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Do not fear, we are at war - an analysis of political discourses after terrorist attacks

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Citation

Arkhis, H. (2020). *Do not fear, we are at war - an analysis of political discourses after terrorist attacks*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

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Do not fear, we are at war – an analysis of political discourses after terrorist attacks

Bachelor Project: Media and Public Opinion in International Relations

Supervisor: Dr. Meffert

Bachelor Thesis – 02.06.2020

8080 words

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According to a survey conducted in December 2018 by *l'Institut Francais d'Opinion Publique* (French Institute of Public Opinion), 90% of the respondents consider the threat of a terrorist attack happening to be high: 60% “somewhat high” and 30% “very high” (p. 8). This illustrates one of the successes of terrorist attacks: to deeply impact the population (Martha Crenshaw, 1981). To mitigate this effect, politicians engage in what scholars have defined as fear management. Fear management is rooted in the concept of crisis communication, which relates to mitigating negative effects of a crisis with effective communication. However, this field of study is dominated by case studies and lacks a grand theory to potentially be applied in a more global way, which creates knowledge gaps still in need of being filled (Coombs, 2007). In order to alleviate this issue, Bakker and De Graaf (2014) developed a theory of fear management. When engaging in fear management, political leaders can use different frames to describe the events and how their nations should respond. Bakker and De Graaf (2014) claim that discourses should: (1) emphasise positive coping mechanisms, (2) provide self-efficacy and (3) do not emphasise negative coping mechanisms. Thus, based on this theory, political leaders have the means to lower fear levels. However, according to the above-mentioned data, such levels remain quite high. This gap between the literature and the data provides a puzzle worth investigating. There are multiple potential explanations to this phenomenon: politicians do not use the strategies suggested by Bakker and De Graaf (2014), the theory is unsuccessful or other factors intervene.

The goal of this thesis is to shed light on whether political discourses after a terrorist attack include the above-mentioned frames as expected by Bakker and De Graaf (2014). To that end, a content analysis of political leaders' speeches is carried out, highlighting the use of different frames. According to the literature, crisis communication and fear management are best conducted by authority figures. Thus the analysis comprises speeches of the heads of state and heads of government of Belgium, France and Germany: King Philippe of Belgium, Prime Minister Charles Michel, President François Hollande, Prime Minister Manuel Valls, Federal President Joachim Gauck and Chancellor Angela Merkel.

This research is relevant on multiple levels. First, its theory-testing character allows for an assessment of the claims made by Bakker and De Graaf (2014). Secondly, in a broader perspective, it adds to the literature on fear management which remains an under-researched topic (Schmid, 2011). Indeed, effective communication with the public before, during, and after a terrorist attack is in the top ten of under-researched topics according to Schmid (2011). Thirdly, adding on to the existing literature has implication for counter-terrorism studies and

measures. Since the 1880s terrorism has been quite successful in spreading fear and using it to advance political goals. However, practitioners seek to mitigate the effects of terrorism, mainly fear, in order to reduce the effectiveness of this tactic. This is necessary because not all attacks can be prevented, however, political leaders can be prepared to handle the consequences if such an event were to happen (Reed & Ingram, 2019). The strategies or ‘best practices’ used to fulfil this goal are often based on scholars’ investigations of fear management and crisis communication. Thus, this research also has social implications in the sense that it is rooted in contemporary concerns which still need to be investigated and solutions that are yet to be found.

This thesis first introduces different conceptualisations of terrorism as well as the consequences of the fear it triggers. It then provides an overview of concepts such as crisis communication, which are necessary to understand the management of the aftermath of terrorist attacks. Then follows a qualitative content analysis of political discourses, based on Bakker and De Graaf’s (2014) theory. The conclusion provides an overview of the results as well as implications and recommendations for further research.

Theory

Terrorism – Conceptualisation and Evolution

Terrorism is a widely debated concept and there is no consensus on how to properly define it. It can be examined through different conceptual lenses, for instance terrorism can strictly be defined as a crime or regarded in a broader manner as a strategy. Even though there are disagreements on the definition of terrorism, its criminal nature remains unquestionable, even when the motive is political (Schmid, 2004). A crime can be defined as “the intentional commission of an act usually deemed socially harmful or dangerous and specifically defined, prohibited and punishable under the criminal law” (Schmid, 2004, pp. 197-198). However, what is considered socially harmful can evolve throughout time and differ in various cultures, and criminal laws vary from state to state. Therefore, this conceptualisation of a crime is not enough to provide a universal definition of terrorism. To fill this gap, the *United Nation Ad Hoc Committee on Terrorism* provides the following definition:

Any person commits an offence within the meaning of this Convention [The Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism] if that person, by any means, unlawfully and intentionally, causes:

- (a) Death or serious bodily injury to any person; or

- (b) Serious damage to public or private property, including a place of public use, a state or government facility, a public transportation system, an infrastructure facility or the environment; or
- (c) Damage to property, places, facilities, or systems referred to in paragraph 1 (b) of this article, resulting or likely to result in major economic loss, when the purpose of the conduct, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a government or an international organisation to do or abstain from doing any act (Schmid, 2004, p. 199)

In addition, Schmid (2004) specifies that terrorism can be considered the “peacetime equivalent of war crimes” (p. 203). The laws of war stipulated in the Hague Regulations and the Geneva Conventions prohibit certain acts, especially attacking people who are not taking part in the conflict (Schmid, 2004). In peacetime, terrorists engage in violent acts such as the massacre of civilians, assassinations or hostage takings which violates the principles of the Hague Regulations and Geneva Conventions. Thus, terrorism can also be regarded through the conceptual lens of war crimes, even if it does not necessarily happen in the midst of a war.

