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With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility:

A Discourse Analysis of The Norwegian Debate on Electricity Interconnectors

Master's thesis in Europeanstudies

Supervisor: Lise Rye

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the Norwegian debate on electricity interconnectors that was triggered by the rise in electricity prices in the third quarter of 2021. By means of its public opinion perspective, the thesis offers an original contribution to the literature on electricity interconnectors. As the public debate on electricity interconnectors became a debate about Norway's relations with the EU, the thesis also contributes to the literature on Norwegian attitudes to European integration. The thesis uses a mixed-methods discourse analysis to determine the characteristics of the Norwegian debate on electricity interconnectors. The thesis argues that the characteristics of the Norwegian debate on electricity interconnectors are largely the same as the characteristics of Norwegian debate on the relationship with the EU has been in the past. These characteristics are the reliance on rationality in their arguments and the divide between those who feel solidarity with the EU and those who do not. This thesis found an overwhelming majority of pragmatic arguments in the debate, and that normative arguments often referred to what was fair to Norwegians versus what other Europeans got. This emphasises the attitudes of some Norwegian discussants that solidarity is not a good enough argument, Norwegians must gain something from a relationship with the EU, otherwise it is not worth it.

Sammendrag

Denne oppgaven analyserer den norske debatten om utenlandskabler som ble utløst av prisveksten i tredje kvartal av 2021. Gjennom offentlig debatt gir oppgaven et originalt bidrag til litteraturen om utenlandskabler. Ettersom den offentlige debatten om utenlandskabler ble en debatt om Norges forhold til EU, bidrar oppgaven også til litteraturen om norske holdninger til europeisk integrasjon. Oppgaven benytter seg av diskursanalyse med metodetriangulering for å bestemme kjennetegn ved den norske debatten om utenlandskabler. Oppgaven argumenterer for at kjennetegnene ved den norske debatten om utenlandskabler i stor grad er de samme som ved tidligere debatt om Norges forhold til EU. Disse kjennetegnene er bruken av rasjonalitet i argumentasjonen og skillet mellom de som føler solidaritet med EU og de som ikke gjør det. Denne oppgaven fant et overveldende flertall av pragmatiske argumenter i debatten, samtidig som normative argument ofte refererte til hva som var rettferdig for nordmenn kontra hva andre europeere fikk. Dette understreker holdningene enkelte norske debattanter har om at solidaritet ikke er et godt nok argument, nordmenn må få en gevinst ut av et forhold med EU, ellers er det ikke verdt det.

Acknowledgements

First off, I offer my heartfelt thanks to my supervisor Lise Rye who has supported me until the very end of this thesis. Without becoming too biblical, she has been my kind shepherd who led me back to the trail when I wandered off and stood by me when I was caught in bad weather.

A big thank you to my family as well. My mom for her emotional support when I needed it the most. My dad for his unwavering interest in my work. My sisters for their belief in their little sister no matter what I do.

Lastly, I want to thank my fellow students (and friends) that frequented study hall 6395. This process would have been very lonely without you, and I am happy you were the ones I got to write alongside of. I appreciate the lunch breaks, the memes, and the spiralling discussions we had throughout the semester.

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List of abbreviations:

ACER	Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators
AP	Arbeiderpartiet (The Labour Party)
EEA	The European Economic Area
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EU	The European Union
FRP	Fremskrittspartiet (The Progress Party)
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
KRF	Kristelig Folkeparti (The Christian Democratic Party)
MDG	Miljøpartiet de grønne (The Green Party)
MOPE	Norwegian Ministry of Petroleum and Energy
MS	Member State (of the EU)
NRK	Norsk Rikskringkasting
RQ	Research question
SP	Senterpartiet (The Centre Party)
SV	Sosialistisk venstreparti (The Socialist Left Party)

1 Introduction

Norwegians found themselves in a situation they were very much unused to when electricity prices in Norway rose to unprecedented heights in 2021. Norway's largest energy producer Statkraft explained that the hike happened because Norway is connected to the European electricity market through electricity interconnectors, and is bound to follow the developments in the European market (Mæland & Oma, n.d.). This led to a new public debate in Norway about electricity interconnectors between Norway and European countries. All but two of Norway's 17 electricity interconnectors connects to a European Union (EU) member state (MS) (Viseth, 2021). The debate about rising electricity prices thus became a debate about energy cooperation between Norway and the EU.

The pre-existing debate on electricity interconnectors was narrowly focused on possible price hikes as a consequence of potential new interconnectors (Overland, 2019, p. 85). This time around, the price hike is a fact. This makes the previous debate somewhat obsolete, as it is now determined that Norwegian electricity prices increased more than Statkraft estimated. The new electricity interconnectors to England and Germany have largely been accepted as instigators of the increased costs of electricity. The new debate is expanding the overarching discussion of Norway's relationship with the EU into a new field, where the electricity interconnectors themselves are at the centre, and the increase in prices has become the backdrop. Additionally, it includes a new type of electricity interconnectors, hybrid interconnectors, that has previously not been a part of the debate on electricity interconnectors. This debate indirectly discusses Norway's relationship with the EU and what relationship Norway *should* have with the EU.

This thesis explores the new Norwegian debate on electricity interconnectors that has emerged alongside the rising cost of electricity. The main research question is as follows: "*what characterises the Norwegian debate on electricity interconnectors?*". The prime purpose is to identify key aspects of this new debate, as well as to investigate and discuss how these aspects may be explained. While this new debate is a worthy topic of research in its own, it is also one that offers to shed new light on Norwegian attitudes to the EU. Public debates on Norway's relationship with the EU has been a rare occurrence since the referendum on EU membership in 1994. Therefore, exploring the characteristics of the debate on electricity interconnectors is a rare opportunity to gauge the Norwegian public's attitude to the EU. This thesis uses mixed-methods discourse analysis to explore the Norwegian debate on electricity interconnectors. The analysis of the debate is a contribution to research on what relationship Norwegians partaking in the debate currently have to the EU. An analysis of the debate on electricity interconnectors may also highlight points of contention in the contemporary stances in Norway on the EU, which could contribute to our understanding of the Norwegian relationship with the EU in the 2020s (Rye, 2019, p. 184). As this debate has evolved into a discussion of the Norwegian relationship with the EU, it is well suited to bring forth new knowledge on Norwegian attitudes towards cooperation with the EU. Thus, this thesis will generate new empirics and contribute to the research-based literature on the Norwegian relationship with the EU.

This thesis argues that the debate is still characterised by pragmatic arguments, a divide in identity and the view on sovereignty and the EU. These findings do not represent new

characteristics of the Norwegian debate on the EU. Instead, it confirms that Norwegians discuss EU matters largely in the same way that they have done in the past, even after decades of constant integration with the EU, that is bringing Norway closer to the EU than ever before. Additionally, it demonstrates the impact of public opinion on the decision makers that are in charge of approving or declining new electricity interconnectors. This demonstration, along with the assessment of public opinion in general, is a distinct contribution to the international research on electricity interconnectors.

1.1 Previous research on EU-Norway energy cooperation and electricity interconnectors

This section presents three strands of literature on: the energy relationship between Norway and the EU, previous research on electricity interconnectors, and Norway's relationship to the EU respectively. These areas are all relevant to what this thesis aims to do and represents where this thesis contributes to the research literature. First, this thesis contributes to the European debate on electricity interconnectors by introducing public opinion as a new area within this field. Second, it contributes to contemporary research on the Norwegian relationship with the EU. Third, and more specifically, this thesis sheds light on the relationship on energy between Norway and the EU. A study researching the energy relationship with the angle of electricity exchange is a new take on energy relations between Norway and the EU. The area of energy cooperation is increasing in salience both as a business opportunity, for energy security, and for the transition to clean energy.

Themes related to energy policy are greatly intertwined. One academic text will often touch upon several themes, which shows that many subjects can fit in or relate to energy politics. Furthermore, it is not uncommon to find energy policy within works that address climate policy or climate issues. Energy policy is closely related to climate and environmental policy because clean energy is a crucial factor in mitigating climate change. Energy policy has also increasingly become a part of security policy, as security of supply has found its way to the top of the agenda for EU energy policy after the gas disputes between Russia and Ukraine, and increasingly so after the recent invasion of Ukraine and the discontinuing of Nord Stream 2.

1.1.1 Research on EU-Norway energy cooperation

The diversity in energy politics is highlighted by the so-called energy policy triangle, three objectives for the EU energy policy (Szulecki et al., 2016, p. 549). The energy policy triangle consists of security of supply, sustainability and competitiveness (Szulecki et al., 2016, p. 549). The aims of the energy policy triangle are highly relevant when discussing electricity interconnectors. They are critical to a secure supply as they connect suppliers and consumers. They can improve the utilisation of clean energy and therefore reduce the reliance on fossil fuels. They will even out the competition across the energy market. Energy policy has generally been a complex policy area for the EU due to the many, often conflicting, interests of MS but also due to the dependence on third countries. Obviously, the EU is interested in influencing the energy policy of these countries and vice versa. Recent contributions to this research have attempted to explore how the EU projects its power and how external suppliers such as Norway respond to it (Godzimirski, 2019, p. 2).

Norway is portrayed as one of the most essential energy partners for the EU. This is emphasised by several academic works that often discuss the role of Norway alongside the role of important member states in terms of energy, such as Germany, Poland, and France (Godzimirski, 2019; Szulecki et al., 2016). Analyses of the EU energy sector often includes Norway when the focus is on the national level. This is a testimony to the importance of the energy relationship between Norway and the EU and builds a picture of the significance of Norway as a closely integrated third country. Even before the EU had a comprehensive collective energy strategy, Norway was an important energy partner for the Nordic EU MS (Von der Fehr et al., 2005). In the early 2000's scholars even recommended increasing the number of electricity interconnectors between Norway and the Nordic EU MS to enhance energy exchange (Von der Fehr et al., 2005, p. 96). What is more, Norway has often been included in articles that assess the future energy potential for the EU. This highlights the conception of Norway as a contributor to the internal energy market (MacIver et al., 2021; Spiecker et al., 2013). Scholars often highlight the technical potential for renewables in Norway, which is of particular interest to the EU as they move to reduce GHG (Greenhouse Gas) from the energy sector (Szulecki et al., 2016, p. 559). Szulecki et al. (2016, pp. 559-560) points out that while energy security is primarily about the security of supply for the EU, energy security for Norway also includes security of demand.

Much of the Norwegian research on Norwegian-EU energy relations at least touches upon the idea of Norway as a green battery for Europe, that emerged as clean energy rose on the European agenda (Gullberg, 2013; Moe et al., 2021; Overland, 2019). Being a green battery for Europe would entail expanding hydro storage capabilities to supply Europe with even more green energy. Norway was singled out for that role due to having about 50% of the European hydro storage capability. Norwegian scholars explored whether it is feasible that Norway will supply Europe with more green energy through multiple different scenarios (Gullberg, 2013; Moe et al., 2021). They all conclude that while there is technical potential for several scenarios where Norway may function as a battery or a balancer, it is not politically feasible that any such scenario will see progress in the near future (Gullberg, 2013; Moe et al., 2021). The previous research on the Nordic energy market can provide perspective on the energy debate at the time of the last 'energy crisis' in Norway when the price of electricity was abnormally high, although not nearly as expensive as today (Von der Fehr et al., 2005). Interestingly, this research uses the unprecedented high electricity prices around 2000 to argue for more interconnection, while today, the same reason is being used to oppose new interconnectors. This thesis will contribute to how discussants argue about electricity interconnectors at present day. This will also give an idea of how those engaging in public debate in Norway express their attitudes to cooperation with the EU.

1.1.2 Research on electricity interconnectors

Previous European research on electricity interconnectors is rich, yet it does not cover public opinion. The literature touches upon subtopics covering the many aspects of electricity interconnectors such as energy exchange, energy security, and the energy union. This thesis will cover the literature gap on electricity interconnectors related to public opinion. A fair share of literature on electricity interconnectors covers themes related to economics, trade carbon reduction and system optimisation (MacIver et al., 2021; Newbery et al., 2016; Van Koten, 2012). The literature often argues for more electricity interconnectors citing arguments such as security of supply, efficient use of

renewables, economic benefits of carbon reduction and optimisation of the energy system (Higgins et al., 2015; MacIver et al., 2021; Newbery et al., 2016; Rafiee, 2020; Van Koten, 2012). A previous issue with electricity interconnectors that is problematic for the electricity exchange in the EU is the application of competition law, which becomes troublesome due to the multiple actors involved and the electricity interconnectors crossing from one territory to another (Talus & Wälde, 2006). This issue has since been mitigated by the Energy Union and the EU energy packages. None of the former research investigated here discusses public opinion, which might indicate that it is not perceived to be a salient topic to European citizens and scholars.

While the literature on electricity interconnectors often uses countries as cases for case studies, scholarly works solely dedicated to Norwegian electricity interconnectors is to my knowledge non-existent (MacIver et al., 2021; Rafiee, 2020). However, a few works include Norway in broader analyses of several countries (Spiecker et al., 2013). Electricity interconnectors in the Norwegian setting only exist as pieces in academic literature about the energy relations between Norway and the EU. Literature that touches upon Norwegian electricity interconnectors emphasises their importance as the only option for Norway to supply the EU with more electricity (Gullberg, 2013; Moe et al., 2021; Overland, 2019). Some even argue that Norway should want more interconnectors as it would be beneficial for both Norway and the EU to be able to buy cheaper energy from one another when supply is high, and that more interconnectors would improve energy security (Overland, 2019; Von der Fehr et al., 2005).

So why is it that there are no scholarly works solely dedicated to electricity interconnectors in Norway? The answer may be twofold. Firstly, while scholars agree that electricity interconnectors are crucial to electricity exchange with other countries, it is only a small part of the overall energy cooperation. Access for Norwegian oil and gas to the internal market was a higher priority until climate and environmental concerns rose on the agenda, which might have overshadowed interest in electricity interconnectors in the past. Secondly, as we see from the international literature, literature on electricity interconnectors is often focused on the political economy or models assessing market performance. The scholars that have included electricity interconnectors in their works on the Norwegian situation are not from those strands of political science, which may hint at a lack of political economists in the field of energy policy in Norway.

However, there is a gap between what scholars see as rational (building more electricity interconnectors), and what gets done. More interconnectors are not being built in Norway, highlighting the difference between the Norwegian and the EU scholarly debate. In the last decade, the academic papers that bring up electricity interconnectors in relation to Norwegian energy relations also include public opinion as a factor (Gullberg, 2013; Moe et al., 2021; Overland, 2019). Research confirms the concerns of the Norwegian public that increased interconnector capacity between northern European states will increase the price of electricity in Norway (Spiecker et al., 2013). Still, the research also found that it would simultaneously increase potential welfare due to increased producers' rent (Spiecker et al., 2013).

As mentioned, public opinion is absent in the European research on electricity interconnectors. A possible reason for this may be that it is simply less salient to the public in other places than Norway. Electricity has traditionally been cheap in Norway. One could even argue that consumers take it as a given that electricity is cheap. Relative

to Norway, the prices have “always” been high in the rest of Europe, and the other countries are far from as self-sufficient as Norway when it comes to power supply. Therefore, electricity interconnectors themselves may be welcomed as a means to cheaper and better supply, which invites less public controversy. When there is a lack of controversies there may not be much point in spending resources investigating the public opinion.

