

How Did the Media Report the Crisis?

Analysis of the
Latvian National Daily Press

Vita Dreijere

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About the author

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About the Centre for Media Studies at SSE Riga

In spring 2009, the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga (SSE Riga) received a donation from the "Anne-Marie och Gustaf Anders stiftelse för medieforskning" foundation in Sweden, part of which was to be used for activities contributing to the development of journalism in the Baltic countries.

These activities are undertaken within the framework of the Centre for Media Studies at SSE Riga, whose activities focus on:

- Educational programmes targeting active journalists and focusing on investigative reporting, business reporting and journalistic ethics;
- Activities encouraging the exchange of experience among journalists active in the Baltic countries, as well as between journalists in the Baltic and Nordic countries;
- Research activities related to media.

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Introduction

The rapid economic downturn in Latvia presented a challenge not only on people's ability to quickly adjust to new circumstances and the capability of politicians to make important choices and adopt unpopular decisions, but also to the media. The economic crisis is at once a significant and sensitive context for the operation of the media, as the issues on the media agenda stemming from it do not merely relate to various abstract macroeconomic indices, statistical tables and diagrams, but rather have a very direct impact on the majority of the Latvian populace – and accordingly, the majority of the media audience. Furthermore, the economic crisis substantially affected the media themselves. The above, in turn, represents a sufficiently relevant argument to spark scholarly interest in journalistic trends during the period of economic crisis.

How did the media report the crisis? Whom did they hold responsible for the downturn? Did they identify those responsible for the recovery? Did they offer their own solutions? Did the media also notice the “human face” of the crisis, or did they simply remain on the level of various utterances by officials and macroeconomic indicators? These are some of the questions that this study will seek to answer through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods of media content analysis.

Six national dailies were analysed for the purposes of this study: the Latvian-language *Latvijas Avīze*, *Diena* and *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, and the Russian-language *Chas*, *Vesti Segodnya* and *Telegraf*. Although this limits the scope of the study to traditional (more specifically, print) media, it does at the same time capture a spectrum of media organisations that is broad in different respects and, consequently, a fairly diverse range of factors impacting journalism (such as different media owners) and generally divergent journalism traditions.

The start and end points of the crisis largely depend on individual perception, and this study does not aspire to encapsulate the entire period of the economic crisis. However, the study reviews a broad and contextually dense period from 8 November 2008, when an extraordinary meeting of the government was called and official information on the crash of Parex banka reached the broader public (which served as proof that the global financial crisis is not just a distant echo and was a symbolic starting point for the crisis), to 20 December 2010 (the date of adoption of the government budget for 2011: positive annual economic growth had resumed by then). This was a period when governments changed, many unpopular decisions were passed, missions by international creditors took place and elections to the local governments European Parliament and the Saeima were held.

Economic and Political Context and the Media Environment

In 2008, as it embarked on the international loan programme, Latvia agreed to implement a comprehensive budget consolidation to cut the budget deficit. According to information published by the Ministry of Finance, the total volume of the consolidation measures amounted to 2.2 billion lats by 2011 (16.6 % of the gross domestic product). The largest budget reduction – 878 million lats – took place in 2009. Government budget revenues were increased at the same time by 370 million lats – the total volume of consolidation measures that year reached 9.5 % of the GDP. Substantial consolidation measures were also undertaken in 2010, reaching 508 million lats.¹ The economic decline brought about a rising unemployment rate. The number of registered job-seekers began to increase in June 2008 and reached the highest level in March 2010 (17.3%), still remaining high at the end of the period studied here: 14.3%.² The rate of inflation also slowed during the surveyed period.³

The nadir of the economic downturn was reached in 2009, when the GDP shrunk by 18 % in comparable price terms.⁴ The Convergence Programme of Latvia stresses that, thanks to the measures taken to stabilise the economy and internal devaluation, as well as the favourable situation in external markets, the growth of the Latvian economy resumed at the end of 2009.⁵ The success story of the Latvian recovery from the crisis was promoted by the head of the government, Valdis Dombrovskis, who in 2011 released a book entitled *How Latvia Came through the Economic Crisis*, co-authored with Anders Åslund. Yet it is not dubbed a unanimous success story in the Latvian media sphere, given the great social inequality.⁶

The unpopular fiscal consolidation measures during the surveyed period also faced unfavourable political conditions: in 2009, consolidation was held back by the

local government election campaign. The delay had a negative impact on the economy and exacerbated the crisis of trust, which was a shock to both the reputation of the country rendering more distant the government's chances of returning to capital markets and to private business activity, acknowledged by Uldis Rutkaste, an economist with the Bank of Latvia, in an interview to *Lietišķā Diena* magazine.⁷ Then, in October 2010, elections to the Saeima (parliament) were held. Some seven months earlier, the People's Party (Tautas partija) had left the government, which meant that a minority government was in place in Latvia during the pre-election period. A change of government also took place in the crisis period: in the spring of 2009, the cabinet of Valdis Dombrovskis took over from that of Ivars Godmanis, who had resigned as prime minister.

In the period studied, changes also affected the media environment and the newspapers analysed here, which had to face dropping subscription rates coupled with a significant loss in advertising revenues. The need for cost optimisation also hit the media: newsrooms and editorial boards were subject to structural changes, journalists' pay declined, and some media outlets cut the frequency of publication. The *Diena* newspaper was subject to the most comprehensive changes, with an ownership change taking place in the summer of 2009. After failing to obtain evidence that the publicised owners were the actual owners of *Diena*, some of the newsroom and editorial staff left the newspaper in the autumn, and the editors-in-chief were replaced several times during the period covered by the study. *Telegraf* faced similar problems. In the period under scrutiny, the editor-in-chief was replaced twice, and towards the end of the period, there were attempts to involve the paper in a dubious sale transaction. In addition, the equity shares of SIA Mediju nams, the publisher of *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, were purchased in January 2010 by MN mediji, a company owned by several representatives of Mediju nams. However, a submission made by AS Ventspils nafta to the public prosecutor's office later appeared in the media containing information that put the economic rationale of the deal in doubt, as the shares had changed hands for EUR 85,000.⁸

1 <http://www.fm.gov.lv/lv/aktualitates/jaunumi/27969-veikta-budzeta-konsolidacija-laika-posma-no-2008-2011-gadam-faktu-lapa>
 2 http://www.lm.gov.lv/upload/darba_tirgus/darba_tirgus/bezd_12_2010.pdf
 3 <http://csb.gov.lv/statistikas-temas/paterina-cenas-galvenie-raditaji-30385.html>
 4 Convergence Programme of the Republic of Latvia 2009-2012. See http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/economic_governance/sgp/pdf/20_scps/2009-10/01_programme/lv_2010-01-29_cp_lv.pdf
 5 Convergence Programme of the Republic of Latvia 2011-2014. See http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/nrp/cp_latvia_lv.pdf
 6 E.g., http://www.rebaltica.lv/lv/petijumi/latvijas_veiksmes_stasta_slepta_puse
 7 Fridrihsone, M. (20 Dec. 2011). "Konsolidācijas ēra vēl nav beigusies." ["Era of consolidation not over."] *Lietišķā Diena*. 6.
 8 E.g., <http://www.diena.lv/sabiedriba/politika/cik-reala-patiesiba-bijusi-mediju-nama-pardosana-pucem-un-citiem-756681>

Framing

Because this study contains frame analysis, I wish to outline the boundaries of the concept – which is widespread in media research.

The concept of framing originates in cognitive psychology and anthropology. A number of other disciplines use it besides communication research: e.g., economics, sociology, linguistics and social movement research.⁹ Representatives of various social science disciplines have defined framing based on an understanding of either media content creation or the effect of media – thus focusing on how news items are presented or on how they are perceived.

It is a convention of framing research that journalists inevitably frame, or structure, their representations of political events: they use certain frames to simplify stories, attach meanings to them and to hold the interest of the audience.¹⁰ News framing is more than just an isolated argument or position on a certain topic: it is also a coherent construction of an issue. Namely, relying on a process of selection and professional routines, journalists create a context for publicly discussed issues using information classification. This is described as a process in which the source of communication constructs and defines a social and political issue for its audience.¹¹ Procedures of selection and construction underlie the process of message framing: frames emerge in the media content by various means, e.g., word choice, metaphors, descriptions, arguments or illustrations. Van Gorp, an adherent of constructivism, stresses that all these methods constitute the framing “package”, held together by a central theme, or topical frame, providing the framing package with a coherent structure.¹² Although reporters are witnesses to events, they may perceive only a part of

the reality. The inability to perceive objective reality and the chaotic flow of unrelated impressions fully explains why selection and ordering cannot be avoided in media activity. Highlighting certain information is a crucial part of this process.¹³ Furthermore, the process of framing involves an interaction between the (un)conscious choice of frames by journalists as a result of their own worldview system and the influence of other, additional factors within the context of media organisations and outside of the media.¹⁴ This can include the influence of various editorial routines, such as the need to fit into certain character limits, and for instance the influence of media owners, which was an object of discussion at various stages of the period studied.

Framing research focuses on both very specific issue frames that are only applicable to particular topics and broadly defined generic frames, which appear to be ubiquitous.¹⁵ In this study, my focus will be on generic frames.

An academic discussion on the concept of framing has been precipitated by the renowned communication scholars Dietram Scheufele and Shanto Iyengar, who hold the view that it has moved away from its original characteristics. Today, communication research has abandoned the comparatively narrow definition stemming from psychology – frames as informationally equivalent labels – in favour of an approach rooted in sociology that blurs the boundaries between frames and other persuasive features of messages, the researchers argue. This then leads to a conceptual uncertainty as to whether any attribute of information is to be perceived as a frame and whether any audience response should be read as an effect of framing. When regarded from this perspective, framing cannot be isolated from other forms of media or social influence, such as agenda-setting, learning and persuasion.¹⁶ Scheufele and Iyengar suggest that research focuses their subsequent empirical efforts on the original features of the concept: the variation in the way in which the identified stimulus is presented rather than manipulations involving the informational or persuasive nature of the messages. They liken the problem to paintings and point out that many researchers of political communication have spent the last couple of decades studying the actual painting (i.e., messages) rather than their frames.¹⁷

9 Van Gorp, B. (2007). "The Constructionist approach to framing: Bringing culture back in." *Journal of Communication*, 57. 60.

10 Valkenburg, P., Semelko, H., de Vrees, C. (1999). "The Effects of news frames on readers' thoughts and recall." *Communication Research*, 26 (5). 550-551.

11 Schuck, A.T., de Vreese, C.H. (2006). "Between risk and opportunity: News framing and its effects on public support for EU enlargement." *European Journal of Communication*, 21(1). 6.

12 Van Gorp, B. (2007). "The Constructionist approach to framing: Bringing culture back." 64.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Van Gorp, B. (2007). "The Constructionist approach to framing: Bringing culture back." 61.

