Anger, Fear, and Propaganda. The Feedback Loop between the Political Discourse of the PP and the FAES on Terrorism in Spain

Raiva, Medo e Propaganda: O Ciclo de Retroalimentação entre o Discurso Político do PP e da FAES sobre o Terrorismo em Espanha

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Abstract

Terrorism constitutes one of the most severe political traumas a society can experience. In a culture permeated by fear and risk, it is not surprising that political entities exploit fear and anger following such events. Think tanks and agenda-setters, especially those linked to political parties, often reinforce these propagandistic narratives. This study examines whether the threat of terrorism is used as a propagandistic resource in the discourses of the Partido Popular (PP) and the Foundation for Social Studies and Analysis (FAES), aiming to determine if a feedback loop exists between them. Systematic content analysis shows that both organizations use similar propaganda strategies, with evidence of reciprocal influence, including techniques like creating an 'enemy' and exploiting the dynamics between the two emotions.

Keywords:

propaganda; think tank; terrorism; fear; anger

Resumo

O terrorismo constitui um dos traumas políticos mais graves que uma sociedade pode enfrentar. Numa cultura marcada pelo medo e pelo risco, não é surpreendente que entidades políticas explorem o medo e a raiva após acontecimentos desta natureza. Os think tanks e os *agenda-setters*, especialmente aqueles ligados a partidos políticos, tendem frequentemente a reforçar estas narrativas propagandísticas. Este estudo investiga se a ameaça do terrorismo é utilizada como recurso propagandístico nos discursos do Partido Popular (PP) e da Fundación para el Análisis y los Estudios Sociales (FAES), com o objetivo de determinar se existe um ciclo de retroalimentação entre ambos. A análise sistemática de conteúdo demonstra que ambas as organizações recorrem a estratégias propagandísticas semelhantes e apresenta evidências de influência recíproca, incluindo técnicas como a construção de um "inimigo" e a exploração da relação dinâmica entre estas duas emoções.

Palavras-chave:

propaganda; think tank; terrorismo; medo; raiva

1. Introduction

The events of September 11, 2001, in the United States marked a turning point in Western societies. The magnitude of the attack, the political prominence of the victims, and the symbolism of the target (Lakoff, 2020) created a sense of global insecurity, along with a feeling of vulnerability and an atmosphere of terror (Salvador, 2015). By its nature, this event can be classified as a "political trauma", which refers to a negative occurrence that causes individual shock shared collectively (Bisquerra, 2017). Such events generate an emotional climate dominated by fear and fragility (Furedi, 2018).

In Spain—the focus of this study—the "political trauma" of terrorism began in the second half of the 20th century with the emergence of armed separatist, fascist, and communist organizations that sought to impose their agendas during the transition to democracy. The longest-standing group was ETA (founded in 1961), which declared a definitive cessation of armed activity in 2011 and dissolved seven years later. Additionally, Spain has suffered jihadist attacks, the most notable occurring on March 11, 2004, at the Madrid's Atocha Station. Despite the Islamist nature of the attack, the then-Prime Minister José María Aznar (PP) attribute responsibility to ETA (Fominaya, 2011).

As Catalán (2018) explains, these traumas are discursively instrumentalized due to the propagandistic potential of fear, an emotion that is politically and electorally profitable because of its impact on the social climate (Rey and Rincón, 2008; Altheide, 2017). Furthermore, it facilitates the implementation of control measures and rallying around authority, as it allows the sender to present the situation as a fight against a universal enemy: "terror" (Tizón, 2011; Bisquerra, 2017). Ultimately, this is considered a necessary struggle in the quest for the desired security: "The 'war on terror'" propaganda context must consider the state-defined concept of

"security", and how "threats" and the range of "solutions" are defined concerning this' (Briant, 2017, p. 25). Hence, the inversely proportional relationship that Bauman (2007) posits between security (and the absence of fear) and freedom.

The terrorist events of 9/11 ultimately forged and popularized concepts such as the culture of fear (Furedi, 2018) and the risk society (Beck, 2008), both applicable to Western reality. These terms are nourished not only by the aforementioned political traumas but also shape the media discourse fueled by the fear of terrorism, which has managed to change the conception of national security. Considering this, the general objective of this study is to identify whether the threat of terrorism is employed as a propagandistic tool in the arguments of FAES and the PP, with the purpose of examining the potential feedback loop between their discourses. On the one hand, think tanks draw from media and political discourse, making the fear of terrorism a recurring theme. On the other hand, political formations use fear in their propagandistic speeches precisely because of the profitability attributed to this primary emotion. All this becomes relevant if fear is understood as an epistemological reality, in that "it exists only when we recognize it as such" (Farré, 2005, p. 103). Therefore, the discourses surrounding terrorism can serve as a warning to the citizenry but also as fuel for fear itself.

