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# WHO IS TO BLAME ON JULY 22, 2011? PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL BLAME FRAMES IN THE REPORTING OF ANDERS BREIVIK IN THE DUTCH SPEAKING BROADSHEET PRESS

**ABSTRACT:** On July 22, 2011 Anders Breivik murdered a large amount of people in Norway. In this study we investigate a sample of articles that were published about Breivik and his deeds in the Flemish and Dutch press. We will investigate these articles looking for the so-called "attribution of responsibility frame." The murders from Breivik could be explained psychologically ("he is insane") as well as sociologically (far-right political parties are responsible because of having spread hate speech). We present a typology of subtypes of frames. We will furthermore investigate how many times these types of frames occur in different media outlets.

**KEY WORDS:** Breivik, framing, content analysis, newspapers, causal attributions, ideology

## Introduction

On July 22, 2011 Anders Breivik murdered a large amount of people in Norway. A bomb exploded in a car in Oslo and 8 people were killed. Subsequently Breivik moved to the isle of Utøya, where youngsters from the Norwegian socialist party had their summer holidays. Breivik killed 69 youngsters and was arrested afterwards by the police. Breivik explained the motivation of his deeds as a protest against the supposed dominance of Islam in western societies such as Norway. He argued that this dominance was made possible

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by the rise of what he calls *cultural Marxism.* Cultural Marxism is the idea that all cultures should be treated equally propagated by particularly socialist ideologies in Europe. Although socialism is the main ideology criticized by Breivik, he recognizes similar arguments among almost all European political parties, excluding only Far Right parties.

The murders of Breivik were extensively covered by the European press. The press evidently condemns his deeds. Nevertheless one could wonder if all press outlets condemn this acts in the same way. Breivik wrote a 1500 page manifest in which he explained his motivations, and in which he sought support for his deeds by quoting (far) right intellectuals and politicians. In this research our question is how this claimed support for his deeds by right wing intellectuals and right wing politicians is explained in papers that have a historically different ideological conviction. How do conservative newspapers interpret the link between right wing politics and Breivik and how do progressive newspapers interpret this link? Are there any differences between newspapers that prove different stances of the editorial team towards Breivik?

The central question is discussed in this article by means of a comparison of four Dutch language newspapers. Hallin and Mancini point out that the historical differences between ideologies of newspapers are becoming obsolete (Hallin and Mancini). A recent observation about Dutch mass media reflects and deplores this trend (Gautier). The aim of this study is to provide a very specific but relevant case study on this matter. Do newspapers still have different ideological orientations if they cover issues with an ideological angle?

We chose to focus on those media that are the backbone of news reporting and that play a leading role in the intellectual public debate i.e. broadsheet newspapers. In each geographical context, we selected one leading progressive and one leading conservative newspaper: *De Morgen* (left-leaning) and *De Standaard* (right-leaning) for Flanders, and *de Volkskrant* (left-leaning) and *NRC Handelsblad* (right-leaning) for The Netherlands. These are not the most read Dutch speaking newspapers, but are considered to be intellectually the most influential newspapers (Hijmans, Schafraad, Buijs & d'Haenens). Both Flanders and the Netherlands are important regions in the debate about Breivik because they are the home country of the far right political parties *Vlaams Belang* in Flanders and *Partij voor de Vrijheid* in the Netherlands. Breivik quotes these parties.

## Application of a Terminology by Philip Zimbardo
## to Formulate a Hypothesis

To deal with this question we rephrase the question in a terminology coined by the American psychologist Philip Zimbardo in his book "The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil" (Zimbardo). Lucifer is claimed to be Gods favorite angel until he challenges Gods authority. Then he turns out to be satanic. Zimbardo points out that this evolution could happen to any of us. We could all turn out to be evil, if the situation urges us to be like that. The empirical data that Zimbardo uses come from the so called "Stanford prison experiment." In this experiment random people were assigned to either a guard or a prisoner role. Although there were no reasons to predict that the guards would turn out to be sadists it did happen. The reason why this happened was because the situation gave them the opportunity to do so. Zimbardo argues that in general people tend to underestimate the influence of situational circumstances and to overly attribute the origin of evil deeds to psychological characteristics of individuals.