16 Scheufele, D.A., Iyengar, S. (2011). "The state of framing research: a call for new directions." In: <http://pcl.stanford.edu/research/2011/scheufele-framing.pdf>

17 Ibid.

Economic Reporting during the Crisis

Researchers stress that economic development is a socially significant topic, as the economic system affects the lives of all citizens, whether directly or indirectly. However, the complexity of the national economic system, the interdependence among its various components and the effects of governmental economic policy prevent a large portion of the public from perceiving and evaluating economic issues accurately. This is of particular relevance at a time when the economic situation is unsettled.¹⁸

Researchers envisage particular difficulty for journalists in the shaping of economic news. In other words, a journalist cannot directly observe and show the economy: it can be known from a vast and constantly changing pool of economic information (some of which comes in the form of complex descriptive statistics, with varying degrees of credibility at that) and an even greater mass of economic interpretations proffered by sources with diverse levels of understanding and integrity. From this large aggregation of material, journalists have to pick a much smaller quantity to use in their stories in a way that can cater to the interest and needs of the audience.¹⁹ There are further factors that influence the production of economic news, such as the journalist's role models, strict time and length restrictions, and the fact that many journalists do not have an economics education. This means that economic news reporting is concentrated and relatively straightforward. To attract and maintain a large audience, economic news items have to be timely, clear and engaging, whereas economics, quite to the contrary, is complex and abstract.²⁰

From the point of view of research on agenda-setting, economic news reporting by the media can be said to have potentially very far-reaching effects on the public agenda. Criticisms of the producers of economic news and concerns about the impact of their stories mainly rest on three assumptions: (a) media tend to give a negative reflection of the economy; (b) economic reporting is capable of shaping the public's perception of the state of the national economy; and (c) economic news can be adverse and as such affect the economic and political picture.²¹ Attempts to test this empirically entail four variables, and the interests of the researchers centre on their causes and effects (adapted to the Latvian situation): economic news reporting, public understanding of the "health" of the economy, the current state of the economy and government approval ratings (originally: presidential approval ratings). These variables span four very vast and distinct empirical fields. This is why studies on the relationship among these variables produce mixed results. Many researchers have uncovered general media effects and specific effects of economic news on the other variables, but a reverse impact has also been identified: i.e., it has been concluded that economic news reporting is determined by public perception, economic conditions and the degree of approval of the government.²²

Many scholars have focused on positive–negative news on the economy and criticise the negative reporting. Thus, before the 1992 U.S. presidential election, a large fraction of American media outlets produced negative reports on the economic situation, even though the market indicators showed economic growth. Another study in the UK demonstrates that journalists cite crisis indicators more frequently than refer to positive developments in the economy.²³

This study, however, focuses on the reporting of the economic crisis, which in itself constitutes a negative context. T. Coombs points to an important aspect: a crisis is perceptual. What we typically deem as crises are events that can be easily perceived as such. This means that the definition of an event as a crisis is aided by the stakeholders.²⁴ There is a broad consensus in the theoretical literature that crises can be perceived to exist when the problems faced by society are seen as threatening and in need of immediate solution. In addition, they contain a high degree of uncertainty.²⁵ As the global financial crisis has demonstrated, if the key institutions

18 Quiring, O., Weber, M. (2012). "Between usefulness and legitimacy: media coverage of governmental intervention during the financial crisis and selected effects." *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 17(3). 295.

19 Smith, T., Lichter, S. R. "Lessons in mass media depiction of economic conditions during a recession." In: King, S. S., Cushman, D. P., eds. (1997). *Lessons from the recession: a management and communication perspective*. New York: State University of New York Press. 12.

20 Ibid., 13.

21 Blood, D. J., Phillips, P. C. B. "Economic headline news in the agenda: New approaches to understanding causes and effects." In: McCombs, M., Shaw, D., Weaver, D. (1997). *Communication and democracy: exploring the intellectual frontiers in agenda-setting theory*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. 97.

22 Ibid., 98.

23 Brettschneider, F. (2003). "Economic affairs, media coverage, and the public's perception of the economy in Germany." In: Schorr, A., Campbell, W., Schenk, M., eds. *Communication research and media science in Europe*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. 260.

24 Coombs, T. (2007). *Ongoing crisis communication: Planning, managing, and responding*. 2nd ed. London [etc.]: Sage publications. 3.

25 't Hart, P., Tindall, K. (2009). "From 'market correction' to 'global catastrophe': framing the economic downturn." In: 't Hart, P., Tindall, K. *Framing the global economic downturn: Crisis rhetoric and the politics of recessions*. Canberra: ANU E Press. 4.

on which the economic system relies are endangered, a socio-political crisis may follow in its wake, especially if the citizens' employment is threatened. Moreover, the extent of the endangerment cannot be gauged by merely counting the people, jobs or amounts of money touched by the crisis. The psychological effects of endangerment have to do with the cultural expectations of a certain degree of social order, predictability, security and well-being, which may differ across communities and polities.²⁶

Studies identify different ways of framing a crisis, as it is presumed that the main preferences of public officials are stability and denial of fault and any non-incremental change. Yet others have developed a crisis–reform thesis (the expected result of a crisis is political reform).²⁷ Other researchers identify four approaches to crisis framing: (1) the nature and severity of the crisis; (2) its causes; (3) responsibility for its origins and escalation; and (4) its political implications.²⁸

In his book written on the lessons learnt from the financial crisis, the economist Marco Annunziata also refers to the role of the media in aggravating the situation. He does not specify the extent of media influence but notes that the rapid and constant diffusion of bad news and gloomy messages helped to spread concern and pessimism in all sectors of society. The reaction was extreme: consumers stopped spending, worried about a possible loss of employment, and companies not only ceased investing but also cut production in an attempt to reduce stock levels – which suddenly proved excessive given the fall in demand. The pace of manufacturing and trade plummeted at a breathtaking rate, Annunziata writes.²⁹

26 Ibid., 5.

27 de Vries, M.S. (2004). "Framing crises: response patterns to explosions in fireworks factories." *Administration & Society*, 36(5). 595.

28 't Hart, P., Tindall, K. (2009). "Understanding crisis exploitation: leadership, rhetoric and framing contests in response to the economic meltdown." In: 't Hart, P., Tindall, K. *Framing the global economic downturn: Crisis rhetoric and the politics of recessions*. Canberra: ANU E Press. 23.

29 Annunziata, M. (2011). *The Economics of the financial crisis: Lessons and new threats*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. 76.

Media in Times of Crisis: Perspective of the Newspaper Editors

The newspaper editors interviewed³⁰ cite clarification, analysis of causes, consequences and proposed solutions and informing about processes as the main functions of journalism during an economic crisis. *“Plus this should be done in a level-headed way – which means abstaining from spreading panic, because we know that a newspaper can kill not only a fly but a bank just as well,”* notes Vikija Valdmane-Rozenberga, head of the Latvian news section and deputy editor-in-chief of *Diena*.³¹

The editor-in-chief and former head of the business section at *Telegraf*, Andrejs Švedovs, stresses the need to provide usable information at a time of an economic crisis. For instance, the audience should be made aware of the opportunities that the government offers people who have found themselves in tough circumstances. Also, questions of interest to the audience should be answered and passed on to those in power. This category also includes revealing and describing opportunities emerging as a result of the crisis: *“The spectrum here is wide: from stories of people who managed to evolve and profit to examples from the life of those countries that have survived crises.”*³²

Linda Rasa, editor-in-chief of *Latvijas Avīze*, is of the opinion that journalistic functions are no different during a period of crisis. However, taking into account the large proportion of negative news during the crisis, the newspaper consciously began to also focus on seeking out and reflecting positive news: *“... after a while, we had a feeling that there was an oversaturation of the media with these ‘bad news’ items, which could cause an opposite reaction from the audience – unwillingness to read media that only provide ‘bad news’. Being mindful of this, LA deliberately started to find and provide space in the paper for the so-called good news,”* Linda Rasa explains.³³

Media representatives point out that they engaged more in the practice of neutral recording of the situation rather than active interpretations and analysis of the processes, causes and potential solutions. The practice of neutral communication of information is related to the professionalism of journalists and the rapid unfolding of events, Linda Rasa explains. Editor-in-chief of *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, Anita Daukšte, believes that the media took a reactive rather than a proactive position during the crisis: in other words, the media reflected on events and issues in connection with the crisis. For example, the threat posed by the bankruptcy of the U.S. investment bank Lehman Brothers was not analysed in advance; the media did not provide any predictions but rather found themselves catching up too late. Later, a critical position [towards the decision-makers] prevailed in the media, yet it remained more on the reflective side.³⁴

All in all, newspaper representatives rate the economic competence of their journalists reasonably highly. The only exception was Linda Rasa, who admitted that *Latvijas Avīze* still had room for growth in terms of reporting on economic topics.

30 The following newspaper representatives were interviewed: Linda Rasa, editor-in-chief of *Latvijas Avīze*; Anita Daukšte, editor-in-chief of *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*; Andrejs Švedovs, editor-in-chief and former head of the business section at *Telegraf*; Vikija Valdmane-Rozenberga, deputy editor-in-chief and head of Latvian news at *Diena*. Given the changes that affected the newspapers in the reference period, the sample includes those representatives of the media who occupied leading positions at the newspapers for the entire duration of the study. Representatives of *Vesti Segodnya* and *Chas* did not respond to interview requests.

31 E-mail interview with Vikija Valdmane-Rozenberga.

32 E-mail interview with Andrejs Švedovs.

33 E-mail interview with Linda Rasa.

34 Interview with Anita Daukšte.

Methodology

There are different approaches to frame analysis in communication science. This study uses the dichotomy of episodic and thematic frames by Iyengar and adapts the approach of the researchers Semetko and Valkenburg to the research of generic frames.³⁵

The episodically framed material identified by Iyengar denotes a reflection of events, whereas thematic reporting demands an in-depth, interpretive analysis that is more difficult to anticipate.³⁶ From this, the first research question then follows.

RQ1: What is the proportion of episodic and thematic frames?

In their turn, Semetko and Valkenburg studied five news frames that have been identified in earlier research: attribution of responsibility, human interest, conflict, morality and economic consequences. **Responsibility frame** presents an issue or a problem by attributing responsibility to someone for its causes or resolution. **Human interest frame** involves individual stories or an emotional angle in presenting an event, issue or problem, which is a way of personalising and dramatising news and rendering them more emotional. **Conflict frame** highlights conflict among individuals, groups and institutions. **Morality frame** places an event in a context of religious principles or moral injunctions. **Economic consequence frame** presents an event, a problem or an issue by underlining the actual or potential economic consequences it will have for an individual, a group, an institution, a region or a state.³⁷ For each frame, Semetko and Valkenburg defined a series of questions (to which the coder had to respond with a yes or a no) to test whether articles fit into them. Many researchers have acted similarly: both using Semetko and Valkenburg's approach as the basis and, depending on the context of

the study, adding further frames, such as a diagnostic frame, a predictive frame and a media self-referentiality frame.³⁸ This study will apply an adapted version of Semetko and Valkenburg's approach by studying the five frames mentioned above, to answer the following research questions:

RQ2: Which frames are more widespread in the reporting of the crisis?

RQ3: How does the proportion of the frames differ in the newspapers analysed?

RQ4: How does the proportion of the frames vary at different stages of the crisis?

In order to analyse the frames, a quantitative content analysis was carried out, and the units of analysis were articles in the news and opinion sections of the newspapers *Latvijas Avīze*, *Diena*, *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, *Chas*, *Vesti Segodnya* and *Telegraf* that touched on the subject of the economic crisis in any context whatsoever: issues, events and problems arising from it. In total, 3,236 articles were found to qualify for the framing analysis. In this instance, it was important to retain a broad selection of articles, as the published items reflected different periods of the crisis. Article coding was performed by four final-year bachelor's students in communication studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Latvia and one graduate of the programme.³⁹ Given the vast sample of articles, a deductive approach to framing analysis with the content analysis method was virtually the only possibility: i.e., identify predefined framing categories as the variables of the content analysis and test their prevalence in published media items.⁴⁰

For each frame, questions were defined relying generally on Semetko and Valkenburg's approach, but also adapting these to the context of the specific study. As in the research project described above, this study will also use a binary coding strategy: coders had to answer the questions with a yes (answer value 1) or no (answer value 0).

The formula $I = \frac{l}{k}$ was used in computing the framing indices, where l is the number of matching frame criteria and k is the total number of frame criteria. Consequently, the potential boundary values of the framing indices are $0 \leq I \leq 1$.

35 See Semetko, H.A., Valkenburg, P.M. (2000). "Framing European politics: A Content analysis of press and television news." *Journal of Communication*, 50(2).

36 Iyengar, S. (1991). *Is anyone responsible? How television frames political issues*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 14.

37 Semetko, H.A., Valkenburg, P.M. (2000). "Framing European politics: A Content analysis of press and television news." 95-96.

38 E.g., Dimitrova, D. V., Lee Kaid, L., Williams, A. P., Trammell, K. D. (2005). "War on the web: The Immediate news framing of Gulf War II." *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 10(1). 32.

39 The article coders were students of the bachelor's programme in communication studies at the LU Faculty of Social Sciences Dairis Anučins, Uldis Kohvs, Ieva Laicāne and Jurita Mikoviča and a graduate of the programme, Dace Utināne.

40 Semetko, H.A., Valkenburg, P.M. (2000). "Framing European politics: A Content analysis of press and television news." 94.

Each frame was also categorised as weak, medium or strong in terms of its manifestation. Given that the number of criteria for the frames differs, the boundaries of their levels also vary.

