



Humanities and Social Sciences  
Bachelor in Global Communication

Final Bachelor Thesis

**Terrorism and Media:  
exploring the causes for  
unbalanced media  
coverage of terrorist  
attacks**

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## **Abstract**

The study examines the intricate and nuanced nature of media coverage of terrorism and its impact on the public. The findings confirm that media coverage is affected by multiple variables, including the nationality and geographic location of media outlets, and substantiate the impact of media coverage on both the public and terrorism. The study also reveals that the asymmetry in coverage is not necessarily disproportionate and is shaped by the frequency of terrorist events and other variables. The nationality of media outlets is a crucial determinant of variations in media coverage, and each country exhibits a unique composition of its media environment.

The study concludes that the coverage of terrorism in the media is influenced by various factors, including the nationality and type of media outlets, as well as the characteristics of the terrorist wave in question. The study underscores the complexity of media coverage of terrorism and the importance of examining multiple factors to fully comprehend the nature of the discourse surrounding it

**Keywords:** GTD, terrorism, media coverage, discourse analysis, nationality

## **Resumen**

El estudio examina la naturaleza de la cobertura de los medios de comunicación sobre el terrorismo y su impacto en el público. Los hallazgos confirman que la cobertura de los medios de comunicación se ve afectada por múltiples variables, incluyendo la nacionalidad y ubicación geográfica de los medios de comunicación, y respaldan el impacto de la cobertura de los medios de comunicación tanto en el público como en el terrorismo. El estudio también revela que la asimetría en la cobertura no necesariamente es desproporcionada y está moldeada por los eventos terroristas y otras variables. La nacionalidad de los medios de comunicación es un determinante crucial de las variaciones en la cobertura de los medios y cada país presenta una configuración única de su entorno mediático.

El estudio concluye que la cobertura del terrorismo en los medios de comunicación está influenciada por diversas variables, incluyendo la nacionalidad y el tipo de los medios de comunicación, así como las características de la ola terrorista en cuestión. También se destaca la complejidad de la cobertura de los medios de comunicación sobre el terrorismo y la importancia de examinar múltiples factores para comprender la naturaleza del discurso que lo rodea

**Palabras clave:** GTD, terrorismo, cobertura mediática, análisis del discurso, nacionalidad

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## **1. Contextualization of the topic and interest**

The role of media in shaping our perception of the world cannot be overstated. In recent times, we have witnessed a proliferation of media outlets and a diverse media landscape. Meanwhile, terrorism has emerged as a persistent threat that has evolved.

Despite the significance of the interplay between media and terrorism, it remains an understudied area. It is essential to acknowledge that terrorism owes much of its reach and impact to media coverage. Thus, media outlets play a critical role in shaping the perception of terrorism, and a thorough analysis of this relationship is vital. In essence, without media, terrorism would not be the same.

A comprehensive study of the relationship between terrorism and media can provide valuable insights into how society perceives this threat. Therefore, this topic should be explored further to develop a better understanding of the role of media in shaping our perception of terrorism and the ample consequences this has.

## **2. State of the art**

### **2.1 Terrorism**

Understanding the relationship between terrorism and media coverage requires first a clear definition of terrorism. However, defining terrorism has been a complex and contentious task over time, due to individual perceptions and the evolving nature of terrorism itself. While the issue of defining terrorism is too broad to address in this analysis, Schmid (2011) notes that there is no universally accepted definition of terrorism and that attempts to define it often reflect political biases or interests. Rather than proposing a single definition of terrorism, Schmid (2011) suggests adopting a multi-dimensional approach that examines various factors contributing to political violence, such as social, economic, and political conditions that fuel terrorism, as well as individual motivations and psychological factors driving people to engage in terrorist activities. Such an approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of terrorism and provides insight into the complex phenomenon of state terrorism.

Despite the complexity of the task, numerous authors and institutions have attempted to provide an exact definition of terrorism. Among the many definitions available, two of the most notable are those offered by the UN and by Crenshaw and LaFree. Of these, the UN's definition is widely used and considered to be one of the most valuable. According to the UN (2004), terrorism is defined as "criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act". This definition encompasses the essential elements that are present in most definitions of terrorism.

Crenshaw (1981, 2017) proposed a list of 13 elements that are considered to be characteristic of terrorism. According to her, terrorism is a specialized form of political violence that is marked by conspiratorial and deceptive practices and requires minimal resources. Terrorism frequently targets civilian and symbolic targets and is intended to create psychological effects on key audiences. It seeks publicity and recognition for its cause and is typically carried out in urban environments through bombings. Terrorism can serve different ideologies and goals and may be associated with non-state organizations or even employed as a tool of foreign policy by states.

The definitions mentioned previously indicate that there are common features among the most widely used definitions of terrorism. However, the issue of whether violent acts carried out by states that meet all the criteria of terrorism should be considered terrorism remains a controversial topic (Nacos, 2016; Schmid, 2011). Another useful definition is the one included in the GTD Codebook, which is used for its database for the study. The GTD (START, 2022) defines a terrorist attack as "the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation." The last definition explicitly does not categorize violence perpetrated by state actors as terrorism. The exclusion of state terrorism from the analysis is a deliberate choice. This decision is based on the idea that the logic of mass media does not allow for the coverage of state terrorism. Unlike non-state terrorism, state terrorism is often carried out by governments, who may actively seek to avoid public attention and scrutiny, rather than seek it out. As Nacos (2016) and Wilkinson (1997) argue, mass-mediated terrorism is driven by a desire for publicity, which is not typically the case for state terrorism.

## **2.2 Relevance of media**

Mass media plays a crucial role in shaping our perceptions of the world. According to the leading scholars in the field of mass media studies, the media not only set the agenda for the public but also influence how individuals position themselves against that agenda. McCombs and Shaw's seminal work (1972) established the notion that the media have the power to shape public opinion by prioritizing certain topics and issues over others and determining how we position ourselves regarding that agenda set by the media. Furthermore, Coleman and his colleagues (2009) noted that for a topic to maintain its social relevance, it must receive sustained media coverage for approximately one to eight weeks.

When the media covers an event or topic, it has a significant impact on our understanding and perception of it. McQuail (1977) argues that mass media have a profound effect on individuals, institutions, society and culture as a whole. Within the same logic, Lippman (2004) argues that the media play a critical role in shaping public opinion by selectively presenting and framing information, which can often lead to distorted and incomplete views of reality among the general public. Bandura and Walters' social learning theory proposes that individuals can learn through a process of observational learning, whereby they model their behaviour after others (Bandura & Walters, 1977). With this concept in mind, it is important to acknowledge the potential influence that media can have in shaping these behaviours

On a divergent standpoint are the scholars who created the uses and gratifications theory. Despite modifications in subsequent versions, the fundamental concept still posits that individuals possess a greater degree of autonomy in determining the media agenda and deliberately use media to gratify particular needs or desires, as opposed to being inert recipients of media content. The public has agency in their behaviour towards media. This process allows them to fashion their own relationship with the media (Ruggiero, 2000).

Media has been recognized as possessing multiple diverse functions in our society, including its role as a watchdog of the government in democratic nations. Additionally, the media plays a monitoring role over the actions of any other establishments that affect the public and have the potential to shape societal practices. As such, media's influence extends to the realm of politics and political power, with many considering it as the fourth branch of government in democratic societies (Biswas, 2009; Felle, 2016; Norris et al.; 2004; Whitten-Woodring, 2009).

### **2.3 The connexion between terrorism and media**

The relationship between terrorism and media has been the subject of extensive research, with previous studies primarily focusing on exploring how terrorism affects media and vice versa, rather than understanding the intricate connection between the two. Due to the purpose of the study, the analysis focusses on the latter. Still, it is crucial to note that media's portrayal of terrorism holds significant effects. Media's portrayal of terrorism plays a critical role in shaping individuals' perceptions and in constructing their social reality. Especially when individuals lack direct experience with the issue. As a result, the impact of media coverage on individuals' understanding and interpretation of terrorism cannot be overlooked (Adoni & Mane, 1984; Kampf, 2014; Tulga 2020).

There exists a notion that the perception of terrorism, as established by media coverage, can be transmitted in a contagious manner. The coverage creates fear and panic in its audience, and this sentiment spreads throughout the general public (Brosious & Weiman, 1991; Tulga, 2020). This phenomenon is of particular relevance, as the media's portrayal of terrorist events can significantly impact how the public perceives the threat of terrorism (Jetter, 2017). Additionally, the definition of terrorism is influenced by media coverage of terrorist events and other factors, with important implications for counterterrorism and policymaking (Huff & Kertzer, 2018; Kampf, 2014; Tulga, 2020).

The terminology used to describe the relationship between terrorism and media is an essential aspect to consider. While the term "media terrorism" implies that media outlets are complicit with terrorists for their benefit by reporting on acts of terrorism, the term "mass mediated terrorism" emphasizes an understanding of the role of media as gatekeepers of information. The latter acknowledges that media outlets may unwittingly assist terrorists by providing them with publicity (Nacos, 2002). However, there is a widely held belief in academia that tension exists between the media's responsibility to inform the public about terrorist events and the potential negative consequences of sensationalizing those events (Barnett & Reynolds, 2009; Damm, 1982). To address this tension, journalists and media outlets must consider the ethical implications of their coverage of terrorism (Marthoz, 2017). There is an issue with the way media outlets categorize arbitrarily violence as terrorism or crimes. Using all three terms as if they were synonymous, without adhering to a universal criterion. This misclassification can lead to the amplification of incidents and may contribute to an incorrect understanding of the nature of the violence being reported on (Nacos, 2016).

An intriguing framework for examining the relationship between terrorism and the media is political communication theory, specifically the political communication triangle model. This model elucidates how, due to the industry model that prevails in the media landscape, various media outlets are in constant competition with one another (Hollihan, 2010). The intensification of competition accounts for why media outlets are often willing to exploit violent incidents to expand their audiences. This trend is further amplified by the saturation of media outlets contending for the same audiences and the emergence of new mass media platforms, precisely social media (Nacos, 2002, 2016). The irruption and use of new media by terrorist groups have structurally changed the media landscape (Amble, 2012). Such factors contribute to the inclination of media outlets to provide coverage of terrorist incidents and the interconnectedness of terrorism and the media.

The relationship between terrorism and media is generally considered to be bilateral and mutually reinforcing (Kearns et al., 2019). Media outlets tend to prioritize coverage of conflicts, especially those that are deemed shocking or sensational (Tuman, 2009). Therefore, when there is more death and destruction, we should see more coverage (Miller & Albert, 2015; Nacos, 2002). This phenomenon is particularly relevant in the context of terrorism, as publicity and media coverage are crucial components of its goals. Publicity is not an end in itself for terrorists but rather a tool to achieve their objectives (Nacos, 2002). Media coverage of events serves to magnify the messaging of the terrorist group while simultaneously sensationalizing the event (Awoviebe et al., 2019; Picard, 1993). Terrorism is dependent on media to achieve its goals of terror. Terrorism is an act of communication (Williams, 2016). The mass media's shift towards providing increased coverage of violent news is having significant and far-reaching effects on its audiences (Signorielli, 2005). Media outlets are now in the process of balancing information and avoiding giving gratuitous coverage of violence to terrorists (Williams, 2016), as previously mentioned when discussing the existing tension. According to Wieviorka's (2004) perspective, the relationship between terrorism and media is not simply one-dimensional, as it can yield both favourable and unfavourable outcomes. Specifically, the media can function to enhance or diminish the impact of terrorism.

The level of press attention plays a crucial role in the perpetuation of terrorism. The relationship between the origin of the media outlet and the level of press freedom in a country is significant since countries with lower press freedom tend to launch foreign attacks in response to domestic media attention, whereas groups from countries with higher press



freedom are more likely to carry out foreign attacks in response to international media attention. In general, the amount of media coverage a terrorist event receives can influence the behaviour of terrorist groups (Asal & Hoffman, 2016). The level of media attention can also increase the probability of future terrorist events due to the "copycat" phenomenon, which is predominantly prevalent in countries with a free media environment (Jetter, 2017).

Few authors explore the relationship itself, particularly quantitatively. The most relevant is the analysis of American national media by Kearns et al. (2019). The most important conclusion it arrives to is that the media coverage of terrorist events is disproportionate based on various factors, one of the most important being the religion of the perpetrator of the attack. In the determination of whether an event is classified as terrorism, ethnicity and group affiliation play significant roles, mostly if the perpetrator is considered an "outsider" of the group or not. In such cases, there is a higher probability that the event is classified as terrorism (Altheide, 2007; D'Orazio & Salehyan, 2018). When similarly, media coverage is more likely to mention the religion and ethnicity of the perpetrator when it is an Islamic terrorist event and the associated coverage tends to be more negative than when the perpetrator is non-Islamist, generating bias in the coverage and public (von Sikorski et al., 2022). In media coverage post the 9/11 attacks, the most prevalent framing is one based on religion that establishes a negative narrative surrounding Islam and associates the religion with terror (Powell, 2011).

Other authors have explored the way specific variables affect media coverage of terrorist events. Weimann and Brosius (1991) concluded that several factors such as the level of disruption produced by the event, the level of aggression and entertainment involved in the event, the event's location, the identity of the perpetrators, and the event's political importance; affect the newsworthiness of any terrorist event.

### **3. Theoretical background**

#### **3.1 Waves of global terrorism**

Rapoport's Waves Theory is a significant theoretical framework within the study of terrorism, as it provides an explanation for how terrorism has evolved over time and accounts for the various trends that have emerged. This framework is relevant for understanding the history and development of terrorism and provides insight into the differing motivations and methods employed by terrorist groups across the world. The theory outlines the key elements associated with each wave of terrorism. According to Rapoport, there have been four successive waves of terrorism in recent history: the first wave of anarchist terrorism (1879-1920s), a second wave of anticolonial terrorism (1919-1960s), a third wave of new left terrorism (1960s-1990s), and a fourth wave of religious terrorism (1979-2020s) (Rapoport, 2022).