The last conceptualisation of terrorism and the most relevant to this thesis is terrorism as a tactic of violent communication, or what Kydd and Walter (2006) call “costly signalling” (p. 50). They define terrorism as “the use of violence against civilians by non-state actors to attain political goals” (Kydd & Walter, 2006, p. 52), thus adding political motive to the conceptualisation. Terrorism usually happens in the context of an asymmetrical political conflict, where the weaker side resorts to using violent means of communication (Schmid, 2004). As the terrorists are too weak to impose their will directly, they resort to violent means in order to persuade their audiences that they have the ability to impose tremendous costs and that they are highly committed to their cause (Kydd & Walter, 2006). In that sense, terrorism is a tactic of communication aimed to persuade audiences through fear and harm imposed through violent means.

In the same fashion that terrorism can be regarded through various conceptual lenses, terrorism has been used in numerous ways and for different purposes throughout the ages. This evolution has been highlighted by David Rapoport in his famous work *The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism* (as cited in Honig & Yahel, 2019). According to Rapoport, a wave is “a cycle of activity in a given time period, with international character; with similar activities occurring in different regions, driven by a common predominant energy that shapes the participating groups” (as cited in Honig & Yahel, 2019, p. 1210). Four major waves of terrorism

have been identified: The Anarchist Wave (1880-1920), The Anti-Colonial Wave (1920-1960), The New Left Terrorism (1960s until the 1979 Iranian revolution), and The Religious Wave (since 1979) (Honig & Yahel, 2019).

The fourth and current wave of terrorism is the Religious Wave which emerged in 1979 with the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union (Rasler & Thompson, 2009). The overthrow of the Shah in Iran allowed Islamic clerics to seize power whose goal was to spread this religious revolution. On the other hand, the Soviet invasion led to a revolt mobilising Muslims in Afghanistan and in the region to fight a religious war against who they considered infidels (Rasler & Thompson, 2009). This Religious Wave is mostly dominated by Islamist groups, even though it eventually spread to radical branches of other religions such as Christianity with the Ku Klux Klan following a racist interpretation of the Bible, or the Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo (Bakker, 2015; Rasler & Thompson, 2009). The terrorist groups increasingly target secular regimes, especially with a new emerging tactic: suicide bombing (Rasler & Thompson, 2009). In recent years, certain terrorist groups became so powerful that we saw the emergence of what Honig and Yahel (2019) call Terrorist Semi-States, which are characterised by their “control [of] portions of a weak state’s territory, maintaining governance there, but still launch terrorist attacks against third party victim states” (p. 1211). The so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) corresponds to these criteria: it holds a territory over which it displays some state features such as clear systems of command, taxation as well as educational structures (Walt, 2015); and provides guidance for jihadi attacks in the West (Honig & Yahel, 2019).

Terrorism, Fear and Consequences

According to Martha Crenshaw (as cited in Braithwaite, 2013), “the political effectiveness of terrorism is importantly determined by the psychological effects of violence on audiences” (p. 95). Whilst there is no consensus on a set definition of terrorism, it is generally accepted as politically motivated violence designed to trigger fear, which corresponds to Crenshaw’s ‘psychological effect on audiences’ (de Roy van Zuijdewijn & Sciarone, 2019; Jenkins, 1974). Terrorists use the fear resulting from their violent actions as a bargaining tool in order to “intimidate governments into making political concessions in line with [their] political goals” (Long as cited in Huddy et al., 2003, p. 255).

Terrorist attacks have two kinds of victims: first the people who are physically harmed during the attack and second, the entire population which is a victim of the fear resulting from the attack. This fear can in turn lead to potential overreaction: for instance, the public is likely

to demand important government responses even if the magnitude of the risk does not require such a response (Bakker & Veldhuis, 2012; Sunstein, 2003). This fear leads to dramatic consequences for a population: “Terrorism destroys the solidarity, cooperation, and interdependence on which social functioning is based, and substitutes insecurity and distrust” (Hutchinson as cited in Huddy et al, 2003, p. 255). This has implications for the functioning of a society: for instance, fear can trigger polarisation resulting from a shift to dogmatic thinking of ‘us versus them’, as well as suspicion, stereotyping and discrimination (Bakker & Veldhuis, 2012). Such fear-fuelled reactions can strongly undermine social and political cohesion, feeding tension rather than countering terrorism (Bakker & Veldhuis, 2012). This lack of trust can also be directed towards governmental institutions as the audience may consider that they have failed to protect citizens (Bakker & Veldhuis, 2012). However, a society that is able to cope with the fear triggered by the attack and that engages in proportionate and calculated reactions may undermine the purpose of the attack which is to disrupt a society and trigger psychological damage (Bakker & Veldhuis, 2012).

Crisis Communication, Resilience and Fear Management

Fear triggered by terrorism leads to several costs due to changes in private and public behaviour such as the reluctance to travel by airplane or appear in public places (Sunstein, 2003). These fear-fuelled changes are disproportionate compared to the low probability of terrorist attacks happening. However, a government is unlikely to be successful in mitigating the fear of citizens solely by emphasising the low probability that the risk will actually occur. Instead it needs to alter the focus of its audience (Sunstein, 2003). Altering the public’s focus can be achieved through *crisis communication*.