- The boundaries of the levels of the responsibility frame:

Weak $0.14 \leq I \leq 0.29$

Medium $0.43 \leq I \leq 0.57$

Strong $0.71 \leq I \leq 1$

- The boundaries of the levels of the human interest frame:

Weak $0.2 \leq I \leq 0.4$

Medium $I = 0.6$

Strong $I \leq 0.81$

- The boundaries of the levels of the conflict frame:

Weak $I = 0.25$

Medium $I = 0.5$

Strong $I \geq 0.75$

- The boundaries of the levels of the morality and consequences frames:

Medium $I = 0.5$

Strong $I = 1$

A qualitative content analysis was also conducted for the identified frames in order to obtain in-depth data on certain features of crisis reporting.

The fifth research question of this study is as follows:

RQ5: On what sources have the newspapers based their articles on the subject of the economic crisis?

To establish this, quantitative content analysis was conducted to measure the representation of predefined source categories in newspaper articles. For this purpose, the coders were also required to provide the answers yes, or “represented” (value 1), or no “not represented” (value 0).

The codebook can be reviewed in the appendix.

Results of the Study

Proportion of Episodic and Thematic Frames

Analysis of episodic and thematic framing helps to establish whether media only focus on particular events or individuals in their published material, or whether they reflect a wider context of events in their articles, e.g., by analysing facts, providing expert opinion and statistical data.

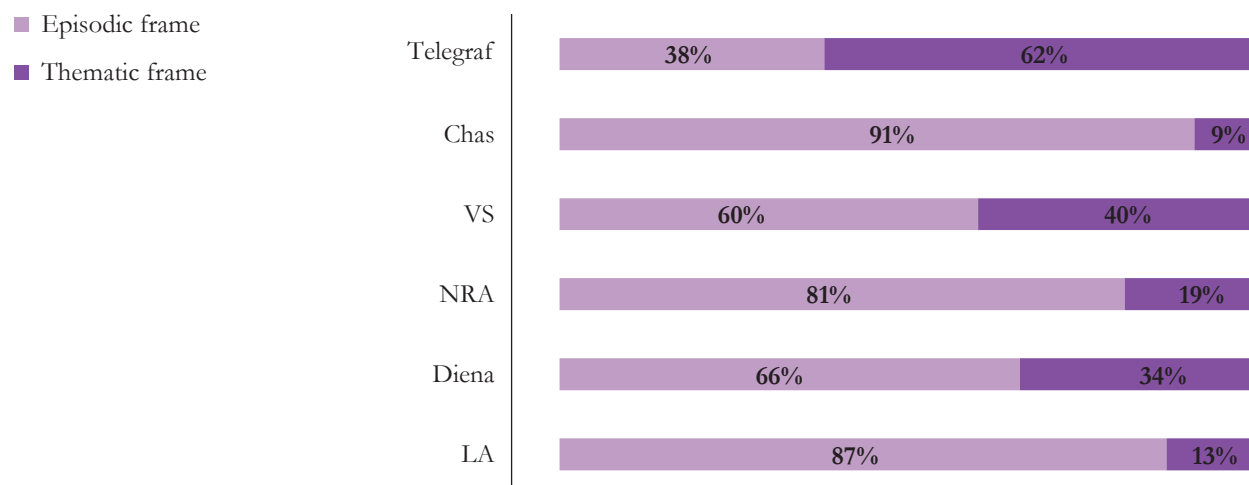
In studying television news, Iyengar concluded that episodic framing dominated here. Thus, when reporting on mass protests, the focus of the stories was on the specific protest actions rather than the issues that had sparked the protest. The same would apply to TV reporting of labour disputes: depictions of picketers gain more air time than discussions on economic and political issues that are at the root of such disputes.⁴¹ This study only analysed newspaper content and normatively the logics of newspapers nowadays is: not just brief news reporting but also analysis of the events, problems and issues. However, the results of the content analysis indicate that episodic framing emphatically dominates in the majority of the newspapers.

Telegraf is the only newspaper included in the study whose publications on the economic crisis feature a marked proportion of thematic frame, while the other newspapers, on the contrary, present a very clear dominance of episodic frame, i.e., a reflection of specific episodes without considering the wider context.

Upon separately analysing articles in news sections and opinion pages, it is evident that a more pronounced share of episodic frame can be observed in the latter, with the exception of *Telegraf* and *Vesti Segodnya (VS)* – where this ratio was exactly inverse.

In response to the question of whether the media they represent focused only on specific events in their published material, without reflecting a wider context, or whether they revealed a broader background of what was happening, newspaper representatives stated that the general task of newspapers is to contextualise information. However, not all of them were convinced that they had successfully done so. The degree of professionalism and workload of journalists were invoked as factors that may hamper the reporting of context.⁴²

Figure 1. Proportion of episodic and thematic frames



41 Iyengar, S. (1991). *Is anyone responsible? How television frames political issues.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 15.

42 E-mail interview with Linda Rasa.

Proportion of Responsibility Frame

Responsibility frame is a multi-layered category of analysis, as it entails not only pointing out those responsible for the crisis but also proposing solutions. Semetko and Valkenburg focused more on the responsibility of government in the broader sense, individual and group-level responsibility, whereas this study, given the context, has been supplemented with criteria to determine whether the media also attributed responsibility for the crisis to international creditors and banks.

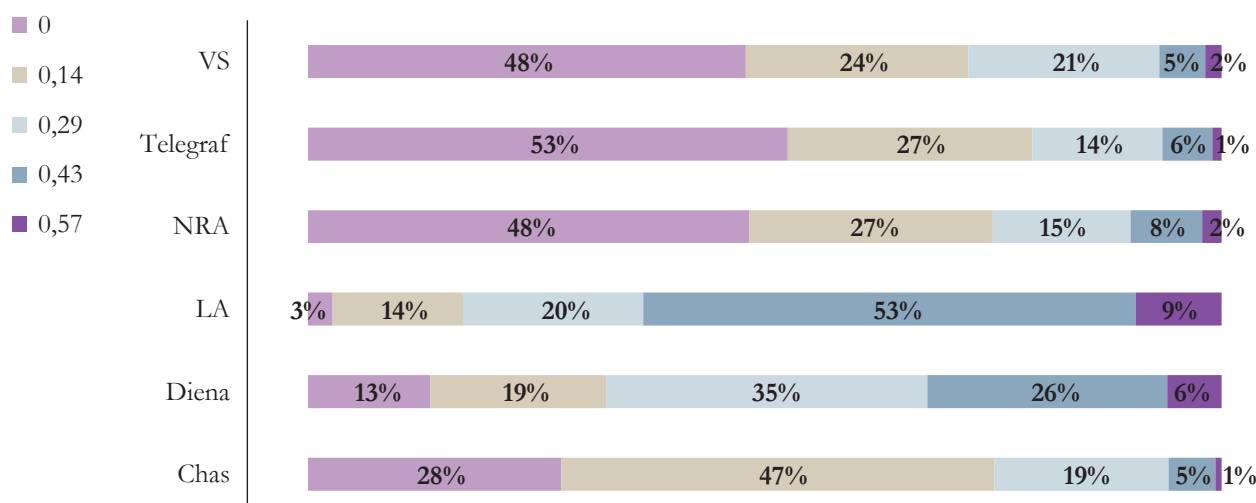
The majority of the criteria of responsibility frame reflect the practice of searching for and identifying those responsible for or guilty of causing the crisis. Heads of the newspapers say that they tried to point to those at fault for the crisis and conduct their own “investigation” (A. Švedovs). “As far as I recall, in interviews as well as in

articles that contained opinions by officials or experts, the main ‘guilty parties’, in simplified terms, were Parex banka and its failures, the ‘Swedish banks’ that allowed excessive lending, and the government of the ‘fat years’ that did not limit the overheating of the economy,” says Linda Rasa.⁴³ Whereas Andrejs Švedovs also names the population among those identified as “guilty” by *Telegraf*, in addition to politicians and banks: “All three groups thought that following Latvia’s accession to the European Union the living standard in our country would rapidly approach that of Germany and Sweden. Oh my...”⁴⁴ Anita Daukšte notes that the general media sphere accepted “the labels offered by political PR, that Kalvītis and Šlesers were to be blamed for the ‘full throttle’ ethos”.⁴⁵

An analysis of the newspaper content indicates that, overall, the media did not allocate responsibility quite in the same multi-layered manner.

Because the responsibility frame had seven criteria, the frame index values for this gauge are narrower than for the other frames.

Figure 2. Proportion of the responsibility framing indices in the surveyed newspapers



43 Ibid.

44 E-mail interview with Andrejs Švedovs.

45 Interview with Anita Daukšte.

Figure 2 shown here depicts the proportion of weak and medium presence of responsibility frame in the dailies surveyed. Strongly pronounced responsibility frame was not present in even 1 % of the articles in any of the newspapers. As is evident, no responsibility framing at all was identified in more than a half of the articles in *Telegraf*, with the figure for *NRA* and *VS* also approaching the 50 % mark. However, 73% of the texts in *Latvijas Avīze (LA)* had medium level responsibility framing.

If, however, each criterion of responsibility frame is analysed individually, it can be seen that some of them were very pronounced in articles.

Figure 3 shows the proportion of articles in which the ability to mitigate the problem was stressed. This criterion was pronounced in *LA* and *Diena*, and both newspapers name the government, various ministries, local governments and, to a lesser extent, the parliament and government-forming and opposition political parties as the institutions capable of mitigating the problem. Both prime ministers of the crisis period, Ivars Godmanis

and Valdis Dombrovskis, and the sectoral ministers were mainly named as individuals capable of alleviating the problem. When the prevalence of this criterion at various stages of the crisis periods is examined, it is evident that, in *Latvijas Avīze*, the ability of the government to mitigate the problem was stressed more after the resignation of PM Ivars Godmanis and after the election of Valdis Dombrovskis to the post. However, from the summer of 2009 onwards, the proportion has declined. Whereas in the *Diena* newspaper, the tendency to stress the ability of the government to attenuate the problem was more pronounced from the aftermath of the riots of 13 January 2009 to December of that year. Thereafter, the trend reversed itself, and the criterion manifested itself sporadically.

The Russian-language newspapers and *NRA* treated the ability of the government to diminish the problem with more reservation and scepticism: it was rarely highlighted in the articles of these papers. By the same token, these newspapers were much more active in highlighting the government’s responsibility for the crisis.

Figure 3. Articles stressing the ability of government to mitigate the problem

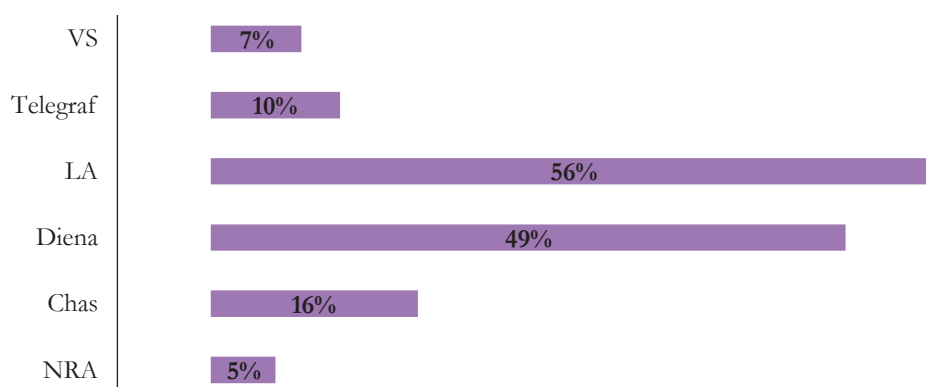


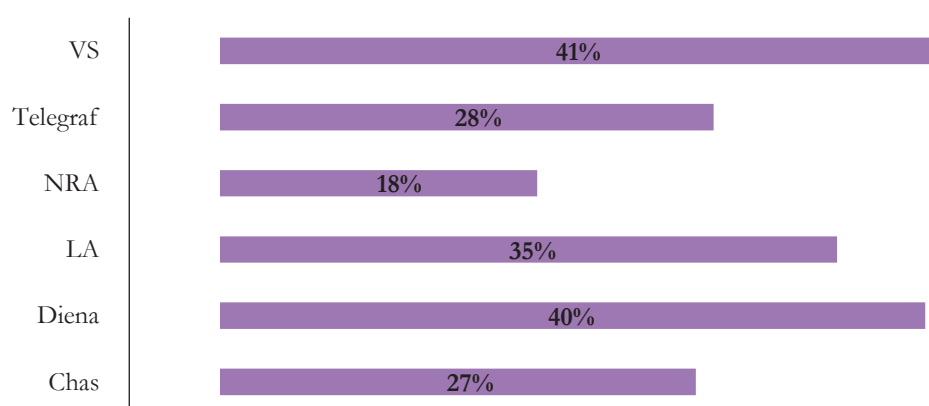
Figure 4 shows that the responsibility of the government for the problems associated with the economic crisis was stressed less frequently in the articles of *LA* and *Diena* than its ability to mitigate the problem. An opposite trend can be observed in the Russian newspapers and *NRA*, which more frequently singled out the government as being responsible for the crisis rather than stressing its ability to find a solution. This trend was especially pronounced in *VS*. In all the newspapers surveyed, a decisive majority of published items that pointed to the responsibility of the government appeared on the commentary pages; this focus on finding those responsible was less typical of articles in the news sections. A more marked tendency to point towards those responsible for the crisis existed in its early stages until mid-2009.

