

Communicating Terror: Selecting, Reinforcing and Matching Frames in Connection to the Attacks in Norway on July 22, 2011

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Abstract

In essence, terror attacks are communicative events. From the perspective of political leaders, the challenge is to make sense of the event by explaining what has happened, who is behind the attack, what is the most appropriate response, and how to move forward. Adding to the difficulties is the fact that leaders have to communicate in a highly mediated environment. In this article, we explore the Norwegian government's crisis communication in the terrorist attacks in Oslo and on the island of Utöya on July 22, 2011. We do so by applying a model of crisis framing. According to the model, political leaders have to be able to select appropriate frames that reinforce each other and match the media coverage. The study proved managerial, responsibility and cultural congruence frames to be central. Moreover, the study demonstrated how the crisis produced a certain type of news coverage characterized by high levels of descriptive journalism, which, in combination with issue and episodic framing, supported the government's communication strategy.

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Introduction

Crises that pose severe threats to the safety of citizens, such as terror attacks, are amongst the most challenging communicative events political leaders may face. In moments of grief and fear, leaders are expected to capture the general spirit of despair and yet, at the very same time, provide hope for the future. Adding to the pressure is the intensive media coverage that follows most terror attacks (Canel and Sanders, 2012). In such an environment, political actors have to be able to promote their own understanding, that is, they have to frame the situation in a way that becomes accepted by the media, citizens and other types of social influential actors. Due to the stakes at play, the consequences of success or failure, in terms of political support, tend to be substantial. For example, British Prime Minister Tony Blair was praised for his communication in the London terror attacks in 2005 whereas Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar's handling of the Madrid terror attacks the year before contributed to his government losing the election. Drawing from previous lessons regarding the communication failures ascribed to the Madrid attacks as well as the ovations following the London

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attacks, Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg managed to craft a message following the July 22 attacks that appealed to the majority of the Norwegian people. According to the opinion polls conducted in connection to the event, 94 percent of the Norwegian people felt that the Prime Minister managed the situation well.¹

The case thus provides an illustrative example of how crises not only pose a threat to political actors but may also provide opportunities for strengthening organizational as well as personal credibility and legitimacy. According to Boin *et al* (2009), skillful political leaders manage to exploit crisis situations to their advantage. Crisis exploitation can thus be defined as “the purposeful utilization of crisis-type rhetoric to significantly alter levels of political support for public office-holders and public policies” (p. 83). Political actors engage in a strategic game through frame contests, that is, rhetorical battles between pro and counter-frames. The news media constitutes a prime arena for these contests. Actors who are successful in these framing contests - by making the media adapt to their framing - can be understood as possessing “framing expertise” (Viorela & Ihlen, 2010). Based on previous research, actors are likely to succeed in their framing efforts when conceiving a message that “resonates with the underlying culture, appeals to psychological biases; and conforms to journalistic needs” (*ibid*, p. 372). In this study we explore the success of the Norwegian government’s crisis communication during the July 22 terror attacks by applying a three stage framing model. According to the model, frames should be carefully selected, reinforce one another and match with the media coverage on the event (Nord and Olsson, 2013). Through a case study, we examine the frames applied by the government as well as the character of the news media coverage. The following research questions have guided our study:

1. Which frames did the Norwegian government select and how did these frames reinforce one another?
2. Which journalistic styles, norms and frames did the Norwegian news media apply in their coverage of the event and how were these beneficial to the government?

The article starts with a discussion on previous research in the fields of journalism, political communication, and crisis communication. After that, we present the data and methods used. The empirical part is devoted to two main analyses: the government’s strategic framing and the media coverage. Thereafter, the results are presented and discussed in the concluding section.

Mediated Communication in Crisis

Crisis communication theories have traditionally been developed based on how organizations handle threats to their credibility (Coombs, 2004). The main focus within this research tradition has been on the ability of organizations to reduce blame and regain confidence from its stakeholders through the appliance of suitable rhetorical strategies. Influential studies within the field have focused on issues such as the categorization of image repair strategies (Benoit, 1995) and

the connection between organizational responsibility and various blame reducing strategies (Coombs, 1995, 2004; Coombs and Holladay, 1996, 2002). Applying Coombs' (2004) Situational Crisis Communication Theory, terror attacks belong to the victim cluster of crisis events, which means that stakeholders are less willing to attribute responsibility to those in power since they did not cause the crisis in the first place (p. 6). Following this logic, crises with lower levels of responsibility attribution will be easier to communicate than obvious wrong doings such as scandals.

