



## Co-designing opportunities towards the development of Irish offshore wind

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### Deliverable D4.16 Media Content Analysis

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## **Executive Summary**

To date, little attention has been given to the analysis of the media coverage of offshore wind in Ireland. This study aimed to identify arguments used to present offshore wind to the public, while the sector is at a nascent stage of development. The study was conducted as part of a wider body of research on public perception of offshore wind in Ireland. This report examines the coverage of offshore wind in the Irish printed news media between 2015 and 2019. Articles about offshore wind were studied in four Irish newspapers to see if it was possible to identify any trends. Five main themes were identified and analysed; government, economy, environment, society and research. It was observed that coverage of these frames remained largely the same with government and economic themes dominating. This study reveals slow but consistent progress towards the inevitable expansion of the offshore wind industry in Ireland with coverage intensifying from 2018. Negative sentiment was perceived with regard to coverage of government action or decisions which reveals the importance of framing; this is shown in the context of media informing public opinion.

## List of Abbreviations

CDA	Confidential Disclosure Agreement
EU	European Union
FLOWW	Fishing Liaison and Offshore Wet Renewables Group
Km	Kilometres
LCOE	Levelised Cost of Energy
m	Metres
MAFA	Maritime Area and Foreshore Bill (Amendment)
MUSES	Multi Use in European Seas
MW	Megawatt
NW	North West
O&M	Operation and Maintenance
OREDPA	Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan
OSWF	Offshore Wind Farm
RES	Renewable Energy Source
SEAI	Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland
TER	Total Energy Requirement
UK	United Kingdom
WP	Work Package

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## 1. Introduction

The increasing presence of the subject of windfarms in the media indicates the growing importance of wind technology both in a societal and industrial capacity (Fischlein et al., 2014; Stephens et al., 2009), however the literature is lacking in studies of the influence the general media has on public perception of renewable energy development (Schmidt, 2017) and how the framing of arguments for and against wind energy (both offshore and terrestrial) by media, policy makers and industry stakeholders affects public acceptance of windfarms (Thompson, 2005). The nearest proximal literature with regard to media affect in the Irish sense is that on onshore wind (Fox and Rau, 2016).

The study of mass media content is an essential component in understanding public perception of the environment (Crawley, 2007, Nerlich et al., 2012). Most of what the general public know and understand with regard to the environment and climate change/global warming/the greenhouse effect, is sourced from mass media, be it television, newspapers, radio and online social media; such as Facebook and Twitter (Hansen, 2011).

Results of a national survey of public perception of offshore wind among the general public in Ireland (Eirwind 2020), revealed that choice of printed news source had a significant effect on attitudes towards offshore wind farms. Those reading tabloid newspapers (as opposed to broadsheet) were shown to have a significantly more negative attitude to offshore wind farms (Eirwind, 2020). This provided the impetus to examine media content, which has been undertaken here as part of a Master's thesis in the Eirwind project.

Thompson, (2005) observed that when involved with a controversial issue such as windfarm development, activist groups will strive to attract supporters and advocates, in order to strengthen their position and voice. As such, media coverage of these issues can be a powerful tool with which to recruit new allies and reinforce the beliefs of existing ones (Thompson, 2005). At a time when national policy is evolving to accommodate multiple uses of offshore wind farms through the National Marine Planning Framework, an opportunity exists to better understand the role of media content in influencing offshore wind development.

### **Framing**

"To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described." (Entman, 1993).

While the media plays a key role in influencing how the public educates itself about new and ongoing renewable energy developments (Thompson, 2005) it can also provide an insight into public discourse in relation to current issues (Stephens et al., 2009). How the media frames messages and articles, directly affects the opinions and perspectives of the public who are exposed to them (Schmidt, 2017) and as a result has the ability to reinforce or even alter public opinion (Stephens et al., 2009).

Stephens et al., (2009) adapted Luhmann's Theory of functional systems (Luhmann, 1995) to identify six distinct areas around which messages regarding wind technology can be framed. The drawbacks and advantages of wind technology can be gauged within these areas i.e. technical, economic, environmental, health and safety, political and aesthetic/cultural.

Using these frames, Schmidt (2017) observed that German media coverage was dominated by economic framing whereas messages from German industry stakeholders were, more commonly from a technical perspective. Media messaging frequently used negative messages with regard to aesthetics, environmental and health and safety which reinforces Hansen's (2011) opinion that media framings tend to concentrate on controversial subjects to ensure a more attention-grabbing story (Hansen, 2011).

In a study comparing media articles and stakeholder interviews to analyse stakeholder perception versus media discourse on wind energy development across four states in the US, Fischlein et al. (2014) observed that all newspapers in the study addressed economics in terms of the growing demand for wind energy, job creation and cheaper fossil fuel alternatives. Political and technical frames were also dominant in the media's narrative. Hindmarsh (2014) commented that concentrating more on the opinion of industry and less on the framing of media messages, as well as sourcing information from other areas can reduce bias from media framing.

Hansen (2011) noted that the factor affecting all of the messages and articles in the public domain, and which affects all off the perspectives is that of language and the choice of language is the central factor in the framing of messages for public understanding and interpretation. In a study comparing the type of language used by the US and UK to frame the issue of climate change, Nerlich et al. (2012) concluded that the US continues to focus on the problem, whereas the UK media emphasis the solution to the problem, which may have a detrimental effect on global environmental policy creation.

As a result of her study of media versus industry stakeholder messages Schmidt (2017) recognised the salient arguments used for and against wind energy development. 'Contribution to climate protection', is an important supportive argument for offshore wind energy development but it was rarely used in media commentary. This argument could be used by decision makers to effectively encourage support for offshore wind energy development. Schmidt also pointed out that arguments which are effective in encouraging opponents of wind energy are seldom considered by industry stakeholder messages. These could be used to great effect if framed correctly by the industry stakeholders and policy makers concerned. To increase credibility of the message, the conclusion is drawn that both negative and positive arguments should be included in all communications (Schmidt, 2017).

The Eirwind national survey of public perception towards offshore wind (Eirwind, 2020) indicated a difference in perception arising from where people got their information. Readers of broadsheets were shown to be more positive towards offshore wind than readers of tabloids. As a result, the objective of this study is to analyse broadsheet content to identify trends and framings related to the narrative around offshore wind in Ireland. This analysis will guide recommendations on salient arguments for

engaging the energy citizen which is a critical enabling factor in the overall energy transition (Devine-Wright, 2008, Mullally et al, 2018, Lennon et al, 2020, EirWind, 2020).