The relevance of Rapoport's Waves Theory lies in its ability to provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of terrorism over time, including the current fourth wave of terrorism and contextualizing the coverage. It is important to note that even though the analysis falls entirely under the fourth wave of terrorism, it is still necessary to examine all aspects of the events, as certain elements may be more prominent than others. The fourth wave of terrorism is marked by its high level of violence, and a common feature of its attacks is the religious motivation behind them, which often includes violence against individuals of different religious groups. Terrorist groups within this wave utilize tactics from previous waves such as kidnappings, while also introducing new techniques such as suicide bombings or self-martyrdom. Overall, there is a lack of preservation of the life and safety of the attacker. Bombs are the preferred weapon of choice, though the use of WMD remains a concern for the general public, even if their actual usage by terrorists is minimal. Finally, the fourth wave is notable for the durability of clearly established groups, which may be attributed to the religious component of their objectives (Rapoport, 2022). Overall, Rapoport's Waves Theory remains applicable as it continues to provide valuable insight into the ongoing evolution of terrorism.

In addition to the four established waves of terrorism, Rapoport introduces the notion of an emerging fifth wave of reactionary right-wing terrorism, which is currently on the rise. However, Rapoport is cautious in considering this a distinct wave on its own, as the trend has some unique features that may not make it last long enough for it to be considered a

separate wave. Furthermore, the right-wing ideology is losing relevance in some countries, which may impact the future growth of this wave. This emerging trend is characterized by lone wolf far-right terrorists who perpetrate events by themselves. Unlike the previous waves, this wave is not characterized by durable, well-established terrorist groups or organizations. However, its attacks have been deemed more deadly than those in the previous wave (Rapoport, 2022).

### **3.2 Agenda setting theory**

As mentioned before one of the main mass media theories that explains the media's relevance is the seminal theory of agenda-setting by McCombs and Shaw (1972). It is part of phase three: powerful media rediscovered of the media effect research history (McQuail, 1987). The main tenets of the theory are that there is a social and public agenda of topics that are relevant to us as a society, which is set by the media's agenda. Although it recognises some individual agency in the way we position ourselves in relation to the set agenda; it reaffirms the power of media since it determines what is of relevance for us and how relevant it should be (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

The argument and its logic remain valid and pertinent for the current media environment. Therefore, the theory used is the simplest form of the theory, without involving the more complex iterations that include the concepts as second and third agendas set by the media (McCombs et al., 2014). This selective and simplified approach is adopted because the primary focus of this analysis is the role of the media in shaping public opinion in terms of the seriousness of the issue, rather than the type of media.

Indeed, even when considering the original strain of research, it is necessary to take into account the new mass media paradigm, particularly the rise of social media. The theory has been operationalised for the newer media context to account for the newer mass media paradigm. Newer revisions of the theory acknowledge the continuing agenda-setting power of traditional mass media while recognizing the emergence of new sources and actors. Agenda-setting is no longer a monopolistic capability of traditional media, as it has been disseminated to other types of media. Social media has a similar reach and, therefore, must also be understood as an agenda-setting force (Boynton & Richardson Jr., 2016).

### **3.3 Cultivation theory**

Also, part of the rediscovered powerful media effects phase of media effect research history is the same as agenda-setting theory (McQuail, 1987). This theory's main academic was Gerbner. Cultivation theory posits that modern media, mainly television, has a significant impact on shaping our understanding of reality. The theory suggests that media create a distorted message that replaces personal experiences and, in turn, shapes our reality or symbolic environment. Media do not merely reflect the world but rather actively construct it. As individuals engage more with media, a greater divergence emerges between their perceived reality and the actual reality. Cultivation refers to the gradual process by which individuals begin to internalize the media message and perceive it as reality through mainstream and resonance. Over time, viewers develop a shared worldview and begin to accept the media world as real because they recognize their own experiences within it (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner et al., 1986).

In the context of terrorism, the relevance of Gerbner and Signorielli's theory is amplified, as they devote a significant portion of their analysis to comprehending the impact of violence portrayal on shaping realities. Their research indicates that the consumption of violent television programming does not necessarily predispose viewers to violence, but rather leads individuals to perceive a greater prevalence of violence in society as a whole (Gerbner & Signorielli, 1988). The phenomenon was operationalized through the concept of the "mean world syndrome," which suggests that exposure to violent media over time can lead to a perception of the world as dangerous or hostile (Gerbner, 1998).

The primary concern with cultivation theory is that the mass media landscape has undergone significant changes, primarily due to the emergence of the internet and social media. Television, which was the primary focus of the theory, is no longer the dominant source. This issue has been approached differently in academia. Some argue that while television has become more fragmented, it remains the primary medium for storytelling, disseminating most of the narratives and having the broadest reach. Therefore, it can still be considered the primary shaper of reality (Morgan et al., 2014). Conversely, more critical schools of thought propose a revision of the theory, suggesting that the construction of assumptions that were once the purview of television is now being carried out by the internet, social networks, and on-demand media consumption (Nevzat, 2018). In the context of terrorism, this is relevant since social media is playing an increasingly important role,

especially in the dissemination of propaganda and for recruitment purposes (Droogan & Waldek, 2019; Kampf, 2014).

There is no need to further delve into the debate about whether television remains an important source or not, although there is ample evidence to support both sides: to suggest that it continues to be significant, albeit not the only medium for shaping reality. However, it is unnecessary to take sides since the fundamental logic of cultivation theory can be effectively applied to different types of media outlets and the present media landscape. The theory remains valid in the current paradigm, as demonstrated by over 125 studies conducted since the year 2000 that endorse its continued relevance and adaptability to the ever-changing media landscape. The multi-directional component of the original theory enables its application to the current status quo, in which social media influences traditional media and vice versa (Mosharafa, 2015).

#### **4. Objectives and hypothesis**

The primary aim of this study is to comprehend the evolution of media coverage of terrorism in recent decades. This investigation has two distinct objectives: first, to comprehend the function that diverse media outlets have played in reporting terrorism throughout the years, and second, to scrutinize the discourse to assess asymmetries in the coverage.

To achieve these objectives, various research questions need to be addressed. These inquiries include the following: Does the origin of the media outlet have an impact on the coverage of terrorism? What types of media outlets are most prevalent in reporting on terrorism? Is there a shared specific discourse among the media? Additionally, do the characteristics of the terrorism waves affect discourse in coverage?

The primary hypothesis of this study is that media coverage of terrorism is multifaceted and can have intricate impacts on both the public and the terrorism phenomenon itself.

## 5. Methodology

This analysis focuses on a quantitative examination of media coverage of terrorism at a global level. The GTD database is used as it is considered to be the most comprehensive and meticulously compiled open-source dataset available on terrorist attacks. The primary determination of what constitutes a terrorist attack and what does not is based on the GTD's definition. It is important to note that this analysis only considers events that fall within the parameters of the database and does not focus on the coverage of violence in general. The GTD defines terrorism as "the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a nonstate actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation." (START, 2022). Moreover, it is important to emphasize that the definition and study do not analyse similar forms of violence perpetrated by states.

The database<sup>1</sup> includes 209,706 events starting in 1970 and ending in 2020, consisting of over 100 different descriptive variables. One of these variables is the first report of the attack in the media, which appears in the database under the label "scite1." This collection of headlines is the most extensive and diverse available in a single database. This analytical approach is chosen to avoid relying on archives from single media outlets, which would be less rigorous and would not allow for the same level of data collection offered by the database. While the analysis only focuses on the first report of each terrorist event, it is important to note that this is a significant limitation as it does not account for any further coverage of the attacks on other media. Nevertheless, the first report is still a crucial aspect to consider since it is the first report and can influence subsequent coverage. Using a complete dataset also enhances the rigor of cross-referencing other variables with media. In summary, the GTD data on media is the primary source of data, and no external archives or terrorist groups' own media are considered sources of data. The lack of primary sources can be considered a limitation of the analysis, but it would make the scope too broad (Schuurman & Eijkman, 2013).

Regarding the actual analysis, the "scite1" variable needed to be prepared for analysis. Several events have been filtered because they do not have a headline associated with the attack, resulting in a reduction of the original dataset to 143,524 terrorist events with their associated headlines and 135 variables. The dataset is reduced when terrorist events that are duplicated or simultaneous and only have a single headline associated with

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<sup>1</sup> Database publicly available at <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>

them are counted as one. This process of removing duplicates further reduces the dataset to 103,169 headlines. Likewise, the collection of headlines has an issue with the format of the headlines, and in 25,651 of the headlines, the format is heavily unstructured, making processing very complicated. These belong mainly to the transition period when the GTD changed ownership, with most concentrated in the 2008-2011 period. Excluding them does not significantly skew results, thus these headlines have been excluded from the final working database, resulting in 77,272 singular events with their associated headlines.

The working database comprises headlines that generally follow the format of: "BBC News, "Concerns Rise in France After Jewish Teen is Attacked," BBC News, June 22, 2008.". These headlines undergo processing to extract the clean headline, media outlet, and the date of the first report which in the previous example would mean separating BBC News and "Concerns Rise in France After Jewish Teen is Attacked,.". The working database consists of 77,272 headlines from 3,430 different media outlets in 165 states. To ensure greater rigour, the working base is utilized exclusively for discussing headlines related to attacks or other variables present in the original GTD database, such as the country and the year of the terrorist event. The final analysis focuses primarily on obtaining frequencies and highlighting the most prominent variables, such as states with the most headlines and outlets that report the most. These variables are observed to determine the most relevant trends. The results are occasionally compared with other analytical tools, such as the GTI, to further analyse the contrasts in outcomes. This analysis seeks to explore the first secondary objective of comprehending the function of diverse media outlets in reporting terrorism throughout the years.

In addition, to fulfil the latter secondary objective of examining the discourse and assessing asymmetries in the coverage, an analysis of the language used in the headlines of the working database is conducted. This analysis entails extracting and analysing the frequency of the words used in the headlines. Furthermore, specific terms of interest have been searched for and analysed in particular to address the different research questions.

Moreover, the final results from both strains of analysis are further considered using Google Trends,<sup>2</sup> to gain a better understanding of their use in the digital landscape and their presence and impact on public opinion. This tool is chosen because using an archive of trends

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<sup>2</sup> Available at: <https://trends.google.com/>

of social media, while interesting, is not a viable option since there is no single reliable compilation of the trends of any social media platform. Additionally, the original database accounts for the digitalization process organically since the first source evolves naturally over time and starts including digital sources when they become the first reporters. Google Trends enables flexible research and the ability to focus the search by region and state, which is highly valuable.

By utilizing the proposed methodology, a quantitative analysis of the first report of all terrorist attacks in recent history is conducted. The discourse analysis provides a quantitative analysis of the frequency of each word used, while also enabling a qualitative analysis of the resulting terms with the highest frequency.

## 6. Analysis

### 6.1 Overview of media outlets

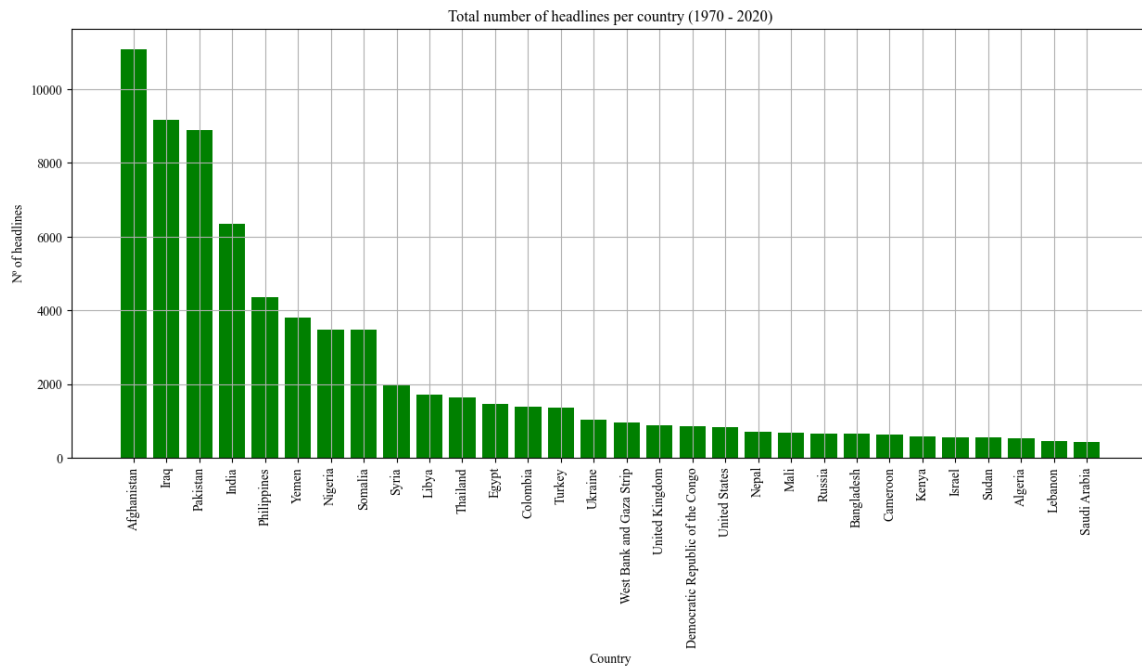


Figure 1: Total number of headlines per country (1970-2020)

Based on Figure 1, it can be observed that the number of headlines is heavily concentrated in a few countries, which are dominant in terms of media coverage. It should be noted that the study only includes the first report for each terrorist event covered, and therefore, headlines may be counted as terrorist events in the working database. Consequently, there is no analysis of whether these terrorist events are being covered



asymmetrically. Figure 1 demonstrates that countries with higher occurrences of terrorist events also receive a proportional amount of media coverage, which has the potential to influence public perception and policymaking. Furthermore, if these countries are the first to report on a terrorist event, their coverage sets the agenda for further coverage. The majority of countries with high numbers of headlines and terrorist events are located in the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa.

To ensure that the conclusion drawn earlier is valid, it is necessary to compare it with the original database and determine whether headlines and terrorist events can be used interchangeably. Additionally, it must be investigated whether the absence of first report information for some terrorist events significantly alters the distribution of events across countries. To accomplish this, Figure 2 displays the total number of terrorist events per country from the original database.

