

THE FRAMING OF POLITICS A Content Analysis of Three Croatian Newspapers

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Abstract / This study explores 11 years of content in three well-circulating Croatian newspapers, *Vjesnik*, *Slobodna Dalmacija* and *Feral Tribune*. Utilizing framing theory, the author examines how the three papers differed in their presentation of the Croatian government from 1990 through 2000. Using a sample of 1400 articles, the use of specific frames and the presentation of antagonists and protagonists in the articles' content are examined.

Keywords / content analysis / Croatia / government / media framing / newspapers

Introduction

While international journalism research has evolved a great deal over the last several decades, certain areas of the world remain sparsely explored. One such area is Central Eastern Europe; and one country in particular that has not received much attention when it comes to journalism is Yugoslavia.

In 1990, the six republics that constituted 'Yugoslavia', or 'the Land of the South Slavs', began to crumble. The seams that had held variations of the republics together for more than 80 years tore apart and five new countries (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, and Macedonia) were formed. The history of Yugoslavia is one of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, suppressed nationalism and rigid government control. Yugoslavia was a land of tension, which had been held together by Josip Broz Tito's 40-year rule until his death in 1980. The political ramifications that resulted were tainted by hues of patriotism, nationalism, economic turmoil and government censorship of media. The media played a central role in much of the relations between the government and the actions of the new countries that were born out of the bloodshed in Yugoslavia. The media primarily became a tool of propaganda for the government and were controlled and muffled by censorship and self-censorship that resulted from the pressure of the new regimes.

For most of the last decade of the 20th century, the region once known as Yugoslavia was sporadically plagued by war and change. Consequently, the 11-year period between 1990 and 2000 proved an extremely vital and significant period in the country's history. It is difficult to generalize about the media in 'former Yugoslavia' since each of the republics had its own specific

journalistic philosophies, and more important, different forms of government control over the media. Instead of attempting to conduct a broad study about the 'former Yugoslav' press, this study focuses on a specific country/republic within 'former Yugoslavia'. That country is Croatia.

It is essential to comprehend that in Croatia the government and the media have had a volatile relationship. The media have either supported the government's propaganda, or, in a few cases, risen in protest against the government and the administration. This intriguing relationship was reflected on newspaper pages, television screens and radio broadcasts. The results were left for citizens to discern: were the media reporting fairly; merely blindly supporting the government; or plainly opposing in earnest dissent and protest? The purpose of this study is not to discover the answer to this question, for it can presumably only be answered subjectively. The purpose is to discover *what* the media were reporting, with regard to the government, and *how* they were reporting it.

Media Framing

The dominant theory applied within this study is framing theory, which has evolved from various definitions and essentially explains how the media frame stories. An exploration into some of the more decisive definitions of media framing theory is appropriate at this point.

Tuchman (1978: 193) offered a simple yet straightforward definition of a frame. 'The news frame organizes every day reality and the news frame is part and parcel of everyday reality . . . [it] is an essential feature of news.' Gitlin (1980) elaborated on this idea of a frame being an element of organization. He stated that frames are 'persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse' (Gitlin, 1980: 7). Furthermore, Gitlin (1980) used the word 'package' to refer to framing – frames package information for audiences.

According to Gamson and Modigliani (1987: 143), a media frame is a 'central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events. . . . The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue'.

Iyengar (1991: 11) elaborates: 'the concept of framing refers to subtle alterations in the statement or presentation of . . . problems'. He believed that responsibility (Who is responsible for a problem?) and remedy (Who can solve the problem?) are at the core of media framing.

Entman (1991: 53), one of the leading scholars on framing, says framing makes a piece of information more 'noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences'. Chanem (1997: 10) divides frames into four major areas: '(1) The topic of a news item – what is included in the frame; (2) Presentation – size and placement; (3) Cognitive attributes – details of what is included in the frame; (4) Affective attributes (tone of the pictures).' Along with presentation, story components such as photographs, pull quotes, subheads and headlines add to the prominence of the story. Nelson et al. (1997: 567) state that 'framing

is the process by which a communication source, such as a news organization, defines and constructs a political issue or public controversy'. They further suggest that 'by framing social and political issues in specific ways, news organizations declare the underlying causes and likely consequences of a problem and establish criteria for evaluating potential remedies for the problem'. Reese (2001: 7) states that 'framing refers to the way events and issues are organized and made sense of, especially by media, media professionals and their audiences'. He defines frames as '*organizing principles* that are socially *shared* and *persistent* over time, that work *symbolically* to meaningfully *structure* the social world' (Reese, 2001: 11; emphasis in original).

These various definitions of framing provide subtle variations in the theory of framing. However, Entman (1993: 52) offers the following definition: 'Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation of the item described. Typically frames diagnose, evaluate, and prescribe.' However, for the purpose of this article, it is Tankard et al.'s (1991: 11) definition that best operationalizes framing: 'A frame is a central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration.'

The present study utilizes Tankard et al.'s (1991) and Entman's (1993) definition in which a frame is a 'central organizing idea' that selects and emphasizes specific aspects of news content, making it more salient. Fourteen issue-specific frames were utilized for the content analysis. More specifically, it might be argued that these were subframes within the more encompassing frames of 'economics', 'war' and 'politics'. Explanation for this reasoning is necessary and is discussed in the Methodology section.

An Abridged History of Yugoslavia and Croatia since 1990

A prerequisite for examining the relationship between the Croatian press and the government is a skeletal outline of Croatia's history and its association to Yugoslavia.

The war in 'former Yugoslavia', which lasted from 1991 through 1995, displaced at least 3.5 million people out of a pre-war population of 23 million (Judah, 1997). However, the prelude to the war began in the 1980s. The 1980s were a tense period in Yugoslavia's history. Ideas of separatism and nationalism were engulfing the republics and its demise clearly became inevitable. It was in 1989 that Slovenia started the domino effect with its parliament's proclamation in September of Slovenia's right to secede. In the same year, Slobodan Milosevic was elected Serbia's president by 90 percent of the 75 percent of Serbs who voted. The signs were clear that Yugoslavia could not survive. Inflation was at more than 1200 percent; Croatian and Slovene parties promised completely free elections in 1990; Communism seemed to be disintegrating.

