

Cultures of anarchy: Images of Russia in the narrative of Norwegian mainstream news media during the Ukraine crisis 2014

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Abstract

This article examines the role of the news media through a case study of the narratives about the 2014 Ukraine crisis in three major Norwegian newspapers. The conflict also contained a 'war' between competing strategic narratives from the involved actors, with a potential for cross-national cascades into the Norwegian narrative. The authors' focus is on the framing of Russia during the most dramatic month of March 2014. They applied the images related to Wendt's cultures of anarchy (Wendt, 1999) to classify the framing of Russia. The Norwegian media narrative was relatively consistent in framing Russia as choosing a path leading away from being a rival of Norway and the West, towards becoming their enemy. This was close to the narrative of the Norwegian government and in clear opposition to the Russian narrative. While this supports Hoskins and O'Loughlin's 'arrested war' hypothesis (2015), it also raises questions about professional media norms.

Keywords

arrested war, media and conflict, Norway, Russia, social constructivism, strategic narratives

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Introduction

Despite hopes to the contrary, international politics and foreign policy have become more complex and unstable after the Cold War. This makes it challenging to comprehend for the news media, especially during times of rapidly emerging crises, which may jeopardise national security. Furthermore, scholarly debate diverges regarding the media's autonomy and ability to influence foreign policy (Chomsky and Herman, 2008; Entman, 2003; Hallin, 1986; Oates, 2008: 6; Robinson, 1999). Another complication is that after the turn of the millennium independent and non-state actors took advantage of the new media ecology and its affordances. This undermined the previous dominance of mainstream "broadcast" media. In international relations, Hoskins & O'Loughlin introduced "diffused war" to conceptualise the new reality of mediatized conflicts where authorities and established big media seemed unable to maintain control over the narratives (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2010). More recently, they have suggested mainstream media and authorities now have adapted to the challenges of new media technology. They have learned to use the technology for their own ends, "re-asserting" at least some of their previous control over conflict narratives (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2015). They conceptualise this as the phase of "arrested war".

In Russia, the authorities implemented full media control as early as from 1999 and the Second Chechen War (Oates, 2008: 126-127; Wilhelmsen, 2014). Nevertheless, the 2014 conflict in Ukraine was a turning point in terms of focus on mediation in international relations, not least because of the aggressive Russian media strategy to gain international legitimacy for its actions against a sovereign state seeking to align itself with the West. "Information war", in tandem with covert war operations on the ground, was an important element in Russia's "hybrid war" on Ukraine (Galeotti, 2015). The Russian state used its own "arrested" media ecology to frame its operations. The strategic narrative conveyed through its media represented an additional line of defence against alleged encirclement from increasingly aggressive Western rival states.

In the subsequent period, there has been considerable academic focus on the Russian media strategy and presentation of the conflict. As far as we know of, the number of academic studies of the conflict's representation in Western mass media, including whether the strategic narrative in Russian "information war" cascaded into this representation, is significantly lower. Ojala and colleagues studied the visual framing in four major West-European newspapers (Ojala et al., 2017). They found that Western news media mostly used visual imagery and captions to construct narratives of the conflict that portrayed Ukraine/Ukrainians as victims and Russia/Putin as villains. Boyd-Barrett's in-depth study of a broader selection of Western mainstream media draws similar conclusions (Boyd-Barrett, 2016).

This paper presents a case study focusing on how Norwegian mainstream mass media framed Russia during the critical events in Ukraine. The analytical framework for the first, descriptive research question (RQ1) is Wendt's three images of "enemy", "rival" and "friend" (Wendt, 1999). It also summarises the strategic narratives told by the Russian and American side, to detect whether these narratives cascaded into the Norwegian news media. The central section of the paper then analyses front pages and articles from the three most widely read Norwegian newspapers (*Aftenposten*, *Dagbladet* and *VG*) during March 2014, the most

critical month of the conflict. Our second research question (RQ2) enquires whether the newspapers' representation of the evolving events corresponds to the "arrested war"-hypothesis and whether this could represent a violation against the ethical norms of journalistic professionalism.

Perceptions of a Russia in transition

During the Cold War, the High North was one of Europe's most tense and militarised regions (Åtland et al., 2005). The Norwegian mass media mirrored the security situation (Karlsen, 2017). The first phase of the post-Cold War era prompted optimism about integrating Russia into the West (Neumann, 2017; Wilhelmsen and Gjerde, 2018). When failed reforms contributed to chaos and economic crisis, Norwegian authorities no longer regarded Russia as capable of being a threat (Åtland et al., 2005). They remained optimistic about establishing a mutually beneficial relationship, including security cooperation through NATO well into the 2000s (NATO, 2018).

The cooperative relationship in the High North continued to be developed after Putin's takeover as president at the turn of the millennium (Wilhelmsen and Gjerde, 2018). But Russia also gradually asserted its identity as in opposition to a hegemonic West (Åtland et al., 2005; Heier and Kjølberg, 2015). A period of renewed optimism came with Medvedev's period as president 2008-12 and the "reset" of relations with the West in 2009. In 2011 The Norwegian Intelligence Service's annual public assessment characterised the bilateral relationship as "stable" and cooperation as "well established", "positive and close" (Etterretningstjenesten, 2011). Russia was not a military threat to Norway. All conflicts were managed within "a well-established political framework".

This changed after Putin returned as president in May 2012. The 2014 assessment, published before the Ukraine intervention, toned down the positive characterisations. It identified a more nationalist and ambitious Russian leadership, in the Arctic North and in the post-Soviet space (Etterretningstjenesten, 2014). Russia's rapid military modernisation in the North was noted, but not considered representing a threat to Norway.

The Ukraine crisis was the critical juncture where perceptions of Russia, in Norway and generally, definitely took a different path. In December 2013, Ukrainian President Yanukovich ended negotiations with the EU in favour of a gas agreement with Russia. Protests escalated to a violent conflict between pro-Western and pro-Russian groups. Yanukovich fled to Russia and pro-Western protesters formed a provisional government in late February 2014. This triggered further riots and local insurgencies from pro-Russian separatists. In March 2014, Russia intervened with a covert military operation in Eastern Ukraine and on the Crimean Peninsula. A controversial referendum on Crimea provided an apparently near-unanimous popular mandate for secession from Ukraine and reunification with Russia. Russia and the new Crimean authorities concluded the agreement about formal incorporation later the same month. Most of the outside world regarded this as an illegal annexation. The EU and the member states of NATO promptly implemented economic sanctions against Russia. The right of centre, minority coalition of the Conservative party and the Progress party that had governed Norway since October 2013 quickly joined the condemnations and sanctions from its Western partners.