## 2. Method

Four National newspapers were chosen for media analysis. Two daily newspapers *The Irish Examiner* and *The Irish Times*, and two Sunday newspapers *The Sunday Independent* and *The Sunday Business Post*. Newspaper selection was based on readership (at time of writing *The Sunday Independent* was the most read newspaper in Ireland and *The Irish Times* had the second highest readership). *The Irish Examiner* and *The Sunday Business Post* were chosen as they also have national coverage as broadsheet newspapers.

Searches were performed on the LexisNexis© database using the phrase “*offshore wind*”. All articles containing the term ‘offshore wind’ in were identified as the basis for analysis.

All articles published between 2015 and 2019 were considered for analysis. 2015 was chosen as an initial milestone that marked the advent of The Paris Agreement. Prior to this, offshore wind development was relatively dormant as a sector in Ireland. This landmark environmental pact was a replacement for the Kyoto protocol and was adopted by almost all nations in 2015 to address climate change. The Paris agreement was signed in 2016 as a pledge from all carbon-emitting countries to cut greenhouse gasses. As a result, the period from 2015 onwards shows a marked increase in European activity and communication regarding renewable energy and carbon emission targets. Consequently the Irish print media facilitated increasing debate regarding alternative sources of energy, including offshore wind development, as a solution to Ireland’s Paris agreement commitments. In total 177 articles were shown to be relevant.



Over all the number of articles included in the titles analysed which include 'Offshore Wind' as a topic increased steadily over the 5 years study period with only a small fall in numbers in 2016 (Table 1.) with *The Irish Times* and *The Sunday Independent* showing the most dramatic increase.

Table 1. Number of articles published The Examiner, The Irish times, The Sunday Business Post and The Sunday Independent from 2015 to 2019

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Examiner</b>	7	5	4	1	5
<b>Irish Times</b>	13	13	11	21	42
<b>SBP</b>	5	6	8	3	0
<b>Sunday Independent</b>	2	2	5	7	17
<b>Total</b>	27	26	28	32	64

The qualitative data analysis package NVivo was used to examine and code the articles. Using the six themes by Schmidt (2017) (*technical, economic, environmental, health and safety, political and aesthetic/cultural*) as a guide, emerging topics in each theme were coded for analysis. This led to a refinement of the original themes and the creation of new sub topics.

### 3. Results

Results are presented on a year by year basis. Values shown are percentage coverage of articles for that year, e.g. 12% of all articles published in that year containing the phrase 'offshore wind'. Themes and topics are presented as percentages of all articles containing 'offshore wind' for that year (Table. 2).

Table 2. Themes and Topics which Emerged from a review of The Sunday Independent, The Examiner, The Sunday Business Post and The Irish Times between 2015 and 2019.

<b>Government</b>	<b>Economy</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Brexit</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Construction</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Policy</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Datacentres</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stalling</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Employment</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Targets</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Energy Security</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• UK Policy</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Finance</li></ul>
<b>Social</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hydrogen</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Aesthetics</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Intermittence</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Community engagement</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• International</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conflict</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Technology</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consumer effects</li></ul>	
<b>Research</b>	<b>Environment</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Birds</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Climate change</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Decarbonisation</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Transition to offshore</li></ul>

Throughout the period of analysis (2015-2019) the central theme of the majority of articles published in the four newspapers pertained to government or economic issues. Subjects covered include over Seas investment, government policy questions, and calls for wind farms to be moved offshore. Environmental and social themes in the early articles (2015-2017) were less regularly reported on, - their frequency increased throughout 2018 and 2019; while research was given less attention through the study time period. Table 3. Shows a sample of headlines from the 4 papers analysed over the period.

Table 3. A sample of 'Offshore Wind' headlines from The Examiner, The Irish Times, The Sunday Business Post and The Sunday Independent from 2015 to 2019

	<b>Examiner</b>	<b>Irish Times</b>	<b>Sunday Business Post</b>	<b>Sunday Independent</b>
<b>2015</b>	Ireland set to become 8bn renewable energy hub	State likely to miss 2020 renewable energy targets; Significant fines and possible export ban to result, says wind energy group	Boost for Ronan-linked offshore wind farm	Midlands wind-farm bubble is foolishly ignored by officialdom
	Arguments for wind turbines blowing hot and cold as rural dwellers complain	Oriel and Gaelectric to invest EUR 80m	Energy lobby wants to connect Ireland, Scotland and France	From artificial intelligence to the growth of biometrics, business is going to change dramatically over the next 20 years.
	Climate change pledges 'significant'	Macquarie and 3i Infrastructure win Irish Sea windfarm license	Cork firm to build EUR 415m Australian renewables plant	
<b>2016</b>	Mainstream Renewable Power still 'committed' to £2bn project	Lobby group says Ireland needs more offshore wind capability	Government may reverse position on 'costly' offshore wind projects	NOT a lot is going on
	UK delays green projects	New agreement to bolster offshore wind projects	Billionaire Naughton invests in €80m wind farm	The impact on energy is draining; Continued cooperation with Britain is vital, writes John Mullins
	Solar farming raises some unusual tax questions	Danish utility valued at up to EUR 14bn for flotation	Ronan and Barrett's Irish Sea wind farm shelved	
<b>2017</b>	Leading developer joins key Irish wind farm project	Ireland now exporter of electricity; Report shows record wind farm production as spending on fossil fuels falls EUR 1.2bn	Extension of state subsidies to offshore wind farms seen as sign of policy change	ESB in multi-billion euro offshore wind farm expansion plan; State-owned body plans to start acquiring and developing projects in 2018

	UK suffers drop in subsidies for offshore windfarms	Nordic countries offer to help with energy effort	Denis Naughten to launch renewable energy support scheme	Ireland's race against time to avoid (EURO)360m EU renewables fine
	Simon Coveney eyes offshore windfarms	Mainstream Power puts flotation on hold until 2020; Postponement down to legal wrangle over Scottish wind farm development	Irish green energy firm to sell off €29m of British solar farms	Policy change is in the wind with ESB's offshore energy drive
<b>2018</b>	'Ireland's most competitive and vibrant city': Cork chamber outlines vision for the future	'Pivotal time' for Ireland to tap offshore wind energy; Statoil recommends Ireland establish the framework to deploy offshore wind	Green energy lobby warns future is 'jeopardised'	FDI jobs keep flooding in as Apple keeps it low-key with Leo
		Cabinet backs scheme to diversify Republic's green energy	Getting smart about power	Wind energy could be IFSC of the West', claims Teahon
		ESB chief backs electric cars to cut carbon	It's not easy being green – and blue	Irish wind farms set to change hands with Element Power on the block; ENERGY
<b>2019</b>	Proposals for offshore wind farms; A new sense of urgency is essential	Offshore wind energy key to cutting carbon emissions, forum told		SSE scouts Wicklow and Arklow for offshore wind hub; RENEWABLE ENERGY
	David Connolly: Wind is in the sails of energy industry	Oil groups likely to target Mainstream Renewables as it seeks equity partner		Energia buys Meath solar farm projects in green push; ENERGY
	ESB and Greencoat in windfarm boost	European energy giants reposition for Ireland's offshore windfarm bonanza		Irish energy group in (EURO)1.8bn offshore Cork wind farm plan