In January 1990, after vicious verbal attacks between the Slovenes and the

Serbs, the Slovenes walked out of Congress and soon withdrew from the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY). In the November 1990 elections in Slovenia and Croatia, the victors in both republics were not the Communists, but nationalists. The same occurred in Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In Croatia, in May 1991, the newly elected Croatian Democratic Union, led by Franjo Tudjman, held a referendum in which more than 90 percent of the people in Croatia voted for their independence (Pavlicevic, 1997). The following month, Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence and in 1992 they were recognized as independent states. The war that followed, first in Slovenia, then in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo was plagued with nationalistic tendencies, ethnic cleansing, genocide, rapes and century-old eruptions of old wounds that had been patched by Tito's unyielding proposal of unity. It was within this environment that the media of Croatia were developing.

Methodology

The present content analysis examined three leading Croatian newspapers, *Vjesnik*, *Slobodna Dalmacija* and *Feral Tribune*. *Vjesnik* was one of the most influential dailies in Croatia prior to the breakup of Yugoslavia. However, once Yugoslavia began to crumble, *Vjesnik* became a mouthpiece for the Tudjman regime. For most of the 1990s, *Vjesnik* served as a public relations medium for the government, a weapon to fight the war against the Serbs and a tool to send out messages to the public that would raise the spirits and promote the president – Franjo Tudjman – and his administration. In recent years, the circulation of *Vjesnik* has been around 80,000, although during the 11-year sample, at one point, circulation was as low as 20,000.

In the early 1990s, *Slobodna Dalmacija* was considered to be an uncensored medium free of government control. However, after suppression, takeover and simple dismissal of journalists (or resignation by journalists) who chose not to 'conform' to the government's expectations, in 1993, *Slobodna Dalmacija* gave way to the pressure and followed in *Vjesnik's* footsteps as a governmental publicity machine. Although *Slobodna Dalmacija* was not as blatant as *Vjesnik* in its support of the government and the president, it did lose some of the respect it once held for unbiased and honest reporting. Recent circulation of the newspaper has amounted to an average of 100,000 copies.

The *Feral Tribune* has been one of the most outspoken and freest media outlets in Croatia. Through 1993, the publication appeared as a supplement in *Slobodna Dalmacija*. However, when *Slobodna Dalmacija* began bending to the winds of government control, some strong-minded staff privatized the weekly and made it a separate and free publication. Known for satirical pieces, which tend to criticize anyone and everyone, the weekly suffered great repression throughout the 1990s. More than 80 appeals were filed against the editors, reporters and paper. The editors and reporters were harassed at their homes. They received anonymous death threats. They were forced to pay special taxes that no other media had to pay. They found themselves in the middle of dozens of lawsuits. In short, the *Feral Tribune* was one of a few dissident voices willing to speak up against the government and take the harassment that came with

it. While in 1998 the weekly's circulation was around 50,000, this number has been steadily rising.

In order to penetrate the thus far underexplored Croatian media, this study, through a content analysis of articles, examines these three Croatian news outlets. The two dailies were chosen since they were arguably two of the leading and most influential newspapers in the country during this period. The weekly was chosen for its coverage of politics and its reputation as a leading weekly in the country. While *Slobodna Dalmacija* and *Feral Tribune* are published in Split (Croatia) and *Vjesnik* in Zagreb (Croatia), all three newspapers circulate throughout the country and are available in most areas.

Two sample periods were examined: the 11 years between 1990 and 2000 and four specific two-week time periods (see Table 1 for an overview). The following hypothesis was tested:

Hypothesis: The three newspapers will significantly differ in their reporting of the government with *Vjesnik* being the most favorable in its reporting of the Croatian government, the *Feral Tribune* being the most critical of the Croatian government in its reporting, and *Slobodna Dalmacija* being the most 'evenly balanced' in its reporting of the Croatian government.

The 11-year sample was created from a constructed week for each year (5 January, 17 March, 10 April, 23 June, 8 August, 9 September and 12 November). Essentially these seven days were utilized as a week's worth of newspaper articles for each year. However, in the case of the weekly, *Feral Tribune*, the week in which the sample dates appeared was used for the analysis. Articles appearing on the front page (in the case of *Vjesnik*) or, articles mentioned on the front page with a 'see line'¹ indicating that the story is featured on a page inside the section, were selected *if* they primarily dealt with the government, politics or war in 'former Yugoslavia'.

The second sample, which examined four specific events, was analyzed in order to examine the media in Croatia with more detail. This sample focused

TABLE 1

Sample Overview

11-Year Sample (Routine Reporting)	Events Sample (Event-Driven Reporting)
5 January 1990–2000	Croatian Independence 16–30 June 1991
17 March 1990–2000	Fall of Vukovar 11–25 November 1991
10 April 1990–2000	Operation Storm 1–15 August 1995
23 June 1990–2000	Mesic becomes president 11–25 February 1995
8 August 1990–2000	
9 September 1990–2000	
12 November 1990–2000	

on specific events that would better indicate how media were reporting when it came to central events in Croatia and consisted of four critical time periods in Croatia's history: the T1 sample lasted from 16 to 30 June 1991 (Croatia gained independence on 25 June 1991); the T2 sample lasted from 11 November to 25 November 1991 (on 18 November 1991, the Croatian city of Vukovar fell after suffering severe attacks and being surrounded for several weeks); T3 focused on articles from 1 to 15 August 1995 (between 5 and 8 August, Croatian forces retaliated with Operation Storm and swept through Serbian-occupied territory in Croatia to liberate the formerly Croatian regions); T4 examined articles that appeared from 11 February to 25 February 1995 (on 18 February 2000, Stipe Mesic became the new president of Croatia).

Two coders, fluent in Croatian, performed the content analysis. They were trained for one week, coding articles that were not in the original sample but were selected randomly using a constructed week (as was the case for the actual sample). The unit of analysis for this study was the newspaper article.

