VICTIM, TERRORIST, OR OTHER?: A QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVE NEWS MEDIA DEPICTIONS OF THE SYRIAN HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

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Since March 2011, Syria has been embroiled in a brutal civil war. Since the start of the war, over 470,000 Syrians have lost their lives. This conflict has led to over 13.5 million Syrians who are in need of humanitarian aid. Over 6 million Syrians have been internally displaced and more than 5 million are refugees living outside of Syria, resulting in the largest humanitarian crisis since World War II. Syrian citizens and refugees have faced arduous conditions, as evidenced by three-year-old Syrian child Aylan Kurdi’s body washing ashore in Bodrum, Turkey in September 2015 as his family attempted to flee their homeland.

To date, no studies have examined refugees through the scope of alternative media. Responding to this lack of research, this dissertation examines media framing of Syrian refugees. Informed by Orientalism, Framing Theory, and Critical Race Theory, the dissertation employs qualitative content analysis to analyze language and images used in 473 articles from a strategic selection of alternative media organizations. It incorporates diachronic analysis of media articles released during the two-week period preceding and succeeding three distinct critical incidents: first, the body of three-year-old Syrian child, Aylan Kurdi, washing ashore in Bodrum, Turkey; second, the Paris massacre; and, third, Donald Trump’s first executive order attempting to ban refugees from Syria and six other predominantly Muslim countries. This analysis of change in a phenomenon over time repositions framing by considering it as a changing concept rather than a fixed thought. Additionally, this dissertation advances Oliver Boyd-Barrett’s definition of alternative media by considering their role in operating on the fringes of political spheres.
Overall, U.S. political right media emphasized refugee threat, while the left focused on refugee victimization. As such, both left and right media removed refugees’ humanity and agency. Furthermore, of the 473 articles analyzed, only nine (1.9%) included any voice from Syrian refugees, thus demonstrating how alternative media serve to silence victims of humanitarian atrocities. The dissertation forges directions for future research that, first, should examine how framing of humanitarian crises by international media differ from U.S. media and, second, should amplify voices of survivors of these crises.
To Michael and Christa Chappuis, the greatest cheerleaders I have ever had in my life.
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CHAPTER I: UNDERSTANDING THE SYRIAN HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

In 2018, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs declared that 135.7 million individuals are in need of aid as a result of humanitarian crises around the world (UNOCHA, 2018). Humanitarian crises dramatically influence society and how individuals view those who are trapped within the crises. From the humanitarian crisis during World War II, to humanitarian crises occurring in Yemen and South Sudan, there are numerous people around the globe who are in need of assistance. Media depictions of these calamities provide individuals with information about events that are occurring far from their own countries. With the prevalence of humanitarian crises in society, it is necessary to consider how news contributors frame these tragedies, especially when media consumers are geographically separated from them. While there are several humanitarian crises that are worthy of consideration, this dissertation focuses on the Syrian humanitarian crisis, a crisis that the UN High Commission on Refugees says is the greatest humanitarian crisis that the world has seen since World War II. (UN Refugee Agency, 2015).

This dissertation examines U.S. alternative media, defined by Boyd Barrett (2007) as sources that differ from mainstream news media sources in that they tend to come from smaller enterprises and do not have a larger governing interest that is dictating what those sources are expected to do. This analysis focuses on articles surrounding the Syrian humanitarian crisis in order to investigate how the political ideology of sources impacts the language that is used, as well as how political discourse helps to frame discussion surrounding the Syrian refugees to better understand how news sources utilize language to frame identity.

This research is important for several reasons. For one, the Syrian humanitarian crisis continues to prove relevant to society in the United States. In 2016, U.S. President Barack
Obama pledged to allow 110,000 refugees to resettle within U.S. borders during the following fiscal year (Jordan, 2016). This promise ultimately failed, as Donald Trump, the individual elected President of the United States by the 2016 electoral college rather than the U.S. population, instated a refugee cap for fiscal year 2017 (Krogstad & Radford, 2017; Toosi & Kim, 2016). Since his election, Trump has signed several executive orders that would ban individuals from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen from entering the U.S. Additionally, although this dissertation considers depictions of refugees within the Syrian humanitarian crisis, it is not the only refugee crisis taking place around the world. One can also point to the Somali refugee crisis, as well as the larger European refugee crisis of 2015. In other words, refugee crises and immigration will continue to exist after this dissertation has been published. Research focusing on refugees and immigrants is prevalent, with many studies examining depictions of refugees within mainstream news media, or news that comes from an outlet that often has a higher controlling interest (see Anderson & Antalikova, 2014; Figenschou & Thorbjornsrud, 2015; Milioni, Spyridou, & Vadratsikas, 2015; Van Gorp, 2007). There tends to be a greater degree of freedom of expression within alternative media because, unlike mainstream media, there is no larger controlling interest governing the message that is being communicated.

This study brings a new perspective to framing theory by using diachronic analysis. Diachronic analysis is necessary for several reasons. For one, framing research tends to analyze moments as individual points in time. Utilizing a diachronic analysis will act as a means of expanding the usefulness of framing theory. Additionally, this research is important and necessary due to the newness of the topic. Research examining refugees and immigrants tends to examine these groups through the scope of mainstream news media (see Anderson & Antalikova, 2014; Figenschou & Thorbjornsrud, 2015). To date, however, no research has examined these
groups through the scope of alternative news media. This dissertation acts as a starting point for research examining depictions in alternative media. Finally, print news coverage, as detailed by Cockburn (2016) and Tharoor (2016) demonstrates the importance and prevalence of the refugee crisis in our society. In order to better understand how political ideology impacts how refugees are depicted, the dissertation focused on an in-depth analysis of six different alternative news media forms – three news sources self-identified as being on the U.S. political left and three news sources self-identified as being on the U.S. political right – using Orientalism, Framing Theory, and Critical Race Theory (CRT) as guiding frameworks.

**Rationale**

The objectives for this dissertation were twofold. First, the study examines how Syrian refugees are depicted in six different alternative news sources to better understand the role that political ideology play in the framing of news stories. It then focuses on news stories from three different points in time to understand how the language surrounding the Syrian refugee changes over time. Before discussing how this dissertation research was conducted, it is necessary to define some of the concepts that were used within this research. This chapter examines the Syrian humanitarian crisis and the historical timeline before providing a brief overview of the dissertation.

**Syrian Humanitarian Crisis: A Brief Timeline**

It is impossible to simplify the Syrian humanitarian crisis into a few short paragraphs. However, the following overview helps to provide context into what has been occurring in Syria since December 2010. Additionally, it provides perspective into how alternative media contributors depict refugees in their stories.
On December 18, 2010, a series of revolts across the Middle East known as the “Arab Spring” began, resulting in the removal of Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak from power (Lengel & Newsom, 2014; Newsom & Lengel, 2012). The revolts then spread to Syria in the form of protests in March 2011. The Syrian government responded to the protests by killing many of the protesters and imprisoning others (Al-Jazeera, 2016). As a result, individuals defected from the Syrian military, forming the Free Syrian Army in order to attempt to overthrow the Syrian government, resulting in the start of the Syrian civil war. Conditions in Syria have been unsteady since 2007, when a severe drought hit the region, resulting in a dramatic rise in poverty and political unrest (Pandey, 2015). Since the rise of the Arab Spring, the number of Syrians fleeing the tumult within the country has only increased. In 2015, the number of refugees who had fled to neighboring countries exceeded 4 million for the first time, with an additional 7 million displaced within Syria itself (UN Refugee Agency, 2015).

In 2015, news of the humanitarian crisis began to reach the U.S., as news outlets reported the death of Aylan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian refugee whose body washed ashore in Turkey as his family was attempting to flee. As a result, Kurdi became a face for a crisis that once had no identity, resulting in an outpouring of support for refugees. Bozdag and Smets (2017) compared the photograph of Kurdi to other iconic photographs, including the 1973 photograph of Phan Thi Kim Phuc, the child seen crying and running from a napalm attack in Vietnam. Other researchers (Moretensen, 2017; Mortensen, Allan, & Peters, 2017; Proitz, 2018) considered the iconicity of the picture of Kurdi and how it spurred people in other countries to respond to the crisis in Syria. Pensiero (2015) noted the power behind the photograph of Kurdi, stating that this was the first photograph that spurred response in the U.S. after years of photographs of Syria.
garnered no response. As El-Enany (2016) asserts, over 22,000 individuals have died attempting to enter Europe. Yet, the photograph of Kurdî resulted in a galvanized response in support of aiding refugees. In spite of the expressed support for refugees, some became suspicious, questioning refugees’ motives, as well as whether they were truly innocent.

Any sympathetic view towards refugees soon shifted. On November 13, 2015, 129 individuals were killed in Paris in a series of coordinated bombings and mass shootings for which the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) took credit (Almasy, Meilhan, & Bittermann, 2015). Following the attacks, the French Government vowed that the country would remain united, as the attacks were “an act of war against the nation and its social cohesion: The country has 4.7 million Muslims–this is 7.5% of its population” (Ginesta, Ordeix, & Rom, 2017). Praxmarer (2016) remarks that there was a notable outpouring of support for Paris. The world stood alongside Paris, as the hashtags #IPrayForParis and #JeSuisParis filtered through social media (Neofotistos, 2016). However, Praxmarer (2016) argues that global solidarity in the face of conflict is selective, as there was little sympathy given from the West to Beirut, who had suffered their own terrorist attack the day before. In the time leading up to the Paris tragedy, much discussion in the U.S. considered the fate of Syrian refugees who were attempting to escape the tumultuous atmosphere in their home country, an atmosphere that has existed in the country since the start of the Arab Spring in March 2011, causing Syrians to become the world’s largest refugee population (UN Refugee Agency, 2015). However, the tone of this discussion quickly changed, as Parisian police found a Syrian passport near the body of one of the assailants responsible for the bombings (Tharoor, 2015). This finding then prompted the question – were any of the bombers Syrian refugees? Although the passport was later reported to have either been fake, stolen, or potentially planted at the scene (Douglas, 2016), suspicions towards Muslims
continued to persist. As the outpouring of messages supporting Paris began, so did messages attempting to tie the massacre to religious motivations (Praxmarer, 2016). After the mass murder in Paris, some began equating the events from November 13, 2015 to those of September 11, 2001 in New York City (Draga Alexandru, 2017). As such, rhetoric in the U.S. surrounding the Syrian refugees became increasingly negative, with many worrying that allowing Syrian refugees within our borders would result in terrorists entering the country. Much of the U.S. news media reported on the Syrian refugees during this time, questioning whether these individuals were innocent bystanders or terrorists. During this time, U.S. support of the refugees began to waver, as 31 out of the 50 state governors vowed that they would not allow Syrian refugees to live within their borders (Fantz & Brumfield, 2015). When asked why, some U.S. governors, such as Greg Abbott from Texas, stated on Twitter that “Texas will not accept any Syrian refugees & I demand the U.S. act similarly. Security comes first” (Fantz & Brumfield, 2015, para. 14). Georgia governor Nathan Deal revealed similar sentiments, stating “Georgia will not accept Syrian refugees until the federal government and Congress conducts a thorough review of current screening procedures and background checks” (Fantz & Brumfield, 2015, para. 16). Comments such as these demonstrate the divisive impact that placing a preconceived identity on an individual can have. When individuals think about the concept of identity, they tend to consider it in terms of belonging to certain groups or taking part in different activities (Hall, 2005). However, not all are privileged with the option to ascribe one’s own identity. Rather, many (often those who are marginalized and/or in minority populations) are saddled with conceptualizations of identity that they neither asked for nor desired (Gale, 2004; Mummery & Rodan, 2007). This process of being “Otherized” can have such a negative impact on individuals that they may cease to see themselves as individuals who are proud to be from a given society
and may begin to see themselves as lesser beings who could never hope to measure to anything within the larger hegemonic society (Afshar, 2013).

Since November 2015, conditions in Syria have continued to collapse. On December 12, 2016, *The Guardian* reported that the state of the country was much direr than previously reported, as troops loyal to Syrian president Bashar al-Assad had taken control of nearly 98% of the eastern region of Aleppo, the capital of the Aleppo Governorate, the most populous of the governorates in Syria (Shaheen, 2016). *The Independent* continues to highlight the devastating impact of this news in an article from December 12, 2016 in which the author discussed the impact of the war in Aleppo, stating that a victory by Assad in Aleppo may result in Assad eventually winning the war (Cockburn, 2016). Victory by Assad’s troops could be catastrophic to the region, having a devastating impact on a population that has already been ravaged by five years of war. Due to news such as this, the conflict in Syria and the refugee crisis show continued relevance in today’s global society.

In addition to its relevance within the larger global society, the refugee crisis continues to have an impact in the U.S. On January 27, 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump signed his first executive order titled “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States”, designed to block the entry of potential terrorists into the country by denying access to individuals from seven countries - Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen (Executive Order No. 13,769, 2017). Ahmed (2017) decries the order, claiming that, “The ban affects every individual in the United States who self-defines as Muslim, by labeling Muslims as “the other”” (para. 3). Ayoub and Beydoun (2017) further denounce Trump’s order, stating, “President Trump delivered on a central campaign promise, and as a result, injected Islamophobia into American immigration law and policy” (p. 215). This Islamophobic view is
further illustrated in Trump’s rejection of the Syrian people when the policy states, “The entry of
nationals of Syria as refugees is detrimental to the interests of the United States” (Executive
Order No. 13,769, 2017, p. 8979). Trump further diminishes the value of refugees in the country
by decreasing the number of refugees allowed to enter the country from 110,000, stating, “The
entry of more than 50,000 refugees in fiscal year 2017 would be detrimental to the interests of
the United States” (p. 8979). The executive order includes a provision that states that individuals
may be admitted to the U.S. as refugees by the Secretaries of State and Homeland Security “only
so long as they determine that the admission of such individuals as refugees is in the national
interest – including when the person is a religious minority in his country of nationality facing
religious persecution.” (p. 8979). Spiegel and Rubenstein (2017) denounce the ban, declaring
that it would “impose tremendous human costs that can condemn men and women, their
children, and even future generations to lives of suffering and desperation (p. 680). Joseph
(2017) holds similar views, stating, “The explicit targeting of Middle Eastern and Muslim
peoples adds isolation to the danger they experience” (p. 487). Amdur and Hausman (2017)
condemn Trump’s executive order, claiming that policies such as this threaten immediate and
lasting damage towards the groups being targeted. Others, such as Stanbrook (2017), lambast the
executive order not only because of the impact that it has on refugees from the affected
countries, but also because it will have a lasting impact on many fields, including academia and
the sciences. According to Stanbrook (2017), “although the travel ban targets individuals, its
threat to the integrity and prosperity of scientific collaboration is of paramount concern” (p.
E420). Gostin (2017) contests Trump’s rationale for the ban, stating, “Trump claims that his
order safeguards national security, but nationals from the seven target countries have not carried
out a single terrorist attack on U.S. soil” (p. 5). Some political pundits view Trump’s use of
Islamophobic and xenophobic language and policy as inept governing. However, Joseph (2017) posits that Trump’s mannerisms are, rather, “chaos as a mechanism of governance”, which could be a threat to democracy as a whole (p. 486). This was evident when the Trump administration issued Executive Order 13780 in March 2017 (Macayan, 2017; Park, 2017). The new executive order suspended entry of nationals from Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen (Africa Research Bulletin, 2017). By removing Iraq from the list of suspended countries, the Trump Administration claimed that the order “did not provide a basis for religious discrimination” (Park, 2017, p. 185). However, injunctions were filed against the new order, claiming that “it violated the Establishment Clause of the first Amendment because it was motivated by religious animus, and that it violated the Immigration and Nationality Act and other statutes” (p. 185).

Since the massive bloodshed on September 11, 2001, Muslims have been the victim of xenophobic treatment and othering. While some of these critical incidents have shown Syrians and Muslims in a sympathetic light, others have helped to further xenophobia in the U.S. and around the world (Ahmed, 2017; Douglas, 2016; Spiegel & Rubenstein, 2017). Indeed, since the events of 9/11 in the United States, the exaggerated threat of Muslims has continued to be perpetuated in society. Some researchers have noted the rise in anti-Muslim rhetoric since 9/11 (Lengel & Smidi, 2018). Pastor (2017) remarks that the treatment of Muslims following the issuing of Trump’s first executive order mirrored the treatment of Muslims following 9/11.

**Overview of Dissertation**

This dissertation begins with an overview of refugee crises before focusing specifically on the Syrian humanitarian crisis. Chapter one provides a basic overview of the Syrian humanitarian crisis, as well as discusses the rationale for the research.
Chapter two begins by defining two terms that are essential for this research – identity and alternative news media. After defining these terms, the chapter outlines past research examining immigrant and refugee studies before shifting to a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings for this dissertation – Framing, Orientalism, and Critical Race Theory (CRT). This chapter ends by introducing the research questions that will guide the dissertation analysis.

Chapter three continues with a description of the methodology for the dissertation, as well as the rationale for using Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) as the method. This chapter considers how QCA compares to quantitative content analysis. The chapter then moves to describe the six news sources from which news articles were derived. The final part of the chapter addresses any potential personal connections or biases that may arise from the study.

Chapter four defines the themes that emerged from each of the three critical incidents. Excerpts from articles help to further define each theme, as well as provide context for what is occurring in the humanitarian crisis at each critical incident.

Chapter five contains a discussion of the findings from Chapter 4, as well as the greater implications that can be gleaned from the thematic analysis. Limitations and future directions for research are also discussed.

Based on the theories used in this research, as well as the overarching timeline of the Humanitarian crisis, the following questions are posed for this study:

RQ1: How do alternative news media sources use language and imagery to describe refugees in their depictions of the Syrian humanitarian crisis?

RQ2: How, if at all, do depictions of Syrian refugees differ based on the political leanings of the alternative news media sources?
RQ3: How, if at all, have the depictions of refugees in alternative news media sources changed over time?
CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This world is dominated by media. Due to the ever-present nature of media, individuals are inundated with a wide variety of media messages, regardless of the time of day. In certain times, such as during the 2016 U.S. Presidential election campaign, media messages focusing on certain individuals and stances became increasingly prevalent, as well as emotionally charged. These messages may appear to be the same despite coming from different sources; however, a closer examination reveals the nuanced differences that exist in how similar stories are reported. Consider the Syrian humanitarian crisis, for example. One news source may focus on the impact that refugees are having on American society, vilifying the refugees and comparing them to a destructive force of nature. Another source may consider the plight of the refugees and the struggles that they have faced during this tumultuous time. Theory can help to make sense of the competing messages that are vying for our attention. This dissertation utilizes three theoretical frameworks—Orientalism, Framing Theory, and Critical Race Theory (CRT)—in order to provide a deeper understanding of how alternative news media frame the Syrian humanitarian crisis at different points in time. To begin, it is necessary to discuss concepts that are central to this research before considering the theories that act as theoretical frameworks, as well as the role that each has played within current media and communication scholarship.

Defining Concepts

Identity

The concept of identity is one that is complex and ever shifting. Some individuals may talk about how belonging to a certain group or activity contributes to their thoughts about their identity. Hall (1996), in defining identity, states that, “Identity is formed at the unstable point where the ‘unspeakable’ stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history, of a culture” (p.
115). As a result, the formation of identity seems to operate between a continuum focusing on personal experience and cultural experience. While some may view identity as a positive thing, others may view it in an entirely different light. Hall (2000) identifies a dialectic that exists between the concepts of identity and identification. First, there is often a misconception that exists when we think about the term “identification.” As Hall (2005) details, “We think about identification usually as a simple process, structured around fixed ‘selves’ which we either are or are not” (p. 445). Hall (2000) expands on this thought, stating that, “identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation (p. 16). Essentially, the concept of identification operates within the ideal of inclusion. That is, individuals are able to say that they identify as members of a given community or group. This is a different position than what the term “identity” grants. Unlike identification, identities “are constructed through, not outside difference” (Hall, 2000, p. 17). Hall notes that the concept of identity is one that is fluid and ever changing. Hall (1999) states that this is different that the common perception of cultural identity, asserting that “it is assumed that cultural identity is fixed by birth, part of nature, imprinted through kinship and lineage in the genes, constitutive of our innermost selves” (p. 3). This raises an interesting point. While identification focuses on inclusion and acceptance, identity acts as a means of excluding and othering. Therefore, when societies attempt to impose different identities on people, it is as if they are saying “How can we ensure that you are even more different than we are?” When persons within a society choose to impose identities on others, it is as if they create an invisible hierarchy where they state that the others are automatically inferior to them because they are different. This is demonstrated when Hall (1999) states:
Identities are, as it were, the positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always ‘knowing’ . . . that they are representations, that representation is always constructed across a ‘lack’, across a division, from the place of the Other, and thus can never be adequate – identical – to the subject processes which are invested in them. (p. 19)

When considering the concepts of identity and identification, Hall (1999) states that “identities can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render ‘outside’, abjected” (pp. 17-18, emphasis in original). As such, identification can become a negative experience. Hall discusses the exclusionary power of identity, stating that “the ‘unities’ which identities proclaim are, in fact, constructed within the play of power and exclusion, and are the result, not of a natural and inevitable or primordial totality but of the naturalized, over-determined process of ‘closure’” (p. 8). This seems to indicate that identity creates a false sense of unity in that individuals come together based on what they are not. Hall’s language here evokes imagery similar to that evoked by Said (1978). The implications surrounding this can be quite damaging. If an individual holds a different view than the larger group, he or she can be labeled an outsider or a foreigner.

The concept of identity is not necessarily something that is approached in a passive manner. Ibrahim (2008), for example, considered the experience that African youth in Canada had with diaspora. This immigrant group “finds themselves within . . . a ‘public gaze’ where their bodies are already-always read and imagined as ‘Black’” (p. 235). As a result, they are assigned an identity without the opportunity to express who they truly are. However, as these students become accustomed to their environment, they choose to act in ways that reinforced their identities as they themselves see them. Ibrahim notes:
Before their arrival to Canada, . . . African students were not ‘black’, in the North American sense, although, like the speaking ‘I’ at this very moment, they had other adjectives that patch together their identities: ‘Sudanese’, ‘Somali’, ‘intellectual’, and so one. However, once in North America, these adjectives become secondary in their moments of identification. That is, African students . . . were seeking spaces, identities, and representations with which [they] could say, ‘We too are Black’. (p. 243)

Ibrahim mentions that there is a tension between Hall’s (1991) conceptions of “Old Identity” and “New Identity”, which Ibrahim characterizes when stating, “We are going to keep our culture, but at the same time . . .” (p. 247). This statement helps to clarify the tension that exists – that there is a desire to remain in one’s own culture, but also to fit within the new culture. At the end of his piece, Ibrahim states that “[i]f identities are multiple, shifting and always in the making, then there are no pre-constructed identities that we just slip into (Welcome to the constructed New Identity!)” (p. 249). This acts as a proper application of Hall’s conception of identity, as identities are formed on the basis of one’s circumstances within the prevailing culture. This identity formation could be either positive or negative, as has been previously seen.

When considering the concept of identity, Yuval-Davis (2010) raises an interesting query – one which many other researchers have either actively decided not to focus on or have been unaware to. In her piece, Yuval-Davis notes the dichotomous nature of the term identity, stating that identity and difference ought to be separate entities. Yuval-Davis then differentiates the concepts of identity and identity politics. She describes “[identity] as one analytical dimension in which belonging needs to be understood, and [identity politics] as a specific type of project of the politics of belonging” (p. 266). Hall (2000) frames the concept of identity as an entity based on exclusion by other individuals, typically those within the majority. However, Yuval-Davis
argues that the concept of identity should consider “stories that people tell themselves and others about who they are, and who they are not, as well as who and how they would like to/should be” (p. 266). Thus, it seems that Yuval-Davis’s view of identity seems to be at odds with that of Hall. In examining Hall’s (1991) work, it appears that Yuval-Davis’s conceptualization of identity is similar to Hall’s notion of “old identities”. However, this may be potentially harmful, as Hall (1991) asserts that “[t]hat logic of identity is, for good or ill, finished” (p. 43). As a result, one may wonder if we can even consider identity in this light. One might argue that, since what Hall considers to be “new identities” have taken place of “old identities”, Yuval-Davis’s conceptualization of identity is flawed. However, further examination of works such as this must be conducted in order to fully understand the concept of identity.

