

Media framing of terrorism in Afghanistan: A thematic analysis

Humaira Siddiqi

A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Communication Studies (MCS)

2022

School of Communication Studies

Preface

I was born during a civil war that was raging in Afghanistan. A couple of years later the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in 1996 and my family and I fled the country. We began our lives over again in Pakistan despite the difficulties of being a refugee in a country complicit in the destruction of Afghanistan. We still harboured hope of returning to our homeland after the war ended.

Finally, when the United States overthrew the Taliban in 2001, we, like thousands of Afghans, returned to Afghanistan to rebuild our country without realising that terrorism had not been vanquished. As I grew older, I witnessed a dramatic increase in terrorist activities that claimed the lives of many Afghans, including those of my family, friends and colleagues. These brutalities inspired me to pursue journalism and discover the truth, be a voice for the people, tell their stories, and make a difference in the community.

As a journalist, I reported on the unpredictable and senseless violence against Afghans. Yet I lived with constant fear as journalists were targeted for exposing the truth about terrorism and its perpetrators. As the Taliban grew stronger and Afghanistan fell to the terrorists, I was forced to leave my homeland for the final time. This time, I left as an adult refugee and after a harrowing wait, I was thrilled to be granted permanent residence in New Zealand.

The following research study is the result of the burning questions I have had as a former journalist and a refugee. This research expanded my understanding of terrorism in Afghanistan and helped me to become more reflective. I hope it sheds light on how Afghan media frame terrorism and offers the baseline for further research.

Abstract

There is a growing interest in studying how media frame terrorism as it plays an important role in shaping the public understanding of terrorism. While numerous studies have analysed the framing of terrorist attacks across various nations, there is a lack of research examining how, in particular, Afghan mainstream media cover terrorism. This study fills this gap by examining how terrorism is framed by two prominent Afghan newspapers, Hasht-e-Subh and EtilaatRoz.

The study is based on a reflexive thematic analysis of terrorism news published between January to March 2021. The investigation found that the terrorist attacks received extensive media attention, covering 82 attacks over three months. The newspapers consistently used episodic and responsibility frames in coverage of terrorist attacks. Both newspapers drew attention to terrorism as anti-state violence and the Taliban as the perpetrators. The findings also found that the newspapers relied upon authoritative sources, such as the government and security officials, for information about the type of attack, location, number of casualties, victims' identities and the perpetrators.

The reflexive thematic analysis showed how an overarching theme and four other themes in two Afghan newspapers were used to frame terrorism, based on the NATO definition.

Fear emerged as an overarching theme since the newspapers consistently portrayed terrorism as a constant threat to civilians, government officials and the military and identified the Taliban as the group responsible for terrorist attacks. This created fear among Afghan people from an enemy who used various tactics, from target killing of civilians and government officials, to mass casualty bombings and skirmishing against army units.

The four themes identified from the analysis were:

1. **Magnitude** described terrorism through types of attacks: target assassinations, armed attacks, hostage-taking, firing mortar shells and explosions.
2. **Ordinariness** portrayed the victims as ordinary people (civilians, government officials and the military) who were indiscriminately killed in ordinary places.
3. **The presence of a known but invisible enemy** identified the Taliban as the group responsible for terrorist attacks and described them as criminals, militants and a group that commits war crimes and terrorist activities.

4. **Religion** presented the terrorist attacks as against Islamic values. But, while the themes above were identified to be part of every terrorism news, religion was found to receive little attention in reporting terrorist attacks by the newspapers.

This study used the NATO definition to identify and analyse terrorist attacks. However, the analysis of frames used by the Afghan media revealed an aspect of terrorism not included in NATO's definition. Therefore, based on the findings, it is suggested that the definition of terrorism by NATO may need to be reconsidered to include civilians, armed government forces and government officials as targets of indiscriminate violence by non-state actors.

The findings of this study are significant as they illustrate how Afghan media report terrorism and how policymakers can use this to make informed decisions. While the study is limited to two newspapers, it is useful as a baseline for future studies. It is believed that the findings will contribute to the broader topic by suggesting new directions for terrorism in Afghanistan. The findings of this study also expand the study of framing theory where it analyses its value in interpreting how terrorism is portrayed in the media.

Table of Contents

Preface	i
Abstract	ii
List of Figures	vi
List of Tables	vi
Attestation of Authorship	vii
Acknowledgements	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Thesis background and significance	1
1.2 Research approach	2
1.3 Thesis structure	3
Chapter 2: Literature Review	5
2.1 An overview of history of Afghanistan	5
2.2 Who are the Taliban?	6
2.3 The media in Afghanistan	7
2.4 News production theories	8
2.4.1 News values theory	9
2.4.2 Agenda-setting theory	10
2.4.3 Framing theory	11
2.5 Terrorism definition	15
2.6 Media coverage of terrorism	17
Chapter 3: Research Design	20
3.1 Interpretivist epistemology	20
3.2 Qualitative methodology	21
3.3 Data source	22
3.3.1 Profile: Hasht-e-Subh newspaper	22
3.3.2 Profile: EtilaatRoz newspaper	23
3.4 Data collection	23
3.5 Data analysis method	26
3.5.1 Phase 1: Familiarisation with data	27
3.5.2 Phase 2: Generating initial codes	27
3.5.3 Phase 3: Constructing themes	29
3.5.4 Phase 4: Reviewing themes	29
3.5.5 Phase 5: Defining and naming themes	29
3.5.6 Phase 6: Producing the report	30
3.6 Summary	30
Chapter 4: Results and Findings	31
4.1 Report on themes	35
4.1.1 Theme 1: Magnitude	35
4.1.2 Theme 2: Ordinarity	39
4.1.3 Theme 3: The presence of a known but invisible enemy	42
4.1.4 Theme 4: Religion	45
4.2 Summary of key findings	45

Chapter 5: Discussion.....	47
5.1 RQ1: What are the dominant topics in framing terrorism by the Afghan newspapers?.....	47
5.2 Research question 1b: How are the terrorism topics framed by the Afghan newspapers?.....	49
5.3 Research question 1c: What are the key themes used by Afghan newspapers in framing terrorism?	50
5.4 Conclusion.....	52
5.5 Recommendations for future research	53
5.6 Limitations of the study	54
References	56
Appendices.....	63
Appendix A1: Hasht-e-Subh front and editorial pages	63
Appendix A2: EtilaatRoz front and editorial pages.....	65
Appendix B1: References of analysed articles from dataset by headlines	67
Appendix B2: References of analysed articles from dataset by headlines	70
Appendix C1: Sample of coding in Spreadsheets (Hasht-e-Subh).....	73
Appendix C2: Sample of coding in Spreadsheets (EtilaatRoz)	75
Appendix D: Research output: AUT's 3MT Master's winner	77

List of Figures

Figure 1 Summary of research design	30
---	----

List of Tables

Table 1 Data collection	25
Table 2 Comparative coding table for data coded in two different points of time	29
Table 3 List of codes and their description	32
Table 4 List of codes and sub-codes related to dramatic killings	36
Table 5 List of codes and sub-codes related to authorities.....	39
Table 6 List of codes and sub-codes related to profile of the victims and profile of the location	41
Table 7 List of codes and sub-codes related to known but invisible theme.....	44

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed _____

Date 12.12. 2022

This thesis is lovingly dedicated to my dear mother, Fazela, for her endless love. I am forever grateful of you for teaching me to be resilient, courageous and conscientious.

Acknowledgements

Undertaking this Master's degree has been a life-changing experience for me. This endeavour would not have been possible without the support and guidance I received from many people.

I owe the deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Averill Gordon, for her patience and insightful guidance, as well as her kindness and friendship during the most challenging time of my life, when I watched my homeland fall to the Taliban, a terrorist group responsible for the destruction of Afghanistan. Her continuous support and motivation have made my research journey an inspiring one, culminating in my winning the 3MT thesis competition at AUT and representing the university in New Zealand's inter-universities finals with this research. I have been fortunate to have Averill as my supervisor, who deeply cared about my work and promptly responded to my questions and queries. Working with her on this research has been a delight, and our conversations will remain fond memories.

My gratitude extends to the Kate Edger Educational Charitable Trust, New Zealand's scholarship programme that empowers women through education, funded by social enterprise and Academic Dress Hire, for providing financial assistance that helped me undertake my studies.

Additionally, I would like to thank AUT's Graduate Research School staff for their helpful workshops. My appreciation also goes to Sue and Alan for diligently formatting and proofreading my thesis.

I should not forget to thank my former colleagues at Radio and Television of Afghanistan (RTA), especially my fellow reporter Moqadas, for finding the books related to my research and sending them over to New Zealand.

Last but not least, sincere love and appreciation are extended to my family and friends for all their unconditional support in this very intense academic year. A special thanks to my father, Azizullah, for believing in me, being my sounding board and putting up with my stress. I must express my appreciation to Khadija, my sister, for her continued support and encouragement. You have been amazing, and I am indebted to you for all your help. I will now take over the kitchen as I promised!

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Thesis background and significance

Afghanistan is one of the world's most war-torn countries and has experienced invasion, violence, and internal unrest since its creation in 1747. It has suffered from chronic conflict and instability throughout its history, generated by outside powers (Underhill, 2014). The current wave of terrorism arose in the 1980s, during the cold war battle, when the United States (US) and Pakistan supported the mujahideen, the local insurgent groups against the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan (Shilliam, 2020; Kiras, 2020). This led to a civil war where the US and Pakistan defeated the Soviet troops with the help of the mujahideen but left different mujahideen factions fighting for power (Wahab & Youngerman, 2010). These insurgent groups later joined the Taliban, now recognised as the deadliest terrorist group (Global Terrorism Index, 2022).

Terrorism in Afghanistan started after the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Since then, the frequency and number of terrorist attacks have increased with a growing number of victims (Underhill, 2014). An estimated 176,000 people in Afghanistan, including civilians and military, have been killed over the past two decades (Brown University, 2021), and 4.5 million people have been forced to flee the country (Vine et al., 2020). According to the Global Terrorism Index (2022), Afghanistan ranks as the country most impacted by terrorism, with a 33 per cent increase in terrorist attacks and a 14 per cent increase in deaths in 2021. These instabilities in Afghanistan are largely attributed to the involvement of outside influences in Afghanistan's affairs (Lee, 2018), especially the neighbouring state, Pakistan, which has played a significant role in the longevity of war and insurgency in Afghanistan by supporting terrorist groups (Thomas, 2021).

While terrorism is not a new phenomenon, it has garnered more attention after the attacks in the US on September 11th, 2001. Communication scholars have become increasingly interested in how news media reported terrorism. Their studies include the comparative studies of terrorism across different countries (Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2008; Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2005; Falkheimer & Olsson, 2015); the visual representation of terrorism through photos as part of news stories (Fahmy, 2010); the portrayal of terrorism in Muslim and non-Muslim countries (Nickerson, 2019); the coverage of domestic and international terrorism (Powell, 2011); how media represents the government and political executives' frames in times of war and conflict (Ryan, 2004; Reese & Lewis, 2009); the portrayal of Iraq war by elite and non-elite US

newspapers (Carpenter, 2007); the effects of terrorism news frames in creating and elevating fear among people (Woods, 2011) and how public opinion is influenced to elicit support for counter-terrorism policies (Brinson & Stohl, 2012).

However, despite the proliferation of studies on terrorism in the media, two decades of war and destruction in Afghanistan, and extensive media coverage, there is a dearth of academic studies on how the Afghan media report terrorism. This study therefore addresses the neglected area of research by exploring how Afghan media frame terrorism. As this is a new area of research, the data has been restricted to two key Afghan print newspapers to form a baseline for further research. The study focused on terrorism news from January to March 2021. This time frame was chosen due to a 33 per cent rise in terrorist attacks and a 14 per cent rise in fatalities in Afghanistan (Global Terrorism Index, 2022). The overarching research question is 'how is terrorism framed by two key Afghan newspapers?' This research question is broken into three sub-questions:

RQ1: What are the dominant topics in framing terrorism used by the Afghan newspapers?

RQ2: How are the terrorism topics framed by the Afghan newspapers?

RQ3: What are the key themes used by the Afghan newspapers in framing terrorism?

The three sub-questions aim to discover the key topics, frames and themes used by the Afghan media covering terrorism. This study argues that this research can offer valuable country-specific insights into terrorism in Afghanistan. It will expand the body of knowledge on terrorism in Afghanistan and provide a foundation for further studies.

This study is the first to undertake a reflexive thematic analysis of how Afghan media frame terrorism and how this relates to key media theories, specifically framing theory. The study aims to contribute to the growing area of research on media framing of terrorism with a focus on Afghan media, an area that has not been well-researched to date.

1.2 Research approach

This study adopted a qualitative methodology (Silverman, 2017), which is useful in providing detail, context and depth in understanding the research topic (Gray, 2018) as well as exploring new topics, understanding complex issues and addressing 'why' or 'how' questions (Hennek et al., 2020). This study also adopted a combination of

deductive-inductive analysis approach to build themes or patterns derived from gathered data while processing the data based on previous studies and theories.

This research was conducted by carrying out the reflexive thematic analysis as it is a useful method for analysing textual data and identifying and reporting themes (Braun et al., 2019) in framing terrorism. Additionally, reflexive thematic analysis works well with the study's research design as it provides theoretical flexibility to address different research questions and works well with the interpretive framework, qualitative data and deductive-inductive analysis (Braun et al., 2019).

The data for this research was collected from the websites of the two prominent dailies in Afghanistan, Hasht-e-Subh and EtilaatRoz. Terrorism news articles relevant to the study were identified based on the NATO definition of terrorism and the content was analysed deductively and inductively. NATO (2020) defines terrorism as "the unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence instilling fear and terror, against individuals or property in an attempt to coerce or intimidate governments or societies, or to gain control over a population, to achieve political, religious or ideological objectives" (p.11).

1.3 Thesis structure

The overall structure of the study takes the form of five chapters. This chapter presented an overall introduction to this thesis and its approach. It included a brief history of terrorism in Afghanistan and the lack of research on how terrorism is presented in the media within Afghanistan. The chapter stated the aim of the study and the research question based on the research gap.

The second chapter offers more depth on Afghanistan and explores how terrorism originated within its borders. It provides the theoretical framework of the study, drawing on studies showing how news techniques such as news values, agenda-setting and framing influence the reporting of terrorism in the media. It then identifies gaps in previous research and how this has motivated the development of the proposed overarching question.

The third chapter outlines the research methodology for this study. It begins by stating interpretivist epistemology as the research paradigm, the qualitative approach and the data source and collection method. It then details the reflexive thematic analysis utilised to analyse the data, with news articles as the unit of analysis employing deductive-inductive coding.

The fourth chapter presents the findings of the data analysis. It presents four key themes used by the two Afghan newspapers to represent terrorism.

The fifth and final chapter discusses the findings in relation to the current literature and concludes with recommendations for further research and limitations of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter starts with an overview of the history of Afghanistan and its fall into terrorism, followed by an examination of who the Taliban are. It then reviews the news techniques that can frame terrorism, analyses terrorism definitions, identifies the gap in terrorism research and states the research questions that guide this study.

2.1 An overview of history of Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a landlocked country in Southern Asia (The World Factbook, 2022). Historically, Afghanistan's location at the intersection of the Indian subcontinent (Schiller & Uradnik, 2011), along important trade routes linking Eastern and Southern Asia to the Middle East and Europe (Barfield, 2010), has given it a strategic importance that the great powers have strived to control for centuries (Schiller & Uradnik, 2011) since the time of Alexander the Great (Korkodinov, 2019). Afghanistan has subsequently endured invasions throughout its history and has been used by regional and international powers as leverage (Underhill, 2014) to achieve their economic and military strategic goals (Korkodinov, 2019).

In the mid-nineteenth century, Afghanistan was drastically impacted by the rivalry between the British and Russian empires for territory in Central Asia (known as the Great Game) (Runion, 2012; Schiller & Uradnik, 2011). This geostrategic dispute resulted in the establishment of Afghanistan's modern boundaries and territorial lines (Runion, 2012). Known as the Durand Line, this line was drawn to meet the British "geostrategic need of the time for creation of a buffer zone to fence off Russian encroachment towards British India and the warm waters of the south" (Mojtahed-Zadeh, 2017, p.66). Consequently, the modern Afghan nation-state became an unstable political entity riddled with factionalism and bore little resemblance to the tribal belt known as Afghanistan in the pre-colonial era. These consequences were far more significant for Afghanistan as they deprived the country of the regions it controlled (Lee, 2018) and limited Afghanistan to a landlocked country without access to a seaport (Runion, 2012). Crucially, the Pushtun tribal areas were shared between Afghanistan and British India (and subsequently Pakistan upon its creation in 1947), creating unresolved tensions between the rulers of Afghanistan and its southern neighbour (Lee, 2018).

In the late 20th century, Afghanistan became a key Cold War battleground between the Soviet Union and the US (Underhill, 2014), which both sought to get footholds in the country (Stewart, 2021). The Soviet Union politically intervened in 1979 under the

pretext of protecting the Afghan communist government against the rebels (Martin, 2011). Some argued that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was to control the Persian Gulf oil (Brown, 2013). In response, the US supported Afghan rebels and opposition groups known as mujahideen (Schiller & Uradnik, 2011). These Afghan rebels and religious zealots were significantly funded, armed, and trained by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (Runion, 2012) and backed by regional powers allied with the US and Nato, such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran and China, to defeat the communist forces (Lee, 2018; Runion, 2012). Finally, through the mujahideen, the US ended the Soviet occupation and control of Afghanistan as well as the Cold War threat to Persian Gulf oil control (Runion, 2012).

These foreign interventions sparked a civil war (Lee, 2018) and Afghanistan quickly turned into a haven for Islamic extremists worldwide. The civil war ensued from 1992 to 1994 (Schiller & Uradnik, 2011), which brought decades of violent destruction to Afghanistan and religious extremism imported from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia (Wahab & Youngerman, 2010). These unfolding political dynamics opened the door to interference by the Pakistan military, especially Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and facilitated the exploitation of Afghanistan's vulnerability by foreign Islamist groups (Barfield, 2010). In such a context, the Taliban emerged and with the help of a burgeoning force of foreign Muslim militants equipped and trained by the ISI, they overthrew the Afghan government and occupied Kabul in 1996 (Wahab & Youngerman, 2010). The Taliban remained in power until the US overthrew the Taliban regime for harboring al-Qaeda perpetrators responsible for the September 11, 2001 attacks (Global Terrorism Index, 2022).

2.2 Who are the Taliban?

The Taliban emerged as a reactionary group in 1994. The group included the mujahideen previously involved in fighting against the 1979 Soviet invasion (Global Terrorism Index, 2022), groups of Pashtun tribesmen who had been trained in Pakistani religious schools and foreign Muslim fighters (Schiller & Uradnik, 2011). The term 'Taliban' is the plural form of Talib that translates as a seeker of knowledge or religious student. Since 1994, the term Taliban has defined a socio-religious movement that has evolved into a government (Nojumi, 2002). The Taliban used violence and propaganda to gain control of the fighting warlords (mujahideen) who had divided Afghanistan into five separate sub-states. The Taliban controlled 90% of Afghanistan by the end of 1994 (Rashid, 2010; Linschoten & Kuehn, 2018). They expanded rapidly with support from Pakistan, Osama bin Laden and Saudi Arabia, who provided them with funds, weapons and supplies. They were seen as a strategic partner in promoting

a pro-Pakistani government in Afghanistan to counter Indian and Iranian influence (Underhill, 2014).

