



Media Narratives and International Responses to the Russia–Ukraine War: A Case Study of the Donbas Conflict, 2022–2026

Simon Okich John Chol^{1*}, Mfitiriyayo Jean de Dieu^{2*} & Mukabalisa Janet^{3*}

¹Department of International Relations, School of Social Sciences
Kigali Independent University (ULK), Kigali, Rwanda

^{2,3}Department of Development Studies and International Relations, School of Social Sciences
Kigali Independent University (ULK), Kigali, Rwanda

Email: okichjohnsimon@gmail.com

Abstract: This study examines whether and under what conditions media narratives shape international responses to the Russia–Ukraine war, focusing on the Donbas conflict, 2022–2026. Existing scholarship often examines media framing and state behaviour separately, with limited integration of both within one design. Using a documentary-review design, the study triangulated peer-reviewed literature, institutional records, and twelve purposively selected media documents from Russian, Western, and Asian/non-aligned outlets against verified data on civilian harm, sanctions, military assistance, refugee protection, legal accountability, information regulation, energy security, and public opinion. Narrative–response correspondence was coded ordinally across eight sectors and five years ($n = 40$) and tested using exact non-parametric procedures. Findings show divergent conflict labels, themes, and attribution of responsibility across media systems (H_1). Overall correspondence was moderate ($M = 2.13/3$), with 75% of sector-years showing at least moderate and 35% strong correspondence (H_2). Correspondence was highest for public opinion and lowest for sanctions (H_3), declined from 2022 to 2023–2025 ($p = .031$; H_4), while verified civilian casualties increased by 52% between January–August 2025 and 2026 ($p = .008$; H_5). Alliance structures, economic dependencies, and institutional momentum conditioned outcomes (H_6 – H_7). Media narratives primarily legitimised existing strategic architectures rather than independently driving policy.

Keywords: Documentary Review, Donbas Conflict, Framing Theory, International Responses, Media Narratives, Russia–Ukraine War, Strategic Communication

How to cite this work (APA):

Chol, S. O. J., Mfitiriyayo J. D. & Mukabalisa, J. (2026). Media Narratives and International Responses to the Russia–Ukraine War: A Case Study of the Donbas Conflict, 2022–2026. *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education*, 10(4), 101 – 116. <https://doi.org/10.59765/kb7g>

1. Introduction

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 transformed an eight-year confrontation in the Donbas region into the largest interstate war in Europe since 1945. What had been an internal or “hybrid” conflict in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts since 2014 became a systemic contest drawing in the

United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and non-aligned states across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Coverage of Russia and Ukraine surged to roughly 1.1 million articles in March 2022 before settling at about 400,000 a month (Vianini et al., 2026): the war is contested as much over narrative as over territory.

The divergence in how war is narrated is well documented. Western outlets foreground Ukrainian sovereignty, civilian suffering, and the illegality of the invasion; Russian outlets foreground NATO encirclement and the protection of Russian speakers; Asian and non-aligned outlets favour an order-and-stability frame that avoids attributing blame (Vianini et al., 2026). Responses diverge as sharply: the EU has adopted twenty-one sanctions packages (Council of the European Union, 2026a, 2026b); Western and allied governments have committed several hundred billion euros (Kiel Institute for the World Economy, 2026a, 2026b); civilian casualties documented by the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU, 2026b) kept rising through 2026; and a non-aligned bloc has resisted isolation amid Western “narrative fatigue” (Ipsos, 2025; Pew Research Center, 2025a, 2025b). Yet scholarship has examined either how media frame the war or how states respond to it; few studies link the two across 2022–2026, and fewer still address the Donbas theatre.

It therefore remains unclear whether narratives drive international responses or track and retrospectively justify decisions shaped by geopolitical interest, alliance commitment, and economic dependency. If narratives drive policy, media monitoring is a decisive lever; if they chiefly legitimate, attention belongs with the structural determinants of state behaviour. The problem addressed is therefore the lack of a documentary synthesis explaining how media narratives about the Russia–Ukraine war, and specifically the Donbas conflict, relate to international responses across eight sectors from 2022 to 2026, and how far that relationship is independent of geopolitical interest. The study addresses it by triangulating media documents, institutional data, and peer-reviewed literature in a single hypothesis-driven design (Council of the European Union, 2026a; HRMMU, 2026b; UNHCR, 2026).

1.1 Objectives of the Study

1.1.1 General objective

To examine the role of media narratives in shaping international responses to the Russia–Ukraine war, with particular reference to the Donbas conflict, and the conditions under which that role strengthens or weakens, over the period 2022–2026.

1.1.2 Specific objectives

- i. To compare how Russian, Western, and Asian/non-aligned media systems label, frame, and attribute responsibility for the Donbas conflict.
- ii. To measure the strength and pattern of correspondence between dominant media narratives

and international responses across eight sectors: diplomatic, economic/sanctions, military, humanitarian, legal, information-regulatory, energy-security, and public-opinion responses.

- iii. To determine whether narrative–response correspondence differs systematically between response sectors.
- iv. To trace how correspondence evolved from the acute phase (2022) to the protracted phase (2023–2026), and to relate that evolution to the trajectory of verified civilian harm and to institutional response momentum.
- v. To assess whether geopolitical interest, alliance structure, and economic dependency condition the translation of media narratives into international responses.
- vi.

1.2 Hypotheses of the Study

Each hypothesis is paired with a null hypothesis (H_0) of no difference, association, or change. Objective 1 is served by H_1 , Objective 2 by H_2 , Objective 3 by H_3 , Objective 4 by H_4 , H_5 , and H_7 , and Objective 5 by H_6 .

H_1 : There is a significant difference among Russian, Western, and Asian/non-aligned media systems in terms of their dominant conflict labels, thematic emphases, and attribution of responsibility for the Donbas conflict.

H_2 : Media narratives and international responses to the Russia–Ukraine war are significantly positively associated, such that more than 50% of sector-years show at least moderate narrative–response correspondence, while fewer than 50% show strong correspondence.

H_3 : The degree of narrative–response correspondence differs significantly across international response sectors, with correspondence significantly higher in media-proximate sectors, particularly public opinion, than in institutionally routinized sectors, particularly sanctions.

H_4 : The degree of narrative–response correspondence was significantly lower during the protracted phase of the Russia–Ukraine war (2023–2025) than during the acute phase in 2022.

H_5 : During the protracted phase of the Russia–Ukraine war, there was a statistically significant increase in verified civilian harm accompanied by a statistically significant weakening of humanitarian responses, resulting in a significant divergence between civilian harm and humanitarian response.

H_6 : Geopolitical interest, alliance structure, and economic dependency moderate the narrative–response relationship, so that support for costly measures falls relative to declaratory measures, alliance-structural shifts alter responses without narrative change, and a

dissenting bloc persists irrespective of narrative exposure.

H7: The rate of newly introduced sanctions packages remained statistically unchanged or significantly sustained during 2025–2026 compared with 2023–2024, despite a decline in narrative–response correspondence.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

Media narratives are the selective, patterned ways in which media organisations name actors, sequence events, assign responsibility, and prescribe remedies (Entman, 1993); unlike a single frame, a narrative links frames into a temporally extended story about protagonists, antagonists, and direction (Miskimmon et al., 2013). *Media framing* (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 1993) is the underlying mechanism: the promotion of selected aspects of reality as a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. *International responses* denote the diplomatic, economic, military, humanitarian, legal, information-regulatory, energy-security, and public-opinion reactions of states, alliances, international organisations, and publics to a conflict; the last four are included because they are arenas in which narratives are most directly contested. The *Donbas conflict* denotes the confrontation that began with the Russian-backed insurgency in Donetsk and Luhansk in 2014 and escalated into full-scale war on 24 February 2022, Donbas remaining the principal ground theatre throughout 2022–2026. *Narrative–response correspondence*, the central analytic construct, is the degree to which the timing, scale, or stated justification of a response can be traced to a prevailing media narrative rather than to institutional, legal, bilateral, or material drivers. It is an ordinal property of a sector-year (Section 3.4).

