

Contextualizing the Crisis: The Framing of Syrian Refugees in Canadian Print Media

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Introduction

Since the outbreak of war in 2011, coverage of conflict in Syria has inundated Canadian news networks with depictions of chaos and depravity. The escalation of violence and subsequent mass displacement of Syrian people has raised many questions regarding Canada's response to the conflict, particularly pertaining to intervention, foreign aid and resettlement. As a hotly contested topic, predominantly during the 2015 federal election, the unrest in Syria fueled considerable debate within government and among the public regarding Canada's response to a country in crisis.

This article examines the framing of the Syrian refugee crisis in Canadian print media from January 1, 2012, to December 31, 2016, in eight English language major dailies. Using automated coding and cluster analyses, this project assesses how Canadian newspapers framed the conflict and resettlement of refugees in Canada,¹ finding that the coverage shifts from conflict-dominated representations of the Syrian people to more humanizing depictions of refugees' families and the services provided them following the release of the photo of three-year-old Alan Kurdi's body and the subsequent focus on refugee resettlement in the election and post-election periods.

Media framing is broadly understood as the selection of "some aspects of a perceived reality to make them more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993: 52). Effectively, frames communicate,

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implicitly or explicitly, specific interpretations regarding causes and solutions to issues in the news. In the case of the Syrian refugee crisis, frames that emphasize security concerns or humanitarian considerations may shape readers' opinions of the resettlement efforts and their thoughts on how Canada ought to respond to the conflict. As such, to gain a better understanding of how Canadians formulate their opinions on Syrian newcomers, it is important to examine the lenses that are used to discuss and evaluate the crisis in Canadian news media.

In addition to understanding the frames that are used in the coverage of the crisis, it is also important to assess if and how the frames change over the course of the conflict and resettlement process. News frames are not static and can respond to shifts in the social and political context. Assessing the frequency of the news frames across time can give considerable insight into the ways that specific events in the conflict or, in the Canadian political context, can affect shifts in Canadians' opinions about the crisis. Similarly, exploring differences in the use of frames across the selected newspapers can help us understand if and how there were different concerns regarding the conflict and resettlement process in specific regions within Canada.

This article addresses four central questions: 1) What are the most common frames used in Canadian print media to discuss the Syrian refugee crisis? 2) Do the frames change over time, particularly around the Canadian federal election of 2015? 3) Do the frames vary by newspaper? 4) What is the tone of the news regarding the crisis, and does the tone change over time and/or across news sources?

Principally, this research finds that there are six distinct frames, including conflict, citizenship, services, family, religion and human rights, that are used in varying degrees to discuss the Syrian refugee crisis in the selected newspapers. The conflict frame is the most prominent lens for depicting the crisis prior to the 2015 election. The post-election period demonstrates a marked shift in coverage that focuses more intensely on questions regarding citizenship and integration. Following the election, news coverage concentrates more on refugees' family and home lives in their transition to Canada, closely attending to children, education and language training. Framing also differs between national and regional newspapers, which I suggest may be reflective of different newspapers' political leanings, as well as diverse cities' interaction and contact with Syrian refugees. Finally, while the tone of coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis is generally negative (and not unexpectedly so, given the nature of the topic), news stories are decidedly more positive in the post-election period, keeping in mind that there are significant differences in tone across outlets.

News media play a critical role in reflecting and reproducing depictions of refugees among the Canadian public. The results of this analysis underscore how the framing of refugees can change in response to the political agendas of policy makers and decisive events in international conflicts; the

Abstract. This project examines the framing of the Syrian refugee crisis in Canadian print media from January 1, 2012, to December 31, 2016, in eight English-language major dailies. Using automated coding to uncover central themes in the coverage, this analysis explores the changes in news frames over the course of the conflict and the concomitant federal election in Canada, as well as across regional and national news sources. The results indicate that the conflict frame dominates the coverage of Syrian refugees in the pre-election period but shifts markedly following the release of the iconic Alan Kurdi photo toward a more humanizing depiction of refugee families and their resettlement. This analysis speaks to the importance of news media in reflecting and reproducing depictions of refugees among the Canadian public, highlighting the value of examining changes in the portrayals of refugees over time and across news outlets.

Résumé. Ce projet examine la formulation dont la presse écrite canadienne a rendu compte de la crise des réfugiés syriens du 1er janvier 2012 au 31 décembre 2016 dans huit grands quotidiens anglophones. Au moyen d'une codification automatique employée pour repérer les thèmes clés des reportages, cette analyse explore les changements intervenus dans les cadres d'information au cours du conflit et en coïncidence avec l'élection fédérale au Canada, ainsi qu'au travers des sources d'information nationales. Les résultats indiquent un encadrement général du conflit dans la couverture médiatique de la situation des réfugiés syriens pendant la période préélectorale, avec cependant un changement net après la publication de la photo emblématique du petit Aylan Kurdi marquant une description humanisée de la situation des familles et de leur réinstallation. Cette analyse confirme l'importance des médias d'information dans la réflexion et la reproduction des représentations des réfugiés parmi le public canadien, en faisant ressortir la valeur que revêt l'examen des changements survenus dans la description de la situation des réfugiés au fil du temps et dans les médias d'information.

iconic photo of Alan Kurdi and subsequent focus on resettlement efforts in the Canadian election served as a pivotal point in shifting the image of Syrian refugees in Canadian public discourse. The dominance of the conflict frame in the pre-election period—particularly, its portrayal of the Syrian people as embroiled in war taking place “over there” —conveyed refugees as removed and distant at best, a potential threat at worst; however, as this analysis shows, the emergence of the Kurdi photo and the ensuing efforts to increase refugee intake stimulated news stories that more closely examined refugees’ families, children, hardships and the services provided them. This study and its results speak to the continued need to evaluate narratives about refugees as “threatening” or “undeserving” and the ways in which journalists, politicians and the broader public can shift the conversation toward more humanizing depictions of their circumstances.

Refugees in News Media

Exploring the coverage of refugees and immigrants in news media is an increasingly important subfield in migration studies, particularly in understanding how citizens formulate and justify their opinions toward newcomers. Media frames are not simply tools of persuasion but, rather, analytical lenses

from which issues are characterized and understood (Nelson et al., 1997; Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007) and they exert direct effects on attitudes and policies (Dalton et al., 1998; Domke et al., 1998; Iyengar, 1990, 1991; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Winter, 2008). In contemporary migration research, Banting suggests that there is a growing need to analyze media framing on issues surrounding immigration as “much of the ‘flash’ potential of migration as a political issue undoubtedly flows from such processes” (2015: 7). News coverage can be particularly influential over public opinion about international events, specifically in relation to far-off events about which domestic audiences have little or no first-hand knowledge. In contexts where citizens may have limited personal connections to or interactions with immigrant communities, news media can play an integral role in shaping perceptions of newcomers’ deservingness and legitimacy (Lawlor, 2015a).