The Taliban's ideology is based on Wahabism, a form of Islam that adheres to a strict interpretation of Sharia (Islamic law) (Schiller & Uradnik, 2011). Wahabism first emerged in Saudi Arabia and was exported to Pakistan's religious schools in the 1980s, where the Taliban were taught and trained (Mahendrarajah, 2015). Since their loss of power in 2001, the Taliban have been determined to regain control of Afghanistan and rule the country as they did from 1995 to 2001. Their mission is to fight the enemies of Islam (foreigners/non-Muslims) (Hussaini & Morris, 2020), drive out the international forces and reestablish the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan with a Sharia-based society (Doronsoro, 2009). The Taliban's war is characterised as an ideological and political war (Nojumi, 2002). They legitimise their war based on Sharia and call themselves defenders and protectors of Islam (Johnson et al., 2018).

Over the last two decades, the Taliban have grown stronger (Shweta, 2022), using the porous border (a 1,500-mile-long Durand Line between Afghanistan and Pakistan) to carry out terrorist attacks against Afghan and International forces (Underhill, 2014). Many have accused Pakistan of harbouring Taliban and al-Qaeda militants and using them as proxies that enabled the Taliban to gain a stronger hold in Afghanistan (Runion, 2012; Underhill, 2014; Kumar, 2021; Shweta, 2022). Finally, the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan in 2021 after the withdrawal of the US and international forces (Global Terrorism Index, 2022). The Taliban regaining control of Afghanistan is attributed to factors, such as the US's flawed counter-terrorism strategies in Afghanistan (Underhill, 2014), failure to address the root causes of terrorism (Kiras, 2020; Lee, 2018), and ignoring safe havens of terrorism in Pakistan (Mojtahed-Zadeh, 2017; Underhill, 2014). Also instrumental was the US failure to establish a stable political government in Afghanistan (Kumar, 2021), a lack of political will to act against corruption in Afghanistan (Mahendrarajah, 2015), and the Doha Agreement between the US and the Taliban that resulted in the withdrawal of the US forces and ultimately led to the Taliban takeover of Kabul on 15 August 2021 (Aljazeera, 2022).

2.3 The media in Afghanistan

Afghanistan has a vibrant media sector with numerous television, print and radio outlets that present a range of viewpoints and are generally uncensored. Media providers include a state broadcaster and independent and commercial outlets tied to specific political interests (Freedom House, 2021). As of 2020, 175 newspapers (including 25 dailies), 194 radio stations and 96 television channels were operating

across the country. The first newspaper was established in 1873, the first radio transmitter was installed in 1920, and the first television broadcast happened in Kabul in 1978 (Khalvatgar, n.d.).

The broadcast media are mostly watched in urban areas, while radio dominates the rural, covering 20 provinces out of 34. Radio reaches 73 per cent of the population, whereas television reaches almost 40 per cent of the population. There are local, regional and national radio stations. The content on radio and television includes news, current affairs, music, religious programmes and sports. However, television channels also broadcast panel discussions and soap operas (Khalvatgar, n.d.).

Print media circulates mainly in urban areas. A hundred out of 175 newspapers are produced in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. The readership of print media in Afghanistan is limited due to the high illiteracy rate (Khalvatgar, n.d.). The country's overall literacy rate is 37 per cent (The World Bank, 2022). The papers mainly cover current affairs, including politics, literature and sports. There are local and national newspapers in Afghanistan published in Persian and Pashto, the two official languages of Afghanistan. A few papers are available in the English language for international audiences (Khalvatgar, n.d.).

According to the country's media law, individuals, the government, private and public entities can own media channels. Overall, the government owns three dailies in Kabul and another 35 papers across Afghanistan, and some papers are owned by religious leaders or entities that mainly focus on religion (Khalvatgar, n.d.).

2.4 News production theories

This thesis investigates how terrorism is framed by two key Afghan newspapers. This section, therefore, reviews the key elements of news reporting: news values, agenda-setting and framing.

Much research has been devoted to the news production process over the years. Studies have provided various theories describing how events are transformed into news stories. Many studies have argued that news values, among other factors, are one essential factor that can explain the selection or formulation of news (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Staab, 1990; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001, 2017; Brighton & Foy, 2007). Other studies have focused on the media's agenda-setting role in the news production process, explaining why certain issues are covered more prominently than others (Rogers & Dearing, 1988; Iyengar & Simon, 1993). Another line of research has

focused on framing that transforms events into meaningful news stories by selecting and highlighting some aspects of events (Entman, 1993).

2.4.1 News values theory

News values have been considered an important concept in reference to the identification, selection and presentation of news (Staab, 1990; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001, 2017; Bednarek & Caple, 2014). They are defined as qualities of events or criteria by which journalists "select events as news or choose the structure and order of reporting" (Bednarek & Caple, 2014, p.136). News values were first conceptualised in a seminal study by Norwegian scholars Galtung and Ruge (1965) that identified the common features of events rendering them newsworthy. The authors hypothesised the following twelve criteria as news factors: frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, reference to persons and reference to something negative. Although the study was limited to the coverage of international news in Norwegian newspapers, it illustrated the significance of news values in the selection of news. The authors also defined the news process by suggesting three hypotheses: selection, distortion and replication. The selection stage involves selecting news stories that satisfy the news factors. The distortion stage involves highlighting the newsworthy elements of the stories. Repeating the first two processes at each production phase from event to reader is what the replication stage involves (Galtung & Ruge, 1965).

While some of the news values proposed by Galtung and Ruge remained relevant, studies revealed a shift in the news coverage. For example, a content analysis of three United Kingdom (UK) newspapers reported an increased interest in celebrity and entertainment news, a tendency to report positive and negative news, and coverage of events that fit newspapers' agendas. The study also showed that some news stories were reports of pseudo-events and public relations spin. Consequently, the study proposed the following updated set of news values: the power elite, celebrity entertainment, surprise, bad news, good news, magnitude, relevance, follow up and newspaper agenda (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001).

Another study focused on the role of economic and market factors in producing news. It argued that news is a salable commodity produced by media organisations that function as commercial entities. The study proposed the following set of commercial news values, illustrating the type of news stories most likely to be pursued: (a) stories with an entertaining element (sensationalism); (b) stories that are not costly to cover; (c) stories prepared in a journalistic format, such as press releases and photo opportunities (Allern, 2002).

Some studies focused on how digital media, public relations and broadcast journalism have altered the media landscape and devised a set of news values, acknowledging that no taxonomy of news values can ever explain everything (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017; Brighton & Foy, 2007). These news values are relevance, topicality, composition, expectation, unusualness, worth, external influences (Brighton & Foy, 2007), exclusivity, bad news, conflict, surprise, audio-visuals, shareability, entertainment, drama, follow-up, the power elite, relevance, magnitude, celebrity, good news and news organisations' agendas (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017).

2.4.2 Agenda-setting theory

The term 'agenda-setting' was coined by media professors McCombs and Shaw in the context of election campaigns in 1972. However, the intellectual roots of agenda-setting theory have been credited to American journalist Walter Lippmann (1922), who, in his study of public opinion, argued that the "news media construct our view of the world" (Coleman et al., 2009, p.147). Agenda-setting is often seen as a political process in which the mass media plays a significant role in enabling social problems to be recognised as public issues (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). However, the agenda-setting process is not unique to political campaigns. Rather, it is an ongoing process in which various issues and social problems compete for the attention of journalists, the public and policymakers (Dearing & Rogers, 1996).

There are three types of agenda-setting: media, public and policy agenda-setting. The process through which the news media informs the public about the relative importance of various issues and events is known as 'media agenda-setting' (Rogers & Dearing, 1988). This process is influenced by various forces ranging from the prevailing societal ideology and journalism professional norms to news sources, routine public relations activities and the psychology of the individual journalist (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, 2014). This influence of the media on public opinion is what public agenda-setting is concerned with (Rogers & Dearing, 1988). Research has shown that there is a positive association between the amount of mass media coverage given to an issue and the development of a place for that issue on the public agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Policy agenda-setting (also called agenda-building) refers to a process through which political issues get on the agenda of a government. Numerous factors, including the media and public agendas, can influence policy agenda-setting. The media can substantially influence policymakers if it has first access to information. Alternatively, policymakers may set the media agenda if they control the information sources (Rogers & Dearing, 1988).

Decades of research have identified three levels of agenda-setting (McCombs, 2015). While the first level is concerned with the amount of media attention and prominence given to an issue, the second level focuses on how the media portrays an issue, emphasising the characteristics and attributes of those issues. It is here that attribute agenda-setting is considered to incorporate many aspects of framing (McCombs & Ghanem, 2001), which will be discussed later in this chapter. The second level of agenda-setting is also concerned with the tone of news coverage, which refers to how describing an issue in positive, neutral or negative terms helps the audience discern the various aspects of issues. The emerging third level of agenda-setting explores the media's ability to present "a more comprehensive picture of an issue and its attributes" (McCombs, 2015, p.353).

2.4.3 Framing theory

The concept of framing has two meanings: one refers to how news content is shaped and contextualised by journalists, and the second concerns the effect of framing on the public (McQuail & Deuze, 2020). As a feature of news content, framing is argued to be similar to attribute agenda-setting because both deal with how issues are discussed in the media (Weaver, 2007). However, despite the similarities between the two theoretical concepts, framing is considered a broader concept than a mere attribute or the specifics of an issue (Maher, 2001).

As a theoretical concept, framing has roots in multiple disciplines and has been defined at various levels of analysis (Scheufele, 1999). The origin of framing is often traced back to its roots in sociology and psychology. The sociological foundations of framing were laid by American sociologist Erving Goffman. In his landmark study of frame analysis, Goffman (1974/1986) defined frames as interpretive schemas or "primary frameworks" (p.24) that are the products of a culture, provide contexts to understand information and enable individuals to make sense of events. Goffman further made a distinction between natural frameworks (which considers events as an outcome of natural causes) and social frameworks (views events as socially driven occurrences) (1974/1986). The psychological origins of framing are summarised in the seminal work of Israeli psychologists Tversky and Kahneman (1981). They examined the impact of framing on people's choices and their evaluation of the same scenarios based on how differently these scenarios have been presented to them. In communication, political scholar Entman (1993) summarised the framing process as highlighting some aspects of an issue and elevating their salience by repetition and placement of a text in such a way as to construct an argument about the problems, their causes and solutions. Framing occurs at four levels in the communication process: in the mind of the

communicator, in the texts of communication, in the minds of receivers and in the culture (Entman, 1993).

Other scholars have attempted to explain types of framing and their manifestation in texts that can facilitate and encourage the reception of different meanings. A study by Hallahan (1999) reviewed framing studies across various disciplines and identified seven models of framing:

1. Framing a situation involves defining a situation through language and the structure of interactions among people.
2. Framing of attributes involves focusing on key features of a cause, product, or service while ignoring others.
3. Framing of choices refers to presenting some level of risk or uncertainty for individuals to choose between two options.
4. Framing of actions involves presenting the messages in a positive or negative light to achieve the desired goal or maximise cooperation.
5. Framing of issues involves describing social issues in different terms by different parties who compete to get their preferred definition of a problem accepted by society.
6. Framing of responsibility refers to the attribution of causes and responsibility of issues to either external or internal factors.
7. News framing is employed by news media to relay information in ways that have culturally resonating relevance and meaning for audiences. Other notions of framing described before can be incorporated into news framing (Hallahan, 1999).

Another study presented the following discursive framing tools employed in news content and communication texts: metaphors, stories, slogans, catchphrases, artefacts, contrast (describing a subject using opposite or alternatives) and spin (presenting issues in a positive or negative light). These framing tools function symbolically, representing ideas and insights differently or offering meanings more than words (Deetz et al., 2000).

A review of framing studies shows that framing has been studied in various settings and disciplines. In a comprehensive typology of framing, Scheufele (1999) classified the framing research into two dimensions: conceptual (individual frames vs media frames) and operational (independent variable vs dependent variable). The focus of this study is on the types of media frames. In a journalistic context, frames are considered properties of the news narratives that manifest through symbols, concepts, metaphors, keywords and visual images. By repeating and reinforcing these aspects,

frames offer one basic interpretation that is “more readily discernible, comprehensible, and memorable than others” (Entman, 1991, p.7). According to Gamson (1989), selecting news frames is essential in organising the central idea of news stories, suggesting the issue and allowing the audience to make sense of the events. It is one of the key decisions in the news production process made by the journalists, who select, transform and present the frames offered to them by various sources (e.g., politicians, experts, activists) (Baden, 2020). The decision about framing is shaped by numerous factors, ranging from the journalists’ political orientations and organisational pressures to professional routines, external pressures from interest groups, policymakers and larger societal norms and values (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). In this process, journalists play a key role in offering their frames as primary definers of social reality and as secondary definers communicating and commenting upon the frames of sources (Baden, 2020).

Examining news frames, Entman (2003) proposed the ‘Cascading Activation Model’, describing the construction of frames by government officials and political elites that are handed down to the news media and amplified towards the public. Consistent with this model, studies have contended that the news media tend to preferentially represent and reinforce frames constructed by political and government executives (Entman, 1991; Jasperson & Kikhia, 2003; Carpenter, 2007; Reese & Lewis, 2009). For example, Ryan’s (2004) study of 104 editorials of the ten largest US newspapers illustrated that the news media represented Bush’s war on terror and military intervention frames without any counterarguments. The media further reinforced these frames built in response to the September 11th attacks as they selectively chose government sources, historical references and contextual statements (Ryan, 2004). Similarly, a comparative content analysis of the US and Sweden’s media revealed that the elite newspapers covered the 2003 Iraq war in consonance with the countries’ foreign policy. Swedish media covered the war more negatively than the US media and used responsibility and anti-war protest frames to support Sweden’s political position regarding the Iraq war. By contrast, the US media portrayed the war in a positive light and employed military conflict frames by relying heavily on official government and military sources that closely followed the official government agenda (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2005). Similar evidence was found in Lim and Seo’s (2009) study of the portrayal of the US-North Korea relationship, where both the government and the news media engaged in two-way frame-building and produced economic sanctions and military solutions frames. The magnitude of these frames shifted as the relationship between the US and North Korea shifted, and the public was likely to develop thoughts consistent with the frames (Lim & Seo, 2009).

Scholars have attempted to identify frames that occur commonly in the news. For example, employing content analysis of television news, Iyengar (1996) identified episodic and thematic frames in coverage of political issues, such as crime, poverty, racial inequality, unemployment and terrorism. The episodic frames present social issues in the form of specific instances and events. By contrast, thematic frames depict issues in a broader analytical context by comparing them with other events. Iyengar argued that these forms of media frames influence the audiences' attribution of responsibility. As a result, selecting episodic over thematic frames may shift the attribution of responsibility for issues from societal to personal causes. The study also illustrated that television news relies extensively on episodic framing (Iyengar, 1996). This finding was consistent with the study of European politics, where Semetko & Valkenburg (2000) suggested that television news may usually employ episodic frames. However, the framing of responsibility is influenced by the social context and political culture in which news is created. The authors catalogued five news frames that commonly occur in the news: attribution of responsibility, conflict, economic consequences, human interest, and morality. Responsibility and conflict are among the most used frames. The responsibility frame portrays issues in such a way as to attribute responsibility for their causes or solution to an individual, a group, or the government. The conflict frame presents current events as a conflict between competing actors, issues, or interpretations (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

While some studies focused on generic frames, others identified issue-specific frames employed in the news. For example, an analysis of the Ku Klan Klux (an American hate group) rally in the US revealed two issue-specific frames that the media used to cover the civil liberty conflict. One frame described the event regarding freedom of speech, while the other discussed the event from a disruption of public order perspective (Nelson et al., 1997). Another study by Jasperson and El-Kikhia (2003) identified governance, military and humanitarian frames in CNN and al-Jazeera media coverage of the US war in Afghanistan. Governance frames were primarily used in discussing national unity and public support of the war. Military frames were employed to discuss strategies used in war, and humanitarian frames were used to depict victims' suffering and damage caused by war. Some of the other issue-specific frames identified by studies were: war on terror, military intervention (Ryan, 2004), responsibility, anti-war protest, military conflict (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2005), economic sanctions and military solutions frames (Lim & Seo, 2009).

2.5 Terrorism definition

While hundreds of definitions of terrorism have been proposed, this study reviewed key definitions that illustrated the salient attributes of the phenomenon. Reviewing all definitions lies beyond the scope and limits of space available for this study. Scholars have contended that terrorism is a contested concept (Noris et al., 2003; Schmid, 2011; Archetti, 2013) that is difficult to define because the meaning of the term has constantly changed, and there are many forms and manifestations of terrorism. Additionally, different perspectives, prejudice, geopolitical interests, and moral judgements (NATO, 2020) are barriers to reaching a common definition of terrorism. Therefore, as a socially constructed concept, terrorism can have many different interpretations that are influenced by broader cultural frames that tend to reflect the objectives and particular interests of the specific agency involved (Hoffman, 2017). Noris et al. (2003) advised against maximalist and minimalist definitions that either include theoretically irrelevant attributes or exclude relevant ones. The authors argued that definitions should have “a clear conceptual logic, avoiding problems of redundancy and conflation” (Noris et al., 2003, p.6).

The following outlines key definitions presented in chronological order showing the development of the definition of terrorism. Key definitions presented by leading scholars are as follows:

1. “The systematic use of coercive intimidation against civilians for political goals” (Noris et al., 2003, p.6).
2. “A politically motivated tactic involving the threat or use of force or violence in which the pursuit of publicity plays a significant role” (Weinberg et al., 2004, p.786).
3. “A doctrine about the presumed effectiveness of a special form or tactic of fear-generating, coercive political violence and ... a conspiratorial practice of calculated, demonstrative, direct violent action without legal or moral restraints, targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants, performed for its propagandistic and psychological effects on various audiences and conflict parties” (Schmid, 2011, p. 86).
4. According to Hoffman (2017), a terrorism expert, terrorism is “the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change”, perpetrated by subnational groups or non-state entities. “Terrorism is specifically designed to have far-reaching psychological effects beyond the immediate victim(s) or object of the terrorist attack. It is

meant to instil fear within, and thereby intimidate, a wider target audience” (p.50).

5. “Synthesis of war and theatre, a dramatisation of the most proscribed kind of violence—that which is deliberately perpetrated on civilian non-combatant victims—played before an audience in the hope of creating a mood of fear, for political purposes” (Combs, 2018, p.7).
6. “The unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence instilling fear and terror against individuals or property in an attempt to coerce or intimidate governments or societies, or to gain control over a population, to achieve political, religious or ideological objectives” (NATO, 2020, p.11).
7. “Use of violence by sub-state groups to inspire fear, by attacking civilians or symbolic targets, for purposes such as drawing widespread attention to a grievance, provoking a severe response, or wearing down their opponent’s moral resolve, in order to effect political change” (Kiras, 2020, p. 451).