1.1.3 Former research on Norway’s relationship with the EU

Many scholars have explored the Norwegian relationship with the EU on various topics such as the EEA agreement, the democratic deficit Norway faces due to not being able to vote on EU decisions, and how Norway adapts to the EU (Archer, 2005; Claes, 2003; Eriksen, 2008; Rieker, 2006). Looking back, pragmatic concerns relating to trade, protectionism and access has been factors that drove Norwegian membership in the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), Norwegian optimism about a common market for the European Communities, and Norwegian membership in the European Economic Area (EEA) (Rye, 2019). The fact that the Ministry of Trade and Industry was found to be the only ministry present in Brussels indicates that the relationship was a pragmatic one (Archer, 2005, p. 94). Pragmatic arguments for Norwegian cooperation with the EU is even being used in the research literature to demonstrate why the association could be so fruitful for Norway (Overland, 2019, pp. 84-85). Moreover, not having direct input on EEA legislation also pushed some groups into favour a full EU membership for Norway (Archer, 2005).

Norwegian EU membership has long been a contended topic in Norwegian politics, leading to measures designed to keep the debate on EU matters to a minimum during the last 20 years (Rye, 2019, p. 183). These measures have largely been successful, and EU related topics have been downplayed both in importance and in effect on Norwegian affairs (Rye, 2019, p. 184). Consequently, EU matters have gotten little attention in the media for the last 20 years, resulting in fewer opportunities to research public debate (Rye, 2019, p. 183). The debate on electricity interconnectors represents a new opportunity to research contemporary Norwegian attitudes on the EU.

1.2 Theoretical framework

In this thesis I use the Norwegian debate on electricity interconnectors to determine what characterises the Norwegian debate on energy cooperation with the EU. I ask, “What characterises the Norwegian debate on electricity interconnectors?”. The debate on electricity interconnectors can be treated as a case study within the Norwegian-EU energy relations as 15 out of 17 electricity interconnectors is connected to a MS, one is connected to England, which participates in the EU electricity market, and the last one connects to Russia and has not been contested in the debate (Viseth, 2021). This implies an inductive method, where I start with empirics, in this case, newspaper articles, hoping that it will be possible to draw more general conclusions by analysing said source material (Tjora, 2017, pp. 19-21).

This thesis will use the EU definition of interconnector: “interconnector” means a transmission line which crosses or spans a border between Member States for the purpose of connecting the national transmission system of those Member States or a transmission line between a Member State and a third country up to the territory of the

Member States or the territorial sea of that Member State;' (Directive (EU) 2019/692, 2019).

In this thesis I understand discourse analysis as 'the study of language in use.' (Gee & Handford, 2012). It includes time and place that gives meaning to a sentence beyond the words that are written. In discourse analysis, language is not just something with meaning, it is something with action (Gee & Handford, 2012). Language has power. A famous recent example of how language has power is the speech King Harald V held in 2016. His speech championed inclusivity for all kinds of people and has made people feel accepted in the Norwegian society. One of the most famous lines from that speech says: 'Norwegians are girls that like girls, boys that like boys, and girls and boys that like each other' (Det norske kongehus, 2016). This is the point of language in use beyond the words themselves. The setting of the speech, and most importantly the fact that it was given by The King had immeasurable impact in the gay society.

1.2.1 Method

In order to answer "what characterises the Norwegian debate on electricity interconnectors?" in the best possible way, I pose two sub questions. The first sub question is "How has the debate played out across the newspapers and over time?". To answer this question, I am doing a quantitative analysis of the newspaper articles. The quantitative analysis determines trends over time which gives insight in factors that explain why the debate is taking place now and not for example during the construction of the electricity interconnectors. The quantitative analysis is designed to show results for each individual newspaper and compare them. The design highlights where trends are common for a larger group and can be generalised, and where one or more newspapers stand out.

However, numbers alone cannot give a full answer to what the characteristics of the debate are. Therefore, I use a mixed-methods approach where the quantitative analysis is supplemented by a qualitative content analysis that goes more in depth. The goal of the qualitative analysis is twofold. Firstly, it aims at explaining the variance found in the quantitative analysis. Secondly, it aims at bringing forth knowledge about the content of the debate. The second sub question is "How can the debate on electricity interconnectors be explained?". The qualitative analysis is divided into four sections that gives insight into the characteristics of the debate by diving deeper into the content and the trends in the debate on electricity interconnectors. The first section analyses whether party affiliation can explain the variance in the number of published articles between the newspapers. The second section takes a closer look at what the variance between the newspapers are in terms of content by analysing the articles of the most active contributors to the debate on electricity interconnectors. The third section focuses on what type of arguments the discussants use. This is operationalised by examining what the pragmatic and normative arguments are, which is a more thorough analysis of the trend that were discovered in the quantitative analysis of preferring pragmatic arguments. The third section analyses the normative arguments to a greater extent than the pragmatic arguments because they are the outliers of the debate. The fourth section analyses recurring arguments, this illustrates the trends in the substance of the debate. The content analysis reveals characteristics that cannot be revealed solely by statistics.

The analysis of the debate on electricity interconnectors leans on a theoretical framework that I developed based on the research of Vivien Schmidt (2008) and Helene Sjursen (2017). Both set up useful frameworks, yet their aim is different from mine. Therefore, I will take inspiration from their works to tailor a framework that suits the task at hand. In the following I present the theoretical literature that I have drawn upon and the framework for the analysis.

Sjursen (2017) devises a framework to determine what type of entity the EU is in the eyes of its MS based on how they use norms to justify enlargement. She distinguishes between moral and ethical norms. Moral norms may be referred to as rights in the context of justice, they are universally applicable and could for example be human rights (Sjursen, 2017, pp. 58-59). Ethical norms are specific, they may change from one community to the next and are based on values, identity and the collective perception of what is good (Sjursen, 2017, pp. 58-59). From that distinction, she proposes three ways to perceive the EU; a value-based community, a rights-based community, and as a problem-solving entity. These conceptions reveal the underlying view on the purpose of the EU, expressed in the reasons a MS gave as to why they supported enlargement. Sjursen explains how the conceptions relate to three types of discourse about EU enlargement; pragmatic, ethical-political, and moral (Sjursen, 2017, p. 60). References to utility or efficiency indicate pragmatic discourse, references to values or the common good, indicate an ethical-political discourse, and references to justice and rights indicate a moral discourse (Sjursen, 2017, p. 60). Attempting to characterise a debate about the EU by proxy and not attitudes towards the EU itself means having to reconstruct and simplify the framework. The notion of pragmatic discourse will be used as Sjursen (2017) describes it with indicators such as utility, efficiency and rationality. The other two discourses are no less helpful, but they will be combined in the idea of normative arguments to encompass both moral and ethical arguments, as described below.

Schmidt (2008) develops a fourth new institutionalism, discursive institutionalism, which offers several definitions that will be useful for the analysis as a definition of discourse. Discourse can be described as a term that refers to conveying one's ideas (Schmidt, 2008, p. 305). Her institutional approach cannot describe the content this thesis analyses as institutions are not what is being observed or what is being discussed. However, she offers valuable clarifications of what discourse is, that can apply across traditions. Schmidt defines discourse in discursive institutionalism as a term that refers to the interactive process of conveying ideas, as well as the substantive content of ideas (Schmidt, 2008, p. 305). Meaning that it refers to agency; who says what, where do they to it, how do they say it, why do they say it, and to whom (Schmidt, 2008, p. 305)? This is the definition of discourse that the analysis makes use of. Moreover, discourse can have a function beyond conveying ideas. As actors are free to lie and manipulate, public debates can expose the bad ideas presented in discourse by political (or other) actors (Schmidt, 2008, p. 312).

It is common to separate between two types of ideas, cognitive and normative (Schmidt, 2008, p. 306). In short, cognitive ideas are 'what is and what to do,' while normative ideas are 'what is good or bad about what is' in relation to 'what one ought to do' (Schmidt, 2008, p. 306). They are used when dealing with policies, programmes, and philosophies. Schmidt (2008) gives them functions tied to what level they operate on in an institutional setting. As this work does not examine institutions, her delineation of levels will not be used. However, Schmidt's explanation of normative ideas can be used

as a simplifying replacement for Sjørusen’s ethical-political and moral discourse, giving only two dimensions to categorise the arguments in the debate by. Normative ideas can also be thought of as creating a connection between values and political action, serving as ideas legitimating something by referring to appropriateness (Schmidt, 2008, p. 307). By combining normative and pragmatic discourse as characteristics, I get a framework that is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Illustration of framework

Discourse	Indicator
Pragmatic	Utility, efficiency, rationality
Normative	Ideals, “should”, values,

The relationship between normative and pragmatic arguments is interesting due to the historical justifications of Norwegian integration with the EU that were justified with pragmatic arguments (Rye, 2019). Meanwhile, the EU MS has often relied on normative arguments to justify enlargement or the integration of new MS (Sjørusen, 2017, p. 61). Therefore, it is interesting to explore whether Norwegians argue more similar to how Norway traditionally has argued, or if they have become more European in the way that they discuss integration with the EU.

The quantitative and qualitative analyses play different parts in this framework. The quantitative analysis will give insight into frequency of indicators such as the number of published articles, the number of articles that use normative or pragmatic arguments, as well as how those indicators evolve over time. This will contribute to the question of agency by shedding light on where and when arguments are being made. The qualitative analysis allows a content analysis which will reveal who the actors are and what their ideas are. It examines agency further by analysing what is being said, by whom, and through what kind of arguments.

1.2.2 Sources

Initially I would have preferred to include all the largest news outlets in Norway in 2021. However, the available data is simply too much for the set time frame. The seven most visited news outlets in 2021 was VG (Verdens gang), NRK (Norsk Rikskringkasting), Dagbladet, TV2, Aftenposten, Nettavisen and E24 (Mediebedriftene, 2021). Because of the feasibility of the analysis, the selection of national media is instead based on the political affiliation of the news outlets so that the mainstream political spectre is represented. Note that I am the translator of all quotes from the source material as they are originally written in Norwegian. I have tried to translate them as directly as possible to not lose the intention of the arguments in translation. This will result in some awkwardness due to the differences between the Norwegian and English languages.

VG was the most visited news outlet in 2021, it is the most common mainstream news outlet that is read by readers from across the political spectre and is largely visited by

voters from the two largest parties AP ('Arbeider Partiet' - The Labour Party) and Høyre (The Conservative Party) (Wilhelmsen, 2017). Nettavisen is included as a representative of the right-wing voters from Høyre and mostly FRP ('Fremskrittspartiet'- The Progress Party) voters (Wilhelmsen, 2017). Nationen has close ties to the third biggest party, SP ('Senterpartiet' - The Centre Party), representing centrists. Lastly, Klassekampen is chosen to represent left-wing media. The articles will be collected through the data collection service Atekst retriever.

The data collection was limited to articles released online between 01.05.2021-09.02.2022. The starting point is set to May 2021 because that was when the Nordlink electricity interconnector was put into operation, it is therefore reasonable to assume that is when the debate began. The end date was chosen because the debate is still ongoing, thus it was set to the date when data collection began. The articles were collected using eight key words in Norwegian; "utenlandskabel", "strømkabel", "nord sea link", "strømekspert", "krafteksport", "kraftutveksling", "strømutveksling" and "nordlink". Every hit on these keywords within a set scope was then read through to ensure only relevant articles got included in the data analysis. All articles conveying an opinion on electricity interconnectors and power exchange between Norway and a European country was downloaded to be used in the analysis. The data for the analysis was generated using the qualitative data analysis tool Nvivo.

Only text referencing electricity interconnectors were coded. The criteria were that it had to give a reason or opinion. I.e. a report stating that a new electricity interconnector was opened with this and that technical potential was not included in the analysis, but an account of the opening ceremony stating what was said about what the interconnectors would do outside the technical potential is included. The coding is strictly based on whether the logic of the argument is pragmatic or normative. I am not assessing whether or not the claim of the argument is valid or accurate.

1.2.3 Potential weaknesses

There are potential weaknesses with the data collection and sources. Firstly, due to the sheer number of potential articles, the selection had to be limited. This may have caused the analysis to miss out on interesting trends that only appear in specific sources. Furthermore, the data collection may have missed out on relevant articles due to the limit that had to be put on keywords for the same reason. Human errors such as accidentally skipping an article or paragraph while reading during the data collection also represent a potential missed article. There is also always a risk of the author's personal bias, both with regards to using the framework and the data collection. When using the framework there is the danger that I may have interpreted an argument to be normative when it should have been pragmatic and vice versa. Still, as I was aware of these possibilities when coding, the risk is smaller than it would have been if I had not taken account of these issues.

Concerning the analysis of the newspaper articles it should be mentioned that there is a possible bias due to the selection of newspapers and their writers. The parties associated with Klassekampen, Nettavisen and Nationen are Eurosceptics meaning that the content could be biased by the perception that the readers these news outlets cater to would agree more with content that are negative to electricity interconnectors. The content analysis also found that the writers who published the most in these newspapers are at

least critical to electricity interconnectors. Therefore, the selection of newspapers may be biased in their coverage of the debate on electricity interconnectors, showing a more negative discourse than what is representative of the Norwegian population. One way to find out whether it is representative of the public opinion in Norway would be a survey, which is outside of the scope of this thesis. Still, as all political parties are represented in the selection of articles that were made, the bias will not be detrimental for the ability to draw conclusions on the characteristics of the debate as long as I stay clear of deciding whether the debate is for or against electricity interconnectors.

My personal bias cannot go unmentioned. As a student of European studies, I obviously have an interest in the field and am concerned with the correctness of the arguments in the debate. There is no doubt that every debate will contain statements that are further from facts than others. A challenge for me has been to refrain from fact-checking and treating every argument as simply a statement and not a statement that is true or false. This is part of the reason I do not present the debate sorted by the arguments for electricity interconnectors and against electricity interconnectors.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

Chapter two gives a brief background to the debate on electricity interconnectors to give an understanding of why there is a debate. Chapter three analyses the debate on electricity interconnectors and is divided into two main parts. The first part is a quantitative analysis of the newspaper articles, which aims at answering "How has the debate played out across the newspapers and over time?". The second part is a qualitative content analysis of the newspaper articles, with the purpose of answering "How can the debate on electricity interconnectors be explained?". Chapter four is also divided into two main parts. The first part is a discussion of the results from chapter three. The second part is a discussion of former research in light of the findings from chapter three. Lastly, chapter five concludes and comments on what generalisations can be made from the debate on electricity interconnectors.

2 Status quo for the debate on electricity interconnectors

The incentive for Norway to cooperate with the EU on energy that is continuously being brought up is financial gain (Overland, 2019, pp. 84-85). Despite the possibly huge earnings, the debate about electricity interconnectors in Norway has to a large extent been negative since the decisions to build three new interconnectors at the beginning of the 2010s (Overland, 2019, p. 85). Norwegian consumers and the Norwegian power-intensive industry are all sceptical of electricity interconnectors due to the increase in electricity prices that are expected to be brought about with each new electricity interconnector (Overland, 2019, p. 85). The scepticism runs so deep that the third interconnector, NorthConnect, was put on hold indefinitely in March 2020 and again by the new government that was elected in 2021 (Moe et al., 2021, p. 284). Still, the power-intensive industry is nervous that NorthConnect could be set to life in the future (Skårderud, 2021d). At the same time, some accused the electricity producers and the grid companies of setting profits over people by pushing for new electricity interconnectors, as it would increase the electricity prices in the domestic market (Overland, 2019, p. 85). Yet there has not been any long-lasting domestic debate about electricity interconnectors until 2021, when Nordlink and North Sea Link were put into operation.

To understand why EU MS wishes for more electricity interconnectors between Norway and the EU despite the negative attitudes in Norway, one must also understand why Norway is an attractive energy partner for the EU (Moe et al., 2021, p. 281). The EU has an ambitious climate policy, with pledges to increase renewable energy shares in Europe to half of the total energy supply by 2030, and to decarbonise the energy sector entirely by 2050 (Overland, 2019, p. 74). It is expected that ambitions for shares of renewables will increase as the EU is known to be a driver for climate action (Overland, 2019, p. 74). What is more, investments in renewables will have to increase in light of the invasion of Ukraine and the possible EU wide ban of Russian gas as a move to mitigate the dependence on Russian gas. However, the transition from fossil fuels to renewables cannot happen in an instant. In the meantime, the EU must rely on foreign suppliers.

