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Unpacking the Norwegian Paradox

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Abstract

Fossil energy is the primary driver of global warming, the 2021 IPCC report establishes once and for all that human activity is changing the climate in unprecedented ways. Calls for action have included appeals to fossil fuel-producing countries to end further oil and gas development and start the transition to renewable energy. In Norway, one of the world's top producers of oil and gas, the IPCC report was published during the parliamentary election campaign and brought the question of the future of oil and gas to the forefront of both political and public debate. This master thesis examines newspaper articles in Norway's most popular newspapers in the run-up to the parliamentary election in 2021 in order to uncover discourses present in the debate, the order of those discourses, and if the dominating discourse is challenged in a meaningful way. Through qualitative critical discourse analysis, the results reveal that the established narrative of "oil as the solution, not the problem" is still dominating the debate but is challenged in meaningful ways by dissenting voices, namely environmental organizations and "green" politicians.

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1. Introduction

In August 2021, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published its sixth assessment report on the physical science basis of climate change. The report is crystal clear; human activity is changing the climate in unprecedented ways, and changes in the earth's climate are observed in every region of the world and across the whole climate system (IPCC, 2021). The impacts are already visible, sea level rise, more frequent extreme weather, more frequent and intense droughts, heatwaves, and loss of Arctic Sea ice, to name a few. There is no doubt, overwhelming scientific consensus confirms that climate change is real and human-made. The challenge is how we address it. Countries have debated how to address climate change since the early 1990s and pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through the Kyoto agreement and later Paris climate accords. Still, experts are concerned that these pledges are not ambitious enough and that the action being taken is too little too late.

The 2021 IPCC report delivers, yet again, a stark warning to policymakers that without immediate large-scale action to reduce carbon pollution, limiting global warming close to 1,5 or 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels will be beyond reach (IPCC, 2021).

Policymakers all over the world will have to consider the urgency the report demands; this is especially true for fossil fuel-producing countries as the report calls for an immediate shift away from fossil fuels. UN Secretary-General A. Gutierrez delivered a forceful message to fossil-fuel-producing countries in his statement after the report was published; "This report must sound a death knell for coal and fossil fuels before they destroy our planet ... countries should also end all new fossil fuel exploration and production, and shift fossil-fuel subsidies into renewable energy" (Gutierrez, 2021)

In Norway, one of the world's top producers of oil and gas, the IPCC report was published during the parliamentary election campaign and brought the question of the future of oil and gas to the forefront of both political and public debate. Historically, Norway has positioned itself as an active contributor to the international climate regime while also maintaining broad public and political support for the oil and gas industry. This contradiction is often described as a paradox that places Norway in a position of tension between the economic interest of the oil and gas industry and commitments to global reduction targets. With warnings from

scientists intensifying, this position has become increasingly challenged, and both the public and political debate regarding oil and gas policy and climate change has grown more critical.

1.1 Study area and research objectives

The context for this research is the Kingdom of Norway. Citizens of Norway enjoy a high standard of living and political and economic stability and report a greater trust in public institutions and politicians compared to other European countries (Transparency International Norge, 2021). Norway consistently ranks high on the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2019), and according to the Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, Norway is the fourth least corrupt country in the world (Transparency International, 2020). These rankings are subject to criticism due to what is measured and how. Despite its flaws, they are used to distinguish between “developed” and “developing” countries in terms of economy and industrialization. In this context, Norway is considered a highly developed country. On the Sustainable Development Goals Index, Norway currently ranks number six, with the key challenges listed as unsustainable consumption patterns, climate gas emissions, and the state of biodiversity (Sustainable Development UN, 2021). With the great focus on sustainability in development, it is easy to assume when looking at these rankings that Norway is on track to meet its climate goals. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) most recent environmental performance review, that is far from the case. At the current rate, Norway will not reach the target of a 55 percent cut in emissions by 2030, the report reads: “Despite progress in many areas, the country still faces multiple challenges, including sustainable consumption patterns and biodiversity protection” (OECD, 2022).

Norway enjoys a stable political and economic system, high levels of education, trust in political institutions, and an independent press and should be in a good position to successfully transition away from fossil fuels towards renewable energy in a peaceful and timely manner. The natural first step in the transition away from fossil fuels in Norway is to end oil and gas exploration. Although international climate agreements have been hesitant to include even the word “fossil fuels,” we have known for a while that it will not be possible to limit warming to 1,5 degrees if fossil fuels continue to dominate the global energy market. A recent study finds that, by 2050, “...nearly 60 percent of oil and fossil methane gas, and 90 percent of coal must remain unextracted to keep within a 1,5-degree carbon budget ...

furthermore, we estimate that oil and gas production must decline globally by 3 percent each year until 2050. This implies that most regions must reach peak production now or during the next decade, rendering many operational and planned fossil fuel projects unviable” (Welsby et al., 2021). The International Energy Agency (IEA) flagship report from 2021 echoes these findings and suggests that new oil and gas exploration needs to stop immediately to have a chance of limiting global warming (IEA, 2021). Coal, oil, and gas caused 86% of CO₂ emissions in the past decade (IPCC, 2021), so why are policymakers so hesitant to admit that fossil fuels are the problem?

Powerful economic interest and lobbying from oil and gas companies play a critical role. Another possible answer is the framework, or context, under which climate policy is produced. Popular responses to climate change have been criticized because they have been created within the framework of the neoliberal political economy and rely too much on market mechanisms (MacNeil & Paterson, 2012., Klein, 2014). Examples of this include putting a price on carbon and emission quotas through markets which Norway has been a vocal advocate for in international climate negotiations. Central to the neoliberal political economy is the goal of continued economic growth, as the threat of climate change became clearer during the 1990s, policymakers were able to construct a powerful narrative, that of sustainable development, which insists that economic growth and environmental protection are not just compatible, but that economic growth is the solution to environmental problems. The fact that Norway advocates for neo-liberal policies regarding emissions mitigation may, at first glance, seem uncharacteristic as most of Norway’s fiscal, education, and healthcare systems are not based on neoliberal principles such as privatization and market mechanisms. Anker (2016) and Sæther (2017) both argue that the motivation behind Norway's support of these flexible mechanisms is to protect the economic interests of the oil and gas industry, this will be further discussed in chapter two.

Because Norway has accumulated enormous wealth from oil and gas, it would be a powerful signal effect to the rest of the world if Norway decided to end future oil exploration and scale down production. A few countries have already committed to ending fossil fuel extraction within a certain timeline, so far including Denmark, Costa Rica, Sweden, Wales, and France (BOGA n.d.), but none of these countries produce nowhere near as much as Norway does. However, the fact that more policymakers in fossil fuel-producing countries are communicating that the fossil fuel era must come to an end is a sign that the tide is beginning

to turn. For this transition to occur, transformation is required on many levels, from the political to the personal. Transformation in the context of climate change entails “... substantial, profound, and fundamental change, which requires a paradigm shift in how we relate to and manage the environment» (Massarella et al., 2021), the concept itself can be more generally defined as significant changes in form, structure, and/or meaning-making (Leichenko & O’Brien, 2019). The process of transformation is multidimensional, meaning that it requires changes across different dimensions. This is well illustrated by Leichenko & O’Brien (2019) three spheres of transformation framework. This model considers transformation as a continuous process that involves interrelated changes across three dimensions; the practical, political, and personal spheres, the interacting spheres depict how changes in form, structure, and meaning making together contribute to the transformation process (Leichenko & O’Brien, 2019). The practical sphere focuses on sustainability outcomes through changes in form, actions, and activities that are often aimed at the realization of measurable results and goals, such as lower emissions (*ibid.*). The political sphere refers to; “... social and cultural norms, institutions and governance systems that shape behaviors, actions and investments” (*ibid.*). It is the personal sphere of transformation that is most relevant to this research. This sphere represents changes in meaning making and represents both individual and shared understandings and assumptions about the world, which influence interpretations, constructions, and perceptions of reality (O’Brien, 2018).

