NEW AMERICA

RESOURCE SECURITY

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

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WAR AND TWEETS

Terrorism in America in the Digital Age

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About the International Security Program

The International Security program aims to provide evidence-based analysis of some of the thorniest questions facing American policymakers and the public. We are largely focused on South Asia and the Middle East, extremist groups such as ISIS, al-Qaeda and affiliated groups, the proliferation of drones, homeland security, and the activities of U.S. Special Forces and the CIA. The program is also examining how warfare is changing because of emerging technologies, such as drones, cyber threats, and space-based weaponry, and asking how the nature and global spread of these technologies is likely to change the very definition of what war is.

About the Resource Security Program

New America's Resource Security program looks for ways to grow the natural resource root system for stronger national security in the digital age. New technologies and a rising global population are shifting the supply and demand patterns for global natural resources in ways that shape U.S. national security and prosperity. And yet the U.S. government remains optimized for warfighting in the industrial age, rather than security building in the information age. The Resource Security program at New America examines these shifting patterns, seeking innovative ideas for reshaping national policy to take account of the natural resource roots for human and hard security.

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INTRODUCTION

"Violence and bloodshed always excite human curiosity, and the theatricality, the suspense, and threat of danger inherent in terrorism enhance its attention-getting qualities." Martha Crenshaw, *The Causes of Terrorism*

Since 9/11, 147 people in America have died in terrorist attacks, including 94 at the hands of jihadists.[1] And while U.S. officials say they have prevented many other attacks,[2] it is simply not possible to stop them all, especially in a society that depends on the freedom of movement of ideas, information, capital, and people.

Political violence has long been a fact of life in the United States, including violence committed by domestic groups, from the Weather Underground to right-wing militias. In the past two decades, however, Americans have become particularly concerned about foreign jihadist groups and their ability to conduct or inspire attacks in the United States, a concern that resonates deeply through the U.S. political system. Moreover, no city is immune to the threat: in 2015, an American citizen and his wife, inspired by foreign terrorist groups, killed 14 people in San Bernardino, Calif. The couple apparently chose San Bernardino as a target largely because they lived there, which seems to be the main basis on which such "homegrown violent extremists" in the United States have chosen their targets since 9/11. In other words, while the probability of a terrorist attack in a given city is low, any city can be a target and every city should take steps to be prepared.

At the same time that the threat has changed, the way in which Americans get information about terrorist attacks has changed, too. Today, 24-hour live television coverage and smartphones spread the news of an attack widely and almost instantly, leaving government and law enforcement officials very little time to react and to shape public reaction.

On June 12, 2016, in the worst mass shooting in U.S. history, a gunman claiming allegiance to ISIS shot and killed 49 people in a gay nightclub in Orlando, Fla. While the shooter had no material connection with jihadist groups, he certainly intended to inspire fear and anger in the American public and use news and social media to do so. The city, however, led by a charismatic and experienced mayor, reacted with concern for the victims and affirmation that the city was LGBT friendly.

This paper examines the changing context for public reactions to terrorism in America, particularly the evolving role of the news media in shaping those reactions and the rising, powerful

influence of social media. Orlando is considered as a case study for how government decisions, political rhetoric, and especially news and social media shape public reactions to terrorist attacks and ultimately build civic resilience to terrorism. Leaders in Orlando did many things right in a difficult, tragic, and chaotic situation, and their actions can serve as an example for other cities.

THE CONTEXT: TERRORISM, PUBLIC REACTION, AND THE MEDIA

Terrorism is generally defined as an act of violence against civilians, committed by a group or individual for an ideological or political end.[3] The motive for any given attack may range from drawing attention to a cause or a group, disrupting, provoking, or pressuring a government, or even just inspiring and uniting followers. Regardless of the motive, though, the purpose of such an attack is generally to spark an emotional response in a civilian population and use those emotions as a weapon. "The victims or objects of a terrorist attack," scholar Martha Crenshaw wrote, "have little intrinsic value to the terrorist group but represent a larger human audience whose reaction the terrorists seek."[4]

> **"The victims or objects of a terrorist attack have little intrinsic value to the terrorist group but represent a larger human audience whose reaction the terrorists seek."**

While terrorist groups do not necessarily succeed in meeting their stated goals,[5] such attacks often provoke a government response or a change in public behavior. The United States invaded Afghanistan and Iraq after 9/11, for example, and ten years later almost 60 percent of Americans agreed that day had permanently changed the way Americans live.[6]

A number of variables affect how people react to terrorism. There are two common responses: fear and anger. The more information people have about the perpetrator, the angrier they are; while less or unclear information about an attack makes people afraid. These two emotions have distinct consequences.[7] A 2003 study suggested that individuals who react with anger tend to seek revenge, look to assign blame, and underestimate the risks of responding. Individuals with anxious or fearful feelings are more risk averse and less likely to support anti-terrorism actions or policies. "An angry country," the study concluded, "could endorse different policies than a fearful one."[8] Another study found that fear of terrorism can stimulate authoritarian sympathies and stir hostility

toward outsiders. "Outsiders" may include domestic minority populations, such as immigrants or LGBTQ.[9]

One of the most important factors in determining whether people react with fear or anger is how much they know about the attack.[10] Information about an attack spreads in a variety of ways, with government officials and law enforcement traditionally being the most authoritative source about an attack, though officials have generally relied on the news media to spread the information.[11] Increasingly, social media is shaping the story, as governments, first responders, perpetrators, victims, and eyewitnesses are able to use it to directly and quickly reach the "larger human audience."

> **How a story is told can have a profound influence, calming the public or fanning anxiety, rewarding terrorists with the publicity they seek and inspiring further attacks, or inciting copycat or retaliatory violence against actual or perceived perpetrators.**

It would be difficult to underestimate the importance of the news media in shaping public reaction to a terrorist attack. As reporters curate and interpret information, they decide what the public knows and when they know it. How a story is told can have a profound influence, calming the public or fanning anxiety, rewarding terrorists with the publicity they seek and inspiring further attacks, or inciting copycat or retaliatory violence against actual or perceived perpetrators. One 2015 study, for example, found that media coverage of a terrorist attack increases the likelihood of future attacks.[12] Other studies have found that both terrorist attacks and mass shootings spur "contagion effects," with media coverage as the enabler.[13] Research has also showed that repeated exposure to graphic footage of attacks can cause acute stress symptoms in viewers, with health consequences.[14]

There is a particularly strong link between media coverage of jihadist attacks and anti-Muslim sentiment and even violence against Muslim populations. A 2015 study found that exposure to news portraying Muslims as terrorists is positively associated with support for military action in Muslim countries, as well as with support for harsh civil restrictions of Muslim Americans.[15]

Back in 1985, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher implored the news media to deny terrorists the "oxygen of publicity." Thirty years later, it is no easier to find the balance between the public's right to know, public safety, and terrorists' desire for publicity. In fact, a relatively new kind of media is changing the balance: social media.

Social media is a general term for online platforms and tools that allow individuals, companies, organizations, and governments to create and share information.[16] Today, 76 percent of all Internet users are on social media, compared to just 16 percent a decade ago,[17] and six in 10 Americans get news from social media.[18] Facebook is by far the most popular platform, with 1.7 billion users worldwide as of June 2016.[19] Some of the other well-known sites are Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, Tumblr, Reddit, and Snapchat. The rise of these platforms is tightly linked with the growth of the Internet more widely and cell phones and smartphones, in particular.

