



Struve, Bastian (2019) *The Chinese print media's reporting of domestic 'terrorist' attacks: ideographs, social values and counter-terrorism frames*. PhD thesis.

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**The Chinese Print Media's  
Reporting of Domestic 'Terrorist' Attacks:  
Ideographs, Social Values and  
Counter-Terrorism Frames**

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Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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September 2019

## **Abstract**

Following the attacks of September 11 2001 in the United States, China proclaimed its own ‘war on terror’ with the Uyghur of Xinjiang as a frontline. At the same time as ongoing US anti-terrorism efforts around the world, the Chinese government deployed repressive campaigns in one of its own troubled regions, campaigns which intensified with the riots in Urumqi in 2009. A series of high-casualty attacks since 2014 demonstrates further exacerbation of the conflict and entailed a strengthening of the counter-terrorism apparatus in the following years. Yet several scholars have questioned the nature of the purported terrorist threat to China, suggesting that the new narrative around the Uyghur issue was an attempt by the regime to preserve its authority and escape international condemnation for the severity of its actions. However, although these scholars highlight the party-state’s use of the terrorism label for the Xinjiang conflict, there is still a comprehensive analysis missing on how the party-state portrays the terrorist threat to its people.

Responding to this research problem, this dissertation presents the first systematic analysis Chinese media coverage of domestic ‘terrorist’ attacks. Drawing upon eight cases from 2009 to 2015, and twelve Chinese newspapers, this analysis focuses on the determinants of terrorism coverage and framing patterns through a combination of qualitative content analysis and quantitative text analysis. I argue that the Chinese party-state engages through various methods of news censorship and coordination to construct a terrorist threat that is surprisingly abstract- invoking extremism as the threat, but without referring much to particular agents, organisation or religions. Also, I argue that the party-state uses the abstract terrorism portrayal to campaign against all ‘three evil forces’ (terrorism, extremism, separatism), while also promoting social values that align with the regime’s resilience. The dissertation reveals the various frames that make up the party-state’s terrorist threat construction. It demonstrates that the party-state uses the Xinjiang conflict to rally the Chinese people under the flag of the Chinese Communist Party while also creating the image of an archetypical enemy that can be applied to a large range of party-state perceived threats. These features of the Chinese news coverage of ‘terrorist’ attacks shed light on the mediated reality of the conflict and provide an alternative perspective to US-centred media scholarship on terrorism.

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## Acknowledgements

May this mark the beginning of an interesting journey, it certainly marks the end of a splendid one! I hereby follow the tracks of two people I had the pleasure of meeting in my life. Their view of life as a sequence of journeys allowed them to encounter many unusual adventures.

Now, I shall attempt to follow academic tradition a bit more. Reflecting on the end of this research project, I find that Ray Bradbury's introduction to *Dandelion Wine* applies nicely to academic writing as well:

This book, like most of my books and stories, was a surprise. I began to learn the nature of such surprises, thank God, when I was fairly young as a writer. Before that, like every beginner, I thought you could beat, pummel, and thrash an idea into existence. Under such treatment, of course, any decent idea folds up its paws, turns on its back, fixes its eyes on eternity, and dies (Bradbury 2008: p. VII).

The submission of this thesis is owed to many people, some shorter, some taller but never on average! Among all, my deepest gratitude lies with my Professor Jane Duckett and Dr Brian Fogarty who have guided me through this PhD journey with critical comments, insightful discussions and unfailing humour. I could have not hoped for more understanding and supportive mentors while funding this project through full-time work. Thank you also for the immense help towards the end of this project, with all the things learned in those weeks and months it truly felt like yet another PhD in the PhD! In addition, I am very grateful to those who have kept me going (a.k.a. distracted): Paul Gardner, Jennifer Russi and Hanne Potthast!

## **Authors Declaration**

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed name: Bastian Struve

Signature:

**Abbreviations**

CNKI-CND	Qinghua Tongfang's China National Knowledge Infrastructure Core Newspaper Database
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
ETIM	East Turkistan Independence Movement
PRC	People's Republic of China

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Over a long period of time-especially since the 1990s-the 'East Turkistan' forces inside and outside Chinese territory have planned and organised a series of violent incidents in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China and some other countries, including explosions, assassinations, arson, poisonings, and assaults, with the objective of founding the so-called state of 'East Turkistan'. These terrorist incidents have seriously jeopardized the lives and properties of people of all ethnic groups, as well as social stability as a norm in China, and even threatened the security and stability of related countries and regions. (Information Office of the State Council 2002: 435).

The issue of terrorism in China is often understood as the 'Xinjiang problem'. For three decades, social unrest involving the indigenous Turkic Muslim population, the Uyghur people, has rocked the far western Xinjiang region of China. The Chinese party-state<sup>1</sup> has consistently referred to these uprisings as separatism (分裂), one of the 'three evil forces'<sup>2</sup> – understood to be the party-state's archetypical enemy. The party-state formulated its 'three evil forces' terminology prior to the September 11 2001 attacks, but the consequent global focus on fighting a 'war on terror' provided Beijing with a way of justifying increased attacks against Uyghur separatism. Four months after George W. Bush began to speak of a global 'war on terror', China claimed to face its own domestic terrorist threat in Xinjiang and by doing so reframed its ethnic separatist issue as a terrorism one with links to al-Qaeda (Tschantret 2018). One of the first official party-state documents that claimed the issue of terrorism in China was called 'East Turkistan terrorist forces cannot get away with impunity', published in January 2002, of which the above direct quotation gives an impression of the party-state approach to terrorism. Since then, a cycle of escalated violence and harsh repression has made the 'Xinjiang conflict', or 'terrorism', one of the top national security concerns of the party-state (Clarke 2018).

The scholarship concerning the use of the terrorist threat designation in China has continuously criticised the party-state for jumping on the bandwagon of the US 'war on terror', arguing that this was a tactic to make 'crack downs'<sup>3</sup> on separatists internationally

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the dissertation, I use the term 'party-state' to refer to both the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese state since it is impossible to distinguish between either in contemporary China. For more details, see Wright (2016).

<sup>2</sup> The 'three evil forces' comprise of terrorism, religious extremism and separatism. Aris (2009) points out that the party-state gave terrorism, extremism and separatism broad definitions to enable its signatories wide latitude to repress dissidents and unrests alike.

<sup>3</sup> 'Crack down': The party-state's use of suppressive force to respond to large-scale and serious ethno-religious unrests. See Li (2019).

permissible and nationally more urgent for the protection of stability. Recent publications on China's terrorist violence highlight further that the party-state authorities use the escalation of violence since the last decade as an opportunity to justify the securitisation of the Chinese society beyond Xinjiang (Finley 2019; Tredaniel and Lee 2018; Tschantret 2016; Xie and Liu 2019). Yet, examination of how the party-state portrayed this terrorist threat has remained scarce and analysis has focused on policy documents. Even after ten years of escalated violence, no systematic analysis of how the party-state communicated the terrorist threat portrayal to the Chinese public has been done.

Aiming to address the gap, I took a political communication perspective by analysing the Chinese terrorism news coverage as a party-state construction. Scholarly evidence has abundantly shown that news content needs to pass through layers of censoring and editing mechanisms (i.e. Barbour and Jones 2013; Brady 2017b), thus the news output that is accessible to the Chinese public is a media portrayal of the terrorist threat that was approved by the authorities. My analysis focused on Chinese newspaper data to uncover what factors determined the scale of news coverage and what frames defined the terrorism media portrayal. I focused on print media for two reasons: First, the newspaper readership in China is high and continues to grow (Bandurski 2018; Wang 2017). Second, there is much research available that confirms the existence of a sophisticated apparatus of censoring mechanisms for newspaper coverage. Therefore, the analysis of newspaper coverage can give insight into the Chinese party-state's construction of terrorism. While social media analysis received increasing scholarly attention, the sheer quantity of posts and the lack of understanding on how well the state authorities censor the content make it difficult to infer from social media content the party-state construction of the terrorist threat. Therefore, in this dissertation, I present the first comprehensive examination of how the Chinese print media have portrayed the party-state's terrorist threat. It demonstrates that the Chinese party-state uses terrorism news coverage to promote its ideology of stability maintenance while creating an abstract terrorist threat to campaign against terrorism, religious extremism and separatism simultaneously.

The analysis of Chinese news coverage consisted of three parts: First, I aimed to identify what factors determine the extent of terrorism coverage. Since there have been no studies on this subject for China yet, I tested how well the 'traditionally' strong determinants of terrorism coverage in the US-centred literature on the subject apply to China's censored media environment. Second, I analysed how the news media portrayed the terrorist threat by

using both qualitative content analysis and quantitative text analysis methods. The former involved an inductive open coding process and indicator questions for analysing a sub-sample of 458 news reports; the latter validated the qualitative findings through analysis of the full sample of 2291 news reports and studied frequently occurring terms and their relationships. Third, I examined differences in news content across eight ‘terrorist’ attacks to conclude on changes in the news portrayal of terrorism over time. Beginning with the escalation of violence in July 2009, quantitative topic modelling of the sample and indicator question for the sub-sample helped identify prevalent changes in news reporting. Overall, the dissertation contributes to the understanding of authoritarian political communication, showing what narratives emerge in the terrorist threat construction of the Chinese party-state and how this adds to the party-state’s handling of the ethnic conflict in Xinjiang.

This introductory chapter sets out the aims of this thesis and contextualised them within the country of study and history-political changes. It begins by discussing research on the Xinjiang conflict as an intersection between terrorism framing studies, authoritarian resilience, and studies of the Xinjiang conflict to highlight the contributions of this project to each. The following sections cover the importance of Xinjiang to China, the course of the party-state’s terrorist threat perception, the potential merits of introducing the terrorism discourse to the Xinjiang conflict and the role of the media in this context. It finally concludes on the main arguments and structure of this dissertation.

### **Research contributions on terrorism news framing, authoritarian resilience and the Xinjiang conflict**

Examining the portrayal of terrorism in Chinese news media is of great significance for understanding how the party-state domestically legitimises the fight against the Xinjiang separatists through the terrorism designation. As Nacos (2002/2006) and Norris et al. (2003) argue in their seminal works on terrorism framing in media, the news media shape public opinion of the political leadership as well as the interpretation of terrorist events. Various experimental studies in the US and UK confirmed that the news reporting of terrorism can increase public fear of it, increase support for restricting civil liberties to combat terrorism and foster negative attitudes by the public towards Muslims (Brinson and Stohl 2012; Sikorski et al. 2017; Wood 2011). In line with these points, researchers of the party-state’s terrorist threat construction argue that ‘threat inflation’ achieves the party-states goal of signalling regional instability, which in turn legitimises its hard-line approach in Xinjiang and rallies the Chinese people around the flag of the Communist Party regime (Cliff 2012;

Kanat 2012). Given that the party-state has been using the terrorism label for Xinjiang for two decades, and the impact of media content on public opinion of the Xinjiang conflict, there is urgent need for examination into how the Chinese media portray terrorism in the censored environment. There is strong evidence of the party-state using media control to create narratives (i.e. Luqiu 2018; Roberts 2018b). Research on news coverage is therefore a useful source for insight into the party-state's terrorism threat construction and into what news output reaches the public on the Xinjiang conflict.

Examination of the media's portrayal of terrorism in Xinjiang can also make an important contribution to the authoritarian resilience scholarship. Scholars in this area continuously show that authoritarian leaders fear the loss of political authority due to widespread political resistance (i.e. Geddes 1999; Dukalskis and Gerschewski 2017; Levitsky and Way 2010). These scholars commonly picture authoritarian leaders employing various strategies to maintain stability, among which the most common ones are repression, coercion, co-optation and legitimisation of authority. They tend to agree that an authoritarian regime cannot survive by repression or coercion alone. In this line, Bondes and Heep (2012) argue that part of the authoritarian leadership's job is to persuade the public that the status quo is legitimate and demands public support. Given that the Xinjiang conflict signals weak party-state leadership which risks fanning resistance, the party-state's response to this threat gives insight into how China's authoritarian leadership confronts the separatism issue and persuades the public of its terrorist threat portrayal. Therefore, examining the news portrayal of the Xinjiang conflict after it has passed various layers of censorship contributes to the authoritarian resilience scholarship by providing insight into how the party-state uses media control to persuade the Chinese people that the terrorism construction is legitimate and reinforces support for the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party.

Yet another contribution of this research lies in its focus on the media's role in the Xinjiang conflict scholarship. Despite a recent surge in publications on the Xinjiang conflict, studies remain focused on the party-state led repressive campaigns against the Uyghur people or the securitisation of Xinjiang under the guise of counter-terrorism efforts (i.e. Clarke 2008/2018; Roberts 2012/2018). With the continuous escalation of violence since the 2009 Urumqi riot, these sources highlight extreme repressive and coercive measures used by the party-state to achieve regional stability. Leibold (2019) describes the emergence of a surveillance state in Xinjiang that engages in monitoring, ethnic sorting and disciplining of its regional population in the name of safeguarding all people against terrorism. Smith-Finley (2019)

sees these measures as a form of ‘state terror’, drawing particularly on the example of the millions of detained Uyghurs and alleged party-state enemies in Xinjiang’s ‘re-education camps’ (职业技能教育培训中心). Yet, these scholars have not considered the use of media control as a party-state strategy to achieve stability in Xinjiang. This research compliments the above studies by exploring the news portrayal of terrorism as a party-state construction aimed at strengthening legitimacy for its Xinjiang ‘counter-terrorism efforts’.

### **Xinjiang’s strategic importance to China**

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, literally ‘new frontier’ in Chinese and ‘East Turkistan’ to separatists, is located at the Western Chinese border (see Figure 1-1). The conquest of the region was completed under the Qing Dynasty in the eighteenth century, yet it remained largely beyond the purview of the central authorities until the 1940s (Bovingdon 2010; Millward 2007). In 1949, when the territory was included in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), over 90 per cent of the population were members of the Turkic Muslim group called the Uyghurs. Despite gaining autonomy in 1955, China has pursued a policy of forced assimilation of the Uyghurs through party-state supported immigration of Han Chinese to Xinjiang on the justification of economic development and increased loyalty to Beijing. The latest census data from 2010 illustrates a percentage growth of Han population in Xinjiang from 6 per cent in 1953 to 41 per cent of 22 million people in 2010, only slightly lower than the 46 per cent of Uyghur population (National Bureau of Statistics of China 2013). The rapid process of industrialisation, assimilation and securitisation in Xinjiang has aggravated xenophobia and ethnic inequalities while escalating resentment between the authorities in Beijing and the local indigenous populations.

Resolving the social conflict in Xinjiang is strategically significant for the party-state because bad governance and social instability would reflect badly on the political leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) both nationally and internationally. For instance, the continuation of social instability driven by ethnic grievances between Han and Uyghur Chinese is in conflict with the CCP’s long-standing promotion of economic growth and ethnic solidarity (Klimes 2018). Public unrests in Xinjiang could also fan resistance against the CCP rule nation-wide (i.e. Dodge and Keraenen 2018; Hillman and Tuttle 2016). Yet, this unrest also provides opportunities for the party-state to bolster authority on the national level by clamping down on resistance in Xinjiang. Altogether, for the above reasons, the party-state leadership under Hu Jintao (2003-2013) and Xi Jinping (2013 – ongoing) has

been keen to forge a ‘partnership of stability’ with indigenous ethnic groups to produce a perception of legitimacy among the local communities in Xinjiang.

**Figure 1-1: Xinjiang in contemporary China**



Source: Wars in the world 2014.

Xinjiang also holds significant strategic importance for the party-state economically. It is the most important energy base in China, ranking second in accessible coal supply and first in the production of natural gas. It is a major industrial base for cotton, livestock and nonferrous metals (Hao and Liu 2012; Tanner and Bellacqua 2016). The region also serves as a major transit hub for Russia and Central Asian oil and gas. As one of the largest global importers of oil, China relies on two major sources of oil production: Central Asia, with its geographical links to Xinjiang; and the Middle East, with cultural links to the Muslim community in Xinjiang. Xinjiang has become a bridge head for China’s open-up policy in Central Asia because it shares borders with Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Russia and Afghanistan. Two-thirds of the trade between China and Central Asia takes place in Xinjiang. As Hayes (2019) covers in detail, Xinjiang plays a major role in President Xi Jinping’s ‘big power diplomacy’ and ‘neighbourhood diplomacy.’ The region is home to many projects under the Belt and Road Initiative that will eventually link Beijing to over 70 countries around the world. Considering Xinjiang’s strategic geological position at the border to various Central Asian states, social instability in the region is a serious threat to the Xi and CCP authority in China.

### **China’s evolving terrorism problem**

Studies on the Xinjiang conflict identify two turning points since 2000: First, after September 11, there was a shift in the party-state assessment of the threat from Uyghur

separatism to Uyghur terrorism (i.e. Barbour and Jones 2013; Cunningham 2012; Wayne 2007). Second, after the Urumqi riot in 2009, a vicious cycle of escalating violence in the form of local uprisings and party-state-led counter operations intensified (i.e. Tredaniel and Lee 2018; Tschantret 2016; Xie and Liu 2019). A potential third turning point may be identified with the further escalation of violence since 2013. In addition to attacks in Xinjiang's cities Bachu (April 2013), Lukqun (June 2013), and Urumqi (May 2014), separatist attacks on Tiananmen Square (October 2013) and on the Kunming train station (March 2014) carried the conflict out of Xinjiang and had a national-scale impact (Klimes 2018). In the aftermath of these attacks, Xinjiang's party secretary Zhang Chunxian (张春贤), previously viewed as a moderate, published an article in the *People's Daily* declaring a 'people's war on terror and for social stability', in which terrorists should be 'chased down the streets like rats' (Zhang 2014).

Before September 11, the Chinese party-state assessed the violent unrests in Xinjiang not as terrorism but as separatist activities (or 'splittism' 分裂; Clarke 2008/2018; Mackerras 2001; Millward 2007; Hierman 2007). With the collapse of communist regimes in Europe and the Soviet Union, public unrest in Xinjiang against the CCP rule intensified in the 1990s. The most well-known examples are the Baren incident in 1990 and the Yining incident in 1997, in which protesters called for independence and attacked Han Chinese. Meanwhile, as Pokalova (2013) and Roberts (2018) described in detail, the party-state launched systematic crackdowns on protest activities, strengthened the security presence of military and police forces, and increased scrutiny of religious and educational activities. National Minority Policies forced the assimilation of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang and stressed the importance of 'unity and cooperation among the various ethnic groups' (Tredaniel and Lee 2018: 179). Xinjiang Party Secretary Wang Lequan (王乐泉) declared that terrorism was not a problem in Xinjiang, interpreting the events as perpetrated by Muslim separatists and stating that the 'society [was] stable and people [were] living and working in peace and contentment' (Pokalova 2013: 288).

Shortly after September 11, the party-state re-defined the public unrests in Xinjiang as evidence that China was facing its own terrorist threat. In November 2001, the party-state prepared the document "'Eastern Turkistan' Organizations and their ties with Osama bin Laden and the Taliban'" for United Nations Security Council meetings in which Beijing claimed the previously unknown East Turkistan Independence Movement (ETIM) was a major actor in Osama bin Laden's terrorist network (Roberts 2018). In this paper, and

various shortly following ‘white papers’ and PRC public announcements, the party-state elaborated on the threat of ETIM and generally East Turkistan forces as imminent threats to the security of China and the world. Given the timing of the release of these official documents, many experts of the Xinjiang conflict viewed them as attempts by the party-state to link its struggle with Uyghur unrests to the US global ‘war on terror’ (Clarke 2018; Pokalova 2013; Tanner and Belacqua 2016; Tredaniel and Lee 2018; Tschantret 2018). Despite the party-state’s reassessment of the Xinjiang conflict, the beginning of the millennium was relatively tranquil in the region.

July 2009 marked the second turning point in the Xinjiang conflict and the start of the still ongoing episode of major violence in Xinjiang. In July 2009, fighting broke out in Xinjiang’s capital city, Urumqi, following reports of an alleged sexual assault on a female Han worker by Uyghur co-workers at the Xuri toy factory (Klimes 2018). The unrest that followed for several days claimed the lives of at least 197 people according to party-state sources and left over 1500 people injured (Roberts 2018, Klimes 2018). Beijing blamed the exiled pro-independence Uyghur leader Rebiya Kadeer for inciting the riots, describing the events as premeditated by the three ‘evil forces’ of terrorism, separatism and extremism at home and abroad (Barbour and Jones 2013). The authorities responded to the unrest with a curfew, blocking internet access and disabling mobile phone messaging. Massive crackdowns followed, including checkpoints around Urumqi, interrogations and detentions of over 700 people (Cliff 2012). Since then, party-state authorities have constructed a multi-layered network of mass surveillance in Xinjiang involving monitoring, categorisation, exhortation and disciplining of its population in the name of what Xi Jinping dubbed his strategy for achieving ‘social stability and enduring peace’ (社会稳定和长治久安) in this region (Leibold 2019). In 2014, the Second Central Xinjiang Work Forum explained these changes towards mass surveillance as Xinjiang being under ‘new circumstances’ (新形势) with the Xi Jinping administration; the terrorist threat portrayal remained a centrepiece in this operation as an imminent threat that required a resolute party-state response.

### **The merit of appropriating the ‘war on terror’ lexicon**

Many scholars of the Xinjiang conflict have followed the party-state in using the terrorism designation particularly after 2009 (i.e. Clarke 2012/ 2019; Roberts 2018; Tschantret 2016) while a few others refer to separatist activities as insurgencies (Homolar 2019; Odgaard and Nielsen 2014; Wayne 2007). This is not surprising given that the Xinjiang conflict involves

a wide range of violent and non-violent activities, such as protests, riots, assassinations, explosions and knife attacks. A brief discussion of prominent designations shall cover this debate before moving into the advantages for the Chinese party-state of using the terrorism label.

Insurgency refers to the struggle between a non-ruling group and a ruling authority, where the former uses a combination of violent and non-violent means to challenge governmental power and legitimacy, while striving to obtain or maintain control over a particular area and seek high levels of public support (Boot 2013; O'Neill 2005). Terrorism is usually referred to as one of the tactics of insurgency, together with political mobilisation and warfare (O'Neill 2005; Metz 2012). Prominent terrorism studies expert Bruce Hoffman has summarised terrorism's four core elements: terrorism is (i) perpetrated by sub-national groups or non-state entities, (ii) political in aims and motivation, (iii) violent (or threatens violence), (iv) designed to have psychological impact beyond immediate victims/ targets. Numerous observers align themselves with Hoffmann (2006) and specify terrorism as premeditated, politically motivated form of violence by small groups aimed at instilling fear in the target population and aimed at winning publicity by targeting unarmed civilians and political actors alike (Byman 2007; Callaway and Harrelson-Stephens 2006; Khalil 2013; Norris et al. 2003; Tuman 2010). The majority of definitions emphasise a link between violence, political motives, and 'innocent' victims. China established an official definition of terrorism in October 2011 that was revised for China's first counter-terrorism law in 2015, where it was defined in Article Three as:

Any advocacy or activity that, by means of violence, sabotage, or threat aims to create social panic, undermine public safety, infringe on personal and property rights, or coerce a state organ or an international organization, in order to achieve political, ideological, or other objectives (Zhou 2019: 83).

Western scholars agree that the Chinese party-state's designation of the Xinjiang conflict remains highly abstract and does not meet the legal definition of terrorism used in Western democracies (Bovingdon 2010; Millward 2007; Roberts 2012). Non-academic institutions such as the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) and Radio Free Asia (RFA) regularly raise questions about the party-state's interpretation of the Xinjiang conflict as terrorism. The ambiguity of the terrorism definition makes it difficult for observers to determine the nature and magnitude of China's terrorism problem. In this regard, Clarke (2008) makes an important addition to China's terrorism definition by emphasizing the part-

state's ability to establish an almost one-way trajectory of culpability for political violence. Clarke (2008: 281) argues that terrorism is perpetrated both in China and globally 'against the legitimate political community of the state by a small group of malcontents', therefore legitimising the elimination of this biological threat to China's orderly society. Pokalova (2013) notes that tight media control further limited the available information on these forces to the few official Beijing sources which made ETIM the face of the party-state's terrorist threat construction and enabled the party-state to define the domestic discourse on the Xinjiang conflict.

Studies of Xinjiang terrorism portray three main strategic benefits for the party-state in applying the terrorism designation to the Xinjiang conflict: legitimised securitisation to counter the threat, deployment of an expansive definition of 'terrorism', and strengthening international security cooperation (Clarke 2018). The most common argument is that domestically the terrorism designation permitted China a wide range of measures to counter Xinjiang unrest successfully by creating a discourse that antagonises both ethnicities to the point where the Han Chinese not only are induced to accept the threat construction but also proactively demand punitive actions against the Uyghurs (Tredaniel and Lee 2018). Commonly cited examples for these measures are the emerging surveillance state, repressive campaigns against Islamic teachings, security crackdowns and the expansion of counter-terrorism legislation and forces. Designating something as a security threat warrants taking action against it, and therefore is a way for the state to legitimise the use of 'emergency' or 'extraordinary' measures in order to preserve the social order (Tredaniel and Lee 2018). Cliff (2012) argues that the Chinese party-state needs instability in order to justify its hard-line policies in the region, this also fits with Kanat's (2012) argument that the war on terror can be used as a diversionary strategy in order to 'deflect public attention from recurring domestic troubles, to solve the problem of legitimacy and to rally their citizens around the flag of their regime' (Tredaniel and Lee 2018: 186). Researchers of other authoritarian regimes made similar observations of political leadership using the terrorism label for ethnic separatist movements, including Russia's Chechnya conflict and Turkey's conflict with the Kurds (Bilgin and Sarihan 2013; Dershowitz 2002; Goodin 2006; Pokalova 2013).

Meanwhile, the Chinese party-state has a powerful tool in the form of media control at their disposal to reinforce the terrorist threat construction among the Chinese public. The media draws public attention to certain aspects of an issue and constructs a 'pseudo-reality' by selecting and omitting information for reporting (Baudrillard 1994; Boydston 2013;

Luhmann 2000). The CCP takes advantage of this feature by exerting control over news reporting. Scholars have long pointed to media control as one tool used by authoritarian leaders to maintain resilience of the regime structure by shaping public attention on the legitimacy of those in power as well as any threats to named authority. Such strategies, as King et al. (2013) summarises, involve both censorship (the limiting or omitting of information) and news coordination (the promotion of information). For example, Barbour and Jones (2013) found the Chinese news after the Urumqi riot in 2009 to frame the events as terrorist acts, justifying the violent crackdowns and ethnic repression in the name of protecting the Chinese citizens from the perceived threat of the other. Chen (2012) agrees with Barbour and Jones' observation, showing how party-state officials in the Chinese news define the riot as 'an evil killing, fire setting and looting', ideas that were repeated in all party-state communication materials. In short, due to media control, China's political leadership has a powerful tool at their disposal with the potential to shape public discourse in favour of the party-state's threat interpretation.

Reinforcing the terrorist threat construction provides a platform to confront future challenges to power while also promoting more nationalist attitudes among the public. This is evident in Beijing's increasing tendency to label not only dissenting Uyghurs but also Tibetans, Falun Gong members or the current Hong Kong protesters as 'terrorists'. Hastings (2011) reaches the same conclusion in his analysis of the course of Uyghur unrests in Xinjiang; he argues that the abstraction of the term terrorism and media control enable the party-state to apply the 'enemy of the state' label to a wide range of party-state threats. Moreover, recent research by Hou and Quek (2015) into the effects of terror attacks on public attitudes in China shows that citizens become significantly more nationalistic and supportive of policies that compromise civil liberty for the fight against terrorism. Portraying the Uyghur unrest as externally instigated, with links to al-Qaeda, further allowed the party-state to align itself with the US as a country that also suffered from 'terrorism' and to silence international voices on repression (Hastings 2011). It further permeated China's relations with Central Asian countries through transnational cooperation in the fight against the three evils, such as in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) processes (Clarke 2018; Fredholm 2013).

In sum, the above discussion shows the party-state introduction of the terrorism discourse as a result of coinciding circumstances, namely the escalation of Uyghur dissent at the end of the 90s, the growing awareness of the strategic importance of Xinjiang with the opening up

policies, and the opportunity post-9/11 to align itself with the US in a war on terror. In this line, researchers showed the growing use of the global war on terrorism frame as a new political tool to legitimise tighter public controls and excessive repression. The terrorism label with its unclear definition and great legitimising power has become an important frame in contemporary Chinese politics and thus requires analysis. The scholarship on China's threat construction presents various strategic benefits to the terrorism designation, yet examination of the content of the party-state discourse on China's 'terrorism' is scarce.

### **Research questions and methodology**

While scholars confirmed the party-state's use of the terrorism label and the securitisation of Xinjiang, there is little analysis of how the Chinese news media report the 'terrorism' issue. The previous pages already show the importance of studying the latter by referring to media control as a tool in the party-state's repertoire. Using media control can influence the regional, national and international perception of the Xinjiang conflict and how the Chinese authorities respond to it. I studied the news coverage from two perspectives: the number of press reports that cover the terrorist event (discussed in Chapter 4) and the news content itself (discussed in Chapter 5 and 6). As the literature review demonstrates, the available terrorism media research only published on the former or the latter. Separately from each other, both strands of research suggest that it is not just frames that can reinforce and influence perceptions of an event but also the extent of news coverage has such power. However, so far, there is a lack of considering combining both perspectives for a more holistic understanding of news coverage. Also, there is a strong focus on 'Western' democracies, this subject lacks attention for China. Aiming to provide a systematic understanding of the terrorism news portrayal in China, I examined both aspects of the media coverage.

Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, I present findings what determines the scale of news coverage and what frames define the news portrayal of Chinese domestic 'terrorism'. The findings mainly derive from twelve Chinese newspapers and eight cases of 'terrorist' attacks that took place between 2009 and 2015. By answering the research questions below, this research study aims to present a first understanding of the Chinese news media's portrayal of terrorism and thus contributes new knowledge on terrorism coverage in a censored media environment that contrasts with the US-centred terrorism-media scholarship. The research was guided by three questions:

- ❖ To what extent can traditional predictors of (US-centred) terrorism coverage explain the amount of Chinese news attention for Chinese terrorist attacks?
- ❖ What are the prevalent frames in Chinese newspaper reports on the domestic terrorism?
- ❖ How did the prevalent frames change from 2009 to 2015?

The first research question derived from a strand in the terrorism news coverage research that examines the question of what determines the amount of news coverage terrorist attacks receive (i.e. Chermak and Gruenewald 2006, Kearns 2019). This literature is focused on pluralist media environments such as the US, and my research demonstrates the moderate explanatory power of these ‘Western’ determinants for China’s censored media environment. The first analysis chapter, Chapter 4, turns the reader’s attention towards a discussion of how well the traditional ‘Western’ determinants can explain the scale of Chinese terrorism coverage. The importance of this contribution lies in the absence of any such study for Chinese terrorism coverage, rooted in the for decades ongoing scholarly call to test the ‘Western’-focused media theories for other countries and political systems (see Chapter 2). While such studies on terrorism mainly exist for the US media environment (i.e. Kearns et al. 2019, for an extensive literature discussion see Chapter 4), this will be the first time to compare the case of China with its censored media system to the pluralist media environment of the US. The argument that has driven this pursuit was as simple one, as China researchers on other news items evidence, what explains the amount of media attention in pluralist environments might not hold true for censored media environments. I tested determinants that are ‘traditionally’ strong in Western terrorism coverage – these are the proximity of the news organisation to the attacks, the number of deaths, target types and tactic types. I further added variables that reflect China’s censored media environment, which involved testing differences in the amount of news coverage between party-controlled and commercial media. The analysis involves negative binomial regression analysis under consideration of leaked censorship instructions from China Digital Times (2019).

The second research question targets an understanding of China’s terrorism news construction, aiming to identify prevalent news frames in the news coverage and discuss these in Chapter 5. This analysis began by open coding a representative sample of the collected news data in order to inductively explore prevalent news frames. This also led to the formulation of indicator questions to gain empirical evidence for the framing observations. The inductive approach was necessary to minimise research bias that would come from testing what is known in the US-centred terrorism media scholarship. The

inductive research findings provide an independent analysis for China that can be put in contrast to the US frames as well as identify any frames that are unique to China that would otherwise not be found. While this qualitative approach is supported by a second coder to ensure intercoder reliability, quantitative text analysis provides validation for the coding observations and additional insight into news frames based on frequency and correlation analysis of the news content.

For the analysis of the third research question, the dataset is distinguished by each of the eight cases under study, covering a time period from 2009 to 2015. Based on the above-mentioned indicator questions as well as quantitative topic modelling, the analysis provides first insight into prevalent changes in news frames over time.

Overall, similarities between the Chinese and US terrorism framing suggest the Chinese news media has appropriated the US ‘war on terror’ lexicon in constructing an evil, abstract enemy other. However, the Chinese media define the terrorist threat differently through the ‘three evil forces’ terminology instead of the perpetrator’s Muslim identity. The Chinese media do not mention a ‘war on terror’ as was the case in US terrorism coverage. Chinese news media further add their unique ‘twist’ to terrorism coverage with a strong news focus on the social values of economic growth, national unity, ethnic solidarity and the rule of law. This signals that the party-state uses terrorism coverage as an opportunity for the party-state to promote its CCP ideology of stability maintenance while delegitimising any opposition as threatening said stability. These findings evidence differences in the terrorism coverage between the US and China, and, in particular, highlight the party-state ideology around the above-mentioned social values as distinctive features characteristic for China in addition to frames related to terrorism specifically.

### **Thesis structure**

The rest of the thesis is divided into six parts. Chapter two is a literature review of the key bodies of scholarship that form the theoretical foundation of this thesis and its research questions. Specifically, it engages with literature on authoritarian resilience and the role of the media, the threat perception on Xinjiang, and terrorism news framing. Chapter three explains the methodological approach and methods used to investigate the research questions of this thesis. In particular, it explains the multiple case study research design and mixed method approach. It also explains the data collection process. Due to the combination of

various quantitative and qualitative methods, brief methodology sections in chapters four and five provide analysis specific details.

Chapter four answers the first research question by presenting test findings on the determinants of the extent of Chinese terrorism coverage. An additional section on the methodology in this chapter will cover both the quantitative research process as well as the origin of the variables under study. Chapter five addresses the second research question by explaining prevalent frames in China's terrorism news construction. The additional methodology section will provide details on the text mining approach in R as well as explain the qualitative content analysis approach. Chapter six continues the news content analysis with an exploration of changes in prevalent frames from 2009 to 2015. Chapter seven will draw on all previous discussions to present the main arguments of the thesis and situate the analytical and empirical contributions in the academic literature. It will further identify limitations of this study and suggests next areas for study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

This chapter highlights three gaps in the academic literature on Chinese politics and media studies that have inspired this project's aim and approach. First, an empirical gap exists that connects the authoritarian resilience debate to the theory of framing. Second, the absence of systematic, empirically grounded analysis of terrorism framing in the Chinese print media presents an analytical gap in the scholarship on terrorism in the media. Third, the scant consideration of the media's role in the party-state's terrorist threat construction and Xinjiang operations constitute a 'media gap' in the literature on the Xinjiang conflict. The literature review is organised so as to demonstrate these three gaps. Three sections each start by setting out on the existing scholarly knowledge on the subject before moving to show the gap this thesis is filling. At the end of the chapter, a short section ties the previous discussions together by situating the research questions of this dissertation in the academic debates as well as briefly reviewing anticipated findings. I discuss the literature on the determinants of scale of news coverage separately in Chapter 4 since this approach allows to closely tie the research design section back to the hypotheses that I analysed.

The first section covers research that is thematically closest to this project's topic. It begins with a review of two studies that discussed the media's portrayal of terrorism in China, before turning for more insight on the subject to the well-researched terrorism media scholarship that focuses on pluralist media environments such as the US and UK. The subsequent debate on 'de-Westernising' media theory draws attention to the danger of applying theories derived from the analysis of 'Western' countries to China with its censored media environment, therefore opening up the argument that the absence of a systematic analysis of Chinese news framing of terrorism constitutes an analytical gap in the terrorism media scholarship.

The second section reviews more broadly the Xinjiang conflict literature to review what is known on the party-state's construction of the terrorist threat and its counter-terrorist operations in Xinjiang. This section provides insight into the terrorist threat as a party-state construction as well as demonstrating the various strategies the party-state employs to achieve stability in Xinjiang. The section uncovers these party-state strategies and highlights the little consideration given to the media's role among these strategies. A media gap exists in the scholarship of the Xinjiang conflict.

The third section presents the conceptual framework in which this project was grounded in, that is establishing the connection between framing theory and the scholarly debate on authoritarian resilience strategies. Both areas received ample academic recognition separately from each other, yet it was just recently that scholars were able to establish the link between the two conceptually by showing how framing can be a persuasion tool for authoritarian leaders to legitimate their rule. There is scant empirical research that illustrates this connection so far, however, the section will show that this project's topic is well suited to evidence this connection.

### **Connecting framing theory to the authoritarian resilience scholarship**

This research project is grounded in the debate on authoritarian resilience, a subject that is concerned with the durability of authoritarian regimes. While scholars discuss various resilience strategies, legitimacy re-surfaced over the last decade as important tool to authoritarian leaders after it became clear that the use of violence, or threat of it, would fan resistance but not regime durability. Accordingly, legitimation, so the claim to political power, is a tool to reproduce the people's belief in the elites' leadership qualities and their determination to serve the common interest. In this sense, as Bondes and Heep (2013) explain, claims to legitimacy are attempts of persuading the public of the righteousness of the status quo.

While the importance of persuasion to a regime's legitimacy has been widely acknowledged, it was Bondes and Heep (2012) who explained the relationship between legitimacy and persuasion by introducing the framing perspective from the political communication scholarship to the debate. Accordingly, frames are simplifying, prioritising and structuring the narrative flow of events, they act as attempts of persuasion since they guide the interpretation of events. For example, they applied this conceptual framework to the study of official frames on the CCP leadership in party-state documents. They found that trust in the leadership's qualifications, prioritisation of the people's wellbeing, and the emphasis on stability are frames that persuade the Chinese people of the legitimate leadership of the CCP in China. The following sections demonstrate that each component -legitimacy, persuasion and framing- are well studied by scholars on their own, yet Bondes and Heep (2012) provided the conceptual framework for this research project on terrorism coverage by connecting the three concepts.

### ***Resilient authoritarian regimes strive for legitimacy***

The durability of the CCP's regime has become a central study focus in the debate on authoritarian resilience,<sup>4</sup> driven by consensus that authoritarian rule appears inherently fragile due to weak legitimacy, over-reliance on coercion, over-centralisation of decision making, and the predominance of personal power over institutional norms. This is why Geddes (1999) claimed that authoritarian rule usually has a short life expectancy. Since the

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<sup>4</sup> Scholars have dedicated their attention to the subject under various names, such as authoritarian persistence (Bader 2015; He 2014), responsive authoritarianism (Weller 2008; Reilly 2012; Stockmann 2013), and competitive authoritarianism (Howard 2006; Levitsky and Way 2002) yet continue the notion of a regime that appears able in maintaining authoritarian rule.

millennium, after two decades of scholarship concentrated on explaining the trajectories of democratisation, the field of authoritarianism studies underwent a renaissance motivated by the democratic backsliding and the persistence of authoritarian regimes in different parts of the world (Art 2012; Burnell 2006; Levitsky and Way 2002). In a recent review, Pepinsky (2014) argued that this resurgence in research on authoritarianism was characterised by an ‘institutionalist turn’.

This new wave of research concentrated on explaining durability, persistence, and stability through a focus on the delicate balance between intra-elite cohesion on the one hand and the usage of coercion on the other hand. Institutions like parties, parliaments, courts, and elections were discussed mainly insofar as they provide the autocratic regime with opportunities for co-optation and repression (Brownlee 2007; Dukalskis and Gerschewski 2017; Gandhi 2008; Svoboda 2012). State repression has become renowned as standard instrument in authoritarian rule to uphold and extend political and social control, civil rights are routinely circumscribed, potential opposition intimidated, the population disciplined at large, and coercive measures applied (Levitsky and Way 2010; Bellin 2005; Rorbaek et al. 2014). Coercion is a subset of repressive practises that involves violence or the threat of violence, while state repression refers to government behaviour that brings political quiescence and facilitates regime durability through some form of restriction or violation of political and civil liberties (Davenport 2000). Considering that repression may spark collective action, various scholars explain its strength in ‘demonstrated capacity’ by making threats highly credible and predictable (Belin 2008; Byman 2016; Moller and Skaaning 2013; Pei 2012), while also studying elite co-optation as an additional authoritarian resilience tool. Co-optation, so the strategy of preserving loyalty of the regime elite by giving them enough stake at the status quo, has become further object of studies with the capacity to widening the regime’s power base through controlled inclusiveness (Blaydes 2011; Gandhi 2008; Shkel and Gareev 2015).

In line with the above, in 2003, US scholar Andrew Nathan (2003) argued that China’s durability is rooted not in autocratic force but a system that is responsive to societal demands. Shambaugh (2008) argues that the collapse of the USSR taught the CCP valuable lessons, leading it to adopt new policies to illustrate its responsiveness to public issues. Economic policies suffer less frequently from ideology, resulting in many large party-state enterprises to be removed from party-state ownership or placed under joint ownership with private businesses. The mix of authoritarianism with market economy co-opted the people in favour

of the CCP leadership with more entertainment and improved living standards (Barma and Rather 2006; Hong 2011) and greater freedom in criticising party-state activities (Edney 2012; King et al. 2013). Meanwhile, scholars of the Xinjiang conflict show the party-state to employ a ‘carrot and stick’ method of heavy economic investments and heavy securitisation of the region. While scholars, such as Tredaniel and Lee (2018), argue that the securitisation and repression created fertile conditions for the escalation of violence since 2009, many did not consider the legitimisation strategies as another party-state tool to win over public support for stability in Xinjiang and the rest of China.

Only recently did legitimisation enter the authoritarian resilience debate as a third ‘pillar’ for sustaining authoritarian rule, driven by the common notion that no regime can survive without public support and repression can prove destabilising (Geddes 1999; Kailitz 2013; Schatz and Maltseva 2012). Case-based research has pioneered this new strand, most prominently for the cases of China and Russia (Dukalskis and Gerschweski 2017). These studies construct legitimacy from public opinion, defining the term as ‘capacity of a political system to engender and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate or proper ones for the society’ (Lipset: 1959: p. 86). Soest and Grauvogel (2017), based on review of prior studies, identified six main legitimisation strategies in authoritarian regimes, which are: foundational myth, ideology, personalism, procedure, performance, international engagement. Respectively, the first mechanism stress historical roots of the regime (i.e. liberation struggle), ideology-based legitimacy claims involve frames on the righteousness of the given political order, while some authoritarian regimes focus on the person of the ruler to boost their appeal to the population. Procedural legitimacy is commonly grounded in carrying out elections, performance emphasises the success in satisfying the citizen’s needs, and international engagement to bolster domestic legitimisation.

In China studies, the legitimacy debate evolves commonly around the ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ party-state resilience strategies. For over two decades, economic growth has been studied as key ‘soft’ strategy of the CCP to assert its authority through performance (Dukalski; Laliberté and Lanteigne 2008; Perry 2008; Sandby-Thomas 2015; Zhao 2009). Barma and Rather (2006) speak of the emergence of ‘illiberal capitalism’, referring to the mix of authoritarianism with market economy in the context of an increasing integration of China into the world economy. However, critical voices, such as Zeng (2014) and Tsai and Dean (2013) warn that legitimacy based on economic growth is insecure because of the market economy’s cyclical nature. Propaganda is yet another legitimisation strategy to increase

collective consciousness and increase loyalty to the authoritarian leadership (Brady). Edel and Josua (2018) further show that even repression requires legitimisation. Dukalskis investigates popular protests in China in 1989, Myanmar in 2007, and Iran in 2009–2010, and finds that protesters were blamed as criminals for inciting disorder and for being manipulated by foreigners and ‘not committed to the regime’s vision of legitimacy’ (Edel and Josua 2018: 884). In sum, legitimacy and legitimisation are now well recognised among scholars as an important subject of study in understanding the resilience of authoritarian regimes. Dukalski and Gerschweski (2017) go one step further in stressing that the question is no longer whether authoritarian rulers legitimate their rule but rather how and to what extent they do so.

***Framing theory explains persuasion as legitimisation strategy of authoritarian leaders***

In the words of political communication scholar Edelman (1993: 232), ‘the social world is [...] a kaleidoscope of potential realities, any of which can be readily evoked by altering the ways in which observations are framed and categorized’. In line with this observation, originally developed in social movement theory, Goffman (1986) defines frames as interpretative schemata that are simplifying and accentuating reality, and in doing so influences individuals in how they perceive, label and understand events.<sup>5</sup> For communication scholars, the most useful definition of framing comes from Entman (1993: 52), who specified that:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.

In other words, framing theory emphasises the ability of an entity – media, individual, or groups – to delineate people’s reality, highlighting one interpretation while de-emphasising a less favoured one (Papacharissi and Oliveira 2008). For instance, Woods (2011) demonstrates how variations in messages can influence how people come to think about and

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<sup>5</sup> A by-product of the scholarly focus on topics in the news media have become two of the most fertile research areas in media studies: the agenda setting theory and framing theory. As Woods (2007) criticised, there are persistent disagreements in communication research on the differences and even meanings of agenda setting and framing. While explaining my understanding of framing, I dismiss terminological quarrels to other studies. In this sense, while McCombs and Shaw (1972) coined agenda setting theory as an examination of what information the media provide, Nevalsky (2015) sees in framing theory an evolution of the former as it examines how an author writes about and presents a topic. My choice of using the framing theory is a continuation of the already existing studies on Chinese terrorism framing that employed this perspective (Barbour and Jones 2013).

feel about a range of events, such as when violence that is labelled ‘terrorism’ is often associated with ‘radical Islam’. For this research project, I drew on framing theory to explain the importance of understanding the news coverage of terrorism as a media ‘construction’, a product of party-state censoring mechanisms and market commercialisation. The media are used to legitimate the rule of the CCP leadership, potentially appealing to Uyghur citizens in Xinjiang to cease the unrests and appealing to the China’s citizens beyond the region’s border to legitimate the state leadership. In this sense, the media are a tool in the party-state’s repertoire with the power to influence perception and interpretation of the Xinjiang conflict (for more details, see the following section on the ‘implications from terrorism news framing studies beyond China’). My understanding of a frame in the news content overlaps with and extends on Entman’s above quoted definition as any word, phrase or sentence(s) that is prevalent in the data and therefore is a characterising feature of the news construction, involving, but not being limited to those that define the reported problems, its causes, evaluation, treatment (for more detail on these frames, see Figure 5-1 and examples in Chapter 5).

