

Media and Grassroots Activism for the Achievement of Sustainable Development Goals: A Study of Postcolonial Macau From 2002 to 2021

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In the background of increasing concerns over the various threats to sustainable development, grassroots movements for the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDGs) are on the rise worldwide. Existing research has confirmed the positive correlations between media attention and the success of activism as the former can bring along substantial mobilization resources to the activists. However, not much is known about how the news media frame the protests against threats to the achievement of SDGs. To fill the gap, this study has sampled and analyzed 810 news items on protests against threats to SDGs by news organizations in the postcolonial Macau of China over 19 years, from 2002 to 2021. In particular, the study investigates how the news framing of the protests evolved through the years. The findings show that the news media consider the protests less radical over the years with the protesters focused more on the political issues related to the 17 SDGs. Such findings suggest that the media stance was the driving force for the marginalization of the protests.

Keywords: grassroots activism, media, framing, sustainable development goals, Macau SAR

The United Nations Member States adopted the 2030 agenda for attaining 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) and 169 associated targets. The SDGs aim to solve global problems, such as environmental sustainability, social inclusion, poverty, health, and equality. International agencies, governments, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have been working together to achieve sustainability goals, and they declare for environmental justice and human rights. Regardless of these subsequent official responses, ongoing concerns about various threats referencing sustainable issues have led to an increase in the number of movements aimed at achieving the SDGs. Diversified SDGs activities have emerged worldwide, such as environmental protests, feminist movements, and political justice protests.

Protests constitute a bridge to connect policymakers and the public. Grassroots mobilization is considered the most crucial way to affect opinion formation and functions as an essential means for citizens

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to express their concerns (Cottle, 2008). However, the protest group's ability to achieve the desired results hinges on its ability to attract the media's attention and how they are portrayed in the coverage. As Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993) argue, prominent mainstream media coverage can amplify the protesters' voice, and a positive description can legitimize protesters' goals, thus gaining support from the public and pressuring authority. Communication scholars are interested in how media describe the protest, and they try to interpret the media frames in constructing the protest stories (e.g., Boykoff, 2006; Elmasry & el-Nawawy, 2017; Gerth & Siegert, 2012; Haenggli, 2012; Kuypers, 2002). The traditional mainstream media have been found to follow a certain routine; the tendency to produce biases against the protesters is showcased by the "protest paradigm" (Chan & Lee, 1984). Typically, the mainstream media focuses on the disruptive actions of demonstrators, so reducing the impact of social protests (e.g., Bishop, 2013; Boyle, McCluskey, McLeod, & Stein, 2005; Chan & Lee, 1984; Gitlin, 1980; McLeod & Hertog, 1999; Milne, 2005). During the last decade, the social movement field has turned into what Cottle (2008) called "a cacophonous field of protest" (p. 857). As protests with more emphasis on justification goals evolve into "large-scale individualized action" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013, p. 760), more positive public acceptance of protest and "fundamental changes in the media landscape" have occurred over time (Gil-Lopez & Quarterly, 2021, p. 4), which may transform the way protests were represented by mainstream media. It is crucial to figure out if the SDGs protest coverage followed established norms and whether the structural and intuitional differences shape different news coverages about grassroots activism.

The prominence of Macau's protests provides us with an excellent opportunity to observe the SDGs protests and the media's attention to grassroots mobilization. Macau is a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC). In 1999, Portugal handed over the sovereignty of Macau to China. Under the "one country, two systems" policy, the Macau SAR government adopted the gaming development strategy and the liberalization of the casino industry in 2003 (O'Regan, 2019). Nowadays, Macau is famous as the "Eastern Las Vegas," one of the richest cities in Asia. However, with the rapid growth of gross domestic product (GDP), some controversial problems have emerged, such as the gap in income inequality, illegal foreign laborers, high house prices, government corruption, and bad traffic conditions (Cao, Cheong, & Li, 2014). As O'Regan (2019) said, "the expansion of casino concessions" gradually led to "an illusion of prosperity" in Macau (p. 20). Macau citizens have participated in the annual protests with multiple demands. The large-scale annual protests in Macau include the "May 01" Labor Day protest and the "December 20" Handover Day protest (Chung & Tieben, 2009). In addition to these established rallies, various grassroots protests that advocate for SDGs, such as no poverty, anti-inequality, climate action, peace, justice, and robust institutions, emerge on a regular basis. In the postcolonial era, the legitimacy of the political system (partially democratic governance) and various social issues are causing a growing crisis for the Macau SAR government. Meanwhile, public opinion in Macau is shaped by the prodemocracy media of neighboring Hong Kong. Cross-regional media's influence on the protest framing process highlights its heterogeneous media landscape. In view of the intricacy of protest concerns and identities, the media may serve the function of social control to varying degrees. In this study, both the protest and the media coverage are evaluated as variables. Prior analyses of the SDGs protests focused on individual case situations, or scholars tend to investigate grassroots activists' adoption and use of advocacy strategies. Less well understood is how the media shape the SDGs protests. This study aims to extend previous research by identifying a broader range of conditions under which the protest paradigm could be explored, with a

longitudinal study that would track the protest coverage from 2002 to 2021 across different media outlets, types of protests, and tactics, as well as its change over time.

