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# Outcome and process frames: Strategic renewal and capability reprioritization at the Federal Bureau of Investigation

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## Abstract

**Research Summary:** Framing is critical for leaders who must build support for strategic renewal. While research has concentrated on renewal that replaces one set of capabilities with another, we explore a distinctive challenge: how leaders persuade stakeholders to endorse the reprioritization of resources toward a capability set that must coexist with an existing one. Moreover, while research has focused on how leaders build employee support for renewal, we examine how to persuade those overseeing resource allocation. Our study analyzes Director Robert Mueller's 12-year effort at the FBI—after the 9/11 terrorist attacks—to build up counterterrorism capabilities while maintaining existing law enforcement capabilities. We offer a novel distinction between outcome frames and process frames and discuss how each frame, sequenced properly, is relevant to strategic renewal.

**Managerial Summary:** This study examines how leaders can build support for strategic renewal when an organization must develop new capabilities while maintaining existing ones. We analyze how FBI Director Robert Mueller, in the wake of 9/11, used strategic

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communication—or framing—to persuade members of Congress overseeing the FBI's budget to support the development of new counterterrorism capabilities alongside its traditional law enforcement mandate. We highlight two types of frames: outcome frames (focused on what the organization seeks to achieve) and process frames (emphasizing how the organization operates). Our findings reveal that sequencing these types of frames is essential. By using outcome frames to address immediate concerns and shifting to process frames to resolve longer-term tensions, leaders can build stakeholder support for complex resource reprioritization efforts.

**KEYWORDS**

capabilities, framing, reprioritization, resource allocation, strategic renewal

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

I remember the briefing [on 9/11] going something like the following: "Mr. President, we have command centers that have been set up at each of the sites and we've started to identify the persons responsible for the attacks by their seat numbers." President Bush stops me and says "Bob, that's all well and good and that's what I expect the FBI to do. The FBI has done it throughout its existence. But my question to you today is, '*What are you doing to prevent the next terrorist attack*?'" I did not have an answer for that question. I was prepared to discuss what the FBI was doing to bring the persons to justice. I felt like a high school student who got the assignment wrong.... But it was that question that was asked daily afterwards.

—FBI Director Robert Mueller, interview with authors

On September 4, 2001, Robert Mueller was sworn in as the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), only the sixth in the agency's 93-year history. A week later, terrorists crashed four airplanes into the World Trade Center towers, the Pentagon, and a Pennsylvania field, killing nearly 3000 people. Besides reshaping the course of American and world history, the aftermath of that attack fundamentally altered the FBI. As the Director's quote illustrates, for almost a century, the FBI was oriented toward solving crimes after they occurred. Following the attacks, supported by the President, Mueller set out to reconfigure the FBI so that it could also prevent terrorist attacks before they took place. The ensuing effort was an attempt at strategic renewal; that is, the "refreshment or replacement of attributes of an organization that have the potential to substantially affect its long-term prospects" (Agarwal & Helfat, 2009, p. 282).

Most studies of strategic renewal focus on efforts to replace organizational attributes, particularly capabilities (cf. Danneels, 2011; Eggers, 2016; Helfat & Eisenhardt, 2004; Pettit &

Crossan, 2020; Tripsas, 2009). Capabilities refer to an organization's "ability... to perform a coordinated set of tasks, utilizing organizational resources, for the purpose of achieving a particular end result" (Helfat & Peteraf, 2003, p. 999). This research implicitly assumes that strategic renewal is necessary because the organization's existing capabilities may soon become obsolete (Lavie, 2006; Teece, 2007). Yet this is not always the case (Agarwal & Helfat, 2009). Some renewal efforts require organizations to *reprioritize* attention and resources toward a new capability set while continuing to maintain the original one (e.g., Raffaelli et al., 2022; Smith & Tushman, 2005). Consider a long-standing accounting firm elevating a fast-growing consultancy practice (McDougald & Greenwood, 2012), a traditional car manufacturer emphasizing electric vehicle production (Rindova & Martins, 2022), Amazon recognizing the growing importance of its enterprise web solutions alongside its e-commerce platform (Huckman et al., 2008), or other established firms ranging from banks to motorcycle manufacturers embracing digitization by building platforms alongside their traditional products (Furr et al., 2022). In each example, the organization must redirect its resources from one capability set to another, while ensuring the two sets can coexist.

Capability reprioritization presents organizational leaders with two challenges. First, leaders must create buy-in among employees who can subvert reprioritization directly (e.g., Kellogg, 2011) or indirectly by maintaining their old routines and practices (e.g., Gilbert, 2006). Reprioritization can call into question employees' beliefs about "who we are" as an organization and can shift power dynamics between units or workgroups. These threats to organizational identity and power relations can result in strong internal resistance to renewal (Nag et al., 2007; Pettit & Crossan, 2020; Raffaelli et al., 2019). Second, leaders must also convince stakeholders overseeing resource allocation (including other top executives, boards of directors, appropriation committees, investors, and shareholders) to fund the reprioritization effort (e.g., Bower, 1970; Fiss & Zajac, 2006; Helfat & Maritan, 2024). Reprioritization can result in "resource rigidity" as stakeholders resist investing in emerging capabilities or markets (Eggers, 2016; Gilbert, 2005). This process is further complicated by differing stakeholder interpretations and beliefs about potential investment trajectories (Levinthal, 2017), leading to disagreements over what capabilities should receive funding (Kaplan, 2008; Zuzul, 2019).

Overcoming each of these challenges—minimizing employee opposition and influencing resource reallocation—requires effective *framing*: that is, a leader's "use of... communication to mobilize support and minimize resistance" among key stakeholders (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014, p. 185). As Fiss and Zajac (2006, p. 1173) argued, the success of any renewal effort will depend on a leader's "ability to convey the new mission and priorities to its many stakeholders." However, while a rich and recent stream of research has documented ways leaders can build employee support through framing (Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2018; Giorgi, 2017; Rerup et al., 2022; Rindova & Martins, 2022), how a leader's framing shapes stakeholder support for resource reallocation remains understudied. This lack of attention may be the result of empirical limitations (Hambrick, 2007; Lawrence, 1997), given that the resource allocation process often occurs behind closed doors, or in private meetings among senior executive teams, investors, and boards of directors. In this article, we therefore ask: *How does a leader use framing to, over time, influence the reprioritization of capabilities for strategic renewal?*

To answer this question, we analyzed how Mueller framed a 12-year strategic renewal effort at the FBI after 9/11. The FBI's renewal represents an extreme, revelatory case (Yin, 2008) ideal for studying how leaders can effectively frame the reprioritization of capabilities. Following the attacks, many members of Congress and the intelligence community advocated for the

President to separate counterterrorism from law enforcement into distinct agencies, a division of labor that would mirror Britain's MI-5 Security Services, France's Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire, and Israel's Shin Bet (Yoo, 2007). Mueller, however, advocated for a renewal effort that would position the FBI both to prevent attacks and to accomplish its historical task of law enforcement. Having adopted an against-the-grain approach, Mueller faced pushback and skepticism from stakeholders, including Congressional members responsible for setting the FBI's budget and overseeing its resource allocation decisions. Yet, over a 12-year period, Mueller more than doubled the FBI's budget (Hoffman et al., 2015), grew funding for counterterrorism and national security from 32% to more than 60% of the budget, and built support for some of the most significant changes in the agency's 100-year history. In addition, because the FBI is a public agency, Mueller was required by law to explain and justify these changes during public appearances in front of Congress. This offered visibility into the framing of a resource allocation and reprioritization process that researchers can rarely obtain.

We found that Congressional concerns about the FBI's renewal evolved in a patterned way, prompting Mueller to deploy specific frames to address these shifting concerns. Initially, Congressional members questioned the FBI's *readiness* to build up counterterrorism capabilities. In response, Mueller used a new *outcome frame* (framing focused on "what to do," supported by quantifiable performance metrics and new identity claims) aimed at breaking from stakeholders' historical views of the FBI. While this framing built initial support, it also raised new *capacity* concerns about the FBI's ability to maintain its historical capabilities in law enforcement. To address these, Mueller shifted to *dual outcome frames* (framing focused on "what to do," also supported by quantifiable performance metrics, but equalizing old and new identity claims) aimed at rebalancing the FBI's historical and new capabilities. However, this framing eventually proved insufficient—and possibly counterproductive—in addressing growing *appropriateness* concerns about whether the FBI should pursue both missions. In the renewal efforts' final years, Mueller deployed a *process frame* (framing focused on "how to act," supported by qualitative evidence of behavioral changes and combining new and old identity frames). This frame bridged the FBI's capability sets and secured ongoing support for reprioritization. We propose that each frame is uniquely suited to overcoming specific sources of resistance during reprioritization, and that leaders may need to shift between frames over the "long march" (Kanter et al., 1992, p. 492) of a strategic renewal effort. In doing so, we advance theory at the intersection of strategic renewal (cf. Agarwal & Helfat, 2009) and framing (cf. Cornelissen & Werner, 2014).

## 2 | BUILDING SUPPORT FOR REPRIORITIZATION THROUGH FRAMING

An organization's long-term prospects depend on its ability to renew its strategic attributes, including capabilities (Agarwal & Helfat, 2009). Strategic renewal is a specific type of change that realigns organizational attributes so they are consistent with shifting "internal and external demands" (Huff et al., 1992, p. 55) in order to drive performance and survival. Strategic renewal depends on leaders' ability to recognize changes in the environment and in stakeholder demands (Barr et al., 1992). Renewal can be radical and discontinuous, comprising a punctuated transformation, or it can be incremental and on-going, comprising stepwise adjustments that accumulate to shift the organization's overarching strategy (Agarwal & Helfat, 2009; Albert et al., 2015; Huff et al., 1992).

An essential aspect of leadership for strategic renewal is framing (Daft & Weick, 1984; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). The broader literature on framing points to the role of leaders "as skilled rhetoricians...[who] shape and direct the interpretations... of stakeholders" (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014, p. 198) as they decipher information (Quinn & Worline, 2008; Sonenshein, 2010), cope with unexpected stimuli (Barr et al., 1992), and determine what experiences and capabilities to hold onto or to let go of when taking action (Eggers & Kaplan, 2013; Gavetti & Rivkin, 2007; Raffaelli et al., 2019). Because strategic renewal introduces uncertainty that can result in multiple interpretations about the best path forward (Huff et al., 1992; Kaplan, 2008; Zuzul, 2019), the acceptance or success of any direction will depend "critically on the ability of... top executives to persuade others" to embrace their proposed path (Helfat & Peteraf, 2015, p. 843).

Most studies of strategic renewal have focused on organizations attempting to replace their strategic attributes in response to major changes in technologies or consumer demand (e.g., Barr et al., 1992; Capron & Mitchell, 2009; Eggers & Kaplan, 2009; Gulati & Puranam, 2009; Pettit & Crossan, 2020; Tripsas, 2009). However, some strategic renewal efforts require the firm to *reprioritize* by diverting resources from one capability set to another, although both must coexist for years or decades (Furr & Eisenhardt, 2021; Furr & Snow, 2024). Leaders driving a strategic renewal effort involving the reprioritization of capabilities face two distinct framing challenges. First, they need to anticipate and manage various forms of employee resistance. Second, they must build support among stakeholders responsible for funding resource reallocation.

Most studies of framing focus on the first challenge. Strategic renewal efforts can disrupt employees' perceptions of the organization's identity (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006), challenge established occupational norms (Pettit & Crossan, 2020), and even undermine their sense of self (Cheney & Christensen, 2001). Such disruptions often intensify employee skepticism about the plausibility or desirability of the future envisioned by senior leaders (Rindova & Martins, 2022). For example, when leaders at the toy-maker LEGO redirected the company's focus and resources toward licensing partnerships and amusement parks, employees resisted the shift, expressing discontentment about the "erosion" of the company's unique identity (Schultz & Hernes, 2013, p. 10).