Changes in the personal sphere can occur, worldviews, values, and beliefs are not static, but they are often considered the most challenging to transform (*ibid.*). Shared beliefs, values, and worldviews are used to justify policies and action, which in turn may reinforce existing beliefs and worldviews (*ibid.*) Challenging dominant narratives is one way to facilitate transformation, according to O’Brien (2018): “... challenging assumptions, questioning beliefs, and exploring alternatives lead to more expansive and inclusive worldviews that can potentially transform dominant paradigms and models of reality”. The media can have an important role when it comes to changes in the personal sphere. Changes in the climate are observed and constructed primarily by scientists, whose results can be complex and difficult for many people to understand, the media, or journalists, has therefore become “translators” of complex data and science so it can reach a bigger audience. Although the science on how human activity is influencing the climate is clear, there is no consensus as to how to act on it, the media is an important arena for debating which policies and actions are appropriate. It is well documented that mass media influences our beliefs, values, and worldviews and,

therefore, our social reality (Arendt, 2010.; Mosharafa, 2015, Schafer, 2015), but the media also reflects that reality.

Based on these reflections, my research objective is:

To investigate discourses in newspaper articles about climate change and oil policy in the run-up to the Norwegian parliamentary election in 2021 in order to engage in a critical discussion regarding the order of discourses and if the dominant discourse is challenged in a meaningful way.

1.2 Research questions

1. Which discourses can be identified in newspaper articles about climate change and oil policy in the run-up to the Norwegian parliamentary election in 2021?
2. How is the conflict between oil production and climate change portrayed within these discourses?

This question will be answered by conducting a critical discourse analysis of selected newspaper articles from between 1. August to 13. September 2021.

1.3 Reading Guide

This thesis consists of six chapters in total. Following this chapter is a rather extensive background chapter which I chose to include because of its relevance to both the methodology (social dimension) and the reflective discussion about the findings. I believe that understanding Norway's oil (and climate) history and how oil and climate policy became separated during the 1990s is crucial to understanding the nature of the debate today. In chapter three, I will present the main theoretical and methodical framework of this thesis, discourse theory, and critical discourse analysis. In the following chapter, the methodology is expanded upon before I present the analysis and findings in chapter five, followed by a reflective discussion and conclusions. Parts of this thesis is inspired by and built upon shorter essays I have written in my time as a student, some overlap is expected, but this thesis is my work if not otherwise stated.

2. Background and Literature Review

“It is not just oil and gas being extracted from the bottom of the sea: It is healthcare, education, pensions, childcare, research funding, and jobs”

-Norwegian Oil and Gas Association (cited in: Lahn 2019)

2.1 History of Norwegian oil and gas policy

The Ekofisk oil field discovery on the Norwegian Continental Shelf (NCS) in late December 1969 became the starting point to what is often described as the Norwegian oil adventure, the management of Norway’s oil resources quickly became established as a major political issue (Lahn, 2019; Sæther, 2017; Sejersted, 1999). At an early stage, ensuring national control over the petroleum industry became a consensus position in Norwegian politics (*ibid.*). A set of recommendations, popularly referred to as the “ten oil commandments,” laid out by the parliamentary industry committee in 1971 provide a good summary of the overall direction of the political management and legislation of petroleum activity that followed (Ryggvik et al., 2020; Sæther, 2017: 15). The overarching goal was to develop a “petroleum policy with the aim of utilizing the natural resources on the Norwegian continental shelf so that it benefits the whole of society” (Inst. S. nr. 294 (1970-71), s.632). The first “commandment” stated that “National management and control must be ensured for all activities on the Norwegian continental shelf” (*ibid.*); the committee, therefore, recommended that a state-owned oil company should be established with the objective to develop an “integrated Norwegian oil environment” meaning that Norwegian industry should master all links in the oil production chain (*ibid.*).

New legislation and institutions had to be built from scratch in the years that followed. The work that was done in the early 1970s laid the foundation for what has become known as the “Norwegian Model” of petroleum management (Al-Kasim, 2006), where the operational responsibility for oil policy was divided between three distinct government bodies: “a ministry (now the Ministry for Petroleum and Energy, MPE), a directorate (The Norwegian Petroleum Directorate, NPD) and a vertically integrated state-owned company (formerly Statoil, in 2018 renamed Equinor)” (Lahn, 2019: 10).

A primary concern and topic of political debate during the 1970s was the fear of “overheating” the economy if the petroleum industry expanded too quickly; a government white paper from 1974 titled “The Role of Petroleum Activities in Norwegian Society” therefore introduced a goal of moderate pace in oil extraction (Lahn, 2019; Sæther, 2017: 19). The Ministry of Finance recommended a figure of 90 million tons of oil equivalent per year, which later became politically established as a limit for production (Olsen, 1989: 86). As the industry expanded in the 1980s and new oil fields were discovered, this limit was challenged by both politicians and the industry itself. Therefore, a government commission proposed abandoning the goal of moderate pace in favor of stable investment levels (*ibid.*: 87). However, as the industry further expanded, it was seen as increasingly difficult to control both production and investment levels, and the idea of a buffer fund” was introduced (Olsen, 1989: 114). To separate oil revenues from other government revenues, a sovereign wealth fund was formally set up in 1990 to capture petroleum tax revenue with the official name “Government Pension Fund – Global,” popularly referred to as the “oil fund” (Lahn, 2019). Later, a fiscal policy rule was established to limit the amount of funds to be used through the national budget (*ibid.*). These policies were seen to address the concerns regarding a possible “overheating” of the economy, hence removing the need for a moderate pace in production; this allowed for a rapid expansion in licensing, exploration, and investments in the 1990s and 2000s (Lahn 2019); at its peak in 2004, production was almost 227 million tons, and while production has declined, we are still producing more than double of what the policymakers in the 1970s envisioned as an absolute maximum (Sæther, 2017: 522).

The rapid expansion led to strong growth in the overall economy and boosted public sector spending (Lahn, 2019); the petroleum industry has therefore become strongly linked to Norway’s wealth and high living standards. Today, the petroleum sector is Norway’s largest measured in terms of value-added, government revenues, investments, and export value and accounts for about 14 percent of Norway’s gross domestic product (NPD, 2022). In a report by Statistics Norway (SSB), it is estimated that the number of total employees in the petroleum industry, which includes both direct and indirect employees, in 2019 amounted to about 6 percent of total employment in Norway (Hugnes & Strøm, 2019). As a result of policies that have successfully captured a large share of oil revenue for the Norwegian public, oil and gas production has been widely seen as the main contributor to the Norwegian welfare

state, high standards of living and the provisioning and high standard of public services such as healthcare education, and childcare (Lahn, 2019).

2.2 A Paradox Emerges

Environmental concerns were part of both public and political debate when Norwegian petroleum policy was formulated during the 1970s; the ten “oil commandments” included a recommendation that the development of an oil industry should take place with due regard for the environment (Inst. S. nr. 294 (1970-71), 633-634). Environmental awareness was on the rise in the Norwegian public; the focus was mainly on ecological depletion, possible harmful effects of an increase in material consumption, and the risk to coastal communities and fisheries in case of an oil spill (Anker, 2016; Sæther, 2017). Especially one environmental organization, The Co-working Group for the Protection of Nature and the Environment, known in English literature as Deep Ecologists, was especially effective in setting the agenda for environmental debate in Norway during this time (Anker, 2016). With the discoveries of oil on the NCS, the deep ecologists protested exploration and argued that: “... oil and gas would take Norway further away from the deep eco-political path and instead towards the destructive forces of capitalism, economic growth and exploration of natural resources” (*ibid.*; 31). Tensions between the Deep Ecologist and the government intensified because of civil disobedience demonstrations against hydropower development at the Mardøla Waterfall in 1970 and at the Alta-Keitokeino waterway in 1979-81, and a major oil spill in 1977 from the “Bravo” platform, all of which received a lot of media coverage and public attention.

