# Transatlantic Perspectives on the U.S. 2004 Election[1]

## *The Case of Norway*

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**Abstract**

The U.S. Presidential election of 2004 was an exciting reprise of the 2000 election and was closely watched by numerous observers across the world. The election held significant ramifications for world issues such as the war in Iraq and the war on terror. Norwegian media in particular followed the election with great interest. The strong social and familial bond between Norwegians and Americans was a foundation for an interest in the role that social issues such as abortion, gay marriage, and religion played in the campaign. This article was an exploratory case study based on data from three major Norwegian newspapers. The article used framing theory as a tool to examine the way in which these newspapers covered the 2004 U.S. Presidential election. A key focus was the importance and influence of culture in this framing process. Results are presented and implications for the role of framing theory in international contexts are discussed.

**Keywords:** international news coverage, elections, culture, framing, Norway

## Introduction

The 2004 Presidential election had high stakes. The aftermath of 9-11, the "war on terror", and the war in Iraq made the U.S.'s role in the world an extremely salient issue. These factors, combined with extremely intense emotional feelings of Europeans about Bush (Alterman, 2003), made the 2004 election one of the most closely-observed elections in the eyes of other countries. Some commentators claimed it was the election with the most interest for Norwegian media in the last 20 years (Knutsen, 2004).

This article is interested in providing a glimpse into how the Norwegian news media framed the U.S. Presidential election in 2004. More specifically, the article is a case study that hopes to build on the work of international media coverage of political issues such as elections. The article concentrates on the following areas. *First*, justification for Norway as a country for this content analysis case study is offered. *Second*, this is then briefly discussed within a context of international media views of the U.S. and its elections. *Third*, the main focus is the utilization of framing theory as a concept to explain Norwegian media coverage of the election. In particular, the importance and influence of cultural aspects in this framing process are discussed. Finally, research questions are set forth, results are presented, and implications for future research are offered.

## Norway

Norway is a key case study for studying framing theory in international electoral contexts. Norway has long been a close ally with the U.S. and has been loyal to NATO since 1949 (Ottosen, 2005; Zevin, 2003). Norway, as host of the Nobel Peace Prize, plays an integral role in international peace-making bodies. Norway's government supported the U.S. request for military support in Afghanistan (Ottosen, 2005). However, Norway clings tightly to its independence in vital security matters. Norway presented a unique cultural paradox in the 2004 campaign, as a public opinion poll reported that a majority of Norwegians wished to see Bush defeated, yet only a small percentage wanted Kerry as his replacement (Andersen, 2004; Tisdall, 2005). One sidelight of the campaign was the organization of a group of Norwegian individuals that took out an ad in a U.S. newspaper criticizing Bush. However, this strong interest was not necessarily matched by knowledge. According to Wiese (2004), Norwegian professors had doubted the average Norwegian citizen's ability to distinguish the differences between Kerry and Bush on the issues. In sum, this rich mix of cultural frames provided an interesting case study with which to study framing in Norwegian newspapers in the U.S. 2004 Presidential election.

### Nature of Norwegian Media

Norwegian media often tend to follow national policy perspectives, especially in the case of war reporting (Nohrstedt, Kaitatzi-Whitlock, Ottosen, & Riegert, 2000). Ottosen (2005) noted that, in Norwegian media coverage of the war in Afghanistan, mainstream Norwegian media tended to leave undiscussed issues such as access to oil and U.S. strategic interests. Slaatta (2001) notes how the Norwegian media will symbolically construct political discourse in defining Norway's changing relationships with Europe. Cultural diversity is evident as Ottosen (2005) cited how two major Norwegian newspapers disagreed in their editorial responses to Bush's harsh anti-terrorism rhetoric. Overall, the Norwegian news media play a crucial role in campaigns as tools for information.

*Verdens Gang* and *Aftenposten* are the biggest newspapers in Norway, with circulation figures of 365,266 and 249,861 respectively. While *Verdens Gang* has the largest circulation, *Aftenposten* is also very influential (Ottosen, 2005). The third largest paper is *Dagbladet*, with a circulation of 183,092 (*Aviskatalogen,* 2005). Given that Norway's population is just above 4.5 million, these numbers are quite noteworthy. Norwegian newspapers have had high circulation and readership numbers during the post-war period (Allern, 2007; Statistics Norway, 2005), and the average household buys 1.5 newspapers daily (Høst, 1998). People buy one national newspaper like *Verdens Gang (VG)* or *Dagbladet*, and a regional or local paper.

Although *VG* and *Dagbladet* are tabloids (the subscription-based *Aftenposten* also shifted to this format in 2005), they have much more in-depth and serious coverage of political and social issues, than, for instance, the British *Sun*, or German *Bild Zeitung* (Ottosen, 2005). Eide and Ottosen (1994) note "the Norwegian press structure has produced neither elite-oriented quality papers nor a purely populist popular press... Norwegian journalism finds itself somewhere in "the middle ground between academic elitism and vulgar ignorance" (429).