Scholars have shown that, to alleviate employee resistance, leaders must draw on narratives (Schultz & Hernes, 2013) and labels (Rerup et al., 2022) to create a bridge between the organization's past, present, and future (Foster et al., 2017; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Suddaby et al., 2020). Such framing offers a "conceptual evolution" that gradually substitutes the old with the new (Clark, 1985, p. 245). For example, Dalpiaz and Di Stefano (2018) illustrated how, by framing change as a gradual conceptual evolution that balanced novelty and familiarity, the leader of the Italian company Alessi shifted the core business from manufacturing service tools for restaurants and bars to creating high-end household goods designed by architects and displayed in art museums. Other scholars have pointed to the importance of future-oriented narratives that build a bridge to the past (Bansal et al., 2019). For example, Rindova and Martins (2022, p. 201) theorized that leaders driving renewal need to create "narrative coherence" between the past and future by describing a desirable future-state that resonates with employee emotions.

While much is known about how leaders can persuade employees to accept strategic renewal, less is understood about whether the same framing is effective for convincing stakeholders responsible for resource reallocation: executive team members, boards of directors, investors, or shareholders (Bower, 1970; Helfat & Maritan, 2024). Reprioritization often requires reallocating resources from well-established sets of competencies toward newer, unproven ones (Eggers, 2016). This shift can encounter "resource rigidity" or a rejection of reprioritization stemming from stakeholders' "unwillingness to invest" in new or emerging competencies,

market segments, or customers (Gilbert, 2005, p. 757). For example, facing a decline in its product category, Smith Corona failed to redirect enough resources from typewriter manufacturing to new capabilities, forcing the once-dominant company to file for bankruptcy (Danneels, 2011). Additionally, as Levinthal (2017, p. 2582) argued, the returns associated with resource allocation decisions "are not self-evident but require interpretation, beliefs, and imagination about possible futures." Reprioritization can therefore lead to battles between stakeholders who hold different information, opinions, and frames (Gilbert, 2006; Kaplan, 2008; Zuzul, 2019), and who are therefore likely to disagree about what capabilities should be funded or prioritized (Bardolet et al., 2017; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974; Vieregger et al., 2017).

Thus, whether and how leaders can use framing to influence the reprioritization of capabilities for strategic renewal remains understudied. While a gradual conceptual evolution focused on blending novelty and familiarity may reassure employees that their sense of organizational identity remains intact despite reprioritization (Clark, 1985; Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2018; Dunford & Jones, 2000), will this framing convince stakeholders to reallocate resources from a proven to an unproven set of capabilities? Our paper addresses this gap.

## 3 | MATERIALS AND METHODS

The FBI's post-9/11 evolution is an extreme case (Pettigrew, 1990; Yin, 2008), ideal for building theory on the framing of capability reprioritization for strategic renewal for three reasons. First,

**TABLE 1** Data sources.[a]

| **Congressional testimonies (2001–2013)** | ***N*** |
|---|---|
| Number of testimonies | 166 |
| Average length of opening testimonies | 10 pages |
| Average length of Q&A sessions | 45 pages |
| **Interviews** (2009–2010) | *N* (**individuals**) |
| Senior leaders at Headquarters | 43 |
| Special Agents in Charge (SAC) of field offices | 10 |
| Agents and analysts in field offices | 85 |
| *Total* | *138* |
| **Conversations with Director Mueller** (2006–2017) | *N* |
| Interviews (2006, 2009) | 2 |
| Annual reflections (2010–2017) | 7 |
| *Total* | *9* |
| **Office visits** (2009–2010) | *N* |
| Headquarters visits | 6 |
| Field office visits | 6 |
| *Total site visits* | *12* |
| **Archival data** (2001–2013) | |
| FBI historical archives, newspaper articles, FBI website, press releases, public interviews | |

[a]See Appendix for data collection timeline and data analysis process.

the impact of 9/11 on the FBI was dramatic. Over 12 years following the attacks, Mueller instituted sweeping changes in strategy, structure, processes, personnel, and culture aimed at building up a set of counterterrorism capabilities that would sit alongside the FBI's traditional law enforcement capabilities. Second, convincing stakeholders—including Congress—to support these changes was crucial. Although the FBI is part of the executive branch of the US government and reports to the President, Congress exercises considerable oversight over the Bureau, especially its budget. For changes to be enacted, they had to be funded by Congress, meaning Congressional members had to be convinced that they were desirable. And, because the FBI's budget was approved annually, Congressional members had to reassess funding needs, revisit trade-offs, and support investment needs each year. Third, because the FBI is a public agency, our setting affords rare visibility into how leaders frame the reprioritization of capabilities to stakeholders overseeing resource reallocation. For example, whereas CEOs often update their boards in private meetings, Mueller was required by law to seek funding for specific initiatives, explain why and how resources would be allocated, and answer questions about the FBI's activities under oath in public testimony before Congress. This unique feature of the FBI's renewal made longitudinal data on his framing of the strategic renewal process more "transparently observable" (Pettigrew, 1990, p. 275).

## 3.1 | Data sources

We collected comprehensive archival and interview data on the FBI covering 2001 to 2013, the year Mueller retired from the agency (see Table 1). Our primary archival source was the *Congressional Record* documenting the daily proceedings of Congress. During his tenure, Mueller regularly appeared before Congress. These appearances began with testimonies, when he spoke at length about the FBI's challenges and progress, made annual budget requests, and asked Congress to support specific initiatives and priorities. Through our interviews, we learned that Mueller and senior FBI leaders put significant effort into how they worded this testimony because it served as his primary communication device for building support among Congressional members. Mueller's Congressional appearances continued with extended Q&A sessions, where Congressional members probed (and frequently criticized) the FBI's efforts and posed questions about its future development and resource needs. The Q&A sessions allowed us to examine the Director's unscripted—often unfiltered—responses.

Using the *Congressional Record*'s online platform, we manually compiled a database of all of Mueller's appearances before Congress as FBI Director. This database included: (1) Mueller's testimonies as submitted for the record (averaging 10 pages of single-spaced text each); (2) transcripts of Q&A sessions (averaging 46 pages of single-spaced text each); and (3) questions submitted to Mueller that he answered after-the-fact (averaging 45 pages of single-spaced text each). In total, we compiled 166 files, ranging between 5 and 198 pages long.

In addition, we interviewed 138 FBI leaders and employees. Because of secrecy about and lack of well-documented archival information on the FBI's internal operations, we had to build a historical record of the FBI's strategic renewal from the ground up. Tracing the FBI's renewal was neither easy nor straightforward. Our interviews helped us map each step and build a rich understanding of how the FBI operated and changed over our study period. These background interviews sensitized us to two sets of capabilities that were built within the FBI: its historical capabilities in law enforcement, and its capabilities focused on counterterrorism, significantly shored up post-9/11. Interviewees often described the distinct and even conflicting elements of

the two capability sets. Given the unusually sensitive nature of our interview data, we are limited in our ability to directly quote our interviewees. However, we rely on the interview data when describing the FBI's history and capability reconfiguration over time.

We also visited FBI offices twelve times, making six visits to the headquarters in Washington, DC, and six to five field offices across the United States. We conducted 42 individual interviews with other leaders and employees at FBI Headquarters and 10 interviews with Special Agents in Charge (SACs) and Assistant SACs. Given the challenges of scheduling individual meetings with FBI employees, we conducted 19 team interviews with a total of 85 individuals (in teams of four or five) in the field offices. Each individual and team interview was semi-structured (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and lasted approximately 1 hour. Longstanding FBI security policies banned recording devices in many FBI facilities; therefore, we relied on extensive handwritten notes. To track longitudinal patterns, we also conducted two interviews and seven annual, recorded, and transcribed follow-up reflection visits with Mueller.

Finally, we collected extensive data—both internal and publicly available—from historical archives and from articles in major newspapers between 2001 and 2013.

## 3.2 | Data analysis

Our initial analytical approach was inductive and open-ended (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).[1] To ensure we were capturing both internal and external perspectives, we divided the author team into two "insiders" who examined the FBI's renewal from the perspective of internal stakeholders (authors three and four), and two "outsiders" (the first authors) who considered it through the lens of Congress. In the first stage of analysis, the third and fourth authors analyzed our interviews to construct a detailed case history (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) capturing the FBI's major changes during our study period (Rivkin et al., 2010a, 2010b).[2] The FBI allowed the third and fourth authors to discuss our account with top executives of the FBI, a group of roughly 100 Headquarters staff, and a gathering of the SACs of all 56 offices, allowing us to validate the history.[3]

In multiple interviews and conversations, Mueller explained to us that one of the challenges he faced was framing the FBI's renewal in a way that would be palatable to members of Congress who oversaw the FBI's budget. In the second stage, we sought to understand how Mueller framed the reprioritization of capabilities over time. Given limited existing theory (Edmondson & McManus, 2007), our primary goal was to build novel theoretical insights.

The first authors (the "outsiders") analyzed Mueller's testimonies to examine how Mueller's strategic framing unfolded. Using QSR NVivo, we coded the transcripts of Mueller's Congressional testimony and developed a set of emergent, first-order codes that captured various aspects of his framing, such as: (a) the rationale he used to justify the reprioritization of capabilities, (b) metrics or statements he used to demonstrate the FBI's success, (c) the labels he used to define the FBI, (d) references to the FBI's formal vs. informal organization, (e) his use of the past vs. present vs. future tense, (f) the intensity and ambiguity of his language, (g) his focus on threats vs. opportunities, and (h) his description of change as radical vs. incremental.

[1]Appendix 1 illustrates our data collection timeline and analytical approach.

[2]This effort resulted in the development of a series of teaching cases examining the FBI's internal shifts.

[3]Appendix 2 maps the phases of the FBI's renewal alongside contextual shifts in its environment.

In the third stage of analysis, the first authors engaged in second-order coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) by searching for patterns in Mueller's framing both across codes and over time. As we did so, we noted shifts in (1) how Mueller articulated the rationale for the reprioritization of capabilities as oriented around *what* the FBI was doing and *how* it was acting (i.e., the FBI's "strategic orientation"; Hamel & Prahalad, 2010). We also noted shifts in (2) the kind of metrics or statements he presented to demonstrate success (i.e., in the "evidence" Mueller presented). Finally, we recognized differences in (3) the labels Mueller drew on to define the FBI as an organization (i.e., "identity claims"; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Notably, although these three categories were theoretically distinct, there was significant empirical overlap across them. For example, some statements reflected both Mueller's rationale about what the FBI was doing (i.e., strategic orientation) and the label he used to define the agency (i.e., identity claim). Thus, we discovered that the significance of these categories lay in their interaction. We recognized that the three elements (strategic orientation, evidence, and identity claims) co-occurred in three clusters. We next examined the "intended effect" of each cluster to derive three categories: *breaking*, *balancing*, and *bridging*. We categorized the clusters (the theoretical category of Mueller's "interpretive frames"; cf. Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Fiss & Zajac, 2006) as a *new outcome frame*, *dual outcome frame*, and *new process frame*.[4]

Next, the first authors turned to the Congressional Q&A data because it revealed how Congressional members were responding to and shaping Mueller's framing. We coded themes associated with the types of questions that members of Congress asked the Director. The coding revealed that questions clustered into three types—questions about *counterterrorism*, *law enforcement*, or *both*[5]—that reflected stakeholder concerns about the reprioritization process. We also recognized that these questions could be clustered as performance-related (that is, focused on the FBI's *readiness* or *capacity* to build up capabilities) or as normative (that is, focused on the *appropriateness* of doing so).

We then sought to identify whether these concerns shifted in patterned ways over time. Given our interest in framing for the resource allocation process, the first authors engaged in detailed coding of each distinct line of questions asked during hearings held by the House or Senate Appropriations committees. Appropriations committees are responsible for setting and approving funding from the Treasury for the federal government's activities, including the FBI. Thus, these hearings directly revealed the critical concerns Congressional members grappled with as they made resource allocation decisions. We coded 237 questions—some consisting of multiple pages of text—from 14 hearings between 2002 and 2012. Figure 1 shows the 2-year moving averages of question content. We also coded how Mueller answered the questions: by drawing on outcome frames related to counterterrorism or law enforcement, or by developing a new process frame (see Figure 2 for 2-year moving averages of frames[6]).