Examining comparative literature on the framing of immigration, it is clear that specific lenses, especially those pertaining to security and terrorism, dominate print and television news. Research in the American context demonstrates that the security threat frame is highly prominent in news coverage of immigration (Fryberg et al., 2012; Merolla et al., 2013) and Benson (2010) argues that framing immigration as an issue of security facilitates an emphasis on episodic events, such as instances of immigration fraud, that disengage the public from attending to more thematic debates on immigration policy.

When it comes to research on immigration in Canadian news media, Andrea Lawlor (2015a) suggests that we have a more “piecemeal” understanding of how media framing works. Several analyses have produced troubling results (Abu-Laban and Garber, 2005; Henry and Tator, 2002), demonstrating that Canadian media similarly focus on the supposed “threats” of immigration, including scarcity of resources and employment, immigration fraud and immigration as an impediment to nation building (Fleras, 2011). However, Lawlor (2015a) argues that media framing of immigration is not static and is largely affected by policy changes and events over time. In her automated content analysis of news coverage of immigration from 1999 to 2013, Lawlor finds that immigration is generally related to five thematic issues in Canadian coverage: refugees and asylum, illegality and security, economic and labour considerations, social services, and diversity. Studying the tone of the articles pertaining to the different themes, Lawlor reports that while coverage pertaining to security is more negative following 9/11, the framing of immigration in regard to social services, the economy and labour market and diversity shows a more positive tone from 2004 onward. Effectively, the tone of immigration coverage is conditional on the framing of articles; not all coverage is negative, rather, tone is much more dynamic depending on the topic at hand.

Newly emerging research also demonstrates the importance of disaggregating immigration as a category to focus more specifically on how various classes of immigrants are framed differently in news media, and

a key difference is between immigrants and refugees. Public opinion data demonstrate a marked difference in support for immigrants and refugees in Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012). Immigrants are generally perceived as contributing to the economy while refugees face considerable scrutiny regarding the legitimacy of their claims (Environics, 2016) and are often seen as “taking advantage” of social programs and benefits. In their comparative analysis on the framing of immigrants and refugees in Canadian news media, Lawlor and Tolley (2017) find that perceptions of legitimacy are differently communicated in news. While immigrants are generally framed in connection to the economy, refugees are often depicted as security threats. News articles on refugees are more likely to question the validity of refugees’ claims, focus disproportionately on their national origins and be written in a more negative tone.

News coverage of refugees is most often episodic and is rendered “hard news” when a large or sudden influx of asylum seekers or refugees arrives in host countries. These periods are often labeled as “crises” and, as such, draw significant attention to the supposed security threats and economic costs of resettlement (Hier and Greenberg, 2002). During these times, media frequently focus on the administrative and economic demands, as well as perceptions of refugees’ genuineness in their claims (Nickels, 2007). Coverage of refugees is often backgrounded by questions about illegality and the framing of the crisis is inherently racialized in news outlets’ ascriptions of the ethnically diverse “other” (Hier and Greenberg, 2002; Bradimore and Bauder, 2011). Refugees are frequently dehumanized, coined as “queue-jumpers,” terrorists and security threats (Esses et al., 2013; Gale, 2004; Krishnamurti, 2013). Although human interest stories can personalize refugees’ narratives of struggle and attempt to mitigate perceptions of threat and danger (Figenschou and Thorbjørnsrud, 2015), often refugees are portrayed as “poor victims” that are unable to achieve their social and economic goals (Steimel, 2010).

Recent studies on immigrant and refugee news framing have also started to explore differences in news frames across news sources to determine if local or national news outlets use different lenses. Although Lawlor (2015b) observes no significant differences between national and local news coverage of immigration in Canada, in their analysis specifically on coverage of refugees in Australia, Cooper and colleagues (2017) find that the news source can significantly affect the framing and tone of news articles. National newspapers in Australia are more likely to frame refugees in a negative manner while local newspapers offer more positive, humanizing stories. Likely reflective of the differences in the types of issues that national and local news sources focus on, Cooper and colleagues’ evidence suggests that there is perhaps a growing need to more closely assess how different types of news outlets frame issues surrounding refugees and migration depending on their intended audience, resources and scope.

While the Syrian refugee crisis remains an ongoing and evolving case for analysis, some early research on the crisis indicates a pressing need to address media framing in order to understand public attitudes toward the Syrian people. Although a significant proportion of news media, and increasingly content on social media, portray the situation as a humanitarian catastrophe requiring support, these forums have also been used to express considerable backlash against refugees. In their analysis of Twitter and the hashtag #refugeesNOTwelcome, Rettberg and Gajjala (2015) find that anti-refugee campaigns on social media disproportionately focus on male refugees, erasing the experiences of women and children and conveying male Syrian refugees as rapists and terrorists. Depictions of “predatory sexuality” and “undisciplined aggression” (180) continue to fuel threats regarding security and reinforce the dehumanization of refugees in news coverage. Similarly, Tyyska and colleagues’ analysis (2017) of Canadian news coverage on the Syrian refugee crisis suggests that male refugees were often cast as “security threats” and likewise noted that female refugees’ experiences were silenced across major news outlets. Guided by postcolonial, neoliberal and feminist theories, Tyyska and colleagues’ assessment of news coverage highlighted the prominence of “Canadian values” and the positive representation of the Canadian government and public alongside depictions of “vulnerable” and “needy” refugees.

Although the literature on the representation of refugees in news media is growing, there are considerable gaps on the framing of refugees, and specifically of the Syrian crisis, that this analysis aims to fill. First, while new scholarship on the coverage of refugees speaks to the importance of assessing differences in local and national news sources, using a mix of regional and national publications on the Syrian refugee crisis in Canada can help to determine if, and how, there are differences in frames pertaining to refugees at a regional level in Canada. Similarly, the timeline of the Syrian refugee crisis, corresponding with the Canadian federal election, allows for an opportunity to examine how the change in government is linked to changes in the frames that are used to convey the crisis. While Tyyska and colleagues’ project sheds light on some themes that emerged in news stories on the crisis, this analysis offers a robust assessment of a large news sample and seeks to explore if and how the news frames changed in response to events in the Canadian political context and the larger Syrian war. While many refer to the election and the release of the Kurdi photo as a pivotal moment in the refugee crisis, this content study aims to explore if there were changes in the media frames that occurred in these periods and if this marked a sustained shift in the coverage. Effectively, this analysis aims to build on this existing literature by exploring not only the frames and tone of the news articles, but also the ways in which news sources and political events or circumstances may exert effects on the depiction of refugees in Canadian news.

