

RESEARCH ARTICLE



“Environmentally Friendly Oil and Gas Production”: Analyzing Governmental Argumentation and Press Deliberation on Oil Policy

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ABSTRACT

This article exemplifies an approach to analyzing political arguments and press deliberation on the issue of climate change and oil policy. I apply political discourse analysis to examine an oil minister’s press conference presentation of the key official document on Norway’s future oil policy, and evaluate how he attempted to reconcile the country’s expansive petroleum policy with its self-proclaimed ambition of being world leading in responsible climate policy. The analysis displays how the minister’s argumentation served to legitimate an expansive oil policy by projecting an altruistic motivation and invoking the authority of the tradition of the industry. This is supplemented by an analysis of newspaper editorials and commentaries on the speech, identifying a major split in viewpoints between local and national newspapers. The analyses evaluate arguments in an explicit manner, for example by critically questioning their value premises, thus suggesting an approach that could benefit critical research on environmental communication.

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The overarching objective of this article is to exemplify an approach to analyzing political argumentation on climate related issues, and the media response it generates. A further and broader objective of the study emerges by applying this particular approach to environmental communication. As Hansen (2011) argues, there is a need to reconnect traditionally relatively distinct foci of research on environmental communication, such as the production of media messages, and the content/messages of media communication. I exemplify the approach by analyzing a particular case: the argumentation in the presentation and media reception of a Norwegian petroleum report.


On 24 June 2011, the Norwegian Government announced its so-called petroleum report. This white paper to the Norwegian Parliament, entitled “An industry for the future—Norway’s petroleum activities” (Meld. St. 28, 2010–2011), is the key official document on future Norwegian oil policy and stakes out the course for the country’s oil industry for the next 40 years. In other words, it is a potentially highly influential document.¹

The report makes it clear that the problem of anthropogenic climate change has been incorporated as a major concern into Norwegian oil policy.

The role as petroleum producer shall be united with an ambition of being leading in environment and climate policy. (Meld. St. 28, 2010–2011, p. 6)

This article examines both how the Norwegian petroleum minister presented the report at his press conference, and how a sample of Norwegian newspapers responded in their commentaries and

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editorial pieces. By applying a novel approach to analyzing political discourse, it seeks to illuminate how an influential political actor argued in attempting to reconcile this Western country's expansive petroleum policy with its self-conceived role as a world leader in responsible climate policy.

The overarching research question is: *How is the issue of climate change represented in the political argument made in the press conference presentation of the petroleum report and how do newspapers respond to the presentation in commentaries?* A main objective is to examine the practical reasoning underlying the claims for action made in the political argument. The approach integrates analysis of arguments into critical discourse analysis (CDA), as explicated in the analytical framework below. The analysis not only aims to shed light on the particular case studied, but to exemplify an approach that is attentive both to political arguments made for media, and to whether and how journalists deliberate on the arguments through their own media coverage. By focusing on argumentation along genre chains, the analysis emphasizes dimensions of discourse and text in a manner that so far has not been common in environmental communication research (see Hansen, 2011 for an overview of key trends). The concept of genre chains (Fairclough, 2006) refers to how social events do not occur singly, but in interconnected chains comprised in part of chains or networks of texts. Texts connect events, and the meaning of such events change depending on the context in which they are reported in the genre chains. According to Fairclough, genre chains are:

genres which are regularly and predictably chained together such that meanings are moved and transformed along the chain (...). An example of a genre chain would be the chain that routinely links significant government statements of publications, press conferences and/or press statements, and news reports. (Fairclough, 2006, p. 26)

The analysis builds primarily on the work by Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) that provides an approach to political discourse based on a view of politics that emphasizes the question of action ("what to do?") in contexts of uncertainty and risk. Fairclough and Fairclough view political argumentation as a form of practical argumentation, argumentation for or against particular ways of acting that can ground decisions. By focusing on arguments, they challenge a tendency in CDA to analyze discourses as ways of representing social reality without connecting these representations to agents' action via agents' practical reasoning. They propose that discourses should be seen as representations that enter as premises in arguments, providing agents with reasons for action. Accordingly, analysis of discourses should be integrated into an analysis of argumentative genres.

For an international readership it is hoped that this case study of governmental argumentation and media deliberation on Norwegian oil expansion, can serve as an example of how environmental communication research may benefit from critically examining political discourses as representations that constitute value premises in practical arguments.

In the following, I will first briefly review relevant studies of climate policy discourses and media coverage of climate change and climate policy, before then clarifying the analytical framework and elaborating on the methodology and findings.

Literature review

Climate policy discourses

Several constructivist studies attend to climate policy discourses, whether in international organizations or different nations. Notable work in the first category includes Haas' (2002) review of UN conference contributions to a shift towards multilateral environmental governance, and Corell and Betsill's (2001) test of a framework for analyzing NGO influence in international environmental policy-making. Studies in the second category focus on the development of climate policy discourse patterns in nations such as India (Isaksen & Stokke, 2014), Australia (Christoff, 2013) and Sweden (Zannakis, 2009). These highlight national differences, for example, between the dominant economic discursive field in Australia's climate policy and Sweden's hegemonic discourses of civic environmentalism and "opportunity" (about taking a lead on the carbon-free society). Moreover, in a

study comparing the US, UK and Germany, Jasanoff (2011) displays how these different societies use different modes of public reasoning when making decisions involving climate science. Her study suggests that global climate policy-making needs to take account of deeply embedded national ways of knowing and acting.

