

CLIMATE ACTIVISM AND THE PROTEST PARADIGM

A QUANTITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF FLEMISH ONLINE NEWS CONTENT

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Abstract

De representatie van protest in nieuwsmedia speelt een cruciale rol in het vermogen van sociale bewegingen om de publieke opinie en politieke agenda's te beïnvloeden. Ondanks de groei van de klimaatbeweging en het specifieke belang van media aandacht voor de klimaatzaak, blijft empirisch onderzoek naar klimaatprotesten in media schaars. Deze scriptie gebruikt het protest paradigma als theoretisch kader om de representatie van klimaatactivisme in nieuwsmedia te bestuderen. Het protest paradigma benadrukt patronen in berichtgeving die protesten delegitimeren, vaak door negatieve aspecten zoals geweld te benadrukken, en zo de publieke perceptie te beïnvloeden. Deze studie onderzoekt Vlaamse online nieuwsinhoud door middel van een kwantitatieve inhoudsanalyse, waarbij de aanwezigheid van indicatoren van het protest paradigma en factoren die het gebruik ervan beïnvloeden, worden onderzocht. De bevindingen tonen dat delegitimerende framing nog vaak aanwezig is, zij het soms naast legitimerende frames. Daarnaast zien we wel een aanzienlijke aanwezigheid van niet-officiële bronnen, wat afwijkt van de verwachtingen van het protest paradigma. Bovendien tonen protestkenmerken, zoals het gebruik van illegale en radicale protestacties en locatie, effecten op het gebruik van het paradigma. Hoewel geen significante verschillen werden waargenomen tussen verschillende types van nieuwsmerken, wordt verder onderzoek, vooral naar alternatieve nieuwsmerken, aanbevolen. In essentie biedt deze scriptie waardevolle inzichten in de dynamische representatie van klimaatactivisme in Vlaamse online nieuwsmedia, waarbij de complexiteiten inherent aan mediavertegenwoordiging van sociale bewegingen worden onderstreept.

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I. Introduction

The dynamics of social movements and their portrayal in the media have been the subject of scholarly attention for decades. Social movements, as agents of change, constantly adapt to address new social and political issues in an ever-evolving world. A central strategy of movements is protest, serving as a means of political representation and influence on agendas and policies. However, the success of protest is tied to its portrayal in the media, particularly in shaping public discourse and opinion. This thesis studies the representation of climate protest within the Flemish online news landscape, with a specific focus on the application of the protest paradigm.

The protest paradigm, a theoretical framework derived from extensive literature on media framing and agenda-setting theory, defines certain patterns present in news coverage of protests. It highlights the tendency of media outlets to delegitimize protests and emphasise negative aspects, such as violence, subsequently influencing public perception and political standpoints.

The motivation for this study originated from the emergence of the climate movement as a prominent social movement. With concerns over climate change rising, climate activism has picked up steam and a surge in protest actions worldwide has been observed. Yet, despite media coverage having a significant role in shaping attitudes towards climate issues, current scholarship lacks empirical research on how climate protests are represented in the news.

This thesis investigates the portrayal of climate protests in Flemish online news content and asks whether and under which circumstances the protest paradigm is adhered to. First, an extensive literature overview is provided, drawing from the rich literature on movements, news selection and framing, and the protest paradigm. Next, an empirical study is conducted, consisting of a content analysis of news articles that examines the use of protest paradigm indicators like framing and sourcing practices. It also researches factors influencing adherence to the paradigm. Finally, the conclusions shed light on the extent to which Flemish online news content uses the protest paradigm and point out how deviant protest tactics, protest location, and characteristics of news organisations might influence adherence.

This paper aims to contribute to the broader discourse on media representation and social change by offering insights into climate protest coverage. It wants to advance our understanding of the mechanisms through which media shape perceptions of social movements and influence public

opinion. This study underscores the importance of critically looking at media portrayals of social movements, particularly in the context of pressing global challenges such as climate change. By doing continuous research on biases present in media coverage and exploring what could trigger certain representations, this thesis aims to inform media practitioners, scholars, and activists alike, hopefully paving the way towards a more informed and inclusive public discourse on climate issues and protest.

II. Literature review

1. Social movements

1.1 Social movements defined

A social movement can be defined in many ways, but a common goal they all have is to change, challenge or even destroy certain societal structures, norms, or policies. Social movements are not limited to a specific kind of goal but promote a range of social changes from civic engagement to identity creation (Amenta et al., 2009). According to Marchi (2018), social movements emerge when the public perceives a need for social change and can express this need through protest.

Throughout history, social movements have taken on different faces. One typology of social movements categorises them into two groups: old social movements (OSM) and new social movements (NSM) (Wouters, 2013). OSMs are focused on materialist issues and are generally considered to have a stronger organisational structure, are more professional and are more institutionally embedded. Unions, welfare, and professional organisations are old social movements that are still prominent today. NSMs on the contrary are defined as standing up for more post-materialist issues with a weaker organisation, professionalism, and institutional embedding (Wouters, 2013). The environmental and climate movements are clear examples of movements with post-materialistic values.

Wieviorka (2005) offered a different categorisation. He distinguishes three historical segments in social movements, which he analysed on different dimensions such as relationship to culture, their adversary and in which framework their actions take place. The latter differentiates in national, international, or global contexts.

The first segment consists of the working-class movements, heavily embedded in the industrial society and framework of the nation-state. What followed were the “new social movements”, which emerged in a post-industrial society. These “new social movements”, like women’s rights movements and student movements, also mainly took place on the nation-state level. They differentiated from the working-class movements in their cultural rather than social orientation, with a less clear adversary (Wieviorka, 2005). After the Cold War, a new set of struggles surfaced,

which were often classified as global. The climate movement falls into this most recent segment, which Wieviorka (2005) calls “global movements”. These global movements differ from previous waves of movements because they transcend the framework of the nation-state and have no clear adversary. Wieviorka synthesises the uniqueness of global movements as

The ‘global’ movements do not adopt the classical guise of domination; they are not impelled primarily by a challenge to forms of exploitation; their prime desire is to construct another world and to put an end to the various forms of contempt and ignorance which leave them to one side. (Wieviorka, 2015, p. 10)

The climate movement fits under this umbrella of global social movements, but also under NSM as per definition of Wouters (2013). What matters most for this paper is the distinction of the more recent and diverse social movements we see at the forefront of social change today.

1.2 The study of social movements

A lot of scholars, especially in the field of sociology, have focused on social movements and whether they have been able to impact policy and society (Walgrave & Vliegenthart, 2012). A debate is still ongoing about the potential outcomes of social movements. Some scholars complain about the lack of knowledge on social movement outcomes (Amenta et al, 2010; Giugni, 2018). Walgrave and Vliegenthart (2012) attribute this in part to the variety of potential outcomes that have been studied. They point out different studies about the impacts of social movements on changes in legislation (Banaszak 1996), increases in legislative activity (Costain and Majstorovic 1994), contributions to changes in constitutional amendments (Soule and Olzak 2002) and so on. In their study, Walgrave & Vliegenthart (2012) focused on the agenda-setting power of social movements, as they argued that agenda-setting is a necessary step in policy outcomes (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005; Walgrave & Vliegenthart, 2012).

The study of social movements lies in the field of sociological research. However, social movements and outcomes are researched in media studies as well. Protest has been a subject of media research for decades. Social movements throughout history have most often turned to “protest as a means of shaping political discourse, public opinion, and social policy” (Boyle et al., 2012, p. 128). Social movements play an important role in shedding light on important issues and

facilitating social change. The study of protest and its news coverage provide important insights into the vitality of democracy (Boyle et al., 2012). In line with a rich research tradition linking social movement outcomes with media attention for protest, this paper will explore how climate movements are represented in the news media.

First, we will draw upon the literature to explain why social movements resort to protest and why media attention is a key component in movement outcomes.

1.3 Movements and protest

Throughout the history of social movements, protest has been an important way to reach movement goals. Before democratic systems were installed, people had no other way to voice their concerns than through protest (Brassart & Prak, 2023). In modern history, countless mobilisations by movements took place. Scholars have extensively studied protest as a mechanism of influence, with mixed results (Amenta et al, 2018). For example, Olzak and Soule (2009) found that protests on environmental issues had little effect on congressional attention in the United States. Santoro (2002), on the other hand, concluded that black protests had an impact on voting rights policy.

But why do movements resort to protest? Protest happens when the classical means of political engagement are not effective or accessible (Boyle et al., 2012). Movements lack institutionalised power and don't have access to many channels of influence, like lobbying. In democratic societies, protest is used as a legitimate mechanism of political representation that aims to influence agendas and policies (Papaioanou, 2015).

An important theoretical perspective for explaining social movements and their actions stems from the public sphere theory by Habermas. In *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1962) Habermas poses an ideal model of a (virtual) space where citizens discuss public issues, without influences of state or corporate authority. Using critical reasoning, individuals come to a consensus to solve an issue (Ferree et al., 2002). In this ideal public sphere, civil society has an equal position in the discussions.

However, Habermas points to a decline of the public sphere due to the influences of the market and state, leading to a re-feudalization of the public sphere (Adamoli, 2012; Edwards, 2009). In a society with power imbalances, the civil society fails to obtain its' equal position in the public

sphere, with little access to the public debate. In this logic, protest can be a way to reclaim the public sphere and challenge the dominant powers. Protest is a way to engage in the rational-critical debate proposed by Habermas. In Habermas' theory, the role of the media in facilitating this debate and the importance of ensuring that the media remain independent are also highlighted (Edwards, 2009; Gray, 2009). Overall, Habermas sees protest as a necessary response to the decline of the public sphere and a way for civil society to gain influence in a society of imbalanced power dynamics.

In any case, it is not through protest directly that a change is made. It's not the act of protesting itself that brings political pressure, but the reaction of others to the act (Lipsky, 1968).

"Like the tree falling unheard in the forest, there is no protest unless protest is perceived and projected" (Lipsky, 1968, p. 1151).

Movements essentially mobilise the public to show the people in power that a change is needed or wanted (Walgrave & Vliegenthart, 2012). Their power lies in public support and without it, movements actions are useless (Gamson, 2004). Herein lies the difference between social movements and institutional actors. The latter not only have the power to shape policy but can do it without mobilisation or validation (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993).

For people, citizens, and politicians to react to a protest and support a movement's demands, their message must be spread. Here, the media's role in social movements' objectives comes in.

2. Movements and media coverage

To reach the desired audience and support, movements need the mass media to spread their message, demands or concerns (Walgrave & Vliegenthart, 2012). Koopmans (2004) argues that interaction between social movements and political elites happens in mediated, indirect encounters among contenders in the public sphere. Political actors respond to what they see in the news about social movements, and activists learn about political opportunities and limits from the reactions to their actions (Koopmans, 2004). The mass media, being the main source of information on political matters for the public, significantly influences public opinion by determining what becomes news and how it is presented (Van Zaben & Tulloch, 2021). That control over the news agenda doesn't only shape what we think *about* but also influences our perspectives on specific topics (McCombs and Shaw, 1972).

How and how much protests and movements are covered in the media plays a crucial role in their success (Hellmeier, 2018). Yet media attention is scarce, and many political causes never make the news (Koopmans & Olzak, 2004). As Wouters (2013) puts it: "News is to a far greater extent the result of a process of exclusion than inclusion" (Wouters, 2013, p. 83).

These notions of the importance of media coverage are rooted in agenda-setting theory, which serves as one of the theoretical backgrounds for this paper. The agenda-setting theory was developed by McCombs and Shaw in 1972. It emerged after earlier research failed to find evidence for the influence of communication and media on concrete behaviour (McCombs, 1977). McCombs and Shaw focused their attention on the media's impact on awareness and knowledge rather than on behaviour (McCombs, 1977). The basis of the agenda-setting theory states that although the media might not be able to decide *what* the public thinks, it may have a strong influence on *about what* the public thinks (McCombs, 1977). This is explained using the concepts of public and mass media agendas. The public agenda consists of what individuals find important for themselves and their community and what they talk about with people around them (McCombs, 1977). The mass media agenda is what the media produce content about (McCombs, 1977).

In the early days, mainly newspapers were believed to have agenda-setting power (McCombs, 1977). Throughout the years, television, the internet, and social media (Feezell, 2018) were added to that list. Agenda-setting goes beyond awareness, as McCombs (1977) refines. He points out that the order of priorities on the media agenda is transferred to the public agenda. Another effect of

agenda-setting is issue salience, which describes an issue being perceived as more significant when the media reports on the issue (McCombs, 1977). Besides setting the agenda on issues, which is termed first-level agenda-setting. Within second-level agenda-setting, mass media are theorised to influence which attributes of those issues are put on the agenda or in other words how the issues are structured (McCombs, 1977).

Notions of the agenda-setting theory have been used by scholars to explore the quantity and quality of protest coverage and the importance of that coverage for movements. Vliegenthart et al. (2016) underline the importance of media for protest outcomes as they find media to take on a dual mediating role between protest and the political agenda. First, the media cover the protest event and consequently give more attention to the underlying issue in their general coverage (Vliegenthart et al., 2016).

In any case, movements rely heavily on the media as a broadcaster of their message (Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2012), but the media don't have to rely on movements to gather news. Todd Gitlin already pointed out this power asymmetry between media and movements in 1980 and Wolfsfeld calls their relationship a 'competitive symbiosis'. Media are believed to help sustain the status quo and are not only shaped by their pragmatic considerations. Economic and political powers also shape elite-media-movement relationships (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993; Gil-Lopez, 2021), and influence when and how movements are covered. Multiple factors explain this status quo-maintaining role. Gil-Lopez (2021) listed the following: relationships with political elites, ideological and cultural perspectives, and more practical considerations like information subsidies, journalistic routines, and rules of newsworthiness. In the following section, this paper will highlight these factors and how they contribute to protest coverage.

To understand whether movements get access to media as a channel or not, it's crucial to look at how newsmaking works. Many scholars have found that newsmaking is state-centred (Sobieraj, 2011). Journalists often focus their attention on public officials or political "insiders" because they are inherently deemed relevant and legitimate because of their role (Entman, 1989; Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993; Gans, 1979). Sobieraj (2011) points out there is no specialised news section concerning civil society or social movements, suggesting members of these arenas have a threshold to cross before getting the attention of reporters. Because political news is of such significance in news organisations, journalists often inherently focus on political elites. When

social movements want media attention, they must actively pursue it (Wouters, 2013). Movements are suggested to need aspects of novelty or disruption to gain media attention (Amenta et al., 2012). Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993) described the media as having a front door through which political insiders have access to media and media attention. Political “outsiders” or challengers to those in power (Tarrow, 1998), must content for attention at the backdoor and force their way in (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). To be novel or disruptive, movements resort to disruptive collective action, or, in other words: protest activities (Lipsky, 1968). Protest is considered a key strategy for movements to get their message across (Christancho & Wouters, 2022).

Society’s power structures are reflected in the media apparatus (Brown & Harlow, 2019), creating a double hurdle for social movements. Political “insiders” like politicians have institutionalised power. They are part of governments or other democratic institutions and are crafting policy first-hand. They are powerful and automatically relevant for journalists. Social movements, on the other hand, don’t have direct access to policy and are political “outsiders”. They must gain attention from the public and policymakers to reach their goals. But to gain attention, they must prove their newsworthiness and actively pursue coverage (Wouters, 2013; Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2012). Marchi (2018) points out that recognising this insider/outsider dynamic helps us understand how the mass media exercise power over movements’ success.

It must be noted that traditional news and mass media are not the only players in the media ecosystem today. The emergence and widespread adoption of the internet and social media have altered media ecosystems (Caren et al., 2020; Billard, 2021; Scheuch, 2023). It compensated social movements somewhat for their general lack of resources (McLeod, 2007) and social movements have adapted to this new landscape (Caren, Andrews & Lu, 2020; Scheuch, 2023). In this new age, the role of ordinary citizens in the selection, filtering and distribution of news has expanded (Gil-Lopez, 2021). However, news media coverage remains crucial in movements’ pathways to influence (Corrigall-Brown, 2016; Scheuch, 2023). Although news organisations don’t have a monopoly on information streams anymore, they remain a central factor in social movements’ ability to display their messages to a wider public (Papaioannou, 2015; Scheuch, 2023). Social media and the internet do allow movements to frame their own message. However, the reached audiences are often not very diverse, leaving movements to ‘preach to the converted’ in their online presence. To reach mainstream audiences, movements still rely on mass media coverage

(Culver & McLeod, 2023). New media technologies provide movements with the opportunity to attract mainstream media coverage, rather than bypass it (Lee & Hutchins, 2009).

We already established that media attention is a key factor for social movements. In the paragraphs below, this paper goes into detail about what movements exactly gain from coverage and the conditions they are covered in.

2.1 What movements gain from media attention

Researchers have identified different reasons why media coverage and attention are so important for social movements and protest groups. In line with Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993), the consequences of news coverage for movements can be roughly separated into three categories: mobilisation, validation, and scope enlargement.

2.1.1 Mobilisation

Media attention is used by movements to communicate their cause to the public (Ferree et al., 2002; Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993) and to explain their stance on issues (Amenta et al., 2017). By being covered in the news, movements can raise awareness of injustices, mobilise support from bystanders (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993; Vliegenthart et al., 2005), and spread information about their protests (Coombs et al., 2020). Vliegenthart et al. (2006) also find that media coverage causes an increase in membership for certain social movements. Ultimately, movements wish to shape public and official perceptions by spreading their message (Jiang, 2022).

2.1.2 Validation

Coverage of social movements serves as an indicator of their influence (Amenta et al., 2009; Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993; Koopmans, 2004). As mentioned before, movements use protest to participate in politics. Media coverage grants them the legitimisation as spokespersons (Gamson, 1975) that they need in a democratic society (Amenta et al., 2009). Lipsky (1968) posits that coverage of social movements is a condition for being influential and achieving political gains. The political agenda-setting power of movements and their protests is believed to be mediated by news coverage (Walgrave & Vliegenthart, 2012). Media are the forum of public discussion and

social movements need this platform to connect with audiences, from citizens to political actors (Ferree et al., 2002, Gamson, 2004, Rucht, 1991).

2.1.3 Scope enlargement

Upon receiving coverage, movements can broaden the scope of the conflict they are engaging in (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). When the media pick up on movements' causes and report on their demands, more attention and allies can be gained (Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2012). Movements have little to lose and much to gain when third parties get involved in their fight (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993).

Ultimately movements seek to influence public opinion (Sobieraj, 2010) and the political agenda (Soule & King, 2006; Walgrave & Vliegenthart, 2012), so awareness and support are essential for that.

Apart from spreading their message, movements also need media as a source of information and a sounding board for their strategies (Koopmans, 2004). Mass media provides information on the standpoints of institutional actors and the public. As mentioned, the interactions between movements and other actors in either direction are not direct but take place in a mediated public sphere (Koopmans, 2004).

2.2 When are movements covered?

But when do social movements succeed in gaining media attention? In what we call selection bias literature, scholars have studied newspapers, along with media-independent data, most often police archive data, to examine which protests make it onto the news (for overview: see Wouters, 2013).

The other perspective, movements' attempts to get into the media, has been studied as well and results show there are different pathways movements use. Rucht (2004) has distinguished four possibilities: abstention (movements not seeking media attention), attack (vilifying the mass media), adaptation (following mass media rules) and alternatives (movement-owned media). When examining when movements do get covered by mass media, it is evident we focus on adaptation strategies.

Before listing conditions in which movements are more likely to be covered, it is important to highlight that movements' influence on their own coverage is debated. While some scholars call it indirect at best (Amenta et al., 2017), others believe can make use of opportunities in the media landscape to maximise coverage. Another view suggests a dynamic relationship between media and movements (Hellmeier, 2018; Seguin, 2016). However, as established above, movements are in an unfavourable position of power toward news organisations and institutional actors. Most scholars agree that the institutional logic of media organisations does not favour social movements (Brown & Harlow, 2019).

Research has shown that the selection of movements and protests by media is far from random (Christancho & Wouters, 2022). Because ultimately journalists and news organisations decide what is covered (Amenta et al., 2017), we must consider the (implicit) rules and routines they follow when making news.

This is what scholars have identified as news value theory. Galtung and Ruge developed this theory in 1965 to explain how events become news. Their theory starts with the premise that journalists and editors act like gatekeepers that decide what ends up in the news. Galtung and Ruge (1965) determined twelve news factors of news selection, including proximity, level of conflict, novelty, and the presence of elite actors. Since then, news value theory has been studied by journalism scholars worldwide. Today, the theory still proves to be relevant, although it is not without flaws (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001). Galtung and Ruge fail to acknowledge that news is not out there to report, but that journalists construct reality when making news. Marxist scholars point out that news values should not be seen as a neutral set of routines, but rather as a cultural map that journalists use to make sense of the world (Hal et al, 1978; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001).

In this paper, news values are treated as a 'predictive pattern' of news content, as Harcup and O'Neill (2001) suggest. It is kept in mind that they do not explain all aspects of news composition. The influence of political and economic factors (McQuail, 1994), which lead to the media upholding the status quo, will also be highlighted in later sections.

Another set of explanations for news selection can be found in news routines. Apart from news values, the day-to-day way that journalists and news agencies are organised also plays a role in the selection of news. Journalists and news organisations are also viewed as gatekeepers. Here the focus lies more on media ownership, the economic interests of news organisations and the assignment of reporters to specific beats. These so-called news beats ensure consistent coverage,

with the political beat holding particular significance as it reflects the media's role as the fourth estate (Wouters, 2013). Consequently, newsrooms tend to focus more on institutional sources for day-to-day reporting, while social movements must actively strive for media attention. By anticipating news routines and playing into the newsmaking process, movements can improve their likelihood of coverage.

