Extensions to Audience Cost Theory and the Roles of Old and New Media in the Channeling of Street Protests by East Asian Governments

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In reporting street protests, traditional media retains its central role in framing narratives of competent government power in contrast to newer media closer to the movements. Using theories of “audience costs” – originally positing that democratic regimes face domestic penalties for going back on their word internationally, making them more formidable negotiating partners – I argue that media structure rather than regime type determines government ability to make use of protests, with a common semi-free structure composed of chaotic new media rubbing up against regime compliant old media making for similar effects. This study first looks at the 2012 China anti-Japanese demonstrations: several days of chaos followed by an propaganda ministry-enforced anti-Japanese boycott protest theme as seen through microblog keyword blocks. Further synergistic contention between stories on new media serving as call to action and later channelling in print is shown by not only the similar autocratic example of the 2014 Vietnam anti-Chinese protests but also democratic Taiwan’s Sunflower Movement. In Taiwan, however, media fragmentation has loosened the grip of such channeling, and this combined with idiosyncratic social factors will lead to this type of control becoming increasingly difficult.

Audience Costs

Theories of audience costs, which originally posited that democratic regimes would face a domestic penalty for going back on their word in international negotiations, and thus, as this would be understood by counterparts, would make them more formidable negotiating partners (Fearon, 1994), have been extended beyond their original remit in recent years. Most interestingly, autocratic regimes have been said to enjoy an audience costs dividend by using the signaling ability afforded by anti-foreign street protesters (Weiss, 2014). As a democracy has visible democratic mechanisms
and the threat of upcoming elections, an autocracy has low-to-medium level civil unrest broadcast around the world with the implicit threat of escalation resulting in revolution.

James Fearon’s article (1994) on audience costs – the domestic political costs of getting caught in a diplomatic bluff – has in the last twenty years spawned an entire field of scholarly literature. It was posited that threats issued by democracies are more credible as their domestic audience is stronger, thus facing the international situation head-on is an attractive option relative to paying the audience costs. This harkens back to Thomas Schelling’s description of the propensity for national representatives going to international negotiations to create a bargaining position by public statements calculated to arouse ‘a public opinion permitting no concessions to be made’ (1980), and the possibility that this generation of visible commitment may not be equally available to both democracies and autocracies.

Recently, however, this logic has been extended in many directions. Here I follow Slantchev (Slantchev, 2006) in pushing beyond the fixation on regime type, instead looking at possibilities for mainstream media channeling allowing protest use. This is found to be just as possible in a democracy as in an autocracy. While such real-world experiments are open systems and such assertions would perhaps be better tested with a large-n study of protests in general, I seek to illuminate a trajectory protests follow when media control is possible, and to show what type of gaps form when it is not – at least in part. These gaps are filled by new media in Taiwan, which provides fertile ground for their flourishing due to societal particularities and media structure.

Thus I wish to show that the possibility for use of street protest as the visible manifestation of costs is available in both authoritarian and democratic regimes: in China (2012 anti-Japanese protests – with reference to Vietnamese anti-China protest (2014) – and Taiwan (2014 Sunflower Movement). The Taiwan case shows the possibility for use in democracies exists but is fading with media environment fragmentation, and can perhaps be thought of as two cases operating in parallel.

**Beyond Negotiations in Considering Audience Costs**
As the diplomatic corps of democracies are helpfully constrained by what will be ratified by their respective parliaments, it is said that authoritarian regimes may be constrained by the street (Weiss, 2014), as if the counterpart government does not adopt a conciliatory posture which leads to the protests getting out of hand to the point of revolution, this would be likely to yield, after the resulting chaos, a new government more strident in its defense of the goals that were the subject of the protest. However, the extensions to Fearon’s original concept do not merely hinge on street protest – the logic has been extended to autocracies in general, noting that earlier theory underestimated the difficulties most autocrats face in corralling their public (Weeks, 2008). Though recent criticism has taken aim at the original logic’s requirement for explicit threats, which may indeed backfire by provoking the counterpart’s domestic audience by engaging their prestige (Trachtenberg, 2012), the extensions to audience cost literature have largely dispensed with this form, concentrating on the media as conduit and enabler of audience costs generation (Potter & Baum, 2010, 2014; Slantchev, 2006).

