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## Can Political Leaders Make a Difference? Norwegian versus Spanish Experiences in Responding to Terrorist Attacks

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### ABSTRACT

This article compares the public communication of Norwegian Prime Minister Stoltenberg after the attacks of 22 July 2011 and Spanish Prime Minister Aznar after the Madrid train bombing on 11 March 2004. These two political leaders opted for very different styles of crisis communication in the direct aftermath of the attacks. There is also a great difference in how the attacks influenced their political support. By focusing on these two cases, the article asks whether political leaders can make a difference when it comes to the public response to terrorist attacks.

Terrorist acts have direct consequences only for their immediate victims in the form of bullets and bombs. The political response to the attack, whatever that may be, depends on the meanings that society attaches to the acts and the terrorists that are behind them. Since the highest-level politicians are normally eager to respond to terrorist acts with visible policies, social activism is not always necessary.<sup>1</sup> It is normal for people to spontaneously gather together, however, to mourn, light candles, and show solidarity toward the victims and their families, but sometimes this social action also has political meanings, like opposing terrorism and terrorist ideologies, or questioning the state policies that are regarded as provoking the attack. In the most extreme social response cases, acts of racism, hate crimes, or other stereotype-based political violence have been reported.

When social action is galvanized, all types of public information, true and false, play a role in the process. Information is directly related to the way people appraise who has attacked them, why and how the attack has happened, and what the incident signifies for them as individuals and as part of a group, society and state. As Nacos<sup>2</sup> and many others have demonstrated, the mass media influence the way in which people perceive terrorism and its consequences. Nowadays, social media or “citizen journalism” also play an increasing role in information dissemination during crisis situations (Watson).<sup>3</sup> Top politicians are among the many that try to explicate the attacks. While their ability to influence interpretations is limited, information on individual cases suggests that their responses carry particular significance.<sup>4</sup> This article focuses on the role of prime ministers in influencing the meanings given to terrorist attacks and the social and political responses that ensue.

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For the purposes of this article, two different terrorism-related crisis responses have been analyzed and compared, focusing on the politicking<sup>5</sup> of the respective heads of state. The selected leaders are Spain's Prime Minister José Maria Aznar after the 2004 Madrid terrorist attack and Norway's Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg after the 2011 massacre in his country. The cases originate from opposite ends of geographical Europe, the perpetrators represented different terrorist ideologies, and the political contexts were naturally different in Spain and Norway. Despite the differences, the task facing these two heads of state was the same for two reasons: First, they had to demonstrate that the state leadership was capable of dealing with the crisis situation, and second, they had to address the political meaning of the terrorist attacks, and how to continue with the political process that the attacks had triggered.

These two cases are also poles apart when it comes to the way in which Aznar's and Stoltenberg's responses have commonly been analyzed in retrospect. In Spain, protests were staged against the government, and the ruling party suffered an electoral defeat in the elections that were held four days after the attack.<sup>6</sup> This is commonly linked to the errors of judgment that Aznar made in his initial responses to the attacks. In Norway, the dominant response was a typical rally-around-the-flag effect, namely increased support for the prime minister and his party, while Stoltenberg was widely praised for his calm and measured statements.<sup>7</sup> This begs the question, to what degree can we really credit or blame the prime ministers for the outcome?

### **Social Responses to Terrorism in the Light of the Appraisal Theory of Emotions**

Social responses to terrorist attacks range from one extreme to another, and different types of responses may occur simultaneously. A quite typical response to isolated acts of terrorism is the so-called rally-around-the-flag effect. For example, when the United States was attacked on 11 September 2001, President Bush's approval ratings rose significantly.<sup>8</sup> This happened to some degree in Norway as well, but in Spain the government lost support as well as the subsequent elections, which demonstrates that the rally effect is not automatic. Irrespective of the political support for the government, it is typical for the public to gather together to demonstrate solidarity toward the victims and to condemn terrorism in the aftermath of such attacks. This happened in both Spain and Norway. However, sometimes these social responses manifest themselves in more radical ways. Demonstrations may turn into more political protests against certain policies, politicians, or other stakeholders that are considered to be relevant in some way. In Spain, some sectors of the public turned their attention toward the ruling conservative party and gathered in ad-hoc mobs in front of the party's headquarters in Madrid.

The most extreme forms of social response can cross the boundaries of legal political action. As van Donselaar and Rodrigues reported during the backlash that followed the murder of Theo van Gogh in the Netherlands,<sup>9</sup> and as Bouckaert attested during the Kosovo riots in 2004,<sup>10</sup> acts of racism, hate crimes, or other stereotype-based political violence can take place in the aftermath of violent attacks.<sup>11</sup> The Kosovo case is especially interesting: When it was reported that two children had been deliberately killed by the other ethnic group in Kosovo, ethnically motivated political violence erupted in response. However, investigations later proved that the children had been killed by accident with no ethnic group involvement, which indicates how crucial a role information plays with regard to social response. A somewhat similar case highlighting the fatal consequences of misinformation also occurred in Spain: A police officer killed a baker who refused to let him put an anti-Euskadi Ta

Askatasuna (ETA) poster on the wall of a bakery in Pamplona, in the Basque Country. At that time, the government was blaming ETA for the attack.

A useful tool for understanding differential emotional responses in such cases comes from psychology: the Appraisal Theory of Emotions. Although there are different traditions within the theory, they all concur that cognitions are important antecedents of emotions or, to be more specific, and to quote the explanation advanced by Smith et al., that “emotions are evoked by an evaluation of the significance of one’s circumstances for personal well-being.”<sup>12</sup> A practical example demonstrates the core idea of the theory: If a person hears a loud bang when walking next to a construction site, he will most likely be startled by the noise, but will nevertheless keep on walking. Hearing the same sound in a conflict zone might urge the same person to run for cover.

As Lazarus has noted, in order to make an *appraisal*<sup>13</sup> “one must have a well-developed representation of the relevant circumstances.” In the event that the aforementioned bang comes out of nowhere where one cannot have a “well-developed representation” of the possible causes and consequences of the sound, the need to find an explanation arises. However, as Lazarus<sup>14</sup> has studied, even if the context for the stimulus is the same, people may have different kinds of emotional responses to it due to the variety of inferential strategies, personal processing capacity and limitations on the information that is available about the relevant circumstances.

