

A Headline is Worth a Hundred Words:

An Analysis of Syrian Opposition and Government Media

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Senior Thesis

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May 1, 2023

Abstract

With about thirteen million displaced Syrians worldwide, the Syrian refugee crisis remains one of our most significant global challenges. In 2015, images of Alan Kurdi, a Kurdish-Syrian two-year-old refugee, lying dead on a beach went viral across the West and dramatically increased the media attention on the Syrian crisis. Despite extensive research on how media in receiving countries, like Canada and Turkey, discuss refugees, there is minimal research on the media representation of Syrian refugees in Syrian media. This study explores headlines from Syrian opposition and government sources and concentrates on how they frame refugees. The data highlighted the power of political alignment as a gatekeeping force as the sources framed refugee stories differently based on their ownership and political-lean. Using refugee headlines as a topic area allowed for an exploration of varying manifestations of nationalism that were shaped by issue-framing. The opposition source was more likely to tie nationalism to the value of the Syrian identity, while the government source was more likely to link it to the value of the Syrian homeland. This research has important implications for understanding how media in sending countries like Syria discusses their own refugees.

Introduction

In early September 2015, a photo of Alan Kurdi, a two-year-old Kurdish-Syrian boy, lying dead on a beach in Turkey made headlines across the globe.¹ The image drove increased personal donations and pledges from nations to accept more refugees, and news organizations presented more empathetic and sympathetic reporting of the Syrian refugee crisis directly in response to the photo, and countries made pledges to accept more refugees.² For example, the United Kingdom announced an additional 20,000 Syrians would be resettled while referencing Kurdi's death.³ The media attention around the photo highlighted the media's power in the refugee crisis. Kurdi's fate was not unique, but his picture, along with the increase in refugees fleeing Syria, made the Syrian refugee crisis "a heavily political issue" by 2015.⁴

The Arab Spring sparked the Syrian Civil War in 2011 after pro-democracy protests erupted across the country demanding an end to Bashar al-Assad's regime. The government used police and military forces to suppress the demonstrations, which led to the development of opposition militias and, eventually, to a civil war.⁵ The US, Turkey, and many Western countries supported the opposition, and Russia and Iran backed

¹Diane Cole, "The Aunt of the Drowned Syrian Boy Tells What Happened after the Tragedy," NPR (NPR, August 31, 2018), <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/08/31/642952840/an-aunts-memoir-remembering-the-drowned-syrian-boy-on-the-beach>.

² Myria Georgiou and Rafal Zaborowski, "Council of Europe Report: Media Coverage of the 'Refugee Crisis': A Cross-European Perspective," *Council of Europe Report*, n.d., accessed September 25, 2022, 8.; Cole, "Study: What Was the Impact.>"; Georgiou & Zaborowski, "Media coverage," 3.

³ Cole, "Study: What Was the Impact.>";

Mukul Devichand, "Did Alan Kurdi's Death Change Anything?," BBC News (BBC, September 2, 2016), <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-37257869>.

⁴ Marta Szczepanik, "The 'Good' and 'Bad' Refugees? Imagined Refugeehood(s) in the Media Coverage of the Migration Crisis," *Journal of Identity and Migration Studies* 10, no. 2 (2016): pp. 23-33, 23.

⁵ "Syrian Civil War," Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed September 25, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Syrian-Civil-War>.

Assad's regime; meanwhile, border countries like Lebanon have mostly remained mostly neutral.⁶

Though an estimated 13 million have been displaced, over half of Syrian refugees are internally displaced; these numbers are expected to rise in the coming years.⁷ Most of the refugees have fled to Turkey (3.6 million), Lebanon (831,000), and Jordan (675,000).⁸ Over one million refugees reached Europe in 2015 alone, but it is still relatively few compared to their Middle Eastern counterparts.⁹

While Alan Kurdi's photo illustrates the power of mass media in garnering attention and support, media is also a valuable resource for studying public perception of refugees. "Because the media both reflect and reinforce public perceptions about social groups and because they are produced and recorded [daily], media portrayals of minorities offer a unique opportunity to track sentiment towards groups over time, across geographic locations and in comparison to one another."¹⁰ The ever-growing migration flow necessitates an analytical frame to understand it. "Migration can be evaluated as a threat, an opportunity, or a challenge," and different media sources, contexts, and political saliency determine which frame it will take.¹¹

⁶ Nuray Aridici, "Constructing the 'National Ideal': The 'Inclusive' and 'Exclusive' Representations of Syrian Refugees in Turkish Print Media," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 24, no. 4 (December 2022): pp. 696-714, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2022.2037859>, 703; Holly Dagues, "Lebanon's Fate Appears to Be Irreversibly Tied to Syria," Atlantic Council, July 21, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/lebanons-fate-appears-to-be-irreversibly-tied-to-syria/>.

⁷ Kathryn Reid, "Syrian Refugee Crisis: Facts, Faqs, and How to Help," World Vision, July 12, 2022, <https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syrian-refugee-crisis-facts>; Ulaş Sunata and Esra Yıldız, "Representation of Syrian Refugees in the Turkish Media," *Journal of Applied Journalism & Media Studies* 7, no. 1 (January 2018): pp. 129-151, https://doi.org/10.1386/ajms.7.1.129_1, 130.

⁸ Reid, "Syrian Refugee."

⁹ Reid, "Syrian Refugee."

¹⁰ Erik Bleich et al., "Media Portrayals of Minorities: Muslims in British Newspaper Headlines, 2001–2012," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41, no. 6 (September 2015): pp. 942-962, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183x.2014.1002200>, 943.

¹¹ Sunata and Yıldız, "Representation of Syrian Refugees," 133.

Based on a synthesis of previous research, receiving countries' media depictions of Syrian refugees can be divided into three categories of frames: (1) traditional nationalism, (2) humanitarian nationalism, and (3) gendered bias.¹² These frames often result from the near-total lack of refugees' voices in the media about themselves.¹³ Traditional nationalism refers to the concept that refugees are presented as a threat to lives, economies, and ways of life in the receiving nation. Humanitarian nationalism glorifies one's own nation as being strong enough to accept refugees. It often presents the receiving country in the role of a savior, and any failure to help refugees is considered a "moral failure" and, thus, is disconnected from the national identity and values of the savior nation.¹⁴ Finally, the gender bias framework presents women and children refugees as passive victims while male refugees are portrayed as dangerous and barbaric.¹⁵ These frameworks are helpful for understanding the public's perception of refugees, particularly in receiving countries. However, not much academic attention has been paid to the question of how refugee issues are portrayed in the media of the countries where refugee crises begin.

This paper aims to analyze the content of Syrian media's discourse about refugees in two Syrian online news sources, one from the opposition side of the war and the other from a state-run media organization. Extensive research exists on the media's treatment of migrants and refugees in receiving countries like Canada, Turkey, and various European nations. However, media studies specifically on Syrian refugees are limited, and literature on Syrian media's discussion of refugees is nearly nonexistent. This content

¹² Previous research is from Tyyskälä et al., Georgiou & Zaborowski, Szczepanik, Aridici, and Al-Thani.

¹³ Szczepanik, "The 'Good' and 'Bad' Refugees," 29.

¹⁴ Vappu Tyyskälä et al., "The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Canadian Media," *Ryerson Center for Immigration and Settlement*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.32920/ryerson.14669130.v1>, 7.

¹⁵ Szczepanik, "The 'Good' and 'Bad' Refugees," 24.

analysis will contribute to the research on portrayals of refugees. Given the Syrian government's history of aggression towards their people, I anticipate that the opposition media will be more empathetic to refugees than the pro-government sources. To build on the previous frameworks, this study will also propose an additional framework: sympathy production. The sources highlight the victimhood of refugees to promote humanitarian action to help the Syrian people.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As previously noted, to date, there is minimal research on Syria's media and their depiction of refugees. Most existing research only examines the media in receiving countries, such as Turkey, the United States, and Canada. The traditional nationalism, humanitarian nationalism, and gender bias frames present in receiving countries' media have not been examined in sending countries' media. This study will analyze the headlines of media stories in Syria grounded in agenda-setting, gatekeeping, and issue-framing theories. The following will discuss each of these theories in detail.

Agenda-Setting

Agenda-setting refers to the role of media in determining what consumers care about. "Agenda-setting is the creation of public awareness and concern of salient issues by the news media. Two foundational assumptions underlie most research on agenda-setting: (1) the press and the media do not reflect reality; they filter and shape it; and (2) media concentration on a few issues and subjects leads the public to perceive those issues as more important than other issues."¹⁶ For certain media consumers who do

¹⁶ "Communication Theories - Universiteit Twente" (University of Twente), accessed September 26, 2022, <https://www.utwente.nl/uc/f32b97e4401021a2d8f00d5e2e5030c0add13d6eed6e400/Communication%20Theories%20University%20of%20Twente%20-%20UTwente%20-%20The%20Netherlands.pdf>, 104.

not engage with refugees or people from conflict areas, the media may be the unique force driving their knowledge and concerns about refugees. “For this research, agenda-setting helps explain the implications of media coverage about refugees because it establishes that the prevalence (or absence) of content about refugees impacts the public, regardless of the content.

Without explicitly using the term, Lippman produced some of the earliest research on agenda-setting in 1922 by addressing why people construct opinions and feelings on events or ideas they have never experienced. People can form those opinions because of the media. Lippman remarked that the world is too complex for humans to understand, so “we have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we can manage it.”¹⁷ The media facilitates that reconstruction by implicitly telling consumers which events, people, and countries are worth their attention.

In a study in US politics, McCombs and Shaw officially named agenda-setting through their research investigating which issues voters in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, said were most important in the 1968 presidential election. They found a significant correlation between the issues the media featured and the issues voters prioritized.¹⁸ Their findings highlighted the central thesis of agenda-setting: the media may not tell viewers how to think, but it tells them what to think about by concentrating on some issues more than others. More coverage of an event leads the consumers to assume that it is relevant. Though “Maxwell and McCombs’ study did not prove the media could set the agenda, [the stories the media selects] will have some impact on what we think is important.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (Allen & Unwin, 1922), 16.

¹⁸ Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, “The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media,” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36, no. 2 (1972): pp. 176-187, <https://doi.org/10.1086/267990>, 180.

¹⁹ “The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media,” *Media Studies*, accessed May 1, 2023, <https://media-studies.com/agenda-setting-theory/>.

