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Hizb ut-Tahrir in Kyrgyzstan: Quantitative Media Content Analysis

Kurzfassung: Für den Durchschnittsbürger stammt Wissen über jegliche Organisationen normalerweise eher von den Massenmedien als aus direkter Interaktion, insbesondere, wenn eine Organisation geheim ist. Diese Studie versucht zu ermitteln, wie viele und welche Art von Informationen die Menschen in Kirgisistan durch die Lektüre der Vechernii Bishkek (VB), der nationalen kirgisischen Zeitung mit der höchsten Auflage im Land in der Periode von 2001–2005 über die religiöse Organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) erhalten haben. Diese Organisation wurde von der kirgisischen Regierung als extremistisch eingestuft. Die Haupthypothese dieser Studie, dass die Berichterstattung über Hizb ut-Tahrir in der Vechernii Bishkek in den letzten fünf Jahren kein vollständiges Bild der Organisation geliefert habe, wurde mittels elf Unterhypothesen geprüft. Die Untersuchungsmethode ist zweigeteilt – quantitativ und qualitativ. Halbstrukturierte Interviews von vier Journalisten der Vechernii Bishkek, die den größten Teil der relevanten Artikel geschrieben hatten, und qualitative Inhaltsanalysen der ausgewählten Artikel trugen dazu bei, die quantitativen Ergebnisse zu erklären und die "Warum" und "Na und?"-Fragen zu beantworten. Während der letzten fünf Jahre haben VB-Journalisten mehr Artikel über HT geschrieben als andere Journalisten der bedeutendsten kirgisischen Printmedien. VB scheiterte jedoch aufgrund politischer und sozialer Einschränkungen für Journalisten und Zeitungen daran, ein vollständiges Bild und ausgewogene Informationen über diese Organisation zu liefern. Jede positive Berichterstattung über die verbotene und geheime Organisation richtet sich gegen die offizielle Meinung über HT, die noch immer die Tagesordnung für private, aber regierungsorientierte Zeitungen in Kirgisistan bestimmt.

Abstract: People are more likely to learn about organizations from the mass media than from personal experience, especially in the case of clandestine organizations. This study covers the period 2001–2005 and tries to determine how much and what kind of information Kyrgyz readers received about Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), an allegedly extremist religious organization, from Vechernii Bishkek (VB), a Kyrgyz national newspaper. VB enjoys the highest circulation of any newspaper in the country. The main hypothesis is that Vechernii Bishkek's coverage of Hizb ut-Tahrir did not provide a complete, balanced picture of the organization during the five years covered by the study. This is tested on the basis of eleven sub-hypotheses. The research method is two-fold – quantitative and qualitative: Semi-structured interviews were held with the four Vechernii Bishkek journalists who wrote the majority of the relevant articles, and qualitative content analyses were made of selected articles. Together, these explain the quantitative findings and help answer questions like "why" and "wherefore."

During the five years covered by the study, VB journalists wrote more articles about HT than any other journalists working for major Kyrgyz print media. However, VB failed to provide a complete picture of and balanced information about this organization due to political and social constraints upon journalists and the newspaper. Covering any positive aspects of this officially-banned and clandestine organization would conflict with the government's opposition to HT, which still sets the agenda for this private, but pro-government Kyrgyz newspaper.

1 Introduction

During the past five years, Vechernii Bishkek (VB), a Kyrgyz national newspaper with the largest circulation in the country, published an average of two lengthy articles per year solely to inform its readers about an allegedly terrorist religious organization called Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), including comprehensive information on its origins, objectives, ideology, activities in the country and arrests of its members. In the same period, however, VB also published 205 other articles which mentioned HT at least once. The objective of this study is to content-analyze all 215 articles, to identify the types of articles that contain references to HT, as well as the tone of such references, and, finally, to determine whether VB provided a comprehensive, balanced picture of the organization during the past five years.

1.1 Hypotheses

To answer these questions, the following eleven sub-hypotheses are tested: (H1) the number of articles that contain references to HT will increase over time; (H2) the majority of articles will be written by a small number of journalists; (H3) the number of informative articles on HT will be smaller than the total number of articles about HT member arrests and irrelevant articles; (H4) the majority of informative articles will address the question of combating HT; (H5) the majority of articles mainly irrelevant to HT will refer to the organization in the context of terrorism; (H6) in most cases the tone of references to HT will be very negative; (H7) the articles will become less informative over time; (H8) the tone of references to HT will depend on the article's content; (H9) the number of articles with very negative references to HT will increase over time; (H10) there will be a correlation between the authors of articles and their type of content; (H11) there will be a correlation between author and tone.

1.2 On Hizb ut-Tahrir

"Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami" ("Party of Islamic Liberation") was founded in 1952 in a Jordanian-ruled East Jerusalem suburb by Sheikh Taqiuddin an-Nabhani (1909-1977), a Palestinian Islamic legal scholar and political activist (Baran, 2004: 21). The central goal of HT ideology is to re-establish a Caliphate and apply Islamic law to all spheres of life. HT publicly rejects the use of violent means to achieve its goals, and "... the party's record provides no evidence of it being involved in terrorist activity against civilians, or in military actions against U.S. or Western interests" (ICG, 2003: 9). Because of its anti-Semitic slogans, the organization is banned in several Middle Eastern countries, including Jordan, Syria, Egypt, and Iraq, and also in European countries, including Germany and Denmark. HT is banned in all Central Asian countries (ICG, 2003: 9-11).

HT reached Central Asia in the second half of the 1990s (ICG, 2002: 6). In this region, "the majority of – though by no means all – Hizb ut-Tahrir members appear to come from the Ferghana Valley region (including the Andijan, Ferghana and Namangan provinces of Uzbekistan, the Sughd province in Tajikistan, and the Osh and Jalalabad provinces of Kyrgyzstan)" (ICG, 2003: 18). Hizb ut-Tahrir membership in Kyrgyzstan continues to be overwhelmingly ethnic Uzbek¹ (ICG, 2002: 8). Under Article 299 of the Kyrgyz Criminal Code, which forbids instigating religious and ethnic tensions, HT members are generally fined or sentenced to two-five years of imprisonment if caught distributing literature with extremist content.²

In November 2003, the Kyrgyz Supreme Court banned HT and designated it as an extremist organization (Kushchubekov, 2004: 54; Baran, 2004: 109). However, "... many incidents that the government is quick to label as the work of 'Islamic extremists' are actually much more about growing organized crime, much of it linked to the drug trade and lucrative cross-border contraband with Uzbekistan" (ICG, 2003: 38). "There are also vested bureaucratic interests in the government structures that have used the Hizb ut-Tahrir 'threat' to broaden their own powers" (ICG, 2002: 12). In 2004, the Kyrgyz Ministry of Internal Affairs estimated that HT membership was 1522 (Satybekov and Himidov, 2005).

1.3 Kyrgyz print media

On January 6, 2006, 180 newspapers were registered in Kyrgyzstan, but *de facto* the number of newspapers that are actually published is far smaller (Internews, 2006). The number of newspapers that provide reliable political information is, however, even smaller than that. "There are 56 state-owned newspapers in Kyrgyzstan whose circulation does not exceed 5000 copies per week. These newspapers are not popular, and without state subsidies only a few of them could survive.

1. The Uzbek minority in the Kyrgyz Republic comprises 13%-14% of the 4.8 million population, the majority of which lives in the southern parts of Kyrgyzstan (Population census of 1999, <http://www.welcome.kg/ru/kyrgyzstan/population/sostav/>). The higher number of Uzbeks sympathizing with HT compared with Kyrgyz sympathizers may be explained by the fact that Kyrgyzstan has been unable to provide the population in the south with print media, school textbooks and other channels from which Uzbek citizens could obtain information in their own language. The vacuum that could not be filled by Kyrgyz officials is filled by HT leaflets, which contain information on current and topical political, social, and economic developments not only in the region, but also internationally (Grebenschikov, 2002: 1).
2. References to this article of the Criminal Law are made in many press news reports related to arrests of HT members.

The 16 private newspapers must absorb heavy court fines if they offend the honor and dignity of officials. Their circulation, nevertheless, varies from 10 to 60 thousand copies per week, and their popularity is greater than that of government publications" (Mambetaliev, 2003: 250-251). According to a 2005 Freedom House report on freedom of the press, the media in Kyrgyzstan are not free from government control (Freedom House, 2005).

