

International News Media Coverage of Black Lives Matter: Evidence From Norway

HILMAR MJELDE¹

Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway

This article analyzes how five Norwegian news media outlets cover Black Lives Matter (BLM) in the United States. Examining media coverage of BLM in other countries allows media scholars to begin to draw comparative conclusions. The analysis shows that in contrast to much of the U.S. news media, Norwegian news media are clearly positively disposed toward BLM, which I suggest may be related to Norway's political culture, journalistic praxis, and geographical distance.

Keywords: Black Lives Matter, international news media coverage, right-wing alternative media

Black Lives Matter (BLM) is arguably the most high-profile and consequential global social justice movement in recent years. It was started as an online movement in 2013 after the 2012 shooting death of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teenager, and it expanded quickly after numerous additional African Americans were killed either by the police or in confrontations with the police over the next years. BLM is now a decentralized, international political and social movement, hashtag and rallying cry, advocating against both police violence against Black people and structural racism more broadly (Kirby, 2020).

The 2020 protests are believed to have been the largest and broadest in U.S. history (Putnam, Chenoweth, & Pressman, 2020) and had several measurable impacts. First, they led to dozens of state and local police reforms nationwide (Rummler, 2020). Second, public opinion on BLM shifted markedly in favor of the movement during the protests, although the shift was presumably also in part a direct result of the distressing images of Floyd's death (Tesler, 2020). Third, the social unrest contributed to the wider perception of crisis that appears to have doomed former President Donald Trump's reelection bid.

The news media have been at the center of the BLM protests. Both TV and press coverage of BLM spiked after the Dallas shooting in 2016 and the killing of Floyd in 2020 (Mehta, 2020). It is through the media that most citizens experience the protests, and the content is curated through editorial decisions on

Hilmar Mjelde: himj@hvl.no

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image use, sources, language, thematization, and framing (see e.g., Benson & Hallin, 2007; Cissel, 2012; Entman, 1993; Lasswell, 1948). As Kilgo (2020) notes, "The general public's opinions about protests and the social movements behind them are formed in large part by what they read or see in the media" (para. 4). Thus, the media have both informed the public about BLM and participated in the creation and negotiation of its public identity (Iyengar, 1994; Lecheler & De Vreese, 2019).

Media coverage of BLM is a topic of academic and public interest. Although a number of studies have analyzed American news media coverage of BLM (Carney & Kelekay, 2022; Elmasry & el-Nawawy, 2017; Kilgo, Mourao, & Sylvie, 2018; Phelps & Hamilton, 2022; Umamaheswar, 2020), little is known about how foreign press covers it. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to contribute to the general literature on news media coverage of BLM: It analyzes how five Norwegian news media outlets covered BLM in the United States from 2013 to 2021. Examining how BLM is viewed by media in other countries is in itself interesting for media scholars because the movement has received international attention, and it enables media scholars to begin to draw comparative conclusions about news media coverage of BLM. Norway has high newspaper readership and high media interest in American politics and society and is thus a good case for exploring international media coverage of BLM. Moreover, Norway, as a small, unitary social-democratic country, offers somewhat of a most different system's design, in which evidence of critical media coverage of BLM would provide prima facie strong evidence of negative framing of the movement independent of national context.

News Media Coverage of Protest Movements and Black Lives Matter

Past research has identified a negativity bias in media coverage of political and social movements, including BLM. The "protest paradigm" (McLeod, 2007) is a much-used template whereby the focus on "the noise, performance, spectacle, and conflict of street demonstrations" (Poell, 2020, p. 613) tends to delegitimize protest movements. Movements need mainstream media to communicate with their constituency, expand the scope of conflict, and win legitimacy (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993; Lipsky, 1968). Knowing that the media are interested in conflict and spectacle, protesters resort to drama, extravaganza, and confrontation, and possibly violence and lawlessness (Boyle, McLeod, & Armstrong, 2012)—a phenomenon Wasow (2020) calls "agenda seeding." Mainstream outlets, exercising a social control function, react critically to contrarian actors by framing them negatively, privileging official sources, and highlighting adverse and disruptive tactics rather than the substance of their agenda (Boykoff, 2006; Chan & Lee, 1984; Dardis, 2006; Gitlin, 1980; McLeod & Hertog, 1992; Oliver & Myers, 1999). Thus, the tactics that attract media and public attention can also diminish an advocacy movement because media narratives trivialize or delegitimize the protests (Boykoff, 2007; Gitlin, 1980). A number of studies exploring media coverage of specific social movements or protest events identify this pattern. Based on a review of past research, Dardis (2006) developed a typology of common "marginalization devices" that news media employ to frame advocacy movements negatively, which he applies to *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *USA Today* coverage of the 2002–2003 anti-Iraq War protests. The techniques include portraying protesters as radical, lawless loonies and freaks; not reporting on protesters' demands; emphasizing disruption and confrontations with police; relying on official sources; and invoking public opinion that suggests the activists are out of step with the majority. One or several of these tools were used in news media coverage of the women's movement (Ashley & Olson, 1998); the 1999 World Trade Organization protests in Seattle and the