Despite the disagreement described above, *Aftenposten* and *VG* have traditionally been conservative newspapers, while *Dagbladet* is considered a liberal-left newspaper. Most Norwegian newspapers started out with an affiliation to a political party, but from the 1970s, they gradually established themselves as politically independent (Eide, 1995;

Høyer, 1995). The editorial platforms of all three newspapers are, however, well within the mainstream political context of social democracy, whose electoral supremacy is strong in Norway (Arter, 1999).

### *International Media Views of U.S. Elections*

This article focuses on elections as a political issue. Political campaigns are news events that still matter and are a critical aspect of political institutions (certainly in the U.S.) that are mainly brought before the public's eye through the media (Allern, 2007; Jamieson, 2000). The media are a primary source of campaign information, including for Norwegians (Allern, 2007). The media are thus a key factor in shaping public perceptions of political institutions, the political process and in the development of political culture in general (Carlsson, 2007; Curtin & Gaither, 2007; Patterson, 1988). From a broader societal perspective, political institutions become a key way in which meaning is determined (Curtin & Gaither, 2007). Van Gorp (2007) claims culture becomes a primary basis for knowledge and meaning as a citizen understands these institutions or processes. Kunczik (1997) notes this is particularly the case with public perceptions of political culture in other countries.

However, apart from a few studies (Clausen, 2003; Holtz-Bacha, 1999; Gunther & Mughan, 2000; Stovall, 1979; Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2006; Wu, 2000), precious little research has been conducted on cross-national perspectives of elections. Yet, comparisons in international contexts are important and campaigns are particularly amenable to such comparisons (Barnett & Lee, 2002; Blumler & McQuail, 2001; Donsbach, 1999; Schorr, 2003). World opinion about the U.S. is an "ongoing process" of homogenization and diversification that affects international images of the U.S. and shifts in response to political events (Rusciano, 2003: 175). Media in different countries reflect distinct regional and national identities, interests, and policies (Nacos, Shapiro, Hritzuk, & Chadwick, 2000; Wu, 2000). For example, Ottosen (2005) found mostly U.S. friendly framing in Norwegian newspapers after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, yet Alterman (2003) notes that other European media believe America is in the grip of a fervent Christian fundamentalism. Kern, Just and Norris (2003) stress that geopolitical position and domestic political perspectives (as played out in the media) strongly shape news frames of political issues.

One of the classic studies in this regard is Galtung and Ruge (1965). McQuail (2000) asserts that it may be one of the most influential studies of the values that influence the selection of what actually makes it into the news. Galtung and Ruge (1965) developed a list of twelve factors (based on certain organizational and cultural criteria) that help determine whether an event is more likely to become news. While certainly seminal, Galtung and Ruge's study has been recently revisited and was found to have some shortcomings such as its focus on crises (over day-to-day coverage of events), and its hypothetical nature (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001). Galtung and Ruge recognized this themselves when they said that "no claim is made for completeness in the list of factors" (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; 64). Most important for the current study, however, is that Galtung and Ruge's work seems to focus more on how news stories are selected (i.e. news production), and less on *how* news stories are covered. The latter is the main focus of this article. The current study focuses neither on the production nor the consumption of news stories. Rather, the emphasis is placed on *how* stories about the U.S. Presidential election were framed once they appeared in the news.

## Framing Theory

Framing theory is a useful theoretical approach for analyzing media content (Entman, 1993; Gamson, 1992; Gamson & Modigliani, 1987; 1989). Framing theory occupies an "important position in the international communication research agenda" (de Vreese, 2001; 180) namely because it extends research beyond the agenda setting tradition to focus on *how* issues are talked about in the news media. The media can have a strong impact in constructing social reality and frames of reference for the audience (de Vreese, 2004). Frames are organizing principles that are "socially shared and persist over time and work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world" (Reese, 2001: 11). Framing is a way of making meaning by indicating which facts or symbols are salient and implying a connection among those facts by "promoting a particular problem definition, causal interpretations, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation, ..." (Entman, 1993: 52).

### Culture in Framing

While there have certainly been a plethora of conceptualizations of frames (Scheufele, 2000), this article focuses on the importance and influence of culture in the framing process and is in accord with those who argue for "bringing culture back in" (Van Gorp, 2007; 60). Culture is thought to be a key factor responsible for explaining and predicting variety among news frames and citizens' responses to such frames (Hansen, 1991, Van Gorp, 2007). Van Gorp (2007) claims that a group of frames in culture is the link between news production and consumption. Culture consists of citizens' "cognitive, affective, and evaluative orientations to political phenomena" (Almond, 1980; 26). Culture "might be defined as the empirically demonstrable set of common frames exhibited in the discourse and thinking of most people in a social grouping" (Entman, 1993: 52-53).