Relevant for the present analysis is a study of the historical development of Norwegian climate policy in which Hovden and Lindseth (2004) identify two dominant discourses. A discourse of “national action” (NA discourse) that focuses on restraining national greenhouse gas emissions and leading by example, dominated the country’s climate policy in the early 1990s and still holds a strong position among environmental non-governmental organizations and parties such as the Socialist Left Party, the Liberal Party and the Christian Democratic Party. However, a discourse of “thinking globally” (TG discourse) replaced the NA discourse in the late 1990s as the dominant one. The TG discourse acquired its position when business and the petroleum industry “entered the stage emphasizing cost-effective solutions and hence more complex policy choices” (Hovden & Lindseth, 2004, p. 76). The TG discourse is favored by the majority of the Labour Party and the Conservatives, as well as the petroleum industry, the business community and trade unions. This discourse explicitly targets international reductions and aims to achieve them as cost-effectively as possible.

In the red-green coalition (Labour Party, Socialist Left Party and Centre Party) that governed in Norway when the petroleum report was published, the Minister of Oil and Energy, Ola Borten Moe (hereafter referred to as BM), represented the Centre Party, traditionally a party associated with a NA discourse (Hovden & Lindseth, 2004). However, a TG discourse became pronounced in public speeches given by BM and in the red-green government’s climate policy, in spite of the strong position of the NA discourse in the smaller parties (Socialist Left Party and Centre Party) of the coalition. Similarly, a TG discourse dominates in the current governing coalition of the Conservatives and The Progress Party in Norway, although The NA discourse has a strong position in the smaller parties supporting the coalition (Christian Democratic Party and Liberal Party).

Studies of media coverage

Studies of the media communication of climate change have found public misunderstandings of climate change (Bell, 1994) and deficient media coverage due to journalistic norms and developments in political economy (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007; Boykoff & Yulsman, 2013). Other studies identify constructions of disparate frames or discourses on climate change, whether between the sectors of science, politics and the media in Germany (Weingart, Engels, & Pansegrau, 2000) or in the UK media (Hulme, 2009). Carvalho (2007) identifies striking differences between quality UK newspapers’ discursive reconstructions of scientific knowledge on climate change, whereas Boykoff (2008) identifies and discusses recurrent framings in UK tabloids and their possible influence on the cultural politics of climate change discourse. Even more focused on the political dimensions of climate change, Carvalho (2005) identifies discursive strategies of political actors in UK national quality newspapers in their reconstructions of climate change. She finds that—despite resistance and presentation of alternatives to governmental discourse in some newspapers—the press coverage avoided a sustained critique of the possibility of constant economic growth and increasing consumption, and of the profound injustices associated with the “greenhouse effect.”

In what follows, I apply some concepts (such as “TG discourse”) from these studies. However, none of the aforementioned studies closely address the crucial question of how climate concerns are incorporated into political *arguments* made in public for expanded oil policy and how the press deliberates over this issue. As Anderson (2009) notes in her overview of existing research on the media framing of climate change, there is a need for examining more closely the media strategies of political institutions in representing climate change. I believe that the framework provided below can contribute to meeting this need.

Analytical framework

According to Fairclough and Fairclough's (2012) framework for political discourse analysis, practical arguments typically take *circumstances* and *goals*—and the *values* that underlie goals—as premises. From given and known circumstances and goals, agents reason that certain actions might enable them to transform current circumstances in accordance with some values and concerns. The claimed actions must be compatible with both goals and circumstances and with the values that inform the agent's conception of what the circumstances are and what the goals should be. Seemingly neutral circumstantial premises remain premises that are described as problems to be solved. As problems, they inherently contain an evaluation of facts. Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) suggest that goals should be seen as an imagined state of affairs that are compatible with various sources of normativity/desires, moral values, etc., and a specification of this normative source constitutes the value premise.

Arguments can be evaluated by judging the acceptability of the reasons adduced in favor of creating a choice of action. Evaluation can involve critical questioning of the acceptability of the goal and value premises by pointing to the consequences on human well-being that pursuit of those goals and values is likely to have. Evaluation can also include questioning the sincerity of the arguer (whether arguments offered for proposed actions are rationalizations) and whether arguments are based on false circumstantial premises, such as a wrong diagnosis of the context of action. Furthermore, analysts can contribute to critique by analyzing how arguments draw selectively on certain discourses or how deliberating agents can restrict the range of options that can be addressed, in accordance with certain power interests.

Such evaluations should be applicable to BM's presentation of the petroleum report. It is an example of political discourse in which argumentation is the primary activity taking place. Political speeches are typically made in public forums in which politicians attempt to project their political agendas (Reyes, 2011). Politicians use their power to explain and justify acts in a specific way to elicit people's support. Their speeches are to a certain extent organized and conceived to legitimize political goals. Actions can be legitimized through appeals to emotions; a hypothetical future requiring imminent action; referring to rational procedure as a basis for the proposed action; voices of expertise, invoking the authority of tradition; and through altruism—by claiming to do things for others, not being driven by personal interests (van Leeuwen, 2007; Reyes, 2011).

BM presents a report from the Norwegian government to parliament. Such reports may present future policy in a specific area (Regjeringen.no, 2010). The reports are to be subject to public discussion before they are deliberated in parliament, in this case half a year after the presentation. In my analysis, the speech presentation will be subject to critical questioning in accordance with the evaluative strategies outlined above. I will discuss the tenability of BM's argument, for example, by assessing the compatibility of proposed actions, goals and premises and the way he legitimizes proposed action.

The article also examines how Norwegian newspapers evaluated and represented the speech in commentaries. Ideal expectations of press coverage of political arguments may be formulated on the grounds of Ettema's view of journalism's function within a framework of deliberative democracy. According to Ettema (2007), deliberative democracy confronts the fact that political arguments are irreducibly moral arguments. It asks that "the reasoning in such arguments be morally compelling rather than merely politically efficacious" (Ettema, 2007, p. 145). Reasons politicians offer should be grounded in principles that cannot be reasonably rejected by citizens seeking fair terms of cooperation. However, because reasoning in actual political argument regularly fails to meet this criterion, Ettema holds that journalism cannot be content to uncritically preside over a forum for its presentation. Journalism must also act as a reasoning participant in processes of deliberation, pursuing and compellingly rendering reasons that satisfy the key criterion of deliberative democracy.

