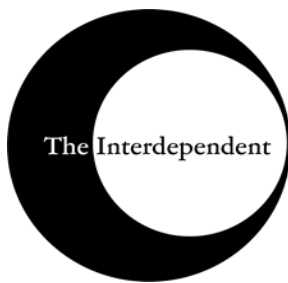


Conducting the Narrative: An AI-Assisted Analysis of Government and Media Framing in the Coverage of the 7/7 London Bombings



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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between UK government communications and national media framing in the aftermath of the July 7, 2005 (“7/7”) London bombings. It poses two research questions: (1) what were the dominant frames employed by the British government and media in their coverage of 7/7; and (2) to what extent did the frames in media publications reflect changes in the government’s framing? Drawing on both manual and AI-assisted content analysis, the project reviews a sample of four Prime Ministerial addresses and 1,393 news articles from four major UK outlets over a four-week period. The research identifies thirteen recurring frames—ten common to both government and media, and three unique to media coverage—and assesses their salience over time. The findings reveal a strong alignment between government and media narratives, particularly as the framing evolved from initial emotional appeals (e.g., resolve, atrocity, victims) to strategic and policy-driven narratives (e.g., security, homegrown extremism, immigration). Media framing closely tracked the government’s rhetorical shifts, reinforcing rather than contesting the official narrative arc. This convergence underscores the government’s discursive power in shaping public understanding and highlights the media’s role as an amplifier of state messaging during crises.

Keywords

Media; Framing; Securitization; Terrorism; 7/7 Bombings; United Kingdom; Artificial Intelligence

Introduction

If a bomb goes off and no one hears it, did it really go off?

On July 7, 2005, four suicide bombers detonated improvised explosive devices along London's public transit system during the morning rush hour. Fifty-two people were killed and more than 700 were injured in the UK's deadliest terrorist incident since 1988 (Intelligence Committee 2006, 2). The bombings, referred to as "7/7," held the national spotlight for months. The attack not only left an indelible impact on those that it directly affected, but also profoundly influenced how terrorism has been perceived, discussed, and responded to in the UK over the past two decades. This article explores the interplay between government communications and media reporting in the immediate aftermath of the bombings. Two research questions guide the project:

1. What were the dominant frames employed by the British government and media in their coverage of 7/7?
2. To what extent did the frames in media publications reflect changes in the government's framing?

To address these questions, this project analyzes four major speeches by Prime Minister Tony Blair and associated press briefings, alongside 1,393 media articles published between July 7 and August 5, 2005, in *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Independent*, and *The Daily Mail*. Coverage is divided into four chronological "phases," each anchored to a key executive address. This design allows for a phased comparison of how frames appeared, shifted, and recurred across both domains. The methodology combines a manual analysis of government discourse with an AI-assisted analysis of the media sample. Specifically, this study uses OpenFraming AI, an open-source natural language processing platform that incorporates topic modeling and

supervised classification to identify and categorize recurring frames. This dual approach enables both interpretive depth and large-scale pattern recognition.

The findings suggest a notable degree of alignment. Media outlets largely adopted the government's evolving narrative arc: from emotional response and moral clarity, to strategic concern, to policy readiness. While an occasional counterframe appeared—particularly around Britain's involvement in Iraq—they were relatively rare. The dominant press narratives thus reinforced, rather than contested, the framing set by government communications. This alignment has implications for how we understand narrative control in times of crisis. It suggests that in the immediate aftermath of terrorism, the government's framing power is not only political, but discursive. Through strategic emphasis and moral framing, it defines not only its own message, but the boundaries of what is said publicly. This article explores how that discursive space was constructed.

Theoretical and Empirical Underpinnings

“We need to interpret interpretations more than to interpret things.”
Michel de Montaigne, *De l'Expérience*

Framing: Key Concepts and Approaches

Portrayals of events are inherently selective. Even when facts are clear, they are arranged to convey specific interpretations; where facts are contested, the ability to shape meaning increases significantly. Modern mass media, through its scale and reach, has unprecedented influence on defining how the public understands events. Framing theory explains how actors—especially media and governments—emphasize certain aspects of reality while downplaying others to construct meaning. One of the most cited definitions comes from Robert

Entman: “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman 1993, 52). Saliency refers to the emphasis placed on specific elements. This includes editorial choices such as what to include, exclude, repeat, or associate with cultural symbols or broader narratives. Framing thus becomes a way to influence how audiences interpret and evaluate information.

These practices are part of what McCombs and Shaw describe as the media’s “agenda-setting” function (1972). Selective saliency of certain information points towards an issue (or set of issues) that is *defined, interpreted, evaluated, and/or prescribed* for (Entman 1993, 52), reinforcing or challenging an audience’s perception. As such, while the media may not determine exactly what people think, it is highly effective in shaping what people think about (Cohen 1963). Frames, as Gamson and Modigliani note, are the basis for this function; they act as the “central organizing ideas” that connect and give meaning to unfolding events (Gamson & Modigliani 1987). This occurs through recurring language, sources, symbols, and story structures.

In newswriting, framing emerges from routine processes—story selection, source preference, and editing decisions. The final product often includes a condensed narrative in the form of a headline, lede, and theme-driven structure. The intention behind frames is not always deliberate; they can result from the interplay of competing interpretations. In the resulting text, frames manifest “by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts and judgements” (Entman 1993, 52). Governmental framing shares similar mechanics but is more ideologically and strategically driven. Political actors often frame events to gain support for

policy agendas. This can involve explicit arguments or subtle cues—such as citing military or police sources to frame an event as a security matter. While Entman’s emphasis on salience still applies, government frames tend to be clearer in intent and outcome: they are tools to guide public opinion and policy debate.