Norway already exports 97% of its oil and gas to the EU, and is in many ways the perfect external energy partner for the EU (Overland, 2019, p. 76). First of all, Norway is a West European country that shares culture, history and identity with the EU. Second, Norway is the most integrated third country with the EU, they share the climate ambitions of the EU and has a precedence for cooperation with the EU (Overland, 2019, p. 77). The natural gas from Norway is known to be the greenest natural gas there is as there is less leakage in the pipelines compared to other interstate pipelines and the production chain has a lower carbon footprint (Overland, 2019, p. 78). Third, and increasingly important, Norway is a reliable supplier. The risk associated with Norway as an energy supplier is minimal as they do not engage with political tactics, such as withholding energy (Overland, 2019, p. 78). Additionally, Norway has a power surplus of clean hydropower that can be safely imported directly to the EU through electricity interconnectors. The supply is not dependent on extra EU transit countries and therefore not exposed to other actors. The abundant hydropower in Norway offers another safety net. Partly due to the geography, partly due to the numerous hydropower plants, Norway is particularly well

set up for pumped hydropower storage (Overland, 2019, p. 78). Which means that technically, it is possible to pump water back into reservoirs to be saved for later, serving as a hydro battery for green energy (Gullberg, 2013, p. 615).

Norway seems to be the perfect green battery for Europe due to having close to half of the hydro storage capacity in Europe (Moe et al., 2021, p. 282). The idea emerged in the early 2010s and builds on the idea of pumped hydropower storage that enables a battery function. More electricity interconnectors are a vital aspect in making the concept work (Overland, 2019, p. 84). The Norwegian government of the early 2010s was not opposed to the idea, with the disclaimer that consequences for electricity prices and security of supply would have to be assessed (Gullberg, 2013, p. 615; TV2, 2011). The salience of importing clean energy was highlighted when German Chancellor Angela Merkel got involved in securing a deal for a new electricity interconnector between Germany and Norway (Brekke, 2012; Moe et al., 2021, p. 281). The Norwegian Minister of Petroleum and Energy at the time said that the Nordlink interconnector had been a long time coming, but more new interconnectors between Germany and Norway would not be up for discussion until the market impact of Nordlink could be assessed (Brekke, 2012). At this point it had also been decided that another subsea electricity interconnector, North Sea Link, would be constructed between Norway and England with the same capacity as Nordlink (Brekke, 2012). The rationale for the new interconnectors was the financial gain that could be obtained by selling *surplus* energy (Moe et al., 2021, p. 282). Moe et al. (2021) found that the politicians did not make this decision alone. Equally, or perhaps more, important was the compromise between the power sector and the energy-intensive industry in Norway. The compromise was the support from the industry for new electricity interconnectors that were expected to be very profitable for the power sector, if the power sector supported new hydro and wind power installations that were meant to keep domestic prices at a minimum (Moe et al., 2021, p. 283). This compromise allowed the politicians to move forward with more electricity interconnectors without losing the support of the industry and the labour unions (Moe et al., 2021).

Today's situation has confirmed that electricity interconnectors can influence the price of electricity. However, the relation is not as straightforward as many Norwegians would have it. The specific markets connected to the new electricity interconnectors can explain some of the increase. Over time, both England and Germany have increased the share of renewables in their energy mix by shutting down coal and nuclear power plants (Rystad, 2021). The ideal solution is to have a simultaneous increase in green power production, yet that has not been the case, leading to a situation where clean energy has become more scarce and more expensive (Rystad, 2021). This was exacerbated by a period with little wind in Europe leaving Germany and England with very little domestic energy production (Bugge, 2021). Additionally, as part of the climate policy, the carbon tax has increased, driving up the price for the remaining carbon-heavy sources all over Europe (Bugge, 2021). As a consequence of the increased cost of electricity, the current government has included a section in their platform that specifies that they will not approve any new electricity interconnectors in their term (NTB, 2021a). This government consists of the two largest parties from the government that initially approved Nordlink and North Sea Link, AP and SP. While this decision is less severe than other reactions, it did provoke a reaction from the EU. Commissioner for Energy Kadri Simson warned Norway against measures that would affect the electricity exchange (NTB, 2021b). Adding to the difficult situation was the internal price difference between pricing areas in the north and south of Norway because the current interconnectors to Denmark, the

Netherlands, England and Germany all connect to the southern part of Norway (Skårderud, 2021b).

A new issue has emerged about the compromise made by Norwegian industrial actors. The power-industry wishes for hybrid interconnectors, interconnectors that send electricity through interconnectors to the Norwegian mainland *and* to another country connected to the European electricity grid. It would be beneficial to them as the electricity prices in Norway is normally so low that it is difficult or even impossible to make money from expensive projects such as ocean wind. The power-intensive industries fear hybrid interconnectors will increase the extreme electricity prices even more and are vehemently opposed. When the new government revised the strategy for the Norwegian ocean wind venture, it became clear that they had not been specific enough about the kind of interconnectors that were restricted by their platform. As they were to decide on the venture, they realised that they disagreed on whether or not hybrid interconnectors counted as electricity interconnectors such as those going to Germany and England (NTB, 2021a). AP argued they are something different as they go directly from the ocean wind power plant, and SP argued it is just another word for the same outcome (NTB, 2021a). This is a new addition to the Norwegian debate on electricity interconnectors that has emerged in the public debate during the period of data collection for this thesis.

3 Analysis

This chapter will lay the ground to answer the research question “What characterises the Norwegian debate on electricity interconnectors?” through analysis. Naturally, this work began with the selection of sources to be analysed. First, I identified articles that were relevant to the debate on electricity interconnectors by reading through the articles that contained any of the keywords presented in the sources chapter and discarded articles that were not a part of the debate. I.e., articles that used the words in a different meaning or articles that did not present arguments about electricity interconnectors were deemed irrelevant. Every article that presented an opinion on electricity interconnectors in one way or another, even if it was only a small part of the article, is included as source material for the analysis done in this chapter. The total number of articles identified to be a part of the debate on electricity interconnectors in the four newspapers is precisely 100.

Central to the discourse analysis method presented by Schmidt (2008, p. 305) is agency. Therefore, the analysis must analyse who the central actors are, what is being said, how they say it, and where they say it. The aim of the analysis in this chapter is twofold. The first aim is to sort pragmatic and normative arguments and determine trends over time and across newspapers. Those aims will answer the “where do they say it”, the “when do they say it”, and the “how do they say it” questions of discourse analysis. This is done through a quantitative analysis. The other aim is to identify central actors, recurring arguments, and the type of arguments used, which will be done through qualitative content analysis. The second aim will answer the “who says it”, the “where do they say it”, the “what do they say”, and the “how do they say it” questions of discourse analysis. The result of the analysis is presented below.

The first subchapter of the analysis is dedicated to quantitative analysis. The quantitative analysis will take a closer look at statistics, both for each individual newspaper and in comparison to each other. The second subchapter is dedicated to qualitative content analysis and is divided into four sections. The first section explores the stances of political actors in the debate and whether it can explain the difference in published articles between the newspapers. The second section looks at who the individuals contributing to the discussion are, and if a newspaper stands out with regards to how these individuals behave in the debate. The third section dives deeper into the pragmatic and normative arguments in the debate and looks for differences in the normative arguments between the newspapers. The fourth section sheds light on recurring arguments and how those arguments are made.

3.1 Quantitative findings from the debate on electricity interconnectors

This subchapter analyses the quantitative data that was generated in Nvivo. It sets out to reach the first aim, to determine trends in publishing over time, and across newspapers. To achieve that, I used the qualitative analysis tool Nvivo to ensure a specific structure that enables others to replicate the analysis, as suggested by Tjora (2017). In Nvivo I created a mother code for each newspaper. Under the newspaper codes, I created a child code for every month there was an article. Finally, under every month I created two child codes, one for pragmatic arguments and one for normative arguments.

3.1.1 How has the debate on electricity interconnectors played out across newspapers and over time?

This section analyses the individual results for each newspaper and compares them. This will identify where “they”, the discussants, make their arguments. And show when the debate took off, which can be used to determine why the debate in the first place. The results are presented in figures where the light blue column represents the total number of articles published that month. The medium blue column represents the number of articles that used pragmatic arguments that month. The dark blue column represents the number of articles that used normative arguments that month. Some articles contain both normative and pragmatic arguments and will in that case be counted both in the medium blue and dark blue column, but still only once in the light blue column. This illustrates the use of normative and pragmatic arguments, which demonstrates how the discussants argue. Lastly, the figures illustrate how much has been published over time both for each individual newspaper and in comparison to each other, which shows when the discussants were actively engaging in the debate on electricity interconnectors.

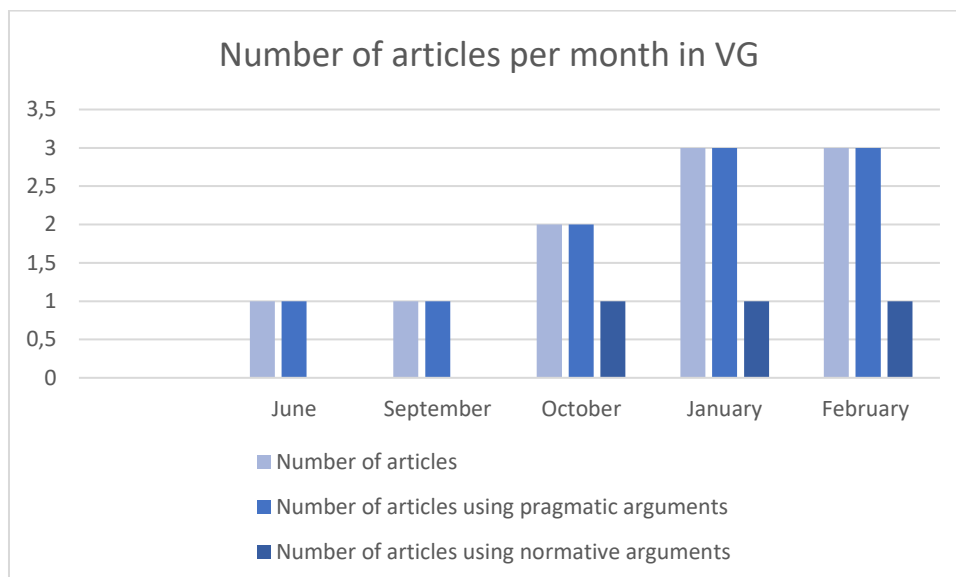


Figure 1: Number of articles per month in VG

VG only published articles arguing about electricity interconnectors in five out of ten months. Overall, they published ten articles, which in comparison is the same as Nationen published in January alone. Interestingly, while leaning heavily on pragmatic arguments, every third article contained a normative argument in January, and February. Although VG published relatively fewer articles than the average, VG has on average more normative arguments than the average trend of one in four. VG published most of their articles about electricity interconnectors in January and February, with three articles each month.

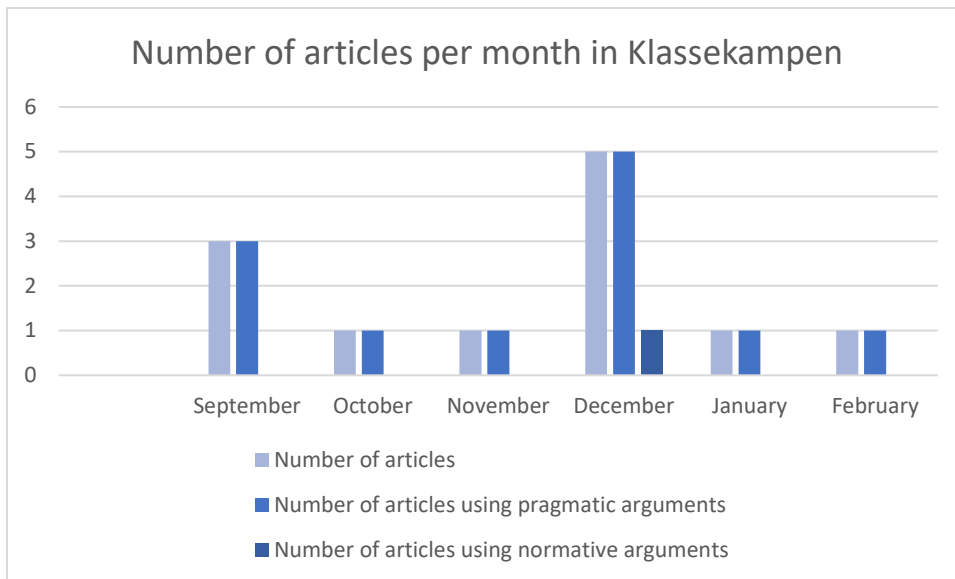


Figure 2: Number of articles per month in Klassekampen

Klassekampen only published two more articles than VG, but stands apart from VG as they published more consistently over an extended period of time and peaked in December when VG did not publish any articles. It is clear that September and especially December stands out, as there is more than one article for both of these months, contrary to the rest. Note that August and November were both months where the electricity price hiked from the month before (see table 2). Furthermore, only one article in Klassekampen uses a normative argument. This is much lower than the average one in four.

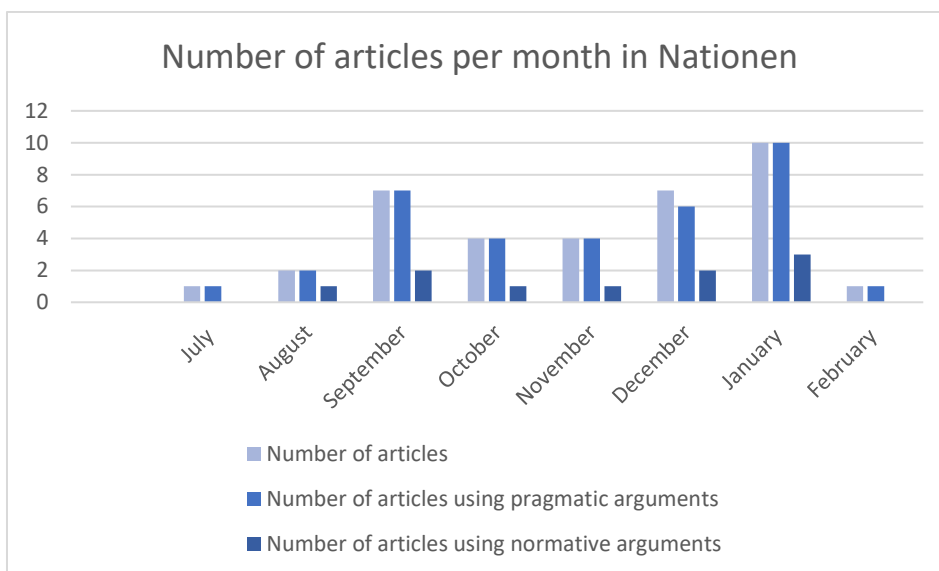


Figure 3: Number of articles per month in Nationen

Nationen had the longest consistency of publishing articles that argued about electricity interconnectors over time. However, Nationen was not consistent in the number of published articles, ranging from one to ten articles per month. December stands out here as well, but not because it is the month with the most articles. It stands out as a month where an article only contained normative arguing, which is indicated by the light blue

column being longer than the medium blue column, in contrast to most articles that only contain pragmatic arguments. Nationen published the most articles in January, the month following the highest electricity prices so far.