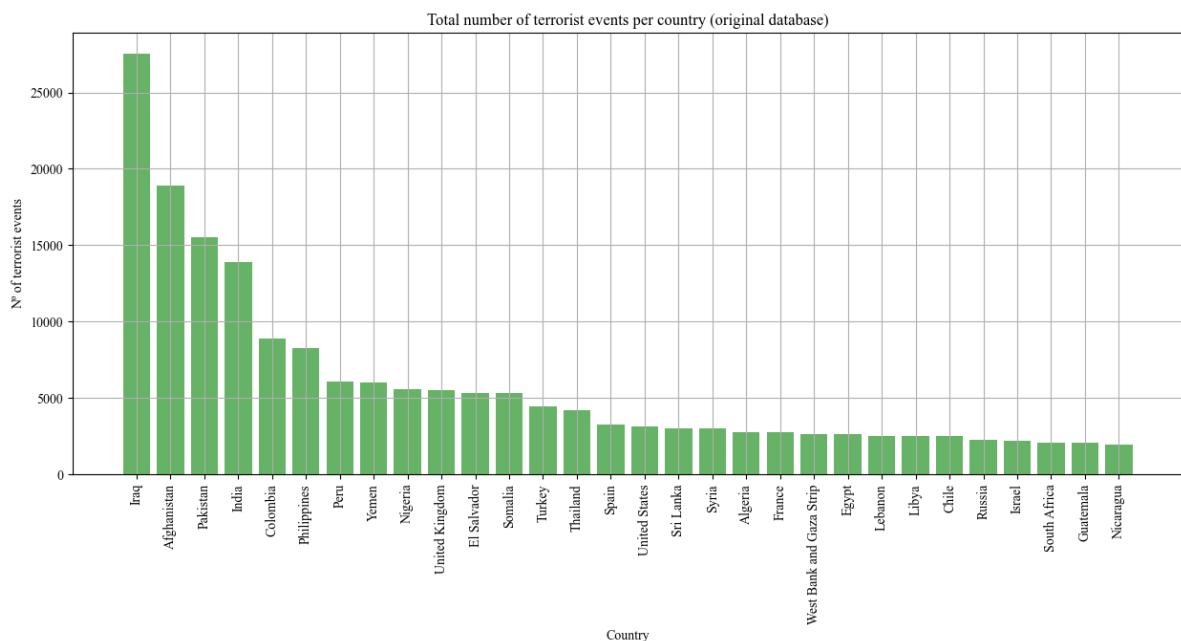


Figure 2: Total number of terrorist events per country (original database)

Upon contrasting the top ten countries with the highest number of headlines from Figure 1 and the top ten countries with the highest number of terrorist events from Figure 2, certain discrepancies can be observed. Table 1 illustrates that there are several countries from Latin America and Europe withing the top ten countries with the highest number of terrorist events, which are not included in the top countries with the highest number of headlines in Figure 1. This suggests that the number of headlines alone does not provide a complete representation of the distribution of terrorist events across different regions and countries.

The most notable difference between the two figures, shown in Table 1 is that countries such as Colombia, Peru, and the UK are not included in the list of countries with the highest number of headlines, despite having a significant number of terrorist events. Conversely, countries like Somalia, Syria, and Libya receive more media coverage than their number of terrorist events would suggest. There are several explanations for this asymmetry, with the most likely being the absence of first-report data for countries with more events than headlines. This lack of data reflects the media environment in those countries. Nonetheless, the top countries with the highest number of headlines and terrorist events remain almost the same and will be the subject of further in-depth analysis.

*Table 1: Comparison of countries with highest number of headlines and countries with highest number of terrorist events*

<b>Order of countries by n° of terrorist events</b>	<b>Order of countries by n° of headlines</b>
Iraq	Afghanistan
Afghanistan	Iraq
Pakistan	Pakistan
India	India
Colombia	Philippines
Philippines	Yemen
Peru	Nigeria
Yemen	Somalia
Nigeria	Syria
United Kingdom	Lybia

To gain a better understanding of the difference in media coverage and perception of terrorism, it is useful to examine the data from a specific year. For this purpose, the year 2019 will be contrasted as it provides a reliable outlook on terrorism without being influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, 2019 is an interesting year since it marked the first time in decades that Afghanistan replaced Iraq as the country most affected by terrorism (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2020).

By analysing the data from 2019, it is possible to gain insights into how media coverage and public perception of terrorism differ across different regions and countries.

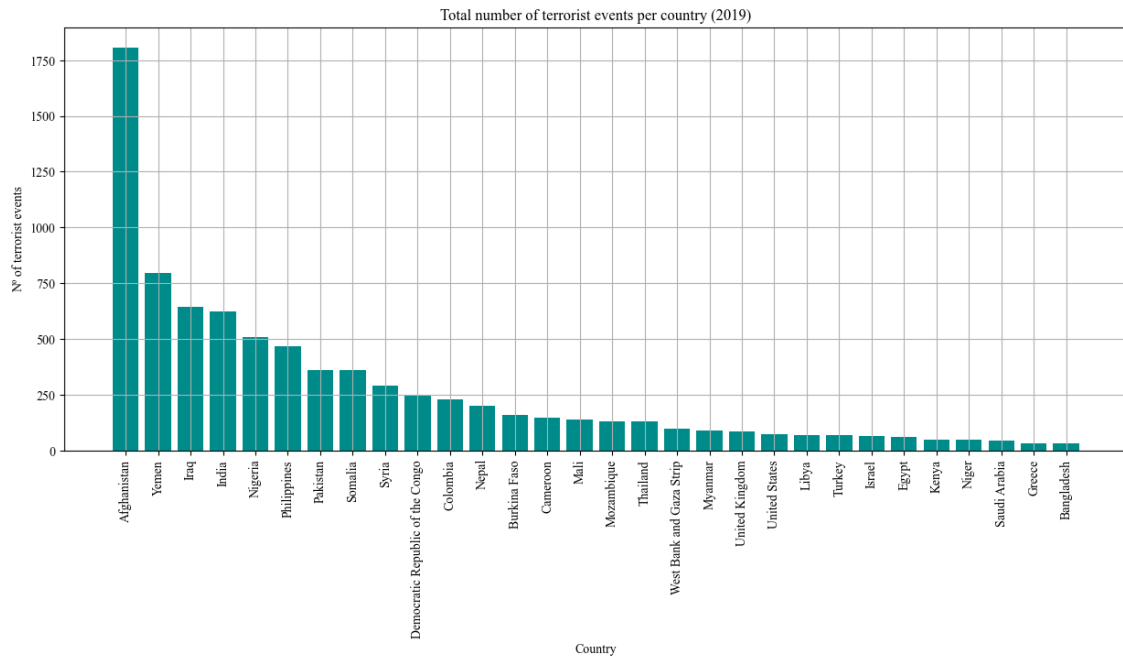


Figure 3: Total number of terrorist events per country (2019)

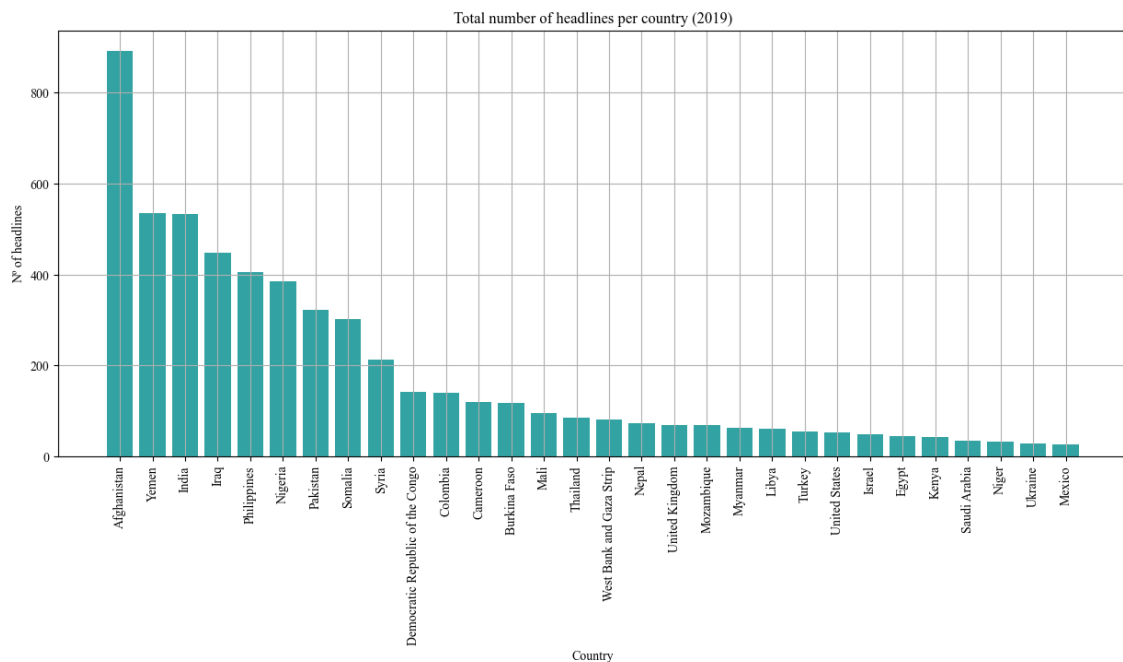


Figure 4: Total number of headlines per country (2019)

Comparing Figure 3 and Figure 4, it can be concluded that, for the most part, the number of headlines distributed by country does correspond with the number of terrorist events in 2019. However, a more intriguing comparison can be made by examining the top ten countries with the highest number of headlines and the top ten countries considered to be the most affected by terrorism during that same year.

By analysing the differences between these two sets of countries, it may be possible to gain a better understanding of how media coverage and public perception of terrorism can differ from the reality of the situation on the ground. This comparison provides insights into how media biases and other factors influence the way in which people view terrorism and its impact on different regions and countries.

*Table 2: Comparison of countries with most headlines and countries affected by terrorism (per the GTI)*

Order of by n° headlines in 2019	Countries most affected by terrorism 2019
Afghanistan	Afghanistan
Yemen	Iraq
India	Nigeria
Iraq	Syria
Philippines	Pakistan
Nigeria	Somalia
Pakistan	India
Somalia	Yemen
Syria	Philippines
DRC	DCR

Table 2 presents an interesting conclusion that highlights how the amount of coverage, or the number of terrorist events does not necessarily translate into the perception of the importance of terrorism in a given state. While the top ten countries in terms of coverage and terrorism events are the same, the order is significantly different, with only the first and last countries coinciding in both metrics. This indicates that although all these countries are present in media coverage of terrorism, the level of attention given to each does not necessarily correspond with the number of terrorist events taking place in the country. This is consistent with agenda-setting theory, which suggests that the media has the power to shape public perception of events and prioritize certain issues over others.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the GTI considers other factors beyond the number of events, such as the number of deaths and macro socio-economic factors. Therefore, the media's prioritization of certain countries may also be influenced by these other factors (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2020).

To effectively shape public perception and accurately assess the extent of follow-up coverage of terrorism, it is imperative to consider not only the number of terrorist events but also the impact of those attacks. As discussed in the State of the Art on the role of violence in media, the media tends to prioritize the reporting of more gruesome events, which ultimately drives up their audience engagement and revenue. Consequently, the media is more likely to report on events in a manner that aligns with the GTI rankings, rather than solely based on the number of attacks. While the global population may place greater importance on countries listed in the second column of the GTI rankings and have a greater awareness of terrorism occurring there, the media's agenda-setting hierarchy is still influenced by the factors considered in the GTI rankings. However, the quantitative order of countries listed in the GTI is still relevant, as it provides a consistent framework for discussing and ranking terrorism worldwide. In summary, while media outlets may adjust the importance and order of reporting on countries, they are likely to focus on the same countries altering the attention granted to each state.

The analysis raises an intriguing point regarding the significance of media outlets in the coverage of terrorist events. It suggests that the media outlets that report the most on such events possess the greatest agenda-setting and cultivation power, which ultimately shapes public realities and perceptions surrounding terrorism. Understanding the characteristics of these outlets is therefore crucial, as they can significantly influence how terrorism is perceived both locally and globally.

Based on Figure 5, it is evident that the 150 media outlets with the largest presence in terms of headlines are the ones that report on the most terrorist events. Consequently, these outlets hold significant power in shaping the public's perception of such events. One key aspect worth exploring further is the potential role that the nationality of these outlets may play in their reporting. While these outlets are reporting on countries with the highest number of headlines (as shown in Figure 1), their country of origin does not necessarily correspond with their area of coverage. Therefore, it is important to investigate whether there are any biases or preferences that these outlets may have towards certain regions or countries when reporting on terrorist events. Such factors significantly influence how terrorism is portrayed in the media.