2000 World Bank protests in Washington, DC. (Boykoff, 2006); the “Right to Party” movement (McLeod, 1999); the 2011 Occupy Wall Street protests (Xu, 2013); and the Tea Party movement, although not invariably across the sampled outlets (Weaver & Scacco, 2013).²

Much news media coverage of BLM has been negative, but not uniformly. Leopold and Bell (2017) investigated how leading American newspapers covered the movement in the months after the death of Michael Brown in 2014 and conclude that the protest paradigm fits well: The papers focused on lawlessness and disruption, cited official resources, and also engaged in victim blaming, with little discussion of the substance of the protests. In contrast, Elmasry and el-Nawawy (2017), who also analyzed coverage after Brown’s death in some of the same outlets over the same period, found that the paradigm did not fit; the newspapers framed BLM positively, emphasized peacefulness over chaos and violence, and privileged protesters as sources. They suggested that BLM has gained legitimacy in society more broadly, including in the media. Kilgo, et al. (2018), however, found that the press followed the paradigm (i.e., focusing on tactics) before the judicial decisions in the Brown and Trayvon Martin cases, but that coverage became more substantive and the framing more positive after the defendants were not convicted. Moreover, several studies yield similar findings, although they do not explicitly use the protest paradigm framework. Banks (2018) shows how leading news media outlets employ delegitimization devices such as historical contrasts and utilizing rules of decorum in BLM coverage. According to Adamson (2016), print, radio, and television outlets across the political spectrum used racialized and racist language and images and emphasized law-and-order narratives when covering both Michael Brown demonstrations and the protesters in Ferguson. Maneesh, Phoenix, and Delshad (2019), however, find that the killing of Michael Brown was followed by more news articles about policing, a shift toward more positive framing of protesters, and subsequently more policing-related legislation. Relatedly, a couple of quantitative studies have investigated whether the amount of BLM news media coverage is linked to independent variables such as the killings of African Americans by police (Bennett-Swanson, 2017; Bordonaro & Willits, 2018). Studies including the 2020 protests find that news media focused more on the supposed negative effects of the movement (Umamaheswar, 2020) and that the coverage diminished the legitimacy of the movement, was ahistorical, and erased Black women (Carney & Kelekay, 2022), although the political leanings of the outlet may affect image choices and the tone of images (Phelps & Hamilton, 2022). Thus, Carney and Kelekay, referring to both their own findings and those of Umamaheswar (2020), note that “mainstream media continues to frame the BLM movement as disorganized, violent, and chaotic” (Carney & Kelekay, 2022, pp. 569–570).

The Norwegian News Media Context and News Coverage of the United States

Norway’s media system is considered a typical example of Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) “democratic corporatist” media model, characterized by a strong mass-circulation press with high readership, a now politically neutral commercial press, strong public broadcasting institutions that have retained a high degree of autonomy, a high level of media/journalistic professionalism with institutionalized self-regulation, generous press subsidies (since 1969), and a rank of first in the world in press freedom by Reporters Without

² For media coverage of protest movements in other countries, see, e.g., Harlow, Brown, Salaverría, and García-Perdomo (2020) and Shahin, Zheng, Sturm, and Fadnis (2016).

Borders (2021). Norwegian journalists also perceive little economic and political influence on their work (Ahva et al., 2017).

For the purposes of this study, it is relevant to point out that Norwegian news media cover the United States extensively on a regular basis. Nearly all the major news outlets have a permanent U.S. correspondent. When it comes to Norwegian news media coverage of international news, news about the United States dominates relative to other countries and areas in the world (Kvalheim & Sjøvaag, 2016). Furthermore, next to domestic political news, international political news is the regular topic that interests Norwegians the most (The Norwegian Media Authority, 2021). It was thus with considerable familiarity with U.S. politics and society that Norwegian news media began reporting on BLM early on.

Research Design

Newspaper Selection and Sampling Procedure

Five national news media outlets—*Aftenposten*, *VG*, *NRK (nrk.no)*, *Klassekampen*, and *Resett*—were selected for analysis according to two criteria: relevance to the objective of the study and diversity in terms of content.

