

# All the Muslims Fit to Print: Racial Frames as Mechanisms of Muslim Ethnoracial Formation in the *New York Times* from 1992 to 2010

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## Abstract

A generative turn in scholarship examines the institutional and political dimensions of Islamophobia, conceptualizing Muslim representations as a mechanism of ethnoracial formation in which the media is one such site of racialization. Moments of great political and cultural transformation can motivate and activate these racial projects, generating racialized representations that attach racial meaning to bodies. Much of the research on Muslim representations in news media centers on this very question: did the attacks of 9/11 usher in a new racial project? Previous studies offer competing hypotheses. Bridging social movement and communication theories with a theory of ethnoracial formation, the author develops an approach for evaluating racial framing processes through a comparison of diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames. The author applies this approach using computational text analysis techniques to examine latent shifts in the racial framing of Muslims in the *New York Times* in the decade before and after 9/11. The author finds evidence of increasingly racialized, but more complex, representations of Muslims in the decade after 9/11 in which diagnostic frames evolve from locating social problems in states and institutions to locating social problems in Muslim bodies. Prognostic frames shift from institutional reforms to those targeting group pathology. The author argues that excavating the latent mechanisms of racial projects helps us better understand the dynamic and ongoing processes of ethnoracial formation.

## Keywords

Muslims, racialization, media, frames, islamophobia, culture

As anti-Muslim attitudes have grown since September 11, 2001, increasing discrimination and violence against those who are Muslim and those who appear Muslim (Kishi 2016; Ogan et al. 2014), scholars and activists have turned toward explaining both the causes of Islamophobia and the consequences of anti-Muslim racial projects for Muslims' ethnoracial social locations. Here, Islamophobia is conceptualized not as a subconscious pathology but rather as an active set of racializing practices, the racial projects of ethnoracial formation (Ansari and Hafez 2012; Elver 2012; Garner and Selod 2015; Husain 2017; Love 2017; Maghbouleh 2017; Meer 2013; Rana 2007; Selod 2018; Volpp 2002; Zopf 2018). These practices are mutually constituted by structural and cultural processes through

laws and policies, discourses and symbolic representations, that draw on racist ideology to render Muslims as urgent subjects of public concern (Alsultany 2012; Aydin and Hammer 2010; Chon and Arzt 2005; Saeed 2007; Said 1979, 1997; Selod 2018; Shaheen 2012; Stubbs 2004; Yazdiha 2014). These representations have profound effects on publics' perceptions of threat, driving support for

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racialized policies that subjugate Muslims (Baum and Potter 2008; Ciftci 2012; Das et al. 2009).

Many studies cite the media as a powerful site for these racial projects, a space where cultural knowledge and ideology is constructed and reproduced (Adorno 2001; Alsultany 2012; Gonzalez-Sobrinio 2019; Horkheimer, Adorno, and Noeri 2002), a political institution (Cater 1959; Cook 1998; Schudson 2002) with an “ideological state apparatus” (Hall 1982), occupying a powerful role in the construction of social reality. As Omi and Winant (2014) explain, racial projects are the “building blocks” of ethnoracial formation, the mechanisms through which structures are linked to representation, “glued” together by racial ideology. Institutions such as news media that produce what Omi and Winant call “propaganda initiatives” are “bubbling cauldrons of racial conflict” where racial projects take place. Moments of great political and cultural transformation can motivate and activate these racial projects, generating racialized representations that attach racial meaning to bodies (Omi and Winant 2014:264). As a result, *how* the media, as a framing institution (Watkins-Hayes, Pittman-Gay, and Beaman 2012), frames groups and their relations matters a great deal for making sense of ethnoracial formation processes.

Much of the research on Muslim representations in news media centers on this very question: did the attacks of 9/11 usher in a new racial project? After all, the long trajectory of racialized representations of Arabs and Muslims is well documented (Alsultany 2012; Cankar 2009; Love 2017; Said 1997; Selod 2018; Shaheen 2012). In previous studies, the evidence for a new racial project was mixed (Alsultany 2012; Aydin and Hammer 2010; Bail 2012; Bleich, Nisar, and Abdelhamid 2016; Powell 2011; Saeed 2007). In this article, I organize previous studies and compare them against processes of Muslim representation in a paper of record, the *New York Times*, following previous studies that identify the *Times* as a reliable archival source (Amenta et al. 2009; Bleich et al. 2016; Gonzalez-Sobrinio 2019; Silva 2017), what Stoker called, “a trendsetter for the US press, [that] helped validate objective reporting” (p. 7). Although not representative of all news media, the *Times* is considered an influential mainstream news source and offers a useful window into the representations of Muslims received by a wide national readership (Chermak and Gruenewald 2006).

To analyze whether and how the shape of Muslim representations in the *New York Times*

changed after 9/11, I develop a theoretical framework bridging social movement and communication theories with ethnoracial formation theory to analyze the connection between frames and racial projects of ethnoracial formation. This framework unpacks the tasks of framing in three parts that constitute a racial project: diagnostic framing, which constructs a social problem by assigning racial meanings to the group; prognostic framing, which assigns potential solutions to the social problem, providing a rationale for social control of the group; and motivational framing, which mobilizes publics to adhere to and maintain the racial project. I argue that connecting these components of framing to mechanisms of ethnoracial formation helps scholars test (1) whether and how frames generate racialized representations and (2) whether and how these representations shift with changing political-cultural contexts in an ongoing and dynamic process of ethnoracial formation (Omi and Winant 2014).

