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Constructing Russia through metaphor on Twitter.
A discourse-historical and corpus-assisted analysis of US
news tweets and user replies.

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Tesi di dottorato

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Introduction

This study was born out of the intertwining of two strong passions: Russia and metaphor. I lived alongside the former, and it was through this experience that I came to discover the latter. To extend the metaphor, Russia became the catalyst that opened the path to research, and it is from this encounter that this work originates.

The aim of the present study is to investigate metaphor in Twitter discourse by adopting a cognitive approach to discourse analysis. In particular, it adopts both a qualitative and quantitative (corpus-assisted) approach to investigate the metaphorical representation of Russia and its relations with other nations and supranational organizations in a relatively understudied time frame, i.e. 2014-2021. While Cold War and post-February 2022 studies abound, this time frame, which marked the decline of the improvement of relations between the so-called West and the Russian Federation, remains a largely neglected area of research in discourse studies. Twitter offers a particularly versatile ground for investigating metaphor: it not only allows researchers to analyze digital journalism discourse and therefore observe how news outlets propose their content on this social media, but also makes it possible – in a *Bakhtinian sense* – to examine how grassroots discourse responds *dialogically* to news. In other words, Twitter's horizontal system of news spreading allows scholars to explore a more varied audience consisting, among others, of news outlets and ordinary users. This dual perspective – top-down journalistic framing and bottom-up user engagement – makes Twitter an especially fruitful site for discourse-oriented metaphor analysis.

To operationalize the research carried out for this study, the following research questions are addressed. They are designed to move progressively from news production to news genre comparison, to user reception, thereby offering a multi-layered analysis.

RQ1 adopts a discourse historical approach to investigate metaphors used by the main Twitter accounts of the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal. In particular, the analysis focuses on the years 2014, 2017 and 2021, considered historical turning points, to investigate (i) potential differences in metaphor use between the two news outlets (ii) diachronic changes in metaphor use in the metaphorical representation of Russia, Russia-related events and the interactions between Russia and other social actors. This first research question thus lays the foundation for understanding how Russia-related metaphors circulate within broadsheet news discourse over time.

RQ2 adopts a corpus-assisted approach to investigate (i) potential differences between broadsheet and tabloid discourse with respect to the representation of relations between the United States and the Russian Federation. By extending the analysis to tabloids, this question highlights how register and genre conventions influence metaphor use, offering a broader picture of the journalistic landscape.

RQ3 investigates how Twitter users respond to metaphorical news-outlet tweets, in particular (i) whether and how users rework –extend, recontextualize or reframe–metaphors adopted by news outlet in replies, and (ii) whether reply patterns are sensitive to register (broadsheet vs. tabloid) and narrative (mainstream- vs. counter-narrative). This final research question shifts the focus from production to reception, thereby completing the analytical arc by considering metaphor as not only a dynamic, but also an interactive process.

The present work is structured as follows: Chapter 1 focuses on the socio-historical background, moving from the concept of nationhood, through an historical excursus on events concerning the Russian Federation from 2014, to an examination of Twitter as a key Social Media Platform for digital journalism. This contextual chapter provides the historical and technological scaffolding necessary for the subsequent analyses. Chapter 2 explores the theoretical foundations of metaphor, providing both an overview of central metaphor theories and a discussion of identification approaches to figurative language.

Chapter 3 focuses on previous work on the framing of nations and International Relations (hence IR), and in particular on the representation of Russia. Chapter 4 presents the corpus design and methodologies for this study: data collection for the three research questions, a replicable protocol for the identification of metaphor-related verbs and nouns, the use of Wmatrix to identify potential source domain candidates, and finally guidelines for the annotation of user replies. Chapter 5 reports the linguistic analysis carried out for this study. Finally, Chapter 6 considers both the limitations of this study and potential future directions. In attempting to address three broad questions, the research also opens further lines of inquiry. Such an outcome embodies the aim of research itself: asking questions not merely to find answers, but to inspire new ones.

Chapter 1. Socio-historical background

1.1 Nations as discursive objects

There is no univocal definition of nation. According to an essentialist (and ethno-symbolist) view (Smith 1991), shared language, culture, territory, and political base constitute its ontological base; yet scholarly accounts range along a continuum from more essentialist models to constructivist models. On the constructivist side, influential accounts define nations by present consent, shared memories, constitutional citizenship and rights, and public culture, or by the notion of a large “imagined community” (Anderson 1983: 15) whose members will never meet yet picture themselves as belonging together. In other words, “essentialist” points to heritage-based positions that foreground “objective” cultural denominators and myths of common ancestry (e.g., Smith), whereas “constructivist” designates accounts that treat nations as made and maintained through consent, institutions, and communicative practice (e.g., Anderson).

Wodak et al. (2009) build upon Anderson's concept, assuming that nations are “imagined communities” and mental constructs that nationalized political subjects perceive as discrete. They further posit that national identities are special forms of social identities. Operationally, their discourse-historical model links (i) contents and thematic “blocks” of national identity to (ii) macro strategies (construction, perpetuation/justification, transformation, dismantling), (iii) recurrent argumentative topoi (e.g., danger/threat, external constraints, comparison), and (iv) linguistic realizations (e.g., personal reference, spatial/temporal deixis, vagueness/nominalization). Rather than selecting a single definition, it is important to observe how expert and folk models co-evolve in use, each shaping the other within specific historical and political contexts.

An analytically productive stance treats nationhood as a contested, historically situated social formation enacted in discourse: Wodak et al. (2009: 2) explicitly focus on the “manifold attempts to imagine and construct national identity” through discourse, and eventually identify two principal, albeit ultimately critiqued, conceptions of the nation: the *Kulturnation* and the *Staatsnation*. The former, or cultural nation, defines national belonging through so-called “objective criteria” such as a common language, culture, and territory, often implying an ethnically-based heritage; the latter, i.e., political nation, also termed Willensnation – nation

by an act of will – is a concept that posits the nation as a “mental principle” founded upon the subjective will of its citizens to form a political community. Therefore, the authors maintain that the distinction's primary analytical value is not for classifying entire nations, but for highlighting differences in self-perception within a country, such as between competing political or ideological camps.

In this study, the concept of nation is understood in broad and dynamic terms, encompassing both the cultural-symbolic and the political-institutional dimensions of collective identity. As such, references to the “nation” may index not only the people or territory, but also the government, state institutions, or political leadership acting in its name

1.2 Discourse and power

Following a view that is widely adopted in language-and-politics research, discourse is treated here as a set of social practices. In other words, it concerns who uses language, in what contexts, for what purposes, and how these choices shape and are shaped by broader social dynamics. This definition shifts the analytic focus from meaning treated as a decontextualized linguistic property to participants, purposes, and settings, emphasizing that nationhood is performed and contested in situated interaction (van Dijk 1997). It also supports a critical perspective in which discourse is socially constituted and constitutive: it shapes social practices and institutions while being shaped by them. This study thus adopts that “discourse as social practice” baseline and combines historical context with linguistic evidence. Within this perspective, political discourse can be understood as a domain-specific instantiation of discourse as social practice. In the tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis (e.g. van Dijk 1997), political discourse is not defined primarily by the identity of the text producer. In other words, a discourse can be considered “political” insofar as it contributes to the construction, legitimisation, or contestation of power relations, collective identities, and socio-political realities, regardless of whether it is produced by political actors or mediated through journalistic institutions.

It is through political discourse that social actors make claims about governance, decision-making, responsibility, and belonging. Conceiving political discourse in this way foregrounds its performative role in the construction of social realities such as “the nation”, and allows it to be analysed as a form of social practice that both draws on and reshapes existing power relations across different sites of interaction.

Following Wodak et al. (2009), political discourse is also not restricted to official texts: to understand elite influence one must also examine reception and in settings where key concepts like nation are co-constructed in interaction. Within this design, outlet tweets function as mediated elite discourse, while reply threads serve as semi-public arenas.

Crucially, however, the texts analysed here are not instances of political discourse that are mediated through journalistic practices on social media platforms. In the digital age, political discourse has undergone a shift from predominantly monomodal, print-based communication to multisemiotic forms of meaning-making, where verbal language is systematically integrated with visual and graphic resources within platform-specific formats (Demata 2019). News outlets therefore function as channels of transmission that select and frame political events and statements through headlines, captions, images etc. As Fachinetti (2021) argues, contemporary news discourse is better understood as the dissemination of perspective rather than the neutral transmission of information: even visual and seemingly objective forms of journalism involve editorial choices that structure interpretation and foreground particular angles on political reality.

Recent work on digital journalism further shows that this mediation cannot be reduced to textual or semiotic choices alone, but is embedded in the material, organisational, and technological conditions of news production. Drawing on a social media Critical Discourse Studies perspective, Smith and Sissons (2023) demonstrate how social media communication is legitimised as an integral component of journalistic practice, and reshapes routines, professional roles, and temporal pressures within the journalistic field. Their ethnographic analysis highlights how political meanings are transformed not only through news texts, but through newsroom practices, platform logics, and institutional expectations that prioritise speed, visibility, and constant circulation. From this perspective, digital newspaper discourse on social media emerges as a layered site of mediation in which political discourse is shaped simultaneously by editorial framing, technological affordances, and the everyday practices of digital journalism.

Power is intrinsic to how “the nation” becomes thinkable and actionable. This process involves both institutional speakers – governments, policy bodies – and grassroots publics – fora, comment sections, social media – both contribute to the production and circulation of nationhood, at times reproducing dominant frames, at times challenging them. International Relations (IR) arenas (parliaments, UN fora, government briefings) are thus sites where national identity is performed before recognizable audiences. The statements produced there

often travel across media ecosystems, where they are taken up, reframed, or resisted by journalists and citizens alike.

1.3 The Russian Nation

Russia is often taken as a paradigmatic case of a top-down state-nation formation. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century projects of national consolidation remained closely tied to imperial sovereignty and loyalty to central authority, aspects which produced a durable tension between empire and nation that privileged vertical control over horizontal civic belonging (Hosking 2005; Laruelle 2009). Within this vertical architecture, a long-standing set of established rhetorical formulas centers on *Rodina*, i.e., the Motherland, and leader-as-guardian figures such as *otec otečestva*, “father of the fatherland”. Scholars describe this symbolic pairing as simultaneously matrifocal – with a strong emphasis on the mother-child bond to the state – and patriarchal with a personalized authority embodied in rulers, a pairing that historically facilitated expectations of duty and loyalty in moments of strain (Rancour-Laferriere 1995: 137-138). These constructs operate alongside symbols such as rituals, commemorations, or visual emblems, which help bind heterogeneous publics into a shared political community. Importantly, such symbols are effective not because they fix a single meaning, but because their meanings remain open enough to be recognized and appropriated by different audiences – an ambiguity that has been leveraged in state communication to sustain unity across regions and social groups (Cepinskytė 2019).

The Soviet Union, despite being a multi-ethnic state, non-nationalist in its declared ideology, maintained personalized forms of vertical power that hindered the development of a solid Russian national identity and an evolved civil society. In other words, the USSR created the characteristics of a nation, but the potential nation was understood as the “Soviet people,” and not as the Russian nation (Hosking 2005: 202). The vertical architecture inherited from Tsarist Russia was re-created and supported by the Soviet system through the Party monopoly and the persistence of personalized power structures, actively hindering the emergence of a fully developed Russian public life and national identity (Hosking 2005: 207-209). Despite political changes since the collapse of the USSR, political and economic life in the Russian federation maintain similar personalized power structures (Laruelle 2009: 7). In the contemporary period, elite discourse has continued to stress sovereignty, stability, and the

competence of a “strong state”, themes widely analyzed in political-communication and IR scholarship (Koteyko and Ryazanova-Clarke 2013; Tsygankov 2014).

1.4 Russia, 2014-2021: State, Nation and IR Setting

This section situates the analysis within the period 2014–2021, a period that has received comparatively little attention in discourse-historical research but is widely recognized as a chain of critical turning points in US–Russia relations. The year 2014 marks a structural rupture with the West and the onset of a lasting sanctions regime. In 2017, domestic and institutional constraints on US policy became more visible – most notably with the passage of CAATSA¹ – while adversarial framings of Russia were increasingly normalized in transatlantic strategy. By 2021, there was a brief reprieve through the extension of New START², yet this unfolded within a broader consolidation of “structured confrontation,” culminating in the late-2021 European security crisis around Ukraine and the Geneva summit between Presidents Biden and Putin.

1.4.1 Year 2014

2014 operates in the literature as a watershed, marking a structural break with the post-Cold War arc of fitful cooperation. The year opened under the glare of the Sochi Olympics amid intensified criticism of Russia’s 2013 anti-LGBT legislation, which complicated high-level diplomatic attendance. In parallel, energy ties with Ukraine were already being leveraged in hard-nosed terms. After President Yanukovich fled Kyiv on 22 February 2014 amid the

¹ The Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) is a US federal law enacted in August 2017, which codified and expanded sanctions against Russia in response to its actions in Ukraine, cyber activities, and alleged election interference, while also targeting Iran and North Korea. It significantly constrained the executive branch’s ability to lift sanctions without congressional approval. See United States Congress. (2017). *Countering America’s adversaries through sanctions act*, Pub. L. No. 115-44, 131 Stat. 886 (2017). <https://www.congress.gov/115/plaws/publ44/PLAW-115publ44.pdf>

² The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) is a bilateral arms control agreement between the US and Russia, signed in 2010 and entered into force in 2011, which limits deployed strategic nuclear warheads and delivery systems and establishes verification mechanisms. In 2021, the treaty was extended by five years, making it valid through 5 February 2026. U.S. Department of State. (2010). *Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on measures for the further reduction and limitation of strategic offensive arms (New START)*. <https://www.state.gov/new-start/>

Revolution of Dignity³, Russian troops in unmarked uniforms began seizing key sites in Crimea on 27 February; Russia then formalized the annexation in March 2014 following a referendum that the UN General Assembly deemed illegal, condemned internationally as a violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and international law.

Conflict simultaneously escalated in Donbas, where pro-Russian separatist movements, supported by Moscow, sparked a war that would continue for the rest of the decade. In July 2014, the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 over eastern Ukraine killed nearly 300 civilians and intensified Western sanctions and public condemnation of Russia.

Russia's annexation of Crimea redefined the relationship as long-term adversarial rather than episodically contentious; in response, the United States and the European Union constructed a layered sanctions regime that quickly became the principal instrument of Western statecraft toward Moscow. Analyses emphasize that this "cloud of sanctions" is not just a lever to extract concessions, but rather an enduring strategic signal accepted on both sides as part of the baseline condition of interaction (Stulberg and Darsey 2021)

Domestically, the 2014 turn coincides with a sharper securitization in official doctrine within the country: comparative readings of Russia's core policy documents across 1991–2023 show a marked reclassification of the United States from partner to principal threat, embedding external confrontation into the state's own self-description and narrowing the political elasticity necessary for compromise (Borovsky 2024).

1.4.2 Year 2015

Economically, the dual impact of the oil-price collapse and Western sanctions pushed Russia into a sharp recession, while at the same time forcing policy makers to accelerate adaptation strategies and diversify external partnerships (Stulberg and Darsey 2021). In February, the signing of the Minsk II agreement sought to freeze the Donbas conflict and created the Normandy Format of negotiations, though violations soon underscored the fragility of the settlement. By mid-2015, Western sanctions were renewed and explicitly tied to Minsk compliance, further embedding sanctions as a structural feature of the relationship. On the

³ The Revolution of Dignity is the name widely used in Ukraine for the Euromaidan protest movement's climax in February 2014 – mass demonstrations in Kyiv that followed the government's November 21, 2013 decision to suspend an EU association agreement. It culminated in deadly clashes, the ousting of President Viktor Yanukovich, and a return to the 2004 constitution. In English-language sources it is also called the Maidan Revolution.

geopolitical front, Moscow's September 2015 military intervention in Syria marked the start of sustained US–Russia airspace deconfliction. It also routinized a form of competitive crisis management in the Middle East, as both sides developed communication channels to prevent inadvertent clashes even while pursuing fundamentally divergent strategic aims (Katz 2019). Within this shifting context, the formal architecture of strategic stability – anchored in long-standing arms control agreements – remained in place but showed increasing signs of strain. Scholars point to mounting frictions over compliance and modernization programs as early signals of the arms-control erosion that would become more visible in subsequent years (Woolf 2021). Domestically, the adoption of the 2015 National Security Strategy codified this adversarial turn, explicitly designating the United States and NATO as threats to Russia's security.

1.4.3 Year 2016

In 2016, allegations of Russian interference in the U.S. presidential election became a central theme of political debate, sharpening partisan divides in Washington, hardening elite and public attitudes toward Moscow, and laying the groundwork for statutory sanctions frameworks that would later restrict presidential flexibility. Analysts emphasize that this episode marked not just a temporary rift but a structural embedding of Russia policy within domestic polarization (Shuya 2018).

In parallel, the sanctions “cloud” grew heavier and more complex, with measures expanding in both purpose and expected permanence. By this point, scholarly and policy assessments largely converged on the view that restrictions would persist regardless of short-term diplomatic fluctuations, becoming a baseline condition of the relationship (Stulberg and Darsey 2021). Meanwhile, in the Syrian theater, the United States and Russia maintained a narrow deconfliction regime. This arrangement allowed tactical communication to reduce airspace risks and avoid accidental clashes, even as broader strategic rivalry continued unabated.

1.4.4 Year 2017

In 2017, US Congress' assertiveness culminated in CAATSA⁴, which codified and expanded sanctions and formalized a harder line toward Moscow. Despite early rhetoric about a possible “unfreeze,” bilateral ties continued to deteriorate (Natalizia and Valigi 2020). The year was dominated by investigations into alleged Russian election interference, combining White House denials with congressional and DOJ⁵ inquiries and constant media scrutiny – illustrated by Flynn's resignation and the high-profile dismissal of FBI Director Comey.

At the UN Security Council, Washington and Moscow clashed over resolutions on Syria's chemical-weapons use, with Russia shielding Assad diplomatically and contesting evidentiary claims; Russia and Iran publicly backed Assad in April, and Russia later vetoed a probe seen as likely to blame Damascus.

In Northeast Asia, a doctrinal split emerged: the US emphasized sanctions and pressure on North Korea, while Russia and China rejected military threats and promoted “dual freezes,” a divergence that echoed into the G20 context. The Hamburg summit in July, the first Trump–Putin meeting, drew global attention but produced limited substantive outcomes.

The period also featured intensifying attention to information operations: Moscow announced information-warfare capabilities; Western reporting probed RT/Sputnik and wider influence campaigns; and platform-centric stories amplified the theme of “information war.”

In the Euro-Atlantic theatre, NATO posture became more forward-leaning – including US F-35 deployments, planning for two new commands, and calls by frontline states such as Lithuania for a more permanent U.S. presence. Large-scale Zapad 2017 exercises near Belarus reinforced perceptions of confrontation, even as the Balkans and Ukraine remained zones of friction.

Beyond Europe, Arctic and energy pivots showcased long-term hedging under sanctions—from Svalbard's “coal war” to the Yamal LNG launch and deepening financial/energy ties with China—while Middle East reach expanded via Saudi King Salman's visit to Moscow and an oil-cut pact that underwrote talk of rising Russian clout.

1.4.5 Year 2018

The post-2017 statutory framework led US authorities to expand designations and increase compliance pressure in 2018, making sanctions a geo-economic tool. The cumulative signal

⁴ See Footnote 1.

⁵ Department of Justice.

was that sanctions would persist and deepen, with policy operating simultaneously as coercive statecraft and as a tool to reshape commercial exposure to Russia (Stulberg and Darsey 2021). Leader-level engagement in 2018 did not generate durable de-escalation. Instead, narrative and identity clashes – over sovereignty, interference, the European security order – continued to structure expectations on both sides. Elite rhetoric and domestic political constraints in Washington further limited room for policy shifts, so visible contact coexisted with hardening baselines in security and economic domains (Natalizia and Valigi 2020).

Even as formal arms-control pillars still stood in 2018, disputes over INF⁶ compliance, concerns about missile defense, and the unveiling of new strategic systems intensified doubts about the durability of the bilateral framework. Scholarly assessments from this period flagged a clear trajectory toward treaty fragility, anticipating the 2019 INF exit and broader strain on strategic-stability arrangements (Neuneck 2019; Troitskiy 2020).

1.4.6 Year 2019

In 2019, the collapse of the INF Treaty on 2 August removed one of the central pillars of late-Cold War arms control and, as many analysts warned, opened the door to riskier regional force postures. At the same time, debate shifted toward new technologies such as hypersonic weapons, which complicated any prospect of restoring a stable framework (Neuneck 2019). Sanctions persisted and broadened: beyond CAATSA's baseline, the United States imposed new measures in December targeting the Nord Stream 2⁷ pipeline.

In Washington, the publication of the Mueller Report in April closed the main investigation into alleged collusion, but its findings – no criminal conspiracy yet extensive evidence of interference – deepened polarization in U.S. debates about Russia.

On Ukraine, there were limited de-escalation moves – the 35-for-35 prisoner exchange on 7 September, Ukraine's acceptance of the Steinmeier Formula⁸ in October, and the Normandy

⁶ Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

⁷ Nord Stream 2 is a natural gas pipeline project running under the Baltic Sea from Russia to Germany, designed to double the capacity of the existing Nord Stream route. Launched in 2015 by Russia's Gazprom with European partners, it quickly became one of the most politically contested energy projects in Europe. Proponents argued it would enhance energy security through stable supplies, while critics – especially the United States and several EU and Eastern European states – warned it would increase Europe's dependency on Russian gas and undermine Ukraine's role as a transit country. US sanctions against companies involved in its construction began in late 2019

⁸ The Steinmeier Formula is a sequencing device for implementing parts of Minsk II in the Donbas: local elections would first be held under Ukrainian law with OSCE monitoring; the regions' "special status" would take effect provisionally on election day and become permanent only if the OSCE judged the vote broadly free and fair. Ukraine accepted it on October 1, 2019 to unlock talks, but the move provoked protests and implementation stalled

summit in Paris on 9 December – which produced incremental steps but no durable settlement. Domestically, Moscow’s summer protests over City Duma elections triggered some of the year’s largest detentions and highlighted tightening internal control even as the ruling party lost ground in the capital (Osborn and Tsvetkova 2019).

Beyond Europe, Moscow projected influence with the delivery of S-400s to Turkey and military personnel to Venezuela, moves that complicated US alliance management. Further afield, Russia sought to signal global reach through its first-ever Russia–Africa Summit in Sochi and by brokering a deal with Turkey over northern Syria after Ankara’s incursion in October, underscoring Moscow’s growing role as a regional power broker.

1.4.7 Year 2020

Beyond the erosion of arms-control guardrails, 2020 marked a consolidation of Russia’s domestic and regional posture. At home, a week-long nationwide vote (June 25–July 1) approved constitutional amendments that “reset” presidential terms and re-centered authority in the federal presidency, a move that international observers criticized for its limited safeguards and uneven process. The year also saw sustained protest dynamics: mass rallies in Khabarovsk after the arrest of Governor Furgal⁹ signaled regional discontent with center-periphery control, while the poisoning of opposition leader Alexej Naval’nij in August, confirmed as a Novičok-class agent by European laboratories, provoked EU sanctions against senior Russian officials (Allevato 2024).

The geo-economic and energy sphere was impacted by the March Russia–Saudi oil-price war, which caused a historic price collapse and an April OPEC+ cut, which strained Russia’s fiscal

over unresolved security preconditions – especially withdrawal of forces and restoring Ukrainian control of the border – leaving the core sequencing dispute unresolved. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. (2019, October 1). Press statement of Special Representative of OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group in Minsk [Press release]. <https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/434384>

⁹ Sergei Furgal – the popular LDPR governor of Khabarovsk Krai who defeated the Kremlin-backed incumbent in 2018 – was arrested on 9 July 2020 and flown to Moscow on charges of involvement in the murders of businessmen in 2004–2005 (which he denied). His arrest triggered weeks of mass protests across Khabarovsk and other Far-Eastern cities, where many locals said the case was politically motivated and demanded he be tried at home. The Kremlin replaced him on 20 July 2020 with Mikhail Degtyaryov as acting governor. In February 2023 a Russian court sentenced Furgal to 22 years in a strict-regime colony. These events became a major episode of center–periphery tension in Russia during 2020–2021.

Gershkovich, E. (2020, July 25). Anger at Kremlin grows in latest massive Russian Far East protest. *The Moscow Times*. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/07/25/anger-at-kremlin-grows-in-latest-massive-russian-far-east-protest-a70919>

buffers; later in the year, US policy tightened on pipeline sanctions Nord Stream 2 and TurkStream. COVID-19 framed additional statecraft: Moscow announced regulatory approval of “Sputnik V” on August 11 – which leveraged vaccine diplomacy abroad even as domestic uptake lagged.

On the US–Russia track, Washington’s formal withdrawal from the Open Skies Treaty¹⁰ in November deepened the sense of a fraying verification regime. In cyberspace, the SolarWinds supply-chain compromise (made public in December) was a significant example of Russian-linked espionage on a large scale and was directly influenced by 2021 policy responses. Attackers tampered with software updates for SolarWinds’ Orion IT-monitoring platform, so when customers installed routine updates they also installed a backdoor (SUNBURST), i.e., a hidden access point inserted into software that allowed attackers to bypass normal authentication and gain covert entry into a system. US CISA¹¹ issued an emergency directive instructing federal agencies to disconnect Orion immediately.

Regionally, Moscow also reasserted its influence: in Belarus, it backed President Lukashenko amid mass protests following contested elections, while in the South Caucasus it brokered the ceasefire ending the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War and deployed peacekeepers – moves that underscored Russia’s role as security guarantor in its neighborhood.

1.4.8 Year 2021

2021 was defined by an attempted “managed” stabilization under President Biden – anchored in arms-control pragmatism and alliance repair – while preserving, and in some domains tightening, long-standing instruments of pressure, i.e., sanctions. The result was structured confrontation with bounded cooperation, punctuated late in the year by a mounting security crisis around Ukraine that overshadowed earlier diplomatic gains (Sokolshchik 2024).

¹⁰ The Treaty on Open Skies (OST), signed in 1992 and entered into force in 2002, established a regime of unarmed aerial observation flights among 34 participating states to foster transparency and mutual confidence regarding military forces and activities. The US announced its intent to withdraw in May 2020 and formally left the treaty on 22 November 2020, citing alleged Russian non-compliance; Russia, in turn, withdrew in December 2021. The OST is often regarded as one of the key confidence-building agreements of the post–Cold War era, complementing other arms-control frameworks such as the INF Treaty and New START.

U.S. Department of State. (2020, November 22). *On the Treaty on Open Skies*. Press statement. <https://2017-2021.state.gov/on-the-treaty-on-open-skies/index.html>

¹¹ Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency.

Washington and Moscow extended New START¹² for five years in early February 2021 – preserving limits, data exchanges, and inspections on deployed strategic systems through 5 February 2026¹³ (Woolf 2021). The 16 June 2021 Geneva summit relaunched strategic-stability talks, important as a channel-management tool even amid rivalry (Bidgood 2023), though experts anticipated difficult follow-on negotiations given divergent threat perceptions and contested issues, i.e., missile defense, non-nuclear strategic weapons, emerging tech (Woolf 2021). In US media commentary, Geneva delivered limited concrete security gains while affording Moscow a short-term public-relations boost, a line widely circulated in the immediate aftermath.

Sanctions remained a persistent architecture of pressure: the administration signaled continuity with—and, in some areas, incremental tightening of—the post-2014 regime, treating sanctions as an enduring feature of US statecraft rather than a short-term lever (Stulberg and Darsey 2021; Sokolshchik 2024).

At the same time, US policy focused on alliances and shared values. It sought to restore unity with Europe, reassure allies on NATO’s eastern flank, and frame relations with Russia as part of a broader struggle between democracy and authoritarianism. This approach left little room for compromise in bilateral relations (Sokolshchik 2024). Cyber and information frictions remained salient: while major intrusions such as SolarWinds predated Biden, their political aftershocks carried into 2021, and cyber featured in Geneva and subsequent exchanges as both sides probed norms and red lines (Shuya 2018). Domestically, Navalny’s January arrest upon returning to Moscow sparked nationwide protests, linking Russia’s internal repression to renewed international sanctions debates.

By spring and again in late autumn, Russian force build-ups near Ukraine triggered US crisis diplomacy and allied coordination— including intelligence disclosures, deterrent signaling, reinforcement of NATO’s eastern flank, and preparations for severe sanctions— policies that set the stage for 2022 (Sokolshchik 2024). Contemporary reporting recorded a stiffer Western message alongside intra-European debates over pace and instruments, and, by October, diplomatic channels narrowed further as Russia closed its NATO mission after expulsions of

¹² New START is the 2010 US–Russia strategic arms reduction treaty. In February 2023, Russia suspended its participation. The United States took reciprocal steps on certain data/telemetry while keeping the treaty on the books. As of 2025, Washington reports that verification remains paused; the limits technically still apply, but there is no active verification and no replacement agreement in place. [2024 Report to Congress on Implementation of the New START Treaty - United States Department of State](#)

¹³ While New START remains legally extended through Feb 5, 2026, the parts about “preserving ... data exchanges and inspections” are no longer accurate: those verification activities have been suspended since 2023 even though the numerical limits appear to be largely respected. [New START at a Glance | Arms Control Association](#)

suspected intelligence officers. In a late-December call, President Putin warned that additional sanctions tied to Ukraine would trigger a “complete rupture” in US–Russia relations amid a ~100,000-troop build-up. This showed how the Ukraine standoff erased the impact of earlier attempts at stabilization and confirmed that US–Russia relations were locked into long-term rivalry with only minimal safeguards left (Woolf 2021).

1.5 Social Media as news outlets: The Twitter case

The previous section traced the international and domestic dynamics that shaped Russia’s position between 2014 and 2021, highlighting how sanctions, military interventions, and recurring crises reshaped its relations with the United States and Europe. Yet these transformations did not unfold only in diplomatic or military arenas: they were also narrated, contested, and amplified in the information environment. In this respect, social media platforms – most notably Twitter – emerged as central spaces where news outlets and audiences negotiated meanings and framed events in real time.

Section 1.5 explores Twitter as both a news medium and a platform for discursive interaction. It begins by situating the platform within the broader rise of digital journalism (1.5.1), emphasizing how economic pressures and technological affordances transformed news production. The following subsection (1.5.2) retraces Twitter’s evolution from a microblogging tool for status updates into a global newswire and agenda-setter. Attention then shifts to the practices of journalists on Twitter (1.5.3), examining how the platform’s brevity, immediacy, and interactivity reshape conventional news routines. Subsection 1.5.4 focuses more closely on the structure of news tweets, highlighting stylistic and rhetorical strategies that foster engagement and visibility. Finally, subsection 1.5.5 discusses differences in Twitter policies across outlets, showing how broadsheet and tabloid organizations adapt their editorial voice and strategies to platform logics.

1.5.1 The advent of digital journalism

Since the early 2000s, news organizations have undergone structural transformations due to falling print sales and the rise of digital intermediaries, such as social media, which fragmented the audience and disrupted traditional economic models.

Franklin (2014) highlights both the opportunities and the crises that followed: while online platforms allow wider reach and more flexible forms of reporting, they also encourage a drift toward “clickable” content at the expense of traditional journalistic values such as verification, depth, and independence. In his account, the profession has been caught between innovation and erosion, with the future of journalism defined by pressures from advertising, audience metrics, and the constant demand for immediacy.

Kwak et al. (2010), by contrast, approached Twitter not from the perspective of newsrooms but through the lens of network analysis. By crawling over 41 million profiles and more than a billion social ties, they demonstrated that Twitter differed sharply from typical social networks: most links are one-way, reciprocity is low, and information can travel across the network in just a few steps. Crucially, they found that over 85% of trending topics were news-related – often headline or persistent news – and that once a tweet was retweeted, it could reach an average of 1,000 additional users regardless of the original account’s follower count. These findings positioned Twitter less as a “friendship network” and more as an information diffusion system where news circulates rapidly and broadly.

Franklin’s concern with the shifting values of journalism and Kwak et al.’s demonstration of Twitter’s architecture as a news medium frame the platform as both a challenge and a resource. For traditional outlets, Twitter amplifies pressures toward speed and visibility; for researchers, it illustrates how the logics of digital networks transform news into fast-moving, participatory streams.

Early studies confirm this dual orientation of Twitter as both a social and a news medium. Armstrong and Gao (2010), for example, show that US news organizations rapidly adopted the platform to disseminate urgent information, with national outlets and broadcasters leading the way. They also highlight the persistence of traditional news values – crime, politics, and public affairs emerged as the most tweeted topics – suggesting that while the medium was new, editorial priorities remained familiar. At the same time, their study documents clear variation across outlet type (national vs. local, print vs. broadcast), underlining that Twitter’s role in journalism was shaped not only by technology but also by newsroom identity and resources.

1.5.2 Twitter's story: from status updates to a real-time newswire and agenda-setter

Early work on Twitter described it as a conversational channel—short posts, @-replies, emergent collaboration—rather than a news medium (Honeycutt and Herring 2009; Java et al 2007). As conventions such as @mentions, retweets, and hashtags stabilized, the platform began to function as an “awareness system,” which enabled ambient journalism, understood as a mode of news consumption characterized by continuous flows of micro-updates that keep audiences peripherally informed about events (Hermida 2010). Network analyses— as discussed in Section 1.5.1—soon showed Twitter's follower trending dynamics behaved less like a mutual friendship network and more like an information network, optimized for rapid discovery and diffusion of newsy items (Kwak et al 2010).

During events like the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, researchers traced cross-flows of information among activists, bloggers, journalists, and mainstream outlets, where Twitter acted as a networked wire service feeding both professional and citizen newswork (Lotan et al 2011). By working on affective news, it was discovered that emotion, attention, and circulation were intertwined on hashtagged streams like #Egypt, creating the rhythms and values of live news storytelling (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012). Together, these studies documented Twitter's maturation from “status” chatter to a real-time news layer for wide distribution.

The integration of Twitter into journalists' routines led to a change in agenda formation, from one-way editorial gatekeeping—the process by which information is selected, shaped, and allowed (or not) to pass from sources to audiences through “gates” controlled—to gatewatching—real-time observation, checking, and curating of information flows rather than blocking or admitting items through a gate. Hashtags scaffolded “ad hoc publics,” enabling rapid discussion that journalists could monitor (Bruns 2021). This repositioned Twitter as a rapid-response news substrate: a place where news is sourced, sorted, and signaled before (and alongside) full articles and broadcasts.

The acquisition of Twitter by Elon Musk in 2022 marked a critical turning point for the platform, with impacts on content moderation and algorithmic transparency. Musk's public statements about wanting to “restore free speech” and his dismissal of key content moderation teams led to heightened concerns about the spread of misinformation, hate speech, and harassment, especially among media professionals and vulnerable users. These developments

prompted fears that Twitter – rebranded as X¹⁴ – was becoming a less safe and less predictable space for news dissemination (Jia and Xu 2022).

1.5.3 Journalistic practices on Twitter

Bastos and Zago (2013) define Twitter’s role as a hybrid platform that combines characteristics of mass media and interpersonal communication. They note that Twitter’s immediacy and brevity have enabled it to emerge as a key tool for real-time journalism, where both professionals and audiences contribute to the construction and dissemination of news. In this regard, Twitter not only reconfigures journalistic norms but also transforms readers into participants within the broader communication ecology.

As noted by Bastos (2015), a significant portion of the content circulated through traditional news media is – either concurrently or subsequently – shared on Twitter, with a focus on hard rather than soft news, the former concerning events of immediate public importance and that deal with topics of collective interest, the latter being more light, entertainment-oriented. This is also confirmed by Rega (2021) in her comparative study between Twitter and Facebook. The author reveals that platform-specific dynamics significantly shape journalistic role performance. Twitter posts are more likely to adopt a watchdog role, prioritizing political coverage, institutional sources, and accountability functions. This is consistent with Twitter’s affordances: its brevity and immediacy network structure make it particularly suited for hard news and political content. In contrast, Facebook posts tend to emphasize the infotainment and civic roles, featuring more soft news, emotional tone, and calls to community engagement. This aligns with Facebook’s algorithmic preference for engagement-based content and its more personal, socially-driven user base.

Moreover, this new shaping of the news environment is not independent of capitalistic market dynamics, and as such dynamics foster a race for visibility, in which online presence is not only a marketing strategy but a necessary condition for survival in digital journalism (Orellana-Rodriguez and Kane 2018, Vallez et al. 2024).

Within this economy of visibility, social media editors do not simply repost headlines from their outlets. Instead, they engage in what Lamot et al. (2022) term “remediation”: the systematic rewriting of headlines to fit the logic of social media. Their comparative study found

¹⁴ Since the data for the present study were collected when the platform’s name was still Twitter, the original name and terminology e.g. tweets, is kept in the present study.

that nearly half of the headlines examined had been rewritten for platform publication. These edits often emphasize emotive language, insert rhetorical questions, or shorten complex titles into more concise, shareable forms.

Styles of rewriting vary. While some posts remain formal and factual, others adopt a more casual, conversational tone. Pillai, Fokkens, and van Atteveldt (2025) show that even minimal modifications – such as adding a short colloquial tag like “strange, isn’t it?” – can significantly raise predicted engagement. This illustrates how journalists on Twitter operate at the intersection of institutional authority and platform logics, continuously experimenting with language and tone to maximize visibility and resonance.

1.5.4 Structure of news tweets

Orellana-Rodriguez et al. (2018: 79) define news-tweets as

“[...] tweets by journalists that, typically, (a) link to articles they have written, (b) link to articles from other sources, or (c) include a journalist’s commentary on news items or tweets by non-journalists that report significant events/comments/opinions that are news (e.g., by eyewitnesses, celebrities, or politicians).”

The authors examine content features to understand how the formulation of the message contributes to user engagement. There are several aspects to consider when analyzing news-tweets: headlines, topic, and tweet and textual elements.

The most widely used format of a news-tweet is that of headline + link, i.e., the reuse of the same title taken from the related article. According to journalistic norms which date back much prior to social media journalism, headlines must be inherently captivating. This aspect is even more relevant in the contemporary social media journalism landscape, where headlines have acquired even more heightened significance, as they often constitute the only visible element through which readers gain access to a news outlet’s content. Given that news is increasingly encountered via social media feeds, the headline may, in many cases, represent the only portion of the article that users actually read, as noted in Gabielkov et al. (2016).

As for topics, it appears that not all categories of news perform equally well in terms of attention and dissemination. Categories such as opinion, editorial, or analysis are less frequently shared, possibly due to their analytic nature, which may not translate well to Twitter’s fast-paced environment. However, news topic popularity is context-sensitive, both

temporally and socially, i.e., certain stories spike due to current events and different audiences react differently depending on demographics or ideology.

Textual stylization within tweets contributes to their potential for dissemination. Beyond metadata and structural features (hashtags, mentions, URLs¹⁵), rhetorical and expressive elements – such as emphatic phrases, personal commentaries, quotations, and memes¹⁶ – shape how users perceive journalistic tweets. Hashtags, mentions, and replies, as well as the URLs that users can click to get more details on news articles of interest may influence the attention to news-tweets and enhance the possibility of intertextuality. Moreover, quotations are typically concise and carefully selected for their resonance or memorability: they may function as hooks to increase the reader's likelihood of clicking through or retweeting. The use of emphatic or attention-grabbing phrases is also highlighted as a key textual strategy for increasing the salience of tweets.

Recent studies add further nuance by examining how linguistic features correlate with audience engagement. Gligorić et al. (2023) show that negative words, consistent with the broader “negativity bias¹⁷,” significantly increase the visibility of news headlines and tweets, whereas positive sentiment does not have the same effect. Lamot et al. (2022) likewise find that editors deliberately choose headlines with negative connotations for social platforms. Bednarek and Caple’s (2017) approach, known as Discursive News Values Analysis (DNVA), provides an analytical framework for understanding this preference, defining Negativity as one of the core news-values (newsworthiness) that news organizations actively construct in journalistic discourse to establish the newsability of events.

Pronoun use also matters: first-person singular and third-person pronouns are associated with higher engagement, while first-person plural tends to dampen it (Gligorić et al. 2023). Length and complexity exert mixed effects: while longer headlines may succeed on websites by

¹⁵ On Twitter/X, hashtags are keywords or phrases preceded by the “#” symbol (e.g., #Russia), used to categorize content, enhance visibility, and enable searchability across the platform. Mentions employ the “@” symbol followed by a username (e.g., @nytimes) to directly address or reference another user, creating a hyperlink to that profile and notifying the addressee. URLs (Uniform Resource Locators) are web addresses embedded in tweets, often shortened via services like t.co, functioning as gateways that connect the platform to external news sites or resources.

¹⁶ Memes are multimodal units of communication – typically combining text, image, and intertextual reference – that spread virally across platforms through processes of imitation, adaptation, and remixing. In digital discourse memes function as dynamic, participatory practices of meaning-making. They operate simultaneously as humor, commentary, and political critique, and their circulation reflects both platform affordances (e.g., ease of sharing) and community norms (Shifman 2013).

¹⁷ The term “negativity bias” – refers to the well-documented psychological tendency for negative information – such as threats, losses, or critical evaluations – to exert a stronger impact on attention, memory, and decision-making than positive or neutral information. In media and communication research, this bias helps explain why negatively framed content often attracts more engagement and circulation than positive content (Rozin and Royzman 2001).

offering more information, shorter tweets tend to travel further on Twitter (Gligorić et al. 2023). Higher textual complexity, measured in characters per word, correlates with lower engagement, suggesting that simpler, more accessible wording is more effective (Pillai et al. 2025; Kuiken et al. 2017).

1.5.5 Twitter policies across different news outlets

Diakopoulos and Zubiaga (2014) offer a systematic analysis of how social deviance, as a dimension of newsworthiness, affects the likelihood that news content will be reshared by ordinary Twitter users. Building on Shoemaker and Cohen's (2006) theory of news values—particularly the salience of deviance as a predictor of professional news attention—the authors examine whether this same news value influences networked gatekeeping practices in participatory media environments. Their study operationalizes deviance in the following extract:

When a person violates a social norm, it is considered to be a socially deviant action. Social norms often but not always overlap with legal norms of behavior [...] Examples of news stories involving social deviance include robbery, homicide, or violence, while examples with no social deviance include a sports game, a political event, someone's passing, or a natural disaster where no human is violating any norm (588).

The results are particularly relevant for the present study because the authors disaggregate their data by outlet, including those selected for RQ1 and RQ2: The New York Times (NYT), The Wall Street Journal (WSJ), The New York Post (NYP), and The New York Daily News (NYDN).

In the case of The New York Times, the authors found a moderate yet significant presence of deviant content: approximately 17.8% of the headlines in their sample contained references to socially deviant events. These tweets, consistent with the overall trend across outlets, exhibited a higher likelihood of being retweeted. Importantly, this occurred despite the NYT's traditional broadsheet identity and professional editorial tone. Rather than relying on sensationalist or emotionally charged language, the NYT appeared capable of achieving social media engagement through its authoritative reporting of deviant topics. This finding somehow may complicate assumptions that tabloidization is a prerequisite for virality on social media and suggests that institutional reputation and perceived credibility can mediate the relationship between deviance and shareability.

In contrast, The Wall Street Journal exhibited both the lowest proportion of deviant content (7.7%) and the weakest correlation between deviance and retweet frequency. This divergence from the pattern observed in other outlets is attributed by the authors to both thematic and stylistic factors. The WSJ's deviant stories often focused on corporate crime, white-collar investigations, or international legal affairs, which, although falling under the definitional umbrella of deviance, may lack the visceral or emotive impact that typically drives engagement on Twitter. Moreover, the WSJ's lexical style is characterized by formal, legalistic terminology, which, according to the study's lexical analysis, correlates negatively with retweet counts.

The two tabloid newspapers examined – The New York Post and The New York Daily News – present a stark contrast to the WSJ. Both outlets were found to have the highest proportion of deviant content in their Twitter outputs, with 27% and 27.5% respectively. Not only did these newspapers focus disproportionately on crime, scandal, and other forms of social transgression, but their headlines were also characterized by emotive language and sensationalism. Lexical items such as “attack,” “killed,” “sex,” and “porn” appeared frequently in their tweets and were positively associated with higher retweet rates.

Furthermore, Diakopoulos and Zubiaga's findings reveal how these stylistic and topical differences map onto divergent platform strategies. The NYP and NYDN's high engagement levels reflect an editorial alignment with user preferences for emotionally salient content, which may be more likely to provoke reactions such as outrage, empathy, or curiosity. In contrast, the WSJ's low engagement may reflect a mismatch between institutional voice and platform expectations, while the NYT's moderate success in amplifying deviant content may stem from a more balanced strategy—leveraging institutional authority without abandoning professional restraint.

However, these results should be read cautiously and not generalized to the present analysis for one simple reason: the discourse of interest in this dissertation – Russia and international relations – rarely falls under the definition of “deviance.” Most Russia-related tweets concern diplomacy, economics, or security, which the study would code as non-deviant content. There is therefore a need for further research on less overtly sensationalist topics in both broadsheet and tabloid formats, a gap that Section 5.2 directly addresses.

1.5.6 Broadsheet and tabloid formats

Circulation data confirm that the NYT and WSJ maintain the largest national reach, while the NYP and NYDN operate with more regional and popular readerships (Statista 2019¹⁸).

The NYT and WSJ dominate in national circulation, whereas the NYP and NYDN cater more to regional, popular readerships. Surveys also show that US audiences rely on Twitter disproportionately for following legacy outlets such as the NYT and WSJ (Statista 2021¹⁹), confirming Twitter’s role as a channel where institutional brands and tabloid voices compete side by side.

Editorial policies further differentiate these outlets. The NYT issued newsroom guidelines in 2017 (revised in 2020) to regulate staff social media use, stressing that all activity – even from personal accounts – is linked to the institution’s reputation. Journalists are instructed to avoid partisan endorsements or online affiliations unless justified for reporting purposes, reflecting an effort to balance Twitter’s visibility with professional standards of neutrality. Similar debates have unfolded in other newsrooms, though the NYT’s explicit policies remain among the most widely cited examples of institutional responses to the platform.

By contrast, tabloid outlets like the NYP and NYDN do not foreground neutrality to the same extent, instead cultivating an outspoken, emotive tone both in print and online. Bias ratings from independent monitors (Media Bias²⁰) consistently place the WSJ in the “center-right” spectrum, the NYT in the “center-left,” and the tabloids further toward “sensational” or “mixed reliability.”

¹⁸ Statista. (2019). *Circulation of the biggest daily newspapers in the U.S.*

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/272790/circulation-of-the-biggest-daily-newspapers-in-the-us>

¹⁹ Statista (2021). *News sources paid most attention to when using social networks for news in the United States as of February 202.*

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1312737/social-network-news-source-usage-us/>

²⁰ <https://mediabiasfactcheck.com>

Chapter 2. Metaphor in theory

Chapter 2 lays the theoretical foundations for understanding metaphor, a concept that has been at once central and contested in the study of language, thought, and discourse. Metaphor has been defined as “the phenomenon whereby we talk and, potentially, think about something in terms of something else” (Semino 2008: 1), yet the field has grown so extensively that “the sheer quantity, extraordinary variety and richness of recent work on metaphor means that the field can appear fragmented and overwhelming” (Semino and Demjén 2017: 2). To navigate this complexity, the chapter begins by tracing how metaphor has been theorized as a cognitive phenomenon (Section 2.1), most notably through Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which emphasizes the embodied and experiential roots of figurative mappings. It then moves to explore metaphor in discourse (Section 2.2), highlighting its forms, functions, and rhetorical force, with particular attention to how metaphors shape argumentation and invite resistance in interaction (Section 2.2.1).

From there, the focus shifts to the methodological terrain: approaches to metaphor identification and annotation are reviewed in detail (Section 2.3), ranging from manual (2.3.1), corpus-based (2.3.2), and computational techniques (2.3.3) to multimodal approaches (2.3.4) that extend the analysis beyond language into gesture, visuals, and other communicative modes. The chapter closes by examining repositories of metaphors (2.3.5), which provide valuable resources for tracing figurative patterns across time, genres, and languages.

These sections aim to clarify not only what counts as metaphor, but also how it can be systematically studied across different modalities, thereby equipping the present study with the conceptual and methodological tools needed for the analysis of Russia-related discourse on Twitter.

2.1 Metaphor in thought

In Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphor is not a decorative linguistic feature but a fundamental part of how we think, reason, and communicate. Their formulation suggests that we constantly understand abstract or unfamiliar phenomena in terms of more concrete and familiar experiences. A classic example is

ARGUMENT IS WAR, where phrases like “she *defended* her position” or “he *attacked* my point” reveal how reasoning is routinely structured through the logic of conflict.

CMT illustrates three classic types of metaphor: structural (a rich, relational source organizes the target), orientational (global spatial schemata such as UP-DOWN structure abstract domains), and ontological (targets are construed as entities/substances so they can be counted, bounded, or manipulated). A key principle of CMT is systematicity: mappings between domains are not random but follow consistent patterns across language and thought. For example, the vertical axis consistently structures metaphors about quantity, e.g., prices went up vs. sales dropped. These patterns are not arbitrary; they are motivated by embodied experience, meaning that they reflect correlations in our physical, but also cultural, lives. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) stress, such regularities are grounded in the body: we naturally associate “more” with “up” because when we pour liquid into a container, the level rises. Later elaborations of CMT refined this insight by introducing more fine-grained mechanisms of embodied cognition.

Image schemas are one such mechanism. They are recurring, schematic patterns abstracted from bodily interactions, such as the CONTAINER schema (inside–boundary–outside), the SOURCE–PATH–GOAL schema (origin, trajectory, destination), and FORCE DYNAMICS (competing pressures, balance, obstacles). These schemas act as cognitive blueprints that structure both literal and metaphorical meaning. For instance, the CONTAINER schema underlies expressions like “in trouble, out of danger, or fall into depression.”

Building on the foundations of CMT, Grady (1997) introduced the concept of primary metaphors to explain why certain mappings appear to be so pervasive. He argued that many of the metaphors we use daily are not elaborate inventions but compact, experientially grounded pairings that emerge very early in life through repeated co-activation of bodily and affective experiences. For instance, infants regularly experience warmth in the arms of caregivers, which leads to the association AFFECTION IS WARMTH. Similarly, observing that liquid levels rise as quantity increases gives rise to the metaphor MORE IS UP.

What makes primary metaphors particularly powerful is their simplicity and universality. Because they are based on correlations in sensorimotor experience, they are not limited to individual languages or cultures but appear cross-linguistically and cross-culturally, often with remarkable consistency. Grady points out that communities “widely separated by time and geography” (1997: 2) nevertheless converge on mappings like IMPORTANCE IS WEIGHT (a

weighty issue, light reading), which shows how strongly embodied experiences shape cognition.

Another crucial insight is that primary metaphors rarely exist in isolation. Instead, they combine compositionally to form more complex metaphorical systems. For example, the metaphors LIFE IS A JOURNEY or THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS can be seen as higher-order structures composed of several primary metaphors, such as PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS, MEANS ARE PATHS, and PERSISTING IS REMAINING ERECT. This compositionality explains both the productivity of metaphor in language and its stability across different communicative contexts.

Psycholinguistic studies (e.g., Gibbs 1994) confirm the cognitive force of primary metaphors: they are easy to process, often unconscious, and allow us to talk about complex or abstract matters with vividness and immediacy. In this sense, primary metaphors function as the basic “building blocks” of metaphorical thought, onto which more elaborate figurative constructions are scaffolded.

A further elaboration of embodiment is offered by the theory of embodied simulation. Barsalou (1999) proposed that when we process metaphors, our minds may partially reenact the sensory or motor experiences that underlie the source domain. His theory of perceptual symbol systems suggests that schematic traces of perception (e.g., grasping, moving, seeing) are stored in the brain and later reactivated during abstract reasoning. Thus, understanding grasping an idea may recruit motor areas associated with physical grasping, while interpreting rising prices may activate perceptual systems linked to verticality.

This view has received support from psycholinguistic and neuroscientific evidence, showing that metaphorical expressions often activate sensorimotor regions of the brain. Experiments demonstrate, for instance, that spatial primes can influence temporal judgments (Boroditsky 2000) and that motion-related metaphors affect how people imagine and recall events. These findings suggest that metaphor processing is dynamic, context-sensitive, and embodied, rather than a purely abstract cognitive operation.

At the same time, scholars recognize limits to embodiment: metaphors for highly abstract domains – such as democracy, cyberspace, or global warming – cannot be reduced to direct bodily correlates. Current accounts propose that embodied simulations are partial and selective: they do not reproduce entire sensory experiences but instead provide minimal, context-relevant scaffolding that supports understanding (Borghi et al. 2017; Casasanto and Gijssels 2015; Kövecses 2020).

2.1.1 Critiques and implementations of CMT

Although the central insights behind CMT were not unprecedented (see Black 1962), Lakoff and Johnson's work catalyzed a genuine paradigm shift by re-centering metaphor as a cognitive phenomenon with broad disciplinary reach. Yet, CMT has been criticized in several respects. Among several raised issues, the main observations made against the CMT concern (1) the overgeneralization on the English language and the Western value system, (2) the selective use of data with prefabricated examples, (3) the neglect of register and diaphasic variation, (4) the lack of systematic treatment of different metaphor types, and (5) the reliance on single source–target mappings .

With respect to the first critique (1), Kövecses (2005, 2010, 2020) has sought to move beyond the Lakoffian Occidental-centric conception by analyzing variation in metaphorical thinking across multiple dimensions. His studies investigate metaphors and the related semantic domains not only cross-linguistically, but also within the same cultural context, considering the social, ethnic, regional, diachronic and individual dimensions. For instance, Kövecses argues that in western cultures life is understood in terms of a struggle, war, precious possession, game, journey, whereas in Asian cultures like Laos and Thailand in terms of a string that can be cut and broken – a metaphor which reminds of Greek mythology (2005: 71). In Tunisian Arabic, by contrast, education is metaphorically framed as a process of construction or building, extending the source domain of BUILDING in ways less common in English. To account for such cross-cultural variation, Kövecses introduces the notion of “meaning foci”, where source domains provide core themes to target domains. For example, the JOURNEY domain carries the theme of progress, while HEAT conveys intensity. These meaning foci represent shared cultural knowledge and make it possible to capture both the universality and the diversity of metaphorical thought.

Critique (2) concerns Lakoff and Johnson's selective use of data. Later scholars have argued that corpus-based approaches offer a stronger foundation by grounding metaphor analysis in actual usage rather than intuition (Cameron 2003; Charteris-Black 2004; Deignan 2005; Semino 2008; Stefanowitsch & Gries 2009; Steen et al. 2010; Bolognesi et al. 2019). These methods have revealed not only the distribution of metaphors across registers and genres but also their pragmatic and rhetorical functions in context (see Section 2.2 for further discussion).

Relatedly, critique (3) highlights the under-researched issue of diaphasic variation, or register-specific distribution of metaphor. With few exceptions, studies have focused on a single register, leaving cross-register variation relatively unexplored. A notable exception to this relatively under-researched field is the work of scholars from the VU University of Amsterdam: the team manually annotated words used metaphorically in texts related to four registers: academic texts, newspapers, fiction, and conversations. Results showed that metaphor-related words were not distributed equally across registers, with academic texts containing 18.5%, news having 16.4%, fiction comprising 11.7%, and conversation containing 7.7% metaphor-related words (Steen et al. 2010: 790; see Section 2.3 for a detailed explanation on MIPVU). As for critique (4), many scholars point out that CMT discussed “metaphor” too generally and did not spell out the different kinds we actually find in real use—such as conventional vs. novel, direct vs. indirect, metaphor vs. simile, and deliberate vs. non-deliberate – so they call for clear typologies and corpus-based methods (e.g., MIPVU) to track how these types pattern across genres and registers (Cameron 2003; Charteris-Black 2004; Semino 2008; Steen 2008; Steen et al. 2010).

Psycholinguistic studies further support the need for such distinctions: novel metaphors tend to be processed by comparison, familiar metaphors function more like category labels, and deliberate metaphors attract conscious attention (Bowdle and Gentner 2005; Glucksberg 2001, Steen 2017). Thus, a single one-size-fits-all account of metaphor processing is inadequate.

Finally, critique (5) concerns CMT’s reliance on single source–target mappings, which leaves more complex meaning construction underspecified. This has been addressed by Conceptual Blending Theory (Fauconnier and Turner, 1998, 2002), which builds on mental spaces theory to model how meaning is dynamically constructed by selectively projecting and integrating elements from multiple inputs. These mental spaces, imagined as containers, are blended together during discourse, generating emergent structures not directly present in the input spaces, i.e. source and target domains.

This accounts for complex cases where image-schematic scaffolds and entrenched primary metaphors provide inputs, but the resulting blend compresses vital relations (time, space, cause, identity) into a new, cognitively economical scene. In this way, blending complements CMT: image schemas often populate the generic space, primary metaphors supply entrenched correspondences ready for projection, and embodied simulation explains how the blended scene is enacted in processing. One example is the personification of the Grim Reaper (Death as a hooded figure with a scythe): here the blend integrates DEATH (abstract) with metonymic features (skeleton, priest's robe, scythe) to generate an agentive entity with coherent roles and

properties – a case in which metaphor and metonymy²¹ cooperate within the same network of integration (Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 131–135).

In sum, the critiques of CMT have not undermined its status as a foundational framework but have enriched it by encouraging methodological rigor, cross-cultural sensitivity, and theoretical expansion.

2.2 Metaphor in discourse: forms and functions

Metaphors are not abstract mappings floating above language but situated communicative events. Their linguistic, multimodal, and interactional realizations in context both enable and constrain the conceptual inferences we draw from them (Cameron 2003, 2008; Semino 2008). Both qualitative variation (linguistic form) and quantitative variation (textual metaphoricity) depend on discourse type/register (Cameron 2003, 2008; Steen et al. 2010; Sullivan 2007).

Methodologically, conceptual structure should be reconstructed inductively from attested evidence, using explicit identification procedures and distinguishing linguistic, conceptual, and communicative levels (Pragglejaz Group 2007; Steen et al. 2010; Metaphor Identification procedures are discussed in detail in Section 2.3).

Cameron’s discourse-dynamics approach treats metaphor as a dynamic, interactional phenomenon that must be studied from attested talk: metaphors “spread, connect, and disconnect,” (2008: 197) cluster and shift across turns, and are sometimes strikingly absent in certain phases of conversation. Cameron documents their uneven distribution, noting that densities may vary from about 20–60 per 1,000 words in many registers to around 100 per 1,000 words in reconciliation talk.

She argues that reliable generalizations therefore require explicit identification and careful unitization of speech. Crucially, Cameron et al. (2010) distinguish discourse-level “systematic metaphors” from community-level “conceptual metaphors”, warning against inferring the latter from the former. Instead, they recommend combining inductive corpus/discourse analysis with

²¹ Metonymy is a cognitive and linguistic process whereby one entity provides access to another that is closely related to it within the same frame or domain (Littlemore 2015: 3–5). It is pervasive in discourse, fulfilling referential as well as evaluative and ideological functions.

deductive testing, since real-life data are far richer and more dynamic than the carefully chosen examples used to illustrate CMT.

Like Cameron's et al. (2010) metaphor-in-use program, Musolff's scenario approach (2006; 2016) ties metaphor explanation to what recurrent texts actually do. Musolff's scenario-based account starts from the observation that source domains (e.g., LOVE–MARRIAGE–FAMILY) do not appear in discourse as flat inventories of features but as mini-narratives (“scenarios”) with participants, roles, typical plotlines and outcomes, and normative/evaluative assumptions. A scenario is thus “a set of assumptions” held by competent members of a discourse community about what typically counts as normal/abnormal, successful/unsuccessful, permissible/illegitimate in the source situation; these assumptions are then mapped—together with their evaluative load—onto the target topic, licensing rich inferences that exceed schematic domain structure. This definition builds on Fillmore's scenes/frames²², Lakoff's ICM-based notion²³ of scenarios, and blending-theoretic uses of “scenario”, but gives it an explicit analytic focus.

Conceptually, scenarios carry a “conceptual package”: role expectations, presumed intentions and emotions, and assessments of likely outcomes. Precisely because these inferences are encyclopedic and culture-mediated, they are not deducible from abstract domain schemas; yet they are needed to understand what a text is doing argumentatively. Hence Musolff argues that scenario analysis is a necessary complement to domain-mapping accounts: it supplies the missing link between conceptual structure and usage patterns in socially situated discourse, and it makes the evaluative dimension empirically manageable.

Building on Musolff's scenario account, which shows that it is at the scenario level – not the abstract domain label – that communities' evaluative stances become visible and rhetorically exploitable, thus linking conceptual structure to usage patterns in actual texts, Zinken, Hellsten and Nerlich (2008) reconceive these recurrent mappings as “discourse metaphors,” i.e., “relatively stable metaphorical projections that function as key framing devices within a discourse over a certain period of time” (2008: 2). These discourse metaphors are relatively stable metaphorical projections (e.g., EUROPE IS A HOUSE, FRANKENFOOD, BOOK OF

²² In Fillmore's frame semantics, a frame is a structured package of background knowledge—participants, roles (frame elements), relations, and expectations—evoked by lexical items and guiding inference in context (Fillmore 1985)

²³ Lakoff's Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs) are gestalt conceptual structures that organize categories and reasoning (including prototypes, frames, image-schemas, and metaphoric/metonymic mappings) and allow for radial extensions and exceptions (Lakoff 1987). Musolff's scenarios can be viewed as discourse-instantiated, evaluatively loaded subsets of frames/ICMs—frame-based mini-narratives (e.g., MARRIAGE → honeymoon → crisis → divorce) that become stable resources in public debate and license argumentatively rich inferences.

LIFE) that become key frames within a discourse over time, typically drawing on phenomenologically salient source images and leaving corpus-traceable footprints in collocations and intertextual patterns. Where scenarios foreground the argumentative logic and attitudinal load at the level of narrative packages (e.g., honeymoon → crisis → divorce in EU coverage), discourse metaphors foreground diachronic circulation and cultural anchoring – how labels rise, stabilize, and fade with issues and news cycles, and how they vary across languages and communities. Thus, after identifying which scenario a debate is enacting (e.g., MARRIAGE/CRISIS), one can track which discourse metaphor provides the durable, public label and cultural imagery organizing that debate across months/years and across outlets (e.g., EUROPE AS A HOUSE vs. alternative framings), yielding a usage-based link from scenario logics to framing repertoires.

Charteris-Black's Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) provides that explanatory, rhetorical-ideological layer (Charteris-Black 2004, 2011, 2019). CMA integrates corpus linguistics, cognitive semantics, and rhetoric to uncover how metaphors evaluate, persuade, and legitimate action in public communication.

Charteris-Black treats metaphor as a prime rhetorical resource through which political actors construct legitimacy and naturalize ideologies in public discourse. In his analyses of political speeches (2011) and media commentary (2019), metaphors are not just mappings but evaluative choices that align proposals with shared moral narratives e.g., crisis-as-disease often activates a frame where the leader is a healer who must administer a cure, recast agency and responsibility, and shape collective identity (e.g., the nation as home/family → duties of care and boundaries against “intruders”). These figurations become powerful legitimating strategies: they justify action and normalize distributions of risk and benefit. Over time, frequent reuse in dominant outlets naturalizes these frames, turning contingent political stances into common-sense descriptions of reality. Building on CMT/Charteris-Black/Musolff's approaches to metaphor as patterned evaluation and legitimation in public discourse, subsequent scholarship has charted how metaphor operates across multiple arenas of contemporary communication.

Building on CMT and its discourse-oriented extensions, research has mapped how metaphor operates across a wide range of communicative domains. In political rhetoric and policy discourse, metaphors organize legitimacy, stance, and scenario-based reasoning (Charteris-Black 2011, Lakoff 1991). Migration and asylum debates recurrently mobilize container/liquid, invasion/war, and disease schemas across party discourse and news coverage (Del Fante 2024, Musolff 2010, Santa Ana 1999, Taylor 2021). Climate and environmental communication often

relies on competing frames that shape perceptions of risk and mobilization (Flusberg et al. 2017; Nerlich 2010). In health and medicine, metaphor choices – from cancer and end-of-life communication to COVID-19 – have been shown to carry significant clinical, ethical, and empathy implications (Semino et al. 2018; Flusberg et al. 2024). Finally, gendered discourse frequently deploys metaphors of war, sport, or evolutionary struggle to masculinize domains such as business, finance, and politics, thereby indexing authority and participation (Koller 2004).

The approaches reviewed in this section demonstrate that metaphors are not merely cognitive shortcuts but key resources for structuring discourse. Yet, their role goes beyond descriptive framing. Metaphors actively participate in argumentative processes: they justify stances and invite audiences to accept or resist evaluations. This argumentative dimension of metaphor is the focus of the next subsection (2.2.1).

2.2.1 Metaphor, argumentation, and resistance

As Chilton (1996: 70) notes, “metaphors can become, with varying degrees of explicitness, contested conversational objects”. They are put forward, taken up, modified, or resisted in interaction.