Drawing on these theoretical backgrounds, below a list of concrete factors influencing media coverage of movements and protests is given. Following Vliegenthart and Walgrave (2012), these factors are classified into four categories: event and movement characteristics, news agency characteristics, issue characteristics and time and contextual factors. Finally, interactive views will be highlighted.

2.2.1 Event and movement characteristics

Disruption

Journalists are believed to disproportionally cover disruptive events (Earl et al., 2004). Movements are believed to have more influence overall when they are disruptive (Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2012). Protests that are violent and disruptive are more likely to be covered (Earl et al., 2004, Amenta et al., 2009, Wasow, 2020). Boykoff (2006) even suggests that movements' tactics grow more violent and disruptive because of their need for media attention. However, resorting to violent tactics may not result in the effects movements are hoping for. Scholars have found that public support for movements declines when they use violent tactics (Boyle et al., 2004, Gutting, 2020) and increases with a more moderate approach (Thomas & Louis, 2014, Stuart et al., 2018).

Protest size

The size of protests also helps to gain coverage (Amenta et al., 2009). Scholars have studied this by comparing samples of events based on media data with other databases, like policy records (f.e. Wouters, 2013). They confirmed that the larger the protest and movement, the more frequently they are covered (Amenta et al., 2009; Wouters, 2013). This can be traced back to news value theory. But it can also be explained by using the resource mobilisation theory (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Zald and McCarthy 2002). This theory posits that movements with large capacities mobilise the best and have the biggest impact accordingly, also on media coverage (Amenta et al.,

2009). As news media aim to reflect what is happening in society (Gans, 1979), coverage is more likely when it concerns a large social movement with lots of participants. Smaller movements can also piggyback on actions taken by larger movements to gain more coverage (Amenta et al., 2017).

Similarity to institutional actors

Because newspapers usually favour institutional actors and powerful elites in their coverage, movements that resemble those actors are more likely to be covered (Andrews & Caren, 2010, Elliot et al., 2016). This resemblance is measured in organisational resources like budgets and membership, formal organisation and having a media department. Having these characteristics make coverage for movements more likely (Amenta et al. 2017). Overall, highly resourced organisations are more prominent in the news (Elliot et al., 2016)

Movements can also resemble institutional actors in the goals they pursue. Movements aiming at goals more outside of mainstream values, often paired with violent tactics, are more prone to marginalisation by news organisations (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993).

Proximity

When looking at international coverage, scholars found that geographical proximity and commercial ties between countries can positively impact protest reporting of events in either country (Westerstahl & Johansson, 1994). Similar effects have been noticed in reporting about protests in countries with language affinity and little cultural distance (Chang et al., 1987).

Protest events taking place in more remote areas with less cell phone coverage and internet access are underreported by news media (Weidmann, 2016; Croicu & Kreutz, 2016). These events are not only less relevant for newsmakers and consumers, but there is a lack of information to report on (Hellmeier, 2016).

Alternative news values for political outsiders: authenticity

As opposed to the elements highlighted above, Sobieraj (2010) posits that to be covered by news media movements must not behave like institutions. They find that movements must follow the implicit rules of newsmaking for coverage, but that these rules differ for political outsiders. In their study, journalists indicated they are looking for authenticity in social movements. They conclude that movements fail to make the news not because they don't follow the rules of newsmaking, but because they follow the wrong rules.

Journalists accept press releases, press conferences, and spokespeople in their routine political reporting, but their coverage of activism was governed by a very different set of rules and practises, which in many ways were opposed to those employed in their routine newsgathering. (Sobieraj, 2010, p. 512)

2.2.2 News organisation characteristics

Some inherent characteristics of newspapers have also been found to influence the coverage of social movements.

The political slant of newspapers is believed to impact coverage (Amenta et al., 2017; Rohlinger, 2014). Liberal papers are evidenced to be more likely to cover progressive movements, and conservative movements cover conservative movements more substantially (Amenta et al., 2017).

Some scholars also point out that there is a difference in the treatment of social movements in local vs. national newspapers (Andrews & Caren, 2010). Local newspapers and journalists report on social movements in a more informed manner (Davenport, 2010). But, Amenta et al. (2012) argue that to break into the political agenda, movements must be covered nationally.

Under this category, we can also include news routines in the production process of news and among reporters as factors that influence coverage (Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2012).

2.2.3 Issue characteristics

The coverage of social movements is sensitive to the issue attention cycle (Downs, 1972). When issues relating to the movement are being discussed, movement actors are covered more, and more substantially. When the issue is no longer prominent, this attention to the movement dies down (Amenta et al., 2017; Amenta et al., 2012).

When movements' actions concern legislative issues, they are covered more by news media (Amenta & Polletta, 2019). Because policymaking has an impact and involves political elites, it

receives extensive coverage (Elliot, Amenta & Caren, 2016). So, when movement concerns overlap with policy-making and legislative issues, the spotlight is also on them.

A history of coverage for an issue can also increase the chances of coverage in the future (Amenta et al. 2017). Hellmeier et al. (2018) find robust statistical evidence for sequential attention effects in protest reporting. When protests take place soon after other well-reported events, they consistently receive more coverage (Hellmeier et al., 2018). Movements can use this pattern to their advantage and use the momentum generated by well-covered events.

2.2.4 Time and contextual factors

When studying media coverage of movements, it is also important to look at the context in which media and movements are always embedded and at which time protest events are taking place.

Scholars argue that movements are more likely to be covered when the political context is sympathetic to the movement (Amenta et al, 2009). Ferree et al. (2002) found that in an intuitively weaker party system, movements have more standing in the news.

A context of crises can also bring about more coverage for social movements because of the inherent novelty crises have (Elliott, Amenta & Caren, 2016). Movements can find opportunities for media attention when their goals are linked to crises. This is especially true for protest-oriented organisations (Elliot, Amenta & Caren, 2016).

Some evidence has also been found that in a crisis, routinely used experts can be doubted. Then movement actors can provide an alternative (Amenta et al., 2017).

Protest reporting is sensitive to news-hole effects as well. On a day with lots of newsworthy events, the chances of coverage drop. On slow news days, protests are more likely to be substantially reported on (Myers & Caniglia, 2004). Even the day of the week on which protest events take place influences coverage. Research suggests that events taking place on a Monday are more likely to be covered (Myers & Caniglia, 2004).

2.2.5 Interactive views

Scholars combine the different factors explained above to make up a more well-rounded explanation for protest and movement coverage. Elliot, Amenta and Caren (2016) for example, found that organisations get more coverage when policies are changing, but only if they are well-resourced and have an inclusive identity. This combines context factors with the similarity to political elites, as described above. Amenta et al. (2009) combined the need for favourable internal and external conditions to receive media attention. These include disruptive capabilities or a substantial number of organisations, particularly during periods of policy favourability or under partisan regimes. These examples draw upon multifaceted explanations for media coverage.

We can also see these interactive views in the political mediation theory, as defined by Elliot, Amenta and Caren (2016). This theory entails that the combination of political context and movement characteristics must be considered when predicting media coverage and policy outcomes (Elliot, Amenta & Caren, 2016). The theory posits that social movements can control their methods, mobilisation, and foci, but don't have control over political outcomes. The mediation theory ascribes a lot of importance to protest as an influence on political institutions and outcomes (Cammaerts, 2013). Additionally, the model stresses the importance of media representation and the need for activists to be creative to ensure their actions grab attention. It suggests activists must overcome challenges like media bias, volatile public opinion, and technological limits (Cammaerts, 2013).

The political mediation model helps us understand how mainstream national newspapers work by explaining how their resources, identities, and strategies interact with their operating procedures to shape their news coverage (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993).

Ultimately, we can conclude that although movements need media attention for an array of reasons, this coverage is far from unbiased. Movements deal with what scholars call 'selection bias' (Boyle et al., 2005). Hutchins and Lester (2006) describe a protest as a power struggle over the news agenda with the potential to impact the public perception of an issue. Above, we already established how movements can eventually make it into the news. However, the extent to which movements and protest groups are covered is just one element that is important in their representation in the media. The framing the group and its' causes receive also matters. As the media can shape public opinion and social policy (Brown & Harlow, 2019), how movements and

their protests are represented is relevant. Merely quantifying the number of times an SMO is mentioned in the media fails to capture important nuances. Raw coverage doesn't indicate whether the SMO has achieved significant attention or 'standing' or whether the media coverage portrays the movement favourably (Amenta et al., 2009).

So, when movements do get covered, they face a new hurdle: the description bias (Boyle et al., 2005). A large body of research concerns this description bias in a tradition known as 'protest paradigm' studies (f.e. Boyle et al., 2004; McLeod and Hertog, 1998; Wouters, 2013).

3. How movements are covered: the protest paradigm

Previous sections highlighted the importance of media coverage for movements, but an important nuance to make is that not all coverage is good coverage.

Movements depend on media, not only to spread their message but also to generate sympathy (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). The actions of movements don't speak for themselves but must be embedded in a broader story. Even when movements make it into the media, this does not mean their preferred meaning or frame is used (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). How media represent protest influences how audiences perceive it and whether the public will support it (McLeod & Detenber, 1999). As public support is a key element for movements' protests to be accepted as political tools (Gil-Lopez, 2011), their portrayals in media must be favourable. The power struggle between media and movements is not only over inclusion but also over framing.

Besides the theories of agenda-setting and news values and routines, the research on protest coverage also draws from framing literature. Based on Goffman's (1974) concept of schemas, frames are defined as tools used to define, interpret and construct meaning from information (Papaioannou, 2015). Entman (1993) applied this to news and defined the news-framing process as selecting, emphasising, and elaborating on certain aspects of reality. This can affect the meaning of the stories (Entman, 1993). Framing helps shape and define stories, (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989) and helps audiences make sense of the world around them (Reese, 2001).

This paper uses a theoretical background that converges agenda-setting and framing. This convergence has been theorised and encouraged by prominent scholars within both research traditions (McCombs & Ghanem, 2001). Especially second-level agenda-setting can be linked to framing theory. McCombs and Ghanem described framing as "the construction of an agenda with a restricted number of thematically related attributes in order to create a coherent picture of a particular object" (2001, p 70).

Scholars have studied the possible description bias when reporting on protest events (Amenta et al., 2017). The questions researchers asked include whether movements' claims and standpoints are included in the reports on protest events (Gitlin, 1980), which tone is used regarding movement action (Smith et al., 2001) and what frames are used.

As this paper will expand on in the following sections, it turns out the media systematically delegitimise protest groups in their reporting (Gitlin, 1980; Hertog & McLeod, 1992), a pattern also known as the 'protest paradigm' (McLeod & Hertog, 1999).

Research has found that mainstream media coverage is not objective and has frequently upheld the political status quo (Carragee, 2019). When reporting on protest, media often focus on aspects of violence rather than discussing movements' objectives (Smith et al., 2001), ultimately reducing public support for social movements (Salazar Rebolledo & González de Bustamante, 2023). This pattern was first researched by Chan and Lee (1984) and Gitlin (1980), and later coined the protest paradigm by McLeod and Hertog (1999). The protest paradigm is a framework used to make sense of protest coverage in mainstream media (Coombs et al., 2020).

The main premise of this paradigm states that the more protest groups threaten the status quo, the more unfavourably they will be reported on by the media (Boyle et al, 2005; Shoemaker, 1984). The coverage applying the protest paradigm is believed to marginalise and delegitimise protest groups while maintaining the status quo (Gitlin, 1980; Shoemaker, 1984), especially when the movement also is deviant in its' tactics and appearance (Boyle et al., 2005).

Adherence to the protest paradigm can be seen as a conscious way of enforcing the status quo but is also ascribed to implicit news routines, values, and journalistic habits (Boyle et al., 2005, McLeod & Hertog, 1992). As noted in the section on news values earlier in this paper, newspapers look for certain elements of novelty and disruption. This means they are, for example, more inclined to cover violent characteristics of protest, internal conflicts in the movement, or personal details about movement leaders. Vliegthart and Walgrave (2012) even point out that 'in many ways, the interaction between movements and media resemble that between politicians and journalists.'. Certain elements of journalistic preference, practices and norms are accepted characteristics of the journalistic profession, but at the same time, they can be linked to elements of the protest paradigm (Reul et al., 2018)

However, journalistic practice is shaped not only by pragmatic considerations but also by political and economic elites (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). This idea stems from the notion that media organisations are agents of social control (Boyle et al, 2005; Salazar Rebolledo & González de Bustamante, 2023).

Although media organisations and journalists act as gatekeepers for news content, it must be kept in mind that this biased media output is often a reflection of power structures in society at large and not journalists' independent decisions (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993).

When looking back at the factors that make it more likely for movements to be covered by the news media, we can conclude that the protest paradigm creates a double bind for protest groups (McLeod & Hertog, 1999):

Movements must adapt and appeal to media logic to receive coverage, but when they do, protest coverage tends to demonize protesters, characterizing them as menaces to society, marginalizing their voices, and under or inadequately reporting the grievances, demands, and agendas of movements. (Brown & Harlow, 2019, p. 510)

A protest not causing disruption will often not make the news, so movements turn to protest tactics that attract media attention (McLeod, 2017). But when they become more radical, the news content covering them will delegitimise them (Boyle et al., 2006, McLeod, 2007). McLeod (2007) concludes that coverage in line with the protest paradigm can heighten tensions when a protest movement doesn't feel heard, eventually leading to more dysfunctional outcomes instead of a healthy discourse about the issue at hand.

Before the protest paradigm literature is further laid out in the sections below, it must be noted that most research cited is based on the study of the protest paradigm in the U.S. This North American context can differ significantly from the European and Belgian contexts this paper's empirical study will concern, as the history of protest and media is very different. Wherever possible, research by European and local researchers was used, which includes work by Wouters, Reul et al., Koopmans and Walgrave and Vliegenthart. To consider even more cultural differences, research from other parts of the world is also included in works by e.g. Salazar Rebolledo and González de Bustamante, Harlow et al., and Mourao.

3.1 The protest paradigm in practice

The research on protest reporting has defined elements of the protest paradigm. This paper follows the categorization of these characteristics as proposed by McLeod and Hertog (1999), which lists the following four elements: a narrative structure or frame that delegitimises the protest (1), the reliance on official sources when reporting on protest (2), the invocation of antagonistic public opinion to oppose the protesters (3) and the use of other delegitimation, demonisation and marginalisation devices (4). In this section, the literature on these characteristics will be reviewed.

3.1.1 *Framing: a delegitimizing narrative structure*

As established above, the kind of frames that are being used in protest reporting have a significant impact on how the public views a protest and its' goals (McLeod & Detenber, 1999).

Scholars found that protest stories often emphasise violence, lawlessness, and the sole events rather than the issues the protest is about (McLeod, 1999; McLeod & Hertog, 1999). The frames are typically dichotomous and describe the protests as us vs. them (Reul et al., 2018). These specific frames are prone to marginalising and delegitimising protest groups (Boyle et al., 2005). By using unbalanced framing, journalists interpret the news rather than report on it (Coombs et al., 2020).

McLeod & Hertog (1999) identified four key frames that are used in protest reporting.

The first is the violent crime or riot frame, which highlights the violent and disruptive behaviour of protesters rather than the issue the protest is about. Looting, destruction of public property, and chaos caused by the protesters are the foci of the reports. What readers learn most about the movement is how it hinders society, rather than how they want to change it (Brown & Harlow, 2019; McLeod & Hertog, 1999).

In the recent Black Lives Matter protests, Culver and McLeod (2023) found this frame to be the most frequently used in reports on the protests.

A second frame defined by McLeod and Hertog (1999) is the spectacle frame. Here reports focus on the sensational and dramatic aspects of the protest. It emphasises the size of protests, portrays

them as a show or circus, and may focus on unique or odd aspects like the protesters' attire (Brown & Harlow, 2019; McLeod & Hertog, 1999). Additionally, the spectacle frame may refer to certain public figures who attended the demonstration and apply a more individualistic framing (Salazar Rebolledo & González de Bustamante, 2023).

Another frequently used frame is the confrontation frame. This frame underscores the conflict between protesters and law enforcement or other oppositional forces. This frame describes protests as combative, focuses on arrests and “clashes” with police or confrontation with oppositional protests (Brown & Harlow, 2019; McLeod & Hertog, 1999; Salazar Rebolledo & González de Bustamante, 2023).

The final frame proposed by McLeod and Hertog (1999) is the debate frame. As opposed to the frames listed above, the debate frame does not delegitimize the protest discussed (Brown & Harlow, 2019). Instead, it includes the agendas and demands of the protest and engages audiences with the substance of the issues (Brown & Harlow, 2019; McLeod & Hertog, Hertog, 1999).

The protest paradigm predicts that the frames used in protest reporting will be delegitimising. When using frames that focus on aspects of violence, crime, confrontation, or spectacle rather than the message the movement is trying to spread, news media prompt readers to think about the issues at hand in a negative way (Papaioannou, 2015) and hegemonic structures are upheld (Gitlin, 1980).

As established earlier, media can influence and shape thoughts and beliefs. Scholars have found that the framing of protest stories is a powerful element of the protest paradigm (Boyle et al., 2005) and often predicts audience engagement and interpretation (Harlow et al., 2017). The framing of certain issues and related protests have been proven to shape the public's perception of who is to blame for those social, political, and economic issues (Iyengar, 1991).

A study by McLeod and Detenber (1999), for example, found that frames that upheld the status quo led to less audience support for the protests' cause and less identification with the protest group. Similarly, Moraou's (2021) study concluded that the use of the debate frame increased support and identification. These findings on the importance of framing are consistent across different studies concerning different movement issues (Ozcelik, n.d.).

When media utilise multiple and conflicting frames in their reports, the effects of framing are reduced and neutralized (Frisby, 2018), resulting in a more heuristic-based view of the protest at hand.

3.1.2 Sourcing: *reliance on officials*

In the earlier sections of this paper, journalists' tendency to focus on (political) elites when making news was already highlighted. The study of protest reporting revealed that even when news reports on protest movements, journalists also rely on official and expert sources (McLeod & Hertog, 1999). News media prefer sources with political power that can give the 'official' story and mainly use these views in their coverage (Walgrave & Vliegenthart, 2012). The use of official and expert sources adds prestige to a story and maintains the illusion of objectivity (McLeod & Hertog, 1999). Movements sometimes try to replicate the way official sources interact with media to facilitate the news-making routines, by releasing press statements for example. However, scholarship finds that when statements come from those in more marginalised positions, they are rejected (Sobieraj, 2011).

Because authority figures are often the targets of these protests, directly quoting them causes a conflict of interest (McLeod, 2007). Protest stories told from the perspective of those in power tend to marginalise them and downplay the perspective of the movement. By using mostly official sources, media coverage tends to neglect questioning the systematic problems that force disadvantaged groups to protest (Boyle et al., 2006).

Although sometimes official sources have similar views to the protest movement and support their objectives (Mourão 2019), this doesn't mean the pattern of the protest paradigm is breached (Brown & Harlow, 2019). According to Bray (2012), movement perspectives play a crucial role in making news coverage more legitimising and less adherent to the protest paradigm.

3.1.3 Invocation of *public opinion*

Aside from the standpoints of political elites, journalists can also incorporate a statement about public opinion in their reports on protest events. However, within protest reporting, this public opinion is often constructed in an antagonistic way, contrasting the stance of the protesters

(Papaioannou, 2015). The focus often lies on the opposition of mainstream values by the movement and depicts it as being an isolated minority in the margin of society (Coombs et al., 2020; McLeod & Hertog, 1999). This fits the protest paradigm, as it undermines the agenda of the protest.

On one hand, the media do this by incorporating opinions and commentary from bystanders which represent 'the citizenry' at large (McLeod, 2007). However, most protest stories do not refer to actual public opinion polls but rather quote certain sources that generalise the public opinion or invoke social norms that protesters are violating (McLeod, 2007).

3.1.4 The use of delegitimisation, demonisation and marginalisation devices

Under this category, some more typical features of protest reporting in line with the protest paradigm are indicated.

Firstly, journalists delegitimize protests by providing no background context to the movement's actions (Coombs et al., 2020). Failing to properly explain the meaning and intentions of protest actions leads to the audience perceiving them as pointless and even irrational. This way, the media also fail to acknowledge the latent functions of protest groups, like generating ideas for social change (McLeod, 2007; Papaioannou, 2015).

This aspect is also highlighted by the literature on episodic vs. thematic framing. Thematic frames provide background and context, which leads to a better understanding of and relation to the issue at hand (Iyengar, 1991). In protest reporting thematic frames better attribute the issue to underlying social structures (Frisby, 2018)

Episodic framing zooms in on specific events or stories and places blame on a particular individual or action (Frisby, 2018). The use of episodic frames in protest reporting can lead to a limited view of the issue at hand. Iyengar (1991) found that audiences exposed to an episodic frame of protest stories were more likely to blame the problem at hand on individuals than on societal structures. This relates again to the media upholding the status quo and framing protest stories in a way that relieves their responsibility.

Researchers found that episodic frames are more common in protest reporting and are part of the characteristics of the protest paradigm (Boyle et al., 2004; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Gitlin, 1980; McLeod & Hertog, 1992).

Demonisation of protest groups happens by heavily including short- and long-term negative consequences of social protest (Coombs et al., 2020) and creating moral panic over protesters by exaggerating the threats they pose (Culver & McLeod, 2023). For example, McLeod and Hertog (1999) found reports on anti-war protests to focus mostly on counter-cultural elements like flag burning. Many protest news stories will also focus on the social costs of the protest, like their negative impact on the local economy or the cost of police deployment (McLeod and Hertog, 1999).

Generally, labelling is used to marginalise protest groups and accentuate their oddities, and groups are treated critically even in the headlines of news articles (Boyle et al., 2005).

Apart from these content-related characteristics of the protest paradigm, journalists also use certain stylistic and literary techniques such as the use of quotation marks, stance adverbs, or visual cues to portray protestors as deviants.

After finding out what the protest paradigm looks like, we continue the synthesis of the literature by looking at when journalists use the paradigm.

