

THE SYRIAN REFUGEE NARRATIVE: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF MEDIA
FRAMES DURING THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

by

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ABSTRACT

This study examined news coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis from 2011-2018. Specifically, it investigated how various mainstream news publications framed the Syrian refugee story, the overall tone of coverage, and shifts in coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis over time. Refugees were depicted positively. Tone of coverage became more positive over time, and the most common frames employed were the foreign government response frame and the conflict frame. The foreign government frame described how governments outside of the U.S. responded to the Syrian refugee crisis and the conflict frame was used to describe any form of conflict between individuals, groups, institutions, or countries. Results of this study suggests the coverage of humanitarian crises is impacted by the power of framing.

I. INTRODUCTION

During the spring of 2011, Syrians were motivated by the activism of protestors in the Arab Spring movement in Egypt and Tunisia. Citizens took to the streets and started protesting against the Bashar al-Assad regime. Government troops responded by opening fire on the civilians, killing hundreds and imprisoning more. The military destroyed entire neighborhoods and towns which eventually led to the formation of the Free Syrian Army, a rebel group aiming to overthrow the government, and Syria began its descent into the civil war (Al Jazeera, 2018).

Since the onset of the Syrian Civil War in March 2011, more than half of the country's population has been killed or forced to leave their homes ("What You Need to Know," 2017). In 2016, the United Nations (UN) identified 13.5 million Syrians requiring humanitarian assistance. Six million are still displaced in Syria, and another five million continue to seek refuge in neighboring countries ("What You Need to Know," 2017). The devastation in Syria is now internationally recognized as the largest refugee crisis of the time period ("Syrian Refugee Crisis," 2016).

Roughly 18,000 Syrian refugees have entered the United States since 2011 (Zong & Batalova, 2017). Coverage of the events in Syria has been featured in major U.S. news outlets such as CNN and *The New York Times*. In 2011, CNN's Arwa Damon traveled back across the Syrian border to interview survivors who said they had witnessed "horrific" scenes in Jisr al-Shughour (Friedman, 2011).

In September of 2015, *The New York Times* published an article about a young boy named Alan Kurdi who lost his life when his family attempted to escape Syria. Kurdi was only three years old when his body was discovered washed ashore a beach in Turkey

(Barnard & Shoumali, 2015). The image of Kurdi, which was first captured by a Turkish News Agency, sent shockwaves through the world. This image galvanized public attention to the Syrian crisis.

Less than a year later, *The New York Times* published a piece that featured an iconic photo of 5-year-old Omran sitting covered in dust only moments after he was pulled from the rubble of war in Aleppo. Within minutes of the photo being shared by journalists on social media, Omran's name was known throughout the world. Much like the image of young Kurdi, Omran's story brought new attention to the crisis in Syria and the thousands of children dying during years of war (Barnard, 2016).

The United Nations estimates Syria's population to be roughly 18.4 million people ("Syria Population," 2019). However, exact numbers are difficult to determine due to instability as approximately 5,000 citizens flee the country every day ("U.N. says 5,000 Syrian refugees," 2018). Syria is identified as a predominantly Islamic country with 87 percent of its population being Muslim. When broken down, around 74 percent of that population are Sunni and 13 percent are Shia. Though Syria is primarily Muslim, it is also home to one of the largest Christian populations in the Middle East. Syria's largest ethnic group, approximately 90 percent of its inhabitants, is Arab ("Syria Population," 2019).

Now in its eighth year, the Syrian civil war has left more than 320,000 dead and drained \$226 billion from the Syrian national economy (Gaouette, 2017). In August 2017, CNN reported the findings of the ninth annual Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey that analyzes the attitudes and beliefs of young Syrian refugees in Jordan and

Lebanon (Gaouette, 2017). The survey found more than half of young Syrian refugees had no intention of returning home until the end of the war (Gaouette, 2017).

After Trump was elected president in 2016, several media outlets voiced concern about the future for Syrian refugees in the United States (Amos, 2016). These fears were realized when the president implemented a temporary ban on the entry of all Syrian refugees and drastically scaled back the limit of any refugee admissions to 50,000 for the year. This was the lowest acceptance rate for the U.S. refugee admission program in decades (Koran, 2017). In comparison, nearly 70,000 refugees were admitted to the U.S. in 2015, and another 85,000 refugees were admitted in 2016 (*Cumulative Summary of Refugee Admissions*, 2019). CNN, among other news organizations, condemned Trump's decision and refuted his attempts to portray refugees as radical Islamic terrorists (Bergen, 2017). Researchers have proposed that attacks like those in Paris in 2015 and Orlando in 2016 have caused an increase in the public's stigmatized views toward refugees from predominantly Muslim countries (Patel, 2018). Whether these labels/sentiments are shared or disputed via news outlets and social media, it is arguably affecting the perception of refugees entering the United States.

On January 31, 2018, the Trump administration announced its extension of the Temporary Protected Status for Syria—allowing 7,000 refugees to renew their protections for 18 months (Lind, 2018). However, Syrian refugees who came to the U.S. after August 1, 2016, will be forced to leave after their current visas expire. Media outlets like *The New York Times* argue the Trump administration does not believe in global refugee crisis and the future for Syrians remains unknown (Lind, 2018).

President Trump ordered a targeted missile strike on Syria aimed at the Shayrat Airbase in response to the Syrian government's chemical weapons attack in Khan Shaykhun, that killed more than 80 civilians in 2017. Trump insisted his decision was prompted by failures of the world community to effectively respond to the Syrian civil war. "It is in this vital national security interest of the United States to prevent and deter the spread and use of deadly chemical weapons," the president said (Gordon, Cooper, & Shear, 2017, p. 1).

President Trump and his advisers debated a more drastic attack against Syria than the missile attack of 2017 during April of 2018. However, the White House and national security advisors expressed concern that an operation of this scale would not be effective in halting the Syrian military's war efforts. Trump and his team have enlisted external support for action against the Syrian government. France, Britain, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar are among these alliances. Though, it remains unclear as to whether allies will participate (Baker, Cooper, & Gibbons-Neff, 2018).

President Trump abruptly proposed the withdrawal of 2,000 American troops from Syria in December of 2018 (Landler, Cooper, & Schmitt, 2018). Trump argued the U.S. had "won against ISIS," though the Pentagon and State Department continued to try to talk him out of his decision. The president's declaration of victory over the Islamic State incited backlash among the Senate ("McConnell Snubs Trump," 2019, p.1). Majority Leader Mitch McConnell plans to introduce an amendment to the Middle East policy bill that would recognize the continual threat posed by al-Qaida and the Islamic State group.

