

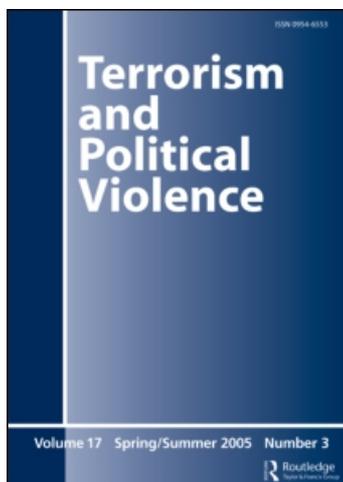
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## Terrorism and Political Violence

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### How Does the Business of News Influence Terrorism Coverage? Evidence From *The Washington Post* and *USA Today*

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## How Does the Business of News Influence Terrorism Coverage? Evidence From *The Washington Post* and *USA Today*

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*Observers argue that the business of news is responsible for worsening the coverage of terrorism, but exactly how economic considerations influence coverage is controversial. Based on an analysis of over 1600 articles from The Washington Post and USA Today, we find that concerns about the effects of economic pressures on terrorism reporting are exaggerated. The business climate affects coverage, but the long-term impact of market pressures on coverage is modest. Articles about terrorist violence are increasingly prominent, but coverage of counterterrorism remains robust. Efforts to inoculate the press against the worst excesses of the market are unnecessary.*

**Keywords** competition, counterterrorism, economics, media, newspapers, terrorism

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Although it is widely believed that economic factors influence the coverage of terrorism in newspapers, there is disagreement about how.<sup>1</sup> Some say that the print media is susceptible to a fatigue effect that results in shorter, less prominent terrorism coverage over time.<sup>2</sup> Others argue that terrorism is increasingly important because violence “sells.”<sup>3</sup> A third hypothesis is that the coverage of terrorism is demand driven,<sup>4</sup> with lengthy, prominent articles associated with high levels of public interest in this subject.

Resolving the debate over terrorism coverage is important for several reasons. First, newspaper reports about terrorism appear to encourage new attacks.<sup>5</sup> If terrorism gets attention to satisfy the profit motives of media organizations, then restraining this impulse offers an indirect method of preventing future violence. Second, media reports about terrorism influence the counterterrorism policies democracies pursue.<sup>6</sup> The media’s ability to sway people’s assessments of issues<sup>7</sup> and government institutions is well known.<sup>8</sup> Thus, an over-emphasis on terrorism by the media could result in public pressure on governments to invest more in security than is required to prevent future attacks<sup>9</sup> while a desensitized press may lull the public into lobbying for less protection than it needs. Finally, the emphasis the news media place on terrorist violence relative to counterterrorism can play into the hands of perpetrators by undermining public confidence in government’s ability to thwart future attacks.<sup>10</sup> In short, market-induced biases in the information people rely on can quickly result in politically suboptimal outcomes that advantage the perpetrators of violence over the victims.

Our analysis suggests, however, that concerns about the effects of economic pressures on terrorism reporting are exaggerated. The business climate certainly influences coverage, but our study of over 1600 articles published in the *Washington Post* and *USA Today* between 1977 and 2006 suggests that the impacts of market pressures are modest. Articles about terrorist attacks have grown in length and prominence, but the coverage of violence is not crowding out other terrorism related subjects.

We conclude that proposals to inoculate high quality newspapers against pressures to sensationalize terrorist attacks are unnecessary.<sup>11</sup> There is little evidence that attack coverage dominates the print press. As a result, we do not believe that readers of *The Post* and *USA Today* get an exaggerated view of terrorism as an unchecked threat to society. Our results also cast the notion that the news media and terrorist organizations have symbiotic interests in a new light. While newspaper organizations undoubtedly help themselves by publishing material about terrorist activity, terrorist organizations do not enjoy greater access to the press than the targets of terror. Counterterrorism is the most reported story in the press, not terrorist attacks.

## Literature Review and Hypotheses

In the following section, we discuss the literature on the coverage of terrorism in the news, with an emphasis on hypotheses about how the business of news influences the placement and length of articles. Terrorism involves the premeditated use or threatened use of force by sub-national actors or clandestine state agents against non-combatants for the purpose of influencing an audience.<sup>12</sup> It is a strategy that depends on media exposure for success<sup>13</sup> because the physical effects of terrorism are typically minor.<sup>14</sup> Knowing this, what perpetrators of terrorism want is *attention* in order to magnify the psychological consequences of their acts and influence the

public agenda.<sup>15</sup> News coverage of attacks is essential, therefore, since there is no easier way for groups to communicate with large audiences than through the mass media.

Early empirical work on the nexus between terrorism and the media focused on the coverage of terrorist attacks. The focus on attacks made sense since terrorist violence scores high on the dimensions editors use to select stories for publication.<sup>16</sup> Terrorist attacks are shocking, conflictual, and capable of dramatically affecting the lives of ordinary people. In addition, terrorist violence threatens the established order and perpetrators are easily cast as active opponents of government policies. This is the stuff of great news.

Yet, the attention the news media gives to attacks varies widely.<sup>17</sup> The question is: why? The early research assumed that attack characteristics drove the selection, placement, and length of terrorism articles: strikes that resonated with editors got into the paper, the rest did not. Thus, the most newsworthy events: involved casualties (i.e., shocking and conflictual); used extraordinary tactics (i.e., unusual); and took place in salient locations (i.e., familiar to audiences).<sup>18</sup> Consistent with the preference for “proximate” stories,<sup>19</sup> domestic terrorism typically garnered more press interest than international terrorism.<sup>20</sup> Finally, the most wide-ranging study of terrorism coverage also found that media attention increased when Palestinians were the suspected perpetrators and when groups claimed responsibility for acts of violence.<sup>21</sup>

The notion that attack characteristics drive coverage has not been questioned directly. Nevertheless, observers increasingly argue that economic pressures also shape reporting on terrorism. From the use of marketing surveys to determine what readers want<sup>22</sup> to budget cuts for national and international news,<sup>23</sup> news is treated as a commodity designed to maintain the profitability of media firms.<sup>24</sup> As a Vice-President of on-line news at a local television station told the Pew Research Center, “Journalism is becoming more and more a business operation. What news stories will make our newspaper/television station the most profitable? This has always been part of the ‘business’ but now it has become the major factor.”<sup>25</sup>

Yet, it is unclear exactly how the marketplace influences terrorism coverage. Three claims stand out.<sup>26</sup> The first is that terrorism is subject to a “fatigue” effect that results in reduced coverage of terrorist violence. The second is that terrorist violence is over-emphasized in the press to the detriment of other terrorism related subjects because sensational news sells. The final argument is that the coverage of terrorism fluctuates with demand for reporting on this subject. We discuss each of these perspectives below.

### ***Fatigue***

The idea underlying the fatigue hypothesis is captured by the press folk wisdom that “man bites dog” stories are newsworthy, but “dog bites man” stories are not.<sup>27</sup> Since editors have limited space within a daily newspaper, they must limit what gets published to stories that will help their papers generate profits. This economic reality pushes editors (and reporters) to value novel stories because they attract readers. Terrorism, however, often fails to meet the newness test. Terrorist attacks occur frequently—the Global Terrorism Database records over 80,000 attacks between 1970 and 2007—and according to familiar scripts: the modal attack involves either an explosive device or an armed assault and results in zero fatalities.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, it is difficult to portray terrorist violence as either unusual or a major social ill.