Literature Review

Grassroots Activism for SDGs Achievement

People can be sensitized to pursuing a social change objective through the process of grassroots activism (Akpors, 2013). As a result of the protests, the SDGs communication gap between other stakeholders, including the media, policymakers, and the public, has been bridged (Vu et al., 2021). They have contributed to the promotion of SDGs by replenishing media coverage gaps and bolstering action in response to government inaction (Laestadius, Neff, Barry, & Frattaroli, 2013). A wide range of protests has taken place across various locations and industries as part of the SDGs' activism, which aims to bring about major social and political reforms (Meyer & Tarrow, 1998). In the setting of an authoritarian media environment, grassroots activists in China have frequently negotiated for participation in the policymaking of the state and for the formation of a public sphere (Yang & Calhoun, 2007). Protest tactics have been described as modes of action (Rucht, 1990) or "action repertoires," which refer to the variety of tactics employed by social movement organizations (Tilly, 1978). The "new" social mobilization strategies take advantage of the continuously emerging communications tools and technologies (Akpors, 2013). Globally, online advocacy for the SDGs by NGOs and grassroots organizations is increasing (Blumer, 1951). Identifying the variety of activities is essential for comprehending the dynamics underlying the SDGs' grassroots activism. Our study employs a longitudinal perspective to investigate the fluidity of the grassroots movement, concentrating on the action repertoires used to achieve success in shifting political settings.

Media Framing of Protest and Protest Paradigm

The media has always been considered essential to gaining the public's attention needed for effective advocacy (Ryan, 1992). Long-standing research on the relationship between the media and protest groups has revealed that journalists follow specific patterns and scripts while reporting on activism (Kleut & Milojevic, 2021). Framing theory explains how the public interprets, absorbs, and discerns essential signals throughout media coverage (Scheufele, 1999). By highlighting particular aspects of a news item over all others, media framing can alter the public's perception of an event (Entman, 1993). The manner in which the media chooses to frame a given story or event has a direct influence on how audiences interpret the significance of the developing events and its long-term ramifications for molding public opinion (Chong & Druckman, 2007).

The protest paradigm serves as a series of framing strategies, emphasizing certain characteristics of protesters and depicting them as "the other" (Chan & Lee, 1984). McLeod and Hertog (1999) specified the protest paradigm as being manifested in the following characteristics: such as narrative structure, the citation of official resources, the invocation of public opinion, the delegitimization of protesters, marginalizing the protest activists, and even demonization. Among them, the narrative structure is derived from Goffman's (1974) concept of "schemas," serving as a script of a news story. It is common for the media to use a violent crime story narrative structure to describe the matter at issue as a conflict between the police and

protesters, rather than as a matter of intelligent debate (McLeod & Detenber, 1999). The journalists rely heavily on official resources because they are seen as objective and also add prestige to a news story (Gitlin, 1980). McLeod and Hertog (1992) found that the media convey cues to marginalize the protest group in the news story of protest, including the opinion polls, social norms, and the violations of laws. The news story often emphasizes the defiance of a protest and portrays the protesters as an isolated minority. McLeod and Hertog (1999) found that a news story would be more consistent with the characteristics of the protest paradigm when the protests were more threatening to the status quo.

As a result of the changing media landscape and macroenvironment, media representation of protests has become more diverse and unclear, especially for SDGs protests. For example, despite favorable media coverage of the antiwar movement, marginalizing framing strategies emerge in stories covering the grassroots-led protest, in which the media focuses on actions rather than the substance of criticism (Murray, Parry, Robinson, & Goddard, 2008). The grassroots protest got some sympathetic media attention, but it was less effective than the elite protest in accusing the war's justification. However, recent research indicates that media coverage of the SDGs protest deviates from the protest paradigm. When covering financial crisis protests, less emphasis is being placed on the (dis)order frame, and more on national sovereignty and social imbalance, as the news media shifts toward more validating coverage (Papaioannou, 2020). All significant organizational declarations were covered in media coverage of the Women's March, with an emphasis on grassroots engagement and unity (Nicolini & Hansen, 2018). This study aims to contribute to the present understanding of grassroots activism in support of the SDGs by researching the extent to which protest paradigm mechanisms are integrally linked to the variety of action repertoires.

The Developing Perspective of the Protest Paradigm

In the past decade, more recent studies looking at the concept of the protest paradigm have begun to treat the pattern of media coverage as a variable (e.g., Boyle, McLeod, & Armstrong, 2012; McCluskey, Stein, Boyle, & McLeod, 2009; McLeod & Detenber, 1999; Weaver & Scacco, 2013), the media environment has been changing, and the coverage of protests has "become less clear or predictable" than in the past (Cottle, 2008, p. 854). The protest paradigm will shift amid sociopolitical conditions.