To assess reliability of the coding, 75 of the 782 articles in the sample (10 percent) were randomly selected and coded by two coders. The overall inter-coder reliability for these four principal categories was .972 (Holsti). The categories for frame, antagonist, protagonist and source were also examined separately for reliability. The results were as follows: 'frames', .979 (Holsti); 'antagonist', .965 (Holsti); 'protagonist', .952 (Holsti); 'source', .994 (Holsti).

Once coding was completed, the data were then statistically analyzed. Cross-tabulation was chosen as the primary method of analysis. It allowed us to most succinctly compare and contrast the newspapers and time periods/years. In addition to the chi-square, the adjusted standardized residual was used in some cases to show how the observed data differed from the expected. With the adjusted standardized residual, the residual for a cell – which is the observed minus the expected value – is divided by an estimate of its standard error. If the adjusted standardized residual is greater than +2 or smaller than -2, it indicates that there is a significant difference (+/- shows the direction) between the observed and expected values: the greater the number, the greater the difference.

As mentioned, 14 specific frames were utilized in the study rather than more encompassing or generic frames such as 'war', 'economics' or 'politics/government'. The reasoning for this was multifaceted. Foremost, this study examined the specific situation in Croatia, which, as the review of its history detailed, was, to say the least, rather complicated. A 'war' frame, for instance, would not have provided any specific detail. Namely, would a 'war' frame refer to the war between Serbs and Croats? Bosnians and Croats? The war taking place on Croatian soil? Bosnian soil? Or, in terms of government performance, were the more generic 'government performance' frame applied, the study would not have revealed whether the performance was referring to the Bosnian government, Croatian government, Slovenian government or Serbian government. One has to be aware of the fact that in many respects Croatia's mindset was still that of a republic *within* Yugoslavia, not an independent country. Thus reporting was not specific to Croatia but included many, if not all, of the other republics within former Yugoslavia. Had the frames been

more generic in nature, rather than specific, much of the detailed data would have been lost. One of the contributions this study offers is its detailed analysis of specific frames. The historical, political and economical situation in Croatia was in turmoil and cannot be compartmentalized into generic terms. Hence, the frames had to be specific and detailed given the situation and sample of the study, in order to provide a glimpse into the specific and precise situation.

Results

Constructed-Week Sample

As part of the content analysis for the 11-year period, 782 articles (321 articles in *Vjesnik*; 216 in *Slobodna Dalmacija*; and 245 in *Feral Tribune*) were content analyzed. The frame most frequently found throughout the articles was the 'Croatian government performance', mentioned in 33.6 percent of the articles. As Table 2 shows, significance was achieved in six of the total 14 frames indicating that the three newspapers were significantly different in their use of these frames.

The 'economic situation in Slovenia', the 'Bosnian war', 'Croatian government performance', 'Serbian government performance', 'international reaction' and 'other' frames were significantly different in use (see Table 2). The Croatian government performance frame occurred most in *Feral Tribune*'s articles. The *Feral Tribune* also presented articles on Serbian government performance more frequently than the other two newspapers. *Vjesnik*, on the other hand, was dominant in taking the focus away from local politics by presenting articles on international reactions more frequently than either of the other two newspapers.

The concepts of protagonist and antagonist were central in the coding and analysis process. Coders determined which of the key players (i.e. Croatian

TABLE 2
Significant Frames Used by the Three Newspapers (11-Year Sample)

Frame	<i>Vjesnik</i>	<i>Slobodna Dalmacija</i>	<i>Feral Tribune</i>	χ^2	p
Economic situation in Slovenia	6 1.9%	1 0.5%	0 0%	6.10	<.05
Bosnian war	14 4.4%	20 9.3%	5 2%	13.07	=.001
Croatian government performance	60 18.7%	44 20.4%	159 64.9%	156.42	<.001
Serbian government performance	8 2.5%	13 6%	21 8.6%	10.35	<.01
International reaction	72 22.4%	31 14.4%	34 13.9%	9.10	<.05
Other	70 21.8%	53 24.5%	13 5.3%	36.94	<.001

government, Croats, Serbs, Serbian government, etc.) were portrayed in a positive light – protagonists – and which were presented in a negative light – antagonists.

Significance was attained in several categories of antagonists, indicating that the three newspapers differed significantly in their presentation of these antagonists and results were most likely not due to sampling error (see Table 3).

For instance, Croats were identified as antagonists most frequently by *Feral Tribune*. Of the total 321 *Vjesnik* articles, the Croatian government was identified as antagonist in only 15 articles; *Slobodna Dalmacija* labeled the Croatian government antagonist in only 16 of its 216 articles; and *Feral Tribune* branded the government of Croatia as antagonist in 172 of its total 245 articles. That is why the Croatian government was portrayed as antagonist in 26 percent of the articles. 'Serbs', on the other hand, were identified as antagonists mostly by *Vjesnik*, followed by *Slobodna Dalmacija* and the *Feral Tribune*. The 'Serbian government' was portrayed as antagonist mostly in *Vjesnik's* articles, again followed by *Slobodna Dalmacija* and then *Feral Tribune*.

If we briefly examine the standardized residual, we discover the following: *Vjesnik*: -68.3, indicating that the paper did not show the government as antagonist; *Slobodna Dalmacija*: -40.1, indicating the same, only to a lesser degree; and *Feral Tribune*: 108.4, indicating quite the opposite. This paper showed the Croatian government as antagonist a great deal more than did the other two

TABLE 3
Significant Differences for 'Antagonist' between the Three Newspapers (11-Year Sample)

Antagonist	Total for All 3	<i>Vjesnik</i>	<i>Slobodna Dalmacija</i>	<i>Feral Tribune</i>	χ^2	<i>p</i>
Croats	3.5%	2 0.6%	4 1.9%	21 8.6%	28.63	<.001
Serbs	6.3%	32 10%	10 4.6%	7 2.9%	13.33	=.001
Croatian government	26%	15 4.7%	16 7.4%	172 70.2%	363.89	<.001
Serbian government	18.4%	69 21.5%	42 19.4%	33 13.5%	6.17	<.05
Bad history/past	6.9%	19 5.9%	8 3.7%	27 11%	10.38	<.01
Croat nationalism	6.5%	5 1.6%	4 1.9%	42 17.1%	66.04	<.001
None	29.8%	124 38.6%	101 46.8%	8 3.3%	124.13	<.001
Other	11.1%	51 15.9%	31 14.4%	5 2%	30.09	<.001

newspapers ($\chi^2 = 363.89; p < .001$). It is not surprising that *Vjesnik* presented the Croatian government as protagonist most often since this newspaper has commonly been known to support the ruling government.

