

# EMOTIONAL AND SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF ECONOMIC SECURITY DISCOURSE NARRATIVES

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**Abstract.** This article examines how Lithuanian online media from 2020 to 2024 constructs narratives of economic security through emotional and semantic forms of expression. The issue is grounded in the observation that financial security in the public sphere is increasingly represented not only through factual indicators but also through linguistic, emotional, and visual structures that shape collective perceptions of (in)security. Despite the growing role of media in regulating the emotional climate, there is a lack of systematic research in Lithuania that reveals how emotions and metaphors influence the logic of discourse and citizen responses. This study aims to analyse how narratives of economic security are formed in Lithuanian media through emotional and semantic expression. A mixed-methods approach is applied, combining thematic narrative analysis, emotion classification, latent semantic analysis (LSA), and the principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA). Data were collected from three major news portals: Delfi, 15min, and LRT. Articles were selected based on thematic keywords (“crisis,” “security,” “threat,” “inflation”) and analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The visualisation of emotion frequency was performed using the Python environment. The results revealed five dominant emotions — fear, anxiety, anger, trust, and hope — along with their dynamics in relation to major crisis events. Emotions in the discourse are not random; they are structured through metaphors (“inflation front,” “crisis blow”), discursive oppositions (for example, security versus threat, state versus citizen), and recurring semantic cores. A comparative analysis of the portals highlighted stylistic differences: Delfi tends to use dramatization and affective rhetoric more frequently, 15min balances emotional urgency with analytical structure, while LRT adopts a tone of trust and hope. The study suggests that the economic security discourse in the media functions as a means of emotional governance, helping to shape civic expectations, reinforce representations of (in)security, and influence public responses to crises.

**Keywords:** economic security, emotional framing, media discourse, semantic analysis

## Introduction

Economic security is considered a cornerstone of both state and societal stability, particularly against the backdrop of global uncertainty, military conflicts, and financial disruptions. However, in the public sphere, this concept is no longer confined to statistical indicators or expert assessments. Increasingly, it is constructed through linguistic imagery, emotional tone, and narratives shaped by the media. Scholars of language and power (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020; Lakoff & Johnson, 2020; Buzan, 2023) emphasize that the way we talk about threats profoundly affects how we perceive them. As a result, representations of economic security function not only as channels of information but also as vehicles for emotion and meaning.

The academic relevance of this study stems from the need to understand better how the media not only reflects but also creates the discourse of economic security by employing emotional strategies and semantic templates. In Lithuania, this topic has been explored so far only in fragments, and the affective dimensions of communication are often overlooked. Grigienė (2025) examined communication processes in business organizations during crises, focusing on reputation management, and although her work touches on emotional responses, it is situated at the organizational rather than media level. Kalinauskaitė (2017) analysed the communication strategies of politicians on social media from a sociolinguistic perspective, revealing a range of linguistic tactics, but did not explore emotional framing or semantic discourse structures. Bogdzevič (2020), in her dissertation, delved into the semantics and conceptualization of anger, fear, and shame in the Lithuanian language from the standpoint of cognitive linguistics. While her research provides a solid theoretical basis for the analysis of emotions, it is not directed at media or public communication. Although some works in Lithuania contribute to the theoretical development of emotion and communication analysis, their application in the study of economic security in public discourse remains limited. This study aims to fill that gap by integrating emotion analysis, semantic structure, and media discourse research into a unified analytical model.

This article also builds on media-based emotion communication research developed by Gross (2024), Slater et al. (2024), Papacharissi (2021), and Nabi & Myrick (2019). These scholars emphasize that emotions in the media are not accidental; they are framed, structured, and used as tools for audience engagement. Emotional expression becomes a communication strategy, not merely a stylistic feature. In times of crisis in particular, emotions in media communication become an inseparable part of the information itself, shaping the collective sense of (in)security. The relevance of this research is also practical: the ability to recognize emotional framing models improves our understanding of how public communication functions and strengthens society's

informational resilience and media literacy. This understanding is crucial not only for scholars and journalists but also for decision-makers whose work depends on the emotional climate of society.

Contemporary media functions not only as a channel for the dissemination of information but also as a space for the construction of meaning and emotion, particularly during periods of crisis and economic uncertainty. Traditionally associated with political or economic experts, the discourse of economic security is increasingly moving into the field of public communication, where it acquires emotional weight and symbolic power. Despite this trend, there remains a lack of research in Lithuania that systematically reveals how emotions such as fear, anxiety, or hope, and semantic structures such as metaphors, oppositions, or thematic domains, shape narratives of economic (in)security in the media. Comparative studies are especially scarce, leaving open the question of how different media outlets employ emotional framing, what stylistic strategies they use, and how these influence collective perceptions of threat and security. This **issue** is significant not only at a theoretical level but also practically: the recognition of emotional framing has become a necessary condition for fostering informational resilience and critical media literacy. The research problem can be further specified through the following questions: How did Lithuanian media shape narratives of economic security through emotional expression in 2020–2024? What dominant emotions and metaphors structure the discourse of economic security? How do the stylistic and emotional framing strategies differ between Delfi, 15min, and LRT?

**The novelty** of this study lies in its interdisciplinary approach, which examines the communication of economic security by integrating discourse analysis, affective media theory, and semantic research. This is the first study to systematically analyse how emotions such as fear, anger, and hope are expressed in Lithuanian media during the period from 2020 to 2024, and how these emotions relate to the structure of economic security narratives.

**The object** of the study is the emotional and semantic expression of economic security discourse in Lithuanian news portals during the period from 2020 to 2024.

**The aim** of the study is to analyse the formation of economic security narratives in Lithuanian media through emotional and semantic expression.

**Research objectives:**

1. To analyse the expression of emotions in the discourse of economic security in Lithuanian media during the period from 2020 to 2024.
2. To identify the key semantic cores and metaphors that structure economic security narratives.
3. To compare the stylistic and emotional framing differences among the main media portals in the discourse of economic security.

