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Autonomous journalists and anonymous politicians?

Norwegian media coverage of the NSA surveillance and the «Snowden Affair»

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ABSTRACT

The NSA/Snowden revelations represent a case for studying the degree of journalistic autonomy versus the political field, in a situation where national and international security is at stake. In an era of rapid digital transition the revelations constitute a unique moment for studying field relations. This article examines the coverage of the NSA/Snowden revelations of massive transnational surveillance in six national Norwegian newspapers, with a main emphasis on opinionated articles. By way of content analysis we find that a clear majority of the editorials demonstrate a supportive attitude to Edward Snowden and treat him as a whistleblower, while treating the publishing journalists in The Guardian as situated within a proud tradition of investigative journalism, albeit with some diversity of opinion. In external opinionated contributions, a majority of the items reveal a critical attitude towards this surveillance and a supportive attitude towards Snowden. With a few exceptions, politicians do not take part in these exchanges, and are challenged for their low degree of engagement by several editorials. The article demonstrates a strong field autonomy vis-à-vis a political field where only a few parliamentarians came out in support of Snowden.

Keywords:

journalism, field autonomy, surveillance, NSA, snowden

The leaker is now an indispensable but criminalized link, mediating a vexed relationship between the public and the cleared. (Nick Cullather 2015)

I would not say that he is a traitor, but he is not a whistleblower. (Prime Minister Erna Solberg, in the Norwegian Parliament)



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In June 2013, *The Guardian* started publishing data proving that the NSA, the US surveillance body, together with major electronic enterprises, was responsible for monitoring communication data for hundreds of millions of citizens across the world, in an unprecedented abuse of power. This was made possible by whistleblower Edward Snowden, a former NSA employee who saw it as his duty to reveal what he considered unlawful mass surveillance. This widespread, systemic overreach became a global news story and what followed was a major debate on national security and information privacy (Greenwald 2014, Harding 2014, Lyon 2015). Furthermore a new web journal, *The Intercept*, emerged, led by Glenn Greenwald, Laura Poitras and Jeremy Scahill.¹

The Snowden revelations, spearheaded by Greenwald and Poitras, demonstrated that the somewhat misguided metaphorical argument, «the needle in the haystack» (and the need to have the whole haystack surveilled to find the needle), had been used to justify mass surveillance of hundreds of millions of citizens with non-suspect statuses. The NSA did this with the help of a range of institutions, such as Facebook, Google, and other sites that have become a prominent part of the everyday lives of hundreds of millions of individuals.

An early impression from the Norwegian news media was one of criticism of the surveillance revealed. Edward Snowden seemed to be regarded by many as a courageous whistleblower. To investigate whether this initial impression held true, we concentrated on the following research questions:

- To what extent did leading Norwegian newspapers lend editorial support to Snowden's revelation of the NSA surveillance?
- Did the newspapers deviate in their positions due to political-ideological leanings, in spite of the press no longer adhering to political parties (Eide 2011)?
- What was the level of public engagement in newspaper debates on NSA/Snowden, and what positions emerged?

We consider *editorials* as particularly useful for analyzing journalistic autonomy vis-à-vis political authorities, since they, to a large extent, represent the views of the respective news institutions. Individuals belonging to the editorial groups of news institutions are generally considered to harbor high cultural capital as experienced practitioners of the profession (Neveu 2007). The article looks at the coverage in two parts: first, an examination of the total number of editorials identified in the sample, and second a similar examination of the external opinionated material.

1. «*The Intercept*, launched in 2014 by Glenn Greenwald, Laura Poitras and Jeremy Scahill, is dedicated to producing fearless, adversarial journalism. We believe journalism should bring transparency and accountability to powerful governmental and corporate institutions, and our journalists have the editorial freedom and legal support to pursue this mission.» From the website: <https://theintercept.com/staff/#about-flm> Accessed 12.12.2015

The editorial as a genre is «a nameless force» (Nordenson 2008: 43) representing «more [than news] evaluative beliefs linked to norms and values» (van Dijk 1995). As for their impact, Nordenson suggests that politicians and other leaders «follow the opinion of the most respected newspapers» (ibid. 19). Lars Nord, in his study of the genre, concludes that editorial writers consider it of utmost importance to adhere to the newspaper's general profile (Nord 2001). In spite of media fragmentation in recent years, this may still be an argument for investigating newspaper editorials in relation to high profile controversies.

By also looking at external opinion pieces, it is possible to analyze the level of public engagement in the debate. By analyzing these genres (op-eds, «chronicles» and letters to the editor) and differentiating between politicians and other contributors, we can say something about the particularities of the political response. Also, from a hermeneutical perspective, the voices of editorials, politicians, lawyers, social science professors, researchers, IT experts and authors inform and supply each other, and expand people's knowledge and perspective on the matter, developing the public discourse.

Some politicians respond to editorials, as well as to other opinion pieces. Thus, the press – and independent intellectuals – demonstrate a certain power to set the agenda. Studying how this happens gives an impression of the dynamic between the actors in the field, and to a certain extent the level of autonomy of the journalistic field versus the political field.

NEGATIVE GLOBALIZATION AND FIELD AUTONOMY

Zygmunt Bauman, in his writings on the age of uncertainty (2007) envisages a culture of fear where all the politicians need is fear of a «phantom enemy» to maintain their power. «The spectre of social degradation against which the *social* state swore to insure its citizens is being replaced in the political formula of the 'personal safety state' by threats [...]» (Bauman 2007: 15). Bauman places the new fears in a framework of state withdrawal and «negative globalization», which he defines as «selective globalization of trade and capital, *surveillance* and information, violence and weapons, crime and terrorism, all unanimous in their disdain of the principle of territorial sovereignty and their lack of respect for any state boundary.» (ibid.: 7, e.a.). «Negative globalization» contributes to weaker state control, but the question of how the nation state is able to retain some responsibility for security and military issues, remains. These issues are strongly globalized, and results of surveillance are indeed shared across borders (Lyon 2015), such as in the case of the infamous «nine eyes», whereby Denmark and Norway are included in a network of cooperation led by the US, and are thus closer to global surveillance systems than many other European nations.²

2. For details, see Information 4 November 2013: «Denmark part of NSA inner circle»; <http://www.information.dk/477405>

The NSA revelations may also be viewed as a continuation of the schisms between «toeing the line of [warring] governments» and independent, critical, peace-oriented journalism (Freedman & Thussu 2012; Lynch 2014; Nohrstedt & Ottosen 2014).