Framing research has long focused on attempts to mobilize people to act, yet much less research is available on how these are used by state leaders to reproduce political legitimacy. Drawing on Beetham’s (1991) theory of legitimacy<sup>6</sup>, Bondes and Heep (2012) argue that the beliefs of the people are critical to a regime’s legitimacy insofar as they provide the normative foundation for its power. Therefore, persuasion, and more specifically official frames, are ‘soft’ party-state strategies in contrast to the ‘hard’ measures of repression and coercion (see also Edel and Josua 2017; Omelicheva 2016). The notion of using official frames to strengthen people’s beliefs in leadership qualities and providing ideological frameworks that guide the interpretation of concrete policies and events are well supported in China studies, such as with the importance of CCP ideology to maintain power over the party-state (Brown and Berzina-Cerenkova 2018; Klimes 2018; Lams 2018) or the use of media coordination to achieve positive publicity on public affairs (Kingsley 2014; Zeng et al. 2015).

Bondes and Heep (2012) argue that the success, or resonance, of frames depends on their consistency, their compatibility with the society’s ‘cultural stock,’ i.e. existing cultural

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<sup>6</sup> He argues that regardless of the characteristics of the political system, ‘[p]ower can be said to be legitimate to the extent that (i) it conforms to established rules, (ii) [these] rules can be justified by reference to beliefs shared by both dominant and subordinate, and (iii) there is evidence of consent by the subordinate to the particular power relation’ (Beetham 1991: 16).

narrations, heritage and symbols, as well as their relevance for the addressees' everyday life and experiences. By integrating individual frames into a big picture, such overarching ideological frameworks not only facilitate the frames' consistency with each other, but also link them with the country's collective memory and culture. While I contend that further empirical research is necessary on the drivers of successful framing, their notion of framing depending on the 'cultural' environment aligns with the earlier discussed de-Westernisation theory in the sense that frames can differ by geographic location. Both debates underline the point this thesis is trying to make: terrorism news framing in China is not the same as in other countries, it demands exploration.

Evidently, Chinese news content undergoes various layers of monitoring by editorial and propaganda professional, leaving the common notion among researchers that news frames are a reproduction of the official frames by the party-state. While this is well evidenced in the academic literature (Bandurski 2012/2016, Singh 2016, Brady 2017), Xi Jinping stressed this himself as part of his media policies, which are also available in a compilation of 'important speeches' published in the People's Daily, titled 'Xi Jinping's view on news and public opinion (习近平的新闻舆论观)' (People's Daily 2016). China media expert David Bandurski (2016) translated and highlighted one example of Xi Jinping's view on the media's role: 'raise high the banner [of Marxism-Leninism], direct [proper] guidance [of public opinion], unite the people, encourage high morale, spread public morals, create cohesion, clear up fallacies, distinguish between truth and falsehood' (高举旗帜, 引领导向, 围绕中心, 团结人民, 鼓舞士气, 成风化人, 凝心聚力, 澄清谬误, 明辨是非).

Applying frames to the Xinjiang conflict, as Papacharissi and Oliveira (2008) point out on news frames on terrorism, may serve as a strategy with which to identify main causes, assign responsibility, make moral judgements, and suggest policy response. Consequently, the frames adopted by the media to cover terrorism and the ones adopted by the party-state to report and respond to terrorist events influence the society's perception of activities related to the situation. For instance, the distinction between freedom fighters and terrorists is frequently blurred across political regimes (Papacharissi and Oliveira 2008). While the action employed by one group may be outrageous in one society, these same strategies may be acceptable in others -as was demonstrated in earlier sections with the international criticism towards China's threat perception and ethnic repression. Frames associated with these strategies play a major role in how these acts are perceived and therefore are resilience strategies with potential legitimation effect.

### *News censorship and coordination in China's censored media environment*

There is a good amount of research that relates the party-state's pursuit of regime legitimation back to the state mechanisms of media control. The party-state supervision and coordination of media content has been a steady characteristic of China throughout PRC history, though media reforms since the 1990s have led to the emergence of party-market corporatism with the following characteristics. First, there is the propaganda work which underpins all social, media and political life to facilitate ideological control over public opinion. According to Brady (2008), the propaganda work received new impetus in the wake of the major legitimacy crisis of the Tiananmen protests in 1989. It taught the political leadership to renew the emphasis on propaganda work for public opinion guidance in addition to their long-standing strategy of legitimation through economic development: 'seize with both hands, both hands must be strong' (两手抓, 两手都要硬). Second, there is media censorship, that is the omitting of media content that received much attention regarding self-censorship, party-state regulations, and editorial supervision. This is common knowledge among China media researchers (i.e. King et al. 2013, Stockmann 2013). Third, there is a body of literature on media management that has slowly grown since the SARS outbreak in 2003 into a vibrant area for research. These sources show that China has moved away from the initial strategy of denial and lockdown with SARS outbreak to the attempt of a 'controlled' media openness – as observed by China scholars with the Sichuan earthquake in 2008 (Yang 2012) and the Urumqi riot in 2009 (Barbour and Jones 2013; Zeng et al. 2013). The use of news conferences, investigative journalism and interviews with party-state officials are examples of the new media management strategy.

Like with previous leaders, media management continues under President Xi to be an important tactic in the regime's repertoire to maintain political stability (Repnikova 2017). By 'party-state corporatism', Lee et al. (2007) highlight that China's media industry has changed in favour of content diversity due to market commercialisation, featuring a mix of market demands and the party-state mandate. Accordingly, the party-state plays the role of primary definer of news, while journalists in the commercialised media are secondary definers who can deviate to some extent from the official line. On the one hand, there are measures in place to make sure that media actors comply with the party-state, such as a constant stream of directives regarding what news items can be reported and how to report them (Hung 2010; Lorentzen 2014), the repackaging of propaganda for more discriminating audiences (Brady 2008), market incentives for media actors to comply with censorship guidelines (Esaray 2005), and an environment of restrictive uncertainty among journalists.

On the other hand, there are many publications showing how market competition drives the press away from propagandistic discourses and pulls it towards sensational news that cater to popular interests and advertisers (Stockmann 2013; Wang and Chew 2016).

Over the last decade, scholars confirm that the growing media commercialisation under Hu, with its market driven competition and media professionalism, has eroded the CCP's prior monolithic power over media content. Beside from new classifications of China's media system, as the one mentioned by Lee et al. (2007) above, researchers like Stockmann (2013) began to account for this change in the media system by distinguishing the Chinese press into official, semi-official and commercial newspapers. China's changing media environment is a very deeply studied field of scholarship, its review is beyond the scope of this project, but the table below shall provide a simple introduction into the topic by contrasting the greater media openness under the Hu administration to the previous administrations, before focusing on the Xi administration in line with the focus of this project.

**Table 2-1: Reported changes in China's news media industry**

	<b>Media as 'party mouthpiece' Pre-1992 media reform</b>	<b>Media as 'party-state corporatism' Hu Jintao administration (2003 – 2013)</b>
<b>Functions of the media</b>	Single function: Mouthpiece of the party – Ideological indoctrination	Multiple functions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mouthpiece of the party</li> <li>• Source for advertising</li> <li>• High circulation and audience</li> </ul>
<b>Media content</b>	Official government news	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• News</li> <li>• Entertainment</li> <li>• Advertising</li> <li>• Foreign programmes and independently produced programmes</li> </ul>
<b>Nature of media product</b>	Political and ideological propaganda	Propaganda as well as market commodity
<b>Actors</b>	Party and government representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Party and government representatives</li> <li>• Entrepreneurs</li> <li>• Media professionals</li> <li>• Advertisers</li> <li>• Semi-official interest groups</li> <li>• Entertainers</li> </ul>
<b>Ownership</b>	Directly state-owned, highly centralised for all information and distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In theory and officially, still state-owned</li> <li>• Indirect ownership by collective and private businesses</li> <li>• Publicly listed news agencies</li> </ul>
<b>Financial support</b>	Government-funded	Chiefly through advertising, circulation, financial investment
<b>Management and editorial personnel</b>	Government appointed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government appoints key leading positions in major state and local government news media</li> <li>• Market hiring for professional management and editorial positions in non-key media units</li> </ul>

Source: Winfield and Peng (2005: 263) with updates based on Chen and Naughton 2016; Creemers 2017; Dai 2014; Huang 2018; Stockmann 2013.

What seems certain from the above review is that the Chinese news media could no longer simply be called 'mouth piece' of the party-state, yet Beijing's continuous control over the

news media still makes China inherently different to pluralist media environments. Ge (2016) observes that the increasing commercial pressures force newspaper organisations to incorporate more sensationalist reporting strategies to attract readers, many scholars trace this trend back to the party-state reducing funds for news organisations (i.e. Li and Sparks 2016; Ngai and Jin 2016; Simons et al. 2016; Tong 2015; Wang 2016). Pan and Lu (2009, Hassid 2016) observed the professionalization of the media industry that resulted from the profit-orientation in the dramatic increase of the number of journalism schools, the teaching of professional journalistic values such as timeliness, objectivism and newsworthiness, the activism in social media and investigative reporting, and the audience orientation of news agencies as imperative for commercial survival. In this light, Yu (2009) and Ren et al. (2014) refer to the work of Chinese journalists as ‘double clientelism’ – the need to balance the opposing ideologies of the ‘free’ market economy and party line. While accounts differ as to whether Chinese journalists adopt the same kind of professional norms as are characteristic of (some) Western journalists (Sparks 2010), the growing professionalism has been reflected in more diverse media coverage.

However, commentators and scholars alike highlight how the repression under Xi is more reminiscent of Mao Zedong times instead of the ‘party-state corporatism’ of the Hu administration (2003-2013). Creemers (2017) shows how party-state institutions continue to promulgate policies, laws and regulations and officers of the propaganda system control the implementation of the current Chinese ideology at every level of the bureaucracy. Examples of party-state institutions that engage in media ‘managing’ she gave are party organs, state departments, state-owned enterprises and industrial associations. Anne-Marie Brady (2008), a leading scholar on the role of propaganda in Chinese politics, focused with several publications stronger on the propaganda aspect, arguing that propaganda work is the very lifeblood of the party’s ongoing legitimacy and hold on power. A multi-layered grouping of agencies with overlapping functions together form the propaganda system and is overseen at the very top by a handful of leading Figures in the Propaganda and Thought Work Leading Group (中央宣传思想工作领导小组成员) and CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping (中央书记处). As their top administrative body, the Central Propaganda Department (中央宣传部) is a party institution that guides the entire propaganda system by determining general policy pertaining to all propaganda activities, supervising its execution and having authority over the party units that are mandatorily present in all levels of state institutions (national, provincial, city, and district level). Creemers (2017) further shows that at the lower level of administration, a network of propaganda cadres and officers are installed in state bureaucracies (i.e.

education and health), security forces (i.e. People's Liberation Army), and mass organisations (i.e. journalist associations, neighbourhood committees).

The above apparatus is controlled through both party and state documents. National (or central) bodies, such as the Central Propaganda Department, issue guiding opinions, plans and policy documents outlining the direction media regulation will take in the future (Brady 2008, Creemers 2017). These documents outline objectives, list tasks and policy steps, and as such form the basis for the drafting of further regulations. At the next level, there are the 'management regulations' (管理条例). On the basis of these, the individual ministries and administrations then formulate more detailed management rules and regulations, each further detailing and interpreting the rules of higher-level regulations. For instance, as a follow up China's first national counter-terrorism law issued in 2015, the Xinjiang provincial-level government issued several revisions that add implementing measures to the law.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, there are the Notices (通知), that are used to deal with ad hoc issues, publish administrative decisions, or bring attention to enforcement of specific regulation (Hearn-Branaman 2009).

In addition, a legislative framework of censorship together with at least partly party-state ownership of news organisations closely tie media organisations to the political leadership and thus are responsible for bias in news reporting (Abbott et al. 2013; Hassid and Stern 2012; Hearn-Branaman 2009). The legislation gives freedom to the party-state to censor articles, harass journalists and shut down media outlets. However, Creemers (2017) showed that, with the exception of copyright and advertising, China's media sector is not governed by law, but by administrative regulation. This subtle difference indicates that the party-state wants to maintain over the media sector: any law or law revision must be approved by the National People's Congress, in contrast, administrative organs retain a free hand to make changes administrative regulations and remain responsible for implementing these regulations. Accordingly, Creemers (2015) found that hundreds of media-related documents with regulatory effect have been released since 1979, constructing an intricate web of prohibitions, obligations, procedures and responsibilities (see also Pan 2016; Xu 2014; Zhang and Fleming 2005).

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, see the document titled 'Xinjiang implementing measures for the P.R.C. counter-terrorism law (2018) in China Law Translate (2018).

Most accounts of party-state control in China stop here, with the tangle of news content supervision and regulations, at times emphasising the importance of censorship (Xie 2014), but without looking into the journalist's self-censorship as another form of media control. In this realm, it appears from the literature that uncertainty over the limits of political tolerance and potential retribution as part of everyday life work drives Chinese journalists to back down, change emphasis or avoid topics altogether (O'Brien 2008). One example that attracted international and scholarly attention was the Chinese news reporting on the Sun Zhigang case in 2003. After Sun Zhigang (孙志刚), a migrant, was detained for not carrying his temporary residence permit and beaten to death by staff members and other inmates while in custody in a detention facility, the Southern Metropolis Daily's report on his death sparked a media storm that spread over the country and generated a national uproar (Hand 2006; Liebman 2005). While the central party-state then repealed the law authorising detention facilities so that this can be considered a victory for a watchdog press, a few months later police raided the Southern Metropolis Daily, and detained and sentenced top editors in what was regarded by others as retribution for aggressive reporting on this (Stern and O'Brien 2011). The Sun Zhigang case therefore seems to be a case of media control rather than self-censorship.

Another example of the party-state 'managing' the media is with self-censorship. Xie (2014) notes that the party-state regulates entry into the journalist profession by requiring the journalists hold a state-issued press card compulsory for journalists. This card in turn requires attending frequent training sessions covering topics such as journalistic ethics and Marxist-Leninist press theory. In case of disobedience, various sources describe party-state responses that threaten the professional career. For example, the Hsu (2019) mentions warning phone calls from unlisted numbers threatening with fines, closure or chat invitations to the Judicial Bureau. As Stern and Hassid (2012) confirmed in interviews with journalists, this can go so far that license renewals are delayed, pressure is exercised to find a new employee or press cards are revoked. Therefore, they conclude, losing a livelihood is a potent threat that keeps the majority of journalists from considering controversial issues. Furthermore, daily briefings from the Central Propaganda Department outlining which current topics are unacceptable for press coverage on internal websites (Hassid 2011) and the differing state policies in each province contribute to the atmospheric uncertainty punctuated by occasional crackdowns. To sum up, it becomes clear these media strategies are a continuation of the previous era, but they have intensified and expanded under Xi's leadership (Repnikova 2017).

### *The empirical gap*

The previous section showed how the Xi administration continue and altered the censoring mechanisms for media content in comparison to its predecessor, sections prior to that explained the relevance of these changes in media control as an important tactic of the regime to maintain stability. Though this dissertation's research was rooted in Bondes and Heep's (2012) conceptual framework of framing, persuasion, legitimacy and authoritarian resilience, further application of it had been necessary for empirical support. The literature review showed the growing awareness of legitimation as an important subject in the authoritarian resilience debate as well as indicated with China studies the variety of legitimation strategies. Among these claims to legitimacy, this PhD project focused on China's persuasion tactics by following the framework introduced by Bondes and Heep (2012). As they note, and this literature review demonstrates, the relationship between a regime's legitimacy and persuasion is well acknowledged among scholars but it was their contribution that conceptualised this connection by introducing the framing perspective. Framing theory asserts the ability of an entity to emphasises or de-emphasises aspects of a topic. Therefore, framing can be employed by authoritarian rulers as legitimation strategy towards the populace.

China media researchers have often made this connection between framing and legitimation automatically without introducing this, or any, conceptual foundation. For instance, Barbour and Jones (2013) or Zeng et al.'s (2015) analysis of the news construction of the Urumqi 2009 terrorist attack took place without considering party-state interference with media content. While Bondes and Heep (2012) applied their conceptual framework to China, their research focus did not go beyond party-state official frames presented in policy documents. I demonstrate with this thesis that the analysis of the Chinese media portrayal of terrorism can further benefit from this conceptual framework. First, the scholarship confirms China to employ various legitimation strategies and that the use of media control is one of these (i.e. King et al. 2013, see Chapter 4). Second, framing research is well recognised as useful tool to examine Chinese news content (see next section for more detail) and received conceptualisation with Bondes and Heep's (2012) contribution. Third, the Xinjiang terrorism problem is a top national security concerns that has received party-state interference. The analysis of news content on China's terrorism will not just provide insight into how the news media cover the events but will show what frames the party-state used in the media discourse of the Xinjiang conflict. Thus, it expands Bondes and Heep's (2012) conceptual framework to the media domain as well as provide empirical evidence to support it.

## **Terrorism news framing in China and beyond**

### ***Chinese media portrayals of terrorism***

There is no systematic analysis of how Chinese news media cover domestic terrorism. Closest to the topic are the two news framing studies by Barbour and Jones (2013) and Zeng et al. (2015), both of which focus on a single ‘terrorist’ attack, the Urumqi riot on 5 July 2009. These two studies both examined the party-state’s capacity to define how a violent incident is described in the media and thereby control the symbolic significance of the events in Xinjiang, creating a framework for future media interpretations of violence or party-state operations. Barbour and Jones (2013) drew on 150 articles from *China Daily* and Xinhua<sup>8</sup> covering the month after the incident. They sought to understand the portrayal of identity boundaries between the Uyghur, Han and ‘the terrorist’ in the news. They conclude that ‘the ambiguities of what actually occurred were repackaged into a narrative of order, civilised behaviour, and justice on the one hand, and violence, barbarity, and anti-state activities on the other’ (Barbour and Jones 2013: 16). In this sense, the authors found a ‘us’ versus ‘them’ framing of violence (sometimes referred to as ‘adversarial framing’, i.e. Norris et al. 2003, Powell 2011/2018, Steuter and Wills 2008) that criminalises and links the Uyghur to the ‘three evil forces’, standing in contrast to the civilised Han and the Chinese state that guarantees justice and security. Zeng et al. (2015) compared framing differences across three news agencies, Xinhua, Reuters and Associated Press, focussing on which sources are used in their reporting and frame changes over nine weeks following the incident. They find that Xinhua more strongly and continuously relied on government sources.

Both studies indicate that in China the ‘official’ news portrayal of terrorism is a party-state construction, and they suggest that adversarial framing is prevalent. Yet, they focus on a single case and on identity boundaries or sourcing patterns, and provide neither a comprehensive, empirical analysis of news frames nor a multi-case study that can deliver more generalisable observations and to compare frame changes over time. Neither study examined the terrorism framing, therefore missed out how the party-state portrays the terrorist threat in the media and how this possibly legitimises the party-state’s counter-terrorism operations in Xinjiang.

Though not specifically discussing the news framing of terrorism, a few further studies have explored the Chinese party-state’s media crisis management after the Urumqi riot in 2009 or

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<sup>8</sup> The Xinhua is the party-state’s official and biggest press agency. For details see Hong 2011.

have examined the news framing of two major national crises, the SARS epidemic in 2003 and the Sichuan earthquake in 2008.<sup>9</sup> Chen (2012) analysed how Beijing communicated with the media over the 2009 Urumqi incident by looking at news conferences and conducting interviews with party-officials. Chen concludes that Beijing was aiming for controlled and positive publicity of the party-state by engaging with the domestic and international media instead of restricting reporting. This aligns well with Zeng et al.'s (2015) finding mentioned above that party-state information has been the main source of information in the international news. Yang's (2012) news framing study of the 2003 SARS epidemic and the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, which she interprets as public crises, reaches the same conclusion on the stronger 'media openness' of the party-state over time. She also found difference in framing between the party-controlled (*People's Daily* 人民日报) and commercialised (*Southern Weekend* 南方周末) press, arguing that the former focuses on the party-state as leading force in solving the crisis whereas the latter focuses on the victims and losses. While both studies suggest a changing party-state media strategy with the 2003 SARS epidemic – from a closed information system to a 'managed' open one, this needs to be tested further by examining a wider range of news content. Indeed, Zhang and Fleming's (2006) study concluded, based on their analysis of SARS framing, that the diversity of frames in the news varies with the party-state leadership and their media control.

Though scarce, studies on the representation of Muslims and Islam in the Chinese media provide a further indication of how the Muslim Uyghur might be portrayed in the Chinese media's terrorism coverage. Luqiu and Yang (2018) studied news reports on Muslims and Islam in the party-state mouthpieces *People's Daily*, Xinhua and the CCTV website spanning over ten years, arguing that real-life discrimination of Chinese Muslims might be the consequence of negative stereotyping in the media. Their study revealed a negative framing of Muslims and Islam in news coverage and a survey of Chinese Muslims that revealed their increased daily discrimination since 2009. This finding aligns well with the findings of Barbour and Jones (2013), whose study on the news framing of the Urumqi 2009 incident uncovered the division between Uyghur and Han Chinese in the news. Kanat (2012) offers a possible explanation for this news pattern, arguing that the presence of an ethnic 'other' presents the party-state with an opportunity to exploit the society's fragmentation in favour of the leader by making the ethnic minority play the domestic target as an enemy

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<sup>9</sup> Some studies examined the Urumqi riot in 2009 not as terrorist attack but as crisis. These crisis news framing studies provide further insight into how the party-state responds with the media in cases in the public spotlight.

outsider. Though requiring empirical testing, Kanat's (2012) argument aligns with the other studies discussed above that see the party-state attempting to construct an enemy other and framing the news to favour its own responses to that enemy.

### ***Implications from terrorism news framing studies beyond China***

The scholarship on the terrorism media relationship has been flourishing over the last two decades, with seminal work by Nacos (1994, 2002, 2006), Norris et al. (2003), Papacharissi and Oliveira (2008), and others, focusing on Western countries with the US as strong focus point. They lack a comparative perspective on the terrorism media relationship in authoritarian regimes and specifically China. Nonetheless, they demonstrate the importance of understanding the terrorism news construction with the power the media has by reinforcing and altering public perception of the political leadership and the terrorist threat. For example, Brinson and Stohl's (2012) experimental findings on the impact of the media framing of the 2005 London bombing on US and UK citizens shows that attacks framed as 'homegrown' increase fear of terrorism more than attacks framed as international terrorism. They found that this enhanced fear led in turn to greater support for restricting the civil liberties of Muslims and generally a more negative attitude towards them. The authors see this framing effect manifested in the UK's substantial programme of monitoring and surveillance of the UK's Muslim community as part of the counterterrorism strategy (CONTEST) and the PREVENT policy (see also Heath-Kelly 2012). Sikorski et al. (2017) conducted research on the effect of Islamic State terrorism news framing with students of the University of Vienna, concluding that it increases the fear of terrorism. These findings resemble those of Luqiu and Yang (2018) in China, which showed that the overall negative framing of news reports on Islam or Muslims increases negative stereotypes non-Muslim Chinese towards Muslims.

Further details on the influence of frames on the audience is available through experimental studies. Wood's (2011) experiment with US students, who were exposed to different news articles on terrorism. While his findings align with the above studies in that the identification of 'radical Islamic groups' as terrorist suspects increased the threat perception, he found that the term 'terrorism' itself did not affect the perceived threat. The implication from this research is that understanding the effect of terrorism framing on the people's mind requires examination of how the media frame terrorism. This particular finding highlights once again the importance of this dissertation examining how the Chinese media frame terrorism, together with prior studies demonstrating that 'news frames do matter' in their effect on

public opinion. Since extensive research on this subject is yet missing for China, the existing terrorism framing studies on ‘Western’ pluralist media environments provide implications for China.

‘Western’ terrorism framing studies claim the following frames prevalent in the print media, namely the ‘war on terror’ frame, episodic and thematic frames, the adversarial frame and Islamophobia. The ‘war on terror’ frame has been the most commonly studied in research on terrorism framing, though it is often under-specified. Any study of this frame, and even many of those studying terrorism framing of other kinds, begin by describing how the Bush administration perceived the September 11 attacks as the beginning of a global ‘war on terror’ and how the media, both national and international, internalised this frame in future coverage of terrorist events (i.e. Norris et al. 2003, Steuter and Wills 2016). What some scholars even call a macro-frame, hinting at the possibility of including various frames, still lacks specification on what it includes (i.e. Matthews 2015; Merz 2014). For instance, the well-cited work of Reese and Lewis (2009) on the US print media’s adaptation of the war on terror frame only describes how the Bush administration interpreted the 9/11 events does not precisely identify what the ‘war on terror’ frame actually consists of. Steuter and Wills (2016) devoted their book ‘At war with metaphor’ to their observation that the ‘war on terror’ frame is highly abstract to ‘construct’ an archetypal enemy that might or might not be true but can be applied to a range of perceived threats of states. Accordingly, a key ingredient of this frame is the ‘othering’ of the enemy and the de-humanisation of that enemy. In agreement with this, Reese and Lewis describe the frame as portraying an abstract enemy that threatens the ‘freedoms and way of life’ of the US citizens, separating ‘us’ from ‘them’, juxtaposing Iraq and 9/11 to provide the rationale for the invasion of Iraq.<sup>10</sup>

The study of ‘us’ versus ‘them’, also known as adversarial framing, became a centrepiece in terrorism framing research, though it has been studied from different angles. Some scholars focus on ‘them’, what some called the ‘othering’, instead of the adversarial framing. Steuter and Wills (2016) are one example of this category, highlighting that the constructed enemy is indistinguishable, so terrorist come to stand for all Arabs, or religious extremists for all Muslims, so broadening the target from immediate actors to encompass all Arabs.

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<sup>10</sup> Their finding was that the US print media quickly accepted, post-September 11, the ‘war on terror’ framing of the Bush administration, confirming Entman’s (2003) famous cascading model on the power of the political elite over the direction of the news discourse (see also Glazier and Boydston 2012). In line with this observation, Norris et al. (2003) in their seminal work on US terrorism news framing also found the prevalence of adversarial frames that distinguish between the US citizens and the radical Islamist other.

Another trait of this ‘other’ is the separation from ‘us’ by highlighting their bestial nature, such as by picturing their brutality. Steuter and Wills highlight on this point the dichotomy between the Other as evil to Our good. It has become a common argument among academics that this form of adversarial framing has the effect of strengthening the public sense of unity while also legitimising a wide range of measures, national and international, in the name of counter-terrorism. In this vein, Norris et al. (2003) conclude that the terrorism frames serve both a cognitive function, by linking together disparate facts, events and leaders, and an evaluative function, by naming perpetrators, identifying victims and attributing blame. They therefore allow political leaders to communicate a coherent simple message to the public, while also reshaping perceptions of ‘friends’ and ‘enemies’. Common examples can be found not only in the US but also in authoritarian regimes such as Russia. Several publications at the beginning of the millennium described how Putin declared the Russo-Chechen conflict as Russia’s frontline in the international ‘war on terror’. For instance, Russel (2005) described the demonization of the Chechens by both the authorities and public by branding the resistance as ‘bandits’, mentally ill and culturally backward. The first indication of ‘the othering’ of Muslims in Chinese news and public was already confirmed by Luqiu and Yang (2018), though their research did not consider the domestic terrorist threat perception but the daily representation of Chinese Muslims. In sum, the terrorism framing scholarship clearly suggests the prevalence of adversarial framing, or ‘othering’, yet there is still no research on whether and how the Chinese media portray the terrorist enemy.

Islamophobia has been another common object of study in terrorism framing research. Previous research has argued that Muslim identity of terrorist perpetrators increases media coverage (Kearns 2019; West and Lloyd 2017), that the terms terrorist and Muslim as frequent associated, that Muslims are portrayed as irrational and radicalised and that using negative stereotypes of Muslims or Islam in the media heightens public fear (i.e. Brinson and Stohl 2012; Sikorski et al. 2017). These observations are well supported empirically. One of the often-cited sources on this subject is Powell’s (2011) news framing analysis of US terrorist attacks between 2001 and 2010. Powell showed that across all US terrorist attacks (in the period she studied), terrorist perpetrators were quickly labelled or suspected as Muslim. Event coverage, for example, began by stating or asking if the perpetrator was Muslim, before there was certainty. Moreover, Powell confirmed the dualisation of victims and terrorists in this context. Victims were portrayed as undeserving of the attack and as spiritual, often Christian. Victims who tried to stop the terrorist actors were portrayed as

heroes, though this was also commonly used for victims who were not doing anything extraordinary. Powell showed that this perception was pitted against the ‘bad guys’, such as the radicalised Muslim. Revisiting the more recent terrorism coverage, Powell (2018) confirmed the continuation of these reporting patterns for the US print media. Other studies, such as Matthews (2015), who looked at British terrorism news coverage, also observe the association between terrorism and Muslim identity and how these created frames of Islamophobia and the dichotomy of good versus evil.

The news focus on a global ‘war on terror’ implicates another reporting pattern, that is the prevalence of the thematic frame on the larger terrorism issue over an episodic one. Introduced by Iyengar (1990), episodic frames report on concrete events without placing them into the broader context, whereas thematic frames focus on issues in a broader context and present general and abstract information. Previous research suggests that coverage of terrorist events features both thematic and episodic frames (Berbers et al. 2015; Nacos and Torres-Reyna 2007; Papacharissi and Oliveira 2008). Analysis of US terrorism coverage demonstrates that although episodic frames directly follow an event, news content becomes increasingly thematic in the context of the global war on terror (Powell 2011). The thematic framing entails comments on the future threat. Powell (2011) confirmed that the majority of news stories alluded to the possibility of more strikes from the attack, thus keeping a future threat of terrorism salient.

### ***The need to ‘de-Westernise’ the scholarship on terrorism news framing***

As demonstrated above, there is a significant imbalance between the breadth of findings on terrorism framing in US-centred scholarship and in the scholarship on China. This observation echoes a concern at the heart of the de-Westernisation of media theory debate, that there is a shortage of media studies research outside ‘the West’ and an over-reliance on ‘Western’ media theory when discussing other parts of the world (Curran and Park 2000, Gunaratne 2010/2011, Miike 2006/2007, Thussu 2009). The early epistemological foundation for ‘de-westernising’ media research stems from the notion that the US-centric perspective does not acknowledge the different Asian communication traditions nor their cultural, historical and social context. Generally, the term ‘de-Westernisation’ indicates the removal of things that are ‘Western’, but conceptually it says very little about which elements should be removed and which should be included. Nonetheless contributions point towards differences between ‘the West’ and China in the media environments – including, for example, state-media relations (Nerone 1995; Nip and Fu 2016; Rawnsley and Rawnsley

2015), limited pluralism due serving both the market and political authority (Becker 2004; Lee 2015; Lei 2016; Stockmann 2013), and the democratising or sustain media effect on regime durability.<sup>11</sup> The key message from these sources is that news coverage in the ‘West’ and China is not identical, therefore the terrorism news coverage in China demands studying.

While differences in the media systems between China and the ‘West’ suggest difference in news coverage, it would be too simple to claim no diversity in media content due to its non-pluralist media environment. The commercialisation of China’s media after the 1990s led to a perceived transition from party-led propaganda tool to a market-oriented product (Brady 2011; Haern 2016; Hong 2011; Lee 2015; Simons et al. 2016; Stockmann 2013; Walker and Orttung 2014; Xie 2014; Young 2013). While these studies show no doubt about the weak watchdog function of the Chinese media, they also stress growing diversity in media content during the Hu Jintao administration (2002-2012) and the emergence of media sensationalism due the development of professionalism in journalistic practices. Nonetheless, the same scholarship continues to provide examples of party-state supervision and interference through media ownership, editorial censorship, ideological training, and encouragement of self-censorship (King et al. 2013; Lin et al. 2015; Lorentzen 2014; Nip and Fu 2016; for more details see chapter 4). More recent studies also indicated tightening media control since 2012 under Xi Jinping’s leadership (Brady 2016; Gill 2017; Hadland 2015; Ranade 2017).

Trends in loosening and tightening of controls over media content has also been observed in studies of public crises and terrorism in China. For instance, Yang (2012) found considerable framing differences in how official and commercial Chinese press covered the 2003 SARS and 2008 Sichuan earthquake. She argues that the party-state has learned from denying media communication to intensify the SARS outbreak, turning since then towards ‘managed’ media openness. Yang found examples not just in the framing of the rescue and treatment of the victims, or the losses of the victims, but also how commercialised media criticised government officials for their response to the events. However, even though the grip of the party-state seems to sometimes have loosened over the commercial media during natural disasters and health crises, Chen (2012) found with the 2009 Urumqi riot that crisis communication was highly centralised, and that the Chinese media closely followed the government line to focus on injured Han whilst ignoring the Uyghur background story. Zeng et al. (2015) confirmed this observation for the initial stage of reporting but found news

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<sup>11</sup> For a comprehensive list of media studies on China, see Zhao 2009; Tong 2012.

content to diverge over time after the incident. Returning to the de-Westernisation issue, research on the Chinese press demonstrates that framing cannot simply be assumed to be diverse, as it is in the US and UK, and yet should not be assumed to be straightforwardly controlled and unified. Even in the Chinese studies research, scholarship remains inconclusive on the extent of framing differences between commercialised and party-controlled media. There is lack of empirical research on the Chinese media's framing of terrorism and its change over time.

### ***The analytical gap in the terrorism media scholarship***

The first observation from the literature review is the obvious lack of a systematic analysis of Chinese terrorism coverage. While there are two framing studies on Chinese terrorism, their authors entrenched their focus on a single incident in 2009 and findings remain limited to sourcing patterns and the media representation of the division between Uyghur and Han Chinese. A systematic analysis would uncover a wider range of the news frames and incorporates a larger number of terrorist attacks to enhance generalisability of the findings. Second, the framing studies on China's terrorism missed analysing how the media portray the terrorist threat. Both Barbour and Jones (2013) and Zeng et al. (2015) discussed the 2009 Urumqi attack from the crisis communication perspective, therefore avoided a discussion of the party-state's interpretation and designation of the events. Such consideration involves an understanding of how the terrorist threat is portrayed by the media and how any operations are legitimised in the name of fighting this threat. Therefore, there has been thus far no analysis how the media define the terrorist threat and legitimise any counter-terrorist operation in the name of fighting this threat.

Third, the de-Westernisation debate on media theory has demonstrated that news content is not identical between the pluralist media environment in the 'West' and China's censored media environment. Thus, an exploration of the Chinese terrorism coverage is necessary to compare it with what is known in the 'Western'-centred scholarship. This way, the comparison would heighten scholarly awareness of alternative media models by incorporating Asian examples more strongly in the discourse.

## **The literature on the Xinjiang conflict and the party state's counter-operations**

### ***Studies of China's designation of the Xinjiang conflict***

Since the beginning of the millennium, scholars were in consensus when criticising the Chinese party-state for using the terrorism label to the Xinjiang conflict. Yet from around 2009 they increasingly adopted the term in publications and considered terrorism to be among tactics Uyghurs use to express discontent with CCP rule (i.e. Clarke; Cunningham 2012; Smith-Finley 2019; Tschantret 2016). These scholars commonly see in the party-state's issuing of the document titled 'East Turkistan terrorist forces cannot get away with impunity' shortly after the September 11 attacks the beginning of China's still ongoing fight against terrorism.

In 2002, the party-state sent a list of alleged terrorist groups to the United States and NATO in which China identified its terrorist enemies, both only recognised the previously unknown East Turkistan Independence Movement (ETIM) as terrorist group and said group has since then become the archetype of the terrorist enemy (Cunningham 2012). Until this time, the international community had seen the Uyghurs as a repressed ethnic group in authoritarian China. Scholars outside of China therefore interpreted these Chinese government's actions so soon after 9/11 as jumping on the bandwagon of the US global 'war on terror' and seeking to change the international narrative by declaring Xinjiang the frontline of their own terrorism problem. The timing of the terrorism designation, the retrospective designation of incidents from the previous ten years as acts of terrorism, and the attribution of responsibility to previously almost unknown terrorist groups led these scholars to conclude that the Chinese party-state was constructing a terrorist threat to legitimise the securitisation of the region and the continuing repression of the Uyghurs.

With news on re-education camps popularising the Xinjiang conflict issue worldwide, 2019 has seen a surge in scholars presenting their newest evaluation of what the party-state is doing in the region. These voices picture images of wide-ranging party-state aggression against the local minorities in the name of fighting terrorism. Smith-Finley (2019) speaks of state terror – as terrorising a population in the short term by instilling fear to ensure the state's continued political control in the long term – by drawing the de-extremisation campaigns and mass internments in the region as examples for the ideological turn of the CCP under Xi towards Xinjiang. To my knowledge, Smith-Finley was the first to introduce the term state terrorism to the debate, yet the notion of the incubation of violence is a common feature in studies on the Xinjiang conflict. For instance, Anand (2019) sees in the

securitisation of Xinjiang and Tibet a modern form of colonialism, stressing the asymmetry of power between the Han Chinese and the ethnic minorities. While Rodriguez-Merino (2019) agrees with the party-state construction argument, he calls it unstable as it would be contingent on the global war on terror and further aggravate local grievances towards an endless cycle of mutually depending violence and repression induced by the party-state. Both Clarke (2008) and Tredaniel and Lee (2018) reach the same conclusion the radicalising effect of the party-state's Xinjiang strategy.

### *The literature on the China's Xinjiang operations*

The literature on the Xinjiang conflict presents an image of a wide-ranging array of party-state strategies to achieve stability in the region, yet lack consideration of the media as another tool. Leibold and Grose (2017) argue that ethnic minority<sup>12</sup> and Han cultures have long been at odds in modern China with the Chinese party-state portraying the former as symbolising 'backwardness' and 'tradition', and the latter 'modernity' and 'progress'. For example, it frames forms of veiling not just as expressions of religious extremism and cultural backwardness, but also as outcome of foreign (i.e. Middle Eastern) influences. China's claim after September 11 of the existence of previously unknown terrorist groups, and specifically the acknowledgement of ETIM, left observers genuinely surprised (Cunningham 2012).

Tanner and Ballacqua (2016) analysed the Chinese party-state's overall approach to counter-terrorism by examining key party-state documents on the subject that have been made available in the public domain. Their examination suggests it has made a three-pronged effort that comprises promoting economic development, strengthening internal security capabilities and restricting unauthorised religious activities. Key components of this effort include: Strengthening counter-terrorism legislation; expanding the counter-terrorism bureaucracy; increasing law enforcement operations in Xinjiang; promoting economic growth and other development initiatives in Xinjiang; promoting ethnic unity and combating religious extremism. Odgaard and Nielsen (2014) explain that many of these actions have their origins in the Chinese party-state's post-September 11 re-assessment of China's vulnerabilities to terrorist threats. Prior to 2001, China had no police force dedicated to combatting terrorism, no laws governing how to deal with it, and no organisation dedicated

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<sup>12</sup> In China, the Han Chinese are the dominant ethnic group forming more than 90% of the population. The largest ethnic minority in Xinjiang are the Uyghur people (see chapter 1).

to coordinating the efforts of the institutions charged with preventing and responding to terrorist incidents.

Among the above strategies, most scholars discussed the long-running party-state strategy of promoting economic growth as the ‘carrot’ in the ‘carrot and stick’ approach for the region (Wayne 2009; Wei and Cuifen 2010; Yang 2015/2016). Tranner and Bellacqua (2016) show that the party-state has invested heavily in developing of the region’s infrastructure and tourism industries and to attract foreign investment, while several white papers on Xinjiang describe economic development as the top priority for the region and trumpet the improvement in living standards. However, Kutkauskaitė (2012) points out that preferential socio-economic policies on the one side and exploitation of the rich natural resources on the other side deepened the cleavages between Uyghur and Han Chinese in the region. In addition, facing the many years of unsettling situation, Zhu and Blachford (2016) emphasise that development is just one element in China’s governance strategy of combining hard and soft policy.

Possibly the most studied topic in the context of the Xinjiang terrorism is the securitisation of the region, specifically ‘strike hard’ campaigns and surveillance (Kutkauskaitė 2012; O’Brien and Deng 2015; Lu and Chan 2016). Zenz and Leibold (2017, also Clarke 2018) describe the party-state’s securitisation strategy in Xinjiang to occur in stages over the course of the past decade, starting with the Urumqi 2009 incident. They show how, after the dispatch of 14,000 People’s Armed Police (PAP) forces to regain control of Xinjiang after the Urumqi incident, authorities responded by boosting personnel recruitment efforts across public security organs in the region, rising the number of security related position from almost 7,000 in 2006-8 to almost 16,000 in 2009-11 with continuing growth in numbers over the following years. Meanwhile, the party-state used grid-style social management technique that divides communities into smaller units in which surveillance technology and personnel monitor activities.

Zenz and Leibold (2017) argue that there was a change in around 2013 that marked a new surveillance-oriented, technology-focused security strategy. Other observers confirm the expansion of a ‘surveillance state’ in both Xinjiang and the rest of China. Wayne (2007) points particularly towards the creation of a ‘four-in-one’ system of defence, consisting of the People’s Liberation Army, the paramilitary People’s Armed Police, the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, and the people. Wayne’s inclusion of ‘the people’ as

one of the defence forces resonates with the party-state's prevalent use of the adversarial framing as part of the war on terror, stressing that part of the party-state's terrorism construction is aimed at motivating public support for counter-terrorist operations. It highlights again the importance for the party-state to 'win the people's mind' and the media construction of terrorism as one tool to do so. Wayne further observed after 2009 the brutal use of military force and yearly 'strike hard campaigns', accelerating arrests, trials, and sentencing of Uyghur terrorists, extremists, and separatists to punish and deter terrorism commensurate with the state's inclination of employing harshness and swiftness to curb crime down (see also Becquelin 2004; Hastings 2011; Li 2016). Repressive measures including arbitrary and large-scale arrests, containment strategies, harsh punishment and the violation of basic human rights have gained strong international criticism, with interment camps receiving currently much attention by Human Rights Organisation and others (Amnesty 2018; CFR 2019; Marquest 2019).

As part of the securitisation of the region, scholars also recently began growingly to discuss the party-state strengthening of the counter-terrorism legislation with the issuing of China's first counter-terrorism law in 2015. Clarke (2018) further stresses with 2015 a new emphasis on strengthening legal provisions and procedures to replace government directives with written regulations. One can characterise such efforts as attempts to further normalise and standardise the management of ethnic and religious affairs. Yet he warns that China is conflating 'normal' religious activities with 'abnormal' and 'illegal' ones, is creating a hotbed of further violence. Starting in 2001, China made several piecemeal amendments to its criminal law, criminal procedure law, and a number of administrative laws regarding the regulation of terrorism (Roach 2015). However, as Li (2016) notes, it was not until 2015 that China passed its first comprehensive counter-terrorism law after many years of policy review. Tanner and Bellacqua (2016) comment that the new law, which will form the blueprint for China's counter-terrorism strategy, conflates 'terrorism' with an undefined 'extremism' linked to religion, and gives scope to follow the imposition of oppressive and counter-productive policies in Tibet and Xinjiang, involving extra-judicial killings, torture and imprisonment, and crackdowns on even mild expressions of religious identity and culture. Little attention has yet been drawn toward the legal response to the terrorist threat (Clarke 2018; Li 2016; Tursun 2008). It has yet remained unstudied how the Chinese party-state explained these legislative changes.

Along with the legislative changes, the counter-terrorism bureaucracy has grown substantially as the Mercator Institute for China Studies (2016) explained. Accordingly, in August 2013, the State Council established the Leading Small Group on Counter-Terrorism (反恐工作领导小组), which is a top-level body in charge of advising and implementing counter-terrorism work, led by the Minister of Public Security. Along with the establishment of the National Security Commission (中央国家安全委员会), which is headed by Xi Jinping himself, this led to the centralisation and prioritisation of counter-terror policy-making at the highest level (Tanner and Bellacqua 2016). Wayne (2009) observed that controlling, constraining and steering Islam in Xinjiang is an important feature of their work, Kutkauskaitė (2012) notes foreign policy measures on the issue involve transnational cooperation in fighting terrorism and the minimisation of foreign discourse on Xinjiang's territorial integrity.<sup>13</sup> There has been no research that examined how the media portrayed these changes to China's counter-terrorism apparatus, despite its large impact on the Chinese people in form of the emerging surveillance state.

Finally, studies on the party-state ideology show the long-standing strategies of sustaining political authority by promoting economic growth, stability and ethnic solidarity under the leadership of the CCP. Wayne (2007) contends that the party-state's ambition in influencing public opinion through strategic narratives aims to maintain stability and gain the support of the public in counter-terrorist efforts. More recent studies continue to highlight the party-state's attempt of transforming the Chinese society through strategic communication into an environment hostile to terrorism, a society that is tied to and intertwined with the state (Lams 2018; Lorentzen 2014). Brady (2012) demonstrates this with the 2009 Urumqi attack, after which the party-state immediately shut down of Xinjiang's internet connections, using brute force and, a few weeks later, launching a new ethnic unity campaign with the slogan 'we are all part of the same family'. New sources on the Xi administration argue that Xi Jinping's centenary goal for China is to enhance the assimilation of all ethnic groups in China with the Han population, by continuing the promotion of national unity and economic growth as the benefit of stability (Clarke 2018). Given that the literature confirms the importance of the promotion of economic growth, stability and national unity, no study has yet examined to which extent the Chinese media frame these party-state ideals in the terrorism coverage.

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<sup>13</sup> An example of Beijing expanding its counter-terrorist measures beyond the national border lies in counter-terrorism cooperations with neighbouring states in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), with the five member states Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Russia (Chung 2004; Guang 2006; Wallace 2014).

### *The media gap*

Studies on the Xinjiang conflict and the party-state's counter-operations have largely neglected media control as another tool for the party-state to try and achieve stability in the region and the nation. Instead, scholars who have investigated the Xinjiang conflict concentrate on either the party-state use of the terrorism label or describe the securitisation of the region in the form of counter-terrorism bureaucratisation and legislation, strike hard campaigns, economic development initiatives. Media coordination efforts would add to this list a consideration of the 'hearts and mind' approach Xi spoke of, in the sense that gaining public support is a strategy in addition to the regional securitisation to win public support for the party-state operations in Xinjiang. The section on Xinjiang operations highlights both soft approaches (economic development) and hard approaches (securitisation of the region), yet the two studies of the Urumqi riot in 2009 discussed in the first section of this chapter did mention that media coordination was one of these strategies. Until now, there was little consideration of the media's role in the Xinjiang conflict for other cases after 2009 as well as well as more generally on the media communicating the terrorist threat construction of the party-state.

## **Situating the PhD research focus in the scholarship on China's 'terrorism' problem**

### ***Filling the gaps in the academic literature on China's 'terrorism' threat***

The above literature review has uncovered an analytical gap that comprises of a lack of understanding of both how the Chinese news cover terrorism and how this differs from terrorism news framing in pluralist media environments. Regarding the former, the thesis presents empirical findings on the news media's terrorism construction based on inductive qualitative content analysis and quantitative text analysis. These findings are compared and contrasted with common terrorism news framing patterns in the pluralist media environment of the US. This contribution opens up a debate on the party-state's construction of terrorism, specifically in the media, as well as demonstrate in the spirit of the de-westernisation theory that terrorism framing theories are not universal across regime types.