My article proceeds as follows. First, I develop a theoretical framework for analyzing frames as racial projects of ethnoracial formation. Next, I evaluate how existing studies of media representations of Muslims map onto this new framework, highlighting competing hypotheses. Next, I describe the data and methods, explaining the value of using computational techniques such as topic modeling to analyze the latent racial frames that structure discourse. From a corpus of *New York Times* articles from 1992 to 2010, I use latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) topic models and naive Bayesian classification techniques to examine the most salient environment of representations through which Muslims are framed over time. Finally, I discuss the results, which offer evidence of increasingly racialized, but more complex, representations of Muslims in the decade after 9/11. I conclude with a discussion of implications, and I offer examples of how these results may drive further exploration of the cultural mechanisms behind racial projects.

## RACIAL FRAMING AS A MECHANISM OF ETHNORACIAL FORMATION

To analyze racial projects in news media, I develop a framework for analyzing framing tasks as racial projects of ethnoracial formation. Research at the intersection of social movement theory, cultural sociology, and communication theory examines how frames are imposed on social life. Frames are the “schemata of interpretation that enable

individuals to locate, perceive, identify, and label” issues, people, and events (Benford and Snow 2000; Goffman 1974; Snow et al. 1986). Like a picture frame, these frames effectively narrow attention in on a particular aspect of a story, obscuring what is “out of frame,” shaping what an audience understands of a subject (Gamson and Modigliani 1989).

The media can be conceived of as a *framing institution*, an intermediary “between micro-level perceptions and actions and macro-structural forces and systems” that deploys particular conceptualizations of reality (Watkins-Hayes et al. 2012). Although reporters, writers, and editors may deploy different frames individually, the cumulative discourse they produce is a product of the institution, received by readers as a single entity perceived simply as “the news” (Cook 1998). Studies have shown that how institutions frame issues over time generates a dominant perception of the issue, limiting the audience’s capacity to imagine the issue any differently (Baum and Potter 2008; Entman 1991). These frames can legitimize social inequality by reproducing and reinforcing hegemonic ideologies (Gramsci 2011; Hall 1982; Thompson 1990). In short, frames are powerful.

The framing approach is useful in examining how media, as framing institutions, produce and reproduce cultural meanings that shape popular understandings of groups and issues. Extending this work to race theory, race scholars argue that we cannot understand frames without rooting them in the racial ideologies that constitute them, the glue that links them (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Feagin 2006; Omi and Winant 2014). So too are framing institutions rooted in racial ideology. As racialized organizations, they are constituted by and constitute racial meanings through the frames they deploy (Ray 2019). But how does a frame do the work of a racial project of ethnoracial formation?

To answer this question, I bridge social movement and communication theory with a theory of ethnoracial formation to propose a framework for evaluating the link between framing tasks and racial projects. Such an approach offers scholars a way to test the descriptive analysis of frames against the propositions of ethnoracial formation and evaluate (1) whether and to what extent there is evidence of racialization and (2) whether this racialization changes over time. How does this process unfold? Social movement theory describes how framing takes place through diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames. Put simply, the diagnostic frame identifies the problem and

attributes blame. The prognostic frame expresses the potential or desired solution(s) to the problem. Finally, the motivational frame activates a “call to arms,” encouraging collective action to solve the problem (Benford and Snow 2000). These three framing tasks are not independent but rather often intersect and work in conjunction with one another. In particular, diagnostic and prognostic frames are often coupled as the “identification of specific problems and causes tends to constrain the range of possible ‘reasonable’ solutions and strategies advocated” (Benford and Snow 2000:616). Connecting these framing tasks back to a process of ethnoracial formation, they form the structure of a racial project of meaning-making, a schema for making sense of the social world through a particular social order of groups and a system of power for maintaining their relations (Omi and Winant 2014). I lay out these connections in Table 1.

First, diagnostic framing shapes and defines the problem and attributes “causality, blame, and/or culpability agents” (Benford and Snow 2000). In a racial project, the diagnostic frame will locate the problem in the group through racialized meanings to uphold the system of racial categorization and domination. Here, the group is the social problem (Bayoumi 2008; Du Bois 1907). Scholars conducting racial frame analysis can enact this rubric to analyze where the locus of attribution emerges in frames. For example, applying this rubric to Vultee’s (2009) frame analysis of Fox News content, Islam and Muslims are framed through a diagnostic frame rooted in Orientalism, in which the social problem is located in a savage, threatening (Mid)East. Notably, these diagnostic frames also generate intersectional racial projects, where, for example, the racial meanings attributed to women’s bodies differ from those attributed to men’s bodies, providing an infrastructure of logic for intersecting systems of oppression (Bobo 1995; Collins 2004; Crenshaw 1990; Dines and Humez 2003). For instance, studies show how diagnostic frames construct Arab/Muslim men as barbaric, savage terrorists and women as oppressed, silenced, and/or exoticized (Abrahamian 2003; Ogan et al. 2014; Saeed 2007; Said 1997; Shaheen 2012; Silva 2017). Terman’s (2017) analysis of newspaper coverage of Muslim women shows that news stories routinely emphasize women’s rights violations and gender inequality, constructing a diagnostic frame about Muslims as sexist and oppressive in nature (Terman 2017).

Second, prognostic framing identifies and organizes the institutions, resources, and social practices deemed necessary for managing the social problem.