## 2015 Government and Economics – International Finance

The theme given most coverage in 2015 was economics of offshore wind farms taking 50% of the narrative across the four papers analysed (Figure 1). Within that theme, the topics of finance and international financing of windfarms was the most dominant with 31% of the overall 'offshore wind' coverage being on these two topics for 2015. This includes the buying and selling of offshore wind farm interests both nationally and internationally and articles on financing potential offshore wind farms in Ireland. Windfarms referenced in these articles included the Oriel wind farm off the north east coast and Codling wind farms off the Wicklow coast. The theme of government featured in 26% of 'offshore windfarm' reporting. Government policy (11%) and targets (6%) were the two most dominant topics within this theme. Content regarding the topic of policy included the Integrated Marine Plan, Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth, the all Island Energy Market and the unveiling of the White paper on Energy towards the latter end of 2015. With regard to the topic of targets, the key narrative concerned the possibility that Ireland would miss its 2020 renewable targets. Environmental framings, making up 21% of the thematic coverage, included the need for increased decarbonisation (9%) and climate change (5%). The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) brought an action against the decision by the Scottish government to licence a 450 megawatt windfarm (*Neart na Gaoithe*) along with 3 other projects on the east Scottish coast, citing detrimental effects on the bird population (4% coverage). The transition to offshore and its respective advantages constituted 2% of coverage. Social issues included the coverage of the picketing of TD Alex White's (the then Minister for Communications and Natural Resources) office by Wind Aware Ireland, a protest group which was moving its focus from onshore to offshore wind. Research was covered in 2% of articles, including the Irish Maritime and Energy Resource Centre (IMERC) which was a collaboration of University College Cork, Cork Institute of Technology and The Irish Naval Service.

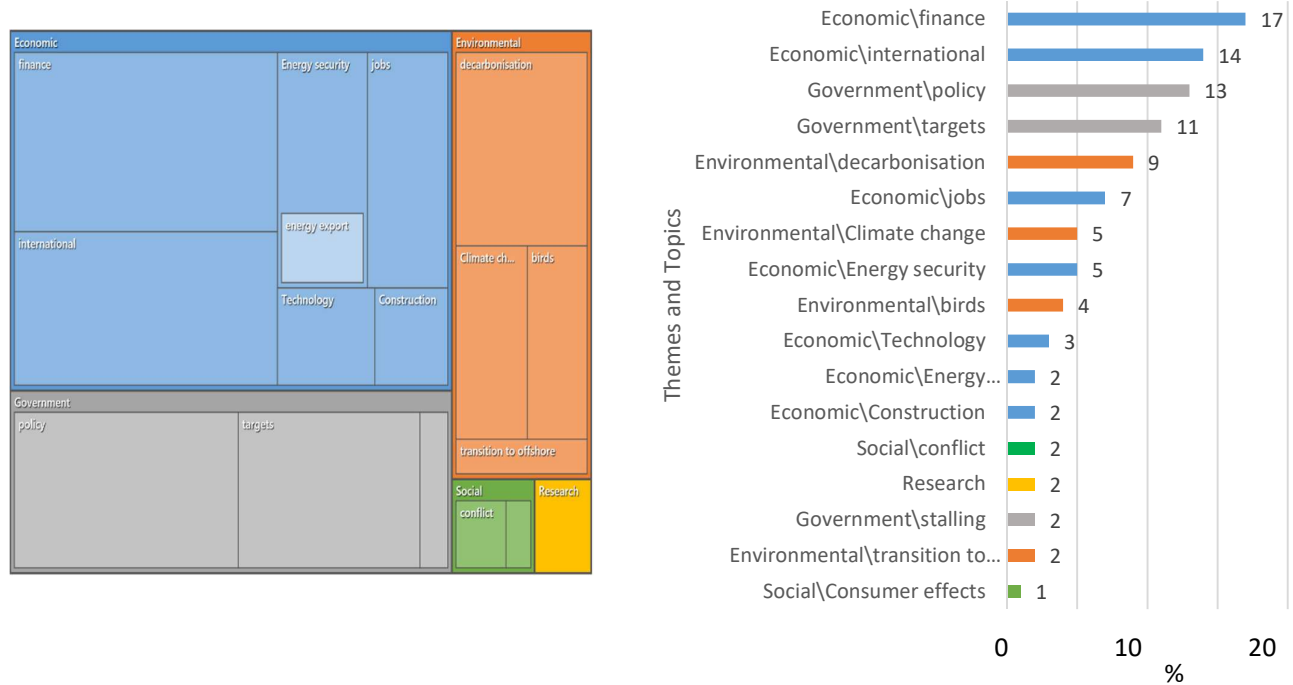


Figure 1. Hierarchy chart of themes and topics as a percentage of total 'offshore wind' coverage in the four titles studied in 2015

## 2016 Government and Economics - Finance and Policy

The themes of government and economics dominated in 2016 with government making up 41% of overall coverage (Figure 2) for 2016. As a signatory to the Paris agreement in 2016, the media speculated on government policy and how it could enable Ireland to move forward with its renewable energy obligations, including the inevitable transition to offshore and what added social conflicts that might bring. Within the theme of government, policy issues (16%) and targets (12%) remained important. Given the advances in scale and technology it was widely reported in 2016, that the cost of offshore wind development was falling, but concern was raised regarding the governments agreement to host European datacentres, and the narrative questioned Ireland's ability to meet the targets it committed to in the Paris agreement with the added energy requirements of datacentres. Other topics included Brexit (5%) with concerns about the possible divergence of energy policies between Europe and Britain and the effect that could have on 'energy union' initiatives. Alternative commentaries discussed how Brexit could make Ireland a more attractive investment prospect. Government stalling constituted 4% of coverage; with a focus coming from the shelving of the Codling Wind Park<sup>1</sup>. Reasons for the shelving were given as the failure of the Irish and British government to agree an export agreement. The fact that the Irish government did not offer a price support to offshore wind in 2012 was also cited as a reason for the failure of the multi-billion euro wind farm planned for the Irish Sea. UK Policy was also under scrutiny with 4% coverage, including reportage regarding the newly formed Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and its delaying of the publication of the fifth carbon budget detailing plans for emission reduction.