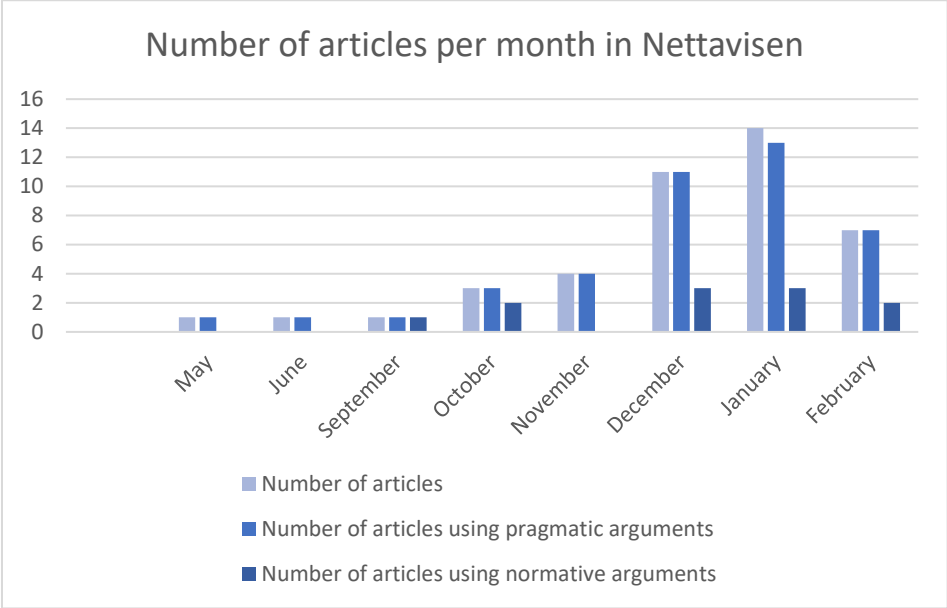


Figure 4: Number of articles per month in Nettavisen

Nettavisen is not very consistent in its number of published articles per month, yet articles are being published every month beginning in September. While Nettavisen is the newspaper with the most articles in total, most of their articles about electricity interconnectors were pooled around the turn of the year. The highest peak across all the newspapers is the 14 articles published in Nettavisen in January, following the most expensive month in 2021 for electricity. January is also the only month where an article used only normative arguments and no pragmatic ones, again indicated by the difference in the light and medium blue columns. Nettavisen is the only newspaper to publish an article in the first month of the data collection, May. Initially, I expected more articles to be published as the Nordlink interconnector between Norway and Germany went into full operation. The average of one in four articles containing normative argumentation is representative for Nettavisen where the average is circa the same.

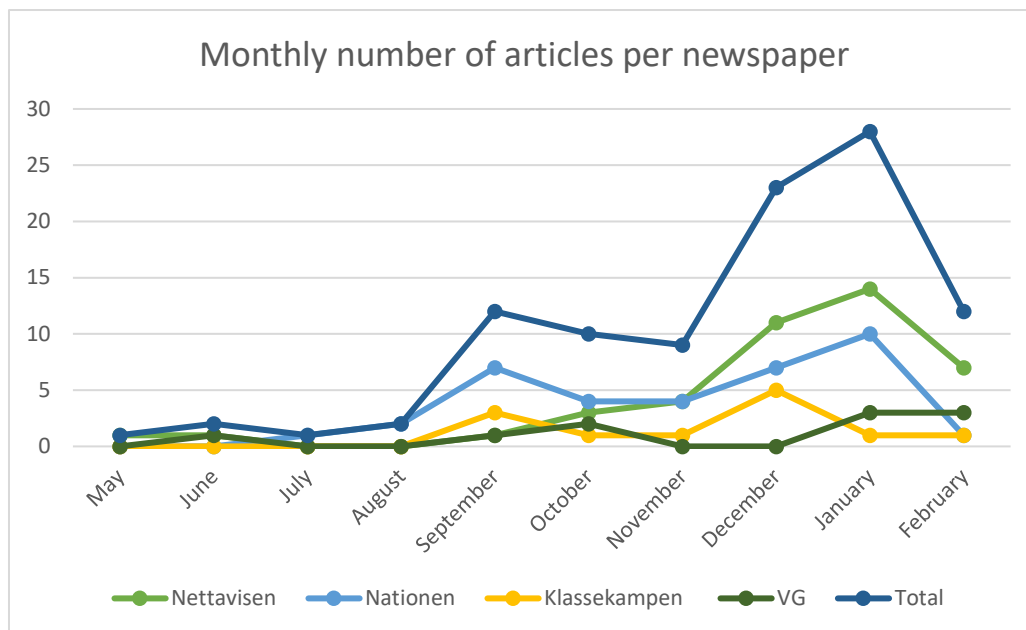


Figure 5: Monthly number of articles per newspaper

Figure 5 shows that September is a turning point for articles discussing electricity interconnectors. However, this turning point is most prominent in Nationen and Klassekampen. Nettavisen did publish in September but did not begin increasing its number of articles until October. Nationen is the newspaper that is most consistent in publishing articles over time. Once they started publishing articles on electricity interconnectors, they kept publishing every month throughout the data collection period. Klassekampen and Nationen follow more or less the same trends, both taking off in September, having a downturn in November and picking back up in December. Perhaps it is a reflection of the political activity on the left-wing in Norway, as both Klassekampen and Nationen are left or centre-left in political orientation. However, contrary to Nettavisen and Nationen, Klassekampen had its peak in December and published zero articles in the first months of 2022. Nettavisen and Nationen show a clear trend toward increasing the number of published articles towards the turn of the year. VG has an overall small number of articles and publishes more in October while the others publish less and keep publishing in January and February. There may be a connection between many articles in December and January and Christmas celebration. Christmas usually demands a higher spending of financial resources than other times of the year, combined with the extraordinary electricity prices it might have fuelled peoples' frustrations. Additionally, as Norway had Covid restrictions in place over Christmas, people might have had more free time on their hands as they were off work but unable to spend the holidays as they are used to. The increased frustrations combined with extra free time might have played a part in the increased number of articles in this period.

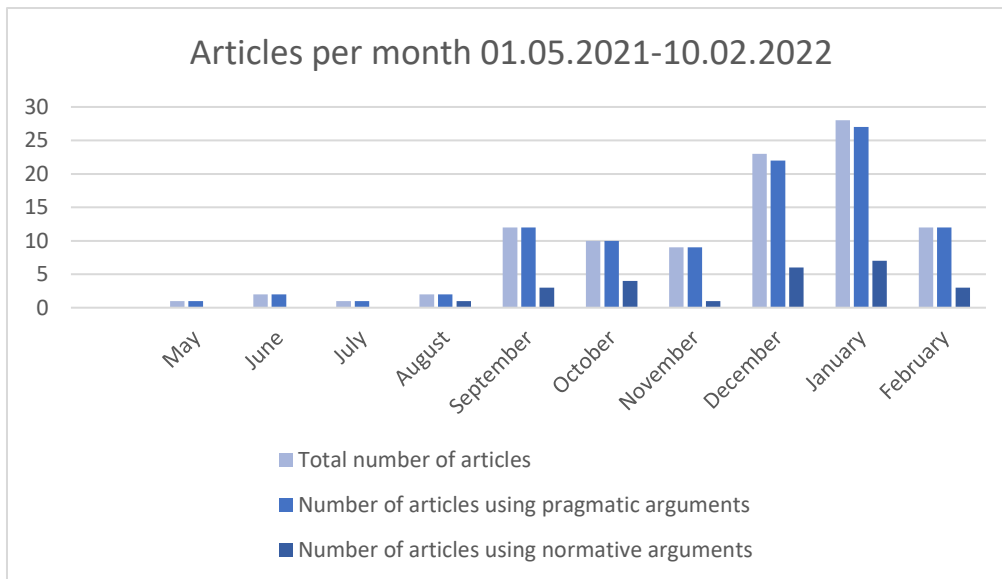


Figure 6: Articles about electricity interconnectors per month

Seeing the low number of articles from May to August is interesting, and it disproves the initial expectation that the debate would at least spark somewhat as the electricity interconnector to Germany, Nordlink, was put into full operation in May 2021. Looking at the historical electricity prices presented in table 2 for the pricing area NO2, where both new electricity interconnectors are connected to the Norwegian grid, it is clear that the total increase in articles coincides with rising electricity prices. What is more, there is an increase in articles the month following a price hike. August is the first month with a considerable price hike, and September is the first month with more articles than two. The price hikes back up in November and even more in December, both December and January have more articles than the previous month. With the price going down in January, but still being the month with the second highest electricity prices, it is reasonable to assume that the number of articles in February only increased after the data collection ended. Following that logic, it is also reasonable to assume there will be quite a few articles in March and especially April as well. This trend is not as clear when the results are broken down by newspaper, yet Nationen seems to follow this logic when comparing electricity prices and the publication of articles. Nettavisen does not publish a lot in September. Instead Nettavisen has a steady increase of published articles towards January, which coincides with the general increase in electricity prices towards the end of the data collection period. Although this thesis treats the electricity prices as a part of the backdrop that is not to be examined in itself, it is clear that the debate on electricity interconnectors exists in relation to the prices, which is something to be aware of.

Table 2: Electricity prices in price area NO2, Norwegian øre/kWh

Sørvest-Norge - Kristiansand (NO2)							
Prisene er oppgitt inkludert mva.							
Måned/År	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
Januar	175,79	62,39	30,51	67,94	38,93	34,07	31,04
Februar	150,67	60,99	15,64	56,35	46,21	35,10	22,92
Mars	233,80	52,65	11,22	51,05	50,20	35,07	25,24
April		55,48	6,66	49,78	46,43	33,82	25,54
Mai		60,79	9,91	48,24	39,46	32,90	26,28
Juni		68,60	1,95	36,82	52,86	27,91	28,11
Juli		74,53	1,88	42,23	61,17	30,80	27,42
August		93,57	5,13	43,25	60,92	31,09	25,15
September		135,46	12,75	37,30	55,93	35,10	26,81
Oktober		121,67	17,94	46,37	49,50	31,87	34,65
November		132,92	6,24	53,38	57,76	37,56	41,68
Desember		221,35	26,77	47,56	63,47	38,25	34,79

(LOS, 2022)

Another difference to take note of is the difference between the number of articles published in Nettavisen and Nationen with 42 and 36 respectively, and the number of articles published in Klassekampen and VG with 12 and 10. VG is the most read newspaper in Norway (Mediebedriftene, 2021). Yet, the number of published articles does not give the impression that the debate on electricity interconnectors is of significant importance to the population as a whole. As VG does not cater to only a specific group in politics while the other newspapers do, the following subchapter will explore if party affiliations can explain the difference in published articles.

3.2 Qualitative findings from the debate on electricity interconnectors

The sub question that this subchapter answers is "How can the debate on electricity interconnectors be explained?". This question will enable an investigation of the variance found in the quantitative analysis and bring forth knowledge about the content of the debate. The qualitative analysis is divided into four sections that gives insight into the characteristics of the debate. The first part analyses whether party affiliation can explain the variance in the number of published articles between the newspapers. The second section takes a closer look at what the variance between the newspapers are in terms of content by analysing the articles of the most active contributors to the debate on electricity interconnectors. The third section focuses on the type of arguments the discussants use. This is operationalised by examining what the content of the pragmatic and normative arguments are. The fourth section analyses recurring arguments, this clarifies the substance of the trends in the debate.

This subchapter identifies central actors, types of arguments that are being used, and recurring arguments through qualitative content analysis. After having identified the 100 articles that were relevant to the debate on electricity interconnectors and doing the qualitative analysis, I had an overview of who the discussants that participated in the debate were and what themes they touched upon. However, to ensure all relevant

information was considered, I systematically went through the articles looking for the specific information each section of the qualitative analysis aims to give.

3.2.1 Can party affiliations explain the variance in the number of published articles between the newspapers?

This section will take a closer look at the political actors that were involved in the debate on electricity interconnectors. It will give insight into who “says it”, i.e., the political actors in the debate. The quantitative analysis found a great difference in the number of articles published by each newspaper. The goal in this section is to shed light on whether party affiliations can explain the variation in published articles between the newspapers with the strongest party affiliation, *Nationen*, *Klassekampen* and *Nettavisen*. As VG primarily caters to the Norwegian people in general and is not commonly associated with a specific party, it does not make sense to include them directly. However, if party affiliation appears to be a significant factor, it might explain why the number of articles in VG is so low. Looking at party affiliations to the newspapers will show where these political actors “say it” i.e. it will identify where their views are presented.

All the major political parties in Norway have in one way or another been involved in the debate on electricity interconnectors. Sometimes their statements to (other) media or at ceremonies are being used as claims that discussants call attention to in order to make counterarguments or prove them wrong. Other times they are being interviewed directly or write articles themselves. Regardless of means, their stance on electricity interconnectors has been communicated even in the small selection of newspapers examined here.

FRP is the political party with the most substantial ties to *Nettavisen*. They have been mostly concerned with electricity prices but have nonetheless communicated their stance on electricity interconnectors. FRP politicians Frank Sve and Marius Nilsen only touch upon electricity interconnectors in an article aimed at solving the closely related debate on the electricity crises (Sve & Nilsen, 2021). Yet they managed to communicate their opinion that the export of electricity should be taxed because the export drives the price of electricity up (Sve & Nilsen, 2021). Sve also accused the government of ‘not lifting a finger’ to explore options for reducing the export of electricity to Germany or England (Mullis & Heldahl, 2022). Although, their own Tord Lien, former Minister of Petroleum and Energy, confirmed to *Nationen* in August that FRPs intention with approving the new electricity interconnectors was indeed to increase the cost of electricity in Norway (Nordlund, 2021f). The increased price for electricity would increase the profits of power companies and make the development of new renewable energies more attractive from a business point of view (Nordlund, 2021f). Meaning that FRP intentionally contributed to the exact outcome that they are protesting. Leader of FRP Sylvi Listhaug takes a slightly different approach when she argues that Norway should ‘take control over the export going through the electricity interconnectors’ (Revfem, 2021).

SP is the smaller one of Norway’s two government parties and is a known Eurosceptic party. SP is the party with the closest ties to *Nationen*. They are quite outspoken about being opposed to the electricity interconnectors as they increase the price of electricity, in the aftermath of the Norwegian election in September 2021 they said: ‘...we have to immediately look into how we can limit the export of electricity within the legal framework’ (NTB, 2021d; Åsnes, 2021a). Party leader Trygve Slagsvold Vedum openly

blames the electricity interconnectors for the extreme electricity prices (Åsnes, 2021a). SP has also argued that the electricity interconnector to England weakens the security of supply in Norway (Ånestad, 2022). In December, parliamentary leader for SP Marit Arnstad called for a renegotiation of the agreements on electricity interconnectors with Germany and England (NTB, 2021c). Her comments has been quoted several times by discussants in the debate on electricity interconnectors, both in *Nationen* which has close ties to SP and in *Nettavisen* which is more commonly associated with right-wing parties (Nordlund, 2021b; Svendsen, 2021). Still, SP has met some backlash as they are in government, yet have according to some failed to limit or quit electricity export through the new electricity interconnectors (Nordlund, 2021b; Sjøli, 2022c). Even their own politicians have called them out for not doing enough as the water level in the hydro dams decreased (Lundteigen, 2022).