**Table 1.** Components of Framing Process in Racial Projects of Ethnoracial Formation.

Frame Type	Purpose	Ideological Function for Racial Project	Examples of Arab/Muslim Racial Projects in Media
Diagnostic	Attributes the problem	Defines group as a problem through racialized meanings to uphold system of racial categorization/domination	Alsultany (2012), Gavrilos (2002), Ogan et al. (2014), Powell (2011), Saeed (2007), Shaheen (2012), Terman (2017), Vultee (2009)
Prognostic	Identifies the potential solution(s)	Organizes institutions, resources, and social practices to enact and legitimize structural and cultural management of the racialized group	Alsultany (2012); Dunn, Moore, and Nosek (2005); Tehranian (2009); Vultee (2010)
Motivational	Motivates action	Generates emotions and urgency to mobilize audiences toward support and adherence to racial project	Nacos and Torres-Reyna (2007), Saleem et al. (2017), Stabile and Kumar (2005)

In a racial project, these frames legitimize structural and cultural management of the racialized group through the ideologies of racial domination. Scholars can apply this rubric to analyze where frames are identifying the solutions for the diagnostic problem and whether they offer evidence of a racial project. Are frames locating solutions in the control of groups and bodies or in the reform of institutions and systems? For example, applying this rubric to Messer and Bell's (2010) analysis of the 1921 race massacre in Tulsa shows how media first constructed the attribution of the social problem of the violence to Black residents, establishing the diagnostic frame. Then the media framed the solution to the problem through police control of the Black population, the prognostic frame. Applying this rubric to studies of Muslim representations, these prognostic frames legitimize the racial profiling of Muslims, the limitation of their civil rights, and generate increasingly mainstream discourses espoused by politicians and cultural elites about Muslims as foreign threats to American values (Bail 2016; Hagopian 2004; Jamal and Naber 2008; Vultee 2010; Yazdihia 2014).

Finally, motivational framing is the "call to arms," generating emotions and motivation to mobilize audiences. In a racial project, these emotions will be generated toward adherence to and maintenance of the racialized system. Scholars can apply the rubric to examine the tone and sentiment of the frame. Studies show how racial diagnostic frames of Black "welfare queens" generate moral outrage and shape the public's support of welfare

policies (Williams 1994), how racial frames of Black crime generate fear and drive public support for punitive policies (Gilliam and Iyengar 2000; Oliver 2003), and how racial frames of immigrants and refugees as "enemies at the gate" generate perceptions of threat and mobilize citizens toward anti-immigrant political parties and social movements (Boomgaarden and Vliegthart 2007). Applying the rubric to the framing of Muslims, studies have shown that emotional appeals drive public support for the control of Muslims through policies ranging from surveillance and racial profiling to military intervention (Nacos and Torres-Reyna 2007; Saleem et al. 2017; Stabile and Kumar 2005). For example, Saleem et al. (2017) tested the effects of news portrayals of Muslims as terrorists on public support for policies that would harm Muslims and found that exposure to these frames was positively associated with support for military action in Muslim countries and positively associated with support for public policies that would harm Muslims. Exposing participants to negative media footage of Muslims also increased perceptions that Muslims were aggressive and increased support for severe civil restrictions on Muslim Americans.

By connecting the mechanisms of framing to the ideological processes of ethnoracial formation, we can better map whether and how racial projects take shape through framing institutions like news media. Applying this rubric to previous analyses of media frames offers compelling evidence that across different forms of news media, the news generates racial frames enacting racial projects,

whereby diagnostic frames that identify groups as a social problem provide prognostic frames to offer solutions, maintaining the rationales and logics of a system of power and domination. These frames matter because they prime publics' perceptions of the social world and motivate them to act in particular ways, acting as agents of a system of racial domination.

I adopt this approach to examine the framing of Muslims in the *New York Times* before and after 9/11 and to test whether there is evidence of a racial project and, if so, *which* racialized meanings are attributed to Muslims. Previous studies of Muslim representations in the media present three competing hypotheses: (1) racialized portrayals of Muslims increased after 9/11 (Abrahamian 2003; Bail 2012; Nacos and Torres-Reyna 2007; Poole and Richardson 2006; Powell 2011; Trevino, Kanso, and Nelson 2010), (2) racialized portrayals of Muslims always existed (Shaheen 2012) and were as prevalent before 9/11 as they were after 9/11 (Bleich et al. 2016), and (3) portrayals of Muslims diversified after 9/11, so positive or more nuanced portrayals of Muslims increased (Alsultany 2012; Aydin and Hammer 2010). These competing findings are due in part to the notable differences among studies, from the type of media analyzed (e.g., television, film, newspapers, magazines) to the ideological bent of the media institution analyzed (e.g., Fox News, Infowars, the BBC). However, even among more similar studies of Muslim representations in the *New York Times*, findings are mixed. Bleich et al. (2016) analyzed every fourth headline about Islam or Muslims between 1985 and 2013 and found that headlines became more positive over the long term, even after 9/11 (Bleich et al. 2016). Meanwhile, Silva (2017) analyzed 607 *New York Times* articles about radicalization between 1969 to 2014 and found that "conceptualizations of radicalization, which once denoted political and economic differences, have now shifted to overwhelmingly focus on Islam...[contributing] to conceptual distinctions that are used to construct Muslims as an 'alien other' to the West" (p. 1). I argue that by focusing only on tone or a single topic, framing studies may miss the opportunity to examine the ideological work that frames are doing beneath the surface of a body of discourse, namely through their diagnostic and prognostic functions that define social problems and their solutions. The tone of a representation, an aspect of motivational framing, is only part of the story. As a result, this study centers on diagnostic and prognostic framing processes but in the

conclusion, I offer methodological suggestions for analyzing motivational framing in future studies.