The banality of terrorism is compounded by the human tendency to become desensitized to violence. Research in psychology, much of which focuses on televised violence, suggests that repeated exposure to violent content dulls people's sensitivity to subsequent brutality.<sup>29</sup> From this perspective, the frequency of terrorism works to its own disadvantage as a method of generating publicity because psychological forces lead people to discount the importance of repeated violence. The result is that editors gradually devote less space and give less prominence to articles about terrorist attacks.

Empirically, if a fatigue effect exists, then *all things equal the probability of articles about terrorism appearing on the front page should decline over time. In addition, articles about terrorism should appear closer to the back pages of newspapers over time.* These articles are also *likely to be shorter* because of media fatigue. The effects on coverage should be pronounced for the most mundane attacks: *attacks that use the most common tactics (bombings and armed assaults) should be shorter and less prominent than other terrorism related articles.* Declining attention to terrorism in newspapers should be accentuated by the tenure of executive ("top") editors, since they have the greatest say over the placement and length of stories in newspapers. *The longer top editors hold their positions, the likelier newspapers are to publish shorter, less prominent articles about terrorism.*

### **Over-Emphasis**

An opposing perspective on the coverage of terrorism suggests that the media *over-emphasizes* terrorist violence at the expense of material about prevention. This argument involves two claims. First, "if it bleeds it leads": the news media intensifies its coverage of terrorism in response to economic pressures. The media is an "infotainment" industry that values sensational stories because shocking, violent material generates profits.<sup>30</sup> And in an era of declining audiences for news, the press gravitates to stories like terrorism that attract consumers.

The second claim is that bottom line pressure causes media firms to deemphasize counterterrorism reporting relative to attack coverage. The result is that even minor terrorist attacks generate considerable amounts of coverage (in quantitative terms), while counterterrorism is either ignored or footnoted in the news. According to Nacos, for example, between 1996 and 2000 the U.S.'s three television networks (ABC, NBC, and CBS), *The New York Times*, and *National Public Radio* mentioned the word "terrorism" 10,696 times compared to only 2441 total mentions of "counterterrorism" and "antiterrorism."<sup>31</sup> Similarly, in their study of a thirty-nine month period following the 9/11 attacks, Nacos, Bloch-Elkon, and Shapiro found that network news casts aired 373 stories about the threat of terrorism compared to 85 stories about prevention.<sup>32</sup>

In the U.S., the imbalance in terrorism versus counterterrorism coverage is significant because the public's level of trust in the federal government (expressed in surveys) appears to fluctuate with the number of messages about terrorism prevention in the mass media. As the number of reports about counterterrorism efforts increases, public trust in government increases. However, since terrorist violence dominates the news, Americans believe that the government's counterterrorism efforts are inadequate.<sup>33</sup>

The empirical implications of an over-emphasis on terrorism are as follows. First, *the prominence and length of terrorism related articles should increase as*

*newspaper readership declines* (all things equal). Second, the emphasis on violence leads us to expect that newspapers give more prominence and space to stories about terrorist violence than stories about counterterrorism. *Ceterus paribus, stories about terrorist attacks should be more likely to appear on the front page than stories about counterterrorism; stories about terrorist violence should receive more prominent placement in newspapers than stories about counterterrorism* as well. Third, *articles about terrorism should be longer than stories about counterterrorism*. Finally, *articles about terrorist attacks should outnumber articles about counterterrorism*.

### **Consumer Demand**

The final perspective suggests that the attention newspapers give to terrorism is driven by consumer demand for relevant news.<sup>34</sup> For an American media audience, events that involve U.S. citizens or take place in the U.S. are likely to be more interesting than similar events in other parts of the world and involving non-U.S. citizens. Fluctuations in terrorism's newsworthiness reflect changes in "the public's taste for various types of news coverage."<sup>35</sup>

Whereas claims about fatigue and over-emphasis imply that terrorism coverage is subject to relatively invariant long-term influences, the consumer demand hypothesis suggests that there are both fixed and variable influences on terrorism coverage. Newspapers derive much of their revenues from advertising. This means that editors must invest in stories that attract readers to remain profitable.<sup>36</sup> Editors are, therefore, sensitive to the elements of events that make them "must reads." A widely used rule of thumb in U.S. newsrooms is that newsworthy stories involve U.S. citizens or U.S. interests because it is relatively easy to connect these events to the lives of ordinary Americans.<sup>37</sup>

However, terrorism coverage is also influenced by the public's sense that terrorism is a subject worth following. As Scott argues, "journalists do not face a bottomless pit of public interest in any one topic, which they can fill with news on this topic, *ad infinitum*."<sup>38</sup> Terrorism as a subject must also compete with hard news stories on the economy, elections, corruption, and wars, in addition to soft news coverage of sex scandals and celebrity divorces. At any particular time, the public is likely to assess the relative importance of these stories differently. In some circumstances, terrorist violence will be the most important issue of the day, but other issues are also capable of occupying public attention. The job of editors is to identify the stories that are most important to the reading audience and deliver material on that subject to them.

Evidence for the consumer demand hypothesis includes Gartner's study of local casualties,<sup>39</sup> which showed that newspapers serving communities that suffered casualties in the USS Cole attack gave more sustained and prominent coverage to the Cole incident than newspapers in communities that did not have one of their own hurt or killed in the strike. Similarly, the evidence that the location of events is a significant predictor of terrorism's newsworthiness<sup>40</sup> also suggests that editors focus coverage on places they think readers want to know about.

Empirically, the market demand hypothesis suggests that *the prominence and length of news stories about terrorism vary with public assessments of the importance of terrorism as an issue*. However, it is also clear from past research that public assessments of the importance of terrorism are conditioned by media attention.<sup>41</sup> Thus we expect *public assessments of terrorism's importance to fluctuate with the*

*volume of terrorism coverage. The newsworthiness of terrorism is also likely to increase when Americans are hurt or killed and when events occur in the U.S. Since the Washington Post's core readership lives in Washington DC and relies on federal jobs more than most, we might also expect that attacks against government personnel and/or buildings will increase terrorism's newsworthiness. The 9/11 attacks, in particular, should be associated with longer and more prominent terrorism reports.*

## Research Design

Despite the controversy surrounding the effects of bottom line pressure on press coverage of terrorism, there has not been a systematic assessment of the relationship between the business of news and the prominence of terrorism reporting. Instead, judgments about economic influences on terrorism coverage rely on either impressionistic data or methodical observations drawn from a small number of cases. Neither of these strategies is well suited to examining how economic pressures affect terrorism coverage over time.

Our contribution to the research on how the business of news influences terrorism coverage focuses on two randomly drawn samples of articles from national newspapers. The first and larger of the two samples is comprised of 1465 articles published between January 1, 1977 and December 31, 2006 from the main news (i.e., first) section of the *Washington Post*.<sup>42</sup> This database allows us to draw unbiased inferences about a number of the factors shaping terrorism (and counter-terrorism) coverage over a nearly thirty-year period. The second is comprised of a random sample of 250 terrorism articles published in *USA Today* over five randomly selected years: 1990, 1993, 1999, 2003, and 2006. This dataset is designed to check the results of our *Washington Post* analysis to determine whether they are peculiar to that paper.

We generated the sampling frames for *The Post* and *USA Today* using the *LexisNexis Academic* electronic database. Searching under "General News," we queried the database for articles with the words "terrorism," "terrorist," or "terrorists" in the headline, lead paragraph, or key terms.<sup>43</sup> This procedure generated over 18,000 articles in *The Post* and more than 1700 articles in *USA Today* from which we randomly selected approximately 50 per paper per year. (We determined sample size using a power analysis.)