2.2 Theoretical Review

2.2.1 Strategic narrative theory

Miskimmon et al. (2013, 2017) conceptualise strategic narratives as the means by which political actors construct a shared understanding of international politics to shape the behaviour of others. They distinguish *systemic* narratives about the international order, *identity* narratives about a state's values and history, and *issue* narratives that justify a specific policy; Russian, Western, and non-aligned media each project a distinct bundle of the three. The theory links communication to power but neglects audience resistance and algorithmic amplification. It grounds H₂ and H₄, which ask how

tightly, and for how long, narratives are matched by response.

2.2.2 Framing theory

Rooted in Goffman's (1974) interpretive schemata and adapted by Entman (1993), framing theory identifies four functions: defining a problem, diagnosing causes, making a moral judgement, and suggesting a remedy. In war reporting these map onto editorial choices, such as whether military action is illegal aggression requiring sanctions or encirclement requiring defensive escalation. Because frames are visible in labels, keywords, and attributions of blame, they permit the systematic comparison on which H₁ rests. Though criticised for overlapping with agenda-setting, the theory remains the most tractable tool for comparing media systems.

2.2.3 Securitization theory

For the Copenhagen School (Buzan et al., 1998), an issue becomes a security issue when an authoritative actor persuades a relevant audience that it is an existential threat warranting extraordinary measures. Framing Russian action as a threat to European security helped legitimate measures such as freezing central-bank assets and heavy-weapons transfers, while Russian narratives of NATO enlargement as an existential threat served an equivalent domestic function. Though criticised for its European liberal orientation, the theory informs H₃ and H₆: a narrative translates into extraordinary response only where the audience is already primed by interest.

2.3 Empirical Studies

A hybrid human–artificial-intelligence analysis of more than twenty-two million titles from sources in 194 countries found that coverage of Russia and Ukraine follows stable recurring patterns (security, energy and sanctions, information manipulation), with Russian-language sources increasing foreign-language output around moments such as the annexation of Crimea and the full-scale invasion (Vianini et al., 2026). Indian, Chinese, and Southeast Asian outlets adopt an order-and-neutrality frame consistent with non-alignment and trade ties with Russia. Institutional reporting documents the material side: the HRMMU (2026b) recorded 55% more civilian casualties in January–August 2026 than in the same months of 2025, UNHCR (2026) counted more than 5.2 million refugees from Ukraine in Europe by the end of 2025, and European military and non-military allocations rose 67% and 59% above the 2022–2024 average as United States support was withdrawn (Kiel Institute for the World Economy, 2026a, 2026b). Three gaps follow: a *longitudinal-persistence* gap, since framing research captures mainly the 2022–2023 escalation rather than salience or fatigue as the war protracts (Ipsos, 2025; More in Common, 2026); a *cross-regional triangulation* gap, since Western, Russian, and

Asian/non-aligned media are usually studied in isolation; and an *attribution-mechanism* gap, since whether narratives generate or retrospectively legitimate

responses remains underspecified. The present design addresses all three.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

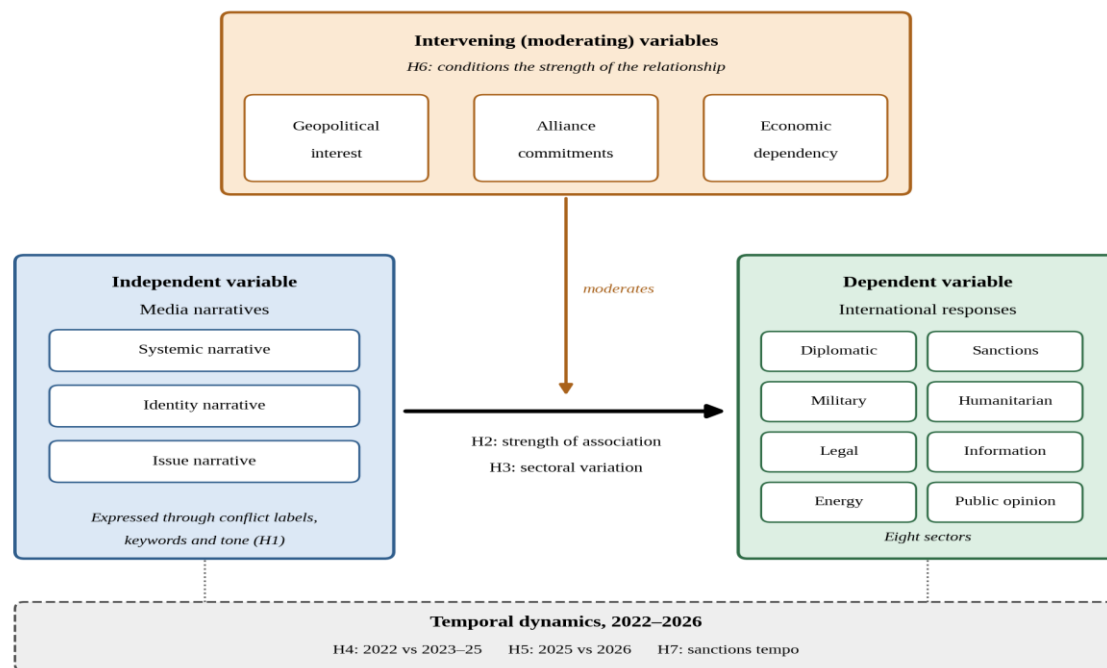


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Media Narratives, Intervening Variables and International Responses

Note. H1 = structure of the independent variable (systemic, identity and issue narratives); H2 = strength of the narrative–response association; H3 = sectoral variation in that association; H4, H5 and H7 = temporal dynamics; H6 = moderating role of geopolitical interest, alliance commitments and economic dependency. Responses are rated 1–3 for narrative–response correspondence in each of eight sectors.

Source: Author’s conceptualisation, adapted from Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle (2013) on strategic narratives; Entman (1993) and Goffman (1974) on framing; and Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998) on securitisation.

3. Methodology

The study adopts a documentary-review design with quantified pattern matching; it is explanatory and non-experimental, using documents rather than respondents. It compares three media blocs (Russian, Western, and Asian/non-aligned) for Objective 1 and eight response sectors across 2022–2026, yielding 40 sector-year observations for Objectives 2–5, assessed through pattern matching and exact non-parametric tests. Sources comprise peer-reviewed literature, scholarly books, official institutional and international-organisation reports, and 12 purposively selected Russian, Western, and Asian/non-aligned media documents. Documents were selected for direct relevance to the war or the Donbas conflict, identifiable provenance, and verifiable evidence; unattributed or uncorroborated materials were excluded. Documents were retrieved through structured searches of academic databases, institutional repositories, and official websites, and a source register recorded titles, issuing bodies, publication dates, and access dates. Media documents were coded for conflict labels, dominant themes, attribution of responsibility,

and tone; institutional and legal documents were coded across eight sectors and five years. Narrative–response correspondence was rated 1 = weak, 2 = moderate, or 3 = strong, with 1.5 and 2.5 for transitional cases, considering explicit narrative citation, temporal proximity, and competing explanations. Casualty, sanctions, aid, and voting data were extracted as reported, without imputation. Sources were assessed for authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning, with greater weight given to peer-reviewed and institutional sources. Revised humanitarian figures are reported by publication date, with revisions disclosed. Hypotheses were tested with exact binomial, Kruskal–Wallis, Mann–Whitney, Wilcoxon, Spearman, Kendall, chi-square, and exact conditional tests as appropriate ($\alpha = .05$), supported by effect sizes and confidence intervals. Given the purposive corpus and non-independent observations, p -values indicate pattern strength rather than population-level inference. Robustness checks tested alternative treatment of half-point ratings; analyses used Python 3 with SciPy. The study uses publicly available secondary documents and involves no human participants; accurate attribution, balanced source representation, and transparent

reporting were observed. Limitations include single-coder judgement, limited statistical power from 40 observations, the small 12-document media corpus, and provisional 2026 data.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Media Framing Across the Three Systems

