Triangulating Securitization: Analyzing Media Frames of Refugees in U.S. English and Spanish Press

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Abstract

In the 21st century, the framing of migration as a security issue has intensified, particularly in the U.S. media. Thus, this study investigated how U.S. newspapers, both national and local, in English and Spanish, framed refugees and asylum seekers from 2016 to 2020, revealing patterns of securitization through a "triangulation" of frames: sovereignty, meritocracy, and responsibility. Analyzing 75 headlines, totaling 675 words (including 120 in Spanish), the study identified key terms such as "border," "Trump," and "crisis," as well as rhetorical devices including implication, vagueness, and irony. English headlines often focused on Middle Eastern and European crises, while Spanish headlines emphasized Latin American issues, notably Venezuelan refugees. Additionally, the contrast between local and national headlines highlights differences in framing priorities. Understanding these evolving frames is essential for grasping the broader narrative rather than just isolated segments. It highlights how these frames shape and reflect our evolving understanding of refugees and asylum seekers. Moreover, given the significant influence of U.S. media on public opinion and policy, understanding how these media outlets portray refugees also reveals critical insights into the evolving discourse.

Keywords: Securitization, Representation, American Media, Discourse, Triangulation

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I. Introduction

Every year, millions of people are displaced from their homes, including refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, stateless individuals, and Internally Displaced People (IDPs). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2023) Mid-Year Trends Report, the global number of forcibly displaced persons has exceeded 110 million due to violence, human rights abuses, and persecution. This represents an increase of over 1.6 million from the end of 2022, when the figure was 108.5 million. Consequently, more than 1 in 73 people worldwide now face forced displacement. In 2015, Europe faced an extraordinary wave of refugees and migrants, making headlines and sparking heated political debates. The crisis, marked by a significant loss of life and an overwhelming number of arrivals, became a central issue in European politics for months. According to Pew Research Center (2016), a record 1.3 million migrants applied for asylum in the 28 member states of the European Union, as well as Norway and Switzerland, in 2015. This number was nearly double the previous high of around 700,000 set in 1992, following the fall of the Iron Curtain and the collapse of the Soviet Union, based on data from Eurostat, the European Union's statistical agency.

The crisis triggered debates and actions within the EU and drew significant U.S. attention. It raised concerns about global stability and migration, leading U.S. officials to consider how to collaborate with European allies to address the crisis, humanitarian needs, and geopolitical impacts. This also impacted U.S. discussions on immigration policy and international roles. Historically, the U.S. admitted an average of 95,000 refugees annually since 1980, but the Trump administration reduced this to 30,000 in 2019 and 18,000 in 2020. Policies like the "Muslim Ban" and local consent requirements further shifted U.S. policy. Figures like Ban Ki-Moon and Pope Francis have called for more empathy in refugee discourse, and the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted refugee vulnerabilities, reinforcing these calls.

Despite these appeals, the issue is more complex, rooted in in-group and out-group member dynamics. Olsson et al. (2005) observed that people often fear "the

other," associating them with negative stereotypes. This bias is evident in debates over refugee acceptance and exclusion, with negative framing reinforcing these stereotypes. Extensive research highlights the media's significant influence in shaping public perceptions and attitudes towards refugees (King & Wood, 2001; Wright, 2019; Chouliaraki, 2017; Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2016; Giannakopoulos & Anagnostopoulos, 2016; Musarò, 2017). Malkki (1996) goes even further and argues that media perpetuates colonial-era orientalism, maintaining stereotypes of Eastern societies as 'other' and influencing perceptions of their customs and beliefs ("Study of West's Dominance," 2017). Modern portrayals of refugees often reflect this "otherness," depicting them as both victims and potential threats that strain resources and challenge national identity (Bohmelt et al., 2017).

In the legislation sphere though, refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers are distinct, though sometimes grouped together. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines refugees as those fleeing persecution, war, or violence, while asylum seekers are individuals who have applied for refugee status and are awaiting a decision. Although their experiences overlap, discussions often focus on refugees, leaving asylum seekers' vulnerabilities less understood. This study aims to include asylum seekers in the analysis to provide a fuller understanding of their shared experiences and challenges. Moreover, Ravn et al. (2019) highlights the importance of understanding refugee issues through three key dimensions: legal, moral, and economic. The legal dimension, which is of great importance, focuses on how the 1951 Geneva Convention frames refugees' rights and protections, asserting that entitlement is central to the concept of deservingness.

The moral dimension, on the other hand, addresses how refugees are perceived as either productive contributors or potential burdens on welfare systems (Sales, 2002). This view often reflects broader societal beliefs, such as the idea that poverty is self-inflicted, which can influence perceptions of all groups seeking social assistance (Ravn et al., 2019). Lastly, the economic dimension is emphasized by international organizations and NGOs, which work to raise awareness and secure funding for refugees (Malkki, 1996). This dimension often

showcases refugees, particularly women and children, as embodying qualities like strength and independence—traits they must exhibit during their challenging journey to safety in Europe. Thus, by exploring these dimensions, Ravn et al. (2019) provides a well-rounded understanding of the diverse challenges faced by refugees, underscoring the need for a comprehensive and informed perspective on their experiences.