The Perspective of the Deviance of Protest

The media act as an agent of social control, and protest coverages varies along with the media's perception of the degree of deviance represented by the protest group (Shoemaker, 1984). The conventional way to define "deviance" is from the perspective of social consensus. When someone's behavior breaks a social rule or norm, this action is defined as "deviance" by the authority (Wells, 1978). Moscovici (1980) defines the minority as deviant. Shoemaker (1984) criticizes Moscovici's idea by saying the notion of "deviance" should "express more about a group than its size" (p. 66). Shoemaker advocates the labeling perspective to approach the notion of "deviance," and treats "deviance" as a continuous variable. Labeling theory says groups are perceived to be deviant based on the judgment made by the powerful actors in society (Wells, 1978). From the labeling perspective, the journalist can create a deviant group simply by labeling them as deviant in the coverage. How journalists cover political groups can alter public opinion (Smith, McCarthy, McPhail, & Augustyn, 2001).

Based on the framework of Chan and Lee's (1984) protest paradigm, some studies have explored the dynamic relationship between the deviance of a protest and the protest coverage (e.g., Boyle & Armstrong, 2009; Boyle et al., 2012; Lee, 2014). McLeod and Hertog (1999) said the level of a protest's challenge to the status quo has an influence on the extent to which the protest paradigm is used in news coverage. These studies operationalized the level of deviance by using the protest group's tactics and goals. The goals of the protest group are components in deciding the level of deviance, and the deviance of the goals refers to the degree of intent to change the status quo, established by examining whether the protesters argue for a radical change (e.g., overthrowing the legal rules or opposing generally accepted public opinion), or a minor reform or maintaining the status quo (Boyle et al., 2012). The tactics range from nonthreatening or peaceful actions such as sit-ins and vigils to violent and extreme behaviors, such as a gunshot, and fighting with the police (Boyle & Armstrong, 2009). Besides the goals and the tactics, the type of protest also affects the nature of the protest coverage. The type of protest is closely related to the protest group's goals. For example, in the U.S. sociopolitical context, the antiwar protests have more radical goals than the labor protests (McLeod, 1995). As Boyle, McCluskey, Devanathan, Stein, and McLeod (2004) pointed out, labor protests target part of the political system, not the entire one. When compared with the antiwar protest, the labor protest is "sanctioned as a normal part of system operation" in some countries, and thus the labor protest would be treated more favorably by the news media (Boyle et al., 2004, p. 46). In addition to measuring the level of deviance based on examining the combined effect of the goals and tactics, Boyle and Armstrong (2009) also examined the separate influence of protest goals and tactics on the media coverage, and they found that the tactics, rather than the goals, are the strongest predictor of how the media will treat a protest group. This study follows the conventional line of investigation and examines how the level of deviance shapes the coverage of SDGs protests in Macau.

The Perspective of Media Outlet

The media construct reality rather than directly reflect it in a mirror. The media's framing of a protest is an integral part of the media politics of dissent, as demonstrated by Cottle (2008). With the increasing competition in the readership market, in a more complex and fragmented media environment, the media tend to occupy a stance on a certain issue and then keep the professed ideology to flourish (Milne, 2005). A general conception of media stance is described in the theorist's works. Media stance is understood as the production of ruling ideas (Mannheim, 2013; Marx & Engels, 1972; Thompson, 1984). Snow and Benford (2000) clarify the relation between media framing and media stance, and they show that the media framing process articulates and amplifies the elements of events; media frames indicate the "existing beliefs and values," which are linked with "existing ideologies" (p. 9). Van Dijk (2006) described the media's existing stance as a "socially shared representation of a general and abstract kind" (p. 145). He said that the frame is rooted in the media stance, which can facilitate or constrain the framing process. The field of the media is heterogeneous, and media coverage on social and political issues can be dramatically different across that field; "the extent to which news outlets are oriented to generating profit" can have an effect on how they describe a protest story (Rohlinger, Kail, Taylor, & Conn, 2012, p. 53). Jenings and Saunders (2014) noted that the media's agenda-setting power should be understood in dynamic terms. Because of the complexity of the contemporary media system induces various media formations, we should challenge the media's traditional bias against the protests. This is particularly true of the media system in the Greater China Area,

and a comparative study examining the case of Macau—a heterogeneous media environment—can broaden our understanding of the application of the protest paradigm.