If we transpose the terminology of Zimbardo to our case on the newspaper coverage of Anders Breivik we might argue that the deeds of Breivik could be explained in two ways. The explanation that mirrors popular belief is that the deeds of Breivik are mainly the cause of psychological shortcomings. Of course this is to a large extent true, because a large scale massacre of this degree can never be entirely explained by situational circumstances. Nevertheless we can also say that the environment of hate speech created by right wing politics might be partially responsible. The murders from Breivik could be explained psychologically ("he is immoral and/or insane") as well as sociologically. The sociological explanation says that extreme right parties are also responsible, because of having spread hate speech.

Transposing this terminology to our hypothesis about the coverage of Anders Breivik we could argue that holding right wing politics responsible for the murders of Breivik could be a more used strategy in left wing news coverage, while this link is less popular in conservative news coverage. This leads us to the next central hypothesis: Progressive news coverage about Breivik will be inclined to use situational explanations for Breiviks deeds more often while conservative news coverage uses psychological explanations more often. Next to this hypothesis, we will investigate an

additional research question: are there any systematic differences between the Dutch newspapers and the Dutch language newspapers in Belgium?

## Application of the Frame Concept to Operationalize the Hypothesis

To operationalize this hypothesis we need to search for a content analytic device to measure the distinction between psychological and situational explanations. Therefore we look at the framing analysis instrument that was developed by Semetko and Valkenburg (Semetko & Valkenburg). Framing analysis departs from the assumption that public perceptions about issues are shaped by how these issues are represented in the news. As such these so-called "frames" are "conceptual tools which media and individuals rely on to convey, interpret and evaluate information." (Semetko & Valkenburg 94). Another classic definition of framing is provided by Entman (Entman 52). Framing "is to select some aspects of 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."

Semetko and Valkenburg identify five predominant frames: the conflict frame, the human interest frame, the economic consequences frames, the morality frame and the responsibility frame. One could argue that each news article could to a certain extent contain different degrees of these frames. Many, if not all, news articles would for instance evoke some sort of responsibility for the phenomenon that is covered. In the case of reporting about Breivik this implies blaming Breivik himself or the ideological context that surrounds him. Our study takes this responsibility frame as a main topic of interest and looks at how this responsibility is covered in news articles from four Dutch speaking newspapers. If we look at the four dimensions of framing Entman distinguishes we focus on "causal interpretation" rather than on problem definition, moral evaluation or treatment recommendation.

Interpreting if Breivik himself or the social conditions he lives in are hold responsible in a newspaper article might not be an easy task altogether, because many shades of interpretation may be present in newspaper articles. It is therefore not easy to opt for

"deductive coding" (Semetko and Valkenburg), which means applying preexisting codes. "Inductive coding" implies reading trough the material and searching for different frames. Although we distinguish between psychological and situational accounts of responsibility we need to work inductively to search for the different dimensions of responsibility that fit this basic distinction between psychological and situational responsibility.

Searching inductively for attributions of responsibility implies searching for linguistic choices. A key premise in discourse analysis is that texts are based upon choices and that alternative choices were always an option (Fairclough 202). The words and sentences of the analyzed texts are also linked to different actors. The journalist who wrote the article might be giving his own opinion or representing the opinions of others. We look at the voices in the text and how they are constructed to identify inductively an array of frame types.

In this article we present a taxonomy of responsibilities that we find when we inductively investigate a sample of newspaper articles from four newspapers. The grid that we derive from this endeavor is quantified in a second phase, to test the central hypothesis. This study works with a limited sample of articles (N=247) and serves as a benchmark for a broader further study including other Dutch speaking newspapers and English newspapers as well, that is currently being developed. All articles published in the four analyzed newspapers up until October 15, 2013 (the date of data collection) that refer to Breivik on the one hand and to at least one of four key terms on the other hand get selected. These key terms are "Islam," "multiculturalism," "multicultural society" and "cultural diversity."