Therefore, this study aims to understand to what extent refugees are framed and securitized in both English and Spanish local and national news across the U.S. It is unique in that it addresses a gap in the literature by offering a bilingual analysis of media representation, examining both local and national perspectives. This approach provides a comprehensive view of how refugee issues are portrayed in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts, including often-overlooked Spanish-language media. By integrating theories of framing and securitization, the study explores how these processes intersect in shaping public perceptions and understanding of refugees.

This paper builds upon these studies by using the securitization framework to examine how refugees are framed in both English and Spanish local and national news across the U.S. The unique contribution of this study lies in its bilingual analysis, addressing a gap in the literature regarding the representation of refugees in Spanish-speaking sources. Thus, by integrating theories of framing and securitization, this study aims to explore how media narratives in both linguistic and cultural contexts shape public perceptions and understandings of refugees and asylum seekers, providing a comprehensive view of their portrayal across different dimensions and platforms.

II. The Language of Security and Framing

While early media coverage highlighted the vulnerabilities of refugees, the discourse soon diversified. Some advocated for greater willingness to manage the influx of displaced individuals, while others focused on the potential consequences of this large-scale movement affecting state stability. This shift marked a transition towards the securitization of migration, framing migration

issues increasingly through the lens of national security. In essence, securitization has moved migration from the realm of 'normal' politics into the domain of security (Bourbeau, 2011; Huysmans, 2014).

This approach aligns with the Copenhagen School of Security, which emphasizes discourse through 'speech acts.' According to this framework, securitization involves elites converging on a shared perception of a threat and the urgent mobilization of resources. In essence, securitization moves migration from the realm of 'normal' politics into the domain of security. However, it's crucial to highlight that the sense of 'urgency' in refugee coverage varies across media outlets. This divergence is particularly evident in online news platforms, particularly in national newspaper platforms.

According to the Copenhagen School, "securitization signifies the inclusion of immigration issues in the catalogue of state security threats and considering them from the point of view of potential dangers to public order, including the receiving societies" (Podgórzańska, 2019, p. 68). This goes hand in hand with framing, which plays a critical role in shaping public perception by selectively emphasizing certain aspects of immigration, such as potential dangers, while minimizing or ignoring other perspectives. This selective framing can significantly influence how receiving societies perceive and respond to refugees and asylum seekers, often leading to heightened fears and restrictive policies.

Therefore, framing and securitization are closely intertwined processes that significantly influence how refugee and immigration issues are perceived and addressed within public discourse. Framing involves the strategic selection and emphasis of particular aspects of a complex issue to shape public understanding. In the context of refugees and immigrants, framing can present these groups in various ways—such as victims, economic burdens, or security threats—thereby influencing public attitudes and media narratives. Securitization, as articulated by the Copenhagen School, builds on these frames by transforming a political issue into a security threat, using language and discourse to elevate it to the level of existential concern. Ultimately, the relationship between framing and securitization is symbiotic: framing serves as a tool that enables securitization by

crafting narratives that portray refugees as threats, while securitization reinforces these frames by positioning them as critical to national security. Thus, together, framing and securitization create a powerful dynamic.

In the case of refugees, the framing and securitization is paradoxical. While migration securitization is intended to justify protective measures, it should technically not compromise the legal protections granted to refugees. Refugee or asylum seeker status is meant to provide rights and shield individuals from being seen as threats. However, in practice, these legal protections often fall short, as evolving discourse increasingly frames refugees as security risks rather than people in need of protection. This shift is evident in the rhetoric of various political leaders who, while advocating for tolerance, have also reinforced narratives of resistance. For example, Theresa May characterized large-scale migration as a threat to a "cohesive society" (Dominiczak, 2015), and former Prime Minister David Cameron described migrants as "a swarm of people coming across the Mediterranean, seeking a better life" (Elgot, 2016, para. 2). These statements illustrate how the securitization of migration can conflict with the humanitarian obligations to protect refugees.

Furthermore, former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon referred to the refugee crisis as a "crisis of solidarity," emphasizing the importance of language by stating, "we must change the way we talk about refugees and migrants. And we must talk with them. Our words and dialogue matter" (UNSG, 2016). Similarly, Pope Francis, in his address to the U.S. Congress, urged, "we must not be taken aback by their numbers, but rather view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation" (Holy See Press Office, 2015). Moreover, in light of the pandemic, the Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) warned that "[the] coronavirus will decimate the refugee communities if we don't act now" (NRC, 2020). This humanitarian discourse, which reiterates the moral duty not to forget refugees, is not new but remains relevant in how refugees are situated—and subsequently securitized—in public dialogue. Nonetheless, while questions of responsibility, burden-sharing, and resettlement caps remain central to the representation of

refugees, this study focuses instead on exploring the varying frameworks used to portray refugees in U.S. media.

