



Volume 33, Issue 1

Exploring the relationship between media and terrorism: a panel study of south asian countries

Muhammad Nasir

Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, Islamabad, Pakistan

Aqeel Ahmad Khan

*Directorate of Information FATA, FATA Secretariat,
Pakistan*

Hafiz Hanzla Jalil

*Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, Islamabad,
Pakistan*

Abstract

This study empirically explores the relationship between terrorism and the media in selected South Asian countries. Using Negative Binomial Regression, the results indicate that freedom of media has actually been used by militants to their benefit in inciting more terrorism in the region. Hence, both the print and electronic media should be careful in the coverage and broadcast of terrorist attacks.

The views presented are those of the authors and may not be assigned to their respective institutions.

Citation: Muhammad Nasir and Aqeel Ahmad Khan and Hafiz Hanzla Jalil, (2013) "Exploring the relationship between media and terrorism: a panel study of south asian countries", *Economics Bulletin*, Vol. 33 No. 1 pp. 714-720.

Contact: Muhammad Nasir - nasirawan84@yahoo.com, Aqeel Ahmad Khan - azai93@hotmail.com, Hafiz Hanzla Jalil - hanzla_jalil@yahoo.com.

Submitted: December 09, 2012. **Published:** March 12, 2013.

1. Introduction

Terrorism, in the most widely accepted contemporary usage of the term, is fundamentally and inherently political. It is also ineluctably about power: the pursuit of power, the acquisition of power, and the use of power to achieve political change. Terrorism is thus violence—or, equally important, the threat of violence—used and directed in pursuit of, or in service of, a political aim [Hoffman; 2006]. Terrorism has been acted upon throughout the history but it has taken a new road in the recent decades most particularly due to its relation with the mass media. There has been a long debate on the role of media on terrorism especially in today's global environment. There exist two radically different views in this regard. On one hand, there feels to be a strong need of independent and free media to disseminate information to the general public. Media provides a platform to the deprived to raise their voice and hence they do not get frustrated enough to adopt negative means like terrorism to get heard. Media helps in creating harmony among the public. By giving true description of the situation it lessens the panic prevailing among the masses as well as it informs the local officials at different locations of the state of affairs for them to react to the emergency [Singer; 2001]. This being said, however, another school of thought believes that freedom of press may also become source of promoting terrorism.

Many terrorists do seek publicity and perpetrate their violent acts to gain publicity for their causes or to obtain concessions such as the release of comrades from prison, precisely because mass media quickly spread awareness of their acts to a wide audience in ways the terrorists alone could not do [Biernatzki; 2002]. Nacos (2007) combined various aspects and objectives into one comprehensive framework stating that terrorists have four general media-dependent objectives when they strike or threaten to commit violence. The first is to gain attention of the audience by targeting population (and government) for intimidation. The second goal is recognition of the organization's motives. They want people to think about why they are carrying out attacks. The third objective is to gain the respect and sympathy of those in whose name they claim to attack. The last objective is to gain a quasi-legitimate status and a media treatment similar to that of legitimate political actors. In most cases, terrorist attacks are much localized, and affect only a few people. Without massive news coverage the terrorist act would resemble the proverbial tree falling in the forest: if no one learned of an incident, it would be as if it had not occurred [Nacos; 2000]. The goal (of terrorists), however, is to spread the message to more people than just those who were directly hit in the attack; the media play an important role in achieving this by spreading the news of the attacks or even by directly transferring the message of terrorist organizations.

The important question, however, is that how extensive media coverage of terrorist acts promote or incite more terrorism? According to Jenkins (1983) terrorists specially design their attacks to gather maximum media attention. Although a lot of people will develop the loath for such incidents by seeing them on media, but a few may get inspired by it. If terrorists get more publicity than needed, it would motivate the other individuals and groups to follow the same path for their voices being heard and their demands fulfilled. When a terrorist incident takes place at one corner of the country, it intimidates people at the other corner due to extensive media

coverage, which pushes the government on back foot, therefore, rendering it weak. It encourages terrorists to follow the policy of carrying out more terrorist attacks.

South Asia is one of the most victimized regions that have frequently faced terrorist attacks. The presence of separatist groups in countries like Pakistan, India, and Sri Lanka has made these countries vulnerable to terrorist attacks. Interestingly, this region has also observed increase in media independence in the last two decades. This calls for the need to investigate the nature of relationship, if any, between terrorism and freedom of media in these susceptible countries. To our knowledge, there has not been any study which has empirically modeled the relationship between terrorism and media freedom. This study will be first such attempt to serve the purpose.

