

**Journal of Geography, Politics and Society**  
2025, 15(2), 59–65  
<https://doi.org/10.26881/jpgs.2025.2.07>



## SHAPING THE IMAGE OF UKRAINE IN THE MODERN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE INFORMATION SPACE BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF PERIODICALS

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### Citation

Kuczabski A., Kuzyshyn R., Kuzyshyn A., 2025, Shaping the image of Ukraine in the modern English-language information space based on the example of periodicals, *Journal of Geography, Politics and Society*, 15(2), 59–65.

### Abstract

The image of a state in the global public sphere is shaped not only through official diplomacy but also by its representation in international media. For Ukraine, since 2014 and especially after the full-scale Russian invasion on 24 February 2022, leading English-language outlets with broad global reach—BBC News and The Times in the United Kingdom, The New York Times and CNN International in the United States—have played a decisive role. Their news, analysis, and reportage have framed the understanding of the war, shaped moral narratives, and influenced political debates in allied societies and governments. The aim of this article is to trace the transformation of Ukraine's image from a “peripheral post-Soviet state with structural problems” to an “active player in the struggle for a democratic world order.” The study combines rhetorical analysis (framing, narrative roles, appeals) with quantitative indicators (frequency, tone) and illustrates findings through specific media examples and references.

### Key words

Ukraine, national image, English-language media, information, media analytics.

Received: 20 June 2025

Accepted: 17 August 2025

Published: 30 September 2025

### 1. Introduction

The image of a state in the global public sphere is shaped not only by official public diplomacy but also by daily media representation. For Ukraine, since 2014 (the beginning of Russian aggression) and especially since 24 February 2022 (the full-scale invasion), English-language media with high credibility and

global reach have been crucial – British BBC News and The Times, American The New York Times and CNN International. Their news, analysis and reporting set the frames for understanding the war, shape moral emphases and influence political discussions in the governments and societies of allies.

The aim of the article is to trace the change in the image of Ukraine in the pages of the aforementioned

media from a 'peripheral post-Soviet state with structural problems' to a 'player in the struggle for a democratic world order', to analyse rhetorical strategies, to present quantitative indicators (frequency of mentions, tone/framework), to illustrate this with specific examples of publications, and to provide accurate references.

## 2. Data and Methods

In the process of preparing this study, a targeted selection of materials from 2013–2021 (pre-war and 'hybrid' periods) and 2022–2025 (full-scale war) was carried out in stages. The qualitative analysis of rhetoric (framing, narrative roles, emotional appeals, argumentation patterns) corresponds to the quantitative context based on open review studies on the dynamics of news coverage and consumption.

The source base of the study includes the media of the United Kingdom (BBC News, The Times) and the United States (The New York Times, CNN International).

The formation of Ukraine's image from a geopolitical perspective has been evaluated by both Ukrainian and international scholars with different emphases. A. Kuzyshyn and I. Poplavska analyzed this issue through the lens of information use in Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine (Kuzyshyn, Poplavska, 2023). H. Chernov examined the persistence and recurrence of key frames in the international media coverage of the war in Ukraine. The author investigates how the media space reproduces the same interpretative schemes – "victim," "hero," "aggressor" – and why these frames become entrenched in public discourse (Chernov, 2023).

The study by M. Danielsson is devoted to the analysis of the communications of the Ukrainian Red Cross during the full-scale war of 2022–2024. The author explores how in public statements and media content the framing of Ukrainians shifted – from "victims of war" to "heroes and agents of solidarity." Particular attention is given to rhetorical strategies, the use of emotional appeals, and visual symbolism in shaping Ukraine's international image. This work is valuable for understanding how humanitarian organizations participate in constructing both national and international informational narratives (Danielsson, 2024).

H. O. Fisher analyzes topic selection, linguistic strategies, and the tonality of leading English-language publications, highlighting the tension between the pursuit of neutrality and explicit moral positioning (Fisher, 2023).