2. Fear, Anger and Propaganda

The significance of fear partly causes social traumas, as it is an emotion linked to individual survival; after all, it alerts us to the presence of a threat or danger, allowing us to either avoid it or at least minimize its consequences (Marks, 1991; Sarráis, 2014). From this arises the ability to control the emotion (Tizón, 2011; Altheide, 2017) and, consequently, the interest of propagandistic communicators in understanding and utilizing fear as part of their strategies. According to Pineda's (2006) definition of propaganda, this communicative phenomenon aims to maintain, reinforce, or achieve power, for which this emotion, acting as a social controller, is useful.

To achieve these communicative goals, fear has been employed in specific propagandistic strategies, developed with fear as their foundation. Consequently, research by Getty and Naumov (2001) and Servín (2004), among others, demonstrates how the use of certain techniques involves the utilization of fear (and vice versa). Specifically, these techniques include polarization, the creation of the enemy, and atrocity propaganda.

The first technique, polarization, results from the dissemination and adoption of a Manichean perspective and attitude, a common characteristic of a propagandistic sender (Huici, 2017). Thus, recipients are presented with two possible options: absolute goodness and virtue, embodied in "us", or, conversely, the most dreadful evil, represented by "others/them". In this way, intermediate positions are nonexistent, forcing the audience to take one side or the other (Chomsky, 1992; Brown, 1995; Huici, 2017).

The second technique, the creation of the enemy, aims to imbue "others/them" with intrinsic evil linked to them in propagandistic discourse (Catalán, 2018). Ultimately, the creation of an enemy relies on the construction of identities,

seeking to differentiate "them/others" in the most fearful and repugnant way possible (Brown, 1995). In fact, Eco (2013) argues that defining and characterising an enemy is essential to shaping one's own identity—that of the in-group. By doing so, a perceived threat is constructed against which the group's system of values is assessed and reaffirmed as "us". This process subsequently facilitates the justification of confrontation.

Finally, atrocity propaganda is a technique that seeks to elevate this deformation of the enemy to a higher level, associating it with dehumanized actions and ideas (García-Orta, 2002; Morelli, 2002). Following Lippmann (1922), this idea is constructed by portraying vulnerable members of society—such as the elderly or children—as victims. In this way, citizens are made to feel a "need" to take action in response.

While it is true that these propagandistic techniques directly utilize fear, it is essential not to overlook an additional strategy necessary for this emotion to operate as desired by the sender: the savior strategy. This strategy is based on the idea that the hope of overcoming insecurity, uncertainty, and vulnerability is crucial for the emotion to be effective (Boscoboinik, 2016; Furedi, 2018). Thus, the savior strategy involves the propagandistic sender highlighting a threat to present themselves as the only solution (Charaudeau, 2009). In this way, the sender positions themselves as the protector of the citizenry and the only one capable of eliminating (or mitigating the consequences of) the threat (Catalán, 2018). Faced with the construction of the sender as the only viable option, citizens tend to adopt a passive stance towards both the propagandistic message and the situation it highlights (Lasswell, 1971; Arendt, 1987). This passivity facilitates the legitimisation of certain ideas with greater ease.

Therefore, the use of fear in political propaganda involves two communicative actions: first, the dissemination of a threat, and second, the presentation of the sender as the solution. This directly relates to Wodak's (2015) theory, which explains that the communicative handling of this emotion involves three scenarios: (1) identifying the threat and its victims, (2) the existence of scapegoats, and (3) the "conspiratorial" vision. It is relevant to note that Domenach (1962) argues that propaganda requires fertile ground in order to be effective, meaning that citizens must already be predisposed to assimilate the ideas it seeks to promote. Accordingly, for Wodak's theoretical framework to operate as intended, individuals must hold pre-existing assumptions that enable a favourable response to a negatively framed message. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge the link between fear and anger, and consequently, hatred. Ultimately, all the aforementioned techniques aim to create an "others/them" who induce harm to the victims, "us". This engenders hostility towards specific social groups, thereby reinforcing xenophobic, racist, and other prejudicial attitudes. Crucially, the concept of the "relativity of the other" suggests that these perceptions are inherently malleable, shaped by the particular socio-political context in which the discourse is constructed (Stella, 2009). Thus, as explained by Bisquerra (2017), one ends up hating everything that generates fear (and ***vice versa***).

All these aspects are indispensable for understanding the dissemination of terrorism as a primary threat, which is useful for reinforcing political ideas and actions with a partisan goal (De Castella and McGarty, 2011).

However, for this to be effective, the communicative efforts do not originate solely from the propagandistic sender. As Altheide (2017) explains, the media are indispensable reproducers. In particular, this study focuses on the role of think tanks, especially those linked to political parties, in the use of fear and the threat of terrorism as propagandistic resources within political discourse, examining their interaction with the discourses of the PP and FAES.

3. Think Tanks as Disseminators of Political Party Information: The Case of FAES

Since the mid-20th century, think tanks have grown significantly worldwide, now numbering over 8,000 (McGann, 2021). Their expansion has heightened public visibility and fueled conceptual debates, leading some to call the term "slippery" (Xifra, 2016, p. 11). The discussion remains marked by ambiguity and broad definitions, lacking a universally accepted description (Abelson, 2006; Castillo and Smolak, 2017).