Crisis situations are generally characterized by uncertainty. The flow of official information, allegations, speculations, and rumors of all kinds circulates with ease. Every new piece of information about the event in question may cause an individual making an appraisal to revise their thinking. This might also be one reason why psychiatrist Salli Saari<sup>15</sup> has noted in her fieldwork among crisis-affected patients that individuals often have a sensation that their emotions are changing swiftly in the aftermath of a traumatic incident. The complexity of emotional responses in crisis situations demonstrates that the appraisal process is nonlinear. In a nonlinear process an individual has to constantly ask himself relevant questions about his circumstances or, likewise, about an event that takes place in a specific political context. Due to the nonlinearity, it is always possible to reprocess the event and make reappraisals that may modify the emotional outcomes.

From an individual point of view, there are some components of every incident that can lead the appraisal in a certain direction. When making an appraisal of the “relevant circumstances” of an event like a terrorist attack, people have three main objectives. These are:

1. estimate the causes and consequences of the incident,
2. evaluate how the event is relevant to oneself, and
3. ascertain the coping potential and best available strategy to deal with the event.<sup>16</sup>

Before making any assessment of the action that is needed, one has to estimate who or what may have caused it, either directly or indirectly. Regarding the possible coping strategy, it will make a difference if the event was due to human action or caused by circumstances, and whether it was caused intentionally or by accident. Therefore it is relevant what kind of information about the incident is delivered to the public and whether it involves apportioning blame, and if it does, in what way. As Jennings and Saari have noted, if the causal locus is on other human beings and the incident is intentional—as in the case of acts of terrorism—anger and hatred are typical emotional reactions. This distinguishes terrorism-caused crises from other crises, like natural disasters.<sup>17</sup>

Second, people make an appraisal about the way in which the crisis affects them and their goals.<sup>18</sup> This includes both physical and symbolical relevance. Physical relevance can mean anything from an actual injury to oneself, or a significant other, to an imagined threat of pain and loss, whereas symbolical relevance refers to a group identity. According to Volkan, the most common and politically relevant (large) group identities are normally related to religion, ethnicity, nationality, or ideology.<sup>19</sup> As Huddy has noted, group identities are relevant from the point of view of political cohesion.<sup>20</sup> Understanding the relevance of the terrorist attack in terms of group identity may have positive effects on the cohesion of the group, but as Pyszczynski, Solomon, and Greenberg have demonstrated in laboratory experiments, the salience of death-related thoughts and images can have negative effects on behavior toward other groups.<sup>21</sup>

### Politicking and Crisis Leadership

According to Sheppard, Rubin, Warman, and Wessely, “the public is fairly resilient, calm and rational in its reactions” in the immediate aftermath of big terrorist attacks.<sup>22</sup> However, this is not always the case. As mentioned earlier, numerous examples of violent social action in the aftermath of a terrorist attack demonstrate that although the public at large may be fairly calm and rational, some sectors may respond strongly. Furthermore, certain recognized behavioral changes after terrorist attacks may be minor at the individual level, but in the bigger scheme of things they can have a major impact economically, such as minimizing air travel or influencing the choice of destination.<sup>23</sup>

In open democratic societies, social responses to terrorism-caused crises depend on the crisis governance and management, other political forces, the media, social media, public demand, and so on, which all play a role in the outcomes of a crisis because they project their power through framing: “selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution.”<sup>24</sup> As seen when compared to the definition of the Appraisal Theory, framing touches the issues of causal attribution, relevance, and coping. Although seldom applied in political science or terrorism studies, the Appraisal Theory aptly explains why the information is relevant and why there are so many instances where the event is intentionally framed in a certain way. Public information plays a pivotal role in determining how people make their appraisals about the terrorist attacks, what they signify to them and how to respond to them. Since leading politicians are important sources of public information, the hypothesis here is that all speeches, press conferences, visits to sites where the attacks occurred, and other similar public performances, namely politicking, play a part in determining how people make their appraisals in the aftermath of a terrorist attack.<sup>25</sup>

In this comparative case study, the focus is solely on the heads of state, but naturally they are not the only political authorities that matter in the appraisal process. There are often different roles and tasks within the government. The Minister of the Interior in Spain, for example, and the Minister of Justice in Norway, acted as “crisis managers,” whose role was to deliver official information to the public about what the police and other relevant officials had been doing and what was known about the incident. The role of the head of state in both cases was limited to acting as a “crisis governor,” who was the one who took ultimate political responsibility for the crisis response, dealt with the other political forces, maintained contact with other statesmen, addressed the public about the relevance of the attack and offered a model, a “national coping strategy.”

Politicking refers to the way in which politicians, in this case the heads of state, act in the aftermath of an attack. Is the head of state blaming someone for the attack, demanding justice or revenge, or focusing solely on the victims and their ability to cope? Blaming a certain perpetrator, like a separatist terrorist group in the case of Spain, and underlining the personal relevance of the attack is more likely to lead to anger, which can lead to more violent and aggressive social responses than to fear, which is more likely to lead to aversion and less confrontational social responses. As De Castella et al. have noted, fear is a typical emotional response if people estimate that the threat is personally relevant and the coping potential is considered low or uncertain.<sup>26</sup> Leaders can amplify the fear response by emphasizing that the terrorists pose a serious threat that will not disappear for a long time. Similarly, anger is a typical response to a situation where the people assess that the incident threatens them and what they represent, and action against the agent that they consider responsible is likely to succeed.<sup>27</sup> Quite typically, the answer to “what they represent” is related to large group identities. Therefore, blaming another large group to which the majority of the population belong, for example, and emphasizing the harmful and negative qualities of the perpetrators can lead to violent action against the blamed large group representatives, as in the previously mentioned case of Kosovo.

