

**ARTICLE/ARTÍCULO**

# Discourses on the End of ETA Terrorism. Analysis of its Presence in the Written Press in the Basque Country between 2011 and 2014

Los discursos ante el final del terrorismo de ETA. Análisis de su presencia en la prensa escrita del País Vasco entre los años 2011 y 2014

**José Miralles Meroño**

University of the Basque Country, Spain  
[josemiralles@hotmail.com](mailto:josemiralles@hotmail.com)

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## ABSTRACT

In relation to the end of ETA terrorism in the Basque Country, two antagonistic discourses compete for the consolidation of a social narrative. One of these discourses would assume the existence of the terrorist organisation ETA as a consequence of the secular political and social conflict between the Basque Country and the rest of Spain (identified as Model 1); the other would understand the existence of ETA as the cause of this conflict (identified as Model 2). These clashing models define two possible frames of reality (framings) which, in turn, are based on the use of certain psychological defence mechanisms known as states of denial. In this sense, this article aims to demonstrate the degree of penetration of both framings (Models 1 and 2) in the written press not ideologically related to Basque nationalism, between 2011 and 2014 (dependent variable). It also aims to explain how and by means of what mechanisms the adoption of these models can be explained (independent variable).

**KEYWORDS:** sociology; social problems; the Basque Country; terrorism; ETA.

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## RESUMEN

En relación con el fin del terrorismo de ETA en el País Vasco, dos discursos antagónicos compiten por la consolidación de un relato social. Uno de estos discursos asumiría la existencia de la organización terrorista ETA como consecuencia del secular conflicto político y social entre el País Vasco y el resto de España (identificado como modelo 1); el otro, entendería la existencia de ETA como la causa de dicho conflicto (identificado como modelo 2). Dichos modelos en pugna definen dos encuadres posibles de la realidad (*framing*), los cuales se encuentran a su vez articulados sobre el recurso a determinados mecanismos psicológicos de defensa denominados estados de negación. En este sentido, este artículo pretende demostrar el grado de penetración de ambos encuadres (modelos 1 y 2) en la prensa escrita no ideológicamente afín al nacionalismo vasco, entre los años 2011 y 2014 (variable dependiente). Asimismo, pretende explicar cómo y mediante qué mecanismos se explica la adopción de dichos modelos (variable independiente).

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** sociología; problemas sociales; País Vasco; terrorismo; ETA.

## 1. Introduction

Following approximately fifty years of continuous terrorist activities by ETA, 864 murders (more than three hundred still unsolved), 2,500 wounded, thousands of victims and untold suffering<sup>1</sup>, certain sectors of Spanish society insist on adopting a conclusive discourse that legitimises an ideology whose results are no less regrettable than those produced by other types of ideologies while based, however, on the same irrationality.

In the Basque case, this discourse is based on a useful equidistance between victims and perpetrators—essentially based on the equality of human suffering—and on comparing violence of different signs and contexts that have nothing to do with terrorism<sup>2</sup>. Thus, through the use of these devices, the aim is to shape the “framing” of an entire society in relation to the end of ETA terrorism and its associated ideology.

To carry out this shaping, certain sectors of society resort to an arbitrary use of language (Castells, 2013, p. 212), in an area as sensitive as the problem of terrorism and its ideological link to peripheral nationalism, which—as Fernández Soldevilla and López Romo (2012, p. 31) point out—are radical in nature in their very essence; coinciding, almost twenty years later, with the opinion of Professor Mata (1993, p. 45). Furthermore, these sectors also use the powerful propagation vector of a media strongly anchored in the media model known as “polarised pluralism” (Hallin and Mancini, 2008).

Within the framework of strictly formal questions related to content, it is necessary to precisely define the socio-political environments within the Basque Country which are capable of influencing individual and collective thought. In this sense, the nationalist family, mainly represented by the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV/EAJ), has been defined here as “institutional nationalism”. Likewise, the term “Basque nationalism” is also used to define the socio-

political universe formed by the convergence of the previous constellation with the self-styled “nationalist left” (well known in Spanish political jargon as “izquierda abertzale”) which, although representing very distinct social and political sentiments, have often formed a symbiotic tandem whose coinciding aims should not be disregarded. Delving further into the above, the concept of “Basque nationalism” is understood here as that social constellation ascribed to an ideology that seeks to instrumentalise Basque cultural uniqueness for political purposes. Furthermore, as a definition of terrorism, the definition given by Pippa Norris, Montague Kern and Marion Just, “the systematic use of coercive intimidation against civilians for political goals” (Norris et al., 2003, p. 3), will be adopted, given that it includes, with surprising simplicity, all aspects of this complex phenomenon.

## 2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This research article sets out a conceptual and theoretical framework structured around two aspects: a psychosocial dimension based on certain psychological defence mechanisms known as states of denial, in addition to a sociolinguistic aspect based on the theory of *framing*. Subsequently, the conclusions presented will support this decision.

Stanley Cohen (2005), in his work on victimised societies, sensed the importance of recourse to these defence mechanisms in situations of social violence and related suffering. In the specific case of the treatment of the Basque problem in the media, these same cognitive mechanisms are used which, in turn, are based on the use of the so-called language of social control (Cohen, 1988, pp. 393 ff.). Cohen thus highlights the use of euphemism as a means of softening realities for which verbalising is uncomfortable, through a process of linguistic sweetening that makes them more palatable, both for the sender and the receiver of the message (ibid., p. 398).

However, this language of social control is more complex than mere deception. Community patterns are sufficiently entrenched and historically resonant for lies to be truly believed and genuinely influential. In the latter sense, and as Cohen pointed out, “we must rather look in the direction of self-deception and contradictions...” (ibid., p. 183). Cohen’s assessment adds a new dimension to Castells’ view and reinforces, effectively, what the same author subsequently explains, “people tend to select information that favours the decision they feel inclined to make” (2014, p. 199) or, put another way, “people tend to believe what they want to believe” (ibid., pp. 211, 229).

Moreover, as an additional dimension integrated with the previous psychosocial approach, this research addresses a sociolinguistic dimension based on Robert M. Entman’s framing theory. (1993). The integration of the two aspects highlights the complexity of the framing paradigm referred to by Professor Sádaba when stating, “the disciplinary context that gives rise to framing theory is broad and

diffuse [...] it merges contributions from various sciences such as Psychology, Sociology and Philosophy” (2008, p. 15) which, in turn, reinforces what Entman has already stated in terms of framing as a fragmented paradigm (Sádaba, 1993, p. 51). Furthermore, according to Sádaba (2008, p.19), when referring in Spanish to the term *framing* the term “*encuadre*” is used.

## 2.1. On denial

Psychology has shown that denial processes are a defensive resource used on a daily basis by a large part of society (Sutherland, 2015). In that regard, Cohen’s work is one of those that convey an uncomfortable truth. His analysis focuses on what has been referred to above as denial, understood as the individual—and collective—process of denying the reality of certain events or their true impact.

People want to keep their lives ordered and, to a degree, everyone wants to stay in control. Traditionally, Western culture has assumed that the individual must be in control of everything that surrounds his or her own existence (Thompson, 1999), which results in a number of adjustment disorders in situations involving profound change in a person’s life plans. Thus, when a person goes into denial, they reject the threatening and/or uncomfortable situation or event to be accepted—even when it is obvious to others—or, on the contrary, admit the event, but deny its consequences or their magnitude (Goleman, 2015).

In this section it will be essential to refer to the work of Cohen (2005), who, together with Castells (2014) and Goleman, represent essential reading on the use of these psychological defence mechanisms and how psychology itself views them. It is also useful to quote the sociologist Erving Goffman (2006) and the “frameworks” he refers to, thus highlighting the close relationship between psychology, sociology and even linguistics, as Goleman himself acknowledges when quoting Michael Weissberg.<sup>3</sup>

Cohen identifies a full range of strategies adopted by the individual—and the group—in order to arrive at these states of denial. In turn, these strategies make use of all kinds of tools at the disposal of the human mind to convince oneself—and thus others—through “good arguments” that what is observed does not exist as such, or at least has not been correctly interpreted. In that regard, Cohen highlights mechanisms such as (Cohen, 2005, pp. 100 ff.):

- a. Virtual blindness.
- b. The refusal to know or no necessity to know.
- c. Moral indifference.
- d. Diffusion of responsibility and transfer of blame.
- e. Compliance with other loyalties.
- f. Denial of the victim.

