

## American Perceptions of Terrorism: A Q-Methodological Analysis of Types

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**Abstract** *The literature on terrorism makes a number of significant predictions of the effects of media coverage of terrorism on audiences, public policy, and terrorism itself. Many of these predictions are contradictory, and little or no empirical social-scientific research has been done to determine public perceptions of international terrorism. Q-methodology offers a means of identifying groups or "types" of persons who share similar attitudes toward a phenomenon. Use of Q-methodology here revealed four types of respondents sharing similar views of international terrorism. These distinctive types helped shed light on the many diverse and contradictory predictions of the effects of terrorism coverage on American public opinion and public policy.*

**Keywords** Terrorism, perceptions, attitudes, Q-methodology, American, rhetorical visions, public opinion.

The literature on media coverage of terrorism is replete with predictions of the effects coverage has on the readers, listeners, and viewers of journalistic accounts of acts of terrorism. Scholars investigating terrorism have focused on the effects of coverage rather than on the effects of exposure to actual incidents because so few persons have ever been exposed even indirectly to acts of terrorism. Most Americans get their information about terrorism from media news accounts rather than from direct exposure to terrorism. Hence, any opinions or perceptions that most Americans have of terrorists and terrorism will be formed at least in part as the result of media portrayals of terror.

Reading and drawing concrete conclusions from the extant literature on the effects of terrorism coverage is difficult. The difficulty arises from the sheer number of effects predicted, the seemingly contradictory nature of the predicted effects, conceptual and methodological weaknesses in the studies, and conceptual and methodological differences between the studies conducted.

Among the predicted effects of mediated coverage of terrorists incidents are: (1) increased public fear; (2) increased reliance on government for control of terrorism; (3) greater/lower willingness to use violence against terrorists; (4) greater/lower sympathy for the terrorists; (5) increased/decreased credibility of the media, terrorists, and governments involved; (6) national unity in nations victimized by terrorism; and (7) greater/lower understanding of terrorism and terrorists. The following literature review should reveal some of the difficulties involved in coming to any concrete conclusions about what is really known about the effects of terrorism coverage.

## Literature Review

A frequently made prediction is that media coverage of acts of terrorism increases public fear. No scholar is more affiliated with this position than George Gerbner. One of the reasons for the great attention paid to fear as a response to media coverage is the widespread belief that terrorists *intend* to create fear in the audience.<sup>1</sup> Jenkins, for example, has argued that terrorists have succeeded in causing "worldwide alarm" with their tactics, and Picard believes media distortions of the reality of terrorism spread fear "throughout the populace."<sup>2</sup> In rebuttal, Dowling has argued that although terrorists may try to create fear, the form in which television covers terrorist violence precludes the actual creation of fear.<sup>3</sup>

Another reason for concern over the creation of fear in media coverage of terrorism is Gerbner's concern that media coverage reduces the "community's ability to think rationally and creatively about injustice." The result is that government institutions use the increased fear and diminished rationality "to mobilize support for repression, often in the form of wholesale state violence and terror and military action, presented as justified by the provocation." Gerbner cites many examples of public opinion polls taken after terrorist events which indicate that there is a widespread willingness to rely on governmental measures—even those which might make a nation "somewhat resemble a police state."<sup>4</sup>

Another problem with mediated depictions of terrorism is that they tend to increase people's desire to see terrorists dealt with violently.<sup>5</sup> Dowling found that journalistic depictions of the Iran hostage crisis as a humiliation to the United States, for example, motivated Americans to seek a violent solution and/or punishment of Iranians.<sup>6</sup> Lule examined the use of myth in news coverage of the *Archille Lauro* hijacking and discovered that it enhanced public identification with the victim and thereby gave the U.S. government fertile ground for arousing desire for retribution.<sup>7</sup> Falk examined the paradoxical surveys that revealed widespread American support for bombing Libya in retaliation for terrorist acts even though only a minority of respondents believed retaliation would deter terrorism, while the vast majority thought it either would not reduce or would actually increase terrorism.<sup>8</sup> This indicates a strong motivation for violent retaliation. Knight and Dean, Flemming and Stohl, and Palmerton are among the scholars whose studies have concluded that media coverage of terrorism enhances public willingness to use violence against terrorists.<sup>9</sup>

Contradicting these findings are scholars arguing that media coverage of terrorism reduces public support for violent responses to terrorism. DeSousa concluded that editorial cartoons gave Americans an opportunity to express their hostilities without resorting to violence.<sup>10</sup> Government spokespersons often express concern that live television coverage of terrorism, especially interviews with hostages and their families, effectively rules out any violent governmental response that might result in the death of hostages.<sup>11</sup>

Many media critics worry that coverage glorifies terrorism and increases sympathy for and understanding of terrorists. Alexander has noted that terrorists commit their deeds "with a view of making their violent deeds appear heroic."<sup>12</sup> Despite the frequency with which this concern is expressed by media critics and government officials, and the terrorists' belief in its validity, academicians often argue that this effect simply does not occur. In the latter category we must include Decker and Rainey's conclusion that media audiences receive no "sympathetic education" about terrorists or their causes because the media rarely explain them "in any detail." In fact, Decker and

Rainey conclude, "Statements which boldly assert that media coverage provides desired publicity for the terrorist, or that the media stage is the carrot enticing terrorists to engage in more activity, or that terrorists' causes are fully and sympathetically explained by the media, are at best not descriptive and at worst misleading."<sup>13</sup>

A number of studies have examined the effects of media coverage of terrorism on the credibility of the media, the terrorists, and the government(s) affected by terrorism. These studies, too, are contradictory at times.

Goldman has argued that the forms of television coverage make the networks appear more in control of events and more credible than the government.<sup>14</sup> This critically derived conclusion has some intuitive appeal, but given the widespread attacks on the media for alleged excesses in covering terrorist incidents, other factors may outweigh any enhancement in media credibility produced by the forms of television coverage.

