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**FEAR OR FALSEHOOD? FRAMING THE 3/11
TERRORIST ATTACKS IN MADRID AND
ELECTORAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

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Fear or Falsehood? Framing the 3/11 Terrorist Attacks in Madrid and Electoral Accountability¹

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Summary: This paper explores the following aspects of the terrorist attacks of 11 March 2004 in Madrid:

- Failures of organisation, anticipation and learning in the system of security crisis management (early alert and strategic surprise, information policy, police and intelligence leaks to the opposition and media, partisan politicisation of terrorist attacks) in comparison with the effective operation of the emergency response.
- Whether the PP government mismanaged its relations with other elites and journalists, especially as it was unable to find compelling schemas that supported its main line of argument ('the ETA authorship frame') during the days before the election, while prime minister J.M. Aznar lost control of the frame because of his lack of credibility.
- Under these circumstances, elite opponents and oppositional journalists could attain as much influence over framing as the government, and developed their own line assigning blame to the government ('the government is lying' frame), winning the both frame contest and the elections.

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Terrorist attacks were perpetrated in Madrid on the penultimate day of the general election campaign (scheduled for 14 March 2004). There were 192 killed and 1,430 wounded. Three days before the general elections, the ruling *Partido Popular* (Popular Party, PP) of prime minister José María Aznar was ahead in the polls by around 5%, and Aznar's designated successor, former Minister of the Interior and Deputy prime minister Mariano Rajoy seemed likely to continue the by now eight-year-old PP government. The result of the terrorist attacks' framing contest was that from being 5% ahead in the polls on Wednesday, the PP was down from 43% to 36% on Sunday –a 12 percentage point shift–. In contrast, approval for George W. Bush shot up from 35% to 40% in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, reaching 90% and hovering in the upper 80s in the months that followed. Why was there no 'rally round the flag' effect for the Spanish government? In this era of mass mediated politics, what were the interactions between the government's information policy and the oppositional media's agenda? In the Post-Cold War period, the media themselves have become actors in the political arena, promoting certain problem definitions and remedies and neglecting others. The victory of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) was unanticipated by the polls: what influence did the traditional media, especially press and radio, have? In sum, how did the actors use framing strategies to (re)allocate blame for politicised terrorist attacks?

INTRODUCTION: A NATIONAL TRAUMA

The ways in which political crisis develop depend on how the different participants respond to contested and problematical actions in them. In some cases, acts that appear to shift the advantage in a situation might require special justification for other participants to accept or tolerate them. Some political acts may arouse suspicion as potential violations of the norms that bind participants together in a situation; under these circumstances an actor may have to offer special reasons, justifications, excuses, or normative interpretations to retain the support of a constituency or a coalition or to maintain the opposition's commitment to fair play². The extreme polarisation and the deep cleavage between the *Partido Popular* (PP) and the *Partido Socialista* (PSOE) in this extreme security crisis provoked a national trauma that general elections and the new majority have not yet improved one year later. My aim here is to analyse the effects of the terrorist attacks on the characteristics of our peculiar rally effect and the following electoral overturn. Two alternative accounts have been developed to explain this outcome.

The first account describes what happened as a result of fear ('in fear'). The government arrested suspects two days after the attacks and informed public opinion in real time of the

development of the police investigation. The electoral overturn was unjust, a result of manipulation by oppositional elites and media. According to the conventional interpretation ('against cheating'), the effects of terrorism were minimal; just another factor added to an ongoing tendency favouring the socialist majority, despite pre-electoral polls unanimously predicting victory for the PP. According to this interpretation, the situation prior to the attacks was a 'technical draw', ie, the differences in voting intention were less than the survey's margin of error. The PP government mismanaged the crisis. Its electoral defeat was a typical example of accountability. Some journalists and scholars, explaining the Spanish electoral overturn, echoed V.O. Key's assertion, made forty years ago, that 'voters are not fools',³ but in certain settings, on certain issues, many of them can be fooled.

The meanings of a terrorist attack of such a magnitude are complex and widespread among the public. The prevalent meanings were:

- An imprecise declaration of war.⁴
- A human catastrophe to be attended to by the health subsystem of the crisis management system.
- A police investigation trying to discover the authorship of the attacks and producing information disseminated to the public through the government, the opposition and the media.
- An independent variable in an ongoing electoral campaign: a rigid governmental framing and an oppositional elite counter-framing, reinforced by the partisan politicisation of terrorist attacks by oppositional media, produced a blame game aimed at the incumbent government, which took the blame for the attacks and lost the elections.

Framing is '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'.⁵ The prime minister, his supporters, and his opponents and critics advocate their messages to the media, including now old (press, television, radio) and new (*micro media* (e-mail, lists) and *middle media* Internet channels (blogs, organisation sites, e-zines) media in the hope of gaining political leverage. The media's political influence arises from how they respond –from their ability to frame the news in ways that favour one side over the other–.

The spreading of frames is stratified: some actors have more power than others to push ideas into the news and then to the public. In the cascade model of frames representation, each level in the metaphorical cascade (governmental elites, oppositional elites, old and new media, news frames, public) also makes its own contribution to the mix and flow of ideas.⁶ For many events or issues, dominant frames suggest conflicting or unclear interpretations. Framing of such ambiguous matters depends to a great extent on motivation, power and strategy. When a frame contradicts dominant public opinion, it becomes dissonant or too complex for most people to handle and therefore a blocking response is called forth.⁷

Rallies occur because oppositional leaders fail to criticise the prime minister's policies; hence, the public receives primarily positive messages about them from the media.⁸ The absence of negative elite evaluations indirectly leads to the absence of negative public evaluations, thereby producing surges in prime minister popularity. With the large-scale

demonstrations on March 12, feelings of allegiance to Spain's democratic political system, and human solidarity with the victims and their families were invoked by the government, achieving the rally effect. At the same time, the demonstrations created the political opportunity structure to spread rumours and suspicions about the ETA authorship frame in certain sectors. The oppositional political and journalistic elites, using the old media, and extremist social movements, using the new media, developed a master frame⁹ that unified oppositional forces and symbolic messages, assigning the blame to a rigid governmental frame that lost the contest and the elections.

My argument tries to describe the complex meanings of the terrorist attacks and the different avenues of influence opened up by the bombings on voter behaviour. By carrying out an intensive empirical case study of what happened in those four days, I hope to display proof of the plausibility of my hypothesis of a massive effect of the bombings and especially of their framing (March 11), the mobilisation against terrorism (the real rally around the flag on March 12) and the flash mobs against PP locales (13 and 14 March). How did this happen? I shall attempt a path-dependent explanation.¹⁰ First, I shall describe the relevant antecedent conditions, ie, the factors that define available options for decision-makers and shape selection processes among the actors: in this case, the various failures and political mistakes for which the PP government under the leadership of prime minister Aznar was accountable prior to the election campaign. In other words, the political context in which the crisis was embedded. Secondly, I will depict the critical juncture shaped by the terrorist attacks and the selection of a policy option ('the ETA authorship' frame) from among multiple options. Third, I shall attempt to explain why there was a structural persistence, a kind of reproduction of the structural pattern of failure in crisis management under those circumstances. Fourth, I shall present the reactions ('the government's lies' frame) and counter-reactions to the structural pattern. And fifth, I shall analyse the resolution of the conflict generated by reactions and counter-reactions: the electoral overturn outcome.

This paper explores the following aspects:

- Failures of organisation, anticipation and learning in the system of security crisis management (early alert and strategic surprise, information policy, police and intelligence leaks to opposition and media, partisan politicisation of terrorist attacks) in comparison with the effective operation of the emergency response.
- Whether the PP government mismanaged its relationships with other elites and journalists, especially because it could not find compelling schemas that supported its main line ('the ETA authorship' frame) during the days before the election and prime minister Aznar lost control of the frame because of his lack of credibility.
- Under these circumstances, elite opponents and oppositional journalists could attain as much influence over framing as the government and developed their own line assigning blame to the government ('the government lies' frame), thereby winning the frame contest and the elections.

SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN GOVERNANCE

The alternatives available during critical junctures, as well as the choices finally made by actors, are usually embedded in previous events. The degree to which these antecedent conditions determine actor choices during critical junctures can vary, ranging from decisions characterised by a high degree of individual discretion to choices that are more deeply rooted in earlier events.¹¹ In order to clarify these options, some of the successes and failures in governance by the PP government during its overall majority (2000-04) will be described in order to place the crisis in its proper context.

The Success of Counter-terrorist Policy against Basque Nationalist Terrorism

The Basque nationalist movement is hardly unique with respect to its internal fragmentation, its historical process of splits and mergers. The movement's organisational field represents an increasingly heterogeneous mix of organisations and aims. Its branches compete with each other for resources, legitimacy and the right to speak on behalf of Basque society; some groups have been able to navigate this competitive environment successfully while others, less fortunate or less adept at formulating appropriate strategies, have found themselves increasingly marginalised, with diminishing public support and unable to induce the regime to respond to their claims in any meaningful way. In 1959, a group of militant activists within the moderate Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) formed a breakaway faction seeking more radical policy goals and committed to outspoken, direct action against the Spanish government. At its inception, this new organization, *Euskadi ta Askatasuna* (Basque Homeland and Freedom, ETA) appeared generally unified behind a shared vision of a future independent, socialist Basque Country, to be achieved through 'armed struggle'. After all these years, ETA is one of the longest-lived terrorist organisations in the Western world, with more than forty years in existence, more than thirty years of personal attacks, around a thousand assassinations and a significant destabilisation problem for Spanish democracy.

After years of successful underground activity, ETA's leadership was arrested in the south of France in 1992 in a joint operation by the Guardia Civil and the French police, with the technical support of the CIA. This was the beginning of an operational decline in the terrorist organisation. In July 1997, a terrorist cell kidnapped a young Basque councillor in a small town, Miguel Ángel Blanco, who was a member of the PP, then in power in a minority government. ETA threatened to kill him in forty-eight hours if ETA's imprisoned members were not repatriated to prisons in the Basque Provinces. After his murder, massive demonstrations and expressions of outrage spread throughout Basque territory. This process of mobilisation triggered two main reactions in the Basque nationalist movement: its disloyal political branch, PNV, radicalised its stance in order to help the terrorist branch and favoured the creation of a pan-nationalist front under its political hegemony, while its terrorist branch suffered internal dissent when important activists of older generations demanded the end of the 'armed struggle' because of ETA's faltering support and its ineffectiveness. Alonso (2004, p. 705) has rightly underscored the underlying rationale of these actions: Basque nationalists' fears that ETA's military defeat would have very negative consequences for the Basque people, rendering its main nationalist party (PNV) insignificant.

On 15 July 1998 Judge Baltasar Garzón closed the daily newspaper *Egin* and the radio station *Egin Irratia*, having proved that ETA appointed their directors and defined its

editorial line. In September 1998, this strategic and political climate led to the declaration by ETA of an indefinite cease-fire that broke down in late 1999. ETA's cease-fire was the trade-off for a radicalisation of the PNV, which then retreated from any agreement with Spanish democratic political forces (PP and PSOE) and in January 2000 endorsed the terrorist aim of self-determination. This secret pact opened the way for the Estella (*Lizarra* in the Basque language) Declaration, an agreement signed by the main Basque nationalist parties and trade unions, with the addition of the Basque section of the post-communist coalition *Izquierda Unida* (United Left, IU), then in the Basque regional government.¹²

Before this scenario, the popular government pursued its strategy of no political concessions to the PNV, enforcement of the rule of law against terrorists, elimination of any of its political, financial and symbolic resources through legal measures, and their encouragement of international cooperation. On 8 December 2000, an agreement between the PP and the PSOE was signed designing several counter-terrorist measures. The PP government's new strategy against ETA is clearly presented by Ignacio Cosidó:¹³

'The new comprehensive approach to combat terrorism starts with the premise that ETA is not [constituted] only [of] its cells but also of a big network with political parties, social organisations, companies and propagandistic means. That entire network is directly controlled and directed by ETA and provides the political support, welfare services and logistic and economic assistance rendered to terrorist activity. The Government approach is, therefore, to fight against that network so as to hinder, on the one hand, the regenerative capacity the armed gang has enjoyed throughout its history and, on the other, the impunity most of the organisation has had making use of democratic means in order to destroy democracy.'