Cultures of anarchy and images of other states

The Russian intervention in Ukraine appeared to be a surprise to Western leaders, experts and media (Dilanian, 2014; Everett and Gerstein, 2014; Maliniak et al., 2014; Voeten, 2014). In a short span of time, they had to make sense of what was happening, why it happened and the appropriate reactions. Even according to the "rational" world of realist scholars, states have to interpret and may misunderstand each other's actions and intentions. A state may seek "adjustment" of power or to "maintain its preponderant position in certain regions" (Morgenthau, 2006: 27). However, other states can misconceive such policies as "a stepping stone to world conquest".

In periods of international disruption, the perspectives offered by "social constructivism" are better equipped to analyse these aspects of interpretation and representation. Its primary concern is that human actors, as individuals or collectives, have to make sense of their identities and the world to guide their actions. As captured by Wendt's much quoted "Anarchy is what states make of it" (Wendt, 1992), states may operate within the structure of international anarchy. But international anarchy is "an empty vessel" that has to be filled with meaning (Wendt, 1999: 6). Its social structure is based on the actors' shared ideas of self and the other, and consequently how this influences states' behaviour towards each other.

Wendt suggests three broad categories of states' mutual perception of each other, either as "enemy", "rival" or "friend". When these perceptions add up to widely shared ideas among a sufficient number of states, they form cultures of anarchy, conceptualised as either of a "Hobbesian", "Lockean" or "Kantian" ideal type. Individual states' adherence to their rules of behaviour may be a consequence of external force from others, a trade-off ("price") or of the state internalising the norms as its own. Deeply internalised and widely shared ideas form a cultural structure likely to affect the perceptions and behaviours of states. Such cultures may be restricted in space and time or incorporate the whole system over protracted periods. In the next section, we discuss how internal norms of the national news media may contribute to the discourse on states' perceptions of themselves and their relations to other states.

News media norms

National news media convey narratives of events and images of actors in a state's international environment to national publics. Framing refers to the processes that shape these narratives and images (Entman, 1993: 52). Besides newsworthiness, different professional norms guide the media's choices of framing. The most celebrated in the Western press is that of the news media as an independent "fourth estate", acting on behalf of the citizens through critical and thorough investigation. The Code of Ethics of the Norwegian Press ("Vær varsom-plakaten"), adopted and upheld by the Norwegian Press Association, states in Section 1. The Role of the Press in Society:

A free, independent press is among the most important institutions in a democratic society ... The press has important functions in that it carries information, debates and critical comments on current affairs. The press is particularly responsible for allowing different views to be expressed... It cannot yield to any pressure from anybody who might want to prevent open debates, the free flow of information and free access to sources. (The Norwegian Press Association, 2015)

There is nothing elsewhere in the Code of Ethics to indicate that the statement excludes the representation of international conflicts. Therefore, the Norwegian press has taken on a social responsibility to convey debates and the voices of those involved. However, we also understand the norm to encourage independent analysis and conclusions, which may end up with attribution of responsibility for the cause or treatment of the conflict.

The tradition of peace journalism represents the second set of internal norms (Colbert, 2009; Keeble et al., 2010; Nohrstedt and Ottosen, 2015). According to this tradition, journalists should prioritise non-violent responses, avoid taking sides as far as possible and nuance the framing of the parties into more than just two opposing (black and white) sides. They should map out common ground and potential for dialogue (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005). Hence, this is an ethic calling for journalists to defuse violent conflicts by attributing responsibility to both conflicting parties, as well as third parties.

Regarding national matters of foreign policy and involvement in conflicts, there is also a competing third set of patriotic norms. The press may feel called upon to prioritise considerations of national security, even at the expense of transparency and criticism. Hallin called this "the ethic of responsibility", implying a change from the role of "fourth estate" to acting as a "fourth branch of government" (Hallin, 1986: 8). From the perspective of this set of norms, attribution of causal responsibility will be on "the other" outside one's own culture of anarchy. Rune Ottosen and colleagues claim there is a long tradition in Norway of close collaboration between mainstream media and authorities in matters of national security, combined with a strong emphasis on political consensus and continuity (Ottosen, 2001, 2018). This has kept any critical security debate off the Norwegian public agenda from the start of the Cold War and up to the present time.

Strategic narratives and media control

States seek to deploy their self-images, images of others and the international system as a whole, to legitimate certain actions and policies as necessary. These images form "strategic narratives" (Miskimmon et al., 2018b; Miskimmon and O'Loughlin, 2017). Success in building a globally shared narrative that triumph over the narratives of other states is obviously an instrument of power. Titling their book "Forging the World", Miskimmon and colleagues (Miskimmon et al., 2018a) not only suggested such a capability to use the media to shape the world, but also deliberately lying or concealing for that purpose.

Seen as an extension of Entman's cascading activation model, a successful strategic narrative will cascade into other states (Entman, 2003). As shown by the arrows in Figure 1 below, our approach adds competing cross-national cascades of strategic narratives, on top of national cascades. While this paper focuses upon the Norwegian mass media, it is necessary to detect influences from other states in its narrative about Ukraine and Russia. Actual effects on the national public (the third tier in the model) are not included in our analysis but should be included in future research. However, we provide a brief discussion at the end of the paper on changes in the public perception of Russia.