It is typical for the leading politicians to emphasize crisis management in their initial public addresses, namely the work of the police, emergency workers and other officials, or their own actions in crisis governance. They want to underline that the situation is under control and people can focus on their individual coping instead of more outwardly directed action, such as demonstrations, vigilante activism, and so forth. Normally, this seems to work and Jennings’s perception would appear to be valid: people are not afraid because the officials are responding to the threat.<sup>28</sup>

However, politicking is not only about words and their meaning. It is also about another kind of visibility, namely performance.<sup>29</sup> Particularly in the case of crisis situations, nonverbal politicking seems to play a role. Is the head of state visible everywhere, or does he prefer to pull the strings behind the scenes? Visits to attack sites, to hospitals, and so on demonstrate that the leaders are where the action seems to be taking place. A distant leadership style, on the other hand, can, even if effective from the perspective of crisis governance, be interpreted as the leader being absent and people having to deal with the crisis and its consequences alone.

## Material and Method of the Analysis

The research material is based solely on the visible and public aspects of the politicking of the two heads of state in the two cases, and on the content of their public speeches and press conference statements.

The timeframe for the analysis is limited to four days, for the simple reason that Prime Minister Aznar gave up the premiership after the parliamentary elections that were held four days after the Madrid attack and did not make any public appearances regarding the terrorist attack in the role of prime minister after those four days. Nevertheless, four days are enough to cover the acute phase of the crisis, since social responses tend to peak quickly. The coping phase of the targeted society naturally lasts much longer and policy responses to the incident can take months, even years.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the appraisals on terrorist attacks may change long after the attack if new, relevant information emerges, but the further the

distance from the event itself, the harder it becomes to rule out other factors that influence the appraisal process. This means that many actions by the heads of state, such as private phone calls to other political leaders, are excluded from this analysis, even if information about them has since emerged.

During the four days under analysis, Prime Minister Aznar gave two speeches in public: The first in the afternoon of the day of the attack, 11 March 2004, and the second on the following day. Both speeches were broadcast from the prime minister's office in Moncloa together with Minister of the Interior Ángel Acebes. These were essentially TV press conferences broadcast to the wider public.<sup>31</sup>

Prime Minister Stoltenberg gave three speeches to the general public in the first four days of the aftermath in the following order: The first on the day of the attack, 22 July 2011, the second the following day together with Minister of Justice Knut Storberget, and the last in Oslo Cathedral on 24 July.<sup>32</sup> The first two speeches were in the form of press conferences, whereas the third was a memorial speech for the victims and their families, broadcast live on Norwegian TV.

In the analysis of the Spanish speeches, the original versions have been used and the citations in this article have been translated by the author. The speeches by the Norwegian prime minister have been translated into English and are available on the website of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In this article, the English translations are used. The translator from Norwegian into English is unknown.

The speech content has been analyzed by categorizing phrases and meanings that are related to the three main objectives of the appraisal process: (1) causality, (2) personal relevance, and (3) coping potential. For example, naming the perpetrators and interpreting the symbolism behind the attack is related to large group identities like nationality, ethnicity, religion, and political ideology. This can be done directly by pointing out the perpetrator and the group represented, but also by focusing on the victims, and why the terrorists attacked them precisely in that place and at that moment. Coping potential can range from proposed individual coping, such as mourning and offering solidarity to the victims, to more official, state-level coping, like proposing new policies or emphasizing the importance of the existing ones.

### **Spain: Turning a National Trauma into Party Politics**

When the attacks in Madrid took place on 11 March 2004, parliamentary elections were due to be held only three days later. The electoral campaigning had been heated, but it seemed that Prime Minister Aznar's Popular Party (PP) was about to win the elections by a clear margin over the rival Socialist Party (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, PSOE).<sup>33</sup> Instinctively, the government blamed the Basque terrorist group ETA for the attack, although there was no conclusive information about the perpetrator. It was not until the evening of the day of the attack that a group named Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigades of Al Qaeda confessed to being behind the attack, but the government did not consider the confession credible at first and insisted on blaming ETA and keeping all lines of investigation open until the elections.<sup>34</sup>

The political context in Spain at the time was very complex due to the elections. Prime Minister Aznar was no longer running, but his successor for party leadership, Mariano Rajoy, was leading the PP's campaign. As a consequence, there were several different representatives from the PP appearing in public, such as Minister of the Interior Acebes, Minister of Foreign Affairs Ana Palacio, Spokesperson for the Government Eduardo Zaplana, and

candidate for the premiership Rajoy. The same applied to the political opposition. Due to the proximity of the elections, the attack was quickly politicized and the government criticized by the other political parties. Added to this, the Spanish party system is bipolar in practice. As hypothesized in my earlier work,<sup>35</sup> bipolar party systems are more vulnerable to terrorism than pluralistic systems. The reason for this is most likely that in bipolar party systems the ruling party tends to take full political responsibility for anything that happens during its rule, whereas in pluralistic systems the responsibility is shared among the parties involved in the government.

Prime Minister Aznar remained, for the most part, in his office at Moncloa throughout the acute phase of the crisis, governing by telephone and personal meetings.<sup>36</sup> Whereas there was a high degree of transparency at the management level and any progress in the police investigations was rapidly relayed to the public, the same transparency was not applied to the actions of the prime minister. Aznar's leadership style was decisive, but at the same time distant and authoritative. He decided to stay behind closed doors in Moncloa, not visiting the scene of the attack nor the places where the victims were treated, and not using the official Delegate Commission of the Government for Crisis Situations. His first visible move after the attack was to release a notification about his decision to organize a national demonstration for the following day with the slogan, "With the victims, with the Constitution, for the defeat of terrorism." Since the constitution and its interpretations was one of the most debated electoral themes in the electoral campaign and a central theme in the PP's campaign, referring to it was clearly a partisan move. Somewhat later, Aznar appeared in a press conference and gave his first speech, which was his last and only direct appearance in public during the first day of the aftermath.