Anker (2016) argues that the tensions between the Deep Ecologists and the government created a need for a new narrative of environmentalism that was more compatible with the booming oil industry and economic growth in general. One prominent Labor politician, Gro Harlem Brundtland, who was Minister of the Environment from 1974-to 1979 and later would become Norway’s first prime minister, became a central figure in constructing this new narrative (Anker, 2016; Sæther, 2017). In the late 1980s, global warming and climate change entered the political agenda in Norway and abroad. After her first run as prime minister, Brundtland was asked to chair the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1984; the final report titled “Our Common Future,” popularly referred to as

the Brundtland report, was presented in 1987. The report spelled out the dangers of global warming and coined the problem as one of the world's chief environmental challenges (United Nations, 1987). The report presented a vision of economic growth as a necessary step toward solving environmental issues. Gomez-Baggethun & Naredo (2015) expounds: "The Brundtland report reframes environmental problems and solutions in a way that turns upside-down the understanding of the relation between growth and the environment that had guided sustainability reports over the 1970s. Growth is no longer presented as the culprit of ecological decline but as the solution to social and environmental problems". When Brundtland returned to Norway as Prime Minister in 1986, she was determined to act on climate change and wanted Norway to show the world the path towards a sustainable society.

Before the 1989 election, a government white paper titled "Environment and Development" laid out a vision of Norway as "a driving force" and "pioneer country" for sustainable development (St.meld. nr 46 (1988-89): 8). At the time, there was strong support across the political spectrum to limit Norway's greenhouse gas emissions and pursue similar limits for other countries through an international agreement (Lahn, 2019). Norway would, in the spring of 1989, become one of the first countries in the world to adopt a goal to stabilize CO₂ emissions, and a CO₂ tax was adopted in 1991, which included a tax on CO₂ emissions from oil and gas production on the NCS (Sæther, 2017). The CO₂ tax was heavily criticized by the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO) and the petroleum industry itself, and there was growing concern that an international agreement to reduce emissions would stand in the way of the development of new oil fields and possibly also reduce the oil demand all together (*ibid.*). NHO and the Norwegian state-owned oil company Statoil engaged in a massive lobbying campaign to influence policymakers to abandon the CO₂ stabilization target; Sæther (2017) describes the campaign as highly effective; "In the early 1990s we had a baking crisis, falling property prices, and rising unemployment. Norwegian society was therefore extra receptive to arguments about preserving Norwegian value creation".

This eventually resulted in a radical shift in Norway's position on climate policy both at home and abroad; the stabilization target was abandoned in favor of a so-called cost-effective climate policy that would rely on global emissions trading and flexible commitments (Lahn, 2019). Hovden & Lindseth (2004) identifies a change in discourses during this time from what they labeled "national action" to "thinking globally," and through discourse analysis, found that the petroleum industry, the business community, trade unions, the Conservative

party, and the Labour party actively employed the “thinking globally” discourse which became the dominant discourse in the 1990s. The “thinking globally” discourse was characterized by promoting cost-effective solutions in reducing emissions internationally and later also included promoting the use of the Kyoto Mechanism, such as carbon trading (Hovden & Lindseth 2004).

In the 1990s, leading up to the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio and the 1997 Kyoto meeting, Norway engaged in an intense diplomatic campaign to establish an emission market supported by the international regime (Anker, 2016). They failed to convince world leaders at the Rio Summit but ramped up efforts before the Kyoto meeting. Norwegian diplomats initiated several test projects to secure support from developing countries, coined Clean Development Mechanisms (CMDs), where countries with the means would pay for a clean development initiative in a developing country and then get credit for it in their carbon budget at home (*ibid.*). When the Kyoto Protocol was established, it was a win for Norway as they could secure support for both CMDs and carbon emission trading. In addition, focus on state responsibility was put on the demand side of fossil fuels rather than the supply side, and explicit mentions of fossil fuels were left out of the agreement altogether (Lahn 2019). As a result, the international climate regime now supported and legitimized Norway’s position and interest as a major oil and gas exporter while at the same time allowing the country to meet emission reduction targets. This further enabled and legitimized the decoupling of oil and gas policy from climate policy. During the 1990s and early 2000s, there was a massive increase in Norwegian oil investments and production, while at the same time, climate change was at the forefront of political debate. Still, the two issues continued to be discussed in separation (*ibid.*).

2.3 Current political fault lines

Twenty years ago, it would be unthinkable for a Norwegian political party to advocate for the end of new oil and gas exploration or even mention scaling back. Advances in climate science, ambitious targets set out by the international climate regime, and advocacy from environmental organizations have challenged the separation between oil and gas policy from climate policy. The two issues are no longer exclusively discussed separately in political and public debate, but there are still powerful industry actors and political parties that advocate

for continued separation, but this has become close to impossible due to the growing realization that fossil fuel consumption is the biggest threat to our climate.

Norway's two biggest political parties, the Labor Party, and the Conservative Party, both still advocate for and support a global approach to climate policy based on carbon trading and are strong supporters of oil and gas development (Lahn, 2019). Historically, Norwegian governments have been led by either the Labor party or the Conservative party in coalition with smaller parties, this has ensured stable and predictable policy conditions for the oil and gas industry (Sæther, 2017). Parties that are critical of further oil and gas development include the Socialist Left party, the Liberal party, the Christian Democrat party, the Red party, and the Green Party (Lahn, 2019). The Liberal Party has advocated for reforms of the petroleum tax system, arguing that the current system is encouraging too much investment in the oil and gas sector. The Socialist Left party is the largest political party to take an explicit position against new oil and gas exploration licenses and advocates for Norway to take initiative for an international agreement between oil and gas producing countries to scale down production. The Green party similarly advocates for the ending of exploration but goes further than the Socialist Left by arguing for a managed phase-out of the industry and an end date for Norwegian oil production (Lahn, 2019).

As governments are usually made up of a coalition of either the Labor or Conservative Party with smaller parties, the basic features of Norwegian oil and gas policy have been maintained, while smaller parties have only been able to win concessions involving restrictions on oil and gas exploration in certain areas, most notably the areas outside Lofoten, Vesterålen, and Senja (*ibid.*). The Labor Party's policy regarding oil exploration remains the same, but Lahn (2019: 21-22) points out that there is an increased level of debate within the party: "For the last few years, the party leadership has been struggling to strike a balance between its youth wing on the one hand, which supports ending licensing and establishing a deadline for phasing out Norwegian oil and gas production, and its strong membership base in industry unions on the other."

2.4 Public opinion

Many surveys and studies have documented Norwegians' attitudes to both climate change and the oil and gas industry. Here, I will present a selection of the most recent relevant findings.

A recent study from Policy, Expertise, and Trust (PERITA) founded by the EU, found that 24% of Norwegians do not believe that human activity increases global temperatures, and 61% believe that it is true (PERITA, 2022). A third of people in Norway are uncertain whether the last century's global increase in temperature was the largest in the past 1000 years and are the least worried about the impact of climate change in their country (*ibid.*) This makes Norway the most "climate skeptical" of the countries studied, which were Ireland, Italy, Poland, the UK, and Germany. When asked if respondents think oil companies are hiding technology that could make cars run without petrol or diesel, only 29% of Norwegians think this contrasts with 53% of Italians (*ibid.*) Norway is the only country where more people think this is false rather than true (*ibid.*). Associate professor at the Arctic University of Norway Truls Tunby Kristiansen commented on these findings in an NRK article shortly after it was published, he comments on the findings as "surprising," considering Norwegians generally have high trust in scientific research, but he also purposes that the conflict between fossil fuels and the climate can make it difficult for Norwegians to "take in" the realities of climate change (Grønning, 2022).

However, different findings stand in contrast to this study. A recent report from the Norwegian Centre for Climate Science (CICERO) studied developments in Norwegians' attitudes and perceptions of climate, climate policy and personal responsibility from 2018-2021. The study found that 8 out of 10 believe that the climate is changing, and 7 out of 10 believe that human activity is the cause of climate change (Aasen et al., 2022). 13% of respondents answered "neither or" to the claim that climate change is happening. Young people, in this study, anyone under 30, support the claim to a greater extent than respondents from other age groups, the same applies to women and respondents with higher levels of education (*ibid.*) Interestingly, there is also a tendency for increased disagreement with the statement the higher the respondent's income is reported to be (*ibid.*). It is reported that the majority believe that industries with high emissions have a responsibility to cut them and that Norway has a responsibility to cut emissions at home, not just abroad (*ibid.*). The majority are reported to feel personally responsible for reducing their own emissions and support climate policy: "The majority of the population believes that everyone has a responsibility to reduce greenhouse gas emissions: in 2021, 63% of respondents state that most people have a responsibility, 64% that businesses have a responsibility, 69% that politicians have a responsibility, and 51% believe that Norway has a responsibility, not just other countries" (Aasen et al., 2022: 10).