Social media is not only changing the speed at which the public receives information about terror attacks, but also the speed at which the public reacts. In 2013, two assailants claiming sympathy for Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan brutally murdered British Army soldier Lee Rigby. A 2016 study of the murder examined data collected from Twitter, Facebook, and blogs, finding that social media was a primary information source for the public. At one time, there were 800 tweets per minute regarding the Rigby murder.[20]

In addition to its role in shaping how people read media coverage, social media has also changed how journalists go about reporting stories. Shane Harris, a senior intelligence and national security correspondent for the Daily Beast and an ASU Future of War Fellow at New America, described how he first heard of the September 2016 bombing in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan:

"...On Saturday night I was at a friend's birthday party. I saw the alerts going off on my phone. I sort of found a corner, hopped on social media and hopped into a virtual newsroom that we use called Slack... everybody was kind of reporting in with what they were seeing and flagging things... So there's that initial very quick, rapid trying to come up to speed with what the facts on the ground are."[21]

Harris further emphasized the role of social media in today's reporting, noting that once a suspect is named, "one of the first things we do is look at their social media profiles."[22]

In addition, social media is changing who actually shapes the story about an attack. Today, victims, eyewitnesses, and even perpetrators of an attack are able to use social media to directly reach the public immediately and repeatedly. Law enforcement and first responders also increasingly use social media to communicate directly with the public about an attack, without necessarily relying on the news media. On November 13, 2016, for example, ISIS mounted a devastating coordinated attack on the city of Paris, killing 130 people, an event that reverberated through social media as it was happening. A little over a week later, police traced three suspects to Brussels, placing the entire city on lockdown as they searched for the suspects. Authorities took to Twitter, requesting that city residents refrain from posting messages that might expose or interfere with police operations going on in various neighborhoods.[23] The Twitter community responded by flooding the platform with pictures of cats, with the hashtag #BrusselsLockdown, making it difficult to pinpoint any details that might have been posted about police activity. The police acknowledged the public assistance on their own Twitter account, with a tongue-in-cheek message and a picture of cat food. "For cats who helped us last night ... Help yourself!"[24]

Terrorists also use social media as a means to directly intimidate their targets, as well as a recruitment and even tactical tool. A 2008 U.S. Army report included scenarios showing how terrorists could use Twitter and other online tools to coordinate attacks using real-time situational information with the assistance of a Global Positioning System (GPS) and other software.[25] A month after the publication of that article, terrorists in Mumbai used Google and live news coverage of Twitter commentary to coordinate attacks in this fashion.[26]

Today, victims, eyewitnesses, and even perpetrators of an attack are able to use social media to directly reach the public immediately and repeatedly.

Many social media companies have taken steps to limit the use of their sites by terrorists and other violent actors through community standards and use policies. On its community standards pages, for example, Facebook states that the company will not allow organizations engaged in terrorist or organized criminal activity to "have a presence" on its site. They also note that they will remove content expressing support for such groups, but will allow "broad discussion and social commentary." In practice, the distinction is not always clear, and Facebook employs a mix of technical filters and human reviewers to exclude unacceptable content. On its rules page, Twitter expresses support for free speech and "speaking truth to power," but notes it will suspend or permanently delete accounts that "make threats of violence or promote violence, including threatening or promoting terrorism." Given the volume of tweets—about 500 million per day— it would not be possible for the company to review all content, and so Twitter relies on users

to report offensive content that makes it past automatic filters.[27]

Smaller social media companies or those based outside the United States may have more permissive rules and fewer staff to enforce community standards or rules. The founder of the Germany-based site Telegram once commented, for example, "the right for privacy is more important than our fear of bad things happening, like terrorism."[28]

A number of lawsuits have sought to hold social media companies accountable for terrorist content on their sites. Section 230 of the 1996 Communications Decency Act states, however, that "no provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider," and the law has generally protected social media companies from such suits. In the summer of 2016, however, new lawsuits were filed against Facebook, Twitter, and Google for providing a platform for terrorist organizations (Hamas[29] and ISIS[30], specifically), rather than for the content of the speech on the site. These suits are still in litigation.

Technological advances may ease the pressure facing social media companies about terrorist content. There is a possibility of using photo DNA technologies to prevent the uploading of terrorist content to social media sites, for example, as has been done with child pornography.[31] Yet such technologies also have their risks and constraints, and social media companies have been somewhat reluctant to adopt them.[32] Mary DeBree, a manager with Facebook's Content Management Unit, for example, noted that unlike child pornography, where the image is criminal, images used in terrorist propaganda can also be used for journalistic purposes or even to counter propaganda and as a result, "automation when it comes to terrorist content is more nuanced," requiring a continued role for human expertise.[33]

THE CHANGING MEDIA ENVIRONMENT: 1993-PRESENT

The use of terrorism as a tactic is not new, and by some reckonings dates back thousands of years. In the last two decades, however, the marriage of information technology and terrorism has changed how news of an attack spreads to the public—and even the nature of the threat itself.

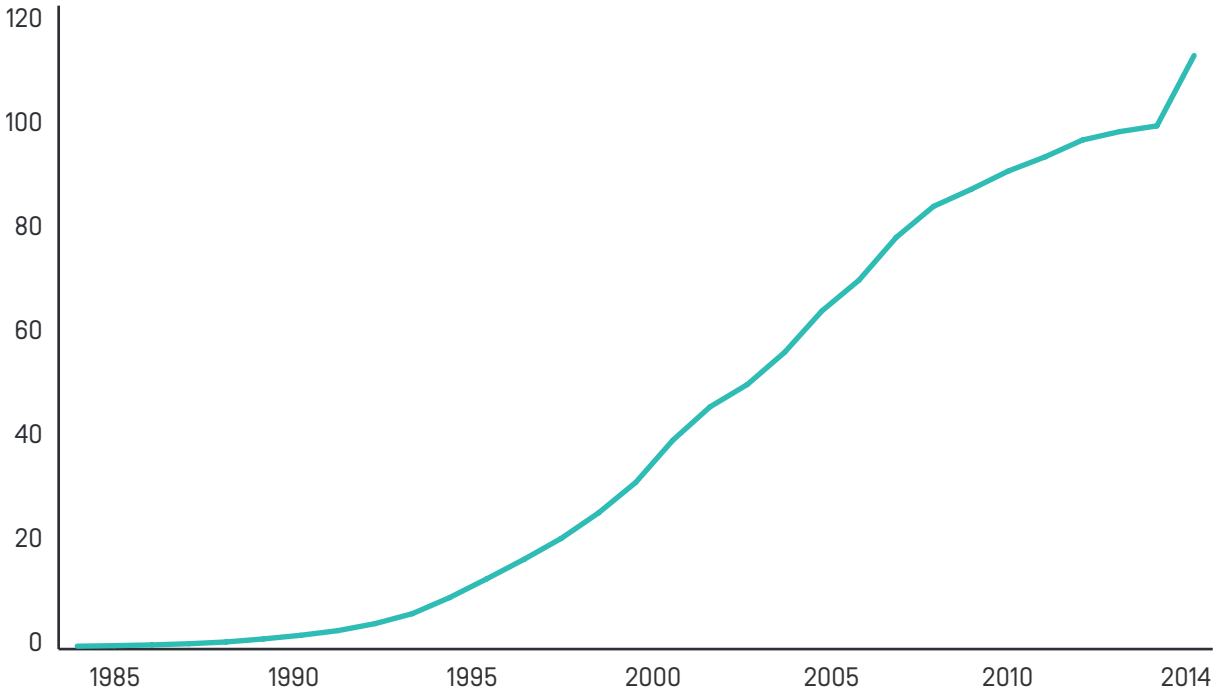
A good starting point for understanding the evolving link between terrorism and information technology is the first World Trade Center bombing, which occurred in New York City on February 26, 1993. At the time, traditional media—television and radio—dominated news coverage. A Pew study around that time found, for example, that only 14

percent of American adults had Internet access while 63 percent either knew nothing or very little about it.[34] The speed that news traveled then was generally slower: it took 29 minutes before the first news of the explosion aired on New York's WINS and WCBS radio stations, and even then the first reports suggested it was an electrical fire.[35] The perpetrators claimed responsibility in a letter mailed to The New York Times, which arrived four days after the attack.[36] The letter cited objections to U.S. policy in the Middle East, and while there was no mention of al Qaeda at the time, it would later be clear that the perpetrators were part of the terrorist organization.

Even in 1993, cell phones were a factor, foreshadowing the emergence of social media. A 1993 report by the New York City Fire Department assessing lessons from the World Trade Center bombing noted that "many 911 calls were received from callers trapped in the towers who had access to cellular phones...their information subsequently was relayed to the command post to assist in the search and evacuation processes."[37] An August 1999 Library of Congress report on the attack cautioned: "the proliferation of cellular phones in recent years has made it possible for emergency victims to interact directly with media."[38]

The 1993 bombing also came at a time of change in television news, only two years after the Gulf War became the first war to be covered live and three years before 24 hour news coverage cemented its role with the entry of Fox News and MSNBC as competitors to CNN.[39][40] The New York Times noted at the time how the live coverage helped produce a "stream-of-consciousness quality to the coverage, and many unsubstantiated theories about what had caused the blast made it onto the air."[41] Public information officials descibed having to scramble to

Figure 1 | Mobile Cellular Subscriptions per 100 People, 1984-2014



Source: The World Bank, International Telecommunication Union, World Telecommunication/ICT Development Report and database. http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.CEL.SETS.P2?end=2014&locations=US&start=1984

keep up both with the onslaught of media requests and a rapidly evolving situation.[42]