**The research methods** include thematic narrative analysis, emotion classification, latent semantic analysis (LSA), and the principles of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, van Dijk). Quantitative data on emotion frequencies were visualised using tools from the Python programming language. To ensure textual coherence, stylistic clarity, and argumentative structure, the preparation of this text involved the use of the artificial intelligence tool OpenAI ChatGPT (June 2025 version). This tool assisted in refining phrasing and verifying terminology usage. The final analysis and conclusions are the sole responsibility of the author.

## **Theoretical Context and Methodology**

This study is grounded in the frameworks of critical discourse analysis, affective media theory, and the concept of the risk society. Critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2018; van Dijk, 2024) enables the examination of how linguistic structures both reflect and shape power relations, ideological codes, and collective perspectives. In the context of economic security discourse, it is essential to analyse not only the content itself but also its structure, oppositions, and recurring semantic fields.

Affective media theories (Papacharissi, 2021; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020) stress that media serve not only an informational function but also an emotional one. It structures public mood, activates emotional responses, and creates what are referred to as affective public spaces. Wahl-Jorgensen (2020) argues that the media becomes an emotional infrastructure in which collective emotions are not only reflected but also deliberately shaped, especially during times of crisis.

Also relevant in this context is the risk society model (Beck, 1992), which helps explain how the communication of uncertainty, danger, and threat becomes a daily structure of information. Risk communication in the media often relies on emotional metaphors that construct a backdrop of instability and encourage responses that are not only rational but also affective. Papacharissi (2021) and Gross (2024) likewise emphasize that emotions in public discourse are not spontaneous. They are framed, reproduced, and used as instruments of political influence.

The study employs a mixed-method strategy that integrates both qualitative and quantitative approaches. This methodological combination allows for a conceptual and empirical investigation of the role emotional and semantic framing plays in the discourse of economic security in Lithuanian media. The research was carried out in several stages using different but complementary methods.

**Applied Methods.** Thematic narrative analysis was employed to identify the most common storylines in media narratives related to economic security. This analysis helped to distinguish the main thematic centers and their function within emotional discourse. Emotion classification was based on a model of five primary emotions: fear, anxiety, anger, hope, and trust. These emotions were identified in the texts using lexical and contextual markers. Latent semantic analysis (LSA) was used to uncover relationships between words and concepts, allowing for the formation of semantic cores that represent images of economic security. The principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, van Dijk) were applied to examine the ideological aspects of media constructions, the structure of oppositions, and metaphorical models. Visualisation tools were used to illustrate the dynamics of emotions during the study period. The Python programming language and the Matplotlib library were used to present data changes in the form of graphs. The choice of these methods makes it possible to address the research questions by analyzing the expression of emotions, identifying semantic cores and metaphors, and comparing the stylistic features of the portals.

**Research Conditions.** The research period covers 2020–2024, in order to include the communicative reflections of significant crisis events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the surge of inflation. For the analysis, three main Lithuanian online news portals were selected – Delfi.lt, 15min.lt, and LRT.lt. The sample consisted of texts related to economic security, inflation, energy dependency, support, the impact of war on the economy, and other relevant topics. The material was collected using keywords such as “crisis,” “inflation,” “security,” “support,” “economy,” and “threat.” The analysis included news reports, opinion pieces, and editorials, ensuring continuous coverage from January 2020 to March 2024. The analysis was carried out using the NVivo program for qualitative thematic segmentation and semantic analysis scripts developed in Python (using the sklearn, gensim, and matplotlib libraries). The analytical results were verified according to the principles of frequency and contextual relevance.

**Ensuring Reliability.** To ensure linguistic and logical consistency, the artificial intelligence tool OpenAI ChatGPT (June 2025 version) was used to refine phrasing, structure the analytical process, and clarify terminology. The final results were reviewed and approved by the author, who assumes full responsibility for the content of the study.

**Research Limitations.** Although several methodological levels were applied and various media sources were analyzed, it is necessary to highlight a few essential limitations. First, the research period (2020–2024) covers the most significant crises of recent years; however, the results may not reflect longer-term trends in the transformation of economic discourse or the rhetoric of periods of peace. In addition, the examined themes (inflation, support, energy, war) were restricted to the framework of economic security and did not encompass the broader discourse of social security. Second, the selection of sources was selective – only three news portals (Delfi, 15min, and LRT) were analyzed, which, although representing Lithuania’s main information channels, do not reflect the entire media ecosystem (e.g., regional press, radio, television, or communication in social networks). Third, the identification and classification of emotions, although based on clear criteria, remain to some extent subjective, especially when interpreting emotional tone or subtext. Fourth, during the preparation of the text, the artificial intelligence tool “ChatGPT” was used to structure the analysis and improve language; however, its contribution did not involve independent decision-making or conceptual analysis, so the interpretations of the study depend on the author’s human capacities. Finally, the concepts of economic security and the interpretation of emotional vocabulary may vary depending on political, cultural, or geopolitical contexts, which means that their meanings are not fixed and may affect the generalizability of the results.

## **The Expression of Emotions in the Discourse of Economic Security**

Topics related to economic security in the public sphere are inseparable from emotional expression. Between 2020 and 2024, economic issues in Lithuanian media were frequently presented alongside emotional framing, which served to enhance audience engagement and construct a sense of (in)security. This section discusses five core emotions that dominated the discourse of economic security: fear, anxiety, anger, hope, and trust. In Lithuanian media, the discourse on economic security is shaped not only through factual economic indicators but also through emotionally charged linguistic choices that either mobilize the audience and intensify the perception of threat or, conversely, foster a sense of stability. This analysis provides an answer to the first research question – Lithuanian media shapes economic security narratives by employing the emotions of fear, anxiety, anger, hope, and trust.