Regarding the media gap in studies of the conflict in Xinjiang, this dissertation adds insights on how the print media report on terrorism and how reporting relates to the party-state strategies of hard and soft power in Xinjiang. In doing so, it demonstrates media coordination efforts as another Xinjiang strategy as well as its link to other Xinjiang strategies, for example by framing an urgent and grave terrorist threat to back up the securitisation in Xinjiang. Theoretical research has established a connection between framing and authoritarian resilience, yet there had been a lack of an empirical analysis to demonstrate this link. The literature has shown China to be an ideal case for examining the relationship: there is a great deal of research available on both China's authoritarian resilience strategies and media coordination efforts outside of the topic of terrorism. Additionally, consensus among studies on the Xinjiang conflict confirm the terrorist threat as party-state tactic to employ a wide-range of measures to stabilise the region as well as a few studies on the Urumqi riot in 2009 confirm media coordination efforts by Beijing. To conclude, the extant literature acknowledges the terrorism designation as framing strategy by the party-state but was up to this point lacking research situating this in the realm of the authoritarian resilience debate as well as exploring how the print media frame the constructed terrorist threat.

### ***The implications from the literature and the linkage to the research questions***

Aiming to fill the above-mentioned gaps in the literature on China's terrorist threat perception, this dissertation's research was guided by three core research questions:

- ❖ To what extent can traditional predictors of (US-centred) terrorism coverage explain the amount of Chinese news attention for Chinese terrorist attacks?

- ❖ What are the prevalent frames in Chinese newspaper reports on domestic terrorism?
- ❖ How did the prevalent frames change from 2009 to 2015?

The literature review revealed the absence of studies that test what determines the amount of Chinese terrorism coverage, although this is well-studied for the US. However, following the debate on the de-Westernisation of media theory, findings from pluralist media environments of Western democracies require testing on whether they hold true for China with its media supervision and control by the party-state. Therefore, the analysis for this research question involved testing whether determinants of terrorism coverage in the US hold true for China as well (see chapter 4 for details on the hypotheses, determinants under analysis and the literature-driven rationale). The comparison with the US coverage continues regarding the news content with an inductive approach by answering the second research question. Following up on the analytical gap, this analysis uncovers how the Chinese news media portray terrorism and suggests differences to the US media's terrorism construction. These findings will fill the media gap and empirical gap by not just adding the media perspective to the Xinjiang conflict scholarship but also establishing the relationship between the media construction of terrorism and the authoritarian resilience of party-state rule in China.

The third research question emerged since the reviewed literature points towards an evolving party-state threat perception over time in China (i.e. the terrorism designation and the escalation of violence since 2014) and the ideological turn under the Xi administration. Therefore, the third part of the project was to identify changes in prevalent frames over time. The time period stretches from 2009 to 2015 since (1) the beginning of the millennium was relatively tranquil in regard to unrests in Xinjiang and the shift in terrorism designation after 9/11 is well acknowledged by scholars, and (2) 2009 marks the Urumqi high-casualty riot a turning point in the escalation of violence and the party-state's threat perception, until the number of unrests decreased after 2015 (RFA 2018). Therefore, altogether, these three research questions aimed to uncover the Chinese print media's portrayal of terrorism by examining both the amount and content of news reports, as well as exploring prevalent changes over time.

While a systematic analysis of Chinese terrorism coverage had been absent to this point, the literature review distilled several implications for the Chinese media coverage of terrorist events. The conceptual framework on the connection between authoritarian resilience and

framing suggests that Chinese leaders would employ media management tactics to cover the Xinjiang conflict in ways favourable to the party-state. Chen's (2012) study of the Urumqi incident in 2009 confirmed this, demonstrating that the party-state has shifted over the years from denial to news coordination efforts aimed at positive publicity. This observation provides insight on how terrorism is constructed as party-state tactic and to examine how the news media communicate this construction to the public within a censored media environment.

The few existing framing studies on the Urumqi 2009 incident, expanded by the rich US-centric terrorism-media scholarship, provide further expectations on the Chinese news construction. For instance, the former indicates negative stereotypes of Uyghur and strong reliance on government sources in the press coverage. The US sources further suggest the prevalence of adversarial frames, Islamophobia, both episodic and thematic frames, the abstraction and demonization of the enemy other, and the urgency of preventive counter-terrorism efforts, the notion of a 'war on terror' and success of these efforts if the US people stand united and supportive of these actions. Nonetheless, the framing analysis for this thesis was conducted inductively to avoid bias as the result of the scholarship's focus on pluralist media environments. China scholars often speak of China's 'war on terror' when referring to the Xinjiang conflict, yet it remains to be tested with this is a common frame in the Chinese news portrayal or a US feature.

Moreover, the literature revealed a shift in the party-state's Xinjiang strategies since Xi Jinping took over in 2013. With Xinjiang 'under new circumstances' during the Xi administration, scholars already identified comprehensive securitisation efforts, stronger public opinion guidance to distinguish between official truths and 'rumours', and stronger reinforcing of party ideology of ethnic solidarity and economic development. This comprehensive package of party-state measures suggests the media to reflect the Xinjiang conflict and counter-operations in accordance with the party-state policies. The thesis will be the first study that contributes with insight to which extent the news media cover and reinforce the necessity of securitisation, ideology and public opinion guidance in accordance with the party-state's Xinjiang efforts.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

To answer each research question, the research for this dissertation involved a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The methodological decisions reflect the purposes of this study: on the one hand, taking an inductive approach by exploring the Chinese media's construction of terrorism; on the other hand, testing deductively whether Western media theories on the determinants of terrorism coverage hold true for China. Regarding the latter, I discuss the variables and hypotheses related to the analysis in a separate methodology section in Chapter 4.

The first research asked how well US determinants of terrorism coverage can explain the Chinese terrorism coverage. To answer this question, I used regression region analysis in which I tested the explanatory power of the number of deaths, proximity of the news organisation to the attack, tactic variables and target variables for the extent of Chinese terrorism coverage. I also tested for the relevance of whether the newspaper is an official party-state press or commercial; I also tested whether party-state claims of ETIM's responsibility for the attack increased media attention, given that this terrorist group is a key actor in the party-state's terrorist threat construction. In addition, I analysed leaked censorship instruction of the party-state to gain insight in how well China's censored media environment can explain why some terrorist attacks receive more media attention than others. For the second research on prevalent news frames, I used qualitative content analysis and quantitative text analysis. I began with the former by open coding a sub-sample of 458 news articles to identify and formulate framing categories. Based on the open coding observations, I used indicator questions to gain empirical evidence on framing patterns in the sub-sample. In addition, quantitative analysis of the most frequently occurring words and their relationships to each other in the full data set of 2291 collected news reports not just validates the qualitative observations but visualises framing patterns in word networks. These methods led to the discovery of ten prevalent frames in Chinese terrorism coverage.

The third research question asked for the prevalent frame changes over time. I analysed the frame changes over time by comparing the news coverage across eight terrorist attacks that range from 2009 to 2015. I used the indicator questions on framing patterns to identify changes across cases. Quantitative similarity tests and structural topic modelling provided further insight into the extent of framing differences across cases.

The chapter begins by reviewing the research aim and purposes, before moving to the data collection and analysis strategies. A discussion on the validity of the research findings complements this insight into the project's methodology. Chapter 4 on the determinants of terrorism coverage provides an additional research design section that centres around the regression analysis process and the selection of the variables for testing.

### **Research aim, purposes, and approach**

The aim of my research project was to understand how Chinese newspaper reports portray the (domestic) terrorist attacks and whether determinants of the extent of US terrorism news coverage are equally relevant in China. The project involved a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods with various research purposes. The research is:

- ❖ Exploratory purpose: The research explored inductively what prevalent frames exist in Chinese terrorism coverage. This exploration involved a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods.
- ❖ Descriptive purpose: The dissertation's purpose is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the news frames portray the terrorist threat in the Chinese media. The research focused on the news output, aiming to present an image of the prevalent reporting patterns that reach the Chinese public.
- ❖ Explanatory purpose: The research also involved testing to what extent determinants of US terrorism coverage are of relevance in China's censored media environment. Therefore, the purpose of the dissertation was also to discuss the explanatory power of Western media theory on the extent of Chinese terrorism coverage.

The analysis used a mixed-method approach, comprising both inductive and deductive components. An inductive approach to examining terrorism news framing in China was needed due the lack of systematic analysis on the subject. Rather than merely testing whether findings from the Western-centred scholarship on terrorism news framing hold true for China, the inductive approach allows an exploration of news frames that can bring forward both similarities and differences in news content between China and 'the West'. The literature review in Chapter 2 demonstrates that terrorism news frames found in pluralist media environments may not be the same as those in China's censored media environment.

I used a deductive approach in two parts of the project. First, I analysed the determinants of the extent of terrorism coverage using predictor variables that had been found in previous studies (see chapter 4 for a discussion of these variables). This allowed me to explore

deductively whether US determinants of terrorism coverage hold true in China, therefore contributing to the de-Westernisation of media theory debate. Second, although my news content analysis relies on an inductive open coding process, my findings on prevalent news frames are compared to what is known on US terrorism news frames. This involves an inductive approach using both qualitative content analysis and quantitative text analysis, supported by the use of indicator questions.

## The data collection process

### *Case selection*

My analysis is based on a multi-case study design using eight ‘terrorist’ attacks that occurred between 2009 and 2015. The attacks are as follows:

**Table 3-1: Selected cases (with brief event description)**

❖ Case 1: July 5, 2009 (Xinjiang): A series of protests that were sparked by a migrant Uyghur who was accused in South China of sexually assaulting a Han female (and groups of both ethnicities fought with several deaths). The protests escalated in violent attacks with around 200 people dead and 1800 people injured.
❖ Case 2: June 26, 2013 (Xinjiang): 35 people were reportedly killed in a conflict between Uyghurs and police in the town of Lukqin. The Xinjiang regional government blamed the incident on a 17-member terrorist group. In the following security crackdown in Xinjiang by the People’s Liberation Army, 380 Uyghurs were arrested and officially 3 were executed for leading terrorist groups.
❖ Case 3: October 23, 2013 (Beijing): An SUV plowed into a group of tourists and burst into flames at Beijing’s historic Tiananmen Square, killing the three occupants as well as two pedestrians. The Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau described the incident as rigorously planned, organised, premeditated, and violent terrorist attack.
❖ Case 4: March 1, 2014 (Yunnan): Eight individuals armed with knives attacked passengers at the Kunming train station, killing 29 and injuring 140. PRC authorities described the incident as an organised, premeditated, serious and violent terrorist attack.
❖ Case 5: April 30, 2014 (Xinjiang): Two assailants attacked bystanders with knives and bombs at Urumqi’s train station, killing 3 and injuring 79 people. The attack occurred just hours after the conclusion of President Xi Jinping’s inspection tour of Xinjiang.
❖ Case 6: May 22, 2014 (Xinjiang): Two cars crashed into and Urumqi market and suspects reportedly threw up to a dozen explosives into the crowded street market, killing 43 and wounding another 90 people.
❖ Case 7: July 28, 2014 (Xinjiang): Armed gang of Uyghurs attacked police station and government offices before moving to other cities. Xinhua reported that nearly 100 people were killed (37 civilians, 59 attacks, 4 security officers) and over 200 arrested following a allegedly premeditated terrorist attack on a police station in Shache County.
❖ Case 8: September 18, 2015 (Xinjiang): Uyghurs with knives struck at a coal mine at night, killed the security guards and the sleeping miners. At least 50 people, most Han Chinese, were killed in an attack on a coal mine in Aksu County by knife-wielding assailants. This attack happened during national celebrations to mark the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the Xinjiang region.

**Source: Tanner and Bellacqua 2016. See also Clarke 2012/2018; Godbole and Goud 2012; Roberts 2018; Tredaniel and Lee 2018.**

A challenge in the case selection came with the question of what counts as a terrorist attack and according to whom. The first chapter already highlighted the definitional debate around the term ‘terrorism’ as well as the global questioning of the party state’s terrorist threat designation. To avoid a definitional debate on what counts as terrorism, I selected incidents for study which the party-state labelled as acts of terrorism. I began the search for appropriate cases by searching for ‘terrorism’ (恐怖) in the newspaper databases Wisearch and CND (see next section for detail). Among these news reports, incidents in the years 2013 to 2015 were covered most frequently as terrorist acts, including the above listed cases. Additionally, although there is no full list of how many incidents the party-state has labelled as terrorist attacks, the eight cases under study were consistently discussed by scholars of the Xinjiang conflict as party-state labelled acts of terrorism (see sources for Table 3-1). These lists pointed to the July 2009 riot (Case 1) as the first clearly party-state defined terrorist attack since September 11 2001 and listed additional incidents for the following years with the above cases appearing in these publications consistently as party-state labelled terrorist acts. Furthermore, I used the University of Maryland’s Global Terrorism Database (START 2018, see next chapter for details) to get a sense of the estimated total number of terrorist attacks in China for the time period the above eight cases cover. It showed that between 2009 and 2015 65 terrorist attacks occurred in China, eight of these attacks were used for this research project.

Beyond receiving the terrorism label by the party-state, I selected the Cases 1, 2, 6, 7 and 8 due the high number of casualties that led to strong party-state attention according to the above-mentioned sources. For the other three cases, the selection criteria were contextual factors that possibly increase media attention. Starting with case 1, the Urumqi 2009 incident is the only terrorist attack that has received attention by media researchers, therefore made a good starting point for this research project to compare observations (Barbour and Jones 2013; Zeng et al. 2013). Moreover, it was the first high-casualty terrorist attack of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in China was interpreted by the party-state as ‘China’s 9/11’ (Roberts 2012; Clarke 2018). Case 2 in Xinjiang’s Lukqin was another high-casualty incident with 35 deaths. The third case occurred in October 2013 at the Tiananmen Square in Beijing with a car crash resulting in three deaths. Although the number of casualties is lower than in the previous cases, I included it for the cultural and political significance the Tiananmen Square has to China and the party-state (i.e. see Cheng 2011; Fewsmith 2001). The next case occurred in March 2014 at Kunming train station (Yunnan province in South China), where 29 people died in a knife attack – both a high number of casualties as well as an attack outside of

Xinjiang. Case 5 one month later in Urumqi's largest train station involved fewer casualties, but it coincided with Xi Jinping's speech in Xinjiang on the successful fight against terrorism and received attention due to the brutality of knife attacks at a central station. Both cases 6 and 7 again were a high-casualty incident that involved a series of explosions in a street market as well as knife attacks. The final case in Xinjiang's Baicheng was the latest incident at the time of data collection, while receiving much publicity due to the number of casualties as well as this being an assault at night.

*Newspaper articles as unit of analysis, the data sources and the time frame*

The study's units of analysis are newspaper articles published in the 30 days following each of the eight selected domestic 'terrorist' events. To my knowledge, publicly available databases for television and radio do not exist in China (Stockmann 2013). My focus is therefore on traditional print media. Unlike other studies that tend to examine only newspapers' front pages as indicators of their coverage, the analysis here examined all coverage in the aftermath of the terrorist events in the newspapers listed in the next section. The population of news reports was gathered from two online Chinese newspaper databases, (1) Wisearch, and (2) Qinghua Tongfang's China National Knowledge Infrastructure Core Newspaper Database (CNKI-CND). Not only does the use of these databases make the newspaper content easier to collect, it also contains the articles in their print version. The CND newspaper database of CNKI is commonly used in Chinese media research (i.e. Carlson et al. 2010; Stockmann 2013; Wang 2018; Ye and Pang 2011); it was launched in 1999 by Tsinghua Tongfang Knowledge Network Technology Company and includes over 700 Chinese newspapers, covering from 2000 to date. Wisearch is a Chinese and English database of over 900 media sources aggregated by Wisers Information Ltd base in Hong Kong. It claims to offer the world's largest archive of Chinese language newspapers and has been increasingly used in China media studies for this reason and because of its user-friendly interface (Cheng 2016; Du 2016; Tong 2014). Both databases are the most comprehensive full-text databases for Chinese newspapers and have gained academic recognition as such. These two databases were used to extend the range of accessible newspapers and thus partially overcome the newspaper selection bias that results from the use of a single database.

Turning to the time frame of the analysis, I chose the first four weeks after each incident for the exploration of news frames. Time periods for news coverage analysis vary widely, ranging from those that look at major frames which have become established over several years (Chermak and Gruenewald 2006; Ruigrock and van Atteveldt 2007) to those of few

weeks or days which aim to identify prevalent frames after terrorist threats or assess their ephemerality (Chyi and McCombs 2004; Falkheimer and Olsson 2014; Matthews 2015; Nevalsky 2015; Roy and Ross 2011; Zeng et al. 2015). To my knowledge, two to four weeks is the most commonly used time frame in framing analysis of terrorism coverage. I chose to analyse reports in the four weeks after each terrorist event because with a lack of systematic analysis of Chinese terrorism coverage it was ‘safer’ to go for the longer time frame.

### *Newspaper selection*

Twelve Chinese newspapers made up the data source (see Table 3-2 for name and brief description). The newspapers are listed below by the main area of circulation; an additional list of sources that also used the listed newspaper is available for further reference.

**Table 3-2. Selected newspapers (and further readings)**

<b>National circulation</b>		<b>Academic studies</b>
People’s Daily (人民日报)	Official party-state press, representing the opinion of the head of the CCP and the national government of China, and published worldwide with a circulation of 3 to 4 million.	Lee 2015; Tang 2012; Tang and Bie 2016; Tong 2014; Yang 2012; Zhang 2012
Southern Metropolis Daily (南方都市报)	Market-oriented newspaper with 1.6 million daily circulation.; it is also the largest daily newspaper in Guangdong.	Dai 2014; Tang and Bie 2016; Tong 2014/2015; Wu et al. 2015; Yan and Kim 2015
Yangzi Evening News (扬子晚报)	Market-oriented newspaper with a circulation of 1.74 Mio. Daily, based in Nanjing.	Tang 2012; Yan and Kim 2015
Xinmin Evening News (新民晚报)	Market oriented newspaper with circulation of 1 million.	Han et al. 2017; Peng and Tang 2010.

<b>Beijing Region</b>		<b>Academic studies</b>
Beijing Daily (北京日报)	Official party-state press (of the CCP Beijing Municipal Committee) with a circulation of 400.000 daily.	Lee 2015; Repnikova 2017; Stockmann 2013; Zhao 2018
Beijing Youth Daily (北京青年报)	Official newspaper of the Communist Youth League committee in Beijing. It is very and with 5 million daily circulation very popular.	Lee 2015; Zhang 2009
Beijing Evening News (北京晚报)	Market-oriented newspaper with a daily circulation of 800.000.	Lee 2015; Rui 2010; Stockmann 2013; Tang and Bie 2016; Tang and Iyengar 2012
Beijing News (新京报)	Market-oriented newspaper with a daily circulation of 576.000.	Lee 2015; Li and Sparks 2016; Tong 2014

<b>Xinjiang Region</b>		<b>Academic studies</b>
Xinjiang Daily (新疆日报)	Official party-state press with daily circulation of 124.000 in Xinjiang.	

<b>Guangdong Region</b>		<b>Academic studies</b>
Nanfang Daily/Southern Daily (南方日报)	Official party-state press with daily circulation of 1.7 million. However, it is known to be more market-driven than other party-state daily’s and is very popular.	Yang 2012

Guangzhou Daily (广州日报)	Official party-state press with daily circulation of 1.9 million. Again, known among academics to be more market-oriented than other party-state papers.	Peng and Tang 2010; Tang 2012; Wu et al. 2015; Qin et al. 2018; Zhang and Fleming 2005; Zhou et al. 2008
Yangcheng Evening News (羊城晚报)	Market-oriented newspaper with a daily circulation of 1.4 million.	Chia 2018; Duan and Takahashi 2016; Yan and Kim 2015

I developed a three-level criteria model for the newspaper selection in order to include in the analysis papers that have (1) high circulation rates, (2) varying areas of circulation, (3) are considered by media researchers to be more or less commercialised (see Figure 3-1). This model goes beyond the usual selection based just on popularity (measured by selling rates) as it also accounts for the proximity to the terrorist event and the ties to the party-state supervision. I deem this approach necessary to ensure that the diverse newspaper universe in China was well-represented in the dataset. All of them are daily newspapers to ensure that each newspaper is equally represented in the news frame analysis. An analysis of any photos that might be published together with the articles was not possible since either database did not provide access to these. The rationale for each of the three selection criteria was as follows:

**Figure 3-1: Newspaper selection criteria**

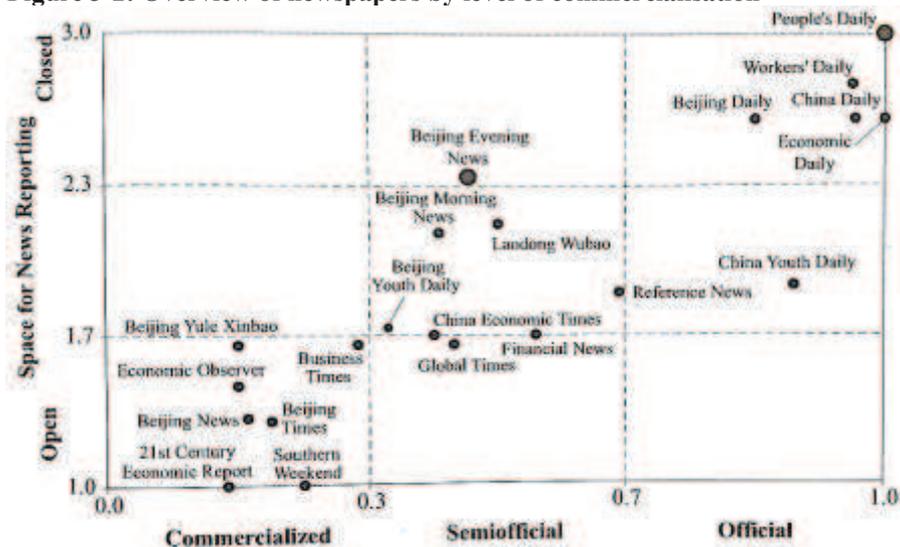


- a) **Area of circulation.** Nationally circulating newspapers were selected for the large reader base across the country. Beijing and Xinjiang press was selected based on my theory that event coverage in the news media varies across the country. This perspective was grounded in two reasons. First, proximity theory in media research suggests that events gain more media attention the closer they happen to the audience or news organisation (Ruigrok 2007; Woods 2011; Zeng 2015). Said literature often argues that this is the result of increased relevance assigned to the news event. Second, with media coordination efforts confirmed earlier as strategic tool of the authoritarian leader, I suggest that the news product is different depending on whether it circulates in Xinjiang

as the nexus of terrorism and ethnic unrest, or the distant centre of political power of the party-state in Beijing. Guangdong province was included as control case, to include newspapers that are well-studied in China research in terms of media reporting and act as a reference point for comparison with the other newspapers in the dataset.<sup>14</sup>

- b) Circulation rate: In the second step, I follow the footsteps of most news media researchers by identifying those newspapers that have a high readership and thus appear influential in setting the tone for coverage in their respective areas and have the greatest impact on the Chinese public (i.e. Lee 2015; Xie 2012; Yang 2012; Zeng 2015; Zhang and Fleming 2005). The information is drawn mostly from academic research (see Table 3-2) but was also cross-checked and updated using internet sources that facilitate current selling numbers (Bandurski 2018; People's Daily Online 2010; Wang 2017).
- c) Degree of party-state supervision: This selection criteria is the result of scholars, such as Stockmann (2013), distinguishing newspapers by the extent of received media control into official (党报), semi-official (晚报) and commercial newspapers (都市报) (see also Yang 2012; Tang and Tang 2016). A first reference point was Stockmann's surveys with Chinese journalists on the matter. She distinguished Chinese newspapers into the above three levels of reporting autonomy based on the opinions of domestic media practitioners.

**Figure 3-2: Overview of newspapers by level of commercialisation**



Source: Stockmann 2013: 71.

<sup>14</sup> The theory on framing variance posited here has not yet been tested for China and will object to another future research project with the dataset (i.e. comparison of frames between newspapers), yet it is a measure to ensure a good representation of the available newspapers in the large country of China. As such, it is also a necessity to include newspapers other than those circulating in Xinjiang in order to make conclusion on how the Chinese press more generally portray terrorism.

A second reference point was that of media ownership. Different publisher groups (报业集团) responsible for issuing newspapers have a varying number of CCP officials represented in the editorial board, thus suggesting they are likely to follow official press content to different degrees (more when they have more CCP officials on their board) (Lee 2015; Zhang 2010). Moreover, by doing so I wanted to make sure to avoid selecting newspapers in the same circulation area that all come from the same publishing house to ensure better representation of the local press. However, recent publications on the tightening of media control under the Xi administration as well as the rather unclear division of what counts as semi-official or commercial lead me to distinguish newspapers by two categories, into the official party-state press (i.e. People's Daily, Beijing Daily) and their more commercialised competition (i.e. Southern Metropolis Daily, Beijing Evening news).

### ***The search string for data collection***

Most studies on terrorism news coverage use the word terrorism to identify news reports for the data analysis and therefore lost the chance in obtaining a representative sample of the universe of news coverage on the topic. While I agree that this strategy allows researchers to identify news reports that are strongly related to the terrorist event and makes the data collection faster, the sample would exclude articles that refer to the events differently, such as by riot, crisis, conflict. I consider this approach as not advisable for this research project as it would introduce a selection bias. First, this is the first in-depth analysis of Chinese terrorism coverage and as such limiting the search radius to those articles that refer to the events as terrorism would contradict the exploratory nature of this project. Although the party-state labels the incidents as terrorist acts, this approach allows consideration of any articles that use other terms to describe the events. Second, several studies show the Xinjiang conflict as a multi-faceted one with much room for labels to be chosen by journalists (i.e. ethnic conflict or terminology for the types of attacks), making the sole use of the terrorism label a selection bias in the data collection.

I developed what I call a '*minimal consensus approach*' to formulate a search string for the collection of news reports. The idea behind this approach is to identify search criteria that can be applied to all cases despite their unique event characteristics. The result was for each case a search string that includes for the 'terrorist' event: (1) the location (province, city, and

other sub-provincial units if the reports seem to use these as well); (2) date; (3) the ‘9/11’ label used to refer to the incident. This process is outlined below in detail.

- i. In the first stage of exploring terrorism reporting, I used ‘terrorism’ (恐怖主义) as the search word in combination with the date of the incident. This was necessary to gain first insight into how Chinese newspapers report on the event. The reports commonly showed the date and location as reference points for the event. Moreover, the reports showed the use of a ‘9/11’ label to stress the gravity of the incident (i.e. for the July 5th, 2009 Urumqi riot it was ‘7·5’) and employ other terms of classification in addition to terrorism (i.e. violent incident, riot, knife attacks). The conclusion was the aforementioned position that merely using the term terrorism (and date for specification) would result in selection bias.
- ii. Searching for other event characteristics as search word criteria, I explored news reporting with search words for: (1) What --classification of the event; (2) Who -- label of the offender (i.e. terrorist, criminal, Uyghur); (3) When -- when it happened; (4) Where -- where it happened; (5) How -- what happened. Through this approach, I learned that only the location and date are search criteria that can be applied across the cases to ensure consistency in how news articles were collected for all cases.
- iii. Further exploration of the search string included the exact configuration of the date and location criteria. For instance, theoretically it would be plausible that reports would not just use the date but refer to it as occurring yesterday, two days ago, last week and so on. However, I did not find this to be the case. Instead, articles used the date (day and month) as reference (i.e. for case 1, ‘5 日 7 月’ for the 5<sup>th</sup> July 2009). Regarding the location, I theorised that local press might specific the location differently to other newspapers (i.e. to the district or prefecture, while the latter might refer Xinjiang more generally). This has been the case where the attack did not occur in the capital city (i.e. Urumqi in Xinjiang, Kunming in Yunnan). For the cases 2 and 8 (see table 3-3), I have found prefecture or district names being used in some reports as well.

The result of this process is a search string for each case that includes a combination of the variables location, data and event label. A very small number of articles were manually removed from the dataset because there was no relevance to the topic at all (i.e. description

of the weather in the province on that day without any relation to the event). This was a necessity due to the general search word criteria, yet only those articles that included no relation to the conflict in Xinjiang were removed from the analysis (less than 1%). The search strings for each case were as presented in Table 3-3. Case 1 serves as example for translation, the search string in English is: '(Xinjiang and (date or label)) or (Urumqi and (date or label))'. So, news reports are available that either include the combination of Xinjiang and date/label or Urumqi and date/label in the headline or news body of the article.

**Table 3-3. Search string for data collection, sorted by case**

Case	Date	Search string
1	Urumqi 2009	05/07/2009 (新疆 and (7 月 5 日 or '7·5')) or (乌鲁木齐 and (7 月 5 日 or '7·5'))
2	Lukqun 2013	26/06/2013 (新疆 and (6 月 26 日 or '6·26')) or (鲁克沁 and (6 月 26 日 OR '6·26')) or (鄯善 and (6 月 26 日 or '6·26')) or (吐鲁番 AND (6 月 26 日 or '6·26'))
3	Beijing 2013	28/10/2013 (北京 and (10 月 28 日 or '10·28')) or (天安门 and (10 月 28 日 or '10·28'))
4	Kunming 2014	01/03/2014 (云南 and (3 月 1 日 or '3·1')) or (昆明 and (3 月 1 日 or '3·1'))
5	Urumqi 2014	30/04/2014 (新疆 and (4 月 30 日 or '4·30')) or (乌鲁木齐 and (4 月 30 日 or '4·30'))
6	Urumqi 2014	22/05/2014 (新疆 and (5 月 22 日 or '5·22')) or (乌鲁木齐 and (5 月 22 日 or '5·22'))
7	Shache 2014	28/07/2014 (新疆 and (7 月 28 日 or '7·28')) or (莎车 and (7 月 28 日 or '7·28'))
8	Baicheng 2015	18/09/2015 (新疆 and (9 月 18 日 or '9·18')) or (阿克苏 and (9 月 18 日 or '9·18')) or (拜城 and (9 月 18 日 or '9·18')) or (苏干 and (9 月 18 日 or '9·18'))

### Research validity

Given that the primary purpose of all types of research is to reach valid conclusions, most books on social science research methodology cover validity as an important criterion for the research project's quality. Validity refers to what the research measures and how well it does so. The two distinct types of validity are internal validity and external validity. Internal validity is the ability of a research design to rule out or make implausible alternative explanations of the findings, thus leaving confidence in the prescribed findings. External validity is concerned with the generalisability of the results of a research study (for further details, see Bryman 2004; King et al. 1994; Marczyk et al. 2005).

High internal validity is challenging with the exploration of news frames as main part of the research project, yet my use of triangulating qualitative and quantitative methods led to arguments with high levels of certainty. Triangulation is the use of a diverse set of methods and sources of evidence to investigate research problems through multiple forms of exposure.

Regarding the news framing analysis in this project, the news data came from two academically well-acknowledged databases for Chinese newspaper content. I was able to consider a larger range of newspaper due to access to these two databases, therefore reducing selection bias which is a potential risk when access is limited to a single database.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the analysis included twelve newspapers with various areas of circulation, therefore enabling the best possible representation of the universe of newspapers given the scope of the project. The same argument can be made on the multi-case study. Moreover, the exploration of news frames entailed various methods, that is the inductive open coding process of 20 per cent of the data population (which was empirically evidenced with indicator questions in the appendix), with high intercoder reliability, and the exploratory quantitative text analysis. The congruent observations from the qualitative analysis, quantitative analysis and the second coder provide a high level of internal validity and strong confidence in the findings presented in this dissertation.

Several choices in the research design were made to achieve high external validity, mainly the multi-case study design, the large number of newspapers, and the inductive approach in exploring news frames instead of limiting the research to frames found in Western news content. Both the framing observations from the sample analysis and the quantitative text analysis of the full dataset clearly point towards the existence of two main frames that define the terrorism news construction (for further detail, see Figure 5.1 and Chapter 5). The strong confidence in this observation resulting from the triangulation of methods, and the comparative perspective by analysing various newspapers and cases suggest a high level of external validity. Nonetheless, of course, the framing observations need further testing with a larger dataset. In this regard, the role of this research was to first explore news frames so that follow-up studies can take a more deductive approach in testing frame prevalence across a larger dataset.

### **The framing analysis process**

The framing analysis comprised of a combination of inductive qualitative content analysis and quantitative text analysis. The initial exploratory analysis for frames began with the open coding of 20 per cent (n=458) of the collected news articles in NVivo. This process took

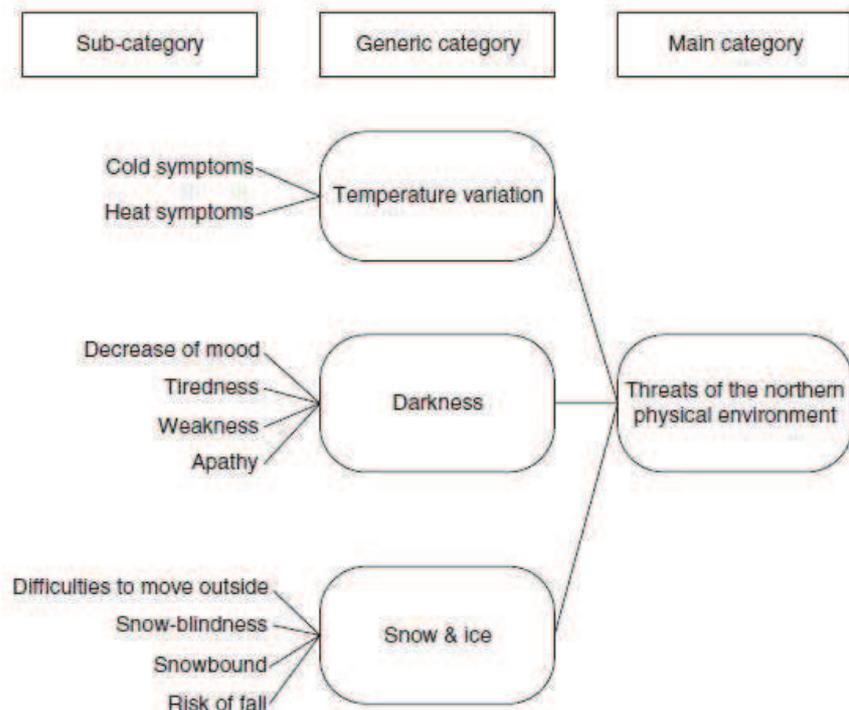
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<sup>15</sup> Some readers might have concerns on any Chinese newspaper database providing merely censored news content. I contend that this possibility is part of this dissertation's argument: the news product communicated to the public has overcome various layers of party-state monitoring and amendments, therefore allowing conclusions on what the party-state wants the public to know about the terrorist events. As such, the news construction is a product of China's censored media environment.

place with a representative sample, created by using a random number generator for assigning the articles from the study population randomly (King et al. 1994).

The open coding process relied on close reading of the data, aiming to classify news content as belonging to particular coding categories and thus identifying prevalent frames. In the first step, the material was read through and headings written down to describe aspects of the content. These headings were collected and grouped into more abstract categories. This process continued until the prevalence of frames became visible. Therefore, I understand a frame as a coding category that establishes, based on combining sub-categories, a defining feature of the terrorism news construction. This process is illustrated in Figure 3-3 below (for more information on the open coding process, see Elo and Kyngäs 2007; Krippendorff 2012; Saldana 2016).

**Figure 3-3. Example of the open coding process**



**Source: Elo and Kyngäs 2007: 111.**

Since this was the first comprehensive analysis of Chinese terrorism coverage, an inductive approach was necessary to minimise preconceptions from the Western-focused terrorism media scholarship and to be open to new frames that appear due to China's different media environment (see Chapter 2). As explained in the literature review on framing theory As explained in the beginning of the literature where I looked at framing theory, the framing analysis process I describe a more flexible definition of frame in comparison to Entman's definition to avoid limiting the exploration of Chinese news content with his observations

from Western pluralist media environments. As Chapter 5 will show in more detail, I discovered frames on moral evaluation, problem definition, cause and treatment as mentioned in Entman's definition of frames, but also discovered additional frames that would not be found unless taking an open coding approach. While I argue that this is of merit for this first systematic analysis of Chinese terrorism news coverage, the limitations of the subjective nature of the open coding process is further discussed in the conclusion (for additional discussion on this and qualitative content analysis, see Blair 2015, Braun and Clarke 2019, Hsie and Shannon 2005, Schreier 2013). Many studies have demonstrated that the strength of the open coding lies in the exploration of and immersion in the data (Corbin and Strauss 2015; Saldana 2016). While there is simply a need to explore what is yet barely studied, I also gained deep insight into the news content which in turn enriches the discussion in the following chapters through various examples and observations.

However, this manual coding process is time-consuming because of the interpretation and classification tasks it involves by the researcher. Therefore, the analysis was limited to a sample size of 20% of the study population (2291 articles). Also, since the open coding process relied on subjective judgements, a second coder analysed 100 randomly selected articles (from the sample) to ensure the validity of the framing observations. The second coder was a Chinese student at the University of Glasgow, and I trained the student in the open coding analysis by drawing on the terrorism news content under analysis. This allowed an understanding of frames as main coding categories that are made up of sub-categories and help the second coder to find examples for the frames under analysis. The second coder was involved in testing the coding process twice, with 50 articles each time, after the first stage of formulating main coding categories and after the second stage of improving these codes. The first time, the primary and secondary coder reached identical framing observations at an average of 75% per article, ranging between 63% and 92%. A discussion with the second coder revealed that the initially lower similarities in the 60s and low 70s was mainly due to misunderstandings of what later in this thesis is classified as counter-terrorism frames (Figure 5-1). Where the counter-terrorism frames involved moral evaluations of the terrorist act or the state response to it (i.e. demonization frame, aptness frame), the second coder would not classify descriptions of the terrorist's brutality as fitting the demonization frame and would not classify blood donations as fitting the aptness frame. The second time, the student seemed to have a clearer sense of the meaning of each frame and several examples for each frame led to strong agreement in the framing observations. On average,

there was 84% agreement between the two coders, ranging across the sample between 78% and 100%. This left strong confidence in the inter-coder reliability of the findings.

Based on the open coding observation, I designed 16 indicator questions to further analyse each newspaper article in the sample. The purpose of these indicator questions was to garner empirical evidence for the initial exploratory analysis. Answers to these indicator questions provided an understanding of the prevalence of particular frames (for Chapter 5) and served to identify changes in frame prevalence over time (for Chapter 6). The second coder agreed with this list of indicator questions to reflect the open coding findings on prevalent frames. Chapter 5 draws on these findings, together with the findings from the open coding process.

I then quantitatively analysed all 2291 articles in R. I did this for two reasons. First, the quantitative analysis served as measure for backward validation. Since the qualitative and quantitative analyses ran separately from each other, an overlap in the observations leaves strong confidence in the findings on frame prevalence. Second, the quantitative and qualitative analyses complemented each other. The qualitative analysis enabled an understanding of the news content yet was constrained to a small sample size, whereas the quantitative analysis explored frames for the full body of the study population but requires understanding based on qualitative readings in order to interpret the findings. The quantitative analysis output, such as the word network analysis (see Chapter 5), demonstrate that the findings aligned.

Several steps of pre-processing the news data were necessary for the quantitative text analysis. First, all documents were converted into “.txt” files to ensure that the corpus was machine-readable for the text analysis in R. For this purpose, I used the suite of tools available in the Chinese Natural Language processing toolkit of the Stanford Natural Language Group (2018). This approach was also employed by Roberts et al. (2013) when analysing Chinese newspaper content by the use of unsupervised text analysis. Chinese word segmentation and the removal of a standard set of Chinese stop words was processed before analysis. Chinese word segmentation is discussed by a growing number of China quantitative researchers as a crucial step towards Chinese language processing tasks, due to the unique characteristics of Chinese language structure. Chinese words are generally composed of multiple characters without any delimiter appearing between words. Chinese has no spaces between words and therefore text analysis techniques that rely on the word as

the unit of analysis cannot naturally parse the word into individual units (Chen and Xu 2015; Shu et al. 2017; Zeng et al. 2008; Zhao et al. 2013).

Afterwards, the text analysis comprised of: frequency analysis to identify the most common words in the dataset; word network analysis that visualises the associations between words; and structural topic modelling to identify themes and similarity analysis for comparison of news content over time. The structural topic model developed by Roberts et al. (2013) is an unsupervised text analysis approach that does not require prior analysis of the data, assumes a mixture of topics in each document and estimates these topics based on word frequencies and correlations in the corpus. It was built on well-established topic models, such as the latent dirichlet allocation, and is to the best of my knowledge the only unsupervised model that has yet been applied to Chinese news content (Roberts and Stewart 2014). Moreover, it has received recognition as useful tool for the exploration of themes in text in other fields (i.e. Bauer et al 2016; Grimmer and Stewart 2013; Munksgaard and Demant 2016; Roberts et al. 2016; Truex 2016). Altogether, the quantitative text analysis methods provide insight into prevalent frames by use of frequent terms and their relationship to each other.

### **Research strategies by chapter**

Following this methodology chapter are three analysis chapters, each oriented towards answering one research question and using different research strategies. These analysis chapters also have their own research design sections to describe the concrete approach for the analysis and specify the variables and hypotheses relevant for the discussion. Below is a brief overview of the research strategies.

Chapter Four presents findings on the extent to which ‘traditional’ determinants of terrorism news coverage hold true in China. The analysis involved a deductive approach in which the literature on terrorism coverage was reviewed to identify the determinants of terrorism coverage. This was then tested by fitting negative binomial regression models to the dataset, with the number of news reports for each case and newspaper as the response variable (also called dependent variable). The analysis comprised of two parts. In the first part, the regression analysis was used for all 65 terrorist attacks listed for China in the Global Terrorism Database (START 2018) from 2009 to 2015. While the inclusion of all listed terrorist attacks enabled the discovery of findings on the explanatory power of the determinants with the highest possible level of external validity, the second analysis focused on the eight cases of the same time period, which were further investigated as part of the

news framing analysis. Contrasting the observations from both datasets provided further insight into the similarities and differences in the determinants of terrorism coverage.

Chapter Five elaborates on the prevalent frames of the Chinese news construction of terrorism. These findings derived from a combination of inductive qualitative and quantitative methods. The research process began with an open coding analysis of a representative sample that comprised of 20 per cent of the collected newspaper article population (2291 articles), with articles assigned to the sample by use of a random number generation. The open coding process of the sample took place in NVivo, aiming to gain first understanding of how the news report on terrorism and to identify the frames for analysis. To provide empirical support for framing observations, 14 indicator questions were developed which were answered with each news report as unit of analysis. A second coder coded 100 randomly selected articles from the sample using the developed codebook on the news frames, with high inter-coder reliability confirming the coding observations. The second coder further agreed with the indicator question representing well the most prevalent frames in the dataset. This exploratory process was followed by various text mining methods (frequency analysis, word network analysis, topic modelling) as another method to validate the coding observations. These text mining measures were conducted in R. The text mining approach drew on the full population of news reports collected and identified prevalent key words and the strength of their relationship in the news text independently of the previous qualitative process. Thus, both methods mutually validate and contextualise each other in their findings.

Chapter Six is a continuation of the methods used in Chapter Five. The aforementioned indicator questions were here divided by case (each terrorist attack) in order to identify changes in the news framing over time. I used structural topic modelling and similarity tests which, together with the insights from the open coding process, further aided in the pursuit of identifying prevalent changes over the time period 2009 to 2015.

## Chapter 4: The Determinants of Chinese Terrorism Coverage

The motivating question for this chapter was why some terrorist attacks in China receive more news coverage than others. This led to posing the research question of the extent to which traditionally strong determinants of (US-centred) terrorism coverage can explain the extent of terrorism coverage in China. This chapter will conclude on this question that the existing literature with its US focus is only moderately able to explain Chinese terrorism coverage. This is important because the quantity of coverage can be an important influence on the public perception of terrorism (see Kearns et al. 2019 for further details).

The chapter starts with a visual overview of the number of newspaper articles identified across the eight cases listed in the previous chapter, which illustrates that news coverage varies strongly by case and therefore raises the question of its determinants. The subsequent research design section then draws on the extant literature to explain the determinants under study and formulate the hypotheses.

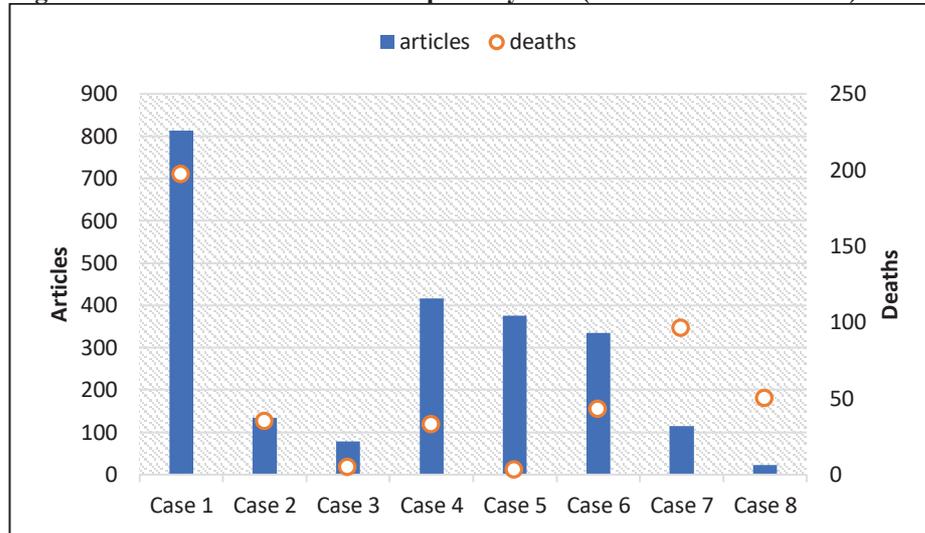
The analysis section that then follows, is comprised of three parts. The first part draws on all 65 terrorist attacks listed by the Global Terrorism Database for the time period 2009 – 2015 to answer the research question with the highest level of external validity possible. The second part narrows the research focus to the eight cases that received further scrutiny as part of the news framing component of my thesis project, both to understand what determined their coverage specifically while also contrasting it to the population of terrorist attacks analysed in the first part. The final part draws on leaked censorship instructions that provide case-relevant information on the media environment in which the terrorism coverage took place. Together, these findings demonstrate that US determinants have only moderate explanatory power for the extent of Chinese terrorism coverage. The Chapter will further conclude that the combined research observations empirically confirm the tight grip of the party-state over the media coverage of the domestic terrorism as well as suggest the party-state constructing the terrorist threat.

### **The research context: The news coverage data and prevalent trends**

I collected 2,291 articles from 12 Chinese newspapers, covering 8 ‘terrorist’ attacks that occurred in the period 2009-2015. Figure 4-1 illustrates the amount of news coverage each case received in the Chinese press, while also contrasting it to the number of deaths displayed

on the secondary vertical axis since scholars discuss casualties as a traditionally strong determinant of news attention (Harcup and O'Neill 2017).