S. Kang conducted a comparative analysis of the coverage of the Russia–Ukraine war in global news media. The author considers differences in framing across Western and Asian outlets, focusing on the use of key narratives – "aggressor," "victim," "international solidarity," and "geopolitical crisis." The study demonstrates that media in different regions interpret the same events through the prism of their own political and cultural contexts. This research is useful for understanding global informational asymmetries and diverse models of representing Ukraine in the international public sphere (Kang, 2022).

The visual framing of the conflict in Ukraine in international media has also been studied. M. Ojala analyzes photographs and video content accompanying news materials to reveal how visual imagery influences perceptions of responsibility for the war and the formation of public discourse (Ojala, 2017).

Technologies of shaping Ukraine's image through media outlets are further explored in the studies of A. Verbytska (2024) and A. Rudakova (2024).

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1. Pre-war context (before 2014): 'periphery', 'transition', 'corruption'.

Before Euromaidan, Ukraine was not often at the centre of the English-language agenda and mostly appeared in stories about 'post-Soviet transition', corruption and elite struggles. BBC News often included Ukraine in regional selections of Eastern European news, presenting events in the format of concise explanations: gas conflicts, government crises, vacillations between European integration and Russia's 'orbit.' (Ukraine protests: What's going on?, 2013). The Times interpreted Ukraine through the prism of European security: the texts have an elitist-political perspective – is the EU/NATO capable of restraining Moscow's influence and how should London act in the field of sanctions and defence policy (Protests Persist in Kiev Despite Concessions, 2013). The New York Times developed the geopolitical frame of a 'buffer zone', focusing on the competition for influence and personifying conflicts through leaders, elections, and 'oligarchic' networks (Protests Persist in Kiev Despite Concessions, 2013). CNN International picked up on crisis peaks, building timelines for a mass global audience and explaining the basic context. Three rhetorical visions dominated: first, the perception of Ukraine as a Central and Eastern European country currently on the periphery of the

European order; second, the reduction of domestic politics to elite conflict and corrupt practices; third, the interpretation of the state's strategic agency as a derivative of external pressure. The surge of interest in Ukraine in popular English-language media grew in late 2013, when the country was swept by mass protests against the rollback of European integration processes in the state.

Thus, until 2013, the leading English-language press worldwide was dominated by the view that Ukraine was a post-Soviet, 'not yet integrated' state, characterised by 'elite conflict' reflected in the permanent confrontation between 'the authorities and the opposition,' which was mainly personified by their leaders. Another widely used thesis is the idea of Ukraine as an object of competition between external forces (this idea has deep roots, dating back to the early 20th century, when attempts were made to form an independent Ukrainian state).

### **3.2. Hybrid period (2014-2021): low-intensity war, Crimea, Minsk, reforms**

The events of 2014 became a watershed moment in shaping the image of Ukraine in the English-language information space. Russia's annexation of Crimea and the start of the war in Donbas put Ukraine high on the international agenda. Whereas before it often appeared in the media as a 'peripheral state' or a 'buffer zone,' after 2014 the media began to systematically cover the situation, forming a stable framework for perception.

BBC News responded by creating a large number of timelines, analytical explanations and reports from the conflict zone. Among the characteristic genres were Q&As and interactive maps explaining the course of events, the division of territories, key dates, and diplomatic decisions. The BBC cemented the status of Ukraine as a victim of aggression, emphasising violations of the international law and the humanitarian consequences for the civilian population. (Ukraine crisis: Timeline, 2014).

The Times focused primarily on the geopolitical implications for Europe. The publication often analysed the consequences of the annexation of Crimea and the results of hostilities for NATO and EU security, as well as the position of the UK in the face of new challenges. In commentaries and editorials, Ukraine is presented as a 'test' for the West and the main question is whether it is capable of protecting democracy on Eastern European borders.