According to its own code of ethics, journalism in Norway should ideally perform a watchdog role, such as revealing failures by official authorities to keep their word about plans of action to

mitigate climate change. Given the potential influence of the petroleum report, it is reasonable to expect that newspapers in Norway would raise questions about how well the country realizes its ambition of uniting its energy policy with climate policy as expressed in the coalition government's *Soria Moria* declaration.² More specifically, in the case of editorials and commentaries about the presentation, genre characteristics raise expectations regarding deliberation on BM's reasoning with some critical evaluation of his argumentation and weighing of alternative options for incorporating climate change concerns into oil policy. The question, then, is how the newspapers respond. How do they assess the reasonableness of the proposed action, the likely impact of the action on the various goals, and the acceptability of the stated goals?

Methods and methodological approach

BM's press presentation played a key role in the journalistic coverage of the report. When I contacted journalists who had written about the report in editorials and commentaries most of them confirmed that they were familiar with BM's presentation, either from watching the governmental Net TV broadcast of the conference (Borten Moe, 2011) or from reading a press report, power point presentation or news story that presented points made in the speech (see Regjeringen, no, 2011).

In the analysis of the press coverage, I examined all of the articles (from major national, regional and local Norwegian newspapers) retrieved in the course of a week after the presentation of the report on 24 June 2011. Searches were carried out in the Norwegian newspaper database Retriever by applying Norwegian word combinations for "petroleum report," "oil report" and "Ola Borten Moe." The search returned 37, 40 and 91 articles, respectively. Of these, I have chosen for closer scrutiny commentaries/editorials on BM's presentation of the report. I considered including news reports, but decided to select only commentaries/editorials in order to streamline the analysis through a focus on the most distinct argumentative genres of journalism. Ten editorials/commentaries were selected for close scrutiny. These were the commentaries in the material that most closely addressed BM's presentation.

The process resulted in a sample of relevant articles from different types of newspapers:

- (1) Oslo-based papers with nationwide distribution: *Aftenposten* (major subscription paper, commentary by Harbo, 2011), *Dagbladet* (large tabloid, commentary by Blindheim, 2011), *Nationen* (district-oriented subscription paper, unsigned editorial, "Oljepolitikk uten klima," 2011) and *Vårt Land* (subscription paper with Christian profile, unsigned editorial, "Mer Olje," 2011).
- (2) Intellectual, weekly niche papers with a cultural profile: *Dag og Tid* (commentary by Refsdal, 2011) and *Morgenbladet* (commentary by Bonde, 2011).
- (3) Regional and local newspapers: *Glåmdalen* (Werner, 2011), *Fremover* (unsigned editorial, "Offensiv oljepolitikk," 2011, *Nordlys* (unsigned editorial, "Store muligheter," 2011) and *Altaposten* (unsigned editorial, "Leder," 2011), the first three attached to the media company group *Apressen*, with traditionally strong ties to the Labour Party in Norway. *Fremover*, *Nordlys* and *Altaposten* are based in the cities of Northern Norway.

The analysis of BM's speech provides a basis for examining how different newspapers responded to it. Extracts from newspaper commentaries are placed in the scheme for practical argumentation according to which components of BM's argument they comment on, followed by a discussion of the argumentation that characterizes their different responses. In addition, I interpret visual content when caricature drawings constitute a salient part of the commentaries.

Analysis of BM's presentation

The following analysis is based on close attention to the elements of BM's speech, which was initially transcribed in its entirety from the Net TV transmission of the press conference held at Ringerike College (see Supplementary file).

Less than a fourth of the 29 minutes of BM's speech is devoted to climate and environmental issues. However, he initially frames his speech in a discourse emphasizing climate friendly energy policy. He announces the news that Norway has reached an agreement on green certificates³ with Sweden, and suggests a change of pace in the development of renewable energy: "This (...) we will see a lot of in the years to come: (...) an environmentally friendly and climate friendly expansion of power resources." BM exhibits vigor and apparent environmental consciousness, thus contributing to establish a value premise of concern for the future environment underlying the proposed energy initiatives. The oil minister's initial choice of topic may be seen as a strategy of morally clearing the way for his main announcement and argument for expanding the Norwegian oil industry. Considering the phrases he later uses to characterize the planned petroleum operations ("full thrust," "fast pace," "increased extraction"), BM's introduction can be interpreted as "greenwashing." The term is conventionally used to criticize the oil industry for exaggerating its environmental friendliness. As Ihlen (2007a) points out, the industry's commitment to renewable energy is small compared to the amounts spent on exploration and production.

Environmental friendliness is also a major aspect of BM's argumentation when he places the report in a global context (paragraph 9–13 in Supplemental data). The global orientation is a clear example of the dominant TG discourse in Norwegian climate policy in the sense that it depicts the country's petroleum operations as a form of climate policy. BM claims that the Norwegian oil industry is on the front line when it comes to environmental friendly oil extraction, and this proclaimed truth is followed by a rationale for planned Norwegian oil production seen in a global perspective:

A steady production of oil and gas from the Norwegian shelf is therefore the best contribution Norway can give in order to meet the world's energy challenges in an environmentally friendly way in the short and medium term.

The argumentation is initially framed as a concern for poor people (value premise), with BM declaring: "The world needs more and modern energy to lift millions (...) out of poverty" (circumstantial premise). The concern is voiced in a narrative in which he relates experiences that his Secretary of State, Eli Blakstad, made during her stay in a Ghanaian village. The detailed personal narrative reports on how children must do strenuous work that makes it hard for them to concentrate in school classes. The cause of the problems is depicted as a lack of access to modern energy in the village.