Public communication in contemporary society is inseparable from emotion. The media not only informs but also shapes the emotional climate of society, influencing collective perceptions of threats, political decisions, or social change. According to media studies theorist Gross (2024), emotions can be deliberately regulated or triggered by specific communicative means, especially in the media, where selectively chosen events and their interpretations dominate. Wahl-Jorgensen (2020) states, “*The media functions as an emotional infrastructure in which fear is not only reflected but also produced*” (p. 178). Media content, through the use of strong linguistic emphasis, not only conveys information but also shapes the collective emotional climate.

**Fear and Its Mobilising Function.** Fear is one of the most prominent emotions observed in economic texts, especially during periods when public discourse responds to external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the outbreak of war in Ukraine, or surges in inflation. The expression of fear manifests not only through the choice of content but also through stylistic devices: metaphors like “storm clouds,” “crisis blow,” or “inflation front,” as well as hyperbole and visual elements such as images of military equipment or empty store shelves. In this context, fear performs a mobilising function — it enhances the media’s ability to direct attention, sustain tension, and create public expectation for specific decisions or state actions.

The media frequently uses constructions that express fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. For example, phrases such as “*inflation front*” (15min, 2023 09 27), “*crisis blow*” (Delfi, 2022 09 27), and “*threatening storm clouds*” (15min, 2022 02 17) portray economic processes as threatening, inevitable, and personally impactful. This creates an emotional atmosphere in which rational evaluation gives way to a desire for security. These texts are often structured in a way that builds emotional tension to a climax, after which a possible solution is presented, such as state intervention, a support package, or citizen responsibility. This structure is typical of crisis communication and functions as a symbol of emotional release and hope. One of the clearest examples is a Delfi.lt project on mental health, which states, “*The invisible pandemic: a life-shattering disorder is hitting harder and harder, the numbers have already reached unprecedented heights*” (Delfi.lt, 2022 04 28). The quotes use hyperboles such as “*hitting harder and harder*” and “*unprecedented heights*” that generate a strong emotional reaction. This stylistic approach aligns with the concept of emotional framing described by O’Neill and Nicholson Cole (2009), where information is framed to evoke fear, insecurity, or even guilt. A similar effect is created by 15min.lt messages about the threat of war. One article states, “*Anxiety index survey: 77 percent of Lithuanians feel a direct threat of war even in Lithuania*” (15min.lt, 2023 03 14). Here, the use of a statistical figure (77 percent) acts as a numerical dramatization which, according to Wahl-Jorgensen (2020), becomes an effective tool for amplifying fear when subjective emotions are supported by supposed objectivity. Another quote from LRT.lt shows how the media conveys institutional assessments: “*Security experts warn that Lithuania faces cyberattacks and must prepare for the worst-case scenario*” (LRT.lt, 2022 10 21). This type of rhetoric, such as “*could face*” and “*worst case scenario*,” matches the models of risk communication described by Beck (1992), where a persistent sense of insecurity is cultivated in society even when the actual threat is difficult to define or remains hypothetical. The media constructs the discourse of fear not only with words but also visually. These texts are often accompanied by alarming images such as military equipment, grieving people, or fans wearing masks. Slater et al. (2024) argue that such visual language strengthens the narrative and affects the reader’s emotional experience rather than rational thinking. The expression of fear in the media is not accidental. It is a deliberately applied strategy of emotional engagement. The media, especially Delfi and 15min, use alarming headlines, exaggerated vocabulary, and emotional framing to create tension as a means of retaining audience attention (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020). This mode of expression reflects a deeper paradox of the information society: the more information we have, the more intense the emotional responses to it become.

**Anxiety as a Marker of Prolonged Uncertainty.** Anxiety is often linked not to a specific threat but to uncertainty, unpredictability, and the unknown. The portal 15min frequently uses rhetorical questions such as “*Will small businesses survive?*” and “*What awaits the healthcare system?*” thereby implying unresolved issues. According to Beck’s theory of the risk society (1992), such phrases reflect structural anxiety that arises not from isolated events but from ongoing systemic instability. Anxiety emerged as the dominant emotion in 2020 when both health and economic threats were being articulated due to the danger of COVID-19. In public space, anxiety is a unique emotional state tied not so much to a direct threat but to constant uncertainty, waiting, and doubt. Beck’s theory emphasizes that the structure of modern society is based on the continuous communication of risks, which creates not fear but rather an atmosphere of anxiety since threats are often invisible, dispersed, and never fully resolved. On the 15min portal, this emotion is frequently conveyed through interrogative constructions that do not offer answers but instead generate further tension. For example, in a 2022 article about inflation, the question is posed, “*Will Lithuania cope with record prices?*” (15min.lt, 2022 10 17). Such questions, although formally neutral, imply doubt and anxiety about the future. This is a typical strategy of what is known as problem framing, where journalistic discourse constructs an atmosphere of uncertainty (Entman, 2009). During the pandemic, anxiety became one of the dominant emotions. The LRT

portal wrote, “*Coronavirus changes everything. Will we return to normal life?*” (LRT.lt, 2021 01 10). This example again demonstrates the recurring rhetorical structure, a question without a clear answer. Journalists here are not only conveying a fact about the impact of the virus but also expressing emotional uncertainty, which, as noted by Wahl-Jorgensen (2020), is an emotional companion of social change. Delfi also uses similar rhetoric. In an article about mental health, it states, “*Life after the pandemic: more questions than answers*” (Delfi.lt, 2023 03 22). This formula, questions without answers, reflects what sociologist Papacharissi (2021) calls affective insecurity, where texts continually create a sense of waiting and instability but never fill it with specific content. Another important detail is that the language of anxiety often uses words with vague but strongly negative connotations, such as crisis, instability, uncertainty, pressure, and tension. For instance, “*Pressure in the labor market is being felt across all sectors*” (15min.lt, 2023 09 04). Here, the word pressure conveys an intensifying but unspecified threat. The visual part of journalism also contributes to this effect. Articles about economic uncertainty are often accompanied by photos of empty offices, closed businesses, or worried individuals. According to Slater et al. (2024), such illustrations reinforce the tone of the narrative and heighten the affective impact of the text on the reader. The expression of anxiety in Lithuanian media between 2020 and 2024 often appears not as a clearly defined threat but as a rhetorical construction through questions, vague forecasts, and affective metaphors. In this way, the media shapes a long-term emotional background that influences both individual moods and collective public sentiment.