## DATA AND METHODS

For studies concerned with racial framing, the process of interpretation is at times so subtle that you only "know it when you see it," given the prevalence of racially coded "dog whistle" appeals (López 2015). As a result, many scholars understandably center analysis on news sources where racial frames are undeniably apparent and more readily identifiable. For example, most studies of Muslims in the news center on conservative right-wing media, in which anti-Muslim sentiment is evident (Ansari and Hafez 2012; Bail 2012, 2016; Vultee 2009). How do we measure the frames that lie beneath the surface of a body of discourse? Unearthing deeply embedded racial meanings are a greater methodological challenge, but they are no less important. Interpretivist methods like content analysis have long been the dominant approach, whereby researchers hand-code a text into pre-defined categories of substance or meaning (Della Porta 2014). However, increasingly, scholars use computational text analysis techniques as a valuable tool for investigating what is going on beneath the surface by extracting the latent structure of discourse revealing the most salient *environment of representations* (Mohr and Bogdanov 2013). When analyzing a framing institution like news media, this method is a useful way to analyze the relationship between discourse as a holistic entity rather than analyzing each article, written by different individuals, as discrete documents.

Topic modeling is one such computational method that analyzes "the words of the original texts to discover the themes that run through them, how those themes are connected to each other, and how they change over time" (Blei 2012). Topic modeling uses algorithms to automate coding into a set of "topics," or categories, through a more deeply inductive method that is both "substantively plausible and statistically validated" (DiMaggio, Nag, and Blei 2013). As DiMaggio et al. (2013) explained, topic modeling accounts for the limitations of previous modes of textual analysis by satisfying four ideal conditions: (1) it is explicit, so that other researchers can access the data and reproduce the analyses; (2) it is automated, to satisfy voluminous text corpora; (3) it is inductive, such that no priors are imposed by researchers; and (4) it treats terms as variable in meaning across contexts, focalizing the relationality of meaning. The fourth



condition is perhaps the most encouraging: topic modeling builds on cultural theories of language and meaning, rooted in the assumption that meanings are relational, constituted by multiple clusters of language (de Saussure 1959). In this sense, it is a natural fit for a theory of ethnoracial formation by thinking about the relationality of racialized meanings as they are “glued” together by racial ideology, offering an exciting new mode for operationalizing these concepts (DiMaggio et al. 2013; Mohr 1998). This method helps us answer these questions: What are the central meanings, the most emergent frames through which a subject like Muslims gets portrayed? And do they change over time?

How does topic modeling work? Topic modeling is part of a larger computational field of probabilistic modeling in which the most commonly used model is LDA, a “statistical model of language” and the model used in this analysis (Blei 2012; Blei, Ng, and Jordan 2003). In a topic model, each document is considered a “bag of words,” and an algorithm identifies patterns in word clusters across the word bags. Using generative probabilistic topic modeling, the LDA model assumes a joint probability distribution over both observed and hidden random variables. The model analyzes text by using an algorithm that computes the conditional distribution, or posterior distribution, of latent variables using this joint distribution, given the observed features or variables (Blei 2012). In other words, drawing from the assumption that meaning is relational, any given topic in a topic model is constructed from a set of patterned word clusters (Mohr and Bogdanov 2013). The mapping of word distributions effectively “reverse-engineers” the frames that shaped the text (Mohr and Bogdanov 2013), a valuable way to see a racial project in action. Unlike some other computational methods like natural language processing, in which algorithms require human training, topic modeling is “intervention-free,” a mode of discovery that allows the patterns of underlying meanings in a text—the themes—to rise to the surface.

Topic modeling begins with a corpus of text compiled by the researcher, in this case, newspaper text. Using LexisNexis, I searched *New York Times* articles for the keywords *Islam*, *Muslim*, and variants, in the headlines, from 1992 to 2010. Although these are not interchangeable concepts, I drew from Said’s (1979) foundational theory of Orientalism, in which “Islam is inseparable from what Muslims do, and Muslims are inseparable from each other” (Vultee 2009:623), where these concepts are largely conflated in popular use and imagination. As I was concerned with capturing articles most centrally

focused on Islam and Muslims, I searched only for articles explicitly detailing Muslims as a subject in the heading rather than searching for any article mentioning Islam or Muslims in the body of the article. Unlike Bleich et al. (2016), I downloaded the entire corpus rather than sampling stories in order to derive the full landscape of discourse. I also downloaded the entire articles for analysis, as I was interested in the content of the news itself, not only headlines. To apply the probabilistic topic modeling approach, I used Python and the Natural Language Toolkit (NLTK) as commonly used and reliable text analysis tools. Using a Python script, this newspaper text file was converted into tab-delimited format retaining only columns for date, headline, and content. The result was a corpus of 2,012 *New York Times* articles, ready for analysis.

The process proceeded as follows: using the Python script, sentences were stripped of punctuation through down-casing. Next, text was tokenized, applying the Porter stemming algorithm, which takes a word as the input and returns its basic building block, or stem. Next, text strings were turned into a list of unique words, and the most common words were identified. Given the rationale of Zipf’s law, features that are too rare or too common, like stop words (e.g., *the*, *and*, *is*) will not be reliable representations and were thus removed from analysis, and the NLTK located and built a dictionary from this set of remaining features. Next, a list of “words in context” was generated automatically, allowing me to test the validity of the results by examining how the emergent words were used in context. Next, naive Bayesian classification distinguished between the probability that words would belong to a pre-9/11 or post-9/11 class.