The narrative is evidently intended to appeal to the listeners' feelings. However, BM also employs a value premise (concern for poor people) conventionally used in arguments by environmentalist *opponents* of further expansive oil exploration, and he adjusts (or "recontextualizes") it into an argument for oil expansion. In an environmentalist argumentation for precaution, the premise is typically articulated as a concern that people in poor parts of the world will likely suffer the most from climate change created by greenhouse gas emissions caused by activities such as oil production (Ihlen & Nitz, 2008). In BM's speech, oil extraction and expansion are depicted as a precondition for the opposite of suffering in poor countries. On the contrary, energy production will provide citizens of the poorest countries with a vastly improved standard of living. In other words, BM uses the energy needs of poor countries and people to justify further Norwegian oil and gas expansion.

In what emerges as argumentation largely based on moral value premises (fairness, environmental consideration and altruism), an expansive Norwegian oil and gas production is portrayed as a global savior capable of strengthening the quality of life of millions of poor people. BM's argument is schematized in [Figure 1](#).

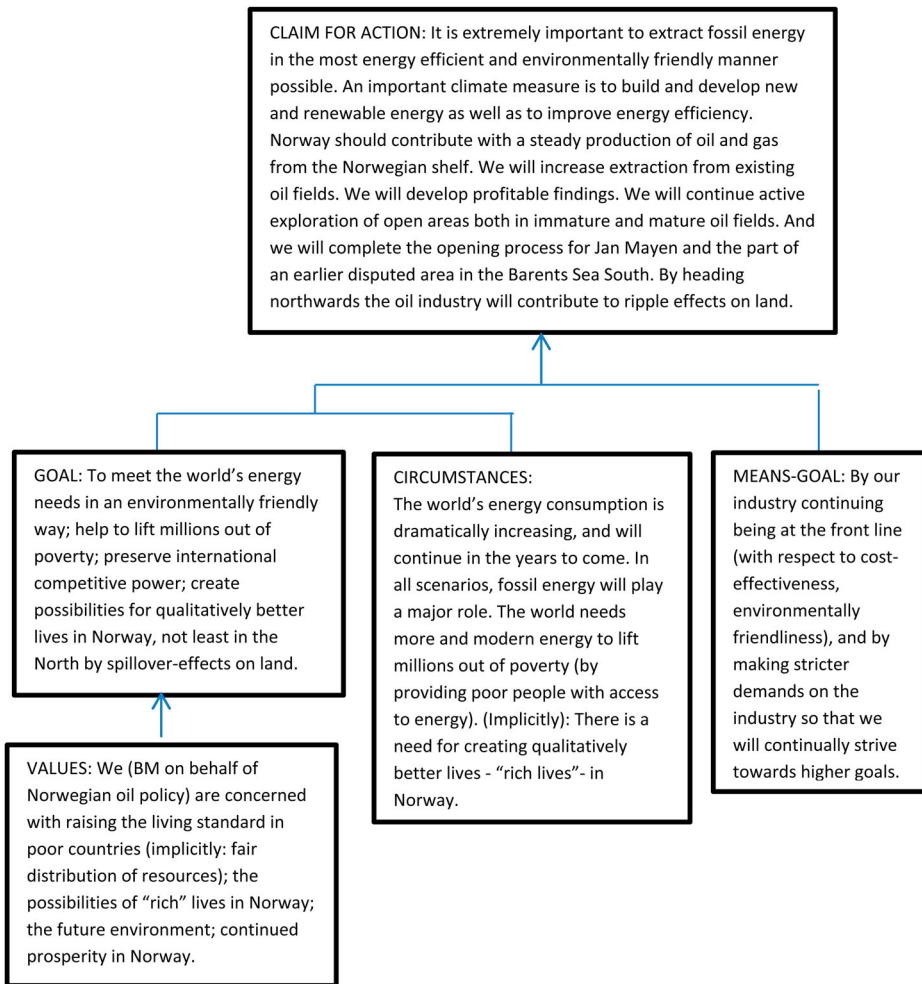


Figure 1. BM's argument for planned Norwegian oil activity the next 40 years (from 2011).

In BM's argument, a circumstantial premise is that there is an increasing need for fossil energy in the world. An aspect of energy consumption in future scenarios is presented as an undisputed fact: "In all scenarios, fossil energy will play a major role." Although development of renewable energy is included as a climate measure in his claims for action, no mention is made of future scenarios where fossil energy does not play a major role. The goal of meeting the world's energy needs in an environmentally friendly way is presented as being realizable by building upon an alleged traditional value (and practice) of environmental consideration in the Norwegian oil industry. Thus, the claims for expansive oil production are not only legitimized by projecting an altruistic motivation, but also by invoking the authority of tradition.

In BM's argumentation, then, there is no weighing of alternative options, such as the often expressed argument that people in poor countries most probably will benefit from reduced oil extraction and production because unfortunate climate change effects may be reduced as a consequence. Rather than deliberating over alternative proposals and counter-arguments, BM presents circumstantial premises as truisms. Furthermore, although the stated goals of the petroleum policy are likely to appear as incompatible and contradictory to many ("environmentally friendly oil extraction"), they are presented as undisputed goals, as well as realizable with reference to a continuation of practices and values in the tradition of the industry.

In much of his speech, BM addresses regional rather than global concerns, reflecting the government's hope that the planned activity will create a new petroleum province in the north of Norway. He bases his argumentation on a combination of goal and value premises for industrial competitiveness and material prosperity on the one hand, and improved life quality on the other. BM's formulation: "This report implies that Norwegian oil and gas industry (...) will create (...) possibilities for (...) rich lives in the North in the same way that it has done in other parts of the country," presupposes that lives in Northern Norway until now have not been as rich as they have in other parts of the country. In altruistic terms, Norwegian oil policy is not only legitimized by being depicted as a savior of the poor in other countries, but also as a provider of conditions for improved quality of life for people living in the northern region. However, environmental and climate issues are not addressed when he expresses concern for improving the life quality of the citizens of Northern Norway.