**Figure 4-1: Total number of news reports by case (with number of deaths)**

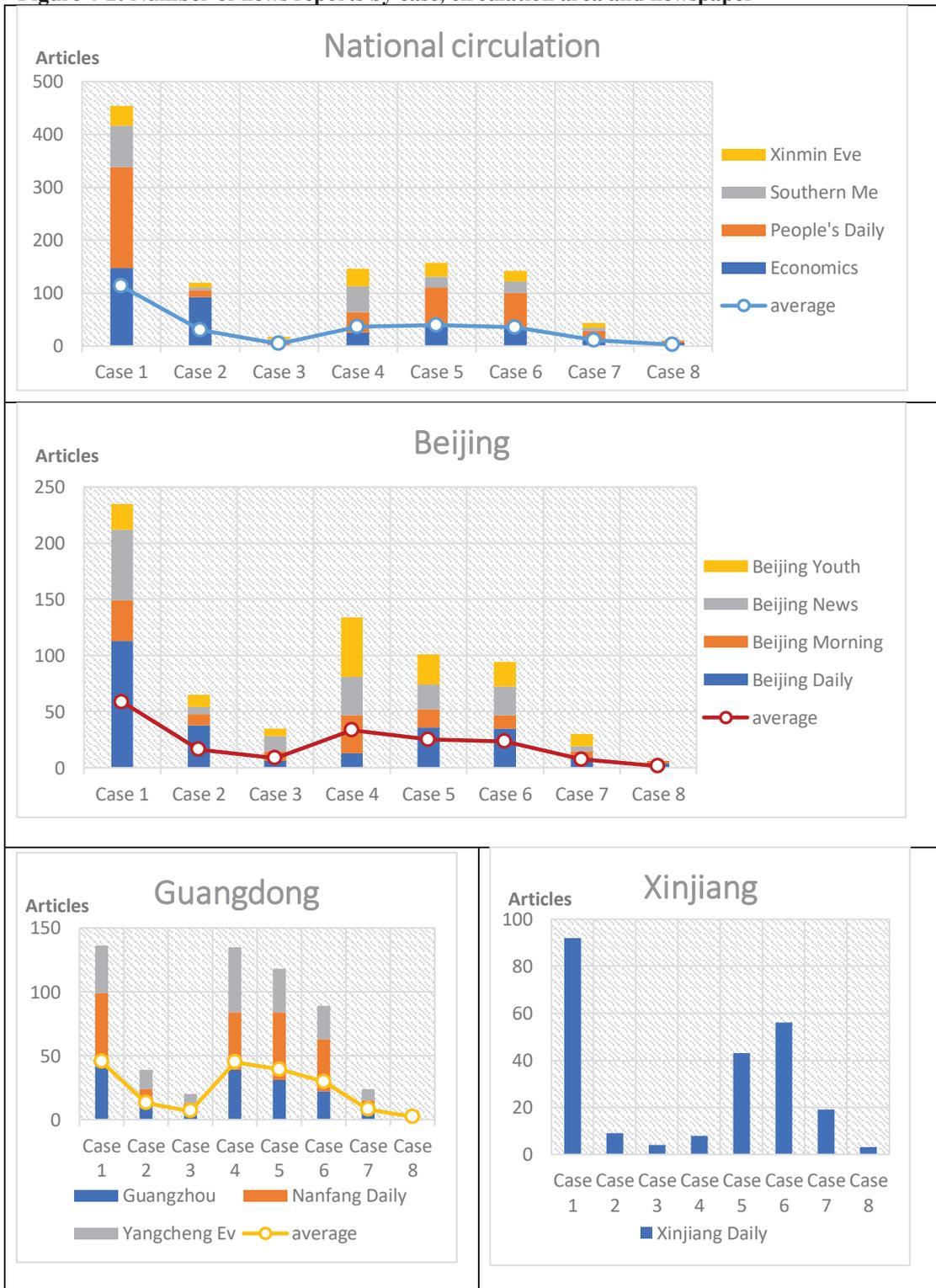


Source: START (2018) on deaths; CNKI-CND (2019) and Wisearch (2019) on news reports.

The Figure shows strongly varying numbers of both news reports and deaths across cases, while also showing an inconclusive relationship between these two factors. The first three cases seem to have a positive relationship between number of articles and deaths, with the first case having high numbers of deaths and reports, while cases two and three have small numbers in both these categories. The other cases do not share this pattern. Cases 4, 5 and 6 had a similar number of deaths as the two previous terrorist attacks yet the former received three to four times the amount of news coverage. In the last two cases, the death toll even exceeds the number of news reports, with the eighth case receiving almost no coverage. The collected data might already suggest that the number of deaths is not a good determinant for the news media attention the eight terrorist attacks received. It further reveals strong variation of attention across cases, therefore raising the question of what determines the extent of terrorism coverage.

Further insight can be gained from Figure 4-2, where the collected data is separated by the newspaper and its main area of circulation. As explained in the previous Chapter, the area of newspaper circulation was divided into National, Beijing, Guangdong, Xinjiang, with a total number of 12 newspapers. The additional average line in each diagram shall facilitate easier comparison of the news coverage between areas of circulation, which would otherwise be difficult with the stacked bars for each newspaper. Thus, Figure 2 allows a comparison of trends in news coverage across cases, areas of circulation and newspapers.

**Figure 4-2: Number of news reports by case, circulation area and newspaper**



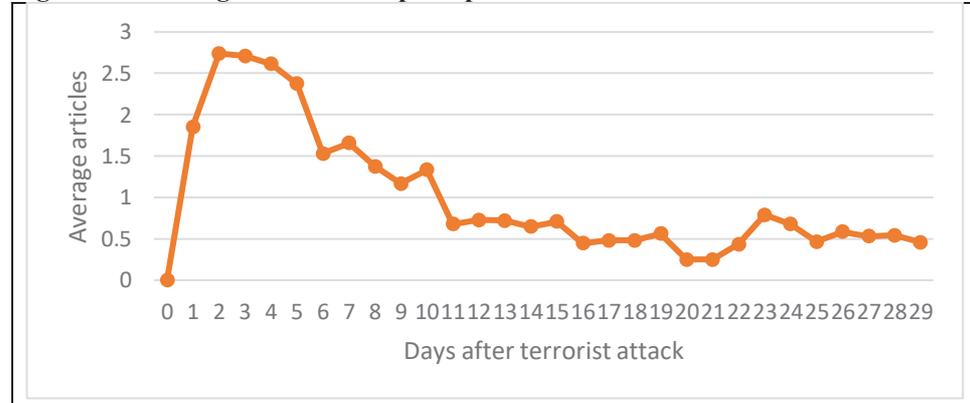
Source: CNKI-CND (2019) and Wisearch (2019) on news reports.

In all four areas of circulation, the average line shows a similar pattern across cases. That is, the average number of news reports decreased from case 1 to 3, increased slightly and remained relatively stable in the following three cases, before then decreasing further on the last two attacks. The similar trend in the average number of news reports by case might

suggest that the location of the terrorist attacks and newspaper is not a strong predictor of the extent of terrorism coverage each event received. One exception to this observation occurred in Xinjiang with case 4 (terrorist attack in Yunnan, outside of Xinjiang), when the Xinjiang Daily covered the event with less than 10 newspaper articles and therefore issued a quarter of what newspapers in the other areas devoted to the subject.

Another observation from the Figure is the higher amount of coverage by newspapers that circulate on the national level, while official party-state press (*People's Daily*, *Beijing Daily*, *Guangzhou Daily*, *Nanfang Daily*, *Xinjiang Daily*) seem to publish a slightly higher number of articles on each terrorist attack in comparison to local papers. Further insight from the data can be gained by visualising the extent of news coverage over the period of four weeks after each terrorist attack. Figure 3 presents the average number of newspaper articles published on each day of the four weeks following each incident. It is the average behaviour of the media for all eight cases taken together, this should be interpreted with caution in consideration of the strongly deviating behaviour of the Xinjiang press and the differences across cases shown in the previous graph.

**Figure 4-3: Average number of reports published over 4 weeks after terrorist attacks**



Source: CNKI-CND (2019) and Wisearch (2019) on news reports.

The above trend in news coverage aligns with the phases of public opinion trends Tsai (2016) described for China. Accordingly, there are periods of incubation, development, upsurge and fall-back. During the incubation period (the day of the event and the following day), social media posts remain minor due to the party-state immediately employing information control to prevent escalation of public communication on the issue. After the first day, in the development period, posts were surging up in number and continued to reach their peak during the upsurge period in the following days. A slow fall-back period would continue. In the case of the news data presented above, news coverage is already surging up strongly on

the following day of the event, therefore skipping Tsai's incubation period. Indeed, studies on the Urumqi 2009 event reviewed in Chapter 2 suggested strong party-state interest in managing media reporting on the event. The above data might suggest that the party-state was immediately able to coordinate news coverage so that reporting began quickly the following day of the event. Media reporting peaked in daily average on the second day already (upsurge period) and remained stable for a few days. The fall-back period on around the 5<sup>th</sup> day after the event yet the incident continued to receive (minor) media attention for the following weeks. Reading the news data as part of the open coding process (see Chapter 5) revealed that the news reports in the third and fourth week usually just refer in a single sentence to the incident when highlighting its severity.

In conclusion, three main observations can be taken away from the data presentation. First, the number of deaths seems to be no strong determinant of media attention for the eight cases. Second, there seem to be no vast differences in the amount of coverage that party and commercial press have devoted to the incidents. Third, news media attention seems to follow the usual media behaviour of a 'media hype' shortly after the event and slowly falls back. Overall, the data demonstrates variation in media attention across cases, illustrating the need for a thorough research into what determines the amount of news coverage.

### **Research design**

Media coverage is best analysed quantitatively using count models, among which recent studies have found negative binomial regression models to be most suitable to account for overdispersion of the count response variable (Hilbe 2011/2014, Stroup 2012).<sup>16</sup> The next section begins with analysis of the data for the response variable (also called dependent variable) to explain the reason for using the negative binomial regression model to fit the data. Further tests on the data structure made the use of a multi-level design necessary, in which I tested the relationship between the response and predictor variables by accounting for variation of the number of news articles across each of the eight cases and each of the twelve newspapers within these cases.

The selection of the predictor variables under study derived from the scholarship on terrorism coverage which receives review on the following pages. The data on the predictor

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<sup>16</sup> This is because the news data violates the Poisson assumption that the variance is equal to the expected value. Because the variance far exceeds the expected number of occurrences, the data exhibit considerable overdispersion. For further details see the citations in the text.

variables came from the global terrorism database (START 2019), a database collected and maintained under the auspices of the START Centre (Centre for the study of terrorism and responses to terrorism) at the University of Maryland. Global terrorism database (GTD) captures a variety of information on terrorist attacks, including – but not limited to – date, geographical location, perpetrators, targets, weapons and methods used, number of victims killed and wounded, and an estimate of material damage (for more on GTD, see LaFree et al. 2015). It has already gained academic recognition in other studies on terrorism coverage as useful source for terrorist event characteristics (i.e. Behlendorf et al. 2016; Berkebile 2016; Jetter 2014/2017).

The analysis of the correlation between response and predictor variables for this Chapter comprised of two parts. First, the correlation was conducted for all 65 terrorist attacks listed in the Global Terrorism Database and other studies on the course of China's terrorism (Roberts 2018, Tanner and Bellaqua 2016) for the time period 2009 to 2015. Conducting the analysis with all available attacks for the time period enables conclusions on the determinants of Chinese terrorism coverage with the highest level of external validity possible. Second, I conducted another regression analysis with the eight terrorist attacks, listed in Chapter 3, which I analysed in more depth in the framing analysis. While the focus of this PhD project rested with an understanding of the eight cases (see Chapter 3 for the reasons), comparison on the findings between these two parts of the analysis provided more insight in in which aspects these attacks might differ.

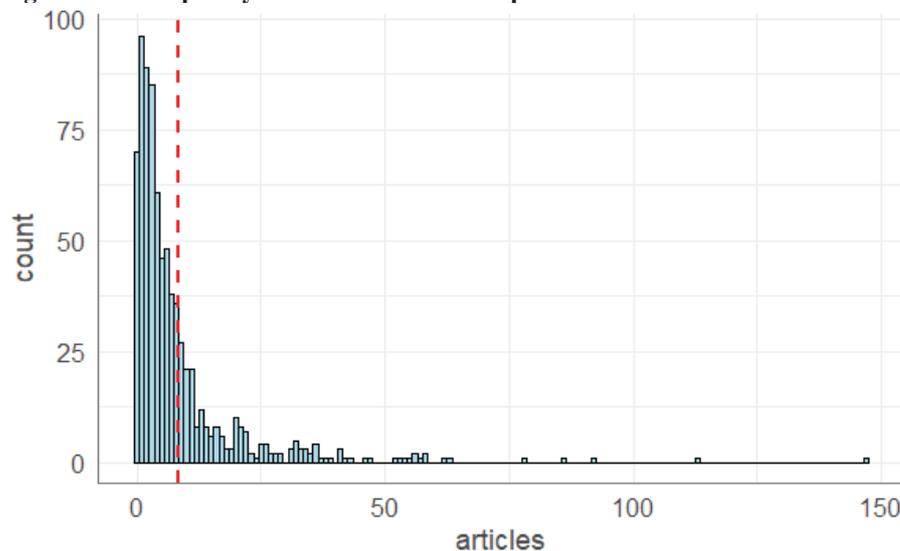
Regarding the eight cases of 'terrorism' under study in this dissertation, insight into the censored environment was available with leaked censorship instruction provided by the China Digital Times (2019) on most of the cases under study, which confirm party-state efforts to control or censor aspects of the events (for their detailed analysis in combination with the following regression analysis findings, see Chapter 4). The extant literature on authoritarian resilience (discussed in Chapter 2) further suggests that violent public unrest is a politically sensitive issue that is likely to attract strong news coordination efforts by party-state organs. Moreover, beginning in 2014, the Xi administration issued a string of policies to tighten up the regulation of the entertainment, media, and culture industries and urge them to follow the party line and avoid 'becoming the slave of the market and bearing the stench of money' (Hobbs and Roberts 2018). The party-state's attempt to 'manage' the media reporting of 'terrorist' events has already been noted (in the literature review in Chapter 2) for the Urumqi riot in 2009. While this observation raises questions about how the Chinese

news media portray the terrorism in a controlled media environment, scholarly observations on media commercialisation in China also demand framing analysis to examine the diversity of framing across newspapers.

***The response variable: The count of newspaper articles***

The response variable (variable name: ‘articles’) was a raw count of Chinese newspaper articles that reported the eight terrorist attacks in 2009 – 2015. This number of news reports derived from the data collection using the CNKI-CND (2019) and Wisearch (2019) newspaper databases, as outlined in the previous Chapter. To confirm whether the data ought to be modelled using a poisson or negative binomial model, I began the analysis by testing the amount of overdispersion in the data set. The fundamental characteristic of a poisson distribution is equidispersion, meaning that the mean is equal to the variance of the distribution. As a benchmark, without taking any predictors into account, a simple variation calculation of the response variable already suggested substantial overdispersion, with the variance being nearly 21 times the mean (see Appendix 1 for the test results). Below histogram displays the overdispersion in the long right tail of observations.

**Figure 4-4: Frequency distribution of the response variable ‘articles’**

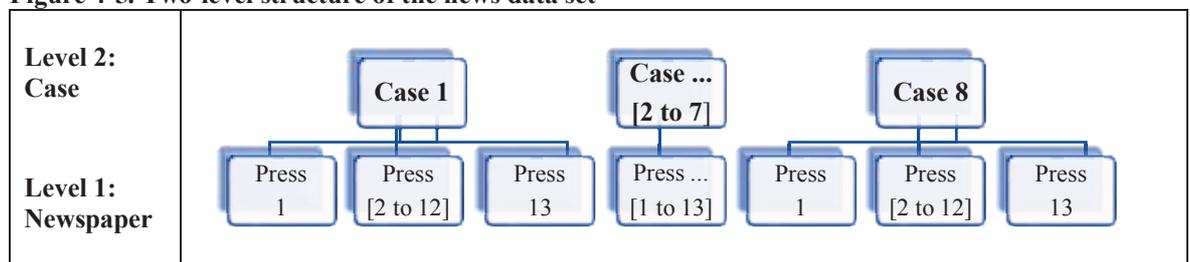


While the histogram confirms the overdispersion issue, it also shows that the data set did not contain a large number of zeros. Therefore, zero inflation was not a primary concern and the utilisation of a zero-inflated model was not necessary. One additional standard approach to test the better fit of the poisson over negative binomial regression model is the Likelihood Ratio Test (LR test). The test confirmed that the negative binomial regression model a better fit for the count data, with a p-value less than 0.01 (see Appendix 1 for the test results).

Applying a Poisson model, which assumes the variance is equal to the mean, would lead to type I errors. All these diagnostic tests confirmed the negative binomial estimation being a better fit to the data set than the poisson model.

The negative binomial regression is a generalisation of the poisson model that accounts for over dispersed count observations (Hilbe 2014/2017). This model is relatively free from the overdispersion problem, as it adds a dispersion parameter in the relational equation of the mean and the variance. It has been confirmed in recent analyses of news coverage as being highly appropriate for count variables (i.e. Friendly 2017; Hilbe 2017), as was the case for this research. The next part of the diagnostic tests involved the decision on whether to use of a single-level or multi-level negative binomial regression model. Instead of fitting a regression for each case separately, I ran multi-level model tests for the correlation between response and predictor variables while controlling for the variation between each case and each newspaper within each of these cases (also called random effect). The units are newspapers and cases which form two levels (see Figure 4-5). The lower units form the newspapers and the higher units form the cases in the analysis.

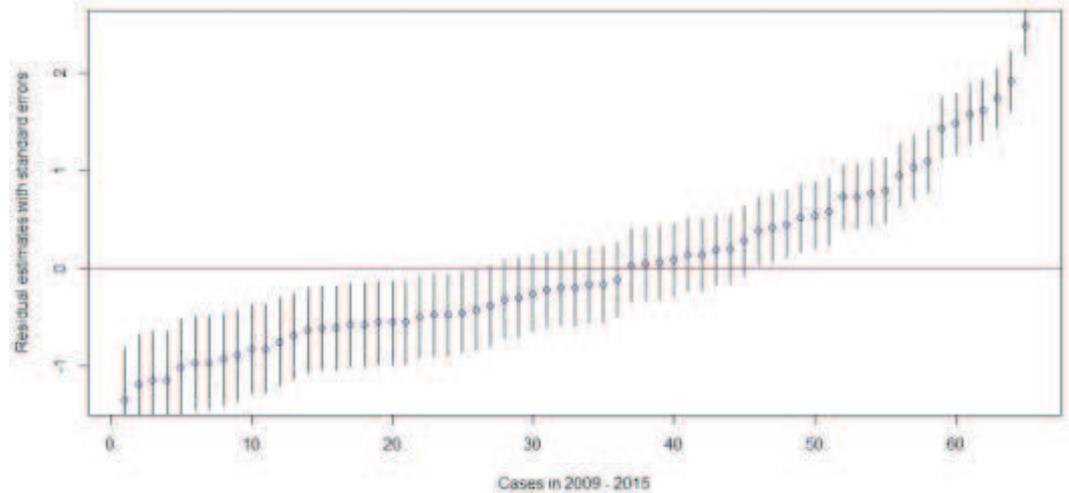
**Figure 4-5. Two-level structure of the news data set**



**Note: For further sources on multi-level data structures, see Gelman and Hill 2006.**

Following Hajduk's (2017) suggestion, another likelihood ratio test was run that compared the single-level and multi-level model in order to conclude on the importance of accounting for the variation in the count observation across newspapers and cases by using a two-level model. The output provides conclusive evidence of case effects on article, with a p-value again being close to zero. Below, Figure 4-6 further displays this by plotting the case-level residuals and their associated standard errors for all 65 cases in the data set.

**Figure 4-6. Ranked case residual estimates and standard errors**



**Note: Random effect residuals with standard errors to examine the differences between the cases, confirming the importance of accounting for the case effect in the multilevel model.**

The caterpillar presents the estimated level 2 residuals which is accompanied by 95% confidence intervals to demonstrate the uncertainty of their estimation due to sampling variability. The horizontal line to  $y=0$  corresponds to the average case. There are 65 residuals, one for each case. The residuals represent case departures from the overall mean, so a case in which the confidence interval does not overlap with the line at  $y=0$  (representing the mean article value across all cases) differs significantly from the average at a 5% level. The width of the confidence interval associated with a particular case depends on the standard error of that case's residual estimate, here, the intervals are narrow and of similar width. Figure 4-6 shows that approximately a quarter of the intervals do not overlap with the zero line, which means that choosing a case at random has a probability of roughly 25% that it will have a residual judged significantly different from the mean. This confirms a two-level negative binomial regression model is necessary to account for the variation of predictor effects across the cases. With the model selected and the response variable tested, the next step is the literature review on the predictors under study.

***The predictor variables: The 'traditional' determinants of terrorism news coverage***

Studies on what determines the extent of terrorism coverage is often situated in the larger debate on 'newsworthiness', with strong research focus on why terrorism receives more media attention than other public issues and why some terrorist attacks receive substantially more attention than others. Galtung and Ruge (1965) coined with their work the term newsworthiness by putting forward a list of twelve factors which they argued determine how

much attention a media outlet devotes to a news story.<sup>17</sup> Galtung and Ruge (1965) distilled these factors, or news values as they called them, from Norwegian newspaper coverage of crises in the 1960s in Congo, Cuba and Cyprus, though their greatest contribution to media studies seems to be the observation itself that the news media attention and content depends on certain criteria.

Newsworthiness further became a common term in news journalism. For instance, Boyd (1994) explained that news journalism follows a broadly agreed set of values, which editors and journalists are trained in through practice to determine ‘what sells’. Since Galtung and Ruge’s (1965) contribution, manifold empirical studies, such as Shoemaker and Cohen’s (2006) news analysis in ten countries, supported the argument that certain events are similarly newsworthy around the world. Shoemaker and Cohen found this shared notion of newsworthiness in the popularity of sports, international or national politics, cultural events, human interest, and other topics. While there certainly has been no end to the list of news values over the last 50 years, some of the most agreed news criteria for news stories involve the geographic proximity of the events, topicality, relevance, human interest, entertainment and conflict (for further details on news values, see Harcup and O’Neill 2001; Semetko and Valkenburg 2000; Yan and Kim 2015; Zillich et al. 2012).

Research on news values has largely followed two theoretical streams: one is event-oriented and the other focuses on contextual factors. Geographic proximity, for instance, has long been held as a determinant of news media attention under the assumption that neighbouring events are more salient than news stories of distant locales. Violence is one of the most prominent topics in the news media, as Kearns et al. (2019) states, of which the severity of an event tends to statistically account for media attention. Context-oriented research focuses on underlying news factors, investigating political, economic, and demographic traits that influence media coverage. Common context-oriented factors evaluated as determinants include press freedom (Gottlieb 2010) and human rights issues (Maier 2019). McCombs (2005) made clear why understanding the drivers of media attention is so important: while media coverage does not necessarily determine how people feel about an issue, it still sets the tone for which issues they discuss and how they discuss them. In re-visiting Galtung and Ruge’s list of news value, Harcup and O’Neill’s (2001) own study has become one of the

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<sup>17</sup> These news criteria include frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite persons, reference to people, reference to something negative.

most cited articles of the journal *Journalism Studies*. In another revision of theirs in 2017, they developed a list of 15 news values for any type of news story, showing similarities with Galtung and Ruge's list while also accounting for changes since then (see Table 4-2).<sup>18</sup>

**Table 4-2: Contemporary news values according to Harcup and O'Neill**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Exclusivity</i>: Stories generated by, or available first to, the news organisation as a result of interviews, letters, investigations, surveys, polls, and so on.</li> <li>• <i>Bad news</i>: Stories with particularly negative overtones such as death, injury, defeat and loss (of a job, for example).</li> <li>• <i>Conflict</i>: Stories concerning conflict such as controversies, arguments, splits, strikes, fights, insurrections and warfare.</li> <li>• <i>Surprise</i>: Stories that have an element of surprise, contrast and/or the unusual about them.</li> <li>• <i>Audio-visuals</i>: Stories that have arresting photographs, video, audio and/or which can be illustrated with infographics.</li> <li>• <i>Shareability</i>: Stories that are thought likely to generate sharing and comments via Facebook, Twitter and other forms of social media.</li> <li>• <i>Entertainment</i>: Soft stories concerning sex, showbusiness, sport, lighter human interest, animals, or offering opportunities for humorous treatment, witty headlines or lists.</li> <li>• <i>Drama</i>: Stories concerning an unfolding drama such as escapes, accidents, searches, sieges, rescues, battles or court cases.</li> <li>• <i>Follow-up</i>: Stories about subjects already in the news.</li> <li>• <i>The power elite</i>: Stories concerning powerful individuals, organisations, institutions or corporations.</li> <li>• <i>Relevance</i>: Stories about groups or nations perceived to be influential with, or culturally or historically familiar to, the audience.</li> <li>• <i>Magnitude</i>: Stories perceived as sufficiently significant in the large numbers of people involved or in potential impact or involving a degree of extreme behaviour or extreme occurrence.</li> <li>• <i>Celebrity</i>: Stories concerning people who are already famous.</li> <li>• <i>Good news</i>: Stories with particularly positive overtones such as recoveries, breakthroughs, cures, wins and celebrations.</li> <li>• <i>News organisation's agenda</i>: Stories that set or fit the news organisation's own agenda, whether ideological, commercial or as part of a specific campaign.</li> </ul>
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**Source: Harcup and O'Neill (2017): p. 1482**

Many of the above news values were found to be strong determinants of terrorism coverage in the US context or other democracies. For instance, violence is a key theme in news coverage of terrorism and covers in the above list the factors bad news, conflict, surprise, drama, relevance, and magnitude, if not even more.

Research has found that the most common determinant of terrorism coverage associated with violence is severity, measured by the number of deaths or injured (Shoemaker and Cohen 2006; Kearns et al. 2019). Another related determinant is the type of tactic involved in terrorist attacks, as, for example, with explosives or hijacking, attracting more media attention. The second component is information about whom the violence was against, conveyed through either the type of target or the proximity of the incident. The third component accounts for the nature of the study object: the terrorist organisation ETIM has

<sup>18</sup> Caple and Bednarek (2013) published a comprehensive overview of the news value research, including a list of news values with the respective studies that stretches over twelve pages.

since 2001 become key scapegoat in the party-state's construction of the terrorist threat. Thus, another key theme in Chinese terrorism coverage might be whether there is an increase in press coverage when the party-state official claims ETIM/ is responsible for a terrorist attack. These five categories of news values were tested as determinants of Chinese terrorism coverage. Table 1 displays the above five categories and all variables included in the data analysis by name. The number of deaths was included in the model as count variable; whereas all other variables were binary coded as 0 and 1 for the absence or existence of an observation with the respective variable.

**Table 4-3: List of variable names in the data analysis**

Category	Variable names
1. Severity	Deaths
	Deaths_30up
	Deaths_50up
2. Location	Location
3. Tactic	Multitactics
	Assault
	Explosive
	Transportation
	Othertactic
4. Target	Multitargets
	Government
	Security
	Business
	Citizens
	Infrastructure
	Othertarget
5. ETIM responsibility	Claimed
6. Newspaper type	Official_press

The following paragraphs provide further detail on each predictor and the related hypotheses.

- **Severity and tactic**

Terrorism media studies suggest that violence observed in terrorist incidents strongly affects the amount of news coverage along two dimensions – severity and tactic. In one of the first extensive studies on the predictors of terrorism coverage, Shoemaker and Cohen's (2006) study of US terrorism coverage between 1998 and 2005 proposed deviance from the 'average' terrorist attack was an important indicator of the extent of news media attention. It sets an event aside as different from others and was operationalised into indicators such as novelty, oddity, unusualness, conflict, controversy and sensationalism (see also Yan and Bissell 2018). Future studies followed this line of thought, though they usually became more concrete in the type of deviance tested. This has often been measured by the seriousness of the event, specifically the number of deaths or injured. Focusing on terrorism in the US

between 1980 and 2001, Chermak and Gruenewald (2006) found that attacks received more news coverage if there were casualties involved. Revisiting their findings for post-9/11 US coverage, Mitnik et al.'s (2018) analysis of the determinants of terrorism coverage in *The Times* confirmed that attacks that involved casualties are more likely to be covered and receive more detailed coverage. Kearns et al. (2019) continued this observation based on newspaper coverage from five national media outlets in the US. The finding on the continuing relevance of casualties is in line with the human negativity bias integrated into journalism routine as violence 'sells' (Albertson and Gadarian 2015; Miller and Albert 2015; Soroka and McAdams 2015).<sup>19</sup> Comparing US and Chinese terrorism coverage determinants, Zhang et al. (2013) drew on 137 international terrorist attacks between 2004 and 2010 by testing statistically the predictive power of casualties in addition to measurements for the significance the terrorist attacks had for the respective country. They concluded that the number of casualties is the strongest predictor of terrorism coverage in both countries. To conclude, the above literature highlights that a high number of casualties, specifically the number of deaths, leads to higher amounts of news coverage. This is intertwined with a second empirical implication: the number of deaths will have a large effect on the amount of news coverage.<sup>20</sup>

*Hypothesis 1: Terrorist attacks with more deaths receive more Chinese news coverage*

Another relevant predictor is the tactic employed by the perpetrators, as also structuring the perceptions of its gravity. For example, Barack Obama's statement following the Boston Marathon Bombing in 2013 is emblematic of this link between type of violence and threat perception: 'any time bombs are used to target innocent civilians, it is an act of terror' (Landler 2013). Huff and Kertzer's (2018) research into public understanding of the term terrorism further shows that violent tactics are more likely to be classified as terrorism than non-violent ones, with those incidents involving bombings being more likely classified as terrorism than other forms of violence. Tactic types were coded based on GTD classifications, including assault, explosion, hijacking and 'other tactics'. Creating an equally large number of tactic type variables was not deemed necessary for this study, given that the literature on China's terrorist attacks highlights the above-mentioned ones as the

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<sup>19</sup> The same observation was made in other types of crises that involved casualties, such as by Yan and Bissell's (2018) analysis of natural disaster coverage, and Silva and Capellan's (2018) research on mass shooting coverage.

<sup>20</sup> The model included the number of deaths as predictor variable rather than casualties. The reason for this is the strong variation in quantity of injured victims depending on the source of information.

most common tactics employed by the terrorists. The predictor category ‘other tactic’ includes any other tactic type but remained small in quantity, while the variable multitactics accounts for a combination of tactics involved in the attacks. Opposite to Chermak and Gruenewald (2006), Mitnik et al. (2018) found that explosives no longer draw much news media attention post 9/11. Armed assaults continue to receive considerable amount of media attention, whereas the use of transportation devices remains a weak predictor of media attention. The empirical implications of this prior research are that the extent of news coverage varies with the different tactics, with armed assaults receiving more news coverage and the use of transportation devices not having much impact on media attention. The expectation on the small effect of explosives derives from Mitnik et al.’s (2018) study, though more research remained necessary since his finding opposes studies that claim explosives highly salient among the public and therefore would attract media attention due to their audience orientation.

*Hypothesis 2: Terrorist attacks that involve armed assaults receive more Chinese news coverage, whereas the use of transportation devices or explosive has smaller effects.*

- **Target and location**

In a study of international terrorism, Zhang et al. (2013) found attacks against politically significant targets, such as the government facilities or employees, to receive more coverage. Kearns et al. (2019) reached the same observation on the prevalence of attacks against the government by looking into US coverage analysis of terrorist attacks between 2006 and 2015, explaining this observation with the political dimension terrorism has (sending a clearer signal about intent). The publicity of government attacks appears to be a post-9/11 phenomenon, given that Chermak and Gruenewald (2006) did not make this observation for pre-9/11. Furthermore, Huff and Kertzer’s (2018) analysis of the public’s interpretation of events as terrorism suggests further prevalence of attacks against civilians, though this yet had to be tested as news determinant. Nonetheless, attacks against civilians align with Harcup and O’Neill’s (2017) list of news value, as being a surprise, has high relevance and involves drama. Following the GTD’s categorisation of targets, though again limiting it to a few predictor variables while accounting for less frequent target types by inclusion in the variable other targets, the following target-level predictors were tested: *multiplerecipients, government, police, business, citizen, infrastructure, othertarget*. To my knowledge, there is no study that has tested attacks on the police, business and infrastructure as determinants for news coverage, yet the previously discussed Xinjiang studies suggest that the party-state

devotes great attention to economic and security stability. Therefore, I would expect that the occurrence of these target types would increase news coverage. The empirical driven expectation is that attacks against the government and civilians have a large, positive, effect on the amount of news coverage.

*Hypothesis 3: Terrorist attacks that involve attacks against the party-state, police, business, citizen, infrastructure, or multiple targets receive more news coverage, with civilian and party-state targets have a larger effect.*

The inclusion of the proximity between the place of the terrorist attack and the place of the news organisation was inspired by the proximity theory in media studies, arguing that relevance and interest for news stories increase with decreasing geographic and social distance (Lieberman et al. 2007; Rosengren 1970). Huff and Kertzer (2018) exemplified this relationship between proximity and event newsworthiness by comparing the public response for the terrorist attacks in Paris and Lebanon that occurred in the fall of 2015. Western publics were criticised for selective empathy – as revealed by their willingness to change their Facebook profile pictures in solidarity with Paris, while mostly ignoring the attacks that had occurred in Lebanon the previous day. Several decades of research have confirmed empirically proximity as an important news value (Chang et al. 1987, Tunez and Guevara 2009), research into the determinants of terrorism coverage reached the same conclusion on proximity. For instance, when it comes to international terrorism, both Jetter (2014) and Sui et al. (2017) demonstrated that terrorism coverage by US media outlets is largely dependent on proximity to and affinity with the United States. Ruigrok and van Atteveldt (2007) noted the same observation for newspapers in the US, UK and the Netherlands.

Meanwhile, other scholars question the simplicity of the relationship between proximity and event newsworthiness, suggesting contextual factors as additional drivers for that relationship. Donnelly (2005), while supporting the proximity theory, argues that a single terrorist event can rarely usurp the proximity effect in the news but requires contextual factors to raise newsworthiness for the media. In their framing analysis of tweets on terrorism news, Kwon et al. (2017) gave the example of what they called social proximity as contextual factor. They showed that reference to outsiders (defined as socially distant others, with tweet examples given on immigrants, refugees and religious groups) led to more abstract news storytelling and reinforced social categorisation through ‘them’ versus ‘us’ portrayal. Wu (2007) adds historical, economic and social ties to the terrorist event as determinants of news

coverage. As it stands, the proximity theory still required testing for Chinese terrorism coverage. To apply proximity theory in the Chinese terrorism coverage model, I created a dummy variable measuring whether a terrorist incident took place in the same province in which the news organisation is located. The extant literature suggests that proximity plays a key role in the extent of news coverage.

*Hypothesis 4: Terrorist attacks that occurred in the same province as the location of the newspaper organisation receive more news coverage.*

- **Perpetrator identity and newspaper type**

My regression model also included perpetrator identity as well as the reporting newspaper type as predictor variables to account for the findings on China's media environment and terrorist threat perception. The incentive to do so came from Kearns et al.'s (2019) recent study on the determinants of US coverage in which he not only introduced the perpetrator's Muslim identity as a potential news value but showed it to have the largest effect on the amount of US news coverage. The same argument can be found in Powell's (2011/2018) framing analysis of US terrorism coverage. He argued that President George W. Bush has frequently juxtaposed Iraq and 9/11, resulting in a climate of fear of terrorism that is linked repeatedly to Muslims (Sikorski et al. 2018). According to Powell, this climate feeds further speculation about the possibility of future attacks and generates increasing amount of coverage. For China, data on the perpetrator's identity for all terrorist attacks for the time period 2009 to 2015 does not exist to my knowledge and an information on their identity remains highly speculative given China's earlier described efforts in constructing the terrorist threat with links to al-Qaeda. Instead, I created a binary variable for whether ETIM were claimed by the party-state responsible for the terrorist attack. The rationale for choosing the association to these terrorist groups as perpetrator identity variable is because the literature on the party-state's terrorist threat construction emphasised East Turkestan independence movement, specifically ETIM, to be mainly responsible for China's terrorism problem.<sup>21</sup> Following research that shows ETIM/ to be at the centre of China's 'war on terror' framing strategy, I hypothesise that ETIM/ claimed attacks receive more news coverage. The data on their accountability derived from the GTD database as well as non-empirical studies

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<sup>21</sup> While various non-empirical studies even question the existence of these terrorist groups (i.e. Robertson 2010, Tanner and Bellaqua 2016), it nevertheless remains a relevant factor in the news coverage when the Chinese party-state is suggesting them publicly to be responsible for the attack since it could lead to increased news coverage. Gunaratne et al. (2010).

that covered the course of terrorist attacks in China (Roberts 2018; Tanner and Bellacqua 2016; Wayne 2007).

*Hypothesis 5: Terrorist attacks receive more news coverage when ETIM or are held responsible by the party-state for the events.*

Finally, a binary variable for the newspaper type shall account for the censored media environment covered at the beginning of this Chapter by testing for difference in the extent of news coverage between official party-state press and more commercialised press (i.e. Stockmann 2013, Lee 2015). Zeng et al.'s (2015) small-scale framing analysis of the Urumqi 2009 news coverage suggests considerable differences between newspaper types. Although the analysis remained limited to news framing, not the extent of news coverage, he demonstrated that commercialised Chinese press developed more diverse news frame over time of the event coverage. In line with this, Zheng (2015) and Ho and Liu's (2015) suggest that less commercialised press, specifically party-state press, cover daily events less than their more commercialised competition.

*Hypothesis 6: The party-state press produces fewer articles on terrorist attacks than their more commercialised competition.*

### **Regression findings for all cases from 2009 to 2015**

The small number of observations that is the result of the relatively low number of terrorist attacks from 2009 to 2015 made it necessary to replace the top-down approach of statistical modelling by an exploratory bottom-up approach. The top-down approach involves the use of a model with all theoretically relevant predictor variables at the outset, removing or re-arranging variable to find the best fitted model. The benefit of this approach is the inclusion of all selected predictor variables (see Table 4-3) and through a step-by-step elimination method aims for a fitted model with the largest number of possible variables for analysis. However, the full model output (Model 20, see Figure 4-7) showed in the higher Akaike Inferential Criteria (AIC) and the lack of significant predictors not a good starting point for the top-down elimination method. Therefore, I designed an exploratory approach that involves producing a range of regression models with each model adding a single predictor variable to test the impact on the model fit and to identify patterns in the predictor effects across the regression models. Figure 4-7 displays the results of 20 two-level negative

binomial regression models with the count of newspaper articles as response variable, fitted to the data set for all terrorist attacks that occurred in China between 2009 and 2015.

Figure 4-7: Negative binomial regression results for all terrorist attacks in China from 2009 - 2015

	Dependent variable:																			
	articles																			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)	(20)
location		0.71*** (0.09)	0.71*** (0.09)	0.71*** (0.09)	0.71*** (0.09)	0.71*** (0.09)	0.66*** (0.09)													
deaths			0.01** (0.004)	0.01 (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	0.01* (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01* (0.01)
deaths_30up				0.35 (0.45)	0.59 (0.46)	0.44 (0.45)	0.44 (0.45)	0.37 (0.44)	0.41 (0.45)	0.44 (0.44)	0.45 (0.45)	0.48 (0.46)	0.31 (0.50)	0.33 (0.47)	0.50 (0.45)	0.44 (0.45)	0.46 (0.46)	0.48 (0.45)	0.63 (0.45)	0.17 (0.49)
deaths_50up					-1.42* (0.69)	-1.41* (0.67)	-1.41* (0.67)	-1.83** (0.67)	-1.38* (0.67)	-1.45* (0.66)	-1.54* (0.67)	-1.40* (0.67)	-1.39* (0.67)	-1.35* (0.67)	-1.29 (0.68)	-1.34 (0.72)	-1.43* (0.67)	-1.33* (0.67)	-1.31* (0.66)	-2.96** (1.08)
multitactics								-0.55* (0.24)												-0.90 (0.50)
assault									0.13 (0.20)											0.43 (0.44)
explosive										-0.36 (0.20)										0.12 (0.44)
transportation											-0.46 (0.31)									0.28 (0.49)
othertactic												0.16 (0.28)								0.31 (0.49)
multitargets													0.19 (0.32)							-1.61 (1.15)
government														0.27 (0.34)						2.21 (1.16)
security															-0.21 (0.20)					1.87 (1.10)
business																-0.08 (0.29)				1.78 (1.07)
citizens																	-0.08 (0.21)			1.72 (1.03)
infrastructure																		0.32 (0.26)		2.14* (1.06)
othertarget																			1.02* (0.51)	2.57* (1.08)
claimed						0.72 (0.42)	0.73 (0.42)	1.01* (0.42)	0.75 (0.42)	0.87* (0.43)	0.93* (0.42)	0.76 (0.45)	0.64 (0.43)	0.64 (0.42)	0.67 (0.42)	0.71 (0.42)	0.75 (0.42)	0.63 (0.42)	0.83* (0.41)	1.30* (0.56)
official_press							0.10 (0.05)	0.09 (0.05)	0.10 (0.05)	0.10 (0.05)	0.10 (0.05)	0.10 (0.05)	0.09 (0.05)	0.10 (0.05)						
Constant	1.66*** (0.11)	1.59*** (0.11)	1.44*** (0.11)	1.44*** (0.11)	1.40*** (0.11)	1.38*** (0.11)	1.34*** (0.11)	1.45*** (0.12)	1.28*** (0.14)	1.51*** (0.14)	1.39*** (0.11)	1.32*** (0.12)	1.32*** (0.12)	1.33*** (0.11)	1.43*** (0.14)	1.36*** (0.12)	1.37*** (0.13)	1.30*** (0.12)	1.33*** (0.11)	-0.73 (1.16)
Observations	780	780	780	780	780	780	780	780	780	780	780	780	780	780	780	780	780	780	780	780
Log Likelihood	-2148.04	-2116.50	-2111.60	-2111.31	-2109.25	-2107.80	-2105.98	-2103.35	-2105.75	-2104.35	-2104.88	-2105.81	-2105.81	-2105.67	-2105.44	-2105.93	-2105.90	-2105.23	-2104.06	-2097.34
Alkalke Inf. Crit.	4302.08	4241.00	4233.20	4234.62	4232.51	4231.59	4229.95	4226.70	4231.50	4228.70	4229.77	4231.62	4231.62	4231.34	4230.88	4231.87	4231.80	4230.46	4228.12	4236.67
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	4316.06	4259.63	4256.49	4262.57	4265.12	4268.87	4271.88	4273.29	4278.09	4275.29	4276.56	4278.22	4278.22	4277.93	4277.47	4278.46	4278.40	4277.05	4274.71	4334.52

Note: \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

Note: The regression output for each model involves the predictor estimates and robust standard error in brackets below. The asterisk over the estimates signals the significance level. Each of the models is the result of two-level negative binomial regression with the case-level as random effect and the listed predictor variables list on the left side of the Table as fixed effects. The estimates are log odds, so require exponentiation to interpret the effect on the number of news articles (presented on the following pages).

The models 1 to 19 are part of the exploratory approach and the best-fitting model was defined as the one with a low AIC. The effect of the predictor variable on the response variable can be determined by the regression estimate listed in Figure 4-7 (Appendix 1). Since count regression techniques model the log of incident counts, the estimates are interpreted as follows: for a one unit change in the predictor variable (in the case of a binary variable that is the change between absence and occurrence of the factor), the log of the response variable is expected to change by the value of the regression estimate. For instance, in Model 10, for terrorist attacks that are in the same location as the newspaper organisation, the log count of newspaper articles is expected to increase by approximately 0.66. The

statistical significance of the coefficient is displayed by the p-value as asterisk in Figure 4-8 (and is listed in the full summary Table in the appendix 1 under the column ‘ $P>|z|$ ’). In this example, the p-value is below the standard threshold of 0.05, meaning that the finding is statistically significant, and the estimate can be interpreted.

Starting with the Null model (Model 1), the addition of the location as predictor variable improved the model fit, as is signalled by the lower AIC of Model 2. Continuing on, the next models include measures of the number of deaths (‘deaths’ for the effect of one additional death, ‘deaths\_20up’ and ‘deaths\_50up’ on whether the death toll was equal to or higher than 20 and 50 respectively), tactic-level variables, target-level variables, ‘claimed’ where the authorities claimed ETIM responsible, and ‘official-press’ for the newspaper type. Across the Models 2-20, the location of attack and number of ‘deaths’ are significant and robust predictors of the amount of terrorism coverage, with a significance level below 0.05.<sup>22</sup> The predictor ‘claimed’ varied slightly across models, yet its significance level remains close to the desired 0.05 to allow for careful interpretation. The ‘official\_press’ predictor appears non-interpretable due to low significance level, however, both the robust standard error in brackets and summary statistics across the regression models confirm the variable being close to the desired significance level and within the 0.10 range. Therefore, cautious interpretation of the estimate was accepted. The tactic-level and target-level variables appear insignificant across models, so their effect on the extent of terrorism coverage cannot be further interpreted. Both the location as well as ‘claimed’ show relatively strong effect on the number of articles, whereas the number of deaths and newspaper types remain weak predictors.

Since the estimates in the regression models are log odds, exponentiation is required to interpret the extent of their effect on the number of news articles. Among the models with the lowest AIC, Model 10 was selected for further interpretation of the predictor effects on the response variable since the tactic-variable explosive with significance level lower than 0.10 additionally allows cautious interpretation. The two alternatives, Model 8 with multitactics included and Model 19 with othertarget as additional predictor, deem theoretically less insightful on what exactly determines terrorism coverage in comparison to the specific tactic use of explosives. Additional diagnostic tests of Model 10 confirmed its

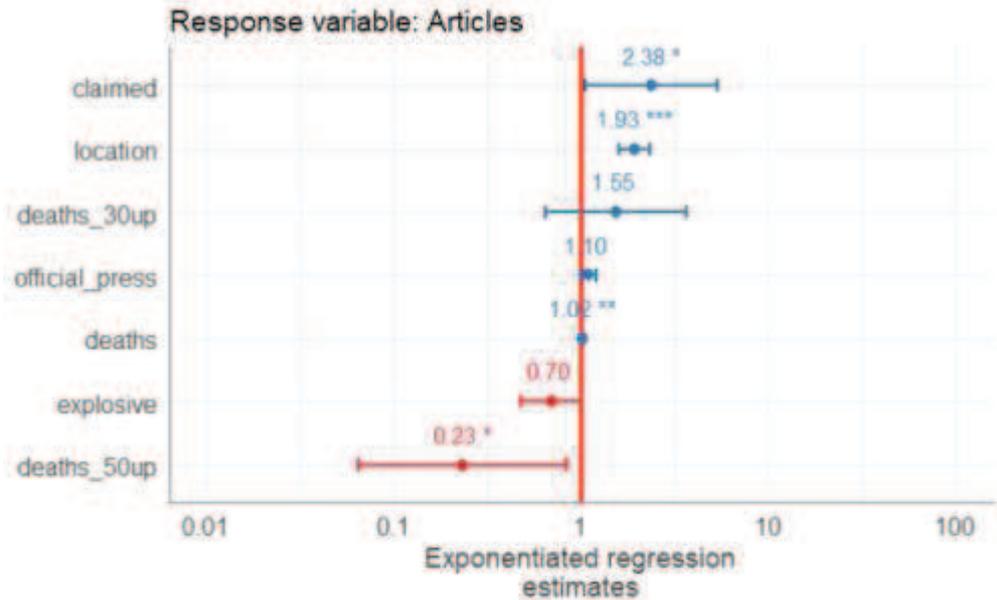
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<sup>22</sup> Following common practice in political science, 0.05 has become the standard significance level for interpretation of regression estimates. Some scholars also interpret estimates below the 0.10 significance level, though with caution.

good fit to the data, therefore giving room for interpretation of the determinants of terrorism coverage. Following both Hartig's (2018) and Friendly and Meyer's (2016) suggestions, the diagnostic tests comprised of the calculation of scaled (quantile) residuals and plotting these against the predicted values to detect overall deviations from the expected distribution, and overdispersion tests (for the diagnostic test results, see Appendix 1). Model 10 is displayed below in Figure 4-8 and includes the seven predictor variables: location, deaths, deaths\_30up, deaths\_50up, explosive, claimed, official\_press.