Recent research shows that (print) newspapers in most countries still have a strong influence over the agenda setting in other media, including television (Cushion, Kilby, Thomas, Morani, & Sambrook, 2018), so they are still a highly relevant data source for analysis of news coverage. The first three are leading mainstream media institutions in Norway. *Aftenposten* is the largest broadsheet, *VG* is the largest tabloid, and *nrk.no* is the website of the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation. Per 2019 numbers, *Aftenposten's* and *VG's* daily print editions have the largest circulation of all newspapers, whereas *VG* and *nrk.no* have the highest online readership, with *Aftenposten* in sixth in online readership (Aarli-Grøndalen, 2020; medianorway, 2020). The other two are one borderline mainstream/niche outlet and one alternative news media outlet. The former, *Klassekampen* (English: *The Class Struggle*), styles itself as “the daily newspaper of the left.”³ Its print edition had the eight largest circulation in 2019, but the paper placed 18th on the list of combined online and print edition readership (Aarli-Grøndalen, 2020; medianorway, 2020).⁴ *Resett* is a right-wing alternative media website that 7% of Norwegians read weekly, according to Ihlebæk and Nygaard (2021). It has a strong anti-immigration/anti-Islam focus and was denied membership in the Association of Norwegian Editors.⁵ Taken together, the five news outlets make up a representative sample of the Norwegian news media landscape in terms of readership, format, and journalistic profile.

³ Klassekampen's slogan (“Venstresidas dagsavis”).

⁴ The placement of its online edition was not evident from the ranking.

⁵ After internal strife and forcing out its former and founding editor, Helge Lurås, Resett filed for bankruptcy in 2022. However, Lurås, who founded a new online news site soon after his exit, has acquired the rights to the name “Resett.”

Using the search words “Black Lives Matter,” I searched within each media outlet for all news and debate items that mentioned the movement from 2013 through February 2021, which covers the entire period it had existed when this article was being written. Moreover, the inauguration of a new U.S. president reset the political agenda to some degree, and BLM receded as a top issue in the public debate, making this time a natural endpoint for the data collection. Only items that explicitly mentioned BLM in the United States were included in the sample. Items that referred to foreign BLM chapters or BLM-related events that occurred in other countries were excluded. News and debate items are broad categories that include the main content genres found in a newspaper, such as news and feature articles, interviews, columns by staff and guest writers, op-eds, letters to the editor, and reviews (e.g., of books and music that refer to BLM). Such a broad search was necessary, because BLM is a political, social, and cultural phenomenon that can be discussed in any newspaper genre, from political and economic news to sports, arts and entertainment. Importantly, newspapers are gatekeepers of their own institution, so all content that they publish is reflective of editorial and journalistic decision-making in their news coverage.

The most complete archive for all newspapers is Retriever, which is a media-monitoring company with a searchable online news article database that includes both print and online items. Due to technical constraints, I did not have full access to Retriever throughout the entire data collection phase, and I could use it only to sample *nrk.no* and *Klassekampen*. In the case of *Aftenposten* and *VG*, I used these newspapers’ own online archives, which include only print edition articles. To control for any potential substantive difference between printed and online content, I sampled only the print edition of *Klassekampen* to make the comparative analysis of the three daily newspapers as consistent as possible. Thus, the *Aftenposten*, *VG*, and *Klassekampen* articles were all print edition items. *Resett*, like *nrk.no*, is online only and has a searchable online archive.⁶ Irrespective of item length, I included all items that mentioned BLM in *Aftenposten*, *VG*, *nrk.no*, and *Resett*, but I selected every second item in *Klassekampen* because it had a much higher number of articles about BLM than the others. Including all these items would have yielded a disproportionately large sample of the nonmainstream outlets in the total sample. Selecting the first and then every second item is a method that allows for systemic sampling of a larger universe (cf. Hovden & Mjelde, 2019b). However, the total sample is not designed for statistical generalization, because the universe of potentially relevant cases (articles) is not easily delimited. There might be news reporting on protests that does not explicitly mention BLM, even though protesters could be loosely affiliated with it or share its goals; a defining characteristic of social movements is that their membership is not clearly delimited (Della Porta & Diani, 2020). Moreover, personally collecting and analyzing the items is time-consuming, and there were time and financial constraints for this research project. The final sample of 572 articles is nearly evenly divided between the three mainstream (277) and the leftist and the far-right outlets (295), as detailed in Table 1.

⁶ Eight items in *Resett*, five items from *nrk.no*, and two items in *Klassekampen* were based on articles from the NTB news agency.

Table 1. Sampled Articles on Black Lives Matter Per News Media Outlet.