Table 1: Comparative Framing Profiles of Russian, Western, and Asian/Non-Aligned Media Systems

Framing dimension	Russian state-aligned (TASS, RT, Kremlin communications)	Western (NYT, Guardian, BBC, Reuters)	Asian/non-aligned (China Daily, Times of India, Jakarta Post)
Dominant conflict label	“Special military operation”; liberation; defence of Russian speakers	“Invasion”; “unprovoked aggression”	“Security crisis”; “conflict”
Thematic emphasis	NATO expansion and encirclement; denazification; Western hypocrisy	Sovereignty and territorial integrity; civilian suffering; illegality and war crimes; sanctions	Regional order and stability; economic and energy consequences; negotiation
Attribution of responsibility	NATO and the West	The Russian Federation	Neither belligerent explicitly; systemic
Tone and implied remedy	Defensive-justificatory; continued military operations	Condemnatory-humanitarian; sanctions and military assistance	Neutral and procedural; de-escalation and dialogue

Note. Profiles synthesise the coded twelve-document corpus (four documents per bloc, 2022–2025) and the large-scale computational evidence of Vianini et al. (2026). Bloc labels describe the tendency of the sampled outlets; internal variation exists, and the small corpus does not support outlet-level generalisation. Sources: Vianini et al. (2026); author’s coding of the media corpus.

Table 1 shows that the three media systems diverge on every coded dimension: all twelve pairwise contrasts (four dimensions across three bloc pairings) differ. Russian outlets locate responsibility with NATO and the West, Western outlets with the Russian Federation, and Asian/non-aligned outlets with neither, and each bloc supplies a distinct implied remedy (Entman, 1993) matching its sanctions-and-assistance, continued-operations, or de-escalation posture. This internal

The results follow the order of the objectives: media framing (4.1; Objective 1), civilian harm (4.2), narratives and responses by sector (4.3–4.4; Objectives 2 and 3), hypothesis tests (4.5), and discussion (4.6). The analysis of each table follows the table.

coherence is what strategic narrative theory predicts (Miskimmon et al., 2013), and it is corroborated at scale by Vianini et al. (2026).

4.2 Humanitarian Context: Verified Civilian Harm

Table 2: Cumulative Verified Civilian Casualties at Documented Reporting Milestones, 2022–2026

Reporting date	Cumulative civilians			Δ killed	Interval change		Cumulative children	
	Killed	Injured	Total		Killed/day	Total/day	Killed	Injured
27 Feb 2022	102	304	406	—	—	—	—	—
15 Feb 2023	8,006	13,287	21,293	+7,904	22.4	59.2	—	—
21 Nov 2023	≥10,000	≥18,500	≥28,500	≈+1,994	≈7.1	≈25.8	—	—
22 Feb 2024	10,582	19,875	30,457	+582	6.3	21.0	—	—
31 Aug 2024	11,743	24,614	36,357	+1,161	6.1	30.9	—	—
21 Feb 2025	12,654	29,392	42,046	+911	5.2	32.7	—	—
10 Jul 2025	13,580	34,115	47,695	+926	6.7	40.6	716	2,173
10 Sep 2025	14,116	36,481	50,597	+536	8.6	46.8	733	2,285
30 Jun 2026	16,431	48,613	65,044	+2,315	7.9	49.3	803	2,960
31 Jul 2026	16,874	51,273	68,147	+443	14.3	100.1	—	—

Note. Interval means are the increase in the cumulative figure divided by the days since the preceding milestone (from 27 February 2022), calculated by the author and rounded to one decimal. Values marked ≥ or ≈ rest on approximate published

thresholds; dashes indicate no reported figure. Sources: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2022, 2023, 2024a, 2024b); HRMMU (2023, 2025a, 2025c, 2025d, 2026a); Statista (2026), compiling OHCHR data.

Table 2 shows that the pace of verified civilian killings has not declined monotonically. The mean daily rate fell from about 22 in the invasion year to a trough of 5.2 in the six months to February 2025, then climbed to 8.6 by September 2025 and 14.3 in July 2026. Total casualties rose more steeply, from 21.0 a day in late 2023 to 100.1

in July 2026, driven mainly by injuries. Child casualties reached 3,763 by 30 June 2026 (803 killed), 5.8–6.1% of all civilian casualties at each reported date. The trajectory suggests phases of intensity that only partly follow the international narrative cycle.

Table 3: Verified Civilian Casualties, January–August 2025 and 2026

Month	Killed		Injured		Total		Change, 2026 vs. 2025 (%)	
	2025	2026	2025	2026	2025	2026	Killed	Total
January†	148	157	770	768	918	925	+6.1	+0.8
February	130	188	592	757	722	945	+44.6	+30.9
March	178	211	922	1,206	1,100	1,417	+18.5	+28.8
April	223	238	1,169	1,404	1,392	1,642	+6.7	+18.0
May	191	274	865	1,763	1,056	2,037	+43.5	+92.9
June	249	293	1,416	1,990	1,665	2,283	+17.7	+37.1
July	312	437	1,482	2,610	1,794	3,047	+40.1	+69.8
August	260	372	949	2,349	1,209	2,721	+43.1	+125.1
Jan–Aug total	1,691	2,170	8,165	12,847	9,856	15,017	+28.3	+52.4

Note. Percentage changes were recomputed by the author and may differ from HRMMU headline percentages because earlier figures are revised retrospectively. †January values are derived from first-quarter totals minus February and March. The October–December 2025 aggregate (not shown) was 588 killed and 2,930 injured (3,518 total). HRMMU headline totals for January–August 2026 (2,222 killed; 13,058 injured) exceed the monthly sums shown (2,170; 12,847) because of revisions and derived January values. Sources: HRMMU monthly Protection of Civilians updates (HRMMU, 2025b, 2025c, 2025d, 2026a, 2026b, 2026c).

Table 3 documents a sustained escalation: every one of the eight paired months was worse in 2026 than in 2025 (exact Wilcoxon $T = 0$, $p = .008$; rank-biserial $r = 1.00$). Over January–August, killed rose 28.3% (1,691 to 2,170), injured 57.3% (8,165 to 12,847), and the total 52.4% (9,856 to 15,017). July 2026 was the deadliest

month in the series (437 killed; 3,047 casualties), and a Kendall test across the sixteen months confirms an upward trend ($\tau = .60$, $p < .001$). Because the HRMMU (2026b) headline total of 15,280 casualties exceeds the sum of monthly values, the table is conservative.