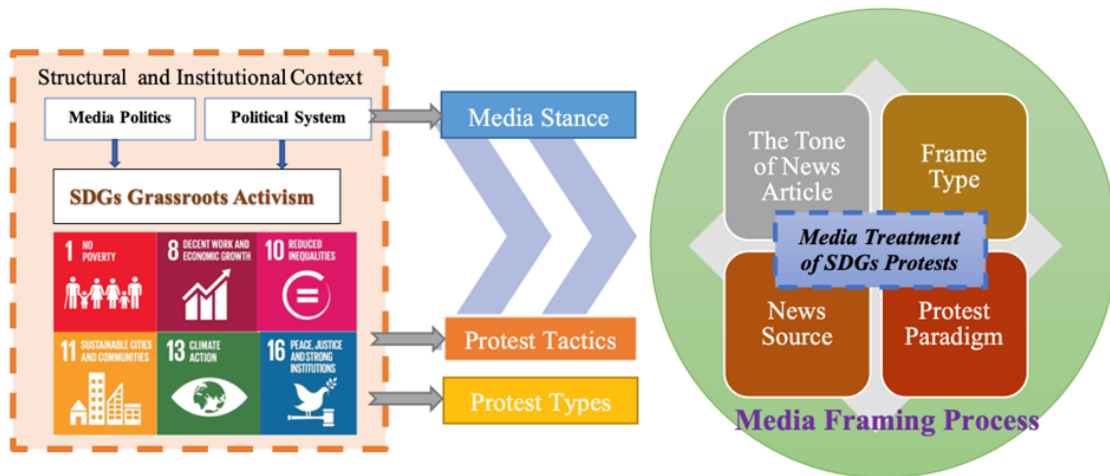


Figure 1. The theoretical framework.

As shown in the theoretical framework (see Figure 1), the main questions and hypotheses for this study are:

RQ1: Have the issues and tactics of grassroots activists involved in advocacy shifted over time?

RQ2: How have the marginalizing framing devices of the protest paradigm evolved in protest coverage over the past two decades?

H1: The prevalence of protest paradigm devices is more likely to occur in radical protests than in moderate and peaceful ones.

H2: The prevalence of protest paradigm devices is more likely to occur in antiregime/political protests than in policy-focused and labor/economy protests.

RQ3a: Do the media with different political stances vary in their adoption of the protest paradigm?

RQ3b: Do the media with different political stances differ in their sourcing practice?

Methodology

Data Collection and Sampling

This study explores the features of SDGs activism across time, the media's construction of the protests, and how multiple factors influence the media's treatment of the SDGs protests. Specifically, how

the media's political stance, the perceived degree of deviance of the protest tactics, and the protest type shape news coverage of SDGs protest. This study used a content analysis of news articles ($N = 810$) covering 19 SDGs protest events during a 19-year period from 2002 to 2021.

Macau's sociopolitical situation has a distinct difference before and after Macau's return (Leng, 2009). The present study seeks to examine media representations of SDGs protests during the postcolonial period since Macau's return to China. Hence, the time frame is set from January 1, 1999, to December 31, 2021. The relevant articles were retrieved from the WiseNews database. The keywords "protest" or "marching" (*you xing, kang zheng, kang yi*), "demonstration" (*shi wei*), "sit in" (*jing zuo*), and "rally" (*ji hui*) were used to search the relevant articles. Through reading all the relevant news articles, searching for the information referring to protests in Macau on the Internet, and reviewing the literature in relation to Macau, this study found 19 SDGs protests had been recorded by the newspapers or other documents. In terms of media samples, as a result of Hong Kong newspapers capturing the lion's share of Macau's reading market, Macau's public opinion environment is strongly affected by Hong Kong media. Hence, five newspapers from each region were examined: *Apple Daily (HK)*, *Ming Pao (HK)*, *Jornal Va Kio (Macau)*, *Macau Daily (Macau)*, and *Jornal do Cidadao (Macau)*. Based on the assumption that the media's ideological stance affects the way protest is being covered (Chan & Lee, 1984), this study measured each media outlet's political stance toward the sociopolitical system and categorized the media outlets into three different types, conservative media (161 articles for *Jornal Va Kio* and 267 articles for *Macau Daily*), prodemocracy media (76 articles from *Apple Daily* and 242 articles from *Jornal do Cidadao*), and neutral media (63 articles for *Ming Pao*).

Measurement

The unit of analysis was a single newspaper article. Four coders were tasked with coding all news samples within two months, then the intercoder reliability was calculated and was found to be more than 85%. During the last three decades, content analysis has been applied to the study of media and social movement (e.g., Edelman, 2001; Mahone, 2013; Shoemaker, 1984), and scholars have used it to study marginalization framing devices in news articles (e.g., Dardis, 2006; McLeod & Hertog, 1992; Xu, 2013), to analyze sources quoted in news coverage (e.g., Armstrong & Boyle, 2011; Boyle et al., 2004; McCluskey et al., 2009), and also to compare the media outlet's difference of the protest coverages (e.g., Lee, 2014; Saif Shahin, Sturm, & Fadnis, 2016). It has been verified by earlier studies that content analysis is a systemic and objective evaluation method. The analytical categories employed here were derived largely from predominant variables that have been highlighted in the protest paradigm literature. Some codes were selected inductively in accordance with the peculiarities of Macau's SDGs protests.

