards to preparedness for terrorist attacks. Other studies support these findings, such as a 2009 study by David Eisenman et al., which looked at the influence of being a vulnerable group and perception of personal risk of terrorism.²² This study found race influenced responses to the threat of terrorism, supporting the notion of the importance of sociodemographic factors to understanding responses to terrorism. Christopher Salvatore and Brian Gorman focused on gender and fear of terrorism in their 2006 study. Results of said study found that gender-based fear of terrorism closely mirrors the higher levels of fear females express in regards to other types of crime. This finding may be of particular note, as women could be targeted for prevention and preparedness strategies for terrorist attacks, as well and treatment programs are targeting those dealing with high levels of stress, fear, and anxiety due to the potential for or as a result of, terrorist attacks.²³ In a more recent study, Christopher

Salvatore and Gabriel Rubin used data from the General Social Survey (GSS) collected post 9/11 to examine individual-level protective actions to a future terrorist attack and the perceived effectiveness of these actions. Their study found several factors—including race and gender—influence responses to and perceived effectiveness of those responses.²⁴ The literature supports the importance of examining sociodemographic factors like race and gender in order to have a solid grasp on how a population responds to terrorism. To fully understand the role of specific emotional responses—in this case, anger and fear—they must first be defined.

Definitions and Ramifications of Anger and Fear

As George Marcus stated, "Understanding emotion has for a very long time been central to the ongoing attempt to understand human nature."²⁵ While it may sound simple, the concept of emotion is hard to pin down. Though fear is a common term whose definition seems obvious, it seems that authors that have studied responses to terror have grouped too broad an emotional range under the label "fear." To this end, it is important to define fear²⁶ and anger. Scholars that study emotions differentiate them by five characteristics: arousal, expression, feeling, cognitive antecedent, and action tendency.²⁷ For this paper, the latter two characteristics are most important.

In defining anger, Roger Petersen and Sarah Zukerman argue that a critical cognitive component of anger is the notion that an individual or group perpetrated a blameworthy action against one's self or group.²⁸ As such, the corresponding tendency is to exact revenge by punishing the perpetrating group or individual.²⁹ In terms of how anger impacts our responses, anger makes risky behaviors look less risky. For example, Leonie Huddy, Stanley Feldman, Charles Taber, and Gallya Lahav state, "Anxiety commonly produces an overestimation of risk and thus risk-averse behavior.... In contrast, anger tends to decrease perceived threat and leads to

heightened risk-taking behavior.”³⁰ In addition to influencing perceptions of risk, anger causes increased prejudices and stereotyping; these may lead to feelings of superiority to the people or groups who are viewed as victimizing them, and in turn influence acts of vengeance in which they perceive themselves as better than the group that made them feel “less.” Revenge also instills a sense of power and control for the victimized group or party. However, relative to fear’s reasonably slow decline, scholars have found that anger can spike quickly, but decreases at a much slower rate.³¹

This view of anger links well to the social psychologist’s theory of frustration-aggression, which states aggression or violence can be explained by the aggressive actor’s feelings of frustration.³² Frustration, of course, can be equated with anger as it arises due to a person feeling that an injustice has occurred and that some external factor is to blame. Further, the excitation-transfer theory of aggression also supports an angry response to terrorism. According to this theory, specific events physiologically arouse people and, for those events that anger, residual arousal (in the form of a residual physiological response such as an elevated heartbeat) can lead to lashing out at others even when they are not to blame for our initial anger.³³ In other words, anger causes one to seek vengeance, to “even the score”; fear causes a person to perceive even innocuous situations as threatening. Contrary to anger, fear makes an individual or group feel like their life or well-being is being threatened. People hide from or avoid things that they fear. As Smith states, assessments of within-group strength cause people to respond to inter-group conflict with anger and confrontation, whereas appraisals of in-group weakness lead people to respond to inter-group conflict with fear and avoidance.³⁴ Furthermore, Mackie, Devos, and Smith find that when insulted by an out-group member, angry responses predicted confrontation while fearful responses predicted avoidance.³⁵