Media Outlet	<i>N</i>
<i>Aftenposten</i>	77
<i>VG</i>	65
<i>NRK</i>	135
<i>Klassekampen</i>	99
<i>Resett</i>	196
Total	572

Method and Analytical Framework

Based on a qualitative reading of the articles, I categorized the content using four selected variables: *theme, framing, centrality, and sources*. Whereas qualitative content analysis tends to take a more open and inductive approach in terms of identifying themes in the material (cf. Thomas, 2006), I used a categorization scheme with broad and distinct categories to organize and code the sample of articles. This way, the categorization becomes relatively easier and can be more easily carried out in a consistent way (c.f. Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005). I started off by constructing the categorization scheme with the four variables, which were arrived at and operationalized through a two-step process. First, I selected them as variables commonly included in research on news media coverage of contentious political and social issues.⁷ They indicate the focus (theme) and perspective/slant (if any; frame) of the coverage, depending on the emphasis on BLM in the story as a whole (centrality) and the sources used. Theme was included to gauge the focus of the individual stories and thus the nature of the social events BLM is involved in, as portrayed by the media. For example, if law and order-related events such as violence and disruption dominate BLM coverage, it will have a delegitimizing effect (cf. Carney & Kelekay, 2022). However, the framing will modify how the reader perceives the stories, as will whether BLM is the main or secondary focus in them. If BLM is the main focus, it should at least in principle allow for more nuanced coverage, depending on item length. These aspects will be colored by the selection of sources. Taken together, the selected variables indicate what a given news media outlet understands an issue as being about and whether the media outlet is positive or negative toward it. The coding was applied to each individual item as a whole (i.e., text body, headline, introduction) irrespective of genre, with each item being assigned one category per variable, except for sources, which does not have predefined categories. Second, I tried out a first operationalization of the variables on 53 *Aftenposten* items before concluding that it was too fine-grained to have confidence that I categorized the data in a consistent way. In the revised categorization scheme, the variables had both more inclusive and more distinct categories and were operationalized thus:

Centrality

This variable seeks to gauge the extent to which the news media do stories on BLM per se, tend to discuss it as a subtopic, or mention it tangentially. Categories:

- *main*: BLM is the primary focus of the article.
- *secondary*: BLM is discussed or mentioned secondarily.

⁷ See, e.g., Hovden and Mjelde (2019a).

Theme

The variable examines what the overall theme of article is, and that BLM appears in relation to. Categories:

- *socioeconomic matters*. The article discusses BLM in the context of the welfare state, the economy, work life/unemployment, or education (e.g., an item about BLM activism on university campuses).
- *racism and multicultural coexistence*. The item is in some way about racism, discrimination, identity, culture, nationalism, or multicultural society (e.g., discussions about identity politics).
- *law and order*. The article focuses on law and order-related issues such as violent protests, crime, or national security (e.g., the Kenosha riots).
- *elections and political parties*. BLM appears in a story about an election or one of the two main parties (or a third party) (e.g., stories about the impact of BLM protests on the 2020 election).
- *culture, arts, and entertainment*. BLM is discussed in relation to something that happens in sports, entertainment, or the art world (e.g., artists discussing their support for BLM).

Frame

Consistent with established framing theory (cf. Entman, 1993; Snow & Benford, 1992), this variable examines whether the tone of article is sympathetic or critical toward BLM. Frames:

- *victim frame*. BLM is portrayed as a victim of racism, police brutality, or other forms of oppression or aggression.
- *hero frame*. BLM is presented in a positive light as fighting the good fight for racial equity against racism, police brutality, etc.
- *threat frame*. BLM is portrayed as aggressive, dangerous, ideologically radical/extreme, violent, etc.
- *no discernible frame*. Central to framing theory is the idea that some type of frame is always present, so this category merely means that none of the previous frames can be discerned.

Sources

Given that much of Norwegian news coverage of international news is based on foreign press coverage, rather than interviewing the actual sources themselves, this variable registers which American news sources Norwegian news media cite in their coverage of BLM. Thus, it captures which American outlet Norwegian news media trust and prefer, which in turn can also be seen as an expression of ideological position. If Norwegian news media primarily rely on liberal-leaning outlets such as *The New York Times* and CNN (cf. AllSides Media, 2021) for empirical information, and rarely or never cite the conservative Fox News, that can in principle both reinforce or temper their preexisting outlook.

Lastly, I present the data in tables in the following sections and use instructive examples of and from articles to complement the discussion of the findings.

Findings

Patterns in Norwegian News Media Coverage of Black Lives Matter

Table 2. Press Articles With BLM as Main or Secondary Focus.

Media Outlet	Main (%)	Secondary (%)
Aftenposten	19 (25)	58 (75)
VG	12 (18)	53 (82)
NRK	33 (24)	102 (76)
Klassekampen	28 (28)	71 (72)
Resett	102 (52)	94 (48)

Table 2 shows that BLM is the main focus in about a quarter of the articles in *Aftenposten*, *VG*, *NRK*, and *Klassekampen*. More commonly, it is brought up in relation to some other topic that is the main focus of the article. In *Resett*, however, BLM is the primary focus in half of all items.

Table 3. Themes in Articles With BLM.