- g. Advantageous comparison.
- h. The use of euphemistic language.

It is precisely with regards recourse to these mechanisms that the coding system will be defined and will subsequently be explained in the corresponding section.

## 2.2. On framing

Over recent decades, Basque nationalism has used language in order to give legitimacy to a nationalist ideology affected by ETA terrorism. This has led to the causes and consequences of terrorist violence being presented in a certain way, framing the reality of terrorism within an interpretative framework that converges with its interests. Basque nationalism is thus in the midst of a battle for the construction and consolidation of a social and political narrative that reinterprets ETA's terrorist violence in accordance with criteria favourable to nationalism itself.

In that sense, as stated above, this research is also sustained by the framing paradigm, adopting the theoretical model developed by Robert M. Entman (1993). Thus, according to the definition, "framing is selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making 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 for the item described" (*ibid.*, p. 52).

Furthermore, the framing constitutes a suitable instrument for analysing the situation in which a clash of approaches occurs (Canel et al., 2013, p. 192). In that sense, it is useful in explaining why a certain framing model permeates public discourse to the detriment of others. However, before presenting the results obtained, it is necessary to properly contextualise the framing paradigm and its relationship with the media, and to present the specific case of Spain in relation to the media.

In general terms, it could be said that the process of constructing media reality follows two steps: the selection of the constituent elements of the news agenda, "agenda setting" (McCombs, 2006), in other words, the content considered to generate sufficient news interest among the public and, on the other hand, the "frame building" or "framing" of that content within the framework of the corporate ideology that serves as a reference. However, in the specific case of Spain, it is necessary to introduce some preliminary considerations.

In order to position the Spanish case within the context of Western democracies, media systems are divided into three models: "liberal" (Anglo-Saxon), "democratic corporatist" (Central and Northern Europe) and "polarised pluralism" (Mediterranean area) (Hallin and Mancini, 2008). In essence, polarised pluralism argues that political power elites have considerable influence on agenda setting and frame building, as the media themselves are ideologically aligned with the political option from which they wish to benefit.

Regarding Spain, and in the specific case of polarised pluralism, the media have, in turn, consolidated themselves as elites with political and economic power. In that sense, they interact symbiotically with political parties and other power elites, which, in turn, have adopted a position of dependence on the media for the propagation of their ideology. As a result of this interaction, a natural framing process based on the trial-and-error model does not occur socially, but rather the situation described leads to a framing conflict model, motivated by political interest in reinforcing one's own option by attacking or discrediting the opponent. In other words, a situation arises in which different framings emerge, come into conflict, and either triumph or disappear. (Canel et al., 2012, pp. 214 and 215).

### 3. Hypotheses and Methodology

The formal aspects that make up the structural and analytical apparatus of the research carried out will now be discussed.

#### 3.1. Delimitation of the object of analysis

This research article will present the results obtained from an analysis of the written press between 2011 and 2014, mostly read in the Basque Country, in relation to the penetration of possible framing in the light of an end to ETA terrorism.

The data universe consists of three groups of documents. This division is based on criteria relating to the intrinsic characteristics of the documents that make up the groups:

- a. The first group is made up of a single document drawn up by the Basque Government entitled "*Propuesta de Plan de Paz y Convivencia 2013–2016. Un objetivo de encuentro social*" (Proposal for a Peace and Coexistence Plan 2013–2016. A goal of social engagement), of 11th June 2013 (hereinafter, PPC). The main feature of this document is its institutional nature. From a conceptual point of view, the discourse of this document is precisely that which is taken as a reference in relation to the model that Basque nationalism aims to instil among those who are exposed to its narrative.
- b. A second group is made up of each of the subspaces of the data universe of the written press media outlet *Deia*, whose editorial line is ideologically aligned with institutional Basque nationalism (Fernández and López, 2012, p. 132). These subspaces correspond, in turn, to each of the milestones or specific events that are considered relevant for analysis.
- c. A third group of documents is made up of each of the subspaces within the data universe related to the written press outlets not ideologically aligned with Basque nationalism, which are most widely read in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (*El Correo*, *El Mundo* and *El País*)<sup>4</sup>. These subspaces correspond, in turn, to each of the milestones or specific events that are considered relevant for analysis.

### 3.2. Research questions, hypotheses and methodology

Having defined the theoretical and conceptual framework, in addition to the object of study, this research aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What framing models are found in the written press, mostly read in the Basque Country, with respect to the scenario related to the end of ETA terrorism?
2. What level of penetration do these framing models have in the print media?
3. Why is a certain framing adopted that reinforces the perpetrators' narrative against the victims' narrative?
4. Finally, and in connection with the previous question, by means of what mechanisms is the framing emerging from Basque nationalism adopted in the written press?

In this sense, the research questions formulated are crystallised in the following hypotheses:

#### *Hypothesis 1*

In the period between 2011 and 2014 (inclusive), the written press, mostly read in the Basque Country, tends to reproduce content that substantially contributes to an interpretation of the terrorism perpetrated by the terrorist organisation ETA based on the discourse arising from the ideological framework of Basque nationalism (this interpretation is defined as model 1).

#### *Hypothesis 2*

The reason for the presence of model 1 in the media can be explained, essentially and among other aspects, from a psychosocial perspective. This psychosocial perspective is characterised by substantial recourse to certain psychological defence mechanisms related to so-called states of denial.

In accordance with the above, an appropriate way of addressing the proposed research problem is a mixed methodological approach based on the following:

- Content analysis (CA): a quantitative analytical approach in line with the dimensions of the theoretical framework related to Robert M. Entman and the theory of framing.
- Critical discourse analysis (CDA): a qualitative analytical approach in line with the dimensions of the theoretical framework related to Stanley Cohen and recourse to states of denial in situations of violence and related social suffering.

### 3.3. Coding system

By combining the work of Entman and Cohen in relation to the end of ETA terrorism, two framing models (dependent research variable) have been established which are fighting to establish themselves socially in order to contribute to the definition of a specific social narrative regarding the definitive end to “armed actions” decreed by ETA on 20th October 2011.

By measuring the penetration of the two models, the degree to which hypothesis 1 is fulfilled will be determined. These competing framing models are as follows:

- Model 1. The theory of the secular political and social conflict with Spain as the cause of ETA terrorism.
- Model 2. ETA terrorism as an instrument for the imposition of a nationalist model.

Further defining the parameters of the study, with regard to the types of units of analysis, the “sample units”<sup>5</sup> will be composed of each of the pages contained in the subspaces selected in accordance with the purpose of the research. Furthermore, the “recording units” will be represented by each of the content samples that can be classified within one or more of the categories listed below. Finally, the “context units” will be given by the inclusion of the recording units themselves in the corresponding framing which, in turn, acquires its wording according to the defined categories or indicators.

In that sense, a fundamental part of any research is the determination of an appropriate coding system that allows for the verification of the hypothesis(es) proposed in the research. This coding system is embodied in a set of categories that are essential to the coding process. It is not for nothing that Berelson (1952, p. 147) states that content analysis stands or falls as a result of its categories.

Therefore, in order to explain the reasons for the penetration of the previously defined models, the definition of a series of categories based on recourse to the so-called states of denial is implemented. The measurement of these categories contributes to the verification of research hypothesis 2 by answering the following question: by means of what mechanisms and how is the presence of models 1 and 2 expressed in relation to the end of ETA terrorism in the print media analysed? (independent research variable). These categories are the following:

- a. Conferring credibility on ETA.
- b. ETA as an important socio-political player.
- c. ETA as a terrorist organisation.