Table 4: Weapon-Type and Territorial Composition of Civilian Casualties at Selected Verified Periods

Period	Dominant weapon or incident type	Territorial distribution
24 Feb 2022–15 Feb 2023	Wide-area explosive weapons (artillery, rockets, missiles): 19,220 of 21,293 casualties (90.3%)	—
Aug–Oct 2023	Wide-area explosive weapons, including cluster munitions and loitering munitions; more than 560 children killed cumulatively by 21 Nov 2023	≈86% in government-controlled territory
2024 (full year)	Aerial bombs, short-range drones, long-range missiles, and loitering munitions increasingly dominant; casualties 30% above 2023	—
To 21 Feb 2025	—	84% government-controlled; 16% Russian-occupied
March 2025	Long-range missiles and loitering munitions the primary cause	95% in government-controlled territory
August 2025	Short-range drones the largest single cause: 58 killed and 272 injured of 260 killed and 949 injured (≈22% and ≈29%)	≈72% near the frontline, mainly Donetsk and Kherson oblasts
Feb–Aug 2026	Long-range missiles and drones rising from ≈36% (Feb–Mar) to ≈47% (Aug) of monthly casualties; short-range drones ≈30% (Aug)	≈95–97% government-controlled (Apr–May 2026)

Note. Dashes denote a genuine gap in the published record for that period rather than a zero value; the study does not infer statistics that the source documents omit. Percentages for August 2025 were calculated by the author. Sources: OHCHR (2023); HRMMU (2023, 2025a, 2025b, 2025d, 2026a, 2026b, 2026c).

Table 4 shows that the composition of harm has changed as much as its volume. Wide-area explosive weapons caused about 90% of casualties in the invasion year; by 2025–2026, aerial bombs, drones, and long-range missiles dominated, with missiles and drones rising from roughly 36% to 47% of monthly casualties during 2026. Most casualties (84–97%) occurred in government-controlled territory, and frontline harm remained concentrated in Donetsk and Kherson oblasts ($\approx 72\%$ of August 2025 casualties), confirming Donbas as the principal ground theatre even as long-range strikes made the burden national (HRMMU, 2025b). This escalation coincided with a Western narrative of negotiation and

fatigue (Ipsos, 2025; More in Common, 2026), so battlefield intensity and narrative tone did not move in lockstep.

4.3 Media Narratives and International Responses in Eight Sectors

Tables 5 to 8 set each year’s dominant documented narrative against the dated response and its quantitative indicator, with the correspondence rating assigned under Section 3.4.

Table 5: Media Narratives and Diplomatic, Multilateral, and Sanctions Responses, 2022–2026

Year	Dominant documented narrative	Response event and quantitative indicator	Correspondence rating
Sector 1: Diplomatic and multilateral responses			
2022	Western: “unprovoked aggression,” sovereignty violation. Russian: “special military operation,” liberation.	UNGA ES-11/1 (2 Mar.; 141–5–35); Council of Europe expels Russia (16 Mar.); ES-11/3 suspends Russia from Human Rights Council (7 Apr.; 93–24–58); ES-11/4 declares annexation referenda invalid (12 Oct.; 143–5–35).	Moderate (2): votes track events more than tone
2023	Western “war crimes/illegality” narrative sustained (occupied territories, child deportation).	Finland joins NATO (4 Apr.), the 31st member.	Weak (1): set by ratification process
2024	Western “protracted stalemate”; non-aligned “neutral security crisis” persists.	Sweden joins NATO (7 Mar.), the 32nd member, after Turkish and Hungarian ratification delays.	Weak (1): bilateral bargaining
2025	Western “negotiation fatigue” and peace-process narrative; majority sympathy for Ukraine in polls.	Renewed peace-process engagement (UK, France, Germany, Poland, US); clear majorities in 4 of 5 polled countries reject territorial concessions.	Strong (3): posture and narrative move together
2026	Western narrative bifurcates between “fatigue/settlement” and continued atrocity coverage.	European Council (18 Jun.) reaffirms firm, unwavering support for Ukraine; 21st sanctions package adopted (23 Jul.).	Moderate (2): momentum despite fatigue
Sector 2: Economic and financial sanctions responses			
2022	“Legal-moral violation” framing peaks around Bucha (Apr.) and the Mariupol siege (Mar.–May).	Packages 1 to about 9; RT/Sputnik broadcast ban (1 Mar.); SWIFT exclusion of selected banks. 6 outlets banned, extended to 9 (Jun.).	Moderate–Strong (2.5): pace tracks atrocity coverage
2023	Shift to “war of attrition” and sanctions-evasion (“shadow fleet”) narratives.	10th (Feb.), 11th (23 Jun.; third-country evasion), 12th (18 Dec.) packages; 12 cumulative; anti-circumvention framework introduced.	Weak–Moderate (1.5): legal-technical logic
2024	Technical, legalistic Western coverage (asset-freeze mechanics).	13th (23 Feb.), 14th (24 Jun.), 15th (16 Dec.) packages; 15 cumulative; first hybrid-threats designations.	Weak (1): routinised calendar
2025	Sanctions described as struggling to compel concessions amid stalemate.	16th ($\approx$ Feb.), 17th (20 May), 18th (18–19 Jul.), 19th ($\approx$ Oct.) packages; ≈ 19 cumulative.	Weak (1): packages continue on schedule

Year	Dominant documented narrative	Response event and quantitative indicator	Correspondence rating
2026	Renewed “economic pressure” narrative alongside rising casualty coverage.	20th (23 Apr.; 120 listings, largest addition in two years) and 21st (23 Jul.) packages; 21 cumulative. EU energy payments to Russia –85% vs. 2021; EU–Russia exports –66%, imports –83%.	Moderate (2): coincides with, not attributed to, casualty reporting

Note. UNGA = United Nations General Assembly; votes are in favour–against–abstentions. Ratings follow the three-point scale in Section 3.4 (1 = weak, 2 = moderate, 3 = strong; half-points transitional). Package dates marked ≈ are approximate. Sources: Sector 1: United Nations (2022a, 2022b, 2022c); NATO (2023); Government of Sweden (2024); More in Common (2026); Council of the European Union (2026b, 2026c). Sector 2: Council of the European Union (2022, 2026a, 2026b, 2026c); European Commission (2026).

Sector 1: Diplomatic and multilateral responses ($M = 1.80$). Diplomatic action followed events more closely than narrative tone. General Assembly support was 77.9% of votes cast on ES-11/1 and 78.1% on ES-11/4, but only 53.1% on ES-11/3, which suspended a member state from the Human Rights Council. NATO enlargement in 2023 and 2024 ran on ratification calendars and bilateral bargaining, so correspondence was weak; it became strong only in 2025, when public rejection of territorial concessions and diplomatic posture moved together (More in Common, 2026).

and the RT/Sputnik ban followed within a week of the invasion (Council of the European Union, 2022). From 2023, a legal-technical logic of closing loopholes and a routinised calendar displaced narrative timing, and correspondence sank to 1.0 in 2024 and 2025. The 20th package coincided with intensified casualty reporting without being attributed to it, and the structural outcomes, an 85% fall in EU energy payments to Russia and falls of 66% in exports and 83% in imports relative to 2021, reflect cumulative decoupling that no single narrative moment explains (Council of the European Union, 2026a; European Commission, 2026).