Although unsupervised machine learning is perceived as less time-intensive than supervised machine learning, the difficulty of sorting through the noise of observable features to uncover a latent structure is arguably a more challenging task. As a result, evaluation of this unsupervised learning technique requires multiple iterations of probabilistic topic modeling to cut through the distraction of observable, but unmeaningful, features of newspaper stories to get to the subjectivities of descriptive, active expressions, such as adjectives and verbs. For example, I identified a list of frequently occurring but neutral words that detracted from the identification of meaningful topics, such as the months of the year and the *New York Times* URL. These “evil words,” in Python-speak, were excluded from analysis. The result was 4,162 features with frequently used words, stop words, and 24,251 rare words excluded from analysis. Performance was

**Table 2.** Cumulative Latent Frame Structure of Muslim Representations in the *New York Times*, 1992 to 2010.

Frame	Frame Features
Terrorism	afghanistan bin laden british attacks terrorism britain taliban qaeda london iraq osama sept terrorist pakistan jihad bombings terrorists fight
Violence	police killed attack violence city attacks security officers killing friday fire wounded death reported militants least several forces mosque
Women	she her women woman husband mrs children family girl head girls mother daughter home scarf school parents men wearing
Nation of Islam/ Black Muslims	nation muhammad black farrakhan khan african leader jackson louis members speech malcolm college community jews guards mohammed men organization
Eastern Europe	bosnia bosnian croats serbs croatian peace croatia agreement croat sarajevo plan mostar herzegovina federation serbian izetbegovic nato fighting serbia
Immigration	france french school schools europe students paris education immigrants algerian algeria european head public young north girls wearing mosque
New York City	center mosque city york community brooklyn imam mosques building project manhattan immigrants jewish avenue immigrant site ground mayor park
War	sunni iraqi iraq baghdad shiite military sunnis insurgents arab members forces iraqis awakening arabs province sheik army americans security
Politics	party elections election vote parliament parties constitution members front leader democratic campaign power national council voters member seats minister
Economy	percent turkey turkish countries million europe germany european german company workers business spain economic population turks market union bank

measured by the ability of the model to arrive at this latent, unobservable topic structure of newspaper text, as well as the ability of the naive Bayesian classification to reveal how the observable probabilities of newspaper topics pre- and post-9/11 related to this topic structure. To unearth the latent frames, I first applied an LDA topic model to extract the 10 most prominent underlying frames, as I was interested in the most salient ways Muslims were framed. Then, I drew on the principles of grounded theory to analyze the relationship between the common features in context (Charmaz 2006; Corbin and Strauss 2008; George and Bennett 2005) and assigned thematic labels to each topic. In line with previous applications of topic modeling to frame analysis (DiMaggio et al. 2013; Mohr and Bogdanov 2013), I refer from here on to these thematic topics as the central frames. By exploring the underlying discursive structure of newspaper articles in pre-9/11 and post-9/11 articles, in this analysis I (1) examine the most prominent topics through which Muslims are framed in the *New York Times* over two decades, (2) compare diagnostic and prognostic frames in the decades before and after 9/11 to evaluate whether there is evidence of a new racial project, and (3) use naive

Bayesian classification to measure the likelihood that racial frames appear before or after 9/11.

## RESULTS

How are Muslims represented in the *New York Times* from 1992 to 2010, and are Muslims more likely to be framed as anti-American terrorists after 9/11, or do representations remain consistent? I first examined the holistic framing of Muslims across all newspaper articles in the corpus to show the cumulative shape of discourse around Muslims and the emergent meanings around which Muslims have been represented, shown in Table 2.

The 10 most salient frames are: terrorism, violence, women, nation of Islam/Black Muslims, Eastern Europe, immigration, New York City, war, politics, and economy. Terrorism, for example, is framed through patterned, relational meanings such as “attacks,” “jihad,” “bombings,” and “fight.” Violence is framed through patterned, relational meanings such as “killed,” “wounded,” and “militants.” Although some of the underlying frames, such as politics and economy, are unsurprising and closely match observable newspaper sections, there are interesting distinctions that arise between

**Table 3.** Naive Bayesian Classification Model of Central New York Times Frame Features Pre-9/11 and Post-9/11.

Most Informative Frame Features Pre-9/11	Most Informative Frame Features Post-9/11
Shelling	Anti-American
Peacekeeping	Recruitment
Negotiators	Bomber
Artillery	Activists
Truce	Proselytizing
Peacekeepers	Antiterrorism
Refugees	Radicalized
Territory	Radicalization
Republics	Deportation
Multiethnic	Homegrown

established, observable newspaper sections and the latent frames that arise in this analysis. For example, observable newspaper sections distinguish between domestic and foreign affairs. However, the underlying structure of the discourse distinguishes between acts of terrorism, wars, and other types of violence, not whether they are domestic or foreign. In each of these emergent frames, violence “here” is conflated with violence “there.” A computational text analysis captures these latent relationships, the most salient meanings attached to Muslims, where a conventional content analysis might apply a researcher’s imagined distinction between domestic and foreign news reporting. Other latent frames separate out Eastern European (white) Muslims and Black Muslims into their own categories, mirroring much work that shows how the ethnoracial formation of “Muslims” has separated South Asian, Arab, Middle Eastern “brown” Muslims from indigenous Black Muslims who are nearly a third of American Muslims (Husain 2019; Selod and Embrick 2013). In addition, the cumulative representation of Muslims includes a predominant frame around women. This may offer support for studies that argue that the racialization of Muslims is also gendered, that framing Muslims includes a patterned set of meanings specifically about women (Selod 2015; Terman 2017). These initial results are valuable in that they provide greater insight into the underlying meaning structures that shape the cumulative framing of Muslims over two decades, the central topics with which Muslims have been attached. They offer some signals about the construction of a diagnostic frame in social problems of terrorism, violence, and war. However, we are interested in how diagnostic and prognostic frames compare before and after 9/11.