We examine the degree of journalistic autonomy in the NSA/Snowden case in an era when several journalistic institutions are finding it hard to survive without the painful measures of downsizing due not only to the process of adapting to digital challenges, but also to varieties of globalization. Journalism is «caught between the globalization from above of new coordinating economic structures and military-based hegemony on the one hand, and the globalization from below of activists and the new inter-relationships of world public opinion on the other hand» (Reese 2008: 243). Generally, journalistic field autonomy is weak, as it is under pressure from both the political and the economic fields (Benson & Neveu 2005, Bourdieu 2005, Champagne 2005), although Bourdieu also refers to moments of journalism's strong impact on politicians and their performance (Bourdieu 1998). Political pressure tends to be higher in situations related to issues of national security. In the NSA case, one might thus expect mainstream journalism, in a country being a close ally of the U.S., not to deviate too much from the established global post 9/11 security discourse (Nohrstedt & Ottosen 2012).

Often, in discussions on surveillance, concepts such as *liberty* and *security* are counterpoised. But as Cullather (2015:19) writes: «If one truism captures the tenor of discussion surrounding the Snowden revelations, it is the recurring metaphor of balance between liberty and security». Furthermore he iterates that the «balance cliché», through repetition, has

[...] gained an aura of probity, even wisdom. It appears to be the neutral framing of the problem of official secrecy, but the perception that liberty and security sit in the teetering pans of a beam scale comes laden with assumptions that deserve examination (ibid. 20).

A «language of balance» was introduced in the US «to describe the proper relation between the small group of people with security clearance and the remainder of the American public» with «no legitimate recourse to the growing system of hidden knowledge their government was creating and using» (ibid.: 23). In other words, it may be suggested that the revealed mass surveillance is a way in which a small elite takes away the majority's right to privacy and influence over their own situation.

Increased impingement on human rights as well as the commercialization of journalism may also change our perception of what *objective* and *autonomous* journalism actually is. In October 2013, Glenn Greenwald engaged in a newspaper debate with *The New York Times'* Bill Keller on what the «right» journalism is, around concepts such as «impartial» versus «partisan» journalism.³ In his book he elaborates this further, examining his own role as a reporter:

The double standard applied to publishing classified information is even more pronounced when it comes to the unwritten requirement for «journalistic objectivity». It was the suppressed violation of this rule that made me an «activist» rather than a «journalist». As we are told endlessly, journalists do not express opinions, they simply report the facts. (Greenwald 2014: 230).

Greenwald clearly sees the legacy media and their closeness to power in the «War on Terror» as *non-objective*, since he claims that the «fear of terrorism – stoked by consistent exaggerations of the actual threat – has been exploited by US leaders to justify a wide array of extremist policies.» (Greenwald 2014: 5). He mentions wars of aggression, a «worldwide torture regime» and the detention of individuals of different backgrounds without charge (ibid.). Furthermore, he highlights the enormous potential of the Internet:

[...] the ability to liberate hundreds of millions of people by democratizing political discourse and levelling the playing field between the powerful and the powerless. [...] Converting the Internet into a system of surveillance thus guts it of its core potential. Worse, it turns the Internet into a tool of repression, threatening to produce the most extreme and oppressive weapon of state intrusion human history has ever seen. (Greenwald 2014: 6).

Greenwald thus implicitly criticizes the «balance» paradigm, while being aware that helping Snowden to reveal the NSA and GCHQ⁴ institutions and their massive surveillance would provoke reactions from many political leaders. What was harder to predict, was the way in which police would clamp down on his partner David Miranda when travelling through UK, and furthermore cause destruction of computers in the *Guardian* newsroom in a naïve hope that this would stop the whistleblower activities.⁵ Also hard to predict was whether media around the world would support Snowden and the journalism gathered from his and Chelsea Manning's whistleblowing – or blame Snowden for the betrayal of secrecy.

The NSA/Snowden case is about many fundamental themes, such as what legitimizes surveillance, about renegotiations on what it entails to be part of a democracy, about global and local Internet steering, connections between security, freedom of expression and privacy, and not least about digital citizenship, and media technology as a political question.⁶

3. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/28/opinion/a-conversation-in-lieu-of-a-column.html?_r=0 Accessed 12.06.2016.
4. NSA: National Surveillance Authority in the USA. GCHQ: UK Government Communications Headquarters, the centre for Her Majesty's Government's Signal Intelligence (SIGINT) activities.
5. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2014/jan/31/snowden-files-computer-destroyed-guardian-gchq-basement-video> Accessed 16.11.2015
6. This overview is inspired by a speech held by Alan Rusbridger in Oslo 25.04.2015, and by an interview made with him (by EE) on the same day.

Privacy is essential to the development of the self, and surveillance may threaten our ability to construct and control different social identities (Goold 2010). Much of the surveillance and data gathering was about collecting metadata, i.e. who is in contact with whom, when, and so on. According to Glenn Greenwald, metadata is not only as revealing as it is to uncover the content of emails and phone conversations; it can be even more revealing (Greenwald 2014).

Greenwald has a track record for investigative journalism on surveillance (Greenwald 2014, Greenwald 2011, 2006). According to Ettema & Glasser (1998: 185), investigative journalism means to «more fully report the facts», also involving «an effort to report the profoundly moral facts» and to «amplify the call for public indignation at the facts». In other words, investigative reporting may also be seen as a *moral* endeavour. Thus, whether the *moral legitimacy* of defending the Snowden revelations may be seen as part of an examination of the press texts, is an interesting question.