Emotional Responses to Terrorism: Fear and Anger

Terrorist attacks prompt significant fear and anger in the populations who experience them. As expected, prior studies found that there are a marked range of emotional responses to terrorist attacks. For example, in their study of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)—which was prevalent throughout the United States as a result of the 9/11 attack—Silver, Holman, McIntosh, Poulin, and Gil-Rivas found long-term problems may result from terrorism-based victimization.³⁶ PTSD symptoms vary but often include difficulty concentrating, angry outbursts, difficulty sleeping, nightmares, and anxiety.³⁷ Other studies strongly support fear and anger to be common emotional responses to terrorism.³⁸

Emotional responses to events can be mixed, and that is the point. Too much of the terrorism literature focuses on fear and ignores anger. Both responses, in addition to other emotions, are present in response to terrorism and the presence of anger has significant ramifications for the study of responses to terror attacks. To date, research on emotional responses to terror attacks has primarily focused on public fear's role in the post-terror attack process. Typically, the concept of mass fear is measured by looking at the percentage of people in a given country fearful of terrorism. This fear is then typically linked to public approval for civil liberty abridgments or heightened security.³⁹ Studies show that fear guides the individual to seek guidance from his leaders. As Clemente and Kleiman underline, fear need not be based upon any real threat, making the perception of danger fomented by seemingly random terrorist attacks so inimical to democracy.⁴⁰

The existing models, thus, could be structured with an exogenous terror attack leading to mass fear which is then manipulated by government elites to push a range of counterterror policies such as “enhanced interrogation,” reductions in privacy rights and other civil liberties,

extended detention for terrorists, or even war. Here the level of mass fear is a constraint on government action since, presumably, if fear did not go up—or did not go up sufficiently, the government would be restrained in its action. Fear alone is thus the catalyst, precursor or lubricant that yields policy changes.

As discussed above, people responded with a wide range of emotions after the September 11 attacks; anger was particularly salient. A University of Chicago study conducted in the days and weeks after the attacks found that "the dominant reaction [to the attacks] was anger," with 65 percent of respondents answering in this way. New York residents, 73 percent of whom reported experiencing anger after the attacks, were even more filled with rage.⁴¹ More evidence for the salience of anger comes from Lerner, Gonzalez, Small, and Fischhoff, who establish that in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 (they polled study participants on September 20 and November 10, 2001), participants self-reported themselves as being markedly more angry than fearful, on average. Their study also found that people viewed the world as a less risky one when they were angry and a more risky one (a world full of threats) when fearful.⁴²

Anger's role in terrorism should be evident given that anger is an emotion felt when people feel that someone else is responsible for an injustice occurring. Studies demonstrate that an angry citizenry is more willing to support counterterrorism policies⁴³ and to oppose immigrants.⁴⁴ Friedland and Merari found that terror attacks "hardened" Israelis' attitudes towards terror groups and Palestinians, an example of such an emotion response.⁴⁵ Social scientists have long used the term "hardening of attitudes" as a euphemism for the emotion of anger.⁴⁶ As Friedland and Merari's polling study found, "there was no evidence of any willingness [on Israelis' part] to concede to terrorists."⁴⁷ Indeed, the opposite was true. Will Josiger shows that the second intifada only served to make Israelis see the prospects of peace as

increasingly dismal.⁴⁸ If fear were at work here, perhaps it could be argued that Israelis would seek peace to stop the violence against them. Instead, here anger is supported by the "hardening" of Israeli attitudes, i.e., their anger. If terrorism only elicited fear, then peace might be a likely outcome to an extended terror campaign as Israelis might cede to their fears. Instead, peace becomes less likely in the Israeli public's view due to anger directed at the terror campaign being fought against them.