As Figure 1 illustrates, we identified two inflection points—2003/04 and 2006/07—where Congressional concerns about reprioritization appeared to shift. After 2003, questions about counterterrorism began to drop while questions about law enforcement increased; after 2006, there was a rise in normative questions about both capability sets. This led us to delineate three phases of inquiry that triggered new strategic framing challenges for Mueller, and that were associated with differences in his frames (see Figure 2). We examined whether these shifts

[4]Appendix 3 presents our data structure for this analysis.

[5]While other questions were occasionally asked, these did not appear to be patterned.

[6]Because these are 2-year moving averages, the 2011 numbers include testimonies from 2012. We did not analyze data from 2013 here, since Mueller did not appear before the Appropriations Committee that year.

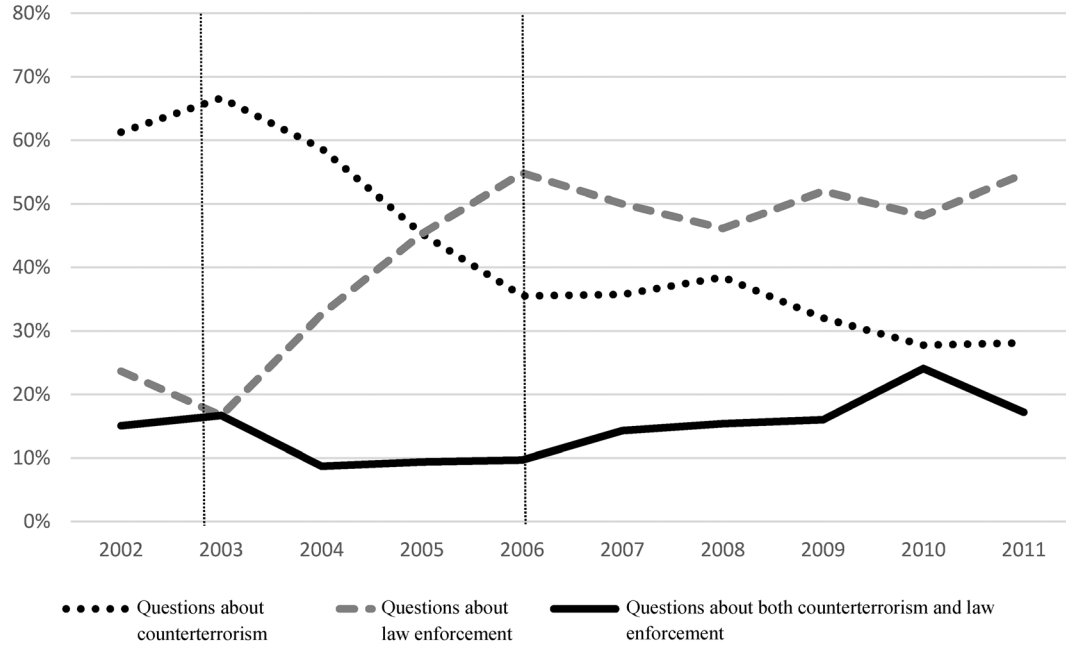


**FIGURE 1** Focus of congressional questions (2-year moving average).

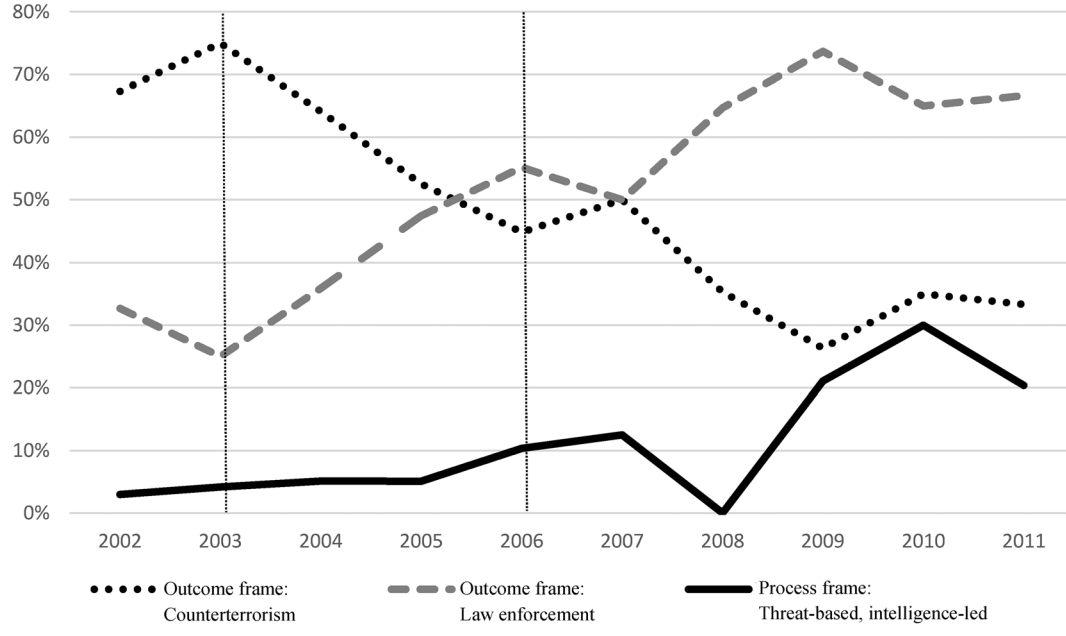


**FIGURE 2** Frames invoked by Dir. Mueller's responses to questions (2-year moving average). Note that, as some responses invoked multiple frames, percentages may sum to more than 100.

corresponded to changes in the broader context, including Presidential changes, the composition of both houses of Congress, the state of the economy, crime rates, and major terrorist events.

In the final stage of analysis, the author team came together to combine our "insider" and "outsider" understanding of the FBI's renewal. We compared the trajectory of the FBI's internal evolution, Mueller's framing, changing Congressional concerns about reprioritization, and shifts in the broader context to induce a process model examining how Mueller built support for the reprioritization of capabilities for strategic renewal post-9/11.

## 4 | FINDINGS

Before examining how Director Mueller framed the FBI's strategic renewal, we provide a historical and contextual overview. We summarize the changes that took place in the agency immediately after 9/11 and highlight the differences between the FBI's historical capabilities in law enforcement and newer capabilities in counterterrorism. We then show how Mueller attempted to build support through three sequential frames—a *new outcome frame*, *dual outcome frames*, and a *new process frame*—and show how each frame addressed distinct Congressional concerns. Building on these observations, we theorize how the reprioritization of capabilities for strategic renewal may require different types of frames over time.

### 4.1 | The FBI before 9/11: A legacy of law enforcement

The FBI was founded in 1908 as part of the Department of Justice (DOJ), responsible for prosecuting federal crimes and representing the United States in legal matters. Its founding mission, described by Attorney General Charles J. Bonaparte in 1907, was to serve as the DOJ's "permanent detective force... to *secure the enforcement of the laws*" (FBI historical archives).[7]

This mission was forged through episodes related to law enforcement, including a successful campaign in the 1930s against gangsters like Al Capone and a dramatic battle in the 1960s and 1970s against the American mafia. Throughout its history, the FBI occasionally engaged in domestic intelligence activities. With the rise of Communism in the 1930s, President Franklin Roosevelt authorized the FBI to collect intelligence on domestic organizations, including the American Communist Party. In 1956, Director J. Edgar Hoover launched a secret program to monitor and disrupt the Party. The program expanded, however, to scrutinize figures, including civil rights activists like Martin Luther King, Jr. In the 1970s, disclosures about this domestic spying program shocked and angered many Americans and led to legislative limits on the FBI's latitude to collect intelligence within the United States. This made FBI leaders wary of domestic intelligence work and affirmed law enforcement as the FBI's primary objective.

By the end of the Cold War, the FBI was focused squarely on arresting and convicting individuals who had broken federal laws. The goal of law enforcement was solving crimes after they occurred—or, as the FBI agents we interviewed described it, "locking up bad guys." Of the FBI's 12,730 convictions in 1998, more than half involved drugs, bank robberies, and bank fraud; only 37 were related to terrorism. The heroes of the Bureau were its special agents. The FBI had traditionally recruited agents with backgrounds as police officers, attorneys, or military

[7]Italics represent emphasis added by the authors throughout the "Findings."

**TABLE 2** Contrast between law enforcement and counterterrorism capabilities.

| | Law enforcement | Counterterrorism |
|---|---|---|
| End result | Solve crimes *after* they occur | Prevent attacks *before* they occur |
| Focal actor | Agent on the street | Analyst at a workstation |
| Critical tasks | Forensics<br>Investigating crime scenes<br>Generating substantial evidence (beyond a reasonable doubt) to merit arrests, prosecutions, convictions<br>Closing cases quickly | Data analysis<br>Creating and recognizing patterns within large databases<br>Generating sufficient evidence (based on limited information) to merit preventative action<br>Building cases over the long term |
| Coordination mechanisms | By city or region<br>Decentralized: local autonomy | By type of threat<br>Centralized: national coordination |

members—individuals who appreciated closure and publicly visible results. According to our interviews, a typical agent was a person of action, with little tolerance for bureaucracy, who longed to be on the street working a case. "I'm here to fill jail cells, not filing cabinets," an agent told us. They relied on advanced forensics to investigate crime scenes and generate substantial evidence to merit arrests, prosecutions, and convictions (the basis for agent promotions). They worked to achieve a high burden of proof—beyond a reasonable doubt—and close cases rapidly.

Resource allocation decisions and coordination mechanisms reinforced this goal. In 2000, the FBI assigned 76% of its agents to criminal cases, and just 2 to 3% to counterterrorism.[8] The local inflow of cases drove how resources were allocated across regions and offices. Prior to 9/11, the FBI was structured as a matrix, with reporting relationships defined by geography and by "program" or type of investigation (e.g., white-collar crime, public corruption, or narcotics). Mirroring the local nature of most crime, the FBI operated from 56 field offices in major cities. Each field office enjoyed considerable autonomy. At Headquarters in Washington, DC, personnel were organized by programs and provided only light-handed coordination across offices. The need for coordination was reduced by an "office-of-origin" system allowing the field office that started an investigation to stay with it even if it expanded beyond its geographic area.

Fittingly, leaders had framed the FBI as a law enforcement agency throughout the twentieth century. Mueller's predecessor, Louis Freeh, began his tenure in 1993 by stating, "law enforcement is at the forefront of our national interest" (FBI historical archives). Mueller, when testifying before Congress during his confirmation hearings in the summer of 2001, described the FBI as "the finest law enforcement agency in the world" (6/30/2001).[9] A *New York Times* profile of Mueller following his confirmation hearings carried the headline "A Man Made for Law Enforcement" (Lewis, 2001).

[8]Remaining agents were assigned primarily to counterintelligence activities, defined by the FBI as efforts to expose and investigate the intelligence activities of foreign nations within the United States (i.e., spying, espionage).

[9]Unless otherwise specified, quotes are taken from the *Congressional Record*. The date in parentheses indicates the date of the testimony or hearing.