Two key independent variables were designed to measure the deviance of the protest. "Protest Type" was adapted from Young's (2015) definition of protest: protests were organized in three types, which are based on the protest issues and their target group. The higher score means the protest group had a more extreme protest goal and presented a more significant challenge to the status quo: 1 = *Labor/economy*, a critique of labor or economic inequality, protests aimed at challenging the Macau gambling corporation or the construction companies; 2 = *Policy focused*, protest aims to withdraw a specific law or policy; 3 = *Antiregime/political*, protest addresses power struggle against the established norms, current government or regime. For *Protest Tactic*, the classification is based on whether protest involves disruption

or radical conflict (Lee, 2014), the item was coded as: 1 = *Peaceful tactics*, there was no confrontation situation during the demonstration; 2 = *Moderate tactics*, sit-ins or conversation with the police, but the protesters did not engage in any violent behavior; 3 = *Radical tactics*, the use of force, physical fights, or firing guns. Besides, *Time frame* was included as a continuous variable, indicating the year that event happened: 1 = *Sep. 08. 2002*, 2 = *May. 01. 2007*, and so on, up to 19 = *Mar. 28. 2021*.

The dependent variables were generated by a qualitative analysis of news text. The *Tone of the News Article* was used to measure the media's treatment of protest in the "news headline" and "the main body" (Cammaerts, 2013). Both items were coded on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 = *from highly supportive* to 3 = *neutral* to 5 = *highly critical*. We coded for *Frame Type* mentioned in the literature, as, according to Mcleod and Detenber's (1999) findings that the news coverage of more radical protests tends to be episodic, focusing on the actions of the group rather than the issue being addressed by the protesters. The item was assessed by using a 5-point scale (from *highly thematic* to *highly episode*). Journalists usually quote different sources in a news story, such as the police, bystanders, participants, or officials. These quotes are intended to represent people's arguments about the protests. *Sources practice* is concerned with the news sources, which involves two items and is evaluated based on the order, the proportion, and the length of the quotes. *Representation of dissenting voice* refers to the news report citing a source or sources from the protesters or dissenting leaders/organizers, or citizen dissenters. *Representation of the target group* was used to measure the use of sources that support the established sociopolitical system, such as the officials from the government, political institutions, or progovernment parties. Both variables were coded on a 3-point scale. The higher ratings indicate that the sources are more likely to be used to identify the protest group's efforts or to highlight the negative features of the dissidents (Boyle et al., 2004).

The framing devices of the protest paradigm—"show, goal, public attitude, and impact" was adapted from Xu's (2013) study. The media may adopt a complex pattern of protest coverage in a heterogeneous media environment, according to previous research, which found that the four framing strategies were not used merely to marginalize the protest group (Harlow & Johnson, 2011; Kleut & Milojevic, 2021; Kyriakidou & Olivás Osuna, 2017). This analysis, therefore, divides the protest paradigm into two sets of framing mechanisms, whereby we coded for three ways of media framing: (a) -1 = negative item was mentioned (*Freak show, Delegitimizing frame, Public disapproval, Violence*), 0 = not mentioned, 1 = positive item was mentioned (*Spectacle, Legitimizing frame, Public support, Peacefulness*). The *Spectacle* focused on the well-organized demonstration, the emotions, and the drama of protests (Harlow & Johnson, 2011). The *Freak show* refers to the protesters' young age, freakish, or eccentric appearance. The *Legitimizing frame* focuses on protesters' constructive proposals for political changes (Kyriakidou & Olivás Osuna, 2017). The *Delegitimizing frame* refers to the protester's opposition to the status quo and the unreasonable goals. The *Public support* put emphasis on the protest's wide public support, the narrative asserts that a societal majority supports protests. The *Public disapproval* mentions that protesters are unrepresentative of the citizens, and the news story equates citizen commentary with generalizations about unfavorable public opinion. The *Peacefulness* emphasizes that the protest is in good order and well regulated. The *Violence* illustrates that protest harms citizens and brings shame to Macao's image, producing social problems and intensifying conflict. We applied Principal Components Analysis (Varimax Rotation) to test the four framing strategies, and the *Paradigm factor* was formed with high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .854). The *Paradigm factor* was used as a single variable for multiple regression testing.

Results

The Evolution of SDGs Protests Over Time

In answer to RQ1, this study considered the feature of the change of SDGs protest over time from 2002 to 2021 (see Table 1). The protests in Macau SAR mainly targeted the six goals among all SDGs, those are SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG10 (reduced inequalities), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), SDG 13 (climate action and peace), and SDG 16 (justice and strong institutions). Protests against SDG 16 were the most common ($n = 8$), followed by SDG 10 protests ($n = 7$), SDG 11 protests ($n = 5$), SDG 8 protests ($n = 3$), and SDG 1 protests ($n = 2$). The correlation test results show that the protesters adopted more moderate tactical repertoires, $r(810) = -.59, p < .001$, but the activists involved more political issues ($r = .41, p < .001$) across time.