During the second day after the attack, Prime Minister Aznar gave one speech in public, and appeared in the front row of the national demonstration that he had called for the previous day. By the time the demonstration was held, there were already leads pointing towards Islamic terrorism, but Aznar's government was still blaming the Basque terrorists for the attack. As a consequence, the massive demonstration under the conservative party's electoral slogan functioned mainly as a place for sharing information, emotions, and suspicions about the possibility that the government was manipulating information. During the second day after the attack, the day before the elections, the media were already framing the attack as Islamic terrorism, but the government stated that it would not close any lines of investigation. Due to this controversy, some protesters gathered together in front of the PP headquarters in Madrid to protest against the government and to blame them not only for manipulating information, but also for the fact that their policy of participation in the war in Iraq had caused the terrorist attack.

### **Causality**

Regarding the content of Aznar's speeches, he typically referred to the perpetrators as "terrorists," "assassins," "criminals," or "a fanatical minority." By being terrorists, they were the ultimate "evil," which legitimized the use of all possible means in hunting them down. Aznar did not explicitly state that by terrorists he meant the Basque group ETA, but he left little room for any misinterpretation of his message by referring to them as "those assassins that have so many times sown death on the whole Spanish terrain," or that they are those who "we know so well here." As a result, Aznar was trying to blame a large group within Spanish society, the Basques, not by naming them directly, but by implication. Due to the fact that

other politicians in his party were talking about ETA directly, there was no room for misinterpretation. Yet in his second speech, he was already poised to politicize a new threat and opening avenues to new policies by taking into account that the perpetrators could be an Islamic group instead of Basque terrorists. Again, he was not explicit about this change of opinion: He underlined that in the end it did not matter who the perpetrators were since “Religious fanaticism and ethnic fanaticism are only different in their pretexts, but they seek and obey the same murdering, destructive and genocidal impulse.” What is more, Prime Minister Aznar also admitted at the end of his second speech that he was not sure about the causal locus at all: “If we were certain [...] I would be most pleased to say as the prime minister that these are the assassins.”

What was truly remarkable in Aznar’s politicking is that the blame was not confined to the perpetrators of the attack, but also aimed at other political forces in Spain that were critical of the information that the government was delivering to the public. This was related to the ongoing framing competition on the causality of the attacks, but did play a significant role in politicizing the terrorist attacks and crisis governance.<sup>37</sup> In one statement, Aznar pointed the finger at ETA’s unofficial spokesperson, Arnaldo Otegi, who appeared in public during the day of the attack saying that ETA was not the perpetrator but that some Islamic group might be: “the government does not concede and will not concede ... any credit to the declarations of spokesmen of illegal organizations that acquit, or are talking on behalf of a terrorist organization.”<sup>38</sup> He also said that questioning the official information policy was something that should not be tolerated and mentioned the General Secretary of the Socialist Party José Blanco as one that “should apologize himself.” This in particular can be regarded as a sign that the government was already competing with the other domestic political forces and not only trying to control the crisis and its consequences.

### **Relevance**

When describing the terrorists or the threat that they posed to Spain and the Spanish people, Prime Minister Aznar said, for example, that the terrorists wanted to “cause all the damage possible,” and that the organization was “made to kill and to kill everything it can” and that the attack “is lacking any justification.” Such descriptions can add to the appraisals to the effect that people become more fearful of the threat of terrorism. He also emphasized that the threat had existed before (insinuating that the perpetrators were the Basques) and still existed: “Their killer instinct and will to subdue Spain into their dictates remain, nevertheless, tragically active,” although “their operative capacity is weaker than ever.” Furthermore, Aznar explained to the public that the terrorists wanted to “subdue Spain to their dictates” and that terrorism posed “the biggest threat to all societies: it aims to put an end to our system of coexistence, it aims to put an end to Human Rights, it aims to put an end to our democracy.” All these descriptions certainly made the threat of terrorism sound terrifying, but at the same time describing terrorism in such a destructive and fearsome way facilitates policymaking against it, which justifies the use of such rhetoric by politicians.<sup>39</sup> No new policies were proposed in Aznar’s speeches, but that is not to say that emphasizing the destructiveness of terrorism would not be used later as grounds for policy changes.

The relevance of large group identities and the appraised symbolism of the attack can be seen in the interpretations that the Spanish prime minister used in his speeches: “Many people have been killed for the mere fact of being Spanish,” “We are a great nation,” and so on.

Even if he underlined that several other nationalities were among the fatalities, he ended up fortifying national symbolism by promising that Spanish citizenship would be granted to all the non-Spanish victims and their relatives. He also defined the values and qualities that were needed by the Spanish people in their time of crisis: “unity” and “firmness,” but went even further by including a partisan political position that the people should take in order to express solidarity with the affected: “we stand together with the Constitution,” which is “the great accord of our political regime and an expression of our united and plural Spain.”

By referring to the international dimensions of the attack, Aznar reminded the public about the larger polity that stands united against the common enemy of terrorism. However, in the Spanish case, naming all the statesmen that were expressing their condolences was also used to justify Aznar’s policy choices, which in foreign policy included a strong and visible commitment to the U.S.-led “War on Terror,” including the war in Iraq, which had met with strong opposition from the Spanish public only a year before the Madrid attack when the war started. Aznar stated, for example, that the “international community” was “united and supporting” not only in solidarity, but also in “effective cooperation against the shared threat of terrorism.”

### **Coping**

Aznar’s vision regarding the coping potential was contradictory. On the one hand, he regarded it as low or uncertain by saying in his first speech that after all that the government had done to combat terrorism, the terrorists “continue to be active.” However, this was followed by a different affirmation: “We will destroy them.” In his second speech, he assured listeners that “everyone is working without rest in order to respond to the situation and to regain normality as quickly and completely as possible” and also that the Ministry of the Interior and Minister Ángel Acebes were doing “an extraordinary job” in managing the crisis.

Aznar’s attack on other domestic political forces revealed that he was not able to control the situation as much as he would have liked. Nevertheless, he vehemently emphasized that the crisis could only be solved by governmental action and people should just rely on that. For example, he explained to the public how he had been in contact with King Juan Carlos and leaders of the most important parties, how he had taken the victims and society into account in his policy decisions in the form of compensation, and how he had also been in contact with statesmen from other countries and how the crisis management structures, that is to say the emergency services, police, or other relevant officials, were functioning efficiently.