We selected the *Washington Post* because it is emblematic of elite newspapers in the United States; we focused on the main news section because this is where the *Washington Post* features the "hard" news at the heart of its reputation for reliable, dispassionate journalism. The first section also serves as a signal about the important issues of the day that readers use to identify the stories they ultimately read.<sup>44</sup> It is material from the news sections of newspapers like *The Post* that is "inevitably"<sup>45</sup> repeated on television news and the internet, making the elite print press a leading indicator of the stories that will dominate the U.S.'s national news agenda.

We chose *USA Today* because it provides a useful contrast to the *Washington Post*. *USA Today* has the largest circulation of any newspaper in the U.S. (the *Post*'s circulation is fourth largest), but *USA Today* is not considered an elite paper. Unlike the *Washington Post*, which sells most of its copies within the Washington, DC metropolitan area, *USA Today*'s readership is truly national. Its audience, therefore, is unlikely to be as interested in news of the U.S. government as regular *Washington Post* readers, many of whom are federal employees. In addition to the different

audiences, sales of *USA Today* depend more on newsstand purchases and less on home subscriptions than sales of *The Washington Post*. If terrorism is a useful selling point, *USA Today* is more likely to use it on the front page than *The Post*. Finally, *USA Today* epitomizes profit-driven journalism.<sup>46</sup> Again, if terrorism coverage is changing as a result of economic pressures, we may be more likely to see those effects in *USA Today* than *The Post*.

By focusing on newspapers we do not mean to imply that other information sources are unimportant. Television news informs more people about current events than newspapers and the internet allows terrorist organizations to circumvent the mainstream media while publicizing their own activities. Still, newspapers remain relevant. Those that read newspapers regularly are more likely than non-readers to get involved in political and community activity.<sup>47</sup> The *Washington Post* is interesting in this regard since its core readership in Washington, D.C. is positioned to influence counterterrorism policy more than any other U.S. news audience. Traditional newspapers are also superior to the internet for understanding terrorism coverage. Like television, much of the news content that appears on the internet is generated by newspapers. Additionally, the internet has not undercut the traditional media's control over terrorism coverage yet. Most perpetrators rely on the traditional press for attention<sup>48</sup> and surveys suggest that people still get more news from newspapers than the internet.<sup>49</sup>

### ***Dependent Variables***

Consistent with previous research,<sup>50</sup> we assessed every article in our sample along two dimensions: "prominence," which we measured using page numbers and "length," which we gauged using word counts. We also used a binary variable ("front page") to keep track of front page stories, since articles that appear on page one are the most important published each day.

### ***Independent Variables***

We classified every article in our sample by subject. An assumption running through the terrorism in the media literature is that certain topics are more noteworthy than others—hence the intense focus on reported attacks. Yet, we are unaware of any study that examines the range of articles newspapers publish about terrorism. Thus, to test this argument and learn about the terrorism beat we read every article in our sample and assigned them to one of the following eight topic categories: 1) terrorist attacks; 2) alleged or convicted terrorists and/or terrorist organizations; 3) anti- and counterterrorism efforts by governments; 4) the demands terrorists or their hostages make during terrorist events; 5) state and state-sponsored terrorism; 6) the presence/absence of support for terrorism; 7) the consequences of terrorism; and 8) editorials on terrorism and/or its control. We developed these categories using a small random sample of stories from the *Washington Post* that we did not include in the study.<sup>51</sup>

*The Fatigue Hypothesis.* We used six variables to examine the proposition that the prominence and length of terrorism articles declines over time. The first of these, called *time lapse*, is a count of the number of days since the start of the modern era of international terrorism (July 22, 1968). We chose this date because it marks the beginning of the period in which terrorism began consistently exerting a powerful

influence over international affairs.<sup>52</sup> If there is a fatigue effect, the prominence of and space devoted to terrorism articles should decrease with the passage of time. Because fatigue is thought to affect the coverage of terrorist attacks in particular, we also created an interaction between articles about terrorist attacks (“*topic 1*”) and *time lapse*.

The fatigue hypothesis further implies that *editorial tenure* is inversely related to the attention terrorism receives in newspapers. We examined this using a count of the number of days the top editors at the *Washington Post* (Ben Bradlee, 1964–1991, and Leonard Downie Jr. 1991–2006) and *USA Today* (John C. Quinn, 1988–1991; Peter Pritchard 1991–1994; Karen Jurgensen, 1999–2003; and Ken Paulson 2004–2006) served in their posts during our study period. Finally, we identified tactically *mundane attacks*—those involving incendiary devices or firearms—since they are ones least likely to be seen as worthy of prominent coverage.

*The Over-Emphasis Hypothesis.* We also examined the placement and length of articles about terrorist attacks and counterterrorism. Newspaper sales are thought to drive editorial fascination with terrorist attacks relative to counterterrorism. We assessed this relationship using annual *circulation* figures for *The Post*’s Monday through Saturday editions and *USA Today*’s Monday through Friday editions, which we drew from the *Editor and Publisher Yearbook*.<sup>53</sup>

Judging the economic health of a newspaper by its circulation figures is appropriate.<sup>54</sup> “All sources of revenue for the newspaper and all services provided by the newspaper, to make of it an indispensable medium and a financial success are based on circulation.”<sup>55</sup> However, circulation figures can change for reasons other than the changing business landscape and so we introduced variables designed to gauge the growth of alternative media that are thought to compete with newspapers for audience share. The first, *cable subscribers*, measures the number of households that have basic cable television subscriptions. Data for this variable came from The National Cable and Telecommunications Association.<sup>56</sup> The second variable, *internet*, measures the total number of internet users in the U.S. per year.<sup>57</sup> Data for this variable came from the World Bank’s World Development Indicators.

*The Consumer Demand Hypothesis.* We used five variables to assess the argument that terrorism coverage is driven by the interests of readers. First, we gauged the *importance* of terrorism using the percentage of people who identified terrorism as the most important issue in monthly polls collected by the Gallup organization between 1977 and 2006. Second, we gauged the *volume* of terrorism coverage in the previous quarter using data on newspaper content from Lexis Nexis (we used this variable to predict public interest in terrorism in several instrumental variable analyses). Third, we used a binary variable (“*U.S. casualties*”) to track whether U.S. citizens were hurt or killed in a given incident. Fourth, we singled out those articles that reported on events that took place in the U.S.. Fourth, we identified attacks that targeted *government* personnel and/or facilities. Finally, we coded for the 9/11 attack since the magnitude of that attack and responses to it generated additional interest in terrorism. All of these variables are expected to increase the newsworthiness of terrorism.

*Additional Controls.* We included several additional binary variables previous research suggests are important predictors of terrorism coverage. These include indicators of: events reported from either *Europe* or the *Middle East*; *spectacular attacks*

(i.e., skyjackings or suicide bombings); events resulting in *casualties*; *claims of responsibility* for acts of terrorist violence; when either *Palestinians* or *Islamic fundamentalists* were suspected of perpetrating acts of terror; and when violent acts resulted in *property damage*. We also identified every story in our sample published on Sunday in *The Washington Post*, since the larger Sunday paper may contain longer stories that appear further from page one than they can the rest of the week.

Finally, we controlled for the number of international terrorist attacks committed in each year of our study, using the ITERATE dataset.<sup>58</sup> International terrorist activity is cyclical,<sup>59</sup> raising the possibility that fluctuations in terrorism coverage are related to varying levels of violence rather than business pressure. Descriptive statistics for all the independent and dependent variables appear in the downloadable appendix.