THE NORWEGIAN CASE: FOCUS AND METHODOLOGY

The ‘Snowden case’ had a special impact on the Norwegian debate, since Edward Snowden has been nominated to the Nobel Peace Prize (in 2014, 2015, and 2016), with support from prominent academics. In Norway, we have experienced different positions of critique against the authorities and their surveillance activities (Halvorsen 2014, Haagensen 2014). While left-wingers seem to adhere to «a dystopian perspective and regard all surveillance as a step in the direction of a totally surveilled society, right-wingers conjure up utopian scenarios of a society where terror and crime may be prevented almost without hindrance, aided by surveillance» (Haagensen 2014: 269).⁷ But do we find this variety of positions in the mainstream media editorials or in debates on the NSA/Snowden issue?

This article analyzes the coverage of the surveillance revelations from 7 June 2013 to 10 October 2014 (The Nobel Peace Prize winner is announced on 10 October each year) in six major Norwegian newspapers, with particular emphasis on opinion pieces. The main aim of the project⁸ is to map how ongoing public (media) discourses redefine questions about privacy and security, since the NSA/Snowden case marks the biggest disruption to international politics since the 9/11 terrorist attacks and represents a major crisis of legitimacy in foreign and security policies. The case also raises questions regarding trust of the neutrality of the Internet.

The Norwegian media selected are *Aftenposten* (liberal-conservative), *Dagbladet* (liberal-left), *Dagsavisen* (left-leaning), *Verdens Gang* (liberal-conser-

7. All translations from Norwegian to English are done by the authors.

8. It is part of a larger transnational project initiated in 2013, with participation from Finland, France, Germany Hong Kong, China, The Netherlands, Russia, UK, and the USA.

vative), business paper *Dagens Næringsliv* (conservative) and *Klassekampen* (leftist-socialist).⁹ All are, to an extent, newspapers with a national reach. We used the digital news archive *Atekst/Retriever* as a search base. The search string used was «Snowden*» OR «NSA*» OR «National Security Agency», and the search was limited to the print versions, but excluded separate weekend magazines.¹⁰ The criterion for selection was that the NSA surveillance was an important (although not always the main) theme in the article.

Opinion pieces were registered, both editorials and reader contributions («chronicles»¹¹ and letters to the editor) filed by politicians and other citizens. Here, all pieces written by Norwegian politicians, intellectuals and others were especially identified and analyzed. For the external opinion pieces, our criterion was that the author was not employed by the newspaper. For the task to be manageable, internally produced opinion pieces that were *not* editorials, were also excluded. Inclusion might have led to a wider spectrum of views, not least in *Verdens Gang* and *Dagens Næringsliv*, which published few editorials. But since a main aim with this part of the research was to map the positions of the newspapers, editorials seemed best fit for the purpose.

The editorials (71) as well as externally produced opinion pieces (50) were subject to qualitative content analysis, grouped after newspapers in which they appeared, and furthermore grouped after identifying some major positions vis-à-vis Snowden and the NSA revelations:

- **Supportive** of Snowden and his revelations and critical towards global surveillance
- **Critical:** supportive of the surveillance systems, while **critical** towards Snowden and his allies
- **Neutral/balanced** or ambiguous (being largely descriptive, or partly praising Snowden, but with some critical view points)
- **Less relevant:** This category included items where the NSA/Snowden was mentioned, but where the main theme was another issue. Our reasons for including this category were that it was interesting to note in which contexts the Snowden case would occur. In some of these instances, the Snowden case was clearly used to legitimize arguments, or as a trigger to focus on other issues

The supportive stance represented the majority of items, both of the editorials monitored and the externally generated material. In order to be included in this category, the author expressed support for Snowden and his case, including

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9. These characteristics of the newspapers in a «post-party-affiliation phase» are partly subjective.
 10. This was done for comparative reasons, since not all six have such separate magazines. This entails excluding an issue of *A-magasinet* (31.01.2014) with main focus on Edward Snowden.
 11. In Norwegian: «kronikk» is a long letter, placed prominently in the letters (leserinlegg) pages, but with another name, often written by persons of some scientific merit.

strong support for the right to privacy, or criticizing the US, the NSA or Norwegian politicians (for being cowardly, for a lack of principles, a lack of understanding of the right to privacy or for weakness when it comes to criticizing the US). If the critique was not directed at anyone particular, but nonetheless expressed a clear worry about privacy and a wish to regulate surveillance more, it was also included.

On the opposite side, pieces would be seen as supportive of the NSA surveillance if they voiced criticism of Snowden and expressed a degree of support of the US/NSA. Some items were labeled as neutral/balanced or ambiguous as they were more concerned with explaining the issue than taking sides, or they voiced arguments in both directions.

Some of the opinion pieces could not easily be assigned to one of the above categories. One example is Norwegian author and human rights activist Aage Borchgrevink («Should Snowden be granted asylum?» *Verdens Gang*, 04.07.2013), who writes that it is beneficial for all that Snowden revealed the secrets, but voices doubt concerning his status as being persecuted and expresses confidence in the American judiciary. His text deals with explaining factually what the case needs to be should Snowden be granted asylum in Norway. This text was therefore categorized as balanced/neutral. That was also the category for the external opinion piece «Minerva and Snowden» (*Klassekampen* 16.07.2013), by the editor of the liberal-conservative journal, *Minerva*, Nils August Andresen. His text is an answer to an editorial in the same newspaper, claiming that *Minerva* was afraid to annoy the US. Andresen argues that we should not make conclusions before we know all the facts, and that on one hand, it is a good thing that society knows about the surveillance revelations, but on the other it is obvious that American authorities will see the revelations as damaging to American interests. Yet another example is an editorial in *Verdens Gang* («The Whistleblower», 17.08.2013), which hails Snowden for being part of a «proud tradition of courageous men and women who, at great personal risk, have shouldered the burden of civil disobedience», while thinking that it is «deeply regrettable that he has chosen to flee from his responsibilities and has sought refuge in Russia».