Topics within the Economic theme constituted 37% of the overall coverage. Offshore wind finance coverage (13%) included that of Glen Dimplex founder Martin Naughton investing in an €80million cash call for Oriel Wind Farm, while international financing coverage (11%) included Mainstream's interests in emerging markets in Africa, South America and Asia. The theme of employment represented 5% of analysis, with NOW (National Offshore Wind Association) Ireland estimating that Ireland's offshore wind energy industry has the potential to create up to 20,000 jobs, but questions were asked in the media regarding the prospects of those who work in Ireland's peat fired power stations and European coal mining and oil and gas industries. Other topics within the Economic theme included construction (3%), technology (2%) and the issue of datacentres covering 1% of the narrative, with media conveying the message that with the added energy demand, the 2020 targets were now unattainable.

The theme of Environmental constituted 9% of overall coverage for 2016. Related topics were decarbonisation (3%), the challenge by the RSPB over the environmental impacts of (among three other projects) Mainstream's 450-Megawatt *Neart na Gaoithe* project along the east coast of Scotland (2%), climate change and how offshore wind could help stall it (2%) and the transition of onshore wind farms to that of offshore (2%). Topics included in the social theme included conflict (5%), and community engagement (2%). The cost of renewable energy to

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<sup>1</sup> Codling park has since been 're-booted' under the governments fast-track incentive



consumers constituted 1% of coverage of topics in this theme. The theme of research formed 1% of the overall coverage in 2016.

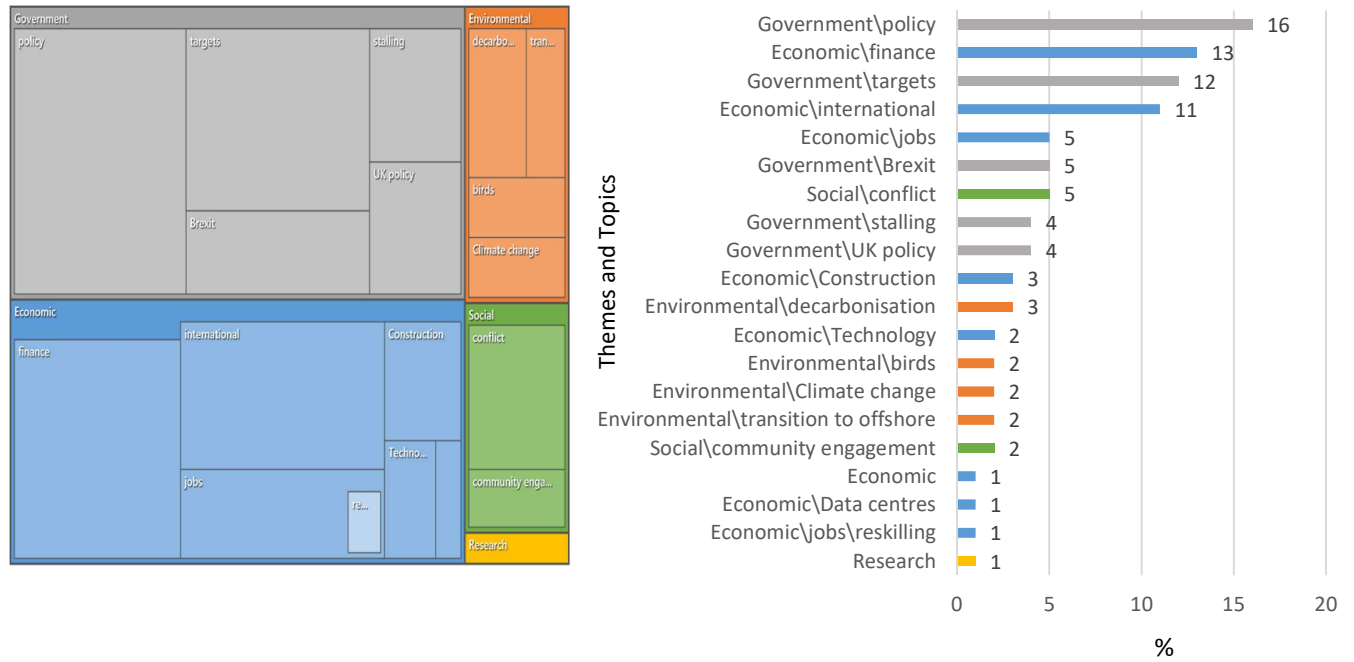


Figure 2. Hierarchy chart of themes and topics as a percentage of total 'offshore wind' coverage in the four titles studied in 2016

## 2017 Government and Economics – Policy and Finance

Government and Economic themes remained equally dominant in 2017 comprising 42% and 41% respectively of overall coverage for the year (Figure 3). The themes continued from 2016 but this year the topics began a shift in focus towards policy and indigenous development of the sector. Of the Government's share of coverage, the topic of government policy was the most scrutinized receiving 23% of overall coverage for the year. The Government was beginning to show a shift in policy away from relying on onshore windfarms which were becoming politically controversial, towards offshore wind by providing state subsidies for offshore wind and wave farms. European targets were the second most analysed topic (10%) within the theme of government. Focus was on the fact that Ireland was looking likely to miss its 2020 European energy targets, thus accruing fines. The topic of government stalling with regard to offshore wind energy development continued this year (5%). The EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) released figures confirming that European targets would not be met by 2020, the government was quoted as declaring that they targets were 'inappropriate'. At the same time the government announced that offshore wind was being considered for inclusion in the price support scheme for renewable energy. The topic of Brexit got 3% of coverage; coverage focused on the risk it posed to the single electricity market which had been set up less than a decade before between Dublin and Belfast to bolster the island of Ireland's energy security. The falling cost of offshore wind energy received 2% coverage, with reports citing that the cost of producing electricity from offshore wind in the UK had fallen 32% in the preceding 4 years. RESS (Renewable Energy Support Scheme) got 1% focus this year with Minister Naughton announcing 3 new policy initiatives for renewable energy in Ireland.