Another pillar of this strategy was international cooperation with an important Trans-Atlantic dimension that Cosidó underscores, after too many years of French reluctance. The new strategy has produced several important legislative changes and judicial decisions:¹⁴

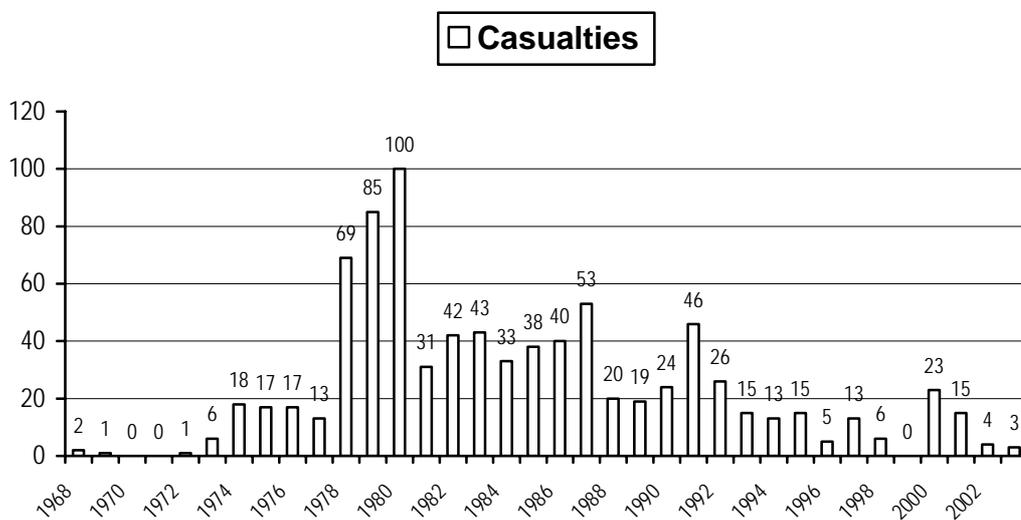
- The amendment of the Criminal Law and the Criminal Responsibility of Under-aged Persons in January 2000 put an end to this impunity, toughening the sentences for this kind of terrorist hooliganism (*kale borroka*). This was decisive in undercutting the recruitment of young activists to the terrorist group.
- The sentences for terrorist crimes became more severe after Law 7/2003 was approved by Parliament on 30 June 2003. The Law was supported by the vast majority of members of Parliament, with the endorsement of both the PP and PSOE. The new rule extends the punishment for terrorist crimes from 30 to 40 years and in the most serious cases those convicted have to fully serve their sentences. Before the law was passed it was a common occurrence for terrorists to remain in prison for a maximum of 20 years.
- The Supreme Court sentence of 17 March 2003 that dissolved the *Batasuna* political party in accordance with the Political Parties Law passed one year earlier, with the votes of the PP, the PSOE and regionalist and nationalist groups. This sentence prevented ETA from counting on a powerful propaganda tool, which benefited from public money. The illegalization entailed *Batasuna's* debarring from the 25 May local elections, consequently losing power over the 49 small towns of the Autonomous Regions of Navarre and the

Basque Country, with a budget of more than 90 million euros.

- On 20 February 2003, Judge Del Olmo ordered the preventive close-down of the daily newspaper *Euskaldunon Egunkaria* on the grounds that the direction of the paper was under the control of ETA.
- On 29 April 2003, the Police neutralised the direction of the Assembly *Udalbitza Kursaal* as part of an operation coordinated by the *Audiencia Nacional* Judge Baltasar Garzón. The *Udalbitza Kursaal* Assembly was created in February 2001 by local representatives of *Batasuna* and served as a political platform to support ETA.

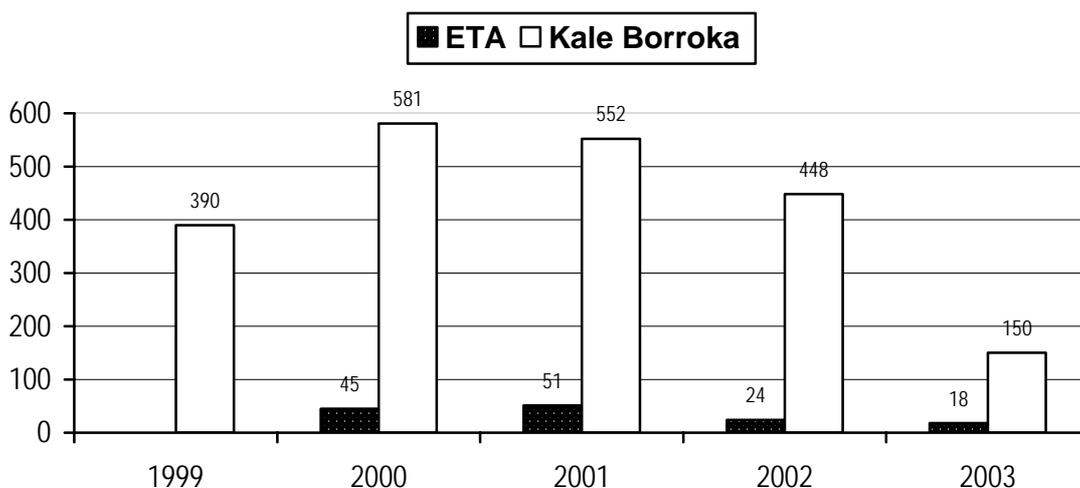
The success of this strategy cannot be denied. Different data can sustain this assertion. As a result, in 2003, ETA only launched 18 attacks, causing three fatalities. This is one of the lowest figures in 30 years (see Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1. Casualties caused by ETA, 1968-2003



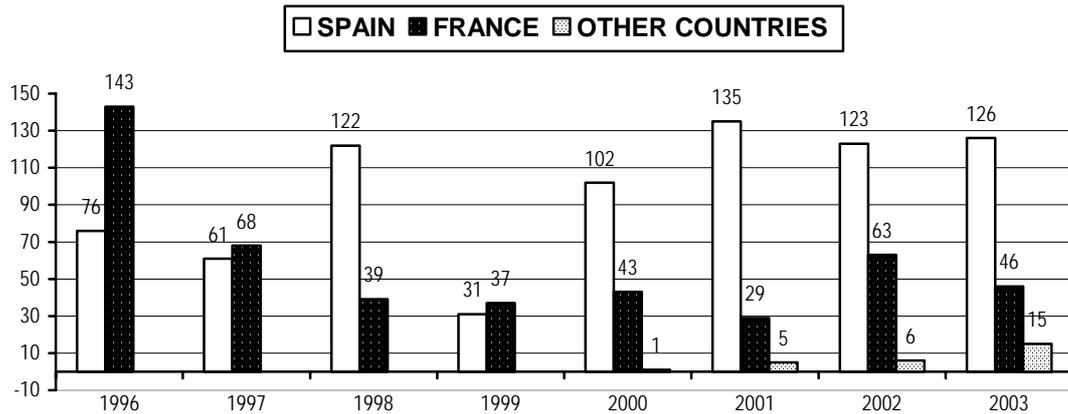
Source: Avilés, 2004, with data from the Spanish Ministry of the Interior.

Figure 2. Terrorist Attacks: ETA and *Kale Borroka* (Low-intensity Urban Terrorism), 1999-2003



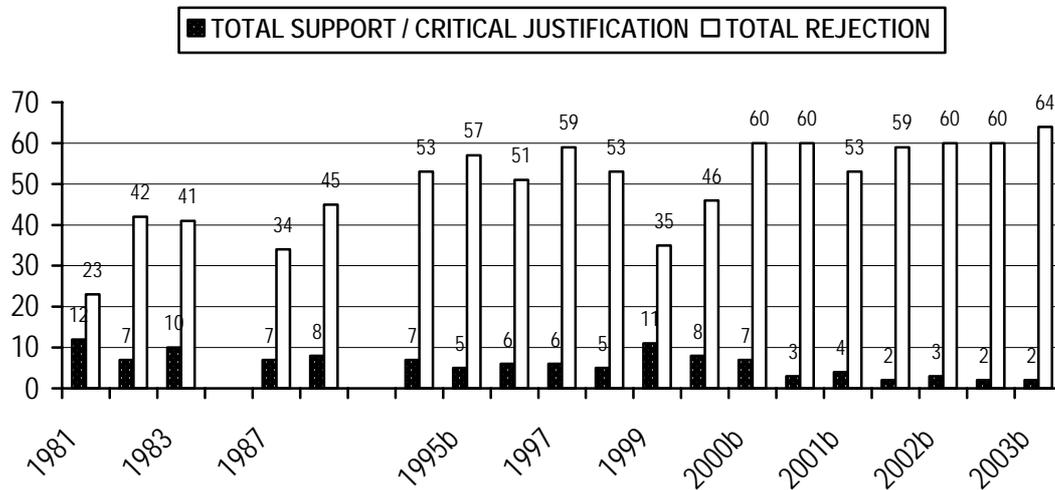
Source: Avilés, 2004, with data from the Spanish Ministry of the Interior.

Figure 3. ETA Terrorist Arrests, 1996-2003



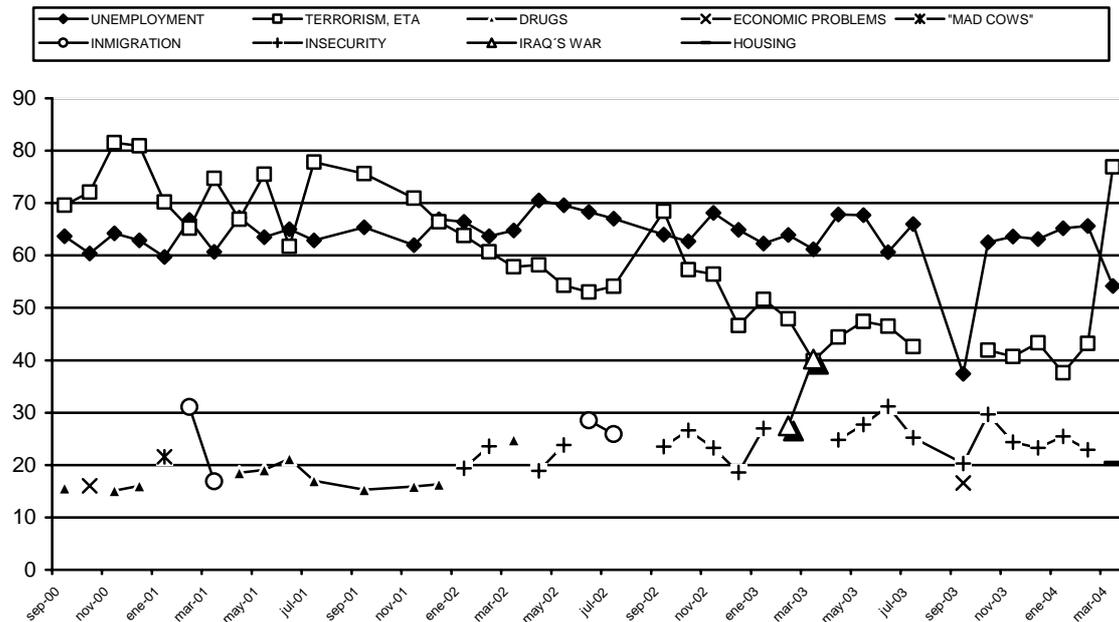
Source: Avilés, 2004, with data from the Spanish Ministry of the Interior.

Figure 4. Attitudes towards ETA, 1981-2003



Source: Avilés, 2004, with data from CAV Euskobarómetro.

Figure 5. Public Agenda: Which are, in your opinion, Spain's three main problems? (Multiple answer), 2000-04



Source: CIS 2000-04.

In recent years, these efforts have made possible the arrest of large numbers of ETA terrorists, including some of its leaders. In contrast to the 100 arrested in the year 2000, as ETA resumed its terrorist activities following the cease-fire, 187 ETA members were arrested in the year 2003 (see Figure 3). And, last but not least, social support for the terrorist group has also significantly decreased. Support for ETA, which in the 80s was at around 10%, is nowadays at around 2%. In contrast, total rejection has increased from 40% around the middle of the 80s to the current 64%. The remaining 30% takes a position of rejection but with certain qualifications, supporting, for instance, the gang's aims but not the violent means used to achieve them and justifying its existence during the Franco regime but not in democracy¹⁵ (see Figure 4). These results produced a polarisation of Basque nationalist forces, leading to serious confrontation with the national PP government due to the threat of secession invoked by the Basque regional government.

But I want to stress the consequences of this success for the Spanish population's perception of the terrorist threat. According to data from the CIS, the answer 'terrorism, ETA' as a Spanish problem has almost disappeared (the wording of the question was: 'Which are, in your opinion, the three main problems in Spain? Multiple answer') beginning in 2002 (see Figure 5). In my view, this success would leave a legacy in the way government decision-makers faced terrorism. However, one year after 9/11, the CIS asked 'Do you think that there can be terrorist attacks of the same magnitude as 9/11/2001 in the next weeks or months in the United States or in another developed country?' Of those asked, 62.6% said 'yes'.¹⁶

The First Failure of Crisis Management: The Sinking of the *Prestige*

On November 13, 2002, the single-hull tanker *Prestige*, loaded with 77,000 tons of low quality fuel, sent out an SOS after suffering a major leak 28 miles from Finisterre on the Galician coast. Despite the adverse weather conditions, the political authorities decided to

take the Prestige out to sea by means of tugboats. The route chosen was rather erratic and, in the end, proved fatal: at first the tanker was taken northwards, and then, following the alleged intervention of the French authorities in an effort to protect their own coastline, southwards, before finally steering eastwards. An oil slick first appeared on the Galician coast on 16 November. Three days later, the tanker broke in half, sinking to a depth of 4,000 metres at a location 120 miles west of the Galician Cíes Islands, while still holding around 50,000 tons of fuel. Beyond the tremendous environmental damage and the devastating economic cost of the spill for the fishing sector, the social response to the Prestige was probably sharpened by a tragic sequence of similar accidents on Galician coasts over the previous decades: *Polycommander* (1970), *Urquiola* (1976), *Andros Patria* (1979), *Casón* (1988) and *Mar Egeo* (1992).

There were political shortcomings relating to the management of the crisis. There was a lack of reaction by the political authorities at the regional and national levels of government at the beginning of the crisis. There was no coordination between local (*Capitanía de La Coruña*, the Corunna captaincy), regional (*Xunta de Galicia*) and national (Government Delegate in Galicia, General Direction of Maritime Rescue) levels of government. There was no vacuum ship to clean the waters. There was no protocol for action in this kind of oil spill, despite the above-mentioned antecedents. There was no swift deployment by the armed forces to help clean the coast. There was an acute lack of communication from the departments involved (Environmental Affairs and Public Works). There was insufficient technical advice about spillage to the political authorities at every level. It took a month and a day after the oil spill for prime minister Aznar to visit the Galician coast.