The current study analyzes the reporting of agenda-setting U.S. news outlets to determine how the media framed Syrian refugees. It investigates the potential change in tone of coverage about Syrian refugees in the media throughout this ongoing humanitarian crisis, how the refugees were depicted in the news media, as well as how the story of the Syrian conflict was framed. The study examines how tone, depiction, and frames changed as the Syrian crisis dragged on. It is important to understand how the media cover these types of events because citizen's attitudes and opinions are formed by the information they read.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Agenda-Setting

Agenda-setting is the theory based on the idea that media do not tell people what to think, but what to think about (Baran & Davis, 2015). Though he did not coin the term, Bernard Cohen (1963) is often credited with identifying the agenda-setting process. “The world looks different to different people, depending not only on their personal interests, but also on the map that is drawn for them by the writers, editors, and publishers of the papers they read,” (p. 35). This perspective was later supported by the research of McCombs and Shaw (1972).

During the 1968 presidential election, 100 registered voters who hadn’t committed to either candidate were interviewed about campaign issues. McCombs and Shaw (1972) compared responses against a content analysis of media outlets in the area. They discovered a strong correlation between media content surrounding the election and voter judgment.

The agenda-setting hypothesis specifies the media’s effect is not on people’s attitudes, but on their cognitions. “The media, by describing and detailing what is out there, present people with a list of what to think about and talk about” (Shaw, 1979, p. 97). In this sense, agenda-setting aligns more closely with a diffusion or multi-step flow model because it emphasizes the role of personal influence on altering human behavior. Early studies conducted on the diffusion of news found there was little information being relayed from the press that individuals categorized as “influential.” Rather, the news was obtained from the mass media. People tend to only ask others for their personal opinions, not for public information (Deutschmann & Danielson, 1960).

The agenda-setting theory of mass media is also indebted to uses-and-gratifications research (Shaw, 1979). This research tradition portrays mass media as sources of gratification for individual needs and entertaining outlets for personal escape. Bauer (1964) found people are not passively overpowered by mass media, but they “obstinately” put different forms of media to their own use for their own gratification. Researchers who favor the gratification approach focus more on what media do *for* people rather than *to* people (Shaw, 1979). Like uses-and-gratifications research, agenda-setting theory maintains an initial focus on people’s needs. Agenda-setting researchers realize psychological and social attributes of a person can determine their use of the media. However, these factors can also exist outside of the political realm. Agenda-setting fills a void in communication theory by “locating and defining media power as a peculiar influence, not so much on the *substance* of a person’s mental and verbal behavior but on the *structure* of those private and social activities” (Shaw, 1979, p. 101).

The agenda-setting theory has only recently been applied to the rapidly advancing digital media landscape, specifically to social media. Feezell’s research (2018) investigated whether mainstream media had the ability to influence the public agenda when channeled through social media by studying the potential agenda-setting effects of a participant’s exposure to political content on Facebook. She discovered participants who were exposed to political information on Facebook did exhibit increased levels of issue salience consistent with the specific political policy issues shown.

Agenda-Building

Agenda-setting maintains a macro-level implication known as agenda-building. Lang and Lang (1983) defined agenda-building as a collective process in which media,

government, and the citizenry influence one another. While agenda-setting focuses on the relationship between mass media content and the mass media audience, agenda-building looks at the relationship between news sources and the mass media while the news agenda is formed (Berkowitz & Adams, 1990).

The agenda-building process is composed of three separate agendas: the media agenda, the public agenda, and the policy agenda (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). *Media* agenda refers to studies that conceptualize the mass media news agenda as their central dependent variable. The *public* agenda studies focus on the relative importance of issues to members of the public as their dependent variable. The *policy* agenda conceptualizes the issue agenda of governmental bodies or elected officials as their main dependent variable. It was an “ongoing competition among the proponents of a set of issues to gain the attention of media professionals, the public, and policy elites,” (Dearing & Rogers, 1996, p. 6).

Second-Level Agenda-Setting/Framing

McCombs and Ganhem (2001) sought to expand the agenda-setting theory even further by developing second-level agenda-setting. Agenda-setting operates at two levels: the object level and the attribute level (McCombs & Ganhem, 2001). The object level suggests the media tell people “what to think about” while the attribute level says media tell people “how to think about” certain objects (McCombs & Ganhem, 2001). Conventional agenda-setting research focuses on the object level, while second-order agenda-setting focuses on the attribute level.

One way to tell the audience how to think about a particular issue is by the story frame used. Entman (1993) defines framing as the “process of culling a few elements of

perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation” (p. 164). Media framing involves selection and salience of certain parts of events and remains the central idea or story line that provides meaning. Frames are known by the information included or excluded (Entman, 1993). Framing also refers to the way journalists choose to package their news stories (Kosicki, 1993). Journalists can affect the way audiences perceive the actions of certain groups of people by the frames they use in their coverage.

Sociologists Todd Gitlin (2017) and Gale Tuchman (1978) provide early examples of framing research applied in mass media. Tuchman (1978) investigated routine news production work and the limitations on specific event coverage strategies. Gitlin’s research (2017) concentrated on news coverage of politically radical social movements during the 1960s. Though their studies differed, Tuchman (1978) and Gitlin (2017) agree news mainly serves to reinforce common or popular beliefs and to undermine social movements.

Gamson (1989) used framing theory to trace social movements that promoted frames consistent with a person’s beliefs, particularly with nuclear power and global warming. He believed cultural and political elites maintain an advantage in social institutions because “some frames have a natural advantage because their ideas and language resonate with a broader political culture. Resonances increase the appeal of a frame by making it appear natural and familiar,” (Gamson, 1992, p. 135).

Gamson’s perspective (1992) was later supported by Entman’s (2007) cascading activation model of framing which explains how interpretive frames activate at the top level of a stratified system (the White House), spread through government elites and then

on to news organizations and finally to the public. Entman (2007) illustrated the model's potential by examining the White House's frames following 9/11. This study revealed "that media patrol the boundaries of culture and keep discord within conventional bounds" (p. 415).

Studies have also found an association between changes in public policymaking and the collaboration of journalists with government officials. This research developed a model that would specify the conditions under which media influence public attitudes and agendas (Protest, 1991). The hierarchy-of-effects model is typically illustrated as the C-A-B sequence: cognitive effects (C) lead to affective effects (A), which lead to behavioral effects (B) (Moon, 2011). While studying media coverage during the presidential election, Moon (2011) concluded, "In the learning hierarchy of CAB, people give more thought to those objects or attributes that they regard as important—and the greater amount of thought, the stronger the attitudes. In turn, strong attitudes function as predictors of behavior," (p.14).

There are several different framing aspects that should be differentiated. For example, postpositivists believe the frames utilized in critical cultural research are too abstract, while critical cultural scholars argue postpositivists often neglect the elite domination of framing (Carragee & Roefs, 2004). Over the past few decades, postpositivist researchers have used effects research to explain the influence frames can have on news audiences. The most frequent finding is exposure to certain news coverage results in learning consistent with the frames structuring the coverage (Ryan, Carragee, & Meinhofer, 2001). This research shows news coverage has the ability to influence the way audiences make sense of news events and their key players. Both postpositivists and

critical cultural framing theorists maintain a pessimistic view of the role journalism plays in society. They believe frames used to relay news surrounding major events are often based on outdated journalistic traditions with little concern of how the structuring of this information will affect audience interpretations (Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2008).