**TABLE 3** Stakeholder concerns: representative quotations.

| | |
|---|---|
| 2001–2003 | ***Can you do the new? (readiness concerns)*** |
| | Senator herb kohl (D): As the lead government official in charge of *preventing terrorism*, *are you prepared* to make sure that *this threat* posed by chartered jets...*is addressed*? (6/6/2002) |
| | Senator Mike Dewine (R): You inherited a great organization, but also a great bureaucracy.... And as you try to *reshape this bureaucracy into a lean machine that can go after the terrorists*.... Your biggest challenge is: *How you are going to do that*? (6/6/2002) |
| | Senator Fred Thompson (R): *Law enforcement looks backward* to solve a crime that has been committed.... *Intelligence*, *on the other hand*, *tries to look forward*.... [It is a] *massive transformation*.... Do you acknowledge this difficulty? (6/27/2002) |
| | Chairman Lindsay Graham (R): Director Mueller, what *would you describe as our state of preparedness to deal with the embedded international terrorists* who are within the United States, similar to the 19 who hijacked the airplanes on 9/11? (10/17/2002) |
| | Rep. Tim Roemer (D): Director Mueller, I would ask you, do we have in place now, a year and a month after 9/11, the necessary computer networks to *compile counterterrorist information* in common databases between our district offices and the FBI across the country and with headquarters, and how do you disseminate that information? (10/17/2002) |
| | Rep. Jane Harman (D): Would [9/11]... be prevented today?.... *How much better are you at doing this than you were pre-9/11*? (10/17/2002) |
| **2004–2006** | ***Can you maintain the old? (Capacity concerns)*** |
| | Rep. Frank Wolf (R): Gangs are growing more violent and widespread. We understand there are approximately 30,000 gangs and more than 800,000 gang members in the United States.... Can you give us a status of the National Gang Intelligence Center and how widespread this problem is and *how you plan on dealing with this issue*? (3/8/2005) |
| | Rep. Lamar Alexander (R): We have heard a lot of talk this morning about drugs.... Meth is probably more destructive today than all the other drugs combined and I find that rather startling. *I hope that we are doing enough to try to bring meth under control*. (3/8/2005) |
| | Rep. Chaka Fattah (D): Who is the largest group of people who are trading in this particular drug [meth]? ....These gangs, we need to discuss that.... *We don't want to leave them out of the focus here*. (3/8/2005) |
| | Rep. Alan Mollohan (D): The FBI's budget request reduces the FBI's direct resources for drug investigations by $67 million and 608 positions.... *What specific drug-fighting capability will be lost* by...the proposed FBI reduction? (3/8/2005) |
| | Senator Mark Kirk (R): Can you talk about *how the Bureau looks at some of these Web sites* and... how they make it easy for a pedophile to approach and contact young women? (3/28/2006) |
| | Senator John Kennedy (D): Many of us are interested in the challenges on hate crimes.... I would like to be able to...work with you to see if there is a way of detecting [them].... I would like to see if we *can get a greater focus on it*. (5/2/2006) |
| **2007–2013** | ***Should you do both? (Appropriateness concerns)*** |
| | Senator Barbara Mikulski (D): We've heard about the fact that you're two agencies, but you're one agency.... As I looked at your budget, 60% of the FBI's money goes to counterterrorism.... 34% goes to traditional crime-fighting responsibilities.... Is that the right ratio*? Or is it that as we scrambled to fight the global war against terrorism... we kind of left crime fighting a little bit behind?* (4/26/2007) |
| | Rep. Mel Watt (D): One of the concerns I am hearing expressed to me by a number of people is that *traditional law enforcement is being compromised* by our overemphasis... I guess you can't overemphasize—but we are *paying so much attention to terrorism*... that your traditional law enforcement [efforts]... are down. (7/26/2007) |
| | Senator Barbara Feinstein (D): The *Seattle Post Intelligencer* recently quotes a recently retired high-ranking FBI official as saying that... the FBI [is] *cannibaliz[ing] its traditional crime-fighting units in the name of fighting terrorism*. Would you agree with this? (3/5/2008). |

**TABLE 3** (Continued)

| |
|---|
| Rep. Frank Wolf (R): You have been focused on the number one issue [terrorism]. But do you think that *[because]... this has been such a priority for the Nation*, that... perhaps areas of drug use and drug violence and gang violence have been *able to get out of control a little bit*? (4/6/2011)<br>Rep. Steve Austria (R): How does the FBI ensure that [its]...priorities are being met?.... [Are] there areas that are a bigger threat, maybe cyber, or terrorism, that you prioritize...during these difficult time periods? And if that is the case, are you taking away from other areas? (4/6/2011)<br>Rep. Jose Serrano (D): I've asked you this question before. You've given us the right answer, but it needs to be asked. You, after 9/11, and I was on the Committee then, we, in many ways Congress asked you, the FBI, to *refocus your attention to terrorism*, *and we always wonder what happens to the ongoing investigations* on white-collar crime and drug issues and so on? *Has that suffered at all*? (4/6/2011) |

## 4.2 | The aftermath of 9/11: A contested mission

The events of 9/11 profoundly reshaped the FBI. Immediately following the attacks, Mueller launched the agency's largest investigation ever, directing almost half its agents to identify the hijackers and their sponsors. As leaders across the US government struggled to make sense of the attacks, Mueller articulated a new focus for the FBI: preventing terrorist attacks on US soil. This shift was not inevitable. Stakeholders debated what federal agency—including the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency (and eventually the Department of Homeland Security, created in 2002)—should take primary responsibility for domestic counterterrorism. However, breaking his predecessor, Louis Freeh, who only 4 months earlier had defined the Bureau's top priorities as "national and economic security; criminal enterprises and public integrity; and individuals and property" (5/11/2001), Mueller issued a new list of priorities, starting with "protect the United States from terrorist attack" (11/1/2001).

Achieving this new focus required urgently building up a distinct capability set in counterterrorism alongside the FBI's traditional capabilities in law enforcement. Table 2 summarizes the contrast between law enforcement and counterterrorism capabilities. The goal of counterterrorism operations was preventing attacks (or infiltrations) before they occurred. While law enforcement was reactive, counterterrorism was proactive and often invisible (because it commonly did not result in arrests). As one agent explained: "In criminal cases, there's a clear thumbs up or thumbs down that comes from the US Attorney, the judge, the grand jury, and ultimately the jury"; counterterrorism had to unfold without that kind of "closure." It required analytical and data-intensive capabilities, including the creation of and pattern recognition within large datasets. Traditional agents not only lacked but also frequently rejected these capabilities; as one FBI agent explained, "real men don't type" (Lichtblau & Piller, 2002). Thus, counterterrorism relied on a distinct set of key actors: desk-bound analysts. Unlike special agents, analysts did not develop informants, make arrests, or carry weapons; many had advanced degrees in data science and backgrounds in military intelligence. Analysts needed to generate and act on limited information—in essence, to live with doubt and engage in preventative action as soon as they were seriously worried—and to work patiently to build cases over the long run.

Building up counterterrorism capabilities also demanded the reallocation of resources within the FBI. Besides the hiring and training of a new cadre of analysts, successfully building this capability required investment into advanced computer systems because, as we

**TABLE 4** Leader's framing: representative quotations.

| | New outcome frame | Dual outcome frames | New process frame |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Strategic orientation** | ***What* to do**<br>*The prevention of another terrorist attack remains the FBI's top priority* as we strive to disrupt and destroy terrorism on our soil. (2/11/2003)<br>The FBI's top priority is the *prevention of any further terrorist acts* in the United States or against US citizens and interests abroad. (3/6/2002) | ***What* to do**<br>Although *protecting the United States from terrorist attacks is our first priority*, we *remain committed to... the enforcement of federal criminal laws*. (5/2/2006)<br>While our *national security efforts* remain our top priority, we continue to fulfill our *crime fighting responsibilities* as well. (3/28/2006) | ***How* to act**<br>To be successful, we must *understand the threat*, *continue to integrate our intelligence and law enforcement capabilities* in every FBI operational program. (3/5/2008)<br>Developing intelligence is... *a way of thinking about your mission.... We have to address the threats*, *analyze the threats*, *identify what we do not know about those threats*, *and fill in those gaps* in order to prevent an attack. (4/6/2011) |
| **Evidence used** | **Quantifiable metrics**<br>Today...the number of FBI Agents committed to counterterrorism is approximately *2000*, *or double the amount of our pre-9/11 commitment*. (6/6/2002)<br>Over the past 18 months, we have charged over *200 suspected terrorists* with crimes.... In the past month alone, the FBI has arrested *36 international* and *14 domestic* suspected terrorists. (3/18/2003) | **Quantifiable metrics**<br>In FY 2004, we reported more than *21,000 arrests*, *15,000 indictments*, *and 16,000 convictions*. (3/8/2005)<br>The FBI had a *312% increase* in the dissemination of intelligence assessments from calendar year 2003 to 2004 and a *222% increase* in the dissemination of Intelligence Information Reports during that same period. (5/24/2005) | **Ongoing behaviors**<br>The FBI has continued to make tremendous progress.... Today, intelligence is woven throughout every program and every operation. *Much of our progress has been the result of investigative expertise gained in our nearly 100 years of our existence*. (4/23/2008)<br>The FBI's transformation into a threat-based, intelligence-driven organization has led to a *dramatic increase in domain analysis*, *collection management*, *source identification*, *and the dissemination of both raw intelligence and finished intelligence products*. (12/14/2011) |
| **Identity claims** | **Prioritizing new claims**<br>The FBI's role as a *lead agency in terrorism matters* is further supported by Presidential Decision Directive (PDD)-39 and PDD-62. (6/21/2002) | **Equalizing old and new claims**<br>The FBI's *combined mission* as an *intelligence*, *counterterrorism*, *and law enforcement agency* gives us the singular ability to exploit the connections between | **Combining old and new claims**<br>This funding is critical to continue our progress in transforming the FBI into an *intelligence-driven*, *threat-based agency*. (3/17/2010) |

**TABLE 4** (Continued)

| | New outcome frame | Dual outcome frames | New process frame |
|---|---|---|---|
| | The FBI is responsible for *investigating acts of terrorism* and for leading operational response to a weapons of mass destruction incident. (6/21/2002) | terrorism and criminal activity. (9/8/2004)<br>The development of the National Security Branch has been another step in enhancing the FBI's mission as a *dual law enforcement* and *intelligence agency*. (9/14/2006) | They also demonstrate how the FBI has evolved as a *threat-based*, *intelligence-driven agency* in responding to these threats and how the FBI will meet these challenges in the years to come. (7/28/2010) |
| **Intended effect** | **Breaking**<br>The 13 months since the September 11th attacks have been a time of great change for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Starting immediately after the planes hit, when over half of our 11,500 agents suddenly found themselves working terrorism matters, it *became clear that our mission and our priorities had to change*. (10/17/2002)<br>The FBI has *turned a corner in its history*. With the support of Congress, we have been able to make *dramatic and substantive changes*.... I want to reassure you that we are committed to *protecting this country from those who seek to harm us* (3/27/2003). | **Balancing**<br>We continue to adapt and strengthen to meet our *new intelligence* and *law enforcement challenges*. (3/8/2005)<br>More than 5 years have now passed since the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and I do believe that the FBI is *effectively organized and strategically focused* to fulfill our mission as *both a law enforcement* and a *domestic intelligence agency*. (12/6/2006) | **Bridging**<br>The new field intelligence model challenges us to begin *a new way of thinking about ourselves*, and our roles and responsibilities for conducting domestic intelligence.... This is not the job of one "side of the house," but *of the entire Bureau*.... We must overcome the tendency to prioritize and handle resources in program silos. (Internal FBI document, 2007)<br>Our objective is to defeat national security and criminal threats by operating as a *single intelligence-led operation*, with *no dividing line between our criminal and counterterrorism programs* (3/25/2009). |

heard frequently in interviews, the FBI's pre-9/11 information technology was antiquated. The FBI's field office structure was also not well-suited for the coordination of counterterrorism operations and intelligence gathering, where threats tended to span regions. As a counterterrorism lead explained, "There is no such thing as a local terrorism problem. Something might happen locally, but within two seconds, you discover national and international connections."

At the time, virtually all other developed democracies maintained separate agencies for law enforcement and domestic intelligence or counterterrorism (e.g., the National Crime Agency and MI5 in the United Kingdom; the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Security Intelligence Service in Canada). Following 9/11, many observers called for the United States to establish a domestic intelligence agency distinct from the FBI—a so-called "American MI5." However, no such agency was set up. Instead, over a 12-year period, Mueller instituted some of the most significant changes in the agency's history to shore up a new set of counterterrorism capabilities to sit alongside the FBI's historical mandate for law enforcement.