When it comes to oil production, 42% of respondents disagree with the statement that Norway should scale back production, this is a slight increase from 2019 when 39% of the respondents answered the same (*ibid.*). 29% is reported to answer that Norway should reduce oil production in both 2019 and 2021 (*ibid.*). Support for wind power both on land and at sea decreased drastically, in 2018, 65% of respondents said Norway should develop more wind power on shore, by 2021 this number is reduced to 33%. (*ibid.*). I believe that these studies reflect Norwegians' ambivalent relationship to climate change, most people understand that it is happening and caused by human activities, but they have trouble “taking it in” as it means reflecting on personal consumption habits and larger societal changes.

2.5 Literature Review

The focus of this research is on identifying discourses about oil and climate policy in relation to each other, I will argue that the study on environmental discourses is relevant because of how oil policy is debated in the context of climate change. Discourse analysis has become an increasingly established framework in environmental policy analysis and has contributed to a broader understanding of how we talk about environmental issues and how it affects environmental policy. The field has evolved to encompass a variety of conceptual approaches, methods, topics, and geographies (Feindt et al., 2019). Works published by Maarten A. Hajer (1995), Karen Litfin (1994), and John S. Dryzek (1997) paved the way for a multitude of studies on environmental discourses from local to global and across a wide variety of subjects (Feindt et al., 2019). John Dryzek’s book *The Politics of the Earth*, where he identifies discourses present in deliberations about environmental policies that are dominant in Europe, North America, Australia, and the global arena, is considered pioneering in the field of environmental discourses. Dryzek (2013) points out that discourses do not necessarily need to be articulated for them to be influential; sometimes, they can be so integrated into people’s mindsets that they are not even questioned. In Dryzek’s view, all environmental discourses depart from industrialism; this is illustrated through a taxonomy for organizing environmental discourses, defined according to two dimensions. He identifies four main categories of environmental discourses with nine discourses in total within this framework: 1) Global limits and their denial, 2) Solving Environmental Problems, 3) The Quest for Sustainability, and 4) Green Radicalism (Dryzek, 2013). Discourses identified by Dryzek (2013) include what he labeled: sustainable development discourse, economic

rationalism discourse, limits and survival discourse, green politics discourse, and administrative realism discourse.

Studies that cover discourses in Norwegian climate policy include one previously mentioned by Hovden & Lindseth (2004), which identified two main discourses: “thinking globally” and “national action.” Tellmann (2012) identified through a comprehensive discourse analysis of Norwegian climate policy from 1989 to 2008 three distinct discourses: the tax discourse, the quota discourse, and the technological discourse. Tellmann (2012) found that these discourses have, over time, partly overlapped and replaced each other, with the technological discourse being the dominant today. It is also pointed out that the ideas and ambitions that characterize the prevailing discourses in Norwegian climate policy are not necessarily reflected in actual policy; “... while they may be influential in early phases of policymaking, discourses lose influence in the phase when policy solutions are designed and implemented” (Tellmann, 2012). Research has also addressed specific parts of Norwegian climate policy, such as carbon capture and storage (Tjernshaugen, 2011), the gas debate (Tjernshaugen, 2007), and political actors (Gullberg & Skodvin, 2011), to name a few.

Retriever Norway, in collaboration with the Norwegian Agency for Development and Cooperation, published an analysis of the Norwegian press coverage of climate change from 2010-2020, which is worth expanding upon. First, approximately 3% of all news media coverage is in relation to climate change, in comparison, coverage of Donald Trump amounted to 3,6% (Retriever, 2020). The word “climate crisis” is the most used in mentions of climate change (*ibid.*). The report further identifies four categories dominant in climate journalism: first, the coverage that presents debate, conflict, and problematization, which makes up the largest part of the coverage, and second is coverage conveying proposals and requests for measures, third is coverage that conveys negative trends, and fourth is coverage that conveys positive trends (*ibid.*).

3. Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method

3.1 Discourse as Theory

Discourse is a term that has become widely used in scientific texts and debates, but there is no formal definition available as the term has different meanings depending on the context. Jorgensen & Phillips (2002; 1) provide what they describe as a common-sense definition: "... underlying the word discourse is a general idea that language is structured according to different patterns that peoples utterances follow when they take part in different domains of social life, familiar examples being medical discourse and political discourse". However, this definition does not clarify what discourses are, how they function, or how to analyze them. Therefore, more developed theories and methods of discourse analysis need to be sought out.

Most variations of discourse analysis incorporate insights from French Philosopher Michel Foucault, for whom "... discourse was a term that denoted the way in which a particular set of linguistic categories relating to an object and the ways of depicting it frame the way we comprehend that object. The discord forms a version of it. Moreover, the version of an object comes to constitute it" (Bryman, 2016; 531). For example, the discord concerning climate change makes up our concepts of what climate change is, why it is happening, what can be done to combat it, and who is best suited to create the guidelines for said action. The premise of discourse analysis is the rejection of the idea of universal truths and objective knowledge and that our access to reality is through discourse. Discourse analysis is underpinned by a social constructionist orientation to knowledge which rests on the assumption that physical reality is constructed from collaborative consensus rather than pure observation of that reality; "Our knowledge of the world should not be treated as objective truth. Reality is only accessible through categories, so our knowledge and representations of the world are not reflections of the reality out there, but rather are products of our ways of categorization of that world" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Another key premise of discourse analysis is that we are fundamentally cultural beings, our views and knowledge about the world are the products of historical and cultural realities, and these realities are contingent (*ibid.*). Discourse is a form of social action that plays a part in producing knowledge, identities, and social relations, thereby maintaining specific social

patterns (*ibid.*). The role of social processes is also emphasized in that knowledge is created through social interaction in which we construct shared truths and compete about what is true or false (*ibid.*). Another central claim of Foucault is that there is a link between knowledge and social action, meaning that the social construction of knowledge has social consequences. Within a particular worldview, some forms of action become natural and legitimate, while other forms of action can be seen as unthinkable. Thus, language is not just a neutral device for imparting meaning or simply a reflection of pre-existing realities, it constructs our knowledge, identities, and our social reality. That does not mean that reality itself does not exist, but it only gains meaning through discourse. For instance, the transformation of old plants into fossil fuels is a material event, but it is only given meaning when it is placed in a context,

3.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) serves as a label for a broader movement within discourse analysis, Norman Fairclough's approach is, according to Jorgensen & Phillips (2002), the most developed analysis model within discourse analysis. CDA draws on the theories and approaches of Foucault but stands out in some important areas. Central to Fairclough's approach is the idea that discourse is a social practice that both reproduces and changes knowledge, identities, and social relations, including power relations. This emphasis on change diverges from other approaches to critical discourse analysis, which assume a higher degree of stability (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). The notion of discourse within CDA is often defined more broadly than in more fine-grained approaches. Fairclough defines discourse as "language use conceived as social practice" (1995: 135). Discourse then contributes to the construction of 1) Social identities, 2) Social relations 3) systems of knowledge and meaning (Fairclough, 1992). Fairclough further identifies two dimensions of discourse that are important focal points for analysis; the communicative event and the order of discourse. He uses the term *communicative event* to describe any instance of language use, such as newspaper articles, a film, or a political speech (Fairclough, 1995). The order of discourse refers to the configuration of discourse types, meaning genres and discourses, within a social institution or a social field (*ibid.*). Jorgensen & Phillips (2002) expounds: "Within an order of discourse, there are specific discursive practices through which text and talk are produced and

consumed or interpreted ... in every discursive practice, that is the production and consumption of text and talk – discourse types are used in particular ways.”

Fairclough uses the terms intertextuality and Interdiscursivity to expound upon the interrelated and reproductive nature of discourse. Interdiscursivity refers to a situation where different discourses are articulated together in a communicative event: the shaping of a text's meaning by another text, this can occur through, for example, quotation or allusion. The degree of intertextuality and how it is employed can, through new articulations of discourses, change boundaries both within the order of discourse and between different orders of discourse (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). Jorgensen & Phillips (2002) refers to intertextuality as: "... the influence of history on a text and to a text's influence in history, in that text draws on earlier texts and thereby contributes to historical development and change". Change can occur by employing existing discourses in different ways, but the possibility for change can be limited by power relations.