Given these circumstances, rather than providing an imprecise solution, it is more appropriate to present fragments of various definitions and highlight the features most relevant to the present study. Thus, a think tank could be described as a "soft power instrument" (Montobbio, 2013, p. 20) or an "institution composed of intellectuals and experts in various fields" (Rebollo-Bueno, 2019, p. 168), which, "through research and analysis" (Castillo, 2009, p. 4), aims to "influence public opinion" (Montobbio, 2013, p. 20), make "political action proposals to institutional bodies" (Castillo, 2009, p. 4), "inspire public policies" (Author, 2019, p. 168), and influence the "actors in the political system who participate in policy-making" (Montobbio, 2013, p. 20).

Think tanks are often considered altruistic, especially in the United States, where many operate as non-profits independent from government, business, and political parties (McGann and Weaver, 2000). Yet, this independence does not equate to neutrality. Although think tank leaders may view themselves as champions of reason and objectivity, they frequently advance specific political agendas (Shaw et al., 2015) and vigorously defend their ideologies (Rich, 2004)

The discourse around think tanks is framed by two principal theories: elitist, viewing them as closely tied to business, financial, and government networks, and pluralist, seeing them as civil society actors (Parrilla et al., 2016). Medvetz (2012) challenges this binary by emphasizing their role as boundary organizations, existing not strictly within or between these spheres but at their intersection.

The Fundación para el Análisis y los Estudios Sociale (FAES) is precisely one of those "boundary think tanks". Established in 1989, it considers itself "a private, non-profit foundation working in the realm of ideas" with the objective of "nourishing the thought of the liberal reformist center with political proposals that influence decision-making and impact public opinion" (FAES, n.d.). From its inception, it was

linked to the Popular Party (PP). Although FAES modified its statutes in 2016 to officially sever its ties with the PP, it remained the foundation with the highest income from public subsidies (ElHuffPost, 2020).

FAES aligns with advocacy think tanks, which are characterized by a strong policy, partisan, or ideological focus, combined with aggressive efforts to influence current policy debates (Weaver, 1989). However, it also fits the profile of a policy-oriented think tank, aiming to act as "a factory of ideas in the service of public policies" (Barberá and Arregui, 2011, p. 12). McGann's (2021) classification proves insufficient to fully capture its nature. Prior to the 2016 statutory reform, it more closely resembled a political-party-affiliated think tank, which not only develops arguments for public policy but also fosters political debate and serves as a training platform for party members (Botto, 2011).

Lastly, FAES has also been described as "a good example of a generative node", meaning a nucleus capable of generating nodes and branches, as well as linking to other networks with the aim of "strengthening its outreach and presence in new spaces and new territories" (Olmedo and Santa Cruz-Grau, 2013, pp. 478-479). This is especially true in Latin America.

FAES is recognized as Spain's second-leading think tank in the use of diverse media tools to disseminate its ideas (Castillo et al., 2020). It employs seven unidirectional tools—such as multimedia archives, newsletters, and annual reports—and nine bidirectional tools, including interviews, seminars, academic events, and social media. Notable initiatives include its academic journal Cuadernos FAES, featuring contributions from institutional and academic sectors, as well as its Leadership Training Program and FAES Campus, where prominent PP figures regularly speak.

In 2009—when formal ties with the PP still existed—researchers Barberá and Arregui conducted an interview with the "internal operations manager" of FAES, who admitted that "its actions generate a significant impact on the political process, although this claim is based more on intuition and feedback received from public institutions" (Barberá and Arregui, 2011, p. 14). He also noted that "there is a very fluid communication channel with the party [PP]" and that "a large part of the Foundation's work is carried out based on the party's [PP] needs on issues where deeper reflection is deemed necessary" (Barberá and Arregui, 2011, p. 13). He emphasized the importance of "formal and informal contacts" with "key actors in the political process" over the open dissemination of reports and research (2011, p. 16).

Regarding its relationship with the media, studies on FAES present diverse results. The latest index by McGann (2021) ranks FAES as the fourth most important Spanish think tank, suggesting high media exposure. This was confirmed by the work of Castillo et al. (2017), which identified FAES as the think tank with the greatest media presence between 2012 and 2016. However, these findings contrast with more recent studies, such as that by Roger-Monzó and Castelló (2020), which place the foundation in ninth position.

This discrepancy could be due to various hypotheses, such as the one proposed by Lalueza and Girona (2016, p. 7), that "the greater the public awareness of a relationship between a think tank and a political party, the less attractive this think tank is as a source to the media", or the idea that, although FAES distributes

academic products, “their commitment to academic rigor is dubious when they hold consistent political and economic servitudes” (Parrilla et al., 2016, p. 344).

In addition to these considerations, attention must be paid to the dynamics of the coexistence between think tanks and politics in Spain. Various studies have shown that FAES’s media appearance increases during political conflicts or economic crises, with a declining trend during periods of stability (Roger and Castelló, 2020; Castelló and Roger, 2021).