VB was selected for this study for several reasons. First, VB is the only daily – appearing five times per week – national newspaper. It has the highest circulation in Kyrgyzstan: 8,000 copies printed from Monday to Thursday, and 62,000 copies on Friday (Internews, www.vb.kg). Second, VB published 215 relevant articles during the past five years. This number is considerably higher than that found in other major Kyrgyz newspapers.¹ Third, VB has an electronic database of all articles published since 1998. None of the other major newspapers posted articles published earlier than 2004 on their websites.² There is evidence that, considering all the print media in Kyrgyzstan, VB is one of the major sources of information on HT.

From May 2001 to August 2005, this newspaper was loyal to the government, i.e., to ex-president Akaev, because Adil Toigonbaev, Akaev's son-in-law, owned a controlling interest in VB. Shortly after the change of the Kyrgyz government on March 24, 2005, Aleksandr Kim, the previous owner of VB, demanded reconsideration of VB ownership, insisting that shares of VB were unlawfully appropriated by Toigonbaev. On August 15, 2005, Kim's ownership of VB was restored by a court decision (<http://news.akipress.org/news/21564>).

1.4 Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Kyrgyz mass media

The Kyrgyz law "On combating extremist activity," which went into effect on August 19, 2005, contains many references to the activities of the mass media. "Extremist activity" includes, among other things, activities of the mass media directed at "... instigating racial, ethnic or religious discord, as well as social discord connected with violence or appeals for violence ..." and "... public appeals for the implementation of the mentioned activity or the perpetration of the mentioned activities ..." (Jogorku Kenesh, 2005: 1). Article 8 of the same law warns against promulgating extremist ideas through the mass media when reporting on extremist activities. Articles # 11 and # 17 also contain regulations that prohibit distributing "extremist material" or publishing such material on behalf of extremist organizations in the Kyrgyz Republic.

A number of reports reveal that Kyrgyz regional administrations try to limit coverage of HT in the mass media in order to avoid accusations of violating this and other laws related to media and extremism (Marat, 2005: 3). In her final recommendations on how to combat religious extremism in Central Asian states, Zeyno Baran, Director of International Security and Energy programs at the Nixon Center, emphasized the crucial role of the media in this process. Not only should there be: "... free and reliable media sources to which people can turn to receive objective information ... all available media resources need to be used to disseminate the positive values of Islam and to increase basic levels of religious understanding" (Baran, 2004: 137-138).

Religious topics are, however, not extensively covered and discussed in Central Asian mass media (Freedman et al., 2005; Loma, 2003). One possible explanation for this phenomenon is that, "Religious freedom and restraint issues are controversial for reporting, as they come into conflict with unofficial government campaigns against pious Muslims" (Machleder quoted in Freedman et al., 2005: 5). The HT organization received limited or no coverage in Central Asian media. In Tajikistan, "... any information related to this movement [HT] is published under the heading 'Crimes', and only with reference to the law enforcement press service" (Mansurova, 2002: 2). In Uzbekistan, "... there are no reports whatsoever about the activities of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir radical Islamic party, no accounts of the party's members brought to trial, no accounts about protests staged in Ferghana province by wives and mothers of those arrested for links with informal religious organizations" (Tokhtakhojayeva, 2002: 1). In Kyrgyzstan, "[N]ewspapers and television channels have no balanced approach to the forbidden movement. The media persistently repeat the cliché that Hizb-ut-Tahrir's members are terrorists and extremists who wish to destroy the existing regime and establish an Islamic state in Central Asia, and this is all the authorities want to talk about" (Grebenschikov, 2002: 2).

The reason journalists avoid writing about HT is that they are afraid to discuss this organization objectively, "... largely because of the intimidating and repressive attitudes of governments ..." (Loersch, 2002: 1), and/or because there are few journalists who know and write about the subject (Sukhov quoted in Grebenschikov, 2002: 3).

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1. For example, during the same period *MSN* published 114 articles that contained references to HT. *MSN*, a private newspaper, has the second highest circulation after VB (www.msn.kg; <http://www.internews.kg/?pid=81&cid=2&nid=40>).
 2. *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, a state-owned newspaper, has maintained electronic archives of articles published since 2004. Thirty relevant articles were published in 2004-2005 (www.sk.kg). *Delo* _ doesn't offer an Internet archive for issues appearing earlier than 2006 (www.delo.ktnet.kg).

2 Methodology

The method of media content analysis employed in this study draws on the work of Neuendorf (2002), Stacks et al. (1992) and Stempel et al. (1981). These researchers, whose work spans 70 years, employ similar steps and rules in making quantitative media content analyses. The following principles, as stated by Neuendorf, are employed to give the study a scientific basis: 1) objectivity; 2) *a priori* design; 3) inter-coder reliability; 4) validity; 5) generalizability; and 6) replicability (Neuendorf, 2002: 11; 80-81; 142). The steps of quantitative analysis identified by the above-mentioned authors include 1) literature review; 2) definition of messages and/or variables to be studied; 3) data sampling methods that ensure that the selected messages are representative of all relevant messages; 4) identifying units of analysis, which can include selected words, themes or attitudes; 5) creating categories to which a unit of analysis can be assigned; 6) coding data in accordance with the created categories; 7) testing the reliability of the coding system; and 8) tabulating, analyzing and interpreting the coded results (Neuendorf, 2002: a flowchart for the typical process of content analysis research; Stempel et al., 1981: 119-129; Stacks et al., 1992: 252-253).

The unit of analysis of this study is each article published in VB during the period from January 1, 2001 – December 31, 2005 in which the name Hizb ut-Tahrir is mentioned at least once. Data was derived from the VB web page using a search engine. Since virtually no quantitative research has been conducted on the portrayal of religious extremist organizations in pro-government newspapers in Central Asia, this study attempts to fill this gap by using a quantitative media content analysis that tabulates the number of articles about HT published each year and the number written by various individual journalists, as well as the types of articles and the tone of reference to HT. The study also makes correlations between author and year, content and year, tone and year, content and author, tone and author, and content and tone. The independent variables are time and author. The dependent variables are content and tone. The coding sheet has six columns: sequence number of the article, year of publication, month of publication, author, content and tone. For an example of the coding sheet, see Appendix A.

Each article was assigned a number from 1 to 215, starting with January 2001 and ending with December 2005. Years of publication are encoded with the numbers 1 to 5, starting with 2001 and ending with 2005. Months are encoded from 1 to 12, starting with January and ending with December. During initial encoding, authors were coded with the capital letters of their initials. Having ascertained that the majority of the articles were written by a small group of journalists, the authors who wrote 12 or more articles were encoded with the numbers from 1 to 6: Erlan Satybekov is encoded as 1, Oibek Hamidov as 2, Mahamadjan Urumbaev as 3, Asel Otorbaeva as 4, Daniyar Karimov as 5, and Urii Kuzminyh as 6. Articles written by other authors were encoded as 7, and those containing no information about their authors as 8.

Initially, seven content categories were identified: 1) arrests of HT members, 2) activities of HT in Central Asia, 3) some information on HT *per se*, 4) some analysis or discourse on how to combat HT, 5) HT name is used either in the title or lead of the article, with no further reference to HT in the main text of the article, 6) the article contains references to HT, but overall is completely irrelevant to HT, and 7) article is irrelevant to HT, but reference is made to HT in the context of terrorism. Using so many categories made the number in each cell of the Statistical Program for Social Sciences too small to determine whether the correlations were statistically significant. For the statistical analysis, the seven categories were, consequently, combined into three. Articles solely dedicated to reporting about arrests of HT members were encoded with the number "1." The initial categories 2, 3, and 4 were combined as "informative articles" and were encoded with the number "2," while the categories 5, 6, and 7 were combined as "irrelevant articles" and encoded with the number "3." Although initial categorization of articles is not used in the computerized content analyses, these data are used to establish the dynamics of change in types of articles over the study period.

The tone of reference to HT was encoded into three categories: 1) neutral, 2) negative, 3) very negative. A "positive" category was initially included, but no article fit into that category, and it was, therefore, dropped. A positive attitude toward the organization could have been expressed by mentioning that members of the organization help each other in coping with such problems as unemployment, religious education, funerals, medical care, etc. – but it was not. Neutral articles, encoded as "1," were those in which the authors used no adjectives when referring to HT. They refer to the organization as religious or political, and/or mention that the organization's goal is to establish a Caliphate. Negative articles, encoded as "2," were those containing expressions with reference to HT such as: "prohibited organization," "clandestine organization," "spreading leaflets with anti-constitutional content," "government is concerned (or alarmed) because of HT activities." Very negative articles, encoded as "3," contained references to the organization such as the following: "religious extremists," "terrorists," "radicals," "religious fanatics" or "threat to the state and/or people."