The media are a key arena in which this discourse takes place by transmitting important values and cultural identities that may privilege certain frames or interpretations over others (Clausen, 2003; Gamson, 1992; Gunter & Mughan, 2000). Citizens' perceptions of political processes, performances, and institutions depend in large part upon the mass media (Moy & Pfau, 2000). Consequently, media framing of these political events might explain the formation of cognitive and evaluative attitudes or orientations regarding institutional rules and norms (Almond, 1980; Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1997). The media have influence in that they give an audience a way of understanding events through the production of forms or identities that culturally resonate with the audience's view of the world (Curtin & Gaither, 2007; Grossberg, Wartella, Whitney, & Wise, 2006; Hansen, 1991; White, 1983).

This article supports the assertions of those who advocate that frames are comprised of several different dimensions or aspects that make up an overall package (de Vreese, 2004; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2006). These frame packages are "clusters of organized devices that function as an identity kit" (Van Gorp, 2007: 64). Culture can be a difficult concept to grip, but such a package approach can help uncover cultural patterns embedded in media content. Some examples of these elements are words, exemplars, and descriptions (Gamson & Lasch, 1983), reasoning devices such as causes or justifications (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989), and reasoning devices related to framing functions such as problem definition, moral evaluations, and treatment (Entman, 1993; Van Gorp, 2007). By themselves, these manifest elements are not necessarily an actual frame, but together in combination they help complete a

package that can point to certain latent cultural structures or frames (Van Gorp, 2007). This combinatory approach has been criticized for not always operationalizing these devices. In addition, it is difficult to come up with a completely exhaustive list of elements. However, this combinatory approach has strong heuristic qualities (Van Gorp, 2007). Consequently, this article argues that it is possible to use such an approach to analyze the framing of the 2004 U.S. Presidential election in Norwegian newspapers. The sections that follow present some of these package elements that are frequently researched in framing analyses of political news coverage.

### Thematic/Episodic

Iyengar's (1991) approach to framing theory suggests that news reports may be usefully analyzed by their thematic or episodic content. Thematic news places events in a broader context of related events. In general, such stories do better at promoting learning and informing citizens (Iyengar, 1991). Episodic framing merely provides snapshots of an issue, with any explanations based on sensational or emotional appeals. Research shows episodic framing trivializes public discourse, discourages citizens from seeking links among issues and leads to the exclusion of many important issues (Iyengar, 1991; Nitz & West, 2004).

### Responsibility

Iyengar's work also incorporates notions of responsibility (both causal and treatment). Causal responsibility addresses the source of a problem, while treatment responsibility addresses solutions. Individual attributions tend to be associated with episodic framing, while societal attributions tend to be associated with thematic framing (Iyengar, 1991). A framing process where individuals are assigned blame does little to encourage rational decision-making or promote comprehension of a political process (Iyengar, 1991).

### Image/Issue

Research on media in election campaigns indicates that image-based political frames dominate (Jamieson, 2000; Trent, Short-Thompson, Mongeau, Nusz, & Trent, 2001). Image-based political frames, by concentrating on style over substance, lead to a more disconnected, episodic form of discourse (Hollihan, 2001). There is a widening trend in Europe as well of image-based personalization occurring in campaigns and in media coverage of such campaigns (Holtz-Bacha, 1999; Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2006).

### Tone

Iyengar (1991) notes that tone of coverage could be significant in shaping public opinion. News stories can adopt a positive or negative tone towards individuals and societal institutions. A negative, adversarial tone in news accounts only breeds more cynicism and encourages voters to focus on character rather than issue substance (Moy & Pfau, 2000). This tone is not only present in headlines and articles, but also perhaps in the photos or visuals used to portray a story. Smith (1995) claims that journalists look for symbolic images that help to convey the meaning of the story. These visual images are effective at shaping public opinion and government policy (Graber, 1990; Shaw, 2000).

*Source*

Sources selected could be significant determinants of the media's potential ability to prime viewers about the nature of a particular issue (Cantril & Oravec, 1996). A good deal of journalistic discretion that goes into shaping media coverage of issues occurs by ways of deciding which sources to use and how much overall attention to give to the issue (Trumbo, 1996). A focus on only one aspect of a source could lead to certain viewpoints or frames creeping into viewers' interpretations of the news.

*Type and Quality of Issue Information*

Despite the growing predominance of image in political campaigns, issues still matter in the context of how they help candidates play and win the game (Jamieson, 2000). By focusing on a particular topic and ignoring others, the media can help define problems and shape perceptions, especially in a close election like 2004 (Schoenbach & Becker, 1995). Certain cultural themes or frames may thus become more privileged in the media coverage of an election. Relatedly, Paletz (1999) argues that it is not only important what issues are focused on, but also to examine the quality of this information. The media have a key impact in their ability to inform the public on political issues (Jamieson, 2000).