Finally, a significant body of publications revolves around the ideology of FAES and the promotion of its economic agenda. Specifically, these works address its adherence to the so-called “Washington Consensus” (Parrilla, Almirón, and Xifra, 2016) and its defense of the free market with an Anglo-Saxon approach (Pineda et al., 2019). This economic agenda extends to various domains, such as education, with recurrent proposals for privatization, neoliberal legislative reforms, and the abandonment of the welfare state (Olmedo and Santa Cruz-Grau, 2013; Saura, 2015).

Advocacy think tanks, by their nature, typically pursue diversified rather than specialized activities (Barberá and Arregui, 2011). As a result, economic analyses alone fail to fully capture the FAES phenomenon, which extends into social and political domains beyond the economic sphere, such as perceptions of terrorism and its perpetrators.

Thus, the present study has the general goal (GG) of identifying whether the threat of terrorism is used as a propagandistic resource in the discourses of FAES and the PP, aiming to determine if there is a feedback loop between them. If the answer is affirmative, it would support the possibility that FAES, despite no longer maintaining formal ties with the PP, retains an informal political relationship. It is important to highlight that terrorism, as mentioned, is not trivial in the political and intellectual history of the party and the foundation. Therefore, the analysis of fear and anger could serve as “quality indicators” in assessing the potential feedback loop.

This objective is complemented by three research questions:

RQ1: What strategies and propagandistic techniques are employed when using the threat of terrorism in both discourses?

RQ2: What is the presence of fear and anger in the discourses on terrorism by the PP and FAES?

RQ3: Is there, in fact, a discourse about terrorism by the PP and FAES?

4. Methods

To address both the objective and the research questions, a quantitative content analysis (CA) was employed. This method was chosen for its systematic and exhaustive data collection, without overlooking the analysis of “symbolic phenomena” (Krippendorff, 1990, p. 7), which is pertinent given the study’s focus on two primary emotions: fear and anger.

This methodological approach was applied to the publications on the social network X (formerly Twitter) by FAES [@FundacionFAES] and the PP [@ppopular].

This platform was selected because it is considered "the quintessential political network" (Fernández-Gómez, Hernández-Santaolalla, and Sanz-Marcos, 2018, p. 20), allowing direct communication between the party/institution and the public without human intermediaries, as might occur in debates or interviews. For FAES, out of the five social networks it uses, X is the most active (Castillo, Castillero-Ostio, and Castillo-Díaz, 2020).

The sample was collected using the platform FanPage Karma, which specializes in extracting material from social networks. All posts or shares (formerly tweets or retweets) by FAES and the Popular Party (PP) that included the word "terrorism" were obtained. This resulted in an initial corpus of 1,048 publications, each considered a unit of analysis, except for those forming part of a larger thread, which were treated as a single unit. However, sixteen posts were unavailable for analysis, reducing the corpus to 1,032 publications: 984 from the PP and 48 from FAES. Although the difference is notable, this represents the entire population of posts. Data collection occurred on May 6, 2024, covering the period from March 11, 2013, to April 18, 2024 (determined by the dates of all posts and shares published by FAES and PP profiles on X).

Regarding the analysis tool, a coding sheet with fifteen variables was created to operationalize emotional and propagandistic aspects. These variables were obtained from similar studies that have conducted quantitative research on the phenomenon of propaganda (e.g., Rebollo-Bueno, 2024). Likewise, the triggers were taken from literature in the field of psychology (e.g., Domínguez-Sánchez, 2011; Martín-Díaz, 2011). Additionally, a codebook was developed to ensure that the coding process adhered to the exhaustiveness and systematicity required by the method. With three coders, Krippendorff's alpha (1990) was used to measure the tool's reliability, resulting in $\alpha = 0.89$, which exceeds the required 0.8.

The analysis sheet consists of five initial variables that record general information about the coding itself (coder, coding date, URL of the analyzed piece, tweet publication date, and sender). Following these initial data, five filter variables are used to determine if fear and/or anger are being utilized:

(1) Triggers for the use of fear (Martín-Díaz, 2011): (a) perception of harm/danger; (b) very intense negative stimuli; (c) very noticeable and new stimuli; (d) special evolutionary dangers; (e) stimuli from social interactions; (f) conditioned fear-inducing stimuli; (g) none; (h) undetermined; and (i) other (open field).

(2) Use of fear: (a) yes; (b) no. This is marked affirmatively if any of the previous triggers are found.

(3) Existence of another threat/danger besides terrorism: (a) unemployment; (b) immigration; (c) economic crisis (Castella and McGarty, 2011); (d) none; (e) undetermined; and (f) other (open field). In this case, the "other" option is particularly significant, as fear is a primary emotion that is especially contextual (Rimé, 2011).

(4) Triggers for the use of anger (Domínguez-Sánchez, 2011): (a) impediment to achieving a goal (individual or collective); (b) violation of norms; (c) extinction of learned norms, considerations, etc.; (d) harm inducer; (e) none; (f) undetermined; and (g) other (open field).