**Anger: A Tool of Moral Outrage and Mobilisation.** Unlike fear or anxiety, anger in public discourse often has a specific target or culprit. Sociologist of emotion Papacharissi (2021) notes that “*anger is a directed emotion that shapes moral boundaries by identifying who has violated a norm and who must be condemned*” (p. 171). In Lithuanian media, expressions of anger are most commonly used in contexts of political or social dissatisfaction. This emotion is conveyed both through criticism of institutions and through quotations of reader voices. On the 15min portal in 2022, an investigation into possible misuse of public funds appeared under the headline, “*Do they think we are idiots?*” — readers outraged over parliamentary spending” (15min.lt, 2022 06 03). This quote highlights an authentic expression of anger, and its expressiveness, with words like “*outraged*” and “*idiots*,” allows the media to present emotional disappointment from readers as a socially significant signal. This strategy aligns with what is known as the politics of outrage (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020), in which media use expressions of anger as a tool to mobilize and engage audiences. The targets of anger are often government institutions or their actions. On the LRT portal, a headline reads, “*Teachers warn: we are tired of being exploited*” (LRT.lt, 2023 09 01). Here, anger arises from a sense of social injustice and exploitation. As noted by Flam (2015), these themes often create the conditions for collective emotions in public space. The use of the verb “*tired*” indicates accumulated anger that has grown over time and finally erupts in public statements. An example from Delfi reads, “*After the scandal over doctors' salaries, the prime minister's words provoked even more anger: 'He is mocking us'*” (Delfi.lt, 2023 01 16). In this case, the journalistic text conveys not only the presence of anger but also its escalation, as seen in the phrase “*even more anger*,” emphasizing emotional intensification. This kind of emotional escalation, as noted by Papacharissi (2021), is typical of digital media, where the expression of anger is often used as a way to energize a message. Anger can also be expressed through irony, sarcasm, and an informal tone. In an article about strikes, the text states, “*For six months they promised a solution, now they offer patience - teachers respond: we have no patience left*” (15min.lt, 2024 02 28). The quote implies an emotional limit that, once crossed, transforms passive frustration into active resistance. This matches Jasper's (2014) concept of moral anger, where people become angry not only due to personal grievances but because their core values are violated. Between 2020 and 2024, anger in the media was not a random phenomenon. It was a strategically constructed emotion often directed at government institutions, injustice, and social inequality. The expression of anger not only gives voice to emotional reactions but also enables collective action, public debate, and political engagement. The expression of anger varies depending on the editorial stance of the media outlet. Delfi and 15min often draw on opinions from social media or reader comments, quoting emotional statements such as “*People no longer trust the government*” or “*This is a mockery of taxpayers*.” Meanwhile, LRT more often channels anger through editorial commentary or analytical articles, as in “*Inaction is the greatest danger in the face of crisis*” (LRT, 2022 02 18). This approach aligns with Habermas's theory of the public sphere (2023), which emphasizes the relationship between rational discourse and emotional indignation as a foundation for political activity.

**Hope and Its Restorative Function.** Although fear, anger, or anxiety more frequently dominate the news stream, positive emotions, especially hope, also hold an important place in media discourse, particularly during times of crisis. According to Nabi & Myrick (2019), hope encourages people not to react passively to threats but to actively seek solutions, plan actions, and believe in recovery. On the LRT portal, positive expression is especially visible when discussing sustainable development and economic change. For example: “*The transition to a green economy is necessary to reduce the impact of climate change and to promote sustainable*

*growth*” (LRT.lt, 2022 09 12). This quote reflects an orientation toward the future, optimism, and a long-term goal, which are characteristic semantic markers of hope (Scioli & Biller, 2021). In this way, the media not only acknowledges the problem, such as the climate crisis, but also presents it as solvable, depending on human will and decision-making. The discourse of hope is also observed in health-related topics. In a Delfi article about innovation, it is written: “*Scientists in Lithuania are developing a new cancer treatment method that could save thousands of lives*” (Delfi.lt, 2023 04 03). Such texts often convey hope as a rational expectation based on scientific progress. According to Cavaillé & Neundorf (2023), this is referred to as intellectual hope, where emotional belief is linked to technology, scientific advancement, or collective competence. In 15min, expressions of hope appear most clearly in contexts related to civic engagement and social initiative. For example: “*Despite the difficulties, Lithuanians are volunteering more actively and creating support networks. The pandemic has united them*” (15min.lt, 2021 11 10). This kind of positive message conveys not individual but collective hope — a narrative of community resilience which, as noted by Papacharissi (2021), shapes emotional public spaces based on care rather than solely anger or fear. Another notable case is media communication in the context of war. An LRT article on the reconstruction of Ukraine states: “*Despite the war, Ukraine is already planning a reconstruction strategy. There is a belief in the future of democracy*” (LRT.lt, 2024 06 30). Here, hope is articulated as a response to upheaval — not a denial of the threat but a belief in renewal, similar to Frankl’s (2004) principle of meaningful suffering. Visually, hope is often conveyed through bright, colourful, and optimistic images such as smiling people, scientists, or activists working in green natural settings. This visual language complements the verbal discourse of hope and shapes an overall emotional tone that contributes to informational resilience.