One of the central claims of Foucault is that discourses create a constitutive relationship between knowledge and power in social relations. Fairclough (1992) introduces the terms hegemony and ideology to expand upon this notion and describe a constant discursive battle between various actors who want hegemony. The battle for hegemony between discourses is more about just having the best arguments, it is a battle between understandings of reality and how different terms should be understood. Ideological notions also contribute to the production and reproduction of discourses, this is because certain ideological notions have become so neutralized that they are no longer questioned (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). This facilitates a more critical understanding of power relations in the context of discourses and enables the researcher to uncover these power relations and question how ideologies contribute to maintaining these relations.

3.3 Fairclough's three-dimensional model

Fairclough (1992,1995) developed a model for critical discourse analysis, which is illustrated through a framework consisting of three interrelated categories in this model referred to as dimensions:

- Text
- Discursive practice

- Social Practice

Any discursive event, meaning any instance of discourse, consists of these dimensions, analysis of discourses should therefore focus on the linguistic features of the text, for example, linguistic devices, metaphors, grammar (text dimension), processes in relation to the production and consumption of the text (discursive practice), and the wider social practice to which the communicative event belongs (social practice) (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). People use language to produce and consume text, that text is then both shaped and is shaped by social practice and mediated by discursive practice (*ibid.*). A critical analysis of a communicative event would therefore include: First, an analysis of discourses and genres which are included in the production and consumption of the text. Then, a detailed analysis of the linguistic structure and considerations about whether the discursive practice reproduces or restructures the existing order of discourse, and further about what consequences this has for the broader social practice (*ibid.*). I will further expand upon these three dimensions in relation to my analysis material in the next section.

3.3.1 The Social Dimension

As previously stated, the social dimension refers to the wider social practice to which the communicative event belongs. Chapter two of this thesis provides an account of what is relevant to the social dimension in the context of this research. Understanding this context is crucial for anyone who wants to research discourses about climate change and oil policy in Norway. Norway's history as an “oil nation” and the notion that revenues from the oil and gas sector are the main contributor to the welfare state and high standards of living is a part of the country's identity. That makes it very hard to even debate a possible end date or phase down of production, even in the face of devastating changes to the climate.

In addition to the accounts provided in chapter two, it is also relevant for the purpose of this research to look at the state of press freedom in Norway and public trust in the media. Reporters Without Borders, an international watchdog group, tracks several indicators for press freedom, such as media independence, transparency, legislative framework, and political pluralism (Reporters without borders, 2022). Norway currently enjoys the number one ranking on their press freedom index for 2022, the organization sums up why: “Norway's legal framework safeguarding freedom of the press is robust. The media market is vibrant, featuring a strong public service broadcaster and a diversified private sector with publishing

companies guaranteeing extensive editorial experience” (*ibid.*), and further, “The constitution guarantees both freedom of expression and the right to public information ... On the whole, society and the state encourage independent journalism and the exchange of ideas” (*ibid.*). These conditions enable the media to fulfill their role in democracy, that is, to ensure the exchange of ideas, opinions, and information.

The Norwegian public generally has high trust in news media. “Mediatilsynet”, the Norwegian Media Authority, reported in a 2019 survey that 8 out of 10, or 83%, of the respondents, believed that the Norwegian press is generally to be trusted (Mediatilsynet, 2019). The same survey also asked how high trust the respondents had in news from different sources, with the most trusted being state-funded NRK (Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation), TV2, Aftenposten, local newspapers, Dagbladet, and VG (*ibid.*). A survey from 2022 reported that 63% of the public either has fairly high or very high confidence in the information presented in Norwegian news media regarding scientific findings and research in climate and environmental science, and only 12% reported fairly low or low trust (Mediaundersøkelsen, 2022).

3.3.2 The Discursive Dimension

The discursive context denotes the conditions of production, the textual norms, and the recipients the text is intended for, its focus is, therefore, on the production, distribution, and consumption of the text (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). In the context of this research, it will be relevant to expound upon the following.

The timeframe of this study, which is during an election, will affect the conditions of production under which the articles are produced. It is natural to assume that the election, policy in general, and discussion around it are devoted more time than in a usual news cycle. It is also likely that interest groups such as environmental groups and organizations under the “oil lobby” umbrella will work harder than usual to promote their case. The same applies to politicians across the political spectrum, although bigger parties are usually devoted more space. The timing of the 2021 IPCC report and increased pressure from the international climate regime will likely also contribute to more debate. It is my hope that analyzing the discourse of newspaper articles about climate and oil policy within this timeframe will give a deeper insight into a wider variety of voices and nuances in the debate.

Voices in the debate, referred to as actors, are also a point of analysis and are a part of the discursive dimension because who is included is mostly an editorial decision. Actors are identified based on either who is quoted in the article or who writes it. The genre of article is categorized as either an opinion piece or news article and is taken into consideration when conducting the analysis.

3.3.3 The Textual Dimension

The textual analysis in Fairclough's model draws upon linguistic traditions, and it places a much higher emphasis on linguistic and textual approaches in analysis than other variations of discourse analysis. Fairclough (1992: 73-78, 234-237) proposes a number of analytical tools with a particular interest in grammatical details, this will not be a focus of analysis. The textual part of this analysis will be focused on the use of different words, and metaphors in the context of certain themes that will be further elaborated on in the analysis. It is particularly interesting to look at how the use of certain words and metaphors are socially and ideologically motivated by different actor groups.

4. Methodology

Methodology concerns what approach is most appropriate to answer the research questions, in this case: 1) Which discourses can be identified in newspaper articles about climate change and oil policy in the run-up to the Norwegian parliamentary election in 2021? 2) How is the conflict between oil production and climate change portrayed within these discourses?

The nature of this research is qualitative in that it focuses on words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data, and the purpose of this research is to generate knowledge and create understanding rather than generalization (Bryman, 2016). Critical discourse analysis can be employed using both qualitative and quantitative designs, but the former is the most common (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). I have previously elaborated on why I believe discourse analysis is appropriate for this particular study; first, Fairclough's definition of discourse as social practice opens for a broader understanding of discourse and what it contributes to the construction of social identities and social relations, and knowledge systems. It also reflects attitudes and perspectives within a society, thus, analyzing a text can reveal the "standpoint" of a certain society. Fairclough's attention to ideology and hegemony is especially relevant to this thesis, it facilitates a more critical understanding of power relations and the discursive battle happening between discourses. The discursive battle for hegemony will be a central part of the analysis in this research; what discourses dominate and what discourses challenge the dominant will be a central part of the analysis.

The research questions will therefore be answered through qualitative critical discourse analysis and reflective discussion. The process of sampling was done using the qualitative tradition of purposive sampling, where "... sampling is conducted with reference to the research question so that units of analysis are selected in terms of criteria that will allow the research questions to be answered." (Bryman, 2016: 340). The sampling has been contingent, meaning that the selection criteria changed during the research process.

4.1 Data Material

The data material for this research is newspaper articles. It is first and foremost practical concerns, namely timeframe and resources, that led me to choose newspaper articles as data

material, digital archives of newspaper articles are readily available while gathering data from TV and radio can be a very time-consuming and difficult process. I am aware that by excluding a large part of the media coverage, I risk overlooking prominent discourses and/or influential actors that are present in other forms of media. As an avid reader and consumer of Norwegian news media, both print and television, I have deemed this possibility as minimal. There is a clear overlap of both themes, actors, and arguments repeated across the news media.

The choice to analyze print newspaper articles over online news articles can be controversial, as online news media often have a much bigger audience than newspapers. According to a 2022 SSB survey, 59% of respondents reported reading online news every day, 22% reported reading traditional newspapers, and 46% and 47% reported consuming TV and radio every day (SSB, 2022). As the question posed in this study is what they consume on an average day, it is only natural for print newspapers to be the least popular among these, but that does not mean it is not relevant. The newspapers included in the data material for this research are also present online, most also provide apps to download the paper edition to a tablet or smartphone, it is unclear in the SSB survey if “online news” is defined clearly to respondents and if that includes reading a copy of a print newspaper online. The online news coverage is also likely to mirror what is in print and vice versa. Based on these reflections, I will argue that newspapers are highly relevant as data material for the context of this research.