(5) Use of anger: (a) yes; (b) no. This is marked affirmatively if any of the previous triggers are found.

After this, the propagandistic analysis is collected, consisting of the following aspects:

(1) Propagandistic techniques related to fear (e.g., Morelli, 2002; Charaudeau, 2009; Catalán, 2018): (a) Manichaeism/polarization; (b) creation of the enemy; (c) atrocity propaganda; (d) savior strategy; (e) none; (f) undetermined; and (g) other (open field).

(2) Types of propaganda (Pineda, 2006): (a) affirmation propaganda; (b) reaction propaganda; (c) denial propaganda; and (d) undetermined.

(3) Perpetrator of the danger (culprit): (a) political adversary (individual); (b) political adversary (party); (c) internal armed adversary (Spanish terrorists); (d) external armed adversary (e.g., jihadist terrorists); (e) another country (specify which); (f) another religion (specify which); (g) none; (h) undetermined; and (i) other (open field).

(4) Legitimator of the danger, who serves to assist and/or support the threat. The categories for this variable are the same as for the previous one.

(5) Function/purpose of the piece (Graham et al., 2013; Bustos-Díaz and Ruiz-del Olmo, 2016; Hernández-Santaolalla et al., 2024): (a) report a news item; (b) individual position of a party member; (c) party position; (d) criticize/discuss a topic; (e) give advice/help; (f) express recognition/appreciation; (g) personal matter; (h) humor; (i) highlight achievements; (j) none; (k) undetermined; and (l) other (open field).

The statistical treatment was conducted using Excel 16.65 and IBM SPSS Statistics 26. This analysis involved obtaining the relative frequencies of the variables under study and examining the existing relationships through Pearson's Chi-square non-parametric statistical test.

5. Results

5.1. Analysis of Fear and Anger

Regarding the presence of fear, the total sample shows a result of 63.0%, with 96.9% of these cases belonging to PP publications. When examining the data on anger, this figure rises to 65.5%, with 96.6% of the instances attributed to the PP and 3.4% to FAES. In total, 69.77% (720 posts) evoke one of these emotions, and in 92.8% of cases, both emotions coincide, occurring simultaneously. There is a statistically significant relationship between the two variables ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 577.72$; $p < 0.001$). The large percentage gap between PP and FAES is due to the equally wide difference in the number of units of analysis for each sender, which prevents establishing direct correlations or comparisons, although it does suggest possible feedback.

An example of this combination can be seen in Figure 1, a tweet from PP Andalusia [@ppandaluz] shared by the studied user, with the text: "For the PSOE,

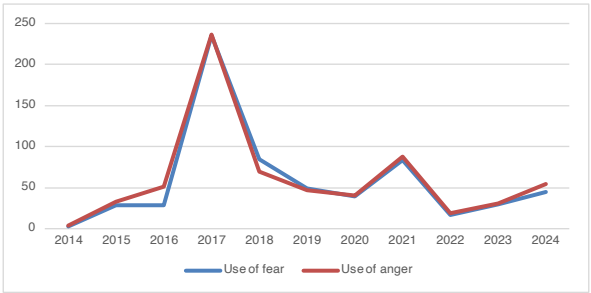
this is no longer terrorism; it's just 6 votes" (Ppandaluz, 2024). This publication is accompanied by four images depicting disturbances in Catalonia. The textual and graphical concurrence could generate fear through a noticeable and intense stimulus, as well as a perception of danger, while also evoking anger due to the induction of harm.

Figure 1.
A tweet shared by the Popular Party's account

Source: Ppandaluz (2024)

From a longitudinal perspective, which tracks the temporal evolution of both emotions, a fluctuating trend is observed. In 2017, there was a spike due to several attacks carried out by the Islamic State on Western soil, including Barcelona (Figure 2). Conversely, the increase seen in 2021 is mainly due to a discursive shift led by Pablo Casado, who held numerous events with ETA victims. The program of the National Convention that year included a panel titled "Terrorism and Political Violence". Additionally, Casado sought to equate the parliamentary agreements between the government and the Catalan and Basque separatists with terrorism. Furthermore, a similar use of fear and anger is observed, which could indicate their complementarity.

Figure 2.
Longitudinal Study of the Emotions Fear and Anger (Total)



Source: own elaboration

To arrive at these findings, as previously explained, the triggers were examined. Among these, to generate the emotion of fear, the "perception of danger" stands out (59.5%), followed, distantly, by "very intense negative stimuli" (14.1%) (Table 1). The difference is notable. Despite the absence of internal armed organizations during the decade studied and having suffered only one jihadist attack (in 2017), both the PP and FAES opted to convey a sense of threat consistent with the pursuit of favorable partisan and electoral outcomes. As Marks (1991) notes, alluding to danger triggers survival mechanisms—in this case, the ideological solutions proposed by both institutions. There is, therefore, a significant relationship between the primary trigger and both senders ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 10.146$; $p < 0.001$), indicating a common tendency to address terrorism as a current phenomenon in Spain, despite its declining activity. Figure 1 can again serve as an example of this trigger.