Although the media is often accused of emotional negativity, LRT stands out through its expression of a more positive emotion — hope. Statements such as “*Lithuania withstood the first blow of the pandemic more strongly than its neighbours*” (LRT.lt, 2021 05 30) indicate a deliberate choice to spread optimism. According to Nabi & Myrick (2019), hope in the media functions as a reinforcer of trust and resilience, especially during times of crisis. This emotion is essential not only for psychological well-being but also for the political state of society. The expression of hope in Lithuanian media is not accidental. It is used when there is a need not only to inform but also to mobilize society to act and to believe in the future. This is particularly important in crisis contexts, where emotional exhaustion can be alleviated not through calm but through inspiration.

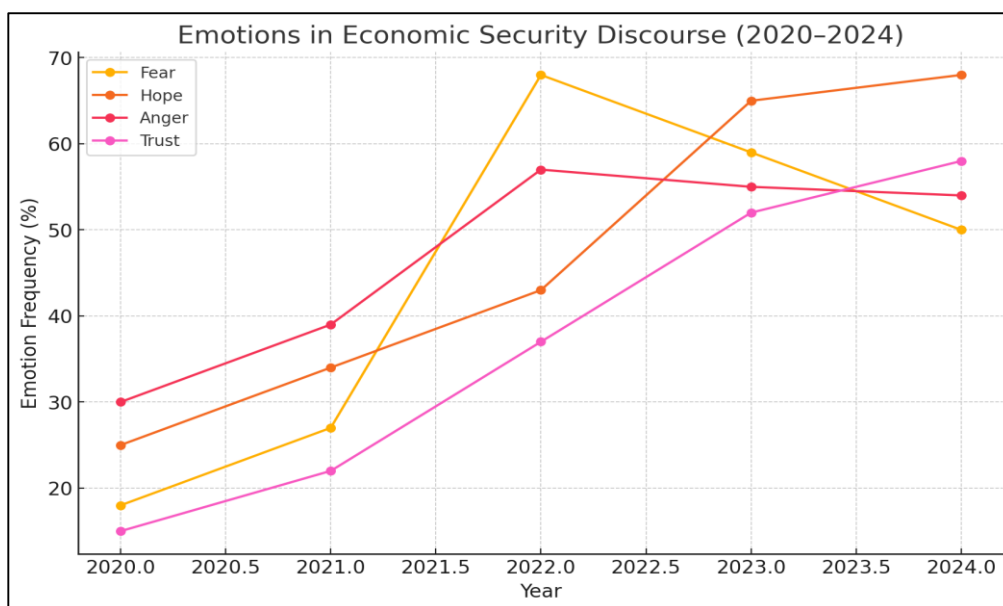
**Trust as an Indicator of Emotional Stability.** The emotion of trust is most often associated with institutions such as the healthcare system, the military, NATO, and experts. It is conveyed both through direct statements (for example, “*Lithuanians trust doctors*”) and indirect references to competence, stability, or action plans. This emotion is particularly important during times of crisis, as it helps maintain communal trust and reduce emotional exhaustion. In articles published by LRT and 15min, signs of trust frequently appear in relation to expert opinions, the presentation of facts, and data visualisation.

Trust is one of the main pillars of public communication, especially during times of crisis, war, or uncertainty. According to Giddens (1996), trust steps in where there is no possibility of individual control over the situation. It is the stability of action based on dependence on the system. In the media, trust is often articulated through confidence in institutions, experts, professionals, or technological solutions. One of the clearest examples is a text published by LRT during the pandemic: “*Eighty-three percent of residents trust Lithuanian doctors. This shows that the health system managed the first wave*” (LRT.lt, 2021 05 10). This message strengthens the image of institutional trust, grounded in empirical data. According to Luhmann (2018), trust is based on the reliability of a functioning complex system. In this context, the media acts as a reflexive mirror of the system that legitimizes or delegitimizes its actors. A 2023 article on the 15min portal stated: “*Even in the context of war, Lithuanians maintain high trust in the army and NATO. This has been one of the most stable indicators since 2014*” (15min.lt, 2023 03 22). This formulation presents trust as a consistent and long-term value that symbolizes the stability of the relationship between citizens and the state. Here, trust is framed not as emotional satisfaction but as a rational, historically grounded choice, what Misztal (2013) refers to as structural trust. Interestingly, trust can also be articulated through indirect signals. A Delfi publication wrote: “*Vaccination rates are increasing. People are increasingly relying not on rumors but on doctors’ recommendations*” (Delfi.lt, 2022 01 28). This quote shows a shift in the prestige of information sources — a movement from emotional noise to expertise. In this case, trust is presented as a sign of social maturity, connected to the growth of information literacy. The expression of trust is also evident in narratives about civic initiatives and solidarity. LRT reported: “*More and more residents are joining volunteer organizations. Trust in the community is growing*” (LRT.lt, 2023 12 14). Such messages create an emotional background of stability, which, as Putnam (2016) notes, strengthens social capital, people trust each other, and thus become more active citizens. From 2020 to 2024, the expression of trust in the media served as an important emotional and political strategy. It made it possible not only to overcome fear but also to restore a

logic of action based on facts, reliability, and collective resilience. As the analysis shows, trust is formed through vocabulary such as stability, reliability, and is based on data, expert opinions, and emotional narratives about the community and the actions of state actors.

**Emotional Dynamics from 2020 to 2024.** As shown by the quantitative analysis (see Figure 1), the expression of emotions varied over time. The year 2022 stands out as the peak of emotional intensity, with significantly heightened levels of fear, anxiety, and anger. Starting in 2023, however, the frequency of trust and hope began to rise, indicating a certain stabilisation within the discourse. This shift in emotional tone reflects the media's ability not only to respond to the context but also to gradually reshape it.