Data and Methods

To conduct an automated content analysis on the coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis in Canada, I compiled a sample of articles from January 1, 2012, to December 31, 2016,² from the *Globe and Mail*, the *National Post*, the *Toronto Star*, the *Vancouver Sun*, the *Calgary Herald*, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, the *Montreal Gazette* and the *Chronicle-Herald*. The *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post* are national broadsheet newspapers and the *Toronto Star*, the *Vancouver Sun*, the *Calgary Herald*, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, the *Montreal Gazette* and the *Chronicle-Herald* were selected as English-language newspapers with the highest readership rates in specific regions across Canada (namely, Western Canada, the Prairies, Ontario, Quebec, and Atlantic Canada). These papers were chosen to assess if there are differences in the coverage of the refugee crisis between a) national and regional newspapers; b) national newspapers themselves; and c) the regional papers themselves. Many news content studies in Canada demonstrate that, despite having slightly different ideological orientations and targeted regional audiences, there are few differences in coverage across outlets (Lawlor, 2015b; Lawlor and Tolley, 2017). However, I opted to include a variety of news sources to examine if, in the specific case of the Syrian refugee crisis, the priorities or issue agendas are communicated differently in the publications under study. In terms of the resettlement process, regions experienced different interactions with refugee intake and, as such, examining the differences across a variety of news sources may help to better understand how various regions interpreted the refugee crisis.

In terms of acquiring a news sample, I used the Canadian Major Dailies database (ProQuest, formerly Canadian Newsstand) to search for articles that included the terms Syria*, refugee*, and Canad*, to obtain a sample that specifically addressed Syrian refugees and Canada's role in the conflict and crisis. After removing duplicates and election primers,³ the search yielded a total of 4473 articles. The specific article count for each newspaper and time period are included in Tables 1 and 2.

The objectives of this analysis were 1) to explore what frames exist in the coverage; 2) to determine the frequencies of the frames, particularly in regard to the independent variables (news source and time frame); and 3) to assess the tone of the coverage, also in connection with the independent variables. In order to understand the coherent lenses that exist in the coverage, I opted for an inductive approach to content analysis, using hierarchical clustering to determine what frames exist in the news sample. As discussed by Pennebaker and colleagues (2003), word pattern analysis can provide a bottom-up approach to understanding how words covary, signaling important information about the content and tone of a text. Instead of applying an external dictionary to the sample and assessing the frequency of frames that are devised by the

TABLE 1
Data Set by Newspaper

Newspaper	Number of Articles	Proportion of Total Articles Published by Newspaper in Timeline
<i>The Globe and Mail</i>	888	0.47%
<i>National Post</i>	607	0.29%
<i>Toronto Star</i>	962	0.51%
<i>Vancouver Sun</i>	455	0.26%
<i>Calgary Herald</i>	362	0.18%
<i>Winnipeg Free Press</i>	341	0.33%
<i>Montreal Gazette</i>	420	0.40%
<i>Chronicle-Herald</i>	362	0.31%

TABLE 2
Data Set by Time Period

Time Period	Number of Articles
<i>Pre-Election</i> (January 1, 2012–July 31, 2015)	743
<i>Election</i> (August 1, 2015–October 31, 2015)	940
<i>Post-Election</i> (November 1, 2015–December 31, 2016)	2790

researcher, employing an inductive approach allows the researcher to assess what types of frames exist organically in the news sample and how they relate to one another. Using WordStat, a content analysis software program created by Provalis Research, I explored the most frequent terms and phrases in the corpus and selected those that were substantively related to issues surrounding migration; the goal of this step is to build a collection of terms and phrases that are connected directly to the issue under study and to then assess if and how those terms are used in conjunction with one another in internally coherent frames. Effectively, this meant compiling a set of terms that were meaningfully connected to the refugee crisis and using various features of the program to determine if there were consistent patterns in the clustering of words or phrases that constituted distinct themes. With WordStat's dendrogram function, a feature of the program that uses Jaccard's coefficient to analyze the co-occurrence of selected words and phrases, I was able to determine what clusters of words and phrases existed in the sample and how these clusters were grouped or connected to one another. The resulting dendrogram produced six coherent frames,⁴ outlined in Table 3.

Tone, in this paper, represents the general sentiment of an article: Does the article convey a more negative or positive viewpoint in regard to the topic at hand? Negativity measures the use of terms or phrases that describe the topic in a more pessimistic, gloomy manner; conversely, positivity is a measure of the terms or phrases that describe the situation in a lighter, upbeat manner. In this analysis, tone does not specifically measure attitudes

TABLE 3
Description of the Frames

Frame	Description	Example from Text
<i>Conflict</i>	Encompasses discussion of the conflict, military, ISIS, and aid; this included discussion on the Syrian war and military action/aid on the ground.	<p>“Canadian aircraft are making what Harper describes as an important contribution to the fight against ISIS... Harper calls the mission vital and successful” (<i>Chronicle-Herald</i>, September 2015).</p> <p>“Both Mulcair and Trudeau want to back away from military action against ISIS, despite the clear threat the terrorist organization poses... Backing away is no strategy - it simply makes Canada look weak” (<i>Calgary Herald</i>, October 2015).</p>
<i>Citizenship</i>	Encompasses discussion of citizenship, immigration, and sponsorship; this included discussion of the vetting process and refugees’ entry into Canada.	<p>“Waiting time for citizenship is about 12 months, far more for ‘non-routine’ cases, 36 months” (<i>Toronto Star</i>, October 2015).</p> <p>“All Syrian resettlement applications and sponsorships are being processed on a priority basis” (<i>National Post</i>, September 2015).</p>
<i>Family</i>	Encompasses discussion of families and children, including children’s safety, schooling and health.	<p>“In the ongoing Syrian conflict, the numbers of vulnerable children are truly staggering” (<i>National Post</i>, September 2015).</p> <p>“The camp...takes newly arrived Syrian children, aged 5 to 14, and brings them together to learn about art, teamwork and making friends” (<i>Toronto Star</i>, August 2016).</p>
<i>Services</i>	Encompasses discussion of resettlement services, housing and work.	<p>“Will the government increase the resources available to agencies providing settlement and employment services to refugees?” (<i>National Post</i>, September 2015).</p> <p>“It helped him understand the importance of making sure they have jobs lined up upon arrival” (<i>Montreal Gazette</i>, August 2016).</p>
<i>Human Rights</i>	Encompasses discussions of human rights and social justice.	<p>“Such groups continue to experience serious human rights violations” (<i>Toronto Star</i>, September 2015).</p> <p>“Basic human rights remain values shared amongst all Canadians, regardless of their political affiliation” (<i>Toronto Star</i>, October 2015).</p>

Continued

TABLE 3
Continued

Frame	Description	Example from Text
<i>Religion</i>	Encompasses discussions on religion (particularly Muslim and Christian faiths) and religiosity.	“Asked about the many refugees from many different religions, including moderate Muslims, facing persecution, Harper suggested his policy does not ignore them” (<i>Toronto Star</i> , September 2015). “Christian Arabs, at least they’re not Muslims” (<i>Toronto Star</i> , September 2015).