Domke, Shah, and Wackman (1998) argued media framing of certain political issues in either moral or ethical terms can prime voters to make attributions about a candidate's integrity or evaluate other issues in ethical terms. After studying two sub-populations—evangelical Christians and university undergraduate students, they discovered two consistent patterns. Experimental tests indicated different issues produce different effects, with some issues (i.e., social-moral) priming perceptions of a candidate's integrity and others (i.e., more ambiguous issues with an ethical frame) priming ethical understandings of more material issues. Analysis within groups revealed differences among sub-populations in the process of priming, with “only evangelical Christians exhibiting a pattern of linkages between ethical interpretations of the manipulated issues and other ethically based evaluations” (Domke et al., 1998, p. 68).

Types of Frames

Episodic and thematic frames are two common frames. *Episodic frames* use a specific individual's experience or event to illustrate the issue; while *thematic frames* focus on broader trends or background information on a topic (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Springer and Harwood (2014) sought to determine the media effects on attitudes about social policy by exposing participants to either episodic frames or thematic frames. Participants who read episodic frames were significantly more likely to endorse message-consistent attitudes than participants who read thematic frames. Another investigation

examined influence of episodic and thematic frames on policy behavior surrounding climate change. Participants exposed to thematic frames had more support for policies addressing climate change than participants who were exposed to episodic frames (Feldman & Hart, 2018).

Conflict frames are examined in times of unrest. A conflict frame shows “conflict between individuals, groups, institutions, or countries” (Semetko, De Vreese, & Peter, 2000, p. 95). Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) conducted a content analysis of more than 2,600 newspaper stories and 1,500 broadcast stories surrounding the Amsterdam meetings of European heads of state in 1997. They investigated the pervasiveness of conflict frames in addition to four other types of frames: (1) attribution of responsibility, (2) human-interest, (3) economic consequences, and (4) morality among news coverage. Results indicated attribution of responsibility frames were the most common followed by conflict frames.

Human-interest frames are commonly used in news (Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992). This type of frame “brings a human face or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue, or problem” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 95). Journalists often use human-interest frames to capture and retain audience attention. These frames are also prevalent in crisis coverage, often with the intent to elicit a public response (Cho & Gower, 2006). Cho and Gower (2006) investigated the effects of a human-interest frame by exposing participants to news coverage of a crisis in either a human-interest frame or a non-human-interest frame. Results indicated participants exposed to human-interest frames were more likely to have an emotional response to the crisis and their emotional

response was a “significant predictor of blame and responsibility in a transgression crisis” (p. 420).

Responsibility frames are frames which present “an issue or problem in such a way as to attribute responsibility for its cause or solution to either the government or to an individual or group” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 96). Psychological research distinguishes between two types of responsibility: *causality* and *treatment*. Iyengar (1991) explains causal responsibility looks primarily at past events while treatment responsibility looks into the future for solutions to current problems. U.S. news media have often been ascribed with molding the public perception of who is responsible for solving major social problems, like poverty. An and Gower (2009) conducted a content analysis of news frames found in crisis news coverage surrounding specific crisis-prone businesses identified in the 2006 annual crisis report published by the *Institute for Crisis Management* (ICM). Their findings concluded the attribution of responsibility frame was the most predominantly used frame in crisis news coverage. However, they also discovered the use of level of responsibility varied depending on the type of crisis covered. An and Gower (2009) suggested crisis stories focusing on responsibility of organizations had a lower level of responsibility because the news media tend to minimize organizational and governmental blame.

Liang, Tsai, Mattis, Konieczna, and Dunwoody (2014) investigated how prime-time television news implemented responsibility frames for climate change policy issues in the United States, China, and Canada during the 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. Their results found television news among these three countries portrayed responsibility much differently. Discussion of treatment

responsibility for mitigating climate change was significantly more apparent in Chinese news coverage than in either American or Canadian coverage (Liang et al., 2014).

Morality frames are another type of frame commonly used in coverage of controversial events by putting the issue in the context of “religious tenets or moral prescriptions” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 96). Because journalists are trained in the professional obligation of objectivity, reference to these moral frames is often indirect—through some form of quotation or inference. This frame is more apparent in the audience minds rather than in news content, but still identified morality frames as among the many frames used in reporting (Neuman et al., 1992). Severson and Coleman (2015) investigated the association between types of media frames used in climate change coverage and public support for climate change. They discovered secular moral frames were effective in increasing overall policy support (Severson & Coleman, 2015).

When journalist report using frame violations, specifically those serving the agendas of the elite, they serve as protectors of the status quo because many violations involve events disrupting the status quo. Frame violations are reported in news stories providing detailed accounts of the disruption, but they also document how elites restore order (Gans, 1979). Bennett (2005) calls this coverage “normalizing” news or news framing social world, so issues appear to be smoothed over and dealt with by those in power.

Disorder in the news can appear in many forms. Including natural disasters, technology failing, or disease epidemics. Disorder also happens amidst massive social movements, especially those challenging the government or elite class. Herbert Gans (1979) discovered news coverage of social unrest was significantly dominated by

reputable news sources, which chose to frame events from the status quo perspective. Gans (1979) argued journalists are most effective in presenting the upper-middle-class professional perspective and defending this class above others.

Gans (2003) investigated how journalists report social movements within major American public policy issues like the Arab-Israeli conflict, affirmative action, and abortion. He discovered abortion was the only social movement for which there was consistent and on-going coverage. Other issues garnered some coverage in certain stages of social movements, but this coverage was almost always diminished when powerful elites altered policy in a different direction. However, in times of crises news coverage often provides readers reassurance that the world will go on like it always has (Carey, 1989).

Much of framing research suggests there is a symbiotic relationship between those journalists who report the status quo and news consumers seeking reassurance that the status quo will endure. This relationship is likely to be heightened during times of severe tragedy or change.

Gamson (2001) adapted a more positive approach by recommending news coverage encourage citizen engagement with politics, suggesting the use of collective action frames which highlight positive aspects of a social movement and “offer ways of understanding that imply the need for and desirability of some form of action” (p. 58).

Scholars have identified three key components of collective action: political opportunities, organizational structures, and framing processes (McAdam & Scott, 2005). These framing processes involve “conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and

motivate collective action” (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996, p. 6). Collective action frames help to create a shared understanding among people of some issue or problematic situation in their lives in order to make them feel connected and optimistic about addressing the problem together (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Framing Immigrants and Refugees

Media framing is associated with the public perception of certain groups of people, especially when the group is tied to a politically-involved issue. For instance, frames often create a narrative surrounding international immigrants and refugees or asylum seekers.