Table 1.
Frequency (%) of Fear Triggers by Sender

	PP	FAES	Total1
Perception of harm/danger	60,6	37,5	59,5
Very intense negative stimuli	14,5	6,3	14,1
Stimuli from social interactions	4,6	2,1	4,5
Special evolutionary dangers	1,5	0	1,5
Very noticeable and new stimuli	1,3	2,1	1,4
Conditioned fear-inducing stimuli	0,8	2,1	0,9
Undetermined	0,9	0	0,9
Total	96,9	3,1	100

Source: own elaboration

[1] The sum of the totals is greater than the sample size because more than one category can occur in the variable.

Regarding anger, the "harm inducer" stands out (25.4%)—with a significant relationship ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 4.40$; $p < 0.036$)—followed by "violation of norms" (22.8%) and "extinction of learned norms, considerations, etc." (20.4%) (Table 2). An example of the "harm inducer" trigger is a tweet from the PP that includes a video where the then-party leader, Pablo Casado, stated in front of some ETA victims, "your loved ones were killed for being from the PP" (Ppopular, 2021). On the other hand, the trigger most frequently used by FAES appeals to the moral considerations of terrorism and its legitimizers ("extinction of learned norms, considerations, etc."), as the think tank focuses more on waging the intellectual and cultural battle.

Table 2.
Frequency (%) of Anger Triggers by Sender

	PP	FAES	Total1
Harm inducer	26	12,5	25,4
Violation of norms	23,4	12,5	22,8
Extinction of learned norms, considerations, etc.	20	29,2	20,4
Impediment to achieving a goal	13,7	4,2	13,3
Undetermined	0,6	0	0,6
Total	96,6	3,4	100

Source: own elaboration

It is worth noting that references to other threats allied with terrorism are fewer (22.7%) (Table 3). This could suggest that the threat posed by terrorism alone is sufficient and does not require an additional fear-inducing element. However, coinciding with the ascent of the socialist Pedro Sánchez to the presidency of the government, the "other" category increased abruptly, leading to the addition of three more situations ("corruption", "institutional crisis", and "disintegration/rupture of the country/state"), some of which are related to the Catalan independence process or the government agreements between the PSOE and the Basque left-wing separatists, interpreted as a "surrender" of the state for partisan interests. As observed, "institutional crisis" accompanies terrorism in 18.2% of cases, showing a similarity between both senders (PP and FAES), which may indicate a concurrent argument that positions the president as allegedly putting institutions at the service of terrorists.

Table 3.
Frequency (%) of existence of another threat/danger besides terrorism

	PP	FAES	Total1
Institutional crisis	18,2	18,8	18,2
Disintegration of the State	3,5	6,3	3,6
Corruption	1,2	4,2	1,4
Migration	1,3	0	1,3
Economic crisis	1,2	2,1	1,3
Unemployment	0,7	0	0,7
Undetermined	0,4	0	0,4

Others	1,4	6,3	1,6
Total	96,9	3,1	100

Source: own elaboration

5.2. Propagandistic Analysis

The most frequently used technique related to fear and/or anger by both senders is the "creation of the enemy" (74.7%) (Table 4). This result aligns with the overall finding that the primary trigger for both emotions was predominantly the "perception of harm". An example of this technique is the following tweet from FAES: "Otegi has already stated that he will continue to support Sánchez. It is worth remembering: he has not condemned ETA nor asked for forgiveness from the victims. We should be concerned about the moral bewilderment in the face of those who act as executors of the legacy of terrorism" (FundaciónFAES, 2019). Additionally, the breakdown of these propagandistic techniques based on the emotion evoked reveals that both emotions appear in a very similar manner (Table 5).

Table 4.
Frequency (%) of Propagandistic Techniques by Sender

	PP	FAES	Total1
Creation of the enemy	74,9	70,4	74,7
Manichaeism/Polarization	18,3	3,7	17,8
Savior strategy	10,7	0	10,3
Atrocity propaganda	7,9	3,7	7,8
None	3,5	14,8	3,9
Undetermined	1,2	11,2	1,5
Total	95,25	4,75	100

Source: own elaboration

Table 5.
Frequency (%) of Propagandistic Techniques by Emotion

	Fear	Anger	Total1
Creation of the enemy	78,4	78,2	74,7
Manichaeism/Polatization	18,6	16,2	17,8
Savior strategy	8,6	10	10,3
Atrocity propaganda	8,5	8,3	7,8
None	1,7	3	3,9
Undetermined	0,9	1	1,5
Total	63	65,5	100

Source: own elaboration

Regarding the types of propaganda (Table 6), "affirmation" is the most common in the PP, while "denial" is prominent in FAES. This could reflect a logical relationship between the nature of both senders: FAES, as a think tank, focuses on the causes and analysis of problems, while the PP, as a political party, must also

offer a positive image of itself—competent and decisive—alongside the "creation of the enemy". Additionally, there is a significant relationship between the variable senders (PP and FAES) and the types of propaganda ($\chi^2_{(3)} = 34.027$; $p < 0.001$).

