

# Boundaries of Legitimate Debate: Right-wing Extremism in Norwegian News Media in the Decade after the July 22, 2011 Attacks

by Anna Grøndahl Larsen

## Abstract

*How to deal with voices deemed deviant and extremist is a recurring topic of debate, including questions such as whether deviant actors and ideas should be silenced or included in public debates. As with terrorist attacks in other parts of the world, the attacks in Norway on July 22, 2011 ignited discussions on the limits of legitimate debate, including the role of mainstream politicians and news media in setting the boundaries for what is appropriate in public debates. This article explores news debates on right-wing extremism in the decade after the attack, shedding light on how boundaries between legitimacy and deviance were drawn and negotiated. Analyzing articles on right-wing extremism in two national news outlets in Norway (NRK and VG) between 2013 and 2019, the author explores who got to speak and define the debate, to what extent actors deemed extremist were granted a voice, and how boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate political actors were negotiated. First, the analyses show that although the coverage was dominated by elites, actors deemed extremist were relatively prominent sources. Second, political and cultural elites engaged in continuous negotiations over the boundaries of legitimate and appropriate debate. However, third and relatedly, the analysis illustrates that debates concerning possible links between the views of legitimate elite actors—such as politicians in parliament—and deviant extremists were challenging to initiate.*

**Keywords:** Boundary-work, deviant voices, extremism, journalism, mainstream, media, news access, news sources, terrorism, violent extremism

## Introduction

How to deal with voices deemed deviant and extremist is repeatedly debated across the globe, often in terms of whether deviant actors and ideas should be silenced or included in public debate. While such questions are not new, in recent years, persistent calls for the silencing of a range of different voices has given rise to notions such as “cancel culture” and “deplatforming”. When related to violent extremism in particular, terrorist attacks tend to spark debates concerning how the news media should report on perpetrators and their views, with opinions ranging from inclusion of extremist voices to a news black-out. The present article addresses such issues, focusing on boundary drawings and negotiations related to right-wing extremism in Norwegian news media in the decade after the 2011 attacks.

As with attacks in other parts of the world, the July 22, 2011 attacks in Norway [1] ignited discussions on the limits of legitimate debate, including the role of mainstream politicians and news media in setting the boundaries of permissible public debate. In the aftermath of the attacks, mainstream media definitions of what constituted legitimate and deviant actors were challenged. The attacks fueled debates on the question of how journalism and news media should deal with “deviant” ideas and actors, and where the boundaries of legitimate debate should be drawn. This included debates that specifically focused on the inclusion of deviant voices. Here, some opinion leaders argued that extremist voices should be included to a larger extent in the news, in order to prevent online echo chambers and to facilitate public debate and denunciation of extremist views (the so-called “pressure cooker thesis”). Others underlined the need for restrictive editorial practices when it comes to the inclusion of voices deemed extremist, arguing that inclusion could serve to spread, amplify and legitimize extreme views.[2] In line with the most prominent argument among media elites, pointing out that the boundaries of inclusion should be broadened, mainstream news debates were opened up to previously largely silenced far-right actors in the months after the attacks.[3] Simultaneously, however, and similar to the response to attacks elsewhere [4], established news media engaged in processes of solidarity and

consolation, serving as guardians of appropriate discourse, excluding voices that were perceived as offensive [5], and implementing stricter control of online debates.[6] In terms of the political response, immediately after the attacks, the Norwegian prime minister defined these as an attack on Norwegian society, community and democracy. In short, a key narrative was established, where the common “we” was attacked and people needed to stand up against the terrorist [7] – a narrative that was largely echoed in established news media. Although there were subsequently attempts to make a more structural explanation of the attacks, including attention to anti-Muslim sentiment and rhetoric online [8], the key narrative largely remained that Norwegian society and democracy had been attacked by a terrorist. The consensus related to societal unity against the terrorist meant that in the months following the attacks, party politics were largely absent from the public debate when it came to the dual attack and its perpetrator [9].

This article focuses on how the news debate evolved over time. Extending extant insights into boundary negotiations in the aftermath of crisis, the article explores characteristics of boundary drawings and boundary negotiations in established news media after the more immediate focus on societal and judicial responses to the attacks had declined. More specifically, analyzing articles on right-wing extremism in two national news outlets in Norway (*Norsk rikskringkasting - NRK* and *Verdens Gang - VG*) between 2013 and 2019, the article sheds light on:

- i) who got to speak and define the debate,
- ii) to what extent actors deemed extremist were granted a voice, and
- iii) how boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate political actors and views were negotiated and drawn.

As such, the article contributes insights into how a right-wing extremist attack, and the dominant narrative of an attack, may over time have a bearing on the public debate and on newsroom practices of inclusion. Moreover, the analysis seeks to gain insights into how boundaries between legitimacy and deviance are drawn and which actors are the primary definers when key democratic principles are at stake.