Newspaper responses in editorials and commentaries

There is some difference between the editorial and the commentary genre. Editorials usually express the opinion of the newspaper, whereas a commentary signed by one of the newspaper's commentators normally bears more of an individual stamp (Roksvold, 1997). However, both of these text types tend to reflect the style, tone and outlook of the particular newspaper, and I have chosen to include them under the same heading as indicative of a newspaper's opinion on the issue.

Oslo-based newspapers with nationwide distribution

Some of the most pronounced criticism is voiced in the Oslo press. A mocking tone is evident in *Dagbladet's* commentary, with a headline ("Pumping himself up") that uses a metaphor associated with oil extraction to frame a portrayal of the minister as an unconvincing speaker. Partly by mimicking his speech, the journalist ridicules BM and his proposed actions, displaying what appears as incompatibilities in premises of his arguments, such as the goals of preserving international competitive power and of lifting the poor out of poverty. Thus, she also indirectly criticizes how BM's claims for action are partly based on a wrong diagnosis of the context for action (circumstantial premises). The text ridicules the all-embracing argumentation of BM by pointing out how in one moment he addresses right-wing party voters and the next moment left-wing party voters. The journalist ironically narrativizes BM's own narrative, particularly his narrative of the poor:

Then he said that it might be that some countries soon start to think that they should stop digging their own coal, and rather buy oil and gas from Norway. It is a little better for the climate if they do that. There was also a big yellow sun hanging over the poor children, but he did not notice it, and he did not want to speak any more about climate. (Blindheim, 2011, p. 3, *my translation*)

The commentary is accompanied by a caricature drawing that depicts a big-headed minister oiling a cogwheel with an oil platform in his background. The image can be read as a metaphor for keeping the wheels or the machinery of society going without considering climate measures. Exaggerating verbal points by visual means is a distinctive mark of this genre, in this case resulting in the portrayal of BM as a rather ludicrous figure.

Aftenposten's commentator is more deliberative than *Dagbladet's*, assessing BM's arguments with her own arguments. She demarcates two competing views on the issue: one represented by BM, the other by an environmentalist Frederic Hauge from an NGO, Bellona. They are represented as participating in a battle of catchy slogans: whereas BM is credited for giving the report the title: "En næring for framtida" (A nourishment (an industry) for the future), Frederic Hauge is quoted as saying: "En tæring på framtida" (A corrosion on the future, "tæring" being a pun on "næring"). The commentator does not evaluate the conflict as much as she critically discusses BM's argumentation. Drawing on an argument for sustainable development, incorporating the precautionary principle,

the commentator argues against BM's argument that gas extraction and use of gas is "an effective initiative or measure in the fight against anthropogenic climate change." By arguing that increased gas consumption will delay a commitment to renewable energy (one of BM's action claims), she criticizes how the oil minister displays environmental concern to legitimize future oil exploration.

Aftenposten also includes a caricature. It portrays BM sitting in an old-fashioned bathtub overflowing with oil from a barrel he clings to, with an Arab dishdasha and headgear hanging on the wall behind him. The caricature apparently equates BM's oil policy with a traditionally expansive oil policy in Arab countries.

Other newspapers with a nationwide distribution, *Nationen* and *Vårt Land*, express similar views. *Nationen* ironically expresses self-righteousness in the rhetoric of environmentally friendly oil extraction: "We are best. We shall extract oil because we do it more effectively and considerately than other countries. The argument is used for all it is worth against environmental objections" (my translation). By accusing the report of lacking a climate policy, the editorial questions the sincerity of an argument that appears as a rationalization of actions based on disputable circumstantial premises (considerate oil extraction). Nor is the paper *Vårt Land* convinced by BM's arguments, doubting that increased combustion of Norwegian oil and gas "is positive for the world's poor." Advocating a precautionary principle and emphasizing climate sensitive conditions for poor villagers in Africa (circumstantial premise of the editorial), the editorial alerts the reader to how further oil expansion may lead to the opposite of helping the poor.

Intellectual niche newspapers

The weekly, elite-oriented cultural newspapers *Dag og Tid* and *Morgenbladet* provide even more detailed analysis and criticism of BM's presentation of the report. *Dag og Tid* thoroughly deconstructs BM's argument by drawing on a range of written sources to inform readers about the realities of increased global emissions in recent years. BM's narrative of the poor, based on retold experiences, is countered by the commentator's narrative from his own and agricultural experts' experiences in Africa, arguing that on this continent one needs "green fingers" and professional knowledge to take care of the biological capital, more than energy and heavy machines (a circumstantial premise of the editorial).

Figure 2 displays excerpts from comments on BM's argument from newspapers that voice critical opinions. As Figure 2 shows, critical comments from these papers may challenge all aspects of the argument, questioning the different premises and the reasonableness of the proposed action, and even introducing counter-claims for action (*Vårt Land's* claim that some of the earth's oil and gas must remain where it is). All of the commentaries are concerned about how the climate change issue is downplayed or omitted in the argument for future oil policy and thus how BM restricts the range of options that can be addressed. Some of the newspapers point out the moral unacceptability of this omission in response to BM's argument for expanding Norwegian oil policy on the circumstantial premise of how poor people need to be lifted out of poverty. These comments may reflect on different aspects of the premises for BM's action claims. The *Aftenposten* commentator, for example, formulates her evaluation of BM's poverty premise in this way:

The Minister of Petroleum and Energy is right that the world's poor need a better supply of energy to heat their homes. But to use this as an argument in favor of further Norwegian expansion is a bit excessive. At the same time he ignores the fact that it is the poor who are most severely affected by climate change and severe weather. (Harbo, 2011, p. 3, my translation)

This comment, however, differs markedly from those found in the opinion journalism of regional and local papers in my material.