In the next sections, we describe how the FBI's strategic renewal unfolded across three phases. For each phase, we begin by describing the distinct concerns expressed by Congressional members about reprioritization (see Table 3). Next, we outline how the FBI reconfigured its capabilities. We then detail how Mueller framed these changes to shape Congressional support for the reprioritization of capabilities (see Table 4).

## 4.3 | Phase 1 (2001–2003): A new outcome frame

### 4.3.1 | Stakeholder concerns: Can you do the new?

The 2 years following 9/11 saw nation-wide unease about the US's safety from future terrorist attacks. As Senator Pat Roberts (R) noted to Mueller during a Q&A session, "We've heard a lot of news about the increased dangers of terrorist attacks... and I know this has really disturbed many Americans" (2/11/2003). Reflecting this unease, Congressional members expressed concerns about whether the FBI could develop the capabilities necessary for preventing attack—even if these were funded. Our analysis found this to be true of hearings comprised of both the Republican-led House and the Democratic-led Senate.[10] Stakeholders' concerns were largely performance-related, revolving around the FBI's *readiness* to successfully build up counterterrorism capabilities and prevent attacks: in 2002, 61% of Congressional questions probed the FBI's ability to dismantle terrorist plots (see Figure 1). For example, in October 2002, Senator Fred Thompson (R) stated:

> My concern is that we are asking the FBI to change its nature on a dime, as it were, from an *after-the-fact investigative body* that has been legendary for years and years in this country to a *before-the-fact prevention body* (10/17/2002).

Congressional members made it clear that their support depended on the FBI's demonstrated readiness to build up its counterterrorism capabilities. In 2002, for example, Senator Chuck Grassley (R) remarked, "Congress may need to cap money for new agents *until the FBI can get serious about terrorism*" (6/6/2002).

### 4.3.2 | Capability reconfiguration: Triage

With this challenge in mind, Mueller implemented a series of changes between 2001 and 2003 to build up counterterrorism capabilities. In a 2009 interview, he referred to these

[10]During our study period, there were three changes in the political party composition of Congress. We analyzed whether Congressional questions or concerns were associated with a particular party and found no discernible trends. While the total number of questions posed by members of a specific party varied based on committee leadership and composition, the proportion of questions focusing on any given topic (e.g., counterterrorism, law enforcement) remained consistent. This neutrality may reflect what Mueller jokingly noted to us in an interview: "over a period of time I had annoyed both sides sufficiently." For clarity, we indicate party affiliation throughout the findings with (R) for Republican and (D) for Democrat. Additionally, the 2009 transition from Republican President George W. Bush to Democrat President Barack Obama did not produce visible changes in Congressional questions or Mueller's framing. As Mueller observed in an interview, "I have been very fortunate that both Presidents have seen issues the way I see them, and have given us support."

efforts as "triage," describing them as urgent measures to ensure the FBI could prevent future attacks. He doubled the number of agents committed to counterterrorism to around 2000, both by hiring and training new agents, and by reassigning around 500 agents away from criminal (particularly narcotics) cases. In November 2001, he reorganized Headquarters so that all counterterrorism activities were merged under a newly appointed Executive Assistant Director for Counterterrorism and Intelligence. He also terminated the office-of-origin system for terrorist cases and dismantled the Investigative Services Division, previously responsible for identifying possible trends across cases. Instead, he created an Office of Intelligence at Headquarters to handle all terrorist cases. He described how this change was crucial because, for counterterrorism, "you have victims in all 50 states. Everyone is affected." Nonetheless, he elaborated how this was controversial: "[The change] was not willingly embraced at the onset... those who led the various offices were very happy to be left alone [in the past] to do their cases." In May 2003, Mueller appointed a Directorate of Intelligence to report directly to him. The Directorate focused on building a cadre of intelligence analysts embedded in the field offices and tasked with integrating and disseminating intelligence information. In conjunction with the CIA, Mueller created a College of Analytical Studies to train these newly hired analysts.

### 4.3.3 | Leader's framing: A new outcome frame

During this period, Mueller framed the buildup of counterterrorism capabilities—including the reallocation of resources from law enforcement to counterterrorism—through a *new outcome frame*. Through his statements, Mueller directed stakeholders toward a new way to make sense of the FBI: as a counterterrorism agency aimed at achieving a new outcome (preventing attacks before they occurred).

This frame comprised four components. First, in his testimonies, Mueller rationalized the reprioritization of capabilities as necessary given the Bureau's new strategic orientation: *what to do* to prevent terrorist attacks. In 2002, for example, he testified that *"prevention of terrorist attacks* is our top priority" (6/21/2002). "Simply put," he testified a few days later, "our focus is now one of prevention" (6/27/2002). He described all changes as critical in allowing the FBI to achieve this new essential outcome. For example, he underlined this idea in 2003:

> The FBI is undergoing momentous changes—including the incorporation of an enhanced intelligence function—that will allow us *to meet the terrorist threat* head-on (02/11/2003).

As these quotes illustrate, Mueller emphasized how 9/11 required the FBI to shore up capabilities that would allow it to orient toward preventing the next terrorist attack.

Second, Mueller frequently used *quantifiable metrics* as evidence of success in this new outcome orientation. In our interviews, we repeatedly heard that success in counterterrorism is difficult to measure, since metrics like numbers of arrests and convictions are difficult to apply to preventative or prospective activities. Nonetheless, Mueller responded to stakeholder concerns by presenting precise numbers of potential plots thwarted and of counterterrorism analysts hired and reassigned. For example, in 2002, he demonstrated success by pointing to specific numbers of potential incidents the FBI had investigated:

> Since 9/11... the FBI has responded to approximately *7089 suspected anthrax letters*, *950 incidents* involving other potential *weapons of mass destruction*—such as bomb threats—and an estimated *29,331 telephone calls* from the public about suspicious packages. (10/17/2002).

By presenting these and similar metrics, Mueller's framing portrayed an agency making unambiguous progress toward the achievement of its new outcome: the prevention of attacks.

Third, Mueller *prioritized new identity claims*: that is, he used a coherent set of labels to define the FBI squarely as a counterterrorism or intelligence agency. Immediately following 9/11, Mueller's use of the term "law enforcement" (the dominant label previously used to describe the FBI) subsided. Instead, he increasingly described the FBI as a "counterterrorism agency" or "intelligence agency." For example, in a written Q&A response submitted in 2002, he wrote: "The FBI is recognized as *the primary federal agency responsible for counterterrorism* investigations and enforcement within the United States" (6/6/2002). In 2003, he testified how "the men and women of the FBI recognize the need to adapt and are... transforming the FBI into a world-class *intelligence agency*" (2/11/2003).

The combined effect of these three framing components was *breaking*: through his language, Mueller framed the FBI as a fundamentally changed agency. In a 2002 testimony, he drew on this new frame to argue for the FBI's immense progress in breaking from its past:

> Mr. Chairman, the unpredictable and unconventional threats to our national security... necessitate *changes in the FBI*, *changes in our priorities*, *changes in our workforce*, *and changes in our approach to performing our mission*.... I am confident that change is being embraced. I will not pretend it will be easy but I also do not doubt that *a different FBI is emerging post-9/11*. (6/6/2002).

To summarize, by defining a new strategic orientation (*what* to do) to justify capability reprioritization, presenting quantifiable evidence of the FBI's reorientation, prioritizing new identity claims related to counterterrorism, and breaking from the agency's past, Mueller communicated a *new outcome frame* for the FBI. In an interview, he reflected on the necessity of framing around the vital outcome of prevention of attacks:

> One of the things I kept hammering home was that [building up counterterrorism capabilities] was not what we wanted to do, it was what...the American public *needed* us to do, and what we *had* to do... And I think everybody understood that.

Thus, through the lens of this new outcome frame, Mueller focused stakeholders on the need for immediate, extensive action. As Figure 2 illustrates, Mueller responded to up to 75% of Congressional questions during this period by drawing on this new outcome frame.

## 4.4 | Phase 2 (2004–2006): Dual outcome frames

### 4.4.1 | Stakeholder concerns: Can you maintain the old?

Congressional members supported Mueller's early efforts, approving the growth of the FBI's counterterrorism and national security budget from 32% to 44% of the total, and supporting a

drop in its criminal budget from 61% to 32% of the total (03/17/2004). However, our analysis suggested that, after 2003, Congressional concerns about reprioritization shifted. Congressional members largely accepted the idea that the FBI could successfully engage in counterterrorism. In May 2004, for example, Senator Mike Dewine (R) complimented the FBI's effective transformation:

> Director Mueller, ....once 9/11 happened, the FBI... fundamentally shifted gears, and *you moved from a reactive agency to a proactive agency*, and you moved from an agency that dealt with many, many different things to *an agency that has focused to a great extent today on terrorism* (5/20/2004).

However, in 2004, Congressional members began to ask questions about the FBI's ability to fulfill its old mission of law enforcement: dealing with violent crime, gangs, narcotics, cybercrime, human trafficking, and so on. This may have reflected a broader contextual change. Between 2004 through 2006, the media did not report about any major terrorist plots dismantled on US soil; meanwhile, according to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Program, the United States experienced its first uptick in violent crime since 1991. Accordingly, Congressional questions about counterterrorism dropped to 35%, while questions about law enforcement increased to 55% from a low of 24% in 2002 (see Figure 1). As before, these questions were largely performance-related, but now they reflected *capacity concerns*: Congressional members questioned whether the FBI could demonstrate an ability to maintain its historical focus on law enforcement. In 2005, for example, Representative Alan Mollohan (D) described "a growing nervousness about cybercrime" and questioned whether the FBI was capable of doing enough in this area: "There is a perception that law enforcement is not equipped to deal with cybercrime" (3/8/2005). In a 2006 session, Senator Mark Kirk (R) wondered whether "the Bureau can really make the key difference" in preventing gang violence, because "[a] great trend we are now seeing is gangs moving outside of cities into suburban communities where... they are taking on a far less capable police force" (3/28/2006). Such questions represented a rekindled concern about the FBI's law enforcement capabilities during this second phase of the renewal effort.

### 4.4.2 | Capability reconfiguration: Experimentation

To address these growing concerns, Mueller experimented with new structures that would allow the FBI to renew its law enforcement capabilities without losing ground on counterterrorism. Much of this experimentation occurred not at Headquarters but in the field offices. In 2003, the Directorate of Intelligence tasked each office with establishing a Field Intelligence Group (FIG), bringing together analysts and agents to analyze and disseminate intelligence and to liaise across offices and with Headquarters. Each field office was told to set up a FIG quickly, with little central guidance, and the different FIGs experimented with ways to support law enforcement and counterterrorism capabilities at the same time. A veteran agent described the outcome:

> No one knew... how a FIG should operate, so we let a thousand flowers bloom. Nearly every FIG was different. Some were conducting high-end strategic analysis, but many were supporting the tactical casework of squads.

As this quote suggests, experimenting with the old and newer capabilities came with challenges. In some offices, the new counterterrorism analysts struggled to establish credibility, reporting that they were being told to fetch coffee for agents. In other offices, agents working on conventional law enforcement cases, who had previously been the heroes of the FBI, felt their value diminished. Nevertheless, efforts to maintain strong capabilities in both law enforcement and counterterrorism were underway in every field office by the start of 2004.

### 4.4.3 | Leader's framing: Dual outcome frames

To address new concerns about the agency's capacity to maintain its old law enforcement capabilities, Mueller drew on *dual outcome frames* when speaking to Congress. Rather than only emphasizing the Bureau's counterterrorism efforts, he framed the FBI as an agency renewing itself to pursue two sets of outcomes at the same time: counterterrorism *and* law enforcement. Four factors comprised this new framing.

First, during this phase, Mueller rationalized the FBI's reprioritization of capabilities as critical given its two strategic orientations: *what to do* to successfully pursue counterterrorism *and* law enforcement. In 2006, for instance, he highlighted the FBI's two objectives:

> So, while... we understand our responsibility is to *keep the United States safe from terrorists*, from weapons of mass destruction, *we have not in any way forgotten... our criminal programs* (3/28/2006).