### ***Background: Immigration and Criticism of Immigration in Norway***

Immigration has for the past decades received extensive attention in Norwegian news media, with emphasis on questions such as who should be admitted, how immigrants should be integrated into society, and what the effect of immigration on society are.[10] Research on immigration critics, in Norway and in other countries, have found that while immigration critics are not silenced, they have tended to be presented as deviant.[11] Hagelund and Kjeldsen (2021), for example, find that news stories on immigration critics “are hardly ever written to an audience where anti-immigration opinions are assumed to exist. In this sense, immigration critics are constituted as outsiders to a sphere of political normalcy.” Simultaneously, as Norway has over time become an increasingly multicultural society, there is evidence to suggest the emergence of a normalization of anti-immigrant attitudes, in politics and in the news media.[12] For example, the right-wing populist Progress Party, which has as its main focus the introduction of strict(er) immigration policies [13], joined a conservative-led government in 2013 – a change that serves to illustrate the prominence of immigration on the public agenda, and indicates the broadening of what constitutes legitimate debate on immigration.[14] In addition, over the past decade, alternative right-wing media sites, characterized by skepticism – or hostility – towards immigrants and Muslims have been established and/or received increased attention. Some of these sites can be regarded as placed somewhere between “the sphere of legitimacy” and “the sphere of deviance” – whereas mainstream news reporting and debates on the one hand regularly present these sites as deviant [15], while, on the other hand, the editors of such sites are regularly invited into mainstream news debates.[16] However, some other right-wing sites, holding more extreme nationalistic and xenophobic positions, are firmly placed within “the sphere of deviance”. Yet, the more modest sites may indicate a shift pertaining to what is understood as legitimate political debate.[17] Although it should be noted that trust in alternative right-wing media is significantly lower than trust in established news media, and readership figures remain relatively low (5-8 percent).[18] Moreover, despite the increased normalization of anti-immigrant attitudes, as reflected in

politics and in established and alternative news media, the Norwegian population's attitudes to immigration are relatively positive, and positive attitudes have also increased in the past decade.[19]

### ***Theoretical Perspectives: the Boundaries of Public Debate***

This article draws on the notion of boundaries to study the ways in which the limits of deviance and right-wing extremism are defined and negotiated in the news media. As central parts of public debate, the news media can be conceived both as actors whose practices shape and guard the boundaries of public debate and as arenas in which contestations over the boundaries of what is appropriate in public debates play out.[20] As noted by Carlson (2016), the notion of boundaries emphasizes “how social actors actively shape boundaries through a variety of expressive practices bent on inclusion and exclusion and how such implied difference structure[s] the social world of these actors.”[21] In other words, the notion of boundaries draws attention to consequences of discursive practices, definitions and classifications. Understanding the news media as both arenas where symbolic contests play out and as actors contributing to these processes draws attention to journalism as a site of struggles over meaning among political actors, enabling and disabling (legitimate) understanding of issues.

An extensive research literature has documented that news practices tend to be organized on the basis of a consensus model. Here, the views of the political mainstream—specifically state and government officials—enjoy crucial advantages in securing news access, whereas views deemed deviant tend to be absent or delegitimized.[22] In his influential three-sphere model on deviance and legitimacy in journalism, Hallin (1986) distinguishes between three spheres, guided by different journalistic standards: *the sphere of consensus* (those issues generally not regarded as controversial), *the sphere of legitimate controversy* (those issues and views that are seen as legitimately up for debate within the political mainstream), and *the sphere of deviance* (consisting of those actors that are seen as unworthy of being heard by journalists and the political mainstream). [23] By being granted access to the news, sources may set the political agenda, define the premises of the issues under debate, and thereby can gain legitimacy. Yet, the news media may employ various strategies to minimize and undermine the credibility of sources.[24] Extremist views may be placed in the sphere of deviance merely by being labelled “extremist”. Research, however, shows that when actors deemed extremist are reported and granted a voice in established news media, they tend to be actively and explicitly denounced, framed as holding illegitimate and potentially dangerous ideas.[25]

Emphasizing the ritual and communal aspects of journalism after traumatic events such as violent attacks, a strand of literature has foregrounded how journalism can serve as arena and actor in repair work to convey communal solidarity, set the boundaries of appropriate discourse and mark out core democratic values.[26] Thus, through triggering feelings of solidarity against extremist threats, the news media potentially work as a bulwark against anti-democratic forces.[27] From this perspective, public mediated responses to attacks are interpreted as “collective rituals” and as “counter-readings” to strengthen cohesion, clarify the boundaries of appropriate discourse and reaffirm society's moral order [28], constructing the discourse around “the wide inclusion of those who believe in freedom and liberal democracy, and the exclusion of those who do not – that is, extremists of all forms.”[29] The aftermath of attacks tends to result in such discourses of solidarity and exercise “consensus pressure”. Yet, after some time consensus gradually disintegrates into conflicting interests. [30]

Extant research provides valuable insights into the dynamics of public debate after attacks, including the role of the news media in marking out the legitimate boundaries of the debate. Yet, we know less of how such dynamics play out beyond the initial phases after an attack. Drawing on the strands of research presented above – foregrounding boundary making as rituals and as related to access and primary definition – the present article aims to address this gap.

### ***Methods***

The analyses are based on a quantitative content analysis of sources, supplemented with a close reading of a selection of the sample. The material analyzed includes online news stories on right-wing extremism in

the outlets *VG* (*vg.no*) and *NRK* (*nrk.no*) published between January 2013 and the end of December 2019 (n=341)—that is, the years *after* the attacks, the court case and the sentencing of Breivik.[31] As such, the material is well suited to cast light on characteristics of day-to-day editorial practices in reporting of right-wing extremism, after the focus on societal trauma and judicial responses to the 2011 attacks had diminished.

The two outlets selected for analysis are the two largest in Norway and include the principal tabloid (*VG*) and the public service broadcaster (*NRK*). Apart from being two of the most used online news sites, the two outlets represent somewhat different journalistic styles (tabloid versus public service broadcasting). Of the analyzed items, 154 were published in *NRK* (45 percent of the sample, 127 news articles, 26 op-eds) and 188 were published in *VG* (55 percent of the sample, 126 news articles, 62 op-eds). In other words, the two outlets granted more or less the same amount of attention to right-wing extremism in the period analyzed.