3.2 What triggers the protest paradigm?

As stated before, one of the reasons for media to represent protests the way they do is because of their social control function and mission to maintain the status quo. Consequently, movements and their protests that challenge the mainstream and elite standpoints will be treated unfavourably by the media (Gil-Lopez, 2020; Smith et al., 2001). Scholars have researched this and other factors influencing when the protest paradigm is used. The triggers of the protest paradigm are explored in the following sections.

3.2.1 Level of deviance

To determine to what measure protest groups challenge the status quo, scholars have looked at the level of deviance. The more deviant or radical a group is perceived, the more the protest paradigm and unfavourable coverage are triggered (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993; Lipsky, 1968; Shoemaker, 1984; McLeod & Hertog, 1999). Journalists don't treat all protest groups the same as more radical groups are more delegitimised than moderate groups (Boyle et al., 2005). So, although movements often need to resort to radical tactics to gain attention and support, this often leads to unfavourable coverage and less public support. This is what researchers call "the activists' dilemma" (Feinberg et al., 2020).

The level of deviance or radicality is determined by movements' goals and their tactics (McLeod & Hertog, 1999). Radical goals include the overturning of laws or governing structures, which is a threat to the power dynamics in place. However, Boyle et al. (2012) found that the type of tactics that movements use affects coverage more than their goals, and they urge to differentiate between goals and tactics as separate units of analysis. Lee (2014) also concluded that several features of the paradigm were more likely to occur if the protests involved radical tactics.

McLeod (2007) found evidence for the relevance of protest objectives as well when his study concluded that journalists are more inclined to deviate from the protest paradigm when the protest covered is more consistent with public and elite opinions.

However, scholars have also pointed out that a lack of radicality does not automatically lead to more substantive coverage of a protest event. The media have such a strong affinity for conflict and violence that when activists are peaceful, the story often highlights the lack of violence or conflict (Sobieraj, 2011). "Conflict does not steal the spotlight; it owns it" (Sobieraj, 2011)

Scholars agree that the protest paradigm exists and results in a certain type of coverage. The main idea that radical and disruptive protest, both in goals and tactics, triggers more negative coverage has been proven by a large body of research, as explained above.

However, more recent scholarship on the paradigm suggests that we cannot assume the straightforward description and occurrence of the protest paradigm as initially theorised (Cottle, 2008). In more recent research, the paradigm is not treated as a given anymore, but rather as a

possible variable in protest reporting (Lee, 2014; Papaioannou, 2015). This line in research suggests a range of influencing factors and a changing perception of dissent in media (Papaioannou, 2015). Continuing to explore the research on the protest paradigm and its' conditionality, this paper next highlights some contextual and systematic characteristics that influence the adherence to the protest paradigm.

3.2.2 *Protest issue*

A lot of the research on the protest paradigm has focused on specific case studies (e.g. Gitlin, 1980; Chan & Lee, 1984). But some studies have also compared the prevalence of the paradigm across different protest issues (Boyle et al, 2004) and found significant differences.

Boyle et al. (2004) found war protests to be more susceptible to the protest paradigm. Because they found them to be more deviant as well, the effect of the protest issue is suggested to be indirect. Brown and Harlow's (2019) research suggests that certain protest topics are covered more critically than others, mainly using different frames. Protests concerning anti-black racism, for example, were found to be covered the most using the delegitimizing riot frame. Protests about health, the environment and immigration were more often framed using a legitimising debate frame. They concluded that race issues were systemically delegitimised, while protests on other topics invoked more balanced coverage. This suggests a hierarchy of social struggle, where media uphold certain power imbalances in Western society (Brown & Harlow, 2019). Gil-Lopez's (2020) study also concluded that when it comes to news coverage, movements against war and oppressive regimes often followed the protest pattern more closely compared to labour or social protests.

3.2.3 *Geographical influences*

As seen in earlier sections of this paper, the news value of proximity influences news coverage. Protest events that happen in closer proximity to the news outlet reporting on them, can usually count on more substantive coverage (Shoemaker et al., 2007, Brown & Harlow, 2018). However, when looking at the protest paradigm, some studies find limited evidence for geographical factors to cause substantial differences in coverage (Brown & Harlow, 2018). In their study, Brown and

Harlow (2018) concluded that framing and sourcing consistent with the protest paradigm were found regardless of the location of the media outlet.

Boyle et al. (2012) found the geographical location of protests and news outlets to influence the way protests were being covered. However, when including tactics and goals in the analysis, they concluded that location has an indirect influence on the coverage, as it influences the goals and tactics, which are better predictors of the nature of coverage (Boyle et al., 2012).

Gil-Lopez (2020) concluded that stories about foreign protests showed more elements of the protest paradigm than national protest stories in the U.S. Furthermore, they found that protests in countries with more positive relations and history with the U.S. were covered more positively as well and that coverage could change according to relations with the U.S. changing. This indicates geopolitical influences on protest coverage.

3.2.4 Political context

Some political context factors do not just provide more coverage, as established earlier, but can also facilitate more favourable coverage. When the regime in power is amicable towards the protest, more favourable coverage is also expected (Amenta et al., 2017). As stated above, Gil-Lopez (2020), finds this is also true for amicable relationships with foreign countries and the coverage of protests in those countries. Back in national political contexts, Mourao (2019) also finds that when elite opposition groups are supporting the protest, journalists adhere less to the protest paradigm. Wouters (2015) found that protests staged by organisations with a strong base in civil society and a high media standing are covered more thematically as well.

3.2.5 Characteristics of the media outlet

Some characteristics of the media outlet reporting on the protest have also been proven to have an impact on the quality of the reporting.

Firstly, researchers have shown that the political ideology or slant of news organisations can predict their adherence to the paradigm (Rohlinger et al., 2012; Weaver & Sacco, 2013). Lee (2014), for example, found that the protest paradigm was more likely to occur in the reports by conservative news outlets.

Some studies have also compared traditional and alternative news outlets in their use of the paradigm. Harlow et al. (2017) concluded in their study on the Ayotzinapa protests that the type of media outlet did not make a difference in the use of delegitimizing frames but did show that alternative outlets made more use of the debate frame. This aligns with the common view that alternative media are more affectionate towards social movements and frame them more often in legitimising ways (Harlow et al., 2017). Reul et al. (2018) also reinforced the hypothesis that alternative media are more inclined to cover protests in a legitimising way, as opposed to traditional media in their research.

Wouters (2015) points towards the media's ownership structure as a factor to keep in mind as well, as he finds that the public broadcaster reports more favourably on protests than expected.

To conclude this section, attention must be drawn to the more interactive approach used by some scholars. Amenta et al (2012) developed a story-centred approach and found that the quality of coverage depends on specific combinations of coverage situation, political context, and type of collective action. Carragee (2019) also states that despite the shortcoming ways that media report on protests, movements have opportunities to positively influence coverage by using creative organising and media strategies. These findings highlight the importance of focusing on triadic interactions between media, elites, and movements to explain the content of protest coverage.

3.3 The protest paradigm in the changing media environment

Following the claims made above that the protest paradigm is not set in stone, the evolution of protest reporting over time was studied as well, with specific attention to the evolutions in the digital and media landscapes.

Boyle et al. (2005) found that between 1960 and 1999 the level of deviance of protests covered in newspaper articles declined. Yet, no decrease in the level of criticism during the same period was observed. When also taking protest type into account, they concluded that the principles of the protest paradigm receive support across various contexts and time periods (Boyle et al., 2005). Gil-Lopez (2020) studied the representations of collective action between 1998 and 2017. This study's results also indicated that the representations closely resembled the protest paradigm

over those 20 years. On the other hand, the study found that dissenting voices gained some standing, especially when social media was used as a source.

Cottle (2008) and Lee (2014) suggest that the results of their studies indicate that the protest paradigm has become slightly less negative over time. Lee (2014) finds that because movements and protests become more common and accepted, media might be less likely to treat protests as deviant.

Authors also attribute these evolutions to the internet, the surge in user-generated content, and “citizen self-mobilisation” (Lee, 2014). Some studies followed this premise and compared the prevalence of the paradigm in classic journalism to social media, citizen journalism, and social media (f.e. Harlow and Johnson, 2011; Harlow et al., 2017; Jiang et al, 2022; Keyes, 2013).

Harlow and Johnson (2011) found that traditional news media, The New York Times in their case, adhered the most strongly to the protest paradigm. While online alternative media and social media (Twitter and Facebook) do a generally better job at substantively covering protest, they also still fall short in some areas, like sensationalism. Jiang et al. (2022) studied how the BLM protests were talked about on the recently popularised social media platform TikTok. They found that the content on the platform, which was mainly generated by regular citizens, did not follow the pattern of the protest paradigm.

As noted earlier, social media can play a role in amplifying the voices of movement actors. Harlow et al. (2017) reported that legitimisation on social media is more likely, with representation of peaceful protest as much as violent protest. On the other hand, Poell (2014) notes that social media also have a predilection for spectacle and disruption. The debate between scholars regarding whether social media has avoided or accelerated the protest paradigm remains (Jiang et al., 2022).

Despite some research pointing to a decline in the use of the paradigm, most comparative studies suggest that mainstream media still report on protests following the protest paradigm (Harlow et al., 2017). However, the premise that the protest paradigm is not set in stone and is susceptible to societal changes and other factors underlines the relevance of protest paradigm studies in diverse contexts.

4. Emphasis on climate activism

In the previous sections of this paper, the importance of extent and especially the kind of media attention for social and protest movements was discussed. An extensive literature on the representation of all kinds of protest groups in the news exists. This line of research remains relevant as a substantive group of scholars expresses that the protest paradigm is susceptible to a range of factors, including the issue the protest concerns.

However, specific research focusing on the representation of climate protest and the use of the protest paradigm remains rather limited. Arguments can be made as to why climate action groups warrant more dedicated research. In the following sections, this paper will lay out a brief explanation of climate movement and explore the relevant literature about climate change and action in media that already exists.

4.1 The climate change movement and its impacts

Climate change is increasingly understood as one of the most urgent and complex problems of our time (Sun & Yang, 2016). But climate change activism has been around for several decades. Activists have been calling for a more effective political approach regarding climate change and other environmental issues since the 1970s (Dietz & Garrelts, 2014).

The movement is entangled with the broader environmental movement; however, climate change differs from most other policy domains. Bomberg (2012) describes climate change as a policy issue characterised by a strong urgency and complexity, with long-term effects and large up-front costs.

The uniqueness and urgency of climate change as a policy problem make the academic study of climate change activism in particular interesting and useful.

Climate activism has resorted to multiple forms of action throughout its history. Research points out that the climate and environmental movement has often taken a politicised and legal approach, with activists using lobbying and litigation to change policies. Financial institutions and businesses have also been targeted directly by divestment campaigns (Bomberg, 2012; Roser-Renouf et al., 2014).

However, the focus in this paper lies more on the mobilisation of ordinary citizens with limited economic or political powers. Climate activism has focused on the individual actions people can take. Using awareness and education campaigns, climate activists have tried to change behavioural patterns among the public (Roser-Renouf et al., 2014). Of course, protest and direct action are also a part of climate activists' repertoires. As we will establish in a following section, in recent years a surge in direct climate action including protests, rallies and acts of civil disobedience, has taken place (De Moor et al., 2021).

In the field of environmental sociology, researchers agree that the climate movement and protest are crucial to facilitating social change necessary to halt climate change (Bugden, 2020).

But have activists' efforts made a difference? The outcomes of climate and environmental movements have been studied from multiple perspectives.

Most climate activism is concerned with indirect impact, as actions often target nodes of power like policymakers and businesses (Fisher & Nasrin, 2021). A significant portion of climate activists try to conquer these power nodes from within the system. One example is litigation, where activists try to use the legal system to steer policy and corporations in a more climate friendly direction. The Columbia Law Schools' Climate Change Litigation Database (2024) reports on 1746 U.S. climate cases and 876 global cases. Most recently, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that "humans have a right to safety from climate catastrophes that is rooted in their right to life, privacy and family" (Di Sario, 2024). However, no academic evidence regarding what the effects of these lawsuits are on greenhouse gas emissions exists currently.

The effects on activism that concern financial measures have also been explored by researchers. Results indicate mixed success for shareholder activism and a large potential for fossil fuel divestments to reduce emissions significantly (Fisher & Nasrin, 2021).

As stated, the interest of this paper lies more in the direction of activism outside the realms of political or economic power. Below, research on more civil society-based climate activism is explored.

Because of the challenging nature of investigating the topic, very limited studies have been conducted on the effects of climate activism and individual behavioural changes affecting climate change (Fisher & Nasrin, 2021). However, one study did look at the electricity use of households

in England and found an association between contact with environmental organisations and little electricity use (Saunders et al., 2014). Similarly, Vestergren et al. (2019) found reduced plastic and meat consumption in people who participated in an environmental campaign.

Apart from behavioural changes, how citizens have impacted climate change using tactics like boycotting, striking, protesting, and direct action has also been studied and is most interesting for this paper.

Olzak et al. (2016) find no evidence for the claim that protest activity influences the fate of environmental legislation. However, research did find that collective action targeting corporations has had an impact on perceived risk and on actual performance (see Muñoz et al., 2018 for an overview). In their own study, Muñoz et al. (2018) further explored the impacts of movement activity and subsequent policy regimes on levels of CO₂ emissions in U.S. states. Their results indicate that social movement protest effectively lowers carbon emissions. Rucht (1999) concluded in his essay that the more pressure environmental movements can exert, the more policy tends to improve environmental quality. Several scholars have also concluded that protests and strikes play a significant role in pressuring governments to adapt more climate-friendly policies (Brulle, 2000; Fisher & Nasrin, 2021).

Another relevant aspect of climate activism outcomes concerns the effects of actions, especially direct action tactics like protests, on public opinion and attitudes. Although recent surveys from the Pew Research Centre (2022) conclude that three in four people across 19 countries see climate change as the biggest threat to their country, this does not equal support for climate protests or actual changes in behaviour. A current hypothesis is that extreme tactics will cause a 'backfire' effect and lessen support for climate change policies. This is supported by general research concerning social movements and the activist's dilemma (Feinberg et al., 2020), which we covered in previous sections. Research on the dilemma applied to climate activism is limited. One study by Bugden (2020) did research on the effectiveness of climate protest by looking at whether they increase support for structural societal changes, taking protest tactics as well as partisan identity into account. He found that no backfire effect happens, and civil disobedience even has a positive effect on support among Democrats. In a 2022 Conversation article, Heather Alberro, a lecturer in sustainable development, also argued that extreme tactics can benefit the climate movement. She describes radical tactics as a last resort measure for grabbing media and public attention when all other ways of activism are exhausted. This can impact the movement in a positive way and is what

scholars call the radical flank effect (Haines, 2013). When the progress of a movement faces difficulties, a group of activists may resort to more disruptive strategies. These actions can make the requests of the moderate majority within the movement appear more acceptable to both governmental authorities and the public, thereby supporting the overall goals of the movement (Alberro, 2022; Haines, 2013). Evidence for this effect on climate activism in particular has, however, not been studied.

4.2 Climate change and climate activism in media

As highlighted in the previous section, climate change activism can make a real-world difference by using protest tactics. Research additionally points out the importance of attitudes concerning climate change and protest. It is evident that the media also have a role in these movement outcomes. Below, the literature on the relations between media and climate change, and climate activism, is explored.

Some studies have looked at the representation of climate change and climate activism in news and other media.

Hase et al. (2021) analysed coverage of climate change in general and found that protests have a significant impact on the extent of media coverage. Trumbo (1996) also looked at news coverage of climate change news and found that the issue has become increasingly politicised, with scientists being less used as a source.

Scheuch et al. (2023) examined British news coverage of climate action over 7 months. They found conservative publications to use more unfavourable coverage and actions targeting the public were found to be covered more favourably. Actions targeting the industry were found to be covered more often. They point out that questions of the disruptiveness and legality of movement actions are key in predicting coverage and public support.

As established, activists' aim is often to put pressure on economic and political actors to change policies (Fisher & Nasrin, 2021). To maximise this pressure, public support for the climate activists' causes is important, showing the relevance of the study of the effects of climate action on public attitudes.

Communication scholars have in turn pointed out the specific role of media in environmental and climate attitudes. Media are believed to have the power to shape the debate, influence outcomes,

determine representation, and grant or deny power (Hutchins & Lester, 2006). Below some research on the impacts of media representations of climate protests on movement support and climate attitudes is summarised.

Vliegenthart et al. (2006) studied the Dutch environmental movement and found that the visibility of organisations in the media directly impacts membership support, however, more membership did not increase coverage. Chinn et al. (2020) also argue that news coverage is likely to have a significant impact on public attitudes about climate change and point out the importance of researching the degree of politicisation and polarisation of climate change news coverage. An experiment by Kenward and Brick (2021) also found evidence that positive coverage of climate protests can increase pro-climate attitudes. Scheuch et al. (2023) summarised that “news coverage is an important outcome of climate actions, in that its volume and tone can have a key influence on the climate debate” (p. 4).

Feldman and Hart (2017) tested the effects of news visuals and text on discrete emotions and on support for climate mitigation policies. They found that news images and texts that focus on climate-oriented actions can increase hope and decrease fear and anger.

All these results indicate the importance of the way climate action is represented in the media, making another argument as to why the protest paradigm in this coverage makes up a relevant research topic.

4.3 The most recent surge in climate protest

Research documents a 'new wave' of climate activism that began in 2018. Climate strikes and protests gained more traction, marked by the emergence of movements like Fridays For Future (FFF), better known as the school strikes (Fisher & Nasrin, 2021). Movements using more disruptive tactics such as Extinction Rebellion (XR) (De Moor et al., 2021) also arose. Along with those international movements, local organisations followed their lead, like Youth For Climate and Code Rood in Belgium. De Moor et al. (2019) found that FFF and XR display some novel characteristics as opposed to earlier climate change mobilisation. They point out the large number of participants, which includes more newcomers, school pupils and girls than ever before. A shift in tactics is also described, as there seems to be a stronger emphasis on non-violent civil disobedience (de Moor et al., 2019; Scheuch et al., 2023). In September 2019, people from over 180 countries participated in what is likely the largest climate protest in history (Laville & Watts, 2019). The renewed climate justice movement succeeded in creating a lasting international

protest network, rallying supporters through social media and public actions, and ultimately raising the level of climate awareness in the public (Von Storch et al., 2021). Although the COVID-19 lockdowns disrupted ongoing protest cycles, today, climate activism remains prominent (Von Storch et al, 2021). In 2022, another new climate action group arose: Just Stop Oil. They gained a lot of attention with their provocative actions where activists (try to) vandalise famous artworks to raise awareness of the urgency of climate change action.

As the effects of climate change become more apparent (World Health Organisation: WHO, 2023), climate concern and action are on the rise.

Scholars have already started to research these newer climate movements mentioned above. Von Zabern and Tulloch (2021) for example, investigated how the Fridays for Future strikes were represented in German online newspapers. They found evidence for both positive and negative framing of the demonstrations and pointed out that although most articles do include protester voices, they are reduced to apolitical statements.

Pardal et al. (2021) looked at media representations of the Belgian Youth For Climate protests and found that although the protests were extensively covered, a discussion of climate change issues was also barely present. Bergmann and Ossewaarde (2020) studied the depictions of the school strike participants in German newspapers. They find both progressive and conservative newspapers to be ageist in their representation of the protesters and their portrayals to delegitimize the youths' participation and interest in climate activism. Similarly, Alexander et al. (2022) found that Australian newspapers used narratives that disregarded the political voice and ability of young demonstrators when covering the school strikes for climate. A thesis by Adolfsson (2023) studied the discourse used in reports on an action by Just Stop Oil, where activists threw tomato soup on Van Gogh's 'Sunflower'. They found news stories to be very sensationalistic, with little focus on the demands and goals of the protesters.

As we have previously established, media attention and coverage are vital and impactful for social movements, especially with complex and global issues like climate change. Therefore, it is evident that research on climate activism and its representation in (news) media is a compelling topic, especially considering the new cycle of activism taking place.

5. Conclusion

This literature review on the representation of protest in news coverage started off with a definition of social movements. As facilitators of social and political change, social movements will always be a relevant subject for scholars across disciplines. Social movements have transformed themselves to target new, post-materialistic issues in an ever-changing world. However, protest continues to be a means to their end. The reason for that lies in the power structures of society. As actors without any institutional power, movements need to find alternative ways of political engagement. Protest was and continues to be used as a form of political representation, influencing agendas and policies. However, to reach protest objectives, movements need media attention to reach and gain support from their desired audiences and to interact with political elites. The power prescribed to mass media is rooted in the agenda-setting theory. This theory points out the power of the media to decide what their audiences think about, thus influencing what issues are deemed important by the public and politicians alike.

While the importance of media coverage for social movements is clear, this does not mean it comes easy. Movements, and any other actor without institutional power, deal with a selection bias. The media are theorised to reflect society's power structures. This means that while media are always interested in certain elites, movements without institutional power face a struggle to pass through the news gates. The question of when movements do overcome this struggle has been studied extensively. Answers are found in a range of internal and external conditions, like event and movement characteristics, the news organisations themselves, the issues movements talk about, and time and contextual factors. Most of these explanations are rooted in news value theory and news routines, as they prescribe what makes a certain event newsworthy and how news comes about. The theories were applied to protest events in the literature study, along with other findings scholars have made in the rich literature of news selection.