Crisis communication corresponds to the framing of public perception of an event with the intention to reduce the harm done to stakeholders (Reynolds & Seeger, 2005). It can be defined as a “verbal, visual, and/or written interaction between the organisation and its stakeholders (through the media) prior to, during and after a negative occurrence” (Fearn-Banks as cited in Reynolds and Seeger, 2005, p. 46). To that end, crisis communication aims at explaining the specific crisis, its potential consequences and providing information helpful to reduce the harm of affected communities (Reynolds & Seeger, 2005).

Crisis communication is crucial in the case of terrorist attacks as the reputation of organisations is at stake (Canel & Sanders, 2010). Indeed, terrorist attacks defy the state’s ability to protect its citizens, thus jeopardising the reputation of the government and the trust of citizens towards its institutions (Bakker & Veldhuis, 2012). Therefore, since the government’s

ability to respond to the crisis is put to the test, there is a need to engage in effective public relations techniques to provide an adequate answer to a terrorist attack (Canel & Sanders, 2010). Thus, crisis communication is mostly carried out by authority figures such as political leaders during speeches or press conferences during which informative messages regarding the current state of events are conveyed, based on known information (Reynolds & Seeger, 2005). The first aim of crisis communication is to protect stakeholders from harm resulting from the physical threat of the crisis (Coombs, 2007). In the case of a terrorist attack this would be for instance, telling the public not to go in the area of an ongoing attack. The second step is to help people cope with the psychological threat resulting from the crisis (Coombs, 2007). This can be achieved by providing clear information to the public in order to reduce uncertainty and the stress it could trigger (Coombs, 2007). The resulting public messages are aimed at creating a particular response from the public: resilience (Reynolds & Seeger, 2005).

Resilience relates to the ability to adapt to a crisis and limit its negative impacts. Bakker and Veldhuis (2012) offer the following definition: “a resilient individual or society shows the capacity to proactively adapt to and recover from disturbances that are perceived within the social system to fall outside the range of normal and expected disturbances, such as terrorism” (p. 5). The *Homeland Security Institute* provides a more detailed conceptualisation building on two categories: hard aspects, comprising of institutions and infrastructures, and soft aspects, relating to individuals and communities (Sheppard, 2011). This thesis focuses on the soft aspects of resilience which include “the capacities of individuals and communities to be self-sufficient, adapt, and critically, develop psychological toughness” (Sheppard, 2011, p. 2). Developing coping mechanisms to recover from traumatic events is important especially in the case of terrorist attacks. Indeed, the more a society is able to increase its resilience, the more difficult it will be for terrorists to disrupt the society and benefit from it (Bakker & Veldhuis, 2012). A first step to increase the resilience of a society is to deal with the fear resulting from a terrorist attack to mitigate its negative consequences.

The concept of *fear management* falls under the umbrella of crisis communication and also aims at increasing the society’s resilience, however it is more oriented towards mitigating fear. Fear management can be understood as “comprising the efforts, undertaken by governmental institutions, prior, during and after situations of emergency and recovery regarding a terrorist threat/attack, to manipulate the human capital in society in order to improve the positive, collective coping mechanism of that society” (Bakker & De Graaf, 2014). Sunstein (2003) claimed that citizens out of fear demand the implementation of what would be

disproportionate regulations compared to the probability of terrorism happening. Thus, one way to reduce fear amongst citizens could be to guarantee them the implementation of said regulations. However, Sunstein (2003) argues that “if [the] government is able to inform and educate people, it should do that rather than regulate” (p. 132). Nevertheless, the empirical evidence to confirm that information and education will succeed in reducing fear is yet to be found (Sunstein, 2003). Even though research on fear management could offer insight on ways to undermine terrorism, it remains an under-researched topic (Schimid as cited in Bakker & De Graaf, 2014). In order to fill this knowledge gap, Bakker and De Graaf (2014) investigated governmental approaches to fear management. They found three strategies that can be used in order to mitigate fear: “(a) do not reinforce negative coping mechanisms; (b) influence positive coping mechanisms and (c) provide self-efficacy” (Bakker & De Graaf, 2014, p. 15). Bakker and De Graaf (2014) define coping as “thoughts and behaviour that people use to manage the internal and external demands of situations that are appraised as stressful” (p. 5). They also highlight that, according to previous research carried out by the *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism of The Hague* as well as studies by Schuster et al. (as cited in Bakker & De Graaf, 2014), positive mechanism focus on bringing people together. This can be achieved through various actions such as commemorations or exchanging sentiments with one another (Bakker & De Graaf, 2014). For instance, Hollande (2016) presented his condolences and expressed his solidarity with the victims and their families. On the other hand, according to Fullerton (as cited in Bakker & De Graaf, 2014), negative coping mechanisms correspond to people altering their behaviour due to rising anxiety. This translate into avoiding crowds and flights or even the increase of alcohol and cigarette consumption. This is encouraged by the use of alarmist rhetoric and emphasising the idea of an imminent threat (Bakker & De Graaf, 2014). Such rhetoric can be found in Michel’s (2016) speech for example, when he underlines the rising level of threat and the additional security measures taken. Thirdly, self-efficacy builds on positive coping mechanisms: it corresponds to the fact that citizens do not want to remain bystanders and wish to act in order not to fall into the terrorists’ trap, and how they can achieve this (Bakker & De Graaf, 2014). Self-efficacy can be facilitated by politicians, for instance when Merkel (2016) encouraged German citizens not to be paralyzed by fear and to keep on living the life they want. Bakker and De Graaf’s (2014) conceptualisation remain quite fuzzy. However, by applying their concepts to specific cases, this thesis contributes to refining the definition of said concepts.