Salwen and Matera (1997) investigated news media agenda-setting with the issue of illegal immigration. They aimed to explicate two major concerns in agenda-setting: (a) How do respondents’ perceptions of their “most important problem” influence their perceptions of experience and interest in the problem? And (b) Are there ethnic differences in how respondents perceive social problems? (Salwen & Matera, 1997). Findings support the proposition “ethnic identification can heighten interest in a social problem” (p. 338).

Balmas and Sheaffer (2010) conducted a content analysis of leading Israeli newspapers during the 2006 Israeli elections. Their study extended the function of the media agenda setting and priming effects on public attitudes. They concluded “public opinion fluctuates in tandem with the saliency of candidate attributes emphasized in the news” (Balmas & Sheaffer, 2010, p. 204). They also discovered the public evaluative tone used by these media outlets was linked with voting intentions for each candidate’s political parties.

Refugee policy is a highly contested political issue around the world. Bleiker, Campbell, Hutchison, and Nicholson (2013) examined how visual images of refugees seeking asylum in Australia. This type of visual framing “associates refugees not with a humanitarian challenge, but with threats to sovereignty and security” (Bleiker et al., 2013, p. 398). They found these patterns reinforce a political fear and do not encourage a compassionate response.

Researchers have investigated how refugees are framed in Austrian media by examining online news articles during and after the initial ‘welcome culture’ with regard to asylum seekers settling in Austria (Zeitl-Bank, 2017). Tone of coverage became significantly more negative after the initial ‘welcome culture’ decreased.

Another study examined Canadian newspapers framing of Tamilian refugees who came over from Sri Lanka. Researchers conducted a content analysis of media coverage from three separate Canadian publications following the arrival of Tamil refugees in 2009. Results indicated an overall negative representation of Tamil refugees with a press emphasis on criminality and terrorism. Refugees were portrayed as a risk and discussions established security rather than human rights as a focal point. The immigration system was framed as “both failing and abused by bogus claimants” (Bradimore & Bauder, 2011, p. 637).

Media may also differ in their portrayal of immigrants versus refugees. Lawlor and Tolley (2017) conducted a content analysis of Canadian news coverage surrounding immigrants versus coverage surrounding refugees. Their research found distinct differences between the two. Immigrants were often framed in economic terms, whereas more attention was focused on the validity of refugee claims, possible security threats,

and if refugees take advantage of social programs. More focus was given to a refugee's national origin and framing was disproportionately negative (Lawlor & Tolley, 2017).

In the United States, the media play an important role in how Americans understand controversial social and political issues like immigration. One study examined how key features of the media, such as location and political ideology, affect the framing of arguments supporting anti-immigration bills (Fryberg, Stephens, Covarrubias, Markus, Carter, Laiduc, & Salido, 2011). Both location and political ideology influenced framing. National newspapers were more likely than local to frame arguments "supporting the bill in terms of threats (e.g., threats to economic and public safety) and to frame arguments against the bill in terms of civil rights issues (e.g., racial profiling)" (Fryberg et al., 2011, p. 1). However, in terms of political ideology, Conservative newspapers were found to be more likely to frame the bill in terms of economic and public safety threats than the Liberal newspapers. Mentions of civil rights issues did not differ between the two types of publications.

Immigrants and refugees are often portrayed as "enemies at the gate" who are attempting to invade Western nations (Esses, Medianu, & Lawson, 2013). This study suggests such depictions dehumanize immigrants and refugees to the public and serve to promote the spread of apathy toward human crisis issues.

Other case studies have focused on a combination of linguistic elements used in news coverage during migration discourse and the impact of language on news frames (Benert & Beier, 2016). A frame analysis of the German *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the English *Guardian's* coverage of the boat sinking off the coast of Lampedusa, Italy, found the connotation of key words used in news frames surrounding the incident diverge from

the orientation of news frames. Roughly two-thirds of the articles examined used protection frames, but the majority of the key words describing refugees was connoted negatively. The contrary orientations of news frames and connotations serve as “a first indication for linguistic elements as influencing factors in framing research” (Benert & Beier, 2016, p. 1).

Researchers have also analyzed the language used to frame immigration narratives among major U.S. news outlets. Quinsaat (2014) reviewed articles from both *The New York Times* and *USA Today* in order to determine how mass media attempts to reduce the complex immigration issue into simple talking points. Her findings indicated through framing, the media create “diametrically opposed representations of immigration and contemporary immigrants but at the same time normalize dominant ways of thinking and talking about immigration that sustain and consolidate power relationships” (Quinsaat, 2014, p. 573).

Framing Syrian Refugees

Studies have investigated visual framing narratives in European news coverage surrounding the refugee crisis, particularly those which are heavily emotion-laden (Cmeciu, 2017). The photo of the young dead boy Aylan on the beach in Turkey is just one example of how newspapers have used jarring images of refugees to garner reader attention. These images have also been used by debating platforms to initiate debates with EU citizens about the refugee crisis. Selection of visuals plays a vital role in the representation of an issue in these debates.

A qualitative analysis of visual images used to represent Syrian refugees in nine debates from the *Europe's Refugee Crisis* themed debate series on the ‘Debating Europe’

open online platform, found salience of three major clusters: failure, humanitarian protection, and negotiation (Cmeci, 2017). This research also determined the ‘Debating Europe’ platform’s visual framing of “citizens willing to accept refugees clearly shows how the visual coverage of an issue is influenced by who owns the control over information and image flows” (p. 91).

One of the most iconic moments of the debate on the European refugee crisis was influenced by the circulation of images of Alan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian boy who drowned when his family attempted to flee Syria and seek asylum in Turkey. The photos of Kurdi triggered reactions from politicians, organizations, and citizens all around the world. Bozdag and Smets (2017) analyzed reactions through a qualitative study of 961 tweets from Turkey and Belgium, organizing them into framing of refugees before and after the Kurdi photos were released. Their study found “despite their iconic qualities and potential to mobilize Twitter users around refugee issues, the images did not cause a major shift in common discourses and representations” (Bozdag & Smets, 2017, p. 4046). References to Kurdi were, instead, incorporated into preexisting representations of refugees providing different actors in the public debate.

Masses of Arab citizens fleeing from Syria, as well as other countries like Iraq, has drawn substantial attention and debate worldwide. For this reason, researchers have found the study of framing of Arab refugees and asylum seekers to be extremely significant, especially in relation to the war on terrorism (Elsamni, 2016). A content analysis of CNN’s coverage of the Arab refugee crisis revealed responsibility frames were the most apparent type of frames and various governmental levels pinpointed European governments enacting measures to reduce refugee migration into their countries

(Elsamni, 2016). Governments of those countries of origin responsible for the Arab refugee crisis was another recurring point of coverage. The attribution of responsibility frame also became common in news coverage due to the amount of news stories framing ISIS as the reason for the mass influx of refugees (Elsamni, 2016).