Rather than reporting the results as log odds estimates (as in Figure 4-8), analysts usually measure their effect on the response variable by exponentiating the estimates (see also Incidence Rate Ratio for more details, i.e. Piza 2015). The exponentiated regression estimate represents the change in the response variable in terms of a percentage increase or decrease, with the precise percentage determined by the amount the estimate is either above or below 1. This allows for a clearer communication of the predictor's influence instead of using log odds. Below, Figure 4-8 displays the exponentiated estimates of regression Model 10. Continuing the previous example for the variable location in this model, the exponentiated estimate of location (1.93 at  $p < 0.01$ ) suggests that article counts increase by approximately 93% if the terrorist attack occurs in the same region as the location of the news organisation. Conversely, the IRR of 0.70 for the predictor 'explosive' reports a 30% decrease when terrorist attacks involved explosives. The strength of the effect of each variable was illustrated by the dot, with residual errors indicating the confidence levels. Those variables with exponentiated estimates on the right side of the red line, in blue, show a positive impact on the amount of terrorism coverage. Only the explosive and deaths\_50up estimates show a negative effect on the response variable.

Figure 4-8: Exponentiated estimates for regression Model 10



Starting from the top, ‘claimed’ and ‘location’ are the strongest determinants with a positive effect on the scale of news coverage. While the variable on deaths over 30 cannot be interpreted due to lack of significance, the measurement for attacks that involve more than 50 deaths is statistically significant and suggests a strong negative effect on the scale of news coverage where the death rate was high. The effect for ‘claimed’ appears to be strong, but confidence intervals are wide. So, one cannot exclude the possibility that the effect is much weaker or stronger. The IRR shows that when the party-state officially attributed responsibility for the terrorist attacks to ETIM, then news coverage is 138% higher than without it (or in other words 2.38 times higher). An almost similarly strong predictor is location, yet the smaller confidence interval leaves stronger certainty in the observation. Accordingly, terrorist attacks that occurred in the same provincial-level unit as the news organisation receive almost twice as much news coverage to those that occur somewhere else. The effect of both ‘deaths’ and official\_press predictors are almost zero and this can be said with good certainty. While one additional death seems to have minor effect on the extent of news coverage, the official\_press IRR suggests that party-state press cover terrorist attacks minimally more than their more commercialised competition. Finally, the predictor ‘explosive’ can just be interpreted with caution since the wide confidence intervals (as well as a significance level between 0.05 and 0.10) leave relatively low certainty in conclusions. The regression shows that attacks where explosives were used received slightly less news coverage.

Moving on to the revision of the hypotheses, the above regression model and the regression overview Table 4-7 allow conclusions on the predictive power of the variables under study,

with high level of generalisability for the time period 2009-2015 under analysis in this project since all 65 terrorist attacks listed in the database were included. However, poor model fit of the full model and rank deficiencies showed that more observations need to be collected to interpret all predictor variables, such as by extending the time frame in future research. Nonetheless, several conclusions can be made from the analysis.

Hypothesis 1 on the strong effect of deaths on the scale of coverage need to be differentiated further. The estimates for 'deaths' shows death to be a strong predictor of the scale of coverage but the effect is weak positive. One additional death tends to slightly increase the extent of news coverage. The estimate for 'deaths\_50up' shows that the hypothesis can be rejected, since attacks with the high death toll of 50 or higher receive much less news coverage. Both variables demonstrate that measures of the death toll can help predicting the extent of news coverage. While the increase in the number of deaths has a weak effect on news coverage (constituting a difference from the US), attacks with a relatively high death toll of 50 or higher receive much less coverage (in agreement with the US-centred research).

Hypothesis 2 on the effects of the type of tactic employed by the terrorist can neither be rejected or confirmed since the large confidence intervals did not allow interpretation of the estimates. Model 6 suggests, though with relatively low certainty, that explosives in terrorist attacks receive less terrorism coverage, which indicates another difference to the US news coverage. For the same reason as with the tactic-variables, Hypothesis 3 on the type of target cannot be answered for China. In both cases, an increase in the number of observations, such as by extending the time period of analysis in future research, might allow for new findings on their relevance as determinants of news coverage.

Hypothesis 4 that claimed strong positive relationship between the proximity of the terrorist attack and the amount of news coverage can be confirmed for China with strong certainty. Accordingly, the proximity theory holds true for terrorism coverage in China. However, an increase of 93% in news coverage where the incident occurs close to the newspaper organisation might be understood as moderate to strong effect.

Hypothesis 5 on the effect of ETIM's accountability for attacks can be confirmed with moderate certainty. Model 6 showed this factor to have the strongest effect on the number of news articles. Although the claimed involvement of these terrorist groups has been firstly tested as part of this study, the finding yet aligns with Kearns et al.'s (2019) broader

observation that the perpetrator's Muslim identity, though he was focusing on religious identity, was a strong determinant of US terrorism coverage.

Finally, Hypothesis 6 suggested that the party-state press would cover terrorist attacks less than their more commercialised competition. This can be rejected with moderate certainty (based on robust estimates across models and  $p < 0.10$ ). Accordingly, there is almost no difference in the amount of news articles commercialised and less commercialised papers publish on terrorist attacks in China.

### **Similarities and differences with the determinants of the 8 cases**

The model fitting process began anew with the new data set on the eight cases introduced in Chapter 3. Beginning with the complex model, that includes all theoretical relevant predictors, led to a rank deficient model, an issue that could be traced back to the low number of observations that comes with just looking at eight terrorist attacks. A singularity test of this model showed strong singularity, together with very low variance on the case level. This shows that there is no need to include the case level as random effect (since correlations in the measurements within each group is low) but instead a single-level model is a better fit for the eight-case dataset. Only the variable location varies on the newspaper level, so removing the random effect by using a single-level model requires running two regression models. One regression model just includes the location predictor to account for variance by using a two-level model. All other predictors could be tests with a single-level regression model. Figure 4-9 illustrates the findings from the exploratory approach.

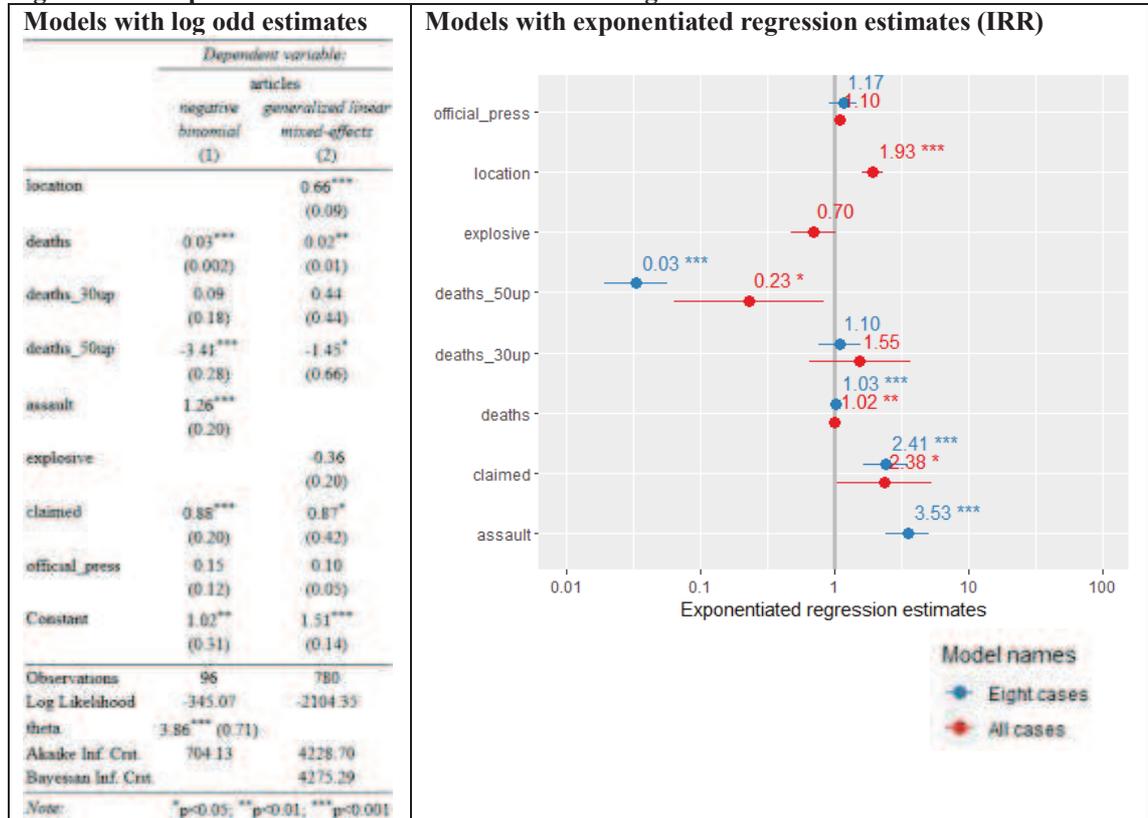
Figure 4-9: Negative binomial regression analysis results for 8 terrorist attacks in China 2009 - 2015

	Dependent variable:																	
	articles																	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)
death		0.01*** (0.002)	0.01*** (0.002)	0.02*** (0.002)	0.02*** (0.002)	0.02*** (0.002)	0.03*** (0.004)	0.03*** (0.002)	0.02*** (0.002)	0.03*** (0.002)	0.03** (0.01)	0.02*** (0.002)	0.02*** (0.002)	0.02*** (0.003)	0.02*** (0.003)	0.02*** (0.002)	0.01*** (0.002)	0.03** (0.01)
death_30up			-0.25 (0.26)	-0.44* (0.19)	-0.37 (0.21)	-0.37 (0.21)	-0.66* (0.30)	0.09 (0.18)	-0.57* (0.25)	0.09 (0.18)	-0.80 (0.56)	-0.01 (0.32)	-0.15 (0.22)	0.05 (0.23)	-0.37 (0.21)	-0.15 (0.22)	1.02** (0.33)	-0.80 (0.56)
death_50up				-2.60*** (0.25)	-2.63*** (0.25)	-2.65*** (0.25)	-2.97*** (0.35)	-3.41*** (0.28)	-2.95*** (0.33)	-3.41*** (0.28)	-2.94*** (0.44)	-2.95*** (0.33)	-2.45*** (0.24)	-1.66*** (0.32)	-2.04*** (0.42)	-2.45*** (0.24)	-1.99*** (0.26)	-2.94*** (0.44)
multitactics							-0.41 (0.30)											
assault								1.26*** (0.20)										
explosive									-0.56 (0.37)									
transportation										-1.26*** (0.20)								
other tactic											-1.21 (1.47)							
multitargets												0.56 (0.37)						
government													0.56 (0.37)					
security														-0.42* (0.18)				
business															-0.86*** (0.22)			
citizens																0.56 (0.50)		
infrastructure																	0.42* (0.18)	
othertarget																		1.23*** (0.23)
claimed					0.11 (0.18)	0.10 (0.18)	0.27 (0.22)	0.88*** (0.20)	0.43 (0.28)	0.88*** (0.20)	-0.10 (0.30)	0.43 (0.28)	0.22 (0.17)	0.09 (0.17)	-0.11 (0.21)	0.22 (0.17)	0.76*** (0.19)	-0.10 (0.30)
official_press						0.14 (0.14)	0.16 (0.14)	0.15 (0.12)	0.16 (0.14)	0.15 (0.12)	0.15 (0.14)	0.16 (0.14)	0.13 (0.14)	0.14 (0.13)	0.17 (0.14)	0.13 (0.14)	0.18 (0.12)	0.15 (0.14)
Constant	3.19*** (0.10)	2.79*** (0.15)	2.93*** (0.19)	2.87*** (0.14)	2.76*** (0.23)	2.70*** (0.23)	2.92*** (0.28)	1.02** (0.31)	2.92*** (0.27)	2.28*** (0.21)	2.87*** (0.31)	1.80** (0.64)	2.60*** (0.23)	2.74*** (0.22)	2.92*** (0.26)	2.18*** (0.30)	0.82* (0.40)	2.87*** (0.31)
Observations	96	96	96	96	96	96	96	96	96	96	96	96	96	96	96	96	96	96
Log Likelihood	-405.44	-397.35	-396.84	-362.53	-362.34	-361.84	-360.92	-345.07	-360.73	-345.07	-361.52	-360.73	-359.66	-355.38	-360.16	-359.66	-349.59	-361.52
theta	1.01*** (0.14)	1.19*** (0.18)	1.20*** (0.18)	2.49*** (0.42)	2.49*** (0.42)	2.52*** (0.42)	2.56*** (0.43)	3.86*** (0.71)	2.57*** (0.45)	3.86*** (0.71)	2.53*** (0.42)	2.57*** (0.43)	2.70*** (0.47)	3.03*** (0.54)	2.59*** (0.44)	2.70*** (0.47)	3.46*** (0.63)	2.53*** (0.42)
Akaike Inf Crit.	812.89	798.69	799.67	733.05	734.68	735.68	735.85	704.13	735.46	704.13	737.04	735.46	733.32	724.76	734.72	733.32	713.19	737.04
Note:																	*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001	

Diagnostic tests (see Appendix 1) confirmed the good fit of Model 8 and left room for the interpretation of the predictor effects. This was visualised with exponentiated estimates in Figure 4-10 below, while also putting the model in comparison to the best fitted Model of the analysis for all cases in the time period 2009 to 2015 (Model 10). Putting these models in contrast allows interpretation of similarities and differences in the determinants of terrorism coverage and adds insight on the research question with additional predictor variables included in either model. While I recommend not to generalise from the findings of the eight-case model due to the small number of terrorist attacks included in the dataset (relatively low external validity), this analysis was deemed necessary due to this thesis' focus on these eight cases. An understanding of both what determined the extent of news coverage

they received as well as the news framing allows together for a comprehensive understanding of the terrorism news construction.

**Figure 4-10: Exponentiated estimates for all-case and eight-case models**



Note: The regression Table on the left provides coefficient estimates, with the first model being Model 10 from the all-case analysis and the second model being Model 8 from the eight-case analysis in Figure 4-9. The coeffplot on the right side presents the exponentiated estimates of both models, this allows interpreting the predictor effects on the response variable.

Similar effects were estimated in both models for the predictor deaths, claimed and official\_press, the models differ regarding the predictive power of assault, explosives due to lack of statistic significance in the respective other model. However, the comparison of both models provides new insight into the topic of the determinants of terrorism coverage with significant predictors that were not included in the all-cases model.

In the tactic-level category, the assault estimate is highly significant and has a relatively strong positive effect on press coverage (assault: 3.53 at p<0.001). Accordingly, when terrorist events involved assaults (i.e. use of firearms or knives), press coverage increase by 353 per cent. The estimate for explosives only showed low statistical significance (p<0.01), so can only be cautiously interpreted: in both the all case model (Model 10) and a different Model for the eight cases (Model 9), the estimates equally show that press coverage decreases when explosives were used. From these two variables it becomes clear that the type of tactic employed by terrorist might be a strong predictor of terrorism coverage. The

analysis of the location variable required to fit a separate, two-level model since the variance for location was strong across both the newspaper and case level. The Model result (see details in Appendix 1) aligns with the all-case Model, which shows the positive relationship with the scale of news coverage. Accordingly, when terrorist attacks occur geographically close to the newspaper organisation, press coverage is higher by 93% (log odds estimate: 0.66 at  $p < 0.05$ ; see Appendix for full Model summaries).

In sum, comparing the findings from the all case dataset and the eight-case dataset, led to various findings on the predictive power of the determinants under study. The all case model allows for generalisation of the findings to the population of Chinese terrorist attacks in 2009 to 2015. It showed that measures for deaths are strong predictors of the scale of news coverage; the proximity theory was confirmed with terrorist attacks in the same region as the news organisation receiving stronger media attention. However, the strongest positive effect on media attention was generated when the party-state blamed the terrorist group ETIM for the attack, which led to almost 2.5 times more press coverage. The strongest negative effect on media attention seems to be where terrorist attacks involved a relatively high death toll of 50 victims or higher. Due to the lack of observations, no further generalisable findings could be generated. However, further indication can be gained from the analysis of the eight cases. Accordingly, assault generated strong increase in press coverage, whereas terrorist attacks that involved explosive lead to less media coverage. Before moving to a discussion of the findings, the next section will review the censored media environment as another determinant of terrorism coverage.

### **Leaked censorship instructions confirm party-state interference with the media coverage of terrorism**

Leaked censorship instructions confirm party-state interference as another determinant of Chinese terrorism coverage, though this could be not included in the statistical analysis since there is no indication of the population of internal media regulations and a selection bias of the people leaking the instructions. However, the leaked censorship instruction, with the largest number available through China Digital Times (CDT, 2019) for the time period this PhD project was focusing on, provide the unique insight into what otherwise requires stronger speculation on the party-state apparatus that oversees media content. Moreover, it adds to the previous statistical analysis an account of China's non-pluralist media environment by showing what is being omitted or highlighted in the Chinese press. Among

the available censorship instructions, six out of the eight terrorist attacks analysed for the PhD project received censorship instructions that were available in the China Digital Times.

**Table 4-4. Availability of leaked censorship instructions**

	Case	Date	Available censorship instruction?
1	Urumqi 2009	05/07/2009	Yes
2	Lukqun 2013	26/06/2013	Yes
3	Beijing 2013	28/10/2013	Yes
4	Kunming 2014	01/03/2014	No
5	Urumqi 2014	30/04/2014	Yes
6	Urumqi 2014	22/05/2014	Yes
7	Shache 2014	28/07/2014	Yes
8	Baicheng 2015	18/09/2015	No

Case 1, the Urumqi riot in 2009, was the only ‘terrorist attack’ since then that received academic research regarding the party-state’s Xinjiang operations and media strategies (see Chapter 2). The CDT reveals one media directive with two main orders, issued three days after the incident. The first order is to block comments on the grievances between Uyghur and Han Chinese in Xinjiang and specifically with any relation to the incident. This was also the case with the Shaoguan incident, which academics, media and government (Clarke 2018) considered the cause of the Urumqi riot (violent conflict between Han and Uyghur in a Shaoguan factory in Guangdong due to allegation of the sexual assault of a Han Chinese female). The second order involves the identification of a long list of ‘black list’ key words, demanding that these are filtered in favour of promoting ‘white list’ words instead (the white list words were not available in the CDT archive). Black list words relate mostly to (1) the Shaoguan incident, (2) grievances between Uyghur and Han Chinese, (3) past unrests in Xinjiang and Tibet, (4) Politburo members (without further context). It appears from this list that particularly the topic of ethnic conflict, prior local unrest and the cause are being filtered. These orders confirm the use of media instructions to block, filter and promote news content, as was also claimed by a Chinese Web publisher reported in a Radio Free Asia report (RFA 2014) published shortly after the incident. The CDT further presents two timely updates, based on news sources and press releases, demonstrating the government’s effort in promoting the return to order and the allegation of the World Uyghur congress and Rebiya Kadeer as having instigated the unrest. Altogether, these insights into the first case confirm the scholarship findings reviewed in Chapter 2, which highlighted a turning point in China’s media strategy from denial and censorship towards ‘controlled’ openness through coordination of news content (see Chen 2012; Roberts 2012).

The next case, in Xinjiang's Lukqin in 2013, resulted in 25 deaths and received much less news coverage (see data presented at the beginning of this Chapter). The CDT had one directive from the State Council Information Office in which they demand (1) only to republish Xinhua reports on the incident and (2) to remove any other coverage, discussions, images and opportunities 'to attack the party and the government'. Following another shooting in Hotan (Xinjiang) a few days afterwards, another directive suggests the authorities to delete all content related to the incident as well. The tighter censorship in these cases (as compared to the previous one) might be explained by these two incidents coinciding with the anniversary of the July 2009 riot in Urumqi. This seems a possible explanation since the following meeting of the Communist Party chaired by Xi Jinping expressed their concerns over the rising violence in Xinjiang in the context of Xinjiang's anniversary.

Case 3 occurred in October 2013 at the Tiananmen Square in Beijing, with a car crashing into civilians and a bridge resulting in three deaths. The number of articles covering the incident was very small, which could be explained again by one directive available in the CDT archive. The instructions demand to follow Xinhua, the party-state 'mouthpiece', in coverage and to downplay the story. Such censorship instruction is not surprising, given the strong symbolic power of the Tiananmen Square to the Communist party and its popularity among Chinese and tourists alike. However, another explanation could be this event coinciding with another attack at Beijing's Forbidden City in which two working staff of the local museum were stabbed. Following another series of stabbing attack from three months before, these incidents have led to the ban of the sale of knives in the capital. While knives were not used in the car crash that followed, the incident took place at a time when the Tiananmen Square received much negative public attention. This could explain the tight censorship or the lack of details on the car crash.

Although no censorship directives were available for Case 4, Case 5 followed shortly after at the end of April 2014 with explosives at Urumqi's largest train station. The number of casualties was very low, but the amount of news coverage exceeded that of the previous three cases. A censorship instruction from the next day demands again close adherence to Xinhua coverage and no additional reports. The tight grip over the media content might be due to Xi Jinping's visit to Xinjiang and his speech on terrorism at the same time. This seems plausible since the CDT archive presents instructions shortly before the incident that already demand to closely follow Xinhua's reports on Xi Jinping's visit to Xinjiang. In this context,

the amount of news reports available on this case is rather surprising. One possibility is that the Xinhua has covered the terrorist attack or Xi Jinping's visit extensively and other newspapers followed accordingly.

The following case in May 2014 in Urumqi involved a series of suicide explosions in a street market that led to 31 deaths. The amount of coverage and casualties is similar to case 4, though censorship instructions on media content are available for this case. Accordingly, news websites were asked to promote four articles which present the people's apathy towards terrorism as well as promises of the political leadership to severely punish terrorists. Two more directives issued in the following days prohibit the issuing of newspaper website articles that refer to Xinjiang as 'hometown of terrorists' and compare Xinjiang to Chechnya. Once again, these instructions demonstrate news coordination efforts by the party-state.

Case 7 refers to several armed attackers targeting government building and police stations in Shache county with knives in July 2014 (Xinjiang). Different to the previous cases, the high number of deaths is not proportional to the small number of news reports in the Chinese press. The one available media directive demands no coverage of the incident. This instruction would well explain the low number of articles collected for the one month after the incident. The tightly managed information control on this case is further confirmed by CDT analysis and others (RFA 2014, Reuters 2014), and can further be seen in the complete internet shut down when unconfirmed news of the attack began circulating online. This tight censorship might be a result of having a series of terrorist attacks in 2014 in Xinjiang already. As Chapter 1 pointed out, 2014 saw strong escalation of violence. It might also be driven by the attempt to not shed a negative light on the yearlong crackdown campaign on terrorism that was running in the region at that time.

The final case occurred in a coal mine in Baicheng (Xinjiang) in which 50 miners and security guards were stabbed in September 2015. Unfortunately, no censorship instructions were leaked on this case. However, the CDT (2019), RFA (2015) and other media sources observed that, similar to the previous case, the government kept tight lid on the coal mine incident. For example, New York Times reporter Andrew Jacobs describes local officials denying it even took place and citizens being reluctant to talk about it. He related this observation back to Xinjiang's coinciding 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the placards condemning terrorism. These sources further show that the investigations lasted for two months. While the reasons for this remains unclear, this long-lasting investigation would explain the minor

amount of collected media coverage and suggests the use of censorship instructions demanding to refrain from coverage.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

Answering the research question, determinants of US terrorism coverage can only moderately explain the extent of Chinese news coverage on the domestic terrorism. Similarities exist in the positive effect of the location, the tactic-variable assault, yet differences exceed with the effects of deaths (respectively ‘deaths’ and ‘deaths\_50up’), the tactic variable explosive. Further insight on potential determinants was gained by including factors unique to China (claimed, newspaper type, censorship instructions). Various potential determinants of terrorism coverage could not be interpreted in the regression analysis due to lack of observations. Altogether, the moderate applicability of US-centred theory on the determinants of terrorism coverage as well as the lack of observations highlight the need in future research to expand the scope of the study and explore for additional explanatory factors. These findings empirically support the argument to further de-westernise media theory.

Beginning with the predictors that are relevant in both media contexts, the analysis confirmed the proximity to terrorist attacks as a moderately strong determinant of news media attention. However, assaults seemed to have a stronger effect. For instance, where assaults was a tactic, the effect on press coverage was two times higher than the location effect. In contrast, explosives only had weak predictive power and suggest that media attention would decrease in case they would be used.

Turning towards differing conclusions on the predictive power of US determinants, the number of additional deaths leads to minor increase in news attention, yet attacks that involved a high number of deaths seem to receive much less media coverage in comparison to attacks that have less deaths. Similarly, the use of explosives leads to less news coverage. The inclusion of the ETIM/ responsibility of the attacks and the newspaper type led to further conclusion, while testing the explanatory power of factors deriving from the literature on Chinese media. When the party-state blamed ETIM responsible for the terrorist attacks, the amount of press coverage increases even more than with the proximity effect. The strong effect of the accountability of ETIM for the terrorist attacks aligns with Kearns et al.’s (2019) observation for the US that the perpetrator’s Muslim identity matters for the media attention. In contrast, whether the newspaper is an official party-state paper, or its more

commercialised alternative, has almost no effect on the amount of news coverage. The leaked censorship instructions on the eight cases selected for this research project further confirmed attempts by the party-state to (1) refrain from covering the events, or specifically content that relates to ethnic or social grievances, (2) promote or follow party-state press event coverage.

Various arguments can be distilled from the above observations. First, the minor difference in news coverage between party-state and commercial press as well as the leaked censorship instructions empirically demonstrates the close grip that the party-state holds over the news coverage of terrorism. It also confirms the previously laid out scholarly claims of media censorship and coordination efforts in China. Second, the estimates for various predictors could be interpreted as confirming the previously discussed idea of the terrorist threat being a party-state construction. To begin with, the number of additional deaths is of minor importance to the news media attention, while a high death toll seems to be very important leads to much less news coverage. The proximity of the attack only has a moderate effect. Instead, various factors which scholars signalled as indicative of terrorist construction efforts were stronger in the analysis. The involvement of ETIM, introduced by the party-state in 2001 as main responsible group for China's terrorism, leads to strong increase in press coverage. Other models seem to suggest that attacks against party-state officials and buildings or attacks that involved armed assaults, receive much stronger news media attention. Attack characteristics that indicate the escalation of violence, such as multiple targets, attacks against the security forces that are Figures that 'uphold stability', and explosives – receive less press coverage. In conclusion, these findings suggest party-state interference with the news coverage, therefore demonstrating the importance of the subsequent analysis of the terrorism 'construction' in the Chinese media.

## **Chapter 5: The Chinese Print Media's Framing of Domestic Terrorism**

The motivating research question for this chapter was how Chinese newspapers frame the domestic terrorism. Based on findings from data analysis, this Chapter presents the argument that the Chinese party-state created a terrorism construction, that it promoted through the media. This brand employs a highly abstract construction of the terrorist threat that enables the party-state to run a mediated campaign against all the 'three evils' of terrorism, religious extremism and separatism simultaneously. It legitimises action in light of claimed emergency, while also promoting the CCP's rhetoric of a harmonious society under the leadership of the Party.

This chapter's findings contribute to the academic literature reviewed in Chapter 2 by filling the analytical gap through discovery of prevalent news frames, the media gap by showing that the media reinforces CCP ideology and terrorist threat perception and therefore serves as additional tool to the CCP's Xinjiang conflict strategies. It further fills the analytical gap by showing that the media legitimise the securitisation of Xinjiang and the CCP leadership by exaggerating the terrorist threat. Combined, the findings demonstrate that the media are not just a party-state tool in the Xinjiang conflict but also construct a terrorist threat so as to promote social values that favour stability as well as legitimise securitisation efforts.

This chapter begins with an overview of the three main components of the Chinese news construction. What follows are three main analysis sections, each presenting one overarching argument that contributes to this Chapter's conclusion. The first analysis section reports the empirically observed party-state measures aimed at constructing a terrorism brand for the Xinjiang conflict. The second analysis Chapter reviews the content of the terrorism brand, focusing what will be introduced as the counter-terrorism framing. It argues that the Xinjiang conflict has been used by the party-state to initiate a media campaign against all 'three evils' by constructing terrorism as an ideograph. The final section reviews the social values, presenting the argument that the terrorism coverage also serves as platform for promoting CCP ideology. These findings are derived from quantitative text analysis, in-depth reading of the material during open coding, and the analysis of 16 indicator questions (see Appendix 2 for the questions and answers).

### **The main components of China's terrorism construction: Social values, counter-terrorism frames and the attack itself**

The qualitative and quantitative data analysis found that the Chinese news portrayal of terrorism centres around three main building blocks, these are an event description of the terrorist attack, a counter-terrorism main-frame, and a social value main-frame.<sup>23</sup> Regarding the proportion of media attention to these three parts, both coders agreed in the impression that the event description received the least amount of media attention and social values the most.

Articles frequently described the terrorist attack at the beginning of news coverage. For all cases and newspapers, news coverage began on the first or second day after the attack and involved a brief event description that was identical in content across newspapers. This description comprised of information on the location of the attack, the number of casualties, the rescue and treatment of the victims and confirmation of the police being in control of the situation. The consistent mentioning of Xinhua as the source at the beginning of these reports as well as the identical content clearly suggest the party-state to hold a tight grip over media reporting shortly after the attack. Example 1 presents such event description, issued two days after the terrorist attack in Lukeqin in 2013 (Case 2).<sup>24</sup>

#### **Example 1: Early event description of the terrorist attack**

Beijing News (28/6/2013)

**24 people were killed in Xinjiang terrorist attacks. 11 thugs were killed. At 5:50am on the 26<sup>th</sup>, thugs attacked special patrol squadrons, town governments and migrant worker construction sites, and set fire to police cars**

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According to Xinhua News Agency, at about 5:50am on the 26th, a violent terrorist attack occurred in Lukeqin town, Shanshan county, Turpan prefecture, Xinjiang. Several thugs attacked the Lukeqin police station, special patrol police squadron, town government building, migrant worker construction sites and set fire to police cars.

At present, 24 people have been killed (including 16 Uyghurs), including 2 police officers; a further 21 police officers and people have been injured. At the scene, the police killed 11 thugs, wounded and captured four. Public security organs are doing their best, and the current situation is under control.

Within a few days, a more comprehensive account of the events appeared for each case, yet the newspapers showed greater diversity in how they presented the information. A slight majority (58 per cent in the sub-sample) issued the same piece of text with only different headlines, whereas the rest divided and mixed the information. The result were news

<sup>23</sup> A 'main-frame' includes several sub-frames, Figure 5-1 lists these frames. For simplicity, I use the term 'frame' for the counter-terrorism and social value framing, though continue to understand these as main-frames.

<sup>24</sup> In this and the following examples, the translations provide the newspaper name and publication date. The newspaper article and news content follow underneath. The Chinese originals are in Appendix 2.

products with different headlines and articles that on the first glance appear to present different news stories. While there were differences due to omitting or adding content from other articles, the news stories remained similar. Besides repeating event characteristics, reporters tended to either re-construct several periods of the day in more detail, describe the brutality of the terrorists, or focus more strongly on the rescue and treatment strategies of the party-state.<sup>25</sup> The following piece is an example of the latter approach, focusing in the first half on the event and casualties, then turning in the second half to a detailed summary on the treatment of the wounded.

**Example 2: Detailed event description of the terrorist attack**

Beijing News (30/10/2013)

**Beijing gives all-out support for the rescue and treatment of wounded in the ‘10.28’ incident**

On October 28, a jeep crashed into the Jinshui Bridge [in front of Tiananmen], causing five deaths and 38 injuries. Five of the injured required surgery, 12 are staying in intensive care units. The remaining 21 are staying in general hospitalisation and shared their observation of the ‘Oct. 28 Jinshui Bridge car crash incident’ with the Beijing News.

At about 12:05pm on the 28th, a jeep broke into Chang'an Street sidewalk from Nanchizi Nankou, Beijing. Coming from the East to the West, it crashed into the guardrail of the Jinshui Bridge in Tiananmen and caught fire. Many tourists and policemen on duty were injured in the process. According to preliminary data, five people were killed and 38 injured in the accident. Three of them died in the car, two tourists died as well (one Filipino female tourist and one Guangdong male tourist). Among the 38 injured, there were three Filipino tourists (two women and one man) and one Japanese male tourist.

After the incident, Beijing immediately organised the rescue and treatment of the wounded. The heads of the Municipal Party Committee and the Municipal Government asked the health departments to spare no effort in rescuing the wounded at all costs. The Municipal Health Bureau quickly set up a specialist group for medical treatment, formulated a treatment plan, and centralized the city's high-quality medical resources to set up a municipal expert group that provides consultation and guidance for each of the wounded one by one, and to guide the rescue of critically injured people at all time.

At present, among the 38 hospitalised victims, five have undergone surgical treatment, 12 have been treated in ICU, and the remaining 21 have been transported for general hospitalization and continued observation.

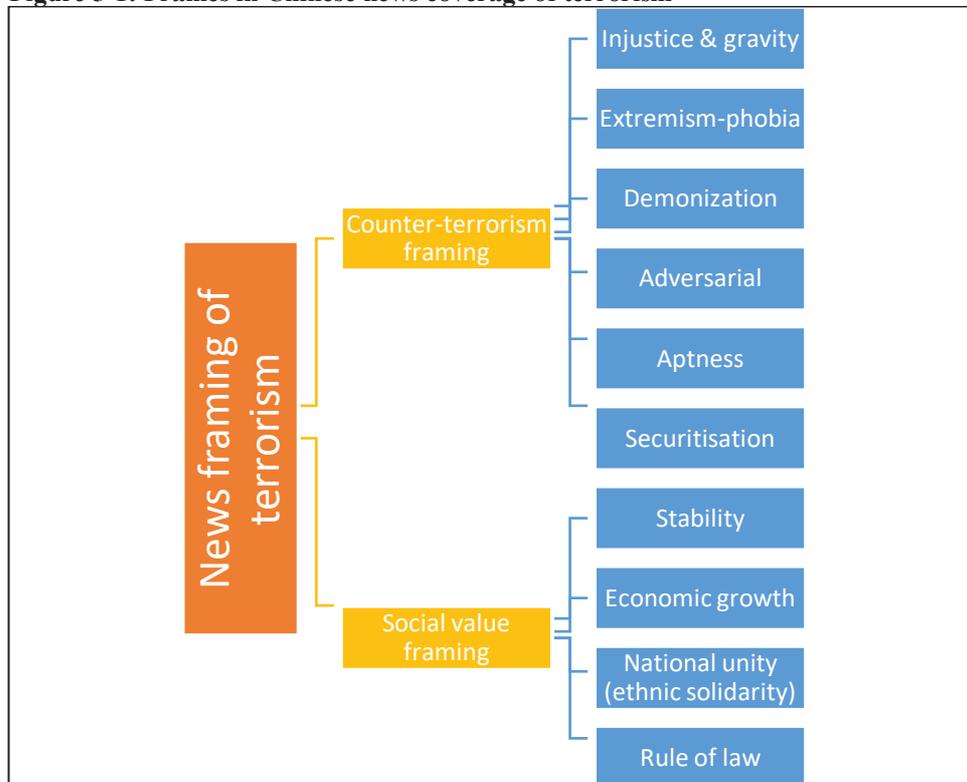
After the brief event description, the news direction quickly shifted away from the attack to the larger terrorist threat, with the counter-terrorism and social value frames gaining prevalence in the news coverage. The name counter-terrorism for the first main-frame derived from the continuous emphasis by the media to ‘resolutely fight terrorism’ (坚决反恐怖) against the terrorist enemy in the name of justice. I decided against naming the frame ‘terrorism’ to avoid reinforcing the party-state perception of a terrorist threat in this thesis. Instead, the counter-terrorism designation emphasises the party-state’s quest to legitimise its fight against terrorism by communicating a constructed enemy portrayal. Therefore, the

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix 2 for an indicative example of a news article that provided a detailed re-construction of a terrorist attack.

terminology aligns with the discussion on authoritarian resilience reviewed in Chapter 2 in the sense that the framing of the Xinjiang conflict as terrorism is a legitimization strategy and more generally a resilience strategy.

The prevalent frames of the terrorism construction are outlined in Figure 5-1. A frame can be a word, phrase or sentence(s) that relate to the frame description provided underneath the following graph. Each one is further discussed (with examples) in the following discussion of this Chapter. Another reference point are the indicator questions listed in Appendix 2. When discussing the frames, I relate the frames back to the indicator question by using references; the indicator questions (IQ) are straightforward yes or no questions that can help to recognise frames and understand the description of the frames in the following discussion better. While their main role was to illustrate changes in framing patterns across cases for Chapter 6, they also serve here as an additional empirical tool to evidence framing observations in addition to the quantitative text analysis and the open coding observations. Following Figure 5-1, I explain each frame briefly, they receive further detail and examples in the rest of this Chapter.

**Figure 5-1: Frames in Chinese news coverage of terrorism**



The most prevalent counter-terrorism frames, covered on the following two pages with reference to the Indicator Question 7 in Appendix 2, were the ‘extremism-phobia’ and the ‘injustice and gravity’ sub-frames, signalling the serious threat the party-state perceives in

terrorism. The prevalence of this ‘injustice and gravity’ frame mainly lies in the news consistently referring to the incident as ‘serious’ (严重) or ‘pre-meditated’ (预谋) terrorist attack. Further details on what is in grave threat commonly occurs in relation to the social values, for instance, terrorism threatening the economic growth and stability in China. For instance, the news pictured the image of improved living standards for all people in Xinjiang and define the seriousness of the terrorist attack not by the human lives it has cost but potentially destabilising effect on the people’s living standards. Locals cited in news coverage of Case 1 describe the financial losses as a result of terrorism generally, such as the decreasing income in the tourism industry.

‘Extremism-phobia’ is another highly prevalent frame that portrays ‘extremism’ (极端) as the ideological root cause of terrorism and the central threat to the Chinese society. The news did not just focus on terrorism but link all the ‘three evils’ together by using these interchangeably. The media rarely referred to the terrorists as separatists, more commonly was the emphasis on religious extremist thought and activities being a threat to the Chinese people. It remained undefined what constitutes ‘extremism’, instead the media discussed ‘extremism’ on a highly abstract level as generally ‘the archetypical enemy’ (see Appendix 2, indicator question (‘IC’) 4). While the term ‘religious extremism’ might lead to believe strong defaming of the Muslim identity of the Uyghur people and Islam, the media instead emphasises that this issue was not linked to any specific ethnic group or religion.

The terrorists, or extremists, are portrayed as epitome of evil in the demonization frame). The demonization frame includes the frequent condemnation of terrorist for the attack and the disruptions of society (see Appendix 2, IC 7). Some articles re-construction the events of the attack and provide a detailed account of the terrorist violence. For instance, one article published on the fourth case focuses on the re-emergence of life and vitality that comes in nature with the arrival in Spring. It then turns to the terrorist attack, describing how Spring has faded after the terrorist attack and left a city in fear and pain. In other reports the violence of the terrorists receive attention to demonstrate their brutality and thus define them as inhuman, such as in a report that describes the victims in a hospital corridor and that the head of a four- or five-years old child was cut off.

The adversarial frame juxtaposed the terrorist with the good, orderly Chinese society. This frame was very common in the news (see Appendix 2, IC 7); it pictured the image of a Chinese society that embraces ethnic solidarity, economic growth and stability while

vilifying the enemy other as aiming to harm this society. Part of this image were appeals to resolutely fight terrorism, creating boundaries between ‘us’ (the Chinese people) and ‘them’ (the terrorists): ‘Violent terrorists are the common enemy of the people of all ethnic groups’ (暴力恐怖分子是新疆各族人民的共同敌人). Other statements described the harm terrorists have caused to lives and property or explain the struggle against terrorism as ‘safeguarding the motherland’ (捍卫祖国).

In face of the ‘terrorist’ threat, the reports take a pro-active stance by mobilising the public for action with the aptness framing. The aptness frame emphasises the need to counter the terrorist threat and likely success in doing so if the Chinese people remain united. A common example is the just fight against terrorists, such as ‘the struggle against illegal crimes and violent terrorism alike is the sacred and glorious duty of all citizens given by law’ (打击违法犯罪，同暴力恐怖活动作斗争，是法律赋予每个公民的神圣权利和光荣义务). The likelihood of success is tied to all Chinese people fighting terrorism, though without specification of what this involves, or abstract phrases of justice always overcoming evil. For instance, ‘Justice overwhelms evil and criminals cannot escape the law’ (正义压倒邪恶，罪犯难逃法网).

The securitisation frame most commonly involves appeals by the reporter to fight terrorism or to show no mercy in this struggle. Only moderate detail was given to how this should take place, mostly the media described the improved training of counter-terrorist forces and the improvements in the legislation. For instance, the media describe the increased presence of police and military officers to enhance safety. Yet, more attention was devoted to the growing counter-terrorism apparatus of the party-state, on which the media describe emergence of new task forces to detect and crack down on terrorist cells. Another example of these counter-terrorism efforts is the introduction of counter-terrorism legislation, which was particularly prevalent in cases during the Xi administration in references to China’s rule by law. Overall, the securitisation frame pictures the securitisation of Xinjiang most to take place in form of counter-terrorist efforts and emphasises these as part of the struggle against terrorism.

The second main frame, which I call the ‘social value’ frame, denotes the promotion of what the media portrays as corner stones of the Chinese society under leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (see Appendix 2, ICs 10 and 11). The prevalent frames involve promotion of stability, national unity, economic growth, and the rule of law. Stability, national unity and economic growth usually appeared together in news reports, highlighting

that a ‘harmonious society’ (和谐社会) is stable, prosperous and shows inter-ethnic solidarity. The data analysis showed that social value frames do not just occur in relation to the issue of terrorism but also exist independently in large news section that exclusively promote these social values. Thus, it became evident that the Chinese news coverage of terrorism is not just about covering the terrorist threat but also aims to reinforce CCP ideology on these social values. The following pages of this Chapter elaborate on this argument.

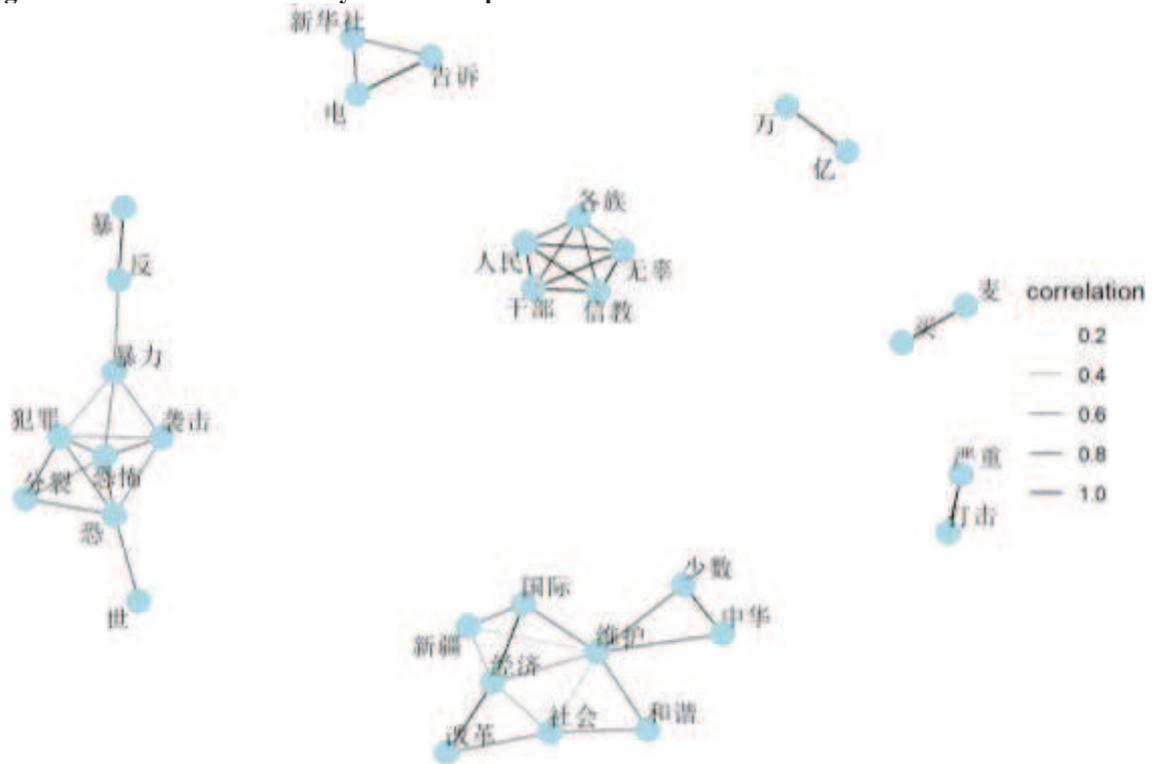
Besides the qualitative analysis, validation for the above observations was derived from frequency and word network analysis of the full sample of 2291 collected articles. Besides Xinjiang as the region of most of China’s terrorist attacks, Table 5-1 shows the most frequently occurring terms to be ‘ethnicity’ (民族), ‘terrorism’ (恐怖), ‘society’ (社会), ‘work’ and ‘development’ (工作 and 发展), ‘the [Chinese] people’ (群众 and 人民), ‘violence’ (暴力), ‘stability’ (稳定), and ‘unity’ (团结). Indeed, the open coding showed that violence and terrorism are strong indicators of the counter-terrorism framing, whereas all the other above-listed terms are commonly used in the social value framing (as the names of some frames already suggest, i.e. [national] unity frame)

**Table 5-1: Most frequent terms in the new coverage**

Word	Frequency	Translation
新疆	13012	Xinjiang
民族	7629	Ethnic group
恐怖	7437	Terrorism
社会	7166	Society
工作	7005	Work
群众	6734	‘The masses’ (= the Chinese people)
暴力	6171	Violence
事件	5669	Incident
人民	5267	The people
发展	5040	Development
稳定	5024	Stability
恐	4825	Fear/Terror (part of terrorism 恐怖)
乌鲁木齐	4742	Urumqi (Capital city of Xinjiang)
中国	4482	China
团结	4261	Unity

The word network in the following Figure provides further context to these terms by illustrating the strength of their relationship to other words in the data set. To reduce statistical noise as a result of the large number of terms in the data set, I filtered for the most commonly occurring terms (with frequency over 500). The correlation test identified three main clusters as being prevalent in the news which overlap with the above argument on the prevalence of counter-terrorism and social value frames.