Based on the assumption that political leaders wish to manage fear amongst their population, they should be inclined to use the strategies summarised by Bakker and De Graaf (2014) to reduce fear levels. However, when looking at public opinion data, such strategies seemed not sufficiently used or did not have the expected results. Indeed, according to the Eurobarometer, terrorism has been ranked as the primary concern of Europeans (European Commission, 2017). In addition, the Pew Research Center shows that the plurality of most European populations is very worried about Islamism across Europe and North America (Poushter, 2017). Thus emerges the puzzling situation where the data collected does not match the expectations drawn from Bakker and De Graaf's (2014) research. These surveys indicate that levels of fear are still quite high in European countries which contradicts the conclusion drawn from Bakker and De Graaf's (2014) research. Therefore, there is a need to investigate these conflicting findings. Thus, the goal of this research is to test Bakker and De Graaf's (2014) hypothesis by answering the following question:

To what extent do political leaders use Bakker & De Graaf's (2014) fear management strategies in response to terrorist attacks?

To answer this question, the research draws directly on Bakker and De Graaf's (2014) findings. The aim is to assess whether the expected elements can be found in the political speeches analysed. Thus, if politicians use Bakker and De Graaf's (2014) theory of fear management, they should employ the following strategies:

Expectation 1: Political leaders do not reinforce negative coping mechanisms.

Expectation 2: Political leaders foster positive coping mechanisms.

Expectation 3: Political leaders encourage self-efficacy.

Method

In order to conduct this analysis, three cases have been chosen: the terrorist attacks of 2016 in Nice, Brussels and Berlin. The first attack was on the 22nd of March 2016 in Brussels. The attack consisted of two explosions in the Zaventem international airport and a third one later in a metro station of the city centre (BBC, 2016b). This coordinated attack led to 32 deaths (16 in each location) and 340 people injured. The attack was perpetrated by five men: two died as suicide bombers, one was fatally shot by the police and the remaining two were arrested in the beginning of April 2016 (BBC, 2016b). The second attack took place on the 14th of July 2016 when a man drove a lorry into a crowd and fired shots during the celebration of Bastille Day in

Nice. The attack resulted in 86 victims and 303 people were transferred to the hospital for medical care (BBC, 2016c). The driver was shot by the police after a pursuit of a hundred meters (BBC, 2016c). In a similar fashion, a lorry drove into a Christmas market in the centre of Berlin on the 19th of December 2016. 12 people were killed, 49 injured and 18 were left in a critical condition (BBC, 2016a). After fleeing to Italy, the perpetrator was shot after opening fire on the local police (BBC, 2016a). All three attacks were claimed by the so-called Islamic State (BBC, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c).

The three terrorist attacks have been chosen because they share a number of characteristics. Firstly, France, Belgium and Germany are all major European countries and the cities targeted are amongst the most populated. For these reasons, the attacks are expected to have had a major impact on the national population but also in neighbouring countries thus leading to a large political response. Secondly, according to the Eurobarometer (2017), a year after the attacks the population in each country was still very concerned about the terrorist threat which is considered an indicator of fear. Fourthly, the year 2016 was chosen because multiple attacks in Europe sharing important similarities were conducted. This allows for a comparison across different states. Lastly, they were all perpetrated by followers of the Islamic State and had quite a similar number of casualties in Brussels and Nice, and the same *modus operandi* in Nice and Berlin. It was important that the perpetrators belong to the same group as it may influence how they are perceived and framed. Moreover, the Islamic State has been chosen because it is an example of religious terrorism which according to Rapoport (as cited in Bakker, 2015) corresponds to the current wave of terrorism.

In order to test the expectations, the research consists of a qualitative content analysis of speeches made after the three attacks. The speeches to be analysed are the ones made by the head of state and head of government as they correspond to the what is expected based on the crisis communication concept: speeches by authority figures (Reynolds & Seeger, 2005). Moreover, these speeches represent the response of the nation to the attack and aim at conveying a message to the citizens as well. Six speeches are analysed. Firstly, the speeches of King Philippe of Belgium and the Prime Minister Charles Michel on the 22nd of March, have been retrieved in video format from two French news channels. The first one from France Television in collaboration with Agence France Press which are the two main organisations in charge of public media and information in France. The second one has been retrieved via France 24, a public news channel recognised for its coverage of international news. The videos were transcribed in written format for the content analysis. Secondly, the declarations of the French

president Hollande and prime minister Valls are retrieved from the official websites of the French delegation to the UN and the prime minister's office. Both the President and the Prime Minister addressed the nation on the 15th of July. Lastly, the two remaining speeches are those of Chancellor Merkel and President Joachim Gauck. The Chancellor addressed the nation on the 20th of December, the speech has been retrieved in video format via France 24 and has also been transcribed into written format. The President did not address the German citizens specifically after the attack. However, he mentioned it during his Christmas speech which was his first elocution after the event of the 19th December. For these reasons, it is the one chosen for the analysis.