## Inductive Coding : Seven Types of Frames

Our taxonomy of responsibilities includes seven subtypes of frames : the factual frame, the dispositional frame, the hate speech frame, the denial of hate speech frame, the network frame, the systemic frame and the reaction frame. The definition of these frames will be discussed below, followed by a quantitative comparison of the occurrence of these frames in the four analyzed newspapers. Often articles are multilayered, but each article is coded as being a representative article for the frame that occurs predominantly in this article.

## The Factual Frame

A first frame we need to discern is the "factual" frame. One of the central values in Western journalism culture is objectivity (Obijofor & Hanusch 25), and this is also mirrored in our selection of newspaper articles on Breivik. Although we specifically selected articles that make a link between Breivik and his motivation because of our use of key words we do find a lot of articles that are strictly descriptive. A quote illustrating this frame is this one (from *De Morgen*, April 17, 2012, translated in English): "Breivik recognizes the facts, but he does not think that he is a guilty. He deems he acted out of self-defense against the "state enemies" that opened up Norway for multiculturalism and made a "Muslim invasion" of Norway possible." The words between quotation marks are also in the original article and represent the fact that the journalists in this article merely quote Breivik. They explicitly do not want to add further interpretation. The dominant linguistic feature of this type of articles is what Fairclough has called "discourse representation" (Fairclough 79-85): through the use of quotes we know that a journalist is not giving his personal opinion.

## The Individual Frame

But many articles do leave factuality behind and contain opinions about the nature of the causes of Breiviks actions. Such an argumentation can for instance be found in *De Standaard* from 14 April, 2012. It is argued that ideologies may not be irrelevant, but that we do not need to condemn movies or video games, because they are not the root cause of the action of Lone Wolves. *De Morgen* (May 24, 2013) for instance published an article that says that the loudest screams are the ones by Lone Wolves.

This Lone Wolf interpretation primarily condemns the acts of terrorists as manifestations of psychiatric diseases. The specific terminology of psychiatry is present in many articles about this interpretations. Terms such as "narcissism," "schizophrenia," "accountability," "delusions" and "psychosis" are frequently used in the studied press outlets (cfr. Melle, 2013 for a psychiatric evaluation of the Breivik debate). Two types of voices are represented in this category of articles. On the one hand psychiatric specialists are quoted. An article in *NRC Handelsblad* (29 November, 2011) says that Breivik is not accountable and merely quotes psychiatric

reports. On the other hand journalists themselves may participate to this debate to prove a point. An example is an article by a journalist from *de Volkskrant*. In this article the journalist argues that the deeds of Breivik are very tragical indeed but they remain an isolated phenomenon and political interpretations of this phenomenon are far-fetched.

## The Hate Speech Frame

The individual interpretation contrasts with the situational interpretations. These situational interpretations can be further divided in three subtypes. The first two subtypes directly blame right wing politics, but they do so for different reasons. The first subtype of the situational explanation blames hate speech for stimulating Breivik, but it does so on a merely intellectual level. Belgian intellectual and journalist Marc Reynebeau for instance explains in *De Standaard* from 16 November, 2012 that freedom of speech is a right, but not a right that can be cut off from the duty of responsibility. Belgian political scientist Marc Hooghe explains in *De Morgen* from July 28, 2011 that politicians from the far right cannot have peace of mind when it comes to Breivik.

It is possible to find references to the potential psychiatric disease of Breivik but these references are rather denials of psychiatric conditions. In *de Volkskrant* we find an article with the title (translated from Dutch): "Whether Breivik is crazy, remains to be seen." The discourse that is echoed in these articles is a journalistic version of the media critique of scientists such as Elizabeth Poole and John E. Richardson. The climate of "threat, fear and misunderstanding" (Poole & Richardson 1) in the current media and public opinion creates a breeding ground for the extremism of terrorists as Breivik. The voices associated with this frame may be journalists, but often also intellectuals contributing to the Breivik debate.