At the same time, it should also be noted that crisis events are open to various framing efforts by the actors affected in regard to both their causes and management. Terror attacks can thus produce different outcomes in terms of political support. This can be exemplified by the differences in response to the terror attacks in Madrid and London, where the latter was seen as a success and the former a failure. The Madrid failure can, according to Canel and Sander (2012), be explained by the Spanish government's rigid and "one-sided" framing that was characterized by a narrow definition of "us" and a broad definition of "the others." In contrast, the British government showed a more cautious approach where, for example, the initial response (including the strategic communication) was organized by the Metropolitan Police rather than by the government. Moreover, the government's message was focused on creating unity around British values and showing sympathy with the victims. As a way to symbolically ground their message and encourage a spirit of unity, the government made numerous references to key events in British history such as the London Blitz. Both the media and the opposition gave its full support to the British government during the crisis.

Crisis communication studies have foremost focused on the rhetorical strategies of actors rather than on the role of news media. When media coverage has been the object of study, attention has primarily been given to the role of media in allocating responsibility and blame in evaluating crisis management responses (Perko *et al*, 2012; Coombs, 2004; Luther and Zhou, 2005; An and Gower, 2009; Schultz *et al*, 2012). In this study, we argue that in order to understand what makes certain crisis communication strategies more successful than others, we also need to take into account the general character of the news coverage in terms of framing and journalistic styles. Framing theory has been widely applied in the political news literature (Entman, 1993). On a general level, most scholars would agree that frames are important due to their propensity to categorize and connect large chunks of information, reducing complexity, and yet carry ideological and political implications (Gamson, 1992). Hence, framing is about selection and the salience of information (Entman, 1993). Framing is often understood as an essential feature of news media characteristics since, on an overarching level, it shapes news reporting and in doing so has a significant impact on the perception of the audience (Iyengar 1994; Shen and Edwards 2005; Barker 2005; Borah 2011).

Political actors often use framing deliberately in an attempt to shape people's attitudes towards a certain issue (Entman, 2004). Framing in a political

context can thus be understood as a contest where various actors (e.g., politicians, media and citizens) compete over the interpretation of reality as well as the prioritization of values and principles (Entman, 2003, p. 415-432). Governmental actors have a greater chance of promoting their messages when the opposition and journalists are silent (Entman, 2004; 2003). According to Entman, four types of frames are especially salient in framing contests: *cultural congruence*, *motivations*, *power*, and *strategy*. The cultural congruence frames, which employ culturally resonate terms, are said to have the highest potential for influencing people due to their use of words and images that are highly culturally salient, making them “noticeable, understandable, memorable, and emotionally charged” (Entman, 2004, p. 6). According to Nord and Olsson (2013) political leaders become successful in their crisis communication when they manage to select frames that are coherent, mutually reinforcing and that match with the media coverage of the event. In this article, we apply the notion of frames when studying the Norwegian government’s communication strategies as well as the news media coverage of the terror attacks, albeit we focus on different types of frames in the two sections.

In regard to our media study, we examine four dimensions of journalistic norms, standards and frames that are based on research in the field of political communication. According to Nord and Strömbäck (2006), the quality and character of journalistic coverage depends on the levels of journalistic routines and preparedness, which are seriously hampered in times of crisis. The worse type of news events, in terms of journalistic norms and standards, are those in which news organizations lack both preparedness and routines, such as the September 11 attacks in 2001 and the case analyzed here – the July 22 attacks in Norway. Previous research on terror attacks and war stresses the rally-around-the-flag effects, which tend to result in the suppression of core journalistic norms related to objectivity and critical scrutiny (Katz and Liebes, 2007; Zandberg and Neiger, 2005; Schudson, 2002; Reynolds and Barnett, 2003). However, not all cases follow this pattern. For example, the Spanish government was heavily criticized with regard to the Madrid bombings in 2004 when they, in the eyes of the public, politicized the crisis response as a way to gain political credit (Canel and Sanders, 2010. p. 458; Canel, 2012).

In this study, we follow previous studies on crisis coverage and their operationalization of, what they refer to as, crisis exploitation coverage (Olsson & Nord, 2014; Olsson et al, 2015). In short, crisis exploitation coverage relates to a certain type of news media reporting that helps political actors get their frame adopted. Crisis exploitation coverage is characterized by high amounts of issue framing and descriptive journalism that contribute to portraying political actors as credible crisis managers rather than tactical politicians. Moreover, the coverage demonstrates less focus on journalistic norms in terms of balance in how political actors are portrayed, which benefits political actors already framed as credible crisis managers. Accordingly, the media analysis was centered on the four themes described below.