Examples that may be coded as «less relevant» are, for instance, pieces that address the relationship between the US and Russia, or the ones that domesticate the Snowden affair by allowing it to trigger national issues, such as the controversial EU directive on data retention. The distinction between «relevant» and «less relevant» is not easily drawn, be it editorials or external opinion pieces. Cases where the pieces are clearly critical of mass surveillance but Snowden is barely mentioned, could have been coded as relevant and «supportive», but since the support is more implicit than explicit, we have chosen to code these items as «less relevant». The bulk of the «less relevant» external opinion pieces represent texts critical of surveillance, but with minimal focus on Snowden.

The examples above show that the different categories are not necessarily easily separable. However, the main result remains: support for Snowden's case is clearly more dominant than criticism of it.

THE AMOUNT OF COVERAGE

Figure 1 demonstrates that the peak in coverage appeared in the early days of the Snowden revelations, as breaking news (June-July 2013), and that a smaller peak occurred in October-November 2013 when it was revealed that the German chancellor Angela Merkel had been subject to NSA surveillance, and when some debate around the Nobel nomination occurred. Smaller peaks may be seen when books on the Snowden affair were published in 2014, and again in the summer of 2014 when the Nobel debate reappeared in Norwegian media.

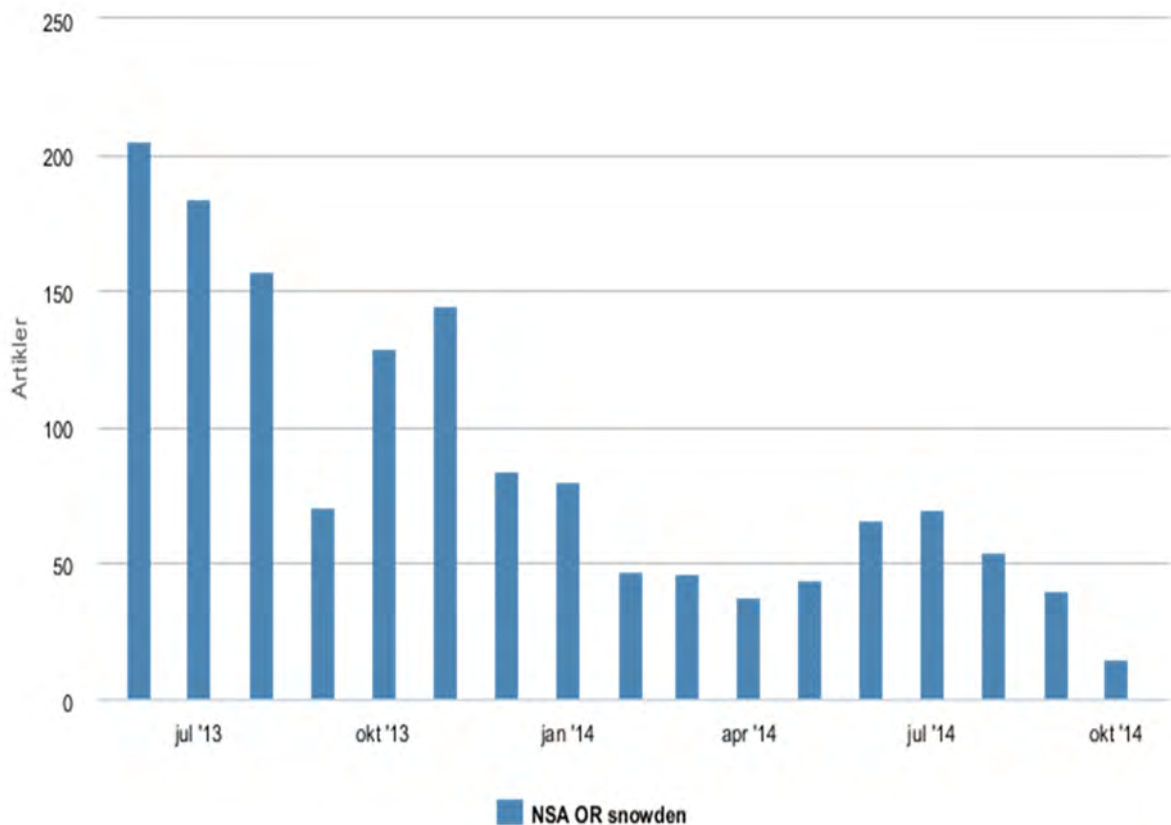


Figure 1: The coverage in the six newspapers, generated by search string «Snowden*» OR «NSA*» in Atekst/Retriever. N= 1475.

The amount of newspaper coverage varied widely between the selected newspapers. Tabloid *Verdens Gang* and the business paper *Dagens Næringsliv* had lesser coverage than the other newspapers, with 160 and 132 items respectively. At the other end of the scale, left-wing *Klassekampen* published the most,

with 417 items, while Norway's largest print/subscription newspaper *Aftenposten*, scored second with 334 items.

TABLE 1: ALL ARTICLES, AND NUMBER OF EDITORIALS FOUND IN THE MATERIAL. SEARCH STRING: «SNOWDEN*» OR «NSA*» OR «NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY».

	Aftenposten	Dagbladet	Dagsavisen	Klassekampen	Verdens Gang	Dagens Næringsliv	Total
All articles	334	263	296	419	162	133	1607
Editorials	13	19	7	19	4	3	65
Sub-editorials	0	2	0	0	3	1	6

THE EDITORIALS

As demonstrated from the overview of the six newspapers, there is no absolute correlation between the total coverage and the number of editorials printed in the period of investigation. Liberal tabloid *Dagbladet* had by far the largest number of editorials (19 main, 3 sub-editorials), even if their total coverage was not among the «top three», while *Klassekampen* followed suit (19 main). The number of editorials seem to a certain degree to correlate with the degree of critical engagement towards the NSA, since in these two newspapers there was ample support for Snowden's acts.