Much concern has been expressed that coverage of terrorism enhances terrorists' credibility. Dowling has argued that the violence required to achieve media access precludes terrorists from enhancing their credibility as sources of persuasion.<sup>15</sup> Importantly, Dowling cites Weisband and Roguly's assertion that terrorists seek an altogether different form of "credibility." In their words, "For the terrorist, the path to legitimacy is through one's reputation for resilience, for self-sacrifice and daring, for brutality, and, above all, for effective discipline over words and action. . . . It is the credibility that violence produces, whenever it appalls, that renders terrorism horrifying yet powerful and, if successful, self-legitimizing."<sup>16</sup> Other writers have indicated their concern that this kind of credibility is enhanced by media coverage, and still others have expressed their concern that media coverage equalizes terrorist and government credibility.<sup>17</sup>

A related concern of scholars (in contrast to Gerbner's concern about coverage increasing reliance on government) is the fear that coverage of terrorism may reduce the credibility of the government. Dowling has argued that the credibility of the Carter administration was reduced, while that of Reagan was enhanced, by the coverage of the Iran hostage crisis.<sup>18</sup> Scott and Smith have argued that one of the main purposes of confrontational rhetors is to provoke the government into extreme responses that "show us how ugly you really are."<sup>19</sup> Schlesinger has argued that Johnson's handling of the *Pueblo* affair produced coverage that kept its credibility intact, while Carter's handling of Iran and Reagan's handling of the hijacking of TWA flight 847 threatened their credibility.<sup>20</sup> Picard has found that both newspaper and television coverage of terrorism focused on governmental responses rather than on the events themselves, hence providing a foundation for believing that news coverage affects persons' perceptions of government.<sup>21</sup>

Another suspected result of media coverage of terrorism is national unity. DeSousa examined editorial cartoons on the Iran hostage crisis and concluded that their ethnocentric, culturally bound messages may have increased the sense of U.S. national unity.<sup>22</sup> Dowling examined print coverage of the Iran hostage crisis and concluded that the fantasy themes found in the coverage enhanced American national unity.<sup>23</sup>

News media spokespersons defend coverage of terrorism by arguing that terrorism is news and that people have a right to know about it. Implicit in this is the assumption that coverage enhances public understanding of terrorism. Picard is one scholar whose research indicates that the forms which terrorism coverage takes tend not to increase public understanding. As Picard concludes, "Partially because of its sensational approach, and the lack of context, historical understanding, and grasp of the political and social issues involved, media make it difficult for the public to understand terrorism."<sup>24</sup>

## Summary

The literature on terrorism abounds with predictions of its effects. Since these predictions are contradictory, only further research can resolve their apparent contradictions and inconsistencies. Much of the existing research on effects has relied on qualitative analysis to predict effects based on various theoretical foundations. The only way to test these predictions is with quantitative analyses of public perceptions. As we have already argued, most persons' perceptions of terrorism are the result of media influences, so any test of these perceptions amounts to a test of media effects. The present study is an exploratory such study of public perceptions of terrorism.

## Significance

The significance of studying the effects of media coverage of terrorism on public perceptions apparently is not a question to the many fine scholars who already have devoted their time to the issue. However, readers not acquainted with the literature may not be familiar with the rationale for these studies. We will not belabor the rationale here, but we will present some of the reasons such studies are important. These reasons fall into two categories: the pragmatic and the academic.

The pragmatic reasons for studying the effects of terrorism coverage begin and end with the assumption that public policy toward terrorism is, or may be, influenced in some way by public attitudes and beliefs about terrorism. Dobkin has analyzed at length the process by which media coverage has made terrorism into a public problem.<sup>25</sup> The process by which public opinion affects policy decisions is complex and poorly understood, but has three dimensions.

First, politicians desiring to implement certain policies in a free society are freer to act when they have some base of support for their action. That is, political processes being what they are, only a fairly wide consensus that a policy is desirable or wise will assure policymakers that the resources required to carry out the policy will be made available and that opponents will be unable or unwilling to oppose the policy. Public perceptions of terrorism, then, may influence the freedom leaders how to act—whether wisely or foolishly.

Second, there is the case in which opportunistic candidates for (re)election seize on an issue upon which they feel people can be manipulated to support them, even if they know the policy to be foolhardy. Having been elected, the candidate may feel compelled to carry out the policy. Some have charged that Reagan's promises of retaliation against terrorism may have compelled him to bomb Libya.<sup>26</sup> Bush's use of the flag during his campaign and current support for a Constitutional amendment against flag desecration may be similarly related.

The final dimension of the process is that public perceptions of candidates and office-holders influence voting. Hence, if media coverage of terrorism influences perceptions of politicians, it influences who wins and what policies are subsequently implemented. Dowling and Bostdorff have both argued that media coverage of Carter's handling of the Iran hostage crisis contributed greatly to Reagan's victory in 1980.<sup>27</sup>

Academically, the significance of the study is at once more general and simpler to express. That is, when existing research is contradictory and confusing, one proper response is more research. When existing research is critical and the dispute is over observable effects, empirical quantitative research may provide the best way to resolve the controversy.

## Purpose

The purpose of this preliminary investigation was to determine the efficacy of Q-methodology as a tool to explain perceptions of the American public regarding international terrorism. Through Q-methodology, the researchers sought to identify distinct views of terrorism and the significant variables characterizing those views.

## Method

A fundamental technique of Q-methodology is Q-sorting. Individuals sort statements (or other stimuli) according to an evaluative criterion (i.e., agree-disagree, like me-unlike me, beautiful-ugly). Stephenson, the originator of Q-method, asserts:

Q-sorts are operations of "focalizing attention" under given conditions of instruction, in which measurement is for a person's feeling and belief with self reference. . . . The individual, in Q-sorting, may of course use judgment, reason, and comprehension, all of which we call conscious. But the underpinning is "affectability," and quantification is with respect to feeling, belief, and self reference. The outcome for any individual is operant factor structure . . . a structure that is indicative of objective properties of communicability of which the person is quite unaware.

Q-sorts are correlated and submitted to factor analysis to identify patterns of responses, that is, unique ways of responding to the stimuli. Persons who sort in a similar fashion are viewed as a common type. Through examining and contrasting the sorting behavior of each type, the researcher is able to examine the "phenomenological world of the individual (or small numbers of individuals) without sacrificing the power of the statistical analysis."<sup>29</sup>

Selection of appropriate statements (or stimuli) becomes the prime concern in the construction of a Q-sort. Because the Q-statements compose a sample of all statements relevant to the phenomenon being investigated, the Q-sort must be representative. Usually theory guides the selection of statements, i.e., a Q-sort to measure interpersonal needs may include statements reflecting the needs for inclusion, control, and affection, because interpersonal communication theory suggests that these three needs motivate interpersonal communication. Additionally, the statements must be meaningful to the subjects, i.e., they should use language common to the respondents.