Firstly, we studied the distribution of sources in the news coverage in order to examine which actors received the most attention. Secondly, we examined the style of reporting based on a distinction between *descriptive* and *interpretative* reporting. The latter concept is generally used to denote journalism that goes beyond descriptive and factual based reporting. Interpretive journalism is concerned with explaining *why* an event occurred in contrast to the other four classical journalistic ‘w’ questions: *what, where, when, and who*. Interpretive journalism can be problematic since it challenges the distinction between facts and values and turn journalists into analysts rather than observers of political events (Salgado and Strömbäck 2011; Schudson 1978). In general, there is a growing tendency for journalists to adhere to interpretative journalism (Neveu 2002; Gulati *et al.* 2004). The third dimension relates to the amount of so called *episodic* and *thematic* frames (Iyengar, 1994). An episodic frame is characterized by its focus on single isolated events or personal actions lacking contextual explanations. On the other hand, a thematic frame places the event in a wider context by comparing it with other events, persons or collectives. As such, a thematic frame seeks to understand the event as an effect of social, political, cultural or economic aspects. The last dimension is the *strategic game* frame, which portrays politics as a game with winners and losers at the expense of substantial policy issues (Gulati *et al.* 2004; Vliegthart 2011; Aalberg *et al.* 2012). At the core of the frame is the depiction of politics as a race (van Aelst *et al.* 2012). Even though there is general agreement between scholars on the importance and expansion of this frame, there is disagreement about its effect on audiences.

Below we describe the material used and the method applied before moving onto the empirical study.

Data and Methodology

The study involves qualitative and quantitative analyses. The qualitative analysis of the Norwegian government’s framing of July 22 was based on a variety of sources, such as public speeches, interviews, press statements, editorials and press conferences during the period July 22, 2011 - August 22, 2011.² The primary focus of attention was the Prime Minister’s office (PMO) since Prime Minister Stoltenberg and his cabinet were in charge of crisis management at the strategic level during that period. In addition, material from the PM’s cabinet together with the lead ministries, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA), were also examined in order to ensure that the material from the PMO was representative of the government’s crisis communication. The material was collected from the Norwegian government’s official website where each ministry publishes official press statements, broadcasted press conferences and, in many cases, prepared notes for public speeches. The accessible material included 21 public speeches, press conference statements, and editorials, as well as 22 press releases. In addition, three interviews were conducted with the Head of Communication at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Head of Communication at the Prime Minister’s cabinet, and the Head of Communica-

tion at the Ministry of Justice. The interviewees were identified as key players in the Norwegian government's communication work. As such, they were the most central non-political actors involved in the government's communication work during and after the July 22 crisis; and two of the interviewees were personally involved in the crisis communication. The interviews were aimed at capturing personal insights and reflections regarding the motives and rationales behind the government's communication strategy (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011). Each interview was conducted by telephone, lasted about one hour and can be characterized as one-on-one semi-structured conversations. The interviews were originally conducted in Norwegian; all quotes have been translated to English by the authors.

The sample for the quantitative media study consisted of 924 news articles, published between July 22 and August 5, 2011 on the websites of two major newspapers in Norway (i.e., *Verdens Gang* and *Aftenposten*). The articles were collected by using the media database Retriever and the search words (bombe* AND Oslo) OR (Utøya OR Breivik). *Verdens Gang* (VG) is Norway's second largest national print newspaper with a total print circulation of 211,600 and the country's most read web newspaper with 1,728,000 daily readers (TNS Gallup, 2011). VG is owned by the company Schibsted and is politically independent. *Aftenposten* (AP) is a national daily evening newspaper. It is also owned by Schibsted and has an independent conservative opinion label. At the time of the July 22 attacks, VG's office was located across the street from the Executive Government Quarter and was evacuated, so, in fact, VG was directly affected by the attack even if nobody had reportedly been injured. AP has a total print circulation of 337,500 (of which the morning edition consists of 236,000). The evening edition is only published between Tuesday and Thursday. In 2011, AP was Norway's largest print newspaper and the third most read web newspaper with 554,000 daily readers (TNS Gallup, 2011). In 2011, approximately 79 percent of Norwegians (9-79 years) read a print or web newspaper daily: 63 percent read a printed newspaper, and 48 percent read a web newspaper (TNS Gallup, 2011).

Methodology

This study uses two methodological approaches. The analysis of the Norwegian government's framing applied an inductive qualitative text analysis. This analysis was inspired by Entman's (1993) framing analysis, a method aimed at identifying key words or phrases in an attempt to identify the presence or absence of frames in texts. According to Entman (2004), framing includes four general functions: defining the conditions as problematic; identifying causes to the problem; evaluating/conveying moral judgment of those involved; and endorsing solutions and remedies to the problematic situation. Inspired by Entman's definition, the frame identification process was guided by a set of questions: Which elements are highlighted in the government's texts? Which elements are used to construct arguments about the problem and its causes? Which elements are used to evaluate/judge the problem? Which elements can be found in the government's solution to the problem? Guided by Entman's definition, we categorized

the empirical material into frames, eventually ending up with three such frames: responsibility, managerial management and cultural congruence. The results presented in the first part of the empirical analysis are typical and illustrative examples of frames found in the total sample of news articles.