Starting from a dialogic view of discourse, metaphors are not context-free “containers” for pre-given mappings but utterances that answer, echo, and anticipate other utterances. Cameron (2008) shows that metaphor in discourse is sustained by systematic reuse, so that metaphors become shared conversational resources that participants align with, modify, or resist across turns. In Bakhtin’s terms (1981), every use of (metaphorical) language can reaccentuate prior uses circulating in a discourse community. Semino, Deignan and Littlemore (2013) explicitly adopt this Bakhtinian stance to frame metaphor as recontextualization: speakers and writers lift a specific metaphor from one interaction and redeploy it in another genre or situation, thereby potentially altering its form, function, and evaluative stance. Their political case on Montanelli’s “Berlusconi vaccine”²⁴ (2013: 46–51) is exemplary: a disease/vaccine frame first used to justify a paradoxical voting stance later recirculated in blogs and forums with new

²⁴ In a TV interview with Enzo Biagi (March 2001), Indro Montanelli advanced the now-famous line: “Perché Berlusconi è una di quelle malattie che si curano con il vaccino. E per guarire da Berlusconi ci vuole una bella dose di vaccino di Berlusconi” (“Because Berlusconi is one of those diseases treated with a vaccine... we need a good dose of Berlusconi vaccine”). The paradox is strategic: although the speaker opposes Berlusconi, he recommends a short-term “dose” (electoral victory) to produce long-term “immunity” (the electorate learns and rejects him next time). After 2001 the metaphor was lifted and reused across genres: editorials and online forums cited or adapted it to explain Berlusconi’s continued dominance.

plotlines (immunity, antibodies, poisoning), thereby shifting the metaphor’s argumentative burden and blame attributions. In short, recontextualization licenses creative adjustment of both source and target so the metaphor can do fresh rhetorical work in new sites.

Social media discourse offers an excellent opportunity to study metaphor in interaction, because the medium is inherently dialogic and makes uptake, adaptation, and pushback publicly traceable (quotes, threads, retweets, memes). Within this genre, studies of metaphor reuse have proliferated. Burgers et al. (2019) speak of “metaphor transformations,” showing on the case of DRAIN THE SWAMP²⁵ three patterned uses in partisan online media: (1) no transformation (paraphrase/explanation/evaluation), (2) transformation of the target (narrowing or recasting who/what the “swamp” is), and (3) transformation of the source, which follows story-grammar constraints (e.g., changing the event, adding characters/objects, offering an alternative ending, or mixing metaphors).

Building on Burgers et al.’s (2019) work, Augé’s analysis (2024) of French news responses to Macron’s COVID-19 “war” metaphor shows how resistance in public discourse often proceeds via source transformation, recasting WAR as “drôle de guerre (phoney war)” to invert the original stance and its legitimising force. Poppel and Pilgram (2023) further specify where resistance is aimed and on which norms it is argued: replies can target the proposition (aptness/fit of source→target), the locution (form/wording), the person (ethos), or the situation (appropriateness), appealing to discussion rules, optimality, or institutional norms – thus explaining why particular transformations or reuses are challenged. Their 2024 study, used in the present study as a baseline for RQ3 (see Section 4.3.1), narrows to metaphor exploitation in disagreement – opponents hijack the initiator’s metaphor and redeploy its pragmatic commitments against them—analytically separating exploitation from supportive/critical extension, recontextualization (change of target domain), and reframing (change of source domain); crucially, they also show empirically²⁶ that most antagonistic reuse takes the form of extension rather than target-shift (≈90.7% vs. 9.3%).

²⁵ The metaphor DRAIN THE SWAMP has a long history in American political discourse, originally used in the early 20th century to describe efforts to eliminate corruption in Washington, D.C. It was popularized by Ronald Reagan during his 1980 presidential campaign and reactivated by Donald Trump in 2016, when it became a central slogan targeting the alleged corruption of the political establishment. For an overview of its rhetorical trajectory, see Burgers et al. (2019: 59) for a detailed excursus.

²⁶ The figures derive from van Poppel and Pilgram’s (2024) corpus study of 196 direct replies to a Channel 4 News tweet quoting Boris Johnson’s 27 April 2020 “mugger” metaphor about Covid-19. They first isolated 45 replies that reused Johnson’s metaphor to make a case and coded these as extension (41) vs. recontextualization (4); they also noted 8 instances of reframing elsewhere in the dataset. Crucially, they then narrowed to antagonistic reuse, which they term metaphor exploitation (i.e., hijacking the initiator’s metaphor against their standpoint): 43 cases met this criterion, of which 39 were exploitation-by-extension (90.7%) and 4 were exploitation-by-recontextualization (9.3%) – hence the claim that most antagonistic reuse proceeds by extension rather than target-

A comparative reading of these studies also exposes several research gaps. First, most accounts revolve around single, emblematic cases within one issue, which limits generalizability and motivates multi-metaphor, cross-domain, and cross-linguistic designs that track families of frames over time. Second, across these studies, the focal cases are high-salience, leader-initiated frames – e.g., DRAIN THE SWAMP (Burgers et al. 2019), VIRUS–MUGGER (van Poppel and Pilgram 2024), WAR/“DRÔLE DE GUERRE” and JAMES BOND (Augé 2024) – which creates a selection bias toward overt, deliberate political metaphors, leaving comparatively under-explored “less vivid” metaphors used by less visible social actors. Third, the focus is predominantly textual, whereas social-media discourse is natively multimodal; we still lack a scalable, reliable scheme for annotating visual transformations and visual resistances comparable to textual taxonomies (Zurru 2024).

Extending current taxonomies to capture subtle metaphorical patterning – textual and multimodal – alongside the vivid cases would strengthen generalizability and link spectacular episodes of metaphor contestation to the background metaphors of routine talk. For this reason, RQ3 addresses these gaps by analyzing multiple metaphors across issues and languages, sampling both elite and non-elite speakers, and integrating a pilot annotation scheme for visual/multimodal reuse and resistance aligned with existing textual frameworks.

2.3 Approaches to metaphor identification and annotation

Metaphor identification methodologies vary significantly depending on the criteria used to delineate metaphorical expressions (e.g., lexical units, phrases, or broader contexts), the methods employed to distinguish between literal and figurative language, and the overall approach to investigating metaphoricity (e.g., manual, semi-manual, data-driven, or theory-driven). Despite these differences, metaphor analysis begins at the linguistic level, a dimension that was largely overlooked until the early 2000s due to the “cognitive bias” (Heywood et al., 2002, p. 35). While the cognitive perspective has been groundbreaking in understanding the role of metaphor in thought (see Section 2.1), it has led to a neglect of two aspects: first, the linguistic dimension, such as how metaphors are expressed and structured in discourse, and

shift. The study reports that supportive recontextualization was not found (likely due to Twitter’s negativity bias), and details the sampling (replies only; July 2021 collection) and coding decisions.

second, the modal dimension, namely that metaphor is pervasive not only in language, but also in multimodal environments.

The advent of robust linguistic methodologies, such as the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), has provided systematic tools for identifying metaphorical language in texts. However, metaphors extend beyond the confines of language. They manifest in various modalities, including visuals, gestures, and multimodal environments, which remain comparatively underexplored. Visual metaphors in advertising, metaphoric gestures in discourse, and multimodal metaphors combining text and imagery in political cartoons are just a few examples of how metaphoricity transcends verbal expression. Each modality poses different challenges for metaphor identification and requires ad-hoc methodologies tailored to its specific features. This chapter examines both linguistic and multimodal methodologies for metaphor identification. It explores systematic approaches to finding metaphor in discourse, grounded in linguistic frameworks, and investigates how these principles can be extended to multimodal data. By addressing metaphors across modalities, this chapter underlines the dynamic nature of metaphor research and its application to diverse forms of communication.

The chapter begins by examining manual approaches to metaphor identification in language (2.3.1), including the “methodological revolutions” of Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) and its extension, the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit (MIPVU), which offer systematic guidelines for annotating metaphorical expressions in text, and the Metaphor Identification through Vehicle terms (MIV), Cameron’s approach to the analysis of metaphor in talk. Moving beyond manual techniques, the chapter focuses on corpus-based methods (2.3.2), such as collocation and keyword analysis. The chapter then transitions to computational approaches (2.3.3), emphasizing machine learning and neural network techniques, which have transformed metaphor detection through tools like BERT²⁷ and multilingual models.

The fourth section of the chapter addresses metaphor identification beyond the word dimension, exploring the integration of textual, visual, and auditory data to analyze metaphors

²⁷ BERT (Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers) is a machine learning model introduced in 2018. It is based on a neural network architecture called a transformer, which allows the system to read text in both directions (left-to-right and right-to-left) at the same time. This bidirectional processing helps the model capture context more effectively than earlier word embedding methods, making BERT highly influential in natural language processing tasks such as text classification, sentiment analysis, and question answering (Devlin et al 2019).

beyond traditional linguistic boundaries (2.3.4). The chapter ends with an examination of the available metaphor repositories which have been and are being built (2.3.5).

2.3.1 Manual approaches to metaphor identification

2.3.1.1 Metaphor in text

At the beginning of the new millennium, a group of researchers (Pragglejaz Group 2007) devised the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) to lay out guidelines for a universal and replicable identification methodology which does not rely on intuition. The group's name PRAGGLEJAZ is an acronym derived from the initials of its members: Peter Crisp, Ray Gibbs, Alan Cienki, Graham Low, Gerard Steen, Lynne Cameron, Elena Semino, Joe Grady, Alice Deignan, and Zoltán Kövecses. United by the common aim to systematize metaphor identification, the scholars came from different research areas, ranging from cognitive psychology, cognitive linguistics, cultural linguistics, discourse analysis, and pragmatics. This collaborative effort culminated in the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), whose key steps are outlined below.

2.3.1.2 Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP)

The MIP procedure can be described as follows (Pragglejaz 2007: 3):

1. Read the entire text–discourse to establish a general understanding of the meaning
2. Determine the lexical units in the text–discourse
3. (a) For each lexical unit in the text, establish its meaning in context, that is, how it applies to an entity, relation, or attribute in the situation evoked by the text (contextual meaning). Take into account what comes before and after the lexical unit.
(b) For each lexical unit, determine if it has a more basic contemporary meaning in other contexts than the one in the given context. For our purposes, basic meanings tend to be
 - More concrete; what they evoke is easier to imagine, see, hear, feel, smell, and taste
 - Related to bodily action
 - More precise (as opposed to vague)

–Historically older

Basic meanings are not necessarily the most frequent meanings of the lexical unit.

(c) If the lexical unit has a more basic current–contemporary meaning in other contexts than the given context, decide whether the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning but can be understood in comparison with it.

4. If yes, mark the lexical unit as metaphorical.

The procedure was first demonstrated on a sentence from *The Independent* about Sonia Gandhi: “For years, Sonia Gandhi has struggled to convince Indians that she is fit to wear the mantle of the political dynasty into which she married, let alone to become premier”. In this example, words such as “struggled” and “wear” are identified as metaphorical, since their basic meanings of physical effort or clothing are contrasted with their contextual meanings of political struggle and inheritance (Pragglejaz Group, 2007: 3–10)

2.3.1.3 Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit (MIPVU)

The MIPVU was developed by scholars at Vrije Universiteit (the Free University of Amsterdam) to refine the original MIP. MIPVU extended the original procedure in a manual of 18 pages, which is summarized in the following paragraph (Steen et al. 2010).

MIPVU steps.

1. Find metaphor-related words (MRWs) by examining the text on a word-by-word basis.
2. When a word is used indirectly and that use may potentially be explained by some form of cross-domain mapping from a more basic meaning of that word, mark the word as metaphorically used (MRW).
3. When a word is used directly and its use may potentially be explained by some form of cross-domain mapping to a more basic referent or topic in the text, mark the word as direct metaphor (MRW, direct).
4. When words are used for the purpose of lexico-grammatical substitution, such as third person personal pronouns, or when ellipsis occurs where words may be seen as missing, as in some forms of co-ordination, and when a direct or indirect meaning is conveyed by those substitutions or ellipses that may potentially be explained by some form of cross-domain

mapping from a more basic meaning, referent, or topic, insert a code for implicit metaphor (MRW, implicit).

5. When a word functions as a signal that a cross-domain mapping may be at play, mark it as a metaphor flag (MFlag).

6. When a word is a new-formation coinage, examine the distinct words that are its independent parts according to steps 2 through 5.

For instance, Steen et al. (2010, pp. 30–31) analyze the sentence “That’s a very bright idea.” Here the adjective bright has a basic sense of strong light, but in context it is used for intelligence or creativity. Since the two meanings contrast yet can be compared, MIPVU classifies bright as metaphorical. This illustrates how the procedure identifies metaphor-related words while providing more detailed categories than the original MIP.

2.3.1.4 Differences between MIP and MIPVU procedures

The present section tackles the main differences between the two procedures. Such approaches diverge for five main aspects, i.e., (a) Lexical units, (b) Word class boundary crossing, (c) Different kinds of identified metaphors, (d) Historicity of word meanings, and (e) Possible personification

(a) Lexical units

In both MIP and MIPVU, metaphor identification takes place at the level of lexical units, so that each word in a text is systematically coded as metaphorical or not. This enables subsequent quantitative analysis, as researchers can count and compare frequencies across corpora and examine how metaphoricity is distributed by part of speech (e.g., verbs vs. nouns vs. adjectives). The explicit, word-by-word annotation also enhances replicability, since other researchers can apply the same procedure and arrive at comparable results. However, while MIP offers only limited guidance on how words should be tokenized, MIPVU provides a more detailed and systematic account.

Steen and colleagues largely follow the British National Corpus (BNC) conventions for Part of Speech (POS) tagging, treating items such as *of course* or *by means of* as single lexical units. However, their procedure also requires a number of decisions that diverge from BNC practice,

particularly in the treatment of multiword expressions. These include phrasal verbs, compounds, proper names, and idiomatic expressions, each of which raises specific challenges for consistent tokenization and metaphor identification.

MIP and MIPVU treat phrasal verbs as single lexical units because they represent a single action, process, state, or relation. However, different challenges arise: (i) less clear-cut cases, e.g. verbs + up particle, which adds the notion of finishing (Pragglejaz 2007: 26) (ii) some dictionary inconsistencies exist, as certain prepositional verbs and free adverb combinations are often mislabeled, e.g., “look at” is tagged as a phrasal verb by Macmillan dictionary, while the BNC more correctly suggests it is a prepositional one (Krennmayr 2011: 47). These elements constitute a problematic aspect for the POS annotation.

Compounds are single lexical units made up of two parts, and they can be written in three ways: as one word, as two hyphenated words, or as two separate words. When a compound noun is written as one word, and is found in the Macmillan English dictionary, it is treated as a single lexical unit that represents one referent. Similarly, hyphenated compounds listed in the dictionary, are treated as one unit. However, if the compound is a new formation or not found in the dictionary, it is analyzed as two separate units, as the language user must interpret both parts to understand the relationship between the concepts. For compound nouns written as two separate words, the BNC generally treats them as two independent units. If these compounds are conventionalized and function as a single referent, they are treated as a single lexical unit, akin to polywords. The same rules apply to compound adverbs and adjectives.

Proper names present another challenge. If the name is listed in the dictionary, MIPVU applies a stress-pattern test: if stress falls on the first element (e.g., Labour Party), the name is treated as a single unit; if it falls on the second (e.g., United Kingdom), it is split into two. This leads to some counterintuitive results, such as analyzing country names as multiple units, but reflects MIPVU’s commitment to formal criteria over intuitive meaning.

Finally, idiomatic expressions are treated as separate lexical items, following the decomposability criterion proposed by Gibbs et al. (1989). This psycholinguistic evidence suggests that speakers often perceive idioms as analyzable into parts, even when they are semantically opaque. Thus, each component word in an idiom is examined for potential metaphorical meaning, even in cases where the idiom as a whole is non-decomposable (Pragglejaz Group 2007: 27). While this approach risks overcomplicating annotation, it ensures that potential metaphorical meanings are not overlooked.

(b) Word class boundary crossing

Corpus research by Deignan (2005) shows that the grammatical class of a word can affect how likely it is to be used metaphorically: for instance, cement is more often metaphorical when used as a verb than when used as a noun (Pragglejaz Group 2007: 27). MIPVU refines the analytical process by applying stricter rules to grammatical categorization. Unlike MIP, which allows comparisons across word classes (e.g., between noun and verb forms of the same word), MIPVU treats each grammatical category as separate and does not permit cross-class comparisons.

For example, MIP would allow an analyst to compare the noun dog with the verb to dog to determine whether a metaphor is present. MIPVU, by contrast, considers the two to be different lexical units, so such a comparison is not allowed. The same principle applies to other grammatical distinctions, such as linking vs. primary verbs, transitive vs. intransitive uses, and countable vs. uncountable nouns.

This difference matters in practice. With MIP, word class crossing can highlight less conventional metaphorical uses – such as the verb to squirrel in to squirrel money, compared to the noun squirrel. Under MIPVU, however, such cases would not be coded as metaphorical, since the procedure requires words to be analyzed strictly within their morphological and syntactic context, not by reference to their derivational forms (Nacey et al. 2019).

There are advantages and disadvantages in adopting either approach. If on the one hand MIPVU would “miss” potentially metaphorical words, on the other hand MIP would identify more lexical units as metaphorical.

(c) Different kinds of identified metaphors

MIP is restricted to identifying what Steen and colleagues call indirect metaphors, whereas MIPVU broadens the scope to include two further types: direct and implicit metaphors.

Indirect metaphors are the most common in everyday discourse and the only type captured by MIP. They involve a contrast between the contextual and the basic meaning of a word or phrase, which leads to a metaphorical interpretation. For example, in the sentence “After weeks of negotiations, the government finally caved in,” the verb caved in has a basic meaning related to physical collapse but, in context, describes giving up under pressure. The metaphor here is suggested rather than stated explicitly, and its interpretation relies on recognizing the gap between the literal and contextual senses.

Direct metaphors, by contrast, do not rely on such contrasts. Instead, they convey metaphorical meaning through explicit signals of comparison or substitution. These metaphors are often marked by metaphor flags such as *like*, *as*, or *as if* – though not exclusively. For example, in “He soars like an eagle,” the metaphorical comparison is spelled out directly, allowing the reader to grasp the intended image without further interpretation. In such cases, the contextual meaning is aligned with the basic meaning, since the figurative link is linguistically overt.

Implicit metaphors consist of cohesive grammatical or semantic links that refer back to previously established metaphors, thereby maintaining metaphorical coherence in the text. For instance, if an earlier passage describes a heated debate, a subsequent reference such as “this fire is spreading quickly” uses the demonstrative *this* to implicitly pick up and extend the initial metaphor. Such cases illustrate how metaphors can be sustained and elaborated without repeating the original figurative expression.

Another key innovation of MIPVU is its expanded terminology, such as *metaphor-related words* (MRWs), encompassing all three metaphor types. It also introduces additional tags like *When in doubt, leave it in* (WIDLII) for ambiguous cases and *Discard for metaphor analysis* (DFMA) for cases where metaphor identification is impossible.

(d) Historicity of word meanings

A key distinction between MIP and MIPVU lies in their treatment of historicity of word meanings. MIP allows analysts to consider the historical or etymological dimensions of a word meaning, incorporating its diachronic evolution into metaphor identification. Therefore, a historically older meaning of a lexical unit could be considered the most basic meaning of it. This approach acknowledges that a word’s past uses and derivations can inform its metaphorical potential.

For example, in the sentence about Sonia Gandhi in 2.3.1.2, the verb “struggled” has the contextual meaning of “making an effort without success in persuading others.” Its basic meaning, however, is physical – “to use one’s strength against someone or something,” as in “She picked up the child, but he struggled and kicked.” As the Oxford English Dictionary indicates, this physical sense is historically prior (Pragglejaz Group 2007: 5). The contextual meaning thus contrasts with, but can be understood in comparison with, the basic one, marking *struggled* as metaphorical.

In contrast, MIPVU focuses exclusively on the synchronic analysis of a word, considering only its meaning within the immediate context of the discourse. By focusing solely on the synchronic context, MIPVU risks oversimplifying the analysis and missing deeper connections that historical meanings might reveal. However, authors affirm that in highly debated cases the word's history can be considered. An example of this is the verb *to serve* in "He served with distinction in the child psychiatry section of the Royal College of Psychiatrists (...)" (Krennmayr 2011: 74). While contemporary meanings such as "to perform a job" were considered, the Oxford English Dictionary indicated that these are derived from the older meaning "to be a servant". By tracing the evolution of *to serve* back to its origin, it becomes clear that the act of "serving" inherently involves the notion of duty performed by a human being. This connection means that the word retains its foundational, literal sense of performing service, even in modern contexts where it may describe professional roles rather than servitude. As such, in the analyzed example, *served* was determined to be non-metaphorical, because its usage aligns closely with its historical and literal meaning (Krennmayr, 2011: 75).

(e) Possible personification

The treatment of personification is present in MIPVU, while absent in MIP. In MIPVU, personifications, i.e. when non-human entities are attributed human characteristics, such as in phrases like "furious debate" or "this essay thinks", are marked as metaphor-related words (MRWs) due to their potential metaphorical interpretation (Steen et al., 2011, p. 34). However, these instances could also be interpreted metonymically, where the non-human entity represents the people involved or their actions, thus rendering the human attribute non-metaphorical. This dual interpretative possibility has led to discussions during the Vrije Amsterdam Winter School 2023 on whether MIPVU's approach adequately captures the complexity of personification or if it oversimplifies the figurative language by defaulting to a metaphorical classification. Also, it is evident that analyzing personification goes beyond the linguistic level of analysis, and enters the conceptual level, which is not within MIPVU's scope.

2.3.1.5 Strengths and challenges of MIP(VU)

(a) The use of dictionaries to check word meanings

Both approaches make use of dictionaries so as to identify the meanings of lexical units. Specifically, both MIP and MIPVU methodologies rely on the online version of MacMillan dictionary as the first choice; however, its online service was discontinued as of July 2023. The online versions of Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English²⁸ and the Oxford English Dictionary (OED)²⁹ are also consulted for cases of major disagreement, Longman being suitable for more recent or contemporary meanings, while OED for investigating diachronic semantic changes and therefore older meanings. Dictionary consultation is time-consuming, and dictionaries are finite resources which cannot always provide all the existent meanings, more recent and context-related meanings of words often being absent (Bolognesi and Werkmann Horvat 2023:46). On the other hand, avoiding the use of dictionaries to identify basic and contextual meanings would lead to a significantly higher degree of subjectivity, and therefore make the analysis more prone to the annotator's bias.

(b) The absence of the conceptual level of analysis

MIP and MIPVU offer systematic procedures for identifying metaphorical language at the linguistic level, but they stop short of addressing the conceptual level, where metaphors are modeled as cross-domain mappings. This is a significant limitation: while analysts can reliably mark metaphor-related words, they are left with the additional task of assigning source and target domains, often without clear methodological support.

To address this gap, Krennmayr (2013) built on Steen's five-step model (1999, 2009) to propose a structured method for conceptual analysis. Her approach begins with metaphor identification via MIPVU and then moves through a series of additional steps: (1) breaking sentences into propositions to create a textbase of concepts; (2) identifying similarities between potential target and source domains; (3) using lexical databases such as WordNet to label domains; and (4) formulating mappings across multiple levels of abstraction. The key innovation here is the use of WordNet, a large lexical database of English developed at Princeton University. WordNet is organized around "synsets" (sets of synonyms), each representing a distinct concept or meaning. Its structure connects words through semantic relations such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy (specific instance), hypernymy (general category), and meronymy/holonymy (part-whole relations). These interconnections allow

²⁸ [Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English | LDOCE](https://www.ldoce.com/)

²⁹ <https://www.oed.com/>

WordNet to serve as a powerful tool for situating words in a semantic network and ensuring that source and target domains are labeled at comparable levels of abstraction. Krennmayr states that the integration of this tool allows for a formulation of domains which are at the same level of abstraction, but also a formulation of mappings at multiple levels of abstraction. The final step is the actual identification of cross-domain mappings.

Yet, this reliance on lexical databases also introduces limitations: not all items are included in repositories like WordNet, and emerging meanings in real-world discourse may go uncaptured. Furthermore, Krennmayr's method leans heavily on syntactic patterns, which makes it less effective for non-canonical metaphors, such as those frequently found in the fragmented, multimodal discourse of social media

More recently, Reijnierse and Burgers (2023) proposed the Metaphorical Source Domain Identification Procedure (MSDIP) as a refinement of conceptual-level annotation. MSDIP begins by identifying metaphor-related words (MRWs) using MIPVU. Analysts then analyze the broader textual and situational context to clarify the metaphors' intended meaning. This step is fundamental for generating potential source domain candidates, which are conceptual categories that provide the imagery or structure for understanding the target domain. For example, the phrase "the foundation of an argument" might suggest source domains such as CONSTRUCTION or ARCHITECTURE. When ambiguities arise, analysts document multiple plausible source domains rather than forcing a singular interpretation. Even though this approach is systematic and relies on the Inter Annotator Agreement³⁰, it does not indicate a single option for the source domain selection and actually states that these procedure allows for "the labeling of multiple *possible* source domains simultaneously" (Reijnierse and Burgers 2023: 296). It raises the question of why such a systematic, but time-intensive, approach is necessary if the outcome remains a collection of potential source domain candidates rather than definitive identifications. Metaphorical expressions, when analyzed at the conceptual level, can encompass different source domains.

The difficulty lies in the fact that semantic categories, as shown by Rosch's studies on prototype theory (Rosch 1977; Carolyn and Rosch 1981), are not mutually exclusive. Categories often share features, and concepts do not belong exclusively to a single category. For instance, a

³⁰ Inter-annotator agreement (IAA) refers to the level of consistency or agreement between different annotators who independently classify the same data. It is an essential measure in research involving human annotation, especially in tasks like text categorization, sentiment analysis, and metaphor identification. IAA is used to determine how reliably a set of annotators apply the same criteria to the data. High inter-annotator agreement indicates that the annotation process is clear, consistent, and reproducible, while low agreement may signal that the task is ambiguous or that annotators have different interpretations of the instructions.

word like bridge could metaphorically belong to domains of connection, structure, or even journey, depending on the context. This inherent overlap makes defining categories for metaphorical mappings particularly controversial. To address this, some researchers advocate for the use of frames instead of broad domains. Frames, as defined by Croft and Cruse (2004) and further elaborated by Sullivan (2013), are structured representations of knowledge that account for specific contexts. Acknowledging the complexity and layering of metaphorical meanings, Dancygier and Sweetser (2014) reinforce this perspective, noting that a broad conceptual domain (e.g., WAR, JOURNEY) may encompass multiple frames and subframes.

Adopting a more discourse-based approach, Musolff (2006, 2016) also argues that CMT's conceptual domains are too broad and static concepts. Musolff's scenarios, discussed in Section 2.2, align with the frame-based approach by emphasizing the situational as well as cultural specificity of metaphorical mappings. While frames provide a systematic and structured organization of knowledge, scenarios transform these structures into dynamic narratives within specific contexts. These narratives include distinct actors, actions, and outcomes, therefore offering a clearer picture of how metaphors are used to shape arguments, influence opinions, and evoke emotional responses in communication. Overall, frame-based approaches excel at identifying the cognitive structures underlying metaphorical thought, while Musolff's scenarios extend this understanding to real-world applications. The concept of scenario functions as an analytical tool aimed at encapsulating groups of metaphorical expressions within a corpus that are conceptually linked, and is especially relevant as it aims to bridge discourse-centered and cognitive perspectives on metaphor (Semino et al. 2018: 636).

Therefore, combining MIPVU procedure for the identification of metaphorically used words together with Musolff's approach allows for a systematic annotation which encompasses the linguistic, the conceptual, and the pragmatic level of analysis, as chapter 4 will show.

2.3.1.6 Metaphor in talk: MIV

The Metaphor Identification through Vehicle terms (MIV) approach (Cameron 2003) was developed in response to challenges in identifying metaphors within naturally occurring discourse. Cameron introduced MIV to provide a more transparent method for metaphor identification with a specific focus on educational and conversational contexts. Traditional methods often relied on intuition or lacked systematic procedures. Therefore, MIP and MIV

share a common aim: to create systematic methods for identifying metaphorical language in use.

According to Cameron, there are two primary components in linguistic metaphors: the Tenor and the Vehicle. The Tenor is the subject to which attributes are ascribed, while the Vehicle is the figurative expression that provides those attributes, i.e. “a word or phrase that is clearly anomalous or incongruous against the surrounding discourse” (Cameron 2003, p.59).

MIV, MIP, and its extended version MIPVU represent distinct yet complementary methodologies for identifying metaphors. MIV focuses on vehicle terms, the figurative elements of metaphors, and emphasizes their discourse-level dynamics in natural contexts. In contrast, MIP offers a structured and replicable framework for identifying metaphorical language at the lexical level, since it relies on a systematic comparison between a word’s basic meaning (drawn from dictionaries) and its contextual meaning. While MIP and MIPVU prioritize systematicity and consistency, MIV’s flexibility allows for a deeper analysis of how metaphors function in real-time communication. However, MIV is less standardized and relies more heavily on researcher interpretation, whereas MIPVU excels in precision for annotating diverse datasets. Together, these approaches tackle different research needs: MIV for capturing the interactive nature of metaphor in discourse and MIP/MIPVU for more formal, corpus-driven analyses.

(a) MIV developments

Cameron’s approach to metaphor identification evolved in the first decade of this century. Cameron and colleagues expanded this framework to emphasize the interactive properties of metaphor in real-world discourse by adopting the Discourse Dynamics Approach (DDA). Unlike traditional static views of metaphor as fixed mappings between conceptual domains, Cameron et al (2009) decide to treat metaphors as evolving within the interconnected systems of language, cognition, and social interaction. This approach outlines a multi-level framework for analyzing metaphors: at the micro-level, analysis focuses on individual metaphorical expressions and their immediate linguistic context. The meso-level examines episodes of talk or threads of interaction, capturing metaphor trajectories (Cameron et al 2009: 77), which track how metaphors emerge, evolve, and adapt during interactions. At the macro-level, the entire conversation or discourse event is considered, revealing overarching patterns and how metaphor clusters contribute to the coherence of interaction. Finally, the sociocultural level situates metaphors within broader cultural and ideological contexts and analyzes their role in

reflecting societal norms, values, and attitudes. Cameron integrates dialogism, inspired by Bakhtinian theory, to account for the collaborative nature of discourse. Metaphors introduced by one speaker may be adapted or contested by others, revealing the dynamic co-construction of meaning.

The method's emphasis on the dynamic nature of metaphor in discourse requires meticulous interactional analysis, which can be resource-intensive and inaccessible to researchers without extensive training. Furthermore, its interpretative focus on metaphor trajectories raises concerns about subjectivity, as identifying and tracing these patterns can lead to inconsistent results across studies, and therefore challenges replicability. While this approach provides a rich understanding of metaphor in context, it may obscure the identification of stable patterns across broader datasets. As a consequence, this focus on the uniqueness of each discourse event may limit its generalizability to larger-scale metaphor studies. However, DDA continues to shape contemporary research. More recent studies have extended and sometimes adjusted this methodology in different disciplines, ranging from mental healthcare (Knapton and Rundblad 2018) to film reviews discourse (Fuoli et al. 2022).

Knapton and Rundblad (2018) applied the DDA to analyze the text of one participant to explore how metaphors describe his experiences of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD). Results demonstrate that the participant's metaphors show significant density, with recurring use of vehicle groups such as movement and container. These metaphors represent his OCD and his thoughts as dynamic states of activity. The repeated use of vehicles of movement creates a sense of equivalence between different elements of OCD. Moreover, the participant uses academic metadiscourse to orient himself towards the reader and construct an identity as an informed participant. Results confirm DDA's tenet: metaphors do not work in isolation, but are reinforced by non-metaphorical language that creates dramatic context.

Fuoli, Littlemore, and Turner (2022) investigated the role of metaphor in evaluative language within film reviews by integrating both Cameron's approach together with MIP procedure, and demonstrated once again how the two perspectives are not mutually exclusive. Their study analyzed film reviews and annotated creative and conventional metaphors, as well as positive and negative evaluations. The findings revealed that approximately half of the metaphors performed an evaluative function, with creative metaphors significantly more likely to do so than conventional ones. Additionally, metaphorical evaluations tended to be more negative than non-metaphorical evaluations.

These studies collectively underscore the value of the DDA in analyzing metaphors as evolving phenomena within interactional and cultural contexts. From health communication to film

criticism, the DDA continues to provide a useful lens for understanding the intricate relationship between metaphor, discourse, and societal meaning-making.

2.3.2 Corpus approaches to metaphor identification

Corpus linguistics has played a pivotal role in advancing metaphor identification by providing empirical, data-driven methods for analyzing metaphorical language in large, naturally occurring datasets. As a matter of fact, corpus linguistics brings quantitative rigor to metaphor studies: it enables researchers to count and analyze the frequency, distribution, and patterns of metaphorical expressions across large datasets, therefore helping to identify trends in metaphor usage. Moreover, corpus-based tools enable the (semi) automated identification of metaphorical expressions, which makes the metaphor identification process faster and more efficient.

Early work by Deignan (1999, 2005), Charteris-Black (2004), and Stefanowitsch (2006; Stefanowitsch and Gries, 2006) demonstrated how corpus methods could uncover conventionalized metaphor patterns and their rhetorical functions. The recent development of tools like Wmatrix (Rayson 2008) now allow researchers to semi-automatically identify semantic domains.

2.3.2.1 Deignan's approach

Deignan's work in corpus studies for metaphor research is pioneering. While supportive of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), she also critically examined its assumptions. Deignan (2005) process for metaphor identification implies that potential metaphorical expressions are identified by analyzing collocations, i.e. co-occurrences of specific lexical items. The next step is to compare the literal sense of the expression with its metaphorical sense. The literal sense, typically identified through dictionary definitions and corpus data, refers to the most concrete, physical, or prototypical meaning of a word. By contrast, the metaphorical sense occurs when this literal meaning is extended to describe something more abstract. For example, the word *attack* has a literal meaning involving physical aggression (The soldiers attacked the village). In corpus data, however, it often collocates with abstract nouns such as *policy* or *argument* (The minister attacked the policy; critics attacked his argument). Here, the physical meaning

of violent assault is mapped onto the abstract domain of verbal or ideological criticism. According to Deignan's method, this shift from a physical action to an abstract domain indicates metaphorical use.

Words or phrases that are frequently used metaphorically in the corpus are flagged as potential candidates for further analysis. A key focus of her work was to highlight the differences between authentic corpus data and data derived from introspection. One striking finding was that animal metaphors function differently depending on word class: metaphorical uses of animal nouns are relatively rare, whereas animal verbs (to horse around) and adjectives (sheepish) occur far more frequently (Deignan 2005: 152–155). Deignan also explored colligation, which refers to the grammatical patterns or structures that a word habitually appears in, alongside collocation. For example, in her study of the noun "price", she observed that certain colligates, such as the preposition "of" in "price of", tended to convey literal meanings, reflecting a syntactic association with literal usage. Meanwhile, some collocates, such as the adjective "heavy" in "a heavy price to pay", were more commonly associated with metaphorical meanings (Deignan 2005: 203–209). By investigating both grammatical and lexical patterns, Deignan revealed systematic behaviors in how metaphors emerge in authentic language data.

2.3.2.2 Charteris-Black's and Stefanowitsch's approaches

Within CMT, corpus-based investigations of metaphor can begin from either the source domain lexicon (Charteris-Black 2004) or the target domain lexicon (Stefanowitsch 2006b). These two perspectives reflect different ways of operationalizing metaphor in corpus data: one starts from figurative triggers, the other from conceptual fields in need of explanation.

Charteris-Black (2004) integrates corpus linguistics with cognitive linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis in what he calls Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA, see section 2.2 for a detailed explanation). His methodology unfolds in three stages: identification, interpretation, and explanation. In the identification stage, candidate metaphors are first spotted through a close reading of a sample of texts. A metaphorical expression is recognized when there is "semantic tension or incongruity – at the linguistic, pragmatic, or cognitive level – resulting from a shift in domain use, even if this shift has become conventionalized" (2004: 35).

Once identified, such words are classified as keywords and then used as search terms to retrieve further examples in a larger corpus. The interpretation stage examines the interpersonal

meaning of metaphors, showing how they construct relationships, roles, and power dynamics. Finally, the explanation stage situates metaphors within their broader discourse context, considering how they contribute to the coherence of texts and the legitimization of ideologies. In this way, CMA emphasizes not just what metaphors mean, but also what they do in context. Stefanowitsch (2006), by contrast, takes the opposite entry point. Instead of starting with source domains, he proposes Metaphorical Pattern Analysis (MPA), a methodology that focuses on target domains. MPA begins with lexical items that represent a particular conceptual field (e.g., anger, happiness). These items are extracted from a corpus, and their surrounding contexts are examined for metaphorical expressions, which he defines as “multi-word expressions from a source domain into which one or more target-domain items have been inserted” (Stefanowitsch, 2006: 65). For example, anger appears in patterns such as vent one’s anger or boiling with anger, where physical actions or states are mapped onto the emotion domain.

The identified patterns are then grouped into sets corresponding to conceptual metaphors. For example, using data from the British National Corpus, Stefanowitsch shows how emotions are often represented via event-structure metaphors, with anger conceptualized as a container or happiness as a fluid substance. This approach shifts attention from researcher introspection to data-driven discovery, letting metaphorical structures emerge directly from corpus evidence. In doing so, MPA uncovers additional mappings that introspection had overlooked, while providing quantitative evidence that challenges assumptions about the exclusivity of certain metaphors to specific emotions.

Some problematic aspects emerge in the abovementioned methodologies. Both Deignan and Stefanowitsch focus on individual lexical items, missing broader discourse-level insights, whereas Charteris-Black incorporates some critical discourse analysis but is limited by its source-driven approach. Moreover, all three approaches involve a degree of subjectivity in deciding what counts as metaphorical, even when corpus methods provide systematic guidelines.

2.3.2.3 Wmatrix

More recent advances in Corpus-based metaphor research have been carried out at Lancaster University with the creation of Wmatrix³¹. Developed by Paul Rayson, it is a powerful web-

³¹ <https://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/wmatrix/>

based software tool designed for corpus analysis and annotation. Originally created to facilitate linguistic and discourse studies, Wmatrix has become particularly valuable for corpus-based research due to its comprehensive suite of features. Researchers can freely load their linguistic data to analyze large text datasets. The platform incorporates the following functions: frequency lists, concordances, key words, collocations, n-grams, part-of-speech tagging and semantic field tagging, and key domain analysis. The UCREL Semantic Analysis System (USAS) tool can be used to ease metaphor analysis, in particular, the function of key semantic domains, i.e. groups of lower frequency words and multiword expressions that are identified based on their association with key grammatical categories and semantic fields. These domains are extracted using automatic tagging software that assigns part-of-speech and semantic field tags, and can be used to reduce the number of key items that a researcher needs to examine when analyzing a corpus. The keyness calculation is then applied to tag frequency lists to identify the most salient domains for comparison between corpora. The methodology can be applied to identify key domains that are associated with specific semantic fields, which may be used metaphorically in a corpus. These domains can then be examined more closely to identify specific expressions that are used metaphorically. Moreover, the tool allows researchers to add ad hoc semantic categories which can be added by using the function My Tag Wizard (Rayson 2008).

2.3.3 Natural Language Processing approaches

In recent years, NLP techniques have been widely applied to metaphor identification, moving beyond manual annotation toward scalable computational models. Approaches typically fall into three categories: rule-based, machine learning/deep learning, and hybrid.

Rule-based systems rely on expert-crafted “if-then” rules to detect metaphor candidates. Berber Sardinha’s Metaphor Identifier (2010), for example, used heuristic rules to flag potential metaphor vehicles based on mismatches between literal and figurative meanings. While effective for conventional patterns, such systems struggle with novel or creative metaphors.

Machine learning and deep learning models treat metaphor detection as a classification task, learning patterns from annotated corpora. Rei et al. (2017) proposed a supervised similarity network trained on datasets including the VU Amsterdam Metaphor Corpus, which uses word embeddings to classify individual lexical items in context as metaphorical or literal.

Hybrid approaches combine unsupervised and supervised learning. Mao et al. (2019), for instance, clustered semantically similar words without labels, then refined these clusters with supervised training, balancing flexibility and precision.

Despite these advances, challenges remain: ambiguity between literal and metaphorical senses, limited annotated datasets, poor cross-domain generalization, and the “black box” nature of deep learning models.

AI offers promising solutions to these challenges. ChatGPT and similar large language models (LLMs) can assist in overcoming many of these challenges. ChatGPT, built on the GPT architecture³², is trained on massive datasets and excels in understanding meanings in contextual language. Recent work is already exploring how GPT and other large language models (LLMs) can be harnessed for metaphor tasks. For instance, Wachowiak and Gromann (2023) evaluate GPT-3’s ability to detect metaphors and predict their source domains using few-shot prompting, achieving ~65 % accuracy in English domain mapping tasks. Ichien, Stamenković and Holyoak (2023) push this further, showing that GPT-4 can produce metaphor interpretations of novel literary metaphors that human judges rated as superior to those of college students. Reimann and Scheffler (2025) show that current large language models continue to struggle with extended metaphors, especially when tested in so-called zero- and few-shot settings. In a zero-shot setting, the model is expected to detect metaphors without being given any prior examples in the prompt, while in a few-shot setting it is guided by only a handful of labeled examples. Their experiments with GPT and LLaMa³³ reveal that both models often overgeneralize, labeling too many expressions as metaphorical, or fail to sustain coherent domain mappings across multiple metaphor-related words. In other words, even when models correctly identify single metaphorical words, they tend to miss the fact that extended metaphors function as connected chains of meaning, where coherence between source and target domains must be maintained throughout a passage.

³² The GPT architecture (Generative Pre-trained Transformer) is a deep learning model developed by OpenAI for natural language processing (NLP). It is based on the Transformer architecture, which uses a self-attention mechanism to process sequences of words. Unlike earlier models, GPT evaluates all words in a sequence simultaneously, allowing it to capture long-range dependencies in language more efficiently. GPT is pre-trained on massive datasets using an unsupervised learning approach, where it learns to predict the next word in a sequence based on prior context. After pre-training, GPT can be fine-tuned for specific tasks, e.g. text generation, summarization, or translation. The architecture consists of stacked transformer layers with multi-head self-attention and feed-forward networks, enabling the model to generate coherent, human-like text.

³³ LLaMA (Large Language Model Meta AI) is a family of open-source large language models introduced by Meta AI (Touvron et al. 2023). Designed to be smaller and more efficient than earlier models such as GPT-3, LLaMA provides competitive performance across many NLP benchmarks while being accessible to the research community. Its open availability has made it a widely used baseline for studying and comparing LLM behavior, including tasks such as metaphor identification.

Looking ahead, the release of GPT-5 raises the prospect of further advances in metaphor research. At the time this section was written, no peer-reviewed studies have yet tested GPT-5 specifically for metaphor identification or interpretation, yet the model has been reported to outperform previous versions on a range of reasoning and contextual understanding tasks (OpenAI 2025, August).

2.3.4 Metaphor identification beyond words

Affirming that metaphor is pervasive in language is incomplete. As a matter of fact, metaphor research has evolved in different directions far beyond language. Metaphors can be found in gestures, in static or moving pictures, and in environments combining different spheres of perception. It also appears in music, where sound structures metaphorically represent concepts or emotions, in architecture, where spatial arrangements metaphorically evoke abstract ideas like freedom or unity. Metaphor operates in dance, where movements embody metaphorical representations of feelings or narratives. Research is showing increasing interest in metaphor in sign language as well, but no systematic identification has been developed yet within this research area.

This diversity of metaphorical manifestations highlights its omnipresence across different domains of human expression, transcending language to shape our understanding of the world. This section will focus on metaphor identification in the dimensions of gesture, picture and multimodality.

2.3.4.1 Metaphor in gesture

Cienki, already a founding member of the Pragglez group (2007) led the first systematic studies on metaphor in gesture. He emphasizes how gestures are not mere accompaniments to speech but constitute a complex semiotic system providing insight into cognitive operations. Metaphoric gestures represent abstract concepts through physical movements, and often draw on embodied experiences or spatial representations to convey meaning. Let's consider the sentence "you have to draw your line," accompanied by a gesture where the speaker extends the index finger and moves it downward from shoulder height to waist level. This gesture iconically represents the action of drawing a vertical line and symbolizes the metaphorical

division between two moral categories: right and wrong. The physical act of separating two spaces is mapped onto the conceptual act of making a moral decision, illustrating how gestures can embody abstract ideas through spatial and iconic representation (Cienki 2010: 203–204). The Metaphor Identification Guidelines for Gesture (MIG-G), developed by Cienki (2017), provides a systematic framework for analyzing metaphors in gestures. This methodology addresses the challenges posed by gestures, such as their context-dependence and multifunctionality. MIG-G begins with identifying the gesture stroke, the most meaningful and intentional phase of the gesture, and describing its form features, such as hand shape, movement trajectory, and spatial orientation. The next step involves interpreting the gesture's referential function to determine what concept or entity it represents. Researchers then identify the physical referent(s) depicted in the gesture(s), i.e. the potential source, and the contextual topic being referenced, i.e. the potential target domain; then the last step assesses whether a resemblance-based mapping exists, therefore indicating a metaphorical relationship.

The study of metaphoric gestures reveals how abstract thought is grounded in sensory and motor experiences, and provides additional support to the embodiment hypothesis in cognitive linguistics (see chapter X). By analyzing the form, trajectory, and context of gestures, Cienki demonstrates how they serve as visual and dynamic instantiations of metaphorical concepts. This perspective offers a richer understanding of how humans communicate, and gives new prominence to non-verbal ways of communicating.

2.3.4.2 Visual Metaphor

Charles Forceville's work – *Pictorial Metaphor in Advertising* (1996) – laid the foundation for understanding how visual elements function metaphorically, much like linguistic expressions. In his 1996 study, Forceville analyzed over 100 print advertisements to categorize how visual metaphors work in commercial communication. He identified three primary types: pictorial simile, i.e. where the source and target are both visually represented (e.g., a car shaped like a cheetah to imply speed); contextual metaphor, where only the target is shown in a context that prompts the viewer to infer the source (e.g., a perfume bottle placed in a romantic or luxurious setting to suggest desirability) and hybrid metaphor, where source and target are visually merged into a single entity (e.g., a lightbulb with wings to evoke inspiration or lightness). Later, in Forceville (2008), he refined this framework by introducing the notion of integrated metaphor, which emphasizes the seamless blending of source and target within a unified visual

form, such that the metaphor emerges holistically from the visual composition rather than from juxtaposition or contextual placement, e.g., a coffee machine stylized to resemble a butler (p. 18).

For decades Forceville (1996, 2002, 2008, 2020, 2024) has been expanding and implementing his identification methodology, which is in open contrast to MIP-related approaches. As a matter of fact, MIP approach to metaphor identification has been adapted to pictorial metaphors as well, with the methodology VISMIP, proposed by Šorm, together with the father of MIPVU, i.e. Steen (2013, 2018). Analyzing advertising, Forceville states that three main aspects are to be answered: (1) what the two terms of the metaphor are; (2) what target and source are, i.e. primary and secondary subjects respectively; (3) which features of the source must be projected upon the target (1996: 201). Forceville's method (2020) emphasizes the interplay of decoding (recognizing visual elements) and inferring (interpreting their metaphorical relations) through the lens of Relevance Theory³⁴. Forceville argues that while CMT focuses on systematic correspondences between domains (source and target), RT provides tools for understanding how these metaphors are pragmatically interpreted in specific communicative contexts. He argues that non-verbal signals lack the structured syntax of language, which makes their interpretation highly context-dependent. Visuals and multimodal signals are argued to require similar inferential processes as verbal communication but adapted to their unique characteristics.

Šorm and Steen (2018) contend that Forceville's methodology lacks sufficient guidelines for identifying pictorial metaphor. According to VISMIP, visual metaphors occur when one element (the source domain) is visually represented in a way that contrasts with or deviates from the expected literal context, mapping onto a target domain to create metaphorical meaning. As for MIP(VU), VISMIP provides systematic guidelines for identifying metaphors in static images, and emphasizes the role of incongruity as a key criterion. VISMIP steps are reported in the following paragraph (Šorm and Steen 2018: 82).

1. Look at the entire image, including visual and verbal elements, to establish a general understanding of the meaning.

³⁴ Relevance Theory (RT) was developed by Sperber and Wilson. RT builds on Grice's conversational maxims, simplifying them into two core principles: the Cognitive Principle (humans naturally focus on what is relevant for their survival and well-being) and the Communicative Principle (communication is optimized for relevance). The theory emphasizes that communication involves a sender's informative intention (what they wish to convey) and communicative intention (their desire to engage the receiver). RT distinguishes explicit communication (explicatures) from implicit meanings (implicatures), emphasizing that meaning is derived through context, background knowledge, and inferences. This dual process is dynamic, with a continuum from strong implicatures, which are almost unavoidable, to weak ones, leaving more interpretive work to the receiver.

1a. Describe in just a few simple phrases the referential meaning of the image, i.e. what/who is being depicted here, what he is doing, where he is doing it, and so on. For example: “Tall, blond man and spotted dog walk quickly in park. Smiling girl gives green apple to frowning boy under tree.” If the referential meaning is ambiguous and allows more than one interpretation, then give alternative descriptions.

1b. Test whether there are any clues that tell you that more general and abstract meaning should be attached to what is described under step 1a. For example, if the exemplary image described under 1a is accompanied by the caption ‘summer joy’, we have a clue that the more abstract concept ‘summer joy’ should be attached to the referential meaning.

1c. Reconstruct the point underlying the image.

1d. Derive from step 1c the topic of the point, i.e. that about which the point is stated.

2. Structure the descriptive phrase(s) under step 1a. For example:

“Tall, blond man and spotted dog walk quickly in park. [Agent(man|tall, blond) Agent (dog|spotted) Action(walk|quickly) Setting (in park)] Smiling girl gives green apple to frowning boy under tree. [Agent(girl|smiling) Action(give) Object(apple|green) Recipient(boy|frowning) Setting (under tree)]”

3. Find incongruous visual units.

3a. Decide for each unit under step 2 whether it is incongruous with the topic as formulated under step 1d (‘topic-incongruous’).

3b. Decide for each topic-congruous unit under step 2 whether it shows properties that are incongruous with the properties that are typically true of that unit (‘property-incongruous’).

4. Test whether the incongruous units are to be integrated within the overall topical framework by means of some form of comparison.

4a. For each incongruous unit under 3a, determine which replacing unit would be congruous with the topic AND would be coherent with the referential meaning of the image.

4b. For each incongruous unit under 3b, determine which replacing unit would typically own the incongruous properties AND would be coherent with the referential meaning of the image.

- (i) Test whether the comparison(s) is/are cross-domain.
- (ii) Test whether the comparison(s) can be seen as some form of indirect discourse about the topic as formulated under step 1d.
- (iii) If the findings of tests 4, 5, 6 are positive, then a visual unit should be marked for metaphor.

Šorm and Steen (2018) distinguish between two types of incongruity: topic-incongruity, where an element does not semantically align with the overall topic of the image, and property-incongruity, where a visual element is contextually appropriate but displays unusual or implausible features for that type of entity. In both cases, such incongruities prompt the viewer to resolve the semantic mismatch by mapping the incongruous unit onto a different conceptual domain. If the comparison resolves the visual conflict in a coherent and cross-domain way, and if it functions as an indirect discourse about the topic, the visual unit is marked as metaphorical. While this formalized approach offers structure and replicability, The scholars acknowledge that the identification of incongruity involves a degree of interpretive judgment.

Forceville (2024) argues that this strict reliance on overt contrasts limits VISMIP's ability to recognize subtle or creative visual metaphors which often emerge from less explicit cultural or contextual elements. Moreover, he points out that

“[...] there simply is no failsafe procedure to decide a certain picture constitutes, or contains, a metaphor. One reason is that the analyst of visual metaphor is not helped by a grammar or vocabulary – a crucial resource in Steen et al. (2010) for identifying verbal metaphor. There must thus be other reasons to construe the combination of two elements in a picture as a metaphor” (Forceville 2024: 265).

As a result, he contends that visual metaphors require a flexible analytical framework that accounts for the specific cultural knowledge influencing their meaning. VISMIP's procedural focus, while systematic, struggles to accommodate this interpretive complexity, especially in creative genres like political cartoons, in which visual metaphors often operate through layered meanings of knowledge to convey evaluative perspectives. Finally, Forceville criticizes VISMIP for sidelining these genre-specific elements and failing to address the creative nature of visual metaphors. While he recognizes the importance of systematicity in metaphor analysis, he advocates for a hybrid methodology that integrates structured guidelines with interpretive flexibility.

While Šorm and Steen (2018) refer to the procedure outlined as a Visual Metaphor Identification Procedure (VISMIP), many of the examples analyzed—particularly in print advertising—contain both visual and verbal elements. This raises a theoretical concern: if metaphor comprehension in these cases depends on the interaction between image and text, why are they not classified as multimodal metaphors? Šorm and Steen (2018) does not explicitly justify this terminological choice, but the underlying assumption appears to be that a metaphor can still be labeled visual as long as the source-target mapping is primarily constructed through visual means, even if verbal elements provide contextual support. In this

framework, captions or headlines are treated pragmatically – as interpretive scaffolding to disambiguate the image – rather than as components of the metaphorical structure itself. However, as Forceville (2016, 2024) argues, such examples should more accurately be described as multimodal metaphors, since the metaphorical meaning arises through the interaction between different semiotic modes (e.g., pictorial and linguistic). From this perspective, many of the so-called “visual” metaphors analyzed using VISMIP may in fact involve cross-modal integration, and thus require a multimodal analytical framework. Forceville (2024) strongly defends the idea that if either the source or target of a metaphor depends on a different mode (e.g., visual for one, verbal for the other), the metaphor should be classified as multimodal, not visual. This challenges the terminology used in VISMIP, where metaphors are labeled as visual even when textual elements are necessary to interpret them. Once again, a rigid and context-independent approach to metaphor analysis appears to somehow limit the research’s scope, but a more flexible one leads to a less objective analysis. In the end, this decision is left to the researcher.

2.3.4.3 Multimodal metaphor

Following his 1996 pioneering study, Forceville underlines a fundamental aspect of metaphor research beyond the language level:

“Purely pictorial metaphors – metaphors in which the signalling of the two terms of a metaphor, target (tenor, topic) and source (vehicle, base) is achieved by visual means only – are relatively rare. Once we leave the realm of the verbal, usually either or both of the terms are cued in more than one channel simultaneously” (2007: 16).

When researchers analyze pictorial metaphors, they are likely to encounter different overlapping modes of expression. To this regard, Forceville and Urios-Aparisi (2009) underline the importance of distinguishing between monomodal and multimodal metaphors. To make such a distinction, the concept of mode must first be defined. A mode can be understood as a sign system linked to a specific sensory perception process, such as visual, sonic, olfactory, gustatory, or tactile. In brief, one could argue that monomodal metaphors involve target and source domains represented within the same mode, while multimodal metaphors involve target and source domains represented across different modes, e.g., a film might convey a metaphor through the visual image of a storm coupled with ominous music to signify emotional turmoil. As El Rifaie (2017: 148) puts it, a complete list of all available modes exploited by human

interactions cannot be fixed, as their number as well as boundaries vary over time and between cultures or communities.

Building on earlier methodologies such as MIPVU for linguistic metaphors and VISMIP for visual metaphors, the Filmic Metaphor Identification Procedure (FILMIP) adapts these frameworks to accommodate the complex interaction of visual, auditory, and linguistic elements. Bort-Mir developed FILMIP's foundations (Bort-Mir 2019), while Bolognesi contributed to its empirical validation (Bolognesi/Bort-Mir 2022). FILMIP is a two-phase, seven-step process: it begins with macro and micro-level analyses, i.e. analysts determine the overall message or communicative purpose of the material, setting the interpretative context (macroanalysis). They then pinpoint incongruous elements, such as unexpected visuals or sounds, which may serve as indicators of metaphorical mappings (microanalysis) (I phase). This is followed by a deeper exploration of metaphorical components: identification of target, source and mapping process which implies the analysis of those features that are transferred to the target (II phase).

The authors evaluated FILMIP in two studies. 21 Spanish speaking participants underwent a two-hour training session on FILMIP before individually analyzing two TV commercials across two separate two-hour sessions. By using complementary statistical metrics across the two studies³⁵, the authors ensured a thorough evaluation of FILMIP's reliability. While some variations in interpretation emerged, often due to cultural differences, FILMIP seems to provide a replicable method for analyzing complex multimodal materials. This genre-specific limitation is again criticized by Forceville (2024). Once again, contextual relevance plays a key role for Forceville.

Pérez-Sobrino's corpus-based analysis (2016) can be seen as a natural extension of Forceville's theoretical framework, but it broadens the scope of multimodal metaphor and includes metonymy research. She finds that metaphonymy, i.e. a combination of metaphor and metonymy, is the most frequent conceptual operation in her corpus of 210 advertisements. This study has the merit of having introduced novel multimodal patterns, such as (MS)iT metonymy, that were not previously examined in multimodal contexts. Her research shows that metonymy and metaphor, particularly when combined, are key to simplifying complex messages for

³⁵ Study 1 used Krippendorff's Alpha and Fleiss's Kappa. These metrics measure inter-coder reliability and are particularly suited for categorical data. They assess the level of agreement among coders while accounting for the likelihood of chance agreement. Study 2 used the Percentage Agreement Index, a simpler metric to calculate the proportion of total agreements among coders relative to the total number of coding decisions.

consumers, making them more effective. While Forceville's framework laid the foundation for studying multimodal metaphors, Pérez-Sobrino's large-scale corpus study provides quantitative analysis of how modes trigger different amounts of conceptual complexity in advertising.

When addressing multimodal metaphors, there has been a prevailing interest in political cartoons (Đurović and Silaški 2016; El Refaie 2003, 2009, 2015) and advertising (Caballero 2009; Forceville 1996, 2008, 2009, 2016; Martín de la Rosa 2009; Pérez Sobrino 2013, 2016, 2017, Pinelli 2022), as the abovementioned studies demonstrate. There has been a growing interest in multimodal metaphors in memes (Benammar 2023, Piata 2016, Scott 2021), but as Zurrú (2021) states, multimodal metaphors in social media are still a rather underexplored territory. Given that social media discourse is one of the best representatives of multimodality, there is a need for new advancements in the area.

2.3.5 Repositories of metaphors

2.3.5.1 Verbal metaphors

Metaphorically annotated datasets have been developed both to support and to extend metaphor research, as they provide systematically labeled examples of literal and figurative language that can be used for training, testing, and validating identification methods.

The Master Metaphor List (MML), curated by the Cognitive Linguistics Group at the University of California, Berkeley, is the first attempt to systematically collect metaphors in English. Serving as a foundational resource in cognitive linguistics, the MML aggregates metaphors identified through extensive research, including published works, student papers, and academic seminars. This is a metaphor repository of source–target domain mappings, organized into four major categories (event structure, mental events, emotions, and other) which have a hierarchical structure, e.g. STATES ARE LOCATIONS has several subcases, among which there is PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS. MML not only provides detailed mappings between domains, but also examples from everyday language (Lakoff et al. 1991). This repository served as a starting point which led to the implementation of MetaNet, Metanet.Hr, and French MetaNet. The French and Croatian MetaNets are independent

implementations inspired by the original MetaNet but developed to meet the specific needs of their languages and cultures. While they draw on the same theoretical and methodological foundations, they operate separately and serve as regional adaptations rather than direct extensions of the original MetaNet project.

MetaNet³⁶ is a computational metaphor identification system initiated in 2011 under the sponsorship of the Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity (IARPA). It was hosted at the International Computer Science Institute in Berkeley, sharing a base with the FrameNet project, which influenced its foundational approach. The system integrates insights from CMT and employs a network of semantic frames and metaphor mappings to analyze metaphoricity in natural language corpora. It consists of three key components: a repository of formalized metaphors and frames, an automated metaphor extraction system that uses information from the repository to identify metaphorical expressions, and computational tools for evaluating, analyzing, and visualizing the extracted metaphor data. The integration of these components creates a dynamic analytical tool. Insights gained from analyzing extracted data inform the refinement and expansion of the metaphor repository, which in turn enhances the system's metaphor extraction capabilities. A key innovation of MetaNet is its ability to represent hierarchical relationships among metaphors. The hierarchical relationships in MetaNet go beyond just categorizing metaphors into a list, as MML did; they map how various metaphors connect to one another across different domains. MetaNet not only represents hierarchical relationships but also focuses on the interaction between metaphors and their syntactic structures. This hierarchical organization enables efficient analysis of metaphorical patterns (Dodges et al 2015; Sweetser et al 2019). Now MetaNet operates across four languages, i.e. English, Spanish, Farsi, and Russian, and allows researchers to implement cross-linguistic comparisons of metaphor usage.

Building upon the MetaNet framework, MetaNet.Hr is a specialized extension focused on Croatian (Despot et al. 2019). The project serves as a repository for conceptual and linguistic metaphors, metonymies, cognitive primitives, image schemas, and semantic frames unique to the Croatian language. It employs a dual approach, combining top-down analysis, i.e. systematic examination of conceptual metaphors in Croatian aligned with MetaNet methodologies, with bottom-up, corpus-based analysis that investigates metaphor use within Croatian language corpora to derive empirical insights into real-world applications. The French-language MetaNet Wiki is an online collaborative resource aimed at analyzing

³⁶ https://metaphor.icsi.berkeley.edu/pub/en/index.php/MetaNet_Metaphor_Wiki

metaphors specific to the French language. Inspired by the English-language MetaNet, it was developed by a team of North American and European francophones to address both European French and Canadian French variations. Currently, it includes 766 frames, 187 metaphors, and over 100 detailed metaphor entries, with plans for expansion (Moar et al. 2023).

Further expanding the field is the VU Amsterdam Metaphor Corpus (VUAMC), one of the most comprehensive resources for metaphor analysis. Developed by Steen et al. (2010), it comprises approximately 200,000 words sampled from the British National Corpus (BNC), covering a wide range of genres, including fiction, academic writing, news, and conversations. The annotation process follows MIPVU, discussed in Section 2.3.1. The corpus is designed for diverse research purposes, including studies in cognitive linguistics, natural language processing (NLP), and applied metaphor studies. The dataset is freely accessible, and the annotations can be analyzed using an integrated tool³⁷.

Veale et al. (2016) provide an exhaustive description of metaphor datasets distinguishing between (i) categorized collections of metaphors (Barnden 1997; Rash 2006; Cardillo 2010; Pasanek 2015) (ii) annotations of specific constructions or target expressions (Birke and Sarkar 2006; Bambini et al 2014; Hovy et al 2013) (iii) full text annotations (Shutova and Teufel 2010; Beigman Klebanov and Flor 2013) and (iv) Additional annotated materials (Jang et al. 2015; Shaik et al. 2014)

(i) Barnden's Metaphors of Mind dataset (1997) contains 1,200 annotated excerpts focusing on metaphors of cognition, each categorized by the conceptual metaphor it represents. Similarly, Rash (2006) compiled 2,000 metaphors from Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. The Metaphors of Mind database (Pasanek, 2015) documents 15,000 metaphorical excerpts from British literature between 1660 and 1819, with classifications by source domain, literary period, and authorial characteristics. Cardillo et al. (2010) developed a dataset of 280 matched pairs of metaphorical and literal sentences, characterized along dimensions such as length and complexity. This resource supports psycholinguistic research on metaphor processing.

(ii) Birke and Sarkar's (2006) dataset, i.e. the TroFi (Trope Finder) focuses on distinguishing between literal and non-literal uses of verbs in context, and uses supervised learning to classify metaphorical expressions by analyzing linguistic context. Bambini et al.'s Literary metaphors in Italian (2014) contains annotated sentences evaluated for their metaphorical or literal nature, particularly in controlled psycholinguistic experiments. Hovy et al. (2013) created a dataset of around 4,000 metaphorical and non-metaphorical word instances using a bootstrapping

³⁷ [VU Amsterdam Metaphor Corpus](#)

approach. They began with 329 seed metaphor examples and extracted sentences containing these words from the Brown Corpus. Each sentence was classified into metaphorical, non-metaphorical, or impossible to decide by seven annotators via Amazon Mechanical Turk³⁸. Annotators determined whether the highlighted word retained its original meaning. A weighted voting system with an unsupervised item response model was used to assign final labels, down-weighting less reliable annotators.

(iii) Shutova and Teufel (2010) developed a metaphor corpus of 761 sentences from the British National Corpus (BNC), sampled across genres such as fiction, news, essays, and radio broadcasts. The focus was on verbs, with annotators identifying metaphorical and non-metaphorical uses. Following the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), three native English-speaking annotators with linguistic backgrounds categorized metaphors into source and target domains, using the Master Metaphor List as a guide. Annotators could create new categories if none matched their intuition and relied on their understanding without specific dictionary references. Beigman Klebanov and Flor (2013) designed a dataset of essays about the role communication in society written for an examination of graduate school entrance, and the annotation was implemented by two researchers who were given a set of guidelines.