### *Development of the Instrument*

Because of the preliminary, heuristic nature of this study, the researchers did not approach the construction of the Q-sort with an a priori theoretical base. Instead the researchers interviewed individuals and based the structure of the Q-sort on the themes presented. Sixteen individuals (undergraduate and graduate college students, college faculty members, and members of the local community) volunteered to be interviewed. From tape recordings, statements were transcribed to cards and thematic categories were identified. Individual statements applied to one or more of the following categories: definitions of terrorism, evaluations of types of terrorism, broad statements of value, personal reactions to acts of terrorism, role of the United States, scene or setting for terrorism, motivation for terrorism (goals of terrorists and causes of terrorism), charac-

ters (individuals, groups, nations) involved in terrorism or participating in the drama of an event of terrorism.

Definitions of terrorism ranged from the general and abstract (i.e., "uncalled for hatred," "hostile actions," and "an invasion of privacy"), to the specific and concrete (i.e., acts of killing, hijacking, bombing, and hostage-taking), to the metaphorical (i.e., "terrorism is a Russian out of uniform").

Some statements evaluated a specific act of terrorism (i.e., "The worst type of terrorism is holding hostages and making families wonder and suffer" and "Attacking innocent civilians in the day-to-day realm is the worst type of terrorism"). Others applied values more broadly (i.e., "It's never right to kill") or expressed personal reactions (i.e., "I feel scared when Americans are killed" and "I want to kill those hateful bastards").

Many statements pertained to the role America has played or should play vis-à-vis international terrorism. Four such statements (originating in the interviews) were worded to parallel items used in Cragan and Shields' Q-study of the three prevailing views of U.S. foreign policy. Cragan and Shields called these three prevailing views the cold war, neoisolationism, and power politics views of U.S. foreign policy. Two statements reflected the neoisolationist vision because the interviews indicated the need for both statements.<sup>30</sup>

Some statements identified the *world* as the scene for terrorism: a world of hatred and danger and without honor and dignity. That world, however, often was contrasted with the United States (i.e., "We are fortunate that terrorism has not been a real problem in this country like in the rest of the world"). While some respondents referred to Ireland/Great Britain and Central America, most associated terrorism with the Middle East.

Statements pertaining to the goals of terrorists focused primarily on seeking recognition for a cause or "changing the system" (noble motives) and seeking personal attention, power, or satisfaction (selfish motives). The respondent who identified the United States as "the world's greatest terrorist nation" (as exemplified by the dropping of the *second* atomic bomb), attributed "American terrorism" to the need to dominate and control. Statements attributed "external terrorism" to frustration, hatred, corrupt/unfair political systems, "age-old religious practices," unwillingness/inability to work within "the system," and wanting "everything right now."

References to actors in the drama of terrorism tended to be general: terrorists, innocent people/civilians, hostages, the press, America/the United States/Americans, the Russians, the military, Iran, Libya, Israel, Arabs, and fanatics/the unbalanced/the insane. Only a few respondents referred to the Irish or the IRA, and only one to Greenpeace. Even when asked to recall specific acts of terrorism, few respondents mentioned terrorist groups by name. One respondent said, "I don't remember those names. Just when I think of terrorists, I see olive skin, dark hair, and a beard." Occasionally a respondent used the name of Khomeini, Qaddafi, or Arafat—or asked the interviewer for help in remembering the name.

Noteworthy was the reluctance of most respondents to identify the act of terrorism they best remembered. Those who responded often made factual errors, and/or combined details from different events. For instance, one respondent referred to the shooting of "the man in the wheel chair" whose body was "tossed to the ground from the plane" (hence confusing the hijackings of the *Achille Lauro* and TWA flight 847).

From the broad range of issues presented, the researchers prepared 49 statements for the Q-sort.

### Subjects

Forty-one students enrolled in a basic course in public speaking or interpersonal communication at a midwestern university completed the terrorism Q-sort. Participation was voluntary.

### Analysis

The subjects produced 37 usable sorts, i.e., sorts that contained the number of each Q-statement. The sorts were analyzed using QUANL, an established, Q-factor analysis program. The program correlated the individual sorts and executed principal-component factor analysis retaining unity on the diagonals. Varimax rotation was performed to produce a simple-structure solution.

### Findings

Analysis of the 37 Q-sorts using the QUANL program produced four types, or views toward terrorism. The four-factor, simple-structure solution accounted for 54.0% of the total variance among the sorts: factor 1 accounted for 20.6%; factor 2, 7.2%; factor 3, 11.8%; and factor 4, 14.5%.

Although only the arrays of Type 1 and Type 3 were significantly correlated at the .01 level, the correlations between Type 1 and both Type 2 and Type 4 approached significance (see Table 1). The relationship between Type 1 and each other type suggests a commonality of opinion underlying the sorting behavior of the subjects. In fact, eight of the 49 statements were "consensus items," that is, the greatest difference between pairs of  $z$  scores for each of the items did not exceed 1.0 among the four types (see Table 2).

Of the 37 subjects, 18 loaded significantly ( $p < .01$ ) on one factor only; 18 loaded significantly on two factors; and one failed to load significantly on any factor (see Table 3). Among the 16 subjects who loaded highest on Type 1, two also loaded on Type 2, seven on Type 3, and four on Type 4. None of the four subjects who loaded highest on Type 2 loaded significantly on another type. Among the seven subjects who loaded highest on Type 3, one also loaded significantly on Type 1 and two loaded on Type 4. Among the 10 subjects who loaded highest on Type 4, two also loaded significantly on Type 1 and one on Type 2.