The media coverage was analyzed using a codebook with comprehensive code instructions for every item. In short, the coding was conducted in the following. First, we accounted for the most frequently quoted sources (actor groups) in the coverage. Second, we indicated whether an article had displayed more of an issue frame or game frame approach. When an article focused on the actual events or the actions taken by certain actors, it was categorized as an issue frame. When an article focused on the event as a strategic or tactical game for the political actors (e.g., involving relationships between and consequences for political actors), it was categorized as a game frame. Typically, articles with a game frame approach include game, sport and war metaphors. Third, we measured the amount of descriptive versus interpretative media coverage. Descriptive journalism is defined as a more straightforward presentation of the facts surrounding an event. Interpretative journalism implies that a journalist, in important ways, provides his or her own interpretations or conclusions regarding certain events. Fourth, we looked for episodic and thematic frames in the media coverage. An episodic frame means that an article mainly focuses on an individual incident or an individual actor. An article with a thematic frame attempts to put an event into a broader context by comparing it with other incidents, social trends or persons and by relating it to more general trends, tendencies, and social impacts. In the analysis, the dominating perspective of the news item was decisive for the coding. In cases where diverging perspectives were offered, the dominating perspective, based on an overall evaluation of the unit, was decisive for coding.

Background - The Norwegian Crisis Response

It was late Friday afternoon in the middle of summer. Many Norwegians had already started their summer vacation. Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg was working from home at his official residency near the Royal Palace in Oslo, preparing a speech for the Labor Party's youth league annual camp on the island of Utöya, which is 25 miles outside of Oslo.

At 15:26 a car bomb exploded in central Oslo. The target was the building housing the Norwegian government's headquarters where the Prime Minister's office, the Ministry of Justice, and the Supreme Court were located. The explosion caused severe damage to this building and consequently knocked out several ministries. The Prime Minister's office had to be moved to a new location. Initially the Prime Minister's official residence was used as a temporary office (NOU 2012: 14, p. 209). This situation was not only a logistical challenge but it also affected the government's ability to respond to the crisis (ibid p. 213-220). By targeting the institutions that would normally handle the government's communication during a crisis³, the terrorist attack managed successfully to wipe out

the country's crisis management capacity, including the ability to communicate with the public and to coordinate the work of the government and its agencies.

After placing the car bomb in front of the government buildings, the terrorist (later identified as right-wing extremist Anders Behring Breivik), disguised as a police officer, drove his car 25 miles to the island of Utöya with the intention of killing as many of his "political enemies" as possible. In the chaotic two hours following the explosion in central Oslo, he managed to kill 69 people, mostly teenagers participating at an annual meeting for the youth league of the Labor Party, before the Norwegian police managed to disarm him. During these first hours and the following day, the information void was huge. The July 22 attack resulted in 77 people losing their lives and is considered the most severe terror attack in Norway's modern history (ibid, p. 449). Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg and his cabinet office first and foremost managed the crisis at the political and national level. Since several key institutions and vital societal functions had been attacked, the government was forced to take full responsibility and leadership of the crisis response at the strategic level. The government was well aware that the handling of such a crisis had the propensity to either make or break political careers (Interview with Head of Communication at the PMO, April 15, 2013). Hence, one of the initial priorities of the Norwegian government and the Prime Minister was to get as much information as possible in order to understand the nature of the crisis and to be able to communicate with the public (NOU 2012: 14, p. 224). Although certain facts (such as the explosion in central Oslo, and later the disclosure of the mass killing on Utöya) were clear to the public early on, there were still many uncertainties about other aspects relating to the nature of the problem and what action needed to be taken.

Even though the acute phase of the Norwegian crisis was relatively short, the accountability process continued long after the terrorist was arrested. An inquiry commission was convened by the Norwegian government less than a month after the terror attack. The Commission started to conduct an investigation in order to clarify and shed light on the tragic events and the response work carried out on July 22, 2011. In August 2012, the Commission released its report and many important and critical questions were addressed: what actually happened, why did it happen, who was responsible, what action was taken, and what were the lessons to be learned. This generated a renewed debate about the shortcomings in Norway's management of the crisis and what could be done to prevent it from happening again.

Case Study

Frame Selection and Reinforcement

In accordance to the model of crisis framing applied herein, we examined the government's selection of frames and their reinforcing effect. Three key frames were identified: managerial, cultural congruence, and responsibility frames. The frames are presented in the following section.