Figure 1 shows how often the three newspapers portrayed the Croatian government as antagonist and protagonist. From this chart we can clearly see that *Vjesnik*, more than any of the three newspapers, portrayed the Croatian government as protagonist, while *Slobodna Dalmacija* and *Feral Tribune* differed only slightly. In terms of the Croatian government as antagonist, *Feral Tribune* considerably surpasses the other two newspapers. *Vjesnik* and *Slobodna Dalmacija* are similar in their presentation of the Croatian government as antagonist.

The overall most frequently cited protagonists were 'Croats'.

Of the 15 protagonists, six were found to be significantly different. Croats were most shown as protagonists in *Feral Tribune's* articles, followed by *Vjesnik* and *Slobodna Dalmacija*. The Croatian government was identified as protagonist most in *Vjesnik's* articles (76 out of 321 articles), followed by *Slobodna Dalmacija* and then *Feral Tribune*. Other significant protagonists are indicated in Table 4.

In terms of the standardized residual, we find the following: *Vjesnik*: 5.2, indicating that the paper significantly showed the government as protagonist, in the positive direction; *Slobodna Dalmacija*: -2.1, indicating that *Slobodna Dalmacija* went in the opposite direction to *Vjesnik* and did not show the government as protagonist nearly as much; and *Feral Tribune*: -3.4, indicating that this paper went even further in the opposite direction to *Vjesnik*, in not showing the government as protagonist ($\chi^2 = 27.36; p < .001$).

FIGURE 1

The Croatian Government in Different Newspapers as Antagonist or Protagonist

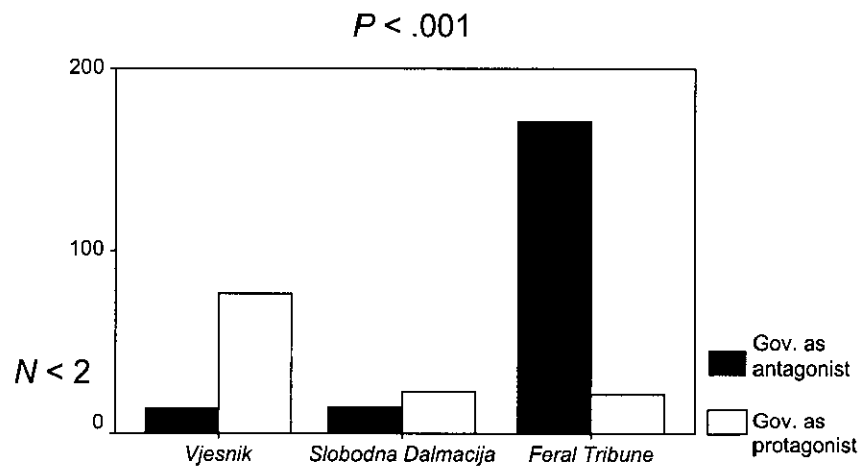


TABLE 4
Significant Differences for 'Protagonist' between the Three Newspapers (11-Year Sample)

Protagonist	<i>Vjesnik</i>	<i>Slobodna Dalmacija</i>	<i>Feral Tribune</i>	χ^2	p
Croats	90 28%	49 22.7%	190 77.6%	185.79	<.001
Serbs	7 2.2%	10 4.6%	38 15.5%	40.39	<.001
Croatian government	76 23.7%	24 11.1%	22 9%	27.36	<.001
International community	24 7.5%	6 2.8%	10 4.1%	6.66	<.05
None	116 36.1%	106 49.1%	7 2.9%	130.76	<.001
Other	39 12.1%	24 11.1%	4 1.6%	22.08	<.001

Coverage of Events

Now we turn to the event-related sample that looked at the four specific events: Croatian independence, the fall of Vukovar, Operation Storm and the election of Stipe Mesic as Croatia's president. We then compare the results for the two samples – the 11-year sample and the events sample.

For the sample of the four events, 649 articles (390 articles in *Vjesnik*; 224 in *Slobodna Dalmacija*; and 35 in *Feral Tribune*) were content analyzed. The reason so few articles appeared in the *Feral Tribune* sample is due to the fact that in the early 1990s the newspaper's publication was sporadic. Furthermore, in the early years, *Feral Tribune* was only an insert within *Slobodna Dalmacija*, sometimes not publishing any articles that could be content analyzed. Consequently, it was not until the mid- to late 1990s that *Feral Tribune* became a more regular, weekly publication. Because two of our events cover the year 1991, the number of articles for *Feral Tribune* is low.

Significance was achieved in five of the total 14 frames, again showing that when comparing the three newspapers there were substantial differences as to the use of those five frames – differences that were most likely not due to sampling error. Only two of the top (those used most frequently by the newspapers) five frames were significantly different in use between the three newspapers – economic situation in Croatia ($\chi^2 = 17.36; p < .001$) and international reactions ($\chi^2 = 7.53; p < .005$). None of the other three frames – war in Croatia, Croatian government performance or Serbian government performance – were found to be significant when comparing their use within the three newspapers. The 'Slovenian war' ($\chi^2 = 18.09; p < .001$), 'Slovenian government performance' ($\chi^2 = 9.87; p < .01$) and 'Bosnian government performance' ($\chi^2 = 9.35; p < .01$) frames, however, were significant.

It is interesting to note that of the three newspapers, *Feral Tribune* used the 'economic situation in Croatia' frame in more of its articles than the other two papers. Another curious result is that both *Vjesnik* and *Slobodna Dalmacija* had the international reaction frame in approximately 22 percent of its articles, while in *Feral Tribune* this frame occurred in only 2.9 percent of its articles.

