

Challenging a Terrorist Tag in the Media: Framing, the Politics of Resistance and an Iranian Opposition Group

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Abstract

Scholars have shown that media framing has a powerful effect on citizen perception and policy debates. Research has provided less insight into the ability of marginalized actors to promote their preferred frames in the media in a dynamic political context. The efforts of an exiled Iranian opposition group to get its name removed from official terror lists in the US, UK and EU provides a valuable platform to examine this problem. Using a content analysis I explore how the group promoted its frames in the opinion sections of major world news publications over 9 years (2003-2012). I then examine the extent to which journalists aligned to its frames, as opposed to rival official frames, over time in the larger arena of news. The results support research showing that by nurturing small opportunities, marginalized political actors can expand media capacity and influence, but these effects are mediated at least in part by critical or focusing events that make rival frames less salient. The study sheds light on the complex relationship between activists, the government and the media. It has implications for the ability of marginalized political actors to get their frames into public discourse. It also has implications for terror tagging and media coverage of other controversial issues.

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