Mummery and Rodan (2007) and Gale (2004) both utilized Hall’s work in a manner that is quite relevant. In these pieces, the researchers examined how refugees and those seeking asylum within Australia were viewed by natives within Australian media. In his piece, Gale specifically notes a theme in Australian media focusing on the fear of the Other. For example, Gale notes that “[r]efugees arriving by boat are represented as the ‘illegal’, non-western, non-Christian Other. Common representations include stereotypes of the uncivilized, ‘illegal’, ‘queue jumping’, if not barbaric Other” (p. 334). In this instance, Gale misses an opportunity to enter into a discourse about the impact of imposed identity on these individuals. The setup for that discourse appears to be present, as Gale discusses the role that whiteness plays with regard to the representations of refugees. Mummery and Rodan also have the potential to enter into a discussion focusing on identity, as they focus on how Australian individuals perceive the refugees with regard to whether they believe the refugees would fit within Australian society. In one instance, the authors note that, according to Australian natives, “being Australian means
founding in to the wider Australian community – it means not establishing oneself in a separate cultural enclave” (Mummery & Rodan, 2007, p. 351, emphasis in original). In each of these examples, both Mummery and Rodan (2007) and Gale (2004) utilize Hall’s work well. However, the researchers miss the opportunity to dialogue about the concept of identity, especially with regard to how the refugee is framed within the larger society. This dissertation research will act as an attempt to engage in this dialogue about the concept of identity with how refugees are framed within alternative news media focusing on the Syrian humanitarian crisis.

Before discussing the theoretical frameworks that shaped this study, it is necessary to examine the other concept that is central to this research – alternative news media.

**Alternative News Media**

This dissertation examines alternative news media articles rather than those found in mainstream news media. Alternative news media texts are sources that differ from their mainstream counterparts in that they tend to come from smaller enterprises and do not have a larger governing interest dictating what they are expected to do. Boyd-Barrett (2005) proposed a model in which four phases of communication (production, distribution, content, and reception) can be evaluated on a continuum ranging from “mainstream” to “alternity”. According to Boyd-Barrett (2007), “alternative media are more likely than mainstream media to: originate from small, ideologically, or artistically committed groups; employ low-cost production and distribution technologies; exhibit non-commercial behavior; and rely for funding on such sources as nonprofit sponsorships, subscriptions, and users” (p. 206). With regard to content, Alternative media are more likely than mainstream to oppose dominant ideologies, agendas, values; represent a wide diversity of sources and perspective; be considered ‘extreme’, by the mainstream; promote activism and interactive dialogue between
producers and receivers; exhibit innovative, hybrid, and unconventional formulas; demonstrate partisanship and polemic; feature ‘non-professional’ and ‘out-of-house’ contributions; and observe ‘public sphere’ criteria. (Boyd-Barrett, 2007, pp. 206-207, emphasis in original).

One of the weaknesses of mainstream news media is the type of framing used within the media. Mostafiz (2015) recognizes that mainstream news media is predisposed towards more of a conflict frame. Because of the prevalence of conflict framing, Mostafiz notes, “peace journalism is hard to practice in mainstream media” (para. 1). Mostafiz also discusses the secretive nature of the U.S. administration, stating that the government releases a great deal of material about a given topic; however, very little information is included within that material. Mainstream media tend to perpetuate the myths and the messages sent forward by the government. This is evident in Herfroy-Mischler’s (2015) research. In her study, the researcher noted that framing that occurred in writing a news story after information was leaked to a news organization was highly based on hypotheses of interpretation due to the fact that the media organizations were required to remain silent on certain aspects of the story by a higher governing authority (in this case, the Swiss Press Agency). However, “the media, in fact, are accomplices in silencing the news, subject to various powerful officials and tacit power struggles” (p. 251). This duplicitous nature of the mainstream media may be what has caused individuals to begin to lose faith in the mainstream media. On this note, Mostafiz (2015) notes that “today people look for the truth on social media or elsewhere on the internet based alternative media” (p. 8). For this reason, researchers should consider using framing theory to understand how journalists within an alternative news media source frame their stories, as well as the framing effects obtained from such sources.
Boyd-Barrett (2007) mentions that he has turned to left-leaning alternative media over mainstream news media in his own personal life, stating, “alternative online news sites have proved rewarding, personally and professionally” (p. 201). Furthermore, “I have concluded that through such sites I often have been informed or educated about significant stories, issues or controversies significantly in advance of seeing these dealt with in depth, if at all, within mainstream media of the USA” (p. 201). As a result, alternative news media may be a more fruitful source for research utilizing framing theory. This will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

These terms are central to the research conducted in this dissertation. Now, it is necessary to consider how past research has examined refugees and immigrants before defining the theories that were used to guide the analysis to answer the research questions for this study.

**Humanitarian Crises**

Since 1885, over 100,000 research articles have examined refugees and immigrants. Some articles focus on the right to asylum, while others focus on the refugee experience and the development of post-traumatic stress disorder. This area of research has sparked researchers’ interests for over 130 years. The current humanitarian crises provide evidence to the relevance of continuing research. This section will consider how some previous studies have considered depictions of refugees and immigrants in different media platforms. For example, Anderson and Antalikova (2014) utilized framing theory in order to understand how an individual’s religious background influenced his or her perceptions of individuals based on how they were portrayed within a conversation. The researchers found that, regardless of religious background, individuals tended to have more negative attitudes towards an individual who was framed as a Muslim than they did towards an individual who was framed as an immigrant. Additionally,
when considering the implicit attitudes of those involved in the study, the researchers noted that “Christians’ attitudes toward the targets were more negative when the targets were framed as immigrants rather than as Muslims, while Atheists’ attitudes were more positive when the targets were framed as immigrants rather than as Muslims” (p. 597).

In another study, Figenschou and Thorbjornsrud (2015) examined how the news media shaped how refugees and immigrants were portrayed. Through a quantitative content analysis of 18 months of media coverage examining irregular migration in the United States, France, and Norway, the researchers found that “Norwegian media have the highest number of stories with a human interest frame, and as many as two thirds of the Norwegian coverage of irregular migration has a human face or example” (p. 791). The researchers also found that U.S. and French media utilized a human interest frame far less frequently, with human interest frames being used in 41% and 28% of articles respectively.

Interpretive and critical researchers have also considered how refugees and immigrants are viewed by society. Back, Sinha, and Bryan (2012) considered the narratives of student migrants in order to understand how they were viewed by natives of the countries to which they migrated for educational advancement. The authors considered the narratives of one individual – Charlynne, a migrant student from Dominica who was studying in the United Kingdom. In this piece, the authors examined on Charlynne’s poetry detailing her experiences. In one instance when she described the interaction that she had with an immigration officer, she stated: “I registered the contempt//plastered on her face, // Her rigid posture screamed // ‘Foreigner know your place!’” (p. 146). In this instance, Charlynne recognized that the immigration officer saw her as different. Rather than being viewed as an equal in society, Charlynne noted that the immigration officer treated her as if she were a lesser being. In this occasion, Charlynne was
forcibly given a new identity. Rather than being viewed as a student or as an intellectual being, she was seen as a foreigner, an Other, someone who was to be looked down upon simply because she did not have the same cultural background as another individual from the United Kingdom.

Several researchers have considered the news frames that have been utilized when examining news about immigrants and refugees. Milioni, Spyridou, and Vadratsikas (2015) examined how news media in Cyprus framed their stories in 2013 surrounding the European financial crisis. In framing the article, the authors noted that anti-immigrant sentiment has been rampant throughout Europe since the 1990s, thus providing a necessary rationale for the study. Through their study, the researchers found three main frames that emerged from the articles – the victim frame, the threat frame, and the active agent frame. The victim frame depicts immigrants and refugees as individuals who are helpless within the larger community. The threat frame paints immigrants in a decidedly different light, showing them as criminals, threats to society, and unwelcome burdens upon the country’s economic system. Finally, the active agent frame depicts immigrants within a mostly positive light, showing them as the “low-skilled and low-paid worker, whose presence is deemed important for economic development and increased competitiveness” (p. 168). Here, immigrants are shown in a more positive light. However, they are viewed as a positive entity for the country, while their rights as individuals are diminished.

Van Gorp (2007) took a similar approach to examining news media in Belgium. Prior to the study, the researcher noted two frames that are typical of news depicting immigrants and asylum seekers – the victim frame and the intruder frame. The victim frame depicts the asylum seeker as a more helpless member of society or someone who is unnecessarily targeted by xenophobic and/or racist remarks. The intruder frame depicts the asylum seeker as an unwanted nuisance, almost as if he or she is a leech on the society in which he or she lives. The researcher noted that
use of the victim frame within Belgian news media was much more pronounced than was use of the intruder frame. If the intruder frame was used, it was found to be used in a subtler and more nuanced manner.

Other researchers have investigated the use of language when framing refugees in news media. Thorbjornsrud (2015) notes that many media channels have portrayed undocumented immigrants in a negative light, stating that

They are known to the public as “over stayers,” “failed asylum seekers,” “irregular job seekers,” “sans papiers,” or simply “illegals” and face the constant threat of expulsion at a time when Western democracies have increasingly turned to policies of deportation to control immigration. (p. 773)

Through this, Thorbjornsrud demonstrates that the language used to portray these individuals can have a lasting impact on how they are perceived by the rest of the population. Cheng, Igartua, Palacios, Acosta, and Palito (2010) consider how immigration was framed within Spanish news media. For the researchers, this study is important, as they noted that the Spanish people identified immigration to be one of the main issues present in Spanish society. Through their research, the authors found that newspapers tended to use words such as “crime, economic contributions, victims of xenophobic aggressions, irregular/illegal entry, and political debate” to refer to immigrants within their stories (p. 209). However, these terms were not necessarily used to frame immigrants within a negative light; rather, these meanings were defined within the context of each story individually. However, the researchers also noted that “the local newspapers did not over represent the negativity by adding up more tragic visual elements in the information to appeal news importance” (p. 210). As a result, while there may have been negative aspects to news about immigrants, the regional newspapers did not see it fit to capitalize
on that negativity in order to increase the news value of their own paper. Furthermore, “reporters in the regional newspapers seemed to capture images of immigrants at work or family members having fun as equivalent of ‘happiness’ and ‘dreams come true’” (p. 210). Consequently, the regional news reporters were able to depict immigrants in a positive light in the midst of whatever negative events were occurring within the country.

Studies examining how migrant groups are depicted in news media are not new. In their research, d’Haenens and de Lange (2001) note the issue at hand is “how migrant groups are presented in news coverage, and whether or not this is a distortion of reality” (pp. 848-849). That is, do the depictions of immigrants and refugees within news media align with who these individuals are outside of the media? Van Dijk (1991) considered this phenomenon. In conducting a discourse analysis of local and national newspaper articles, he found that many of the articles acted as a conduit to communicate the views of the hegemonic majority. Moreover, few articles considered the perspective of those within the minority group. If the minority group was depicted in a news article, the coverage was more negative in tone.

In her study, Lawlor (2015) considered how immigration was framed within news media in Canada and in the United Kingdom. Leading up to the study, Lawlor noted that some may be hesitant to consider her study, as they may view Britain and Canada as being too culturally different to compare due to the differences in how each country supports immigration. However, Lawlor notes that Britain and Canada share a similar trajectory with their respective immigration policies. Hence, there was a necessity to examine these news media. Additionally, this study takes a longitudinal approach to examining news media, thus acting as a means of showing how framing shifts over time. Through her study, Lawlor found that the frames used in British and
Canadian news coverage on immigration were quite similar. However, Lawlor notes that differences emerged in the framing methods used. Here, the researcher notes:

Whereas Canadian coverage is driven by a focusing event such as a terror attack or a large-scale refugee claim, Britain has seen more durable changes in the volume of framing, particularly in the period surrounding the expansion of the British immigration regime to EU countries. (p. 350)

When considering the tone of coverage, Canadian news about immigration was more negative in the periods following Canadian officials seizing more than 100 Chinese immigrants who were smuggled into Vancouver in 1999 and the tragic events in the United States on September 11, 2001, than they were in the time after 2004. This could be due to the overall view of immigration, as well as the prevailing opinions towards illegal immigration and refugees. Comparatively, British news media was found to be predominantly negative. Lawlor (2015) remarks that this could be a result of the influx of British immigrants beginning in 2003, stating that “a heightened rate of immigration may have prompted concern over the amount of diversity in Britain” (p. 348).

Now that past research focusing on refugees and immigrants has been considered, it is necessary to define the theoretical frameworks that guide this dissertation.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

**Orientalism**

The first framework of importance to this dissertation is Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism. Said (1978) provides three definitions for the term Orientalism. The first refers to any individual “who teaches, writes, or researches the Orient,” regardless of whether he or she focuses on general or specific aspects of the Orient (p. 2). The second explanation takes on a
more general meaning, as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’” (p. 2). The Occident refers to Western countries (primarily England, France, and the United States), while the Orient is Said’s term for the misunderstood Middle East, Northern Africa, and Far East. Therefore, the Orient is not necessarily a reference to a static point. Rather, the Orient is more a Westernized version of what people and cultures in the East should look like. The third denotation that Said provides takes the Western (i.e., British, French) gaze of the Orient (i.e., the Middle East and North Africa) into account. This view states that Orientalism “can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient . . . by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing, it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it” (p. 3). These explanations of Orientalism help to direct Said’s perspective in his writing. Said delves deeper into the meaning of the third definition throughout his work.

**Historical Contexts of Orientalism.** Historically, the definition of Orientalism has shifted largely due to Western influence. Initially, an individual deemed to be an Orientalist was seen as someone who had a strong knowledge and understanding about language and culture (Said, 1978). However, Western influence radically changed that definition. In 1928, Arthur James Balfour, then-Prime Minister of England, declared in a speech to the House of Commons that England was able to exert power over Egypt, a country which they were occupying at the time. In his speech, Lord Balfour declared that “England knows Egypt; Egypt is what England knows; England knows that Egypt can’t have self-government; England confirms that by occupying Egypt” (p. 34). By acting as the power force over a country such as Egypt, Said argues England essentially robbed the Egyptian people of their voices, believing that their values and beliefs did not matter because they were viewed as weak and inferior to the English. This
thinking introduces the “us versus them” critique, Said’s main tenet in *Orientalism*, which he explores and develops throughout the remainder of the work.

**Orientalism and the “Us versus Them” Dichotomy.** The “us versus them” dichotomy that Said posits and develops throughout *Orientalism* considers the comparison between Western culture and Oriental culture. Part one of *Orientalism* initially examines this tenet and emphasizes the Western influence. Said notes that it is this Western gaze that has resulted in the loss of a truly Oriental identity for anyone from these Oriental cultures. To emphasize this loss of identity, Said (1978) states that “no matter how much a single Oriental can escape the fences placed around him, he is first an Oriental, second a human being, and last again an Oriental” (p. 102). According to Said, Western thought dictates that any belief that an Oriental has about himself or herself is incorrect. Moreover, Said claims Western countries believe that the Orient does not understand itself because it does not view itself as the West views it. Said, in a critique of the Western perspective, states that in order to correct this way of thinking, “Orientals” must ascribe to the Western view, which is influenced by Western learned thought. In this, there is an implicit superiority of the West over the Orient, an idea that is confirmed by Said when he states that “so far as the West was concerned during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, an assumption had been made that the Orient and everything in it was patently inferior to, then in need of corrective study by the West” (pp. 40-41).

In the third section of *Orientalism*, Said extends the “us versus them” critique to consider depictions of Orientalism in the 20th century, especially with regard to Arabs and Islamic individuals. After World War II, “The Arab Muslim has become a figure in American popular culture” (p. 284). Said discusses how Arabs were frequently portrayed negatively in popular culture, often taking on the role of the evil menace. Said states of the portrayals that, “[l]urking
behind all of these images is the menace of jihad. Consequence: a fear that the Muslims (or
Arabs) will take over the world” (p. 287). These negative depictions of Arab populations are still
present to this day in U.S. popular television programs and films such as True Lies (1994), 24
(2001-2010, 2014), and Tyrant (2014-2016). In his discussion, Said identifies four tenets of
Orientalism that still seem to be at play in the present day as Western individuals focus on Arabs
and Islam. The first is that there is still a complete separation between the West, “which is
rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, inferior”
(p. 300). Another tenet is that “the Orient is at bottom something either to be feared . . . or to be
controlled” (p. 301). This idea of control is reflected in the knowledge and interpretation of the
Orient. As with Balfour’s statement in the opening of Part One, Said, in referring to Arabs,
states, “Only the Orientalist can interpret the Orient, the Orient being radically incapable of
interpreting itself” (p. 289).

**Orientalism and the Demonization of Islam.** Said’s work is also relevant in the
discussion of how the Orient is depicted in media. Said (1997) examines how media in the U.S.
depicts Muslims and Islam. Labeled as the third book in a trilogy beginning with Orientalism,
Covering Islam examines how depictions on Islam in mainstream news media in the U.S. are
incredibly distorted. According to Said (1998), “So far as the United States seems to be
concerned, it is only a slight overstatement to say that Moslems and Arabs are essentially seen as
either oil suppliers or potential terrorists” (para. 10). This depiction of Islam is nothing new, as
many in the Middle Ages and the European Renaissance believed that “Islam was . . . a demonic
religion of apostasy, blasphemy, and obscurity” (p. 5). Said discusses how the depiction of Islam
is “depressing and misleading” (para. 13). In Covering Islam, Said details how Islam has been
viewed as a threat to the Western world. In this text, Said primarily considers the Iran conflict in
1978 and different events in the 1980s and 1990s. In fact, the Western world began to quake in the 1970s as it seemed that the Muslim world would continue its earlier conquests. “The onset of “Islamic terrorism” in the 1980s and 1990s has deepened and intensified the shock” (p. 5).

Unfortunately, this view of Islam as threat has not dissipated, as similar rhetoric was used during Donald Trump’s campaign for the U.S. presidency in 2016.

However, the impact of U.S. produced news and media is not limited to the Western world. Rather, “most of the Third World is now fully bathed in U.S.-produced TV shows, and is wholly dependent upon a tiny group of news agencies that transmit news back to the Third World, even in the large numbers of cases where the news is about the Third World” (para. 15). As a result, “the Islamic world may be said to be learning about itself in part by means of images, histories, and information manufactured in the West” (para. 15). As such, the vast inaccuracies regarding the Islamic world are able to persist due to the Orientalist views depicted within these sources.

The view of Islam as threat has been able to persist, in part, due to the belief that Islam does not fit within the hegemonic norm of society. In order for the norm to remain, nations must help to create and generate order in society. “If these new nations are not creators and generators of order, they can only be disruptors of it” (Said, 1997, p. 38). When considering the previously stated “us versus them” dichotomy, “they disrupt because all they are and can be as a group is inversely equal and opposite to “us”” (p. 35). There is an inherent danger in vilifying Islam, as this demonization often occurs as a result of ignorance and/or fear of the unknown. Said (1997) states that “you can readily equate Islam with almost any Muslim” (p. 43). So, if an individual chooses to equate Islam with ISIS, for example, “you can then go on to compare Islam to everything you dislike, regardless of whether what you say is factually accurate” (p. 43). By
doing so, this helps to broaden the gap between “us” and “them”, creating greater divisions between groups that may, in fact, be more similar than they even realize.

How has the study of Orientalism impacted scholarship in media and communication studies? Said’s influence is present in work by scholars such as Powell (2011), who examined the themes presented in news coverage surrounding terrorist events that either allegedly occurred on US soil or were allegedly thwarted before they could occur. Powell’s analysis revealed that news media tended to present fear of terrorism as a dominant theme in their news stories. In each of these stories, Muslims, Arabs, and others within the Islamic community were depicted as a looming terrorist threat to “Christian America.” However, domestic terrorism, such as the alleged Anthrax attacks of 2001, was depicted more as a minor happening as a result of a few disgruntled and troubled individuals. Wang (2011) considered how Orientalism has influenced the genre of media and communication research as a whole, noting that the dominance of knowledge production by the West is, in part, attributed to the “willful demeaning of indigenous intersections of life and learning by the locals” (p. 58). However, Wang also notes that “little attempt has been made to look into the issue from an African, Asian or Latin American perspective” (p. 59). Thus, Wang attempted to examine Occidentalism through an Asian lens. Through her research, Wang notes the prevalence of Occidental thought in contemporary research, stating that “the imprint Occidentalism has left in communication research in the non-Western world today . . . is an Occidental psyche which is reflected in locally generated works; and both are sustained by the Euro-American model of educational institutions” (p. 71).

However, in a parallel to Said’s statement regarding Orientalism and Occidentalism, Wang posits that “they are not dichotomies,” but rather “symbiotic paired concepts, as there will be no end to Orientalism and Eurocentrism in media and communication research if Occidentalism persists”
Consequently, it is ever more crucial to examine how these concepts are continuing to work in media and communication studies.

Now that Orientalism has been properly defined, it is necessary to move to the second theoretical framework included in this dissertation – Framing.

**Framing**

When examining news stories presented by media outlets, it is necessary to consider how those outlets have framed the stories that they are presenting. Hence, framing theory is a relevant framework to aid in the investigation. Framing theory was first proposed by Goffman (1974) to understand how individuals interpret information that is presented to them. Initially, framing was viewed as a concept within agenda setting research. Some argue that framing still remains part of agenda setting theory, calling it second-level agenda setting (McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 1997). However, Pan and Kosicki (1993) note that framing goes a step further than agenda setting theory, looking “into what people talk or think about by examining how they think and talk about issues in the news” (p. 70, original emphasis). In attempting to understand framing, one must first note the variety of definitions that exist.

**Definitions.** Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009) noted that there is an inherent difficulty that exists when defining framing, as there are no “clear, definitional boundaries” (p. 22). Entman (1993) defines framing, stating that “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p. 52). Chong and Druckman (2007) define framing as “the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue” (p. 104). Kepplinger, Geiss, and Siebert (2012) define framing in the
context of the audience, stating that “[f]raming is a cognitive theory of media effects, which accounts for the audiences’ active processing of media content” (p. 660). For the purposes of this research, I define a frame as the underlying theme or message present within a story in a given context. Based on this definition, framing is defined as how news writers choose to interpret and depict actors in stories based on various contextual clues.

**Assumptions.** Next, consider the main assumptions of framing theory. First, media producers are in charge of the meaning that is produced in that those who determine what news is also determine what aspects of that news are important. As a result, the frames that are used can potentially differ based on the political ideology of the source. Second, many believe that media will have an impact on those who partake of it. Chong and Druckman (2007) noted that the way that an issue or a piece of information is presented can have a great effect on an audience, a phenomenon known as a framing effect. These framing effects occur when small changes, usually related to the use of positive or negative language, are made in the presentation of an issue. These changes may then have an impact on individuals based on their perceptions of the information. For example, consider the research from Kepplinger, Geiss, and Siebert (2012). In their study, the researchers considered how media could influence audiences’ perceptions regarding different scandals. When considering celebrity scandals presented by the media, one could think of O. J. Simpson and Anna Nicole Smith, or, most recently, Bill Cosby. In their study, Kepplinger, Geiss, and Seibert sought to examine the framing effects of how the news media presented an individual embroiled within a public scandal. Through their study, Kepplinger, Geiss, and Seibert found that very few media articles will completely condemn an individual who is embroiled in scandal. Rather, the media will include varying amounts of information regarding the individual’s guilt to allow the audience the opportunity to form their
own opinions regarding the matter. However, the researchers also found that, while individuals may feel badly for those involved in the scandal, emotion does not necessarily predicate one’s belief that an individual involved in scandal should be excused. This is evident when the researchers noted that “the influence of sadness on calls for punishment was positive, rather than negative as expected” (p. 672). Consequently, media framing can influence how audiences feel. However, these feelings are not necessarily indicators of beliefs that are held.