### Interpretation of Q-Types

To aid the interpretation of the Q-types, QUANL provides an array of  $z$  scores for each type. The typical array is a weighted average of individuals' scores for the item. The more highly individuals load on a factor, the more their scores contribute to the typical array. The typical array represents a pattern underlying the sorting behavior, a concrete representation of individual subjectivity. QUANL also identifies the highest and lowest scores for each item among the types and computes the difference between the extreme score and the arithmetic mean of the remaining scores (DZA).  $Z$  scores and DZA scores for items appear in the interpretation below. The appearance of a DZA score indicates the  $z$  score for the item was either the highest (+) or lowest (-) among the four typical arrays.

*Type 1. The Frightened Philosopher.* Type 1 treated *terrorism* as a devil term: It is never justified, is a major threat to world peace, is personally threatening, and must be ad-

**Table 1**  
Pearsonian Product Moment Correlations between  
Q-Typal Arrays

Type	2	3	4
1	.351	.373*	.332
2		.190	.267
3			.012

\* $P < .01$ .

dressed with diplomacy and military strength (but not to the point of engaging in terrorism); terrorists are insane opportunists who think they have the right to do whatever it takes to accomplish their goals.

Type 1 appeared to be preoccupied with the (in)justice of terrorism. More strongly than any other type, Type 1 endorsed the ideas that terrorism that harms innocent people can never be justified (item 16:  $z = +2.4$ , DZA = +1.5) and that terrorism serves no common good (item 45:  $z = +1.6$ , DZA = +1.9). Similarly, Type 1 most strongly disagreed that terrorism is not wrong if you believe in your cause strongly (item 35:  $z = -2.2$ , DZA = -1.8) and that there are times when acts of terrorism are justified (item 12:  $z = -2.2$ , DZA = -2.3). Additionally, Type 1 strongly rejected the idea that it's easy to justify American acts of terrorism because we always have good reasons for our acts (item 19:  $z = -1.6$ ). More so than any other type, Type 1 rejected the idea that sometimes a system is so far gone the only way to change it is through terrorism (item 15:  $z = -1.5$ , DZA = -1.3). Only Type 1 rejected the notion that only through terrorism can causes get attention (item 11:  $z = -.5$ , DZA = -1.3).

Type 1 identified international terrorism as a major threat to peace and order in the world (item 8:  $z = -1.9$ ) and more strongly than other types indicated feeling scared when Americans are harmed or killed by terrorists (item 30:  $z = +0.9$ , DZA = +1.0).

**Table 2**  
Consensus Items and Average z-Scores

Item	Description	Average z-Score
33.	Most of the world's terrorism is the result of conflict in the Middle East.	0.82
36.	Terrorism shows there is a lot of hatred in the world.	0.61
24.	I usually don't know enough about situations to know if a specific act of terrorism is justified.	-0.04
39.	The world is a dangerous place without honor and dignity.	-0.33
10.	The worst type of terrorism is hijacking planes.	-0.60
26.	When the media label an act as terrorism, they're usually right.	-0.61
2.	Terrorism would not occur if world political systems were fair.	-0.78
7.	Terrorists are self-centered, spoiled brats.	-1.01



**Table 3**  
Number of Subjects Loading on Q-Types

Type	Number of Subjects Loading Highest on This Type	Number of Subjects Loading Purely* on This Type
1	16	4
2	4	4
3	7	3
4	10	7

\*Subjects loaded at the .01 level on one and only one factor or type.

Type 1 appeared to believe that while the United States must respond to terrorism with diplomacy and military strength (item 31:  $z = +1.2$ ), it should not get involved in hurting innocent people to help other countries (item 17:  $z = +1.0$ ). The United States can best respond to terrorism by providing a model of freedom and stability for the world (item 18:  $z = +1.1$ , DZA = +0.6). Those categorized as Type 1 respondents hence have endorsed policy statements that fall under Cragan and Shield's power politics and neoisolationism visions of U.S. foreign policy. Type 1 was neutral toward the cold war vision (item 1:  $z = 0.0$ ) and slightly negative toward the other neoisolationist statement (item 43:  $z = -0.5$ ) that the United States should no longer play policeman [sic] to the world.

With two exceptions, Type 1 placed toward the center of the sort statements referring to types of terrorism. Type 1 endorsed the idea that Libyan attacks on U.S. planes and Iranian attacks on U.S. navy ships are terrorist acts (item 27:  $z = +1.3$ , DZA = +0.6) and agreed strongly that attacking innocent civilians in the day-to-day realm is the worst type of terrorism (item 42:  $z = +1.1$ ). All other statements regarding types of terrorism appeared less than 0.5 standard deviation from the mean of the sort.

Type 1 appeared to dehumanize terrorists. More so than any other type, Type 1 rejected the ideas that most terrorists are sane, reasonable people responding to an unreasonable world (item 41:  $z = -1.8$ , DZA = -1.7) and that terrorism is a last resort by people who have tried everything else (item 23:  $z = -1.2$ , DZA = -1.2). Instead, Type 1 indicated terrorists are looking for a fast way to get in the press (item 37:  $z = +1.2$ ) and feel they have a right to do whatever it takes to accomplish their goals (item 48:  $z = +1.1$ , DZA = +1.1).

*Type 2. The Humanistic/Cold-War Patriot.* Type 2 reflected the views of a cold-war patriot tempered by concern for human needs. Type 2 indicated that international terrorism poses a major threat to world peace (item 8:  $z = -1.6$ ), but tended to view the problem as one that has not been a real problem in the United States (item 29:  $z = +1.5$ , DZA = +0.7), one that is primarily the result of conflict in the Middle East (item 33:  $z = +1.1$ ). Yet Type 2 appears to remain vigilant: Type 2 alone rejected the idea that terrorism gets more publicity than it deserves (item 6:  $z = -1.0$ , DZA = -1.9) and, as did Type 3, strongly denied ignoring news about terrorism or being numbed to it and by it (item 34:  $z = -1.5$ ).

Concern about the Soviets' role in international terrorism distinguished Type 2 who most strongly endorsed the statement: "The United States should act forcefully to pro-

tect the world from Russian terrorism" (item 1:  $z = +1.6$ ,  $DZA = +2.1$ ). This statement endorses the cold war rhetorical vision identified by Cragan and Shields. Consistently, and although all other types strongly rejected the assertion that the Russians are behind most acts of international terrorism, Type 2 did not (item 21:  $z = +0.5$ ,  $DZA = +2.1$ ). Type 2 endorsed the power politics vision statement that diplomacy and military strength are the solution to terrorism (item 31:  $z = +1.0$ ). Type 2 slightly endorsed the neoisolationist statement that the best U.S. response to terrorism is to provide a model of freedom and democracy for the world (item 18:  $z = +0.42$ ), but slightly rejected the neoisolationist statement that America should no longer be the policeman of the world (item 43:  $z = -0.69$ ).