The roster of those singled out by the media ranged widely: from Prime Minister Valdis Dombrovskis and his consolidation policy, to the governing coalition, PM Ivars Godmanis's government and previous governments. The government of the former Prime Minister Aigars Kalvītis was often invoked in this context (at times, only Aigars Kalvītis or the "full throttle policies" of Aigars

Kalvītis and Ainārs Šlesers are mentioned). The current and former governments are those mentioned most frequently as bearing responsibility for the crisis. The media have also attributed responsibility for the crisis to the "the political clique that ruled [steamrolled] this country for the past ten years", "the constantly changing governments that were tugging the blanket towards themselves", public administration, "the bureaucratic apparatus", a number of ministries, ministers of finance Atis Slakteris and Einars Repše, as well as the ministers in certain, more socially sensitive sectors (welfare, health, education).

Although the process of consolidating the government budget was accompanied by visits by the international creditors, the need to balance the national budget and recommendations that were unpleasant to various social groups, an analysis of media content indicates that a relatively small share of articles blamed the international creditors for the problems. There was an especially small number of such articles in the *Chas* newspaper and more in *VS* and *NRA* (this, however, is true in absolute numbers, because the share of such articles in *NRA* only reached 3%). In *Diena* and *VS*, indications towards the

Figure 4. Articles stressing the responsibility of government for the problem

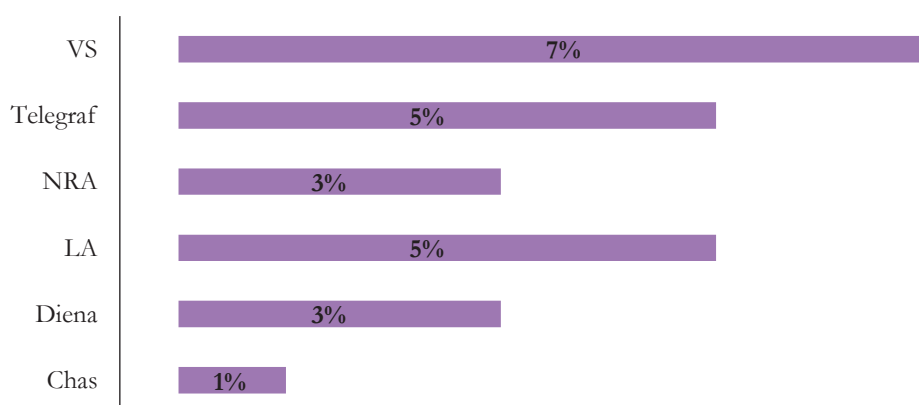


responsibility of the international creditors could be found more in articles published in the news pages, while in the remaining newspapers the greater proportion of such articles was published in the commentary sections. In absolute figures, there were more such articles following the local government elections on 6 June 2009 (but these data are also not statistically significant), which could be associated with the government budget amendments that came soon afterwards and contained many socially harsh measures, including pension cuts.

“In 2009 we more or less succumbed to the situation and said that the international creditors were the bogeyman. In 2010 and 2011, when we had more information and experience, we understood that we should try to demand more responsibility here from the government and the parliament rather than from the international creditors. Maybe, to some extent, one could dub the international creditors as the strict schoolmasters who demand some kind of a result, but it is the government itself that makes these decisions,” says Anita Daukšte, explaining the attitude of her newspaper towards the responsibility of the international creditors for social problems.⁴⁶

In turn, Linda Rasa notes that sometimes the causes of the negative treatment of the international creditors by the media could be found in the quality of communication. That is to say, the international creditors were reticent in their communication with journalists and rarely explained their position at length. *“It is, of course, the case that our journalists also often swallowed the hook cast by the local politicians – that the many restrictions were demanded by the lenders and that they were the actual bad guys. In the rare conversations (including off the record) that a representative of the international creditors had with the press, including LA, a position crystallised and emerged in the interviews that it was the international creditors that had in some matters expressed greater concern for the Latvian society and people than its own government,”* stresses Linda Rasa.⁴⁷ The editor-in-chief of LA brings up another important aspect that could define the media’s treatment of the international creditors: they were *“the other”* (with the government being *“our own”* in this context).⁴⁸ This reflects the worry expressed in the media regarding the role of the international creditors in decision-making: i.e., that the country could be steered *“from the outside”*,⁴⁹ which was sometimes equated to the loss of independence.

Figure 5. Articles indicating that the international creditors were responsible for the problem



⁴⁶ Interview with Anita Daukšte.

⁴⁷ E-mail interview with Linda Rasa.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ E.g., Elkins, A. (24 Nov. 2008). “Uz Latviju sūfīs uzraugu.” [“Overseer to be dispatched to Latvia.”] *Vesti Segodnya*. 4.

The criterion of individual and group responsibility for the crisis was represented in the newspapers just as rarely. Only a small portion of articles attributed responsibility for the crisis to society in general, “us”, those who lived

beyond their means and took out loans, “*people who do not want to take responsibility*”, “*people who elected a Saeima [parliament] of this kind*”, tax evaders and dishonest businesspeople.

Figure 6. Articles pointing to individual and group-level responsibility for the crisis

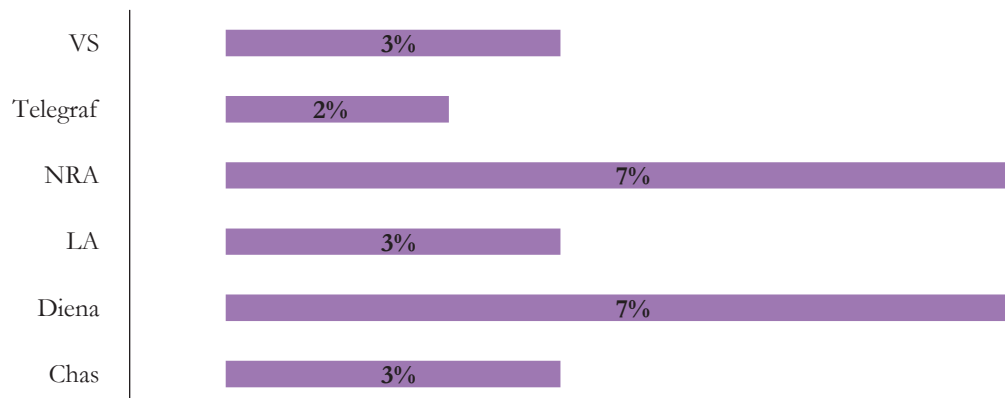
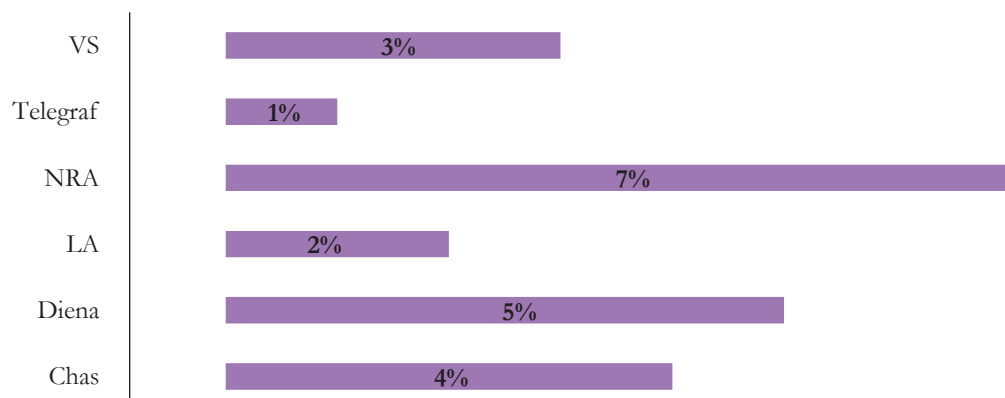


Figure 7. Articles identifying the responsibility of banks for the crisis



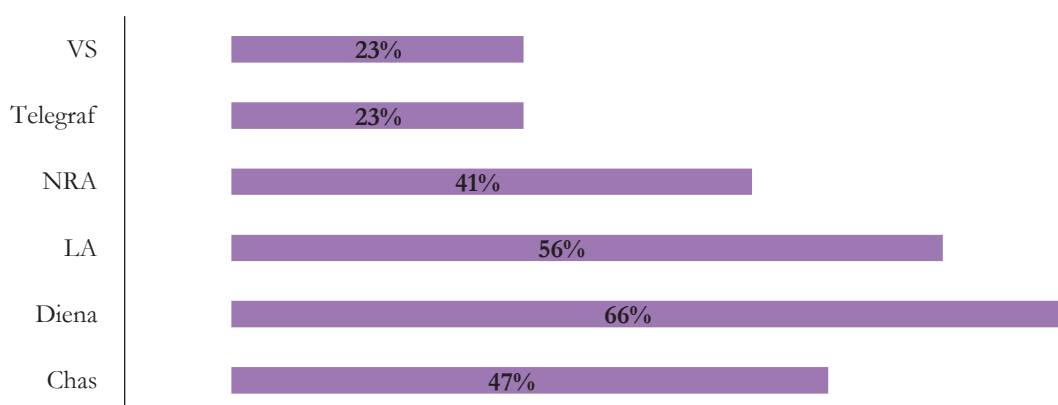
Even though in the assessment of experts one of the causes of the economic crisis was greater lending, which then facilitated the inflation of the real estate “bubble”,⁵⁰ media publications rarely point to the responsibility of the banks for the crisis. Parex banka, which suffered a crash and was effectively nationalised and received a considerable injection of funds from the national budget, is invoked most frequently. The other banks mentioned within the context of the responsibility frame are either dubbed generically as banks (banks that practised irresponsible lending policies and “handed out loans left and right”⁵¹, banks as “enslavers”⁵², banks that “forced” loans on borrowers⁵³) or as Scandinavian or Swedish banks (this label was used for the banks responsible for the crisis by *Chas*, *VS*, *LA* and *NRA*).

Figure 8 illustrates the proportion of articles that also offer some type of a solution to the problem. It includes both the position of the newspaper and the solution options arising from it and – far more frequently – the

necessary steps mentioned by various sources. The proposed solutions can be categorised into several groups. The first group comprises episodic solutions and solutions at the level of individuals or certain social groups, such as “give birth before 3 November”, taking an accountancy course, laying off the cleaning staff and change of specialisation by physicians. The second group contains comprehensive and generalised solutions, such as developing a viable economic growth plan, encouraging exports, conducting an effective structural reform, dissolution of the Saeima or a change of government. The third group, in turn, includes comprehensive and also specifically formulated solutions, such as introducing a progressive income tax, issuing government bonds or devaluing the lat. The fourth group comprises solutions to reform specific sectors, e.g., closing schools, merging and re-profiling hospitals.