**Key Components.** When utilizing framing theory, one should be aware of the various frames that are at play within a given news story or medium. The critical unit within framing theory is the frame itself. Littlejohn and Foss (2008) define a frame as “a basic organizational pattern used to define a series of activities” (p. 87). Baran and Davis (2102) define frames slightly different, considering them to be “a specific set of expectations used to make sense of a social situation at a given point in time” (p. 332). Each of these definitions displays a frame within a slightly different light, as Littlejohn and Foss’s definition tends to be more focused on the individual or organization framing the content, whereas Baran and Davis’s definition considers frames from an audience perspective. However, Lawlor (2015) notes that “frames are more than the positive or negative lenses through which we view an issue; they are the heuristics and thematic cues obtained (largely) through news media that help the public synthesize and integrate new information” (p. 330). When examining the frame, researchers must consider both the valence of the frame, as well as the cues obtained from the use of the frame.

**Implications/Outcomes.** When considering past usage of framing theory, it is easy to look at how politicians and news media frame their messages. While there are many studies that utilize framing as a theoretical framework, the following studies act as exemplars that demonstrate how framing research has been conducted in the past. Schuck, Vliegenthart, and De
Vreese (2014), for example, examined the impact that conflict framing had on audiences of news media. Through the use of content analysis and two wave panel surveys examining the European Parliamentary elections in 2009, the researchers found that the more audiences were exposed to conflict-based news reports, the more likely that they were to vote in the parliamentary elections. However, they also found that “mere news exposure has a small but negative effect”, indicating that “considering content characteristics contributes to our understanding of the exact role of campaign news coverage” (p. 187). This helps to demonstrate the impact that framing can have on an individual.

This impact is also present in McGinty, Webster, Jarlenski, and Barry’s (2014) research considering how media frames individuals with serious mental illness who are involved in violent crimes. Through a content analysis of news media spanning from 1997 to 2012, the researchers found that “fewer than 10% of news stories mentioned key facts about [serious mental illness]” (p. 409). To expand on this point, the researchers noted that “[t]welve percent of thematic news stories mentioned that [serious mental illness] is often stigmatized, versus 4% of event-focused news stories, and 19% of thematic news stories mentioned that most persons with [serious mental illness] are not violent” (p. 409). Hence, the absence of information regarding serious mental illness can result in a bias against those who have an illness that can be classified as such.

A final outcome of framing theory is that exposure to news coverage that primarily emphasizes one frame over another will impact learning in a way that is consistent with that frame. Baran and Davis (2012) note that news coverage tends to fall in line with what is the hegemonic norm within society, resulting in movements outside of the norm receiving negative coverage. This implication could be applied to the 2016 Democratic Primary Election process.
between Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Senator Bernie Sanders. During the primary campaign, media outlets tended to highlight Clinton, while paying scant attention to Sanders, an individual who many considered to be an outsider within the Democratic Party.

**Strengths of Framing.** When examining framing theory, it is necessary to consider the various strengths that exist with the theory. One strength of the theory is that it can be used to analyze different kinds of framing that occur. That is, researchers are able to examine framing from multiple perspectives. For example, some researchers (i.e., Anderson & Antalikova, 2014; Figenschou & Thorbjornsrud, 2015; Milioni, Spyridou, & Vadratsikas, 2015; Van Gorp, 2007) chose to examine framing from the perspective of the news media organization by analyzing how individuals were framed within the media. Others (Igartua, 2013; Igartua & Cheng, 2009; Quinsaat, 2014; Reid & Al Khalil, 2013) chose to study framing from the audience perspective, examining the framing effects that occurred based on the presence of different frames within news media stories. Studies such as these show that framing research can help us understand how frames are used by news media corporations and journalists, as well as how those frames are received by audiences.

Another strength of the theory is that meaning is not only derived from the words on a page. Rather, meaning can be found through analyzing images and other visual texts. For example, Greenwood and Jenkins (2015) chose to analyze photographs published in different U.S.-based mainstream magazines, specifically *Time* and *Newsweek*, depicting different aspects of the Syrian humanitarian crisis in order to better understand the messages that were being sent to audiences who were geographically distant from the conflict. The authors could have chosen to analyze the text used in news stories. However, they chose to examine the photographs in order to see the type of visual framing that occurred (i.e., conflict framing vs. peace framing).
The researchers found that the pictures primarily depicted the Syrian humanitarian crisis as a violent struggle, with few peaceful moments interspersed throughout. Thus, framing can be used to analyze a variety of material besides text-based material.

A third strength of framing theory is its applicability to a wide variety of concepts and contexts. For example, the authors cited in the previous two paragraphs used framing theory to better understand how refugees were depicted in news media, as well as how individuals responded to these depictions of refugees. Schuck, Vliegenthart, and DeVreese (2014) examined the impact of conflict framing on how individuals voted in European Parliamentary Elections. McGinty, Webster, Jarlenski, and Barry (2014) also considered how the news media framed individuals with severe mental illness who committed a violent crime. These are a few of the many different areas in which framing theory can be used.

A General Critique of Framing Theory. As there are several strengths of framing theory, there are also several areas in which the theory could be strengthened and improved. One of the greatest weaknesses with the theory is its overall vagueness. For example, Entman (1993), Chong and Druckman (2007), and Kepplinger, Geiss, and Siebert (2012) all have their respective definitions of framing theory, as discussed earlier. In addition to the definitional issues that exist, Matthes (2009) argues that definitions are being used inconsistently in framing research. Matthes notes two types of definitions that exist – general definitions, which define the term “frame” on a very basic level without clarifying how to use the definition on an operational level, and other definitions which precisely identify what the frames are meant to do. However, there are clear weaknesses with each type of definition. The main weakness with general definitions is that, although they are useful, they “leave the explicit operational understanding of the frame concept open” (p. 350). Matthes argues that having a clear and accurate definition for framing is
necessary for scholarly work, as it is “central to frame validity, i.e., whether scholars really do measure what they intend to measure” (p. 350).

Another weakness of framing involves the assumptions that are made regarding the media. Researchers utilizing framing often operate under the assumption that the system is fair. However, some scholars, including Oliver Boyd-Barrett, Chris Hedges, and Colman McCarthy, would debate the fairness of the system, arguing that the system is rigged and that the news that is reported fits the interests and the needs of those in power. As such, framing research fails to consider the outside influence on the frames that are used within the media (Boyd-Barrett, 2010). This outside influence plays a great role in how news stories are framed, as “[m]edia are unlikely to undermine the interests of the establishment” (Boyd-Barrett, 2004, p. 435).

A final weakness of framing theory is that it tends to focus on media depictions at a singular point in time. Thus, it is not able to provide insight longitudinally. Greenwood and Jenkins (2015) attempt to move beyond this shortcoming by analyzing photographs of the Syrian humanitarian crisis featured in news stories between March 2011 and December 2012. However, this study cannot be termed a longitudinal study, as all results are lumped together, finding that conflict frames are predominantly present within the photographs. A more complete picture could be obtained if researchers were to consider how the use of certain frames changes over time. This could allow researchers to better understand how the depictions of different people groups and events shift over time.

**Framing and Assumptions about Media.** The previous section identified more general critiques of framing theory. This section will look more in-depth at nuanced critiques of the theory. One of the aforementioned critiques of framing theory involves the assumptions that are made regarding the media – that it is a fair system. Consider the cases of both Chris Hedges and
Colman McCarthy. Both Hedges and McCarthy were, at one time, journalists reporting news within two of the best know news sources in the United States, Hedges for the *New York Times* and McCarthy for the *Washington Post*. However, Hedges, an avowed critic of the conflict in Iraq, and McCarthy, a known advocate for reporting using more of a peace-oriented frame, were both fired from their respective positions due to their desire to report the truth in their stories rather than maintaining the status quo (Barsamian, 2011; FAIR, 1997). Hedges (2015) notes that reporting that is completely truthful is something that could never exist, as “any reporting of the truth – the truth about what the powerful are doing to us and how we are struggling to endure and retain our dignity and self-respect – would fracture and divide a global population that must be molded into compliant consumers and obedient corporate subjects” (para. 3). Boyd-Barrett (2004) suggests that “[t]here is evidence that many journalists go well beyond, or rather against the call of duty, in their collaboration, direct or indirect, with third parties, whether these be government agencies or public relations/disinformation agencies” (p. 437).

*Judith Miller*. One example of a journalist going against the call of duty involves the case of Judith Miller, a former journalist for the *New York Times*. In 2001 and 2002, Miller’s stories about Saddam Hussein and the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq were prominently featured in the *New York Times*. However, these reports were later proven to be falsified. In his research, Boyd-Barrett (2004) describes how American news media can act as a form of state propaganda, often when leading up to war. In this piece, Boyd-Barrett outlines Miller’s complicity to write news stories that contained fabricated material in order to persuade American citizens into believing that the U.S. should become involved in the conflict in Iraq. Vann (2003) mentions that Miller’s stories had a dramatic impact, as her “news reports based on anonymous sources and hearsay, which subsequently proved false, served a hidden political
agenda and played a direct role in promoting an illegal war” (para. 27). Boyd-Barrett (2004) details the impact that Miller’s stories had, noting that there was a “strong possibility that elements within the administration had used Miller’s stories to strengthen their own endeavors to shape official intelligence in ways that would support the case for war” (p. 439). At the end of the day, “Miller’s role in the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 was to excite fear of [weapons of mass destruction]” (Boyd-Barrett, 2010, p. 35). This case is one example of how the news can be framed to suit the needs of a larger enterprise (in this case, the Bush Administration).

**Informing and Refining Framing Theory – A Peace and Conflict Studies Approach.**

This discussion of strengths and critiques within framing theory is not to say that it is necessarily a good or a bad theory. Rather, this discussion is meant to spark thought and inquiry into how framing could be improved and strengthened. In this discussion, one can turn to scholarship within the field of peace and conflict studies to identify some ways in which scholarship can inform and/or refine framing theory. One way that framing can be refined is by changing the object of its focus. That is, research using framing theory needs to move away from mainstream news media. Some individuals (i.e. Boyd-Barrett, 2007; Mostafiz, 2015) have noted the advantages that exist when examining alternative news media, namely that they represent a wider range of perspectives than do mainstream media. Herfroy-Michler’s (2015) sheds light on the duplicitous nature of mainstream news media and how they can work to silence agendas that do not align with their larger goal. Because of the distrust that has been sowed towards mainstream news media, alternative news media may be a more fruitful genre of news media to consider in framing theory research. One reason for this is that alternative news media sites are still a relatively new area for researchers to explore. Additionally, there is a greater chance that researchers can see frames other than conflict framing at work due to the fact that alternative
news media tend to present a wider diversity of sources and perspectives than do mainstream news media sources. Thus, Framing Theory could help to shed light on a new area of research.

Another way that Framing Theory could be refined is by researchers taking more of a critical approach to analyzing the frames at play within news media sources. Many research studies discuss what themes and frames are present within a given media story and how they manifest themselves within social situations. However, research using Framing Theory needs to discuss WHY those frames manifest themselves in the ways that they do, as well as the impact that these meanings can have on different populations. By doing so, research utilizing framing theory could move from a media emphasis to that of a social emphasis. As stated previously, one weakness of Framing Theory is that it assumes that the system is fair, that news is being reported free from the controlling influence of a higher power. However, this is not presently the case. Rather, news stories are framed and shaped by the controlling interests of larger news corporations. These stories are then meant to (hopefully) shape the attitudes and opinions of the larger audience. Van Dijk (2008) notes that “those groups who control most influential discourse also have more chances to control the minds and actions of others” (p. 89). By controlling the messages that are dispersed, media organizations play a major role in how audiences respond to different issues and people groups. Van Dijk mentions that “political, media, academic, corporate and other elites play an important role in the reproduction of racism. They are the ones who control or have access to many types of public discourse, have the largest stake in maintaining white group dominance and are usually also most proficient in persuasively formulating their ethnic opinions” (p. 121). Thus, mainstream news corporations may be reproducing racism, albeit subtly, in how they frame their stories. Framing Theory research could examine the use of
language within a story’s frame in order to understand the rhetorical impact of said frame on news audiences.

A third way in which framing theory could be refined is through reframing media production itself. Perez (2008) argues that reframing needs to occur in media across the board. “We should not limit reframing to journalism, but expand it to all forms of media. Frames are not only present in the news, but also in movies, TV programs, books, advertisements etc.” (pp 9-10). In her case study of U.S. media coverage of the war in Iraq, Perez discusses the current state of American media, noting two competing frames that are prevalent within the American political system – the nurturant parent frame and the strict father frame. As stated previously, many of the stories coming from mainstream American news organizations are framed through the use of a conflict frame. This framing strategy makes sense, considering the prevalence of conflict framing within the U.S. governmental structure, specifically the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The presence of these departments within the U.S. frames the U.S. within more of the strict father frame than the nurturant parent frame. For example, Perez notes that “[t]heir (DoD and DHS) premise is that through the use of force and violence, the United States will maintain its strength and impose its moral authority” (p. 7). The prevalence of conflict framing in our society demonstrates that reframing is necessary within all forms of media. Other researchers note that reframing can drastically change how individuals interpret events (Gorsevski, 2014; Boyd-Barrett, 2007), resulting in a clearer understanding of the events that is not influenced by an overarching bias.

A final way that Framing Theory can be reshaped is by including new types of frames within the theoretical framework. Gamson (2001) identified one type of frame that should be used – collective action frames. These frames, according to Gamson, would depict social
movements in a positive light and “offer ways of understanding that imply the need for and desirability of some form of action” (p. 58). Baran and Davis (2012) identify three qualities that are necessary for such a frame to be effective: injustice, identity, and agency. “They need to reveal an existing harm or wrong (injustice), identify specifically who is doing the harm and who is being harmed (identity), and finally, explain the possibility of collective action to address the injustice (agency)” (pp. 339-340). Such a frame would help to shed light on injustice and would help to call for accountability for larger institutions that allow these injustices to persist.

This dissertation attempts to address some of the weaknesses of framing theory by utilizing a diachronic approach to analyzing the framing used in alternative news media. Additionally, this dissertation utilizes the author’s definition of framing when analyzing alternative news media stories, which are not subject to meeting the interests of a higher organization.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory acts as the final theoretical framework used in this dissertation. The Critical Race Theory, henceforth noted as CRT, movement, according to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), is “a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (p. 3). A noteworthy quality about CRT is that it is a theoretical framework that evolved out of a call for social justice and activism. The movement emerged in the 1970s as scholars such as Alan Freeman, Richard Delgado, and Derrick Bell began to recognize that many of the civil rights advances that had been made in the previous decade were beginning to be taken away as newer, subtler forms of racism began to emerge. While initially founded within the areas of critical legal studies and feminism, the movement sought to create a theoretical framework that could be utilized in order to bring justice in the face
of civil rights injustice. As a result, CRT, a framework that can be utilized in a wide variety of contexts, including, but not limited to, legal studies and educational reform, was born. This multidisciplinary nature of CRT is discussed in greater detail in the next section.

**Main Assumptions and Components.** In order to more clearly define CRT, Lawrence III, Matsuda, Delgado, and Crenshaw (1993) identified five tenets that are central to the theory. These tenets act as the fundamental assumptions of what the theory is and how it functions within scholarship. First, the authors noted that racism is something that is prevalent and pervasive within American society. Because of this, the authors note that the main focus is not necessarily how to eradicate racism and discrimination while allowing current hegemonic thinking and interests to persist, but rather how these hegemonic norms and ideal help to contribute to the racism and discrimination that persists in society.

The second tenet emphasizes the prevalence of the dominant ideology in society, expressing “skepticism toward dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy” (Lawrence III, et al., 1993, p. 6). Under this tenet, CRT scholars believe that individuals within the American governmental system actually benefit from the continued inequality that exists within American society. Here, Schneider (2003) notes that “privileged groups are assumed to represent society as a whole” (p. 91). Even though the U.S. tends to pride itself on the diversity within its borders, it is essentially a white society, as whiteness is the hegemonic norm.

The third tenet states that “critical race theory insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color and our communities of origin in analyzing law and society” (Lawrence III, et al., 1993, p. 6). This tenet emphasizes that individuals who have experienced prejudice and discrimination have a special kind of knowledge of the situations examined
through CRT. Moreover, Schneider (2003) posits that research utilizing CRT “should be conducted by those who are the subordinated in addition to the members of the dominant class” (p. 91). Thus, those who have been subjected to discrimination can help to shape scholarship within that area.

The fourth tenet emphasizes the interdisciplinary nature of the theory. Although CRT was developed within the field of legal study, it borrows from several other traditions, including, but not limited to, feminism, pragmatism, Marxism, and critical legal theory. The authors argue that this eclecticism is a benefit to CRT research, as it “allows critical race theory to examine and incorporate those aspects of a methodology or theory that effectively enable our voice and advance the cause of racial justice even as we maintain a critical posture” (p. 6). Hence, CRT can be used in a variety of contexts, including work outside of the black-white racial binary. Furthermore, thanks to this multidisciplinarity, scholars can examine race and racism through a wider variety of lenses in order to break down the stereotypes and myths that exist.

The final tenet of CRT emphasizes the larger goal of the theory. In using CRT, researchers and practitioners are able to uncover more of what causes racial discrimination and oppression and allows it to persist in society. Schneider (2003) expands on this point when he notes that “[n]ot only does critical race theory address and attack racism, but more importantly, it makes institutional racism visible, which refers to the discriminatory practices that are built into prominent structures within society” (p. 92). This continued work helps along the path of eliminating racial oppression wholly. This work then helps to dismantle other forms of oppression that exist within society. This is because individuals often experience other types of oppression (i.e. gender, class, sexual orientation) as they experience racial oppression.
Consequently, due to the intersectionality present within oppression, as one form of oppression is defeated, the others may soon follow.

**Implications/Outcomes.** CRT has made some definite advancements in its relatively young life. For one, as noted by Trevino, Harris, and Wallace (2008):

CRT has begun to move beyond the Black-White paradigm and beyond vulgar racial essentialism to consider the racialized lives over other oppressed minorities, the daily microaggressions inflicted upon various oppressed minorities such as Latinos, Asians, gays, Indians, and women of color. (p. 7)

Thanks to the advancements that have been made using CRT, other programs of study utilizing critical theory have emerged, such as Latina/o critical studies (LatCrit), critical race feminism, and critical queer studies (queer-crit). Additionally, work using CRT has led to advances in education reform (Cerezo, McWhirter, Pena, Valdez, & Bustos, 2013; Gillborn, 2005). CRT work in the educational sphere has also led to pedagogical insights and advancements within the field. Gonzalez (2001) notes that CRT, along with a focus on gender, gives educational researchers the opportunity to “bring together understandings of epistemologies and pedagogies to imagine how race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality are braided with cultural knowledge, practices, spirituality, formal education, and the law” (p. 643). Additionally, Bernal (2002) notes that the use of counterstorytelling in CRT serves two purposes – to allow individuals to hear stories that are often unheard due to the hegemonic norms at play in society, as well as to teach individuals how to listen and hear the themes and messages at play within the narratives.

**Limitations.** Up to this point, CRT has helped researchers to make great strides in the areas of race and discrimination research. However, that does not mean that CRT is without
flaws. For one, some researchers still feel that CRT has not done enough to move past the Black-White racial binary that is pervasive within our society (Trevino, Harris, & Wallace, 2008). The researchers state that, in order for CRT to be a more effective tool in counteracting the racism and discrimination present in society, “it must adopt a more sensitive and appropriate analytical lens that accounts not only for race and racism, but also for their constituent parts of color and colorism” (p. 10).

A second limitation for critical race theory centers on the use of narrative for analysis. Studying narratives can help to shed light on many of the ways that racism and prejudice manifests itself within our society. However, our interpretations of these narratives may result in important aspects of those narratives being left out. Yes, research utilizing CRT tends to be more subjective in nature. As such, researchers can interpret the narratives in order to better understand what is at play within those narratives. However, the possibility exists that a researcher may read something in a narrative that may not have been present in the actual event. This possibility is a potential weakness of any theory or method that uses interpretation to understand what is at play within a given scenario.

Each of the theories mentioned in this section plays a crucial role in telling the story of how refugees are depicted in alternative news media. Using Orientalism is beneficial, as it allows the researcher to gain insight into how populations are potentially Otherized by dominant societal groups or other organizations. Using CRT is necessary, as it is important to consider the stories and lived experiences of individuals in different racial and ethnic groups. This consideration of stories and lived experiences helps to ensure that voices are not silenced. Finally, using framing theory helps researchers to better understand the different themes that are used in depicting refugees in news stories from a variety of sources. Additionally, this
dissertation attempts to address one of the aforementioned weaknesses of framing theory – the lack of longitudinal insight into a given issue. As previously mentioned, framing theory tends to focus on framing in one instance, providing a singular snapshot of what is going on. This dissertation attempts to advance framing theory by considering how Syrian refugees are depicted during three distinct critical incidents, thus providing more of a longitudinal approach in order to understand how framing shifts, if at all.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The Syrian humanitarian crisis has been a tumultuous experience for those who live in Syria, as well as those who have been forced to flee for their lives. Depictions of both the crisis and refugees impacted by it in U.S. based news media have not helped the plight of those involved in the crisis. Rather, this news media has helped to exacerbate the issue. In a time when Syria is embroiled in such a turbulent conflict, many are being forced from their homeland into a great unknown. Due to the turbulent environment surrounding the Syrian refugees, as well as the fact that displaced Syrians make up the largest number of refugees in the world today (UN Refugee Agency, 2015), it is imperative that research in this area be conducted. Before moving forward, it is necessary to restate the research questions that guide this dissertation.

RQ1: How do alternative news media sources use language and imagery to describe refugees in their depictions of the Syrian humanitarian Crisis?

RQ2: How, if at all, do depictions of Syrian refugees differ based on the political leanings of the alternative news media sources?

RQ3: How, if at all, have the depictions of refugees in alternative news media sources changed over time?

Qualitative Content Analysis

There are many methods that could be employed in order to understand what is occurring within the Syrian humanitarian crisis. Some may argue that quantitative content analysis may be beneficial for use within a study like this, as quantitative content analysis allows researchers to gain a better understanding of what is happening on a macro scale. While quantitative content analysis has its advantages, it can place undue restrictions on the research due to the face that the researcher must interpret the texts using codes defined prior to data collection and analysis. As
such, there is less freedom of interpretation. Qualitative content analysis (QCA), on the other hand, allows for greater freedom, as the researcher codes each text using an open ended coding sheet in order to let themes freely emerge from the data. QCA, like its counterpart, does have its share of limitations, one of which being that it is an entirely subjective methodology, influenced by the experiences of those employing it. That being said, QCA acts as an integral means of answering the research questions for this dissertation, which examine how alternative news media sources employ the use of strategic language in order to describe refugees in their depictions of the Syrian humanitarian crisis, as well as how the political leanings of U.S. news media sources impact the depictions of the Syrian Refugees. I utilized QCA as the research method, applying strategies described by both Schreier (2012) and Corbin and Strauss (2008), as well as organizational strategies described by Schreier (2012). This chapter begins with a discussion regarding what QCA is and how it differs from quantitative content analysis. This section also focuses on the purpose, main assumptions and key procedures of QCA, as well as provides examples of how scholars have used this method in the past to answer specific research questions. The chapter then moves to a description of how the articles for this study were obtained.