A second coder coded every 10th article, and her data was compared to the encoding of the primary researcher. The established reliability coefficient was 93.2%. SPSS was used for the statistical analysis of the data – frequencies, cross tabulation and Chi-square tests. Excel was used for the graphic presentation of data.

Interviews with the journalists who wrote the majority of relevant articles – Erlan Satybekov, deputy editor-in-chief of VB; Urii Kuzminyh, a VB journalist in charge of crime reports; Oibek Hamidov, a VB journalist based in Osh, the southern oblast of Kyrgyzstan; and Mahamadjan Urumbaev, a VB journalist based in Osh – were conducted in an attempt to explain the quantitative data and to answer questions such as “why” and “wherefore.”

3 Findings

3.1 Year

Of the 215 articles containing references to HT published in VB during 2001-2005, 10 (4.7%) were published in 2001, 48 (22.3%) in 2002, 50 (23.3%) in 2003, 55 (25.6%) in 2004, and 52 (24.2%) in 2005. The number of articles increased between 2001 and 2002 and then remained virtually constant from 2002 to 2005. There was no support for H-1, that the number of articles containing references to HT increases over time. Lack of support for the first sub-hypothesis lends support to the main hypothesis, according to which the coverage of HT in VB didn't provide a complete picture of the organization. For a graphic representation of these data, see Figure 1.

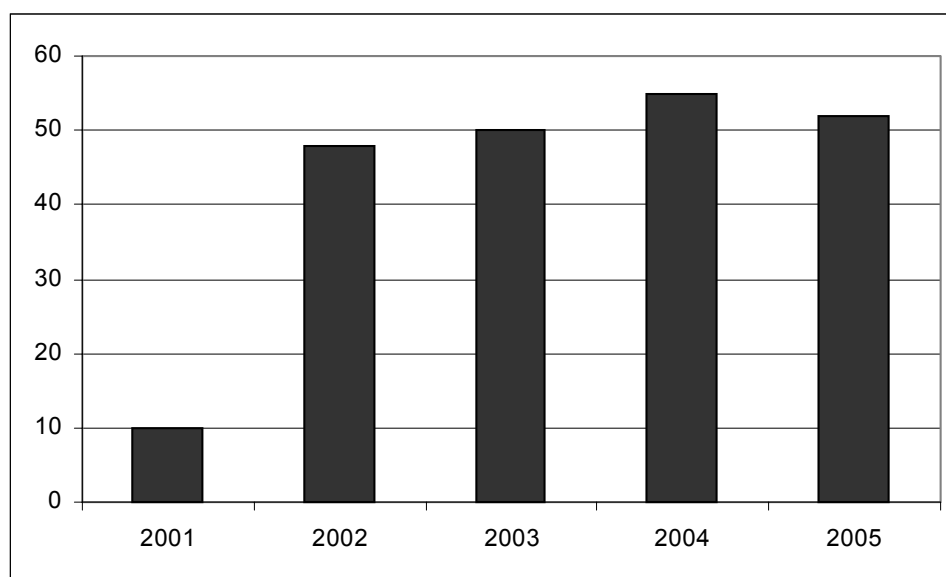


Figure 1: Frequency per year

3.2 Author

Of the 215 articles, 39 (18.1%) were written by Erlan Satybekov, 20 (9.3%) by Oibek Hamidov, 23 (10.7%) by Mahamadjan Urumbaev, 12 (5.6%) by Asel Otorbaeva, 15 (7.0%) by Daniyar Karimov, 13 (6.0%) by Urii Kuzminyh, 46 (21.4%) by 29 other authors, and 47 articles (21.9%) did not contain information about their authors. There is support for H-2, that the majority of the articles are written by a small number of journalists. Support for the second sub-hypothesis lends support to the main hypothesis. For a graphic representation of these data, see Figure 2.

3.3 Content

Of the 215 articles, 49 articles (22.8%) dealt with arrests of HT members, 109 articles (50.7%) were informative, and 57 articles (26.5%) were mainly irrelevant to the topic. We do not find support for Hypothesis (H-3), that there are fewer informative articles on HT than the combined number of articles about arrests and irrelevant articles. Lack of support for the third sub-hypothesis does not lend support to the main hypothesis. For a graphic representation of these data, see Figure 2.

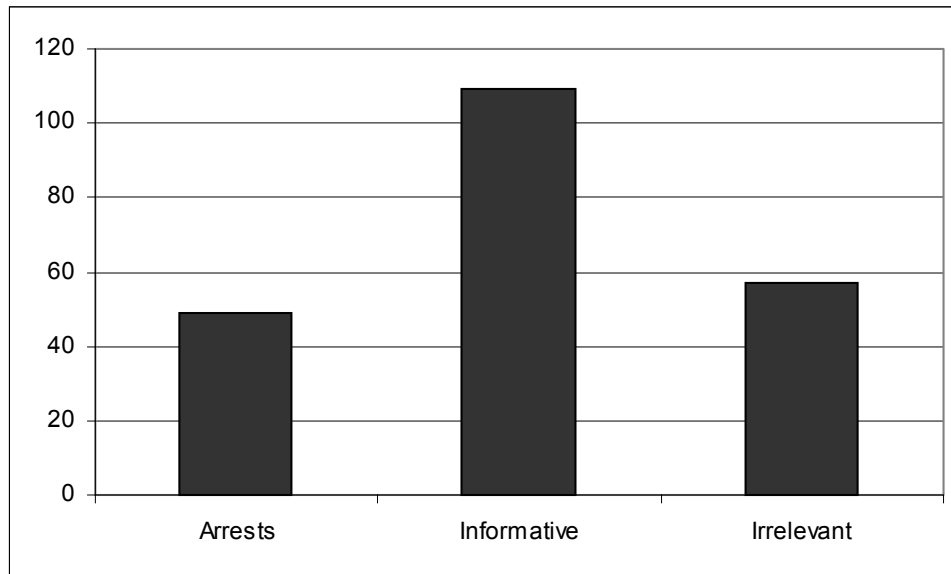


Figure 2: Frequency of Content

Of 109 informative articles written over the five years, 58 articles (53%) focused primarily on describing HT activities in the Central Asian region, 30 articles (17.8%) provided general information about the HT organization, and 21 articles (12.5%), apart from providing relevant information on HT, focused on how to combat it. There is no support for H-4, that the majority of informative articles address the question of combating HT. Lack of support for the fourth sub-hypothesis does not support the main hypothesis.

Of 57 articles mainly irrelevant to HT, 6 (10.5%) contained references to HT in the titles or leads of the articles, but nowhere else in the main text of the articles, 22 (38.5%) contained references to HT in the main text, and 29 (50.95%) contained references to HT in the context of terrorism. There is support for H-5, that the majority of irrelevant articles contain references to HT in the context of terrorism. Support for the fifth sub-hypothesis lends support to the main hypothesis.

3.4 Tone

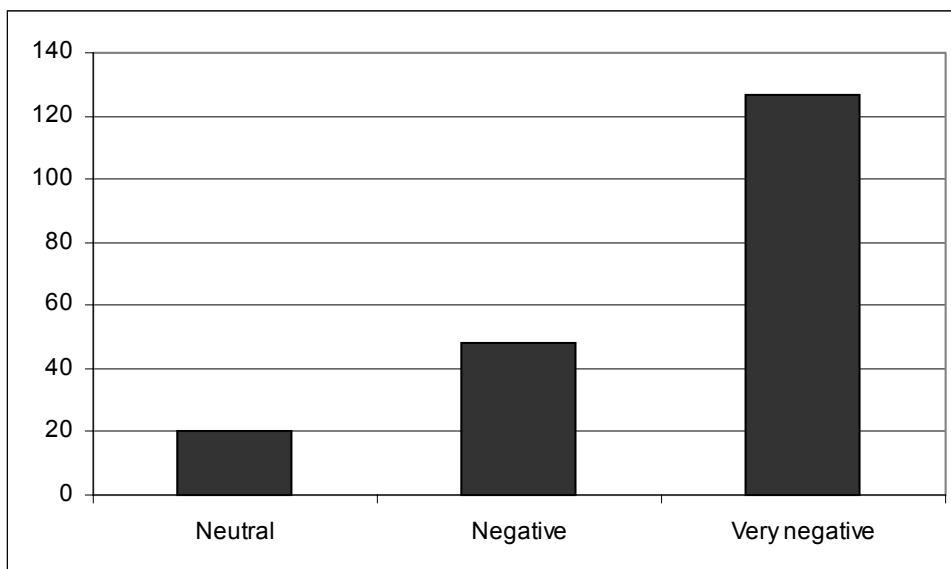


Figure 3: Frequency of Tone

Of the 215 articles, 20 (9.3%) contained neutral references to HT, 48 (22.3%) negative, and 127 (68.4%) very negative.