The relationship between the agenda and public opinion is reciprocal; the media is also responding to what people think is important. However, agenda-setting aims to identify how the media shapes public opinion while also responding to it.

Testing agenda-setting requires examining the content rather than the effects.

Al-Thani notes that consistency is a key characteristic of agenda-setting and issue-framing.²⁰ Beyond simply the single use of certain frames, the consistent repetition of the frame drives the viewer to form thoughts, decisions, and actions according to the frame.²¹

While various factors influence agenda-setting, gatekeepers are responsible for interpreting those factors to determine what stories get coverage and how they are reported.

Gatekeeping

Gatekeeping is critical to understanding how various forces select and shape the information that viewers ultimately consume. Shoemaker et al. explain gatekeeping as the mechanism by which, from the endless pool of stories to choose from, the items that count as ‘news’ are selected, shaped, timed, and disseminated.²² According to Shoemaker et al., news routines, organizational structure, and ideology of sources influence the coverage that news organizations produce. Gatekeeping lays bare the power of newsmakers and the news production processes in controlling the media content the audience ultimately receives.

²⁰ Ali Al-Thani, “The Media Representation and Misrepresentation of Refugees: A Comparison between US and French Media” (University of San Francisco, November 2018), <https://repository.usfca.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2244&context=thes>, 8.

²¹ Al-Thani, “The Media Representation,” 8.

²² Pamela J. Shoemaker et al., “Individual and Routine Forces in Gatekeeping,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (2001): pp. 233-246, <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900107800202>.

Shoemaker et al. describe gatekeeping as “the overall process through which the social reality transmitted by the news media is constructed.”²³ Gatekeepers’ power is especially impactful given that they determine which stories will be “on the agenda” and how they will frame them. This process becomes increasingly important in discussing how different media sources present the same events and issues significantly differently due to the influence of gatekeepers. Gatekeeping is especially significant in this analysis because the two media sources are on opposite sides of the war. A gatekeeper's ideology influences their focus and message, so (given their opposing extreme ideological differences) gatekeeping theory assumes that two opposing sources would have dramatically different reporting and slants to a story.²⁴ All actors in the news production process and routines (e.g., writers, producers, editors, camera operators, etc.), subconsciously or more intentionally, shape their content with their organization’s ideology in mind. Gatekeepers could regulate content about refugees through mechanisms like which types of refugees they concentrate on (e.g., men, women, children, entrepreneurs, criminals, educated, low-skilled, etc.), how they talk about displacement, whether they concentrate on successes or failures, and others.

Of course, the media coverage of the Syrian crisis is influenced by the consistently changing situation in Syria and the number of people leaving the country. Gatekeepers in receiving countries' frames vary based on the changing situation in Syria. Lueders et al. identified a “vicious cycle” of refugee-hostile media coverage where

²³ Shoemaker et al., “Individual and Routine,” 233.

²⁴ Doreen Kutufam, “BBC's Presentation of Africa: A Comparison of BBC Television World News for Africa and North America,” February 9, 2009, https://doi.org/http://www.allacademic.c-om//meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/0/1/3/4/0/pages13408/p134082.php, 4.

gatekeepers react to community sentiments to shape their frame of refugees.²⁵ An “influx of refugees into Europe [increases] the endorsement of refugee-hostile media coverage and [decreases] the endorsement of refugee-friendly media coverage.”²⁶ Their content shift highlights how gatekeepers shape and change refugee narratives. Further, Lueders et al. note that this change in reporting may produce increased frustration and hostility among citizens of the receiving country.²⁷ The Lueders et al. study highlights how gatekeepers can influence both the framing and the prominence of the story.

Agenda-setting allows gatekeepers in receiving country media sources to determine when and how the refugee crisis will be in the news. For example, there was a large increase in reporting about refugees in 2015 following the combined effects of both the photo of Alan Kurdi and the increase in refugees moving to Europe.

For Syria, refugee issues are already “on the agenda,” but the gatekeepers determine the framing of their stories. For example, focusing more on stories of the refugees who drowned when their boat capsized in the Mediterranean Sea would have far different implications than stories about someone from the same boat who survived and became a successful businessperson. While they would be covering the same incident, those two stories are framed quite differently. This example is a stylized example of how framing works, but it highlights how gatekeepers shape the media for viewers to consume.

Gatekeeping identifies the power of media creators to shape content, but issue-framing describes a specific way that gatekeepers may do so.

²⁵Adrian Lueders, Mike Prentice, and Eva Jonas, “Refugees in the Media: Exploring a Vicious Cycle of Frustrated Psychological Needs, Selective Exposure, and Hostile Intergroup Attitudes,” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 49, no. 7 (2019): pp. 1471-1479, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2580>.

²⁶ Lueders et al., “Refugees in the Media.”

²⁷ Lueders et al., “Refugees in the Media.”

Issue-Framing: Underlying Theories in Media About Refugees

While agenda-setting leads viewers to construct knowledge and awareness about refugees, issue-framing tells the consumers how to form values and opinions.

“...A frame refers to the way media and media gatekeepers organize and present the events and issues they cover, and the way audiences interpret what they are provided. ... Frames influence the perception of the news of the audience, this form of agenda-setting not only tells what to think about, but also how to think about it.”²⁸

Thus, the consistency of the frame can drive the viewer to form thoughts, decisions, and actions consistent with the frame.²⁹

Tyyskä et al. describe the effect of two theories on the issue-framing of refugee media in the West: postcolonial theory and Orientalism. The combined influence of colonialism and Orientalism led to Western-centrism in the media’s discussion of refugees. Relevant here, the Western media portrays Syrian refugees as “others,” which makes some consumers view them as threats, burdens, passive, or needy.³⁰ Syrian media likely also presents refugees as “others,” but less explicitly.

Othering creates a mental lens through which media consumers view refugees. “Public representation of unequal social relations and the play of cultural power...[constructs] a sense of who “we” are in relation to who “we” are not.”³¹ Two primary themes contribute to othering refugees: homogenization and victimization. Terms such as “the refugee crisis” or “refugee resettlement” blur the distinctions between various groups of refugees. People of diverse ethnicities, nationalities, and cultures can be united in the consumers’ eyes because they have all fled their homes.³² Of course,

²⁸ “Communication Theories - Universiteit Twente,” 107.

²⁹ Al-Thani, “The Media Representation,” 8.

³⁰ Tyyskä et al., “The Syrian Refugee Crisis,” 2.

³¹ Georgiou & Zaborowski, “Media coverage,” 5.

³² Szczepanik, “The ‘Good’ and ‘Bad’ Refugees,” 31.

these stereotypes tend to be shaped around race, color, and ethnicity; for example, Arab refugees, African refugees, and Latin American refugees are each lumped into their own groups that carry their own labels. These archetypes have become familiar to media consumers, and it is difficult to accept any counterevidence to an image they have established.³³

In Western media, othering often occurs through a lack of context about refugees.³⁴ However, in Syria, the readers have the context to understand the Syrian Civil War and the consequential refugee crisis. Thus, if othering is prevalent in Syrian media, it would likely be due to a distinction between refugees as the out-group and Syrians who can or choose to stay as the in-group. In the case of the sources examined in this research, the opposition source (which is run by Syrians and Turkish outside of Syria because of safety concerns) would likely “other” refugees less than the government source (which is run from within Syria by people who are not displaced). Media theories indicate that Syrians, both inside and outside the country, would still be reliant on the media to help form their opinions, but because they have the context on the war, Syrians are distinctly less reliant on the media to form opinions about the Syrian Civil War and the refugee crisis.

Beyond othering, media about refugees consistently victimizes them. While victimization of refugees in the media may be unavoidable (they are, of course, victims), unfortunately, it perpetuates the distinction between refugees and everyone else.

Victimization represents refugees as needy, passive, and lacking agency while evoking feelings of playing the role of savior.³⁵ “...refugees are dehumanized when presented as

³³ Szczepanik, “The ‘Good’ and ‘Bad’ Refugees,” 30.

³⁴ Georgiou & Zaborowski, “Media coverage,” 13.

³⁵ Tyyskä et al., “The Syrian Refugee Crisis,” 11.

devoid of agency, a speechless ‘sea of humanity’ where individuals remain anonymous or [are] sentimentalized (as the figures of refugee mothers with children).”³⁶ It is often inadvertently perpetuated by media and humanitarian agencies who depict images and headlines of tragedy to elicit consumers’ emotional (and financial) responses.³⁷ Georgiou & Zaborowski highlight that this framework limits the capacity of consumers to expand their view of refugees:

“Refugees thus emerge from these narratives as an anonymous, unskilled group. . . . In the mediated narrative, without individual characteristics, refugees are implied to be of little use for European countries (as they seem to have no profession), inspiring little empathy (because they are dehumanized and de-individualised) and raising suspicion (because no gender distinction aids the narrative of refugees being “mostly young men chancing their luck”).”³⁸

This homogenization leads to a moderated narrative that makes it difficult for media consumers to form divergent opinions about refugees because despite their media consumption, they are actually getting little information about refugees themselves.

Receiving countries’ media generally display a pattern of a lack of stories from refugees themselves when they cover the issue. It is a “mediated experience” rather than a “lived experience.”³⁹ While Syrians have more context to understand the refugee crisis, Syrian media likely follow a similar pattern. Reporters only directly cite unique material, unique expression, and important quotes from important people.⁴⁰ Georgiou & Zaborowski’s data supports the idea that this preference means that politicians and leaders are more likely to be published in articles than refugees.⁴¹ The mediated versions

³⁶ Szczepanik, “The ‘Good’ and ‘Bad’ Refugees,” 31.

³⁷ Szczepanik, “The ‘Good’ and ‘Bad’ Refugees,” 31.

³⁸ Georgiou & Zaborowski, “Media coverage,” 10.

³⁹ Szczepanik, “The ‘Good’ and ‘Bad’ Refugees,” 29.

⁴⁰ Brian S Brooks, Beverly J Horvit, and Daryl R Moen, “Chapter 5: Quotation and Attributions,” in *The Missouri Group: News Reporting & Writing*, 13th ed. (Boston, Massachusetts : University of Michigan School of Journalism, 2011), pp. 82-111, 84-86.

⁴¹ Georgiou & Zaborowski, “Media coverage,” 10.

recontextualize, disperse, and even alter the stories. They allow the stories to meet the familiar archetypes that the consumers expect from refugee content which may exclude or modify important details. Although Syrians have more context on the issue than the rest of the world, their view of the refugee crisis is still influenced by the media.