The discourse of economic security in Lithuanian media between 2020 and 2024 is marked by a high density of emotional and semantic markers, especially in topics such as energy dependency, inflation management, military threat, and geopolitical stability. Narrative analysis applied to texts from Delfi, LRT, and 15min reveals a clear correlation between geopolitical events such as the start of the war in Ukraine and the intensification of emotional rhetoric. Emotional analysis shows that dominant emotions include fear, indignation, and patriotism. Delfi and LRT more often employ constructive emotional framing, such as strength and unity, while 15min more frequently uses rhetoric of crisis or uncertainty.



**Fig. 1.** Changes in the Frequency of Emotions in the Discourse of Economic Security in Lithuanian Media (Delfi, LRT, 15min) during the period 2020 to 2024

*Source: created using the Python programming language and its Matplotlib visualization library*

The chart (see Figure 1) reveals notable changes in the frequency of emotions in the discourse of economic security in Lithuanian media (Delfi, LRT, 15min) during the period from 2020 to 2024. The intensity of fear and anxiety spiked sharply in 2022, largely due to the start of the war in Ukraine, but later began to decrease. At the same time, trust and hope increased steadily, particularly after 2022, indicating a gradual stabilization of the discourse and the emergence of a more constructive tone. Anger also rose in 2022 but subsequently started to decline as the discourse shifted towards a less confrontational character.

The presented analysis of emotions suggests that the expression of emotions in Lithuanian media from 2020 to 2024 is not accidental. It clearly correlates with each portal's communication strategy, audience profile, and editorial values. Delfi, aiming to attract a wide audience, more frequently employs dramatization, expressive language, and affective headlines. Emotions such as fear and anger are most often conveyed through strong metaphors, hyperbole, and the inclusion of emotionally charged reader comments. This creates emotional intensity, which, according to Wahl-Jorgensen (2020), becomes the core currency in the economy of attention. By contrast, 15min is characterized by a strategy of problem contextualisation. Emotions here are usually expressed through structured questions, a diversity of viewpoints, and attention to causes and solutions. In this portal's discourse, anxiety, hope, and anger tend to be associated with analytical reflection rather than raw emotional charge. This aligns with Papacharissi's (2021) concept of "affective public spaces," where emotions in the media function not as chaotic outbursts but as mediated reflections on social injustice, political decisions, or societal conditions. LRT, as a public broadcaster, adheres to a more restrained and institutionalised model of emotional expression. The dominant emotions in its coverage are trust, hope, and rational concern, typically conveyed through expert commentary, analytical framing, and reliable information. The emotional tone is

more often stabilising than escalating, reflecting the mission of public service media to provide objective information in the public interest. According to Slater et al. (2024), such a strategy helps to “normalize crisis” and reduce psychological tension in society. These differences can also be interpreted through the theoretical lens of media ecology. Postman (2005) emphasized that every media form creates its own “infospheres”, meaning not just a domain of content but also a context of delivery, emotional tone, and technological framing. Delfi, as a commercial portal, fosters a fast-paced, affect-driven information environment. 15min, a hybrid between commercial and quality journalism, balances between analytical depth and emotional immediacy. LRT, as a public broadcaster, maintains normative stability and emotional restraint. The expression of emotions in Lithuanian media is strategically regulated. It not only conveys news but also shapes the collective emotional climate, influencing civic participation, political trust, and even social resilience. The media is not merely a disseminator of information, but an architect of emotion, crafting what can be described as the affective landscape of society.

## Semantic Structures and Narratives in the Discourse of Economic Security

Emotional expression in economic discourse is not separate from linguistic structure. On the contrary, emotions are often embedded within specific semantic fields, metaphors, or narrative frameworks. This section examines how the media semantically structures the topic of economic security, what kinds of metaphors it uses, and which oppositions it employs to give meaning to reality. This analysis draws on the insights of Lakoff & Johnson (2020), Buzan (2023), who emphasize that metaphors and discursive frames are not merely stylistic elements. They structure how the audience perceives reality.

The semantic map generated using the method of latent semantic analysis allows for the identification of key concepts such as security, aggression, energy independence, NATO, and threat. Semantic associations between economy and defense intensified after 2022, indicating a militarization of the discourse. These findings confirm data from studies on information warfare in the Baltic region, which emphasize that emotional articulation is a strategic media tool used to strengthen trust in national institutions and to promote social cohesion (Cook, 2021).

**Dominant Semantic Fields.** Economic issues in the media are more than just the transmission of information. They are constructed as fields of meaning where interpretations, values, fears, and expectations circulate. According to the principles of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2018), the media gives meaning to economic phenomena through semantic structures such as dominant vocabularies, oppositions, and recurring narratives, the function of which is to shape the audience’s perception of social reality.

An analysis of economic texts on the portals Delfi, 15min, and LRT reveals several frequently recurring semantic fields related to representations of economic security. One of the most prominent is the field of crisis, threat, and uncertainty, illustrated by headlines such as “Residents are waiting for a second wave of crisis” (15min.lt, 2022 11 14), “World Bank warns: inflation could rise to 20 percent” (Delfi.lt, 2022 09 18), and “No one can say what will happen in three months” (Delfi.lt, 2022 10 01). These examples reflect the paradigm of risk communication described by Beck (1992), in which the economy is portrayed as constantly vulnerable. Another semantic field emphasizes support and reserves, as seen in formulations like “The government introduces a two-billion-euro business support package” (LRT.lt, 2021 12 02). Such rhetoric presents state actions as a guarantee of protection in the face of economic unrest and aligns with the welfare state protection narrative identified by Wodak (2015), reinforcing the image of the state as a savior and strengthening paternalistic discourse. A third semantic field relates to responsibility and saving, exemplified by messages such as “Residents must prepare for harder times. Save and give up unnecessary expenses” (Delfi.lt, 2023 01 09). This type of rhetoric signals a discourse of individual responsibility, encouraging a personalized approach to the crisis and shifting the burden of solutions onto citizens.

