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## Silence, voice, and public listening: Media coverage of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Anja Vranic  
University of Oslo  
[ORCID](#)

Eli Skogerbo  
University of Oslo  
[ORCID](#)

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### Abstract

The Norwegian Parliament appointed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 2018 to investigate past injustices inflicted by the Norwegian state upon Norway's Indigenous people, the Sámi, and two national minorities, the Kvens and the Norwegian Finns, as well as to create a foundation for reconciliation between these minorities and the majority population. This study investigates the media coverage of the TRC from 2016 to 2021. We found shrinking and uneven media coverage over time. Whereas news logics in minority and local media favoured TRC news and debates, coverage in nationwide mainstream news media was rare. While some explanations for these differences relate to marginalisation of Indigenous and national minority voices in media, others can be linked to the TRCs work methods and practices, which are designed to not attract journalistic attention until the final report is published in 2023.

### Keywords

Truth & Reconciliation Commission, Media Coverage, Silence, Public Listening, Indigenous, Sámi, Kven, Norway

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**Corresponding author:** Anja Vranic, Postbox 1093, Blindern 0317 Oslo, University of Oslo  
Email: [Anja.vranic@media.uio.no](mailto:Anja.vranic@media.uio.no)

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## Introduction

During the past decades, societies previously or currently subjugated to colonialism have sought to come to terms with the effects of discriminatory state policies and injustices committed against Indigenous peoples and other cultural groups. Several Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) have been appointed worldwide. A TRC gives the opportunity for truth-seeking public discussions at a national level, can contribute to judicial and political reforms, and open for a change in the national discourse and understanding of Indigenous peoples' experiences (Waller et al., 2019).

The issue of coming to terms with previous injustices has occupied the Sámi people for decades. The Sámi constitute the Indigenous people of northern Europe, and their traditional homelands, called Sápmi, stretch from the south of Norway and Sweden across northern Finland and into the northern parts of Russia. To some extent, Sámi and other ethnic groups' claims for justice have been acknowledged by the states, in the form of certain degrees of political self-determination (Falch et al., 2016) and the appointments of TRCs in Norway (2018), Finland (2021), and Sweden (2022). This study looks at the media coverage of the Norwegian TRC from 2016 to 2021.

Before going into the background and details of the study at hand, we will establish our position as researchers, because "who you are as a researcher matters" (Olsen, 2018, p. 206). The first important point is that we, the authors, are non-Indigenous researchers who identify as and may be described as 'allies' in Indigenous research (Olsen, 2018). The first author is a first-generation immigrant who, at a very young age, sought refuge in Norway due to war and ethnic cleansing in their home country. The second author is a so-called 'ethnic Norwegian' with long and strong family, friendship, and professional ties to Sámi people. We have been welcomed into private and personal relationships, been allowed to take part in and share knowledge, and have worked in research teams including Indigenous and non-Indigenous members. The second point is that the present study is not designed and intended as Indigenous research. On the contrary, it is an investigation into how the TRC is covered by Norwegian media and thereby presented and represented in the Norwegian public sphere. The essential aim is to uncover the position of the TRC and its main topics, with the focus on whether and how a democratic welfare state includes and listens to the experiences of its Indigenous people and national minorities.

## Background

From around 1850 until approximately the 1960s—parallel to the forging of an independent Norwegian state—Norwegian authorities implemented harsh assimilationist policies, referred to as 'Norwegianisation', against Sámi and other ethnic and cultural minorities. The effects of the assimilation policy have lingered for decades after it was formally abolished, affecting generations of people. Over the past decades, there have been attempts to recognise and remedy past injustices. The state has acknowledged 'groups with a long-standing attachment to the country' as 'national minorities' that generate specific cultural rights. Norway's national minorities are: Kvens and Norwegian Finns (people of Finnish descent in Northern Norway), Jews, Forest Finns, Roma and Romani people/Taters (Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, 2022). Since this is the acknowledged term, we use the term here, too.

Norwegianisation led to racist practices, stigma, abuse, children being removed from their homes, extensive use of boarding schools for Sámi children, and loss of culture, languages, and rights to land and water. After decades of Sámi political mobilisation and activism, Sámi rights were strengthened with the Sámi Act in 1987, the adjustment of the Constitution including the state's responsibility to ensure Sámi people's rights to develop their own culture, languages, and social lives; the opening of the Sámi Parliament in 1989; and the ratification of the C169 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention in 1990. Despite these state measures, the Sámi and national minorities are still exposed to discrimination and hate speech, and past wounds are yet to heal (Andresen et al., 2021, Norwegian Institution for Human Rights, 2022).