Rødt (The Red Party) is one of the two parties with the strongest association with *Klassekampen*, although *Klassekampen* caters to the entire left wing of Norwegian politics. They have also made their stance abundantly clear, Rødt is firmly against new electricity interconnectors. Rødt politician Sofie Marhaug voiced Rødts disappointment with the decision of the AP-SP government to not process, rather than outright cancel, the application for a third electricity interconnector, NorthConnect. In an article in *Nettavisen*, she stressed that it meant a new government could still approve NorthConnect in the future (Marhaug, 2022). Moreover, she clarified that Rødt is not opposed to all electricity interconnectors, just the ones leading to unstable pricing areas (such as Germany) (Marhaug, 2022). She has also stated that Rødt is opposed to electricity interconnectors which leads to more export of Norwegian electricity, which is why Rødt wants to slow down the export (Blaker, 2021). Additionally, the leader of Rødt Bjørnar Moxnes accused those who had voted for the new interconnectors in the Parliament of letting the Norwegian people down (Johansen & Vestheim, 2021b). Note that the article written by Marhaug was published in *Nettavisen* rather than in *Klassekampen*.

SV (The Socialist Left Party – 'Sosialistisk venstreparti') is the second party with strong ties to *Klassekampen*. SV leader Audun Lysbakken has been quoted on multiple occasions where he calls for a renegotiation of the agreements on electricity interconnectors (Fjellanger et al., 2022; Mullis & Heldahl, 2022). Still, Lysbakken is not as harsh as other actors and gives the electricity interconnectors only partial blame for the rising cost of electricity (Fjellanger et al., 2022). He argues that as the interconnectors were meant to exchange electricity but are primarily being used to export electricity, it is grounds for asking for a renegotiation (Fjellanger et al., 2022). Lysbakkens arguments was presented in *VG* and *Nettavisen*. Moreover, SV has a smaller presence in the debate on electricity interconnectors than the other parties with solid ties to *Nettavisen*, *Nationen* and *Klassekampen*.

From the first part of the analysis of the political parties' stance in the debate on electricity interconnectors, it is clear that all the parties with the strongest associations with the newspapers *Nettavisen*, *Nationen* and *Klassekampen* are in one way or another opposed to the new electricity interconnectors and to possible future electricity interconnectors. They are also voicing their desire to end, limit or renegotiate the electricity export to Germany and England. Still, as mentioned, all the major political parties have been involved in the debate. What about the parties that have a weaker or lack of association with *Nettavisen*, *Nationen* and *Klassekampen*?

Høyre was the largest party in the former government that left office during the electricity crisis. They are seen as the party with the main responsibility for the agreements for power exchange through the new electricity interconnectors with Germany and England. While Nettavisen might be closest to FRP, people supporting Høyre represents a large portion of their readers (Wilhelmsen, 2017). They are one of only two Norwegian parties that supports membership in the EU. Naturally, Høyre has not voiced any critique of the electricity interconnectors. Instead, Høyre politicians have spoken about the necessity of electricity interconnectors on multiple occasions. At the opening ceremony for Nordlink, former Minister of Petroleum and Energy from Høyre Tina Bru said that the electricity interconnector would contribute to the security of supply and the reduction of fossil fuels (Eilertsen, 2021a). The former Secretary of State, who was also a Høyre politician and the signatory of the agreement on North Sea Link, pointed out that it was important to look at the effect of the electricity interconnectors from a long term perspective (Johansen & Vestheim, 2021b). Lastly, Høyre politician Eva Westgaard-Halle writes an article where she tries to correct what she deems to be common misconceptions in the debate by explaining why Norway chose to build electricity interconnectors (Westgaard-Halle, 2021). The former Secretary of State was quoted in *Nationen*, which is also where Westgaard-Halle decided to publish her article. This might have been a deliberate move in an attempt to answer the critiques Høyre faced in *Nationen* despite the lack of ties between Høyre and *Nationen*.

MDG (The Green Party – “Miljøpartiet de grønne”) has no affiliations to any of the newspapers. As a relatively young party, they do not subscribe to either the left or the right-wing of politics. Overall, they are favourable to cooperation with the EU, as it is an international leader in climate policies. MDG said in August that the high prices that come with the electricity interconnectors are something Norwegians will have to learn to live with to meet the goals of the EU’s climate strategy (Johansen, 2021a). To MDG, having enough exchange capacity to export and import to the neighbouring European countries is instrumental to reaching the goal of a green society by phasing out carbon fuelled power (Lindal, 2021). MDG is primarily present in *Nationen*, which might be deliberate as *Nationen* is the newspaper for the Centre in Norwegian politics.

Venstre (The Liberal Party) was also in government when the agreements governing the new electricity interconnectors were signed. Venstre is the second of the two Norwegian parties supporting Norwegian membership in the EU. Unsurprisingly, Guri Melby, leader of Venstre, appears in an interview where she defends electricity interconnectors from what she dubs to be conspiracies (Åsnes, 2021a). Melby denies statements made by sceptics, such as attributing increased electricity prices to the interconnectors (Åsnes, 2021a). Venstre is not commonly associated with any of the newspapers examined here. Yet as members of a right-wing government, it would be reasonable to assume they are closest to *Nettavisen*. However, the interview of Guri Melby was published in *Klassekampen*, the newspaper furthest away from Venstre on the left-right axis. Venstre has a smaller presence in the debate on electricity interconnectors than AP and Høyre. However, as a significantly smaller party it may be a matter of resources.

AP, the largest party in Norway and in government could be associated with both *Klassekampen* and *Nationen* to a certain degree. *Nationen* seems to be where AP is referred to the most. They have a history of being positive towards cooperation with the EU, although not without internal disputes. AP is overall positive to electricity interconnectors but is aware of the current political climate and acts accordingly. Already

in July, now Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre was quoted denying the relationship between rising electricity prices and participation in the European cooperation on energy (Johansen & Vestheim, 2021a). He added that over time the connection to the countries around Norway would lower the price of electricity (Johansen & Vestheim, 2021a). Moreover, Støre made it clear that AP has halted the concession for a third electricity interconnector. The ones already built were approved in cooperation with SP (Johansen & Vestheim, 2021a). When confronted about limiting the power exchange with the EU (and the UK), the Minister of Petroleum and Energy Marte Mjøs Pedersen simply said 'The electricity exchange between Norway and the EU is regulated by the EEA agreement ... Norway cannot put limitations on our own electricity export within these agreements' (Mullis & Heldahl, 2022).

The analysis shows internal disagreements in the government between AP and SP. They disagree on Norwegian relations with the EU or their stance in the debate on electricity interconnectors. It is reasonable to assume that this has been a point of contention. As SP is very outspoken about their scepticism towards European cooperation in general, and energy cooperation such as the electricity interconnectors more specifically, it appears that AP has ended up with the responsibility of defending energy cooperation with the EU. One such incident is their disagreement on the role of ACER (Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators), where AP supports Norwegian participation, and SP is highly critical and accuses it of taking away national control of energy policy (Røsvik, 2021; Skjæran, 2021). A possible explanation for why AP has taken on the role of the defender of all this can be found in an article about ACER and electricity exchange by the deputy party leader in AP Bjørnar Skjæran in May. In this article he explains that AP does not use the same polarising and misleading communication as 'their friends in SP do' because '... we are also a governing party. We will take responsibility for Norway. We cannot act like that' (Skjæran, 2021). Indirectly referring to the role of AP in Norwegian politics, AP must always act responsibly because, as the largest party in Norway, they are at any given time among the strongest candidates for government. Yet, when AP and SP announced their plans for the ocean wind venture at the very end of the data collection period, they had become more united in their policy on hybrid interconnectors. From the looks of it in the debate, AP had agreed to not include hybrid interconnectors in the ocean wind venture at this stage. In return, SP had toned down their harsh communication on their electricity interconnector woes, presenting a united front to the public where hybrid interconnectors are out of the question for now (Sjøli, 2022a).

Still, the fact that SP wanted to shut down electricity export to Europe is not the only challenge for AP (Sjøli, 2021). Another challenge for AP, in particular, has been the internal disputes, such as an uprising among the mayors of municipalities hosting hydropower plants, where 60 AP mayors are going against the party leadership and calling for limiting or even ending the export through the electricity interconnectors (Nationen, 2022). Moreover, the former deputy leader of AP Trond Giske also called for his own government to renegotiate the agreements on electricity interconnectors (Mullis & Heldahl, 2022; Skårderud, 2022). SP has not experienced such internal disputes where there are significant disagreements, although they have had members wanting more swift action and an even stricter stance on electricity cooperation with the EU (Nordlund, 2022b). AP shut down the idea of a large scale renegotiation or resignation of the agreements altogether (Mullis & Heldahl, 2022). Interestingly, the Minister of Trade and Industry from AP said at the very end of the data collection period that he thinks most people find the debate on electricity interconnectors to be 'a bit weird' (NTB, 2022b). He

expands by saying: 'What the people in Norway are concerned about is whether there is electricity here, and it is our responsibility to secure that' (NTB, 2022b). Given the connection to electricity prices, his statement seems out of touch.

A closer inspection of the party stances in the debate on electricity interconnectors suggests that the parties with strong ties to a specific newspaper are generally against the newer electricity interconnectors. As mentioned, this may have affected the newspapers to publish more content in tune with the attitudes of the parties they cater to. In contrast, parties without the most substantial ties to a particular newspaper (of the ones examined here) generally support the electricity interconnectors. To be clear, Høyre is definitely among the parties Nettavisen caters to, and AP is among the parties Klassekampen caters to. Yet they are not the primary audiences of any newspapers in this analysis. The articles referring to parties supporting electricity interconnectors seem spread out, with just a few more in Nationen. Of the articles referring to unsupportive parties, many are in Nettavisen. This is one of the factors explaining why Nationen and Nettavisen have so many more articles than Klassekampen and VG. Meaning that party affiliation can barely explain the variance in published articles between the newspapers. The parties that are associated with Nettavisen, Klassekampen and Nationen are most often referenced in Nettavisen. Nettavisen has the most articles about electricity interconnectors. Other parties that lack the close association to the newspapers are more often referenced in Nationen, the newspaper with the second most articles about electricity interconnectors.

Moreover, another finding is that although the politicians who comment on electricity interconnectors are often associated with a specific newspaper, all the newspapers published articles referring to politicians with stronger associations with another newspaper. For example, FRP is referenced in Klassekampen, and SP is referenced in Klassekampen and Nettavisen. Moreover, the newspapers are not unquestionably loyal to the parties they cater to. Journalist Eva Nordlund from Nationen accuses SP of not delivering on their promises in their election campaign (Nordlund, 2022b). Magnus Marsdal criticises FRP in Nettavisen for offering unrealistic solutions (Marsdal, 2022b). Clearly, the references to politicians/parties are, as to be expected, to prove them wrong or disagree with them (Stavrum, 2021a). Yet, there are also those who agree. A discussant referring to Marit Arnstad in Nettavisen uses Arnstads statements as a starting point to elaborate and agree with her sentiment (Svendsen, 2021). Høyre politician Lene Westgaard-Halle wrote an article in Nationen, although her party is more commonly associated with Nettavisen (Westgaard-Halle, 2021). Deputy leader in AP, Bjørnar Skjæran wrote an article in Nettavisen (Skjæran, 2021). Even Rødt politician Sofie Marhaug wrote an article in Nettavisen instead of Klassekampen (Marhaug, 2022). It is reasonable to assume that the politicians writing for newspapers they are generally not associated with is a conscious choice to reach a new audience. As for the discussants that are not politicians themselves but refer to politicians they agree with, they may use it as a tool to increase their legitimacy. Still, this underpins that party affiliation alone cannot fully explain why there is a variance in the number of published articles.

3.2.2 What is the variance in the content submitted by the most active contributors in the debate?

Some discussants are particularly involved in the debate on electricity interconnectors, as they have written several pieces throughout data collection. An analysis of their

contributions can give a better understanding of the debate and its characteristics. The last section failed to fully explain the variance in the number of published articles. By identifying the most active contributors to the debate on electricity interconnectors, another factor that contributes to this variance is identified. Most of these individuals write for *Nationen* and *Nettavisen*, which has contributed to their comparatively large number of articles. Together, the discussants that are examined more closely in the following section have written a third of all articles in this analysis. Two discussants from *Nettavisen*, two discussants from *Nationen* and one from *Klassekampen* will be afforded a closer look. One journalist, Hans Petter Sjøli, in *VG* is cited as the author of four articles. However, the articles give the impression that he is not the actual discussant of all of them. Therefore, I have chosen to not give them the same attention due to the uncertainty of who the actual transmitter is.

A discussant that stands out in *Nettavisen*, where he is a columnist, is Kjell Erik Eilertsen. He uses different methods to get his message across, often using sarcasm to express his disagreement. For example, after referring from the speech of the former Minister of Petroleum and Energy, who praises the increase in security of supply brought about by Nordlink, he writes: 'The line was as read from a script, but whether it was referring to Norway or Germany was not so important at *the exchange party*.' (Eilertsen, 2021a). The use of exchange party is clearly sarcastic, it is even put in brackets in the title of the article 'The Great "Exchange Party"' (Eilertsen, 2021a). This is a common tactic in his articles, where he turns an argument around by commenting on it, often using sarcasm or phrases such as 'should we believe her, then..', revealing his opinion without actually presenting it himself (Eilertsen, 2022a). In the same article, he even goes as far as drawing lines between Angela Merkel smiling at the opening ceremony for Nordlink and the Nazi major Erich Walther as he made Norwegians in Minnesund surrender during the second world war (Eilertsen, 2021a). That is quite a serious accusation, yet it efficiently gets across his disdain of the interconnector between Norway and Germany.

Eilertsen also engages with other articles in the debate. In one instance, he accuses the fact-checking project Faktisk.no and the national news outlet NRK of making the issue of electricity prices more innocent than it is (Eilertsen, 2021b). In this article, he addresses specific statements made by experts brought in by Faktisk.no, accusing one of them, Anders Lie Brenna, of giving statements that lack perspective. Eilertsen describes Brenna's statements using a derogatory term that loosely translates to "word vomit". Brenna reacted by writing his own article where he comments on every attack on his expert opinions by explaining his stance (Brenna, 2021). Brenna himself is a writer for an online newspaper *Europower*, an independent trade journal.

Gunnar Stavrum, the editor of *Nettavisen*, is another active discussant in the debate on electricity interconnectors. Curiously, he is somewhat inconsistent in his opinions throughout data collection. Stavrum has been overall positive towards electricity interconnectors over time, and even in November, 'Norway is Europe's green battery, and power exchange is a good idea' (Stavrum, 2021b). He even repeated the sentiment that electricity interconnectors are a good business venture for Norway. Still, he is firmly against hybrid interconnectors and argues that their only effect on Norwegian consumers is pushing the price of electricity even higher (Stavrum, 2022a). This indicates that he is against more electricity interconnectors, yet he has accepted Nordlink and North Sea Link as permanent. This assumption is strengthened by his article from January 2022, where Stavrum discarded arguments that call for renegotiation or quitting Norway's agreements

with the EU, saying they are utopian and unrealistic as such solutions lack support in the Parliament (Stavrum, 2022b).

In between several articles where he is positive about the financial gains from the electricity interconnectors, he takes issue with 'footing the bill for the discontinuing of German nuclear power plants and the rising carbon tax on electricity for coal and gas in Europe' (Stavrum, 2021d). Still, in another article published only a month before about the most reasonable climate policy for Norway, he writes: 'Norway should export as much as possible of the renewable, zero-emissions electricity to Europe' (Stavrum, 2021b). Later, he argues that, in theory, the electricity interconnectors are good business for Norway, the problem is that right now they are causing extreme prices for consumers, which needs to be dealt with domestically (Stavrum, 2022b). Stavrum's main issue seems to be that Norwegian consumers are paying the price for the greed of the Norwegian state and municipalities. They are the main owners and rent collectors of the hydropower plants and the company Statkraft that owns the electricity grid in Norway and the Norwegian half of the electricity interconnectors. The state and municipalities are the profiteers of the electricity crises according to Stavrum (Stavrum, 2022a, 2022b). It is not easy to pinpoint what this discussant argues for as several of his statements in different articles appear contradictory.