This slow governmental reaction and worse information policy facilitated the Galician people's angry response. The *Nunca Más* movement was led by left-wing nationalists but soon embraced a much broader socio-political spectrum including socialists and post-communists. The first demonstration saw over 150,000 people march through the Galician capital of Santiago de Compostela and it represented a watershed in the history of collective action in the region. There was an innovative repertoire of protest actions with the cooperation of the world of arts and culture. Under the leadership of Mariano Rajoy, in charge of the coordination of government management of the post-crisis situation, relief measures were implemented to compensate the different sectors affected and finally prime minister Aznar unveiled the so-called Galicia Plan, according to which the region would receive another €12,000 in investment.¹⁷

War in Iraq: The Failure to Overcome/Neutralise Oppositional Public Opinion

Though Aznar was quite conscious of the need to win over public opinion for defence while in the opposition,¹⁸ once in power he did not follow his own advice. This was the case with his support, which was more photographic than effective, for the war in Iraq. He did not try to convince Spanish public opinion of the merits of his position, not even his ministers and his own party. This is exactly the opposite of what socialist prime minister Felipe González did in the first Gulf War. González fought a hard battle against journalists, pacifists, communists... and some sectors of his own party to win over public opinion, though he then had the support of the PP. Aznar later implicitly acknowledged his mistake¹⁹ but this is not the *modus operandi* of statesmen in a democracy. Rajoy was his only help among his ministers. His resignation to losing the favour of public opinion was a gross mistake because it left his supporters without a frame to interpret the situation. As

Emilio Lamo de Espinosa said, ‘the government of prime minister Aznar did not know how to carry out that campaign [to legitimise the use of force in Iraq] or did not want to do it. The Iraq war could have been illegal but legitimate like Kosovo. But it was not. And the result is that, as the Anglo-Saxons say, *bad cases make bad law*, and Iraq has ended up being a bad case for almost everything.’²⁰

Besides, in my opinion there was enough space to build a case defending Aznar’s position in an attempt to overturn opinions. The attitudes against Saddam Hussein were noteworthy, without a prior campaign like that of Bush and Blair, and without knowledge of his genocidal practices. Spaniards were very much concerned by the conflict (80%); 60% considered Saddam a danger to international security; 54% believed he was linked to international terrorism, though they were probably ignorant of his funding of Palestinian suicidal terrorism; 80% agreed with the UN resolutions that ordered Iraq to disarm; and 58% believed he had weapons of mass destruction. However, these opinions are compatible with a notable anti-Americanism, with 62% in opposition to the US position before the conflict. The positive assessment of the government’s policy was only 11%, with 35% in favour of the socialist opposition; 91% declared their opposition to military intervention,²¹ with 67% ingenuously supporting a neutral stance, without realising that we are all corrupt and decadent western infidels, allies of the United States, in the eyes of Islamists.²² Politics in a democracy depend on public opinion: acting without heeding it is as irresponsible as pandering to it. In order to succeed in a democratic polity, it is crucial for a political leader to frame policies in such a way as to generate public support for them, common identities and shared definitions of the situation, at the elite and mass levels in public opinion.

The lack of a framing on the Iraq war and the Spanish position in the repertoire of arguments for the government’s political communication would prove disastrous in the forthcoming Ides of March. There was a large-scale demonstration against the war in Madrid on 15 February²³ 2003 and a smaller one on the following 23 February. However, the government did not dispatch troops until the war had formally ended. And its mission was a peace-keeping mission, with very strict rules of engagement. But the socialist and post-communist opposition framed it as if it were a war mission, with the aim of mobilising their followers against the PP government.

The Second Failure of Crisis Management: The Yak-42 Disaster

After completing its humanitarian mission in Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan, 62 Spanish military were coming home on a rented Yakovlev-42. The plane went down in Trabzon (Turkey) on 26 May 2003 and all its passengers were killed. There were several failures in the management of the crisis by the minister of Defence. The choice of Soviet-rented planes for military transport to save on financial resources was made against the advice of his own secretary of state for Defence. The minister denied the existence of previous military reports asking for a change in these flights due to their unsafe conditions, which was later proved to be a lie. There was no personalised attention to the victims’ families. The bodies of the victims were not forensically identified because civilian forensic experts were not dispatched to Turkey (there are no military forensic specialists in the Spanish Armed Forces) and, as a consequence, there were mistakes in the identification of the remains that affected half of the victims. The mourning ritual followed by the PP government served as way of blaming the minister and the prime minister for their decisions and non-decisions. The organisational climate in the armed forces was intensely

deteriorated by these failures in leadership.

Warning without Response: The Casablanca Terrorist Attacks and the Killing of Seven Intelligence Agents in Iraq

On 12 May 2003 suicide bombers attacked three compounds housing foreign workers in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, killing 34, and 11 al-Qaeda suspects were arrested on 28 May. On 16 May, a series of terrorist attacks in Casablanca, Morocco, left 41 people dead and around 100 injured. At least one suicide bomber detonated explosives attached to his body in a Spanish restaurant. A Spanish cultural centre, a Jewish community centre and cemetery, the Belgian consulate and a luxury hotel were damaged in the blasts in the restaurant and by the four car bombs.

The Casablanca terrorist attacks effectively proved that al-Qaeda had launched a sustained and coordinated international terrorist campaign in the wake of the Iraq war. While it was possible that local Saudi militants operating autonomously from the al-Qaeda leadership could have carried out the Riyadh bombings, it is much less likely that Morocco's home-grown extremists had the ability to organise and perpetrate simultaneous suicide attacks. While Moroccan officials had admitted that most of the attackers were Moroccan, and probably members of the local Assirat al-Moustaqim group, they were also keen to stress that some of the bombers had recently returned from another country and that the explosives training must have been provided by a foreign source.²⁴ This campaign was especially clear when seven Spanish intelligence agents (CNI) were killed in an ambush in Iraq.²⁵ It seems that some security protocols were not observed and this opened the window for treason and the ambush. It is now clear that both events, the Casablanca and the Iraq attacks, were possible evidence of an impending strike. The political authorities had sufficient but perhaps not very persuasive intelligence advice, and they also probably lacked an accurate evaluation and sound judgment of their own intelligence. Bin Laden had explicitly threatened Spain (Al-Andalus for Islamic persons, an extraordinary example of the splendour of the caliphate to be recovered from the infidels) in his videotape on 7 October 2001 and several previous times. If we add the police pressure against Islamist sleeping cells on Spanish soil to all this, we get a very dangerous cocktail from the point of view of security. Besides, the government made another avoidable mistake: the decision to forbid the comrades-in-arms of the seven CNI agents to wear their regulation uniform at the funeral services, when those assassinated were all military men. This incident worsened the organisational climate within the intelligence service.

Failures in Governance and the Rise of a Populist Opposition

The overall majority achieved by the PP in 2000 had opened the window for a *Popular reform* that would be more consistent with the party's strategic aims than its minority government in the previous legislature. I define reform as 'a policy innovation manifesting an unusually substantial redirection or reinforcement of previous public policy'.²⁶ The Aznar government managed to achieve, through sponsored legislation and/or other executive action, an unusually large number of reforms in different public policy sectors: counterterrorism, defence and foreign policy, education, industrial relations, budgeting, the national hydrological plan, the reinforcement of Spanish national identity, etc. This *Popular reform* paved the way for conflict and dispute due to its own content and the lack of a communication policy for winning public opinion. This was aggravated by prime minister Aznar's presidential leadership style: aloof and opposed to group-think. In fact, it

constituted an authentic political opportunity structure for major waves of collective action, opening a cycle of protest. Indeed, this cycle of protest presents the major characteristics of Tarrow's depiction of the concept²⁷: a heightened conflict across the social system and paths of diffusion from centre to periphery are crucibles out of which the repertoire of contention evolves and, finally, the cycles produce new or transformed frames of meaning to justify and dignify collective action. Let us see some examples.

There were numerous student mobilisations against certain PP legislative measures, usually with street demonstrations. Another controversial issue was the government's decision to press ahead with an ambitious national hydrological plan to transfer water from Spain's largest river, the Ebro, to the drought-stricken south-eastern and eastern areas of the country. Another very important conflict was the government project for labour market reform. The lack of consensus with the socialist and post-communist unions produced a general strike on 20 June 2002 and led to the end of peaceful industrial relations.

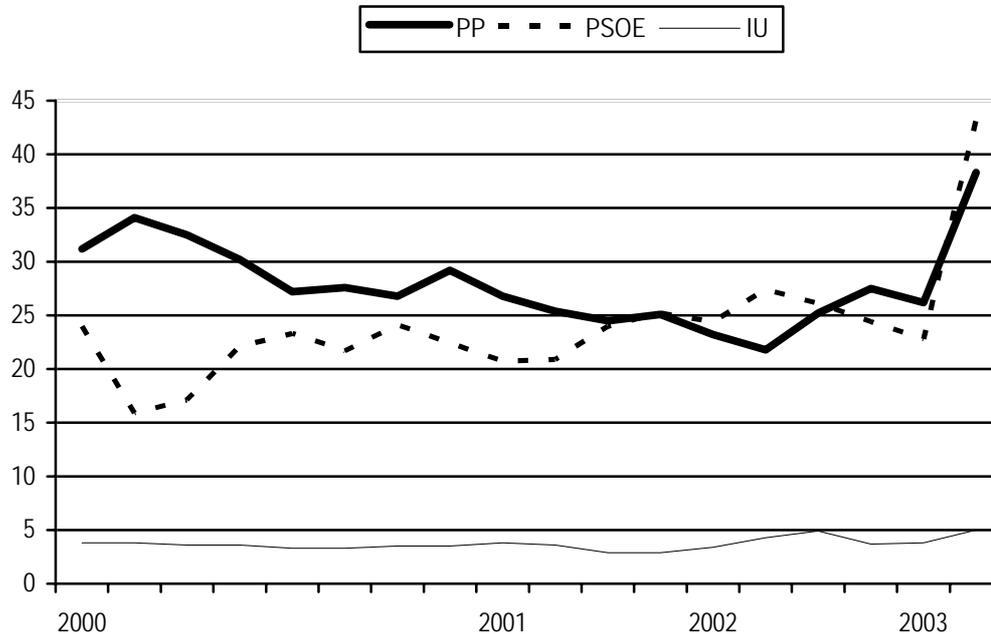
In sum, there was a crystallisation of an anti-PP policy cycle of protest in search of a master frame to unify the contest against the government: the demonstrations against the war in Iraq provided important elements for such a frame. In any case, the behaviour of the socialist opposition in the student mobilisation, the Prestige oil spill, the National Hydrological Plan, the general labour strike and the war in Iraq was purely populist. I use the term to denote the pursuit of political goals outside and against the institutions of representative government by parties or other interest groups seeking to pressure the political system with the instruments of grassroots and protest politics: demonstrations, mass marches, blockades, etc, in short, 'mobilisation from below'. This was perhaps an unintended consequence of calling soft oppositional leadership to the new socialist leader who tried to combine both facets. Before these events, it must be stressed that the government lacked an efficient communication policy, both in the sense of exploiting the government's successes in several policy sectors (economy and fiscal policy, foreign affairs, counter-terrorism...), and in the sense of minimising the numerous mistakes and policy failures. It seems that the overall majority in a parliamentary regime wrongly impelled the forgetfulness of public opinion. This is a gross misunderstanding for governing a contemporary liberal democracy.²⁸

The Campaign and the Polls

Campaigns reduce voter uncertainty but equally impressive in these concerns is how modest the effect of campaigns seems to be, how much uncertainty remains when they are through. The PP campaign stressed two thematic lines²⁹: Spain-Terrorism-Security, and Economic Stability-Fiscal Cuts-Full Employment, while the socialists aired housing and welfare policies. The terrorist attacks broke down the first PP electoral line and increased voters' uncertainty because they were traumatic events, an incident outside the range of normal experience, which most people would expect to be extremely stressful to persons having to endure the effects. Did the cycle of protest influence the direct intention to vote in the general elections? Would the socialists have won were it not for 11 March (and its extraordinary aftermath of bad governmental information policy and popular mobilisation)? A simple, if inadequate, approximation to this issue lies in examining the available public opinion polls. Opinion polls may not be published in Spain during the final six days before an election³⁰.

Figure 6 shows data on the direct intention to vote. The recovery of the intention to vote for the PSOE, and the drop for the PP, was visible up to April 2003, immediately after the formal end of the Iraq War. After that, there was an inverse tendency favouring the PP.

Figure 6. Direct Intention to Vote, 2000-04



Source: CIS 2000-03.

Neither was there a final convergence of the intention to vote between the two big national parties, according to the polls published by several media.³¹ According to the data, there is no progressive approach between the intention to vote for the PP and the PSOE, which is the dominant explanation for the electoral overturn.³² Or following a softer and subtler version of this interpretation, Torcal and Rico say³³: ‘obviously, the tragedy did have an effect on voters, yet this effect cannot be understood in isolation from the events of the Spanish political agenda over the previous years. In other words, the tragedy of March 11, as mediated by other events which had no direct relation with the bombing, the terrorist attack and, especially, the government’s handling of information in the days immediately following it, served to trigger a change that had been in the making for weeks previously. This change was wrought by the conservative government’s actions over the previous three years.’

However, the net difference between the mean difference between the PP-PSOE forecasts and the final results was 10.3 percentage points, too great a deviation, including Spanish standards³⁴, and also too great for campaign effects, given the forecasts. As González says³⁵: ‘there are few doubts today that the electoral overturn was a result of March 11, and the subsequent mobilisation, which raised the rate of voter turnout from circa 70% (a characteristic level in continuity elections: 1986, 1989 and 2000) to 80% (typical in change elections: 1982 and 1996). Voter sentiments and decisions in the United States (eg, the 2002 Congressional elections), Israel (especially in 1996), and other countries would appear to offer clear evidence that terrorism *can indeed* change mass level opinion. But as a general matter, on average, the direction of that change is likely to favour the right-wing political forces in the electoral arena,³⁶ rather than the advocates of withdrawal of troops from Iraq, as in this case.’