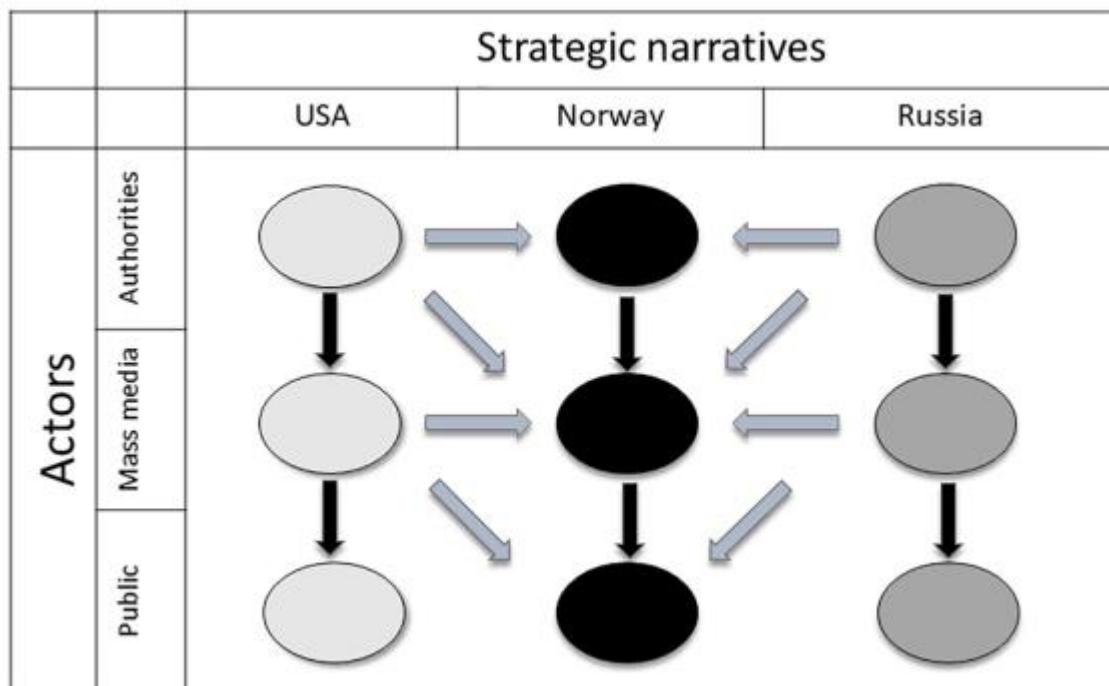


Figure 1. National and cross-national cascades of strategic narratives

Successful media management therefore entails the penetration of the media systems of other states, as well as resisting the attempts of other states to do the same. As indicated, cross-national narratives may contain lies and cascade through concealment. "Sharp power" refers to how less attractive, authoritarian states like China and Russia can exploit the affordances of the global media ecology to hurt democratic rivals through penetration of their more open media systems, to create confusion and division (Walker and Ludwig, 2017).

Hoskins & O'Loughlin's concepts of "diffused" and "arrested war" can be helpful to address how democratic states may be comparatively disadvantaged, as they are more vulnerable to penetration than authoritarian states. "Diffused war" capture that the new media ecology which grew out of the expansion of the Internet, cheap digital technology and non-Western global satellite TV, challenged the dominance of established mainstream big media in the post 9/11 era (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2010, 2015). However, by introducing "arrested war" they suggest that mainstream media and authorities gradually learnt to deal with the new media technology and have "re-asserted" some of their previous control (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2015; O'Loughlin and Hoskins, 2015).

According to the "sharp power" argument of Walker & Ludwig, we shall not take for granted that this excludes the possibility that the struggle between strategic state narratives about war and conflict can turn asymmetrical. Western democratic states may be more vulnerable and less able to "arrest the war" than authoritarian states like Russia. The latter may turn a conflict like the Ukrainian conflict into a "diffused war" for their rivals or enemies, through open or concealed penetration of their media systems.

Research questions and methodology

This study explores the framing of Russia in the Norwegian mainstream mass media during the Ukraine crisis and discusses the applicability of the arrested war thesis in light of this case. The two primary research questions are specified below, before we go on to describe the selection of data.

RQ 1: Which Wendtian images did the news media use to frame Russia?

This first research question is descriptive and asks which of the three Wendtian images the news media applied to frame Russia. We outline each of these images below and explain how they will be applied to the sample of news items.

The Hobbesian culture represents the image of other states being "threatening adversaries who observe no limits in their violence toward each Other" (Wendt, 1999: 258). "The other" does not recognise "us" as an autonomous actor. They might, therefore, use violent power against "us" when it is in their favour (Wendt, 1999: 260). Hence, for a negative discourse to qualify for framing of Russia as an enemy of a state, the discourse must present Russia as a military threat to national sovereignty. This is what Wendt dubs "deep revisionism".

The Lockean culture rests on the image of other states as rivals. States might use limited or restrained violence to serve their interests, but recognise the sovereignty of each other (Wendt, 1999: 279). However, this is still a matter of perception. Other states may perceive and frame Russia's objectives as the "deep revisionist" intentions of an "enemy" state. Alternatively, the Ukrainian conflict might be an instance of temporary rivalry and "shallow revisionism" between two states outside the Kantian culture, with limited implications for Norway and the West. Or it may work as rivalry by proxy, between Russia and the West. Still, the framing of Russia's intentions and behaviour only fit the Lockean rival image if it also attributes the blame for the conflict to other parties than Russia.

The image of friendship between states is the basis of the Kantian culture of anarchy. States follow established norms to resolve conflicts peacefully. But they are ready to fight as a team to protect the security of other states within the culture if outsiders attack them (Wendt, 1999: 298). They form a community, rather than just an alliance based on temporal security interests. Hence, to qualify for the image of a "friend", other states must frame Russia as a state that would refrain from attacking states within the Kantian community and support other states in this community, if attacked. Russian intentions in the Ukrainian crisis might then even be framed as "friendly" if recognised to be within international law. The United Nations can accept outside intervention as invited assistance to defend legitimate national authorities or to protect human rights and security.

Application of these three images raises some methodological challenges. The first is that framing of Russia involves more than the dyadic relation between Ukraine and Russia. Relations between other pairs of states, including Ukraine-Norway and Russia-Norway, as well as constellations of states, such as NATO or the EU are significant for perception and subsequent framing. When states identify with different cultures, any given state might perceive relations within a specific dyad differently. For example, if Norway identifies with the Kantian Western culture an attack on a state perceived as part of this culture will

represent an attack on a "friend" from an "enemy" outside this culture. If Norway considers Ukraine as outside the Kantian culture, the news media might frame Russia as an enemy of Ukraine. But still only as a rival of Norway or the West. Consequently, we treated the framing of Russia as a matter of degree, opening for hybrid categories, such as "enemy/rival" in the latter case. To qualify as a full "enemy", the framing of Russia had to be framed as an enemy of both Ukraine and Norway or the West.

A second methodological challenge is that individual stories and front pages might contain an indistinct or inconsistent discourse on Russia in graphics, titles and text. Such ambiguities might also lead to discrepant interpretations among readers. To address this, both authors conducted separate classifications to control for intersubjectivity and identify such ambiguities. We found it appropriate to use the hybrid image categories, in cases identified as ambiguous by both authors, as well as in the cases of ambiguity revealed by disagreement in the classification of image.

RQ 2: Did the Norwegian mass media "arrest the war"?

Our second research question is explanatory and enquires whether the mass media had reasserted at least some of its authoritative role. The mass media had to interpret and represent a conflict appearing out of nowhere, accompanied by a huge and dissonant stream of information and disinformation. Russia might have arrested the war. But the successful application of "sharp power" – or concealment and lies – from the Russian side would turn the situation for its adversarial others into a "diffused war"-scenario. For the Norwegian mass media to have reasserted its authoritative role, we would expect an independent and consistent framing of the conflict in Ukraine. Hence, it is necessary to identify the main contents of the Russian strategic narrative to detect whether this cascaded into the Norwegian media's narrative. That said; we are aware of the limitation that strong correlation between narratives does not necessarily imply causation. Journalists might still have constructed the narratives independently without being influenced by other states. Influence is, therefore, a sufficient but not necessary condition. Hence, only a negative correlation between the Norwegian news narrative and the Russian narrative is evidence of little Russian influence.

We also need to address another aspect of ambiguity in the re-assertion hypothesis if both the state and the mainstream media have "arrested" the war. Assuming that the renewed mainstream media have reasserted its role; can we expect them to act independently on the "fourth estate" norms of professional journalism or even peace journalism? Or will they collaborate as part of the state's media management strategy, which can be compatible with patriotic norms? So, we also need to detect the main contents of the official narratives from the Norwegian government and its allies and compare it with the media's narrative.