Finance was the second most covered topic (16%) with the focus being on the ability of Ireland to finance its own offshore wind industry. 2017 saw the announcement by Park Wind of major investment in the Irish offshore wind industry, in the form of Oriel Wind Farm off the Louth coast. This was to be the biggest step forward in the offshore wind industry in 10 years, and would restart interest in international investment in Ireland offshore wind. The sentiment of the papers' coverage of offshore wind farms was very positive, acknowledging Ireland's potential in the offshore wind industry. Construction was a newcomer into the top five most covered topics within the economic theme gaining 10% of the annual narrative. Articles scrutinised the cost of construction and maintenance of offshore wind farms, declaring that although high, construction costs had been and continued to fall, and as such an impending offshore wind farm construction boom was expected. International financing of offshore wind interests received 5% coverage which included floating wind farm interest off Scotland by Statoil (Equinor) and the completion of the first phase of the Walney project off the coast of Cumbria in the Irish sea by Danish wind farm giant Dong (on completion to be the biggest wind farm in the world at the time). Mainstreams overseas interests in windfarms in Chile, Vietnam, Scotland and Senegal was also covered. Ireland's energy security got 5% exposure and included coverage of the Celtic interconnector project between Eirgrid and the French electricity provider Réseau de Transport d'Électricité which would have the capacity to carry up to 700MW between both countries. The topic of datacentres and the energy required to run them gained 3% of reporting. Reports questioned the wisdom of the IDAs

efforts to attract datacentres to Ireland, and asked how this would affect Ireland's ability to meet European energy targets. Within the environmental theme, transition to offshore was covered in 5% of articles. Papers reported that the volume of onshore turbines throughout Ireland was beginning to attract increasing objections, and the question of moving offshore began to feature. The ongoing battle between Mainstream and the RSPB in Scotland was reported on with Scotland's top civil court ruling in favour of the offshore windfarm developer allowing the continuation of construction of the *Neart na Gaoithe* with farm, got 1% of coverage.

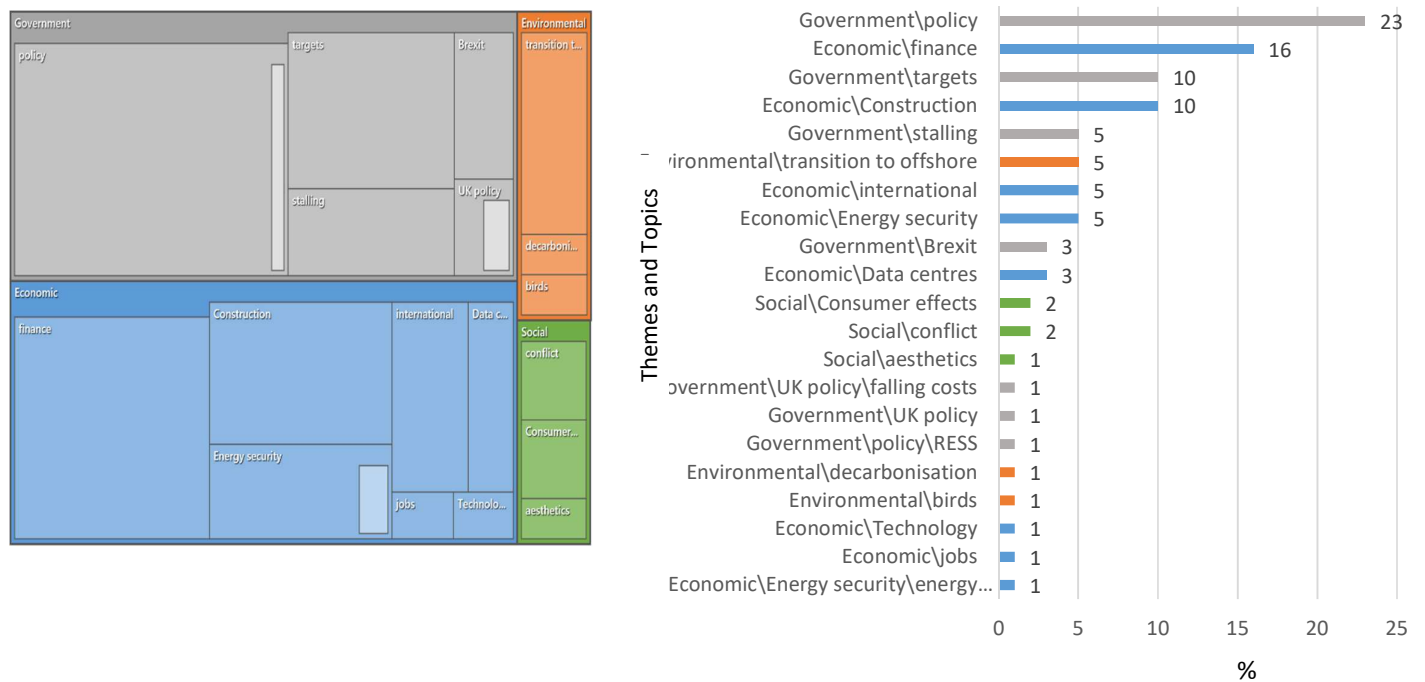


Figure 3. Hierarchy chart of themes and topics as a percentage of total 'offshore wind' coverage in the four titles studied in 2017

## 2018 Government and Economics – Policy and Finance

The government (36%) and economic (34%) themes continued to dominate in 2018 albeit with a reduction of overall percentage coverage (Figure 4) with a slight shift in focus as environmental topics come more to the fore. The two dominant topics within the theme of government remained as targets (11%) and policy (9%). The failure of the government to implement a carbon tax in the 2018 budget provoked strong criticism from many groups. Newspaper coverage reported on ‘indifference’ and ‘failure to act’, with the era being described as ‘a really shameful episode in Irish Politics’. Negative sentiment against the government’s failure to implement practical measures against climate change was beginning to grow, although the communications between the Irish government and the interest shown by Statoil (Equinor) towards green energy in Ireland was reported on as being a positive signal that the government were investigating ways to develop offshore wind in Ireland. The topic of RESS (Renewable Energy Support Scheme; a government scheme to provide financial support to renewable electricity projects in the republic of Ireland (Eirgrid, 2007) also gained more attention in 2018 (6%). Commentators saw it as a shift in government attitude toward offshore wind and renewable energy. RESS was seen as a critical element in the expansion of green energy development in Ireland. The governments unveiling of the Climate Action Plan received 4% of reporting, with concerns being raised over the discrepancy between what the government committed to in terms of carbon emission reductions and the action it had failed to take in order to achieve those reductions. UK policy and Brexit gained 3% and 2% coverage respectively, with observations about how Brexit would detrimentally effect Ireland decarbonisation with the potential derailment of the all-Ireland integrated single electricity market and the North South electricity interconnector. Government stalling made up the remaining 1% of coverage.

Environmental topics gained more attention this year, constituting 22% of thematic coverage. Of that, 9% constituted coverage of decarbonisation. The Irish Wind Energy Association (IWEA) made inroads into national coverage, with related articles emphasising the importance of cleaner electricity generation with growing demand. The ESB declaring that they were working towards achieving the EU aim of reducing carbon emissions by 80% by 2050. This year Climate Case Ireland won a legal action against the Irish government’s ‘National Mitigation Plan’ which was found to be ‘wholly inadequate’ and as such, in breach of the European Convention of Human Rights.