Sector 2: Economic and financial sanctions ($M = 1.60$, the lowest). Early packages tracked atrocity coverage,

Table 6: Media Narratives and Military & Humanitarian Responses, 2022–2026

Year	Dominant documented narrative	Response event and quantitative indicator	Correspondence rating
Sector 3: Military and security assistance responses			
2022	“Existential defence of Ukrainian sovereignty” intensifies around Mariupol and the Kharkiv and Kherson counter-offensives.	US, UK, and EU states approve HIMARS, howitzers, and air defence; European Peace Facility funds lethal transfers; Western aid accumulates towards ≈€315bn (2022–Feb. 2026).	Moderate (2): also reflects battlefield assessment
2023	“Siege of Bakhmut” and attritional-warfare narrative dominates Western coverage.	Leopard 2 and Challenger 2 tanks pledged (Jan.); first F-16 pledged later in the year.	Moderate (2): debate underway since 2022
2024	Russian gains near Avdiivka and energy-infrastructure strikes reinforce “critical need.”	US approves ATACMS use inside Russia (Nov.); US aid 2022–2024 ≈€115bn cumulative.	Moderate (2): follows strikes by several months
2025	US narrative shifts to disengagement; European narrative to “Europe must lead.”	US bilateral allocations effectively stall; European military allocations +67% and non-military +59% above the 2022–2024 average.	Strong (3): European statements cite need to compensate
2026	“European strategic autonomy” alongside high casualty reporting.	€90bn Ukraine Support Loan (2026–2027); ≈€11bn allocated by European institutions in May–Jun., of which €4.3bn military.	Strong (3): design linked to sustaining the war effort
Sector 4: Humanitarian and refugee-protection responses			
2022	Civilian-suffering framing around Mariupol, Bucha, and mass displacement.	EU activates the Temporary Protection Directive (4 Mar.), eight days after invasion, granting residence and work rights across 27 member states; several million refugees within weeks.	Strong (3): activation follows earliest, most intense coverage
2023	Sustained but declining displacement coverage as front lines stabilise.	Protection continues; refugee population in Europe stabilises at 5.7–6.2 million.	Moderate (2): established architecture

Year	Dominant documented narrative	Response event and quantitative indicator	Correspondence rating
2024	Energy-strike coverage renews humanitarian salience in winter.	Protection continues; 306 attacks damaged or destroyed medical facilities (threefold the 2023 level).	Moderate (2): aligns with, does not generate, commitments
2025	Casualty-escalation coverage renews urgency amid fatigue elsewhere.	Protection extended; EU financial and humanitarian aid 41% lower (monthly average) than 2025 levels by mid-2026; ≈5.2 million refugees in Europe (end-2025), >6.8 million worldwide.	Weak (1): budget-driven, not narrative-driven
2026	Casualty-escalation narrative intensifies without matching aid.	Protection remains in force; the €90bn Loan allocates a minority share to humanitarian and budget support; 68,147 cumulative casualties by 31 Jul.; aid below 2025 levels every month.	Weak (1): clearest narrative–response divergence

Note. Ratings follow the three-point scale in Section 3.4. Cumulative aid figures are Kiel Institute allocations in euros. Sources: Sector 3: Kiel Institute for the World Economy (2026a, 2026b); European Parliament Research Service (2025); Statista (2026). Sector 4: Kiel Institute for the World Economy (2026b); UNHCR (2026); HRMMU (2025a); Statista (2026).

Sector 3: Military and security assistance ($M = 2.40$).

Weapons decisions clustered around besieged-city and attrition coverage but also reflected battlefield assessment, hence moderate ratings for 2022–2024. Correspondence was strongest in 2025–2026, when the “Europe must lead” narrative and the alliance-structural adjustment coincided: European allocations rose as United States support receded, and the €90bn loan was designed to sustain the war effort (Kiel Institute for the World Economy, 2026a, 2026b; European Parliament

Research Service, 2025). The narrative articulated, rather than caused, a structural shift.

Sector 4: Humanitarian and refugee protection ($M = 1.80$). Correspondence was strongest at the outset, when the Temporary Protection Directive was activated within eight days of the invasion, and weakest at the end: in 2025–2026 humanitarian aid fell 41% even as verified casualties climbed 52% (Table 3). Allocation followed budget priorities rather than narrative salience, the clearest divergence between narrative and material response.

Table 7: Media Narratives and Legal and Information-Regulatory Responses, 2022–2026

Year	Dominant documented narrative	Response event and quantitative indicator	Correspondence rating
Sector 5: Legal and judicial accountability responses			
2022	Western coverage of alleged war crimes (Bucha, Izium) and forced child transfers accumulates.	ICC investigation proceeds under Ukraine’s 2014/2015 acceptance of jurisdiction.	Strong (3): activity follows specific atrocity reporting
2023	Sustained narrative on Ukrainian children deported to Russia.	ICC warrants for Putin and Lvova-Belova (17 Mar.), the first against a sitting head of state of a UNSC permanent member; charges under Rome Statute Arts. 8(2)(a)(vii) and 8(2)(b)(viii).	Strong (3): warrant cites the deportation allegations
2024	Continued accountability framing as further ICC action is reported.	Further warrants reported for attacks on civilian energy infrastructure (as of Jun. 2024).	Moderate (2): causal link not independently verified
2025	Narrative shifts to whether warrants are enforceable.	A special tribunal for the crime of aggression remains under discussion; none established.	Weak (1): institutional obstacles bind
2026	Tension between accountability and peace-deal narratives becomes explicit.	Peace talks raise amnesty trade-offs; two high-profile ICC warrants (Putin, Lvova-Belova) unresolved.	Moderate (2): no new judicial action
Sector 6: Media, information, and digital-regulation responses			
2022	EU frames RT and Sputnik as instruments of “information manipulation” and propaganda.	EU suspends RT/Sputnik broadcasting (1 Mar., in force 2 Mar.); 3 further outlets added (6 Jun.); 6 outlets banned initially, 9 by mid-year.	Strong (3): legal instrument names the narrative as target

Year	Dominant documented narrative	Response event and quantitative indicator	Correspondence rating
2023	Western institutional narrative treats Russian state media as a security threat; Russia counter-frames as censorship.	Further outlets added to the EU prohibited list in later packages.	Moderate (2): follows sanctions calendar
2024	Disinformation narrative more prominent in computational media analysis.	EU adopts first “hybrid threats” designations (Oct.) under a distinct regime.	Moderate (2): follows accumulating narrative
2025	Coverage of AI-generated and algorithmically amplified disinformation.	Continued platform-level restrictions; no single major new EU action located; not quantified.	Weak (1): attention real, action not located
2026	20th package explicitly targets Kremlin-backed disinformation outlets.	Licences of several outlets suspended (Jun. conclusions); 20th package: 120 listings.	Strong (3): objective explicitly stated

Note. ICC = International Criminal Court; UNSC = United Nations Security Council. Ratings follow the three-point scale in Section 3.4. Sources: Sector 5: International Criminal Court/UN News (2023); Wikipedia (2024); More in Common (2026). Sector 6: Council of the European Union (2022, 2026a, 2026c); European Audiovisual Observatory/Council of Europe (2022); Vianini et al. (2026).

Sector 5: Legal accountability ($M = 2.20$).

Correspondence was strong where narrative attached to specific, verifiable allegations, notably the deportation of children cited in the ICC warrants of March 2023 (International Criminal Court/UN News, 2023). It faded as constraints became institutional and diplomatic: no aggression tribunal existed by 2025, and in 2026 the tension between justice and peace generated no new judicial action.

Sector 6: Information regulation ($M = 2.20$).

Here narrative is itself the object of policy, so the coupling is partly definitional: the EU’s 2022 instrument cited “information manipulation” as its justification, and the 20th package again targeted disinformation outlets (Council of the European Union, 2022, 2026a; European Audiovisual Observatory/Council of Europe, 2022). In the intervening years, additions followed the sanctions calendar, so ratings were moderate to weak.