More strongly than any other type, Type 2 endorsed the idea that it's embarrassing when small countries get away with terrorizing the United States (item 4:  $z = +1.3$ ,  $DZA = +1.2$ ). Unlike the other types, Type 2 strongly rejected the idea that America is engaged in terrorism (item 38:  $z = -1.4$ ,  $DZA = -2.1$ ), but was neutral to the idea that America is not involved in terrorism (item 14:  $z = -0.0$ ,  $DZA = -0.8$ ). Type 2 tempered expressions of patriotism with expressions of human concern. Type 2 disagreed most strongly with the statement "It's easy to justify American acts of terrorism. We always have good reasons for our acts" (item 19:  $z = -1.9$ ). However, Type 2 denied that when American troops bomb civilian food supplies or mine harbors, it's terrorism (item 47:  $z = -0.6$ ).

Type 2 identified the worst types of terrorism as holding hostages (item 22:  $z = +1.4$ ,  $DZA = +1.1$ ) and attacking innocent civilians in the day-to-day realm (item 42:  $z = +1.1$ ). Although not as extremely as did Type 1, Type 2 indicated that terrorism that harms innocent people can never be justified (item 16:  $z = +1.4$ ). More strongly than did any other type, Type 2 endorsed the value that it's always wrong to kill people, even for a just cause (item 3:  $z = 1.2$ ,  $DZA = +1.7$ ). While not as extremely as did Type 1, Type 2 rejected the idea that terrorism is not wrong if you believe in your cause strongly (item 35:  $z = -1.1$ ).

Demonstrating considerable empathy for terrorists, Type 2 responded strongly to statements about the causes of terrorism. Terrorists are not trying to show the world they are strong (item 25:  $z = -1.9$ ,  $DZA = -2.5$ ), nor are they just looking for a fast way to get in the press (item 37:  $z = -1.1$ ,  $DZA = -1.9$ ). Terrorists are not unwilling to work within the system (item 13:  $z = -1.3$ ,  $DZA = -1.3$ ), but feel they can't (item 40:  $z = +0.8$ ). Terrorism is the result of frustration (item 20:  $z = +1.5$ ). Terrorists want publicity for their causes, not themselves (item 46:  $z = +1.2$ ,  $DZA = +0.8$ ); and for some groups, terrorism is the only way to get attention for their causes (item 11:  $z = +0.9$ ). Type 2 rejected more strongly than any other type the notion that terrorists feel they have a right to do whatever it takes to accomplish their goals (item 48:  $z = -0.9$ ,  $DZA = -1.6$ ). Perhaps sympathy for the plight of terrorists accounts for the placement of item 45: "Terrorism serves no common good" ( $z = -0.4$ ,  $DZA = -0.8$ ).

*Type 3. The Aggressive Patriot.* Type 3 appeared to dehumanize terrorists into an enemy deserving contempt, a watchful eye, and eradication. Type 3 indicated that international terrorism is a major threat to peace and order in the world (item 8:  $z = -2.2$ ,  $DZA = -1.0$ ) but not a real problem in the United States (item 29:  $z = +0.9$ ). Type 3 denied feeling scared when Americans are harmed or killed by terrorists (item 30:  $z = -0.6$ ,  $DZA = -1.0$ ). While heartily endorsing the notion that terrorism gets much more

publicity than it deserves (item 6:  $z = +1.8$ ,  $DZA = +2.1$ ), Type 3 strongly denied ignoring news about terrorism (item 34:  $z = -1.5$ ).

Unlike the other types, Type 3 strongly rejected the ideas that it's always wrong to kill (item 3:  $z = -2.1$ ,  $DZA = -2.6$ ) and that America should not get involved in hurting innocent people to help other countries (item 17:  $z = -1.4$ ,  $DZA = -2.4$ ). While all other types disagreed, Type 3 strongly endorsed the notion that the only way to deal with terrorists is to give them a taste of their own medicine (item 28:  $z = +1.6$ ,  $DZA = +2.5$ ). Additionally, Type 3 strongly rejected the assertion "America should stop being the policeman of the world. Communism is no longer the bogeyman" (item 43:  $z = -1.6$ ,  $DZA = -1.7$ ) and was neutral to the idea that America can best respond to terrorism by providing a model of freedom and stability (item 18:  $z = +1.0$ ,  $DZA = -0.8$ ), and nearly neutral to the idea that America must act forcefully to protect the world from Russian terrorism (item 1:  $z = 0.38$ ). Hence, it appeared that military strength—with a dose of diplomacy—was Type 3's answer to terrorism (item 31:  $z = +2.4$ ,  $DZA = +1.8$ ). This sorting behavior reflected a ringing endorsement of Cragan and Shields' power politics vision, a rejection of the neoisolationism vision, and neutrality toward the cold war vision. Unlike the other types, Type 3 failed to reject strongly the idea that it's easy to justify American acts of terrorism (item 19:  $z = -0.2$ ,  $DZA = +1.7$ ) and failed to endorse strongly the notion that terrorism that harms innocent people can never be justified (item 16:  $z = +0.1$ ,  $DZA = -1.4$ ). Type 3 rejected the assertion that when American troops bomb food supplies or mine harbors, it's terrorism (item 47:  $z = -1.2$ ,  $DZA = -1.5$ ), yet identified as terrorist acts Libyan attacks on U.S. planes and Iranian attacks on U.S. navy ships (item 27:  $z = +1.2$ ).

Unlike the other types, Type 3 rejected frustration as a cause of terrorism (item 20:  $z = -0.5$ ,  $DZA = -1.5$ ). Even more strongly than did Type 1, Type 3 attributed to terrorists the motive of looking for a fast way to get in the press (item 37:  $z = +1.7$ ,  $DZA = +1.8$ ). Terrorists want to show the world they are strong (item 25:  $z = +1.1$ ,  $DZA = +1.4$ ). Terrorists would rather have people hate them than ignore them (item 44:  $z = +1.3$ ,  $DZA = +0.9$ ). Terrorism is primarily the result of conflict in the Middle East (item 33:  $z = +1.2$ ,  $DZA = +0.5$ ), not the efforts of the Russians (item 21:  $z = -1.4$ ).