Turkey has experienced one of the biggest influxes of Syrian refugees since the beginning of the crisis and currently has the largest number of refugees compared to any other (western) country. Researchers thought this overwhelming refugee presence made it important to understand just how Syrian refugees are perceived by Turkish citizens. Sunata and Yıldız (2018) conducted a content analysis of coverage from Turkey's three largest active news agencies in order to evaluate temporal milestones and spatial importance in reporting of refugee-related news. Findings concluded Syrian refugees are most frequently portrayed as victims struggling to survive and a large portion of news about humanitarian aid proves Syrian refugees are evaluated in humanistic terms (Sunata & Yıldız, 2018).

Research suggests most international news is often framed in terms of conflict and violence. Greenwood and Jenkins (2015) examined 193 photographs published in two news magazines and nine public affairs magazines (with differing political/ideological orientations) during one year of the Syrian crisis (2011-2012). They found the conflict frames to be the dominant visual frame in images depicting active fighting and victims within news magazines. However, they also discovered public affairs magazines tend to publish a higher number of photographs depicting peace framing (Greenwood & Jenkins, 2015, p. 207).

Visual frames have also been used to create positive representations of Syrian refugees. Perreault and Paul (2018) conducted a narrative framing analysis of the Humans of New York series ‘Syrian Americans.’ Their findings indicated social sites such as Humans of New York do not function under traditional journalistic norms like mainstream media outlets. Instead, they provide alternative portrayals through the use of three narrative frames: refugees are skilled, normalized and are ideologically American (Perreault & Paul, 2018). The overall narrative was a “social master analogue that indicates that refugees are capable of assimilating into American life” (p. 92).

Past research has focused on visual frames of Syrian refugees. The current study extends the research by examining print coverage. Little research has examined the coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis over time. Past research examining crises (e.g. war) has shown media tend to be uncritical (Kellner, 1992). The press sometimes act as cheerleaders when covering a conflict at the start (Aday, 2005). However, Haigh (2014) found the positive coverage of war changes over time. She analyzed more than 1,000 articles about the war in Afghanistan over a ten-year period and found the initial positive coverage eventually turns negative after the cheerleading stops. Although the Syrian conflict is different, it has been ongoing for more than eight years, so the same pattern might be found. The press may have painted the civil war in a positive light because it was led by the citizens during a period of strife in the region. The “little guy” was fighting back. The Assad regime was kidnapping, torturing, and killing protestors; as well as destroying entire neighborhoods. This could influence how the press reported conflict. The coverage may be more positive at the start of the conflict because civilians still seem

to have a fighting chance and haven't fled their country yet. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 suggests:

H1: The tone of coverage about the Syrian refugee crisis will become more negative over time.

Syrian refugees have been portrayed in a number of ways in both international and domestic news, but there is limited research investigating the most common types of frames used in U.S. media coverage of Syrian refugees. Past research examining humanitarian crises found media commonly use conflict frames (Bradimore & Bauder, 2011). However, some studies have discovered human-interest and responsibility frames to be more prevalent (Sunata & Yıldız, 2018). Semetko, van der Brug, and Valkenburg (2003) analyzed thousands of newspaper stories and television news stories in the period surrounding the Amsterdam meetings of European heads of state in 1997. Her findings showed, overall, the attribution of responsibility frame was most commonly used in news, followed by the conflict frame. Semetko noted sober and serious newspapers were more likely to apply the responsibility and conflict frames. The articles analyzed for this study during the Syrian refugee crisis were also pulled from what would be deemed 'serious and sober' news: *The New York Times*, *The LA Times*, and *The Washington Post*. An and Gower (2009) also conducted a content analysis of crisis news frames found in 2006 crisis news coverage. Their findings concluded the attribution of responsibility frame was the most predominantly used frame in crisis news coverage. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 suggests:

H2: The conflict and attribution of responsibility will be the most common frames employed when discussing the Syrian crisis.

Though some studies have found media often portray refugees as victims during crises (Sunata & Yıldız, 2018), there is substantial research suggesting refugees are depicted as outsiders or intruders (Esses et al., 2013). Refugees have also been seen as both economic and security threats (Lawlor & Tolley, 2017). Often times, migrants into any country are viewed by the public as illegals. Blinder and Allen (2015) examined coverage of immigration in the British national press to determine whether press portrayals of migrants provided a basis for negative public attitude. Their findings showed the press most often portrayed migrants as “illegal immigrants” and “failed asylum seekers.” This proved immigrants were depicted in a negative light. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 posits:

H3: Syrian refugees will be depicted negatively.

Previous studies have suggested news coverage of a crisis becomes more negative overtime (Haigh, 2014). However, there is little to no research which analyzes a refugee crisis’s coverage over time. In 2015, Europe dealt with the arrival of over 1.25 million refugees fleeing from war-torn countries. Greussing and Boomgaarden (2017) investigated how the tone of coverage and frames used surrounding the influx of asylum seekers may have changed from 2015 to 2016. Their findings suggested established narratives of security threat and economization were most common. Humanitarianism frames and background information on the refugees’ situation were less prominent. The results of the study confirmed stereotyped interpretations of refugee and asylum issues became more common as the humanitarian crisis continued to worsen. Therefore, Research Question 1 posits:

RQ1: Are there differences in coverage (shown in tone, depiction, and frame) over the eight-year period?

III. METHOD

A content analysis of three national newspapers was employed. Articles were selected from the following news outlets including: *The New York Times*, *the Washington Post*, and *the Los Angeles Times*. The *Los Angeles Times* ($n = 90$) was selected for its influence on the West coast, *The Washington Post* ($n = 119$) was selected for its influence on the East coast, and *The New York Times* ($n = 180$) was selected for its national notoriety.

The dates selected for the sample span from March 15, 2011 to March 31, 2018. The year 2011 was selected because it's the start of the Syrian conflict. March of 2018 was selected as the closing date because of the most recent anniversary.

Articles were pulled from Nexis Uni using search terms "Syrian refugee" in the lead paragraph or headline. The unit of analysis was each individual article by a journalist ($N = 389$). Op-eds and editorials were not included. Wire stories were identified, and duplicates were not included.

Coder Training

Three students enrolled at a Southwestern University were trained to complete the coding. A written coding instrument was developed by the researcher to code the sample. Coding norms were established during supervised coder-training sessions. Coders established a high degree of standardization during the training phase. Eight percent of the sample was used for intercoder training ($n = 46$). Effective inter-coder reliabilities between .86 to .95 when employing Rosenthal's formula (1984, 1987) for interval level

data and multiple coders.¹ Tone of coverage had a reliability of .86-.95; overall frame had a reliability of .86-.95; and depiction of Syrian refugees had a reliability of .82-.91.