**Definition**

Before proceeding with how this dissertation research was conducted, it is necessary to first understand exactly what qualitative content analysis (QCA) entails. QCA emerged after several scholars (e.g., Kracauer, 1952; Mayring, 2000) criticized quantitative content analysis for overlooking several aspects of texts, namely that overemphasis on quantifying results can lessen the accuracy of results and that quantification can result in overlooking the latent contexts
present within the texts. Bryman (2004) notes that QCA is “probably the most prevalent approach to the qualitative analysis of documents” (p. 392).

**Qualitative vs Quantitative Content Analysis**

QCA differs from its quantitative counterpart in several ways. For one, the findings derived from quantitative content analysis have the potential to be generalizable to a wider context, whereas the findings derived from QCA are only meant to be applied to a specific context. Additionally, quantitative content analysis tends to be limited to the manifest content present within a source, whereas QCA is able to move beyond how something is printed on a page to examine the latent meanings present within the source (Berelson, 1952; Kracauer, 1952). Because of this, QCA must take more contextual cues into account. These cues could be the entirety of a passage, or other information, such as the publication venue of the passage (Schreier, 2012). Moreover, quantitative content analysis is more of an objective process, meaning that the findings obtained should be roughly the same regardless of who conducts the research. This is one of the greatest differences between quantitative and qualitative content analysis. QCA is more subjective in scope. As such, the findings obtained through the content analysis will vary from researcher to researcher due to the fact that each researcher comes from a different lived experience and a different background. That being said, it would be improper to confidently state that one method of content analysis is wholly better than the other, as each form does serve a larger purpose. In fact, Berelson (1952), while a critic, posited that quantitative content analysis may be appropriate based on the types of research questions asked within a given study. As such, both quantitative and qualitative content analysis can work in tandem with one another, with the quantitative content analysis providing a surface level overview of what is
occurring within a given source and the QCA providing a more in-depth look into what is actually going on.

Qualitative and quantitative content also differ when considering how issues of reliability and validity are considered. For example, quantitative content analysis tends to measure reliability by having two individuals code the same passage independently. The more manifest the meaning of a message is, the more likely that the coders will code the passage the same way (Neuendorf, 2002). However, as more latent meaning is considered, it becomes harder to achieve reliability in a quantitative sense. In qualitative content analysis, reliability is more linked to how consistently categories are used within a coding scheme. If a category is improperly defined, then it may be used inconsistently due to the lack of structure in the definition. In this way, reliability tests can be used to point out potential flaws that exist in the coding frame (Schreier, 2012). There are additional differences that exist between quantitative content analysis and qualitative content analysis when considering issues of validity. In quantitative content analysis, validity is considered when examining how theory does or does not validate the parts of the coding frame that are driven by particular concepts (Schreier, 2012). However, qualitative content analysis tends to be more driven by the data itself. As such, validity must be considered in a different way. Schreier (2012) notes that “[a] coding frame is valid to the extent that the categories adequately represent the concepts under study” (p. 175). In qualitative content analysis, there are four types of validity that can be considered – face, content, criterion, and construct. Face validity is concerned with whether a research instrument is truly measuring what it should be measuring, what Neuendorf (2002) refers to as “what you see is what you get” validity (p. 115). The second, content validity, goes deeper than face validity and considers the extent to which a research instrument measures all facets of a concept (Schreier, 2012). The third
type of validity, criterion validity, is concerned with how a concept measured within a research study relates to “another indicator of the concept in question whose validity has already been established” (Schreier, 2012, p. 185). The final type of validity, construct validity, considers how a concept that is being examined relates to other concepts. This is typically tested through the use of hypothesis testing. As this present dissertation is more concerned with how Syrian refugees and the Syrian humanitarian crisis are framed within alternative news media, criterion and construct validity are not appropriate for this research. As such, I will use face and content validity in order to validate the inductive and deducting coding frames that I will derive from this study.

Now that we understand the differences that exist between quantitative and qualitative content analysis, it is necessary to consider the steps that researchers need to take when utilizing qualitative content analysis as a research method.

**Key Procedures**

Altheide and Schneider (2013) note that there are three steps that researchers must follow when it beginning to use QCA. First, they must identify a specific problem. Identifying this problem is a necessary step within QCA, as it “helps inform the appropriate unit of analysis, or which portion or segments of relevant documents will actually be investigated” (p. 39). Identifying this unit of analysis is crucial, as it will inform how the rest of the research proceeds. Moreover, identifying the problem will help the researcher determine what aspects of the text should be analyzed.

The second step that researchers must follow is that they must explore different sources of information in order to determine which sources would be best for analysis in the study. Some sources may be better suited for analysis than otherwise. Additionally, this investigation will
allow the researcher to gain a better understanding of the context of the information.

For the third step in preparing to conduct QCA, researchers must examine several examples of documents in order to determine what the unit of analysis should be. Schreier (2012) defines the unit of analysis as “each case on which qualitative content analysis is carried out” (p. 130). Analyzing several examples of documents will allow the researcher to better understand the context of the situation, as well as the process that is used when analyzing those sources. This familiarity with the process, Altheide and Schneider (2013) note, allows the researcher to be able to describe how the text was produced initially.

After determining the unit of analysis, Altheide and Schneider (2013) recommend that researchers construct a research protocol in order to guide how qualitative data is collected and analyzed. Unlike quantitative content analysis, which tends to have a large number of variable and categories in order to understand what is taking place within a text, “protocols for qualitative document analysis tend to be less precise and fairly short, often having a dozen or fewer categories” (p. 45). This is due to the reliance that researchers have on text, narrative, and descriptions in shaping and framing their responses.

Once researchers identify the text that they would like to include in the study, they then need to develop what Schreier (2012) calls the coding frame. Schreier notes that the coding frame is beneficial to researchers, as it allows them to “select certain key aspects of your material and to focus on those”, rather than examine every piece of information related to the topic at hand (p. 59). Schreier notes that the coding frame is advantageous to the researcher, as it provides a means of strategically organizing data in such a way that the researcher can better understand and analyze the data. The coding frame consists of two parts – dimensions and subcategories. The dimensions of the coding frame help researchers to structure their analyses,
whereas the subcategories help to provide more detail in analyzing what the researcher is looking for. In creating the coding frame, Schreier notes four basic requirements. The first requirement is unidimensionality, meaning that “each dimension in your coding frame should capture only one aspect of your material” (p. 72). By ensuring that unidimensionality is present, researchers will have a more concise collection of data. The second requirement, mutual exclusivity, means that only one code can be assigned to a given subcategory within a given dimension. Schreier’s third frame for a coding frame is exhaustiveness. According to Schreier, “a coding frame is said to be exhaustive if you are able to assign each unit of coding in your material to at least one subcategory in your coding frame” (p. 75). The final requirement for the coding frame is that it must fill the criterion of saturation, meaning that all subcategories included within the coding frame must be used at least once during the coding process. By constructing a coding frame such as that defined by Schreier, researchers can systematically define their research focus.

After developing the framework, researchers should then develop a research protocol, as outlined in Altheide and Schneider (2013). In this stage, Altheide and Schneider note three steps that researchers should take. First, researchers should “list several items or categories to guide data collection, and draft a protocol” (p. 44). The coding frame that the researcher develops will help to shape the protocols that they will use. After this step, researchers should then test the protocol by collecting data from different sources. Testing the protocol in this manner helps researchers to ensure that they are measuring exactly what they were intending on measuring. If any gaps emerged within the protocol during the testing process, researchers must then revise the protocol in order to fill in the gaps.

This dissertation utilized QCA to examine the language surrounding depictions of refugees within the Syrian humanitarian crisis. More specifically, it analyzed the language used
by three sources self-identified as being situated on the U.S. political right (Breitbart, Red State, and Newsmax) and three sources self-identified as being situated on the U.S. political left (The Nation, Huffpost and Democracy Now) at three specific critical incidents during the Syrian humanitarian crisis. Exploring the news stories surrounding these critical incidents provided an understanding as to what themes are prevalent at a given moment, as well as whether language used to refer to refugees and the humanitarian crisis as a whole changes depending on the events that occur. The events that constituted the critical incidents for this dissertation were 1). Two weeks before and two weeks after 3-year-old Aylan Kurdi’s body washed ashore in Turkey (August 19 - September 16, 2015), 2). Two weeks before and two weeks after the mass murder in Paris on November 13, 2015 (October 31 – November 27, 2015), and 3). Two weeks before and two weeks after Donald Trump attempted to sign his first executive order banning refugees from seven predominantly Muslim countries, including Syria (January 13 – February 10, 2017).

In order to conduct this study, I constructed a research protocol, utilizing strategies provided by Schreier (2012). For this study, the unit of analysis was the individual sentences and images included within each article. This decision was based on a pilot study in which I examined themes that emerged from mainstream news media articles focusing on the Syrian Refugee Crisis (Chappuis, 2017). When analyzing news articles, I examined both the title of the article, as well as the source in order to determine whether there were any codes that emerged upon an initial glance. I then read each article, writing down and examining the codes that emerged from the articles. After reading each of the articles, I compiled a list of the codes. From there, I then grouped the codes into overarching themes based on commonalities present within the codes. This process continued for each source at each critical incident. Once all sources were coded and grouped, I then analyzed the codes and themes from the critical incidents and grouped
them into overarching themes in order to understand what themes were most prevalent throughout the process.

**Main Assumptions**

When utilizing QCA, researchers must consider the type of content analysis to be used. Hseih and Shannon (2005) identified three types of qualitative content analysis that researchers use – conventional, directed, and summative. Conventional content analysis “is generally used with a study design whose aim is to describe a phenomenon” (p. 1279). Directed content analysis is more structured than conventional content analysis, as the researcher uses key concepts or variable to define some of the coding categories prior to the analysis of data (Hseih & Shannon, 2005). Finally, summative content analysis is used to explore language usage in order to understand both the manifest and latent meanings of language used (Hseih & Shannon, 2005).

Utilizing a conventional approach to qualitative content analysis in this manner will be beneficial for several reasons. For one, it will allow me to gain insight into each of these alternative news media sites. As this dissertation aims to describe sentiments towards Syrian refugees throughout the refugee crisis, the conventional approach is the most appropriate of the three approaches. While the research questions and the theories used will help act as guides, the actual coding phase of the analysis will be freer in form. In this, the researcher will utilize both open and axial coding, as defined by Corbin and Strauss (2008). Although these forms of coding are typically associated with grounded theory, they are appropriate for use within this context, as they will help to define the overarching groups of themes that will arise during the analysis. Additionally, utilizing the coding protocol as defined by Schreier (2012) will help provide insight into the sentiments surrounding the refugees and the refugee crisis. Additionally, using
this will allow me to directly analyze the language used in order to see how the sources differ, if at all, depending of political ideology.

Before continuing with the methodology for this dissertation, it is necessary to define what a text is, as well as how the concept will be used within this study.

**Text**

**Definition**

As mentioned previously, the purpose of qualitative content analysis is to be able to understand the underlying meaning of qualitative texts. Before proceeding, it is necessary to answer the question of what is considered to be a test. This question seems simple to answer; however, the answer to this question is more complex than it appears, as there is much that must be considered when determining the type of text to examine. For one, there are multiple definitions of the word “text” that can begin to confound its meaning. Schreier (2012) defines a text as any type of qualitative material, regardless of whether it is visual or verbal. McKee (2006) goes one step further in defining what a text is, describing it as “something that we make meaning from” (p. 4). Thus, a text is able to encompass much more than simply the written words on a page. The use of the word text by scholars is intentional, as the definition of text allows for more to be considered within the scope of study. McKee explains the meaning of “text”, noting that “the word ‘text’ has post-structuralist implications for thinking about the production of meaning”, meaning that a variety of sources can help to shape the meaning of a given text (p. 4). Some individuals may be inclined to think that a text is something physical with typewritten words. After all, these typewritten words are “texts” themselves. However, this view of a text is too narrow. Ott, Aoki, and Dickinson (2011), Woods, Ewalt, and Baker (2013), and Atkinson and Rosati (2012) analyzed texts that move beyond the typewritten word. In their work,
Ott, Aoki, and Dickinson (2011) used the Cody Firearm Museum as a text as they analyzed their use of space, noting that the complete encasement of the firearms stripped the firearms of their destructive power, forcing the museum visitors to view the firearms as a sanitized artwork rather than as potentially destructive weapons. Woods, Ewalt and Baker (2013) looked at two exhibits focusing on Willa Cather and Brandon Teena in the Nebraska History Museum in order to understand the rhetorical meaning that these exhibits displayed. The researchers also looked at how these exhibits were positioned with relation to the other exhibits within the museum, noting that there was a sort of otherizing taking place through the museum’s use of physical space.

Atkinson and Rosati (2012) examined how the city of Detroit was portrayed within a virtual tour of the city and a discussion board within a web community. The researchers found that the virtual tour show Detroit as a sort of ruins, allowing users to journey into abandoned landmarks and to relive the nostalgia of their youth, which was shown through messages left on the message boards.

Then, what constitutes a text? While one may be inclined to say that a text is something that can be easily held and analyzed, the preceding cases help to dispel that definition. Taking all of this into consideration, McKee’s (2006) definition of a text is best suited for this study. However, the “meaning” that can be ascribed from a text is not necessarily the original meaning given by the author. Rather, meaning can be assigned to the object/entity based on the audience’s own interpretation.

There are several advantages to analyzing texts, as opposed to other communication channels. For one, there tends to be informational richness present in the texts. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), this informational richness is due to the fact that the texts are “contextually relevant and grounded in the contexts they represent” (p. 277).
elements help shed light on what is occurring within a given text. Another advantage that exists is that they are almost always available for free or minimal cost. Since the advent of the internet, accessibility to texts has increased, as there are fewer obstacles between researchers and the texts themselves. A third advantage that exists is that texts are typically nonreactive; that is, they tend not to drastically change over time. Rather, scholars can examine texts from many years prior and hold confidence that the texts have not changed from their original form.

In this dissertation, I analyzed multiple types of texts, including both written and visual communication. In the following section, I consider past research that has done this, as well as discuss the importance of including the visual aspect of communication.

**Written Communication**

When individuals think of the term “text”, they may immediately think about items that exist in the form of words on a page, regardless of whether that page is digital or hard copy. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) note that documents, defined as “symbolic texts that can be retrieved for analysis” (p. 229), are important to qualitative research, as there is a great deal of information that can be derived from them. Several researchers have examined written texts in order to interpret the themes that emerge. For example, Figenschou and Thorbjornsrud (2015) examined 18 months of media coverage in order to determine the types of frames used in news media in the United States, France, and Norway, finding that Norwegian media tended to focus on stories on irregular migration through a human interest frame in two thirds of the articles examined, whereas U.S. and French media utilized this framing far less frequently (41% and 28% of articles respectively). Other researchers (see Cheng, Igartua, Palacios, Acosta, & Palito, 2010; Lawlor, 2015; Milioni, Spyridou, & Vadratsikas, 2015; Quinsaat, 2014; Van Gorp, 2007) have examined how newspapers, both local and national, frame refugees and immigrants in order to determine
how these individuals are depicted within the larger community. This dissertation aims to expand on this line of research, as the aforementioned studies all considered how refugees and immigrants were depicted in mainstream news media. This research will consider how language is used within alternative news media.

While it is important to examine research that focuses on the written language used in news media, it is also important to consider the visual component, which will be a crucial element of this dissertation.

**Visual Communication**

As previously demonstrated, several researchers have examined written texts focusing on refugees and immigrants in order to determine what themes were at play. While this may derive interesting information, I would argue that this doesn’t provide a complete picture, as written communication can be subject to the interpretations of the scholars analyzing it. Visual communication can add a new perspective, as it can show some of the lived experiences of individuals who are directly impacted by refugee crises. Lester (2011) notes that “all messages, whether verbal or visual have literal and symbolic components” (p. 3). The visual components of messages contain many complexities. Because of this, “visual communication relies both on eyes that function and on a brain that interprets all the sensory information received” (Lester, 2011, p. 3). The key to understanding the messages within an image can be traced back to Aldous Huxley (1942), who state that “sensing plus selecting plus perceiving equals seeing” (p. 11). In order to truly examine visual communication, researchers must search beyond the surface level for the deeper meanings present. Previous research (see Fair & Parks, 2001; Galikhuzina, Penkovtsev, & Shibanova, 2016; Greenwood & Jenkins, 2015) has examined news media depictions of refugees and immigrants in different contexts. For example, Greenwood and Jenkins (2015) examined
visual depictions of the Syrian humanitarian crisis in U.S. mainstream magazines, finding that
the pictures primarily depicted the crisis as a violent struggle, with few peaceful moments
interspersed. Others, such as Fair and Parks (2001) examined photographs from other refugee
crises. The aforementioned study by Fair and Parks examined aerial photography of Rwandan
refugee camps during the Rwandan genocide, finding that news coverage of the crisis depicted
refugees as separate pockets of people, separate from a defined “home” and separate from a
singular human identity. These studies, among others, help to show that studying the visual
images depicting events can shed greater light on the complexities of those events, allowing us to
gain a better understanding of what is occurring.

Method

To conduct this research, I utilized qualitative content analysis to analyze articles
obtained from six alternative media sources, three (The Nation, Democracy Now, and HuffPost)
that self-identify as being situated on the U.S. political left, and three (RedState, Newsmax, and
Breitbart) that self-identify as being situated on the U.S. political right. Sources were selected
using Boyd-Barrett’s (2005) modernity to alterinity scale. Additionally, the sources that were
selected for analysis were chosen due to their popularity in their respective political spheres.
Before proceeding with how this study is conducted, it is necessary to look at each of the
alternative media sources to learn what each source is, as well as why each is included within
this dissertation.

Description of Article Sources

The Nation. The first alternative media source for this dissertation is The Nation, an
alternative news media source self-identified as being on the U.S. political left. The Nation was
founded in 1865 and is the oldest weekly news source in the United States (TheNation.com). The
Nation acts as a voice for progressive individuals, “serving as a critical, independent voice in American journalism and a platform for investigative reporting and spirited debate on issues of import to the progressive community” (para. 1). According to the editors, “We don’t just talk about progress, we instigate it” (para. 2). Additionally, the writers and contributors to The Nation aim to “shift paradigms, open minds, broaden public discourse, and ignite debate” through their stories and contributions (para. 3). Past contributors to The Nation have included Eleanor Roosevelt, Willa Cather, Hannah Arendt, Gore Vidal, W. E. B. Debois, Albert Einstein, and Jean-Paul Sartre.

The Nation was included as one of the alternative news sources that were analyzed for several reasons. For one, its 152-year lifespan proves that it has remained popular among different generations. Additionally, it has had many distinguished contributors throughout its span, thus increasing the notability of the source.

**Democracy Now.** The second source I examined for this dissertation was *Democracy Now*, a source which self-identifies as being on the U.S. political left. Democracy Now’s news stories are primarily featured on television and radio; however, this dissertation focused on the typewritten transcripts of their stories. Democracy Now and its reporters are known for their work as activists in the United States. This was evident when Amy Goodman, one of the executive producers for the organization, was notified of an arrest warrant issued for her participation in the Dakota Pipeline protests in North Dakota in September 2016 (“Arrest Warrant Issued for Amy Goodman”, 2016). One of the main purposes of Democracy Now is to provide individuals with “access to people and perspectives rarely heard in the U.S. corporate-sponsored media, including independent and international journalists, ordinary people from around the world who are directly
affected by U.S. foreign policy, grassroots leaders and peace activists, artists, academics and independent analysts” (para. 2).

Democracy Now is included in this dissertation because of its understanding regarding the need for independent news media. The reporters and contributors to the site recognize that the mainstream news media is dominated by a select few. According to Democracy Now, “in the year 2000, just six corporations dominated the U.S. media” (para. 5). The executive producers desire for their organization to maintain its independence. This desire for independence and to remain in alternity is why Democracy Now is included in this study.

**HuffPost.** The third alternative news source analyzed in this research is HuffPost, a news source founded by Arianna Huffington in 2005 that self-identifies as being on the U.S. political left. In the months immediately following its establishment, Huffpost, originally called the Huffington Post “became a must-read for the opposition during [George W.] Bush’s second term” (Kludt, 2017, para. 29). However, this political driving lessened during Barack Obama’s presidency. During this time, Arianna Huffington decided to take Huffington Post in a different direction, focusing more on other matters, including lifestyle (Kludt, 2017). In August 2016, Huffington announced that she would be stepping down as Editor in Chief of the Huffington Post (Ember, 2016). CEO Jared Grusd announced that Lydia Polgreen would be the new Editor in Chief of Huffington Post in December 2016 (Kludt, 2016). Kludt (2016) also describes how leadership in the site aims to move back to having more of a focus on politics like they did back in 2005. This rebranding included the changing of the site’s name to HuffPost.

One of the reasons why HuffPost is included in this dissertation is because of the popularity of the source. HuffPost articles are released multiple times per day and community
members tend to respond, with roughly one million new comments each month. Due to its success and popularity, HuffPost is contained in this analysis.

**RedState.** The first of the alternative news sources included in this research that self-identifies as being on the U.S. political right is RedState. RedState, initially founded as RedState.org, began in 2004, calling itself “the singular hub of conservative grassroots collaboration on the right” (“About RedState”, 2017, para. 2). In its 13-year existence, RedState has become an influential voice for individuals on Capitol Hill. RedState contributors include Editor-in-Chief Erick Erickson, other contributing editors, and registered users on RedState.com. RedState is a unique news source in that any individual can contribute content to the site. However, it does take more to get a story to the front of the website, as only the stories with the most viewer votes will make it to the front page of the site (“About RedState”). RedState considers itself to be an ardent supporter of grassroots Republican candidates, touting its position as the first national political site to endorse Marco Rubio in his campaign to represent Florida in the U.S. Senate. RedState has three key goals as an organization – “to educate conservatives, to motivate conservatives to get involved in the political process, and to activate conservatives through RedState’s support and tools” (“About RedState”, para. 8). Because of its unique position as an alternative news source with user-generated content, RedState is one of the sources included in this dissertation analysis.

**Newsmax.** The fifth alternative news media source examined for this dissertation is Newsmax, a news media outlet situated on the U.S. political right that was founded by Christopher Ruddy in 1998. Throughout its lifespan, Newsmax has had a wide variety of subscribers, including former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Newt Gingrich and Independent U.S. Senator Joe Lieberman. Dick Morris, a former political strategist for President
Bill Clinton and contributor to Newsmax stated “Newsmax is the most influential Republican-leaning media outlet in the country”, noting that it focuses on “what Republicans in the heartland are really thinking” (Smillie, 2009, para. 4). Newsmax chief executive Christopher Ruddy emphasizes what Newsmax has to offer, stating that it brings “news that Americans in the heartland would like to see” (Peters, 2011, para. 3). Newsmax has proven its popularity in the past, as Peters mentions that, “among news sites that draw large conservative audiences, only FoxNews.com has more visitors” (para. 5). Newsmax has been viewed by some to be an influential body in the political world. In the past, most of Newsmax’s audience chose to make political donations. “The average donation amount was $2,930” (Peters, 2011, para. 9). Because of this high level of participation, many Republican candidates view Newsmax as a viable and necessary source to approach for advertisement and to get their names out in Republican circles. It is because of this very success that Newsmax is included as one of the six alternative news media sources that were analyzed.

**Breitbart.** The final alternative news media source analyzed in this dissertation is Breitbart, a news source self-identified as being on the U.S. political right that has gained increased national attention over the past few years. Breitbart was founded in 2007 by Andrew Breitbart, a former contributor to the Huffington Post and “a former liberal who became a conservative standard-bearer until his death from heart failure at 43 in 2012” (Bromwich, 2016, para. 3). Breitbart is viewed as a polarizing force in political circles, as it “is loathed by many liberals, moderates and establishment Republicans who say it stokes a partisan atmosphere and misleads readers in order to escalate what they see as non-issues” (Bromwich, 2016, para. 13). However, others on the conservative side of the political spectrum see Breitbart as “an answer to mainstream media organizations . . . that are viewed as liberal in outlook” (para. 14).
One reason for the attention the Breitbart has garnered can be attributed to Milo Yiannopoulos, a former Breitbart contributor who was known for his sexist and racist diatribes against many individuals and groups, including actor and comic Leslie Jones. Breitbart rose to national attention during the 2016 U.S. Presidential election when then-President Donald Trump hired Steve Bannon, a top executive with Breitbart news, to be his campaign’s chief executive. It is this very notoriety that resulted in Breitbart’s inclusion within this dissertation research.