THE IDES OF MARCH: FRAMING AND BLAMING³⁷

Al-Qaeda issued a declaration of war against Western democracies seven years ago. However, the majority of westerners, especially in Europe, did not think of making decisions in order to protect and defend our political system and values. The attacks were evidence of Spanish strategic vulnerability. There were both hard and soft forms of this vulnerability. The hard form was that the terrorists decided to launch an attack against Spanish targets because it appeared advantageous to do so compared with other targets. The soft form was that, after the bombing, the terrorists could tacitly coerce the new socialist political authorities, whose hands would be tied by their presumably vulnerable mentalities as compared with the tough line against any kind of terrorism of the PP government. In the post-Cold War period, in our era of mediated politics, if a prime minister mismanages his relationships with other oppositional elites and journalists, and the mass public, especially if he cannot find compelling schemas that support his line, he might lose control of the frame. For ambiguous matters, under some critical circumstances, elite opponents, oppositional journalists and indicators of public opinion might together attain as much influence over framing as the government, despite all its resources.³⁸

Day One, 11 March 2004: The Attacks

Frequently, critical junctures are moments of relative structural indeterminism when wilful actors shape outcomes in a more voluntaristic way than normal circumstances permit. These junctures are critical because once an option is selected, it becomes increasingly difficult to return to the initial point when multiple alternatives were still possible. In a path-dependent framework, the centrepiece of analysis is a critical juncture stage –the terrorist attacks in our case– because after this phase major alternative development trajectories are gradually more closed off.³⁹ The terrorist attacks in the final phase of the election campaign produced this critical juncture.

During the election campaign, the PP had stressed its record in government on ‘the fight against terrorism’. Its candidates frequently accused the nationalist PNV (governing in the Basque country) of using the threat of ETA attacks to obtain further regional powers. The PP also accused the PSOE of not being sufficiently tough on terrorism and of being in alliance in the government of Catalonia with a minor Catalan separatist group favouring the old policy of appeasement or disarmament negotiations with ETA. After ETA announced a unilateral cease-fire in Catalonia, on 18 February 2004, the Ministry of the Interior declared a ‘maximum alert’ and claimed that a terrorist ‘attack or at least an attempt’ would be very likely in Spain before the 14 March election. On Thursday, 11 March at 7:35am, ten bombs exploded on four trains arriving from suburban towns at Atocha Station, Madrid, causing 192 deaths and around 1,500 injuries. The front page of the daily newspaper *ABC* on this same day spoke of the special deployment of security forces in prevention of an ETA attack. Spaniards were extremely shocked by the massacre, which also made front-page headlines across the world. In the context of pre-election claims and counterclaims about Basque terrorism, the immediate suspicion among Spaniards was of an attack by ETA, despite the evident weakness of ETA and the fact that ETA had never delivered an attack on such a scale.⁴⁰

According to information provided by Madrid’s local and regional governments, the

emergency response was pretty efficient and quick:

- Two hours after the attacks, 291 ambulances were transporting the wounded to 19 Madrid hospitals, treating 1,430 patients during the first nine hours and performing 95 surgical operations.
- 162 fire engines were dispatched to the four scenarios of the tragedy.
- Before one hour had gone by, six vehicles were activated for blood donors. Thousands of Madrid citizens formed long queues to give blood. In that lapse of time, the Catalan regional government sent 500 bags of blood plasma.
- During the first day, the emergency phone (112) attended 20,000 calls with an answering time of 30 seconds.
- During the first hours, four judicial teams were formed, one for each train attacked, composed of a judge, a prosecutor, a judicial secretary, a coroner and several judicial auxiliaries for the removal of the bodies.
- In the first 24 hours, 120 bodies were identified by 83 Madrid coroners, with others transferred immediately from Galicia and Catalonia.
- In the first 48 hours, the regional government's psychological attention unit visited 3,000 residences, activating 450 professionals and putting 1,200 on reserve. 729 volunteer experts took care of victims' families.
- After 24 hours, the railway system was operational at 80% of service.
- The archbishopric of Madrid offered as many priests as needed.
- Taxi drivers, hotel managers, travel agencies, airlines and department stores offered to satisfy the needs of victims' families.

The problem awaited the political framing of the attacks.

Government: 'The ETA Authorship' Frame

Aznar called the King, his successor candidate, the ex-president of the Catalan regional government and the opposition leader at around 9:55am, telling them he was going to call a demonstration under the slogan 'With the victims, with the Constitution, for defeating terrorism' for the afternoon of the following day. He received no objections. But Aznar's first task was to get a general picture of what was going on, assessing the magnitude of the attacks. He established a minimal schedule: assisting the victims, preventing new attacks, guaranteeing essential services, arresting the perpetrators and, finally, guaranteeing the right to vote in the elections.⁴¹ The attacks implied the end of the election campaign. Following his personal leadership style, Aznar did not summon either the Delegate Commission of the Government for Crisis Situations⁴² or the Delegate Commission of the Government for Intelligence. Instead, he summoned an Informal Inner Crisis Cabinet which met at 11:00am at the Moncloa Palace (for its composition see Figure 7). It must be stressed that the minister of Defence did not participate in the informal cabinet; the Intelligence Service depends on him and its Director did not participate either.

The nature of the attacks put the minister of the Interior in the mass media's focus. He had gone to the scene of the bombings and saw, like the rest of the people there, the controlled explosion of a bomb discovered in a backpack that had not exploded during the attacks. After that, he appeared before the media asking everyone to remain calm, for care for the victims and for explanations of the attacks. He said that there was no previous warning (a difference with respect to most ETA attacks) and that it was the moment for the emergency and security forces.⁴³ At 11:20am the minister met with the mayor of Madrid and the president of the regional government to organise assistance to the victims and their

families.

Figure 7. Composition of Crisis Management and Intelligence Organs

Political Authorities	Delegate Commission of the Government for Crisis Situations ⁴⁴	Delegate Commission of the Government for Intelligence ⁴⁵	Informal Inner Crisis Cabinet
Prime Minister	X		X
Deputy Prime Minister for Political Affairs	X	X	X
Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs	X		X
Minister of Foreign Affairs	X	X	
Minister of Defence	X	X	
Minister of Economics and Finance	X	X	
Minister of the Interior	X	X	X
Spokesperson for the Minister			X
Director of the Cabinet of the Prime Minister	X		
Secretary General of the Prime Minister		X	X
Secretary of State of Security		X	
Secretary of State, Director of National Centre for Intelligence		X	
Secretary of State for Communication			X

Source: Prepared by author.

The secretary of state for Security, director general of Police, director general of the Civil Guard, deputy director of Police, deputy director of the Civil Guard and the chiefs of Intelligence of the Police and the Civil Guard met from mid-day to 1:00pm. During the brainstorming, different data were assessed. The precedents were very meaningful. On 24 December 2003, ETA had planted two bombs made of 25 kilos of *titadyne*, a commercial brand of dynamite stolen in France, in backpacks on an intercity train from Irún (Guipúzcoa) to Madrid. The explosion was planned for 20 minutes after the arrival of the train at Chamartín Station in Madrid. On 28 February 2004, a van with 506 kilos of *cloratite*, a hand-made explosive, plus 30 kilos of *titadyne*, and 90 metres of fuse was stopped in Cañaveras (Cuenca). ETA had planned to explode the van near Alcalá de Henares, the same place where the bombs were planted on the trains in the 11 March 2004 attacks.⁴⁶ Around 12:45pm, the commissioner for Citizen Security called the deputy director of the Police from the scene of the attacks, telling him that the explosive was *titadyne* plus fuse. The informant is an unidentified fuse-setter on site. The secretary of state called the minister at the Moncloa Palace to tell him this information. The picture for the ETA authorship frame was pretty clear. The National Centre for Intelligence later released a report at 3:51pm saying ‘it is believed to be nearly certain that the terrorist organisation ETA is the perpetrator of these attacks’, pointing to the above mentioned antecedents and the similarities with the situation in 1997.⁴⁷

The government declared three days of national mourning. The PP candidate, Mariano Rajoy, declared the end of his election campaign; he showed his grief and rage at the attacks, asking for unity, serenity, firmness and resolve to end terrorism.⁴⁸ But the main contribution for building the ETA authorship frame came from the minister of the Interior at his first press conference around 1:00pm. He said that ‘ETA was looking for a massacre, you have heard me say that in recent months, in recent days’, as they had been stopped four times by security forces. They needed an attack with many victims with a massive effect. He dismissed the denial of ETA’s responsibility as a poisoning, intolerable, and cheap statement. He was speaking as ‘a minister and a Spaniard’. He described the situation at that moment: 173 deaths, more than 600 wounded. There had been 13 explosions at 7:39am, plus three controlled explosions of bombs with delayed fuses. He thanked the emergency and health services for their quick reaction and praised the coordination among the services and the different levels of government. He then answered the journalists’ questions. The first question was about the intervention of al-Qaeda. He

replied that there was no doubt about ETA authorship, that Arnaldo Otegui, the spokesperson for the political branch of ETA, was misleading the public because of his denial of ETA intervention. He said that it was not the first denial in similar circumstances, and that ETA was always trying to spread fear, confusion and disorientation. He said that convicted terrorists would serve their entire terms of imprisonment and that they would pay a high price for their terrorist actions. Answering a question about the type of explosive used, he said that this was being investigated, but the modus operandi was ETA's: bombs in trains, bombs in backpack traps. It was their general strategy; they were seeking a large-scale attack. Answering a question about the way that ETA usually acknowledges attacks, he said that nobody had claimed authorship, and that ETA did not always immediately claim responsibility. He stated that ETA needed this kind of action to enhance its public presence. 'With no change in our strategy, we will win'. It would be necessary to trust the security forces and police enquiries to find out what had happened, invoking union against terrorism.⁴⁹ Here we get, at least, the two most important framing functions, according to Entman⁵⁰: problem definition, which often virtually predetermines the rest of the frame, and remedy, because it directly promotes support for public policy, in this case the PP's counter-terrorism policy. For Entman 'to frame (or "framing") refers to the process of selecting and highlighting some aspects of a perceived reality, and enhancing the salience of an interpretation and evaluation of that reality'.⁵¹ Thus media coverage provides a clear problem definition in framing the event, provides a remedy in framing a related issue, and, finally, conveys a moral judgment.

The Royal Family visited the victims' families at the hospitals. The minister of Justice reiterated the frame: it was ETA, we stand with the victims, we ask for unity against terrorism to implement the rule of law, the firmness of democracy, and judicial sentences to send the perpetrators to jail; the electoral calendar will be observed, and we ask for a massive turnout at the polls on Sunday.

It is important to remember that Aznar himself was victim of an ETA terrorist attack on 19 April 1995, while he was leader of the opposition. This would determine his way of thinking in this matter. Aznar's press appearance at around 2:00pm dramatically marked a tragic moment for Spaniards and for himself, as he had received a terrible blow from terrorism in his political farewell. His speech was going to consecrate the ETA authorship frame without explicitly mentioning the Basque terrorist band. He declared that 'the terrorists had added another date to the history of infamy'. 'We are with the victims and their families, I feel the same anguish, we will never forget'. He thanked the exceptional citizen response, the work of the emergency and health services, the security forces and judicial, local and regional official efficacy and sense of duty. He assured the public that measures had been taken to re-establish public services and that police enquiries had begun immediately. He had talked to the King and different leaders of political parties and different institutions. He had declared 'three days of mourning as an expression of our sorrow'. He insisted on the need for an international fight against terrorism. He said that this massive killing lacked any justification: 'terrorism is not blind, they have killed many persons just for being Spaniards; everybody knows that it is not their first attempt, several attempts have been stopped by the security forces; they are weaker in their operational capacity than ever thanks to the security forces'. 'We will defeat them; we will finish off the terrorist band with the force of the rule of law and Spaniards' unity. With strong laws, the work of security forces and justice tribunals firmly backed and decided to enforce the law, these criminals will be arrested and judged under the rule of law. They will serve their entire terms of imprisonment. They will have no other horizon than seeing the sunrise

within prison walls'. 'We are on the victims' side. We are on the side of the Constitution; it is our pact for freedom and rights, the great agreement of our political regime, the expression of our united and plural Spain. Complete and total defeat of terrorism is our aspiration, its withdrawal without conditions of any kind. No possible or desirable negotiation with the assassins can be held. We will show firmness not only in the counter-terrorist fight but in our total opposition to terrorist final aims. To defend these objectives, the government calls a civic demonstration under the slogan: With the victims, with the Constitution, for defeating terrorism. I hope this demonstration will show our civic patriotism and solidarity with the victims. We are a great nation, whose sovereignty lies in the Spanish people; we will never let a minority of fanatics impose its decision on our national future.'⁵² Obviously, he did not mention ETA by name but tacitly ('terrorist band'). However, he developed the frame first presented by the minister of the Interior. He implicitly addressed the secessionist stance of Basque nationalism, by both its political and terrorist branches, conveying a moral judgment against it. Finally, he vindicated his own counter-terrorist policy as the remedy for the attacks.