To investigate whether representations remain the same over time or a new racial project emerges, I next applied a naive Bayesian classification model to analyze the likelihood that a frame would emerge before or after 9/11. This model calculates the probability that an informative feature, constituting the frame, will be used pre-9/11 compared with post-9/11. The results of the naive Bayesian model are shown in Table 3, which shows that there are some notable differences between the framing of Muslims before 9/11 and after 9/11.

In the decade before 9/11, Muslims were most prominently represented through a diagnostic frame that locates problems in the nation through a language of war and institutional processes: shelling, peacekeeping and peacekeepers, negotiators, artillery, truce, refugees, territory, republics, and multiethnic. In the decade after 9/11, frames are more likely to be decoupled from the state, locating the social problem in Muslims as a group. Post-9/11 frames are constructed through meanings such as anti-American, recruitment, bomber, activists, proselytizing, antiterrorism, radicalized and radicalization, deportation, and homegrown. Although a reasonable argument might be that the actual events on which journalists reported had changed, the use of language on comparable events—wars abroad and foreign interventions—tells a story of shifting focus, shifting framing. The most prominent frames of post-9/11 news media stories *about* Muslims and Islam were not centered on the state processes of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars so much as they were on its targets: a diagnostic frame of a Muslim social problem. Similarly, it is not that stories about Muslims and terrorism did not exist prior to 9/11 but rather that this analysis shows that they were not the most salient frames.



**Table 4.** Naive Bayesian Sample of the Most Informative Frame Features in Context Pre-9/11.

Frame Features	Percentage of Articles with Frame Feature	Percentage with Frame Feature Pre-9/11	Frame Feature in Context
Refugees	7.90	12.49	“Srebrenica, a long town that stretches up a mountain valley, is bullet-scarred and economically ruined. Mr. Jensen, a former Danish police officer, said there would be no foreign help to change that until Serbs of Srebrenica, many of them refugees from Muslim-dominated Sarajevo, started letting some of the Muslims to return...”
Agreement	8.20	18.62	“The agreement, signed after 10 days of negotiations here that have scarcely begun to address the most contentious issues of an overall Bosnian peace, amounts to the first serious attempt to... integrate divided Muslim and Croatian communities.”
Relief	6.90	25.54	“Watched by armed guards and locked behind bolted doors, more than 1,500 men, women and children, nearly all of them Muslims, remained crowded inside a former military base near here today while the United Nations and relief agencies pressed their Croatian captors for their release.”
Peace	18.60	26.70	““For the first time in the war, the tide in Serbian politics is turning in a direction favorable to us,’ Muhamed Filipovic... told Parliament in Sarajevo. Others at the session argued that signing a peace pact now might be handing victory to the Serbian and Croatian nationalists just when the tide was beginning to move in the Muslims’ favor.”
Weapons	7.80	27.17	“All weapons deliveries are supposed to be shared between Muslim and Croatian units in the united force set up under the peace accord. The Muslim-Croat force exists largely on paper, however, and NATO officials said the T-55’s were to be delivered only to the Muslims.”

To examine the context of these frame features, I analyzed the model’s additional output of “words in context,” a selection of which is displayed in Table 4. Sampling the context of features allows a supervised check of output directed only in terms of a temporal distinction between pre- and post-9/11 to clarify whether the frame really became more prominent after 9/11.

These frame features in context confirm the findings in Table 3 and offer greater insight into the relationship between the diagnostic and prognostic frames and the racial project they constitute. In the decade before 9/11, despite a major domestic terrorist attack in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the cumulative focus of newspaper articles referencing Muslims and Islam framed state-centric

aspects of war such as artillery, weapons, and shelling, territory and republics, the humanity and heterogeneity of victims such as refugees and multiethnics, and the resolutions of peacekeeping and negotiating. Connecting these features to racial framing processes, the diagnostic frame identifies the problem not in the group but rather in geopolitical dynamics. The prognostic frame identifies the potential solution not in group control but rather in state-directed relief and peacekeeping efforts. For example, a sampled article with the refugees frame, prevalent in 13 percent of pre-9/11 articles about Muslims, includes this passage:

Srebrenica, a long town that stretches up a mountain valley, is bullet-scarred and

economically ruined. Mr. Jensen, a former Danish police officer, said there would be no foreign help to change that until Serbs of Srebrenica, many of them refugees from Muslim-dominated Sarajevo, started letting some of the Muslims to return. (Whitney 1999)

Here, Muslims are not the problem so much as the “bullet-scarred and economically ruined” context is the problem. The prognostic framing of the solution here lies in the “foreign help” and Serbs’ agreement to let the Muslims return. Similarly, in a sampled article about relief, prevalent in 26 percent of pre-9/11 articles about Muslims, the journalist writes:

Watched by armed guards and locked behind bolted doors, more than 1,500 men, women and children, nearly all of them Muslims, remained crowded inside a former military base near here today while the United Nations and relief agencies pressed their Croatian captors for their release. (Schmidt 1993)

The frame of relief efforts does not create a diagnostic frame of Muslim threat but rather of concern for Muslim victims of Croatian captors. The prognostic solution is framed through the assistance of United Nations and relief agencies. A frame feature such as “weapons,” which carries greater connotations of violence, is prevalent in 27 percent of pre-9/11 articles but mostly frames weapons through state processes of war, as one journalist writes:

All weapons deliveries are supposed to be shared between Muslim and Croatian units in the united force set up under the peace accord. The Muslim-Croat force exists largely on paper, however, and NATO officials said the T-55’s were to be delivered only to the Muslims. (Hedges 1997)

The weapons here are delivered by the state, a prognostic solution under a state-directed peace accord.