While the definitions include important aspects of terrorism, they can vary in their focus. For example, the definitions proposed by Norris et al. (2003), Schmid (2011), Combs (2018) and NATO (2020) focused on tactics employed in terrorism by using keywords, such as systematic use of coercive intimidation, fear-generating and dramatised act of violence. Weinberg et al. (2004) emphasised the communicational aspect of violent tactics used in terrorism, and Hoffman (2017) focused on the psychological impacts of terrorism through which terrorists intend to intimidate the wider public to get their message across.

This study employs the definition proposed by NATO (2020) because it summarises four features of terrorism considered necessary for an act to qualify as terrorism. The following criteria created from the terrorism definition by NATO will be consistently applied to identify and analyse terrorism news throughout the study: (1) terrorism is an act of violence, (2) carried out against civilians, (3) intended to frighten a larger audience, (4) for political, ideological, and religious purposes and motives.

Terrorism occurs both in the context of violent resistance to the state (group terrorism) as well as in the service of state interests (state terrorism) (Norris et al., 2003). Group terrorism is political violence against the state by minority dissidents or radical insurgents. By contrast, state terrorism involves “coercive intimidation initiated by government authorities against civilians” (Norris et al., 2003, p.10). This study focuses on group terrorism that is premeditated and directed against the government and civilians of Afghanistan employed by non-state actors (the Taliban) for political and ideological change.

2.6 Media coverage of terrorism

Terrorism and conflict have long been topics of interest in communication research. However, following the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, communication scholars became increasingly interested in studying how different media cover terrorism, employing a variety of approaches and foci. For example, Papacharissi and Oliveira (2008) conducted a comparative framing analysis of the US and UK newspapers, covering terrorism in Afghanistan, Iraq and Israel. The US newspapers reported terrorist events in relation to military strategy and mainly employed episodic frames. By contrast, the UK newspapers engaged in more thematic coverage of the events and evaluated them from a diplomatic viewpoint. As argued by the authors, the US and UK newspapers constructed terrorism news frames in alignment with the corresponding policy in the two countries (Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2008).

Similarly, a study of visual frames employed by the US and Arab newspapers in the transnational coverage of the September 11th attacks and war in Afghanistan revealed that the newspapers provided different narratives of the war and terrorism based on the respective countries' cultural and political perspectives. For example, the US newspaper used the pro-war and technical frames to garner support for the war on terror in Afghanistan. In contrast, Arab newspaper employed anti-war and human-interest frames to expand opposition to the war on terror. The study contended that visual frames, contingent upon frames presented in texts, are effective in articulating ideological messages (Fahmy, 2010).

Other scholars focused on how media cover domestic (homegrown) and international terrorism. A study of the US media revealed that the threats of domestic terrorism were downplayed, and the perpetrators were described as lone lunatics with anti-government sentiments. By contrast, international terrorism was linked to al-Qaeda, and the perpetrators were described as extremists and Muslim radicals to magnify the level of fear. The author argued that the US media supported the war on terror narrative (developed after the September 11th, 2001, attack) by emphasising religious differences and enhancing a climate of fear of Muslims and Islam to justify foreign policies (Powell, 2011). The same result was demonstrated in a study of Norwegian media where the media employed the government's perspective to depoliticise the terrorist attacks by denying the political motivation behind the attacks and describing the perpetrators as non-politically motivated lone lunatics (Falkheimer & Olsson, 2015).

Some scholars investigated the media coverage of terrorist attacks in Muslim and non-Muslim countries. A study of the US media coverage of terrorist attacks in France and

Turkey (which happened between 2015 and 2017) found a systematic difference. The terrorist attacks in France received more coverage than the attacks in Turkey. Additionally, the attacks in Turkey were not described as terrorism and were linked to the instabilities in the country, unlike the coverage of France's terrorist attacks. The study highlighted bias in the US political and public discourse over terrorism issues where the frames reinforced prejudices against Muslims, even when they were themselves the victims (Nickerson, 2019).

Studies have also focused on the impact of terrorism media frames on public perception. An experimental study of framing effects found an elevated level of fear in subjects under study when terrorism was characterised by radical Islam groups (as compared to domestic terrorism) and nuclear weapons (as compared to conventional weapons). The study argued that these frames could have political and social implications, citing the Iraq war as an example, in which Iraq was framed for possessing weapons of mass destruction. Additionally, Iraq was accused of having links with terrorist organisations, which led to heightened fear among Americans and justified the US call for a pre-emptive strike against Iraq (Woods, 2011). Another study examined how terrorism news frames can influence the public's support of counterterrorism policies. They found that framing terrorism as a problem developed within a country produced greater fear and provided support for restrictions on civil liberties. The authors contended that consistent exposure to these frames employed by the media and government elites led to changes in religious, ethnic and racial attitudes and garnered the public's support for government counterterrorism policies (Brinson & Stohl, 2012).

A review of past studies shows that the media framing of terrorism has been studied across different nations (Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2008; Fahmy, 2010; Powell, 2011; Falkheimer & Olsson, 2015; Nickerson, 2019). How terrorism is represented by Afghan media remains a neglected area of terrorism research. Therefore, this study represents a substantive effort to remedy this deficiency by investigating terrorism news in two prominent and widely read newspapers in Afghanistan. From a theoretical perspective, this research expands the study of framing theory by examining key frames used in the coverage of terrorism and conflict in Afghanistan. This research also contributes to the body of knowledge by providing information about how Afghan media report terrorism. Therefore, this study is guided by the following overarching research question and three sub-questions:

RQ: How is terrorism framed by the two key Afghan newspapers?

RQ1: What are the dominant topics in framing terrorism used by the Afghan newspapers?

This question seeks to investigate the framing of terrorism by identifying the dominant topics. News stories frame issues by focusing on one or two specific elements of the issue to offer one basic interpretation that is readily comprehensible to the audience (Entman, 1993). Frames manifest through slogans, concepts, metaphors, keywords (Deetz et al., 2000) and visual images (Fahmy, 2010). Additionally, coverage of issues may vary across different media platforms considering the journalists' perceptions of the event, editorial policies, news gathering routines, and the political, ideological, social, and economic factors (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Therefore, this question investigates the aspects of terrorism focused on in the news and how differently two key Afghan newspapers frame them.

RQ2: How are the terrorism topics framed by the Afghan newspapers?

This question aims to discover key news frames used in the coverage of terrorism. This study is based on the framing theory by Hallahan (1999) and the study of news frames by Iyengar (1996). Hallahan identified seven framing models: framing a situation, framing of attributes, framing of choices, framing of actions, framing of issues, framing of responsibility and news framing. Iyengar identified two news frames of episodic (event-oriented) and thematic (context-oriented) in the coverage of political issues.

RQ3: What are the key themes used by Afghan newspapers in framing terrorism?

This question aims to find patterns of meanings or themes across news articles that are important in understanding how terrorism is framed. To do so, this study adopts a combination of deductive and inductive approaches in that themes are constructed from data by constant comparison and development of codes while processing the data deductively based on framing studies by Hallahan and Iyengar mentioned above.

The research questions will be explored through a theoretical framework of interpretivism that assumes reality is socially constructed and that it is multiple and interpretive (Crotty, 1998). This study applies a set of specific procedures outlined in the following chapter to answer the research questions.

Chapter 3: Research Design

This chapter outlines the research design for the study, the purpose of which was to collect data to answer research questions that emerged from the literature review. It begins with discussing interpretivist epistemology and the decision to use a qualitative methodology that includes textual data analysis, with aspects of data source and collection. Lastly, the reflexive thematic analysis is explained as a data analysis method. As discussed in the previous chapter, despite media framing of terrorism having been studied across different nations and media platforms, there is little research on how Afghan mainstream media frame terrorism. This research, therefore, aims to address the gap identified in terrorism research by exploring how terrorism is framed by the two key Afghan newspapers.

3.1 Interpretivist epistemology

Research design is determined by a research paradigm that is consistent with the researcher's views about the nature of reality. These beliefs are, in turn, influenced by the investigator's cultural context and history (Mills et al., 2006). Guba and Lincoln (1994) define a paradigm as a worldview or basic belief system that guides the researchers in selecting the research epistemology, ontology and method. The epistemological position guiding this research is interpretivism, which "looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of social life" (Crotty, 1998, p.67). Interpretivism contends that reality and meaning-making are socially constructed, and they are subjective, have multiple facets and are interpretive. Additionally, interpretivism focuses on meaning construction and clarifies what and how meanings are embodied in the data (Schwandt, 1998).

The rationale for selecting the interpretivist paradigm is that it enables researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the research problem by collecting and interpreting qualitative data. It also allows the inquirers to focus on the whole data rather than considering certain parts, which leads to valuable findings and insights (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). The interpretivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontological position (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), which claims that concepts such as truth and reality must be understood in the context of a particular theoretical framework, conceptual scheme, culture, or society (Bernstein, 1983). In other words, the world consists of various individual realities that are shaped by contexts that might sometimes be conflicting. These realities, however, can be equally valid accounts of the world (Gray, 2018). Therefore, considering the researcher's worldview, the nature of this research and its

context, interpretivism was selected as the most appropriate research paradigm to gain insights into how the Afghan mainstream media frame terrorism.

3.2 Qualitative methodology

The preference of research methodology for this study depends on interpretivism epistemology and relativist ontology. While epistemology and ontology informed the research questions about media framing of terrorism in Afghanistan, methodology provided the framework within which this research was conducted. Methodology refers to the principles of reasoning used in selecting a research design, which involves choices about appropriate data-gathering methods, data analysis, and execution of a research study. Research methodologies within social sciences are divided into quantitative (grounded in positivism) and qualitative (grounded in interpretivism) research approaches (Silverman, 2017). This study used qualitative methodology because it is linked to the adopted research paradigm (interpretivism), which sees reality or meaning as socially constructed and interpreted by individuals (Crotty, 1998). Contrary to quantitative research, qualitative research claims that reality is not a fixed or measurable phenomenon. Instead, there are “multiple constructions and interpretations of reality that are in flux that change over time” (Merriam & Grenier, 2019, p.33). Therefore, qualitative research is useful in understanding how the media frames terrorism in the context of Afghanistan at the selected period of time.

Qualitative research is defined as interpretive techniques which seek to decode, describe, and translate the meaning of social phenomena (Maanen, 1979). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the following four characteristics are crucial for understanding the nature of qualitative research: (1) the focus is on the process of how meaning or reality is constructed; (2) the researcher is the primary instrument for gathering and analysing the data; (3) the inquiry process is inductive; and (4) the final output is richly descriptive that conveys the research findings. This study also adopts a combination of deductive and inductive approaches that allow the researcher to build concepts, themes or patterns derived from gathered data while processing the data based on framing theory. This requires the researchers to immerse themselves in data while being alert to new insights throughout data collection (Neuman, 2014).

The qualitative method advantage lies in its ability to provide detail, context and depth in understanding the topic under investigation as it allows the researcher to gain a deep and holistic overview of the research topic (Gray, 2018). Additionally, qualitative methods provide a flexible and emergent research design that respond to changing conditions of the study in progress (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It can also be particularly useful in studying new topics, understanding complex issues and describing processes

by addressing 'why' or 'how' questions (Hennek et al., 2020). Given the characteristics above, qualitative methodology was seen to fit with this study's purpose.

3.3 Data source

There are three major data sources for a qualitative research study: observations, documents/artefacts, and interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study used the Hasht-e-Subh and EtilaatRoz newspapers' websites as the data source. The study focused on terrorism news from January to March 2021. This time frame was chosen due to a 33 per cent rise in terrorist attacks and a 14 per cent rise in fatalities in Afghanistan (Global Terrorism Index, 2022). The investigation period is before the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan in August 2021. Hasht-e-Subh and EtilaatRoz were selected because they are the two key leading newspapers with the highest readership in Afghanistan. Additionally, they represent the dominant discourses that enhance their power to shape widely shared constructions of reality in Afghanistan. Profiles of the two dailies are given below, based on the newspapers' websites research.

3.3.1 Profile: Hasht-e-Subh newspaper

Hasht-e-Subh is a non-governmental daily based in Kabul, Afghanistan. The newspaper is published five days a week (Saturday – Wednesday) and is available in 18 major cities in Afghanistan. It is the highest circulated and widely read paper in Afghanistan, reaching more than two million people through the newspaper's website and Facebook page. Hasht-e-Subh Daily, on its website, brands itself as the largest independent newspaper founded by a group of journalists and human rights defenders in 2007 that gives coverage to political, social, and cultural news within ten pages. The newspaper has established itself as one of the defenders of freedom of expression and women's rights (Hasht-e-Subh Daily, n.d.).

The most critical events happening in Afghanistan constitute the newspaper's front page, followed by an editorial on the second page wherein Hasht-e-Subh takes a firm stand on Afghanistan's critical problems and usually proposes a solution in the editorial. The first-page displays headlines of news spread throughout the newspaper along with the most important news. The editorial page includes an editorial and important news and reports of the day (see appendix A1). Hasht-e-Subh publishes an average of 19 articles daily, including news, reports, analysis, opinions, book reviews and international news. The newspaper maintains an updated and free website, which hosts online editions of the daily and electronic replicas of the printed version (Hasht-e-Subh Daily, n.d.).

3.3.2 Profile: EtilaatRoz newspaper

EtilaatRoz, founded in 2011, is also an independent newspaper that publishes high-quality journalism content, including news, investigative reports and analysis, within eight pages, five days a week. It follows a similar layout as the Hasht-e-Subh daily in editorial content. The newspaper's front-page highlights the headlines of the day's most critical stories, followed by editorial, important news articles, and opinions on the second page (see appendix A2). EtilaatRoz publishes an average of 17 articles daily, including news, reports, opinions, analysis and international news. According to the EtilaatRoz website, the paper has an average online readership of 20,000 per day and reaches 714,540 people on Facebook. The newspaper maintains an updated and free website, publishing online editions of the daily and electronic replicas of the printed version. EtilaatRoz upholds the reputation for journalistic quality and balanced coverage of controversial issues (EtilaatRoz, n.d.).

Both the newspapers have an independent approach to issues related to Afghanistan and are published in Persian, mainly for Persian-speaking audiences. Persian is a Western Iranian language that is part of the Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family. It is a polycentric language spoken and used officially within Afghanistan, Iran and Tajikistan (Spooner, 2012). Persian ranks among the world's 20 most widely spoken languages, with 62 million native speakers and 50 million second-language speakers (Boston University, n.d.).

3.4 Data collection

The data for this study was collected from the newspapers' websites. The pdf versions of newspapers' print editions were downloaded, yielding a total of 123 issues (61 issues for Hasht-e-Subh and 62 issues for EtilaatRoz) and organised into two folders by the newspapers' names.

The news articles under investigation were limited to the front and editorial pages, excluding editorials, analysis, opinions and international news. The rationale was to understand news perspectives as factual reports of events rather than opinions or interpretations of those. Another reason was that the most important and salient news is placed in the first two pages through which the media sets its agenda (also called media agenda-setting). It is a process through which the media communicates to the public the relative importance of various issues and events (Rogers & Dearing, 1988). The unit of analysis for this investigation was an individual newspaper article. The study aimed to establish key topics and themes, news sources, the victims' and perpetrators' descriptions, and how terrorist events were framed in news stories.

Previous studies were reviewed to examine the strategies used to identify and analyse terrorism news. Most studies used keywords to identify relevant news stories. For example, Papacharissi and Oliveira (2008) used the following keywords to study coverage of terrorism in the US and UK newspapers: “terrorist attacks and Iraq”, “terrorist attacks and Israel”, and “terrorist attacks and Afghanistan” (p.60). Similarly, Nickerson (2019) used “terrorist attack”, “France attacks”, and “Turkey attacks” keywords to select data for the content analysis of newspaper reports on terrorist attacks in Turkey and France (p.555).

These studies mentioned focused on specific terrorist attacks and used keywords to identify the relevant news articles. This study, however, aimed to analyse all the terrorist attacks that happened over three months in 2021 (January – March).

Therefore, to identify terrorism news articles, this study used the following criteria created from a definition by NATO (2020). This meant that the news articles included for analysis were (a) an act of violence; (b) carried out against civilians; (c) intended to frighten a larger audience; (d) for political, ideological and religious purposes and motives (NATO, 2020). Other definitions of terrorism were also explored, as discussed in the literature review (chapter 2). However, the definition by NATO was selected as it pulled together all criteria that qualify an attack as terrorism.

Following these criteria, 102 news articles were identified over a three-month period, of which 46 belonged to Hasht-e-Subh and 56 belonged to EtilaatRoz newspapers. Only the articles that illustrated political violence directed against the Afghan government and civilians by non-state actors (also called group terrorism) were included for analysis.

Table 1*Data collection*

#	Newspapers	Period under study	Location of the articles selected for analysis	Number of issues	Number of news articles	Criteria for selection of news articles for analysis
1	Hasht-e-Subh	January – March 2021	Front page (the first page) and editorial page (the second page)	61	46	(a) an act of violence (b) carried out against civilians (c) intended to frighten larger audience (d) for political, ideological and religious purposes and motives (NATO, 2020)
2	EtilaatRoz			62	56	

The relevant articles were then translated into English using Google Translate to facilitate the coding process in NVivo software. The translated version of each article was read twice and compared to the original one to ensure the English words and phrases reflect the original content of the news articles as accurately as possible. In case of deviance from the original text, the translation was refined as closely as the content in Persian. Then, a dozen randomly selected articles were checked by an immigration lawyer (whose mother tongue was Persian) to ensure reliability. Although the translation process was reliable using Google Translate and the researcher's knowledge, there may be minor inadvertent subjectivity due to translation nuances.

3.5 Data analysis method

Reflexive thematic analysis is a widely used method within qualitative analysis. It is used to identify, analyse and report patterned meanings (themes) concerning research questions being explored (Braun et al., 2019). Thematic analysis was first developed by a physicist and historian of science, Gerald Holton, in the 1970s (Merton, 1975, as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2013) but was rarely acknowledged until clear guidelines for conducting thematic analysis were proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This led to the recognition of thematic analysis as a distinctive analytic method within social sciences to reveal patterns within a large dataset. Thematic analysis is only a method for data analysis and does not provide ontological or epistemological frameworks, theoretical positions and methods for data collection (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In their recent study, Braun et al. (2019) emphasised the active role of the researcher in the research process and, thus, called it reflexive thematic analysis. It considers researchers as storytellers actively engaged in interpreting data through knowledge of their culture, social settings, ideological commitments and theoretical assumptions (Braun et al., 2019). Therefore, the researchers' subjectivity is considered valid and a resource in the knowledge production process (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Reflexive thematic analysis allows researchers to explore the dataset and develop semantic and latent themes through coding. This process requires a critical and deep engagement of the researcher to go beyond the surface or explicit content of the data and to identify hidden or unexpected patterns of meaning. Therefore, the reflexive thematic analysis provides a compelling and coherent interpretation of the data (Braun et al., 2019).