Concluding a public debate initiated by the Sámi Parliament, the Norwegian Parliament appointed the TRC in 2018. In addition to the Sámi, two national minorities—the Kvens and Norwegian Finns—were included in the mandate. The TRC's mandate is threefold:

- 1) conduct historical mapping of Norwegian authorities' policies inflicted upon the minorities during the Norwegianisation period;
- 2) investigate the current effects of Norwegianisation; and
- 3) suggest measures for further reconciliation (such as promoting minority languages and cultures).

The TRC's methods consist of gathering individual and group stories through meetings and interviews, studying archive materials, and facilitating close cooperation with affected communities and organisations for consultation. The TRC was originally to finalise its work by 1 September 2022 (Sannhets- og forsoningskommisjonen, 2020), but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the period was extended to 1 June 2023 (Sannhets- og forsoningskommisjonen, 2021).

Whereas TRCs have generally been responses to past atrocities committed by non-democratic states, such as apartheid, military dictatorship, and armed conflict, the Norwegian TRC is comparable to recent TRCs set up in Canada, Finland (Prime Minister's Office Finland, 2021), and Sweden (Regjeringskansliet, 2021). Until the 2000s, TRCs were uncommon in democratic states. As such, the Norwegian TRC is part of a new trend where welfare democracies also seek to remedy and reconcile past injustices (Wiebelhaus-Brahm, 2010). There are, however, mixed experiences with the outcomes and effects of these TRCs. De Costa (2017) studied the TRC in Canada and found that shedding light on historical knowledge was not sufficient; it is also necessary to gain deeper insight into how discursive practices can contribute to change. The discourse used by the Canadian TRC was not effective enough and failed to engage and mobilise those who were not directly affected by the injustice. Corn tassel and Holder (2008) studied TRCs in four countries (Canada, Australia, Peru, and Guatemala) and found in each case that the TRCs failed to make the states responsible for past injustices and in changing the relations between those subjugated to injustice and the overall populations. We have taken the findings of previous studies into consideration when designing the current study.

## Theoretical perspectives and literature

Here, we investigate the mediation and media coverage of the TRC in Norwegian news media in the period 2016 to mid-2021. Recent strands of theorising guide the analysis. First, we expect that the logics of mainstream news production—in which underrepresentation and overshadowing of Indigenous and ethnic peoples' issues is well-known—impact the media coverage of the TRC (McCallum & Waller, 2021). Second, we take a public listening approach, looking out for media coverage that signal that the TRC creates “practices of receptivity, attentiveness, and response” (Dreher & de Souza, 2018, p. 24) particularly to marginal groups and ‘silent voices’, those whose stories and experiences have rarely been heard and listened to in the nationwide public sphere. A third strand is termed ‘politics of refusal’ (Simpson, 2014), referring to Indigenous actors refusing the opposer’s power of recognition and saying ‘no’ to what presumably is perceived as a ‘gift’, in this case the TRC appointed by the Norwegian Parliament. Refusal can also be expressed by silence, not offering views and not consenting. In addition to these specific lines of thought, there is a significant amount of literature on Indigenous peoples’ experiences in colonial societies, including on topics such as oppression and injustice inflicted upon them, their right for self-determination, and how to research on Indigenous peoples (see, for instance, Balint et al., 2014; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Xanthaki, 2007) that we also draw on.

## New logics and medication and Indigenous and national minority issues

Trine Kvidal-Røvik and Ashley Cordes state in their article on listening to Indigenous voices in the Disney movie *Frozen 2* that “media are key in processes of history and memory, nation-building, self-articulation, and empowerment” (2020, p. 2). As the authors emphasise, for Indigenous and ethnic minority communities’, processes of history and nation-building have often been those of the dominant groups, in which Indigenous experiences have been obliterated, omitted, or marginalised. Previous studies of media representation and mediation of the Sámi and other ethnic minorities in mainstream media consistently show marginalised and often biased coverage in mainstream media (Eide & Nikunen, 2011; Eide & Simonsen, 2007). Skogerbø et al. (2018) focus on the importance of Indigenous journalism as a tool for storytelling and news reporting from the inside, in contrast to being a marginalised group that can only be reported about from the outside. Still, even in periods when Sámi journalism and media institutions were growing, Sámi political issues continued to be marginalised in national news (Ijäs, 2012; Skogerbø, 2000). This indicates that more Indigenous stories do not necessarily give access to the national public sphere (Josefsen & Skogerbø, 2013; Skogerbø et al., 2017). Bhroin et al. (2021) found that even though Indigenous political participation can be strengthened by media innovations, they can also reinforce existing power relations, giving global commercial actors more power. Further, Rasmussen et al. (2021) argue that there is no Sámi media system that fully complements and thereby works to fill in the gaps and missing attention given to Indigenous issues in Norwegian and Nordic media. Outside of the Nordic context, McCallum and Waller (2017) give an overview of the news media’s role in the development of Indigenous politics in Australia and how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are not included in debates about politics and media. Dreher et al. (2016) investigate the potential of digital media in Indigenous peoples’ participation in political debates and argue that although digital media increase the opportunities for

representation of Indigenous voices, the question of listening provides the foundation for an understanding of the representation of voices.