But movements' power struggle with media attention doesn't end when they are covered. As media are also believed to have the possibility to shape public discourse and opinion, how they represent movements and their protests is essential. However, since movements often challenge the status quo and media are said to reflect and uphold that status quo, movements deal with a second bias, the description bias. As the media use so-called frames to describe protests and all other news stories, they select and emphasise certain aspects of events and give the stories a

certain meaning. Scholarship finds that protest reporting often marginalises and delegitimises protests and emphasises negative aspects like violence. The study of the protest framing in news coverage converges on a theory coined the protest paradigm. The protest paradigm describes certain patterns in protest coverage that tend to delegitimise protests and their objectives. The literature has extensively described how the paradigm manifests itself in news coverage and under what conditions it does so. The paradigm is mainly recognised by its use of delegitimizing frames, a sourcing that relies heavily on elites, the invocation of an antagonising public opinion and the use of other marginalising devices. These elements were observed across many different studies.

The triggers of the protest paradigm are often found in the protests' level of deviance. The use of illegal and radical protest tactics, as well as the persuasion of status quo challenging goals often result in coverage that adheres to the protest paradigm. Additionally, the paradigm is theorised to be subjected to certain geographical and political contexts. Finally, some characteristics of the news organisations publishing the protest reports are also said to impact the use of the paradigm. As described in the literature review, scholars have extensively researched the protest paradigm across time and different countries, cultures, and movements.

However, the study of the protest paradigm in practice remains relevant. The use of the paradigm is not set in stone and is subjective to change over time and across different contexts. Especially as the news media landscape has undergone significant changes due to the rise of the internet and further digitalisation of society, the continuous study of news coverage and the protest paradigm is warranted.

Additionally, one movement that is particularly relevant and active today, is only the subject of very few protest paradigm studies: the climate movement. As concerns about climate change become more pressing each year, the climate movement has seen a surge in recent years. Starting around 2018, new climate movements took the stage and carried out numerous actions. Scholarship has pointed out that media are especially influential in terms of climate attitudes and even climate-related behaviour, and protest coverage plays a significant role in that matter. This is why the study of climate protest coverage poses a relevant and interesting topic, that seems to be underexposed in current literature. Even more so, considering the newer climate movements often resort to more radical tactics and the impact on public support is being questioned.

This study aims to broaden the understanding of how climate activism is covered in the news by investigating the use of the protest paradigm in protest coverage, by using quantitative content analysis. As this master thesis is constrained in time and resources, the study will focus on the Flemish online news landscape. However, this paper hopes to give an impetus to all journalism scholars to target climate and climate protest representation in their future studies, given the relevance of the issue of climate change today.

III. Empirical study

1. Research questions

The broad research question this paper poses is the following: How is climate protest represented in Flemish online news media?

This thesis aims to expand on the literature about protest groups' representations in media and the protest paradigm, specifically for the climate movement. As the time and resources for this research are limited, the empirical study will be limited in scope. However, this study will still contribute valuable insights to the existing literature.

Drawing on the conclusions of the literature overview, some more specific research questions are posed.

RQ1 Do the Flemish news media adhere to the protest paradigm when reporting on climate protest?

RQ1A What frames out of the four proposed by McLeod and Hertog (1999) do Flemish news media use when reporting on climate protests?

RQ1B Do Flemish news media use episodic or thematic framing when reporting on climate protests?

RQ1C Do Flemish news media use more official and expert sources than protest voices and non-official sources?

RQ1D Do Flemish news media invoke antagonising public opinion when reporting on climate protests?

RQ2 Are characteristics of the protest affecting the adherence to the protest paradigm?

RQ2A Is there a difference in adherence to the protest paradigm in Flemish news media when the protest uses either legal or illegal actions?

RQ2B Is there a difference in adherence to the protest paradigm in Flemish news media when the protest uses either disruptive or non-disruptive actions?

RQ2C Is there a difference in adherence to the protest paradigm in Flemish news media when the protest happens either locally or internationally?

RQ3 Are characteristics of the news organisation affecting the adherence to the protest paradigm?

RQ3A Is there a difference in adherence to the protest paradigm between quality and popular news brands?

RQ3B Is there a difference in adherence to the protest paradigm between mainstream news outlets and alternative news outlets?

2. Methodology and research design

In order to answer the posed research questions, a quantitative content analysis will be conducted. This study concerns a problem-driven analysis, as the research stems from a set of epistemic questions and the idea that a systematic reading of relevant content can provide answers (Krippendorff, 2018).

Weber defined content analysis as using “a set of procedures to make valid inferences about a text” (Weber, 1990, p. 9). In other words, content analysis is a research method used to analyse and interpret the content of all kinds of communication. This includes text, images, audio, and video. The technique is used across multiple disciplines, including communication and media studies, sociology, and political science.

Some authors describe the possibility of quantitative and qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018). A qualitative content analysis reconstructs the meaning of a text through a close reading by expressing the latent meanings in its context (Krippendorff, 2018).

Other prominent scholars in the field of content analysis argue that content analysis is always quantitative in nature. Neuendorf (2002, p. 14) for example, defines the goals of a content analysis as the construction of “a numerically based summary of a chosen message set”.

Most authors do see the value in qualitative analysis of content and underline how the two strategies are complementary (Macnamara, 2003; Krippendorff, 2018).

In the case of this study, a quantitative strategy will be used to expand on the existing body of research about the representation of protest in media. Berelson defined quantitative content analysis as “a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (1971, p. 18). His definition emphasises that content analysis is a methodology and scientific approach to studying content. By defining the technique as objective and systematic he highlights the importance of a reliable study that is consistent and free from personal bias.

It must be acknowledged that a solely quantitative study is limited in some ways, as this kind of research “has not been able to capture the context within which a media text becomes meaningful” (Newbold et al, 2002, p. 84) as opposed to qualitative studies. In the context of this master’s thesis, these shortcomings are deemed acceptable. Because this study draws upon previous qualitative

and framing research (see section 3.1.1), some more latent variables are even included. However, because the research in this paper aims to count the prevalence of these variables, it can still be considered a quantitative study. To meet the scientific standards of a proper content analysis, the reliability of the coding process is discussed in the following sections.

2.1 Sample and data collection

Following Macnamara (2003) the selection of a sample in media content analysis entails three steps:

- 1) Selection of media forms and genres
- 2) Selection of dates or periods included in the study
- 3) Sampling of relevant content within those media

Below each of these steps will be illustrated in the context of this study.

As for the selection of media forms and genres, this study focuses on the online news content of mainstream Flemish newspapers because they are considered an influential medium in the discussion of political matters and have high credibility in the eyes of information-seeking audiences (Castells, 2002). Because of the evidence we found in the literature for a different use of the protest paradigm in alternative news media, two alternative news websites, that publish no physical newspaper are also included in the sample.

The choice for Flemish rather than Belgian media outlets can be justified by the structure of the media landscape in Belgium. Since the start of the development of the press, the Belgian news market has been separated into a Flemish and a Francophone part (De Bens & Raeymaeckers, 2016). This separation is not only based on language, but social and political differences exist and essentially create two different public spheres (De Bens & Raeymaeckers, 2016). The choice to focus on online news content is also a justified one. The *2023 Digital News Report* found that online news is by far the most important news source in Flanders. 48% of the researched populations indicated online news as a news source in the past week, as opposed to 9% for printed news. As part of this study's relevance is due to the important effects of media coverage on public perceptions of protest issues, it seems appropriate to study the news content that reaches the largest audience. A study on print news, however more traditional, can be argued as less relevant in today's news consumption landscape.

The period from January 2018 until July 2023 will be studied in this paper. For this selection, multiple factors were considered. Firstly, as the time and resources for this thesis are limited, a limited research period is also warranted. However, the period was not selected at random. As established in the literature study, a new wave of climate activism began around 2018. In the years following, the international Fridays for Future movement and the Belgian Youth for Climate and Code Rood movements organised numerous actions. This makes the period an interesting and relevant one for studying the representation of climate protest groups.

The type of sampling used in this paper is purposive sampling, as described by Macnamara (2003). All relevant articles from key media in the Flemish news landscape are selected. Those key media are determined by looking at the Flemish online news landscape.

The news websites this paper decided to study are the following: *De Morgen*, *Het Nieuwsblad*, *De Tijd*, *MO** and *Apache*. This sample includes a website from each large media group in Flanders and two independent news websites. Table 1 shows the organisational connections in the Flemish news landscape.

Table 1

Largest media groups in Flanders and their respective news brands

Media group	Flemish news brands owned by media group
DPG Media	De Morgen, HLN
Mediahuis	De Standaard, Het Nieuwsblad, Gazet Van Antwerpen, Het Belang van Limburg
Roularta ¹	De Tijd, KW De Krant van West-Vlaanderen, De Zondag, De Streekkrant

We selected only *Het Nieuwsblad* from *Mediahuis* because *De Standaard* and *Het Nieuwsblad* share a lot of their articles. *De Morgen* rather than *Het Laatste Nieuws* was chosen from *DPG Media* because the online content from *Het Laatste Nieuws* on *hln.be* is not exclusive to the brand *Het Laatste Nieuws* but also uses news from other brands within *DPG Media*. This paper focuses on

¹ Roularta Media Group publishes *De Tijd* under *Mediafin*, a joint venture with Groupe Rossel.

newspapers focusing on the whole of Flanders, so no local news brands owned by *Mediahuis* or *Roularta* were studied. *De Tijd* is the only remaining brand from *Roularta* that produces online Flemish news articles, hence its' inclusion in the sample.

By selecting these brands, different types of news brands are included. In Flanders, newspapers and news brands can be differentiated as quality brands (*De Morgen* & *De Tijd*) and popular brands (*Het Nieuwsblad*) (De Bens, 1997). Quality brands provide high-quality information (De Bens, 1997) on difficult, complex, and far-reaching matters (Jansen, 1987). Popular brands are more focused on entertainment and sensationalism and report on news with 'instant reward' like crime and corruption, disasters and accidents, human interest, etc. (Jansen, 1987). With the characteristics of the protest paradigm in mind, looking into the differences between protest reporting in quality and popular news media is relevant.

*MO** and *Apache* were selected as alternative and independently owned news brands. Some contexts on their ideological slant and mission are warranted.

Apache describes itself as a progressive medium that consciously takes on the role of the fourth estate of power. It aims to critically approach power elites and structures in society, most often by utilising investigative journalism.

*MO** is owned by a collective of NGOs and their mission is to provide a journalistic media project about global trends and local realities around the world. They point out that they are independent and do not adhere to any political ideology, but they can also be classified as a more progressive medium.

This study does not include a more conservatively slanted independent news brand, as practical constraints did not allow for inclusion in the sample.

One unit of analysis in this study consists of one full article. Images and embedded social media posts are also considered in our analysis; however, video's will be excluded.

The collection of the units in the form of online news articles was done by using the BelgaPress database (formerly GoPress). The whole archive was searched by using a manual boolean search query with filters concerning the selected news brands, online content and the searched period enabled. The search string stated: *klimaatprotest* OR klimaatmars* OR klimaatactivist* OR klimaatbetoging OR klimaatactie OR klimaatbeweging OR klimaatspijbel* OR klimaatbrosser**.

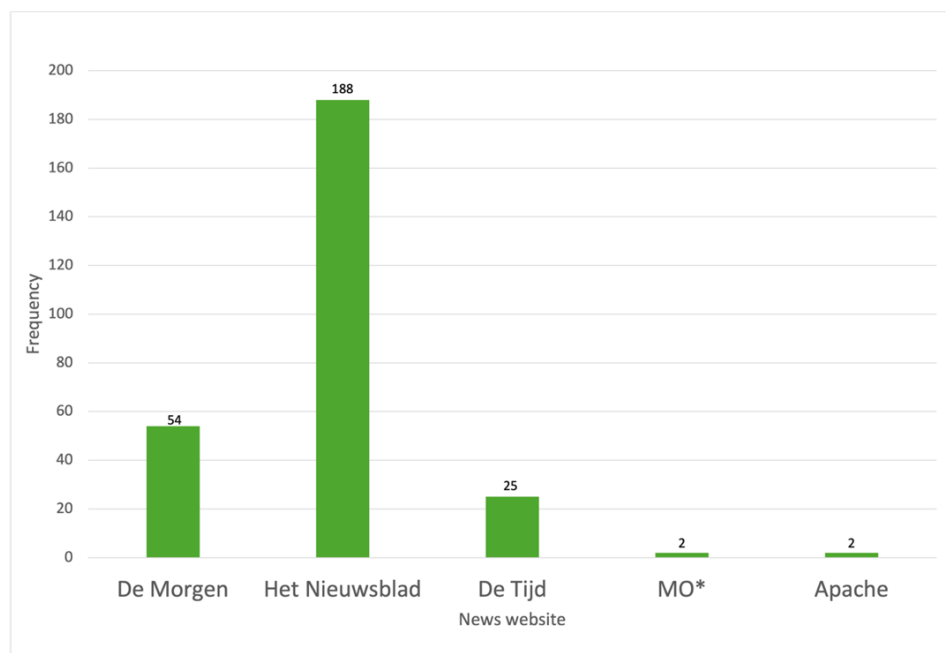
The search string initially resulted in over 400 articles. The articles found were scanned for duplicates and those were discarded. To be able to apply the protest paradigm, only articles were selected that concerned an actual protest event. Articles concerning protest events that had already happened or were happening were selected. Articles concerning members of climate protest organisations, but not an actual protest event were discarded.

The data collection process resulted in a final sample (n) of 271 articles.

Below, Figure 1 shows the frequency table for each included news brand. Het Nieuwsblad is clearly the most represented within the analysed articles. Quality brands De Morgen and De Tijd are significantly less present in the sample.

Figure 1

Frequency for each news brand ($n=271$)

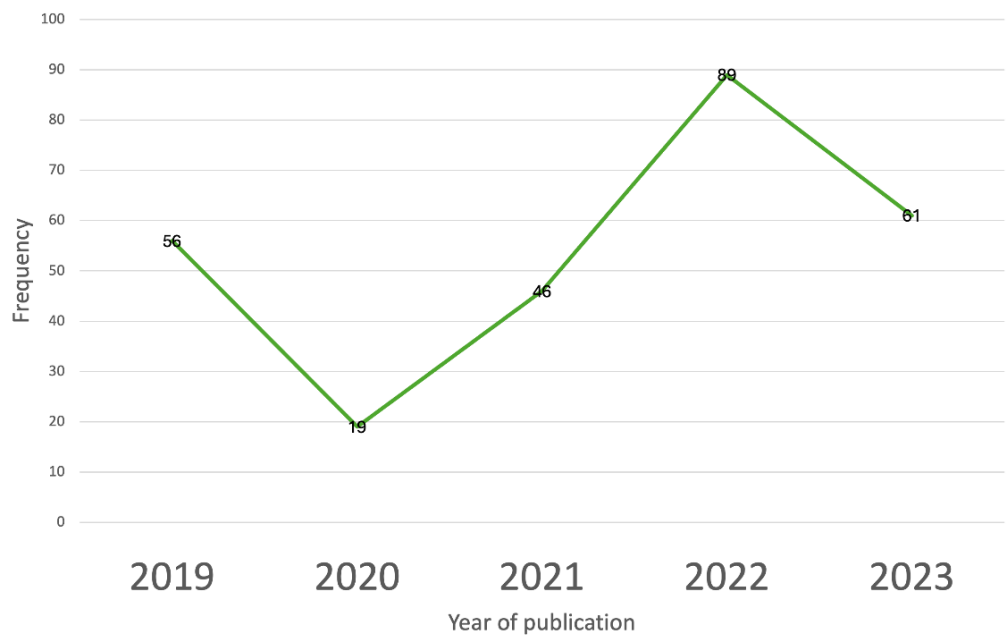


A very small number of articles from alternative news brands made the final sample. Apache has a clear focus on investigative journalism and publishes few classical news reports, such as protest reports, so its absence is not so surprising. For MO*, the low frequency of articles is more notable, as their global focus warrants attention to global climate strikes happening during the researched

period. In any case, the lack of articles from alternative news websites has implications for some of the research questions in this paper. In section 3.4.2 on RQ3B, these implications will be discussed further.

Another aspect worth exploring is the frequency of articles published each year. Although our research period was established from January 2018 until July 2023, the oldest article resulting from our search query stems from May 2019. When double checking, it seemed that the Belga.Press database is flawed and does not contain all articles dating before mid 2019. Although this is unfortunate, the sample was large enough to still research the representation of climate action in news content. In practice, this did result in a shortened researched period, from May 2019 up until July 2023.

Figure 2
Articles published per year (n=271)



In Figure 2 the distribution of articles throughout the years is visualised. The differences in the articles published per year are not surprising. 2019 and 2023 naturally have fewer articles as only a part of those years was included in the sample. The drop in 2020 is explained by the COVID-lockdowns. More in-depth analyses on this topic are provided in section 3.

2.2 Codebook and registration form

To conduct a quantitative content analysis, a code book must be composed. A code book should enable other researchers to repeat the same analysis and arrive at similar conclusions (Higgins & Stroud, 2009).

To operationalize the protest paradigm and setting up the code book, this study mainly draws from the analysed literature. This strategy of developing classifications based on existing theories and literature is described by Krippendorff (2019). He finds that by using this technique “researchers can avoid simplistic formulations and tap into a wealth of available conceptualizations” (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 352).

The codebook was constructed by extracting relevant variables from the literature review and from examples of other protest paradigm content analyses. As mentioned in the codebook itself, the studies from Harlow and Kilgo (2017), Harlow et al. (2019), De Cillia and McCurdy (2020) and Salazar Rebolledo et al. (2023) served as inspirations and examples for this study.

The codebook was constructed in three sections. The first section concerned the article characteristics. The date and year of publication were recorded. The wordcount was also coded in categories. Next the news website the article stemmed from, and the article type were included. For the article types a distinction was made between a factual article, an interview, an opinion piece, and an article providing a background analysis of the events. Lastly, the sentiment of the article as provided by the BelgaPress database was also indicated. The sentiment could either be neutral, positive, or negative.

The next section concerned the characteristics of the protest itself. First, the size of the protest was coded in categories. Next, the types of tactics used in the protest(s) were registered. A distinction was made between legal and illegal protest tactics and within those categories the tactics were even more defined. The protest tactics were also coded as radical or non-radical. A radical tactic was defined as disrupting the existing order and aiming for a reaction from authorities or the public. Radical tactics can entail activities like civil disobedience, occupation of public spaces and symbolic or shocking gestures. Non-radical actions are characterised as having a peaceful and non-confrontational character, without violence or radical means.

It is important to note that not every illegal action is automatically classified as radical. Lastly, the location of the protest was also recorded. For each article the location of the protest was coded as

either domestic (in Belgium), taking place in a neighbouring country (Germany, The Netherlands, France, Luxembourg), taking place elsewhere abroad or as a cross-border action.

During the coding process the presence of a range of indicators of the protest paradigm was recorded. These indicators were deduced from the literature study conducted in chapter II. The first few variables concerned the framing of the article. The four frames proposed by McLeod and Hertog (1999), the riot, confrontation, spectacle, and debate frame, were each coded as present or not present. The next couple of variables recorded the sources used in the article. The quantity and types of both official sources and non-official sources were coded. Official sources are defined as sources with powerful position within society, like governments, law enforcement and businesses. Non-official sources are those without that inherent power position, like protest voices and citizens. The next protest paradigm indicator that was recorded as present or not is the use of an antagonising public opinion. The form in which it was present was coded as well. Each article was coded as using a thematic of episodic framing as well, using the descriptions of the type of framing provided in the codebook. For each article one of the two was flagged as more dominant, meaning the categories are mutually exclusive. Lastly the use of labelling, the mention of the protester's demands and concerns and the highlighting of ineffectiveness and negative consequences were also coded as present or not present, concluding all protest paradigm indicators.

To facilitate the analysis of these indicators, some of them were recoded so that for all indicators a value of 0 means the indicator is absent and a value of 1 means the indicator is present. When an indicator is present, the article adheres more to the protest paradigm than when it is not present. More detailed information on how these variables were computed is found in the appendix.

Table 2 lists all the indicators and corresponding variables that resulted from this process.

Table 2*List of indicators of the protest paradigm derived from the dataset*

Variable number	Variable label	Indicator
V27	Delegitimizing frame used	The presence of a delegitimizing frame (without the presence of a legitimizing frame)
V28	No goals and demands	The absence of the protesters' goals and demands
V29	Episodic framing	The use of episodic instead of thematic framing
V26	Dominance official sources	The use of more official and expert sources than non-official sources and protest voices
V16.1	Antagonising public opinion	The use of an antagonising public opinion
V21	Ineffectiveness	The description of the protest as ineffective
V18	Negative consequences	The highlighting of the protests' negative consequences
V19	Labelling	The use of labels to describe the protesters

To ensure the replicability of the study, the reliability of the original variables recorded during the coding process was tested using Cohen's kappa (see section 2.4).

The registration form was made digitally using Qualtrics survey software. For each coded article a new survey form was filled out. Using this software made the extraction of the data a lot easier and less susceptible to mistakes like typing errors. The data was exported into .sav files and used to conduct the statistical analyses with SPSS.

The complete codebook, both in Dutch as used by the coders and an English translation, and the registration form will be included in the appendix.

2.3 Reliability and validity

In research in general, but also especially in content analysis, it is important to pay attention to the quality and accuracy of the measurements (Jansen, 2023). The concepts of reliability and validity help researchers make sure their measurements and results are of scientific quality.

Validity refers to the accuracy of the measurements and reliability refers to the consistency of the measurements. Below, the concepts of validity and reliability are further defined and applied to the study in this paper.

Validity entails whether the research instruments you are using accurately measure what they're supposed to measure (Jansen, 2023). The concept concerns 'the truth' (Krippendorff, 2019), as it concerns the overlap between the measured variables and the real-life concept they aim to measure. If a study is valid, this overlap is strong. To assess the validity of this study we look at three key points. The first is the representativity of the sample. As discussed in section 2.1, this study used a purposive sample. All relevant articles from key media were included in the sample. How these key media make up a representative sample of the Flemish news landscape is also discussed in section 2.1. We can conclude that the studied sample can produce results representative of Flemish online media. Second, the operationalisation of the concepts is also important. As the variables and codebook were deduced from an in-depth literature review, one can assume these to be valid as well. Lastly, to ensure valid results, the correct statistical techniques to draw conclusions from the data must be used. The techniques and analyses used are discussed in section 3.