In the wake of a 2012 debate centred around an issue of Security Studies on the usefulness of the concept, I follow the example set by Mercer (2012) in using “audience costs” as an analytical lens rather than focusing on diplomatic gains. This acknowledges that government attempts to form a strategy are not monolithic and they succeed and fail for reasons that are inherently untestable. The usefulness of the theory thus lies far less in predictive power that in its ability to alert us to a broader desire of governments – and organizations in general – to seem credible in comparison to various audiences, whether domestic voters, belligerent counterparts, trade partners, or most likely, a combination of all three. To simplify: one amplifies threats that one is uniquely placed to allay. The state, with its monopoly on violence (Weber, 2004) is uniquely placed to dissuade, disperse, or suppress protesters – regime type, whether authoritarian, democratic, or hybrid, does not change this – with the exception of a totalitarian government such as North Korea’s where the protests would not be permitted, even tacitly, to begin with. Though it has been argued that “hybrid” regimes – managed democracies such as Russia – are particularly ripe for “managed” protest (Robertson,
2011), that is, protests that serve elite interests, I argue that all protest is managed and serves an elite function. A protest is simultaneously an exercise in empowerment for its participants, a business opportunity for the media, and a useful disturbance for some elites. The zero-sum negotiation between protester challengers and various arms of local or international governments may be the object of the protesters from the protester view. Once they exist, however, the usefulness of the disturbance for other reasons becomes a peri-battlefield with political actors ascribing – via the media and their being quoted therein – the meanings most useful to them, which invariably involve a privileging of the role they do or will play in restoring order.

While the above is a broad outline of what the usefulness of protests holds in common across regime types – essentially claiming that all regimes are on the hybrid scale and thus “useful” in Slantchev's schema (Slantchev, 2006) except for the totalitarian, it should be noted that differences remain: the risk of a protest escalating to violent revolution is more acute in authoritarian regimes, whereas violence in democratic regimes may be seen as remaining solidly within the realm of attention grabbing tactic. However, the tactic to be examined here is, again, not about success or failure – of the protesters toppling a government, or in the case of the broadcast constraint that protesters represent, the way in which the protesters are used for some sort of material gain, but rather aimed at simply painting the populace as unreasonable – unable to be bargained with. The greatest tool for doing so lies in violence. Not merely the fomenting and encouraging of protester violence, although this makes the tool easier to wield, but more importantly the portrayal of such violence in the media, which is how counterparts – whether domestic voters or counterpart governments – become aware of it. If a protester smashes a window, but nobody sees, was it ever smashed?

The Violence Frame Paradox

To garner news coverage, protesters must engage in unconventional action. However, it is difficult to engage in unconventional action and remain respected. Violence is generally denigrated: protest
carnivals are attended by drug-smoking hippies with magenta hair, or at least by the supposedly “immature” (Boykoff, 2006). The concept of “propaganda by the deed” (Brousse, 1877) is an old one, though has yet to attain general respectability, though it may work if increased media coverage is all one is after. If one is attempting to gain respectability for the group it is a poor choice. If the interests of elite sectors aligns with those of the protesters, however, as they do under conditions in which the government is negotiating internationally, then it can be understood that however much the government may condemn the protesters, that the constraint represented by the violent “mob” is welcomed in line with the logic of audience costs. Thus the government should attempt to have the focus on law and order, which requires the protesters to exist in the first place, and to be seen as destructive, but not taken seriously or seen as desirable as an alternative locus of power. This requires the protests to be effectively created as violent, and then unmade. I first show this in action in China, then in Taiwan.