These semantic fields not only reveal the evaluative direction of economic phenomena but also help emotions become anchored within a specific context. In other words, emotions such as fear or anxiety do not arise on their own but are triggered by the way a message is framed.

**Metaphors: Linguistic Bridges Between Emotion and Meaning.** Economic discourse is highly metaphorical - metaphors are used to construct compelling and emotionally charged narratives. In economic discourse, three main groups of metaphors are most frequently used (see Table 1). The first are military metaphors (“inflation front,” “defense plan,” “strategic reserves”), which mobilize the audience and legitimize control measures. The second are natural disaster metaphors (“economic storm,” “inflation avalanche,” “blow to the markets”), which depoliticize crises by presenting them as inevitable natural processes. The third are physical impact metaphors (“crisis blow to the gut,” “disturbed balance”), which intensify emotional identification by creating an image of insecurity that is personally and physically felt.



**Table 1.** Analysis of Economic Security Metaphors

Source: compiled by the author

Type of Metaphor	Examples from the Media	Function in Discourse
Military metaphors	<i>“The inflation front is approaching dangerous limits”</i> (Delfi.lt, 2022 07 04); <i>“Economic defense plan”</i> (LRT.lt, 2022 12 11); <i>“Strategic reserves”</i> (15min.lt, 2023 01 03)	Mobilizes; creates a logic of threat; justifies control measures
Natural disaster metaphors	<i>“An economic storm hit the markets”</i> (15min.lt, 2023 03 18); <i>“The inflation avalanche reached Lithuania”</i> (Delfi.lt, 2022 08 30); <i>“Price blow”</i> (LRT.lt, 2023 05 05)	Depoliticizes; presents crises as natural phenomena; weakens the discourse of responsibility
Physical impact metaphors	<i>“Crisis blow to the gut”</i> (15min.lt, 2023 09 22); <i>“Disturbed balance”</i> (Delfi.lt, 2024 02 10); <i>“The economy stumbles after a blow”</i> (Delfi.lt, 2024 02 10)	Strengthens emotional identification; creates the image of a physical threat; reinforces empathy

These metaphors amplify emotional impact by conveying not an abstract phenomenon but a vivid, visualisable situation. They also enable the media to communicate the proximity and personal relevance of the threat. The use of metaphors strengthens the perception that economic insecurity is a physical, bodily, and personally affecting threat that not only informs but also mobilizes.

**Discursive Oppositions: The Logic of Meaning Construction.** Alongside semantic cores, opposing dichotomies emerge that structure the discourse and serve to ideologically frame information (van Dijk, 1998). One of the most common is the opposition between security and insecurity. For example, LRT.lt (2023 03 12) reported, “The Ministry of Finance reassures that reserves are sufficient,” whereas 15min.lt (2022 10 20) warned, “The energy crisis threatens mass bankruptcies.” Such contrasting formulations illustrate an emotional framing practice in which different sources construct either reassurance or threat, creating emotional fluctuations between calmness and fear. Another recurring dichotomy is responsible governance versus chaos, as reflected in the claim “The government has a clear plan” (LRT.lt, 2021 04 06), contrasted with “Uncertainty and wavering over decisions spark panic” (Delfi.lt, 2022 07 01). Finally, the state–citizen opposition is evident in statements such as “Stricter sanctions will be applied for undeclared income” (15min.lt, 2024 01 19), which implies a discourse of control positioning the citizen as a potential source of risk.

These oppositions shape not only the perspective on economic decisions but also legitimize or delegitimize specific actors or strategies. According to Hall (2018), discourse oppositions help interpret a phenomenon as normal or dangerous, honest or distorted. The discourse of economic security in Lithuanian media constructs the citizen as both an emotional and moral actor. On one hand, the citizen is positioned as a potential victim, experiencing “*blows*” and suffering from the “*storm*.” On the other hand, they are given the responsibility to adapt, plan, save, and anticipate. The emotional burden here is linked to a sense of individual guilt and duty - if one fails to cope with the crisis, it implies a lack of responsibility. This is directly related to the second research question, as metaphors and semantic fields structure the discourse of (in)security.

### Stylistic and Emotional Framing Differences Among Lithuanian News Portals

The analysis of economic discourse shows that the media does more than simply report facts; it actively shapes meaning through semantic fields, oppositions, and narratives. The emotional and semantic analysis of economic security narratives reveals that media discourse functions not only as a channel of information but also as a tool of emotional governance. Through metaphors, semantic cores, and emotional rhetoric, the media constructs not only imagery of economic insecurity but also structures civic expectations. In this way, the media becomes a significant discursive space where collective economic self-perception is formed.

The emotional discourse analysis of the three main Lithuanian news portals, i.e., Delfi, LRT, and 15min, provides empirical support for the role of emotional framing in economic security coverage. Drawing on the principles of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, van Dijk), affective media theory (Papacharissi, Wahl-Jorgensen), and media ecology (Postman), the study identified distinct emotional tones, followed by semantic cores, discursive oppositions, and visual templates. Quantitative analysis revealed changes in the frequency of emotions (see Figure 1), which were further explored through qualitative investigation of semantic fields. Each identified emotional component in the discourse, such as fear, anxiety, anger, trust, and hope, was linked to a corresponding media strategy and communicative aim.

The emotional framing of the economic security discourse in Lithuanian media is not uniform – each of the analyzed portals (Delfi, 15min, and LRT) is characterized by its own stylistic tone, editorial stance, and

affective profile. Delfi frequently relies on strategies of emotional engagement, based on a dramatized style, strong metaphors, and expressive headlines. Particularly common are natural disaster and physical impact metaphors, such as “a storm hit the markets,” “a crisis blow to the gut,” or “the economy stumbles,” which intensify the emotional effect of fear and anxiety. In addition, the frequent inclusion of readers’ comments or opinions enables the transmission of anger, frustration, or indignation. Such a style corresponds to the so-called “logic of affective economy” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020), in which emotions become the main tool for capturing and holding attention.