Krippendorff's Alpha ranged from .83 to .99 for frames coded nominally including: conflict, responsibility, human-interest, security, the forgotten, foreign government's response to refugees, US response to refugees, UN response to refugees, and tent cities. See Table 2 for a list of specific Krippendorff's Alpha results.

Variables Measured

Independent Variable. The independent variable was the *year* each article was published 2011-2018.

Dependent Variables

Overall tone of coverage. Tone of coverage was assessed using an attitude scale (Burgoon, Cohen, Miller & Montgomery, 1978). Pfau et al. (2005) and Haigh (2014) previously employed this scale to measure tone of newspaper coverage during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It consists of six, 7-interval semantic differential scales: good/bad, positive/negative, wise/foolish, valuable/worthless, favorable/unfavorable and acceptable/unacceptable ($\alpha = .99$; $M = 3.59$, $SD = .81$).

Depiction of refugees. Depiction of international refugees in the Syrian crisis was assessed through Individualized Trust Scale (Wheelus & Grotz, 1977). Pfau and colleagues (2005) and Haigh (2014) used this to examine the depiction of U.S. military in Iraq and Afghanistan. The scale is based on four, 7-interval semantic differential scales; trusting/untrusting, candid/deceptive and sincere/insincere and honest/dishonest ($\alpha = .99$; $M = 3.26$, $SD = .69$).

¹ Rosenthal's formula: (correlation of the coders)(number of coders) divided by 1 + (number of coders – 1)(correlation)

Frames

Overall frame. The extent to which each story unit employed episodic framing was measured with a single 7-interval scale. That is the thematic/episodic previously used by Pfau et al. (2005) and Haigh et al. (2014) when examining stories about Iraq and Afghanistan. Iyengar (1991) acknowledged most news stories embody both episodic and thematic frames, with one being more dominant. Iyengar (1991) state frames usually tilt in one direction or the other. As Pfau et al. (2005) stated, “The degree of the ‘tilt’ using a relative measure assessing the extent to which each news story embodied episodic or thematic framing” (p. 477) ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 1.26$).

Nominal level frames. Additional frames coded were coded present/absent. These frames included: conflict, responsibility, human-interest, security, the forgotten, foreign government’s response to refugees, U.S. response to refugees, U.N. response to refugees, and tent cities. A conflict frame shows “conflict between individuals, groups, institutions, or countries” (Semetko, De Vreese, & Peter, 2000, p. 95). Responsibility frames are frames which present “an issue or problem in such a way as to attribute responsibility for its cause or solution to either the government or to an individual or group” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 96). Human-interest frames “brings a human face or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue, or problem” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 95). Security frames are used to describe refugees as potential threats to other countries (Esses et al., 2013). Foreign government response to refugees was a frame created for this study used to describe how governments outside of the U.S. responded to the Syrian refugee crisis. U.S. response to refugees and UN response to refugees were also frames used in this study. Tent cities was a frame used to describe the

rough make-shift homes where refugees were living as they fled Syria. The Forgotten Syria frame was created for this study and used to describe civilians still in Syria. See Table 2 for a list of specific Krippendorff's Alpha results.

IV. RESULTS

This study conducted a longitudinal analysis of newspaper coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis. A content analysis was conducted examining *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and the *L.A. Times* coverage of the event. When reviewing descriptive statistics, *The New York Times* published the most articles about the crisis (46.3%) followed by *The Washington Post* (30.3%), and the *L.A. Times* (23.1%). There were a small number of wire stories (8.2%), and most of the articles were published outside of Syria (72.2%). Only a small number of articles were published with a dateline of Syria (3.9%). Almost a quarter of the sample had a dateline of somewhere in the U.S. (23.9%). The crisis received the most coverage during 2015 (100 stories), 2013 (88 stories), 2012 (65 stories), and 2016 (10 stories). Now that the sample population has been described, the hypotheses will be examined.

Hypothesis 1 predicted the overall tone of coverage about the Syrian refugee crisis would become more negative over time. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was computed on the independent variable year and the dependent variable tone. There were significant differences in tone and year of coverage $F(7, 388) = 9.63, p < .01, \eta^2 = .15$. The most negative coverage appeared in 2011-2013 ($M = 2.87, SD = .52_{2011}; M = 3.27, SD = .64_{2013}; M = 3.29, SD = .65_{2012}$). The most positive coverage was during the years 2015 ($M = 3.92, SD = .80$) and 2016 ($M = 3.84, SD = .93$). When reviewing the pattern of means, Hypothesis 1 was not supported. The tone of coverage became more positive over time, opposite of what was predicted. Table 1 reflects the means and standard deviations for the independent and dependent variables.

Hypothesis 2 predicted the most common frames uses in the newspaper coverage would be the conflict frame and the attribution of responsibility frame. Descriptive statistics were used to examine the frequency of each nominal level frame category. The most common frame employed was the foreign government frame (how foreign governments were responding to the Syrian refugee crisis) (78.1%). The conflict frame was present in 62.5% of the articles. The human-interest frame (47.8%), U.N. response to the crisis (42.4%), and U.S. response to the crisis (40.4%) were present in roughly forty percent of the articles sampled. Thirty-eight percent of the articles employed the tent-city frame (38.3%). Articles did not employ the responsibility frame (29.4%) as frequently as how governments were responding to the crisis. The security of the U.S. from Syrian refugee frame was only employed 28.5% of the time. The frame employed the least was the “forgotten Syrian” frame 12.9%. The pattern indicates Hypothesis 2 was only partially supported. The conflict frame was one of the two most common frames employed; however, the responsibility frame was not employed as frequently as the other two frame categories.

Hypothesis 3 predicted Syrian refugees would be depicted negatively in the newspaper coverage. Descriptive statistics indicated the mean depiction was 3.26 with a standard deviation of .69. The scale employed was a five-point measure. The mean indicates the depiction was more positive than negative because it was above a 3.0 which indicates a neutral score on the one to five scale. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Research Question 1 asked if the coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis changed over time. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Chi-Square analyses were run to

answer this question. An ANOVA with the independent variable of year and the dependent variables of overall frame, tone of coverage, and depiction of Syrian refugees was computed. There were significant results for the dependent variables: overall frame $F(7, 388) = 2.37, p = .02, \eta^2 = .04$; and tone of coverage $F(7, 388) = 9.63, p = .00, \eta^2 = .15$. There were no significant findings for the dependent variable depiction of Syrian refugees $F(7, 373) = 1.11, p = .40, \eta^2 = .02$.

Tukey HSD post hoc tests were conducted for all the dependent variables. When examining the pattern of means for overall frame, the means indicated stories were most thematic in 2014 ($M = 2.16, SD = 1.12$) and was approaching the midpoint of the scale when the war started in 2011 ($M = 3.07, SD = 1.28$).