Roger Giner-Sorolla and Angela Maitner note that descriptions of terrorism evinced anger when feelings of injustice were provoked in both British and American subjects.⁴⁹ By contrast, when the terrorist group was seen as authoritative, the subjects in both the British and American groups felt more fearful. More recently, Kim found that there is a relationship between collective anger in response to a terrorist attack and an individual's anger level, suggesting there is a relationship between societal level responses to terrorism and how individuals emotionally react.⁵⁰ This may have significant implications for support of counter-terrorism policies such as the Patriot Act. The link between feelings of injustice and anger is crucial because crimes and terrorism frequently elicit feelings that something unjust has occurred in the eyes of the victims. This means that the phenomenon of anger as an emotional response to terrorism must be an important and frequently occurring one. This may be of particular relevance when examining samples of college students as they are being socialized during an era of heightened awareness, fear, and anger in response to the threat of terrorism.

Scholars argue that college students are a population who are especially emotionally vulnerable to terrorist attacks.⁵¹ College is a challenging development period for many. College-age youth who experience terrorist attacks have increased levels of anxiety about future attacks. For example, Bosco and Harvey state, "Millennials will feel the impact even if they do not recall

the event, because they will see the after effects. Things will be different for their everyday lives even though they may not connect everything with 9/11."⁵² In other words, college-aged students live in a world transformed by the fear and anxiety around the prospect of another terrorist event such as 9/11. Moreover, college students are the next generation of practitioners in fields such as criminal justice, medicine, and others who will be tasked with responding to terrorist attacks, as well as being the next generation of legislators and politicians who will respond to the public's anxieties and concerns regarding the threat of terrorism. As such it is essential to understand how fear and anger impact college students' responses to terrorism.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore if anger is as important an emotional response as fear for survey respondents' reactions to terrorist violence. This study is exploratory, seeking to serve as a pilot study that can generate a greater understanding of anger based responses to terrorism. As stated in the introduction, this study sought to decipher whether anger is an essential variable for study in regards to the terror threat and the ramifications of inclusion of anger in this area of research.

The sample is a convenience sample of college undergraduates located at a university in the Eastern area of the United States. Payne and Chappel examine the benefits and weaknesses of utilizing students for survey-based studies. Benefits including the ease of access to student samples, the time and cost efficiency of using students, and relative ease of measuring change with a student sample. Additionally, the authors note that while student data is not generalizable as a national random sample, students do reflect the society and culture in which they live. Further, demographic factors make students more likely to be involved and impacted by crime and related issues, and the utilization of students for survey-based studies can be a beneficial

learning experience, giving them first-hand experience with being a subject in a research study.⁵³ Payne and Chappel also identify four fundamental weaknesses with the use of students' samples. The first concern is validity issues, as students may be subjected to a series of surveys from several projects throughout a semester. As such, factors such as fatigue or boredom may set in, and as Payne and Chappel state, those conducting studies have to question how seriously the students may take their responses. Second, there is the concern of social desirability, in particular as related to crime, victimization, and other sensitive topics. Students may feel compelled to provide the answers that are socially desirable, in this case, what their professor or the researcher may want. Third, there is a stigma attached to using students as samples. However, a variety of highly ranked journals in social science (e.g., *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, *Criminology*) publish studies utilizing student based samples. Finally, there are concerns related to generalizability. Students are part of the general population, however relative to the general population they typically are younger, have different income levels, a distinct subculture, and different life experiences.⁵⁴ Despite these concerns, college students do represent America's future leaders, a fact that mitigates some of the above concerns about surveying them. Deciphering how these future leaders react emotionally to terrorism certainly represents an important research goal.

Unlike victimization or crime base survey, the current study does not seek to examine the specific behavior of the students themselves but rather their attitudes and responses to scenarios, therefore limiting the impact of social desirability in responses. It should also be noted that none of the students surveyed were in classes taught by the authors and the surveys were distributed by research assistants, reducing some of the potential bias concerns.

Since data on people's fear-based reactions to terrorism is extensive but data is sparse for

their anger-based reactions, the authors constructed a survey on how people react emotionally to terrorism. The survey sought to compare those who responded with fear to those who responded with anger.