By contrast, the discourse of 15min takes an intermediate position between emotional immediacy and structured analysis. Although signs of fear and anxiety are also present in this portal, emotions are more often articulated through problem-based structures, questions, and contextualized explanations, for example: “What awaits the healthcare system?” or “Will businesses withstand inflationary pressure?” This strategy does not so much frighten as create a field of emotional uncertainty. Moreover, this portal frequently employs a rhetoric of hope, particularly when discussing community, volunteering, and civic initiatives. In this way, 15min discourse balances between emotional relevance and analytical journalism.

As a public broadcaster, LRT adopts a more restrained style, based on the presentation of expert evaluations, data, and analysis. Emotional expression here is most often associated with trust, hope, and rational concern. Typical headlines such as “Lithuania withstood the first wave of the pandemic” or “Residents increasingly trust experts” emphasize long-term stability rather than crisis disruption. This tone corresponds to Habermas’s (1991) concept of the public sphere, in which rational discussion dominates and emotions are subordinated to the logic of argumentation.

The analysis reveals that a portal’s affective stance influences not only the intensity of emotions but also their function. Delfi focuses on emotional tension as a strategy for retaining audience attention. 15min strikes a balance between emotional relevance and analytical reflection, while LRT aims to stabilise the emotional tone and strengthen trust. These differences suggest that the expression of emotions is not random; it is strategically regulated according to each portal’s editorial orientation, audience expectations, and institutional goals. This analysis provides an answer to the third research question, revealing Delfi’s dramatization strategies, 15min’s analytical balance, and LRT’s restrained expression of emotions.

## Conclusions

In response to the first research question, it was established that narratives of economic security in Lithuanian media are strategically constructed through emotional framing. The dominant emotions – fear, anxiety, anger, trust, and hope – varied depending on external events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and economic crises. This shows that emotional intensity is not accidental but rather serves as a tool for managing public moods.

In response to the second research question, three groups of metaphors were identified: military, natural disaster, and physical impact. Together with semantic cores and oppositional meanings (e.g., security–insecurity, state–citizen), these metaphors structure the discourse, reinforce emotional impact, and establish a particular logic of interpreting economic security.

In response to the third research question, significant stylistic and emotional framing differences were observed among the portals. Delfi employs a dramatized and hyperbolized tone, dominated by fear, anger, and social indignation. 15min balances between emotional immediacy and analytical reflection, often relying on problem-based structures and representations of community. LRT, as a public broadcaster, maintains a more restrained style, in which trust, hope, and rational concern prevail, supported by expert insights and data. These differences demonstrate that media channels not only disseminate information but also create distinct affective public spheres, shaping the emotional climate of society in the context of economic (in)security.

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## EKONOMINIO SAUGUMO DISKURSO NARATYVŲ EMOCINĖ IR SEMANTINĖ ANALIZĖ

### Santrauka

Straipsnyje analizuojama, kaip 2020–2024 m. Lietuvos interneto žiniasklaidoje formuojami ekonominio saugumo naratyvai pasitelkiant emocines ir semantines raiškos priemones. Tyrimas grindžiamas prielaida, kad ekonominis saugumas viešojoje erdvėje vis dažniau konstruojamas ne tik per faktinius ekonominius rodiklius, bet ir per kalbines, vaizdines bei emocines struktūras, darančias poveikį kolektyvinėms (ne)saugumo reprezentacijoms. Nepaisant stiprėjančio žiniasklaidos vaidmens formuojant emocinį visuomenės klimatą, iki šiol Lietuvoje trūksta sisteminių tyrimų, atskleidžiančių, kaip diskurso emocinė logika daro įtaką pilietinėms nuostatoms. Tyrimo tikslas – atskleisti, kaip emocijos ir semantinės struktūros dalyvauja formuojant ekonominio saugumo diskursą Lietuvos naujienų portaluose. Tyrime taikomas mišrus metodinis dizainas, jungiantis teminę naratyvų analizę, emocijų klasifikavimą, latentinę semantinę analizę (LSA) ir kritinės diskurso analizės (CDA) principus. Duomenys surinkti iš trijų pagrindinių žiniasklaidos portalų – „Delfi“, „15min“ ir LRT – pagal teminius raktažodžius („krizė“, „saugumas“, „grėsmė“, „infliacija“) ir analizuoti kiekybiškai bei kokybiškai. Emocijų dažnis vizualizuotas naudojant „Python“ aplinką. Rezultatai atskleidžia penkias dominuojančias emocijas – baimę, nerimą, pyktį, pasitikėjimą ir viltį – bei jų dinaminę sąsają su svarbiausiais kriziniais įvykiais. Emocijos diskurse struktūruojamos per metaforas („infliacijos frontas“, „krizės smūgis“), diskursines opozicijas (pvz., saugumas / grėsmė, valstybė / pilietis) ir semantinius branduolius. Lyginamoji portalų analizė atskleidžia stilistikos skirtumus: „Delfi“ dažniau naudoja dramatinę ir afektyvią retoriką, „15min“ derina emocinį krizių vaizdavimą su analitinę struktūrą, o LRT išsiskiria pasitikėjimo ir vilties tonu. Straipsnyje teigiama, kad ekonominio saugumo diskursas Lietuvos žiniasklaidoje veikia kaip emocinio valdymo priemonė, formuojanti kolektyvinius lūkesčius, legitimuojanti (ne)saugumo naratyvus ir veikianti piliečių reakcijas į krizes.

**Raktiniai žodžiai:** ekonominis saugumas, emocinis įreminimas, žiniasklaidos diskursas, semantinė analizė

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