**China: Egging On and Subsequent Suppression as Seen in Keyword Blocks**

At the time of the 2012 anti-Japanese protests, the platform of choice was Sina Weibo. Earlier microblog services had been shuttered at the time of the 2009 Urumqi riots (which also led to the DNS blocks of Facebook and Twitter), and Sina Weibo become the outlet of choice among the new microblogs that took their place, which were in turn the method of expression most likely to have collective action potential – by enabling cross-province networking (Huang & Sun, 2014).

Many keywords on Sina Weibo became blocked as the 2012 protests were pushed to become less chaotic and more ‘politically correct’ on September 17th (Wallace & Weiss, 2014) three days into the main protest wave which was initially characterized by a understanding-bystander police presence allowing for violence. This represents a compromise between the fear of chaotic collective action and the desire on the part of the Chinese authorities to be seen by the Japanese government as constrained by rabid nationalists – subject to audience costs. The message after this point is quite clear. While Sina Weibo keywords such as ‘anti-Japan’ and ‘smash car’ became blocked
(Henochowicz, 2012), ‘boycott Japanese goods’ became unblocked sometime between the 12th and the 17th of September (“Sensitive Sina Weibo Search Terms,” 2015). The term has gone unblocked ever since.

**Why a Boycott?**

China has so far been successful in skirting the ‘dictator’s dilemma’ (Boas, 2000) with regards to the internet – the government has harnessed its economic potential without being threatened with loss of central political control due to free flow of information. This has required a constantly fine-tuned filtering system. With confidence generated thereby in the ability to either ramp up or tamp down a protest as necessary, the Chinese government has found itself in the enviable position of being able to turn on a chaos faucet – anti-foreign protest – with which to scare Japan.

This does, however, require constant caution. Increasing competitiveness in the Chinese media environment can yield triggers for such protest to be more strident in its demands. With popular newspapers fighting over market share, protest events – and provocative incidents – are covered in sensationalist tones, focusing anger on Japan (Reilly, 2011). Further, it is always possible to pair something uncontroversial and unassailable like patriotism with grievances against the state.

Thus arises the need for careful theming when anti-foreign protests are used as tool. A boycott is perfect, as the Japanese government is perhaps most scared of another economic downturn. It should be seen as nothing more than a well-chosen tactic, however – “consumer nationalism” being picked from among all possible media frames (Wang, 2005). Most boycott campaigns have a message of reform or redemption (Pezzullo, 2011) – the rabid on the chaotic street are unlikely to think the Japanese are capable of being redeemed. It is merely of service as it ensures the situation will not escalate beyond the level useful for generating audience costs.

The Chinese government should be aware of the likelihood of eventually suppressing the protests without the aid of a concession by Japan which can be held up as a victory. Further, in line with the logic of prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), the longer the protests go on – all
else being equal – the larger the suppression costs. Due to the need to suppress, at issue is not only what may be conceded (now, or down the road) by a counterpart in an international dispute, but how dangerous it is to allow a protest demanding such things directly. It is more dangerous for something to be demanded if there is less likelihood of it being conceded, as this will merely serve to highlight the government’s impotence and without the victory claim require the government to suppress in a less clean manner, transferring the righteous anger to the government itself as in the aftermath of the 1985 anti-Japanese protests.

It is of course even more dangerous to demand something cutting to the heart of a pillar of the legitimacy of the state’s rule, such as sovereignty. This is why protests on the subject of Taiwan are unacceptable (Weiss, 2014).

The demand for a boycott skirts both dangers; its satisfaction is within the reach of the protesters themselves.

**Vietnamese Tacit Approval and Suppression**

Vietnam in 2014 follows a similar trend, with initial tolerance for violence followed by text messages from the Prime Minister days later “urging them to act in defence of the country’s sovereignty following China’s deployment of an oil rig in disputed waters, but said that ‘bad elements’ shouldn’t be allowed to engage in violence.” (“Vietnam PM urges nation to ‘defend fatherland’s sovereignty’ in row with China,” n.d.) In an understanding of the kind of bargaining pressure such actions can elicit, the violent imagery went suppressed in China until the Vietnamese clampdown began (“China’s Information Management in the Sino-Vietnamese Confrontation,” n.d.).