## Research Questions/hypotheses

This article is interested in how the 2004 U.S. Presidential election was framed in three major Norwegian newspapers. The following research questions attempt to explore the overall nature and extent of this framing:

RQ1: Is Norwegian newspaper coverage of the U.S. 2004 Presidential election predominantly thematic or episodic?

RQ2: What entities or individuals are assigned responsibility for causing problems and coming up with solutions to solve these problems?

RQ3: Do image-based or issue-based frames predominate in Norwegian newspaper coverage of the U.S. 2004 Presidential election?

RQ4: What is the overall tone or bias in Norwegian newspaper coverage of the U.S. 2004 Presidential election?

RQ5: What sources are predominant in Norwegian newspaper coverage of the U.S. 2004 Presidential election?

RQ6: What is the nature of the type and quality of issue information in Norwegian newspaper coverage of the U.S. 2004 Presidential election?

These research questions stem from the literature review and the work of those who advocate a "package" approach to framing analysis of the news (Grossberg et al., 2006; Van Gorp, 2007). Together, the answers to these questions are an attempt to provide an uncovering of at least some elements that could be evidence of underlying cultural frames or patterns.

## Method

Newspaper stories from three major Norwegian newspapers (*Aftenposten, Verdens Gang* [*VG*], and *Dagbladet*) about the U.S. election were collected during the first author's stay as a guest professor in Norway. Only stories from the main news sections and editorial/opinion pages were included. A story was defined as each newspaper article, commentary/editorial, or feature about the U.S. Presidential election that listed a reporter's byline. The time frame of Labor Day to the Sunday after Election Day was the period in which stories were collected. Due to delivery error and other malfunctions, not every story was collected. Nonetheless, a representative sample of 201 stories was collected. Two of the authors could read Norwegian. As an extra verification check, a Norwegian student was enlisted to assist in this coding process. All coders were trained beforehand.

The coding scheme was composed based on the framing elements mentioned in the literature review. While each element in the scheme is examined separately, it is the taking together of these elements as a whole that hopefully conveys a glimpse of some patterns of underlying cultural frames or structures. This approach is consistent with those (Neuendorf, 2002; Van Gorp, 2007) who state that a series of manifest variables can represent a latent concept such as culture. The following sections describe these coding scheme categories.

### Thematic-Episodic

Stories were coded for the presence of thematic or episodic framing using Iyengar's (1991) notion of predominance. Stories were read in their entirety to determine whether they, when taken as a whole, were predominantly thematic or episodic. If a story was judged to be two-thirds or more episodic, it was coded as episodic. An example of a thematic story would be a story on the background of the U.S. electoral system or a story on U.S. foreign policy in the context of 2004 election. An example of an episodic story would be a story that predominantly focuses on some idiosyncracy such as Bush's physical appearance or an isolated campaign incident. A mixed category was included for those stories in which a predominant thrust could not be determined.

### Responsibility

Responsibility included both causal and treatment dimensions (Iyengar, 1991). Causal responsibility referred to assignment of blame for a problem. Treatment responsibility referred to solutions for these problems. Within each of these two responsibility types, stories were coded for whether they made individual or societal attributions for causes and solutions related to "problems" mentioned during the campaign. Individual attributions included Bush and Kerry, as well as Osama bin Laden and other world leaders and officials. Societal attributions included general assignment of blame to governments, political parties, non-government organizations, and general U.S. citizenry/culture. Once again, a two-thirds rule was utilized for coding, with a mixed category for those stories in which multiple attributions of responsibility occurred, yet had no predominant focus for any one of these attributions.

### Image/Issue

 Patterson's (1988) scheme that determines whether political stories are primarily image-based or issue-based was utilized. This scheme analyzed whether stories focused on

frames of horse race coverage (who is winning or losing, polls), campaign issues (facts and rumors of scandals, dirty campaigning), campaign images (style of campaigning, personal appearance, likability), governing images (leadership ability, trust, knowledge/competence), policy (positions on issues), and candidate orientation (religious affiliation, personal background).

*Tone*

Stories were coded for their tone/bias (for Bush-Kerry) in three separate areas of headlines, overall article, and any accompanying visuals (photos, cartoons, graphs). Stories were coded as positive if two-thirds or more of the story (headline, overall article, and accompanying visuals) referred to candidates (Bush-Kerry) and/or their policies in a positive manner. Relatedly, stories were coded as negative if two-thirds or more of the story made predominantly negative references. This follows Ottosen's (2005) work which argues that one actually can make four separate judgments about two candidates (pro or anti for each). If it could not be judged whether a story was primarily negative or positive, a mixed category was included. Finally, a neutral category was included for those stories that simply portrayed an event, i.e. Bush campaigns in Iowa with no valuation of that event. In addition, stories were coded (using the two-thirds rule) for overall tone towards the U.S. (A gestalt perception of the U.S. political system, culture, and/or general views of policy).