(iv) Jang et al. (2015) annotated data retrieved by web discussion for a, one being a cancer support group and the other a forum of street gang members. Having applied MIP, the annotators encountered several challenges in the annotation of sub-culture lexicon. While Shaikh et al. (2014) created a multilingual repository of 100,000 metaphors in English, Spanish, Farsi, and Russian, focusing on governance and economic metaphors classified by source-target relationships and affect.

2.3.5.2 Multimodal metaphor repositories

Bolognesi et al. (2018) introduce VisMet 1.0, an online corpus designed to address the gap in resources for studying visual metaphors systematically, which serves as the first structured and publicly accessible repository of annotated visual metaphors. It is accessible online, featuring

³⁸ Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) is an online crowdsourcing platform that connects businesses and researchers with a vast global workforce to complete small, human intelligence tasks. Launched by Amazon, it enables requesters to post tasks such as data categorization, transcription, image tagging, and survey participation, which are then completed by workers for a fee. MTurk has raised concerns about worker compensation, with some critics arguing that many tasks are undervalued given the time and skill required. Furthermore, the quality of work can vary, although mechanisms like worker reviews and qualifications are used to maintain standards

tools for browsing the annotated images. The pilot corpus comprises 350 images from various genres and media, analyzed for metaphorical incongruities, i.e. the basis for metaphorical meaning. These incongruities are categorized along three dimensions: expression (referential meaning of the visual element), conceptualization (abstract mappings between source and target domains), and communication (message conveyed). The authors apply Phillips and McQuarrie's (2004) framework for visual metaphor classification, which includes juxtaposition, fusion, and replacement as key types. Symbolism and linguistic familiarity are also assessed to explore the interplay between conventional signs and verbal elements in interpreting metaphors. Crowdsourcing is employed to incorporate diverse perspectives and reduce bias in annotations, ensuring that interpretations are not limited to academic or expert viewpoints. However, challenges remain, including subjectivity in identifying metaphor types, difficulty in accounting for cultural differences, and the need for scalable methodologies. VisMet 1.0. Future plans include expanding the corpus, refining annotation guidelines, and enhancing user interaction to foster broader collaboration.

MultiMET (Multimodal Metaphor Understanding) (Zhang et al. 2021) is a dataset designed to implement the analysis of multimodal metaphors, and focuses on textual together with visual elements. It consists of 10,437 text-image pairs, primarily collected from online platforms like social media and advertisements. Each pair is annotated with detailed information about the metaphor's occurrence, the relationship between its source and target domains, sentiment, and author intent. The dataset provides a rich resource for developing and evaluating systems that can interpret metaphors in multimodal contexts. Researchers have used MultiMET to advance models for metaphor detection, sentiment analysis, and understanding the rhetorical goals behind metaphor use. while VisMet is primarily centered on visual metaphors in advertising and media, MultiMET offers a broader scope, incorporating a diverse range of multimodal metaphors, and is designed with more detailed annotations, making it a complementary resource for further research in the field of multimodal metaphor.

Chapter 3. Metaphor in practice

3.1 Metaphors of the Nation

The conceptualization of nations through metaphor is a recurrent feature of political and cultural discourse, and has been extensively theorized within the Cognitive Linguistics framework. Metaphors are intrinsically connected to nations as they help the understanding of such complex constructs by relating them to familiar or more tangible entities or experiences. The idea of nation can thus be conceptualized in different ways and is constantly reframed (Stanojević and Šarić 2019).

As already discussed in Section 1.1, in the present study nationhood is not treated as a fixed or essentialist category, but as a dynamic and context-sensitive discursive construct that may include references to the state, the government, or the political leadership acting in its name. This broader conceptualization aligns with discourse-analytic perspectives that emphasize the multiplicity of ways in which national identity is enacted and recontextualized (Wodak et al. 2009). The complexity of defining “nation” entails the possibility of drawing from a multiplicity of semantic source domains, depending on context, genre, and ideological positioning. The two following figures³⁹ illustrate the range of source concepts identified by the MetaNet project (see Section 2.3.5.1) to conceptualize both NATION and GOVERNMENT, reflecting the frequent metaphorical overlap between the two constructs⁴⁰. Some of these mappings are further discussed in the present section, without any claim to completeness, but rather for explanatory purposes.

³⁹ The two figures are separated only for practical purposes. Given the vast amount of NATION-GOVERNMENT mappings, the shared ones are reported in the former figure, while other not intersecting mappings are reported in the latter one.

⁴⁰ The metaphorical data presented in these figures draw on the approach of the MetaNet project (Metaphor Research Project, UBC), which publishes repositories of metaphors for English, French, and Spanish in RDF/OWL format <https://metanet.arts.ubc.ca/metaphor-databases/>.

In its interface – currently under development – each metaphor is represented as a mapping (source → target) embedded in a network of interconnected semantic frames, which can be visualized through diagrams. In my graphical representation, each colored circle corresponds to a target concept (e.g., NATION, GOVERNMENT), while the phrases inside serve as descriptive labels for the source-domain mappings, maintaining consistency with MetaNet’s conceptual style but adapted to a circular format.

Figure 3.1. MetaNet mappings for NATION and GOVERNMENT (I).

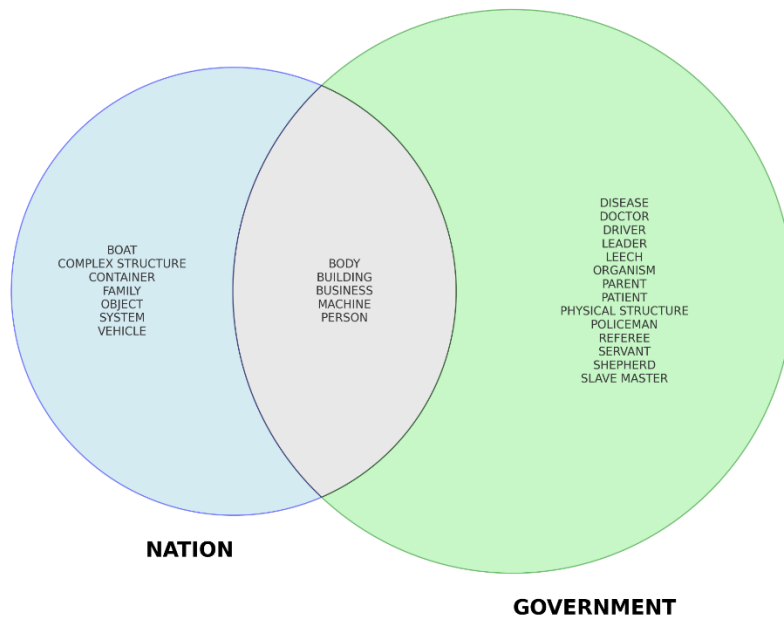
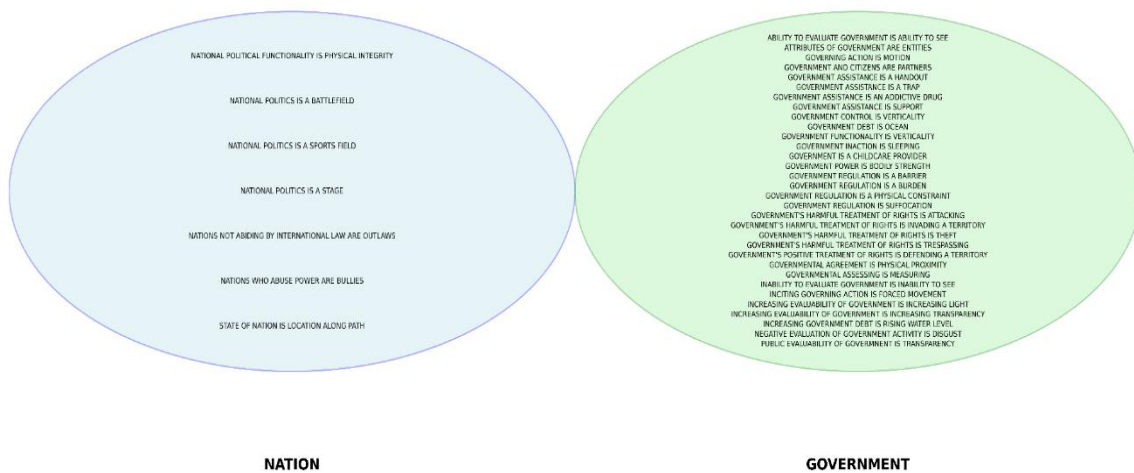


Figure 3.2. MetaNet mappings for NATION and GOVERNMENT (II).



As reported in Figures 3.1 and 3.2, metaphorical mappings can vary in precision and scope – they may be fine-grained, evaluative, detailed, and strongly shaped by context. This raises the broader issue of domain attribution and hierarchy. As Dancygier and Sweetser (2014) observe, metaphorical domains cannot be treated as discrete or mutually exclusive, since categories often overlap and single expressions may operate at several levels simultaneously. For this reason, many scholars turn to the more flexible notions of frames and subframes (Croft and Cruse 2004; Sullivan 2013) or scenarios (Musolff 2006, 2016). Metaphors may range from

highly schematic image schemas, such as PATH or CONTAINER, to more elaborate frame-rich mappings, such as LIFE IS A JOURNEY, with inheritance relations –“cascades”– connecting different levels. Moreover, domains frequently group into “metaphor families” (Morgan 2008). This complexity highlights that mappings, including those involving the nation, rarely work as simple one-to-one correspondences. Instead, they operate within overlapping, hierarchical, and context-sensitive structures.

In this light, NATION AS PERSON can be understood both as an ontological metaphor and as part of a broader family of social-relational mappings, which allow international relations to be viewed through analogies with human friendships, enmities, or obligations. Conceptualizations of the nation can thus shape political discourse for specific purposes, relying heavily on figurative language – especially metaphor and metonymy⁴¹ – as rhetorical resources that make abstract realities more concrete and familiar (A’Beckett 2012; Bencsez and Szabó 2020; Charteris-Black 2019; Demata 2019, among others).

A clear illustration is offered by Demata’s (2019) analysis of US State of the Union addresses, where successive presidents repeatedly draw on nation metaphors – most notably the NATION-AS-PERSON (and related FAMILY/BODY) schemas – to evoke allegedly shared values, create common ground with audiences, and naturalize particular policy priorities. By recruiting domains of everyday experience that are widely accessible, such framings simplify the idea of nation, promote homogeneity, and marginalize dissent (Demata 2019: 220–221)

Another prevalent conceptualization frames the nation as a physical entity requiring protection, often through container metaphors (Musolff 2010; Mujagić 2023; Charteris-Black 2019). Here metaphor becomes a strategy for de-legitimization in political speeches. Like in the case of Nazi propaganda, which justified the persecution of Jews by framing them as animals which threatened the body of the German nation (Musolff 2010). A country experiencing an influx of migrants may be described as a container under pressure that is nearing its bursting point, a social fabric at risk of unraveling, or a sinking ship being overloaded by new arrivals (Charteris-Black 2019; Mujagić 2023). Such metaphors are powerful because they evoke visceral fears of

⁴¹Given the broad range of manifestations of metonymy – discussed in note 22 – across language and multimodal communication, a comprehensive treatment would fall outside the scope of this study. Here the focus is deliberately limited to metonymic referents of location names for nations and states, as it will be discussed in Section 4.1.

rupture and collapse, thereby fostering public anxiety and justifying the implementation of rigid, exclusionary policies (Mujagić 2023).

The construction of a threatening “the Other” is often intensified through dehumanizing animal metaphors, which leverage the cultural model of the GREAT CHAIN OF BEING⁴² (Lakoff and Turner 1989) to position an out-group as ontologically lower and less human than the in-group (Charteris-Black 2019; Iori 2023). During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, Western media frequently employed this strategy to frame China as a predatory beast, a “wolf warrior,” reinforcing Sino-phobic narratives of a “Yellow Peril” and constructing China as an aggressive, dangerous entity (Iori 2023).

Beyond metaphor, metonymy serves as a subtle yet crucial linguistic tool for constructing a unified national identity for political ends (Salamurović 2020). The PLACE-FOR-PEOPLE metonymy, in which a location name such as a country or capital stands for its population and government, is particularly prevalent. For instance, using “Brussels” to refer to the European Union’s institutions (Bencsez and Szabó 2020), or “Montenegro” and “Germany” to refer to both the people and their political leadership, creates the impression of a single, coherent national subject. This collectivization is a powerful legitimation strategy, as it allows political leaders to present their own voice and decisions as representing the unified will of the entire nation, thereby strengthening their authority and mobilizing public support for their actions (Salamurović 2020).

These studies demonstrate that personification is a pervasive pattern in how nations are conceptualized. The next subsection looks more closely at these personification strategies.

3.1.1 Personification in Nation metaphors

⁴² THE GREAT CHAIN OF BEING is a hierarchical cultural model that organizes all existence on a vertical scale, with “higher” beings and properties (like humans and reason) positioned above “lower” ones (like animals, plants, and inanimate objects). In the field of cognitive linguistics, this framework was first outlined by Lakoff and Turner in their 1989 book, *More than Cool Reason*. They describe it as a “contemporary unconscious cultural model indispensable to our understanding of ourselves, our world, and our language” (1989: 167). It is noted by Musolff (2021) that while Lakoff and Turner present this as a contemporary cultural model, it has a long history in Western thought. For ancient and medieval thinkers, the Great Chain of Being was not a metaphor but a literal description of the universe that had practical applications in law, medicine, and politics. His criticism focuses on the fact that Lakoff and Turner's approach ignores this historicity, presenting a simplified and universalist version that does not do justice to the complexity and ideological impact of the concept over time.

The personification of abstract entities is a deeply rooted cognitive strategy that allows complex and collective phenomena to be imagined in more relatable terms. This tendency, ingrained in human cognition, is widely applied across domains, but it is especially prominent in political discourse, where the personification of nations has become one of the most pervasive – and contested – metaphorical strategies. Within CMT, personification is treated as a basic ontological metaphor, wherein abstract or collective entities are conceptualized as human beings (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 33). In particular, the metaphor NATION AS A PERSON makes political, economic, or diplomatic processes intelligible by attributing agency, intentionality, and emotion to the nation-state (Lakoff 1991 2004; Kövecses 2002: 60–62). As Thompson (1996: 188) notes, this rhetorical simplification reduces complexity by collapsing the actions of multiple actors into a single agentive force, thereby enabling narratives of decisive action.

A particularly entrenched variant of this metaphor conceptualizes the nation not only as a PERSON but as a LIVING BODY. As Musolff (2021) illustrates, the genealogy of this metaphor can be traced back to classical antiquity, beginning with Aesop’s Fable of the Belly. This allegory portrays social hierarchy as natural and necessary: the belly, initially accused by the other body parts of idleness, justifies its role by emphasizing its vital function in nourishing the whole. Historians like Livy and Plutarch later repurposed this narrative in political contexts, famously attributing it to the Roman senator Menenius Agrippa to quell plebeian unrest. The metaphor evolved in early Christian thought, particularly in Paul’s epistles, where the Christian community is likened to the “body of Christ” – a unified organism whose members depend on each other, with an embedded moral obligation of care from strong to weak. In the Renaissance, Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus* reactivated this scenario in a dialogic and contested form: the analogy is no longer accepted uncritically but challenged by dissenting voices that reinterpret the body’s internal roles and power dynamics. Contrary to views that see such metaphors as obsolete after the early modern period, Musolff (2021) argues that their continued rhetorical vitality lies precisely in their adaptability to conflict and debate. Even in Marx’s *Capital*, the body metaphor re-emerges – this time inverted – to critique capitalist exploitation and the fragmentation of the worker’s body. The NATION-AS-BODY metaphor thus functions as a dynamic argumentative scenario, historically used both to justify and to challenge political orders.

This long-standing tradition of imagining the nation as a human body or person provides the conceptual groundwork for more recent metaphorical framings of political community. One prominent extension is found in Lakoff's analysis (1996) of the NATION IS A FAMILY, which underpins competing US moral and political models through two opposing metaphorical framings: the Strict Father and the Nurturant Parent. In the Strict Father model, associated with conservative worldviews, the nation-as-parent emphasizes discipline, moral strength, and self-reliance, reflecting a hierarchical and authority-based understanding of national identity. By contrast, the Nurturant Parent model, often linked to progressive politics, foregrounds empathy, social responsibility, and mutual care. These metaphorical constructs function as foundational schemas for political discourse in the United States, informing views on taxation, welfare, foreign policy, and beyond.

Yet Lakoff's binary opposition has drawn criticism. Musolff notes that, although Lakoff allows for hybrid cases, he still treats the Strict and Nurturant models as the "center of all such conceptual variations" (2006: 25). This, Musolff argues, risks reducing complex ideological submodels to a single FAMILY domain. To address this, Musolff introduces the concept of metaphor scenarios (see Chapter 2). Musolff's scenario-based model thus shifts the focus from stable conceptual dichotomies to flexible and evaluatively rich patterns of metaphor use in public discourse. For instance, within Russian political discourse, this system is frequently deployed to assert dominance, framing Russia as an "elder brother" who bears a "fraternal" responsibility to guide and, if necessary, discipline its "younger" neighbors like Ukraine. This "strict" model legitimizes expansionist effort – as for the case of Russia's large scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 – such as military operations or political pressure, as a form of "fraternal" care that should be met with obedience (A'Beckett 2012).

Similar processes appear elsewhere. In Hungarian populist narratives, the EU AS PERSON frame is used to construct an "Us" versus "Them" dichotomy, personifying the European Union as an external BULLY or an overbearing AUTHORITY FIGURE (Bencsez and Szabó 2020). This simplifies the complex institution of the EU into a single, accountable individual, making it a convenient rhetorical target to rally domestic support against a perceived corrupt elite (Bencsez and Szabó 2020). The same personification logic was evident in the Brexit debate, where Britain's relationship with the EU was frequently framed through the script of a marriage and subsequent divorce, providing a powerful heuristic for reasoning about the financial obligations (the "divorce bill") and emotional costs of political separation (Charteris-Black

2019).

The ideological functions of nation personification are particularly evident in conflictual media coverage. Baker et al (2021: 126–128), drawing on corpus analysis of jihadist discourse, finds that America is predominantly represented as a social actor rather than a geographical entity. These representations often blur the distinction between the US government and its citizens, thus enabling discourses that legitimize violence against civilian populations. Similarly, Pérez Sobrino (2013) argues that the personification of nations plays a crucial role in framing international events, as in the case of the Green Revolution⁴³ in Iran, where states are portrayed as interacting human bodies, with actions and intentions attributed to entire nations.

In a later study, Musolff (2018) provides a detailed exploration of personification in diplomatic speech, particularly in the context of Israeli and Palestinian addresses at the UN General Assembly. His analysis shows how speakers project their nations as unified social actors capable of extending hands, sitting down for peace, and expressing emotional openness – gestures that not only personify the state but also enact a discursive “face” in the Goffmanian sense. At the same time, Musolff cautions against treating every instance of national agency as personification.

At the linguistic level, the identification of personification in metaphor analysis raises methodological challenges. Dorst (2011) observes that the status of personification may vary depending on whether analysis is conducted at the linguistic, conceptual, or communicative level. She shows that conventional personifications – e.g. “The gangway lamps seemed to *give* no light” or “Valentine’s Day *brought* two happy events” (2011: 121) – may not be consciously processed as metaphorical by language users. On the basis of MIP and MIPVU it can therefore be argued these two examples are instances of linguistic personification, involving a contrast and comparison between a human basic sense and a non-human contextual sense. However, experiments by Bowdle and Gentner (2005) have shown that derived metaphorical senses of a word can become so conventional that they are no longer experienced as metaphorical by language users, and are normally accessed directly (i.e. via categorization) during processing.

⁴³ The “Green Revolution” (also known as the Green Movement) refers to the wave of protests that erupted in Iran following the disputed 2009 presidential elections, in which incumbent Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was declared the winner over opposition candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi. Protesters, adopting green as their unifying symbol, demanded electoral transparency and democratic reforms. The movement was met with a violent state crackdown, and it has since become emblematic of resistance to authoritarianism and the struggle for civil liberties in contemporary Iran.

In this sense, conventionalized personifications – such as attributing agency to abstract entities like “the state” – may be understood less as active comparisons and more as routinized categorizations. What begins as a striking figurative extension gradually stabilizes into a lexicalized sense, accessed automatically and with minimal awareness of its metaphorical origin. Dorst’s observation is therefore crucial: the analytical identification of personification at the linguistic level does not necessarily coincide with speakers’ experiential perception of metaphor. This divergence highlights the need for methodological caution, since what analysts label as metaphor may function for users as an entrenched category label, no longer evoking the original human/non-human mapping.

3.2 Metaphors conceptualizing Russia

In the case of Russia, metaphor has served not only as a cognitive heuristic, but also as a persuasive device in the construction of national identity and international alterity (Ilyushkina and Chudinov 2019; Luraghi and Stringa 2024; Solopova and Ilyushkina 2017; de Lazari et al. 2019). As diachronic analyses reveal, the meaning and affective valence of these metaphors are highly unstable, shifting in accordance with the state of Russia’s relationship with the West (Solopova and Kushneruk 2021; Solopova et al. 2023).

Among the most entrenched metaphorical frameworks used to represent Russia are zoomorphic metaphors, particularly those invoking animals such as the bear or more broadly “beastly” figures. These metaphors function to semantically position Russia as an object of either admiration or fear, often facilitating strategies of discursive “othering” (Solopova et al. 2023). The metaphor RUSSIA IS A BEAR stands out as one of the most persistent and productive across historical periods. Though often perceived as an indigenous symbol, the metaphor largely originated as a Western construct as early as the 16th century and has become a familiar trope since the late 18th century (de Lazari et al. 2019; Solopova et al. 2023). Historically, the bear has been used to demarcate a symbolic boundary between the “civilized” West and a perceived “barbaric” East, with Russia occupying the latter space (de Lazari et al. 2019: 327). This spatialized opposition was reinforced visually through cartographic representations. As shown by Platoff (2012), early modern European maps from the seventeenth century frequently depicted Russian territory as inhabited by bears, initially as decorative markers signaling

regions perceived as wild and remote. While these early cartographic depictions were not yet overtly political, they contributed to associating Russia with untamed nature. By the eighteenth century, this spatial association became explicitly metaphorical, with the Russian Empire being likened to a gigantic polar bear extending its paws toward Europe. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the motif was fully politicized in Western satirical cartography and propaganda, where Russia was repeatedly represented in the shape of a bear advancing toward Europe. In such maps, the bear's body often coincided with Russian territory, transforming geopolitical space into an embodied threat and visually encoding narratives of encroachment (Platoff 2012).

Interestingly, Platoff (2012: 7–8) notes that in the late twentieth century the bear was increasingly appropriated within Russia itself, shifting from an externally imposed symbol of backwardness or threat to a self-referential emblem of strength and resilience. This reappropriation complicates earlier Western constructions of the Russian bear, as it highlights the metaphor's ideological flexibility across contexts.

As a matter of fact, in periods of antagonism – such as in contemporary Western discourse – the metaphor takes on overwhelmingly negative connotations. The Russian bear is constructed as scary, vicious, and violent, with explicit references made to its teeth and claws as metonymic stand-ins for Russia's nuclear capabilities (Ilyushkina and Chudinov 2019; Solopova et al. 2023). In such cases, the metaphor has reinforced dominant narratives of Russian aggression and its threat to the Western geopolitical order. Conversely, during moments of political alignment or military cooperation, the BEAR metaphor has undergone a transformation. During World War II, for instance, the American and British press employed the image of the Russian bear as that of a reliable and powerful ally in the shared struggle against Nazism (Solopova and Kushneruk 2021). Similarly, during the 19th century – another period of relatively amicable US–Russia relations – the bear was depicted as a noble and effective hunter, whose geopolitical pursuits were viewed as reasonable and justified (Solopova et al. 2023).

Closely related to the bear metaphor is the more general and often more explicitly dehumanizing RUSSIA IS A BEAST metaphor. This metaphor evokes notions of immorality, brutality, and uncontrollability, casting Russia as a rogue actor operating outside the bounds of international norms (Solopova et al. 2023). In the 21st-century American press, this metaphor framed Russia as a rapacious and expansionist force, endangering neighboring states. Nevertheless, the metaphor is not uniformly negative. In the 19th century, US media

occasionally deployed the “beast” trope with positive connotations, likening Russia to the benign yet powerful creature from the “Beauty and the Beast” fairytale – a good-natured and strong figure whose transformation was a matter of perception rather than essence (Solopova et al., 2023). In these instances, the metaphor functions to generate affective proximity and foster identification, rather than exclusion.

Beyond zoomorphism, Russia is also metaphorically construed through models of power and leadership. A prominent example is the PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA IS THE TSAR metaphor, commonly applied to Vladimir Putin in Western media. This metaphor draws on historical associations with autocracy and imperial authority, as it portrays the Russian president as an omnipotent figure with unchecked, even inherited, power. Comparisons with Tsars such as Peter the Great serve to reinforce this frame (Ilyushkina and Chudinov 2019).

Contemporary metaphorical framings in English-language media also prominently feature models of war and criminality. One of the most dominant is the RUSSIAN POLICY IS WAR metaphor, which has been shown to account for over half of all metaphorical references in Solopova and Ilyushkina’s (2017) corpus analysis. This metaphor constructs Russia as an aggressor, consistently deploying the lexical field of military operations, strategic assaults, and weapons to describe its foreign policy behavior. Often, these representations are interlinked with the enduring COLD WAR metaphor, which continues to frame Russia-West relations as fundamentally adversarial, rooted in the stereotype of Russia as an enduring enemy of liberal democratic values. Another frequent framing is RUSSIAN POLICY IS A CRIMINAL ACTIVITY, with criminal metaphors accounting for approximately 38% of metaphorical references in the same corpus studies (Solopova and Ilyushkina 2017). In these cases, Russia is depicted as a lawless state—described variously as a “mafia state,” a “hooligan,” or led by a “delusional thug”. Such imagery portrays Russia as an inherently deviant and illegitimate actor on the international stage, an element which reinforces its construction as a source of systemic instability (Solopova and Ilyushkina 2017).

A noteworthy set of metaphors anthropomorphizes the state through familiar social structures. For example, in some contexts, RUSSIA IS A PERSON – often a woman – attempting to navigate the complex terrain of international diplomacy (Ilyushkina and Chudinov 2019). Another variation is RUSSIA IS A FAMILY, wherein internal political dynamics are viewed through the lens of paternal authority, with President Putin cast as a “father-ruler” and the citizenry as his children. Interestingly, when applied to international relations, the metaphor

takes on a more negative tone: alliances are framed as “fictitious marriages,” suggesting relations driven by moral ambiguity (Solopova and Ilyushkina 2017).

Overall, these metaphorical constructions rarely operate in isolation. They are embedded within broader narratives that define Russia’s position in relation to other powers – most notably, the United States. It is therefore necessary to move beyond the metaphorical conceptualization of Russia as a singular entity and examine how metaphor shapes representations of the US–Russia relationship in diachrony. The following section addresses this discursive space.

3.3 Metaphors conceptualizing IR, with a focus on US–Russia relations

Relations between the United States and Russia have long been shaped by alternating phases of strategic cooperation and geopolitical rivalry, and this complex history is deeply embedded in metaphorical language that has consistently influenced public perceptions of key international events. The foundations of this bilateral relationship can be traced back to Russia’s neutrality during the American Civil War and the earlier establishment of the First League of Armed Neutrality in 1780, which challenged British maritime dominance. Subsequently, Russia’s sale of Alaska – dismissed by some as an apparent “Ice box” – to the US in 1867 was crucial for the consolidation of US–Russia relations against the UK. However, this brief phase of alignment began to unravel in the latter half of the 19th century. A clash of worldviews – between the liberal-democratic American model and the authoritarian Russian monarchy – fueled mutual misunderstandings and prefigured the ideological antagonisms of the 20th century (Saul 1991). The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution marked a radical rupture, further intensified by the US intervention in the Russian Civil War. The subsequent “Red Scare” of the 1920s delayed US recognition of the Soviet Union.

Metaphor played a key role in framing these tensions. After WWII, President Truman’s framing of a US bomb test as “an ace in poker” (Chilton 1996: 129), immediately after WWII cast diplomatic relations as a zero-sum game where each side attempted to outmaneuver the other, rather than seeking mutual understanding. This poker metaphor also trivialized the severe threat posed by atomic weaponry by reducing it to a “card” that can be strategically deployed. Moreover, such a strategy entailed not telling the Soviets about developments of the

atomic bomb, which made them even more reluctant to trust the US. The Russians were framed as poker players, but also as infants and outlaws at the same time by the American administration. As Chilton (1996: 131) argues, figurative choices such as these may have escalated tensions by enabling a “practice of conversational exclusion” – a defining feature of the Cold War.

The Cold War period, symbolized by the emergence of the “Iron Curtain” metaphor, marked a discursive and geopolitical solidification of ideological frontiers. First popularized by Winston Churchill in his 1946 “Sinews of Peace” speech, the Iron Curtain metaphor served as a powerful image of division which conceptualized Europe as split between two irreconcilable blocs – one governed by liberal democracy, the other by communist authoritarianism. The curtain, constructed of “iron,” evoked rigidity and permanence, and reinforced the notion that engagement or reform was impossible. Thus, the Iron Curtain became a foundational metaphor of Cold War discourse, setting the stage for subsequent metaphorical framings of US–Soviet relations.

Chilton and Lakoff (1995: 39) argue that the problem with many of these metaphors lies in the absence of critical reflection on their discursive power to shape public opinion and foreign policy agendas. For example, disease metaphors have functioned as powerful ideological tools to construct both Russians and Arabs in Western foreign policy discourse as existential threats to international order. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union was frequently conceptualized as a pathological entity – Kennan’s (1946) influential Long Telegram described communism as “a malignant parasite which feeds only on diseased tissue” (Kennan 1946: 708) – a framing that legitimized policies of containment as therapeutic interventions. This metaphorical construction positioned the USSR not merely as an adversary but as a contagious force threatening the “health” of the Western “body politic” and therefore justified exclusion from the international community and the militarization of US foreign policy.

Building on the foundation laid by Kennan, Reagan's discourse echoed the portrayal of the USSR as irrational, aggressive, and contagious. Reagan’s presidency (1981–1989) was characterized by an extensive and systematic use of metaphor to frame the Soviet Union and, more broadly, to shape public perception during a critical phase of the Cold War. One of the most iconic examples of Reagan’s metaphorical framing was his designation of the USSR as the “Evil Empire”, a term that invoked the myth of the conspiratorial enemy (Charteris-Black 2011: 140). This polarizing schema was further reinforced by Reagan’s frequent use of

metaphors of light and darkness. The Soviet regime was portrayed as shrouded in “totalitarian darkness,” as casting a shadow over “strategically vital parts of the world,” while the United States was envisioned as a source of brightness—the “warm sunlight of human freedom.” Such imagery framed the USSR as an oppressive, obscuring force to be resisted by the radiance of liberal democracy. In sharp contrast, the United States appeared as a “beacon of hope” and a “shining city on a hill,” metaphors that drew from biblical language and American exceptionalist ideology.

By the late 1980s, however, metaphorical landscapes shifted with Gorbachev’s new thinking. His metaphor of the “Common European house” proposed a cooperative Europe in which different nations could coexist as families in their own apartments within a shared building. As Chilton and Ilyn (1993) observe, the metaphor drew on the Russian concept of *dom*, which denotes both “house” and “home.” Importantly, in Russian cultural models *dom* is not a single-family house but rather a multi-apartment block, a prototype that allowed Gorbachev to envision Europe as a communal space: diverse yet structurally united.

Reception varied across political cultures. In Germany, leaders adapted the metaphor to emphasize national reunification, focusing on the “roof” as a unifying symbol. In France, however, the prototype of *maison* suggested a single-family dwelling, producing a cognitive mismatch with Gorbachev’s apartment-block model. French officials thus resisted the metaphor’s unifying implications: some stressed the barriers still posed by the Iron Curtain, while President Mitterrand recast the image into a “building under construction,” implying that the project of Europe was far from complete. The “common European house” metaphor was fundamentally reinterpreted based on local political interests, distinct cultural frameworks, and linguistic differences. The German discourse was preoccupied with national and territorial concerns, particularly reunification. The French discourse was more abstract and cautious, resisting the metaphor’s unifying implications. Ultimately, the analysis revealed that Gorbachev’s intended message of a pluralistic but cooperative Europe was conceptually transformed in its reception, becoming a tool for other national agendas rather than a shared vision.

In the post-Cold War context, this disease framing was transferred to Arab states, particularly those labelled as “rogue,” such as Iraq and Libya. These nations were similarly construed as

sources of contagion whose behaviors could “infect” the global system, thus sustaining a logic of containment. Such metaphors dehumanized the populations and suppressed alternative framings that might have prioritized human welfare and transnational cooperation (Lakoff 1992).

While the post-Cold War moment initially promised a more cooperative global order, that optimism quickly faded. As a matter of fact, the period did not produce lasting peace. Instead, the new millennium marks the true genesis of a renewed confrontation, i.e., a “New Cold War” (Achcar 2023) with China as a new competitor in the originally bipolar “race”. Although the applicability of the term may be debated – since the current confrontation lacks the overtly ideological structure of the 20th-century Cold War – the conflictual dynamic persists, albeit in a more complex, multipolar configuration. The emergence of new global actors and shifting alliances has not diminished the centrality of geopolitical competition; instead, it has diversified its arenas and intensified its stakes.

The collapse of the Soviet Union did not erase debates over Russia’s position in relation to Europe or to the idea of a “common European home.” Russian public discourse as well often employed distancing strategies and demonizing narratives that assigned negative traits to the West, particularly in times of internal crisis (Allevato 2024).

Russian discourse also continued to frame its relationship with the West in metaphorical terms. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 marked the outbreak of a new adversarial order. Sanctions failed to reverse Russian actions, while the Donbass conflict further destabilized relations. Ukrainian leaders described Russia as an “aggressor,” while Russian officials denounced Ukraine’s shifts as an “anti-constitutional coup.” Metaphors abounded: Russian media cast Ukraine as a “colony” or depicted relations as a suffocating “brotherhood” turned abusive (A’Beckett 2012; Diedkova and De Landtsheer 2018). Other frames included ROAD metaphors of diverging paths, BODY/DISEASE metaphors portraying Donbass as “sick” or “dead tissue,” and GAME metaphors framing the war as a strategic contest. These figurative framings reinforced polarization and in-group bias, entrenching incompatible worldviews.

Also, the RACE metaphor, another hallmark of Cold War discourse, has been extensively recontextualized in contemporary public narratives (Charteris-Black 2017), in particular, with reference to the Covid-19 vaccine race (Pedrini 2021), where Russia and the US are again positioned as competitors—this time joined by a new rival, China.

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 crystallized these antagonisms. Pawliszko (2023) shows that the Moscow Times emphasized brutality (“bloodbath”) and division (“cognitive dissonance”), often attributing agency directly to Putin. By contrast, the New York Times framed Russia as a criminal aggressor, using metaphors of CRIME, SURPRISE, SUFFERING, JOURNEY, FUEL, and CONTAINER. Orientation metaphors such as IN–OUT highlighted territorial violation, while RUSSIA AS CRIMINAL dominated moral condemnation. Across outlets, metaphorical framing evolved from depictions of rational diplomacy in the early 2000s to full-scale demonization and exclusion by 2022.

These continuities and shifts underscore the resilience of Cold War metaphorical schemas. Despite new contexts – from nuclear deterrence to biomedical innovation and open war – the same underlying frames persist in shaping public understanding. This reconfiguration of Cold War metaphorical frameworks illustrate the enduring nature of cognitive schemas: despite shifting contexts – from nuclear deterrence, through biomedical innovation, to invasion – the underlying metaphorical structures persist and continue to shape public understanding.

Despite the pivotal geopolitical events that occurred between 2014 and 2021 this period has received relatively fragmented attention in metaphor and discourse-analytic scholarship. As shown in this chapter, much of the existing literature tends to concentrate either on the ideological metaphorical framings of the Cold War era or on the rhetorical intensifications that followed the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. As a result, the intermediate phase remains underexplored. The present study seeks to address this gap by systematically analyzing metaphorical representations during the 2014–2021 period, with a particular focus on the way metaphors circulated, evolved, or were contested across news-tweets and user-generated replies.

Chapter 4. Corpus design and methodology

The present chapter provides a three-part methodological account of how metaphorical representations of Russia and relations between Russia with other countries were identified and categorized across journalistic tweets and their user replies. To address the complexity of metaphor use and reception in digital political discourse, the chapter adopts a tripartite methodological structure, and each section reflects a distinct yet complementary analytical orientation.

Section 4.1 addresses the methodology for RQ1, and adopts a bottom-up approach, beginning with lexical items to trace metaphorical patterns and subsequently identify Russia-related metaphor scenarios – focusing on Russia itself as well as on its relations with other (supra)national entities – in news tweets by the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*. It outlines the Data Collection for RQ1 (4.1), the Corpus compilation (4.1.1), the Identification Protocol with a refined application of the MIPVU framework (4.1.2), and the Guidelines for the Identification of Conceptual Source Domains. Section 4.2 addresses the methodology for RQ2 with a top-down approach moving from pre-established conceptual source domains to their linguistic realizations. Drawing on Wmatrix analysis of broadsheet and tabloid datasets, this section outlines the Data Collection for RQ2 (4.2), the Corpus compilation (4.2.1), and the 4.2.2 Identification of Potential Source Domain Candidates (4.2.2). Section 4.3 addresses the methodology for RQ3, and shifts focus to user replies, explaining the procedure to analyze how metaphorical framings are reused, transformed, or newly created by social media users. Here, the section includes Data Collection for RQ3 (4.3), an adaptation of the Identification Protocol based on existing frameworks on metaphor transformation, along with visual and multimodal metaphor identification (4.3.1).

4.1 Data collection for RQ1

Twitter was selected as the platform of analysis not only due to its role in the real-time dissemination of news, but also because empirical evidence shows that it is the platform where users most actively interact with mainstream news outlets and journalists (See Section 1.5 for

a more detailed analysis of Social Media News consumption). According to the Digital News Report 2021, 37% of Twitter users pay primary attention to such sources when seeking news, compared to significantly lower percentages on Facebook and YouTube (Statista 2021).

The main accounts of *the New York Times* and *the Wall Street Journal* (hereafter NYT and WSJ) were selected for a qualitative analysis of news tweets for the following reasons.

First, the two news outlets occupy a central position in the US media system as elite news institutions whose reporting practices shape patterns of agenda-setting (Zhang 2018). Journalists routinely rely on these newspapers as informational reference points and treat their editorial decisions as cues for what counts as newsworthy (Habel et al. 2018). This influence is particularly evident in the coverage of foreign policy and international crises, where the NYT and WSJ act as discursive leaders whose framing choices are subsequently echoed across the wider news ecology. While other US outlets also play a relevant role in foreign policy reporting, the NYT and the WSJ are uniquely positioned as long-standing reference points within the elite segment of the US press, making them particularly suitable for a controlled comparative analysis.

Importantly, while comparable in journalistic status and professional norms, the two newspapers occupy distinct editorial positions within the US media spectrum. The NYT is commonly associated with liberal and progressive viewpoints, whereas the WSJ is generally aligned with more conservative perspectives, especially in its opinion section (Media Bias 2022). At the same time, both outlets are embedded within the same national, institutional, and geopolitical context. Differences in editorial stance are analytically relevant because they shape how Russia and US–Russia relations are narrativized. By comparing outlets with divergent editorial orientations operating within the same media system the analysis holds the national and geopolitical context constant, allowing discursive differences to be more plausibly attributed to editorial positioning rather than to contextual variation.

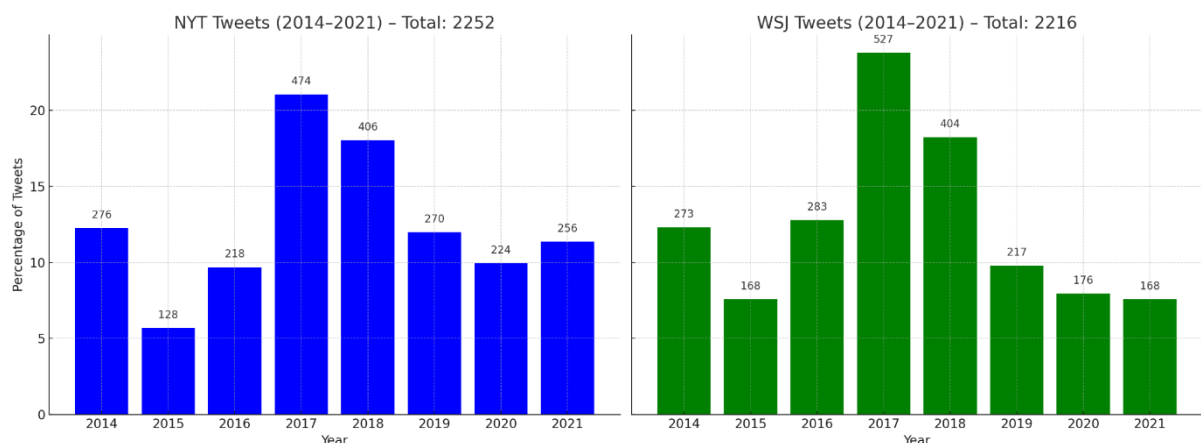
Although both newspapers maintain multiple specialized Twitter accounts, this study focuses on their main accounts (@nytimes and @WSJ), which serve as the primary channels for disseminating curated news content to broad audiences. These accounts reflect the overall editorial positioning of each outlet and offer the widest thematic coverage, including foreign policy. In this context, follower counts are reported only as a supplementary indicator of discursive reach. As of June 2025, @nytimes had approximately 55 million followers and

@WSJ 20.7 million, a factor that increases the likelihood that their journalistic framings gain visibility and circulate widely, thereby triggering user engagement. However, recent research on intermedia agenda-setting suggests that elite legacy outlets such as The NYT and WSJ no longer exert unilateral influence in online news environments, but rather participate in dynamic processes of salience formation, meaning that the perceived importance of news issues emerges through short-term interactions between elite media, other journalistic actors, and audiences in online environments, rather than being set unilaterally by a single outlet (Ritter 2020). While convergence across media tends to occur at the level of broad topical categories, divergence emerges at the level of specific stories and their discursive construction. This makes it analytically necessary to examine not only news tweets themselves, but also how their narratives are taken up, reinterpreted, or resisted by users in the replies – a focus addressed in RQ3.

4.1.1 Corpus design

Data were automatically gathered by using the Twitter API⁴⁴. All news tweets containing the lemma “Russia” were collected⁴⁵ from January 1, 2014, to December 31, 2021, while retweets were discarded. This filtering yielded the following number of tweets, reported in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3. Tweet distribution in @nytimes (left) and @WSJ (right).



⁴⁴ Twitter’s Application Programming Interface (API) enabled the retrieval of tweet content and metadata.

⁴⁵ For the quantitative analysis in RQ2, all variants of the lemma Russian (e.g., Russia, Russian, Russians) were included. By contrast, the qualitative analysis of the present section concentrated specifically on Russia.

Figure 4.3 reveals a broadly similar distribution across the two outlets. Both news organizations maintain comparable levels of tweeting activity over time, with @nytimes posting 2,252 tweets and @WSJ 2,216 – a difference of merely 36 tweets over eight years. Year-by-year comparisons confirm this alignment: in 2014 and 2018, the gap is negligible (3 and 2 tweets, respectively), while in peak years such as 2017, the figures remain close (@nytimes: 474; @WSJ: 527). Although @WSJ shows moderately higher activity in 2015 and 2016 – with differences of 40 and 65 tweets – such deviations are not large enough to suggest a substantial divergence in editorial strategy. This consistency suggests that both broadsheets prioritized coverage of Russia in similar ways during key geopolitical moments.

At the same time, the year-by-year distribution highlights important differences that map closely onto historical developments. Both outlets reached their highest levels of coverage in 2017, coinciding with the intensification of investigations into Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election and the early months of Donald Trump's administration, a period marked by heightened scrutiny of US–Russia relations. The high volume of tweets continued into 2018, a year marked by ongoing developments in the Mueller investigation, escalating tensions in Syria involving Russian forces, and the controversial Trump–Putin Helsinki summit in July, which reignited public and journalistic debate. Notably, 2014 also registers as a year of significant coverage, which aligns with the Russian annexation of Crimea in March and the outbreak of armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine – events that signaled a major shift in post-Cold War international relations (as discussed in Section 1.4).

4.1.2 Protocol for the identification of metaphor-related verbs and nouns

The following section sets out the annotation protocol used to identify metaphorical expressions and to map them at the conceptual level. The procedure combines criteria from both MIP and MIPVU, already described in detail in Section 2.3.1. This protocol was implemented in Excel spreadsheets, where each tweet was entered as a separate row and each annotated lexical unit was recorded in dedicated columns. The structure allowed systematic application of the ten steps, cross-checking of MRWs, and integration with metadata (e.g., date, outlet, retweets). Excel also facilitated filtering, sorting, and exporting the data for subsequent quantitative analysis.

4.1.2.1 The selection of dictionaries

At the core of the MIP and MIPVU protocols is the consultation of dictionaries, which is essential for distinguishing the basic and contextual meanings of lexical units. Since the choice of dictionary can directly affect judgments of metaphoricity, the features of each dictionary employed are briefly outlined here.

This study relied primarily on the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDCE) and the Oxford English Dictionary (OED). In cases of significant ambiguity, the Macmillan Dictionary for Advanced Learners of American English (MD) was also consulted, although its free online service was discontinued as of 1 July 2023, which required the use of the print edition.

The LDCE employs corpus-driven methods to define entries, i.e., meanings are organized according to frequency of occurrence in everyday language, derived from empirical corpus evidence. The OED provides detailed etymological as well as historical information. As a result, researchers can verify whether and how a certain meaning has evolved historically. This aspect supports the robustness of metaphor identification by clarifying the evolution of meanings. Therefore, the LDCE (together with MD) were used to investigate the lexical units' contemporary meanings, and the OED complemented the analysis to check the etymology of meanings, useful to access historicity and potentially more basic meanings, i.e., basic meanings tend to be historically prior ones.

Consulting the print version of MacMillan, though time-consuming, remained necessary to support queries that were under-specified—either because they involved relatively new entries or low-frequency items in dictionaries, or to determine whether certain phrases should be treated as multiword expressions or as single lexical units.

4.1.2.2 Checking words' meanings

Conversion – a morphological process in which a word changes its grammatical category without any overt morphological modification – is highly productive in English. Clear guidelines were therefore needed to ensure consistent identification of meanings.

Following MIPVU (Steen et al. 2010: 35–36), and not MIP, dictionary entries for lexical units are identified according to their part of speeches, i.e. if the lexical unit is a noun, the dictionary is consulted for the meanings related to that part of speech. Exceptions apply only if the lexical unit’s description is limited to one grammatical category; only in that case word class crossing is permitted. However, the consultation of three dictionaries clearly reduces this possibility. For the purposes of this study, only the metaphoricity of nouns and verbs was investigated. Restricting the analysis to these two word classes ensured analytical depth and methodological consistency, while keeping the scope of annotation manageable and comparable with previous studies.

4.1.2.3 Adapting Metaphor Identification for targeted metaphor annotation

MIP and MIPVU were implemented with the aim of identifying metaphorical words in any discourse. In this study, two subsets of metaphor-related words are under investigation, i.e., nouns and verbs used metaphorically to frame Russia and its relations with other (supra)national entities. For this reason, an additional level of analysis – concerning the target domains in terms of CMT– is integrated in Section 4.1.2.3. This additional aspect involving an a-priori selection of the target of interest is necessary to restrict the scope of the investigation and is a common practice in studies involving the use of MIP and MIPVU (Semino et al. 2018: 61). The Protocol for the Identification of Linguistic Metaphors is reported in the following 10 steps.

1. Read the entire tweet text.
2. Identify nouns and verbs as potential Metaphor Related Words (hence MRW) within the tweet; if they are part of multiword expressions, see section 2X.
3. If the identified lexical unit targets the conceptualization of Russia, proceed with 3a; if the identified lexical unit targets the conceptualization of relations between Russia and other

countries/supranational organizations, proceed with 3b. If the conceptualization potentially involves personification, see section 3X for additional explanations.

3a. If the identified lexical unit targets the conceptualization of Russia, proceed with establishing which referent is involved. The following labels are adapted from Markert & Nissim's (2002) annotation scheme for Location Names. These categories disambiguate the different referential functions of the toponym Russia. The following Target concepts are identified for the analysis:

Figure 4.4. Annotation of Russia's metonymic referents.

<i>Label for Targets</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Example</i>
RUSSIA	General or underspecified use of the toponym, referring either to the geographical location or to the state as a whole. Often hard to disentangle (Markert & Nissim, 2002: 1388), so deliberately left unspecified.	<i>Russia's unions are struggling to survive.</i>
RUSSIA (OFF)	Institutional use of the toponym: Russia stands metonymically for its official administration (government, military, state bodies). Includes Moscow as capital-for-government.	<i>Russia Purges Schoolbooks. / Did Moscow tilt the election to Donald Trump?</i>
RUSSIA (ORG)	Refers to sports organizations associated with the location name.	<i>Russia can clinch a spot in the round of 16 with a win.</i>
RUSSIA (POP)	Refers to the population as a whole or in majority.	<i>Fear Envelops Russia After Killing of Putin Critic.</i>

3b. If the lexical unit targets relations (diplomatic, economic, sporting, etc.) between Russia and another actor, annotate only if it fits one of the following categories:

<i>Label for Targets</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Example</i>
RUSSIA & NATION(S) X,Y	Relations between Russia and one or more specific nation-states.	<i>Russia and France are good friends.</i>

RUSSIA & NATO	Relations between Russia and NATO as a supranational organization.	<i>Russia scolds NATO.</i>
RUSSIA & WEST	Relations framed between Russia and “the West” in general, often as a collective actor.	<i>the West needs a new policy to restrain Russia.</i>
RUSSIA & US PRESIDENT	Relations specifically between Russia and the US President as a political actor.	<i>Obama accuses Russia of bullying Ukraine.</i>

4. Identify the contextual meaning of the lexical unit.

– If the context is unclear, check the original news article linked in the tweet⁴⁶ to contextualize the lexical unit’s meaning

– If the lexical unit is a Multiword Expression, see Section 4X

5. Check if there is a more basic meaning of the lexical unit. As the Pragglejaz group states, “basic meanings tend to be

–More concrete; what they evoke is easier to imagine, see, hear, feel, smell, and taste.

–Related to bodily action

–More precise (as opposed to vague)

–Historically older.

Basic meanings are not necessarily the most frequent meanings of the lexical unit” (Pragglejaz 2007: 3).

6. If there is a more basic meaning, move on to point 7; if not, move on to 9.

7. Determine whether the contextual meaning of the lexical unit can be related to the more basic meaning by some form of similarity.

⁴⁶ The related URL is always cited in tweets published by the selected news outlets’ accounts.

- If a lexical unit's contextual meaning is general and abstract, appearing as a vague, bleached version of a more specific and concrete sense, it should be marked as metaphorical if the senses clearly differ yet share some similarity.
- Do not confuse similarity with class-inclusion. For example:
 - cases like *appeal* (specific legal vs. general abstract meaning) illustrate class-inclusion, not metaphor;
 - whereas *palliate* shows metaphorical similarity from concrete (physical pain relief) to abstract (general relief); metaphorical
 - When similarity between abstract and concrete senses is unclear, consult the OED to clarify historical relations, which may justify treating both senses as equally basic (Steen et al 2010: 37–38)]

8. If similarity is established, mark the lexical unit as **INDIRECT METAPHOR**

9. If the lexical unit is used directly and its use may potentially be explained by some form of cross-domain mapping to a more basic referent or topic in the text (Steen et al 2010: 26), apply the following tests:

- (a) Detect referent or topic shifts through lexical incongruity – words that seem out of place in the context
- (b) Check for integration through comparison, looking for lexical cues that signal similarity or projection
- (c) Assess whether the comparison is cross-domain, meaning the two concepts belong to distinct semantic fields
- (d) Determine whether this comparison functions as indirect discourse about the main topic, making it possible to sketch a metaphorical mapping between source and target domains (Steen et al 2010: 38–39)

If the findings are positive, mark the lexical unit as **DIRECT METAPHOR**

10. Mark the metaphor as **ASCRIBED**, if the lexical unit is part of a reported or quoted speech. Both direct quotation and reported speech are considered:

- “Russia is *poisoning* our democracy,” said Senator X. → poisoning is marked as **ASCRIBED**, since the metaphor belongs to the speaker, not the journalist.

- According to U.S. officials, Russia is *strangling* Europe's energy security. → strangling is also marked as ASCRIBED, because it is attributed to a source rather than the journalist's own wording.

4.1.2.4 Appendix to Steps 2,3, and 4 of the annotation protocol

2X. The identification of lexical units for analysis.

In line with MIP and MIPVU, metaphoricity is identified on a word-by-word basis. This study focuses on verbs and nouns, though they can also occur inside multiword expressions (MWEs). Since dictionary lookup depends on lexical unit identification, decisions about MWEs directly affect metaphoricity judgments.

Three main exceptions are considered: (a) Phrasal verbs (b) Proper names (c) Fixed multiword expressions: Compounds, Collocations, Idiomatic expressions (See section 4x for contextual meanings of MWEs).

(a) Phrasal verbs

MIPVU treats PVs as single lexical units, as they represent one action, process, state, or relation. Problem: dictionaries are inconsistent (phrasal vs prepositional verbs often overlap).

Decision rule: if 2 out of 3 dictionaries (LDCE, OED, Macmillan) code a verb + particle(s) as a PV, it is treated as one unit.

(b) Proper Names

MIPVU suggests using stress patterns (if stress falls on the second word → separate units). However, this is often counterintuitive, as proper names are semantically unified.

Decision: treat proper names as single lexical units, regardless of stress.

(c) Fixed Multiword Expressions

Fixed Multiword Expressions include Compounds, Collocations, and Idiomatic expressions – Decision: If the Fixed Multiword expressions are coded in 2 out of 3 dictionaries, they are considered as single lexical units.

3X. Potential metaphoricity in personification patterns.

Following Tan (2023), “weak” and “evident” personification are distinguished. Only the latter is annotated as metaphorical. *Evident* personification occurs when the dictionary definition of a lexical unit clearly involves a human referent as its subject or object, or unambiguously attributes human traits to a nonhuman entity (Tan 2023: 163).

If the referent is clearly human, and the attributed action is typical of that agent, then the expression is not metaphorical. For instance,

- *Breaking News: Russia said its troops were patrolling in northern Syria*

Russia clearly refers metonymically to the national government—more specifically, the military leadership. The verb *said* is therefore interpreted literally, as speech is a natural action of a human institution, and no metaphorical personification is involved. A contrasting case appears in the following:

- *Russia cannot be allowed to get away with this continued bullying of Ukraine*

Here, the metonymic referent of Russia remains the same – state actors or political leadership – but the verb “bullying” introduces a different conceptual structure, a mapping in which a human social behavior, i.e., *to threaten to hurt someone or frighten them, especially someone smaller or weaker* (LDCE) – beyond the literal communicative or military acts state policy makers can perform – is attributed to a collective entity. In other words, *bullying* is not used literally, since state policy makers do not literally engage in physical abuse.

4X. Checking contextual meanings for Fixed Multiword expressions (FME)

The governing principle for the identification of metaphoricity for FME draws on Tan’s refinement of the method. Following Cameron and Maslen’s (2010) metaphor identification

method, Tan (2023: 145) argues that components of Multiword Expressions “[...] are still metaphorical when their vivid physical imagery and concrete senses are easily noticed by annotators”. This implies that even when a FME is treated as a single lexical unit for the purposes of metaphor identification (as discussed in 2X), it is still necessary to examine whether any component within the expression retains a metaphorical potential grounded in its more basic, physical or concrete meaning. If so, the expression may be considered metaphorical despite its lexicalization in the dictionaries. Let us consider FME separately, i.e., Compounds, Collocations and Idiomatic Expressions.

(a) Compounds

Compounds can be written – and therefore lexicalized in dictionaries – in three ways: as one word, as two hyphenated words, or as two separate words. Steen et al (2010: 30) suggest solving the question of compound separation by checking stress patterns in dictionaries. According to this approach, the compound is formed by one lexical unit if the primary accent falls on the first word, while by two separate lexical units if the primary accent falls on the second word. To exemplify, *arms race* would be considered one lexical unit. This aspect has an impact on the identification of metaphoricity, as the coder would have to check dictionary entries by looking at the meanings of it as a single lexical unit, whose *Arms race* is coded in OED and has the following entries.

1. *Competition between nations, regimes, etc., in the accumulation, development, or testing of weapons, esp. nuclear weapons.*
2. *In extended use: any competitive process which escalates as those involved develop increasingly sophisticated adaptations, equipment, knowledge, etc.*

LDOCE has one entry:

1. *the competition between different countries to have a larger number of powerful weapons*

If MIPVU is strictly applied, the expression *arms race* – whose 2 entries in OED are not sufficiently distinct and therefore its basic meaning coincides with the basic meaning in the dictionary entry – would be considered literally used. The metaphoricity potential of the word *race* – given by the contrast of its basic meaning, i.e., compete to run vs. contextual, i.e., compete for power (LDOCE) – is therefore lost. For this reason, compound metaphoricity is analyzed by separating their constituents.

(b) Collocations

Given the focus on nouns and verbs, the collocations of interest are the verb + noun collocations. Let us consider the verb + noun collocation “reach an agreement”. The verb “reach” maintains an active metaphorical grounding, as it evokes a spatial dimension. Here, the negotiation process is conceptually framed as movement towards a goal or destination, indicating that the metaphor remains salient and cognitively accessible (Gibbs, 1994; Steen, 2015) and “reach” is considered a MRW.

(c) Idiomatic expressions

When an idiomatic construction is lexicalized in the dictionary, it often has only one meaning, and the literal one may not be listed. In such cases, the following procedure is applied:

If the literal meaning can still be deduced and a contrast between literal and contextual meaning is noticeable, the expression is tagged as METAPHORICAL-IDIOMATIC. For example, compare “take a hard line” and “take a back seat”: “in take” a hard line, the figurative meaning is fully lexicalized; the imagery is opaque and the physical sense of line is no longer salient or easily retrievable. In “take a back seat”, by contrast, the spatial mapping remains vivid. The phrase still evokes a concrete image of sitting behind someone (e.g., in a car), making the physical source domain accessible. In summary: only the idiomatic expressions in which the basic mapping remains recoverable are annotated.

4.1.3 Guidelines for the identification of conceptual source domains

As discussed in Section 2.3, the process of systematically identifying conceptual domains remains a contentious issue, with considerable variation across studies and a susceptibility to subjective interpretation. Considering these challenges, the mapping of domains is presented as a set of guidelines rather than a rigid protocol, thereby acknowledging the interpretive flexibility required.

1. Use of MetaNet.

The first step is to consult the MetaNet repository (Sweetser et al. 2019), which provides a standardized reference for mapping conceptual domains. Whenever a domain listed in MetaNet is activated by a metaphor-related word (MRW), the label is recorded systematically both in the Excel spreadsheet and in a separate list. This dual recording ensures traceability and supports the later grouping of metaphorical patterns.

2. Introducing new Sources.

Since MetaNet does not capture all possible metaphorical mappings, new semantic labels are created whenever a MRW activates a frame not represented in the repository. In such cases, the principle is to stay as close as possible to the original lexical item in context, avoiding overgeneralization. As Cameron et al. (2014: 29) suggest, the label should generalize participants' language "only to the extent necessary to encompass related expressions." This ensures that the metaphor analysis retains both lexical specificity and contextual relevance.

3. From domains to scenarios.

Conceptual domains should be understood as broad macro-categories that require further unpacking through the analysis of metaphor scenarios. Following Musolff's (2006, 2016) approach, domains should be unpacked through the analysis of ad hoc metaphor scenarios. Once domain identification is complete, the analyst then groups instances into more fine-grained subcategories, i.e., metaphor scenarios. Once the broad domain is identified, it is essential to reconstruct the scenario evoked in a given context, e.g., who is framed as the aggressor, the victim, or the legitimate authority in a WAR metaphor. Only then can instances be meaningfully grouped into fine-grained subcategories that reflect their evaluative and ideological function.

4. Semantic convergence.

Semantic convergence of more than one MRW in the co-text can assist in narrowing down the range of possible source domains when annotating metaphorical mappings. The process involves analyzing surrounding lexical items to ensure logical coherence and domain unity between source and target. For instance, the presence of the term "play" alongside "competitors" prompts the interpretation of competition in terms of SPORTS or GAME, yielding the mapping TRADE IS SPORTS/GAME (Tan 2023: 163–164).

5. Handling mixed metaphors.

MRWs can often activate multiple conceptual frames simultaneously, resulting in what is commonly referred to as mixed metaphors. A mapping is typically not annotated if it extends beyond the established target concepts. For example, in “U.S. Nuclear Deal With Russia Is Derailed as Tensions Rise,” the phrase “tensions rise” draws on PHYSICAL FORCE and links to the primary metaphor MORE IS UP. Since both expressions contribute to the same idea of intensifying conflict, the mapping remains within a single domain. By contrast, in “The U.S. has balked at providing lethal aid to Ukraine, wary of inflaming tensions with Russia,” the phrase “inflaming tensions” activates the FIRE domain, which diverges from the FORCE metaphor typically associated with tensions. Here, the mapping is coded as layered, combining FIRE and PHYSICAL FORCE.

4.2 Data Collection for RQ2

News tweets were collected automatically from the main Twitter accounts of the New York Times (@nytimes), Wall Street Journal (@WSJ), New York Post (@nypost) and New York Daily News (@NYDailyNews) by using the Twitter API and a custom Python script as defined in Section 4.1.1. All tweets containing the terms “Russian” and “Russians” were collected from January 1, 2014, to December 31, 2021, and combined with those already retrieved using the query “Russia”, which had been previously gathered for the qualitative analysis. During data collection for this second study, tweets matching the “Russia” query were filtered out to avoid exact duplicates—that is, if a tweet containing “Russian” or “Russians” also included the word “Russia”, it was excluded, given it had already been collected.

For the purposes of RQ2, news tweets including “US”, “U.S”, “American”, “America”, and “White House” were filtered for the analysis. This lexical filtering aimed to narrow the focus to tweets where the Russia-related content was explicitly framed in relation to the United States.

The resulting datasets are divided into two sub-corpora: broadsheet (NYT + WSJ, 41,775 tokens) and tabloid (NYP + NYDN, 12,477 tokens). The size difference is unsurprising: broadsheets tend to cover foreign policy more extensively, whereas tabloids often prioritize

sensationalist topics. This imbalance was corrected through Wmatrix's data normalization procedures⁴⁷.

4.2.1 Corpus design

The two sub-datasets – broadsheet and tabloid – were uploaded in .txt format to Wmatrix, which provided a Part of Speech and Semantic Tagging for each lexical unit. The datasets with the two annotations were downloaded in a .csv format and analyzed in Excel, as shown in Figure 4.5.

The UCREL Semantic Annotation System (USAS) introduced in Section 2.3.2 is organized into a three-level hierarchical taxonomy designed to categorize lexical items according to their semantic properties. At the top level, broad semantic fields are represented by a single uppercase letter (e.g., G for Government and Politics). The second level refines these categories with a number (e.g., G3 for Warfare, Defense, and the Army), offering more specific subdomains. The third level, indicated by an additional number or decimal (e.g., G3.1), allows for finer-grained distinctions. USAS tags may include special symbols to signal semantic ambiguity or extension: a slash (/) indicates that the item may belong to multiple domains; Plus (+) and Minus (-) denote positive or negative connotations or positions on a semantic scale.

Figure 4.5 provides a sample of this annotation system. Each token in the dataset is assigned a POS tag based on the CLAWS⁴⁸ conventions – for example, NP1 for singular proper nouns, NN1 for singular common nouns, and VVG for present participle verbs – together with one or more USAS semantic labels. These labels enable a fine-grained classification of lexical meaning: for instance, Z8 designates proper nouns (e.g., U.S.), G1.1c refers to government and politics (e.g., government), S2mf captures human referents, male and female (e.g., officials),

⁴⁷ Wmatrix automatically normalizes frequency data when comparing corpora of different sizes. Its statistical measures (discussed below) account for differences in corpus length by calculating expected frequencies proportionally. As a result, keywords and semantic domains identified as key are not simply more frequent in absolute terms but are statistically overrepresented relative to corpus size, thus allowing for meaningful comparison across sub-datasets (Rayson 2008).

⁴⁸ CLAWS (Constituent Likelihood Automatic Word-tagging System) is a part-of-speech tagger developed at Lancaster University (Garside and Smith 1997). <http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/claws/>

and Q2.2 denotes speech acts (e.g., acknowledge). This dual tagging system thus provides both grammatical and semantic information.

Figure 4.5. Screenshot of POS tagging (left) – token (center) – Semantic USAS tagging (right).