The professional norms established in the "Code of Ethics" corresponds to a thorough and critical analysis, besides the representation of different viewpoints on the crisis. This adds up to an expectation of some variations in the images of Russia. Peace journalism leads us to the expectation of the newspapers averting one-sided attribution of blame and emphasising attribution of responsibility to deal with the crisis to all parties, including the international society. Following that norm, we expect the rival image to dominate. The norm of national

responsibility leads us to expect the re-presentation will avoid attribution of blame to the Norwegian authorities or its allies. The enemy image will dominate the presentation of Russia.

Selection of data

We examined the framing of Russia and the Ukrainian crisis in March 2014 in the three principal national dailies in Norway. *Aftenposten*, *Dagbladet* and *VG* each reached an estimated readership of 1.3-2.4 million in the first quarter of 2014 through their publishing platforms (print, net and mobile). The newspapers' stories about Ukraine, therefore, had the potential to reach a substantial portion of the 3.6 million persons registered as Norwegian voters in 2013.

Table 1. Estimated number of daily readers first quarter of 2014

Newspaper	Estimated readers (in thousands)	
	Print edition	On all platforms
<i>Aftenposten</i>	658	1301
<i>Dagbladet</i>	319	1545
<i>VG</i>	631	2398

Source: TNS Gallup (<http://hjem.tns-gallup.no/magatab/>)

All three are in tabloid format and based in Oslo, but distinct in style. Although leaning to the non-socialist side, none of them officially supports individual political parties (Herbjørnsrud, 2017). Ideologically, *Dagbladet* tends to have the most liberal profile while *VG* tends to be the most conservative. *VG* and *Dagbladet* are also more tabloid – or “boulevard” - in style. As their daily circulation is based on sales over the counter, they are more dependent on sensational news that attracts attention than *Aftenposten*, which is subscription based.

Our data corpus is the daily print versions of the three papers. Although print has been in decline circulation wise, it presents the most significant material that reappears on the other platforms. Moreover, the linear browsing inherent in the paper format reduces selective exposure and increases the likelihood of the stories on Ukraine being discovered and read thoroughly (Thurman, 2017). We reviewed all 93 front pages of that month and 516 potentially relevant news stories identified through a search on the Norwegian news indexing service *Retriever* (retriever.no). The search included the Norwegian equivalent of "Russia" (Russland), but excluded articles also containing "Sotsji" (Sotchi), the host of the Olympic Winter Games in February 2014. We identified 35 front pages and 233 articles that commented upon the crisis. These were included in the contents analysis, along with accompanying visual elements, such as photographs, cartoons and symbols. The latter add immediate and considerable suggestive power to the framing (Ojala et al., 2017; Ottosen, 2007).

For the second research question, we drew sources of presentation from the US and Russia into the analysis, to get an indication of whether the Russian and American strategic narratives cascaded across state lines into the Norwegian news narrative. We selected public statements from the Russian and American leadership made in major speeches by President

Putin to the State Duma on 18 March (Putin, 2014) and President Obama in Brussels on 26 March 2014 (Obama, 2014).

We also added the online version of RT International (formerly Russia Today), which is the major English-language news source from Russia. A Google search of the RT International web site on 25 May 2018, with "ukraine https://newspaperurl" as search term identified 202 relevant articles in March 2014. Compared with the speeches of Putin and Obama, these data give an indication of cascading effects within Russia. They also provide for a basic comparison with the narratives in the Norwegian press, to indicate Russian influence.

Finally, we included data to address the state – media ambiguity in the “arrested war” hypothesis. Our primary source for the state narrative is Foreign Minister Brende’s Annual Statement on foreign policy to the Norwegian Parliament on 25 March, and the subsequent Parliamentary debate (Brende, 2014b; Stortinget, 2014). While this cannot be an analysis of the actual processes of cascading activation, it can detect whether the reporting in the three dailies criticised or deviated from the narrative of Norwegian authorities.

State narratives about the Ukraine conflict

Table 2 summarises President Putin’s and President Obama’s narratives and the Norwegian narrative delivered by the Foreign Minister. Hence, the table represents the top tier from *Figure 1. National and international strategic narratives*. The summary uses the narrative categories of state self-images, images of others and the international system as a whole, which states deploy to legitimate actions and policies (Miskimmon et al., 2018b; Miskimmon and O’Loughlin, 2017). These actions and policies mentioned by the leaders are located at the bottom of the table.

Table 2. Summary of state narratives

	Russia / Putin	Norway / Brende	USA / Obama
Self-image	Russia's glorious past disrupted by communism. Russian soil and nation disintegrated by Crimea "gifted" to Ukraine and dissolution of USSR.	As a small state Norway especially dependent on defending a liberal international order and on the solidarity of NATO allies.	The USA and the West stand for and defend universal liberal ideals.
Images of others	Aggressive and hypocritical West encircling Russia, led by EU and the USA. Ukraine as an arena for Western geopolitical aggression in the near abroad.	Usually a peaceful and mutually beneficial relationship with Russia. Bolstered by power through NATO. Ukraine crisis a new, unfortunate phase with breaches of international law.	The world had "an interest in a strong and responsible Russia". But it violated international law in Ukraine and disrupted the ideals of the liberal world order.
	Ukraine led by coup-makers and radical nationalists, prompting Russian speakers to self-defence and calls for protection.	No independent reports of systematic violence against ethnic Russian minority. However, Ukrainian authorities had made some mistakes.	New government result of the people "reaching" liberal ideals. No evidence of systematic violence against ethnic Russians. No Western intervention or interest in "controlling Ukraine".
Image of the International system	End of global power balance after the Cold War. West set aside international norms as they please. Double standards and "rule by the gun".	A global order based on international law, sovereignty, democracy, and free trade.	Universal liberal ideals won through attraction, not force. International cooperation between sovereign states serves mutual interests.
Policies	Legitimate humanitarian intervention to protect civilians. Democratic referendum for justified Crimean return to Russia. Defend international order.	Fully agree with partners in EU and NATO on the sanctions against Russia. But also maintain bilateral cooperation, contacts and predictable relations.	Russia will be contained through sanctions and reinforced NATO military presence.

The table identifies a struggle between two incompatible narratives. The Norwegian state narrative, as it appeared in Brende's speech and other official statements (Brende, 2014a, 2014b; Søreide, 2014; Utenriksdepartementet, 2014a, 2014b), was close to the American and also incompatible with the Russian narrative. Furthermore, the subsequent Parliamentary debate 2014 confirmed that the well-established values of inter-party consensus and stability on foreign policy also applied to the Ukraine crisis (Stortinget, 2014). The representatives of all seven parties, including the opposition parties, supported the government's views and actions. The Norwegian state narrative about Russia had gradually become more critical after

Putin's return to the presidency, and especially with the new right of center government. But Brende's statement and the unison parliamentary support signified what Wilhelmsen and Gjerde have described as a "tectonic shift" (Wilhelmsen and Gjerde, 2018: 391).