Exploring what frames were used in the specific events, we find that 10 frames were significantly different. A few should be highlighted.

Looking at the newspapers' presentation of antagonists, significance was attained in only four relationships. The Croatian government as antagonist was identified by *Vjesnik* in 14.1 percent of its articles, in 16.1 percent of *Slobodna Dalmacija*'s articles and in 60 percent of *Feral Tribune*'s articles ($\chi^2 = 47.72$; $p < .001$). The Serbian government was identified as antagonist in 53.3 percent of *Vjesnik*'s articles, 54.9 percent of *Slobodna Dalmacija*'s articles and 22.9 percent of *Feral Tribune*'s articles ($\chi^2 = 12.94$; $p < .01$). 'Serbian nationalism' was identified as the antagonist in 37.3 percent of *Vjesnik*'s articles, 21 percent of *Slobodna Dalmacija*'s articles and 17.1 percent of *Feral Tribune* articles ($\chi^2 = 9.48$; $p < .01$). Croat nationalism was also found to be a significant antagonist with 1.3 percent of *Vjesnik*'s articles identifying it as such, 2.7 percent of *Slobodna Dalmacija*'s articles and 8.6 percent of *Feral Tribune*'s articles ($\chi^2 = 8.53$; $p < .05$) (see Table 5). The standardized residual reveals the following results in terms of antagonists: *Vjesnik*: -2.6, indicating that the paper significantly did not show the government as antagonist; *Slobodna Dalmacija*: -0.6, indicating that there was not a drastically significant difference within *Slobodna Dalmacija*, in terms of expected and observed counts; and *Feral Tribune*: 6.9, indicating that this paper did significantly show the Croatian government as antagonist a great deal more than the other two newspapers.

Nine antagonists were found to be significant within the four events (see Table 5), indicating the differences between the four events are statistically reliable and most likely not due to sampling error. The Croatian government as antagonist was found to be most prevalent in the event where Mesic was elected president. If we look at the four events, during the Croatian independence, the fall of Vukovar and Operation Storm, the Serbian government was the dominant antagonist, while at the moment when Mesic became president, it was the Croatian government.

In terms of protagonist, we find that the Croatian government was also most often portrayed as the protagonist (47.6 percent), followed very closely by 'Croats' as protagonists (46.7 percent). The third most frequently portrayed protagonist was the international community (18.3 percent). The Slovenian government was the fourth most frequently portrayed protagonist (9.6 percent). The fifth most frequent protagonists were the Slovenians (6.6 percent).

Only three protagonists were found to be significant within the three newspapers. 'Croats' as protagonists were significant. *Vjesnik* identified Croats as protagonists in 42.8 percent of its articles. *Slobodna Dalmacija* identified the same protagonist in 50.4 percent of its articles, while *Feral Tribune* had Croats as protagonists in 65.7 percent of its articles ($\chi^2 = 8.71$; $p < .05$). The Croatian government as protagonist was also found to be significant. *Vjesnik* identified the Croatian government as protagonist in 55.9 percent of the articles. *Slobodna*

TABLE 5
Significant Differences for 'Antagonist' between the Four Events

Antagonist	Croatian Independence	Fall of Vukovar	Operation Storm	Mesic Becomes President	χ^2	p
Serbs	3 1.8%	14 7.4%	15 10.2%	4 2.7%	14.11	<.01
Croatian government	19 11.4%	16 8.5%	6 4.1%	71 48.3%	131.19	<.001
Serbian government	97 58.1%	151 80.3%	80 54.4%	11 7.5%	180.00	<.001
Slovenian government	8 4.8%	0 0%	1 0.7%	0 0%	19.40	<.001
International community	26 15.6%	16 8.5%	25 17%	4 2.7%	20.56	<.001
Bad history/past	8 4.8%	3 1.6%	0 0%	6 4.1%	9.04	<.05
Serbian nationalism	39 23.4%	61 32.4%	71 48.3%	4 2.7%	81.82	<.001
None	23 13.8%	8 4.3%	10 6.8%	34 23.1%	33.12	<.001
Other	3 1.8%	2 1.1%	3 2%	19 12.9%	36.84	<.001

Dalmacija identified the Croatian government as protagonist in 34.4 percent of its articles and *Feral Tribune* identified the Croatian government as protagonist in 28.6 percent of its articles ($\chi^2 = 31.50$; $p < .001$). No protagonist was identified in 2.3 percent of *Vjesnik's* articles, 5.8 percent of *Slobodna Dalmacija's* articles and 0 percent of *Feral Tribune's* articles ($\chi^2 = 6.61$; $p < .05$).

Significance was established for 10 of the protagonists (Table 6), indicating that it is very unlikely that the association between the four events and the use of protagonists in those events resulted from sampling error.

Croats as protagonists were most prevalent during the fall of Vukovar. Serbs as protagonists were most often portrayed as such during Croatian independence. Slovenians were not presented as protagonists during Operation Storm or when Mesic became president. Bosnians were shown as protagonists mostly during Operation Storm. The Croatian government was shown as protagonist most during Operation Storm, although the moment when Mesic became president closely followed in portraying the Croatian government at protagonist. The Serbian government was portrayed as protagonist most often during the Croatian independence. The Slovenian government too was most often portrayed as protagonist during the Croatian independence, and was not portrayed at all during Operation Storm or when Mesic became president. The Bosnian government was depicted as protagonist mostly during Operation Storm. Croat nationalism was portrayed as protagonist mostly during Croatian