Most editorials that had the Snowden revelations as their main theme were critical towards the NSA surveillance, and thus also mostly supportive of Snowden. Among the *less relevant* category we found editorials, whose main topics were about something else, such as for example the relations between Russia and the US, where Snowden is mentioned as an element of triumph for Putin and a headache for Obama.

TABLE 2: ALL EDITORIALS, GROUPED ACCORDING TO MAJOR POSITION TOWARDS SNOWDEN/NSA

	Supportive	Ambiguous or neutral	Critical	Less relevant	Total
Aftenposten	7	2		4	13
Dagbladet	12	1		8	21
Dagens Næringsliv	1	1		2	4
Dagsavisen	6			1	7
Klassekampen	18			1	19
Verdens Gang	2	4		1	7
Total	46	8		17	71

An example of unconditional support is *Dagbladet's* «Give Snowden protection» (04.07.2013), stating that most people all over the world «react with disgust» towards the revelations. *Dagsavisen* published «Whistleblower Snowden» (26.06.2013) characterizing the NSA surveillance as a «major violation against American private lives». *Aftenposten*, in its first editorials, appears more descriptive and careful, such as when they twice iterate in «The Hunt for Whistleblower and Truth» (24.06.2013), that there is much they do not know, while adding that «such authorization must also be balanced against privacy and rights that are also part of the constitution in the US» It is understood that this balance may be problematic, since it is «[...] the duty of the authorities to defend citizens' lives and security». The editorial hails Snowden for raising a necessary debate on surveillance and raises doubts about the surveillance leading to more security; it could also lead to less. Here, we may perhaps see an example of Cullather's «imaginary balance» (Cullather 2015: 19). However *Aftenposten*, in its editorials, gradually becomes more critical, not least after events in August 2013 when Greenwald's partner David Miranda was arrested at Heathrow, and *The Guardian's* staff were ordered by British surveillance authorities to destroy their laptops, and again after it was revealed in October that German chancellor Angela Merkel was surveilled («A Crisis of Confidence the US cannot afford» 29.10.2013). A later editorial supports the 2014 Pulitzer prizes being awarded to *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post* for their publication of the NSA revelations. The newspaper adds: «Sometimes the authorities' abuses are so massive that we need disloyal public servants in addition to critical journalists» («The Snowden Case Demonstrated the Need for Whistleblowers» 16.04.2014).

TRUST THE US – OR NOT?

Leftist *Klassekampen* in its first editorial («Surveillance», 14.06.2013) after the revelations, praises Snowden's «civil courage» while criticizing one of *Verdens Gang's* columnists for his critical stance on Snowden's choice of refuge (at that stage, Hong Kong). As mentioned above *Verdens Gang*, in its first editorial on the case («The Whistleblower», 17.08.2013) demonstrates an ambiguous attitude towards Snowden. The same ambiguity remains in an editorial from early 2014 («Snowden's Return», 09.01.2014), where trust in the US judicial system is a main theme: «We believe that the strength of the open American democracy will be some of the best defense a man like him can wish for.» In between the newspaper comes out with a more open critique towards the NSA after the Angela Merkel case broke («Distrust in the Alliance» 27.10.2013).

The ambiguity, including the «trust US democracy» argument is also iterated by another editorial in *Verdens Gang*, and the same argument may be identified in *Dagens Næringsliv*. In an editorial («Snowden's return», 09.01.2014), the newspaper refers to the history of the *Pentagon Papers*, but furthermore states that Snowden will be persecuted if he returns to the US. They also claim

that the US is one of the few countries in the world that is fit to tackle such a case of «‘dirty laundry’ in the full eye of the public and to learn from its mistakes», underlining their belief in the «open, American democracy» as «the best defense a man such as him can wish for». Elsewhere, this trust does not occur frequently in the editorial material.

Explicit counter-arguments to the belief in ‘fair treatment’ are for instance found in *Dagsavisen*, where one editorial refers to the treatment that whistleblower Bradley (now Chelsea) Manning has been subject to, since he was arrested, accused of spying: «The treatment of Manning hardly gives Snowden any incentives to return back to the US to ‘defend himself», as the American authorities encourage him to do» («Obama’s Hunt for Whistleblowers», 01.08.2013). *Klassekampen*, in an editorial, mentions a CNN lawyer calling Snowden a «criminal», since he had found refuge in authoritarian states such as China and Russia. In their polemic against this view, they cite Greenwald’s statement that the US is no longer a safe place for whistleblowers, and furthermore refer to the US government cancelling Snowden’s passport and calling him a criminal. *Dagsavisen*, while writing that the story seems like a spy novel, concludes that «US allies, such as Norway, also ought to treat Snowden as what he is: a whistleblower, not a spy» («The Whistleblower Snowden» 26 June 2013). *Aftenposten*, while not addressing the issue quite as directly, but rather the hypothetical situation wherein Snowden would be crossing Norwegian airspace, states that they «can understand that American authorities wish to protect their secret services and their methods. [...] But for Norwegian authorities, taking into account the American secret services’ controversial use of methods cannot be the most important in this case» («A Right that Norway Should not Employ», 11.07.2013). The article concludes that «Norway should never, not even tacitly, accept that a whistleblower risks persecution just because he has had the civil courage to reveal his own employers’ misuse of power».

The references to civil courage and the whistleblower term, used by five of the six newspapers, albeit with nuances, may be seen as a *moral* legitimization of Snowden’s revelations, and thus as a token of solidarity with the investigative journalists who helped Snowden reveal the story.

A NOBEL LAUREATE?

The few editorials in the business paper *Dagens Næringsliv* mainly address other issues, while attributing their being on the agenda to the Snowden revelations. One of them concludes that it is time to revise the vote on the Data Retention Directive due to the Snowden revelations: «Edward Snowden’s NSA leaks have demonstrated to the world that it is not at all unthinkable for a Western democracy to misuse access to personal information about both one’s own and other countries’ citizens» («Yes to Play-off», 12.11.2013).