The article explores right-wing extremism as it is defined in the news media, by journalists and/or by sources. Rather than taking as starting point a specific definition of right-wing extremism, the material analyzed is selected through a key word search on the term “høyreekstem\*” (right-wing extrem\*) in the Norwegian newspaper database *Retriever*. While the selection criteria are largely pragmatic, they are also well suited to explore where the lines between legitimacy and deviance are drawn in news debates. Analyzing items specifically concerning right-wing extremism entails that the focus is on phenomena defined within “the sphere of deviance”—that is, phenomena (explicitly) labelled as illegitimate and unworthy of being heard by journalists and/or sources.[32]

The selection criteria may in principle entail that items that would not fall within an academic definition of right-wing extremism are included in the sample. However, reading of the material indicates that when covering right-wing extremism, the analyzed news media arguably focus largely on phenomena, groups and actors that would fall within an academic definition of right-wing extremism. This, for example, includes the perpetrator of the 2011 attacks, the group the Nordic Resistance Movement, and the attack carried out by Philip Manshaus in Norway in 2019. In cases where definitions are less clear-cut—for example when it comes to the group Pegida—this is reflected in the news items. For example, in some articles Pegida is framed within a discourse of right-wing extremism, but the group is usually not explicitly labelled right-wing extremist. Finally, it should be noted that several items refer to right-wing extremism as a phenomenon, and do not focus on a specific group or actor. The sample includes all articles focusing on the Norwegian context and where right-wing extremism was a key topic. This means that news articles on right-wing extremism in, for instance, Sweden, Germany or the U.S. were not included in the sample.

The content analysis focuses specifically on the affiliation of sources quoted in the material. A coding scheme, including descriptions on how to carry out the coding, was developed by the author. To ensure reliability, the coding scheme was tested and revised before the full sample was coded. Sources were defined as actors or institutions that were *directly quoted* in the articles (marked by quotation marks). In addition, authors of op-eds and commentaries were defined as sources. Actors mentioned, but not quoted, were not included as sources. The first five sources of each article were included in the analysis.[33] The coding of source affiliation was based on the affiliation that the sources were presented with in the articles. For example, sources were coded as “right-wing extremist” when they were defined as such in an article, either by journalists or other quoted sources. The sample was coded in SPSS by the author. A second coder was trained for testing and re-coded a randomly drawn sample making up ten percent of the total codings. The intercoder reliability score for the source affiliation variable was 0.787 (Cohen’s Kappa).

In order to explore i) the content and context of quotes by actors deemed right-wing extremist (70 articles) and ii) how the boundaries of legitimate debate were negotiated, a qualitative reading of a selection of the sample was conducted (91 articles). To explore the content and context of quotes by right-wing extremist actors, all items where right-wing extremists were quoted were selected (70 articles). The items were then read, focusing on the topic of the item, where in the item right-wing extremist actors were quoted (i.e., in the title, lead, middle, or end of the item), whether there were other sources quoted in the item, whether/how other sources engaged with the views of right-wing extremists, as well as the content of the quotes of right-wing extremists.

To explore how the boundaries of legitimate debate were negotiated, the items were selected when one (or

more) of the following key topics were present: items including statements or discussions of where to draw the lines of appropriate debate, items concerning the limits between extreme and legitimate views and actors, and items concerning how extremism should be dealt with in public debates. This resulted in a sub-sample of 91 articles that were read and analyzed by the author. The author read through the material several times, and categorized the material in the three key themes presented in the analysis (boundaries of inclusion into “mainstream” public debates; how to debate the views behind the July 22 attacks, and links between extremist and legitimate political ideas).

### ***Analysis***

Exploring how right-wing extremism was reported and debated and how boundaries of legitimate debate were negotiated in Norwegian news media in the decade after the July 22, 2011 attacks, the following section first explores which voices were prominent in the reporting. Second, the section analyses the items concerning “metadebates” – that is, articles concerning normative ideals of public debate, where to draw the lines of appropriate debate and/or the limits between extreme and legitimate views and actors.

#### *Voices: “Contextualized Inclusion” of Right-wing Extremist Sources*

Identifying which voices were most prominent in news articles and op-eds, sheds light on where the boundaries of legitimate mainstream news debate were drawn, and which actors functioned as primary definers in debates on right-wing extremism.

**Table 1.** Sources Quoted per Source Category [34]

	<i>Main Source (n=340)</i>		<i>Overall Sources (n=846)</i>	
	n	%	n	%
Journalists/commentators	48	14.1	75	8.9
National politician position	30	8.8	78	9.2
Police security services	29	8.5	63	7.4
Police	28	8.2	70	8.3
Researchers/experts	27	7.9	85	10.0
National politician opposition	25	7.4	57	6.7
‘Right-wing extremists’	23	6.8	86	10.2
Lawyers	21	6.2	60	7.1
Victims <sup>[35]</sup>	20	5.9	57	6.7
Culture	18	5.3	45	5.3
NGOs	16	4.7	39	4.6
Local politicians	14	4.1	35	4.1

As shown in Table 1, and confirming extant research into sourcing patterns in news on (violent) extremism [36], the news debate was dominated by elite sources. This includes politicians (20 percent of all sources, 20 percent of main sources); the general police and the police security services (16 percent of all sources, 17 percent of main sources); researchers and experts (10 percent of all sources, 8 percent of main sources); and journalists (9 per cent of all sources, 14 percent of main sources). In other words, right-wing extremism was largely defined and discussed by judicial, political, and cultural elites. Notably, however, 10 percent of the quoted sources were actors deemed as being right-wing extremist. These actors were the main source in 7 percent of the articles that contained direct sources, and they were quoted in 20 percent of the articles (70 articles) in the sample. The most cited actors in this category include the July 22 perpetrator Anders Behring Breivik, Philips Manshaus (the perpetrator of an attack in Norway in August 2019), members of the Nordic Resistance Movement, and members of the group Soldiers of Odin. The findings imply that the news media did indeed include actors deemed illegitimate, and who held views that can be placed within the sphere of deviance.