Figure 5-2: Word network analysis with frequent terms and their correlation



The first cluster on the left evolves around the term ‘terrorism’ (恐怖), strongly correlating with ‘separatism’ (分裂), ‘crime’ (犯罪), ‘surprise attack’ (袭击) and ‘fear’ (恐). These words again correlate with ‘violence’ (暴力) and the term ‘fan’ (反), the open coding showed the latter to be mainly used in the context of fighting terrorism (反恐怖). The terms in this cluster align with the counter-terrorism framing described earlier, in that they provide various designations for the incident and the need to fight terrorism. The second large cluster at the bottom relates well to the social value framing. In the two centres of this cluster are ‘protecting’ (维护) and ‘economy’ (经济). The media associated protection most frequently with ‘economy’, ‘harmonious [society]’ (和谐 [社会]) and ‘China’ (中华). When speaking of the economy, besides from its protection, strong correlations existed with ‘Xinjiang’ (新疆), ‘reform’ (改革), and ‘international’ (国际). This cluster does not include words directly associated with terrorism, as can be seen in the lack of a connection to the counter-terrorism cluster. Nonetheless, when decreasing the filter to allow for less frequent words and associations, there relationship appears with the term ‘ideology’ (注意) connecting both clusters. This shows that social value frames and counter-terrorism frames are more frequently appearing separately from each other, rather than in relation to each other (i.e. social values as being threatened by terrorism). In conclusion, the separation of both clusters in the word network validates the earlier argument that the media promote social values in

addition to covering the terrorist threat. The analysis further confirmed social values and counter-terrorism frames to be a key component in the Chinese news construction of terrorism.

The other clusters continue to confirm the earlier qualitative observations, though are less informative without further context. The third main cluster in the centre shows the words ‘the people’ (人民), ‘ethnicities’ (民族), ‘cadre officials’ (干部), ‘religion’ (信教) and ‘innocent’ (无辜), with equally strong correlations to each other. This cluster suggests another social value framing that focuses on the different social groups of China. The other smaller pieces remain less informative. The top cluster presents several words associated with Xinhua reports, confirming the strong news reliance on the party-state’s official news agency, the Xinhua. Regarding the bottom right cluster with the terms ‘strike/attack’ (打击) and ‘hard/heavy’ (严重), the open coding showed them commonly occur in the context of ‘severely cracking down on terrorism’. The two clusters at the top right could not be interpreted without further details.

In conclusion, the news construction of terrorism is made up of three main components, among which social values and counter-terrorism frames are the most dominant main frames. The prevalence of social value frames, both related to terrorism and independently of it, lends itself to the question of how specifically the Chinese media frame terrorism. The following section was motivated by this question, showing that the party-state constructed a terrorist threat perception for the media that also promotes the social values of the CCP leadership.

### **‘Making’ a terrorism news construction for Xinjiang and China**

The party-state constructed a terrorism portrayal for the Chinese news media, various observations reviewed in this section led to this argument. These observations from the data analysis involved the continuous use of the terrorism label (called reinforcing) (see Appendix 2, IC 1), the thematic focus on the larger terrorist threat as opposed to a single terrorist attack (transcendence) (see Appendix 2, IC 4); the discussion of the terrorist threat without consideration of the ethnic grievances as potential root problems (de-contextualisation) (see Appendix 2, ICs 3 and 5); and the strong reliance on party-state source, in addition to the media control (see Appendix 2, IC 15) confirmed by the academic literature on China in Chapter 2 and leaked censorship instructions in Chapter 4. Together

they demonstrate the party-state effort to control and shape the reporting of violent incidents so that these would be understood by the readership and public as ‘terrorist threat’. that is by defining the terrorist threat and promoting this brand to shape public interpretation of the Xinjiang conflict. It is an example of how the party-state’s media strategy has evolved over time. While Chapter 2 demonstrated that the party-state at first denied the SARS epidemic in 2003 and prohibited any news coverage on the issue, the party-state led public opinion on the Xinjiang conflict by reinforcing an interpretation of the events that is discussed on the following pages.

As with any brand, there is a prevalent name for the product. The previous figures already showed that this label is ‘terrorism’ (compare also with Appendix 2, IC 1). As a reminder, the news data was collected by using only location and date as search words, not the term terrorism. This decision allowed the collection of articles that use any kind of label to refer to the incident, such as riot or separatism. Nonetheless, terrorism remained with great lead the most prevalent label for the incidents under study. Alternatives were ‘incident’ (事件), and much less frequently ‘violence’ (暴力) or ‘crime’ (犯罪). Terms that relate to the attack characteristics find rarely mentioning, such as there is no mentioning of the 2009 Urumqi attack being a riot. When shifting direction to the larger terrorism issue, the ‘three evils’ (三股势力) or ‘separatism’ (分裂) were occasionally used in articles instead of terrorism, yet ‘extremism’ (极端) remains far more frequently used in relation to terrorism. Figure 5-2 illustrated the strong use of the terrorism label by positioning the term at the centre of the counter-terrorism cluster.

A strong reliance on party-state sources, namely official media and state officials, helps the party-state to define the terrorism brand. For instance, brief event description issued within two days after each terrorist attack were identical in content, therefore demonstrate the party-state capability to use media control to communicate a certain event portray to the public (see Example 1). Of the media sources named in the sample articles, 34 per cent of the reports named the Xinhua or the People’s Daily as source of information (see Appendix 2, IC 15). Of the non-media sources, over two third were party-state officials or police investigation reports. Where official sources were named in the reports, much or even all news content was found similar to articles in other newspapers, though usually different in length and structure. I found that the newspaper had similar sentences or full paragraphs similar to other newspapers, yet the news content was re-arranged so that at first glance each news report might appear different in news content. Meanwhile, victims are hardly mentioned at all in

the news (see Appendix 2, IC 13), slightly more frequently are Xinjiang locals of any profession who describe the emotional harm and economic loss caused by terrorism (see Appendix 2, IC 14). Nonetheless, their occurrence plummets to almost zero starting with Cases in 2014 and are replaced by Xi Jinping for commendation (for further details, see Chapter 6) (see Appendix 2, IC 16).

Moreover, the media ignore any prior ethnic grievances or conflicts in Xinjiang prior to the terrorist attack (see Appendix 2, IC 3) but instead blame ‘Western hostile forces’ and East Turkistan movements (for more detail, see the following pages). Not even once in the sample did the media mention social grievances as potential cause for the terrorist attacks. This de-contextualisation of the root problems in Xinjiang is another observation that shows the party-state to shape the interpretation of the Xinjiang situation by denying the ethnic issues that would undermine its portrayal of national unity.<sup>26</sup> Instead, the portrayal of daily life in Xinjiang remained very positive with reference to the beauty of the landscape, ethnic solidarity, stability, and the improvement in living standards as result of economic growth. The following quote from Zhu Weiqun (朱维群), member of the CCP’s Standing Committee on Religious Affairs, is an example of de-contextualising a ‘terrorist’ attack by stressing that there is not a relationship between terrorism and any ethnic group. The de-ethnicising of terrorism, together with the promotion of national unity, show the media’s framing of the terrorist attack to be a ‘constructed’ interpretation of the events independent of prior or currently existing social issues in Xinjiang.

**Example 3: De-contextualisation by denying ethnic grievances**

Southern Metropolitan Daily (4/3/2014)

**Zhu Weiqun, Head of the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee of the CPPCC: Don't Link Kunming's Terrorist Incident to Specific Ethnic Groups**

Zhu Weiqun, Member of the CPPCC standing committee, head of the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee, says that these terrorists are under no circumstances representing any of our ethnic groups, but only represent those very few who betray their motherland and their own ethnic group.

‘If we associate the incident with a particular ethnic group and blame a particular one, it is not only totally against the reality, but also will hurt the feelings of ethnic minorities, which is exactly what the violent terrorist forces want’. Zhu Weiqun said that fighting violent terrorism requires the united strength of all ethnic groups. “I am fully convinced that the masses of all ethnic groups and cadres at the grass-roots level can unite against the violent terrorism. With unity as foundation, we can surely win the struggle against violent terrorism and against separatist forces.’ [...]

<sup>26</sup> This stands in contrast to a large body of academic literature that considers ethnic conflicts between Uyghur and Han Chinese as essential context to understand the escalation of violence in Xinjiang since 2009 (Clarke 2018; Roberts 2018).

To conclude, the above discussed coding observations, together with the findings presented in previous sections, confirm empirically that the party-state branded the incidents as acts of terrorism. Strategies of reinforcing, transcendence, denial, and party-state sourcing were interpreted as strategies to construct this brand. This observation confirms what Brown (2018) argues, that the party-state embraces unified ideology as key means of avoiding the further fracturing of Chinese society. The consistency in the label and news content across newspapers suggests an attempt of ‘unifying’ the news discourse on terrorism, while the de-contextualisation and transcendence ‘direct’ the news portrayal towards the terrorist threat construction that is discussed in the following section.

### **Constructing terrorism as ideograph to campaign against the ‘three evils’**

The party-state constructed a terrorism brand that functions as an ideograph in the Chinese news coverage. An ideograph, as Dobkin (1992) explained on terrorism television coverage in the US, is a journalistic lens with a normative commitment towards the telling of events, defining what is acceptable and what is to be condemned. The following sections present this argument through the prevalent frames listed earlier, showing from various perspectives the high level of abstraction of the terrorist threat, producing an epitome of evil that can be replaced by any of the ‘three evils’ as enemy. In addition, the news emphasis on the gravity of the situation and the merits of stability create a culture of fear and threat that legitimises immediate and comprehensive action against the terrorist threat. Therefore, the Chinese news coverage is not just a campaign against terrorism but against terrorism, religious extremism and separatism, in which the use of the ideograph brings great flexibility for the party-state in who is labelled a terrorist or not and legitimises any action taken in Xinjiang as ‘just’ in the name of counter-terrorism efforts.

### ***The terrorist threat: Prevalent Extremism-phobia, subtle Islamophobia***

Although the media most frequently speak of ‘terrorism’, the news construction of terrorism evolves around extremist thought as the root issue while refraining from giving more concrete information beyond religious fanaticism and ‘Western hostile forces’ (see Appendix 2, IC 5). While scholars found an Islamophobia in the US terrorism coverage, ‘extremism-phobia’ defines Chinese terrorism coverage. The term ‘extremism’ (极端主义) was undefined in the news articles but appears to be an umbrella term for not just religious extremism relating to the ‘three evils’, but as any form of extremist thought or activity that harms Chinese society. The following quotation exemplifies both the strong danger implied to be

coming from extremism as well as the its abstract nature: ‘Religious extremist thought has become the theoretical basis and ideological support for the emergence of violent terrorist activities and has become a cancer seriously affecting China's social stability’ (宗教极端思想已成为催生暴力恐怖活动的理论基础和思想支撑，成为严重影响中国社会稳定的一个毒瘤) (Case 3, Xinjiang Daily).<sup>27</sup>

The portrayed danger of extremism, as well as terrorism, stems from its de-stabilising effect on Chinese society (see Appendix 2, IC 6). News articles consistently portray it either as having the potential to destroy all the achievements under CCP leadership, as the example at the end of this paragraph shows. The open coding found a small number 18 articles in the sample which take a retrospective view by portraying pre-terrorism Xinjiang as a place of inter-ethnic solidarity, beautiful landscape, economic growth and put this in contrast to their destruction by terrorism and extremism. For instance, ‘looking back on Xinjiang’s 60 years of development, when the society stabilised and the economy developed healthily, the life of the people of all ethnic groups has become orderly and peaceful; when the social stability would be destroyed, the economy would stagnate and retrogress, and the safety and happiness of the people of all ethnic groups will be lost’ (回顾新疆 60 多年的发展历程，什么时候社会稳定，经济就健康发展，各族人民生活就安定祥和；什么时候社会稳定受到破坏，经济就停滞倒退，各族人民的安全、幸福就会失去保障) (Case 2, Beijing Daily).

Yet, the media do not just portray terrorism as the result of (religious) extremist thought, but also as a pernicious outcome of foreign influences. Terrorism seems not ‘home-made’ but ‘Western hostile forces’ (西方敌对势力) used the dispersion of extremist thought as tactic to harm China’s stability and development. While the reports do not specify who these “Western forces” are, both China’s membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the literature on China’s course of the Xinjiang conflict show Beijing seeing its Western neighbouring countries as epi-centre of the terrorism problem (Clarke 2018; Fredholm 2013). The concrete example are the East Turkistan terrorist groups (i.e. ETIM) that the party-state claimed responsible for China’s terrorism problem and to be linked to al-Qaeda. Very rarely and limited to Cases in 2014, the blame also shifted towards the far West, with the US being blamed for attempts of ‘westernisation’ of China and applying a ‘double standard’ for China’s and their own terrorism problem, allegedly in order to discredit China’s international

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<sup>27</sup> The full article is available in Appendix 2 since it provides a detailed insight in what constitutes the terrorist threat. Various frames can be found in this example as well.

standing. Example 4 shows in detail the long-held threat of hostile forces outside of the Chinese border.

**Example 4: The portrayed threat from ‘Western hostile forces’**

Xinjiang Daily (7/7/2013)

**Fully recognize the long-term arduous complexity of the struggle against separatism**

[...] As early as the 1930s, the separatist forces at home and abroad, motivated by foreign hostile forces, have planned several ‘independent’ political turmoil in Xinjiang. In the 1990s, with the dramatic changes in Eastern Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the nerves of domestic separatists were greatly stimulated. In addition, the Western hostile forces focused on China, and intensified their efforts to pursue the strategy of ‘Westernization’, ‘Differentiation’ and Containment, in an attempt to find and open a breakthrough into the border minority areas. They regard Xinjiang as their main target of attack, strive to attract and cultivate national separatist forces at home and abroad, support and manipulate national separatist organizations, and take various means to engage in separatist and destructive activities against Xinjiang. From the ‘4.5’ counter-revolutionary armed riots in Baren Township in 1990 to the ‘7.5’ incidents in Urumqi in 2009, and several recent violent terrorist Cases, all of them are strong reflections of the destruction the hostile and separatist forces bring. These facts fully show that the criminal activities of the hostile forces at home and abroad, which create violent and terrorist incidents, endanger national security, destroy national unity and social stability. They have not stopped and will not stop. We should have a full understanding of this and be prepared for a long-term struggle. [...]

Ethnic separatist forces, religious extremist forces and violent terrorist forces are united, which makes Xinjiang's struggle against terrorism and for stability increasingly complicated. In recent years, religious extremists and violent terrorists in some neighbouring countries and regions have gone rampant. They have set up training bases everywhere, recruited and trained violent terrorists, and carried out various subversive activities. Due to this, ethnic separatist activities in Xinjiang are also gradually escalating. The ‘three forces’ at home and abroad have intensified their collusion and constantly change their tactics. They wear the cloak of religion and take the form of concealment or openness to carry out reactionary propaganda and attack the party-state's line and policies, especially the national and religious policies. They cultivate the backbone of resistance, incite religious fanaticism, provoke national hatred and even create violent and terrorist activities with great arrogance. [...]

The portrayed blame on ‘Western hostile’ influences, the religious extremism as foundation of terrorism, and the Muslim identity of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, these factors would give reason to expect the Chinese media inhibiting traits of Islamophobia. However, this would be premature. The data analysis showed that the media used the terms Islam (回教 or 伊斯兰教) or Muslim (穆斯林 or 伊斯兰教徒) sparingly, with no mention of the Uyghur’s Muslim identity. Where Islamic beliefs *is* mentioned (see Appendix 2, IC 12), the media framed it in in two distinctly different ways, neither involved explicitly framing Muslims or Uyghurs as potential terrorists. The prevalent frame was to disassociate terrorism and extremism from Islam by clarifying that the terrorist acts were not related to any specific ethnic group or religion. Less common was the subtle defaming of Islamic beliefs as culturally backward, yet this remained in the news stories without a clear link to terrorism.

Most common were statements that disassociate terrorism from any specific ethnic group or religion. News reports cited Imams or Figureheads of Islamic associations who stressed Islam being a peaceful religion and opposing the killing of innocent people. The Southern

Metropolis Daily cited the party-state official Zhu Weiqun (朱炜群) saying that ‘the violent terrorist incident in Kunming cannot be generally described as an ethnic or religious issue, let alone ‘linked’ to specific ethnic groups. In any Case, they do not represent any ethnic groups but only the very few who betray their motherland and their own identity’ (不能把昆明暴力恐怖事件一般地说成民族宗教问题, 更不要把它同特定民族 ‘挂钩’。这些恐怖分子无论如何代表不了我们任何一个民族, 只能代表那些背叛祖国, 也背叛他们自身所在民族的极少数人) (Case 4, Southern Metropolis Daily). The media denying involvement of Islamic beliefs complements the earlier observation of the promotion of inter-ethnic solidarity, together clearly demonstrating the party-state’s ambition to maintain national unity. Nonetheless, Islamic beliefs remained a rare component of China’s news reporting, something which Luqiu and Yang’s (2018) study of Chinese news coverage of Islam and Muslims (unrelated to terrorism) provide a possible explanation for. They explain that Islam has been a traditional taboo in the Chinese news but was somewhat allowed in the Chinese news after 9/11. Given the prevalence of religious extremism as threat in the news construction, it seems likely that Islam as a religion a difficult issue to report on. Thus, the impression from the news data is that there is no explicit stigmatisation of Islam believers as enemies, but instead the promotion of inter-ethnic solidarity.

Yet, the second framing pattern of Islam appears somewhat counterintuitive, showing rare subtle comments that indicate the cultural backwardness of the Islamic way of living. While the terms Islam or Muslim rarely appear (see Appendix 2, IC 12), the media criticises an unspecified ‘other’ in Xinjiang for banning alcohol or forcing women to stay at home. Moreover, religious beliefs generally were then described as prone to extremist thought, such as by this *Xinjiang Daily* article: ‘In order to achieve their evil purposes, they always raise the banner of religion, to use the simple ethnic and religious feelings of the religious masses in every possible way to incite religious fanaticism, provoke ethnic conflicts, and create ethnic barriers’ (为实现其罪恶目的, 他们总是打着宗教的旗号, 千方百计地利用信教群众朴素的民族宗教感情, 煽动宗教狂热, 挑起民族矛盾, 制造民族隔阂) (Case 2, Xinjiang daily). Twelve articles across the sample data further defamed Islam as undesirable and backward, in below Case this is published as a comment from a Xinjiang PhD graduate who compares past and present Xinjiang life.

**Example 5: Defaming Islam**

Xinjiang Daily (15/11/2013)

**Learning to come back and visit the hometown**

(Yimingjiang Maimaiti, Ph.D. Graduate from the Institute of High Energy Physics, Chinese Academy of Sciences)

I remember when I was a child, there were very few women veiled in our countryside. In junior high school, the beautiful seven braids were the beauty symbol of the girl's youth. At that time, the girl's handkerchiefs or hat was embroidered with flower caps as tokens of young people's love. At that time, every young man who went to college would take an Aidelaisi [woven silk] skirt or a Kanawayi [local clothing] shirt as a way of thinking of his hometown. When I returned home this time, I found veiled women in the streets of Urumqi, many of them being young people. In my understanding, social development should be forward and upward. The combination of modern civilization and excellent national traditions is the trend of the development of all nations in the world. Many historical experiences at home and abroad show that this kind of extreme development in dress and ideology often leads to extreme behaviour, and even becomes the preferred target of infiltration by religious extremist forces. Every Uyghur youth must reflect on the fundamental question of which direction our society should develop. If we don't stand up to fight those extreme ideas now, they won't let our women go out to work tomorrow, and they won't let our dance songs appear on the stage. [...]

Only when our people of all nationalities are in deep friendship, advance together hand in hand, then our farmers can live in Western-style houses, and our women can play a greater role in society instead of squatting at home in their Jilibafu [clothing]. Our children will have a better education and more employment choices. This is our future life, and it should be our future life.

To conclude, the media framed religious extremism as imminent danger to the Chinese people, while simultaneously employing a twofold framing strategy on Islam. On the one hand, the media disassociate Islamic thought from religious extremism and keep the mentioning of Islam to a minimum. Extremist thought mainly remains the enemy in form of an abstract concept. On the other hand, above examples illustrate the news to vilify Islamic thought, without giving it a name, as harmful to China's development and prone to extremist fanaticism. Much research with focus on the US suggests that such defamation of Islamic believes fuels negative perception of Muslims as 'out-group' in society, yet this requires further testing for China (see the following section on adversarial framing; Luqiu and Yang 2018). Yet, extremism remained the prevalent threat in the media portrayal of terrorism, suggesting an extremism-phobia rather than an Islamophobia.

***Polarising the Chinese people and the terrorists with ideographs***

The Chinese news grouped terrorists together, obscuring any differences between terrorists or acts of violence, therefore creating an archetypical enemy that stands opposed to the Chinese people (see Appendix 2, IC 2). The terrorist has become part of the terrorism ideograph, defined by its tactics alone, as religious extremist who inflicts harm to China's stability without a clear or rational political motivation. While the portrayal of the religious fanatic gives the archetypical enemy a face, it also obscures the reality of other forms of

terrorism or conflicts in China. Therefore, together with the de-contextualisation and the extremism-phobia described earlier, the abstraction of the enemy other is another characteristic of the Chinese news construction on terrorism. Based on the data analysis, I argue that the news media vilified the image of “the terrorist” yet maintain throughout coverage a very abstract definition of this actor, therefore allowing the party-state to apply this threat construction to a wide range of threats to Beijing. There is only minor mentioning of individual terrorists by name and left to reports published shortly after the attack as part of the police investigation and detainment of terrorist suspects. Chapter 2 provided such examples with Falungong members or the current Hong Kong protesters being labelled as terrorists.

The most concrete indicator of the enemy other’s identity, yet an example of its abstraction, is the media grouping terrorists into “East Turkistan forces”. Only ETIM is mentioned, and only in a very few articles, in which these groups were used interchangeably for East Turkistan group generally. Although East Turkistan forces were rarely mentioned, the media therefore continued to reinforce the party-state’s accusation since 2001 of East Turkistan forces as terrorist threat (see also Tredaniel and Lee 2018; Clarke 2018).<sup>28</sup> More frequently was the media reporting on police investigations that discovered jihad flags or East Turkistan flags with the perpetrators in all eight attacks or note witness reports of them shouting the word ‘jihad’. While this links the attack back to the religious extremist threat, the media never interpreted the discovery any further by linking it to Islam or the Uyghurs explicitly. Nonetheless, the media portrayal of such discovery links the Xinjiang conflict with the Uyghurs to the global war on terror discourse on Islamic radicalisation. From both observations it becomes clear that Islamic radicalisation is a defining trait of the archetypical terrorist, yet it remains obscured with the East Turkistan forces and the abstract concept of religious extremism. The example below shows that the media blame ETIM for the Beijing 2013 attack (Case 3), while the second half shows the separation between ‘us’ as the Chinese people and ‘them’ as the terrorists as part of the framing on the enemy other.

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<sup>28</sup> For more information on ETIM and other terrorist groups in China, see Clarke 2018.

**Example 6: ETIM and terrorist motivation**

Xinjiang Daily (14/11/2013)

**Safeguarding the unity of the motherland is the common responsibility of the citizens of all ethnic groups**

(Zuliati Simayi, Associate Professor, School of Politics and Public Administration, Xinjiang University)

[...] On October 28 of this year, at Tiananmen, Beijing, a violent terrorist attack took place that injured many civilians and tourists and led to significant loss of life and property. This atrocity has made countless people angry and shocked the peace-loving people of the world.

Relevant departments have now ascertained that the 'East Turkistan Islamic Movement' [ETIM] group was the one who planned and carried out the Tiananmen terrorist attack in Beijing. The group is recognized by the United Nations Security Council as terrorist organization. Over the years, its personnel, together with many international terrorist extremist organizations, have been disseminating violent terrorist ideas in China through various means, and inciting, planning and implementing terrorist activities. It constitutes a major threat to the security and stability of China and other countries.

The Tiananmen Square in Beijing has always been regarded as the political heart of China. ETIM has chosen this special area in order to create fear among the people of China and to bring about more violent political reactions and sensationalism both at home and abroad.

Terrorist activities are mainly directed against the lives and property of ordinary civilians, using acts of violence or threats of violence. When committing this crime, they usually do not target any specific individuals. As in the '10.28' incident in Beijing, the victims were innocent civilians, regardless of ethnic group, religion and nationality. The atrocities committed by terrorism against innocent people reflect their cruelty and cowardice.

From the "7.5" incident in 2009 to the "10.28" incident this year, we can clearly see that no country, ethnic group or individual can remain 'an outsider' in the terrorism problem. Terrorism is a violation of the citizens' basic human rights and a challenge to the order of human civilization. Its crazy nature opposes society, humanity and civilization. [...]

The most prevalent face of the terrorists are not East Turkistan forces but that of a ruthless and brutal beast (Appendix 2, IC 7). This potent image portrays the enemy not only as straightforwardly villainous but goes further to deny their basic humanity. Examples of this 'demonization frame' were found in reports commonly labelling the terrorist act or the terrorists as inhuman (反人类) or more specifically described the brutality involved with the attacks. For example, a report in the Beijing Morning Post described police officer Shelin (射林) as not retreating in the face of the terrorists approaching and how their hit with a machete caused a ten-centimetre head wound, leaving him in a pool of blood (Case 4, Beijing Morning Post). Another very common statement on the attacks clearly separates the terrorist as an evil 'other' that stands opposed to the Chinese people: 'Violent terrorist attacks are against humanity, against society, and against a modern economy' (暴力恐怖袭击是反人类、反社会、反文明的行径) (Case 3, Nanfang Daily).

With the same observation of demonization in the US news coverage, Steuter and Wills (2016) argue that the description of the violent nature of terrorism increases drama and therefore news value, making terrorist acts to stand out against the routinised news treatment of crime and politically motivated violence. Another effect, they argue, is that these

metaphors of the terrorist's 'bestial nature' persuades the readers as 'our' side as righteous and the enemy as demonic. Therefore, stripping them systematically of humanity would provide the cultural platform for acts of war against the terrorist threat and a potent cognitive framework of the public for interpreting future acts of terrorism. This matters since creating sides fosters a sense of unity and conviction in objectives, as the next paragraph on adversarial framing demonstrates.

While terrorist acts have become horrifying, Chinese society was simultaneously glorified as inherently good. The media frequently reminded the readers that the 'good' manifested in improved living standard, as well as a harmonious society defined by ethnic solidarity and national unity. Reinforcing that 'we' stand on the side of stability and economic growth; the news promote terrorism as a fight between 'us' and 'them' (see Adversarial Frame, Appendix 2, IC 7). The emotional language, such as 'violent acts' (暴行) and the 'struggle against brutal extremism', help to create and reinforce the separation between 'us' as the 'good guys' and 'them' as violent terrorists. This 'adversarial frame' was in the content analysis one of the most prevalent frames (see Appendix 2 for the indicator question results). By also assuring the public of the success in this fight depending on 'us' standing united, the media engage in a form of othering and seek public trust in the party-state's ability to safeguard them. An indicative example is the following: 'I am fully convinced that the masses of all ethnic groups and cadres at the grass-roots level can unite against violence and terror. With [national] unity as foundation, we can surely win the struggle against violence and terror, and against separatist forces'. (我完全相信, 我们的各族群众、基层干部, 能够团结起来反对暴力恐怖。有了团结的基础, 我们肯定能取得这场反对暴力恐怖、反对分裂势力斗争的胜利) (Case 4, Southern Metropolis Daily).

By taking the ethnic grievances and political motivation out of terrorism and concentrating on the horror inflicted by religious fanatics, the ideograph of terrorists magnifies the incomprehensibility of terrorism. Using the ideograph of the Chinese society as the actual and symbolic target of terrorism has confined terrorism to a struggle between 'us' against 'them' rather than exploring the broader issue of the pre-existing ethnic grievances in Xinjiang. By portraying the ideographs as dialectically opposite, the news imparts equal levels of abstraction to the terms. In other words, terrorism functions as a term of political separation, while the ideograph of Chinese society promotes unification. In addition to creating a separation between the two, their ideological opposition further mobilises public support in opposing the enemy other. Therefore, presenting terrorism as an ideological

opposite to the Chinese society empties terrorism of both political motivation and historic context, while mobilising public support for party-state action against the terrorist threat.

***Fanning the flames of the terrorist threat: Urgency, gravity and ‘the right side’***

The media portrayal of terrorism as an unprecedented threat to the maintenance of an orderly society has elevated it to the status of a national security threat. Stipulating an official truth in the media and juxtaposing this to ‘false rumours’ and the ‘double standard’ of ‘the West’ also enabled the party-state to maintain opinion leadership in how the terrorist threat is perceived. In this sense, the prevalent urgency and gravity frame as well as ‘the right side’ frame portray terrorism as a grave threat which requires a united and resolute response by the Chinese people.

The urgency and gravity frame manifested in the consistent emphasis on the seriousness (严重) of the terrorist attacks whenever referring to the incident, followed by claims of their pre-meditation (预谋). Other manifestations of the urgency and gravity frame were visible in earlier examples, such as when reporters stress the need to fight terrorism resolutely to prevent any further harm to China’s stability. The media portrayed the terrorist attacks as serious, independent of whether the casualties were high or low (see Figure X in Chapter 4), therefore signalling that the number of casualties is not the main reason for the assessment on its severity. The data analysis showed that the terrorist threat and its gravity was not defined by the number of casualties but rather its destabilising effect on the Chinese society.

As Example 7 shows, the media portrayed stability at the centre of China’s contemporary society, yet it is under threat by terrorism and extremism (see also Appendix 2, IC 6). First, the media portrayed terrorism as unprecedented threat to the maintenance of the orderly society due to its negative effect on economic growth (i.e. property loss, loss in tourism income) and quality of life. As discussed in more detail at the end of this Chapter on social values, the news reports picture solidarity and commitment to the Chinese economy as necessary for the continuous growth in living standard, a factor that is at the very least disrupted by acts of terrorism. Second, terrorism reportedly spreads extremist thought that weakens the social value ideology that holds the Chinese society together. The severity of the terrorist threat stems from the de-stabilising effect on society. The example of such harm to Chinese society can be found below in which terrorism was portrayed by the media as tumours.

**Example 7: The harm of terrorism to Chinese society**

Xinjiang Daily (15/11/2013)

**Violent terrorists are tumours that gravely affect the stability of the Chinese society**

Kuran Nihemaiti, Member and Vice-President of the Party Committee of the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences

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Their purpose is to create a sensational effect in the international arena, to create pressure on the party and the state, and to create an atmosphere of terror in the whole society, which once again exposes their reactionary plots to split the motherland, destroy consensus and national unity. Facts have proven once again that violent terrorists are the common enemy of the people of all nationalities worldwide. Our struggle against violent terrorists is neither a matter of nationality nor religion, but a political struggle between splittism and anti-splittism, defending and destroying the unity of the motherland. There is absolutely no room for compromise or leeway.

Terrorist crimes have seriously endangered the lives of people of all ethnic groups. From this year's '4.23', '6.26' to '10.28' violent terrorist Cases, we can see that the tactics of violent terrorists are extremely cruel, with killing as the definite goal, among those killed including Uyghur as well as international tourists. These acts of violence and terror are a serious violation of human rights, a serious challenge to the dignity of the legal system, a serious damage to the civilized order, and a typical anti-social, anti-human and anti-civilized terrorist act, which will surely be strongly condemned and rejected by peace-loving countries and people around the world. The reality also warns us once again that violent terrorism has become the most realistic and direct threat to the social stability of China and Xinjiang.

Therefore, when an attack occurs, the media's goal seems to articulate an official account to serve as the authoritative version of events and to control the way the public perceives the issue (Appendix 2, IC 15). One can also observe the party-state's practice of articulating an official truth in the rapid response to each incident, providing brief event descriptions that are displayed in each newspaper within two days. Starting with Case 3, the 2013 car crash into Tiananmen, the media also framed the party-state as providing "the only truth" on China's terrorism problem and providing an antithesis to the 'double standard' (双重标准) of 'the West'. The 'double standard' refers to the media's claim of any information on terrorism other than from the party-state would be 'lies' or 'rumours' and stands in contrast to the party-state's 'truth' (真相 or 真像) on the situation.

Accordingly, 'the West', specifically the US, were criticised by the media for applying what they called a 'double standard' to China's terrorism issue. They claim that "the West" applies different criteria to what is called terrorism in China as opposed to their own country and includes criticisms against 'Western' journalists of breaking their professional ethics by lying. Such comments, though with nine examples in the sample a relatively low number, are without exception sources that reportedly came from the Xinhua. The example below demonstrates this criticism towards various named Western outlets for their reporting, three days after the Kunming railway station attack in March 2014.

**Example 8: Western double-standard on China's terrorist threat**

Economic Daily (4/3/2014)

**A statement by the head of the All-China Journalists' Association on Western media having ulterior motives in reporting the serious violent terrorist incident in Kunming**

Xinhua News Agency, Beijing, March 3. [...] On the evening of March 1, a serious violent terrorist incident occurred in Kunming Railway Station, Yunnan Province. Terrorists brutally attacked with knives a large number of innocent people. At present, 29 people have been killed and 143 injured. The Chinese people of all nationalities and the international community immediately strongly condemned this serious violent terrorist incident. However, some western media ignore most basic journalistic ethics, and have ambiguous, unpredictable and ulterior motives in their reports. For example, CNN quotes terrorists in its reports, the Associated Press prefixes China's 'officially called terrorists' in its reports, and the New York Times, Washington Post and Reuters call terrorists 'attackers' and 'radicals'. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) not only puts the words violent terrorism in quotation marks, but also emphasizes that the official reports cited by the BBC are 'unconfirmed'. What's more, when the Associated Press selectively quoted a respondent, it claimed that 'Uyghurs should be allowed to be independent'.

It must be pointed out that a large number of facts fully prove that the heart-breaking atrocity at Kunming Railway Station is a naked violent terrorist crime. The cruel nature of the criminals' anti-humanity, anti-civilization and anti-society has been exposed, and these thugs are without doubt terrorists. However, some of the Western media, which have always been the loudest voices on the issue of counter-terrorism and human rights, have been collectively 'blind' and have even defended and sought excuses for the atrocities committed by terrorists. This practice is obviously a double standard, contrary to the principle of objective and impartial news, and lacks the minimum professional ethics of the media. Chinese journalists expressed strong indignation on this. [...]

Other articles additionally remain brief and with emphasis on not to tell lies (Example: Case 2, Xinjiang Daily, article 2). They demand loyalty to the government, disbelief of rumours and continuous adherence to the promoted social values. In this line, later Cases (under the Xi administration) reinforce the need to strengthen media control to guide public opinion towards this truth (see also Klimes 2018).

Therefore, the main message remains that of a grave terrorist threat that requires a united and resolute response by the Chinese people. Considering the national trauma, national unity is deemed essential to the collective survival of the state against hostile foreign forces. As Tredaniel and Lee (2018, p. 179) point out, this 'threat inflation' comes along with a securitisation of the issue and can lead to securitisation of Chinese society.

***Mobilising and legitimising China's securitisation***

Regarding the question of how to respond to the threat, the media focused on mobilising public support for the party-state's counter-operations rather than portraying its reality. There is first, unsurprisingly, the event description that shaped the threat perception by the selection of information and evaluation given. When describing the event, for instance, the number of casualties and the police investigations, immediate party-state response strategies

are mentioned. Specifically, the increased security presence on the street and the arrest or pursuit of the terrorist suspects are mentioned. Such statements remain brief, yet they demonstrate that the party-state has the situation under control and demonstrate the capability in successfully detaining terrorist threats.

When it came to the reality of the counter-operations, the media focus aligned with policy changes on terrorism. The main focus remained on changes to counter-terrorism legislation and bureaucracy (Appendix 2, ICs 8 and 9). Regarding the latter, the media mentions the establishment, expansion and training of police and military forces, demonstrating that the party-state acts to establish task forces that specialise in counter-terrorism operations. In 2014, media attention shifted to counter-terrorism legislation and surged in the number of statements that demand the drafting of counter-terrorism law to fight terrorism. The timing is of importance since in the same year the fourth Plenum of the CCP's 18<sup>th</sup> Central Committee resolved to advance the 'social rule of law with Chinese characteristics', promulgating to strengthen ethnic unity work and to fight terrorism.<sup>29</sup> The quest for legal authority over Xinjiang began already in the late Hu Jintao period, yet it was only in 2014 that the Committee declared to 'rule Xinjiang by law, stabilize Xinjiang unity, and build Xinjiang for permanence' (Klimes 2018: 425), and the adoption of China's first national counter-terrorism law took place in December 2015. Therefore, the media seem to reinforce policy changes on terrorism by adding statements to the news reports that favoured these changes in advance.

Indeed, news focus did not rest with the reality of counter-terrorism but in creating public consensus that a pro-active stance by the party-state is a necessity against terrorism. In the coding category for counter-operations, the demand of the reporters, Xinjiang locals or party-state officials to 'strike hard' (坚决反恐怖) was with appearance in 36% of the articles in the sub-sample the most prevalent frame. A brief, yet typical example is on the Kunming railway station knife attack in Case 3: 'As for the problem of combating terrorists, such as Kunming "3.01", which just happened, these terrorists are inhumane, and their crimes are heinous. Anti-humanity, anti-society and anti-civilization are our common enemies, including the common enemies of the people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang. Such arrogance must be brought down by thunder' (对于暴恐分子打击问题, 比如刚刚发生的昆明 "3·01" ,

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<sup>29</sup> Implementation papers on the regional level have followed since then for Xinjiang, with the most detailed piece being the XUAR De-Extremisation regulation from 2017 and the newest version from March this year, 2019. See Klimes 2018 for detail.

这些暴恐分子毫无人性，罪行令人发指，反人类、反社会、反文明，是我们共同的敌人，包括新疆各族人民的共同敌人。必须以雷霆之势把这种嚣张气焰打下去) (Case 4, Guangzhou Daily).

No ambiguity could be found on the party-state's ambition to thwart terrorism, therefore the news content is in line with the official Beijing rhetoric of ruling with an iron hand in Xinjiang (Gunaratna et al. 2010) (Appendix 2, IC 8). Though Beijing claims its terrorist problem to come from outside, rarely articles refer to any cooperation with other states in fighting terrorism (3% of the sub-sample). Where this was the Case, the commitment was stronger in favour of transnational cooperation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) with China's neighbouring countries, reference to international cooperation to fight the 'global war on terror' remained absent.

Concluding from the above observations, the media on the securitisation of China and specifically Xinjiang weight towards the necessity of counter-terrorism rather than its reality. This aligns with the argument of this larger section on the counter-terrorism framing that the media portrayal of terrorism as ideograph includes counter-terrorism as an ideograph.

### **Embracing social values to fight terrorism**

#### **Example 9: The social values of stability, unity and economic growth**

Xinjiang Daily (1/7/2013)

#### **Unity and stability are the fundamental interests of the people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang**

Turkan Pida, head of the religious affairs bureau of the Autonomous Region People's Committee

[...] Great developments and changes have all proven the greatness of the Communist Party of China, the superiority of the socialist system and the concrete body of ethnic and religious policies. Long-term historical practice has proven that national unity and social stability are the fundamental interests of all ethnic groups. Without the pre-condition of unity and stability, nothing can be done. The achievements of development that have been achieved will be lost, not to mention the sustainable and healthy development of economy and society, and the gradual improvement of people's living standards of all ethnic groups. The long-term policy of the Communist Party of China and the fundamental interests of the people of all nationalities are to unite, advance, prosper and develop together, consolidate and develop equally, united, with mutually beneficial and harmonious ethnic relations among the people of all ethnic groups. When there is harmony and social and political stability, the economy will develop and the living standards of the people of all ethnic groups will be guaranteed. When national unity and social stability are destroyed, the economy will stagnate and fall back, and the lives of the people will be affected. This is an irrefutable truth proven by long-term historical practice. [...]

Chinese terrorism coverage is not just about the terrorist threat, a main component is the promotion of social values that constitute the ideological foundation of contemporary China under CCP rule (Appendix 2, ICs 10 and 11). Social value frames were consistently and highly prevalent in the news reporting and manifested in frames of stability, economic growth, national unity (ethnic solidarity), and rule of law. The above news excerpt is indicative of their importance to the party-state, while also demonstrating the promotion of social values independent from the issue of terrorism. This section explains the third main

argument of this Chapter, which is that the terrorism coverage was not just a campaigning opportunity against the ‘three evils’ but for the promotion of social values under CCP leadership. This analysis-driven position reflects Brady’s argument reviewed in Chapter 2 that the party-state successfully reinvented its ideological promotion strategy to be applicable in terrorism coverage. The frequency and word network analysis presented at the beginning of the Chapter further validated their importance, displaying stability, solidarity and economic growth as among the most frequently used terms in the data set. In short, they dominate the news coverage.

As the quotation below exemplifies, the media remain clear on stability being the foundation of a functioning Chinese society (Appendix 2, IC 11). The media equate stability with continuing economic growth and improving living standards yet made its existence dependent on national unity and loyalty to the CCP. Starting with Cases in 2014, the rule of law became more prevalent as additional conditions to stability yet remained the least promoted frame of the four. For instance, the importance of social values becomes clear in this citation: ‘Stability is the premise of development, stability is the basis of prosperity, and stability is the greatest livelihood of the people, which is the irrefutable truth proved by historical practice’ (稳定是发展的前提, 稳定是繁荣的基础, 稳定是最大的民生, 这是历史实践所证明的颠扑不破的真理) (Case 2, Beijing Daily).

National unity was the most prevalent condition for stability (Appendix 2, IC 11), which manifested in emphasis on collectivity as one Chinese society or through inter-ethnic solidarity (i.e. ‘harmony and stability are the common aspirations of all ethnic groups, and we must better fulfil our mission’ 和谐稳定是各族人民的共同心愿, 一定要更好地履行使命; Case 4, Xinjiang Daily). The national unity frame promotes a sense of ‘us’ as collective, but, different to the adversarial frame (‘us’ versus ‘them’) is not defined by unity in the face of the enemy. Nonetheless, together these two frames, and even on their own, make the sense of unity among the Chinese people one of the most prevalent frame in the terrorism coverage. Similar to the rule of law covered earlier regarding the counter-terrorism law, the prevalence of national unity aligns with the promulgation of the 18<sup>th</sup> Central Committee as well as the Central Xinjiang Work Forum to solve Xinjiang’s ethnic unity problem by establishing national consciousness as well as strengthening identification with the homeland (Klimes 2018). Therefore, the data confirms the aim of the Chinese government to maintain an image of a harmonious society with unity among its different ethnic groups, using the rhetoric of

solidarity between all ethnic groups to raise national consciousness and strengthen boundaries to terrorism.

### **The Chinese and US framing of terrorism in comparison**

Contrary to the scholarly findings on US terrorism framing reviewed in Chapter 2, the Chinese media do not employ the ‘war on terror’ frame (Steuter and Wills 2016). The framing analysis for China found indeed the portrayal of a fight against terrorism yet does not use the terminology of war. Moreover, the US ‘war on terror’ involves the conflict with other states due to the perception of terrorists coming from outside the US border. While the Chinese media explain the terrorism issue to be the result of religious extremist thought being spread from outside China, there is no indication of an inter-state conflict to combat terrorism. Contrasting these two portrayals of the terrorism issue demonstrates that the party-state interprets the issue as a domestic one. This finding challenges the currently existing claim of Xinjiang scholars who see the party-state appropriating the ‘war on terror’ lexicon for the Xinjiang conflict (Clarke 2008; Roberts 2018; Wayne 2007). While this yet requires testing for the policy domain, this finding on the media would suggest that scholars who use the ‘war on terror’ label to refer to China’s terrorism issue do so prematurely and require conceptualisation before their use.

In contrast with Islamophobia in the US, the Chinese news stories of terrorism exhibit an Extremism-phobia. In the US war on terror, scholars confirmed the existence of Islamophobia with comments on Islam being a ‘cancer’, regular calls for arrest and deportation of non-white immigrants and the extermination of entire countries that may or may not harbour suspected terrorists (Steuter and Wills 2016). The Chinese media, however, rarely mention Islam and subtle comments defame Islam as prone to extremism. However, the central purported threat lies in religious extremist thought more generally. While subtle comments defamed Islam, a larger number state that Chinese terrorism is not linked to any specific religion or ethnic group. Therefore, ‘extremism-phobia’ is a more precise description of the Chinese news reporting. An additional impression from the reading of the material, though requiring further testing in future research, is the stronger level of abstraction for the terrorist enemy in China in comparison to the US.

Another difference rests with China’s focus on social values. The previous discussion showed in the prevalence of the four frames stability, economic growth, national unity and rule of law the central role the CCP ideology takes in China’s terrorism coverage. These

frames are unique to China. However, one could argue of a similar existence of social values in the US coverage, just in different forms. For instance, Dobkin (1992) already described the pride Americans take in freedom and their morality in terrorism coverage. Similarly, being a nation under god as well as the defence of democracy as were chief rhetorical weapons (Moeller 2009). However, the analysis confirmed similarity between both countries in the thematic framing, on the incidents remain brief, and even those that seemed pivotal in shifting the direction of the conflict were quickly subsumed into the larger story of China's terrorist threat (Moller and Skaaning 2013). In addition, they both reportedly show the prevalence of the adversarial framing ('us' versus 'them'). In both Cases, the media seem to set boundaries between the nation's citizens as unified and in opposition to the terrorist. The similarity includes the demonization of the terrorist enemy strengthening said boundaries (Edney 2014, Roberts 2018; Yang 2012).

Overall, there are certainly similarities in terrorism coverage between the US in framing terrorism as an ideograph, focusing with thematic framing more on the larger terrorist threat, promoting a sense of unity, and setting with adversarial frames boundaries to the evil other. Therefore, both countries share the attempt of legitimising counter-operations against the alleged terrorists by defining the news construction. Yet, there are several differences in the news construction that provide empirical support to the de-Westernisation of media theory debate discussed in Chapter 2.