The greatest share of articles mentioning at least some solutions has appeared in *Diena*. However, a large

Figure 8. Articles offering a solution to the problem



50 E.g., <http://www.ir.lv/2012/8/2/starptautiskais-aizdevums-latvijai-2>
 51 E.g., Radionovs, V. “Glābiet cilvēkus, nevis bankas.” [“Save people not banks.”] *Chas*. 2.
 52 Elkins, A. (23 March 2009). “Glābiņa nav?” [“No deliverance possible?”] *Vesti Segodnya*. 4.
 53 Elkins, A. (24 Feb. 2010). “Parādu jūgā.” [“Under the yoke of debt.”] *Vesti Segodnya*. 4.

proportion of such articles reflected solutions offered by the government. Vikija Valdmane-Rozenberga also agrees that in its published pieces on the austerity policies, *Diena* took the government's side.⁵⁴ *LA* also did not present its own solutions for emerging from the crisis. "A way out of the crisis was mainly seen through the austerity policies, and this, as a solution, was offered by the government. In this respect, the paper could not come up with its own magic wand," Linda Rasa justifies this.⁵⁵ Similarly, in terms of economics, *Telegraf* can also be identified as a newspaper loyal to the government of Valdis Dombrovskis, as its editorial position regarding the means for achieving economic growth is consistent with the government's consolidation policy, Andrejs Švedovs explains.⁵⁶

NRA represents a contrast in this respect: in its editorial position, it advocated an opposite course, i.e., devaluation of the lat. "I cannot claim that this was a general position of *NRA*, but the commentators who were here believed that Latvia should follow Poland's path. As we know, in order to avoid an economic crisis, Poland devalued the zloty and thus achieved a greater increase in exports. . . . We have to understand that the devaluation of the lat was only possible in one very brief period in early 2009; later on, this made no sense. Consequently, *NRA* later ended up in the position of some sort of a troubadour of missed chances," Anita Daukšte explains.⁵⁷ The government's course of austerity was also very intensely criticised by the *Chas* and *VŠ* newspapers, which reached for colourful means of expression. Some examples of this were: "it is to the government's advantage that people die";⁵⁸ "the creditors will destroy Latvia";⁵⁹ "if Dombrovskis is planning another budget consolidation, it means the end is nigh for all of us"⁶⁰. If one sums up the epithets for the government used in articles by *VŠ* and *Chas*, it is depicted as an incompetent body run by the International Monetary Fund that acts in its own interests and those of the rich rather than thinks of ways to lead the country out of the crisis. There are multiple mentions of the fact

that all independence-era governments are to be blamed for this situation.

It follows from the results of the analysis of responsibility framing that the media had a tendency to identify the responsible parties for the problems in the economy, yet such responsibility was chiefly attributed to politicians (the crisis was mainly positioned as a problem caused by current and former governments); to a much lesser extent, responsibility for the crisis was attributed to individuals and groups, as well as banks, which participated in the "overheating" of the economy.

An important aspect must, however, be mentioned at this point: the shared responsibility of the banks and the population in this case applies to the causes of the crisis, whereas the government's responsibility weaves through the decisions associated with the consequences of the crisis – which in the case of a quantitative content analysis of this type is relevant.

Proportion of Human Interest Frame

We need to start with a reminder of what was mentioned above: that human interest frame in the reporting of the events, issues or problems associated with the economic crisis involves individual stories or emotional angles. Referring once again to the work of Semetko and Valkenburg, it has to be noted that this is a way of personalising stories by putting a "human face" on various economic indices and current problems and giving an article a more emotional tone.

Newspaper representatives have noted that crisis-related problems in their media outlets have been illustrated with specific human interest stories. The remarks by Vikija Valdmane-Rozenberga and Linda Rasa indicate that the economic crisis was not a context that would force the newspapers they represent to intensify the use of human interest stories to illustrate the issues and problems reported in their articles, as this is also a typical practice of the newspapers during non-crisis periods. For instance, there is said to have been a stipulation in place at *Diena* at one point that each social problem needs to be shown "through specific people to whom it applies".⁶¹ The editor-in-chief of *NRA* makes a point that personal

54 E-mail interview with Vikija Valdmane-Rozenberga.

55 E-mail interview with Linda Rasa.

56 E-mail interview with Andrejs Švedovs.

57 Interview with Anita Daukšte.

58 Elkins, A. (21 July 2009). "Nomirstiet taču ātrāk!" ["Die already!"] *Vesti Segodnya*. 4.

59 Elkins, A. (6 Oct. 2009.gada). "Kreditori iznīcinās Latviju!" ["Creditors will destroy Latvia!"] *Vesti Segodnya*. 4.

60 Author not indicated. (9 Oct. 2009). "'Avārijas' variants: slikti būs visiem!" ["Emergency option: things will be bad for everyone!"] *Vesti Segodnya*. 3.

61 E-mail interview with Vikija Valdmane-Rozenberga.

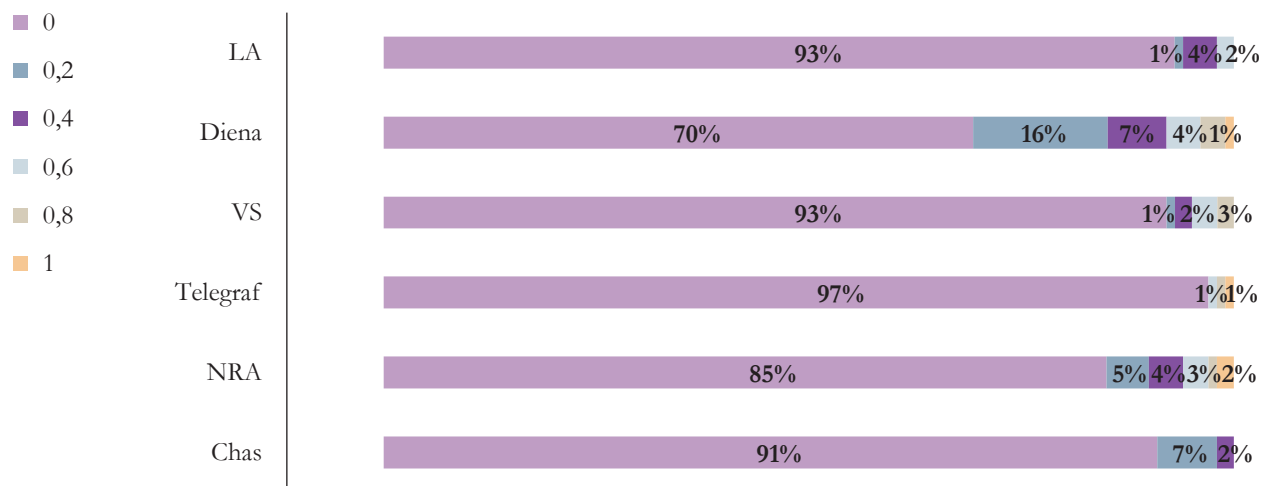
crisis situations appeared in the newspaper’s content in nearly every interview: “No matter whether it was an actor, an artist, a teacher or an economist who spoke, this question of crisis continuously cropped up in their rhetoric, their personal experience”.⁶²

At the same time, Andrejs Švedovs underlines an approach of reporting human interest stories in his newspaper that differs from that of the three other papers mentioned so far. *Telegraf* tried to seek out “successful people”, he says, to be able to use real examples to demonstrate that there is “light at the end of the tunnel”. Thus preference is given to reporting affirmative rather than negative human interest stories: “There was enough adversity in the lives of our readers – we didn’t see any point in writing more about it in our paper.”⁶³

Yet the results of an analysis of newspaper content shows that the practice of illustrating the issues, events and problems brought to the fore by the crisis with specific human interest stories was not very widespread.

This diagram illustrates the share of the human interest framing index in the six newspapers surveyed here. There is a striking dominance of articles that do not fit any of the defined criteria for human interest frame: in four of the six newspapers examined, such articles made up more than 90 % of the total. *Diena* is the only exception: it had more articles featuring a weak (23% of the articles), medium (4%) or strong (3%) human interest frame.

Figure 9. Proportion of the human interest framing indices in the surveyed newspapers



62 Interview with Anita Daukšte.

63 E-mail interview with Andrejs Švedovs.

One of the main criteria of human interest frame is the illustration of problems or issues with examples of specific persons for whom they are relevant. This means that the problem is not simply left at the level of statistical data or comments by officials but also acquires a human dimension. This is not a widespread practice in the newspapers (see Figure 10). In *NRA*, “people” appear in one article out of ten, and in *Diena*, somewhat more frequently. At times human stories have been used by the media organisations to supplement the description

of a certain event (e.g., picketers’ stories) – this also involves less effort when locating sources. More often it has been an initiative by the media themselves, and human interest stories supplement media news stories or problem descriptions/analysis. People who contribute to the “human face” of articles represent various social groups sharply affected by the consequences of the crisis: e.g., unemployed persons, teachers, parents of large families, rural doctors, farmers, young parents, working pensioners, small entrepreneurs, pupils of closed schools.

Figure 10. Published items illustrated with examples of particular individuals

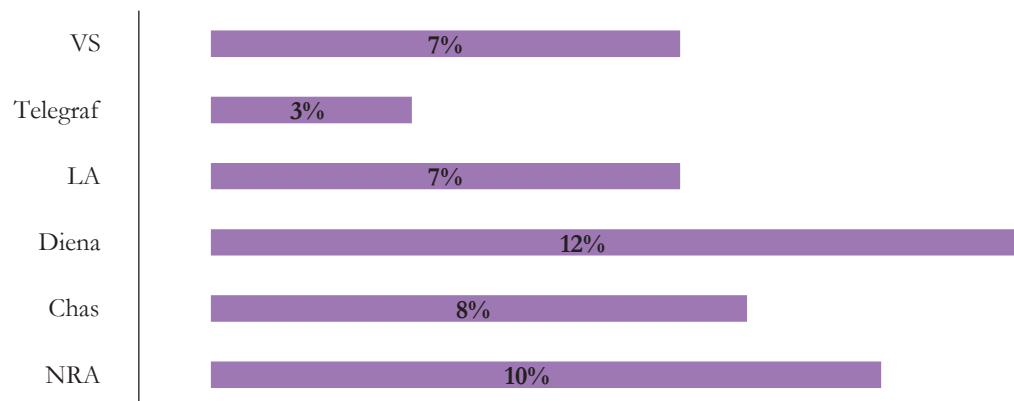
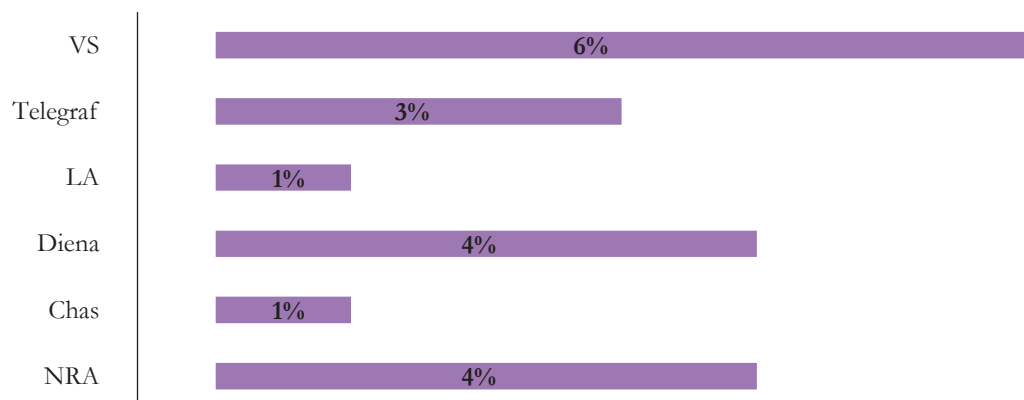


Figure 11. Articles using adjectives or personal descriptions encouraging empathy, sympathy or compassion



Even less common is the tendency for articles to use adjectives or personal descriptions that can precipitate various emotional responses, such as sympathy, compassion, even empathy (e.g., crying people, interviewees in a “dark mood”⁶⁴ and with “words full of bitterness”⁶⁵, a dishevelled man who sells his car for scrap as he is obviously in urgent need of money,⁶⁶ the “little first-former [who has to travel to a distant school] sitting in the next seat groggy and grumpy”⁶⁷, “now Madam Silvija can afford to put some money towards medicine”⁶⁸).