[37] This indicates that newsrooms practices were in line with the so-called “pressure-cooker thesis” in relation to inclusion of deviant voices, arguing the need to invite deviant voices in so that they can be countered.[38] Although the two analyzed news outlets share many similarities in terms of sources, there are also some differences that are worth commenting on: In *VG*, ‘national politicians in position’ made up the largest source category (55 quotes in *VG*, making up 70.5 percent of the total source category). In *NRK*, experts/researchers made up the largest source category (49 quotes, making up 57.6 percent of the total source category). More notably, however, actors deemed right-wing extremists are to a larger extent included in *NRK* than in *VG* (52 quotes in *NRK*, 33 in *VG*, entailing that 12.6 percent of the quoted sources in *NRK* were right-wing extremists, compared to 7.7 percent in *VG*). This variation can hardly be interpreted as two completely different strategies regarding inclusion of extremist voices. However, it is arguably noteworthy that the public service broadcaster *NRK* practiced a somewhat more inclusive strategy than the tabloid *VG*.

The analysis of quoted sources in op-eds and commentaries shows a somewhat different picture than the overall source analysis. As seen in Table 2, actors deemed extremist were *not* participating in the news outlets’ op-eds sections. The opinion format was characterized by a narrower selection of (elite) sources, including journalists (commentaries), NGOs and researchers (op-eds).

**Table 2.** Main Sources in Op-Eds and Commentaries (n= 87)

	n	%
Journalist/commentator	35	40.2
NGOs	10	11.5
Expert/researcher	9	10.3
Culture	8	9.2
Think tank	6	6.9
Politician opposition	6	6.9

To explore the ways in which actors deemed extremist were included in the news, a qualitative reading of the articles where extremists were quoted was conducted, focusing on the content of the quotes and the contexts in which they were invited in to speak (70 articles). This analysis shows that the news media conveyed extremists’ explanations in court cases, and that “right-wing extremists” were granted space to speak about their views and ideology, to criticize “the establishment”—including mainstream politicians and news media—and to redefine the ways in which they were categorized by journalists (i.e., claiming that they were not Nazi or racist, but were “honoring the Nordic culture”). The quotes were often relatively short and frequently placed at the end of an article. Yet, “right-wing extremists” were occasionally quoted more at length, especially in articles exploring more in-depth the views of particular groups or milieus. The contextualization of the articles clearly established the deviance of these actors, labelling them as “militant”, “violent”, “neo-nazi” and/or “right-wing extremist”. Moreover, rather than working as primary definers in the articles, extremist actors were mainly responding or reacting to claims from other (elite) sources. In sum, while extremist actors were granted space to speak about their views and defend themselves against criticism, the contextualization established them as deviant, and elite actors defined the premises for the debate. In sum, newsroom practices can thus be regarded as a form of “contextualized inclusion”, on the one hand including extremist voices, while, on the other hand, characterising extremist actors as deviant, illegitimate, and potentially dangerous. This insight is corroborated by the analysis of sources in the op-ed sections (above) – where the news outlets include deviant voices in formats where there is room for journalistic contextualization, while reserving the op-ed sections for views that are deemed as legitimately up for debate (“the sphere of legitimate controversy”). (However, it should be noted that the analyzed data do not include information on which actors that actually submitted op-eds).

### *Debating the Debate*

The following section focuses on the meta-debate. The analysis is based on articles (91 in total) where the main focus was on how to draw the lines of appropriate debate, the limits between extreme and legitimate views and

actors, and how extremism should be dealt with in public debate. In order to shed light on characteristics of these debates, this section focuses on who the sources in these meta-debates were (content analysis), which topics were discussed and how boundaries of appropriate debate were drawn and debated (qualitative close reading of the articles).

*Primary Definers of what is Deemed Legitimate and what is Deemed Deviant in Public Debates*

As Table 3 shows, the key sources in the metadebates were politicians (35.6 percent of the sources), journalists and commentators (16.1 percent), actors from the cultural realm (10.2 percent) and researchers (8.5 percent).

**Table 3.** Sources in Meta-Debate (n=236)

	n	%
Journalist/commentator	38	16.1
National politician position	37	15.7
National politician opposition	24	10.2
Culture	24	10.2
Local politician	23	9.7
Researcher/expert	20	8.5
NGOs	18	7.6
Victims	15	6.4
'Right-wing extremist'	9	3.8
Think tank	6	2.5

We can conclude that primarily the political and cultural elites engaged in discussions concerning the boundaries of appropriate debates and the limits between legitimacy and deviance. Actors deemed extremist were only to a very small extent part of this meta-debate.

*Negotiating the Boundaries of Legitimacy and Deviance*

A further question concerns *the content* of the meta-debates, including where the line between legitimacy and deviance, between appropriate and inappropriate debate were drawn. The qualitative reading of the articles concerning meta-debates shows that the following key themes were prominent in the period of analysis: which actors and views should be invited into “mainstream” public debates; how to debate the views behind the July 22 attacks, and the links between extremist and legitimate political ideas.