The New York Times actively covered the aftermath of the MH17 crash, which became one of the biggest

news stories of that period. In addition, the American publication focused on the internal problems of Ukraine, highlighting its ambitious reforms but also emphasising the difficulties of overcoming corruption and oligarchic influence. There were frequent reports on the Minsk agreements, discussions about their effectiveness, and the role of the United States in supporting Kyiv.

CNN International, in turn, provided a large number of live broadcasts, photo reports and videos, which made the conflict more understandable to a global mass audience. Visual materials helped to increase the emotional impact, including footage of destroyed cities, interviews with displaced persons, and reports from the combat zones (Crimea votes to join Russia, 2014).

Three key frames dominated during this period. The first was 'victim of aggression', which reinforced the image of Ukraine as a state fighting for its territorial integrity and in need of international support. The second was 'reforms under pressure', which emphasised the need for internal reforms for integration with Europe. The third was 'international solidarity', which emphasised the role of Western countries in restraining Russia through sanctions and diplomatic mechanisms.

Thus, 2014–2021 can be defined as a 'hybrid period': the image of Ukraine was twofold – a state that was a victim of external aggression (the legal illegitimacy of the annexation, the humanitarian consequences of the war) and a country with chronic internal problems, which, nevertheless, demonstrates a desire for reform and the gradual establishment of a European identity.

### **3.3. The turning point of 24 February 2022: representation of full-scale war**

24 February 2022 became a critical turning point in shaping the image of Ukraine in the English-language media space. While attention to the country fluctuated between 2014-2021 and depended on individual crisis events, the start of full-scale Russian invasion made Ukraine a central topic on the global level. From the first hours of the war, leading publications in the UK and the US switched to a mode of constant information updates, providing their audiences with maps of combat operations, eyewitness accounts, and analytical commentary.

BBC News launched a large-scale multi-format project: hourly live blogs, maps of troop movements, reports from hot spots, and stories about civilian life. Reports from Bucha, Irpin, and Kharkiv gained global

resonance, reinforcing the narrative of ‘resilience and heroism.’ The BBC positioned itself as a ‘trusted service’ that verifies facts and explains events in a way that is understandable to a global audience (Russia invades Ukraine: What we know, 24–28 February 2022; The war in maps and charts (series of updateable maps); We saw our neighbours executed’: Survivors of Bucha, 2022).

It has been noted that audiences in the United Kingdom «particularly rely on the BBC for understanding international events, including the war in Ukraine» (We saw our neighbours executed’: Survivors of Bucha, 2022).

The Times used a different approach: it emphasised historical analogies and European responsibility. In its editorials, Ukraine was presented as a ‘barrier against tyranny’ and Kyiv struggle as a ‘fight for Europe.’ The newspaper actively covered diplomatic efforts, NATO assistance and the British government policy, emphasising the strategic unity of the West.

The New York Times combined two levels: detailed investigations using satellite imagery and OSINT technologies, and global analytics on the consequences of the war for the energy, food, and security sectors. The materials on war crimes in Bucha became an example of evidence-based journalism, which shapes a strong moral emphasis in the perception of Ukraine.

CNN International focused on emotionally impactful stories and continuous marathon coverage. Particular attention was paid to the stories of civilians: refugees, volunteers, and medical workers. Video footage from Kyiv, Lviv, and the border with Poland reinforced the image of Ukraine as a nation fighting for survival, while also mobilising global solidarity.

In general, after February 2022, new rhetorical frameworks dominated: ‘Ukraine is both a hero and a victim’, ‘Zelenskyi’s leadership as a symbol of resistance’, ‘the global consequences of war’, and ‘moral clarity’ in defining the aggressor and the victim. Ukraine is no longer a peripheral topic but has become a subject that determines the direction of international discussions. Thus, a new image is being formed in the Western media: a country that not only suffers from war but also embodies the struggle for a democratic world order.