Editorials in regional and local newspapers

The newspapers *Glåmdalen*, *Nordlys* and *Fremover* praise BM for expressing a determined and ambitious oil policy. They emphasize the prospect of regional prosperity in the northern region by

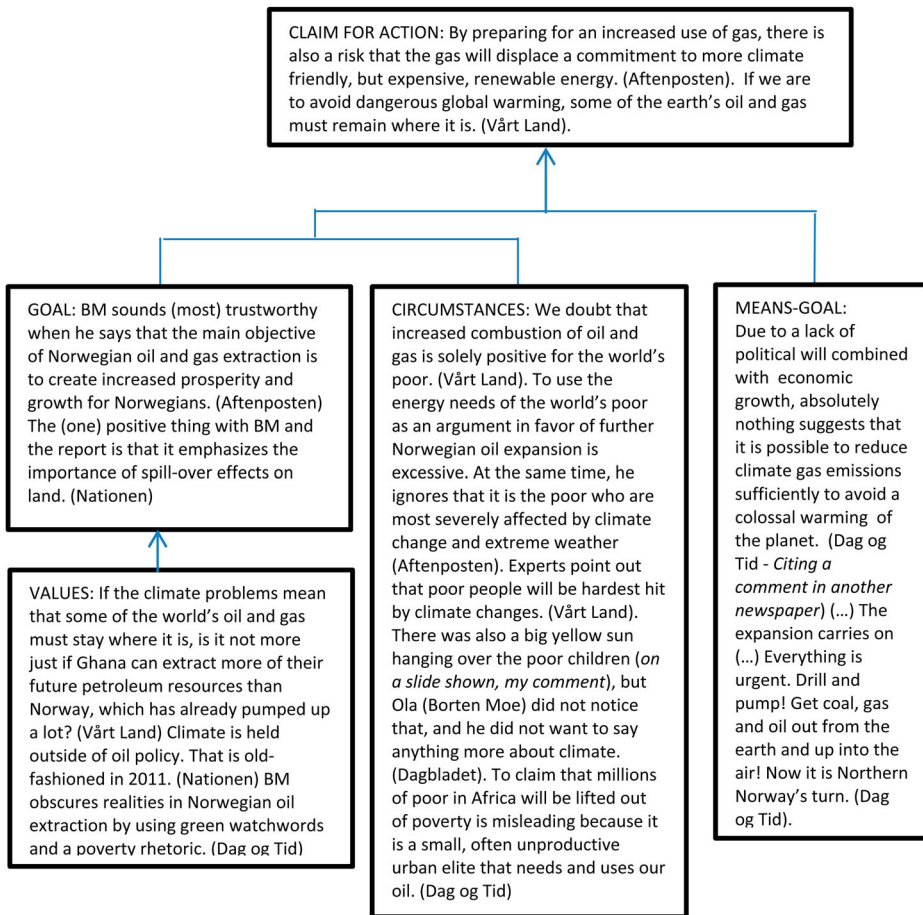


Figure 2. Commentaries critical of BM's argument.

repeatedly using the adjective “great” in connection with the potential of finding oil in the Barents Sea and by welcoming BM's initiative to create spill-over effects on land.

Three of these editorials, although claiming to express the view of the newspaper with standard editorial top captions such as “Fremover is of the opinion that,” are in fact comprised of the same text. The duplicated comment was originally written by the political editor of ANB, a news bureau owned by the A-press, with traditionally close ties to the Labour Party, the leading party in the government coalition in Norway when the report was presented. *Nordlys* is the only newspaper with some minor changes in wording. *Altaposten* presents its own editorial, but limits its environmental concern to one sentence, stressing a need for technological development to reduce emissions.

Figure 3 displays markedly different comments on BM's argument in these newspapers compared to those represented in Figure 2.

The local newspapers' primarily positive evaluations focus more on regional employment and growth possibilities when commenting on goals and values communicated by BM. However, the climate issue is addressed in the *Glåmdalen*, *Fremover* and *Nordlys* editorials, which argue against the environmental movement's demand for reduced oil activity and endorse the circumstantial premise of poor people's energy needs in BM's argument.

A closer juxtaposition of the Oslo paper *Aftenposten*'s commentary and these regional papers' editorials sheds light on the difference in the premises of their arguments and the different degrees of affiliation with BM's argument. The *Aftenposten* commentary (see Figure 2 and the excerpt above) assesses the