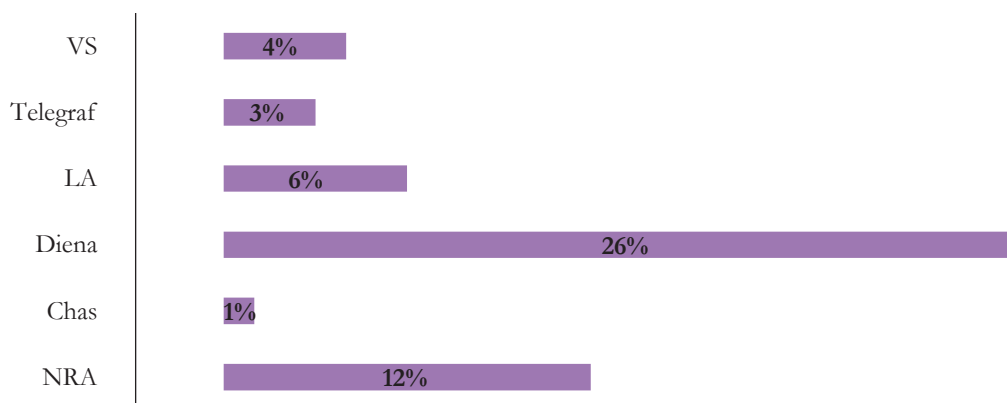
On very rare occasions, articles contained visual information that sparks empathy, sympathy or compassion. *Diena* was an exception in this respect, which contained nearly 12 % of such material; in *NRA* and *VS* the figure was 4 to 5%, while the share of such

items in the remaining newspapers did not exceed 1 or 2%.

This diagram shows the proportion of media articles reporting the impact of a problem where the focus is not solely on the macro-level and attention is also given to individual or group-level impact. Except for *Diena* and *NRA*, this sort of journalistic practice was very little pronounced. In most cases, this relates to falling incomes, loss of employment and an increasing debt burden of various social groups.

All in all, the results of the analysis of human interest framing indicate that macro-level issues and problems dominate strongly in newspapers, and a reflection of problems caused by the crisis at an individual or group level less so.

Figure 12. Articles stressing the impact of a problem at the level of individuals or groups



64 Firere, I.N., Procevska, O. (11 March 2009). "Situācija mainās pa nedēļām." ["Situation changing week by week."] *Diena*. 9.

65 Novicka, A. (20 Dec. 2008). "Bankas kredīta un zemo piena cenu ķīlnieki." ["Hostages of a bank loan and low milk prices."] *Diena*. 4.

66 Dubkovs, A. (23 Apr. 2010). Krīze. "Auto nodod metāllūžņos." ["Car sold for scrap."] *Telegraf*.

67 Stankeviča, Z. (18 Sep. 2009). "Ilgais ceļš uz skolu." ["The long road to school."] *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*. 1/4.

68 Paparde, I. (8 Nov. 2010). "Sociālā māja glābj bez pajumtes palikušos." ["Social home a haven for those left without shelter."] *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*.

Proportion of Conflict Frame

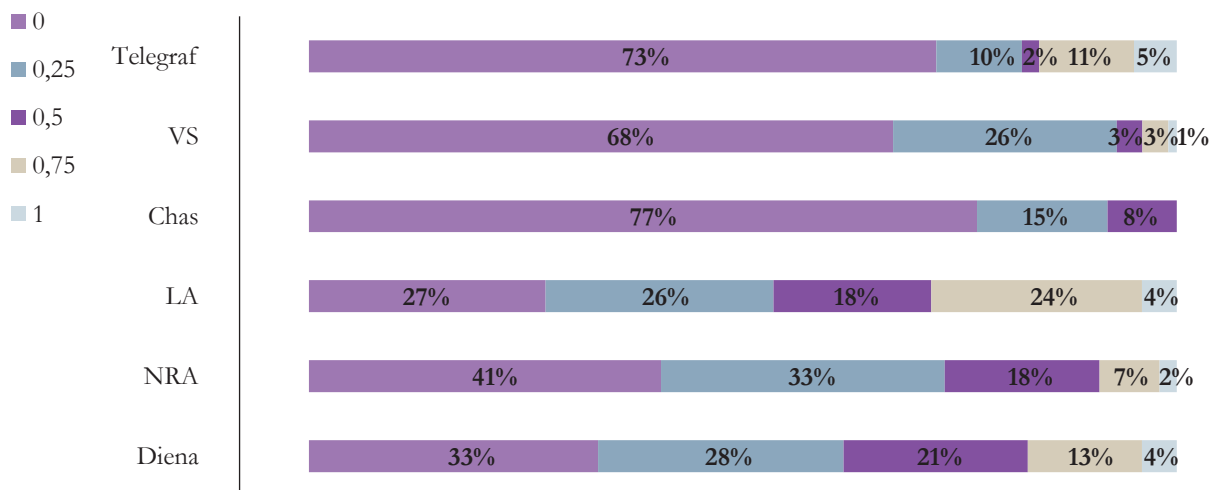
In justifying the need to include conflict frame among the “armoury” of frames of their research project, Semetko and Valkenburg invoked previous studies that demonstrated the relatively high incidence of conflict framing in news, for instance, by reducing complex and relevant political debate issues to the level of simplistic conflict.⁶⁹ In their research, Semetko and Valkenburg concluded that conflict frame is more frequently used in “serious” newspapers, which are the ones that report more on political issues.⁷⁰

As is evident, there are large differences in the incidence of conflict frame between newspapers published in Latvian and Russian. For example, in the case of *LA*,

medium or strong conflict frame has been identified in nearly half of the articles, and there are comparatively many articles in *Diena* and *NRA* where weak, medium or strong conflict frame is present. In turn, *VS*, *Chas* and *Telegraf* contain decidedly more articles where no conflict frame was identified. Admittedly, in the case of *Telegraf*, there are 16% of articles where conflict frame is strongly pronounced ($I = 0.75$ to 1).

The reporting of differences of opinion among political parties, individuals, groups and countries in articles is one of the most common criteria of this frame (Figure 14). This criterion can be observed most frequently in the items published by *LA* and *Diena*. The share of this criterion among all the newspapers surveyed was greater in articles appearing in the news sections than in opinion pieces.

Figure 13. Proportion of the conflict framing indices in the surveyed newspapers



69 Semetko, H.A., Valkenburg, P.M. (2000). “Framing European politics: A Content analysis of press and television news.” 95.

70 Ibid., 106.

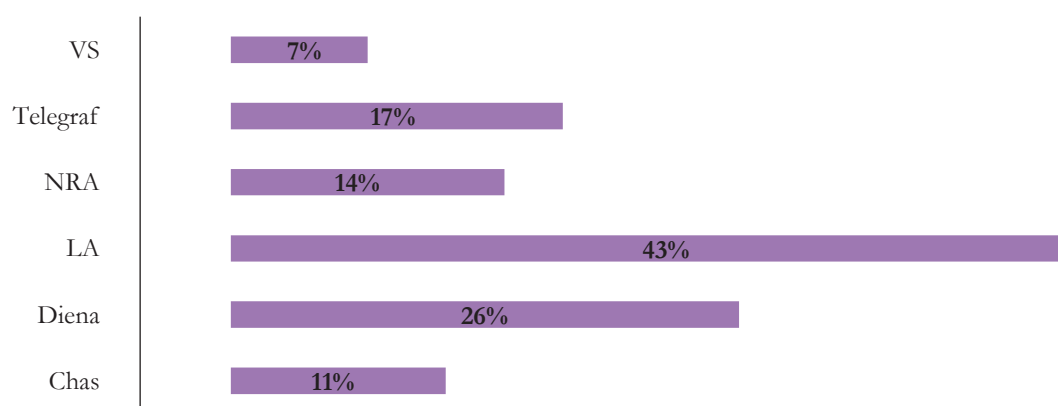
The subjects of disagreements were most often political personalities or institutions. In a large number of instances, crisis themes were used as a platform to depict political differences: the conflicting parties were the coalition and the opposition, with their representatives as the actors; in addition, articles reflected disagreements within the coalition itself – on the level of political parties as well as among the ministers and ministries of various sectors. Frequently, the divergent positions of the Ministry of Finance and other officials and agencies on matters of consolidation were framed as a conflict, as were the divisions between the International Monetary Fund/World Bank and the government.

Furthermore, trade unions and the government, Auditor General Inguna Sudraba and the government and various social groups and the non-governmental organisations representing them (e.g., farmers, pensioners, teachers) and the government or sectoral ministries were framed as subjects to the conflict.

In general terms, the results of the analysis indicate that the incidence of this criterion of conflict frame increased in the period following the local government elections in 2009, which is a time when difficult negotiations with the lenders took place and budget amendments containing many unpopular initiatives were passed.

Editor-in-chief of *LA*, Linda Rasa, admits that her newspaper also took sides in such conflict situations: *‘For instance, if the opposing sides were ‘trade unions (teachers, medical professionals) vs. the government’ or ‘pensioners vs. the government’, the editorial position was more in favour of the former. And this sort of position seemed, and still seems, quite natural, since this is the section of the public that is our audience, our readers, whose interests we take into account. Because a paper will only be purchased and read if, for example, we will look for, bear out and publish the reasons why teachers and medical workers should not have their pay cut or be laid off.’*⁷¹ *Diena* tended to take the government’s side in such conflict situations,⁷² whereas *NRA* was on the side of the critics when it came to matters of the government’s austerity policies.⁷³

Figure 14. Articles reflecting disagreements



71 E-mail interview with Linda Rasa.

72 E-mail interview with Vikija Valdmāne-Rozenberga.

73 Interview with Anīta Daukšte.

This criterion of the analysis applied to the largest proportion of articles. It is important to note that this does not merely include articles that report the accusations of some parties against others. In the coding process, articles were included in the category in which journalists themselves express reproof. Such articles are predominantly published in opinion sections (the incidence of this criterion in the articles published in the opinion sections is higher). *Chas* and *VS* tended to be exceptions in this respect, where an author's rebuke could also be expressed in a news article.

Most often, the target of criticism is the government, and the content of the reproaches reflected in the articles runs a wide gamut, from generalised disapproval (e.g., the government is doing everything wrong, Repše sees no people behind the numbers, Atis Slakteris is an unprofessional minister, the government has used economically ill-justified methods in budget planning) to criticisms regarding specific decisions or omissions on the part of the government (e.g., failure to introduce certain taxes or to raise/lower the rates, mechanical budget cuts within the sectors, delays in creating a uniform remuneration system), and for heeding certain recommendations of the International Monetary Fund. The contemplated devaluation of the lat was also a

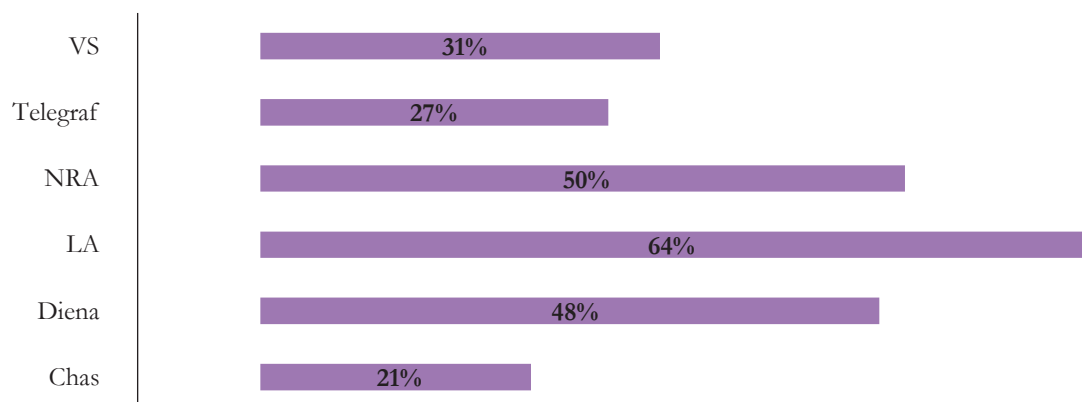
reason for criticism: recriminations appeared in the media both against those who failed to take the decision to do so and those who publicly emphasised the likelihood of the devaluation.

In the analysis of how the newspapers framed “winners” and “losers”, a fairly pronounced trend materialised: politicians of the ruling parties were mostly depicted as winners – the Prime Minister in particular and the government in general – whereas the people or different societal groups were shown as losers.