- d. Questioning the legitimacy and/or validity of actions by the Spanish state's law enforcement forces and agencies.
- e. Questioning and/or transcending the existing political and/or legal framework.
- f. Distortion of the reality regarding ETA terrorism.
- g. Equivalence between victims of ETA terrorism and other victims.
- h. Equivalence between ETA terrorism and legitimate state violence.
- i. Internationalisation of the Basque problem with the aim of promoting the existence of "conflict theory".
- j. Transfer of responsibility for solving the Basque problem to society and state institutions.
- k. Institutional assimilation and dissemination of the nationalist interpretation.
- l. Diffusion of responsibility and transfer of blame.
- m. Fantasy warfare and euphemistic language.
- n. Advantageous comparison.
- o. Moral distancing from ETA terrorism.
- p. Legitimation of ETA's existence as a perpetrator of violence.
- q. Legitimation of ETA's ideological framework.

Thus, having defined the above categories, it was necessary to create a coding tool to quantify their presence in each of the sample units for the various data subspaces. In that sense, the data matrix in Table 1 was designed as part of the analytical apparatus to carry out this coding process.

**Table 1**  
*Data matrix*

1. Nationalist interpretation: assimilation of the "conflict theory" and ETA terrorism as a consequence of the "political and social conflict"	2. Constitutionalist interpretation: ETA as a cause of the terrorist phenomenon in Spain	3. Pre-dominance of the nationalist interpretation over the constitutionalist interpretation	4. Conferring credibility on ETA	5. ETA as an important socio-political player	6. ETA as a terrorist organisation	7. Questioning the legitimacy and/or validity of actions by the Spanish state's law enforcement forces and agencies	8. Questioning and/or transcending the existing political and/or legal framework	9. Distortion of the reality regarding ETA terrorism	10. Equivalence between victims of ETA terrorism and other victims	11. Equivalence between ETA terrorism and legitimate state violence	12. Internationalisation of the Basque problem with the aim of promoting the existence of "conflict theory"	13. Transfer of responsibility for solving the Basque problem to society and state institutions	14. Institutional assimilation and dissemination of the nationalist interpretation	15. Diffusion of responsibility and transfer of blame	16. Fantasy warfare and euphemistic language	17. Advantageous comparison	18. Moral distancing from ETA terrorism	19. Legitimation of ETA's existence as a perpetrator of violence	20. Legitimation of ETA's ideological framework
Σ categories	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Σ pages	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Own research.

With the analytical instrumentation defined, the sample units are ready to be analysed by means of a mixed analytical approach. On the one hand, following Content Analysis (CA) techniques, the presence of certain words/syntagms in the data universe under analysis will be measured quantitatively. On the other hand, the sample units will also be subjected to a qualitative analytical process. This process, based on the use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), will consist of identifying and coding that latent, hidden content in the text which, nevertheless, is susceptible to being framed in accordance with some of the previously defined models.

Finally, given the length of the research period (from 2011 to 2014), both models are subjected to analysis within specific timescales, defined by an event that is relevant socially or in the media because of its connection with the subject of the research. The measurement is carried out in the period of fifteen calendar days around the event in question. The selected events or milestones are as follows:

- Legalisation of Bildu on 5th May 2011 (analysing the period from 28th April 2011 to 12th May 2011).
- The Aiete Conference on 17th October 2011 (analysing the period from 10th October 2011 to 24th October 2011).
- ETA statement of 20th October 2011 (analysing the period from 13th October 2011 to 27th October 2011).
- Legalisation of Sortu on 20th June 2012 (analysing the period from 14th June 2012 to 27th June 2012).
- Durango press conference on 4th January 2014 (analysing the period from 29th December 2013 to 11th January 2014).

- IVC statement of 21st February 2014 (analysing the period from 17th February 2014 to 2nd March 2014).

In accordance with the above, Table 2 shows the volume of samples analysed, amounting to a total of 1,436 sample units and 41,130 recording units.

**Table 2**

*Documentary resources analysed*

	Deia		El Correo		El Mundo		El País		Basque Government Peace Plan 11-06-2013		Totals	
	Pages	Comments	Pages	Comments	Pages	Comments	Pages	Comments	Pages	Comments	Pages	Comments
Legalisation of Bildu (5th May 2011) 29-04-2011/12-05-2011	49	1,062	82	1,797	84	1,398	53	1,108			268	5,365
The Aiete Conference (17th October 2011) 10-10-2011/24-10-2011												
ETA's definitive ceasefire announcement (20th October 2011) 13-10-2011/27-10-2011	153	6,016	135	3,955	109	3,591	107	3,413			504	16,975
Legalisation of Sortu (20th June 2012) 14-06-2012/27-06-2012	44	1,024	57	1,382	50	1,338	39	1,037			190	4,781
Basque Government Peace Plan 11-06-2103									74	1,625	74	1,625
Durango former ETA prisoners press conference (4th January 2014) 29-12-2013/11-01-2014	54	2,325	57	1,868	47	1,541	39	1,580			197	7,314
IVC statement (21st February 2014) 17-02-2014/02-03-2014	58	2,118	67	1,246	43	1,051	35	655			203	5,070
Totals	358	12,545	398	10,248	333	8,919	273	7,793	74	1,625	1,436	41,130

Source: Own research.

## 4. Results

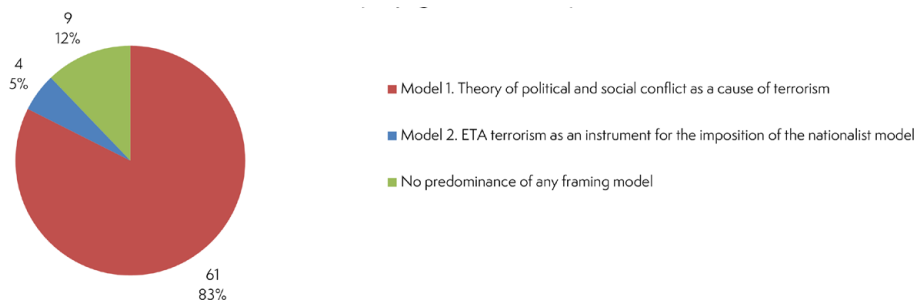
Having established the above constraints, the analysis performed can now be presented.

### 4.1. Comparative analysis between the PPC and Deia, and methodological implications

First, the results of the PPC analysis are given. This first analysis is directed towards checking the functionality of the analytical tools proposed, as can be seen in Graph 1.

## Graph 1

*Analysis of the Basque Government's Peace and Coexistence Plan (11th June 2013)*



Source: Miralles (2016, p. 157).

While the analysis of the PPC confirms the functionality of the analytical tools, the institutional nature of this document invalidates its use as a point of reference in the analysis of print media. This issue will be resolved by adopting *Deia* as the point of reference for the rest of the written press analysis.

Likewise, the choice of *Deia* and its subsequent analysis—when compared with the analysis of the PPC—provides data whose convergence contributes towards consolidating the validity and reliability of the proposed analytical tools. This convergence—initially suspected—was justified by the fact that *Deia* is the written press media outlet whose editorial line most faithfully follows (Fernández and López, 2012, p. 132) the political line of institutional Basque nationalism, which, in short, is the political formation that was in government in the Basque Autonomous Community at the time of the drafting of the PPC.

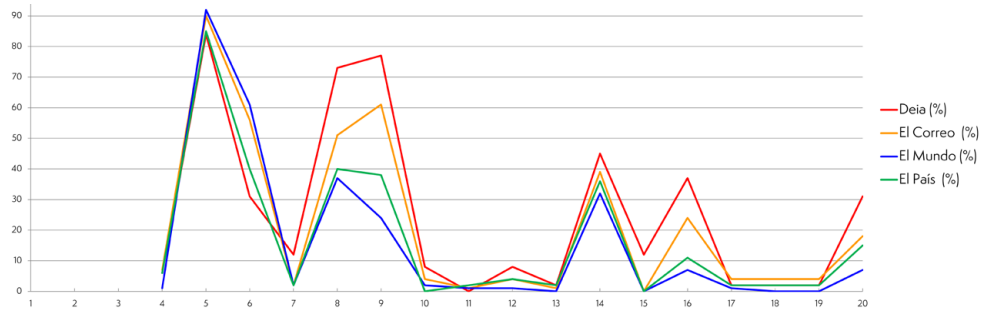
However, with regard to the reliability and validity of the research as a whole, some points must be raised. On the one hand, the reliability<sup>6</sup> of the research is supported by the consistency found when comparing the results obtained in the same publication over time, in addition to the consistency of patterns in the behaviour of publications in the same period of analysis (Graphs 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7). As this is a manual analysis, the researcher's performance of the analysis involves a certain degree of subjectivity that should not be overlooked. However, this situation has been minimised through an adequate definition of categorisations and their rigorous quantification (Berelson, 1952, p. 147).