Because issue-framing can influence the way that consumers think about refugees, previous research has concentrated quite specifically on the way receiving countries' media frame refugees.

Issue-Framing: Frames Present in Previous Research

Though issue-framing can take many forms, scholars have identified three consistent frameworks in discussions about refugees: traditional nationalism, humanitarian nationalism, and gender bias. Notably, the previous research that shaped these frameworks analyzed receiving countries' media and does not necessarily provide insight into how a sending country, like Syria, frames its discussion of refugees. However, in attempting to build on this literature, I will explain how parallel logic might apply to portrayals from Syrian perspectives.

Both of the nationalism frameworks demand “the inclusion and exclusion of the refugees to construct a national identity.”⁴² “While constructing a national past and present, one would construct the Self (as the nation) and the Other (either from inside or outside the country).”⁴³ Regarding refugees, the expression of nationalism is different for Syria than for the US; Syrian media that supports Syrian refugees *because* they are Syrian is considered traditionally nationalist because it forms ideas about people/groups based on their relationship to the Syrian national identity. Headlines that specifically name them

⁴² Aridici, “Constructing,” 699.

⁴³ Aridici, “Constructing,” 699.

as “Syrian” and highlight what they have to offer other countries meet that standard. Hypothetical examples could be “Syrian refugees promote economic growth in Europe” or “Syrian refugee opens restaurant for their award-winning Syrian cuisine.”

Constructing a national identity demands the exclusion of others, but in the case of humanitarian nationalism, it also promotes the inclusion of others, with the effect of emphasizing the importance, to the consumers, of the receiving nation. However, whether a refugee is included/excluded is often determined by their own identities (e.g., gender, marital status, age).

The following will further discuss the previous research on how the three frameworks – traditional nationalism, humanitarian nationalism, and gender bias – manifest in media about refugees.

Traditional Nationalism

Under traditional nationalism in receiving countries, the media discusses refugees with implicit or explicit indications that refugees are presented as a threat to lives, economies, and lifestyles. This type of messaging asserts that refugees are strains on government resources.⁴⁴

Traditional nationalism primarily focuses on the impacts refugees have on the receiving country, which are typically portrayed negatively. It promotes the narrative that citizens should be anxious about unwanted consequences at the hands of refugees.⁴⁵ The negative consequences are often framed as practical impacts refugees could have on the viewer’s life, while positive consequences focus on the ways that refugees could benefit

⁴⁴ Tyyskä et al., “The Syrian Refugee Crisis,” 3.

⁴⁵ Georgiou & Zaborowski, “Media coverage,” 9.

the host country.⁴⁶ This framework limits the capacity of the viewers to engage with the possibility of practical benefits of refugees to their lives and countries. Georgiou & Zaborowski's research on European media about refugees found that hostility originating from the traditional nationalism framework was more common in countries "where hate speech is not always tackled systematically (e.g., Hungary, France)."⁴⁷

However, as Syria is not receiving Syrian refugees, traditional nationalism certainly presents itself differently. It may manifest itself as the direct inverse of the receiving countries. As noted, previous research indicates that the receiving countries describe refugees as problems for their country, thus, traditional nationalism for a sending country may indicate that refugees are beneficial to other countries.

Alternatively, as Syria is at war, traditional nationalism may also be tied to sacrifice for the country; this would indicate that those who leave are less patriotic Syrians. Bashar al-Assad has hinted at this idea repeatedly. In a speech in July 2015, he said, "the fatherland is not for those who live in it or hold its nationality, but for those who defend and protect it,...the army, in order to be able to perform its duties and counter-terrorism, must be supported by the human element."⁴⁸ Assad's nationalism centralizes the army, and specifically, men to indicate that "the ideal Syrian is a martial man."⁴⁹ Furthermore, the government may display traditional nationalism by blaming the opposition for causing refugee displacement. From the perspective of the government, the opposition is undermining the theoretical definition of nationalism as the "the creation and maintenance of a fully sovereign state owned by a given ethno-national group ...

⁴⁶ Georgiou & Zaborowski, "Media coverage," 9.

⁴⁷ Georgiou & Zaborowski, "Media coverage," 13.

⁴⁸ Rahaf Aldoughli, "Syrian Nationalism Is All about Masculinity," University of Manchester, December 13, 2017, <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/news/syrian-masculinity/>.

⁴⁹ Aldoughli, "Syrian Nationalism."

as a primary duty of each member of the group.”⁵⁰ By rebelling against their government, the opposition is undermining “the nation” and thus, traditional nationalism from the government would appear in headlines that blame the opposition for the refugee crisis.

Though the traditional nationalism framework promotes hostility, hatred, and violence against refugees by representing them as a threat to the receiving country's culture and national values, it presents itself in a much different way in Syrian media. It may still promote hate by indicating that refugees are cowards, for example, but it may also present refugees as beneficial across the globe. That distinction depends on whether Syrians are presented as valuable because they are Syrian or if they are only valuable when they are contributing to the “fatherland.”

Humanitarian Nationalism

Turkey has accepted more Syrian refugees than any other country.⁵¹ In Nuray Aridici's research on Turkish media, “the inclusive politics of accepting refugees is a way to glorify the myth of greatness of Turkish government and nation while differentiating the ‘newcomers’ from the self.”⁵² It promotes the idea that hospitality and kindness are part of the national identity and affirms the country's moral superiority. Like victimization, humanitarian nationalism supports the idea of the receiving nation as a savior that “[offers] a narrative of humanitarian and generous” citizens.⁵³ Any

⁵⁰ Nenad Miscevic, “Nationalism,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Stanford University, September 2, 2020), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/nationalism/>.

⁵¹ Reid, “Syrian Refugee.”

⁵² Aridici, “Constructing,” 700.

⁵³ Tyyskä et al., “The Syrian Refugee Crisis,” 7. The quote refers to Canadians but the analysis can be expanded to other country's media that reflects similar characteristics.

xenophobia, racism, or hate speech is “dismissed as uncharacteristic” of the receiving country as opposed to a realization of a systemic issue.⁵⁴

Though humanitarian nationalism is prevalent in much of the previous research, it highlights the lack of exploration on refugee sending countries like Syria. Discussions of a moral obligation or the strength to accept more refugees uniquely occur in transit and receiving countries. There is no expectation that Syria should accept refugees from other countries and as such, the same type of humanitarian nationalism should not be prevalent in Syrian media. However, a potential alternative to receiving countries’ humanitarian nationalism in Syria may include headlines that emphasize the importance of Syrians helping Syrian refugees (hypothetical examples: “The Syrian government must bring refugees home” or “10 ways Syria is solving the refugee crisis”) or headlines that highlight the humanitarianism of other countries (hypothetical examples: “The UK to increase their refugee caps despite opposition” or “Canada to provide \$50 million for refugee camps in Syria”).

Gender Bias

The media depicts refugees significantly differently depending on their gender, age, and other aspects of their identity. Women are typically portrayed in images as passive, while men are much more active and often aggressive.⁵⁵ This difference is especially significant given that fear of refugees is a defining factor of traditional nationalism; however, that fear is often directed at men. The gender bias is short-sighted

⁵⁴ Tyyskä et al., “The Syrian Refugee Crisis,” 7.

⁵⁵ Szczepanik, “The ‘Good’ and ‘Bad’ Refugees,” 24.

given that displacement has affected everyone, “regardless of who the media prioritizes.”⁵⁶

The media's warmer portrayal of women refugees has led to the creation of an "imaginary refugee ideal" who is often female, young, non-threatening, and unlikely to abuse the social welfare system.⁵⁷ This ideal has distanced most viewers' perception of refugees from reality and makes it more difficult for countries to accept more refugees.⁵⁸ It indicates that if they do not meet the ideal, they are less deserving of protection. This type of issue-framing only generates empathy and victimization for certain refugees. The gender bias prioritizes innocence and vulnerability, which reaches the idea that it is “primarily children whose lives are worth saving.”⁵⁹ This type of gender bias likely persists in Syrian media with respect to the victimization of women and children, but it may be more hostile to male refugees than the receiving country media.

Beyond a preference for women and children, there may be hostility to male refugees because of the perception that they should have remained in Syria to help their country.⁶⁰ Wartime has fostered a message of the importance of strong men to save Syria. Aldoughli notes that Syrian nationalism centralizes masculinity; “Syria is a “fatherland” for which Syrian men should be ready to die; their self-sacrifice requires martial ability and physical strength, both of which are tests of national loyalty.”⁶¹ This sentiment may generate contempt for male refugees in Syrian media. The predominant negative

⁵⁶ Szczepanik, “The ‘Good’ and ‘Bad’ Refugees,” 27.

⁵⁷ Szczepanik, “The ‘Good’ and ‘Bad’ Refugees,” 26.

⁵⁸ Szczepanik, “The ‘Good’ and ‘Bad’ Refugees,” 28.

⁵⁹ Szczepanik, “The ‘Good’ and ‘Bad’ Refugees,” 25.

⁶⁰ Jill Walker Rettberg and Radhika Gajjala, “Terrorists or Cowards: Negative Portrayals of Male Syrian Refugees in Social Media,” *Feminist Media Studies* 16, no. 1 (2015): pp. 178-181, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2016.1120493>, 180.

⁶¹ Aldoughli, “Syrian Nationalism.”

stereotypes about male refugees (i.e., terrorists and cowards) are in direct conflict with each other, but Rettberg and Gajjala note that both aim to question their masculinity.⁶²

Hypotheses

When applied to the study of Syrian headlines, the research provided in the literature review can be tested through several hypotheses. Many of these hypotheses test more than one theme in previous research but they are organized below based on which they address most directly. Explicit connections to previous research are listed in Appendix A. Each of the hypotheses connects to the analysis featured in the findings section.

- 1a. Sources will report on refugees relatively consistently over time.
- 1b. The opposition source will describe refugees as victims increasingly frequently every year after the start of the Syrian Civil War in 2011.⁶³
- 2a. The opposition source will display Syrian refugees more positively than the government source.
- 3a. The opposition source will be more likely to describe refugees as victims.
- 3b. The opposition source will report on the problems of accepting refugees less than the benefits.
- 3c. Government sources will be more likely to describe refugees as problems.
- 3d. Opposition sources will describe Syrian refugees as victims when they report on the challenges of accepting refugees.
- 4a. Both sources will display traditional nationalism by describing Syrian refugees as beneficial internationally.