Table 8: Media Narratives and Energy-Security and Public-Opinion Responses, 2022–2026

Year	Dominant documented narrative	Response event and quantitative indicator	Correspondence rating
Sector 7: Energy-security responses			
2022	Russian media frame energy as leverage; Western media frame dependency as strategic vulnerability.	REPowerEU launched (18 May); Nord Stream pipelines sabotaged (26 Sep.).	Strong (3): REPowerEU invokes the vulnerability narrative
2023	“Energy independence achieved” narrative as LNG and Norwegian supplies scale up.	Russian pipeline-gas share of EU imports falls sharply.	Moderate (2): narrative and the loss of Nord Stream
2024	Scrutiny of Russian LNG imports via third countries as a “loophole.”	Sectoral restrictions added package by package against LNG-adjacent circumvention.	Moderate (2): pressure and incremental tightening
2025	Energy coverage recedes as diplomatic and fatigue narratives dominate.	Energy sanctions continue via routine cycle (17th, 18th packages).	Weak (1): salience falls, regime tightens
2026	Renewed emphasis on cutting Russian revenue as war financing.	20th package: LNG-terminal-services ban from 1 Jan. 2027 and maritime tools; 21st targets energy; EU payments to Russia –85% (2025 vs. 2021).	Strong (3): EU cites “weakening the war economy”
Sector 8: Public-opinion and civil-society responses			

Year	Dominant documented narrative	Response event and quantitative indicator	Correspondence rating
2022	Near-universal Western sympathy framing in the opening weeks.	Support for Ukraine and NATO favourability spike; 55% favourable among US Republicans and leaners.	Strong (3): opinion and narrative move together
2023	Sustained but less acute Western narrative as the war protracts.	Concern about a Russian victory rises relative to the September 2022 baseline.	Moderate (2): also reflects battlefield events
2024	Growing US partisan divergence over aid and Zelenskyy's leadership.	NATO favourability 75% (Democrats) vs. 43% (Republicans), a 32-point gap; confidence in Zelenskyy falls in several European countries.	Strong (3): split mirrored in polling
2025	"Aid fatigue" and "is it worth it" framing prominent in US coverage.	36% say support helps US security, 36% say it hurts, 24% no impact; majorities in 27 of 29 countries oppose direct military involvement.	Strong (3): fragmentation mirrored
2026	Peace-process narrative dominates alongside atrocity coverage.	Clear majorities in Britain, France, Germany, Poland, and the US sympathise with Ukraine and reject territorial concessions; stable since Mar. 2025 in 4 of 5 countries.	Strong (3): closest explicit tracking

Note. LNG = liquefied natural gas. Ratings follow the three-point scale in Section 3.4. Sources: Sector 7: European Commission (2022, 2026); Council of the European Union (2026a, 2026b); Wikipedia (2022). Sector 8: Pew Research Center (2024, 2025a, 2025b); Ipsos (2025); More in Common (2026).

Sector 7: Energy security ($M = 2.20$). RePowerEU invoked the strategic-vulnerability narrative (European Commission, 2022), reinforced by the material shock of the Nord Stream sabotage (Wikipedia, 2022), so narrative and structure cannot be cleanly separated. Correspondence fell to weak in 2025 as energy coverage receded while sanctions tightened, and recovered in 2026 with the LNG-terminal-services ban and the explicit link between energy measures and Russia's war economy (Council of the European Union, 2026a, 2026b).

Sector 8: Public opinion ($M = 2.80$, the highest). Polling mirrors the narrative environment closely: a 32-point partisan gap on NATO favourability, a 36–36–24 split on whether support helps US security, and stable majorities rejecting territorial concessions in four of five countries (Pew Research Center, 2024, 2025a, 2025b; Ipsos, 2025; More in Common, 2026). This does not show that media caused opinion, since audiences self-select into outlets; it shows that where the public is the responding actor, narrative and response are hard to disentangle.

4.4 Cross-Sector Synthesis

Table 9: Narrative–Response Correspondence Ratings by Sector and Year, 2022–2026

Response sector	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	M	SD
1. Diplomatic and multilateral	2.0	1.0	1.0	3.0	2.0	1.80	0.84
2. Economic and sanctions	2.5	1.5	1.0	1.0	2.0	1.60	0.65
3. Military and security	2.0	2.0	2.0	3.0	3.0	2.40	0.55
4. Humanitarian and refugee	3.0	2.0	2.0	1.0	1.0	1.80	0.84
5. Legal and judicial	3.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	2.0	2.20	0.84
6. Information and digital regulation	3.0	2.0	2.0	1.0	3.0	2.20	0.84
7. Energy security	3.0	2.0	2.0	1.0	3.0	2.20	0.84
8. Public opinion and civil society	3.0	2.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.80	0.45
Year mean (M)	2.69	1.94	1.88	1.75	2.38	2.13	0.77
Year SD across sectors	0.46	0.56	0.64	1.04	0.74	—	—
Strong ratings (of 8)	5	1	1	3	4	14	—
Weak ratings, ≤ 1.5 (of 8)	0	2	2	5	1	10	—

Note. $n = 40$ sector-years; 1 = weak, 2 = moderate, 3 = strong; half-points are transitional. The final column of the year-mean row gives the grand mean and standard deviation. Ratings are the author's single-coder judgements from the correspondence entries in Tables 5–8. Sources: author's coding of the documentary evidence in Tables 5–8.

Table 9 condenses forty sector-years into one matrix. The grand mean is 2.13 ($SD = 0.77$), indistinguishable from "moderate" (one-sample Wilcoxon against 2, $p = .297$): 14 ratings are strong, 16 moderate or moderate–

strong, and 10 weak or weak–moderate. Year means follow a U-shaped path, from 2.69 in 2022 to 1.94, 1.88, and 1.75 in 2023–2025 and 2.38 in 2026, with dispersion peaking in 2025 ($SD = 1.04$). Fatigue therefore polarised

sectors into those still tied to narrative (diplomacy, military assistance, public opinion) and those that had detached (sanctions, humanitarian aid, legal action, information regulation, energy).

4.5 Hypothesis Testing

H	Test procedure	Key statistics	Decision
H ₁	Pairwise pattern matching of three blocs on four framing dimensions (Table 1)	12 of 12 contrasts differ; corroborated by Vianini et al. (2026)	Supported
H ₂	Exact binomial tests against .50: share $\geq$ moderate; share strong	$\geq$ moderate = .75, 95% CI [.60, .86], $p = .001$; strong = .35, CI [.22, .50], $p = .040$	Supported
H ₃	Kruskal–Wallis across 8 sectors; Mann–Whitney contrast, opinion vs. sanctions	$H(7) = 8.88$, $p = .261$, $\epsilon^2 = .06$; $U = 23.5$, exact $p = .032$, rank-biserial $r = .88$	Partially supported
H ₄	Exact sign-flip Wilcoxon, 2022 vs. 2023–2025 mean by sector; Spearman year–rating	$T = 2.5$, exact $p = .031$, $r = .55$; $\rho = -.42$, $p = .018$ ($n = 32$)	Supported
H ₅	Exact Wilcoxon on 8 paired months; Kendall trend; Mann–Whitney on Sector 4	$T = 0$, $p = .008$; $\tau = .60$, $p < .001$; $M = 2.33$ vs. 1.00, exact $p = .100$	Supported (aid component descriptive)
H ₆	χ^2 on UNGA votes; alliance-structural shift; dissent stability; cost-bearing vs. cost-light sectors	$\chi^2(2) = 34.80$, $p < .001$ (indicative); +67%, +59%; 5 and 35 in both votes; $U = 162.5$, $p = .290$	Substantially supported
H ₇	Exact conditional test of package rates, 2023–2024 vs. 2025–Jul. 2026	0.25 vs. 0.32 per month; $RR = 1.26$, 95% CI [0.34, 4.72]; one-sided p (decline) = .758	Supported (low power)

Note. CI = confidence interval; RR = rate ratio. Exact p -values are two-tailed unless stated. Because the corpus is purposive, p values are descriptive indices of pattern strength (Section 3.6). Sources: author's calculations from Tables 1–9; United Nations (2022a, 2022b, 2022c); Kiel Institute for the World Economy (2026a); Council of the European Union (2026a, 2026b).