Following McCallum and Waller (2021, p. 791), media and journalism play important roles in the process of national inquiries: “The mediation of an inquiry [...] can be understood as a national level witnessing. The media’s role is to witness and make public others’ painful experiences, and in doing, create a collective experience that ideally is part of the process of response and recovery.” Waller et al. (2020) use the mediation of the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse 2013-2017 (RCIRCSA) as an example: The media coverage generated by the RCIRCSA was vital in breaking the silence around child sexual abuse. Despite these efforts, there was an inherent structural imbalance in media coverage. Not only did the analysis chart a highly uneven pattern of news media attention, but it also revealed the overshadowing effects: “Where the Royal Commission ensured that previously silenced victims were recognised and valued, entrenched news values directed media attention to some of the most powerful and influential voices in Australia and on the world stage” (Waller et al., 2020, p. 192). Similar challenges were present in the Norwegian case. The TRC opened for inclusion, dialogue, and storytelling by Sámi, Kven, and Norwegian Finn sources and survivors, but did it attract media attention and, through its work methods, facilitate public listening? Or should we assume that the news logics that direct attention towards scandals, conflict, personalisation, and celebrities would dominate the Norwegian context as well? These questions arise from a news logic perspective.

### **Silence, protest, and refusal**

Discrimination, assimilation policies, and racism against ethnic minority communities have had long-term consequences, one of which is silence (Kovach, 2009; Jensen, 2019). Being silent does not mean that one has nothing to say. Thill (2018, p. 60) argues that the ideal of “participation parity” where both speaker and listener are equals in the communication process as the foundation for justice (Fraser, 2008) disregards the fact that they are not equal in social standing and thus cannot be seen as equal in the distribution of responsibility when participating in institutionalised communication. Hate speech against individuals and ethnic groups leads to fear, which in turn leads to unwillingness to participate in public debate (Fladmoe & Nadim, 2017). Similarly, an established finding is that if ‘everyone’ has the same opportunity to speak, the most resourceful are most likely to come forth and be heard (Midtbøen et al., 2017). Further, Fernandez (2018, p. 191) explores how silence itself can also be a form of agency, “an explicit modality of protest, or even as a means of subversion and secret resistance”. Duncan (2004), too, points out that silence can be used as a strategy for refusal, protest, or simply denying participating in processes that may not be perceived as trustworthy or legitimate. Regardless of the amount of responsibility each side has, voices must come forth to be heard. For several decades, Sámi individuals and families have been silent about the traumatic experiences and injustices they have suffered (Johansen, 2020; Labba, 2020; Isaksen, 2021). This provides challenges for the TRC in collecting stories, and for stories to be shared in the public sphere through news media.

## Public listening

Turning the attention from the speaker to the listener is essential as it takes a significant amount of the responsibility for maintaining a democratic public sphere from the marginalised groups to the conventions, institutions, and practices that form what can be heard in the media (Dreher, 2009). Waller et al. (2020, p. 193) point directly to the connection between news logics and listening: “[listening] puts the onus on journalists and news organisations to access the interests and claims of communities that have been marginalised”. Listening as participation for strengthened democratic media and for more just futures needs practice and commitment to continuation (Dreher & de Souza, 2019), and is not an end but a necessary step in processes for social transformation (Thill, 2015). Listening as the other side of communication is under-theorised and under-appreciated, leading Dreher and de Souza (2019, p. 178) to call for the “discursively privileged” to actively listen to and decentre privileged voices and narratives. In our setting, we look for indications of public listening by examining which outlets and what types of content show up in the analysis. Is the TRC a topic that reaches nationwide media? Is there ongoing reporting in the period that we have studied?

Following the perspectives outlined above, we asked the following questions:

RQ1: How extensive is the media coverage of the TRC, and what topics, issues, and discussions do we find? Do we find TRC reporting in all areas of the Norwegian media landscape, or are there signs of overshadowing?