⁶² Rettberg & Gajjala, "Terrorists or Cowards," 180.

⁶³ Because Enab Baladi did not start circulation until 2012, the results start in 2012.

5a. Sources will describe women, children, and families as victims more than men.

5b. There will be more of a gender discrepancy in the government sources than the opposition sources.

Research Design and Methodology

I conducted a mixed methods content analysis of two Syrian news sources from 2012 or 2013 to 2021, depending on the availability of the data. I selected one government-leaning source and one opposition-leaning source (table 1). The results were primarily quantitative, but I included qualitative analysis to identify major themes in each of the coding categories and provide more context to the quantitative results.

Table 1. Source Title Information

Source Title	Publishing Source	Lean
Enab Baladi	Private (non-profit)	Opposition
Syrian Arab News Agency	State owned and controlled	Government

Enab Baladi is an independent Syrian nonprofit media organization and the only opposition media source in Syria. It was established in 2011 by citizen journalists and activists from Daraya, a Syrian town in Damascus suburbs.⁶⁴ The Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), the most robust news agency in Syria, was created in 1965 and all state newspapers heavily rely on their reporting. Alan George describes it as a “propaganda organisation charged with singing the regime’s praises.”⁶⁵ There are several other government-leaning sources in Syria; however, because the other sources tend to “cover

⁶⁴ “About Us,” Enab Baladi, December 9, 2019, <https://english.enabbaladi.net/about-us/>.

⁶⁵ Alan George, *Syria: Neither Bread nor Freedom* (New York: Zed Books, 2003), 125.

much of the same stories” as SANA and heavily rely on its reporting, collecting data on other government-leaning sources would likely not yield considerably different results.⁶⁶

I focused solely on headlines for three reasons: (1) they “serve as cognitive shortcuts that draw readers’ attention...,” (2) they are “particularly likely to influence readers who do not already have strong opinions about a topic,” and (3) they are “composed by editors rather than by reporters.”⁶⁷ It was also more practical to code headlines because of the difficulty of translating the full text of so many articles.

Because the papers have different distribution rates, they demanded a different sample size and collection method. The samples were collected by searching the word “Syrian refugee” in both sources which produced a list of all stories that mentioned those words. Because any article that mentioned Syrian refugees at any point was included in the search results, many headlines were excluded because they did not mention Syrian refugees in the headline, such as “The final statement of the meeting of the guarantor countries of the Astana process: commitment to Syrian sovereignty and rejecting forced economic measures” (SANA, December 22, 2021).⁶⁸

For Enab Baladi, a weekly online newspaper, I collected all of their headlines about Syrian refugees since they were founded in 2012.⁶⁹ SANA publishes much more frequently, so I randomly sampled 50% of their headlines from January 1, 2013, to December 31, 2021.⁷⁰ The random sample was done by collecting alternate headlines as they appeared in SANA’s chronologically-listed search results. SANA’s website was hosted by a US company until November 2012 when US sanctions made it illegal for US

⁶⁶ Alan George, *Syria: Neither Bread nor Freedom* (New York: Zed Books, 2003), 125.

⁶⁷ Bleich et al., “Media Portrayals,” 946.

⁶⁸ There were 265 (21.96%) “no mention” headlines in the Enab Baladi data and 875 (72.49%) in SANA.

⁶⁹ The first headline collected was published October 1, 2012.

⁷⁰ The first headline collected was published October 5, 2013 and the last was December 31, 2021.

companies to provide website hosting services to Syrian companies.⁷¹ As such, there were no headlines from before November 2012.

My research critically extends beyond the 2015-2016 time period because most of the previous research was sparked by Alan Kurdi's photo in the fall of 2015. There is already extensive research on the framing of refugees in the media during that time period. Furthermore, following the Kurdi photo and a massive influx of refugees to Europe, there was a period of heightened coverage and often daily engagement with the refugee crisis, so data collected during that time may have yielded results unique to that period rather than a reflection of more general theories about media perception of refugees.⁷² My data also reflects that heightened engagement, but I go beyond the limited time periods of many prior studies.

In total, there were 899 headlines from Enab Baladi and 1,204 headlines from SANA. However, there was a considerable amount of headlines that appeared in the search results because they mentioned Syrian refugees in the story but not the headline. Those were removed from the initial analysis because Syrian refugees needed to be the focus of the headline. After removing those headlines from the initial analysis, there were 635 headlines from Enab Baladi and 329 from SANA.

All data was collected and coded in its original language, Modern Standard Arabic. A Native Levantine Arabic speaker did the coding and assisted with English translation for headlines used in qualitative analysis.

⁷¹ Amy Chozick, "Official Syrian Web Sites Hosted in U.S.," *The New York Times* (*The New York Times*, November 30, 2012),

<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/30/world/middleeast/official-syrian-web-sites-hosted-in-us.html>.

⁷² Georgiou & Zaborowski, "Media coverage," 4.

I replicated parts of a research design from Bleich et al. in their analysis of the representations of Muslims in British media. "...[Each] headline was coded in one of five frame categories: victim, beneficial, problem, other and ambiguous. The first three of these categories have either a positive or negative tone" based on the feelings they elicit.⁷³

While the literature cited above rightly notes that the "victim" frame can otherize the subject and indicate that it lacks agency, "they are more aptly identified as having a positive tone because they tend to generate sympathy for the victim group."⁷⁴ The "beneficial" frame has a positive tone, while the "problem" frame has a negative tone. The "other" frame describes headlines that are neither positive nor negative but often more informative, such as "5 facts about Syrian refugees" The ambiguous frame refers to headlines that could be positive or negative depending on the reader's interpretation (e.g., "Lebanon is taking action on the refugee issue") and headlines that are both positive and negative (e.g., "Refugees stealing jobs and bolstering the economy").

I expanded the coding design beyond that used by Bleich et al. to include international and domestic along with the "problem" and "beneficial" coding categories. This change provides a more nuanced understanding of the data and allows for a discussion of the prevalence of nationalism in the headlines. "Beneficial" (both domestically and internationally) explores nationalism and "problem" adds more nuance to the data on "victim" and gender bias. Though the Bleich et al. study only coded each headline under one of their codes, I allowed headlines to be coded under multiple categories to adapt to the expanded coding design.

⁷³ Bleich et al., "Media Portrayals," 948.

⁷⁴ Bleich et al., "Media Portrayals," 948.

To examine gender bias in the headlines, I added a category for women/children/family and men. When analyzed against the “victim” and the “problem” category, the gender categories provide insight into a potential gender bias in refugee coverage.

However, each of the categories have some inherent shortcomings worth keeping in mind. Given the civil war, by definition, the term “Syrian refugee” indicates that they are victims of conflict, instability, oppression, or something else. The “problem” category presents a similar dilemma. A large influx of refugees can be a problem for receiving nations to address, even if there is no resentment and the refugees themselves are not creating problems. Even countries that want refugees (e.g., to benefit their economies, fulfill a moral obligation) have to process resettlement and potentially provide public services. For the data, debates about addressing the rising numbers of Syrian refugees were coded under “problem,” even though it does not necessarily reflect negativity towards Syrian refugees. As such, the data has certain limitations, and future studies should also measure the headline's tone. For example, the Bleich et al. study gives each headline a score based on how positive or negative it is.⁷⁵

Each headline was coded under one or more of nine frame categories: beneficial domestically, beneficial internationally, problem domestically, problem internationally, victim, women/children/family, men, ambiguous, and other. I included a coding category for no mention of Syrian refugees, but that data was excluded from the analysis. Each of the coding categories are linked to one or more hypotheses (Table 2), except for ambiguous and other. A list of examples of headlines that fit under each coding category

⁷⁵ Bleich et al., “Media Portrayals.”

are listed in Appendix B, but there are also tables at the end of each section to provide examples of relevant headlines.

Table 2. Coding Category Connections to Hypotheses

Number	Hypothesis	Coding Category
1a	Sources will report on refugees relatively consistently over time.	Collection data: year
1b	The opposition source will describe refugees as victims increasingly frequently every year after the start of the Syrian Civil War in 2011. ⁷⁶	Collection data: year, victim
2a	The opposition source will display Syrian refugees more positively than the government source.	Beneficial domestically, beneficial internationally, victim
3a	The opposition source will be more likely to describe refugees as victims.	Victim
3b	The opposition source will report on the problems of accepting refugees less than the benefits.	Beneficial domestically, beneficial internationally, problem domestically, problem internationally
3c	Government sources will be more likely to describe refugees as problems.	Problem domestically, problem internationally
3d	Opposition sources will describe Syrian refugees as victims when they report on the challenges of accepting refugees.	Victim, problem internationally
4a	Both sources will display traditional nationalism by describing Syrian refugees as beneficial internationally.	Beneficial internationally
5a	Sources will describe women, children, and families as victims more than men.	women/children/family, men

⁷⁶ Because Enab Baladi did not start circulation until 2012, the results start in 2012.

5b	There will be more of a gender discrepancy in the government sources than the opposition sources.	women/children/family, men
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FINDINGS

The results indicated that the headlines explored the victimhood of refugees while displaying nationalist undertones that varied by source. The two most significant findings were the proposal of a new framework for understanding media from sending countries and the analysis of different manifestations of nationalism. The data also yielded analysis on frame consistency, tone, and gender bias.

The following sections explore the results based on themes rather than hypotheses, but they are organized in a corresponding order to the literature review (agenda-setting, issue-framing, and gender bias). Most of the charts display the data as a percentage of the number of headlines collected from that source. Any chart that deviates from that style is explained explicitly. Because there was overlap in many of the categories (e.g., a headline could indicate that refugees were beneficial domestically and internationally), some of the charts add up to more than 100%. Others do not meet 100% because the chart only displays certain coding categories. Examples of headlines coded in relevant categories are listed at the end of each section.