NP1	U.S.	Z8		
NN1	government	G1.1c		
NN2	officials	G1.1/S2mf S7.1+/S2mf		
VH0	have	S6+ j6.2.1 A9+ Z5 A2.2 S4		
RR	yet	T1.1.2		
TO	to	S6+ j6.2.2 Z5		
VVI	acknowledge	Q2.2		
DDQ	what	Z8 Z5		
AT	the	Z5		
NN2	Russians	Z2/S2mf		
VBDR	were	Z5 A3+		
VVG	seeking	X2.4		
CC	or	Z5		
DDQ	what	Z8 Z5		
PPHS2	they	Z8mfn		
VVD	stole	G2.1-/A9+		
II	in	Z5		
AT	the	Z5		
RR	recently	T3---		
VVN	detected	A10+		

4.2.2 Identification of potential source domain candidates

Having defined US–Russia relations as the target domain of interest, this study proposes a systematic rationale for selecting USAS semantic labels to identify potential source domain candidates in the two sub-datasets. Selection is guided by three complementary criteria, i.e., statistical salience, theoretical relevance, and semantic coverage. This approach aligns with existing research that integrates corpus linguistic techniques with conceptual metaphor theory, where statistically significant semantic tags have been used to detect potential source domains related to metaphorical patterns (e.g., Koller et al 2008; Semino et al 2009; Semino et al. 2018). Every criterion is further explained in the following paragraph.

First, statistical salience: specific labels are chosen because they rank as key ($p < .01$, log-likelihood > 6.63) in both sub-datasets. The Wmatrix function Key Semantic Domains (KSD) allows for the identification of overused semantic domains in a target corpus compared to a reference corpus. The target sub-datasets, i.e., broadsheet and tabloid respectively, were

compared to the Reference Corpus American English 06. Log-likelihood values establish whether a difference between corpora is statistically significant, i.e., unlikely to be due to chance. However, significance alone does not guarantee that the difference is substantial in practical terms. For this reason, effect size was also considered through the LogRatio statistic provided by Wmatrix.

LogRatio measures the magnitude of difference between corpora in terms of frequency, expressed on a log base-2 scale (Hardie 2014). Each increase of 1.0 corresponds to a doubling of relative frequency: a LogRatio of +1.0 means an item is twice as frequent in the target corpus than in the reference corpus; +2.0 indicates a four-fold difference; +3.0 an eight-fold difference, and so on. Negative values indicate the same proportionality in the opposite direction, with the item being more frequent in the reference corpus. Unlike log-likelihood, which can highlight statistically significant but trivially small differences in large corpora, LogRatio provides a direct measure of effect size, ensuring that the selected items are not only significant but also meaningfully overrepresented. In this study, a LogRatio threshold of ± 1.0 was applied, so that only semantic domains at least twice as frequent in the target corpus compared to the reference corpus were retained.

Figures 4.6 and 4.7 show the output of Wmatrix Key Semantic domains in broadsheet and tabloid, respectively. Each row represents a semantic domain identified by the UCREL Semantic Annotation System (USAS), with the following information: the observed frequency in the target corpus (O1) and its percentage (%1), the observed frequency in the reference corpus (O2) and its percentage (%2), the log-likelihood (LL) statistic, the LogRatio value, and a descriptive label of the domain.

The second selection criterion for selecting semantic labels is theoretical relevance: semantic labels are retained when they correspond to well-established conceptual source domains (Koller et al. 2008). Among the key labels shown in Figures X and Y, Warfare (G3/G3-), Violence (E3-), Sports competition (K5.1), Trying Hard (i.e., Effort/force X8+), Hindering (S8-), and Movement (M4/M5) were selected – which, as they are key in both sub-datasets and identified in literature as highly productive source domains for metaphorical mapping (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Kövecses 2002, 2010; Morgan 2008).

Third, semantic coverage: the selected labels span six distinct USAS macro-classes (G, E, K, X, S, M), thus ensuring that the analysis draws on a wide range of experiential frames and does not privilege a single domain of human experience⁴⁹.

Figure 4.6. Screenshot of Wmatrix Key Semantic Domains in the Broadsheet sub-dataset.

			Item	O1	%1	O2	%2	LL	LogRatio	
1	List1	Broad-list	Concordance Z9	3873	9.27	0	0.00 +	26754.33	17.86	Trash can
2	List1	Broad-list	Concordance Z2	3266	7.82	10904	0.85 +	7962.20	3.20	Geographical names
3	List1	Broad-list	Concordance N1	1728	4.14	11936	0.93 +	2329.95	2.15	Numbers
4	List1	Broad-list	Concordance G1.1	830	1.99	3993	0.31 +	1560.84	2.67	Government
5	List1	Broad-list	Concordance S7.4	175	0.42	15	0.00 +	1104.90	8.48	Permission
6	List1	Broad-list	Concordance S1.1.3+++	119	0.28	35	0.00 +	659.21	6.70	Participating
7	List1	Broad-list	Concordance G3	434	1.04	2891	0.23 +	607.70	2.20	Warfare, defence and the army; weapons
8	List1	Broad-list	Concordance G1.2	355	0.85	2562	0.20 +	456.62	2.09	Politics
9	List1	Broad-list	Concordance E3-	259	0.62	2214	0.17 +	272.76	1.84	Violent/Angry
10	List1	Broad-list	Concordance Z3	355	0.85	3795	0.30 +	271.75	1.52	Other proper names
11	List1	Broad-list	Concordance Z1	823	1.97	13664	1.07 +	244.14	0.88	Personal names
12	List1	Broad-list	Concordance Q2.1	591	1.41	8870	0.69 +	230.47	1.03	Speech: Communicative
13	List1	Broad-list	Concordance X8+	143	0.34	1368	0.11 +	129.43	1.68	Trying hard
14	List1	Broad-list	Concordance X9.1+	113	0.27	979	0.08 +	116.97	1.82	Able/intelligent
15	List1	Broad-list	Concordance X7+	299	0.72	4795	0.37 +	97.95	0.93	Wanted
16	List1	Broad-list	Concordance S7.1+	361	0.86	6200	0.48 +	96.60	0.83	In power
17	List1	Broad-list	Concordance Q2.2	540	1.29	10410	0.81 +	96.03	0.67	Speech acts
18	List1	Broad-list	Concordance Y2	137	0.33	1557	0.12 +	94.76	1.43	Information technology and computing
19	List1	Broad-list	Concordance G2.1	231	0.55	3477	0.27 +	89.43	1.02	Law and order
20	List1	Broad-list	Concordance X2.4	194	0.46	2724	0.21 +	88.59	1.13	Investigate, examine, test, search
21	List1	Broad-list	Concordance S8+	247	0.59	3858	0.30 +	86.92	0.97	Helping
22	List1	Broad-list	Concordance G3-	23	0.06	41	0.00 +	77.93	4.10	Anti-war
23	List1	Broad-list	Concordance M5	82	0.20	761	0.06 +	77.44	1.72	Flying and aircraft
24	List1	Broad-list	Concordance I2.1	139	0.33	1926	0.15 +	65.38	1.14	Business: Generally
25	List1	Broad-list	Concordance K5.1	110	0.26	1393	0.11 +	62.40	1.27	Sports
26	List1	Broad-list	Concordance S8-	92	0.22	1063	0.08 +	61.84	1.41	Hindering
27	List1	Broad-list	Concordance Z5	10395	24.88	294140	22.99 +	61.30	0.11	Grammatical bin
28	List1	Broad-list	Concordance G2.1-	84	0.20	1009	0.08 +	52.67	1.35	Crime
29	List1	Broad-list	Concordance T3-	153	0.37	2503	0.20 +	47.38	0.90	Time: New and young
30	List1	Broad-list	Concordance S7.3+	30	0.07	205	0.02 +	40.91	2.16	Competitive
31	List1	Broad-list	Concordance A1.1.2	88	0.21	1230	0.10 +	40.60	1.13	Damaging and destroying
32	List1	Broad-list	Concordance T2-	111	0.27	1721	0.13 +	39.83	0.98	Time: Ending
33	List1	Broad-list	Concordance S7.4-	29	0.07	218	0.02 +	35.64	2.03	Not allowed
34	List1	Broad-list	Concordance A5.2-	41	0.10	467	0.04 +	28.25	1.43	Evaluation: False
35	List1	Broad-list	Concordance E6-	72	0.17	1079	0.08 +	28.18	1.03	Worry
36	List1	Broad-list	Concordance S1.1.3+	55	0.13	745	0.06 +	27.18	1.18	Participating
37	List1	Broad-list	Concordance O1.3	36	0.09	401	0.03 +	25.76	1.46	Substances and materials: Gas
38	List1	Broad-list	Concordance A11.1+	135	0.32	2602	0.20 +	24.03	0.67	Important
39	List1	Broad-list	Concordance I2.2	140	0.34	2741	0.21 +	23.38	0.65	Business: Selling
40	List1	Broad-list	Concordance S5+	236	0.56	5170	0.40 +	22.92	0.48	Belonging to a group
41	List1	Broad-list	Concordance S3.1	77	0.18	1312	0.10 +	21.12	0.85	Personal relationship: General
42	List1	Broad-list	Concordance A10-	87	0.21	1589	0.12 +	18.96	0.75	Closed; Hiding/Hidden
43	List1	Broad-list	Concordance X2.2+	190	0.45	4147	0.32 +	18.84	0.49	Knowledgeable
44	List1	Broad-list	Concordance I1.3	62	0.15	1035	0.08 +	18.10	0.88	Money: Cost and price
45	List1	Broad-list	Concordance T4-	24	0.06	265	0.02 +	17.43	1.47	Time: Late
46	List1	Broad-list	Concordance N3.5	27	0.06	323	0.03 +	17.06	1.36	Measurement: Weight
47	List1	Broad-list	Concordance I3.1-	22	0.05	236	0.02 +	16.75	1.51	Unemployed
48	List1	Broad-list	Concordance Y1	80	0.19	1497	0.12 +	15.96	0.71	Science and technology in general
49	List1	Broad-list	Concordance M4	54	0.13	907	0.07 +	15.47	0.87	Sailing, swimming, etc.
50	List1	Broad-list	Concordance Q1.3	36	0.09	536	0.04 +	14.32	1.04	Telecommunications
51	List1	Broad-list	Concordance N3.2+++	25	0.06	319	0.02 +	13.97	1.26	Size: Big
52	List1	Broad-list	Concordance A1.9	25	0.06	325	0.03 +	13.46	1.24	Avoiding
53	List1	Broad-list	Concordance A11.1-	20	0.05	270	0.02 +	9.96	1.18	Unimportant
54	List1	Broad-list	Concordance A2.2	214	0.51	5278	0.41 +	9.03	0.31	Cause&Effect/Connection
55	List1	Broad-list	Concordance N3.2+	69	0.17	1430	0.11 +	8.94	0.56	Size: Big
56	List1	Broad-list	Concordance T3---	22	0.05	327	0.03 +	8.79	1.04	Time: New and young
57	List1	Broad-list	Concordance S7.1++	9	0.02	84	0.01 +	8.43	1.71	In power
58	List1	Broad-list	Concordance I3.2	16	0.04	222	0.02 +	7.50	1.14	Work and employment: Professionalism
59	List1	Broad-list	Concordance I2	2	0.00	3	0.00 +	7.28	4.35	Business
60	List1	Broad-list	Concordance O1.2	44	0.11	869	0.07 +	7.08	0.63	Substances and materials: Liquid

⁴⁹ Although additional USAS labels attain statistical keyness in one or the other sub-dataset, they have been excluded from core selection for two reasons: they either fail to function as metaphor source domains in cognitive linguistic theory or do not emerge as key overrepresented categories in both sub-corpora. Future work may extend this framework by systematically testing additional key labels within more narrowly defined contexts.

Figure 4.7. Screenshot of Wmatrix Key Semantic Domains in the Tabloid sub-dataset.

			Item	O1	K1	O2	K2	LL	LogRatio	
1	List1	Broad-list	Concordance Z9	1294	10.37	0	0.00 +	12088.16	18.02	Trash can
2	List1	Broad-list	Concordance Z2	1007	8.07	10904	0.85 +	2654.57	3.24	Geographical names
3	List1	Broad-list	Concordance N1	579	4.64	11936	0.93 +	914.97	2.31	Numbers
4	List1	Broad-list	Concordance G1.1	242	1.94	3993	0.31 +	468.03	2.64	Government
5	List1	Broad-list	Concordance S7.4	48	0.38	15	0.00 +	376.57	8.36	Permission
6	List1	Broad-list	Concordance S1.1.3+++	48	0.38	35	0.00 +	333.10	7.14	Participating
7	List1	Broad-list	Concordance G3	163	1.31	2891	0.23 +	296.27	2.53	Warfare, defence and the army; weapons
8	List1	Broad-list	Concordance Z1	359	2.88	13664	1.07 +	256.41	1.43	Personal names
9	List1	Broad-list	Concordance Z3	139	1.11	3795	0.30 +	161.20	1.91	Other proper names
10	List1	Broad-list	Concordance G1.2	111	0.89	2562	0.20 +	156.19	2.15	Politics
11	List1	Broad-list	Concordance E3-	97	0.78	2214	0.17 +	138.13	2.17	Violent/Angry
12	List1	Broad-list	Concordance M5	57	0.46	761	0.06 +	130.12	2.94	Flying and aircraft
13	List1	Broad-list	Concordance Q2.2	236	1.89	10410	0.81 +	127.49	1.22	Speech acts
14	List1	Broad-list	Concordance Q2.1	179	1.43	8870	0.69 +	74.39	1.05	Speech: Communicative
15	List1	Broad-list	Concordance G2.1-	45	0.36	1009	0.08 +	65.30	2.19	Crime
16	List1	Broad-list	Concordance G2.1	87	0.70	3477	0.27 +	56.97	1.36	Law and order
17	List1	Broad-list	Concordance X2.2+	87	0.70	4147	0.32 +	39.66	1.11	Knowledgeable
18	List1	Broad-list	Concordance M4	33	0.26	907	0.07 +	37.95	1.90	Sailing, swimming, etc.
19	List1	Broad-list	Concordance Y2	42	0.34	1557	0.12 +	31.37	1.47	Information technology and computing
20	List1	Broad-list	Concordance Y1	40	0.32	1497	0.12 +	29.41	1.45	Science and technology in general
21	List1	Broad-list	Concordance S8-	32	0.26	1063	0.08 +	28.44	1.63	Hindering
22	List1	Broad-list	Concordance T2-	42	0.34	1721	0.13 +	26.25	1.32	Time: Ending
23	List1	Broad-list	Concordance L1-	34	0.27	1365	0.11 +	22.08	1.35	Dead
24	List1	Broad-list	Concordance K5.1	33	0.26	1393	0.11 +	19.48	1.28	Sports
25	List1	Broad-list	Concordance A8	35	0.28	1632	0.13 +	16.77	1.14	Seem
26	List1	Broad-list	Concordance X9.1+	24	0.19	979	0.08 +	15.13	1.33	Able/intelligent
27	List1	Broad-list	Concordance X8+	30	0.24	1368	0.11 +	15.10	1.17	Trying hard
28	List1	Broad-list	Concordance S7.1++	6	0.05	84	0.01 +	13.22	2.87	In power
29	List1	Broad-list	Concordance T1.1.3	57	0.46	3485	0.27 +	12.77	0.75	Time: Future
30	List1	Broad-list	Concordance G2.1+	8	0.06	185	0.01 +	11.23	2.15	Lawful
31	List1	Broad-list	Concordance I3.1-	9	0.07	236	0.02 +	10.96	1.97	Unemployed
32	List1	Broad-list	Concordance S1.1.2+	17	0.14	699	0.05 +	10.56	1.32	Reciprocal
33	List1	Broad-list	Concordance A10-	30	0.24	1580	0.12 +	10.50	0.95	Closed; Hiding/Hidden
34	List1	Broad-list	Concordance A15-	14	0.11	527	0.04 +	10.19	1.45	Danger
35	List1	Broad-list	Concordance S8+	58	0.46	3858	0.30 +	9.35	0.62	Helping
36	List1	Broad-list	Concordance S6++	1	0.01	0	0.00 +	9.28	7.68	Strong obligation or necessity
37	List1	Broad-list	Concordance X7+	69	0.55	4795	0.37 +	9.11	0.56	Wanted
38	List1	Broad-list	Concordance S3.1	25	0.20	1312	0.10 +	8.97	0.97	Personal relationship: General
39	List1	Broad-list	Concordance X7-	9	0.07	292	0.02 +	8.28	1.66	Unwanted
40	List1	Broad-list	Concordance T3-	40	0.32	2503	0.20 +	8.23	0.71	Time: New and young
41	List1	Broad-list	Concordance S1.1.3+	16	0.13	745	0.06 +	7.69	1.14	Participating
42	List1	Broad-list	Concordance W1	21	0.17	1108	0.09 +	7.43	0.96	The universe
43	List1	Broad-list	Concordance S7.1+	83	0.67	6200	0.48 +	7.43	0.46	In power
44	List1	Broad-list	Concordance A5.4-	8	0.06	268	0.02 +	7.02	1.61	Evaluation: Unauthentic
45	List1	Broad-list	Concordance G3-	3	0.02	41	0.00 +	6.73	2.91	Anti-war
46	List1	Broad-list	Concordance X2.4	41	0.33	2724	0.21 +	6.64	0.63	Investigate, examine, test, search

4.2.3 Identification of metaphorically used lexical units and metaphor scenarios

Manual concordance analysis was then implemented to assess the metaphoricality of each selected Key Semantic Domain (KSD). Each lexical unit associated with one of the eight key labels – Warfare (G3/G3-), Violence (E3-), Sports competition (K5.1), Trying Hard (i.e., Effort/force X8+), Hindering (S8-), and Movement (M4/M5) – among its semantic tags was examined as a potential metaphorical expression. Only nouns and verbs were considered for the identification of metaphorically used words, and the co-text of +15 -15 vertical window span (shown in Table 4.5) was considered to understand the surrounding context of the word.

Metaphoricity was not assessed in general terms but specifically with respect to the target domain of US–Russia relations. This encompasses relations between the two nations in five dimensions: (1) economic ties, (2) diplomatic initiatives, (3) cybersecurity, (4) sports events,

and (5) presidential relations. This procedure operationalizes the target domain “US–Russia relations” as a multi-dimensional macro-frame. Accordingly, lexical items were annotated as metaphorical only when they mapped a source domain (e.g., warfare, sport, motion) onto one of these five dimensions.

In order to identify metaphorically used words, the adjusted version of the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit (Steen et al. 2010) defined in Section 4.1.2 was adopted for the annotation. Once metaphorically used lexical units were identified, each instance was further analyzed for its underlying metaphor scenario, following the framework proposed by Musolff (2006) and discussed in Section 4.1.3.

4.3 Data Collection for RQ3

Direct replies to news tweets were collected using Exportcomments.com⁵⁰. Replies to replies and retweets were excluded in order to focus exclusively on first-level interactions with the original news tweets. Only replies to tweets identified as metaphorical in RQ1 and RQ2 were retained. To protect user privacy, all usernames were anonymized. In addition to textual replies, the tool also enabled the collection of images attached to replies, which were considered in the analysis of multimodal discourse.

4.3.1 Corpus design

The dataset for RQ3 consists of direct replies to metaphorical news tweets, collected via Exportcomments.com. For RQ3.1, the analysis focuses on broadsheet outlets only: 172 replies to six conversation threads from @nytimes and @WSJ were collected. For RQ3.2, the dataset includes both broadsheets and tabloids: 167 replies to six conversation threads distributed across @nytimes, @WSJ, @nypost, and @NYDailyNews.

⁵⁰ Exportcomments.com is a web-scraping tool designed to extract comments and replies from social media platforms. It allows researchers to download textual data and metadata (e.g., timestamps), in structured formats such as Excel files. <https://exportcomments.com/>

All replies are first-level responses to metaphorical news tweets identified in RQ1 and RQ2, while retweets and replies to replies were excluded. Non-English content and duplicates were removed.

4.3.2 Identification protocol for metaphor in replies

The same identification procedure (MIPVU, discussed in Section 4.1.2) was used for identifying metaphoricity in users' textual replies. However, two other aspects have to be considered for the annotation of direct replies, i.e., (i) the annotation of potential transformations of the original news metaphor or entirely new metaphorical expressions elicited by users (in 4.3.1.1), and (ii) the analysis of multimodal metaphors, where meaning is conveyed through text, images or other semiotic resources embedded in the reply (in 4.3.1.2).

4.3.2.1 Annotation of Transformations and New Metaphors

To systematically annotate potential reuses or reframes of the news tweets' metaphors, the study partially draws on metaphor transformation typologies firstly outlined in Burgers et al. (2019) and subsequently developed in a fine-grained procedure by van Poppel and Pilgram (2024). The following types of interaction with the metaphors produced by news tweets are analyzed: (a) Metaphor extension, where the original source-target mapping is retained but further elaborated; (b) Metaphor recontextualization, in which the original metaphor's target domain is altered; and (c) Metaphor reframing, involving a change in the original metaphor's source domain, resulting in a new metaphorical framing.

The procedure for the identification of metaphor-related words in direct replies is reported in the following steps.

1. Identify Metaphor Related Words (MRW) – restricted to verbs and nouns – according to the adapted MIPVU procedure described in Section 4.1.2.

2. If the MRWs are related to the source domain of the original news-tweet metaphor, determine whether they constitute an extension (2a).
→ If the MRWs indicate a transformation of domains, proceed to step 3. If they are unrelated to the original target or source, proceed to step 4.
3. If the reply involves a transformation:
 - 3a. Same source domain, different target → annotate as recontextualization.
 - 3b. Same target domain, different source → annotate as reframing.→ In all cases (2a, 3a, 3b), establish the underlying metaphor scenario(s).
4. If the MRWs introduce domains not linked to the original metaphor, identify and annotate the new metaphor scenario(s).

Note: Twitter replies often reference culturally specific events, figures, or narratives. As a result, metaphoricity may depend on contextual or background knowledge. In such cases, the coder was instructed to supplement interpretation by consulting external resources. Where context was unclear, ChatGPT was used with the following standardized prompt:

“Provide the context of this post, which is a reply to the following news tweet [insert News Tweet content], and include hyperlink sources to justify and verify your answer.”

This step proved fundamental to the annotation process. ChatGPT was not treated as an interpretive authority but as a tool to redirect the researcher to relevant sources (e.g., news articles, opinion pieces, academic papers, or official statements) that clarified the background knowledge implicitly assumed in the replies. In doing so, the procedure replicated, as closely as possible, the interpretive resources available to a native US Twitter user, while maintaining a transparent and verifiable research trail.

4.3.2.2 Analysis of Multimodal Metaphors

Many replies included images or multimodal elements, raising the question of how to identify non-verbal metaphors. At first glance, it might seem appropriate to adopt the Visual Metaphor Identification Procedure (VISMIP; Šorm & Steen, 2018), being an extension of the MIPVU protocol. However, as discussed in Section 2.3.4, Forceville (2024) highlights several limitations of VISMIP for online discourse. In particular, its reliance on overt visual incongruity risks overlooking conventional, subtle, or culturally embedded metaphors, which are especially common in social media. Moreover, because visual communication lacks the equivalent of a reference vocabulary or structured grammar, the identification of visual metaphors is inherently more interpretive and dependent on shared background knowledge. These issues are intensified in computer-mediated contexts, where multimodal messages are compressed, ambiguous, and often highly context-dependent.

For these reasons, this study adopts Forceville's broader semiotic framework, which has been elaborated over nearly three decades. Across several publications (1996, 2008, 2009, 2024), he articulates a coherent and theoretically grounded framework for metaphor analysis. This framework rests on three components:

1. Modal configuration – whether source and target are represented within the same semiotic mode (monomodal) or across different modes (multimodal).
2. Typological structure – distinguishing contextual metaphors, hybrid metaphors, pictorial similes (Forceville, 1996), and the later addition of integrated metaphors (Forceville, 2008).
3. Interpretive grounding – relying on cultural, genre-specific, and prototypical knowledge to reconstruct metaphorical mappings.

Forceville's approach prioritizes the analyst's ability to detect cross-domain mappings across semiotic resources, thereby providing a more flexible and context-sensitive method for analyzing multimodal metaphors in social media discourse.

4.4 Methodological summary

This chapter has presented a multi-step and multi-level methodological framework designed to analyse metaphor as a discursive resource in digitally mediated journalistic communication.

The methodological design combines qualitative and corpus-assisted approaches to capture both the production and the reception of metaphor in news discourse on Twitter.

The analysis proceeds in three main stages. First, to address RQ1, the study adopts a qualitative, bottom-up approach to metaphor identification in news tweets published by the main accounts of the New York Times (@nytimes) and the Wall Street Journal (@WSJ). Metaphorically used lexical units targeting Russia and US–Russia relations are identified through a refined application of the MIPVU procedure (Steen et al. 2010), supported by systematic dictionary consultation and explicit annotation criteria. This stage enables the identification of metaphorically used nouns and verbs and the reconstruction of recurrent metaphor scenarios, grounding the analysis in close linguistic evidence while maintaining transparency and replicability.

Second, RQ2 is addressed through a corpus-assisted, top-down approach, aimed at identifying dominant metaphorical source domains across a broader dataset that includes news tweets published by both broadsheet and tabloid outlets. Using Wmatrix semantic tagging and keyness analysis, statistically salient semantic domains are identified and compared across outlets and time periods. These quantitative results are then subjected to qualitative concordance analysis to determine the metaphoricity of nouns and verbs tagged with the identified key semantic domains.

Third, RQ3 shifts the focus from metaphor production to metaphor reception, transformation, and creativity in user replies. Building on existing work on metaphor reuse and reframing (van Poppel & Pilgram 2024), the study analyses how users engage with journalistic metaphorical framings by resisting or creatively reworking them. Additionally, new instantiations of metaphorical expressions produced by users are tagged as well. This stage integrates multimodal analysis, drawing on Forceville’s framework, to account for visual and semiotic resources that contribute to meaning-making in replies.

Overall, the methodological framework is designed to capture metaphor as a dynamic and circulating phenomenon, rather than as a static linguistic device. By integrating qualitative analysis, corpus-based methods, and multimodal approaches, the study traces how metaphors emerge in journalistic production, are reshaped through platform-specific affordances, and are subsequently taken up or contested in audience interaction. This integrated design ensures coherence with previous metaphor research while extending it to the analysis of contemporary digital news discourse.

Chapter 5. Linguistic analysis

5.1 RQ1. Metaphor scenarios of Russia and its International Relations

In order to address RQ1, the analysis is structured into two interrelated stages. Section 5.1.1 provides a quantitative overview of data, mapping the distribution of metaphor-related words across outlets, years, and target concepts. This step establishes the empirical basis of the investigation by identifying recurrent patterns and lexical regularities. Section 5.1.2 subsequently develops a qualitative, discourse-historical analysis, which contextualizes these quantitative tendencies by relating them to the historical and political events under examination and by examining how they are instantiated in specific metaphor scenarios. The two components are thus complementary: the quantitative results delineate the contours of metaphor use, while the qualitative discussion accounts for their discursive realization and rhetorical functions. In this respect, it is worth briefly recalling the different levels of analysis mobilized in this study: metaphor-related words (MRWs) signal the lexical triggers; domains provide the broader conceptual categories; scenarios capture recurrent mini narratives within domains; and the classification into types of metaphors – ascribed, direct, indirect, idiomatic/metaphorical – helps to specify how figurative meaning is realized in discourse. Together, these layers make it possible to move from individual lexical items to the larger conceptual and argumentative patterns in which they are embedded.

5.1.1 Quantitative results

In the present section, results about the annotated Target and Source concepts are reported and discussed in further detail.

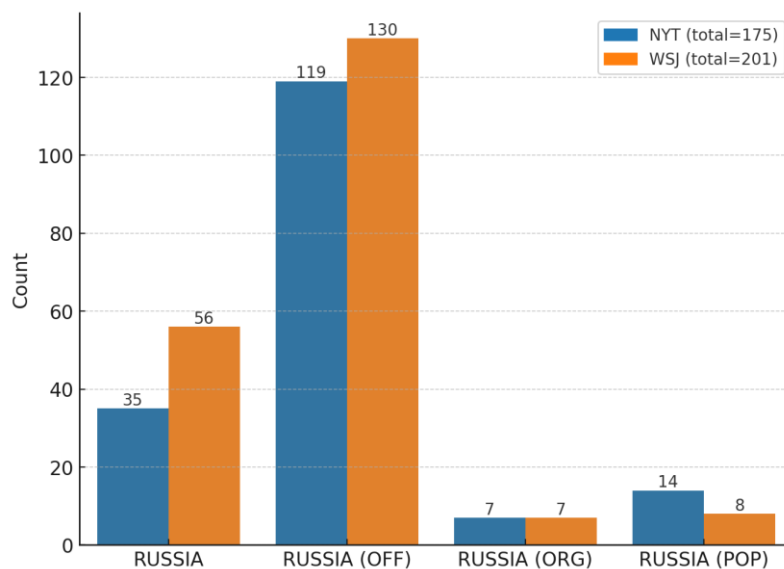
The following sub-sections focus on the quantitative dimension of the analysis, reporting how mappings are distributed across outlets.

5.1.1.1 Identified target domains

This subsection presents the distribution of Target domains across the 2014–2021 period. By outlining which domains are most frequently activated in the corpus, the analysis offers an overview of the dominant interpretative frames that structure one journalistic discourse during this timeframe.

(a) *RUSSIA and its metonymic referents as Target*

Figure 5.8. *Russia and its metonymic referents as Target domains.*



Note. Abbreviations on the x-axis: OFF = official administration; ORG = sports organization; POP = the population

Figure 5.8. illustrates the distribution of “Russia” as a target across the NYT and WSJ datasets. The unmarked label “RUSSIA” refers primarily to the country as a geographical location, but—as Markert & Nissim (2002) point out—location names are rarely clear-cut. The boundary between a purely locative reading and a metonymic one is often blurred, since the same form may simultaneously evoke the place and its political institutions. Thus, the label “RUSSIA” refers to the country as a geographical location, but it does not exclude the concept of Russia in the political sense (cfr. Section 4.1.1 for further discussion). By contrast, the marked forms “RUSSIA (OFF),” “RUSSIA (POP),” and “RUSSIA (ORG)” specify distinct metonymic referents: (OFF) identifies the official administration and political leadership, i.e., the government of the Russian Federation; (POP) refers to the Russian population; (ORG) identifies the Russian Federation’s sports teams or organizations.

Both outlets predominantly frame Russia through the lens of its official administration (OFF), with NYT registering 119 instances and WSJ 130 occurrences. This suggests that political

decision-making actions are the focus of coverage. The unmarked term “RUSSIA” also appears frequently (35 in NYT and 56 in WSJ), reflecting its versatility as a reference point that oscillates between geographical designation and shorthand for the state. In contrast, the categories (POP) and (ORG) occur far less often, indicating that references to Russia’s population or sports are comparatively marginal in the (geo)political reporting of these outlets.

(b) *International Relations as TARGET*

Figure 5.9. Target domains for International Relations.

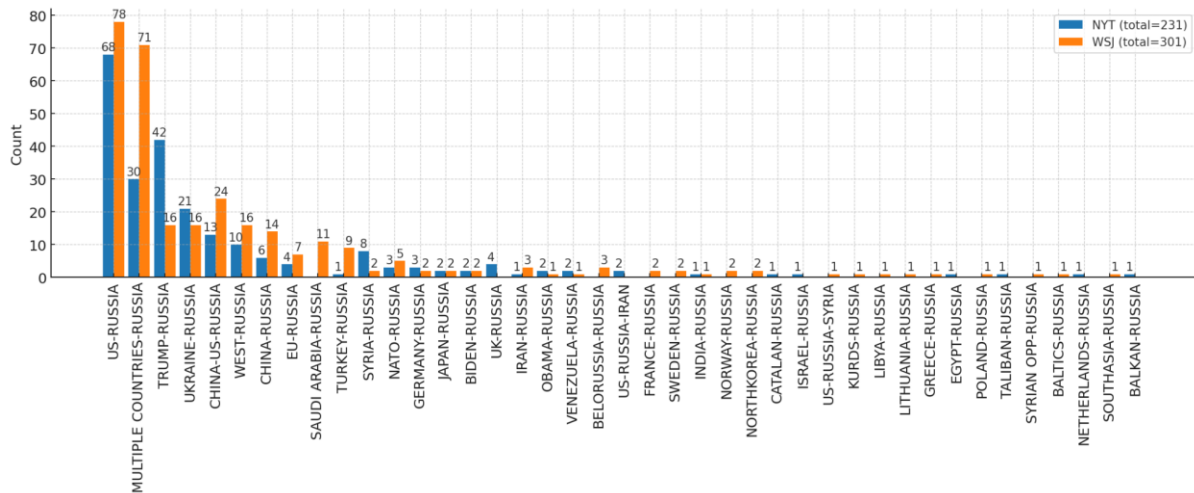


Figure 5.9 illustrates the distribution of IR target concepts. The graph captures the range of international relations in which Russia is metaphorically framed, including both bilateral dyads (e.g., US–Russia, EU–Russia) and multilateral constellations involving multiple states or organizations.

It reveals that, between 2014 and 2021, US–Russia relations dominated the coverage of both outlets, confirming the centrality of the bilateral axis in US policy reporting. For this reason, this dual relation will be further analyzed in Section 5.2. While this pattern is consistent across the NYT and WSJ, divergences emerge in the salience of other targets.

Notably, WSJ consistently displays a broader coverage of international actors, diversifying the range of dyads across domains, whereas NYT shows a tendency to concentrate on a smaller set of pairings. However, the overall frequencies of these dyads remain generally low in both outlets, so the observed differences should be interpreted as tendencies rather than robust contrasts. This general pattern, already visible in the overall distributions, recurs in the more fine-grained analyses that follow and will be further illustrated through examples in the

subsequent sections. The category MULTIPLE COUNTRIES-RUSSIA aggregates cases where Russia is represented in relation to multiple state actors. The higher WSJ counts may be attributed to the outlet's broader focus on multilateral dynamics, by contrast, the NYT tends to privilege bilateral framings—especially leader-centric ones such as TRUMP-RUSSIA—which foreground individual figures or dyadic conflicts rather than diffuse multilateral constellations. The decision to treat presidential figures in combination with Russia (e.g., Trump-Russia, Biden-Russia, Obama-Russia) as distinct target concepts is motivated by the prominence of personalization in political and media discourse. In many cases, international relations are framed not only as interactions between abstract state entities but as being driven by the agency and decisions of individual leaders (van Aelst et al. 2012). The NYT records a markedly higher frequency of Trump-Russia associations, reflecting its extensive coverage of the 2016 election interference allegations, the Mueller investigation, and the broader debate on Trump's ties with Moscow. By contrast, the WSJ assigns more prominence to China–US–Russia triangular dynamics and Saudi Arabia-Russia, a difference which can be linked to its stronger emphasis on economic issues, such as OPEC+ agreements on oil production.

Both outlets report consistently on Ukraine-Russia, linked to the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the conflict in Donbas, while references to Syria-Russia are more frequent in the NYT, in line with its humanitarian and security focus. Other European targets (e.g. EU-Russia, Germany-Russia) and Middle Eastern or regional relations (e.g. Iran-Russia, Turkey-Russia) appear more sporadically in relation to Russia.

5.1.1.2 Identified source domains

This subsection turns to the distribution of Source domains, that is, the conceptual areas from which figurative language is drawn to frame Russia and Russia-related actors.

(a) Source domains for RUSSIA

Figure 5.10. Source domains conceptualizing RUSSIA: NYT vs. WSJ.

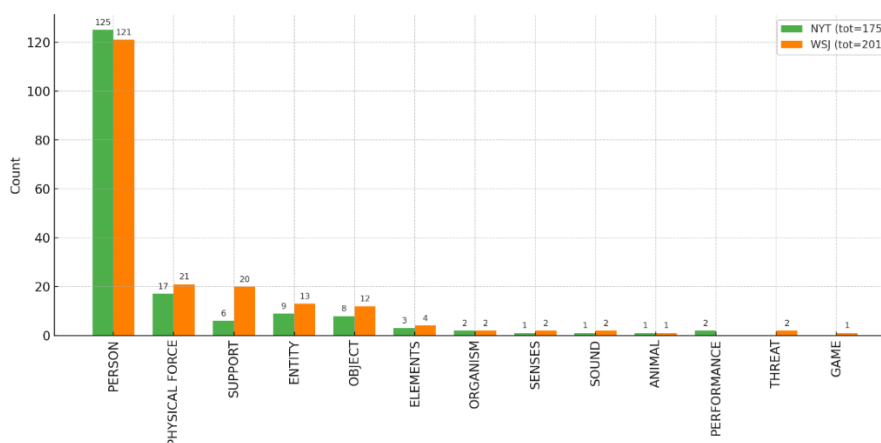


Figure 5.10 illustrates the distribution of source concepts across the two news outlets. As expected, personification patterns strongly prevail, in line with previous studies underlying the pervasiveness of the PERSON domain in the conceptualization of Nations’ metaphors, accounting for more than 65% of the total mappings for RUSSIA (See Section 3.1.1 for a detailed discussion). FORCE metaphors reflect entrenched conflictual framings (Chilton 1996), while ENTITY metaphors conceptualize nations as bounded containers that may move, be moved, or contain others; SUPPORT metaphors concern bounded structures that can sustain or be sustained, and this source concept is the only which shows a greater difference in occurrences, i.e., the WSJ adopts it 20 times, while the NYT only 6. This suggests that WSJ relies more frequently on infrastructural or structural imagery than the NYT. OBJECT metaphors represent countries in terms of breakable, broken, moving and tilting objects. The source concept ELEMENTS refers to FIRE and WATER metaphors, such as Russia described as “fueling the fire”. ORGANISM refers to living beings other than PERSON and ANIMAL, such as plants or generic life forms. SENSES refers to cases where for instance Russia is associated to darkness, e.g., in the *shadow* with Russia; these metaphors activate perceptual frames that foreground concealment, invisibility, or lack of clarity. The SOUND source concept frames present geopolitical dynamics as repetitive events, signaling resonance, e.g., Russia’s behavior *echoes* past Cold-War moments. The label PERFORMANCE was tagged when Russia was compared to theater, or a reality show; such metaphors highlight staging, spectacle, and performativity in domestic and international relations.

Figure 5.11. Source domains conceptualizing RUSSIA and its metonymic referents.

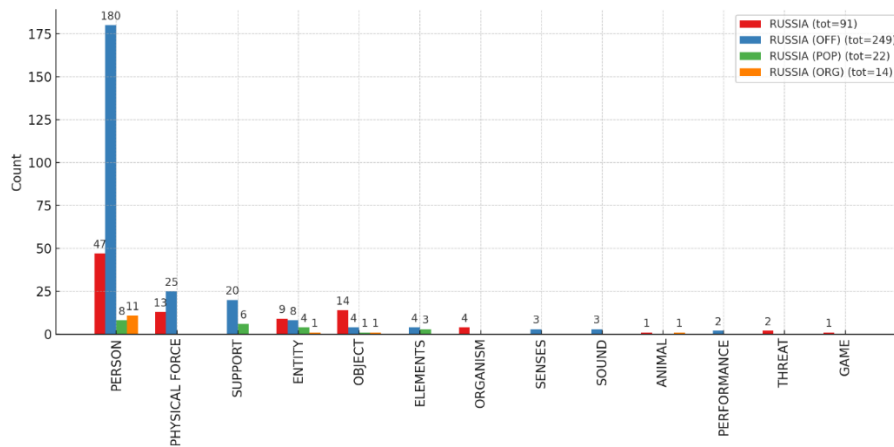
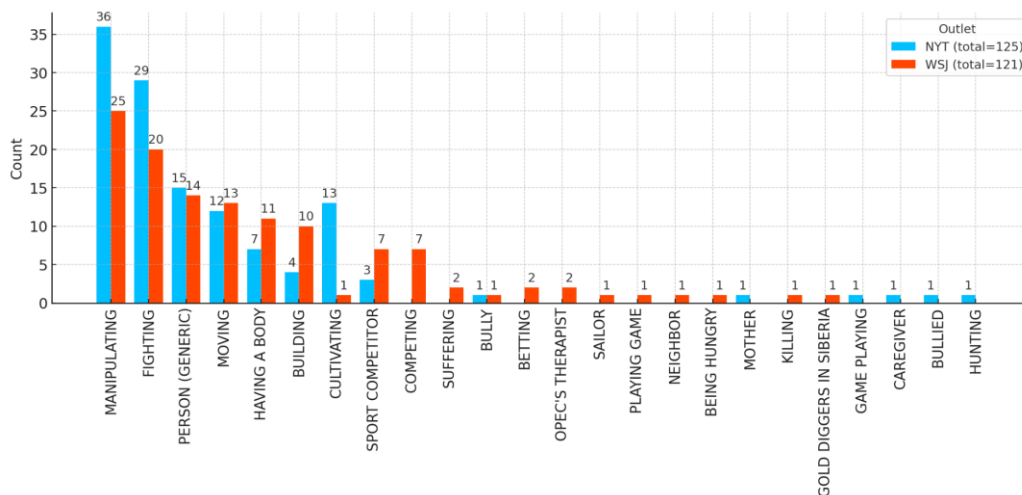


Figure 5.11, in turn, presents the same distribution with respect to Russia’s different metonymic referents.

As for Russia’s metonymic referents, the most frequent representation of the location name is that of RUSSIA-AS-GOVERNMENT, i.e., RUSSIA (OFF, 249 instances), followed by RUSSIA (91 instances), which refers to both the locative and political entity interpretation of the location name when the two referents overlap. The referents of RUSSIA (POP) and (ORG), respectively identifying the population and sport-related organizations, are much less represented; together, they account for fewer than 10% of the cases, underscoring the marginal role of these frames compared to institutional and governmental framings in news discourse.

The following graphs focus on the most frequently used source concepts, since they entail more specific metaphor scenarios.

Figure 5.12. Metaphor Scenarios within the PERSON domain



In personification patterns, Russia is predominantly seen as MANIPULATING and FIGHTING. While both scenarios construct Russia as an intentional actor, their implications differ: MANIPULATING evokes a more subtle, indirect form of influence – suggesting hidden control or behind-the-scenes maneuvering – whereas FIGHTING conveys overt confrontation and direct antagonism. These two scenarios dominate both outlets, yet with markedly different values: MANIPULATING emerges as the more frequent pattern, especially in the NYT, while FIGHTING, though present, accounts for a smaller share of cases

Several personification patterns were not further specified as they referred to general actions carried out by humans, i.e., PERSON (GENERIC). This generic category highlights cases where the discourse does not assign a specific role or activity to Russia but nevertheless reinforces the anthropomorphic projection of agency. Although less semantically specific, such cases are important for showing the pervasiveness of personification even when no precise or fine-grained role is assigned.

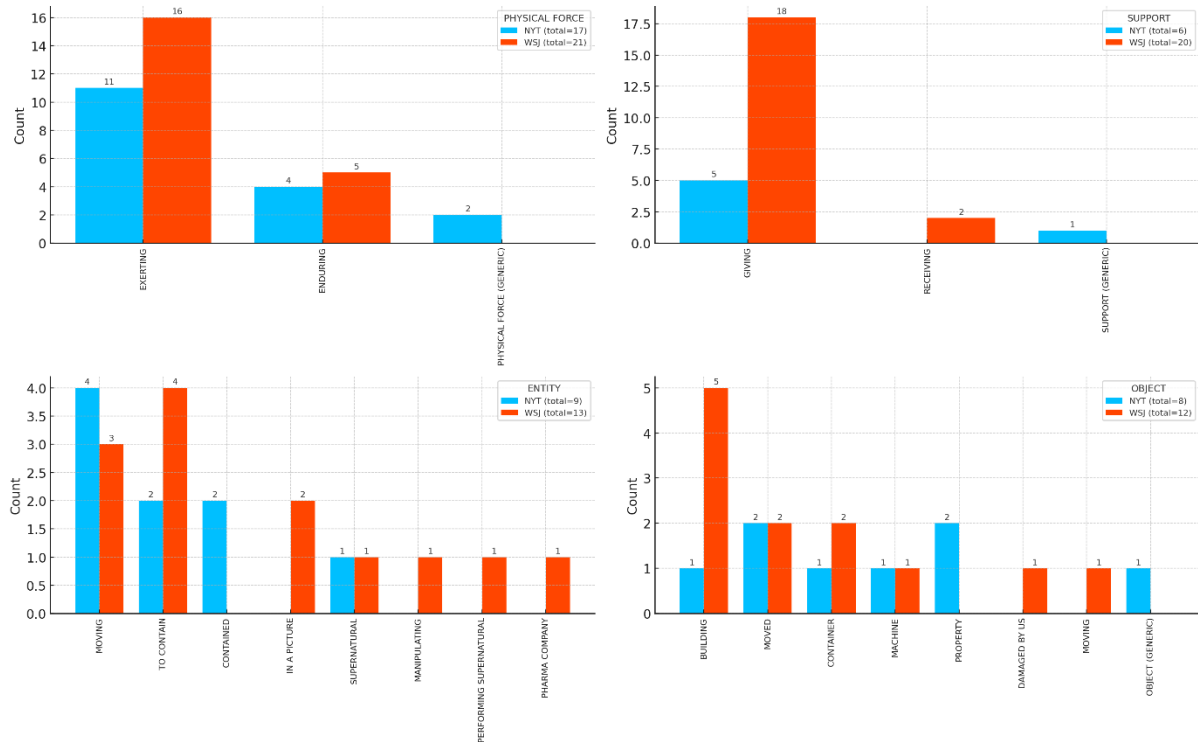
Other examples include RUSSIA-AS-MOVING, which implies an individual deliberately following a certain route, thus suggesting directionality and strategic orientation; RUSSIA-AS-HAVING-A-BODY, which frames the state as a physical entity with body parts, evoking corporeal vulnerability or strength; and RUSSIA-AS-BUILDING or CULTIVATING, where the nation appears as an actor engaged in constructive yet ideologically loaded practices, e.g., *Russia sows discord*. Finally, the COMPETING and SPORT COMPETITOR scenarios foreground competitive interaction, situating Russia within a contest framework against other actors.

The long tail of less frequent scenarios (e.g., SAILOR, NEIGHBOR, MOTHER, CAREGIVER, or GOLD DIGGERS IN SIBERIA) further nuances these portrayals. While quantitatively marginal, they introduce evaluative tones ranging from ironic or pejorative (e.g., BULLY, BULLIED, GOLD DIGGERS – all of which occur in NYT) to more relational or even nurturing (e.g., MOTHER and CAREGIVER, again only in NYT). WSJ, by contrast, contributes idiosyncratic metaphors such as OPEC'S THERAPIST or BEING HUNGRY, which point to Russia's dependence and vulnerability in international affairs. These isolated cases, although rare, show the creative flexibility of personification.

What is immediately evident is the active role of the nation, not as a passive but rather an active agent involved in controversial actions, many of which connote manipulation, aggression, or rivalry. Such scenarios collectively activate a predominantly negative picture of the country, foregrounding intentionality, confrontation, and competitiveness. This finding is consistent

across broadsheet outlets, though the distribution varies, and being context-dependent, will be further detailed in Section 5.1.2.

Figure 5.13. Metaphor Scenarios within the PHYSICAL FORCE, SUPPORT, ENTITY and OBJECT domains.



The present graphs describe the scenario distribution within four source concepts, i.e., PHYSICAL FORCE, SUPPORT, ENTITY and OBJECT.

In the PHYSICAL FORCE domain, both outlets portray Russia as actively EXERTING force, which occurs more frequently than RUSSIA-AS-ENDURING force. In the SUPPORT domain, WSJ is strongly skewed toward GIVING (18 vs. only 5 in NYT), positioning Russia as a benefactor or provider in international relations, whereas NYT rarely frames Russia in supportive terms. RECEIVING support appears marginally and only in WSJ (2), while SUPPORT (GENERIC) is exclusive to NYT (1). This contrast suggests that WSJ more actively mobilizes the SUPPORT frame, often attributing agency to Russia in this regard. The ENTITY domain shows a wider dispersion of scenarios, though with low frequencies. Both outlets depict Russia as MOVING (7), ENTITY TO CONTAIN (6), and as ENTITY CONTAINED (4).

Finally, the OBJECT domain highlights Russia in terms of BUILDING, which is more frequent in WSJ (4 vs. 1). PROPERTY is the only scenario exclusive to NYT (2), whereas WSJ provides DAMAGED BY US (1), emphasizing Russia's vulnerability when objectified. Both outlets use

MOVED (2 vs. 2) and CONTAINER (2 vs. 1), showing a degree of overlap in conceptualizing Russia as manipulable or bounded.

Taken together, these four domains reveal distinct outlet preferences: WSJ tends to diversify metaphorical scenarios, with a stronger emphasis on Russia as an EXERTER of force, a GIVER of support, and even as unconventional entities such as a PHARMA COMPANY. NYT, on the other hand, presents more generic and less frequent scenarios. In quantitative terms, the NYT makes far less use of these non-PERSON scenarios overall, which limits the variety of metaphorical roles attributed to Russia. The only exception is the PERSON domain, where frequencies are comparable across the two outlets, suggesting that personification constitutes a shared and recurring strategy.

These differences suggest that WSJ frames Russia more actively across multiple domains, while NYT remains comparatively restrained, though still negative in evaluative implications.

(b) Source domains for International Relations

Figure 5.14. Source domains for IR.

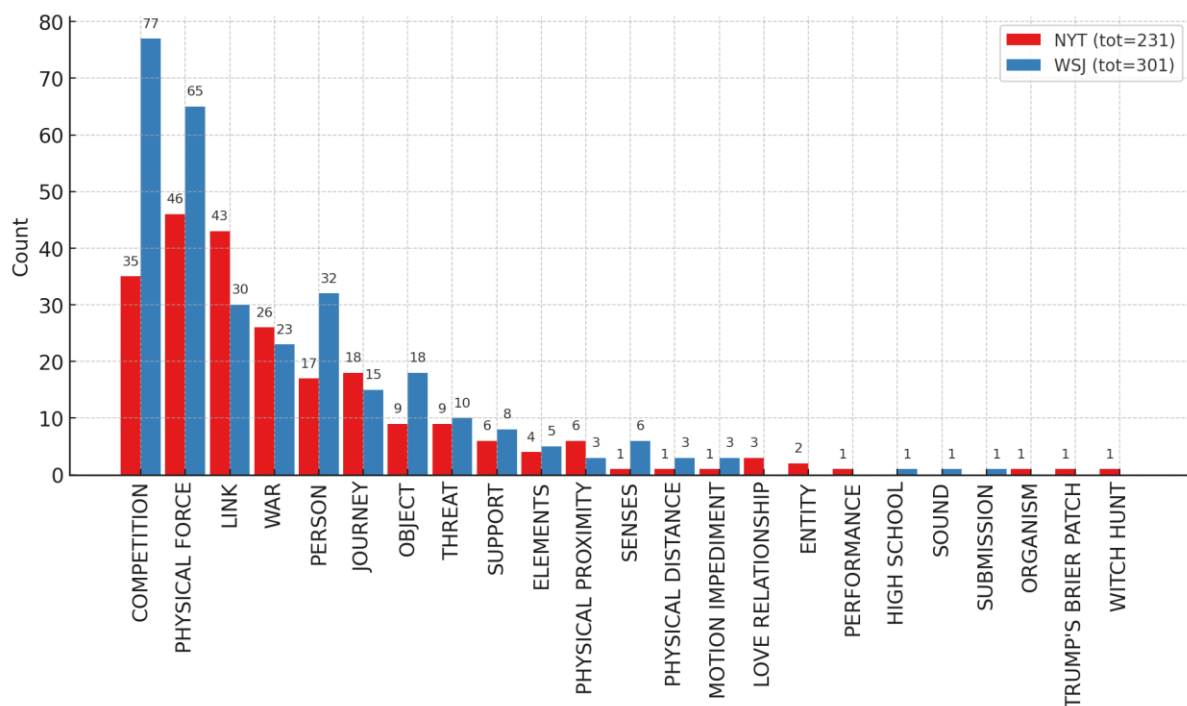


Figure 5.14 describes source concepts for the representation of the relations between Russia and other (supra)national organizations.

The most salient source concept is COMPETITION, overwhelmingly dominant in both outlets but especially in the WSJ (77 vs. 35 instances of the NYT); PHYSICAL FORCE is the second

most frequent domain, again with WSJ in the lead, reinforcing the image of Russia's relations as antagonistic and conflictual. Together, COMPETITION and PHYSICAL FORCE not only constitute the two largest categories, but also jointly account for nearly half of all metaphors in this subset (49% for the WSJ and 46% for the NYT). This finding highlights a systematic preference for adversarial conceptualizations in IR discourse.

By contrast, the NYT shows relatively higher proportions of LINK and WAR mappings (30 vs. 23 for LINK; 26 vs. 17 for WAR), suggesting that its discourse more often emphasizes strategic connections and belligerent confrontation, while the WSJ privileges competition and force.

By contrast, other domains such as JOURNEY, OBJECT, and THREAT occur with considerably lower frequencies. While less salient, they nevertheless diversify the mapping of Russia's relations, associating them with directional movement (JOURNEY), fragility (OBJECT), or existential danger (THREAT).

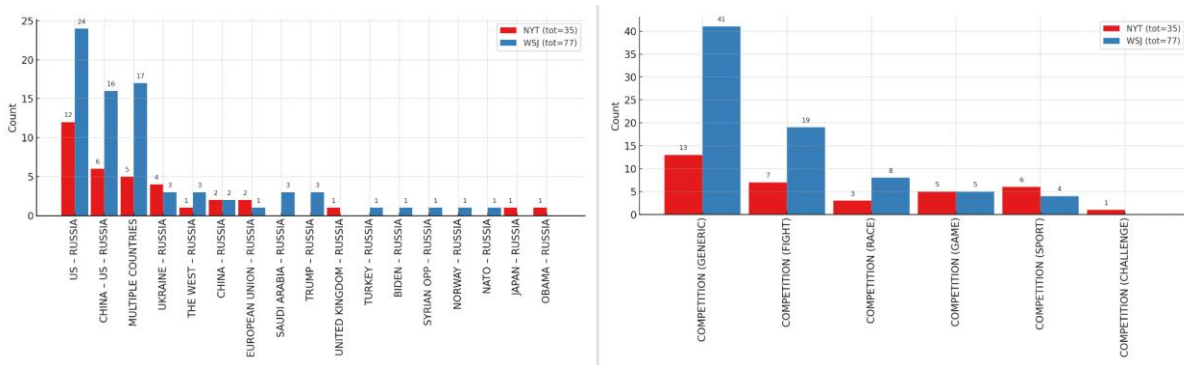
Less frequent domains, including SUPPORT, ELEMENTS, and ENTITY, play a marginal role, while idiosyncratic and low-frequency concepts (e.g., SOUND, SUBMISSION, TRUMP'S BRIER PATCH) underscore the occasional creativity of the discourse.

The imbalance between the overwhelming presence of conflictual scenarios and the relative low frequency of JOURNEY mappings is telling: While JOURNEY metaphors usually imply directionality and progress⁵¹, their marginal role suggests a stagnation in the narrative, where Russia's relations are framed less as a process of movement and development and more as an arena of perpetual confrontation.

In the following subsection, the source concepts COMPETITION, WAR, PHYSICAL FORCE, PERSON, OBJECT, LINK and JOURNEY will be analyzed in greater detail, as they entail more fine-grained scenarios. Each source concept is examined with respect to its target domains (left figure) and its associated scenarios (right figure).

⁵¹ As established in CMT, JOURNEY metaphors map abstract processes onto trajectories with destinations, thereby framing them as progressive and goal-oriented (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Chilton 1996; Semino 2008). In political discourse, such metaphors typically imply directionality and development, as in Charteris-Black's (2019) observation that politicians often frame reforms as steps forward.

Figure 5.15. Target domains for COMPETITION (left) and scenarios within COMPETITION (right)



The COMPETITION domain is the most frequent across both outlets, as already noted in Section 5.1.1, but with a marked difference in distribution: WSJ employs this source 77 times compared to only 35 in NYT. This asymmetry shows that WSJ systematically frames Russia’s international relations through rivalry and contest, making competition its preferred lens of representation.

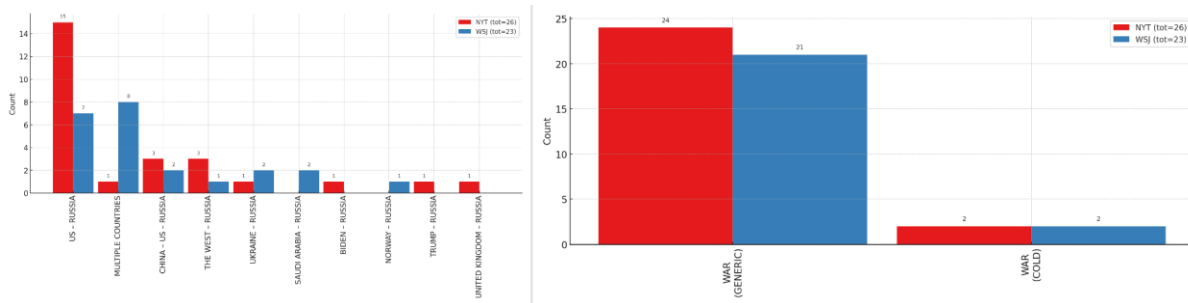
In Figure 5.15 on the left, COMPETITION is most strongly linked to US–RUSSIA relations (24 in WSJ vs. 12 in NYT), underscoring the salience of bilateral antagonism. WSJ also frequently frames Russia in competitive relations with CHINA–US (16 vs. 6 in NYT) and MULTIPLE COUNTRIES (17 vs. 5). Consistent with the overall pattern (see 5.1.1.1), WSJ situates Russia in multiple competitive constellations (e.g., CHINA–US, MULTIPLE COUNTRIES), while NYT limits competition metaphors to fewer dyads. Minor but notable target pairings include UKRAINE–RUSSIA (3 in WSJ vs. 4 in NYT), THE WEST–RUSSIA (3 vs. 1), and CHINA–RUSSIA (2 each). WSJ further diversifies by attributing competition scenarios to actors such as TRUMP–RUSSIA (3), TURKEY–RUSSIA (1), and NATO–RUSSIA (1), which NYT does not feature.

In Figure 5.15 on the right, i.e., scenario analysis, COMPETITION (GENERIC) dominates in both outlets but especially in WSJ (41 vs. 13), showing a tendency to leave the conflictual contest undefined yet central. COMPETITION (FIGHT) also appears more often in WSJ (19 vs. 7), reinforcing its emphasis on overt confrontation. COMPETITION (RACE) follows the same pattern (8 vs. 3), pointing to dynamics of speed and progress. Interestingly, COMPETITION (SPORT) is more balanced (6 in NYT vs. 4 in WSJ), indicating a shared reliance on familiar sporting imagery.

By contrast, COMPETITION (RACE) and COMPETITION (SPORT) suggest more regulated or conventionalized forms of rivalry: while RACE (8 vs. 3) highlights dynamics of speed, progress, and technological or political performance, SPORT (6 vs. 4) evokes familiar, rule-

bound arenas of competition. Both scenarios, though quantitatively less frequent, provide a softer and more structured image of international rivalry compared to the open antagonism conveyed by FIGHT or the vagueness of GENERIC competition. Finally, COMPETITION (GAME) emerges with identical values in both outlets (5 each), a pattern that frames Russia’s interactions as strategic moves within a bounded set of rules.

Figure 5.16. Target domains for WAR (left) and scenarios within WAR (right).



In Figure 5.16 on the left, US–RUSSIA relations dominate in both outlets but with different intensity: NYT shows 15 occurrences compared to 7 occurrences in WSJ. This indicates that NYT foregrounds the bilateral antagonism between the two nations more heavily within the WAR frame. In line with this tendency, WSJ distributes WAR mappings across varied actors, whereas NYT primarily centers them on the US–Russia dyad.

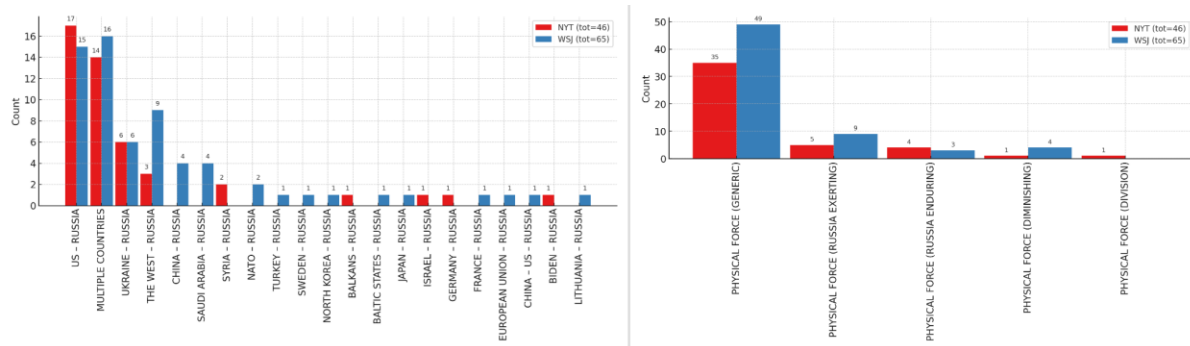
Importantly, however, when considering that WSJ employs more metaphorical mappings for IR overall (301 vs. 231 in NYT – see Figure 5.16 above), the fact that NYT still has slightly higher WAR counts indicates that this frame is proportionally more central in NYT discourse. In other words, NYT leans more heavily on WAR metaphors relative to its total output, while WSJ relies on a broader variety of alternative frames.

The Figure on the right further specifies this tendency. WAR (GENERIC) clearly dominates in both outlets (24 in NYT vs. 21 in WSJ), confirming that war is typically invoked in broad, unspecific terms rather than through detailed scenario elaboration. Only a handful of references evoke the COLD WAR explicitly (2 in each outlet), showing that, despite its historical resonance, the Cold War metaphor is not a preferred template in this dataset. This suggests that the war frame functions less as a precise historical analogy and more as a generalized lens of antagonism, particularly in the NYT where its proportional weight is greater.

Overall, the results suggest that WAR is a more defining and concentrated lens in NYT, reinforcing a narrative of direct US–Russia confrontation. WSJ, by contrast, distributes WAR

metaphors more widely but less intensively, framing Russia’s relations through a broader spectrum of conflict scenarios.

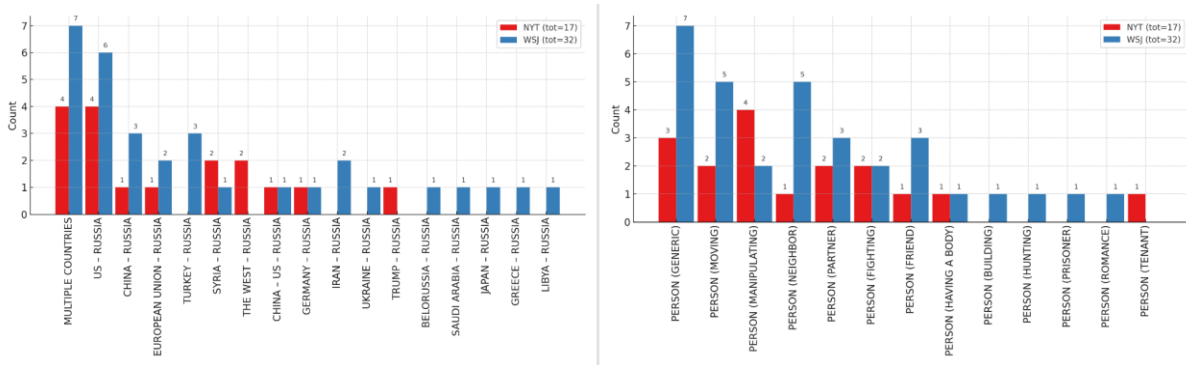
Figure 5.17. Target domains for PHYSICAL FORCE (left) and scenarios within PHYSICAL FORCE (right).



At the level of target concepts, US–RUSSIA relations are the most frequent, with NYT showing a slightly higher frequency (17 vs. 15). This suggests that NYT mobilizes the PHYSICAL FORCE frame primarily to emphasize direct bilateral confrontation. The PHYSICAL FORCE domain follows the same logic: WSJ disperses it across multiple actors, while NYT concentrates on a narrower set.