The content analysis method highlights which frames are used and compares the frequency of their use. The research will use *a priori* codes corresponding to 'negative coping mechanisms', 'positive coping mechanisms' and 'self-efficacy', thus testing the expectations. As previously mentioned, negative coping mechanisms are enhanced by alarmist rhetoric emphasising the danger of the situation, thus elements relating to war, heightened security etc. will be coded 'negative coping mechanism'. On the other hand, positive coping mechanisms are influenced through information and assistance to the victims, positive meaningful events or visible acts of justice, thus words translating empathy, clear information etc. will be coded as 'positive coping mechanism'. Lastly, mentions of any action that citizens can carry out in order to improve the situation will be coded as 'self-efficacy'. This coding category includes advisory measures on what citizens can do such as reporting suspicious activities for instance. The units of analysis are words or sentences and they were coded with the software MaxQDA. These coded words and sentences are also referred to as coded segments. The analysis starts with *a priori* codes to test the hypotheses, however a second analysis using open codes is carried out. This sheds light on other frames used by the political leaders, potentially having implications for further research. Moreover, as Bakker and De Graaf (2014) did not clearly define boundaries of what corresponds to positive coping mechanisms or to self-efficacy, using open coding leads to a clearer separation based on the word choices of political leaders.

Analysis

In order to test the three hypotheses, the analysis focuses on identifying three frames in the speeches of heads of state and government after the terrorist attacks in Brussels, Nice and Berlin in 2016. The three relevant frames for this content analysis are: negative coping mechanisms, positive coping mechanisms and self-efficacy.

Negative Coping Mechanisms

According to the definition of negative coping mechanisms provided by Bakker and De Graaf (2014), the coded segments include words and sentences leading the public to alter its behaviour due to rising anxiety. Triggering negative coping mechanisms can be done through various uses of language. Therefore, the segments coded ‘negative coping mechanisms’ have been divided into subcategories, offering a more detailed overview of how leaders can foster negative coping mechanisms.

The first subcategory encompasses words indicating a menace or a sense of urgency such as François Hollande (2016) referring to the threat of Islamism and Philippe King of Belgium repeatedly using words such as “menace”, “urgency” and “preoccupation” (Philippe de Belgique, 2016). Secondly, most of the coded segments are related to the additional measures taken by the different governments. 20 out of the 35 coded segments mention additional measures such as special restrictions for public transports in Belgium or enhanced border control in France (Hollande, 2016; Michel, 2016). Moreover, these additional measures often include military participation such as the Operation Sentinelle in France, deploying armed soldiers on the territory, or in a similar fashion, the military reinforcement in Belgium (Hollande, 2016; Michel, 2016). The involvement of the military, even to defend the citizens, can add to the feeling of being under threat and relates to what Bakker and De Graaf (2014) consider alarmist rhetoric. Therefore, it has been coded as reinforcing negative coping mechanisms. The last subcategory includes sentences or words conveying feelings of fear, powerlessness or even rage as mentioned by the German Federal President Joachim Gauck (2016).

Frames encouraging negative coping mechanisms have been used in all six speeches. Overall, 35 segments have been coded as belonging to the negative coping mechanism frame. However, the segments coded are unequally distributed: French leaders referred to this frame four to seven times more than Germans. Indeed, fourteen segments have been coded in Hollande’s (2016) speech, nine in Vall’s (2016) but only two in Gauck’s (2016) and Merkel’s (2016) (see table 1).

Table 1: distribution of coded segments - closed coding

| Frames of coded segments | German Leaders | | Belgian Leaders | | French Leaders | | Total |
|----------------------------|----------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|-----------|
| | Angela Merkel | Joachim Gauck | Charles Michel | King Philippe of Belgium | Manuel Valls | Francois Hollande | |
| Negative Coping Mechanisms | 2 | 2 | 7 | 1 | 9 | 14 | 35 |
| Positive Coping Mechanisms | 10 | 15 | 6 | 5 | 10 | 3 | 49 |
| Self-efficacy | 3 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 11 |
| Total | 15 | 22 | 14 | 7 | 20 | 17 | 95 |

Belgium lies in between with only one segment coded in the speech of King Philippe of Belgium (2016) and seven in that of Charles Michel (2016). This means that German leaders have been more successful than Belgian and especially French leaders in not reinforcing negative coping mechanisms. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the first expectation – political leaders do not reinforce negative coping mechanisms – is fulfilled for the cases of Germany and Belgium but not for France due to the overwhelming references to the military and sense of threat.

Positive Coping Mechanisms

49 segments have been coded as belonging to the positive coping mechanism frame, which is 14 segments more compared to negative coping mechanisms. According to Bakker and De Graaf (2014), positive coping mechanisms bring people together, especially by expressing compassion and solidarity. This frame has been used in various ways. Firstly, leaders have clearly expressed their empathy, such as Angela Merkel (2016) sending her thoughts to the victims, their family, their friends and everyone affected, or King Philippe of Belgium (2016)

expressing his sorrow on his and Queen Mathilda's behalf. Secondly, acts of solidarity, especially towards the first responders, have been coded as reinforcing positive coping mechanisms. This has mostly been done by Angela Merkel (2016) and Charles Michel (2016). Thirdly, positive coping mechanisms have been encouraged through different governmental and judicial actions alluded to in the various speeches. Both Angela Merkel (2016) and Manuel Valls (2016) mentioned the cooperation between government agencies to tackle the issue of terrorism and its consequences. They also highlighted the judicial measures taken, with Angela Merkel (2016) in particular stating that the terrorist attack would be punished as much as is allowed by German law. Lastly, speeches of German and French leaders also emphasised the strength of the country, and the solidarity of its citizens: François Hollande (2016) claimed that France is stronger than the threat it is facing, and Joachim Gauck stated that Germany moved closer together as a community after the attack.