**In Democracy: Storming the Executive Yuan and the Use of Sunflower Movement Violence**

The case here used as example of the use of the violence frame in democratic regimes is the short occupation of the Executive Yuan during the March-April 2014 Sunflower Movement. On March
23, after four days of the occupation of the legislature in opposition to the government’s accelerated ratification of a trade agreement, some frustrated occupiers decided to escalate the situation by occupying the Executive Yuan, Taiwan's cabinet office. Whether this was by design or due to seeing an opportunity is up for debate, however the crackdown clearly veered in a violent direction, with some of the more than 500 wounded protesters suffering severe head injuries (Ho, 2015), with sixty-one arrested.

Some commentators have suggested that attempting to wait out the students in the Legislative Yuan, hoping they make a misstep (Liu, 2015) while leaving the Executive Yuan relatively unguarded and “tantalizingly vulnerable” (Batto, 2014) was an attempt to goad the students into the sorts of actions that could be painted as violent. While this worked to a degree and had a delegitimizing effect, as will be seen in the data presented below, overall support was regained due to various factors arising out of the Taiwanese context as well as tactical choices the students made to recover from this self-inflicted blow. In the end, the blow was less to popular support than to a split in Kuomintang leadership, which would have been helpful to the evolving movement (Ho, 2015).

**Difficulty of the Use of the Violence Frame in the Taiwanese Context**

There are two main difficulties in the Taiwanese context that created difficulties for the KMT government in, though not preventing, use of violence framing. The first is the elevated status that students hold when compared to Western countries, the second is the inherent elite split between the KMT and civil-society aligned forces that while generally DPP supportive have also veered towards independence from traditional party alignments in recent years due to perceived DPP impotence.

**Elite Split in Taiwan as Impeding the Violence Frame**

The experience under a Leninist martial-law regime for forty years split political actors in Taiwan into those who would continue the legacy of the regime and those that wished to wipe the slate
clean while remembering with distaste a time when their political action would have been severely punished. This is not limited to Taiwan. Spain, Portugal, and Latin America are also split between those that benefited from previous authoritarian social arrangements, seeing police clearing protesters as valid action – merely carrying out routine duty, and those that see certain scenes as reminiscent of “those experienced in Latin America in the 70s”, for example (Mac Sheoin, 2013).

This split is visible in the media, with the pan-green (largely pro-independence) Liberty Times' slant understandable even in such simple ways as the constant use of the term “China” when referring to the People's Republic rather than the far more common use of “mainland” as seen in the China Times and United Daily News (Chiang, Chiou, & Jinkins, n.d.). During the Sunflower Movement, the students were also aided by Wang Jin-pyng, the Speaker of the Legislative Yuan, who Ma attempted to expel from the party six months previously. Wang chose to use his control of the separate branch of government to refuse permission to clear the legislature of students.

These splits (though the unusual case of Wang cannot be considered systematic) weaken the protest paradigm whereby disagreement among elites creates opening for dissent (Herman & Chomsky, 2002) in mainstream media. However, with the rise of social media, social movements attempt to be as self-reliant as possible. This is turn creates unique discourse that is fed back into the mainstream media looking for ever increasing amounts of content which will be shared and pumped back into the social media system in a feedback loop.