*Sources*

Stories were coded for their use of sources. Stories were read as a whole to determine which type of source (using two-thirds rule) was predominant. Categories included experts, politicians, average citizen, media sources, academic sources, business, and a category for mixed in those stories where a predominant focus could not be determined.

*Type and Quality of Issue Information*

Stories were coded for the presence/predominance of issues. This category included specific issues such as Iraq, war on terror, the economy, U.S./Norway relations, and the environment. Socio-cultural issues such as U.S. political culture, abortion, gay marriage, and the role of religion in politics were also included. Finally, campaign-related issues such as descriptions of the U.S. electoral system or where the predominant focus of a story described how one of the above issues is making a difference in the campaign were included.

Coders also rated whether stories primarily focused on an individual, an issue, institutions/groups, or an overall country's culture. Finally, the quality of information was coded using Paletz's (1999) continuum of sophistication, utility, and truth of news information. Coders rated the stories for their overall (using two-thirds rule) sophistication (did the story present different angles), utility (did the story help illuminate an issue or show how it was relevant to evaluating a political entity, or was the story merely "fluff"?), and overall truthfulness (did the story represent consensus about what was said, or was there distortions/embellishments of a trait or issue stance?).

## Results

The present investigation attempted to provide a snapshot of Norwegian media coverage of the U.S. 2004 Presidential election by examining three major Norwegian newspapers. Overall, 201 stories were coded. There were 77 stories from *Aftenposten,* 61 stories from *Dagbladet,* and 55 stories from *Verdens* Gang. To determine whether coders reliably identified the instances of framing, three individuals independently coded a random sample of approximately 10 percent of the total instances. Inter-coder agreement was acceptable with 73% for the coding categories, and Cohen's kappa was acceptable (Î=.63).

### RQ1

The first research question asked whether Norwegian newspaper coverage was predominantly thematic or episodic. Newspaper coverage was mainly episodic (59%), with thematic stories occupying 24 percent and mixed stories 17 percent of the remaining coverage. Examples of episodic stories were an interview with Norwegian-Americans in Williston, North Dakota about their opinions, John Kerry's background in a rock band, and a story about the Teresa Heinz Kerry and Laura Bush dispute (Teresa Heinz Kerry had commented that Laura Bush had never held a "real job", even though Laura Bush had been a teacher and a librarian).

Within the three main newspapers, the *Aftenposten* had the largest percentage of thematic coverage (42%). This newspaper was excellent at writing detailed, in-depth analyses (often with accompanying graphics) of the U.S. electoral system. A significant amount (75%) of *VG* stories were episodic. Only five percent of *VG* stories were thematic. The *VG* often featured stories (and big pictures) of campaign issues such as allegations of President Bush cheating in the first debate by wearing an electronic device under his suit jacket or a story quoting a poll saying Republicans had better sex lives than Democrats. The *Dagbladet* also mainly used (48%) episodic framing in its stories, although thematic framing was present in a higher amount (20%) of stories than *VG.* The *Dagbladet* stories were more commentaries (almost one-third of all stories) by its reporters on the U.S. campaign or electoral system.

### RQ2

The second research question looked at who was assigned blame for causing problems and who was given the responsibility to come up with solutions. Across the three papers, President Bush received the most blame (21%) for causing problems such as global instability. The front page of the *Dagbladet* the day after the election suggested that the next four years will bring danger for abortion laws, crisis in NATO, and Norway will be pushed closer to the EU. The U.S. government (15%) and U.S. culture/citizens (14%) were second and third, respectively, in receiving blame. An ineffective electoral system and a culture that places too much emphasis on religion in politics were examples of this blame. The remaining percentage of causal responsibility was spread out through a variety of other categories. President Bush was also the one labeled most responsible (19%) for treating problems. However, John Kerry came in tied for second (with U.S. culture/citizens) with 14 percent. Stories either focused on the President needing to take more responsibility for world affairs, Senator Kerry needing to be elected so he can take care of these affairs, or the U.S. political system reforming itself for better electoral processes.

Within the three papers, the *Aftenposten's* assigning of causal and treatment responsibility closely approximated the overall percentages. Interestingly, however, *VG* had a significant higher percentage (29%) of causal responsibility assigned for President Bush, and the *Dagbladet* put the primary responsibility (24%) for solutions on U.S. culture and citizens (and not Bush).