Tukey HSD post hoc tests did indicate statistically significant for year and tone of coverage. Only the significant differences are reported below. When looking at 2011 ($M = 2.87, SD = .52$), there were significant differences in tone compared to the years 2014 ($M = 3.73, SD = .65; p < .005$); 2015 ($M = 3.92, SD = .79; p < .000$); 2016 ($M = 3.85, SD = .93; p < .001$); 2017 ($M = 3.79, SD = 1.02; p < .002$). When comparing 2012 ($M = 3.29, SD = .65$) to subsequent years, there were significant differences in tone compared to the years 2015 ($M = 3.92, SD = .79; p < .000$), 2016 ($M = 3.85, SD = .93; p < .008$), and 2017 ($M = 3.79, SD = 1.02; p < .02$).

There were also significant differences when examining the tone of coverage in 2013 ($M = 3.27, SD = .64$) compared to both the later years of 2014 ($M = 3.73, SD = .65; p < .04$), 2015 ($M = 3.92, SD = .79; p < .000$), 2016 ($M = 3.85, SD = .93; p < .02$), and 2017 ($M = 3.79, SD = 1.02; p < .01$). The overall tone of coverage became more positive as time went on. However, it is worth noting the tone of coverage was never neutral or

positive over the years. Tone was measured using a 1 to 7 scale, and 4 would have represented a neutral point.

To examine the differences in the nominal level frame categories and the independent variable year, Chi-Square analyses were conducted. The Chi-Square analyses found significant differences for conflict frame $\chi^2(7, N = 389) = 42.44, p < .00$. This frame was most common in 2013 ($n = 67$) and least common in 2018 ($n = 3$). Significant differences were also found for the responsibility frame $\chi^2(7, N = 388) = 65.24, p < .00$. The security frame ($\chi^2(7, N = 389) = 20.47, p < .00$) was most common in 2012 ($n = 37$) and least common in 2016 and 2018 ($n = 3$). The security frame was most common in 2015 ($n = 35$) and least common in 2011 ($n = 1$). The “forgotten Syria” frame ($\chi^2(7, N = 389) = 16.54, p < .02$) was rarely used. It was employed the most in 2012 ($n = 15$) and the least in 2018 ($n = 1$).

There were also significant differences in framing how foreign governments were reacting to the Syrian crisis ($\chi^2(7, N = 389) = 65.32, p < .00$), how the U.S. was responding ($\chi^2(7, N = 389) = 62.11, p < .00$), as well as the U.N. response ($\chi^2(7, N = 389) = 28.18, p < .00$). The foreign government ($n = 85$) and U.N. response ($n = 51$) frame were employed more commonly in 2013. The U.S. response ($n = 62$) was employed more frequently in 2015. The tent city frame ($\chi^2(7, N = 389) = 46.06, p < .00$) was employed most often in 2013 ($n = 48$). Please refer to Table 1 for the means and standard deviations for the dependent variables over time. Table 2 indicates the nominal level frame categories and how often they occurred.

Table 1*Differences in Variables Over Time*

| Year | Overall Frame | Tone | Depiction |
|------------------------|---------------|------------------------------|-----------|
| 2011 (<i>n</i> =15) | 3.07(1.28) | 2.87(.52) ^{d,e,f,g} | 3.33(.49) |
| 2012 (<i>n</i> =65) | 2.25(1.16) | 3.29(.65) ^{e,f,g} | 3.22(.55) |
| 2013 (<i>n</i> =88) | 2.61(1.18) | 3.27(.64) ^{d,e,f,g} | 3.14(.64) |
| 2014 (<i>n</i> =37) | 2.16(1.12) | 3.73(.65) ^{a,c} | 3.29(.57) |
| 2015 (<i>n</i> =100) | 2.51(1.34) | 3.92(.79) ^{a,b,c} | 3.33(.69) |
| 2016 (<i>n</i> =39) | 2.77(1.39) | 3.85(.93) ^{a,b,c} | 3.21(.81) |
| 2017 (<i>n</i> =38) | 3.00(1.25) | 3.79(1.02) ^{a,b,c} | 3.47(.97) |
| 2018 (<i>n</i> =7) | 2.71(1.25) | 3.71(.49) | 3.14(.90) |
| Total (<i>n</i> =389) | 2.56(1.26) | 3.59(.81) | 3.26(.69) |

Notes: Means and standard deviations (shown in parentheses) for variables. Depiction of refugees was measured using the Individualized Trust Scale (Wheelus & Grotz, 1977).

Overall frame was measured using a thematic/episodic single 7-interval scale previously used by Pfau et al. (2005) and Haigh et al. (2014). Tone of coverage was measured using an attitude scale (Burgoon, Cohen, Miller & Montgomery, 1978) consisting of six, 7-interval semantic differential scales: good/bad, positive/negative, wise/foolish, valuable/worthless, favorable/unfavorable and acceptable/unacceptable.

a = significant when comparing to 2011 at the $p < .05$ level

b = significant when comparing to 2012 at the $p < .05$ level

c = significant when comparing to 2013 at the $p < .05$ level

d = significant when comparing to 2014 at the $p < .05$ level

e = significant when comparing to 2015 at the $p < .05$ level

f = significant when comparing to 2016 at the $p < .05$ level

g = significant when comparing to 2017 at the $p < .05$ level

Table 2

Coding Categories, Krippendorff's Alpha, Percent Present

| | Krippendorff's Alpha | Percent Coded as Present |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Conflict Frame | .99 | 62.5% |
| Responsibility | .83 | 29.3% |
| Human Interest | .94 | 47.8% |
| Security Frame | .97 | 28.5% |
| Foreign Government | .99 | 78.1% |
| Forgotten Syria | .91 | 12.9% |
| U.N. Response | .94 | 42.4% |
| U.S. Response | .99 | 40.4% |
| Tent Cities | .97 | 38.3% |

Notes: Frames were coded as present or absent. The percent coded present indicates the frame was employed in the article.

V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine news coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis from 2011-2018. Specifically, it investigated how three mainstream news publications (*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Los Angeles Times*) framed the Syrian refugee crisis and the overall tone of coverage used. It also evaluated if coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis changed over time.