Rest of the study proceeds as follows; section 2 gives description of data and variables. Results and discussion are given in section 3, while section 4 concludes the study.

2. Methodology and Data

In order to find association between terrorism and media freedom in these four countries—Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, we have included various control variables in our analysis, which have been extracted from literature on determinants of terrorism. These determinants include: economic determinants, such as GDP per capita and inflation; political variable like political repression; socioeconomic variables, such as inequality and education. Hence, the following model is estimated:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{No of Terrorist Incidents} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Freedom of Media} + \beta_2 \text{GDPPC} + \beta_3 \text{Inflation} + \beta_4 \text{Inequality} \\ & + \beta_5 \text{Repression} + \beta_6 \text{Literacy} \end{aligned}$$

Since the dependant variable is a count variable, Poisson Regression is the appropriate estimation technique. However, in our analysis we have used the Negative Binomial regression model for panel data estimation to deal with the over-dispersion problem. Moreover, robust standard errors are used to exclude the effects of autocorrelation and heteroscedasticity from data.

The data is obtained for the four South Asian Countries for the period 1994-2008. Data for dependant variable has been obtained from Global Terrorism Database (GTD) of the “National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses of Terrorism”. Data on freedom of media has been obtained from Freedom House where media freedom is measured on a scale of 0-100, where 0 represents highest freedom. This measure divide the score in three statuses; 0-30 (Free), 31-60 (Partly Free), and 61-100 (Not Free). In order to make the scale compatible with our interpretations, we have subtracted these scores from 100. At this revised scale, an increase in the score represents higher freedom of media. Data on political repression has been adopted from the Freedom House measure of political rights and civil liberties. The Freedom House assigns each country and territory a numerical value on a scale of 1 to 7 for political rights and civil liberties separately; a rating of 1 indicates the highest degree of freedom and 7 the least degree of freedom. Data on GDP per capita, inflation and literacy rate have been taken from the World

Development Indicators. Data on income inequality, which is measured by Gini Index, obtained from World Institute for Development Economic Research (WIDER).

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 represents the estimation results of six models in which Freedom House's Freedom of Media scale has been used. It can be seen that in all of the six models association between terrorism and media freedom is positive and statistically significant. This result surfaces the fact that, in South Asia, freedom of media has in fact played a significant role in inciting terrorism. The reason might be the manner in which the terrorist incidents are covered by the media. Presenting terrorist incident as "breaking news", broadcasting clips of the attacks and live coverage of the dead and injured easily spreads the terror across the country. All this helps terrorist to achieve what they want, and encourage them for further attacks. This result can also be reaffirmed from the fact that in the last two decades both terrorism and freedom of media has increased.

The results further show that increase in state's capacity, represented by increase in GDP per capita, compels militants to make terrorist attacks instead of coming into an open war with the state. Likewise, inflation is also identified as determinant of terrorism in this region [see also, Nasir *et al.*, 2011]. Inequality and political repression are, nonetheless, found insignificant in this analysis. The dummies for country specific effects are found significant for almost all of the under study countries. Interestingly, these country specific characteristics bring terrorism down in case of India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. However, these characteristics, which also include cultural and religious diversity, aggravate terrorism in Pakistan. It could be validated further from the data on sectarian violence in the country which shows frequent occurrence of sectarian violence throughout the history.

A question can arise on the scale measure of freedom of media, as these scores are categorized in three different statuses of "Free", "Partly Free" and "Not Free". To deal with this concern, a dummy variable has been used to measure media freedom. For the purpose, we combined the "Free" and "Partly Free" into one category as "Free" and assigned it value "1". The rest has been classified as "Not Free" and has been given the value "0". They have been then used in the regression analysis to represent freedom of media. The results of this analysis are given in Table 2.

It is evident from the table that in almost all the models freedom of media is positively related to violence. Hence, this result authenticates the outcome presented in Table 1. Same is the case with other explanatory variables such as inflation, inequality, repression and literacy rate. However, in contrast to the results in Table 1, GDP per capita is found insignificant in most of the cases. This is also true for the country specific effects for India. For rest of the countries, nevertheless, results are the same as in Table 1.