## **Conclusion**

The data analysis found ten prevalent frames in the Chinese terrorism coverage, creating a news product that not just legitimises any party-state action against the enemy in the name of a counter-terrorism, promotes social values in accordance of CCP ideology and constructs the archetypical enemy as an ideograph that the party-state can apply to any perceived threat. The terrorism label has come to represent a virtual biological threat to the Chinese social order, making it a powerful image that stands opposed to China's ideal of the 'harmonious society'.

Data analysis observations of reinforcing, transcendence, denial, and party-state sourcing focus led to the empirically grounded conclusion that the party-state is promoting and defining the terrorist threat perception. They constructed the terrorism brand that the media applied and promoted to the Xinjiang conflict. The findings on leaked censorship instructions discussed in the previous Chapter further support this conclusion. While

Barbour and Jones (2013) and Zeng et al.'s (2015) study suggest party-state attempts of 'guiding' terrorism coverage, neither had empirical evidence to support their claims on this or drew on a comprehensive framing analysis to reach this conclusion. The previous Chapter already demonstrated that the party-state was not silencing news coverage on the terrorist attacks but was engaging in 'media management'. Reasons for this strategy are reflected in prevalent frames, such as on 'the right' side, social values or the adversarial frame, which all promote a definition of who is the enemy and which ideals are to be desired. In this sense, the framing observation confirm the media to serve as another resilience tool of the party-state in addition to those covered in Chapter 2.

The terrorism brand does both, mobilising support for the fight against an abstract other and juxtaposing it to the ideal of harmonious and stable society. The previous discussion on prevalent frames revealed the reporting of terrorism to be a complex combination of almost opposing views, such as the defaming of Islamic beliefs while advocating for ethnic solidarity, legitimising a fight against terrorism while embracing the ideal of a 'harmonious society', mentioning ETIM as terrorist group yet focusing largely on terrorism as an ideograph. It becomes clear from the analysis that the framing of the terrorist threat is imbued with the fear of an evil other, seeking to legitimise the forceful intrusion of the party-state's security forces. Meanwhile, at the centre of the news coverage is not the terrorism, especially not its victims, but the social values that define the CCP ideology.

## **Chapter 6: Prevalent Changes in the News Framing of Chinese Terrorism**

No research until now has investigated Chinese news frame changes on terrorism since 2009, and yet the literature on the securitisation of Xinjiang and the tightening of media control during the Xi administration would suggest changes in the news construction of terrorism. This dissertation's exploratory analysis of prevalent frame changes over time did indeed find Xinjiang under 'new circumstances' during the Xi administration, with cases in 2014 shifting in news framing towards Xi Jinping and social values. This chapter demonstrates that the terrorist threat portrayal itself, however, only changed to a minor extent. Two exceptions were the growing prevalence of the securitisation frame in 2014 with the news demanding counter-terrorism law and the increased focus on the larger terrorist threat with its links to extremism. The news media attention turned stronger towards Xi Jinping and social values, with the rule of law being a new prevalent frame since 2014. Therefore, the findings evidence the media's increased role in promoting ideology while the terrorist threat in terrorism coverage became secondary.

This argument has been distilled from the sub-sample of 458 articles by comparing framing differences between cases, therefore allowing to identify prevalent changes in framing over time. The first part of this chapter involves findings from three quantitative tests on the similarity of news content between these cases. The aim was to identify the extent to which news coverage varies in terrorism coverage over time; the quantitative text analysis validates some of the framing observations presented in the previous chapter, while also demonstrating that quantitative text analysis of Chinese content requires much more scholarly development. The indicator question analysis was the main source of findings to answer the research question. For each case, I answered the 16 indicator question in Appendix 3 and compared differences in the answers across cases to identify frame changes. These are the same indicator questions as used for the framing analysis used for Chapter 5, only that separates the answers by case. Together, this chapter empirically confirms scholarly claims on Xi Jinping's tighter grip over the media to hold true for terrorism coverage and that it has resulted in press reporting of terrorist incidents that focus heavily on Xi's appeal to fight terrorism and the promotion of the social values stability, economic growth, national unity and rule of law.

### Similarities in news coverage over time

The exploration of frame changes over time began with quantitative similarity tests in which the data population of 2291 articles was separated by case. Based on the frequency of words in each of these documents, the Pearson's correlation test was a first indication of the extent to which the news coverage of these cases overlapped in content. It tested the hypothesis that news content in terms of words used is consistent across the cases. In order to test the hypothesis, the Pearson's correlation test used the frequencies of all words occurring in each article and compared their similarity across cases. Case 1 served as reference point for comparison since it was the only case that is timewise furthest apart from the other cases, Case 1 occurred in 2009 whereas the other cases took place between 2013 and 2015. Therefore, a similarity test between case 1 and each of the other seven cases indicated the extent of news content change within the six years (see Table 6-1).

**Table 6-1: Similarity of news coverage across cases**

Cases	Extent of similarity
Case 1 and Case 2	68%
Case 1 and Case 3	55%
Case 1 and Case 4	60%
Case 1 and Case 5	73%
Case 1 and Case 6	73%
Case 1 and Case 7	55%
Case 1 and Case 8	67%

**Note: See Appendix 3 for the full test details.**

The test results suggest that news content of case 1 compared to other cases ranged from moderate correlation with case 3 ( $r=0.55$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ) to high correlation with all other cases ( $r=0.60 \leq 0.73$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ). All tests showed statistical significance of  $p \leq 0.05$ , with most cases achieving the high correlation range of 0.60-1.00 in relation to case 1.<sup>30</sup> Strong levels of similarity exist between case 1 and the other others, starting with 68 per cent of similar words between the cases 1 and 2. Over time, this level of similarity fluctuated by around ten per cent, yet the values remain consistently over 50%. This shows that the news content for the different terrorist attacks remained similar over time.

Figure 6-1 illustrates these high levels of similarity between both cases by clustering words close to the dashed line that goes in each box from the bottom left to the top right. The

<sup>30</sup> To the best of my knowledge, this similarity test has not previously been conducted on the news coverage of any news item in China. While the importance of this test should not be overstated since the similarity of words cannot signal frame similarity, I hope that continuation of incorporating this test can allow researchers to establish a link between these two based on a larger number of cases. As of now, it shall only serve to indicate the extent of content similarity. Only a few studies on Western press have used this test, suggesting that any correlation higher than 0.60 signals strong similarity in content. For examples, see Baden and Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2017; Schober et al. 2018; Tedesco 2006.

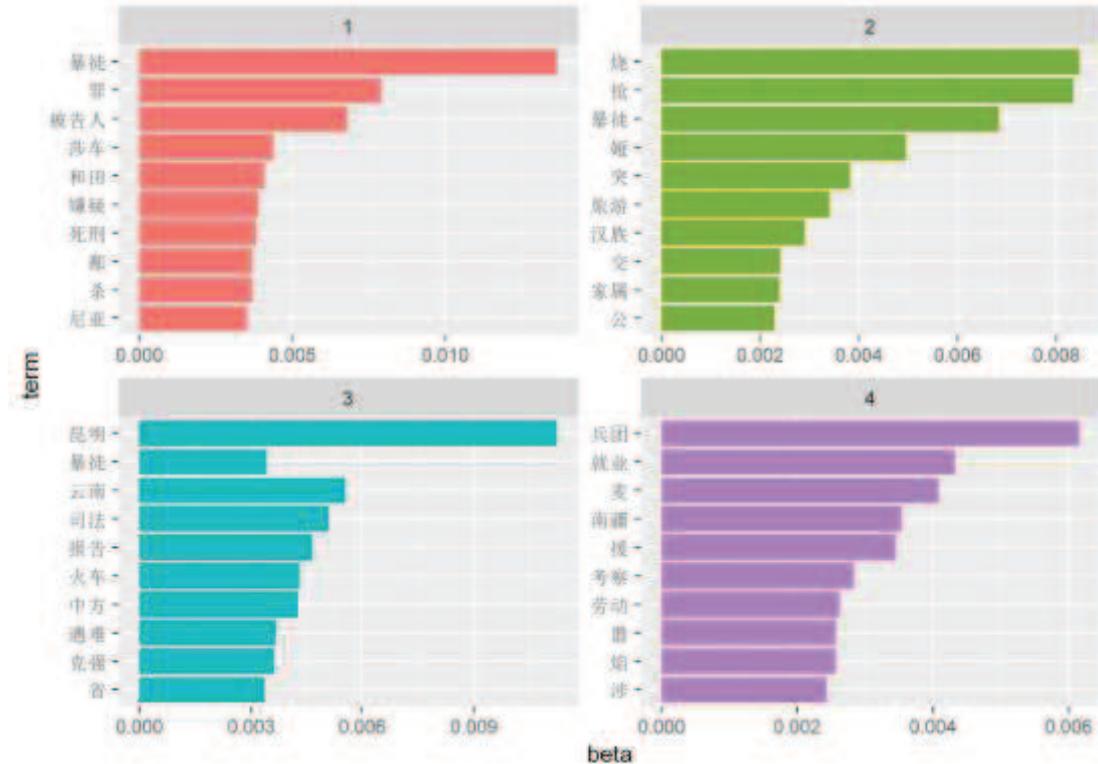
deviation of a word from the dashed line signalled that this word occurred more frequently in one of the two cases. Words positioned at the bottom left of the box appeared rarely, whereas those positioned at the top right appeared frequently in the news coverage. For instance, in the comparison of the first and second case, the term Xinjiang (新疆) was at the top right corner of the box and close to the dashed line. The high x-value signalled highly frequent use of the word in case two, the additional high y-value showed the same for case 1. In another example, the word ‘terrorism’ (恐怖) was in the same box below ‘Xinjiang’ and deviated from the dashed line. The extremely high x-value signalled frequent appearance in the news coverage of case 2, yet the y-value is lower. Therefore, the terrorism appeared much more frequently in case 2, therefore signalling a difference in news content regarding this word.



the top right or at the centre confirm the prevalence of the social value frames and counter-terrorism frames in Chinese terrorism coverage. For instance, frequent terms across cases were ‘terrorism’ (恐怖), ‘unity’ (团结), ‘the people’ (人民 and 群众), ‘[people of all] ethnic groups’ (各族), ‘development/growth’ (发展), ‘serious’ (严重), ‘violence’ (暴力). The words align with the previously discussed prevalent frames of national unity, economic growth, injustice and gravity frame. Meanwhile, a prevalent difference between the first and the other cases is the use of the word ‘terrorism’, at a y-value of around 0.100%. Its position right of the dashed line illustrates that, apart from case 4, all other cases used the term much more frequently than case 1. Future research could take this observation as a starting point for an in-depth analysis of the use of the word ‘terrorism’ in news coverage over time. As of now, a possible explanation could be an increasing use of the terrorism label over time for terrorist attack, yet more cases during the Hu administration would be necessary to reach this conclusion.

Finally, I used structural topic modelling to explore framing patterns in the news, while also testing for any framing differences across cases to extend on the above similarity tests. While the above tests only considered word frequencies, structural topic modelling identifies prevalent ‘topics’ that constitute a main component of the news story based on the frequencies of words and their relation to each other. While this should not be confused with framing, since the former remains highly generalised based on large amounts of text and the latter is a concrete understanding of a word/phrase/sentence(s), it nonetheless indicates prevalent parts in a news story. In this sense, it is an unstructured quantitative text analysis that analyses news content independent from the qualitative content analysis (for more details, see Chapter 3). Diagnostic tests showed that four topics defined the news coverage of all eight cases (see Appendix 3 for the diagnostic tests and selection criteria). Figure 6-2 shows these four topics together with the ten most commonly associated words.

Figure 6-2: Structural topic modelling - News topics and associated words



Note: 'Beta' on the x-axis refers to the extracted per-topic-per-word probability, while 'term' on the y-axis denotes the words that are most frequently associated with the respective topic.

The output generally suggested a news focus on the terrorist threat, the fight against that threat, and the role of legislation in this. It confirms framing observations stated in the previous chapter on their prevalence. Taking a closer look at the first topic, the extracted words 'thug' (暴徒) as common word for terrorist, 'crime' (罪), 'the accused' (被告人), 'the suspect' (嫌疑), 'death sentence' (死刑) and 'kill' (杀) together suggest this topic to be on the terrorist suspects and their punishment. Topic three is also recognisable due to several extracted terms being location terms related to case 4, these were Kunming (昆明), Yunnan (云南) and the train station (火车站), which reminded of the knife attack at the Kunming central railway station in case 4. The words 'judicial' (司法) and 'thug' might relate to content analysis observation for case 4 on the prevalence of calls for counter-terrorism legislation.

The topics two and four remain less clear to interpret due to the large number of single characters that require further context for interpretation. The two terms that were strongest associated with topic two, 'burn/cook/heat' (烧) and 'fight over/ grab/rob' (抢), together with the term 'thug', where when reading the reports as part of the open coding commonly used in the context of 'cracking down' on terrorists. For topic 4, the terms 'bingtuan' (兵

团)<sup>31</sup>, ‘employment’ (就业) and ‘labour’ (劳动) suggested that another news focus was on work life. This finding links back well to the open coding observation that shows the media to appeal to the people to continue the day-to-day work life without fear of terrorism. In previous chapters I explained that the media demand to the public to resolutely fight terrorism, yet the news coverage does not contain any suggestion on how to do so but instead mobilises the people to maintain stability. One example of this stability was not just the political leadership of the Chinese Communist Party but also the economic growth as signalled above with the fourth topic on work life.

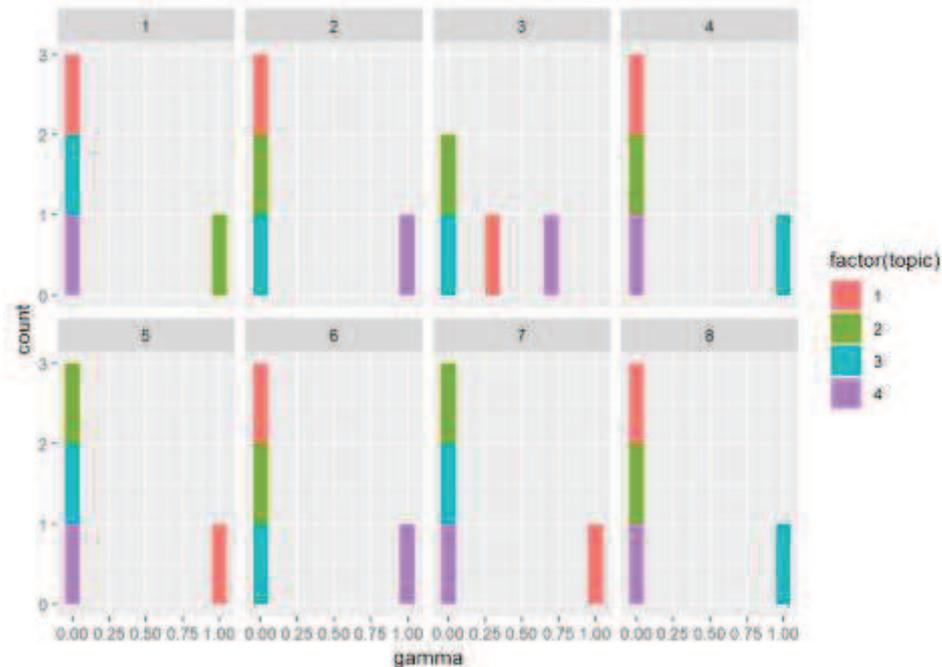
I cannot interpret the role of the other terms in the news focus of topic 4 due to large number of single characters. This issue demonstrates the challenge any utilisation of structural topic modelling still poses for the analysis of Chinese text, it is the word segmentation process that is necessary for the text analysis as part of pre-processing the data. The process yet suffers from the challenge of which characters together form a ‘word’. For instance, the pre-processing of the data separated Xi Jinping into two so-called tokens, the first name and the last name. The result of this challenge can be seen in the various single characters in topic two and four. Therefore, it showed that unstructured topic modelling for Chinese text is still in its infancy but also demonstrated why the additional use of qualitative methods for this project was necessary to explore the news portrayal.

Nonetheless, the main reason for using the structural topic modelling was to test whether these topics derive from each of the eight cases to a similar extent. So, Figure 6-3 showed to which extent each of the four topics was associated with each case. If one topic uniquely derived from one case, this would uniquely signal differences in news content to the other cases.

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<sup>31</sup> A ‘bingtuan’, with the full name ‘Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps’ (新疆生产建设兵团), that according to Cliff (2009) is a military-agricultural settlement and production institution founded in 1954 to open up land for agricultural production and defend the Xinjiang region. See also Zhu and Blachford (2015).

**Figure 6-3: Strength of association between each topic and case**



**Note:** ‘Gamma’ on the x-axis refers to the ‘per-case-per-topic probability’, indicating the extent to which the news coverage on one case identified a topic. ‘Count’ denoted the number of topics that hold a certain gamma-value for each case. See Silge and Robinson (2017) for details.

The key finding was that case one uniquely defined topic two, as signalled by the gamma value of one for topic two in box 1. All other cases share ties to the other three topics. Topic 1 derived strongly from the cases 5, 7 and to less extent also from case 3. Topic 3 was strongly tied to the cases 4 and 8, while the fourth topic related strongest to case 2, 3 and 6. This figure highlighted once again, though through the difference method of unsupervised topic modelling, that news coverage on case 1 was different to the following cases. Together with the prior similarity analysis, these findings clearly demonstrate strong similarity in news content across cases, while case 1, the only one that occurred during the Hu administration seems to deviate from the rest. The subsequent analysis of framing patterns across cases shed further light onto prevalent framing changes over time.

### **Main changes in prevalent frames over time**

For a qualitative understanding of changes in the news framing over time, I divided the answers to the indicator questions used for the previous chapter by case. This way, strong changes in the answers for each case signal prevalent frame changes over time. Table 6-2 lists the indicator questions that suggest frame changes (see Appendix 3 for the table with all indicator questions).

**Table 6-2: Indicator questions signalling prevalent frame changes**

<b>Question 1: Does the report take a thematic focus in the news story?</b>								
Answer	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8
Yes	61%	65%	69%	68%	72%	68%	66%	70%
<b>Question 7: If at all, which counter-terrorism frames exist in the report?</b>								
Extremism-phobia	44%	41%	35%	58%	64%	61%	63%	55%
Securitisation	16%	10%	15%	26%	29%	28%	18%	13%
<b>Question 8: Does the report contain the description of or call for 'striking hard' against terrorism?</b>								
Yes	25%	20%	32%	37%	39%	40%	27%	22%
<b>Question 9: Does the report contain the description of or call for counter-terrorism legislation?</b>								
Yes	0%	0%	0%	12%	15%	13%	8%	0%
<b>Question 10: To which extent does the report focus on social values?</b>								
Note: Scale between 0 and 10, with 10 suggesting total focus on social values.								
Average	4.6	4.8	4.9	4.9	5.0	5.2	5.4	5.8
<b>Question 11: If at all, which social value frames exist in the report?</b>								
Economic growth	57%	54%	42%	41%	43%	40%	36%	40%
Rule of law	0%	0%	0%	13%	16%	14%	0%	0%
<b>Question 13: Does the report cite individuals who had been directly affected by terrorist attacks?</b>								
Yes	6%	5%	2%	2%	0%	2%	0%	0%
<b>Question 16: Does the report refer to the general secretary (Xi Jinping, Hu Jintao)?</b>								
Yes	7%	8%	10%	48%	53%	57%	56%	52%

Based on the analysis, the media has over time growingly prioritised the thematic focus on the general terrorist threat over a single terrorist act. The answer to question 1 demonstrated continuity in thematic news focus across the cases as opposed to an episodic focus with the single terrorist attack or an individual. However, the proportion of articles that took a thematic focus increased over time. From 61 per cent in 2009, the following attacks starting from 2013 showed stronger thematic focus in the top 60 per cent of each sub-sample. From reading the material, it became clear that the slightly weaker thematic focus in case 1 was due to more frequent references to the East Turkistan Independence Movement (ETIM), and especially Rebiya Kadeer and the World Uyghur Congress as instigator of the attack. The latter two actors were not mentioned at all in the following cases and ETIM remained a rarely occurring enemy in the news.

Instead, the later cases tended to focus stronger on the larger terrorist threat with growing news focus on extremism as a danger to the Chinese people. Question 7 signalled the growing extremism-phobia in an increase from 44 per cent in 2009 to 59-62 per cent in the 2014 cases. Meanwhile, the impression from the open coding was that the increase in focus on extremism came at the expense of separatism as a news topic. While it remained rarely used across cases, it very rarely finds mentioning in cases starting from 2014 in contrast to

case 1. Another observation regarding extremism was the high level of abstraction as it lacked any explanation in the meaning of the term. However, the open coding suggests that the concept of extremism has grown more abstract over time. In the cases 1 and 2, the media commonly linked terrorism to religious extremism, arguing that religious extremist thought leads to terrorist activities. Starting from case 3 in 2013, the news discussion shifted from 'religious extremism' to 'extremism', in addition to discussing extremism as an issue separate from terrorism.

Together, the increased thematic framing, the extremism focus and its higher level of abstraction, led to the conclusion that over time news coverage shifted further towards portraying terrorism as an ideograph. In tandem with this, the abstraction of both terrorism and extremism demonstrate the argument of the previous chapter that terrorism coverage was a campaigning opportunity against all 'three evils' by inter-connecting the three abstract concepts of terrorism, extremism and separatism.

Other components of the counter-terrorism frame showed only minor changes over time, signalling that the party-state has constructed a relatively stable terrorist threat for a range of incidents. The only exception was the securitisation frame that surged up in the year 2014 (question 7). The answers to the questions 8 and 9 showed that this surge related to the increased number of calls in the news for counter-terrorism legislation in 2014 cases, which gained prevalence a year before the final issuing of China's first national counter-terrorism law. Meanwhile, calls to resolutely fight terrorism remains consistently a strong component of the securitisation frame. Yet, news coverage of cases 3 and following showed increased news reporting of how the party-state follows up on this demand. The news reports describe recent changes in the personnel for counter-terrorism strategies, thereby providing evidence that the party-state more resolutely fights terrorism. In this sense, the media no longer only reiterate the case for policy changes but also demonstrate that the party-state is capable of fighting the portrayed threat. Beside from these changes, the terrorist threat portrayal remained relatively stable, which suggested a solid party-state terrorism construction that was re-applied to cases over time

The thematic focus did not just entail a growing abstraction of the terrorist threat but also a growing news focus on social values. Question 10 evidenced this observation by presenting the average level of news attention which each report devoted to social values. While media attention to social values was consistently high across cases, with roughly every second news

report focusing on social value framing, news coverage of cases after 2009 remained consistently stronger in social value focus in contrast to case 1.<sup>32</sup> Questions 9 and 11 on changes in social value framing showed a potential explanation in the prevalence of the rule of law frame that occurred together with the increased securitisation frame. While the securitisation frame measures any description of, or calls for, counter-terrorism legislation (among others explained in the previous chapter), the rule of law gained more news attention as a frame that promotes political leadership based on law. Only 2014 cases (cases 4—7) utilised this frame, in which the media newly emphasise the fight against terrorism by law, which occurred simultaneously to policy changes on the same matter and led to the approval of China's first national counter-terrorism law in the following year. With the promotion of legislative changes came a promotion of the rule of law under the Xi administration.

Another change in the social value framing came with increasing number of examples for national unity over time. Across cases, national unity was a prevalent frame. Yet, in the cases 1, 2 and 3, the media discussed national unity on an abstract level as either being harmed or as socially desirable. In the following cases, news coverage gave examples that demonstrated this strong sense of solidarity much more concretely. For instance, in cases 4 and 5, all newspapers published several articles that focused on the voluntary blood donations of large numbers of citizens and emphasised this commitment to help others as evidence of solidarity. While it remained unreported why so many people decided to donate blood after these two attacks, articles instead emphasised that the blood banks were full thanks to all these volunteers. Another example, with the same cases, was the reporting of petition that unnamed individuals started to ask for a minute of silence in CPPCC National Committee meetings as reminder of the lives lost in the terrorist attacks. Following up on this, articles across newspapers briefly reported that indeed Members of the Second Session of the Twelfth CPPCC National Committee in Beijing committed to a period of silence. These are examples in which the news reports evidence national unity, which is an addition in later cases to the continuously prevalent, abstract use of national unity as something desirable.

Meanwhile, economic growth, confirmed by research on the Hu Jintao administration as indicative of Hu's more technocratic leadership (Brown and Berzina-Cerenkova 2018; Kou and Zang 2014; Singh 2016) in comparison to Xi Jinping's, lost news focus. While it remains

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<sup>32</sup> The high percentage values for case 8 for this indicator question and any other question needed to be considered with caution. The case received only a small number of publications, therefore the percentage values fluctuated stronger for this case.

a relatively strong frame in the terrorism news construction, news coverage starting from 2014 turned stronger to the importance of the party-state guiding public opinion with help of the media. For instance, Xi Jinping expressed concerns about the double-standard of anti-Chinese voices at home and abroad (see Chapter 5) and called for stronger tightening of media content to serve the party-state in providing ‘truthful’ reports on the terrorist events. Overall, the growing abstraction of the terrorist threat and the greater promotion of social values indicated the party-state’s shifting strategy for the media to devote more attention on promoting social values at the expense of counter-terrorism frames.

Finally, the media have grown much more personalised in cases one year after the succession of Xi Jinping, with prioritising Xi Jinping’s comments and activities in the news coverage at the expense of party-state officials and terrorism victims. Question 11 showed this to be the most prevalent change over time. In 2009 and 2013 cases, the media rarely mentioned Hu Jintao, but instead a range of party-state officials from various party-state departments locally and nationally who usually condemned the terrorist act, emphasised the gravity of the terrorism issue and the need for resolute struggles against terrorism. Starting in 2014, the media greatly increased focus on Xi Jinping’s thoughts and activities regarding terrorism and the Chinese people. For instance, case 4 showed often how Xi Jinping visited citizens in Xinjiang (not in the area of the attacks) to get a sense of their needs and to emphasise the great improvement in living standards they experienced over the previous decades. These reports include comments from people who received Xi Jinping, stressing the special experience of Xi coming in person to learn about their lives and needs. Other activities involve additional visits to military camps, confirming the excellent facilities and training the soldiers have at their disposal. In this sense, the news coverage pictured Xi as a leader who stands close to the people – a portrayal that is different to the largely absent predecessor Hu Jintao.

Yet, this change in leadership focus came with a large decrease in any citations of terrorism victims or Xinjiang locals generally (question 13). In 2009, Xinjiang locals described the economic losses or the growing as result of terrorism, in addition to calls for fighting terrorism. While victims found mentioning in 2009, the news stories have turned in the 2014 cases and onwards towards almost exclusively Xi Jinping. Together with the consistently high reliance on Xinhua or *People’s Daily* (see question 15 in the appendix), the news data clearly evidenced the stronger leadership focus during the Xi administration.

## Conclusion

Distilled from the above findings, the over-arching argument of this chapter is that the strong similarity in news content across cases confirms the tight grip of the party-state over news content, while over time the media have growingly served as promoter of social values for the party-state. Meanwhile, the terrorist threat portrayal remains a relatively stable construction. In short, the news coverage has shifted under the Xi administration away from the specific issue of terrorism towards the larger issue of terrorism, religious extremism and separatism for the Chinese society and the importance of social values for stability.

Both the similarity tests and indicator questions showed greater news content differences between the 2009 case and the rest, which occurred in the 2013-2015 period, whereas there are fewer differences among the latter group. The news portrayal of the terrorist threat has grown more abstract with greater focus on extremism, lending itself to the argument from the previous chapter of terrorism as an ideograph, creating an abstract enemy other that can be applied to any of the ‘three evils’ (terrorism, extremism, separatism). The only more concrete change in this terrorist threat construction is the greater prevalence of the securitisation frame in 2014, in form of description of and calls for counter-terrorism legislation and ‘strike hard’ campaigns, simultaneous to policy changes for securitisation of Xinjiang (Leibold 2019). Other indicator questions on the counter-terrorism frames remained relatively stable over time, only the extremism and securitisation frames have grown more prevalent at the same time as the Xi administration initiated comprehensive measures to fight against terrorism and for stability in Xinjiang under the motto of ‘Xinjiang under new circumstances’. Based on the data analysis, the ‘new circumstances’ could be interpreted as stronger media focus on Xi Jinping with close ties to the people, a stronger counter-terrorism apparatus in response to calls for a resolute struggle against terrorism, and the expansion of social values with the rule of law and guidance of public opinion.

Greater frame changes were visible in the stronger leadership focus during the Xi administration. While news coverage started with strong focus on Xi Jinping in 2014, this stood in sharp contrast to sparse mentioning of the former general secretary Hu Jintao while he was on power during the first case. Media attention further shifted towards stronger promotion of the social value frames, with the strongest changes involving less focus on economic growth and increased focus on the rule of law. Together, these findings highlight the tighter leadership focus and ideological promotion that other studies pointed out more broadly as stronger ideational governance by Xi Jinping (Klimes 2018; Lams 2018).

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

Returning to the research questions at the beginning of the dissertation, the first research question asked to what extent determinants of US terrorism coverage can explain the amount of Chinese news attention for Chinese terrorist attacks. The regression results discussed in Chapter 4 showed that US determinants can only moderately explain the extent of Chinese terrorism coverage, factors unique to China's socio-political environment had greater predictive power. In both the US and China, the closer the terrorist attacks were to the news organisation the more likely the media covered the event (Ruigrok and van Atteveldt 2007; Sui et al. 2017). In China, attacks that involved assaults (i.e. use of firearms or knives) was the strongest predictor of the extent of news coverage terrorist attacks received, followed by attacks where Chinese authorities identified ETIM as responsible for the attack.

In contrast to these similarities in both the US and China, the first difference among the determinants was the predictive power of the number of deaths. In China, measures of deaths were strong predictors of the scale of news coverage but the analysis showed that an additional death leads to minor increase in media attention. However, different to the US, attacks with high death tolls tend to receive much less news coverage in comparison to attacks with less than 50 deaths. Furthermore, Chinese news coverage decreased when terrorists employed explosives. This stands in contrast to the US, where this event characteristic would lead to more extensive news coverage. In contrast, variables that reflect China's censored media environment demonstrated additional relevance in explaining the extent of terrorism coverage. Leaked censorship instructions confirmed party-state interference with the news coverage by issuing directives for most of the eight terrorist attacks under study to either promote, change or delete content on the events. Similarly, where the party-state officially held the East Turkistan Independence Movement (ETIM) responsible for the attack, news coverage increased over twofold. Meanwhile, there was minor differences between official and more commercialised newspapers regarding the extent of terrorism coverage.

The findings on the determinants of Chinese terrorism coverage confirm empirically the importance of the de-Westernisation debate in the terrorism media scholarship. Following the debate, the literature review laid out the question of whether media theories based on studies of 'Western' democracies, specifically the US, hold true for the Chinese censored media environment (Curran and Park 2000, Gunaratne 2010/2011, Miike 2006/2007,

Thussu 2009). On the subject of terrorism coverage, this project confirmed the value of Western media theory for China with several determinants showing similar effects on the extent of news coverage in both the US and China. However, various differences signalled the importance of additionally accounting for China's censored environment in the analysis as well. For instance, the minor relevance of additional deaths and the strong relevance of censorship instructions. Overall, tests on what determines the amount of terrorism coverage in China requires a combination of both 'traditional' predictors from the existing terrorism-media literature as well as consideration of additional variables that account for China's censored media environment.

The second research question asked which frames have been prevalent in the Chinese news coverage. Based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, Chapter 5 showed that the social value and counter-terrorism main-frames largely make up the Chinese news construction of terrorism, together comprising of ten prevalent frames (see figure 7-1). The six counter-terrorism frames constructed terrorism as an ideograph, as a highly abstract concept. The portrayal of the terrorist remained mainly that of an undistinguishable enemy other, a religious fanatic who aimed to disrupt China's stability. Reports of their brutality and the prevalent framing of these 'inhuman other', juxtaposed to the Chinese people, created a powerful image of a just fight of the party-state against terrorists. The media portrayed this enemy not just as a terrorist, but also as a religious extremist and separatist. One key finding was that the media constructed a terrorist threat that rarely refers to particular agents, organisation or religions, but instead remains highly abstract. This abstract construction invokes all 'three evils' (terrorism, religious extremism, separatism) as threat. Therefore, I concluded that the party-state used the escalation of violence in Xinjiang for a media campaign against terrorism, extremism and separatism simultaneously by framing terrorism as a highly abstract ideograph.

The four social value frames were another highly prevalent component of the news construction, promoted by the media both in relation to terrorism and independently of it. Maintaining stability was described by the media to be the ultimate desire of the Chinese people and equated with economic growth. The reports reiterated that the pre-conditions for stability are national unity, rule of law and the extermination of the biological threat of terrorism. Example 7 in Chapter 5 exemplified this by portraying terrorism as 'tumour' in China's otherwise orderly society, with its destabilising effect on China as its pathogenic effect. Common statements described the consequences of terrorism as the end of economic

growth and the rise of inter-ethnic conflicts. This stood in contrast to retrospective views in the reports on life in pre-terrorism Xinjiang, in which the media presented a picture of improving living standards and ethnic solidarity under the leadership of the Communist Party. The media portrayed social values as generally desirable but being in threat by terrorism. I reached the conclusion that the party-state used media control not just to construct a terrorist threat but adds its 'twist' to it with the promotion of social values that advocated for maintaining the status quo under leadership of the CCP.

Turning to the literature gaps the above findings are filling, studies on Chinese news framing of terrorism remain scarce with only Zeng et al. (2013) showing attempts of the party-state to 'manage' news coverage of terrorist attacks and Barbour and Jones (2013) observing the social drift between Uyghur and Han Chinese in the news reporting. To this scholarship, this dissertation provides the first systematic framing analysis of Chinese terrorism coverage. It fills the analytical gap not just by discussing prevalent frames but also by illustrating differences to the US terrorism framing. For instance, in contrast to the 'war on terror' frame that is prevalent in the US, the Chinese media do not refer to the fight against terrorism as 'war' and do not identify Islamist radicals as terrorist threats. Instead, the Chinese media remain highly abstract in what the terrorist threat constitutes which enabled the party-state to campaign against all 'three evils' and promote social values unique to China. Thus, the dissertation demonstrates the need for continuing research into terrorism framing in censored media environments and provides with the discussion of prevalent frame the first stepping stone on this for the China studies. The findings further add to the Xinjiang conflict literature by demonstrating that the party-state uses the news media to reinforce their portrayal of an imminent terrorist threat to legitimise both the securitisation of Xinjiang and the importance of social values. Where the extant Xinjiang conflict studies are focused on the securitisation of the Xinjiang conflict (Clarke 2018; Roberts 2018; Tanner and Bellacqua 2016), the framing analysis confirmed the media as another party-state tool used to legitimise party-state action in Xinjiang.

The third research question asked what prevalent frame changes occurred from 2009 to 2015. Quantitative comparison of news content for each case under study showed strong similarity, with every second article showing a primary focus on social values. What has changed was the growing news focus on social values. While stability, economic growth and national unity gained more news attention, the previously less mentioned rule of law gained prevalence in 2014 together with a larger number of calls for counter-terrorism legislation

reiterate the case for the first national counter-terrorism law (which was promulgated in 2015). Rule of law frames state the governance of China and Xinjiang in accordance with law, without further specification of what the rule of law involves. In this sense, 2014 marked a turning point in the media on terrorism towards greater promotion of social values and particularly the concept of rule of law. Meanwhile the terrorist threat portrayal remained relatively stable over time, only growing more abstract with stronger focus on extremism as threat to China and the growing focus on Xinjiang's securitisation to counter the terrorist threat. Meanwhile, any victims of terrorism receive less and less media attention, at the expense of the news focusing on Xi Jinping's visits to Xinjiang locals and security forces or calls to strike hard. From these findings, I concluded that the party-state's grip over the news content on terrorism tightened, with stronger news focus on social values while the terrorist threat portrayal remains relatively stable over time.

These findings address all three of the literature gaps identified in Chapter two as follows. Regarding the analytical gap, it presents the first analysis of terrorism news framing changes in China. Also, it is the first framing analysis of terrorist attacks after the 2009 Urumqi attack. The exploratory findings demonstrate that the news portrayal of terrorism has changed since 2009, therefore highlighting that more in-depth analysis of frame changes is a necessary study field for the future. Regarding the media gap, the above findings demonstrate the strong alignment between news coverage and political changes, as demonstrated in the prevalence of securitisation and social value frames simultaneously to Xi Jinping strengthening these areas in the policy domain. Therefore, the analysis confirms that the media reinforce political changes as necessary (Brady 2017b; Lams 2018). In this sense, the media gap in the literature on the Xinjiang conflict, as well as the empirical gap on authoritarian resilience, was filled with the empirical finding that the media indeed are used by the party-state as resilience tool to legitimise both the securitisation of Xinjiang and the stronger ideational governance under Xi. In conclusion, the analysis of Chinese coverage is an important tool to further understand the party-state strategies regarding the Xinjiang conflict and China's terrorism problem.

Taking all of the above findings together, my thesis is that the party-state has constructed through use of media control a highly abstract terrorist threat which invokes extremism as the actual threat but without much referring to particular agents, root causes or religion, whereas promoting stability maintenance for regime resilience. This terrorism brand shares similarities with the US 'war on terror' framing in creating an enemy other that is portrayed

as inhuman and juxtaposed to an orderly society, and requires a resolute state response to safeguard peace. However, differences lie in the interpretation of the terrorist threat. While the US media portray the terrorist as radical Islamist and point to the Middle East for preventive counter-terrorist measures (i.e. Powell 2011/2018), the Chinese media turn the ‘three evil forces’ ideology of the Communist Party. While the US news media mobilise its people to a global ‘war on terror’, the Chinese media promote the party-state ideal of stability. It becomes clear from the findings discussed in this dissertation that both the censored media environment and the CCP’s ideational governance of China led to a different terrorist threat portrayal to the US. Therefore, the findings support the de-Westernisation of media theory argument that further research into China (and other authoritarian regimes) is necessary due to variation in the news outputs.

### **Ideographs, social values and counter-terrorism frames in the Chinese news coverage of terrorism**

Chen (2012) explains based on interviews of party-state officials that the party-state desires ‘controlled’ opening of news coverage of domestic terrorist attacks. In doing so, she confirms for Chinese terrorism coverage what is well acknowledged among China researchers: that the party-state uses media control to create and control frames (Brady 2017; Creemers 2017; Luqiu 2018; Stockmann 2013). To this field, the dissertation presents the argument that the party-state used media control to create a terrorism construction for the Xinjiang conflict. The party-state not just uses media control to construct the media’s portrayal of terrorism but also promotes this news construction to the public thorough news censorship and coordination efforts. The predictive power of traditionally strong determinants of terrorism coverage, leaked censorship instructions and the high similarity in news content across cases confirm that the party-state constructs the media portrayal of China’s terrorism. The high number of news reports on some of the terrorist attacks under study (see Figure 4-1), the strong media focus on social values and lengthy articles that extensively cover social values, or the terrorist threat, show the party-state is promoting the terrorism news construction. Therefore, this dissertation presents the Chinese news coverage of terrorism as massive party-state attempt to introduce, define and promote their own terrorism construction.

To the analytical gap, only Barbour and Jones (2013) provide thus far insight into the content of the terrorism brand in form of the negative media portrayal of the Uyghurs in terrorism coverage. This dissertation adds to this gap, as first systematic framing analysis of Chinese

terrorism coverage, the understanding of the portrayed terrorism as an ideograph. Each of the six prevalent frames that construct the terrorist threat remain highly abstract in the news. The media portray the terrorist as an archetypical enemy, a brutal and irrational other, that opposes Chinese society and its stability. Said enemy primarily remains an abstract concept as religious extremist, only rarely are there information that link this enemy to East Turkistan 'terrorist groups' (i.e. ETIM) or Islam. However, this threat is said by the media to be a grave threat, therefore precludes calls to fight terrorists resolutely and celebrate Xinjiang's securitisation as defence of the people and their stability. With these abstract pictures of the enemy, the Chinese people, the gravity of the situation and the need for securitisation, the portrayed terrorist threat is that of an ideograph.

Moreover, the dissertation presents the argument that the media's portrayal of terrorism as an ideograph facilitated a media campaign against all 'three evils' (terrorism, extremism and separatism) simultaneously. This argument speaks to a subject that yet lacks any scholarly discussion, that is the conflation of the three-above party-state enemy constructions into one archetypical enemy. A potential merit of this strategy lies in the capacity of the party-state to denote perceived threats as any of the 'three evils' to legitimise domestically repressive measures, as demonstrated in the Chechen-Russian conflict in the 1990s (Russel 2005) or the recent denotation of Hong Kong protesters that demand democratic reforms as terrorists.

Turning to the Xinjiang conflict scholarship, recent publications discuss the securitisation of Xinjiang as party-state strategy to maintain stability over the region (Clarke 2008/2018; Leibold 2019; Roberts 2018). Yet, there is a media gap in this literature, to which this dissertation contributes with the finding of the media frames legitimising both the securitisation of Xinjiang and CCP leadership through portrayal of an urgent terrorist threat. Based on a framing perspective, the previous sections show the media picturing an image of a prosperous and harmonious society under the CCP leadership that requires protection by fighting terrorism resolutely and standing united. In this sense, the media promote both the terrorism brand and social values. Therefore, I conclude that the party-state took the escalation of violence since 2009 as a media campaigning opportunity to promote social values in favour of maintaining stability as part of the terrorism brand in the media.

Moving to the empirical gap, decades of research on China's authoritarian resilience discuss the various strategies the party-state employs to maintain authority (Byman 2016; Dukalskis and Gerschweski 2017; Levitsky and Way 2010), among which Bondes and Heep (2012) re-

introduced to the debate the importance of persuasion for regimes to strengthen legitimacy. To their analysis of official frames as forms of persuasion in party-state documents, this dissertation adds through framing analysis of news content empirical evidence for the use of media control to legitimise both the securitisation of Xinjiang and the authority of the CCP. The data analysis discusses ten frames that together portray the terrorist to threaten China's stability and in doing so legitimate counter-terrorism measures by the party-state.

The findings on the Chinese news framing of terrorism are illustrated again in the Figure below.

**Figure 7-1: China's domestic terrorism news framing model**

China's terrorism construction	China's terrorism frames
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reinforcing terrorist threat interpretation through repetitive use of terrorism label</li> <li>▪ Strong media reliance on party-state sources</li> <li>▪ De-contextualising terrorism issue by not mentioning existing ethnic conflicts and grievances in Xinjiang</li> </ul>	Counter-terrorism framing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Injustice &amp; gravity</li> <li>- Extremism-phobia</li> <li>- Demonization</li> <li>- Adversarial</li> <li>- Aptness</li> <li>- Securitisation</li> </ul>
	Social value framing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stability</li> <li>- Economic growth</li> <li>- National unity</li> <li>- Rule of law</li> </ul>

Beyond China, the conclusions in this dissertation point towards features of authoritarian regimes that make it likelier for similar strategies of promoting and constructing a terrorist threat to appear. First, one key feature is the Leninist organisation structure of the media industry with its extensive propaganda system. The propaganda department takes a central role in the state apparatus. This enables the propaganda department to reinforce, by use of state power, the ideologies of the political leadership to the rest of the citizens in the nation. Second, the media commercialisation is another potential feature in an authoritarian regime for these observations to occur. The profit orientation that comes with the media commercialisation means media actors are catering content more towards the readers; the high readership in China and the sensational nature of terrorism in the press provide state authorities with reasons to use media control as tool for influencing public perception of the terrorist events. Third, another factor is the extensive ideological apparatus involving social values that can be applied to terrorist event coverage with relative ease. In China, the media were able to draw on social values that the party-state authorities promoted already prior to the terrorist attacks. The existence of this extensive ideological apparatus allowed the state

authorities to quickly produce a narrative that relates back to the social values that were already established in society. Beyond authoritarian politics, a fourth feature is the existence of a globally acknowledged and abstract threat. The ‘global war on terror’ that followed the September 11 2001 attacks on the US enabled China to employ the terrorism label of the Xinjiang conflict without much international condemnation for the severity of its actions. The abstract global definitions of terrorism, as no longer related to only a single group or individual, further allowed the authorities to construct a terrorist threat that can be applied to a range of perceived threats (i.e. in China the ‘three evils’: terrorism, extremism and separatism). In sum, various characteristics of the media system, ideological system, political system and the existence of global threat constructions possibly make it likelier in other authoritarian regimes to find similar trends of promoting and ‘constructing’ terrorist threats. New comparative research is needed on this in the fields of both comparative authoritarianism and in the context of democracies.

### **Limitations and opportunities for future research**

Starting from the simple observation at the beginning of this project that no researcher has engaged with the party-state’s terrorism communication strategies beyond the Urumqi 2009 case empirically, this thesis introduces the study of authoritarian political communication strategies on sensitive issues as an important field of study. The lack of research on this matter possibly has to do with, firstly, data access challenges given its sensitive political nature and, secondly, research design challenges given the ambiguity of the term terrorism (i.e. scholars might disagree in the case selection due to ambiguity in what classifies as terrorist attack). To avoid this issue, I selected for this research project cases that have been by party-state officials and media actors alike reported as acts of terrorism and received 9/11-like labels to highlight their severity in China’s terrorism history. While selecting high publicity cases leaves high confidence in conclusions on what the party-state classifies as acts of terrorism, these research findings require testing in the future with other cases of domestic terrorism for further validation (e.g. Xie and Liu 2019). It is yet to investigate consistent the observations from this research apply to all incidents that state authorities label as acts of terrorism.

Methodological extensions to the data analysis can provide further insight into China’s political communication on terrorism. The open coding, indicator questions, word frequency analysis and topic modelling allowed me to inductively uncover prevalent frames while their

triangulation further ensures high reliability in the research observations. I considered this inductive approach a necessity given that the creation of codebooks based on the US-derived terrorism media theory would easily introduce research bias and does not account for the different social structures in China. Aiming at presenting a first attempt of a China terrorism news framing model for comparison therefore is an attempt engaging in the debate of de-westernising (terrorism) media theory. Building on the findings from this research, possibilities include a more in-depth framing analysis by reducing the number of newspapers or the opposite to test my findings across more newspapers. The focus on one country generally entails a recommendation for more comparison. This involves a comparison of terrorism coverage with other authoritarian regimes and democracies. Comparison can also be made between terrorism and non-terrorism issues in China. When further questioning the nature of the terrorism label, researchers could also go back to past violent secessionist movements in other countries to identify framing similarities and differences, such as with Northern Ireland or the Chechen conflict in Russia. As Kleinot (2017) said in his article, a freedom fighter to one might be understood as a terrorist to others. In this sense, comparing the news coverage of the Xinjiang conflict, not limited to terrorist attacks, with the above-mentioned examples might further illuminate, empirically driven, China's news portrayal of the Xinjiang conflict and terrorism. In other words, to what extent does Xinjiang terrorism coverage show similar framing patterns to coverage of non-terrorist violent conflicts in other countries?