toward refugees; rather, it serves as an indicator for the general outlook of the news coverage. Although the topic under examination within these articles—the Syrian war and resulting human suffering—is expected to be quite negative in its feeling, it is important to measure if this sentiment shifts over the timeline: Does the tone become more positive in its outlook as the coverage moves from a focus on the war to a focus on the integration of refugees into Canadian society? Here, the tone represents the “ambience,” so to speak, of the articles and stands to measure if the coverage changes in mood or character over the timeline of the study. To determine the tone of the articles, I used the WordStat Sentiment Dictionary (version 1.2) to examine whether the articles conveyed a more positive or negative outlook. This dictionary encompasses a series of negative and positive word patterns (that account for negations in the proximate words) that can capture the general tone of a text. The dictionary is calibrated for use within the parameters of the specific topic under examination by adding and removing domain-specific words that may skew the results and identifying mistaken predictions.⁵ Using paragraphs containing the terms Syria* and/or refuge* as the unit of analysis, the net tone for each article was calculated using Young and Soroka’s formula (2012): net tone = (# of positive words/all words) minus (# of negative words/all words).

Although automated coding is a highly efficient approach to content analysis, it can be subject to error given the complexities of language use in news media. As Tolley (2015) observes in her work on racial mediation in Canadian news, there are many trade-offs in the use of automated and manual coding in text analysis. Although automated coding cannot replace the careful readings of texts (Grimmer and Stewart, 2013), it can effectively classify and categorize central themes across a large population of texts, complementing the close readings of writings by uncovering the extent of such patterns in a much larger sample. While the frame dictionaries in my analysis include specific retrieval rules to ensure that the program yields the most correct usage of the terms under study,⁶ there are concerns

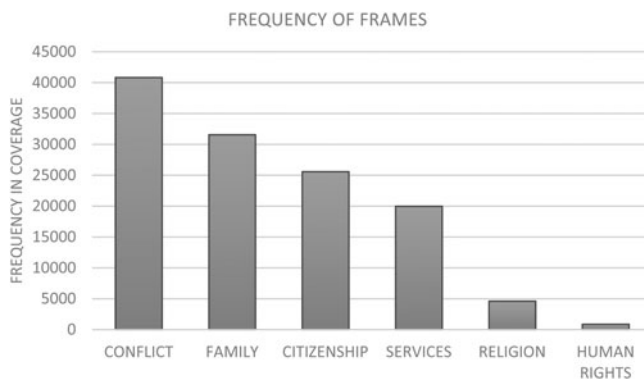
regarding the semantic validity of automated coding results and the assumptions that researchers read into the operative relationship between the variables and observed text (Lowe and Benoit, 2013). To combat this, Grimmer and Stewart (2013) maintain that automated coding requires considerable validation; this entails a human-coded check to ensure that the dictionaries are accurately capturing the appropriate interpretations of the words and phrases comprising the frames. Thus, to validate my results, I followed Lawlor and Tolley's validation procedure (2017); consistent with their research, I conducted a manual check on a random sample of 5 per cent of the articles in the study ($n = 224$) to ensure that, in practice, the coded terms accurately reflect the frames that they are intended to represent. Revisions were made until more than 80 per cent of the frame uses in the random sample(s) were consistent with the automated coding results. A similar process was used for validating the sentiment dictionary (consistent with the Provalis Research guidelines for use).

Results

Frames in news media

As depicted in Table 3, the hierarchal clustering analysis revealed six prominent frames in the reporting of the Syrian refugee crisis, including conflict, citizenship, family, services, human rights and religion. Figure 1 indicates the prominence of each frame in the news sample (the total mentions of terms in each of the frames across all articles in the sample). The conflict frame is clearly the most referenced frame, followed by attention to families, citizenship and services, in that order. Although human rights

FIGURE 1
Total Frequency of Frames



constituted an internally consistent and coherent frame in the dendrogram, it was used minimally in reporting on the refugee crisis. Similarly, although religion was not a particularly prominent frame in the full sample, exploring its frequency across time and news source does depict specific patterns of use. These frames are fairly consistent with Lawlor and Tolley's findings (2017), particularly regarding the use of service, human rights, and ethnicity and religion frames for refugees in Canada.

Frame frequencies: time periods and news sources

The next step was to examine framing across time and across newspapers. Upon examining the results of the frame frequencies by month, it was clear that shifts in the coverage tended to occur around the 2015 federal election; as such, I have broken the timeline down into three specific periods: pre-election (January 1, 2012–July 31, 2015), election (August 1, 2015–October 31, 2015), and post-election (November 1, 2015–December 31, 2016). These time periods coincide with important events in relation to Canada's role in the conflict and resettlement process, as outlined in [Table 4](#).

To measure differences in the frequencies of the frames across the selected time periods, I compared the mean use of the frames per article across the time periods with a series of one-way ANOVA and post-hoc tests to measure the significance of changes in the use of the frames.⁷ The mean use of the frame represents the average number of keywords/references to each frame that appear in an article. [Figure 2](#) provides the means plots for each of the six frames across the time periods and [Figure 3](#) depicts the proportion of the frame frequencies in each time period.