In the meantime, a meaningful new clue had appeared: at 10:50am near the Alcalá de Henares railway station, a van had been found after being mentioned by a witness. After a quick inspection, the van was transported to central police facilities, following standard operating procedures, where it arrived at around 3:00pm. Later, a tape with verses of the Koran in Arabic and seven fuses made in Spain were found, with traces of dynamite, *Goma 2-ECO* (also used by ETA, but years before). While the minister of Foreign Affairs, Ana Palacio, sent a message to Spanish ambassadors invoking the ETA authorship frame at 5:28pm, in order to obtain a resolution from the UN Security Council mentioning the Basque terrorist organisation, a meeting of high police officials was called at 5:00pm. There was an assessment of new information that had become available (the mistaking of *tytadine*), and a new line of inquiry was opened because of new data, without setting aside the ETA authorship frame.⁵³ This is the usual way to proceed in any kind of investigation: one has to proceed slowly and carefully, adding pieces of evidence without ruling out any possibility until a provisional picture of the subject under investigation is obtained.

Then something strange happened: CNN began to broadcast the King's message at 8:00pm. The second press conference of the minister of the Interior began at the same time and he mentioned the new clue but insisted on the ETA frame: 'The terrorist organization ETA is the first line of police inquiry, its priority, but a second line has been opened. Prudence and caution must be stressed. I am telling you everything with transparency'. Explosives and antecedents pointed to ETA. There was a similar *modus operandi*: backpacks in a train on 24 December 2003.⁵⁴ Though the new clue was mentioned, the frame was neither changed nor extended.

The Opposition

José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero was the first political leader to attribute the authorship to ETA in an interview on *Cadena COPE* at 8:45am.⁵⁵ Later he issued a formal declaration at 1:10pm. He declared his affection for and solidarity with the feelings of the victims and their families. He called for serenity and unity. The attack is against democracy, against our values and constitutional principles, echoing the slogan of the demonstration convoked by Aznar. We need democratic unity against terrorism; any government would give the same response. He declared his support for prime minister Aznar in coordinating our civic and political response, and the call for popular demonstrations of democratic reaffirmation. He declared his support for the security forces, and invoked unity, the freedom of the

Spanish nation and democracy, expressing his commitment to Spain and to the unity of its citizens.⁵⁶ However, the socialist prime minister of the Catalan regional government, Pasqual Maragall, head of a coalition of socialists, post-communists and republican-secessionist Catalanists, expressed doubts about the slogan of the demonstration.⁵⁷ Early in the morning, at 9.30am, the Basque nationalist President of the Basque regional government had spoken against ETA, taking for granted its authorship of the attack. The spokesperson from ETA's political branch was the only deviant voice that morning, but according to the CNI (Intelligence Service), he had no direct information from ETA, and so his aim could only be to distract attention. This intelligence report was issued at 3:51pm and encouraged the government's insistence on the ETA authorship frame.⁵⁸

Selected Media

The reaction of the mass media in general was to support the ETA authorship frame up until late at night. The dominant referent, the daily newspaper with the largest circulation, *El País*, supported the frame, before and after being called by the prime minister. But the radio station with the biggest audience, *Cadena Ser* (both *El País* and *Cadena Ser* belong to the powerful mass media group PRISA), soon began to broadcast some rumours which first increased confusion, and later developed a counterframe.

Though Madrid's papers published extra editions, I will concentrate on the programmes of the *Cadena Ser* radio station, just for this date, because it had the largest audience and it was the most influential. As in the attempted coup d'état on 23 February 1981, the radio was going to be a very important source during those days in March. It must be stressed that according to surveys of media use, the radio is thought to be more objective than television and is more trusted by the public.

Audio: The Counterframe

After a terrorist attack, there is always confusion, as in the fog of battle. However, it is not so frequent for the confusion to give way to rumours, although during times of crisis, rumours do tend to spring up. In this case, the rumours, or improvised news, were functional for building a counterframe against the governmental frame on the terrorist attacks. The importance of the role played by the *Cadena Ser* arises from the very crisis situation plus its place as an actor in the Spanish public sphere. Nobody can deny *Cadena Ser's* role in promoting certain problem definitions and remedies and neglecting or derogating others at this critical juncture, as we shall see.

The first rumour was a story attributed to the General Commissioner of Information at 8:30pm, according to which the minister of the Interior was circulating, as possible suspects, nine black and white photos of ETA militants, three women and six men aged between 20 and 24.⁵⁹ This was proved false. More important was the beginning of the frame dispute, because it implied breaking the governmental frame. The rumour content was the alleged discovery of a suicide bomber among the corpses, according to three different sources. The minister of the Interior denied the story, but the station broadcast it around 10:00pm.⁶⁰ Why did this sudden change of frames happen? This change was very important because it altered the symbolic climate after the attacks. It did so because it coincided with an alleged al-Qaeda statement of responsibility for the Madrid bombings by the London daily *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, which did not seem to be an authentic al-Qaeda document according to Islamist terrorism expert Yigal Carmon.⁶¹ The existence of a suicide bomber would blur the ETA authorship frame because it was the only element missing for the attacks to meet al-Qaeda's *modus operandi*. The calls for unity in the face

of the terrorist attacks did not last 24 hours. The counterframe was going to grow on two bases: the political opposition and certain mass media. What is politically important is the presence of a relatively complete counterframe, not merely fragments of information strewn incoherently throughout the news, the next day.

Day Two, 12 March 2004: The Demonstrations

Was there a structural persistence, a kind of reproduction of the structural pattern of failure in crisis management? Which were the specific mechanisms of reproduction? The rigidity of the government actors, who were incapable of introducing a certain flexibility in their framing of the attacks, must be stressed, as well as the cleavage in the climate of national unity introduced by the Catalan regional government's questioning of the mention of the Constitution on the front placard of the demonstrations. However, the counterframe began to be developed at the elite level by the daily paper *El País* and at the mass level by *Cadena Ser*. The importance of the mobilisation was undeniable: more than 11,000,000 people, out of a population of 42,000,000, demonstrated in Spain's cities. But the unitary climate lasted a very short time. Several PP politicians were attacked at the Barcelona demonstration. At the Madrid demonstration small groups of activists shouted at the front of the march: '¿Quién ha sido?' (Who did it?). In demonstrations in other places, people shouted against ETA.⁶²

Government

After discovering a backpack with an undetonated bomb, a police bomb-disposal expert was able to defuse it at around 5:15am. Thanks to his heroic action, the explosive and its mechanism were identified: dynamite *Goma 2-ECO* of Spanish origin, copper fuses also made in Spain, and a cellular phone with its connected card. Late that night, the clue of the card was pursued, but it must be stressed that the clue was not yet definitive because it could have pointed anywhere (the Deputy Director for Operations and the General Direction of the Police mentioned France and Yugoslavia).⁶³ In the course of the day the inquiry proceeded with new data, but both lines of possible authorship were still open. According to this, the government held, perhaps too rigidly to some ears, to the ETA authorship frame, but always mentioned the data relative to the other line.

PP candidate Mariano Rajoy praised the demonstration called for that afternoon.⁶⁴ Prime minister Aznar gave a press conference after the last meeting of his cabinet at 11:00am. He said that Spanish citizenship would be given to the non-Spanish victims. He expressed his commitment to transparency as always, and said that no line of inquiry would be ruled out. He attacked the spokesman from ETA's political branch, saying 'The government gives no credit to spokespersons of ETA and its illegal satellite organisations. That is my criterion, that is our criterion, shared by all Spain's citizens, and it is the only criterion of responsibility (...)' 'No democratic society can admit that there are terrorisms of distinct genres or moral qualifications, that there are explainable and unexplainable terrorisms'. 'I do not differentiate between religious or ethnic fanaticism'. In the press conference, a journalist said that the socialist secretary of organisation had accused the government of concealing information and demanded to know the authorship before Sunday. The prime minister replied that all available information had been given. He said that when the tape with Arabic verses had been analysed, public opinion would be informed as soon as the results were known. He personally informed the socialist candidate, the PP candidate, and the directors of the main newspapers twice. And he insisted on the ETA authorship frame, and especially on its antecedents: after thirty years of terrorism, the logical hypothesis

about authorship is ETA, just as everybody else thought. The public transport system is a well-known target for ETA.⁶⁵ The star journalist of *Cadena Ser*, Iñaki Gabilondo, criticised Aznar and hinted that the Azores agreement (between Bush, Blair and Aznar for the Iraq war) might have charged the Islamist terrorist weapon.

The minister of the Interior called a further press conference describing the new data at 6:00pm: materials employed in the defused bomb, which were dynamite *Goma 2-ECO* with grapeshot, a fuse and a cellular phone. He insisted on the similarities of the *modus operandi* with previous ETA attacks. He confirmed that the dynamite and fuses were the same as those in the van found on 11 March. He said that their priority is ETA, that there was no motive for ruling out ETA, based on circumstantial evidence. However, police inquiries continued to follow up the other clues. He dismissed the first claim in London, saying that it lacked credibility, according to British intelligence and the minister of the Interior. The press conference broadcast was interrupted to air several commercials; there are no more sound bites.⁶⁶

Opposition

In the Socialist Party, a familiar pattern in political communication was followed: candidate Rodríguez Zapatero asked for unity and invoked solidarity, and his secretary of organisation attacked the government for concealing information. Early in the morning, Rodríguez Zapatero, following the journalists' cue, said in the interview: 'The political response would have some variation depending on whether we were facing a terrorist attack from al-Qaeda or from ETA (...) we need a government that informs adequately'. The journalists and commentators warned the government and the minister of the Interior not to conceal information and to be transparent.⁶⁷ Later Rodríguez Zapatero called a press conference at PSOE headquarters. He 'urged the government to inform with diligence', as if it were not doing so, and criticised the government for not calling a meeting with all the parliamentary groups to give and share information in a direct dialogue, to make a joint declaration of unity, strength and solidarity with the victims, and to meet this challenge with a joint strategy.⁶⁸

Juan José Ibarretxe, prime minister of the Basque regional government, said at 10:15am that the political evaluation would be different depending on the attack's authorship, claiming 'we have the right to know'.⁶⁹ On the other hand, the Basque terrorist group ETA denied any involvement in the terrorist attacks in Madrid. An anonymous caller telephoned the Basque newspaper *Gara*, saying he represented ETA and denied 'any responsibility' for the bombs planted in Madrid. The caller said that ETA had played no part in the massacre perpetrated in Madrid. ETA usually uses the same tactic (telephone calls to Basque newspapers) to claim responsibility for terrorist attacks. It is the first time ETA has used this tactic to explicitly deny any involvement.

Selected Media

The frame contest had begun. The different media were the scenarios where the symbolic engagement was being fought. However, the prime minister and the minister of the Interior, confident in their control of government media, especially public television, did not seem to realise that their framing of the terrorist attacks was being disputed and that they were not addressing the counterframe.

Press: The daily newspaper *ABC* accepted the ETA authorship frame: it praised the PP counter-terrorist and national identity policies, asking for serenity and the unity of political

parties and citizens.⁷⁰ The daily paper *El Mundo* was more critical. Its editorial said that the authorship was open; it mentioned that the BBC had spoken of the possibility of a ‘joint venture’ between ETA and al-Qaeda, but that it was necessary to await the end of the police and judicial inquiry. It pointed out that the political consequences depended on the different authorships, and criticised the hastiness of the minister of the Interior, accusing him of giving his prejudices precedence over the data.⁷¹ The daily paper *La Vanguardia* of Barcelona also said that the authorship was still an open question. It added that if it were al-Qaeda, it would be a ‘punishment for supporting the Iraq war’.⁷² The daily newspaper *El País* questioned, not very subtly, the ETA authorship frame: first, pointing to ‘the eventuality of it being a job by al-Qaeda and that had to do with the role played by Aznar’s government in the Iraq War’; ‘one can only hope that there has not been a concealment or a manipulation by the government’ If al-Qaeda were the author, the attacks would be ‘an attempt at extending the Iraq war on Spanish territory’, blaming the government for ‘taking electoral advantage of terrorism during the campaign’; if it were a joint venture between al-Qaeda and ETA, the blame is on Aznar also for saying that ‘all terrorisms are the same’. Moreover, for the editorialist, the idea of ETA as the perpetrator was not to be ruled out yet.⁷³

Audio: The mention of the Constitution as a symbol of national political institutions and policies in the slogan of the demonstrations was considered by some journalists to be a manipulation (‘How can I accept a Constitution that has let Aznar govern’); another journalist said, after the press conference at 6:30pm, that the minister lacked any credibility, and that he was afraid that information was being covered up by the government, among other examples.⁷⁴

Day Three, 13 March 2004: Micro-mobilisations (Flash Mobs) against Popular Party Offices

With the elections set to take place the following day and the prohibition of any kind of electioneering during the so-called ‘day of reflection’ prior to voting, the framing contest reached its climax through the frame alignment of oppositional media and flash mobs surrounding PP offices that afternoon, breaking the prohibition.

Government

It was late on 12 March, at midnight, when the police inquiry, following the clue of the card associated to the cellular phone from the defused bomb, gave its first concrete results. The clue was pursued and already, around 11:00am on 13 March, the place where the card was sold, managed by two Indians, led to a booth managed by some Moroccans, but the suspects’ nationalities were not revealed by the police information service. Only the judge who was to sign the arrest was informed.⁷⁵

The government thanked people for their participation in the demonstrations. The minister of the Interior gave his fourth press conference at 2:47pm. There was progress in the police inquiry and insistence on working on both lines, insistence on the ETA line because of the antecedents, logic and common sense, without mentioning the imminent arrest, but alluding to the possibility of not damaging the inquiry, following the standard operation procedures for an arrest. There were no suicide bombings. A possible cooperation among different terrorist organisations could not be ruled out. A journalist asked about a possible repetition of the general elections in case the government had covered up or distorted information. The minister reiterated that he had informed with honesty and transparency

about the new clues as soon as he had been informed by the security forces, telling the press all the progress that had been made.⁷⁶

At 8:10pm the minister of the Interior gave information about an open police operation: two Indians (the minister wrongly said Hindus) and three Moroccans had been arrested in Madrid, and several searches were being carried out. The motive was the sale and falsification of a cellular phone and prepaid card. He asked for prudence and caution and praised the efficiency and professionalism of the police force sixty hours after the attacks. He ruled nothing out yet, because it was too early to trace connections with previous Islamist attacks, or extremist Moroccan groups, but this was the line of inquiry that was producing some progress.