Terrorism, the Media, and 7/7

Terrorism is not a neutral or universally agreed-upon term. Rather, it is a socially constructed label shaped by political, media, and institutional forces. Scholars have long pointed out the lack of an objective definition, emphasizing that “terrorism” functions more as a value-laden designation than a precise analytical category (Laqueur 1977; Campbell 2017). In this sense, terrorism itself is a form of framing, used by powerful actors to define moral and political boundaries.

The media plays a central role in this framing process. It amplifies the voices of both terrorists and authorities, shaping how threats are perceived and discussed. Some argue that this creates a “symbiotic relationship”: terrorists seek publicity to advance their cause, while the media benefits from the dramatic, emotionally charged content that terrorism provides (Damm 1982). As Margaret Thatcher famously declared, the media provide “the oxygen of publicity” for terrorists (Apple 1985). This critique suggests that media coverage can unintentionally aid extremist agendas by repeating their messages. However, others note that in democratic societies, the state often holds greater power to shape narratives, particularly in crisis situations. Governments control key information, set the tone for official discourse, and have privileged access to media channels. In the wake of an attack, journalists face a dilemma: to either challenge or echo the framing offered by government officials. This decision has profound implications for public perception and policy support.

Framing is especially powerful in the context of terrorism because such events provoke intense emotional responses—fear, anger, and anxiety—which heighten the public’s receptiveness to dominant narratives (Nosal 2018). Repeated frames can influence how the public identifies threats, perceives specific groups, and evaluates proposed policy solutions. As Brinson and Stohl (2009) argue, a narrow set of dominant frames can limit public deliberation, making certain interpretations or responses appear self-evident or necessary.

In the UK, the government’s counterterrorism strategy—known as CONTEST—illustrates the tangible consequences of framing in the wake of crisis. Though implemented secretly in 2003, CONTEST was formally introduced on the one-year anniversary of the 7/7 bombings. The strategy includes four key pillars: Prevent, Pursue, Protect, and Prepare, encompassing a range of initiatives, from deploying domestic surveillance systems and monitoring for radicalization to enhancing personal data collection and fortifying border security (Home Department 2006; Gearson and Rosemont 2015, 1045). As of 2024, it remains as the backbone of the UK’s anti-terror framework. The timing of CONTEST’s public unveiling—just as national anxiety remained high—suggests a strategic effort to link policy to the emotional aftermath of the bombings. While this study does not claim that the media intentionally supported this strategy, it investigates whether media narratives reflected and potentially amplified the themes embedded in government communications.

Operationalizing & Identifying Frames

Methodology

This study compares framing strategies in UK government communications and national media coverage in the month following the 7/7 attacks. The approach is twofold: (1) identify and

define frames in government discourse; and (2) assess whether, and to what extent, these frames appeared in the media.

To analyze official framing, this study focuses on four key executive communications: Prime Minister Tony Blair’s major public addresses between July 7 and July 26, 2005. These speeches were chosen due to their high visibility and influence during a national crisis. Each speech was paired with press briefings from the Prime Minister’s Official Spokesperson—covering the day before and after the address—to capture a broader framing environment. These combined documents formed four chronological “government samples.”

Media analysis focused on four widely circulated UK publications that reflect a political and stylistic spectrum: *The Times of London*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, and *The Daily Mail* (including their Sunday editions). These sources were selected due to their reach and political diversity at the time. Articles referencing 7/7 from July 7 to August 5, 2005, were compiled, resulting in a dataset of 1,393 articles. To align with the government discourse timeline, articles were grouped into four “phases” corresponding to the periods between executive addresses. This temporal segmentation allowed for comparative analysis between evolving government discourse and concurrent media framing. For example, all media coverage from July 7 to July 11 constituted Phase 1, with subsequent phases aligned to later speeches. This design enabled an assessment of how framing trends shifted in tandem with government messaging.

Research Design

This study uses a mixed-methods content analysis to identify frames in both government and media discourse. The process involved two parallel approaches: manual analysis of government communications and AI-assisted analysis of media coverage. Both analyses began

with topic modeling using Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA)¹ to inductively identify thematic clusters, which were later refined into concrete framing packages following Entman’s definition of framing. To support this process, the study employed OpenFraming AI,² an open-source natural language processing tool designed specifically for computational framing analysis. OpenFraming facilitated the identification, labeling, and classification of frames across both datasets, combining machine learning precision with human interpretation.

Part 1: Manual Analysis of Government Samples

Due to the relatively small volume of government texts, LDA was used as a starting point to identify recurring themes, but the frames were ultimately developed through close manual reading. Four government datasets—each consisting of a speech and associated press briefings—were analyzed for keyword presence and thematic consistency. Recurring clusters of language were grouped into framing packages based on how they defined, interpreted, evaluated, and prescribed the events of 7/7.

This yielded ten distinct frames in government communications. Each frame was labeled with typical lexical markers (e.g., “resolve,” “resilience,” “defiance”) and tracked across all four phases. Salience was assessed qualitatively, based on the presence and emphasis of each frame within each sample.