The survey was conducted using the unobtrusive split-third survey methodology employed by Kuklinski et al., because it was posited that respondents might falsify their emotional responses for reasons of social desirability bias.⁵⁵ Survey respondents were randomly assigned to three groups. All of the groups were primed by viewing a two-minute video that depicts terrorist violence from around the world (including images of September 11th, the aftermath of the 2005 London bombings, and terror victims in Israel).

Each group then received a survey that asked them five questions with the following prompt: "After watching the video, indicate how many of the statements below you agree. Don't choose which ones you agree with, only write how many you agree with on the blank line." The method is meant to get people to agree to statements that they might not otherwise agree with if they knew that their responses were known. Each question has three general statements about terrorism that are meant to be innocuous. The first group of survey takers is a baseline group; the baseline group's questions only contain the three generic statements about terrorism. This group is meant to exhibit how many of the generic responses the average respondent will agree. The next two groups are given the same survey with the same five questions—with one fundamental difference. The second group gets the same survey as the baseline group with an additional response choice for each question meant to measure their fear response. The third group also gets the same survey as the baseline group but this time with an additional response choice meant to measure their anger response. The average response rates for each question are then compared using simple ANOVA (analysis of variance) statistical analysis.

To illustrate, the first question on the baseline survey has the following three statements: "A terrorist's conception of religion is distorted;" "The September 11 attacks changed the world forever;" and "Terrorism has increased dramatically over the past several years." In the fear survey, a fourth statement is added: "Sometimes it is necessary to give up some individual rights to make it easier for the government to combat terrorism." By comparing the average number of statements respondents agreed within the baseline survey to the average number of statements agreed with by respondents in the anger and fear surveys, it can be inferred whether or not the fourth statement was, in general, agreed to or not. For instance, if the average baseline response to question 1 was agreement with two statements and the average fear response to question 1 was agreement with three statements, then it can be surmised that the extra "fear" statement was generally agreed to.

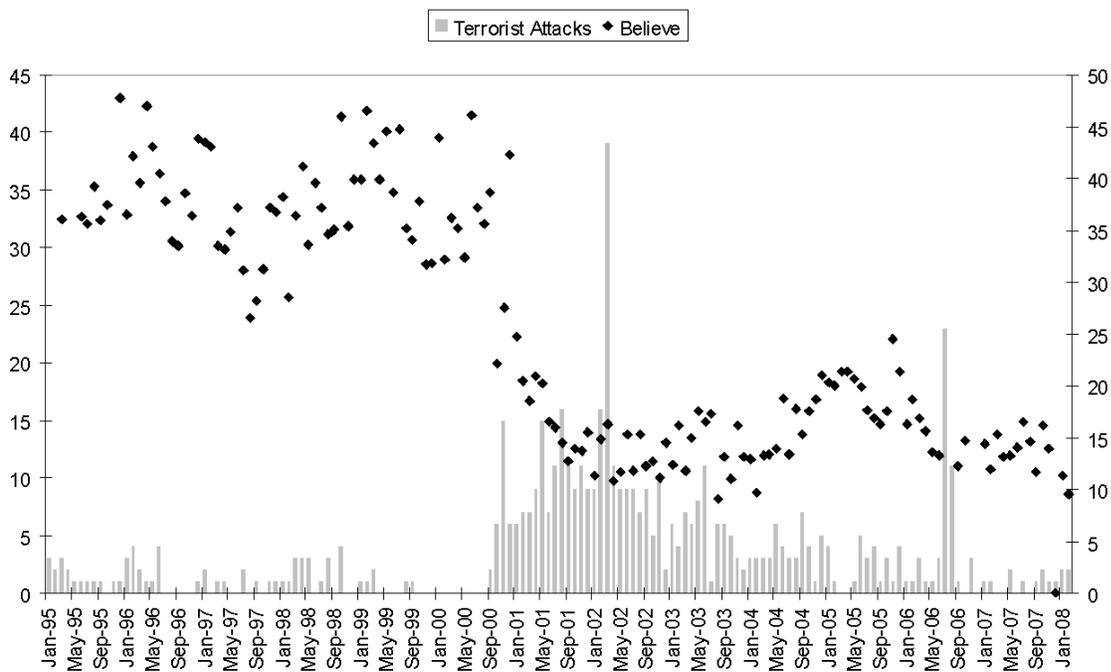
One hundred sixty-six survey respondents completed the surveys between February and April of 2010—fifty-five baseline surveys were completed, fifty-four anger surveys, and fifty-seven fear surveys. All of the survey respondents were undergraduate students at a university in the Eastern United States where the survey received approval from the Institutional Review Board. The gender breakdown was close—seventy-five males and eighty females (eleven respondents chose not to answer the gender question). The mean age of the respondents was 20.1 years old. 53.9 percent of the respondents were white, 10.2 percent were African American, 12.6 percent Hispanic, and 23.3 percent other ethnicities or no-responses. These percentages roughly hewed to the make-up of the university at the time, though more recently the university has shifted to a greater proportion of Hispanic students. The proportion of female students at the university is also greater than that of the attained sample. Political views leaned left: 72 respondents said they were liberal (43.1 percent), 62 said they were moderates (37.1 percent),