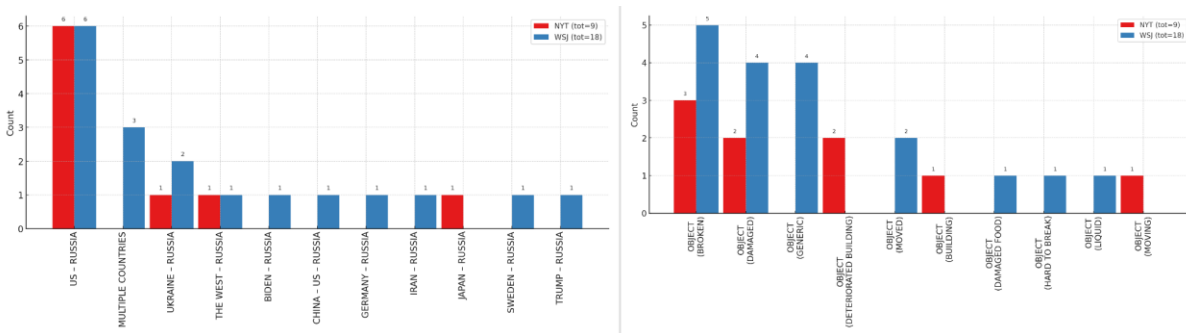
At the scenario level, PHYSICAL FORCE (GENERIC) overwhelmingly dominates in both outlets (35 in NYT vs. 49 in WSJ). This category includes unspecific expressions such as *tensions*, *pressure*, or *strain*, where conflict is evoked in broad terms without clarifying whether Russia is exerting or enduring force. The prevalence of such generic formulations indicates that physical force is frequently mobilized as a diffuse metaphor for confrontation or instability, rather than as a precise description of aggression or resistance. This indeterminacy makes the frame rhetorically flexible, allowing it to suggest conflict while leaving agency underspecified. RUSSIA EXERTING physical force is slightly more frequent in WSJ (9 vs. 5), reinforcing its emphasis on Russia as an aggressor, whereas RUSSIA ENDURING appears in both outlets but is slightly higher in NYT (4 vs. 3). Overall, the comparison indicates that NYT focuses its PHYSICAL FORCE mappings on the US–Russia dyad and often casts Russia as engaged in bilateral antagonism, while WSJ uses the frame more extensively and diversely, situating Russia in conflicts with a wide range of actors and emphasizing both aggression and decline. The scenario breakdown shows that although both outlets rely heavily on generic uses, WSJ systematically diversifies its deployment, while NYT occasionally balances aggressor depictions with scenarios of Russia enduring force.

Figure 5.18. Target domains for PERSON (left) and scenarios within PERSON (right).



In Figure 5.18 on the left, for the PERSON domain, WSJ once again stands out for its wider range of dyads (16 distinct actor–Russia pairings compared to 8 in NYT). In the Table on the right, at the scenario level, WSJ portrays Russia through a greater variety of personifications, including relational roles such as neighbor, partner, or friend, and evaluative roles such as prisoner or romance. By contrast, NYT concentrates on fewer but sharper scenarios such as MANIPULATING or TENANT. This contrast suggests two distinct narrative strategies: WSJ normalizes Russia’s presence in the international “social sphere” by embedding it in diverse interpersonal relations, while NYT restricts its use of personification to fewer, more pointed framings that foreground agency and judgment.

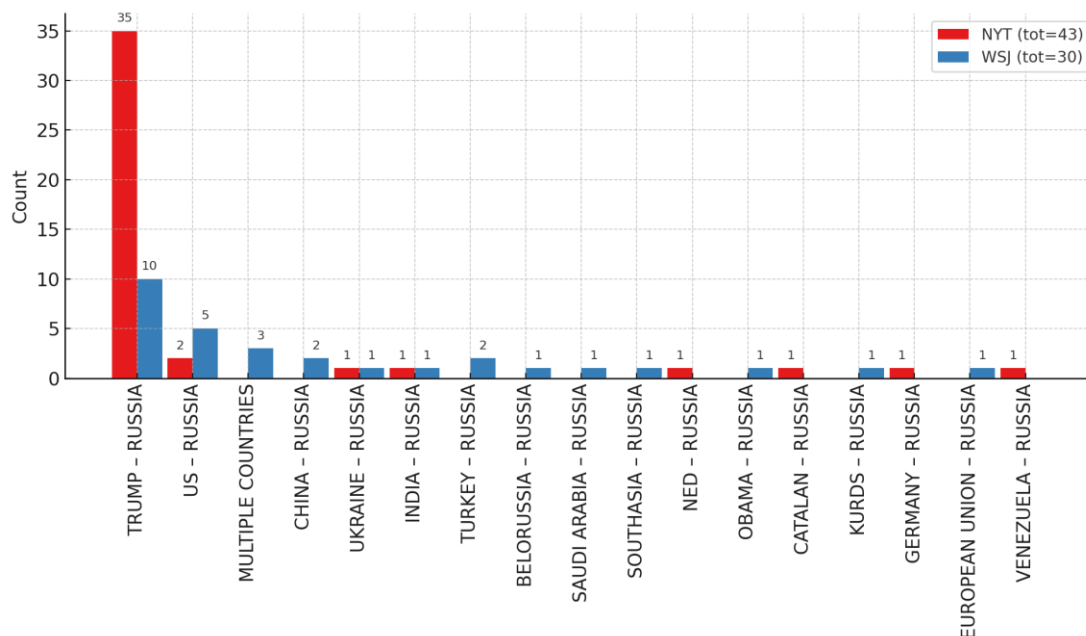
Figure 5.19. Target domains for OBJECT (left) and scenarios within OBJECT (right).



In Figure 5.19 on the left for the OBJECT domain, OBJECT metaphors confirm the same contrast: WSJ diversifies across relations, whereas NYT restricts them largely to the US–Russia dyad. Overall, the OBJECT frame is nearly twice as frequent in WSJ, highlighting its preference for portraying Russia through images of material fragility and degradation across multiple relational contexts.

In the Table on the right, at the scenario level, BROKEN, DAMAGED, and DETERIORATED BUILDING are the most recurrent conceptualizations, foregrounding an imagery of instability, decline, and erosion. Such mappings imply that Russia’s international relations are brittle structures liable to fracture or collapse, rather than resilient or progressive

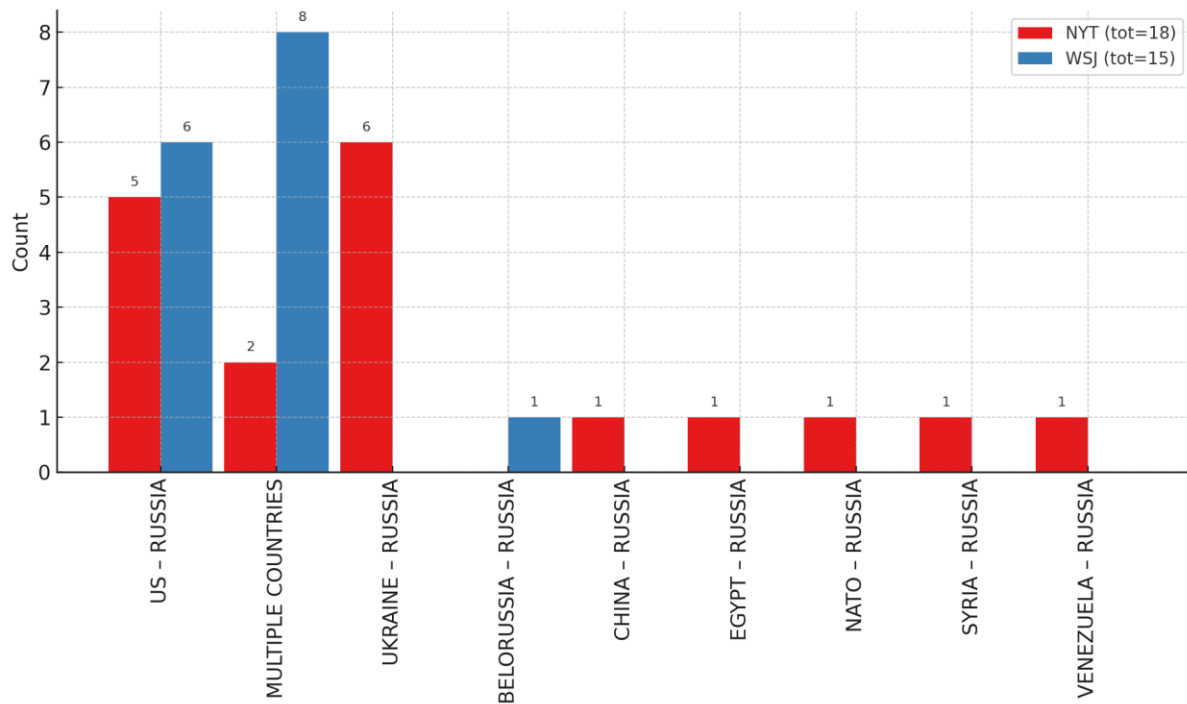
Figure 5.20. Target domains for LINK.



The source concept LINK does not include scenarios or sub-sources but is employed to represent relations between Russia and other actors, typically through lexical items such as *ties* or *links*. At the target level, TRUMP-RUSSIA overwhelmingly dominates in the NYT (35 vs. 10 in WSJ), making it the single most frequent pairing within this domain. This shows that NYT strongly foregrounds the Trump–Russia connection through the LINK frame, projecting a persistent narrative of entanglement between the US president and Moscow. This finding likely reflects coverage of the so-called “Russiagate”⁵². This concentration shows how the LINK frame was mobilized to foreground alleged connections between Trump and Moscow, which reinforced a narrative of entanglement that dominated US political discourse throughout the investigated period (2016-2020).

⁵² “Russiagate” is a shorthand used for the controversy surrounding alleged Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election and possible collusion between the Russian government and Donald Trump’s campaign. The label derives from the “-gate” suffix established after the Watergate scandal (1972-74), which led to President Nixon’s resignation. Like other “-gate” terms, it signals a major political scandal while also reflecting its contested and often polemical use in US media and political discourse.

Figure 5.21. Target domains for JOURNEY.

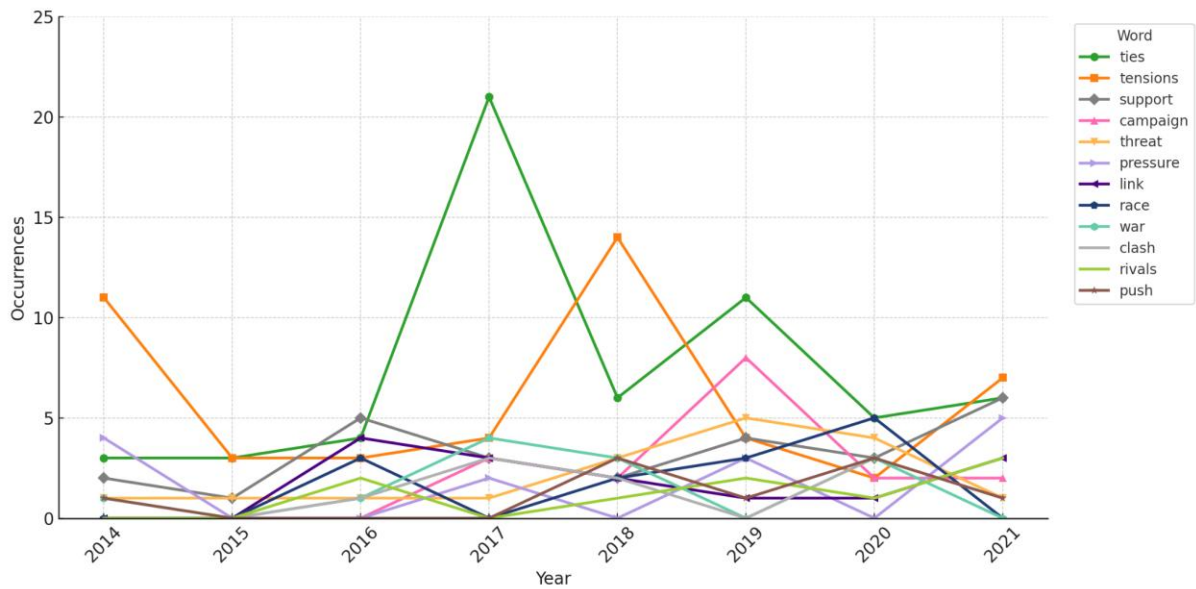


Overall, the JOURNEY frame does not include scenarios or sub-sources but is used in a more general way to depict Russia’s movements and trajectories in international relations. In absolute numbers it is relatively balanced across outlets (18 in NYT vs. 15 in WSJ), but the distribution differs: NYT uses it to stress the trajectory of Russia in connection with other countries – most notably Ukraine, but also a range of global partners – while WSJ foregrounds Russia’s multilateral routes.

5.1.1.3 Metaphoricity: mostly used Metaphor Related Words

This section investigates the most frequently used metaphor-related words (MRWs) in the corpus, focusing on how they shaped the framing of Russia and its relations in news discourse between 2014 and 2021. Tracing their frequency over time makes it possible to identify the lexical anchors that consistently structured reporting.

Figure 5.22. Mostly used MRWs in the corpus.



The graph above shows diachronic patterns of the most frequently used metaphor-related words (MRWs) in both news outlets.

Across the 2014–2021 period, the discourse is anchored by relationship metaphors, with “ties” and “tensions” structuring the diachronic profile. “Ties” dominates overall, reaching its highest frequency in 2017 with 21 occurrences, while “tensions” records its own peak in 2018 with 14. Their alternation across the timeline suggests a recurrent framing of relations as a relationship under strain, rather than a unidirectional escalation: the lexicon regularly re-centers connection (ties) while re-introducing friction (tensions), and episodic upswings in conflictual wording (campaign, threat, war, clash, race) punctuate – not replace – this relational baseline.

Figure 5.23. Mostly used MRWs in each sub-corpus: NYT vs. WSJ

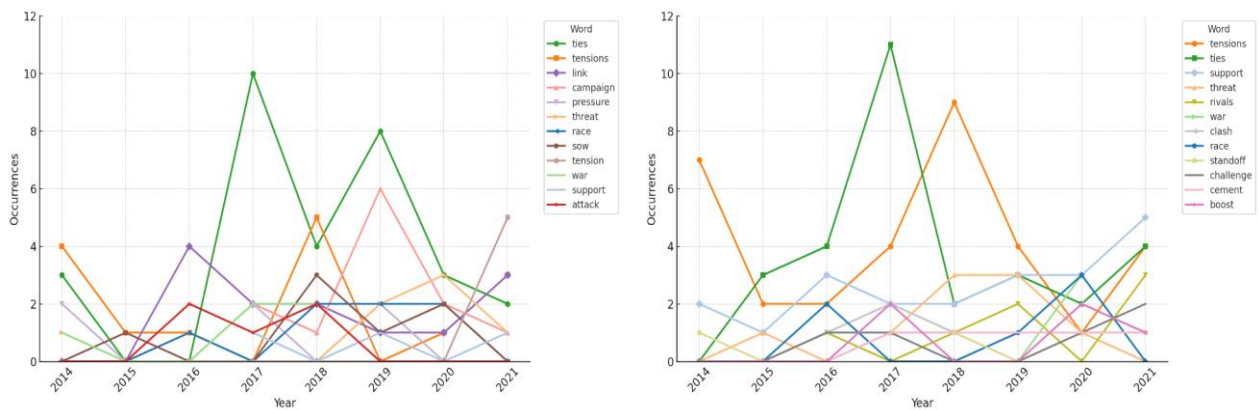


Figure 5.23 focuses on the differences between the two news outlets.

The NYT exhibits a more event-driven pattern in which relational and associative lemmas spike around domestic political controversies. “Ties” surges in 2017 (10 occurrences) and 2019 (8), “campaign” peaks in 2019 (6), and “link” concentrates in 2016 (4) and 2017 (2) – a configuration consistent with reporting tied to the 2016 US election and subsequent investigations. “Tensions” is more intermittent in the NYT, cresting in 2014 (4) and 2018 (5), while conflict/pressure lexemes remain present but bounded: “pressure” intensifies only in 2021 with 5 occurrences; “threat” rises in 2019 with 2 and in 2020 with 3; “war” appears twice in both 2017 and 2018; and “race” maintains a moderate presence with 2 occurrences each year between 2018 and 2020. Occasional items like “attack” also surface in specific news cycles, for example in 2016 and 2018 with 2 mentions each, but do not establish a long-term trend.

By contrast, the WSJ maintains a steadier strain-and-competition profile. “Tensions” is both frequent and stable, spiking in 2018 (9) and featuring strongly in 2014 (7) and 2021 (4); ties is also salient, peaking in 2017 (11) and recurring in 2021 (4). The WSJ gives comparatively greater space to alignment/competition vocabulary: “support” is persistent and culminates in 2021 (5) (with regular activity from 2016 onward), “rivals” builds to 2021 (3), and “clash” features in 2017 (2) and 2020 (2). Competition becomes more explicit in 2020 with “race” (3), while “campaign” remains present but flatter (2019: 2) and “link” is marginal (2017: 1). Lower-frequency WSJ terms (cement, boost, standoff, challenge) appear as event-tied spikes rather than sustained narratives.

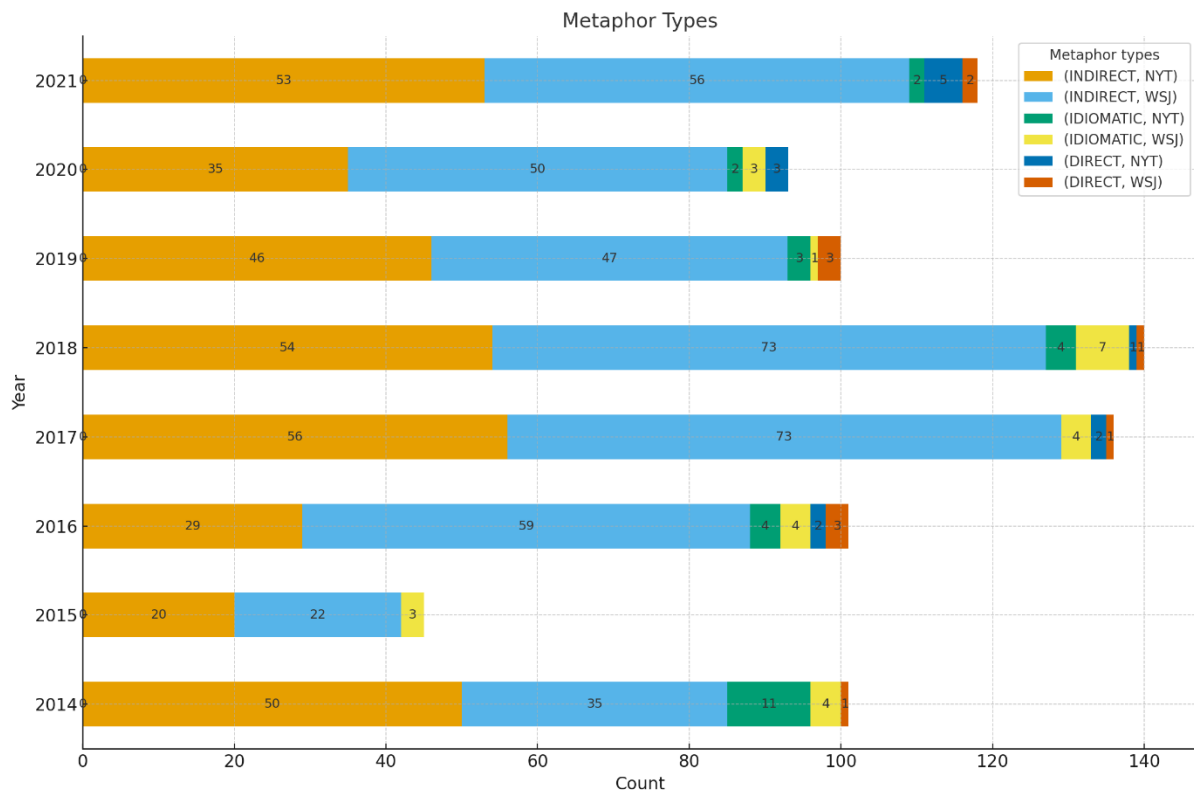
Overall, these trajectories depict a common relational baseline – the co-presence of ties and tensions – over which outlets layer distinct emphases. The NYT’s profile concentrates sharp peaks around US-domestic political flashpoints (notably 2016–2019, with ties/link/campaign), whereas the WSJ sustains a steadier representation of persistent strain (tensions, ties) while foregrounding alignment and competitive positioning (support, rivals, clash, and race in 2020).

5.1.1.4 Metaphor types

The present section provides an overview of the types of metaphorical expressions identified in the corpus. Looking at how indirect, direct, and idiomatic expressions are distributed across

outlets and years makes it possible to assess the dominant modes of figurative framing in digital news discourse.

Figure 5.24. Types of Metaphorically Used Words across years and newspapers.



The horizontal stacked bar chart in Figure 5.24 provides a comparative overview of metaphor annotation categories across the NYT and the WSJ between 2014 and 2021. As reported in Section 4.1.3, three types of figurative language were annotated: metaphorical expressions indirectly used, metaphorical expressions directly used, and metaphorical/idiomatic expressions— respectively identified in table 5.17 as indirect metaphors, idiomatic expressions, and direct metaphors.

Across both outlets and all years, indirect metaphors dominate overwhelmingly, accounting for the vast majority of annotated instances. This reflects the well-established prevalence of indirect metaphorical expressions in news discourse (Krennmayr 2011, Praggeljaz Group 2007; Steen et al. 2010). By contrast, idiomatic expressions and direct metaphors appear far less frequently, and their relative distribution remains marginal throughout the period.

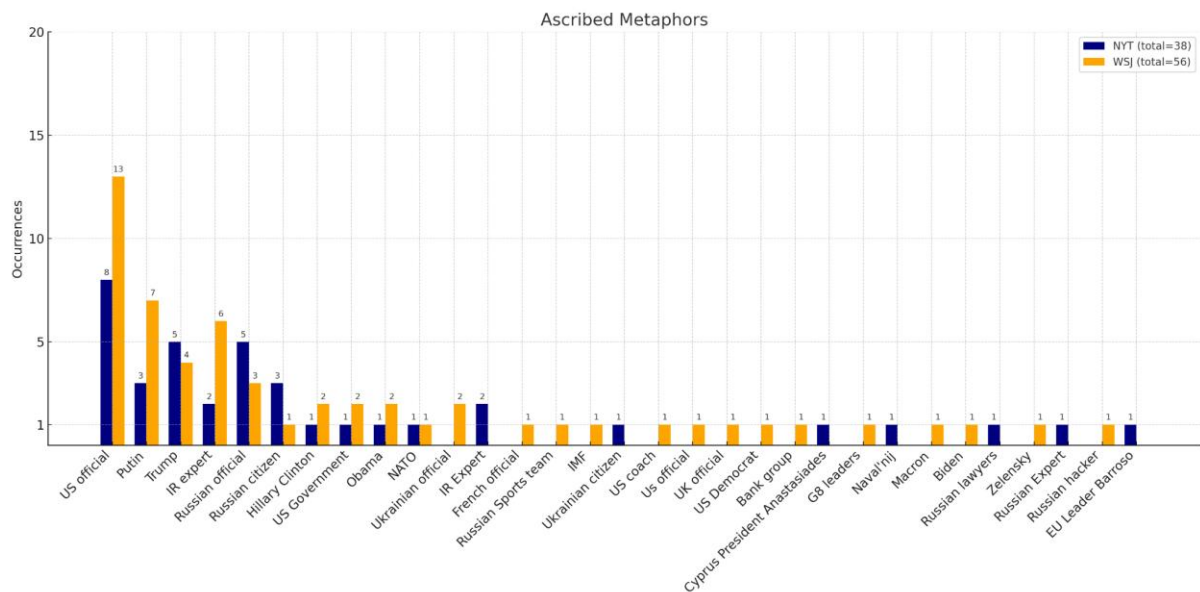
The consistent marginality of direct metaphors suggests that explicit figurative formulations (e.g., TARGET X IS SOURCE Y: “Russia is a bear”) are relatively rare in news discourse compared to indirect metaphorical framings. Idiomatic expressions, too, remain peripheral,

surfacing sporadically in both outlets and never approaching the magnitude of indirect metaphors.

5.1.1.5 Ascribed metaphors

This section examines ascribed metaphors, that is, metaphorical framings explicitly attributed to individual political actors or institutional figures. It provides insight into how responsibility, agency, and evaluative stance are discursively constructed across outlets.

Figure 5.25. Ascribed metaphors.



In news reporting, the attribution of metaphorical language to third parties involves a selective process not only regarding whose (figurative) discourse is quoted, but also – crucially – regarding which metaphors are reported. Journalists and editors decide whether a given metaphor is newsworthy, illustrative, or aligned with the outlet’s framing, thereby filtering the rhetorical material that reaches the audience. Figure 5.25 compares the frequency with which the NYT and the WSJ reported news items in which specific individuals or institutional actors – listed along the x-axis – were ascribed the use of metaphorical language. The counts on the y-axis indicate the number of articles or tweets in which metaphors were attributed to these sources, allowing for a comparative view between the two outlets for a total of 94 conceptual mappings.

A first observation concerns the total number of ascribed metaphors: the WSJ attributes more instances of figurative expressions to third parties (56) than the NYT (38). While this difference may reflect a greater salience given to metaphorical language per se, it might more broadly indicate a variation in the treatment of quoted or reported speech. In this sense, the WSJ appears more inclined to reproduce the verbal style of political figures and institutional actors, including their metaphorical framings, whereas the NYT is comparatively more selective. The imbalance thus speaks not only to metaphor representation, but also to divergent editorial practices in mediating the voices of third parties.

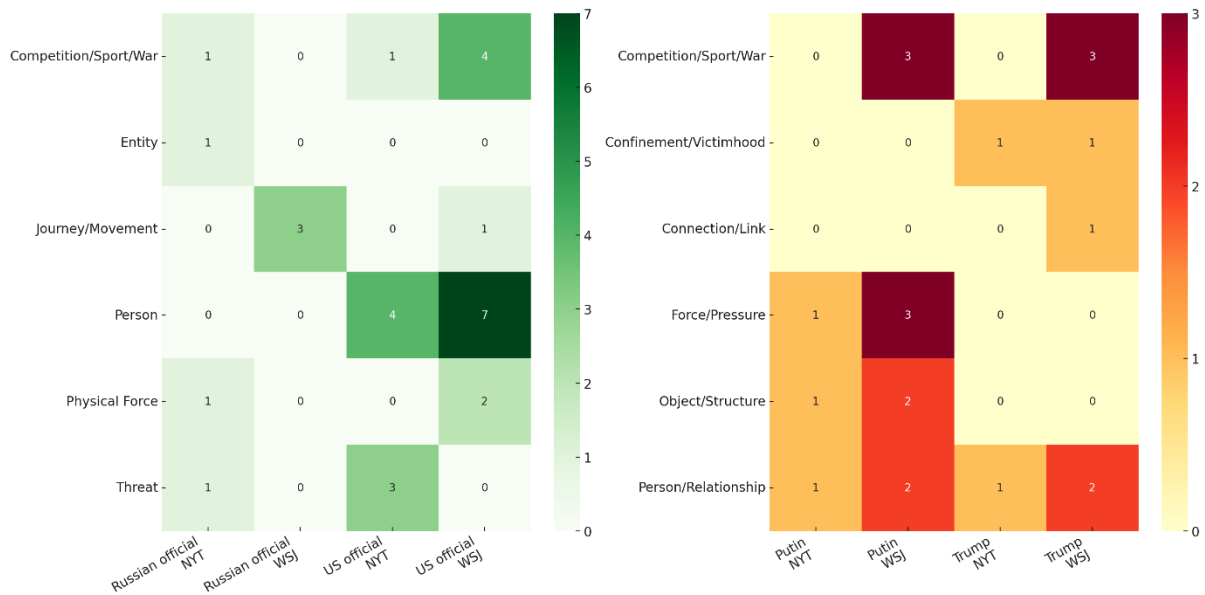
Additionally, the graph shows a clear prominence of certain actors across both datasets. “US official” emerges as the most frequent category overall, particularly in WSJ coverage, suggesting that American political figures and governmental representatives are recurrently framed as active producers of metaphorical discourse. This may reflect both outlets’ emphasis on political communication in domestic and foreign affairs, but WSJ’s higher figure hints at a more sustained engagement with US institutional metaphor use.

Among individual actors, Putin appears with comparable salience in both outlets, the WSJ reporting more metaphors elicited by the Russian President. Trump holds a markedly high position in both corpora, consistent with his anti-establishment and flamboyant distinctive style and documented reliance on metaphor as a framing device (Burgers et al. 2019). The presence of IR experts’ ascribed metaphors in both NYT and WSJ datasets reflects a broader journalistic reliance on expert commentary to interpret events, where metaphor functions as an explanatory tool. On the Russian side, Russian official (aggregating governmental and Kremlin-associated actors) accounts for a considerable proportion of metaphor attribution.

Lower-frequency actors – such as EU leaders, Bank group, and Zelensky – are primarily context-dependent, their metaphor use being tied to specific events (e.g., EU political summits, financial crises, wartime diplomacy).

From a comparative perspective, the chart indicates both convergence and divergence in metaphor attribution. Convergence occurs around global political leaders (Trump, Putin) and key institutional categories (US official, Russian official), while divergence is seen in the relative weight given to certain actors –WSJ amplifies US domestic actors and NYT displays a more balanced distribution across US and Russian figures. These patterns may reflect editorial priorities, target readerships, or differing approaches to political framing. The next section illustrates the actual metaphorical mappings used by social actors.

Figure 5.26. Metaphors used by government officials and presidents.



The heatmaps in Figure 5.26 are included here to visualize the distribution of ascribed metaphors for the two most salient categories, government officials – US and Russian – and presidents – Trump and Putin. As for the metaphors ascribed to presidents, an asymmetry emerges in the selection of metaphor use for each leader across the two outlets. For Putin, WSJ coverage exhibits a wider spread than the NYT, ranging across Object/Structure (e.g., “encroach on Russia’s *doorstep*”), Force/Pressure (e.g., “*threat* posed by the US”), and Person/Relationship metaphors (e.g., “China and Russia are *friends* forever”). In contrast, Trump’s metaphors in NYT are dominated by Competition/Sport/War (e.g., “a new arms *race*” “the US would *outmatch rivals*”) and Confinement/Victimhood (e.g., the Russia *witch hunt*), suggesting a focus on combative and defensive rhetorical frames. WSJ, by comparison, attributes fewer conflict metaphors to Trump, instead foregrounding Person/Relationship (“partners”, “ties”), Connection/Link (“ties”), and Confinement (“captive”), which frames his discourse more in terms of alliances, alignment, and geopolitical positioning.

As for the officials in the heatmap on the left, both news outlets highlight primarily PERSON metaphors (4 NYT and 7 WSJ), once again indicating that news discourse frequently frames Russia and IR in anthropomorphic terms, attributing responsibility, agency, or intentionality to states. In contrast, the WSJ reports a broader range of domains for US officials, while it only

uses JOURNEY/MOVEMENT metaphors for Russian officials, which are given less visibility than US ones.

5.1.2 Qualitative discourse-historical analysis

Building on the quantitative findings presented in Section 5.1.1, this section develops a qualitative discourse-historical analysis of the most recurrent metaphorical domains. The aim is to illustrate how numerical distributions translate into discursive practices, showing how metaphors are embedded in broader argumentative and historical contexts. Each scenario is examined through representative examples, tracing not only the linguistic realization of metaphor but also its rhetorical and evaluative functions in the outlets' coverage.

Although metaphor annotations were conducted across the entire 2014-2021 timeframe, the present analysis provides a qualitative, discourse-historical investigation of selected years. Specifically, the years 2014, 2017, and 2021 were selected for close qualitative and discourse-historical analysis, as they represent discursively salient turning points. The year 2014 marks the annexation of Crimea and the onset of a new geopolitical phase that significantly altered the relations between Russia and Western countries. In 2017, the early phase of Trump's presidency was characterized by heightened media attention to Russian interference in the 2016 US election. The year 2021, in turn, corresponds to the beginning of the Biden administration and a recalibration of US foreign policy toward Russia, occurring in the lead-up to renewed tensions over Ukraine. These three years were thus identified as particularly rich in metaphorical and discursive shifts. The intervening years (2015, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020) are included in the broader quantitative analysis of metaphor use, which allows for the identification of shorter-term diachronic trends across the full-time span. Each of the three years discussed in further detail – 2014, 2017, 2021 – is analyzed by considering differences and similarities in the narratives of the NYT and WSJ tweets. In particular, each year is assessed by focusing on two aspects: (i) The metaphorical representation of relations between Russia and other (supra)national entities, and (ii) the metaphorical representation of Russia.

5.1.2.1 Year 2014

5.1.2.1.1 Metaphor scenarios for IR

(a) FIGHTING/WAR scenarios

The year 2014 marked a critical turning point, which profoundly reshaped Russia’s domestic and international trajectory. In February, international attention turned to Russia as it hosted the Winter Olympics in Sochi. War-related lexicon emerged in coverage of sports competitions between Russia and the US (1), echoing Cold War confrontations where sport served as a proxy battlefield.

(1) In U.S.-Russia Hockey Game, **Cold War Shifts** to the Ice <http://t.co/jSHuQ8horo> (@nytimes, 14/02/14)

The FIGHTING and WAR scenarios were often difficult to distinguish in corpus data, as belligerent and combat-related lexicon frequently overlap. Even though these concepts do not entirely coincide, Musolff’s approach (2016: 14–16) was followed and therefore the two labels form a single category, i.e., FIGHTING/WAR, since any attempt to draw a strict distinction between them would have been largely arbitrary. Notably, SPORT and WAR frames can operate bidirectionally as both source and target domains. As a matter of fact, Morgan (2008) identifies war and sport as core members of the Competition Metaphor Family, which is structured around a shared “us vs. them” frame-schema involving opposing entities competing for a specific goal. In other words, due to their structural similarity, war is often conceptualized in terms of sport, while sport is frequently framed through the language of war. This reciprocal mapping reflects a deep cognitive and cultural alignment, particularly evident in the American discourse, where military and sports metaphors are pervasive in domains such as politics and business (Koller 2004). Indeed, in examples (2) and (3), belligerent language extends metaphorically to both diplomatic and economic arenas. The Russian anti-LGBTQ legislation – eventually signed in June 2013, a few months before the Olympics – triggered international criticism and deepened existing social divisions both within Russia and globally: it affected diplomatic relations between Russia and international policy makers heading to Sochi for the Olympic Games (2), creating a “minefield”. Concurrently, economic ties between Russia and Ukraine were reimagined as a “battlefield” (2), reinforcing the adversarial frame.

(1) Russia's antigay law creates political **minefield** for many world leaders heading to #Sochi2014: <http://t.co/SkFJKr9UV1> (@WSJ, 6/02/14)

(2) Russia Ratchets Up Ukraine's Gas Bills in Shift to an Economic **Battlefield** <http://t.co/76DTGavMKX> (@nytimes, 11/05/14)

Russia's military intervention in Crimea, following political upheaval and a shift in Ukraine's government, culminated in the annexation of the region in March 2014, widely condemned as a breach of international law and Ukrainian sovereignty. In subsequent discourse, FIGHTING/WAR metaphors extended beyond literal references to aggression and shaped figurative framings of diplomacy and international security. Policy makers involved in diplomatic talks were represented as if involved in a physical confrontation with Russia (3,4, 5, 6).

In tweet (3), European leaders are said to “lash out” at Russia, a metaphor of sudden attack that conveys verbal hostility without concrete action. Tweet (4) intensifies this pattern: Ukrainian leaders are reported as “slamming” Russia, a violent physical act metaphorically applied to verbal condemnation, while simultaneously accusing it of trying to “tear their country apart”. This dual figurative framing constructs Ukraine's territorial integrity as a body under assault, thereby dramatizing the threat posed by Russia. The impasse was soon to end, however, as the EU moved from verbal condemnation to concrete measures, metaphorically represented in tweet (5) as “slapping” sanctions on Russia.

(3) European leaders **lash out** at Russia over #Ukraine but don't say what action, if any, they could or would take. <http://t.co/elryEosBTb> (@WSJ, 01/03/14)

(4) Ukrainian leaders **slam** Russia for what they said was another effort to tear their country apart. <http://t.co/KgLMcBBY32> (@WSJ, 07/07/14)

(5) EU to **Slap** New Sanctions on Russia Over Ukraine <http://t.co/Mq212deOd4> (@nytimes, 30/08/14)

(b) BUILDING scenarios

With the dramatic shift brought about by the annexation of Crimea, the fragile process of diplomatic rapprochement between Russia and the West collapsed. The event gave way to a new phase of confrontation, captured in metaphors based on the BUILDING scenarios. The metaphor of “fence-mending” (6), employed by the NYT presupposed the existence of a damaged but potentially reparable relationship between “neighbors”. By contrast, the US Secretary of State Kerry's warning about Russia's possible “eviction” from the G8 – ending

with a joint statement suspending Russia's participation in the G8 – not expelled, but suspended⁵³– (7) shifted the conceptualization from collaborative maintenance to disciplinary exclusion and metaphorically constructed the G8 as a bounded space, from which deviant members may be expelled.

(6) Amid **Fence-Mending**, Another U.S.-Russia **Rift** <http://t.co/ysyF9c0cfr> (@nytimes, 21/02/14)

(7) Kerry Warns Russia of Possible **Eviction** From G-8 <http://t.co/03rNmgbD9C> (@nytimes 2/03/14)

The logic of excluding the Russian Federation from IR was not universally applied. Japan, for instance, while formally aligning with the G7 sanctions regime, maintained a pragmatic channel of communication with Moscow. The metaphor of “keeping the door” open (8) falls within the architectural/building framing, but within a more flexible diplomatic register. It suggests permeability and partial access, as opposed to the metaphorical “eviction” of (7). While Western condemnation was almost unanimous, other social actors preferred to preserve bilateral interests, i.e., gas import–export.

(8) Japan **Keeps Door** to Russia **Open** While Imposing Sanctions <http://t.co/YOKz19o1rk> (@nytimes, 05/08/14)

(c) *MISSED JOURNEY scenario*

JOURNEY metaphors are a common rhetorical device in discourse to signal either the achievement of goals or the breakdown of negotiations. Leaders have adapted it to create specific myths –heroic, messianic, confrontational, or renewing– that are central to their leadership style and persuasiveness. According to Charteris-Black, the use of this metaphor is particularly common among American politicians, a fact that could be linked to historical experiences such as migration to America and the conquest of the West (2011: 315). For instance, Martin Luther King Jr.'s rhetoric was dominated by journey metaphors, which accounted for 39% of his total usage: he framed the Civil Rights movement as a spiritual journey analogous to the biblical Exodus, a path toward a “promised land” seen from a “mountaintop” (2011: 83-89). Bill Clinton employed the “journey of renewal” to build his myth

⁵³ Since then, the group has continued to operate as the Group of Seven (G7), comprising Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States, together with the European Union. As of September 2025, Russia remains excluded.

of national rebirth, contrasting purposeful movement with the “drift and deadlock” of previous administrations, with his policies were presented as a “road map” to guide the nation (2011:196-212). Barack Obama integrated journey metaphors into the epilogues of his speeches to create emotional impact and convey historical continuity.

Initially, the possibility of dialogue between the US and the Russian Federation was metaphorically construed as a shared journey toward agreement, implying coordinated “steps” along a linear diplomatic path (9). However, this frame was not consistently sustained across outlets. On March 2nd, the “steps” which the US should “take” with Russia (9, NYT) framed US action as a forward-oriented itinerary shared with Russia; yet, only two days later, the WSJ reported Kerry’s declaration that the US was prepared to “take further steps against Russia” (10), thus recasting the same journey metaphor within a confrontational pattern. This shift therefore reflects not a reversal of stance by the same outlet, but a cross-outlet divergence in the rhetorical construal of diplomatic “steps.”

Shortly afterwards, the metaphorical journey frame was reinforced in more oblique ways. On March 8th, the NYT described Russia’s move into Ukraine as “born in shadows” (11), evoking imagery of a hidden or illegitimate path rather than an open, legitimate itinerary. By March 19th, the NYT projected the two countries as “headed for a new, more dangerous era” (12), which mapped the unfolding geopolitical crisis onto a perilous forward movement, anticipating a renewed Cold War. Both examples extend the JOURNEY metaphor by emphasizing not cooperation, but a hazardous trajectory.

Later tweets reintroduced the possibility of de-escalation through the idea of “stepping back.” On April 17th, the NYT suggested that talks might give Russia a chance to “step back on Ukraine” (13), while on May 27th the WSJ framed Russia, Ukraine, and their Western allies as collectively taking “a step back from mounting tensions” (14). Nonetheless, the overall framing soon returned to confrontation: on July 29th, Obama warned that if Russia “continues on its current path, the cost on Russia will continue to grow” (15, WSJ). By the end of 2014, the JOURNEY metaphor had consolidated into a narrative of geopolitical estrangement, in which Russia was portrayed as moving away from the international community – not merely through exclusion, but by deliberately continuing along a divergent path. These metaphor scenarios capture both the missed opportunity for reconciliation and the progressive widening of distance between Russia and the West.

- (9) Rubio Proposes **Steps** U.S. Should **Take** With Russia <http://t.co/R791fbIRcp> (@nytimes, 2/03/14)
- (10) Breaking: Kerry: U.S. prepared to take further **steps** against Russia <http://t.co/pSeiZYuzTE> (@WSJ, 04/03/14)
- (11) Russia's **Move** Into Ukraine Said to Be Born in Shadows <http://t.co/HVgOYa7xxn> (@nytimes, 08/03/14)
- (12) Russia and the U.S. are **headed** for a new, more dangerous era, if not a new Cold War <http://t.co/HHryY7iWtb> (@nytimes, 19/03/14)
- (13) Talks a Chance for Russia to **Step Back** on Ukraine <http://t.co/hC0okuWEil> (@nytimes, 17/04/14)
- (14) Ukraine, its Western allies and Russia take a **step back** from mounting tensions <http://t.co/xgAJFgbczV> <http://t.co/uC9mcWhuIM> (@WSJ, 27/05/14)
- (15) Obama: If Russia continues on its current **path**, the cost on Russia will continue to grow. <http://t.co/kBfk7fZbKQ> (@WSJ, 29/07/14)

(d) PHYSICAL FORCE: ENDURING vs. EXERTING scenarios

FORCE emerged as a dominant framing in media coverage during the 2014 Crimea crisis. Lemmas like “boost”, “push”, “pressure”, “press”, “tensions” are pervasive in the narratives of NYT and WSJ and evoke bodily exertion by mapping abstract geopolitical moves onto the domain of physical mechanics/kinetics. As Chilton (1996: 54) puts it, “[e]ven after the Einsteinian revolutions, Newtonian metaphors continued to structure much thinking about states and relations between states”. Chilton draws on Talmy’s theory (1988) of Force Dynamics to explain how metaphors involving physical force structure geopolitical narratives. Central to this model is the interaction between two entities: the Agonist, typically the focus of the scenario, and the Antagonist, which applies opposing force. Chilton emphasizes that in real-world discourse, not all elements of this schema are fully or evenly represented; instead, some are “preponderantly or exclusively involved” (1996: 54) in shaping narrative meanings. In other words, language does not always fully instantiate the dynamic schema but instead foregrounds some roles.

Foregrounding and backgrounding in FORCE metaphors thus concern the salience of primary image schemas. Russia’s active role of exerting – rather than enduring – such physical forces is more evident in the NYT (16-18); in contrast, the WSJ adopts a relatively more neutral and

distributed attribution of agency, highlighting multiple actors involved in the escalating tensions (21). Being fundamental cognitive building blocks of reality, FORCE and MOTION image schemas (See Section 2.1) operate not in isolation but in interwoven, compositional structures that encode not just abstract mappings but also experiential viewpoint, as shown in (18-21), where FORCE frequently overlaps with PATH/JOURNEY. Thus, “raising” presupposes an UP-DOWN motion schema; “squeezed out” an IN-OUT schema. In Example (20), Russia functions as the Agonist, whose intrinsic force tendency is to maintain its geopolitical presence in the Black Sea region. NATO is the Antagonist, exerting a counterforce that seeks to displace Russia – thus, the Antagonist’s force tendency is oriented toward action (i.e., removal), while the Agonist’s is toward stasis (remaining). The verb “squeeze out” metaphorically encodes the idea that the Antagonist is stronger, and by applying spatial and strategic pressure, prevails over the Agonist. As Kövecses (2020: 6) observes, “squeezing out” implies not only an imbalance of force but also a lack of volition and/or control on the part of the affected entity. In tweet (20), this metaphorical construal foregrounds NATO as the dominant force that threatens to displace Russia from the Black Sea region, while Russia is portrayed as the weaker, strategically constrained party. Such an interpretation contributes to ideological framing: it resonates with Putin’s narrative of encirclement (Allevato 2024), since “squeezed out” is reported speech attributed to him. By contrast, Western narratives typically reversed this alignment, representing Russia not as strategically threatened but as the exerting power responsible for escalating tensions.

(16) Russia Steps Up Economic **Pressure** on Kiev <http://t.co/sQc9ZSF8M7> (@nytimes, 24/03/14)

(17) Russia Tightens **Pressure** on Ukraine With Rise in Natural Gas Price <http://t.co/JGzFrR0zJ4> (@nytimes, 02/04/14)

(18) Russia Detains Estonian Officer, **Raising Tensions** <http://t.co/r8TSKdloX0> (@nytimes, 05/09/14)

(19) Russia **Pushing** Ukraine Conflict to ‘Point of No Return,’ E.U. Leader Says <http://t.co/sqToNG2CvA> (@nytimes, 30/08/14)

(20) Breaking: Russia feared being '**squeezed out**' of strategic Black Sea region by NATO, Putin says <http://t.co/YQxxrhmxR0> (@WSJ, 17/04/14)

(21) Ukraine cut off electricity and train services to Crimea, moves that could **raise tensions** with Russia. <http://t.co/JySxfKDq48> (@WSJ, 26/12/14)

5.1.2.1.2 Metaphor scenarios for RUSSIA

Personification is a dominant strategy in the figurative representation of nation-states, as widely recognized in both metaphor theory (see Section 3.1.1) as well as in the present study (see Section 5.1.2). It enables nation-states to be conceptualized in human terms: as fighters, victims, or manipulators; countries are endowed with human traits, intentions, and capabilities, which facilitates the attribution of agency. Russia, in this regard, is no exception. A recurring entailment of personification in discourse is the mapping of body parts onto the nation, i.e., NATION AS BODY (Musolff 2016, 2018, 2021). Russia is frequently depicted as “tightening its grip”, “bending truth”, or “flexing muscles”, expressions that implicitly frame it as a sentient being with a corporeal presence. This framing supports a range of interpretations, from portraying Russia as an assertive actor to depicting it as a wounded entity that reacts unpredictably.

Personification patterns vary between news tweets by the NYT and WSJ. The NYT makes use of metaphor scenarios which frame Russia’s behavior as aggressive or intrusive, a critical evaluative perspective that aligns with the geopolitical implications of the 2014 annexation of Crimea, which was widely condemned as a violation of international law. Such framings were grouped within the scenarios ENTITY TO CONTAIN and MANIPULATING. By contrast, the WSJ adopts the scenario SUFFERING, therefore focusing the attention on the actual effects on the annexation of Crimea, which had strong repercussions on the Russian economy.

Each abovementioned scenario is further discussed in the following section.

(e) RUSSIA AS BODY scenario

Tweet (22) reports the escalation of pro-Russian demonstrations in eastern and southern Ukraine in early March 2014, notably in Donetsk and Kharkiv, regions with significant ethnic Russian populations. While some local citizens supported greater ties with Russia or direct intervention, the protests were not entirely organic. Evidence indicated that “protest tourists” – Russians crossing the border to participate – played an active role. The demonstrations appeared organized and echoed the Crimean scenario. Russian flags were raised in several Ukrainian cities and coordinated messaging suggested Kremlin backing, i.e., “Russia’s hand”. Following Russia’s annexation of Crimea, Latvia, NATO and EU member, became

increasingly anxious about Russian influence, especially given its large ethnic Russian minority.

(22) Russia's Hand Can Be Seen in the Protests <http://t.co/PiHb10mP5U> (@nytimes, 04/03/14)

Tweet (23) explores how Russia's "gaze" heightens anxieties in Latvia⁵⁴. This "gaze" manifests not as open aggression but as surveillance, influence, and potential interference. In a tweet (24) published a few months later, it is illustrated how Russia, under Putin, escalated displays of military power across multiple domains, a phenomenon described metaphorically as "showing muscle".

Even if "gaze" is less concrete than "muscle" or "hand", its conceptual coherence within the personification of Russia remains plausible. It suggests that Russia is not only capable of physical action, but also of strategic observation. Overall, the focus on body parts emphasizes Russia's corporeity and its violent physicality, i.e., an entity abusing his power, a framing which is evident in the following scenarios.

(23) Tensions mount in Latvia under Russia's **gaze**: <http://t.co/EfJyxRzZV2> (@WSJ, 06/05/14)

(24) In Air and Cyberspace, on Land and Sea, Russia **Shows Muscle** <http://t.co/gZ6uD6lqwB> (@nytimes, 31/10/14)

(f) ENTITY TO CONTAIN scenario

Containment metaphors have a rooted tradition in US discourse. The CONTAINER schema was already pervasive in the influential Kennan's Long Telegram⁵⁵, even though the word "containment" was not explicitly used in the document (Chilton 1996: 153). According to Kennan (1946), the Soviet Union was expanding not only its borders, but also its power and communist ideals. And the justification for a containment policy was grounded in the framing of the Union as a mentally-deranged person, whose irrational behavior had to be restrained.

⁵⁴ In June 2025, an episode in the Latvian Parliament evidently enhanced the tensions between ethnic Russians and Latvians. A Member of Parliament was suspended and removed after he spoke in Russian during an official session. The MP, Rosļikovs from the "Stability!" party, defended the use of Russian by declaring, "We are the majority! Russian is our language!" before making an obscene gesture. This act violated Saeima procedures mandating the use of Latvian as the official language in parliamentary sessions. He is risking up to 20 years of prison. See Stasiuk, Y. (2025, June 16). *Latvia detains ex-MP in Russia probe*. Politico Europe. <https://www.politico.eu/article/latvia-aleksejs-roslikovs-detention-russia-for-stability-party/>

⁵⁵ cfr. Section 3.3. for an exhaustive description of Kennan's Long Telegram.

This figurative construction of containment as a necessary defensive barrier has persisted into contemporary discourse on Russia, even though the Cold War preconditions of bipolar rivalry and superpower competition are no longer present.

The verbs used in (25-27) reiterate post-WWII containment rhetoric. Obama metonymically standing for the US government (25), NATO (26), and the West (27) shared the task of “containing” Russia.

(25) **Pressure Rising** as Obama Works to **Rein in** Russia <http://t.co/MF1taE1Lqo> (@nytimes, 03/03/14)

(26) Eastern Europe Frets About NATO’s Ability to **Curb** Russia <http://t.co/tlHvoZX2CO> (@nytimes, 24/04/14)

(27) The West needs a new policy to **resist, restrain** and **retain** Russia <http://t.co/9rcSVc93uj> via @nytopinion (@nytimes, 07/11/14)

Example (27) is of particular interest because metaphor and alliteration converge: the three verbs “resist”, “restrain”, and “retain” metaphorically frame Russia as a volatile force threatening Western order. In this case, alliteration may function as a rhetorical intensifier, reinforcing the perception of unity and determination. Metaphorical idioms (Boers and Stengers 2008) and metaphoric compounds (Benczes 2013) often feature alliteration, and such expressions may be partly shaped by phonological preferences. As Krennmayr (2011: 172) observes, metaphorically used words may also display a tendency to cluster based on sound similarities even in non-idiomatic contexts. However, she argues that these sound-based preferences are not necessarily the result of deliberate choices. Instead, they likely reflect unconscious stylistic tendencies of individual journalists that manifest naturally during the writing process.

In example (27), the choice of verbs encompassing the sounds re-, s, and t, does not appear contingent. Semantically, the three verbs are partially overlapping, as all three imply actions of containment and opposition. This emphatic piling-up of near synonyms underscores the centrality of containment in Western discourse. Interestingly, such rhetorical elaboration contrasts with Twitter’s general policy of communicative brevity and efficiency, suggesting that stylistic devices like alliteration can still surface in condensed digital genres. Additionally, the fact that the tweet redirects to an opinion article further supports the interpretation of sound repetition as a deliberate rhetorical device, employed to reinforce and dramatize the containment frame rather than arising from unconscious stylistic preference.

(g) *MANIPULATING scenario*

To amplify the perceived threat posed by Russia, NYT tweets recurrently activate the MANIPULATING scenario, a metaphorical framing that relies on the personification of Russia as a coercive agent exerting strategic control both internationally (28–32) and domestically (33–36).

(28) West Scrambles on Ukraine as Russia **Tightens Grip** in Crimea <http://t.co/ThW0MV7FoD> (@nytimes, 03/03/14)

(29) Tatars fear repression as Russia **tightens** its **grip** on Crimea <http://t.co/0BfBK6tUPm> (@nytimes, 15/03/14)

(30) Ukraine Pulls Back Forces as Russia **Tightens Grip** on Crimea <http://t.co/6EieaPiGw2> (@nytimes, 24/03/14)

(31) Russia Is Quick to **Bend** Truth About Ukraine <http://t.co/hptoc5p4vK> (@nytimes, 16/04/14)

(32) 2014-05-05 Kiev Struggles to **Break** Russia's **Grip** on Gas Flow <http://t.co/20D4OTQYYD> (@nytimes, 05/05/14)

This scenario is instantiated linguistically through corporeal metaphors, where manipulation is bodily encoded in verbs such as “tighten”, “bend”, and “flex”, which all suggest the physical exertion of force and control. Notably, the collocation to “tighten grip” appears five times between March and December 2014, with “grip” used once more in tweet (32). Such repeated lexical choices construct Russia as an embodied actor that not only seizes control but physically grasps or constricts entities—territories, resources, or populations.

MANIPULATING scenarios emerge in several tweets concerning the Russian Federation's domestic policies (33-36). Tweet (33) discusses the case of the Russian independent news site Lenta.ru, which faced government backlash, i.e., it was “reined in”, after publishing an interview with a Ukrainian nationalist leader linked to *Pravij Sektor*, a group denounced as extremist by Russia⁵⁶. The state media regulator *Roskomnadzor* issued a formal warning, citing

⁵⁶ *Pravij Sektor* (Right Sector) is a Ukrainian far-right nationalist organization formed during the Euromaidan protests in late 2013. It united several radical right-wing and paramilitary groups and became known for its militant opposition to the Yanukovich government. Although its actual political influence in Ukraine remained

violations of extremism laws. Shortly after, the long-time editor was dismissed and replaced by a Kremlin-aligned figure. Tweet (34) refers to when Russia deployed substantial pension-based subsidies to solidify control over Crimea and raised them to the average levels paid in the Russian Federation, “flexing control”. Tweet (35) concerns a large-scale cleanse of school textbooks in Russia, i.e., a “purge”, which were removed for not aligning with state-sanctioned patriotic content. The process benefited a publisher tied to Putin's close associate Rotenberg. Having won multi-billion contracts at the recent Winter Olympics in Sochi, Rotenberg – chair of the publishing house Enlightenment (*Prosveščeniye*) – a close friend and judo sparring partner of President Putin – not only emerged almost untouched, but also managed to retain a dominant share of approved textbooks. Enlightenment led the list with 415 approved titles, far ahead of competitors. Lately, he was also sanctioned for actions compromising the sovereignty of Ukraine⁵⁷. Tweet (36) discusses the figure of Durov, founder of the Russian social network VKontakte, who refused to cooperate with Kremlin demands, including releasing data on Ukrainian activists. Following state pressure and the sale of VKontakte to Putin allies, Durov sold his remaining shares and left Russia. In response to concerns over secure communication, he launched Telegram⁵⁸. The abovementioned events are emblematic of the Kremlin’s broader strategy to suppress dissent and consolidate ideological control under the guise of promoting traditional values, which started long before the annexation of Crimea. As Allevato (2024) argues, the propaganda of traditional values⁵⁹ helped prepare public opinion to accept the invasion of Ukraine without much resistance.

(33) Russia **Reins In** Another News Organization <http://t.co/hsi6tJYxUs> (@nytimes, 12/03/14)

limited, Russian state institutions designated it as an extremist organization in 2014 and subsequently banned its activities within the Russian Federation.

⁵⁷ *La Stampa*. (2014, 23 settembre). *Sanzioni all'amico di Putin, congelati beni per 30 milioni di euro*. *La Stampa*. <https://www.lastampa.it/esteri/2014/09/23/news/sanzioni-all-amico-di-putin-congelati-beni-per-30-milioni-di-euro-1.35616694/>

⁵⁸ Pavel Durov has led a symbolic and technological resistance against the Russian government’s tightening control over digital information. After going into self-imposed exile in 2014 amid pressure from the FSB, he continued developing Telegram, which became a central tool for both private communication and political dissent. In 2018, when Russia attempted to block the app, Durov mobilized a decentralized network of anonymous developers – dubbed the Digital Resistance – to circumvent censorship through proxy servers and cloud services provided by global tech giants like Google and Amazon. Despite a formal ban lasting two years, Telegram remained accessible and widely used, even by government officials. Today, Telegram is the world’s second-largest messaging platform after WhatsApp (Allevato 2024: 55–57)

⁵⁹ In Russian political discourse, “traditional values” (*tradiconnnye cennosti*) are framed as moral and cultural foundations allegedly under threat from the West. This narrative, promoted by state media and political elites since the 2010s, has functioned both as a domestic legitimation strategy and as a foreign policy tool, contrasting Russia’s “spirituality” with Western “decadence.”

(34) **Flexing** Control, Russia Raises Pensions for Crimeans <http://t.co/hlXzc7lWev> (@nytimes, 31/03/14)

(35) Special Report: Russia **Purges** Schoolbooks, and Putin's Friend Profits <http://t.co/mqJNxXUyDQ> (@nytimes, 01/11/14)

(36) He founded Russia's most popular social network. Then the Kremlin **tightened** its **grip** over the Internet. <http://t.co/WSEZLawWGr> (@nytimes, 02/12/14)

(h) SUFFERING scenario

In the WSJ, the negative stance towards Russia as a physically violent and coercive actor is less prevalent. Instead, Russia is often cast in a SUFFERING role. Russia is defined as an entity with “pains” in tweets (37) and (39), as a “wounded bear” in (38). However, more subtle implications emerge within this scenario. Russia is indeed suffering, but such suffering (economic pain, demographic decline, geopolitical insecurity) is not portrayed as passive/incapacitating. Instead, it is recast as a driving force behind Russia's assertive, sometimes aggressive, international behavior.

(37) Russia's **pains** don't end at its borders. How Russia's geopolitics are affecting the markets: <http://t.co/WpI057cnku> <http://t.co/cVd99Rj6rS> (@WSJ, 12/08/14)

(38) Like a wounded **bear**, a weakened Russia could be more dangerous than a strong one. Why its market turmoil matters: <http://t.co/lh4q6dWTes> (@WSJ, 16/12/14)

(39) Russia's economic **pain** is just beginning, one of the world's largest banking groups warns <http://t.co/1eHMYiImKA> (@WSJ, 17/12/14)

In tweet (37), this suffering was not confined within national borders but is portrayed as radiating outward; it destabilized global markets as well as geopolitical balances. Weakness, rather than strength, fuels Russia's disruptive behavior. Thus, pain becomes a central cognitive frame which appears to legitimize Russia's aggressive foreign policy as a reactive force. Tweet (38) uses a direct metaphor comparing Russia to a “wounded bear”, historically the symbol of the nation. Nevertheless, a bear is not simply a symbol, it evokes associations with brute force and unpredictability, which dehumanizes Russia by likening it to a wild dangerous animal rather than a rational actor (Solopova et al 2023: 523). While the bear is often used to emphasize strength and threat, within this context of suffering, the metaphor adds another layer of

meaning. A wounded bear, as in the WSJ tweet, carries both menace and vulnerability. Russia is therefore a potentially irrational actor lashing out due to injury, which consequently heightens the perception of risk.

Tweet (39) metaphorically uses “pain” to frame Russia’s deepening economic crisis, portraying the country as a suffering body under duress. This suffering is attributed to two main causes: the collapse in global oil prices – vital for Russia’s export-driven economy – and Western sanctions imposed due to its involvement in Ukraine. Thus, these framings emphasize the costs borne by the country and positions Russia more as a patient of international consequences than as an active manipulator, though its role is not a passive one in (37) and (39).

This divergence in metaphorical framing may be partly attributed to the editorial priorities and institutional identities of the two newspapers, i.e., the NYT focuses on geopolitical power dynamics and the WSJ typically frames international events through the lens of financial and economic consequences. At the same time, if one considers the temporal framing, it is likely that NYT covered the act of aggression more intensively and therefore favored metaphors of manipulation/control, whereas WSJ focused on economic aftermath.

5.1.2.2 Year 2017

5.1.2.2.1 Metaphor scenarios for IR

Throughout 2017, significant attention to US–Russia relations had been drawn: the year began with heightened tensions in the US as reports emerged of Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election, which culminated in the resignation of National Security Adviser Flynn in February. Investigations into the Trump campaign’s ties with Russia intensified through the spring, particularly following the dismissal of FBI Director Comey in May.

(a) LINK scenario

Central to the “Russiagate” narrative is the image schema LINK. Within LINK, several scenarios are activated by words with different degrees of specificity. Words such as “ties” and “links” are frequently used to frame the potential contacts between the American president and

Russia. In the first days of the year, Trump underlined the necessity to improve the relation between the US and Russia, by “embracing” (40) it and highlighting the stupidity of not “having good ties” (41). Once again, the NYT is more emphatic and enhances the LINK concept via a figurative corporeal representation of Russia.

(40) Trump said only “stupid” people would reject an **embrace** of Russia, calling for a closer relationship <https://t.co/MQj9KRQ5ZO> (@nytimes, 07/01/17)

(41) Trump says Russia will soon respect U.S. more, says it's "stupid" to think having good **ties** is a bad thing <https://t.co/azvDaLiFna> (@WSJ, 07/01/17)

Trump’s denials about his connections with Russia remained central in the following months, both in social media outbursts (42) and press conferences (43). He vowed to track down and punish the “low-life leakers” (42) responsible for providing classified information to the media. His statements targeted major news outlets, including the NYT and accused them of fabricating stories, even as he demanded those sources be prosecuted.

During the press conference held less than a month into his presidency, Trump defended his administration’s early performance and forcefully denied allegations of ties between his campaign and Russian officials.

(42) Trump promised to catch the “low-life leakers” who gave the media information on his administration's **ties** to Russia <https://t.co/EApXuvGCvE> (@nytimes, 16/02/17)

(43) President Trump, in a wide-ranging Q&A, denied Russian **links**: 'I own nothing in Russia. I have no loans in Russia.' (@WSJ, 16/02/17)

Interestingly, the Russiagate narrative differs in the two news outlets and metaphor scenarios become more articulated, enriched and further articulated by American cultural narratives. While the NYT tended to adopt an investigative tone, portraying the Trump-Russia connection as an evolving crisis deserving public scrutiny, the WSJ –particularly through its opinion section– often framed the same developments as overblown. In the NYT for instance, the unfolding crisis is sarcastically framed as a love affair –a “romance”– (44). This metaphorical construction is not isolated; on the contrary, it reflects a broader pattern observable in grassroots Twitter narratives (See Section 5.3).

As in example 27, the NYT reinforces its framing through stylistic choices, notably alliteration – “riches”, “rages” and “romance” – drawing the reader’s attention to what are presented as

three defining traits of Trump’s character: his wealth, his volatility, and his controversial affiliations.

(44) Opinion: Trump’s riches, rages and **romance** with Russia all demand scrutiny, but his meals don’t. Let him eat steak. <https://t.co/0m1DIXNF5O> (@nytimes, 5/03/17)

The Trump-Russia story is depicted as a “brier patch” (45) from which he could not “escape”. The phrase “brier patch” draws on a well-known motif from Southern African American folklore popularized through the character Br’er Rabbit⁶⁰. In the story, made famous by Disney and more recently subject to critique⁶¹, Br’er Rabbit is caught by his nemesis, Br’er Fox, and pleads not to be thrown in the brier patch, knowing that doing so will in fact allow him to escape unharmed. The fox, deceived by this plea, tosses the rabbit into the thorny patch, unwittingly facilitating his getaway. However, here the expression appears to be used in its more straightforward sense, i.e., it emphasizes the inescapability and entanglement of the scandal, rather than any potential strategic advantage.

(45) The Russia story is the **brier patch** from which Trump cannot escape. Now aides are anonymously blaming one another. <https://t.co/zQdR8NzhxB> (@nytimes, 12/07/17)

In contrast, the WSJ underscored the absence of a “smoking gun” – figuratively a piece of incontrovertible incriminating evidence⁶² – as exemplified by tweet (46), quoting a Democratic Senator Warner’s cautious formulation of the evidence. Warner emphasized the importance of upcoming congressional hearings, including testimony from former FBI Director Comey, in clarifying the extent of Russian interference and any potential obstruction of justice by President Trump. He also distanced himself from Hillary Clinton’s more assertive claims, stating that investigations were ongoing and conclusive evidence had not yet emerged.