The concept of reliability covers the consistency of the measurement instruments used (Jansen, 2023). In other words, if a study is replicated studying the same phenomena under the same conditions and produces the same results, it is reliable.

To ensure the replicability of this study and the consistency of the coding tools, the inter-coder reliability was measured. A so-called reliability sub-sample (Macnamara, 2003) consisting of 25 randomly selected articles out of the complete sample was created. It was then coded using the code book by two coders, the author of this paper and another master's student.

Using SPSS, Cohen's kappa was calculated for 18 variables. The kappa value between 0 and 1 indicates the agreement between the two coders, with 0 indicating no agreement and 1 indicating perfect agreement. There is no fixed minimum level of reliability that all researchers adhere to (Krippendorff, 2019). A general rule of thumb, as stated by Ellis (1994, cited in Macnamara, 2003), is that reliability coefficients with a value above 0.75 or 0.80 are accepted as highly reliable. Neuendorf (2002) also finds that a score above 0.75 is acceptable in most cases and even finds a more lenient threshold to be afforded to Cohen's kappa.

Below, in Table 3, the kappa values for the 18 variables tested are listed. All kappa values measure above 0.75 and a considerable amount even have perfect agreement.

Table 3

Cohen's kappa values for tested variables

Variable name	Cohen's kappa	Variable name	Cohen's kappa
V6 Article type	1	V13.4 Debate frame	1
V8 Protest size	0.886	V14.1 Official sources	1
V9.1 Illegal tactics	1	V15.1 Non-official sources	1
V10.1 Legal tactics	1	V16.1 Antagonistic public opinion	0.779
V11 Radical tactics	0.911	V17 Episodic or thematic framing	0.865
V12 Protest location	0.94	V18 Negative consequences	0.752
V13.1 Riot frame	1	V19 Labelling	1
V13.2 Confrontation frame	0.834	V20 Goals and demands	0.826
V13.3 Spectacle frame	1	V21 Ineffectiveness	1

Note that not all variables were tested for reliability. For pragmatic reasons, variables that were directly adopted from BelgaPress were not included, for example: date, word count and news brand. Variables that defined or categorised other variables were also not included, for example: the different types of illegal and legal protests.

Another factor in the reliability of a content analysis is the reliability of the selection of the units for the sample. We have analysed all relevant articles from a selection of news brands. Within the brands, no actual sample selection took place, so we can assume it is reliable. The brands themselves were consciously selected keeping the Flemish news landscape in mind. While not every researcher might pick the same brands or even make a selection at all, a selection deemed acceptable in the context of this master's thesis with limited time and resources.

3. Results

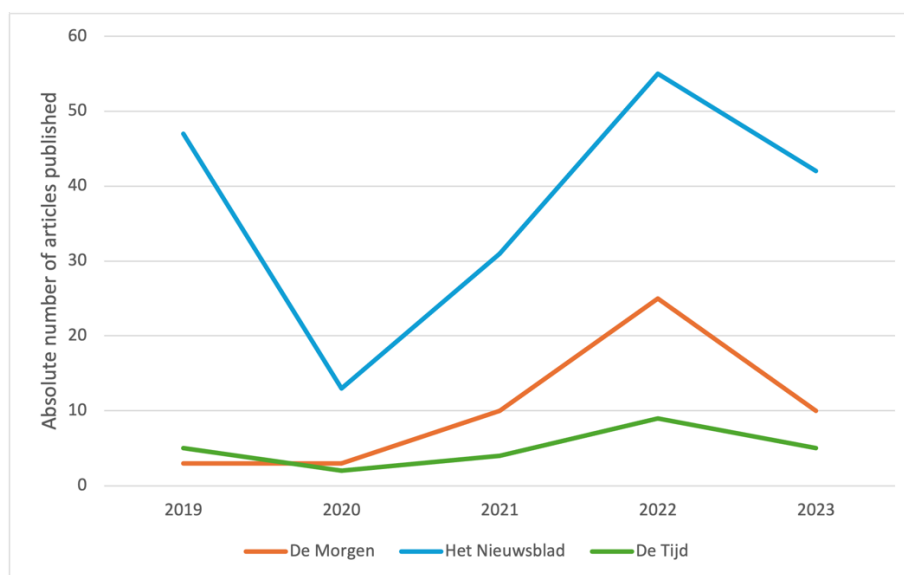
3.1 Exploring the sample

Before the specific research questions are discussed, first some general characteristics of the sample are explored. This way, some general insights on the protests and the subsequent reporting during the studied period are given.

By looking at the number of articles published each year, an idea of the protest activity during our studied period is provided. In section 2.1 a general overview was already given. Below, a comparison for the number of articles per year between the different news brands is visualised in Figure 3. Although there are large differences in the number of articles between news brands, a similar pattern is observed, especially from 2020 onward. In 2019 a lot of the protest articles concerned the global climate strikes and local school strike initiatives. The drop between 2019 and 2020 follows the COVID lockdowns, where very little protest activity was possible. After COVID, newer protest organisations like XR and Just Stop Oil gained a lot of attention with disruptive actions and acts of vandalism to ask for climate attention.

Figure 3

Comparison of articles published per year between news brands (n=267)

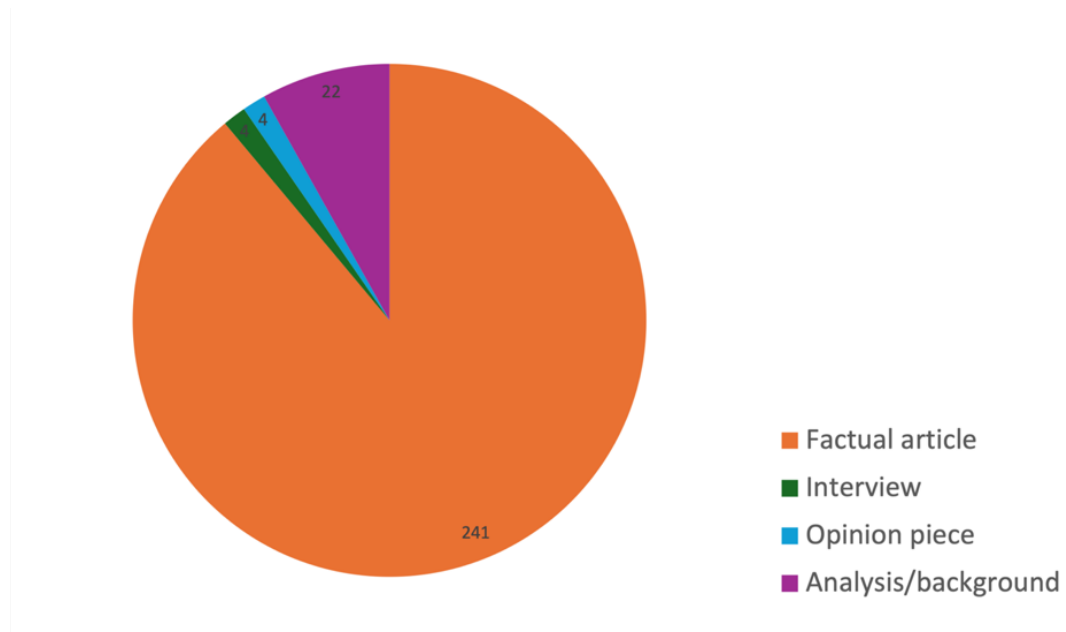


Note. Because only very few articles were published by MO* and Apache they are not included in this graph.

To give a broad insight into how protests are reported in our sample, the type of article and article length are more closely observed. Figure 4 shows the frequency for each article type.

Figure 4

Absolute frequencies of each article type (n=271)



Most of the articles analysed were factual articles, reporting on protest events in a classic news report. Only 8% of the articles in the sample were classified as giving an extended background or analysis of a protest event. This already points toward a more episodic approach to protest reporting in our sample, which is supported by the literature (f.e. Boyle et al., 2004). A couple of interviews and opinion pieces were included in the sample as well, but only when they concerned protest events and the protest paradigm was applicable.

The article length was indicated by classifying the word count into five categories. Table 4 shows the frequency for each category.

Table 4*Frequency of wordcount categories (n=271)*

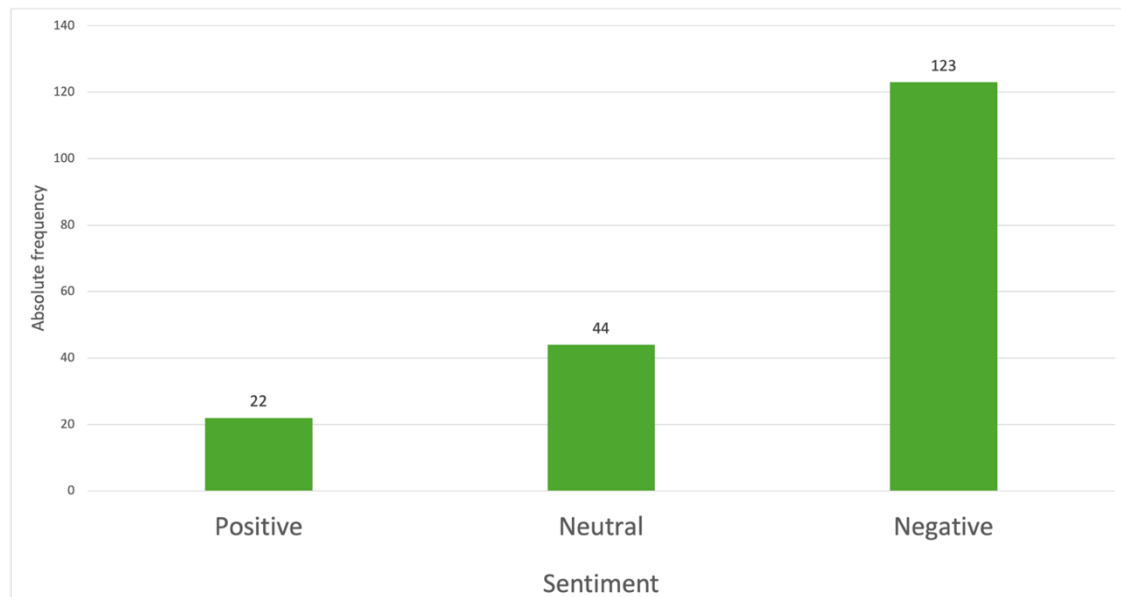
Wordcount	N	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Under 100 words	8	3.0	3.0
Between 100 and 299 words	167	61.6	64.6
Between 300 and 499 words	56	20.7	85.2
Between 500 and 699 words	13	4.8	90.0
700 words or more	27	10.0	100.0
Total	271	100.0	

We can conclude from this data that the length of most articles is relatively short, with almost 65% of the articles falling in the first two categories and being under 300 words. About a fourth of the articles were of medium length and only 10% are considered long articles.

Lastly, the sentiment of the article was also recorded during the coding process. When coding it became apparent that BelgaPress did not start attributing sentiments until late 2020. This means that for a significant portion of the sample sentiments were not included. Because of this, and because of a lack of transparency on how these sentiments are attributed by BelgaPress, we will merely look at the sentiments as an exploratory variable. Beyond this it will not be included in the analysis of the use of the protest paradigm. Figure 4 shows the frequency of each sentiment. The negative sentiment was clearly most frequently attributed to the protest coverage in our sample. Although a negative sentiment is intuitively attributed to the protest paradigm, without further (qualitative) interpretation of each article, we cannot conclude whether this negative sentiment is towards the activists and their actions.

Figure 5

Frequency of each sentiment (n=189)



Note. The articles for which no sentiment was attributed in BelgaPress are excluded from this graph.

The negative sentiment was clearly most frequently attributed to the protest coverage in our sample. Although a negative sentiment is intuitively attributed to the protest paradigm, without further (qualitative) interpretation of each article we cannot conclude whether this negative sentiment is towards the activists and their actions.

Now that a general idea of the protests and accompanying reporting that was analysed in this paper is formed, analyses are conducted to answer each research question.

3.2 Do Flemish online news media adhere to the protest paradigm when reporting on climate protest?

The first research question asked is whether the protest paradigm is used in Flemish online news content concerning climate protests. To evaluate the use of the protest paradigm in the Flemish news media, the frequency of each protest paradigm indicator recorded in the data was calculated. How these indicators were extracted from the collected data is exemplified in the appendix. Table 5 provides an overview of all indicators and their frequencies. In sections 3.2.1 to 3.2.4 the use of delegitimizing frames, official sources, episodic framing, and an antagonising public opinion are explored more in detail as they are the subject of separate research questions. These separate questions contribute to answering RQ1 as well.

Table 5

Frequency of presence of protest paradigm indicators (n=271)

Indicator	Absolute frequency	Percentage
Delegitimizing frame used	113	41.7
No goals and demands	65	24.0
Episodic framing	202	74.5
Dominance official sources	49	18.1
Antagonising public opinion	36	13.3
Ineffectiveness	12	4.4
Negative consequences	37	13.7
Labelling	26	9.6

The data tells us that characteristics of the protest paradigm can be found in the articles from our sample. However, differences in the frequency of use are apparent. Below, the indicators are analysed by category, as described in chapter II section 3.1.1 to 3.1.4.

The framing of the articles was researched by indicating which frames as proposed by McLeod and Hertog (1999) were used in the protest articles. A synthesising variable was created to indicate whether the article solely used one of the delegitimizing frames. The use of delegitimizing

frames is the second most frequent indicator of the paradigm in our sample with over 40% of articles showing elements of the riot, spectacle, or confrontation frame without the presence of the debate frame. For more details on the framing of the articles, see section 3.2.1.

To analyse the sourcing, the presence of official and non-official sources was recorded for each article. A variable was created that indicated whether an article used more official than non-official sources. This was the case for almost a fifth of the articles. This means most of the articles used a balanced array of sources. For more details on the use of sources, see section 3.2.3.

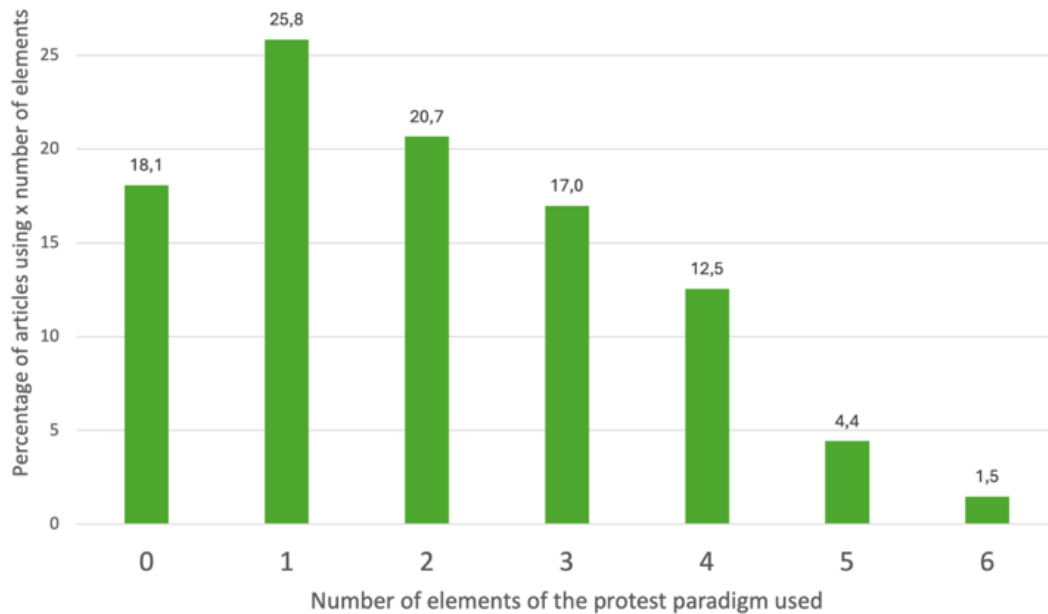
A third element of the protest paradigm presented in the literature was the invocation of an antagonising public opinion. The presence of such public opinion in different forms was coded for in each article. It was only found in 13.3% of the articles. A more in-depth overview of the use of antagonising public opinion is provided in section 3.2.4.

The use of delegitimisation, demonisation and marginalisation devices was measured by 5 different indicators, with stark differences in frequency between them. Episodic framing is by far the most common element of the protest paradigm in our sample (see also section 3.2.2). Additionally, almost a quarter of the articles fail to mention the protesters' goals and demands. Other marginalisation devices such as labelling, highlighting of negative consequences, and pointing out protest ineffectiveness are less frequently used.

Apart from the use of each protest paradigm indicator separately, it can also be meaningful to look at how many of these elements are used per article. This variable expresses the strength of the protest paradigm in each article. The distribution of the scores' frequency is visualised in Figure 6. On average, the articles in the sample used 1.99 elements of the protest paradigm, with a standard deviation of 1.52.

Figure 6

Percentage of articles using x amount of protest paradigm indicators (n=271)



In 81,9% of the analysed articles at least one element of the protest paradigm is present. However, almost half of the articles only used 1 or 2 elements, as reflected in the mean. None of the articles in the sample used all or all but one elements of the protest paradigm that were coded for.

These findings indicate that the protest paradigm was present in the news reporting on climate protests during our studied period. The extent to which it is present does vary and in most of the reports only a couple of paradigm indicators are present. However, the indicators that are most often present concern the framing of the article. As framing concerns the whole article, and not just a section, sentence or even word like some other indicators, we can conclude that the protest paradigm does have a noticeable influence on the news content. Further analyses of the framing and sourcing of the articles are provided in the following subsection.

3.2.1 RQ1A What frames out of the four proposed by McLeod and Hertog (1999) do Flemish news media use when reporting on climate protests?

For each unit in the sample, the presence of the riot, confrontation, spectacle, and debate frame were coded. In each unit there could be multiple frames or none of the frames present as well. The latter implies the presence of other frames that were not mentioned by McLeod and Hertog (1999), and this was the case in 75 of the analysed articles. Because a framing analysis lies outside the scope of this thesis, no findings on alternative frames used will be presented. No information is available on the legitimising or delegitimising nature of the frames used in articles where none of the frames mentioned by McLeod and Hertog (1999) are present. It must be kept in mind that there is a possibility that other delegitimising or legitimising frames are used in the articles. This paper only draws conclusions on the use of the proposed frames.

In Table 6 the frequency at which each of the frames proposed by McLeod and Hertog (1999) is used is presented.

Table 6

Frequency of each frame used (n=271)

Frame used	N	Percentage
Riot frame	20	7.4
Confrontation frame	67	24.7
Spectacle frame	91	33.6
Debate frame	83	30.6

Note. The percentages do not equal 100% as multiple frames can occur within one article. The percentage was calculated within the whole sample.

All frames proposed by McLeod and Hertog (1999) were recognised in the articles on climate protest. The most used frame in our researched sample is the spectacle frame. However, the legitimising debate frame was used almost as much, pointing towards a more balanced reporting. In 52.4% of the sample (n=271) at least one of the delegitimizing frames was used. As stated, in one article the use of multiple frames is possible. Some articles did use one of the delegitimizing frames in combination with the debate frame. This is relevant to consider when judging adherence to the protest paradigm. The use of the debate frame points toward less adherence. To express how many articles adhered to the protest paradigm in their framing, a new variable was created

to identify the articles that exclusively used delegitimizing frames. 113 articles or 41.7% of the sample (n=271) turned out to exclusively use delegitimizing frames out of the proposed frames by McLeod and Hertog (1999).

We can conclude that the use of all four frames proposed by McLeod and Hertog is prevalent in the Flemish online news content on climate protests. Additionally, the results show that in over 40% of the sample delegitimizing frames are used without evidence of legitimising framing, meaning in a way that adheres to the protest paradigm. However, in about a third of the sample the debate frame is found, pointing towards more balanced framing and reporting in that segment of the sample.

3.2.2 RQ1B Do Flemish news media use episodic or thematic framing when reporting on climate protests?

Another feature commonly found in delegitimising protest reporting is the use of episodic frames. During coding an article was categorised as either using episodic or thematic framing.

Figure 7

Frequency of both thematic and episodic framing (n=271)

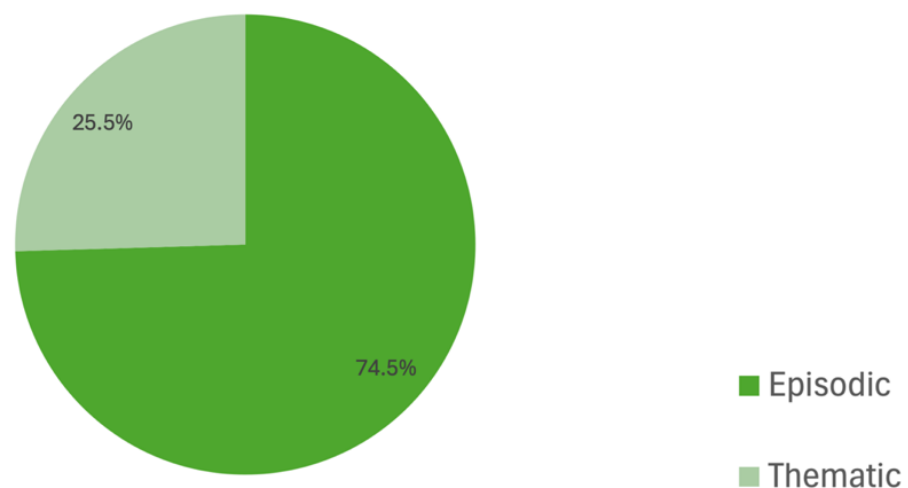


Figure 7 shows the frequency of both thematic and episodic framing used in the whole sample (n=271). Only a quarter of the articles in the sample used thematic framing, which indicates at least part of the article was dedicated to detailing (an aspect of) the climate crisis. Most of the articles analysed did use episodic framing, as expected in the protest paradigm. In those articles the focus was on the protest action at hand, failing to give context to the changing climate and denying political or elite responsibility for the problem.