*Boundaries of Inclusion*

The first strand of debate, concerning which actors and views should be invited into “mainstream” public debates, focused in particular on boundaries of inclusion in public spaces and at public events. These debates focused on whether political organizations, actors and parties that were deemed (by some) to be right-wing extremist and hostile towards immigration should be allowed to participate in “legitimate” public and political arenas. This included debates on whether the political party Alliansen should be allowed to participate at an annual political festival, whether an Oslo bookstore should allow Martin Sellner (an Austrian deemed right-wing extremist) to speak at an event, and whether the Norwegian Free Speech Foundation should have granted a scholarship to the blogger Fjordman (who inspired Anders Behring Breivik).[39] Apart from the latter, these debates were not directly related to the July 22 attacks. Interestingly, in contrast to the period in the immediate aftermath of the attacks [40], and to media reporting of violent extremists in general [41] only very few articles dealt with the issue of how established news media should report right-wing extremism, including whether actors holding extremist views should be invited in to speak.

Overall, in these boundary negotiations the news outlets largely played the part as an arena to put forward

and debate different arguments concerning what constitutes a legitimate and healthy public debate, and how extremism should be dealt with. The debates featured differing views on whether or not deviant actors should be invited. There were those holding that deviant voices should be invited in so that they could be met with counter voices, and there were others arguing that inclusion equals legitimization of deviant actors and their ideas.[42] As such, these debates can be seen as routine ways in which established news media serve as an arena where (elite) actors negotiate the boundaries of free speech and appropriate debate, while simultaneously demarcating the boundaries between legitimacy (i.e., those who participate in the boundary negotiations) and deviance (i.e., those who are in the focus of the boundary negotiations).

### *Debating the Views Behind the July 22 Attack*

A second (and relatively large) part of the meta-debate specifically concerned the July 22 attacks. Since 2013, there have been voices, particularly from the Labor Party, repeatedly calling for the need to properly discuss and denounce the views and ideas behind the attacks. These voices emphasized that while Norwegian society (“we”) had denounced the attacks and the perpetrator, the attitudes behind the attack had never been properly discussed or denounced. For instance, in March 2013 then-Labor Party Youth (Arbeidernes Ungdomsfylking - AUF) leader Eskil Pedersen was quoted in VG as saying that: “if there is one thing that we haven’t come far enough with since July 22, it is to denounce extremism. [...] I and AUF have tried to bring it up, but we have been met with silence from the political parties and from the media”.[43] In July 2014, Raymond Johansen, then-Party Secretary of the Labor Party, wrote in an *NRK* op-ed that:

Norway has denounced the acts, but we also need to denounce his [Anders Behring Breivik] ideas. We can discuss how common they are, but they do exist. [...] Immediately after the attack there was broad consensus that we should form a collective political front against what happened and what the perpetrator stood for, but at the same time it was a silent consensus that time had not come to take the broader debate on those in the Norwegian society who share many of the perpetrator’s ideas/views.[44]

In July 2018, Labor Party politician and survivor of the Utøya attacks, Kamzy Gunaratnam, said to *NRK* that: “we haven’t really gone into what happened [...] Let us call what happened for what it was – a racist motivated attack. It was racism, Breivik was a racist, and there is a lot of everyday racism in Norway. But how many dare to say that?”[45] Apart from the occasional researcher and commentator forwarding similar claims, the claims were, as the quotes illustrate, largely forwarded by Labor Party politicians, including survivors of the 2011 attacks. Interestingly, these claims concerning the need to denounce the ideas behind the attacks were rarely met with counter claims and they did not lead to a broader discussion on how society should deal with the ideas behind the attacks. In other words, the claims were more often than not met with silence. This may be the result of the claims lacking a clear recipient. While the claims could be read as a critique of specific actors within the sphere of legitimacy, including the Progress Party, the recipient(s) was not clearly spelled out. Simultaneously, the lack of response to the claims may also to some extent confirm the notion that mainstream politicians and media indeed were not willing to debate the issue – indicating how the debate becomes more complicated when criticism goes beyond the views and actors that society agrees are deviant. In other words, while society, including established news media and mainstream politicians, may engage in “collective rituals”, standing united against “a common enemy” [46], the debate becomes more complex and more sensitive when the common “we” breaks up and criticism goes beyond the perpetrator and those “we” agree are deviant. That is, when the debate is no longer directed at actors within the sphere of deviance, such as the July 22 perpetrator, but rather includes actors within the sphere of (full and partial) legitimacy.

### *Links Between Legitimacy and Deviance*

The previous point is underlined by the third key strand of the meta-debate in the decade after the July 22 attacks – a debate on the relationship between right-wing extremism and the right-wing populist Progress Party which raised questions concerning the boundaries between mainstream, legitimate views and deviant extremist views. Previous research has shown that the Progress Party’s rhetoric on immigration and Islam

became part of the media debate in the months after the attack, and as a consequence, the Progress Party had to some extent adjust its rhetoric, albeit for a limited period of time.[47] In the period analyzed here, this strand of debate first occurred after the parliamentary election in 2013, securing the Progress Party a place in a coalition government with the Conservative Party. After the election, international media (as opposed to Norwegian news media), foregrounded the Progress Party's connection to the July 22 perpetrator Anders Behring Breivik (who had been a member of the Progress Party Youth and the Progress Party from 1997-2007). The linking of the party with Breivik (and right-wing extremism more generally) led to an effort from the Progress Party, directed at international news media, to clarify their stance and point out important differences between their views and the views of Breivik. Although international media's focus on the link between the Progress Party and extremism – and the Progress Party's active effort to distance themselves from right-wing extremism – did receive attention in Norwegian news media, there was a broad consensus among Norwegian experts and commentators quoted in national media that international news reporting was biased and operating with too broad definitions of terms such as “far-right” and “extremism”. In other words, there was an apparent consensus that there were indeed important differences between the Progress Party and those engaged in far-right rhetoric, and that it was in any case not the right time to discuss possible similarities. In sum, from the perspective of Norwegian news debates, it seems that the boundaries between the governing Progress Party (holding views presented as part of the sphere of legitimate controversy) and deviant, far right rhetoric (views that are placed within the sphere of deviance) were clear enough and not up for debate. With very few exceptions, the linking of right-wing extremism with the Progress party was absent from the debate until the fall of 2019.