Table 1: Negative Binomial Regression Results using Index for Media Freedom

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Media Freedom	0.036 (2.39)***	0.047 (3.35)***	0.057 (3.48)***	0.049 (3.01)***	0.05 (3.29)***	0.051 (3.30)***
GDPPC		0.00058 (2.68)***	0.0004 (1.89)*	0.0004 (2.00)**	0.0003 (1.59)	0.0004 (1.57)
Inflation			0.097 (3.43)***	0.086 (2.78)***	0.102 (3.97)***	0.103 (3.88)***
Inequality				4.052 (1.00)		
Repression					-0.329 (-1.75)*	-0.298 (1.46)
Literacy						-0.009 (-0.46)
India	-0.729 (-1.76)*	-0.897 (-2.13)**	-0.642 (-1.57)-11%	-0.531 (-1.44)	-1.22 (-2.20)**	-1.074 (-1.66)*
Bangladesh	-1.925 (-5.03)***	-1.356 (-2.97)***	-0.966 (-2.26)**	-0.986 (-2.34)**	-1.472 (-2.99)***	-1.421 (-2.78)***
Srilanka	-0.913 (-2.52)**	-1.69 (-4.06)***	-1.515 (-4.20)***	-1.568 (-4.34)***	-1.862 (-4.66)***	-1.482 (-1.60)-11%
Constant	3.732 (5.43)***	2.104 (2.41)**	0.91 (0.95)	-0.143 (-0.11)	2.849 (1.95)**	2.984 (2.07)**
Wald Test	(64.29)***	(90.09)***	(73.96)***	(85.60)***	(94.41)***	(95.91)***

Note: t-stats are presented in parenthesis. ***, ** and * represents significance at 1%, 5% and 10% levels.

Table 2: Negative Binomial Regression Results using Dummy for Media Freedom

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Media Freedom	0.555 (1.62)	0.697 (2.13)**	0.768 (2.47)**	0.571 (1.43)	0.574 (1.70)*	0.63 (1.87)**
GDPPC		0.004 (2.27)**	0.0003 (1.46)	0.0003 (1.41)	0.0002 (0.98)	0.0001 (0.62)
Inflation			0.086 (2.63)***	0.078 (2.18)**	0.091 (2.96)***	0.09 (2.94)***
Inequality				4.076 (0.74)		
Repression					-0.286 (-1.25)	-0.321 (-1.37)
Literacy						0.014 (0.77)
India	-0.263 (-0.70)	-0.314 (-0.88)	0.064 (0.18)	0.711 (0.34)	-0.485 (-0.94)	-0.729 (-1.16)
Bangladesh	-1.866 (-4.56)***	-1.379 (-3.04)***	-1.002 (-2.15)**	-1.057 (-2.29)**	-1.504 (-2.84)***	-1.556 (-2.88)***
Srilanka	-0.982 (-2.61)***	-1.552 (-3.34)***	-1.393 (-3.31)***	-1.393 (-3.34)***	-1.593 (-3.55)***	-2.232 (-2.34)**
Constant	4.8661 (13.82)***	3.824 (7.09)***	3.052 (4.53)***	1.826 (1.10)	4.728 (3.12)***	4.349 (2.88)***
Wald Test	(44.78)***	(51.75)***	(49.61)***	(60.75)***	(60.77)***	(65.56)***

Note: t-stats are presented in parenthesis. ***, ** and * represents significance at 1%, 5% and 10% levels.

4. Concluding Remarks

Mass Media is no doubt a crucial source that has the potential to be misused; either by the government or the terrorists. The results of this study reveal that freedom of media has been used by the militants in inflaming terrorism in South Asia. Therefore, the people related to both print and electronic media, together with the government, should make a code of conduct and operations for themselves, so that the coverage and broadcast of terrorist incidents does not spread and provoke terrorism.

References

Biernatzki W. E., (2002), "Terrorism and Mass Media", *Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture*, Vol.1, No.1

Freedom House, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/>

Global Terrorism Database, <http://www.start.umd.edu/data/gtd/>

Hoffman B., (2006). *Inside Terrorism (Revised and Expanded Edition)*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Jenkins B., (1983), "Research in Terrorism: Areas of Consensus, Areas of Ignorance", in B. Eichelman, D. Soskis, & W. Reid (Eds.), *Terrorism: Interdisciplinary perspectives* (pp. 153–177). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.

Nasir M., Ali A., and Rehman F.Ur., (2011) "Determinants of Terrorism: A Panel Data Analysis of Selected South Asian Countries," *The Singapore Economic Review*, Vol. 56, No. 2, pp. 175-187.

Nacos B.L., (2000). *Accomplice or Witness ? The Media's Role in Terrorism*. *Current History*, Vol No. 99, pp. 174-178.

Nacos B.L., (2007). *Mass-Mediated Terrorism : The Central Role of Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism* (2nd Edition ed.). New York: Rowman & Littlefeild Publishers, Inc.

Singer M., (2001), "The Challenge to Science: How to Mobilize American Ingenuity" *Talbot and Chanda*, pp.193-218.