We can conclude that episodic framing is dominant in the reports on climate protests in our sample and Flemish news media do resort more to this type of framing as opposed to a thematic framing.

3.2.3 RQ1C Do Flemish news media use more official and expert sources than protest voices and non-official sources?

To gain an understanding of the sourcing used in the articles from our sample, the presence and quantity of official and non-official sources, as well as further categorizations under each source type were recorded.

In Table 7 the frequencies for the whole sample are displayed.

Table 7

Frequency for each type of official source (n=271)

Type of source	Absolute frequency	Percentage
Police	61	22.5
Government	25	9.2
Politicians	14	5.2
Businesses	18	6.6
Other official or expert sources	15	5.5

Note. The percentage was calculated within the whole sample (n=271).

In 40.6% of the analysed articles official and/or expert sources were used. Police and law enforcement were used the most as official sources. Political elites are expected to be used quite often as an official source (Walgrave & Vliegenthart, 2012), in our sample governments and

politicians were not quoted as often in relation to climate protests. Some of the other official sources recorded included a couple of professors and (social) scientists, as well as museum directors, who were quoted following some vandalism actions against art works to garner attention for climate issues.

Non-official sources were used in 64.6% of all articles in the sample. In Table 8 the frequency for each non-official source type is displayed. We can see that protest voices make up the bulk of these sources, with activists, protest leaders and representatives of organisations or NGO's participating in protests being used the most. Bystanders and citizens are quoted very occasionally.

Table 8

Frequency for each type of non-official source (n=271)

Type of source	Absolute frequency	Percentage
Activists	94	34.7
Protest leaders	35	12.9
Representatives of (protest) organisations or NGOs	85	31.4
Bystanders	4	1.5
Citizens	7	2.6
Other non-official sources	2	0.7

Note. The percentage was calculated within the whole sample (n=271).

In some articles no sources were used at all. This is true for 57 cases, or 21% of the sample. A comparison was made between the number of official and unofficial sources used in each article to determine which types of sources were used more. In 49 units or 18.1 % of the analysed articles (n=271) more official and expert sources were used. In those cases, the sourcing practice follows the expectations of the protest paradigm.

We can conclude that the sources used by Flemish news brands in general include more unofficial and protest voices, and the sourcing adheres to the protest paradigm in only a limited segment of the articles.

3.2.4 RQ1D Do Flemish online news media invoke antagonising public opinion when reporting on climate protests?

As it is another indicator of the protest paradigm, the presence of an antagonising public opinion was recorded for each unit, as well as in what form this public opinion was expressed.

The data shows 36 units, or 13.3% of the sample, describing at least one antagonising public opinion towards the climate protest at hand. Table 9 shows the different forms in which this occurred and the frequency of each form's use. Bystanders' negative reaction to the protest is most often used as an expression of negative public opinion. However, the frequencies of legal conduct, social norms and direct references to public opinion are not far behind.

Table 9

Frequencies of the different forms of antagonising public opinion (n=271)

Form of antagonising public opinion	Absolute frequency	Percentage
Direct reference to public opinion	10	3.7
Reference to social norms	10	3.7
Reference to legal conduct	12	4.4
Reference to bystanders' negative reaction	14	5.2

Note. The percentage was calculated within the whole sample (n=271). The absolute frequencies & percentages exceed 36 units and 13.3% because within the number of articles in which an antagonising opinion was found multiple forms could be observed.

We can conclude from this data that Flemish online news content reporting on climate protests does contain some references to antagonising public opinions, but only in a limited percentage of the articles. Within the articles where an antagonising public opinion was observed, no particular form in which these opinions occurred was dominant.

After these analyses we can conclude on RQ1 'Do the Flemish news media adhere to the protest paradigm when reporting on climate protest?'. The findings of this study show that the protest paradigm is present in a significant share of the articles. However, the prevalence of the different indicators varies, as does the strength of the paradigm's presence between articles. Within the framing of the articles the protest paradigm is most apparent, as a large share of articles use

episodic framing and/or one of the delegitimizing frames as proposed by McLeod and Hertog (1999). When looking at the articles' sourcing, the protest paradigm is less present, although a fifth of the analysed articles still sourced in line with the paradigm's prediction. Another prevalent indicator of the paradigm was the failure of the article to include protester's goals and demands, leading to less substantial coverage. Other indicators, including the invocation of antagonising public opinion, were also observed, but notably less.

3.3 RQ2 Are characteristics of the protest affecting the adherence to the protest paradigm?

In the previous sections, it became clear that the protest paradigm is present in the coverage of climate protests in Flemish online news content but also that it varies greatly between different articles. In RQ2 (and RQ3) factors influencing adherence to the paradigm are examined. RQ2 looks at the characteristics of the protest itself. Three characteristics were chosen based on what was theorised and evidenced in earlier literature. These characteristics are reflected in the secondary research questions, which will be discussed in detail in the sections below. After answering these questions, a conclusion will be drawn about RQ2.

Before getting into the influence of the different variables, a note must be made on the interconnectedness of the different variables. We look at legality and radicality separately, because not all illegal tactics are radical, and vice versa. Truancy for example is an illegal tactic but is not radical. In the opposite direction a hunger strike is not illegal, but it is quite radical. But for most protest tactics used and covered in our sample, it is the case that illegal tactics are also radical. Still, this paper differentiates between the two to see a possible difference in effect on the protest paradigm.

Additionally, legality and radicality could also have an association with protest location. When keeping news value theory in mind, it is quite possible that coverage of protests abroad mostly focuses on deviant actions, as they are more newsworthy, and neglects less deviant protests happening. This could lead to a stronger effect being prescribed to protest location than it has in reality, because the effect of deviancy is ascribed to location. However, our data set did not lend itself to pursuing conclusive analyses on this matter. For these reasons, the conclusions will be drawn based the presence of an influence of these characteristics, rather than on the strength of the influence. This is however an interesting point to discuss in future research on climate protest coverage.

3.3.1 RQ2A Is there a difference in adherence to the protest paradigm in Flemish news media when the protest uses either legal or illegal actions?

The first protest characteristic and its' impact on the protest paradigm that is scrutinised is the either legal or illegal nature of the protest tactics used. Before comparing the adherence to the protest paradigm between articles that report on protests using legal vs. illegal tactics, an overview of the different types of tactics used in the protests covered in our sample is given.

Within the sample, 43.5% of the articles reported on protests using legal tactics. The most used legal tactics were a classic rally, demonstration, or march, with 31.7% of the analysed articles concerning such protest events. Within one protest event, both legal and illegal tactics can be used. In 29 cases or 10.7% of the sample (n=271) a combination of legal and illegal tactics was reported on. In 32.8% of the sample, only legal tactics were used by the protest described. In 67.2% of the articles in the sample the report concerns a protest using illegal tactics. Within illegal tactics, vandalism was the most used tactic was vandalism, followed by the hindering of traffic and occupation. In our sample, we can see evidence of the surge of more disruptive tactics used by new organisations such as XR and Just Stop Oil as described by De Moor et al. (2019). Although the classic protest tactics are still quite prevalent, vandalisms like attacking artworks with paint and occupations of industry terrains or public domain make up a significant portion of the tactics reported on. Note that these percentages do not add up to 100%, as within one article legal and illegal tactics could both be reported on.

To analyse the difference in adherence to the paradigm for the use of legal or illegal tactics, the variable pointing out the use of illegal tactics was used to distinguish two groups, one where illegal tactics were used and one where only legal tactics were used. A t-test was conducted with the metrical variable containing the number of protest paradigm indicators as the dependent variable and the use of illegal vs. legal tactics as the grouping variable. Our results indicate that when reporting on illegal tactics ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 1.53$) significantly more indicators of the protest paradigm are present than when reporting on legal protest tactics ($M = 1.19$, $SD = 1.11$), with $t(269) = 7.30$, $p = <.001$. Cohen's d tells us this effect is large ($d = .85$)

The association between the separate indicators of the protest paradigm and the use of either legal or illegal protest tactics is further analysed by using chi-square tests. In Table 10 the results

from the chi square are displayed. Because 2x2 chi-square tests were used, the continuity correction is reported.

Table 10

Frequencies and Chi-square results for paradigm indicators with legal vs. illegal protest tactics

Indicator protest paradigm	Type of protest tactic				X ² (1)	V
	Illegal (n=182)		Legal (n=89)			
	n	%	n	%		
No delegitimizing frame used (n=158)	84	46.2	74	83	32.140**	.352
Delegitimizing frames used (n=113)	98	53.8	15	16.9		
Goals and demands mentioned (n=206)	123	67.6	83	93.3	20.227**	.282
No goals and demands mentioned (n=65)	59	32.4	6	6.7		
No episodic framing used (n=69)	35	19.2	34	38.2	10.358**	.205
Episodic framing used (n=202)	147	80.8	55	61.8		
Equal or more non-official sources (n=222)	143	78.6	79	88.8	3.532	
More official sources (n=49)	39	21.4	10	11.2		
No antagonising public opinion (n=235)	151	83.0	84	94.4	5.806*	.158
Antagonising public opinion (n=36)	31	17.0	5	5.6		
Ineffectiveness not highlighted (n=259)	176	96.7	83	93.3		
Ineffectiveness highlighted (n=12)	6	3.3	6	6.7		
Negative consequences not highlighted (n=234)	146	80.2	88	98.9	16.100**	.225
Negative consequences highlighted (n=37)	36	19.8	1	1.1		
Labelling not used (n=245)	164	90.1	81	91.0	.000	
Labelling used (n=26)	18	9.9	8	9.0		

Note. Only when the χ^2 value was found to be significant, Cramer's V was reported. * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

The results of the Chi-square tests indicate a weak to moderate association with the use of either legal or illegal with 5 out of 8 protest paradigm indicators. For all indicators with significant associations, the protest paradigm indicator is indeed more present within articles using illegal protest tactics.

The strongest association is observed between the use of delegitimizing frames and the use of either legal or illegal tactics with a Cramer's V of .352 showing a moderate association. For the other significant associations, Cramer's V lies between .1 and .3 showing a rather weak association.

For the use of labelling and dominant sourcing, no significant associations were found.

For the highlighting of ineffectiveness, no Chi-square could be calculated because not all assumptions for the test were met as the expected cell counts did not exceed 5 in all cells. Fisher's exact test is also not significant.

The t-test concluded that the use of illegal tactics significantly increases the number of protest paradigm indicators used. When looking at the effect of the legality of tactics on the separate indicators, different associations are found for different indicators. The legality of protest tactics does impact most indicators significantly, and the significant associations all point towards more adherence to the protest paradigm when using illegal protest tactics.

3.3.2 RQ2B Is there a difference in adherence to the protest paradigm in Flemish news media when the protest uses radical vs. non radical actions?

Aside from the categorisation of protest tactics as either legal or illegal, another distinction was made between radical and non-radical protest actions. In 145 units or 53.5% of the sample at least one of the protest tactics reported was classified as radical.

A t-test was conducted with the metrical variable containing the number of protest paradigm indicators as the dependent variable and the use of radical vs. non-radical tactics as the grouping variable. Our results indicate that when reporting on protests using radical tactics ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 1.51$) significantly more indicators of the protest paradigm are present than when reporting on protests using non-radical protest tactics ($M = 1.42$, $SD = 1.32$), with $t(269) = -6.178$, $p < .001$. Cohen's d tells us it is a medium effect ($d = -.75$).

Chi-square tests are used to further analyse possible associations between the separate indicators of the protest paradigm and the radicality of tactics. The results are displayed in Table 11.

Table 11

Frequencies and Chi-square results for paradigm indicators with radical vs. non radical tactics

Indicator protest paradigm	Type of protest tactic				X ² (1)	V
	Non-radical		Radical			
	(n=126)		(n=145)			
	n	%	n	%		
No delegitimizing frame used (n=158)	95	75.4	63	43.4	27.007**	.323
Delegitimizing frames used (n=113)	31	24.6	82	56.6		
Goals and demands mentioned (n=206)	108	85.7	98	67.6	11.178**	.212
No goals and demands mentioned (n=65)	18	14.3	47	32.4		
No episodic framing used (n=69)	44	34.9	25	17.2	10.191**	.202
Episodic framing used (n=202)	82	65.1	120	82.8		
Equal or more non-official sources (n=222)	112	88.9	110	75.9	6.869**	.169
More official sources (n=49)	14	11.1	35	24.1		
No antagonising public opinion (n=235)	116	92.1	119	82.1	5.011*	.147
Antagonising public opinion (n=36)	10	7.9	26	17.9		
Ineffectiveness not highlighted (n=259)	120	95.1	139	95.9	.000	
Ineffectiveness highlighted (n=12)	6	4.8	6	4.1		
Negative consequences not highlighted (n=234)	123	97.6	111	76.6	23.625**	.306
Negative consequences highlighted (n=37)	3	2.5	34	23.4		
Labelling not used (n=245)	111	88.1	134	92.4	.994	
Labelling used (n=26)	15	11.9	11	7.6		

Note. Only when the χ^2 value was found to be significant, Cramer's V was reported. * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

A significant association between 6 out of 8 protest paradigm indicators and the use of either radical or non-radical tactics was found. The association ranges from weak to moderate, with the use of delegitimizing frames and the highlighting of negative consequences resulting in the strongest associations.

For two indicators no significant association was found, namely the use of labelling and the definition of the protest as ineffective.

For all the indicators with significant associations, it is true that the use of a radical tactics results in a greater presence of that indicator, pointing towards a higher adherence to the protest paradigm when the protest reported on uses radical tactics.

The t-test concluded that the use of radical tactics significantly increases the number of protest paradigm indicators used. When looking at the effect of the radicalness of tactics for the separate indicators, different associations are found for different indicators. When the protest reported on is considered radical, the use of most indicators increases significantly, pointing towards more adherence to the protest paradigm.

3.3.3 RQ2C Is there a difference in adherence to the protest paradigm in Flemish news media when the protest happens in locally vs. internationally?

The last protest characteristic of which the influence on adherence to the protest paradigm is examined is protest location.

The frequencies for each category of protest location within the sample are displayed in Table 12. As expected by news value theory (Galtung & Ruge, 1965), the majority of the protests reported took place in Belgium, the second most in a neighbouring country followed by cross-border protests and protests abroad.

However, for this RQ we are more interested in the difference in adherence to the protest paradigm between the different protest locations.

Table 12*Frequency of protest location categories (n=271)*

Protest location	Absolute frequency	Percentage
Domestic (Belgium)	120	44.3
Neighbouring country	80	29.5
Abroad	53	19.6
Cross-border	18	6.6

Only a few cross-border protests are present in the sample. Because our research question concerns the difference in adherence to the protest paradigm between local and international protests, only the cases coded as domestic protests, protests in a neighbouring country, and protests abroad will be used in this analysis. This also allows for a one-way independent ANOVA test to be used, with the number of protest paradigm indicators used as the dependent variable.

The ANOVA shows a small but significant effect of protest location on the number of indicators used ($F(2, 250) = 25.84, p < .001, \eta^2 = .17$). The Scheffe-test revealed a significant difference in the number of indicators between domestic protests ($M=1.39, SD=1.37$) and protests in a neighbouring country ($M=2.65, SD=1.36$) as well as between domestic protests and protests elsewhere abroad ($M=2.60, SD=1.38$). Between protests abroad and protests in a neighbouring country no significant difference was found.

An additional chi-square test was conducted to further analyse the effect of protest location on each of the protest paradigm indicators separately. Table 13 shows the chi-square results for each protest paradigm indicator and protest location. Because the ANOVA found no significant difference between protests in a neighbouring country and elsewhere abroad, these categories were combined. As we are using a 2x2 chi-square test, the continuity correction is reported. The cross-border protests were still excluded from the analysis.

Table 13

Frequencies and Chi-square results for paradigm indicators and domestic vs. abroad protests (n=253)

Indicator protest paradigm	Protest location				X ² (1)	V
	Domestic		Abroad			
	(n=120)		(n=133)			
	n	%	n	%		
No delegitimizing frame used (n=142)	91	64.1	51	35.9	34.495**	.377
Delegitimizing frames used (n=111)	29	26.1	82	73.9		
Goals and demands mentioned (n=189)	105	55.6	84	44.4	18.513**	.280
No goals and demands mentioned (n=64)	15	23.4	49	76.6		
No episodic framing used (n=58)	42	72.5	16	27.6	17.559**	.273
Episodic framing used (n=195)	78	40.0	117	60.0		
Equal or more non-official sources (n=206)	111	53.9	95	46.1	17.150**	.271
More official sources (n=47)	9	19.1	38	80.9		
No antagonising public opinion (n=221)	111	50.2	110	49.8	4.625*	.147
Antagonising public opinion (n=32)	9	28.1	23	71.9		
Ineffectiveness not highlighted (n=244)	116	47.5	128	52.5		
Ineffectiveness highlighted (n=9)	4	44.4	5	55.6		
Negative consequences not highlighted (n=219)	114	52.1	105	47.9	12.628**	.235
Negative consequences highlighted (n=34)	6	17.6	28	82.4		
Labelling not used (n=228)	103	45.2	125	54.8	3.836*	.136
Labelling used (n=25)	17	68.0	8	32.0		

Note. Only when the χ^2 value is significant, Cramer's V was reported. * $p < .016$ ** $p < .001$

For the indicator concerning the mention of ineffectiveness, no chi-square test could be conducted as the expected cell counts didn't exceed 5. Fisher's exact test also is insignificant.

For all other protest paradigm indicators, a weak to moderate association with protest location was found. All, but one, indicators are more present when the protest reported on takes place in Belgium. For labelling the opposite is true, as it is more prevalent with domestic protests. A possible explanation for this exception is that a lot of domestic climate protests were associated with Youth For Climate. The scholars protesting were described using labels quite often, with news coverage calling them 'klimaatspijbelaars' or 'bosbrossers'.

The results of the analysis do show a difference in adherence to the protest paradigm between reports of protests happening locally and internationally. The ANOVA showed a small but significant effect and the separate paradigm indicators almost all pointed at a stronger adherence to the paradigm when reporting on an international protest, with labelling as the exception. The disclaimer described at the beginning of this section must however be kept in mind, as the effect might have more to do with the type of protest actions happening abroad that make it into local news.

The findings allow us to draw some conclusions on RQ2 'Are characteristics of the protest affecting the adherence to the protest paradigm?'. A significant relationship was found between legality, radicality, and protest location and the adherence to the protest paradigm. The strongest main effect was observed between legal and illegal actions, but a very similar effect was found for radicality. This could be expected, as both of those characteristics are about the level of deviance from the protest. The effect for location was smaller, but still significant. These main effects were underwritten by the chi-square tests for the separate indicators of the protest paradigm. All data pointed toward a higher usage of the protest paradigm indicators when using concerning protests using illegal and radical tactics. Between protests abroad and locally, all indicators also pointed towards a stronger adherence to the paradigm with abroad protests, except for labelling.

3.4 RQ3 Are characteristics of the news organisation affecting the adherence to the protest paradigm?

In the literature, some authors also point towards the news organisation itself influencing the adherence to the protest paradigm. Two categorisations of news brands were applied to the sample: quality vs. popular brands and mainstream vs. alternative brands. The effect of being in either category on the adherence to the paradigm was tested in the following research questions.

3.4.1 RQ3A Is there a difference in adherence to the protest paradigm between quality and popular news brands?

As most commercially owned Flemish news brands can be categorised as a popular or a quality brand, a comparison between the two types in terms of adherence to the protest paradigm is analysed. The few articles from alternative news brands were excluded from this analysis.

A t-test was conducted, using the number of protest paradigm indicators as the dependent variable and the type of news brand, either quality or popular, as the grouping variable.

The results indicate no significant difference in the number of protest paradigm indicators used ($t(265) = -1.32, p = .095$) between quality news brands and popular news brands.

Because no significant main effect was found, no further analyses were conducted.

3.4.2 RQ3B Is there a difference in adherence to the protest paradigm between mainstream news outlets and alternative news outlets?

This paper aimed to analyse differences in the use of the protest paradigm between the main news brands and alternative news brands. However, as indicated earlier, not enough units from alternative news outlets made it into the final sample to carry out any statistical analysis.

When observing the few articles from alternative news brands, some insights can be given.

All articles from alternative news brands scored negatively on all protest paradigm indicators, meaning they did not adhere to the protest paradigm at all. This is noteworthy, even though it only concerns 4 articles. However, in this study no conclusion may be drawn about alternative news brands' adherence to the paradigm. The observations made do invite further analysis in future research, where hopefully more alternative news content can be studied.

The conclusion to RQ3 is that within this the research in this paper no effects of the news brand on the adherence to the protest paradigm are found. However, this does not mean no effects exist. Especially for the difference in protest paradigm use between alternative and mainstream news brands more research is warranted.

4. Discussion and conclusion

To conclude this thesis, in this section the findings from the content analysis conducted in this paper will be further discussed, and final conclusions will be drawn. Lastly, some limitations of this study and recommendations for future studies will be highlighted.