RQ2: What outlets and voices were represented and expressed in the media coverage? What types of media covered the TRC, and what indications do we find of public listening and refusal or silence?

RQ3: Are the perspectives we apply adequate to explain and understand our findings?

To answer these questions, we conducted a predominantly quantitative study of the media data that mention and discuss the Norwegian TRC between 2016 and 2021. By doing so, we examined what topics are brought forth and discussed, which outlets report on the TRC (how widely they are distributed), and what form it is presented in. We also bring in examples of stories and debates that took place in this period.

## Method

The data for this study was collected through a media archive search on news media coverage of the TRC. We used the Retriever media archive, a data analysis company that monitors media in the Nordic countries, to gather articles from Norwegian media outlets. Retriever holds most news media services but not all. It has more content from newspapers—online and printed—than TV, and there are no social media outlets included in the material. After several search string tests, a simple search with the word ‘sannhetskommisjon\*’ (truth commission in Norwegian) was conducted on all the media outlets available in the archive, predominantly consisting of newspaper outlets, paper and online versions. The search period was set from 1 January 2016 to 30 June 2021 and

resulted in over 1,700 articles, of which a significant number was about international TRCs. Articles that did not explicitly refer to the Norwegian TRC and non-media content, such as legislative proposals, information on church websites, and the like, were excluded, leading to 1,146 articles. These were systematically organised and coded into various categories, consisting of date, medium, online/paper version, number of words, genre, and topic. The data material was coded into 11 topics, see Figure 1.

| Topic                          | About                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Norwegianisation               | Norwegianisation policy, storytelling about Norwegianisation                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Proposal for a TRC             | Discussions about whether there is a need and want for investigation of past and current injustices and whether a TRC should be appointed                                                                                                |
| Input                          | Specific input to the TRC's mandate (what it should investigate) which groups it should incorporate, TRC asking for personal stories, personal stories being told (input to the Parliament in appointing the TRC and stories to the TRC) |
| Reconciliation                 | Discussions about whether reconciliation is possible and what needs to be done to reach reconciliation                                                                                                                                   |
| Rights and knowledge           | Sámi and national minority rights, such as land, culture, and language rights, lack of knowledge on the minorities in school, lack of political acknowledgement, and calls for more rights and knowledge on the these communities        |
| Practical matters              | About the TRC, its mandate, who the members should be, where it should investigate, its future plans, financial support, where they are, and what they do                                                                                |
| Discrimination and hate speech | Bullying, discrimination, and hate speech experienced by these communities today                                                                                                                                                         |
| Trust                          | Discussions on whether there is trust in the TRC, its members, and mandate, how it works, and the time frame                                                                                                                             |
| Silence                        | Criticism of the TRC for being silent about their work, and the TRC's defence of its silence                                                                                                                                             |
| Culture                        | Culture events, movies, and books that promote Sámi and national minority cultures                                                                                                                                                       |
| Other                          | Content that is about other topics and only briefly mentions the TRC, or content that does not fit into the above categories                                                                                                             |

*Figure 1. Coding categories. Topics.*

During the coding process, it became evident that the search and the archive did not contain all relevant news articles, as we discovered missing articles coincidentally. This was deemed not an essential problem with the material, as the intention of mapping media coverage of the TRC over time was to show tendencies, not to provide exact figures. The figures we present suggest how the press coverage developed over time and which topics were highlighted. Further, we regard searching the Retriever media archive as the most effective method, as the alternative would be to either search the entire web, or search in well over 200 individual Norwegian media archives, which would require substantially more resources. In order to assess the extent of coverage of the TRC in relation to general coverage of Sámi and national minority issues, we also conducted

'control searches'; one comparative search of all coverage of Sámi, Kven, and Norwegian Finn issues in all Norwegian media outlets available in the Retriever archive in the same time period. We used the search string 'samisk\* OR kvensk\* OR norskfin\*' (not 'same' and 'kven' to eliminate words with overlapping meaning), which resulted in a total of 66,410 articles from 2016 to mid-2021. This material has not been cleaned (that is, irrelevant articles have not been removed from the final number) and is used solely to put the coverage of the TRC in relief. We also conducted individual searches per year, including years preceding 2016 (starting from 2010), to see whether Sámi, Kven, and Norwegian Finn coverage in general received more attention after the appointment of the TRC. The numbers vary somewhat each year, ranging from 9,400 to 16,661, but predominantly consisting of around 12,000 articles each year, before and after the TRC's appointment.