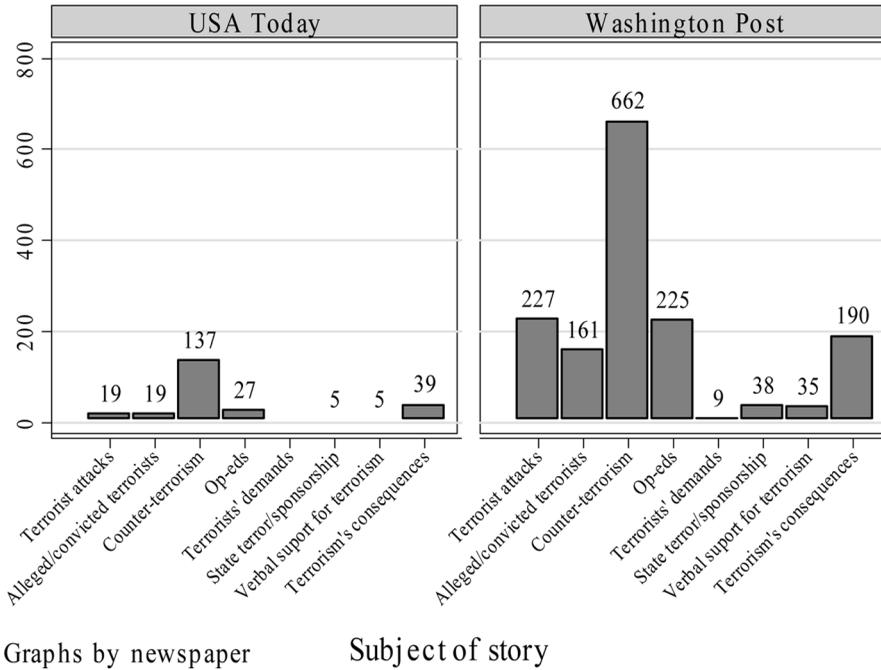
## Analysis

We begin with a discussion of some aspects of the terrorism coverage in the two newspapers we examined. Excluding opinion pieces, the average terrorism article appears on page fourteen (14.43) of the *Post* and is approximately 715 words long. The average terrorism article in *USA Today*, which is a shorter paper than *The Post*, appears on page six (6.3) and contains approximately 478 words. However, variation around these averages is large: articles within one standard deviation of the page number and word count means in *The Post* appear anywhere from page four to page twenty-five and contain between 223 and 1207 words. When Op-eds are factored in, the average terrorism article is 697 words long and appears on page fifteen or sixteen. By comparison, articles within one standard deviation of the *USA Today* mean appear anywhere from pages two to twelve and vary in length between 91 and 865 words.

Terrorism articles in both papers (see Figure 1) cover a wide range of subjects. In addition to detailing specific attacks, *The Post* and *USA Today* also report on the activities, attitudes, biographies, and whereabouts of suspected perpetrators as well as the consequences of terrorism—everything from a lack of parking at the Smithsonian Museum to psychological effects of terrorism. Opinion pieces about terrorism are common in both papers while articles about state sponsorship of terrorism and people who either sympathize with or denounce terrorist organizations appear infrequently.

The most reported terrorism related subject in both *The Post* and *USA Today* is counterterrorism, outnumbering articles about terrorist attacks by nearly 3:1 (662 vs. 227) in *The Post* and more than 7:1 (137 vs. 19) in *USA Today*. The typical counterterrorism article appears around page fourteen (13.5) of *The Post* and is approximately 728 words long whereas the typical article about terrorist violence appears on page eighteen (17.7) and is approximately 473 words long (standard deviations for both subjects are similar). In *USA Today* counterterrorism articles are slightly longer (by thirty-one words) than articles about attacks, but *USA Today* features attack stories (mean 4.1) a bit more than reports about prevention (mean 5.25).

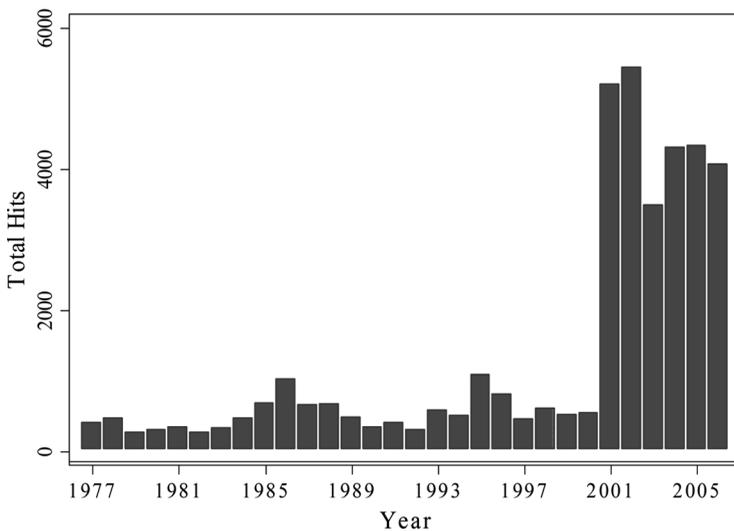
Front page coverage is also skewed in favor of counterterrorism in both papers. Of the 276 front page articles in our *Washington Post* sample, 138 (50%) focus on counterterrorism compared to thirty-three (12%) about terrorist attacks. Respectively, these totals represent twenty-one and fourteen percent of the counterterrorism and terrorist attack articles in the sample. In *USA Today*, twenty-five of our thirty-four front page stories (73.5%) focus on counterterrorism compared to only



**Figure 1.** Coverage of terrorism by subject in *USA Today* and *The Washington Post*.

four that focus on terrorist attacks. These totals represent eighteen percent of the articles about counterterrorism and twenty-one percent of the articles about terrorist attack articles in the sample.

Because of its dramatic effect on coverage, 9/11's impact on terrorism reporting is also worth noting. Prior to 9/11, *The Post* published approximately 525 terrorism related articles per year (see Figure 2), although the actual frequency of articles



**Figure 2.** Articles on terrorism in *The Washington Post*, 1977–2006.

ranged from a low of 272 in 1979 to a high of 1092 in 1995. After 9/11, however, the number of articles in *The Post* consistently numbered in the thousands. In 2003, the slowest year for terrorism reporting in the post-9/11 era, *The Post* ran nearly 3500 articles—more than three times the pre-9/11 high.

### *Instrumental Variable Analysis*

We performed six analyses (three per newspaper) with endogenous variables (two instrumental variable probits and four two-stage least squares regressions) to assess whether the business of news influences terrorism coverage. We used models with endogenous variables to capture the symbiotic relationship between media reports of terrorism and public assessments of the importance of terrorism as an issue. We report these results in Table 1, below.<sup>60</sup> Note: we did not report coefficients for the control variables in our analyses of the *Washington Post* or *USA Today* due to the large number of variables in each model.<sup>61</sup> We list marginal effects under the probit results to make interpretation easier and unstandardized coefficients for the regression analyses. Negative signs under the columns for *page number* mean that articles appear closer to page one. Shorter articles are associated with negative signs under the *word count* columns.

Consistent with previous scholarship, articles in *The Washington Post* reporting on events from the *Middle East* increased the likelihood of front page coverage, while reports from *Europe* were less prominent than those from other regions. Stories from the *Middle East* or *Europe* were more prominent in *USA Today*. In the *Washington Post*, stories about *spectacular attacks* tended to be longer than articles that dealt with less dramatic aspects of terrorism. Similarly, terrorism articles published in *The Post's Sunday* edition tended to be longer than those published on other days, but *Sunday* articles also appeared further back in the paper. *Palestinian* and *Islamic fundamentalist* perpetrators, *claims of responsibility*, *property damage*, and the annual number of international terrorist attacks had no effect on articles in *The Post*. Finally, casualties reduced the prominence and length of articles about terrorism in *The Post* and made front page coverage less likely in *USA Today*. This result is related to disparities in the coverage of terrorist attacks in the early years of our sample, when articles on strikes tended to be shorter and less prominent than they were at the end of our study period.