He also described the FBI's extensive changes as necessary for the achievement of both outcomes. In 2004, he explained:

> We have spent the past two and a half years transforming the FBI and realigning our resources to *combat international terrorism* and other evolving national security threats, including *criminal threats* (6/3/2004).

Such statements reframed the FBI's reprioritized capabilities as not only helpful in preventing attacks, but also in advancing its ability to solve crimes—that is, its traditional capabilities.

Second, Mueller conveyed the FBI's success in both law enforcement and counterterrorism through frequent use of two sets of *quantifiable metrics*: for law enforcement, the numbers of criminal investigations, arrests, and convictions; and for counterterrorism, the number of intelligence reports generated, potential terrorists identified, and plots disrupted. In 2004, for example, Mueller highlighted conviction numbers that indicated success in law enforcement. He stated, "The FBI, along with its partners, is investigating *170 major cases* of corporate fraud. To date, *240 executives have been indicted* and *132 have been convicted"* (3/17/2004). Later that year, Mueller continued to cite progress in counterterrorism, emphasizing the importance of metrics:

> We have also seen *measurable accomplishments* within the FBI.... We have gone from no intelligence bulletins in 2001 to *115 since 9/11*; and from no intelligence reports to *2648*. Finally... [we] show an increase of *85% in the number of Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act warrants* we have obtained and an increase of *91% in the number of counterterrorism sources* we have developed... (4/14/2005).

As in the previous phase, an emphasis on clear metrics provided unambiguous evidence of success. However, now, given Congressional concerns about the FBI's historical mandate, that success was claimed to lie both in counterterrorism and in law enforcement.

Third, Mueller increasingly *equalized* the FBI's *old and new identity claims*: that is, he drew on two distinct sets of labels to define the Bureau. His use of the terms "counterterrorism" and "intelligence agency" remained consistent; at the same time, he once again began to refer to the FBI through its historical label of "law enforcement." In 2004, for example, he described the FBI as "both a *law enforcement* and an *intelligence* agency" (5/24/2004).

Together, through his language, Mueller framed the renewal effort as *balancing* the FBI's historical and new capabilities. The intended effect was to reassure stakeholders that both law enforcement and counterterrorism capabilities were equally important to and carefully managed within the FBI. In 2004, for instance, Mueller emphasized how the FBI was successfully balancing both: "We have remained *at the forefront of criminal investigations* while upholding our highest priority *of terrorism prevention*" (03/17/2004). He highlighted that the FBI's distinctiveness lay precisely in its ability to balance both sets of capabilities. In 2004, he testified, "the FBI has *a unique capacity* to handle both the *criminal aspects* and *the intelligence... presented by any terrorism case*" (9/8/2004).

In summary, during this phase, Mueller deployed *dual outcome frames*. Moving from one frame to dual outcome frames addressed stakeholder concerns about the FBI's capacity to pursue its new and old capabilities. By explicitly framing around the two outcomes and leveraging dual metrics and identity claims, Mueller elevated the perceived importance of both. As Figure 2 illustrates, Mueller consistently drew on the dual frames—outcomes related to counterterrorism and to law enforcement—to respond to Congressional questions.

## 4.5 | Phase 3 (2007–2013): A new process frame

### 4.5.1 | Stakeholder concerns: Should you do both?

Our analysis suggested that, by the beginning of 2007, stakeholders had begun to accept the FBI's ability to engage in both counterterrorism and law enforcement. Congressional members approved further resource reallocation, so that 60% of the budget was allocated to counterterrorism and national security (04/26/2007). The FBI's efforts to disrupt terrorist plots were largely highlighted as successful; at the same time, crime rates began to drop once again. For example, in January 2007, Senator Barbara Mikulski (D) complimented the FBI, describing how "After 9/11, [the FBI has]... been doing two jobs: *fighting crime* as well as *fighting the global war against terrorism*" (1/11/2007).

However, new tensions and questions emerged. While in prior periods Congressional members focused their questions on counterterrorism *or* law enforcement, after 2007 they increasingly began questioning how the two might interact. In particular, we noted an increase in questions—up to 24% in 2010 (see Figure 1)—about whether the FBI's capabilities in counterterrorism and law enforcement were fundamentally incompatible. Unexpectedly, many of these questions reflected normative concerns about the *appropriateness* of the FBI's dual focus. Congressional members questioned whether—even if it could—the FBI should maintain both sets of capabilities. These questions were notable for length and intensity; the most contentious topic of the hearings revolved around what the FBI should be doing (rather than what it could do).

This shift in concerns appeared to be partly driven by resource constraints and the annual nature of resource allocation, both forcing stakeholders to reevaluate priorities and trade-offs. Even as the FBI demonstrated that it *could* manage dual capabilities, Congressional members sought to understand whether it *should* pursue continued investments in both over the long run. For example, in a Q&A in 2008, Senator Richard Shelby (R) pushed Mueller to address a potential incompatibility between its two capability sets:

> Since 9/11, the *FBI has shifted more than 2000 agents* from criminal investigations into terrorism. I agree that terrorism is the highest priority... I think it's also short-sighted for us to *continue to cannibalize the criminal side* of the FBI (4/14/2008).

Congressional members increasingly questioned if the FBI needed to be split into two agencies, each focused on a distinct outcome. For example, in 2009, Representative Steve Cohen (D) asked: "Do you think that the FBI has grown so much that maybe it needs to have *two different bureaus*, one for... counterterrorism... and another for the criminal section (5/20/2009)?" Thus, our findings suggest that Mueller's focus on outcomes may have reached a threshold and may have become less effective in assuaging stakeholder concerns about reprioritization.

### 4.5.2 | Capability Reconfiguration: Formalization

During this period, Mueller introduced changes that aimed to formalize how law enforcement and counterterrorism capabilities were deployed throughout the Bureau. His senior team developed hiring, training, and promotion initiatives to standardize analyst career paths. In late 2007, Mueller launched a Strategic Execution Team (SET) of almost 90 agents and analysts to upgrade the Field Intelligence Groups. The SET identified best practices, codified existing FIG models in a 61-page document, and developed a single model for all FIGs to follow (adjusting for field office size and complexity). In early 2008, Mueller also launched a series of Strategy Performance Sessions— videoconference check-ins to review results and to standardize and upgrade each office's intelligence processes.

The result of these efforts was a single, newly codified model that was intended to guide how the FBI prioritized its workflow and deployed both its counterterrorism and its law enforcement capabilities. The model comprised two significant components—an emphasis on threats and a reliance on intelligence—that would guide both counterterrorism and criminal efforts. As previously described, historically, an agent would open a case in reaction to an incident or tip. In contrast, the new model urged each field office to analyze threats in its region—whether related to law enforcement (e.g., threats of gang violence) or to counterterrorism (e.g., potential for a future attack). Once threats were identified, criminal agents or counterterrorist analysts were tasked with collecting and disseminating information related to those threats. The office would then deploy capabilities—whether in law enforcement (e.g., developing sources to identify and arrest gang members) or in counterterrorism (e.g., undertaking additional surveillance)—toward the gravest ones. An SAC described to us how this model guided the FBI's capability deployment: "The FBI has so many things to do, we have to set priorities.... [The model] helps us establish priorities based on the underlying threats we face, not the crimes that happen to occur."

### 4.5.3 | Leader's framing: A new process frame

While enacting these changes, Mueller faced a final framing challenge: convincing stakeholders that the FBI *should* pursue both counterterrorism and law enforcement over the long term. Our analysis showed that, toward the end of this period, Mueller began to deploy a *new process frame*. The purpose of this frame was to bridge the FBI's capabilities in counterterrorism and law enforcement by emphasizing that a single process could produce both previously separate outcomes.

To construct this frame, Mueller's testimonies highlighted process—*how* the FBI acted and conducted its work. Rather than focusing only on outcomes, he framed the adoption and deployment of a new "intelligence cycle" or a new "threat-based, intelligence-led" approach (9/13/2011) as the agency's strategic orientation. For example, in 2011, he described the FBI's focus as "a way of thinking." He said, "We have to address the threats, analyze the threats, identify what we do not know about those threats, and fill in those gaps" (4/6/2011). Statements like this one represented a significant departure from Mueller's past framing; for the first time, he described the FBI's strategy as oriented around a way of working. And instead of justifying the Bureau's changes as necessary only to achieve outcomes, he also described them as essential to move the agency toward a new process. The FBI's strategic orientation, in other words, focused on *how to act* rather than what to aim to achieve. In 2008, for example, he testified: "The purpose of the SET [Strategic Execution Team] is... *to ensure we are an intelligence-driven organization* and *to drive a change in mindsets* throughout the FBI (9/16/2008)."

In addition, Mueller's testimonies now provided evidence of the FBI's success through references to *ongoing behaviors*. Perhaps because quantifying success in deploying a process is more difficult than quantifying success in achieving an outcome, his testimonies highlighted improvements in capabilities as the FBI's major achievements. For example, he emphasized how the FBI's renewal effort had led to the successful development of several new behaviors:

> The FBI's transformation into a threat-based, intelligence-driven organization has led to a *dramatic increase in domain analysis*, *collection management*, *source identification*, *and the dissemination of both raw intelligence and finished intelligence products* (12/14/2011).

Naturally, Mueller's testimonies still contained metrics, particularly because he was often asked for them. However, he increasingly paired these metrics with qualitative descriptions of ongoing behavior that provided evidence of meaningful change.

During this period, Mueller also *combined* the FBI's *old and new identity claims* through a single label that defined the FBI. This label focused stakeholder attention on the agency's internal process. At a meeting of all SACs in 2006, attended by one of the authors of this study, Mueller first framed the FBI in a new way: as a "*threat-based*, *intelligence-led*" organization. He began using this label extensively in 2007. The label defined the FBI as an agency deploying a process that could underlie both its law enforcement and its counterterrorism capabilities. The FBI, in other words, was not solely a law enforcement nor a counterterrorism agency; instead, its status as a "threat-based, intelligence-led" agency meant it could—and should—pursue both mandates.

Through this language, Mueller addressed normative stakeholder concerns by *bridging* or connecting the FBI's capability sets. In 2009 he testified, "If the FBI is to successfully prevent terrorist attacks," it had to "operate as a threat-focused, intelligence-led agency" (9/16/2009).

However, he also testified how "the FBI leverages its threat-driven and intelligence-led approach to human trafficking investigations" (4/7/2011) along with other critical components of law enforcement. As these quotes suggest, by framing through a process, Director Mueller began to bridge the FBI's capability sets: although the capabilities remained distinct, the new process provided language to help stakeholders understand how the FBI would approach cases and set priorities across its multiple workstreams.

Over time, Mueller described almost all the changes the FBI had undergone since 9/11, including those previously framed as helping achieve law enforcement or counterterrorism objectives, through this *new process frame*. For example, looking back in 2011, he testified:

> To carry out this mission, the FBI has taken significant steps since 9/11 to transform itself into a *threat-based*, *intelligence-led agency*. This new approach has driven changes in the Bureau's structure and management; our recruitment, hiring, and training; our information technology systems; and even our cultural mindset (6/8/2011).

As Figure 2 illustrates, by 2012, Mueller responded to 30% of Congressional questions by drawing on the threat-based, intelligence-led process frame. Critically, this new frame did not supplant the FBI's new (counterterrorism) or old (law enforcement) outcome frames. Rather, by characterizing the agency with a process that could underlie both counterterrorism and law enforcement, it created a bridge connecting the two sets of capabilities.

## 4.6 | Acceptance of resource allocation priorities

Our analysis suggested that, in the final years of our study, Congressional members accepted the FBI's successful development of two distinct capability sets, including the ongoing reassignment of resources from one to the other. In 2012, the FBI's budget increased to $8.12 billion (from $3.81 billion in 2001). Almost 60% of its 34,000 full-time employees focused on intelligence and counterterrorism. Our interviews revealed that, internally, counterterrorism capabilities had been strengthened while law enforcement capabilities remained intact. While interviewees stated that the ultimate result of the renewal effort was unlikely to be clear for years, the United States had not experienced a major terrorist attack since 9/11. At the same time, crime rates continued to decrease throughout the United States.