Due to Aznar’s politicking style of remaining behind the scenes, he did not place much emphasis on individual or social coping like mourning and social action through visits to attack sites and emergency management, but nor did he ignore them either. In both of his speeches he thanked citizens or encouraged them to be active and to demonstrate solidarity with their fellow countrymen and women in the difficult days of the aftermath.

### **Norway: De-Politicization of a Partisan Attack**

When Anders Behring Breivik attacked the government buildings in Oslo and the youth camp of *Arbeiderparti* activists on Utøya island, the Norwegian political calendar was not as hectic as it was in Spain.<sup>40</sup> Municipal elections were held on 12 September, 42 days after the

attack, but the parliamentary period was roughly halfway through. The attack was carried out in summer, at a time when many people take their holidays, and hence the government buildings were not as populated as they might have been. As a result, Prime Minister Stoltenberg could focus solely on the crisis and its management and his political intentions were not questioned the way Aznar's were. The Norwegian party system is pluralistic, and so the prime minister's party takes neither credit nor blame as easily as in bipolar systems like the one in Spain. Furthermore, Norway was more united and the political tradition was based on a strong sense of consensus, which lowered the motivation of other political forces to immediately politicize the incident and turn it against the government, as they did in Spain. Another important difference is that Norway did not have as long a history of terrorism as Spain, which might have given rise to bias in the investigation. Despite this, there was some speculation in public in the immediate aftermath that the perpetrator could have been a radical Islamist, which persisted for some time after the first piece of information was released about the perpetrator. Since the identity of the perpetrator was quickly revealed and his manifesto clarified his ideological reasons, those speculations lacked political relevance. Despite this information, Stoltenberg opted not to talk about the perpetrator and his motives.

Not only was the political context very different in Norway, but Prime Minister Stoltenberg was the complete opposite of Aznar in his crisis governance style. Unlike Aznar, Stoltenberg was visible in his leadership: He visited the attack sites and hospitals where the victims were treated and even gave a memorial speech in a cathedral for the victims. He also showed strong personal commitment to the tragic events by reminding people that he himself knew many of the victims personally and that he was shocked and saddened because of that. His relationship to the attack was also very different because it targeted Stoltenberg's own party, not completely random citizens. However, the prime minister's visibility and emotional style were no doubt instrumental in turning an attack based on an ideological large group identity into a national trauma.

### **Causality**

The only causality-related content in Stoltenberg's first speech was a statement to the effect that "We don't know who has attacked us," but the attack was "cowardly." At the time of the speech, the perpetrator had already been caught, but his motives were not completely clear. In the other two speeches, Stoltenberg avoided pointing out the causal locus by refraining from naming or describing the perpetrator at all. Instead, he used the passive voice: "people have been killed" or "Norway was hit." This choice, at least in the Norwegian case, functioned as a depoliticizing element. When no "enemy" was pointed out, the threat that any large group identities might experience due to the attack was not amplified by the prime minister. Since the perpetrator was from the same ethnic, national and religious group as the majority of Norwegians themselves, this factor ruled out stereotypical violence and "vigilante justice," as in the cases of the Netherlands and Kosovo mentioned earlier in this article.

### **Relevance**

Prime Minister Stoltenberg described the attack using the concept of evil and other similarly negative, even biblical concepts: "We are all shocked by the evil events that struck so

suddenly and brutally,” “It is like a nightmare,” “Utøya is the paradise of my youth that yesterday turned into hell,” “the full extent of this evil act will become apparent in all its horror.”

Right from his first appearances in public, Stoltenberg started to frame the partisan attack as a national trauma. For example, he also used a historical comparison point to underline how harmful the attack was: “Norway was hit by the worst atrocity it has seen since the Second World War.” He also emphasized that “Norway stands together in times of crisis,” “This is an attack [...] on us.” However, at the same time Stoltenberg defined the core values and characteristics of what he saw as essential in the Norwegian identity and repeated them in his speeches: “We must show that our open society can pass this test” and “We are a small country, but a proud people.”

Similarly to Prime Minister Aznar, Stoltenberg also mentioned international awareness of the event: “I have promised to pass on the condolences of Barack Obama, Vladimir Putin, Frederik Reinfeldt, Angela Merkel, David Cameron, Dimitry Medvedev and many other heads of state and government.” Since Stoltenberg did not refer to any shared values or policies, this reference remained non-political. He reminded the people that there was an international polity that felt the sorrow and loss of the Norwegian people.

### **Coping**

Unlike Aznar, however, Stoltenberg strongly emphasized individual coping. He repeatedly talked about mourning and sadness, about supporting those who were close: “today is a day for mourning,” “many of us know someone who has been lost. Even more know of someone. I knew several,” “we will take care of one another. Comfort one another, talk, and stand together.” His personal closeness to the victims undoubtedly played a role. He showed his emotions when crying in public. His sadness was seen as genuine, and his role in the memorial event justified, which helped to de-politicize the attack.

Stoltenberg framed the attack as a very demanding situation, but emphasized at the same time that people would get over it: “This is an evening that will demand a great deal from us all. The days that follow may be even more demanding,” “It is incomprehensible,” or “We are still struggling to take in the scale of this tragedy.” If statements like these alone had been made, they would have sent the message that the coping potential was low and uncertain, but they were followed by encouraging messages saying that despite the difficulties, “We are prepared to face them,” “No one is ever going to frighten us away from being Norway,” and “we will get through this too.”

The only political aspects of coping were the ones he framed in his often-quoted phrase: “The answer to violence is even more democracy. Even more humanity. But never naivety.” Similarly, he also stated that, “Norwegian democracy grows stronger when it is under pressure.”