Further, to ensure that our interpretations are reliable and valid, to gain a broader understanding of the contextual aspects of the TRC, and conduct an analysis of the existing media coverage more thoughtfully, we met with several institutions and key individuals who were involved in various aspects of the TRC in Norway. These meetings gave us substantial background information of the steps leading to the appointment of the TRC and its mandate, as well as different perspectives on the current climate, including the experiences of the Sámi people and national minorities. These conversations are treated as confidential and anonymous and are not quoted directly. We have also participated in physical meetings and followed digital meetings that the TRC had set up.

## Results

The TRC was covered in 1,146 articles during the set period, spread across around 100 media outlets that published in print and online. Compared with the control searches which yielded approximately 66,000 articles on Sámi, Kven, and Norwegian Finn issues in the same period, the coverage of the TRC was noticeable but not remarkable. More interestingly, the TRC attracted most media attention in 2017, with 444 articles. Out of these, 295 were coded under "proposal for a TRC". After the TRC was set up in mid-2018, the coverage fell sharply, indicating both reduced news value and mirroring the work methods of the TRC. Again, compared with the control searches, which show no sharp decline, we can assume that the drop in coverage can be attributed to characteristics with the TRC issue, and not a general drop in journalistic attention to Indigenous and national minority issues. From 2019 onwards, fewer articles mention the TRC: 196 in 2019; 132 in 2020; and 20 in the first half of 2021. All in all, there were more articles before the appointment of the TRC than after.

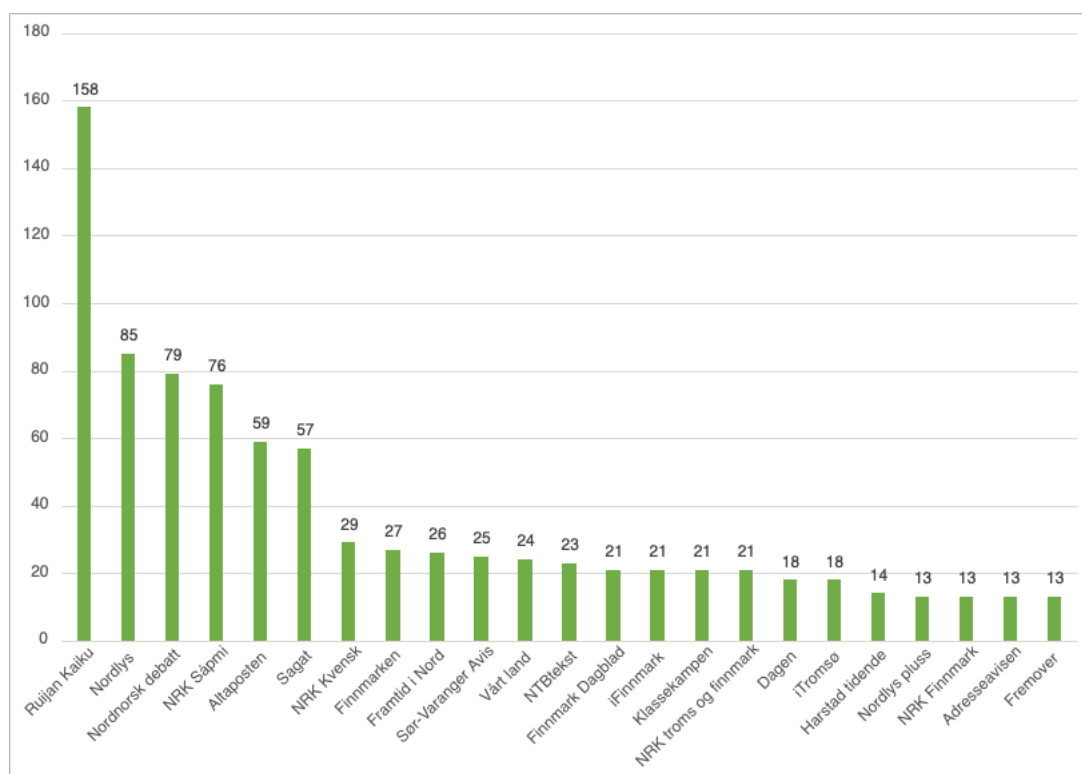


Figure 2. Coverage of the TRC in the top 23 news media. Articles per medium.  $N = 854$