RT International is a global media network funded by the Russian state, offering global news with a "Russian view", in several languages, via cable TV, its websites and YouTube channels (Hutchings et al., 2015; Reisinger and Golts, 2014; Yablokov, 2015). According to President Putin, the government intended RT to "break the Anglo-Saxon monopoly on the global information streams" and expected it to "reflect the Russian government's official position" (RT International, 2013). Amid the Ukraine crisis, RT's editor-in-chief confirmed that she "supported her country" and "considered Russia's position to be right" (Simonyan, 2014). Hence, the network openly adhered to the patriotic norms, defining itself along with the role of "the fourth branch of government". Our analysis of the articles on RT International's website found that their framing of the conflict in Ukraine was strikingly similar to the narrative of President Putin. This corresponds well with other observations of the network (Hutchings et al., 2015; Østevik, 2017).

Hence, the Russian state had "arrested the war" and used the RT International to spread its strategic narrative and achieve legitimacy for its actions among an international audience. As for its potential impact, the network claims to have built a significant global audience on its various platforms (RT International, n.d.). While their own figures are considered being inflated, especially for TV (Zavadski, 2015), there were worries about its impact (Applebaum, 2014). The Norwegian government was also concerned (Brende, 2014a), even confronting a major regional newspaper for publishing an Op-ed (Nistad, 2014) that was "merely repeating Russian propaganda" (Skjøtskift, 2014).

The representation in the Norwegian mainstream press

Russia on the newspapers' front pages

Front pages catch attention and convey messages in an instant to both readers and those passing by newspaper stands, through visual imagery and large titles. They push and frame political issues on to the public agenda. Figure 2 below summarises the presentation of the Ukraine conflict on the front pages of the three Norwegian newspapers in March 2014.

The conflict appeared on more than a third (35 of 93) of the daily front pages during that period. But there were substantial variations between them. The two boulevard papers were much less preoccupied with the conflict and more focused on sensational domestic issues, besides catering to lifestyle issues and the weather. *Aftenposten* had almost two-thirds (21) of the front pages. We also calculated the percentage of space on total daily front pages dedicated to the conflict. The pattern of variation between the newspapers was similar. *Aftenposten*'s dedication of space (11.4%) was twice as high as that of the boulevard newspapers.

Our independent assessments concluded that almost all of the conveyed images of Russia contained in the front-page items were in the "enemy" category or bordering between "enemy" and "rival". Only three fitted clearly into the "rival image" and none into the "friend

image". Dagbladet appears as most oriented towards the "enemy image", with the two others, and especially VG, as somewhat milder. Also, Aftenposten and in particular Dagbladet dedicated relatively more space to the most explicit enemy images. These results indicate a match between liberalism and hostility towards Putin's Russia. Still, as Aftenposten dedicated more front-page space to the conflict than the others did, it contributed most to framing Russia negatively during the whole month.

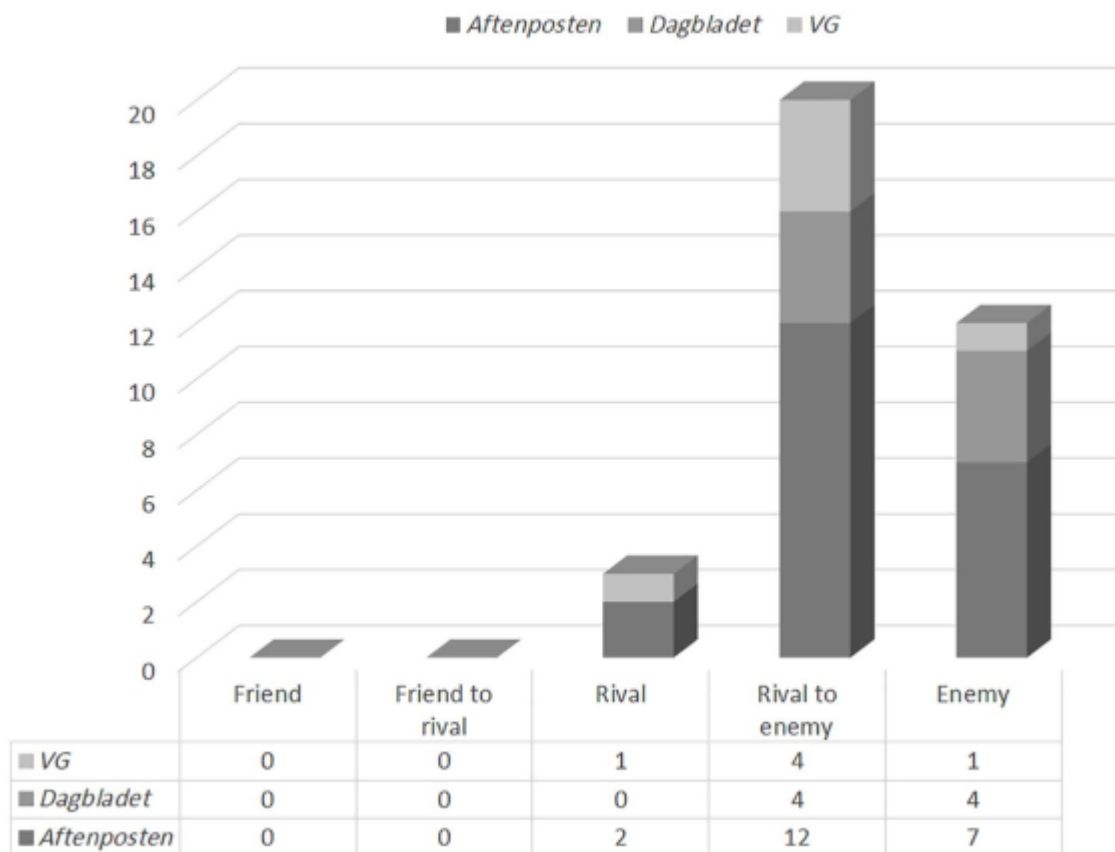


Figure 2. Images of Russia on front pages in March 2014

Treating the image of Russia as a continuous variable, ranging from 1 ("Friend") to 3 ("Enemy") and including the hybrid categories allows us to calculate the central tendency as an arithmetical mean and use standard deviation as a measure of dispersion. It also allows us to use the mean in the few cases of disagreement between coders. The arithmetical means confirm that Dagbladet ($x=2.81$) was more "hawkish" than Aftenposten ($x=2.71$) and especially VG ($x=2.54$). Furthermore, the standard deviations show that Dagbladet ($s = 0.19$) provided a less varied image than Aftenposten ($s = 0.31$) and VG ($s = 0.33$).

