

likely to succeed in such countries, another recommendation is to give higher priority to preventing or foiling attacks. If an attack occurs, it should be handled with less partisanship over framing the issue than occurred after the 11-M attack. Finally, because distrust of the government led by the Popular Party contributed to the terrorists' success, governments have an interest in building and maintaining the trust of their publics.

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—Rysia Murphy
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The Author Replies:

I appreciate William Rose and Rysia Murphy's thoughtful comments on my recent article in *International Security*.¹ We agree on two main points: (1) terrorist groups that primarily target civilians fail to coerce their governments into making policy concessions; and (2) future research is needed to determine if there are any exceptions to the rule. Rose and Murphy focus on the second point and purport to identify an important outlier that "does not fit" the rule: the March 2004 Madrid train bombings.

The authors claim that the Madrid case undermines my article in two ways. First, they believe the attack shows that democracies are uniquely vulnerable to coercion because terrorists can sometimes influence policies by scaring the electorate into ousting the incumbent leader. Specifically, they argue that the Madrid attack represents a successful case of coercion because it bombed to power the antiwar candidate for prime minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, who kept his campaign pledge to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq. Second, the authors assert that the Madrid case does not conform to correspondent inference theory because the Spanish public interpreted the bombings as evidence of 11-M's intent to end the occupation, rather than to destroy the Spanish way of life, making coercion possible. The first claim is weaker than the second: the Madrid case is an empirically problematic example of terrorist coercion, but it helps to delimit the antecedent conditions in which terrorist attacks on civilians might theoretically be effective.

The Madrid case is an empirically problematic example of terrorist coercion for three reasons. First, the argument that the 11-M attack coerced Spain into withdrawing from Iraq is questionable, because Zapatero might have won the election and then altered Spanish policy even in the absence of the attack. The "surprise" defeat of Prime Minister José María Aznar was actually not that surprising. In the days preceding the attack, Aznar held a narrow lead in most surveys, but the differences between the candidates' voter estimates usually fell within the margin of error.² Indeed, by early March the gap

1. Max Abrahms, "Why Terrorism Does Not Work," *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Fall 2006), pp. 42–78.

2. Ignacio Lago and José Ramón Montero, "The 2004 Election in Spain: Terrorism, Accountability, and Voting," *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (July 2006), p. 17.

between the two candidates had closed: some surveys put Aznar ahead by a single point, while others had Zapatero winning by a razor-thin margin. In their study on the 2004 Spanish election, Ignacio Lago and José Ramón Montero state, "It must be remembered that if the attacks had not taken place, either the PP [Aznar's Popular Party] or the PSOE [Zapatero's Socialist Party] could have won the election: only days before 11-M, the polls pointed to a 'technical tie.'"³ Furthermore, in the lead-up to the attack, the majority of Spaniards believed the country needed a "change of government"; a large percentage of the electorate was undecided; and in Spain undecided voters tend to vote for left-wing candidates such as Zapatero.⁴ Postelection returns confirm that Aznar did not lose any electoral support after the attack; as expected, the undecided voters gravitated toward the left-leaning candidates.⁵ The extent of electoral change or interelectoral volatility was not atypical for Spanish national elections.⁶ The claim that the 11-M attack successfully coerced Spain into withdrawing from Iraq is based on the counterfactual argument that without the attack, Zapatero would have lost the election, which is uncertain from the polling data.

Second, Rose and Murphy imply that undecided voters gravitated toward Zapatero after the attack because it revealed the escalating costs of maintaining troops in Iraq, but Aznar compromised his electoral viability primarily by blaming the bombings on ETA. In testimony before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Philip Gordon stated, "The [Aznar] government appears to have paid more of a price for misleading the public than for its policy on Iraq."⁷ In her study on the 2004 election, Georgina Blakeley found that "the point, therefore, is not that the bombings affected the general election, but rather, that the government's handling of the bombings had such profound consequences."⁸ The BBC likewise reported, "It is sometimes wrongly claimed that the bombings themselves led directly to the defeat of the Conservative government and its replacement just days later by the Socialists. In fact, it was the perception that the government was misleading the public about who was responsible that did [the] most damage."⁹ Other foreign outlets, including Spanish television networks and the French newspaper *Le Monde*, reached the same conclusion.¹⁰ In sum, the dominant in-

3. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

4. Georgina Blakeley, "It's Politics, Stupid! The Spanish General Election of 2004," *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (March 2006), p. 339.

5. See Enric Ordeix i Rigo, "Aznar's Political Failure or Punishment for Supporting the Iraq War? Hypotheses About the Causes of the 2004 Spanish Election Results," *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (December 2005), p. 613.