The coded segments are again distributed in an unequal fashion: six segments each for the Prime Minister and King of Belgium, ten and eighteen for the Chancellor and Federal President of Germany, and three and eleven for the President and Prime Minister of France (see table 1). The speeches differ in the frequency of sentences reinforcing positive coping mechanisms but also in which subcategories are used. In Belgium, the positive coping mechanisms are mostly reinforced by underlining empathy for the direct victims and the community affected. The French leaders mostly emphasise the strength of the country and actions taken by the government and the judiciary power to tackle aftermath of the attack. German leaders emphasise their empathy towards the victims and the solidarity within their community. This is mostly done in the speech of the German federal president Joachim Gauck, which could be influenced by the context in which he delivered this speech. Indeed, Gauck did not address German citizens directly after the attack but rather during a Christmas speech. Christmas being a holiday typically known for the joy of bringing people together, it is possible that this influenced Gauck to emphasise on community and solidarity more than other leaders. Overall, German leaders encouraged positive coping mechanisms more than French leaders and twice as much as Belgian leaders (see table 1). This means that German leaders have been more successful than Belgian and French leaders in emphasising positive coping mechanisms. However, in each speech sentences encouraging positive coping mechanisms can be found, therefore, the second expectation – political leaders foster positive coping mechanisms – is supported in all three cases.

Self-efficacy

Eleven segments have been coded as belonging to the self-efficacy frame, which is around three times less than negative coping mechanisms and almost five times less than positive coping mechanisms. The segments coded reflect the politicians' advice to the population on how to best react to the traumatic event that took place. Firstly, the most prominent message is to remain calm, which has been indicated by Manuel Valls (2016), Charles Michel (2016) as well as King Philippe of Belgium (2016). Secondly, to encourage self-efficacy, Angela Merkel (2016) asks citizens to refuse to be overwhelmed by fear and try to keep on living the life they chose. Thirdly, Joachim Gauck (2016) adds on to Merkel's (2016) speech by stating that people should not reject minorities nor blame politicians as a whole. This would be a way to preserve the solidarity of the country, enabling positive coping mechanisms.

Overall, mentions of measures fostering self-efficacy are quite absent from the different speeches. In addition, they are also mentioned in an unequal way (see table 1). Indeed, out of the eleven coded segments, eight were taken from the speeches of German politicians: three from Merkel's (2016) and five from Gauck's (2016). The three remaining segments were coded in the speeches of Charles Michel (2016), King Philippe of Belgium (2016) and Manuel Valls (2016). François Hollande (2016) did not mention measures to foster self-efficacy in his speech. Therefore, we can say that German leaders foster self-efficacy but Belgian and French politicians do not. Thus, the third expectation is only supported in the case of Germany. In the two remaining cases, leaders do not behave according to the fear management theory by Bakker and De Graaf (2014).

Summary and Discussion of Framing Analysis

Conclusions regarding the three expectations can be drawn after a general observation of the coded segments. Firstly, even though all leaders mention measures leading to negative coping mechanisms, it is done to a relatively small extent by German and Belgian leaders. On the other hand, French politicians overwhelmingly use military-related words and emphasise strong additional measures. Therefore, the first expectation – political leaders do not reinforce negative coping mechanisms – is fulfilled in the cases of Germany and Belgium but not France. Secondly, it is observed that words and sentences encouraging positive coping mechanism have been used in all speeches. Therefore, the second expectation – political leaders foster positive coping mechanisms – is fulfilled in all three cases. However, an additional observation is worth making. It is possible to see that political leaders use words fostering positive rather than negative coping mechanism, except in the case of France. French leaders, even if encouraging

positive coping mechanisms, foster negative ones to a greater extent. Thirdly, it is possible to observe that the self-efficacy frame hardly has been used by the political leaders, except for the German ones. Therefore, the third expectation can only be verified in the case of Germany.

When examining each case, it is possible to see that German leaders did not reinforce negative coping mechanisms but fostered positive ones, and fostered self-efficacy. Therefore, they acted according to what is expected by Bakker and De Graaf (2014). In addition, Belgian leaders acted in a similar fashion but did not foster self-efficacy. Thus, they acted according to Bakker and De Graaf (2014) only to a certain extent. On the other hand, French leaders fostered positive coping mechanisms but less than negative ones and did not provide self-efficacy. Thus, they did not act according to Bakker and de Graaf's (2014) best practices. Therefore, to the question: to what extent do political leaders frame their discourses as expected by Bakker and De Graaf (2014), it is possible to answer that German leaders frame their discourses as expected, Belgian leaders frame their discourses somewhat as expected and French leader do not. These differences are reflected in the Eurobarometer results of Spring 2017. In France, 42% of respondents considered terrorism to be the main issue faced by the European Union, against 38% of Belgian respondents (European Commission, 2017). On the other hand, in Germany terrorism was considered the second most important issue with only 34% of respondent votes (European Commission, 2017).

An Emerging Frame: Grief and Suffering

In order to better understand the dynamics that underly the conclusions reached above; a second analysis was conducted using open coding. This allows for the identification of frames other than those expected by Bakker and de Graaf (2014), thus offering a deeper understanding of the discourses employed by politicians in the face of a terrorist attack. Analysing the six speeches in such a manner made it possible to observe the recurrence of specific themes such as death, pain and struggling. Therefore, a new frame has been identified: the grief and suffering frame.