Proportion of Morality Frame

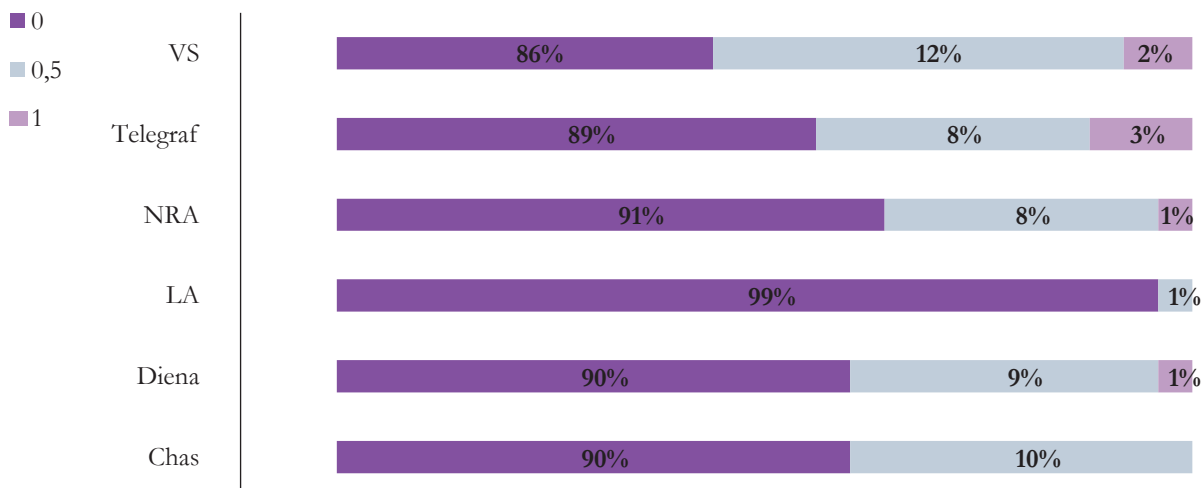
Research demonstrates that morality frame is not very common in media content. Semetko and Valkenburg remind us of the specific nature of the journalistic genres: considering that impartiality is one of the professional norms of journalism, news journalists use morality frames in an indirect way – by using quotations (thus allowing someone else to raise the issue).⁷⁴ The boundaries are looser in opinion pieces, which were also included in the sample of this study.

Figure 15. Articles in which political parties, individuals, groups or countries reproach another



⁷⁴ Semetko, H.A., Valkenburg, P.M. (2000). "Framing European politics: A Content analysis of press and television news." 96.

Figure 16. Proportion of morality frame indices in the surveyed newspapers

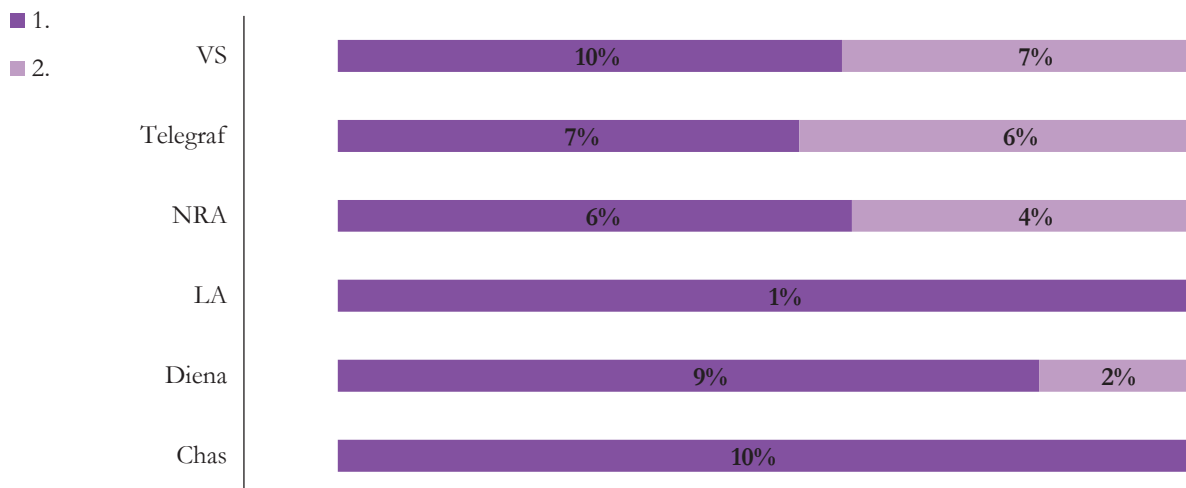


This study only uses two morality framing criteria, which means that the boundaries between the indices of this frame are broader.

Similar to studies conducted by foreign authors, the articles on the issues and problems of the economic crisis in the newspapers included in this study also have a very low incidence of morality frame: by far the greater part of the articles do not meet either of the two criteria; in an average of 8% of articles, the morality frame was pronounced to a medium degree (Figure 16).

When both of the criteria of morality frame analysed here are summed up (Figure 17), it is evident that the proportion of articles containing a moral message is greater. A large share of such messages have to do with lessons from the crisis: *the crisis is in our heads*; the crisis is a time for re-evaluating our values; the crisis is a suitable time for change; the choice is in our own hands; solidarity, justice are important; *those who are drowning need to be rescued*; the crisis is a reminder that miracles do not happen; *he who seeks shall find*.

Figure 17. Articles containing a moral message (1) or specific social prescripts on how to act (2)



There were fewer articles that also contained social injunctions for action. In a number of articles, people were advised to stop complaining and to act, to start with themselves, to cease thinking only about themselves and to help those in even greater difficulty, or to think in a sustainable way.

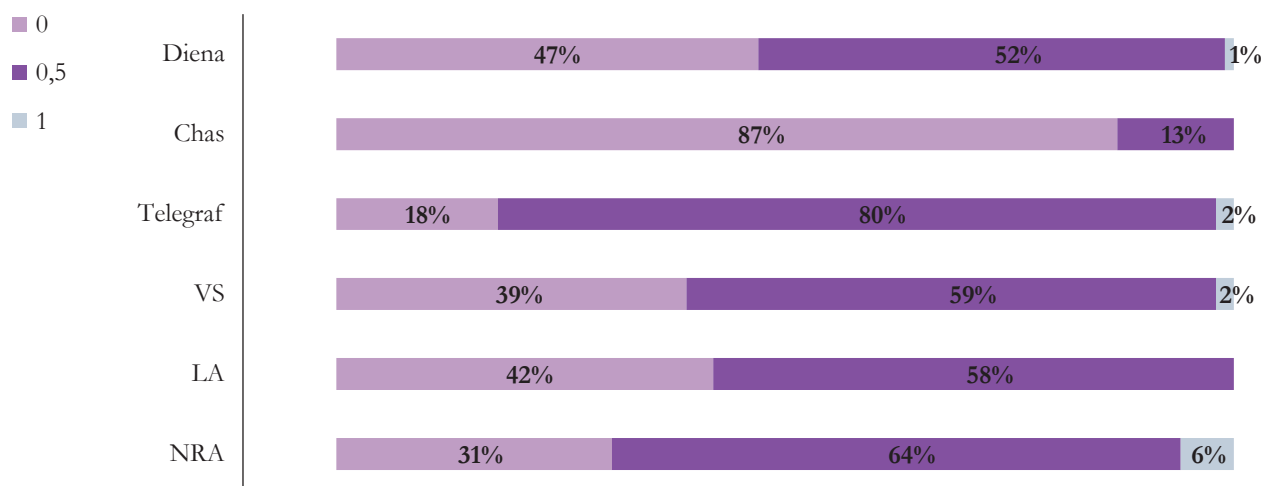
Share of Consequence Frame

Consequence framing (originally: economic consequence framing) depicts events, issues and problems by also highlighting their economic consequences. It is identified as a frame used often in news, as the impact on people also represents significant news value.⁷⁵ In the present instance, the frame has been narrowed down considerably

compared with Semetko and Valkenburg's original approach, as the context has been considered: i.e., the sample includes published items that in any way touch on the consequences of the economic crisis. However, it is important to gauge whether the media in their published material focus on the consequences that could potentially arise from performing certain actions. For the most part, this applies to various actions discussed at the policy level and those actually implemented, with a view to emerging from the crisis. This study distinguishes between two levels of reported consequences: the macro-level and the individual and group level.

In most newspapers (except for *Chas*) more than half of the sampled publications met at least one of the two criteria of consequence frame. The greatest number of references to the consequences of actions appeared in *Telegraf* and *NRA*; the least: in *Chas* and *Diena*.

Figure 18. Proportion of the consequence framing indices in the surveyed newspapers



⁷⁵ Semetko, H.A., Valkenburg, P.M. (2000). "Framing European politics: A Content analysis of press and television news." 96.

Figure 19, in turn, illustrates in greater detail which level of consequences of actions was reflected more in newspaper articles. Negative macro-level consequences represent by far the largest share: e.g., growing unemployment, falling pay levels in the public and private sectors, increasing tax burden, state bankruptcy, social unrest, poverty. Whereas the consequences of actions at the individual and group level find far less expression in the media. Quite often the consequences included in this category are attributed to individuals and groups of individuals that suffer from some changes instigated at the macro-level, such as the teachers of a specific school who have lost their jobs as a result of the optimisation of the school network; doctors who are poised to go abroad for work because their social conditions have deteriorated; the employees of specific institutions or businesses who will be receiving smaller salaries or will be laid off.

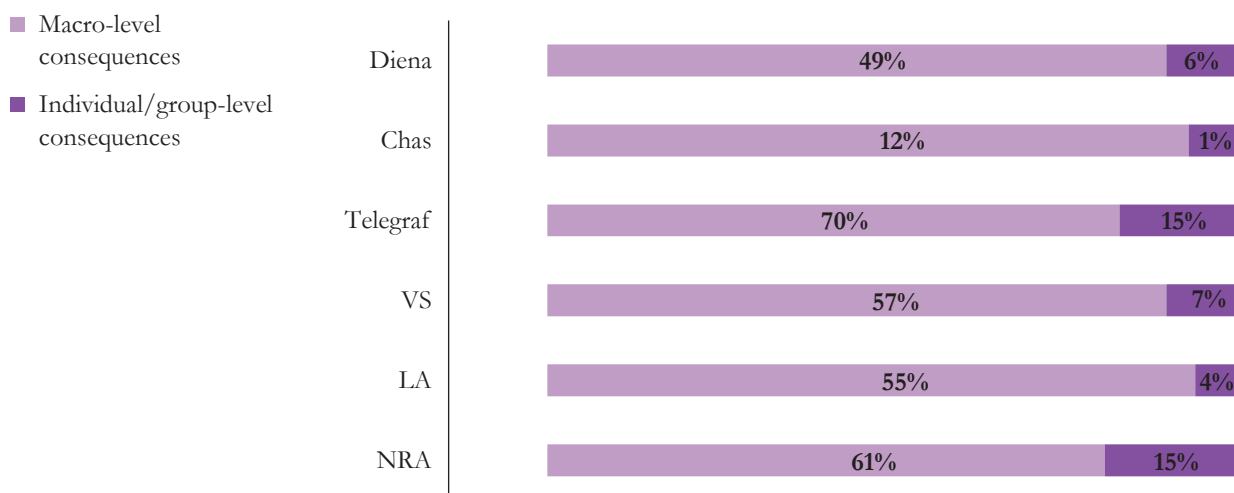
Sources of Publications

Research shows that news sources have some key functions in the process of news formation, such as the

possibility of verifying the opinion expressed in a news item, to give credibility, to offer a diversity of views and to protect against prejudices.⁷⁶ The above functions could also be attributed to other genres of journalism represented in newspapers. It has also been found by researchers that journalists tend to forge relationships with so-called “elite sources”, as these possess a higher degree of credibility and they are considered authoritative. This means that official sources are often cited by the media – such as leaders of political parties – who are thus given the opportunity to gain significant influence over media discourses, which includes the possibility of affecting the meanings and interpretations of issues.⁷⁷

However, the role of sources in the process of frame development is subject to discussions among scholars. Proponents of constructivism argue that authoritative sources are the main shapers of media frames, while those in favour of the critical perspective stress that the power of politicians as news sources is limited, as the choice of a source, the quotation and its placement within the news item are in the hands of the media representative.⁷⁸

Figure 19. Reflection of macro-level and individual/group-level consequences



76 Dimitrova, D. V., Strömbäck, J. (2011), “Election news in Sweden and the United States: A comparative study of sources and media frames.” *Journalism*, 13(5), 609.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.