Another potential limitation is that the analysis was limited to only newspapers, given a worldwide declining number of newspaper readers questions might arise on the relevance of the analysis. This was less a concern with this project, as the interest was in 'what the party-state wants the Chinese public to know about the terrorism problem' and not how many people read the newspapers. Conclusions are built on the premise of a media-controlled environment, as was confirmed through literature and empirically in this project, but is not dependent on the number of newspaper readers. Where researchers are interested in the media discourse more generally, other media platforms naturally require additional investigation and come with additional methodological challenges. For example, an analysis of social media content might require not just to scrape posts from websites but also to consider how these immediately or over time disappear due to censorship efforts (i.e. King et al. 2013). Therefore, the aim with this project remained with a first exploration of news coverage before follow-up studies can widen the scope to other media platforms by using my observations. In this vein, this research project contributed with a first comprehensive

insight into Chinese terrorism news coverage while also introducing content analysis methods for future investigations.

Moreover, comparison of framing differences between newspapers was not possible in the confines of this PhD project. This research focused on firstly identifying what are prevalent frames in the news and this involved both open coding processes and quantitative analysis of the most frequently occurring words. To make this better comparable across newspapers, each frame requires further conceptualisation and additional methods for analysis. In this sense, this project's aim was to take the first step for future analysis in the news portrayal by exploring the news framing. Another implication of this exploratory focus of the project was the study focus on the news output at the expense of an analysis of the audience response. The question of why an understanding of the news content matters relies on tacit assumptions about the effect frames have on the readership (and beyond as part of the public discourse). I engaged with this debate in Chapter 2, in which I showed through review of other literature that evidence of the party-state using media control would suggest that they consider media influence to matter for the political leadership. Moreover, I demonstrated through discussion of experimental studies conducted in the United States how receiving terrorism frames can affect our perception of terrorism. Therefore, while I focused first on understanding the news product that is available on terrorism, new research needs to study how the audience perceives the news construction and responds to it.

Insight into the new patterns in news framing remain limited due to the exploratory nature of this study. First, questions arise on how different China's terrorism coverage is to those of other countries. The coding observations could be used to develop a dictionary for supervised topic modelling, testing these observations for a larger set of terrorist incidents. I have taken a first step towards this by identifying common US terrorism news frames and setting these in comparison to China, yet a more comprehensive approach requires to examine US newspapers based on my findings anew as most past publications entrenched on a few frames rather than as wide-ranging as this project. This approach of testing framing observations is also an important follow-up step since I relied on an open coding process as part of the framing analysis. I have addressed concerns about its inherently subjective nature in earlier sections by explaining the use of a second coder and the triangulation of methods (open coding and indicator questions, unsupervised quantitative text analysis) as measures to increase the validity of the findings. All of these methods pointed at the discussed news content observation. To increase the generalisability of the research findings and review their

reliability, further testing is necessary by including more cases, extending the time period under analysis and using a deductive approach for the framing analysis. In addition, a comparison of the framing observations with news coverage on non-terrorism affairs would add insights on how strongly news content on terrorism deviates from other news items. For example, I confirmed Xi Jinping's prevalence in the terrorism coverage empirically, yet it is still necessary to compare this to every-day life news coverage to conclude on whether there is a unique characteristic to the terrorism news coverage. Finally, things have changed already since the beginning of this study. In 2015, regional party secretary Chen Quanguo has taken over leadership as regional party secretary of Xinjiang. Since then, strike hard campaign continued, massive efforts have been put into the creation of a 'surveillance state' (Leibold 2019), less high casualty incidents seem to have occurred. In the wake of this, Xie and Liu (2019) are already speaking of a new turning point in China's terrorism history that might also be reflected in the news coverage. Data from this fourth period, following my time line presented in the first Chapter, could be added to continue the empirical comparison of frame changes over time.

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# Appendix 1

## --- 1. Model building ---

### Summary statistics of the response variable

Min.	1st Qu.	Median	Mean	3rd Qu.	Max.
0.000	2.000	4.000	8.347	9.000	147.000

### Residual deviance of the response variable

mean	var	ratio
8.347436	163.847041	19.628428

### Likelihood Ratio test for fit-test of Poisson and Negative Binomial regression models

Model 1: Poisson model

Model 2: Negative binomial model

Model 1: articles ~ 1

Model 2: articles ~ 1

#Df	LogLik	Df	Chisq	Pr(>Chisq)
1	1	-5742.4		
2	2	-2472.5	1	6539.9 < 2.2e-16 ***

---

Signif. codes: 0 '\*\*\*' 0.001 '\*\*' 0.01 '\*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

### Likelihood Ratio test of Single-level NB model and Multilevel NB model

Model 1: Negative binomial model, single-level

Model 2: Negative binomial model, two-level (levels: newspaper, case)

Model 1: articles ~ 1

Model 2: articles ~ 1 + (1 | case)

#Df	LogLik	Df	Chisq	Pr(>Chisq)
1	2	-2472.5		
2	3	-2148.0	1	648.9 < 2.2e-16 ***

---

Signif. codes: 0 '\*\*\*' 0.001 '\*\*' 0.01 '\*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

--- 2. Negative binomial regression modelling for all 65 cases in 2009 – 2015 ---

**Full summary of regression model 10 in the regression overview table**

Generalized linear mixed model fit by maximum likelihood (Laplace Approximation) [glmerMod']

Family: Negative Binomial(4.2343) (log)

Formula: articles ~ location + deaths + government + claimed + official\_press + (1 | case), Data: china.all.cases

AIC	BIC	logLik	deviance	df.resid
4231.3	4268.5	-2107.6	4215.3	772

Scaled residuals:

Min	1Q	Median	3Q	Max
-1.8206	-0.6546	-0.1410	0.4942	5.2989

Random effects:

Groups	Name	Variance	Std.Dev.
Case	(Intercept)	0.6059	0.7784

Number of obs: 780, groups: case, 65

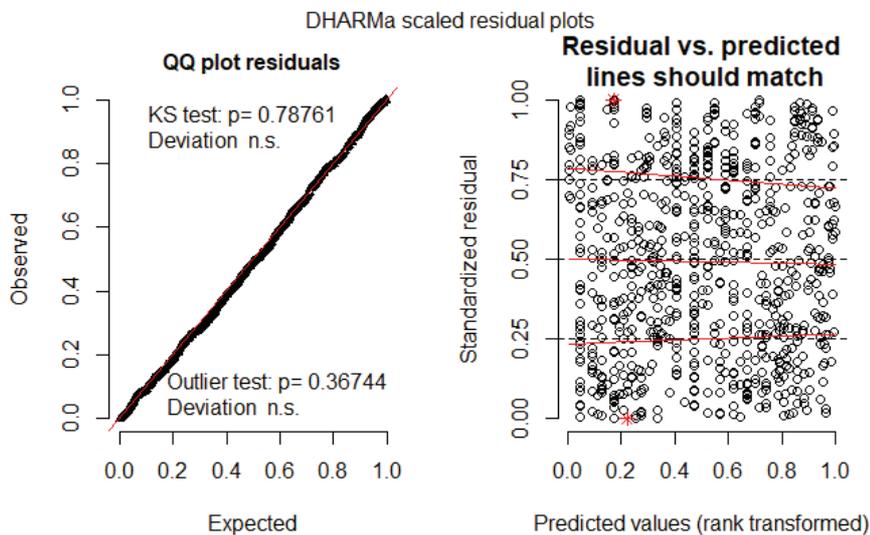
Fixed effects:

	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z )
(Intercept)	1.351612	0.114897	11.764	< 2e-16 ***
location	0.661290	0.093697	7.058	1.69e-12 ***
deaths	0.009944	0.003616	2.750	0.00596 **
government	0.362864	0.340607	1.065	0.28672
claimed	0.631800	0.441733	1.430	0.15264
official_press	0.094709	0.049708	1.905	0.05674 .

---

Signif. codes: 0 '\*\*\*' 0.001 '\*\*' 0.01 '\*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

**Figure A1 – 1: Diagnostic plots for Model 10 (“MM10”)**



--- 3. Negative binomial regression modelling for the selected 8 cases in 2009 – 2015 ---

**Full summary of regression model 8 in the regression overview table**

The singularity test confirmed a single.level model (glm.nb) as better fit for the dataset

[1] 1.413521e-06

**Full summary of regression model 17 in the regression overview table**

```
glm.nb(formula = articles ~ deaths + deaths_30up + deaths_50up +
  assault + claimed + official_press, data = china.corrected,
  init.theta = 3.862565183, link = log)
```

Deviance Residuals:

Min	1Q	Median	3Q	Max
-2.5719	-0.8900	-0.1223	0.5605	2.3565

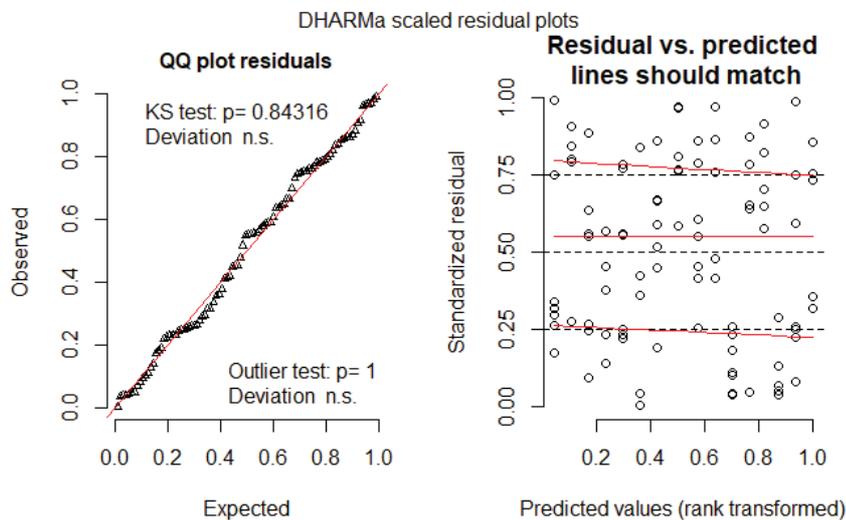
Coefficients:

	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z )	
(Intercept)	1.016881	0.311964	3.260	0.00112	**
deaths	0.026070	0.002007	12.987	< 2e-16	***
deaths_30up	0.090862	0.184752	0.492	0.62286	
deaths_50up	-3.406437	0.276664	-12.313	< 2e-16	***
assault	1.262041	0.195099	6.469	9.88e-11	***
claimed	0.880508	0.197255	4.464	8.05e-06	***
official_press	0.154252	0.120193	1.283	0.19936	

---

Signif. codes: 0 '\*\*\*' 0.001 '\*\*' 0.01 '\*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

**Figure A1 – 2: Diagnostic plots for Model 8 in the overview regression table**



**Full summary of regression model with the predictor location**

Generalized linear mixed model fit by maximum likelihood (Laplace Approximation) ['glmerMod']

Family: Negative Binomial(7.0655) ( log )

Formula: articles ~ location + (1 | case)

Data: china.corrected

AIC	BIC	logLik	deviance	df.resid
688.9	699.1	-340.4	680.9	92

Scaled residuals:

Min	1Q	Median	3Q	Max
-1.9181	-0.6035	-0.1277	0.5957	3.2718

Random effects:

Groups Name	Variance	Std.Dev.
case (Intercept)	1.191	1.091

Number of obs: 96, groups: case, 8

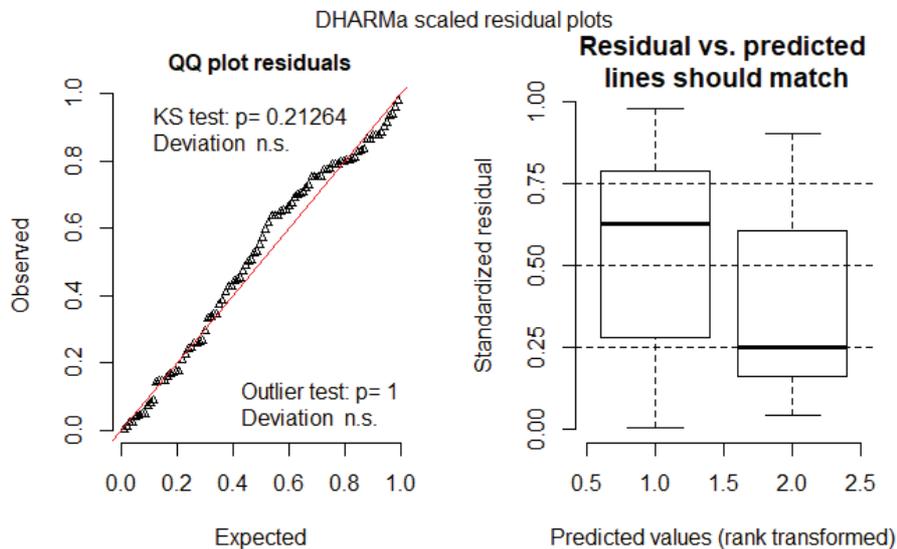
Fixed effects:

	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z )
(Intercept)	2.6741	0.3901	6.855	7.14e-12 ***
location	0.4175	0.1616	2.583	0.00978 **

---

Signif. codes: 0 '\*\*\*' 0.001 '\*\*' 0.01 '\*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

**Figure A1 – 3: Diagnostic plots for Model Location**



## Appendix 2

### --- 1. Indicator questions for framing analysis ---

**Explanation:** Total number of sample articles: 458. The percentage values behind the possible answers denote the number of articles in the sample to which the answer applied. For instance, in question 10, 79% of the 458 articles in the sample employed the stability frame.

- 1) Does the report mainly classify the incident as an act of terrorism?  
*Note: If the answer is unclear due to various classifications, select 'no'.*  
 0: No (5%, 23)  
 1: Yes (95%, 435)
- 2) Does the report name a specific terrorist suspect?  
*Note: Answer with 'yes', if the report refers to any individual or groups by name and identifies them as terrorists. I.e. ETIM.*  
 0: No (82%, 376)  
 1: Yes (18%, 82)
- 3) Does the report mention that ethnic grievances had existed in Xinjiang prior to the terrorist attack or identifies these as cause of the attack?  
 0: No (100%, 458)  
 1: Yes (0%, 0)
- 4) Does the report take a thematic focus in the news story?  
*Note: A thematic focus takes a more distanced perspective in contrast to the episodic focus with the single attack. For example, a thematic focus is prevalent where the news story focuses on social values or on the larger terrorist threat as opposed to the single attack. Where the question cannot be answered clearly, choose 'can't say' (i.e. even episodic and thematic focus).*  
 0: No (23%, 105)  
 1: Yes (66%, 302)  
 99: Can't say (11%, 50)
- 5) Does the report mention the origin (i.e. motivation) of China's terrorism issue?  
*Note: The question includes both the larger terrorism issue as well as any specific terrorist attack. For example, the origin could constitute ethnic grievances in Xinjiang, the goal of harming Chinese economic growth, or the killing of people.*  
 0: No (57%, 261)  
 1: Yes (43%, 197)
- 6) If at all, does the report mention what is in danger due to terrorism?  
*Note: The question includes both the larger terrorism issue as well as any specific terrorist attack. Choose 'other' if other factors are in danger due to terrorism. Value 1,2,3,4 refer to the occurrence of exclusively stability, national unity etc.*  
 0: No, it doesn't say: (11%, 50)  
 1: Stability: (19%, 87)  
 2: National unity: (11%, 50)  
 3: Economic growth: (6%, 27)  
 4: CCP leadership: (0%, 0)  
 5: Yes, but it is more than one: (46%, 211)  
 99: Other: (7%, 32)
- 7) If at all, which 'just' war frames exist in the report?  
*Note: Choose 'other' where the question cannot be answered, i.e. no 'just' war frames exist.*  
 1: Injustice & gravity frames (62%, 284)  
 2: Extremism-phobia frame (65%, 298)  
 3: Demonization frame (28%, 128)  
 4: Adversarial frame (57%, 261)  
 5: Aptness frame (27%, 124)  
 6: Securitisation (27%, 124)  
 99: other (8%, 37)

- 8) Does the report contain the description of or call for ‘striking hard’ against terrorism?  
 Note: To ‘strike hard’ refers to any expression that states to resolutely fight terrorism, i.e. ‘to bring them down with thunder’.  
 0: No (64%, 293)  
 1: Yes (36%, 165)
- 9) Does the report contain the description of or call for counter-terrorism legislation?  
 0: No (84%, 385)  
 1: Yes (16%, 73)
- 10) To which extent does the report focus on social values?  
 Note: Scale between 0 and 10 using integers, with 10 suggesting total focus on social values. Social values are stability, economic growth, national unity, rule of law.  
 Average: 5.2
- 11) If at all, which social value frames exist in the report?  
 Note: Choose ‘other’ where the question cannot be answered, i.e. no social value frames exist.  
 1: Stability frame (74%, 339)  
 2: National unity frame (51%, 234)  
 3: Economic growth frame (39%, 179)  
 4: Rule of law frame (12%, 55)  
 99: Other (12%, 55)
- 12) Does the report refer to Islamic beliefs or Muslim identity?  
 Note: This excludes any comments that only refer to religious extremism in general but includes indirect references to Islam where the term might not be used.  
 0: No (94%, 431)  
 1: Yes (6%, 27)
- 13) Does this news story cite individuals who have been directly affected by terrorist attacks?  
 Note: ‘Directly affected’ is defined as experiencing loss that is the direct result of a terrorist attack, i.e. emotional harm, loss of loved ones, property loss.  
 0: No (98%, 449)  
 1: Yes (2%, 9)
- 14) Where victims are covered, was the primary focus their feelings and emotions?  
 Note: Here, ‘victim’ is anybody who directly due to a terrorist attack or indirectly due to terrorism in general claimed victimisation. For instance, victim condemns terrorist attack.  
 0: No (0%, 0)  
 1: Yes (100%, 458)
- 15) Does the report mention the Xinhua or the People’s Daily as sources?  
 0: No (66%, 302)  
 1: Yes (34%, 156)
- 16) Does the report refer to the general secretary (i.e. Xi Jinping, Hu Jintao)?  
 Note: For example, this can include citations of the general secretary or description of their activities.  
 0: No (49%, 224)  
 1: Yes (51%, 234)

--- 2. Indicative example of terrorism coverage: Full report ---

**Full report on Case 3, Xinjiang Daily (cited in Chapter 5)**

Xinjiang Daily (15/11/2013)

**Violent terrorists are poisonous tumours seriously affecting China's social stability**

Kuran Nihemaiti, Member and Vice-President of the Party Committee of the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences

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The recent "10.28" incident at Jinshui Bridge, Tiananmen, Beijing, was closely planned by the "three forces" at home and abroad.

Organised and premeditated violent terrorist attacks. In the incident, bereaved terrorists indiscriminately killed innocent tourists and civilians, seriously endangering the safety of the people's lives, which can be described as inhuman and heinous. Their purpose is to create a sensational effect in the international arena, to create pressure on the Party and the government by public opinion, and to create an atmosphere of terror in the whole society, which once again exposes their reactionary plots to split the motherland, destroy unity and national unity. Facts have proved once again that violent terrorists are the common enemy of the people of all nationalities and the people of the whole world. Our struggle against violent terrorists is neither a matter of nationality nor religion, but a political struggle between splitting and anti-splitting, defending and destroying the reunification of the motherland. There is absolutely no room for compromise or concession.

Terrorist crimes seriously endanger the lives of people of all ethnic groups. From this year's "4.23", "6.26" to "10.28" violent terrorist cases, we can see that the means of the violent terrorists are extremely cruel, with killing as a clear target, killing innocent people including Uyghurs as well as international tourists. These acts of violence and terror are a serious violation of human rights, a serious challenge to the dignity of the legal system, a serious damage to the civilized order, a typical anti-social, anti-human and anti-civilized terrorist acts, which will surely be strongly condemned and rejected by peace-loving countries and people in the world. The reality also warns us once again that violent terrorism has become the most realistic and direct threat to the social stability of China and Xinjiang.

Terrorism is a huge obstacle to the peaceful development of the world. It is the international community to strengthen cooperation and research in combating terrorism and to combat and prevent terrorism.

It is incumbent upon all countries of the world to share their responsibilities and obligations. However, after the "10.28" incident of Jinshui Bridge in Tiananmen, Beijing, some western media have made an ulterior attempt to link the terrorist incidents with China's national and religious policies, and even expressed sympathy for the terrorists involved. Although some Western countries, led by the United States, are threatened by terrorism and have high-profile anti-terrorism verbally, they always wear "coloured glasses" to deal with counter-terrorism issues, divide their camps with the so-called "ideology", establish "double standards" for China's anti-terrorism cause, and openly and secretly deal with violent terrorism in China. Support for or indulge in incitement to terror. Its plot to divide and westernize China has never changed. Looking back on history, we can see more clearly that on issues concerning China's core interests and major concerns such as Xinjiang and Tibet, some media in the United States have always turned a blind eye to the rights of the Chinese government to protect the interests of all nationalities, including freedom of religious belief, in accordance with the law; once terrorist and violent crimes occur in China. They confuse and mislead public opinion. Finding excuses for terrorist crimes fully exposes the ulterior purposes of the United States and other Western countries.

At present, we should deeply realize that behind the escalation of violent terrorist activities, it reflects the anti-secession in the ideological field of our region.

The long-term, complex and acute nature of the struggle. Comrade Jiang Zemin once pointed out that "opening the gap through ethnic issues is an important means for the peaceful evolution of hostile forces at home and abroad." Western hostile forces often use national problems to stir up national emotions and create incidents, thus forming internal and external integration of separatist forces at home and abroad; using resources development and religious beliefs as excuses to stir up national estrangement; carrying out deceptive propaganda under the so-called banner of caring for the interests of ethnic minorities, distorting history and facts, and carrying out such propaganda. Stir up alienation, and even carry out violent terrorist activities, undermining national unity. Especially in recent years, the infiltration of religious extremism has intensified, which has become the ideological basis of the "three forces" separatist and destructive activities. Judging from the cases of violence and terror uncovered in the whole region and October 28 this year, the scope of violence and terror is expanding, and the number of female members of organizations is increasing. By means of suicide bombing, it triggers the resonance of "jihad" and ultimately implements violent terrorist

activities. The practice of the anti-secession struggle also fully demonstrates that religious extremism has become the theoretical basis and ideological support for the emergence of violent terrorist activities and has become a cancer seriously affecting the stability of China's society.

Stability is the overall situation of Xinjiang, the premise and guarantee of leapfrog development and long-term stability, and the best interests of the people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang. With the support and assistance of the central government and other provinces and cities, Xinjiang is developing at an unprecedented speed, and the living standards and living conditions of the people of all ethnic groups are constantly improving. We should always be aware that our struggle against the "three forces" is a struggle against division and division, a struggle against terror and terrorism, which is long-term, complex and arduous. Xinjiang's social sciences have always been at the forefront of separatism and anti-separatism, infiltration and anti-osmosis. As a cadre of social sciences, in the current test of anti-terrorism struggle, he feels more strongly that he has a great responsibility, just like General Secretary Xi Jinping's recent important speech at the national propaganda and ideological work conference. It is emphasized that cadres of all nationalities should consolidate the guiding position of Marxism in the ideological field, draw a clear line between right and wrong, clarify vague understandings, enhance initiative, grasp initiative, fight a good initiative, and be responsible, responsible and conscientious in matters concerning major issues of right and wrong and political principles. Faced with the complex and changeable international political pattern and the grim situation of Xinjiang's anti-secession, anti-terrorism and anti-osmosis struggle, as well as the infiltration and spread of religious extremist ideology in the ideological field, we should conduct theoretical guidance from a strategic political and theoretical height, and have a clear attitude and dare to stand firm on the issue of major and minor issues. We should dare to shine our sword and make correct voices against wrong ideas, noises and murmurs. We should always be ready to step forward at the critical moment with practical actions, not disgrace our mission, dare to shoulder our responsibilities, abide by our duties, firmly grasp the initiative in the struggle against the enemy, so as to build a harmonious, stable and prosperous Xinjiang and achieve leaps and bounds. Typical development and long-term stability are two major historical tasks, making unremitting efforts to realize the "Chinese Dream" of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

新疆日报/2013年/11月/15日

### 暴力恐怖分子是严重影响中国社会稳定的毒瘤

库兰·尼合买提，新疆社会科学院党委委员、副院长

近期在北京天安门金水桥发生的“10·28”事件，是一起由境内外“三股势力”严密策划，有组织、有预谋的暴力恐怖袭击事件。事件中，丧心病狂的暴恐分子滥杀无辜游客和平民，严重危害了人民群众的生命安全，可谓灭绝人性、令人发指。他们的目的就是要在国际上制造轰动效应，给党和政府制造舆论压力，在全社会营造恐怖氛围，这再次暴露了他们分裂祖国、破坏统一和民族团结的反动阴谋。事实也再一次证明，暴力恐怖分子是全国各族人民和全世界人民的共同敌人。我们与暴力恐怖分子的斗争既不是民族问题，也不是宗教问题，而是一场分裂与反分裂、捍卫祖国统一与破坏祖国统一的你死我活的政治斗争，绝没有丝毫妥协、退让的余地。

恐怖主义犯罪严重危害了各族群众的生命安全。从今年所发生的“4·23”“6·26”到“10·28”暴力恐怖案件看，暴恐分子手段极其残忍、以杀人为明确指向目标，被杀害的既有维吾尔族在内的无辜群众也有国际游客。这些暴力恐怖行径，是对人权的严重践踏，是对法制尊严的严重挑战，是对文明秩序的严重损害，是典型的反社会、反人类、反文明的恐怖主义行径，必定会受到世界上爱好和平的国家和人民的强烈谴责和唾弃。现实也再一次警示我们，暴力恐怖活动已经成为破坏中国及新疆社会稳定最现实、最直接的巨大威胁。

恐怖主义是世界和平发展的巨大障碍，加强反恐合作和研究，打击和防范恐怖主义是国际社会和世界各国义不容辞的共同责任和义务。但是，北京天安门金水桥“10·28”事件发生后，西方个别媒体却在报道中别有用心地把恐怖事件与中国民族宗教政策挂钩，甚至对涉案恐怖分子表示同情。以美国为首的一些西方国家虽然自身饱受恐怖主义的威胁，口头上高调反恐，但在对待反恐问题上总戴着“有色眼镜”，以所谓的“意识形态”划分阵营，对中国的反恐事业搞“双重标准”，明里暗里地对发生在中国的暴力恐怖活动给予支持或纵容煽动。其企图分化、西化中国的阴谋从来就没有改变过。回顾历史，我们更清晰地看到，凡是在涉疆、涉藏等事关中国核心利益和重大关切问题上，美国一些媒体一向对中国政府依法保护全国各民族利益包括宗教信仰自由在内的各项权利视而不见；一旦恐怖暴力犯罪事件在中国发生，他们便混淆视听、误导舆论。为恐怖分子的犯罪行径找借口，充分暴露了美国等西方国家不可告人的目的。

当前，我们应深刻地认识到，暴力恐怖活动升级的背后，反映的是我区意识形态领域反分裂斗争的长期性、复杂性和尖锐性。江泽民同志曾指出：“利用民族问题打开缺口，是国内外敌对势力进行和平演变的重要手段。”西方敌对势力往往利用民族问题，挑动民族情绪，制造事端，从而形成境内外分裂势力的里应外合；以资源开发、宗教信仰等为借口，挑动民族隔阂；打着所谓关心少数民族利益的旗号，进行欺骗宣传，歪曲历史与事实，进行挑拨离间，甚至进行暴力恐怖活动，破坏民族团结。尤其是近年来，宗教极端思想渗透活动加剧，成为“三股势力”分裂破坏活动的思想基础。从今年全区以及“10·28”破获的暴力恐怖案件来看，暴力恐怖范围在扩大，女性组织成员在增加，以自杀式爆炸等手段，引发“圣战”共鸣，最终实施暴恐活动。反分裂斗争的实践也充分说明，宗教极端思想已成为催生暴力恐怖活动的理论基础和思想支撑，成为严重影响中国社会稳定的一个毒瘤。

稳定是新疆的大局，是跨越式发展和长治久安的前提和保障，是新疆各族人民群众最大利益之所在。在中央和各援疆省市的大力支持与帮助下，新疆正以前所未有的速度向前发展，各族人民生活水平与生活条件在不断提高。我们要时刻清醒地认识到，我们与“三股势力”的斗争是分裂与反分裂的斗争，是恐怖与反恐怖的斗争，这场斗争是长期的、复杂的、艰巨的。新疆社会科学界始终处在分裂与反分裂、渗透与反渗透的前沿，作为一名社会科学界的干部，在当前反恐斗争的考验当中，更加强烈地感受到自己肩负的责任重大，就如习近平总书记最近在全国宣传思想工作会上的重要讲话中所强调的，我们各族干部要巩固马克思主义在意识形态领域的指导地位，在事关大是大非和政治原则问题上，划清是非界限，澄清模糊认识，增强主动性、掌握主动权、打好主动仗，做到守土有责、守土负责、守土尽责。面对国际政治格局的复杂变幻和新疆反分裂、反恐怖、反渗透斗争的严峻形势，面对宗教极端思想对意识形态领域的渗透蔓延，我们要从战略的政治高度和理论高度进行理论引导，在大是大非问题上要态度鲜明，敢于坚守阵地，敢于亮剑，对错误观点、各种噪音、杂音，要敢于发出正确的声音，以实际行动，时刻准备着在关键时刻挺身而出，不辱使命、敢于担当，恪尽职守，牢牢把握对敌斗争主动权，为建设和谐、稳定、富强的新疆，为实现跨越式发展和长治久安两大历史任务，为实现中华民族伟大复兴的“中国梦”作出不懈的努力！

### --- 3. Original reports cited in chapter 5 ---

#### **Example 1: Early event description of the terrorist attack (Source: Case 2, Beijing News)**

新京报 (28/6/2013)

**新疆恐怖袭击24人遇害 11暴徒被毙 26日凌晨5时50分许，暴徒袭击特巡警中队、镇政府和民工工地，放火焚烧警车**

据新华社电 26日凌晨5时50分许，新疆吐鲁番地区鄯善县鲁克沁镇发生暴力恐怖袭击案件，多名暴徒先后袭击鲁克沁镇派出所、特巡警中队、镇政府和民工工地，放火焚烧警车。

目前，已造成24人遇害（其中维吾尔族16人），包括公安民警2人；另有21名民警和群众受伤。公安民警当场击毙暴徒11人、击伤并抓获4人。公安机关正在全力开展工作，目前当地社会大局整体平稳。

#### **Example 2: Detailed event description of the terrorist attack (Source: Case 3, Beijing News)**

新京报 (30/10/2013)

**北京全力救治“10·28”事件伤者**

28日一吉普车冲撞金水桥致5死38伤；伤者中5人手术，12人在ICU，其余21人转为一般住院和留观新京报讯 “10月28日金水桥汽车冲撞事件”。

28日12时5分许，一辆吉普车由北京市南池子南口闯入长安街便道，由东向西行驶撞向天安门金水桥护栏后起火，行驶过程中造成多名游客及执勤民警受伤。据初步统计，事故致5人死亡，38人受伤，

其中肇事车内3人死亡，另有2名游客死亡（1名菲律宾籍女游客、1名广东省男游客），38名受伤人员中包括3名菲律宾籍游客（2女1男）及1名日本籍男游客。

事件发生后，北京市立即组织伤员救治工作，市委、市政府领导要求卫生部门全力以赴、不惜一切代价、千方百计抢救伤员。市卫生局迅速成立了医疗救治领导小组，制订了救治方案，并集中全市优质医疗资源成立市级专家组，对所有伤员逐一进行会诊指导，随时指导对危重伤员的抢救。

目前，38名住院救治伤员中，5人实施了手术治疗，12人在ICU治疗，其余21人已转为一般住院治疗和继续留观。

### **Example 3: De-contextualisation by denying ethnic grievances (Case 4, Southern Metropolis Daily)**

南方都市报 (4/3/2014)

#### **全国政协民宗委主任朱维群：别把昆明暴恐事件同特定民族挂上钩**

朱维群身份：全国政协常委、民族和宗教委员会主任这些恐怖分子无论如何代表不了我们任何一个民族，只能代表那些背叛祖国，也背叛他们自身所在民族的极少数人。

“如果我们把事件跟特定民族联系起来，去指责某个民族，不仅完全违背实际，而且将伤害少数民族群众的感情，这恰恰是暴力恐怖势力所希望的。”朱维群说，反对暴力恐怖事件，要依靠各民族共同的力量。“我完全相信，我们的各族群众、基层干部，能够团结起来反对暴力恐怖。有了团结的基础，我们肯定能取得这场反对暴力恐怖、反对分裂势力斗争的胜利。” […]

### **Example 4: The portrayed threat from ‘Western hostile forces’ (Case 2, Xinjiang Daily)**

新疆日报 (7/7/2013)

#### **充分认识反分裂斗争的长期性艰巨性复杂性**

本报评论员

[…] 早在20世纪30年代以来，境内外分裂主义势力在外国敌对势力策动下，几次策划新疆“独立”政治动乱。20世纪90年代，随着东欧剧变和苏联解体，极大地刺激了国内分裂主义的神经，加之西方敌对势力把“和平演变”的矛头重点指向我国，加紧对我推行“西化”“分化”和遏制战略，企图在沿边少数民族地区寻找和打开突破口。他们把新疆作为主攻目标，极力拉拢、培植境内外民族分裂势力，支持和操纵民族分裂组织，采取各种手段从事针对新疆的分裂破坏活动。从1990年“4·5”巴仁乡反革命武装暴乱到2009年发生在乌鲁木齐的“7·5”事件，再到近期发生的几起暴力恐怖案件，无一不是敌对势力分裂破坏的集中反映。这些事实充分表明，境内外敌对势力制造暴力恐怖事件、危害国家安全、破坏民族团结和社会稳定的犯罪活动没有停止也不会停止，我们对此要有充分的思想认识和长期斗争的准备。 […]

民族分裂势力、宗教极端势力、暴力恐怖势力沆瀣一气，使得新疆的反恐维稳斗争不断复杂化。近年来，一些周边国家和地区的宗教极端势力和暴力恐怖势力十分猖獗，他们四处建立训练基地，网罗、培训暴力恐怖分子，进行各种颠覆活动。在这种背景下，新疆的民族分裂活动也呈逐步升级态势。境内外“三股势力”加紧勾结，不断变换策略和手段，他们披着宗教的外衣，采取隐蔽或公开的形式，进行反动宣传，攻击党和政府的路线方针，特别是民族宗教政策；他们培植反动骨干，煽动宗教狂热，挑起民族仇视，甚至制造暴力恐怖活动，气焰十分嚣张。 […]

### **Example 5: Defaming Islam (Case 3, Xinjiang Daily, article 2)**

新疆日报 (15/11/2013)

#### **学成归来看家乡**

中国科学院高能物理研究所博士毕业生依明江·买买提

我记得小时候，我们农村很少有妇女蒙面。初中那会儿，靓丽的7束小辫子是小女孩青春美丽的象征。那时候，女孩子们亲手绣手帕或花帽作为年轻人爱情的信物。那时候，每个考上大学的年轻人都会带上艾得莱斯裙子或卡娜瓦依衬衣作为对家乡的思念。这次回到家乡，我发现乌鲁木齐的大街

上都能遇到蒙面妇女，很多都是年轻人。在我的理解中，社会发展应该是向前、向上的，现代文明和民族优秀传统文化的结合是世界各民族发展的趋势。国内国外很多历史经验表明，这种穿着、思想上往极端方向的发展往往会带来行为上的极端，甚至会成为宗教极端势力渗透的首选对象。我们每一位维吾尔青年必须反思，必须思考我们社会应该往什么方向发展这个根本问题。如果我们现在不站出来跟那些极端思想作斗争，明天他们就不让我们的妇女出门工作，就不让我们的舞蹈歌曲上台。[...]

只有我们各族人民情同骨肉，携手并进，我们的农民才会住得起洋房，我们的女性才会在社会上发挥更大的作用，而不是穿着吉里巴甫蹲在家里，我们的孩子会有更全面的教育和更多就业选择。这就是我们未来的生活，也应该是我们未来的生活。

#### **Example 6: ETIM and terrorist motivation (Source: Case 3, Xinjiang Daily)**

新疆日报 (14/11/2013)

##### **维护祖国统一是各族公民的共同责任**

新疆大学政治与公共管理学院副教授祖力亚提·司马义

[...] 在今年的10月28日，在北京天安门，发生了暴力恐怖袭击事件，多名无辜平民和游客伤亡，造成重大生命财产损失。这一暴行让无数国人为之愤怒，也让世界爱好和平的人民为之震惊。

有关部门现已查明，这次策划、实施北京天安门恐怖袭击的是“东突厥斯坦伊斯兰运动”组织。该组织，是联合国安理会认定的恐怖组织。该组织人员与多个国际恐怖极端组织勾联，多年来不断通过各种方式在中国境内传播暴力恐怖思想，煽动、策划和实施恐怖活动。对中国国内和其他一些国家与地区，都构成了安全与稳定的重大威胁与实际危害。

北京天安门广场历来被视为新中国的政治心脏，“东伊运”组织将恐怖袭击选择在这一敏感地区，目的就是想要对国内民众造成更大的恐惧心理，在国内与国际社会造成更加剧烈的政治反响和轰动效应。

恐怖主义活动主要是针对普通平民的生命、财产，采用暴力或者暴力威胁的行为。恐怖分子在实施犯罪中通常没有特指的个人受害者，正如本次北京发生的“10·28”事件，受害者都是事先非特定的无辜平民，不分民族，不分宗教信仰，不分国籍。恐怖主义针对无辜民众的暴行，正是他们内心残忍而懦弱的反映。

#### **Example 7: The harm of terrorism to Chinese society (Case 3, Xinjiang Daily, article 3)**

新疆日报 (15/11/2013)

##### **暴力恐怖分子是严重影响中国社会稳定的毒瘤**

新疆社会科学院党委委员、副院长库兰·尼合买提

[...] 他们的目的就是要在国际上制造轰动效应，给党和政府制造舆论压力，在全社会营造恐怖氛围，这再次暴露了他们分裂祖国、破坏统一和民族团结的反动阴谋。事实也再一次证明，暴力恐怖分子是全国各族人民和全世界人民的共同敌人。我们与暴力恐怖分子的斗争既不是民族问题，也不是宗教问题，而是一场分裂与反分裂、捍卫祖国统一与破坏祖国统一的你死我活的政治斗争，绝没有丝毫妥协、退让的余地。

恐怖主义犯罪严重危害了各族群众的生命安全。从今年所发生的“4·23”“6·26”到“10·28”暴力恐怖案件看，暴恐分子手段极其残忍、以杀人为明确指向目标，被杀害的既有维吾尔族在内的无辜群众也有国际游客。这些暴力恐怖行径，是对人权的严重践踏，是对法制尊严的严重挑战，是对文明秩序的严重损害，是典型的反社会、反人类、反文明的恐怖主义行径，必定会受到世界上爱好和平的国家和人民的强烈谴责和唾弃。现实也再一次警示我们，暴力恐怖活动已经成为破坏中国及新疆社会稳定最现实、最直接的巨大威胁。

#### **Example 8: Western double-standard on China's terrorist threat (Case 4, Economics Daily)**

经济日报 (4/3/2014)

中华全国新闻工作者协会负责人发表谈话指出 部分西方媒体对昆明严重暴力恐怖事件报道别有用心

新华社北京3月3日电 [···] 3月1日晚，云南昆明火车站发生严重暴力恐怖事件，恐怖分子残忍地砍杀无辜群众，目前已造成29人遇难、143人受伤。中国各族人民和国际社会随即对此次严重暴力恐怖事件予以强烈谴责。然而，有些西方媒体却罔顾最基本的新闻准则，在报道中态度暧昧，居心叵测，别有用心。比如，美国有线电视新闻网（CNN）在报道中将恐怖分子打上引号；美联社在相关报道中加上中国“官方所称的恐怖分子”这一前缀；《纽约时报》《华盛顿邮报》及路透社等媒体将恐怖分子称为“攻击者”“激进分子”等。英国广播公司（BBC）不仅将暴力恐怖袭击三个词加上引号，而且还强调其所引用的中国官方报道“未经证实”。更有甚者，美联社在选择性引用某受访者的话时，竟声称“应让维吾尔人独立”。

谈话说，必须指出的是，大量事实充分证明，昆明火车站发生的这起丧心病狂的暴行，是赤裸裸的暴力恐怖犯罪，犯罪者反人类、反文明、反社会的残暴本质暴露无遗，这伙暴徒是不折不扣的恐怖分子。但是，一向在反恐和人权问题上叫得最响、标榜客观真实的部分西方媒体却集体“失明”，甚至为恐怖分子的残暴行径进行辩护、寻找托辞。这种做法明显是双重标准，违背新闻客观公正原则，缺乏起码的媒体职业道德。中国广大新闻工作者对此表示强烈愤慨。[···]

### **Example 9: The social values of stability, unity and economic growth (Case 2, Xinjiang Daily)**

新疆日报(1/7/2013)

#### **团结稳定是新疆各族人民的根本利益所在**

自治区民委(宗教局)主任(局长) 吐尔干·皮达

【。。。】巨大的发展变化，无一不在印证中国共产党的伟大，社会主义制度的优越，无一不是党的民族宗教政策的具体体现。长期的历史实践证明，民族团结、社会稳定，是各族人民共同的根本利益所在。没有团结稳定这个前提条件，什么事情也干不成，已经取得的发展成果也会失去，更不可能实现经济社会的持续健康发展，更不会有各族人民生活水平的逐步提高。各民族人民共同团结进步、共同繁荣发展，巩固和发展平等、团结、互助、和谐的民族关系，是中国共产党一以贯之的长期政策，是各族人民共同的根本利益所在。什么时候民族关系融洽、社会政治稳定，经济就发展，各族人民生活水平就有保证。什么时候民族团结、社会稳定受到破坏，经济就停滞倒退，人民群众的生活就会受到影响，这是为长期历史实践所证明的颠扑不破的真理。【。。。】

## Appendix 3

### --- 1. Indicator questions for framing analysis ---

**Explanation:** For the indicator questions, see appendix 2 'indicator questions for framing analysis'. The percentage values in the table denote the quantity of articles for the given answer in relation to the sample article number of each case. For instance, the answer to question signals that 87% of the sample articles on case 1 answered 'yes' to the question on whether the report mainly classifies the reported incident as act of terrorism. Prevalent changes in framing are highlighted and discussed further in chapter 6.

**Table A3– 1: Indicator question answers by case**

Question	Answer	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7	Case 8
1	Yes	87%	92%	90%	94%	94%	96%	92%	95%
2	Yes	23%	18%	16%	12%	13%	10%	8%	12%
3	Yes	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
4	Yes	61%	65%	69%	68%	72%	68%	66%	70%
5	Yes	51%	30%	48%	41%	44%	39%	36%	26%
6	Stability	18%	18%	16%	16%	17%	12%	18%	15%
	National unity	11%	13%	14%	7%	6%	9%	16%	13%
	Economic growth	12%	11%	10%	8%	9%	6%	13%	8%
	CCP leadership	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	More than one	37%	41%	47%	50%	46%	58%	33%	47%
	Other	9%	2%	5%	8%	8%	5%	10%	5%
7	Injustice & gravity	61%	55%	53%	65%	61%	61%	56%	52%
	Extremism-phobia	44%	41%	35%	58%	64%	61%	63%	55%
	Demonization	22%	16%	12%	29%	24%	26%	20%	24%
	Adversarial	43%	30%	48%	52%	54%	51%	48%	48%
	Aptness	19%	18%	24%	26%	27%	24%	21%	20%
	Securitisation	16%	10%	15%	26%	29%	28%	18%	13%
	other	5%	8%	5%	0%	4%	0%	8%	10%
8	Yes	25%	20%	32%	37%	39%	40%	27%	22%
9	Yes	0%	0%	0%	12%	15%	13%	8%	0%
10	Average	4.6	4.8	4.9	4.9	5.0	5.2	5.4	5.8
11	Stability	65%	57%	62%	64%	70%	66%	71%	66%
	National unity	44%	40%	38%	48%	54%	53%	54%	56%
	Economic growth	57%	54%	42%	41%	43%	40%	36%	40%
	Rule of law	0%	0%	0%	13%	16%	14%	0%	0%
	Other	13%	14%	8%	6%	4%	6%	0%	0%
12	Yes	3%	0%	5%	7%	8%	8%	6%	0%
13	Yes	6%	5%	2%	2%	0%	2%	0%	0%
14	Yes	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
15	Yes	34%	27%	32%	38%	35%	36%	28%	32%
16	Yes	7%	8%	10%	48%	53%	57%	56%	52%

--- 2. Full R output for similarity test ---

Explanation: List of Pearson's product moment correlation tests between case 1 and cases 2 to 8.

**Table A3 – 2: Similarity of news content across cases**

Case 1 and case 2: $t = 56.118$ , $df = 3651$ , $p\text{-value} < 2.2e-16$ Alternative hypothesis: True correlation is not equal to 0 95 percent confidence interval: 0.6627159 0.6975558 Sample estimates: cor.: 0.6805203	Case 1 and case 6: $t = 88.001$ , $df = 6859$ , $p\text{-value} < 2.2e-16$ Alternative hypothesis: True correlation is not equal to 0 95 percent confidence interval: 0.7169118 0.7391470 Sample estimates: cor.: 0.728221
Case 1 and case 3: $t = 45.063$ , $df = 4665$ , $p\text{-value} < 2.2e-16$ Alternative hypothesis: True correlation is not equal to 0 95 percent confidence interval: 0.5303954 0.5703851 Sample estimates: cor.: 0.5507062	Case 1 and case 7: $t = 40.268$ , $df = 3716$ , $p\text{-value} < 2.2e-16$ Alternative hypothesis: True correlation is not equal to 0 95 percent confidence interval: 0.5283886 0.5731626 Sample estimates: cor.: 0.5511722
Case 1 and case 4: $t = 66.773$ , $df = 7902$ , $p\text{-value} < 2.2e-16$ Alternative hypothesis: True correlation is not equal to 0 95 percent confidence interval: 0.5863107 0.6145035 Sample estimates: cor.: 0.6005937	Case 1 and case 8: $t = 58.529$ , $df = 4139$ , $p\text{-value} < 2.2e-16$ Alternative hypothesis: True correlation is not equal to 0 95 percent confidence interval: 0.6559256 0.6892712 Sample estimates: cor.: 0.6729402
Case 1 and case 5: $t = 89.917$ , $df = 7176$ , $p\text{-value} < 2.2e-16$ Alternative hypothesis: True correlation is not equal to 0 95 percent confidence interval: 0.7167975 0.7385601 Sample estimates: cor.: 0.727862	

-- 3. Structural topic modelling: Model diagnostics for estimation of number of topics --

Explanation: As part of pre-processing the data, features were trimmed off that were very rare (less than 7.5%) to decrease statistical noise. For exploring the best fitted number of topics (called 'K'), model diagnostics were run with various K's. Below the diagnostic tests are illustrated for K=3,4,6, which shows K=4 as balance between quantity of residuals, exclusivity and semantic coherence.

Figure A3-1: Model diagnostics for structural topic modelling