H₁ (cross-bloc divergence) is supported. All twelve pairwise contrasts in Table 1 differ, and the pattern coincides with the independent large-scale computational evidence of Vianini et al. (2026). The null hypothesis of common framing is rejected.

H₂ (conditional association) is supported. Thirty of 40 sector-years (75%; 95% CI [.60, .86]) were at least moderate, significantly more than half (exact binomial $p = .001$), but only 14 (35%; CI [.22, .50]) were strong, significantly fewer than half ($p = .040$): the association is positive but not deterministic. The result holds when half-points are rounded down, although the strong component loses significance under upward rounding ($p = .077$).

H₃ (sectoral heterogeneity) is partially supported. The omnibus test did not detect differences among the eight sectors ($H(7) = 8.88$, $p = .261$; $\epsilon^2 = .06$). The theory-driven contrast is clear, with public opinion ($M = 2.80$) exceeding sanctions ($M = 1.60$), $U = 23.5$, exact $p = .032$, $r = .88$, but it is sensitive to rounding ($p = .016$ to $.095$) and would not survive strict correction for multiple comparisons, so it is best read as suggestive.

H₄ (temporal attenuation) is supported. Correspondence was higher in 2022 than in the 2023–2025 mean in seven of eight sectors (2.69 vs. 1.85; exact sign-flip $T = 2.5$, $p = .031$, $r = .55$), and across 2022–2025 rating and year were negatively correlated ($\rho = -.42$, $p = .018$, $n = 32$) under both rounding rules. The 2026 recovery ($M = 2.38$) is not significantly above the 2023–2025 mean ($p = .109$), so the rebound is tentative.

H₅ (harm–response decoupling) is supported.

The casualty component is firmly established: all eight paired months of 2026 exceeded those of 2025 (exact $T = 0$, $p = .008$), with a monotonic sixteen-month trend ($\tau = .60$, $p < .001$). The response component is directional: humanitarian correspondence fell from 2.33 in 2022–2024 to 1.00 in 2025–2026 and aid fell 41% (Table 6), but with so few observations this element rests on descriptive evidence.

H₆ (moderation by interest) is substantially supported. Three lines converge. First, support fell when a measure imposed cost on a member: 77.9% of votes cast favoured ES-11/1 and 78.1% ES-11/4, but only 53.1% the Human Rights Council suspension ($\chi^2(2) = 34.80$, $p < .001$, indicative only because states recur across votes; United Nations, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c). Second, alliance structure moved responses without narrative change: European allocations rose 67% and 59% above the 2022–2024 average as United States support receded, while the Western narrative stayed constant (Kiel Institute for the World Economy, 2026a). Third, the dissenting bloc was invariant, with 5 votes against and 35 abstentions on both ES-11/1 and ES-11/4 despite intervening atrocity coverage. A crude sector-cost contrast did not discriminate ($U = 162.5$, $p = .290$), so moderation operates through alliance and dependency structure rather than sectoral cost alone.

H₇ (institutional momentum) is supported, with low power. The EU adopted six packages in 2023–2024 (0.25

per month) and six from January 2025 to July 2026 (0.32 per month), a rate ratio of 1.26 (exact 95% CI [0.34, 4.72]; one-sided $p = .758$ for decline), although the wide interval does not demonstrate equivalence. Sustained output while sanctions correspondence stood at 1.0–1.5 is the signature of routinised policy that no longer depends on narrative salience.

4.6 Discussion of Results

The findings support a conditional, legitimating account of the narrative–response relationship. Strategic narrative theory predicts coherent, competing narrative bundles, and H_1 confirms them (Miskimmon et al., 2013, 2017). Correspondence is real (H_2) but seldom strong and unevenly distributed: it is highest where the public responds or where narrative is itself the regulatory target, and lowest where responses run on legal, budgetary, or alliance calendars (H_3), as expected if narratives supply the interpretive vocabulary of policy rather than its engine.

Correspondence peaked in the acute securitizing moment of 2022, when an existential-threat narrative met an audience primed by proximity and interest, consistent with the Copenhagen School (Buzan et al., 1998). It then decayed (H_4) and polarised: diplomacy, military assistance, and opinion stayed coupled while sanctions, humanitarian aid, and legal action detached, even as civilian harm escalated (H_5) and sanctions output persisted (H_7). Once established, institutional and alliance-based responses acquire momentum independent of narrative attention, extending a literature drawn mostly from the war’s early phase (Vianini et al., 2026).

The moderation evidence (H_6) supports a broadly realist critique of narrative-centric explanations: Western securitizing narratives did not alter the interest calculations of the invariant non-aligned bloc, and the European adjustment after 2025 was alliance-structural rather than narrative-driven. Responses to a protracted conflict such as Donbas are thus better predicted by institutional and alliance variables than by narrative monitoring alone, yet narrative remains the mechanism through which material interests are made politically legible. Given the limitations in Section 3.7, the findings are a transparent hypothesis test, not causal proof.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined how media narratives shaped international responses to the Russia–Ukraine war, with particular reference to the Donbas conflict in 2022–2026, through a documentary review of peer-reviewed literature, institutional records, and a purposive media corpus. Six of the seven hypotheses were supported or substantially supported, and one (H_3) partially.

Russian, Western, and Asian/non-aligned media differed on all twelve pairwise contrasts of label, theme, attribution, and remedy (Objective 1). Narrative–response correspondence was moderate ($M = 2.13$), with 75% of sector-years at least moderate but only 35% strong (Objective 2), and was highest for public opinion and lowest for sanctions (Objective 3). Correspondence fell from 2.69 in 2022 to 1.85 in 2023–2025, while civilian casualties rose 52% and sanctions output did not slow (Objective 4), and alliance restructuring, cost-sensitive voting, and an invariant dissenting bloc show that interest, alliance structure, and dependency condition whether narratives become policy (Objective 5).

On balance, media narratives function primarily as instruments of legitimation and coordination within a policy architecture shaped by material interest, not as independent drivers of response. Their role is to supply the vocabulary through which material interests are made publicly and diplomatically defensible.

5.2 Recommendations

According to the findings, the following recommendations were made.

- **International organisations:** The UN and regional bodies should institutionalise cross-bloc media monitoring of active conflicts, interpreting narrative shifts alongside verified indicators such as those of the HRMMU and UNHCR.
- **Governments and policymakers:** Strategic communication should complement, not substitute for, alliance management and capability planning, since narrative alone neither predicts nor generates policy; measures that impose costs on partners will attract narrower coalitions and require diplomacy that addresses dependency directly.
- **Media organisations and journalists:** News organisations in all three blocs should strengthen source diversification and cross-verification and be transparent about the institutional pressures that shape conflict labelling, to reduce the bloc-specific narrative silos documented here.
- **Civil-society, peacebuilding, and humanitarian actors:** Advocacy should anchor communication in verified casualty, displacement, and sanctions data and, because aid fell while casualties rose, target budget and allocation decisions rather than rely on narrative salience.
- **Conflict researchers and academics:** Future work should use larger, double-coded corpora with reported inter-coder reliability and time-series designs capable of establishing the causal direction between narrative and policy shifts.