## The Denial of Hate Speech Frame

Sometimes the reference to the influence of hate speech may take the form of a meta-critique stating that the responsibilities of far-right discourse might be exaggerated. Such an example is the article "The witch hunt from the Left is very hypocrite" (*NRC Handelsblad,* August 4, 2011). The critique and meta-critique are

two manifestations of a political interpretation, that contrasts with a merely factual or psychological interpretation. Sometimes the right wing variant says that Muslims and/or left wing intellectuals are even responsible themselves because tolerance towards Muslim extremism caused frustration. The most quoted source in these articles is *Éloge littéraire d'Anders Breivik* (Millet) by the French author Richard Millet, who condemns Breivik, but also says that his murders have a *literary* value, because multiculturalism and related social developments destroy Europe.

## The Network Frame

Situational explanations suggest that Breivik is not a Lone Wolf, because he got inspiration from the far right. The hate speech is however markedly different from another interpretation that says that Breivik is not a Lone Wolf. This interpretation, the "network" interpretation does not only point out the intellectual responsibility of right wing politics, but also points out that these politicians form networks that actually support ideas similar to the ones of Breivik. An example of this type of article is the article on 16 February, 2013 in *De Morgen* about a counterjihad conference in Brussels where ideas similar to those of Breivik were propagated. An article in *NRC Handelsblad* (November 25, 2011) talks about a "curious conglomerate of marginal groups in Norway."

The difference between this frame and the hate speech frame is that these articles talk about actors that might actually do the same things as Breivik did. The "hate speech frame" blames right-wing actors on a discursive level, but it is nevertheless seen as merely a discursive responsibility. The network frame talks about actors intending to practice islamophobia rather than only preaching it.

## The Systemic Frame

A fifth general subtype is a situational explanation that says that Breiviks actions can be explained by more general conditions in society. This can be called the systemic attribution. Zimbardo distinguishes between two basic types of cause attribution that are consequently used in social psychology, but he further adds a third layer of attribution: systemic attribution (Zimbardo). This type of attribution involves political, economic and legal conditions that shape

the phenomenon to be explained. Examples of this type are an interview with philosopher Martha Nussbaum in *De Morgen* on the July 6, 2013 and an article on the of December 28, 2011 by philosopher Johan Braeckman in *de Morgen* about the events that happened in 2011. Both refer to the importance of anxiety in our current society. The culture of anxiety might be partly responsible for actions like the ones of Breivik, but this condition transcends the direct responsibility of right wing politicians. Interpretations pertaining to the systemic frame go beyond the situational frame and the voices that articulate these frames are the voices of intellectuals.

Yet another example of this systemic frame is to be found in *NRC Handelsblad*, 13/12/2011 where the theory of Slavoy Zizek about the cause of Breiviks deeds is explained, in Zizek's own words (http://www.lacan.com/thesymptom/?page_id=2310):

> There is thus an interconnection between the rising anti-immigrant tide in Western countries (which reached a peak in Anders Behring Breivik's killing spree…) and the ongoing financial crisis: clinging to ethnic identity serves as a protective shield against the traumatic fact of being caught in the whirlpool of non-transparent financial abstraction—the true "foreign body" which cannot be assimilated is ultimately the infernal self-propelling machine of the Capital itself.

## The Consequential Frame

A final frame that needs to be added to our list of subframes is a frame that is not so much about responsibility but focuses on the answers Norwegians give to Breivik. Breivik accused Norwegian society of being to open, but Norwegians can and should respond with even more openness. An article involving this framing of Breivik is the article "Flowers for the Utøya ideal" in *De Morgen* on July 30, 2011. Another example is the article "The answer to Breivik: more humanity" (*De Standaard*, 27 August, 2012). The voices that get represented in articles pertaining to this frame are almost exclusively voices coming from within Norway.