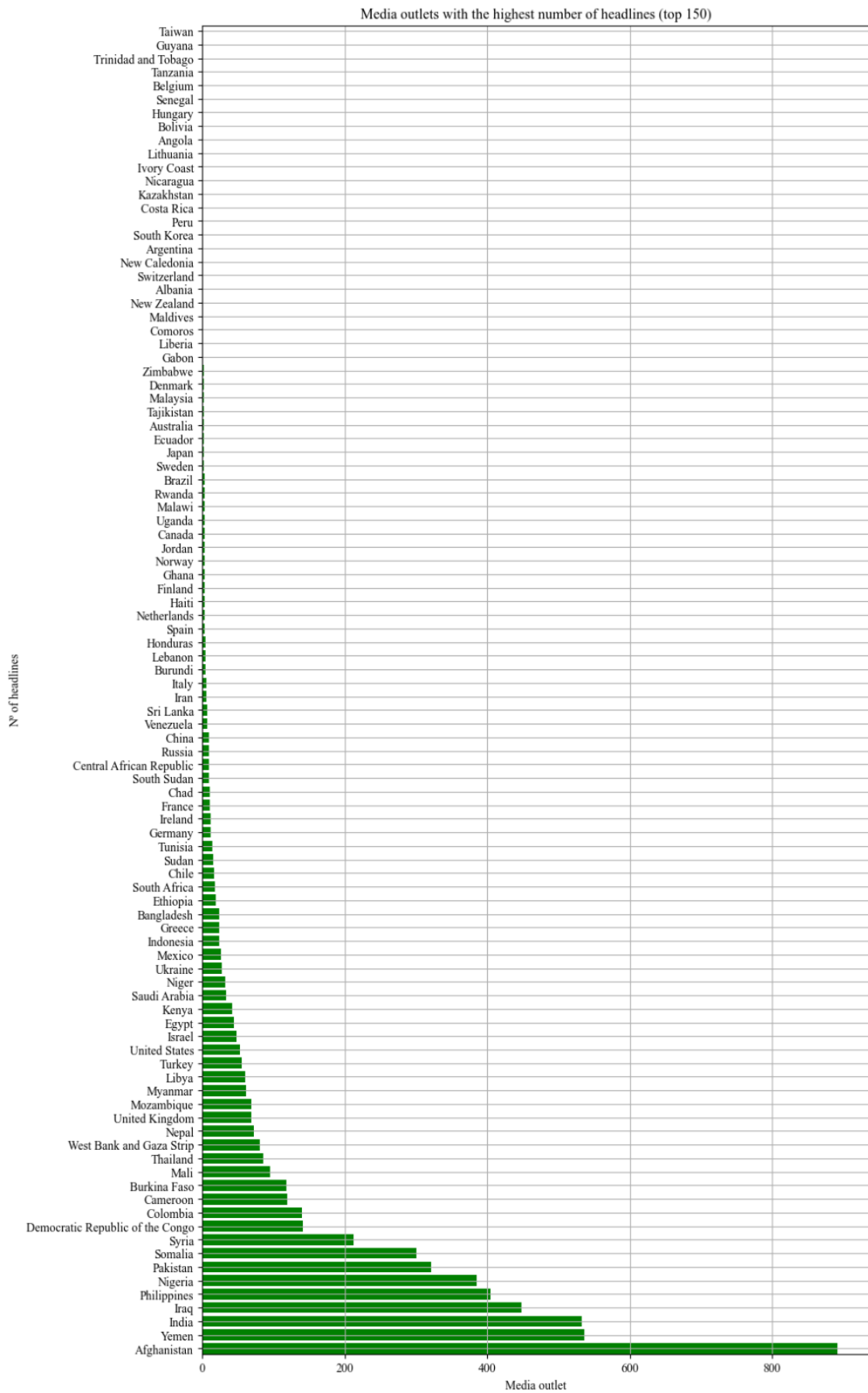


Figure 5: Media outlets with highest number of headlines (top 150)

As indicated in Figure 1, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and India have the highest recorded coverage of terrorist events in that order. Therefore, these four countries have been selected for an in-depth analysis of the presence of national and foreign media. Specifically, the top 20 media outlets with the highest number of headlines for each country have been analysed. This approach allows for a focused examination of the media outlets with the largest overall presence. It is worth noting that these top 20 media outlets coincide with the top 80 outlets from Figure 5. A comprehensive dataset and breakdown of this analysis are included in Appendix 1.

The analysis of media coverage in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and India is based on several criteria, which include determining the country of origin of the media outlet, the type of media outlet (e.g., news agency, newspaper), the broadcast area (local, regional, international), the language of the coverage, the type of ownership (e.g., independent, private, state-owned), and the main format of the coverage (e.g., print, digital). These criteria allow for a comprehensive evaluation of how media outlets report on terrorist events in different contexts and provide insights into potential biases or preferences in their coverage. By taking these factors into account, the analysis can identify patterns and trends in media coverage and inform strategies for improving media reporting on terrorism.

The results of the analysis of media coverage in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and India are highly significant as these countries represent two distinct models of media coverage of terrorism and have different media environments that impact public perception in various ways.

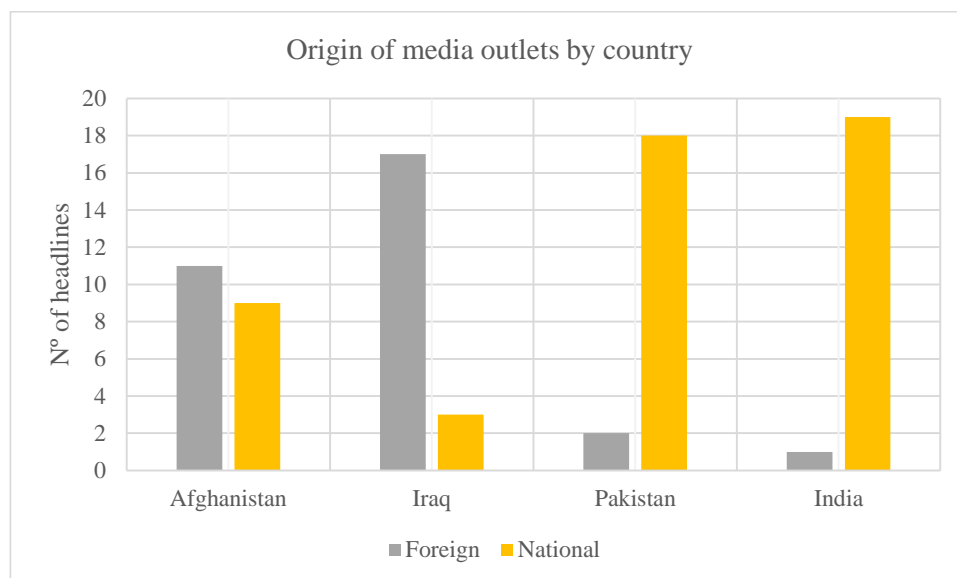
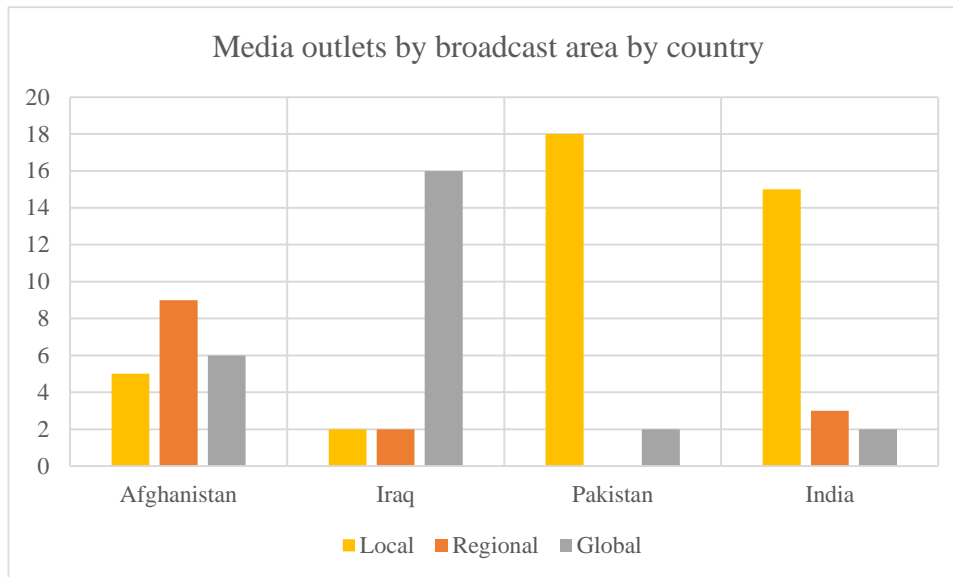


Figure 6: Origin of media outlets by country



*Figure 7: media outlets by broadcast area by country*

The analysis shows that Iraq and Afghanistan have a much higher number of foreign media outlets and media outlets with global and regional reach than Pakistan and India. This means that the audiences for news coverage of terrorist events in Iraq and Afghanistan are likely to be different from those in Pakistan and India. Moreover, the presence of Western media outlets as the first to report on events in these countries means that the populations in Western countries are more likely to read news coverage about terrorist events in Iraq and Afghanistan. This is not only because they are more likely to have access to news about terrorism in those countries, but also because Western media outlets are more likely to pick up and echo news coverage from other Western international outlets than from smaller more remote local outlets. For example, a Spanish news agency is more likely to pick up coverage by Agence France Presse, from a neighbouring country than from Hindustan Times. This is because it is more sensible for a news agency to monitor coverage from big news agencies than from hundreds of smaller outlets, especially when resources are limited. That effect is even more present in smaller local media, which may echo the coverage of big national or international news agencies over a local newspaper from a very distant country. As a result, the Spanish population is more likely to be informed about Iraq than Pakistan, seeing more coverage and across more sources they regularly consume, which can deeply shape the agenda and establish perceptions of those countries for the Spanish population.



Furthermore, even when disregarding the first-to-second echo phenomenon, the Western audience of a Western news agency exhibits a broader yet more concentrated focus. Specifically, in the case of Spain, it is more probable for an individual to rely on Agence France Presse directly as their primary source of news, resulting in greater coverage of terrorist events in countries with a higher concentration of foreign press media compared to Hindustan Times. In accordance with agenda setting and cultivation theory, this implies that the Western population is more likely to possess knowledge of terrorism occurrences in Afghanistan or Iraq than in India and Pakistan, as the latter have less presence of foreign media and outlets of global reach. Moreover, this phenomenon extends not only to Western countries but also to those with external outlet presence, where the transnational reach of news events is more likely since the audience receiving the news is not necessarily local. The way audiences are shaped, and the media attention received nationally and internationally related to the nationality of the outlets can also affect the future decisions of terrorist groups themselves (Asal & Hoffman, 2016).

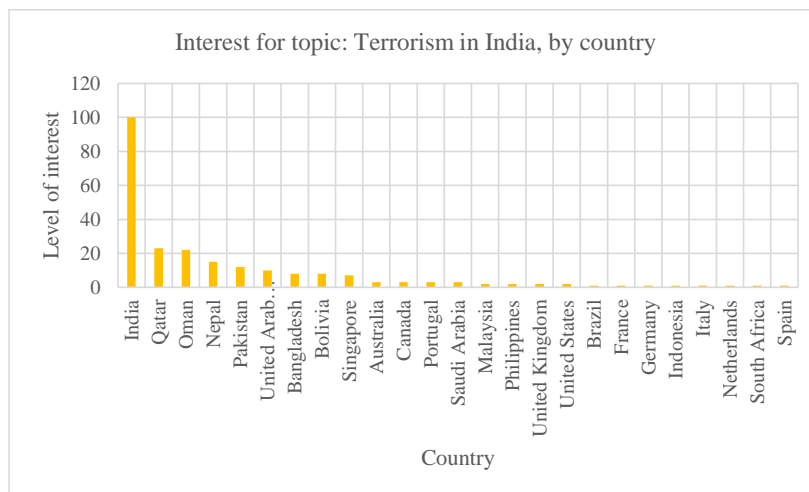


Figure 8: Interest for topic: Terrorism in India, by country

Figure 8 utilizes the data on the topic of *Terrorism in India*, as provided by Google Trends. As a topic, the data is not sensitive to language and can be compared by region, unlike searches which are subjected to languages. Furthermore, the terrorism data for the other three states under study is based on searches, and hence, does not provide relevant geographical analysis.

Nevertheless, Figure 8 illustrates a clear interest in India, which is reasonable since one would expect terrorism to be of national interest primarily. The regional breakdown of

public interest is consistent with the previous findings. Given that India's terrorism coverage is primarily carried out by local media outlets with limited reach, it is not surprising that there is limited international interest in terrorism in India. Furthermore, there is some regional interest, which aligns with the extent of regional media coverage in the country. It can be inferred that the agenda-setting power of media outlets partially sets public interest in this regard.

The previously mentioned phenomenon can be amplified by the language used in the coverage of the events. This is because the language used plays a crucial role in determining which audiences have access to the information. The choice of language is indicative of the intended audience for the coverage.

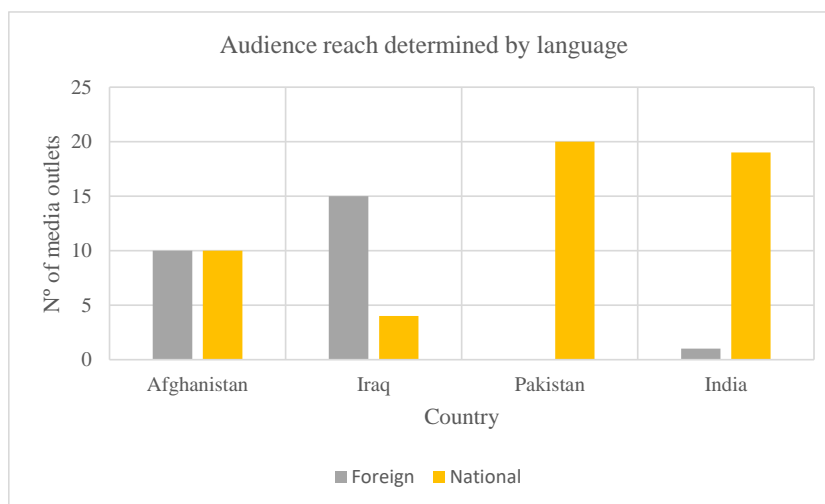


Figure 9: audience reach determined by language of outlet

In the case of India and Pakistan, language is not a distinguishing factor since English, which is one of the official languages for both countries, is the predominant language used in the coverage of terrorist events. For the purposes of the study, English is considered a local language for both states. This availability of coverage in English makes it accessible to global audiences, although its impact is restricted by the broadcast reach of the media outlets reporting on terrorist events. The intent behind using English in the coverage is not to make it accessible to a global audience but rather to the local audience reading the local media. On the other hand, Iraq has a different audience, with more coverage of terrorism in languages not spoken by locals. This clearly indicates that the coverage of terrorism in Iraq is intended for an external audience. In the case of Afghanistan, the situation is more complex, but there is a strong inclination towards internationalization of the coverage.