TABLE 6
Significant Differences for 'Protagonist' between the Four Events

Protagonist	T1 Croatian Independence	T2 Fall of Vukovar	T3 Operation Storm	T4 Mesic Becomes President	χ^2	p
Croats	63 37.7%	147 78.2%	38 25.9%	55 37.4%	111.08	<.001
Serbs	12 7.2%	9 4.8%	15 10.2%	2 1.4%	11.36	=.01
Slovenians	37 22.2%	6 3.2%	0%	0%	89.55	<.001
Bosnians	7 4.2%	3 1.6%	12 8.2%	5 3.4%	9.22	<.05
Croatian government	62 37.1%	58 30.9%	97 66%	88 59.9%	57.26	<.001
Serbian government	11 6.6%	2 1.1%	1 0.7%	1 0.7%	18.28	<.001
Slovenian government	56 33.5%	6 3.2%	0%	0%	151.00	<.001
Bosnian government	4 2.4%	2 1.1%	17 11.6%	3 2%	28.67	<.001
Croat nationalism	6 3.6%	0%	2 1.4%	1 0.7%	9.12	<.05
None	11 6.6%	3 1.6%	7 4.8%	1 0.7%	11.20	<.05

independence. The absence of a protagonist most often occurred during Croatian independence. During that same event, the presentation of Croats and the government as protagonist was nearly identical – 37.7 percent of the articles showed Croats as protagonists and 37.1 percent showed the government as protagonist. During the fall of Vukovar, the dominant protagonists were the Croats. Equally, during Operation Storm the dominant protagonist was the Croatian government.

In terms of protagonists, we discover the following, when it comes to the standardized residuals: *Vjesnik*: 5.6, indicating that the paper significantly showed the government as protagonist; *Slobodna Dalmacija*: -4.7, indicating a negative relationship in presentation of protagonists; and *Feral Tribune*: -2.2, also referring to a negative relationship in terms of protagonist presentation.

A great deal of the focus of this study is on the Croatian government, and it was noted that the presentation of the Croatian government as protagonist and antagonist differed over the four events. The government as antagonist dramatically rose in its presentation in the newspapers when Mesic was elected president, whereas the presentation of the government as protagonist rose significantly during Operation Storm.

Findings Comparing the 11-Year and the Events Sample

We now focus on the comparison of the results between the 11-year sample and the events sample. The frames used when covering the four events were comparable to those in the 11-year sample. Again, the frame 'Croatian government performance' was most frequently used throughout the articles (37.6 percent). This can easily be explained since the 'new' government was central in nearly every event during the 11-year sample and, of course, during Croatian independence, the fall of Vukovar, Operation Storm and the election of Stipe Mesic as president. However, unlike the 11-year period sample, the 'economic impact on Croatia' was not the second most frequent frame in the articles in the four events sample. Instead, 'war in Croatia' was identified as the second most frequently used frame (25.6 percent). This is not surprising since three of the four events centered on the war in Croatia. In fact, it is surprising that this frame was not the *most* used. An explanation for this might simply be that the government was at the crux of the war and all of the central events in the events sample; therefore, it received more coverage than the war itself. 'International reaction' came in as the third most frequently used frame (21.3 percent). This too is not surprising since international reaction – action or inaction – was a central factor in the war situation in Croatia.

Several differences come to light when we explore the presentation of the antagonist in the four events and compare it with the 11-year sample. While in the 11-year period, 23.4 percent of the articles had no antagonist, during the four events no antagonist was identified in only 11.6 percent of the articles. This could be explained by the fact that the events sample focused on the war and difficult situations in Croatia's history, consequently the media chose to diminish their attacks on specific individuals and entities, which would cause more turmoil and blame allocation. Furthermore, in the 11-year sample, the Croatian government was identified as antagonist in 26 percent of the articles while during the events coverage the Croatian government was portrayed as the antagonist in only 17.3 percent of the articles. Again, this result comes as no surprise if we look to the issue of censorship. The government had a clear stake in having itself presented in a positive light during such a dismal and difficult time in Croatia's history. The country was at war for independence, the city of Vukovar fell, Croatia's soldiers were fighting for their land in Operation Storm and a new leader was attempting to guide Croatia into the 21st century. Were the media to attack the entity that, in the government's eyes, was not only 'protecting' its citizens, but also fighting for Croatian independence, the morale of the country's citizens would fall into an even greater abyss and questions of whether the government's initiation of the war for independence was worth the bloodshed, and economic difficulties would ensue. Consequently, the government had to censor the media in its presentation of the government as antagonist.

More interesting is the fact that while the Croatian government was portrayed as antagonist less frequently during the four events than it was in the 11-year sample, the opposite is true for the Serbian government. The latter was identified as antagonist in 18.4 percent of the articles in the 11-year sample,

but in 52.2 percent of the articles in the events sample – the most frequently identified antagonist in all articles. This is an obvious result in that the Serbian government was the entity blamed for all of Croatia's turmoil – from the war, to the fall of Vukovar and the reason for Operation Storm. Thus they had to appear as the 'bad guys' in the media. Now we turn to the results in light of the hypothesis proposed earlier.

Major Findings

In examining the 11-year sample and the event-specific sample, the hypothesis was confirmed. Specifically, when looking at the 11-year sample, we found that *Vjesnik* portrayed the Croatian government as protagonist in 23.7 percent of the articles, compared to *Slobodna Dalmacija's* 11.1 percent and *Feral Tribune's* 9 percent ($p < .001$). As to the events sample, the Croatian government was depicted as protagonist in 55.9 percent of *Vjesnik's* articles, 34.4 percent of *Slobodna Dalmacija's* articles and 28.6 percent of *Feral Tribune's* articles ($p < .001$). Moreover, when looking at the four events, we discover that during Operation Storm, the Croatian government was most frequently portrayed as protagonist (66 percent), followed by the moment when Stipe Mesic became Croatia's president (59.9 percent), during Croatian independence (37.1 percent) and at the time of the attack on the city of Vukovar (30.9 percent) ($p = .001$). Additionally, as mentioned, the residual showed us that *Vjesnik* was the only paper with a positive significant relationship, while *Slobodna Dalmacija* and *Feral Tribune*, to an even greater degree, were significant in the negative relationship. In other words, *Vjesnik's* positive residual results indicate that the paper did significantly show the government as a protagonist. The fact that *Slobodna Dalmacija's* and *Feral Tribune's* results are negative but significant shows that these two papers' observed results were negatively different from the expected results. Consequently, these two newspapers did not present the Croatian government as protagonist as much as would have been expected, and clearly less so than *Vjesnik*, whose results indicated that the paper presented the government as protagonist more than was expected.