There is support for H-6, that in most cases the tone of references to HT is very negative. Support for the sixth sub-hypothesis lends support to the main hypothesis. For a graphic representation of these data, see Figure 3.

3.5 Content and Year

In 2001, VB published 1 (10.0%) article on arrests of HT members, 7 informative articles (70.0%), and 2 articles (20.0%) mainly irrelevant to HT. In 2002, VB published 13 articles (27.1%) about arrests of HT members, 23 informative articles (47.9%), and 12 articles (25.0%) mainly irrelevant to HT. In 2003, VB published 9 articles (18.0%) about arrests of HT members, 34 informative articles (68.0%), and 7 articles (14.0%) mainly irrelevant to HT. In 2004, VB published 15 articles (27.3%) about arrests of HT members, 23 informative articles (41.8%), and 17 articles mainly irrelevant to HT (30.9%). In 2005, VB published 11 articles (21.2%) on arrests of HT members, 22 informative articles (42.3%), and 19 articles mainly irrelevant to HT (36.5%). The correlation of content and year is not statistically significant ($t=0.111$). Support was not found for H-7, that articles would become less informative over time. Lack of support for the seventh sub-hypothesis does not provide support for the main hypothesis. For a graphic representation of these data, see Figure 4.

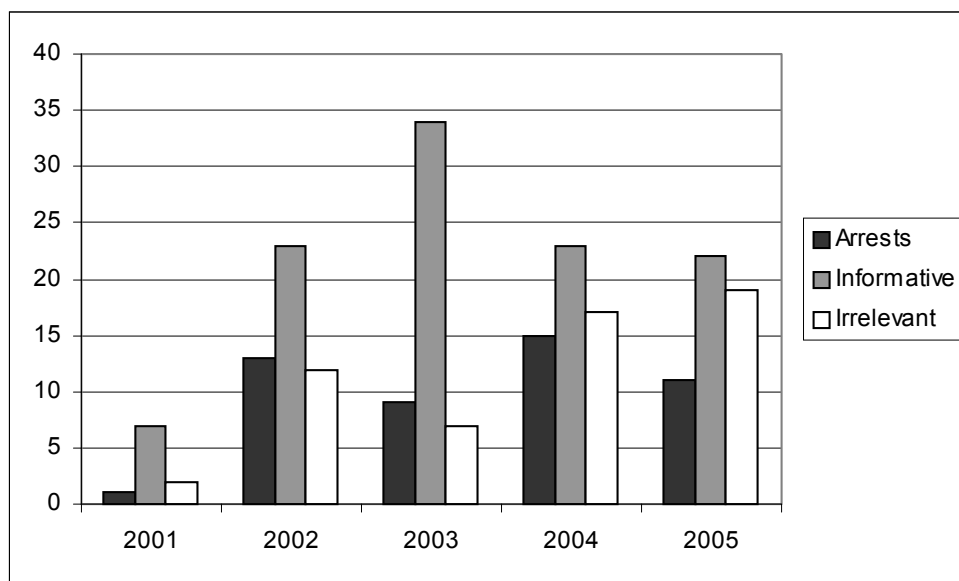


Figure 4: Content*Year cross tabulation

3.6 Tone and Content

Of 49 articles about arrests of HT members, 3 articles (6.1%) contained neutral references to HT, 13 (26.5%) negative, and 33 (67.3%) very negative. Of 109 informative articles, 8 articles (7.3%) contained neutral references to HT, 23 (21.1%) negative, and 78 (71.6%) very negative. Of 57 articles mainly irrelevant to HT, 9 articles (15.8%) contained neutral references to HT, 12 (21.1%) negative, and 36 (63.2%) very negative. The correlation between tone and content is not statistically significant ($t=0.347$). Support was not found for H-8, that the tone of reference to HT depends on the article's content. Lack of support for the eighth sub-hypothesis lends support to the main hypothesis. For a graphic representation of these data, see Figure 5.

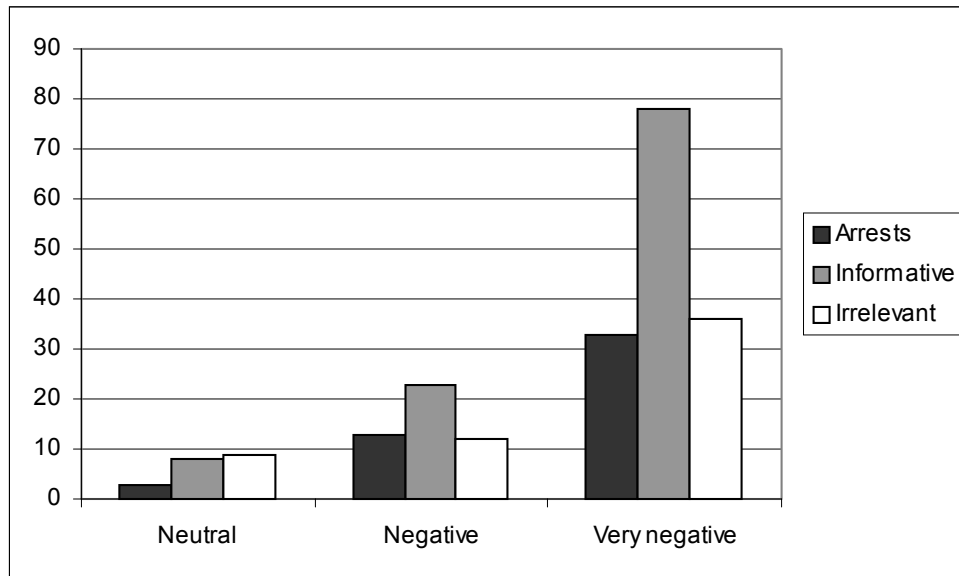


Figure 5: Tone*Content cross tabulation

3.7 Tone and Year

Of 10 relevant articles published in 2001, none contained neutral references to HT, 1 (10.0%) contained negative references, and 9 (90%) very negative ones. Of 48 relevant articles published in 2002, 4 (8.3%) contained neutral references, 4 (8.3%) contained negative references, and 40 (83.3%) very negative ones. Of 50 relevant articles published in 2003, 4 (8.0%) contained neutral references, 9 (18.0%) articles contained negative references, and 37 (74.0%) very negative ones. Of 55 relevant articles published in 2004, 1 (1.8%) contained neutral references, 14 (25.5%) contained negative references, and 40 (72.7%) very negative ones. Of 52 articles published in 2005, 11 (21.2%) contained neutral references, 20 (38.5%) contained negative references, and 21 (40.4%) very negative ones. The correlation between negativity and year is statistically significant ($t=0.000$). References to HT became more neutral over time. There is no support H-9, that the number of articles with very negative references to HT increases over time. Rejection of the ninth sub-hypothesis does not lend support to the main hypothesis. For a graphic representation of these data, see Figure 6.