The findings of this study indicate the evolution of the social movement environment in Macau. In western democratic societies, the normalization and routinization of social movements have caused humanity to treat protest as a legitimate way for the public to express their opinions (Meyer & Tarrow, 1998). The increased interactional capacities provide unprecedented chances for the global dissemination of political protests and dissent, resulting in the formation of a "new social movement environment" (Cottle, 2008, p. 855). In postcolonial Macau, citizens have gradually developed a civic and democratic consciousness; the changing character of civil society makes citizens more likely to view protest as a legitimate means of political engagement; among the SDGs, they place the highest priority on political sustainability issues. The resource mobilization theory demonstrates that social movement organizations (SMOs) attempt to influence the media's construction of protest (Nimmo & Swanson, 1990). Grassroots activists seek mainstream media backing through more peaceful protest tactics.

Marginalizing Devices in the SDGs Protest Coverage

RQ2 sought to confirm the emergence of the protest paradigm in an authoritarian setting (see Table 1). According to the coding sheet, Score "1" means the protest paradigm functions as a marginalization strategy. The percentage of score "1" frames in the sample is shown in Table 1. The data revealed the overall prevalence of marginalizing devices in the 19-year protest articles. Less than one-third of the news articles applied the negative subframes; in general, the protest paradigm has not been extensively used in postcolonial Macau. The violence was the most widely used frame ($n = 220, 27.1\%$). Media highlighted the idea that the protest caused annoyance to the surrounding residents, was harmful to traffic safety, or it destroyed the environment, and so on. The violence frame is followed by freak show ($n = 204, 25.2\%$). In this framing, photos or videos were usually used to visualize the protesters' indignation and to highlight their funny dress, immature appearance, and odd behaviors.

The study applied multiple regression analysis to test the multiple factors' effects on adherence to the protest paradigm and other framing devices (see Table 2). The result showed that, in general, the model was highly significant, $F = 76.40, p < .001, R^2 = .49$, and the independent variables as a whole can explain 49.2% of the variability of the protest paradigm factor "show, goal, public attitude, impact." According to Cohen's (1988) measurement standards, this data result showed a large effect size (over $R^2 = .26$). For the

predictor variables, time frame ($\beta = -.11, t = -2.21, p < .05$), protest type ($\beta = -.23, t = -4.99, p < .001$), protest tactics ($\beta = .25, t = 4.92, p < .001$), and media stance ($\beta = .46, t = 11.37, p < .001$) were all statistically highly significant, they were all important indicators for adherence to the protest paradigm. Notably, the year in which the protest occurred relates significantly to paradigm factors in a negative way, this indicates that the media coverage of protests adopted fewer protest paradigm across time and was more likely to frame protest coverages thematically ($\beta = .26, t = 4.79, p < .001$). It indicates that news articles were more likely to emphasize the protester's goals rather than focusing on the disordered scene.

Given the central role that news's narrative structure on shaping the protest coverage, this study also explored which factor can best predict the type of frame. The results showed that protest tactics significantly affect the type of media frames used (see Table 2). The violent protests were more likely to be framed episodically rather than thematically ($\beta = -.25, t = -4.54, p < .001$).

Multiple Factors Influencing Protest Framing

H1 was strongly supported, which proposed that the deviance of protest tactics would affect the protest framing. The marginalizing devices of the protest paradigm and protest tactics showed a significant negative correlation (see Table 1). It suggests that more extreme tactics trigger more critical treatment by the mainstream media. When a protest adopted a more radical tactic, the protest coverage would conform more to the characteristics of the protest paradigm; the news articles about peaceful protests employed a tone in favor of protesters.

Table 1. Pearson Correlation Between Protest Paradigm, Protest Tactics, and Protest Type.

		Protest Tactic	Protest Type
Time	Pearson correlation	-.59***	.41***
(Year 2002–2021)	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00
Freak show	Pearson correlation	.38***	-.21***
($n = 204, \text{Yes} = 25.2\%$)	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00
Delegitimizing frame	Pearson correlation	.16**	-.04
($n = 149, \text{Yes} = 18.4\%$)	Sig. (2-tailed)	.01	.50
Public disapproval	Pearson correlation	.26***	-.19**
($n = 109, \text{Yes} = 13.4\%$)	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00
Violence	Pearson correlation	.28***	-.23***
($n = 220, \text{Yes} = 27.1\%$)	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.00

Note. $N = 810, **p < .01, ***p < .001$.

We should also note that the protest type showed a negative regression coefficient for predicting each framing device (see Table 2), The result is opposite of the predicted direction of H2. As the mean value of the protest type increased, the predictive value of the paradigm factor decreased. The "labor/economy" protests, which are at the lowest level of deviance, were treated critically by the mainstream media; the "antiregime/political" protests were covered more positively. This shows that, when the SDGs of a protest challenged the status quo to a higher degree, the media adopted fewer protest paradigm framing strategies. The result indicated that media politics have changed in Macau. Macau's residents aspired to the continued

advance of democracy; the news agencies paid more attention to what the public was really concerned about and made the political issue more prominent rather than marginalized.