## RQ3

The third research question asked whether issue-based or image-based frames predominated in Norwegian newspaper coverage. Image-based frames were heavily prevalent. The main focus was on horse race coverage (32%). Campaign issues such as rumors of scandals in the U.S. voting system or allegations of dirty attacks (usually by Bush) came in second (18%). Campaign images were third with 15 percent of the coverage. Stories would focus on Kerry's use of Clinton in his campaign or Bush's posturing toughly on Iraq. Governing images (stories about Bush's competence as a world leader or Kerry's trust) occupied 13 percent of the coverage. Interestingly, candidate orientation came next with 11 percent of the coverage. There was a noticeable focus on candidates' religious background and family history. Finally, only ten percent of stories focused on actual issue statements as a predominant frame.

The first-place percentages for horse race coverage were even higher for *VG* (42%) and *Dagbladet* (33%). These papers also focused more on campaign issues and scandals. *VG* had the highest percentage (22%) of such coverage. Surprising, perhaps, was the low percentage of stories in the *Aftenposten* focusing on policy (8%). The main focus of the *Aftenposten*, after horse race, was campaign images (22%). Stories closely followed Bush and Kerry on the campaign trail, yet focused heavily on their campaign style rather than who was winning.

## RQ4

The fourth research question analyzed the overall tone or bias in headlines, articles, and accompanying visual images (as well as overall tone or bias towards the U.S.). Overall, the Norwegian newspapers were mixed (43%) in their bias towards the U.S. Surprisingly, 42 percent of stories were neutral. A common theme was the simple picking up and translating of U.S. Associated Press-type stories with no accompanying analysis. Only two percent of stories were found to have a pro-U.S. bias. An anti-U.S. bias was present in 11 percent of stories. The *Aftenposten* was the most neutral (74% of stories). The *Dagbladet* had the highest percentage (23%) of anti-U.S. bias. The role of religion and the U.S. electoral system were criticized in particular. Nearly 45 percent of stories that focused on these two items had an anti-U.S. bias.

In terms of headlines, the largest percentage (37%) were neutral. This trend held true across all papers. However, the *VG* had a strong individual focus with headlines being pro-Bush 18 percent of the time, 18 percent pro-Kerry, and 11 percent anti-Bush. For both *VG* and *Dagbladet*, the combined pro-Kerry and anti-Bush headlines totaled over 25 percent which made this combination the second largest percentage overall.

For articles, the largest percentage was mixed (41%). A neutral focus was the second-most prevalent percentage (26%). The predominant bias or tone was anti-Bush 13 percent of the time and pro-Kerry eight percent of the time. Ten percent of stories incorporated a pro-Bush focus. For the *Aftenposten*, the largest percentage was neutral (48%). The paper was mixed in its focus 27 percent of the time, with relatively equal percentages

of stories favoring Bush and Kerry. For the *VG* and *Dagbladet*, the highest percentage was also mixed (48% and 53% respectively). The *Dagbladet* had the highest individual percentage (17%) of anti-Bush stories. As with headlines, the combined anti-Bush and pro-Kerry bias made it the second highest overall percentage.

Perhaps the most interesting themes of tone and bias were evident in the visual images which were present in 79 percent of all stories. All three papers had colorful images which might be expected as all are now in tabloid formats. Overall, most visual images were neutral (33%). A picture of the Norwegian reporter was very common as the only picture. Also common was an apparent attempt to balance a pro (or anti) visual of Kerry with a similar one of Bush. The second highest percentage (16%) was mixed. Many stories would position an almost gigantic picture of Kerry (usually smiling or otherwise positively portrayed) with an almost minuscule picture of Bush (also usually positively portrayed), but the difference in images was so large that it seemed evident to coders a bias was present enough to code such occurrences as mixed. Another interesting feature in mixed stories was when Bill Clinton began campaigning for Kerry. It was almost as if Clinton was the candidate as pictures related to this story would predominantly focus on Clinton in the foreground. Pro-Kerry images were predominant in 13 percent of stories, with nine percent being anti-Bush and seven percent being pro-Bush. Once again, as with headlines and articles, the anti-Bush/pro-Kerry combination was the second highest percentage. Interestingly, all three papers featured pictures of Americans praying or in other religious contexts.

Such differences become more interesting when one looks at individual newspapers. The *Aftenposten* was mostly neutral (36%) in its visual presentations with 14 percent mixed and 12 percent pro-Kerry. However, the *VG* was neutral in only 25 percent of stories. The combined percentages of anti-Bush and pro-Kerry images were 29 percent. An example of such bias occurred the day after the election with a front page headline reading "Election drama overnight". Even though the focus of article was that no winner had been determined, the cover had a huge picture of Kerry smiling and a tiny inset picture of Bush grimacing. Similar episodic pictures in the *VG* included giant layouts of Arnold Schwarzenegger and even general citizens. One picture had a citizen showing his middle finger to a cardboard cutout of Kerry. The *Dagbladet* used political cartoons extensively that were either mainly pro-Kerry (12%) or anti-Bush (14%). Many cartoons portrayed Bush in a religious crusader's outfit or as a cowboy.

