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NATIONAL CONSORTIUM FOR THE
STUDY OF TERRORISM AND RESPONSES TO TERRORISM

Understanding Community Responses to Authority/Law Enforcement Minority-Outreach Intergroup Communication Frames

OVERVIEW

Fostering partnerships between authorities and racial/ethnic minority communities is critical to counterterrorism efforts. Moreover, recent theory suggests that counterterrorism efforts should be rooted in an understanding of terrorism and political violence as a consequence of intergroup conflict. The "war on terror" and harsh law enforcement tactics has increased the tendency to stereotype racial/ethnic minority communities, such as Muslims, and defining entire racial/ethnic minority communities as a 'threat', increasing isolation among racial/ethnic minority communities. Isolation is one set of conditions that predisposes individuals and groups to terrorism. Viewing authority outreach to racial/ethnic minority communities as fundamentally an intergroup encounter, the purpose of this project was to identify existing authority minority-outreach communication frames, identify the minority-outreach communication frames that elicit hostility/backlash, as well as the minority-outreach communication frames that are most likely to foster willingness to build partnerships with authorities.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The project starts with two basic assumptions: 1) Given past history, the starting point for authority and racial/ethnic minority community intergroup relations is negative (rather than neutral), and 2) The most effective partnerships are rooted in both parties identifying (at least in part) with a shared social identity (i.e., a perception of working on the 'same team').
The study had the following aims:

- Aim 1: Identify existing communication framing minority-outreach strategies,
- Aim 2: Identify which communication framing minority-outreach strategies are associated with unwillingness to build partnerships with authorities
- Aim 3: Identify which minority-outreach communication frames are associated with preference to build partnerships.

METHOD

To identify existing authority minority-outreach communication frames, researchers independently coded over 100 speeches and outreach strategies from authorities and law enforcement from across the United States to identify thematic frames.

A series of experiments was conducted to test for the causal relation between minority-outreach communication frame and racial/ethnic minority community members' willingness to partner with authorities/law enforcement. Participants were asked to read a "news report" and were informed that authorities were coming to their racial/ethnic neighborhood to conduct outreach to their specific community. Participants were then randomly assigned to experimental condition, which varied minority-outreach communication frame (i.e., paternalism, commonality or respect). Finally, participants completed a variety of distinct measures including: perception of shared social identity, trust, preference to build partnerships with authorities, and support for counterterrorism policies.

FINDINGS

Aim 1 (Identify existing minority-outreach communication frames):
After analyzing thematic content, three minority-outreach communication frames were identified: paternalism, commonality and respect. In addition, results indicated the commonality communication frame as being most commonly used by authorities. Additionally, the paternalism frame was the second most frequently used, followed by the respect minority-outreach communication frame.

A Paternalism minority-outreach frame organizes relations in terms of authority figures knowing what is best for the minority group and includes language that often suggests the need to "teach" minority groups how to behave.	A Commonality minority-outreach frame organizes relations in terms of both groups knowing what is best for the minority group and includes language that suggests the authority and minority group are "on the same team."	A Respect minority-outreach frame organizes relations in terms of racial/ethnic minority groups knowing what is best for them and includes language that often suggests the target minority group as being in a position of power.

Aim 2 (Identify minority-outreach communication frame associated with unwillingness to build partnerships):
Researchers used an ANOVA to test for differences in the dependent variables based on minority outreach communication condition. Overall, the results provide clear evidence of the detrimental effects of paternalism minority-outreach communication frames, compared to commonality, respect, and a control condition. Key findings across a series of experiments were as follows:

- Participants were less likely to view authorities and racial/ethnic minority community as being on the "same team" (i.e., shared social identity; more likely to view authorities as a "separate" group) in the paternalism condition, compared to the respect, commonality, and control conditions.
- Participants were less likely to trust authorities/law enforcement in the paternalism condition, compared to all other conditions.
- The paternalism minority-outreach communication frame was also the most likely to elicit perceptions that the racial/ethnic minority group had suffered in a unique way (exclusive victimhood).
- Finally, the paternalism minority-outreach frame was more likely to increase preference for isolation from authorities and decrease support for counterterrorism policies.

Aim 3 (Identify minority-outreach communication frame associated with willingness to build partnerships):
Overall, the results provide clear evidence of the clear benefits of respect minority-outreach communication frame (over and above commonality). Key findings across a series of experiments were as follows:

- Participants were more likely to view authorities and their racial/ethnic minority community as being on the "same team" (i.e., shared social identity) in the respect condition, compared to the commonality, paternalism, and control conditions.
- Respect was also associated with increased trust in authorities.
- Participants were more likely to show increases in expectations of fair treatment in the future by law enforcement (i.e., procedural justice) in the respect condition, compared to all other conditions.
- Finally, the respect minority-outreach communication frame was associated with increases in perceptions of the need to combat terrorism and support for counterterrorism policies.

Summary:
The findings of the project suggest that authority/law enforcement minority outreach communication frames can have a strong influence on racial/ethnic minority communities' perception of shared social identity, trust, preference to partner with authority groups/law enforcement, and support for counterterrorism policies. Whereas the findings suggest detrimental effects of paternalistic minority-outreach communication frames, there are several benefits associated with respect minority-outreach communication frames.

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