Live television led the way in coverage of the next major terrorist attack. At 9:02 A.M. on Wednesday, April 19, 1995, an explosion ripped through the nine-story Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Okla., killing 168 people. This time, individuals tied to the domestic far right conducted the attack. The local KWTV channel began coverage two minutes after the explosion, and all three local TV channels were airing live footage within minutes. By 10:00 A.M. the national networks were airing live coverage of the explosion.[43]

Real-time television coverage of the Oklahoma City bombing brought with it a number of challenges. News anchors often cautioned viewers about the gruesome imagery they would be showing in live feeds. Newspapers faced similar issues, although with more time to assess and debate editorial decisions.[44]

Live television coverage also increased the reporting of unvetted information. Los Angeles Times television critic Howard Rosenberg noted at the time, "On display, once again, was the amazing capacity of TV newscasters to swiftly mobilize their technological resources for horrifically difficult live coverage of major breaking news, and also the perils entailed by such instantaneous coverage as reporters and camera crews and their studio colleagues madly scramble for fragmentary information that they can rush onto the air while the ashes are still settling."[45] Rosenberg noted that at one point an anchor for the local NBC affiliate KFOR-TV overstated the devastation, saying, "downtown Oklahoma City is in smoke and flames right now," while a local CBS affiliate reported erroneously on a second undetonated explosive device, and CNN put live on the air a phone call with a local businessman who ended up being a prankster promoting Howard Stern's radio show.[46] Reporters also, infamously, speculated that Islamist terrorists were behind the attack. CBS aired an interview with a former Oklahoma congressman who said there was "very clear evidence" the attack was conducted by Islamic groups, while CNN and other news outlets reported that authorities were looking for three Arab suspects. CNN recanted the story before airing a similar one again, and again recanting it.[47] While poor editorial decision-making may have played a role in some of these cases, the nature of live television also contributed.

The effect of television coverage of the Oklahoma City bombing was not all negative. Television stations provided critical information to their viewers, including helping to locate victims' families and coordinating food collection. In the following months, local stations broadcast stories celebrating the victims' lives and hotlines for psychological counseling,[48] showing a commitment to the community of which they were a part. Michelle Fink, a spokeswoman for KFOR said, "our philosophy is, we're not going to sensationalize this tragedy that truly happened to our own people."[49]

By September 11, 2001, live television was firmly ensconced and had not changed much since the Oklahoma City bombing. This time, it was the threat that changed. A small group of terrorists were able to use the mobility of American society and a few sharp blades to execute the most brutal, sensationalist terrorist attack in U.S. history. To this day, 9/11 continues to generate fear, anger, and a great deal of publicity.[50]

When the first jet crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center at 8:46 AM, all the major networks quickly broke into their coverage and called in anchors and reporters.[51] By 8:49 A.M., only three minutes later, CNN was airing the news.[52] The sense of disorientation in the live television coverage was palpable. Charles Gibson, then a Good Morning America co-anchor, recalled: "We didn't know anything, so we were going to figure this thing out along with the viewers."[53]

Confused or incorrect information again posed a problem. The "Arlington County After-Action Report on the September 11 Attack on the Pentagon" noted:

> "Understandably, in the first few hours, the media obtained information from any available source, including passengers in automobiles caught in the I-395 congestion. Thus, there were 'eyewitness' accounts of a 'small private aircraft' crashing into the Pentagon, and many other erroneous reports. Estimates of 'up to 800 fatalities' were based on the potential occupancy of the impact area at the Pentagon, despite the renovation work that left a significant part of the area uninhabited."

The Arlington County report blamed government officials for some of the confusion, noting that the failure to set up a Joint information Center to serve as the central site for coordinating interagency media interaction "proved to be an impediment to the presentation of coordinated, factual, and timely public information."[54]

Once again, the media played a role in providing emergency information as they had in prior attacks. The Arlington County After Action Report, for example, noted: "Media reports regarding the overall situation and specific events at the Pentagon were a prime source of information for hospitals and clinic staffs. In some respects, this information compensated for the lack of information flowing to them directly from the scene."[55]

Cell phones were an important facet of the media environment during the 9/11 attack. According to the 9/11 report, at least 10 passengers and two crew members on United Flight 93 "shared vital

The Beltway Snipers Case: The Challenge of a Prolonged Attack

Many of the terrorist attacks in the United States in the last 20 years have been of short duration. The June 16, 2016 attack in Orlando, for example, was over in a matter of hours, before most Americans woke up. The short timelines of attacks such as Orlando may obscure the potential for more serious, longer-lasting attacks that can pose unique challenges for media coverage and government response—and can exact a greater psychological toll on the public.[58]

Although the 2002 Beltway Sniper attacks in Washington, D.C., are not generally considered a terrorist attack, given that the perpetrators lacked a political motive, this incident does offer insights as to how a prolonged attack might affect the American public. For 23 days, starting on October 2, 2002 Lee Boyd Malvo and John Allen Muhammad conducted 14 shootings, killing 10 people, chosen at random.[59] In one study of public reaction in the Washington, D.C., area, more than half of respondents to a poll reported feeling less safe in their own neighborhoods as a result of the shootings, and more than one third said they were afraid to go outside. Almost half showed signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).[60]

The prolonged time frame of the attacks also stressed the government's interaction with media and the public. Joe Gentile, the public information officer for the Washington Metropolitan Police Department, stated: "From a public information perspective this was the most difficult case I've ever seen."[61] Brian Porter, then the Montgomery County, Md. schools spokesman, noted: "The biggest difficulty facing the school district was keeping emotions in check and the schools functioning. We didn't do Code Blue just once—it was done repeatedly. There were eight days where the school system implemented a Code Blue and 20 days when the district prohibited outside activities in the county."[62] Montgomery County was also overwhelmed by the scale of press interest, issuing more than 1,300 press passes and holding 59 press conferences during the investigation.[63]

information with family, friends, colleagues, or others on the ground."[56] Five of the calls included information about the earlier hijackings, informing the passengers' decision to challenge the hijackers' control of the plane and prevent them from reaching their objective.[57]

In the years after the 9/11 attacks, traditional media was still controlling the coverage. When al Qaeda officially claimed responsibility in late 2004, for example, it did so via a videotape featuring Bin Laden and delivered to al Jazeera. The station decided to air only about seven minutes of the 18-minute tape, withstanding pressure from the U.S. government not to air the tape at all.[64]

By the early 2000s, however, technology was undermining the traditional media's gatekeeper role. One such advancement was the development of the camera phone. The first camera phones emerged in 2000 in Japan and South Korea, entering the American market in November 2002, more than a year after the September 11 attacks.[65] By 2004, more than half the phones sold worldwide had a camera.[66]

On July 7, 2005, jihadist terrorists bombed London's metro killing more than 50 people. Four days after the attack, National Geographic ran an article, "London Bombing Pictures Mark New Role for Camera Phones."[67] The article called the existence of camera phone footage from commuters "a first for such a major breaking news story" and "a 'tipping point' in the news-gathering process."[68] Within 30 minutes of the bombings, cell phone video footage of the explosions was airing on television, as well.[69] Networks put out calls for such footage, and the BBC received 30 video clips and 300 emails with photos on the day of the attacks.[70]

Bystanders during the shooting at Fort Hood on Nov. 5, 2009. (Photo: Jeramie Sivley / U.S. Army)

Live, 24-hour news coverage and cellphones also played an important part in the November 5, 2009 shooting at Fort Hood in Texas. Nidal Hasan, a 39 year-old U.S. Army Major and psychiatrist, killed 13 people at the military base. Most networks interrupted normal broadcasting with live coverage of the shooting within minutes of the incident.[71] CNN invited people on the base to call in to the program with more information.[72] Indeed, the instantaneous nature of live coverage continued to run the risk of spreading misinformation. In one such example, Fox News called Nidal Hasan's cousin Nader Hasan, a well-respected lawyer in the Washington, D.C. area, putting him live on the air.[73] Nader, who knew little about the shooting, called his cousin a "good American," referring to his military service and lack of a criminal background, yet the comment was widely represented as a justification and defense of the shooting.[74] Nader continued for months to be harassed by phone calls and hostile emails from people who had seen the interview, making him feel as if he and his family had been labeled as terrorists.[75]

The Fort Hood shooting, one of the first jihadist attacks of the social media era, also illustrated the ways in which social media was beginning to change the news environment. The Pew Research Center's New Media Index found that from November 2-6, 20 percent of links to news stories from blogs were about the attack.[76] On Twitter, the attack accounted for 32 percent of links to news stories.[77] Social media found its way into traditional reporting as a variety of outlets, including the *New York Times*, set up lists of Twitter accounts to follow on the attack.[78] The *Austin American-Statesman* even

set up a Twitter account specifically to provide raw information as it came in.[79]

> **Just as with live television coverage, social media experienced its own challenges with spreading misinformation.**

Just as with live television coverage, social media experienced its own challenges with spreading misinformation. Among the misinformation were rumors of more than one shooter, a common issue with mass shooting incidents.[80]

The next deadly jihadist attack in the United States occurred on April 15, 2013, when two bombs exploded along the route of the Boston Marathon.[81] The attack, conducted by Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, killed three people, and the Tsarnaevs managed to leave the scene and continue their violence over the next few days, killing one more person.[82] Social media played a significant role during the Boston Marathon bombing, but this time, as both a conveyer of information for the news media and public and as a law enforcement tool.