There is no space for commenting on each individual front-page item. But we shall provide a few examples to illustrate. The front page from Dagbladet 2 March framed Russia as an "enemy", personified through a close-up of an aggressive Putin. Its headings said Putin now "has a dangerous self-confidence", was "ruthless" and invited us to look inside the paper for more on "Putin's bloody record". Almost the same message warning us against "Putin's dangerous game" and "that we should fear the ruthless Putin" appeared on 10 and 24 March.

A slightly more ambiguous image, coded as between enemy and rival, appeared in Dagbladet 29 March. The front page posited new NATO general secretary (and former Norwegian PM) Stoltenberg against a bare-chested Putin on horseback. The title now referred to "the new struggle for power" and demanded "Jens had to tame the ruthless Putin".

VG's front pages were fewer and more ambiguous, seemingly more distanced from the conflict. They mostly framed the conflict as domestic, or rivalry between Russia and the West. There was little doubt about Russia as the aggressor towards Ukraine, but few signs that Russia represented a direct threat to Norway. The exception we coded as "enemy" appeared on the top of the front page on March 5. It shows an angry Norwegian Foreign minister Brende, who "lashes out against Putin" in an interview on the inside. On March 29, VG used an almost identical front page to the Stoltenberg vs. Putin front page in Dagbladet on the same day. However, we coded this as between "enemy" and "rival". VG added a larger close-up of an angrier Stoltenberg opposite a smaller version of the Putin on horseback picture. Their message was "Yes! He (Stoltenberg) is tough enough" (to tame Putin). A small section of the front page about the Crimean referendum on 17 March fit into the "rival" image. It comprised a photo of Crimeans celebrating the victory (no quotes used) and a title that claimed this was a "victory dismissed by the West".

While Aftenposten put the Ukraine conflict on their front pages almost daily, they took a slightly different approach. Like the others, they framed Russia as an aggressor acting outside of international law. But they focused more on ordinary civilians and combatants from both sides of the conflicts, and less on the Putin persona. Furthermore, readers were reminded of the conflict almost daily by small notices on the front page. The front page on 2 March conveyed a message of Russia as an enemy. Crimea was under occupation by Russian troops, unwelcomed by the local population. A photo showed masked soldiers watching worried civilians in the street. The accompanying title clarified that this represented "Cold war in the streets of Crimea". On March 16 a photo of Crimeans celebrating the referendum formed the backdrop for a title and comments that emphasised the voters had no real alternatives. However, there were no references to Russia as a direct threat to the West. This ambiguity contributed to a mixed image of Russia containing both elements of "enemy" and "rival".

Rival images on Aftenposten's front pages of Aftenposten were less visible for readers, as they appeared as small items on the lower part of the pages. Both items referred to the Russian claims of Ukrainian fascism. The first appeared on 15 March and described "a new army set up to watch over the referendum" and its claim of necessary defence against "fascist aggression". On 28, March a small title referred to the controversial historical figure of Stepan Bandera. Bandera was "a hero for Ukrainians" and "Quisling for the Russians", because of his collaboration with Germany during WWII against the Soviet Union, to gain independence for Ukraine.

[Comments and articles](#)

As shown in table 2 below, the coverage of the conflict inside the newspapers was extensive and dominated by staff contributions. The difference between the newspapers was smaller than for front pages. On average, the two boulevard papers dedicated around two articles and pages daily to the conflict, while Aftenposten dedicated over three articles and pages.

Table 3. The Ukraine conflict in Aftenposten, VG and Dagbladet articles, March 2014

	Newspaper	Articles	Pages
Internal	Aftenposten	96	87,15
	VG	56	69,7
	Dagbladet	52	63,35
External	Aftenposten	11	9,75
	VG	13	5,95
	Dagbladet	4	4,75
Total	Aftenposten	107	96,9
	VG	69	75,65
	Dagbladet	56	68,1

We used the same method as for the front pages to analyse and code these items. Figure 3 below summarises the findings. Overall, the framing of Russia was hostile, but less than on the front pages. None of the articles fitted into the Kantian "friend" image. Most of the articles written by the newspaper staff identified Russia according to a hybrid image with elements of both "enemy" and "rival". Fewer articles identified Russia's identity as an unambiguous "enemy" than a "rival". The variation in terms of image was more significant among the external contributors. However, these contributions were few in numbers and comprised mostly shorter and less visible pieces.

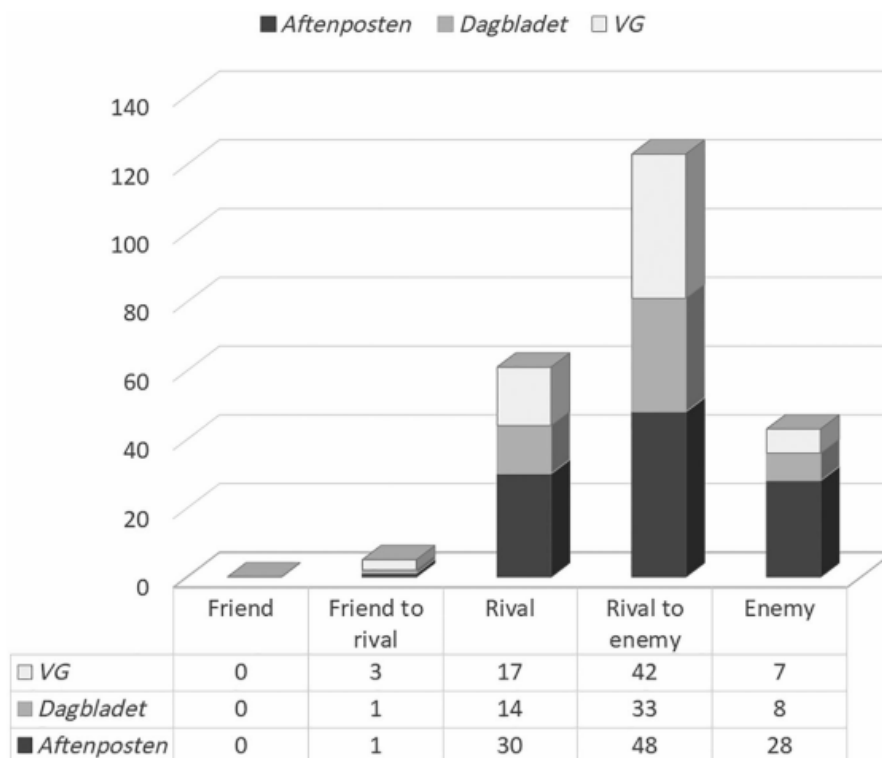


Figure 3. Images of Russia in articles and comments in March 2014.
 (Absolute and relative frequency distribution. Percentages in brackets)

Like the front pages, we also treated the image of Russia as a continuous variable. Regarding internal contributions the arithmetical means varies little, from $x=2.53$ (Dagbladet) to $x=2.60$ (VG), all overlapping with the median value ("rival to enemy"). The standard deviations at $s=0.22$ (VG), $s=0.30$ (Dagbladet) and $s=0.32$ (Aftenposten) confirm the readers were exposed to a limited range of images, especially in VG. The external contributions varied more, ranging from "hawkish" in Aftenposten and Dagbladet ($x=2.75$) to milder in VG ($x=2.25$). Standard deviations ranging from 0.57 in VG to 0.42 in Aftenposten and 0.29 in Dagbladet indicate a broader use of images in external than internal contributions in Aftenposten and VG.