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the articles in the 23 news media that covered the TRC the most. The Sámi and Kven news media, barely known to the nationwide Norwegian population, published the main share of the articles. The outlet for the Kven people, Ruijan Kaiku, tops the list with 158 articles, followed by NRK Sápmi and NRK Kvensk, the Sámi and Kven divisions of the public service broadcaster NRK, and the Sámi newspaper Sápat. Most other top outlets were local and regional newspapers located in north and mid-Norway, the regions that are also called Sápmi. This is where we would expect the news value of the TRC to be the highest, as these regions are the traditional strongholds of the Sámi and Kven people. Only four outlets, Vårt Land (Christian daily newspaper), NTB (Norway's largest news agency), Klassekampen (leftist daily newspaper), and Dagen (Christian-conservative daily newspaper) can be described as media with a nationwide audience. The three newspapers are nevertheless small niche media that only reach segments of the Norwegian population. That the leader of the TRC is a former MP and Minister of Health for the Christian People's Party may go far to explain the interest from the Christian papers, whereas Klassekampen has historically supported the Sámi rights movement. Most news media subscribe to NTB, which produced several articles that appeared across several media types and platforms. There were approximately 200 stories originating in a few news items produced by NTB and published in up to 20 media outlets each (paper and online versions). Figure 3 adds to the picture already established that the TRC had little news value for mainstream and nationwide media. Sámi, Kven, regional, and local media have for decades voiced their communities' views and carried the bulk of the media coverage on Sámi and Kven issues (Skogerbø, 2000; Josefsen & Skogerbø, 2013).

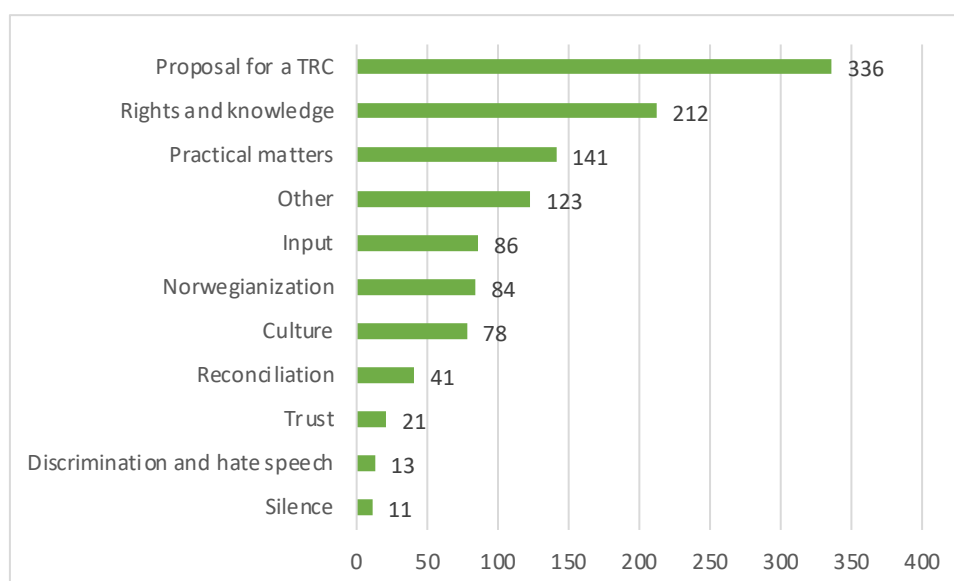


Figure 3. Number of articles in the Retriever media archive per topic from 1 January 2016 until 30 June 2021.  $N=1146$ .

Figure 3 shows the distribution of topics in the articles during the period. ‘Proposal for a TRC’ includes 336 articles and is the category that filled the news in 2017. It remained the dominant topic in the data material, although not surfacing after 2018. During the public debate reported in these articles, many pushed for a TRC to reconcile past injustices, whereas others argued that a TRC would work against its purpose (for example, resurface old wounds but fail to lead to reconciliation or benefits for the Sámi and national minorities). There were also voices that strongly opposed a TRC, arguing that the Norwegianisation policy had been a positive experience for these communities, as well as voices who did not see the purpose of a TRC, arguing that Norway’s king had already apologised for past injustices, or expressing disbelief in and disregard for injustices and discrimination. A commentator in *Nordnorsk Debatt*, a regional online debate forum, argued that the Sámi Parliament was established to ensure and develop Sámi languages and cultures, a historical mapping of the injustices had already been happening for a while, and researchers had already acquired new knowledge on the Norwegianisation, which made him question the relevance of a TRC. Believing that the issue had already achieved enough attention and arguing against a TRC, he asked, “[w]hose truths have not already come out into the light?” (Nygård, 2017, our translation).

The second largest category is ‘rights and knowledge’, which comprised 212 articles. Preceding the appointment of the TRC, many articles coded in this category dealt with calls for equal rights and strengthened knowledge on the history and current issues of these communities as context for a TRC to be appointed. Documenting the need for increased knowledge, Josefsen and Skaar (2021) report from a nationwide survey on knowledge about the existence of the TRC, Norwegianisation, and attitudes towards reconciliation. They found that knowledge on these issues was generally low and the TRC was barely visible in the public sphere. Still, there was a general positive attitude towards a mapping of the Norwegianisation policy.