Following the detonation of the first bomb, the Boston police commissioner called for the use of social media to disseminate information while on his way to the scene and sent a tweet confirming the details of the bombing within an hour.[83] Throughout the incident, Boston police used social media to help counteract misinformation spreading both via social media and traditional media.[84]

Though social media mostly played a positive role for law enforcement during the Boston Marathon attack, the medium also presented some challenges for first responders. Massachusetts' After Action Report noted that the city did not establish a Joint Information Center and that while traditional tools for reaching the public, such as press conferences, operated relatively well, "there was no coordination or validation of messages delivered by numerous agencies and organizations through social media."[85] In at least one case, the Boston Police actively used social media to spread misinformation, such as erroneous accounts of an explosion at the John F. Kennedy Library.[86]

Perhaps more of a problem than a lack of coordination was the power of enthusiasm on social media to go seriously awry. Users on the social media site Reddit started a thread on the Boston bombing, with users posting theories and combing through photographs, identifying individuals they thought might be the culprits.[87] Law enforcement officials decided to release grainy photos of the two suspects, who would later be identified as the Tsarnaevs, in part because they were afraid that if they did not, news outlets and social media would lead to "a chaotic free-for-all, with news media cars and helicopters, as well as online vigilante detectives, competing with police in the chase to find the suspects," in the words of the Washington Post.[88]

Unfortunately, a Reddit user misidentified Sunil Tripathi, a missing Brown University student, as one of suspects in the photo, a speculation that went viral on Twitter and other social media. Even more to the point, online, print, and television journalists from Digg, Politico, Buzzfeed, CBS, NBC, and others picked up the allegation and repeated it.[89] The Tripathi family was flooded with angry and threatening emails, Facebook posts, and phone calls, and their son's picture was broadcast as "Suspect Number Two" in the bombing.[90] Sunil Tripathi was not only uninvolved in the bombing, he was deceased, a victim of suicide. While people had shared theories on online message boards about the 2002 D.C. Sniper attacks, often flooding the official tip line with their theories,[91] social media gave such theorizing a far larger, immediate, omnipresent, and in the case of Tripathi, tragic vehicle for shaping the Boston story.

The new role of social media in terrorist attacks was not limited to the United States. On September 21, 2013, terrorists directed and organized by the Somali al Qaeda affiliate al Shabaab initiated a four-day

siege of the upscale Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi, Kenya, during which 67 people were killed.

Westgate marked the first time a terrorist group used Twitter to provide live updates about a significant terrorist attack.[92] The initial confirmation of the attack came not via news channels or government officials, but directly from an al Shabaab-affiliated Twitter account, which gave the group the opportunity to shape the narrative of the attack first. J.M. Berger, an investigative reporter, noted that "the Westgate attack was definitely a watershed moment," shaping the way social media, and in particular Twitter, viewed the challenge of terrorist activity on their platforms.[93]

Since 2014, ISIS has led the way for terrorist groups in using modern technology and social media to directly reach a global audience, including with very graphic content. In February 2016, for example, Twitter announced that it had suspended "over 125,000 accounts for threatening or promoting terrorist acts, primarily related to ISIS" since the middle of 2015.[94] ISIS propaganda also circulates via Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, and Tumblr among other sites. And ISIS is not the only group using these online tools: Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Al Shabaab, Boko Haram, and other groups all use the Internet to post magazines, videos, and other content.[95]

This growth in terrorist media affects the ability of traditional news media to filter problematic content. Jason Burke, a longtime foreign correspondent, for example, has argued that while traditional media's decisions not to show graphic imagery are welcome, it "misses the point" because terrorists are increasingly capable of production and distribution themselves.[96]

Social media and new technology have also made it easier for terrorist networks to maintain links with the outside world in the face of military and law enforcement pressure. This was visible during the 2016 attack on a cafe in Dhaka, Bangladesh. ISIS' Amaq media outlet released photographs of the attackers and the inside of the cafe prior to the entry of police.[97] Indeed, Amaq acts as a wire service, distributing and broadcasting short claims of responsibility and statements praising attacks throughout the world.[98]

On social media, it is increasingly easy to share images, which have particular power to affect a broader audience.[99] On June 13, 2016 in Magnaville, France, Larossi Abballa, a 25-year-old Frenchman who had previously been convicted of being part of an ISIS recruitment network, killed an off-duty police officer and his female partner and proceeded to set up a live video stream using Facebook, pledging allegiance to ISIS and weighing in real time whether to murder the couple's son.[100] ISIS later disseminated an edited version of the video via Amaq, further confirming that the traditional media is no longer the only gatekeeper of news.[101]

Facebook Live and other means of livestreaming major events will likely play an increasing role in shaping future coverage of terrorism. Mary DeBree, a manager with Facebook's content management team, said: "Live is a very new product; it basically came out in June [2016], so I don't think we've really even seen the full extent of what it will be used for. But certainly we've begun to see the power of the eyewitness reporting and how important it is and how valuable it is to people to have that."[102]

The growth in terrorist media affects the ability of traditional news media to filter problematic content.

2016 ORLANDO NIGHTCLUB SHOOTING

In June 2016, a gunman claiming allegiance with ISIS killed 49 people in Orlando, Fla., the worst mass shooting in U.S. history. As a mid-sized city with an outsized effect on American life—it is one of the most visited cities in the country—Orlando offers an important case study in how to handle communications and media in the wake of an attack. This section of the report recounts the events of June 12, examining the role of city government officials, first responders, news media, and social media in shaping the public response to the attack. A key finding of the investigation is that social media and technological advancements have significantly diminished the role of traditional media as a gatekeeper of coverage of terror attacks. In the case of Orlando, this created challenges similar to previous cases, but also presented opportunities for building civic resilience to terrorism.

Timeline of Attack

On Sunday, June 12, 2016, Omar Mateen opened fire inside of Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Fla., killing 49 and wounding 53. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Justice, and the Orange County Sheriff's Office (OCSO) released official accounts of the shooting in mid-June 2016.

According to the OCSO Pulse shooting incident reports, there were 127 deputies on the scene, plus an additional 17 deputies in a staging area nearby. Twenty-one deputies entered the building in total.

According to an excerpt released by the FBI on June 20, which is based on the Orlando Police Department (OPD) radio communications during the event, the shooting began around 2:00 A.M. and the incident continued until 5:15 A.M., when the shooter was reported down.

According to Officer Sergio Uribe's incident report, at 2:02 A.M., a dispatcher informed him and the other responding deputies that an OPD officer was not responding to his radio after calling, "Shots fired!"[103] At approximately 2:35 A.M., Mateen dialed 911 from inside of Pulse nightclub and spoke with an operator. As soon as the Orlando Police Dispatcher answered the call, Mateen began speaking in Arabic saying, "In the name of God the Merciful, the beneficent." He said several phrases in Arabic, which the FBI later translated, though he confessed to his crimes in English.

"Praise be to God, and prayers as well as peace be upon the prophet of God," Mateen continued. Switching to English, he then said: "I wanna let you know, I'm in Orlando and I did the shootings."

The Pulse nightclub in Orlando, where Omar Mateen killed 49 people in June 2016. (Photo: Neville Elder / Shutterstock.com)

During the call, which lasted less than a minute, Mateen said his name was "I pledge of allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi of the Islamic State." He repeated this and added that he was located in Orlando before terminating the call.

Shortly thereafter, Mateen engaged in three conversations with OPD's Crisis Negotiation Team, according to the FBI's account. During the three calls, which lasted nine, 16, and three minutes respectively, Mateen told a crisis negotiator the reason he was "out here now" was related to the U.S. bombing of Syria and Iraq. In addition to providing motive, he attempted to inflate the severity of the threat he posed, saying that he had a number of explosives with him, including a vest of the type that was used in the November 2015 Paris attacks. Mateen told one of the negotiators: "In the next few days, you're going to see more of this type of action going on."