Reflexive thematic analysis is a useful analytic method for most types of qualitative data, including secondary sources and textual data (Braun et al., 2019). Therefore, this study employs reflexive thematic analysis because it can assist with identifying and analysing patterns, themes and concepts embedded within qualitative data. Additionally, reflexive thematic analysis provides theoretical flexibility in addressing

different research questions (Braun et al., 2019). A major advantage of the reflexive thematic analysis approach is that it works well with the interpretive framework that informs this research project. Furthermore, it works well with most types of qualitative data that have large or small datasets to produce both theory-driven (deductive) and data-driven (inductive) analyses. Therefore, thematic analysis was employed to capture both explicit and implicit meanings beneath the surface of the data (Braun et al., 2019).

The six phases of reflexive thematic analysis by Braun et al. (2019) are detailed below as guidelines in relation to the available data and research questions:

3.5.1 Phase 1: Familiarisation with data

The first phase of reflexive thematic analysis involves getting immersed in the data through active and focused reading, a common step across all qualitative studies. This requires the researcher to keep the research questions in mind and make notes of initial ideas and patterns found in the data (Braun et al., 2019). The data familiarisation phase in this study involved downloading the data from the newspapers' websites, identifying relevant news articles based on the NATO definition of terrorism, reading and translating them to understand the data's depth and breadth and identify emerging ideas. The process also involved making notes about individual data items and the whole dataset to highlight how the data was related to research questions and existing literature, which facilitated the subsequent phases of coding and analysis.

3.5.2 Phase 2: Generating initial codes

The second phase of generating initial codes involved systematic and detailed engagement with the data to capture interesting aspects of the data relevant to the research questions (Braun et al., 2019). According to Braun and Clarke (2014), "coding is not simply a method of data reduction; it is an analytic process that captures both semantic (surface) meaning within the data and latent (underlying) meaning" (p.1948). To break the data into smaller units for analysis, there was a need to build a coding framework. A few seminal terrorism studies were reviewed to examine their coding methods. However, none of the studies provided a clear coding method applicable to this study. Therefore, a coding framework was developed using concept-driven (deductive) and data-driven (inductive) strategies. This coding framework can be employed in future terrorism studies in the print media.

The data-driven codes were derived from the data by keeping the three research questions in mind and identifying the relevant aspects of the data necessary for answering these questions. Concept-driven codes (framing of responsibility and

episodic/thematic news frames) were derived from Iyengar (1996) and Hallahan's (1999) framing studies. Hallahan identified seven framing models: the framing of the situation, framing of attributes, framing of choices, framing of actions, framing of issues, framing of responsibility and news framing. Iyengar identified episodic (event-oriented) and thematic (context-oriented) frames employed in the coverage of political issues.

The coding framework contained nine data-driven codes and two concept-driven codes. It also included a set of sub-codes that specified relevant aspects of the data. Any data string relevant to the research questions was coded using the coding framework. The entire data set was systematically worked through and with equal attention given to each data item to identify interesting aspects that could form the basis of repeated patterns (themes) across the data set. Overall, the coding was done in two rounds and separately for the data related to each newspaper to ensure consistency and reliability. The first round of coding was manually done in Excel Spreadsheets. This process involved coding the entire dataset consecutively, one code after another. For example, news articles were first coded on codes one and two, then in a second round for codes three and four. Because the data was rich and the coding framework consisted of many codes, it was important to review the news articles separately for each code. The second round of coding was carried out after a time interval of 14 days, as suggested by Schreier (2012). The same coding procedure was repeated using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software tool designed for qualitative studies involving rich text-based data. The decision was made to use NVivo because it provides a structured and organised approach to analyse data efficiently and rigorously. To get familiar with the application of NVivo Software, the researcher attended several online workshops facilitated by AUT University and Academic Consulting on NVivo core skills and aspects of qualitative research, which helped in managing and analysing the data.

In the next step, a comparative coding table (Table 2) was created where the codes of the first and second rounds were compared. Any piece of data coded differently at the two points in time was reviewed and finalised. Additionally, the data excerpts were organised around similar meanings and collated with the same codes for all news articles. The entire coding process was reviewed again, keeping research questions in mind to ensure the consistency and relevance of the codes.

Table 2*Comparative coding table for data coded at two different points of time*

Code	Article no	First round of coding	Second round coding
Type of attack	1	Explosion	Explosion
	2	Ambush	Armed attack

3.5.3 Phase 3: Constructing themes

In the third phase of searching for themes, the focus was placed on the analysis at the broader level and involved reviewing the coded data to identify areas of similarity and overlap between codes and sub-codes to construct themes. Braun et al. (2019) argue that good themes tell an insightful and coherent story about the data in relation to the research question. The themes were analytically constructed to capture meaningful patterns across the dataset, wherein the researcher had an active (reflexive) role. As Braun et al. (2019) emphasised, themes do not simply emerge from the data. Instead, they are generated from the researcher's interpretative choices.

During this stage, the relationship between themes was also explored to examine how themes work together in telling the overall story about the data. As argued by Braun and Clarke (2012), good themes are distinctive, but they also work together as a whole. At the end of this phase, a table outlining the candidate themes with their collated data extracts was created to facilitate the next phase of analysis.

3.5.4 Phase 4: Reviewing themes

The fourth phase involved revising and refining the identified themes. The themes were checked in relation to the coded data and then the entire dataset to check whether each theme truly represents its data (Braun et al., 2019). The entire process was reviewed again to ensure that the developed themes were coherent and distinctive and they captured the most relevant information concerning research questions.

3.5.5 Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

The fifth phase involved naming and defining themes to capture the essence of each theme and determine what aspect of the data they capture (Braun et al., 2019). In this phase, the identified themes were named so that each theme has a clear focus and scope and builds on the previous themes. Furthermore, it was ensured that themes provide clear, comprehensive and concise patterns of meanings, relevant to the research questions and the data in general. The data extracts were also selected to illustrate the analytical points, considering their connection to the broader research questions. This process was carried out across all the themes to tell an analytic

narrative around each selected data extract. Overall, this phase involved a progression from describing themes to interpretation, where the significance and meanings of patterns were illustrated.

3.5.6 Phase 6: Producing the report

The sixth phase involved finalising and reporting the analysis (Braun et al., 2019). This phase served as a final test of how well the themes worked individually and in relation to the dataset. The research question, notes from familiarisation and coding phases, the list of codes, and theme definitions were all reviewed to ensure that the final themes were consistent with the data and answered the research question. The study's results are presented in the next chapter.

3.6 Summary

This study aims to discover how Afghan mainstream media frame terrorism and how this can be explained by news production theories, especially framing theory. The research design used for the study was based on the foundation of relativist ontology and interpretivism epistemology. Interpretivist epistemology assumes that knowledge is not in the external world ready to be discovered. Instead, it is constructed by people as they engage in and make meaning of a phenomenon. Moreover, relativist ontology claims that there tend to be several interpretations of reality relative to a particular context. The study adopted a qualitative approach to address the research questions and used newspapers as the data source. Newspapers were chosen because they provided a reliable source of information about terrorist events in Afghanistan and linked well with the research approach. As the final step, the study employed reflexive thematic analysis to analyse terrorism news articles employing a deductive-inductive approach.

Figure 1

Summary of research design



Chapter 4: Results and Findings

This study sought to investigate how Afghan mainstream media frame terrorism and how this can be explained by news production theories, especially framing theory. The data sources were the newspapers' websites. As mentioned in chapter one, the overarching research question was 'how is terrorism framed by two key Afghan newspapers?' and this was investigated through the following sub-questions to identify the topics, how they are framed, and the themes in terrorism reporting.

RQ1: What are the dominant topics in framing terrorism used by the Afghan newspapers?

RQ2: How are the terrorism topics framed by the Afghan newspapers?

RQ3: What are the key themes used by the Afghan newspapers in framing terrorism?

This chapter presents the findings from the analysis of terrorism news articles obtained from the Hasht-e-Subh and EtilaatRoz websites. It outlines the key themes constructed using the following six-step process of reflexive thematic analysis by Braun et al. (2019).

As discussed in the methodology chapter, the first phase of reflexive thematic analysis involved selecting, reading and translating 102 articles published on the front and editorial pages of two key newspapers in Afghanistan (Hasht-e-Subh and EtilaatRoz) from January to March 2021 and noting aspects of the data relevant to research questions. The articles were selected based on the criteria created from a seminal terrorism definition by NATO (2020), further discussed in chapter two. The key elements of this definition are as follows:

- (a) an act of violence
- (b) carried out against civilians
- (c) intended to frighten a larger audience
- (d) for political, ideological and religious purposes and motives

The second phase of reflexive thematic analysis involved double coding. This meant that the entire dataset was first coded in Excel Spreadsheets. NVivo was then used to systematically code the data using concept-driven (deductive) and data-driven

(inductive) strategies. Using the combined framework, each news article, as an individual unit of analysis, was coded under the following 11 main codes to break a large data set into smaller units for analysis. These codes are summarised in Table 3 below.

Table 3

List of codes and their description

No	Codes	Description of codes in brief
1	Issue no	Newspapers' issue number that published terrorism related news articles
2	Article no	Number of terrorism related news stories
3	Religion	Religious explanation in the news
4	Authority	Source of news
5	Dramatic killings	Type of terrorist attacks
6	Profile of the victims	How victims were defined
7	Profile of the perpetrators	How perpetrators were defined
8	Profile of the location	Type of location where the attack happened
9	Framing of responsibility*	Attribution of responsibility for the attack
10	Taliban presence	Presence and activities of the Taliban near attack area
11	News frames*	News stories as episodic (event-oriented) or thematic (context-oriented)

*Deductive codes

The following details the origin and process of coding where the data was coded under 11 main codes and 71 sub-codes:

1. The first code, issue number, was identified from the newspapers' issue number of each day that published relevant news articles.
2. The second code, article number, was based on the identified news stories, which were then numbered.
3. The third code, religion, was based on explanations of the attacks from a religious viewpoint.
4. The fourth code, authority, was based on sources of information mentioned in the news stories. The data showed that all news stories were reported from an authoritative source. The sub-codes for authority were government officials, security officials, eyewitnesses and other sources. Any government official ranging from the governor, and provincial council members to members of parliament, were coded under government officials. Police and army sources were coded under security officials, and any foreign source was coded under other sources.

5. The fifth code, dramatic killings, was based on how the attacks were described. The data showed that the attacks were reported dramatically in the news stories. The attacks were coded under the sub-codes of explosions, armed attacks, hostage-taking, shooting, and firing mortar shells and rockets. The overlapping sub-codes were subsumed under an existing category. For example, types of attacks explaining roadside explosions, landmine explosions, car bombs and magnetic car mine explosions were all subsumed under the 'explosions' instead of keeping them as individual sub-codes.
6. The sixth code, profile of the victims, explored how victims of terrorist attacks were described. The sub-codes for the profile of the victims were civilians, military, killed, injured, men, women, children, and status. The sub-code of status was split into sub-codes of civil activist, student, driver, prosecutor, journalist, bodyguard, bank employees, provincial council members, uprising forces, head of a bank department, judge, head of the development council, national Directorate of Public Protection press officer, Ministry of Telecommunication and Technology employees, head of a religious council, head of the Central Bank financial resolution commission and religious preacher.
7. The seventh code, profile of the perpetrators, explored how attackers were described in the news. The sub-codes were the Taliban, specified by the type of attack and unidentified gunmen.
8. The eighth code, profile of location, explored the places where the attacks took place. The sub-codes were created based on the locations of the attacks, and they were district centre, vehicle carrying people, highway, market, on the street, provincial council, residential house, security checkpoint, workplace, army ranger, business institute, on the way home and on the way to the hospital.
9. The ninth code, framing of responsibility, explored the attribution of responsibility for the attacks. The data showed that the Taliban was held responsible for the attacks. If the Taliban were held responsible directly, it was coded under the sub-code of explicit. If the Taliban were indirectly blamed for the attacks, that piece of information was coded under an implicit sub-code.
10. The tenth code, the Taliban's presence, identified that references were made to the presence and activities of the Taliban in the area where the attacks were conducted or similar previous attacks by the group.
11. The eleventh code, news frames, explored the attacks explained through episodic or thematic frames. The data showed that news stories were mostly

described as specific events (episodic) that focused on the terrorist attacks, perpetrators and victims.

In the third phase of reflexive thematic analysis, four themes were created by reviewing and collating codes that shared some unifying features. These codes were clustered together with their associated data extracts so that they describe and reflect coherent and meaningful patterns in the data:

Firstly, the data relating to the codes of dramatic killings and authority were grouped to form a theme named 'magnitude' as data relating to each code reflected levels of significance of the attacks. For example, news stories were framed into magnitude by describing the attacks, using dramatic keywords (e.g., explosions, armed attacks, shootings) and using authorities (e.g., government and security officials) as news sources.

Secondly, the data relating to the codes of the profile of the victims and profile of the location were grouped to construct a theme named 'ordinariness' as each code described how terrorist attacks targeted ordinary people at ordinary places.

Thirdly, the data relating to the codes of the profile of the perpetrators, framing of responsibility, news frames and the Taliban presence were grouped to form a theme named the presence of a known but invisible enemy as the data relating to all codes focused on how perpetrators were portrayed and held responsible for the attacks.

Finally, the theme of religion was constructed, which examines whether anything regarding religion and terrorist attacks was featured in the news stories, as Afghanistan's war has always been considered a religious war.

In the fourth phase of reflexive thematic analysis, the four themes mentioned above were checked in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set. The themes were further reviewed to ensure they were coherent and distinctive and captured the most relevant information concerning the research questions. In the fifth phase of reflexive thematic analysis, the created themes were named, and their specifics were refined with ongoing analysis and selection of data extracts to illustrate the analytical points.

In the sixth and final phase of reflexive thematic analysis, the results of the study were reported under four main themes, beginning with magnitude, ordinariness, presence of a known but invisible enemy and leading to religion. The following section explains the origin of each theme (as described by the tabulated codes presented under each theme). Data extracts illustrate the results. Data analysis showed no significant

difference between Hasht-e-Subh and EtilaatRoz's coverage of terrorism news. Therefore, the material has been merged for the presentation.

4.1 Report on themes

4.1.1 Theme 1: Magnitude

The data identified that the terrorist attacks were described as dramatic killings and always from an authoritative news source. This reflected the significance of the attacks. Therefore, the codes of dramatic killings and authority (of news sources) were grouped to form the theme of magnitude.

A review of the data found that the terrorist attacks were described as explosions, shootings, armed attacks, hostage-taking, firing mortar shells and rockets to evoke dramatic images of the attacks. For example, terrorist attacks conducted by explosions were described as landmine explosions, roadside mine explosions, car bomb blasts and magnetic car mine explosions, e.g.,

(a) Five people have been killed, and nine others have been injured when a magnetic mine exploded at a car carrying the head of the Kapisa Ulema Council.

(b) Officials in Ghazni province say a car bomb has exploded on the Kabul-Herat highway, killing a driver of a large truck and wounding seven army personnel.

Shootings, on the other hand, were described as hit-and-run attacks where the targets were shot dead on the spot. The word assassination was used in relation to shootings, illustrating most of the shootings as targeted killings, e.g.,

Security sources in Ghor province confirm that Bismillah Adel Aimaq, the managing director of Sada-e Ghor Radio, has been assassinated by unknown gunmen. The incident took place yesterday evening (Friday, January 2nd) in the Bare Khaneh area west of Firuzkuh, the provincial capital, Ghor police chief Nik Mohammad Nikzad told the daily EtilaatRoz. Mr Nikzad added that unknown gunmen fled the scene after the assassination of the local media director but that police are working to arrest the perpetrators.

And the armed attack was described as a group attack mostly targeting security checkpoints, e.g.,

Local sources in Kunduz province say at least 12 people have been killed and 10 others wounded in a Taliban attack on a security checkpoint in the Imam Sahib district of the province.

Hostage-taking and abduction were used interchangeably. The results showed that civilians and workers of infrastructure projects (e.g., railway and dam projects) were mostly the targets of abduction e.g.,

(a) A representative of Maidan Wardak in the House of Representatives confirms that the Taliban group has taken 14 civilians hostage in the Jalrez district of the province for the past 10 days.

(b) Local sources in Herat province say that the Taliban have abducted 11 workers from the Pashdan dam.

Firing mortar shells was shown to be conducted remotely, and the word ‘hit’ was mostly used to describe the attack, e.g.,

A young woman has been killed and 11 others injured when a mortar shell hit residential houses in Herat.

One significant finding was that 82 terrorist attacks occurred in three months, from January to March 2021. As illustrated below, most of these attacks were explosions targeting civilians, followed by armed attacks, which were specifically used to target police and army units at security checkpoints. Shootings were used for targeted killings, which in most cases included government officials or high-profile individuals. Hostage-taking was the tactic used mostly to target civilians and workers of strategically significant infrastructure projects, such as railway or dam projects.

Table 4

List of codes and sub-codes related to dramatic killings

Code	N *
Dramatic killings	
Explosion	42
Armed attacks	26
Shootings	26
Firing mortar shells and rockets	6
Taking hostage	5

* Number of articles

Additionally, the data showed that the terrorist attacks were reported from authoritative sources, such as the government and security officials. These sources were authorities who had access to the information media needed. Thus, the information provided by them was considered credible.

Four sources of information were identified, out of which security and government officials were used as primary sources of information. Table 5 below illustrates that the

police were the most used source since they had a key role in providing information about the type of attack, location, number of casualties and victims' identities. Both newspapers adopted the security officials' views in times of crisis, which means that they relied upon statements from police and army spokespersons in their reporting, e.g.,

Security officials in Kapisa province confirm that five civilians have been killed in a mine explosion in the provincial capital, Mahmud-raqi. A spokesperson for the Kapisa Police, Abdul Shaykh Shooresh Kouhestani, told the daily EtilaatRoz that ... the incident was caused by the explosion of a magnetic mine ring that targeted the car carrying Mirwais Karimi, head of the Kapisa Ulema Council.

While most security officials were named in the news, some were reported anonymously. Only nine out of 102 news stories included unnamed security officials. The results showed that security sources remained unnamed in sensitive issues, e.g.,

A reliable security source confirms that three people, including Zia Wadan, the press officer of the National Directorate of Public Protection, have been killed in a mine explosion in Kabul. The source, who did not want to be named in the news, told EtilaatRoz ... that all the victims of the explosion were employees of the National Directorate of Public Protection. He said the incident was caused by a landmine targeting a car carrying them.

Government officials were the second most used news source. They ranged from the governor, governor spokesperson, member of parliament, and provincial council members to the Vice President, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defense spokesperson (see Table 5). While some sources were quoted once, other sources, such as members of parliament, were quoted six times, the governor seven times and provincial council members 15 times.

(a) Local officials in Uruzgan province say 10 people have been injured in a motorcycle bomb blast in Trincot, the provincial capital. The governor of Uruzgan, Mohammad Omar Shirzad, said the blast occurred on Tuesday, January 20th ... According to him, a motorcycle embedded with bombs targeted a personal vehicle belonging to the police forces.

(b) Local officials in Kapisa province confirm that three security forces in the province have been killed in an ambush by Taliban fighters. Kapisa Governor Abdul Latif Murad told the Hasht-e-Subh newspaper that the three soldiers had been killed in a Taliban ambush in the Afghaniyah district of Najrab district.