**Social Media**

The “augmented revolution” (Jurgenson, 2012) speaks of the ability to quickly see one's audience, and thus to matter. One's impact is immediately viewable: likes, retweets, comments. One doesn't need to wait to physically hear one's opinion validated. This knowledge of the reach of one's dissent reproduction may seem to be particularly important in authoritarian regimes where one may be jailed for extended periods of time, as the likelihood of any one actor being jailed decreases with a rise in participation, but street protests in democratic regimes, while less dangerous, are still subject
to the same constraint (Khamis, Gold, & Vaughn, 2012). Though of course not all of those who click “going” on a Facebook event are indeed going to show up on the day, the mobilizing potential over relying solely on word of mouth or e-mail lists is exponentially better.

But more than the actual mobilization is the shift in news circulation, where social media use drives alternative media usage simply by serendipitously encountering it through trusted networks. Stories on alternative media can be reported on themselves by mainstream media outlets without adequate resources, thus content's existence elsewhere becomes the story. While this happens more commonly in tabloid newspapers that specialize in clickbait in their online editions – *Apple Daily* in Taiwan, this also shows up in the *China Times* and *Liberty Times*. An authoritarian regime such as China or Vietnam has the advantage of, while having a vibrant and trusted commercial media (Stockmann, 2013), sending out memos calling for use of only official sources when a sensitive topic is decreed.

**Alternative Media**

Social movements have been partially freed from the need for mainstream media engagement. This is especially true among the demographics that do not consume news sources whole – say watch a television news program or read a newspaper – but consume in a varied manner due to social media effects. This creates a space for alternative media to thrive as stories among others, and this is only augmented by the ability to subscribe to pages and have their updates show up in one's Twitter or Facebook feed. *Civilmedia.tw*, led by the Taiwanese media scholar and activist Kuang Chung-Hsiang has over 90000 such Facebook subscribers and played a key role in disseminating protest-led stories during the Sunflower Movement. Such content is particularly useful for consolidating the counter-elites (Atton & Wickenden, 2005), however the journalistic protest paradigm (Chan & Lee, 1984) remains active in attempts to filter out to larger society. In Taiwan, pirate radio and telnet bulletin board systems had long played the role of gathering the counterelites (Hsu, 2014) during the latter years of martial law, thus the ground for alternative media is particularly fertile, if limited
in breadth.

**Social Media Enabling Alternative Media**

The key is again the mechanics of social media. The counterelites may share content from alternative media sources with their friends on social media (Leung & Lee, 2014) that may have been on Facebook to chat to friends or look at pictures of cats. While “filter bubbles” (Pariser, 2012) – whereby people are kept algorithmically increasingly likely to see internet content that pleases them as this increases time spent with the social media service – have only exacerbated the worries about “deliberative enclaves” (Sunstein, 2000), this autopropaganda can be thwarted by the mainstream media taking up the social media content which may have been even been originally commenting on mainstream media stories and bringing it back to widespread consumption. This is the specialty of Apple Daily in Taiwan, and while when encountering it one is commonly struck by the inanity of the story (“vague Facebook celebrity posts angry comment”, for example), when the story is about an ongoing political crisis the filter bubble is effectively popped thereby. The “subaltern public sphere” (Squires, 2002) is put on display. Taiwan is especially ripe to generate sympathy for alternate media spheres as counterpublic tools as under martial law the counterpublic were the majority.

Thus, for economic reasons – the need to churn out ever more copy while numbers of journalists remain static or decline (Pedro, 2011), the alternative sphere has increased access. Lower journalistic standards can have salutary socio-political effects, especially during periods of heightened political activity, such as during the Sunflower Movement. During such periods, the need for in-depth political reporting and on-the-spot commentary becomes acute with no way to fill the breach but to rip stories directly from social and/or alternative media, which are thereby “re-mediated” and reach the general public (Mathes & Pfetsch, 1991). Thus the ability to mobilize, increase the legitimacy of demands, and “widen the scope of conflict beyond the likeminded” (Cammaerts, 2012) all become easier thereby, and framing becomes more difficult with ever-
increasing numbers of engaged.