References

- Buzan, B., Wæver, O., & de Wilde, J. (1998). *Security: A new framework for analysis*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Council of the European Union. (2022, March 2). EU imposes sanctions on state-owned outlets RT/Russia Today and Sputnik's broadcasting in the EU [Press release]. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/02/eu-imposes-sanctions-on-state-owned-outlets-russia-today-and-sputnik-s-broadcasting-in-the-eu/>
- Council of the European Union. (2026a, April 23). 20th sanctions package against Russia. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/>
- Council of the European Union. (2026a, June 25). Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: Council extends economic sanctions for another year [Press release]. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/06/25/russia-s-war-of-aggression-against-ukraine-council-extends-economic-sanctions-for-another-year/>
- Council of the European Union. (2026b, July 23). 21st package of sanctions: EU hits Russian energy, financial services and crypto hard [Press release]. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/07/23/21st-package-of-sanctions-eu-hits-russian-energy-financial-services-and-crypto-hard/>
- Council of the European Union. (2026b, June 25). Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: Council extends economic sanctions for another year [Press release].
- Council of the European Union. (2026c, July 23). 21st package of sanctions: EU hits Russian energy, financial services and crypto hard [Press release]. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/07/23/21st-package-of-sanctions-eu-hits-russian-energy-financial-services-and-crypto-hard/>
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>
- European Audiovisual Observatory / Council of Europe. (2022). The implementation of EU sanctions against RT and Sputnik [Note]. <https://rm.coe.int/note-rt-sputnik/1680a5dd5d>
- European Commission. (2022, May 18). REPowerEU Plan. <https://ec.europa.eu/>
- European Commission. (2026, July 23). EU adopts 21st package of sanctions against Russia [News release]. https://finance.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-adopts-21st-package-sanctions-against-russia-2026-07-23_en
- European Parliament Research Service. (2025). State of play: EU support to Ukraine [Briefing]. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2025/775834/EPRS_BRI\(2025\)775834_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2025/775834/EPRS_BRI(2025)775834_EN.pdf)
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Harvard University Press.
- Government of Sweden. (2024). Historical relations between Sweden and NATO. <https://www.government.se/government-policy/sweden-in-nato/history-of-sweden-and-nato/>
- International Criminal Court / UN News. (2023, March 17). Russia: International Criminal Court issues arrest warrant for Putin. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/03/1134732>
- Ipsos. (2025). Global attitudes to the Ukraine war. <https://www.ipsos.com/en/global-attitudes-ukraine-war>
- Kiel Institute for the World Economy. (2026a). Ukraine support after 4 years of war: Europe steps up [Policy brief]. <https://www.kielinstitut.de/publications/news/ukraine-support-after-4-years-of-war-europe-steps-up/>
- Kiel Institute for the World Economy. (2026b). Ukraine Support Tracker: Europe leads on aid – US weapons remain key. <https://www.kielinstitut.de/publications/news/ukraine-support-tracker-europe-leads-on-aid-us-weapons-remain-key/>
- Miskimmon, A., O'Loughlin, B., & Roselle, L. (2013). *Strategic narratives: Communication power and the new world order*. Routledge.
- Miskimmon, A., O'Loughlin, B., & Roselle, L. (Eds.). (2017). *Forging the world: Strategic narratives and international relations*. University of Michigan Press.
- More in Common. (2026). International public opinion on the Ukraine peace process. <https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/research/international-public-opinion-on-the-ukraine-peace-process/>

NATO. (2023, April 4). Finland joins NATO as 31st Ally [News release]. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_213448.htm

Pew Research Center. (2024, July 2). Confidence in Zelenskyy and support for Ukraine in 35 countries. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2024/07/02/confidence-in-zelenskyy-and-support-for-ukraine/>

Pew Research Center. (2025a, February 14). US views of Ukraine aid, NATO and European defense in 2025. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/02/14/americans-views-of-the-war-in-ukraine-continue-to-differ-by-party/>

Pew Research Center. (2025b, April 17). How Americans view the Russia-Ukraine war. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2025/04/17/how-americans-view-the-russia-ukraine-war/>

UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine. (2025a, February 21). Civilian harm and human rights abuses persist in Ukraine as war enters fourth year. <https://ukraine.un.org/en/289667-civilian-harm-and-human-rights-abuses-persist-ukraine-war-enters-fourth-year>

UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine. (2026a, July 14). Civilian casualties soar in Ukraine in the first half of 2026 amid escalating attacks and intensifying use of deadly weapons, UN human rights monitors say. *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*. <https://ukraine.ohchr.org/en/Civilian-Casualties-Soar-in-Ukraine-in-the-First-Half-of-2026-Amid-Escalating-Attacks-and-Intensifying-Use-of-Deadly-Weapons-UN-Human-Rights-Monitors-Say>

UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine. (2026b, May 13). UN human rights monitors warn of rising civilian casualties. *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*.

<https://ukraine.ohchr.org/en/UN-Human-Rights-Monitors-Warn-of-Rising-Civilian-Casualties>

UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine. (2026c, September 16). Protection of civilians in armed conflict August 2026. *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*. <https://ukraine.ohchr.org/en/Protection-of-Civilians-in-Armed-Conflict-August-2026>

UNHCR. (2026). Europe. UNHCR – The UN Refugee Agency. <https://www.unhcr.org/where-we-work/regions/europe>

United Nations. (2022). Resolution ES-11/1: Aggression against Ukraine, adopted 2 March 2022 (141-5-35). <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/ES-11/1>

United Nations. (2022). Resolution ES-11/3: Suspension of the rights of membership of the Russian Federation in the Human Rights Council, adopted 7 April 2022 (93-24-58).

United Nations. (2022). Resolution ES-11/4: Territorial integrity of Ukraine, adopted 12 October 2022 (143-5-35). <https://press.un.org/en/2022/ga12458.doc.htm>

Vianini, I., Kharazi, S., Kotseva, B., Kovacikova, K., Faggiani, N., Nikolaidis, N., Della Rocca, L., Potapova, K., Snigyr, O., & Linge, J. P. (2026). *Tracking the narrative: A data-driven analysis of media coverage of Russia and Ukraine 2013–2024*. *PLOS ONE*, 21(6), e0351627. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0351627>

Wikipedia. (2022). 2022 Nord Stream pipeline sabotage. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022NordStream_pipelinesabotage

Wikipedia. (2024). ICC arrest warrants for Russian leaders. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ICC_arrest_warrants_for_Russian_leaders

APPENDIX 1: MEDIA CORPUS REGISTER

This register lists the purposive media corpus used for Objective 1. The institutional reports, official documents, and books consulted are listed in full in the References.

Purposively Compiled Media Narrative Corpus

The media component is a purposive corpus of twelve information-rich documents, four from each media-system category: Russian state-aligned, Western, and Asian/non-aligned. Individual article titles and publication dates are not reproduced here.

Media-System Category	Short Name / Outlet	Full Name	Corpus Allocation	Corresponding Objective(s)
Asian/non-aligned	China Daily	China Daily	Included within the 4-document Asian/non-aligned corpus	O1; O2; O3; O4

Asian/non-aligned	The Jakarta Post	The Jakarta Post	Included within the 4-document Asian/non-aligned corpus	O1; O2; O3; O4
Asian/non-aligned	Times of India	The Times of India	Included within the 4-document Asian/non-aligned corpus	O1; O2; O3; O4
Russian state-aligned	Kremlin communications	Official Communications of the President of Russia / Kremlin	Included within the 4-document Russian corpus	O1; O2; O3; O4
Russian state-aligned	RT	RT (formerly Russia Today)	Included within the 4-document Russian corpus	O1; O2; O3; O4
Russian state-aligned	TASS	Information Telegraph Agency of Russia (TASS)	4 documents	O1; O2; O3; O4
Western	BBC News	British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) News	Included within the 4-document Western corpus	O1; O2; O3; O4
Western	Reuters	Reuters	Included within the 4-document Western corpus	O1; O2; O3; O4
Western	The Guardian	The Guardian	Included within the 4-document Western corpus	O1; O2; O3; O4
Western	The New York Times	The New York Times	Included within the 4-document Western corpus	O1; O2; O3; O4

Methodological note. The media corpus is treated separately from the institutional sources because its unit of analysis is the individual media document rather than the institution or report series.