However, in the decade after 9/11, the representation of Muslims shifts through diagnostic frames constituted by more descriptive language that constructs the problem less through geopolitical dynamics and more through group-attributed violence and terrorism, as shown in Table 5.

For example, frame features such as bomber, radicalization, and homegrown (terrorism/terrorist) are predominant. The frame of “extremists” is most

common, in 28 percent of post-9/11 articles about Muslims, as, for example, when a journalist writes,

Violent extremists acting in the name of Islam have seemingly adopted a gruesome tactic against the United States and its allies in the recent rash of incidents in which attackers have beheaded hostages and then raced to disseminate the gory images. These militants see such acts as the ultimate symbols of power over an enemy—horrific and utterly unambiguous examples of ruthlessness—scholars and analysts of the Middle East say. (Wakin 2004)

Although seemingly overtly value-laden in its use of descriptively loaded words such as *gruesome*, *gory*, *horrific*, *ruthlessness*, the journalist attributes these ideas to “scholars and analysts of the Middle East,” legitimizing the journalistic integrity of the frame. Both terrorist and terrorism are highly prevalent, at 20 percent and 22 percent of articles respectively, as for example when a journalist writes:

The turning point was the terrorist bombings in London, said more than a dozen Muslim leaders interviewed for this article. Unlike the Sept. 11 attacks and most other terrorist incidents around the world, the London bombings were done by Muslims raised, educated and living in Britain, and willing to kill fellow Britons in the name of Islam. (Goodstein 2005)

Here, the diagnostic frame attributes the social problem to homegrown Muslims and their willingness to kill on behalf of their religion. However, the same article describes the “good” Muslim leaders who denounce terrorism and work to eradicate the most radical—“bad”—members of their communities, providing evidence for a hypothesis that post-9/11 portrayals offer greater nuance in their representations.

Similarly, Islam is framed in more pronounced ideological terms, such as proselytizing, extremism, and anti-Americanism. For example, anti-Americanism, which is prevalent in 5 percent of post-9/11 articles, is expressed through framing such as:

Anti-American demonstrations widened in Indonesia today, with riot police firing tear gas to disperse angry protesters outside the United States Embassy in Jakarta...radical Muslim groups said they were preparing larger demonstrations and repeated their warnings that

**Table 5.** Naive Bayesian Sample of the Most Informative Frame Features in Context Post-9/11.

Frame Features	Percentage of Articles with Frame Feature	Percentage with Frame Feature Post-9/11	Frame Feature in Context
Anti-American	2.40	4.99	“Anti-American demonstrations widened in Indonesia today, with riot police firing tear gas to disperse angry protesters outside the United States Embassy in Jakarta.... Radical Muslim groups said they were preparing larger demonstrations and repeated their warnings that they might attack foreigners here.”
Terrorist	20.00	19.95	“The turning point was the terrorist bombings in London, said more than a dozen Muslim leaders interviewed for this article. Unlike the Sept. 11 attacks and most other terrorist incidents around the world, the London bombings were done by Muslims raised, educated and living in Britain, and willing to kill fellow Britons in the name of Islam.”
Terrorism	19.70	21.98	“A two-day conference of Muslim and Christian leaders was supposed to highlight cooperation, not conflict. But then, the very first religious speaker at the conference began by loudly excoriating ‘arrogant Zionists.’ By the end of the morning, several others had explicitly tied terrorism to the treatment of Palestinians in Israel, expressed strong anti-American feelings and shown how hard it was even for some relatively moderate religious leaders to moderate their language when it came to recent events.”
Immigrant	6.60	26.31	“Another wave of deportations began last year after officials said they planned to find and arrest illegal immigrants who pose security threats and already have deportation orders. Of that group, more than 3,000 people have been arrested. Officials say they cannot say how many of those Arab and Muslim men have been deported.”
Extremists	7.20	28.02	“Violent extremists acting in the name of Islam have seemingly adopted a gruesome tactic against the United States and its allies in the recent rash of incidents in which attackers have beheaded hostages and then raced to disseminate the gory images. These militants see such acts as the ultimate symbols of power over an enemy—horrific and utterly unambiguous examples of ruthlessness—scholars and analysts of the Middle East say.”

they might attack foreigners here. (Mydans 2001)

This frame constructs “anti-American,” “angry,” “radical” Muslims who are ready to “attack.” However, the article goes on to separate the anti-American Muslim groups from the state, the Indonesian government, which is described as a

“moderate Muslim country” whose president “has announced her qualified support for the United States in its campaign against terrorism in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks on New York and Washington.” Again, the social problem is made complex through a dynamic between “good” and “bad” Muslims, offering support for a hypothesis of greater post-9/11 nuance.