### *The Fatigue/Over-Emphasis Hypotheses*

The results of our hypothesis tests provide support for the notion that terrorist violence is an increasingly important subject in national newspapers. The main support for the alternative argument about fatigue is that articles in *The Washington Post* covering *modal attacks* ( $b = -141.16$ ,  $p < .05$ ) are significantly shorter than other terrorism articles. In *USA Today*, the most pedestrian forms of terrorism *never* appear in our sample of front page articles. Perpetrators, it seems, must go beyond boilerplate attacks to get top billing from the press.

Offsetting these effects, however, are several factors that appear to be increasing terrorism's prominence in the news. In *The Washington Post*, the longer the top editor held his position the more likely terrorism articles were to appear on the front page ( $b = .005$ ,  $p < .05$ ). At the end of Ben Bradlee's tenure, for example, terrorism articles were twelve percent more likely to appear on page one than they were when

**Table 1.** *Washington Post* and *USA Today* analyses

	Page one (probit)			Page number			Word count		
	<i>Wash. Post</i>	<i>USA Today</i>	<i>USA Today</i>	<i>Wash. Post</i>	<i>USA Today</i>	<i>USA Today</i>	<i>Wash. Post</i>	<i>USA Today</i>	<i>USA Today</i>
Fatigue/over-emphasis results									
Time lapse	-0.000 (0.000)	.001** (0.000)	0.002 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.006)	0.050 (0.071)	0.266*** (0.095)			
Time*topic1	0.00003** (0.00001)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	0.001 (0.003)	0.025** (0.012)	0.004 (0.052)			
Modal attacks	-0.029 (0.062)	- <sup>†</sup> (0.000)	-0.127 (1.394)	-8.096 (13.284)	-141.159** (62.731)	-38.799 (201.939)			
Editorial tenure	0.005** (0.002)	-0.023 (0.030)	-0.007 (0.044)	3.976* (2.280)	1.069 (1.979)	62.291* (34.656)			
Circulation	0.000 (0.000)	-0.000001** (0.0000008)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.001 (0.001)	-0.002** (0.001)			
Cable subscribers	-0.001 (0.011)		-0.077 (0.235)		-6.753 (10.571)				
Internet	0.002* (0.001)		-0.058** (0.021)		1.341 (0.956)				
Importance	0.001 (0.003)	0.056** (0.025)	0.130* (0.069)	-0.694 (2.139)	5.893* (3.103)	89.615*** (32.508)			
U.S. casualties	0.347*** (0.131)	0.940*** (0.019)	-7.302*** (2.332)	-8.232 (14.930)	335.451*** (104.913)	342.497 (226.959)			
U.S.	0.141*** (0.041)	0.093 (0.065)	-6.890*** (0.859)	-18.088*** (4.892)	91.968** (38.639)	8.303 (74.358)			
Demand results									

Government	0.099	-0.060	1.381	
	(0.080)	(1.414)	(63.602)	
9/11	-0.078	-0.305	-301.684***	
	(0.082)	(2.205)	(99.212)	
Terrorist attacks	-0.206***	1.717	-286.765**	-36.039
	(0.064)	(2.689)	(120.994)	(281.634)
Alleged terrorists	-0.016	-0.016	156.781***	
	(0.035)	(0.894)	(40.234)	
Op-eds	- <sup>†</sup>	5.565***	-78.670*	
		(1.043)	(46.918)	
Terrorist demands	-0.118	4.047	-99.743	
	(0.084)	(3.350)	(150.701)	
State terror	0.066	0.341	2.708	
	(0.076)	(1.654)	(74.419)	
Support for terror	-0.005	0.780	10.524	
	(0.067)	(1.709)	(76.885)	
Consequences	0.037	0.785	124.122***	
	(0.035)	(0.842)	(37.864)	
Counterterrorism				
			4.722	-47.853
			(3.618)	(54.998)
Constant		7.833	-82.471	2,307.409
Observations	1256	1465	1465	240
R-squared	.05 <sup>†</sup>	0.20	0.15	0.16

\* $p < .1$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .01$ . Std. errors in (). <sup>†</sup>Dropped; never appear on page one. <sup>‡</sup>Pseudo  $R^2$ .

Bradlee started. At *USA Today*, the probability of front page coverage did not change with the length of an editor's tenure, but the space allotted to terrorism articles increased by approximately 60 words ( $b = 62.29$ ,  $p < .1$ ). In *USA Today*, terrorism articles tended to migrate toward the back of the paper the longer editors held their positions ( $b = 3.976$ ,  $p < .1$ ). Yet, this is one of the least reliable results we found.

Market pressures from other media also influenced terrorism coverage, although the effects were inconsistent across newspapers. Declines in *annual circulation* ( $b = -.002$ ,  $p < .05$ ) levels made terrorism articles in *USA Today* longer and more likely to appear on page one ( $b = -.000001$ ,  $p < .05$ ). A standard deviation's worth of lower circulation inflated terrorism articles by approximately 727 words and increased the probability of front page coverage by .36%. Changes in *The Post's* circulation did not influence terrorism coverage, but growth in *internet* subscriptions did: for every million internet subscribers, the probability of front page terrorism coverage increased by .2% ( $b = .002$ ,  $p < .1$ ). Over the study period, this rate of change translated into a 41% increase in the probability of front page coverage for terrorism related articles. Internet use is also associated with more prominent coverage in *The Post* ( $b = -0.58$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Growth in the number of households with cable television did not influence the publication of terrorism articles in either of our papers. We confirmed this result by checking national surveys about the sources people get their news from, looking for evidence that cable news stations reduced the public's use of newspapers. In response to the question, "How have you been getting most of your news about national and international issues—from television, from newspapers, or from magazines?" anywhere from forty to fifty percent of respondents have listed newspapers as one of their two main sources of news since the early 1980s.<sup>62</sup> The growth of cable news during the 1980s and 1990s has not changed these proportions dramatically, suggesting that the economic effects of cable news have been felt more by network news programs than newspapers.

Returning to the results, we also found that terrorism is increasingly prominent and lengthy over time in both *The Washington Post* and *USA Today*. In *USA Today*, the probability of any terrorism article appearing on the front page increased with each passing year (*time lapse*:  $b = .001$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In 1990, only four of the fifty articles we drew from *USA Today* appeared on page one. In 2003, eleven articles in our sample appeared on page one and in 2006 eight of the fifty sampled articles made the front page. Articles published in 2006 were also more than 1600 words longer than articles published in 1990 (*time lapse*:  $b = .266$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

In *The Post*, articles about terrorist attacks benefitted from the trend toward more prominent terrorism coverage (*Time lapse\*topic 1*); other terrorism articles experienced no change in their relative prominence over time. Each day, attack coverage was .00003 ( $p < .05$ ) percent more likely to appear on the front page and .025 ( $p < .05$ ) words longer than other terrorism related articles. Over the entire study period, this incremental change resulted in about a forty-one (40.5%) percent increase in the probability of front page coverage and a 311 (311.4) word expansion in the length of articles.