In August 2019, right-wing extremist Philip Manshaus killed his stepsister (because she had been adopted from China), and then attacked a mosque in Bærum, outside of Oslo. The attack reignited debates concerning the rhetoric of the Progress Party, particularly the party's use of the term “creeping Islamization” (“snikislamisering”). In August 2019, Oslo City Council Leader Raymond Johansen, criticized the Progress Party and their use of the term “creeping Islamization”, linking it to the Bærum attacks [48]. This criticism was echoed when in September 2019, a politician from the Liberal Party, Abid Raja, wrote in an op-ed that “the rhetoric of the Progress Party stinks”, adding that the term “creeping Islamization” could be understood as right-wing extremist and calling it “brown intimidation propaganda.”[49] Raja went on to say that “we will be loud and clear every time Siv Jensen or Sylvi Listhaug [Progress Party leaders] present brown propaganda. The Liberal Party will no longer be silent. To be silent is to concur. And going forward, I refuse to concur.”[50] The Liberal Party leader Trine Skei Grande supported Raja – though saying to VG that she was not happy that Abid Raja used the term “brown” about the Progress Party's rhetoric, adding that she found the party's rhetoric reprehensible. [51] However, apart from Skei Grande's support, the op-ed received massive criticism and led to extensive news attention. In particular, Raja was criticized for using the term “brown”, a term associated with Nazism (Norway had been occupied by Hitler's Germany during World War II), to categorize the Progress Party's rhetoric. This forced Raja to clarify his stance, and explain that his use of the term did not mean to denote Nazism. Thus, the debate largely focused on the use of the term “brown” rather than on the use of the term “creeping Islamization”. However, while the Progress Party defended its use of the term “creeping Islamization”, leading politicians from both sides of the political spectrum, including the Conservative Party, denounced the Progress Party's use of the term.

In sum, this debate shows that interconnections between the spheres of deviance and legitimacy were discussed at least to some extent. However, the analysis also illustrates how such boundary negotiations are more sensitive, more demanding to raise and harder to agree upon when they concern actors within the political mainstream. Moreover, the 2019 debate suggested that the apparent consensus about abstaining from discussing boundaries between mainstream views and deviant far-right rhetoric had been broken. The 2019 attack, carried out by a right-wing extremist, arguably served as a “window of opportunity” to again set the issue on the agenda and discuss interconnections between deviance and legitimacy.

## **Conclusion**

By analyzing the ways in which right-wing extremism was reported and debated in Norwegian news media between 2013-2019, the article provides insights into how boundaries of legitimacy and deviance are drawn

and negotiated *after* the focus on communal and judicial responses to an attack have diminished.

A comparison of the number of articles shows that right-wing extremism was covered relatively sparsely compared to the attention granted to extremist Islamism, in at least parts of the period analyzed.[52] Simultaneously, however, the topic did receive continuous attention, indicating that Norwegian newsrooms, criticized immediately after the attacks for having ignored (online) right-wing extremism and anti-Islamism, [53] persisted to put resources into monitoring and reporting right-wing extremist actors. On the one hand, the findings suggest that newsrooms practices were in line with the so-called “pressure-cooker thesis”, including deviant voices and inviting extremist voices into the debate so that they could be met with counter voices. Yet, on the other hand, extremist actors were contextualized in a way that clearly marked them as deviant. Therefore, confirming findings from other research on the period after the attacks [54] and the reporting of extreme Islamism [55], this analysis shows that while actors deemed right-wing extremist were indeed granted a voice in the reports, they were not granted a role as primary definers. Moreover, extremist actors were often responding to and/or defending themselves against comments or criticism from elite sources. Therefore, newsroom practices may be regarded as a form of “contextualized inclusion”, informing citizens on anti-democratic and potentially violent forces, while simultaneously marking out clear boundaries between legitimate and deviant views and actors. This approach can be said to be both different from and have similarities to the approach taken by Norwegian newsrooms in the months immediately after the 2011 attacks. Deviant voices were to some extent included (and contextualized) also in the months after the attacks. However, a comparison of the present study with studies from the first months after the attacks suggests that deviant voices were included in an even more controlled and contextualized fashion in 2011 than in the decade that followed.[56]. In other words, journalism over time returned from a crisis and consensus phase to “regular, day-to-day” reporting, including newsroom practices and a public mood that were less sensitive to a broader range of voices. This shift is also illustrated by the absence of meta-debates focusing specifically on the news media, indicating that, although issues related to the 2011 attacks remained sensitive topics of debate, during the period analyzed, newsroom practices of inclusion to right-wing extremist voices were largely in line with the climate of opinion regarding the appropriate boundaries of debate.[57]