Table 6.
Frequency (%) of Types of Propaganda by Sender

	PP	FAES	Total1
Affirmation	43	18,5	42,1
Denial	31,3	63	32,5
Reaction	24,7	7,4	24
Undetermined	1	11,1	1,4
Total	95,25	4,75	100

Source: own elaboration

Regarding the perpetrators, the most notable data indicate that in 42.1% of cases, an "internal armed adversary (Spanish terrorist)", predominantly ETA, is identified, followed by the "external armed adversary" (24.2%), which aligns with jihadist terrorism. Both the PP (42.4% and 24.4%, respectively) and FAES (34.6% and 19.2%) follow this same dynamic. Additionally, some interesting patterns emerge when focusing on specific dates: each anniversary of the 11M attacks sees tributes to terrorism victims. During the study period, 27 tweets were published: 15 with an "undetermined" perpetrator, referring to "generic terrorism"; in 8 instances, the commemoration was diverted to remember ETA's violence; and only in the last 4 was jihadist terrorism mentioned, though never specifying Al-Qaeda, likely due to the controversy over the attribution of responsibility that marked José María Aznar's government. The highest concentration of references to ETA on the 11M anniversaries corresponds with Pablo Casado's leadership of the PP.

In contrast, legitimators are less common, not appearing in 63.4% of the messages. Although this is the overall data, a look at the timeline suggests a progressive trend in identifying legitimators, especially since Pedro Sánchez became president, with recurring mentions of him, some of his ministers, or his party as endorsers of terrorism. Argumentatively, they are portrayed as supporters of terrorism by reducing the dispersion of ETA prisoners in prisons far from the Basque Country, through their government pacts with separatist parties, or due to the recent Amnesty Law, which affects terrorism-related crimes linked to the Catalan independence process.

The last variable in the propagandistic analysis aims to understand the purpose of the piece under study. As observed in Table 7, the PP usually opts for "party position statement" (39.5%). For example, Mariano Rajoy, as leader of the conservative party, tweeted—and it was shared by the party's account—the official stance of the organization regarding "the war against terrorism": "We will reinforce the fight against ETA and the memory, justice, and dignity of the victims of terrorism. We stand with them" (@MarianoRajoy, 2017). The "expression of recognition/appreciation" to the victims of terrorism occupies a minor place (15.9%), even though the internal terrorism phenomenon is fortunately part of Spanish historical memory and does not act as a real threat in the present. They also do not "solicit opinions" from their audiences, even though social networks represented an in-

novation in bidirectional communication; these data align with those provided by Cea-Esteruelas (2020), which already demonstrated the low interactivity of the PP profile on X. This category is followed by "criticize/discuss a topic" (32.4%), which is the main function in FAES (66.7%), a case that makes sense as think tanks strive to appear neutral to their audiences, who are more concerned with intellectual production than ideological militancy. It is also noteworthy that there is a significant relationship between both variables ($\chi^2_{(7)} = 45.22$; $p < 0.001$).

Table 7.
Frequency (%) of the Function/Purpose of the Unit of Analysis

	PP	FAES	Total1
Party position statement	39,5	7,4	38,2
Criticize/discuss a topic	32,4	66,7	33,7
Express recognition/ appreciation	15,9	3,7	15,4
Personal position statement	7,2	0	7
Report a news item	3,2	22,2	3,9
Highlight achievements	1	0	1
Give advice/help	0,4	0	0,4
Humor	0,4	0	0,4
Total	95,25	4,75	100

Source: own elaboration

6. Discussion and Conclusions

Following the presentation of the results, it is evident that the PP has sought to stimulate fear and anger in its propagandistic discourses on terrorism on the social network X. This aligns with the Western and Spanish context we previously outlined in describing the notion of "political trauma". Similarly, as the studies cited indicate, this discourse is fueled by other institutions, such as think tanks, which help create narratives that support certain political decisions and/or ideas, as well as develop a political and social agenda (Shaw et al., 2015). This is the case with FAES.

Although a limitation of the study is the complexity of creating a comparative analysis between the discourse of the political party and the foundation in quantitative terms—especially considering that FAES, despite favoring X as its preferred social network, does not fully utilize its potential, using it mainly as a bulletin board for other content (its magazine, online analyses, etc.) (Castillo and Smolak, 2017)—it can still be affirmed that there is certain feedback between both discourses on the analyzed social network.

There is a clear alignment between the two senders in identifying ETA as the main perpetrator, despite its armed activity having ceased in 2011, before the creation of the two X accounts. The connection between the PP, FAES, and ETA is well-known and was mentioned earlier, and it cannot be overlooked that associations of terrorism victims are a major political actor in Spain (Alonso, 2017).