⁶⁰ As Encyclopædia Britannica explains, “through the character’s experiences, the idea that a small, weak, but clever force can overcome a larger, stronger, but unintelligent force is seen as a universal concept among oppressed peoples” (Brer Rabbit, 2025). *Encyclopædia Britannica*. (2025). *Brer Rabbit*. In *Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Brer-Rabbit>

⁶¹ The Br’er Rabbit stories originated with enslaved West African griots in Georgia. These trickster tales, symbolizing the cunning and resilience of the enslaved, were later appropriated and distorted in popular culture, notably by Disney’s *Song of the South*. Recent scholarship and museum initiatives aim to reframe Br’er Rabbit’s legacy within its African American oral tradition and resistance narrative. See Howard, B. L. (2025, February 13). *Reclaiming the narrative of Br’er Rabbit*. *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. <https://www.ajc.com/news/reclaiming-the-narrative-of-brer-rabbit/>

⁶² Oxford English Dictionary. “Smoking, adj.” In *OED Online*. (2025). Oxford University Press. [smoking, adj. meanings, etymology and more | Oxford English Dictionary](https://www.oed.com/entry/smoking-adj)

(46) Top Democrat sees ‘**smoke**’ but no ‘**smoking gun**’ showing Russia-Trump campaign collusion <https://t.co/Mw43W3272G> (@WSJ, 04/06/17)

By foregrounding Senator Warner’s caution, the WSJ engages in a strategic act of source selection. The denial of conclusive collusion evidence acquires heightened credibility precisely because it comes from a Democrat, a member of the party most invested in proving Trump’s wrongdoing. For a conservative outlet, amplifying a Democratic voice that tempers accusations functions as a rhetorical shortcut: it allows skepticism about collusion to be framed as bipartisan rather than partisan. This choice of emphasis both mitigates the urgency of the accusations and implicitly shields Trump, while maintaining the appearance of balance. The metaphorical contrast between “smoke” and the absent “smoking gun” thus legitimizes delay and doubt, and the distancing from Hillary Clinton’s stronger claims further underscores Democratic ambivalence as reported through a conservative lens.

(c) COMPETITION frames

Another prominent framing in 2017 narratives is that of COMPETITION, which comprises different scenarios and is used to conceptualize a variety of events, ranging from the abovementioned Russiagate, military intervention in Syria, information intelligence confrontations, UN diplomatic gatherings, geopolitical and economic disputes in the Arctic.

This macro-frame, already defined as a metaphor family by Morgan (2008) in Section 3.1, entails the following scenarios: SPORT COMPETITION, FIGHTING-WAR, and GAME, which are further discussed in the following section.

SPORT COMPETITION scenario

In the year 2017, sport-related scenarios were identified only in the WSJ. In tweet (47) WSJ reporter Jenkins Jr. draws a direct comparison between the Trump-Russia scandal and the 1989 Alar apple scare, framing both as cases of “availability cascades”, i.e., collective panics built on repeated but weak claims.

(47) Opinion: The Trump-Russia scare comes from the same **playbook** as fake cancer scares, writes @HolmanJenkins <https://t.co/nPpHYH7aWX> (@WSJ, 21/06/2017)

He claims that just as sensationalist reporting led the public to believe in the false dangers of a pesticide, Jenkins argues that the press, driven by cognitive biases as well as reliance on

unverified sources, constructed a narrative of collusion between Trump and Russia from incidental associations. Interestingly, while Jenkins does not explicitly invoke the term “Red Scare⁶³,” his use of the phrase “Trump-Russia scare” invites historical resonance with that period of American political anxiety marked by McCarthyism⁶⁴ and accusations of communist infiltration. This lexical choice subtly activates intertextual associations with the rhetorical strategies of the early Cold War era and suggests that the investigation into Trump’s alleged ties with Russia might similarly be viewed as a politically motivated overreaction. The phrase thus functions as a framing device that positions the narrative within a legacy of perceived mass hysteria, i.e., it casts doubt on the legitimacy of the allegations and the media’s role in amplifying them.

Moreover, the word “playbook” is used metaphorically: a playbook originally refers to a book containing a set of strategies or plays used by a sports team, especially in American football. Implying a deliberate, rehearsed quality to media coverage and suggesting a potential bias in news reporting, the use of a SPORT metaphor through the term *playbook* frames the collusion narrative as an engineered strategy.

The WSJ tweeted the same article twice on June 21, once prefaced with the label “Opinion” (47) and once without (48).

(48) The Trump-Russia scare comes from the same **playbook** as fake cancer scares, writes @HolmanJenkins <https://t.co/mPD2Fer2uc> (@WSJ, 21/06/2017)

This may simply indicate a deliberate scheduling strategy to reach different audience segments, i.e., late-night users versus morning readers in different time zones, e.g., US East vs. West Coast, or international readers. However, the brevity of the interval makes it implausible that reposting aimed at time-zone targeting or audience segmentation: the two tweets were published only 29 minutes apart, i.e., at 7.47 pm and 8.16 pm UTC. Instead, the duplication

⁶³ The term Red Scare refers to two distinct periods of intense anti-communist sentiment in the United States: the first following the Russian Revolution (1919–1920), and the second during the early Cold War (late 1940s–1950s). Both episodes were characterized by widespread fear of radical leftist infiltration, mass suspicion of dissenters, and government measures aimed at suppressing perceived subversive activity.

Encyclopaedia Britannica. (2025). *Red Scare*. In *Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Red-Scare>

⁶⁴ McCarthyism refers to the political practice, especially during the early 1950s in the United States, of making unsubstantiated accusations of subversion and treason, particularly against alleged communists. The term derives from Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, who spearheaded a campaign of investigations and hearings that created a climate of fear and repression during the Cold War. See: *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. (2025). *McCarthyism*. In *Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/McCarthyism>

suggests either an editorial choice or a form of A/B testing⁶⁵, both of which had the practical effect of circulating the same article under two different generic signals. The omission of the label in the second tweet may have blurred, intentionally or not, the distinction between editorial commentary and factual reporting. Such blurring resonates with what Carlson and Lewis (2015) describe as the erosion of boundaries between facticity and opinion in digital journalism, where traditional genre distinctions give way to hybrid norms shaped by engagement logics. Such editorial strategies also echo critiques regarding the politicization of reporting practices during the Trump–Russia investigation, where it has been argued that news outlets’ continuous repetition and innuendo can consolidate narratives in the public mind regardless of their evidential foundation (Majin 2019).

The “playbook” metaphor is reused to describe a strategic shift in Russia’s foreign policy toward its former Soviet “neighbors” in tweet (49). Instead of relying solely on military force and economic sanctions, the Kremlin offered incentives such as trade deals and relaxed immigration policies to reassert influence. Moldova served as a key example, with President Putin proposing to ease restrictions in exchange for distancing from the EU. This softer, more diplomatic approach seems to mark a tactical shift in Russia’s regional ambitions.

(49) For former Soviet republics, Russia has a new **playbook** <http://on.wsj.com/2jTUJcs> (@WSJ, 20/01/17)

In tweet (50), Russia unexpectedly challenged the US-led conclusion at a UN Security Council emergency meeting by asserting that North Korea had launched a medium-range missile, not an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). This diplomatic “curveball” surprised other nations and effectively derailed the US effort to issue condemnation statements. The metaphor of the “curveball” aligns with the earlier “playbook” metaphor, where Moscow was seen to be shifting tactics. Both metaphors derive from the SPORT domain, in particular two distinct sports domains—football for planning and control, and baseball for unpredictability—to metaphorically frame Russia’s foreign policy moves as both strategic and disruptive. Such

⁶⁵ A/B testing refers to the practice of publishing two or more versions of the same content with slight variations in wording, framing, or visuals to evaluate which performs better in terms of engagement or reach. In the context of journalism, it has become a common strategy for optimizing headlines and social media posts. Studies such as Gligorić et al. (2023) on headline features and Pillai, Fokkens & van Atteveldt (2025) on rewriting news tweets find that small changes in wording, framing, or style can lead to measurable differences in engagement on platforms like Twitter.

framings reinforce the idea of international relations as a high-stakes game (see Section 3.3) in which Russia disrupts plans with changing maneuvers and tactical unpredictability.

(50) Russia threw a diplomatic **curveball**, disputing findings that North Korea launched an ICBM <https://t.co/LvZ2qEBDiq> (@WSJ, 06/07/17)

FIGHTING/WAR scenarios

Belligerent metaphors recur throughout the 2017 dataset to frame disinformation, diplomacy, and energy politics as forms of warfare. These metaphors naturalize adversarial worldviews and echo Cold War rhetoric, casting Russia not only as an international rival but as a hostile force engaged in ongoing battles across multiple domains.

Militarizing narratives of disinformation (Tweets 51–56).

Several tweets portray Russian information activities as metaphorical battles for ideological control. Tweet (51) portrays activists as “foot soldiers” in a broader, covert “campaign” led by Russian nationalist Usovskij⁶⁶.

(51) Foot Soldiers in a Shadowy **Battle** Between Russia and the West <https://t.co/Ex2313mReX> (@nytimes, 29/05/17)

Russia’s influence is mentioned also in French elections. While the article explicitly mentions that “many” of the hacking attempts against Macron’s campaign originated from systems located in Ukraine, tweet (52) summarizing the news omits this detail, instead reducing the attribution solely to Russia through the verb “torpedo”. The omission of Ukraine as a technological origin point, even if not politically culpable, reflects a discursive strategy in which Russia is metaphorically positioned as the sole manipulative actor. This selective foregrounding reinforces a simplified adversarial narrative.

(52) French candidate Emmanuel Macron says Russia is out to **torpedo** his campaign <https://t.co/Ct6UNgMOhx> (@WSJ, 14/02/17)

In tweet (53), the Russian government’s perspective—voiced through the defense minister—is reported. The announcement described the creation of a military task force to engage in “information warfare,” which was portrayed as a defensive measure against what Russia

⁶⁶ Aleksandr Usovskij is a Russian nationalist activist known for his attempts to promote pro-Russian and anti-Western narratives in Eastern and Central Europe. In 2014–2015 he gained visibility when leaked emails revealed his efforts to obtain Russian funding to organize rallies and propaganda campaigns in countries such as Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic.

considered hostile media coverage. The initiative aimed to discredit articles that allegedly misrepresented Russia, employing visual strategies such as a red “FAKE” stamp and disclaimers asserting that the reported information was not corresponding to reality. Such tactics reflect a broader Kremlin strategy of counter-framing, where accusations of disinformation are turned back on Western media in order to undermine their credibility and relativize truth claims. Yet the narrative space devoted to Russia’s own perspective is brief and soon overshadowed. In subsequent tweets (54–56), the focus shifts back to the American context.

(53) Russia's defense minister told Parliament that the military had created a task force to **wage information warfare** <https://t.co/01x1EPPIgl> (@nytimes, 23/02/17)

The same framing and rhetoric of belligerency is proposed again in tweets (54-58) published a few months later. Tweet 54, moving beyond Russian influence in US elections, explores allegations that Russia has long engaged in information campaigns aimed at disrupting the US energy market, particularly by funding environmental groups opposing hydraulic fracturing; it mentions a broader “campaign” of (dis)information designed to maintain Western dependence on Russian oil and gas. “Campaign” foregrounds a sense of strategic premeditation and long-term planning and implies a coordinated sequence of moves aimed at influencing an outcome.

(54) Opinion: A congressional committee examines Russia’s **campaign** to influence U.S. energy policy, writes @FreemanWSJ <https://t.co/ubFoZNAv02> (@WSJ, 15/07/17)

The articles linked in both tweets (55) and (56) investigate how Russia has built a powerful information warfare apparatus through state-backed media outlets RT and Sputnik, which operate as tools of influence targeting Western audiences. Historically, the former piece compares this modern propaganda strategy with Cold War-era information battles, noting that RT, founded in 2005 under Putin’s guidance, initially aimed to improve Russia’s image but shifted to undermining Western narratives with its slogan “Question More.”

(55) How Russia is **waging** an information **war** against the West <https://t.co/yrLrwFi4xi> (@nytimes, 13/09/17)

(56) How Russia built one of the most powerful information **weapons** of the 21st century <https://t.co/XfFABshcGw> (@nytimes, 13/09/17)

Twitter as a symbolic battlefield (Tweets 57–58).

Metaphorical belligerency also extends to Twitter itself, which is framed as an arena of conflict. Tweet (57) explores how Ukraine has turned to Twitter as a symbolic battlefield in its conflict with Russia. While Russia maintains dominance in the physical war, Ukraine has managed to outwit Russia in the online discourse. The @Ukraine Twitter account uses humor and pop culture references to challenge Russian propaganda.

(57) In tweet **war**, @Ukraine **skewers** @Russia <https://t.co/QWIVwybAY9> (WSJ, 21/09/17)

Tweet (58) promotes an article that advocates resilience through media literacy, yet the headline, i.e., the tweet text, reproduces the dominant conflictual vocabulary. The author of the article⁶⁷ emphasizes the need to address the domestic crisis of trust in American institutions by investing in media literacy, critical thinking, and the revitalization of local journalism. The article thus advances a fundamentally different epistemic strategy, grounded in civic resilience rather than retaliation or censorship. However, the tweet's text still reproduces the dominant belligerent metaphor, reinforcing a defense–offense binary. The lexical choices “defend” and “war” align with the conflictual rhetoric prevalent throughout the dataset, even when the underlying article advocates for a more subtle and constructive approach. This tension between headline rhetoric and article content exemplifies how metaphorical framings can persist and circulate independently of the discourse they ostensibly represent. Moreover, if users engage only with the tweet, the more detailed vision promoted by the article remains obscured, and the war metaphor continues to shape public understanding.

(58) Opinion: The only way to **defend** against Russia's information **war** <https://t.co/L0untWGFLR> (@nytimes, 25/09/17)

Diplomatic confrontations framed as clashes (Tweets 59–63)

Beyond disinformation, US–Russia diplomatic tensions are consistently portrayed through martial imagery. Tweets (59, 62, 63) report on a series of diplomatic confrontations, i.e., “clashes”.

⁶⁷ Jankowicz, N. (2017, September 25). *The only way to defend against Russia's information war*. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/25/opinion/russia-propaganda-disinformation.html>

- (59) A Security Council vote seeking to punish Syria for using chemical weapons sets up a **clash** between U.S. and Russia <https://t.co/zAM96H8e5w> (@nytimes, 28/02/17)
- (60) Russia, Syria and Iran presented a unified **front** in support of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad <https://t.co/mZTorVgkBF> (@WSJ, 14/04/17)
- (61) U.S., Russia **spar** over approach to North Korea threat <https://t.co/HLG2NipIci> (@WSJ, @ 06/07/17)
- (62) Russia and the U.S. **clash** over an investigation into chemical weapons attacks in Syria <https://t.co/7brHcroeLn> (@WSJ, 24/10/17)
- (63) U.S., Russia **clash** over how to handle Syria, North Korea <https://t.co/byBWEKMQca> (@WSJ, 27/12/17)

In February, Russia vetoed a resolution that aimed to impose sanctions on Syrian officials for chemical weapons use. Russia had consistently supported Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria, both politically and militarily, especially since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011. The veto marked the first direct "clash" between the Trump administration and the Kremlin at the Security Council. The vote revealed underlying tensions in US–Russia relations, despite President Trump's more conciliatory rhetoric toward Putin. Russia dismissed the resolution as biased and warned that it would harm ongoing peace negotiations. The incident highlighted the Kremlin's continued commitment to protecting Syrian President Assad, further confirmed in tweet (60), where in April 2017, Russia and Iran publicly backed Assad, rejecting US claims that his regime carried out any deadly chemical attack. At a joint meeting in Moscow, their foreign ministers dismissed the accusations as fabricated and called for an international investigation. Another "clash" (62) occurred a few months later, when Russia again vetoed the resolution before a report's release likely blaming the Syrian regime for the April 2017 gas attack, in line with its long-standing support for Assad. This move echoed Russia's broader strategy –as seen in April 2017 and in previous events– of questioning evidence to maintain its influence in Syria and avoid setting precedents for regime change.

In tweets (61) and (63) another country was set to create discord between the US and Russia, i.e., North Korea. Following North Korea's July 4 test of its first intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of reaching parts of the US, which, calling the launch a major escalation, urged for stronger sanctions and warned that military action was possible if diplomacy failed. In contrast, Russia (and China) opposed military threats and proposed instead a joint freeze on North Korean missile tests as well as US-South Korea military exercises. This

difference in approach exposed a sharp diplomatic divide just ahead of a scheduled Trump-Putin meeting at the G20 summit. Tweet (63) shows how those divisions persisted and the countries “clashed”: Russia maintained its opposition to US military threats and sanctions, while the US pursued pressure-based strategies.

Extending the war frame to strategy and resources (Tweets 64–65)

Finally, war metaphors surface in broader strategic contexts. Tweet (64) outlines the Trump administration’s new national security strategy, which represents a marked shift from previous doctrines by explicitly tying economic strength to national security. Overall, by the end of December, ISIS had lost the majority of its territory across Syria and Iraq, and therefore Trump decided to refocus US attention on what the administration would consider other threats. The strategy redefined global relations as great-power competition, focusing on China and Russia as “foes” that threaten US interests

(64) As ISIS retreats across the Middle East, Trump’s national security strategy returns to traditional **foes**: Russia and China <https://t.co/u6PaUfosS2> (@WSJ, 18/12/17)

Tweet (65) details what has been dubbed the “coal war” between Russia and Norway on the Arctic Archipelago of Svalbard. Though the coal mines were economically unviable, both nations subsidized them as instruments of geopolitical assertion rather than sources of profit. Russia’s Barentsburg settlement – complete with Soviet iconography, Russian schools, and ruble-based commerce – sat on Norwegian territory but signaled Moscow’s strategic “grip” in the Arctic. Meanwhile, Norway maintained its own state-run mine near Longyearbyen, largely to preserve its sovereign presence. This coal standoff thus functioned less as an economic endeavor than as a symbolic performance of power projection. The journalist in the related article argues that under Putin, Russia has tied Arctic dominance to national strength and has expanded military infrastructure to assert influence under the guise of economic activity. Norway, a NATO member with strong environmental credentials, found itself balancing green commitments with the imperative of defending territorial claims.

(65) In the Arctic, Russia and Norway **wage a coal war** <https://t.co/JAxeOikPss> (@WSJ, 14/10/17)

(d) GAME scenarios

Game metaphors provide another lens through which US media framed Russia's geopolitical actions in 2017. They emphasize strategy and foreground contests of skill and endurance.

Tweet (66) uses the metaphor of a “stalemate” to depict the geopolitical deadlock between Russia and Ukraine, where military conflict has slowed but the battle continues covertly through espionage. As the frontlines in eastern Ukraine froze into a violent but static confrontation, both sides increasingly resorted to clandestine methods—including contract killings—to eliminate opponents. This shadow war turned the capital into a chessboard of spies, mercenaries, and double agents, an extended metaphorical “chess game” of unresolved conflict and violence.

(66) Bodies are piling up on the streets of Kiev, as the military **stalemate** between Russia and Ukraine devolves into a murky **contest** of spies and hired guns <https://t.co/44I1111mRu> (@WSJ, 23/11/17)

Tweet (67) employs a different kind of game metaphor. Reporting on Russia's launch of the Yamal Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project in December 2017, the WSJ highlights it as a calculated move to circumvent Western sanctions imposed after the annexation of Crimea and support for separatists in Eastern Ukraine. Located on the Yamal Peninsula in the Arctic Circle, the plant represented a significant pivot in Russian energy policy, shifting from pipeline exports toward LNG shipments to Asian markets. The tweet uses the verb “trump” figuratively, evoking the card game sense of gaining an advantage by outplaying an opponent⁶⁸. This metaphor positions Russia as strategically outmaneuvering U.S. sanctions. The move is thus framed as both a symbolic defiance of American restrictions and part of a broader geopolitical realignment: while U.S. measures sought to isolate Russia, Moscow deepened its partnership with China, securing more than \$12 billion in financing from Chinese banks.

(67) Russia is launching a giant Arctic gas project as it tries to **trump** Western sanctions and **boost ties** with China <https://t.co/6s2n5WuWeQ> (@WSJ, 08/12/17)

(e) PHYSICAL FORCE

The PHYSICAL FORCE frame persisted throughout 2017, foregrounding international politics as a contest of exertion, pressure, and counterpressure. The balance of forces was narrated as

⁶⁸ Oxford English Dictionary. (2025). *Trump*, v.3. In *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. https://www.oed.com/dictionary/trump_v3

shifting among multiple actors, with NATO often positioned as Russia's principal opponent in a series of critical frictions. The geopolitical environment also appeared increasingly volatile due to the unpredictability of Trump's presidency. For instance, tweet (68) describes Trump's foreign policy as a "whiplash," with the article underscoring the fragility of U.S.–Russia relations in early 2017. Initially perceived as overly sympathetic to Putin–Trump had downplayed concerns over Russia's role in Ukraine and interference in the 2016 election—the administration soon pivoted toward confrontation after a U.S. missile strike on Syria. The attack, framed as retaliation for Assad's chemical assault (already noted in tweets 60, 62, 63), marked a rupture in the anticipated rapprochement.

(68) News Analysis: Trump's shift on Russia brings geopolitical **whiplash**
<https://t.co/xBrlFbZA55> (@nytimes, 12/04/17)

Tweets (69) and (70) extend this force dynamic to Eastern Europe and the Balkans, where NATO's presence is depicted as a counterweight to Russian influence. Nearly two decades after the US-led intervention in Kosovo, NATO troops remained deployed to safeguard a fragile peace. Yet the region grew increasingly unstable due to Russia's support for Serbian nationalism, backing Serb separatists in Bosnia, and empowering fringe parties in Macedonia. These actions were framed as Russia "stirring tensions" (69), a verb that connotes deliberate agitation and destabilization. On the ground, NATO's presence carried ambivalent meanings: for Albanian Kosovars it was a security guarantee, while for many local Serbs it symbolized occupation.

(69) Russia is again **stirring tensions** in the Balkans, as NATO keeps an uneasy peace
<https://t.co/U7BGjRv47F> <https://t.co/BeNW8izLht> (@nytimes, 20/02/17)

In tweet (70), Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė, following a meeting with the US Defense Secretary, stressed the need for a permanent U.S. troop deployment and enhanced air-defense capabilities, especially as Russia prepared military exercises in Belarus. She criticized NATO's decision-making as too slow to ensure rapid defense in crisis situations, portraying the US presence as a vital deterrent. Across Kosovo and Lithuania, NATO thus emerges as a stabilizing force, yet one whose credibility is portrayed as dependent on American leadership.

(70) Lithuania calls for permanent U.S. military presence amid Russia **tensions**
<https://t.co/ojorKY98TW> (@WSJ, 11/05/17)

Tweets (71) and (72) illustrate this pattern. Tweet (71) reports the first overseas deployment of U.S. F-35A stealth fighters to Europe, framed as “flexing muscle.” Tweet (72) covers NATO’s creation of two new commands: (i) a logistics command to improve rapid deployment of troops and equipment, and (ii) a maritime command to protect transatlantic sea lanes, particularly in the Atlantic and Arctic. Both measures aligned with the objectives of the European Reassurance Initiative (2014), later the European Deterrence Initiative, designed to enhance NATO readiness and deterrence.

(71) U.S. jet fighters flex muscle amid Russia **tensions** <https://t.co/tIWW1HMC9a> (@WSJ, 05/05/17)

(72) NATO plans to create two new commands amid Russia **tensions** <https://t.co/uq1Qikudvt> (@WSJ, 24/10/17)

Force metaphors also shaped coverage of Russia’s rapprochement with Saudi Arabia in 2017. Historically closer to the West, Saudi Arabia’s pivot toward Moscow was transactional and centered on energy diplomacy. In tweet (73), the WSJ describes Russia and Saudi Arabia “pushing” for an extension of the oil-cut deal, casting both as applying deliberate pressure to stabilize markets. Later coverage noted that the pact not only recalibrated output but also “boosted” bilateral ties (74), suggesting an accumulation of strength akin to a tactical alliance. Most strikingly, King Salman’s unprecedented visit to Moscow (75) was framed as a demonstration of Russia’s rising “clout” in the Middle East—a metaphor of physical dominance that underscored Moscow’s growing assertiveness in the region.

(73) Saudi Arabia, Russia **pushing** for three-month extension to oil-cut deal that would leave pact in place through June <https://t.co/tvm2VJbmFm> (@WSJ, 28/08/17)

(74) How a pact to cut oil output has **boosted** relations between Russia and Saudi Arabia <https://t.co/ANtSpfC8Om> (@WSJ, 21/09/17)

(75) 2017-10-05 Russia's Putin hosted Saudi Arabia's King Salman for a visit that showed Moscow's rising Middle East **clout** <https://t.co/QGs25pBIGV> (@WSJ, 05/10/17)

5.1.2.2.2 Metaphor scenarios for RUSSIA

(f) *MANIPULATING/CULTIVATING scenarios*

Within personification patterns, several scenarios emerge in 2017. Some instances depict Russia as a generic human-like actor—not always strict personification, but rather an entity performing recognizably human activities.

The predominant metaphor scenario is that of MANIPULATING, already noted in 2014. This scenario conceptualizes distortion and concealment of information as forms of manual adjustment – physical interventions upon facts. Its recurrence underscores a central leitmotif of the year: Russia’s alleged⁶⁹ interference in the US election. This scenario draws on embodied experiences and is metaphorically extended to describe the strategic alteration of facts or narratives. The verbs “cover up” and “distort”, used respectively in tweets (76) and (77), instantiate this frame by portraying Russia’s involvement in Syria’s chemical weapons discourse as an active concealment and deformation of truth. In the first case, “cover up” evokes imagery of hiding incriminating evidence beneath a surface. In the second, “distorted” implies a twisting of information, and therefore reinforces the idea of manipulation as physical interference.

(76) Breaking News: The White House accused Russia of trying to **cover up** Syria's role in last week's chemical attack <https://t.co/VGwooBgFBr> (@nytimes, 11/04/17)

(77) How Syria and Russia **distorted** the facts surrounding the chemical attack on Khan Sheikhoun <https://t.co/ZjEj8q0kC2> (@nytimes, 26/04/17)

Similarly, in tweets (78) and (79) the verbs “tampered with” and “sway” serve the same purpose of manumission. In the former, Putin denied allegations that Russia interfered in the 2016 US election or intended to meddle in European elections, dismissing them as “rumors.” In the latter, during the 2017 G-20 summit in Hamburg, Secretary of State Tillerson reported that Trump repeatedly pressed Putin, who continued to deny involvement. These lexical choices sustain the metaphorical understanding of geopolitical communication as a domain where actors handle facts like malleable materials—concealing, reshaping, or repurposing them to strategic ends. Such framings reinforce perceptions of Russia not merely as a partisan actor but as one that physically intervenes in the construction of knowledge, undermining trust in its discursive practices.

⁶⁹ While in 2017 news outlets typically referred to Russia’s interference as alleged, subsequent official inquiries confirmed it. The US intelligence community’s 2017 assessment, the Mueller Report (2019), and the bipartisan Senate Intelligence Committee report (2020) all concluded that Russia influenced the 2016 US election.

(78) Vladimir Putin denies Russia **tampered with** foreign elections <https://t.co/2KRQVKjwGI> (@WSJ, 02/05/17)

(79) Vladimir Putin denied "such involvement" when asked if Russia tried to **sway** the U.S. election, Rex Tillerson said <https://t.co/R6DbKXLDqm> (@nytimes, 07/07/17)

This MANIPULATING scenario is further specified through the CULTIVATING scenario, as evidenced by the repeated use of “harvest” in examples (81-82) and “plant” in (80). Here, Russia is depicted as exploiting data and public sentiment for strategic gain—an image evoked by agricultural metaphors. Such framing presents Russian influence not merely as incidental, but as the result of a calculated process of nurturing and extracting resources. In doing so, the scenario adds a new layer of meaning, i.e., the idea of manipulating is further developed by construing Russia as an actor who not simply interferes but also systematically prepares the conditions for influence to “flourish”.

Interestingly, as for the cases of tweets (47) and (48), a tweet is republished with minor variations in instances (81) and (82). The near-duplicate publication of tweets (81) and (82), which differ only in the phrasing “Americans’ own rage” versus “American rage,” is noteworthy. While the distinction may appear minor, it introduces a subtle shift in emphasis: the possessive construction foregrounds responsibility, suggesting that US citizens actively generate the emotional resource that Russia can exploit, whereas the more generic phrasing presents anger as an abstract, collective sentiment. Both formulations reinforce the CULTIVATING frame by portraying emotions as harvestable material, but the first highlights ownership and agency, while the second universalizes the effect. This lexical variation, whether the result of editorial strategy or engagement testing, underscores how even slight changes in wording can recalibrate the metaphorical entailments of influence operations.

(80) Opinion: Did Russia **plant** wild allegations? Questions from Congress are blocked at every turn, writes @KimStrassel <https://t.co/jfEORfmpnM> (@WSJ, 06/10/17)

(81) How Russia **harvested** Americans’ own rage to reshape U.S. politics <https://t.co/GlgwUZiI9p> (@nytimes, 10/10/17)

(82) How Russia **harvested** American rage to reshape U.S. politics <https://t.co/8GLY1RCzVy> (@nytimes, 10/10/17)

(83) Russia **harnessed** Kaspersky antivirus software for use in spying against U.S. <https://t.co/DMWnSu4xiw> (@WSJ, 11/10/17)

(g) *SUPERNATURAL/FICTIONAL/ ENTITY scenarios*

On different occasions, Russia is discursively constructed as a supernatural, opaque, or fictionalized entity engaging in shadowy and even mystical practices. This metaphorical framing surfaces most clearly in portrayals involving political manipulation (84), historical revisionism (85), and exaggerated, almost conspiratorial, claims (86).

Tweet (84) explores Russia's longstanding use of "kompromat"—short for the Russian phrase *komprometirujushcij material*, i.e., compromising material—as a “dark art” of political manipulation, discrediting and even blackmail. This practice, dating back to the Soviet KGB, involves collecting real or fabricated damaging information, which could be used either publicly to humiliate or secretly to exert pressure. The publication of the Trump dossier in 2017, containing unverified claims of Russian blackmail material on Trump, revived global focus on kompromat. Though Trump and the Kremlin dismissed the dossier as fake, its very existence highlighted how such tactics—whether authentic or not—are embedded in Russian political culture.

(84) The public airing of a dossier on Trump casts a spotlight on Russia's **dark art** of kompromat <https://t.co/TjNloAFaUn> (@nytimes, 01/11/17)

A similar SUPERNATURAL scenario emerges in tweet (85), which reports on the resurrection of controversial historical figures such as Dzerzinskij⁷⁰ and Stalin. In stark contrast to the United States' dismantling of Confederate statues, contemporary Russia under Putin has engaged in a project of monumental revival, which aligns with Putin's broader nationalist agenda and frames Russia as a strong, self-reliant power rooted in selective historical memory (Allevato 2024). Both “Dark art” and “resurrect” activate a SUPERNATURAL scenario, in which Russia is busy in undertaking obscure actions, which personify the nation as an unreliable, non-transparent character. While Soviet monuments fell during the collapse of the USSR, Putin-era Russia is increasingly reinstalling them, including statues of Stalin, Lenin, and Prince Vladimir⁷¹, often linking them to traditional values and attempting to whitewash past atrocities. The tweet also not so implicitly contrasts two national memory strategies: while

⁷⁰ Felix Ėdmurovič Dzeržinskij (1877-1926) was a Bolshevik revolutionary and the founder of the Soviet Union's secret police. He played a central role in establishing the architecture of political repression during the early years of Soviet power. Shortly after the Bolsheviks took power, he was appointed head of the Čeka, the first Soviet secret police agency, which would later evolve into the GPU, NKVD, KGB, and eventually the modern FSB.

⁷¹ Prince Vladimir I (c. 956–1015), also known as Vladimir the Great, was grand prince of Kiev who converted Kievan Rus to Christianity in 988. His baptism and subsequent Christianization of the state are regarded as pivotal in the cultural and religious history of the Eastern Slavs. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2025), *St. Vladimir I*. In *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Vladimir-I>

the US is portrayed as moving forward by dismantling monuments tied to a controversial past, Russia is shown as moving backward—reviving figures associated with repression and treating them as instructive models for the present. This juxtaposition reinforces a stark ideological contrast: the progressive, liberal United States is portrayed as actively confronting its past by dismantling symbols of oppression, whereas conservative, authoritarian Russia is shown as embracing and rehabilitating its own controversial figures. Even the architecture of cities becomes an arena for ideological contrast.

(85) As Confederate statues come down in the U.S., Russia is **resurrecting** figures from its own thorny past <https://t.co/FIw9c4zHUV> (@WSJ, 05/09/17)

A more overtly fictionalized SUPERNATURAL framing appears in tweet (86). Here, Russian state media portrayed the fidget-spinner craze⁷² as a possible Western plot to manipulate Russian youth in support of opposition leader Alexej Navalnij. Reports accused the toy of “zombifying” children, prompting an official investigation. While other countries raised safety concerns, Russia politicized the trend. “Zombify” suggests that fidget spinners (harmless toys elsewhere) are being portrayed as tools to dull the minds of Russian youth, making them more susceptible to manipulation.

While the American narrative draws on documented practices and historically grounded strategies of influence, the reported Russian portrayal of Americans as wielding near-supernatural powers—capable of manipulating youth through a toy—verges on the absurd. This highlights the propagandistic tone and implausibility of the claim, especially when compared to the substantiated discourse around Russia’s own information tactics, and clearly discredits not only the narrative, but also the narrator, i.e., Russian news outlets.

(86) State-run news outlets in Russia said fidget spinners might be an American plot to “zombify” young Russians <https://t.co/do0zuZ44oX> (@WSJ, 19/07/17)

Remaining in the realm of the fiction, in tweet (87) the term “theater” functions as a metaphor to describe Russian diplomacy as a performative act, where calculated staging takes precedence over genuine negotiation. During his 2017 visit to Moscow, US Secretary of State Tillerson met with Putin and Lavrov to ease escalating tensions. The nearly two-hour meeting revealed deep divisions, particularly over two central issues: the Syrian chemical weapons attack of

⁷² A fidget spinner is a small, hand-held toy designed to spin around a central bearing. Typically made of plastic or metal, it consists of a central disc with two or three prongs that can be flicked to rotate.

April 4 and Russian interference in the 2016 US election. The US accused Assad of the chemical weapons attack and affirmed Russian election meddling, while Putin countered with denials and staged ambiguity, likening American claims to the 2003 Iraq WMD case⁷³ and suggested Washington was fabricating a confrontation. The delayed confirmation of Tillerson’s meeting with Putin, the choreographed press statements, and the lack of concrete outcomes all underscored diplomacy as spectacle—more about projecting narratives than resolving conflict.

(87) In Russia's diplomatic **theater**, Vladimir Putin is looking for ways to control the narrative of Rex Tillerson's visit <https://t.co/KjIF6Khz1g> (@nytimes, 12/04/17)

Interestingly, in the original NYT article the “theater” metaphor is articulated beyond the tweet’s condensed form. The following extract reports the co-text of the metaphor⁷⁴.

“This reminds me very much of the events of 2003, when U.S. representatives in the Security Council showed alleged chemical weapons discovered in Iraq,” Mr. Putin said, referring to an intelligence failure that Mr. Trump has also cited in recent months. “The exact same thing is happening now,” he charged. He quoted two Russian writers, Ilya Ilf and Yevgeni Petrov, authors of the 1928 satire “The 12 Chairs⁷⁵,” and said, “‘It’s boring, ladies.’ We have seen this all before.” But the diplomatic **theater** playing out in Moscow on a rainy Wednesday morning was far from boring: Mr. Putin, operating on home turf, was looking for any way to shape the narrative of Mr. Tillerson’s first trip here as secretary of state” (NYT⁷⁶).

The journalist builds on Putin’s own metaphorical framing but subverts it slightly by suggesting the “show” is not boring, thus reclaiming narrative authority while reinforcing the idea that what’s happening is somehow staged. This is an example of topic-triggered metaphor, i.e., a metaphorical framing directly prompted by the discourse topic itself, often borrowing from or reacting to the language of quoted actors (Augé 2024, Koller 2002, Semino 2008,2009). The journalist’s metaphor is directly motivated by Putin’s use of the satire metaphor but reverses

⁷³ The 2003 Iraq WMD (Weapons of Mass Destruction) case refers to the justification used by the United States and its allies for launching the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. The central claim was that Saddam Hussein’s regime possessed or was developing weapons of mass destruction and posed a growing threat to international security.

⁷⁴ Although the dataset centers on tweets, in some instances it is necessary to examine the linked articles to understand how metaphorical framings are expanded or reframed beyond the condensed tweet form.

⁷⁵ *The Twelve Chairs* is a satirical novel written in 1928 by Soviet authors Il’ja Ilf and Evgenij Petrov. The plot follows a former nobleman and a con artist as they search across Russia for a hidden fortune concealed within one of twelve chairs confiscated during the revolution. The novel critiques greed, opportunism, and the absurdities of Soviet bureaucracy through humor and farce.

⁷⁶ David E. Sanger, “Tillerson and Lavrov Press Moscow Meeting Over Syria and Russia Tensions,” *The New York Times*, April 12, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/12/world/europe/tillerson-putin-lavrov-russia-syria.html>

its evaluative polarity: unlike the fictional boredom of “The Twelve Chairs”, the diplomatic encounter is portrayed as a political drama.

Tweet (88) draws a compelling parallel between Russia’s social media disinformation efforts and the manipulative mechanics of reality television. The article compares troll behavior to tactics used on shows like *The Bachelor*⁷⁷: incite strong feelings, provoke confrontation, and let chaos unfold for an audience. The brilliance and danger of this campaign lie in how it blurred the line between staged manipulation and authentic public outrage, which made it difficult to distinguish “performance” from genuine political action. In this sense, the tweet distills the article’s core thesis: we were all unwitting contestants in Russia’s social media reality show.

(88) Russia's social media influence **campaign is** basically "**The Bachelor**," @fmanjoo writes. <https://t.co/OcERULy7GM> (@nytimes, 08/11/17)

5.1.2.3 Year 2021

5.1.2.3.1 Metaphor scenarios for IR

The year 2021 marked a pivotal juncture in the evolution of Russia’s foreign policy and its relations with key international actors, particularly the United States and NATO. The inauguration of President Biden signaled a notable shift in US posture, with early initiatives suggesting a recalibration of diplomatic engagement with Moscow. Among these, the extension of the New START treaty⁷⁸ between the United States and the Russian Federation offered a brief revitalization of arms control diplomacy, reaffirming the mutual interest in maintaining strategic stability despite deepening mistrust. However, this gesture of cooperation stood in

⁷⁷ *The Bachelor* is an American reality television series that first premiered in 2002 on ABC. The show follows a single man (the "Bachelor") who is introduced to a pool of romantic candidates, typically women, from whom he is expected to choose a future partner through a process of staged dates, eliminations, and emotionally charged rituals.

⁷⁸ The New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) is a bilateral nuclear arms control agreement between the United States and the Russian Federation, originally signed in 2010 by Obama and Medvedev. It entered into force in 2011 and was set to expire in February 2021 but was extended by five years—until February 2026—shortly after President Biden took office. As of August 2025, the New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) remains the only major nuclear arms control treaty still in effect between the United States and Russia, although its status is fragile.

sharp contrast to the broader geopolitical climate, which increasingly reflected a reconfiguration of global power dynamics into what analysts have described as a phase of structured rivalry (Sokolshchik 2024).

This period also witnessed the politicization of vaccine diplomacy, as countries actively sought to expand their global influence through the distribution of COVID19 vaccines. Meanwhile, tensions continued to escalate in Eastern Europe, particularly in relation to the conflict in eastern Ukraine. NATO's reaffirmed commitment to collective defense and its increased military presence on the alliance's eastern flank were interpreted by the Kremlin as a direct challenge to Russian strategic interests. In this context, 2021 emerged not as a moment of de-escalation, but as a year in which systemic antagonism between Russia and the West became further institutionalized.

Concurrently, changes in Twitter influenced the dynamics of political discourse and information dissemination. In particular, the increase in Twitter's character limit in late 2017—from 140 to 280 characters—had a notable impact on the structure of (news) tweets. Posts became more elaborate, often incorporating layered narrative strategies, but also with overlapping metaphor scenarios. This shift potentially allowed for a more expansive projection of messages within a constrained yet increasingly flexible medium.

January 2021 was anticipated as a pivotal month for civil unrest in Russia, with widespread protests planned in response to the arrest of opposition leader Naval'nij. In August 2020, Naval'nij was poisoned with Novičok, a nerve agent linked to the Russian state. After treatment and recovery in Berlin, he accused Putin of orchestrating the attack and released a video tricking a Russian agent into confessing. In January 2021, Naval'nij returned to Moscow, where he was arrested immediately. Despite clear government warnings, he issued a public call for protests. On January 23, tens of thousands in several Russian cities rallied in his support, and this event marked one of the broadest protest waves under Putin. While not all protesters were Naval'nij loyalists, many expressed frustration with injustice, corruption, and authoritarian rule. Within this framework, metaphor scenarios of FIGHTING, JOURNEY, PHYSICAL FORCE, and SUPPORT alternate. The NYT and WSJ initially choose a partially different perspective: by adopting expressions related to the FIGHTING scenario, the @nytimes underlines the Russian government's hardship in tackling protesters and social media dissent practices, while @wsj adopts a CHALLENGE scenario to describe the situation.

(89) Russia is **scrambling** to stop young people from protesting for Aleksei Navalny. But it's **struggling to rein in** TikTok, where in one viral clip, a young woman is giving people tips on how to sound like an American – "I'm gonna call my lawyer!" – if detained. <https://t.co/KvQB4L5uCn> (@nytimes, 23/01/21)

(90) Thousands of people across Russia took to the streets in **support** of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny, in what has shaped up to be a key test for his movement and a fresh **challenge** for the Kremlin <https://t.co/BwkKKQpMIO> (@WSJ, 23/01/21)

The scenario PHYSICAL FORCE is present in both news and activated using the same verb in tweets (92) and (93). Additionally, the NYT through a question posits a JOURNEY scenario, asking whether such movements may lead to a change, a “turning point”.

(91) The protests that **swept** Russia in support of Alexei Navalny this weekend were among the largest in recent years. Security forces detained more than 3,500 people—the largest number in at least nine years, according to independent monitors. <https://t.co/8q19ZYw63i> (@WSJ, 24/02/21)

(92) Protests **swept** Russia over the weekend in support of the jailed opposition leader Aleksei Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's loudest critic, leading to thousands of arrests. Could this be a political **turning point**? Listen to today's episode of The Daily. <https://t.co/CAzr1c0n4B> (@nytimes, 24/02/21)

The PHYSICAL FORCE scenario, as for 2014 and 2017, is predominant throughout the year, activated by the extensive use of MRWs such as “pressure”, “tensions”, “push” to describe states exerting or enduring pressure. The image schemas rooted in embodied experience FORCE and MOTION do not function independently but are often integrated into compositional structures, and therefore PHYSICAL FORCE and JOURNEY are often interrelated. Naval'nij's incarceration did increase tensions, as the following tweet (93) summarizes. In February 2021, Germany, Sweden, and Poland expelled Russian diplomats in a coordinated response to Russia's earlier expulsion of their envoys, whom Moscow accused of attending pro-Naval'nij protests. The EU countries denied this, asserting their diplomats were lawfully observing the demonstrations. The incident deepened EU-Russia tensions, revealing internal EU divisions and prompting discussions on future sanctions and the bloc's dependence on Russian energy, especially the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

(93) Russian diplomats were expelled from Germany, Poland and Sweden in retaliation for the recent ejection by the Kremlin of envoys from the three EU nations last week. **Tensions**

have **heightened** between the bloc and Moscow after Russia jailed Aleksei Navalny. <https://t.co/qFmt6MDnqs> (@nytimes, 08/02/21)

In (94) and (95), the JOURNEY metaphor scenario positions the US government as the leader of EU countries. The two tweets are nearly identical, published within a three-hour window, however, in (95) the final sentence is omitted. The removal of “But Germany and France are holding back” eliminates a crucial nuance: that within Europe, not all states support a tougher stance toward Moscow. Because the linked WSJ article—the same unmodified article linked in both tweets—consistently included this detail, the omission cannot be explained by a factual update of the story. Rather, it reflects an editorial decision in the tweet itself—whether for reasons of brevity, impact, or selective framing. Although such a choice could stem from editorial brevity, social media strategies such as A/B testing⁷⁹, or the routine practice of posting multiple versions of the same link throughout the day, these practices are consistent with the dynamics of doing journalism “live” on Twitter, where content is continually reframed to maximize clarity, visibility, or engagement. Yet regardless of intent, the discursive effect remains the same: the omission downplays intra-European divisions and constructs a more cohesive image of European alignment behind US leadership.

(94) As the Kremlin threatens Ukraine and Russia’s main opposition leader’s health deteriorates, some European countries want to follow the Biden administration’s **lead** and take a tougher line toward Moscow. But Germany and France are **holding back**. <https://t.co/P0ZZUtX8gs> (@WSJ, 19/04/21)

(95) As the Kremlin threatens Ukraine and Russia’s main opposition leader’s health deteriorates, some European countries want to follow the Biden administration’s lead and take a tougher line toward Moscow <https://t.co/5ohsgBCR2b> (@WSJ, 19/04/21)

If on the one hand at the beginning of Biden’s mandate there were signs of “reorienting” (96) the relationship between the US and Russia, the attempt remained largely rhetorical, and relations progressively deteriorated for multiple reasons. One early flashpoint was the Russian government’s campaign against Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), a US-funded independent news outlet, which faced heavy fines and possible criminal charges after refusing

⁷⁹ See footnote 68.

to comply with the “foreign agent”⁸⁰ law. The outlet argued that such labeling would severely undermine its journalistic credibility and reach.

(96) Russia’s government is threatening the American-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty with fines and criminal charges for its journalists, just as President Biden seeks to **reorient** the U.S. relationship with Russia. <https://t.co/CqBsONSCm6> (@nytimes, 21/01/21)

Tensions escalated sharply after Biden publicly called Putin a “killer” in response to a US intelligence report accusing Putin of ordering interference in the 2020 US election. In retaliation, Moscow recalled its ambassador to Washington, a serious diplomatic gesture. In a televised response, Putin criticized US historical shortcomings and accused the US of projecting its flaws onto others. He sarcastically wished Biden “good health” and challenged him to a live public debate.

(97) U.S.-Russia **ties** came under fresh **strain** as Moscow responded to Biden’s comment that he considered Putin a killer <https://t.co/8xdEPSkFUO> (@WSJ, 13/08/21)

(a) COMPETITION frames

COMPETITION frames were prominent as in the previous years, yet with a focus on a new narrative, i.e., COVID19 vaccine implementation. Amid critical shortages of Western-made COVID-19 vaccines, several nations turned to China, India and Russia to secure doses, allowing both powers to expand their geopolitical influence also in regions traditionally aligned with the US. What this episode reveals, however, is that the logic of competition often prevailed even in an international crisis which demanded collective solutions. Rather than fostering a coordinated global vaccination effort, vaccine distribution became entangled in geostrategic rivalry, shaped by concerns over influence. As Pedrini (2021) demonstrates in her cross-linguistic analysis of pandemic discourse, the pervasive metaphor of the “vaccine race” foregrounded speed, rivalry, and competitive struggle as the dominant lens through which the search for an immunization was narrated. This competitive mindset persisted despite the fact

⁸⁰ Russia’s “foreign agent” law was first adopted in 2012 and has since been repeatedly expanded. It requires organizations, media outlets, and individuals receiving foreign funding and engaged in broadly defined “political activity” to register as “foreign agents” and label their publications accordingly. Critics, including the OSCE and human rights groups, argue that the designation stigmatizes independent journalism and civil society and is used selectively to silence dissent.

Human Rights Watch. (2022, December 1). *Russia: New Restrictions for ‘Foreign Agents’*. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/01/russia-new-restrictions-foreign-agents>

that pandemics are transnational threats requiring collaborative responses. The enduring sense of commercial opportunism foregrounded national interest over equitable access. Within this COMPETITION frame, states “jockey”, join the “fray” (98), and are “rivals” (99). Major powers rebranded the frame: the pandemic did not suspend global competition; it rethematized it.

(98) Covid-19 vaccines are becoming an important form of diplomatic currency around the world, as nations **jockey** for soft-power gains. China and Russia are touting their own vaccines, as are Western drug companies. Now India is joining the **fray**. <https://t.co/uZbrpfGUWJ> (@WSJ, 13/02/21)

(99) Instead of looking to the U.S. for help with vaccines, countries across Latin America are so far relying on Washington’s global **rivals**, China and Russia <https://t.co/rsnxF5fHeb> (@WSJ, 24/02/21)

Rival states remain as such of course beyond the COVID narrative. At his first NATO summit as president, Biden reaffirmed the United States’ commitment to the alliance, contrasting sharply with Donald Trump’s approach; in tweet (100), Russia and China are respectively “aggressive” and “rising”. While China was not labelled a “threat” like Russia (see Section 5.2 for a detailed analysis of the THREAT scenario), the communiqué noted its expanding global presence, military modernization, and cooperation with Russia as strategic concerns. Commenting on the summit, Vindman argues that although Biden was firm in his statements, Putin gained a symbolic victory simply by being seen on equal footing with the US president. This global visibility reinforced Putin’s image as a powerful world leader, especially useful for domestic propaganda in Russia ahead of the September 2021 parliamentary elections. As stated in (101), Russia was metaphorically “winning” the public relations battle, even if the actual summit delivered limited political substance – mirroring how a team may win on points or on image even if performance is uneven.

(100) President Biden is taking part in his first NATO summit as president. The **challenge** of a more aggressive Russia and a rising China will be at the top of the agenda as the 30 member nations meet. Follow live updates. <https://t.co/WMuX2QVhyW> (@nytimes, 14/06/21)

(101) In Opinion Alexander Vindman writes in a guest essay: "The clear problem here is that Russia is **coming away with** a public relations **win** while the U.S. has little to show from the summit in terms of tangible improvements to national security." <https://t.co/fpTxhmDzAK> (@nytimes, 17/06/21)

(b) DAMAGED/MOVED OBJECTS scenarios

Throughout the year, International Relations were represented in terms of different kinds of MOVED and/or DAMAGED OBJECTS. In tweet (102), West-Russia diplomatic worsening is expressed as food spoilage through the verb “sour”. This metaphor sets the tone: relations are depicted as decayed beyond repair, with Russia turning to asymmetrical tactics.

(102) Russia’s relations with the West continue to **sour**, and the Kremlin sees the cyber operations as a cheap and effective way to achieve its geopolitical goals, analysts say <https://t.co/qgVW45xbuz> (@WSJ, 03/01/21)

Russian military incursions along the borders with Ukraine marked the clearest escalation of tensions in 2021. Russia staged large-scale military exercises near Ukraine's border and in Crimea. Tweet (103) summarizes the events of late March 2021, with the initial Russian mobilization along the Ukrainian border. In figurative terms, the moved object is the cease-fire between Ukraine and pro-Russian fighters, which Russia is “threatening to upend.” his choice reinforces Russia’s image as an agent of disruption against a fragile peace. A CHALLENGE scenario is also activated. Notably, Ukraine – the direct target of the military buildup – is backgrounded, while the US is cast as the primary entity being challenged. This discursive framing reflects a Cold War-like logic, interpreting local events through the prism of great-power rivalry rather than Ukrainian sovereignty.

(103) Russia has begun mobilizing troops along its border with Ukraine, presenting a fresh **challenge** to the U.S. and threatening to **upend** a cease-fire between Ukraine and pro-Russian fighters <https://t.co/C5jpKFpSiP> (@WSJ, 01/04/21)

Russia announced it would cease its diplomatic mission to NATO⁸¹ in October, ending a decades-long, post-Cold War attempt to build trust between Russia and the Western military alliance. This decision, taken by Foreign Minister Lavrov, followed NATO's expulsion of eight Russian diplomats accused of espionage. Though diplomatically significant, the move involved

⁸¹ The NATO–Russia Council (NRC), established in 2002, was the main forum for consultation, joint decision-making, and cooperation between NATO and Russia. It built on earlier mechanisms of dialogue dating back to 1997. While the Council had already been suspended temporarily after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the closure of Russia’s NATO mission in Brussels and the shutdown of NATO’s Moscow office in October 2021 dismantled the remaining institutional channels of contact (Gheciu and von Hlatky 2024).

no immediate military escalation, i.e., “unraveling relations”, and Russia maintained ties with individual NATO member states.

(104) Russia plans to cease diplomatic engagement with NATO, the Russian foreign minister said on Monday, in the latest sign of **unraveling** relations between Moscow and the West. <https://t.co/N5I56YBtjS> (@nytimes, 18/10/21)

In a 50-minute phone call on December 30, 2021, President Putin warned Biden that imposing further economic sanctions on Russia due to its actions in Ukraine could lead to a “complete rupture” (105) of US–Russia relations. The call was requested by Putin and came amid escalating tensions over Russia’s military buildup of around 100,000 troops along Ukraine’s border. Russia accused the US and NATO of placing offensive weapons near its borders, including concerns over potential deployment of intermediate-range nuclear missiles, previously banned under the INF Treaty (which the U.S. exited in 2019 after accusing Russia of violations). The US has provided defensive weapons to Ukraine, which Russia viewed as a threat. The “rupture” was soon to be “complete” with Russia’s large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

(105) President Vladimir Putin warned President Biden that any economic sanctions imposed on Russia if it were to take new military action against Ukraine would result in a “complete **rupture**” of relations between the two nuclear superpowers. <https://t.co/kw9TFNLCUg> (@nytimes, 31/12/21)

5.1.2.3.2 Metaphor scenarios for RUSSIA

Unlike in the previous years 2014 and 2017, the metonymic referents of the location name “Russia” include several instances of RUSSIA-FOR-POPULATION (POP) and RUSSIA-FOR-ORGANIZATION (ORG). This aspect is mainly due to media coverage of pro-Naval’nij protests, widely addressed in the international press and involving a great turnout of Russian citizens, and the Tokyo Olympics, in which the Russian Federation could compete under the name of the Russian Olympic Committee due to doping schemes accusations.

(a) The metonymic referent RUSSIA-FOR-POPULATION

In tweets where Russia is metonymically used to refer to its people, the recurrent SUPPORT scenario—especially in relation to pro-Naval’nij protests—may initially appear conventional or literal. However, following Koller’s (2024) analysis, such uses should be understood as metaphoric mappings rooted in basic physical experience. Drawing on the Oxford English Dictionary and MIP procedure, Koller (2024: 92,93) shows that the verb “support” retains a primary meaning of “bearing weight” or “keeping from falling,” which is metaphorically extended in discourse to denote social or political assistance. In the context of protest discourse, supporting Naval’nij is an expression activating the conceptual metaphor HELP IS PHYSICAL SUPPORT, mapping the physical act of propping up an object onto the socio-political act of endorsing or enabling dissent. Thus, tweets framing Russians as “supporting” Naval’nij evoke a conceptual structure where protestors collectively sustain or uplift the opposition figure, thereby contributing to a metaphorical image of resistance as embodied action. Despite their conventionality, these metaphors activate embodied schemas (Lakoff & Johnson 1999), making the abstract notion of political solidarity experientially salient.

(106) Thousands of people across Russia took to the streets in **support** of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny, in what has shaped up to be a key **test** for his movement and a fresh challenge for the Kremlin <https://t.co/BwkKKQpMIO> (@WSJ, 23/01/21)

(107) Tens of thousands of people turned out across Russia on Sunday for a second consecutive weekend rally in **support** of a jailed opposition leader, Aleksei Navalny. But where the protesters went, so did the police, meeting them in sometimes brutal clashes. <https://t.co/adEMIWDM6g> <https://t.co/KdnkalGS8e> (@nytimes, 31/01/21)

The repression of the Russian authorities was brutal not only during the January rallies but is part of a broader pressing authoritarian drive which exacerbated in 2021 and culminated in 2022, but has earlier roots. Kolesnikov⁸² (2023) conceptualizes a “second front” to describe the domestic “war” waged by Putin against Russian civil society, in parallel to the military campaign in Ukraine. While the primary front is located on Ukrainian territory, the internal front targets the psychological, ideological, and social fabric of Russian society. Over the past fifteen years, the Putin regime has progressively intensified its efforts to suppress political indifference, compelling citizens to demonstrate public loyalty to the state and, since 2022, to the war effort. Consequently, for those unwilling to align themselves with the government, emigration has often remained the only viable option. As reported in tweets (108), dissidents,

⁸² Kolesnikov, A. (2023, April 7). *Putin’s Second Front: The War in Ukraine Has Become a Battle for the Russian Psyche*. *Foreign Affairs*. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/russian-federation/putins-second-front>

opposition politicians, and independent journalists are increasingly forced to choose between exile or imprisonment under the regime. The Kremlin's strategy, according to analysts, aims to neutralize domestic dissent without creating "martyrs", portraying those abroad as foreign-aligned traitors. "Wave", "trap", "retreating"/"struggle" respectively activate WATER (108), CONTAINED ENTITY (100), and WAR/FIGHTING (110) scenarios to describe the situation:

(108) Dissidents and journalists in Russia are increasingly facing a choice: Flee or face prison. Dozens are believed to have left this year in what experts say is the biggest **wave** of political emigration in the country's post-Soviet history. <https://t.co/DiukvJYptB> (@nytimes, 30/08/21)

In the lead-up to Russia's 2021 parliamentary elections, a NYT cross-country investigation revealed how Putin's sustained dominance, i.e., a "trap", rests on a combination of fear, controlled stability, and the co-optation of nationalism. From Murmansk to Chečnja, citizens expressed disillusionment with corruption, low wages, and rising prices, yet hesitated to imagine a post-Putin future, fearing instability and violence.

(109) "We are all in a **trap** – trapped by one tyrant." Ahead of Russia's parliamentary elections, many say they are fed up with corruption, low pensions and rising prices. But they worry, as one man said, that "if things start to change, there will be blood." <https://t.co/IkiC3F9jJN> (@nytimes, 17/09/21)

In tweet (110), the lexical choices "retreating" and "oases" combine to construct a metaphorical framing of political disengagement under authoritarian conditions. The verb "retreating" activates a WAR/FIGHTING scenario, connoting a strategic or enforced movement away from a contested domain – in this case, the arena of national politics – into safer terrain. The noun "oases", meanwhile, draws on a GEOGRAPHICAL/ENVIRONMENTAL source domain, representing isolated, life-sustaining refuges within an otherwise inhospitable environment. In the related article, the "oasis" – specifically located in the Soloveckij Archipelago⁸³ – serves as a metaphor for a self-sufficient, apolitical micro-world in which individuals believe they can preserve a degree of personal quality of life without confronting the state. When combined, these elements yield a composite metaphor whereby activists and disaffected citizens are

⁸³ The Soloveckij archipelago is located in the White Sea, in northern Russia, near the Arctic Circle. They are historically significant as the site of the Soloveckij Monastery, founded in the 15th century, and later notorious as one of the first Soviet labor camps (the Solovkij prison camp), often regarded as a precursor to the Gulag system. Encyclopædia Britannica. (n.d.). *Solovetsky Islands*. In *Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Solovetsky-Island-prison>

conceptualized as withdrawing from the “desert” of systemic corruption and repression to “seek shelter” in autonomous enclaves.

(110) President Vladimir Putin remains a hero to many in Russia, especially for his foreign policy. Those who oppose him are **retreating**, as they put it, into their own **oases** or parallel worlds, fearful of facing a post-Putin unknown. <https://t.co/C5PKZI3RS4>
<https://t.co/aMnbqaaZE3> (@nytimes, 17/09/21)

(b) The metonymic referent RUSSIA-FOR-(SPORT)ORGANISATION

The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) confirmed the World Anti-Doping Agency’s (WADA) findings that Russia engaged in a state-orchestrated doping scheme followed by a deliberate cover-up, and then what was described as a “cover-up of the cover-up.” The CAS panel reduced WADA’s proposed four-year ban to two years and weakened restrictions, and Russian athletes were allowed to compete in national colors with “Russia” on their uniforms. In tweet (111) –in which “Russia” refers metonymically both to the sports-administrative apparatus and to the government hierarchy that oversaw or enabled the doping (i.e., OFF and ORG) – a MANIPULATING scenario is activated by the noun “cover-up.” This term frames Russia’s manipulation of anti-doping data as an act of literally concealing incriminating evidence beneath a figurative “cover,” implying deliberate obstruction and suppression of truth. “Off the hook” derives from the (fishing) ANIMAL domain, in which a caught fish escapes the hook and thus avoids capture. In this context, it metaphorically depicts Russia as evading from the full weight of punishment, underscoring a narrative of impunity despite demonstrated culpability. This metaphor constructs the CAS decision as allowing the “caught” wrongdoer to slip free.

(111) An appeals panel at the Court of Arbitration for Sport substantiated much of the World Anti-Doping Agency findings on Russia’s doping **cover-up**. And then it let the Russians **off the hook**. <https://t.co/ma9HiYs9wN> (@nytimes, 14/01/21)

Other scenarios metonymically refer to Russia as the country’s sports administration apparatus. At the Tokyo Olympics women’s team gymnastics final, while the US faltered on beam and floor, the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) team won gold. Strong performances secured Russia’s first Olympic team title as an independent nation, marking a shift in the long-standing

US–Russia gymnastics rivalry and narrowing the performance gap that had previously favored the Americans. In the expression “Russia skirted disaster” (112) from Olympic sports reporting, the spatial action is mapped onto an abstract target domain involving potential negative outcomes. The disaster is conceptualized as a bounded area or object that can be circumnavigated; while “skirting” it implies a skillful, narrowly achieved avoidance. During the Soviet era, Olympic gymnastics was one of the USSR’s most dominant disciplines, producing global icons and serving as a showcase for Soviet physical culture and discipline ideals. For the US, victories over the Soviets (rare before the 1980s) were seen as symbolic wins in the ideological competition between the two superpowers. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia inherited this sporting legacy but with diminished institutional resources. Nevertheless, US–Russia encounters in gymnastics continued to be framed in competitive-national terms. This makes elite gymnastics an example of cross-domain metaphorical COMPETITION, where an athletic contest is narrated through the same competitive logic that underlies political and geopolitical struggles between the US and Russia.

(112) On the beam, Viktoria Listunova of Russia performed difficult acrobatics and beautiful leaps, then dismounted with a double tuck. Her mostly clean routine meant Russia **skirted** disaster, since two of her teammates had fallen. <https://t.co/PGTe9YQBbx>
<https://t.co/wZS3wgrnxy> (@nytimes, 27/07/21)

Although banned from competing under its flag and anthem due to the state-sponsored doping scandal, the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) excelled at the Tokyo Games, surpassing its own medal projections with 53 medals (behind only China and the US) and winning in high-profile events like women’s and men’s gymnastics team gold. Tweet (113) constitutes a neat case where a journalist can inject a culturally resonant, vivid image while simultaneously guiding the reader toward a particular evaluative stance. Russia is historically associated with resource extraction (especially Siberian mining), so the mining frame is activated automatically for the reader when the subject is Russia. The sports success is metaphorically mapped to the extraction of natural resources, – “gold” (medals) – from a location (Tokyo) rather than a mine. The term “haul” may suggest exploitative, mechanical, or opportunistic accumulation rather than purely celebratory sporting achievement. In the context of the ROC’s presence under doping sanctions, it could be read as subtly questioning the legitimacy of the “haul”.

(113) 2021-08-04 Russia's not really at the Olympics. But that hasn't stopped the world's largest country from **hauling** gold out of Tokyo **like a Siberian mine**. <https://t.co/hVQYi50hco> (@WSJ, 04/08/21)

(c) *The metonymic referent RUSSIA-FOR-GOVERNMENT*

When Russia metonymically stands for the country's Official Administration, the same conventional metaphor scenarios enacted in 2014 and 2017 reappear, with BUILDING and PHYSICAL FORCE scenarios prevailing in the WSJ and in the NYT, respectively. The BUILDING scenario encompasses both RUSSIA AS BUILDER and RUSSIA AS STRUCTURE.

Referring to the 2021 mass protests, Tweet (114) adopts construction-related lexicon – “built”, “infrastructure”, “clamp down” – to describe the Russian government's attempts to censor the internet and “build” a Russian alternative. However, the Kremlin's approach has combined partial platform control with targeted crackdowns. Measures to curtail online dissent included surveillance mandates for providers, selective takedowns, and pressure on companies to remove protest-related content. Yet attempts to ban platforms like Telegram proved technically ineffective. At the same time, pro-Kremlin voices continue to use Western platforms to disseminate state narratives abroad. Quite interestingly, journalists define the internet as a new form of the soviet phenomenon of *samizdat* (self-publishing) (Cooper 2020: 21). YouTube, in particular, has been viewed as an alternative to state-run television, with independent journalists uploading videos that attract large audiences. More recently, however, authorities have deliberately slowed down YouTube performance to a crawl: in December 2024, a digital rights expert reported traffic plummeted to just 20% of normal levels, calling it a “de facto” ban⁸⁴.