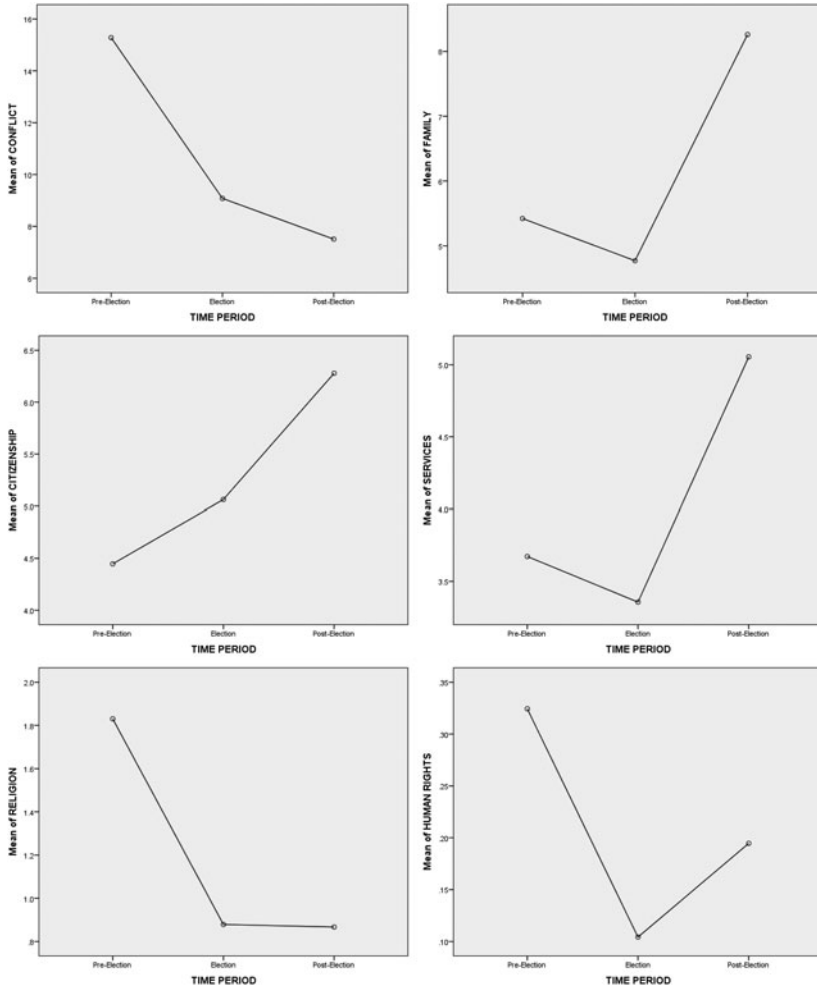
Although the conflict frame remains prominent over the course of the timeline relative to the other frames, it decreases markedly during and after the election period ($p < .001$). This is likely reflective of the attention to resettlement commitments following the release of the Kurdi photo and campaign promises during the election, as well as the major shift under the new Liberal government to quickly take in 25,000 refugees. Similarly, in the post-election period, there is an increase in attention to citizenship ($p < .001$) and refugee services ($p < .001$), focusing largely on housing and employment opportunities. Likewise, there is also a significant shift following the election in assessing the impact of the conflict and the resettlement efforts on families. Especially following Kurdi's death, the family frame gained significant traction ($p < .001$) and centred prominently on the experiences of children. Specifically, examining the breakdown in the use of the frames within the election period supports the findings that the Kurdi photo led to considerable shifts in the coverage: evident in [Figure 4](#), there is a marked decrease in the use of the conflict frame in the weeks that follow Kurdi's death that is sustained across the remainder of the election period and into the post-election period ($p < .001$).

TABLE 4
Timeline of Syrian Refugee Crisis and Resettlement in Canada

Time Period	Events
<i>Pre-Election</i> <i>January 1,</i> <i>2012–July 31, 2015</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Groups in Canada call for government help with the displaced population in Syria by hastening the asylum claim process (2012). – Conservative government states it will not resettle refugees until there is an official call for assistance from the UN; government makes changes to the refugee policy regarding private sponsorship, known as the “group of five” policy, and states that refugees must be registered with the UN in order to be considered (2012). – Canadian embassy closes in Damascus (2012). – UN makes a formal request for states to take in refugees (2013); Conservatives set a target to resettle 1,300 refugees by the end of 2014 and miss their target. – Lifeline Syria starts and sets a goal to take in 1,000 refugees through private sponsorship (2015). – Conservative government increases its target to 10,000 refugees but remains under fire for failing to meet original targets
<i>Election</i> <i>August 1,</i> <i>2015–October 31, 2015</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Coinciding with the election call in August 2015, iconic pictures of three-year-old Alan Kurdi’s body are released in early September; news investigations find that Kurdi’s family had applied for refuge in Canada and were rejected. – Conservatives exempt applications from Iraq and Syria from the group of five rule to help alleviate wait times. – Throughout the election, all parties campaign to increase the intake of refugees; Liberals set target for 25,000 refugees by end of 2015 and win the election.
<i>Post-Election</i> <i>November 1,</i> <i>2015–December 31,</i> <i>2016</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Liberals take office and initiate plans to resettle 25,000 Syrians in Canada by February 2016; they reach their goal, with private sponsorship accounting for approximately one-third of intake – Liberals close major processing centres in Jordan and Lebanon and continue processing private sponsorship applications (February/March 2016). – Prime Minister Trudeau speaks at the UN summit in New York, encouraging states to increase refugee intake (September 2016). – Many human-interest stories emerge in December 2016 to follow-up, one year later, with refugees who settled in Canada in 2015.

Similarly, there is an increase in the services frame following Kurdi’s death ($p < .005$) and, perhaps most telling, a pronounced surge in the family frame during this time ($p < .001$). Moving into the post-election period, after the Liberals hit their intake target goal, many news stories explored refugees’ new home life in Canada, attending to refugee children’s transition to school and language training programs. Effectively, these findings support the argument that the photo of Kurdi and the subsequent attention

FIGURE 2
Means Plots—Frame Frequency per Article by Time Period



*Graphs are not set to a standard scale, Y-axis values differ for each graph included.⁸

to resettlement efforts served as a pivotal point in the coverage, shifting the framing of refugees from stereotypical depictions of conflict and contention toward more humanizing representations of refugees' safety, family life and integration.

Although the religion frame was not a particularly common frame in the overall sample, it is clear that it was frequently used in the pre-election period ($p < .001$). This is likely reflective of the Conservative government's

FIGURE 3
Percentage of Frame References by Time Period

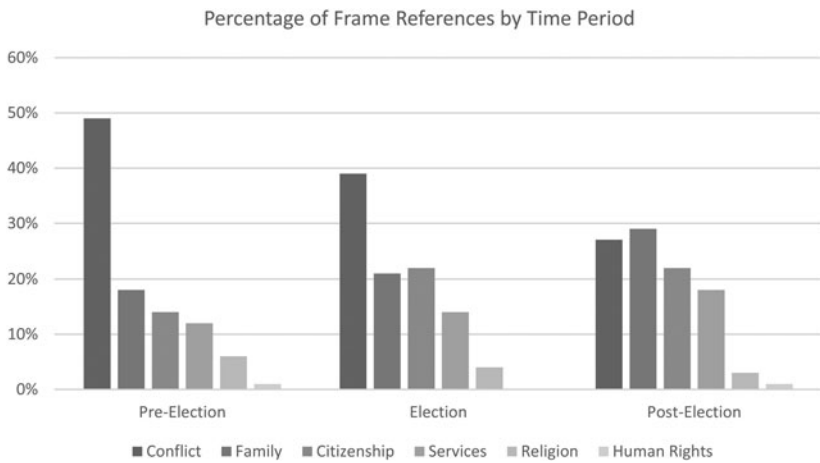
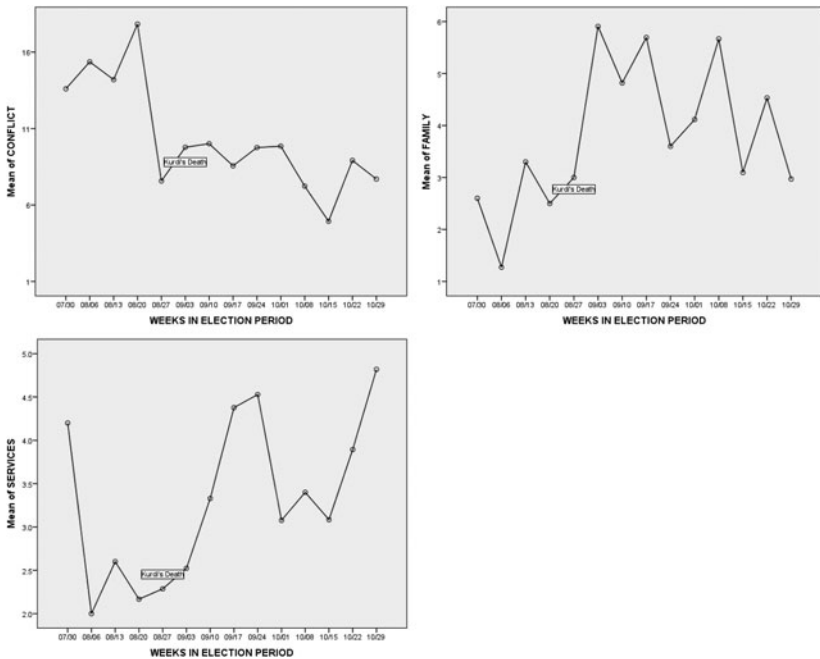