OPD began rescuing people from open areas, like the dance floor, as early as approximately 2:15 A.M. Around 04:30 A.M., officers began a rescue operation for those still locked in smaller rooms, pulling an air conditioning unit out of a Pulse dressing room window for victims to evacuate. As victims left the building, they told police officers that the shooter said he was going to put four vests with bombs on victims within the next 15 minutes.

According to Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer, a hostage from inside the club also texted Mateen's claims. "I thought this was going to end with the building and everyone in it getting blown up," he later said.[104] An immediate search of Mateen's vehicle produced no evidence of any explosive devices.

OPD SWAT and OCSO's Hazardous Device Team breached a wall at approximately 05:02 A.M., and the shooter was reported down within fifteen minutes. After that, Officer Terence Lee and others assisted in corralling the witnesses near the command post to be debriefed by FBI agents, according to his incident report.

Local agencies responding to the Orlando nightclub shooting began releasing documents related to their response in the weeks following the attack.[105] Information released so far has left reporters with remaining questions about the timeline of the attack, as well as how officials handled the initial response. Thus far, the releases have not included calls made to the OPD by people inside the club or by Mateen. Twenty-seven news organizations, including the Orlando Sentinel, are suing the city for the release of the calls, citing Florida's expansive public records or "sunshine" law.[106]

Dissemination of Information

The way information traveled from victims, the shooter, and law enforcement to traditional and social media and ultimately to the public illustrates just how much has changed since the 1993 World Trade Center attacks.

Victims

The communications of victims during the attack were primarily point-to-point, or from individuals to individuals and not directly out to a broader public audience, mirroring information flows in earlier attacks, such as 9/11. Unlike past attacks, however, hostages in the bathroom with Mateen recorded videos on their phones, which they sent directly to family members. They also made phone calls to the police. The FBI and the Department of

Justice released a joint statement on June 20, 2016, stating that out of respect for the victims of the shooting, law enforcement would not release audio of the shooter's 911 calls, nor audio or transcripts of the calls made by victims at the Pulse nightclub during the incident.[107] On August 30, 2016, however, the OCSO did release twenty 911 calls from frantic family members and friends of people trapped inside of the club.

The FBI acknowledged the victims provided information that allowed the OPD to gain knowledge of the situation inside Pulse and facilitated the rescue of the victims. Reports support that the victims were communicating on cell phones from inside of the nightclub with their families and law enforcement throughout the attack. Miguel Leiva, for example, hid with approximately 20 to 30 people in a Pulse bathroom stall for four hours. Leiva, who suffered two gunshot wounds in the attack, sent videos to his girlfriend, telling a reporter:

"The only way we knew to, like, let our families know, you know, we're OK, we're OK, was just to record it and let them hear that we're trying to be quiet and send the video."[108]

Few of these videos made it onto social or news media. The news director for WFTV, based in Orlando, said he had footage of the attack filmed inside the club, which he decided not to air, given the graphic nature of it.[109] There was one major exception, however: Amanda Alvear, a victim who died in the attack, posted three video clips to Snapchat, a popular image messaging and multimedia mobile application. A friend then uploaded the video to Facebook, garnering more one million views within 24 hours.[110] At the time of this writing, the video has accumulated more than 3.7 million views.[111] This video proliferated not only on social media, but also on television news, which is increasingly airing such eyewitness footage gleaned from social media.

Shooter

There is no evidence that Mateen had any interaction with a foreign terror organization, though he claimed sympathies with several terrorist groups and ISIS claimed credit after the attack. AQAP lauded Mateen in its online magazine, as the group had after the Nice attack in 2016, in which 84 people were killed.[112]

Mateen did, however, use his cell phone and social media in an attempt to publicize his attack and directly reach a wider audience, actively checking online to see if his methods were effective. His account to police was mostly misleading, and possibly intended to inflate his own importance and the threat he posed. In addition to communicating with a 911 operator and three crisis negotiators, Mateen also exchanged text messages with his wife, Noor Salman. According to officials, Mateen posted messages of allegiance to ISIS on five different Facebook accounts during the attack.[113] Facebook removed his posts, though it is unclear how quickly they were removed. According to a letter from Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Chairman Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.) to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, the removed content included the following posts: "America and Russia stop bombing the Islamic state..I pledge my alliance [sic] to abu bakr al Baghdadi [sic]...may Allah accept me"; "The real muslims [sic] will never accept the filthy ways of the west," and "You kill innocent women and children by doing us [sic] airstrikes..now taste the Islamic state vengeance." In a final post, Mateen apparently wrote, "In the next few days you will see attacks from the Islamic state in the usa [sic]."[114] Throughout the attack, Mateen apparently searched for "Pulse Orlando" and "Shooting" using the Facebook search function, also searching for himself on Google. Around 4:00 A.M., according to an anonymous police official who spoke to CNN, Mateen texted his wife, Noor Salman, asking if she'd seen the news.[115] Finally, he called friends to say goodbye, and also called the newsroom of the local CNN affiliate station, News 13.[116]

Despite Mateen's volubility during the attack, his motivations remained a subject of speculation afterwards. Many reports surfaced in the immediate aftermath of the shooting, alleging that Omar

Mateen frequented gay dating apps and other gay nightclubs. Other reports stated that he cased Disney World and had other targets for potential attacks. These rumors proliferated rapidly across both social and news media. Ron Hopper, FBI assistant special agent in charge of the Tampa Division, told the Washington Post that authorities had no evidence that Mateen was casing other locations, such as Disney, or that he was gay or had visited other gay clubs.[117] Corrections to the rumors also proliferated across social media.

City Government and Law Enforcement

Typically, first responders have the most information about an attack, and they and other government officials are responsible for providing information to the public, relying on news media to disseminate the information. In the past, these individuals had some control over what information reached the public, at least in the immediate wake of an attack, but today, the shooter, victims, and eyewitnesses also have the ability to communicate directly with the public. In the case of Orlando, the first details to reach law enforcement came from the victims and the shooter during the attack. As with the 9/11 attacks, where cell phone calls with people on the ground watching news informed the United 93 passenger revolt, victims at the Pulse club were able to use their cell phones not only to contact the OPD and their relatives, but to collect video evidence of the attack, ultimately facilitating a rescue operation. These accounts did not, however, immediately reach the public.

First responders and government officials will generally have two top priorities after an attack: the law enforcement operation itself and public safety. As the history of press coverage of terrorist attacks shows, the media's need for more information and the competitive pressure for a scoop is not always compatible with these government priorities, especially if official sources do not provide enough information. In the case of Orlando, as news of the attack spread, hundreds of reporters descended on the city, looking to cover the story. As Americans woke up to the news, discussions and speculations swiftly mounted on social media. Officials and local press reported feeling quickly overwhelmed by the pace of events and the demands for information. Local government officials managed to mitigate much of this frenzy, however, by having a communications strategy in place prior to the attack.

Local government officials managed to mitigate much of this frenzy, however, by having a communications strategy in place prior to the attack.

John "Buddy" Dyer was first elected mayor of Orlando in 2003. The next year, Hurricane Charley directly hit Orlando on August 13, 2004, followed a few weeks later by Hurricane Frances and then Hurricane Jeanne. "We didn't have electricity," Dyer recalled, "it was really hard to communicate [with city residents] in the aftermath…That event showed me the importance of communications."[118] As a result, Mayor Dyer emphasized public communications in the city's table top exercises and other trainings for disaster situations.

Heather Fagan, the mayor's deputy chief of staff, worked with Dyer to formulate much of the communication strategy for the city that morning, drawing on plans and past exercises.[119] "Every year we have tabletop exercises for our emergency management, and communications is a function of that." Fagan explained that the exercises have historically been focused on weather, but last year, she realized they were not prepared for the sort of civil unrest in seen Ferguson, Mo. in 2014 and Baltimore, Md. in 2015. "So," Fagan said, the city "had an exercise specifically related to civil disobedience, and a huge component of that was communications." Public information officers from the police and fire departments and city communications teams all played an active part.

Through that training, the city established a process for communicating about different types of events.

"We established that…if it was a hurricane then it would be the city's Twitter and Facebook that took the lead on communication and messaging. Or if it was…civil unrest, it would be the police department. So we didn't even have to think twice… we instinctively knew that OPD was going to go to… Twitter…and we would all share information from that," Fagan explained.