In post-9/11 articles, prognostic frames are also more centered on the “problem” of Muslims rather than on geopolitical dynamics, such as a focus on deportation, immigrant assimilation, national security, and antiterrorism. For example, the frame feature of “immigrant,” prevalent in 26 percent of post-9/11 articles about Muslims, describes policy concerns and their potential solutions. In one frame in context, a journalist writes:

Another wave of deportations began last year after officials said they planned to find and arrest illegal immigrants who pose security threats and already have deportation orders. Of that group, more than 3,000 people have been arrested. Officials say they cannot say how many of those Arab and Muslim men have been deported. (Swarns 2003)

Here, the security threats attributed to Muslims are linked to immigrants, a social problem for the state to be concerned with and to manage through arrests and deportation. However, again, the article highlights complexity in the issue, describing a policy that targets Muslims broadly:

Officials acknowledged that most Arab and Muslim immigrants swept up in counterterrorism sweeps have no ties to terrorist groups. Of the 82,000 men who showed up at immigration offices, and tens of thousands more screened at airports and border crossings in the past six months, 11 have had links to terrorism. Still, officials said, they can no longer ignore illegal immigrants from countries that pose a security risk. They noted that several Sept. 11 hijackers were in the country illegally at the time of the attacks. (Swarns 2003)

The prognostic frame acknowledges nuance in the state control of brown bodies, offering support for a racial project but one with complicated implications. How do these results map on to hypotheses about the media’s role in the ethnoracial formation of Muslims after 9/11?

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Growing research on Islamophobia not as individualized anti-Muslim sentiment but rather as an active set of institutional practices has generated rich research on the ethnoracial formation of Muslim immigrants. I have argued that although much of this research describes the media as one

site where these racial projects take place, there is less work that explains how discursive framing processes relate to the racial meanings that are attributed to groups. Making these connections is essential in testing whether representations are changing over time and how they are changing. Bridging social movement and communication theory with a theory of ethnoracial formation, I have developed an approach that offers scholars a way to test whether and how discursive frames map on to racial projects, as a function of ethnoracial formation. I describe a framing process constituting a racial project in which diagnostic frames construct the group as a social problem and assign it racialized meanings, prognostic frames direct attention to particular solution(s) to legitimize institutional and social control of the group, and motivational frames make emotional appeals to mobilize audiences to adapt this amended racial categorization and maintain the racialized system. Although most studies of media representation focus on the tone of frames—the motivational framing—this analysis is centered on the first two, understudied functions of racial framing.

Applying this rubric to test whether a new racial project emerged in news media after 9/11, this analysis shows that the latent, racial frames that represented Muslims did shift in the *New York Times* after 9/11. Representations evolved from diagnostic frames that locate social problems in states and institutions to diagnostic frames that locate social problems in racialized bodies. Prognostic frames shifted from institutional responses such as peacekeeping to prognostic frames centered on targeting group pathology like radicalization and deportation. This does not mean that negative representations of Muslims did not exist prior to 9/11 but rather that the most salient representations changed and were more likely to be racializing. As the naive Bayesian analysis shows, post-9/11 frames are more likely to take on a descriptive bent that focalizes the group, describing Muslims as radicalized, militant, terrorists with extremist ideological agendas. However, the frames in context also show increasing nuance in representations, balancing accounts of “bad Muslims” with the possibility of “good Muslims” who partner with and work on behalf of the state. These nuances highlight the complexity of racial projects in the post-civil rights era, the contradictions that emerge when racist ideology is cloaked in “neutral” or “objective” language (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2013; Omi and Winant 2014).

This analysis offers only the tip of the iceberg in examining how framing institutions enact the racial

projects of ethnoracial formation. One expansion of this approach could investigate how diagnostic and prognostic frames are linked to the third dimension of the framing process: motivational framing. These “call to arms” frames generate emotions to mobilize audiences toward adherence to and maintenance of the racialized system. Introducing a supervised learning model using sentiment analysis could detect and trace changes in emotional sentiment around subjects over time (Balahur et al. 2010). Scholars could test which configurations of diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames are most salient, driving the racial project, then draw from external measures of public opinion to test their efficacy and cultural resonance. In other applications, these methods have shown how racialized policies shift public emotions (Flores 2017) or how advocacy organizations generate greater public attention through emotional appeals, generating “cognitive-emotional currents” (Bail, Brown, and Mann 2017). Extending these methods, scholars could examine how news media frames generate “cognitive-emotional currents” to link racialized groups to particular social problems, driving public support toward some laws and policies and away from others, for example, the Muslim ban.

Future studies could also investigate how changing political and cultural contexts shape the dynamics between framing institutions and their audiences. Another useful application would analyze how resistance by racialized groups challenges institutional frames, as mobilizing groups deploy counter-frames. Extended research might also compare the *New York Times* with other newspapers in the United States to generate measures of racial bias in framing institutions as well as to other countries for a cross-cultural comparison of framing processes and sociohistorically embedded racial orders. Studies could also examine the diffusion of racial frames. This analysis was not centered on where the frames came from, but studies should investigate where racial frames originate and how they spread, expanding our understanding of the wider cultural systems of racial ideology.

My study advances promising new connections between the study of culture and the study of race through computational methods for excavating the latent structure of discourse, the racial meanings that lie beneath the “objective” surface. This analysis reveals that beyond the explicit, observable “who-what-where” of the news, there are powerful systems of meaning that shape how social reality is constructed and communicated to the public. The way an institution such as the *New York Times* constructs and deploys discursive frames shapes not only the groups

and issues that we understand to be matters of public concern but also how we feel and act toward them. News media that operate through more convincing performances of objectivity become bestowed with particular power as arbiters of truth and fact, rendering their constructions of reality all the more urgent for critical analysis. Excavating the latent mechanisms of racial projects as they shape the contours of group identities helps better expose and explain the deep roots of racial inequality.

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