Overall, after February 2022, new rhetorical frames have come to dominate: “Ukraine as both hero and victim,” “Zelensky’s leadership as a symbol of resistance,” “global consequences of the war,” and “moral clarity” in defining the aggressor and the victim. Ukraine ceases to be a peripheral topic and instead emerges as a subject shaping the course of international discussions. Thus, in Western media

a new image takes shape: a country that not only suffers from war, but also embodies the struggle for a democratic world order.

A clear line of moral asymmetry (aggressor/victim) also comes to the forefront: the media no longer “balance” both sides when describing war crimes, but instead rely on verified evidence, photo and video testimonies, OSINT, and satellite imagery (e.g., NYT Visual Investigations; BBC Verify). This is accompanied by a set of framing devices:

1. **“Ukraine as hero/victim”** – a fusion of suffering (destruction, Bucha, Mariupol) and heroism (the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Territorial Defense, volunteers).

2. **“European identity”** – The Times and BBC emphasize Ukraine’s value-based kinship with liberal democracy; CNN and NYT highlight allied structures.

3. **“Global consequences”** – NYT, BBC, and CNN consistently analyze the shocks to energy, food security, and the redistribution of defense resources.

4. **“Zelensky’s leadership”** – a personalized narrative of “mobilizing communication in crisis,” expressed through digital addresses to parliaments and international forums.

5. **“Evidence and verification”** – a growing number of reports with reconstructions of events, maps, and detailed chronologies.

Related academic reviews from 2022–2024 confirm the prevalence of the victim frame and emotional appeals in Western coverage of Ukraine during the full-scale war, as well as systematic differences in the framing of different refugee groups (Ukrainian vs. Syrian).

At the same time, one can trace how the very same events were presented in different tones by different media outlets.

As an example, let us take the coverage of events in Bucha (April–May 2022). BBC focused on eyewitness accounts and reportage (Bucha: What we know, 2022). The New York Times presented an investigation with analysis of video evidence, satellite images, and geolocation verification; the language was restrained yet categorical in its factual claims (“evidence shows...”). CNN emphasized visual narratives with emotional testimonies of witnesses and graphics mapping troop movements. The Times offered commentary on accountability, sanctions, and international law, with elite opinion stressing the strategic consequences.

Thus, in covering this inhumane event, the conclusion is clear: The New York Times acts as a “forensic expert of journalism”; BBC as a “public validator of facts”; CNN as a “camera in the hands of witnesses”; and The Times as a “European editor of foreign policy.”



Another landmark event was the grain deal and global food security, which dominated coverage throughout the summer–autumn of 2022. In July 2022, the signing of the Black Sea Grain Initiative became one of the most important topics in international media. It carried not only regional but also global significance, which was reflected in the rhetoric of both British and American outlets.

The New York Times emphasized global supply chains, stressing that the blockade of Ukrainian Black Sea ports had “shaken the world food market.” In “How the war upended grain flows” (July 22, 2022), NYT detailed how export routes had shifted: the rising role of Romania and Poland, the overload of European railways, and attempts by Africa and Asia to diversify imports. The authors underscored that Ukraine, as one of the leading exporters of wheat and corn, is a systemic element of global food security for the Global South.

BBC News provided a more practical, consumer-oriented analysis. In Q&A explainers, journalists highlighted how the export blockade affected bread prices in the UK, Africa, and the Middle East. BBC materials often included commentary from FAO and WFP experts, emphasizing the risk of famine in poorer countries. This approach conveyed the idea that the war in Ukraine has direct consequences for households worldwide.

CNN International built its focus on the visual dimension: reports from the port of Odesa, footage of the first cargo ships being loaded, interviews with sailors and exporters. The emotional component—the anticipation of the first shipments—created a narrative of hope, while simultaneously highlighting the fragility of the agreements.

The Times stressed the geopolitical dimension: Turkey’s role as mediator, the implications for NATO and the EU, and the risks of inflation in European countries caused by supply instability. Its analysis underscored that the grain deal was not only an economic instrument but also an important element of a “strategy of deterrence” against Russia, with direct implications for European politics.