Eva Nordlund works for Nationen, she has a background from SP and Nei til EU ('No to the EU', the Norwegian organisation against membership of the EU). She has written nine articles within the debate on electricity interconnectors just within the span of data collection. This makes her the most active discussant from the period of data collection. Some of her articles are simply reports on the statements made by politicians and union representatives where she does not share her personal opinion explicitly (Nordlund, 2022c). Other articles clearly convey her dislike of the new electricity interconnectors and her disapproval of the lack of decisive action on energy policy and the electricity interconnectors that SP promised in the election campaign (Nordlund, 2022b). She is also unsurprisingly among those who take issue with the Norwegian participation or "transfer of power" to ACER as well as other cooperation with the EU (Nordlund, 2021c, 2021d). Although she is in no way a neutral party, she does fulfil the role of the media by questioning the current government and holding them accountable for promises they have made, even if it means criticising SP, and the former government that negotiated the agreements for Nordlink and North Sea Link that did not take any measures to relieve the extreme electricity prices before the transfer of power (Nordlund, 2021e, 2021f, 2022a).

Eskild Johansen also writes for Nationen, where he is a political journalist. Unlike Nordlund, he does not appear to have strong associations with political organisations, and he co-writes articles on occasion. Like other journalists, he writes articles where he mainly gives reports of the latest statements from public actors with accompanying basic facts (Johansen & Vestheim, 2021b). Still, his articles are written in a way that sets electricity interconnectors and electricity exchange with the EU in a bad light (Johansen & Vestheim, 2021a). His own attitude sometimes shines through in the wording of his articles: 'Despite mainly using the electricity interconnectors for export of electricity from Norway to Great Britain, the British could potentially be left with six to seven million NOK in yearly revenue...' (Johansen, 2021d). Whether intentional or not, his seemingly objective reports are in fact not painting a completely neutral picture.

Jo Røed Skårderud writes half of Klassekampen's articles on electricity interconnectors in the data collection period. He is also involved in politics and is an independent representative in the city council of Trondheim. Similarly to Nordlund, he writes articles that are mainly reporting on the statements and actions of politicians and public actors where he keeps his own opinions to a minimum (Skårderud, 2021e, 2022). What separates Skårderud from the others is that he does not write articles that clearly convey his own stance. Despite being much less evident with regards to his own opinions in his articles, there is a trend of affording much more room to actors that are critical of the electricity interconnectors and electricity exchange (Skårderud, 2021d). Only one of his articles is centred around a somewhat neutral actor, Kjetil Lund, director of The Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate (Skårderud, 2021b).

The greatest variance in the content submitted by the most frequent authors is between Nettavisen and the two other newspapers, Klassekampen and Nationen. The discussants in Nettavisen directly communicate their own opinion and discuss much more than they report. Nationen and Klassekampen's journalists report on statements and facilitate debates between others more often than they argue for their own opinion. They are more subtle in their opinion, yet when looking for opinions, one can detect them in the way that they present the issue. Common for all these writers is that they all seem to have a negative view of the electricity interconnectors. As they are responsible for a third of all the articles in this analysis, their negative attitudes has contributed to a perception or trend that the debate is overall negative to electricity interconnectors.

3.2.3 How are different types of arguments expressed in the debate?

Figure 6 makes it quite clear that Norwegians regard the topic of electricity interconnectors as a pragmatic one. Most discussants solely refer to pragmatic concerns, while some refer to normative attitudes on occasion. This section will analyse the pragmatic and normative arguments that are being used in the debate on electricity interconnectors, which will also serve to identify how the actors in the discourse communicate their ideas.

Revealing such a large majority of pragmatic concerns is not surprising, as Norwegians have been known to make decisions regarding their relationship with the EU based on economic considerations (Rye, 2019). Moreover, as it is now clear there is a connection to the rising cost of electricity, pragmatic concerns tied to personal and industrial finances are to be expected. Indeed, arguments linked to the price of electricity in connection to the electricity interconnectors represent the majority of arguments (Ingebretsen, 2022; Lindal, 2021; Mullis, 2021b; Nordlund, 2021c; Skårderud, 2021c). Carriers of these arguments often use reports to back up their claims (Lange, 2021). For example, in one of his articles, Skårderud refers to a report that concluded the electricity interconnectors to England and Germany had played a more significant part in the rising costs for electricity than low water levels in the hydro dam magazines (Skårderud, 2021c). He then turns to the head of the webpage "price match electricity", who makes the connection to the electricity interconnectors: 'Mathias Nilsson, ..., does not believe the government will gain control over the electricity prices unless they take action on the electricity exchange' (Skårderud, 2021c). Naturally, the counterargument to this is also pragmatic. A discussant argues that there is proof that shutting down export will not affect the price of electricity, as both the electricity interconnector to the Netherlands and the one to Germany was shut down for a short period of time in 2021 (Sjøli, 2021).

During that period, the cost of electricity remained at the same level as when the electricity interconnectors were in operation, hence shutting down the electricity interconnectors when the cost of electricity goes up will likely not have the intended effect (Sjøli, 2021).

However, not all pragmatic arguments are about electricity prices. They also cover other aspects such as security of supply. A recurring argument is that electricity interconnectors guarantee the security of supply, especially in dry years when Norway does not necessarily have a power surplus (Lindal, 2021; Oshaug, 2021). Others also argue that low water levels in the hydro dam magazines threaten the security of supply, yet they argue the electricity interconnectors cause the low levels, and there needs to be a break system to stop electricity export to prevent it from happening (Ydersbond, 2022). Another example is the not so common argument that Norway will inevitably lose out on industrial capital as domestic businesses can no longer compete in the international markets due to the rising cost of electricity brought about by electricity interconnectors (Marsdal, 2022a). It is clear that the pragmatic arguments are often arguing about how the electricity interconnectors are to blame for the rising cost of electricity, which utilises rationality to say that the cost of the interconnectors is too high. Rationality and efficiency are also the logics that is being used by the other arguments that do not focus on electricity prices. Arguing that the interconnectors has weakened the security of supply indirectly argues that it is not an effective or rational means to the goal of a secure supply of electricity.

Only two of the 100 articles contain strictly normative articles. The remaining 98 articles contain mostly pragmatic arguments, with about one in every fourth article containing both normative and pragmatic arguments. While the pragmatic arguments can often be repeated throughout the debate, the normative arguments are more unique to an article. Some normative arguments argue that Norway can contribute to encouraging more green energy by acting as a safety net to the countries Norway shares an electricity interconnector with, which rests on a notion of solidarity and a collective responsibility (Åsnes, 2021a). Others refer to justice, asking if it is fair that Norwegian consumers should pay the price for the greed of others (Nordlund, 2021f). This argument refers to the massive profits power companies are expected to get from electricity interconnectors due to higher electricity prices in Europe (Nordlund, 2021f). This is also expressed as problematic from the opposite angle, some argue that the electricity interconnectors were built with the massive profits the state and municipalities could make in mind, which the private sector has to pay for in the form of high electricity prices (Solli, 2022).

The one and only normative argument in Klassekampen is that Norway should provide electricity through electricity interconnectors to countries such as Denmark so that they have a safety net for when the wind stops blowing, encouraging them to keep up the work on renewable energy (Åsnes, 2021a). VG has more variation in their normative arguments, such as references to fairness or values (Haugsbø & Bohlin, 2022). One discussant attaches value to electricity export, blaming Høyre for facilitating more electricity export which, to him, is wrong (he does not state why) (Sjøli, 2022b). Another attaches value through arguing electricity interconnectors are good for the climate (VG, 2021).

In Nationen there are many more nuances of normative indicators and arguments. Several discussants ask whether it is fair that Norwegians have to pay so much for

electricity, or that the British are making money on Norwegian electricity export when there is a difference in the cost of electricity between the two markets (Johansen, 2021d; Nordlund, 2021d, 2021f). This employs the normative indicator of what should be, the authors make it quite clear that they do not think that is how it should be. Others state outright how they feel Norway should act (Nationen, 2022; Ydersbond, 2022). For example, other indicators are when Marit Arnstad employs justice to argue against hybrid interconnectors, saying they must abide by the same agreement as the electricity interconnectors, meaning they should not receive concessions in the current government's term (NTB, 2021a). Once is climate solidarity brought up, though it should be mentioned that the author discards this argument as weak (Nordlund, 2022a). There are also arguments leaning on values, such as the value to not exploiting nature, which is of great importance in Norway, that is being used to argue for electricity interconnectors (Westgaard-Halle, 2021). Other value indicators include references to the common good, attaching value to political action, and that the power belongs to the people (Johansen & Vestheim, 2021a; Nordlund, 2021e; Westgaard-Halle, 2021).

In Nettavisen some indicators are similar to those in Nationen, such as arguing the situation is unfair, what should be done, and arguments saying the situation is right or wrong (Eilertsen, 2022a; Moen, 2022; Revfem, 2021; Ullmann, 2022; Aasen & Hanssen, 2021). One article comments: 'Many experience the situation as an unfair one' using it as a reason to stop the export of electricity (Blaker, 2021). Using sarcasm, one discussant clarifies where he thinks politicians did the wrong thing: 'Having Norwegian taxpayers finance the electricity interconnector was genius' (Eilertsen, 2021a). Again climate solidarity, as well as solidarity with the EU, is brought up as an argument for electricity interconnectors (Eilertsen, 2021a; Moen, 2021; Mullis & Heldahl, 2022). There is also the reference to the Norwegian value of leaving nature intact and contributing to climate mitigation (Eilertsen, 2022b). Interestingly, one discussant also brings up the power companies' societal responsibility, arguing that their exports show they are out of touch with their responsibility to the Norwegian society (Moen, 2021).

Solidarity between Norway and the EU as well as aiding the green transition are normative arguments supporting electricity interconnectors that appear in all four newspapers. Especially solidarity to encourage or assist the green transition is perhaps the argument that occurs most often arguing for the same specific reason across all normative arguments. While arguments about fairness and ideal situations are most common as indicators, they do not necessarily apply fairness to the same argument. Some ask about the fairness of the British making money on the electricity interconnector from Norway to England, while others ask if it is fair that Norwegians have to pay so much for the electricity that has gone up in price due to the electricity interconnectors (Johansen, 2021d; Nordlund, 2021e). There are also the occasional arguments that rest on certain values. The most common is that electricity interconnectors have allowed Norway to leave more nature intact than they would have been able to had they not had electricity interconnectors (Eilertsen, 2022b; Westgaard-Halle, 2021). As the one normative argument in Klassekampen is also being used in the other newspapers, Klassekampen only stands out because of the low number of normative arguments, not because the argument differs from the rest. In the remaining three newspapers, authors primarily present arguments that rely on the same indicators. There is no apparent major difference in the normative arguments if one looks at the indicators between these three.

3.2.4 What are the recurring arguments in the debate?

This section analyses recurring arguments from the debate on electricity interconnectors from VG, Nettavisen, Nationen and Klassekampen. Thus, it will provide insight into all the questions of discourse such as who, what, where, and when, that the qualitative analysis set out to answer. The analysis in this section will centre around what the discussants say. Analysing the recurring arguments in the debate will also reveal the characteristics of the content in the debate.

Several discussants bring up a difference between electricity interconnectors to the Nordic countries and electricity interconnectors to countries outside the Nordic (Eilertsen, 2022a). Some make this distinction by explaining that the Nordic conditions are more similar to the Norwegian ones, and connecting to larger markets such as the German can potentially have more effect on the prices than the Nordic ones due to the dissimilarity in sizes (Haugsbø & Bohlin, 2022). The party Rødt are among those making a distinction based on where the electricity interconnector from Norway goes to: ‘... not because we are opposed to *all* electricity interconnectors. Power exchange with the Nordics has been important to us for decades,...’ (Marhaug, 2022). Marhaug explains further that the distinction is due to the low cost of electricity across the Nordics and the relatively good security of supply, while these new electricity interconnectors have connected Norway to unstable pricing areas (Marhaug, 2022). Arguing that the Nordic markets already covered the security of supply has been used to support being connected to the Nordic market, but against the new electricity interconnectors to England and Germany (Braanen, 2021). Interestingly, one discussant argues that while the cooperation on electricity in the Nordic market is a success for the security of supply, the electricity interconnectors to England and Germany have caused Norway to lose national control in the power sector (Westeren, 2022). Despite the positive attitude to electricity exchange with the Nordic countries, there was a dispute between Norway and Sweden when Sweden limited their power export due to domestic issues with the capacity as the water in the northern hydro dams froze (Johansen, 2021c). Many Norwegians felt it was unfair of Sweden to do this, even as they wanted to limit Norway’s own electricity export (Johansen, 2021c).

Some arguments such as security of supply, get repeated multiple times by those in favour of the electricity interconnectors (Aglen, 2022; Eilertsen, 2021a). Interestingly, they are not always presenting those arguments themselves in the public debate, rather it is just as often those who disagree that bring up their arguments from public ceremonies or debates outside the newspapers (Braanen, 2021). This has the effect that their support of electricity connectors becomes a tool for those against them when the proponents of electricity interconnectors do not engage with the media directly. By pointing out that the transfer of electricity from the new interconnectors has mainly gone from Norway to England or Germany, opponents explain that the interconnectors become a threat to the security of supply when the intended electricity exchange is absent (Svendsen, 2021). Again, one discussant argues that the security of supply was already secured by Norway’s integration with the Nordic electricity markets (Braanen, 2021).

What is more, the new electricity interconnectors to England and Germany have been accused of eating up the Norwegian power surplus (Blaker, 2022b). This argument has also been aided by the fact that the water level in Norwegian hydro dams has been lower than average. Several discussants bring up the low water levels in the hydro dams to argue that the electricity interconnectors need to be put on a break (Ydersbond, 2022). It

has also been used to argue that the government is not fulfilling their promises or their duty to the country when they allow electricity export under these conditions (Lundteigen, 2022; Thorheim, 2022).

Another frequent argument is that the electricity interconnectors have caused Norway to lose control over their energy policy, especially the electricity prices (Johansen, 2021b; Pedersen, 2021). Some uses the connection between the electricity interconnectors and the electricity crises to argue for a review of Norway's association with the EU (Johansen, 2021b; Pedersen, 2022a; Rød, 2022). They make this connection as such '... Norway's commitments to the ACER cooperation with the EU,..., restrain Norway from preventing the electricity crises' (Johansen, 2021b). Such arguments are met by others who do not refute the effect electricity interconnectors have on electricity prices but refute the claim that ACER is responsible for them (Molnes & Delebekk, 2021). Another discussant says it is a paradox that many people who demonstrate against the high electricity prices are not opposed to the EU, the EEA agreement, or Norwegian participation in ACER (Ingebretsen, 2022). Jon Ingebretsen argues that these agreements hinder Norway from renegotiating or quitting power exchange agreements. Therefore the chance for continued high electricity prices is like '... a dark cloud hanging above the Norwegian society...'. Discussant and editor of Nettavisen Gunnar Stavrum call this a distraction from the real issue of the electricity prices, as changing Norway's agreements with the EU is not politically feasible (Stavrum, 2022b). Furthermore, some take issue with the effect the European power market has on electricity prices but who underlines that Norway's agreements with the EU, such as the EEA agreement, are crucial to their business' survival (Mullis, 2021a). There is also a third group that take issue with both Norway's agreements with the EU and the increased cost of electricity caused by the electricity interconnectors. Yet they dismiss the possibility of changing the electricity export: 'Measures such as removing the value-added tax on electricity or introducing an export tax are probably illegal...' (Stavrum, 2021c).