Reporters largely relied on the OPD's Twitter account for attack details, as did the rest of the public, at least initially. According to local reporters, the police department did a decent job of releasing information through the account in a timely manner. As national media began arriving on the scene, Twitter and Facebook postings gave city officials a way to respond to the rising volume of press inquiries without getting overwhelmed. At the same time, the OPD may have chosen to keep the press at arm's length for other reasons. According to reporters and local officials, Orlando Sentinel reporter David Harris' 2015 story about excessive use of force by Orlando police left a chill in relations between the OPD and local media, which may have affected access to police sources.[120]

Technology management was a significant component of the city's response strategy, beyond communicating the details of the incident. According to Fagan, their first step was to arrange a line that the public could call to provide information or ask questions. Additionally, the city established an in-person family notification center. There was also a website where an assistant would eventually take calls throughout the night from an officer who was notifying victims' next of kin. Once the web assistant received that information, she would immediately put the name online. "We tried to really make the families and the people wanting the information the priority," said Fagan.

Getting credible information about the attack and especially the victims out to the city as quickly as possible was a top priority for the mayor and his staff throughout the incident and its aftermath, but they also explicitly discussed how to calm public fears. The mayor first heard of the attacks around 3:00 A.M. when Orlando Deputy Chief of Police Bobby Anzueto called to tell him there was an active shooter and hostage situation, with multiple casualties. Dyer and Fagan then went to the on-site command center, where they waited for the situation to resolve. Dyer recalled trying to stay out of the way of the ongoing operation, finding himself wondering: "What is my role? I've never been in this situation." Fagan talked to the police department's public information officers, trying to stay abreast of the unfolding events. "We tried to gather as much information as possible so we could convey that later," Dyer noted.[121]

Dyer made the decision, with local law enforcement and police officials, to delay any public statements until they could confirm that there were no explosives. That meant the first press conference did not occur until around 7:15 A.M., more than five hours after the incident began. Dyer and Fagan planned carefully who would speak at the press

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conferences, and in what order. Fagan said initially that the plan was to have the police chief speak first and provide details, but then they decided it was more important for the mayor to set the tone and assuage fears. "I wanted to keep it factual and concise," Dyer later recalled, "but also let people know this is safe, we had this under control…if you leave a void, people will fill a void, even if it's not correct information."[122]

> **Different objectives and priorities between the FBI and the city became a challenge in releasing details about the attack, and in keeping ahead of the national media.**

In preparing for the second news conference, Dyer and Fagan braced themselves to announce the full scope of the attack, with the mayor once again speaking first. While Dyer still wanted to communicate as much information as possible, especially about the victims, and the sense that law enforcement had the situation under control, he also had two other messages he wanted to convey. First, he did not want Orlando to be branded as hostile to the LGBT community. "Our city won't be defined by hate, but by how we respond, with love, compassion, and unity…it's just what came to me, what I thought needed to be defined,"[123] he said. Dyer's other concern was about the risk of retaliation and copycat attacks, which is why he invited Imam Muhammed Musri, president of the Islamic Society of Florida, to speak at the press conference. "I trusted I could call on him and he would say exactly the right thing," Dyer said. "It's all about relationships."

Even with the city's well-prepared communications strategy, city officials did not always have information control. "Everyone who could get in front of a microphone did," Dyer noted, "especially in between press conferences." Some officials who spoke publicly ran counter to the city's messaging, including U.S. Rep. Alan Grayson (D-Fla.) and Sen. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.), who both labeled the attack a terrorist incident before that information was made public by law enforcement.

Indeed, the FBI had its own, carefully thought-out communications plan, according to a source at the headquarters. However, different objectives and priorities between the FBI and the city became a challenge in releasing details about the attack, and in keeping ahead of the national media. Fagan recalled that "law enforcement, what they were really going back and forth on, was how much information they could release without jeopardizing the investigation." For example, according to Fagan, at one point the FBI instructed the city government not to confirm the name of the shooter, "and we turn over and it's all there on CNN," she said. "We couldn't override that…they had their reasons for it, but people were confirming that and it was in the press. So that was hard."

Traditional Media

Information can trickle out to traditional media in a variety of ways, moving from law enforcement to local officials, from a press conference to a scrum of reporters, and from the reporter on the scene back to the newsroom. In the case of Orlando, there was one piece of information that nearly everyone received at the same time.

Leading the second press conference of the morning, Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer took the podium and announced, "Today we're dealing with something we never imagined and is unimaginable. Since the last update, we have gotten better access to the building. We cleared the building. And it is with great sadness that I share we have not 20, but 50 casualties."

Everyone gasped, according to Evan Lambert, a reporter for Fox 13 Tampa Bay, who arrived to the scene in time for the second press conference.[124] Elyssa Cherney and David Harris, reporters from the Orlando Sentinel; John Cutter, the Sentinel's managing editor; Matt Parcell, the news director at

Orlando's ABC affiliate WFTV; and Heather Fagan, Mayor Dyer's chief of staff, all recalled feeling a sense of shock. "I knew I had to be strong, but it was so hard to stand up there and say it's 50 not 20," Dyer recalled. "That was really hard, but I knew I couldn't break down."[125]

At the time of the nightclub shooting, barely 24 hours had passed since Christina Victoria Grimmie, a popular singer, had been shot and killed by a deranged fan in Orlando. Because of the concert shooting, according to John Cutter, the Orlando Sentinel newsroom was "hyper alerted" to the initial report of an incident at the nightclub, though initial reports indicated "there may have been 10 to 20 injured. And then a report said 20 dead, and it wasn't until mid-morning when we knew it was 49 people [killed] in the club plus the man who committed the shooting."

At that point, all available reporters shifted duties to augment the seven-person breaking news team. Even with the efforts of the entire paper, however, sourcing was still a challenge. "I didn't want to put his name out there because none of my reports had confirmed it," Cutter said. But he also had in mind the implications of revealing that the shooter had a Muslim-sounding name. "The reason I didn't want to put his name on display [was] because hate on his name and for Muslim Americans," and though some of the sources he heard from were credible news organizations, he did not know them personally and decided to follow the protocol of not putting out the name "until we know more."[126]

While the Orlando incident persisted for three hours, the actual shooting was over relatively quickly. The extended timeline of the attack, in addition to the media environment, gave the local government time to prepare their response. Furthermore, it is safe to say most of America was still asleep or just waking up at the time of the first press conference, which occurred around 7:15 A.M.

In the case of Orlando, the city government decided early on to primarily use social media, in addition to the press conferences, to communicate information to the press and the public.[127]

The regular updates of the OPD's Twitter account reduced pressure on investigators to speak with reporters. Furthermore, due to the elevation of the case to a federal investigation, national media outlets had better access to details about the attack because of federal sources. In other words, local outlets quickly lost the ability to break news, so the Orlando Sentinel shifted its coverage strategy.

"I don't think I can compete as an editor who tried to cover the terrorist link of Omar Mateen," Cutter acknowledged. "I don't have sources in the Department of Justice. The Washington bureau was able to dig up some stuff, but purely as a journalistic endeavor I can't compete with that." However, as the only print newspaper in the city, they did have significant ties to the local community. "When this happened, I thought it was foul-play or a terrorist attack, but we kept telling ourselves that this did happen down the block and the effect wasn't going to be about the global war on terrorism. It was going to be who it happened to, and who knew the people it happened to, and what does it really mean," said Cutter. "We can talk about what happened here. So we also went on that angle…we didn't have all the sources, so we had to be very practical about where we wanted to devote our resources."

> **"We kept telling ourselves that this did happen down the block and the effect wasn't going to be about the global war on terrorism. It was going to be who it happened to, and who knew the people it happened to, and what does it really mean."**

On 9/11, media reports about events at the Pentagon were a primary source of information for hospitals and other relevant parties, compensating for the lack of information flowing directly from law enforcement.[128] This was not the case in Orlando. Cutter attributes this partially to a gradual shift

in how law enforcement communicates with the media. "I think there is a bit more control and a bit more concern in the post 9/11 world with what information gets out. And also with social media and with their accounts they can communicate with people more."

During the Oklahoma City bombing, television stations provided critical information to their viewers, including how to help victims' families and donate food. In Orlando, both local and national publications and news networks reported extensively on assistance available for victims, including the need for blood donations.

"I don't think in the short term we or anyone else is going to abandon the news of the day," Cutter said, reflecting on the change in the media environment. "But I do think you will see more of us try to...put a broader, more regional feel into it."

Social Media

The Orlando attack showed how important social media—and Facebook, in particular—has become in communicating all aspects of an attack. The first bit of information to escape the nightclub was a jarring message posted to Pulse nightclub's Facebook page just seven minutes after Mateen fired the first shots. The message read, "Everyone get out of pulse and keep running."[129] The first details of the attack from law enforcement would emerge nearly two hours later, also on a social media platform. The shooter himself used Facebook to post his status and search for news of the attack. Family and friends of victims posted comments and at least one video about the attack on Facebook, and law enforcement ultimately used the site to gather details about Omar Mateen's motives for conducting the attack. And with 60 percent of Americans receiving their news from social media, Facebook may have been the way many Americans heard about the attack.