Thus, each outlet reinforced its distinctive media style: NYT – global structural analysis; BBC – practical explanation of consequences; CNN – emotional reportage; The Times – strategic foreign-policy analysis. Together, they constructed a multidimensional image of Ukraine as a key player in the global food market.

Political scientists, historians, and social scientists will have many opportunities to form their own interpretations of how the image of Ukraine has changed in the geopolitical, European, and global arenas. Based on an analysis of the content presented

by leading English-language media, we consider it appropriate to highlight the following theses:

From the periphery to the center of history: In 2022, Ukraine ceased to be a “buffer” and became an active agent shaping the European security agenda.

Moral clarity: The dominant frame depicts Ukraine as both the victim of aggression and the hero of resistance.

Evidentiary journalism: Investigations (The New York Times), verification (BBC Verify), OSINT methods, and mapping established a high evidentiary standard in war reporting.

Human stories: CNN and BBC ground abstract geopolitics in personal narratives.

The European frame: The Times emphasizes Ukraine’s value-based belonging to Europe, normalizing support as a duty.

Global attention and its fluctuations: An initial surge of interest has been followed by waves of “fatigue,” as confirmed by audience surveys and television coverage data.

Despite the overall high quality of coverage, in 2023–2025 meta-narratives of “fatigue” and the diversion of attention to other crises (the Middle East, electoral cycles in the EU/US) have emerged. GDELT analytics show a “plateau” of attention to Ukraine in U.S. TV news already from the summer of 2022, even during successful Ukrainian counteroffensives.

Inside editorial offices, discussions have arisen about balancing frontline reporting with larger “policy stories” (sanctions, defense budgets, arms production). The Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2022 recorded that audiences were generally satisfied with the depth of coverage, but “overload with negative news” reduced their willingness to follow daily updates.

We also sought to present the presence of the “Ukrainian question” in the content of leading global English-language media. Two analytical platforms were used for the analysis. The first is GDELT Online News 2.1 (by domains), which was employed to count online publications with the keywords Ukraine OR Kyiv across the domains [bbc.co.uk](https://www.bbc.com) (BBC News Online), [nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com), [edition.cnn.com](https://www.cnn.com) (or [cnn.com](https://www.cnn.com)), and [thetimes.co.uk](https://www.thetimes.co.uk) in 2022 and 2024, with results normalized into percentages. This is fully open data and API. The second platform is GDELT TV 2.0, used to measure television mentions. By combining their indicators, the following diagrams were constructed (Figure 1). As can be seen, mentions across the four news outlets fluctuated only slightly during 2022 and 2024, which confirms sustained interest in Ukraine and the consolidation of its renewed perception in the world.

Tab. 1. Comparison of Key Frames in the Construction of Ukraine's Image by Leading English-Language Media

| Frame                      | BBC News  | The Times   | The New York Times  | CNN International   |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| <b>Victim / Hero</b>       | «'We saw our neighbours executed': Survivors of Bucha» (2022) – emphasis on the suffering of civilians and at the same time on their resilience | «Ukraine's fight is Europe's fight» (2022) – Ukraine as the heroic front of the West          | «Evidence Shows How Russian Soldiers Executed Men in Bucha» (2022) – evidentiary representation of war crimes and civilian braver | «Scenes of families fleeing as Russian troops advance» (2022) – emotional footage combining pain and resistance     |
| <b>European Identity</b>   | Q&A «Why Ukraine matters to Europe» – emphasis on the connection with European values   | Liders: «Europe must stand firm with Ukraine» – emphasis on shared history and responsibility | Analitic: «How the Ukraine War Is Reshaping the World» – Ukraine as part of the broader European and global orde                  | Reports from the EU borders (Poland, Romania) highlighting the dimension of integration                             |
| <b>Global Consequences</b> | «Ukraine war: How it affects food and energy prices» (2022) – practical consequences for households   | Analysis of the energy crisis and inflation in Europe   | «How the war upended grain flows» (2022) – global food supply chains  | «Ukraine war live updates» (cepïi 2022–2023) – emphasis on the world's response, including oil prices and migration |
| <b>Evidentiality</b>       | Use of BBC Verify and maps in the material «The war in maps and charts» (2022)  | References to expert assessments, historical parallels, and political analyses                | Visual Investigations «Evidence Shows...» (Bucha), satellite images, OSINT  | Focus on live broadcasts and eyewitness testimonies, with short videos serving as 'evidence of emotions             |