We also found that by 2013, the FBI was routinely described using Mueller's new process frame. For example, the response to "What is the FBI?" in the FAQ section of the Agency's website began: "The FBI is an *intelligence-driven and threat-focused* national security organization with both intelligence and law enforcement activities." The frame was also incorporated by Congressional members. For example, in 2011, Senator Chris Coons (D) described how the FBI was defined by its approach to intelligence, rather than by its objectives:

> The FBI is an enormous *source of valuable intelligence*, not just in... anti-terrorism, but also just in routine local law enforcement—drug interdiction, violent crime, and so forth (3/30/2011).

Despite the magnitude of the FBI's renewal effort, hearings between 2011 and 2013 involved little contestation. Instead, Congressional members from both parties complimented the FBI's

transformation into an organization that successfully bridged law enforcement and counter-terrorism. In 2011, for example, Diane Feinstein (D) said:

> [Director], when you first began to... go into the intelligence area, I doubted whether it could be done... effectively. *I believe you have done it.... I think the intelligence, the way the 56 offices operate*... has demonstrated that the FBI has been effective (12/14/11).

Two years later, Orrin Hatch, the longest-serving Republican Senator in history, was similarly impressed: "I... want to personally thank you for the terrific service you have given.... I do not know that we have ever had an FBI Director as good as you are" (6/19/2013).

### 4.7 | Framing for the acceptance of capability reprioritization: Toward a model

We combine our findings to introduce a model (Figure 3) illustrating how a leader's framing during a strategic renewal can evolve to support the reprioritization of capabilities. The model begins with an event that leads an organization to build up a capability set that is distinct from—but must coexist alongside—its historical one. When this occurs, stakeholders responsible for resource reallocation may be concerned about the organization's readiness to shore up newly needed capabilities successfully. We propose that leaders can minimize such concerns through a *new outcome frame*: introducing a new strategic orientation (what to do), using metrics as evidence of success, and prioritizing a new identity claim. In this way, leaders can *break* from the organization's past to mobilize initial support for reprioritization.

However, as stakeholders begin to accept a new outcome frame, they are likely to question the organization's capacity to maintain its old capabilities. Our findings suggest that leaders may then need to modify their communications and introduce *dual outcome frames* that *balance* old and new capabilities, by emphasizing the organization's dual strategic orientation, demonstrated through two sets of metrics, and described by equalizing new and old identity claims.

However, our findings also suggest that balancing might amplify resistance to reprioritization. Even if stakeholders come to accept that the organization can maintain both sets of capabilities, they may begin to question whether it *should* do so. We therefore theorize an "outcome efficacy threshold": while outcome frames allow leaders to communicate two capability sets, they are effective only to a threshold, and may not overcome appropriateness concerns. Building long-term support for reprioritization may require moving beyond outcomes and using framing tactics that integrate a single, cohesive frame. Our findings suggest that leaders can *bridge* capability sets via a *process frame*; that is, by characterizing strategic orientation in terms of "how" to act, defining success through ongoing behaviors, and combining old and new identity claims, leaders can explain how a single process connects separate capability sets. A process frame reinvigorates support for a strategic renewal effort and stakeholder acceptance of capability reprioritization.

## 5 | DISCUSSION

This study examined how a leader fostered stakeholder support for a strategic renewal effort requiring the reprioritization of resources across two capability sets over time. While research

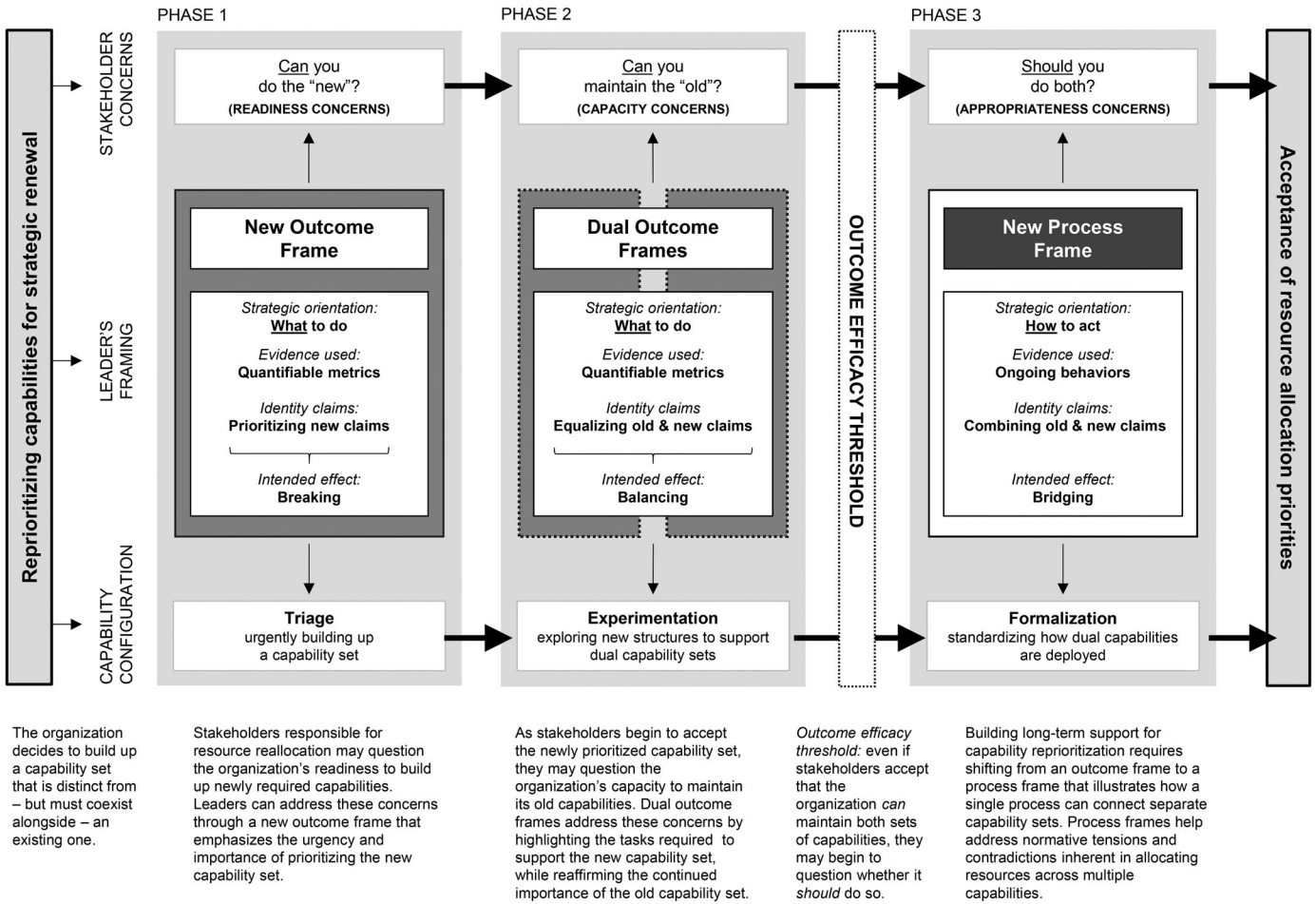


**FIGURE 3** A model of framing for capability reprioritization. [Correction added on 07 February 2025, after first online publication: Figure 3 has been updated in this version.]

has focused on strategic renewal that involves replacing one set of capabilities with another (Agarwal & Helfat, 2009; Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2018; Eggers, 2016; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), we examine how leaders build stakeholder support for reprioritizing and maintaining multiple capabilities that remain critical. In such contexts, leaders face two framing challenges: reducing employee resistance to shifting priorities and persuading other key stakeholders, such as senior executives, boards, or investors, to reallocate resources over time. Although prior studies have addressed framing strategies to overcome employee resistance to strategic renewal (Bansal et al., 2019; Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2018; Nag et al., 2007), less attention has been given to how leaders use framing to secure long-term resource reallocation from other stakeholders. Drawing on a 12-year analysis of FBI Director Mueller's post-9/11 response, we identify a novel distinction between two forms of framing—outcome and process frames—that help leaders build stakeholder support for reprioritization during a strategic renewal effort. These findings contribute to theories of strategic renewal and framing.

First, we propose that a leader's ability to build support for reprioritization among resource allocation stakeholders may require the sequencing of outcome and process frames. Prior research highlights the value of bridging novelty and familiarity through a gradual conceptual evolution to build employee support for renewal (Clark, 1985; Dalpiaz & Di Stefano, 2018; Martens et al., 2007). As Dalpiaz and Di Stefano wrote (2018, p. 691, emphasis added), successful renewal should be framed as "enabled by *familiar* values and capabilities... creating a sense of continuity" when communicating with employees (see also Dunford & Jones, 2000). However, this approach may fall short when engaging resource allocation stakeholders, such as senior executives or boards. For these stakeholders, framing that relies too heavily on continuity can obscure the rationale for directing attention and resources toward new or competing priorities. Gradual conceptual evolution may be ill-suited to the resource allocation process because resource decisions demand clear, timely priorities. Ambiguity or incremental shifts can stall action, create stakeholder misalignment, and undermine the decisive commitments needed for strategic progress. A framing sequence that places an initial focus on outcome frames, and then shifts to process frames, offers an alternative approach.

Second, we propose that an initial focus on outcome frames can help leaders build initial support for reprioritization in the wake of an environmental jolt or punctuation (Meyer, 1982). A leader's use of an outcome frame draws stakeholder attention to the need to reprioritize one capability set in favor of another (e.g., Furr et al., 2022; Helfat & Eisenhardt, 2004; Helfat & Peteraf, 2015). In this early phase, a leader's focus on a single outcome frame addresses stakeholder concerns about why the capability set needs immediate attention. It also clarifies "what to do," and why the capability set requires separate resources and task coordination. In this regard, a single outcome frame addresses readiness concerns, offering a tangible way for leaders to "break the [old] frame" (Hodgkinson et al., 1999, p. 977) so that stakeholders will allocate resources to a capability set needed to address the new priority.

However, after the initial response to the environmental jolt or punctuation moment begins to subside, stakeholder concerns are likely to shift toward questions about whether the organization has the capacity to balance multiple capabilities and priorities simultaneously, and into the future (e.g., Smith & Tushman, 2005). This question becomes particularly salient when shifts in the external environment alter the relative importance of the issues that these capabilities address. For example, following 9/11, the rise in salience of counterterrorism prompted stakeholders to support the prioritization of intelligence capabilities. However, as domestic crime rates later surged while terrorist attacks diminished, the salience of traditional law enforcement capabilities increased, prompting stakeholders to revisit the balance between the two.

To overcome concerns, leaders may need to shift their framing toward dual outcome frames. Doing so maintains a continued focus on "what to do," but addresses broader concerns about whether the organization will be able to balance the newly prioritized capability set alongside existing capabilities that must remain intact. A dual outcome frame balances separate metrics, equalizes new and old identity claims, clarifies the tasks needed to support the newly prioritized capability, and most importantly, does not downplay or abandon the old capability set that requires comparable attention. In short, a focus on dual outcome frames addresses *capacity* stakeholder concerns (i.e., "can you maintain the old?") while the organization continues to redirect resources and attention to the new capability.