## Deductive Coding: Quantifying the Frames

A combination table (N=247) with all frames and all newspaper, though containing small cells, provides interesting information on our hypothesis (concerning ideological differences) and our

research question (concerning the difference between Flemish and Dutch newspapers).

Table 1: Occurrence of frames

| Frame | Total | De Morgen % (Flemish) | De Standaard % (Flemish) | de Volkskrant % (Dutch) | NRC % (Dutch) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Factual | 17 | 22.9 | 17.9 | 14.8 | 15.2 |
| Individual | 9.7 | 8.3 | 15.4 | 13.6 | 3.8 |
| Hate Speech | 29.1 | 18.8 | 33.3 | 29.6 | 32.9 |
| Denial of hate speech | 12.6 | 0 | 5.1 | 16 | 20.3 |
| Network | 8.9 | 20.8 | 7.7 | 1.2 | 10.1 |
| Systemic | 6.9 | 6.3 | 2.6 | 9.9 | 6.3 |
| Consequential | 15.8 | 22.9 | 17.9 | 14.8 | 11.4 |

The results show that the Flemish newspapers (*De Morgen*: 22.9% and *De Standaard*: 17.9%) represent the factual frame somewhat more frequently (*NRC*: 15.2% and *de Volkskrant*: 14.8%). An additional Chi-square test did however not yield any significant results that prove this. There are neither any differences in the degree of factuality between left-wing and right-wing newspapers.

Chi-square tests did not yield statistically significant differences between right-wing and left-wing newspapers and between Dutch or Flemish newspapers when it comes to the choice of the individual frame, but we do see an important trend in the results. In the more right-wing Flemish newspaper *De Standaard* the individual frame is chosen more (15.4%) than in the Flemish left-wing newspaper *De Morgen* (8.3%). This difference does not reach statistical significance. The sample size of the subset of Flemish articles is small (N=87) which makes it difficult for statistical results to reach a significance level. The difference between *NRC* (3.8%) and *de Volkskrant* (13.6%) however is the other way around, with *NRC* (right-wing) reporting less individual responsibility. The difference on individual framing between both newspapers within the subsample of Dutch articles is statistically significant ($X^2$ = 4,794, df=1, p= 0.029 < 0.05).

After having considered the choice of factual and individual frames, we can now move on to a consideration of the three frames that imply the responsibility of the far-right: the hate speech frame, the denial of hate speech frame and the network frame.

A Chi-square test was applied to a cross-tabulation of these three types of frames with on the one hand the difference between left-wing and right-wing newspapers and on the other hand the difference between Dutch and Flemish newspapers. The difference between left-wing and right-wing newspapers did not yield statistical significance, but the difference between Dutch and Flemish newspapers did. In Dutch newspapers hate speech was clearly framed more often as a denial of the influence of hate speech than in Flemish newspapers ($X^2$= 17,185, df=2, p= 0,0 < 0,05). Probably the Dutch far right politician Geert Wilders has a larger influence on the international far-right movement than his Flemish counterparts. In *de Volkskrant* 16% of the articles have a denial of hate speech frame and in *NRC* even 20.3%. In *De Morgen* (0%) and *De Standaard* (5.1.%) this percentage is much lower.

The analysis can be taken a step further by detailed analysis of the choice for the network frame. One might argue that this frame is the strongest articulation of the framing that suggests responsibility of the far-right, because this frame suggests a behavioral involvement that transcends the level of intellectual responsibility. Within the subsample of the Flemish newspapers the network frame is chosen in 20.8% of the articles in *De Morgen*, remarkably more often than in *De Standaard* (7.7%). When we compare the "network frame articles" with the articles that choose another (i.e. non network) frame and cross-tabulate this difference with the difference between *De Morgen* and *De Standaard* within the subsample of Flemish articles (N=87) we see a statistically significant difference ($X^2$= 2,924, df=1, p= 0.087 < 0.1), at least when we accept a significance level of 0.10, which is acceptable (Noymer) in the case of smaller sample sizes. This result suggests the importance of differences between left and right wing orientations in the frame choices about Breivik within the Flemish subsample. If we continue to apply a similar analysis to the difference in the application of the network frame within the Dutch subsample (N=160) we see once again a significant difference ($X^2$= 5,957, df=1, p=0.015 < 0.05), but the right-wing oriented newspaper *NRC* (10.1%) more often applies a network frame than the left-wing oriented newspaper *de Volkskrant*. The support for the hypothesis in the Flemish case is neutralized by the non-support for the same hypothesis in the Dutch case. There is no general statistical significant relation between the ideological stance of the newspapers and the choice for the network frame.