Given the scope of this research, it was crucial to limit the data material subject to analysis, which has been done by limiting both the time period and the number of newspapers. I have decided to limit the scope to the following newspapers: *Aftenposten*, *Dagbladet*, *Dagens Næringsliv*, and *VG*. These were chosen because they are the most popular newspapers in Norway, and they are all considered by politicians to be important agenda-setters (Allern, 2006). In a larger study, it would be interesting to look at regional and local newspapers to uncover geographical differences, but that is outside the scope of this particular research.

The timeframe chosen for the purpose of this research is from 1. August to 13. September, these dates were selected for the following reason. As the aim of this research is to uncover discourses in newspapers in the run-up to the election, it already involves a certain time period, the specific dates were selected because heavy news coverage of the election and

relevant debates usually start after the summer vacation, and 13. September was when the election was held.

4.2 Data Collection

The data material subject to analysis consists of newspaper articles retrieved from the Norwegian digital news archive Atekst. The search was conducted with the following search words: olje* AND klima* (oil* AND climate*), this means that all articles that include *both* words, or words starting with either “oil” or “climate,” will appear in the search. This search gave 281 hits, as the number did not seem overwhelming, I decided to conduct a purposive sampling with the following criteria: 1) Climate change, climate policy or oil policy has to be the main “theme” or focus of the article 2) Oil policy, climate change or climate policy had to be mentioned more than once in relation to the main theme (if an article about climate change only mentioned oil policy in passing it would not be included). Using this method, the sample was reduced to 56. These 56 articles make up the data material subject to analysis in this research.

4.3 Further reflections on methodology and limitations

Reflexivity is about acknowledging the researcher’s role in the research process. That means reflecting on personal experiences, assumptions and beliefs will influence the research process. We all have biases, including me, that influence how we perceive the world. It should not be a goal to eliminate bias because that is not possible. What is possible, however, is to be aware of them and try to analyze the data material with that in mind. I have a personal interest for and like to keep updated on Norwegian politics, and I am passionate about climate change, which means I have some personal opinions regarding the research material and have therefore consciously worked to remain as unbiased as possible.

Ensuring *credibility* should always be of concern to a researcher. Assessing the credibility of research entails assessing the credibility of data, findings, and conclusions made and ensuring that the research is carried out according to the principles of good practice (Bryman, 2016). This thesis, unfortunately, does have some issues regarding credibility, which I take *full* responsibility for. Due to health issues, I was not able to take advantage of the resources

available to me, namely continued guidance, and feedback, which has had negative implications for the research process. Good research should always be, revisited and subject to scrutiny from others to ensure its credibility both in the findings and the process itself.

Validity has to do with the extent to which design and operationalization provide relevant insight to the overall issue (Bryman, 2016). Validity can be challenging to evaluate, but it can be strengthened by using a recognized theory and methodological framework. Fairclough (1992, 1995) asserts that discourse analysis is appropriate for examining power factions in public discourse. By using Fairclough's model as a basis for this study, which can also be characterized as a study of public discourse, the study's validity can thus be said to be strengthened. However, as I have not asked for feedback and guidance in the process, I cannot be confident that I have applied the method correctly, as it is my first time conducting a critical discourse analysis.

The qualitative analysis can be criticized for not producing objective knowledge because the researcher becomes too central as an interpreter (*ibid.*). This affects the study's *reliability*. Providing a detailed account of the findings and analysis process is one way to strengthen the reliability, which is done in this thesis. Objectivity during analysis is also important. As previously mentioned, complete objectivity is not possible, but I have worked to remain as objective as possible. The fact that I have not used the resources available to me for guidance and feedback also affects the reliability of the findings.

The data material for this research are Norwegian newspapers, written in Norwegian, and the findings are presented in English, which can also have negative impacts on reliability. The textual analysis was conducted in Norwegian and later translated to English. In the instances where I was unsure about the right translation, in the examples included, this has been specified, and the Norwegian word included. Generally, I had a few problems with the "translation process," and I am confident that the translations included are correct. Having someone well versed in translating from Norwegian to English look over my translations would have had a positive effect on the reliability of the findings presented.

5. Analysis and Findings

This chapter will present my analysis of the research material. Critical discourse analysis does not provide a clear-cut answer on how one delimits a discourse, but what most approaches have in common is an understanding of discourse as a specific way of understanding a limited part of the world. The main work in defining discourses lies in the analysis of the concrete research material, Jorgensen & Phillips (2002) recommend viewing discourse as an analytical term where the question of delimitations is decided strategically in relation to the research objective, I support this view. As a result, I understand discourses as something that a researcher constructs analytically rather than something that is fully defined in reality. The textual analysis is the main tool to uncover discourses, for the purpose of this research the textual analysis has been focused on words, metaphors, and then identifying themes and attitudes. General themes have been categorized as 1) reduce emissions abroad, 2) reduce emissions at home, 3) IPCC report, 4) International commitments to reduce emissions, 5) Norwegian Identity (paradox), 6) economy and jobs, 7) consequences of climate change, and 8) climate crisis, and 9) other (see appendix for full code sheet, attachment 1)

I have also chosen to follow Fairclough's (2003) recommendation to identify the main elements in the worldview that is presented as the basis of a discourse. I have therefore decided to focus on the main themes and statements I analyze in order to uncover relevant discourses. I have, through textual analysis, uncovered the following discourses:

- 1) Norwegian Exceptionalism
- 2) Oil as welfare
- 3) Climate crisis
- 4) Slow and Steady (less strong use of metaphors and active words, oil is not the enemy)

By using examples from the data material, I will try to convey the main elements of each discourse. The fact that I have separated the discourses in a categorical way does not mean

that they can be understood as pure and absolute, and they are not mutually exclusive. A comment can draw on multiple discourses, this is because discourses are constantly changing, and there is a constant battle between them.

5.1 Norwegian Exceptionalism

I chose to name this discourse “Norwegian exceptionalism” (inspired by the well-known phenomenon of American exceptionalism) because of its focus on presenting Norway as exceptional compared to the rest of the world. This places the discussion regarding Norwegian oil in a global, rather than national, context. Norwegian oil is presented as “exceptional” in the following ways:

The world needs energy, and Norwegian oil and gas will play a crucial role in reducing global emissions. Central to this discourse is the argument that Norwegian oil is more climate-friendly compared to other oil-producing countries, Saudi Arabia, the middle east in general, and Russia are countries often mentioned in contrast to Norway's clean oil and gas.

According to Sæther (2017), this is an argument that have been pushed by the oil lobby for decades. Deputy Chairman of the Norwegian Progress Party (right-wing) asks in an opinion piece: “How much do you think environmental concerns are subject to discussion in Middle Eastern and Russian board rooms? and further that “Honestly, many Norwegians want to boycott the soccer world championship in Qatar because of their values, but we can trust that they will safeguard environmental interests in the gas market. Seriously?” (Aftenposten, 10.09.2021: 34). This is a perfect example of this discourse (full article included in attachments), the only real alternative to Norwegian oil and gas is oil and gas, or even coal, from other countries. Implicit in this statement is that if Norway stops producing oil and gas, other countries will expand production. One clear example of this argument is the headline, “Global emissions will dramatically increase if Norwegian gas is removed from the market” (Aftenposten, 08.09.2021: 32-33).

Demand for oil and gas in developing countries is also used as a justification for further developing the Norwegian oil and gas sector, this is framed differently than the *world needs energy* argument because it its emphasis on the consequences of ending fossil fuel production for people in developing countries. For example: “if the world stopped all use of fossil energy today, millions of people would die from hunger.” (VG 09.09.2022: 32). This example uses

strong words but is representative of this line of argumentation. Implicit in this argumentation, and the discourse in general is that it is irresponsible to end oil and gas production because the consequences are either unknown or catastrophic. *Coal* is also something that is referred to often in this discourse and is compared to oil and gas. Emissions from coal are sustainably higher than from oil and gas, therefore, transitioning away from coal should be prioritized before we question the future of oil and gas. Examples of this line of argumentation include: “An end date for coal is more important for the climate than an end date to oil and gas,” and “In the Norwegian climate debate, one can get the impression that oil and gas are the biggest threat to the climate” (Dagens Næringsliv 27.08.2021: 2).