On the other hand, validity<sup>7</sup> was also a cause for concern. However, the consistency shown by comparing the results of the analysis of the PPC and *Deia* was an early indication of that validity.

Further to the above, a series of comparative graphs are attached, whose consistency in patterns is revealing in terms of the robustness of the research, from the point of view of its reliability and validity.

## Graph 2

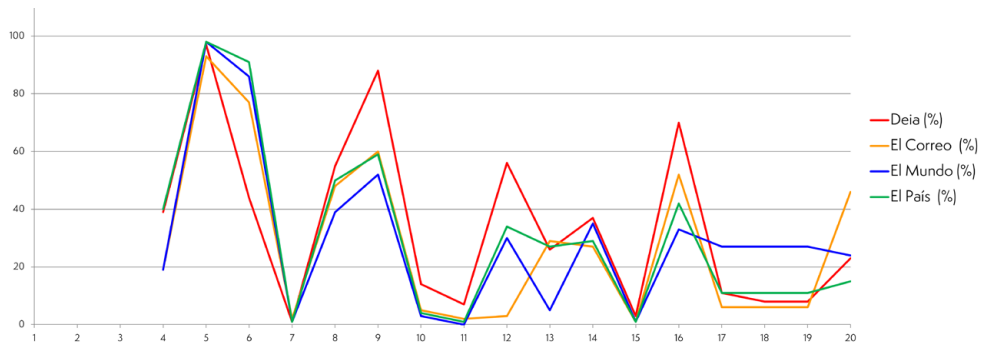
*“Legalisation of Bildu” comparative analysis.*



Source: Own research.

## Graph 3

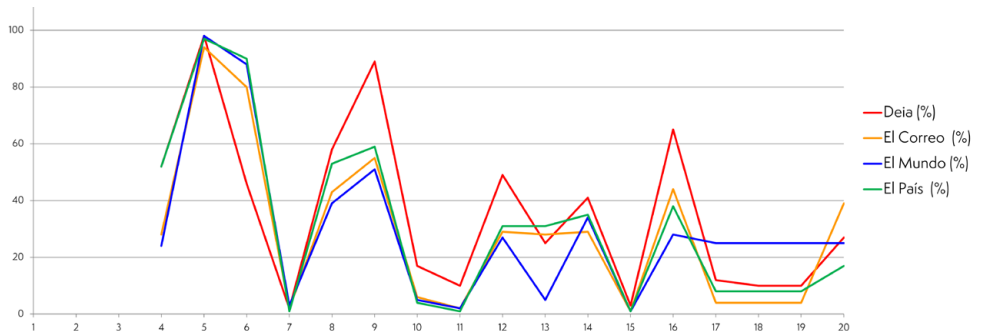
*“The Aiete Conference” comparative analysis.*



Source: Own research.

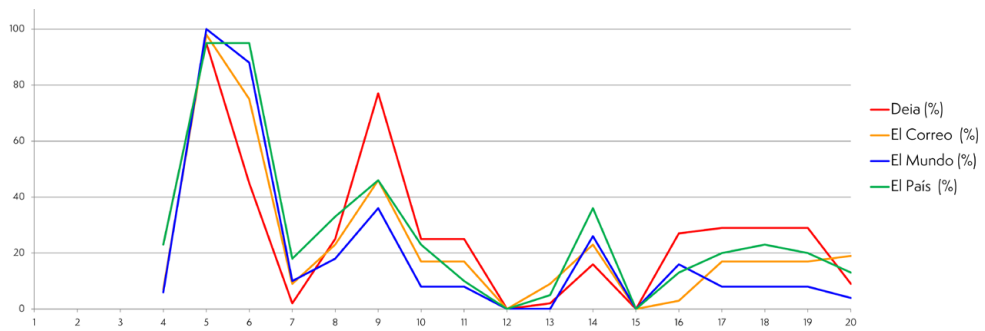
## Graph 4

*“ETA’s definitive ceasefire announcement” comparative analysis.*



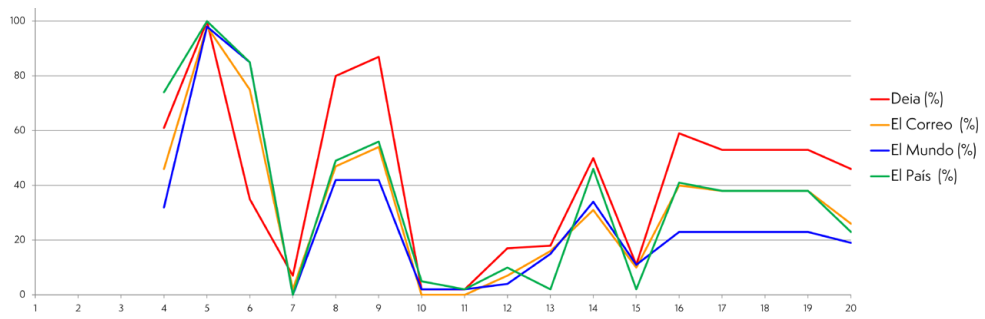
Source: Own research.

**Graph 5**  
 “Legalisation of Sortu” comparative analysis.



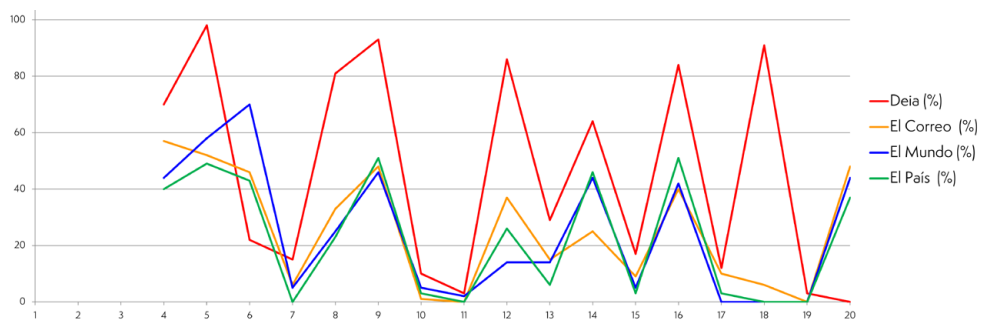
Source: Own research.

**Graph 6**  
 “Durango former ETA prisoners press conference” comparative analysis.



Source: Own research.

**Graph 7**  
 “IVC statement” comparative analysis.



Source: Own research.

Furthermore, it is relevant that, over a period of two years, 1,436 sample units containing 41,130 recording units were manually coded. In that respect, it is clear that such a volume of data should substantially reduce the error differential inherent in any measurement performed manually throughout the course of an analysis without the intervention of computerised systems. Due to the limitations of the length of this article, it is not possible to elaborate on this aspect of paramount importance in the field of social sciences. However, the interested reader may learn more by resorting to the triangulation proposal contained in the research inspiring this article (Miralles, 2016, p. 471).

Graph 8 and Table 3 below show the results of the analysis of *Deia* which demonstrate the consistency with the analysis of the PPC (deviations relating to events connected with Sortu and IVC will be clarified later).