### **Did Aznar and Stoltenberg Make a Difference?**

There were major differences between the politicking of prime ministers Aznar and Stoltenberg. First of all, their governance styles were almost the complete opposite. Aznar chose to govern the crisis from his office in Moncloa, while Stoltenberg chose to make himself visible to the public at the attack sites and in hospitals. This proximity to the public was also present

in the content of the speeches. Stoltenberg constantly used the personal pronouns “us” and “we,” whereas Aznar talked about the actions of the government directed toward the people.<sup>41</sup>

Another remarkable difference between Prime Minister Stoltenberg and Prime Minister Aznar was that Stoltenberg refused to point out the causal locus of the tragedy, even though it was already known who the perpetrator was and what he represented, whereas Aznar firstly blamed the wrong terrorist group, then other politicians for being critical about his accusations. He then admitted that the Islamic thread would be investigated together with the separatist thread, and lastly recognized that he did not even know who was behind the attack, whereas in Norway the perpetrator gave himself up when police arrived at the scene of the massacre leaving no room for speculation.

Both leaders used national symbolism and values in explaining the relevance of the attacks from the point of view of large group identities. However, Aznar’s partisan appeal for the conservative party’s electoral topics, together with his refusal to emphasize the ETA thread despite the mounting evidence pointing toward Islamic terrorism, undermined this goal. His politicking was seen as biased, and some sectors of the public responded by protesting against his party. Stoltenberg, on the other hand, succeeded in his intent to de-politicize the partisan attack, and his party enjoyed the rally-around-the-flag-effect in the upcoming municipal elections.

When it comes to Stoltenberg’s model of not apportioning blame, this would have been a more difficult position for Aznar to take. Merely speaking about mourning and social coping might not be enough in a case where the perpetrator is unknown and on the loose, since the government was under pressure to demonstrate decisiveness and the capability to catch the perpetrator. Since the perpetrator gave himself up in Norway and it seemed that he had acted alone, not representing any known group, it was possible for Stoltenberg to focus only on mourning and social coping. Furthermore, the perpetrator was an average Norwegian in his ethnicity, religion and appearance, which did not raise any intergroup issues. It can be argued that if he had been a Muslim, namely from another large group than the majority of Norwegians, and had represented the global *jihad* à la Al Qaeda, the attack would have been appraised very differently and the possible consequences would also have demanded more from Prime Minister Stoltenberg in the form of policy choices.

The question is, could Aznar have succeeded at all, given the political complexity and Spanish party system? The national identity is not very pronounced in Spain, which consists of strong regions with regional identities. Appeals for national unity while at the same time blaming a group belonging to one of those regional identities are controversial. In order to be completely neutral and non-partisan, Aznar should not have blamed anyone before sufficient evidence had been gathered, but given the hectic political context, even this could have been interpreted as political maneuvering. Appeals to national unity might have been on a firmer footing if Aznar had blamed Islamic terrorism in the first instance, but in that case he would have been confronted with a different political challenge: It was he who involved Spain in the war in Iraq, and if that was the appraised causality behind the attack in Madrid, it could have been costly for the PP in the ballot boxes due to the bipolarity of the party system. However, in that case, the elections would have been about foreign policy choices and the party program, not about approval or disapproval of Aznar’s governance during his final days in power.

In sum, there were several contextual restrictions that influenced the feasibility of options both for Stoltenberg and Aznar, but the restrictions were perhaps fewer for Stoltenberg. He could have blamed Breivik and the right-wing extremists for the attack, but he had nothing to

gain by doing that. The electoral cycle was not at its peak, which reduced the need to politicize the attack. Aznar had fewer choices. He could have waited for the investigations to proceed and then blamed the perpetrator based on evidence, or taken a risk and blamed the only known terrorist group in Spain with the capacity to carry out such an attack. By being completely non-partisan, Aznar had the chance to lose, not to win, since by not being able to inform the public as much as the public needs in times of crisis in order to make their appraisal, the government would have been criticized anyway, either for being incapable of doing its job, or for withholding information. Therefore he opted for pointing the finger at ETA, the “usual suspect” and the group that Aznar’s party had targeted its counterterrorism policy against, hoping that the evidence would later justify the blame. Radical Islamists were the least worthwhile group from Aznar’s point of view, since evoking them would raise the issue of Spain’s participation in the war in Iraq. In hindsight, it is easy to criticize Aznar’s decisions, especially from the moral point of view. Yet bearing in mind that the elections were only three days away and due to the Spanish bipolar party system whereby the winner takes all and the loser loses all, it would have been politically more risky to go for any other option than Aznar did.

### **Conclusion: Beyond Spain and Norway**

If there is anything to be learned from the Spanish case, it is that political speculation, calculation, and other partisan politicking are normally regarded as out of place in the face of a national trauma like a terrorist attack, and they are likely to lead to the exclusion of certain segments of the public, which may again lead to different social responses, including protests, and so forth. The Norwegian way of politicizing the attack in a more neutral, nonpartisan way, through appealing to commonly shared values seemed to work better in preventing harmful social responses. However, political leaders are not always as free to choose their strategy as it might seem because the nature of the event and the political situation can impose significant pressures and constraints on them.

Despite the fact that the Spanish and Norwegian cases do not provide an answer to the best way of dealing with the causal attribution of an attack, they underline the need for special attention to be paid toward it. Blaming the perpetrator and interpreting the possible reasoning of the terrorist(s) can lead to unwanted social responses, especially if the perpetrator represents a large group other than that of the target audience. Violent backlashes are not uncommon in the aftermath of intergroup terrorist attacks, as was seen in the aftermath of the murder of Theo van Gogh, the Kosovo case in 2004 and the Charlie Hebdo shooting in Paris in 2015, among many others. Norway had it easy, in a way, when the perpetrator was caught red-handed and his background did not open up any existing intergroup grievances in society, as the blaming of ETA did in Spain.

Naturally one cannot deny certain facts, like the known background of the perpetrators, but talking about these characteristics calls for discretion and coherence. As the Spanish case clearly demonstrates, authoritative speculation is very risky when there is no evidence-based information available. It may be tempting for politicians to exploit fear after a terrorist attack in order to keep a window of opportunity open for exceptional policies. This can be seen in the way that leaders define the relevance of the event that has taken place. However, it makes the act of terrorism successful by amplifying “a state of fear” that the terrorists created through their deeds. As Furedi has stated, “acts of terrorism succeed in so far as the target society responds in the way perpetrators of these deeds intended.”<sup>42</sup> The heads of state are

the ones that can lead the social response by example but, as mentioned earlier, this can be challenging due to the contextual limitations.