The first question this paper posed is whether Flemish online news content adheres to the protest paradigm when reporting on climate protests. Secondary questions explored the use of framing and sources in the coverage. The results concluded that the use of all four frames proposed by McLeod and Hertog (1999) is prevalent in the Flemish online news content on climate protests. Framing is a powerful and important element of the protest paradigm, as illustrated in the literature by various studies highlighting the influential role of media framing in shaping public perceptions of protests and social issues (Boyle et al., 2005; Harlow et al., 2017; McLeod & Detenber, 1999). Additionally, media have a pronounced role in shaping attitudes towards climate (Chinn et al., 2020; Feldman & Hart, 2017; Scheuch et al., 2023). The possible impact of delegitimising framing on the perception of climate protest is significant, as in over 40% of the sample delegitimising frames are used without evidence of legitimising framing. However, in about a third of the sample the legitimising debate frame is present, pointing towards a more balanced reporting. The use of the debate frame, in combination with the other frames or alone, can neutralise the effects of delegitimizing framing and provide a more nuanced understanding of climate protest (Frisby, 2018). The analysis also pointed out that episodic framing is by far the most used compared to thematic framing in climate protest coverage during the studied period. These findings are in line with what a range of scholars have observed before (Boyle et al., 2004; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Gitlin, 1980; McLeod & Hertog, 1992). The use of episodic frames puts the focus on specific events or individuals, potentially limiting understanding of broader issues, perpetuating the status quo, and thus following the protest paradigm (Frisby, 2018; Iyengar, 1991). As established earlier, media coverage of climate and climate protests are key influencing factors in the broader climate debate (Scheuch et al., 2023), showing the relevance of this particular paradigm indicator.

The literature on sourcing in protest reporting states that the neglect of protest voices contributes to unsubstantial coverage and reinforces the status quo (Boyle et al., 2006; McLeod, 2007). In our sample, protest voices are regularly quoted, pointing towards less adherence to the protest

paradigm. Although in a fifth of the articles the sourcing adhered to the expectations of the protest paradigm, most of the articles did incorporate a significant number of unofficial sources and protest voices. It was observed that (online) statements and press releases from climate protest organisations often contributed to the unofficial sources used. This finding goes against what was previously concluded by Sobieraj (2011), who found that press releases and statements from activist groups were often discarded. Our research concluded that Flemish news brands generally include more unofficial and protest voices, and the sourcing adheres to the protest paradigm in only a limited segment of the articles. While the framing did mostly adhere to the paradigm's expectations, the sourcing in our sample did not.

Further, findings indicate that the use of antagonising public opinions was quite limited within the Flemish online news content covering climate protest. The use of contrasting public opinions regarding the protest undermines the goals of the protest (Coombs et al., 2020; McLeod & Hertog, 1999) as the focus is put on the differences in norms and values between the public and the activists. In the case of climate activism, part of the new social movements, protesters speak about issues regarding everyone, with no clear adversary (Wievorka, 2005). This could be a reason as to why antagonising public opinions are less common. Where the use of antagonising public opinions did occur, it was mainly observed within articles referring to actions of vandalism and truancy. The use of these new approaches by climate action groups provoked some discussion, also within news coverage.

The second research question concerned the influence of protest characteristics on adherence to the protest paradigm. Secondary questions specified the characteristics that were examined, the deviance of protest tactics, and protest location. As the impact of these characteristics on the prevalence of the paradigm is researched, this study and its conclusions can be situated in the line of research that treats the protest paradigm as a variable on which a range of factors have an influence, as proposed by Lee (2014) and Papaioannou (2015).

First the level of deviance was examined by looking at the influence of both the legality and radicality of the protest tactics used. The results of the analyses indicate a stronger adherence to the protest paradigm when the protest used illegal and/or radical tactics, both in the general effect, as well as in the influence on separate protest paradigm indicators. The general effect of illegal vs. legal protest was slightly larger than that of radicality, but both find a higher level of deviance to trigger more adherence to the paradigm. These results are similar to what was earlier concluded by Lee (2014) who found radical tactics to trigger more features of the paradigm to be

used. This study focused on protest tactics in terms of radicality rather than protest objectives. McLeod (2007) did find that the deviance or radicality of protest objectives is a relevant factor to consider as well. As this study solely focused on climate protests with similar goals, no comparison with other types of objectives could be made. The goals of climate activists however can be described as radical, as a lot of their demands overturn the structure of capitalist society. Boyle et al. (2012) found protest tactics to have a stronger influence on the nature of coverage than protest goals, but based on this study no conclusions on this matter can be drawn. What can be drawn from the results is that within a movement with radical goals, the use of radical and illegal tactics does influence the coverage. So similarly to what scholars stated earlier (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993; Lipsky, 1968; Shoemaker, 1984; McLeod & Hertog, 1999), this study also concludes that a higher level of deviance leads to stronger adherence to the protest paradigm. This study thus finds the activists' dilemma (Feinberg et al., 2020) can also be applied to climate protest.

Next the influence of protest location on the use of the protest paradigm was examined. The results show a generally stronger adherence to the protest paradigm when a protest happens abroad as opposed to locally, but the effect size only pointed towards a small effect. Although scholars predict stories happening within closer proximity of the news outlet to be covered more substantially (Shoemaker et al., 2017; Brown & Harlow, 2018), our results show no significant difference in paradigm use between protests in a neighbouring country and protests in other countries. Because of the small effect size of location in general and the insignificant difference the proximity of the protest made, the findings suggest a limited effect of location on protest paradigm use, similarly to Brown and Harlow (2018). Additionally, as mentioned in the results section, this study could not account for the impact of other predictors on the influence of location. Boyle et al. (2012) also found similar effects of location as found in this study, but also concluded that goals and tactics indirectly influenced location and were better predictors of protest paradigm adherence. Even though this study's results cannot lead to the same conclusions, they do point in the same direction as only small effects of location were observed.

The final research question of this paper asked whether the characteristics of the news outlet publishing the reports on climate protests influenced adherence to the protest paradigm. First, a distinction was made between popular and quality newspapers. As popular brands are defined to provide more high-quality and complex information than popular newspapers, less protest paradigm adherence could be expected. However, the results found in this paper don't show a significant difference in the use of the protest paradigm between the two types of papers.

However, in a strongly concentrated news landscape, with editorial offices working on multiple news brands, these results might not be all that surprising. In future research, a stronger focus on the difference or similarity between different types of news brands can be scrutinised.

Lastly, this paper aimed to examine the difference in adherence to the protest paradigm between mainstream and alternative news brands, as some scholars have found evidence for alternative news content to be adhering less to the protest paradigm (Harlow et al., 2017; Reul et al., 2015). Unfortunately, due to a lack of articles from alternative news sources making it into the final sample, no analyses or conclusions could be made. However, this thesis does highlight the relevance of investigating the adherence of the protest paradigm in alternative news outlets. This angle of the protest paradigm literature poses an interesting and relevant research topic.

In conclusion, this study did not find any evidence for the researched characteristics of the news organisations to influence the use of the protest paradigm. The results point toward a consistent paradigm use between quality and popular brands. In the case of alternative vs. mainstream brands, no conclusions are drawn, and further research is recommended.

So, what is concluded regarding the question of how climate protest is represented in Flemish online news media? The examination of the results reveals a multifaceted image of the protest coverage. The findings shed light on the framing, sourcing, and portrayal of climate activism through the lens of the protest paradigm. In a significant portion of the coverage delegitimising framing is used, although sometimes in combination with legitimising frames. Additionally, episodic framing, emphasising specific events or individuals, often prevails, possibly limiting the understanding of broader issues. From this study can be concluded that framing often follows protest paradigm patterns, although more qualitative research is warranted.

Regarding sourcing stark deviations from the protest paradigm are observed, with a significant presence of unofficial sources and protest voices. It can even be concluded that the overall sourcing is balanced in most articles.

Furthermore, the influence of protest characteristics, such as deviance and location, on media coverage underscores the complexities inherent in mapping the representation of climate activism. While no significant differences are observed between news outlet types, the need for further exploration, particularly in alternative news sources, is underscored. In conclusion, this study illuminates the nuanced and dynamic nature of climate protest representation in Flemish online news media, providing valuable insights for both researchers and practitioners in the field of journalism and climate action.

To finalise this master thesis some limitations of this study are listed, along with further recommendations for future research. The first limitation lies in the choice of a solely quantitative research design. The focus on numerical data can potentially overlook a lot of contextual information that can be found in the analysed articles. It was already indicated that merely the presence of certain proposed frames was counted, while other still unknown frames might have been present across the sample. Supplementing a quantitative content analysis with qualitative methods can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the content and frames. In future research, garnering additional qualitative insights is recommended.

Some more limitations concern the sample. Although the sample selection for this study was carefully conducted, some bias is always possible. The flaws in the used database have affected the quality of the sample as well. The fact that so few articles from alternative news brands made it into the sample can be foreseen in future research and perhaps different data collection methods can be applied. Our focus on certain online content and certain news brands stemmed mostly from pragmatic reasons. In future research, with more time and resources available, a sample including different media forms as well as more news brands is suggested. The research could have benefited from a larger temporal selection as well, to capture more trends and changes over time. A longitudinal study in the future could further the insights on the research topic. Additionally, a comparison between different countries and cultures could provide an interesting angle. Lastly, a larger sample size could have made the use of more precise statistical techniques possible.

Regarding the inter-coder reliability, this study's research design could have benefited from multiple trained coders. The reliability sample where Cohen's kappa was measured could have also been larger, but considering the context of a master thesis these shortcomings are acceptable. Because only limited variables were included in the code book, following studies can always strive for better validity and aim to operationalise concepts more comprehensively.

This study and this whole thesis were conducted to the best of the authors' abilities; however, limitations and flaws are present and a critical approach to all methods used in this paper is warranted. In any case, the representation of climate protests in any type of news media makes up for a compelling research topic with loads of opportunities to gain valuable insights.

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Appendix

List of appendices

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i. Codebook Dutch

Codeboek

Item eigenschappen

1 Item ID

Zie Excel file

2 Datum van publicatie

Numeriek weergegeven dus 10 april 2019 zou 10/04/2019 worden

3 Jaartal

- 2018 (1)
- 2019 (2)
- 2020 (3)
- 2021 (4)
- 2022 (5)
- 2023 (6)

4 Aantal woorden

Aangegeven op Belga.Press

- 0-100 (1)
- 100-299 (2)
- 300-499 (3)
- 500-699 (4)
- 700 of meer (5)

5 Nieuwswebsite

- De Morgen (1)
- Het Nieuwsblad (2)
- De Tijd (3)
- Apache (4)
- MO* (5)

6 Type artikel

- Feitelijk artikel (1)

Klassiek nieuwsartikel dat over event of gebeurtenis bericht (wie, wat, waar).

- Interview (2)

Wordt als interview geklasseerd wanneer de focus op een gestructureerd vraag-antwoord gesprek ligt. Het gebruik van een quote in een klassiek artikel maakt niet dat het als interview gecodeerd wordt.

- Opinie (3)

Opiniestukken waar de mening van de auteur duidelijk naar voor komt. Een klassiek artikel dat ook een opinie bevat van een bron valt hier niet onder. Ook een artikel geschreven door een externe auteur dat geen mening van die auteur bevat valt hier niet onder.

- Analyse/achtergrond (4)

Artikel geeft meer achtergrond of uitleg over een actueel feit of actuele situatie maar bericht niet over een (nieuwe) gebeurtenis.

7 Sentiment van het artikel

Geen eigen beoordeling nodig, sentiment wordt aangegeven op BelgaPress. Niet alle artikels kregen een sentiment toegewezen, dus deze variabele zal niet gebruikt worden om conclusies te trekken voor de hele sample.

- Positief (1)
- Neutraal (2)
- Negatief (3)
- Onbekend (99)

Kenmerken van het protest/de actie waarover bericht wordt

8 Protestgrootte: Hoeveel mensen namen deel aan de actie/het protest?

- 0-10 (1)
- 10 - 99 (2)
- 100-999 (3)
- 1000 - 4999 (4)
- 5000 - 10 000 (5)
- Meer dan 10 000 (6)
- Onbekend (99)

9 Illegale tactieken

9.1 Worden er illegale protest tactieken gebruikt?

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

9.2 [if 9.1 = 1] Welke illegale tactieken worden gebruikt?

9.2.1 Vandalisme

Betogers die privé-eigendommen, handelszaken, openbare infrastructuur of kunstwerken vernielen of proberen te vernielen. Ook het ongeoorloofd betreden/ beklimmen van een kunstinstallatie, sportwedstrijd, voorstelling of tentoonstelling zien we als vandalisme.

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

9.2.2 Plundering

Betogers die privé-eigendommen of handelszaken binnen dringen en goederen stelen.

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

9.2.3 Geweld

Betogers die geweld gebruiken tegenover politie, omstaanders, politici, burgers of elkaar.

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

9.2.4 Bezetting

Het bezetten van bijvoorbeeld bedrijven, instellingen of overheidsgebouwen.

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

9.2.5 Hinder van verkeer of doorgang

Het versperren van de openbare weg en de doorgang van verkeer moeilijk of onmogelijk maken.

We rekenen vliegverkeer hier ook bij. Ook het hinderen van toegang tot bepaalde openbare plekken valt hieronder. Een toegestane betoging die (kort) het verkeer hindert maar is toegestaan door de politie valt hier niet onder.

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

9.2.6 Niet- goedgekeurde verzameling

Het houden van een demonstratie zonder hiervoor toestemming te hebben van de bevoegde autoriteiten. Ook niet-toegestane maar gedoogde activiteiten horen hierbij. Enkel ja coderen

wanneer geen andere tactiek beter van toepassing is. Een bezetting is bijv. Ook een niet-goed gekeurde verzameling maar wordt dan enkel bij bezetting als 'Ja' gecodeerd en hier als 'Nee'.

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

9.2.7 Spijbelen

In de context van de klimaatprotesten in 2019 en 2021 is dit een relevante variabele om mee op te nemen. We zien spijbelen als een illegale maar niet radicale tactiek.

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

9.2.7 Andere illegale tactieken

Open antwoord, enkel invullen wanneer vtp.

10 Legale tactieken

10.1 Worden er legale protest tactieken gebruikt?

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

10.2 [if 10.1 = 1] Welke legale tactieken worden gebruikt?

10.2.1 Sit-in

Betogers die ergens verzamelen en een zitstaking houden.

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

10.2.2 Mars/betoging/demonstratie

Betogers die een mars of betoging (bepaalde route volgen) houden of op 1 plek verzamelen en demonstreren. Ze voeren hier dan klassieke en legale acties uit zoals zingen, roepen, borden in de lucht houden of speeches houden.

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

10.2.3 Petitie

Actievoerders die handtekeningen verzamelen om hun doen te steunen.

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

10.2.4 Boycott

Actievoerders die bepaalde bedrijven of instellingen niet meer gebruiken en oproepen om dat niet te doen om hun ongenoegen te uiten.

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

10.2.5 Andere?

Open antwoord, enkel invullen indien vtp.

11 Radicaliteit: Zijn 1 of meerdere tactieken van de protestactie waarover bericht wordt radicaal?

- Ja (1)

Radicale tactieken kunnen activiteiten omvatten zoals burgerlijke ongehoorzaamheid, bezetting van openbare ruimtes, of symbolische/ choquerende gebaren die de bestaande orde te verstoren en een reactie lokken van autoriteiten of het publiek. Spijbelen op zich, hoewel burgerlijk ongehoorzaam, wordt niet als radicaal gezien. De acties van 'klimaatspijbelaars' kunnen wel nog steeds radicaal zijn als ze voldoen aan de beschrijving hierboven.

- Nee (0)

Acties met een vreedzaam en niet-confronterende karakter, zonder geweld of radicale middelen. Dit kunnen bijvoorbeeld vreedzame marsen, zitstakingen, petities of boycotts zijn. Niet radicale acties houden zich aan geweldloze principes.

12 Locatie: Waar speelt de protestactie waarover bericht wordt zich af?

- België (1)
- Buurland (2)
Nederland, Frankrijk, Duitsland of Luxemburg.

- Buitenland (3)
Alles in het buitenland behalve de buurlanden.
- Grensoverschrijdende actie (4)
Het betreft een protest dat over meerdere landen plaats vindt.

Kenmerken van het protest paradigma in het artikel

13 Gebruikte frames

Deze studie is kwantitatief van aard en tracht dus geen echte frame analyse van de artikels in de sample te maken. Omdat we kunnen terugvallen op heel wat eerder frame onderzoek in protest berichtgeving proberen we wel kwantitatieve gegevens te verzamelen over gebruikte frames in de sample. We baseren ons daarvoor op de 'key' frames zoals aangeduid door McLeod en Hertog (1999) en zoals gebruikt in studies van Harlow & Kilgo (2017), Harlow et al. (2019) en Salazar Rebolledo et al. (2023). We bekijken of deze frames voorkomen in de tekst en eventuele foto's die bij het artikel zijn. Video's worden niet meegenomen in de analyse.

We zoeken bij de volgende vragen naar elementen van de frames. Het is dus niet zo dat een artikel volledig moet beantwoorden aan een frame waarvoor het 'ja' gecodeerd wordt. Wanneer de titel een element van een frame bevat, wordt de aanwezigheid van het frame ook als 'ja' gecodeerd'.

13.1 Zijn er elementen terug te vinden van het **'riot' frame**?

Het 'riot' frame wordt gebruikt wanneer het artikel bericht over gewelddadige, destructieve en chaotische aspecten van het protest. De actie en actievoerders kunnen bv. worden beschreven als crimineel, gevaarlijk, een bedreiging voor de bevolking of de openbare orde. Eventuele daden van vernieling en geweld worden benadrukt. Een artikel kan zo bv. vernielingen, rellen en wanordelijkheid beschrijven, zonder de eisen van de actievoerders of context van de actie mee te geven. In beelden kan het riot frame ook voorkomen als er beelden van bv. vernielingen of betogers die de openbare orde verstoren toegevoegd zijn.

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

13.2 Zijn er elementen terug te vinden van het **'confrontation' frame**?

Het 'confrontation' frame wordt gebruikt wanneer het artikel focust op conflicten tussen de betogers en politie of andere groepen. Het artikel gebruikt elementen van het confrontation frame wanneer ze de clashes tussen politie en betogers, arrestaties, schermutselingen of ook verbale confrontatie tussen actiegroepen en tegenhanger/omstaanders uitgebreid beschrijft of in de verf zet. In de beelden kan dit frame voorkomen wanneer bv geweld tussen politie en betogers of beelden van gewonde omstaanders in beeld worden gebracht.

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

13.3 Zijn er elementen terug te vinden van het **'spectacle' frame**?

Het 'spectacle' frame wordt gebruikt wanneer het artikel theatrale en opvallende elementen van het protest benadrukt of wanneer het bijzondere kenmerken van de betogers zelf in de verf zet. Het artikel kan bijvoorbeeld dramatische of ongebruikelijke acties benoemen of kenmerken zoals leeftijd of uiterlijk van de betogers onderstrepen. Ook in beelden kunnen theatrale elementen van protestacties in de verf gezet worden bv door kostuums van de actievoerders in beeld te brengen. Ook als er nadruk gelegd wordt op de deelname van bekende personen aan het protest is dit een element van het spectacle frame.

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

13.4 Zijn er elementen terug te vinden van het **'debate' frame**?

Het 'debate' frame wordt gebruikt wanneer het artikel mogelijkheden opent voor debat over de onderwerpen waar rond actiegevoerd wordt door het publiek voldoende in te lichten over de standpunten van de actievoerders en achtergrond te geven over het issue waarover ze het hebben. Het 'debate' frame wordt gebruikt wanneer in het artikel veel aandacht gaat naar de standpunten van de actievoerders. Dit is herkenbaar aan het feit of het artikel de actievoerders zelf aan het woord laat en uitgebreid over hun eisen en doelen bericht.

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

14 Officiële bronnen

Een bron is een persoon of instantie waarvan in het artikel aangegeven wordt dat ze informatie gedeeld hebben die gebruikt wordt, dit kan door een rechtstreekse quote of parafrasering van de bron. Ook het invoegen van bijvoorbeeld tweets of andere sociale media berichten wordt gezien als brongebruik. Een andere nieuwsorganisatie zien we niet als bron.

Officiële bronnen zijn overheden, politici, industrieën, bedrijven en instellingen ofwel elke bron die een machtspositie in de maatschappij in neemt.

14.1 Wordt er (direct en indirect) verwezen naar officiële bronnen?

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

14.1.2 [if 14.1 = 1] Hoeveel officiële bronnen worden gebruikt?

Numerieke variabele, directe quotes én verwijzingen naar uitspraken of feiten gezegd door een externe officiële bron.

14.2 [if 14.1 = 1] Welke officiële bronnen worden gebruikt?

14.2.1 Politie

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

14.2.2 Overheden

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

14.2.3 Politici (niet sprekend vanuit hun eventuele positie in een overheid)

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

14.2.4 Bedrijven

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

14.2.5 Andere

Open antwoord, enkel in te vullen indien vtp.

15 Niet-officiële bronnen

Een bron is een persoon of instantie waarvan in het artikel aangegeven wordt dat ze informatie gedeeld hebben die gebruikt wordt, dit kan door een rechtstreekse quote of parafrasering van de bron. Ook het invoegen van bijvoorbeeld tweets of andere sociale media berichten wordt gezien als brongebruik. Een andere nieuwsorganisatie zien we niet als bron.

Niet-officiële bronnen zijn deelnemers van de protestactie, protestleiders, leken en anderen, oftewel degenen zonder machtspositie in de maatschappij. Wanneer de slogans of opschriften van actievoerders gebruikt worden als quote zien we dit niet als een bronvermelding.

15.1 Wordt er (direct en indirect) verwezen naar niet-officiële bronnen?

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

15.1.2 [if 15 = 1] Hoeveel niet-officiële bronnen worden gebruikt?

Numerieke variabele, directe quotes én verwijzingen naar uitspraken of feiten gezegd door een externe niet-officiële bron.

15.2 [if 15 = 1] Welke niet-officiële bronnen worden gebruikt?

15.2.1 Actievoerders

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

15.2.2 Protest leiders

Organisatoren of prominente figuren van de protestactie/beweging, die geen formele positie hebben binnen een organisatie, vereniging of NGO.