Part 2: AI-Assisted Analysis of Media Sample

The media sample was significantly larger, requiring computational assistance. LDA was first used to extract 20 thematic topics from the full set of 1,393 media articles. To improve

¹ LDA is an unsupervised machine learning method that identifies patterns in a sample of text without pre-labeled categories or themes. It is especially useful in determining frames inductively; the program treats each document within the sample as a series of word patterns, and when a collection of words occurs together frequently across documents, these words become “keywords” that help shape a “topic,” itself the basis for a frame.

²OpenFraming AI is a public, free-to-use tool that can be accessed at: <http://www.openframing.org/home.html>. This paper employed the tool as laid out by Gou et al. (2022) and modified it to fit this particular dataset loosely following the methodologies of Touri and Koteyko (2014) and Nosal (2018).

precision, these topics were then narrowed using a refined dataset consisting only of sentences surrounding relevant keywords (expanded via synonym and lemmatization lists). These “bundled” text segments formed the basis of the AI classification. From this dataset, 300 high-confidence examples were manually reviewed and labeled as “ground truth” for supervised learning. These labeled samples were used to train a BERT model³—a natural language processing tool capable of identifying contextual meaning. BERT was then applied to the entire dataset to assign each text bundle to one of the finalized frame categories.

Thirteen total frames were identified in the media, ten of which mirrored those found in government discourse. Three additional frames—the *Iraq War*, *Economic*, and *Wider Network* frames—emerged uniquely from media coverage.

Results of Frame Identification

This section addresses the first research question: What were the dominant frames employed by the British government and media in their coverage of 7/7?

Frames Identified in the Government Samples

Manual analysis of Prime Minister Blair’s four addresses and related press briefings identified between four and seven framing packages per address. These packages are each paired with a concrete example from their requisite sample.

Phase 1. “Statement following Cabinet Office Briefing Room Meeting,” July 7, 2005

1) RESOLVE FRAME	
Definition	The public resists terrorism
Cause	Strength and courage of the British people/way of life
Consequence	Terrorism fails to intimidate its intended audience

³ For a more advanced technical explanation of BERT’s processes, see Devlin et al. (2018).

Solution/Action	Do not allow terrorism to frighten, divide, or affect behavior; return to normalcy as quickly as possible
Moral evaluation	Terrorist attacks are futile
Lexical choices	resolve, defiance, stoicism, resilience, hold firm, way of life
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“When they try to divide our people or weaken our resolve, we will not be divided and our resolve will hold firm”</i> (Blair 2005a). 	

2) ATROCITY FRAME

Definition	Terrorist attacks are tragic atrocities
Cause	Terrorist violence aims to indiscriminately maximize casualties
Consequence	Startling severity of violence and destruction
Solution/Action	Harsh criticism; demonstration of shock and condemnation
Moral evaluation	Terrorists are merciless and evil
Lexical choices	atrocities, slaughter, carnage, horror, tragedy, terrible
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“This has been a most terrible and tragic atrocity that has cost many innocent lives”</i> (Blair 2005a). 	

3) VICTIMS FRAME

Definition	Terrorism victimizes not only its direct casualties, but wide swaths of society
Cause	Terrorist attacks target many people
Consequence	Many people are confronted with tragedy in the aftermath of an attack
Solution/Action	Offer condolences and solidarity; remember and honor victims
Moral evaluation	Victims of terrorism are innocent, and terrorists are evil
Lexical choices	condolences, casualties, victims, sympathy, sorrow, grieving
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“I would like again to express my profound condolences to the families of the victims, and to those who are casualties of this terrorist act”</i> (Blair 2005a). 	

4) RELIGIOUS FRAME

Definition	Extremist terrorism does not represent Islam as a whole
Cause	Terrorists do not practice actual Islam
Consequence	The Muslim community is not to blame for the actions of extremists; the Muslim community are victims of attacks as well
Solution/Action	Backlash should target Muslims; terrorism should not be blamed on Islam
Moral evaluation	Terrorists are evil and inherently not religious
Lexical choices	evil, decent, law-abiding

- *“We know that these people act in the name of Islam, but we also know that the vast and overwhelming majority of Muslims, here and abroad, are decent and law-abiding people”* (Blair 2005a).

Phase 2. “Statement to Parliament on the London bombings,” July 11, 2005

1) INTERNATIONAL FRAME	
Definition	7/7 is one episode of the worldwide battle with Islamic extremism
Cause	Islamic extremism occurs in many countries
Consequence	Islamic extremism presents a threat to worldwide stability
Solution/Action	International solidarity and cooperation are necessary to face the threat
Moral evaluation	Terrorism is evil whenever and wherever it occurs
Lexical choices	September 11, international support, solidarity, G8, UN, EU, world-wide
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“It seems probable that the attack was carried out by Islamist extremist terrorists, of the kind who over recent years have been responsible for so many innocent deaths in Madrid, Bali, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Kenya, Tanzania, Pakistan, Yemen, Turkey, Egypt and Morocco, of course in New York on September 11th, but in many other countries too”</i> (Blair 2005b). 	
2) IMMINENCE FRAME	
Definition	Terrorism is easy to commit and hard to prevent
Cause	Terrorist attacks cannot be predicted
Consequence	Future attacks will take place
Solution/Action	Preparation by government, vigilance by the public
Moral evaluation	Everyone has a duty to help prevent the success of terrorist events
Lexical choices	threat, further attacks, immediately, threat-level, new
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“By their very nature, people callous enough to kill completely innocent civilians in this way, are hard to stop.”</i> (Blair 2005b). 	
3) SECURITY FRAME	
Definition	The government faces the difficult task of preventing terrorism
Cause	Terrorism is a major threat to the nation
Consequence	Current law and practices may not be sufficient to prevent future attacks
Solution/Action	The government may require additional powers to successfully combat terror
Moral evaluation	Terrorism is so significant a threat that it justifies expansion of government power
Lexical choices	additional powers, prevent, combat, counterterrorism, anti-terrorist, planners, security

- “It will give us an opportunity, in close consultation with the police and the agencies, to see whether there are additional powers which they might need to prevent further attacks.” (Blair 2005b).