We recognized that our finding of increased enthusiasm for terrorist violence in the press could be the product of subtle selection biases, so we performed additional checks designed to detect likely selection effects. We did not find big problems. The increased standing of attack coverage does not appear to be caused by changes in the

kinds of stories editors choose to publish. We found no evidence, for example, that low level attacks are more likely to be ignored over time. In both *The Washington Post* ( $b = -.00006, p < .01$ ) and *USA Today* ( $b = -.0003, p < .05$ ) we found a negative relationship between the passage of time (*Time lapse*) and the probability that casualty reports appeared in the respective papers. These findings suggest that the threshold for reporting about casualties *declined* over the study period, contradicting the notion that fatigue influences the article selection process at either *The Post* or *USA Today*.

We also checked for evidence that terrorist organizations counter media fatigue by switching their tactics in order to maintain their ability to capture headlines. We did this by condensing the twenty-five separate tactics we collected data on into five categories: 1) kidnapping and seizure events; 2) bombings; 3) armed attacks; 4) suicide attacks; and 5) miscellaneous attacks.<sup>63</sup> Category two and three attacks are by far the most common forms of terrorism. If terrorist organizations change tactics to keep editors interested in their violent activities, we should observe either that other tactical choices start to dominate coverage or that there are tactical cycles in the stories newspapers print. However, our analysis suggests the tactical repertoire of reported attacks is limited. In *The Washington Post*, the vast majority of reported attacks are bombings and armed attacks. We identified only one year when other tactics outnumbered bombings and armed attacks; there are only six years in which other tactics are as numerous as either bombings or armed attacks. In *USA Today*, bombings and armed attacks are outnumbered by other tactical choices in two of the five years we studied. Nevertheless, stories about bombings and armed attacks make up nearly 60% of the articles *USA Today* publishes.

Thus, our analyses suggest that, in general, terrorism coverage is increasing in prominence and length and that these effects are associated with a variety of competitive pressures. Our two newspapers tend to discount attacks that use mundane tactics, but it does not appear that terrorist organizations are so attuned to this that they make wholesale changes to their tactical repertoires. These patterns are consistent with the idea that terrorism is over-emphasized in the press, but as we show below our other findings are inconsistent with the notion that terrorist attacks dominate terrorism coverage.

### **Subject Matter Results**

We examined differences in *The Washington Post's* reporting on subjects related to terrorism using counterterrorism as the baseline; the baseline in our research on *USA Today* was other terrorism-related articles (i.e., subjects other than attacks or prevention).<sup>64</sup> Despite these differences, the patterns we observed are broadly consistent with one another. Starting with *The Post*, we see that articles about terrorist attacks are almost twenty-one percent ( $b = -.206, p < .01$ ) less likely to appear on page one and about 287 words shorter ( $b = -286.75, p < .05$ ) than articles about counterterrorism.<sup>65</sup> Interestingly, articles about attacks are the only ones in our *Washington Post* sample other than opinion pieces that are statistically distinct from counterterrorism articles in prominence and length. The pattern in *USA Today* is similar: articles about terrorist attacks are about nine percent less likely to appear on the front page than other terrorism articles ( $b = -.094, p < .01$ ) while counterterrorism stories are about nine percent more likely to get front page coverage ( $b = .091, p < .01$ ).

The disparate treatment of terrorism and counterterrorism reflect differences in the treatment of these subjects in the earlier years of our respective samples. Between 1977 and 1995, articles about terrorist attacks in *The Post* were half as likely to appear on page one as articles about counterterrorism. After 1995, articles about terrorist attacks were only about three-fourths as likely to be on the front page as counterterrorism articles. The situation with respect to word counts in *The Post* is similar. Before 1997, articles about counterterrorism were 235 words longer than articles about terrorist attacks (646 vs. 409). After 1997, the average gap between articles about terrorist violence and counterterrorism narrowed to sixty words (789 vs. 849). We found a consistent pattern in *USA Today*. Articles published in 1990 and 1993 had approximately a six percent chance of appearing on the front page, while articles in 1999 and later had more than a seventeen percent chance being front page news. Articles in *USA Today* got almost 290 words longer over this period.

### ***The Demand Hypothesis***

The last hypothesis we examined suggests that (1) the volume of terrorism coverage in the mass media influences public assessments of the importance of terrorism as an issue and (2) this interest in terrorism influences the length and prominence of terrorism articles. The results support both claims. The volume of coverage in both *The Washington Post* and *USA Today* is statistically related to public estimates of the importance of terrorism—first stage estimates (not shown) for *The Post* and *USA Today* are both significant at the 99% confidence level and range in size from .52 (*USA Today*) to .63 (*Washington Post*). The *importance* of terrorism, in turn, influences the prominence and length of coverage in both papers. In the *Washington Post*, increased public concern about terrorism resulted in more prominently placed ( $b = .13, p < .1$ ) and somewhat lengthier articles ( $b = 5.89, p < .1$ ), although our statistical confidence in these results is not especially high. The results are stronger for *USA Today* where public concern about terrorism translated into longer articles ( $b = 89.62, p < .01$ ) and a higher probability of front page coverage ( $b = 0.56, p < .05$ ).

The results also support the conclusion that more intense coverage is bestowed on stories that either took place in the U.S. or involved U.S. casualties. Events reported from the U.S. were fourteen percent (14.1%) more likely to get reported on page one of *The Post* than events from other parts of the world. These articles also appeared about seven ( $b = -6.89, p < .01$ ) pages closer to page one and were about ninety-two ( $b = 91.97, p < .05$ ) words longer than other terrorism articles. Editors at *USA Today* were somewhat less impressed with U.S. datelines, but they too gave these articles more prominence than articles reported from abroad ( $b = -18.09, p < .01$ ). Articles mentioning U.S. casualties were almost thirty-five percent ( $b = .347, p < .01$ ) more likely to appear on the front page of *The Post* and ninety-four percent ( $b = .94, p < .01$ ) more likely to appear on the cover of *USA Today* than other terrorism articles. Reports involving U.S. casualties were also published about seven ( $b = -7.30, p < .01$ ) pages closer to page one and averaged about 335 more words than other terrorism articles in *The Post*. In *USA Today*, the effects of U.S. casualties were limited to the front page.

The big surprise is that the prominence and length of terrorism coverage did not change after 9/11: stories about terrorism were neither more likely to appear on page

one nor longer than they were before this attack. Although we know that the frequency of articles on terrorism increased dramatically after 9/11, *The Washington Post* and *USA Today* did not alter the basic characteristics of terrorism news in their main news sections. Thus, while in terms of sheer frequency of presentation it is clear that terrorism became THE story in the press, the basic routines that shape the production of news remained in place.

## Discussion

Stepping back from the individual coefficients and models, our analyses suggest several conclusions about terrorism coverage in the print press. First, terrorism coverage encompasses a wide range of topics—many more than are discussed in the academic literature on terrorism reporting. Articles on specific acts of terrorism, while important, do not outnumber other stories. Instead, the prominence and length of articles about terrorist attacks often lag behind other terrorism related subjects. Counterterrorism articles, in particular, are not only published more often than articles about attacks, they also get more space and better placement in *The Washington Post* and *USA Today*. This result is consistent with the bulk of research that shows that governments have a privileged relationship with the press.<sup>66</sup>

Second, the treatment of terrorism in the print press is influenced by the business of news, but not in ways that are clearly troublesome over the long term. Editorial fatigue appears to have relatively minor effects. On the supply-side, increasing fragmentation of news audiences appears to increase the attention to terrorism. We also found that general terrorism coverage and attack coverage in particular are increasingly prominent and lengthy over the study period. Increasing attention to terrorism, however, has not resulted in decreased attention to government prevention efforts. Bottom-line pressure is not so great that terrorists overshadow governments.