(114) For years, Russia has **built up** the **infrastructure** to **clamp down** on freedom of speech online. But even as Vladimir Putin faced the biggest protests in years last month, his government seemed unwilling – and unable – to limit the spread of digital dissent. <https://t.co/r5djHIEQXg> (@nytimes, 21/02/21)

⁸⁴ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. (2024, December 24). *YouTube Practically 'Blocked' In Russia, Expert Says, As Traffic Plummet*. <https://www.rferl.org/a/youtube-practically-blocked-in-russia-expert-says/33251568.html>

The RUSSIA-AS-BUILDER scenario interacts with the WAR/FIGHTING in (115) and (116) through MRWs such as “built”, “cement”, and “struggle”, campaign”. In these instances, the act of constructing is conceptually linked to belligerency: To “build,” Russia must engage in, or emerge from, some form of conflict. This is evident in the Kremlin’s promotion of Sputnik V, which, by becoming the first COVID-19 vaccine to be publicly registered in August 2020, was framed as a landmark achievement of Russian innovation and speed, a “conquest” which positioned Russia as a leader in the “pandemic-fighting race.” However, domestic uptake remained low, with skepticism fueled by the vaccine’s rapid approval and limited initial transparency. The following tweet reflects this narrative.

(115) Russia has **built** a large public-relations **campaign** both at home and abroad for their Sputnik V vaccine. @georgikantchev takes us through why the vaccine’s success is so important for the Kremlin. #WSJWhatsNow <https://t.co/b9JFGBjT82> (@WSJ, 05/03/21)

In tweet (116), “cement” metaphorically conveys Russia’s aim to make its role in Middle East diplomacy permanent, stable, and difficult to dislodge. After backing Bashar al-Assad militarily, Moscow brokered a 2018 cease-fire in Daraa to end the rebellion and showcase its role as mediator. The deal was meant as a model for other conflict zones. Yet the Assad regime’s siege and continued clashes undermined Russia’s credibility, with locals accusing it of failing to enforce its own truce. This narrative highlights the fragility of Moscow’s peacemaker image, even as it maintains a strong military alliance with Assad.

(116) 2021-08-09 Russia **struggles** to keep the peace in Syria, as an assault by Syrian forces on a rebel-held town erodes Moscow’s aim to **cement** itself as a power broker in the Middle East <https://t.co/esyA9v3ljf> (@WSJ, 09/08/21)

(d) OBJECT (STRUCTURE) scenario

In tweet (117), “Moscow’s backyard” is a metaphor for the former Soviet republics in Central Asia – Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan – which Russia considers within its sphere of influence due to historical, political, and security ties. Here, it suggests that instability in Afghanistan could spill over into this region, which Russia views as a strategically important “close neighborhood” it seeks to protect and control.

(117) Recent military exercises by Russia and allies in Central Asia signaled an intention to prevent terrorism or ethnic tensions in Afghanistan from spilling over into Moscow's **backyard** <https://t.co/1c1wqsiSv3> (@WSJ, 26/10/21)

In December 2021, during his annual press conference, Putin blamed NATO for rising tensions over Ukraine, rejecting claims that Russia was preparing to invade. He employed the metaphor of a “doorstep” to depict allied missile deployments as an intrusion into Russia's immediate living space. In tweet (118), Putin's metaphor of the doorstep is reported.

(118) Putin defended Moscow's military buildup near Ukraine in the face of what he described as attempts by NATO to encroach on Russia's **doorstep** <https://t.co/5fW656TzAe> (@WSJ, 23/12/21)

The following fragment reports Putin's original extended metaphor:

“We have made it clear that further NATO expansion eastward is unacceptable. What's so hard to understand about that? Are we putting missiles near the US border? No. It's the US that has brought its missiles to our **house**. They're already on our **doorstep**. Is it really too much to ask not to put any strike systems near our **home**? What's so unusual about that?”⁸⁵

Among several other scholars, George F. Kennan – once the advocate of the “containment” policy against the Soviet Union and author of the Long Telegram (see section 3.3) – criticized NATO's policy of expansion⁸⁶ in 1998. With him, Professor Mearsheimer supports the idea that Russia has the right to feel encircled⁸⁷, starting much earlier than the last decade.

In 1990-1991, during German reunification negotiations, Western leaders reportedly assured Soviet officials that NATO would not expand eastwards, beyond East Germany. Archival research (National Security Archive; Shifrinson 2016) suggests these assurances extended to Eastern Europe, though they were informal and never codified in treaties. Nonetheless, within a decade NATO began enlarging. In 2017, the Trump administration shifted from supplying only “non-lethal” gear to delivering lethal weapons to Ukraine – labeled “defensive” by Washington but regarded as offensive by Moscow. NATO members also

⁸⁵ “*My jasno i četko dali ponjat', čto dal'nejšee dviženie NATO na vostok nepriemlemo. Nu i čego zdes' neponjatnogo? My čto li stavim rakety rjadom s granicami SŠA? Net. Èto SŠA svoimi raketami prišli k našemu domu. Na poroge našego doma naxodjatsja uže. Razve èto kakoje-to izbytočnoe trebovanie – ne stavit' nikakix udarnyx sistem u našego doma? Čego zdes' neobyčnogo?*”

⁸⁶ Friedman, T. L. (1998, May 2). *Foreign Affairs; Now a Word From X*. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/02/opinion/foreign-affairs-now-a-word-from-x.html>

⁸⁷ The Economist. (2022, March 11). *John Mearsheimer on why the West is principally responsible for the Ukrainian crisis*. The Economist. <https://www.economist.com/by-invitation/2022/03/11/john-mearsheimer-on-why-the-west-is-principally-responsible-for-the-ukrainian-crisis>

trained Ukrainian forces and held joint exercises, including Sea Breeze 2021 in the Black Sea, which nearly provoked clashes with Russia. NATO itself conducted live-fire drills close to Russia's border (e.g., Estonia, 2020-2021) using missiles capable of striking Russian territory. By late 2021, Russian officials declared they had reached a "boiling point" and demanded binding guarantees that Ukraine would never join NATO and that post-1997 military deployments in Eastern Europe be reversed (Abelow 2023).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine, which began two months after the publication of tweet (118), is unequivocally a criminal act under international law and a grave violation of a sovereign state's territorial integrity. At the same time, treating it as an uncaused eruption of aggression flattens a complex history into caricature. A fuller account must acknowledge the interaction of long-running Russian security narratives (e.g., opposition to NATO's eastward enlargement and the presence of Western military cooperation on Russia's periphery), domestic political incentives within the Kremlin (regime legitimation, control of the information space, and rally-'round-the-flag dynamics), and regional contingencies (the post-2014 conflict in Donbas, the status of Crimea, and competing interpretations of Minsk commitments). None of these factors excuse the decision to wage war; rather, they help explain how Moscow framed its threat perceptions and justified coercive choices to its public. Parsing these antecedents is essential for analytical accuracy, and disregarding the underlying motivations would risk a serious historical oversimplification.

(e) PHYSICAL FORCE scenarios

EXERTING

A declassified US intelligence report concluded that Putin authorized a broad campaign to influence the 2020 presidential election in favor of Trump, using Russian state and proxy actors to damage, "hurt", Biden's candidacy. The usage of the verb "hurt" in tweet (11) aligns with well-documented violence/physical harm metaphors in political discourse, where elections are framed as combative arenas and political actors as opponents in a contest. Such metaphorical framing casts political strategy as an act of aggression, thereby intensifying perceptions of hostility within the US–Russia information conflict.

(119) 2021-03-16 Breaking News: Moscow used Trump associates to try to **hurt** Joe Biden's 2020 campaign, says a new U.S. report on influence efforts from Russia, Iran and elsewhere. <https://t.co/UDAQIdG7Rc> (@nytimes, 16/03/21)

In tweet (120), the metaphor-related word "muzzle" is used to frame the Russian government's actions against opposition figures as the deliberate silencing of dissent, drawing from the physical act of restraining an animal's mouth to prevent it from biting or barking. This metaphor reinforces the perception that coronavirus safety rules were cynically repurposed—not for public health—but as a coercive tool to neutralize political opponents ahead of elections. By evoking imagery of suppression and enforced silence, it positions the targeted activists as active agents being forcibly restrained.

(120) Prominent opposition figures in Russia have been confined to house arrest on accusations that they violated coronavirus safety rules. Defense lawyers say the government is using virus-related restrictions to **muzzle** its opponents. <https://t.co/tdHiglO0a> (@nytimes, 19/03/21)

ENDURING

Conversely, the "pressure" metaphor is reversed in (121): instead of Russia applying force on Europe, the image is of Russia itself being subjected to external force. In this case, the "force" comes from the US, the International Energy Agency, and European governments urging Moscow to increase gas supplies to ease the crisis. Metaphorically, Russia is positioned as an object being pressed from above, highlighting external constraints, demands, and scrutiny.

(121) Natural gas prices and utility bills are soaring in Britain and the rest of Europe, and Russia is coming under **pressure** to provide more gas. <https://t.co/DERpefy4rR> (@nytimes, 23/09/21)

Other scenarios portraying Russia as a passive agent enduring force emerge in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, where the country is depicted as the object of an external, uncontrollable assault, which is "hit" by COVID. On 2 November 2021, Russia recorded its highest daily Covid-19 death toll as a fourth wave of infections "hit" the country—a metaphor that casts the pandemic as an aggressive assailant impacting a vulnerable target. The surge is described as "wreaking havoc" (tweet 122) in a population that remains largely unvaccinated and deeply distrustful of government interventions. In this narrative, Russia appears as a nation under siege from a biological threat, its passivity accentuated by low vaccination rates, skepticism toward state measures, and the cumulative toll of previous waves. This

representation stands in stark contrast to Russia's assertiveness in the international vaccine distribution campaign.

(122) Russia recorded its highest daily Covid death toll as a fourth wave of infections **hits** the country. The surge is wreaking havoc in a population that is largely unvaccinated and distrustful of government interventions to slow the spread of the virus. <https://t.co/i6Rk7RGdjs> (@nytimes, 02/11/21)

5.1.3 Discussion on RQ1

The analysis conducted in Sections 5.1.1 and 5.1.2 demonstrates how metaphor operated as a central resource in the framing of Russia and its international relations across the NYT and the WSJ between 2014 and 2021. Quantitatively, the data revealed the predominance of RUSSIA AS GOVERNMENT (OFF), highlighting the centrality of institutional agency and decision-making. At the level of source concepts for international relations, four domains – PHYSICAL FORCE, COMPETITION, PERSON, and OBJECT – proved particularly salient. These mapped Russia's position as an antagonistic force, a rival in institutionalized contests, a personified actor (neighbor, partner, adversary), or a fragile and deteriorating object. A systematic outlet contrast was observed, with WSJ diversifying its metaphorical repertoire across a wide range of dyads, while NYT concentrated more narrowly on recurrent pairings, most notably the US–Russia relationship. Metaphors were predominantly conventional and indirect in type, and attributions were often externalized, allowing the outlets to circulate evaluative framings while maintaining institutional authority.

The discourse-historical analysis complemented these quantitative tendencies by showing how metaphor scenarios materialized in specific discursive contexts. PHYSICAL FORCE scenarios drew on narratives of violence and coercion, framing Russia as an aggressor or disruptive power and intensifying perceptions of hostility. COMPETITION scenarios highlighted rivalry in economic and political arenas, situating Russia within multipolar contests but also foregrounding its challenges to Western hegemony. PERSON metaphors enacted familiar roles such as neighbor, partner, or prisoner, evoking affective associations and legitimating stances toward cooperation or containment. OBJECT metaphors depicted Russia in terms of fragility,

deterioration, or malfunction, rhetorically diminishing its agency and representing its relations as structurally unstable.

Metaphors shape and construct narratives, with varying degrees of specificity. At times, they operate as building blocks, almost emptied of their semantic weight; at other times, they extend far beyond a structuring function, actively framing evaluations and legitimating particular stances. What emerges clearly from the present analysis is that these domains are not new: they largely reproduce entrenched figurative repertoires rooted in Cold War discourse, thereby demonstrating the diachronic stability of metaphorical conceptualizations of Russia. Rather than introducing innovative mappings, the outlets relied on and recycled long-established frames that continue to organize public debate. The findings of this study indicate that, despite occasional differences in emphasis between outlets, the American press between 2014 and 2021 reproduced a largely unchanged metaphorical narrative of Russia. This continuity suggests that strong biases persist in the framing of Russia-related events, cutting across editorial lines and political orientations, and reflecting the resilience of Cold War repertoires in shaping contemporary news discourse.

At the same time, it must be noted that the analysis in RQ1 has focused exclusively on broadsheet discourse. Since tabloid outlets follow different stylistic conventions and communicative logics, their treatment of Russia may diverge. This motivates the shift in RQ2, which extends the investigation to tabloid journalism to assess whether register and genre shape metaphorical framings in distinctive ways.

5.2 RQ2. A corpus-assisted method to investigate US–Russia relations across broadsheet and tabloid formats

While RQ1 investigated how broadsheet outlets framed Russia on Twitter, RQ2 expands the analysis to include tabloid Twitter discourse to assess similarities and differences across journalistic genres. By keeping the medium constant – digital journalism on Twitter – the focus shifts to the role of genre in shaping metaphorical representations. Particular attention is given to US–Russia relations, which dominate American coverage of international affairs and therefore provide a consistent point of comparison across outlets. Methodologically, this

section adopts a corpus-assisted approach combined with discourse-historical interpretation of how these patterns are realized in tabloid tweets.

Section 5.2.1 presents the quantitative results for metaphoricity across broadsheet and tabloid outlets, Section 5.2.2 develops a qualitative analysis of scenario construction, and Section 5.2.3 provides a comparative discussion, highlighting both continuities and divergences between broadsheet and tabloid framings.

5.2.1 Metaphoricity of semantic labels in the corpus

Table 5.1 provides a quantitative overview of metaphorical density across the seven selected semantic labels, the selection of which was discussed in section 4.2.2: G3- Warfare, E3- Violence, K5.1 Sports, X8+ Trying Hard, S8- Hindering, and M4-M5 Movement (in Water and Air). The last two were unified, as both domains instantiate motion through fluid media and show functional similarity in metaphorical usage. The analysis distinguishes between broadsheet and tabloid sub-datasets and highlights both absolute and relative frequencies (in %) of metaphorically tagged lexical units within each semantic field.

Table 5.1. Metaphoricity of semantic labels in the corpus.

<i>News Outlet</i>	G3- Warfare	E3- Violence	K5.1 Sports	X8+ Trying Hard	S8- Hindering	M4/M5 Movement Water/Air
@nytimes	7.35% (37/503)	7.06% (19/269)	2.31% (16/264)	2.31% (3/130)	6.90% (6/87)	1.42% (2/141)
@WSJ	3.87% (24/620)	7.05% (22/312)	3.81% (11/289)	2.46% (3/122)	7.79% (6/77)	0.79% (2/253)
Metaphoricity in BROADSHEET	5.43% (61/1123)	7.06% (41/581)	4.88% (27/553)	2.38% (6/252)	7.31% (12/164)	1.02% (4/394)
@nypost	3.45% (6/174)	13.58% (11/81)	5.48% (4/73)	5.26% (1/19)	16.67% (2/12)	1.20% (1/83)
@NYDailyNews	4.15% (8/193)	6.67% 7/105	6.98% (6/86)	8.82% (3/34)	5.41% (2/37)	1.12% (1/89)

Metaphoricity in	3.81%	9.68%	6.29%	7.55%	8.16%	1.16%
TABLOID	(14/367)	(18/186)	(10/159)	(4/53)	4/49	(2/172)

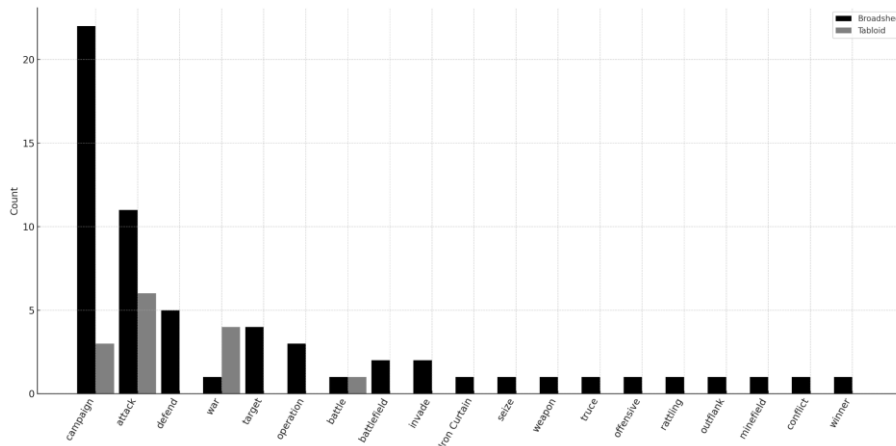
Metaphoricity in	5.03%	7.70%	5.20%	3.28%	7.51%	1.06%
the corpus	(75/1490)	(59/767)	(37/712)	(10/305)	(16/213)	(6/566)

Across the entire corpus, the highest proportion of metaphorically used lexical units is observed in the Violence domain, followed by Hindering, Sport, Trying Hard, and Warfare. Movement: Water/Air shows the lowest metaphoricity. This distribution broadly confirms earlier findings in metaphor studies (Iori 2023, Tan 2023), which show that the VIOLENCE domain is heavily relied upon to structure conceptualizations of geopolitics. At the same time, the relatively low metaphoricity of WARFARE and SPORT can be explained by the fact that these domains were used both metaphorically and literally during the timeframe of interest (January 1, 2014 – December 31, 2021): actual sports competitions and military conflicts were taking place, thus lowering their metaphorical density.

The tabloid sub-dataset displays proportionally higher levels of metaphoricity in five out of the six semantic domains, but a lower proportion in Warfare. Percentage-based comparisons highlight the density of metaphorical usage, but do not reflect the actual volume of metaphoric expressions in circulation. In practice, this means that although the broadsheet sub-dataset contains more metaphorical tokens in total, the tabloid sub-dataset is more metaphorically saturated relative to its size (See Section 4.2.1). The following graphs show the MRWs with respect to each Wmatrix label/domain.

5.2.1.1 G3 Warfare

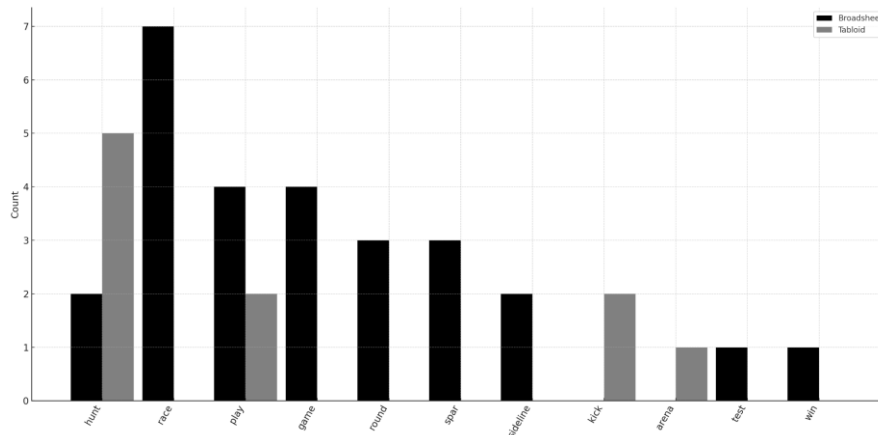
Figure 5.27. Metaphorically used lemmas tagged with the Warfare (G3) semantic label.



In the broadsheet sub-dataset, “campaign” is by far the most frequent item (22 tokens), followed by “attack” (11) and “defend” (5). Beyond these, broadsheets draw on a wider operational and strategic lexicon. This spread suggests that Broadsheet discourse constructs WAR scenarios as networks that include tactics, theatre, and strategy as well as actions. The presence of both aggressive (attack, invade) and defensive (defend, truce) lemmas also points to a more balanced agency structure, where conflict is narrated through multiple roles (attacker/defender, operations, arenas). By contrast, the TABLOID distribution concentrates on high-impact, eventive lexemes – notably “attack” (6) and “war” (4) – with only marginal contributions from “campaign” and “battle.”. The near absence of procedural or strategic vocabulary indicates a preference for immediacy and confrontation over the operational framing typical of Broadsheets. In pragmatic terms, Tabloids appear to foreground discrete, dramatized acts, enhancing salience through verbs of aggression, whereas Broadsheets more often situate acts within sustained or institutionally framed processes (campaign, operation, truce).

5.2.1.2 K5.1 Sports

Figure 5.28. Metaphorically used lemmas tagged with the Sports (K5.1) semantic label.

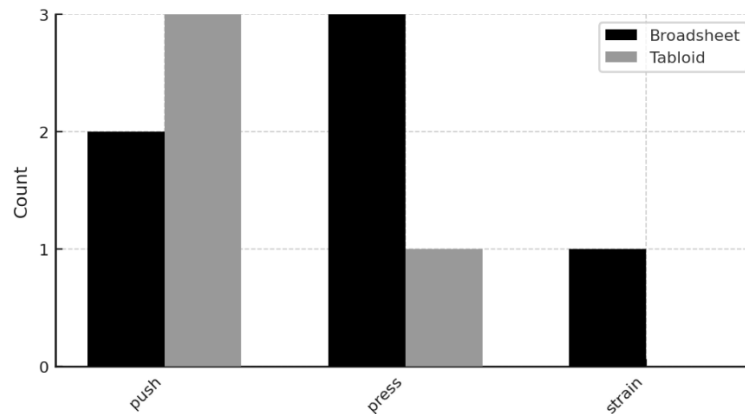


The distributions reveal contrasting metaphorical scenarios: Tabloids foreground HUNT, which in this dataset overwhelmingly realizes “witch hunt”—Donald Trump’s metadiscursive metaphor for the Russia-interference investigations. While the expression is strongly associated with Trump’s self-portrayal as a victim of persecution, it does not always serve to endorse that view. Rather, it often needs to be read as a quoted or reported metaphor whose evaluative force depends on context, sometimes reinforcing Trump’s framing, at other times introducing distance or criticism. In either case, “witch hunt” reallocates agency to portray institutional actors (FBI/DoJ/Congress) as persecutors and Trump as a wrongfully targeted victim. This evaluative framing moralizes and personalizes the conflict and displaces attention from international conduct toward a domestic drama of victimhood and excess zeal—an alignment consistent with tabloid narrativization that privileges immediacy and affect over procedural nuance.

By contrast, the Broadsheet profile is dominated by “race”, “game”, “play”, “round”, “spar”, “sideline”, “win”, which instantiate a competition scenario with explicit staging (rounds), roles (competitors, audiences/referees), and outcomes (wins). Importantly, race is not exclusively an “arms race”: while some tokens clearly index strategic military escalation, others belong to broader contest uses (e.g., race to/for/against). Taken together, the contrast can be summarized as Tabloid reporting a persecution/legitimacy contest, versus Broadsheet reporting a process-rich competition (game/arms-race framing).

5.2.1.3 X8+ Trying hard

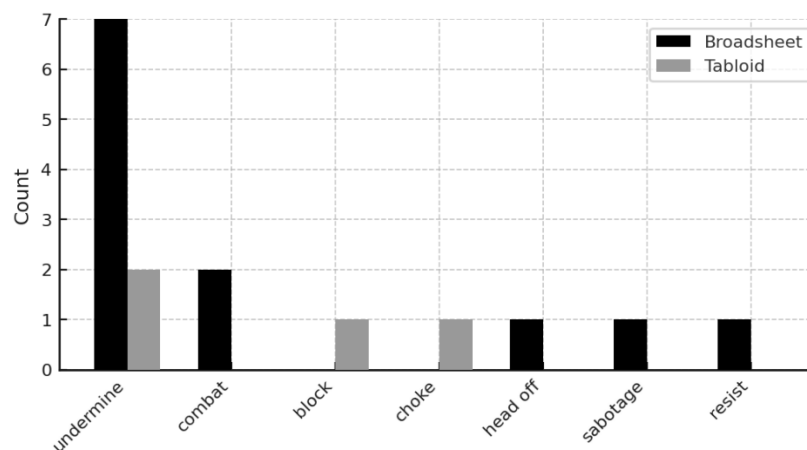
Figure 5.29. Metaphorically used lemmas tagged with the Trying Hard (X8+) semantic label.



The distribution centers on three items – “push”, “press”, “strain” – that cluster within a broader FORCE/PRESSURE semantic field but differ in framing. Tabloids lean slightly toward “push” (eventive, kinetic), a lexeme that foregrounds agentive impetus (“X pushes Y to do Z”), and dramatizes attempts to drive outcomes or accelerate decisions. Broadsheets, by contrast, favor “press”, which appears in collocates such as “press for” or “press to”, which convey the idea of applying ongoing diplomatic or institutional pressure. Unlike “push”, which dramatizes a discrete, forceful act, “press” frames influence as a continuous process of exertion that aligns with extended institutional dynamics.

5.2.1.4 S8- Hindering

Figure 5.30. Metaphorically used lemmas tagged with the Hindering (S8-) semantic label.

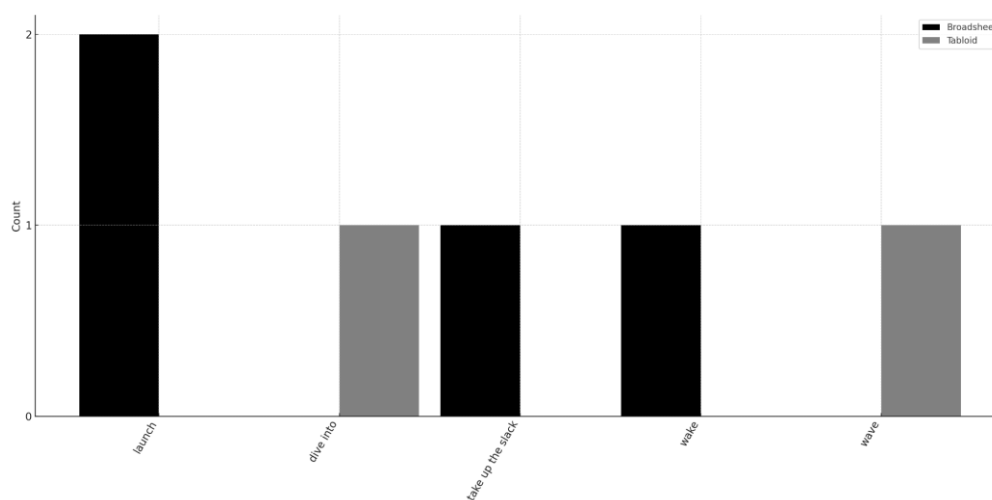


A first observation concerns the predominance of “undermine”, which appears seven times in broadsheet outlets compared to only two occurrences in tabloids. This asymmetry suggests that broadsheets systematically draw on metaphors of weakening and destabilization, framing geopolitical actors as engaged in subversive practices.

Other metaphor verbs occur much more sporadically and are not evenly distributed across the two registers. “Combat” is found exclusively in broadsheet discourse, where it reinforces a combative framing of international relations. Conversely, “block” and “choke” appear only once each in tabloids, signaling occasional use of metaphors of obstruction and suffocation, but without systematic recurrence. Similarly, verbs such as “head off,” “sabotage,” and “resist” appear once each in broadsheet data, pointing to a marginal yet consistent metaphorical repertoire.

5.2.1.5 M4/M5 Movement

Figure 5.31. Metaphorically used lemmas tagged with the Movement (M4/M5) semantic label.



Within this constrained subset, Broadsheets concentrate the most salient bar on “launch” (initiation frame), with additional single values for “slack” and “wake”. Semantically, the onset verb “launch” is associated with institutional initiation—of operations, campaigns, probes, or sanctions—and thus casts actors as agenda-setters rather than mere respondents. “Wake” (usually in the fixed expression “in the wake of”) is an aftermath connector, chaining events into consequential sequences; its presence dovetails with a process-oriented narration of cause-and-effect. The idiomatic expression “take up the slack” profiles compensatory capacity: actors

are construed as absorbing shortfalls or covering gaps in resources, personnel, or policy implementation.

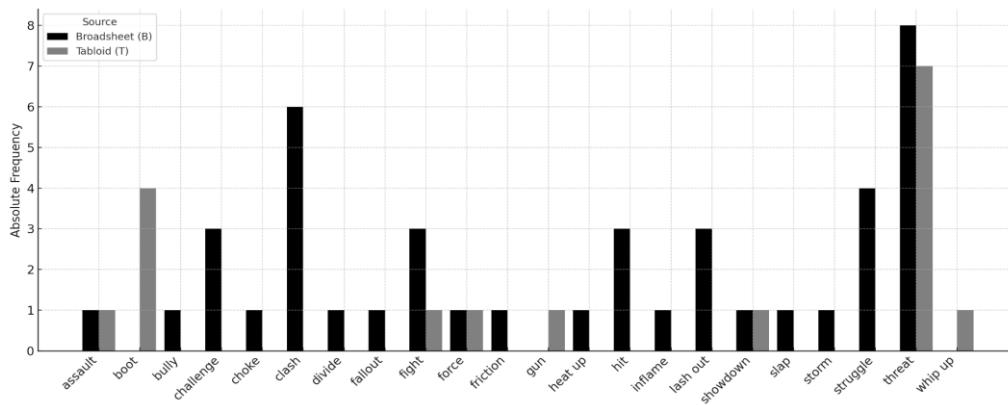
By contrast, the tabloid side registers “dive into” and “wave”. “Dive into” profiles energetic commitment and can metapragmatically frame action as a plunge (e.g., investigations or controversies), thus heightening immediacy. “Wave” describes episodic surges (wave of arrests/sanctions/attacks), a count noun that dramatizes amplitude while suppressing fine-grained process detail. In short, even in this very small cut, Broadsheets skew toward institutional initiation and sequencing, whereas Tabloids highlight immersive action and episodic crescendos.

5.2.2 A closer look at E3- violence

For the qualitative analysis of RQ2, the study zooms in on E3- Violence label. This choice is not arbitrary: violence metaphors emerged most frequently in the quantitative results, and they also resonate strongly with the conflictual dynamics of US–Russia relations. By focusing on this domain, the analysis stays anchored in a repertoire that is both highly visible in the data and widely recognized in the literature, which makes it easier to connect the findings to existing debates (Charteris-Black 2005; Chilton 1996; Musolff 2006, 2018, 2021). At the same time, narrowing the scope to a single, high-frequency domain offers a practical advantage: it makes space for a more detailed, scenario-based interpretation. Rather than spreading thin across many categories, this approach allows the analysis to explore how violence metaphors work in context⁸⁸.

Figure 5.32. Metaphorically Used Lemmas Annotated with the Violence (E3-) semantic label.

⁸⁸ The additional semantic labels remain highly relevant and will be addressed in subsequent research outputs.



5.2.2.1 Metaphorically used lemmas present in both broadsheet and tabloid tweets

In both tabloid and broadsheet tweets, two dominant metaphor scenarios emerge in the conceptualization of US–Russia relations: CONFLICT (realized through MRWs such as “fight”, “assault”, “force”, “showdown”) and THREAT (primarily realized through “threat”). Rather than following the chronological sequence of publication, the analysis below is organized by scenario type, which foregrounds similarities and contrasts across outlets and journalistic styles.

The CONFLICT frame is strongly anchored in the lexeme “fight”, which is deployed flexibly across contexts. In tweet (123), “fight” highlights a defensive stance by the United States, portraying the country as protector against Russian aggression. Yet this display of strength is quickly undermined by an internal inconsistency: the struggle is reframed not only as a confrontation with Russia but also as a source of domestic discord.

(123) President Trump said Russia was no longer targeting the U.S., contradicting his own intelligence chief a day after pledging to **fight** Kremlin meddling (@nytimes, 18/07/18)

The same lexeme can also stretch beyond bilateral tensions to frame a broader, systemic struggle. In tweet (124), the CONFLICT metaphor is amplified into a multipolar confrontation involving China. The phrase “fight for global supremacy” elevates Russia from a bilateral adversary to a systemic rival in world order competition.

(124) The Trump administration's new "Prosper Africa" plan is part of a broader effort to shift U.S. focus from counterterrorism to a **fight** for global supremacy with Russia and China. (@WSJ, 13/12/2018)

In (125), “fight” extends beyond geopolitics into the economic domain: Russia and OPEC are positioned as allies combating the disruptive force of US oil. The metaphor illustrates how CONFLICT frames are recruited to narrate energy competition as battle-like.

(125) OPEC sealed a long-term cooperation pact with Russia, extending a partnership set up two years ago to **fight** a surge of U.S. oil that has upset the cartels pricing power (@WSJ, 02/07/2019)

Interestingly, example (126) shifts away from the canonical adversarial framing. Here, Russia and the US appear as allies against a common external opponent, with fight applied to COVID19. The metaphor momentarily sets aside geopolitical rivalry and instead casts the pandemic as a common enemy that unites former opponents.

(126) “Russia sends plane full of medical gear to help US **fight** coronavirus” (@nypost, 01/04/2020)

Other lexical items dramatize conflict more explicitly. In tweet (127), Biden’s use of “assault” to describe a Russian hack exemplifies how cyber events are reframed as physical violation. “Assault” reframes a cyber intrusion as a physical violation, raising perceived immediacy and intentionality; the deictic phrase “on Donald Trump’s watch” additionally assigns responsibility by anchoring the act to presidential stewardship. In this way, “assault” performs several rhetorical functions at once: it escalates a cyber breach into a physical offence, it moralizes accountability by casting the event in terms of perpetrators and victims rather than “systems” and “bugs,” and sharpens blame by implying a failure of presidential duty.

(127) President-elect Joe Biden accused President Trump of ‘irrational downplaying’ of the Russian hack of the federal government and dozens of American companies. ‘This **assault** happened on Donald Trump’s watch when he wasn’t watching,’ Biden said on Tuesday. (@nytimes, 23/12/20)

In tweets (128) and (129), the MRW “showdown” signals an impending or climactic confrontation. In the NYT, showdown situates contemporary diplomacy within Cold War

continuity. By pairing the term with superlatives (“largest ever,” “darkest days”), the tweet historicizes present-day tensions as part of an enduring East–West rivalry. The metaphor encourages readers to perceive expulsions not as isolated measures but as another episode in a familiar, antagonistic script.

(128) The mass expulsion of Russian personnel stationed in the U.S. was the largest ever, eclipsing even the darkest days of the global **showdown** with the Soviet Union (@nytimes, 27/03/18)

In contrast, tweet (129) is not hard news, but a promotional post for a book. Here, “showdown” does not describe a current event but dramatizes Cold War espionage as a decisive confrontation between the US and Russia. The metaphor is clearly designed for narrative appeal rather than analytic accuracy.

(129) The ugly truth behind the secretive spying world // Marc Favreau⁸⁹’s “**Spies: The Secret Showdown Between America and Russia**” profiles more than a dozen secret agents amid the Cold War. These spies leave us shaken, not stirred⁹⁰. @TheMarcFavreau (@NYDailyNews, 05/10/19)

The metaphor condenses decades of geopolitical rivalry into a single climactic clash, aligning with tabloid preferences for high-impact, simplified framings. The closing phrase “shaken, not stirred” is a famous James Bond catchphrase, here used to inject humor and pop-cultural resonance. Even without knowledge of the reference, the phrasing signals that the story is presented less as sober political analysis than as entertaining spectacle. This example illustrates how conflict metaphors migrate beyond hard news into cultural promotion, sustaining the adversarial US–Russia narrative in popular imagination as much as in political reporting.

Finally, the MRW “force” encodes coercive agency; importantly, tweets (130) and (131) show bidirectional coercion, which makes agency contested rather than fixed. In (130), Russia is depicted as the coercive agent, with the US compelled to implement severe staff reductions. The NYT frames the measure in a sober, institutional tone, but the lexeme “force” magnifies

⁸⁹ Marc Favreau is a US author of historical non-fiction, whose book *Spies: The Secret Showdown Between America and Russia* (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2019) narrates Cold War espionage for a general audience.

⁹⁰ The phrase “shaken, not stirred” is the catchphrase associated with Ian Fleming’s fictional British spy James Bond, popularized in novels from the 1950s and especially in the film franchise from the 1960s onwards, where Bond specifies how his martini cocktail should be prepared.

Russian power to impose costly outcomes. In contrast, the NYDN tweet inverts the vector of coercion: now the US appears as the actor imposing costs on Russia. The same lexeme thus frames Washington as aggressor rather than target. Moreover, the addition of ‘downward spiral’ intensifies the imagery, pathologizing the bilateral relationship as a process of uncontrolled deterioration. Tabloid packaging dramatizes the coercive act as both a power play and a symptom of inexorable decline.

(130) Trump thanked Putin for Russia's decision to **force** the U.S. Embassy in Moscow to slash its personnel by 755 people (@nytimes, 11/08/17)

(131) U.S. will **force** Russia to shut down three consulates as part of ‘downward spiral’ in relations (@NYDailyNews, 01/09/2017)

The mirroring of coercion in tweets (130) and (131) highlights how the same metaphorical lexeme can sustain competing representations of agency. In one case, Russia compels the US; in the other, the United States compels Russia. This symmetry does more than simply illustrate reciprocity: It foreshadows the counter-narratives discussed in the following paragraph, where the canonical RUSSIA-AS-THREAT script is destabilized through inversions of directionality and reassignments of power.

Several tabloid tweets recurrently enact counter-framings that destabilize the canonical RUSSIA-AS-THREAT-TO-THE-US scenario. They can be grouped into three operations on the threat schema: inversion of directionality (casting the US as threatener and Russia as threatened), agentic re-centering on US action (foregrounding an American offensive posture), and reallocation of threat salience (negating uniqueness or ranking other actors above Russia).

The first operation, inversion, is exemplified by tweet (132). The following utterance reverses the default vector of danger, making the US the source and Russia the target.

(132) Vladimir Putin names U.S. as **threat** to Russia’s national security. (@NYDailyNews, 02/01/2016)

The second operation, agentic re-centering, is salient in multimodal tweet (133) in Figure 5.33.

(133) Tomorrow's cover: US prepped for massive cyber **assault** on Russia. (@nypost, 15/10/16)

Figure 5.33. Screenshot of @nypost multimodal news tweet.



The tweet text alone already signals escalation with the collocation “massive cyber assault”, a criminalizing and highly charged alternative to the more common “attack”. Unlike broadsheets’ institutional framing, this formulation compresses the issue into a single spectacular act of aggression, presented as bold and unambiguous. The multimodal composition amplifies the effect. The all-caps headline COLD WAR 2.0 revives the Cold War schema while updating it to a digital register through the numerical suffix. The stark, close-up profiles of Putin and Obama stage a personal face-off, reducing geopolitics to a simplified confrontation between two leaders. The attributed quotation “We’re gonna secretly attack Russia!” – framed evaluatively with the epithet “blabbermouth Biden”– adds a further layer of dramatization, combining reported speech, moral judgment, and personalization. Verbal and visual elements converge on the same mapping but invert the canonical script: The US is recast as aggressor and Russia as victim.

The third operation, diffusion and reallocation of threat, emerges in tweets (134) and (135). In (134), the THREAT schema is pluralized, weakening the exclusivity of Russian culpability. In tweet (135) the ranking goes further: China is explicitly cast as the greater danger, pushing

Russia into second place. Such moves replace the canonical single-source threat with a competitive marketplace of dangers, which weakens the narrative of Russia as the unique peril.

(134) **Threat** to US elections in 2020 is not limited to Russia (@nypost, 30/10/19)

(135) Mike Pompeo warns that China poses bigger **threat** to US election than Russia (@nypost, 03/09/20)

A related but distinct counter-move appears in tweet (136) quoting the US president’s denial that “Russia is a threat to the U.S.,” a notable instance of a negated metaphor that visually embeds another pictorial metaphor, reported in Figure 5.34.

(136) President Trump says he doesn't believe “Russia is a **threat** to the U.S.” — once again contradicting intelligence chiefs (@NYDailyNews, 18/07/2018)

Figure 5.34. Screenshot of @NYDailyNews multimodal news tweet.



The accompanying multimodal GIF (Figure 5.34) visually undermines Trump’s denial by staging Putin as a muscular figure on the beach, holding Trump’s severed head aloft on a stick. This grotesque and satirical image enacts several metaphorical scenarios simultaneously: TRUMP IS SUBORDINATE TO PUTIN – to be developed in the grassroots discourse Section 5.3.3.2 – RUSSIA IS A THREAT THROUGH TRUMP and TRUMP IS A WEAPON IN THE HAND OF RUSSIA.

On one level, it recasts the canonical RUSSIA-AS-THREAT schema through hierarchical subordination: Trump appears literally reduced to an object wielded by Putin, visually reinforcing the idea that the US president is controlled by his Russian counterpart. On another

level, the image introduces a weaponization metaphor: Trump himself becomes the weapon in Russia's hand, suggesting that Russia threatens the US precisely through Trump.

The verbal and visual modes thus pull in opposite directions. While the text reports Trump's negation of RUSSIA-AS-THREAT, the image performs a sharp ironic reversal, representing Russia as both dominant and menacing, and Trump as simultaneously submissive and dangerous as an instrument of Russian power. The multimodal clash creates pictorial irony, where the visual frame negates the verbal denial, dramatizing domestic contestation and reinforcing the perception of Trump's compromised agency.

Beyond negation, tabloids also oscillate back to canonical framings, showing that counter-narratives do not erase the dominant script but coexist with it, as in (137). Here the canonical scenario is reinstated in its most authoritative form: a US Navy admiral's voice anchors the headline, and the Cold War comparison maximizes historical gravity. The tweet exemplifies how tabloids, while often sensational, can also bolster legitimacy by drawing on expert authority and superlatives.

(137) Russian submarine **threat** largest since Cold War: top US Navy admiral (@nypost, 08/09/2018)

Two aspects are worth highlighting. First, the hypothesis that subversion serves sensational purposes is fully compatible with a platformed news economy in which visibility is awarded to posts that promise high arousal. Tabloids' tweet-as-headline style thrives on this: inverted or exaggerated framings draw attention by maximizing news values such as negativity, conflict, and immediacy. Second, the observation that most counter-narratives are attributed to third parties is crucial for understanding stance management in tabloid discourse. The examples already demonstrate a consistent reliance on reported speech, e.g., "Putin names...", "Trump says...", "Pompeo warns...". Attribution externalizes evaluative load: the tweet surfaces a striking proposition that destabilizes the canonical script, but the propositional commitment is grammatically assigned to a referenced actor. This double-voicing accomplishes several things at once: it preserves tabloid dramaturgy – the post still reads like a bold, but also agentive headline – while shielding the outlet, e.g., "X said," "Y warned", which serves as both a source of credibility and a "safety net", metaphorically speaking. It also allows contradictory readings to coexist, because the outlet can foreground a sensational counter-frame without fully endorsing it.

In other words, the sensationalism hypothesis and the third-party-attribution pattern describe a complementary mechanism. Subversion provides the narratively potent reconfiguration that

drives attention; attribution supplies the evidential alibi that makes that reconfiguration publishable but also defensible in the news environment.

These instances should not be read as evidence that the RUSSIA-AS-THREAT-TO-THE-US narrative disappears; rather, they demonstrate that it co-exists with countervailing framings in a heterogeneous, polyphonic news ecology. What the selected examples show, then, is not replacement but layering: subversive headlines operate as episodic perturbations that sit beside, sometimes temporarily overshadowing more conventional threat constructions. It suggests that tabloid discourse manages stance by alternating between sensational inversions and reaffirmations, not by abandoning the dominant script altogether.

5.2.2.2 Metaphor related words only occurring in Tabloid tweets

A metaphor related word that emerges exclusively in the TABLOID sub-dataset is “boot”, which activates the BOOTING scenario. This metaphor portrays diplomatic expulsions as forceful physical removals.

The BOOTING scenario functions as a routinized tabloid script for narrating diplomatic expulsions through the force-dynamics of sudden, physical ejection. Whereas broadsheet coverage typically encodes expulsions with institutionally anchored lexis – “expel,” “retaliatory measures” – and embeds them in legal-procedural frames, the tabloid wording “booting” recasts the same events as quasi-theatrical acts of dominance performed by a clearly individuated Agent upon a removable Patient.

The MRW “boot” is employed across several events that marked periods of heightened tension in US–Russia relations, particularly in the aftermath of election interference and geopolitical crises. The earliest instance appears in a tweet from 30 December 2016 referring to the Obama administration's retaliatory measures against Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election, in tweet (138). The passive morphology preserves event focus while retaining the kinetic semantics of eviction, which intensifies the sense of decisive action more than the neutral “expelled.”

(138) The proposed measures come one day after 35 Russian spies were **booted** from the U.S (@nypost, 30/12/2016)

In August 2017, the metaphor recurs in reports on Putin's retaliatory expulsion of US diplomats from Russia. Two near-identical tweets (139) and (140) highlight Trump's controversial remark, a comment that trivialized the seriousness of the diplomatic fallout. As already noted

for RQ1, duplication is not exclusive to tabloids: broadsheets also re-circulate near-identical tweets, which suggests a platform-driven practice rather than a genre-specific quirk. In both cases, repetition enhances narrative prominence by boosting circulation rather than introducing new lexical content. The fact that the same formulation was tweeted twice within an hour shows how duplication functions as a strategy of emphasis, increasing issue salience and maximizing algorithmic reach.

(139) Trump says he was joking when he thanked Vladimir Putin for **booting** U.S. diplomats out of Russia (@NYDailyNews, 12/08/2017 4:35 p.m.)

(140) Trump says he was joking when he thanked Vladimir Putin for **booting** U.S. diplomats out of Russia (@NYDailyNews, 12/08/2017 5:45 p.m.)

In March 2018, following the attempted poisoning of Sergej Skripal⁹¹ in the UK, a tweet frames the multilateral response to Russian aggression as a bold, punitive act.

(141) The British Prime Minister thanked Trump for **booting** 60 Russian diplomats from the U.S. (@nypost, 28/03/2018 18:46)

Linguistically, “boot” selects a compact transitivity pattern that maximizes clarity and affect: an animate Agent (“Putin,” “Trump”/“the US”) acts upon a countable set of Patients (“spies,” “diplomats”) with directional complements (“from the US,” “out of Russia”) that map movement from an interior to an exterior. The idiomatic collocation “boot X out of Y” carries colloquial and punitive overtones that dramatize the function of expulsion. This idiomaticity matters: it aligns with tabloid register, reduces epistemic distance, and invites readers to treat expulsions less as slow, bureaucratic outcomes than as decisive, stageable gestures in an ongoing contest. The repetition of this lemma and its morphological variants across distinct episodes indicates not merely lexical choice but scenario entrenchment: the same metaphorical template is reactivated to stabilize a narrative. In all these instances, “booting” constructs a metaphorical scenario of expulsion as an almost theatrical act of dominance, aligning with the tabloids’ stylistic preference for dramatized and often personalized political narratives.

⁹¹ Sergej Skripal’ is a former Russian military intelligence officer who acted as a double agent for the UK’s MI6. In March 2018, he and his daughter Yulia were poisoned with a military-grade nerve agent in Salisbury, an attack widely attributed to Russian operatives.

5.2.2.3 Metaphor related words only occurring in BROADSHEET tweets

Several MRWs occur exclusively in the BROADSHEET sub-dataset. Several of these have already been analyzed in section 5.1.2 (challenge in tweet 100, clash in 59-63 and 64-65, hit in 122, lash out in 4, struggle in 110, 115 and 116). For this reason, they are not re-discussed in the present section.

While personalization is often associated with tabloid discourse, the broadsheet data reveal that this strategy is not absent from more institutional outlets. In fact, several metaphor-related words in the broadsheet corpus foreground the role of individual figures – politicians or leaders – in shaping US–Russia antagonism.

Tweet (142) for example, attributes the MRW “challenge” to Senator McCain⁹², thereby framing Russia not simply as a competitor but as the foremost “test” of American resilience. The intensifier “premier” ranks Russia above other global threats, projecting international relations onto a scale of urgency where Russia emerges as the top adversary. The reliance on McCain’s voice illustrates how broadsheets mobilize personalization through authoritative figures, using their evaluations to legitimate metaphorical framings while keeping a degree of journalistic detachment.

(142) John McCain says Russia is 'premier' challenge to American security (@WSJ, 29/05/17)

The MRW “lash out” in (143) personalizes international antagonism by attributing agency to an individual leader rather than an abstract state. The expression suggests sudden, uncontrolled hostility, dramatizing Putin’s behavior as impulsive and emotional. This contrasts with the earlier collective use in tweet (4), where European leaders “lashed out” at Russia. Here, lash out reinforces the personalization of Russia through its president.

(143) Russian President Vladimir Putin lashes out at the U.S. (@WSJ, 27/07/2017)

What emerges from these examples is that personalization is not the exclusive prerogative of tabloid discourse. Broadsheets also rely on the rhetorical force of individual figures – whether US voices like Senator McCain or foreign leaders like Putin – to dramatize antagonism and

⁹² John McCain (1936–2018) was a US Senator from Arizona, the Republican presidential nominee in 2008, and a prominent voice in American foreign policy, particularly known for his critical stance toward Russia.

make international politics legible. While the style is more restrained and embedded in institutional attribution, the underlying mechanism responds to the same media imperative of visibility: person-centered framings attract attention more effectively than abstract references to states or policies. In this sense, both broadsheets and tabloids participate in the broader logic of digital journalism, where personalization enhances salience (van Aelst et al. 2012; van Dijck and Poell 2013), though each outlet calibrates the degree of dramatization according to its genre conventions.

Yet the fact that MRWs like “challenge” or “lash out” appear only in broadsheets suggests that not all figurative resources are equally transferable across journalistic styles. Their relative absence in tabloids can be explained by stylistic preferences: tabloids tend to favor direct, hyperbolic metaphors that maximize immediacy, while broadsheets more readily employ evaluative or behavioral expressions that fit their register but still serve the imperative of visibility. In other words, both genres rely on metaphorical personalization to capture attention, but they calibrate their lexical choices differently, in line with their discursive conventions.

5.2.3 Discussion on RQ2

The analysis of RQ2 has examined how tabloids and broadsheets frame US–Russia relations on Twitter, focusing on metaphorical density, the distribution of semantic domains, and the qualitative scenarios emerging from selected MRWs. Several key findings emerge.

First, tabloids display proportionally higher levels of metaphoricity across most semantic fields, confirming that brevity and dramatization drive their use of figurative language. While broadsheets produce a greater overall number of tokens, tabloids are more saturated with metaphors relative to corpus size. This saturation contributes to their characteristic headline-like style, where metaphors intensify conflict and maximize immediacy.

Second, the qualitative analysis has shown that the VIOLENCE frame is central across both sub-datasets, but with markedly different inflections depending on outlet type. In tabloids, conflict is dramatized through high-impact and sensational lexis. By contrast, broadsheets frame conflict in more processual and institutional terms. Instead of focusing on isolated acts, they situate events within longer chains of causality and formalized interactions.

Importantly, tabloids also stand out for their capacity to destabilize the canonical RUSSIA-AS-THREAT schema. They frequently introduce counter-narratives through three main operations: inversion (e.g., “Putin names U.S. as threat,”), diffusion (e.g., “Threat not limited to Russia,”), and negation (e.g., Trump’s denial), visually subverted through multimodal irony). These rhetorical moves allow tabloids to unsettle entrenched representations while still maximizing news values of conflict and drama. Yet such counter-narratives never replace the dominant frame entirely. Instead, they coexist with canonical constructions.

In short, both genres rely on the VIOLENCE domain to conceptualize US–Russia relations, but they mobilize it differently. Tabloids privilege spectacle and immediacy, reducing conflict to striking acts or epithets, whereas broadsheets prefer procedural framings that locate antagonism within campaigns, retaliations, or institutional disputes. Crucially, the difference lies not in whether metaphors are used but in how they are staged and contextualized, reflecting divergent journalistic styles.

5.3 RQ3. Metaphor in user replies

The present section examines direct replies to metaphorical news tweets. For the purposes of this study, a thread refers to a news tweet together with its direct replies. This section does not pursue a quantitative generalization of users’ reactions, nor does it aim to identify systematic trends across the entire dataset. Instead, it conceptualizes user replies as a form of “social barometer,” offering qualitative insights into public engagement with metaphorical framings and laying the groundwork for future NLP-based large-scale studies.

To address RQ3 in a systematic way, the analysis has been divided into three sub-questions.

Section 5.3.1 (RQ3.1) focuses on six broadsheet threads (three from the @WSJ and three from the @nytimes), to investigate reactions to three crucial events identified in RQ1, i.e., the 2014 containment policy toward Russia; the Russiagate controversy; and the COVID vaccine implementation. This approach allows for an in-depth reconstruction of whether and how users metaphorically react to specific news’ metaphorical framings, and how individual scenarios are extended, recontextualized, or reframed in direct replies.

Section 5.3.2 (RQ3.2) expands the scope by comparing reactions to news tweets across register (broadsheet vs. tabloid) and narrative orientation (mainstream vs. counter-narrative). The rationale for this two-step structure is to balance descriptive depth with comparative breadth: RQ3.1 shows how metaphors are reused with reference to specific events, while RQ3.2 aims at highlighting broader tendencies and contrasts across outlets and discursive positions, thereby contextualizing the findings within cross-register patterns.

Section 5.3.3 (RQ3.3) shifts the analytical focus from reuse to innovation. Here the goal is to identify metaphorical tendencies that emerge independently from journalistic framings, i.e., novel figurative patterns introduced by Twitter users themselves. By capturing the spontaneous, bottom-up generation of metaphors that may be absent from professional news discourse, this section sheds light on how users creatively frame events, actors, and international relations, thereby shaping the interactional dynamics of the threads through their own metaphorical repertoires.

5.3.1 RQ3.1 Replies to broadsheet tweets

The present section focuses on three major events whose related narratives were metaphorically reported by the NYT and the WSJ and analyzed for RQ1: Russia portrayed as a dangerous entity to be “contained” and a “wounded bear”, after the annexation of Crimea (2014); the Russiagate about Trump-Russia “ties”, framed as a “brier patch” but also as “smoke” (2017) and the “race” for the Covid vaccine (2020-2021). Each of these salient topics is analyzed in threads initiated by @nytimes and @WSJ. Twitter’s overall engagement rates increased significantly during the selected time frame; it is therefore unsurprising that the threads from 2014 contain far fewer replies.

Tables 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4 present, for each thread, an identifying number, the metaphorical scenario activated in the news tweet (with tweet text and date), the total number of direct replies to the news tweet, the metaphor scenarios elicited in user comments, and the number of reuse types identified (EX = extension, REC = recontextualization, REF = reframing). For reasons of space and clarity, the full text of the replies is not included in the tables but is quoted and discussed in the main body of the analysis.

5.3.1.1 2014: Crimea’s annexation and RUSSIA-AS-DANGER

Table 5.2. Threads published in 2014.

	<i>News Tweet Scenario with tweet text</i>	<i>Total Replies</i>	<i>Metaphor Scenario in reply</i>	<i>Total of metaphor reuses</i>
1	<p>RUSSIA IS AN ETITY TO CONTAIN</p> <p>@nytimes The West needs a new policy to resist, restrain and retain Russia (07/11/14)</p>	8	<p>(1) RUSSIA IS A BEAR THAT HAS RISEN</p> <p>(2) RUSSIA IS A BULLY TO BE RESISTED</p> <p>(3) A PINK WALL WITH ABBA SOUNDTRACK AS CONTAINMENT</p>	3 EX
2	<p>RUSSIA IS A WOUNDED BEAR</p> <p>@WSJ Like a wounded bear, a weakened Russia could be more dangerous than a strong one. Why its market turmoil matters (16/12/14)</p>	7	<p>(4) BEARS ARE COOL</p> <p>(5) EAGLE AND LIONS ARE DANGEROUS TOO</p>	2 EX

5.3.1.1.1 Direct replies to the @nytimes tweet

In @nytimes thread 1, the reuses in replies are all metaphor extensions. In (1), a user repropose the original ANIMAL metaphor, yet the extension is polemical: instead of construing the bear as a threat, the user flips the framing by attributing cowardice to the West and courage to Putin. It is therefore an extension through role inversion, which recontextualizes the metaphor in a pro-Russia stance.

(1) @nytimes @nytopinion The West are scared that The **Bear** has risen! At least Putin have some balls, the West are cowards!

The user in reply (2) asks a rhetorical question: the BULLY scenario is activated, reinforcing the image of Russia as an aggressive actor. The rhetorical question, however, shifts the focus to the lack of a capable adversary. While the metaphorical mapping is not challenged, it is

strategically reused to highlight Western weakness. This constitutes an extension with implicit critique, which maintains the danger framing but destabilizes the proposed containment strategy.

(2) @nytimes @nytopinion, in the land of geo-politics might is right. So who is going to resist Russia the **bully**.

A user in (3) extends the scenario to a sarcastic level: the reply literalizes and simultaneously ridicules the containment scenario by proposing an exaggerated and comical policy solution. The invocation of a “pink wall” and “ABBA soundtrack” creates an absurd image that undermines the seriousness of the original tweet. This can be understood as an ironic extension, in which the containment metaphor is elaborated in a deliberately parodic register.

(3) @nytimes @nytopinion a big pink wall on the borders of Europe with an abba soundtrack piped through loud speakers 24hrs a day should do it

5.3.1.1.2 Direct replies to the @WSJ tweet

Thread 2 originates from a @WSJ news tweet. In reply (4), the user trivializes the threat potential of the WOUNDED BEAR scenario by appealing to the bear’s positive cultural associations. The danger frame is downplayed, and the metaphor is reframed in affective rather than political terms. This can be described as an extension through revaluation, which neutralizes the original negative connotations.

(4) @WSJ Except bears are cool.

Reply (5) broadens the ANIMAL DANGER scenario beyond Russia, extending it to other powerful animals such as the eagle (commonly associated with the United States) and the lion (a traditional emblem of strength and dominance). The effect is to relativize Russia’s singularity and suggest that any major power can be dangerous when “wounded.” This constitutes an extension through generalization, which diffuses the focus of the original metaphor and redistributes the danger frame.

(5) @WSJ as will any animal including an eagle and lion

5.3.1.2 2017. The Russia Story: the LINK between Trump and Russia

Table 5.3. Threads published in 2017.

	<i>News Tweet Scenario with tweet text</i>	<i>Total Replies</i>	<i>Metaphor Scenario in reply</i>	<i>Total of metapho r reuses</i>
3	<p>THE RUSSIA STORY IS TRUMP'S BRIER PATCH</p> <p>@nytimes The Russia story is the brier patch from which Trump cannot escape. Now aides are anonymously blaming one another. (12/07/17)</p>	98	<p>(6) WHO IS BR'ER FOX</p> <p>(7) IT'S NYT'S BRIAR PATCH</p> <p>(8) IT IS DEM'S BRIAR PATCH</p> <p>(9) TRUMP IS TAR BABY IN THE RUSSIASTORY</p> <p>(10) RUSSIASTORY MAY BE THE DEATH OF THE DEM</p> <p>(11) RUSSIASTORY MAY BE THE SWAMP</p> <p>(12) RUSSIASTORY IS QUICKSAND</p>	<p>1 EX</p> <p>2 REC</p> <p>4 REF</p>
4	<p>THE RUSSIA STORY IS SMOKE</p> <p>@WSJ Top Democrat sees 'smoke' but no 'smoking gun' showing Russia-Trump campaign collusion (04/06/17)</p>	37	<p>(13) 'THEY' ARE STOKING THE FLAMES OF THE RUSSIA STORY</p> <p>(14) THE RUSSIA STORY IS SMOKE FROM PROGRESSIVES' EARS</p> <p>(15) THE RUSSIA STORY IS NOT EVEN AN EMBER</p> <p>(16) THE RUSSIA STORY IS SMOKE BLOWNING UP AMERICANS' REAR-ENDS</p> <p>(17) THE RUSSIA STORY IS SMOKE GENERATED BY DEM</p> <p>(18) THE RUSSIA STORY IS SMOKE FROM FABRICATED STORY</p> <p>(19) THE RUSSIA STORY IS SMOKE FROM FABRICATED STORY</p> <p>(20) THE RUSSIA STORY IS NO SMOKING GUN YET</p> <p>(21) THE RUSSIA STORY IS NO SMOKING GUN IN FLYNN CASE</p> <p>(22) 'I NEVER INHALED SMOKE' AS DRUG USE</p>	<p>9 EX</p> <p>4 REF</p>

		(23) RUSSIA STORY REQUIRES DIGGING	
		(24) RUSSIA STORY IS DIGGING	
		(25) RUSSIA STORY IS PERFORMANCE	

5.3.1.2.1 Direct replies to the @nytimes tweet

The metaphor of the Brier Patch in @nytimes thread 3, already introduced in section 5.1.2 as part of the Br'er Rabbit tales. Users take up the scenario in divergent ways, variously extending, recontextualizing, or reframing the metaphorical mapping.

Reply (6) constitutes an extension of the Brier Patch scenario. Rather than rejecting the metaphor, the user enriches the narrative frame by asking who might embody the role of Br'er Fox, the antagonist who seeks to trap Br'er Rabbit. This uptake remains within the original folklore imagery but shifts attention from Trump as entrapped to the antagonist's identity. By doing so, it prompts readers to reinterpret the Russia story in terms of who is doing the trapping rather than simply who is trapped. The question implicitly reopens the frame, making space for alternative attributions of agency – whether the Democratic Party, the media, or other political actors – without committing to a specific answer. In this sense, the reply extends the metaphor by deepening character allocation within the scenario, while also signaling skepticism about the narrative offered by the outlet.

(6) @nytimes So who is Br'er Fox?

In reply (7), the entrapment is recontextualized from Trump to the NYT itself, turning the metaphor against the news outlet. The scenario is reused but inverted in its application, illustrating how users can appropriate journalistic framings to delegitimize the very source that introduced them. This inversion also highlights the partisan dynamics of metaphor reuse, where figurative language becomes a tool of media critique as much as of political commentary.

(7) @nytimes No it's your Briar Patch.

Reply (8) is a further recontextualization: the trap metaphor is mapped onto a set of Democratic actors rather than Trump. The figures mentioned – Hillary Clinton (former Secretary of State

and 2016 Democratic presidential candidate), James Comey (then Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation), Loretta Lynch (Attorney General under President Obama), Barack Obama (44th President of the United States), and Susan Rice (National Security Advisor under Obama) – were recurrently associated in conservative media discourse with alleged mishandling of the Russia investigation. By situating them in the “brier patch,” the reply recontextualizes the metaphor to suggest that these Democratic figures, rather than Trump, are entrapped by scandal and culpability. Moreover, the reply embeds the scenario within an ideological macro-frame – “Communism vs Freedom” – thus transforming the metaphor into a broader partisan polemic.

(8) @nytimes It’s the same brier patch Hillary Clinton, Comey, Loretta Lynch, Obama, Susan Rice are in! This is Communism vs Freedom!!!

Reply (9) offers a clear case of reframing. Instead of the Brier Patch, the user turns to the Tar Baby – another character from the Uncle Remus tales, a sticky doll that traps Br’er Rabbit when he lashes out at it. The metaphor still revolves around entrapment, but the mechanics change: Trump is no longer caught in a hostile environment but stuck fast because of his own reactions. This shift makes the image sharper and more accusatory, hinting that his troubles stem not only from outside pressures but from his own mistakes. At the same time, drawing on a different figure from the same folklore shows how users creatively recycle shared cultural references to inject variety and irony into political debate.

(9) @nytimes Or is Trump the Tar Baby?

Reply (10) is another reframing: the metaphorical mapping no longer invokes entrapment but death, shifting the source domain to mortality. The target is likewise redirected from Trump to the Democratic Party, recasting Russiagate as politically lethal for the Democrats rather than entrapping for Trump. What is striking here is the openly partisan inversion: the user appropriates the metaphorical frame to celebrate the anticipated “death” of political opponents, turning the investigation into a weapon against those who initiated it. The exclamatory style (“WRONG”) and the final call to “keep it going” underscore the combative tone, positioning Russiagate not as a danger to Trump but as an opportunity for his supporters. This reframing thus transforms a metaphor of vulnerability into one of triumph, in which political survival and annihilation are the stakes of the game.

(10) @nytimes WRONG. The RUSSIA story may be the DEATH of the Democrat party. Let's keep it going!

In reply (11), the metaphor is again reframed. The “swamp” metaphor, pervasive in US political discourse (see Burgers et al. 2019 in Section 2.2.1), is employed to characterize Russiagate as a site of corruption and engulfment. Unlike the folkloric Brier Patch, the swamp metaphor carries a strong evaluative charge: it portrays Trump and his family not as accidental victims of entrapment but as active participants in an environment of dishonesty and moral decay. The explicit association with “perjury” and “treason” underscores the accusatory stance of the reply, which intensifies the blame directed at Trump while anchoring the scenario in a contemporary political trope familiar to American audiences. It is also worth noting that Trump himself had popularized the “swamp” metaphor during his 2016 campaign, promising to “drain the swamp” in Washington⁹³, which makes the user’s reply particularly pointed, as it turns Trump’s own imagery against him.

(11) @nytimes It's more like a perjury and treason swamp large enough to hold Donald and his entire family.

Reply (12) also enacts a reframing, replacing the Brier Patch with quicksand as the entrapment source. Notably, the target domain shifts from Trump to the Republican Party as a whole. The metaphor thus evolves into a warning of collective self-destruction, intensified by the ironic suggestion of adding cement to accelerate the sinking process of the Great Old Party, i.e., the Republican party.

(12) @Hey GOP that's quicksand ur silently standing on. Quick! Catch this bag of cement.