The topic of International finances within the Economic theme was covered by the four papers (12%) with Mainstream’s overseas interests being the most covered topic in this context. Coverage of domestic finance fell to 8% with Ireland being described as perfectly positioned to become a hub for green, renewable energy. Deloitte launched a new report which stated that to meet Ireland’s decarbonisation targets least 50bn investment would be required, which would include the government’s €21.8bn investment programme in the National Development Plan. The topic of employment was given 4% of analysis with offshore wind development being cited as an opportunity to positively affect employment numbers outside Dublin, by creating jobs in coastal communities in offshore windfarm construction, operation and maintenance. The advancement of technology (3% coverage), was reported as driving the cost of construction down. The topic of supply chain, with reports about increased offshore wind trade going through Belfast port as a direct result of offshore wind

development and news that Providence (the offshore exploration company) was considering offering financial resources to larger offshore wind companies. This year datacentres received 2% of attention. Articles favoured the link between data centres and offshore wind.

Intermittence was a new topic covered in 2018, gaining 1% coverage. Articles featured the intermittent nature of marine renewable energy output and to the need for electricity storage and smart meters. Construction and energy security remained low on the print media agenda with 1% coverage given to those topics respectively.

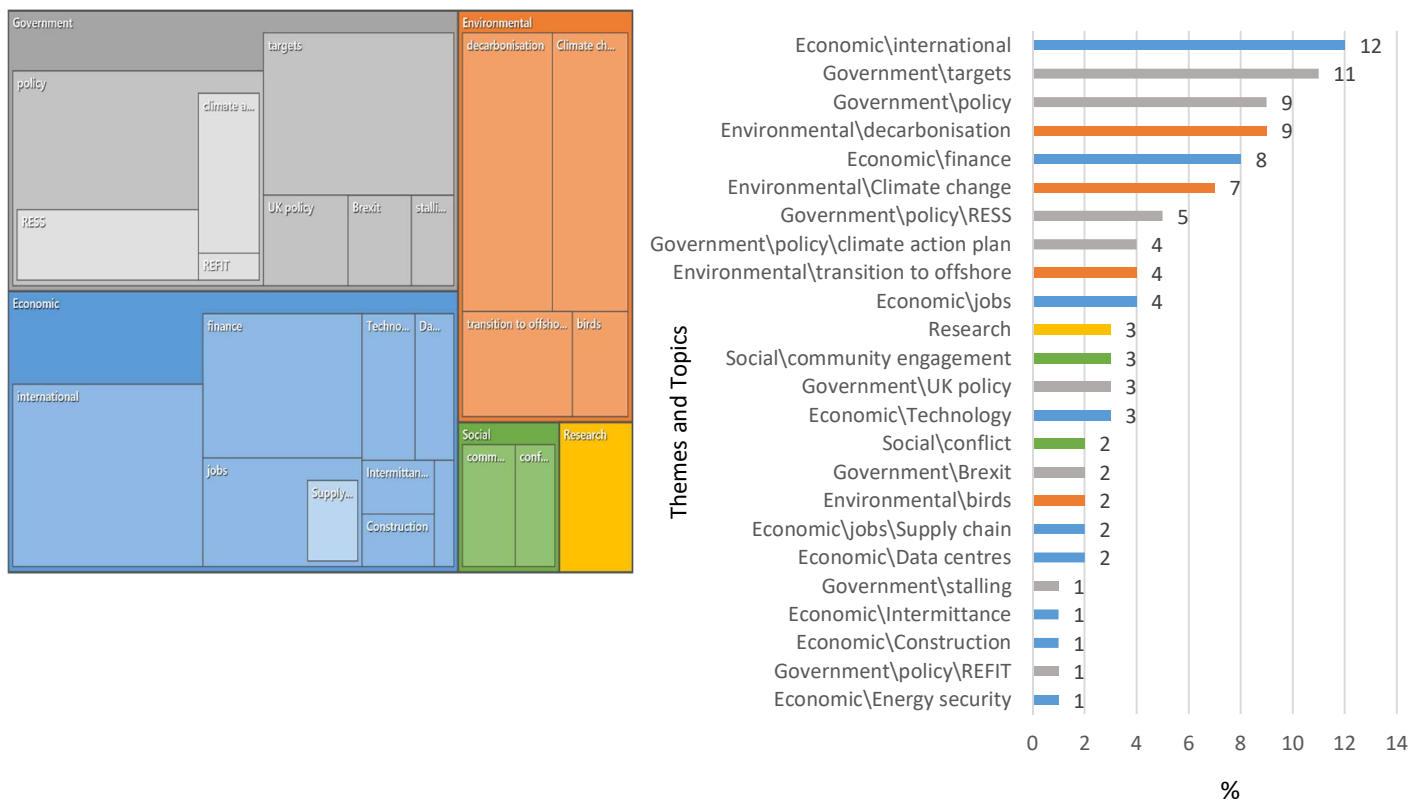


Figure 4. Hierarchy chart of themes and topics as a percentage of total 'offshore wind' coverage in the four titles studied in 2018

## 2019 Economics and Government – International Finance and Targets

The theme of economics gained more coverage in 2019, increasing to 43% (Figure 5) from 2018. Domestic finance regarding offshore wind farms was given 13% of the overall coverage. Reports covered the ESB adding to its 2018 €250m investment into renewables, and its strategic partnering with Equinor with a view to bringing a number of offshore wind projects to Ireland by 2030. Other reports included news of large renewable companies committing to invest up to €6 billion into the Irish Sea, including Innogy, Statkraft and RWE. International finance reports constituted 6% of reporting. Construction constituted 5% with coverage of the Saorgas/Innogy partnership and their plan to deploy turbines with a total capacity to generate 600 megawatts (MW) of electricity off the coast of Dublin. Technology received 4% of the analysis, with narrative covering the development of floating wind turbines and the increasing size and greater output, resulting in fewer, larger turbines being used. This year datacentres began to get more coverage, (4%) with analysis predicting that energy demand in Dublin was likely to double between 2019 and 2028 as a result of growing population but also due to the growing number of datacentres. Amazon (a user of some of these datacentres was in talks to fund a windfarm in Donegal in order to produce energy to run one of their datacentres). Intermittence was covered in 3% of articles, with articles citing the blackouts in the UK and South Australia being attributed to renewable energy intermittence. Employment received 2% of the reporting with articles asking the question of where the displaced workers from fossil fuel dependent industries like Money Point, would be relocated, with possible reskilling (1% coverage) being an option. The topic of Energy security received 2% of the media coverage with the SEAI reporting that in 2019 Ireland still imports 66% of its energy needs. Hydrogen was a new topic to emerge in 2019 with reports of Engie Statkraft and Equinor investigating Hydrogen as a viable fuel product of offshore wind receiving 1% of overall reporting.