Dataset 1

To confirm the operation of the violence frame in the Taiwanese case where, unlike in an authoritarian case, the existence of violence does not permit one to infer state sanction and thus "use", I first used the Global Database of Events, Language and Tone (GDELT)'s (Leetaru, n.d.) Global Knowledge Graph Thematic Timeline Tool. Thereby the usefulness of the image of violence ("actual" violence being unimportant) to the government can be seen. As this dataset at the time of the protests was limited to English-language results, I chose to limit the set by the keywords "Taiwan" and to see the correlation over time between the theme codings "PROTEST" and "VIOLENT_UNREST", theme codings meant to discern what the "core topic(s) of discussion are around a given entity" (Leetaru, 2013), that is, how the discussion shifted over the course of the Sunflower Movement. The results are summarized in the table below, where one can see that if, as mentioned above, there was government strategy aimed at putting the usefulness of violence into action, the brief occupation of the Executive Yuan on the 23rd had the intended effect, with the 24th marking a dramatic shift in reporting: away from the issues, and towards episodic reporting chronicling both protester action and what was seen as the resultant police overreaction.

![Articles on the Theme of Violent Unrest](image_url)
In order to look deeper, a set of the articles from which this data was sourced was created, limiting the articles to those found in the *Taipei Times* (the DPP-leaning sister newspaper of the *Liberty Times*) and the KMT-leaning *China Post*. The Taipei Times had sixteen articles with the theme of violent unrest; the China Post twelve. While this may initially seem counter intuitive as one would expect the KMT-leaning paper to do more to push the protester violence angle, the expectation is not being violated. The China Post simply notes, for example, that riot police were injured ("A march of Blackshirts in Taiwan?,” n.d.), while the *Liberty Times* writes on police attacking journalists (”TRADE PACT SIEGE,” n.d.) as well as students.

A graph of “tone”, consisting of measures of positive and negative emotion on the theme of “PROTEST” in a subset of Taiwan-related articles was also generated by the Global Knowledge Graph, with a dip after the Executive Yuan occupation and expulsion, and regained positive tone in the aftermath of the massive demonstration attended by hundreds of thousands on March 30th.

![Figure 2: Emotional Tone of Article Relating to Protest in Taiwan](image)

**Dataset 2**

In order to probe further, and go beyond the limited dataset possible with only English-language
sources, a Chinese-language dataset was created. Using news articles downloaded from *Liberty Times*, *China Times*, *Apple Daily*, and *Civilmedia.tw* at strategic junctures of the Sunflower Movement, we are able to discern differences and similarities exposing the workings and lack thereof of violence framing and the protest paradigm in general during this period. The strategic junctures are days of coverage, with the exception of *Civilmedia.tw*, which commonly, as the protester-led alternative media source, did not have enough material to make up a representative corpus for a one-day period, and would be extended over the next day.

The *Liberty Times* is, along with *Apple Daily*, the most popular newspaper in Taiwan, each with approximately 40% market share (Chiang et al., n.d.). *China Times* along with the *United Daily News*, have since the introduction of *Apple Daily*'s tabloid journalism, found themselves with diminishing market share (less than 20% each).

The Want Want Group-owned *China Times* is known for printing stories favourable to China under the influence of its owner Tsai Eng-meng, whose effectively wholly owned company's earnings largely come from the Chinese market (Yamada, 2014). Tsai's exceedingly generous offer in late 2012 for the upstart *Apple Daily*, owned by the flamboyantly anti-CCP Jimmy Lai, triggered the anti-media monopoly movement (which had overlapping leadership with the Sunflower Movement and was seen as a precursor (Liu, 2015)) which eventually killed the deal. *Apple Daily* thus remains its muckraking self. Though it is anti-Communist Party, it is considered a neutral outlet not aligned with the DPP (Yamada, 2014). The *Liberty Times*, by contrast is considered close to the DPP, though not a mouthpiece.