Only a few news stories reported the accounts of eyewitnesses, among other news sources.

Local officials in Nangarhar province say two policemen have been killed in a shooting by unknown gunmen in Jalalabad, the provincial capital. ... Mr Amarkhail ... said that unknown people were riding on a rickshaw motorcycle. Meanwhile, eyewitnesses told the daily Information newspaper that unknown gunmen fled the scene after shooting at police soldiers and taking police weapons with them.

Other sources, such as reporters without borders, and the head of the US and British embassies, were used to illustrate negative reactions of sources outside the police and government officials regarding the terrorist attacks.

The head of the US embassy in Kabul, Ross Wilson and the British ambassador to Kabul, Ellison Black, have condemned the attack and called for the perpetrators to be identified. The head of the US embassy attributed the attack to the Taliban and said: "The Taliban should know that such actions of which this group is responsible for making the world angry and if peace is to come to Afghanistan, it must be stopped."

Both newspapers used government and security officials as primary sources of information. However, the only difference was that EtilaatRoz used more than two news sources per article, unlike Hasht-e-Subh, which relied on one source for most news articles.

Table 5
List of codes and sub-codes related to authorities

Code	N
Authorities	
Government officials	61
Governor	7
Governor spokesperson	7
District governor	4
Members of parliament	6
Provincial council members	15
The first vice president	2
Presidential palace	1
Ministry of Interior	3
Ministry of Defense	4
Public health department	6
Central Bank	2
Supreme Court spokesperson	2
Ministry of Higher Education	1
Ministry of Telecommunications and Technology	1
Security officials	75
Police spokesperson	61
Army spokesperson	5
Unnamed security officials	9
Eyewitness	5
Other sources	2

Finding 1: The terrorism-related news stories were framed as magnitude by using (a) keywords (e.g., explosions, armed attacks, shootings) to illustrate the magnitude of attacks and provide an image of where and how the attacks happened; (b) referring to authoritative sources, such as the government and security officials, as primary sources of information, to establish credibility as these sources were perceived to possess relevant information about terrorist attacks and that they could be trusted to give an objective opinion on the topic.

4.1.2 Theme 2: Ordinariness

The data identified that terrorist attacks at ordinary and unexpected places targeted civilians, government officials, and armed government forces. Therefore, the profile of the victims and location codes were grouped to construct a theme named *ordinariness*.

As can be seen from Table 6 below, the results showed that newspapers gave maximal attention to slain victims by giving information about their gender, status, condition of whether they were killed or injured and if they belonged to civilians or military groups. Civilians were the most targeted group by terrorist attacks, followed by the military. Men had the highest number of casualties compared to women and children. Moreover, the victims ranged from students, drivers, preachers, and bodyguards to government officials, women in position of power, civil activists and journalists who were attacked and killed in ordinary and unexpected places.

The results showed that the groups mentioned in Table 6 were targeted using various tactics. For example, the army and police were mostly targeted at the checkpoints by armed attacks and high-profile officials were shot dead. These groups were targeted using other tactics as well, such as magnetic mines planted on their vehicles. Civilians were targeted by explosions in populated places, such as the cities, markets, district and provincial centres and public vehicles, e.g.,

(a) Three civilians have been killed in a roadside bomb blast in Kandahar's Panjwai district. Kandahar police spokesperson Jamal Nasser Barakzai told Hasht-e-Sobh newspaper that the explosion ... targeted a vehicle full of civilians.

(b) A spokesperson and two employees of the Public Protection Directorate have been killed in an explosion in the eighth district of Kabul. ... Interior Ministry spokesman Tariq Arian said a car carrying the spokesperson for the Public Protection Department, Zia Veda, was hit by a mine as he was on his way to work. According to him, Zia Vadan and two of his colleagues were killed, and one more person was injured in the blast.

The second most targeted group was the armed government forces attacked at security checkpoints and their army vehicles. This illustrates how civilians and the military were killed indiscriminately, e.g.,

Several Farah members of parliament have said that nine soldiers have been killed in a Taliban attack on an army checkpoint in the Posht Rud district of the province.

Table 6 below also highlights that the highest number of terrorist attacks took place in ordinary places, inflicting heavy casualties. These places were public vehicles, district centres, security checkpoints, markets, provincial centres and streets. There were also 11 instances of individuals killed at the residential houses, creating an element of surprise that no place was safe from terrorist attacks, e.g.,

Local sources in Badghis province say that the head of the development council in the Qadis district of the province has been

shot dead by Taliban militants. Mirza Ali Bidar, Qadis district governor, told the EtilaatRoz that the Taliban ousted Mohammad Aref, the head of the development council of the "Sultans" village, from his house at around 6:00 pm two days ago (Saturday, February 7) and then shot him.

Table 6

List of codes and sub-codes related to profile of the victims and profile of the location

Code	N
Profile of the victims	
Killed	89
Injured	63
Civilian	80
Military	64
Men	71
Women	14
Children	10
Status	
Civil activist	2
Student	1
Driver	7
Prosecutor	4
Journalist	3
Bodyguard	3
Bank employees	3
Provincial council member	1
Uprising forces	3
Head of a bank department	2
Judge	2
Head of development council	1
National Directorate of Public Protection press officer	2
Ministry of Telecommunication and Technology employees	1
Head of a religious council	2
Head of the Central Bank financial resolution commission	2
Religious preacher	1

Code	N
Profile of the location	
Public vehicle	27
District center	15
Highway	3
Market	5
On the street	11
Provincial council	6
Residential house	11
Security checkpoint	17
Workplace	5
Army ranger	1
Business institute	1
On the way home	4
On the way to hospital	1

Finding 2: The theme of ordinariness showed that terrorism was portrayed as a constant threat to civilians, government officials and the military who were targeted in ordinary and unexpected places. This demonstrated the use of indiscriminate violence by terrorists that created uncertainty and fear as attacks were unpredictable that could happen to anyone, anywhere, at any time.

4.1.3 Theme 3: The presence of a known but invisible enemy

The data identified that the Taliban was framed as the enemy responsible for the terrorist attacks and casualties. Therefore, the codes of the profiles of the perpetrators, framing of responsibility, news frames and Taliban presence were grouped to form a theme named the presence of a known but invisible enemy.

A review of the data found that in more than half the news stories, Taliban were explicitly held responsible for the attacks, and they were described as ‘criminals’, ‘militants’ and a group that commits ‘war crimes’ and ‘terrorist activities’, e.g.,

(a) Zia Vedan, a spokesperson and two employees of the Public Protection Directorate have been killed in an explosion in the eighth district of Kabul. ... Interior Ministry spokesman Tariq Arian said a car carrying Zia Vedan, a spokesperson for the Public Protection Department, was hit by a mine as he was on his way to work. ... Tariq Arian has said that the use of improvised explosive devices and mines is a war crime, and that the Taliban are responsible for these crimes and killings. The Interior Ministry spokesperson stressed that the Taliban's "criminal" act would not go unanswered. Tariq Arian added that those arrested so far in connection with the recent attacks

have made it clear in their confessions that they are members of the Taliban.

(b) According to the Ministry of Defense, one child was killed, and another was seriously injured when a rocket fired by the Taliban hit the Gizab district of Uruzgan province. ... The Ministry of Defense says that the Taliban is the main cause of civilian casualties in the country. The group has inflicted huge financial losses and casualties on civilians by committing suicide attacks, explosions and terrorist activities. The ministry acknowledges that Taliban violence has increased recently.

The Taliban, however, rarely acknowledged responsibility for the attacks. Only two instances were found where they claimed to have inflicted more casualties on army forces, e.g.,

Local sources in Ghazni province say that six army forces have been killed as a result of the attack by a Taliban infiltrator in Ghazni city. ... Mr Jamradwal added that another army force has been injured as a result of the shooting by the Taliban infiltrator. ... Meanwhile, the third Brigade of the 203rd Thunder Corps in Ghazni issued a statement saying that two members of the army have been killed, and five others wounded in the incident. ... The Taliban claimed in a news release that seven soldiers have been killed and five another wounded in the attack.

In some instances, the attacks were not claimed by any group. The attacker was described as an unknown gunman. However, the Taliban was implicitly suggested to be behind the attacks by referring to the previous similar attacks conducted by them or their presence and instabilities in the area, e.g.:

The army forces in the north of the country confirm that two female soldiers have been killed due to the shooting of unknown gunmen on the vehicle of these forces in Mazar-e-Sharif city, the capital of Balkh province. ... The spokesperson of the 209th Shaheen Corps added that the attackers were two people who fled the area after the shooting. No individual or group has claimed responsibility for the attack. Balkh in the north of the country, and Taliban fighters have a large presence and activity in the relatively insecure province.

News stories were also reviewed in terms of episodic and thematic frames, which originated in political communication research. An episodic frame is distinguished by its focus on single isolated events without contextual explanations. A thematic frame places the news event in the broader context and tries to understand the events' political, social, economic and cultural consequences (Iyengar, 1996). As seen in Table 7 below, episodic frames dominated the coverage of terrorist attacks in Afghan newspapers. The focus was primarily on a single terrorist attack and the perpetrators were linked to the Taliban. The news stories did not discuss the causes, political

dimensions and consequences of the attacks. However, references were made to previous similar attacks that did not establish any thematic frame of importance. Additionally, the news stories were factual based reporting (descriptive), providing answers to four classical journalistic 'w' questions: what, who, when, and where, unlike the interpretive style that focuses on explaining why an event occurred, e.g.,

Kabul police confirms that unknown individuals have killed a young prosecutor in the fifth district of Kabul. According to the Kabul police, the incident occurred at 8:20 AM on Monday, the 18th of Hout, on the fifth street of a company belonging to the fifth district. This prosecutor is named Mirwais Samadi. No individual or group has claimed responsibility for this incident. Police say they have begun an investigation. Targeted explosions and assassinations in Kabul have occurred frequently in Kabul in recent months. First Vice President Amrullah Saleh says the Taliban are behind the targeted assassinations, which he says are the most aimless and senseless killings. According to him, the Taliban initially tried to hide the blame for the assassinations, but there is undeniable evidence that the group was involved.

Table 7

List of codes and sub-codes related to known but invisible theme

Code	N
Attribution of responsibility	
Implicit	14
Explicit	61
Profile of the killer	
Unknown gunmen	17
Taliban	55
Specified by the type of attack	31
News frames	
Episodic	102
Thematic	0
Reference to the presence of Taliban	50

Finding 3: The primary finding for this theme reveals that both newspapers engaged in episodic coverage of terrorist-related events. By focusing on a single terrorist attack, the Taliban were blamed and held responsible for the terrorist attacks and casualties. Therefore, the presence of a known but invisible enemy showed that the Taliban could be present anywhere and attack anyone at any time.

4.1.4 Theme 4: Religion

The theme of religion was created from the code of religion, which aimed to explore the explanations in the news from a religious perspective. Because Afghanistan's war has always been touted as an ideological and political war (Nojumi, 2002), and the Taliban have purported themselves to be defenders of Islam (Johnson et al., 2018), it seemed reasonable that religion would be a topic in the news articles. A data review found no religious explanations in the news published in Hasht-e-Subh newspaper. However, there was only one news article in EtilaatRoz, where the attacks were condemned and said to be against Islamic rules, e.g.,

The Supreme Court confirms that unknown gunmen have assassinated two female judges in the 10th district of Kabul. Supreme Court spokesperson Ahmad Fahim Qawim ... said that the driver of the female judges was also injured in the incident. ... No arrests have been made in connection with the incident. Also, no person or group has yet taken responsibility for it. The presidential palace, however, has issued a statement implicitly attributing it to the Taliban. The statement condemned the attack, saying it was against Islamic guidance and the spirit of peace and was contrary to the Afghan people's consensus. The Presidential Palace has said that "force", "terror", and "crime" are not the solution to the problem and called on the Taliban to show a practical commitment to peace by accepting a permanent ceasefire.

4.2 Summary of key findings

The results provide important insights and answer the main research question of 'How is terrorism framed by two key Afghan newspapers?'. The findings show that terrorism was framed through four key themes: magnitude, ordinariness, the presence of a known but invisible enemy, and religion.

The magnitude theme showed how terrorist attacks were described as dramatic killings through keywords (e.g., explosions, shootings, armed attacks). In describing these attacks, the government and security officials were used as sources of information to establish credibility as they were perceived to be authorities who could be trusted to give an objective opinion on the topic.

The ordinariness theme depicted terrorist attacks as a constant threat to ordinary people, including civilians, government officials and armed government forces, who were killed in ordinary places, such as the market, residential homes and vehicles.

The theme of the ongoing presence of a known but invisible enemy framed the Taliban as responsible for terrorist attacks and casualties. They were portrayed as the enemy difficult to distinguish, who could be present anywhere and attack anyone at any time.

The theme of religion showed that terrorist attacks were portrayed as being against Islamic principles. However, considering Afghanistan's war has always been regarded as religious and ideological, the newspapers gave little attention to reporting on terrorist attacks from a religious perspective.

These findings are further explained and discussed in relation to the current literature and theories in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The main goal of this study was to investigate how Afghan mainstream media frame terrorism. The overarching question was how terrorism is framed by two key Afghan newspapers. This study believes that answer to the research question can offer valuable country-specific insights into how the media report terrorism in Afghanistan.

This study undertakes one of the first investigations into how terrorism is framed by the Afghan media, a rarely explored topic. This study provides a baseline for further studies. Additionally, from a theoretical perspective, this research expands the study of framing theory. It is hoped that this research helps to show how terrorism is reported by the media, and ideally, this would help policymakers make informed decisions.

A reflexive thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2019) identified four themes (magnitude, ordinariness, the presence of a known but invisible enemy, and religion) in framing terrorism by two key Afghan newspapers published from January to March 2021. These themes were discovered by grouping the codes found in the data, searching for patterns between codes to find candidate themes, and looking for the meaning behind them to identify the final themes.

The findings of this study focus on key topics, news frames and themes in relation to framing theory and terrorism studies (as outlined in Chapter 2). The last section of the chapter concludes the findings of this study and presents their significance while acknowledging the study's limitations, along with key recommendations for future studies.

The following section provides answers to each research question based on the results. It also describes how the answers to each research question are supported by the studies and theories reviewed in chapter two. Framing theory is used as an overarching theory in interpretation of the findings.

5.1 RQ1: What are the dominant topics in framing terrorism by the Afghan newspapers?

In order to investigate how two key Afghan newspapers framed terrorism, this study first explored dominant topics used in framing terrorism. Entman (1993) defines framing as a process through which aspects of an issues are highlighted to construct an argument about the issue, its causes and solutions. Consistent with this definition, the results of this study highlighted that terrorism was framed as a problem and explained

through the type of terrorist attacks (e.g., explosions, shootings, armed attacks, hostage-taking, firing mortar shells). The impact of terrorism was also highlighted through the civilians and military casualties, and the responsibility of the attacks were attributed to the Taliban (see 5.2 for further explanation). Both newspapers drew attention to terrorism as anti-state violence and the Taliban as the perpetrators. However, the newspapers did not provide any solutions to tackling terrorism in Afghanistan. A possible explanation for this might be that terrorism has been a recurrent issue for the past 20 years and terrorism is argued to be a product of regional and international interventions (Runion, 2012; Underhill, 2014; Kumar, 2021; Shweta, 2022; Barfield, 2010; Wahab & Youngerman, 2010). Thus, offering solutions to terrorism is challenging as the issue is out of Afghan government's control to tackle successfully. Another explanation could be that the news can only offer a brief report of recent events, and more detailed versions of the events are presented in analyses, opinions or editorials, where questions like how and why are answered.

A key finding of this study was that both Afghan newspapers linked the perpetrators to the Taliban and identified them as unknown gunmen affiliated with the Taliban. They were also described as terrorists, militants and criminals. This finding is contrary to Powell's (2011) study, where the US newspapers framed the perpetrators of domestic terrorist attacks as lone lunatics with anti-government sentiments. It also contradicts a study of Norwegian media where that the perpetrators of terrorist attacks were described as lone lunatics (Falkheimer & Olsson, 2015). Both the studies did not define the perpetrators as terrorists. Instead, they were framed as mentally ill people. By contrast, this study revealed that the Afghan newspapers were explicit in framing the Taliban as militants and terrorists and holding them responsible for the attacks. This difference may be explained by the fact that the media rely on news sources' frames. In many cases, these sources are government officials who act as agenda-setters and tend to offer frames in favour of the governments' agendas (Entman, 2003; Ryan, 2004; Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2005).

An analysis of frames used by the Afghan media revealed that terrorism in Afghanistan indiscriminately targeted civilians, armed government forces and government officials. Military and government officials as targets of terrorism and terrorists' tactics were not covered by the NATO (2020) definition employed in this study. Therefore, this study suggests that the definition by NATO may need to be reconsidered to include civilians, armed government forces and government officials as targets of indiscriminate violence by non-state actors.

As mentioned above, the victims of terrorist attacks were all people of Afghanistan from January to March 2021. Given the Taliban introduce themselves as protectors of Islam (Johnson et al., 2018) and claim to fight enemies of Islam (Hussaini & Morris, 2020), it is questionable why they targeted Afghan people, who are Muslims. Keeping this in mind, religion was selected as a code to see if any news article explained terrorist attacks from an Islamic perspective or the relation between Islam and terrorism. Contrary to expectations, little was found regarding religion being discussed in terrorism news articles. This might be due to the nature of hard news that is usually based on facts, presenting information about serious and hard-hitting issues. However, the researcher's experience and background, as a former Afghan journalist, suggests that religion is a well-discussed topic in Afghan media, especially television, where political analysts have argued that the Taliban use a flawed interpretation of Islam as a convenient legitimisation to further political agendas that extend beyond Afghanistan. Their ideologies and policies are considered an affront to basic human values. Afghan political experts believe that radical Islamist groups (such as the Taliban) are used as proxies of external powers to destabilise the region, using Afghanistan as a significant piece in their chessboard of political games.

5.2 Research question 1b: How are the terrorism topics framed by the Afghan newspapers?

The second research question explored how terrorism topics were framed by two Afghan newspapers. The analysis revealed that responsibility and episodic were the two frames that emerged. Framing of responsibility is defined as the attribution of causes and responsibility of events to either internal or external factors (Hallahan, 1999). The findings confirm the use of responsibility frames where the Taliban were held responsible for the terrorist attacks in Afghanistan. This was done explicitly by directly blaming the Taliban for the attacks as well as implicitly by referring to previous attacks conducted by the Taliban and their presence in the area where the attack happened. This finding supports Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) study, which argued that the responsibility frame is the most used frame by the media in covering political and terrorism news.

Additionally, the findings showed the extensive use of episodic frames in covering terrorist attacks, which is consistent with that of Iyengar's (1996). The author argued that episodic frames are used to cover long-term recurring issues and present them in the form of specific events that tend to "elicit individualistic rather than societal attribution of responsibility" (Iyengar, 1996, pp. 15-16). In this study, the coverage of terrorist attacks was characterised by extensive use of a descriptive style of journalism

and episodic frames that focused on the attacks and introduced the Taliban as the cause of casualties and destruction. The Afghan newspapers may have used episodic frames as a strategy to elicit individualistic attribution of responsibility and introduce the Taliban as the responsible group. Frames associated with this strategy play a major role in how groups responsible for terrorism are perceived. However, a lack of context, analysis, and references to causes, effects and political motives behind attacks may potentially undermine the complexity of terrorism in Afghanistan.