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

15.2.3 Vertegenwoordigers van klimaatactiegroepen of NGOs

Met een formele positie binnen in organisatie, vereniging of NGO, bijvoorbeeld woordvoerder van Greenpeace.

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

15.2.4 Omstaanders

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

15.2.5 Burgers

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

15.2.6 Andere niet-officiële bronnen?

16 Publieke opinie

Een 'publieke opinie' kan voorkomen in verschillende vormen (zie 16.2) en wordt gezien als contrasterend wanneer het artikel stelt dat het publiek/omstaanders/ de maatschappij geen aandacht of steun verleent aan het protest en haar doelen of zich er zelfs tegen verzet. Een enkele bron kan ook generaliserende uitspraken doen die hier ook worden bijgerekend.

16.1 Wordt er gebruik gemaakt van een contrasterende publieke opinie?

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

16.2 [if 17.1 = 1] In welke vorm komt de contrasterende publieke opinie voor?

We volgen hierin de categorieën van Tan (2017).

16.2.1 Publieke opinie

Statements over de algemene mening van de bevolking

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

16.2.2 Sociale normen

Betrekken van sociale normen waartegen de deelnemers van het protest zouden ingaan

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

16.2.3 Wettelijk gedrag

Aanduiden van wetten waartegen het gedrag of ideeën van de actievoerder ingaan

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

16.2.4 Omstaanders

Schetsen van een beeld van omstaanders die duidelijk verschillen in mening of uiterlijk van het protest.

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

17 Episodic of thematic framing: Wordt er gebruik gemaakt van ‘episodic’ of ‘thematic’ framing?

- Episodic (1)

Een artikel wordt als ‘episodic’ gecodeerd wanneer het zich richt op dit individuele protest evenement. Episodic framing wordt verder gekenmerkt door anekdotische beschrijving van het event, persoonlijke verhalen, de problemen en oplossingen van de klimaatkwestie op individueel niveau bekeken en het ontbreken van een bredere kadering van klimaatopwarming.

- Thematic (2)

Een artikel wordt als ‘thematic’ gecodeerd wanneer het het protest event inbedt in de context van waarrond er actiegevoerd wordt, achtergrondinformatie over het klimaatprobleem voorziet en de oplossing voor de kwestie eerder op samenlevings- en beleidsniveau plaatst. Er wordt wel gerapporteerd over de individuele protestactie maar uit het artikel kan de lezer ook meer leren over het klimaatprobleem of specifiek issue waarover het protest gaat.

18 Negatieve gevolgen: Worden de negatieve gevolgen van de protestacties benadrukt in het artikel?

Wordt als ‘ja’ gecodeerd wanneer het artikel de negatieve impact van het protest (bv. de protesten veroorzaakten verstoorde mobiliteit of overlast bewoners en werknemers in de buurt; de protesten veroorzaken kosten voor het publiek door bv inzet van de politie; de protesten schaadden bedrijven) aanhaalt. Negatieve gevolgen voor de actievoerders zelf vallen hier niet onder! Wordt gecodeerd als ‘nee’ wanneer het artikel geen negatieve gevolgen aanhaalt of de potentiële positieve effecten van de beweging ook benadrukte (bv. de protesten leiden tot positieve beleidsverandering en gunstige resultaten voor de protestanten en de maatschappij).

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

19 Labeling: Wordt er gebruikt gemaakt van labels die de betogers negatief of merkwaardig neerzetten?

Wordt gecodeerd als ‘ja’ wanneer er specifieke benamingen of ‘labels’ (bv bv klimaatspijbelars)

geplakt worden op betogers die een negatieve connotatie hebben of specifieke ongebruikelijke kenmerken onderstrepen zoals de leeftijd van demonstranten.

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

20 Doelen en eisen: Worden de zorgen van de demonstranten over klimaatverandering vermeld in het artikel?

Wordt gecodeerd als 'ja' wanneer het artikel aandacht geeft aan de eisen en zorgen van de demonstranten i.v.m. klimaatverandering, wordt gecodeerd als 'nee' wanneer er in het artikel enkel bericht wordt over de protestactie zelf maar het niet gaat over de problemen die ze eigenlijk willen aankaarten.

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

21 Ineffectief protest: Worden de acties van betogers in het artikel als ineffectief bestempeld?

Wordt gecodeerd als 'ja' wanneer er in het artikel gesteld wordt dat de actie geen veranderingen zal teweegbrengen omdat de ideeën en doelen van de demonstranten extremistisch of onpopulair zijn, of dat de protestgroepen ongeorganiseerd of niet eensgezind zijn.

- Ja (1)
- Nee (0)

ii. Code book English translation

Codebook

Item properties

1 Item ID

See Excel file

2 Date of publication

Show numerically so April 10, 2019 would become 10/04/2019

3 Year

- 2018 (1)
- 2019 (2)
- 2020 (3)
- 2021 (4)
- 2022 (5)
- 2023 (6)

4 Number of words

Indicated on Belga.Press

- 0-100 (1)
- 100-299 (2)
- 300-499 (3)
- 500-699 (4)
- 700 or more (5)

5 News website

- De Morgen (1)
- Het Nieuwsblad (2)
- The Time (3)
- Apache (4)
- MO* (5)

6 Item type

- Factual article (1)

Classic news article that reports on an event (who, what, where).

- Interview (2)

Classified as an interview when the focus is on a structured question-answer conversation. The use of a quote in a classic article does not mean that it is coded as an interview.

- Opinion (3)

Opinion pieces where the author's opinion is clearly expressed. A classic article that also contains an opinion from a source is not included. This also does not include an article written by an external author that does not contain that author's opinion.

- Analysis/background (4)

Article provides more background or explanation about a current fact or situation, but does not report on a (new) event.

7 Sentiment of the article

No own assessment necessary, sentiment is indicated on BelgaPress. Not all articles were assigned a sentiment, so this variable will not be used to draw conclusions for the entire sample.

- Positive (1)
- Neutral (2)
- Negative (3)
- Unknown (99)

Characteristics of the protest/action being reported

8 Protest size: How many people took part in the action/protest?

- 0-10 (1)
- 10 – 99 (2)
- 100-999 (3)
- 1000 – 4999 (4)
- 5000 – 10 000 (5)
- More than 10 0000 (6)
- Unknown (99)

9 Illegal tactics

9.1 Are illegal protest tactics used?

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

9.2 [if 9.1 = 1] What illegal tactics are used?

9.2.1 Vandalism

Protesters who destroy or attempt to destroy private property, businesses, public infrastructure or works of art. We also regard unauthorized entry/climbing of an art installation, sports competition, performance or exhibition as vandalism.

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

9.2.2 Looting

Protesters entering private property or businesses and stealing goods.

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

9.2.3 Violence

Protesters who use violence against police, bystanders, politicians, citizens or each other.

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

9.2.4 Occupancy

For example, occupying companies, institutions or government buildings.

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

9.2.5 Obstruction of traffic or passage

Blocking public roads and making the passage of traffic difficult or impossible. We also include air traffic here. This also includes hindering access to certain public places. This does not include a permitted demonstration that (briefly) hinders traffic but is permitted by the police.

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

9.2.6 Unapproved collection

Holding a demonstration without permission from the competent authorities. This also includes unauthorized but tolerated activities. Only code yes when no other tactic is more applicable. For example, an occupancy is also an unapproved collection, but is only coded as 'Yes' when occupied and here as 'No'.

- Yes (1)

- No (0)

9.2.7 Truancy

In the context of the climate protests in 2019 and 2021, this is a relevant variable to include. We see truancy as an illegal but not radical tactic.

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

9.2.7 Other Illegal Tactics

Open answer, only complete when applicable.

10 Legal Tactics

10.1 Are legal protest tactics used?

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

10.2 [if 10.1 = 1] What legal tactics are used?

10.2.1 Sit-in/Die-in

Protesters gathering somewhere and holding a sit-down strike.

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

10.2.2 March/demonstration/demonstration

Demonstrators who hold a march or demonstration (follow a certain route) or gather and demonstrate in one place. They then perform classic and legal actions such as singing, shouting, holding signs in the air or giving speeches.

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

10.2.3 Petition

Campaigners collecting signatures to support their actions.

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

10.2.4 Boycott

Campaigners who no longer use certain companies or institutions and call on them not to do so to express their dissatisfaction.

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

10.2.5 Other?

Open answer, only complete if applicable.

11 Radicality: Are one or more tactics of the protest action reported radical?

- Yes (1)

Radical tactics may include activities such as civil disobedience, occupation of public spaces, or symbolic/shocking gestures that disrupt the existing order and provoke a response from authorities or the public. Truancy in itself, although civil disobedience, is not seen as radical. The actions of 'climate truants' can still be radical if they fit the description above.

- No (0)

Actions of a peaceful and non-confrontational nature, without violence or radical means. These can, for example, be peaceful marches, sit-down strikes, petitions or boycotts. Non-radical actions adhere to non-violent principles.

12 Location: Where is the protest being reported taking place?

- Belgium (1)
- Neighboring country (2)
The Netherlands, France, Germany or Luxembourg.
- Abroad (3)
Everything abroad except the neighbouring countries.
- Cross-border action (4)
This is a protest that is taking place in several countries.

Characteristics of the protest paradigm in the article

13 Frames used

This study is quantitative in nature and therefore does not attempt to conduct a true frame analysis of the articles in the sample. Because we can fall back on a lot of previous frame research in protest reporting, we try to collect quantitative data about frames used in the sample. We base this on the 'key' frames as indicated by McLeod and Hertog (1999) and as used in studies by Harlow & Kilgo (2017), Harlow et al. (2019) and Salazar Rebolledo et al. (2023). We check whether these frames appear in the text and any photos that accompany the article. Videos are not included in the analysis.

In the following questions we look for elements of the frames. It is therefore not the case that an article must fully correspond to a frame for which the 'yes' is coded. When the title contains an element of a frame, the presence of the frame is also coded as 'yes'.

13.1 Are there any elements of the 'riot' frame?

The 'riot' frame is used when the article reports on violent, destructive, and chaotic aspects of the protest. The action and activists can, for example, be described as criminal, dangerous, a threat to the population or public order. Any acts of destruction and violence are highlighted. An article can, for example, describe destruction, riots and disorder, without stating the demands of the activists or the context of the action. The riot frame can also appear in images if images of, for example, destruction or demonstrators disrupting public order have been added.

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

13.2 Are there elements of the 'confrontation' frame?

The 'confrontation' frame is used when the article focuses on conflicts between demonstrators and police or other groups. The article uses elements of the confrontation frame when it extensively describes or highlights the clashes between police and demonstrators, arrests, skirmishes or even verbal confrontation between action groups and counterparts/bystanders. This frame can occur in the images when, for example, violence between police and demonstrators or images of injured bystanders are depicted.

- Yes (1)

- No (0)

13.3 Can any elements of the 'spectacle' frame be found?

The 'spectacle' frame is used when the article emphasizes theatrical and striking elements of the protest or when it highlights special characteristics of the demonstrators themselves. For example, the article can mention dramatic or unusual actions or highlight characteristics such as the age or appearance of the demonstrators. Theatrical elements of protest actions can also be highlighted in images, for example by depicting costumes of the campaigners. Even if emphasis is placed on the participation of famous people in the protest, this is an element of the spectacle frame.

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

13.4 Are there elements of the 'debate' frame?

The 'debate' frame is used when the article opens up opportunities for debate on the issues being campaigned on by sufficiently informing the public about the views of the activists and providing background on the issue they are discussing. The 'debate' frame is used when the article pays a lot of attention to the views of the activists. This can be recognized by the fact that the article allows the activists themselves to speak and reports extensively on their demands and goals.

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

14 Official sources

A source is a person or institution that is indicated in the article as having shared information that is used, this can be done by directly quoting or paraphrasing the source. Inserting tweets or other social media messages, for example, is also seen as resource use. We do not see another news organization as a source.

Official sources are governments, politicians, industries, companies and institutions or any source that occupies a position of power in society.

14.1 Are there (direct and indirect) references to official sources?

- Yes (1)

- No (0)

14.1.2 [if 14.1 = 1] How many official sources are used?

Numerical variable, direct quotes and references to statements or facts said by an external official source.

14.2 [if 14.1 = 1] Which official sources are used?

14.2.1 Police

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

14.2.2 Governments

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

14.2.3 Politicians (not speaking from their possible position in a government)

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

14.2.4 Companies

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

14.2.5 Other

Open answer, only to be completed if vtp.

15 Unofficial sources

A source is a person or institution that is indicated in the article as having shared information that is used, this can be done by directly quoting or paraphrasing the source. Inserting tweets or other social media messages, for example, is also seen as resource use. We do not see another news organization as a source.

Unofficial sources are protest participants, protest leaders, lay people and others, i.e. those without a position of power in society. When the slogans or inscriptions of activists are used as quotes, we do not see this as a source reference.

15.1 Are there (direct and indirect) references to unofficial sources?

- Yes (1)

- No (0)

15.1.2 [if 15 = 1] How many unofficial sources are used?

Numerical variable, direct quotes and references to statements or facts said by an external unofficial source.

15.2 [if 15 = 1] Which unofficial sources are used?

15.2.1 Campaigners

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

15.2.2 Protest leaders

Organizers or prominent figures of the protest action/movement, who do not have a formal position within an organization, association or NGO.

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

15.2.3 Representatives of climate action groups or NGOs

With a formal position within an organization, association or NGO, for example spokesperson for Greenpeace.

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

15.2.4 Bystanders

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

15.2.5 Citizens

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

15.2.6 Other unofficial sources?

16 Public opinion

'Public opinion' can come in different forms (see 16.2) and is seen as contrasting when the article states that the public/bystanders/society do not pay attention or support to the protest and its goals or even oppose it. A single source can also make generalizing statements that are

also included here.

16.1 Is contrasting public opinion used?

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

16.2 [if 17.1 = 1] In what form does the contrasting public opinion occur?

We follow the categories of Tan (2017).

16.2.1 Public Opinion

Statements about the general opinion of the population

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

16.2.2 Social norms

Involving social norms that the protest participants would go against

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

16.2.3 Legal Conduct

Indicate laws against which the campaigner's behavior or ideas go against

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

16.2.4 Bystanders

Sketching a picture of bystanders who clearly differ in opinion or appearance of the protest.

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

17 Episodic or thematic framing: Is 'episodic' or 'thematic' framing used?

- Episodic (1)

An article is coded as 'episodic' when it focuses on this individual protest event. Episodic framing is further characterized by anecdotal description of the event, personal stories, the problems and solutions of the climate issue viewed at the individual level and the lack of a broader framing of global warming.

- Thematic (2)

An article is coded as 'thematic' when it embeds the protest event in the context around which the action is taking place, provides background information on the climate problem and places the solution to the issue at a societal and policy level. The individual protest action is reported, but from the article the reader can also learn more about the climate problem or specific issue that the protest is about.

18 Negative consequences: Are the negative consequences of the protests emphasized in the article?

Is coded as 'yes' if the article describes the negative impact of the protest (e.g. the protests caused disrupted mobility or inconvenience to residents and employees in the area; the protests caused costs for the public through, for example, the deployment of the police; the protests damaged companies) quotes. This does not include negative consequences for the activists themselves! Coded as 'no' if the article did not mention any negative consequences or also highlighted the potential positive effects of the movement (e.g. the protests lead to positive policy change and beneficial outcomes for Protestants and society).

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

19 Labelling: Are labels used that portray the demonstrators negatively or strangely?

Is coded as 'yes' when specific names or 'labels' (e.g. climate truants) are attached to demonstrators that have a negative connotation or underline specific unusual characteristics such as the age of demonstrators.

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

20 Goals and Demands: Are the protesters' concerns about climate change mentioned in the article?

Is coded as 'yes' when the article focuses on the demands and concerns of the demonstrators regarding climate change, it is coded as 'no' when the article only reports on the protest action itself but does not discuss the problems they actually face. want to point out.

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

21 Ineffective protest: Are the actions of demonstrators described in the article as ineffective?

Coded as 'yes' when the article states that the action will not bring about change because the ideas and goals of the protesters are extremist or unpopular, or that the protest groups are disorganized or not united.

- Yes (1)
- No (0)

iii. Registration form

Start van blok: Item eigenschappen

V1 ItemID

V2 Datum van publicatie (vorm 22/08/2019)



V3 Jaartal publicatie

- ☐ 2018 (1)
- ☐ 2019 (2)
- ☐ 2020 (3)
- ☐ 2021 (4)
- ☐ 2022 (5)
- ☐ 2023 (6)



V4 Aantal woorden

- ☐ 0-99 (1)
- ☐ 100-299 (2)

- ☐ 300-499 (3)
- ☐ 500-699 (4)
- ☐ 700 of meer (5)



V5 Nieuwswebsite

- ☐ De Morgen (1)
- ☐ Het Nieuwsblad (2)
- ☐ De Tijd (3)
- ☐ MO* (4)
- ☐ Apache (5)



V6 Type artikel

- ☐ Feitelijk artikel (1)
- ☐ Interview (2)
- ☐ Opinie (3)
- ☐ Analyse/achtergrond (4)



V7 Sentiment van het artikel

- ☐ Positief (1)

☐ Neutraal (2)

☐ Negatief (3)

Einde blok: Item eigenschappen

Start van blok: Kenmerken van het protest



V8 Hoeveel mensen nemen deel aan de actie/het protest?

☐ 0-10 (1)

☐ 10 – 99 (2)

☐ 100-999 (3)

☐ 1000 – 4999 (4)

☐ 5000 – 10 000 (5)

☐ Meer dan 10 0000 (6)

☐ Onbekend (99)



V9.1 Worden er illegale protest tactieken gebruikt?

☐ Ja (1)

☐ Nee (0)



V9.2.1 Vandalisme?

☐ Ja (1)

☐ Nee (0)



V9.2.2 Plundering?

☐ Ja (1)

☐ Nee (0)



V9.2.3 Geweld?

☐ Ja (1)

☐ Nee (0)



V9.2.4 Bezetting?

☐ Ja (1)

☐ Nee (0)



V9.2.5 Hinder van verkeer?

☐ Ja (1)

☐ Nee (0)



V9.2.6 Niet goed-gekeurde actie?

☐ Ja (1)

☐ Nee (0)



V9.2.7 Spijbelen?

☐ Ja (1)

☐ Nee (0)

V9.2.8 Andere illegale tactieken?



V10.1 Worden er legale protest tactieken gebruikt?

☐ Ja (1)

☐ Nee (0)



V10.2.1 Sit-in/ Die-in?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)
-



V10.2.2 Mars/betoging/demonstratie?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)
-



V10.2.3 Petitie?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)
-



V10.2.4 Boycott?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)
-

V10.2.5 Andere legale tactieken?



V11 Radicale tactieken?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)
-



V12 Locatie van protest?

- ☐ België (1)
- ☐ Buurland (2)
- ☐ Buitenland (3)
- ☐ Grensoverschrijdende actie (4)

Einde blok: Kenmerken van het protest

Start van blok: Kenmerken van het protest paradigma in het artikel



V13.1 Elementen van het 'riot' frame?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)
-



V13.2 Elementen van het 'confrontation' frame?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)
-



V13.3 Elementen van het 'spectacle' frame?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)
-



V13.4 Elementen van het 'debate' frame?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)
-



V14.1 Wordt er verwezen naar officiële bronnen?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)
-

V14.1.2 Hoeveel officiële bronnen?



V14.2.1 Politie?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)



V14.2.2 Overheden?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)



V14.2.3 Politici?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)



V14.2.4 Bedrijven?

- ☐ Ja (1)

☐ Nee (0)

V14.2.5 Andere officiële bronnen?



V15.1 Wordt er verwezen naar niet-officiële bronnen?

☐ Ja (1)

☐ Nee (0)

V15.1.2 Hoeveel niet-officiële bronnen?



V15.2.1 Actievoerders?

☐ Ja (1)

☐ Nee (0)



V15.2.2 Protest leiders?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)



V15.2.3 Vertegenwoordigers van klimaatorganisaties of NGOs?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)



V15.2.4 Omstaanders?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)



V15.2.5 Burgers?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)

V15.2.6 Andere niet-officiële bronnen?



V16.1 Wordt er gebruik gemaakt van een contrasterende publieke opinie?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)



V16.2.1 Publieke opinie?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)



V16.2.2 Sociale normen?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)



V17.2.3 Wettelijk gedrag?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)
-



V16.2.4 Omstaanders?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)
-



V17 Episodic of thematic framing?

- ☐ Episodic (1)
- ☐ Thematic (2)
-



V18 Negatieve gevolgen benadrukt?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)
-



V19 Labeling?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)
-



V20 Doelen en eisen vermeld?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)



V21 Protest als ineffectief bestempeld?

- ☐ Ja (1)
- ☐ Nee (0)

Einde blok: Kenmerken van het protest paradigma in het artikel

iv. Syntax for recoding of protest paradigm indicators and additional variables

Variable number	Variable label	Syntax
V27	Delegitimizing frame used	COMPUTE OnlyPPFrames=(V13.4_DebFR = 0 & (V13.1_RiotFR = 1 V13.2_ConfrFR = 1 V13.3_SpecFR = 1)).
V28	No goals and demands	RECODE V20_GoalsDemands (1=0) (0=1) INTO V28_GoalsDemands_recode.
V29	Episodic framing	RECODE V17_EpiOrThema (2=0) (1=1) INTO V29_Episodicframing_recode. EXECUTE.
V26	Dominance official sources	COMPUTE MoreOffSources=(V14.1.2_QTOffSource > V15.1.2_QTNOSource).
V16.1	Antagonising public opinion	Original coded value was used

V21	Ineffectiveness	Original coded value was used
V18	Negative consequences	Original coded value was used
V19	Labelling	Original coded value was used
V30	Score protest paradigm	COMPUTE ScorePP=SUM(V29_Episodicframing_recode, V28_GoalsDemands_recode,V27_OnlyPPF rames,