The third largest category is ‘practical matters’, containing 141 articles, logically not appearing until after the TRC’s appointment. These were mainly brief updates on the

mandate, members, and secretariat, their methods, information on open meetings, and the like. Some of this material also consists of letters by the public debating the TRC's consistency, method, and mandate. The 'other' category is found in fourth place, followed by 'input', 'Norwegianisation', and 'culture', each being made up of around 80 articles. 'Reconciliation', 'trust', 'discrimination and hate speech', and 'silence' were rather small categories, indicating that few people raised their voices publicly to question the trustworthiness and methods of the TRC.

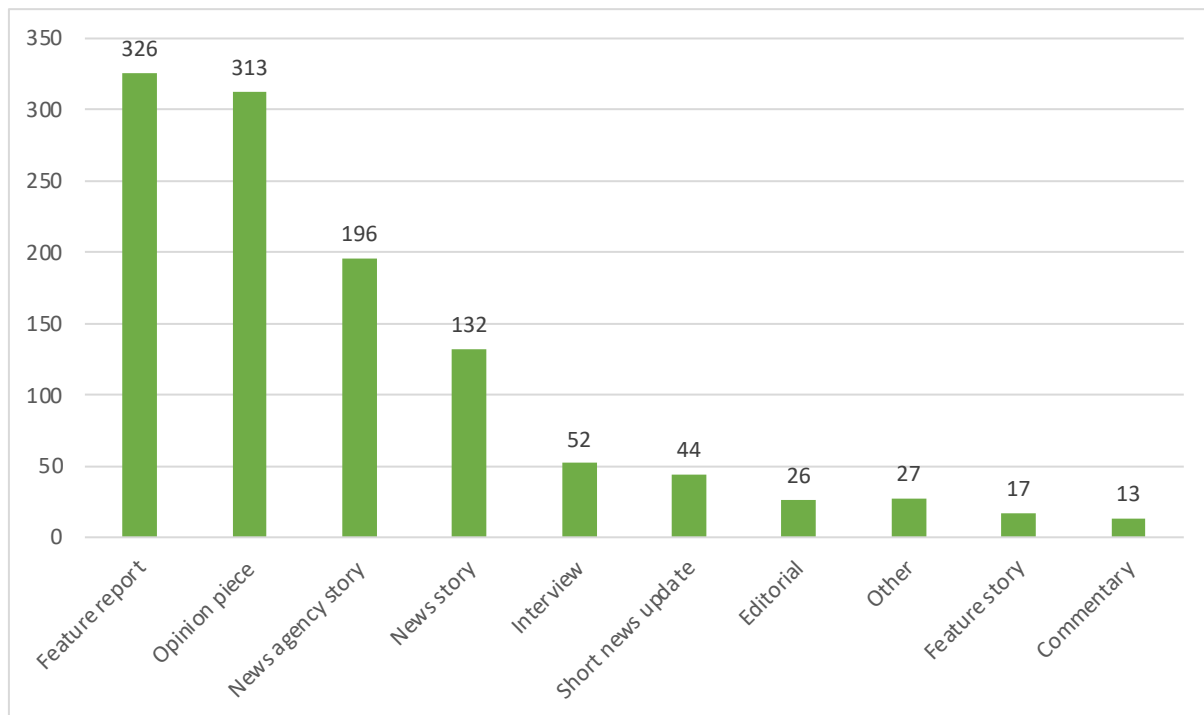


Figure 4. Types of articles. N=1146.

Figure 4 shows the number of articles by genre. There were many short feature reports and news stories giving brief updates on the TRC and its activities, altogether around 450 articles and 313 opinion pieces (letters to the editor, for example, or op-eds). They debated the TRC's purpose, mandate, and plans for reconciliation, as well as insight into the harsh experiences endured by the Sámi and national minorities (including rejection of injustice ever having taken place). The opinion pieces were written by Indigenous and national minorities, staff at Sámi schools and cultural institutions, politicians, and individuals. They provide compelling documentation for understanding whose voices came out and for public listening.

Throughout the entire period, stories from survivors, that is, personal stories of past injustices or current discrimination, were scarce. The Retriever media archive found fewer than 20 at-length feature stories portraying personal experiences of Norwegianisation. A somewhat larger amount of content consisted of short feature reports on the experiences of the Sámi, Kvens, and Norwegian Finns.