Media Outlet	Socioeconomic matters (%)	Racism and multicultural coexistence (%)	Law and order (%)	Elections and political parties (%)	Culture, arts, and entertainment (%)
Aftenposten	2 (2)	32 (42)	2 (2)	19 (25)	22 (29)
VG	0 (0)	26 (40)	4 (6)	19 (29)	16 (25)
NRK	1 (1)	61 (45)	27 (20)	30 (22)	16 (12)
Klassekampen	8 (8)	33 (33)	5 (5)	19 (19)	34 (34)
Resett	3 (2)	89 (45)	66 (34)	30 (15)	8 (4)

Some notable differences between the media outlets appear in Table 3. First, the three print media outlets mention or discuss BLM almost exclusively in the context of stories about racism and multicultural coexistence, elections and political parties, and culture, arts, and entertainment. To the extent that BLM is a broad political, social, and cultural movement, this finding is unsurprising, because all three newspapers are known for broadly oriented quality reporting in areas such as political and cultural journalism, including the tabloid *VG*, which has been called a "schizophrenic" newspaper because it balances seriousness and sensationalism (Eide, 1997). Among the three, four in 10 items in *Aftenposten* and *VG* are about racism and multicultural coexistence; the rest about elections and political parties and culture, arts, and entertainment in about equal percentages. In *Klassekampen*, one-fifth of all items concerns elections and parties; the other two categories make up one-third each. *NRK* has slightly more items on racism and multicultural coexistence than *Aftenposten* and *VG*, but its coverage is different from the three newspapers in a couple of ways: It has markedly more stories in which the theme is law and order (20%) and a lower proportion of stories on culture, arts, and entertainment (12%). This could be connected to the format and *NRK* being the public broadcaster. First and foremost, *nrk.no* provides real-time coverage of the latest news (e.g., a violent riot that breaks out), whereas a newspaper may publish more material that has a looser connection to the daily news agenda (e.g., an interview with an author discussing BLM in relation to his or her artistic work). The

bulk of *Resett*'s articles is also about racism and multicultural coexistence, but its thematization of law and order sets it apart from the other outlets. One-third of the items that mentions or discusses BLM is law and order-themed stories. Except for *NRK*, the other three outlets have hardly any. Finally, socioeconomic matters are very rarely the topic in any of the news outlets.

Table 4. Frames in Articles With BLM.

Media Outlet	Victim (%)	Hero (%)	Threat (%)	No Discernible Frame (%)
Aftenposten	19 (25)	28 (36)	6 (8)	24 (31)
VG	9 (14)	20 (31)	3 (5)	33 (51)
NRK	17 (13)	39 (29)	5 (4)	74 (55)
Klassekampen	9 (9)	54 (54)	1 (1)	35 (35)
Resett	0 (0)	2 (1)	163 (83)	31 (16)

Table 4 reveals several patterns. First, the three mainstream news outlets, *Aftenposten*, *NRK*, and *VG*, often frame BLM sympathetically as heroes or victims. A third of their articles contains a hero frame, in which BLM is portrayed in a positive light as a movement that fights racial injustice. A quarter of *Aftenposten* items and about a fifth of the *NRK* and *VG* items framed BLM as a victim of oppression in some form, such as police brutality. Still, in many articles, none of the frame types were discernible, which is related to the high share of articles in which BLM is not the main focus, and in some cases, it is mentioned only in passing. Half of all articles in *NRK* and *VG* and a third of *Aftenposten*'s articles do not have a clear frame. Less than one in 10 items in each outlet frame BLM as a threat. *Klassekampen* and *Resett* are polar opposites with respect to framing. *Klassekampen* is similar to the mainstream outlets in that a third of its items does not frame BLM in a particular way. However, 54% of the articles frame BLM as heroes, and another 10% use the victim frame. The threat frame is absent. By contrast, threat framing is the rule rather than the exception in *Resett*: 83% of *Resett* articles apply the threat frame, which portrays BLM as Marxist and violent.

Table 5. Three Most Cited American News Outlets.

Media Outlet	Most Cited (%)	Second Most Cited (%)	Third Most Cited (%)
<i>Aftenposten</i>	<i>The New York Times</i>	<i>The Washington Post</i>	<i>CNN</i>
	19 (25)	14 (18)	7 (9)
<i>VG</i>	<i>The New York Times</i>	<i>The Washington Post</i>	<i>CNN</i>
	9 (14)	7 (11)	5 (8)
<i>NRK</i>	<i>CNN</i>	<i>The New York Times</i>	<i>The Washington Post</i>
	28 (21)	18 (13)	15 (11)
<i>Klassekampen</i>	<i>The New York Times</i>	<i>Politico</i>	<i>The Washington Post</i> 3 (3);
	10 (10)	6 (6)	<i>CNN</i> 3 (3)
<i>Resett</i>	<i>Fox News</i>	<i>Breitbart</i>	<i>New York Post</i>
	27 (14)	16 (8)	9 (5)

Note. N = percentages.