The theme of Government also featured strongly in 2019, getting 32% of the total coverage that year. Government policy was the prevailing topic, taking 12% of attention. The Maritime Area and Foreshore (Amendment) Bill came under fire for its inadequacies and The Maritime Planning and Development Management Bill was introduced as the new process to streamline foreshore licence applications. The Climate Action Plan was published this year and as such received 8% of coverage. It recognised the long-term potential for Ireland to generate power from offshore wind. RESS was recognised as only the initial step by the government to back offshore wind generation, with auctions predicted to start by the end of 2019. Reports regarding the stalling of the government still maintained 2% of coverage with comparisons made between Ireland and other EU countries, and a fear that history could repeat itself with investors losing interest when the government did not extend a guaranteed price scheme to the offshore wind industry.

Environmental topics constituted 16% of thematic reporting in 2019. Decarbonisation coverage was the same as 2018 (9%), including a narrative around the Oriel Wind Park, (once operational it was reported to have capacity to reduce carbon emissions by 600,000 tonnes per annum). Climate change coverage reduced to 5% this year (from 7% in 2018) with articles predicting what weather patterns we should expect in 2050, including increasing sea level and global wildfires, with Ireland being cited as having one of the worst records among developed countries in reducing emissions and adopting renewable energy target levels. The topic of transition to offshore received 2% of attention this year with calls for onshore wind farms to be moved offshore, to increase the scale of energy generation. The ESBs owning of

a 12.5% stake in the Galloper wind farm in the UK was reported as a step forward in terms of gaining valuable experience in offshore wind power generation.

Social topics remained in the lower percentage of reporting, including topics of community engagement (4%), with repeated calls in articles on the need of more meaningful engagement and community involvement in the development of offshore (and onshore) wind farms. Reports on social conflict constituted 2% of coverage with Ireland's 'objection culture' being called out as a significant obstacle to offshore development. Eirgrid was reported to foresee planning delays as a result of protests against wind farms and high voltage transmission lines this year.

2019 was the first year that the topic of how the consumer would be affected with the potential introduction of more expensive electricity from offshore wind generation, this received 3% of coverage. The theme of research received 1% of overall coverage in 2019 with Eirgrid predicting how Ireland might achieve its 70% renewable by 2030 and coverage of the multidiscipline research project 'Eirwind' which is investigating pathways to developing offshore wind industry in Ireland

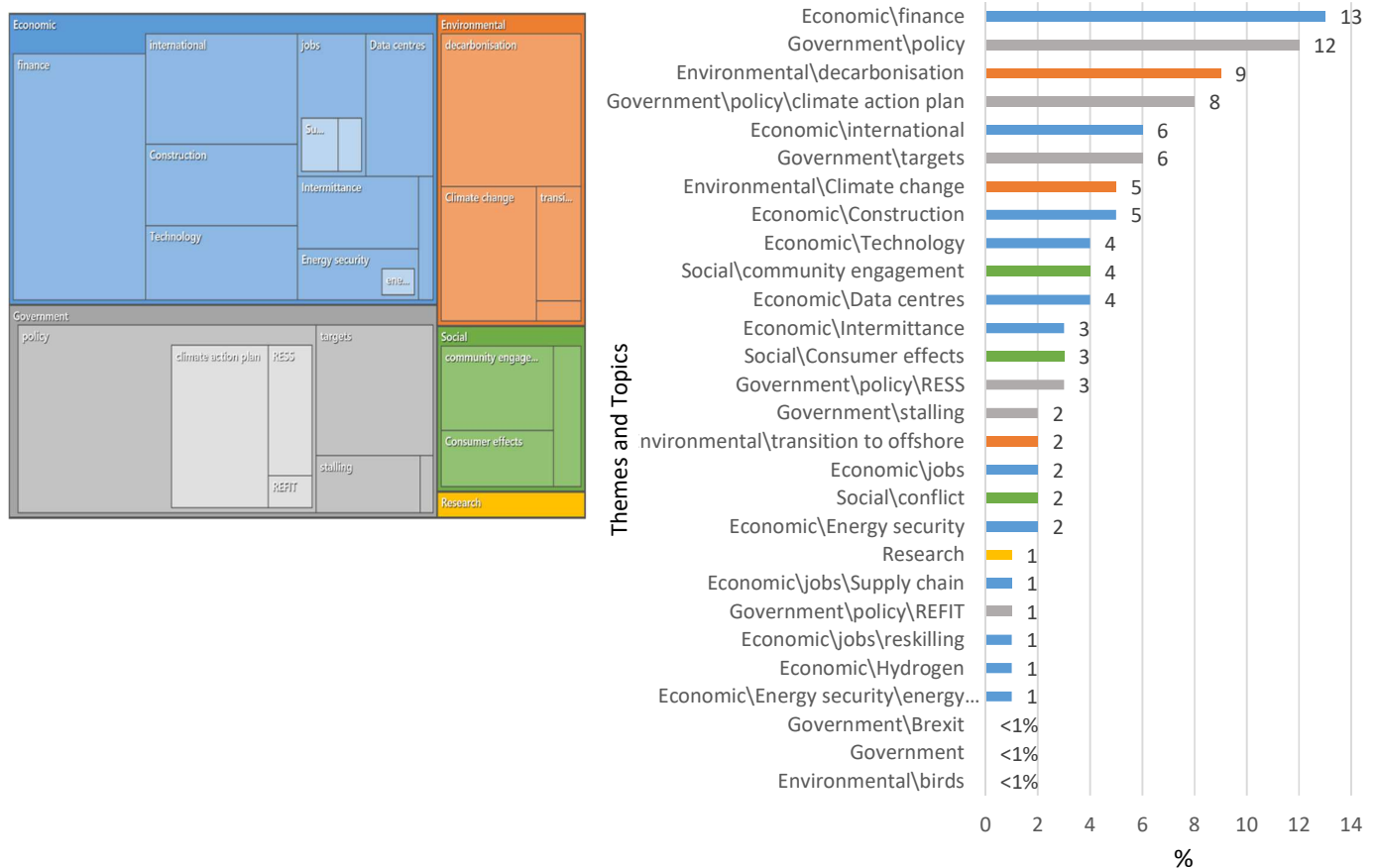


Figure 5. Hierarchy chart of themes and topics as a percentage of total 'offshore wind' coverage in the four titles studied in 2019

## 4. Discussion

With the development of offshore wind farms off the Irish coast, the Irish media is playing an increasingly important role in informing the public about projects, policies and events surrounding the industry. Media's output inevitably influences public discourse regarding every aspect of the changing coastal area and marine usage (ref).