Those arguing against electricity interconnectors often refer to statements by politicians as well. Marit Arnstad raised her concerns about electricity interconnectors to the newspaper DN ('Dagens Næringsliv'), saying that Norway should renegotiate the agreements for power exchange (Svendsen, 2021). Several discussants references her statement in their articles, restating her arguments that they should be renegotiated as the electricity interconnectors are not being used for power exchange, but instead electricity export solely from Norway to the other country, meaning that they no longer contribute to the security of supply (Svendsen, 2021). Referring to statements by such a prominent politician may be a conscious choice to give their arguments more legitimacy.

Articles about renegotiating the terms for the most recent electricity interconnectors increased around Christmas 2021 (Nordlund, 2021a; NTB, 2021c; Skårderud, 2021a; Westeren, 2022). Some argued that renegotiating is a must and the only solution to regain national control over energy politics (Mullis & Heldahl, 2022). Among the most prominent people to raise the issue of renegotiation is the parliamentary leader for SP, Marit Arnstad and the leader of SV, Audun Lysbakken (Mullis & Heldahl, 2022; NTB, 2021c; Svendsen, 2021). Voices within AP have also called for renegotiation (Mullis & Heldahl, 2022; Nationen, 2022). In late December, the month with the highest price hike in 2021, Arnstad said, 'SP wants to renegotiate agreements on power exchange' (Nordlund, 2021b). Discussants in Nettavisen argued that there is still time to renegotiate as the period of notice for North Sea Link is one year (Sivertsen &

Emblemsvåg, 2022). Others argued against attempting to renegotiate and explained why they thought renegotiation would be impossible or send unfortunate signals: 'If Norway wishes to renegotiate the agreements, we will be playing an opportunistic hand that will not be received well by our partners in the EU and Great Britain. ... We would lose their trust.' (Mullis & Heldahl, 2022). It is clear that discussants have different perceptions of what the situation is, as well as what the room for manoeuvring is with regard to the energy cooperation with the EU (Eidesvik, 2021; Molnes & Delebekk, 2021; Mullis & Heldahl, 2022; Trellevik, 2021).

Another argument that is not only centred about renegotiation but why a renegotiation is necessary is centred around who gets the congestion revenues. Congestion revenue is what happens when there is a price difference between two pricing areas that are connected through electricity interconnectors with limited capacity. Several discussants argue that the way those revenues are shared in the agreements is unfair as both the company selling electricity and the one buying it will share the congestion revenue in the agreements governing Nordlink and North Sea Link (Blaker, 2022a). Some find it unfair that Norway has to share the revenue while also experiencing an increase in the local prices (Johansen, 2021d; Nordlund, 2021f). Congestion revenues have also been raised in the debate on hybrid interconnectors. The power-industry have voiced its disappointment that hybrid interconnectors are not included in the plans for the ocean wind venture (Mullis & Berge, 2022). One discussant explains his disdain like this: 'When the power-industry themselves justifies the plans for hybrid interconnectors with the expectation of making money on the difference in prices between a foreign country and Norway, it is also a confirmation that this grid will function in the same way as the current electricity interconnectors' (Braanen, 2022).

By the end of the data collection, the question of hybrid interconnectors had increased in salience. They are first mentioned in June 2021 when the Norwegian labour union LO ("Landsorganisasjonen i Norge") and The Confederation of Norwegian Enterprises ("Næringslivets Hovedorganisasjon" – NHO) agreed that the power produced in the coming ocean wind projects had to be connected directly to the European market through hybrid interconnectors, and that revealing these plans would not lead to polarisation of the debate (Solberg, 2021). Such electricity interconnectors are called 'hybrid interconnectors' as they connect to the Norwegian mainland and the European power grid. This assumption did not age well. Apart from the fact that hybrid interconnectors did cause debate, more people voiced their scepticism about connecting new power projects directly to the European market/grid over these months (Mullis & Berge, 2022; Pedersen, 2022b; Stavrum, 2022a). Still, the power-industry holds that hybrid interconnectors are a must for the ocean wind venture to be profitable (Revfem, 2022).

Articles on hybrid interconnectors increased in the first months of 2022 as the decision to include them in the ocean wind venture approached. When the decision was about to be made public, SP leader Vedum did not want to take a stand on hybrid interconnectors before he had more information, but made it clear that such interconnectors are not included in the current plans for the ocean wind venture (Mullis & Berge, 2022). Still, he is clear that he did not want hybrid interconnectors if they increase the export capacity of mainland Norway (Mullis & Berge, 2022). SP has formerly been much more outspoken that they are opposed to hybrid interconnectors than they were in February 2022 (Nordlund, 2022a). Moreover, the articles suggests there was an internal battle in government about hybrid interconnectors with SP being against them and AP being for

them, a battle that SP clearly won as it was announced in early February that hybrid interconnectors would not be a part of the ocean wind venture (Berge & Mullis, 2022; Nordlund, 2022a). Therefore, it is interesting that despite “winning” the battle on hybrid interconnectors, Vedum had become softer in his stance on them to the media.

Rødt is perhaps the party that was the most outspoken on electricity interconnectors and hybrid interconnectors combined. Rødt politician Sofie Marhaug argued the ruling parties needed to say no to hybrid interconnectors once and for all: ‘We must give a final no to the hybrid interconnectors, which has been proved to increase the electricity prices in Norway.’ (Mullis & Berge, 2022). Her statement must be seen in the context of what Vedum said about wanting more information before making a final decision. There is also KRF (The Christian Democratic Party – ‘Kristelig Folkeparti’) who did not appear to comment on electricity interconnectors in the newspapers examined here until February 2022, when they finally took a stance on hybrid interconnectors, saying they were sceptical of hybrid interconnectors as long as Norway does not have control over the power export (NTB, 2022a). Further stating that hybrid interconnectors could lead to more export and higher electricity prices (NTB, 2022a). As one of the parties that were in government while the agreements on the new electricity interconnectors were signed, one might have expected them to be more outspoken at an earlier point. Interestingly, former leader of KRF Kjell Ingolf Ropstad is the only one who employs concerns for the environment as an argument against hybrid interconnectors, saying he fears high electricity prices due to electricity export could weaken the support for Norway’s climate policy (NTB, 2022a). MDG is at the other end of the scale and finds it incomprehensible that the hybrid interconnectors are not already in place in the plans for ocean wind projects as more green energy is necessary (Berge & Mullis, 2022; Mullis & Berge, 2022).

As energy and climate policy are closely related, it is no surprise that the environment is also frequently brought up in the debate on electricity interconnectors. Environmental concerns can be relevant in a number of cases, this is also evident in this case as many discussants use different arguments that all fall within the scope of environmental and climate concerns. For example, SP politician Per Olaf Lundteigen argues that because the agreement on the electricity interconnector North Sea Link is grounded on meeting the commitments of the Paris Agreement, it means Norway is committed to *exporting* electricity to England instead of *exchanging* electricity as it contributes to a stable supply of green energy to a market with much less green energy than the Norwegian power market (Ånestad, 2022). Several discussants argue that Norway is paying the price for the green transition in Germany and England through the electricity interconnectors. Both countries are shutting down GHG emitting power plants, leading to a domestic energy deficit (Otta, 2021; Stavrum, 2021d). Some even questions whether it is possible to justify developing new hydro or wind power plants in Norway that infringe on nature to the Norwegian people when Norway is selling the electricity to other countries through the electricity interconnectors (Åsnes, 2021b).

Some criticise the Norwegian government for being short-sighted with their climate action. When the government aim to electrify the Norwegian oil rigs but at the same time sell green Norwegian energy out of the country through electricity interconnectors, they make it difficult for other industries to rely on the green electricity due to the rising cost that is associated with electricity interconnectors (Ness, 2021). While Ness mainly argues against electrifying the oil rigs, other discussants compare electrifying the oil rigs and exporting electricity through the electricity interconnector to Germany. They argue that

exporting electricity to Germany will contribute to more reduction in GHG emissions than electrifying oil rigs will, thus, Norway should keep up the electricity export through the Nordlink interconnector (Benth & Schrader, 2021).

The recurring arguments in the debate on electricity interconnectors were perhaps more diverse than expected when it was already clear that most of them were pragmatic arguments tied to the cost of electricity. The discussants had a lot to say, but some ideas were more common than others. One argument was the distinction between the Nordic market and the European market. Another argument was security of supply, and the fear of losing the Norwegian power surplus and control over the Norwegian energy policy. There were also recurring arguments for renegotiating the agreements for the electricity interconnectors, within this argument there were also many who took issue with congestion revenues. Hybrid interconnectors were a new area of disagreement for this debate, and there was a political discussion of them taking place through these articles that took off in the end of the data collection period. The increased focus on hybrid interconnectors may supplement the explanation that electricity prices affected the number of articles in December and January. Lastly, environmental and climate concerns were brought up numerous times.

4 Discussion

The analysis has revealed several interesting findings from the debate on electricity interconnectors. The first part of this chapter discusses those findings to provide new insights. The second part will compare what former research said about electricity interconnectors with findings from the analysis of the current debate on electricity interconnectors.

4.1 New insights

The quantitative analysis set out to answer where, when and how the debate took place. The analysis identified *Nationen* and *Nettavisen* as the newspapers with the overwhelming majority of published articles, meaning that *Nationen* and *Nettavisen* are where most of the discourse in this selection of newspapers happened. Furthermore, December and January were when the newspapers collectively published the most, which also coincides with high electricity prices the month prior. Lastly, the quantitative analysis makes it clear that the debate on electricity interconnectors is characterised by pragmatic arguments, meaning that pragmatic arguments are predominantly how the discussants argued. Pragmatic arguments are present in 98 of 100 articles, while normative arguments are only present in 25 articles. Evidently, the discussants in the debate on electricity interconnectors follow the Norwegian tradition of debating EU matters with pragmatic concerns in mind.

The number of published articles increased throughout the data collection period. Due to that trend, it is reasonable to assume that the total number of articles published in the whole of February was likely equal to or more than the number of published articles in January. The low number of articles at the beginning of the data collection period debunked my assumption that the opening of the Nordlink interconnector set off the debate. However, the quantitative analysis was also able to confirm that there was a correlation between the cost of electricity and the debate on electricity interconnectors. Those findings strengthen the correlation to electricity prices as the instigator of the debate and rule out the idea that the debate was instigated by opening two new electricity interconnectors in the same year. Moreover, it proves that the electricity interconnectors themselves are not what motivated people to debate electricity interconnectors. The motivation to begin the discussion was electricity prices, which evolved into a discussion about electricity interconnectors and the Norwegian relationship with the EU.

The qualitative analysis identified several interesting qualities in the debate on electricity interconnectors. The first section of the qualitative analysis found that party affiliation can only partly explain the variance in number of published articles. While the content analysis revealed that parties associated with *Nationen*, *Klassekampen* and *Nettavisen* was most often referenced in *Nettavisen*, and parties lacking a close association with any of the newspapers, was most often published in *Nationen*. If party affiliation was the full explanation the pooling of newspapers *with* an association and parties *without* a strong association would not have happened. Instead, *Nationen* and *Nettavisen* would have had their high number of articles because the parties associated with them were the most invested in the debate. Moreover, there was no norm about loyalty that decided where party actors should publish their articles or what parties an article in a specific newspaper

agreed with. This strengthened the belief that party affiliations were inadequate to explain the variance in number of published articles.

The content analysis also demonstrated that all the major political parties in Norway participated in the debate on electricity interconnectors. They were all quite explicit in their stances, which is interesting when looking at the debate as a debate on the Norwegian relationship with the EU as several parties simply avoid taking a clear view on what relationship Norway should have with the EU. Through this debate, they have all taken a stance on Norway's cooperation on energy with the EU.

Furthermore, the qualitative analysis revealed that the most active writers in Klassekampen and Nationen wrote in a more similar style to each other than to Nettavisen. While all the people who wrote the most articles for the newspapers have a formal connection to the newspaper they write for, the articles in Nettavisen are much more personal and confrontational than the articles written by the most active writers in Nationen and Klassekampen. Moreover, it is interesting to note that at least a third of the articles in the analysis are written by people whose job is to produce articles that people want to read. It is a possibility that this has inflated the debate on electricity interconnectors, making it appear to be a more salient issue than it is. What is more, as all these journalists present as sceptical of electricity interconnectors, they may have contributed to a skewed impression of the public opinion in the media.

The pragmatic arguments were unsurprisingly relying on rationality and efficiency to argue the best course of action for Norway. This is less exciting to investigate because it is the most common way for Norwegians to argue about the relationship with the EU. Regarding Normative arguments, they are much closer to being a rarity and therefore more interesting to understand. Klassekampen stood out with only one normative argument in all their articles. Still, that argument, which referred to environmental concerns, was the most common normative argument in the analysis. While environmental and climate concerns were most common as arguments, other indicators appeared more frequently. The indicators that arguments relied the most on was the notion of fairness. The arguments varied between what or who was unfair, yet the indicator still stood out as the preferred method to argue for normative concerns.

Perhaps the most exciting finding from the fourth section was the distinction that many discussants made between electricity exchange with the Nordic countries and the EU. Although the arguments are pragmatic, it gives the impression that some Norwegians feel a kinship with the rest of the Nordic states that they do not feel for the EU as a whole. The fact that some found it to be unfair that Sweden limited their electricity export to Norway, which was normative arguments against Sweden's pragmatic stance, at the same time as they themselves called for Norway to restrict exports to other states for economic reasons emphasises the impression that there are more than just pragmatic concerns that influences their attitudes towards Nordic cooperation. A preference for Scandinavian or Nordic collaboration is not new in Norway, after all the Nordic electricity exchange Nordpool was created before the EU had a comprehensive policy on Energy.

Other recurring arguments were reflections of the past as well, as pointed out by several discussants. Security of supply has been used to rationalise more electricity interconnectors in the past and is still being used in the reckoning for the newest ones. However, it is new to the debate that opponents of electricity interconnectors use the

security of supply as an argument to quit the agreements for electricity exchange with England and Germany, arguing that this exchange threatens the Norwegian security of supply. Climate concerns have also been a part of the reasoning for the electricity interconnectors to England and Germany. However, arguments such as “paying the price for green transition in foreign countries” is a new angle that possibly would not have entered the debate without the rising cost of electricity that many pins on Nordlink and North Sea Link.

The remaining recurring arguments that were uncovered by the content analysis could not have been made in an earlier debate as they were all dependent on new factors that did not exist or were not affected before Nordlink and Nord Sea Link were in operation. Firstly, the power surplus in Norway has been uneven from one year to the next, but there has generally always been a power surplus during the last decade (MOPE, n.d.). However, both new electricity interconnectors increase the export capacity compared to the previous status quo, which changes the balance. Additionally, they have a capacity of 1400MW each which instigates fears that they could disproportionately eat away the existing surplus. Secondly, the congestion revenue has always been around. Yet, they are much increased due to the increased capacity of Nordlink and North Sea Link combined with the great difference in electricity prices in the Norwegian and English and German markets. This has then led to the third argument, renegotiation. Although there are several reasons for wanting a renegotiation, some argues for it due to the unfair division of congestion revenues that has previously not been brought up as an issue. Moreover, as the old status quo did not affect Norwegian electricity prices much, people had fewer issues with the existing electricity interconnectors. This has changed to a certain degree with the instalment of the newest interconnectors leading some to blame the agreements themselves. Lastly, there have been several developments in the EU energy policy over the last decade, which Norway has largely followed. One of the most contested decisions on the EU that the Norwegian Parliament has taken lately was the decision to join ACER. This decision was taken to court over issues with Norwegian sovereignty, the result came during the period of data collection and confirmed the assumption of the Parliament that ACER does not infringe on Norwegian sovereignty. Eurosceptics disagree and argue that ACER among other areas of cooperation within the EEA has taken away Norwegian control over the energy policy by hindering Norway from differentiating between Norwegian electricity consumers and foreign consumers. As all these arguments are related to new developments in Norway’s relationship with the EU, they could not have been made at an earlier point without being presented as assumptions about the future.