Results of this study indicated overall tone of coverage surrounding Syrian refugees became more positive over time. The most negative coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis appeared in 2011-2013, and the most positive coverage appeared during the years 2015 and 2016. These findings did not support Hypothesis 1 because overall tone of coverage became more positive over time. Past research has shown the opposite to be true. The press sometimes acts as cheerleaders when covering a conflict at the start (Aday, 2005), and then tone of coverage becomes more negative over time when the welcome culture begins to subside (Haigh, 2014). Though, previous studies focused on conflict, they did not evaluate coverage of refugees over time as this study did, which could explain the difference in outcome. Investigating coverage pertaining to refugees instead of the overall conflict had a significant impact on the results. Of the 389 stories analyzed, the majority of the articles' datelines were in countries other than the U.S. or Syria meaning much of the coverage was most likely written from the 'front lines' where refugees were just barely crossing borders, fleeing for their lives. Refugees were seen as victims of the violence occurring in Syria as opposed to being viewed as illegal immigrants coming in to drain valuable resources as they may have been depicted in the U.S. (Fryberg et al., 2011). Several datelines were also from Geneva which houses one of

the largest refugee centers in the world as well as a major U.N. headquarters. This could have also been a contributing factor to the type of coverage because articles were more likely to focus on the humanitarian crises aspect of the war and how to provide aid for asylum seekers (Cmeci, 2017).

This study also analyzed the most common types of frames employed in news coverage surrounding the Syrian refugee crisis. Hypothesis 2 predicted the most common frames used in the newspaper coverage would be the conflict frame and the attribution of responsibility frame. A conflict frame shows a form of conflict between “individuals, groups, institutions, or countries” (Semetko, De Vreese, & Peter, 2000, p. 95). A responsibility frame presents an issue or problem with the purpose of attributing “responsibility for its cause or solution to either the government or to an individual or group” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 96). The results indicated the most common frame employed was the foreign government frame (how foreign governments were responding to the Syrian refugee crisis). The second most common frame used was the conflict frame, followed by the human-interest frame, U.N. response to the crisis, and U.S. response to the crisis which were present in almost half of the articles. The responsibility frame was apparent in less than 30 percent of the articles studied. These findings only partially support Hypothesis 2 as the conflict frame was one of the two most common frames employed, but the responsibility frame was not employed as frequently as some of the other frame categories.

Research examining other types of humanitarian crises did find media commonly use conflict frames (Bradimore & Bauder, 2011) while other studies discovered human-interest and responsibility frames to be more prevalent (Sunata & Yıldız, 2018). The

current study suggests conflict frames are apparent across different types of humanitarian crises, but responsibility frames are less likely to be used in coverage surrounding refugees. Responsibility frames may not have been used because the coverage began during the Arab Spring which highlighted citizens protesting for their democratic rights alongside other oppressed nations such as Egypt and Tunisia. Of course, Assad didn't hesitate to shut these protests down swiftly and violently in hopes of snuffing out any scent of rebellion in Syria. This could mean more articles were concerned with the aftermath and response to the crisis rather than focusing on who was responsible. These results are significant because framing can be used to help define and solve problems as well as shape public opinion (Knight, 1999). Therefore, the most common type of frames utilized in news coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis define the most prominent issues and could suggest a potential effect on public attitudes toward Syrian refugees.

This research investigated the depiction of Syrian refugees in news coverage. Hypothesis 3 predicted Syrian refugees would be depicted negatively in the newspaper coverage. However, the results showed the depiction was more positive than negative. These findings do not support previous research which found refugees are often depicted as outsiders or intruders (Esses, Medianu, & Lawson, 2013). However, the findings do align with studies suggesting media portray refugees as victims during crises (Sunata & Yıldız, 2018). The coverage analyzed in this study was often discussing Syrian refugees as victims of war and crime, desperately in need of asylum.

The study also analyzed potential changes in coverage over time. Research Question 1 asked if the coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis changed over time. The results indicated there were significant differences over time for overall frame and tone of

coverage. There were no significant findings for depiction of Syrian refugees. When looking at the specific frames which changed over time, the conflict frame was most common in 2013 and least common in 2018. This can be attributed to the amount of coverage focusing on the actual Syrian Civil War at its beginning (2011) and later coverage (2016-2018) focusing more on the refugees themselves. The security frame was most apparent in 2015 and least apparent in 2011. This shift supports the notion that President Trump's early campaigning (2015) to send Syrian refugees back to Syria had a direct effect on the tone of coverage used ("Trump: I Would Send Syrian Refugees Home," 2015). This shift in tone suggests media outlets are prone to agenda-setting instead of providing the public with neutral coverage. This is also supported by the significant difference in the U.S. response frame which was employed more frequently in 2015. These findings are significant because they show a clear shift in media coverage during a major political campaign.

Limitations and Future Recommendations

This study had several limitations. First, the term 'Syrian refugees' was not a very good search term to use for the Nexis Uni archives. In order to find articles discussing Syrian refugees, the term 'Syria' was used. Only articles mentioning Syria in relation to foreign policy, but not referencing refugees specifically. Several of the articles that mentioned Syrian refugees only mentioned them one time. These articles were not used in the analysis. Often the stories pulled were op-eds, letters or commentary pieces, but these articles were not used in the analysis. Future studies could analyze the Syrian refugee crisis until it is complete for a more significant look at the progression of the crisis, instead of only seven years as this study did. Research could also look at a shift in

coverage. Recently the coverage has been about fighting ISIS in Syria rather than the Assad regime. It is unclear when that shift was made, but as the attention shifted and the eighth anniversary approaches, it is worth investigating. Somewhere the focus of the story shifted, and it is worth investigating when that happened. It would also be worth investigating the reports of chemical weapons on Syrian citizens. The current study did not track patterns in tone and frame tied to this type of event, but future research might find differences in the one and frame of coverage once Assad used chemical weapons. Future studies could also specifically compare the coverage of Syrian refugees in the United States with the coverage of Syrian refugees in Europe. Finally, it is worth comparing the coverage of Syrian refugees to other groups of refugees to see if the press did rally around them since their government destroyed their homes. All of the aforementioned future directional studies could also be applied to a different medium such as social media and could analyze how this coverage would eventually affect the attitudes of a common news consumer.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study examined news coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis to better understand the way in which media outlets report on humanitarian crises and how this may change over time. Refugees were depicted more positively than they were negatively. Tone of coverage became more positive over time and the most common frames employed were the foreign government frame and the conflict frame. The coverage did shift over time and suggests certain presidential candidates may affect the tone of news coverage surrounding refugees. This research provides a better understanding of how media can become prone to governmental agenda-setting in times of humanitarian crises, specifically in relation to foreign refugees and asylum seekers.

These findings lend themselves to an even bigger picture in terms of agenda-setting and framing during humanitarian crises because citizen's attitudes and opinions towards specific groups of people or events are formed by the information they read (Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Nisbet & Lewenstein, 2002). Understanding how stories surrounding the Syrian conflict are framed will help determine the depth of the salient information citizens have available (Eveland & Seo, 2007). The information journalists chose to provide and the information they chose to omit when discussing Syrian refugees may have determined where citizens attribute blame (Todd, Harris, Knight, & Worosz, 2008). This research will aid in future studies surrounding public opinions toward Syrian refugees in the U.S. because there is limited research analyzing media frames surrounding the Syrian refugee crisis across three major U.S. news publications.

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