Consistent Frame in Headlines

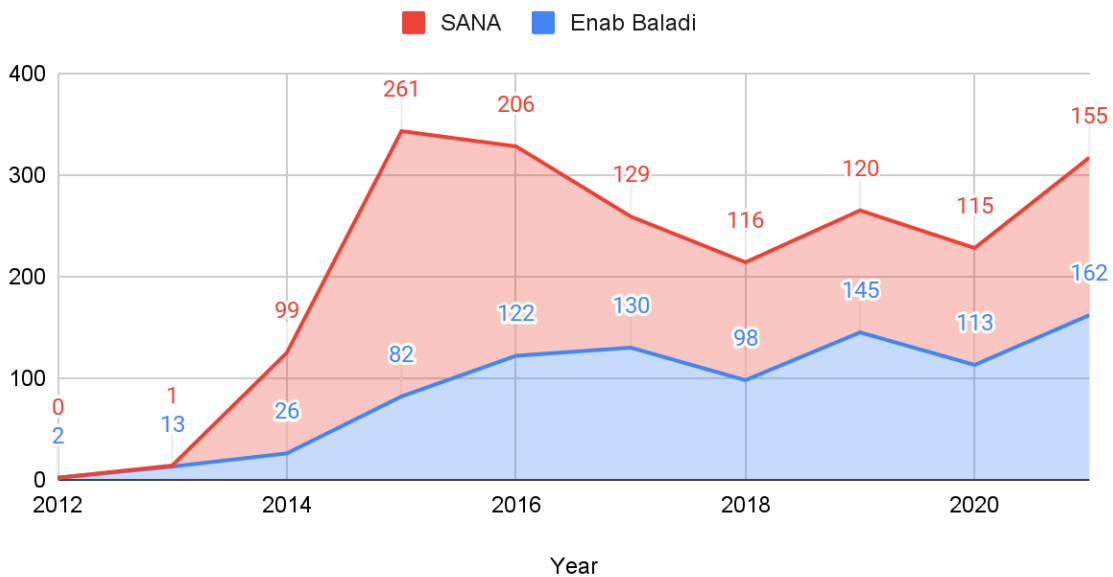
Regarding the coverage over time, both sources were relatively consistent. Hypothesis 1a, which posited that sources report on refugees relatively consistently over time, was supported, but consistency was much more prevalent in Enab Baladi than SANA (Chart 1.1). This section also explores hypothesis 1b, which proposed that the

opposition source will describe refugees as victims increasingly frequently every year after the start of the Syrian Civil War in 2011. Hypothesis 1b was not supported because there was relative consistency in Enab Baladi's use of the "victim" frame (Chart 1.2). In fact, there was a minimal decrease in their description of refugees as victims.

There was an upward trend in the number of stories about refugees over the years collected from Enab Baladi (Chart 1.1). It is important to note that SANA is a larger news organization so it is unsurprising that they published more headlines. There were no headlines in 2012 and only one in 2013 because of access issues mentioned in the research design and methodology section. Those numbers are not a reflection of coverage of refugees in those years.

However, because Enab Baladi started circulation in 2012 and has grown each year, it follows that they would increase the number of stories yearly. When a news media organization experiences growth in its resources and staff, the number of stories they publish typically grows as well. Chart 1.1 may be more of a commentary on the growth of Enab Baladi as a news organization than a suggestion that they have increased their focus on refugees each year. However, the relative consistency of Enab Baladi's coverage after 2016 highlights that there was a stable discussion of refugees in their headlines. SANA had similarly steady coverage. The spike in the SANA consistency graph (Chart 1.3) highlights the global environment in 2015 and 2016 due to the massive increase in the number of Syrian refugees fleeing the country in 2015.

Chart 1.1: Headlines per year



Consistency (and lack thereof) is an indicator of agenda-setting.⁷⁷ Repeating frames over time reinforces the frame in the consumer's mind.⁷⁸ Though both sources were relatively consistent in their frequency of coverage about refugees, Enab Baladi was much more consistent in its use of different frames to describe them (Chart 1.2).⁷⁹ In a comparison of Enab Baladi's use of different categories each year, there was minimal correlation between the frequency of the categories and the year. That consistency was especially evident in headlines that described refugees as problems (internationally and domestically). Thus, hypothesis 1b, which asserted that the opposition source describes refugees as victims increasingly frequently every year after the start of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, was not supported because the victim coding category was fairly consistent over the time period of collection.

⁷⁷ Al-Thani, "The Media Representation," 8.

⁷⁸ Al-Thani, "The Media Representation," 8.

⁷⁹ Both graphs begin in 2014 because it was the first year that both sources had enough headlines to accurately represent the data.

Chart 1.2: Consistency of Enab Baladi over time

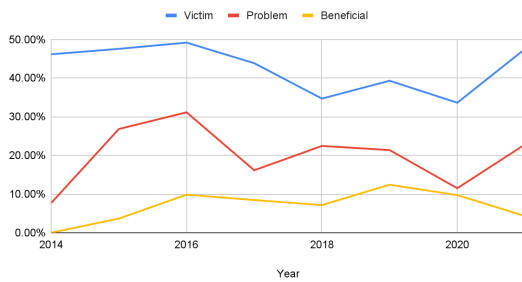
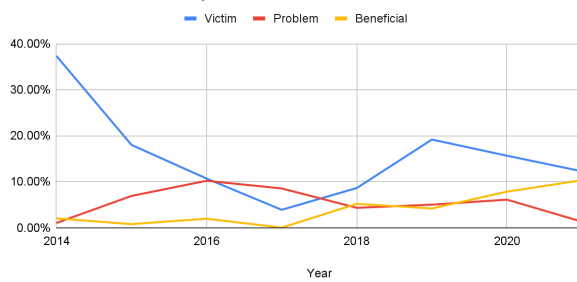


Chart 1.3: Consistency of SANA over time



SANA was far less consistent. It has steadily increased its depiction of refugees as beneficial and its use of the “victim” frame has been inconsistent, moving from 37.37%, dropping as low as 3.88% in 2017, and reaching 19.17% in 2019 (Chart 1.3). This inconsistency likely means that SANA’s coverage reflects the global context more than Enab Baladi; when the world is more sympathetic to refugees, so are SANA’s headlines. Perhaps the most interesting inconsistency is the manner in which certain years were more likely to describe refugees as victims and others as problems. It may indicate a level of issue fatigue where the issue was still being covered, but less favorably. In 2014 (much closer to the start of the civil war), SANA was far more likely to describe refugees as victims. By 2016, “problem” and “victim” were nearly even, and in 2017, SANA was more likely to describe refugees as problems. As noted before, there was a massive increase in refugees that reached Europe in 2015. This increase led to a corresponding increase in international media coverage of the Syrian Civil War and the refugee crisis. The increased use of the “problem” category in 2016 and 2017 may be a response to the global attention on Syria at the time.

The difference between SANA and Enab Baladi’s consistency indicates that Enab Baladi’s coverage may be less influenced by the global context. Given the increase and subsequent decrease in the intensity of the conflict and the significant increase in the

number of refugees fleeing the country in the same period (2012-2021), this consistency indicates that Enab Baladi’s discussion of refugees was not dependent on their situation or the global context.

Comparing Tone

Examining the tone of the headlines provides an overview of each source’s issue-framing patterns. This section addressed hypothesis 2a, which suggested that the opposition source displays Syrian refugees more positively than the government source. It was supported, but minimally (Chart 2).

Enab Baladi described refugees positively only about 4.54% more than SANA, but both sources were more likely to portray refugees with a positive frame than a negative one (Chart 2). Chart 2 displays the percentage of headlines that indicate a positive or negative tone which excludes headlines marked as “ambiguous” or “other.”⁸⁰ Bleich et al. notes that “victim” and “beneficial” have positive connotations, while “problem” has a negative connotation. This similarity indicates that coverage and sentiments about refugees in Syria are independent of a source’s position in the war. Enab Baladi, the opposition source, was not much more likely to be sympathetic towards refugees than SANA, the government source. In fact, Enab Baladi was more likely to portray refugees negatively than SANA. These results provide important context for the discussion of nationalism in the headlines because they indicate that political alignment does not considerably influence the sources’ presentation of refugees.

⁸⁰ Because some headlines were marked under more than one category, the results add up to more than 100%. For example, if a headline was both “victim” and “problem,” it would appear in this chart as having both positive and negative tone.

Chart 2: Positive vs. negative frame

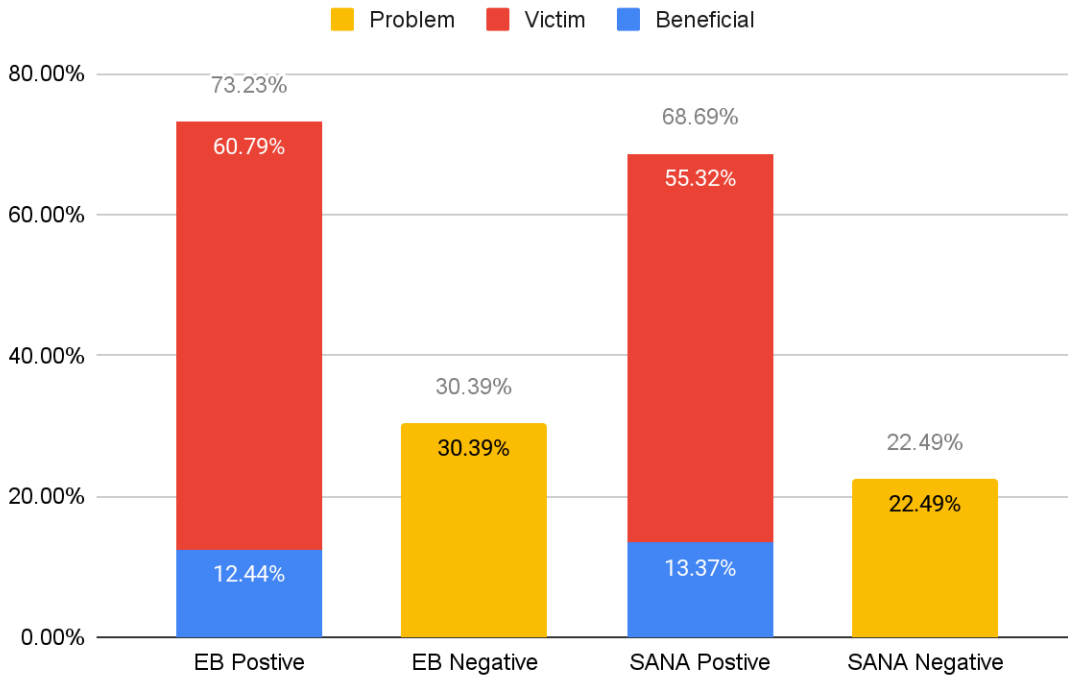


Table 3. Examples of Headline Coding for Consistency and Tone

Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The cold increases the suffering of the Syrian refugees .. Electrical wires threaten the lives of dozens of children in the Zaatari camp” (Enab Baladi, December 15, 2013) • “"Syrian volunteers" is the best service organization in Belgium” (Enab Baladi, October 8, 2017) • “Several measures taken by the Syrian government to return the Syrian displaced from abroad” (SANA, August 30, 2018)
Negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Europeans are burdened with refugees ... and the commission calls for cooperation and intensification of efforts” (Enab Baladi, August 24, 2015) • “The Austrian Liberal Party calls on its country to close its borders to the flow of immigrants” (SANA, September 15, 2015) • “2015 .. The year of building walls in the face of Syrian refugees” (Enab Baladi, January 3, 2016)

Sympathy Production: A New Framework

None of the frameworks from previous research (traditional nationalism, humanitarian nationalism, and gender bias) were considerably present in SANA or Enab Baladi. Though there was support for both traditional nationalism and a gender bias, it presented differently in the Syrian media than in the receiving countries' media.