III. Bilingualism in American Newspapers

Angela Merkel and Italian Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni described the 2015 refugee crisis as a profound threat to the "soul" of Europe ("Merkel and Hollande meet", 2014). However, the impact of refugee crises extends far beyond Europe. In Latin America, Venezuelan refugees face dire circumstances, with opposition leader Juan Guaidó in March 2020 urging the European Union for increased aid, warning that Venezuela's crisis could soon rival that of Syria (Scott, 2015). He compared Venezuela's situation to those in South Sudan, Yemen, and Syria, emphasizing the severity of the suffering that remains largely unseen by the international community. Meanwhile, the Rohingya crisis continues to challenge Bangladesh, which currently hosts over 1.2 million Rohingya refugees and calls for a stronger global response (Schlein, 2020). These examples highlight the global nature of refugee crises and the diverse responses they demand.

The coverage of these crises sheds light on a distinct aspect of refugee portrayal in American media. While Syrian refugees have been the focal point of many studies, Venezuelan refugees are notably underrepresented in English-language American media headlines. This is particularly striking given the presence of 35.5 million Hispanic individuals in the U.S., a rapidly growing demographic. Local Spanish-language media, which plays a critical role in informing this community, remains largely ignored by the broader American public (Hernandez-Nieto et al., 2017). Despite the importance of this media, significant research on Spanish-language sources within the U.S. context has been lacking. As a result, this study incorporates Spanish sources into the final analysis.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight that Spanish-speaking sources cater not only to the Hispanic/Latino community in the U.S. but also incorporates a larger diverse audience of various ethnic backgrounds who speak, write, and read in Spanish. Although not specific to the U.S. context, a relevant study by Hoyer (2016) examines the portrayal of Syrian refugees in Spanish media. Hoyer

found that terms such as "refugiados" (refugees), "demandantes de asilo" (asylum seekers), and "migrantes" (migrants) often created divisions, while terms like "personas" (people) and specific names helped readers connect more personally with the refugees. This approach contrasts with the media's treatment of the Central American refugee 'caravan' in 2019, where 'people' was used separately from terms like 'flow' or direct references to the caravan to maintain neutrality. Additionally, unlike Spain, the U.S. does not have an official national language, despite ongoing 'English Only' movements.

IV. Discourse Analysis and Van Dijk Model Headline Analysis

Van Dijk (2006) introduces a model for analyzing print media discourses through corpus and frame analysis, which this study will adopt. Van Dijk posits that newspapers reflect the ideologies of various groups through their representation of fundamental assumptions. This study will analyze headlines from national newspapers such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Wall Street Journal, alongside local papers like the Salt Lake Tribune, Deseret News, and Ogden Standard Examiner. These newspapers are influenced by distinct cultural, political, and social contexts. Van Dijk emphasizes the presence of "linguistic spins" in political discourse and advocates for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a robust framework for text analysis, which is particularly fitting for this study. He notes that media discourse, even when focused on concise texts like headlines, remains complex and layered with implicit and explicit ideologies. Despite their brevity, headlines encapsulate a range of ideological discourse devices that enable in-depth critical analysis.

Van Dijk's (2006) model includes 16 "categories of ideological discourse analysis," which will be utilized in the qualitative analysis portion of this study. According to Sajid et al. (2019), Dijk views print media discourses as a prism that can either construct or distort reality, influenced by ideological groups (p. 49). This perspective suggests that newspapers act as platforms where ideological investments shape the perceptions of their target readership (Sajid et al., 2019). Consequently, Dijk's model identifies ideological underpinnings through various

discursive techniques, which either reinforce or challenge frame findings. In analyzing headlines, this model helps reveal the elements used to convey specific meanings and perspectives.

These elements include actor description, which focuses on the individuals discussed in the headline, and authority, which involves mentioning authoritative figures to support claims. Categorization assigns people to various groups or sub-groups, while consensus reflects agreement and solidarity within a group on an issue. A disclaimer presents ideas positively but rejects them later, often using "but." Evidentiality supports larger statements with facts, while hyperbole exaggerates events or statements, sometimes using metaphors. Implication provides information not explicitly stated, and irony highlights discrepancies between expectations and reality. Lexicalization uses keywords and verbs to represent others, and national self-glorification highlights a state's positive aspects. The number game employs figures to make statements more concrete, and polarization creates "us" versus "them" distinctions. Presupposition involves preconceived notions about a subject, while vagueness introduces ambiguity about issues. Lastly, victimization emphasizes fragility and narratives of oppression or empowerment.