The data analysis shows that media stance was the strongest determinant of the protest paradigm and other framing strategies (see Table 2). So, in a heterogeneous media environment of a postcolonial region, the mainstream media's marginalization of protesters was not systematic or united, but complicated. When compared with the features of different protests, such as their goals, types, and tactics, media stance was the most prominent factor in determining whether the protests would be marginalized by the mainstream media.

Table 2. Time, Protest Type, Protest Tactics, and Media Stance's Influence on the Protest Framing (Beta).

Variable	Protest		Tone of				Protester Source	Official Source
	Paradigm Factors	Tone of Headline	Main Body	Episode Frame	Thematic Frame			
Time	-.11*	.02	-.06	-.13	.26***	.09	.07	
Protest type	-.23***	-.19***	-.21***	-.19**	.21***	.11	-.01	
Protest tactics	.25***	.19***	.16***	.03	-.25***	-.23***	.13	
Media stance	.46***	.54***	.56***	.01	-.20***	-.26***	.32***	
R^2 (%)	49.2%	42.2%	47.6%	7.9%	41.1%	21.3%	11.4%	
F value	76.40***	57.7***	71.67***	6.80***	55.16***	21.37***	10.15***	
Adjusted R^2 (%)	48.5%	41.5%	46.9%	6.8%	40.4%	20.3%	10.3%	

Note. Entries are standardized regression coefficients. Higher values in dependent variable are more critical for each device of protest paradigm, more critical for the tone of articles, and media frame the protest more thematically or episodically. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

RQ3a and RQ3b are concerned with how different media outlets differ in their sourcing practices and protest paradigm devices. One-way ANOVA and t -test were run with the representation of dissenting voices, target group sources, and the four marginalizing devices—show, goal, public attitude, and impact, as the dependent variables (see Table 3). Scheff's post hoc tests showed that the media outlets have a highly significant difference in the representation of the protester group, $F = 15.54$, $p < .001$, and quotes drawn from target groups, such as official institutions or police, $F = 18.23$, $p < .001$. When compared with conservative media ($M = 1.54$, $SD = .85$) and neutral media ($M = 1.92$, $SD = .86$), prodemocracy media was more likely to uphold "proprotestor" stance ($M = 2.12$, $SD = .94$). Conservative media, such as *Macau Daily*, has often been dubbed the "mouthpiece" of government (Hing, 1995), they make the official arguments more prominent and milder in the criticism of official agencies.

In terms of the application of the protest paradigm, One-way ANOVA and t -Test result shows that there are significant differences in each framing device. Results indicate that freak show ($M = .44$, $SD = .50$), delegitimizing frame ($M = .29$, $SD = .46$), public disapproval ($M = .23$, $SD = .42$), and violence ($M = .43$, $SD = .50$), was more likely to appear in the stories of conservative media compared with the other media. It indicates that conservative media with a progovernment stance supported the status quo, they conformed more to the feature of the protest paradigm and tended to marginalize the protest.

Table 3. One-Way ANOVA and t-Test on the Protest Paradigm by Media Stance.

	Conservative Media (%)		Neutral Media (%)		Prodemocracy Media (%)		F value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Representation of dissenting voice	1.54	.85	1.92	.86	2.12	.94	$F = 15.54^{***}$
Representation of Target group	2.16	.93	1.92	.91	1.54	.81	$F = 18.23^{***}$
Show							
Spectacle	.19	.40	.36	.49	.52	.50	$F = 19.36^{***}$
Freak show	.44	.50	.04	.20	.04	.20	$F = 42.17^{***}$
Goal							
Legitimizing frame	.07	.26	.32	.48	.45	.50	$F = 35.13^{***}$
Delegitimizing frame	.29	.46	.04	.20	.06	.25	$F = 15.70^{***}$
Public attitude							
Public support	.08	.27	.24	.44	.39	.49	$F = 23.45^{***}$
Public disapproval	.23	.42	.00	.00	.02	.15	$F = 17.38^{***}$
Impact							
Peacefulness	.05	.22	.24	.44	.34	.48	$F = 23.97^{***}$
Violence	.43	.50	.04	.20	.10	.31	$F = 26.22^{***}$

Note. $^{***}p < .001$.

Discussion

The role of protests in achieving SDGs and the applied theory-protest paradigm have been studied and have developed in the setting of democratic Western society. The purpose of this longitudinal study is to explore the transformative nature of SDG protests and to determine if and how the marinization framing mechanisms toward grassroots activists change considerably in non-Western contexts. This study found that mainstream news coverage of SDGs protests seems to deviate from the protest paradigm over time, but that is not necessarily an indication that reporting on protests and civil unrest has been completely abandoned.