Portraying an image of leadership seems to be at least as important as the actual effectiveness of managing the situation. The Committee of Investigation of the Norwegian terrorist attack in 2011 clearly states that there were several mistakes and mismanagement issues in the policing during the massacre in Utøya, but Prime Minister Stoltenberg nevertheless enjoyed increased support due to his visibility in public after the attack.<sup>43</sup>

In sum, it can be argued that the most successful terrorism-related crisis politicking is dependent on a favorable political context. In other words, crises are easiest to manage when society is stable, when it lacks inflammable intergroup grievances and the political system itself is ready to take the blow as one, like in Norway, not as quarreling parties, like in Spain. Experience in dealing with terrorism-related crises does not seem to be relevant.

## Notes

1. M. Kent Jennings, "Political Responses to Pain and Loss," *American Political Science Review* 93(1) (1999), p. 5.
2. Brigitte L. Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism: The Central Role of the Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002).
3. Hayley Watson, "Dependent Citizen Journalism and the Publicity of Terror," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24(3) (2012), pp. 465–282.
4. Arjen Boin, Paul't Hart, Eric Stern, and Bengt Sundelius, *The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership Under Pressure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
5. Kari Palonen, "Four Times of Politics: Policy, Polity, Politicking, and Politicization," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 28 (2003), pp. 171–186. Despite the fact that in common language politicking sometimes has a pejorative meaning, here it refers to styles and ways of conducting politics without any judgmental stance.
6. María José Canel and Karen Sanders, "Crisis Communication and Terrorist Attacks: Framing a Response to the 2004 Madrid Bombings and 2005 London Bombings," in Timothy Coombs and Sherry Holladay, eds., *The Handbook of Crisis Communication* (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), pp. 449–466; Narciso Michavila, "Guerra, terrorismo y elecciones: incidencia electoral de los atentados islamistas en Madrid," *Real Instituto Elcano Documento de trabajo* 13 (2005); Jose Olmeda, "Fear or Falsehood? Framing the 3/11 Terrorist Attacks in Madrid and Electoral Accountability," *Real Instituto Elcano Working Paper* 24 (2005); Teemu Sinkkonen, *Political Responses to Terrorism: Case study on the Madrid terrorist attack on March 11, 2004, and its aftermath* (Tampere: Tampere University Press, 2009).
7. According to the opinion poll conducted by the national broadcasting company TV2. Available at <http://www.tv2.no/nyheter/politisk/stoltenbergeffekten-er-ikke-like-sterk-ved-kommunevalg-3814148.html>, there was an increase in support for the prime minister's party after the attack, although it was not as pronounced at the local level as it was at the national level. This was also seen in the local elections that were held 42 days after the attack, on 12 September 2011 when the *Arbeiderpartiet* had a mere two per cent increase in votes compared to the local elections of 2007 (Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation statistics available at <http://www.nrk.no/valg2011/valgresultat/>). This increase was so small and the chronological distance from the terrorist incident so long that no causal explanations can be drawn between the terrorist attack and the electoral success of the Labour Party. The Labour Party was the target of the terrorist attack, which can to some degree explain the increased support for it in the immediate aftermath of the attack.
8. For example, *Roper Center*, "Job Performance Ratings for President Bush." Available at [http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/CFIDE/roper/presidential/webroot/presidential\\_rating\\_detail.cfm?allRate=True&presidentName=Bush](http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/CFIDE/roper/presidential/webroot/presidential_rating_detail.cfm?allRate=True&presidentName=Bush)

9. The murder of film director Theo van Gogh in 2004 was followed by a spiral of religion- and ethnicity-based political violence and vandalism in the Netherlands. See Jaap van Donselaar and Peter Rodrigues, "Developments Following the Murder of Theo van Gogh," *Racism and Extreme Right Monitor: Sixth Report* (Leiden/Amsterdam: Anne Frank Stichting, and Leiden University, 2004).
10. Peter Bouckaert, "Failure to Protect: Anti-Minority Violence in Kosovo, March 2004," *Human Rights Watch* 16(6) (2004).
11. There was also a violent backlash after the Paris shooting on 7 January 2015. For example, *The Telegraph*, "Paris Shootings: The backlash begins against French Muslims," 10 January 2015. Available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/11337938/Paris-shootings-The-backlash-begins-against-French-Muslims.html>
12. Craig A. Smith, Kelly N. Haynes, Richard S. Lazarus, and Lois K. Pope, "In Search of the 'Hot' Cognitions: Attributions, Appraisals, and their Relation to Emotion," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 65(5) (1993), pp. 916–929. See also Richard S. Lazarus, "Cognition and Motivation in Emotion," *American Psychologist* 46(4) (1991), pp. 352–367.
13. It is necessary to make a distinction between an appraisal and other types of reasoning, like attributions, inferences, and evaluations. Although in common language, there may not be a significant difference between these terms, in Appraisal Theory appraisal is distinct from the aforementioned other words exactly in its direct relationship with emotions. See Smith et al., "In Search of the 'Hot Cognition.'"
14. Richard S. Lazarus, "Relational Meaning and Discrete Emotions," in Klaus R. Scherer, Angela Schorr, and Tom Johnstone, eds., *Appraisal Processes in Emotion: Theory, Methods, Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 61–62.
15. Salli Saari, *Kuin salama kirikkaalta taivaalta: Kriisit ja niistä selviytyminen* (Helsinki: Otava, 2003).
16. Compare to Klaus R. Scherer, "Appraisal Considered as a Process of Multilevel Sequential Checking," in Klaus R. Scherer, Angela Schorr, and Tom Johnstone, eds., *Appraisal Processes in Emotion: Theory, Methods, Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 92–120.
17. Jennings, "Political Responses to Pain and Loss"; Saari, *Kuin salama kirikkaalta taivaalta*. Natural disasters also have political implications. They may become relevant regarding causal attribution, especially if there is a failure of crisis management, since people can then point the finger at the authorities for not being able to protect them from the natural disaster. See, for example, Michael J. Trebilcock and Ronald J. Daniels, "Rationales and Instruments for Government Intervention in Natural Disasters," in Ronald J. Daniels, Donald F. Kettl, and Howard Kunreuther, eds., *On Risk and Disaster: Lessons from Hurricane Katrina* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), pp. 89–108.
18. Lazarus (in "Cognition and Motivation in Emotion") calls this *primary appraisal*. See also Smith et al., "In Search of the Hot Cognition."
19. Vamik Volkan, *Blind Trust: Large Groups and Their Leaders in Times of Crisis and Terror* (Charlottesville: Pitchstone Publishing, 2004).
20. Leonie Huddy, "Group Identity and Political Cohesion," in David O. Sears, Leonie Huddy, and Robert Jervis, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 511–558.
21. Tom Pyszczynski, Sheldon Solomon, and Jeff Greenberg, *In the Wake of 9/11: The Psychology of Terror* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2003).
22. Ben Sheppard, James Rubin, Jamie Warman, and Simon Wessely, "Viewpoint: Terrorism and Dispelling the Myth of a Panic Prone Public," *Journal of Public Health Policy* 27 (2006), p. 238.
23. Harumi Ito and Darin Lee, "Assessing the impact of the September 11 Terrorist Attacks on US Airline Demand," Working Paper, Brown University, Department of Economics, 2003–16 (2003); Jorge Araña and Carmelo León, "The Impact of Terrorism on Tourism Demand," *Annals of Tourism Research* 35(2) (2008), pp. 299–315.
24. Robert M. Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 5.
25. An interesting case study based on the Appraisal Theory of Emotions by Krista De Castella, Craig McGarty, and Luke Musgrove, "Fear Appeals in Political Rhetoric about Terrorism: An Analysis of Speeches by Australian Prime Minister Howard," *Political Psychology* 30(1) (2009), pp. 1–26.