The following frames reappeared in Blair’s second address: the *atrocities*, *victims*, *resolve*, and *religious* frames.

Phase 3. “Address at the Labour Party’s National Policy Forum in London,” July 16, 2005

1) HOMEGROWN FRAME

Definition	Terrorism is caused by the influence of Islamic extremism on people in Britain
Cause	Islamic extremism is pervasive and exists across communities; propaganda and misunderstanding; incitement by extremists; domestic recruitment
Consequence	Extremists can radicalize recruits to carry out attacks
Solution/Action	Government action to combat extremism and curb radicalization; partnership with Muslim communities to prevent radicalization
Moral evaluation	Islamic extremism is evil and dangerous
Lexical choices	extremism, exploit, radicalize, preach, Sharia law, Muslim community

- “The extremist propaganda is cleverly aimed at their target audience. It plays on our tolerance and good nature; it exploits the tendency to guilt of the developed world; as if it is our behaviour that should change; that if we only tried to work out and act on their grievances, we could lift this evil; that if we changed our behaviour, they would change theirs” (Blair 2005c).

2) IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE FRAME

Definition	Terrorism is a weapon in an ideological struggle
Cause	Terrorist values are antithetical to values of democracy and tolerance
Consequence	Committing terrorism challenges positive social and cultural values
Solution/Action	Championing liberal democratic values; promotion of debate and dialogue
Moral evaluation	Terrorism is a product of an evil ideology
Lexical choices	ideology, values, freedom, tolerance, respect, struggle, debate, inter-faith

- “[I]t is a battle of ideas, hearts and minds, both within Islam and outside it. This is the battle that must be won, a battle not just about the terrorist methods but their views. Not just their barbaric acts, but their barbaric ideas” (Blair 2005c).

The following frames reappeared in Blair’s third address: the *international*, *religious*, *imminence*, *security*, and *atrocities* frames.

Phase 4. “PM’s Press Conference,” July 26, 2005

1) IMMIGRATION FRAME	
Definition	Terrorists enter from foreign nations
Cause	It is too easy to enter the UK; immigrant communities are not integrated into British culture
Consequence	Immigrants are radicalized (in the UK or abroad) and carry out terrorist attacks
Solution/Action	Tighter controls over who enters the country; assimilation and integration efforts
Moral evaluation	Uncontrolled immigration is a risk
Lexical choices	immigration, borders, passports, embarkation, abroad

- “*A new offence of receiving or giving training in the use of hazardous substances and other methods and techniques for terrorist purposes both here and abroad*” (Blair 2005d).

The following frames reappeared in Blair’s third address: the *security*, *homegrown*, and *resolve* frames.

Frames Identified in the Media Sample

Using OpenFraming AI, thirteen frames were identified across 1,393 media articles. Ten of these matched the frames found in government discourse: *resolve*, *atrocities*, *victims*, *religious*, *international*, *imminence*, *security*, *homegrown*, *ideological struggle*, and *immigration*. Three additional frames emerged exclusively from the media:

1) WIDER NETWORK FRAME	
Definition	The terrorist threat is connected to a worldwide network of extremists
Cause	Unknown logistical/strategic managers are behind the attacks
Consequence	Plot ringleaders will instigate further attacks
Solution/Action	Root out extremist networks in the UK and worldwide; bring ringleaders to justice
Moral evaluation	Unknown masterminds are criminals that must be caught
Lexical choices	mastermind, plot, cells, ringleader, orders, organizers, plotters, coordinator

- “*But what do police really know about the men and women sustaining the plots? Within each cell there is likely to have been one ringleader*” (Whitaker et al. 2005).

2) ECONOMIC FRAME	
Definition	Terrorism is a threat to the British economy
Cause	Attacks stifle tourism in London and travel to the UK
Consequence	The effects of attacks stretch across the entire nation's economy
Solution/Action	Fix perception of London/the UK as dangerous; efforts to boost tourism; maintain faith in financial market
Moral evaluation	Terrorism threatens economic stability
Lexical choices	Financial, economic, tourism, business, market

- *“Already there are indications of the economic impact on London. Tourism chiefs say that they expect to lose at least £150million this year in lost income as a direct result of the events of the past two weeks. And I fear it could get far worse” (Toolis 2005).*

3) IRAQ WAR FRAME	
Definition	7/7 is a product of the UK's involvement in the invasion and occupation of Iraq
Cause	The presence of British forces in Iraq
Consequence	Extremists target the UK as revenge for the government's participation
Solution/Action	End the presence of British forces in Iraq
Moral evaluation	The UK's involvement in Iraq is not worth the cost
Lexical choices	Iraq war, American-led coalition, British troops, war crimes, invasion of Iraq, inevitable

- *“Terror has causes and it is right that they should be identified. The Iraq war has given Al-Qaeda a major boost, enabling it to link its extremist agenda with grievances that are widely felt in Islamic countries. At the same time, it has resulted in a massive diversion of resources from the real work of counterterrorism and significantly boosted terrorist recruitment” (Gray 2005).*

Analysis & Discussion

Analysis: Frames in Government Communications

Across the four phases following the 7/7 bombings, Prime Minister Blair's public communications reveal a deliberate narrative shift—from emotional and ethical framing in the immediate aftermath, toward policy-oriented framing aligned with the government's

counterterrorism agenda. This evolution is significant not only for what it emphasizes, but for how it progressively narrowed the public discourse toward securitization.