Three of the newspapers investigated were clearly supportive of Snowden being worthy of the Nobel Peace Prize. That such statements are issued by centre left-leaning newspapers (*Dagbladet* and *Dagsavisen*) comes as no surprise. But liberal-conservative *Aftenposten* followed suit. «To award the Nobel Peace Prize to Edward Snowden would be vastly courageous, very controversial, but according to our view, also a right decision» («The Peace Award to Snowden» 28.06.2014). The argument was that Snowden has revealed «the flipside of the American surveillance medallion», and that the «threadbare balance between the legitimate needs of society to protect itself, and the rights of individuals, has shifted» and that he has rendered «invaluable services to his own country and to us all» (ibid.). *Dagbladet* echoes the statement in two editorial comments, due to Snowden's opening of «people's eyes to the defense against massive violations of our right to a protected privacy» («An Important Peace Prize», 25.06.2014; «Snowden's merit» 17.07.2014). *Dagsavisen* echoes *Aftenposten*, iterating that this is a «daring and controversial» suggestion, but also right («Give Snowden the Peace Prize», 01.07.2014). The most left-leaning newspaper, *Klassekampen*, does *not* recommend Snowden for the Nobel award. This is not due to lack of admiration and support, since in several news articles they refer to intellectuals and researchers who support this idea. However, the signed editorial opposes the suggestion with reference to Alfred Nobel's will («Snowden», 17.07.2013) and an interpretation of this document.¹² Among the parties in the Parliament, only representatives from the Socialist Left party recommended Snowden for the Peace Prize.

CHALLENGING POLITICIANS

One might presume that politicians would be vocal on the NSA revelations, not least after Greenwald and *The Guardian* revealed that Germany's Angela Merkel had been subject to NSA surveillance, but this does not seem to be the case in Norway. The revelations also included Norway's position as part of the «nine eyes», i.e. states particularly closely involved in the US global surveillance system. While this issue is largely left untouched, *Aftenposten* blames Minister of Defense Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen for her «stubborn silence» after she had repeatedly refused to answer pertinent questions in an interview with the newspaper (17.08.2013).

Liberal tabloid *Dagbladet* explicitly criticizes the politicians for their non-engagement. One editorial starts: «A small barking, but otherwise wagging the tail.» («USA's poodle, as usual» 28.10.2013). The Norwegian «poodle» rhetoric is strengthened by a statement towards the end of the text: «Norway is, and most likely will continue to be, the nicest boy in the NATO class and the most obedient student vis-à-vis our big brother in Washington. It is regrettable, and

12. Alfred Nobel's will states that the award should be given to those who «shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses.» https://www.nobelprize.org/alfred_nobel/will/will-full.html Accessed 12.06.2016.

not least disturbing» (ibid.)). These accusations of «tail-wagging» have a long history in Norwegian public debate, where well-known author and academic, Georg Johannesen, became famous for claiming that Norway was the 51st state in the US federation.¹³ The participation in the «nine eyes» group is mentioned, though, only in two editorials, and hardly at all elsewhere in the coverage of the affair.¹⁴ One of them is in *Dagbladet* («The Norwegian Responsibility», 05.11.2013), stating that a 60-year old co-operation is still «close and confident». On the same day, *Klassekampen* mentions the «nine eyes», asking what «our contribution to NSA's vast database has been and is» («USA's Eyes», 05.11.2013).

Another editorial in *Dagbladet* also took the politicians to task: «Most silent of all are Norwegian politicians. The Prime Minister, the minister of foreign affairs, the minister of justice, who on other occasions do not hesitate to ask for time in front of cameras and microphones, remain mute» («Give Snowden Protection», *Dagbladet* 04.07.2013), after which it recommends Snowden for political asylum in Norway. *Klassekampen* states that Snowden's revelations «have created remarkably little discussion in Norway», and asks for a large-scale official scrutiny of the way in which citizens are surveilled, and how to protect their privacy, freedom of expression and democratic rights. («Intelligence», 14.08.2013).

In news articles included in the total sample, we see that leading politicians (especially those supportive of Snowden) are at times quite vocal, but as is shown below, this is less the case when it comes to actively generating opinion pieces.

EXTERNAL CONTRIBUTIONS: MUTE POLITICIANS?

But how mute were the politicians – really? Based on our material, both politicians from the outgoing Labour-dominated coalition government, and from the conservative coalition government that came to power after the elections in September 2013, seemed to prefer silence. The letters to the editor (including op-eds and «chronicles») material in the six newspapers included 50 items, but only six of these were written by politicians belonging to parties represented in the parliament. In addition, one was filed by the «Red» party, and one by the «Pirate party». It is noteworthy that the Labour party representatives (in power during the period when the surveillance system was revealed) did not publish a single article in this sample, except for the secretary general of the European Council, Torbjørn Jagland (a former PM and party leader).¹⁵

13. See this article: <http://morgenbladet.no/boker/2006/01/ein-wergeland-utan-land>

14. A search through the whole material (including both news and opinion articles) revealed only five items mentioning this fact.

15. Three other parties (FrP (right wing) and two of the «centrist» parties, SP and KrF) did not publish any chronicles in the six newspapers in the investigated period.

TABLE 3: EXTERNAL CONTRIBUTIONS, OPINIONATED ITEMS.

	Politicians	Others	Total
Supportive of Snowden	Piratpartiet (1), V (2), SV (1) Total: 4	23	27
Neutral/balanced		6	6
Critical of Snowden	Høyre (1)	2	3
Less relevant	Høyre (1) SV (1) Rødt (1)	11	14
Total	8	42	50

Some politicians contributed, though. The deputy leader of the «Pirate Party»¹⁶ as expected, is critical towards the surveillance, the party being mostly concerned with libertarian views on Internet practices («Yes, what the US does deserves criticism», *Aftenposten* 03.07.2013).