Source: own study

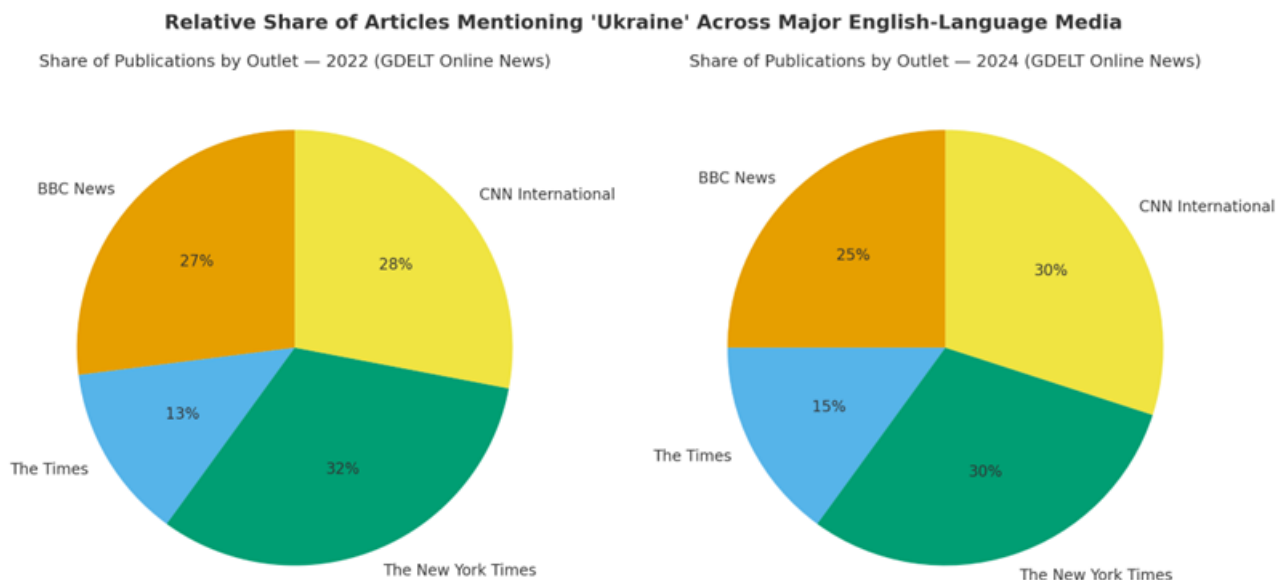


Fig. 1. Relative Share of Articles Mentioning «Ukraine» Across Major English-Language Media.

Source: own elaboration.

#### 4. Conclusions

The image of a state in the global public sphere is shaped not only by official public diplomacy but also by daily media representation. For Ukraine, since 2014 (the beginning of Russian aggression) and especially since 24 February 2022 (the full-scale invasion), English-language media with high credibility and global reach have been crucial – British BBC News and The Times, American The New York Times and CNN International. Their news, analysis and reporting set the frames for understanding the war, shape moral

emphases and influence political discussions in the governments and societies of allies.

The aim of the article is to trace the change in the image of Ukraine in the pages of the aforementioned media from a ‘peripheral post-Soviet state with structural problems’ to a ‘player in the struggle for a democratic world order’, to analyse rhetorical strategies, to present quantitative indicators (frequency of mentions, tone/framework), to illustrate this with specific examples of publications, and to provide accurate references.

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