*Type 4. The Pacifist Isolationist.* Type 4 reflected a pacifistic isolationist, who had little faith in the U.S. government, especially regarding terrorism or military involvement. The type least likely to perceive international terrorism as a threat to peace and order in the world (item 8:  $z = -0.3$ ,  $DZA = -1.6$ ), Type 4 was also least likely to deny tending to ignore news about terrorism owing to being numbed to it and by it (item 34:  $z = +0.0$ ,  $DZA = +1.3$ ).

Type 4 reacted strongly to statements pertaining to America's role in international terrorism. Type 4 rejected soundly the idea that it's easy to justify American acts of terrorism; we always have good reasons for our actions (item 19:  $z = -2.1$ ,  $DZA = -0.9$ ). In fact, only Type 4 strongly endorsed the ideas that the United States engages in terrorism (item 38:  $z = +1.8$ ,  $DZA = +2.1$ ; and item 14:  $z = -1.5$ ,  $DZA = -1.2$ ) and that bombing civilian food supplies and mining harbors constitute terrorism (item 47:  $z = 1.2$ ,  $DZA = +1.8$ ). Only Type 4 rejected the ideas that terrorist countries have no right to attack America for the types of acts they do themselves (item 9:  $z = -0.7$ ,  $DZA = -1.1$ ) and that it's an embarrassment when small countries get away with terrorizing the United States (item 4:  $z = -0.9$ ,  $DZA = -1.7$ ). Additionally, only

Type 4 strongly indicated lack of confidence in the president of the United States to label events accurately as terrorism (item 5:  $z = -1.7$ , DZA =  $-1.5$ ).

Unlike all other types, Type 4 strongly rejected that the United States should act forcefully to protect the world from Russian terrorism (item 1:  $z = -1.8$ , DZA =  $-2.4$ ) and accepted the assertion that the United States should stop being the policeman of the world (item 43:  $z = +1.5$ , DZA =  $+2.4$ ). This reflected a strong rejection of the cold war vision and strong endorsement of the neoisolationism vision of foreign policy. Type 4 was nearly neutral on the power politics vision and hence was the only type that failed to support strongly the notion that the United States must respond to terrorism with diplomacy and military strength (item 31:  $z = -0.1$ , DZA =  $-1.7$ ). As did Type 1, Type 4 indicated the best response to terrorism is for the United States to provide a model of freedom and stability for the world (item 18:  $z = +1.0$ ), hence reflecting Type 4's previously identified endorsement of the neoisolationism vision. Even more so than Type 1, Type 4 strongly believed the United States should not get involved in hurting innocent people to help other countries (item 17:  $z = +1.4$ , DZA =  $+1.4$ ). Not surprising was Type 4's strong rejection of the belief that the only way to deal with terrorists is to give them a taste of their own medicine (item 28:  $z = -1.6$ , DZA =  $-1.7$ ).

Type 4 did not respond strongly to most statements referring to types of terrorism, but one of the two statements most like Type 4 asserted that the worst type of terrorism is attacking innocent civilians in the day-to-day realm (item 24:  $z = +1.89$ , DZA =  $+0.9$ ). Unlike the other types, Type 4 failed to define Libyan attacks on U.S. planes and Iranian attacks on U.S. navy ships as terrorist acts (item 27:  $z = +0.1$ , DZA =  $-0.9$ ).

Similarly, Type 4 failed to respond strongly to most statements that attributed motives to terrorists. Yet, one of the two statements least like Type 4 asserted the Russians are behind most international terrorism (item 21:  $z = -2.1$ , DZA =  $-1.5$ ). Nor was Type 4 as likely as Types 2 and 3 to agree that most international terrorism is the result of conflict in the Middle East (item 33:  $z = +0.4$ , DZA =  $-0.6$ ). The causes supported by Type 4 appeared to be system-based, i.e., terrorists' frustration (item 20:  $z = +1.5$ , DZA =  $-1.2$ ) and feelings that they cannot work within the system (item 40:  $z = +1.3$ , DZA =  $+0.7$ ). Like Type 2, Type 4 moderately supported the motivation of seeking attention for a cause (item 11:  $z = +0.9$ , DZA =  $+0.6$ ; item 46:  $z = +0.8$ ). Type 4, in sharp contrast to Type 1, was the type least likely to deny that terrorists were sane, reasonable people responding to an unreasonable world (item 41:  $z = +0.2$ , DZA =  $+1.0$ ) and that terrorism is usually a last resort by people who have tried everything else (item 23:  $z = +0.4$ , DZA =  $+1.0$ ).

### *Interrelationship among Q-Typal Themes*

Four types, or patterns of perceptions, emerged pertaining to international terrorism. In most cases, one type differed substantially from the attitudes and values found in the other three (which shared a common perspective). For instance, only Type 1 indicated that terrorism serves no common good, and only Type 2 failed to reject the notion that the Russians are behind most international terrorism.

A significant exception to the 3:1 pattern occurred in the distribution of attitudes toward terrorists: Types 1 and 3 dehumanized terrorists while Types 2 and 4 empathized with the problems of terrorists. Downplaying more legitimate motives, both Types 1 and 3 claimed terrorists seek a fast way to get into the press and to show the world they are

strong. The less aggressive Type 1 saw terrorists as insane, while Type 3 viewed terrorists as preferring being hated to being ignored. In contrast, Types 2 and 4 described terrorists as pursuing a cause and as driven by frustration and inability to work within a system.

Both Types 1 and 3 found terrorism threatening to world peace and order, but only Type 1 found terrorism *personally* threatening. Type 1 focused on the injustice of terrorism, while Type 3 focused on getting even. Type 1 endorsed responsive military action, but not to the point of hurting innocent people. Type 3, who rejected the value that killing is always wrong, appeared unconcerned about the consequences of strong, responsive military action.