On the demand-side, factors that drive the prominence of reports include the infliction of American casualties and the location of events. In contrast, the number of international terrorist attacks per year, non-U.S. casualties, and strikes against government facilities did not influence the prominence of published reports. The public's sense of what issues are important, which is driven in part by the media's own reporting, also bears on coverage, pushing stories closer to the front page and encouraging more detailed articles as general interest in terrorism increases.

Thus, our research tends to confirm the basic claim that business of news plays a role in determining the coverage of terrorism. In this sense, our research is squarely in the tradition laid out by Hamilton's analysis of the ways the marketplace turns information into the commodity of news.<sup>67</sup> Early studies of the media's coverage of terrorism implicitly assumed that the characteristics of events drove reporting: the more important the event, the deadlier the attack, the more important the story. Our results paint a somewhat different picture. Non-event related pressures, such as the competitiveness of the marketplace, help determine the amount of space and prominence newspapers give to stories. Like Norris, however, we do not see evidence that these economic effects are associated either with declines in the quality of information that consumers receive or increased sensationalism in the national print press.<sup>68</sup>

Yet, as helpful as an economic lens is for understanding the coverage of terrorism there is much about terrorism reporting we do not know. Judged crudely by  $R^2$  statistics, the models we used explained relatively little of the variance in

terrorism's coverage. This is partially a result of our decision to include the entire range of terrorism stories appearing in the news, not just a selection about terrorist violence. We think this decision produces a more accurate view of what newspapers cover on a daily basis. Moreover, it also helps underscore the need for additional research on the factors that influence editorial decisions about the terrorism beat. The cost of this choice is that we cannot say whether the content of stories changed over time in response to shifting economic pressures. Sensationalism is about more than the length and prominence of articles. It is also about the words and pictures used to describe events. Our sense is that articles in *The Post* and *USA Today* remained reasonably uniform in terms of the tone they struck, but the jury remains out on this question.<sup>69</sup>

## Conclusion

We conclude with a discussion of the implications of this research for thinking about the print media's role in covering terrorist incidents. As many note, the coverage of terrorist attacks plays into the hands of perpetrating organizations by providing publicity, which attackers use for self-serving purposes. News organizations supply terrorists access to their audiences in exchange for the right to publish information about events that will entice consumers to purchase their products. For this reason, the relationship between terrorist organizations and the press is often described as one of mutual interest, since both terrorists and news organizations benefit when information about terrorist attacks is turned into the commodity of news.

While few suggest that the press should be prevented from covering terrorism, there is discussion of the best ways to curtail the incentives that may lead the press to sensationalize relatively minor events. Rohner and Frey's proposal to provide indirect price supports (e.g., reduced postal rates for delivery) to quality newspapers is the most interesting along this line.<sup>70</sup> By (indirectly) subsidizing quality news outlets, Rohner and Frey argue that societies can blunt the pressure media outlets feel to tailor their coverage to those least interested in hard news. This should reduce the opportunities terrorist organizations have to publicize their activities.

However, our results suggest that national newspapers may feel less pressure to report on violent acts of terrorism than is generally supposed. Terrorist attacks are overshadowed by counterterrorism in *The Post* and *USA Today*. While disparities between attack coverage and counterterrorism are narrowing, the former has not overtaken the latter. Until that happens, we think tinkering with the market for news to influence terrorism coverage is unnecessary.

One reason *The Washington Post* and *USA Today* may be able to resist the pressure to sensationalize terrorist attacks is that they have relatively educated reading audiences. For example, *USA Today's* 2004 reader survey showed that more than 50% of its readers had at least some college education. As Rohner and Frey argue, educated readers are able to apply critical thinking abilities and political knowledge in ways that make them less likely to be drawn in by sensationalized news.<sup>71</sup> If true, we are inclined to agree with Rohner and Frey that increasing education spending may provide an indirect way to deny perpetrators the publicity they crave. However, we cannot confirm that the sophistication of newspaper audiences is responsible for balancing the coverage of terrorist violence with other terrorism subjects.

Finally, our research suggests that concerns about terrorism reporting pay insufficient attention to just how much is published about counterterrorism.

While it is often claimed that government efforts to prevent terrorism are overlooked by the press, our research shows that governments get more than their share of coverage. This result is not surprising if we set aside the notion that news organizations and terrorist groups are in a special symbiotic relationship. It is true that the news media and terrorist organizations share some interests in common, but the media shares the same interests with every organization that wants to publicize its activities—government is no exception. The questions going forward are: what explains the counterterrorism coverage governments get? Does this coverage temper the negative effects of terrorism? If so, why and how does this happen?

## Notes

1. Replication data files and appendices associated with this paper are available on Aaron M. Hoffman's website: <http://sites.google.com/site/amhst20/>
2. Norman Podhoretz, "Terrorism and the Media: A Discussion," *Harper's Magazine* 269, no. 1613 (1984): 43–60.
3. Brigitte L. Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism: The Central Role of The Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).
4. Scott Sigmund Gartner, "Making the International Local: The USS Cole, Local Casualties, and Media Coverage," *Political Communication* 21, no. 2 (2004): 139–159.
5. Dominic Rohner and Bruno S. Frey, "Blood and Ink! The Common-Interest Game Between Terrorists and the Media," *Public Choice* 133, nos. 1–2 (October 2007): 129–145. Also, see Gabriel Weimann and Conrad Winn, *Theater of Terror: Mass Media and International Terrorism* (New York: Longman Publishing Group, 1993).
6. Benjamin Page with Marshall M. Bouton, *The Foreign Policy Disconnect: What Americans Want from Our Leaders but Don't Get* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
7. Shanto Iyengar and Donald R. Kinder, *News that Matters: Television and American Opinion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
8. Patricia Moy and Michael Pfau, *With Malice Toward All? The Media and Public Confidence in Democratic Institutions* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000); Kimberly Gross, Sean Aday, and Paul R. Brewer, "A Panel Study of Media Effects on Political and Social Trust After September 11, 2001," *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 9, no. 4 (2004): 49–73.
9. John Mueller, *Overblown: How Politicians and the Terrorism Industry Inflate National Security Threats, and Why We Believe Them* (New York: Free Press, 2006).
10. Brigitte L. Nacos, Yaeli Bloch-Elkom, and Robert Y. Shapiro, "Prevention of Terrorism in Post-9/11 America: News Coverage, Public Perceptions, and the Politics of Homeland Security," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 1 (January 2008): 1–25.
11. Rohner and Frey (see note 5 above).
12. Title 22, United States Code, Section 2656f(d).
13. Ariel Merari, "Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 5, no. 4 (1993): 213–251; Brigitte L. Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism The Central Role of The Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield., 2002); Louise Richardson, *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Enemy, Containing the Threat* (New York: Random House, 2007).
14. Mueller (see note 9 above).
15. Richardson (see note 13 above). Some argue that the commission of unclaimed attacks suggests that terrorists do not always crave publicity. We disagree with this conclusion. The strategy of terrorism works by signaling others (see Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," *International Security* 31, no. 1 (Summer 2006): 49–80; Alex P. Schmid and Janny de Graaf, *Violence as Communication: Insurgent Terrorism and the Western News Media* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1982)). In addition, anonymous attacks do not necessarily indicate lack of interest in publicity (see Aaron M. Hoffman, "Voice and Silence: Why Groups Claim Responsibility for Acts of Terror," *Journal of Peace Research*, Forthcoming.).

16. See Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time* (New York: Parthenon Books, 1976); Doris A. Graber, *Mass Media and American Politics*, 7th ed. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2006).