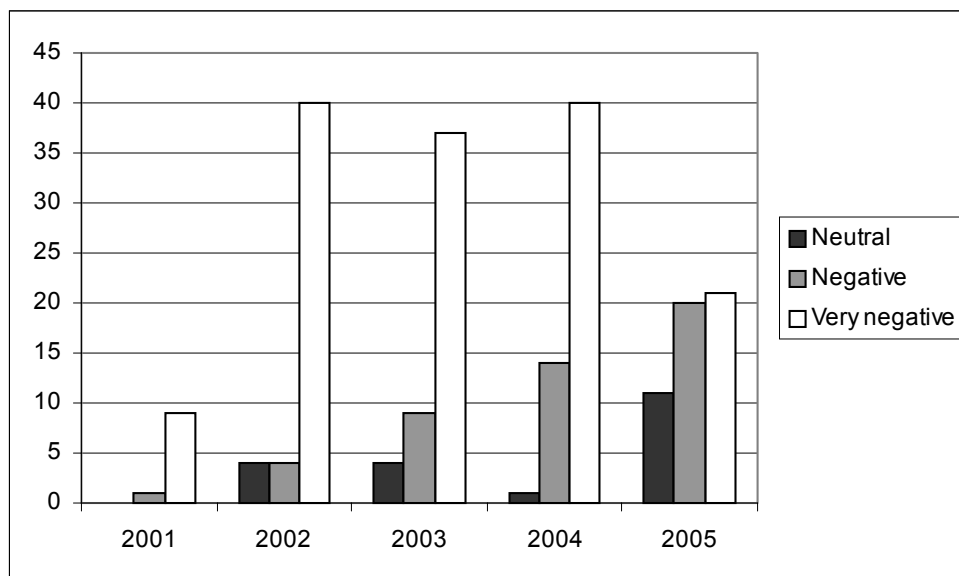


Figure 6: Tone*Year cross tabulation

3.8 Content and Author

Of 39 articles written by Satybekov, 1 (2.6%) was about arrests of HT members, 23 (59.0%) were informative, and 15 (38.5%) were mainly irrelevant to HT. Of 20 articles written by Hamidov, 6 (30.0%) were about arrests of HT members, 12 (60.0%) were informative, and 2 (10.0%) were mainly irrelevant to HT. Of 23 articles written by Urumbaev, 3 (13.0%) were about arrests of HT members, 15 (65.2%) were informative, and 5 (21.7%) were mainly irrelevant to HT. Of 12 articles written by Otorbaeva, 1 (8.3%) was about arrests of HT members, 6 (50.0%) were informative, and 5 (41.7%) were mainly irrelevant to HT. Of 15 articles written by Karimov, none was about arrests of HT members, 7 (46.7%) were informative and 8 (53.3%) were mainly irrelevant to HT. Of 13 articles written by Kuzminyh, 11 (84.6%) were about arrests of HT members, 2 (15.4%) were informative, and Kuzminyh wrote no articles irrelevant to HT. Of 46 articles written by other authors, 7 (15.2%) were about arrests of HT members, 24 (52.2%) were informative, and 15 (32.6%) were mainly irrelevant to HT. Of 47 articles that contained no information about authors, 20 (42.6%) were about arrests of HT members, 20 (42.6%) were informative, and 7 (14.9%) were mainly irrelevant to HT. The correlation between author and content is statistically significant ($t=.000$). There is support for H-10, that there is a strong correlation between the author and the content of the article. Support for the tenth sub-hypothesis lends support to the main hypothesis. For a graphic representation of these data, see Figure 7.

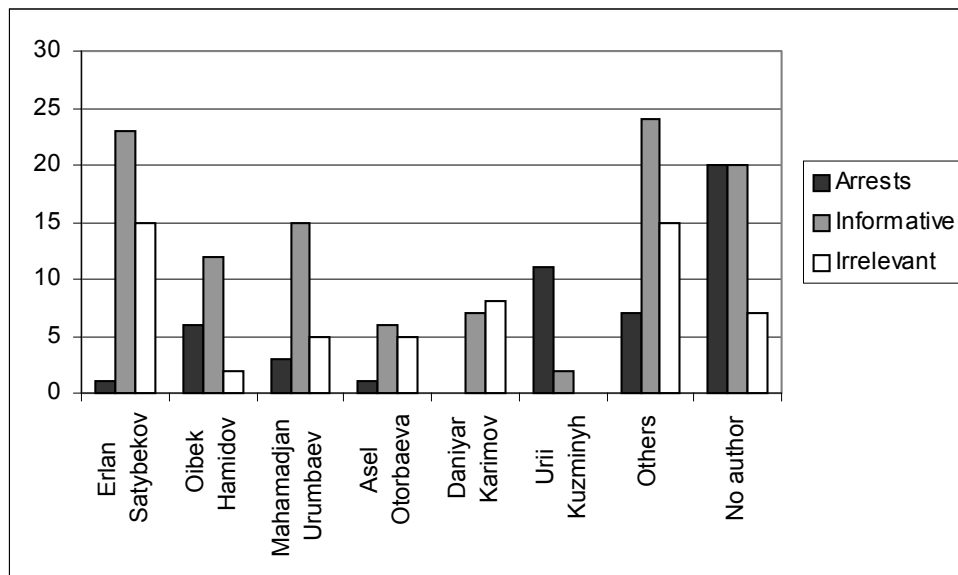


Figure 7: Content*Author cross tabulation

3.9 Tone and Author

Of 39 articles written by Satybekov, 3 (7.7%) contained neutral references to HT, 4 (10.3%) negative, and 32 (82.1%) very negative. Of 20 articles written by Hamidov, 2 (10.0%) contained neutral references to HT, 5 (25.0%) negative, and 13 (65.0%) very negative. Of 23 articles written by Urumbaev, 4 (17.4%) contained neutral references to HT, 2 (8.7%) negative, and 17 (73.9%) very negative. Of 12 articles written by Otorbaeva, 2 (16.7%) contained neutral references to HT, 3 (25.0%) negative, and 7 (58.3%) very negative. Of 15 articles written by Karimov, none contained neutral references to HT, 6 (40.0%) negative, and 9 (60.0%) very negative. Of 13 articles written by Kuzminyh, 2 (15.4%) contained neutral references to HT, 6 (46.2%) negative, and 5 (38.5%) very negative. Of 46 articles written by other authors, 2 (4.3%) contained neutral references to HT, 14 (30.4%) negative, and 30 (65.2%) very negative. Of 47 articles that did not contain information about their authors, 5 (10.6%) contained neutral references to HT, 8 (17.0%) negative and 34 (72.3%) very negative. The correlation between author and tone is not statistically significant ($t=0.102$). There is no support for H-11, that there is a correlation between author and tone. Lack of support for the eleventh sub-hypothesis lends support to the main hypothesis. For a graphic representation of these data, see Figure 8.