## 6.2 Discourse analysis

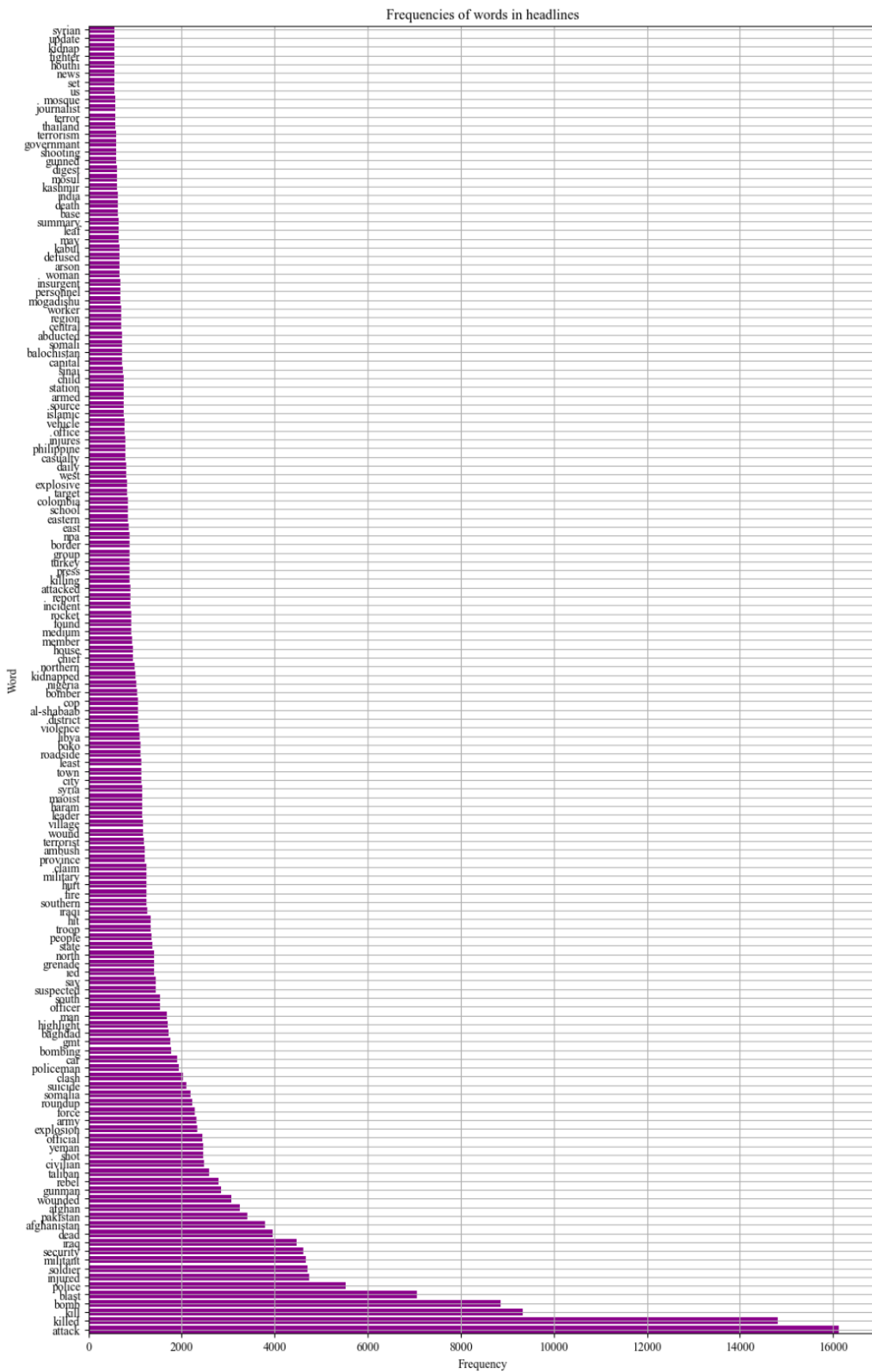


Figure 10: Frequencies of words in headlines

By examining the content of the headlines in the first report of the working database, a frequency analysis of the most commonly used words can be conducted. Figure 10 depicts the 150 most frequently used terms across the entire working database. In the analysis, a list of terms that are considered to be part of the language without analytical value has been excluded (see Appendix 2). After removing these terms, there are only a total of 20,017 singular terms used a total of 479,107 times across all the headlines. This analysis provides insight into the terminology and language most frequently used in the coverage of terrorism. The limited number of singular words suggests the presence of a common language of sorts present in most headlines, even if they are from different media sources and of diverse national origin. This language plays a role in shaping the way audiences understand the coverage of terrorism and how they perceive the trends of terrorism and its focal points.

The 150 most frequently used words can be grouped into ten different semantic fields based on their meanings. This allows for easier analysis and understanding of the language used in the coverage of terrorism.

*Table 3: Number of words sorted by semantic field*

<b>Semantic groups</b>	<b>Freq.</b>
State	24
Violence	21
Politics	17
Type of attack	16
Military & security	14
Location	10
Civilian	7
Weapon	6
Media	3

The criteria of what kind of words are included into each semantic group is as follows:

- State: includes any words related to countries, cities or nationalities. For example Iraq, Afghan or Kabul
- Violence: includes any words related to the type of violence with a particular focus on the success of the attack. For example: killed, wound, gunned
- Politics: includes any words related to ideological elements, terrorist groups and group related terminology. Religious-related terms have been included too. For example: militant, Taliban, fighter or Islamic.

- Type of attack: includes any words related to the weapon type in the terrorist event, it is closely related to the weapon type group. For example: suicide, bombing, shot.
- Military and security: includes any words related to military and security forces. For example: police, soldier, roundup.
- Location: includes any words related to the type of target and infrastructure or the location where the terrorist event took place For example: town, school, station, mosque
- Civilian: includes any words related to descriptions of either the victims or the attackers. For example: people, child, woman.
- Weapon: includes any words related to the weapon type. For example: bomb, ied. It is closely related to the category of the type of attack, could be some overlap.
- Media: includes any words related to the field of media. For example: press, journalist
- Varied: includes any words that have no value for the present analysis. For example: gmt or north. This category has been taken out of the figures and analysis.
- 

The resulting semantic categories are highly significant since they reveal the focus of media coverage when reporting on terrorism. This is predominantly important as it uncovers any biases that may be present from the very beginning of the reporting process. Moreover, subsequent coverage of the terrorist event is likely to draw on the first report as a primary source of information, meaning that the same frames and biases are likely to persist throughout the coverage. The categories also provide insight into which aspects of the attacks the media chooses to emphasize, which undoubtedly influences public biases and has policy implications. The semantic groups highlight which type of language is prioritized in media reporting on terrorism from the outset, and this is incidentally linked to the original variables of the GTD.

The primary emphasis is unequivocally on the type of violence that is manifested. Certain semantic fields are anticipated, such as state or violence. The relevance of the state is salient since news headlines often feature the nationality of either the victims or perpetrators, thereby potentially fostering a bias towards certain states. As Weimann and Brosious (1991) argued, the nationality of the perpetrator impacts deeply the amount of coverage a terrorist event receives. Similarly, other authors have identified the location of a

terrorist event as one of the key variables that affect the framing of coverage. Coverage of terrorist events in non-western countries is less sympathetic (Gerhards & Schäfer, 2014).

A highly intriguing category is politics, as there is a pronounced interest in assigning responsibility for attacks to identifiable groups such as Boko Haram, which is one of the most frequently used terms. This aligns with the principal attributes of the fourth wave of terrorism, which was marked by the durability of its groups (Rapoport, 2022). It is reasonable that some of the most frequently used terms are the names of the most lethal and long-lasting terrorist organizations of that era. This finding is also consistent with the works of D'Orazio and Salehyan (2018) on the importance of group affiliation for media coverage of terrorist events.

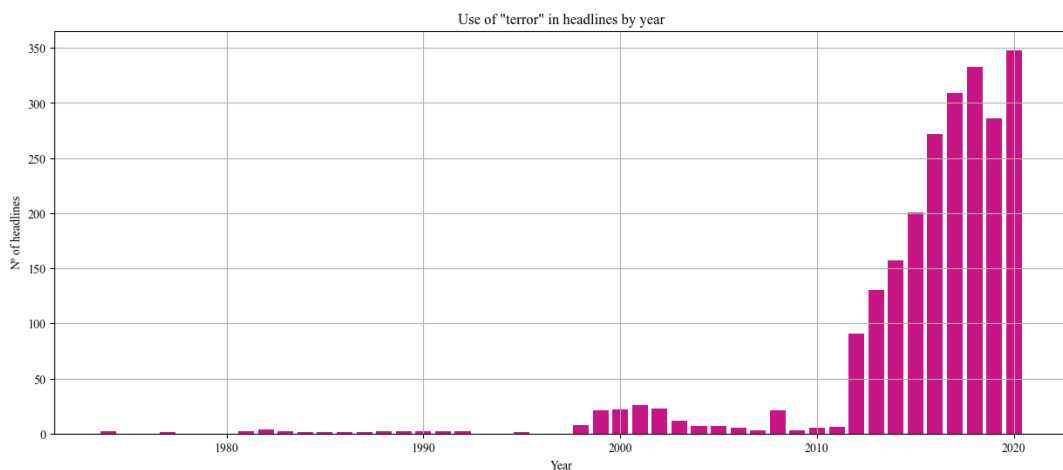
Within the politics category, certain biased terms begin to surface, such as those related to ideology or religion. Some of these terms carry distinct connotations and indicate the ideological framing that media outlets employ. A prime illustration of this is the appearance of both "rebel" and "insurgent" on one end of the spectrum, and "fighter" on the other, which is often used to describe individuals who are viewed as "freedom fighters." The context in which these terms are used in the media frames the attacks in vastly different ways.

It should not come as a surprise that religious terminology is present, given that every headline within the timeframe under study falls within the fourth wave of terrorism, which is characterized as religious terrorism. Moreover, Islamic terrorism is particularly salient within this wave (Rapoport, 2022). Taking both ideas into account, the prominence of Islam-related words could be due to bias or simply a reflection of the proportion of religious terrorism during the period. Therefore, the appearance of terms such as "Islamic" among the most frequently used terms should not be surprising or automatically assumed to be a product of biases, although they can easily give rise to biases.

One could argue that some of the most frequently repeated words are buzzwords. Their inclusion is not accidental; media outlets have the objective of generating interest with their headlines by incorporating certain words. A notable example is the theory proposed by Nacos, (2002) and Miller & Albert (2015), which contend that the more gruesome and sensationalist media coverage is, the more successful it is in terms of audience engagement. This would explain why violence and the type of attack are some of the most prominent categories. Both the semantic fields of the type of weapon and type of attack are in line with

the main characteristics of the fourth wave of terrorism. Some of the terms correspond to the most prevalent tactics at that time, such as kidnappings, suicide bombings, and the use of bombs as the primary weapon (Rapoport, 2022).

The frequency and order of the terms are likely related to the hierarchy dimension of agenda setting. The more we encounter these terms, the more we associate them with terrorist violence and vice-versa. Overall, the terms that are most frequently used highlight some of the most relevant traits of terrorism during that period.



*Figure 11: Use of the word "terror" in media, distribution by year*

It is also noteworthy to observe the use of the term "terror" (which includes variations such as terrorism, terrorist, etc.). It is worth mentioning that the headlines analysed represent the initial report, and very little time often elapses between the terrorist event and the headline. Nevertheless, there is an increasing presence of the term "terrorism" in the very first headline. This could be attributed to the triangle of political communication, whereby media outlets are willing to use buzzwords such as "terrorism" to attract their audience. Considering that the period analysed relates to a religious wave of terrorism this increase in the use of the term terror is coherent with the notion that the public is more inclined to consider an event, terrorism when the perpetrator is Muslim (Huff & Kertzer, 2017). Since within fourth wave of terrorism, these are the most prevalent type of terrorist event, it is conclusive that there is an increase in the use of terror-associated terminology. Whether an audience uses the term terrorism to refer to an event has deep legal and political implications (Huff & Kertzer, 2018). It also affects counter-terrorism strategies and attitudes towards national security, the use of "terrorism" over other terms creates a sense of urgency in the audience to correct the violence (Garzon, 2016).

The most interesting aspect of this increase is that, given the difficulty of determining which violent events constitute terrorism and which do not, and the legal ramifications that follow such classification, the media is becoming more comfortable in making such classification themselves since the very first report.

While it is challenging to prove that the use of religious-related terms is a result of bias, there are certain terms that may warrant a closer investigation to better understand how they have been used by year and by country.

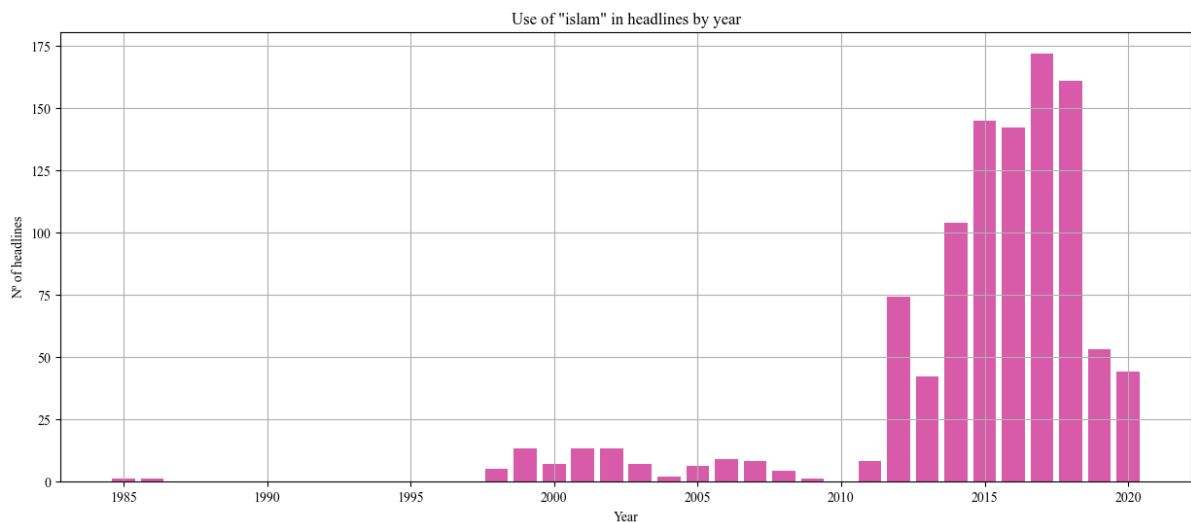


Figure 12: Use of the word "Islam" in media, distributed by year

Figure 12 displays the frequency of all variations of words related to Islam, including terms such as Islam, Islamic, Islamist, and so on. As shown in the figure, the use of these terms skyrocketed in the early 2010s and started to decrease in the late 2010s. This does not necessarily coincide with the wave of terrorism since religious Islamic terrorism started much earlier. This can be attributed to a lack of use of Islam-related terminology or a gap in the reliability of the data. It is challenging to determine the exact cause.<sup>3</sup>

The higher peaks in the use of terms related to Islam in Figure 12 appear to correspond with the public interest over time, as shown in Figure 13 using Google Trends data. This suggests that the use of these terms in headlines may have been influenced by the level of interest and attention of the public.