When we turn to the antagonist category during the 11-year period, overall 26 percent of the articles depicted the Croatian government as antagonist, while in the four events sample 17.3 percent of the articles portrayed the government as antagonist. Within the three papers, in the 11-year period sample, we find that *Vjesnik* showed the government as antagonist in only 4.7 percent of its articles, *Slobodna Dalmacija* in 7.4 percent of its articles and *Feral Tribune* in 70.2 percent of its output ($p < .001$). During the four events, the Croatian government was portrayed as antagonist by *Vjesnik* in 14.1 percent of its articles, in 16.1 percent of *Slobodna Dalmacija* articles and 60 percent of *Feral Tribune* articles ($p < .001$). Overall, the moment when Mesic became president saw the greatest percentage of articles in which the Croatian government was shown to be an antagonist (48.3 percent). The event surrounding Croatian independence was significantly lower in this presentation (11.4 percent), followed by the fall of Vukovar (8.5 percent) and Operation Storm (4.1 percent) ($p = .001$). If we turn to *Vjesnik's* results, we find that the

greatest percentage of Croatian government as antagonist articles also appeared during the time Mesic became president (46.2 percent), followed by the fall of Vukovar (6.9 percent) and Croatian independence and Operation Storm when only 2.2 percent of *Vjesnik's* articles showed the government as antagonist for both events ($p < .001$). During the Croatian independence, the fall of Vukovar and Operation Storm, the lowest percentage of articles portraying the government as antagonist were found in *Vjesnik*, yet when Mesic became president this paper counted more antagonist articles (46.2 percent) than *Slobodna Dalmacija* (38.5 percent). Considering *Vjesnik* was a pro-Tudjman newspaper and not so much a pro-Mesic newspaper, it is not unexpected to find that the paper greatly increased its antagonist depictions of the government when Mesic was elected president.

The standardized residual again confirmed our assumption, showing that in terms of the antagonist frame, *Vjesnik* was significant but highly negative. Hence, this paper did not present the government as antagonist as much as one would anticipate. *Slobodna Dalmacija* was also negative, but to a lesser degree, and *Feral Tribune* was highly positive, showing that this paper did significantly show the government as antagonist – more than expected. Furthermore, if we only observe the results of articles that dealt with the Croatian government performance, the data further confirm our assumptions. Within the 11-year time period, we find that 56.3 percent of the articles with the Croatian government performance frame also portrayed the Croatian government as antagonist. For the 11-year sample, 3.3 percent of *Vjesnik's* articles, which dealt with the Croatian government performance frame, also portrayed the Croatian government as antagonist. In *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 11.4 percent of the articles with the Croatian government performance frame also depicted the government as antagonist. And, 88.7 percent of *Feral Tribune's* articles that dealt with the Croatian government performance frame showed the Croatian government as an antagonist ($p < .001$).

As to the coverage of the events, we find that of the 29.5 percent of articles that had the Croatian government performance frame and portrayed the government as antagonist, 21.5 percent of *Vjesnik's* articles within this frame showed the government as antagonist; 33.7 percent of *Slobodna Dalmacija's* articles within the Croatian government performance frame showed the government as antagonist; and 76.5 percent of *Feral Tribune's* articles within this frame depicted the government as antagonist ($p < .001$). Turning to the protagonist category, for the 11-year sample a total of 15.2 percent of articles within the Croatian government performance frame presented the Croatian government as a protagonist. In *Vjesnik*, 35 percent within this frame portrayed the government as protagonist, 15.9 percent in *Slobodna Dalmacija* and 7.5 percent in *Feral Tribune* ($p < .001$). For the events sample, a total of 66.4 percent of the articles in which the Croatian government performance frame was present also labeled the Croatian government as a protagonist. In *Vjesnik* articles that had the Croatian government performance frame, 75.7 percent also classified the Croatian government as protagonist; 55.4 percent in *Slobodna Dalmacija* and 41.2 percent in *Feral Tribune* ($p < .01$).

As these data demonstrate, *Vjesnik* was clearly more favorable in its reporting on the Croatian government than the other two newspapers. *Vjesnik* most often portrayed the Croatian government as a protagonist, while least frequently depicting the government as an antagonist. This is especially true when we examine the articles with the Croatian government performance frame. In light of this evidence, we can confirm that *Vjesnik* was more favorable in its reporting about the Croatian government than were *Slobodna Dalmacija* and *Feral Tribune*.

Feral Tribune was unmistakably more critical of the Croatian government than the other two newspapers. Not only did this paper – when compared to the other two – least frequently portray the government as protagonist, the paper by far exceeded *Vjesnik* and *Slobodna Dalmacija* in terms of presenting the Croatian government as antagonist (the earlier reported residuals further prove this point). Accordingly, *Feral Tribune* was most critical of the Croatian government.

Our results demonstrated that *Vjesnik* was on the ‘pro-government’ extreme, while *Feral Tribune* was on the ‘anti-government’ extreme. *Slobodna Dalmacija* was the median – its reporting more closely resembled *Vjesnik*’s when the government was portrayed as antagonist and more closely resembled *Feral Tribune*’s when the government was presented as protagonist (again, see standardized residual results). *Slobodna Dalmacija* had been a fairly unbiased newspaper until it crumbled under the leadership of Franjo Tuđman’s party, the HDZ. While it had never become as heavily controlled as *Vjesnik*, it did change its unbiased policies and began to promote the government. Significant differences between *Slobodna Dalmacija*’s and *Vjesnik*’s protagonist presentation and *Slobodna Dalmacija*’s and *Feral Tribune*’s antagonist presentation were discovered. Thus, we can argue that comparing the three newspapers, *Slobodna Dalmacija* was most ‘evenly balanced’ in its reporting.