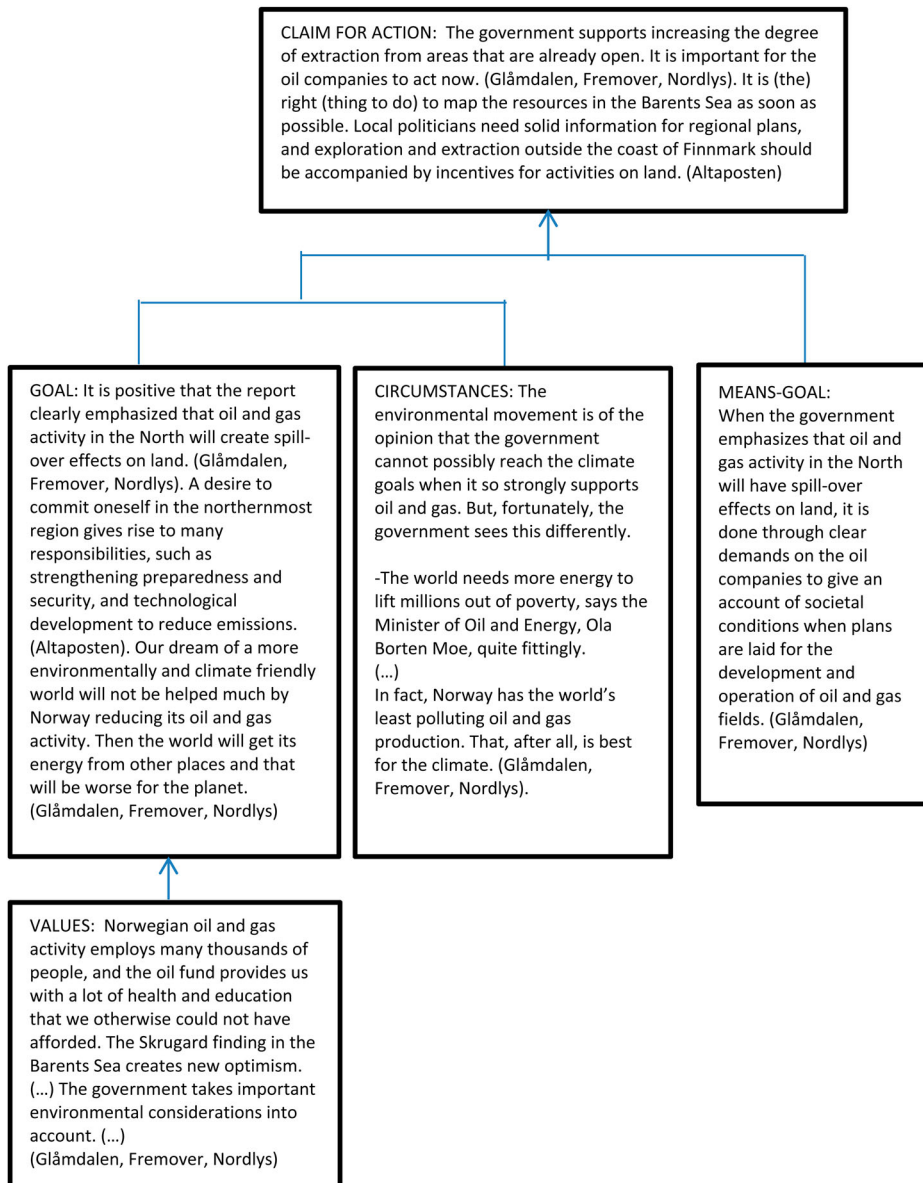


Figure 3. Commentaries approving of BM's argument.

oil minister's argumentation with critical distance. The commentator counter-argues on the basis of a circumstantial premise that builds on knowledge established by scientific predictions. Likely impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities in Africa, for example, are repeatedly emphasized in IPCC documents (e.g. 2012). The *Aftenposten* commentator's negative evaluation of BM's argumentation is based on the premise that "it is the poor who are most severely affected by climate change." Although the phrasing of impacts is more categorical than in conventional scientific discourse, the argumentation is grounded in a scientifically supported premise and refers to generated knowledge.

The commentary in *Glåmdalen*, *Fremover* and *Nordlys* (see Circumstances premise, Figure 3) does practically the opposite, applauding and appropriating the argument of the minister. A major discourse articulated in the premises of BM's claim for action is the TG discourse, which has generally characterized the argumentative strategy of both government and industry. The

Table 1. Differing discourse configurations.

Discourse of expansion emphasizing prosperity and climate friendly oil extraction	Discourse of precaution emphasizing risk and threat to a vulnerable environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The planned petroleum activity</i> creates great potential for the northern region. Through findings in the Barents Sea and spill-over effects on land, regional growth may be stimulated. The activity does not pose a major threat to the environment. On the contrary, future Norwegian oil production is an effective measure in combating anthropogenic climate change and will also help to lift millions out of poverty. • <i>Major actors</i> drawn upon as sources or referred to: the oil minister, “the government,” the oil industry. Other politicians, preferably from right-wing parties such as the progress party. • <i>Press</i> promoting the discourse in their commentaries: ANB, a news bureau owned the A-press (A-pressen, with traditionally close ties to the Labour Party), local and regional newspapers, not least in areas that serve as bases or potential bases for future oil industry: Fremover, Nordlys, Altaposten. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The planned petroleum activity</i> creates dangerous risks for a vulnerable ecosystem and contributes to climate change. Rather than helping poor people, the petroleum activity poses a threat to the poor. • <i>Major actors</i> drawn upon as sources and referred to: NGOs such as Bellona, Fremtiden i våre hender. Representatives of political parties with a marked green profile. • <i>Press</i> promoting the discourse in their commentaries: Newspapers with a nationwide distribution: Aftenposten, Dagbladet, Nationen, Vårt Land. Niche cultural newspapers: Morgenbladet, Dag og Tid.

discourse depicts Norwegian petroleum operations as a form of climate policy in a global context, as the country’s oil production is considered to be the world’s least polluting (Ihlen, 2007b). This discourse is uncritically represented in these newspapers as an undisputed fact (“Norway, in fact, has ...”), although this has been challenged.⁴ Linguistically, one notes how the use of adverbial praises in “*fortunately*, the government sees this differently” and “says (...) Ola Borten Moe, *quite fittingly*” (my emphasis), illustrates the supportive stance in what comes across as a government-promotional argumentation on this issue.

Analyzing the newspaper texts, then, I have discerned a rather clear divide in ideas, beliefs and concerns expressed in the commentaries of different types of newspapers in my material. Table 1 groups these differing views about what should be done with respect to the climate change issue in the context of planned petroleum activity.