Cross-Region Media's Effect on SDGs Protest Framing

This study sought to take an alternate interpretive path to the long-established protest paradigm. Future inquiries on the coverage of SDGs communications and actions could benefit from our examination of media routine. According to the findings, the protest paradigm is as much a product of organizational, social-institutional, and ideological forces as it is of professional culture (Reese & Shoemaker, 2016). The media serves as a social control institution in the democratic sociopolitical system of the West, maintaining the status quo. This study considers the media stance of the cross-region media outlets, and the findings show various journalistic cultures in a heterogeneous media environment.

Macau's public opinion is easily affected by the external media environment, especially by the newspapers from its neighbor, Hong Kong. The result shows that the conservative media, such as *Macau Daily*, tended to use the protest paradigm, whereas the prodemocracy media, such as *Apple Daily*, showed an opposite description of protest, and legitimized the protest group. The findings are different from Boyle and colleagues's (2012) finding in the U.S. sociopolitical context, they said: "There was no distinction between individual papers within regions" (p. 12). The prodemocracy media are not "guard dogs" anymore. As Bishop (2013) pointed out, the "guard dog" acts as the "sentry" of government, patrolling the threat to "the group who hold power and who have the ability to create their own security systems" (p. 65), and the "guard dog" functions as a part of the power structure (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1973). Instead, prodemocracy media play the role of "critical watchdogs" and emphasize the protest's goal. Prodemocracy media were useful social resources for the SDGs protest group.

Compared with the issues and tactics of protest, the media's stance was the driving force behind the marginalization of SDGs protest and exerted more significant influence. Media stance was the strongest determinant of the use of the protest paradigm. This study's findings conform to what Reese and Shoemaker (2016) said that news production is a "human activity, media work naturally involved the agency of individuals" which is restricted and facilitated by "the structures surrounding them" (p. 397). According to Shoemaker's (1984) arguments, using the protest paradigm to marginalize the protest group is a product of the media's routine. Evaluating the macrolevel effect can predict when and why the media's social control function can be triggered. As such, in future studies, scholars should explore the root causes of media bias, examining the interactive relation between the media and the sociopolitical system in which it operates.

The Type and Tactic of SDGs Grassroot Activism

Given that past research reveals the presence of a "protest paradigm" that the media often demonstrates support for the government in terms of its social control role, this finding reflects an exceptional and certainly unprecedented amount of favorable media coverage of the SDGs protest. This study measured a protest's influence on the coverage it received by comparing the degree of deviance of the protest with the independent variables consisting of protest types and protest tactics.

The result shows that protests with more violent tactics tend to trigger the protest paradigm. This result is in line with the findings of an earlier study (Boyle et al., 2012). The coverage of the protests with more radical tactics was more likely to be framed episodically, and the media were more likely to adopt the protest paradigm. The findings about the effect of protest type differ from those of earlier research, when an SDGs protest was primarily intended against the sociopolitical system, the protest paradigm would be less prominent in the coverage. The protests advocating nonpolitical concerns are systematically more likely to be represented negatively than other groups, highlighting regional disparities in coverage. These variations can be linked to the key concept of deviance, which is used to understand media bias against protesters. Deviance is frequently measured in reference to the status quo. Both the driving dynamics of the protest and the broader structure in which it takes place are critical in determining a movement's relationship to the status quo. The reasons could be that the uncertain status of the political system's legitimacy and the government's credibility may affect the social consensus and the media's stand on particular issues.

The mainstream media would perform their social control function when covering radical protest tactics, as they have agreed on the city's cultural norms; that is, the protest should be peaceful and rational, maintaining social stability. However, according to Wittebols (1996), if conventional institutional discourses dominate in the mainstream media, tensions between the movement and the elite should naturally emerge in news coverage. In Macau, there is no solid social consensus on the legitimacy of the political system, and when reporting an SDGs protest on a controversial political issue, to obtain the public's trust, the media did not treat it as more illegitimate than other types of protest. As a political protest can arouse a high level of social concern, the local media with a progovernment stance tend to put it on the media agenda rather than ignore or marginalize it. Another explanation for this is that SDGs protests about political issues usually target political institutions, and officials tend to avoid reacting publicly to political problems that are particularly sensitive in a state-controlled country; thus, it is difficult for the journalists to get any comment from the target group on the record. Protest issues identify the fundamental basis of the change sought, and as such, they locate the movement inside a specific system of interactions with concrete elites (Gil-Lopez & Quarterly, 2021). To effectively measure the deviance of the protest type, the researcher should consider the inherent complexities of the social movement environment. From the perspective of the protest group, grassroots activists who target SDGs should consider taking peaceful action to be treated more supportively by the mainstream media.

Because of the practical problems in conducting experiments and surveys, this study has not analyzed the media effect of the protest framing on readers or the protest group's impact. Long-term media exposure may have a cumulative influence on audience perceptions, which should be investigated in future studies.

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