Because items citing American news media are a modest subset of the total sample, I am reluctant to cite percentages. Table 5 shows that although far from all stories cite American news media (cf. raw

numbers in parentheses), the main dividing line is between the mainstream outlets on the one hand and *Klassekampen* and *Resett* on the other. *Aftenposten* and *VG* rely on *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and CNN in that order, whereas NRK uses CNN the most and then *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. *The New York Times* is the most frequently American news media source in *Klassekampen* as well, followed by Politico, with *The Washington Post* and CNN tied in third place. *Resett*, in stark contrast, eschews all of these and instead relies on Fox News, Breitbart, and *New York Post*.

These patterns clearly indicate that the leading news outlets in Norway primarily consult the leading news outlets in the United States for information about current events there. This is likely due to three reasons in particular. First, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and CNN are all highly reputable media institutions that Norwegian journalists not only trust themselves but also believe their readers trust. Thus, there is normally little question about the veracity of the information in a given story if the Norwegian news outlet can anchor it in a *New York Times* report. Second, for reasons of convenience and sufficiency, there might in many, if not most cases, be little need for Norwegian journalists to cast a wider net because the major American news media are well informed, and the Norwegian journalists get what they need from these outlets. Third, journalists working for mainstream and left-leaning news outlets in social-democratic Norway can be expected to share left-leaning American news outlets' general outlook. In contrast, the converse applies to *Resett*: As a right-wing alternative media outlet, it is apparently distrustful of American mainstream media and prefers American media institutions that reinforce views it already holds. Fox News and *New York Post* are leading right-leaning news media institutions, and Breitbart is itself a far-right alternative media outlet. Although the Norwegian mainstream outlets also cite Fox News, none cites Breitbart. For *Resett*, citing Breitbart should build trust with its target audience.

Selected Examples of Norwegian News Media Coverage of Black Lives Matter

Having identified certain patterns with regard to the centrality of BLM in the articles, theme, framing, and sources, the next section fleshes out the analysis by describing and discussing five selected articles from the sample: one from each news outlet, including all topics and frames. Other examples could have been selected, but these ones are instructive in terms of demonstrating patterns in the coverage and were therefore selected. BLM is the primary focus in three articles and the secondary focus in two.

Aftenposten

In July 2020, in a lengthy story in *Aftenposten* with the headline “*I Am Willing to Die for This Cause*,” (Langberg, 2020, pp. 6–8) the paper’s U.S. correspondent talks to BLM activists/African American locals⁸ who have gathered nearby a statue of Confederacy general Stonewall Jackson in Richmond, Virginia. The story is tagged with the running head “The Uprising Against Racism in the USA” (Langberg, 2020, p. 6). Three White women, one of whom is wearing a Confederate flag hat and carrying a visible firearm, are getting ready to remove graffiti on the statue under the protection of two men with rifles. BLM protesters shout at them, and the atmosphere is tense. Some protesters are armed because they say they fear far-right extremist groups. The police arrive on the scene soon after. From these events, which do not escalate

⁸ It is not clear that all are BLM activists.

further, the story goes on to describe and discuss the larger debate taking place about how the country is reckoning with its troubled history of racism and racial division by taking down statues. The story reports that President Trump has condemned those who take down the statues, and then *Aftenposten* interviews *Washington Post* columnist Henry Olson about where the line should be drawn between statues that should be removed and statues that are OK. This section also discusses how the issue will affect the presidential election. The article ends by returning to one of the locals, an African American pastor, who says, "The graffiti is an expression of all the emotions Black Americans have felt for a very long time. In the past, our version was always washed off with a pressure washer. Now it's time to let our history stand" (Langberg, 2020, p. 8).

Although the story is nuanced and descriptive, it is overall sympathetic to the BLM activists/African American locals. It is structured around their unchallenged statements, which it places in the context of the historical struggle for racial justice in the United States. The three White women are described in an unflattering way from a distance and are not interviewed.⁹

VG

VG has a story in its entertainment section about the pop artist Beyoncé receiving the "prestigious" Humanitarian Award at the 2020 Black Entertainment Television Awards, headlined "Beyoncé: Vote Like Our Life Depends on It!" (VG, 2020, p. 40). The ingress notes that the artist "gave a strong speech at the BET Awards" (VG, 2020, p. 40). The story explains that the award show took place in the wake of the BLM protests triggered by the killing of George Floyd, and the story is mostly about Beyoncé's speech, noting that she dedicated the award to the BLM movement. The artist's message, according to VG, was that it is imperative that everyone votes in the upcoming presidential election to end racial injustice. The story also quotes former First Lady Michelle Obama, who presented the artist with the award for her philanthropic contributions: "To my girl, I just want to say—you inspire me. You inspire all of us" (VG, 2020, p. 40). It also notes that another artist, Alicia Keys, paid homage to the memory of Blacks killed by the police in a performance VG says "numerous American media outlets" describe as "very powerful and moving" (VG, 2020, p. 40). The tone of the article is thus very positive, with VG appearing to join in on the celebration of the popular artist and by extension BLM).¹⁰