On one hand, as Catalán (2018) explains, the PP has an electoral interest in keeping the idea alive that the Basque nationalist group remains armed, recalling—with vindictive language—the acts committed by the group to frame Spain's territorial problem with Catalonia and the Basque Country, which dates back to the early 20th century. Hence, one of the dangers accompanying fear in the studied sample is the "disintegration/rupture of the country/state", and another is the "institutional crisis" linked to partisan agreements between the PSOE and the Catalan and Basque independence movements.

On the other hand, FAES, beyond potentially feeding the PP's political discourse, also has a history marked by ETA. As mentioned earlier, several trustees of the foundation were victims of the group. It is also important to note that the second most frequently mentioned perpetrators are jihadist organizations.

This addresses the general objective of the study: to identify whether the threat of terrorism is used as a propagandistic resource in the discourse of FAES and the PP, and to determine if there is a feedback loop between them.

Another point that indicates the feedback loop between both senders is the "function/purpose of the pieces". On one hand, the PP uses X mainly to position itself and take a stance as a party against the threat of terrorism. On the other hand, FAES primarily uses it to criticize or discuss a topic. Given the alignment in their arguments — for instance, in response to the possibility that the 2024 Amnesty Law could affect Catalan separatists accused of terrorism, the PP tried to position the idea that "there is no good terrorism and bad terrorism", an argument previously employed by FAES in reference to ETA — we can deduce that the foundation fulfills the role of presenting the threat and developing the issue, while the party positions itself politically before mass audiences. This is also consistent with the use of 'affirmation propaganda' by the PP and "denial propaganda" by FAES: while one exposes the danger, the other proposes measures to be taken (Charaudeau, 2009).

Regarding the research questions, RQ 1 (What strategies and propagandistic techniques are used when the threat of terrorism is employed in both discourses?) is answered by pointing out that the "creation of the enemy" is the most used technique by both senders. This also reflects a certain feedback loop, especially considering that they refer to the same perpetrators. As reflected by Brown (1995) and Huici (2017), propagandistic discourses on terrorism need the enemy to be seen as something fearful, as absolute evil, to facilitate its shift towards anger against those who threaten "us" (Bisquerra, 2017). In fact, if we look at Figure 2, both emotions follow a very similar process, which would confirm that they are two complementary primary emotions.

As for RQ 2 (What is the presence of fear and anger in the discourses on terrorism by the PP and FAES?), it is answered by stating that the presence of both emotions is notable, exceeding the majority of the analyzed pieces (fear occupies 63.0% and anger 65.5%). However, as mentioned in the methodology, these data are not comparable between senders due to their uneven presence in the universe; hence, the majority belong to the PP, with the presence of emotions being minimal in the FAES account.

Considering the construction of the enemy and the use of negative emotions employed by both the PP and FAES, it is now possible to answer RQ3. Specifically,

there is a clear and deliberate discourse on terrorism articulated by both the political party and the think tank. This discourse is structured around the persistent identification of ETA, which serves to consolidate and reinforce identity-based narratives within the in-group (see Eco, 2013), thereby legitimising an ideological framework aligned with their political interests. Although this discourse remains predominantly negative and centred on ETA, the PP has increasingly instrumentalised it in order to delegitimise and confront the Basque and Catalan independence movements. This relates to Lasswell's (1971) argument that symbols—such as ETA within these discourses—harbour shifting collective emotions shaped by a specific context. However, as Lasswell explains, both symbols and the ideologies attached to them remain, at least in part, embedded within those emotions, functioning as a form of residual weight within the collective social imagination.

In conclusion, this study highlights two main issues. First, the instrumentalization of the emotions of fear and anger by both the PP and FAES in their discourses on terrorism on the social network X is evident. This could contribute to the atmosphere of terror prevalent in the West (Salvador, 2015) and, in particular, Spain, given its tragic history linked to armed struggle —this may well constitute the fertile ground to which Domenach (1962) refers as a prerequisite for effective propaganda—. Knowing this, it must be considered that fear is regarded by some authors (Korstanje, 2014; Furedi, 2018) as an anti-democratic emotion, serving as a social controller (Altheide, 2017). Terrorism is a deeply complex and emotional phenomenon that impacts societies in devastating ways. The tragic personal stories that emerge from these events reflect the pain and loss suffered by victims and their families. However, the political treatment of terrorism must not be guided solely by fear and anger, but by ethical principles and the pursuit of justice. A more constructive approach to addressing it is offered by transitional justice and memorial values. Transitional justice provides a framework for recognizing and repairing the harm suffered by victims while also promoting long-term reconciliation and social cohesion by fostering an environment where human rights violations do not go unpunished. Memorial values honour and emphasize the importance of defending human rights.

The second issue is the feedback loop between FAES and the Popular Party; despite lacking formal integration, the propagandistic similarities indicate that the original bond they maintained has not been fully severed. As a future line of research, a qualitative study of the sample presented here is proposed, focusing on the same structures that may be of interest (e.g., treatment of the perpetrators).

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Conflict of interest I Conflito de interesses

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Authors Contributions I Contributos dos Autores

- **Study conception:** Sara Rebollo-Bueno and AdriánTarín-Sanz.
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- **Data analysis:** All authors.
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