Discussion

This study explored 11 years of the Croatian press by examining what three leading Croatian newspapers were reporting: how did they frame the news, especially political news? Our initial assumption was a general hypothesis that *Vjesnik* would be predominantly a pro-government newspaper, *Feral Tribune* would be highly anti-government and *Slobodna Dalmacija* would be a midpoint between *Vjesnik* and *Feral Tribune*. This assumption grew from interest in the *Feral Tribune*. The newspaper began as a four-page insert within *Slobodna Dalmacija* and developed into a glossy magazine to which people now subscribe worldwide. For years, the *Feral Tribune* reported on events that many other media would not touch – especially during the time of Franjo Tuđman’s Croatia (roughly 1991 until his death in 1999). The *Feral Tribune* claimed to be free of government control and censorship. However, other Croatian media such as *Vjesnik* and *Slobodna Dalmacija* made the same claims. The purpose of this study was to discover how these three newspapers were in fact reporting on the government.

In analyzing more than 1400 articles we discovered that *Vjesnik* was by far the most favorable in its reporting on the government, while *Feral Tribune*, to the same extreme, was the most unfavorable when it came to the government. If we recall, Croatian government as 'antagonist' was found in an overwhelming 70.2 percent of *Feral Tribune's* articles – compared to *Slobodna Dalmacija's* 7.4 percent and *Vjesnik's* 4.7 percent. Furthermore, when examining the Croatian government as protagonist, we discovered that *Vjesnik* portrayed the government as such in 23.7 percent of its articles; while *Slobodna Dalmacija* did so in 11.1 percent and *Feral Tribune* in only 9 percent.

As we have seen in the earlier sections, the results indicate that government control of the media in Croatia was by no means non-existent. While Franjo Tudjman claimed to bring democracy to Croatia, he also revived the old Communist tactics of government censorship of the media. Only the privatized media, although constantly bombarded by fines, legislation and threats, were able to uphold the ideology of a free press. One such indicator of the government control of *Vjesnik* and *Slobodna Dalmacija* and the relative freedom of *Feral Tribune* is apparent when turning to the frames discussed in this study. *Vjesnik* and *Slobodna Dalmacija* were relatively close in their use of the Croatian government performance frame (which was the overall most frequently used frame). *Vjesnik* used the Croatian government performance frame in 18.7 percent of its articles; *Slobodna Dalmacija* used this frame in 20.4 percent of its articles; while in *Feral Tribune* this frame occurred in 64.9 percent of its articles. Clearly, *Feral Tribune* was not afraid to write about the government's performance, notwithstanding the immense pressure it was under from government control and manipulation (from the imposition of various taxes and fines, to various lawsuits and the harassment of editors and reporters). While *Vjesnik* and *Slobodna Dalmacija* were writing more about international reactions or 'other' topics, *Feral Tribune* was tackling the topic of government performance.

In comparing the two samples (11 years and four events), we discovered some interesting differences worth discussing. For instance, in the 11-year sample, 29.8 percent of the overall articles did not have an antagonist while in the four events sample only 11.6 percent had no antagonist. This variation most likely can be explained by the fact that the 11-year period did not focus on specific events that could give rise to controversy, such as independence, war and elections. Rather, it captured a snapshot of Croatia's history for those 11 years. Since this sample was not structured around specific events but years, it is more likely that there was no reason to present an antagonist. As the events were more controversial, it is consequently not unexpected that there would be more disagreement and more blame.

A second distinction between the two samples is with the Croatian government as antagonist. The findings indicate that in the 11-year sample 26 percent of the articles portrayed the Croatian government as antagonist, while in the events sample only 17.3 percent presented the government as antagonist. Clearly, during events such as the battle for independence, the attack on Vukovar and Operation Storm, the Tudjman government was hoping for support from the public and consequently needed the media to present more favorable stories. The media in turn reduced their presentation of the government as antagonist

during the specific events in comparison with the more general 11-year sample. It is when Mesic was elected president that the Croatian government is presented as the primary antagonist (in 48.3 percent of the articles). This could be due to the fact that the media felt they had more freedom to be critical of the government since the new government – that of President Stipe Mesic who became president after Tudjman's death – was one that allowed more freedom of the press.

In conclusion, this study revealed that government censorship was prevalent in post-Communist Croatia. While the media claimed to be free of government control, in fact, they were not. Only those media that were able to privatize, such as the *Feral Tribune*, were able also to speak freely in terms of politics – be it political parties, the president or actions by the government.

Concluding Remarks and Future Studies

This study has provided a glimpse into the state of the Croatian press by comparing three leading newspapers within the country over an 11-year period. Results indicated that while the media claimed to be free of government control, articles in two of the three newspapers were predominantly favorable in their representation of the Croatian government, specifically Franjo Tudjman's government. It was only the *Feral Tribune* – a privatized weekly – that was able to maneuver around the various fines, legislation and court cases brought upon it by the government. *Feral Tribune* managed to overcome the censorship and present articles that did not portray the government in a favorable light, but instead attacked the government and presented its members as antagonists rather than protagonists.

A future interesting task might be to compare results from this study to the press reporting of the government prior to 1990: e.g. from 1980 through 1990 (from Tito's death to the death of Yugoslavia). Determining whether press censorship was higher during or prior to Tudjman's presidency might provide some interesting results. Furthermore, in addition to looking at the three newspapers under study, other newspapers – such as *Novi List*, which many Croatian editors praised highly – could be content analyzed as well. Moreover, this study could be expanded into an agenda-setting study where public opinion/public opinion poll data could be brought in for a more multidimensional frame analysis where we could elaborate not only on *what* was said by the media, but also *how* it was interpreted by the public. By bringing the public factor into this analysis we could unearth a whole new discussion stemming from the government's use of propaganda and following through to the public's perception of the propaganda/messages. Finally, the years following Stipe Mesic's election will be most telling in terms of the direction of the Croatian media. A future five-year study from 2000 to 2005 could build upon this study and explore whether or not the freedom of the press in Croatia has changed or improved with the election of a new 'more democratic' president and government. Even more interesting is the fact that Franjo Tudjman's party, the HDZ, is slowly returning to power in Croatia. Consequently, the 10 years following the sample of this study will undoubtedly provide highly interesting research data.

This study took on the task of exploring 11 years of a newly formed country's media landscape. The next question is, now that we have seen the first decade of post-Communism in Croatia and its effects on the media, what can we expect to find in the next decade?

Note

1. A 'see line' was identified as any mention of the article on the front page which directed the reader to turn to an inside section where the article was featured.

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