The PP candidate Rajoy issued a statement against the flash mobs surrounding the PP headquarters in Madrid and in other cities at 9:14pm: ‘I appear before public opinion to stop this illegal demonstration; different political parties have created the climate for this call. I have presented a complaint to the Junta Electoral Central (Central Electoral Board). I ask all citizens not to demonstrate against other PP offices. These are intolerable pressures, repeating the attacks on PP offices during local and regional elections. I ask for serenity. Finally I congratulate the security forces on the arrests, and ask you to vote for the best defence against terrorism’. Later, the Minister’s spokesperson issued a statement at 11:35pm. ‘Please do not make false imputations; I ask for prudence, the government rejects the demonstrations as illegal and against the legality of the day of reflection’.

The Opposition

Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba, the socialist spokesman, intervened on behalf of Rodríguez Zapatero at 9:30pm. He said that ‘Spanish citizens deserve a government that does not lie to them, that always tells them the truth. The Socialist Party was aware of the lines of work of the State security forces and corps; in spite of this, due to its sense of State, out of respect for the memory of the victims, we have been silent when the government has made disqualifications or affirmations that did not always fit with the truth; we will never, never, use terrorism as a political weapon. Tomorrow we have the opportunity to participate in the elections as homage to the victims, to reinforce our common convictions of peace and freedom. Citizens want to know the whole truth about the terrible events, the truth, the whole the truth will be known at last, that is our commitment to the victims. We have not convoked the demonstrations’.

Selected Media

Press: The daily paper *ABC* said that the government had implemented, with realism (ETA) and a caution consistent with the timing of the data (without discounting any organisation), an information policy with enough appearances of Aznar (twice) and the minister of the Interior (three times), in 36 hours. It followed the government cue contrasting Aznar’s credibility and ETA’s.⁷⁷ The daily newspaper *El Mundo* said that political analysis and consequences might vary depending on the authorship, which it left open between ETA and al-Qaeda, and called the people to vote for Rajoy.⁷⁸ The daily paper *La Vanguardia* of Barcelona prudently criticised the minister of the Interior but understood him because of the special circumstances: ‘Hasty statements caused by the terrible impression from the attacks and the need to give a credible and immediate response, based on deductions, though not on certainties’. ‘The uncertainty about authorship has affected public opinion, a part of which may be confused or with the

impression that information is being withheld from it for electoral motives only. This assumption is not very credible but may have permeated a sector of the citizenry. The political parties urge the government to be diligent, transparent and truthful in the information about the inquiries of the security forces. But one can inform only with difficulty about conjectures and assumptions. The certainty of inquiry must never be subject to urgency.⁷⁹

The daily paper *El País* said that the government position on ETA authorship was only 'a hypothesis, a rational deduction, not the result of direct clues'. 'On the other hand, the discovery of a van in Alcalá de Henares, point of departure of the trains, with the bombs, with a tape with verses of the Koran and several fuses, is a clue, not evidence yet, but something more than a hypothesis'. The paper criticised the emphasis of the minister on ETA authorship, and it insisted on the different political and electoral effects. It doubted 'if the government resistance to maintaining ETA authorship as more likely is interested or altruistic. The government and the prime minister must be prudent and not convert a hypothesis into a certainty'.⁸⁰

Audio: Why? Who did it? These were the questions in the air. *Cadena Ser* informed at 3:00pm that the CNI, Spain's intelligence service, was dedicating 99% of its resources to the Islamist terrorism hypothesis.⁸¹ However, this information was denied by the CNI at 4:50pm. One of the main problems was precisely the lack of first-hand information and the marginalisation of the intelligence service.⁸² *Cadena Ser* began to broadcast from PP headquarters in Génova Street at 6:30pm about a demonstration called from different web sites on the Internet (*Plataformaculturacontralguerra.org*, *noalaguerra.com*, *nodo50.com*, *lahaine.org...*) and through SMS (short message service) on cellular phones. The first web site announced that *Cadena Ser* and *CNN+* were going to broadcast the mobilisation. At 7:52pm, the arrests of the Moroccan suspects were reported. At 8:55pm the radio station gave information about the flash mobs against the government spreading in different cities: Barcelona, Santiago de Compostela, La Coruña, Valencia, Bilbao and Palma de Mallorca. A further demonstration in Madrid's Puerta del Sol at midnight was announced.

A journalist asked at 11:20pm for a Research Commission to be set up in Parliament if it was confirmed that the minister of the Interior and the government had manipulated, withheld and conditioned information about the terrorist attacks with the aim of avoiding a handicap or looking for an electoral victory. Later, after the minister's spokesperson issued a statement against the flash mobs and the socialist accusations of lying, the same journalist spoke of 'a governmental temptation to declare a state of emergency'.

Day Four, 14 March 2004: The Elections

The flash mobs continued to stroll through the centre of Madrid, demonstrating against the PP at daybreak. Voting began at 9:00am. The final turn-out was 75.7%, 6.9 percentage points more than in the 2000 general elections.

Press

The daily paper *ABC* criticised the flash mobs against the PP headquarters in Madrid. It praised the efficiency and transparency of the government's behaviour, acting without delay and finding a trustworthy clue after two days of inquiry. The left had aired the suspicion of the government covering up information, but it had not done so. On the contrary, the government had produced the only trustworthy information. It was against

those blaming Aznar: ‘Those who said that ETA could not condition political agendas, that terrorism could not be used as an electoral weapon... For them, Islamic terrorism does serve to attack a democratic government’.⁸³ On the other hand, the daily paper *El Mundo* said that the fundamental lack of knowledge about authorship was still maintained, though arrests could begin to remove doubts. Political authorities had been overwhelmed by the events. ‘The government is shocked since Thursday, and this is influencing crisis management. Be it the result of a perfidious strategic calculus of the assassins or of chance, we are in a situation that is at the limit.’ The first reaction of the government was imprudent and hasty. It attributed this to the emotional impact on Aznar, as a previous terrorist victim, but it was not the proper serene behaviour with which rulers must direct crisis management. Moreover, the government had behaved with transparency and honesty. It mentioned the connection between the demonstrators and the media controlled by PRISA, associated with the socialists, according to Reuters.⁸⁴

The daily newspaper *La Vanguardia* of Barcelona asked a couple of interesting questions: ‘Is it relevant to know who was responsible of the massacre in Madrid? Of course. Is it plausible, even feasible, to know it in three days? We are afraid that it is not.’ After this, the editorialist makes a comparison with the 9/11 attacks, saying that two and a half years after the attack many details are still unknown, but that the arrested suspects are revealing data.⁸⁵ The daily paper *El País* felt obliged to say that ‘there is no justification for blaming the government for the attacks’; however it insisted on the ‘new and grave doubts’ about information management by the government. ‘At the last moment, at least, Spanish citizens began to have concrete data about the inquiry’, thus closing the counterframe.⁸⁶ The final results of the General Elections are shown in Figure 8. This was the end of the frame contest. The PP had taken the blame for the attacks, with Aznar becoming a scapegoat.

Figure 8. Electoral Results for the Spanish Congress of Deputies, 2004 and 2000 General Elections

	2004			2000		
	Votes	%*	Seats	Votes	%*	Seats
PSOE	11,026,163	43.27	164	7,918,752	34.71	125
PP**	9,763,144	38.31	148	10,321,178	45.24	183
IU***	1,284,081	5.04	5	1,382,333	6.06	9
CIU	835,471	3.28	10	970,421	4.25	15
ERC	652,196	2.56	8	194,715	0.85	1
EAJ-PNV	420,980	1.65	7	353,953	1.55	7
CC	235,221	0.92	3	248,261	1.09	4
BNG	208,688	0.82	2	306,268	1.34	3
CHA	94,252	0.37	1	75,356	0.33	1
EA	80,905	0.32	1	100,742	0.44	1
Na-Bai	61,045	0.24	1	–	–	–
PA	181,868	0.71	0	206,255	0.90	1
Others	639,490	2.51	0	736,217	3.23	0
Total	25,483,504	100.00	350	22,814,467	100.00	350

* Percentage of total votes for parties.

** Includes votes for Unión del Pueblo Navarro-PP in Navarre in 2004.

*** Includes votes for Iniciativa per Catalunya-Verds both in 2000 and 2004.

Source: Junta Electoral Central 2000: *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, 2 April 2000: 14166-14194; Junta Electoral Central 2004: *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, 5 May 2004: 17586-17618.

THE FRAMING CONTEST: SELECTIVE POLITICISATION OF A SECURITY CRISIS

The public interpretation of the framing of terrorist attacks must be seen in the light of the fact that they occurred during a highly publicised and controversial public debate, at the end of the election campaign, which had started just thirteen days before. My hypothesis

about the causal path which produced the effects that brought about the electoral overturn is as follows. The main effect is fear; this is the climate for blaming the government instead of blaming the terrorist. As we have seen before, the period of the PP government with an overall majority brought an increased polarisation of the electorate. In this milieu, the terrorist attacks were the necessary condition for an increasing turnout (a result of the attacks plus the demonstrations on 12 March); for a transformation of the expressive vote for the post-communists into a instrumental vote for the socialists, an increase of the ‘useful’ vote, especially in the sectors mobilised by the flash mobs and for the constitution of the populist antiwar frame in the master frame to attract younger, new voters nurtured by the cycle of protest against the PP and its policies in different sectors. How did this happen? Let us look at the process.

Framing

After the attacks everybody thought that ETA was responsible. The absence of the minister of Defence and the Director of the National Centre for Intelligence, both in the formal and informal organs for crisis management, was noteworthy. Are terrorist attacks not a security crisis? It seems that Aznar did not perceive them to be. He reacted, as did everybody else in the first moments, in the very same way as in the kidnapping and murder of Miguel Ángel Blanco by ETA on 11-15 July 1997, which gave way to an intense mobilisation against Basque terrorism.⁸⁷ This was his framing of the situation, the ETA authorship frame.

Later in the same day the al-Qaeda hypothesis took on verisimilitude. For the government the problem was that it was not able to construct an all-encompassing frame which included both ETA and al-Qaeda, according to its own conceptualisation of terrorism. It was rigidly attached to the ETA authorship frame; it seems that the government responded in a rigid and inflexible manner to the new terrorist threat, without processing the new information, and concentrating power in the hands of the prime minister, which reinforced the process of rigidification.⁸⁸ This rigid response opened the way to a selective politicisation of governmental failure by the socialist opposition, which without many scruples about the grave security anxiously sought power. The frames of each political actor, according to Entman’s analytical categories, are shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Political Actors’ Frames

	PP Government: ‘The ETA Authorship’ Frame	PSOE + Oppositional Media: ‘The Government is Lying’ Frame
Problem	ETA	Al-Qaeda
Evaluation	Known evil	Unknown evil
Cause	Basque nationalism	The Spanish government’s support for the of Iraq war (framed by opposition as participation)
Remedy	PP counter-terrorism policy (Vote PP)	Peace (Iraq troops withdrawal) (Vote PSOE)

Source: prepared by the author.

Reactive sequences are chains of temporally ordered and causally linked events. These sequences are marked by an inherent logic of events, whereby one event triggers another through predictable reaction-counter-reaction dynamics. Reactive sequences are therefore often marked by properties of backlash and counter-response, as actors challenge structural and institutional patterns established during critical juncture phases. This resistance can set in motion an autonomous process that encompasses events that lead to a final outcome. In a critical juncture, almost every political situation is inherently susceptible to mass challenges from groups that oppose the prevailing arrangements. Reactive sequences might

be launched when subordinate oppositional groups mobilise against established institutions.⁸⁹ The process of blaming as framing followed the pattern so aptly described by Brändström and Kuipers⁹⁰:

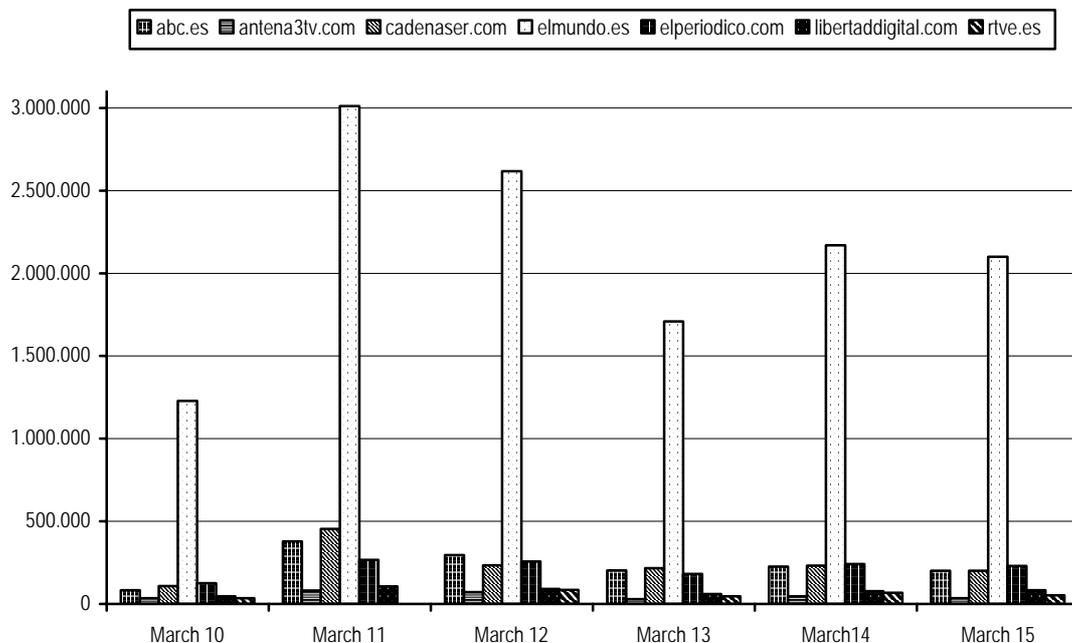
Constructing severity: the opposition elites and oppositional media accused the government of having violated core values: at first it was just manipulation; towards the end it was lying. It was not national security but rather the foreign policy of the incumbent government that was to be blamed. There were police and intelligence leaks to opposition and media.