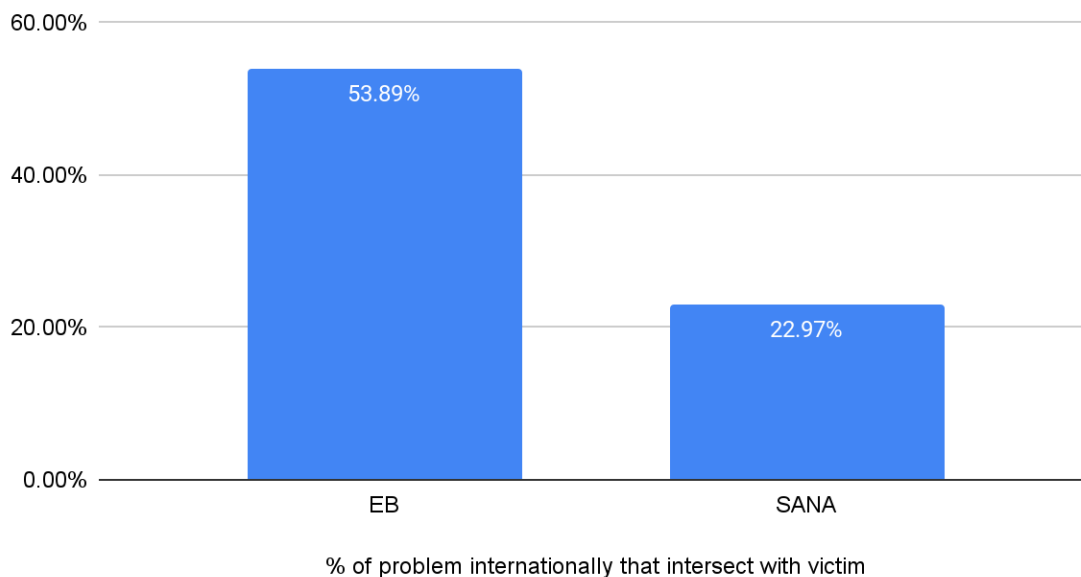
Humanitarian nationalism was not present in the data because discussions of a moral obligation or the strength to accept more refugees uniquely occur in transit and receiving countries. It was also not conclusively studied in this research because to measure humanitarian nationalism, an examination of obligation must be part of the study. It may require researching full articles rather than just the headlines. This indicates that receiving countries' frameworks do not quite fit a sending country, like Syria. However, this data suggests a new framework.

To explore a new framework this section examines hypotheses 3a, 3b, 3c, and 3d. Hypothesis 3a suggested that the opposition source will be more likely to describe refugees as victims. It was supported with the minimal difference between the two sources; Enab Baladi referred to refugees as victims in 60.79% of headlines and SANA did so in 55.32% of headlines. Hypothesis 3b indicated that the opposition source will report on the problems of accepting refugees less than the benefits. It was not supported because Enab Baladi described refugees as beneficial in 12.44% of headlines and as problems in 30.39% of headlines. Hypothesis 3c (government sources will be more likely to describe refugees as problems) was also not supported because Enab Baladi described refugees as problems in 30.39% of headlines while SANA only did so in 22.49%. Lastly, hypothesis 3d, which held that opposition sources will describe Syrian refugees as

victims when they report on the challenges of accepting refugees, was supported. Chart 3 displays the intersection between the “problem internationally” and “victim” coding categories and indicates that Enab Baladi’s headlines under “problem internationally” intersected with “victim” in 53.89% of cases.

Rather than their own humanitarian nationalism, the Syrian headlines refer to the humanitarian nationalism of other nations with headlines that implore other countries to accept more refugees. Despite other differences between SANA and Enab Baladi, both sources described refugees as victims the majority of the time (Enab Baladi at 60.79% and SANA at 55.32%). Both sources cater to international consumers by providing their news online in languages other than Arabic; in addition to Arabic, Enab Baladi offers English and SANA offers French, English, Turkish, Spanish, Russian, Hebrew, and Farsi. Further, Enab Baladi explicitly states their goal of educating the rest of the world on the Syrian War.⁸¹ The similarities between those two categories indicate that both sources use

Chart 3: "Problem internationally" that intersect with "victim"



⁸¹ “About Us,” Enab Baladi, 2019.

their agenda-setting power to call attention to the plight of refugees and capitalize on driving up the sympathy of international actors.

However, it is important to note that there may be a range of motives for their concentration on victimhood. First, it is true; Syrian refugees are victims of conflict who need international assistance. The sources were likely influenced by the countless authentic stories of refugee victimhood. Reporting on refugees is likely impossible to do without describing them as victims at least some of the time. Secondly, and this is specifically true for SANA, the sources may be concentrating on refugees as victims to aim to discourage people from leaving Syria. If they can describe life as a refugee as worse than life in war-torn Syria, people may be less likely to leave.

However, the sympathy production framework provides further explanation of the origin of this concentration on victimhood. Even when reporting on the challenges of accepting refugees, both sources aim to continue to produce sympathy. The “victim” and “problem internationally” categories have extensive overlap in both sources, but there is much more overlap in the Enab Baladi headlines (Chart 3). Both sources recognize that large numbers of displaced people present a challenge for receiving communities. Framing refugees as both problems and victims reminds readers that despite the fact that they present a problem for receiving countries, refugees are victims who need support. Enab Baladi was over 30% more likely to make this connection for their readers. This data demonstrates an issue-framing difference between the two sources; Enab Baladi demonstrates more sympathy for Syrian refugees than SANA.

These findings are especially notable given that Enab Baladi targets an international consumer base more than SANA. With reporting in Arabic and English,

Enab Baladi’s website notes that in an “almost complete absence of foreign media inside Syria, this website serves the role of reporting on the news from inside Syria and presenting it to foreign consumers interested in knowing what is really happening on the ground in Syria.”⁸² Though SANA offers reporting in more languages than Enab Baladi (which only has reporting in Arabic and English), Enab Baladi’s emphasis on international reporting is evident in these results. 40% of its headlines were focused on refugees internationally compared to only about 20% of SANA’s headlines. Meanwhile, less than 3% of Enab Baladi’s headlines were about refugees domestically compared to about 14% of SANA’s headlines. This difference highlights the power of media gatekeepers; Enab Baladi’s gatekeepers drive their consumers to a more international focus, while SANA presents refugees as a domestic issue for Syria.

Because studies on Syrian media on refugees are new territory for academic research, this research identifies sympathy production as a new framework in media on refugees beyond the nationalism or gender frameworks discussed above. This framework provides a mechanism for understanding media from sending countries about refugees. Unfortunately, there is limited data on the sources’ international readership, so it is difficult to measure the impact of their victimhood concentration.

Table 4. Examples of Headline Coding for “Victim” and “Problem Internationally”

<p>“Victim”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Distribution of 425 food baskets and 240 healthy baskets to the people of Yarmouk camp” (SANA, September 3, 2014) ● “After Hungary closed its borders ... where do the refugees go?” (Enab Baladi, September 16, 2015) ● “At least eight dead and many missing persons after an average migrant boat sank” (SANA, November 22, 2016)
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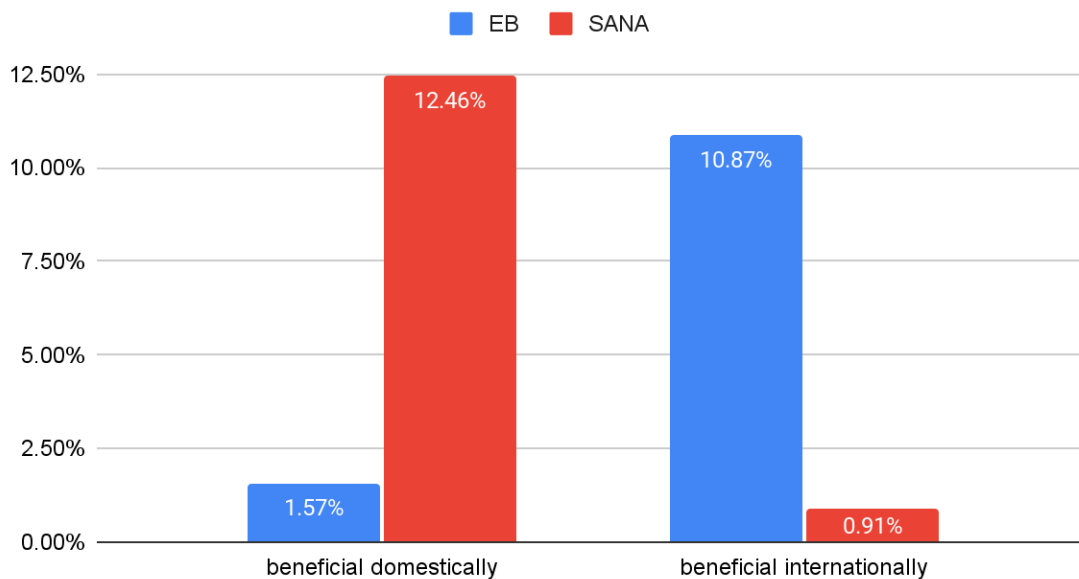
⁸² “About Us,” Enab Baladi, 2019.