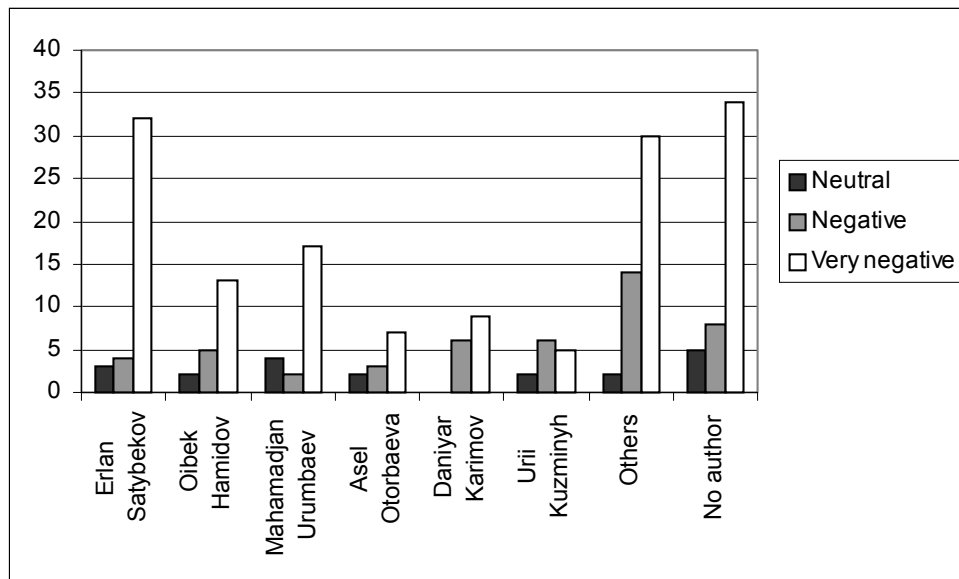


Figure 8: Tone*Author cross tabulation

3.10 Author and Year

Of 39 articles written by Satybekov, 4 (10.26%) were written in 2001, 14 (35.90) in 2002, 10 (25.64%) in 2003, 7 (17.95%) in 2004, and 4 (7.7%) in 2005. Of 20 articles written by Hamidov, 2 (10.0%) were written in 2001, 2 (10.0%) in 2002, 4 (8.0%) in 2003, 5 (25.0%) in 2004, and 7 (35%) in 2005. Of 23 articles written by Urumbaev, 1 (4.35%) was written 2001, 5 (21.74%) in 2002, 5 (21.74%) in 2003, 4 (17.39%) in 2004, and 8 (34.78%) in 2005. Of 12 articles written by Otorbaeva, none were written in 2001, 1 (8.33%) in 2002, 8 (66.67%) in 2003, 3 (25.00%) in 2004, and none in 2005. Of 15 articles written by Karimov, none were written in 2001, 1 (6.67%) in 2002, 4 (26.67%) in 2003, 6 (40.00%) in 2004, and 4 (26.67%) in 2005. Of 13 articles written by Kuzminyh, none were written in 2001-2003, 6 (46.15%) in 2004, and 7 (53.85%) in 2005. Of 46 articles written by other authors, 2 (4.35%) were written in 2001, 9 (19.57%) in 2002, 7 (15.22%) in 2003, 11 (23.91%) in 2004, and 17 (36.96%) in 2005. Of 47 articles written by unidentified authors, 1 (2.13%) was written in 2001, 16 were written (34.04%) in 2002, 12 (25.53%) in 2003, 13 (27.66%) in 2004, and 5 (10.64%) in 2005. The correlation between author and year is statistically significant ($t=.001$). For a graphic representation of these data, see Figure 9.

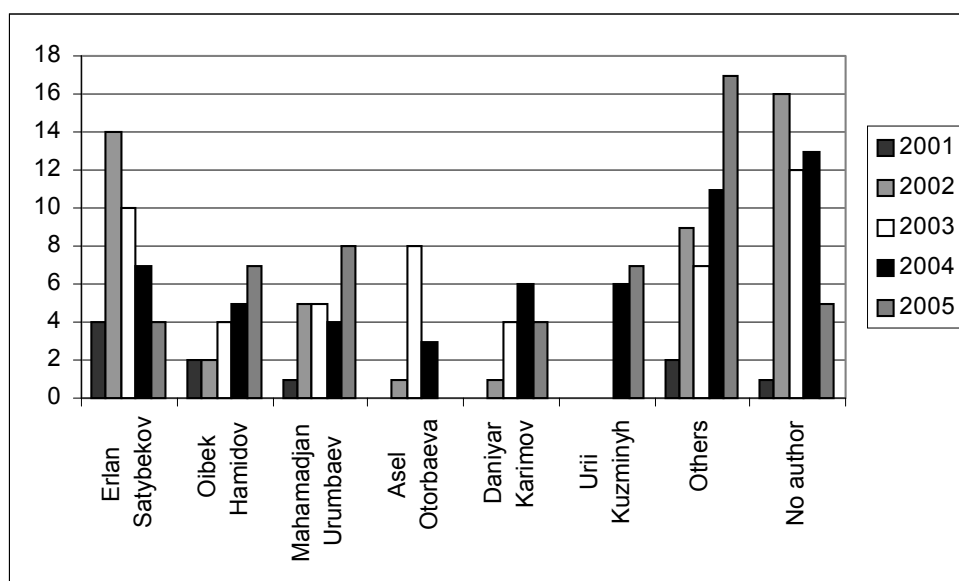


Figure 9: Author*Year cross tabulation

The main hypothesis, that the coverage of HT in VB did not provide a complete picture of the HT organization during the past five years, is supported by 7 sub-hypotheses, but not supported by 4 other sub-hypotheses.

4 Discussion

4.1 Year

Although the number of articles published in 2001 is considerably smaller than that in 2002-2005, this year was important enough to be included in the time frame of this study, because nine of the ten articles were published after September 11, 2001, the day of the terror attacks on the USA and a crucial turning point for major political transformations in the world, including subsequent military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. According to an International Crisis Group report, HT started operating in Central Asian countries in the mid-1990s. There were, however, a limited number of articles on HT in the Kyrgyz press at that time. VB published 25 relevant articles from 1998 to 2000, and references to HT in those articles were mainly attributed to the incursions of a militant group, allegedly the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, in the Batken oblast of southern Kyrgyzstan in 1999-2000. The lack of articles in 2001 could be explained in various ways: first, notwithstanding events in Batken, HT may not have attracted much attention from journalists or law-enforcement agencies until the major terrorist attacks on the USA; second, perhaps there was no journalist at VB knowledgeable about HT or interested in writing detailed articles about the organization; third, the problem of religious extremism may have been neglected by the Kyrgyz government and brought up only during particular political events to justify its decisions and/or policies.

ICG researchers reported that, "during 2002 many observers sensed a decline in Hizb ut-Tahrir activity – fewer leaflets appeared, and some researchers claimed that the reason was a fall-off in financing, perhaps caused by restrictions introduced after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the U.S." (ICG, 2003: 14). According to the findings of this research, the number of articles about arrests of HT members rose from 1 in 2001 to 13 in 2002. Taking into account that HT members were identified mainly if caught distributing leaflets, the ICG observation about fewer leaflets in 2002 is not supported. However, it could be assumed that HT activities were not closely monitored by Kyrgyz law enforcement agencies until September 11, 2001, so that the number of leaflets was greater than in 2002, when the organization had to become more clandestine to avoid arrests. Four VB journalists noted, however, that articles related to HT appeared in VB after the Batken events in 1999 and have increased in number since then, due to the increasing frequency of HT activities in the country (interviews with Satybekov, Hamidov, Urumbaev and Kuzminyh).

The number of relevant articles increased significantly in 2002, and since then has stayed at a level of approximately 50 articles a year. The logic behind seeing support for the main hypothesis because H-1 is not supported is that the more articles VB publishes referring to HT, the greater would be the probability that VB is providing a complete picture of the organization.

As noted by Hamidov, who writes for VB in Osh, HT has become a scapegoat that is blamed during periods of instability in the region, or during a wide range of political events. This view was supported by Urumbaev, who added, however, that references to HT become more frequent during political events, because HT becomes more active at such times and takes advantage of opportunities to disseminate propaganda. It can be assumed, then, that the number of relevant articles has reached a peak level and has not declined, because from 2002 to 2005 there were numerous relevant political events on the local, regional and international levels.

4.2 Author

The main hypothesis was supported by support for H-2, because it is plausible that a diverse group of authors could provide differentiated and comprehensive information about HT. That the majority of the articles were written by a small circle of journalists is attributable to the following factors: Satybekov joined VB in 2001. He has an undergraduate degree in journalism, has lectured in the USA on religious extremism and terrorism in Central Asia, and has visited Israel and other countries to learn more about religious extremism. His colleagues regard him as an expert in this area. Urumbaev and Hamidov, VB journalists based in Osh, the southern part of Kyrgyzstan, are father and son. The father uses a pseudonym not to avoid persecution for writing about HT, but simply to avoid the repetition of the same name in the newspaper. They joined VB in 2000 and write about HT as part of their job of covering events in the southern part of the country. The three journalists noted that they write articles about HT voluntarily and have never been asked by the editor-in-chief to submit additional articles. Kuzminyh joined VB in 1995 and as part of his duties has written crime reports and covered arrests of HT members. Although Otorbaeva and Karimov are two of the six main authors, they could not be interviewed. Karimov was on leave, and Otorbaeva has not worked for VB since 2004.

That 47 relevant articles did not give information about their authors was explained by Satybekov as a technical problem. According to him, if several articles on the same page are written by the same author, only the last article contains infor-

mation about the author. This convention may not have been taken into account when the articles were published on the web page. Kuzminyh suggested that unattributed articles are published by VB as expressing the views of the newspaper. A review of unattributed articles established that the overwhelming majority focused on arrests of HT members or reports by law enforcement bodies operating mainly in the southern regions of the country. The four main authors were strongly convinced that their names were reflected in each of their publications.

4.3 Content

Since the number of "informative" articles (109) was higher than the total number of other articles combined (106), the main hypothesis was not supported. However, the observed difference was negligible, and it is also noteworthy that "informative" articles differed in several respects.

Informative articles were initially subdivided into three groups: 1) articles on the activities of HT members, 2) general information about the HT organization, and 3) articles on how to combat HT. Articles were also noted if they were: 1) long (from 700 to 1500 words); 2) solely dedicated to the HT organization and/or its activities; 3) and/or provided exhaustive information on the organization, including a historical discussion of the origins of HT, its ideology and objectives, its various types of activity, reasons why it has been banned in various parts of the world, the location of its headquarters and/or its attitude towards violence and different forms of government.