V. Data Collection

The study analyzed a total of 75 digital newspaper headlines from 2016 to 2020, encompassing 675 words, of which 120 were from Spanish headlines. These headlines focused on refugee and asylum seeker issues following the 2015 refugee crisis. The dataset included headlines from three national newspapers (The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal) and three local Utah newspapers (Salt Lake Tribune, Deseret News, Ogden Examiner). These newspapers were chosen due to their wide circulation in the U.S., which allows them to significantly influence public discourse, shape opinions, and drive policy debates. Furthermore, their readership includes key decision-makers in politics and business, making them influential in both domestic and international policymaking. As of 2023, *The New York Times* reached 10.8 million readers,

with *The Washington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal* reporting 3.96 million and 2.63 million subscribers, respectively (Statista, 2023). In addition to these national newspapers, local perspectives were captured through Deseret News, Salt Lake Tribune, and Ogden Examiner. These newspapers were chosen due to their regional significance in areas with growing immigrant and refugee populations, particularly in Utah.

Additionally, the choice of local newspapers is grounded in their relevance to Utah, a state renowned for its welcoming stance toward refugees. Incorporating a sample from Utah, along with other states that share this commitment, enriches the overall analysis and underscores the importance of local perspectives. While there is no official, comprehensive list of Refugee Welcome States in the U.S., several states and localities have taken proactive measures to support refugee resettlement and integration. Thus, some states are more recognized for their welcoming policies and community support for refugees, with Utah being a notable example on this list.

Furthermore, this study specifically examined headlines from 2016 to 2020, a critical period marked by major global refugee crises, significant policy shifts under the Trump administration, and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, all of which profoundly influenced media framing and securitization of refugees. Moreover, the decision to limit the analysis to 2020 was intentional, as it allowed for a focused examination of the specific dynamics and discourse during the peak years of the Trump presidency. Therefore, the timeframe chosen for this study captured the significant policy shifts and media narratives that emerged during that period, enabling a more targeted analysis of how these factors influenced public perception of refugees. Furthermore, extending the study to include 2021 would risk diluting this focus, as the subsequent administration's policies and narratives would introduce new variables that could complicate the analysis. Thus, maintaining the timeframe of 2016–2020 ensured a coherent exploration of the Trump administration's impact without the confounding influence of post-presidential developments. Furthermore, this study acknowledges that while headlines may not fully convey the sentiment of the entire articles, they are a

crucial narrative element that reaches a broad audience and significantly shapes public perception.

Selection criteria included headlines containing "refugee(s)" or "asylum seeker(s)" ("refugiados" or "solicitantes de asilo"). Headlines were selected from the online archives of the New York Times, Washington Post and Wall Street Journal discussions of migration or illegal immigration. Each newspaper contributed 10 headlines ensuring coverage of both asylum seekers and refugees, with at least one article per year from 2016 to 2020. For Spanish-language articles, three newspapers with Spanish editions were chosen: New York Times Español, Washington Post Opinión, and Deseret News' El Observador de Utah. These sources ensure representation of Spanish-speaking audiences, which are often underrepresented in media analyses.

Each Spanish source provided at least five articles, with a minimum of two articles each year from 2016 to 2020. In fact, the article selection criteria consisted of 10 articles from each newspaper platform. From the 10 articles, half of them needed to cover asylum seeker issues while the other half needed to cover refugee issues. Furthermore, each newspaper source had to include at least one article from each year, ideally one covering refugee issues and the other asylum-seeking issues for every year between 2016 and 2020. Furthermore, from the three newspaper sources left, each had to contain at least 5 articles and be distributed in a similar fashion as to its English counterpart. Therefore, each article had to have at least a minimum of two articles from 2016 to 2020. These parameters were set to aim for full representation.

Table 1: English and Spanish Distribution

Key Terms: *"Refugee(s) AND/OR Asylum Seeker(s)" AND* *"Refugiado(s) AND/OR Solicitante de Asilo"* *(Total = 75 Articles)*							
10 New York Times (NYT); **10** Washington Post (WP); **10** Wall Street Journal (WSJ) *(Total = 30 Articles)*		**10** Salt Lake Tribune (SLT); **10** Deseret News (DN); **10** Ogden Standard Examiner (OSE) *(Total = 30 Articles)*		**5** New York Times – Spanish (owned by the NYT); **5** Post Opinión (owned by the WP) *(Total = 10 Articles)*		**5** El Observador de Utah (owned by the DN) *(Total =5 Articles)*	
Refugee/s **5** NYT; **5** WP; **5** WSJ *(Total = 15 Articles)*	*Asylum Seeker/s* **5** NYT; **5** WP; **5** WSJ *(Total = 15 Articles)*	*Refugee/s* **5** SLT; **5** DN; **5** OSE *(Total = 15 Articles)*	*Asylum Seeker/s* **5** SLT; **5** DN; **5** OSE *(Total = 15 Articles)*	*Refugiado/s* **3** NYTS; **3** PO *(Total = 6 Articles)*	*Solicitante/s de Asilo* **2** NYTS; **2** PO *(Total = 4 Articles)*	*Refugiado/s* **3** EO *(Total =3 Articles)*	*Solicitante/s de Asilo* **2** EO *(Total = 2 Articles)*
2016 – 1 NYT; 1 WP; 1 WSJ	**2016** – 1 NYT; 1 WP; 1 WSJ	**2016** – 1 SLT; 1 DN; 1 OSE	**2016** – 1 SLT; 1 DN; 1 OSE	**2016** – 1 NYTS/1 PO or 1 NYTS/1NYTS or 1 PO/PO		**2016** – 1 EO	
2017 – 1 NYT; 1 WP; 1 WSJ	**2017** – 1 NYT; 1 WP; 1 WSJ	**2017** – 1 SLT; 1 DN; 1 OSE	**2017** – 1 SLT; 1 DN; 1 OSE	**2017** – 1 NYTS/1 PO or 1 NYTS/1NYTS or 1 PO/PO		**2017** – 1 EO	
2018 – 1 NYT; 1 WP; 1 WSJ	**2018** – 1 NYT; 1 WP; 1 WSJ	**2018** – 1 SLT; 1 DN; 1 OSE	**2018** – 1 SLT; 1 DN; 1 OSE	**2018** – 1 NYTS/1 PO or 1 NYTS/1NYTS or 1 PO/PO		**2018** – 1 EO	
2019 – 1 NYT; 1 WP; 1 WSJ	**2019** – 1 NYT; 1 WP; 1 WSJ	**2019** – 1 SLT; 1 DN; 1 OSE	**2019** – 1 SLT; 1 DN; 1 OSE	**2019** – 1 NYTS/1 PO or 1 NYTS/1NYTS or 1 PO/PO		**2019** – 1 EO	
2020 – 1 NYT; 1 WP; 1 WSJ	**2020** – 1 NYT; 1 WP; 1 WSJ	**2020** – 1 SLT; 1 DN; 1 OSE	**2020** – 1 SLT; 1 DN; 1 OSE	**2020** – 1 NYTS/1 PO or 1 NYTS/1NYTS or 1 PO/PO		**2020** – 1 EO	