The table above shows some differences between the individual newspapers in the choice for the systemic and the consequential

frame, but Chi-square analyses did not show statistically significant relations between the choice of these frames and the origin (Dutch or Flemish) or political stance (left-wing or right-wing) of the newspapers. One further observation on the consequential frame however needs to be made. Although the choice of the factual and the consequential frames are not statistically significantly related to the origin or the stance of the newspapers in itself, we can combine both the factual and the consequential frame and link this with the origin or the stance of the newspapers. The factual and consequential frame share with each other the characteristic that they are both primarily oriented towards what happened in Norway, be it the tragic facts or the reaction towards these facts. We did not see a statistically significant difference between the stance of the newspapers and this combined factual or consequential framing, but we do see a statistical difference between this frame choice and the debate in either Flanders or The Netherlands. The primarily fact oriented frames are chosen in 41.4% of the Flemish articles and in only 28.1% of the Dutch articles ($X^2$= 4,492, df=1, p=0.034 < 0.05). This broader interpretation reflects a more direct sense of involvement towards the Breivik case in the Netherlands when compared with the Dutch speaking part of Flanders.

## Conclusion

This paper started from the observation that ideological differences between newspapers might still be relevant in present newspaper reporting, because newspapers with a right-wing stance and a left-wing stance might attribute the responsibility of right-wing politics in the case of Anders Breivik differently. This hypothesis proved in general not to be true when we tested it on two regional cases, i.e. two Dutch broadsheet newspapers and two Flemish broadsheet newspapers.

Although the hypothesis was falsified, we did find some indications in the Flemish case that did point towards the pertinence of the hypothesis. The Flemish conservative newspaper did chose slightly but not statistically significant more often an individual framing and opts less often for the stronger involvement of the far-right as suggested in the network frame. In the Dutch case these two specific interpretations of the hypothesis pointed towards a difference in attribution tendencies between both investigated newspapers,

but they indicated attribution tendencies that were hypothetically more left-wing in the however right-wing *NRC Handelsblad.*

To ultimately test the hypothesis it is necessary to add more international newspapers to the study. Such an endeavor would make it possible to test to which degree national influences in the debate are important to consider as well. In this case study two important national differences in the debate between Flanders and The Netherlands emerged. In the Dutch debate the denial of the influence of hate speech was more outspoken and the broader context of Breiviks deeds was more important than the facts. These two conclusions can be added to the observation that with the same key words used in our search query the Dutch newspapers (N=160) published almost twice as much articles as the Flemish newspapers (N=87). The Dutch far-right and Geert Wilders might be eventually more influential in the international far right as the Flemish far right, and Breivik himself saw Wilders as a more clear influence than Filip Dewinter, his Flemish counterpart.

A further perspective to be added to our future research about this theme will be the integration of complementary intersubjective perspectives. This will be done firstly by applying reliability coding tests to assess to which degree our coding taxonomy implies subjective judgments. Furthermore interviews with the journalists who wrote the articles will add a necessary estimation of the degree to which attribution differences might be intentional. A final research step may be an assessment of the way in which the audience and different demographic groups deal with the different political interpretations of the Breivik case, because as Haider-Markel and Joslyn argue: "Characterizations of political events and tragedies are not simply rhetorical representations but rather important determinants of citizens' causal reasoning" (Haider-Markel & Joslyn 537).

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