**Article Selection**

For the purposes of this study, I gathered articles from each of the six sources with publication dates falling between three predetermined points in time corresponding to critical incidents within the Syrian humanitarian crisis. As previously stated, the first period of time corresponded with the two weeks before and after Aylan Kurdi’s body washed ashore in Turkey (August 19 – September 16, 2015). The second period of time corresponded with the two weeks before and after the massacre in Paris in November 2015 (October 31 – November 27, 2015). The final period of time corresponded with the two weeks before and after the Donald Trump attempted to sign into law the first executive order banning refugees from seven predominantly Muslim countries, including Syria (January 13 – February 10, 2017). For this dissertation, I aimed to gather 35 articles from each source at each point in time. The number 35 was not selected due to a past precedent for research. Rather, I believed that obtaining 35 articles per source per critical incident would allow me to achieve theoretical saturation. However, several sources had less than 35 articles focusing on the humanitarian crisis during the four week periods. As such, I was able to obtain and analyze 473 news articles.
To conduct this study, I coded each article using the protocol that I constructed based on the guidelines provided by Schreier (2012), making note of the themes that emerge from each article. As the unit of analysis is the individual sentences and images in the article, there may be multiple themes that emerge from an individual article. The analysis was conducted in two stages. The first stage, open coding, consisted of the researcher reading all articles and coding what themes emerge from the sentences and images in the articles (Schreier, 2012). Open coding continued until theoretical saturation was reached. The second stage, axial coding, occurred upon completion of the open coding stage. Here, the researcher examined all of the themes that emerged through open coding and grouped related themes together under a new overarching theme (Schreier, 2012). These larger themes were used to help answer the research questions for this study. NVIVO was used to help organize the codes and themes that emerged from the research.

**Diachronic Analysis**

In the third research question, I ask how, if at all, the depictions of Syrian refugees in alternative news media change over time. In order to examine this, I conducted a diachronic analysis in which I examine the themes that emerge from news stories at three separate critical incidents. The use of diachronic analysis is advantageous, as it moves beyond considering a singular point in time. Previous researchers (i.e., Ignatiev, 1998; Lamb, 2013; Potter, 2015; Steinhardt, 2015; Takaki, 1998) have utilized diachronic analysis in a variety of contexts. For example, Potter (2015) examined public discourse in the time period surrounding the immigration debates that occurred in Congress in the United States in 2006 in order to gain a better understanding of the impact of the shift of the word “illegal” from an adjective to a noun. Steinhardt (2015) conducted an analysis of news media in China in order to trace how the
depictions of protests changed over time. Diachronic analysis is a crucial component of this dissertation, as it acts as a means of beginning to expand framing theory. One of the present limitations of framing theory is that it looks at the frames that are used at a singular point in time. This dissertation aims to expand the utility of framing theory beyond a static point in time by examining framing as more of a fluid process, looking at potential changes over time.

**Personal Connection and Identifying Potential Bias**

In conducting research focusing on depictions of race and religious expression, it is necessary to consider the background of the individual or group conducting the research. As a white cisgender male, I recognize that I occupy a place of privilege. Additionally, I identify as a Christian. As such, I recognize that there may have been an implicit bias in place considering I did not analyze or write from a position of someone who is directly impacted by the crisis due to my religious and/or racial background. However, I argue that my position and my experiences are not to be discounted, not because I believe that my position and experiences are more important than others, but because I believe that it is both necessary and important to consider the views of all individuals. I have both French and Italian heritage. My great-grandfather was an immigrant from Italy who traveled to the United States to begin a new life for him and his family. It is important for all U.S. citizens to take a step back and consider their heritage, as we all come from a line of immigrants and have that experience in our respective family histories. More specifically, my life experiences have had a great impact on how I view the world around me. I grew up in a turbulent family environment. When I was 15 months old, my biological mother walked out on my father, choosing to pursue a relationship with the man with whom she had been having an affair. When I was three years old, my biological mother took custody of me from my father. I lived with my biological mother, step-father, half-brother, sister, and half-sister
for six years. During that time, I was subjected to varying levels of abuse, including verbal and physical abuse. In those six years, I felt as if I were lost in the wilderness with no one to save me. I felt unwanted, unappreciated, unloved, and unknown. It did not matter what I did – I just knew that it was never good enough. When I was nine-years-old, I was sent to live with my biological dad and my step-mom. I have considered them to be my parents for the majority of my life.

Since the day of the custody change, I have reflected on how my past experiences have shaped my view of people and the world around me. I have realized that I tend to have greater empathy for individuals and groups who have endured some level of oppression. I feel a greater emotional connection to individuals who have been hurt by society and by the institutions that should be protecting them. Taking all of this into account, I understand that my own subjective positioning resulted in me emphasizing some concepts over others. That being said, I attempted to conduct the analysis without my own political, racial, or religious identity overly influencing my perspective.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

When analyzing news focusing on the Syrian humanitarian crisis, it is important to note that the stories being reported represent only one perspective of the issue at hand. That being said, news stories do provide insight into events of which media consumers may not necessarily be aware. While individuals may not be directly impacted by these stories, they may become emotionally engaged with the content that is presented to them. However, there is a danger with media consumers only engaging with news content that conforms to their political beliefs, as news contributors are often influenced by the overarching beliefs of the sources for which they are writing. This chapter focuses on the themes obtained from analyzing alternative news media articles. More specifically, the chapter focuses on how these frames differ based on political ideology. It is important to note that while these themes do not represent how all news media frame the Syrian humanitarian crisis, these themes do show evidence that the political ideology of the source does have an impact on how news content is framed. In this chapter, I discuss the themes derived at each critical incident for both groups of alternative news media sources. I also focus on the visual imagery used by sources based on their political ideologies.

**Alternative News Media (U.S. Political Left) Analysis Overview**

For this dissertation, I examined articles from *The Nation*, *Democracy Now*, and *Huffpost* in order to comprehend how news contributors chose to frame refugees within the Syrian humanitarian crisis, as well as the humanitarian crisis as a whole.

**Critical Incident #1: Aylan Kurdi**

To better understand how framing of the humanitarian crisis changed over time, it is necessary to examine how news contributors focused on refugees and the humanitarian crisis at each critical incident. This portion of the analysis focuses on articles from the two weeks before

Table 1: Frequency of Themes for Alternative News Media (U.S. Political Left) at Critical Incident #1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DEMOCRACY NOW</th>
<th>HUFFPOST</th>
<th>THE NATION</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refugee Sensitivity</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian Crisis and Causes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee as Threat</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aid for Refugees</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Refugee Sensitivity.** Statements that fall within the first theme focus on the vulnerability of refugees, specifically that refugees are afflicted with various hardships within the larger humanitarian crisis. This theme is very similar to the victim frame, which other researchers (See Milioni, Spyridou, & Vadratsikas, 2015; Van Gorp, 2007) have found in their analyses of news media.

In order to emphasize the impact of the Syrian humanitarian crisis and the conditions that refugees have faced, many contributors included statistics about refugees to show how many were fleeing the conditions in Syria. According to the Editors of The Nation (2015a), “More than 380,000 people have crossed the Mediterranean this year in search of safety, two-thirds of them landing in Greece; at least 2,850 have drowned or are missing at sea” (para. 1). Hodgson (2015)
also highlights these statistics, noting that “[m]ore than four million refugees have fled Syria since 2011. Most are in Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan, but many have become frustrated by excessively long wait times in temporary camps and undertake perilous journeys to Europe” (para. 12). Providing data such as these show media consumers how vast the humanitarian crisis is, as well as the impact that it is having on society.

When underscoring the sensitivity of refugees, some contributors focused on the plight of the refugees, choosing to accentuate the dangerous conditions that refugees endure when they attempt to escape the unrest in their home countries. In an interview with German lawmaker Annette Groth, Democracy Now contributor Juan Gonzalez noted some of the statistics about the danger that refugees encounter. Gonzalez states:

Approximately 2,500 people are believed to have died or gone missing trying to reach Europe so far this year. Just over a week ago, 37 people died when a boat capsized off the Libyan coast. This came just days after another boat capsized off the Libyan coast, killing more than 200 people. Around the same time, 71 refugees were found dead in an abandoned truck on the main highway between Budapest and Vienna, the victims of negligence by the smugglers they entrusted to bring them to safety. And the world was stunned as images of one of the youngest victims of the migrant crisis, three-year-old Syrian boy Aylan Kurdi, went viral. (Groth, cited in Democracy Now, 2015c, para. 5)

In the same story, Groth notes the hardships that refugees face, asserting that “[refugees] risk their lives” to reach safety (para. 12). Moreover, Groth mentions that countries hold some responsibility concerning refugee safety, declaring that “you know that we are forcing them on the boats” because we are not providing the means for refugees to be safe (para. 12). Democracy Now contributor Amy Goodman continues to highlight the dangerous conditions that refugees
face in attempting to escape the violence in their home countries, claiming that “[t]he Mediterranean Sea has become one of the world’s deadliest borders, as more than 340,000 people displaced by war and violence have attempted to reach Europe this year” (Democracy Now, 2015a, para. 27).

In an attempt to show the conditions that refugees endure in their attempts to escape, some news contributors chose to focus on the inherent dangers that were presented to refugees as they made the life-threatening journey to another country, while others concentrated on the sheer amount of travel that refugees endured when escaping from their home countries. In one story, Democracy Now contributor Juan Gonzalez focused on one Syrian refugee, 23 year-old Zaher Majzoub, and his journey from Syria. In the story, Majzoub discusses how he traveled for months, escaping Syria to reach Turkey and Austria with the hopes of eventually reaching England (Democracy Now, 2015d). Majzoub describes the danger that refugees faced as they attempted to traverse through Hungary:

We walked for about six hours to reach a razor-wire fence. And we go – we go under them. We go under the razor-wire fence. And the planes always go and see if there is refugees to catch them, to arrest them, or to obligate them to have fingerprint in Hungary. But the plane couldn’t see us, so we cross the border and go to somebody who has – know a taxi driver. (para. 10)

Another contributor focused on Ziad Moutash’s journey to flee Syria and to find peace with his brother in Europe. In his article, Rosenfeld (2015) details Moutash’s journey from Syria to France. However, Rosenfeld notes that Moutash has more to face:

Although he has escaped the horrors of Syria’s grinding civil war, Moutash is just beginning the difficult journey through Europe. He will have to cross more borders
illegally; rest in filthy, makeshift camps; pay traffickers to help him cross those borders; dodge border police; and sleep in parks and fields, before he can reunite with his brother.

(para. 6)

An additional aspect that some contributors chose to focus on is how the humanitarian crisis is impacting children who are caught in the middle of the crisis. According to Rashid (2015), “at least 10,000 children have been killed in this crisis, and hundreds of thousands more now suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and psychological trauma” (para. 9). Rosenfeld (2015) also emphasizes the impact of the humanitarian crisis on children when describing the scene of a broken down boat of refugees sinking off of the coast of Greece, stating, “Children and adults alike cried desperately for help, until they were towed to Greece by another boat of refugees coming from Turkey” (para. 2). Children are among the most sensitive victims of the humanitarian crisis. According to Kalaichandran (2015), when considering the number of refugees that are children, “some estimates place the numbers at one-half to one-third of all refugees and migrants, which would effectively mean at least 100,000 to 150,000 children entering Europe to date this year” (para. 11). Kalaichandran also mentions the dangers that children face, especially if they are separated from their families, stating that “unaccompanied children are at a higher risk of exploitation and abuse, and are thus particularly vulnerable and in need of additional protections” (para. 9). The focus on the children allows media consumers to see a more sensitive side to the humanitarian crisis, which may, in turn, elicit a greater outpouring of emotion and support.

These are a few instances of news contributors painting refugees as human, highlighting the tenderness on refugees caught up in the humanitarian crisis. The next theme focuses on the humanitarian crisis on a larger scale.
**Humanitarian Crisis and its Causes.** Statements that fall within the second theme emphasize the impact of the Syrian humanitarian crisis on the individuals involved within the crisis. Other statements make note of different individuals and countries that hold some form of responsibility for allowing the humanitarian crisis to reach the point that it has at present.

In many articles, contributors noted that the United States played a great role in the formation and progression of the Syrian humanitarian crisis to where it is today. When asked about the root of the mass migration from Syria, German Parliament Member Annette Groth, in an interview with Democracy Now producers Juan Gonzalez and Amy Goodman, stated, “It is war, it is terror, and it is the former U.S. government who is accountable for it” (Groth, cited in Democracy Now, 2015c, para. 1). Groth elaborates, noting:

It was Bush who invaded Iraq. It was Bush—then Libya, destroying Libya, then Syria. Now Saudi Arabia, with the help of German weapons, is invading Yemen. This is the next country, you know, where we will receive refugees. The whole area of the Middle East is a zone by war and terror, so therefore people are leaving their countries. (para. 10)

The theme of placing blame for the humanitarian crisis on the United States was present in several news articles. One contributor blamed the U.S. and Britain for the rise of ISIS, stating “[t]he rise of the Islamic State, or ISIS – now terrorizing Syria and Iraq and threatening neighboring countries – was sparked by the aftermath of the Iraq invasion and fueled by the misguided tactics of the United States and Britain in Syria” (The Editors, 2015a, para. 4). Syrian refugees themselves, while grateful for the assistance that they’ve received, are angry with the role that the U.S. and other countries have played in the rise of ISIS. “Although they blame Assad for his brutality, they equally blame the United States, Europe, and their Gulf and Turkish allies for flooding the country with weapons and fighters who have worsened the conflict”
(Rosenfeld, 2015, para. 17). As such, many refugees believe that the U.S. played a role in the crisis because they provided the means for the violence to persist.

Other news contributors placed responsibility on other world leaders. Trilling (2015) placed blame squarely on Germany’s shoulders, claiming that the German government “was an architect of the border policies that made this crisis so bad in the first place, and shows no desire to dismantle them” (para. 8). Focusing on Europe as a whole, “the crisis at Europe’s borders is not a natural disaster; it is one of Europe’s own making” (para. 4). Ahmed (2015) places responsibility for the crisis on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s shoulders, noting that “the refugee crisis in Syria is a product of the conflict that has been raging since President Bashar Assad’s autocratic government sparked a civil war by attacking peaceful protests in March 2011” (para. 9). To elaborate, “what began as an act of civil protest has continued to expand to civil war, genocide, and mass exodus. It began as protest in response to ‘the arrest and torture of teenagers who wrote revolutionary slogans on a school wall’” (Jackson, 2015, para. 2)

**Refugee as Threat.** The third theme focuses on statements that paint refugees as a threat to society and to a country’s security. Analyzed statements that fall within this theme express some sort of doubt regarding the legitimacy of refugees, whether that doubt come from refugee documents, news reports, statistics about refugees, or another source. One important thing to note is that assertions in this theme may not be from the news contributors themselves, but rather from officials quoted within each article.

When confronted with the matter of refugees escaping turmoil in their home countries, some countries responded to the humanitarian crisis by closing off routes to refugees, as leaders tended to view refugees as a threat. Former UK Prime Minister David Cameron demonstrated the view of refugee as threat by referring to refugees entering the country as “swarms” (Kelberer,
2015, para. 7). The view of refugees as a threat was seen in the U.S. as well. According to Foley (2015):

Efforts to bring in more refugees would face political opposition, largely from Republicans who say the new arrivals from Syria — most of whom are Muslim — could be terrorists. Rep. Michael McCaul (R-Texas), chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security, said Monday that although what’s happening abroad is “a tragic situation,” he “cannot support a program that could potentially bring jihadists into the United States.” (para. 14)

Democracy Now producer and contributor Amy Goodman noted that, in August 2015, Hungary responded to an influx of refugees in Europe by erecting a razor-wire fence on the entirety of its southern border in order to prevent refugees from entering the country (Democracy Now, 2015b). Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán defended this decision due to the feeling that “migrants threaten “European civilization” and that Hungary, in building a fence to keep out refugees, was defending “Christian Europe” from the alleged horrors of a multicultural society” (Trilling, 2015, para. 7). Israel responded similarly in September 2015, “saying it is continuing plans to construct a fence along its border with Jordan” (Democracy Now, 2015b, para. 1).

Gastfriend (2015) argues that closing off routes to refugees is a cruel act. In his statement, Gastfriend compares the world leaders’ reactions to refugees to how individuals reacted to the Jews during World War II. Taking these events into consideration, Gastfriend notes that “it is important to think clearly about the challenges of refugee resettlement, and to recognize how these challenges differ across populations. But these realities are not an excuse to abandon or demonize those most desperately in need” (para. 8).
Robins-Early (2015) mentioned that a fear of refugees was brought on by the continuous perpetuation of myths surrounding refugees, as some people are hesitant to want refugees to enter the country, as they believe that they are economic migrants or asylees rather than refugees. However, he combats this myth, stating “the idea that the majority of those arriving in the EU – 95 percent by Fico’s calculation – are economic migrants is not borne out of reality” (para. 7). Robins-Early extends his argument by explaining what it means to be a refugee:

The perverse notion that a person doesn’t look destitute or sickly enough to be granted asylum contains a fundamental lack of understanding about what being a refugee means. The people heading to Europe come from diverse backgrounds, including middle-class lives or wealthy and educated families, but they have been forced to flee due to horrific conflict. (para. 21).

Kalaichandran (2015) defines what a refugee is, stating that “[r]efugees are those who are fleeing persecution and where return or repatriation may pose a reasonable threat of harm or even death” (para. 4). The term “refugee” has its own historical background, as its meaning has changed over time. During World War II, the term “displaced persons” was used in the United States as a means of inviting refugees, including culturally famous individuals, to live in the United States and become citizens. Some of these famous refugees include actress and humanitarian Audrey Hepburn, physicist Albert Einstein, and former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Understanding the background of the definition of refugee is can help individuals to better comprehend what refugees face as they attempt to flee unrest within their home countries.

Other news contributors focus on how the mass media itself perpetuates myths against refugees through the use of photographs and other statements taken out of context. Robins-Early
(2015) discusses the impact of photographs that are used by news sources and taken out of their original context:

One photo purports to show an Islamic State fighter holding a rifle in Syria earlier this year, then smiling in a separate image as he enters Europe wearing a T-shirt that says “thank you.” Another image claims to show refugees holding an Islamic State flag and attacking German police. In actuality, both photos don’t really show anything close to what people circulating the images online claim. The first before-and-after image is that of a man profiled by the Associated Press who was a Free Syrian Army commander before fleeing the conflict. Now, he hopes to bring his family to the Netherlands. The flag photo is from years ago and unrelated to refugees, or possibly even the Islamic State.

(Para. 26)

In the analysis, one of the reasons to not allow refugees that was most cited was the fear that refugees would have a negative impact on society, whether through the consumption of goods or jobs or through an impact on the country’s economy. However, Robins-Early (2015) debunks this myth, noting that “this nativist argument doesn’t hold up to scrutiny, experts say, and some economists argue that if handled correctly, the influx of refugees could actually have a positive effect on the economy” (Para. 32). However, Robins-Early does note that housing refugees is an expensive venture and that state would have to make heavy financial investments for refugees in order to receive a positive return on said investment in the future.

Aid for Refugees. The final theme focuses on segments of analyzed text detailing ways in which individuals or countries have assisted refugees during the Syrian humanitarian crisis. Some of these statements praise countries for their contributions in helping refugees, while others are more critical, calling on countries to do more to aid refugees. This theme also focuses
on assertions that encourage news consumers to help refugees by providing different ways in which the consumers can have a positive impact within the Syrian humanitarian crisis.

When considering the impact of the humanitarian crisis, one need not look farther than Syria itself, as many individuals in Syria are feeling the effects of the crisis. According to Ahmed (2015), “The UN estimates that 12.2 million Syrians in total — more than half of the country’s pre-crisis population — need humanitarian aid” (para. 9). The cost of providing humanitarian aid is expensive, as “the UNHCR, the largest humanitarian agency responding to refugee crises worldwide, currently requires an additional $3 billion to respond to the Syrian refugee crisis alone.” (Kelberer, 2015, para. 2). The worldwide scope is even more dramatic, as “there are 60 million refugees and internally displaced peoples in search of safety, shelter, a home and a future across the globe” (Ramos-Horta, 2015, para. 1). Although there are many individuals who are impacted by this specific humanitarian crisis, this analysis only considers news statements specifically related to Syrian refugees who are caught in the crisis.

Some focused on the humanitarian crisis as a global issue. Several alluded to this in their articles, saying that “this is not a problem for Europe to solve alone” (The Editors, 2015a, para. 4), and that “the Syrian refugee crisis is a global call to action” (NationAction, 2015, para. 1). Levine (2015), citing former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, stated, “We should do our part, as should the Europeans; but this is a broader, global crisis. We now have more refugees than we’ve had in many years — I think, since the Second World War” (para. 3). Keeping this thought in mind, some contributors appealed to their readers, viewers, and listeners to provide aid in the crisis. Kelberer (2015), in writing about citizens living in Boston wanting to help, asserted:

While more than 5,000 miles may separate Boston and Damascus, the heart of the Syrian
refugee crisis, there are concrete steps people can take locally to have an impact on the lives of refugees. These actions may seem small when taken alone, but with concerted efforts by enough people, the inadequate humanitarian response that led to Aylan Kurdi’s drowning can begin to change. (para. 1).

Kelberer described the impact that media consumers can have. In detailing the funding needed to provide adequate aid to refugees, she attempts to reduce the $3 billion goal into amounts that seem more manageable to media consumers to show that they can have more of an impact. According to Kelberer, “[$3 billion] seems insurmountable, but every donation, large or small, funds a textbook for a child, a meal for a family, or a roof over their heads” (para. 2). Kelberer’s final appeal to her audience focuses on each member on an individual level:

Every single person can have a positive impact on the way this crisis is handled. The unprecedented number of people fleeing their homes due to conflict, climate, and poverty requires an equally unprecedented global response, starting at the local level with you. (para. 13)

Other new contributors wrote about how some countries were helping refugees in the humanitarian crisis. However, providing aid for refugees can have an impact on the countries that choose to provide shelter. Robins-Early (2015) outlines how helping refugees has impacted some countries:

In Lebanon, Syrians now make up one-fifth of the population. Over half of these more than 1.1 million refugees live in insecure dwellings, according the United Nations Refugee Agency. Conditions in Jordan, which has over 600,000 Syrian refugees, are similarly dire. Two-thirds of the Syrian refugee population there lives in poverty, according to the UN, while 1-in-6 live in extreme poverty. (para. 15)
While some focused on the assistance that some countries have offered, others considered the need for more to be done to help refugees. For example, Rosenfeld (2015) criticized the United States and other countries for their lack of response to the humanitarian crisis in light of the role that they played in creating it, stating that “despite their roles in creating this mass displacement, neither the United States nor its European allies in that war are doing much to take in the refugees generated by their failed occupation” (para. 16). Vale (2015) criticized the U.S., especially in light of their reputation for being an escape for immigrants. According to former British Foreign Secretary David Miliband, 

The United States since the Syria conflict began has taken 1234 Syrian refugees. The State Department announced last week a target of 5,000-8,000 in 2016, but that’s way below the kind of leadership needed for America to play its historic role, never mind to compare to this German reaction of 800,000 refugees. (Miliband, cited in Vale, 2015, para. 13).