In 2001 two such informative articles were published: interviews by Satybekov with an imprisoned HT member and with a religious scholar. He was also the author of three comprehensive articles on HT published in 2002 as part of a series of articles entitled "Servants of Death." In 2003 VB did not publish any such comprehensive articles. Karimov and Otorbaeva wrote one article each that were the most informative articles on HT published that year. In 2004 VB also published two articles on the topic that were quite informative, although not comprehensive. One of these was an interview by Urii Aleksandrov with the head of the Issyk-Kul regional department of internal affairs. This official, a lieutenant colonel, provided extensive information on HT's activities in the country. The other was based on material from the Uzbek Embassy in Kyrgyzstan and contained general information about the HT organization, as well as its activities in Uzbekistan. In 2005 VB published one comprehensive article on HT, which consisted of an interview with Diler Djumabaev, a HT member in Osh. The interview questions were written by Satybekov, and the interview was conducted by Hamidov. The main hypothesis is strongly supported by the fact that of 109 articles classified as "informative" in this study only 10 were comprehensive, and six of these were written by the same person, Satybekov.

Satybekov maintained that VB keeps its readers well informed about HT's organization, ideology, objectives and origins. He noted, however, that all the mass media inform the public about HT and that knowledge of the organization depends not on the quantity of relevant articles, but rather on their quality. According to Satybekov, much detailed information about HT has been provided by VB and may be repeated for readers about 6 times a year in the form of interviews with knowledgeable persons. He thought that interviews such as the one with Djumabaev permit readers "... to hear the voice of the other side, and at the same time increase the popularity of the newspaper" (Interview with Satybekov). Moreover, he insisted, overly frequent references to HT in numerous articles on the topic would be counterproductive. If people got used to reading a lot of information about HT, they might either skip over such articles, or begin to regard the organization as a part of everyday life. He said the popularity of the newspaper would, consequently, decline (Interview with Satybekov).

The content of articles is carefully considered and discussed prior to publication by Urumbaev and Hamidov in Osh. They try to avoid mentioning such delicate matters as the ethnic identity of HT members (Interviews with Urumbaev and Hamidov). Urumbaev and Hamidov, who are also ethnic Uzbeks, emphasized that highlighting the Uzbek ethnicity of HT members might exacerbate inter-ethnic conflict and provoke violence. Printing that a majority of HT members are ethnic Uzbeks is not prohibited by any official government regulation. Nevertheless, journalists at VB do not write about this fact. The relevant articles published in 2001 and 2002 make no reference to HT members being Uzbeks. In 2003 two articles mentioned that HT leaflets were printed in both the Kyrgyz and the Uzbek languages. In the same year, an author other than the six main journalists wrote that traditionally HT disseminated its ideas among the Uzbek population in the south. In 2004 there was one reference to an arrested HT member being identified as an Uzbek, and one reference to confiscated HT leaflets in the Uzbek language. In 2005 two articles contained references to HT leaflets published in the Uzbek language.

Urumbaev said that the possession of weapons by HT members is another issue that should be thoroughly discussed before reporting it in articles, mainly because this claim has not been proved. However, a number of articles published in VB contain references to law enforcement agencies having proved that HT members possess arms. Such articles appeared in 2002. A September 3, 2002 article entitled "Terrorist Hideout" reported that the National Security Service had discovered a hideout containing weapons, allegedly belonging to HT, in the Jalalabad oblast in the south of Kyrgyzstan. This article was not written by one of the six main authors. Interestingly, in a number of articles journalists referred to both the discovery of arms and HT, but did not directly accuse HT of possessing arms. Such references were made very cautiously, so that readers could themselves infer that the arms discovered belonged to HT. In this connection, Urumbaev stated that VB has only

two reporters with a real grasp of HT issues: Satybekov and himself. Moreover, as noted by Urumbaev and Hamidov, some journalists from the north of the country do not possess in-depth knowledge of the organization and "... sometimes are too harsh ..." in their comments on HT (Interviews with Urumbaev and Hamidov).

4.4 Tone

The reason H-6 appears to support the main hypothesis is that a lack of balanced information cannot contribute to the presentation of a balanced picture of the organization. This study reveals that no matter whether articles contain information about arrests of HT members, general information about the organization or mention of HT by name only, in 90.3% of the cases references to HT are not neutral. An absence of positive references lends further support to the main hypothesis.

However, the data reveal that the number of articles with neutral references to HT decreased between 2003 and 2004, but increased significantly in 2005 (4 in 2003, 1 in 2004 and 11 in 2005). Also, the number of negative references to HT steadily increased over the past five years, and the number of very negative references to HT fluctuated (9 in 2001, 40 in 2002, 37 in 2003, 40 in 2004 and 21 in 2005). These data do not support H-9 and do not lend support to the main hypothesis. Although these two sub-hypotheses seem to contradict each other, it is worth noting that support for H-6 is much stronger than for H-9.

Negative references to HT were found in 22.3% of the cases. Since the organization is officially banned and operates clandestinely, it could, however, be argued that expressions coded as negative portray the organization objectively. Kuzminyh, Urumbaev and Hamidov expressed this view in regard to their writing. According to Kuzminyh, who has written the lowest percentage of articles referring to HT very negatively (38.5%), he always writes neutrally on this topic. He considers it his duty to report information he receives from law enforcement agencies without adding analytical comments, thus avoiding personal criticism of the organization. According to Hamidov, the articles about HT published in VB are neutral, because VB doesn't make any accusations against this organization. He was convinced that he also reported neutrally on HT and that his tone of reference to HT has not changed over time. Hamidov, however, was very negative in 65% of the cases. According to Urumbaev, the portrayal of HT in VB reflected the real situation. He explained that, "VB presented the combined information of four sources: law enforcement agencies, HT, local clergy, and the local population. References to HT were close to being neutral, but were a bit negative because of the critical nature of analytical articles. After all, the organization is officially banned in the territory of the Kyrgyz Republic and cannot be portrayed positively." Urumbaev, nevertheless, made the second highest percentage of very negative references to HT (73.9%) after Satybekov (82.1%).

Satybekov explained that his attitude toward the organization has been changing over time. As an atheist since childhood, he claimed to reject all religious organizations, including HT. He claimed that for him all religions present a misleading picture of the world. He did try to understand HT's situation, as well as that of other religious organizations that set themselves apart from the mainstream religions such as Islam and Christianity. He saw the confrontation between official Muslim clergy and HT as a competition between the two sides for followers. In his view, people join HT, apart from trying to survive under difficult economic and social conditions, in an attempt to satisfy spiritual needs and to learn more about Islam. HT theologians, he thought, were knowledgeable and could explain complex questions to ordinary persons in understandable language. Official Muslim clergy cannot accept that people join this organization and fail to do anything about it (Interview with Satybekov).

Satybekov estimated that in 90% of the cases references to HT in VB are negative mainly because HT is banned, and the objectives of the organization conflict with the Kyrgyz constitution. Of the 32 articles Satybekov wrote about HT in the past five years, 82.1% contained negative references to it. To justify himself he insisted, "As a person, I am a radical myself and a proponent of dictatorship in all spheres. Under a dictatorship, law and order are upheld." He maintained, however, that he did not favor burning mosques and physically eliminating HT members, but made it clear that HT should be combated with forceful measures.

Satybekov and Urumbaev noted that there were some positive aspects of HT that could have been covered. They pointed out, for example, that in the southern part of Kyrgyzstan HT was known for its charitable activities. There was one occasion on which members organized a feast for the local population. HT members could count on financial support from the organization when they faced emergencies or medical needs. They held that such information could not, however, be published in VB, because "... the ultimate goals of this organization are well known ..." (Interview with Urumbaev), and "... VB doesn't promote the HT organization" (Interview with Satybekov).

Another possible explanation for negative references to HT is that Kyrgyz journalists cannot improve their reputation by writing about positive issues. One finding of quantitative research on Kyrgyz media is that the majority of articles published in *Slovo Kyrgyzstana* and *Delo* are negative (Ibraeva et al., 2002: 165-167). To be precise, an analysis of articles containing references to the legislative and executive branches of the Kyrgyz government written by a leading VB journalist in

1998-1999 showed that his comments were negative in 18 of 19 cases (ibid.). It is difficult to expect journalists to write positively about a banned organization when they cover the government of their country so negatively.