Among the parliamentarians, a discussion occurs in November 2013 between Snorre Valen from the Socialist Left party and Anders Werp from right-wing Høyre. Valen criticizes the government for being too lenient to the US – using the double standard argument – by claiming that the prime minister’s reaction would have been much harsher «If a Chinese or Russian whistleblower had revealed the same comprehensive surveillance of European citizens and political leaders» («What the prime minister doesn’t want to do», *Dagbladet* 07.11.2013). Werp from Høyre, on the other hand, expresses trust in the US as a democratic state with an independent judiciary: «Is Snowden a traitor? We don’t know. Investigation and an enforceable judgment will give the answer to this question» («Warning is the Right Way», *Dagbladet* 18.11.2013). He also argues that publicizing large amounts of sensitive and classified information, without warning, for example, members of Congress, is not justifiable.

Two contributions from the Liberal party (Venstre) advocate for better privacy protection and securing Norwegian citizens’ communication. One of the articles, written by the party leader, is a response to a signed editorial comment in *Verdens Gang*, thus an example of journalism triggering some political response («Intelligence, Surveillance and Privacy», *Verdens Gang* 01.12.2013).

Although not specifically directed at Snowden, two leaders from the Socialist Left party in a letter propose a new «Lund commission»¹⁷, which would guarantee against «new surveillance scandals in the future», while also mentioning the Data Retention Directive («Nothing to hide – nothing to fear?», *Verdens Gang* 30.08.2013). This gains a response from a parliamentarian from the Conservative party (Høyre), who writes «we need secret services to counter

16. Not represented in Parliament

17. The Lund commission (1995–1996) was commissioned by the Parliament to investigate claims of illegal surveillance of Norwegian citizens.

the organized and tacit undermining of national security interests» («SV Slept When the Stakes Were High» *Dagbladet* 04.09.2013). Here the question is posed: How much of 'our' privacy are we willing to concede to achieve security?

THE DOMINANT DISCOURSE

The bulk of the 50 items, though, were authored by intellectuals and experts, or bureaucrats and officials. Seen from a hermeneutical perspective, where knowledge is generated in a continuous flow stimulating a more profound understanding, we may suggest that readers' understanding of the Snowden case gradually developed in the period covered by our research. Several pieces are written by independent academics or writers, most of which are critical of the NSA. For example, Terje Einarsen, professor of jurisprudence at the University of Bergen, wrote that «There is a need for international regulation of limitless military intelligence, particularly because it reaches too deeply into all parts of civil society, threatening the founding principles of democracy, the expression of freedom and the rule of law» («Snowden Deserves the Nobel Peace Prize», *Verdens Gang* 01.07.2014).¹⁸ Morten Strøksnes, writer and freelance journalist, wrote: «Before Snowden, several NSA employees (Thomas Drake, Edward Loomis, William Binney and Kirk Wiebe), tried to warn about activities they considered illegal and/or immoral. They were all rejected by their senior managers» («Snowden and the ice queen», *Verdens Gang* 15.07.2014).

Of the 50 items, 27 express support for Snowden, often accompanied by general concern about digital surveillance. Only three items express anger or outright criticism of Snowden, while six may be characterized as balanced/neutral, and fourteen are mainly about other issues. The ones that remained more critical towards Snowden than towards the NSA may to a degree toe the line of former NSA director Michael Hayden, who defends his former institution: «Let's be clear. Espionage is an accepted international practice and the US constitution's Fourth Amendment protection against unreasonable search is *not* an international treaty» (Hayden 2014). A further example of this point of view is published by author Edward Lucas in a letter to *Verdens Gang* («The Traitor Snowden», 30.01.2014), stating that in the worst case, Snowden's acts amount to «sabotage and treason».

DISCUSSION

The surveillance panopticon is no longer a physical one, but a fluid, ever-changing system hardly controllable by any national political authority. The world seems, according to Deleuze (1992: 5) to be moving from Foucault's society

18. He was among the professors suggesting a Nobel Peace Award to Edward Snowden.

of discipline (much in institutions) towards societies of control. The latter are more fluid, «one is never finished with anything – the corporation, the educational system, the armed services being metastable states coexisting in one and the same modulation, like a universal system of deformation». In societies of control, «what is important is no longer either a signature or a number, but a code: the code is a *password*, while on the other hand the disciplinary societies are regulated by *watchwords*» (ibid.). In cyberspace it is not easy to determine the nationality of the source of digital information, «an ambiguity the NSA has exploited aggressively», writes David Fidler (2015: 37), thus pinpointing the fluidity of the system. He maintains that «under current US law, the citizens and leaders of our closest allies get the same level of privacy protection as terrorist suspects and the nation's most bitter foes» (ibid.). This part of the Snowden revelations, including the surveillance of Angela Merkel, may have been an important factor in unifying many Norwegian media and public intellectuals in a critique against the NSA.

One of the fundamental questions addressed in the opinion pieces analyzed is the conflictual relation between security and protection of privacy. Professor in media and communication, Liv Hausken, writes that the question of security «[often] has to do with how society can protect itself against individuals or groups, while the question of legal security is rather a question of how individuals and groups may protect themselves against society and the powers that be» (2014: 28). Director of the Norwegian Data Protection Authority (Datatilsynet), Bjørn Erik Thon, while referring to the European Human Rights convention, further emphasizes the foundation of privacy as based on «the idea of the individual's inviolability and demand for respect from fellow human beings, for their own integrity and privacy» (Thon 2014: 104). Furthermore, he iterates that it may be at least as important to protect citizens against harassment from the authorities as to protect them against terror (ibid.: 126). This seems to be in line with the majority of views emerging from our material, in spite of meagre political support for Snowden.