5.3.1.2.2 Direct replies to the @WSJ tweet

Eight users extend the original SMOKE scenario in @WSJ thread 4. Reply (13) extends the smoke/fire metaphor by shifting from “smoke” to the act of stoking flames, suggesting

⁹³ According to the Washington Post, Trump used the “swamp” metaphor more than 50 times on Truth Social. Harwell, D., Ence Morse, C., & Davies, E. (2025, June 3). *Tallying Trump's online posting frenzy: 2,262 'truths' in 132 days*. The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com>

deliberate fueling of conflict. The agent referred to as “they” remains ambiguous: it could target the Democrats (who are cited in the news tweet as seeing “smoke”), the media (to whom the reply is directly addressed), or a broader amalgam of political and journalistic actors. The metaphor thus intensifies the image of political manipulation as fire-making, while leaving the precise source of agency unspecified.

(13) @WSJ So when do they stop stoking the flames in the country then about issues they don't have any evidence for?

In reply (14), the smoke imagery is extended metaphorically to anger and frustration. Rather than signaling evidence of collusion, the “smoke” is recast as Democrats’ emotional reaction to electoral defeat. This constitutes an extension through ridicule and trivialization.

(14) @WSJ Only smoke is the smoke coming out progressive's ears because they lost.

In (15), the concise reply minimizes the smoke/fire metaphor by asserting the absence of even the smallest trace of evidence, i.e., “ember”. The fire scenario is retained but reduced to insignificance, an extension through minimization.

(15) @WSJ Not even an ember.

Reply (16) parodies the smoke metaphor by redirecting it to an obscene bodily image. The investigation is mocked as artificial “smoke” produced by opponents of Trump. The extension is aggressive and dismissive, using vulgar parody to delegitimize the Russia story.

(16) @WSJ the real smoke in the Dem's Russia-Trump collusion investigations is what the Trump-haters are blowing up Americans' rear-ends. Losers.

Reply (17) is a straightforward inversion: the metaphor is extended to suggest that the smoke does not arise from Trump-Russia collusion but from Democrats fabricating false evidence. This constitutes an extension through inversion of agency.

(17) @WSJ The smoke is generated by DEMOCRATS.

Replies (18) and (19) illustrate how the smoke/smoking gun scenario was appropriated to circulate the Seth Rich conspiracy theory⁹⁴. In (18), the user dismisses the Russia collusion narrative as a “fabricated story” and instead redirects the metaphor toward suspicions surrounding the murder of Seth Rich, a DNC⁹⁵ staffer whose death in 2016 was exploited in online conspiracy circles to suggest a politically motivated cover-up. In (19), the same redirection is made explicit through the call to “Look for the #SethRichMurder smoking gun,” which reuses the metaphor to imply that decisive proof lies not in the Russia investigation but in an alleged Democratic scandal. Both replies constitute extensions through reorientation, as they preserve the original metaphorical frame but redirect its application away from Trump toward Democratic actors. They also exemplify how Twitter discourse around Russiagate often became a vehicle for amplifying conspiracy narratives, with metaphor serving as a powerful resource for legitimizing alternative accounts of political responsibility.

(18) @WSJ Lol "smoke" around a fabricated story about Russia, but nothing regarding a Director of Data at the DNC that was killed right after the leak

(19) @WSJ Look for the #SethRichMurder smoking gun!

In replies (20) and (21), the phrase “smoking gun” is again extended. In (20), it is reused directly to argue that the absence of such evidence confirms the lack of collusion. This is an extension through reinforcement, sustaining the fire/weapon scenario while drawing an exculpatory conclusion. In (21), the same metaphor is applied more conditionally. By pointing to Michael Flynn’s failed bid for immunity, the user argues that no “smoking gun” has yet been uncovered. The stance here is less categorical than in (20): it accepts that investigations exist but insists that evidence remains insufficient. The ironic label “T Rumpers” injects ridicule into the comment, framing Trump’s supporters as naïve for clinging to a case with no hard proof. These two replies show how the same metaphor can be extended to opposite ends – one bolstering Trump’s defense, the other mocking his base while still working within the shared imagery of the “smoking gun.”

(20) @WSJ agree.... and I didn't vote for Trump either... if there was a smoking gun, it would have been found by now..imho

⁹⁴ For the “Seth Rich conspiracy theory” See Abramson, A. (2017, May 23). *Seth Rich’s Parents to Conspiracy Theorists: Stop Politicizing Our Son’s Murder*. *Time*. <https://time.com/4791788/seth-rich-parents-speak-out-fox-news-retraction-conspiracy-dnc/>

⁹⁵ Democratic National Committee.

(21) @WSJ T Rumpers need to wake up. Flynn offers to testify in exchange for Immunity. They did not give it to him. So, no smoking gun yet.

Reply (22) is a humorous allusion to Bill Clinton's denial of marijuana use plays on the notion of smoke. Bill Clinton's statement "I didn't inhale" dates to 1992, when he admitted to experimenting with marijuana while a student at Oxford, but claimed not to have aspirated it. The phrase has become an integral part of American political culture, often cited ironically to stigmatize half-true admissions or to dribble responsibility⁹⁶. The smoke here no longer signifies circumstantial evidence but is reframed as a marker of illicit drug use. The result is a punning reframing: by echoing Clinton's famous denial, the reply trivializes the investigative metaphor. It humorously suggests that, just as Clinton tried to minimize his drug use, the Russiagate accusations are being treated as unserious or overstated.

(22) @WSJ And I never inhaled..

Replies (23) and (24) both reframe the investigation through the entrenched metaphor of excavation. In (23), the exhortation to "keep digging" abandons the smoke/fire imagery and instead conceptualizes the search for evidence as the uncovering of hidden matter beneath the surface, emphasizing persistence and depth rather than circumstantial traces. In (24), the metaphor is extended through the idiomatic expression of "finding dirt," conventionally used to describe the exposure of scandal or wrongdoing. Crucially, the target of this excavation is redirected from Trump to the Obama administration, thereby combining a change of source domain with a partisan reorientation.

(23) @WSJ Keep digging is there someplace

(24) They're more likely to find dirt on the BHO⁹⁷ administration than on Trump.

Reply (25) reframes the Russia story through the source domain of theatre and performance (see section 5.1.2 for a detailed discussion on this metaphor scenario), where political processes are construed as staged acts, and unseen dynamics unfold "behind the scenes." The metaphor reframes the investigation as political spectacle, highlighting manipulation and lack of

⁹⁶ Waxman, Olivia (2017, March 29). *Bill Clinton said he 'didn't inhale' 25 years ago—but the history of U.S. presidents and drugs is much older.* Time. <https://time.com/4711887/bill-clinton-didnt-inhale-marijuana-anniversary/>

⁹⁷ Barak Hussein Obama.

transparency. This is a reframing through substitution, conceptualizing politics as dramaturgy rather than as combustion.

(25) @WSJ It's behind the scenes

5.3.1.3 COVID. The vaccine RACE among states.

Table 5.4. Threads published in 2020.

	<i>News Tweet Scenario with tweet text</i>	<i>Total Replies</i>	<i>Metaphor Scenario in reply</i>	<i>Total of metaphor reuses</i>
5	<p>US–RUSSIA RELATIONS (VACCINE DEVELOPMENT) ARE A RACE AND A GAME</p> <p>@nytimes The race for a coronavirus vaccine has pitted the world’s intelligence agencies in a game of spy versus spy, and China and Russia are expanding their efforts to steal U.S. research (05/09/20)</p>	13	<p>(26) PHARMA INTERESTS MOVED INTO THE RACE</p> <p>(27) COVID IS THE ENEMY</p> <p>(28) US–RUSSIA–CHINA ARE KIDS</p>	<p>1 EX</p> <p>1 REC</p> <p>1 REF</p>
6	<p>RUSSIA (VACCINE DEVELOPMENT) IS A RACE</p> <p>@WSJ Russia is fast-tracking a second coronavirus vaccine as the country races to safeguard its population from a second wave and pushes to raise its profile abroad (05/10/20)</p>	9	<p>(29) VACCINE RACE IS THE NEW SPACE RACE</p>	<p>1 EX</p>

5.3.1.3.1 Direct replies to the @nytimes tweet

In @nytimes thread 5, the news metaphors of “race” and “game” is rather conventional, if compared to the previous threads in Table 5.3.

In reply (26), the “race” metaphor is preserved, and the target is more concretely specified: rather than states or intelligence agencies, which do not literally develop vaccines, the

pharmaceutical industry is presented as the true competitor. The user elaborates the race scenario by foregrounding the competitive dynamics of the market, shifting the focus from espionage to corporate rivalry. This constitutes an extension, since the original source domain of race is maintained and applied more broadly.

(26) @nytimes Why has the pharmaceuticals industry moved into a #vaccine race? What's the business behind vaccine development that makes pharma giants clash?

Reply (27) recontextualizes the adversarial metaphor by rejecting the idea of inter-state competition. Instead, it asserts that the virus itself is the enemy, thereby shifting the target of the competition frame away from geopolitical rivals and toward the disease. This is a recontextualization that challenges the nationalistic metaphorical mapping of the original tweet and foregrounds global health as the true battlefield. Additionally, the user conjoins Trump's nationalistic stance with Wall Street's greed as two sides of the same problem. By doing so, the user extends the adversarial frame beyond geopolitical rivalry to encompass domestic political and economic actors who are depicted as prolonging the crisis. This rhetorical move reinforces the recontextualization of the metaphor, shifting the enemy away from other states toward systemic failures within U.S. politics and capitalism.

(27) @nytimes the U.S. has to understand that the virus is the enemy, not other countries. Trump's nationalistic attitude and Wall Street's greed will merely prolong this pandemic and the resulting global public health and economic crisis.

In (28), the race metaphor "race/game" metaphor is reframed as childish behavior. The competitive framing introduced in the news tweet is not rejected outright but reinterpreted as immature conduct that obstructs global cooperation. The metaphor thus serves to criticize world powers for failing to act responsibly during a crisis.

(28) @nytimes any chance of them stopping acting like fucking children, pooling their resources and getting the job done? No. Thought not.

5.3.1.3.2 Direct replies to the @WSJ tweet

Only one reply directly transforms the original news metaphor. In case (29), the user explicitly extends the race metaphor introduced in the WSJ tweet. By comparing the vaccine competition to the Cold War Space Race, the reply situates vaccine development within a historical frame of superpower rivalry for prestige and technological dominance. This extension reinforces the competitive framing of the original tweet but enriches it by invoking a highly salient precedent in US–Russia relations, where scientific and technological progress was strongly entangled with geopolitical power. The allusion to the Space Race also underscores how vaccine development, like the race to space, is portrayed as a high-stakes contest with symbolic as well as practical implications. In this way, the reply both aligns with the journalistic metaphor and highlights the continuity of rivalry between past and present global competitions.

(29) @WSJ it's the Space Race all over again. With vaccines.

5.3.1.4 Considerations

Across the six threads examined for the years 2014, 2017, and 2020, a consistent pattern emerges: Twitter users do not simply echo the metaphorical framings provided by news outlets but actively transform them.

In 2014, replies to @nytimes inverted the evaluative stance on Russia, reinforced the threat frame, simultaneously criticized Western weakness, or trivialized the frame through parody. Replies to the WSJ tweet, by contrast, often neutralized the threat or generalized it by extending the danger frame to other geopolitical actors.

By 2017, the Russia story had become a domestic and polarizing topic, and users' metaphorical engagement was notably more diverse and vivid. Replies to @nytimes' Brier Patch metaphor drew on folklore to extend the scenario, recontextualized it by redirecting entrapment onto the NYT itself or Democratic figures or reframed it entirely through alternative images of inescapability. Replies to @WSJ's smoke/smoking gun metaphor elaborated the fire scenario with flames, embers, and artificial smoke, often accompanied by ridicule or inversion, while others reoriented it toward conspiracy narratives. A smaller number of replies reframed the metaphor by abandoning the combustion imagery and drawing instead on entrenched metaphors of excavation ("digging," "dirt"), performance ("behind the scenes"), or drug use

("I never inhaled"). Irony and sarcasm pervade both threads, functioning as rhetorical devices to parody containment, trivialize smoke, or ridicule political opponents. Importantly, the 2017 dense and vivid metaphorical uptake reflects the heightened salience of Russiagate as a domestic controversy, where figurative language is more visually salient and immediately noticeable, given the concrete imagery activated by expressions such as the Brier Patch or the smoke/smoking gun. Such vividness arguably made the metaphors more engaging and thus more easily reusable by users.

By contrast, the subsequent discussion of the "vaccine race" metaphor shows how more conventional and widely disseminated figurative frames, precisely because of their familiarity, tend to appear less vivid and therefore elicit a comparatively lower degree of metaphorical engagement. The vaccine-related threads of 2020/21 again centered on the metaphor of competition, but users negotiated it in distinctive ways. Replies to the @nytimes tweet recontextualized the "race/game" framing by portraying it as childish behavior, specifying the true competitors as the pharmaceutical industry, or shifting the adversarial frame to the virus itself as the real enemy.

Out of 172 replies examined across the six threads, 29 instances ($\approx 16.9\%$) displayed metaphorical reuse in the form of extension, recontextualization, or reframing. This relatively modest proportion suggests that, while most replies did not take up the news metaphors directly, those that did activate them in especially salient and inventive ways. In other words, metaphorical uptake is quantitatively limited but qualitatively significant: the replies that engage metaphorically tend to generate vivid, multi-token elaborations that either reinforce, contest, or parody journalistic framings.

5.3.2 RQ3.2 Replies to broadsheet vs. tabloid and mainstream vs. counter narrative

The present section offers cross-sectional comparative reading, organized by register (broadsheet/tabloid) and narrative directionality (mainstream vs counter-narrative), using the same metaphor reuse categories applied in RQ3.1. It focuses on threads triggered by VIOLENCE metaphors, as the framing showed high metaphorical density in RQ2. Two competing directionalities are considered: the mainstream narrative (RUSSIA IS A THREAT

TO THE US) and its counter-narrative (THE US IS A THREAT TO RUSSIA). Like for RQ3.1, user replies are analyzed for potential extensions, recontextualizations, reframings of the original news metaphors.

5.3.2.1 RUSSIA IS A THREAT TO THE US

Table 5.5 below presents an overview of the scenarios activated by the framing RUSSIA-AS-THREAT. A first observation concerns the level of audience engagement. Tabloid tweets (e.g., @nypost, @NYDailyNews) generated a markedly lower number of replies than broadsheet outlets (@nytimes, @WSJ), suggesting that Twitter users are more inclined to engage with the latter’s metaphorical framings. This tendency can plausibly be explained not only by the higher perceived authority and agenda-setting role of broadsheets, but also by their larger follower base and greater prestige in the journalistic field, which increase the visibility, resonance, and perceived legitimacy of their posts.

Table 5.5. Threads Initiated by the Metaphor Scenario “RUSSIA IS A THREAT TO THE US”

	<i>News tweet Scenario with tweet text</i>	<i>Total Replies</i>	<i>Metaphor Scenario in reply</i>	<i>Total of metapho r reuses</i>
1	<p>RUSSIA IS A THREAT TO THE US ELECTIONS</p> <p>@nypost Putin accused American politicians of whipping up hysteria about a Russian threat as a ploy to distract voters (28/10/16)</p>	13	(1) ELIMINATING RUSSIAN THREAT IS USING A CLOTH	1 EX
2	<p>PUTIN DENIES RUSSIA IS A THREAT + TRUMP IS PUTIN CHILD</p> <p>@NYDailyNews President Trump says he doesn't believe Russia is a threat to the U.S. – once again contradicting intelligence chiefs (18/07/18) [GIF reported in figure 5.34]</p>	4	(2) PUTIN IS TRUMP’S DADDY	1 EX

3	<p>RUSSIAN INTERFERENCE IS A THREAT</p> <p>@WSJ "We almost have two governments": The gap between the White House and national security officials in their assessment of the threat posed by Russian election interference was on full display at the Aspen Security Forum (22/07/18)</p>	17	<p>(3) THE DEEP STATE IS THE BIGGEST THREAT</p> <p>(4) US INTERNAL CORRUPTION IS A THREAT</p>	2 REC
4	<p>RUSSIAN INTERFERENCE IS A THREAT</p> <p>@nytimes The FBI director warned anew on Friday about Russia's continued meddling in American elections, calling it a "significant counterintelligence threat" (29/04/19)</p>	30	<p>(5) THREAT AS INVENTED FICTION</p> <p>(6) RUSSIANS ARE TRUMP'S BUDDIES</p>	1 EX 1 REF
5	<p>RUSSIAN INTERFERENCE IS A THREAT BIGGER THAN IRAN</p> <p>@nytimes Breaking News: Russia hacked into U.S. computer networks in recent days, and many intelligence officials say it shows Moscow is a bigger election threat than Iran (22/10/20)</p>	100	<p>(7) EVIL RUSSIANS ARE A RECIPE LOVED BY AMERICANS</p> <p>(8) THE BIGGEST THREAT IS UNCLEAR</p> <p>(9) CHINA IS A BIGGER THREAT</p> <p>(10) CHINA IS A BIGGER THREAT</p> <p>(11) DEM ARE THE BIGGEST THREAT</p> <p>(12) NEWS OUTLETS ARE A BIGGER THREAT</p> <p>(13) DEM AND MEDIA ARE A BIGGER THREAT</p>	2 EX 5 REC
6	<p>RUSSIA IS NOT THE ONLY THREAT</p> <p>@nypost</p>	3	<p>(14) DEM ARE THE BIGGEST THREAT</p>	2 REC

Threat to US elections in 2020 is not limited to Russia (30/10/19)		(15) DEM ARE THE BIGGEST THREAT	
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In the @nypost thread 1, reply 1, Biden and Clinton are subject to sarcastic comments. The multimodal reply reported in Figure 5.35 below exemplifies metaphor extension through a satirical sketch. The user ironically references Hillary Clinton’s pledge to “wipe out cyber threats,” to which Putin is imagined responding by suggesting the use of a “cloth” to accomplish her goal – an allusion that both mocks the literalization of the metaphor and evokes past controversies involving Clinton’s handling of classified information.

Figure 5.35. Screenshot of multimodal reply.



Reply (2) in @NYDailyNews thread 2 is an example of metaphorical extension. The original multimodal tweet already mocked Trump’s denial of Russia as a threat by pairing critical text with a GIF (Figure 5.34 above) showing him carried piggyback on Putin. The reply amplifies this infantilizing image through the phrase “Weeee daddy,” which evokes the squeal of a child at play and casts Putin as the father figure. This turns the visual metaphor of subordination into an even stronger depiction of dependence and immaturity.

(2) 🤣🤣🤣🤣FREAKING HILARIOUS.... I've seen some pictures out there of Putin and Trump, but this tops the chart.. I just gives you that picture in your head of. .. Weeee Daddy🤣🤣🤣👏👏😳😳

Stylistically, the reply also relies on the typical expressive resources of Twitter. All caps (“FREAKING HILARIOUS”) and a flood of emojis (laughing faces, clapping hands, shocked faces) heighten the comic tone and guide interpretation: laughter signals ridicule, clapping

marks approval, and the overall excess underscores mockery. The combination of text, GIF, and emoji shows how different modes interact to intensify metaphorical framing, making the satire both vivid and unmistakable.

Reply (3) in @WSJ thread 3, a case of recontextualization, illustrates not only a deep distrust toward institutional authority, but also shows conspiratorial thinking, a discursive feature typical of digital political communication, as already noticed for the Seth Rich’s conspiracy in section 5.3.1. The invocation of the “Deep State” aligns with a broader conspiracy theory that posits the existence of a secret, unelected elite operating within the US government to undermine democratic processes and manipulate public opinion.

(3) @WSJ The biggest threat to our government is the deep state inhabitants of the DOJ⁹⁸ and FBI.

As Musolff (2022) argued, such conspiracy narratives frequently rely on entrenched metaphor scenarios which allow complex socio-political anxieties to be expressed in simplified terms. Social media environments facilitate the viral spread of such framings, resulting in enhancing their persuasive power. More generally, research has shown that figurative language plays a crucial role in the construction and circulation of conspiracy theories. Instead of relying solely on factual (or pseudo-factual) claims, conspiracy narratives are often embedded within coherent metaphor scenarios that make them appear more plausible and emotionally compelling, even in the absence of concrete evidence (Musolff 2022). Examples include the “COVID-as-war” scenario (Musolff 2022: 122–135), “puppeteering” metaphors of invisible control (Byford (2011, as cited in Demata et al. 2022: 470) or the construction of “enemy images” (Richardson and Wodak 2022: 402–403) simplify complexity, evoke strong emotional responses, and build narrative coherence. In this sense, the “Deep State” trope functions as a metaphor for hidden enemies of democracy, framing political conflict as a struggle against an invisible but powerful elite. Such tropes do not merely describe reality but actively shape perceptions of legitimacy and blame, thereby reinforcing in-group solidarity among those who share conspiratorial worldviews.

In Reply (4) there is another case of recontextualization. The user maintains the threat frame but redirects its target: the real danger is said to come from U.S. institutions themselves. The phrase “Russia Kool-Aid” dismisses the Russian interference narrative as propaganda, while

⁹⁸ Department of Justice.

the expression “corruption personified” casts DOJ and intelligence leaders (Mueller, Rosenstein, Sessions, Wray) as the embodiment of peril. In this way, the reply shifts the metaphorical mapping from an external threat to an internal one, reinforcing distrust in domestic authority while ridiculing the original framing.

(4) @WSJ The corrupt DOJ & Intelligence agencies should sell their Russia Cool-Aid to the third world. America and our great Constitution face no greater danger than these corrupt agencies & employees, chief among them Muller Rosenstein Sessions & Wray - Corruption Personified.

The replies to the @nytimes (thread 4) illustrate two divergent strategies of metaphorical uptake. In (5) the user extends the threat metaphor by reworking it into a narrative of exaggeration, dismissing Russian interference as a “fantasized threat” motivated by institutional self-interest (“budget puffery”). The uptake here does not abandon the original frame but trivializes it, undermining its seriousness by presenting it as an artificial construct.

(5) @nytimes sigh, budget puffery. Why do you mis-inform your readers about fantasized threats?”

By contrast, in (6), the threat scenario is entirely reframed: instead of an adversarial relation, Russia is ironically recast as “Trump’s buddy.” This reframing substitutes the danger frame with a relational metaphor of companionship, mocking both the news outlet and the political actors involved. Together, these replies exemplify how users can either hollow out a threat scenario through trivialization or invert it altogether through ironic relational imagery.

(6) @nytimes STOP!!! Russians are Trump’s buddies

Thread 5 illustrates a particularly rich set of metaphorical reuses, arguably encouraged by both the urgency of the “breaking news” format and the heightened salience of the electoral context. The responses here are not only more numerous but also more elaborated than in previous threads. In reply (7), the original threat frame is extended through culinary imagery. The “recipe” metaphor trivializes the framing of Russia as an election danger by presenting it as a repetitive and almost ritualized dish served to the American public. The reply ridicules the perceived overuse of the Russian threat narrative, implicitly questioning the credibility of election interference claims

(7) @nytimes Ahh the evil Russians... A recipe that lasts decades and Americans love it beyond belief ... As if all the people who voted for trump are Russian Spies... If your so called elections are so easy to manipulate then perhaps change it and do it the same way as the rest of the world.

Reply (8) reflects an extension that highlights uncertainty, casting doubt on the very possibility of attributing electoral danger to a single actor.

(8) @nytimes but who and/ or what is the biggest threat to fair elections in the US?

More numerous are the recontextualizations, in which the label of “biggest threat” is reassigned to alternative actors. The danger frame is redirected away from Russia toward China, in line with partisan narratives that foreground Beijing as the primary adversary, as in (9):

(9) @nytimes China paid billions to a candidate's sons... It is a bigger threat to our national security than election interference

The frame is turned inward, in @nypost thread 6. As for thread 3, Replies (15) and (16) recontextualize the metaphor by projecting the danger scenario onto domestic political actors, in particular the Democratic party, thereby negating the external threat and reframing it as a matter of internal corruption and manipulation.

(15) @nypost Biggest threat is dem party.

(16) @nypost, Indeed. Democrats pose a significant threat to safety, fairness and democracy....

5.3.2.2 Considerations

The RUSSIA-AS-THREAT narrative is deeply rooted in American narratives. Due to its historical entrenchment, this metaphorical framing may function as a taken-for-granted assumption, as such, its familiarity may decrease its perceived metaphoricity. As it can be noticed in the right-hand column of Table 5.6, a prevailing pattern emerges across the outlets: the threat, originally attributed to Russia, is systematically redirected toward endogenous American actors, perceived as the true sources of danger. These include first the Democratic Party, the “Deep State”, the supposedly corrupted administration, and the mainstream media.

5.3.2.3 THE US ARE A THREAT TO RUSSIA

Table 5.6 below presents an overview of the scenarios activated by the framing US-AS-THREAT.

Table 5.6. Threads Initiated by the Metaphor Scenario "THE US ARE A THREAT TO RUSSIA"

	<i>News Tweet Scenario with tweet text</i>	<i>Total Replies</i>	<i>Metaphor Scenario in reply</i>	<i>Total of metaphor reuses</i>
1	US IS A THREAT TO RUSSIA @NYDailyNews Vladimir Putin names U.S. as threat to Russia's national security (02/01/16)	6	(1) US IS NO THREAT (2) OBAMA IS A THREAT AGAINST PUTIN (ironic)	2 EX
2	US (MISSILE SYSTEM) IS A THREAT TO RUSSIA @nytimes Russia calls new U.S. missile defense system a "direct threat" (12/05/16)	12	(3) US IS A DIRECT THREAT FOR RUSSIA	1 EX
3	US IS ABOUT TO ASSAULT RUSSIA @nypost Tomorrow's cover: US prepped for massive cyber assault on Russia [PICTURE in Figure 5.33] (15/10/16)	23	(4) MAINSTREAM JOURNALIST IS WAR PROPAGANDIST	1 EX
4	US IS A THREAT FOR RUSSIA AND CHINA @WSJ Opinion: China and Russia are drawing closer together to meet what they see as "the America threat ," write @GrahamTAllison and Dmitri K. Simes (31/01/19)	14	(5) AMERICAN THREAT IS INTERNET TROLLING	1 EX

In thread 1, initiated by @NYDailyNews, one reply in (1) reuses the news-tweet's THREAT metaphor by denying the mapping between source and target and by shifting the grounds of evaluation. The user's opening assessment performs delegitimation of the authorial voice behind the tweet: rather than engaging the claim on its own terms, it attacks the credibility of the speaker, signaling strong disalignment and preparing the ground for refusal of the frame.

The closing assertion – “U.S no threat” – is a concise mapping denial that directly contradicts the tweet’s implied relation.

(1) @NYDailyNews Only a sick person would say such a crazy thing. He needs look at Russia economy the people are going hungry . U.S no threat

Another reply extends the metaphor multimodally, posting the image in Figure 5.36 with the caption:

(2) @NYDailyNews Hers the threat against Putin:

Figure 5.36. Screenshot of multimodal reply.



The image in Figure 5.36 presents a satirical photomontage in the style of Soviet propaganda, featuring Putin as a muscular figure and Barack Obama as an infantilized character in a Young Pioneer uniform. The composition activates a multimodal metaphor in which RUSSIA IS A STRONGMAN and THE US IS A SUBMISSIVE CHILD. The small American flag pinned beneath the boy’s collar in the image on the right reinforces the identification of the child figure not merely as Obama but as a metonymic representation of the United States. Its subordinate position underlines the perceived humiliation and ideological submission of the US to Russian authority. The ironic deployment of the Soviet motto in the upper left corner “*Bud’ Gotov/ Be ready!*” and the caption at the bottom “*Silen djadja Volodja/Uncle Volodja is strong!*” further amplifies the mock-heroic tone: Putin is framed as a paternalistic figure and ideological role model. This image exemplifies how the metaphorical framings US weakness and Russian dominance are expressed visually in digital meme culture.

@nytimes thread 2 contains the only supportive extension of the US-AS-THREAT scenario:

(3) @nytimes That's good. They should always know the US is a direct threat towards them. Not just a threat N general. Don't test US mightyness.

Rather than contesting or trivializing the metaphor, the user intensifies it, insisting that Russia should “always know” the United States is a direct threat. The uptake strengthens the scalar force of the original mapping and recasts the threat as categorical rather than contingent.

@nypost thread 3 is initiated by the multimodal news tweet in Figure 5.33 previously discussed in Section 5.2.2.1. The tabloid cover dramatizes a revived Cold War scenario where typography, imagery, and reported speech converge to map the conflict onto a WAR frame updated to the digital realm, explicitly casting the US as the aggressor and Russia as the target.

(4) @nypost Put a BAYONET IN @chucktodd s hands....@2manybogeys @realDonaldTrump

Here, the NBC News journalist Chuck Todd is named not for employment ties, but as a symbolic proxy and attention lever in a cross-outlet critique of perceived media hawkishness: he is a recognizable stand-in for the mainstream media. In other words, the tweet’s author is blaming the press ecosystem, not one outlet. By turning media into combatants and criticizing perceived media cheerleading, the MEDIA-AS-COMBATANT mapping rebukes perceived war-pushing of the news outlet.

Thread 4 contains the following extension. Reply (5) constitutes an ironic extension of the AMERICA-AS-THREAT frame. By questioning “A threat to what?” and then answering with “Troll cred on Twitter,” the user trivializes the notion of American power and reframes it as little more than digital posturing. The sarcastic use of “Murrica”—a mocking colloquial spelling of America often used to parody U.S. nationalism or exaggerate patriotic bravado—further signals disdain, reducing the geopolitical metaphor of America as a systemic danger to a parody of online reputation games. The uptake thereby illustrates how extensions can both sustain and ridicule the threat metaphor, turning it into a vehicle for mockery.

(5) @WSJ A threat to what? Troll cred on twitter? That's about all that Murrica has left.

5.3.2.4 Considerations

In contrast to the numerous and varied reuses of the RUSSIA-AS-THREAT scenario, replies to the US-AS-THREAT framing are markedly fewer and less diverse. It is worth noting that replies are fewer in general, i.e., 55 for US-AS-THREAT threads vs. 167 for the RUSSIA-AS-THREAT.

The handful of responses with reuses consist exclusively of extensions. Unlike the multifaceted recontextualizations observed in the Russia case (where the danger was redirected toward Democrats, the media, or China), here users limit themselves to mocking elaborations of the journalistic metaphor rather than redirecting or reframing it. The scarcity of replies can plausibly be attributed to the lower salience of the US-AS-THREAT scenario for the audience under examination. Whereas construing Russia as a danger resonates with entrenched Cold War legacies and contemporary partisan narratives, construing America itself as a threat – particularly when voiced by foreign actors – is more peripheral to the domestic political agenda and therefore less engaging for users. This imbalance suggests that metaphorical uptake is not evenly distributed across all framings but is strongly conditioned by their cultural resonance and partisan utility.

A further point is that metaphorical engagement with the US-AS-THREAT frame relies almost entirely on irony, with only a single reply explicitly supporting the scenario. Most reuses diminish the gravity of the “threat” by casting it in absurd or parodic terms. The absence of recontextualizations or reframings underlines the limited capacity of this metaphor to spark partisan contestation. Put differently, whereas the RUSSIA-AS-THREAT framing was repeatedly redirected and appropriated for domestic blame games, the US-AS-THREAT framing proved far less reusable, yielding only sporadic ironic remarks rather than sustained discursive negotiation.

Interestingly, however, the overall proportions of metaphor reuse are quite similar – and rather low: 15 out of 167 replies ($\approx 9\%$) for RUSSIA-AS-THREAT and 5 out of 55 replies ($\approx 9\%$) for US-AS-THREAT. This suggests that even when scenarios differ in their discursive credibility – how convincing or relevant they appear to users – and in their cultural sedimentation – how deeply they are rooted in collective memory and political narratives – the relative level of metaphorical reuse remains comparable.

5.3.3 RQ3.3 New metaphors in user replies

Across all threads analyzed in Sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2, users introduce new metaphor scenarios that do not simply echo the news tweets but activate fresh mappings of their own. What is striking is that, despite differences in narrative orientation and outlet type, the evaluative dimensions remain largely consistent. In other words, users across the spectrum draw on similar framings, which appear with a kind of cross-ideological symmetry.

Direct replies do not spare vulgar and offensive comments. This is consistent with the style of social media, where anonymity often lowers inhibitions and encourages more aggressive forms of impoliteness. Such replies frequently involve highly dehumanizing metaphors. At the same time, the online setting amplifies the interpretive flexibility of metaphor, making it difficult to decide whether a given expression should be read as clearly hostile or simply playful (Demjen and Hardaker 2016).

The next sub-sections unpack these emergent framings in detail.

5.3.3.1 POLICY MAKERS ARE UNTRUSTWORTHY SOCIAL ACTORS

The framing POLICY MAKERS AS UNTRUSTWORTHY SOCIAL ACTORS brings together a network of metaphor scenarios that present politicians as morally compromised and unfit for their role. The most prominent patterns revolve around betrayal, corruption, criminality, and irresponsibility. Crucially, these framings are not limited to one side of the political spectrum but cut across partisan lines, reflecting a broad distrust of institutional authority.

They are particularly salient in the context of the Russiagate investigations, which dominated the news agenda during the selected time frame. Here, user replies often work to delegitimize traditional actors and structures of power. The Trump administration, in particular, is described through metaphors of destruction and crime: Trump is said to have “attacked” or even “destroyed” the American intelligence service, while his administration is depicted as a “corrupted clan” or an instance of “organized crime.”

Comparative framings are also employed, often to ironic effect. One user asserts that “Putin is an amateur in voter fraud if compared to Democrats”, reversing the conventional West-versus-East narrative and constructing American actors as even more untrustworthy than their geopolitical adversaries. Users play with words and create blends, e.g., “democraps”, which operates as a lexical metaphor reducing political identity to waste, stripping the target group of legitimacy. Biden is also subject to profound critique and identified as a “traitor” who “sold the US to China”.

Trump is again the central figure in this scenario. In the multimodal reply shown in Figure 5.37, the warning about Russian interference is reinterpreted through a domestic emergency-and-justice script. The cartoon uses classical allegory: Justice, personified as a woman, forcefully expels Trump as if he were an “obstruction,” assisted by the Special Counsel. The caption “clearing an obstruction” shifts the meaning into the legal register of obstruction of justice. The metaphor of clearing an obstruction draws on the housekeeping domain, where the polity is imagined as a pathway blocked by debris that must be removed so normal functioning can resume. Trump, blown away by Justice’s breath, embodies the blockage, while the Special Counsel anchors the allegory in recognizable legal machinery. In this way, the abstract power of the law is translated into a tangible natural force: Justice’s breath becomes a cleansing wind. Crucially, the cartoon displaces the idea of threat from an external adversary to an internal impediment: the problem is not Russia at the frontier but Trump within the legal system. The textual reference to “1ST Responders” reinforces this mapping, equating constitutional actors (Congress, courts, law enforcement) with emergency personnel. The effect is a call for institutional action, urging that domestic institutions step in as guardians of the rule of law.

Figure 5.37. Screenshot of multimodal reply.



Copyright 1. Copyright Mike Luckovich⁹⁹

In the wake of comments to Russian hacking accusations, the picture in Figure 5.38 pastes a US political leader's face onto an 18th-century French queen and captions it "Let them have \$600," referring to the famous line "Let them eat croissant", allegedly attributed to Marie Antoinette. Here the core framing links aristocrats to the modern political elite, perceived as out of touch; the queen stands for a distant, insulated ruling class, while the \$600 stands for the US pandemic relief checks debated in late 2020, a meager, symbolic pittance¹⁰⁰. In other words, it is sarcastic moral condemnation: the reply accuses the leader of elite indifference and stinginess, implying a gulf between decision-makers and ordinary people. Again, there is a shift of attention from cyber/foreign-policy talk to domestic economic justice, which records the issue as class disconnect rather than security competence.

Figure 5.38. Screenshot of multimodal reply.



⁹⁹ Mike Luckovich is a Pulitzer Prize winning cartoonist for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. <https://www.mluckovich.com/home>

¹⁰⁰ The second round of US federal COVID-19 relief checks, approved as part of a \$900 billion stimulus package. Eligible Americans received direct payments of \$600 per person, a figure widely criticized as insufficient given the scale of the pandemic's economic impact.

Competence and authority are further undermined in scenarios where policy makers are identified as “irresponsible students”. Additionally, POLITICIAN-AS-CHILD scenarios are often used by twitterers to index irresponsibility. In Figure 5.39, for instance, Trump is infantilized – costumed as a child in shorts and sandals, positioned before an adult authority figure dressed as Santa, with a Christmas set. The Santa role imports the NAUGHTY/GOOD moral ledger from the holiday mythos. The caption “WHAT THE F*** IS WRONG WITH YOU?” fixes the preferred reading as rebuke, upgrading the scolding normally associated with Santa into explicit moral condemnation.

The visual composition reinforces this hierarchy: Trump’s leaning posture and childish outfit strip him of gravitas, while Santa’s seated authority and the observing “elf” create a tribunal of adult oversight. The underlying mappings include CHILD MISBEHAVIOR → POLITICAL DERELICTION, ADULT CAREGIVER/ARBITER → INSTITUTIONAL/MORAL AUTHORITY, and GIFT-GIVING ECONOMY → REWARD/PUNISHMENT. The effect goes beyond satire: it reframes political failure as immaturity requiring supervision, delegitimizing the officeholder through infantilization and ritual shaming within a culturally familiar festive frame.

Figure 5.39. Screenshot of multimodal reply.



5.3.3.2 TRUMP AS SUBDUED TO PUTIN

A particularly widespread framing is TRUMP AS SUBDUED TO PUTIN, where Trump is cast as a “puppet” or “servant” and Putin as his “boss.” This scenario goes beyond the familiar RUSSIA-AS-THREAT metaphor: it reframes the Trump presidency itself as compromised, suggesting that U.S. foreign policy is not autonomously shaped but externally controlled. In doing so, it serves as a powerful delegitimizing device aimed directly at the administration.

The multimodal repertoire of this scenario is rather varied and creative. Figure 5.40 crystallizes the “lapdog” trope again through photomontage: Trump appears as the handled subject, head bowed and tethered by a taut leash, while the Putin is staged as the handler, relaxed and in control. The leash functions as the central control–device signifier, converting “leadership” into being on a lead; the diminutive caption “DONNIE THE DOG!” anchors the reading by animalizing the US president, thereby withdrawing autonomy and dignity.

Composition and body language do much of the argumentative work: Trump’s awkward posture contrasts sharply with Putin’s ease, and the vector of the leash redistributes agency outward, placing power firmly in the handler’s hands. Semantically, the PET–OWNER source domain maps onto FOREIGN–DOMESTIC power relations, casting US foreign policy as externally steered. The result is a strongly delegitimizing frame that constructs the relationship as one of domination and servility, intensified through dehumanization.

Figure 5.40. Screenshot of multimodal reply.



5.3.3.3 (GEO)POLITICS IS A GAME

The mapping GEOPOLITICS IS A GAME encompasses several scenarios in which policy actors are imagined as players engaged in tactical contests, a rather widespread metaphor in Western culture, suggesting “a tendency to regard negotiation and diplomacy only as a competitive, non-communicative, zero-sum game” (Chilton 1996: 129).

Of particular interest is the following multimodal reply in Figure 5.41, as it shows the complexity and overlapping of metaphorical representations in multimodal texts. The metaphor scenario POLITICS IS A CARD GAME IN BIDEN’S HANDS is visually activated by the parody image of Joe and Hunter Biden styled as a fake Popular Mechanics magazine cover. In the image, Hunter holds cards labeled “China” and “Ukraine” like objects he has been handed – metaphorically functioning as “cards in the game”. This visual suggests that Hunter did not gain international ties by skill, but because his father gave him the right “hand” – linking back to the idea that Biden holds and plays the deck in a high-stakes political game. Thus, the entire image stages a visual critique of power as performative, strategic, and familial, rather than democratic and transparent.

Figure 5.41. Screenshot of multimodal reply.



5.3.3.4 REALITY IS FICTION

Another framing constructs REALITY as FICTION, wherein users reimagine political events through the lens of popular culture, satire, and entertainment genres. These representations frame public life as staged and fantastical, thereby undermining once again the seriousness of institutional narratives.

For instance, in one reply, Spyro the Dragon – a fictional video game character – is said to have “tampered with the US election”, absurdly attributing agency to a cartoon figure to ridicule the narrative of interference. This humorous displacement suggests that repeated accusations of Russian hacking resemble the predictability and lack of stakes typical of fiction.

In a reply to a 2020 tweet by @nytimes reporting a new hacking accusation, one user dismisses the story as “a repeat episode of 2016 with the exception that now we know the thief,” invoking the structure of television series storytelling to imply lack of novelty and even credibility. Another user adopts a more grotesque fictional frame, asking: “What kind of twisted clown circus are we living in?”, merging the imagery of circus performance and chaos to cast doubt on the coherence of political reality itself. These metaphorical framings work by collapsing the boundary between factual and fictional discourse, signaling a post-truth dynamic where political communication is evaluated in terms of entertainment value. Ultimately, this scenario further contributes to a broader delegitimizing effect, whereby institutional messages are treated as episodes in a farcical or manipulative performance, rather than as credible representations of reality.

5.3.3.5 Considerations

User replies display a rich ecology of metaphor-making that does not simply recycle news frames but introduces new mappings, signals them explicitly, and packages stance into platform-native forms. Here four phenomena identified as frequently recurrent – coinages, hashtag-borne source concepts, genre-specific metaphor flags, and the bot question – are discussed and situated within established metaphor theory and social-media linguistics.

5.3.3.5.1 Creative coinages as compressed evaluations

In user replies, morphology itself functions as a rhetorical device, enabling speakers to package complex evaluations into single lexical forms. Blends, stylizations, and orthographic play operate as micro-strategies of framing, condensing propositional stances into highly salient tokens. Metaphorical epithets are politically charged nicknames in which an embedded evaluative metaphor replaces the proper name, so that the name itself does the framing. Consider the following examples:

1. DonTheCon – POLITICIAN AS FRAUDSTER

This case constitutes a blend of “Don” (hypocoristic for Donald, but also evoking Mafia “don”) and “Con” (confidence trickster, fraudster). The coinage activates a CRIME/FRAUD scenario: the source domain of organized crime and deception is mapped onto the political domain, reframing the politician not as a leader but as a swindler. The internal rhyme and alliteration (Don/Con) enhance memorability and facilitate memetic spread, making the nickname both a metaphorical epithet and a portable slogan of delegitimization. In this way, Donald Trump’s political leadership is discursively reframed as systematic fraud, with the name itself embodying the accusation.

2. tRUmp – TRUMP EMBEDDED IN RUSSIA

This constitutes a graphemic stylization that foregrounds “RU,” the abbreviation for Russia, within the name “Trump.” Here orthographic manipulation functions as metaphorical insinuation: the politician’s identity is visually fused with Russia, suggesting alignment, collusion, or dependence. The capitalization of “RU” is not orthographic noise but indexical emphasis, anchoring an intertextual narrative of Russiagate and suspected ties with Moscow. The coinage thus compresses an entire frame into a two-letter highlight, simultaneously mocking, accusing, and signaling group affiliation through a highly economical form.

5.3.3.5.2 Source concepts carried by hashtags

Hashtags can encapsulate the source domain itself, rather than simply tagging a topic. For instance, expressions like #theyreEatingAndKillingEachOther map the target domain of

political dispute onto a Game of Thrones¹⁰¹ intertext, where betrayal and internecine destruction are central narrative tropes. The figurative effect derives from compression: a full propositional clause is reduced to a single searchable string, turning the hashtag into a condensed scenario of hostility and destruction.

The result is a register-bound metaphorical repertoire, in which source domains (e.g., violence) are packaged into compact lexical compounds. Such formations enable rapid reframing without syntactic overhead, allowing metaphor to be deployed economically in a high-velocity medium.

5.3.3.5.3 Genre-specific metaphor flags and signals

Twitter users also deploy novel “metaphor flags”, i.e., visible cues that signal non-literal construal (Steen et al. 2010). A recurrent device in replies is “=”, i.e., an equals sign. For instance, in “Putin = Monster”, the equals sign acts as a verbless copula that overtly instructs a class-membership construal (DEMON/BEAST → POLITICAL ACTOR). Its typographic terseness mirrors programming/math genres.

Also, Emoji, all-caps, and typographic play frequently occur: roar/animal emojis in bear memes, full-caps labels (MONSTER, TRAITOR), and repeated letters operate as salience boosters that heighten deliberateness. Such flags frequently moralize the scene, e.g., MONSTER entails inhumanity/expulsion, resonating with research on de-/zoomorphising/humazing political actors in conflict talk (Musolff 2016).

5.3.3.5.4 “Bot or not” and its relevance for discourse analysis

Empirically, social bots have long been shown to produce and even amplify political content at scale, boosting messages across interaction networks. Bots are intrinsic to Twitter’s discourse ecology. Rather than treating “bot or not” as a precondition for analysis, the present approach focuses on the rhetorical forms themselves – the scenarios, mappings, and multimodal elements – that are recognizable for audiences regardless of account ontology. Whether a posting account is human or automated can matter for circulation – reach, timing,

¹⁰¹ Game of Thrones is a fantasy television series based on George R. R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire novels* (2011–2019, HBO).

cascades – but is not determinative of the rhetorical structures analyzed here. Disentangling provenance is a methodological study in its own right; the focus of the present work is how metaphor scenarios are constructed and potentially de-constructed, not who (or what) published the replies, and their interpretive effects on audiences are analyzable independently of authorship ontology.

For these reasons, bot detection is out of scope: it is methodologically important for diffusion studies, but the discourse-structuring devices remain analyzable on their own terms.

5.3.4 Discussion on RQ3

Replies to metaphorical news tweets function as a “social barometer” of how audiences appropriate, contest, and rework journalistic framings. Rather than passively echoing outlet language, users actively manipulate metaphors (through extension, recontextualization, and reframing) and create new ones, often combining verbal, visual, and paralinguistic resources typical of social media interaction. Although the analysis of user replies is primarily qualitative, a limited quantitative overview is provided in Table 5.7 to contextualize the subsequent discussion. Rather than aiming at statistical generalization or cross-thread comparability, this overview offers a descriptive indication of the relative incidence of metaphorical and non-metaphorical language in the reply dataset as a whole.

Table 5.7. Distribution of metaphorical and non-metaphorical replies across thread groups

Thread group	Total replies	Metaphorical replies	Non metaphorical replies
2014	15	8	7
2017	135	50	85
2020	22	5	17
Russia-as-Threat	167	48	119
US-as-Threat	55	16	39
TOTAL	394	127	267
% of total (N = 394)	100%	32.2%	67.8%

Across the reply dataset as a whole (N = 394 replies), metaphorical language represents a substantial but non-dominant component of user replies. A total of 127 comments (32.2%) contain at least one metaphorically used lexical unit, while the majority of replies (267 comments, 67.8%) rely on non-metaphorical linguistic resources. This distribution suggests

that metaphor is neither marginal nor ubiquitous in user responses: rather, it functions as one among several available discursive strategies. In other words, rather than relying exclusively on metaphor, users frequently employ a range of expressive strategies that were not analysed here, as they fall beyond the scope of the present study. These include, among others, explicitly affective language, humour, and hyperbole.

Within the subset of metaphorical replies, a further distinction between novel metaphors and metaphor reuses reveals additional patterns, shown in Table 5.8.

Table 5.8. Distribution of new metaphorical replies and metaphor reuses across thread groups

Thread group	Metaphorical replies	New metaphors in replies	Reuses	EX	REC	REF
2014	8	3	5	5	0	0
2017	50	30	20	10	2	8
2020	5	1	4	2	1	1
Russia-as-Threat	48	33	15	6	7	2
US-as-Threat	16	11	5	5	0	0
TOTAL	127	78	49	28	10	11
% of total (N = 394)	32.2%	19.8%	12.4%	7.1%	2.5%	2.8%

Novel metaphors (78 instances) outnumber reuses (49 instances), indicating a relatively high degree of figurative innovation even in highly recurrent and polarized debates. This finding suggests that users do not simply reproduce a fixed repertoire of conventional metaphors, but actively adapt figurative language to the immediate interactional context, often tailoring metaphors to specific events, and especially social actors. At the same time, the presence of a sizeable number of reuses points to processes of metaphor circulation and stabilization, whereby certain metaphorical frames remain salient enough to be taken up repeatedly across replies.

A closer look at the internal structure of metaphor reuse further shows that reuses are not uniform. In line with van Poppel and Pilgram’s study (2024), extensions constitute the most frequent subtype, followed by reframings and recontextualisations. This distribution suggests that reuse most commonly takes the form of incremental elaboration on an already established metaphorical scenario. Users tend to extend or slightly modify existing metaphors, maintaining their core structure while adjusting their argumentative force. Reframings and recontextualisations, while less frequent, nevertheless demonstrate that metaphor reuse can also involve more substantial shifts in perspective or contextual embedding.

Although the proportion of metaphorical replies varies across thread groups, these differences are not interpreted in comparative or causal terms, given the heterogeneity of thread size, topic, news outlet, and interactional dynamics. Instead, the figures are intended to document the consistent presence of both metaphorical innovation and reuse across all subsets of the data.

In qualitative terms, however, these distributional tendencies gain meaning only when examined in context. Across outlets a unifying pattern emerges: replies consistently express distrust toward institutional authority, redirecting metaphors away from Russia and toward domestic political actors, the media, or policy makers themselves. This transversal stance suggests that, regardless of outlet profile or register, user engagement with metaphors is strongly shaped by a broader erosion of confidence in political and media institutions. Users systematically redirect threat metaphors inward, away from Russia and toward domestic political actors, institutions, and the media. Policy makers are frequently reframed as corrupt, irresponsible, or infantilized figures, with imagery that strips them of gravitas and recasts them as untrustworthy or incompetent. Such framings reflect not only partisan hostility but also a broader erosion of confidence in established authority, intensified by the multimodal and ironic style of Twitter discourse.

Finally, replies often introduce new metaphorical scenarios absent from the news tweets: GEOPOLITICS AS A GAME, REALITY AS FICTION, TRUMP AS SUBORDINATE TO PUTIN. These mappings are frequently multimodal, intensified by typography, emojis, or image macros, which amplify stance and make metaphors instantly legible.

Overall, the findings highlight that replies are not peripheral noise but an integral layer of metaphorical discourse. News outlets seed scenarios, while users remix them to ridicule, delegitimize, or dramatize political conflict. Metaphor thus emerges as a compact, versatile tool through which distrust in authority is articulated and the gravitas of policy makers is systematically undermined.

Chapter 6. Concluding Remarks

The present study has set out to investigate the metaphorical framings employed in political discourse as generated by leading news outlets on Twitter. Its central focus has been the representation of Russia and the discursive construction of International Relations, as articulated both in journalistic tweets and in the interactive dynamics of user replies.

The choice of the 2014–2021 timeframe proved particularly fruitful for this study. By deliberately focusing on the years preceding the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, this research contributes to understanding the discursive dynamics that laid the groundwork for later escalations. While post-2022 studies abound, the years between 2014 and 2021 remain comparatively understudied, despite their centrality in consolidating a long-term adversarial framing of US–Russia relations. This period was marked by recurring controversies over interference, sanctions, and strategic rivalry, which provided fertile ground for metaphorical framings of Russia as both threat and competitor. At the same time, the diachronic focus highlights how such framings evolved not in a vacuum but within a shifting digital environment, one in which Twitter’s affordances and policies directly affected discourse visibility and retrievability. The subsequent transformation of Twitter into X and the restriction of free access to its API further underscored the need to document and preserve data from this earlier stage, when large-scale tweet collection was still possible.

From a methodological and media perspective, this dissertation also foregrounds the affordances of digital journalism.

Twitter’s technical constraints – first the 140-character limit, later expanded to 280 – have often been regarded as obstacles to nuanced reporting. Yet, in line with Hermida’s (2010) characterization of Twitter as an “awareness system” and Franklin’s (2014) discussion of the “Twitterization of news,” the findings here suggest that brevity is not merely restrictive but strategically functional. Far from producing only ellipsis or omission, the short form often serves to spotlight selected actors, processes, or evaluations, thereby intensifying the salience of specific metaphorical framings. For example, formulations such as “the West needs a new policy to resist, restrain and retain Russia” illustrate how the compressed style of news tweets accentuates evaluative and adversarial mappings while leaving background actors implicit. In this sense, character limits do not dilute journalistic framing but recalibrate it, privileging

metaphor as a compact rhetorical device that both fits the medium and enhances uptake in fast-paced digital environments.

Another phenomenon emerging from the data concerns the repetition of nearly identical tweets by the same outlet, often with minimal lexical variation. While at first glance such duplication may appear redundant, it can be better understood as part of a broader engagement strategy. In Twitter's attention-driven economy, repeating a news item increases its visibility in users' feeds and maximizes the chances of retweets, likes, and comments. This practice reflects not a failure of originality but an adaptation to the affordances of the platform and to the dynamics of a novel news ecology, where sustaining audience engagement is crucial amid declining readership and fragmented consumption. In this sense, duplication functions as a form of algorithmic optimization: by recycling content, outlets seek to keep stories alive within the highly competitive environment of social media feeds. For researchers, such repetitions also offer an indirect measure of salience, revealing which stories editors considered important enough to circulate repeatedly. At the same time, repetitions raise methodological questions about representativeness and engagement metrics, since identical or near-identical tweets may inflate the apparent prominence of specific narratives while masking diversity in framing.

Within this ecology of brevity and repetition, metaphor emerges as a crucial resource for condensing complex political issues into compact images. The analysis has shown that Russia-related metaphorical framings in news tweets are not randomly distributed but cluster around a limited set of recurrent scenarios. At the macro-level, the most salient patterns portray Russia either as a threat (to US security and elections), as a competitor (in domains such as military, technology, or vaccine development), or as a strategic actor (sometimes weakened, preponderantly aggressive). These scenarios are shared across outlets, suggesting that US journalistic discourse draws on entrenched and historically familiar metaphorical repertoires to narrate Russia's role in international relations. At the same time, the analysis revealed differences in emphasis and scope: while the *New York Times* tended to foreground metaphors of danger and security, the *Wall Street Journal* often framed Russia in relation to markets, economy, or geopolitical competition – an orientation consistent with its profile as a business-focused newspaper.

In 2014, following the annexation of Crimea, both outlets mobilized metaphors of RUSSIA AS DANGEROUS, but the NYT foregrounded containment and confrontation, projecting Russia as an aggressive force, whereas the WSJ suggested danger but also vulnerability and volatility in Russia's position. In 2017, during the Russiagate controversy, the scenarios served different discursive purposes: dramatization of entrapment in the NYT versus caution and institutional

restraint in the WSJ. In 2021, when reporting on cyberattacks and vaccine competition, both outlets resorted to competition metaphors, particularly the “race” scenario. Yet, again, subtle contrasts emerged: the NYT emphasized global rivalry and the politicization of health, aligning with a narrative of collective security threat, whereas the WSJ contextualized the race within economic and technological domains, consistent with its editorial focus on markets and strategic competition.

These results demonstrate that, although the macro-scenarios are shared across outlets, their discursive realization varies in subtle but significant ways, depending on each newspaper’s editorial profile and historical positioning. The analysis shows that while the underlying conceptual mappings are broadly shared, their linguistic enactment varies with genre conventions: broadsheets privilege strategic framings, whereas tabloids exploit metaphor’s sensational potential to produce emotional engagement. Moreover, the results may be interpreted as hinting at a broader trend of tabloidization in online journalism. Even though broadsheets (NYT, WSJ) and tabloids (NYPost, NYDailyNews) retain their traditional stylistic and discursive distinctions, their metaphorical framings on Twitter often converge in relying on similar narrative patterns and emotive scenarios. This suggests that the affordances of the platform – brevity, immediacy, and audience maximization – encourage forms of simplification, personalization, and dramatization that have long been associated with tabloid discourse (Esser 1999). In this sense, Twitter may function as a “leveling arena” where journalistic genres are reshaped by the dynamics of digital attention economies, contributing to the hybridization of broadsheet and tabloid styles.

At the same time, the framing of RUSSIA-AS-THREAT is more complex. From a rhetorical standpoint, one salient take-home message emerges. In broadsheet coverage Russia is consistently positioned as the danger to be contained. By contrast, tabloid framings tend to be more multifaceted: While they occasionally reproduce the canonical RUSSIA-AS-THREAT narrative, they also destabilize it. This contrast suggests that while broadsheets consolidate an almost univocal rhetoric of containment, tabloids enact a more heterogeneous stance, at times reinforcing, at times subverting, the dominant Cold War-inflected script. In this sense, tabloid coverage contributes to a polyphonic news ecology where the perception of Russia oscillates between enemy, victim, and competitor, depending on the narrative function of each tweet. At the same time, such diversification may be less about ideological positioning than about attracting user engagement in the competitive attention economy of digital platforms.

Results show another finding, i.e., to the pervasiveness of violent and belligerent metaphor scenarios, which have become a dominant template for describing a wide range of

contemporary issues, and its spread into adjacent fields such as cybersecurity is now a subject of scholarly concern. Studies of public discourse show that war metaphors are ubiquitous because they draw on shared schematic knowledge and convey an urgent, negative tone, yet their meaning depends heavily on context, producing both positive mobilizing effects and negative framing consequences (Flusberg et al. 2018; Semino et al. 2017).

An examination of how news metaphorical framings are perceived, reused, and contested by users – introduced a Bakhtinian dimension to metaphor analysis, where figurative language is understood as part of an ongoing dialogic exchange rather than a static news analysis. In this perspective, replies to news tweets represent sites where journalistic framings are appropriated, inverted, or parodied, thus offering insights into how narratives circulate and evolve in the digital sphere.

Although quantitatively modest, metaphor reuses are qualitatively significant. Russiagate threads posted in 2017 showed the highest density of reuse; by contrast, the vaccine “race” metaphor in 2020–2021 tweets elicited fewer transformations, arguably because of its greater conventionality and entrenchment as a framing device. Replies to RUSSIA-AS-THREAT scenarios tended instead to recontextualize danger away from Russia toward domestic actors (e.g., Democrats, mainstream media, the “Deep State”), or toward China, reflecting partisan agendas and conspiracy narratives, and a profound distrust in authority.

Irony and sarcasm are pervasive across all datasets, functioning as key rhetorical resources in both supportive and oppositional stances. Users often trivialize or parody journalistic framings or invert them. Such polarity is not only the outcome of competing political positions but also reflects a medium bias: Twitter as a platform structurally amplifies conflictual and antagonistic voices, thereby reinforcing the polarization of (metaphorical) engagement (Zappavigna 2012). Finally, the study also addressed Twitter’s multimodal dimension, showing how images, GIFs, and visual stylizations intertwine with verbal metaphors, co-constructing figurative framings and broadening the range of strategies through which users negotiate meaning in replies.

6.1 Limitations

While the findings offer new insight into the use of metaphor on Twitter, a few limitations must be acknowledged. News tweets were gathered from four outlets, all of which are historically rooted in the New York area. This geographical concentration reflects the symbolic and institutional centrality of New York in US media culture, and, crucially, the global reach of these newspapers, which are widely read and cited across the world. At the same time, the dataset inevitably foregrounds the discursive practices of East Coast media, potentially overlooking how Russia-related framings might differ in regional or national outlets based elsewhere, particularly those with more limited circulation and influence, such as many West Coast newspapers.

As for user replies, the study did not take into account the declared location of Twitter accounts. There are two reasons for this methodological choice. First, the location stated in user profiles is often unreliable and may not correspond to the actual IP address. Second, Twitter's transnational affordances make it possible for users to reply from virtually anywhere, regardless of geographical proximity to the news outlet. For this reason, replies were treated as discursively relevant but geographically indeterminate contributions, rather than as locally anchored responses.

This raises two important implications. On the one hand, replies may reflect globalized interpretations of US–Russia relations rather than strictly domestic perspectives, contributing to a dialogic space where international and national voices intermingle. On the other hand, the absence of reliable user-location data makes it difficult to assess whether the metaphorical framings examined resonate differently across national or regional audiences. Future research could benefit from integrating geolocation data (when available) or employing methods of digital ethnography to contextualize user engagement more precisely.

Another limitation concerns the tool Wmatrix used in the automatic annotation of semantic domains. When using Wmatrix, some tokens may remain unclassified or be misclassified. This is an inherent trade-off in using corpus tools for automatic analysis. Nevertheless, one such error prompted a methodological question: Wmatrix failed to tag any token containing the prefix *cyber-*, whether as a concatenated form (e.g., *cyberattack*) or as a hyphenated form (e.g., *cyber-attack*). This omission affects the totals for items mapped to Warfare (G3), a limitation acknowledged here. Even if the tool had assigned a label rather than placing these tokens in the Wmatrix “Trash Can,” a rigorous application of MIPVU would still treat cyberwar,

cyberattack, and related forms as literal (not metaphorical), because they are lexicalized in the selected dictionaries and their reported meanings coincide with the basic meaning.

While annotation protocols and tools are essential for accelerating tagging, they necessarily lack critical judgment: the analyst's interpretive work remains indispensable. Therefore, whether cyberattack, cyberwar, and other warfare-related lexicon should be treated as metaphorical or literal ultimately depends on how the boundaries of the concept WAR are operationalized. In a Roschian, prototype-theoretic view, category boundaries are fuzzy rather than sharp, which complicates such decisions.

In other words, is cyberattack a kind of attack in a war, and therefore a literal attack, or is it somehow erroneous to define this form of cyber-activity an actual attack, in the belligerent sense? Cases like all-out cyber war, bombardment of servers, digital siege, front lines of cyberspace – i.e., where attack/assault is used to dramatize non-hostile phenomena – are more evidently metaphorical, but there are cases where the text goes beyond the lexicalized term and therefore are also Metaphor Related Words according to MIPVU criteria. Philosophically, whether cyberattack counts as an “attack” in the belligerent sense depends on how the concept ATTACK is carved up. As an instance of attack-in-war it is, at best, a peripheral member of the WAR category.

More broadly, the issue arises from the pervasiveness and normalization of the WAR frame in contemporary discourse, discussed above, which encourages de-metaphorization and lexicalization of conflict terms in adjacent domains such as cybersecurity. This entrenchment (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Musolff 2016; Semino et al. 2017; Skrynnikova 2020) makes warfare lexicon available as unmarked descriptors, which masks the underlying cross-domain mapping and influences both human judgments and tool-based annotation. Therefore, lexicalization reduces perceived metaphoricity without settling ontology: when a term becomes common and dictionary-like (e.g., cyberattack) the metaphor is less likely to be noticed. But that does not prove the entity named is the same kind of thing as a physical attack. Skrynnikova (2020) offers a practical way out of this literal/metaphorical deadlock: to reframe the domain through metaphor co-creation. Instead of inheriting the normalized WAR frame, stakeholders deliberately generate and privilege alternative frames – e.g., ecosystem, public health, marketplace, cooking/recipe, common space, physical-asset protection – that better capture interdependence, prevention, incentives, and shared responsibility in cybersecurity. This strategy has been piloted in awareness campaigns and workshops, showing that co-created metaphors can displace inapt war talk and channel discourse toward more diagnostic, less militarized inferences.

In conclusion, the scope of the analysis of direct replies remains necessarily limited. The study has shown whether and how users engage with and transform metaphorical framings in their replies, but it does not attempt to measure the actual cognitive uptake or persuasive impact of such figurative language. Questions of processing, retention, and attitudinal change would require complementary evidence from psycholinguistic or experimental approaches, which lie beyond the methodological reach of discourse analysis. What this study does capture, however, is the observable discursive negotiation of metaphors in the public sphere – how they are reused, recontextualized, and reframed within the dialogic dynamics of Twitter.

6.2 Future Directions

While the present study has addressed its main research questions, it also opens a number of avenues for further investigation.

First, the elaborated annotation protocols for the identification of metaphor-related words have been designed with future quantitative developments in mind. The current framework is sufficiently detailed to allow for systematic testing of replicability and inter-annotator agreement, thereby paving the way for large-scale, multi-annotator projects. Such validation is crucial if the methodology is to be extended beyond this single case study and applied to broader datasets.

Second, a complementary annotation protocol aimed at classifying replies according to their discursive function would make it possible to move beyond the identification of metaphorical expressions and obtain a more complete picture of how users position themselves, evaluate news framings, and interact with one another. This would enable researchers to go beyond the identification of metaphorical expressions *per se*, and to map how metaphors interact with broader communicative strategies – such as irony, ridicule, alignment, or conspiracy-building. A functional typology of replies would thus offer a clearer picture of how users negotiate, reinforce, or resist journalistic framings.

Finally, this study has shown that irony frequently co-occurs with metaphorical uptake in replies, functioning as a key rhetorical resource for parody, contestation, or trivialization. The interplay between irony and metaphor remains a particularly underexplored dimension (Attardo 2020). Future research should address this nexus systematically, investigating how

irony modulates metaphor's evaluative force and how multimodal cues (e.g., GIFs, memes, images) contribute to ironic reframing.

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