

# Key issue (Terrorism Coverage)

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**KEYWORDS**

*news topics, frames, issue salience, issue ownership*

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**BRIEF DESCRIPTION**

“Key issue” describes the main issue or perspective an article focuses on when reporting on a news topic. There might be different key issues for the same topic: When reporting on terrorism, articles can for example concentrate on the incident itself, the perpetrator behind it, victims and/or political reactions to terrorism.

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**FIELD OF APPLICATION/THEORETICAL FOUNDATION**

Key issues share similarities with other variables such as news “frames”, “issue salience” or “issue ownership” that also try to identify different perspectives for the same or different news topics. Therefore, studies based on “Framing” (Entman, 1993) work with similar variables to analyze what issues journalists focus on and many studies cited here use the concept of framing to identify key issues, for example Li (2007) or Zhang & Hellmüller (2016).

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**REFERENCES/COMBINATION WITH OTHER****METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

Studies for example combine content analysis and interviews with journalists to shed more light on dynamics and structures of terrorism coverage, including key issues (Larsen, 2019).

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**EXAMPLE STUDIES**

Li (2007); Matthews (2016)

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**INFORMATION ON LI, 2007**

**Authors:** Li (2007)

**Research question:** How did television outlets frame 9/11 during the first 24 hours of coverage and how did this framing change over time?

**Object of analysis:** News coverage by five TV outlets (ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, and FOX news)

**Time frame of analysis:** 24 hours after attacks on September 9 2001 occurred

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**INFO ABOUT VARIABLES**

**Variable name/definition:** Coverage frame: “The coverage frame is defined as the aspects of a perceived reality identified through a story that makes these aspects more salient in the news coverage” (Li, 2007, p. 676).

**Level of analysis:** News story (TV)

**Variables and values:** Political coverage frame, economic coverage frame, criminal coverage frame, environment coverage frame, safety coverage frame, human interest coverage frame, religion coverage frame, disaster coverage frame, other coverage frame

**Reliability:** Scott’s pi: .8

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**INFORMATION ON MATTHEWS, 2016**

**Authors:** Matthews (2016)

**Research question:** How did newspapers react in the immediate aftermath of the London bombings 2005?

**Object of analysis:** News coverage by nine UK newspapers and their Sunday equivalents (The Star, The Sun, Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, Daily Express, The Times, The Telegraph, The Guardian and The Independent)

**Time frame of analysis:** July 8 2005 to July 15 2005

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**INFO ABOUT VARIABLES**

**Variable name/definition:** Story themes

**Level of analysis:** News article

**Variables and values:** Reconstruction and reaction, bombers' identities, police investigation, victims/the missing, heroism and survivors, London's reaction

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**Table 1.** Measurement of “Key Issue” in terrorism coverage.

Author(s)	Sample	Manifestations	Reliability	Codebook
An et al. (2018)	Articles from terrorist websites	31 different key issues, ranging from terrorist attacks to their political consequences	Average Holsti value for all pairwise comparisons: .66	Available under <a href="https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca/article/view/2u/1542">https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca/article/view/2u/1542</a> and <a href="https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca/article/view/2u/1543">https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca/article/view/2u/1543</a>
Du & Li (2017)	Online news articles	6 different key issues, including “description and updates of the incident itself”, “causes of the incident”, “consequences of the incident”, “conflicting viewpoint related to the incident”, “condemn the terrorist behavior and discuss the punishment/reprisal”, and “background/history knowledge of the incident areas”	Scott’s pi for all variables in study: between .798 and 1	Available under <a href="https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca/article/view/2u/1544">https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca/article/view/2u/1544</a>
Haußecker & Jirschitzka, 2010; Jirschitzka et al., 2010	Broadcasting programs	11 different key issues, ranging from war against terror to communication of terrorists	Average Holsti value for all pairwise comparisons with five coders and one main coder: .66	Available under <a href="https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca/article/view/2u/1545">https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca/article/view/2u/1545</a> and <a href="https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca/article/view/2u/1546">https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca/article/view/2u/1546</a>
Larsen (2019)	Broadcasting programs and online news articles	3 different key issues, including “threat of terrorism”, “countering and prevention”, and “terrorism as phenomenon”	Cohen’s kappa: .782	Available under <a href="https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca/article/view/2u/1547">https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca/article/view/2u/1547</a> and <a href="https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca/article/view/2u/1548">https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca/article/view/2u/1548</a>

Author(s)	Sample	Manifestations	Reliability	Codebook
Li (2007)	Broadcasting pro-grams	9 different key issues, including “political”, “economic”, “criminal”, “environment”, “safety”, “human interest”, “religion”, “disaster”, and “oth-er” coverage frame	Scott’s pi: .8	Not available
Li & Izard (2003)	Broadcasting pro-grams and news articles	10 different key issues, including “business”, “World Trade Center”, “Pentagon”, “safety (concerning future attacks)”, “government and U.S. president”, “criminal activity and terrorism”, “personal story”, “American public”, “U.S. Arab community”, and “past events”	Scott’s pi for all nominal variables in study: between .78 and .96	Not available
Matthews (2016)	Newspaper articles	6 different key issues, including “reconstruction and reaction”, “bombers’ identities”, “police investigation”, “vic-tims/the missing”, “heroism and survivors”, and “London’s reaction”	Not reported	Not available
Zhang & Hellmüller (2016)	Online news articles	8 key issues, sorted in the overarching categories “geo-politics” (consisting of “failing state”, “political opportunism”, “strategic game”, “geopolitical alignment”) and “existential threat” (consisting of “ISIS prowess”, “human rights crisis”, “economic consequences”, and “ISIS propaganda”)	Krippendorf’s alpha: .73	Available under <a href="https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca/article/view/2u/1549">https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca/article/view/2u/1549</a> and <a href="https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca/article/view/2u/1550">https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca/article/view/2u/1550</a>