FIGURE 4
Means Plots—Frame Frequency per Article by Week in Election Period



*Graphs are not set to a standard scale, Y-axis values differ for each graph included.

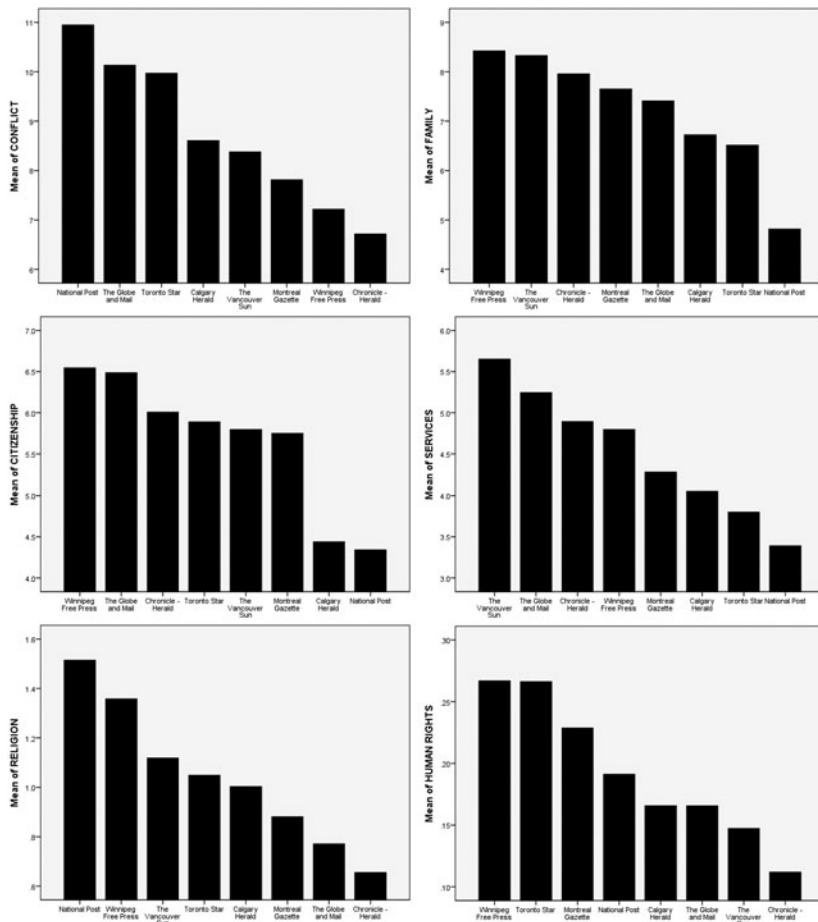
early focus on the persecution and potential prioritization of religious minorities. The religious frame was largely used in conjunction with the conflict frame, particularly in connection to concerns about terrorism, ISIS, and radicalization. Although we see a slight surge in the religion and conflict frames in the week of the terrorist attacks in Paris (November 13, 2015), the shift in the coverage is not sustained for more than two weeks in the post-election period. The human rights frame was also most prominently used during the pre-election period ($p < .001$), generally reflective of the push from the public to address the growing rights concerns in the Syrian conflict. During the pre-election period, many civil society organizations and private citizens launched efforts to increase refugee intake (for example, Lifeline Syria), calling for social justice and government action, which may account for the prominence of the human rights frame in that period.

One-way ANOVA and post-hoc tests (Tukey HSD) were also used to determine the significance of frame frequency differences a) between the national newspapers, b) between the regional newspapers, and c) between the national and regional newspapers. The means plots for the frequency of the frames by news outlet are shown in [Figure 5](#).

Focusing first on the differences in the frequency of the conflict frame, it is apparent that the national and regional newspapers discussed the Syrian war in a markedly different manner. The *National Post* and the *Globe and Mail* used the conflict frame significantly more than most of the regional papers ($p < .001$) with the exception of the *Toronto Star*.⁹ These newspapers are the most circulated newspapers in Canada and the difference between their coverage and the regional newspapers' approach may be largely reflective of their focus on the national government and international community. This is consistent with evidence from studies of refugee framing in Australia by Cooper and colleagues (2017), who suggest that national news outlets are required to focus more on government legislation and international events while regional outlets may have greater opportunities to explore the more personal, human-interest accounts of refugees' experiences. Looking at differences between the regional papers on the frequency of the conflict frame, the *Chronicle-Herald* and the *Winnipeg Free Press* use the conflict frame to a much lesser extent. These newspapers are smaller and have lower readership rates than many of the others under study; as such, this finding also appears to reinforce the notion that there may be a difference in the priorities and available resources of larger newspapers when it comes to reporting on international affairs and Canada's foreign policy agenda.

Looking at the frequencies of the citizenship frame, there is evidence of a clear gap between the national papers. The *National Post* employed this frame the least (along with the *Calgary Herald*, another paper with a reputation for conservatism in coverage), in a markedly different manner

FIGURE 5
Means Graphs—Average Frame Frequency per Article by News Source



*Graphs are not set to a standard scale, Y-axis values differ for each graph included below.

from the *Globe and Mail* ($p < .001$). This gap is also mirrored in the services frame; the *National Post* focused significantly less than the *Globe and Mail* on issues surrounding refugee intake services, housing and employment support ($p < .001$). Likewise, the religion frame is used significantly more by the *National Post* than the *Globe and Mail* ($p < .001$). Effectively, these differences between the national papers may be reflective of their ideological leanings.