The four dates chosen for corpus gathering were March 19, March 24, March 30, and April 7, 2014. March 19 was the first full day during which the Legislative Yuan was occupied by protesters, it having been entered the previous night. March 24 was the day after the brief occupation of the Executive Yuan, with protesters cleared from the building by 5 o'clock that morning. March 30 was the day of the large protest seeing hundreds of thousands of protesters filling the central artery of Ketagalan Boulevard. April 7 was the first day after Wang Jin-pyung
entered the occupied Legislative Yuan promising that review of the trade pact that sparked the occupation would be delayed until specific legislation would be passed to monitor such agreements with China. In response to this concession, the students stated they would leave the legislature on the 10th, and they did, ending the occupation.

The data was gathered by simply gathering articles from Google News using the “site:” search function and advanced search date limitations to target the search. A corpus of a minimum of three thousand Chinese characters was thereby generated, limiting the articles to the conduct of the protest and its triggering trade agreement manually rather than limiting by search term, so as not to bias the sample by the assumptions inherent in a keyword search. Thereby the keywords generated from the corpus reveal sometimes surprising trends (some that by the time of writing I have yet to explain to satisfaction). The articles were then switched into a simplified character set by using Google Translate. Finally, the corpus generated, consisting of article text, titles, and photo captions, was fed into the Zhtoolkit wordlist generator (Redman, n.d.), which parses Chinese text in the simplified character set by means of natural language processing engines, generating “wordcounts” by comparing the text to dictionary files, which include names as well as four-character idioms. The wordlist generated provides both measurements of absolute frequency and rarity in the full text of the Lancaster Mandarin Corpus in order to aid manual determination of the importance of a word’s frequent appearance. I then compared the results from the four corpuses on each date, and from each source over all four dates, looking for patterns and interesting results arising from this content analysis.

**March 19**

Battle lines are drawn early on. The main difference between the sources one day after the occupation of the Legislative Yuan began is the mentioning of different keywords apportioning blame for, or requiring a solution to, the situation, which is quite revealing. The DPP-aligned

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1 I am currently in the process of extending the corpus to include all articles during the 24-hour timeframes under investigation.
Liberty Times go out of their way to consistently mention the KMT, which no other source does. Civilmedia.tw frequently writes about government in general (zhengfu) being the problem, while Apple Daily mentions “Ma” (surname) in reference to the President who was accused of being the main force behind the problematic cross-straits trade pact. The China Times mentions Ma, but is respectful, using his title as President frequently (zongtong) and his full name.

March 24

In the wake of the brief and contentious occupation of the Executive Yuan, again clear differences arise. First, there is a clear attempt to frame the struggle as a popular one on the part of the protester-based Civilmedia.tw, with minzhong being the most frequent word in the corpus, followed in the third position by qunzhong. Liberty Times also uses this construction, but less frequently, with minzhong and qunzhong coming in at eighth and ninth position respectively. In Apple Daily, only minzhong is relatively present, coming in at eighteenth position, while in the China Times, neither word is present in the corpus.

“Student” (xuesheng) is similarly interesting: the Liberty Times uses the term by far the most; it is the most common word in the corpus. In the China Times and Apple Daily, the term is the eight and ninth most common respectively, whereas Civilmedia.tw is reluctant to use the term, it being only the nineteenth most common term. It is inferred that Civilmedia.tw is reluctant to blame the students, whereas Liberty Times is attempting to play up the incident as an impetuous aberration born of immature thinking that did not need to be met in such a way as to cause bloodshed, as is shown by the use of the term in the LT corpus 8 times, far more than any other outlet. Thus the elite media is consolidated around a violence frame at this point – considering the episodic Executive Yuan occupation rather than issues-based concerns, as indicated in Figure 1 above, drawn from a different dataset.

Liberty Times continues to be seen as practicing violence framing while blaming police for the violence, with sixteen instances of bao in the corpus, while Civilmedia.tw, by contrast,
seemingly on the same side writing of “sit-ins” (jingzuo) instead. China Times deems the violence a law-and-order issue, with very little mention of police, only six instances, the same as judge (faguan), and is the only news outlet mentioning applications for arrest, consistently mentioning shengya, and the name of the supposed leader of the Executive Yuan occupation who was to be arrested, while these terms are nonexistent in the Liberty Times and Civilmedia.tw corpuses.