A major finding of this study was that the newspapers mainly relied upon government and security officials as news sources. Security officials, including police and army spokespersons, were the most used sources, followed by government officials, such as members of the provincial council, the governor and members of parliament. This finding is consistent with many studies that contend that the news media tend to preferentially represent and reinforce frames constructed by political and government executives (Entman, 1991; Jasperson & Kikhia, 2003; Carpenter, 2007; Reese & Lewis, 2009; Ryan, 2004). The sources consistently used responsibility frames and identified the Taliban as the group responsible for terrorist attacks. While government and security authorities were suitable news sources, due to the relevant information they possess regarding terrorist attacks, they may also offer frames aligned with the government's policy. Consequently, the episodic frames adopted by the newspapers and those offered by news sources in coverage of terrorism in Afghanistan may have influenced society's perception of terrorism and the Taliban as the enemy. This topic is worthy of more research where experimental studies can examine the impact of news frames on the public.

5.3 Research question 1c: What are the key themes used by Afghan newspapers in framing terrorism?

The third research question explored the themes used in framing terrorism. The data analysis identified four themes used by the Afghan newspapers in framing terrorism: magnitude, ordinariness, the presence of a known but invisible enemy, and religion. As discussed in chapter four, magnitude described the types and significance of the terrorist attacks; ordinariness demonstrated how the civilians and military were targeted at ordinary places; the presence of a known but invisible enemy identified the Taliban as the group responsible for terrorist attacks; and religion presented the terrorist attacks against Islamic rules. Both newspapers consistently portrayed terrorism as a constant threat to civilians and the military and identified the Taliban as the perpetrators. Highlighting this fact in every news piece tends to create fear among Afghan people. Therefore, fear was identified as the overarching theme. This finding

aligns with Woods' (2011) study, where the author argued that news frames impact the public perception of the threat of terrorism depending on how the attacks and perpetrators are portrayed. In the case of Americans, fear was heightened when terrorist attacks were linked to Islamic religious extremism.

Similarly, linking terrorist attacks to the Taliban terrorised Afghan people from an enemy who used various asymmetric warfare tactics, from target killing of civilians and government officials and mass casualty bombings to skirmishing against army units. Two factors seemed to further elevate this fear: firstly, the perpetrators were difficult to distinguish from ordinary people as the Taliban originated from Afghan people (further explained in chapter two). Secondly, the perpetrators could be present in immediate surroundings and strike anytime, illustrating that nobody and nowhere was safe. As shown by the results in chapter four, the Taliban killed judges, journalists, peace activists, women in positions of power, and military and government officials. They used indiscriminate violence against Afghan civilians and the military, employing various strategies, such as infiltrating the police and army unit, shooting the targets, and planting magnetic mines (usually at night, according to the researcher's knowledge). The researcher's understanding also suggests that the perpetrators were rarely arrested. The fact that terrorists carried out terrorist attacks and fled across the border further increased fear among Afghan people.

The findings showed extensive media attention to terrorist attacks by Afghan newspapers over three months. This can be explained by the fact that terrorism possesses elements sympathetic to news values, such as relevance, drama and general newsworthiness. Scholars contend that news values play an important role in identifying, selecting and presenting news (Staab, 1990; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001, 2017; Bednarek & Caple, 2014). The findings showed that Afghan media framed terrorism through magnitude, ordinariness, the presence of a known but invisible enemy, and religion. While magnitude and ordinariness can be argued as news values, the presence of a known but invisible enemy and religion are considered aspects of news stories highlighted by the newspapers. Previous studies have identified magnitude as news values (Harcup & O'Neil, 2001, 2017). However, none of the studies reviewed in chapter two identified ordinariness as news values. It seems reasonable for ordinariness to be identified as a news values in media coverage of terrorism in Afghanistan, considering Afghan civilians have been the targets of lethal terrorist attacks. Given most news values studies are conducted outside Afghanistan, it can be a valuable research topic to investigate which news values are employed by Afghan media.

Another significant finding was that 82 terrorist attacks took place in three months, from January to March 2021, approximately seven attacks per week. This suggests that terrorism news received significant media attention, highlighting that terrorism has been at the top of media agenda-setting. Rogers and Dearing (1988) define media agenda-setting as a process where the news media communicates the importance of various issues to the public (Rogers & Dearing, 1988). Research has shown that the amount of media coverage (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) and how it is framed (Woods, 2011; Brinson & Stohl, 2012) influence public opinion on the issues. Afghan civilians were frequently exposed to violence and conflict through the news media. This promotes the ongoing threat and inevitability of Taliban-perpetuated terrorism among the Afghan people. It can possibly lead to acceptance of terrorism and even create a sense of passivity and helplessness among Afghans that undermines their fight against terrorism and any invading nation. Conversely, two decades of terrorism in Afghanistan and indiscriminate violence against civilians can also provoke the civilian population into a violent reaction against terrorist groups. Further studies are needed to determine whether and to what extent terrorism incites civil violence and retaliation against terrorist groups in Afghanistan.

5.4 Conclusion

The study set out to investigate how two key Afghan newspapers framed terrorism. It attempted to discover key topics, frames and themes in the coverage of terrorism. By applying reflexive thematic textual analysis to terrorism news articles, this study identified a number of key findings that are important in understanding how Afghan media report terrorism. This study contributes to framing research, and it is useful as a baseline for further studies on terrorism in Afghanistan.

As the analyses in chapter four indicate, both newspapers mainly used episodic and responsibility frames and described terrorism as anti-state violence perpetrated by the Taliban. While using episodic frames may serve as a strategy to elicit individualistic attribution of responsibility, a lack of context, political motives and references to causes and effects of terrorism in Afghanistan may undermine the issue's complexity.

Both newspapers gave extensive coverage of terrorist attacks. The results showed that 82 terrorist attacks took place over three months, from January to March. This suggested that covering terrorist attacks was at the top of media agenda-setting. This supported the media agenda-setting and news values theories, where the media cover terrorism due to its newsworthiness and communicate the issue's importance to the public.

The analysis identified four themes in coverage of terrorism: magnitude, ordinariness, the presence of a known but invisible enemy, and religion. Magnitude described terrorism through types of attacks: target assassinations, armed attacks, hostage-taking, firing mortar shells and explosions. Ordinariness demonstrated how civilians, government officials, and the military were indiscriminately killed by the Taliban in ordinary places. The presence of a known but invisible enemy identified the Taliban as the group responsible for terrorist attacks. The Taliban were described as comprising militants, terrorists and criminals. Religion described terrorist attacks as against Islamic values. While the themes above were identified to be part of every terrorism news, religion was found to receive little attention in reporting of terrorist attacks by the newspapers.

The newspapers consistently portrayed terrorism as a constant threat to Afghan people, creating fear from an enemy who used various tactics, from target-killing civilians and government officials to mass casualty bombings and skirmishing against army units. Consequently, fear was identified as an overarching theme in the coverage of terrorist attacks in Afghanistan as the enemy was difficult to distinguish and the attacks were unpredictable.

This study used the NATO definition to identify and analyse terrorist attacks. However, the analysis of frames used by the Afghan media revealed an aspect of terrorism not included in NATO's definition. Therefore, based on the findings, it is suggested that the definition of terrorism by NATO may need to be reconsidered to include civilians, armed government forces and government officials as targets of indiscriminate violence by non-state actors.

5.5 Recommendations for future research

This study opens avenues and possibilities for further research. Firstly, future studies can address the limitations of this study by including several print or broadcast media, or a combination of both and investigating how different media portray terrorism in Afghanistan. It is also recommended that future studies investigate news articles, opinions, editorials and reports on terrorism. Secondly, a comparative study of the US and Afghan media adopting a mixed quantitative and qualitative method could provide fresh insights into media coverage of war and terrorism in Afghanistan. Prior comparative studies across different nations have revealed media bias in covering terrorist attacks in various countries. Considering the US intervention in Afghanistan, it would be important to look into how the US media portray terrorism in Afghanistan differently than the Afghan media and explore the possible explanations and implications of such coverage. A question that could be asked includes whether the US

government's perspective and foreign policies influence the US media portrayal of terrorism in Afghanistan or vice versa. The researcher recommends the 'Hierarchy of Influences' model proposed by Shoemaker and Reese (1996, 2014) as a theoretical framework for this topic. This model explains that news is shaped by forces internal and external to media organisations and explores the news production process within larger political, social and economic structures and how these forces, ranging from micro to macro levels, influence the news. The current study started off to be a comparison between US and Afghan newspapers. However, it proved difficult due to the challenges in obtaining the US newspaper. Therefore, the study was redesigned by focusing on Afghan media. Finally, a comparative study of the Taliban and al-Qaeda/ISIS's portrayal by the US media can be an important topic to investigate and what it tells us about the role of the media in influencing our understanding of significant issues.

5.6 Limitations of the study

While the findings of this study are robust, there may be some limitations in this study that future studies can address. Firstly, considering the scope of this study, the sample size was limited to two newspapers for three months. Future studies can investigate terrorism across several Afghan media over extended periods. A second limitation is that the study only included news articles related to terrorism published on the first two pages of the newspapers and excluded analysis, opinions, editorials and reports. Future research can also investigate whether or not different media in Afghanistan provide a unified narrative in portraying terrorism and look into possible explanations of such coverage.

A third limitation is that there may be unconscious subjectivity in parts of the research as the researcher (as a former Afghan journalist) has been too close to terrorism perpetrated by foreign powers and has felt helpless witnessing Afghan people being brutally slain. She was impacted by terrorism, suffered the loss of friends and coworkers, and ultimately had to flee the country twice. Efforts were made to eliminate the subjectivities she felt in completing this research. However, some scholars contend that subjectivities can be viewed as virtuous and resourceful because they lay the groundwork for the researcher to make a unique contribution by being actively involved in data interpretation, using their social, cultural, ideological and theoretical knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Braun et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, the researcher tried to maintain an objective position and eliminate bias by applying strategies throughout the research process (outlined in chapter 3). The strategies included selecting terrorism-related news based on the NATO definition of

terrorism (2020), having an immigration officer whose mother tongue was Persian check the news articles' translation from Persian to English, using the deductive-inductive coding method, and double-coding first in Excel Spreadsheets and then in NVivo to ensure consistency, reliability, and validity. Overall, the researcher strived to eliminate bias and subjectivity by constantly identifying, monitoring and reflecting on every phase of the research process, including data collection, research design and data analysis.

Researchers may find this nascent research helpful to build upon and choose content or discourse analysis rather than the broader thematic analysis used in this study to create a baseline of research in this area. Additionally, framing theory was selected as a theoretical framework of this study because it is widely used in previous studies, fits well with the research data, and allows for an investigation of media frames covering terrorism and the interpretations it encouraged. However, future studies may gain depth from focusing on other mass communication theories, such as new values and agenda setting, and adopt different data collection methods (e.g., interviews with journalists and editors).

Readers may find this study both too simple and too complex because terrorism in Afghanistan is a complex issue, and the media coverage is restricted to what, how, who, where and when of the terrorist attacks. Nevertheless, it is believed that the findings will contribute to the broader topic of media and terrorism. It is also hoped that this study provides a baseline that encourages further studies that can delve into the topic of terrorism in Afghanistan.

References

- Allern, S. (2002). Journalistic and commercial news values: News organizations as patrons of an institution and market actors. *Nordcom Review*, 23(1), 137-152. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242189101_Journalistic_and_Commercial_News_Values_News_Organizations_as_Patrons_of_an_Institution_and_Market_Actors
- Aljazeera. (2022). *US withdrawal prompted Afghan army collapse: Report*. Retrieved May 18, 2022, from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/18/us-withdrawal-prompted-collapse-of-afghan-army-report>
- Alharahsheh, H. H., & Pius, A. (2020). A review of key paradigms: Positivism vs interpretivism. *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(3), 39-43. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338244145_A_Review_of_key_paradigms_positivism_VS_interpretivism
- Archetti, C. (2013). *Understanding terrorism in the age of global media: A communication approach*. Palgrave Macmillan London.
- Baden, C. (2020). Framing the news. In K. Wahl-Jorgensen, & T. Hanitzsch (Eds.), *The handbook of journalism studies* (2nd ed. pp. 229-245). Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group.
- Barfield, T. (2010). *Afghanistan: A cultural and political history*. Princeton University Press: Princeton & Oxford.
- Bednarek, M., & Caple, H. (2014). Why do news values matter? Towards a new methodological framework for analysing news discourse in critical discourse analysis and beyond. *Discourse and Society*, 25(2), 135-158. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926513516041>
- Bernstein, R. (1983). *Beyond objectivism and relativism: Science, hermeneutics, and praxis*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Boston University. (n.d.). *Why study Persian (Farsi)?* <https://www.bu.edu/wll/home/why-study-persian/>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. J. Sher (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological research designs: Vol. 2.* (pp. 57–71). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/13620-004>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. Sage.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2014). Thematic analysis. In T. Teo (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of critical psychology* (pp. 1947-1952). Springer.

- Braun, V., Clarke, V., Hayfield, N., & Terry, G. (2019). Thematic analysis. In P. Liamputtong (Ed.), *Handbook of research methods in health sciences* (pp. 843-860). Springer.
- Brighton, P., & Foy, D. (2007). *News values*. Sage.
- Brinson, M. E., & Stohl, M. (2012) Media framing of terrorism: Implications for public opinion, civil liberties, and counterterrorism policies. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 5(4), 270-290.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17513057.2012.713973>
- Brown, J. D. J. (2013) Oil fueled? The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 29(1), 56-94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2013.778543>
- Brown University. (2021). *Costs of war*.
<https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/figures/2021/WarDeathToll>
- Carpenter, S. (2007). US elite and non-elite newspapers' portrayal of the Iraq war: A comparison of frames and source use. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 84(4), 761-776. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900708400407>
- Coleman, R., McCombs, M., Shaw, D., & Weaver, D. (2009). Agenda setting. In K. Wahl-Jorgensen, & T. Hanitzsch (Eds.), *The handbook of journalism studies* (pp. 147-160). Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group.
- Combs, C. C. (2018). *Terrorism in the twenty-first century* (8th ed.). Routledge.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *Foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Sage.
- Dearing, J. A., & Rogers, E. M. (1996). *Agenda setting*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Deetz, S. A., Tracy, S. J., & Simpson, J. L. (2000). *Leading organisations through transition*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Dimitrova, D. V., & Strömbäck, J. (2005). Mission accomplished? Framing of the Iraq war in the elite newspapers in Sweden and the United States. *Gazette: The International Journal for Communication Studies*, 67(5), 399-417.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0016549205056050>
- Dorransoro, G. (2009, October 22). *Who are the Taliban?* Carnegie endowment for international peace. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2009/10/22/who-are-taliban-pub-24029>
- Entman, R. M. (1991). Framing U.S. coverage of international news: Contrasts in narratives of the KAL and Iran air incidents. *Journal of Communication*, 41(4), 6-27. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1991.tb02328.x>
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51-58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>
- Entman, R. M. (2003). Cascading activation: Contesting the White House's frame after 9/11. *Political Communication*, 20(4), 415-432.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600390244176>
- EtilaatRoz. (n.d.). *About Etilaat-e-Roz newspaper*. <https://www.etilaatroz.com/about/>

- EtilaatRoz. (n.d.). *About*. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/8am.media>
- Fahmy, S. (2010). Contrasting visual frames of our times: A framing analysis of English- and Arabic-language press coverage of war and terrorism. *The International Communication Gazette*, 72(8), 695-717. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048510380801>
- Falkheimer, J., & Olsson, E. K. (2015). Depoliticizing terror: The news framing of the terrorist attacks in Norway, 22 July 2011. *Media, War and Conflict*, 8(1), 70-85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635214531109>
- Freedom House. (2021). *Afghanistan*. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/afghanistan/freedom-world/2021>
- Galtung, J., & Ruge, M. H. (1965). The structure of foreign news: The presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus crises in four Norwegian newspapers. *Journal of Peace Research*, 2(1), 64–90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336500200104>
- Gamson, W. A. (1989). News as framing: Comments on Graber. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 32(2), 157-161. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764289033002006>
- Global Terrorism Index. (2022). *Measuring the impact of terrorism*. Institute for Economics and Peace. <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/GTI-2022-web-09062022.pdf>
- Goffman, E. (1986). *Fra me analysis: An essay on the organisation of experience*. Northeastern University Press Edition. (Original work published 1974).
- Gray, D. E. (2018). *Doing research in the real world* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). Sage.
- Hallahan, K. (1999). Seven models of framing: Implications for public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 11(3), 205-242. https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjpr1103_02
- Harcup, T., & O'Neill, D. (2001). What is news? Galtung and Ruge revisited. *Journalism Studies*, 2(2), 261-280. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700120042114>
- Harcup, T., & O'Neill, D. (2017). What is news? News values revisited (again). *Journalism Studies*, 18(12), 1470-1488. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1150193>
- Hasht-e-Subh Daily. (n.d.). *About*. <https://8am.af/eng/about/>
- Hasht-e-Subh Daily. (n.d.). *About*. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/8am.af>
- Hennek, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2020). *Qualitative research methods* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications Ltd.
- Hoffman, B. (2017). *Inside terrorism* (3rd ed.). Columbia University Press.
- Hussaini, S., & Morris, T. (2020). The Taliban's information war. *Journal of Information Warfare*, 19(4), 89-109. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/27033647>

- Iyengar, S., & Simon, A. (1993). News coverage of the Gulf crisis and public opinion: A study of agenda-setting, priming and framing. *Communication Research*, 20(3), 365-383. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365093020003002>
- Iyengar, S. (1996). Framing responsibility for political issues. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 546, 59-70. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1048170>
- Jasperson, A. E., & Kikhia, M. O. (2003). CNN and al Jazeera's media coverage of America's war in Afghanistan. In P. Noris, M. Kern, & M. Just (Eds.), *Framing terrorism: The news media, the government and the public* (pp. 113-132). Routledge.
- Johnson, T. H., DuPee, M., & Shaaker, W. (2018). *Taliban Narratives: The use and power of stories in the Afghanistan conflict*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190840600.003.0002>
- Khalvatgar, A. M. (n.d.). *Afghanistan*. Media Landscapes: Expert analysis of the state of the media. <https://medialandscapes.org/country/afghanistan>
- Kiras, J. D. (2020). Terrorism and globalization. In J. Bylis, S. Smith, P. Owens (Eds.), *The globalisation of world politics: An introduction to international relations* (8th ed, pp.449-465). Oxford University Press
- Korkodinov, D. (2019). *Afghanistan's geostrategic importance*. World Geostrategic Insight. <https://wgi.world/afghanistan-s-geopolitical-importance/>
- Kumar, Y. (2021). *Geopolitics in the era of globalisation: Mapping an alternative global future*. Routledge.
- Maanen, J. V. (1979). Reclaiming qualitative methods for organizational research: A preface. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24(4), 520-526. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2392358>
- Maher, T. M. (2001). Framing: An emerging paradigm or a phase of agenda-setting. In S. D. Reese, O. H. Gandy, & A. E. Grant (Eds.), *Framing public life: Perspectives on media and our understanding of the social world* (pp 83-94). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Mahendrarajah, S. (2015). Saudi Arabia, Wahhabism, and the Taliban of Afghanistan: 'Puritanical reform' as a 'revolutionary war' program. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 26(3), 383-407. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2014.982883>
- Martín, M. A. B. (April, 2011). *Analysis document of the IEEE 12/2011: Geopolitical analysis of Afghanistan*. Ministry of Defense. https://www.ieee.es/en/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2011/DIEEEA12-2011_Geopolitica_AFganistan_GBBallesteros_ENGLISH.pdf
- McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176-187. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2747787>
- McCombs, M., & Ghanem, S. I. (2001). The Convergence of Agenda Setting and Framing. In S. D. Reese, O. H. Gandy, & A. E. Grant (Eds.), *Framing public life: Perspectives on media and our understanding of the social world* (pp. 67-81). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