Klassekampen

In a commentary article in June 2020 with the caption "The Inequality, Indisputably" (Johansen, 2020, p. 18),¹¹ a staff writer for *Klassekampen* highlights socioeconomic disparities between African

⁹ The story was coded thus: Focus: Main; Theme: Racism and multicultural coexistence; Frame: Hero; Sources: Washington Post, Wall Street Journal.

¹⁰ The story was coded thus: Focus: Secondary; Theme: Culture, arts, and entertainment; Frame: Hero; Sources: CNN, ABC News.

¹¹ The Norwegian headline contains an expression that is not directly translatable ("Ulikheten, svart på hvitt") and that also has a double meaning with regard to race relations that makes sense in this context. The word used instead ("indisputably") conveys the same meaning but without the double meaning.

Americans and Whites. "Black lives matter—but how much, really?" (Johansen, 2020, p. 18) the introduction reads, after which the main body of the article makes the case that the pandemic has highlighted, and in some aspects exacerbated, structural inequalities between ethnic groups when it comes to health care/mortality, employment, education, and imprisonment. Much of the text consists of statistics and citation of academic experts whose assessments support the columnists' argument, which appears also to be that the disparities help explain the social unrest roiling the country. The experts appear in a *Financial Times* story that the commentator cites, one of whom says that "Black Lives Matter raises several issues of specific relevance to the Black community" (Johansen, 2020, p. 18). The commentator explicitly dismisses as myth Horatio Alger's strive-and-succeed ethos. Thus, in the social determinist perspective adopted by the *Klassekampen* commentator, BLM becomes both an expression of and somewhat indistinguishable from a still victimized African American underclass.¹²

NRK

As (then soon to be) Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden was preparing to announce his pick for vice president in the summer of 2020, an article at *nrk.no* ranked the prospective nominees—the kind of story that nearly if not every news outlet runs before the quadrennial presidential nomination conventions. The headline is "Kamala Harris Odds-On Favorite to Be Biden's Pick for Vice President" (Elster, 2020), and the first paragraph explains that the attention around BLM and racism is the main reason why Biden is expected to select an African American woman, after previously committing himself to choosing a woman as his vice presidential candidate. The remainder of the story discusses the importance of the selection in light of Biden's advanced age, presents the women one by one, and does not bring up BLM again. Although the point about BLM is a key contextualizing piece of information, the article is an example of stories that mention BLM in passing in a matter-of-factly manner without any discernible framing of the movement.¹³

Resett

The following story shows how distinctly different from the others' BLM coverage *Resett's* is:

Video: Masked Antifa and BLM activists attacked people with iron bats outside the White House

A large group of leftwing radicals from Black Lives Matter and Antifa have gathered outside the White House. Multiple videos shared on social media show that the masked activists attack ordinary people. One person was beaten with an iron bat by multiple individuals dressed in black. Several of the leftist radical activists have also attacked the police (*Resett*, 2020).

¹² The story was coded thus: Focus: Main; Theme: Socioeconomic matters; Frame: Victim; Sources: No American sources.

¹³ The story was coded thus: Focus: Secondary; Theme: Elections and political parties; Frame: None; Sources: USA Today, New York Times, Washington Post, CNN.

The rest of the article consists of six integrated tweets by various individuals with video clips meant to corroborate the information from the text. The tweets contain text and language very similar to that of the story and appear to be its basis.

Resett thus frames BLM as a group of unhinged activists: they are ideologically extreme, armed, and violent, and they randomly assault innocent civilians. Moreover, as the events unfolded on election night 2020 outside the White House, as Donald Trump was ratcheting up his false claim that the election was being stolen from him, BLM is not just BLM to *Resett* readers; it could also be seen as exemplifying the sinister, radical leftist forces trying to deny Trump his rightful victory (*Resett*, 2020).¹⁴

Discussion and Conclusion

The main findings of the empirical analysis were, first, that BLM is a secondary rather than the main focus of most news articles in which it appears. Second, BLM is generally discussed in the context of an overarching focus on racism and multicultural coexistence, elections and political parties, and culture, arts, and entertainment. The outlier here is the right-wing alternative media outlet *Resett*, which has persistently defined BLM activism as a law-and-order problem. Third, the three mainstream news outlets *Aftenposten*, *NRK*, and *VG*, and particularly the left-wing newspaper *Klassekampen*, tend to frame BLM sympathetically as heroes or victims. *Resett*, by contrast, has cast BLM as dangerously radical and prone to violence. Fourth, the mainstream and left-wing outlets get their American news from the leading American newspapers, first and foremost *The New York Times*, whereas *Resett* cites news outlets on the right, most often Fox News but also notably Breitbart, the latter of which none of the other Norwegian outlets cite.