**Table 3**

*Deia. Model 1 penetration results.*

*Deia readers influenced by model 1*

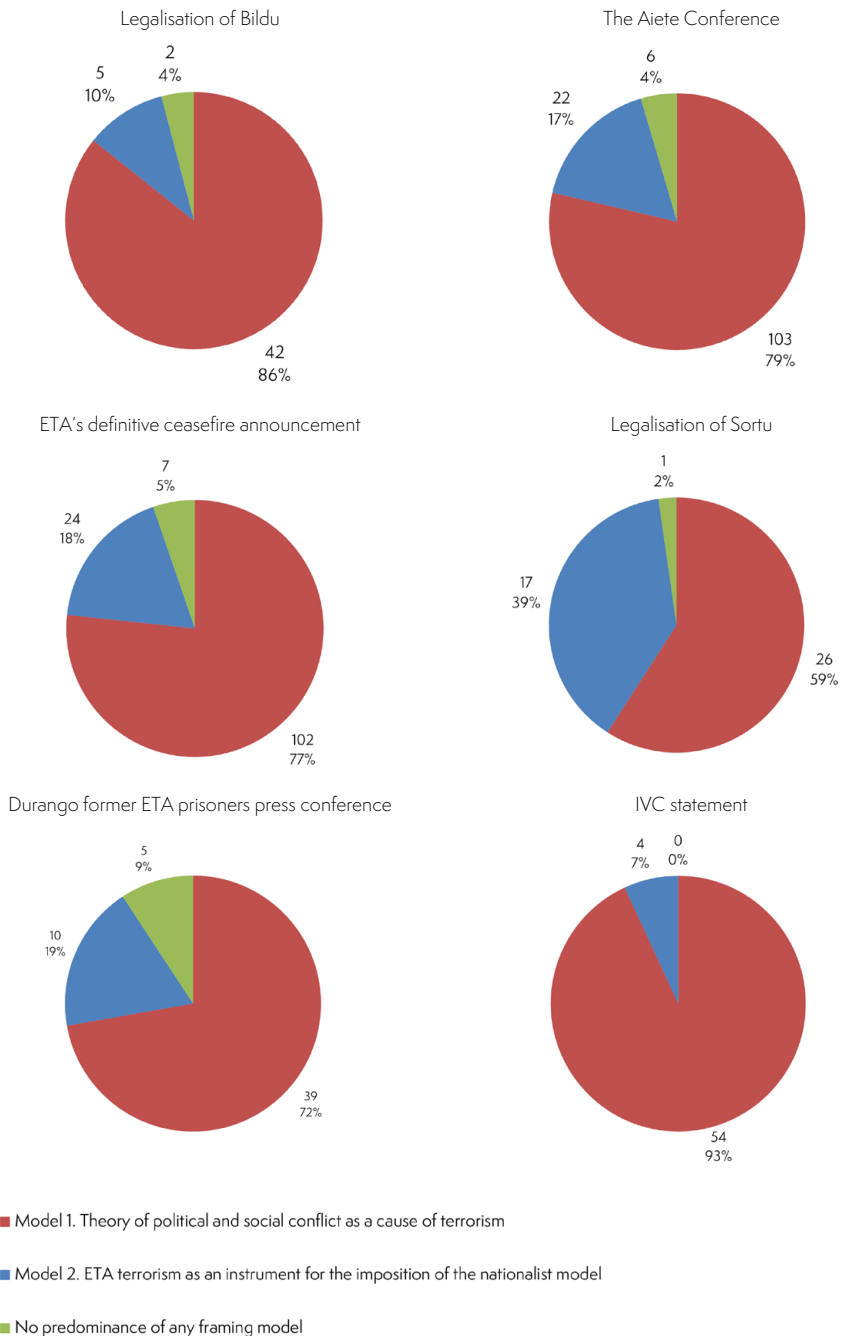
Periods analysed	Bildu	Aiete	ETA cease-fire	Sortu	Durango	IVC	Estimated mean
% Mod. 1	86	79	77	59	72	93	77.67
No. readers	76,540	70,310	68,530	52,510	64,080	82,770	69,126 <sup>8</sup>

Source: Own research based on data obtained during research combined with the *Deia* audience ranking (89,000 readers, EGM [General Media Research] year 3, 2013).

Finally, and in view of the results, it can be concluded that:

- The analytical tools proposed for the research are validated and reliable, given the consistency of the results obtained.
- Furthermore, and taking into account the estimate made by *El Correo*<sup>9</sup> (at the beginning of 2014), it is concluded that approximately 69,000 *Deia* readers are influenced by this media outlet's agenda of attributes in relation to the end of the ETA terrorism scenario, presenting it in accordance with the interpretative framework defined by model 1<sup>10</sup>.

**Figure 8**  
*Deia analysis*



Source: Own research.



## 4.2. Analysis of *El Correo*, *El Mundo* and *El País*

Tables 4, 5 and 6 present the results obtained from the analysis of the penetration of model 1 in *El Correo*, *El Mundo* and *El País*, respectively.

**Table 4**

*El Correo*. Model 1 penetration results.

*El Correo* readers influenced by model 1

Periods analysed	Bildu	Aiete	ETA cease-fire	Sortu	Durango	IVC	Estimated mean
% Mod. 1	43	39	37	31	37	54	40.17
No. readers	181,460	164,580	156,140	130,820	156,140	227,880	169,517

Source: Own research based on data obtained during research combined with the *El Correo* audience ranking (422,000 readers, EGM year 3, 2013).

**Table 5**

*El Mundo*. Model 1 penetration results.

*El Mundo* readers influenced by model 1

Periods analysed	Bildu	Aiete	ETA cease-fire	Sortu	Durango	IVC	Estimated mean
% Mod. 1	26	34	34	20	17	44	29.17
No. readers	6,500	8,500	8,500	5,000	4,250	11,000	7,292

Source: Own research based on data obtained during research combined with the *El Mundo* audience ranking (25,000 readers, EGM year 3, 2013).

**Table 6**

*El País*. Model 1 penetration results.

*El País* readers influenced by model 1

Periods analysed	Bildu	Aiete	ETA cease-fire	Sortu	Durango	IVC	Estimated mean
% Mod. 1	34	38	36	13	33	43	32.83
No. readers	16,320	18,240	17,280	6,240	15,840	20,640	15,758

Source: Own research based on data obtained during research combined with the *El País* audience ranking (48,000 readers, EGM year 3, 2013).

Taking into account the above data, it can be concluded that approximately 69,000 *Deia* readers are influenced by the media outlet's agenda of attributes (minor level of the agenda) in relation to the end of ETA terrorism. In that sense, *Deia* is the publication with the highest level of penetration of model 1, with an arithmetic mean of 77.67% (Table 3). Likewise, after analysing the rest of the publications selected for this research, the publication with the highest degree of penetration of model 1 is *El Correo* (40.17%, according to Table 4), followed by *El País* (32.83%, according to Table 6). In last place is *El Mundo* (29.17%, according to Table 5).

Taking these results into consideration, and combining them with the population data, Table 7 is obtained, which represents a synthesis of the above. In this table the values represent the arithmetic mean penetration of model 1 in the total media analysed, together with the number of readers influenced by model 1.