<sup>3</sup> Included in Appendix 2 there is a distribution of the use of the term by country, which can further contextualize some of the causes for the differences in use.



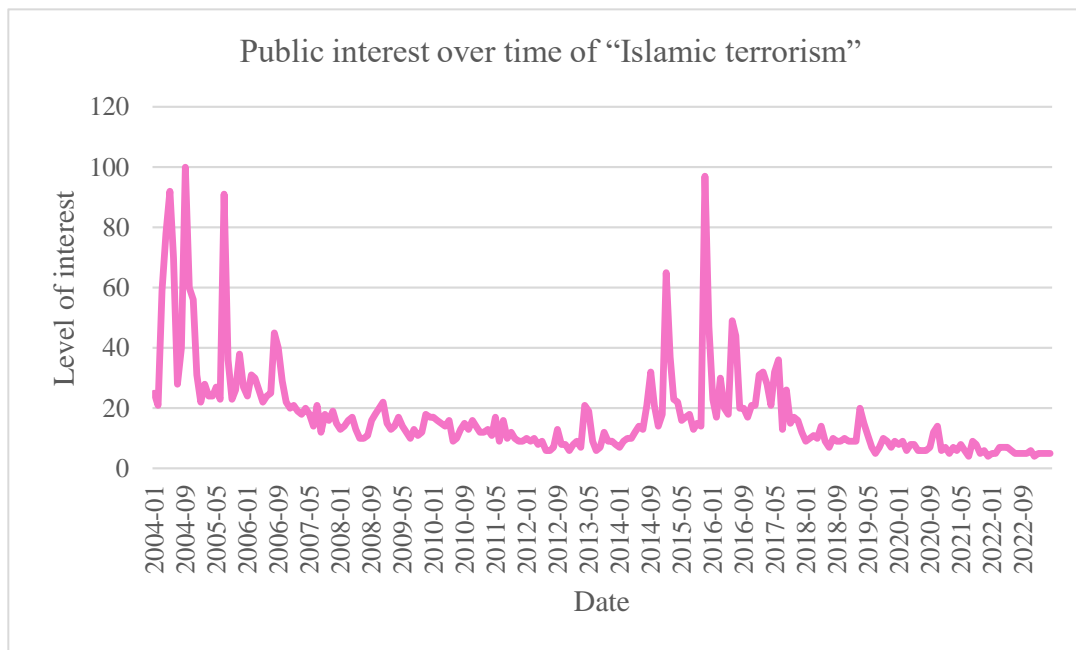


Figure 13: Public interest over time of “Islamic terrorism” (2004-2023)

The global attention given to the subject of "Islamic terrorism" is directly linked to the utilization of Islam-related language in media coverage of terrorist acts during the early 2010s. Notably, the regional interest in this topic shifted during that time, coinciding with the rise of terrorist incidents in the Western world. Furthermore, the rise in public interest coincides with an increase in the use of terror-related language by the media, as demonstrated in Figure 13.

During the early 2000s, there was a public interest in the subject that was not necessarily reflected in initial reports. Although some Islam-related terminology was used in media coverage of terrorist events during that period, it was minimal in comparison to the public interest. This discrepancy may be explained by the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent War on Terror.

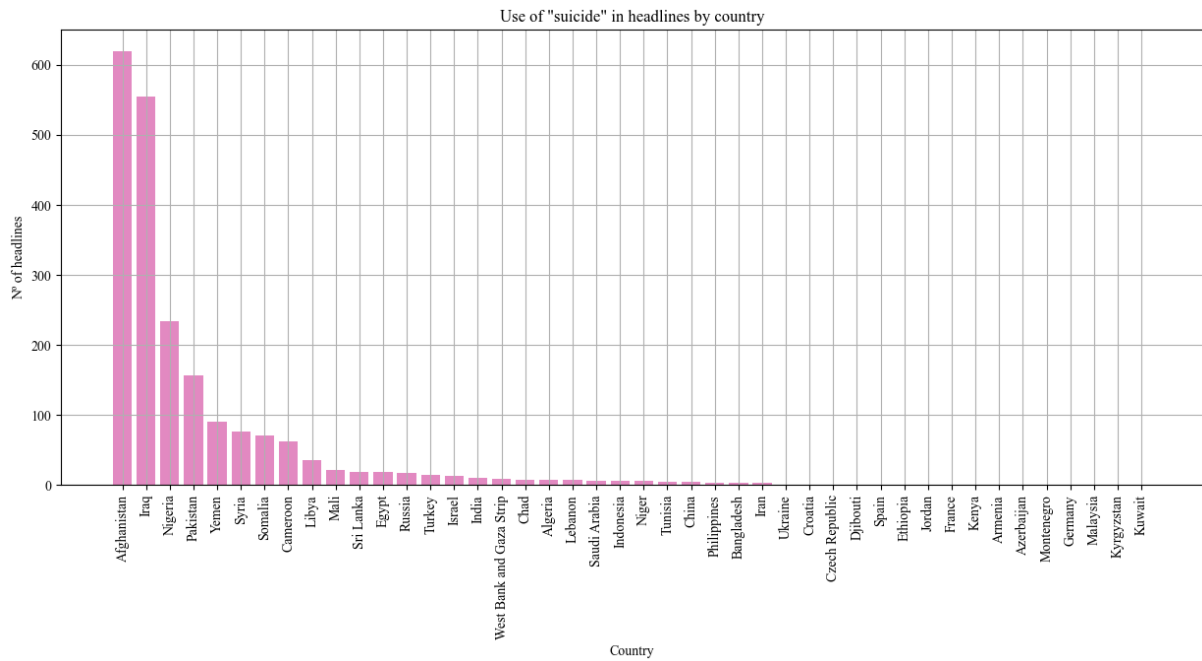
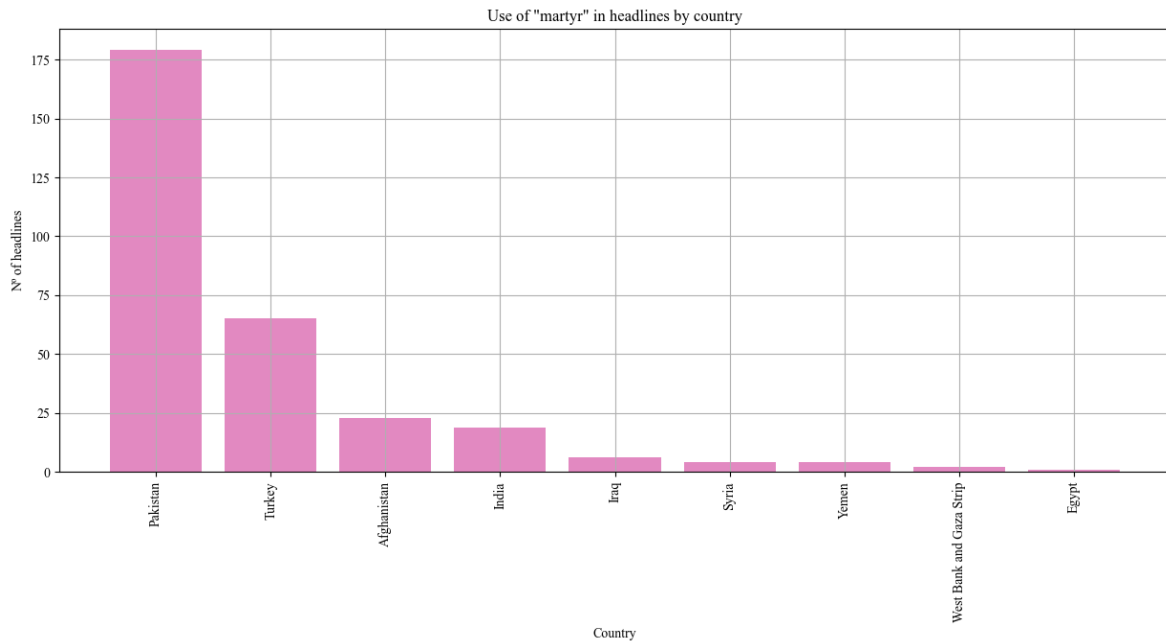


Figure 14: Use of the word "Suicide" in media, distributed by country

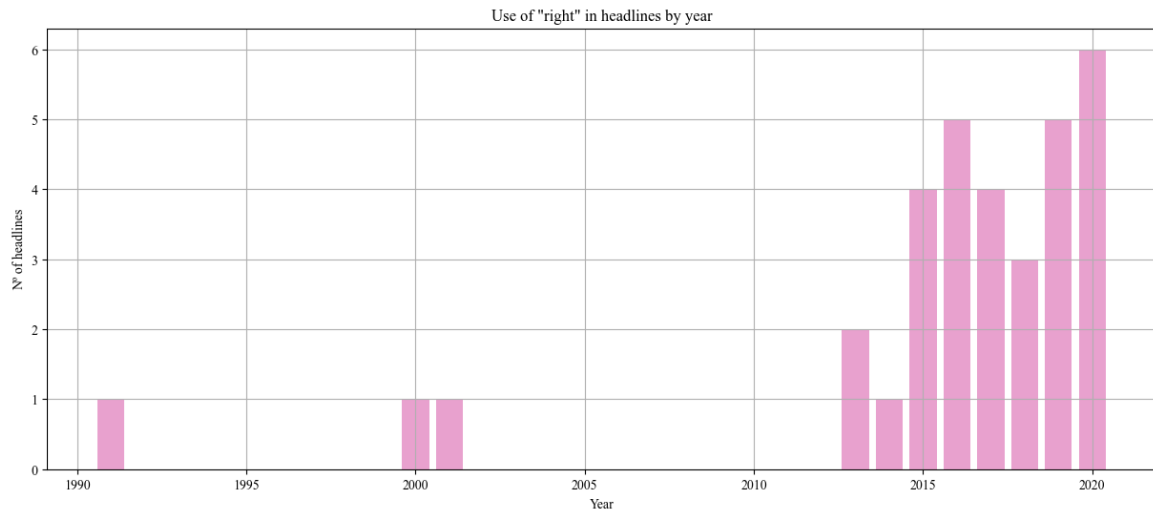
An intriguing term to examine that is indicative of the fourth wave is the usage of suicide. In this case, observing its progression over the years is not as compelling as observing it by state. This is primarily because suicide terrorism carries certain implications and is typically employed by Western media. Conversely, non-Western media often prefers to use self-martyrdom to portray terrorist incidents differently (Rapoport, 2022). This is akin to the issue of distinguishing between a rebel and a freedom fighter. The first noteworthy aspect revealed by Figure 14 is the prevalence of the term "suicide". It is exceedingly common in the language utilized by the media, ranking as one of the most frequently employed words in headlines, as demonstrated in Figure 10. This aligns with the upsurge of this strategy in the fourth wave, which appears to be proportional to the number of suicide attacks that occurred. However, as illustrated in Figure 15, the use of terminology relating to martyrdom is significantly less frequent.



*Figure 15: use of the word "martyr" in media, distributed by country*

The lack of usage of terminology related to martyrdom suggests that the majority of headlines reporting on suicidal terrorist events and explicitly mentioning the type of attack in the first report's headline are likely from Western sources or in alignment with Western ideology. A remarkable example is the instance of Pakistan, where the coverage appears to be evenly divided, with half of the mentions utilizing the term "suicide" and the other half, using "martyr." In the restricted use of terminologies associated with martyrdom, there are no Western nations.

Based on recent contributions by Rapoport (2022) to the theory of terrorism waves, it has been suggested that a new phase of terrorism may be emerging, possibly one that started towards the end of the 2010s. This purported fifth wave of terrorism is expected to display distinctive characteristics that should be discernible in the discourse surrounding these incidents. Although the study is limited to the period of the fourth wave, the progression of the waves is gradual, prompting a change in the nature of terrorist events and their coverage during the last decade under examination, as observed in the preceding waves. The emerging fifth wave is one of reactionary right-wing terrorism.



*Figure 16: use of the word "right" in media, distributed by year*

Figure 16 illustrates the usage of terms related to right-wing and far-right ideologies. It is important to note that the analysis excludes the usage of these terms in the context of human or political rights, and only focuses on their usage in the context of right-wing and far-right ideologies. Overall, there is relatively limited usage of these terms in the analysed corpus. The limited use can be accounted for by the overall difficulties that exist to label far-right violence as terrorism (Signal AI, 2019). Moreover in media, often the terminology related to terror, as previously described, is more likely to be used next to Muslim and Islam-related terminology than next to terminology related to far-right or white supremacists related terms (Center for Media Monitoring, 2020).

Nevertheless, what is interesting is the upward trend in their usage over time. This increase may be due to a rising interest in the media in reporting on right-wing and far-right ideologies, or it may correspond to an actual increase in the incidence of far-right terrorist events, a fifth wave of reactionary terrorism.