Robins-Early (2015) noted that, while Turkey did provide refuge for Syrians, they were not given the same rights as in other countries. To explain, “Turkey, which has taken in 1.9 million Syrians, does not actually grant Syrians living there refugee status as agreed upon in the Geneva Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. Turkey didn’t sign on to one part of the agreement, and therefore isn’t fully bound by it” (Robins-Early, 2015, para. 14).

Kalaichandran (2015) placed blame on the Canadian government and the role that they played in denying Aylan Kurdî’s family asylum:

The tragic loss of Aylan, along with his brother and mother, who were apparently denied asylum in Canada, can serve as an example of how Canada can no longer deny its role in resettling refugee children and their families. If Germany is willing to accept 800 000
refugees, surely Canada can rise above its commitment of a mere 10,000 over four years.

(para. 15)

These themes help to define and describe the sentiment surrounding Syrian refugees in alternative news media situated on the U.S. political left surrounding Aylan Kurdi’s death. The next section of the analysis focuses on news surrounding the second critical incident – the Paris Massacre.

**Critical Incident #2: Paris Massacre**

The second critical incident focused on articles between October 31 and November 27, 2015, the time period surrounding the massacre in Paris that resulted in 137 deaths, including the seven attackers. Six themes emerged from this analysis – 1). Religious Competition, 2). Humanitarian Crisis and its Causes, 3). Security and Issues, 4). Aid for Refugees, 5). Refugee Sensitivity, and 6). Fear Based Reactions. Each theme will be explained in the following sections.
Table 2: Frequency of Themes for Alternative News Media (U.S. Political Left) at Critical Incident #2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>DEMOCRACY NOW</th>
<th>HUFFPOST</th>
<th>THE NATION</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RELIGIOUS COMPETITION</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUMANITARIAN CRISIS AND CAUSES</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECURITY AND ISSUES</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AID FOR REFUGEES</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFUGEE SENSITIVITY</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEAR-BASED REACTIONS</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Religious Competition. This theme focuses on how refugees are framed as being in conflict with different religious groups. In analyzing the news articles, there were several instances in which providers showed refugees as a type of threat due to their Muslim faith. Specifically, contributors looked at how Islam and Christianity had compatibility issues.

In the days following the Paris massacre, Islam was viewed as a threat to U.S. citizens and the larger society. Despite the attempts of Muslims to show that Islam was not a violent threat to society (Praxmarer, 2016), there were instances of people trying to eradicate the perceived threat. One such instance occurred in St. Petersburg, Florida, where “a mosque received a voicemail from a caller who threatened to “firebomb you and shoot whoever is there in the head”” (Democracy Now, 2015e, para. 1). Former Republican candidate for U.S. President Mike Huckabee denounced the admission of Muslim refugees into the U.S., declaring, “The Statue of Liberty says ‘bring us your tired and your weary.’ It didn’t say ‘bring us your terrorists
and let them come in here and bomb neighborhoods, cafes and concert halls’” (Mellen, 2015, para. 6). Huckabee continued his argument against the Muslim people, saying that individuals in the U.S. needed to “wake up and smell the falafel” (para. 2). Texas Senator Ted Cruz divides Christians and Muslims, stating that “allowing thousands of “Syrian Muslim refugees” into the country is “nothing less than lunacy,” while also saying that Christians fleeing persecution deserve “safe haven” (Jamieson, 2015, para. 6). While there are some individuals that are proponents of this view of Muslims, others believe that the divide between Christians and Muslims has been needlessly created. Nichols (2015) notes that the founders of the United States once placed Islam in high regard, with some early leaders of the U.S. keeping regular communication with Islamic leaders.

For some, hearing proposals for a system of religious vetting brought about questions of individuals’ motives and levels of compassion towards those who are suffering. U.S. president Barack Obama, in a speech responding to members of the GOP calling for religious vetting, stated, "When individuals say that we should have a religious test and that only Christians—proven Christians—should be admitted, that’s offensive and contrary to American values” (Walsh, 2015, para. 8). Patru (2015) continues this argument, claiming that banning Muslims from entering the United States has a detrimental impact on U.S. society:

Accepting the refugees based on their religion by banning the Muslims from entering the U.S. while Christians show “no meaningful risk of committing acts of terror” encourages an insane ideology and paranoia. Earlier this year signs of these feelings’ latent existence have been brought to surface in the case of Ahmad Muhammad, the clock-making teen arrested for bringing to school his invention in a suitcase. (para. 4)
Many U.S. politicians recognize that Christians in Syria are impacted and targeted by terrorists because of their religious beliefs (Nichols, 2015). However, some fail to recognize the danger that Syrian Muslims face as well. According to Nichols,

> Muslims have been primary targets and victims of Islamic State violence and oppression in Syria – and they have suffered profoundly from the general chaos that has developed in that country. Never mind that Muslims and Christians are fleeing Syria to escape the sort of carnage that Paris has now experienced. (para. 7).

U.S. Congress member Keith Ellison, the first Muslim member of Congress, describes the impact that religious competition is having, arguing that Daesh, another name for ISIS, benefits from the competition:

> When our country is saying, "We’ll take refugees, but only if they’re Christian. We don’t want any Iraqis and Syrians Aren’t those people Muslim, and couldn’t terrorists be amongst them?" what we’re doing is helping Daesh argue to people around the world that we are not there, that we don’t believe in the values we profess, and that they can make us change our system based on threats. And this is feeding their overall narrative. (Democracy Now, 2015j, para. 8).

Cole (2015) defends this view of the impact that religious competition has, asserting that “a “war” on terror that characterizes, for example, all Syrian refugees as potential combatants plays right into the hands of recruiters like [Abdelhamid] Abaaoud, who aim to “sharpen the contradictions” between Muslims and those of Christian heritage” (para. 8). Consequently, the use of competitive language acts as a divisive tool, driving Christians and Muslims away from one another. However, Gear (2015) works to bring Christianity and Islam closer together by connecting the Syrian humanitarian crisis to the Biblical account of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph
fleeing for their lives. Gear notes that many U.S. governors were criticized by evangelical leaders for refusing to allow refugees within their state borders. Gear’s reasoning for this reaction is:

Perhaps it’s because the Syrian refugee crisis parallels the details of Jesus’ life a little too closely. Jesus and his parents were Middle Eastern refugees. The nativity scene, after all, depicts a Middle Eastern family who were looking for a place to stay, only to be told there was no room for them. (para. 3).

In the New Testament account, “Matthew tells us that after his birth, Mary and Joseph fled with the baby Jesus to Egypt... as refugees fleeing from violence”, as the king of that time vowed to kill all male children under the age of two, as prophecy dictated that a child would rise to become king, thus threatening his throne (para. 3). By connecting the humanitarian crisis to a Biblical account, Gear attempts to bridge the gap between two religious systems that are often viewed as being in competition with one another.

**Humanitarian Crisis and its Causes.** Analyzed texts falling within this theme discuss the humanitarian crisis as a whole, as well as the individuals and countries that contributed to the crisis and its progression to its current state. The humanitarian crisis began in March 2011 in response to injustices committed by the Syrian government. In response to these injustices, “the people of Syria rose up to demand democratic reforms and the release of political prisoners” (Aslan et al., 2015, para. 1). The Syrian government’s response, as directed by President Bashar al-Assad, “was to brutally repress the protesters, pushing his country into a civil war that has attracted local and foreign rebels, among them the terrorists of ISIS” (para. 1). While the event may mark the official beginning of the humanitarian crisis, Klare (2015b) argues that climate change acted as a catalyst that destabilized the region, stating that “the rapidly growing urban
peripheries of Syria, marked by illegal settlements, overcrowding, poor infrastructure, unemployment, and crime, were neglected by the Assad government and became the heart of the developing unrest” (para. 10). Klare (2015a) explains the impact that climate will have on the region, suggesting that “global warming would have devastating impacts of a social and political nature as well, including economic decline, state collapse, civil strife, mass migrations, and sooner or later resource wars” (para. 3). As a result, some of the cause of the burgeoning humanitarian crisis can be linked to climate-based issues.

Others argue that the United States is responsible for the crisis in the region. Lalami (2015), for example, claims that responsibility for the crisis rests with former U.S. president George W. Bush and his administration, as the “disastrous invasion of Iraq in 2003 and subsequent disbanding of the Iraqi army destabilized the entire region” (para. 8). Peter Bouckaert, Emergencies Director of Human Rights Watch, discussed the impact of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, claiming that U.S. occupation led to a destabilizing of the region, which then led to rising unrest in the Middle East:

Yes, it’s absolutely true that Afghanistan was invaded by the United States in 2001 and Iraq was invaded in 2003. Many mistakes were made in terms of the policies adopted. And so we do also have a moral responsibility towards these people fleeing the consequences of our actions, to some degree. (Bouckaert, cited in Democracy Now, 2015h, para. 30)

In his interview with Democracy Now producer Amy Goodman, Bouckaert describes the impact that U.S. President George W. Bush’s actions in the Middle East had on the region in the years following the U.S. occupation:

You know, I do think it’s important for people to understand that the 2003 Iraq invasion,
and especially the very irresponsible policies which were put in place by the Bush administration, played a very direct role in creating the Islamic State. It ripped apart the Iraqi state and allowed for the rise of Islamic extremism. (Bouckaert, cited in Democracy Now, 2015g, para. 24)

The creation of ISIS has had a dramatic impact on the region. According to Cole (2015), ISIS’ occupation in Syria has resulted in a mass exodus from the region, as “500,000 residents fled immediately in horror and disgust, and many more got out later. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians—and not only Kurds —have fled Raqqa Province (pre-2011 population: 900,000), [ISIS’s] current headquarters” (para. 8). Because of the U.S. occupation and the rise of ISIS, Syrians have experienced increasing levels of anger towards the U.S. Individuals within ISIS have also felt their own anger towards the U.S. However, the anger was about more than U.S. occupation in the region. Rather, “it was much more about their own childhoods and adolescences, that they had been blocked from having a normal life because, as they saw it, of the American occupation” (Democracy Now, 2015f, para. 7).

Overall, this theme focused on the Syrian humanitarian crisis and acknowledging those who were responsible for the crisis at its outset. As seen in this section, several individuals believe that the U.S. and previous administrations hold responsibility for what is currently unfolding in the region. The following section will focus on how news media from the U.S. political left depict issues with security in the period surrounding the Paris massacre.

**Security and Issues.** Segments of analyzed falling within the third theme focused on security surrounding refugee entry into different countries. In the days following the Paris massacre, some insisted that borders should be closed to Syrian refugees, as they were perceived as a threat to U.S. society (Fantz & Brumfield, 2015). This view of refugees is not new, as the
editors of *The Nation* point out:

But just as in the United States in the weeks after 9/11, all too many politicians and pundits on both sides of the Atlantic cried out for war and vengeance, demanded draconian new policing and surveillance powers, and insisted on an end to accepting more refugees. (The Editors, 2015b, para. 2)

Robert Bentley, Republican Governor of Alabama, stated that protecting people in Alabama was more important than letting Syrian Refugees in:

I think the thing that I want to do as governor is to make sure the people of Alabama are safe. And if there is any—if there’s even the slightest risk that the people who are coming in from Syria are not the types of people that we would want them to be, then we can’t take that chance. (Democracy Now, 2015g, para. 10)

As part of the argument for barring refugees, some members of the GOP claimed that religious vetting was needed in order to ensure that individuals in the U.S. would remain safe. According to former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee, “The No. 1 job of the president is to protect America, not protect the reputation of Islam” (Nichols, 2015, para. 4). However, news contributor John Nichols disagrees with the need for a religious test, stating:

President Obama should not have had to explain to the Republicans who would be president that one of the basic premises of the American experiment is that this country does not apply religious tests in establishing programs and policies, regulations and rules. (para. 1)

The desire for religious vetting procedures demonstrates the view that Islam is a threat to society. Some members of the GOP asserted that allowing Christian refugees into the country was a more viable option than allowing Muslim refugees into the country. However, Nichols notes that
vetting procedures can be designed in such a way that individuals from any religious or ethnic background can be properly screened, stating that “just as it is reasonable to assume that resettlement programs can and will be designed with an eye toward vetting Syrian Christians before allowing them to enter the United States, those programs can and will vet Syrian Muslims” (para. 11). Moreover, Andreozzi (2015) believes that the desire to turn away refugees is simply an excuse to cover something else, saying “I just don’t buy the whole “better safe than sorry” argument. According to The Economist, over 750,000 refugees were accepted into the United States since 9/11. None were arrested for terrorism. Were lawmakers clamoring to close American shores then?” (para. 12).

Some individuals are unaware that security measures already exist in order to screen refugees before they enter into the U.S. Others view refugees as a threat, regardless of who they are. According to Cole (2015), “Chris Christie wants to bar Syrian refugees from New Jersey, even 5-year-old orphans. And Marco Rubio supports a freeze on refugees until they get background checks— apparently unaware that they already get such checks” (para. 2). In the aftermath of the Paris massacre, members of the U.S. Congress chose to increase security measures against refugees, communicating the thought that refugees are a threat. Democracy Now (2015i) states that “the House approved legislation Thursday to impose significant restrictions on Iraqi and Syrian refugees seeking to resettle in the United States. The American Security Against Foreign Enemies Act passed the House with nearly unanimous Republican support and the backing of 47 Democrats” (para. 6). However, several news contributors feel differently than the members of Congress who believe that resettling refugees is impossible. For example, Wing and McGonigal (2015) believe:
The desire for heightened caution in the wake of a terrorist attack is understandable, but the rhetoric from those who think it’s impossible to safely take in 10,000 Syrian refugees, out of the more than 4 million who have left their country, goes beyond a simple call for vigilance. (para. 5)

Bier (2015) notes that the security measures that the U.S. government has in place are working effectively and acting as a means of turning away would-be terrorists. According to Bier, of the millions of refugees that the U.S. has brought in since 1980, “not one has committed an act of terrorism in the U.S.” (para. 3). Wildes (2015) agrees with this statement, claiming:

Our screening procedures are working. Since 9/11, the U.S. has taken roughly 784,000 refugees. Of these, only three have been arrested on terrorism charges; none had planned an attack on U.S. soil, and two of them were arrested in the airport attempting to leave the States to join foreign terrorist groups. The risk posed is small enough to be negligible. (para. 8)

These news contributors believe that opening the borders to refugees makes sense, as there has been no threat posed in the past. However, Peter Bouckaert believes that keeping the borders open is about far more than there being no threat presented. Rather, he trusts that it is a part of the nature and values that define the United States:

The United States’ values are built about being welcoming to refugees. And it’s our most powerful tool in the war against Islamic extremism, are our values. It’s not our military planes and our bombs. The only way we can fight against this brutality, this barbarism, is with our values. And if we’re going to shut the door on these refugees, we’re giving a propaganda victory to ISIS. (Bouckaert, cited in Democracy Now, 2015g, para. 19)
These statements are a sample of those that demonstrate the impact that closing the borders to refugees will have. The next theme focuses on how various countries chose to aid Syrian refugees in the time surrounding the Paris Massacre.

Aid for Refugees. In the fourth theme, contributors to alternative news media from the U.S. political left discuss the various ways in which leaders around the world extend aid to refugees, especially in the time surrounding the Paris massacre. As was evident in the previous theme, several leaders in the U.S. called for borders to be closed to refugees. Gharib (2015) cites the example of Roanoke, Virginia mayor David Bowers, who stated that banning refugees was permissible, as the U.S. did similarly with the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II. In light of this, Aslan et al. (2015) urged U.S. legislators to have a different mindset, saying,

Together we call upon the government of the United States to take in Syrian refugees, to act with humanity, and to honor Emma Lazarus’s words, chiseled on the Statue of Liberty: “A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame is the imprisoned lightning, and her name Mother of Exiles. (para. 3)

Peter Bouckaert, in his interview with Democracy Now producer Amy Goodman, called on the U.S. to take a stand and welcome more refugees into the country. Bouckaert believes that helping Syrian refugees is beneficial, as “those people will be carefully screened, and I am certain that they will contribute to American society” (Democracy Now, 2015g, para. 34). Hanley (2015) urges the U.S. and other countries to play a greater part in providing aid for those impacted by the humanitarian crisis, stating that “It’s the worst humanitarian crisis since WWII and if nations like the United States don’t embrace Syrian refugees, the terrorist army will only grow larger, and its death count, more horrific” (para. 2).
Several news contributors chose to praise countries for their contributions to refugee aid, while calling out others for their lack of response. News contributors and world leaders have praised German Chancellor Angela Merkel for her open door policy. However, Lennard and Hermsmeier (2015) feel that this is more political calculus than it is kindness and compassion, as many members of the EU would struggle taking in large numbers of refugees. As the EU nation with the largest population at 82 million citizens, it makes sense that Germany would take in the largest number of refugees, as “Merkel’s government expects to register 800,000 refugees this year, part of the largest mass movement of dispossessed people since the Second World War” (para. 4). Some viewed helping refugees in the humanitarian crisis as a potential means for atoning for past wrongs. Pollitt (2015) made this view known when she stated, “My first thought when the refugees and migrants showed up at the Hungarian border was: This is a miracle—history is giving Hungary a chance to redeem itself for the Jews it shipped off to the death camps in World War II” (para. 4). Frej (2015) recognizes France’s efforts in assisting the refugee effort, especially in light of the massacre that occurred within its borders only days earlier, noting that “French President François Hollande said Wednesday that he remains committed to taking in refugees following a wave of deadly attacks in Paris that killed at least 129 people last week” (para. 1). Frej asserted that President Hollande’s position to support refugees was not counter to the vow to keep France and its citizens safe. Rather, Hollande addressed societal fears at play by reassuring people that strengthened security measures would be used in order to ensure the safety of all people. Barton (2015) also mentioned the work that government officials in Canada have done to help refugees, declaring that “in the last six weeks alone, Canadian authorities have managed to screen about 100 people a day in Lebanon to help the government reach its ambitious target of getting 25,000 Syrian refugees here by the end of the year” (para. 3).
Leaders in several countries continued to work to bring in refugees, even in the time after the Paris massacre, where refugees were viewed with greater hesitation. However, some countries have no desire to take in refugees. As such, some news contributors chose to call them out for their response, as is evidenced when Pollitt (2015) states:

Even if Poland wanted to, it couldn’t absorb 3 million immigrants, and it very much doesn’t want to: Poland initially opposed the European Union’s plan to share out the refugees among member nations (Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Romania voted against it) and, in the wake of the Paris attacks, is again calling it into question. Slovakia said it would take 200 refugees, but only Christians. (para. 5)

Pollitt mentions that citizens in different countries deserve a great amount of credit, as they have volunteered their time, energy, and homes to provide aid for refugees who have entered their countries.

The best would be the many ordinary people who have responded with help to the extraordinary, unprecedented wave of humanity that flowed across Austria’s eastern borders this fall: food and water, clothes and blankets and diapers. At Vienna’s main train stations, volunteers provided weary travelers en route to Germany with meals and, for some, a place to sleep. Even the right-leaning tabloids were full of heartrending stories from the temporary camp at Spielfeld on the Slovenian border, where people were freezing at night in the open air. Nor is this limited to Austria: “Do you know who is taking care of the migrants in Germany?” my friend asked. “Middle-aged women!” (para. 1).

Alfred (2015) also shows how Syrians living in Paris responded in the aftermath of the massacre. Eyad, a 28-year old Syrian who relocated to France after fleeing violence in Syria, stated, “We
know about this feeling, when someone attacks you. We’ve been there” (para. 7). However, Syrians in the region worked to help both French citizens and refugees looking to relocate. Eyad displayed this sentiment when he said, “We are not French, but we are living in France. So we should do something for this city that holds us, the city that let us in. We should do something to help and say to the French people, ‘We are with you, and we will stick together’” (para. 9). Nora, a 29-year old Syrian refugee who fled violence, mentioned that individuals in France were helping her and caring for her, saying that “her French friends have already checked that she’s OK, and they know well the difference between Syrians and terrorists” (para. 15).

Overall, while there were some countries that didn’t want to risk opening their borders after the Paris massacre, there were still several that saw the merits in bringing refugees into their countries. Daniels (2015) points out that opening the borders to refugees could have a strong impact in the long run, as “openly welcoming beleaguered Syrians could go a long way toward combating ISIS’s depiction of an uncaring West, and appeal to the marginalized populations the group hopes to radicalize” (para. 5). For this reason, Nicks (2015) petitioned GOP leaders to reconsider their stances on refugees and for them to consider the humanitarian crisis from a place of leadership rather than that of fear:

Amid this global humanitarian crisis we ask you for leadership, not fear. We are a nation of refugees, a people shaped by desperation. It’s understandable if we’ve forgotten what desperation feels like. But it will be unforgivable if we forget how to extend compassion—even in the face of terror—to those who haven’t. (para. 11).

**Refugee Sensitivity.** The fifth theme in this analysis focuses on the hardships that refugees face, as depicted in these sources in the time surrounding the Paris massacre. Some world leaders fail to consider the impact that Islamophobic depictions and language have on
members of the refugee population. Pollitt (2015) notes the damage that these depictions and language have:

> To use David Cameron’s word, the “swarm” of Muslim immigrants will not only overwhelm our social services, take our jobs, and change our culture—the usual anti-immigrant fears—but kill us in our beds. And because these fears are at bottom based on bigotry, it doesn’t matter that none of the eight named suspects in the Paris attacks was Syrian, or that the Syrian refugees are fleeing the very fanaticism we fear. Nor does it matter that we have a responsibility to Iraqi refugees, whose displacement we had a major hand in causing. (para. 5).

Some individuals view refugees as a threat that will invade and take over a country’s resources, as was evident in former British Prime Minister David Cameron’s aforementioned comment. The invasive, bug-like language acts as a means of removing humanity from the refugees and simply viewing them as objects of scorn. However, one must ask – do refugees truly want to be in this situation? Sayu Bhojwani (2015) tells the story of how his parents and grandparents were torn from their homes in India and were forced to relocate. In telling this story, Bhojwani connects his family’s story to that of the Syrian refugees, stating that “Like the Syrian refugees of today, they’d have preferred to stay in the cities in which they were born, to hold on to their family homes, and to avoid the possibility of rape, disease, or death—all dangers of crossing borders” (para. 1). Here, Bhojwani uses his family’s story to provide a human outlook to Syrian refugees, showing a glimpse of what refugees give up when they are forced to flee conditions in their home countries. Aslan et al. (2015) continue this theme when they define who refugees are, noting that “refugees are not the enemy. Refugees are our spouses, our parents, our grandparents.”
Some among us are refugees themselves; others have experienced the violence of war” (para. 3).