ISIS went on to claim responsibility for the attack through social media, as well. The first claim of responsibility came through Amaq, according to New York Times reporter Rukmini Callimachi. The attack happened at around 2 A.M. on June 12, and by 2 P.M. of that day, ISIS claimed responsibility on

A memorial outside the Pulse nightclub in Orlando. (Photo: Miami2you / Shutterstock.com)

an encrypted messaging service called Telegram. And from there the news proliferated on Twitter and other social media forums. The group followed up the next day with a claim on their official radio station. According to Callimachi, this was the same sequence of events as their San Bernardino claim.[130]

Social media also shaped local coverage of the Orlando shooting. According to John Cutter, the Orlando Sentinel used Periscope, a live streaming app, to broadcast the press conferences from the scene. The Sentinel also used Periscope to film reflection videos in the studio. "Every hour we would pull a couple people in and try and do 'what we know now' type videos, and I believe we were showing those on Facebook and then we would just cut them into videos," Cutter said.

In addition to Periscope and Facebook, the Sentinel also had a system called Dejero, a backpack device that streams content directly to the Internet, which could eventually make print media more competitive with broadcast news. Had the reporters

used it more effectively, according to Cutter, they "could have done a lot of the things TV was doing with their trucks…people have an expectation to see and hear things."

As Heather Fagan explained, Orlando managed to avoid the sort of confusing and contradictory social media messaging seen in the Boston bombings by having a digital communications strategy in place. When the attack occurred, all departments of the city understood that information regarding the attack would come from the OPD's Twitter account.

According to Fagan, none of the city's responses were driven by what people were saying on social media, again, a contrast to Boston's experience. This is likely due to the decision to have one person in charge of actively monitoring all of the city's social media accounts and addressing any issues that arose.[131]

In the week following the attack, social media was also instrumental in helping residents of the city deal with the aftermath. There were numerous vigils and memorials created or coordinated through online sites. In one case, social media even became a means for attendees of a vigil to communicate discontent with Florida Gov. Rick Scott's handling of the crisis. On June 19, 2016, the city organized a vigil at Lake Eola in Orlando. Heather Fagan noted that city officials noticed a social media campaign urging attendees at the vigil to turn their backs on Scott when he spoke, "and he ultimately decided to just …stand there and not speak," Fagan recalled.[132] In that case, officials used their monitoring of social media to keep headlines on the victims of the attack rather than the snub of the governor.

COMMUNITY IMPACT AND ELECTORAL CONSEQUENCES

In the case of Orlando, communications from first responders and local government officials were the most important factor in shaping community reactions. The city government's use of social media tools is especially notable, as it gave them a way to authoritatively communicate information about the attack, but also to include information that would not be of interest to national or even local press, such as details about trash pickup in the neighborhood around Pulse.

Dyer used his position as a trusted local official to shape how the wider public might interpret the attack, including clear and comforting language, acknowledging the LGBT community, and keeping the focus on the victims and their families, rather

than the shooter. "I still have never said his name," Dyer recently said, "I don't care about him. He's dead. He's air to me."[133] He also took specific steps to curb potential retaliation toward Muslims, such as inviting Imam Musri to the press conference. Such fears turned out to be well-grounded: on the 15th anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks, a mosque south of Orlando in Fort Pierce, Fla., where Pulse nightclub shooter Omar Mateen prayed, was deliberately set on fire.[134] When asked about the mayor's role in the city's response, many of the people interviewed for this report referred to him as "a hero" who contributed greatly to the resilience of the community.

Given today's news and social media coverage, terrorism simultaneously occurs on a local and national stage and has the potential to impact national policy and electoral politics. Public polling and other research show that Americans prefer strong military reactions to terror attacks, with voters generally expressing more confidence in the Republican Party on such national security matters.[135] A December 2015 Pew Research Center Poll showed voters preferring Republicans to Democrats on terrorism by a 12-point margin.[136]

Given that terrorism has shaped election outcomes in the past, most notably in the 2004 re-election of George W. Bush, there has been much speculation as to whether a terror attack on U.S. soil would have a significant impact on the 2016 presidential election. Specifically, would such an incident favor the Republican candidate? The record is mixed.

In the wake of a January 2015 attack on French satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*, Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump tweeted within hours: "Isn't it interesting that the tragedy in Paris took place in one of the toughest gun control countries in the world?" The tweet would resurface in November 2015, following more attacks in Paris, along with a widely covered speech in which Trump made strong statements about pursuing terrorists. Trump's poll numbers subsequently jumped, helping him to clinch the Republican nomination.[137] Although there were many contributing factors to Trump's rise, terrorism was a top concern for Republican primary voters, who favored Donald Trump on the issue.[138]

The Orlando shooting tested this hypothesis, however, revealing that Americans have varied opinions about Islam, Muslims, and terrorism. These did not translate to an increase in support for the Republican nominee immediately after the attack. Indeed, Trump's favorability rating fell 26 points within days of the attack.[139] And while

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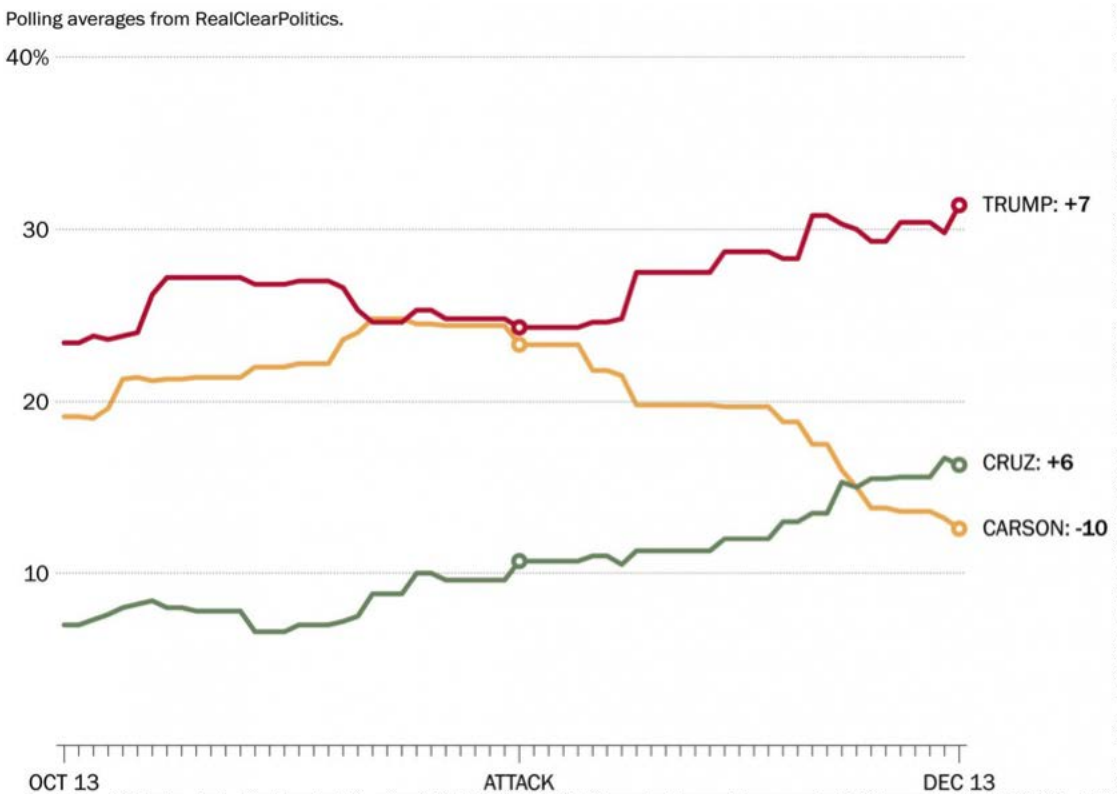
Figure 2 | How the Paris attacks reshaped the Republican field



Source: Philip Bump, "A focus on terrorism may help Trump in the primary. In the general, though, Clinton is stronger," *Washington Post*, March 22, 2016.