## **7. Conclusions and future developments**

### **7.1 Conclusions**

The conducted study yields multiple findings. The foremost finding confirms the principal hypothesis explaining that media coverage is intricately nuanced and intricately affected by a host of variables. Furthermore, the study substantiates the tangible impact of media coverage on both the public and terrorism, as posed by classical mass media theories. The wide-ranging nature of media coverage is particularly evident when taking into account the nationality and geographic location of media outlets.

With regard to the examination of media outlets, it is evident that the nationality of terrorist events is a crucial determinant of the variations in media coverage. Certain countries experience a higher incidence of terrorist events, and this uneven distribution is mirrored in the extent of their media coverage. Coverage is asymmetrical but not necessarily disproportionate. However, it is noteworthy that the asymmetry in coverage is not necessarily disproportionate. The perceived severity and prevalence of terrorism are shaped not only by the frequency of terrorist events but also by other variables.

Arguably, one of the most salient factors for comprehending media coverage of terrorism is the nationality of the media outlets. Each country exhibits a unique composition of its media environment that ranges from a predominance of national outlets, foreign outlets, or a hybrid of the two. This type of media environment shapes the audience that it targets and determines their perceptions of the extent to which a country is affected by terrorism, as well as the public's conceptions of terrorism in that specific country. This type of media environment shapes the audience that it targets and determines their perceptions of the extent to which a country is affected by terrorism, as well as the public's conceptions of terrorism in that particular country.

In light of these findings, it can be concluded that the answer to the first research question, which pertains to whether the origin of media outlets influences the coverage of terrorism, is unequivocally affirmative. As for the second research question, which explores the nature of media outlets, it can be ascertained that no single system prevails in shaping the type of media coverage, as it is highly contingent on the unique media environment of each country.

In regard to the use of discourse in the media coverage of terrorist events, the study yields several conclusions. Firstly, the third research question, which pertains to the existence of a shared and specific discourse among media outlets, is answered affirmatively. A limited number of terms prevail across various media outlets and give shape to the common discourse surrounding terrorism. Moreover, the utilization of language can be explained by the desire of media outlets to capture a larger audience through the use of buzzwords linked to violence. Consequently, this approach shapes the perceptions held by the audience and the type of discourse associated with terrorism.

Upon grouping the most frequently used terms by semantic fields, it becomes evident that the majority of the terms are closely linked to the features of terrorist events of the fourth wave of terrorism as outlined by Rapoport's waves of terrorism theory. This finding corresponds to the final research question, which examines whether the features of terrorist waves influence the discourse utilized to describe them. The distribution of the usage of specific terms by year suggests that the discourse is tied to the distinctive attributes of the terrorist wave in question. This renders it more challenging to determine whether the asymmetry in coverage is attributable to biases or reflects the dominant features of terrorism at that time, although biases can still account for some of the trends discernible in the employment of discourse that are not fully explained by the characteristics of the fourth wave. By analyzing the semantic categories used in reporting on terrorism, one can identify patterns of language use that may contribute to the construction of certain frames and narratives, which in turn can shape public opinion and policy decisions (Norris et al.; 2004).

In summary, the study reveals that the coverage of terrorism in the media is influenced by various factors, including the nationality and type of media outlets, as well as the characteristics of the terrorist wave in question. The discourse surrounding terrorism is also influenced by these factors, as well as the media's desire to attract a larger audience. While there is a shared discourse across different media outlets, it is also contingent on the unique media environment of each country. Ultimately, the study underscores the complexity of media coverage of terrorism and the importance of examining multiple factors to fully comprehend the nature of the discourse surrounding it.

## 7.2 Future developments

The study has several limitations, primarily the use of the first report instead of analysing all existing coverage of each terrorist event. The absence of a single comprehensive database that contains all such information makes it almost unfeasible to collect and analyse such a vast amount of data. However, conducting such an analysis would yield a valuable and reliable overview of the impact of media coverage. Furthermore, comparing the first and second reports could provide discernments into the differences, particularly in terms of the discourse employed.

Another limitation of the study is the limited number of countries with prominent coverage of terrorist events that were analysed. It would be insightful to conduct a similar analysis for media outlets with a significant presence in all states, not just the four with the most coverage. Such a comparison across all geographical areas would provide valuable insights into the trends of terrorism and the impact of media coverage on them.

A significant limitation of the study is the difficulty in analysing the format of media outlets due to the constant changes in the formats offered over time. The database used in the study does not specify whether the outlets were digital, print media or broadcast, which is a crucial factor in shaping media narratives. Each format has a different impact on the audience, as determined by mass media theories. Although the study has analysed the current formats used by the outlets, it is important to note that there is no way to know whether a particular headline used the current format or one that the outlet no longer uses and as such, the results were not included.<sup>4</sup>

In the domain of discourse analysis, numerous areas of inquiry merit analysis. Notably, conducting a qualitative analysis of headlines to ascertain their sentiment could yield intriguing results regarding coverage asymmetries and biases. Similarly, though analysing the discourse utilized in alternative media presents significant challenges, investigating the discourse surrounding terrorism on social media platforms would be highly relevant for comparison with traditional media. In addition, a deeper analysis of the semantic fields and the use of certain terms could be explored to understand the underlying meaning and implications of the language used in media coverage of terrorism. This would provide a more nuanced understanding of the discourse and its effects on shaping public perception and attitudes towards terrorism. Besides, it would also be interesting to explore the impact of media coverage on policy-making and the actions taken by governments and other

institutions in response to terrorist events. Overall, there are various avenues for further research in the field of discourse analysis and its relationship with media coverage of terrorism.

In general, the intersection between terrorism and media studies remains considerably underexplored, with significant potential for development in both quantitative and qualitative analyses. This is particularly true for studies examining overarching trends and relationships, rather than just specific case studies pertaining to individual countries or terrorist organizations. Such potential holds true for both discourse analysis and investigations into the characteristics of media outlets reporting on terrorism.



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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: media analysis

Figure 1.1: Media Outlets with the most headlines for the countries with most headlines

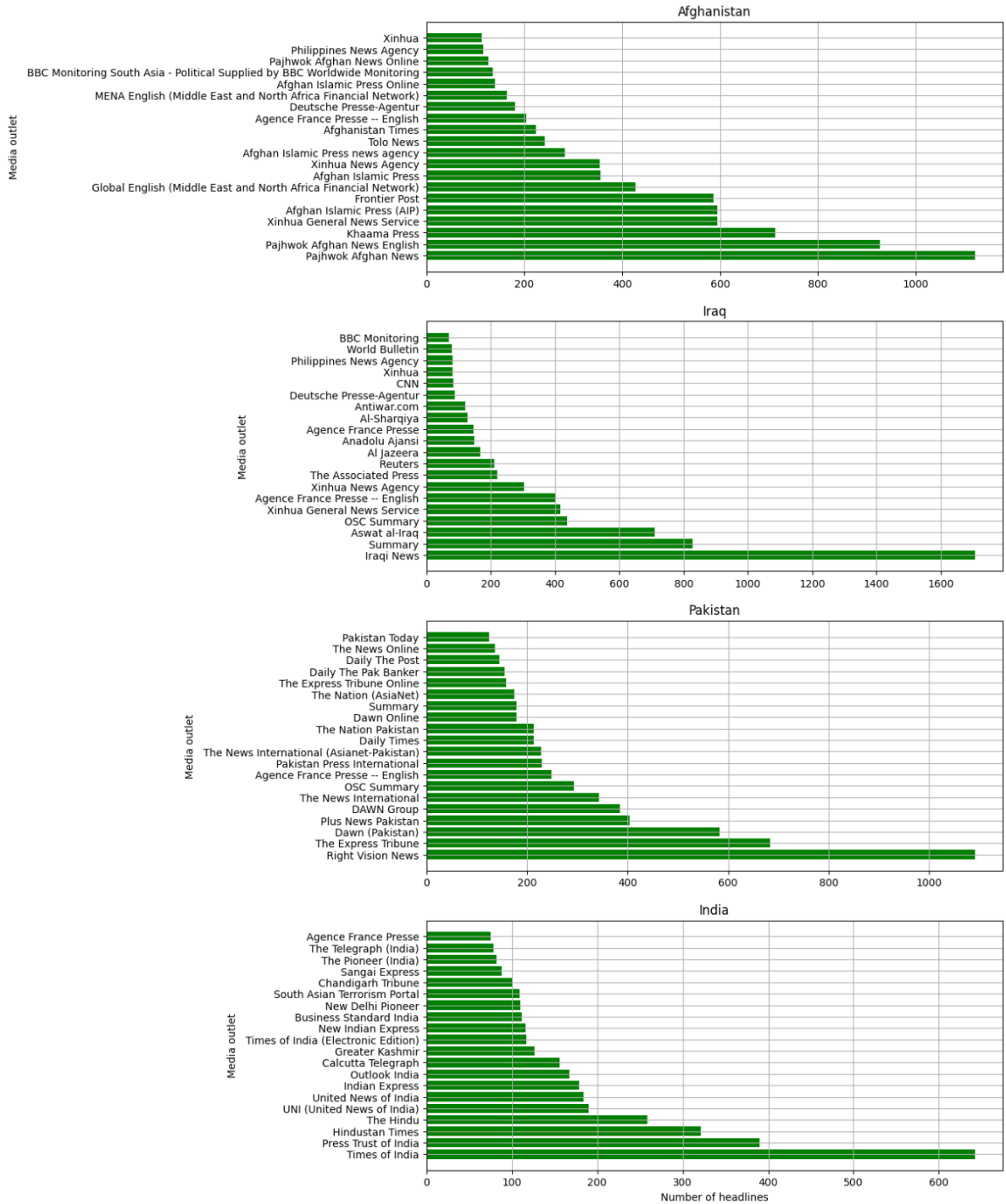


Table 1.1: Media analysis database

Afghanistan	Country of origin	Type of outlet	Broadcast Area	Owned	Language	Format	Origin of outlet
' Pajhwok Afghan News'	Afghanistan	News agency	Local	Private	Dari, Pashto	Digital	National
' Pajhwok Afghan News English'	Afghanistan	News agency	Local	Independent	English	Digital	National
' Khaama Press'	Afghanistan	News website	Regional	Private	Dari, Pashto, English	Digital	National
' Xinhua General News Service'	China	News agency	Global	State	Multiple	Mixed	Foreign
' Afghan Islamic Press (AIP)'	Pakistan	News agency	Regional	Private	Dari, Pashto, English	Digital	Foreign
' Frontier Post'	Pakistan	News website	Regional	Private	English	Digital	Foreign
' Global English (Middle East and North Africa Financial Network)'	Jordan	Business news agency	Regional	Private	Arabic, English	Digital	Foreign
' Afghan Islamic Press'	Afghanistan	News agency	Regional	Private	Dari, Pashto, English	Digital	National
' Xinhua News Agency'	China	News agency	Global	State	Chinese, English, etc	Digital	Foreign
' Afghan Islamic Press news agency'	Afghanistan	News agency	Regional	Private	Dari, Pashto, English	Digital	National
' Tolo News'	Afghanistan	Broadcast	Local	Private	Dari, Pashto	Broadcast	National
' Afghanistan Times'	Afghanistan	News website	Local	Private	English	Digital	National
' Agence France Presse -- English'	France	News agency	Global	Private	Multiple	Mixed	Foreign
' Deutsche Presse-Agentur'	Germany	News agency	Global	Private	Multiple	Mixed	Foreign
' MENA English (Middle East and North Africa Financial Network)'	Jordan	Business news agency	Regional	Private	Arabic, English	Digital	Foreign
' Afghan Islamic Press Online'	Afghanistan	News website	Regional	Private	Dari, Pashto, English	Digital	National
' BBC Monitoring South Asia - Political Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring'	United Kingdom	News monitoring service	Global	State	Multiple	Digital	Foreign
' Pajhwok Afghan News Online'	Afghanistan	News website	Local	Independent	Dari, Pashto	Digital	National
' Philippines News Agency'	Philippines	News agency	Regional	State	Filipino, English	Digital	Foreign
' Xinhua'	China	News agency	Global	State	Chinese, English, etc	Digital	Foreign
Iraq							
' Iraqi News'	Iraq	News website	Regional	Private	Arabic, English	Digital	National
' Summary'	Iraq	Summary	Local	Private	Arabic	Digital	National
' Aswat al-Iraq'	Iraq	News agency	Global	Independent	Arabic	Digital	Foreign
' OSC Summary'	United States	Summary	Global	State	English	Digital	Foreign
' Xinhua General News Service'	China	News agency	Global	State	Chinese, English, etc	Digital	Foreign
' Agence France Presse -- English'	France	News agency	Global	Private	English	Digital	Foreign
' Xinhua News Agency'	China	News agency	Global	State	Chinese, English, etc	Mixed	Foreign
' The Associated Press'	United States	News agency	Global	Cooperative	Multiple	Mixed	Foreign
' Reuters'	United Kingdom	News agency	Global	Private	Multiple	Mixed	Foreign
' Al Jazeera'	Qatar	News agency	Global	State	Multiple	Mixed	Foreign
' Anadolu Ajansi'	Turkey	News agency	Global	State	Multiple	Mixed	Foreign
' Agence France Presse'	France	News agency	Global	Private	French	Mixed	Foreign
' Al-Sharqiya'	Iraq	Broadcast	Local	Private	Arabic	Broadcast	National
' Antwar.com'	United States	News website	Global	Independent	English	Digital	Foreign
' Deutsche Presse-Agentur'	Germany	News agency	Global	Private	German, English	Mixed	Foreign
' CNN'	United States	Broadcast	Global	Private	Multiple	Mixed	Foreign
' Xinhua'	China	News agency	Global	State	Chinese, English, etc	Mixed	Foreign
' Philippines News Agency'	Philippines	News agency	Regional	State	Filipino, English	Digital	Foreign
' World Bulletin'	Turkey	News website	International	Private	English	Digital	Foreign
' BBC Monitoring'	United Kingdom	News monitoring service	Global	State	Multiple	Digital	Foreign
Pakistan							
' Right Vision News'	Pakistan	News website	Local	Private	English	Digital	National
' The Express Tribune'	Pakistan	Newspaper	Local	Private	English	Print, digital	National
' Dawn (Pakistan)'	Pakistan	Newspaper	Local	Private	English	Print, digital	National
' Plus News Pakistan'	Pakistan	News agency	Local	Private	English, Urdu	Digital	National
' DAWN Group'	Pakistan	Media group	Local	Private	English, Urdu	Mixed	National
' The News International'	Pakistan	Newspaper	Local	Private	English, Urdu	Print, digital	National
' OSC Summary'	United States	Summary	Global	State	English	Digital	Foreign
' Agence France Presse -- English'	France	News agency	Global	Private	English	Digital	Foreign
' Pakistan Press International'	Pakistan	News agency	Local	State	English, Urdu	Digital	National
' The News International (Asianet-Pakistan)'	Pakistan	News agency	Local	Private	English, Urdu	Print, digital	National
' Daily Times'	Pakistan	Newspaper	Local	Private	English	Print, digital	National
' The Nation Pakistan'	Pakistan	Newspaper	Local	Private	English	Print, digital	National
' Dawn Online'	Pakistan	News website	Local	Private	English	Digital	National
' Summary'	Pakistan	News agency	Local	Private	English, Urdu	Digital	National
' The Nation (AsiaNet)'	Pakistan	Newspaper	Local	Private	English	Print, digital	National
' The Express Tribune Online'	Pakistan	News website	Local	Private	English	Digital	National
' Daily The Pak Banker'	Pakistan	News website	Local	Private	English	Print, digital	National
' Daily The Post'	Pakistan	News website	Local	Private	English	Digital	National
' The News Online'	Pakistan	Newspaper	Local	Private	English	Digital	National
' Pakistan Today'	Pakistan	News website	Local	Private	English	Digital	National
India							
' Press Trust of India'	India	News agency	Global	Cooperative	English, Hindi	Mixed	National
' Times of India'	India	Newspaper	Local	Private	English	Print, digital	National
' Hindustan Times'	India	Newspaper	Local	Private	English	Print, digital	National
' The Hindu'	India	Newspaper	Local	Private	English	Print, digital	National
' UNI (United News of India)'	India	News agency	Local	Private	English, Hindi	Mixed	National
' United News of India'	India	News agency	Local	Private	English, Hindi	Mixed	National
' Indian Express'	India	Newspaper	Local	Private	English	Print, digital	National
' Outlook India'	India	News magazine	Local	Private	English	Print, digital	National
' Calcutta Telegraph'	India	Newspaper	Local	Private	English	Print, digital	National
' Greater Kashmir'	India	Newspaper	Regional	Independent	English	Print, digital	National
' Times of India (Electronic Edition)'	India	Newspaper	Local	Private	English	Digital	National
' New Indian Express'	India	Newspaper	Local	Private	English	Print, digital	National
' Business Standard India'	India	Newspaper	Local	Private	English, Hindi	Print, digital	National
' New Delhi Pioneer'	India	Newspaper	Local	Private	English	Print, digital	National
' South Asian Terrorism Portal'	India	News website	Regional	Independent	English	Digital	National
' Chandigarh Tribune'	India	Newspaper	Local	Private	English	Print, digital	National
' Sangai Express'	India	Newspaper	Local	Private	English, Manipuri	Print, digital	National
' The Pioneer (India)'	India	Newspaper	Regional	Private	English	Print, digital	National
' Agence France Presse'	France	News agency	Global	Private	French	Mixed	Foreign
' The Telegraph (India)'	India	Newspaper	Local	Private	English	Print, digital	National