Focusing on the regional newspapers' use of the citizenship and service frames also indicates that there are widespread differences

between regional subunits in their priorities regarding the refugee intake process. Although the regional papers generally used the citizenship frame to a similar extent, the *Winnipeg Free Press* was substantially more inclined to analyze issues pertaining to citizenship than the *Calgary Herald* ($p < .005$). Furthermore, the *Vancouver Sun* discussed issues pertaining to housing and services to a much greater extent than the *Toronto Star* ($p < .001$), *Calgary Herald* ($p < .001$) and *Montreal Gazette* ($p < .010$). This finding is interesting given that a) these newspapers represent four major urban centres with high populations of immigrants that appear to prioritize refugee services differently to refugee services in the context of the Syrian crisis; b) the *Toronto Star* is generally perceived as a left-of-centre newspaper and, as such, one could speculate it would be the more likely news source to focus on service issues; and c) it is not likely a reflection of editorial priorities from newspaper ownership as Postmedia Network Inc. owns the *Vancouver Sun*, *Calgary Herald*, *Montreal Gazette* and *National Post*. In explaining the prominence of the service frame in the *Vancouver Sun*, I speculate this may be tied to the primacy of housing as an issue in the Vancouver region; the service frame, which generally encompasses housing and employment, may be a more pertinent frame in the Vancouver region given the prominence of issues pertaining to Vancouver's housing market. Effectively, differences in the frequencies of the citizenship and service frames between the regional newspapers may reflect the different issues and priorities facing major cities in the diverse regions of Canada.

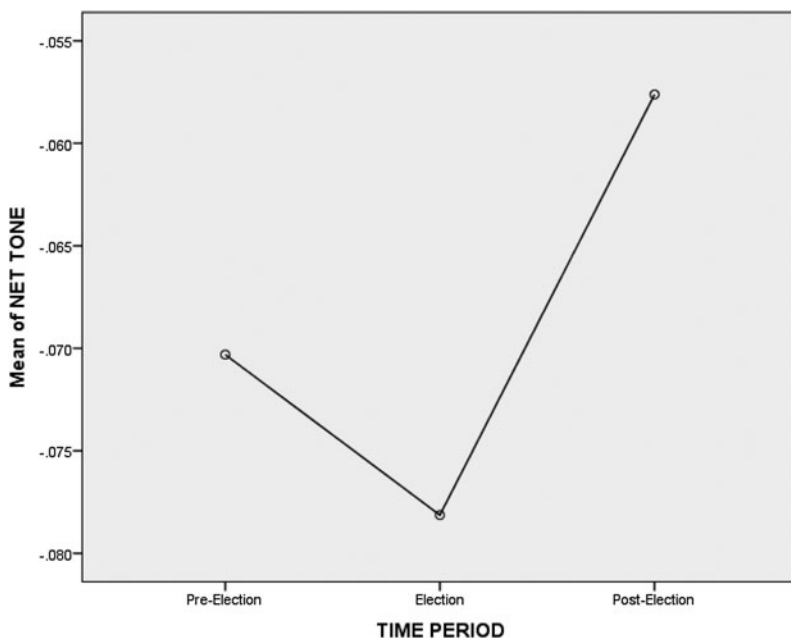
The family frame appears to be used similarly by the regional and national newspapers, with the notable exception of the *National Post*, which uses the family frame significantly less often than the other papers (the *Globe and Mail*, *Vancouver Sun*, *Calgary Herald*, *Montreal Gazette*, *Chronicle-Herald* $p < .001$; *Toronto Star* $p < .017$). This presents an interesting case where there is relative similarity among all the regional papers' use of the family frame. The use of the religion frame is also fairly consistent between all the regional newspapers. Despite the considerable gap between the *National Post* and the *Globe and Mail* in the use of this frame, the religion frame tends to be used to a similar extent across the regional papers.

Lastly, given that the human rights frame represented a small portion of the coverage on the crisis, it appears that the differences in the use of the frames across the national and regional newspapers are not statistically significant. Although the *Toronto Star* and the *Winnipeg Free Press* utilized the human rights frame more than the other papers (perhaps due to the launch of asylum advocacy groups in the Toronto region), the frame was generally used to a similar extent across all the newspapers under analysis.

Tone of coverage: time periods and news sources

The final step of the analysis was to examine the tone of the coverage and to explore if it changes over the selected time periods and/or outlets. The mean net tone for the full corpus was -0.064, meaning that, unsurprisingly, the coverage was negative overall. Using a series of one-way ANOVA and post hoc tests, the results reveal statistically significant differences across the time periods and news sources in the measures of net tone. In terms of the time periods, as is clear in Figure 6, the news coverage of the refugee crisis becomes markedly more negative during the election ($p < .001$) but more positive following the election ($p < .001$). I speculate that the tone of the coverage was most negative during the election period due to the release of Kurdi's photo; at that time, the consequences of the crisis shifted to the forefront of the coverage and brought to light the devastating realities of the conflict. Similarly, in the post-election period, the conflict frame—encapsulating more sombre and negative events—was less frequent as government priorities and subsequent news coverage quickly shifted toward resettlement efforts in Canada. The arrival of 25,000 refugees

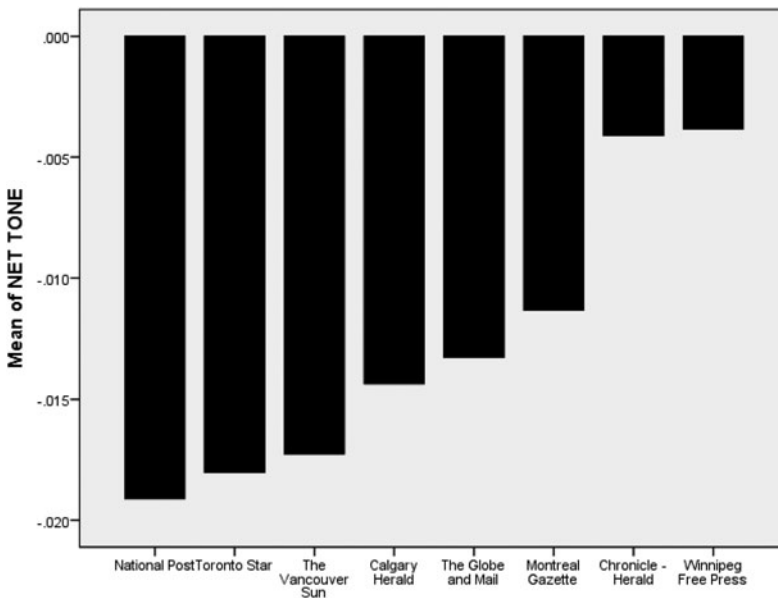
FIGURE 6
Average Net Tone per Article by Time Period



also served as a source of pride for many Canadians in the post-election period. News stories from this time may have been more positive in sentiment because they focused more intensely on refugees' personal stories and expressions of gratitude toward the Canadian government and people. Indeed, the large-scale refugee resettlement effort was part of the Trudeau government's first 100 days of "sunny ways."