Clearly establishing the deviance of violent, anti-democratic and/or xenophobic views and rhetoric can be regarded as a key function of the normative duties of journalism in democracy. However, there is a risk that news attention may serve to further the legitimacy of leaders of extremist groups.[58] Moreover, and as elucidated by the qualitative analysis, sharp boundaries between legitimacy and deviance may contribute to making it difficult to raise public debates on possible links between, and similarities in, the rhetoric and views of deviant versus legitimate actors. In the period analyzed, boundaries of appropriate debate and the limits of inclusion of deviant actors in public debates were regularly negotiated (by elites). Meta-debates first concerned the extent to which actors deemed extremists should be invited into mainstream public debate and, second, the boundaries or links between the views of legitimate, mainstream actors—such as parliamentary political parties—and views deemed extremist. The analysis shows how this latter topic, concerning the links between legitimate political actors and extremist views, was more demanding to discuss as (elite) consensus disintegrated and criticism was no longer directed exclusively at those actors that society could “agree” are deviant. Raising discussions concerning ideas that were not violent, but that could nevertheless be linked to the ideas behind the July 22 attacks remained challenging throughout the period analysed. It proved hard to move beyond the initial societal narrative about our common response to the attacks (which foregrounded that “we” as society and democracy were attacked by a terrorist and needed to take a common stand against terrorism and violent extremism).[59] These findings suggest that societal trauma makes it particularly challenging to discuss possible similarities in the views and rhetoric of extremists and more legitimate (elite) political actors. In sum, if one regard positions on immigration as placed on a continuum ranging from moderate (legitimate and non-violent) to extreme (deviant and violent) positions, both legitimate and extremist positions were indeed included in mainstream news debate. However, possible links between these remained a sensitive topic.

*About the Author:* Anna Grøndahl Larsen, PhD, is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Media and

Communication, University of Oslo. Her research interests include political communication and journalism, comprising topic such as extremism, terrorism and the media.

## Notes

- [1] On July 22, 2011 Anders Behring Breivik first set off a car bomb in the Government District in Oslo, killing eight and wounding more than 200. Breivik then drove to Utøya, a small island outside of Oslo, where the Labor Party Youth held its annual summer camp. Here he opened fire, killing 69 persons, most under the age of 18, and wounding more than 100 others. The attacks were thus directly aimed at the Labor Party. Breivik was arrested while still on Utøya. The trial against Breivik took place in the Oslo District Court from April to June 2012. In August 2012 Breivik was sentenced to 21 years of preventive detention in prison. The analyses conducted in this article focus on the years *after* the attack, the court case and the sentencing (2013-2019). At the time of the attacks in 2011, the Labor Party led a coalition government together with the Socialist Left Party and the Centre Party. After the election in September 2013, The Conservative Party joined a coalition government with The Progress Party. In January 2018, the Liberal Party joined the coalition and in January 2019, the Christian Democratic Party joined the coalition.
- [2] Elisabeth Eide, Maria Kjølstad & Anja Naper (2013), "After the 22 July Terror in Norway: Media Debates on Freedom of Expression And Multiculturalism," *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 2: pp. 187–196; Tine U. Figenschou & Audun Beyer (2014), "The Limits of the Debate: How the Oslo Terror Shook the Norwegian Immigration Debate," *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 19: pp. 430–452; Tine U. Figenschou & Kjersti Thorbjørnsrud (2017). "Disruptive Media Events: Managing Mediated Dissent in the Aftermath of Terror," *Journalism Practice* 11: pp. 942–959.
- [3] Figenschou & Beyer 2014, op. cit.; Figenschou & Thorbjørnsrud 2017, op. cit.
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- [5] Kjersti Thorbjørnsrud & Tine U. Figenschou (2018), "Consensus and Dissent After Terror: Editorial Policies in Times of Crisis," *Journalism*, 19(3): pp. 333-348.
- [6] Karoline A. Ihlebæk, Anders S. Løvlie & Henry Mainsah (2014), "Mer åpenhet, mer kontroll? Håndteringen av nettdebatten etter 22. juli [More openness, more control? Managing online debates after July 22]" *Norsk Medietidsskrift* 30(3): pp. 223–240.
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- [8] Thomas H. Eriksen (2014). "Who or What to Blame? Competing Interpretations of the Norwegian Terrorist Attack," *European Journal of Sociology*, 55(2): pp. 275-294; Figenschou & Beyer, op. cit.
- [9] Notaker 2021, op. cit. p. 125.
- [10] Hovden & Mjelde (2019), "Increasingly Controversial, Cultural, and Political: The Immigration Debate in Scandinavian Newspapers 1970–2016," *Javnost – The public*. DOI: 10.1080/13183222.2019.1589285.
- [11] Anniken Hagelund & Jens E. Kjeldsen (2021), "The Other Other. Representations And Rhetorical Estrangement Of Anti-Immigration Positions In Scandinavian Print Media, 1970 – 2016," *Poetics*. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2021.101529>
- [12] Hagelund & Kjeldsen 2021, op. cit.
- [13] For more on The Progress Party, see for example Ann-Cathrine Jungar & Anders Ravik Jupskås (2014), "Populist Radical Right Parties in the Nordic Region: A New and Distinct Party Family?" *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 37(3): pp. 215-238; Anders Ravik Jupskås (2015). *The Persistence of Populism. The Norwegian Progress Party 1973 – 2009*. PhD dissertation, University of Oslo (Ph.D. dissertation); Anniken Hagelund (2002). *The Importance of Being Decent. Political Discourse on Immigration in Norway 1970-2002*. Oslo: University of Oslo (PhD dissertation).
- [14] Anders Ravik Jupskås (2015, op. cit., pp. 200-201) noted that while the Progress Party favors stricter immigration policies, a key to the party's success is that it largely has avoided to frame immigration opposition in explicitly racist terms and that "the party leadership has cracked down on most members and representatives who have been linked to the extreme right". In a similar way, Anniken Hagelund (2002, op. cit., p. 175) has noted that while racism has been "an underlying theme in other party's relation to the party, mainstream political parties has been very reluctant to say that the Progress Party's or its representatives *are* racist".
- [15] Silje Nygaard (2020), "Boundary Work: Intermedia Agenda-Setting Between Right-Wing Alternative Media and Professional Journalism," *Journalism Studies*, 21(6): pp. 766-782.
- [16] Tine Figenschou & Karoline Ihlebæk (2019), "Challenging Journalistic Authority: Media Criticism in Far-Right Alternative Media," *Journalism Studies*, 20(9): pp. 1221-1237