Constructing agency: first, going back to the Iraq war, the lowest voting intention for the PP and, secondly, going up to the prime minister, not the PP candidate.

Constructing responsibility: concentrating the blame on the prime minister and his party, asking for a vote for the socialist party.

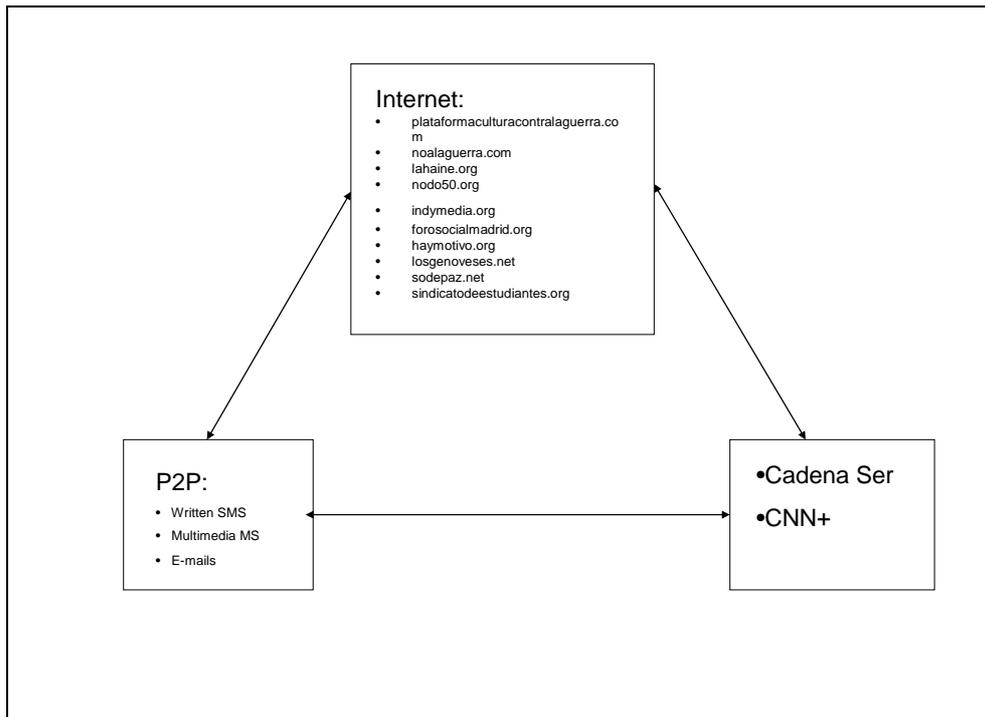
This was the role played, in our case, by several hub organisations and sites of very different ideological persuasion (socialist, communist, eco-pacifist, ecologist, anti-capitalist, anarchist and anti-globalization...), especially *Plataformaculturacontralaguerra.com*, *noalaguerra.com*, *lahaine.org* (hatred), *nodo50.org*; *indymedia.org*, etc. These are Internet umbrella organisations created to organise issue campaigns, and demonstrations often take on distinctive network forms based on how they allow users to access and communicate through the site. Many of these organising networks have survived beyond the action that drew them together because they generally offer networking services and calendars that become useful for future communication and planning. In some cases, these secondary planning features of Internet-only mobilising networks helped to create successor organisations to mobilise for future events. There was also an increase in Internet use, as shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10. Visits and Pages Viewed by Daily Newspaper on Internet or TV/Radio Web Site and Day, 10-15 March 2004



Source: ojd.es.

Figure 11. Symbiosis of New and Old Media for Increasing Oppositional Frame Resonance



Source: the author.

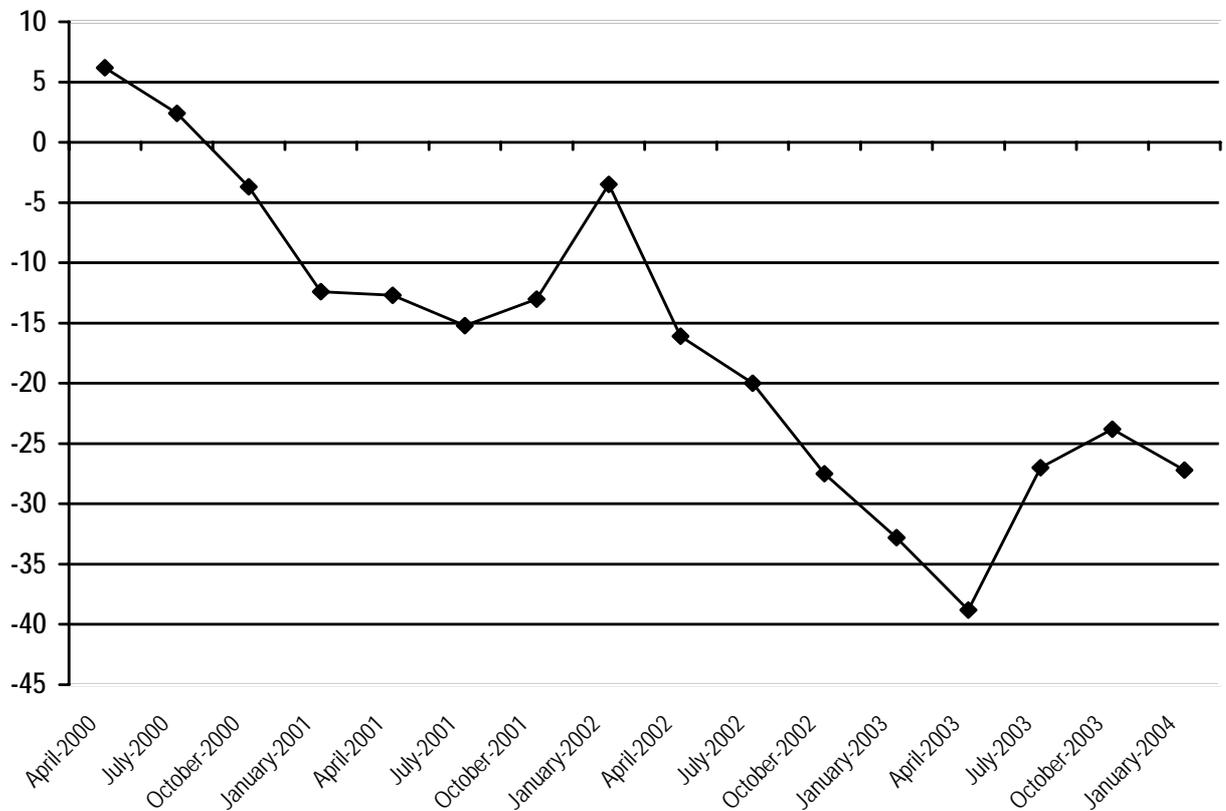
In fact, the flash mobs against the PP headquarters were convoked from these sites⁹¹ and through SMS (Short Messaging Service) on cellular phones, and allegedly from socialist and post-communist automatic calling centres.⁹² These sites recommended listening to *Cadena Ser* and watching *CNN+*. As Cañada has pointed out, the cellular phones broadcast action, while the transistors offered context.⁹³ The diagram of this symbiotic networking can be seen in Figure 11. There was a continuous feedback between the nodes, amplifying the diffusion of the oppositional frame of blaming the government and constituting an authentic master frame,⁹⁴ which provided the interpretive medium through which collective actors associated with different movements within the cycle of anti-PP protest assigned the blame to the PP government.

Taking the Blame: Vulnerable Political Leadership

Aznar had additional vulnerabilities that weakened his credibility before the framing. He was a *lame duck* prime minister at the same time that he was an incumbent prime minister, and he was the condensed symbol of the left's hatred. Mariano Rajoy, the government specialist in crisis management, was out of the government. The campaign's strategy had been low profile, not accepting televised debates with the new socialist leader, and the strategists were not in the informal crisis cabinet. The differences with respect to President Bush after 9/11 are significant in comparison: Bush was the incumbent president just elected after a hotly disputed accession to power, and there was no selective politicisation by the Democratic Party.⁹⁵ Would the socialist counter-framing against the PP government have been possible in the American political context? What would the Americans have said? Aznar was at the end of an election campaign and he was not the candidate when he had to explain to Spaniards the meaning of what they were going through, to answer the 'why' questions that moments like this give rise to. He tried to speak to and for the country as a whole, but there are cleavages in the national identity of Spaniards, especially in the Basque Country and Catalonia, and in certain socialist sectors. When the Spanish people sought an all-encompassing frame, Aznar could not deliver it, because he had not built it

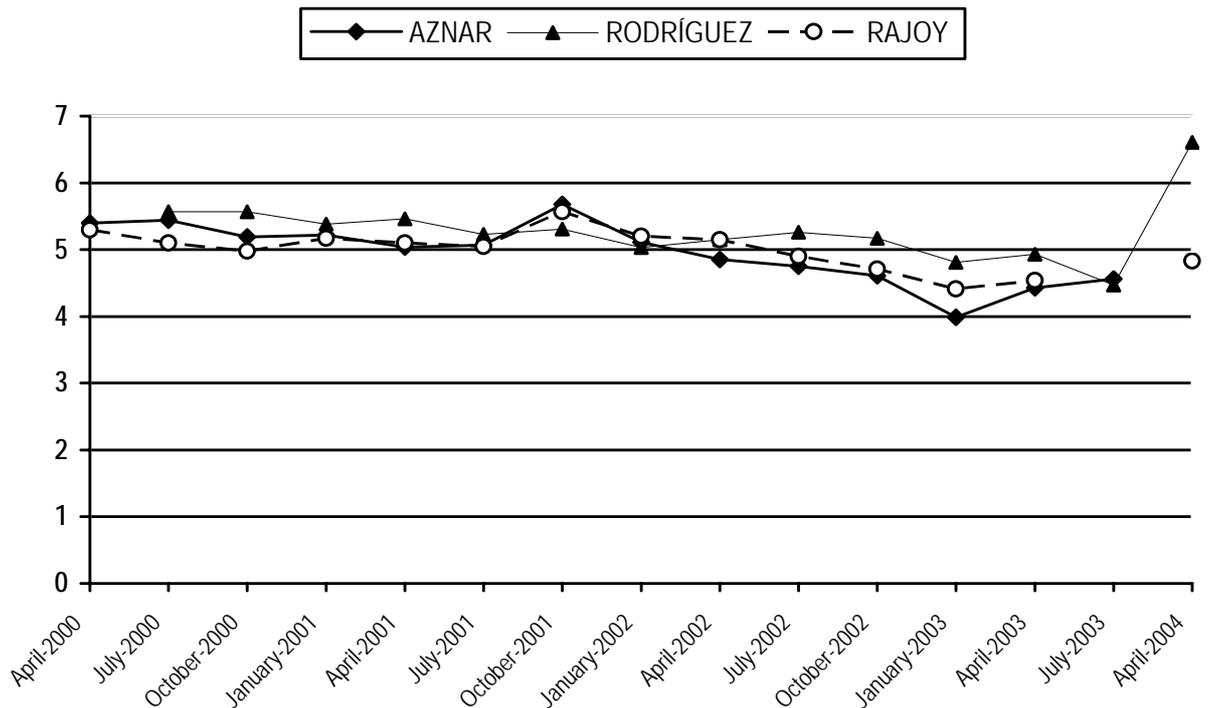
when he supported the Iraq war. In addition he had several image problems. First, he had lost credibility due to the implementation of *Popular reform* during 2000-04 (see Figure 12). Secondly, the socialist candidate was able to generate more confidence than the PP leaders (see Figure 13). Finally, if we compare the images of Aznar and the socialist candidate after their investiture votes in the Congress of Deputies the differences are very significant. A final matter must be stressed, prime minister Aznar did not perform the ritual of solidarity⁹⁶ visiting the families of the victims and the wounded,⁹⁷ but the Royal Family, various members of the PP government and the socialist leader did. After becoming prime minister, Rodríguez Zapatero was perceived by a strong majority of Spaniards as being knowledgeable about the country's problems, being responsive towards Spaniards' problems, moderate and able to communicate with the man and woman in the street (see Figure 14). He had just won the framing contest.

Figure 12. Net Evaluation of Confidence in Prime Minister Aznar, 2000-04



Source: CIS 2000-04.

Figure 13. Net Evaluation of Prime Minister Aznar, J.L. Rodríguez Zapatero (PSOE) and M. Rajoy (PP)



Source: CIS 2000-04.

Figure 14. Presidential Leadership: At the Investiture Debate, did the Prime Minister, José María Aznar, and José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero display...?