**Table 7**

*Model 1 penetration arithmetic means.*

*Readers influenced by model 1 (Deia, El Correo, El Mundo and El País)*

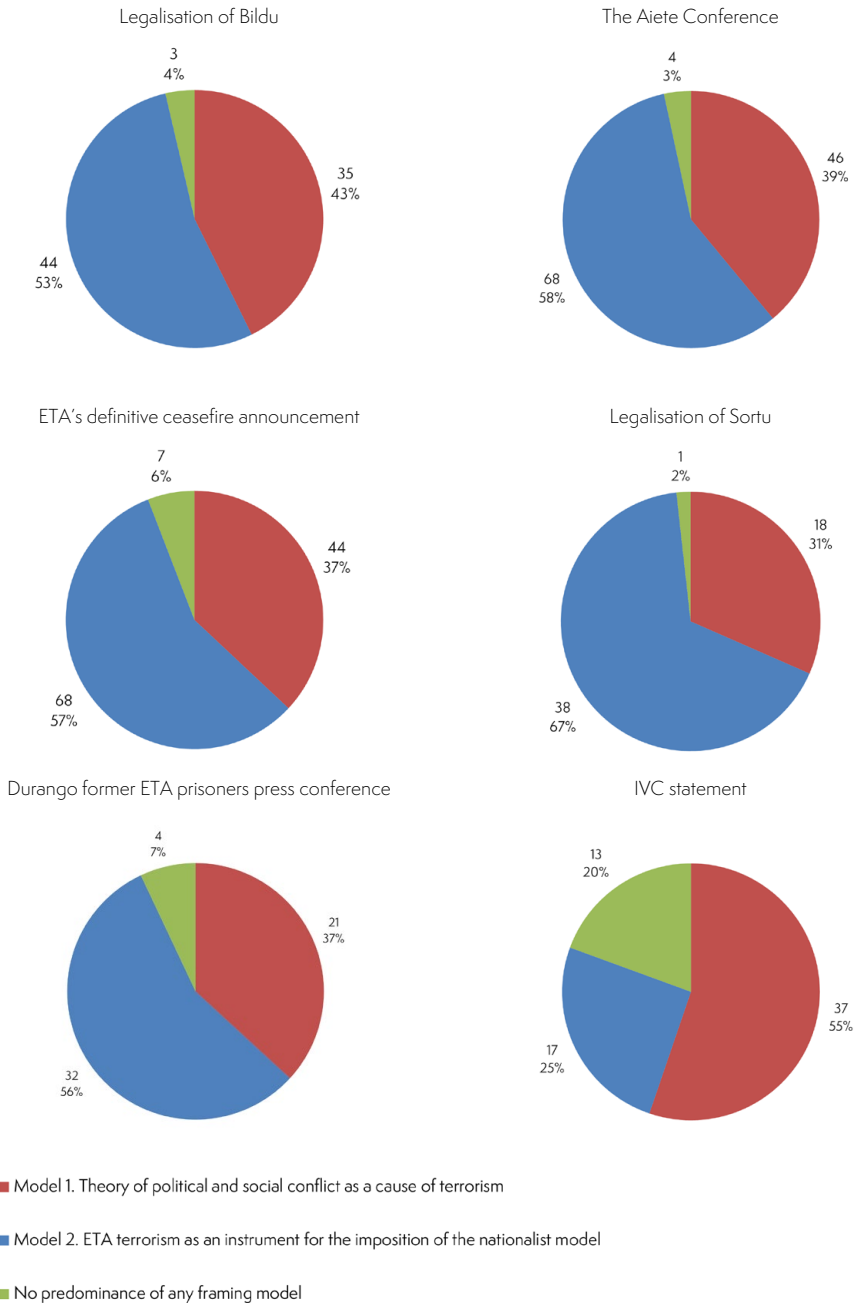
Periods analysed	Bildu	Aiete	ETA cease-fire	Sortu	Durango	IVC	Estimated mean
% Mod. 1	47.25	47.50	46	30.75	39.75	58.50	44.96
No. readers	280,820	261,630	250,450	194,570	240,310	342,290	262,556

Source: Own research based on data obtained during research combined with the Basque press audience ranking (584,000 readers, EGM year 3, 2013).

### 4.3. Comparative analysis of publications

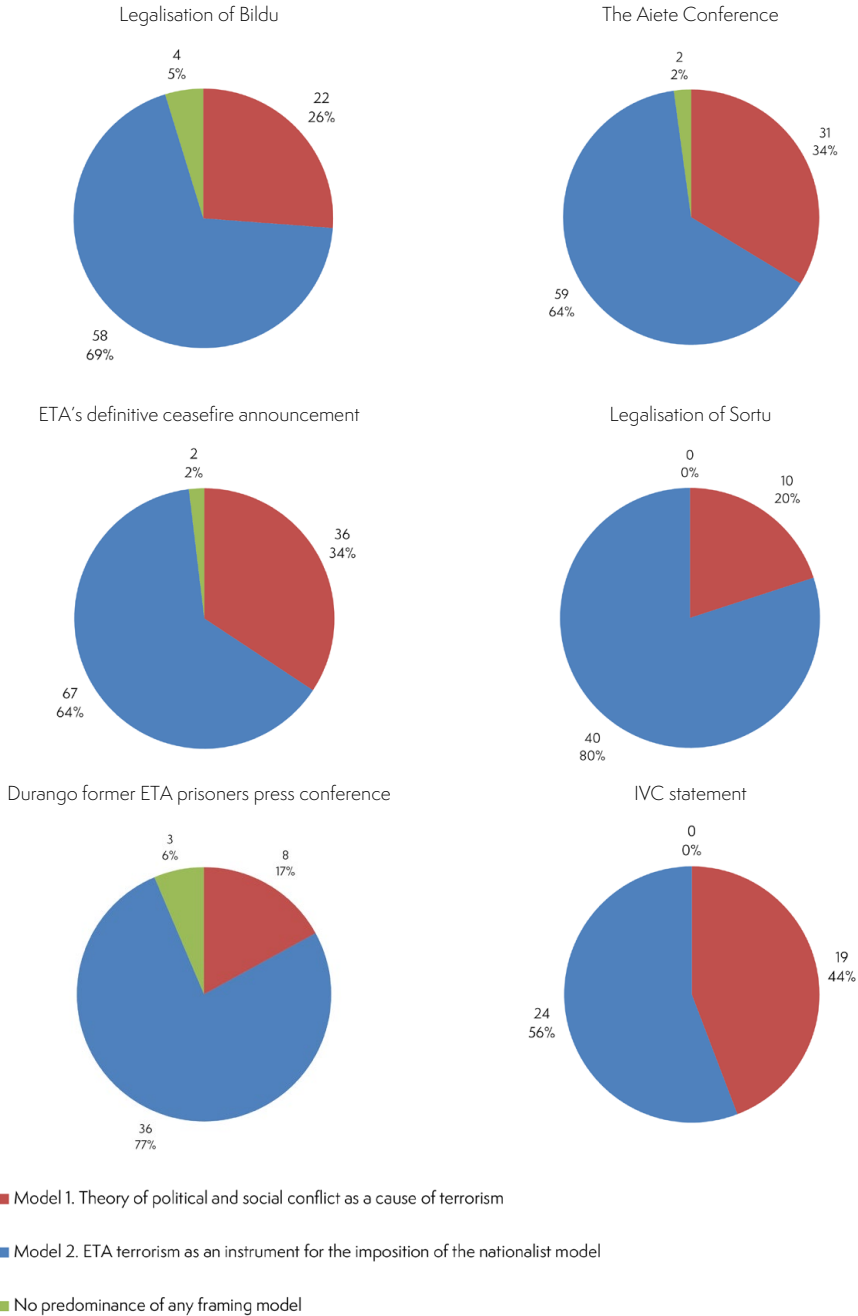
In order to facilitate greater understanding of the above data, it was considered appropriate to provide the reader with the following series of graphs comparing the various publications analysed, and their subsequent analysis:

**Graph 9**  
*El Correo analysis*



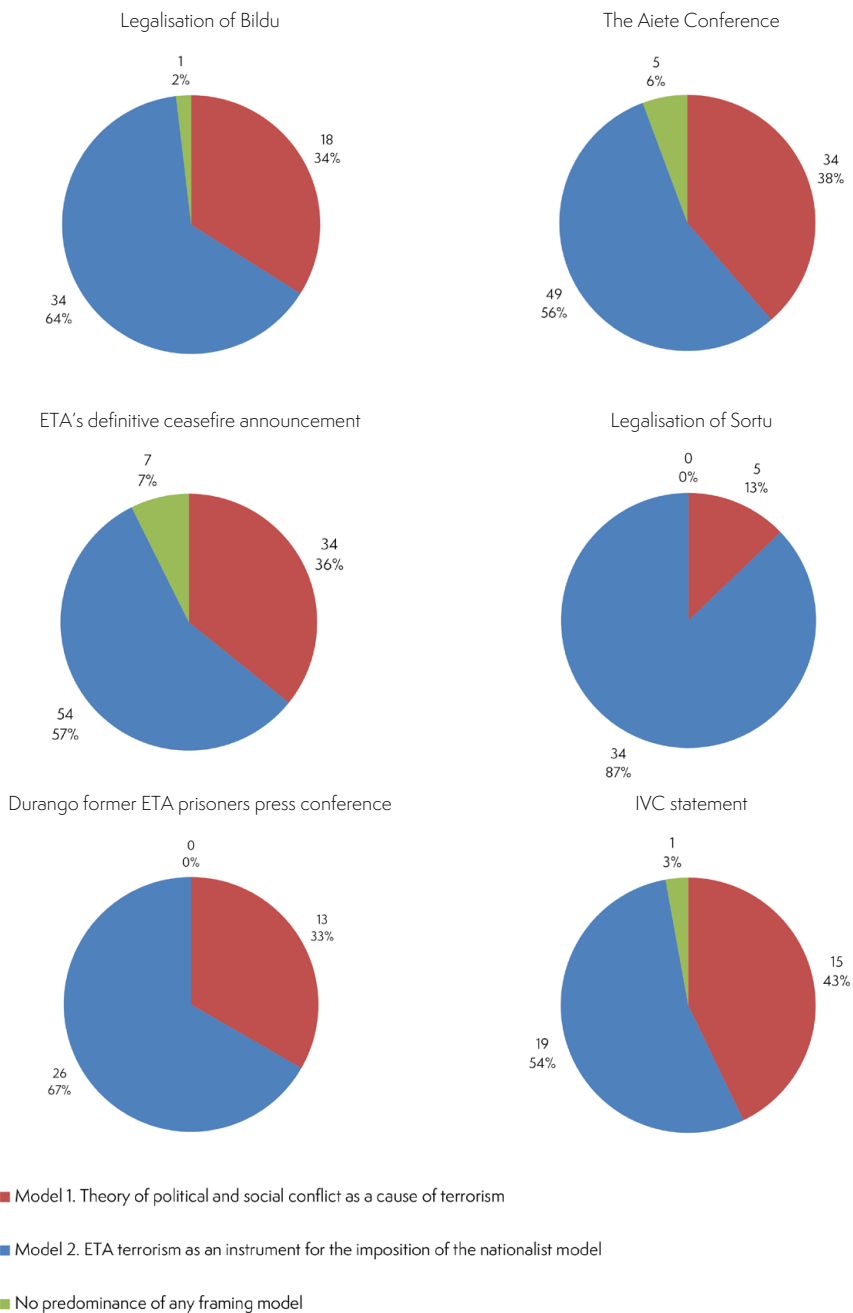
Source: Own research.

**Graph 10**  
*El Mundo analysis*



Source: Own research.

**Graph 11**  
*El País analysis*



Source: Own research.

A comparative study of Graphs 8, 9, 10 and 11 leads to the conclusions shown in Table 8.

**Table 8**

*Comparative analysis between publications on penetration of model 1 (%)*

Publication	Deia	El Correo	El Mundo	El País
Order of highest to lowest penetration of model 1 according to historical milestone	IVC (93)	IVC (55)	IVC (44)	IVC (43)
	Bildu (86)	Bildu (43)	ETA ceasefire (34)	Aiete (38)
	Aiete (79)	Aiete (39)	Aiete (34)	ETA ceasefire (36)
	ETA ceasefire (77)	ETA ceasefire (37)	Bildu (26)	Bildu (34)
	Durango (72)	Durango (37)	Sortu (20)	Durango (33)
	Sortu (59)	Sortu (31)	Durango (17)	Sortu (13)

Source: Own research.

The treatment given to the IVC milestone, in the publications as a whole, could reflect the ridiculous theatricality of the staging which, nevertheless, had significant backing from the Basque Government and Basque president (*lehendakari*) Urkullu himself, hence its notable presence in *Deia*, and in the rest of the publications, which could well be interpreted as an attempt to politically legitimise the Basque Government's actions.

Following on from that, the milestones with the highest penetration of model 1 correspond to Bildu, Aiete and the ETA ceasefire. The above shows the importance of these events in the agenda of objects (major level of the agenda), as well as attributes (minor level of the agenda), for the analysed media.

In *Deia*, as in *El Correo*, *El Mundo* and *El País*, a significant drop in the penetration of model 1 in the Sortu milestone can be seen. This circumstance is interpreted within the political context of the 2012 regional and local elections. In that sense, *Deia* implemented a reduction in the discourse of model 1, in what is interpreted as an attempt to capture—for the benefit of the PNV (Basque Nationalist Party)—the pro-Basque vote of the social-democratic electorate in the Basque Country. Furthermore, *El Correo*, *El Mundo* and *El País* reduced the level of penetration of the discourse of model 1, motivated by what is interpreted as an attempt to capture—for the benefit of the PSE (Socialist Party of the Basque Country)—the more progressive vote of the conservative electorate in the Basque Country. This situation is evidence of the important repercussion of the political agenda on the media's agenda of attributes in order to, in some way, minimise the social impact of Sortu's discourse in relation to the distribution of electoral quotas which, at that time, was interpreted by the rest of the political formations as a real threat to their electoral interests.

## 5. Conclusions

This article, which is based on constructivist assumptions in relation to the generative power of language as a constructor of realities, has focused on the period of time related to the end of ETA terrorism, with the aim of determining the penetration of the interpretative framework of Basque nationalism (model 1) in the written press mainly read in the Basque Country.

It is clear that there is significant convergence between two of the most influential theories of recent years in relation to the media, political power and, in turn, their relationship with society as a whole, *framing* theory and *agenda setting* theory.

Furthermore, and in relation to agenda setting, research in recent decades has shown the important influence of the media agenda on the public agenda, thus demonstrating the validity of Lippmann's (1922, p. 29) and Cohen's (1963, p. 13) earlier assertions regarding the role of the media in relation to their capacity to influence what the public should think.

However, it is clear that the media not only play a major role in influencing the public's agenda of objects, but also exercise a decisive influence on the agenda of attributes or minor level of the agenda. The question that must be asked is, how do the media achieve this transfer of influence to the public?

According to McCombs, the answer is through "convincing arguments", which the author identifies with framing. By means of these convincing arguments the media outlet's agenda of attributes (minor level of the agenda, in other words, how to think about something) is transferred to the public's agenda of objects (McCombs, 2006, p. 179). This is consistent with Cohen's "good arguments", and Goffman's "framing" (referred to at the beginning of the article), from a different perspective.

Based on the above premises, sufficient data has been provided to determine the degree of penetration of Basque nationalist discourse regarding the end of ETA terrorism in the non-ideologically sympathetic media. In that sense, and in connection with the theoretical principles outlined above, relevant results have been found.

On the one hand, the analyses carried out on the PPC and *Deia* have shown significant convergence of the results obtained in terms of the level of penetration of the interpretative framework of model 1 in a media outlet traditionally considered to be akin to the ideological line of institutional Basque nationalism. This evidence shows the influence of a certain political discourse on the shaping of the media agenda in question and, more specifically, on the agenda of attributes (minor level of the agenda).

The above leads to the conclusion that the discourse of institutional Basque nationalism, in relation to the end of ETA terrorism, is overwhelmingly aimed at

the deliberate promotion of the framing defined by model 1 among those exposed to specific media.

Furthermore, in studying framing theory, Entman defined four variables that, in his opinion, make it possible to evaluate the ability of a given framing to be successful in penetrating the public: a) motivations; b) power to influence; c) strategy; and, finally, d) cultural congruence (Entman, 2004, pp. 13–17 and 90–91).

In that sense, connections have been deduced that evoke theories on the influence of political and economic power elites on the media, even influencing the defining of the latter's agendas, which in turn, in certain cases, end up becoming power elites.

In the particular case of Spain, this influence has resulted in the media scenario known as polarised pluralism. These situations described in relation to the symbiosis between political power and the media seem to have a clear connection with the Entman variables, power to influence and strategy which, as has been demonstrated, are, in turn, influenced by certain psychological defence mechanisms—states of denial—in the face of situations involving social violence and related suffering.

The existence of certain pressure groups in the Basque Country linked to the ideological sphere of institutional Basque nationalism itself helps to explain the validity of two of the variables pointed out by Entman—strategy and power to influence—which, in synergy with motivations and cultural congruence, contribute to the social penetration of a given framing. Both variables are applicable to a certain political, economic and social elite in the Basque Country (which could be considered as a subset of the passive observers), relevant in terms of their capacity to contribute to the social penetration of the framing defined by model 1.