Patriotism versus distrust of government clearly distinguished Type 2 from Type 4. Additionally, Type 2 was far more likely to view terrorism as a personal, as well as a world, threat. While both types appeared highly concerned about people, particularly innocent people, their interpretations of acts involving the United States differed substantially. Type 2 strongly rejected, while Type 4 as strongly endorsed, the idea that America engages in terrorism. While Type 4 was neutral or undecided, Type 2 strongly endorsed the value that it is always wrong to kill people—even for a just cause. Nevertheless, Type 2 endorsed military action in response to terrorism, while Type 4 favored restraint. Perhaps Type 2 simply depends on the government to do what is right while Type 4 simply expects the government to do what is wrong.

Not surprising was a simple relationship that appeared across the types: The more strongly a type perceived that international terrorism poses a threat to peace and order in the world, the more strongly the type advocated responding to terrorism with diplomacy and/or military strength. This finding suggests that education or changed media coverage that taught people about the relatively small threat terrorism poses might succeed in reducing the chances of the United States responding violently to terrorism.

The results also indicate that Cragan and Shields' cold-war, neoisolationism, and power politics visions of foreign policy are still useful in distinguishing persons' perceptions of foreign policy issues, particularly terrorism. Type 1 endorsed the use of diplomatic and military means and the need for the United States to serve as a model of freedom and stability, and slightly rejected the idea that the United States need no longer police the world against the Russians. Type 1, then, endorsed the power politics vision and half of the neoisolationist vision, and mildly rejected the other half of the neoisolationist vision.

Type 2 supported forceful U.S. action against Russian terrorism as well as the use of diplomatic and military means to alleviate terrorism, but was undecided on the need for the United States to serve as a model to the rest of the world. Type 2, then, combined the power politics and cold war visions. Type 3 very strongly supported the use of diplomatic and military means, strongly supported U.S. policing of the world against the Soviets, and was neutral toward the other policies. Type 3, then, reflects the power politics vision. Type 4 endorsed providing the world with a model of freedom and stability, strongly rejected forceful action, and was neutral toward diplomatic and military means. Hence, Type 4 reflected the neoisolationist vision.

Types 1 and 2 combine the power politics vision with the neoisolationist and cold war visions, respectively. Type 3 reflects the power politics vision alone, and Type 4 reflects the neoisolationist vision alone. Hence, the present study revealed four types that reflected, alone or in combination, all three visions from the Cragan and Shields analysis. Since some were found alone, others in combinations, and one was found in three of the four types, some explication of their relationship is needed.

Unfortunately, this study cannot definitively explain these results. It does, however, suggest some likely explanations. First, in recent years, elements of the power politics vision may have been adopted by persons previously holding purely neoisolationist or cold war views of foreign policy, hence creating two new hybrid visions. Second, the more abstract and general cognitions people have about foreign policy may not be completely applicable to the specific foreign policy subtopic of terrorism, and these apparent changes in visions are actually a reflection of the application of more specific and appropriate cognitions to different phenomena than those examined by Cragan and Shields. Third, a combination of the first two explanations may account for the result.

This study also offers some insights into some of the questions raised in the literature review. For example, although some were not certain, all four types agreed that terrorism by small nations humiliates the United States, supporting Dowling's findings about the effects of the Iran hostage crisis on the credibility of the Carter administration.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the type most strongly endorsing the embarrassment notion also endorsed the strongest use of force against terrorism, supporting Dowling's finding that media depictions of terrorism as humiliating may legitimate, in some persons' minds, punitive violence against terrorists.<sup>32</sup>

The results also indicate that the ambivalent findings about whether media coverage in cites people to seek violent responses to terrorism may be justified. That is, the four types differed widely in their perceptions of the need for forceful action, and three of the four supported diplomacy along with military strength. Media coverage, unsurprisingly, then, is not having a universal effect on the heterogeneous media audience.

Those who believe that terrorism is creating fear can find limited support in these results. Three of the four types strongly rejected the idea that terrorism is not a threat to the world, and the other type mildly rejected it. However, Dowling's thesis that the forms of television coverage prevent the creation of real fear may have some support in the findings that three of the four types strongly endorsed the idea that terrorism is not a real threat to the United States and that three types did not report feeling scared when Americans were victimized by terrorism.<sup>33</sup> Type 1 was alone in only mildly endorsing the notion that the United States has not been affected and in fairly strongly endorsing feeling afraid when Americans are victimized by terrorism.

Picard's conclusion that media depictions reduce understanding of terrorism seemed to be supported as well.<sup>34</sup> All four types were uncertain whether they had sufficient knowledge to determine if individual acts of terrorism are justified. Further, all four types endorsed the false assertion that most terrorism results from the Middle East conflict.

Those who have debated the effects of media coverage on the credibility of the media, government officials, and terrorists might also take note. All four types were unwilling to admit that the media are usually right when they label an act as terrorism. However, only two types endorsed the idea that terrorism gets more coverage than it deserves. No type endorsed the statement that when the president of the United States labels an act as terrorism, they are sure he is right. The credibility of terrorists *qua* terrorists was not directly measured by any items here, but all four types' belief that terrorism is a major threat to world peace and order may be evidence that people *are* convinced of terrorists' ability and determination to succeed. This is the kind of credibility Weisband and Roguly believe to be essential to the success of terrorism as a strategy.

Finally, those who wonder whether media coverage enhances understanding of and sympathy for terrorists have fruitful ground for further speculation. All four types' endorsement of the assertion that terrorism which kills innocents can never be justified

means that audiences have stopped short of accepting the total world view of terrorists, but other responses indicate some sympathy. Three types endorsed the statement that terrorism is the only means some groups have for gaining attention, Type 4 endorsed the belief that terrorism is a last resort by people who have tried everything else, Types 1 and 3 rejected the notion that terrorists are seeking only fast publicity, only Type 1 strongly rejected the assertion that terrorists are sane people in an insane world, three types agreed that terrorists seek the publicity for their causes rather than for themselves, and three types endorsed the statement that terrorists feel they have the right to do what they do.