<p>“Problem internationally”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “The Lebanese Foreign Minister demands that the number of Syrian refugees be reduced” (Enab Baladi, September 6, 2014) ● “The trial of four Syrians in Germany on charges of belonging to Al -Nusra” (SANA, September 26, 2017) ● “Difficulties in forming a government in Germany are caused by "refugees"” (Enab Baladi, January 11, 2018)
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Nationalism in the headlines

Though nationalism can be complicated to operationalize, this analysis does so by analyzing the sources’ use of the “beneficial internationally” category. Examining the relationship between “beneficial internationally” and “beneficial domestically” yields insight into how the headlines describe their own citizens in reference to both the homeland and other nations. This section addresses hypothesis 4a, which posited that both sources will display traditional nationalism by describing Syrian refugees as beneficial internationally. Hypothesis 4a was not supported because SANA described

Chart 4: "Beneficial" codes



refugees as “beneficial domestically” far more frequently than “beneficial internationally” (Chart 4). This difference indicates that Enab Baladi and SANA display traditional nationalism in distinctly different ways.

SANA focuses on the value that Syrians have to their home country; many of the “beneficial domestically” headlines from SANA were regarding the importance of supporting refugees’ return to Syria. Meanwhile, Enab Baladi indicates that they are beneficial to the countries to which they relocate. Examples are listed in table 5. This difference is likely due to a different perspective on the situation in Syria. Enab Baladi is quite critical of the Assad regime and makes it clear that Syria under Assad is not safe. As such, focusing on the success of Syrian refugees across the world—and not on the benefits of coming back—is a commentary on their perspective. It indicates that Syrians are better off in countries other than Syria, even if their displacement creates problems internationally. SANA’s emphasis on the benefits of refugees domestically, especially through its focus on returning refugees, indicates that SANA is calling for a return to the homeland and ties the value of the Syrian identity to Syria itself. In a comparison of the two, a source with more headlines that are “beneficial domestically” (e.g. SANA) may be more nationalist than more “beneficial internationally” (e.g. Enab Baladi) because “domestically” focuses on the nation rather than the individual. Headlines under both categories identify the value of individual Syrians, but “beneficial domestically” uniquely highlights not only their individual value as Syrians, but their value to the Syrian homeland as well.

The difference between the two sources on the beneficial categories highlights the clearest difference between their reporting and how their reporting is influenced by their

political leaning. Both sources describe refugees as beneficial around 13% of the time (Enab Baladi at 12.44% and SANA at 13.37%) but there is a distinct framing difference in whether they are beneficial domestically or internationally.

Table 5. Examples of Headline Coding for “Beneficial”

<p>SANA: “Beneficial domestically”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Several measures taken by the Syrian government to return the Syrian displaced from abroad” (SANA, August 30, 2018) ● “President Assad in a speech to him during the opening of the international conference on the return of refugees: The issue of refugees for Syria is a national issue and a human issue. The overwhelming majority of Syrians abroad want to return to their homeland-video” (SANA, November 11, 2020) ● “Denmark for the Syrians: You can now return to your homeland in sunny Syria. Your country needs you” (SANA, April 17, 2021) ● “Damascus and Moscow: The continued efforts to secure the return of the Syrian refugees to their liberated areas” (SANA, May 12, 2021)
<p>Enab Baladi: “Beneficial internationally”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Austrian official: Refugees are a great opportunity to develop the economy” (Enab Baladi, September 3, 2015)) ● “Syrian refugees are strengthening economic growth in neighboring countries” (Enab Baladi, January 1, 2016) ● “German expert: Refugees have "amazing" professional experience and necessary for the labor market” (Enab Baladi, July 27, 2019)

Equitable Gender Representation

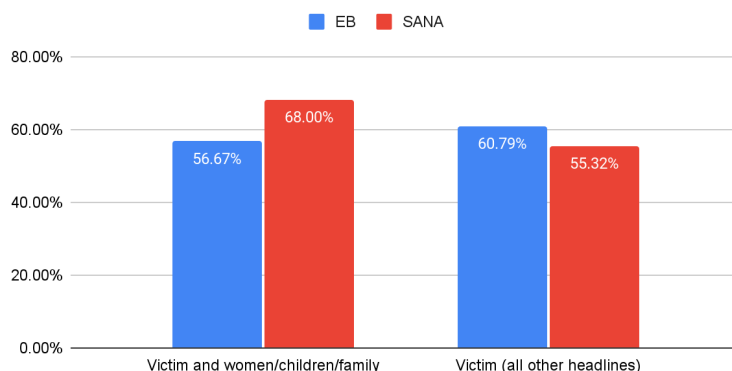
Despite Szczepanik’s findings that there were large differences in how media discusses refugees based on gender, this data does not find meaningful support for a

gender bias.⁸³ Notably, the data on “men” did not have nearly enough headlines to analyze accurately; of the 2,103, only four mentioned men (0.19% of the headlines collected). Because there are too few headlines about men, there is not enough data to compare the “men” and “women/children/family” categories or draw conclusions on a distinct gender disparity. Without the data on the “men” category, hypotheses 5a and 5b, which explore a comparison between genders, were inconclusive.⁸⁴ However, this data indicates that Szczepanik’s findings about a gender bias do not hold true in Syrian media. The remainder of this section will explore the findings in the “women/children/family” category.

Headlines with a “women/children/family” category were not more likely to also display victimization than other headlines. Of the headlines that mentioned women, children, or families, more than half of them were also categorized as “victim”; however, those percentages are quite similar to the frequency of victimization of all refugees, regardless of their group (Chart 5.1).

However, they were less likely to be coded as “problem.” Chart 5.2 compares the percentage of headlines that were coded as “problem” with the headlines that were coded as

Chart 5.1: "Victim" prevalence in "women/children/family" headlines



⁸³ Szczepanik, “The ‘Good’ and ‘Bad’ Refugees.”

⁸⁴ Hypothesis 5a: Sources will describe women, children, and families as victims more than men. Hypothesis 5b: There will be more of a gender discrepancy in the government sources than the opposition sources.

“problem” and
 “women/children/family.”

Headlines discussing women,
 children, and families were
 distinctly less likely to frame
 them as problems.

Interestingly, SANA was
 more likely to frame

headlines that mentioned women, children, and families as victims and less likely to frame them as problems as Enab Baladi. In fact, 0% of SANA’s headlines described women, children, and families as problems. These findings do not provide strong support for research that women, children, and families are more likely to be portrayed as victims and generate empathy because victimization occurred at the same frequency. The findings in Chart 5.2 indicate that women, children, and families are less likely to be framed negatively, but without findings in the “men” category, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from these findings.

Chart 5.2: "Problem" prevalence in "women/children/family" headlines

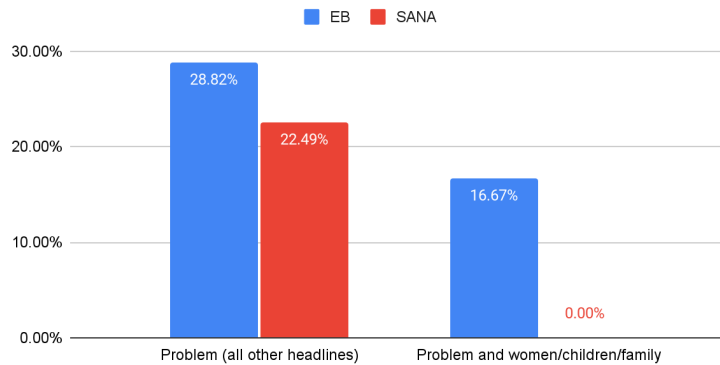


Table 6, Examples of Headline Coding by Gender

<p>“Women/children/family”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Academic at a Spanish university: The countries supporting terrorism are responsible for the killing of thousands of Syrian children and the displacement of parents” (SANA, September 16, 2015) ● “A new crime between refugees in Europe ... a Syrian mother kills her two children with stabbing” (Enab Baladi, November 5, 2016) ● “The death of a child in the Rukban camp due to lack of food and medicine” (SANA, November 13, 2021)
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Additional Findings

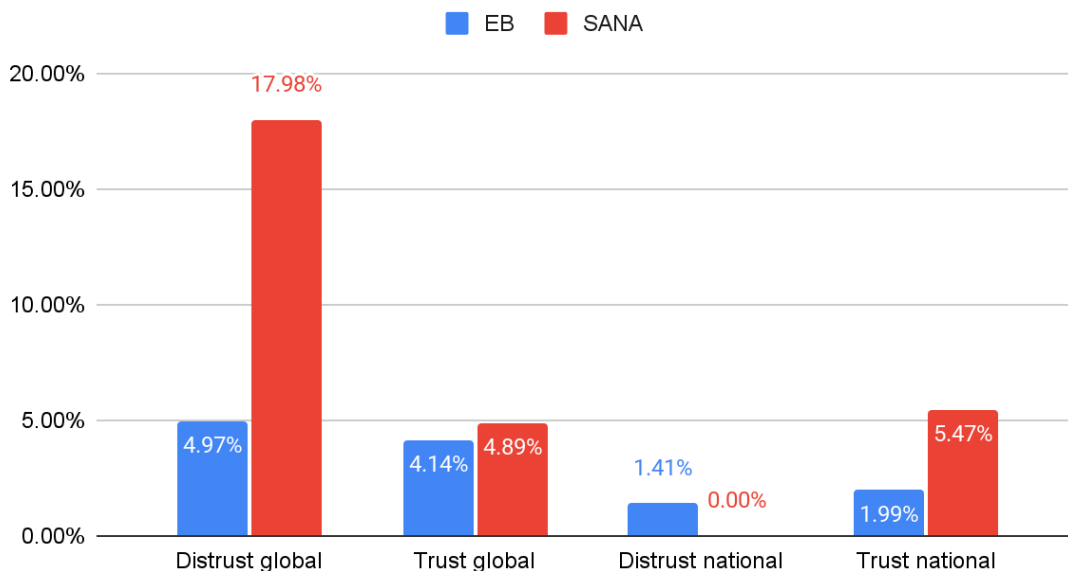
In the process of collecting data, there were additional findings beyond the originally intended nine categories. When coding the SANA headlines, there were a large number of headlines that expressed intense distrust of global institutions and other countries. Some examples include headlines like “Czech parliamentarian: The refugee crisis is the result of the policies of Western countries” (SANA, September 23, 2015), “Fisk confirms that the main causes of attacks in Turkey are Erdogan's support for terrorists in Syria” (SANA, January 3, 2017), and “Pushkov: The so-called “Arab Spring” and “the policies of America and its allies led to the emergence of the migration crisis” (SANA, September 8, 2015).