Furthermore, the headlines used a random sampling method and categorized into English and Spanish sets, with prepositions and common words removed. Spanish articles were translated into English to ensure contextual accuracy. The analysis included a corpus, frame and a discourse device analysis. Overall, the selection of these specific newspapers provides a comprehensive view of how refugee and asylum-seeker issues are portrayed across both national and local U.S. media, as well as English and Spanish-language sources. This is especially relevant given the newspapers' influence on shaping public opinion and, potentially, policy decisions regarding migration and refugee issues.

VI. Findings
1. Keyword Analysis from the Combined English and Spanish Corpus

In the analysis of a total of 675 words from both English and Spanish articles, several key terms emerged as highly significant in framing the discourse on refugees and asylum seekers. The keywords that were mentioned the most included "border" "from" and "Trump." The mention of "border" primarily concerned the U.S.-Mexico border, highlighting issues related to border security, immigration policies, and physical barriers. In many instances, "border" was used not only to refer to geographical boundaries but also metaphorically to describe legislative or administrative barriers that impact refugee and asylum seeker issues. The prominence of "border" in the discourse underscored a focus on national security and immigration control, framing refugee issues within the context of border management and territorial integrity. This term contributes to the securitization narrative by emphasizing the physical and symbolic boundaries that are contested and negotiated in the context of refugee flows.

The term "from" was the second most frequently used term, often referring to specific groups, places, or origins related to refugees and asylum seekers. It commonly appeared alongside mentions of ethnicity, religion, or cultural identity, and sometimes specified countries such as Mexico or Denmark. This usage of "from" reinforces an "us versus them" narrative by highlighting the origins and identities of refugees and asylum seekers. In a way, emphasizing where individuals

come from, this term helps to delineate a more distinct "other," accentuating the differences between the host country and the refugees. Finally, the term "Trump," emerged as a prominent keyword in the dataset. The use of this term referred to both the individual—Donald Trump—and his role as former President of the United States, particularly in relation to his executive actions and policies affecting refugees. Furthermore, as a symbol of various underlying themes in the discourse, "Trump" represented the impact of specific political figures on refugee issues. His policies and statements regarding immigration and refugees were highly contentious and influential, making his name central to discussions on representation of refugees on national media.

2. Frame Analysis from the Combined English and Spanish Headlines

Through a thorough analysis of key words and discourse devices in both English and Spanish headlines, three predominant frames emerged that offer critical insights into the representation and securitization of refugees and asylum seekers in the American press. These frames—"Meritocracy," "Sovereignty," and "Responsibility"—serve as foundational elements in understanding the framing and securitization of refugees and asylum seekers as a whole. Each frame reflects specific ideological perspectives and influences the securitization process in distinct ways. First, the "Meritocracy" frame is based on the premise that individuals are rewarded or penalized based on their perceived contributions and abilities. In the case of the data set, this frame often manifested through narratives that assessed the worthiness of refugees based on their skills, economic potential, or integration efforts.

These headlines showcased the success stories of refugees who have reached notable economic or professional milestones, implying that those who make significant contributions to the host society are more deserving of support and acceptance. For example, English headlines often highlighted refugees who achieved notable success in business or education, framing their acceptance as merited. Conversely, this frame can also justify exclusionary practices by suggesting that those who do not meet specific standards are less deserving of

support. Thus, the Meritocracy frame not only contributes to the securitization discourse by linking refugee status with individual performance and societal value but also influences public attitudes towards refugee policies.