Table 1. *Frames in UK Government Communications*

Address / Frame	Address 1	Address 2	Address 3	Address 4
Resolve	✓	✓		✓
Atrocity	✓	✓	✓	
Victims	✓	✓		
Religious	✓	✓	✓	
International		✓	✓	
Imminence		✓	✓	
Security		✓	✓	✓
Homegrown			✓	✓
Ideological Struggle			✓	
Immigration				✓
Wider Network*				
Economic*				
Iraq War*				

*These frames did not appear in government communications

Blair’s first address emphasized four dominant frames: *resolve*, *atrocity*, *victims*, and *religious*. These frames worked together to stabilize public sentiment, express moral clarity, and offer reassurance. The *resolve* frame centered on national unity and defiance in the face of violence. *Atrocity* and *victims* frames called attention to the scale and brutality of the attack, while the *religious* frame carefully distinguished extremist perpetrators from the broader Muslim population. More importantly, these early frames avoided speculation and policy. Their purpose was emotional grounding: to shape how the public should feel about the event, rather than what should be done in response.

In his second address, Blair retained the initial emotional frames but introduced a new set: *international*, *imminence*, and *security*. These marked a transition toward policy groundwork. The *international* frame positioned 7/7 within a global network of Islamist terrorism, invoking Madrid, Bali, and 9/11. The *imminence* frame emphasized the unpredictability of future attacks, while *security* suggested that the government might need

additional powers to respond effectively. Although concrete policies were not yet proposed, these frames shifted the discourse toward contingency planning, laying the rhetorical foundation for future action. This shift corresponded with both public anxiety and the evolving investigation, which had not yet identified the attackers but suspected further threats.

The third address marked a decisive move into policy-framing. Following the identification of the attackers as British citizens, Blair introduced the *homegrown* and *ideological struggle* frames. The former reframed the threat as internal—radicalization within UK communities—while the latter cast the conflict as a broader battle over liberal democratic values. These frames served dual purposes. On one hand, they acknowledged the domestic roots of the attack, shifting focus away from external threats alone. On the other, they helped justify more intrusive counter-radicalization efforts and community monitoring. The pairing of moral and ideological language with policy implications deepened the process of securitization.

By the time of Blair's final major communication, emotional frames had receded entirely. The focus was now squarely on enforcement, monitoring, and legal reform. The *immigration* frame emerged, linking terrorism to foreign training and weak border controls. Alongside reiterated *security* and *homegrown* narratives, this completed the transition from reassurance to institutional response. The *immigration* frame served as a bridge between domestic and international concerns, enabling the government to advocate for both internal vigilance and external control. Press briefings following the address detailed operational changes at points of entry and legislation targeting overseas training—clear indicators of policy activation.

Viewed together, these phases map closely onto the logic of securitization, as defined by Vultee: the process of convincing an audience that an issue is existential enough to warrant extraordinary policy measures (Vultee 2010, 78). The *imminence* and *security* frames provided

the rationale for urgency, while *homegrown* and *immigration* supplied the justification for broad surveillance and enforcement powers. The way in which these frames align so neatly with the four pillars of the CONTEST strategy—Prevent, Pursue, Protect, Prepare—is no coincidence. While CONTEST had existed behind closed doors since 2003, its public rollout came only after the narrative groundwork had been laid. Blair’s rhetoric in July 2005 played a pivotal role in shaping a climate receptive to its official unveiling a year later.

Analysis: Frames in Only Media Publications

Among the thirteen frames identified in the media sample, three—*Wider Network*, *Economic*, and *Iraq War*—did not appear in government communications. While these frames had relatively low salience overall, their presence underscores the media’s capacity to introduce perspectives that diverge from official narratives.

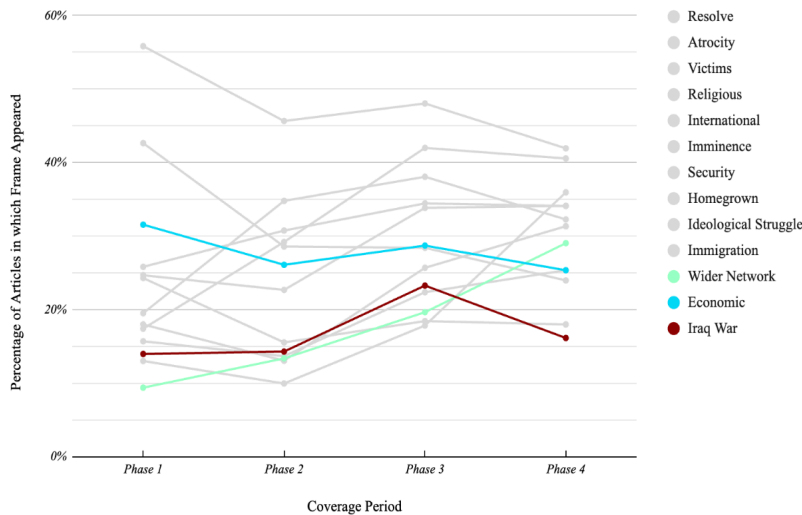


Figure 1. UK Media Frame Salience, by Phase—Wider Network, Economic, & Iraq War Frames

The *wider network* frame emphasized the possibility of a larger terrorist infrastructure behind the 7/7 bombings. It invoked terms like *ringleader*, *cell*, and *mastermind*, speculating that additional actors were involved or planning follow-up attacks. This frame surged in media

discourse during Phase 4, after the failed July 21 bombings and subsequent arrests. While government sources may have avoided this narrative for operational security reasons, the media was more willing to explore these angles—particularly as public concern shifted from isolated perpetrators to systemic threats.