6. Ingrid van Biezen, "Terrorism and Democratic Legitimacy: Conflicting Interpretations of the Spanish Elections," *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (March 2005), p. 107.

7. Philip H. Gordon, "Madrid Bombings and U.S. Policy," testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 108th Cong., 2d sess., March 31, 2004, p. 2, <http://www.senate.gov/?foreign/testimony/2004/GordonTestimony040331.pdf>.

8. "The Legacy of the Madrid Bombings," *BBC News*, February 15, 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6357599.stm>.

9. Blakeley, "It's Politics, Stupid!" p. 342.

10. See Ray Suarez, José Gijón, and Salvador Sala, "Terrorism and Politics in Spain," *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, March 16, 2004; and "L'Espagne Sanctionne le Mensonge d'Etat" [Spain punishes the government's lie], *Le Monde*, March 16, 2004, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/international/jan-june04/spain_03-16.html.

terpretation is that Zapatero's postattack election gains were due mostly to Aznar's mismanagement of the attack—not the Iraqi occupation that elicited it—undermining the claim that the attack itself bombed Zapatero into power and effectively coerced the Spanish withdrawal.

Third, it is doubtful that enlarging my sample of terrorist organizations or including ad hoc groups affiliated with al-Qaida would lend support to the claim that democracies are uniquely vulnerable to terrorist coercion. I agree with Rose and Murphy that "the Madrid case is probably quite rare and possibly unique" because terrorism historically shifts the electorate to the right—not the left—thereby empowering hard-liners who oppose accommodating the perpetrators.¹¹ The most obvious example is in Israel, but the trend is also evident in the United States, where the mere release of Osama bin Laden's videotape the weekend before the 2004 presidential election boosted George W. Bush's electoral lead by two percentage points over his comparatively dovish opponent, John Kerry.¹²

Rose and Murphy's stronger claim is that the Madrid case does not conform to correspondent inference theory. They point out that the train bombings targeted Spanish civilians, and yet the public did not revise its perception that al-Qaida and its affiliates aimed to achieve the limited policy goal of ending the occupation of Iraq. The Madrid case suggests that when a target country has strong preexisting beliefs that the terrorists are motivated by limited policy objectives, it will not always infer from attacks on its civilians that the terrorists are driven by ideological or maximalist objectives.

Before the September 11 attacks, most Americans had little knowledge of al-Qaida. They therefore inferred from the consequences of the terrorist acts that the perpetrators aimed to harm American society and its values. Similarly, until the September 1999 apartment bombings, the Russian public knew little about the Chechnya campaign and therefore inferred from them that the Chechens had maximalist objectives. By contrast, Spanish opinion of al-Qaida's limited policy objectives was broadly and intensely established prior to the train bombings. Before the attack, 90 percent of the public disagreed with Aznar's position that participating in the Iraq war made Spain safer from terrorism, an entrenched disconnect highlighted by two of the largest antiwar protests in history.¹³ Whereas news of the Chechnya occupation was withheld from the Russian public until it was targeted in September 1999, Spanish combat deaths in Iraq in August, October, and November 2003 were front-page news, reinforcing the perception that the terrorists aimed to end the occupation rather than Spain's way of life.¹⁴

The Madrid example suggests that, in theory, terrorist attacks on civilians may potentially lead to policy concessions if the target country has extremely firm preexisting beliefs that the enemy is motivated by limited policy objectives. When this is the case,

11. See Christopher Hewitt, *Consequences of Political Violence* (Sudbury, Mass.: Dartmouth, 1993), pp. 80, 97–98.

12. Claude Berrebi and Esteban F. Klor, "On Terrorism and Electoral Outcomes: Theory and Evidence from the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 50, No. 6 (January 2006), pp. 899–925. See also David Paul Kuhn, "Who Will 'Osama Surprise' Help?" *CBSNews.com*, October 30, 2004, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/10/30/politics/main652438.shtml>.

13. Mar Roman, "Spain Won't Bow to Calls to Pull Troops," Associated Press, December 1, 2003.

14. *Ibid.*

attacks—regardless of target selection—will communicate the escalating costs of defying the terrorists’ limited policy goals, making coercion possible. Future research is still needed, however, to identify a case of coercion where these antecedent conditions are present. Such a case would demonstrate not only that the attack(s) on civilians stoked the public’s preexisting fears of defying the terrorists’ limited policy objectives, but that these fears actually changed the country’s policy. Rose and Murphy’s case study on the 11-M attack provides convincing evidence of the former, but not the latter. It is a basic truism that insurgency works, but terrorism does not.

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