Managerial Frame

The first frame discussed in the government's communication strategy is the managerial frame, which highlights the importance of showing leadership, control and action. Within this frame, the government's most important message was to ensure the public that the responsible authorities were doing everything in their power to handle the crisis, to find out who was behind the attack and make sure they were brought to justice (Interview with Head of Communication at the MoJ, April, 24 2013). The first external message from the government and the PMO was sent out at 15:58, approximately 35 minutes after the first attack. It was a short note saying that the PM had not been directly affected by the attack and was safe. In the first broadcasted interview with the PM (at 17:35 with NRK) one of the key messages was that the authorities were doing everything they could to help the victims and their families. Later that evening the PM again reassured the public that the authorities did everything they could to assist the victims and that the government and its responsible ministers were on top of the events (NOU 2012:14 p. 238). Interesting to note, however, is the fact that the Prime Minister later admitted that some of the wording was foremost meant to have a reassuring effect rather than being entirely true. For example, at the press conference the day after the attack (i.e., July 23), Stoltenberg said that the contingency plans and strategies of the government and police had been activated and put in place, something that turned out to be wrong (NOU 2012:14 p. 142). In order to be seen as trustworthy, the Prime Minister gave detailed accounts of the actions being taken by the authorities. According to the Head of Communication at the MFA, "The most important message was to show that the government was still up and running and to ensure that the police were doing everything they could." (Interview with Head of Communication at the MFA, April 17, 2013). In the coming days, the concrete references to the government's crisis response continued and were among the more frequent elements in the government's messages. The following statement from one of the press conferences serves as an example of this strategy:

Last night I visited Ullevål Hospital where I witnessed the outstanding work being carried out by the staff there. Later today, I will travel to Sundvollen to meet with those who have been affected and their families. In the morning hours, the responsible ministers will have a meeting, and later the whole government will convene. (Stoltenberg, 2011, July 23).

The frequent press releases were one way of keeping the media and the public informed about the actions of the government and authorities. In line with this, basically all of the press releases referred to symbolic actions aimed at showing compassion and support from the different ministers. The most prominent of these actions included visits to the damaged government buildings, to *Sundvallen* (the place where the survivors of Utöya were gathered) as well as the PM's visit to Ullevål Hospital in Oslo on the night of July 22 (Stoltenberg, 2011,

July 23). These powerful symbolic images (together with the royal family consoling families of the victims and the official visits to churches and mosques) aimed at sending out a message that the government was actively dealing with the crisis and participating in the national grief process.

Cultural Congruence Frame

One hour after the bomb went off in front of the government buildings in central Oslo, the State Secretary at the PMO found himself with the responsibility of developing a coherent governmental crisis message that would set the tone for the government's communication strategy for the coming weeks. In the midst of all the confusion, shock and sadness, the staff of the PMO was faced with the challenge of finding the right words that would help make sense and provide meaning to the tragic event. Adding to the already stressful situation was the surreal fact that the office had been completely damaged in the attack and therefore there was no access to the necessary equipment and systems, such as the computer network. Among other things, this meant that certain normal procedures no longer applied, for example, producing speech points. Luckily, there was access to some notes that had been prepared in the event of a large-scale crisis in Norway. The speech points were inspired by the communication strategy used by Tony Blair after the London bombings in 2005 and written by Ken Livingstone. According to the Head of Communication at the MoJ, "We [the communication department and the political leadership] had prepared these speech points in the event of a larger crisis, and we wanted to use the same elements as he [Ken Livingstone] had highlighted" (Interview with Head of Communication at the MoJ, April 24, 2013).

After hearing that several people had also been killed at the Labor Party's annual summer camp on Utöya, the State Secretary at the PMO decided to use the following key message: "They can not break us or scare us into silence" (Interview with Head of Communication at the PMO, April 15, 2013). The government chose to frame the event as an attack on Norwegian values and its democratic society. Thereafter, the following slogan for the attack was formulated as "more democracy and more humanity but without being naïve" (Interview with Head of Communication at the MoJ, April 24, 2013). As expressed by the Head of Communication at the MoJ, "Similar to Livingstone's message, we made it clear that terrorists would always fail. We wanted to communicate that the attack could not destroy our democratic society or weaken our aim to create a better world" (Interview with Head of Communication at the MoJ, April 24, 2013). Thus, the enemy that the Norwegians had to fight was not the terrorist, or even his political ideas, but the prospect of a transformed Norwegian society. The attack was framed as being an "attack on the democratic society." (Stoltenberg, 2011 July 29). In depicting the attack as being directed not only towards innocent Norwegian people but also on Norwegian society at large, the government could make use of an inclusive and unifying rhetoric. By framing it as an attack on common fundamental values rather than on a specific political group (e.g., the Labor party), the government successfully managed to create an inclusive sense

of “we.” This is manifested in e.g., Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre’s editorial piece (August 12, 2011) that mentioned the unification around Norwegian values and the possibilities and strengths of having a more inclusive “we” than before the attack. In one of the PM’s statements, made three days after the attack, Stoltenberg spoke directly to the public declaring that:

Norway stood the test. Evil can kill a person, but it can never defeat a nation. Tonight, the Norwegian people have made history. With the strongest of all the world's weapons, free speech and democracy, we have determined the course for Norway after July 22, 2011 / ... / More transparency, more democracy, firmness and strength. That is us. That is Norway (Stoltenberg, 2011, July 25).