Table 1.2: Media outlet origin by country

	Afghanistan	Iraq	Pakistan	India
National	9	3	18	19
Foreign	11	17	2	1

Table 1.3: Number of media outlets by area of coverage, Afghanistan

Afghanistan	
Reach of media	N° of media outlets
Local	5
Regional	9
Global	6

Table 1.4: Number of media outlets by area of coverage, Iraq

Iraq	
Reach of media	N° of media outlets
Local	2
Regional	2
Global	16

Table 1.5: Number of media outlets by area of coverage, Pakistan

Pakistan	
Reach of media	N° of media outlets
Local	18
Regional	0
Global	2

Table 1.6: Number of media outlets by area of coverage, India

India	
Reach of media	N° of media outlets
Local	15
Regional	3
Global	2

Table 1.7: Media outlets by broadcast area by country

	Afghanistan	Iraq	Pakistan	India
Local	5	2	18	15
Regional	9	2	0	3
Global	6	16	2	2

Table 1.8: N° of media outlets by languages, Afghanistan

	Afghanistan
Dari, Pashto, English	5
Multiple	4
English	3
Dari, Pashto	3
Chinese, English, etc	2
Arabic, English	2
Filipino, English	1

Table 1.9: N° of media outlets by languages, Iraq

	Iraq
Multiple	6
English	4
Arabic	3
Chinese, English, etc	3
Arabic, English	1
German, English	1
French	1
Filipino, English	1

Table 1.10: N° of media outlets by languages, Pakistan

	Pakistan
English	14
English, Urdu	6



Table 1.11: N° of media outlets by languages, India

	India
English	14
English, Hindi	4
French	1
English, Manipuri	1

Table 1.12: N° of media outlets by language audience and country

	Afghanistan	Iraq	Pakistan	India
Local	10	4	20	19
Foreign	10	15	0	1

Table 1.13: N° of each type of media outlet by country

	Afghanistan	Iraq	Pakistan	India
Broadcast	1	1	0	0
Digital	16	10	11	2
Mixed	3	9	1	4
Print, digital	0	0	8	14

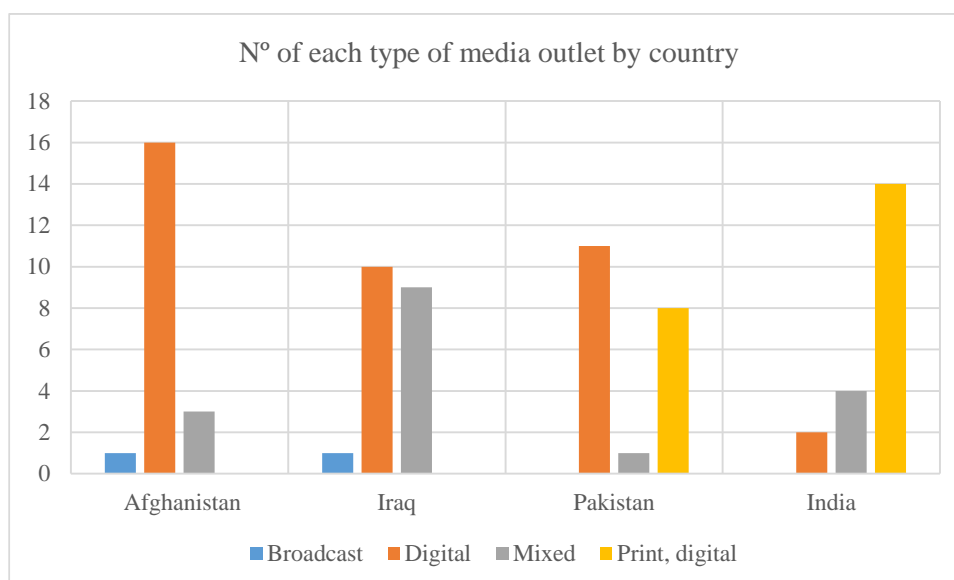


Figure 1.2: Number of each type of media outlet by country

## **Appendix 2: discourse analysis**

Lists of terms for each semantic field

- **State:**

Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Afghan, Yemen, Somalia, Baghdad, Iraqi, Syria, Libya, Nigeria, Turkey, Colombia, Philippine, Baluchistan, Somali, Mogadishu, Kabul, India, Kashmir, Mosul, Thailand, U.S., Syrian

- **Violence**

attack, killed, kill, injured, dead, wounded, hit, hurt, terrorist, wound, violence, incident, attacked, killing, casualty, injures, armed, death, gunned, terrorism, terror

- **Politics**

Militant, rebel, Taliban, claim, leader, boko haram, Maoist, al-Shabaab, Member, group, npa, Islamic, insurgent, government, Houthi, fighter

- **Type of attack:**

Blast, shot, explosion, suicide, clash, car, bombing, fire, ambush, bomber, kidnapped, vehicle, abducted, arson, shooting, kidnap

- **Military and security:**

Police, soldier, security, official, army, roundup, policeman, officer, suspected, troop, military, cop, chief, report

- **Location:**

State, City, Town, District, House, border, School, target, Station, mosque

- **Civilian:**

Civilian, people, province, village, child, worker, woman

- **Weapon:**

Bomb, gunman, ied, grenade, rocket, explosive

- **Media:**

Press, journalist, news

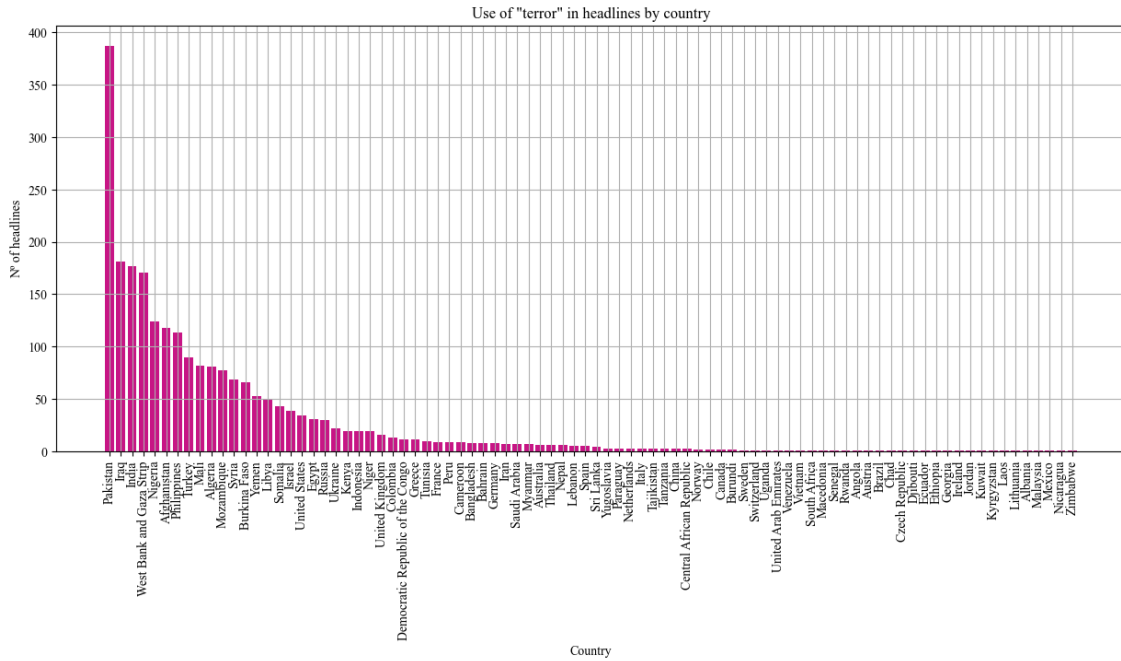


Figure 2.1: Use of term “terror” in media, distributed by country

As described in footnote 3 the distribution of the term by country can give insight into the difference in the usage of the term. It has not been included in the analysis since there is an issue of the reliability of the distribution due to the data available. There are other factors that affect the conclusions.

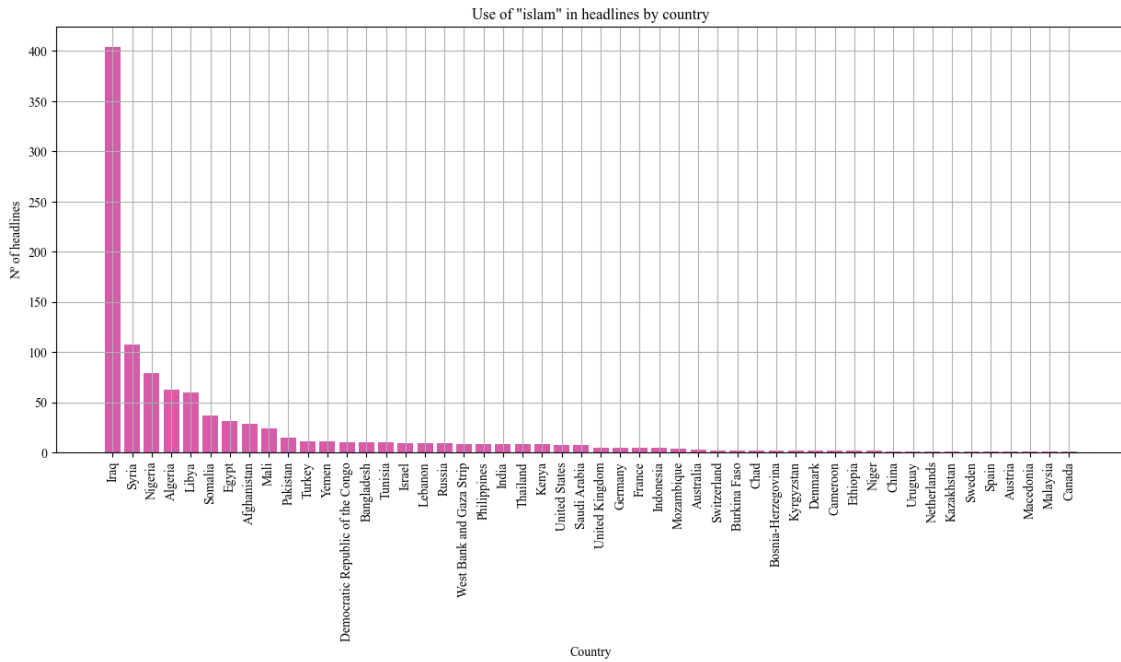


Figure 2.2: Use of term “islam” in media, distributed by country

### **Appendix 3: Terms and abbreviations**

Global Terrorism Database (GTD)

Global Terrorism Index (GTI)

United Nations (UN)

Weapons of mass destruction (WMD)