Sovereignty emerged as the second most prevalent frame, emphasizing the significance of national borders and state authority in immigration control. This frame often focused on national security, border management, and the perceived effects of refugees on national stability. It asserted that a sovereign nation has the right to regulate entry and set conditions for those entering its territory. Headlines under this frame also highlighted concerns about the threats of uncontrolled immigration or the burden placed on national resources by large numbers of refugees. Thus, by underscoring the necessity of safeguarding national sovereignty, this frame reinforced the securitization of refugees, depicting them as potential risks to national security and stability.

Finally, the "Responsibility" frame addresses the ethical and humanitarian obligations of states and international communities towards refugees. This frame portrayed refugees as individuals in need of protection and support, emphasizing the moral duty of states to provide asylum and aid. It encompasses discussions about human rights, international agreements, and the role of states in addressing global displacement crises. The headlines under this frame highlighted stories of refugee suffering, appeal to humanitarian values, or critique inadequate responses to the refugee crisis. Thus, by focusing on the moral imperatives of aiding refugees, this frame advocates for compassionate and supportive policies. However, it also intersected with the securitization discourse by framing the fulfillment of these responsibilities as both a moral and practical challenge, potentially influencing how governments and the public perceive and respond to refugee issues.

3. Discourse Device Analysis from the Combined English and Spanish Headlines

This study analyzed the use and prevalence of discourse devices in Spanish and English headlines to explore how refugees are represented and securitized across different linguistic and cultural contexts. The findings identified notable

differences in discourse patterns, revealing distinct media narratives and cultural perceptions. English headlines frequently emphasize moral judgments, political authority, and practical impacts, whereas Spanish headlines tend to highlight individual experiences, logistical challenges, and broader social contexts. These variations underscore how linguistic and cultural factors influence the portrayal and securitization of refugees.

Implication varied between English and Spanish headlines. English headlines, like "Jews are proud to stand with refugees. Resist the temptation to play it safe and …" (Goldstein et al., 2018), implied a moral duty to support refugees. In contrast, Spanish headlines, such as "A floating population that sleeps in one country and works in the other" (El Observador, 2020), addressed logistical issues. A total of 84 instances of implication were noted. In addition, vagueness also appeared in both languages but with different effects. English headlines often obscured details, as in "We are partnered with the wrong side of the Middle East" (Robinson, 2018). Spanish headlines, like "Thousands of Salvadorans remain in limbo at Trump's immigration ban" (Robles & Semple, 2017), highlighted uncertainties. There were 68 instances of vagueness.

In addition, the use of the actor device differed between languages. English headlines identified specific refugee groups, like "Congolese refugees adjust to Ogden, learn English and Proper Microwave use" (Vandenack, 2018), focusing on particular communities. Spanish headlines, such as "El comienzo de una nueva vida para un niño refugiado" ("The start of a new life for a refugee child," Mashal, 2018), emphasized broader refugee experiences. A total of 53 actor devices were recorded. On the other hand, Irony was used to expose contradictions in both languages. English headlines often highlighted policy discrepancies, such as "Denmark considers seizing valuables from migrants. U.N. refugee agency condemns plan to make asylum seekers pay in part for their journey" (Duxbury, 2016), contrasting policy with migrant realities. Spanish headlines, like "Un crimen oculto a simple vista" ("A hidden crime at a glance," EO, 2017), contrasted expected and actual outcomes. There were 46 instances of irony.

Moreover, Authority was depicted differently in English and Spanish

headlines. English often linked authority to political figures, such as in "How Trump's Policies are Leaving Thousands of Asylum Seekers Waiting in Mexico" (Kao & Lu, 2019), while Spanish headlines also mentioned other authorities, like Canada in "Syrian refugees encounter a strange word in Canada: Welcome" (Kantor & Einhorn, 2016). A total of 46 authority devices were noted. Furthermore, presupposition and lexicalization were similarly used but with distinct nuances. English headlines implied values, as in "Help refugees around the globe and in your neighborhoods, Mormon women told" (Stack, 2016), while Spanish headlines, such as "Protesters in California and the United States oppose white supremacy" (Potter, 2019), assumed shared social understandings. Each device appeared 36 times, with English focusing on specific actions and Spanish using varied verbs.

VII. Discussion

The interplay between Meritocracy, Sovereignty, and Responsibility frames provides a nuanced understanding of how refugees are represented and to some extent securitized. This triangulation highlights the complex ways in which media narratives constructed the refugee image. These frames do not operate in isolation but interact with each other, forming a triangulation that shapes the overall discourse on refugees. First, the prominence of sovereignty, particularly in the year 2016, emphasized state security. The headlines during this period employed language that emphasized concerns about American soil, territory, borders, and land. This ultimately positioned refugees and asylum seekers as possible intruders threatening national security. Headlines also frequently highlighted issues related to territorial control and national sovereignty, effectively shifting the perception of the refugee crisis from a global humanitarian issue to a national security dilemma. Spanish headlines mirrored these findings but the Spanish written headlines frequently highlighted concerns about potential newcomers from Latin America, reflecting more of a regional focus.