and 22 described themselves as conservatives (13.2 percent).

Results

As expected, both the fear and anger survey responses were different from the responses on the baseline survey—and those differences were statistically significant. However, there were no statistically significant differences found *between* the fear and anger surveys. That means that survey respondents were just as likely to respond with anger to the video on terrorism as they were with fear. The number of statements that the average fear survey respondent agreed with overall was almost the same as the number of statements the average anger survey respondent agreed.

*Chart 1: Likelihood of Peace between Israelis and Palestinians*⁵⁶



The three groups of survey respondents (baseline group, anger group, and fear group) were similar regarding gender, age and ethnicity. On political view, however, there was an interesting divergence. A full half of the survey respondents that described themselves as

"conservative" took the anger survey. Though conservatives were still the smallest group, it could be that people were labeling themselves conservative due to an artifact of the survey method. This was posited because respondents were asked about their political view after they answered questions about their views on terrorism. The anger surveys added responses tilt decidedly conservatively and reading these responses may have moved the opinion of respondents.

To give a more fine-grained analysis, the data for all five questions appear below:

Chart 2: Comparison of Three Survey Group

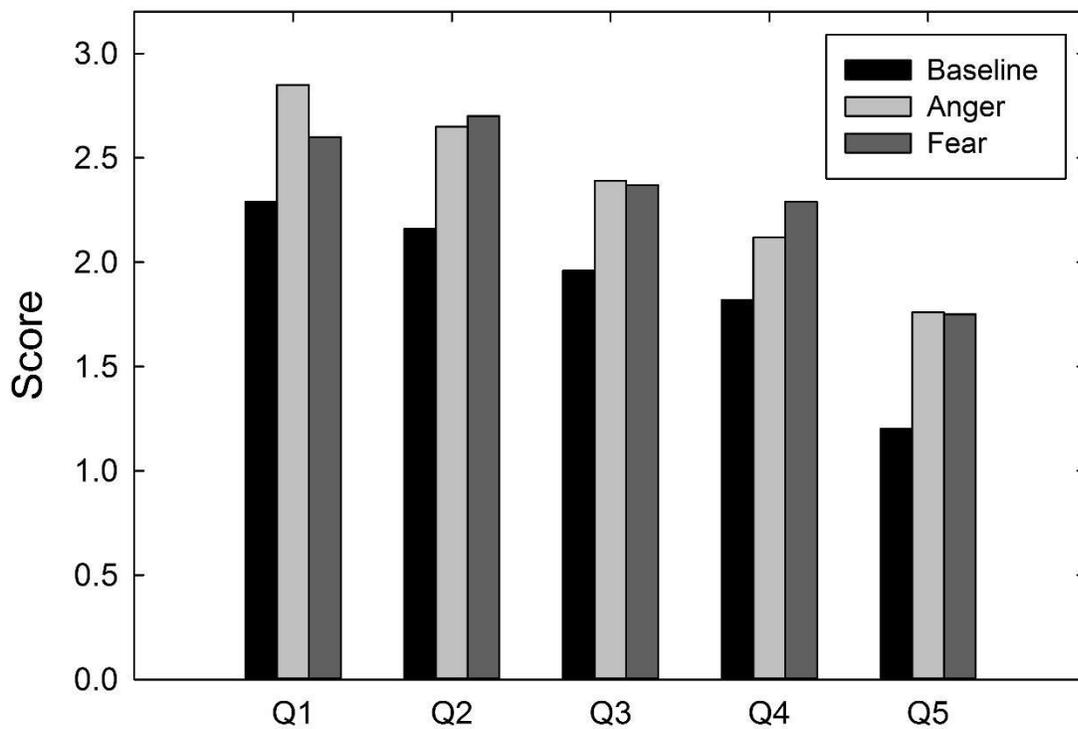


Table 1: Mean Scores for Five Survey Questions

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
Baseline	2.29	2.16	1.96	1.82	1.

Anger	2.85	2.65	2.39	2.12	1.76
Fear	2.6	2.7	2.37	2.29	1.75
Significance	0.001	0.001	0.013	0.017	0.001

In Bonferroni post-hoc analysis, the statistically significant differences were between the baseline group and the other two groups, but not between the anger and fear groups.

Chart 3: Comparison of Anger and Fear Groups

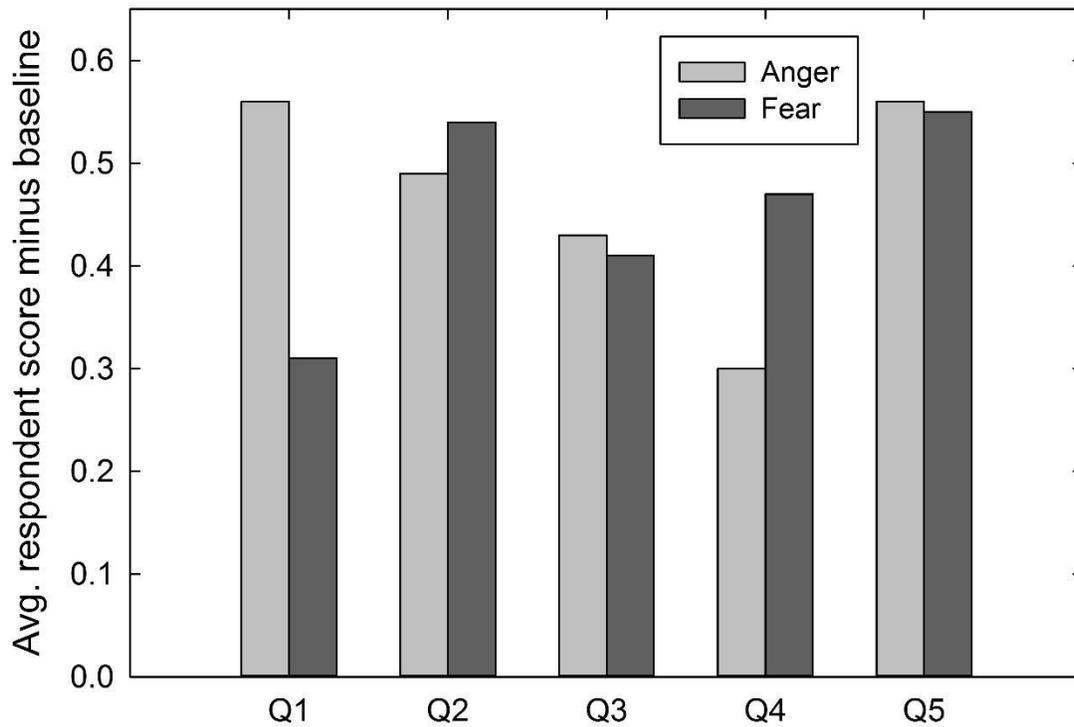


Table 2: Differences from the Baseline Mean for Anger and Fear Respondents

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
Anger	0.56	0.49	0.43	0.3	0.56
Fear	0.31	0.54	0.41	0.47	0.55
Advantage	Anger	Fear	Anger	Fear	Anger