Given that one of goal's of this research was to examine nationalism in Syrian media, I adapted the coding scheme to include “distrust of global institutions” and “trust in global institutions” – which included other countries– and “distrust of national institutions” and “trust in national institutions” (examples in Table 7). For both sources, headlines in each of these categories were either for or against the Assad government. Operationalizing trust and distrust required a similar process as used earlier; examining whether the tone was positive or negative about the subject contributed to the determination of whether it was trusting or distrusting.

The additional coding used the same methods as the rest of the research but it included more headlines. For the original research, any headlines that did not mention refugees (or some variant of the word) were excluded from the data analysis. However, the collection of the headlines relied on the sources' search functions which searched any article that contained the word “refugee.” Of course, this led to the collection of many

headlines that did not mention refugees, even if the article discussed refugees. Those headlines were left out of the original analysis but included in the additional findings. The original analysis was directly examining the manner that the sources frame refugees. Thus, if refugees were not mentioned, it was impossible to examine their discussion of refugees. However, including the data with no mention of refugees in the title allowed for a deeper analysis of nationalism in headlines regarding refugees. This data also provided for a more inclusive view of opinions about refugees because it analyzes headlines from any article that mentions refugees, even if they're not in the title. This was impossible to do in the original findings because headlines that do not refer to refugees do not frame the discussion about them. These additional findings do not explore media coverage on refugees directly, but they examine the prevalence of nationalism in discussions about refugees.

Chart 6: Distrust and trust of global and international institutions



The data on trust and distrust of institutions clearly indicated that SANA expresses distrust of global institutions (Chart 6). In nearly 18% of SANA headlines, there was a present indication of distrust. As a source owned and controlled by the Syrian government, these findings likely highlight a wider sentiment of distrust that goes beyond their media source and into their policy decisions. It also supplements earlier findings on nationalism that indicated that SANA was about 10% more likely to describe refugees as beneficial domestically. Taken together, both findings suggest that SANA has nationalist undertones in many of its headlines. These undertones are specifically tied to a preference for the Syrian government and the Syrian homeland (e.g., “Denmark for the Syrians: You can now return to your homeland in sunny Syria. Your country needs you” (SANA, April 17, 2021), “Lavrov: The Syrians are the ones who define the nature of their state in the future and run the political process themselves” (SANA, November 14, 2015), “President al-Assad: If the United States wants to start a sincere start in combating terrorism, it should be through the Syrian government-a video” (SANA, February 10, 2017). Notably, but unsurprisingly, SANA does not express distrust in their national institutions.

This data also provides interesting insight into Enab Baladi’s reporting because it suggests that it is quite even-handed regarding trust and distrust. This furthers earlier findings because it indicates that nationalism manifests itself differently in each source. It suggests that although both sources had undertones of nationalism, SANA’s is much more robust and wide-reaching, while EB’s is far less apparent.

Table 7. Examples of Headline Coding for Trust and Distrust

Trust of global institutions	A celebration of refugees in Britain and pledged to receive more during the next year (Enab Baladi, June 18, 2019)
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Distrust of global institutions	Czech parliamentarian: The refugee crisis is the result of the policies of Western countries (SANA, September 23, 2015)
Trust of national institutions	Al -Hilqi: We trust the army's ability to restore security for every inch of Syria (SANA, May 30, 2015)
Distrust of national institutions	Assad promotes the division of the Syrians in the election speech (Enab Baladi, May 30, 2021)

Conclusion

My analysis found support for the presence of traditional nationalism in both of the media sources studied. However, the data does not support theories from previous research about humanitarian nationalism or gender biases. Further, while future research might specifically concentrate on humanitarian nationalism to identify its presence in media about refugees, my research design and methodology limited the data on it. Despite failing to provide support for the humanitarian nationalism framework, these findings provide a new framework for understanding sending countries' media about refugees through the sympathy production frame. Despite differences between the two sources, they both expressed nationalism through the sympathy production framework. Generating sympathy, and ideally, action, to help their fellow Syrians highlights an adapted form of humanitarian nationalism that applies to sending countries.

While the data provides a nuanced understanding of Syrian media, it also exhibited several limitations worth noting. I only collected headlines that mentioned some variations of “Syrian refugee” in the title. However, that excluded terms like “internally displaced person,” which could have provided further insight into Syrian media’s sentiment towards Syrian refugees. This omission creates a gap because nearly

half of Syria's displaced population is internally displaced. My collection method also excluded headlines about Palestinian refugees, which may have added to the findings.

Future studies should examine the tone of the headlines in addition to coding the frames. Doing so would provide insight into whether the discussion of refugees is generally positive or negative. Measuring tone would also help overcome the challenge of coding terms like "refugee" and "problem," which have connotations beyond their explicit meanings. Future research should examine media from other refugee-sending countries, like Afghanistan or Venezuela, and specifically explore the sympathy production framework. Further research on sending countries would add to these findings about the representation of refugees in Syrian media, especially compared to the wealth of research on Western media.

This research has several implications for refugee media research. First, it indicates that frameworks present in refugee media in receiving countries either manifest differently or not at all in Syrian media. This was especially true for the gender bias framework. This research gap necessitates the creation of new frameworks to comprehend sending countries' media about their refugees. The sympathy production framework provides a mechanism for understanding the manner that Syrian media highlights both the victimhood of refugees and the challenges for countries accepting them. Furthermore, this research identifies different forms of nationalism present in Syrian media about refugees. This has implications for understanding the parties in the Syrian Civil War and how their media represents both their party and national identity. Finally, the additional findings shed light on the intense distrust in SANA's news coverage. This distrust is especially significant given SANA's widespread readership and

their position as a mouthpiece of the Syrian government. Both sources displayed nationalism, but SANA did so in a manner that actively demonizes other groups, governments, and organizations.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Number	Hypothesis	Previous Research
1a	Sources will report on refugees relatively consistently over time.	Agenda-setting
1b	The opposition source will describe refugees as victims increasingly frequently every year after the start of the Syrian Civil War in 2011. ⁸⁵	Agenda-setting
2a	The opposition source will display Syrian refugees more positively than the government source.	Gatekeeping, issue-framing
3a	The opposition source will be more likely to describe refugees as victims.	Agenda-setting, issue-framing
3b	The opposition source will report on the problems of accepting refugees less than the benefits.	Issue-framing
3c	Government sources will be more likely to describe refugees as problems.	Issue-framing
3d	Opposition sources will describe Syrian refugees as victims when they report on the challenges of accepting refugees.	Issue-framing: traditional nationalism
4a	Both sources will display traditional nationalism by describing Syrian refugees as beneficial internationally.	Issue-framing: traditional nationalism
5a	Sources will describe women, children, and families as victims more than men.	Gender bias
5b	There will be more of a gender discrepancy in the government sources than the opposition sources.	Gender bias

⁸⁵ Because Enab Baladi did not start circulation until 2012, the results start in 2012.

Appendix B

Beneficial domestically	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “The Syrian pound is improving against the dollar in Idlib ... and the refugees are the cause” (Enab Baladi, July 3, 2016) ● “Denmark for the Syrians: You can now return to your homeland in the sunny Syria .. Your country needs you” (SANA, April 17, 2021) ● “Al -Miqdad to Grande: They are keen to cooperate to facilitate the return of the Syrian displaced people” (SANA, October 17, 2021)
Beneficial internationally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Austrian official: Refugees are a great opportunity to develop the economy” (Enab Baladi, September 3, 2015) ● “Syrian refugees support economic growth in Türkiye” (Enab Baladi, February 22, 2016) ● “German expert: Refugees have "amazing" professional experience and necessary for the labor market” (Enab Baladi, July 27, 2019)
Problem domestically	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Slovak political analyst: The Syrian government is the one that bears the largest burden in the case of the displaced” (SANA, December 16, 2015) ● “Syria is dilapidated .. Where do the refugees return?” (Enab Baladi, September 15, 2019) ● “Makhlouf discusses with Grande to accelerate the response to the requirements of the displaced returning to their areas” (SANA, October 17, 2021)
Problem internationally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Czech Prime Minister: Solving the problem of the influx of refugees lies in the defeat of ISIS and the stability to the Middle East” (SANA, September 30, 2015) ● “The Syrian coalition accuses the Lebanese army of killing Syrian refugees” (Enab Baladi, October 20, 2015) ● “Syrian refugees when they destroy the world” (Enab Baladi, June 24, 2018)

Victim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “The cold increases the suffering of the Syrian refugees .. Electrical wires threaten the lives of dozens of children in the Zaatari camp” (Enab Baladi, December 13, 2015) ● “Deaths and missing persons in the sinking of a migrant boat off the coast of Libya” (Enab Baladi, September 25, 2020) ● “Al -Jaafari: The Syrian government continues to cooperate with the United Nations to deliver humanitarian aid to its citizens affected by the crisis” (SANA, October 20, 2015)
Women/children/family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Academic at a Spanish university: The countries supporting terrorism are responsible for the killing of thousands of Syrian children and the displacement of parents” (SANA, September 16, 2015) ● “A new crime between refugees in Europe ... a Syrian mother kills her two children with stabbing” (Enab Baladi, November 5, 2016) ● “The death of a child in the Rukban camp due to lack of food and medicine” (SANA, November 13, 2021)
Men	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Damascus International Fair: The day of Syrian joy protected by the blood of the men of the Syrian Arab Army” (SANA, September 7, 2018) ● “To separate them from Syrian husbands ... the Danish parliament refers a former minister to the trial” (Enab Baladi, February 3, 2021)
Ambiguous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Austrian authorities search trucks in search of refugees” (Enab Baladi, September 1, 2015) ● “Immigration and asylum economic crisis? Or a future benefit?” (Enab Baladi, January 24, 2016) ● “The Lebanese Foreign Ministry regrets the position of the United Nations on the Syrian displaced” (SANA, April 19, 2018)
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Office for Refugee Affairs Commission in As -Suwayda” (SANA, June 19, 2014)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Do Syrian refugees in Europe find better opportunities than Türkiye?” (Enab Baladi, November 28, 2015) ● “On the sidelines of the refugee conference ... Syrian -Russian talks to enhance scientific cooperation” (SANA, November 11, 2020)
No mention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Jordan: The decision to expel the ambassador, hopes here and disappointments there” (Enab Baladi, June 1, 2014) ● “Al -Nayef calls on international organizations for more cooperation” (SANA, July 24, 2014) ● “The Armenians flee the war and return to the land of their ancestors” (Enab Baladi, April 14, 2015)