The endorsement of Norwegian values, more democracy, openness and humanity, became the government’s weapon. In doing so, the country could fight the “dangerous effects” involved in allowing the tragedy to change Norwegian society (Interview with Head of Communication at the MFA, April 17, 2013). Late at night, on the evening of the attack, Prime Minister Stoltenberg held his first press conference and stated, “I have a message to the ones who attacked us and to those behind it. It is a message from the entire country of Norway: You shall not destroy us. You shall not destroy our democracy and our commitment to a better world.” (NOU 2012:14 p. 239).

This message was repeated several times in the following weeks, with the government reassuring that the terrorist did not succeed in changing the country; on the contrary, Norway had been strengthened by the attack. By repeating this positive affirmation, the government created an element of confidence and victory in their message. The central message guiding the communication strategy was the following: unity for Norwegian and democratic values, sympathy for the victims and their families, endorsement of societal resilience, and disdain for terrorism. In terms of frame reinforcement, the cultural congruence frame was strengthened by the managerial frame in that an inclusive “we” was created. As head of the nation, the Prime Minister became the very symbol of these cultural values and the leader of the Norwegian fight and resistance against terror.

Responsibility Frame

Issues related to responsibility are often at the forefront when crisis communication is discussed. Yet, the responsibility frame was barely manifested in the government’s framing efforts after the July 22 attack. On the very first evening, the government tried not to speculate about the motives for or causes of the attack but simply stated this was a police matter (Stoltenberg & Storberget, 2011, July 22, 2011). The goal to avoid speculation was partly based on the lessons learned from the Spanish government’s handling of the Madrid attacks in 2004.

The most important thing at that point was not to comment on the potential motives and who could be behind the attack before we had confirmed information about that/.../ We remembered the mistakes

made in Madrid in 2004. At that time the government claimed that ETA was behind the attack on the train station. We did not want to point in any one direction before knowing more of the facts and potential motives. (Interview with Head of Communication at the PMO, April 15, 2013).

The initial uncertainty caused problems in how the Prime Minister should describe the event in his speech on the evening of July 22.

We had a discussion at the PMO about whether or not to call the event a terror attack. We decided that since it was a politically motivated act of violence, it could be described as a terrorist attack; however, the Prime Minister never used those words in his first speech after the attack. (Interview with Head of Communication at the PMO, April 15, 2013).

The issue of defining the event had organizational implications. Although the MoJ, supported by the crisis support unit (*Krisestøtteenheten*), was quickly appointed as the lead ministry in the strategic crisis response, it was decided that the PMO should lead the crisis communication work. “We were confident in the decision to let the PM be the government’s spokesperson, not solely because of the severity of the crisis but also to avoid sending out wrong signals about the motives behind the attack and who could have been behind it.” (Interview with Head of Communication at the PMO, April 15, 2013). The Head of Communication at the PMO and the other lead ministries alike expressed their concern that if the Prime Minister had met with the media together with the Foreign Minister, or the Minister of Defense, it could have sent a signal that the country was under a foreign attack. Hence, the Foreign Minister was assigned to work with the international media but encouraged to stay away from the national press (Interview with Head of Communication at the PMO, April 15, 2013).

The government stood firm with their strategy of not commenting on the potential motives behind the attacks even after the terrorist was identified (Stoltenberg & Storberget, 2011, July 23). In fact the Prime Minister managed to avoid mentioning the terrorist and the causes of the crisis in practically all of his public speeches and appearances. In addition, the first time the Foreign Minister commented on the terrorist was almost a month after the attack. (Gahr Støre, 2011, August 22) The only minister that made comments about the terrorist without direct questions from journalists was the Minister of Justice. However, he described the causes and details of the crisis in a very general manner, “The man arrested for the massacre on Utöya is Norwegian. I don’t want to discuss any further details.” (Stoltenberg and Storberget, 2011, July 23) Instead of focusing on the reasons for *how* this could have happened or trying to diagnose the causes behind the attack, the government representatives repeatedly used words such as “cowardly,” “evil,” and “hateful” to frame the situation. (Stoltenberg & Storberget, 2011, July 23) In doing so, the terrorist act was portrayed as a cow-

ardly attack on the whole country. “Society” (the government) could not be blamed for this tragedy, as they, together with Norwegian society, were also victims. Hence, the government could rely on the fact that the crisis was caused by an exogenous factor, in this case, a lone individual, which made the responsibility frame less prominent.