The science of climate change is not doubted, all actors within this discourse, either implicit or explicit, recognize that climate change is real and that fossil fuels are contributing to it. Implicit within the discussion about Norway as a more climate-friendly alternative is a recognition of climate change as a real problem that warrants solutions. The Norwegian oil and gas association is quoted as saying, “All the countries of the world and all sectors must reduce their emissions, and that needs to happen fast” (Aftenposten 08.09.2021: 32-33) Here the problem is recognized, but it is emphasized that we need global solutions, of which Norwegian oil and gas is a part.

Identities are constructed within this discourse, both intentionally and unintentionally. By employing the arguments listed below, the discourse paints Norwegian oil and gas as superior to the rest of the world, thus constructing what I have chosen to describe as the identity of Norwegian exceptionalism. Dissenters from this discourse, especially environmental organizations and green politicians, are often described as radical, extreme, controlled by emotions rather than common sense, hysterical, and uneducated. Arguments are painted as removed from reality and not nuanced. Implicit in this use of words is that the arguments central to the Norwegian exceptionalism discourse are the opposite: rational and moderate, based on facts and common sense. For example: “We have two choices ahead of us: we can let fear of emotions control us, or we can let reason guide us” (Dagens Næringsliv, 27.08.2021: 30).

Actors that employ this discourse are right-leaning politicians, in this case, the conservative party and the progress party, interest organizations, independent commentators, and also the Labor party.

5.2 Oil as Welfare

I chose to name this discourse “oil as welfare” because it is focused on the role and the history of Norwegian oil and gas production in Norwegian society. As I elaborated on in chapter 2, revenues from the oil and gas sector have been widely seen as the main contributor to the Norwegian welfare state, this narrative is still present in the debate and is central to this discourse. This discourse goes one step further and argues that revenue from oil and gas will contribute to the “green transition”.

Norway is the best country in the world. If you have grown up in Norway, it is likely that you have heard this sentence more than once and that your parents have told you that being born Norwegian is like winning the lottery. Kjetil Rolness (Aftenposten 11.09.2021:8-9) describes Norway as “the best country in the world.” The same article contains the following quote: “The green party is in a rush to end an industry that has given us 12.000 billion in the oil fund” (he uses the term “felleskassa” which is difficult to translate, but I believe it refers to the oil fund as that is currently around 12 billion). By using this formulation, ending oil and gas production is problematized because of the importance of revenue from the sector. Implicit in this formulation, and for this particular discourse, is also the fact that economic concerns are more important than environmental concerns. The headline “We will not save the world by damaging our own economy and society” (VG 29.08.2021: 37). Another example is from (Dagbladet 09.09.2021: 38-39): “Can new industry replace the revenue from oil and gas and secure today's level of wealth”? (“velstandsnivå” – direct translation is prosperity level, translated to the level of wealth).

Revenue from oil and gas will contribute to the “green transition.” This argument is also one that historically has been actively employed by the oil lobby (Sæther, 2017), where oil and gas are framed as the solution rather than the problem. Or rather, that the revenue from oil and gas is part of the solution; “Equinor confirms that new technology and the green transition presuppose revenue from oil and gas for a long time to come and that the green transition will take place on the basis of expertise in the oil and gas industry” (Dagbladet 27.08.2021: 6-7). This is an example of a clear formulation of this argument. Statements such as “Norwegian oil is part of the solution” (Aftenposten, 29.08.2021: 18) and “without oil and gas, we will not meet the goals of the Paris accords” (Dagbladet 11.09.2022: 54-55) are other

examples. Within this line of argumentation, there is an attempt to separate oil production from climate concerns. One example is, Former Prime Minister Erna Solberg is quoted (in *Aftenposten*, 29.09.2021: 18) as saying, “Climate is more than oil and oil production.”

Actors who employ this discourse include independent commentators and politicians from the Labor party and the Conservative party.

5.3 Climate Crisis

I have chosen to name this discourse climate crisis because of the overwhelming use of the word “crisis” that exists within it. Climate change is, within this discourse, treated as a crisis that warrants immediate and big changes. I want to point out that all the discourses recognize climate change as a real phenomenon, but this discourse goes further than just recognizing it, and strong metaphors are often used to describe the problem.

The time to act is now. The Climate crisis discourse is categorized by its immediate call to action, and its critique of politicians or people in general they believe do not understand the true nature of climate change. The 2021 IPCC report is continuously referenced to within this discourse, with strong words and metaphors used to describe the findings in the report. Une Bastholm, leader of the Green Party, is quoted as saying, “this report terrifies me,” and further that “this is an obvious reminder about how dangerous Norwegian oil policy really is.” (*Dagens Næringsliv*, 10.08.2021: 8-9). Using strong words such as “dangerous” and “terrified” is common in this discourse, and it is an attempt to convey the seriousness of the “climate crisis.” The word “crisis” also has the same function. The immediate call to action is at the heart of this discourse, we do not have time to deliberate anymore, “we need to act now” (*Aftenposten* 12.09.2021: 26).

End new oil and gas explorations and eventually phase out production. Within this discourse, the oil and gas industry is definitely painted as the problem, not the solution. Arguments to end oil exploration immediately and eventually phase out-production are typically framed in two different ways: First, oil production is problematized in view of the IPCC report and the immediate call for action on fossil fuels, this is widely used as the basis for the argumentation. For example: (in reference to the findings in the IPCC report) “Should Norway stop looking for more oil and gas, or should we do everything in our power to avoid

heat waves that will hit every four to ten years?” (Dagbladet 10.08.2021: 2-3). Implicit here is that if we do not stop oil exploration, heat waves are the consequence. The second framing of this issue is that it is irresponsible for Norway to continue to look for oil and gas because it will hurt the climate: “A decision to produce more oil and gas is a decision to increase the global warming” (VG, 10.08.2021: 28).

Responsibility is a word that is much used in this discourse, both in an attempt to invoke feelings of personal responsibility and to point to Norway's responsibility in a global context. Arguments used by the “oil as welfare” discourse are flipped upside down: it is precisely because we have become rich of oil and gas that we have a responsibility to act. This is again placed in a larger context of economic inequality, for example: “The richest 10% of the world’s population, which includes most Norwegians, according to Oxfam, accounted for approximately half of all production, while it is the world’s poor who are most vulnerable when the crops fail, the water supply becomes uncertain or when extreme weather arrives” (Aftenposten, 13.09.2022: 30-31). *Consequences of global warming* are often emphasized to underline this responsibility in this discourse, and the IPCC report is often than not cited in relation to it.

Critique of the “establishment”, major political parties and the oil and gas industry itself, is also present within this discourse, “We need someone to dare to act, instead of just wanting power” (Dagens Næringsliv 13.08.2021: 8-9). “We must dare to act” (Dagbladet 09.09.2021: 38-39). Here also lies an assumption that the reason why major political parties do not want to “act on oil” is because it is unpopular among the public or fear of angering the oil lobby, rather than on the basis of the common good. The word responsibility is also used in a critique of the establishment, appealing to politicians' personal responsibility to act: “We need leaders that acknowledge that they actually have a personal responsibility for the consequences of the policy they support” (VG 10.08.2021: 28).

Actors represented in this debate include politicians from the Green party and the Socialist left, environmental organizations, and independent commentators.

5.4 Slow and Steady (wins the race)

The slow and steady discourse is one that can be said to be very “Norwegian”: no sudden movements, we need to evaluate. Central to this discourse is talk of reforms and deliberations, there is so much unknown, so making any decision on the future of Norwegian oil and gas is not deemed appropriate. The seriousness of climate change is recognized, but this discourse does not employ the same forceful language as that of the climate crisis discourse. Implied within this discourse is that fossil fuels are a threat to the environment, but again, we must evaluate before we make any decisions. One example is a quote from Espen Barth Eide from the Labor party: “I know that we need to stop with oil and gas – I do – but you cannot just make that decision in a day, we need to transform our entire energy system” (Dagens Næringsliv 30.08.2021: 2). The word “adjustment” (In Norwegian: omstilling) is often used in comparison to a phase-out of oil production, often described as an “adjustment” of the oil and gas sector toward renewable energy. This discourse is also categorized by a general optimism that it is not too late to act on climate change, we even have time for evaluating and deliberating what policies are most optimal. “The positive about the report is that it shows that it is not too late. It is possible to achieve the goals of the Paris Climate Accord” (Dagens Næringsliv 10.08.2021).