	YES			NO			DON'T KNOW			NO ANSWER		
	A	ZP	Diff.	A	ZP	Diff.	A	ZP	Diff.	A	ZP	Diff.
Knowledge of country's problems	68.5	80.6	12.1	15.9	11.6	-4.3	14.7	6.4	-8.3	0.8	1.4	0.6
Responsiveness to Spaniards' problems	55.5	82.2	26.7	25.1	8.2	-16.9	18.4	7.9	-10.5	1.0	1.7	0.7
Moderation	69.3	84.9	15.6	13.7	6.4	-7.3	16.2	7.1	-9.1	0.8	1.6	0.8
Practical sense	60.9	64.6	3.7	17.1	17.4	0.3	21.3	16.1	-5.2	0.7	1.9	1.2
Capacity of communication with man in the street	46.3	79.2	32.9	34.3	9.9	-24.4	18.2	9.3	-8.9	1.2	1.6	0.4
Capacity to accept criticism	53.4	72.3	18.9	27.3	11.9	-15.4	18.0	14.1	-3.9	1.3	1.7	0.4
Political initiative	65.0	69.8	4.8	16.1	15.3	-0.8	17.8	13.0	-4.8	1.1	1.9	0.8

Source: CIS Estudio nº 2.389. Barómetro de abril 2000 (N = 1.298); CIS: Estudio nº 2.561. Barómetro de abril 2004 (N = 1.538).

The Impact: From Governmental Responsibility to Electoral Accountability

The Socialist Party and other opposition parties framed Aznar's political support to the Iraq war as belligerence. The PP government did not frame its position efficiently, leaving a vacuum in the public sphere and opening the streets to social movements of various ideological persuasions. The government did not fight to win the public opinion battle, expecting a *blitzkrieg*. And this is what happened, but the distant and short war later turned into devastating terrorist attacks at home. As the government had not framed the Iraq war and Islamist terrorism before, criticising the oppositional frame, it was unable to counter-frame the oppositional discourse that blamed the government instead of the assassins. The government panicked because of electoral fear and rigidly insisted on the ETA authorship frame beyond reasonable evidence, although pursuing the Islamist clue at the same time. Perhaps it was too late and the PP government was too surprised by the oppositional counter-frame, rendering a counter-reaction impossible. In addition, the incumbent prime

minister lacked credibility in the eyes of public opinion and his leadership deteriorated because of the failures in implementing his reform programme. The oppositional forces framed the government's management of the security crisis as a falsehood, tacitly blaming its political responsibility for the attacks, displacing crisis perception into voting. As a result, the PP government took the blame and lost the elections. In this way, the public opinion perception of government responsibility was transformed by way of counter-framing by the oppositional elites into electoral accountability.

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² BENNETT 1980, p. 792.

³ KEY 1966, p. 7.

⁴ PÉREZ DÍAZ 2004: 'Un eslabón muy débil', *El País*, 27/IV/2004.

⁵ According to ENTMAN's conceptualisation (2004, p. 5).

⁶ ENTMAN 2004, p. 9-11.

⁷ ENTMAN 2004, p. 14-15.

⁸ BRODY and SHAPIRO (1989a, 1989b).

⁹ SNOW, BENFORD 1992.

¹⁰ I will closely follow the analytic structure of path-dependent explanation developed by MAHONEY (2001, p. 3-11) and the process of tracing crisis management developed by STERN, SUNDELIUS 2002, p. 71-80.

¹¹ MAHONEY 2001, p. 7.

¹² ALONSO 2004, p. 696-697.

¹³ COSIDÓ 2002.

¹⁴ COSIDÓ 2002, AVILÉS 2004, ROMERO de LARA 2004.

¹⁵ COSIDÓ 2002.

¹⁶ CIS 2002, Estudio nº 2.466, *Barómetro de septiembre*.

¹⁷ AGUILAR, BALLESTEROS 2004.

¹⁸ AZNAR 1994, p. 159.

¹⁹ AZNAR 2004, p. 150-151.

²⁰ LAMO de ESPINOSA 2004, p. 198.

²¹ Asking just one question like 'Do you approve strongly, approve, disapprove, disapprove strongly of military intervention in Iraq?' constitutes a very grave mistake, considering Spain's political-military culture. Simple polls are therefore misleading if they do not include a serious effort to also tap the saliency of the issue and when action mobilisation is necessary to turn mere opinions into impact.

²² CENTRO DE INVESTIGACIONES SOCIOLOGICAS 2003.

²³ ADELL 2004, p. 22, mentions the range of estimates about participants: 2,000,000 according to the organisers and 660,000 according to the municipal police.

²⁴ On 22 May, the Arabic London daily newspaper *As-Sharq Al-Awsat* reported that fundamentalists were in disagreement whether the recent audio tape released by Aiman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda's number 2, was recorded before or after the war in Iraq started. However, all agreed that it was recorded before the terrorist

attacks in Riyadh and Casablanca. Therefore, the attacks to which al-Zawahiri refers to could, in fact, be the Riyadh and Casablanca bombings. See

<http://siteinstitute.org/bin/articles.cgi?ID=publications403&Category=publications&Subcategory=0>. (The Search for International Terrorist Entities, 23/V/2003).

²⁵ ‘Siete agentes del servicio secreto español mueren en una emboscada al sur de Bagdad’, *El País*, 30/XI/2003.

²⁶ KEELER 1993, p. 434.

²⁷ TARROW 1989, p. 46-48.

²⁸ The Secretary of State for Communication appointed by Aznar, Alfredo Timermans –a loyal appointee, another lawyer by formal education and a high official at the Complutense University of Madrid–, lacked any professional experience or creditable expertise in political communication.

²⁹ GONZÁLEZ 2004, p. 23-24.

³⁰ The only two surveys done after the elections, CIS (MICHAVILA 2005) and Demoscopia (LAGO PEÑAS, MONTERO 2005), presented some problems due to the underestimation of Popular voters. The ratio between PSOE and PP voters in the elections on 14/III/2004 was 1.13, but it was 1.65 in the CIS survey and 1.93 in the Demoscopia survey. This bias is too serious to be a good sample.

³¹ MICHAVILA 2005.

³² BARREIRO 2004, LAGO PEÑAS, MONTERO 2005, SANTAMARÍA 2004.

³³ TORCAL and RICO 2004, p. 108.

³⁴ MICHAVILA 2005.

³⁵ GONZÁLEZ 2004, p. 27.

³⁶ FISHMAN 2005.

³⁷ In order to analyse the frames after the attacks and the opinion climate during 2000-04, three kinds of data are used:

- Press, 11-14/III/2004: *ABC* (centre-right, close to the PP, Madrid), *El País* (centre-left, very close to the PSOE, Madrid), *El Mundo* (left and right, very close to J.M. Aznar, Madrid), *La Vanguardia* (centre-right, close to moderate Catalanism, Barcelona).
- Radio, 11-14/III/2004: *Cadena SER* (left, very close to the PSOE, Madrid).
- Polls, 2000-04: *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (Centre for Sociological Research) for the Spanish prime minister.

³⁸ ENTMAN 2004, p. 20.

³⁹ MAHONEY 2001, p. 7-8.

⁴⁰ COLOMER 2005.

⁴¹ MORODO, C. 2005, ‘Aznar, el 11-M: ¿Cómo han podido matar estos asesinos a 200 personas sólo para destruir al PP?’, *La Razón*, 11/III/2005.

⁴² It must be stressed that this organ is assisted by a Direction of Infrastructure and Supervision of Crisis Situations, under the Director of the Cabinet of the prime minister, with two Deputy Directions, one for Alert and Supervision, another for Infrastructure. The three positions were vacant (personal interview with a technical advisor of that Direction).

⁴³ Cadena Ser, 20040311 (date), 11-12 (Hour of broadcasting). Every recording cited is available at http://www.cadenaser.com/static/especiales/2005/sonidos11_14/.

⁴⁴ Royal Decree 2639/1986, 30 December.

⁴⁵ Law 11/2002, 6 May.

⁴⁶ RODRÍGUEZ, J.A. 2004, ‘Detenidos en Cuenca dos etarras con 536 kilos de explosivos para Madrid’, *El País*, 3/I/2004.

⁴⁷ DIARIO DE SESIONES, COMISIONES DE INVESTIGACIÓN Sobre el 11 de marzo de 2004, session of 8/VII/2004, p. 43-44, available at <http://www.congreso.es/>.

⁴⁸ Cadena Ser (2004031111-12).

⁴⁹ Cadena Ser (2004031113-14).

⁵⁰ ENTMAN 2004, p. 6.

⁵¹ ENTMAN 2004, p. 26, 23.

⁵² Cadena Ser (2004031114-15).

⁵³ DIARIO DE SESIONES, COMISIONES DE INVESTIGACIÓN Sobre el 11 de marzo de 2004, session of 8/VII/2004, p. 49-50.

⁵⁴ Cadena Ser (2004031120-21).

⁵⁵ Cadena Ser (2004031108-09).

⁵⁶ Cadena Ser (2004031113-14).

⁵⁷ Cadena Ser (2004031120-21).

⁵⁸ See the report in SECRETARÍA DE ESTADO DE COMUNICACIÓN 2004: *11-M: toda la verdad, en tiempo real*, Madrid, released some days later.

⁵⁹ Cadena Ser (2004031120-21).

⁶⁰ Cadena Ser (2004031122-23).

⁶¹ See CARMON (2004) and the CNI report in SECRETARÍA DE ESTADO DE COMUNICACIÓN 2004: *11-M: toda la verdad, en tiempo real*, Madrid.

⁶² REDACCIÓN 2004, '11 millones de españoles se echan a la calle'; ORDAZ, P. (2004), '¿Quién ha sido?'. REDACCIÓN 2004, 'Cataluña se vuelca'; REDACCIÓN 2004, 'Gritos de "¡asesinos!" contra Rato y Piqué', all in *El País*, 13/III/2004.

⁶³ DIARIO DE SESIONES, COMISIONES DE INVESTIGACIÓN Sobre el 11 de marzo de 2004, session of 8/VII/2004, p. 46.

⁶⁴ Cadena Ser (2004031210-11).

⁶⁵ Cadena Ser (2004031211-12).

⁶⁶ Cadena Ser (2004031218-19).

⁶⁷ Cadena Ser (2004031209-10).

⁶⁸ Cadena Ser (2004031213-14).

⁶⁹ Cadena Ser (2004031210-11).

⁷⁰ EDITORIAL 2004, 'Con España, con la Constitución, con las víctimas', *ABC*, 12/III/2004.

⁷¹ EDITORIAL 2004, 'Nuestro 11-S', *El Mundo*, 12/III/2004.

⁷² EDITORIAL 2004, 'Terror sin límites', *La Vanguardia*, 12/III/2004.

⁷³ EDITORIAL 2004, '11-M', *El País*, 12/III/2004.

⁷⁴ Cadena Ser (2004031218-19).

⁷⁵ DIARIO DE SESIONES, COMISIONES DE INVESTIGACIÓN Sobre el 11 de marzo de 2004, session of 8/VII/2004, p. 46-47.

⁷⁶ Cadena Ser (2004031314-15).

⁷⁷ EDITORIAL 2004, 'España contra el terror', *ABC*, 13/III/2004.

⁷⁸ EDITORIAL 2004, 'Un presidente para hoy, un relevo para mañana', *El Mundo*, 13/III/2004.

⁷⁹ EDITORIAL 2004, 'Civismo maduro', *La Vanguardia*, 13/III/2004.

⁸⁰ EDITORIAL 2004, 'Después de la matanza', *El País*, 13/III/2004.

⁸¹ Cadena Ser (2004031315-16).

⁸² REDACCIÓN 2005, 'La marginación del servicio secreto', *El País*, 10/III/2005.

⁸³ EDITORIAL 2004, 'Jornada de irreflexión', *ABC*, 14/III/2004.

⁸⁴ EDITORIAL 2004, 'Si no hubiera un mandato claro, gobierno de gestión PP-PSOE', *El Mundo*, 14/III/2004.

⁸⁵ EDITORIAL 2004, 'Votar con dolor', *La Vanguardia*, 14/III/2004.

⁸⁶ EDITORIAL 2004, 'Más que nunca: a las urnas, ciudadanos', *El País*, 14/III/2004.

⁸⁷ SÁDABA GARRAZA 2004.

⁸⁸ STAW, SANDELANS, DUTTON 1981.

⁸⁹ MAHONEY 2001, p. 10.

⁹⁰ BRÄNDSTRÖM and KUIPERS 2003, p. 290-301.

⁹¹ The call could be seem at around 5:00pm on 13 March in *Plataformaculturacontralaguerra.com*, created at the time of the demonstrations against the Iraq war. This site recommended listening to *Cadena Ser* and watching *CNN+*.

⁹² These demonstrations were said to be spontaneous, but were in fact carefully planned by the above-mentioned networks of activists. The question is if the Socialist Party and/or the post-communist *IU* (Izquierda Unida, United Left) played a role or not. I believe the answer could be yes because some activists declared having received 'robotic voice' multimedia messages (SAMPEDRO (Ed.) 2005, p. 70), ie, a multimedia message which costs four times as much as a written SMS message. The majority of youngsters use cellular phones with prepaid cards and multimedia messages are beyond personal budgets.

⁹³ CAÑADA 2004.

⁹⁴ SNOW, BENFORD 1992, p. 139.

⁹⁵ ENTMAN 2004, p. 1-28.

⁹⁶ HART 1993, p. 43.

⁹⁷ Juan Luis Cebrián, Founder-Director of *El País*, said in the New York Symposium that Aznar was beaten by a victim's relative. A member of the 11-M Victims Association said this was not true. Cebrián countered that he knew the name of the hospital and of the doctor involved. The member of the Victims Association reiterated the story was not true.