What is more, the analysis has given insight into the perceived utility, or rather perceived lack of utility the EU has to Norway. The content analysis revealed that the arguments stating what Norway gains from the electricity interconnectors is mostly about the security of supply, which is being turned around by opponents who say Norway has actually lost the security of supply by installing Nordlink and North Sea Link. Many arguments do not focus on what Norway will get; rather they focus on what Norwegians are giving up. Apart from the loss of security of supply, many discussants argue Norwegians are losing money to a number of different actors such as private companies or foreign countries. Even proponents of electricity interconnectors argue about what Norway does not have to do due to the electricity interconnectors, such as increasing the number of hydropower plants that infringe on nature, or how the electricity interconnectors will help other countries with a balancing power.

4.2 Findings and former research

Former research is interesting to discuss in light of the findings from the analysis. Most of the former research did not include public opinion at all, still some of the former research that focused on Norway mentions it briefly. This discussion will compare what they took note of with the new debate on electricity interconnectors. What is more, the former research that did not comment on themes that even relates to public opinion did occasionally include bits and pieces that was brought up in the debate on electricity interconnectors. A discussion of those pieces reveals whether their findings were applicable in the public debate as well.

The last period of unprecedented high electricity prices in Norway was the winter of 2002-2003. The situation arose due to issues with supply in the Nordic electricity market, Von der Fehr et al. (2005) wrote that during this winter, people were mostly concerned with the electricity prices. The analysis has proven that this is also a central theme in the debate on electricity interconnectors. Supply issues caused the situation in the Nordic market due to a lack of inflow in hydro dams (Von der Fehr et al., 2005, p. 71). Fears of a similar situation is expressed in the current debate when discussants argue for a temporary pause in electricity export when the water levels in the hydro dams are low. This proves that electricity prices have been important to the consumers and continues to be important to consumers.

Spiecker et al. (2013) published a paper that analysed a potential increase in interconnector capacity between the northern European countries and mainland Europe. They found that increased interconnector capacity would increase the electricity prices in Norway. At the same time, that would increase the welfare as the producer's rent would also increase (Spiecker et al., 2013, p. 122). This was, to a certain degree, correct according to the debate. The electricity prices rose, and Nordlink and Nord Sea Link served as the explanation for it. The producer's rent increased. However, it is unclear whether the welfare increased proportionally in the debate. On the topic of increased revenues, the content analysis found that discussants were eager to blame either the power companies or the government for "getting away with the profit", which does not reflect a clear communication about how that money would be spent. Moreover, they found that grid expansion in already well-connected systems may require additional (public) spending as congestion revenues could be lower than private investors are willing to accept (Spiecker et al., 2013, p. 124). Yet, in the debate it is clear that congestion revenues are a reason for investors to spend their money on the ocean wind venture. Similarly, it is also why other parts of the Norwegian industry and public do not support hybrid interconnectors or the agreements on Nordlink and North Sea Link.

Moreover, MacIver et al. (2021, p. 14) predict that Great Britain will contribute much more to balancing the electricity exchange with low-cost countries such as Norway in the near future when more electricity interconnectors are in place and renewables are in operation. This would also entail a reduction in the congestion revenues for North Sea Link (MacIver et al., 2021, p. 14). Spiecker et al. (2013, p. 124) also found that congestion revenues would increase over time as Europe becomes more interconnected. Given that many discussants have accused the interconnector of purely facilitating electricity exports and the agreement governing North Sea Link of being unfair due to the distribution of the congestion revenues, it is possible that this information could have impacted parts of the debate. However, as most discussants are concerned with the

current conditions, it is likely that they would simply ignore or try to refute this information, just as they did when the State Secretary explained that a long-term perspective is necessary when assessing the electricity interconnectors.

Interestingly, MacIver et al. (2021, pp. 6-7) also assume the construction of NorthConnect, a submarine electricity interconnector between Norway and Great Britain (GB), when building scenarios for GBs interconnectedness. Yet, this interconnector was put on hold indefinitely in March 2020, largely due to public opinion (Moe et al., 2021, p. 284). The discourse clearly shows that this electricity interconnector is unwanted. The political parties Rødt and AP refer to it specifically, expressing that they will not be the ones to approve it. Other discussants are hostile to electricity interconnectors in general and want to end the existing agreement, yet very few refer to NorthConnect specifically. I believe approving this interconnector is politically unfeasible due to the nature of the debate, it would simply cost too much social capital no matter the reason for approval.

Several academic works also underline the importance of electricity interconnectors for increased power exchange between Norway and the EU (Gullberg, 2013; Moe et al., 2021; Overland, 2019). Moe et al. (2021) argue that it is more likely that Norway would contribute to balancing energy needs rather than become a green battery. From the public debate, it is evident that becoming a green battery is unacceptable, some even express that producing energy strictly to fill the need of foreign states could be difficult to justify to the Norwegian people. Moreover, from the debate it appears that many are sceptical of the idea of Norway as balancer as well, or that being a balancer could be acceptable if the electricity exchange went both ways.

Some scholars touch upon previous public debate briefly in their works. Although Overland (2019) did not go into depth on the previous debate on electricity interconnectors, what he wrote was telling for the current debate as well. Overland (2019) described it as largely negative, mainly due to the expectation of increased electricity prices. He also explained that some had accused the electricity producers and the grid companies of setting profits over people by pushing for new electricity interconnectors as it would increase the prices in the domestic market (Overland, 2019, p. 85). The same accusation of setting profits over people has been raised in the current debate as well, both in discussions about Nordlink and North Sea Link and in discussions on hybrid interconnectors. However, Overland (2019, pp. 85-86) wrote that apart from statements from power companies, the discourse largely ignored environmental factors such as contributing to the green transition. This has changed from the previous debate to the current one, where both opponents and proponents employ environmental concerns in their argumentation.

In 2021 (Moe et al., p. 284) predicted that short term investments in new electricity interconnectors were unlikely as political parties had become sceptical of interconnectors. It is evident from the content analysis that many parties are negative toward electricity interconnectors. Yet, the two largest parties, AP and Høyre, are favourable to Nordlink and North Sea Link. However, Moe et al. (2021, p. 284) explained that the industry had become more influential, which might be why AP in 2020 and 2021 contributed to a halt in the process for a third electricity interconnector despite having an overall positive attitude to electricity interconnectors.

In early 2013 Gullberg (2013) identified three core issues for Norway that needed to be considered when discussing energy. They were economic growth versus environmental protection, domestic versus international GHG emissions, and renewable energy versus nature conservation (Gullberg, 2013, p. 617). Electricity prices have since risen on the agenda to become a salient issue in the public debate. It is clear that electricity prices have become just as important as the other core issues, demonstrated by the government's decision to not include hybrid interconnectors in the ocean wind venture despite the economic repercussions of not doing so.

5 Conclusion: With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility

This thesis was born out of an interest in Norwegian relations with the EU, especially within energy policy. As my bachelor's thesis dealt with the gas pipeline Nord Stream 2, it made sense to look into renewables for my master's thesis. The question of Norway as a green battery for Europe has already been settled by Gullberg (2013) and Moe et al. (2021), and the Norwegian debate on the EU has, as mentioned been somewhat suppressed by the unwillingness of political parties to discuss relations with the EU (Rye, 2019, pp. 183-184). So, when it became apparent that there was an ongoing debate on electricity interconnectors during the fall of 2021, the idea of investigating this debate as a part of Norway's relationship on energy with the EU came to mind.

This thesis has analysed and discussed the Norwegian debate on electricity interconnectors in four Norwegian newspapers. It set out to answer what characterises the Norwegian debate on electricity interconnectors through discourse analysis, by asking two sub questions. The first question was "How has the debate played out across the newspapers and over time?". The analysis found that there was an increase in the total number of articles every month following a price hike for electricity, which confirms a link between the cost of electricity and the debate on electricity interconnectors and explains why the debate did not happen at an earlier point. Moreover, there was a clear trend of using pragmatic arguments in the debate, across all newspapers. The trend that was discovered in the analysis responding to the first question that it could not explain, was the variance in the number of published articles between the newspapers. That led to the second question "How can the debate on electricity interconnectors be explained?".

The analysis determined that party affiliation could not explain the variance in number of published articles. While there was a pooling of references to parties that are against electricity interconnectors in Nettavisen and a pooling of references to parties that support electricity interconnectors in Nationen, it is not a clear connection between the party affiliations of the newspapers and where the parties got mentioned the most. However, moving to the most active discussants in the debate, a new factor appeared. Five writers had written a third of all the published articles in the data collection period, four of them had written for Nationen and Nettavisen. That is a clear factor that can explain parts of why there was so many more articles published in those newspapers. Although Nationen and Nettavisen had published circa the same number of articles, they differed in what kind of articles their most active contributors wrote. In Nettavisen they were very personal, while the writers in Nationen (and Klassekampen) were more detached. That finding explains what the content of the variance was, and it might be telling for how other contributions spread out in these newspapers. Furthermore, by analysing what the pragmatic and normative arguments in the debate was, I could explore what these arguments consisted of. Lastly the analysis revealed what aspects discussants were most concerned with, which revealed what drove the debate in addition to electricity prices. The analysis found that the debate on electricity interconnectors is characterised by a number of factors. The factor that set off the debate was the concurrent "electricity crises". The debate is characterised by rational argumentation that are often tied to the cost of electricity. There is also the presence of political parties in the debate, where all major political parties in Norway have made their stance known.

The findings of this thesis contribute to the research on the Norwegian relationship with the EU. In the debate, the political parties took the same stance on electricity interconnectors as they have taken on the overarching cooperation with the EU, which shows that some parallels can be drawn between the characteristics of the debate on electricity interconnectors and the Norwegian relationship with the EU. Firstly, it is to be expected that many Norwegians regard the pros and cons of cooperating with the EU as a pragmatic issue. Secondly, the reliance on fairness in normative arguments communicates a divide between those who feel solidarity with the EU and those who do not. For example, the normative arguments for electricity interconnectors were centred around a shared responsibility for climate change, while the arguments against them focused on fairness for Norwegians versus what other MS received. Fairness and lack of solidarity was also evident in the recurring arguments. Feelings of unfairness tied to congestion revenues highlighted that. This lack of community does not encompass all EU MS though. The willingness to exchange electricity in the Nordic market is justified with pragmatic arguments, yet it was clear in the debate that the Swedish pause on electricity exchange was unfair despite rational considerations of the Swedes. The disconnection between not wanting electricity exchange with EU MS for pragmatic reasons, while finding it unfair that Sweden actually stopped exchange also for pragmatic reasons points to a deeper sense of community with Sweden than other MS that Norway is interconnected to. This thesis found an overwhelming majority of pragmatic arguments in the debate, while the normative arguments often referred to what was fair to Norwegians versus what other Europeans got. This emphasises the attitudes of Norwegian discussants that solidarity is not a good enough argument, Norwegians must gain something from a relationship with the EU, otherwise it is not worth it.

Thirdly, sovereignty continues to be a central issue for Eurosceptics. Some discussants pointed the finger at ACER or the EEA agreement, both blaming them directly for the price of electricity and for taking away Norway's sovereignty on energy policy. This got refuted by several politicians and a judgment in Norway's supreme court, yet it kept being brought up. There is no doubt that this is an argument that will live on in the Norwegian debate on the EU for the foreseeable future. These findings do not present anything new in terms of Norwegian views of the EU. Yet it confirms that past characteristics are still alive, which is still valuable information. Although a long time has passed since Norway had referendums and honestly debated our relationship with the EU, many will still evaluate their opinion in the same way. Adding to that, a new assessment of the cross-cutting cleavages in Norwegian politics, presented by Rokkan (1967), would be interesting. His cross-cutting cleavages has been used to explore the stance on EU membership in Norway in the past therefore a new assessment of crosscutting cleavages after decades of close cooperation with the EU could give an insight into whether agreements such as the EEA agreement or Schengen agreement have had an impact on Norwegians relationship to the EU (Jenssen et al., 1996).

Moreover, the analysis showed that the debate on electricity interconnectors must be a point of contention to the current government. It would likely have been a point of contention for any government due to the parties' stances. Both AP and Høyre are somewhat positive to electricity interconnectors, due to their size, one of them will likely be in government at all times in order to have a majority government. However, as they represent opposing wings in Norwegian politics, they will not form a government together and relies on supporting parties from the centre or left/right-wing. The largest centre party, SP, opposes electricity interconnectors. The second-largest party on the right-

wing, FRP, opposes electricity interconnectors. Both remaining left-wing parties, SV and Rødt, opposes electricity interconnectors. Venstre and KFR are centre-right parties, and MDG does not subscribe to the left-right axis, but they are all so small that their stance has little impact.

Although this thesis did not set out to explore the effects of the debate, the content analysis has revealed that it likely did have an effect on political actors. The content analysis showed that several political parties made adjustments throughout the period of data collection. Firstly, KFR was silent on electricity interconnectors all the way until the end of the data collection period when the decision on hybrid interconnectors increased the number of articles debating them. When, after several months of silence, they finally took a stance, it was to agree with the majority of the articles that electricity interconnectors was too costly for Norwegian consumers. Secondly, and FRP politician confirmed that FRP had wanted the electricity interconnectors because they would increase the cost of electricity and make investments in new electricity production more profitable. Then, after the cost of electricity went up and the debate on electricity interconnectors had begun, they argued for measures that could control or limit the electricity export. Thirdly, AP was positive to electricity interconnectors throughout the data collection period. Their stance included hybrid interconnectors, which they also wanted to include in the ocean wind venture. Yet after hybrid interconnectors had been debated thoroughly in the newspapers, they agreed to leave hybrid interconnectors out of the current plans. These examples show the significance that public opinion can have, and why it is important to study it. This thesis is a contribution to the literature on public opinion in Norway, in the field of electricity interconnector studies and a demonstration of why it is an interesting factor to consider within European Studies. Yet, it also reveals an interesting opportunity for further research. How much are the political decisions Norwegian parties take on EU matters influenced by public opinion?

Norway has a great potential for renewable energy. Apart from the resources that are already being exploited, the potential for both land-based, and ocean wind is enormous. In addition to that, there is future potential to harvest energy from Norway's long coast. This has been pointed out time and again by scholars as well as politicians. The Norwegian debate on electricity interconnectors has shown that there are many opinions on how Norway should manage these resources and how they are best spent. Opinions range from domestic concerns, where an argument is that the resources should ensure a competitive advantage for the Norwegian industry by providing cheap and green energy. To international or global concerns where some believe Norway has a responsibility to aid neighbouring European states towards the green transition. Then there is also the responsibility to fulfil the agreements Norway has made on electricity with old as well as new energy partners. Still, before Norway can honour those agreements which they were able to make due to the vast amount of green energy, Norway must ensure the basic needs for daily electricity use are met.

As the debate on electricity interconnectors drags on, the calls for a new debate on Norway's relation to the EU have increased (Jagland, 2022; Sørum-Johansen, 2022; Werner, 2022). As late as 2019 there was little interest in the Norwegian public to debate the relationship with the EU, however, with the debate on electricity interconnectors, the salience of what Norwegians refer to as "the question of the EU" has increased (Rye, 2019, p. 182). So much so that some are feeling the need to speak out against new discussions (Vedum, 2022). If this evolves into a debate discussing what relationship

Norway should have with the EU, then there is much research potential. It could be used to explore the cross-cutting cleavages, to investigate if it is a population wide interest or if the debate is driven by specific groups and so on.

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