Other reasons for the relatively sharp division between the press and opinion makers and the political field may be specifically Norwegian, such as important debates on individuals' right to privacy. The Lund Commission (1995–1996), revealed much surveillance against left-wing politicians and activists in Norway, created high profile debates on surveillance and may have prompted critical views towards the powers that be and their ability to protect citizens from unlawful surveillance.¹⁹ One editorial suggests a new Lund Commission («Friends», *Klassekampen* 29.10.2013), while another rejects this, but proposes other alternatives («Time is Ripe for a New Personal Protection Commission», *Aftenposten* 20.11.2013).²⁰ The broad-based debates around the EU Data Retention Directive may also have played a role in explaining journalistic

19. <https://www.stortinget.no/no/Saker-og-publikasjoner/Publikasjoner/Dokumentserien/1995-1996/Dok15-199596/> Accessed 12.06.2016

20. A suggestion for such a new commission was made by the Socialist Left party.

autonomy in this case, proven by several references to the directive in our material. An element of transnational solidarity may also have been at play, after the attacks on Greenwald's partner David Miranda and indeed at the offices of *The Guardian* itself. Finally, the media discourses following the 22 July terror in Norway were largely on openness and freedom of expression confronted with terror, not more surveillance, to confront terror (Eide et al 2013, Eide 2013).

The question, raised directly or indirectly by many debate participants and editors, is: Why should the US be allowed to monitor their own citizens, and all others, in this way,? Not only the traditional left-leaning institutions or individuals raise this criticism. It is more broad-based, while suffering from a relative lack of participation from lead politicians.

Susan Landau, professor of «Cybersecurity Policy», thinks that the NSA's massive surveillance has damaged the confidence of the official institutions that are meant to protect their citizens. According to Landau, intelligence services must be allowed to remain secret, but they do not need to be so impenetrable: «through Snowden's efforts, a cloak has been lifted. The US can now have the discussion about surveillance it should have had when these laws were being passed» (2013: 61). This may be read as an urging to open up the public debate not only on surveillance, but also on the roles played by prominent Internet actors.

CONCLUSION: HOW AUTONOMOUS?

From this study, we register a rather solid support for Snowden in the Norwegian press examined (RQ1). In these newspapers there is a somewhat broad consensus on Snowden having rendered global society a service, and seeing Snowden as a whistleblower belonging to a proud investigative journalistic tradition. Several newspapers are also positive to his Nobel nomination and point criticisms at passive politicians who avoid commenting on the revelations.

The newspapers differ somewhat according to their political leanings (RQ2). The three newspapers defined as left-leaning (*Klassekampen*, *Dagbladet* and *Dagsavisen*) are more clearly supportive from the outset, but liberal-conservative *Aftenposten* is also largely supportive, while business paper *Dagens Næringsliv* and conservative tabloid *Verdens Gang* show both less interest in the issue and are more ambiguous, but do by no means wholeheartedly support the NSA. Hence, the Norwegian newspapers differ from the British press, where *The Guardian* remained rather isolated.²¹ In the other large left-leaning newspaper in the UK, *The Independent*, lead commentator Chris Blackhurst wrote that «Edward Snowden's secrets may be dangerous. I would not have

21. This information is based on a short interview one of the authors (EE) did with Rusbridger during his visit to Norway 25.04.2015.

published them. If MI5 warns that this is not in the public interest who am I to disbelieve them?» (13.10.2013), thus expressing a level of trust barely identifiable to the same extent in our material.

Even if the politicians are present in some of the news coverage they, to a very small extent, take part in the debate with opinionated articles on the NSA/Snowden issue (RQ3) in the newspapers investigated. This also leads to complaints of political disengagement in some editorials. In the public debate material monitored, the sentiments expressed are largely pro-Snowden.

The field of journalism – exemplified by editorials in the six newspapers – thus, on this occasion, seemed to be more autonomous vs. the political field than in their coverage of other international conflicts, not least war (see Eide & Ottosen 2013, Ottosen & Nohrstedt 2014). Oppositional arguments emerged mainly from conservative politicians and commentators' expression of trust in US democracy, and stating that Snowden, having done something illegal, should be tried by the US judiciary, which would guarantee him fair process.

In dominant discourses on an issue, some individuals and discourses are bound to be backgrounded (Fairclough 1995). Chelsea (Bradley) Manning, who has been sentenced for his part in earlier revelations, remains almost unmentioned. So does the Norwegian surveillance as part of the US-lead «nine eyes» surveillance alliance. All in all, in our large sample, we find only five articles mentioning this international partnership in surveillance.

The majority of views represented in the six newspapers may, to an extent, have contributed to a critical discourse against the global surveillance system lead by the NSA among the newspaper reading public. On the other hand, the politicians, be it from the Labour-led coalition government or from the new conservative-led coalition government (taking office October 2013) remained low profile or silent, and thus a debate through which people in powerful positions were challenged was largely missing. With this low degree of political response, field autonomy may be easier to exercise. According to Bourdieu, journalism plays an important role both vis-à-vis the social science and the political field, since actors within these fields require notoriety «that only media can give» (2005: 41). But when politicians do not seek publicity, it is perhaps a different game.

Further questions need to be explored. Could an alternative explanation for the rather broad-based press consensus on the Snowden issue be that the Snowden coverage, to a degree, seems *de-domesticated* and thus, the press could more easily take a critical stance (as long as «it is not about us»). The marginalization of the Norwegian «nine eyes» supports this suggestion. However, more in-depth research, including interviews with press stakeholders, is required to substantiate this argument. Another question is to what extent social media «grooms» citizens into attitudes of acceptance when it comes to mass surveillance, since the borders between public and private are reduced. Whether a

«laissez-faire» attitude grounded in the «I have nothing to hide» argument will prevail, or whether the awareness of surveillance will lead to more conscious protection of digital communication and resources, is another open question for the future.

What remains certain is that the Norwegian mainstream press largely challenged political power, and communicated positions supportive of Snowden and the NSA leaks, thus confirming a moment of journalistic autonomy in a highly controversial global political controversy.

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