Table 2: distribution of coded segments - open coding

| Frame of coded segments | German Leaders | | Belgian Leaders | | French Leaders | | Total |
|-------------------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-------|
| | Angela Merkel | Joachim Gauck | Charles Michel | King Philippe of Belgium | Manuel Valls | Francois Hollande | |
| Grief & Suffering | 11 | 4 | 8 | 4 | 7 | 11 | 45 |

A total of 45 segments have been coded as being part of this frame (see table 2). This frame is used in multiple ways. First, it includes all mentions of death and grief, whether it is on a personal or national level. For instance, Angela Merkel (2016) mentions the lives being taken and the long-lasting consequences for the people injured and brings up grief for the entire nation in the same way that Manuel Valls (2016) calls for three days of national grief. Secondly, this frame also includes descriptions of the events or the feelings it triggered emphasising the atrocity of the attacks and the suffering it caused. This is especially present in the speech of François Hollande (2016), starting with “Horror... Horror has just descended on France once again”, then underlining the “terror”, the “monstrosity”, the extreme violence of the attack. Thirdly, it includes the description of the struggle that each country is facing after an attack, for instance the words “hardship”, “struggle” or “tragedy” are repeated multiple times in the speeches of Angela Merkel (2016), Charles Michel (2016) and François Hollande (2016).

These segments were coded as belonging to a new frame for various reasons. First, words or sentences alluded to hardship and suffering in a recurring fashion. A total of 45 segments have been coded as referring to said frame, distributed in a somewhat similar way across every speech (see table 2). Therefore, it is possible to say that the frame is very present and worth noticing. Secondly, one could argue that the segments coded could also trigger negative coping mechanisms and thus belong to this frame, however, it is possible to notice some differences. According to Bakker and De Graaf (2014), fostering negative coping mechanisms can be done by emphasising elements related to war or heightened security, measures forcing citizens to change their habits. However, the frame ‘grief and suffering’

focuses on the description of the event itself and the resulting feeling of the population in the immediate aftermath rather than the consequences and behavioural recommendation coming at a later stage. Therefore, this emerging frame is worth noticing and being considered a coding category of its own. This means that not only have political leaders framed their discourses according to Bakker and De Graaf (2014) to different extents, but they also include a new frame focusing on the struggle that facing a terror attack is, and the suffering it triggers. As this new frame is different than the ones identified by Bakker and De Graaf (2014), further research should be conducted in order to assess the impact it could have on fear levels.

A Broader Political Context

A second noteworthy element emerging from the analysis, is that some leaders tied their response speeches to a broader political context. This was the case of Angela Merkel, Joachim Gauck and François Hollande. Firstly, both German leaders mentioned refugees in their speeches. Angela Merkel focused on claiming how awful it would be for people helping refugees, or refugees seeking peaceful integration, if the perpetrator of the attack were a refugee as well. In doing so, she is the only leader referring to the identity of a potential suspect. On the other hand, Joachim Gauck emphasised the need to remain united and that it does not mean that refugee policies should not be discussed. These brief allusions to refugees can be understood in a broader context of the German struggle with immigration. In 2015 and 2016 Germany faced a wave of hundreds of thousands of immigrants which are battling to being granted asylum and integrate in German society (Smale, 2016). Moreover, several immigrants have been identified as suspects in robberies or sexual assaults such as in Cologne during the 2016 New Year's Eve (Smale, 2016). This led to tensions and social divide amongst the population, including political disagreement over asylum policies (Smale, 2016). Therefore, this context may have influenced German leaders in responding to the terrorist attack in Berlin and could potentially impact the public reaction. On the other hand, the speech of the French president François Hollande (2016) focuses much more on the military, whether it is related to deploying soldiers on national territory or launching more strikes in Syria and Iraq. This refers to the "Opération Chammal", the French participation in the international Operation Inherent Resolve fighting the Islamic State (Ministère de la Défense, 2020). This way, François Hollande frames his response to the attack in Nice within a broader context of a war against the Islamic State.

This second part of the analysis offers an additional perspective on the way political leaders frame their discourses after a terrorist attack. In addition to the frames described as best practices of fear management by Bakker and De Graaf (2014), a new frame emerged,

emphasising the atrocity and struggle that is a terrorist attack. Moreover, three out of the six speeches are connected to a broader political context. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that in addition to the fear management effort, there are other potential factors influencing the way political leaders frame their discourses after terrorist attacks.

Conclusion

The goal of this thesis was to assess the extent to which political leaders use Bakker and De Graaf's (2014) fear management theory. The analysis has shown that the German and Belgian leaders did not reinforce negative coping mechanisms. French leaders, on the other hand, did use words and phrasing facilitating these types of coping mechanisms. Secondly, all leaders fostered positive coping mechanisms. However, it is necessary to make a caveat, as French leaders encouraged positive coping mechanism less than negative ones. Thirdly, only German leaders provided self-efficacy to their audience. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that German leaders framed their discourses fully as expected by Bakker and De Graaf (2014). Belgian leaders did as well, but to a lesser extent: they did not provide self-efficacy. On the other hand, French leaders did not frame their discourses as expected by Bakker and De Graaf (2014): they emphasised negative coping mechanisms and did not provide self-efficacy.