In terms of differences in net tone across the publications (Figure 7), the *Winnipeg Free Press* is the most positive in their coverage of the crisis ($p < .001$), which may be explained by their less frequent use of the conflict frame. Once again, there is also a marked difference between the national newspapers in the tone of the coverage: the *National Post* was significantly more negative than the *Globe and Mail* ($p < .001$). While the prominence of the conflict frame may explain the divergence in tone for the regional news sources, there was no significant difference between the two national papers in the frequency of this frame. Effectively, I suggest that the more positive tone in the *Globe and Mail* may be due to their more frequent use of the service and family frames relative to their use of the conflict frame, occluding depictions of the war abroad with more feel-good stories in local Canadian communities.

FIGURE 7
Average Net Tone per Article by News Source



Discussion

The results of this analysis shed light on an increasingly important topic in Canadian studies of immigration and political communication. Uncovering the six distinct frames that represent lenses for understanding the refugee crisis, this analysis shows that there was a clear shift in the framing and associated tone of the Syrian refugee crisis following the 2015 federal election. This analysis explored how pivotal events in the coverage—particularly the death of Alan Kurdi and subsequent focus on refugee intake in the election—led to sustained changes in both the content and sentiment of articles on Syrian newcomers.

Similarly, consistent with Cooper and colleagues' findings (2017), this analysis has observed considerable differences in the use of frames, particularly the conflict frame, between national and regional news sources, and these differences are predominantly attributed to variation in the scope, resources and policy focus in national and regional publications. However, it is equally important to note that there are also significant differences between the national newspapers in regard to their use of select frames that I suggest are reflective of the newspapers' political leanings. Likewise, the differences in framing and tone that are observed between the regional papers—largely explained by regionally specific issue agendas, political orientations or subcultures and differing interactions with refugee intake—suggest that researchers need to more closely observe the relationship between news coverage and political attitudes in the diverse regions of Canada. These variations in the framing and tone across news sources underscore the importance of analyzing not only the differences between national, regional and local coverage of immigrants and refugees, but also exploring potential differences within the specific levels.

This analysis contributes to the growing field of immigration and media studies that are increasingly attending to the ways in which news frames and public attitudes differ in relation to the class of immigrant under examination. Focusing specifically on the framing of Syrian refugees is important because attitudes toward refugees are unstable. Syrian refugees represent the largest influx of refugees into Canada since the 1970s (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2017) and it is imperative that researchers explore how prominent news frames pertaining to their experiences with integration may shape or inform public opinion about the intake and resettlement efforts. Focusing exclusively on the Syrian refugee crisis also offers the unique opportunity to assess how turnover in government can affect the framing and tone of news pertaining to immigration and refugees; backgrounded by the election and the shift to a Liberal government, the timeline for this analysis is suggestive of the impact of parties' political orientations and priorities on the frames and tone of the

news coverage. Similarly, the large number of news sources included in the sample help to uncover the ways that different issue agendas and political leanings of various publications can affect the framing of refugees. Effectively, this analysis contributes to the growing literature on Syrian refugees in news media by contextualizing the crisis in an increasingly diverse Canada.

The results of this analysis strongly support the argument that depictions of refugees shifted with the emergence of the Kurdi photo and the subsequent focus on resettlement in the election and post-election periods. The depiction of Syrian refugees largely transitioned from a focus on refugees as outsiders amidst conflict toward portraying refugees' integration into Canadian life. Although the results of this analysis focus largely on the big-picture trends in regard to the framing of Syrian refugees and do not convey a finite discourse analysis of the coverage under study, the results signal that the framing of Syrian refugees is not fixed or static. The findings of this analysis remind us that news media, alongside politicians and the general public, have the capacity to re-humanize the coverage of refugees by dismantling stereotypes that are driven by threat and fear.

Endnotes

- 1 This project examines the framing of Syrian refugees and does not explore the framing of Syrian asylum seekers. While a comparison of the coverage between Syrian refugees and asylum seekers may provide interesting findings on narratives regarding perceived deservingness, it is not within the scope of this paper. I would like to thank one of the reviewers for their insightful commentary on this distinction. For an interesting analysis on the distinctions between “deserving” refugees and “undeserving” migrants in the European context, see Holmes and Castañeda (2016).
- 2 Although the war in Syria began in 2011, very few articles were produced on the conflict until the Canadian embassy closed in March 2012. News articles that mentioned the Syrian refugee crisis before 2012 did not substantively discuss the conflict and were excluded from the sample to ensure that the automated analysis best captured salient frames.
- 3 I removed duplicate articles that included the same headline in the same newspaper in the search engine; I did not remove articles that were duplicated across newspapers under the same ownership to give a full and accurate representation of the news stories that readers of these various publications were exposed to. I opted to remove election primers from the search results as they did not substantively discuss the Syrian refugee crisis. In most primers, the refugee crisis was listed among many other issues and, in the interest of ensuring that the other issues did not occlude the content analysis on Syrian refugees, they were removed from the sample.
- 4 Although this is an automated coding analysis, as discussed by Grimmer and Stewart (2013), the researcher must check the results of the hierarchical clustering model to ensure that the clusters are logical and relevant to the topic at hand. Effectively, the researcher must examine if there are clusters that reasonably fit together to form a coherent theme or frame that carries substantive meaning to the topic under study. Consistent with Lawlor's approach (2015a), I assessed the clusters and made qualitative assessments of how these clusters were grouped together to form a coherent theme or

- frame. In this analysis, the dendrogram derived fourteen coherent clusters that constituted six frames. The dendrogram for this project is available in the online appendix; while it does not give a full depiction of the themes and frames that were altered throughout the validation process, it can provide a visual image to help understand the automated coding process.
- 5 For more information on the WordStat Sentiment Dictionary and its guidelines for recommended use, please visit the Provalis Research website (<https://provalisresearch.com/products/content-analysis-software/wordstat-dictionary/sentiment-dictionaries/>).
 - 6 WordStat allows the researcher to implement specific rules for retrieving the appropriate use of the terms you are looking to assess based on proximity to other words or phrases. For example, in searching for the term “citizenship” and wanting to avoid the conflation with Citizenship and Immigration Canada, I was able to implement a rule that would account for the frequency of the term that excluded the unwanted use.
 - 7 The frequencies of the frames were normalized across the timeline to ensure that the shifts in the coverage were not due to differences in article length or frame frequency totals across the three time periods.
 - 8 Although standard scaling is generally ideal, given the large discrepancies in the use of the frames, I chose to change the Y-axes in each of the graphs to best reflect the shifts in their use over time.
 - 9 This might be reflective of the fact that the *Toronto Star* is a “hybrid” newspaper; it is the newspaper with the highest rate of readership in Canada but it also maintains a regional focus. It is possible that the conflict frame was higher on the issue agenda for the *Toronto Star* than other regional newspapers and that it may have had more resources to explore the conflict.

Supplementary materials

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423917001482>.

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