- McCombs, M. (2015). Agenda setting: Effects on. In J. D. Wright (Ed.). *International encyclopedia of the social & behavioral sciences* (2nd ed. pp. 351-356). Elsevier Health Sciences. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.95007-4>
- McQuail, D., & Deuze, M. (2020). *McQuail's media and mass communication theory* (7th ed.). Sage.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass: A Wiley Brand.
- Merriam, S. B., & Grenier, R. S. (2019). *Qualitative research in practice* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass: A Wiley Brand.
- Mills, J., Bonner, A., & Francis, K. (2006). The development of constructivist grounded theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(1), 25-35. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500103>
- Mojtahed-Zadeh, P. (2017). Knowing Afghanistan: Can there be an end to the saga: geopolitical alternative on how to settle this self-inflicted wound of the west in the east. *International Studies Journal (ISJ)*, 13(4), 63-76. https://www.isjq.ir/article_91111_0670233bc88288c12096ca83ce2ce153.pdf
- NATO. (2020). Counter-terrorism reference curriculum. NATO Graphics and Printing. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/6/pdf/200612-DEEP-CTRC.pdf
- Nelson, T. E., Clawson, R. A., & Oxley, Z. M. (1997). Media framing of a civil liberties conflict and its effect on tolerance. *The American Political Science Review*, 91(3), 567-583. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2952075>
- Neuman, W. L. (2014). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (7th ed.). Pearson Education Limited.
- Nickerson, C. (2019). Media portrayal of terrorism and Muslims: a content analysis of Turkey and France. *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 72, 547-567. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-019-09837-6>
- Norris, P., Kern, M., & Just, M. (2003). Framing terrorism. In P. Norris, M. Kern, & M. Just (Eds.). *Framing terrorism: The news media, the government and the public* (pp. 3-26). Routledge.
- Nojumi, N. (2002). *The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan: Mass mobilization, civil war, and the future of the region*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lee, J. L. (2018). *Afghanistan: A history from 1260 to the present*. Reaktion Books Ltd
- Linschoten, A. S. & Kuehn, F. (2018). *The Taliban reader: War, Islam and politics in their own words*. Oxford University Press..
- Lim, J., & Seo, H. (2009). Frame flow between government and the news media and its effects on the public: Framing of North Korea. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 21(2), 204-223. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edp011>
- Papacharissi, Z., & Oliveira, M. F. (2008). News frames terrorism: A comparative analysis of frames employed in terrorism coverage in U.S and U.K newspapers. *The International Journal of Press and Politics*, 13(1), 52-74. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161207312676>

- Powell, K. A. (2011). Framing Islam: An analysis of U.S. media coverage of terrorism since 9/11. *Communication Studies*, 62(1), 90-112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2011.533599>
- Rashid, A. (2010). *Taliban: Militant Islam, oil and fundamentalism in Central Asia* (2nd ed). Yale University Press.
- Reese, S. D., & Lewis, S. C. (2009). Framing the war on terror: The internalisation of policy in the US press. *Journalism*, 10(6), 777-797. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884909344480>
- Rogers, E. M., & Dearing, J. W. (1988) Agenda-setting research: Where has it been, where is it going?. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 11(1), 555-594, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.1988.11678708>
- Runion, M. L. (2012). *The history of Afghanistan*. Greenwood Press.
- Ryan, M. (2004). Framing the war against terrorism: US newspaper editorials and military action in Afghanistan. *International Communication Gazette*, 66(5), 363-382. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0016549204045918>
- Schreier, M. (2012). *Qualitative content analysis in practice*. Sage.
- Schwandt, T. A. (1998). Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human inquiry. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues* (pp. 221-259). Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232477264_Constructivist_Interpretivist_Approaches_to_Human_Inquiry
- Scheufele, D. A. (1999). Framing as a theory of media effects. *Journal of Communication*, 49(1), 103-122. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1999.tb02784.x>
- Schmid, A. P. (2011). The definition of terrorism. In A. P. Schmid (Ed). *The Routledge handbook of terrorism research* (pp.39-99). Routledge.
- Schiller, K., & Uradnik, K. (2011). Afghanistan war in. In K. Uradnik, L. A. Johnson, & S. Hower (Eds.), *Battleground: Government and politics* (Volume 1, pp. 18-27). Greenwood.
- Semetko, H. A., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2000). Framing European politics: A content analysis of press and television news. *Journal of Communication*, 50(2), 93-109. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2000.tb02843.x>
- Shilliam, R. (2020). Race in world politics. In J. Bylis, S. Smith, & P. Owens (Eds.), *The globalisation of world politics: An introduction to international relations* (8th edition, pp- 287-300). Oxford University Press.
- Shoemaker, P. J., & Reese, S. D. (1996). *Mediating the message: Theories of influences on mass media content* (2nd ed.). Longman Publishers.
- Shoemaker, P. J., & Reese, S. D. (2014). *Mediating the message in the 21st century: A media sociology perspective* (3rd ed.). Routledge: Francis and Taylor Group.
- Shweta. (2022). *Reimagining Afghanistan: Geostrategic engagement with major powers*. Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs. <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2913910/reimagining-afghanistan-geostrategic-engagement-with-major-powers/>

- Silverman, D. (2017). *Doing qualitative research* (5th ed.). Sage.
- Spooner, B. (2012). Persian, Farsi, Dari, Tajiki: Language names and language policies. In H. F. Schiffman (Ed.), *Language policy and language conflict in Afghanistan and its neighbors: The changing politics of language choice* (Vol 2, pp. 89-117). Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004217652_005
- Staab, J. F. (1990). The role of news factors in news selection: A theoretical reconsideration. *European Journal of Communication*, 5(4), 23-443. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323190005004003>
- Stewart, E. 2021. *The history of US intervention in Afghanistan, from the Cold War to 9/11: How American meddling shaped life in Afghanistan*. Vox. <https://www.vox.com/world/22634008/us-troops-afghanistan-cold-war-bush-bin-laden>
- The World Factbook. (2022). *Afghanistan*. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/afghanistan/>
- The World Bank. (2022). *Literacy rate, adult total (% of people ages 15 and above) - Afghanistan*. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.ZS?locations=AF>
- Thomas, C. (2021, June 11). *Afghanistan: Background and the US policy*. Congressional Research Service. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45122>
- Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1981). The framing of decision and psychology of choice. *Science*, 211(4481), 453–458. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.7455683>
- Underhill, N. (2014). *Countering global terrorism and insurgency: Calculating the risk of state failure in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq*. Palgrave Macmillan London.
- Vine, D., Coffman, C., Khoury, K., Lovasz, M., Bush, H., Leduc, R., & Walkup, J. (2020, September 21). *Creating refugees: Displacement caused by the United States' post-9/11 wars*. Brown University. https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2020/Displacement_Vine%20et%20al_Costs%20of%20War%202020%2009%2008.pdf
- Wahab, S., & Youngerman, B. (2010). *A brief history of Afghanistan* (2nd ed). Facts On File.
- Weaver, D. H. (2007). Thoughts on agenda setting, framing, and priming. *Journal of Communication*, 57(1), 142-147. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00333.x>
- Weinberg, L., Pedahzur, A., & Hirsch-hoefler, S. (2004). The challenges of conceptualizing terrorism. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 16(4), 777-794, <https://doi.org/10.1080/095465590899768>
- Woods, J. (2011). Framing terror: An experimental framing effects study of the perceived threat of terrorism. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 4(2), 199-217. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2011.586205>

Appendices

Appendix A1: Hasht-e-Subh front and editorial pages



نیمه‌شب‌های هرگند

مردم بیدار و بولیس در خواب!

بررسی ویژه صبح خدای سرحد که باطنی شش‌هنگامه بسیاری از مناطق مرزبان و نیروهای مرزبان شهر هرگند، حضور آوازه برایشان و بسیاری از آن‌ها در وضعیت خوب قرار گرفته. برنده شایسته جوایز است. حضور نیروهای پاسدار در این مناطق، نه تنها امنیت را در این مناطق حفظ می‌کند، بلکه بسیاری از مردم را در این مناطق به خواب آورده است. در این مناطق، مردم به خواب می‌روند و بولیس‌ها در این مناطق به خواب می‌روند. در این مناطق، مردم به خواب می‌روند و بولیس‌ها در این مناطق به خواب می‌روند.

برگزاری وزیر صحت

تقابل تازه‌ای میان غنی و نور شکل گرفته است

تجزیات ترابانه سبب مرگ افراد زیادی در ۲۰ هفته بودعاه شده است

گرفتار در خصومت، ویران در جنگ

باستان در این شهر با وجود همه سختی‌ها و درد آزارهای اخیرش از بسیاری از مناطق ایران متعلق به استان خراسان است. در این شهر، مردم به خواب می‌روند و بولیس‌ها در این مناطق به خواب می‌روند.



فریشت کابل و مرگد زمین

اگر در حال فریشت است، با این فریشت که این شهر پس از مرگد، فریشت را می‌تواند به خواب می‌روند و بولیس‌ها در این مناطق به خواب می‌روند.

واقعه‌های ۲۰ سال پسین افغانستان برای ملکان لابل هشتم و ترک نیست

لیله بیبی

صبح آفتاب بر سر این شهر می‌تابد. در این شهر، مردم به خواب می‌روند و بولیس‌ها در این مناطق به خواب می‌روند.

به بیان چینی از بی سواد بگد معان زغال سنگ در مسکن گشته شد

صبح آفتاب بر سر این شهر می‌تابد. در این شهر، مردم به خواب می‌روند و بولیس‌ها در این مناطق به خواب می‌روند.

داتالیا امداد هواپیمایی

انتقال مریضان با خدمات ویژه به گنور هندوستان

سرویس‌های پرواز به گنور هندوستان.





رئیس جمهور بید صلاحیت‌هایش را درست اعمال کند

تاسیس یوزا به رأی مجلس ادامه‌دار و سپس ابطال استناد و حل آن با صلاحیت‌های رئیس جمهور است. این صلاحیت در بند هفده ماده دستورالعمل قانون اساسی به رئیس جمهور سپرده شده است. هرچند در بند اول ماده شصت دستورالعمل قانون اساسی آمده است که رئیس جمهور در این صلاحیت‌ها باید به صلاحیت‌های خود عمل کند. طبق ماده شصت و یک قانون اساسی، رئیس جمهور می‌تواند در موارد خاص به مقامات قضایی، قضایی و سایر مقامات دولتی و غیردولتی، دولتی و غیردولتی، داخلی و خارجی، اکتفا کند.

رئیس جمهور در موارد خاص می‌تواند به مقامات دولتی و غیردولتی، دولتی و غیردولتی، داخلی و خارجی، اکتفا کند. این صلاحیت در بند هفده ماده دستورالعمل قانون اساسی به رئیس جمهور سپرده شده است. هرچند در بند اول ماده شصت دستورالعمل قانون اساسی آمده است که رئیس جمهور در این صلاحیت‌ها باید به صلاحیت‌های خود عمل کند.

رئیس جمهور در موارد خاص می‌تواند به مقامات دولتی و غیردولتی، دولتی و غیردولتی، داخلی و خارجی، اکتفا کند. این صلاحیت در بند هفده ماده دستورالعمل قانون اساسی به رئیس جمهور سپرده شده است. هرچند در بند اول ماده شصت دستورالعمل قانون اساسی آمده است که رئیس جمهور در این صلاحیت‌ها باید به صلاحیت‌های خود عمل کند.

رئیس جمهور در موارد خاص می‌تواند به مقامات دولتی و غیردولتی، دولتی و غیردولتی، داخلی و خارجی، اکتفا کند. این صلاحیت در بند هفده ماده دستورالعمل قانون اساسی به رئیس جمهور سپرده شده است. هرچند در بند اول ماده شصت دستورالعمل قانون اساسی آمده است که رئیس جمهور در این صلاحیت‌ها باید به صلاحیت‌های خود عمل کند.

رئیس جمهور در موارد خاص می‌تواند به مقامات دولتی و غیردولتی، دولتی و غیردولتی، داخلی و خارجی، اکتفا کند. این صلاحیت در بند هفده ماده دستورالعمل قانون اساسی به رئیس جمهور سپرده شده است. هرچند در بند اول ماده شصت دستورالعمل قانون اساسی آمده است که رئیس جمهور در این صلاحیت‌ها باید به صلاحیت‌های خود عمل کند.

رئیس جمهور در موارد خاص می‌تواند به مقامات دولتی و غیردولتی، دولتی و غیردولتی، داخلی و خارجی، اکتفا کند. این صلاحیت در بند هفده ماده دستورالعمل قانون اساسی به رئیس جمهور سپرده شده است. هرچند در بند اول ماده شصت دستورالعمل قانون اساسی آمده است که رئیس جمهور در این صلاحیت‌ها باید به صلاحیت‌های خود عمل کند.

رئیس جمهور در موارد خاص می‌تواند به مقامات دولتی و غیردولتی، دولتی و غیردولتی، داخلی و خارجی، اکتفا کند. این صلاحیت در بند هفده ماده دستورالعمل قانون اساسی به رئیس جمهور سپرده شده است. هرچند در بند اول ماده شصت دستورالعمل قانون اساسی آمده است که رئیس جمهور در این صلاحیت‌ها باید به صلاحیت‌های خود عمل کند.

رئیس جمهور در موارد خاص می‌تواند به مقامات دولتی و غیردولتی، دولتی و غیردولتی، داخلی و خارجی، اکتفا کند. این صلاحیت در بند هفده ماده دستورالعمل قانون اساسی به رئیس جمهور سپرده شده است. هرچند در بند اول ماده شصت دستورالعمل قانون اساسی آمده است که رئیس جمهور در این صلاحیت‌ها باید به صلاحیت‌های خود عمل کند.

رئیس جمهور در موارد خاص می‌تواند به مقامات دولتی و غیردولتی، دولتی و غیردولتی، داخلی و خارجی، اکتفا کند. این صلاحیت در بند هفده ماده دستورالعمل قانون اساسی به رئیس جمهور سپرده شده است. هرچند در بند اول ماده شصت دستورالعمل قانون اساسی آمده است که رئیس جمهور در این صلاحیت‌ها باید به صلاحیت‌های خود عمل کند.

رئیس جمهور در موارد خاص می‌تواند به مقامات دولتی و غیردولتی، دولتی و غیردولتی، داخلی و خارجی، اکتفا کند. این صلاحیت در بند هفده ماده دستورالعمل قانون اساسی به رئیس جمهور سپرده شده است. هرچند در بند اول ماده شصت دستورالعمل قانون اساسی آمده است که رئیس جمهور در این صلاحیت‌ها باید به صلاحیت‌های خود عمل کند.

رئیس جمهور در موارد خاص می‌تواند به مقامات دولتی و غیردولتی، دولتی و غیردولتی، داخلی و خارجی، اکتفا کند. این صلاحیت در بند هفده ماده دستورالعمل قانون اساسی به رئیس جمهور سپرده شده است. هرچند در بند اول ماده شصت دستورالعمل قانون اساسی آمده است که رئیس جمهور در این صلاحیت‌ها باید به صلاحیت‌های خود عمل کند.

رئیس جمهور در موارد خاص می‌تواند به مقامات دولتی و غیردولتی، دولتی و غیردولتی، داخلی و خارجی، اکتفا کند. این صلاحیت در بند هفده ماده دستورالعمل قانون اساسی به رئیس جمهور سپرده شده است. هرچند در بند اول ماده شصت دستورالعمل قانون اساسی آمده است که رئیس جمهور در این صلاحیت‌ها باید به صلاحیت‌های خود عمل کند.

رئیس جمهور در موارد خاص می‌تواند به مقامات دولتی و غیردولتی، دولتی و غیردولتی، داخلی و خارجی، اکتفا کند. این صلاحیت در بند هفده ماده دستورالعمل قانون اساسی به رئیس جمهور سپرده شده است. هرچند در بند اول ماده شصت دستورالعمل قانون اساسی آمده است که رئیس جمهور در این صلاحیت‌ها باید به صلاحیت‌های خود عمل کند.

ولی ننگرها: ۱۸ عضو طالبان به شمول فرماندهان و شهروندان خارجی در حمله هوایی در پنج‌شنبه کشته شدند



اعضای و فرماندهان ۱۸ نفری طالبان در یک حمله هوایی در پنجشنبه کشته شدند. این حمله در منطقه شمال غربی کابل انجام شد. طالبان در این حمله تعداد زیادی از اعضای خود را از دست دادند. همچنین تعدادی از شهروندان خارجی نیز در این حمله کشته شدند. مقامات طالبان اعلام کردند که این حمله بخشی از عملیات نظامی آنها در منطقه است.



یکه فعل منعی در شهر کابل آشوب شد

اصحیح کابل، خانه جاعت / افعال منعی و لایحه طالبان نشان بر می‌دهند. بارها در خانه جاعت شو کابل / منعی استعدادهای فنی کشته شدند. پولیس کابل این رویداد را تهدید می‌داند. قریباً ۱۰۰ نفر در این حمله کشته شدند. جاعت در منطقه شمال غربی کابل واقع شده است. این حمله در روز پنجشنبه انجام شد. مقامات طالبان اعلام کردند که این حمله بخشی از عملیات نظامی آنها در منطقه است.

سه تن در نتیجه انفجاری در قندهار زخمی شدند



اصحیح، قندهار، در نتیجه یک انفجار در شهر قندهار سه تن زخمی شدند. انفجار در یک مغازه کوچک در منطقه مرکزی شهر رخ داد. زخمی‌شدگان در حال حاضر در بیمارستان‌های محلی بستری شده‌اند. مقامات محلی اعلام کردند که این انفجار بخشی از عملیات تروریستی است.

۱۰ بیمار کرونایی در شبانه‌روز گذشته در کشور جان باختند



اصحیح کابل، طبق اعلام وزارت صحت عامه در کشور، ۱۰ بیمار کرونایی در کشور جان باختند. همچنین ۱۰ بیمار جدید نیز تشخیص داده شدند. وزارت صحت عامه اعلام کرد که این موارد بخشی از روند بهبودی کشور است. مقامات اعلام کردند که سیستم بهداشتی کشور در حال حاضر در کنترل وضعیت است.