To illustrate the range of images, we shall comment upon a small selection of articles. In Aftenposten's commentary on 4 March is an example of an "enemy" image (Dragnes, 2014). A large cartoon of a bare-chested Putin, armed and on horseback, assaulting Ukraine accompanied it. The text framed Putin and Russia as obsessed with power politics. While the commentary did not explicitly mention relations with Norway, it framed neighbouring Russia as a barbaric state, breaking international law and the principle of sovereignty at will.

A more ambiguous image between "rival" and "enemy" appeared in an article from 17 March about the referendum on Crimea (Aale, 2014). The first impression, from the picture and headings introducing the piece, was of Russia as the defender of the Russian-speaking population. Voters commented positively about Crimea's strong ties and imminent accession with Russia. For them, this was a day to celebrate. However, this image was counter-balanced, as the article referred to the lack of transparency and the occupation by thousands of Russian troops.

The "rival" image appeared in an Aftenposten article on 7 March (Claussen and Færaas, 2014). It focused on the right-wing nationalists in the new Ukrainian government and seems partially to support the Russian claims of defence against "fascists". The article emphasised that Western leaders did not want to talk about them. On the other hand, the article also mentioned that Russia was using this as an excuse for their intervention and showed similar fascist tendencies.

Dagbladet's articles framed Russia through headlines and expressions that played on the emotions and prejudices of the reader. They also focused more on Putin's persona, as an emotionless dictator, eager to increase his power. This was visible in an article from 29 March entitled "Meeting a merciless Putin" (Strand and Hagvaag, 2014). Two large photos on the opposite sides of a two-page spread contrasted a warrior-like, bare-chested Putin on horseback with a worried looking new NATO general secretary Jens Stoltenberg out jogging. The text emphasised that NATO now faced a formidable challenge to its security from a changed Russia that had become a "pariah", outside international society.

An article from 3 March used a headline which translates to "No prayers for mercy" in capital letters and a large photo that pitted Russian soldiers against civilians praying in front of a Ukrainian military base (Lillegaard and Strand, 2014). The article left little doubt about Russia as an enemy of Ukraine and their direct military intervention on Crimea. However, it also referred to the apparent chaos, the local militia's claims of defence against Ukrainian fascists, as well as the dramatically different perceptions of reality in the Eastern and Western parts

of Ukraine. Moreover, as there were no mentions of threats to Norway or the West, the article was therefore categorised as between "rival" and "enemy".

Dagbladet had some articles that framed Russia through the rival image. On 14 March an article entitled "The game for Ukraine" put the crisis into a historical context of strategic great power rivalry about control, and as a local Ukrainian rivalry (Skotheim, 2014). It used a major background graphic of the classic board game Monopoly, with a map of Ukraine at the centre of the board. Cards with photos and a short commentary identified several players, both Ukrainian and Western besides Putin. In the commentaries, all players "presented" their interests and views on the conflict. The Tatars, identified as the historic and present-day victim seemed to be the only player who got any sympathy.

VG also emphasised sensational headlines and used Putin's persona, to frame him as the villain through cartoons and text. A large cartoon depicting a Putin dressed as a biathlon competitor aiming his rifle against another competitor headed its editorial on 4 March (VG, 2014). The latter competitor represented Putin as the host of the recent Winter Olympics. The title "Putin's dangerous game" also played on how he had transformed from the Winter Games to the war games in Ukraine. According to the editorial Putin now was a serious threat to world peace. It also drew historic parallels to the Cold War, connecting the Olympics (Moscow 1980) and the Soviet Union invading another country (Afghanistan 1979/80).

The ambiguity between the enemy image and the rival image was visible in an article from 6 March (Skjærli, 2014). Focusing on a "Family on the Crimea", it apparently suggested that Russia was merely protecting the security of the local population. The family feared that the riots and unrest in Kiev would spread and was grateful for the Russian presence. Hence, the article's main heading "Now we feel safe". It identified the family as Russian speakers and the conflict as local. However, the ambiguity became highly visible as VG put the referrals to "look after" in quotes, and commented through a graphic that compared the superior Russian military strength with Ukraine.

An article from 7 March entitled "The cockfight", focusing on the strained personal relations between Putin and Obama, was close to the rival image (Amundsen, 2014). The title was positioned on top of a large photo of the two presidents sitting opposite each other. Both were apparently attempting to make the other blink first. Putin and Obama's opposite viewpoints were referred to and commented, but without attributing singular blame to one of them.

Discussion

Research question 1 asked which Wendtian images the news media used to frame Russia. We found that the three Norwegian newspapers most frequently used a hybrid of the enemy and rival image. In the Russia - Ukraine dyad, the former undoubtedly represented the enemy of the latter. But in the dyadic relation between Russia and Norway, the newspapers mostly abstained from applying a full enemy image, which constructed Russia as a direct threat to Norwegian security and sovereignty. The full enemy image was more frequent on front-pages than in the articles inside, which allowed for more nuanced framing. However, even while

Russia's intervention in Ukraine sometimes was framed as engaging in international rivalry, it was never found to be acceptable within international law.

The Ukraine crisis appears as a critical juncture in the post-Cold War era. During the 2000s Russia was gradually reasserting its position, as a rival to alleged US and Western dominance of the international order. Still, Western states expected that Russia would stick to the rules of international law, despite some temporary deviations. Judging from the newspaper narratives of the intervention into Ukraine, they now rendered this assumption invalid. It represented a reversal of the "qualitative structural change in international politics" hypothesised by Wendt: "The kill or be killed logic of the Hobbesian state of nature has been replaced by the live and let live logic of the Lockean anarchical society" (Wendt, 1999: 279).

This leads us over to the second research question, which asked whether the Norwegian mass media "arrested the war". If Russia had any influence, we would expect the representation to be far from the "enemy" image. The Russian strategic narrative framed the West and the US in particular, as the real enemy of Ukraine. Russian actions in Ukraine were as a "friend", intervening to protect a helpless population. Ukraine had become the scene for a rivalry with an aggressive West forcing Russia to defend its legitimate interests. Political leaders in Norway dismissed this narrative.