Wildes (2015) explains the impact that fear tactics have on refugees:

The threat of terrorism is not primarily physical but existential. It is an aberration when 130 innocent people are gunned down. But it is a tragedy when those deaths are leveraged by politicians for their own personal gain. Indeed, it is a victory for the terrorists when those deaths become an excuse for weak and xenophobic politicians to pursue their jingoistic agendas. (para. 5)

Gear (2015) asserts how the use of fear can act as a means of dehumanizing those who are most at risk. According to Gear,

The terrorists’ most powerful weapon is, well, terror, and if these governors and their supporters fear an attack so intensely that they are willing to deny hospitality to refugee children, who could argue that the terrorists haven’t already won? Not only have they taken human lives, they have now succeeded in taking away our humanity. (para. 10)

**Fear-Based Reactions.** In the final theme, news contributors make note of how individuals, notably leaders within the Republican party in the U.S. use a variety of fear tactics when showing their reasoning as to why Syrian refugees should not be allowed in the country. In the time surrounding the Paris Massacre, uncertainty about terrorism in U.S. was on the rise. However, while some leaders did what they could to assuage the fear and show that refugees were safe (Ginesta, Ordeix, & Rom, 2017), others chose to play on those fears. Nichols (2015) called out then-Republican candidates for President Jeb Bush and Ted Cruz, who asserted the need for religious vetting despite the current vetting system being able to adequately screen Christians, Muslims, and individuals who ascribe to additional religious beliefs. According to Nichols, “Bush, Cruz, and their partisan compatriots understand this. Unfortunately, they have
chosen to play politics. In so doing, they are engaging in the sort of scapegoating and
fearmongering that America’s founders sought to guard against” (para. 12). Rather than focus on
how the current vetting system could screen individuals from different faith backgrounds,
Nichols believes that the GOP candidates rested in the political belief that Syrian refugees,
namely Muslim refugees, were dangerous due to a perceived connection to ISIS. Walsh (2015)
expands on the thought on why the GOP holds this view:

   The GOP consistently plays on reasonable fears by people who maybe don’t have a lot of
time to research how Ebola spreads, or the demographics of Central American child-
refugee patterns, or the evidence that Syrian refugees are actually fleeing ISIS, not
seeking to join it. It’s hard not to sneer, and worse. It may be that the president will have
to play along with a GOP plan to develop “a new certification process” to make sure the
refugees aren’t ISIS members, when in fact we already have one. But even that may not
be enough. (para. 11)

Several world leaders stepped out against refugees in the time following the Paris massacre.
According to Alfred (2015),

   France’s far-right National Front party leader Marine Le Pen said on Saturday the attacks
show France must “regain control of its borders” and “expel foreigners who preach
hatred in our country as well as illegal migrants who have nothing to do here.”
Republican presidential candidates Donald Trump and Ted Cruz said the U.S. should
reconsider plans to take in 10,000 Syrian refugees next year. Meanwhile, a Polish official
said Europe would have to revise its fledgling plans to relocate refugees, and that Poland
could not accept any refugees without “security guarantees.” (para. 13)
Wing and McGonigal (2015) acknowledge the impact that statements such as these have on members of society, noting that “this sort of broad-brush Islamophobia is intended to shape our view of Syrian refugees as enemies at the gate” (para. 8). The authors then attempt to dismantle these arguments by sarcastically discussing the many steps that ISIS would have to take to infiltrate the country, stating that they would be:

Islamic State militants who have temporarily traded their masks for civilian clothes so they can apply for refugee status in the U.S., get selected, pass a rigorous vetting process that can take up to two years, and finally resettle in the U.S., where they would presumably try to activate their sleeper cell without being caught by domestic surveillance. If the whole idea seems ridiculous, that’s because it is. Islamic State operatives would have a far easier time getting someone in with a tourist visa. (para. 8)

Each of these themes provides some insight into views of refugees during the time surrounding the Paris Massacre. The next section focuses on themes that emerged from the final critical incident – Donald Trump’s first executive order limiting refugees.

**Critical Incident #3: Trump’s First Executive Order Attempt**

Articles examined for the final critical incident were published between January 13, 2017 and February 10, 2017, the two weeks before and after Donald Trump attempted to sign his first executive order banning individuals from seven Muslim-majority countries, including Syria, as well as all refugees. Many of these articles focus on the aftermath of the executive order, as well as the impact that the order would have on refugees themselves. In analyzing these articles, four themes emerged – 1). Threats to Refugees, 2). Impact of Executive Order, 3). Refugees as Human, and 4). Refugees as Threat. Each theme is discussed in the following sections.
Table 3: Frequency of Themes for Alternative News Media (U.S. Political Left) at Critical Incident #3

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**Threats to Refugees.** The first theme focuses on statements that depict a clear threat to refugees themselves. Rather than viewing refugees as the threat, these contributors chose to focus on entities that posed a greater threat to refugees as humans.

In many of these articles, contributors depicted Donald Trump as a threat to refugees. One aspect of the threat focuses on Trump’s executive order as a religious ban against those of the Islamic faith. According to Frank (2017),

For many Americans, life under Trump has not been business as usual. An executive order against people of one religion along with the dread of other restrictive orders that may come have led some people to question their daily habits and responsibilities, reevaluating whether their life choices are still valid, effective, enough. (para. 6)

The executive order was viewed as a ban against Muslims, especially after Trump stated that he would allow a provision for individuals of minority faiths to be allowed in the U.S. Schulberg and Grim (2017), in examining an initial draft of the executive order, note that "because the draft executive order gives religious minorities priority in refugee admissions, that may mean
Christians in most countries in the Middle East will be favored over Muslims” (para. 13). Trump claimed that the executive order would help to protect Christians and other religious minorities from the Middle East who have been mistreated. However, Palestinian-American activist Linda Sarsour argues that Trump’s argument and rationale are lacking:

   Yes, of course, there are some Christians that are being persecuted in many countries across the world. But in—let’s take Syria, for example. They were a minority that were protected by the government for a very long time. And for him to say that Christians are seeing more than Syrian Muslims, for example, who are being displaced in the millions, as have—over 500,000 Syrians have been massacred, mostly by the Assad regime. So, to claim that one religion is more persecuted than another, I think, is, first of all, divisive, which we don’t need right now in this world, and I think it’s also untrue. (Democracy Now, 2017g, para. 21)

Omar Jadwat, director of the ACLU Immigrants’ Rights Project, also views Trump’s views as divisive, stating that “President Trump’s war on equality is already taking a terrible human toll” (Jadwat, cited in Democracy Now, 2017c, para. 4). Lalami (2017) declares that a religious ban has a negative impact on society, noting that “Establishing a religious test for refugees runs counter to the values of a country founded on the idea of religious freedom” (para. 2). Vince Warren from the Center of Constitutional Rights asserts that Trump is exhibiting behaviors that show he is less a president and more an agent of chaos:

   Here’s a person who is essentially creating chaos in the world and using that—he’s manufacturing chaos in the world and using that as a justification for exclusion of Muslim people from the United States, the repression of Muslim people within the United States, bringing back or thinking about bringing back things like torture, things like
isolation and things like prisons that are outside of the scope of the federal government.

(Warren, cited in Democracy Now, 2017b, para. 15)

In many of Trump’s arguments, he alleges that Islam poses a threat to the United States. However, Nichols (2017) posits that Islam and the United States actually are able to work closely together, especially considering the historical background of the United States:

This country’s founders recognized Islam as one of the world’s great religions, and interacted with followers of Islam. The first country to recognize the new United States was the Sultanate of Morocco (the ruler of which, Mohammed ben Abdallah, corresponded with President George Washington). John Adams referred in his 1776 essay “Thoughts on Government” to the prophet Muhammad as one of many “sober inquirers after truth.” And Jefferson, who championed religious freedom and diversity, did indeed own and consult a copy of George Sale’s English translation of the Qu’ran. (para. 22)

As such, Islam can be viewed as a positive contributor in the world, rather than the threat that is often depicted in society. Jake, an Armenian Christian originally from Aleppo, mentioned that minorities in Syria are often treated better than Trump indicated:

Minorities are not persecuted. Armenians, Kurds, Turkmens, Assyrians, Druz and many other minorities have lived in Syria for many years without any hassle from the government or the majority Sunnis. We, Armenians have experienced massacres in the hands of fanatic Ottoman Muslims. Syrian, Iraq, and Lebanon have provided us a safe haven. Now the West has taken that away from us. (Peknik, 2017, para. 13)

Here, it is necessary to see that some Syrian individuals view the West as a threat, as they believe that Western countries are responsible for the war and the unrest that has plagued Syria and the Middle East. Another contributor posits that the West itself can be a potential threat to refugees,
especially when considering how refugees are treated. Temple (2017), a humanitarian and filmmaker who spent 30 days living alongside refugees in a Syrian refugee camp, claims that ISIS can use the West’s mistreatment and shunning of refugees to its advantage:

Groups like ISIS, who have proven themselves sophisticated in their global recruitment, can use this narrative to potentially brainwash vulnerable populations. Claiming they are the victims of western oppression. Already, reports on Sunday are suggesting that pro-ISIS social media accounts are celebrating the president's ban, claiming it's proof, as one commenter put it, that the “West would eventually turn against its Muslim citizens.”

(para. 14)

Additionally, Bernie Sanders, Senator from Vermont and former Democratic candidate for President, discussed the impact that the executive order could have on extremist groups as a means of empowering them, stating that “what Trump has done is give ammunition to the jihadists all over the world who have told their people that we in the United States hate them. We do not hate the Muslim people, and we want them to know that” (Sanders, cited in Democracy Now, 2017h, para. 16).

One of the worst ways that the U.S. can threaten refugees is by depicting them as an Other that cannot mesh with society. In the days following the signing of the executive order, Trump and some other officials attempted to show the executive order as a means of protecting the country rather than being a means of excluding. Simone Campbell, executive director of NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice, believes in the benefits of welcoming refugees, stating that “Catholic teaching is very clear: we are called to welcome the stranger. President Trump’s actions today are antithetical to our faith” (Campbell, cited in Blumberg, 2017, para. 5).
This section briefly explains some of the threats to refugees that emerged in the midst of the third critical incident. The next section focuses on one of those threats – the Executive Order and its impact.

**Impact of Executive Order.** The second theme examines statements focusing on the impact of Trump’s first executive order attempt at limiting refugee migration to the U.S. Some of these segments of analyzed text focus on the impact that the order would have on refugees. Others focus on the immediate outcomes and reactions after the executive order was signed.

One impact that was seen was a uniting of countries and other entities against Trump’s order. As the executive order was expected to go into effect, world leaders, such as Germany’s Angela Merkel, responded to the order. Merkel’s response, like others, called out Trump’s order for its prejudicial view:

> The necessary and decisive fight against terrorism does not justify a general suspicion against people of a certain belief - in this case people of Muslim belief or people from a certain country. That way of thinking is against my interpretation of the basic tenets of international refugee support and cooperation. (Al-Daini, 2017, para. 2)

Pramila Jayapal, a Congresswoman from Washington state, decried the executive order, claiming that “This is inhumane and barbaric, and we want this president to rescind this executive order” (Democracy Now, 2017e, para. 9). Jayapal continues her remarks, stating that she believed that the order was detrimental to U.S. security “because we are putting fodder into the hands of people who do wish to do us harm, by allowing them to essentially say that the United States hates Muslims, the United States hates immigrants” (para. 13). Even members of the Republican Party stepped out against Trump. Senators Lindsey Graham and John McCain voiced their dissatisfaction with the executive order, stating that the order “sends a signal, intended or not,
that America does not want Muslims coming into our country. That is why we fear this executive order may do more to help terrorist recruitment than improve our security” (Graham & McCain, cited in Democracy Now, 2017d, para. 9).

The executive order also had an impact on the business realm. On the first Monday following the signing of the executive order, Democracy Now (2017d) reported that the stock market dropped as a result of the turmoil caused by the order. Immediately following the order, leaders from IKEA, Amazon, Airbnb, Google, Facebook, and Goldman Sachs, among others, spoke out against Trump and the executive order, with several companies offering assistance to refugees (Democracy Now, 2017f).

However, the worst impact of the executive order was how it affected refugees themselves. Nelson and Young (2017) cited data from the United Nations High Commissioner for refugees, noting that “an estimated 20,000 refugees from all over the world would be impacted immediately by the executive order that freezes refugee resettlement for 120 days. Many more Syrian refugees are affected by the indefinite suspension of resettlement of Syrians" (para. 4). While some individuals focused on the immediate impact of the executive order, others were wary of what the future would hold. Fahd Ahmed, executive director of the group Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM), posited that there could be more mistreatment of Muslim refugees on the horizon, asserting that “What’s becoming clear is that this [order] is not just a bad, misguided policy. The current administration has a larger ideology, viewpoint and platform—a platform of white supremacy against Muslims, immigrants, and refugees” (Ahmed, cited in Kane, 2017, para. 8). Holland (2017) emphasizes that the executive order is less about security in the U.S. and more about Trump’s own cowardice, fear, and ego:

Donald Trump’s indefinite ban on resettling Syrian refugees is not only a shining model
of moral cowardice, it’s also premised on a falsehood that’s every bit as egregious and readily debunked as his claims that he won the popular vote or that God parted the clouds for his inauguration speech. (para. 1)

Temple (2017) argues that the executive order does more harm than it does good. Additionally, he claims that the order does exactly the opposite of what Trump is attempting to do:

The current executive order not only risks the lives of tens of thousands of refugees, but it undermines our moral legitimacy in the eyes of the world, and provides perhaps the best possible recruitment propaganda to the extremist groups we're trying to protect from. (para. 10)

Talat Hamdani, an American Muslim whose son died in the World Trade Center on 9/11, “believes Trump's order amounts to "religious persecution" and she fears it will eventually lead to more stringent attacks on the American Muslims' freedoms" (Kuruvilla, 2017, para.9). While the executive order could have a detrimental impact on Syrian refugees in general, it was expected to have an even graver impact on those needing immediate medical care. According to Nelson and Young (2017),

President Donald Trump's executive order last Friday has sowed panic and uncertainty among refugees who need urgent medical care, some of whom had prioritized applications, according to aid workers. The four-month U.S. ban on accepting refugees could mean as many as 800 people needing medical treatment will be denied entry. (para. 10)

Shadin Awad, an immigrant from Sudan who participated in protests in Manhattan following the signing of the executive order, asserts that the United States is far more responsible for what it occurring in the Middle East, noting the irony of the U.S. pushing away the very people that it
I think it’s really ironic that, you know, now it’s however many years later, they’re saying, “Oh, we don't want you. We don’t want you after we messed up your country. We don’t want you after we’ve disenfranchised your people. We don’t want you after we’ve disenfranchised the world.” You know, as the U.S., we meddle, we go everywhere. The U.S. goes everywhere and then says, “No, we don't want you anymore.” (Awad, cited in Democracy Now, 2017a, para. 9).

Refugees as Human. The third theme that emerged from analyzing articles surrounding this critical incident was the focus on refugees as humans enduring a horrific plight. Some news contributors focused more on the humanness of the refugees, while others focused on the conditions that the refugees endured and that many still endure to this day.

One way that contributors focused on the humanness of refugees was by providing examples of children who were and are subjected to the conditions within the humanitarian crisis. Cook (2017a) cites the example of Bana Alabed, a seven-year-old child whose family fled Aleppo in December 2016. Alabed sent a letter to Donald Trump detailing her experiences living in besieged Aleppo and begging for Trump to help the other children there. In sharing her experience, Alabed states, “I could not play in Aleppo, it was the city of death . . . Right now in Turkey, I can go out and enjoy” (Cook, 2017a, para. 4). She then appeals to Trump’s position as a father, saying, “However millions of Syrian children are not like me right now and [are] suffering in different parts of Syria. They are like your children and deserve peace like you” (para. 5). Adele Welty, a mother who lost her son in the World Trade Center on 9/11, expresses her own feelings about how American Muslims are discriminated against, stating:
I get very emotional about it because it's very real to me from my own childhood and I see it happening now to poor [American Muslim] children. It's wrong, it's moronic... we want to welcome everyone onto our shores. This is supposed to be a safe haven. (Welty, cited in Kuruvilla, 2017, para. 20)

Temple (2017) describes the negative impact that Trump’s executive order had on refugee children, as well as the message that it communicated to them:

> Syrian children, like my 12-year-old friend Raouf from Za'atari camp, are being told that they're violent, unwanted and potential terrorists. Now add in the reality of their pasts. Raouf, for example, experienced his school being bombed back in Syria and has celebrated three birthdays inside the confines of a 1.5 x 3 mile refugee camp. (para. 9)

Jamieson (2017) notes that, while some individuals do support Trump’s executive order banning refugees, they also are sympathetic to the plight of refugees. Toby McCormick, a 72-year-old veteran and Trump supporter, showed that he did feel for refugees and what they experience, stating that, “I have great sympathy for them, especially those harmless little children who never hurt anybody” (McCormick, cited in Jamieson, 2017, para. 11). Actor Riz Ahmed understands that refugees, especially children, face incredible hardships, which is why he chose to help, saying, “It's now harder and harder for them to flee all the misery they are suffering through no fault of their own. So far we've raised $100,000 for Syrian refugee children to get them emergency aid and an education” (Ahmed, cited in Delbyck, 2017, para. 3). Something that is of interest in these statements is that refugee children are often cited as symbols of innocence in the midst of a crisis that is depicted as cruel and horrific in nature. By including these symbols of innocence, news contributors can create an emotional appeal and rationale for helping them.

Other news contributors focused on the conditions that refugees face on a daily basis.
One Democracy Now interview focused on the conditions of a Syrian military prison where roughly 13,000 civilians had been hanged by the Syrian government over a period of a few years. According to Amnesty International:

   Since 2011, tens of thousands of people have disappeared into a vast network of prisons and detention centers run by the Syrian government. Many have been taken to Saydnaya, a notorious and terrifying prison where detainees are incarcerated in horrific conditions, systematically and brutally tortured. Thousands have died in confinement. Inaccessible to journalists and independent monitoring groups, the prison is a black hole, of which no recent images exist. The memories of those who survive it are the only available resource with which to understand what happens within Saydnaya. (Democracy Now, 2017i, para. 2)

Cook (2017b) asserts that refugee conditions are harrowing and that they face atrocities that many individuals don’t understand. In the opening for her article, Cook writes that "The president is scared of Syrian refugees. They're scared of freezing to death in their own homes" (para. 1). Nicolette Waldman, a researcher for Amnesty international, details the hardships that refugees endure as they work to survive:

   If you think about a population that has been terrorized—they have been arrested, disappeared, tortured and killed, on the scale of tens of thousands of people, and all of those people have family members—it does make sense to me that you might want to flee your country in that kind of circumstance. And many people don’t want to go. They end up going because they feel they have to. (Waldman, cited in Democracy Now, 2017j, para. 3).

   One of the ways in which news contributors choose to focus on refugees is by depicting
them as individuals who are wrongly accused and who are helpless to what is occurring around them. Palestinian-American activist Linda Sarsour describes precisely how refugees are wrongly depicted:

What’s really interesting is we talk about we want to keep America safe. From who? From Syrian refugees? Since when can somebody tell me a time or a case where there has been a Syrian refugee in this country who has committed an act of terror? And that’s the problem here. There is absolutely no basis or no data that supports this particular list of countries. (Democracy Now, 2017g, para. 10).

Chandler (2017) highlights the helpless circumstances surrounding refugees, especially in the era of a Trump presidency. Chandler mentions that refugees did not choose their circumstances. Yet, they are subjected to incredible hardships because of fear. As a result, refugees often resign to the desperation of the situation:

The United States, meanwhile, is unlikely to resettle more refugees in the wake of the recent election, and other nations that have kept their doors open, such as Kenya and Jordan, are increasingly slamming them shut, partly in response to EU policy. Despite this fact, millions of desperate people will still defy the efforts of those governments and political parties that seek to keep them out. They don’t have any other choice. (Chandler, 2017, para. 44)

Photographer Alex Treves acknowledges the lack of control that refugees have and advocates for people to view refugees as innocent individuals, stating that “For economic reasons people in the West are very angry, what I am very keen on is not to demonise refugees because no one became a refugee by choice, you only become one if there is no other option” (Treves, cited in Khambay, 2017, para. 16). Huffpost contributor Temple (2017), in his experience with refugees, does not
understand why individuals fear Syrian refugees, as he believes that they do not pose a threat to society:

   Emad and our other Syrian friends in the camp can't understand why refugees have been falsely equated with extremism. Not one Syrian refugee has committed a terrorist attack on U.S. soil. No Syrian was involved in the tragic 2015 Paris attacks or the March 2016 Brussels attack. In fact, according to a new study by the Cato Institute, the likelihood of being killed by a refugee in the U.S. is one in 3.64 billion. (para. 8).

Overall, one of the messages that news contributors communicate through their depictions of refugees is that they are humans, innocent, and potentially helpless in the midst of the horrific conditions that they face. By creating this image of refugees, contributors appeal to the emotional side of many citizens in order for them to provide aid to refugees.

**Refugees as Threat.** The final theme that emerged from this critical incident focused on statements related to refugees posing a threat to society. One item of interest that emerged from this theme is that, unlike other critical incidents that focused on the threat of refugees, no news contributor themselves wrote about refugees being a threatening force. Rather, the theme emerged due to these contributors including reports from world leaders and other individuals who saw refugees as a dangerous force. These reports were often included in order to provide context for the articles.

   In the days leading up to Trump signing the executive order on refugees, many individuals questioned Trump’s motivations for signing such an order. According to Wilkie (2017), "Trump has insisted the travel restrictions are critical to preventing terrorist attacks, though no immigrant from any of those countries has committed a fatal act of terror on U.S. soil" (para. 4). Nichols (2017) notes that Trump believes that allowing Syrian refugees into the U.S. is
detrimental to the interests of the U.S. Jamieson (2017) states that concerns about refugee populations still remain. According to Jamieson,

Such fears are still widespread among the American public. A Reuters poll release Tuesday found that a plurality of Americans backed the president's ban, though it remains an extraordinarily polarizing issue. Forty-nine percent of those polled said they agreed with the order, while 41 percent said they disagreed with it, and another 10 percent said they were unsure. (para. 15)

This view of refugees is not limited to the United States. In Austria, Heinz Christian Strache, the head of the Freedom Party, views refugees as an overarching threat to society, proclaiming "Let us put an end to this policy of Islamization...otherwise we Austrians, we Europeans will come to an abrupt end" (Strache, cited in Knolle, 2017, para. 3). Strache continues his argument for not accepting refugees, saying "We need zero and minus immigration" (para. 5). Khambay (2017) writes:

A new Pew Research Center survey stated that the eight of the 10 European nations surveyed, half or more believe incoming refugees increase the likelihood of terrorism in their country. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that people fear refugees arriving to reside in their towns and cities. (para. 10)

Trump believes that the humanitarian crisis and the increased number of refugees entering countries in Europe influenced citizens in the United Kingdom to vote to leave the European Union. He also thinks that the crisis and refugees will have a greater impact, stating, "I believe others will leave. People don't want to have other people coming in and destroying their country" (Robins-Early, 2017, para. 4)
As a result of many of these sentiments, hate crimes against Muslims and other minorities have been on the rise. Faiza Patel, co-director of the Liberty and National Security program at the Brennan Center for Justice, claims that the view of refugees as a threat has a detrimental impact on not only refugees, but also other minoritized populations:

So you’re looking at this kind of manufactured fear of the other, fear of the outsider, fear of people who don’t look like us, who, you know, may have beliefs that we don’t agree with in some instances, and extrapolating that as to being, well, these guys must be terrorists. And it has a huge domestic impact, not only for people who have relatives from those countries, but also for the overall atmosphere for American Muslims. And I think it’s no secret that we have seen a significant surge in hate crimes against all communities—the Jewish community, as well—but particularly striking against Muslim Americans. And I think we need to be really careful, going forward as a country that we don’t further stigmatize and alienate these communities. (Democracy Now, 2017b, para. 19)

Holland (2017) also recognizes the impact that this language has had. In analyzing some of Trump’s speech during his presidential campaign, Holland claims:

Calling Syrians fleeing the bloodshed we helped create a potential “Trojan Horse,” Trump repeatedly claimed, as he put it at a campaign stop in Rhode Island last spring that “we don’t know anything about them. We don’t know where they come from, who they are. There’s no documentation. We have our incompetent government people letting ’em in by the thousands, and who knows, who knows, maybe it’s ISIS.” (para. 2)

These are several of the statements from leaders that attempt to show refugees as a threat to society. As such, it is easy to see how audiences can begin to view refugees differently when
they are exposed to these arguments.

**Alternative News Media (U.S. Political Right) Analysis Overview**

In order to better understand how alternative news media depictions of the Syrian humanitarian crisis differ based on the political ideology of the source, I examined articles from RedState, Newsmax, and Breitbart. Analyzing articles from these sources, like the sources on the U.S. political left, provided perspective as to how news contributors framed the humanitarian crisis. Analyzing these sources also provides a point for comparison to the sources on the U.S. political left.

**Critical Incident #1: Aylan Kurdi**

As with the news sources from the U.S. political left, the first portion of analysis of self-identified news sources on the U.S. political right focuses on articles from August 19, 2015 to September 16, 2015, the critical period surrounding Aylan Kurdi’s body washing ashore. In analyzing articles from the three sources, three themes emerged – 1). Threats, 1). Arguments against Helping Refugees, and 3). Refugee as Subhuman.