The *economic* frame appeared primarily in financial reporting, focusing on the potential impact of the attacks on tourism, business, and market confidence. While salient early on—particularly in Phase 1—it declined over time as the economic effects proved limited. Its absence from government discourse is unsurprising: promoting market stability while simultaneously invoking the threat of further attacks would have created a rhetorical contradiction. Moreover, messages about resilience and national unity (*resolve*) likely served the same symbolic function without acknowledging economic vulnerability directly.

The *Iraq War* frame stood apart as the most politically sensitive. It linked the bombings to Britain's involvement in Iraq, suggesting that foreign policy decisions contributed to the radicalization or motivation behind the attacks. This frame was voiced most often in opinion and editorial content, and while its overall salience remained modest, it was consistent across all four phases. Its exclusion from government communications was clearly deliberate. With public support for the Iraq War already in decline, any suggestion that the attacks were a consequence of British foreign policy would have undermined the government's broader security narrative. In fact, when directly questioned, Blair rejected this logic, characterizing it as a dangerous concession to terrorist reasoning (Blair 2005e). Despite this, the *Iraq War* frame's persistence in the press—however limited—highlights the media's potential to challenge dominant framings. It represents a rare moment of discursive tension during a period when government narratives largely structured media coverage.

Though low in salience, these three frames demonstrate that not all media coverage followed the government's lead. The *wider network* and *economic* frames arose from standard journalistic beats—security and finance—responding to unfolding events. The *Iraq War* frame, by contrast, introduced a pointed political critique that, while marginal, resisted the overwhelmingly securitized tone of official messaging.

Discussion: Frames Across the Government & Media

This section addresses the second research question: To what extent did the frames in media publications reflect developments in the government's framing? While causality cannot be definitively proven, the close correlation between government communication and media framing—especially in the temporal alignment of key themes—suggests a strong directional influence. This relationship is clearest when examining how media salience changed in parallel with shifts in government discourse.

Immediate Response Frames

The *resolve*, *atrocities*, and *victims* frames dominated both government and media coverage in the immediate aftermath of the attacks (Phase 1). These frames appeared in the majority of articles and served to establish a shared emotional and moral baseline. Over time, however, their presence in media coverage declined—just as they did in official communications. By Phase 3, these frames had largely disappeared from Blair's speeches and dropped significantly in media salience.

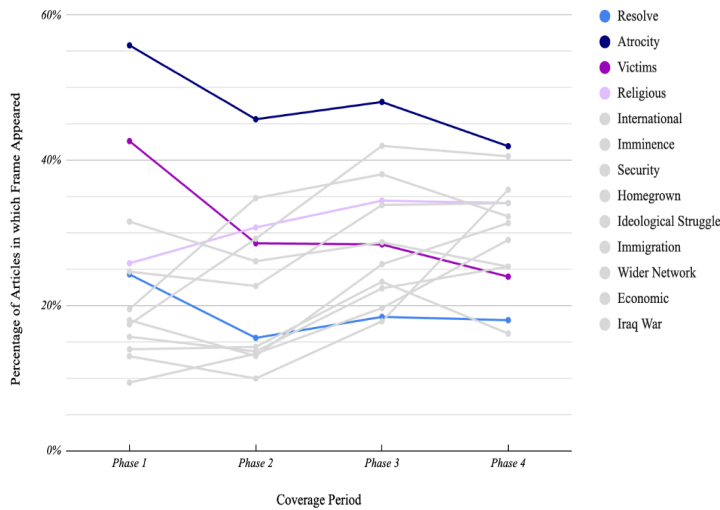


Figure 2. UK Media Frame Salience, by Phase—Resolve, Atrocity, Victims, & Religious Frames

The *religious* frame followed a different trajectory. Although less dominant than the others, it maintained a steady presence throughout all four phases. Its durability can be attributed to its political utility: distinguishing between extremist actors and the wider Muslim community helped the government and media alike avoid charges of Islamophobia. It also served as a rhetorical shield, allowing for discourse about “Islamist extremism” while disavowing broader religious prejudice. This pattern illustrates how emotional framing functioned as an early stabilizing mechanism. Once public sentiment had been shaped, these frames gave way to more policy-focused narratives.

Strategic Frames: International, Imminence, and Security

These three frames marked the first significant shift from emotional to operational discourse. Each was introduced in Blair’s second address and quickly became prominent in media coverage, though to varying degrees and timelines.