Finally, more amusing is the Apple Daily's betraying its tabloid nature, is its obsession with the online celebrity Jipai mei (“chicken cutlet sister”) who supported the protesters, as well as, the most mentioned term in the corpus taiyangbing – suncakes, which were apparently stolen by the students who occupied the Executive Yuan. The China Times is also suncake-obsessed, second only to Wei Yang, the arrested “leader” of the Executive Yuan occupation.

**March 30**

On the day of the major planned street protest, China Times emphasizes the supposed lack of unity of the people against the agreement, mentioning the existence of two camps: the black and the white. But more importantly, it focuses on the stylish army jacket student leader Lin Fei-fan had been wearing. Apple Daily also mentions the army jacket, as one would expect, but also consistently mentions Hong Kong, warning Taiwan not to share its fate; Liberty Times also joins in name-checking Hong Kong, but more importantly mentions Taiwan as by far the most common word in the corpus, which no other outlet came close to doing.

**April 7**

Divergent ways of wrapping up are on display. Civilmedia.tw constantly refers to “you” (nimen), and minzhong, as the reader has joined in the people's struggle. Sixiang (thought) is consistently mentioned, again putting the emphasis on the issues rather than specific incidents of confrontation. Liberty Times and Apple Daily remember the anniversary of the self-immolation of the Taiwanese pro-democracy activist Cheng Nan-jung, tying it to the present struggle (helped along by a student
group choosing to mark the anniversary). *China Times* publishes a letter signed by labour unions
telling the students to “let democracy return to the *rule of law*” and an article quoting the Justice
Minister saying the occupations are *illegal*, and “being a student is no excuse”.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

In Taiwan, aside from the protester-run alternative media outlet Civilmedia.tw, all outlets fall prey
to the violence frame and thus show their usefulness in framing the protests episodically, as
nuisance, whether understandable, as in the case of Liberty Times, or ignorant, as with the *China
Times*. The violence of the taking and clearing of the Executive Yuan was simply too much of an
(engineered?) distraction to concentrate on issue-based concerns. However, Taiwan’s fragmented
elites and its counterpart in the media environment create opportunities for grassroots mobilization
to find itself face-to-face with the general population. This makes for serendipitous encounters
emanating from subcultural zones that would not see light under the vast majority of conditions.
While in many other situations alternative media has not had the ability to speak to people unsure of
their stance and of differing demographics, in Taiwan we find a situation where alternative media
increasingly provides the sources for mainstream news – that is, increasingly quotable, and thus
implicitly considered relevant as the voice of the people.

In authoritarian regimes, by contrast, while alternative media can exist, its ability to bubble
up is close to nil, and thus the usefulness of protest and the ability to unleash chaos strategically will
persist. That is, in all three cases, China, Vietnam, and Taiwan (I would argue further this is a
general tendency), we see a desire to expand chaos, advertise it via the media, and then clamp
down. In all three situations, we see the government calling for “rational” behaviour after allowing
the supposedly irrational.

While protest use can then be said to be similar, a key differentiator may be the legitimacy
of violence. In authoritarian regimes not so far removed from revolution and the legend of its
continuation, the assumption of violence being an illegitimate expression of popular anger may
differ from that embedded in polities where voice is said to be properly expressed via the ballot box.

Thus in terms of the negotiation power afforded by the strategic chaos of street protest the effect may differ if the target is a democratic or autocratic regime. In the foregoing essay, I have concentrated on the usefulness of protests for the regime in which they are staged if the protesting group does not gain currency as an alternative political actor. This is sufficient to infer attempts at audience cost generation, but ignores effects; the latter will be the subject of future study.

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