As suggested in the presentation of RQ 2 earlier, a negative correlation between the Russian narrative and the narratives in Norwegian news is necessary to falsify a hypothesis about Russian influence. We found few examples of narratives defending Russia's actions in the three mainstream newspapers. They all appeared to be aware of alleged Russian propaganda and disinformation and debunked many of the stories reported by RT International as "lies and hoaxes" (Johansen, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c). This shows that Russia was unsuccessful in its deployment of "sharp power", as foreign minister Brende had worried about. Our data support the "arrested war"-thesis. The Kremlin narrative of Putin and RT International did not form a successful cross-national "cascade" into the Norwegian news coverage. The news coverage corresponded more with the official narratives of President Obama and the Norwegian government's narrative. It framed Russia as the illegitimate aggressor against Ukraine. While it sometimes referred to the Russian side of the conflict, this was not a consequence of Russian "sharp power". Protests against alleged "big media bias" and more sympathetic views on Russia were mostly limited to niche newspapers and websites.

Our second research question was extended to ask whether the mass media also "arrested the war", in the sense of acting independently of the Norwegian government and its most important ally the United States. The newspaper narrative was slightly more nuanced than that of President Obama and Foreign Minister Brende, at times attributing some blame to the West and Ukrainian nationalism. However, there was no significant criticism of the policies of the Norwegian government and its NATO and EU partners towards Russia. Given the inter-party consensus apparent from the subsequent Parliamentary debate after Brende's speech, there was probably little room for public criticism. As observed for the USA by Entman, political polarisation and absence of consensus make criticism in the media more likely (Entman, 2003: 422).

Norms of "peace journalism" were clearly not applied. But does this mean that patriotic "fourth branch of government" norms prevailed over professional "fourth estate of government" norms? The news media were confronted with a sudden international crisis reminiscent of the Cold War, as well as an information war with extreme difficulties as to the motives and credibility of Russian and Ukrainian sources. Under such circumstances Norwegian journalists may have had an inherent bias, being close to more trusted sources like NATO, as observed by the General Secretary of the Norwegian Press (Alexandersen, 2016). Furthermore, with a political elite consolidated against Russia as the aggressor, we find it reasonable to consider the news narrative as reflecting patriotic norms.

As indicated earlier in the paper, we have some brief comments on the effects on the public perception of Russia. This represents the third tier in the model presented in *Figure 1. National and cross-national cascades of strategic narratives*. From 2011 to 2018, 85-94% of the respondents to the annual opinion poll of Norwegian defence and security reported they got most of their information on security and defence from the media (Forsvaret, 2018). While we have no data on direct media effects, the same poll (see figure 4 below) also revealed that a growing share of the respondents was "a little, somewhat or very worried of war or attacks on Norwegian territory" after the Ukraine crisis (Forsvaret, 2018). Other polls also indicate a rising fear of Russia among Norwegians. In 2018 57% of the respondents regarded Russia as a significant "threat to world peace", up from 45% in 2016 (Eriksen, 2018; Finsveen, 2016).

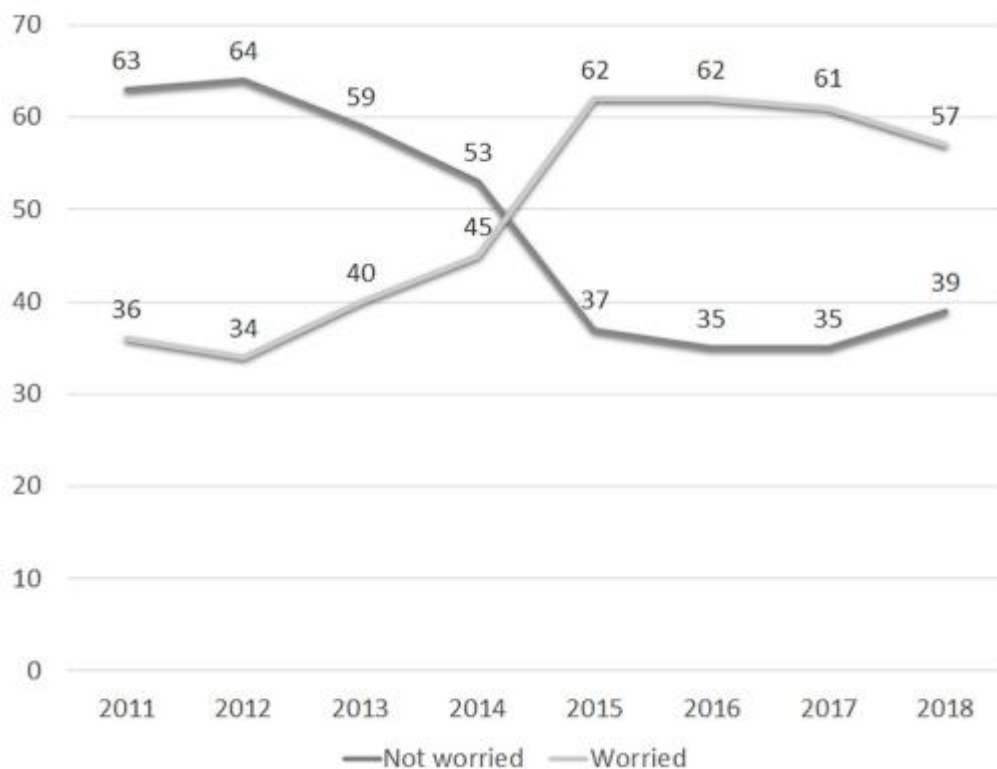


Figure 4. Public opinion on threats of war or attacks on Norwegian territory (%)
Source: Forsvaret, 2018

Conclusion and further research

This paper has investigated how the Norwegian news media framed Russia during its intervention in Ukraine and the Crimea. The data represents a snapshot, limited to a single month and to the print versions of three Norwegian mainstream newspapers. It shows that all newspapers, especially *Aftenposten*, dedicated considerable resources and space to the conflict. The newspapers framed Russia as the enemy of Ukraine, although they mostly abstained from applying the full enemy image of Russia in its relationship with Norway. The analysis indicated that the mainstream media had "arrested" the conflict in Ukraine. But also that the press mostly followed "patriotic norms" and avoided criticism of the government.

Therefore, our evidence indicates that when 1) national security appears to be at stake, 2) information about facts on the ground is confusing and difficult to verify and 3) the political elites agree, 4) the mass media is likely to trust and support the strategic narratives of their own government and its closest allies. However, our empirical material is limited to articles and front pages. It says little about the actual processes behind producing them. Further studies of similar conflicts should therefore include empirical data about the news production process, and how journalists and editors perceive their roles in the process. Neither does our study include data on direct audience effects from the framing of Russia. This should be followed up in forthcoming studies. Finally, we focused on the mainstream news media's representation during a short period marked by surprise, confusion and little transparency. Further research should investigate how the initial frames persist or change during the course of international crises.

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