Finally, how did the responsibility frame fit with and reinforce the other two identified frames? Facilitated by the focus of the responsibility frame on a lone individual rather than on an extended terror networks, or for that matter the failures of the Norwegian system in preventing the attack, the managerial frame was strengthened. The responsibility frame legitimized the emphasis in the managerial frame on handling the acute crisis rather than discussing and blaming and structural conditions. Rather than pointing blame or initiating change, the crisis management was focused on helping Norway return to normalcy, which meant encouraging Norwegians to continue with their ordinary lives. This was foremost done by emphasizing the cultural congruence frame.

Media Coverage Characteristics

In this section, the results from the media study will be presented.

Balanced Reporting

The first measure relates to the notion of balanced reporting. This dimension has been explored by looking at the sources that dominated the news coverage and thereby had the opportunity to frame the coverage in accordance to their interests.

Table 1. Frequency of sources in Verdens Gang and Aftenposten, 22 July to 5 August 2011

Source	N	Percent
Police	179	19
Experts	92	10
Related to terrorist	60	7
Victims, survivors	60	7
PM Stoltenberg	57	6
Other Norwegian Ministers	55	6
Terrorist	49	5
Families of victims	45	5

N=924

Note: Source with a percentage below 1 has been excluded from the table.

As illustrated in Table 1, media coverage primarily focused on governmental sources, experts and victims. This provided the government with a good opportunity to present their message without being challenged by political opponents. The primary source was the police, which is logical since they had a key role in handling the attacks on the operational level, together with the medical and emergency services. The second most dominant news media source was governmental actors, where the Prime Minister and his ministers had 12 percent of the media coverage. The third most dominant news media source was experts.

These experts often had an affiliation to research institutions and were sometimes called “terror experts.” Even the terrorist received five percent of the coverage. In particular, his *Manifesto*, which could be downloaded from the Internet, was quoted. The balance between the Prime Minister on one hand and the terrorist on the other as a source in news articles was rather equal. Moreover, persons related to the terrorist were quoted more often than families of victims. Even though the terrorist and the Prime Minister were quoted to the same extent, the way in which they were described naturally differed. The terrorist was generally framed as a psychologically disturbed lone individual (Falkheimer and Olsson, 2015). In contrast, the Prime Minister was portrayed as a noble statesman and praised by being described as “honorable,” “compassionate,” and “statesman-like” (Mathisen, 2011, July 30). The overall image of the Prime Minister was that he had led the nation in a calm, thoughtful and reassuring manner (Lederskap, 2011, August 28). In sum, the media coverage gave the government authorities the opportunity to deliver their messages, and, even more important, the government and the Prime Minister were portrayed in a way that was in line with the government’s own managerial frame.

Descriptive or Interpretative Style of Reporting

The next dimension relates to journalistic style in terms of interpretative or descriptive journalism. As can be seen below, the table shows low levels of interpretative news, which means that journalists were not engaged in explaining and analyzing the event but rather were focused on reporting what other actors did and said.

Table 2. Descriptive and interpretative journalism: Dominant journalistic approach in Verdens Gang and Aftenposten, 22 July to 5 August 2011 (%)

Style	Descriptive	Interpretative	Not possible to answer
Per cent	91	8	1

N = 924

In this case, we found the results to be rather surprising considering the degree of shock and grief caused by the terror attacks. Based on that, one would expect the media coverage to have larger amounts of interpretative news driven by the journalistic need to speculate, comment and make sense of the event. Yet in this case, such media coverage was rare. Instead media coverage was dominated by a descriptive style. The high amount of descriptive coverage was beneficial to the government’s strategy in two significant ways. Firstly, the lack of interpretative news paved the way for the government to launch their own framing of the event without interference from journalists. This finding confirms previous research claiming that in cases where both the opposition and journalists are silent, governmental actors are able to dominate the framing of news stories (Entman, 2004). That is, if the coverage had been dominated by a strong political opposition or a high amount of interpretative news, the government’s managerial frame would most probably not have been uncontested, as in this

case, but rather questioned and criticized by both political actors as well as journalists. Moreover, due to their descriptive nature, news stories covering the July 22 attack were mainly devoted to describing the event as it happened and the actions being taken to resolve the situation, which nicely complimented the government's managerial frame. Finally, the descriptive style of news was also in line with the government's intention to avoid speculations regarding the terrorist and his motives.

Game or Issue Framing

The third dimension relates to issue or game frames. As can be seen below, issue framing and low levels of game framing dominated coverage.