The first question had the most significant difference between the fear and anger survey takers, though these findings were not statistically significant ($p=0.334$). The anger survey response, which stated that ethnic profiling of Arabs and Muslims should be acceptable at airports, got the most robust response to all questions. This finding supports previous research stating that people are willing to give up the civil liberties of minority groups rather than their own liberties.⁵⁷ Further supporting this point, the fear response here: "sometimes it is necessary to give up some individual rights to make it easier for our government to combat terrorism" got the second weakest of all the responses. For Question 2, the fear response, "torturing terror suspects only antagonizes our enemies and therefore should not be practiced," got a similar response to the anger response, "torture is admissible if it will produce information pertinent to national security." Here fear and anger were basically at a wash—with fear having a slight edge. Turning our attention to Question 3, which measured whether war is the best way to deal with terrorists, responses showed that the anger and fear responses were almost even. "War is the best way to deal with terrorists since the only thing they seem to understand is violence," the anger response, got a fair response as did the fear statement: "bringing our troops home immediately and putting a stop to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is the best way to decrease terrorist attacks." For Question 4, the anger response got the lowest result of an answer on either emotion-

testing survey. "In the long run, the benefits of the war on terrorism outweigh the costs to the American people" got a response rate of only 0.3 over the baseline. By contrast, the costs of the war on terrorism outweighing the benefits got 0.47. Next, in response to the terror threat being elevated, respondents gave strong fear and anger replies. Slightly more people said that the terror threat alert being elevated focused them on their enemies and made them want to help the authorities in any way possible. However, the fear response was also strong: many respondents also said that elevation of the threat alert level, made them worry about the welfare of themselves and their family. Finally, an index variable was created by adding up all of the statements from all five questions that each respondent agreed. The index variable was meant to measure the overall fear or anger response of a given respondent. On the index variable, the baseline group averaged 9.43 statements agreed with (out of a possible 15) while the anger group agreed with 11.72 (out of a possible 20) and the fear group agreed with 11.70 (out of a possible 20). That means that the average respondent to the anger and fear surveys agreed with about 2.3 of the extra response options.

Discussion

Anger and fear received equally strong responses from survey respondents in response to the terrorism video and survey. The importance of anger in determining responses to terrorism was supported by strong support for ethnic profiling of Arabs and Muslims, support for torture of terrorists, support for war against terrorists, and a feeling that raised threat alert levels focused respondents on "our enemies." The weakest link came in one of the theorized outcomes of anger: willingness to take risks. Respondents generally did not think that the benefits of the war on terror outweighed the costs, though this could be because the survey was conducted at a time when the so-called war on terror has been dragging on for almost nine years. The second

weakest response rate was for the statement on war being the only way to deal with terrorists.

The importance of fear in determining responses to terrorism was supported by responses about the costs of going to war outweighing the benefits (risk averseness), respondents feeling worried about themselves or family members when the threat alert level was raised, and torture only serving to antagonize our enemies. Like with anger, the response on war was mild. In this case, it was bringing troops home that got a mild response. The weakest response for fear, however, came with the statement that sometimes we need to give up civil liberties to help the government combat terrorism. In sum, both fear and anger got some support, but neither had overwhelming support. This fact is most plainly shown by the index variable outcome which shows that a shade less than half of the "test" questions were answered by respondents on average and that the fear and anger surveys yielded nearly identical overall scores.