Democratic candidates for office in the Orlando area, such as Rep. Alan Grayson (D-Fla.) and State Sen. Geraldine Thompson, also did not appear to benefit electorally from statements they made immediately after the attacks, public opinion polls showed voters had greater confidence in Hillary Clinton than in Donald Trump to handle such attacks.[140]

As deadly as the Orlando shooting was, however, it was not the sort of attack most likely to generate fear and anger.[141] The attack was not broadly destructive of property, involved a single target, and had a definitive end point; the shooter was dead by the time most Americans heard the news and there was no uncertainty as to whether there were attackers at large or multiple targets. Public opinion polling at the time showed that most Americans thought the attack was both a hate crime and a terrorist attack.[142] Subsequent attacks in New York and New Jersey involved no fatalities and though there were multiple bombs, the lone perpetrator was quickly apprehended. It is difficult to say how public opinion might change in the event of an incident similar to the 2008 attack in Mumbai, the 2015 attack in Paris, and the 2016 attack in Brussels, and even a spree killing, such as the Beltway sniper case. All of those attacks involved bombs and guns, multiple shooters, highly public targets, mass casualties, more prolonged timeframes, and a good deal of uncertainty. The risk of a strong public reaction remains, particularly in this supercharged media environment.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS: THE IMPORTANCE OF CIVIC RESILIENCE

"I had the right people in place and we all knew what we would be doing," Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer[143]

One week after the Pulse shootings, 50,000 people crowded into Lake Eola Park in downtown Orlando for a vigil. The crowd, chanting "peace, love, hope," held rainbow banners and candles. At one point, a cheer went up as an actual rainbow appeared in the sky overhead.

"I hope that Orlando continues to show what a kind city it is," said local resident Kelley Irvin, quoted in the Orlando Sentinel. "I think that kindness will really heal the city."[144]

Orlando offers a case study in resilience, which the Department of Homeland Security defines as the "ability to resist, absorb, recover from or successfully adapt to adversity or a change in conditions."[145] The reasons the city was able to absorb adversity may be instructive for other cities.

1. Leadership Matters

Even in an era when social media can define a story before traditional media or government officials can even comment, officials and law enforcement remain an authoritative source of information in a crisis. How and when officials release information will strongly influence the public's response.

> **Orlando was fortunate to have an experienced mayor who had long considered public communications an important part of preparedness for a crisis.**

Orlando was fortunate to have an experienced mayor who had long considered public communications an important part of preparedness for a crisis. City officials knew their roles and responsibilities. Dyer also made a conscious decision to project a calm tone and release as much information as possible, as soon as possible. He and his communications chief chose to keep the focus on the victims, rather than on the shooter. They thought carefully about how to stage press conferences to reinforce these decisions, inviting speakers they hoped would help forestall an angry

response, particularly against Muslim-Americans. As far as having confidence in these speakers, Dyer pointed to the importance of relationships and the necessity of having them before a crisis occurs.

2. Give the Public a Constructive Role

Dyer implicitly gave city residents agency, urging them to show the world that Orlando was a tolerant city. The people of Orlando responded. A local blood bank made an urgent appeal for blood donors, for example, which was rebroadcast by social media, local press, and national media. More than 28,000 people responded, sometimes waiting in long lines.[146] Although there were attacks on mosques in Fort Pierce, Fla., where Omar Mateen worshipped, and Tampa after the attacks, there was no reported retaliation against the Muslim community or mosques in Orlando. Pro-LGBT signage remains present all around the city, from local businesses to city hall. Dyer and other officials gave the people of Orlando a way be something other than victims of terrorism, focusing them on emotions other than fear and anger.

3. Include Communications and Social Media Use in Exercises and Planning–and Real Life

With the volume and pace of social media, Orlando officials could have easily found themselves playing defense, largely just reacting to an avalanche of information and speculation. Instead, law enforcement and city officials actively used social media as a tool to shape press coverage and directly reach the public. This allowed the first responders to disseminate news about the attack and victims as quickly and widely as possible.

Orlando officials had time to craft their initial responses and adjust their plans for the actual circumstances, since the attack happened in the middle of the night. Even so, every individual interviewed for this paper reported feeling overwhelmed as the crisis unfolded and they were swamped by the tidal wave of press and public interest. If the attack had happened in the middle of the day, lasted longer, or involved multiple shooters, the information demands would have been even more overwhelming. This points to the importance of preparedness, including for strategic communications, which should play a prominent part in any exercises or training for crises. City officials have to be ready for the quick pace at which traditional and social media will spread the news of an attack or the story will get away from them.

4. Empower Local Press

Even though traditional media is no longer the sole gatekeeper for news coverage, it still has a strong influence over public responses to terrorism, including in the case of Orlando. There are no set guidelines at most media outlets for how to cover such attacks, however, and individual judgment often comes into play.

As members of the community themselves, local reporters and editors may differ from national reporters and editors on what they consider newsworthy, and play a particularly important role in public resilience and recovery. The day after the attacks, for example, the front page of the Orlando Sentinel ran a full-page editorial titled "Our Community Will Heal," featuring a picture of two mourners at a vigil.[147]

Local press not only had a vested interest in the community, they have a comparative advantage in local content, relative to national reporters. In Orlando, given that these local news sources were at a disadvantage when it came to national law enforcement sources, they leaned into their community-focused role. City officials, sensitive to the predicament of local press in competing with the much larger news outlets that had flooded into the city, held briefings specifically for local media. Few of the local reporters interviewed for this paper had had the opportunity, however, to participate in trainings or seminars on how to cover a terrorist attack, nor were there any specific editorial guidelines for how to cover such incidents.

Print newsrooms across the country have been shrinking for some time, which may be compromising the ability of local outlets to cover news, particularly breaking news. The Orlando Sentinel, for example, was operating with one third of the staff it had just a few years ago.[148] It is unclear if the comparative advantage of local knowledge will be enough to save some of these traditional outlets in the face of stiff competition. Ironically, local media's use of social media and other new technologies may be helping them compete, from the livestreaming Dejero kit to use of social media to find sources or promote stories. The Sentinel's front page editorial the day after the attack, for example, included the hashtag #OrlandoUnited in a large font.

5. Social Media Companies Should Embrace Responsibility

Social media companies are likely to continue to face difficult choices when it comes to the tension between dangerous terrorist speech online and freedom of expression. Live streaming capabilities have already made those hard choices even harder. And claims that the companies are not responsible for unfettered discussion on their sites will ring hollow when something goes wrong, as with Reddit's shameful treatment of Sunil Tripathi, whom users misidentifed as the perpetrator of the Boston Marathon bombing. On the other hand, Orlando showed that Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms can also be a forum for constructive collective action in response to terrorism. These companies should acknowledge the de facto role they are playing as the mass media of choice for many people and be proactive about adopting standards and responsibilities. The First Draft Coalition, a group of social media sites and projects, for example, recently launched an effort toward improving "eyewitness media" and "raising awareness and improving standards around the use of content sourced from the social web."[149] Other companies, such as Facebook and Google, have engaged with law enforcement and other government officials on how to be responsible about terrorist and extremist content.

Orlando is the 73rd largest city in the country, comparable in population to Lincoln, Neb. and Chula Vista, Calif.[150] Orlando is, however, a major tourist destination, with some 66 million annual visitors.[151] The city has resources, opportunities, and challenges most cities its size do not, and so its level of preparedness may be unusual. Nonetheless, there are lessons for any municipality in this example: leadership, preparation, extensive use of social media, cooperation with local press, and clear, constructive, and quick communications are the building blocks of civic resilience to terrorism.

The history of the last 20 years shows that technology has dramatically changed both the media environment and the ways in which terrorists access the "larger human audience." As social media continues to evolve, authority and accountability for shaping the story are changing. Eyewitnesses, victims, and perpetrators increasingly are competing with officials and reporters to share information and images with the public. In the case of Orlando, law enforcement and public officials made good use of social media, but that also cut out the press in some ways. Media organizations play an important role in holding public officials accountable: if officials bypass them, who will play that role? Will accountability be crowdsourced or hashtagged in the future? That may be an unreasonable expectation, given how much misinformation has spread through social media in past attacks.

Some things have not changed, however: the awful truth is that terrorism is often effective in generating publicity and provoking emotions and reactions. Civic resilience to terrorism should be a public policy priority and the responsibility of city governments, law enforcement officials, journalists, social media companies, and members of the public, who ultimately get to choose how they react to an attack. Orlando offers one example of how a community can successfully choose to be resilient.

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120 It should be noted that Orlando Police Chief John Mina declined to be interviewed for this report on OPD's communications strategy during the attack, citing the current after action report underway by the Department

of Justice's Community Oriented Policing Service (COPS). Public Information Officers (PIO) declined to return phone calls or emails, and Staff Director for Chief Mina Sr. Lt. Vincent Ogburn refused to be interviewed on several occasions.

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