Under the Trump administration, sovereignty-themed headlines often referred to events like the Muslim Ban and the "Remain in Mexico" program, portraying

refugees and asylum seekers as threats to national sovereignty. Headlines from 2016 and 2017 used metaphors and imagery to emphasize perceived dangers, framing refugees as challenges to security. In contrast, Spanish texts from the same period focused more on the experiences of Latin American asylum seekers, highlighting their hardships and fostering solidarity. This approach aligns with Duffield's (2007) argument that human security seeks to address inequalities perpetuated by capitalism in the postcolonial South, which is reflected in the Spanish media's emphasis on Latin American contexts. Secondly, the concept of meritocracy, prevalent in national and local headlines from 2018 and 2019, emphasized evaluating individuals based on their perceived abilities, contributions, and achievements. This was reflected in headlines that embodied the idea of the American Dream and provided personalized success stories. These headlines sought to humanize refugees by showcasing their achievements, offering a more nuanced portrayal during a time when harsh European policies were pushing migrants toward perilous routes (Berry et al., 2015).

During this period, U.S. media made a concerted effort to distinguish itself from the prevailing European narrative, which often depicted refugees in a more dehumanizing and anonymous light. Furthermore, within this frame, refugees were depicted as secondary protagonists, particularly in local newspapers. Unlike asylum seekers, who were less frequently featured in this narrative, refugees were highlighted through their interactions with well-known organizations, religious communities, or individual states like Utah. For instance, the focus on Mormon and Olympic refugees, were notable headlines that distinguished between "good" and "bad" refugees (Hansen, 2012) or "genuine" refugees deserving protection (Hintjens, 2019).

English texts often highlighted individual merit, featuring direct assertions from refugees about their legitimacy. Metaphors linked to the American Dream and adversity, such as "hope," "sunk," and "drown," underscored their struggles and aspirations. However, this emphasis on meritocracy also created subtle distinctions among refugees. In contrast, Spanish headlines took a more anecdotal approach, focusing on "refugee children" and the effects of legislative changes.

Spanish texts used nuanced language to indicate refugees' gender and nationality while often blurring the lines between migrants and refugees. This blending of terms in Spanish media suggested a more fluid understanding of these categories, in contrast to the stricter definitions seen in English texts. Spanish headlines frequently highlighted Latin American refugees and broader human mobility issues, emphasizing security and solidarity over the individualistic meritocracy frame.

Finally, in 2019 and 2020, local newspaper headlines framed the issue of refugees through the lens of responsibility, urging both government action and public awareness. This framework was divided into two categories: passive and active. Passive responsibility depicted refugees and asylum seekers as victims, highlighting their suffering and criticizing U.S. treatment. For example, some headlines implored Americans not to "look away" from the crisis, with comparisons drawn between the care for refugees and pets to underscore inconsistencies in human treatment. Active responsibility, on the other hand, advocated for a more hospitable approach, urging Americans to "look out for our neighbors."

While some headlines celebrated efforts to welcome refugees and create supportive environments, they often lacked practical guidance, resulting in a somewhat superficial treatment of the issue. National headlines generally called for humanitarian protection for asylum seekers, but local headlines often prioritized American citizens, reflecting a more nationalistic stance. In contrast, Spanish headlines approached the refugee issue with a collective perspective, emphasizing solidarity and focusing particularly on Venezuelan refugees. The Spanish media frequently used inclusive language, merging "migrant" and "refugee" and blurring the distinctions between these categories. This inclusive and less nationalistic frame contrasted with the more segmented and nationalistic narratives found in English texts.

V. Conclusion

Ronald Paris suggests that virtually anything can be perceived as a threat to human security. However, it has been argued that the "very ambiguity of

the concept makes it susceptible to incorporation into the hegemonic national security paradigm, thus qualifying its coherence as an alternative perspective or approach" (Shani, 2013). Furthermore, Donnelly (2018) asserts that security must exist within certain limits, irrespective of how ambiguous and blurry these may be. Considering that sovereign states' dominant responses to issues around human mobility are heavily reliant on the language of security, this study explored how American press headlines situate and, therefore, securitize refugees and asylum seekers from 2016 to 2020. It also aimed to understand the extent to which discourse in both English and Spanish headlines differed.

At first glance, "securitizing refugees" might appear contradictory because the securitization of migration should technically have no bearing on the protection of refugees. Receiving refugee or even asylum seeker status should ensure that they are not framed as an existential threat. According to international refugee law, when a person is awarded such status, it should automatically entitle them to rights and protections. It should also automatically endow the international community with the responsibility to watch over them. These principles are why the UNHCR was created in 1950 and why the Refugee Convention was approved by the UN in 1951 in the first place (Donnelly, 2018). However, this is not always reflected in practice, prompting a focus on the securitization of refugees and asylum seekers within the language sphere.