دکتران ریومند در یونان از چنگ آمریکایی جانم تابه شدند



اصحیح، یونان، سربازان آمریکایی در یونان از چنگ آمریکایی جانم تابه شدند. دو پزشک ایرانی که در یونان بستری شده بودند، اخیراً آزاد شدند. مقامات ایرانی اعلام کردند که این دو پزشک در حال بازگشت به کشور هستند. این رویداد بخشی از تنش‌های دیپلماتیک بین ایران و آمریکا است.

Appendix B1: References of analysed articles from dataset by headlines

Table A1. Hasht-e-Subh articles between January and March 2021

#	Date	Newspaper outlet	Location (front/ editorial page)	Headline
1	1/2	Hasht-e-Subh	2	A civil activist has been assassinated in Kabul
2	1/2	Hasht-e-Subh	2	Three people have been wounded as a result of explosion in Kandahar
3	1/4	Hasht-e-Subh	2	Explosion in Kapisa; Five have been killed and nine others have been injured
4	1/6	Hasht-e-Subh	1	Gunmen on motorcycles shot two people in the center of Kapisa
5	1/9	Hasht-e-Subh	2	Ghorian district police chief of Herat province has been killed
6	1/11	Hasht-e-Subh	1	A spokesperson and two staff members of the Public Protection Directorate have been killed in an explosion in Kabul
7	1/11	Hasht-e-Subh	2	An explosion in Ghazni leaves one dead and two injured
8	1/12	Hasht-e-Subh	2	One security force and three civilians have been killed in two incidents in Faryab
9	1/12	Hasht-e-Subh	2	Fire in the market of Raghistan district of Badakhshan due to mortar attack
10	1/13	Hasht-e-Subh	2	A Kabul Bank employee has been assassinated in downtown Ghazni
11	1/13	Hasht-e-Subh	2	Two female soldiers have been killed in an armed attack in Balkh province
12	1/16	Hasht-e-Subh	2	An explosion in Kabul leaves one civilian dead
13	1/16	Hasht-e-Subh	2	A car bomb blast in Ghazni; a driver has been killed and seven others wounded
14	1/17	Hasht-e-Subh	1	A young woman has been killed and 11 others injured when a mortar shell hit residential houses in Herat
15	1/17	Hasht-e-Subh	2	Unidentified gunmen kill two policemen in Nangarhar
16	1/17	Hasht-e-Subh	2	The assailants' attack on the National Security Workshop ended after four hours
17	1/18	Hasht-e-Subh	2	The Taliban has killed a police soldier at his home in Kapisa
18	1/18	Hasht-e-Subh	2	The explosion of seven car bombs executed by the Taliban in Faryab has left 12 dead and 35 wounded in the past month
19	1/20	Hasht-e-Subh	2	A motorcycle bomb blast in Trincot leaves 10 people injured
20	1/23	Hasht-e-Subh	2	A child has been killed by a Taliban rocket in Gizab

#	Date	Newspaper outlet	Location (front/editorial page)	Headline
				district of Uruzgan
21	1/25	Hasht-e-Subh	1	An attack on the car carrying the head of the Central Bank's financial dispute resolution commission in Kabul leaves one person dead.
22	1/26	Hasht-e-Subh	2	Unknown gunmen kill a preacher in Parwan
23	1/27	Hasht-e-Subh	2	An explosion in Kabul leaves one person dead
24	1/31	Hasht-e-Subh	2	A national security official has been killed in an explosion in Kaldar district of Balkh province
25	1/31	Hasht-e-Subh	2	A roadside mine in Kandahar has killed three civilians
26	2/2	Hasht-e-Subh	2	A mine explosion in Kabul targets the car carrying the head of the government ministry's office for peace
27	2/2	Hasht-e-Subh	2	A bomb blast in Kabul leaves two people dead and one injured
28	2/3	Hasht-e-Subh	1	Unknown individuals set fire to the Peace and Freedom Business Institute in Nangarhar
29	2/6	Hasht-e-Subh	2	Sixteen government forces have been killed in a Taliban attack in Khan Abad district of Kunduz province
30	2/9	Hasht-e-Subh	2	Four civilians have been killed in a shooting and landmine explosion in Balkh
31	2/13	Hasht-e-Subh	2	An explosion in Parwan leaves four people injured
32	2/16	Hasht-e-Subh	2	The Taliban abducts a number of workers at the Pashdan Dam in Herat
33	2/23	Hasht-e-Subh	2	The bodyguard and driver of Herat Deputy National Security have been killed
34	2/27	Hasht-e-Subh	1	A journalist's family members have been shot dead in Ghor
35	2/28	Hasht-e-Subh	2	A blast in Kabul leaves one dead and two others injured
36	3/13	Hasht-e-Subh	2	The blast in Ghazni leaves one dead and 11 injured
37	3/9	Hasht-e-Subh	2	A prosecutor has been killed by unknown people in Kabul
38	3/15	Hasht-e-Subh	2	Two explosions in Kabul; three has been killed and 12 others injured
39	3/27	Hasht-e-Subh	2	An explosion in a house in Baghlan province has killed at least one person
40	3/27	Hasht-e-Subh	1	The Taliban have taken 14 civilians hostage in Jalrez
41	3/28	Hasht-e-Subh	2	A security official has been killed in Kabul
42	3/28	Hasht-e-Subh	2	The head of the police command of Sangin district of Helmand province has been killed
43	3/28	Hasht-e-Subh	2	The Taliban attack on Kandahar's Arghistan district

#	Date	Newspaper outlet	Location (front/ editorial page)	Headline
				leaves casualties
44	3/29	Hasht-e-Subh	1	A pregnant woman has been killed in an armed attack in Kandahar and her baby has been injured before birth
45	3/30	Hasht-e-Subh	1	Three army troops have been killed in Kapisa
46	3/31	Hasht-e-Subh	2	Three female vaccinators have been killed in two armed attacks in Nangarhar

Appendix B2: References of analysed articles from dataset by headlines

Table A2. EtilaatRoz articles between January and March 2021

#	Date	Newspaper outlet	Front/ editorial page	Headline
1	1/2	EtilaatRoz	2	A leading member of the Afghan Sunni Hazara Council has been assassinated in Kabul
2	1/2	EtilaatRoz	2	Unknown gunmen attack a house in Parwan; The mother has been killed and the son has been injured
3	1/2	EtilaatRoz	2	The director of the Voice of Ghor radio has been assassinated
4	1/4	EtilaatRoz	2	An explosion targeting Kapisa Ulema chairman's car kills five and injures nine others
5	1/6	EtilaatRoz	2	Six army personnel have been killed in a Taliban's infiltrator attack in Ghazni
6	1/9	EtilaatRoz	2	Taliban attack in Herat; Ghorian police chief has been killed along with three other policemen
7	1/9	EtilaatRoz	2	Five border policemen have been killed in a Taliban attack in Kunduz
8	1/10	EtilaatRoz	2	The Taliban kills the wife of an army soldier in Sar-e Pol
9	1/11	EtilaatRoz	2	Explosion in Ghazni city; At least one civilian has been killed and two others have been injured
10	1/11	EtilaatRoz	2	Hostage-taking in "Qarabagh" of Ghazni continues; The Taliban have abducted four civilians
11	1/11	EtilaatRoz	2	Explosion in Kabul; Three people included press officer of the National Directorate of Public Protection have been killed
12	1/12	EtilaatRoz	2	Nine army soldiers have been killed in Farah
13	1/13	EtilaatRoz	2	Unknown gunmen shoot at an army vehicle in Balkh; Two female soldiers have been killed
14	1/13	EtilaatRoz	2	The Taliban has assassinated a Kabul Bank employee in Ghazni
15	1/16	EtilaatRoz	2	A civilian and eleven soldiers have been killed in a Taliban attack in Kunduz
16	1/16	EtilaatRoz	2	A car bomb blast in Ghazni has killed at least one person and injured seven others
17	1/17	EtilaatRoz	2	Twelve people's uprising forces have been killed in Ghorian district of Herat
18	1/17	EtilaatRoz	2	A roadside bomb blast in Baghlan kills one person and injures two others
19	1/17	EtilaatRoz	2	Two police soldiers have been killed by unknown assailants in the city of Jalalabad
20	1/18	EtilaatRoz	2	Two female judges have been assassinated by unknown gunmen in Kabul

#	Date	Newspaper outlet	Front/ editorial page	Headline
21	1/19	EtilaatRoz	2	Four members of people's uprising forces have been killed in a Taliban attack in Badakhshan
22	1/20	EtilaatRoz	2	Ten people, including a journalist, have been injured in an explosion in Uruzgan
23	1/23	EtilaatRoz	2	Taliban mortar attack kills a child in Uruzgan
24	1/24	EtilaatRoz	2	One policeman has been killed and two others have been injured in an attack by gunmen in Herat
25	1/25	EtilaatRoz	2	Explosion on a car carrying the Head of Financial Dispute Resolution of the Central Bank leaves one dead and two others injured
26	1/25	EtilaatRoz	2	Six army personnel have been wounded in Taliban attacks in Balkh
27	1/31	EtilaatRoz	2	A roadside bomb blast kills three civilians in Kandahar
28	2/1	EtilaatRoz	2	Mortars hit by Taliban at Almar Faryab market; Two have been killed and 14 others injured
29	2/2	EtilaatRoz	2	Explosion on an army vehicle in Kabul; One soldier and one civilian have been killed
30	2/3	EtilaatRoz	2	Taliban attack on security checkpoint in Kunduz city; Four policemen and five Taliban have been killed
31	2/6	EtilaatRoz	2	Kunduz Provincial Council: 16 security forces have been killed in a Taliban attack in Khan Abad
32	2/8	EtilaatRoz	2	Taliban shot dead Quds district development council chairman
33	2/9	EtilaatRoz	2	Nine government forces have been killed in Taliban attacks in Badghis, Ghor and Herat
34	2/10	EtilaatRoz	2	Four guards of Khaf-Herat railway have been killed in a mine explosion
35	2/16	EtilaatRoz	2	The Taliban have abducted 11 workers in Herat Dam
36	2/17	EtilaatRoz	2	Seven policemen have been killed in a mine explosion planted by Taliban in Faryab
37	2/22	EtilaatRoz	2	A mine blast in Helmand has killed one person and injured 15 others
38	2/23	EtilaatRoz	2	Asiya Kha Kabad security checkpoint in Jalal-e-Yazd district of Maidan Wardak falls to Taliban
39	2/27	EtilaatRoz	2	Three family members of Bismillah Adel Aimaq, the former director of Radio Sada-e Ghor, have been shot dead
40	2/28	EtilaatRoz	2	A member of the Nangarhar Provincial Council has been injured in a landmine explosion
41	2/28	EtilaatRoz	2	A bomb blast in Kabul has killed one person and injured two others
42	3/1	EtilaatRoz	2	Explosion in Ghazni city; One person has been killed and seven others injured
43	3/2	EtilaatRoz	2	An explosion in Jawzjan kills one and injures three others
44	3/3	EtilaatRoz	2	Three female employees of the private television

#	Date	Newspaper outlet	Front/ editorial page	Headline
				"Inekas " have been assassinated in Nangarhar
45	3/6	EtilaatRoz	2	Taliban infiltration attack on police station in Uruzgan leaves one dead and one wounded
46	3/7	EtilaatRoz	2	The head of the Helmand National Security Prosecutor's Office has been killed in an explosion
47	3/8	EtilaatRoz	2	A female police officer has been injured in a shooting by unknown individuals in Helmand and her husband has been killed
48	3/9	EtilaatRoz	2	Ten police soldiers have been killed in a Taliban attack in Balkh
49	3/9	EtilaatRoz	2	Unknown gunmen kill a prosecutor in Kabul
50	3/13	EtilaatRoz	2	The commander of the 1st Brigade of the 205th Atal Corps has been killed
51	3/13	EtilaatRoz	2	A prosecutor has been assassinated in central Paktia province
52	3/14	EtilaatRoz	2	The death toll from Friday night's explosion in the city of Herat rises to eight dead and 54 wounded
53	3/16	EtilaatRoz	2	In a mine explosion on a car carrying employees of the Ministry of Communications, 15 civilians have been injured
54	3/17	EtilaatRoz	2	Taliban attack on a car carrying professors and students of Baghlan University; The driver and a student have been killed
55	3/27	EtilaatRoz	2	Hostage-taking of civilians in Jalrez; Nine people have been released and nine others are still being held hostage by the Taliban
56	3/29	EtilaatRoz	2	Roadside bomb blasts in Helmand and Herat leave five dead and seven injured

Appendix C1: Sample of coding in Spreadsheets (Hasht-e-Subh)

Issue no	Article no	Religion	Authority	Dramatic killings	Profile of the victims	Profile of the perpetrators	Profile of the location	Framing of responsibility	Taliban presence	News frames
3511	Article 1	n/a	Police spokesperson	Explosion	Killed – Civil activist – Male - Civilian	Unknown gunmen	On the road	Unspecified	n/a	Episodic
	Article 2	n/a	Police spokesperson	Explosion	2 policemen (military) – a child (civilian) - injured	Specified by type of the attack	On the road	Implicit	Reference to the recent Taliban's attacks	Episodic
3513	Article 3	n/a	Police spokesperson	Magnetic mine explosion	Killed: 5 civilians Injured: 9 including Head of the Kapisa Ulema - Male	Specified by type of the attack	Vehicle	Unspecified	n/a	Episodic
3515	Article 4	n/a	Police spokesperson	Shooting	Killed: 2 people including a body guard - male	Gunmen on motorcycles	City centre	Unspecified	n/a	Episodic
3516	Article 5	n/a	Police spokesperson	Armed attack	Killed: military including the district police chief - male	Group attack by Taliban assailants	District centre	Explicit	✓	Episodic
3518	Article 6	n/a	Ministry of Interior Affairs spokesperson	Mine explosion	Killed: Spokesperson & 2 employee of the public protection Directorate – Injured: 1 civilians - Male	Specified by type of the attack	Vehicle	Explicit	✓	Episodic

Issue no	Article no	Religion	Authority	Dramatic killings	Profile of the victims	Profile of the perpetrators	Profile of the location	Framing of responsibility	Taliban presence	News frames
	Article 7	n/a	Police spokesperson	Mine explosion	Killed: 1 Injured: 2 – civilians - male	Taliban	Market	Explicit	n/a	Episodic
3519	Article 8	n/a	Police spokesperson	Shooting and firing a mortar shell	Killed: 1 security force – 3 civilians Injured: 9 civilians - male	Taliban assailants	Market & residential home	Explicit	n/a	Episodic
	Article 9	n/a	Police spokesperson	Firing mortar shell	n/a	Taliban	Market	Explicit	✓	Episodic
3520	Article 10	n.an	Police spokesperson	Shooting	Killed: a bank employee, male, civilian	Taliban	On the road	Implicit	✓	Episodic
	Article 11	n/a	Army spokesperson	Armed attack	Killed: 2 women army members Injured: a driver, male civilian	Unknown gunmen	Army vehicle	Unspecified	n/a	Episodic

Appendix C2: Sample of coding in Spreadsheets (EtilaatRoz)

Issue no	Article no	Religion	Authority	Dramatic killings	Profile of the victims	Profile of the perpetrators	Profile of the location	Framing of responsibility	Taliban presence	News frames
2060	Article 1	n/a	Police spokesperson	Shooting	Killed: a member of Hazara council, male, civilian	Unidentified gunmen	District centre	n/a	n/a	Episodic
	Article 2	n/a	Police spokesperson + eyewitness	Shooting	Killed: a woman Injured: a young boy Civilians	Unidentified gunmen	Residential house	n/a	n/a	Episodic
	Article 3	n/a	Police spokesperson	Shooting	Killed: managing director of a radio station, male, civilian	Unidentified gunmen	Provincial capital	n/a	n/a	Episodic
2062	Article 4	n/a	Police spokesperson	Magnetic mine explosions	Killed: 5 civilians Injured: 5 others (male)	n/a	Vehicle	Implicit	Reference to the presence of the Taliban	Episodic
2064	Article 5	n/a	Police spokesperson	Shooting	Killed: 6 military Injured: 5 others (male)	Taliban	Security checkpoint	Explicit	✓	Episodic
2065	Article 6	n/a	Police spokesperson + unnamed security source	Armed attack	Killed: police commander with 3 policemen (male)	Taliban	District centre	Explicit	✓	Episodic

Issue no	Article no	Religion	Authority	Dramatic killings	Profile of the victims	Profile of the perpetrators	Profile of the location	Framing of responsibility	Taliban presence	News frames
	Article 7	n/a	Provincial council	Armed attack	Killed: 5 military Injured: 3 policemen (male)	Taliban	Security checkpoint	Explicit	✓	Episodic
2066	Article 8	n/a	Police spokesperson	Armed attack	Killed: a woman (wife of a local army officer)	Taliban	Residential house	Explicit	✓	Episodic
2067	Article 9	n/a	Police spokesperson + local source	Mine explosions	Killed: 1 civilian Injured: 2 others	Taliban	Market	Explicit	✓	Episodic

Appendix D: Research output: AUT's 3MT Master's winner

What do we know about terrorism in Afghanistan?

What comes to mind when you hear the word terrorism? What we think we know about terrorism depends in part on how the issue is framed by the media as terrorism now dominates the headlines across the world from Kabul to Auckland. In an era of increased terrorist attacks, one cannot think of a more important subject than the media's framing of terrorism as it plays an important role in shaping the public understanding of terrorism as well as counterterrorism and countries' foreign policies. Numerous communication scholars studied the topic across different media outlets and nations yet there is no research about media framing of terrorism in Afghanistan, a country most impact by terrorism since 2001. All we know about terrorism in Afghanistan is the picture depicted by international news media, which I, as a former journalist and a refugee, think is an outside view that not only lacks details but also it may be small in scale and impact. Therefore, this is the very first research that aims to present how terrorism is framed by the Afghan mainstream media.

My methodology involves Reflexive Thematic Analysis of two key Afghan newspapers over three months period from January to March 2021, analysed through framing theory.

The results showed that Afghan newspapers used three key themes in framing terrorism. The first theme showed how terrorism-related news was framed as magnitude through words such as bomb blasts, shootings and armed attacks to evoke dramatic images of the attacks. Magnitude was also identified through news stories attributed to authoritarian sources, such as the government and security officials. The second theme, ordinariness, framed terrorism as an ongoing threat to ordinary civilians and the military, who were targeted in ordinary places, for example, in their own houses and vehicles. The third and final theme framed the Taliban as the known but invisible enemy responsible for the terrorist attacks and casualties in Afghanistan. Overall, this research revealed that Afghan newspapers presented terrorism and the Taliban as the constant threat responsible for the indiscriminate killing of tens of thousands of ordinary civilians and armed forces in Afghanistan. However, the question remains, why has terrorism gained momentum in Afghanistan despite the military presence of the US and its allies' and their so called 'war on terror'? And that is the question for my PhD project.

Link to 3MT video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwLkXDG6roY>