Whereas U.S. news media tend to present advocacy movements negatively, that pattern is not evident in leading Norwegian news outlets' coverage of BLM. BLM is seen in a positive light as fighting the good fight for racial equity against racism, police brutality, and discrimination. The exception is the right-wing alternative media outlet *Resett*, which due to its ideological viewpoint engages in what Kevin Drum humorously but aptly termed "nutpicking": "the practice of finding an extreme and outrageous member of a group and attempting to make them emblematic of the whole" (French, 2019, para. 10).

This case study from Norway can only be a building block in the body of international research on media coverage of a movement that has now spread across the world, but its findings suggest a few general insights and propositions that future research should consider. The first proposition is that BLM interests foreign press, but perhaps primarily in relation to other more overarching topics and perspectives (such as racism, elections, and popular culture) that are likely to be more familiar and interesting to a general audience. The relatively minor share of stories in the total sample of this study that had BLM as its main focus suggests this, as do the examples from *Aftenposten* and *VG*. The former's use of the running head "The Uprising Against Racism in the USA" (*VG*, 2020, p. 40) instantly invites readers to draw on their knowledge of and familiarity with the historical struggle of African Americans for freedom and equality, which not only helps readers place BLM politically but also reduces the information costs for them, as BLM becomes the current-day expression of that struggle. The latter writes about BLM in the context of celebrity

¹⁴ The story was coded thus: Focus: Main; Theme: Law and order; Frame: Threat; Sources: None.

news: an award show in which the entertainer Beyoncé was honored for her humanitarian work—an honor she in turn dedicated to BLM. The fact that BLM is covered as entertainment news—the latest news about Beyoncé—and her embracement of BLM amount to favorable coverage of the movement.

Second, media coverage of BLM is likely to be positive in liberal Western democracies that share a commitment to human rights, tolerance, and diversity. Norway fits that description as a social democracy that historically has recognized the civil rights movement in the United States, having awarded Martin Luther King Jr. the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. The Nobel Peace Prize in 2009 was controversially awarded to President Barack Obama nine months into his first term in what may arguably also be viewed as an implicit nod to racial progress in the United States—at least by critics of the official explanation of the jury. What is more, BLM was nominated for the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize by the Norwegian MP Petter Eide for raising global awareness and consciousness about racial injustice. This point is most evident in the *Klassekampen* example, which makes two well-known progressive arguments: that racism is structural, and that an expansive social welfare system is necessary to achieve equity. The latter point is made implicitly by dismissing the (American) self-reliance ethos.

Third, reliance by foreign press on the major American news outlets, which tend to be left leaning, could reinforce a “positivity frame.” Although foreign press may base their coverage of American news on *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and CNN mainly because of the stellar journalistic reputation of these outlets, their political and ideological leanings could also shape the outlook of foreign press, even if these outlets employ marginalization devices in some of their coverage. The *NRK* example earlier is instructive. Although none of the three main frames are evident in this particular article, its sources are *USA Today*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and CNN, all of which are leading mainstream media institutions. In fact, the latter three published their own rankings of likely vice-presidential nominees, cited in the article, and the Norwegian article reads like a summarizing translation of these. Although this might be an extreme example, press coverage that stays that close to the original source—here with respect to both content and structure—is likely to adopt its framing as well.

Fourth, geographical distance from the events on the ground might lessen the impact on coverage of instances of violence, rioting, and looting that have also been associated with fringe actors in the BLM movement, compared to how such events might affect the coverage of American news media institutions that directly witness them and might themselves come in contact with violent actors. This proposition is supported by both research on media coverage of terrorist attacks and public attitudes about terrorist attacks, which find that proximity to the attack matters in both instances (Avdan & Webb, 2019; Ellis & Muller, 2019). However, geographical distance should not matter to outlets that are strongly opposed to BLM from an ideological standpoint, such as *Resett*. Finally, as suggested by the previous proposition, foreign right-wing alternative media coverage of BLM and ideologically related movements is likely to differ little from that of American right-wing alternative media because such outlets are arguably more a participant in a political movement themselves than they are journalistic institutions in a traditional sense (cf. Holt, 2020). The short *Resett* article reads like a typical far-right broadside against BLM that should be familiar to even the casual observer of American politics in the Trump era.

In sum, the analysis suggests that at least in the Norwegian case, certain characteristics pertaining to its political culture, journalistic praxis, and geographical position appear to matter so that BLM receives positive media coverage. I welcome more comparative research that should critically assess whether these propositions hold up in other contexts.

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