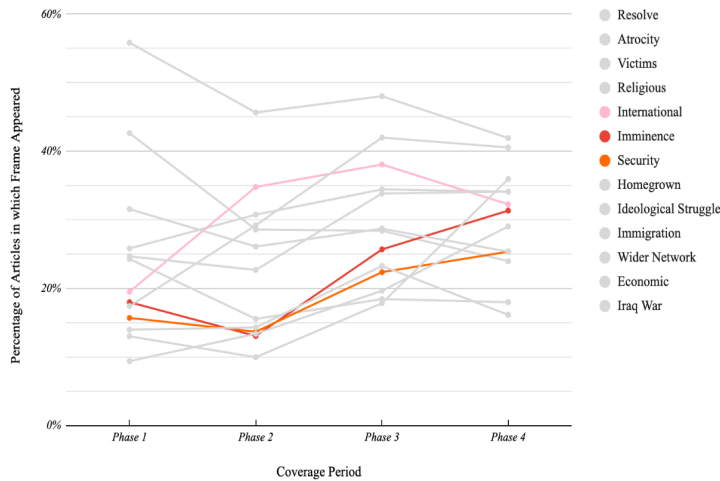


Figure 3. UK Media Frame Salience, by Phase—International, Imminence, & Security Frames

The *international* frame, which positioned 7/7 within a global continuum of Islamist terrorist attacks, experienced the most immediate spike in media salience following its appearance in government discourse. This suggests a direct transmission of thematic framing, as journalists contextualized the event using the same international reference points invoked by Blair—Madrid, Bali, 9/11.

The *imminence* and *security* frames also gained prominence but followed slightly different trajectories. The *imminence* frame, warning of future attacks, initially declined after Blair’s speech—likely due to shifting information about the attackers’ deaths. However, it resurged in Phase 3 following the attempted July 21 bombings, indicating a blend of official discourse and real-time events influencing the press.

The *security* frame grew more steadily. Initially under-emphasized, its salience rose as government officials—including Blair and the Home Secretary—began discussing potential legal reforms. Once tied to concrete proposals (e.g., incitement laws, surveillance expansion), media repetition increased notably. This gradual rise reflects how agenda-setting requires sustained

rhetorical and institutional reinforcement, not merely a single statement. Together, these frames illustrate how the government framed terrorism as an ongoing global and domestic threat—and how the media followed suit. Their alignment demonstrates how narrative authority during crises can shape not just how an event is understood, but also which policy discussions become normalized.

Homegrown and Ideological Struggle Frames

The *homegrown* and *ideological struggle* frames marked a critical rhetorical pivot—from viewing terrorism as a foreign threat to treating it as a domestic, value-driven challenge. Their introduction followed the revelation that the 7/7 bombers were British citizens, prompting both government and media to reframe the narrative around internal radicalization.

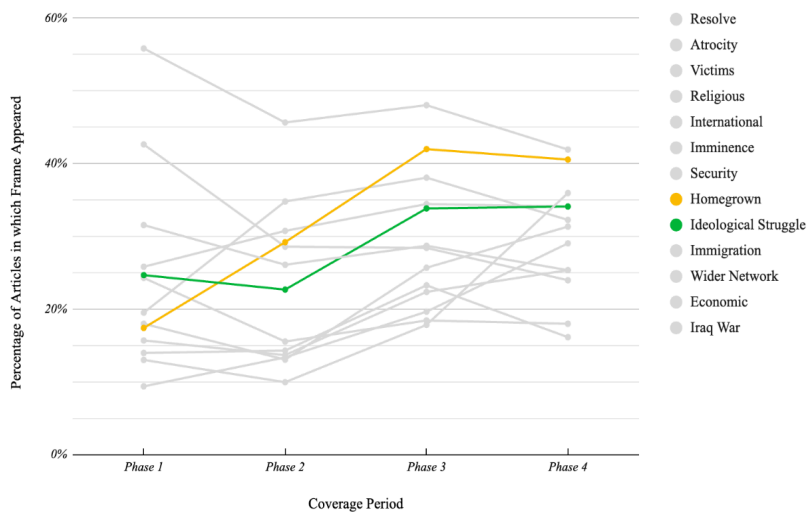


Figure 4. UK Media Frame Saliency, by Phase—Homegrown & Ideological Struggle Frames

Blair’s July 16 address introduced these frames explicitly, describing the attack as “an assault on our values” and identifying the root of the threat as “an evil ideology” (Blair 2005c). The *homegrown* frame emphasized the need to understand how British citizens became radicalized, while the *ideological struggle* frame positioned terrorism as part of a broader

conflict between democratic ideals and extremist dogma. This framing was echoed in the media almost immediately, as news outlets adopted similar language and repeated Blair's moral framing. The alignment in tone and content was particularly striking, indicating that the government's redefinition of the threat quickly shaped journalistic discourse.

Both frames gained salience in the press during Phase 3, then persisted into Phase 4, often appearing alongside debates about immigration and civil liberties. Their durability likely stems in part from their flexibility: they allowed for policy justification, moral high ground, and a continued emphasis on vigilance, all without requiring resolution or closure. Together, these frames completed the internalization of the terrorist threat. The press, following the government's lead, helped normalize a discourse in which national security was no longer about external enemies, but about internal ideologies—and communities—perceived as potentially threatening.

Immigration Frame

The *immigration* frame appeared only in Phase 4, emerging in Blair's July 26 press conference and then quickly surfacing in media coverage. It linked the threat of terrorism to cross-border movement, training camps, and weaknesses in immigration controls, which introduced a new spatial and institutional dimension to the framing of 7/7.

