

# Labeling of groups and events (Terrorism Coverage)

## AUTHOR

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## KEYWORDS

*evaluation, stereotypes, social identity theory, in-group/out-group*

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Labeling of groups and events describes how groups connected to religious, political or other forms of violence as well as their acts are labeled or evaluated. These labels might vary from more nominal descriptions (e.g., “gunmen”) to more judgmental descriptions (e.g., “terrorist”), leading to different perceptions of these groups and acts by the public.

## FIELD OF APPLICATION/THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Labels for groups and events are of interest in journalism research, political communication, research on terrorism and violence as well as stereotyping. These measurements are often based on “Social Identity Theory” (Brown, 2000) as a theoretical foundation for why some groups and events connected to violence are described in a negative way – i.e., as an out-group –, whilst others are described in a neutral way or even positively, i.e., as an in-group.

## REFERENCES/COMBINATION WITH OTHER

### METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

A study by Huff and Kertzer (2017) for example combines a conjoint experiment with an “Automated Content Analysis” of media coverage to understand how the public would label different acts of violence in comparison to the media. Two studies that have been particularly influential in studying the labeling of violent acts and perpetrators will be discussed in more detail in

the following sections.

## EXAMPLE STUDIES

Nagar (2010); Weimann (1985)

## INFORMATION ON NAGAR, 2010

**Authors:** Nagar (2010)

**Research question:** How did American news media cover politically violent organizations that are not linked to Al Qaeda or the events of 9/11?

**Object of analysis:** News coverage by two American newspapers (The New York Times, The Washington Post)

**Time frame of analysis:** 1998–2004

## INFO ABOUT VARIABLES

**Variable name/definition:** Media frame: “First, the labels that describe political violence were coded separately for each segment. Second, the article frame was determined based on the most frequent label.” (Nagar, 2010, p. 537)

**Level of analysis:** Headline, lead paragraph, text

**Variables and values:** four different label categories for labels in text: neutral (“rebel”, “rebellion”, “insurgent”, “insurgency”, “guerrilla”, “militant”, “combatants”, “revolt”, “uprising”, “revolutionary”, “paramilitaries”, “insurrection”, “separatist”), negative (“terror”, “terrorize”, “terrorist”, “terrorism”), positive (“freedom fighter”, “liberation movement”, “independence movement”), no label mentioned

**Reliability:** Krippendorff’s alpha: .82

## INFORMATION ON WEIMANN, 1985

**Authors:** Weimann (1985)

**Research question:** Which labels did the press use in referring to terrorists when covering terrorist attacks?

**Object of analysis:** Israel’s major newspapers



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**Time frame of analysis:** 1979–1981

#### INFO ABOUT VARIABLES

**Variable name/definition:** Label

**Variables and values:** three different labels categories for labels in text: negative (“murderers”, “saboteurs”, “assassins”, “separatists”), neutral (“guerillas”, “army”, “front”, “nationalists”, “underground”, “separatists”) and positive (“patriots”, “freedom fighters”, “liberation movement”, “liberation organization”)

**Reliability:** not applicable

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**Table 1.** Measurement of “Labeling of Groups and Events” in terrorism coverage.

Author(s)	Sample	Manifestations	Reliability	Codebook
Boyle & Mower (2018)	Newspaper articles	Computer-assisted key-word search, looking up labels such as “terror”	Not applicable	Not available
De Veen & Thomas (2020)	Newspaper articles	3 different label categories: negative (“terrorist”, “racist”, “extremist”, “fundamentalist” and clear links to terrorist organizations such as ISIS), neutral (“perpetrator”, “shooter”, “attacker” or other labels emphasizing race and ethnicity, for example “Muslim” or “American”), or positive (family- or work-related labels such as “father” or “colleagues”)	Not reported	Not available

Author(s)	Sample	Manifestations	Reliability	Codebook
Nagar (2010)	Newspaper articles	4 different label categories: neutral (“rebel”, “rebellion”, “insurgent”, “insurgency”, “guerrilla”, “militant”, “combatants”, “revolt”, “uprising”, “revolutionary”, “paramilitaries”, “insurrection”, “separatist”), negative (“terror”, “terrorize”, “terrorist”, “terrorism”), positive (“freedom fighter”, “liberation movement”, “independence movement”), or no label mentioned	Krippendorff’s alpha: .82	Available under <a href="https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca/article/view/2v/1539">https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca/article/view/2v/1539</a>
Picard & Adams (1987)	Newspaper articles	2 different label categories: nominal (e.g., “attacker”) or descriptive (e.g., “radical”)	Holsti: .98	Not available
Samuel-Azran et al. (2015)	Newspaper articles	7 different labels for perpetrators: “terrorist/Jewish terrorist”, “the Jewish terrorist”, “terror-accused”, “killer”, “mass murderer”, “serial stabber/criminal”, “other”; 9 different labels for act: “terror”, “massacre/mass murders”, “bombing/shooting”, “right wing crime”, “description assault (stabbing etc.)”, “criminal”, “attack”, “insanity”, “other”	Scott’s pi indicating lowest value for any variable in the study: .86	Not available
Simmons & Lowry (1990)	Magazine articles	13 different labels for perpetrators: “terrorist”, “gunman”, “guerilla”, “attacker”, “extremist”, “radical”, “hijacker”, “revolutionary”, “nationalist”, “armed man/men”, “leftist”, “rightist”, “militiaman/militiamen”	Not reported	Available under <a href="https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca/article/view/2v/1540">https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca/article/view/2v/1540</a>
Weimann (1985)	Newspaper articles	3 different labels categories for perpetrators: negative (“murderers”, “saboteurs”, “assassins”, “separatists”), neutral (“guerillas”, “army”, “front”, “nationalists”, “underground”, “separatists”), or positive (“patriots”, “freedom fighters”, “liberation movement”, “liberation organization”)	Not applicable	Not available