## RQ5

The fifth research question asked what sources were predominant in newspaper coverage. The media themselves were the most predominant source (30%). Reporter editorials or commentaries, along with interviews were very common. Politicians were quoted 20 percent of the time. Experts, especially voting experts, were next with 14 percent of the total. Human interest stories that quoted average American citizens were surprisingly high (13%). Similar patterns held true for each newspaper individually. However, the *VG* had a very high percentage of this last source (21%).

## RQ6

The sixth research question asked about the type and quality of issue information in stories about the U.S. presidential election in Norwegian newspapers. As might be expected, the predominant type of story was campaign-related (56%). Stories about the

U.S. electoral system were next, with 16 percent of the coverage. U.S.- Norway relations were popular, occupying nine percent of the coverage. Stories about Iraq and the "war on terror" also occupied a combined nine percent of coverage. However, religion came next with four percent of the coverage. In terms of focus, the three most popular were individuals (47%), U.S. political system (19%) and U.S. culture (11%). The quality of the information in stories was mostly of low or moderate value in terms of sophistication (combined percentage of 76%), utility (87%), and truth (82%). Stories about Republicans' sex lives, a campaign worker in Ohio voting for Bush or John Kerry's rock band career were examples of stories containing low quality of information. The individual percentage (42%) for low truth value was remarkable.

Each paper had the same approximate percentages for type of story featured. The same pattern also held true for the specific foci within the story. However, the quality of information was substantially less in both the *VG* and *Dagbladet* than the *Aftenposten.* The *Aftenposten* was coded as having high values of information in terms of sophistication (32%), utility (21%) and truth (32%). The *VG* rarely had high values for sophistication (16%), utility (5%), and truth (7%). The *Dagbladet* was similar with its sophistication (14%), utility (10%) and truth (10%) rarely being rated as high. While the *Aftenposten* had a respectable number of stories that tried to inform its Norwegian readers about the electoral system, Electoral College, or how debates function, the *VG* and *Dagbladet* had numerous stories of low information value. For example the *VG* was rated as having low truth value nearly 70 percent of the time. Examples included pictures of Kerry and Bush in boxing poses before a debate, the Republican sex lives story, and a cartoon that showed an elephant leaving a pile of feces in the shape of Bush's head on the U.S. flag.


## Discussion

This article was a case study of how the 2004 U.S. Presidential election was framed in three major Norwegian newspapers. The article echoes those (de Vreese, 2001; Van Gorp, 2007) who advocate the use of framing theory as a strong heuristic tool in political communication. The importance and influence of culture in the framing process was stressed using a package approach. Taken together, the elements analyzed in this study are potential indicators of underlying cultural frames or structures that were present in Norwegian newspaper coverage of this election. These underlying cultural elements could provide the basis for knowledge and meaning (Van Gorp, 2007) about the U.S. electoral system. As mentioned, political culture is comprised of cognitive, affective, and evaluative orientations (Almond, 1980). Citizens are integrated into this culture via a socialization process that depends fundamentally on the media to provide meaning (Carlsson, 2007; Price et al., 1997).

This supports the work of those (Curtin & Gaither, 2007; Grossberg et al., 2006; Hjarvard, 2001; White, 1983) who argue that media texts create a common symbolic language that has the potential to culturally resonate with their audiences. In the case of Norway, the common symbolic language that Norwegians could read in their three main newspapers was mainly structured around episodic, image-based frames that provided little, if any, quality information about the U.S. election. There was an attempt, especially in the *Aftenposten*, to present the U.S. election in a mixed or neutral tone. However, this was counterbalanced by the strong episodic, image-based framing. Unless a Norwegian had personal experience in the U.S. and/or exposure to alternative

media, he or she would primarily get a picture of the U.S. 2004 election as centered on polls, religious fundamentalism, and an electoral system that is inefficient and flawed for a major world democracy. Further, a reader of Norwegian newspapers would get a clear picture of a pro-Kerry/anti-Bush bias in many of the stories' headlines, articles, and visual images.

The case of visual images was particularly illuminating as a cultural indicator. It is possible that the strong presence of mainly pro-Kerry/anti-Bush visual layouts (i.e. Bush the cowboy maverick crusader) tapped into the Norwegians' preference as a culture for Bush to lose (Andersen, 2004). These visuals are potentially powerful cultural frames (Smith, 1995; Shaw, 2000; Van Gorp, 2007). Future research should pair these images up with actual citizens' perceptions to ascertain their impact.