Actors who are identified to employ this discourse include politicians from the Labor party, the Christian democrats, the Liberal party, and individual commentators.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

In this chapter, I will discuss the identified discourses in relation to the social context, focusing on the relevant aspects of my research objective, which is to:

To investigate discourses in newspaper articles about climate change and oil policy in the run-up to the Norwegian parliamentary election in 2021 in order to engage in a critical discussion regarding the order of discourses and if the dominant discourse is challenged in a meaningful way.

First, I want to make a few observations. It was clear when reading through the data material that the IPCC report sparked a lot of debate regarding the future of Norwegian oil and gas, as the report was mentioned in a majority of the articles subject to analysis. I did a quick search in Atekst Retriever with the same search words and dates, only in 2017, which was the last parliamentary election. That search gave 159 hits in total, compared to 281 hits in 2021. This was my initial hope when choosing the selected timeframe, and I was pleased that the debate was concentrated around the conflict between oil and climate, which is the topic of this thesis.

Determining the order of discourses in the debate was more challenging than anticipated, it was not clear after the analysis which discourse was most dominant in the debate. After further analysis, I am confident in saying that the dominant discourse present in this data material is a combination between the “oil as welfare” discourse and the “Norwegian exceptionalism” discourse, with the “Norwegian exceptionalism” discourse is the more dominant of the two. These two discourses share some fundamental assumptions and are often used together. My reason for separating them during analysis was the global vs. national angle, which I believe is an important distinction. However, they share several similarities. First is the basic argument that Norway should not stop looking for or producing more oil and gas. Second, that global warming is recognized as a real phenomenon, but they are very careful to use forceful words when describing it. Third, is that they together construct the identity of Norway as “special” and “exceptional” both at home and abroad, which together is impactful.

Both of these discourses are based in particular on the arguments of the Labor party and the Conservative Party, and the oil and gas sector itself.

As I have established in chapter two, these narratives are not new, in fact, it is this narrative has dominated the oil debate for decades, the change is that oil and climate are now discussed in relation to each other. Especially the argument within “Norwegian exceptionalism” that Norwegian oil and gas is more climate-friendly is a narrative about oil that is rooted in environmental concerns and is in many ways an argument that seems to be constructed as an answer to forceful critique from environmental organizations and “green” politicians. Because it frames Norwegian oil as the solution, it effectively dismisses any calls for an end to exploration or phase-out of the industry. The same goes for the argument that revenue from Norwegian oil and gas will be crucial in the “green transition”, this is also an argument that is constructed on the basis of environmental concerns, and implicit in this argument is that the green transition is impossible without oil.

This says something about the developments in the debate regarding oil and climate, the two are no longer separated, and *the oil debate is now about the climate*. It is notable that both politicians from the Labor party and the Conservative party continue to reproduce these already established narratives, especially as they are on the opposite sides of the political spectrum. As mentioned in chapter two, there have been some notable discussions within the party itself about its stance on oil exploration, this hesitance is also visible in the findings as they employ several of their discourses in their line of argumentation. The Conservative party is more consistent in its use of discourses and also uses more forceful language to describe the opposite side.

As I have established that the “Norwegian exceptionalism” and “oil as welfare” discourses were most dominating, it means that the “climate crisis” and “slow and steady” discourses are the two challenging discourses. I want to note here that the “climate crisis” discourse was very prominent in the debate and, in my opinion, close to dominating it. The “slow and steady” discourse was less prominent. It was not surprising that the topic of climate change was prominent in the debate because of the short timeframe of this study and the timing of the IPCC report, this was expected. The IPCC was mentioned in a large majority of the articles that were subject to analysis, most of the “climate crisis” discourse used the report actively to both undermine the narratives posed by the other discourses but also as a kind of

justification for the use of forceful language and to justify their argumentation for ending exploration and phase out production. Politicians from the Green party and environmental organizations dominated the “climate crisis” discourse, thus being the biggest challenger to the established narrative of oil as a solution.

The “slow and steady” discourse was, as mentioned, the least prominent discourse in the debate and did not challenge the narrative of oil as the solution. I do believe that this discourse would be more prominent outside the timeframe of this study. I believe that two conditions especially affected the “debate climate” during this period, the publishing of the IPCC report and the Green party's ultimatum that they would not support a government that was going to look for more oil. This created a very polarizing debate, where many of the articles were opinion pieces refuting the claims of their dissenters. Because of these conditions, I am not confident in saying that these findings represent the totality of the debate.

I will argue that the “climate crisis” discourse challenged this established/dominating narrative in a meaningful way for the following reason. First, the fact that the oil and gas sector and accompanying interest organizations use so much time and resources to refute the claims made by climate activists is indicative that the premises, or basis, for the debate has changed. The oil and gas lobby, and politicians who support them, are forced to construct new narratives within already established ones. The oil debate is now about climate. Although there here a few half-hearted attempts at separating the two, it is generally understood that climate concerns are an integral part of oil policy and discussions around it.

6.1 Conclusion

This master thesis has examined newspaper articles in the run-up to the Norwegian parliamentary election in 2021 in order to uncover discourses present in the debate. the order of those discourses, and if the dominating discourse is challenged in a meaningful way. Through qualitative critical discourse analysis, the results reveal that the established narrative of “oil as the solution, not the problem” is still dominating the debate but is challenged in meaningful ways by dissenting voices, namely environmental organizations and “green” politicians.

6.2 Recommendations for further research

There are many things I would look closer into in a larger study on this subject. Including regional and local newspapers is one, it would be interesting to see if the debate is different in areas where oil is clearly present in the forms of jobs, compared to areas where oil production is a threat to the local environment. One could also do a more thorough analysis of the individual newspapers, or rather if there is a difference in what discourses each newspaper reproduces the most. A comparative analysis of the debate in 2017 could also prove interesting, to uncover changes over time. Conducting this research over a longer time period would also give a better picture of the total debate, not just the one concentrated around an election, and other discourses could possibly be identified under different time periods.

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Aftenposten, 10.09.2021: 34. – *Klimakamp for økte utslipp?*

Aftenposten 11.09.2021:8-9 – Norge trenger en utadvendt regjering med politikk for reformer og klima

Dagbladet 11.09.2022: 54-55. – *Vi treng startdatoar, ikkje sluttdato*

Aftenposten 12.09.2021: 26 – *Sivil ulydnad er vår siste moglegheit*

Aftenposten, 13.09.2022: 30-31 – Grønn Realisme

Appendix

Attachment 1: Codes

- 1) Newspapers:
 1. Aftenposten
 2. Dagbladet
 3. Dagens Næringsliv
 4. VG

- 2) Genre of article
 1. Opinion piece
 2. News Articles

- 3) Actors
 1. Politicians from left-leaning parties
 2. Politicians from right-leaning parties
 3. Politicians from the “center” parties
 4. Politicians from the Green Party
 5. Environmental organizations
 6. Interest organizations (such as the oil lobby)
 7. Independent commentators
 8. other

- 4) Main theme
 1. Climate change
 2. Oil and gas
 3. Both

- 5) General Theme
 1. Reduce emissions abroad
 2. Reduce emissions at home
 3. IPCC report
 4. International commitments to reduce emissions
 5. Norwegian Identity (paradox)
 6. Economy and jobs
 7. Consequences of climate change

8. Climate crisis
9. Other

6) Attitudes /angles

1. Oil and gas as a threat to the environment
2. Oil and gas as an important sector to protect (economic concerns)
3. Norwegian oil and gas in a global perspective
4. Climate change is a crisis
5. Calls for (immediate) action
6. Technological and market optimism
7. Norway is on track for the “green transition”
8. other

7) Perspectives

1. Global
2. National
3. A combination



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