Dominant themes in the reporting of offshore wind in the Irish print media have remained relatively stable over the five year study period, with government and economic themes being the leading areas reported on. Throughout the analysis news reports covering government and economic themes constituted at least 70% of articles. Coverage of environmental, societal and research themes remained relatively low. This is in keeping with Schmidt's 2017 study which showed that coverage in the German print media focused on economic issues (Schmidt, 2017) and Fischlein's 2014 study of wind power discourse four state of the US which also showed economic themes as being dominant (Fischlein, 2014). As Schmidt has shown, economic arguments are not necessarily the best arguments to use in order to gather support of offshore wind. Her research showed that the topic of climate change is the most effective influence in that regards. The low percentage coverage of climate change directly linked to the search term 'offshore wind' shows consistency with Schmidts findings that 'climate change' is not used widely as an argument in print media to support 'offshore wind'. (Schmidt, 2017).

Coverage of offshore wind in mainstream newspapers has increased over the 5 year study period, with a marked increase between 2018 and 2019 (from 32 articles to 64 articles containing the phrase 'offshore wind'). The increase in article numbers over the study period mirrors the growing public awareness regarding climate change (Bain and Bongiorno, 2020) and the need to find other sources of energy generation (Pareek et al., 2020). It also reflects the trends in the development of the offshore wind industry. The global market for offshore wind has expanded by 30% per year between 2010 and 2018. The increasingly competitive nature of constructing wind farms offshore will lead to continued market expansion over the next two decades, with modelled scenarios estimating growth rates of 13% per year (IEA, 2019).

The increase of articles also mirrors the increase in national awareness of climate change issues in Irish society as a whole. This is evidenced in the study by the preponderance of articles concerned with related topics of decarbonisation and meeting of renewable energy topics.

As seen in Table 1, the highest number of articles about wind power was in the Irish Times (100 articles). This relatively high coverage could be explained by the fact that readership numbers of The Irish Times are highest in the Dublin area. The east coast population of Ireland is currently more invested in the offshore wind farm debate for a number of reasons; the east coast is currently the location of Ireland's only existing offshore wind farms (with plans for expansion) and the vast majority of wind farm licence applications are for sites along the east coast. Dublin is also the economic, and population centre of Ireland, which concentrates debate.



Schmidt et al., (2013) showed that media attention fluctuates around certain issues events. This was also evident in this study. Coverage of environmental themes peaked in 2015 with the unveiling of the White paper on Energy. In the same context, environmental coverage reduced for the subsequent 2 years (2016, 2017), only to rise again in 2018 to 22%. Towards the latter end of the study period, as planning applications were becoming more common, environmental issues and social topics began to gain more coverage (albeit relatively low column inches), with reporting on community benefits, investment opportunities and a clawback mechanism for consumers to benefit from price fluctuations on wholesale markets.

Hansen's 2011 paper indicated that media framings tend to concentrate on controversial subjects to ensure a more attention-grabbing story (Hansen, 2011). Although each of the headlines in this study were descriptive, they were not shown to be 'attention grabbing', but the question must be asked – what constitutes 'attention grabbing'. The reasons behind this trend may also be because this study only included broadsheet papers. No tabloid papers, which are renowned for 'attention grabbing headline' were examined.

Journalistic framing of particular issues including developments within the Irish offshore wind industry and the Irish governments management of its development are influenced by many factors including social norms, organizational affiliations and constraints, pressure from specific stakeholders, and political orientation of the particular paper (or publication group) (Scheufele, 1999). In tandem with these is also the requirement of print media to ensure adequate readership numbers and revenue streams. Newspapers portray themselves as unbiased story tellers of what is going on in the world, whose job it is to recount day to day happenings in an unbiased and impartial way (Wagner and Payne, 2017), so whilst the extent to which print media's ability to influence opinions on *specific issues* is debatable, the ability of newspapers to influence behaviour, perceptions and public discourse is proven and widely reported on (Macnamara, 2005.; Schmidt et al., 2013, 2013; Stephens et al., 2009). In that vein, this study shows not only the extent to which newspaper reporting fluctuates with national and global events but also illustrates how economic and governmental action (and inaction) can affect the wider societal discourse. The relative novelty of the offshore wind industry when compared with that of the onshore wind sector means that the public salience is not quite developed. What is captured here is a kind of baseline where the governance/economic themes dominate and the social themes are latent rather than manifest.

## 5. Limitations

This study looked only at print media which is diminishing in its ability to inform and influence the populace, with the majority of Irish people now accessing newspapers and other news sources on line (Culloty et al., 2019). The ability to access international news every day suggests that society now has the means to attain a more informed view of global events with regard to the offshore wind industry and project development. Today's society has immediate access to a wider view of international issues arising from territories that are much further along the path of offshore wind development than Ireland. Countries which have a mature offshore wind industry are reporting on issues which, as yet, are not relevant to Ireland's inexperienced offshore wind energy sector. Public discourse is not only being informed by domestic reporting but now enjoys intelligence from international sources which

are arising and being reported on in the mainstream news feeds which reduces the 'fishbowl' view of the wind industry issues which may be affecting Irish society and the societal issues which are affecting Ireland's offshore wind industry.

The databased used in this study was LexisNexis. The resources here were somewhat limited to broadsheet newspapers with no Irish tabloid newspaper coverage. To attain a more complete study of Irish print media coverage, including tabloid media coverage Google News would be a more complete search tool.

This study only used one search term "offshore wind" which restricted results to only those directly related to and including offshore wind energy, subjects such as climate change or global warming which do not include 'offshore wind' and other environmental subjects were therefore not included., Given the time of the constraints of the study it was impossible to include all such searches. A more comprehensive study would include more search terms.

## 6. Conclusion

This study gives a snapshot of the main issues reported on in Irish print media over the last five years. An area for further research is how the Irish print media can help inform the energy citizen about more sustainable energy production.

It has been shown that the Irish print media in this study, have given broad coverage of the issues relevant to offshore wind. Framings around government and economics have dominated. The tendency has been towards negative reporting of government decisions or actions. However, holding government to account is an important role of the media.

In general, the review of the print media in the Irish broadsheets reflects the issues of the day. When presented year by year, they reveal the story of steady progress in the development of offshore wind in Ireland, with a notable increase in coverage of a number of new and strategic developments throughout 2018-2019.

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