- [17] Figenschou & Ihlebæk 2019, op. cit.
- [18] Nic Newman et al. (2020), *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2020*. Oxford: Reuters Institute.
- [19] See for example: SSB (2020). Holdninger til innvandrere og innvandring [Attitudes toward immigrants and immigration], Available at: <https://www.ssb.no/en/befolkning/statistikker/innvhold/aar/2020-12-14>
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- [23] Hallin 1989 op. cit.
- [24] Ian Taylor (2014). "Local Press Reporting of Opposition to the 2003 Iraq War in the UK and the Case for Reconceptualizing Notions of Legitimacy and Deviance," *Journal of War & Cultural Studies*, 7(1): pp. 36-53.
- [25] Larsen 2018, op. cit.; Figenschou & Beyer 2014, op. cit.
- [26] E.g. Alexander 2011, op. cit.; Luengo & Ihlebæk, op. cit.; Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou op. cit.; Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou, op. cit.; Anna Grøndahl Larsen and Tine Ustad Figenschou (2019), "Metajournalism and Media Critique: Responses to 'Extremist Voices' in the Digitalized News Landscape," *International Journal of Communication*, 13: pp. 5463-5482.
- [27] Luengo & Ihlebæk 2019, op.cit.
- [28] E.g. Alexander 2011, op. cit.
- [29] Luengo & Ihlebæk 2019, op. cit., p. 296.
- [30] Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou 2018, op. cit.
- [31] The trial against Breivik took place in Oslo District Court from April to June 2012, and in August 2012 Breivik was sentenced to 21 years of preventive detention in prison.
- [32] cf. Hallin 1986, op. cit.; Taylor 2014, op. cit.
- [33] Few articles included more than five sources. Of the total sample, 29 percent of the items included one source, 29 percent of the items included two sources, 17 percent included three sources, 10 percent included four sources, and 14 percent included five sources. Two items did not include any cited sources.
- [34] Other sources include religious spokespersons (1.4 percent), think tanks (1.2 percent), and judges (1 percent). The remaining source categories were below 1 percent.
- [35] This category includes individuals who have been the victims of extremist attacks and relatives of victims of attacks.
- [36] E.g. Larsen 2018 op. cit.; Jamie Matthews (2013). "News Narratives of Terrorism: Assessing Source Diversity and Source Use in UK News Coverage of Alleged Islamist Plots," *Media, War & Conflict* 6(3): pp. 295-310.
- [37] Cf. Taylor 2014, op. cit.
- [38] Cf. Larsen 2018, op. cit.; Eide et al. 2013, op. cit.
- [39] Peder Nøstvold Jensen, known as the blogger *Fjordman*, received extensive attention in Norwegian news media in the aftermath of the 22. July attacks. Anders Behring Breivik claimed *Fjordman* had inspired him, and he included several texts written by *Fjordman* in the so-called manifesto that he distributed shortly before he carried out the attacks. The Norwegian Free Speech Foundation's key justification for granting Nøstvold Jensen a scholarship to write a book, was his right-to-reply after the (negative) public attention he had received after the July 22 attacks.
- [40] E.g. Eide et al. 2014, op. cit., Ihlebæk et al. 2014, op. cit.; Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou 2018, op. cit.
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- [42] Cf. Eide et al 2014, op. cit.; Larsen 2018, op. cit.

- [43] VG (2013, 5. March). “Eskil Pedersen: - Ikke trygg på at PST har nok oversikt” [- Not confident that the security services have good enough overview].
- [44] Johansen, Raymond (2014, 15. July). “Ett oppgjør med holdningene” [A confrontation with the attitudes]. *NRK*
- [45]. *NRK* (2018, 21. July). «Utøya-overlevende: - Vi har ikke orket å ta ordentlig tak i det som skjedde» [Utøya survivor: - We have not really gone into what happened].
- [46] E.g. Enjolras op.cit.; Luengo & Ihlebæk 2019, op.cit.; Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou 2018, op.cit.
- [47] Figenschou & Beyer 2014, op.cit.
- [48] VG (2019, 15. August). “Raymond Johansen (Ap) om ‘snikislamisering’: - Et skremmebilde” [Raymond Johansen on ‘creeping islamization’].
- [49] In Norwegian, the term “brown”, used in this context, brings connotations to Nazism.
- [50] VG (2019, 17. September). “Abid Raja: - Det stinker av FrPs retorikk” [Abid Raja: - The Progress Party’s rhetoric stinks].
- [51] VG (2019, 18. September). “Trine Skei Grande: - Jeg vil ikke be om unnskyldning” [Trine Skei Grande: - Jeg doesn’t want to apologize].
- [52] cf. Larsen 2018, op. cit.
- [53] Cf. Figenschou & Beyer 2014, op. cit
- [54] Ibid.
- [55] Larsen 2018, op. cit.
- [56] Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou 2018 op. cit. p. 341; Figenschou & Beyer 2014 op. cit.
- [57] See for example Jenkins & Tandoc 2017, op. cit., and Larsen & Figenschou 2019, op. cit. for analyses of public metadepates concerning the media’s inclusion of extremist actors and voices.
- [58] See for example Philip Baugut & Katharina Neumann (2019), “How Right-Wing Extremist Use and Perceive News Media,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 96(3): pp. 696-720; Larsen 2016, op.cit.
- [59] Notaker 2021, op.cit., showed how members of the Labor Party in the fall of 2011 sought, but largely failed, to raise a broader debate concerning links between “mainstream” and non-violent views on immigration and the ideas behind the July 22 attacks (violent extremist views on immigration).