Table 3. Issue or game frames: Dominant framing in Verdens Gang and Aftenposten, 22 July to 5 August 2011 (%)

Frame	Game frame	Issue Frame	Not possible to answer
Per cent	5	94	1
N=924			

The table above shows that the attacks in Norway were not politicized in the news coverage (except the terrorist's failed attempts to do that). Similar to the descriptive style of reporting discussed in the previous section, the weight given to issue framing was beneficial to the government's managerial frame with its emphasis on governmental actions and activities. Moreover, the frame depicted the government as genuinely engaged in managing the crisis rather than acting based on strategic considerations aimed at gaining increased support in the opinion polls.

Episodic or Thematic Framing

Our last dimension relates to how the attack was framed in terms of being contextualized or understood as a single event. In accordance to the table below, we can see how the event was framed as an episodic event.

Table 4. Episodic or thematic frames: Dominant contextual framing in Verdens Gang and Aftenposten, 22 July to 5 August 2011 (%) (N = 924)

Frame	Episodic	Thematic
Per cent	84	16
N=924		

Again, given the magnitude of the event and the fact that the event deeply affected the entire country, the dominance of episodic framing is somewhat surprising. Even though the terrorist had a political motive, which he clearly stated and communicated from the beginning, it did not result in any thematic framing of the news coverage. Rather, the terrorist's individual story was in focus and the newspapers did not, during the period of the study, link the terrorist acts to expressions of national or international political extremism. By isolating the event to the terrorist through the episodic framing, Norwegian society,

framed as “we,” was still intact. In so far as the episodic framing fitted with the cultural congruence frame and its message stating that “society” (the government) could not be blamed for this tragedy as they were also victims. Finally, in framing the event as episodic, the government could focus on managing the acute operative issues rather than on the long-term structural issues, and in doing so promote its managerial frame. More thematic framing would probably have resulted in a stronger focus on prior preparations and other types of long-term policy responses.

Conclusions

The results revealed that the political leaders managed to successfully communicate the terror attacks by selecting frames that were coherent and mutually reinforcing and that match the media coverage. When it came to the frames selected by the political actors, we could see how, in contrast to the main focus in the crisis communication literature, responsibility framing only formed one aspect of the government’s communication strategy. Rather, the government worked more proactively in promoting itself as a competent manager to be reliable and trying to restore trust in society through evoking values and norms related to democracy and openness. Previous research on framing expertise stresses the imperative of crisis management actors to confirm to journalistic needs and news value criteria. In this study, we demonstrate how the news media’s production conditions are altered in times of crisis, providing governmental actors with more room to maneuver compared to everyday reporting. Thus, we argue that the need for governmental actors to, as stressed by previous research on the topic, adjust to journalistic needs and news values is in fact often reduced in times of crisis (c.f. Olsson et al, 2015). Rather, due to the circumstances surrounding journalistic productions in times of crisis, news coverage characteristics facilitate for actors to get their messages across. As could be seen in the study at hand, the crisis news coverage provided the government with the ability to launch their framing of the event without being challenged by political opponents or journalists due to the unbalanced reporting and the high amount of descriptive news that described rather than analyzed the government’s actions. Moreover, the dominance of issue, rather than game frames, made the government come across as honest crisis managers rather than tactical politicians. Lastly, the episodic framing of the event fitted into the government’s framing of the situation as a single tragic event caused by a criminal lunatic rather than by a larger politically motivated network of actors. The framing allowed the government to focus on acute issues rather than on more structural issues relating to planning and response. The episodic frame was also beneficial to the government’s managerial and cultural congruence frames. According to these frames, Norway had been attacked as a country and would only recover if every Norwegian citizen could prove that the terror attacks would not scare them into silence; therefore, they would continue living their ordinary lives and in doing so promote values of openness and democracy.

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Notes

¹ When asked a week after the terror attacks, 80 percent of Norwegians felt the Prime Minister had handled the situation "very well;" the percentage increased to 94 percent when those who felt he handled the situation "well" were included (Svenska Dagbladet, July 27, 2011). Even though the Norwegian government managed to win trust and credibility (evident by their party's success in the local election and in public surveys after the terrorist attack), it is interesting to note that the "crisis effect," or the "July 22 effect," seemed to fade rather quickly for Prime Minister Stoltenberg. Stoltenberg's Labor party dropped back to its pre-crisis popularity level after just a couple of months.β

² The period to be examined for this study was originally intended to be from July 22, 2011 to September 12, 2011, ending with the local election in Norway. However, as no official speeches on the subject of July 22 could be retrieved after August 22, the period was shortened to July 22, 2011 to August 22, 2011.

³ It should be noted that the scale of the crisis was so great that it is unlikely that the ordinary “peace time” institutions could have managed alone to cope with all aspects of the crisis, even if the attack had not demolished several government buildings.