Concluding discussion

One of the objectives of this paper has been to exemplify an approach to analyzing political argumentation on climate related issues, and the media response it generates. By focusing on political discourse dimensions along genre chains, I believe that it is a fruitful contribution to critical research on the many different uses of arguments in different phases of environmental mediation. The approach introduced by Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) provides researchers with a framework for analyzing representations of climate issues as premises for deciding on and justifying action in arguments. In contrast to a tendency in CDA to treat representations in isolation, this approach evaluates arguments in an explicit manner, for example by critically questioning their goal and value premises.

More specifically, the analysis sheds light on the argumentation in the presentation and media reception of the Norwegian petroleum report. It displays how the country’s oil minister projects an image of Norwegian oil policy as environmentally friendly. However, although BM’s framing and ordering of topics in the speech seemingly place environmental concerns on equal footing with plans for industry expansion, his argumentation can be understood as a strategy to legitimize an expansive oil policy. Apparently important in this strategy is to project an altruistic motivation, as well as to invoke the authority of the tradition of the industry.

It could be expected that a petroleum minister would express a commitment to furthering the interests of the oil industry on this occasion. However, his formulations of action proposals and goals appear to be less considerate of climate challenges than the Norwegian oil company Statoil's own policy proposals. Whereas a prioritized company goal is to work with "cutting emissions" on the Norwegian continental shelf (Statoil, 2011), BM makes no explicit mention of the need to restrain national emissions. Rather, "national action" entails stimulating a national initiative on behalf of the oil industry. His proposed claims for increased oil extraction and exploration appear to be incompatible with the expressed value premise of concern for the future environment. Such actions are not likely to have a positive impact on the goal of meeting the world's energy needs in an environmentally friendly way. But there is a question as to what extent BM's seemingly contradictory argumentation actually will fail to convince a Norwegian public at large. Although about 70% of the respondents to a national survey (Austgulen, 2012) partly or fully agreed that climate change is largely anthropogenic, roughly 60% partly or fully agreed that Norway should start extraction from new oil fields right away because this could help to meet the world's energy needs. Only about 24 percent partly or fully agreed that Norway should not start such extraction as it could contribute to global warming. Such results suggest how BM's argument may resound in the country's public space.

However, the newspaper analysis showed how several commentaries pointed to shortcomings in his argumentation. Journalists in the Oslo-based press and the intellectual newspapers exposed unreasonableness in his arguments and interpreted the altruistic motivation as an expression of self-righteousness. The commentary journalism in newspapers with nationwide distribution suggests a press that is critical of the official policy of reconciling an expansive oil activity with an allegedly environmentally friendly climate policy of "thinking globally."

However, the analysis also identified a marked split in viewpoints between different types of newspapers. Whereas nationally distributed newspapers accuse the oil policy of ignoring climate change issues, the local papers rather adopted the petroleum minister's argument. The *Glåmdalen*, *Fremover* and *Nordlys* commentary focuses on the potential for increased prosperity in the North, but it does not seriously consider other conceivable ways of achieving such prosperity than through increased oil extraction, such as ensuring that regional growth creation is limited to forms that are environmentally sustainable. It does attempt to rebut the counter-claim of the environmental movement that reduction of oil activity in Norway will contribute to a more climate friendly world. The premise of this rebuttal, however, is the contested assertion that Norwegian production is the least polluting in the world.

This qualitative analysis of a very limited corpus of texts does not claim to be representative. Still, when comparing it to quantitative findings in a recent study of a related but much larger corpus, an assumption that the observed differences are indicative of characteristic tendencies in the different types of newspapers is supported as far as regional or local newspapers in Northern Norway are concerned. Gjermundshaug (2012) finds that *Nordlys* from Tromsø, as opposed to the other newspapers such as *Aftenposten* and *VG* (Norway's largest tabloid, Oslo-based), appears as a driving force for expanded oil activity, strengthening the official argumentation. The same can be said of local/regional papers from Northern Norway in my analysis, indicating how they have a different function than national newspapers. Røe Mathisen (2010) has pointed out how local newspaper journalists in Norway experience a difficult balancing act between professional ideals of being critical and independent, and expectations of patriotism from political and industrial actors in local communities.

Although this analysis has displayed a markedly divided journalistic response, I note that expectations of critical journalism are partly fulfilled. Commentaries in widely circulated newspapers critically assess the premises for action claims made by an influential politician, questioning the rational and moral acceptability of his argument. Their exposition of how climate change concerns and the alleged environmentally friendliness of Norwegian oil policy serves to justify an expansive extraction and export of Norwegian oil is an important contribution to public deliberation over the future energy course of a Western nation. As of yet, this country has not seriously displayed a willingness

to realize its ambition of using its energy policy actively to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases in Norway and other countries.

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Notes

1. A little context on the Norwegian oil industry: according to the US Energy Information Administration (2014), Norway is the largest oil producer and exporter in Western Europe. All of Norway's oil reserves are located offshore on the Norwegian Continental Shelf. It is divided into three sections: the North Sea, the Norwegian Sea and the Barents Sea. The bulk of Norway's oil production occurs in the North Sea, with smaller amounts in the Norwegian Sea. New exploration activity is occurring in the Barents Sea. The oil and gas industry is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Norway (environment.no, 2014).
2. The political platform for this government's work in the period 2009–2013, is described in the declaration of 2009. Here it is stated that the government will “use its energy policy actively to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases in Norway and other countries” (Regjeringen, 2009, p. 57, my translation).
3. Green Certificates are tradable electronic or paper commodities testifying that certain electricity is generated using “green” or “renewable” energy sources (Rowlands, 2013).
4. The Environmental Report for 2011 from the Norwegian Oil Industry Association indicates how CO² emissions per produced oil drum from Norwegian sector now (2009) are higher than the emissions per drum from the production in the Middle East (Oljeindustriens landsforening, 2011, p. 30).

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