Likewise, the capacity of this pressure group helps to validate Entman's cascade activation model (2003, pp. 514–432) regarding the origin of the *frames*, and the connections of the latter with the mechanisms of power and their relationship to *agenda setting* within an environment of *polarised pluralism*. This is an environment in which the media are also considerably politicised, where there is a high level of political parallelism, and significant clientelism between politics and the media (Hallin and Mancini, 2008, p. 91).

From the point of view of a further dimension of the research carried out, it seems clear that the close link between motivations and cultural congruence with one's own states of denial has also been demonstrated. It is important to point out that these motivations and cultural congruence constitute, in the case of the Basque Country, elements shared by perpetrators and passive observers, undoubtedly contributing to the adoption of a certain type of framing by both, to the detriment of the victim's framing. Obviously, at this stage of the problem, no one wants to be a systematic violator of human rights, nor an uncaring spectator of the suffering of others (both of which are powerful motivations). Therefore, those mechanisms



for altering reality, such as lessening the feeling of guilt, distorting the reality of terrorism, transferring one’s own responsibility, etc., will have widespread social acceptance (cultural congruence) among that part of the population that cannot be categorised as a victim of violence yet refuses to be identified as a victimiser or a facilitator of victimisation (motivations).

This use of language is used in order to socially structure a certain perception of reality, and to do so by resorting to euphemism. At the same time, such language is articulated on the basis of other discursive elements bearing great symbolic weight that, within a social context affected by a profound subculture of violence (Llera, 2012, p. 314), acquire a significant cultural resonance within a certain social group. Furthermore, this cultural resonance is enhanced by recourse to the aforementioned mechanisms of self-deception or states of denial.

In addition, returning to Entman and his definition of framing(1993, p. 52), it is revealing to draw a comparison between this definition and Cohen’s conclusion regarding denial. Thus, according to Cohen, “[...] denial, in conclusion, includes cognition (not acknowledging the facts), emotion (not feeling, not being affected), morality (not acknowledging wrongdoing or responsibility) and action (not taking active steps in response to knowledge)” (2005, p. 29). In that sense, it seems clear that the relationship between framing and denial is much closer than one might initially imagine. This relationship would lead to the conclusion that denial—as defined by Cohen—could be interpreted as a particular type of frame; a “no frame needed” state of mind. In this particular state, the individual—or group—denies all framing processes, in the sense that nothing has happened in accordance with the psychological, political or moral implications of the events that have taken place.

From this point of view, the apparent weakness of the framing paradigm—as a fractured paradigm—becomes a strength, in the sense of its capacity and flexibility to integrate particular aspects of the research environments which, in turn, are inescapable in order to adequately assess the reasons for the presence of certain frames in relation to a specific situation.

**Table 9**  
*Connections between framing and denial*

Definition of FRAMING (Entman)	Definition of DENIAL (Cohen)	Mental state NO FRAME NEEDED
Select some aspects of the perceived reality	Cognition (failure to acknowledge the facts)	There are no events
In order to define the problem, an interpretation of its causes	Emotions (unfeeling, unmoved)	No need to seek explanations
Moral assessment	Morality (failure to acknowledge wrongdoing or responsibility)	There is no need for any moral assessment
Recommend treatment based on the problem	Action (not taking active measures in response to knowledge)	There is no need to act

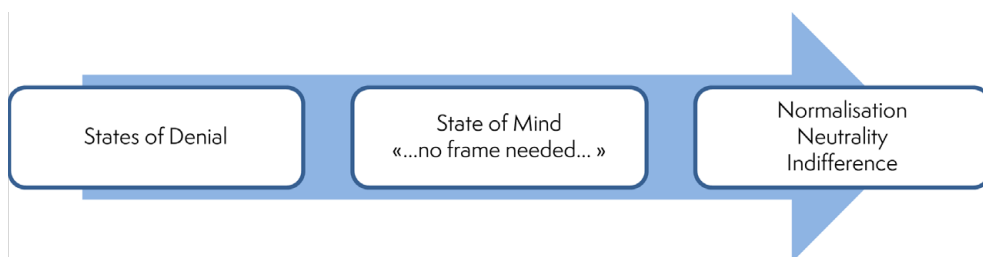
Source: Own research.

This “no frame needed” mental state would be an antecedent related to another of the processes defined by Cohen, namely normalisation (2005, pp. 71, 207 and 208). The latter concept suggests that, “events and images that are once perceived as unusual, unpleasant or even intolerable are eventually accepted as normal [...] what was once perceived as disturbing and anomalous—a sense that things were not as they should be—now becomes normal, even tolerable [...] normalisation becomes neutrality, and then, indifference”.

In short, by resorting to states of denial, a special type of frame may be reached; a state that denies any need to explain reality beyond the perceived “normality” (*no frame needed*) and which, in the end, leads to a state of normalisation, neutrality and, finally, indifference. A useful rationalisation so that the action of looking the other way is not ethically uncomfortable (Sontag, 2013, pp. 86 ff.).

## Graph 12

*Transition from denial to normalisation*



Source: Own research.

Finally, it is clear that Basque nationalism ends up framing the events involved in the end of ETA terrorism through the use of a narrative that is undoubtedly useful for the purposes of nationalism itself. Likewise, this framing ends up fostering a whole series of social constructs which, with respect to the future, have the capacity to alter the historical narrative in relation to an issue as important as the end of ETA terrorism. In that sense, it must be concluded that, as a society, the advancement of a dangerous revisionist process is in progress which, if consolidated, could blur the devastating and objective reality of ETA terrorism and replace it with another reality that is friendlier, more equidistant and, in short, more comfortable for everyone, except for the victims.

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## 6.2. Internet Resources

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## Notes

1 Figures obtained from the document *Estudio sobre los Derechos de las Víctimas de ETA. Su situación actual* (The rights of ETA victims. Their situation today). <https://www.defensordelpueblo.es/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/VictimasETA.pdf>

2 In that sense, for the purposes of this article, it is relevant to refer to the “*Propuesta de Plan de Paz y Convivencia 2013–2016. Un objetivo de encuentro social*” (Proposal for a Peace and Coexistence Plan 2013–2016. A goal of social engagement), 11th June 2013 (hereinafter, PPC). Subsequently, the Basque Government revised the document which was published in November 2013 at <http://www.irekia.euskadi.eus/es/debates/881?stage=conclusions>

3 In the words of Weissberg, “Semantics plays a very important role in downplaying what is really happening, and all sorts of euphemisms are used to try to hide what happens” (Goleman, 2015, p. 26).

4 *Encuesta General de Medios (EGM), 3º año móvil 2013* (Spanish General Media Research, year 3, 2013) in reference to the Basque Country.

5 In that sense, in relation to the PPC, all the pages (74) of the document have been analysed. In the case of the written press, the pages corresponding to the front page, editorials and political or opinion section articles whose contents are directly related to the purpose of the research and to the time–line milestone under analysis have been selected. Photographs and other graphic representations have not been taken into account for the analysis. Likewise, the texts at the foot of the photographs have not been taken into account.

6 In line with Krippendorff, “a reliable procedure is one that yields the same results for the same sets of phenomena, regardless of the circumstances of its application [...] reliability ensures that the analytical results represent something real” (1990, p. 192).

7 Similarly, according to Krippendorff, “to verify validity [...] the results of a procedure must fit with what is known to be ‘true’ or what is already presumed to be valid [...] validity ensures that such results represent what they purport to represent” (1990, p. 192).

8 As a result of applying the triangulation hypothesis, “The number of readers influenced in each media outlet by Model 1 will be the value resulting from applying the penetration coefficient of Model 1 in that outlet to the total number of readers exposed to that medium outlet” (Miralles, 2016, p. 472).

9 General Summary of the General Media Research, year 3, 2013, in reference to the Basque Country. <http://info.elcorreo.com/envios/marketing/tarifas-2014/tarifas-el-correo-2014.pdf>

10 In accordance with McCombs’ (2006) thesis, which points to the convergence between the media agenda and the public agenda.