The representatives of the newspapers themselves list the real decision makers as the main sources of their publications: officials of the Saeima, the government and the ministries, as well as the so-called “experts” who are competent on certain issues and can simultaneously provide an assessment of the decisions and intentions of officials from the sidelines; other sources include statistical data, representatives of commercial banks and also the international creditors.

Quantitative content analysis was run as part of this study to measure the level of representation of the various

sources mentioned above in newspaper publications dealing with topics of the economic crisis. Binary coding was also used here: the coders gave a value of 1 to the categories of sources represented in an article and 0 to those categories not present in an article.

The diagrams provided above illustrate the proportion of the sources used by newspapers in items dealing with events, issues and problems associated with the economic crisis. It is evident that official sources predominate: representatives of ministries and other state institutions (in an average of 24% articles; most frequently in *Diena*.

Figure 20. Official sources in newspaper publications

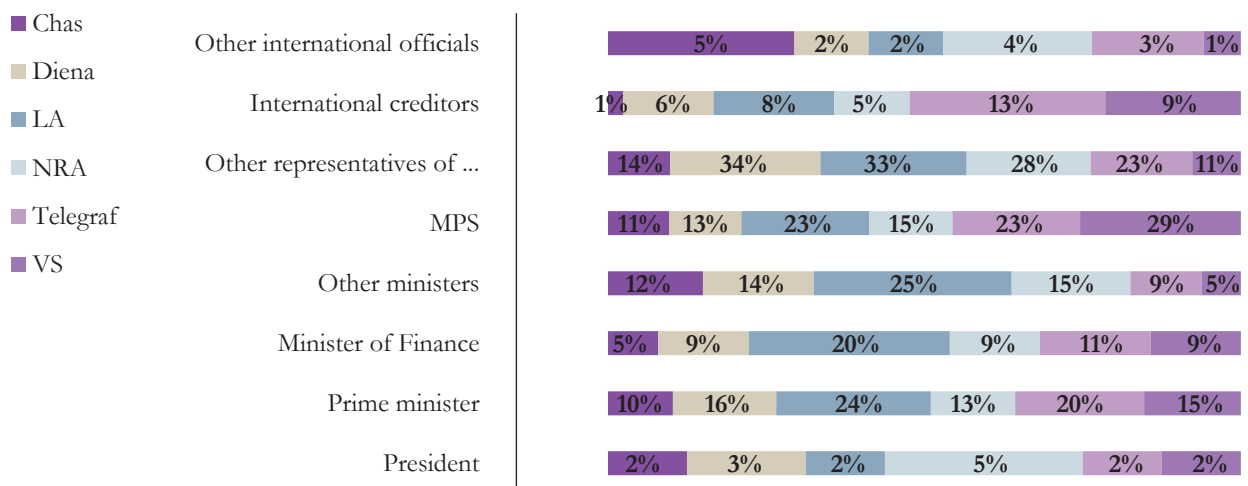
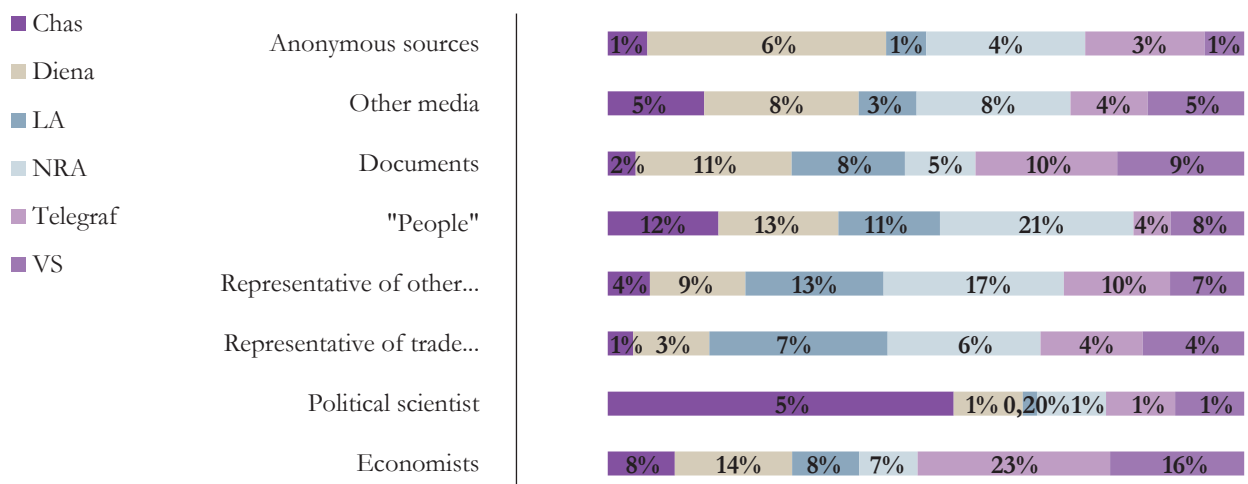


Figure 21. Other sources



34%, and least frequently in *VS*: 11%); members of parliament (average: 19%; most in *VS*: 29%, and fewest in *Chas*: 11%); the Prime Minister (average: 16%; most in *LA*: 24%, fewest in *Chas*: 10%). If the most frequently used sources are compiled for each newspaper, a dominance of official sources becomes evident:

<i>Chas</i>	Representatives of ministries and state institutions (14%)
<i>Diena</i>	Representatives of ministries and state institutions (34%)
<i>LA</i>	Representatives of ministries and state institutions (33%)
<i>NRA</i>	Representatives of ministries and state institutions (28%)
<i>Telegraf</i>	MPs, representatives of ministries and state institutions, economists (23% each)
<i>VS</i>	MPs (29%)

Table 1 Sources most frequently used by newspapers (as a percentage of articles)

Although officials dominated as sources in the media, people was one of the most frequently used categories of sources used by some newspapers. Economists are also a relatively frequently used source (in an average of 13% of articles). The results also indicate that media relatively seldom refer to anonymous sources (*Diena* invoked anonymous sources in 6% of the articles, the other newspapers less frequently).

A comparatively small proportion of publications (8% of articles on average) rely on documentary sources. Overall, these results are an indication of the fact that the media generally base their publications on document analysis and rely more on interviews with officials.

Conclusion

As pointed out in the introduction of this report, the economic crisis was a significant context for media activities, as during this time the media not only reported on issues adversely affecting a large portion of the population but also operated under conditions of an economic crisis themselves. The study enables a number of conclusions, which may serve as a basis for continued discussion.

First of all, even though newspaper editors identify a multi-layered distribution of responsibility for the problems caused by the economic crisis, and the results of the analysis of newspaper content indicate a trend of identifying the responsible parties, by far the greatest share of these publications represent a much more simplified approach: responsibility is attributed to politicians. A simplified reflection of an issue can depend on various factors, internal (e.g., tight submission deadlines for articles, character limits) and external (e.g., the effects of public relations) alike.

Yet one should bear in mind that an approach of this kind can be a sign of insufficient analytical capacity on the part of media organisations. Further arguments allow us to question it. For instance, the prevalence of episodic frame in published pieces, which indicates that media follow certain events and problems without reporting the wider context, may also be explained by weak analysis. Similarly, reflection of the solutions proposed by politicians (whether from the governing or opposition parties) rather than a more active role in generating solutions and a constructive critique of the solutions offered by officials, and the fairly pronounced presence of conflict frame (economic crisis issues as the battleground of disagreements among politicians) in the Latvian-language newspapers serve as further arguments. This study did not include prognostic frame, which could be another indicator of the media's ability to actively interpret and analyse events. However, a critical note was sounded during the interviews with the newspaper editors with respect to the ability of the media to outpace events rather than to react belatedly.

Active analysis of economic issues requires that the responsible media professionals possess not only general journalistic qualities but also specific knowledge of the particular field. In turn, passive following of the flow of events renders reporting more dependent on factors outside the media, such as political public relations. In

this regard, the high proportion of consequence frame in publications can be viewed as a positive trend, which means that the media, in reflecting on certain actions or proposed solutions, have also tried to explain the potential consequences of these.

During the period of the crisis, newspapers actively positioned themselves and can be categorised as proponents of the government's consolidation policies (*Diena*, *LA* and *Telegraf* – generally supported the course towards budget consolidation but criticised specific consolidation measures) and active critics (*NRA*, *VŠ* and *Chas*). The results of the study also indicate that issues, events and problems associated with the economic crisis were for the most part reported in newspapers via various macro-level indices, events and problems, rather than people. However, there is no clear answer as to whether this is a positive or a negative tendency. On the one hand, the appearance of “people” in publications brings media content closer to the audience and its problems, and it is no longer just an arena for battling officials. On the other hand, the economic crisis brings in its wake many macro-level changes and actions by officials that need to be subjected to sound analysis by the media. A heavy emphasis on the personalisation of issues is a sign of the commercial logic of the media, which can border on the trivialisation of content.

The analysis of sources also shows officials dominating to a large extent, and source selection is one of the key explanations for the results of the framing analysis.

The features of journalism that can be uncovered through this research methodology are, of course, limited, which is why it is worthwhile to pose questions to promote further discussion and research. What is the responsibility of the media themselves for the economic downturn: in terms of timely predictions and active warnings regarding the imminent crisis? How did the framing of economic crisis topics vary across different types of media? What were the effects of reporting by the media: e.g., what is its impact on the relatively weak public resistance against the austerity measures and the ability of the head of the government to maintain his popularity? Did the media, in their published material during the crisis period, deliberately promote escapism, and how? How did media organisations adapt to the crisis conditions? These are just some of the questions that could be productively explored in subsequent research and discussions.

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- Convergence Programme of the Republic of Latvia 2011-2014. See http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/nrp/cp_latvia_lv.pdf
- www.rebaltica.lv/lv/petijumi/latvijas_veiksmes_stasta_slepta_puse

Appendix

Codebook

Episodic/thematic framing

A1: Does the article focus on a specific person, event, without reflecting a wider context?

A2: Does the article reflect a wider context of the events, e.g., by analysing facts, providing expert opinion or statistical data?

Responsibility Framing

B1: Does the article state that the government (in the broader sense of the Latvian word) is able to mitigate the problem?

B1.1: Who has the opportunity to mitigate the problem? Have specific individuals, institutions been named?

B2: Does the article state that the government is responsible for the problem?

B2.1: Who has been mentioned as the responsible parties?

B3: Does the article state that the international creditors are responsible for the problem?

B4: Does the article state that some individual or group of individuals is responsible for the problem?

B4.1: Who has been mentioned as the responsible parties?

B5: Does the article state that banks are responsible for the problem?

B5.1: What designation is used to describe the responsible banks?

B6: Does the article propose a solution for the problem?

B6.1: What solution has been proposed?

B7: Does the article state that the solution of the problem requires immediate action?

Human Interest Framing

C1: Has the story been illustrated with an example of a particular individual or the “human face” of the issue?

C1.1: Whose example is used to illustrate it?

C2: Does the article use adjectives or personal descriptions encouraging empathy, sympathy or compassion?

C2.1: What adjectives or personal descriptions promote these?

C3: Does the article stress that individuals and groups are affected by the particular problem?

C3.1: What impact does the article anticipate?

C4: Does the article also touch on the private lives of the actors?

C5: Does the article contain visual information encouraging empathy, sympathy or compassion?

Conflict Framing

D1: Does the article reflect disagreements among political parties, individuals, groups and countries?

D1.1: Between whom do the disagreements arise?

D2: Does a political party, individual, group or country reproach another of something?

D2.1: What is the reproach?

D3: Does the article refer to more than two sides of the problem?

D4: Does the article refer to winners/losers?

D4.1: Who are the winners/losers?

Morality Framing

E1: Does the article contain any moral message?

E1.1: What moral message does the article contain?

E2: Does the article offer any specific social prescripts on how to act?

E2.1: What prescripts are these?

Consequence Framing

F1: Does the article have references to macro-level consequences from performing a specific action?

F1.1: What consequences are mentioned?

F2: Does the article have references to individual, group-level consequences from performing a specific action?

F2.1: What consequences are mentioned?

F2.2: Who will feel those consequences?

Sources

President

Prime Minister

Minister of finance	“People”
Other ministers	Documents
Members of parliament	Other media
Other representatives of ministries and state institutions	Unofficial sources
Economists	IMF and WB
Political scientists	Other international officials
Trade union representatives	Others (need to be specified)
Representatives of other public organisations	



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