It has been possible to draw conclusions from the analysis and answer the research question. Nevertheless, this thesis faced some limitations which have been dealt with in the following ways. First, one must keep in mind that the analysis was based on one speech for each political leader, potentially reducing the result's generalisability. However, this has been a deliberate choice for various reasons. The emergency caused by a terrorist attack calls for responses in a very short time frame. For instance, the Report of the 7th July Review Committee (as cited in Bakker & De Graaf, 2014) in the United Kingdom underlines the importance of communication within the first half-hour following an attack. In addition, it is possible that following speeches did not focus on responding to the attack to the same extent but instead paid homage to the victims for example. Therefore, only the first speech of each political leader has been chosen. The second limitation is a language barrier. The analysis was not conducted directly on German content due to the author's inability to understand German. This was overcome in two ways. Joachim Gauck's speech can be found in French and in English as well and in German on the official website of the Federal President. This allows for a trustworthy translation, approved by the presidential services. On the other hand, the speech by Chancellor Merkel was found only in video format. Thus, a translated video from the French news channel France 24 was used. The speech was directly translated by the news channel during a live

broadcast rather than by the Chancellor's translator. Thus, the words chosen might not have been the most accurate and have not been verified by the Chancellor's services as conveying the intended message. However, France 24 is a trusted public network, well-known for broadcasting international news in France and abroad. Therefore, the translation can be considered to be of a high quality. A third limitation has been the context dependency of discourses, as seen in the case of Gauck's speech. This was addressed in the analysis. The last limitation is intercoder reliability. Due to a lack of resources, the coding was conducted by only one person which may hamper the objectivity of the research. In order to account for this issue multiple rounds of coding were conducted. The analysis included two rounds of closed coding and two rounds of open coding. Each round was separated by two days in order to ensure that the coding was not mechanically repeated. In the case where a segment was not coded the same way in both rounds, a third round was conducted.

This research identified a gap between what was considered 'best practices' by Bakker and De Graaf (2014) and which they expected political leaders to behave accordingly, and how leaders actually frame their discourses. In addition, different strategies when handling similar crises have been identified. Deriving from the identified gaps and findings of this thesis, the literature on crisis communication and fear management requires further research. First, the factors determining the use of different frames should be investigated to allow for a deeper understanding of crisis communication and fear management strategies. Secondly, a comparison between the previously chosen cases and countries where fear levels are lower would shed a light on the actual impact each frame could have. In addition, France and Germany are using different frames but the fear levels are similar in both countries. Identifying the factors behind this gap would provide insights on the efficiency of fear management strategies. Adding to the literature on crisis communication and fear management has positive real-world implications as it can be used by practitioners such as political leaders to handle a crisis responsibly.

This thesis provided an assessment of fear management of different countries based on Bakker and De Graaf's (2014) criteria. It has been identified that Belgian and especially French political leaders are not using effective fear management strategies. In the Eurobarometer Spring issue of 2017, terrorism was considered the most important issue by 42% of French respondents and 38% of Belgian respondents (European Commission, 2017). In Germany, where leaders follow Bakker and De Graaf's (2014) strategies, terrorism was considered the second most important issue (European Commission, 2017). Thus, it is possible to establish a

correlation between the two variables but further research will be necessary to establish a causal link. Nevertheless, to better reduce fear, this thesis advises to frame political discourses according to Bakker and De Graaf (2014) in the future. Additionally, to implement the most efficient measures against terrorism, practitioners should keep relying on research conducted by scholars.

To conclude, this thesis provided an analysis of political discourses after terrorist attacks embedded in theories of crisis communication and fear management, with scientific and social implications. In addition, recommendations for further research were made, in order to deepen the understanding of the relation between political discourses and fear of terrorism.

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Appendices

Appendix A: List of Coded Documents

Gauck, J. (2016). *Christmas message by Federal President Joachim Gauck*.

Hollande, F. (2016). *Hollande: France will always be stronger than fanatics*.

Merkel, A. (2016). Discours de la Chancelière Allemande Angela Merkel. In *France 24*.
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Michel, C. (2016). Discours du Premier Ministre Belge Charles Michel. In *France 24*.
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Philippe de Belgique. (2016). Discours du Roi Philippe de Belgique. In *France 24*.
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Valls, M. (2016, July 15). *Discours de Manuel VALLS, Premier Ministre*. Gouvernement.
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The speeches have been selected according to two criteria. First, it has to be given by a head of state or a head of government. Secondly, it has to be the first speech after the terrorist attack.

Appendix B: Codebook & rules of open coding

Table 3: codebook

| | Inclusion Criteria | Example |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Negative Coping Mechanism | Any statement emphasising the danger of the situation by using alarmist rhetoric, war-related elements and enhanced security. | “menace”, additional security measures, military reinforcement, “the whole of France is under threat”, “state of emergence” |
| Positive coping Mechanism | Any statement focusing on assistance to the victims, words translating feelings of empathy and solidarity as well as meaningful events or visible acts of justice. | Thanking first responders, we share your pain, “I express our solidarity with the victims”, “we will always be stronger” |
| Self-efficacy | Any statement including advisory measures to the population on how to best react to the terror attack. | Refuse to be paralysed by fear, “one does not need to reject” |

Open coding

The analysis started with two rounds of closed coding, in order to ensure the accuracy of the coding. During these first two rounds, recurring themes have been observed, mainly death, pain, horror and struggle. Thus, the first step was to identify the segments reflecting these themes. Then, a second round was done, paying closer attention to such themes: each potential additional segment was compared to the previous one in order to ensure consistency. The final step was to name the frame grief and suffering.