### **Conclusion**

Q-methodology provided a useful tool for examining perceptions of international terrorism and for focusing future studies of unanswered questions about the effects of media coverage of terrorism on audiences. Q-factor analysis revealed four patterns of perceptions regarding terrorism. Viewing terrorists as driven by human needs and possibly noble motives distinguished the humanistic cold-war patriot and the pacifist isolationist from the frightened philosopher and the aggressive patriot. Generally, however, attitudes that distinguished the types such as concern with U.S. or Soviet involvement, perception of threat, and advocacy of military action tended to be similar in three of four types. Similarities across three types combined with consensus across all four types resulted in half of the subject's loading on two types. Information from this preliminary investigation will provide useful information for revision of the terrorism Q-Sort—a process already under way.

**Appendix**  
Item Descriptions (from QUANLI)

	Typal Array z's			
	1 (N = 16)	2 (N = 4)	3 (N = 7)	4 (N = 10)
1. The United States should act forcefully to protect the world from Russian terrorism.	-0.0	1.6	0.4	-1.8
2. Terrorism would not occur if world political systems were fair.	-0.8	-1.1	-1.0	-0.1
3. It's always wrong to kill people, even for a just cause.	0.6	1.2	-2.1	-0.0
4. It's an embarrassment when small countries get away with terrorizing the United States.	0.4	1.3	0.7	-0.9
5. When the president of the United States labels an act as <i>terrorism</i> , I'm sure he's right.	-0.2	-0.3	-0.0	-1.7
6. Terrorism gets much more publicity than it deserves.	-0.0	-1.0	1.8	0.4
7. Terrorists are self-centered, spoiled brats.	-0.5	-1.0	-1.0	-1.5
8. International terrorism does not pose a major threat to peace and order in the world.	-1.9	-1.6	-2.2	-0.3
9. Terrorist countries have no right to attack America for the types of acts they do themselves.	0.3	0.4	0.6	-0.7
10. The worst type of terrorism is hijacking planes.	-0.4	-0.7	-0.5	-0.7
11. Terrorism is the only way some groups can get attention for their causes.	-0.5	0.9	0.5	0.9
12. There are times when acts of terrorism are justified.	-2.2	0.3	0.4	-0.3
13. Terrorists are unwilling to take the time and money and effort to work for change within the system.	0.6	-1.3	0.3	-0.8
14. I don't see America as involved in terrorism.	-0.7	-0.0	-0.1	-1.5



15.	Sometimes a system is so far gone the only way to change it is through terrorism.	-1.5	0.0	-0.6	-0.1
16.	Terrorism that harms innocent people can never be justified.	2.4	1.4	0.1	1.1
17.	America should not get involved in hurting innocent people to help other countries.	1.0	0.6	-1.4	1.4
18.	The United States can best respond to terrorism by providing a model of freedom and stability for the world.	1.1	0.4	0.0	1.0
19.	It's easy to justify American acts of terrorism. We always have good reasons for our acts.	-1.6	-1.9	-0.2	-2.1
20.	Terrorism is the result of frustration.	0.0	1.5	-0.5	1.5
21.	The Russians are behind most acts of international terrorism.	-1.1	0.5	-1.4	-2.1
22.	The worst type of terrorism is holding hostages and making families wonder and suffer.	0.5	1.4	0.5	0.0
23.	Terrorism is usually a last resort by people who have tried everything else.	-1.2	-0.0	-0.5	0.4
24.	I usually don't know enough about situations to know if a specific act of terrorism is justified.	-0.2	-0.1	-0.4	0.5
25.	Terrorists want to show the world they are strong.	0.9	-1.9	1.1	-0.0
26.	When the media label an act as <i>terrorism</i> , they're usually right.	-0.4	-0.9	-0.2	-0.9
27.	Libyan attacks on United States planes and Iranian attacks on United States navy ships are terrorist acts.	1.3	0.6	1.2	0.1
28.	The only way to deal with terrorists is to give them a taste of their own medicine.	-0.3	-0.9	1.6	-1.6
29.	We are fortunate that terrorism has not been a real problem in this country like in the rest of the world.	0.3	1.5	0.9	1.1
30.	I feel scared when Americans are harmed or killed by terrorists.	0.9	0.5	-0.6	-0.0
31.	To maintain world peace and order, the United States must respond to terrorism with diplomacy and military strength.	1.2	1.0	2.4	-0.1
32.	Airline hijackings are the most frequent form of terrorism.	-0.4	0.7	0.0	0.0
33.	Most of the world's terrorism is the result of conflict in the Middle East.	0.6	1.1	1.2	0.4

**Appendix**  
**Item Descriptions (from QUANL) (Continued)**

	Typal Array zs			
	1 (N = 16)	2 (N = 4)	3 (N = 7)	4 (N = 10)
34. I tend to ignore news about terrorism. I'm numb to it and by it.	-0.8	-1.5	-1.5	0.0
35. Terrorism is not wrong if you believe in your cause strongly.	-2.3	-1.1	-0.0	-0.1
36. Terrorism shows there is a lot of hatred in the world.	0.7	0.8	0.4	0.5
37. Terrorists are looking for recognition—a fast way to get in the press.	1.2	-1.1	1.7	-0.4
38. I want to believe in and support my country, but I believe we engage in terrorism.	0.3	-1.4	-0.0	1.8
39. The world is a dangerous place without honor and dignity.	0.3	-0.5	-0.6	-0.4
40. Terrorists feel they can't work within the system.	0.3	0.8	0.5	1.3
41. Most terrorists are sane, reasonable people responding to an unreasonable world.	-1.8	-0.2	-0.3	0.2
42. Attacking innocent civilians in the day-to-day realm is the worst type of terrorism.	1.1	1.1	0.6	1.8
43. America should stop being the policeman of the world. Communism is no longer the bogeyman.	-0.5	-0.7	-1.6	1.5
44. Terrorists would rather have people hate them than ignore them.	0.5	0.2	1.3	0.5
45. Terrorism serves no common good.	1.6	-0.4	-0.2	-0.2
46. Terrorists want publicity for their causes, not for themselves.	-0.0	1.2	0.5	0.8
47. When American troops bomb civilian food supplies or mine harbors, it's terrorism.	0.1	-0.6	-1.2	1.2
48. Terrorists feel they have a right to do whatever it takes to accomplish their goals.	1.1	-0.9	0.6	0.4
49. World terrorism makes it dangerous to leave the United States.	0.2	0.2	-0.9	-0.4

## Notes

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