The high focus on religion is a cultural frame of particular interest. Norway is a secular country that believes the role of religion in politics should be minimized (Hayes 1995). Norwegians "belong to the church but do not go there." (Lundby 1997: 32). Nonetheless, religious belonging does have an impact on how people utilize the media and engage in democratic participation in Norway (Lundby, 1997). The role of religion in the U.S. electoral system is certainly unique and likely quite foreign to non-U.S. audiences (Jamieson, 2000). However, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Europe (and Norway) combined with the U.S. led war in Iraq makes religion an interesting topic for future cross-national political research.

Some writers assert that Europeans are less knowledgeable about and less interested in the U.S. than 20 years ago which leads them to increasingly form their views of the U.S. from the sort of European journalism that stresses American weirdness (Elliott 2003: 40). Hagen (1997) notes that Norwegians often experience foreign news as indistinguishable or irrelevant. On the other hand, Peters' (1999) idea that citizens interpret information from their cultural perspective may have been operating. It is possible that the Norwegian journalists domesticated the news to fit Norwegian national audiences. This is a practice that has been noted before (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Slaata, 2001; Van Gorp, 2003). Unfortunately, it was outside the scope and focus of this paper to determine this.

As mentioned previously, the emphasis here is on interpreting the frames once they occur in the media, and less on the production and/or consumption of these frames. Norwegians were interested in the 2004 election (Knutsen, 2004), but Wiese (2004) cites a survey of Norwegian media professors who criticized Norwegian media coverage for a paucity of coverage that was not conducive to effective learning and that Norwegians were not particularly well-versed in the political differences between Bush and Kerry. This combination of low interest and/or ineffective coverage may have led to an incomplete frame.

Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) believe "the quality of the public debate on issues depends critically on the nature of information brought to the information marketplace and the ability of citizens to use this information to discern and articulate interests" (ix.). In modern democratic societies, citizens' information about political institutions (like campaigns) is mostly filtered through the mass media. The way media frame issues makes a huge difference in how the political culture is understood (Price et al., 1997).

This article suffered from several limitations. First, the article was somewhat limited in scope in that it focused on three Norwegian newspapers' coverage of one individual election. Cross-cultural comparisons would continue to be a fruitful avenue that expands on this. In addition, the article was a content analysis that examined how the election

was covered. Norwegian journalists or citizens were not surveyed. Future research should connect such media framing analyses with surveys of these groups to provide a more complete picture of the influence of culture in the framing process. Finally, future research should continue to explore the connection, touched on in this article, among frames, identity/culture and the political learning of citizens.

Nonetheless, the cumulative results of this article amplify the work of those (Allern, 2007; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001; Holtz-Bacha, 1999; Jamieson, 2000; Strömbäck, 2007; Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2006) who assert that media coverage of elections has a predominantly episodic focus of image-based frames, not just in the U.S., but also in other countries such as Britain, Germany, and Sweden. Norway makes an interesting comparison to the work of Strömbäck and colleagues in that Norway is closer tied to the U.S. than Sweden due to factors such as the former country's membership in NATO and Marshall Plan help after World War Two.

Hollihan (2001) argues that such a framing process hinders the chance for effective learning of political issues. One result could be the Atrivialization of public discourse and the erosion of electoral accountability" (Iyengar, 1991: 143). Relatedly, misperceptions of a political process (in this case the U.S. electoral system) could occur which may result in an incomplete understanding of a political culture and its institutions (Almond, 1980). One possible caveat to this is that there may have been a blurring between images and issues, an increasing phenomenon in political campaigns (Jamieson, 2000). These images can be useful in helping voters access and process political information (Trent et al., 2001). For example, Eide (1995) notes that *VG* has always prided itself as being a human interest paper for the people. In sum, however, this case study argues that the three main Norwegian newspapers presented the U.S. election from a series of cultural perspectives or frames that were not helpful in presenting a complete and accurate picture (Wiese, 2004) for Norwegians' understanding of this key feature of the U.S. political system.

## Conclusion

This article agrees with scholars who argue for more cross-national perspectives that explore the differences between U.S. and European framing of news, including elections (Blumler & McQuail, 2001; Carlsson, 2007; de Vreese, 2001; Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2006). The similarities and differences in these perspectives can help understand and explain cultural frames present in different countries' media. Framing becomes a process of setting, forming and building cultural structures that enable policy-makers in the US and Europe to understand each other better on political issues. In conclusion, this article supports the call of those (Clausen, 2003; Curtin & Gaither, 2007; Strömbäck, 2007) who encourage future researchers to collaborate on excavating the frameworks of these structures to find patterns, symbols, devices, and other elements of common cultural identities that can create shared meaning and broader, more balanced perspectives.

## Noter

1. A version of this article was presented at the International Communication Association conference in Dresden (June 2006).
2. Jessyna Egge and Stacy Sobolik were students at Augustana College. The authors would also like to thank Alexander Beck for his assistancse on this project.

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