Yet the very nature of framing around outcomes may inadvertently provoke stakeholder concerns about the appropriateness of maintaining more than one capability perpetually (i.e., "should you do both?"). Specifically, resource constraints and the annual nature of resource allocation decisions force stakeholders to continually reevaluate priorities. If a leader is able to convince stakeholders that the organization is equipped to manage two sets of separate capabilities (and related performance metrics) (e.g., Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004), a focus on dual outcomes can unintentionally prompt tensions about whether an organization *should* maintain dual (or even dueling) sets of capabilities. Following a moment of punctuation, performance-related concerns often supersede normative (i.e., appropriateness) concerns because of the urgent need to respond to an immediate threat at hand (Hill et al., 2014). However, addressing performance concerns leaves open remaining normative questions about how the changes will align with longer-term strategic goals. Related literature points to the challenge that leaders face when confronted with the decision to adopt and incorporate disruptive practices or radical innovations (e.g., Lounsbury, 2007). Firms may initially adopt a practice or innovation to address a performance gap (Tushman & O'Reilly, 2002), but solving a gap in performance is unlikely to resolve normative concerns that can arise about how a new practice or technology fits into the organization's strategy or identity (Raffaelli et al., 2019; Vuori & Huy, 2016; Zajac et al., 2000). Likewise, the shift from performance-related to normative stakeholder concerns during a strategic renewal effort presents leaders with an equivalent framing challenge.

Although less attention has been paid to how leaders' frames influence resource reprioritization, some scholars have found multiple or incongruent frames can impede how stakeholders collaborate (Kaplan, 2008; Zuzul, 2019), search for solutions (Gavetti & Levinthal, 2000; Weick, 1993), approach new opportunities (Benner & Tripsas, 2012; Hiatt & Carlos, 2019; Kaplan & Tripsas, 2008), accept strategic changes (Sasaki et al., 2020), or focus attention on relevant environmental elements (Barr et al., 1992; Dutton & Jackson, 1987). This line of work hints at a possible limitation of dual outcome frames; in each case, a leader's framing task is to overcome confusion, anxiety, or contestation between multiple frames. In response, our theoretical model introduces the notion of an *outcome efficacy threshold*: a tipping point where outcome frames no longer garner sufficient support from stakeholders to prioritize two distinct capability sets. Our findings suggest that, if and when stakeholders raise normative –rather than performance-related—questions about the appropriateness of strategic renewal, framing through outcomes may exacerbate rather than attenuate their concerns.

To overcome the outcome efficacy threshold, our study's third key insight highlights the relevance of process frames. As a strategic renewal effort stretches into the future, leaders can benefit from a shift in framing toward process rather than solely outcomes. Process frames reconcile normative tensions and contradictions associated with allocating resources to more than one capability (or outcome). By focusing on ongoing behaviors—"how to act"—process

frames allow wleaders to infuse values and communicate meaning beyond the technical aspects associated with each distinct capability set (e.g., Gulati & Wohlgezogen, 2023; Selznick, 1957). Process frames offer leaders a novel framing tool, akin to "a coherent guide" (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006, p. 435), to legitimate the plausibility and promise of a strategic renewal effort well into the future (e.g., Garud et al., 2014; Rindova & Martins, 2022). A leader's shift toward process frames also helps reconcile a mélange of outcome metrics, activities, and disparate identity claims that can heighten ambiguity or foster competing views among top executives and stakeholders responsible for resource reallocation (e.g., Björkman et al., 2007; Corley & Gioia, 2004; Kaplan, 2008). The strength of a process frame lies in its ability to resonate with stakeholders who may have different priorities, enabling them to find common meaning in its blend of ongoing behaviors, practices, and a coherent identity claim. In fact, process frames may offer a response to the ambiguity that stakeholders often experience when new practices are reprioritized but not properly integrated into an organization's identity (e.g., Nag et al., 2007).

## 5.1 | Generalizability and boundary conditions

In any qualitative single-case study, it is necessary to address the topic of generalizability. On the surface, leading the FBI may seem wholly unlike leading a private company: the FBI is not expected to make a profit, does not face market-based competitors, and cannot go bankrupt. Yet there are striking similarities. For example, compare Mueller testifying to Congress and a private sector CEO delivering a quarterly earnings call. Each is participating in a public event tied to evaluation and funding. Both know that the primary audience—be it legislators or analysts—are not the only ones listening closely; employees are also taking careful notes. Both must choose their words carefully, knowing that the framing conveyed will shape how resources and attention are prioritized and allocated. Beyond organizational-level analogies, several theoretical aspects of our study are apt to inform its generalizability to other contexts.

First, it is worth noting that our findings are most relevant to settings where a punctuation event or environmental jolt necessitates strategic renewal. We anticipate outcome and process frames will be relevant to other exogenous shocks that disrupt existing capabilities and require a leader to galvanize support from stakeholders. Scholars would benefit from considering how our findings apply to reprioritization moments such as the introduction of a discontinuous technology (including digitization and generative AI), responses to natural disasters, or market changes prompted by regulatory policy. Studies can also examine whether outcome and process frames are relevant for more gradual or incremental forms of renewal. In these situations, can leaders also build support by sequencing outcome and process frames? Might other contextual factors shape the relative efficacy of outcome versus process frames in building support?

Second, outcome and process frames appear to be particularly viable in situations where stakeholders may perceive two elements to be in conflict with each other (cf. Smith & Lewis, 2011). Consider an automobile manufacturer that chooses to reprioritize its ongoing investments in electric vehicles while maintaining its internal combustion engine product lines. The two capability sets will need to coexist alongside each other for many years (Furr & Eisenhardt, 2021). Yet, to maintain momentum, a leader will need support and ongoing resources from the board of directors and investors so that both can coexist. Our model offers a framing approach to garner support when two capability sets may initially be seen to be in competition for resources, but need to remain viable so the organization can evolve (e.g., Eggers, 2016).

Beyond conflicts or tensions that can emerge between capabilities, research has also highlighted the necessity for stakeholders to embrace seemingly contradictory elements during a strategic renewal effort (Smith & Tushman, 2005). We suggest outcome and process frames may help stakeholders navigate other persistent tensions during strategic renewal, including collaboration versus competition, homogeneity versus distinction, and complexity versus plurality (Huy, 2002; Kreiner et al., 2006; Murnighan & Conlon, 1991). It is unclear if—and indeed unlikely that—leaders are always aware of such tensions, fully anticipate them, or make shifts in their framing efforts to address them. Nonetheless, our study—combined with ideas from prior literature—allows us to build and extend theory on how to help stakeholders embrace seemingly conflicting priorities during strategic renewal.

Finally, outcome and process frames offer promise for studying strategic renewal at different levels- and units-of-analysis. While we focused on stakeholders tasked with resource allocation, akin to a company's board, future work could apply our findings to other stakeholders, such as employees or the senior team. For example, outcome and process frames may help employees reassess "who we are" and "what we do" (Nelson & Irwin, 2014). In the present study, renewal would have been impossible unless a critical mass of FBI agents, from senior leadership to rank-and-file, bought into the change. However, in the early phases of renewal, many FBI agents, who had spent their careers devoted to law enforcement, did not consider their new, analytically trained colleagues to be "real" contributors. Mueller's focus on law enforcement and national security outcomes may have helped widen veterans' definitions of "what we do"—especially after they saw how their new counterterrorism colleagues could help them achieve outcomes related to law enforcement. Due to the confidential nature of our setting, we were unable to pursue this line of inquiry more closely. However, subsequent studies could disentangle whether outcome and process frames affect internal resistance to change.

Future inquiries might also consider the efficacy of outcome and process frames beyond an organization's leader and consider renewal efforts led by middle managers (Balogun & Johnson, 2004) or frontline employees (Kellogg, 2009). Researchers might also consider how other concomitant changes in structure, processes, and culture interact with the framing used to affect a renewal effort's trajectory or consequences (e.g., Rindova & Kotha, 2001). We hope this study, along with future research, will deepen understanding of how leaders can navigate the complexities of strategic renewal. Leaders who recognize the types of frames in their toolkit—including outcome versus process frames—and understand how and when to apply each one may be better prepared to tackle the formidable challenge of strategic renewal with clarity and conviction.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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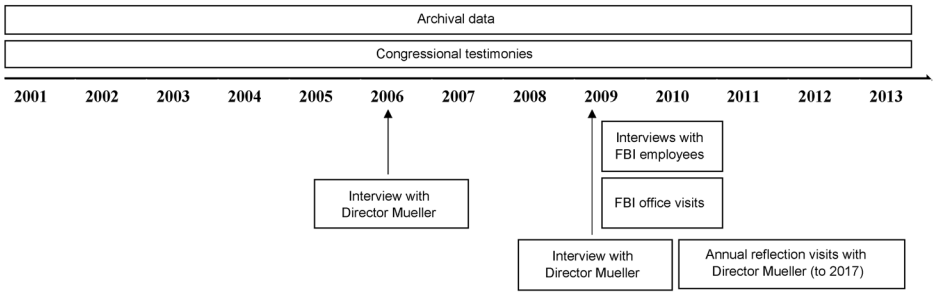
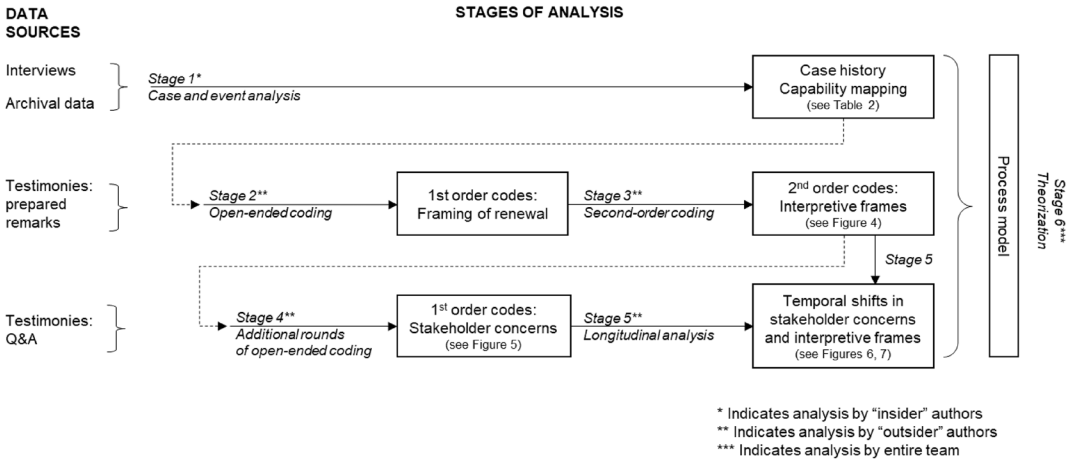
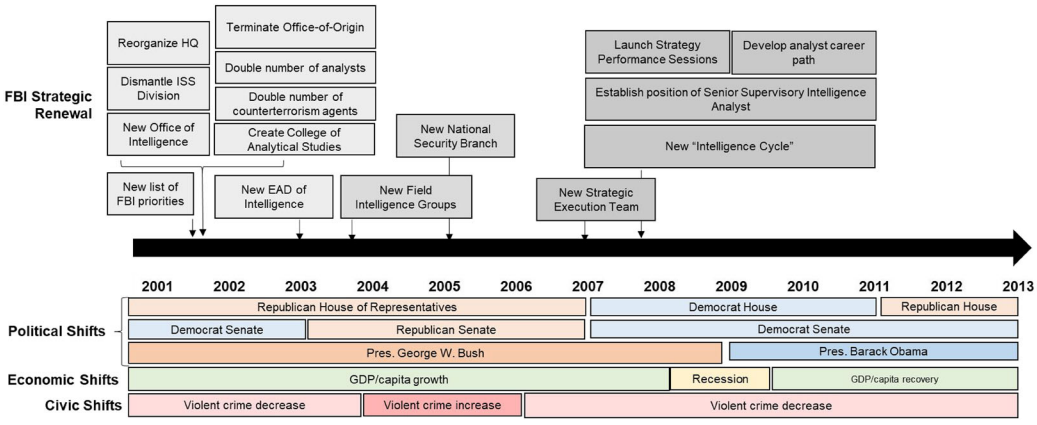
# APPENDIX 1: DATA COLLECTION TIMELINE AND DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS



# APPENDIX 2: TIMELINE OF FBI RENEWAL AND CONTEXTUAL SHIFTS



## APPENDIX 3: DATA STRUCTURE: TESTIMONY CODING