17. Michael J. Kelly and Thomas H. Mitchell, "Transnational Terrorism and the Western Elite Press," *Political Communication and Persuasion* 1, no. 3 (1981): 69–298; Steven M. Chermak and Jeffery Gruenewald, "The Media's Coverage of Domestic Terrorism," *Justice Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (2006): 428–461.

18. Ibid. Also see Gabriel Weimann and Hans-Bernd Brosius, "The Newsworthiness of International Terrorism," *Communication Research* 18, no. 3 (1991), 333–354; Weimann and Winn (see note 5 above); and Gartner (see note 4 above).

19. Graber (see note 16 above): 101.

20. Chermak and Gruenewald (see note 17 above).

21. Weimann and Winn (see note 5 above).

22. Alison Carper, "Marketing News" in Pippa Norris, ed., *Politics and the Press: The News Media and their Influences* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1997): 45–66.

23. Gene Roberts and Thomas Kunkel, eds., *Breach of Faith: A Crisis of Coverage in the Age of Corporate Newspapering* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2002).

24. James T. Hamilton, *All the News That's Fit to Sell* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

25. The Pew Center for the People and the Press, "Bottom Line Pressures Now Hurting Coverage, Say Journalists." (2004): <http://people-press.org/report/214/>. Accessed 5 July 2009.

26. We do not consider the consequences of "media concentration" on the coverage of terrorism because this phenomenon has not been linked to changes in the newsworthiness of terrorism.

27. Phillip A. Schrodt, Deborah J. Gerner, and Ömür Yilmaz, "Methods Meets Policy: Transnational Monitoring of the Israel-Palestine Conflict," *International Studies Perspectives* 6, no. 2 (May 2005): 238. See also, Charles Krauthammer, "Terrorism and the Media: A Discussion," *Harper's Magazine* 269, no. 1613 (1984): 43–60; Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); and Weimann and Brosius (see note 18 above).

28. Data from the Global Terrorism Database on the characteristics of terrorist attacks are available on-line at <http://start.umd.edu/gtd>. Accessed April 28, 2010.

29. W. James Potter, *On Media Violence* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1999).

30. Nacos, "Mass Mediated Terrorism" (see note 3 above); Brigitte L. Nacos, "Terrorism as Breaking News: Attack on America," *Political Science Quarterly* 118, no. 1 (2003): 23–52; Mueller (see note 9 above).

31. Nacos, "Mass Mediated Terrorism" (see note 3 above): 136.

32. Brigitte L. Nacos, Ya'eli Bloch-Elkon, and Robert Y. Shapiro, "Prevention of Terrorism in Post-9/11 America: News Coverage, Public Perceptions, and the Politics of Homeland Security," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 1 (January 2008): 1–25.

33. Ibid., 20.

34. Gartner (see note 4 above); John L. Scott, "Media Congestion Limits Media Terrorism," *Defense and Peace Economics* 12, no. 3 (2001): 215–227.

35. Scott (see note 34 above): 216.

36. Hamilton (see note 24 above).

37. Gans (see note 16 above).

38. Scott (see note 34 above): 216.

39. Gartner (see note 4 above).

40. E.g., Chermak and Gruenewald (see note 17 above).

41. E.g., Iyengar and Kinder (see note 7 above); Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (Summer 1972): 176–187.

42. The starting date for the research was determined by *The Post's* availability through *Lexis Nexis*; the end date was determined by the availability of data on international terrorism.

43. We searched using the words "terrorism" or "terrorist!" For readers interested in examining our data generation procedure more closely, including our coding decisions, a copy of the instructions we used to search the *Washington Post* and translate information from it into the variables for our study are available in the supplemental online materials.

44. Doris A. Graber, *Processing the News: How People Tame the Information Tide* (New York: Longman, 1984): 82.

45. Shanto Iyengar and Jennifer A. McGrady, *Media Politics. A Citizens Guide* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007): 6.

46. Gene Roberts and Thomas Kunkel, eds., *Breach of Faith: A Crisis of Coverage in the Age of Corporate Newspapering* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2002): 14.

47. Leo W. Jeffres, Kimberly Atkin, and Karen A. Neundorf, "A Model Linking Community Activity and Communication with Political Attitudes and Involvement in Neighborhoods," *Political Communication* 19 (2002): 387–421.

48. Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2006).

49. Twenty-four percent of respondents to the 2006 General Social Survey, for example, report getting most of their news from newspapers compared to fourteen percent who say the internet is their main source of news.

50. E.g., Kelley and Mitchell (see note 17 above); Weimann and Brosius (see note 18 above).

51. Out of the 1465 articles we examined, only one (a biographical story about an official in charge of counterterrorism in the U.S.) did not fit into any of the categories we specified.

52. Christopher C. Harmon, *Terrorism Today* (Portland: Frank Cass, 2000); B. Hoffman (see note 27 above).

53. Sunday circulation figures, which are generally higher than the Monday through Friday/Saturday numbers, were not used since they do not reflect the size of the *Post's* readership most of the week. *USA Today* does not publish on the weekend.

54. Alan B. Albarran, *Media Economics: Understanding Markets, Industries, and Concepts* 2nd ed. (Ames: Iowa State Press).

55. Frank W. Rucker, *Newspaper Circulation...What...Where and How* (Ames: The Iowa State College Press, 1957): 1.

56. <http://www.ncta.com/Stats/BasicCableSubscribers.aspx>. Accessed 23 January 2010.

57. Although it is unclear that internet news competes with newspapers (Ahlers, 2006; Althaus and Tewkesbury, 2000), including the emergence of the internet as a competitor is justified because editors behave as if the internet threatens their business.

58. The original description of ITERATE appears in Edward Mickolus, *Transnational Terrorism: A Chronology of Events, 1968–1977* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980).

59. Walter Enders and Todd Sandler, *The Political Economy of Terrorism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

60. The small sample of articles from *USA Today* meant we could not replicate the analysis we did with the *Washington Post*. This is both because we have fewer degrees of freedom to work with and because we lack observations for some of our variables (e.g., we have no *USA Today* articles detailing attacks against government facilities and/or employees). Instead, we focused on relationships that might differ because *The Post* and *USA Today* attract different audiences.

61. Unabridged results are available in the downloadable appendix.

62. We searched past polls using the iPoll archive housed at the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut.

63. A list of the tactics we tracked is available in the downloadable appendix.

64. The choice of different baselines is once again the consequence of smaller sample size for our *USA Today* analysis. We did not have examples of all the subjects found in *The Washington Post* and could not make the same comparisons as a result.

65. One reviewer suggested that this result is unsurprising since counterterrorism stories are less time-sensitive than articles about attacks and can be published by newspapers on "slow" days. Our coding effort did not examine whether articles referred to fresh events or not, however it is our impression that most of the counterterrorism articles we coded reported about events that took place the day before (e.g., developments in court cases, Congressional hearings, legislative hearings, etc.). Thus, we are not convinced that the observed disparity in front page coverage is because counterterrorism articles are more likely to fill news holes than other terrorism articles.

66. Michael Schudson, "The News Media as Political Institutions," *Annual Review of Political Science* 5 (2002): 249–269.

67. Hamilton (see note 24 above).

68. Pippa Norris, *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Postindustrial Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

69. See Joshua Woods, "What We Talk About When We Talk About Terrorism: Elite Press Coverage of Terrorism Risk from 1997 to 2005," *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 12, no. 3, (2007): 3–20 for evidence that the tone of articles about terrorism has not changed appreciably over time.

70. Rohner and Frey (see note 5 above).

71. *Ibid.*