Similar results were achieved by Kim who conducted a similar study in 2009. His work on the role of anger and fear in pushing policy support after terror attacks showed anger having an indirect effect on people's support for counterterror policies. Kim's study was built upon surveys that attempted to elicit angry and fearful responses in individuals. Like in this study, Kim found fear and anger work together to elicit support for counterterror policy or anti-immigrant responses. The limitations of Kim's study are the same as ours—time elapsed since terror incidents occurred and the experimental setting blunts the emotional impact of terror attacks and makes studies challenging to carry out.⁵⁸

These results allow us to answer the questions posed at the outset of the study. Anger—alongside fear—is an essential variable for the study of terrorism reactions. It helps explain support for ethnic profiling, torture, and war, and a binary view of the world as being populated by allies and enemies. These insights are critical to understanding responses to terrorism and

need to be better integrated into terrorism research—a revised model for how terror reactions work can be seen in the below chart.

Policy Implications

The findings of this study have implications for how the public views issues related to terrorism. As discussed above both fear and anger were identified as influencing responses to terrorism with strong support for the ethnic profiling of Arabs and Muslims, torturing terrorism suspects, and supporting the war on terror. These findings provide support for policies geared towards more aggressive anti-terrorism strategies which have become increasingly popular with the public post 9/11. As policymakers continue to balance the needs of public safety, counter-terrorism, and civil liberties findings such as these may be referenced as a gauge of what the public may be willing to compromise in the interest of safety. Utilizing a sample of college students may be telling of what these future policymakers will view as appropriate responses to terrorism in the coming years.

This study may also provide guidance as to how emotional reactions shape public demands of policymakers, even if those responses are not the most judicious or grounded in solid empirical science. Policy makers need to gauge to what degree they will incorporate public views into policy, as well as the influence fear and anger may have on the perceptions of terrorism responses. Results of this study may also be utilized as proxies for understanding the public's attitudes towards limiting the rights of suspected terrorists or those convicted of terrorism.

Limitations/Future Research

This study was a pilot study and attempted to extend the understanding of the emotional responses to terrorism by examining the anger and fear based responses of a sample of students. Although this study provides some significant findings and lays the foundation for future studies,

it does have some limitations. First, the nature of our convenience sample limits generalizability. Results would only apply to similar student samples at similar institutions. However, as a pilot study, our findings allowed us to present some quick results, laying the foundation for a more comprehensive, national, randomized sample. Second, the size of the sample, while appropriate for the analyses presented and reflective of what is typically used in pilot or exploratory studies is relatively small compared to larger, national based surveys. The sample size limited the types of analyses that could be conducted, but still, support the use of the survey on a larger scale study. Finally, the survey data was collected in 2010, as such scenarios describing more recent terrorist attacks (e.g., Paris 2015, Ariana Grande Concert 2017) were not presented.

The findings of this study suggest that emotional responses to terrorism are an essential area of inquiry in the social sciences. As terrorism continues to plague society, studies need to explore the long-term influence of these attacks on the public's emotional responses. This calls for the use of longitudinal surveys exploring these issues with national samples, and this would allow scholars and policymakers to have a better understanding of how trends in terrorism including new attacks, rising or changing terrorist groups, or inactivity/lack of terrorist attacks shape the public's emotional responses. Future studies may also want to target respondents across the political spectrum, as mentioned above those with a conservative orientation may not have been adequately represented in this study.

Conclusion

The literature on terrorism is replete with discussions of fears and threats evoked by terrorists, and this is an artifice of the term "terrorism," and of its history beginning with Robespierre's "Reign of Terror" during the French Revolution.⁵⁹ While terrorists may try to instill fear in their target populations, anger's role in our responses to terror—and terrorists'

goals—is also a critical factor. Indeed, in our survey, students were just as angry as they were fearful of terrorism. The black flag of ISIS may invoke fear, but its many atrocities also are meant to make us angry so that we enter into conflicts haphazardly. An angry response to terrorism would probably be a disproportionate one, and terrorist recruitment feeds on the injustices and grievances wrought by civilian deaths and foreign occupation. Understanding that anger is as vital as fear in our responses to terror helps explain terrorist behavior as well as that of their targeted governments and populations, and hopefully can give credence to more calculated responses to terror attacks. Many people are fond of saying that a fearful response to terrorism, such as avoiding trains, means "the terrorists win." We should also note that "the terrorists win" when governments and populations respond with anger.

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