26. De Castella et al., "Fear Appeals in Political Rhetoric about Terrorism"; Krista De Castella, Craig McGarty, and Luke Musgrove, "Two Leaders, Two Wars: A Psychological Analysis of Fear and Anger Content in Political Rhetoric About Terrorism," *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 11(1) (2011), pp. 180–200.
27. Howard M. Weiss, Kathleen Suckow, and Russel Cropanzano, "Effects of Justice Conditions on Discrete Emotion," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 84(1999), pp. 786–794; Leonie Huddy, Stanley Feldman, and Erin Cassese, "On the Distinct Political Effects of Anxiety and Anger," in Russel Neuman, George E. Marcus, Ann N. Crigler, and Michael MacKuen, eds., *The Affect Effect: Dynamic of Emotion in Political Thinking and Behavior* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 210.
28. Jennings, "Political Responses to Pain and Loss."
29. Palonen, "Four Times of Politics," pp. 171–186. Despite the fact that in common language politicking sometimes has a pejorative meaning, here it refers to styles and ways of conducting politics without any judgmental stance.
30. On the different phases of crisis governance, see Boin et al., *The Politics of Crisis Management*.
31. Various sources. Both the video and the original text in Spanish of Aznar's first speech available at [http://albertmedran.com/bloc\\_cast/2011/03/13/11m-el-discurso-de-jose-maria-aznar/](http://albertmedran.com/bloc_cast/2011/03/13/11m-el-discurso-de-jose-maria-aznar/). The second speech available at José María Aznar's own Web page: <http://www.jmaznar.es/discursos/pdfs/01901A1901.pdf>
32. All the speeches can be found on the Web page of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs both in Norwegian and translated into English. English version used here. Available at <http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/smk/Whats-new/Speeches-and-articles.html?id=886>
33. Comparison of different opinion poll results, for example in ABC, "El PP se centra en Cataluña en busca de un voto oculto clave en la mayoría absoluta." 7 March 2004. The *Instituto Opina*, which conducts surveys related to public opinion and marketing, was the one that predicted the smallest margin between the two biggest parties. According to its estimate, the PP was going to win between 163 and 171 (41.5 percent) seats against the 134–143 (36.5 percent) seats of the PSOE in the 350-seat parliament.
34. In fact, some of the conservative politicians were very persistent in insisting that there was at least some cooperation between ETA and the actual perpetrators of the attack, or that the socialist party tampered with the evidence during the police investigation for their political benefit. For example, Jaime I. del Burgo Tajadura, *11-M: Demasiadas preguntas sin respuesta* (Madrid: La Esfera de los libros, 2006).
35. Sinkkonen, *Political Responses to Terrorism*.
36. Detailed description of Aznar's governance in Teemu Sinkkonen, *Political Responses to Terrorism: Case Study on the Madrid Terrorist Attack on March 11, 2004, and Its Aftermath* (Tampere: Tampere University Press, 2009), pp. 107–157.
37. Olmeda, "Fear or Falsehood?" Causality was relevant for the parliamentary elections that were held four days after the attack. The PSOE opposition party had been criticizing the ruling PP for its decision to participate in the war in Iraq and if the perpetrators had turned out to be Islamic, it would have given them an important political tool.
38. For example ABC, "Otegi solo se limitó a poner en duda que ETA fuese la autora del asesinato masivo," 12 March 2004.
39. De Castella et al., "Fear Appeals in Political Rhetoric about Terrorism."
40. Aage Borchgrevink, *A Norwegian Tragedy: Anders Behring Breivik and the Massacre on Utøya* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).
41. One of the slogans used in the protests against Prime Minister Aznar's Popular Party was "you have your chauffeurs, we have the suburban train," which underlines the distance between the prime minister (and the political class in general) and some of the affected people. VV. AA., *¡Pasálo!: Relatos y análisis sobre el 11-M y los días que le siguieron* (Madrid: Traficantes de sueños, 2004), pp. 70–71.
42. Frank Furedi, *Invitation to Terror: The Expanding Empire of the Unknown* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 171.
43. 22. juli-kommisjonen, "Rapport fra 22. juli-kommisjonen: Preliminary English Version of the Selected Chapters," *Norges offentlige utredninger* 14 (2012).