## Discussion and conclusions

Returning to our research questions, what are the implications of our findings? Our first conclusion is crystal clear: Although we find relatively extensive total coverage, over time, there was a decrease in media coverage and journalistic attention to issues concerning the TRC. The TRC, potentially of major political importance for a democratic state seeking to come to terms with its troubled past (and current) treatment of its Indigenous and national minorities, lost journalistic attention in the period. Only in a few instances did news, opinion pieces, or debates on the TRC reach nationwide or large regional media. Sámi and Kven outlets covered these groups, but Norwegian Finns were hardly visible in the coverage at all. The appointment of the TRC in 2018 led to less, not more, media attention, even though the TRC was in operation and encouraged people to share stories with them in open meetings and online. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2022 inevitably prevented many physical meetings and dominated news agendas, which, to a certain extent, explains the news silence in Norwegian mainstream media, yet we believe that other factors also impacted the decrease in media attention.

First, not ignoring the limitations in our data, few news media with nationwide coverage picked up on the TRC and its surrounding discussions in any part of the period we studied. To the degree that they did publish stories, many were produced by NTB and recirculated. One of the most widespread stories was the inaugural interview with the leader of the TRC, framed by his position as a celebrity politician and well-known former minister. The story, picked up by many news media, was about presenting the Commission and its leader. In later interviews and opinion pieces, the leadership of the Commission several times pointed to the responsibility of the state—and thereby the TRC—for investigating the past and preparing the ground for reconciliation. Still, few of the TRC's findings were published, which again may have diverted rather than attracted attention from nationwide media. The reply to our first question, then, is that we find many types of coverage of the TRC in a large number of outlets, but in news media with nationwide coverage, the issue is rarely mentioned and clearly overshadowed by other issues.

The second main conclusion is the uneven and hierarchical coverage. News about the TRC was covered extensively in Sámi and Kven outlets and was frequently debated locally and regionally. In other words, there was no silence in the Indigenous, minority, and local media. Sámi and Kven media followed the TRC closely, both journalistically and as debate arenas, but they can only be expected to reach their core audiences among the Sámi and Kven peoples. In these stories, many voices were present representing opposing opinions both on the need for a TRC and on its strategy. Silence on behalf of the TRC came up as a topic in the news media only two years after the appointment, as a question to the TRC about its work methods and its role in the public sphere. A few critics, such as Fredriksen (2020) and Josefsen (in Lanes, 2021) raised the question of how the TRC could call for knowledge and facilitate reconciliation when they do not disclose findings and methods. If knowledge is of such essence, critics asked, how can it be known to the public if the TRC does not share it? Numerous times, the leader of the TRC stressed one of the TRC's main goals—acquiring and spreading more knowledge to the nationwide population—and expressed his understanding in people's wish for more information on the TRC's work (Høybråten, 2021). However, during the time period of our investigation, it was never publicly clarified by the TRC why its investigation strategy best

served its purpose, although the leader explained it as a tool for protecting witnesses who came forth to share their stories (Høybråten, 2020).

After having concluded that media coverage of the TRC was shrinking, uneven, and hierarchical and thereby yielding few opportunities for public listening, what did our study say in terms of the politics of refusal? We do not have one simple answer to this as we found several types of protest. One was the criticism of the TRC for being silent and its repeated reply that it could not comment on the topics of truth and reconciliation until after its main report is published in 2023. Another protest was directed at the TRC as such, voiced by people who were either in opposition to the argument that past injustices exist or who were concerned that the TRC would contribute to reopening old wounds and creating new conflicts. A third point voiced several times was the lack of trust in the TRC and its members and methods for uncovering the truth, essentially pointed out by Jensen (2019). Whose truth will be found? Trust in the TRC was at times highly contested. A fourth type of refusal can be inferred from the responses to the TRC: at the time of writing and after almost four years, the number of individual stories collected by the TRC was around 500 (Sannhets- og forsoningskommisjonen, 2022). On the TRC's website, there was no indication of which areas or groups were represented in these stories. Considering that the Indigenous and national minorities included in the mandate constitute tens of thousands of people (estimated from known figures), the small number of stories was striking. This is also the case when compared with some of the other commissions we discussed above. Some of the explanations may also suggest why people have not shared more. Further, as Siri Broch Johansen (2020) emphasised in her book *Letters to the Commission*, the stories are personal and owned by individuals, families, and people. By telling one's story and not receiving the recognition or consequences one hoped for, it can become less appealing to tell one's story at all. Therefore, not telling your story as part of a strategic silence may be a reply that potential contributors to the TRC have chosen.

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