4.5 HT and the mass media

Whereas Kyrgyz leaders of civil society and scholars think that the mass media should be used to combat religious extremism by promoting religious tolerance and exposing the real objectives of such organizations (Sagnaeva, 2002: 70; Musozoda, 2002: 168; Olimova, 2002: 202; Baran, 2004: 137-138), the journalists interviewed had somewhat different opinions. Kuzminyh claimed it was not his job to analyze the problem; he was only supposed to report on what happened and where. "Why" and "how" questions, he maintained, were not his responsibility. Hamidov and Satybekov maintained that the issue must be dealt with by the government and not by the mass media. Satybekov explained that, "... the objective of the mass media is not to campaign against anybody. Our country is not one where the mass media can be regarded as a fourth pillar of the state. I don't believe the mass media's role is to combat religious extremism" (Interview with Satybekov). Hamidov asked, "Why should VB combat HT at all? This group has a right to think whatever it wants, and we just inform the public about their ideas and objectives. It is up to the people to decide whether they will follow them or not." Urumbaev stated that, "... the mass media, and VB in particular, can only offer explanatory material on its pages, publish objective information about the organization so that people will be fully informed and kept up-to-date on the issues" (Interview with Urumbaev). Summarizing the views of the three journalists on ways of combating HT, it appears that Satybekov, who rejects all religions, advocates draconian measures against extremists; Hamidov, who describes himself as "half atheist," believes that the state should combine "hard" and "soft" measures to combat HT; and Urumbaev, who deeply respects all religions, but is not a strong believer, feels that HT cannot be combated with harsh measures at all. Instead, state and clergy should sponsor educational discussions and activities to help people understand the errors of HT ideas.

When the Kyrgyz law "On preventing extremist activity" was adopted on June 30, 2005, it promulgated the official regulation that the mass media is forbidden to publicize extremist ideas. Three of four interviewees, however, had never heard of this law. Satybekov was aware of it, but said that, "... this law, just like any other law in Kyrgyzstan, doesn't work, and it will not work for many years because of a very weak legal culture in Kyrgyzstan" (Interview with Satybekov). According to this law, however, the mass media are not allowed to disseminate extremist material or to contribute to extremist activities. One question this raises is whether interviews of HT members published in VB can be regarded as spreading extremist ideas. On the one hand, HT members are Kyrgyz citizens and have a right to practice the freedom of speech guaranteed by the constitution. On the other hand, they are members of a banned organization and should not be given a public forum.

An analysis of interviews with HT members appearing in VB lends support to the charge that VB has, in fact, given a platform to HT, publishing information that would otherwise be spread clandestinely through HT leaflets. Satybekov's interview with Rahimjan Charikov, an imprisoned HT member, was published in VB on September 26, 2001 (Satybekov, 2001). Satybekov's questions disclosed important information about HT's objectives and ideology, informing readers as to why this organization has been banned in many countries throughout the world. Charikov's answers, moreover, presented HT's views about political developments in the world and the region. Commenting on the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the USA, Charikov insisted that, "... America has itself to blame. It provokes terrorism, because, in leading the West, it wants to suppress Islam" (Charikov quoted in Satybekov, 2001). Among Charikov's other controversial claims were: "Turkish activist Mustafa Kemal Atatürk destroyed it [a Caliphate] by splitting it up into a multitude of smaller states. He did it under the influence of the West Why should we be surprised? Mustafa Kemal was a representative of a Jewish tribe, Yahudi, as is, by the way, the current Uzbek president, Islam Karimov On February 16, 1999, Islam Karimov organized a great provocation: an assassination attempt ... on himself, with the help of the special services, in order to accuse true Muslims, including Hizb ut-Tahrir, of organizing bombings. After that he started arresting anyone who disagreed with the government. That is politics!" (Charikov quoted in Satybekov, 2001).

Another interview with a HT member was published in VB after the presidential elections in Kyrgyzstan on July 22, 2005. Satybekov wrote the questions, and Hamidov conducted the interview. This time the interviewee was Diler Djumabaev, an entrepreneur and press-attaché of the HT organization. In several of his questions, Satybekov revealed basic information about HT's membership, strategies, objectives and ideology. Other questions were aimed, moreover, at ascertaining HT's view on the presidential elections in Kyrgyzstan, the March events in Kyrgyzstan that resulted in the seizure of the government by opposition leaders, on Andijan events in Uzbekistan,¹ the American airbase in Kyrgyzstan and the London terrorist bombings in July 2005. Djumabaev's most interesting replies were: "If a mob of people managed to seize power [in Kyrgyzstan on March 24, 2005] in a couple of hours, we could have done it even faster"; "We inform the population on what the sharia [Islamic law] says about elections – the election of those who rule without the Koran and hadis is a sin – and to vote or not to is the private matter of each individual"; "It was tough for us during Akaev's rule, now it is even worse. As

1. In May 2005 Uzbek government forces killed several hundred protestors in the main square of Andijan who had gathered to protest the unfair trial of 23 businessmen.

an entrepreneur, I opened the TV studio 'Ong', that couldn't operate even for three days. There is an ideological struggle going on"; "[The Andijan events] were organized by the Uzbek special services. Three or four months ago they offered 820 million US dollars to the interested forces to overthrow Karimov's regime. They invited Hizb ut-Tahrir to lead this activity. We refused, [because] there will be another Karimov, but the regime will not change"; "Yuldashev is blamed for having been an HT member. Why doesn't Uzbekistan slander another activist who occupies a high post in official religious structures and at the same time a post of nakib in our organization"; "They [the USA] and their allies set up a base here in order to kill our brothers in Afghanistan. How can we silently watch this?"; "If England starts pressuring Hizb, it means that democracy is on the verge of collapse. Democracy has its own principles: freedom of personality, speech, religion, etc. If they renounce these principles, it means that it is curtains for their ideology" (Satybekov and Hamidov, 2005).

One would expect to find answers to Satybekov's questions in HT's leaflets, but this information was published by VB. Satybekov mentioned that he had initiated the interview with Djumabaev and that after its publication neither he nor the VB management was approached by government officials. Djumabaev was, however, arrested on April 25, 2006, almost a year after the publication. According to state officials, he was arrested because he refused to pay a US \$200 electricity bill (Mir-saitov, 2006). Hamidov said he did not think Djumabaev's arrest was connected with his membership in HT, and that he was not going to cover this event in VB (Interview with Hamidov).

4.6 Hizb ut-Tahrir and changes in the Kyrgyz government and Vechernii Bishkek's directorship

Changes in the Kyrgyz government in March 2005 and the VB management in August 2005 seem to have had little influence on the content or the tone of articles containing references to HT. The only noticeable change is that after the opposition seized power, VB stopped referring to the former opposition as having contacts with and the support of the HT organization. The four journalists interviewed were of the opinion that these changes have influenced neither the content nor the tone of references to HT in VB (Interviews with Satybekov, Hamidov, Urumbaev and Kuzminyh).

5 Conclusions

The quantitative findings of the study revealed that the main hypothesis was supported by 7 of the 11 sub-hypotheses: 1) the number of articles containing references to HT did not increase over time; 2) the majority of the articles were written by a small number of journalists; 3) the majority of articles mainly irrelevant to HT referred to the organization in the context of terrorism; 4) the tone of references to HT was very negative in the majority of cases; 5) the tone of reference to HT did not depend on the article's content; 6) there was a strong correlation between the authors of articles and the type of article content; and 7) there was a strong correlation between authors and tone. Two sub-hypotheses – 1) there would be fewer informative articles on HT than articles about arrests and irrelevant articles combined; 2) articles would become less informative over time – were not supported by the quantitative data and, consequently, did not lend support to the main hypothesis. However, qualitative analysis of these sub-hypotheses revealed that they actually did support the main hypothesis. Two findings – that the majority of the informative articles did not address the question of combating HT, and that the number of articles with very negative references to HT did not increase over time – do not, however, support the main hypothesis.

To conclude, VB failed to provide a balanced, complete picture of the organization over the past five years. It provided information that wasn't balanced, perhaps because a tendency to writing critically and often very negatively about topical issues, including HT, not only increases the popularity of the newspaper, but also protects journalists against accusations of supporting an extremist religious organization.

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