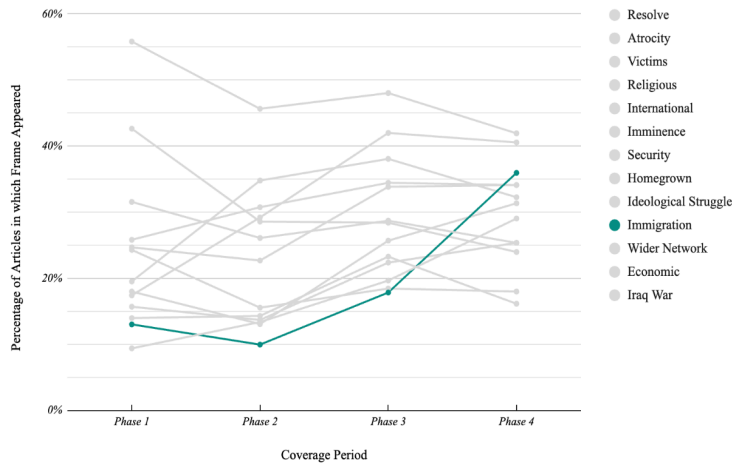


Figure 5. UK Media Frame Salience, by Phase—Immigration Frame

In government discourse, this frame served a strategic purpose: it extended the securitization logic beyond domestic ideology to external oversight. By shifting attention to borders and international travel, the government could argue for expanded authority in monitoring arrivals, sharing intelligence, and deporting suspects. This move allowed the counterterror agenda to intersect with pre-existing debates on immigration policy. While less emotionally charged than earlier frames, the *immigration* frame functioned as a legitimizing tool—subtly connecting national security to border control and, by extension, to broader anxieties about migration. Though its salience remained modest compared to earlier frames, its late-stage introduction and massive uptake following mention by Blair suggest a lasting narrative shift. Crucially, it helped anchor the evolving threat discourse across both domestic and international enforcement frameworks.

Analysis

Taken together, the findings suggest a strong degree of convergence between government and media framing in the month following 7/7. While early media coverage emphasized emotion and uncertainty, it quickly adapted to the evolving narrative structure laid out by government

communications. The introduction of new frames in Blair’s speeches—particularly *international*, *security*, *homegrown*, and *immigration*—was consistently followed by corresponding shifts in media salience. This pattern reflects not passive adoption, but a dynamic in which the government set the narrative agenda and the media, in most cases, reproduced its contours. Moments of divergence—such as the *Iraq War* frame—were limited, low in salience, and largely confined to opinion pieces. In contrast, the frames that supported securitization, moral polarization, and policy justification dominated both domains.

The sequencing of these frames across four phases mirrors a strategic rhetorical arc: from unity and mourning to vigilance, explanation, and policy readiness. By the time the public version of CONTEST was released, the narrative groundwork had already been established in both official and press discourse. In this sense, framing functioned not only as interpretation but as soft power, a way to manage public understanding and legitimize state response. The media, far from acting as a check on official narratives, reinforced them, becoming a channel through which policy-aligned meanings were amplified and normalized.

Conclusion

“Terrorists use the media to magnify their actions and further spread fear. And when we react out of fear, when we change our policy to make our country less open, the terrorists succeed—even if their attacks fail.”

Bruce Schneier, *Beyond Fear*

This article examined the ways in which the British government and national media framed the July 7, 2005 bombings in the month following the attack. Drawing on a mixed-methods content analysis—both manual and AI-assisted—the project sought to identify the dominant frames used by each actor and evaluate how closely media narratives mirrored those promoted by the government. The findings suggest a high degree of narrative convergence.

While it cannot claim a direct causal relationship, the evidence indicates that as the government's framing evolved, the media's framing followed suit—often closely, and with limited resistance.

In the immediate aftermath of the bombings, both government and media relied on what might be called “emotional frames”: *resolve*, *atrocities*, *victims*, and *religious*. These frames stabilized the narrative, giving audiences a set of moral and emotional reference points through which to understand the event. But as new facts emerged, these early frames gave way to more strategic ones. The government introduced a series of policy-aligned frames—*international*, *imminence*, and *security*—that recast the bombings as part of a global threat, laying the rhetorical groundwork for the expansion of counterterrorism powers. Later came *homegrown* and *ideological struggle*, which positioned terrorism not just as a foreign threat, but as an internal crisis rooted in value conflict. The final frame—*immigration*—extended the government's securitizing logic to borders and external networks, helping justify institutional surveillance and legal reform.

The media, for the most part, reproduced this arc. While some moments of divergence did appear, particularly around the *Iraq War*, they were relatively rare. When government frames emphasized control, vigilance, and moral clarity, the press echoed these themes, often amplifying them. This alignment is significant. It suggests that in moments of national crisis, the media may act less as a critical counterweight and more as a discursive amplifier of executive power. The government's ability to define the terms of the debate—by framing the problem, setting its causes, and delimiting its solutions—proved remarkably effective. The timing of the public rollout of CONTEST, one year later, seems less like the start of a policy agenda and more like its formalization, the ground having already been prepared.

Ultimately, this project contributes to ongoing discussions about media-government relations, the politics of narrative control, and the conditions under which frames gain traction. It also demonstrates the value of integrating computational tools like OpenFraming AI into critical media analysis, which allows researchers to track thematic shifts at scale with limited resources or technological backgrounds. This is especially relevant in a global climate where issues of terrorism and security are constantly at the forefront of political discourse, demanding an informed academic dialogue about the balance between state power, civil liberties, and the role of the media in shaping the parameters of this debate. As more crises unfold in real time, framing is not merely an interpretive act; it is a political one. Understanding these frames, their origins, and their impacts thus holds critical importance not just for scholars and policymakers, but for anyone who engages with the ceaseless flow of information that defines our modern existence.

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