In this study, 75 headlines were analyzed, consisting of 675 words, with 120 words in Spanish across the six newspaper platforms. While analyzing each media outlet individually might seem beneficial, there were several compelling reasons to maintain a collective analysis approach. First, focusing on the collective narrative allowed for a clearer examination of overarching trends and patterns in how refugee and asylum seeker issues were covered across different platforms. This holistic perspective was able to reveal shared themes that might have been overlooked when isolating individual outlets. Additionally, an individual analysis could have led to a fragmented understanding of the discourse. Given the interconnected nature of media coverage, examining outlets separately may have also presented a risk in creating a disjointed narrative, making it challenging

to identify broader societal impacts or shifts in public opinion that arise from the cumulative influence of multiple sources. Furthermore, the resources and time required for a comprehensive individual analysis could detract from the depth and quality of the overall study. Finally, while acknowledging the differing political stances of each media outlet is important, the aim of this study was to explore how these outlets collectively shape public discourse on refugee issues. Thus, by maintaining a unified analysis, this study was able to better assess the combined impact of their coverage and contribute to a more cohesive understanding of the media landscape regarding refugees and asylum seekers.

Nonetheless, the corpus analysis revealed that "border, from, Trump" in English and "crisis, U.S., migratory" in Spanish were the most prevalent words. As Biber (1990) points out, corpus-based research relies on mixed methods, with the "functional qualitative interpretation being an essential step." Therefore, upon frame analysis and critical discourse analysis following Dijk's 2006 model, findings revealed that "implication, vagueness, actor, irony, authority, presupposition, lexicalization" were prevalently supportive of the three dominant frames: meritocracy, sovereignty, and responsibility. While these frames overlap, they independently share significant implications for how refugees and asylum seekers are situated and thus securitized.

First, sovereignty, primarily found in 2016 headlines, emphasized "state security" the most—securitizing the "other" with language stressing American soil, territory, border, and land issues. Second, meritocracy, prevalent in 2017 and 2018 headlines, recognized "human security" and "ontological security" principles—securitizing the "other" with language emphasizing the American Dream, personalized narratives, and success stories from or about refugees. Third, responsibility, emphasized in 2019 and 2020 headlines, highlighted the "duty to protect" and "responsibility to protect" principles—securitizing the "other" with language calling for greater government and individual participation. Although "duty to protect" stems from the social work field, it remains a relevant aspect of security.

Moreover, the unique combination of the rhetorical devices found in this

study—implication, vagueness, actor, irony, authority, presupposition, and lexicalization—revealed how media strategically constructs narratives about refugees and asylum seekers. This unique mix of devices allows media outlets to shape public interpretation and emotional responses in nuanced ways. Implication and vagueness can introduce ambiguity, influencing how audiences perceive refugees and their situation, while devices like authority and actor can affect perceptions of credibility and responsibility. Irony and presupposition further color the narrative by highlighting contradictions or underlying assumptions. This strategic use of language not only reflects but also reinforces shifting societal attitudes and geopolitical concerns, impacting public opinion and policy discourse. Moreover, analyzing these devices across different linguistic and cultural contexts—such as English and Spanish texts—illuminates how cultural and geographical factors influence media framing.

Furthermore, the distinction between English and Spanish texts further revealed how geographical and cultural contexts influence the framing of refugees. English texts emphasized crises in the Middle East and Europe, reflecting broader geopolitical concerns. In contrast, Spanish texts focus more on Latin America, influenced by national ties and the reinterpretation of regional crises. The depiction of Venezuela as the next or current "Syria" illustrates how media can blur the lines between migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, contributing to the complexity and ambiguity of these categories. This ultimately demonstrated how the frames differed in tone according to the language, as one often employed a rigid definition of what constitutes an asylum seeker, while the other used a more fluid and nuanced approach, reflecting the varying perspectives and contexts of each language's media coverage.

In conclusion, this study reveals how media framing intricately shapes public perception and policy discourse regarding refugees and asylum seekers. By examining the evolution of sovereignty, meritocracy, and responsibility frames, this study underscores the "triangulation" of securitization that characterizes U.S. media coverage of refugees. This triangulation illustrates how each frame—sovereignty emphasizing state security, meritocracy stressing human

and ontological security, and responsibility highlighting the duty to protect—contributes to a complex narrative that both reinforces and complicates the securitization of refugees. Understanding these evolving frames is crucial for identifying the biases and assumptions embedded in media portrayals, which can perpetuate stereotypes and influence policy decisions in ways that may not always align with humanitarian principles. Furthermore, this study underscores the necessity for more balanced and compassionate narratives that transcend securitization, focusing on the human rights and dignity of refugees. Thus, by shifting the discourse, there is potential to foster policies that address the root causes of displacement and encourage international cooperation and solidarity. Consequently, this study contributes to media studies and international relations, offering a framework for analyzing how media, American media in particular, shapes global issues and providing insights essential for fostering a more informed and empathetic public dialogue on refugee crises.

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