*Table 4: Frequency of Themes for Alternative News Media (U.S. Political Right) at Critical Incident #1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Breitbart</th>
<th>Newsmax</th>
<th>Redstate</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Threats</strong></td>
<td>124</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arguments against helping refugees</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee as subhuman</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Threats. Statements that fall within the first theme depict a threat to the wellbeing of U.S. citizens. In analyzing the articles, three subthemes emerged – Refugee Threat, Partisan threat, and religious threat.

Refugee Threat. When analyzing the news articles at this critical incident, it became evident that there were several news contributors who viewed refugees as a threat to U.S. society and U.S. citizens. One reason for this view is that some saw refugees as being connected to terrorism in the Middle East and with groups such as ISIS. For example, one Newsmax contributor reported the number of refugees being admitted to the U.S., stating, "The number may top 100,000, and concerns many observers who fear the vetting process may not keep out Islamic State (ISIS) infiltrators" (Richter, 2015b, para. 3). While the number of refugees to be admitted refers to refugees from all countries, there are still some who are concerned that refugees from Muslim-majority countries have ties to terrorist organizations. Former House Homeland Security Committee Chairman Michael McCaul is one such person who holds this view. In a 2015 interview, McCaul stated, “I can’t support a policy that would allow a jihadist pipeline into the United States” (McCaul, cited in Fitzgerald, 2015a, para. 2). McCaul elaborated, saying “Bringing thousands of Syrians into the United States, not knowing who they are, I think would be very irresponsible” (para. 3). Edmunds (2015d) highlights the fear of refugees that is prevalent in society when reporting a warning from a Lebanese minister to Former British Prime Minister David Cameron:

Two in every 100 Syrian migrants are likely to be Islamic State fighters, a Lebanese minister has warned David Cameron. Britain has agreed to take 20,000 Syrian refugees over the next few years. If the minister’s warning is correct, as many as 400 of them could be trained terrorists” (para. 1).
Others view refugees as a drain on the U.S. society and its resources. Hahn (2015b) reports the costs related to bringing in Syrian refugees, noting that “President Obama’s plan to import 10,000 Syrian refugees would cost U.S. tax payers $130 million per year” (para. 1). When looking at those costs in the future, Hahn states that “Extended out over the next 50 years, these additional 10,000 migrants would cost U.S. taxpayers $6.5 billion over the course of the migrants’ lifetime” (para. 2).

The theme of refugee as threat wasn’t only applicable to refugees being connected to terrorists. Some contributors portrayed refugees to be a threat through the use of imagery. For example, Fitzgerald (2015b) referred to the refugees as a “massive flood” (para. 1), while Shapiro (2015) used more drug language when talking about refugees, saying that people must ask certain questions about refugees “before the West mainlines Muslim immigrants into its veins” (para. 6).

Several contributors focused on doubts that they had about refugees, especially in light of the mainstream news media coverage surrounding Aylan Kurdi’s body washing ashore. Some held concerns about the consistency of the narrative surrounding Aylan’s death. Breitbart contributor Jon Stanley (2015) calls out the mainstream media for how they depicted Aylan Kurdi in their news coverage, as many news outlets reported that Kurdi’s family was fleeing Syria. According to Stanley,

This was not the trafficking of a vulnerable adult from an extremely dangerous country. Aylan was trafficked from a safe country, a UN founder member and a founding member of NATO, in the hope of arriving in a country where his parents’ debts could be more easily repaid. (para. 8)
Stanley criticizes Aylan’s father, Abdullah, claiming that he was not the innocent figure that the mainstream media depicted him as, but rather a selfish man who endangered his family for his own personal gain. “You see, Abdullah was a people trafficker. He was trafficking his own children, not escaping a warzone or a tyranny” (para. 5). Delingpole (2015) also criticizes Abdullah for contradicting his own story, stating “Abdullah's accounts of his motives, of his intentions and what actually happened are wildly inconsistent. In some versions he was heading for Sweden” (para. 3).

Other news contributors focused on refugees as a potential terrorist threat, namely that terrorists could disguise themselves as refugees as they prepare to enter into the United States. Shapiro (2015) notes that there is a degree of uncertainty in accepting refugees, as many do not know where the refugees come from, nor do they know if the refugees hold any ulterior motives. Richter (2015a), when addressing Ohio Governor John Kasich’s desire to allow refugees into the country provided they are properly vetted, noted that “Kasich said he shares the concerns of those who fear terrorists may have infiltrated the throngs of refugees” (para. 3). Schachtel (2015) writes that children can no longer be viewed as innocent and safe, claiming “A shocking video has surfaced on social media showing a toddler beheading his teddy bear and displaying ISIS-like antics in the process” (para. 1). In the story, Schachtel details how the child demonstrated behaviors similar to that of ISIS, as well as how ISIS had used other children to carry out past killings.

The fear of terrorism is what has led to countries in the Middle East to refuse to help resettle refugees. According to Edmunds (2015a), “[Middle Eastern leaders] have argued that accepting large numbers of Syrians is a threat to their safety, as terrorists could be hiding within an influx of people”(para. 5). Hayward (2015) claims that refugees have taken the role of
terrorist in the past, citing the example of the Tsarnaev brothers who were the perpetrators of the attack on the Boston Marathon in April 2013. Due to this view, news contributors, such as Streiff (2015b), tend not to believe that refugees are who they say they are, despite the humanitarian crisis that is occurring:

While there is no doubt that there is a humanitarian crisis underway in Syria, there is equally no doubt that no more than half of the refugees showing up in Europe are Syrian and that most of those are young men seeking jobs. There is equally no doubt that within this flow of young, military aged men there are a lot of ISIS soldiers. (para. 13)

A part of what is causing U.S. citizens to feel threatened is the belief that refugees are not who they say they are. Streiff (2015b) notes that fake Syrian passports are easy to obtain, complicating the issue. According to Streiff,

A number of migrants arriving in Turkey hoping to reach Europe are purchasing fake Syrian passports in order to claim asylum at the end of their journey, the head of the European border management agency Frontex told French radio today. “There is a traffic of Syrian passports,” Fabrice Leggeri told Europe 1, “because it’s extremely lucrative for smugglers. (para. 6).

Due to this trade, Streiff argues that it is nearly impossible for officials to know how many refugees are true refugees, rather than individuals who are taking advantage of the situation.

These are a sample of the analyzed statements that highlight how refugees are depicted as a threat. The next section focuses on a threat within U.S. borders – the partisan threat.

**Partisan Threat.** The second subtheme focuses on how U.S. Democrats are depicted as a threat to society. The threat may be because of their involvement in the Syrian humanitarian crisis and their desire to help refugees. Some contributors view Obama and other Democrats as
those who are to blame for the Syrian humanitarian crisis. For example, Leon Wolf, a contributor on RedState, wrote about the impact of the crisis, stating, “It has created a crisis that is both economic and humanitarian that is spreading across Europe and Asia, and which is a direct result of the Obama administration’s fecklessness on foreign policy” (Wolf, 2015, para. 7). RedState contributor Streiff (2015a) agrees with this sentiment, stating “When Obama launched his ill-conceived plan to rid the world of Bashar Assad, he set into motion a humanitarian catastrophe in Syria” (para. 2). McLaughlin (2015) continues this thought when he claims that “there is really no organized opposition to Assad right now besides ISIS,” claiming that “this is the result of Obama’s disinterest in getting involved in Syria at the outset when such forces existed” (para. 5).

A few contributors criticized Democrats by questioning their allegiance to the United States. Bennett (2015) attempts to show Democrats as an enemy to the United States, stating:

Their primary goal is to grind down America: to degrade the military to 1940 levels and compel it to include Muslims, openly gay and transgender individuals; to render America hopelessly divided by race and financially destitute; to turn its image from the quintessential respected and trusted world leader into a feeble, dormant giant that betrays its allies and sucks up to its enemies. (para. 6)

Bennett’s assumption is that Democrats act as a threat to the wellbeing of the United States by doing many of these things, including showing support for individuals of the Muslim faith. Bennett questions Barack Obama’s allegiance to the United States, claiming that Obama aligns himself more with Islam than with the U.S. According to Bennett, “[Obama] also spent part of his childhood in Indonesia, and was raised under Islam while there. Now, he exhibits a loyalty to things Islamic that supersedes his sham loyalty to Blacks and to America” (para. 8)
However, Bennett’s criticism of Democrats doesn’t stop with Obama. Rather, he turns his focus to Democrat senators. According to Bennett, “fourteen Democrat senators, led by Illinois Senator Dick Durbin—sometimes dubbed “Turban Durbin,” have written a letter to Obama pressing him to allow 65,000 Syrians in as refugees” (para. 11). This view of Durbin demonstrates that any support of Syrian refugees can be viewed as a support of Islam, which is viewed as a threat to ideals within the United States. I expand on the religious threat in the next section.

**Religious Threat.** The final subtheme focuses on the Christian versus Muslim dichotomy that some news contributors create. According to this subtheme, Christianity and Islam are at odds with one another and cannot mesh in society. Some news contributors view Christianity as a safe choice, while Islam is viewed with contempt, as they attempt to make a connection between Islam and terrorism. For example, Richter (2015b) distinguishes the potential threat that exists, stating that “widespread immigration also has led to numbers of radicalized Muslims who are a threat to attack the homeland from within” (para. 10).

The language attempting to show an exploitation of the system and a Muslim jihadist threat to the United States helps to perpetuate the idea that individuals that ascribe to the Islamic faith are to be feared. Bennett (2015) shows Muslims as incompatible with U.S. society when discussing the threat that Muslim individuals may pose:

The rise in incidents of honor killings and beheadings in America has demonstrated that Muslims immigrating, or being resettled in America is plainly incompatible with our culture, which is 70.6 percent Christian. This is a concept Japan has wisely realized and strictly limits Muslim immigration, terming it a culture alien to theirs. (para. 43)
Other news contributors focus on Christianity when forming their arguments. Edmunds (2015b), for example, cited biblical scripture to back up her argument for refusing to accept refugees within U.S. borders:

However, nothing is simply black and white. All solutions have pros and cons. 

Corinthians 10 reminds us: “Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.” So we must weigh up all the possibilities before us in the light of the best evidence and decide, should we really throw our charity at the first people we see, or do we need to delve a little deeper? (para. 7)

Breitbart News (2015a) focused on the desire to allow for Christian refugees from Syria. In an interview with Glenn Beck, Beck stated, “I asked if my audience could raise $10 million before Christmas to bring the Christians in from Syria” (para. 2). The preference for Christian refugees over Muslim refugees shows a desire for some sort of religious vetting, as well as the belief that Christian refugees are safer than Muslim refugees. Some contributors felt that there was inequity when it came to the refugees that were allowed into the U.S. Bennett (2015) highlights the inequity when he asks, “Why would Democrats want hordes of Islamic refugees in America? It’s certainly not because they feel compassion for refugees; if they do, why are they not doing anything to help the thousands of Syrian Christians displaced from Syria?” (para. 24). Bennett furthers his argument by describing Christian refugees as a non-risk:

The Christians would barely have to be vetted for ties to terror organizations, which by their very nature do not take Christians. Meanwhile, there is the uncomfortable issue that among the Sunni refugees there are some in league with the Sunni terror militias. And beyond that there is the equally uncomfortable question of the acculturation of segments of the Muslim community. (para. 29).
Overall, these news contributors showcase refugee threats, partisan threats, and religious threats to demonstrate how Syrian refugees can be harmful to U.S. society. These same arguments influence the next theme, which focuses on the belief that the United States should not help Syrian refugees.

**Arguments against Helping Refugees.** This theme focuses on the statements that some individuals make as a rationale for not aiding the refugee effort. Some people believe that there is no need for the United States to intervene in the humanitarian crisis. Bobby Jindal, Governor of Louisiana, focused on the past generosity of the United States and how the U.S. does not always have to act as a savior, claiming:

> We are already the most compassionate and generous country in the world and it is not even close. No other country provides anywhere near the amount of assistance for hurting people around the world as we do. But the idea that we can fix all these problems by just accepting the world’s refugees is ridiculous. (Hayward, 2015a, para. 23).

Then-Republican candidate for President Donald Trump argued that other countries in the Middle East needed to provide more aid for refugees, rather than having the United States intervene for them, declaring, “The Gulf states [are] tremendously wealthy. You have five groups of people, six groups, they’re not taking anybody. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, these are tremendously wealthy and powerful from the standpoint of money. They — they’re not taking anybody. Russia’s not taking. Nobody’s taking. [But we’re] supposed to take — we have to straighten out our own problems” (Hahn, 2015a, para. 12). Lowry (2015) stressed Trump’s point, saying:

> Certainly, Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon are doing their part. Turkey is host to nearly 2 million Syrian refugees. Lebanon, a country of 4.4 million, has 1.1 million. In Jordan, 20
percent of the population is refugees. But the Gulf states have none, even though they are very rich and sparsely populated, in addition to being Arab and in the immediate vicinity.

(para. 14)

Scott Walker, Governor of Wisconsin, emphasized that he believed that the United States needs to focus on its own security, asserting, “No, we shouldn’t be taking on any more Syrian refugees right now” (Hahn, 2015b, para. 9). The belief that countries should close their borders is not limited to the United States. Rather, Lowry (2015) believes that this view should extend to Europe as well, especially in light of German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s pledge to welcome more refugees into Germany, noting that "the government is talking of taking 500,000 migrants annually for the next several years, and Chancellor Angela Merkel calls the crisis "the next great European project." The reaction of the rest of Europe should be "No thanks." (para. 5).

On the other hand, some contributors believe that helping individuals is worthwhile. McKee (2015), in response to Donald Trump’s desire to deport illegal immigrants, stated that “Trump seems to forget that our country is based upon compassion and finding solutions to problems in a way not to denigrate the humanity of fellow human beings” (para. 16). Some may argue that the statement only applies to illegal immigrants rather than refugees. However, Glenn Beck argues that saving refugees is the right thing to do:

Now you can’t bring those people in, now you can’t, that’s somehow illegal, we’ll put you in jail’ – I will so gladly grace a jail for the justice cause of saving people’s lives. I don’t need your permission at all to do the right thing! That’s who we need to be now! Forget about Washington! You don’t need permission to do the right thing. (Breitbart News, 2015a, para. 2)

Beck justifies his position by citing Aylan Kurdi’s death, stating "When we can see a boy laying
face down in the sand, and we don't accept them into our country, we don't have a light that we are holding by that door anymore" (Burke, 2015a, para. 2)

These statements help to show how there are individuals who do not support refugees. One of the reasons why individuals do not support helping refugees is because they hold the view that refugees are too different and cannot mix with U.S. society, almost viewing refugees as subhuman. This then leads to the final theme from this section of the analysis.

**Refugees as Subhuman.** The final theme focuses on how news contributors depict refugees in such a way that it removes their humanity. This removal may be overt and directly stated or covert and seen only by the use of certain language.

Some individuals view refugees as so different and incompatible with society that it does not make sense to allow them into the country. For example, Kuwaiti official Fahad al-Shalami believes that Syrian refugees are far too different to accept in Kuwait and that Kuwait would suffer socially by bringing refugees in, stating, “In the end, it’s not right for us to accept a people that are different from us,” he said. “We don’t want people to suffer from internal stress and trauma in our country!” (Hayward, 2015, para. 8). Shapiro (2015) holds a similar view, noting:

> It has become well-accepted in the West that Europe and the United States ought to welcome hundreds of thousands of Muslim refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Based on the available evidence, that accepted perspective spells disaster for the character and safety of the West. (para. 1)

Some individuals questioned who refugees were, creating an “us versus them” distinction. For example, Senator John McCain stated, “You gotta know who these people are… They have to be carefully examined before they would have any chance of entering the United States” (McCain, cited in McHugh, 2015, para. 5). McCain connected refugees to jihadis, stating, “If I were Mr.
[ISIS leader Abu Bakr] Baghdadi I might be sending a few of my recruits as refugees to be able to come to United States” (para. 5). Other individuals focused on how refugees were less than human for choosing to flee rather than staying to fight ISIS. According to Edmunds (2015c), “others are questioning the moral fortitude of men who flee a war zone leaving their wives, children and elderly relatives behind to face the enemy” (para. 7). Edmunds then includes tweets from different individuals to help illustrate this point. One Twitter user, Helma Lennartz, tweeted, “Friendly reminder that every Syrian male aged 16-65 who is not in Syria is a deserter and a coward n deserves nothing but contempt and scorn” (para. 11). Another user, GaryMills65, tweeted, “@BBCNews That Syrian refugee, left his wife & kids to come here & he misses them? What a scumbag! Go home & be with them, what a coward!!!!” (para. 12). These statements, among others, demonstrate how some news sources can work to depict refugees in such a way that they are less than human.

**Critical Incident #2: Paris Massacre**

The second critical incident analyzed for this dissertation focused on articles released during the period of time ranging from October 31 to November 27, 2015, the time period surrounding the November 13, 2015 massacre in Paris. Four themes emerged from the analysis: 1). Threats to Society, 2). Security, 3). Refugee as Burdensome Outsider, and 4). Religious Bias.
Table 5: Frequency of Themes for Alternative News Media (U.S. Political Right) at Critical Incident #2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BREITBART</th>
<th>NEWSMAX</th>
<th>REDSTATE</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>THREATS TO SOCIETY</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>99</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SECURITY</strong></td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>77</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>REFUGEE AS BURDENSOME</strong></td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>56</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>RELIGIOUS BIAS</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Threats to Society.** The first theme considers different elements that are depicted as detrimental to U.S. society. These could range from being threats to security to being threats to nationalism in the country. As this was such a substantial theme, it was broken up into three subthemes that contribute to the larger overarching topic – 1). Partisan Threat, 2). Religious Threat, and 3). Refugee Threat. Each of these themes is defined in the following sections.

**Partisan Threat.** The subtheme considers how more conservative-minded news media frame partisan arguments supporting refugees and individuals of the Islamic faith as a means of threatening U.S. society. These analyzed texts are a sample of those that help to demonstrate the perceived partisan threat that is described within news media from the U.S. political right in the time surrounding the Paris Massacre. Some of the arguments used by these sources focused on Democrat support of refugees as a means of destabilizing U.S. society. Nazarian (2015), for example, believed that the Paris massacre should have been a sign to leadership in the U.S. that refugee resettlement should be closed for a period of time. However, “despite a series of devastating terrorist attacks carried out by members of the Islamic State in the Western world – a number of whom entered Europe as refugees – President Barack Obama has stuck to his plan to have the U.S. absorb 10,000 Syrian war refugees over the next year” (para. 5). Fitzgerald (2015c)
warned that allowing more refugees into the U.S. would create a societal inequality, as the author believed that refugees would begin to take over the population. Hayward (2015b), a contributor from RedState, criticizes how President Obama and other high ranking Democrats responded to doubts about refugees and the current vetting systems in the United States, stating:

President Obama, Hillary Clinton, and other Democrats have taken to openly mocking anyone with the slightest doubt that every last one of these refugees will be carefully examined by the same genius government that brought you HealthCareDotGov, the OPM hack, the V.A. disaster, and a seemingly endless string of Secret Service scandals, overseen by the President who thought al-Qaeda was dead and ISIS was its “junior varsity team”. (para. 2)

Hayward criticizes Obama’s ability to lead the United States through a time of crisis, alleging that “The Obama Administration, to put it mildly, does not have a record of competence on any issue that would inspire blind faith in their ability to handle tens of thousands of refugees from a war-torn region with few reliable records” (para. 4). Berman (2015a) of RedState agrees with this perception of the Obama administration and Democrats when describing how the administration responded to the Paris massacre, noting that “I read Dennis Prager’s excellent article in National Review documenting everything the Left got wrong in the Paris terror attacks (and it’s a very long list—it would be much shorter to write about what they got right, but then we’d have nothing but a headline)” (para. 4). Erickson (2015) also mirrors Hayward’s sentiment about Obama’s response to doubts about refugees. Erickson argues that, after the Paris massacre, some individuals viewed refugees with hesitation due to the possibility that a terrorist could have come through the refugee system. However, he believes that Obama’s response indicates that the issue is more about politics than it is about social caution. He notes that, according to
Democrats, “everything is political so they cannot fathom that some Americans might have looked at the events of Paris and decided we might want to be more cautious. Nope. To the political left, it is polling, politics, and racism” (Erickson, 2015, para. 2).

Other contributors focused on Democrats as a threat to Christianity in the United States, especially in light of Democrats supporting individuals who hold to Islam as their religious belief system. Berman (2015b) admonishes Democrats for their show of favoritism, stating:

The Left picks its own winners and losers, and Islam is a religion of peace marred by perverted zealots who do not follow its teaching, while Christianity is a collection of bloodthirsty sects bent on conquest peppered with some truly placid souls who follow a gentle, effeminate Jesus. (para. 10)

Streiff (2015d) also calls out Obama for perceived favoritism toward other people groups, showing a belief that Obama favored Muslim refugees over other minority refugees. According to Streiff, “an administration with a conscience would have taken early actions to protect both Christians and Yazidis. This need not have required the military action that the Obama administration is terrified of using for anything more than show” (para. 9). Streiff then contrasted Obama’s actions with those of President Gerald Ford’s during the Vietnam conflict when Ford recognized the plight of the Hmong people, an indigenous group that was threatened with extermination by Vietnamese fighters. “[Ford] acted and brought thousands of Hmong to the United States. Obama could easily have treated Iraqi, Syrian, and Libyan Christians as refugees from genocide and opened our doors to them” (para. 9).

Some leaders in the GOP have blamed Obama for his role in ISIS moving into the region, while others criticized Obama for not caring about the U.S. and the security of its citizens. Rick Santorum, former GOP Senator of Pennsylvania, stated that “this president just does not seem to
VICTIM, TERRORIST, OR OTHER?

care about the security of this country” and that Obama’s advocating for refugees is not beneficial for the region (Burke, 2015d, para. 3). Burke reported that Santorum went so far as to allege that Obama was working together with ISIS to destabilize the region (Burke, 2015d). John Thune, Senate Republican Conference Leader, while not connecting Obama with ISIS, does blame Obama for actions leading to ISIS entering the region, stating that "A lot of his decisions, and obviously, the one critical decision to withdraw from Iraq, opened the door to ISIS” (Fitzgerald, 2015b, para. 2).

Religious Threat. The second subtheme focuses on how news media from the U.S. political right frame individuals from the Islamic faith as threats to society. The depiction of a religious threat typically occurs by trying to connect the Islamic faith to terrorism. In the days following the Paris Massacre, U.S. citizens were worried about the terrorist attacks and wondered if such an attack could come to the United States. Burke (2015e) highlights this sentiment in her RedState report when she states that “The Islamic State (ISIS) attacks in Paris have nearly all Americans worried about a terrorist strike in the United States – and a majority convinced we're at war with radical Islam, according to a new poll” (para. 1). Burke (2015f) reports how Marsha Blackburn, GOP representative from Tennessee, supports this sentiment when she states: “We're at war. We have an enemy. It is radical Islamic extremism and we have to kill these people and destroy their network” (Burke, 2015f, para. 3). The perceived threat of Islamic extremism has had such an impact on society that, according to a Washington Post/ABC News Survey, “59 percent [of Americans] think the United States is at war with radical Islam” (Burke, 2015e, para. 4). As evidenced, some news contributors focus on the threat of Islamic extremism. However, others take a decidedly different approach, choosing to depict Islam as a whole as a threat. Streiff (2015c) emphasizes the threat of Islam as a whole when stating:
This is why George Bush’s decision to separate the actions of the 9/11 hijackers from their religion was as profoundly as dangerous an act as Bill Clinton ignoring the rise of al Qaeda. This is why, ultimately, ISIS is going to control part of Iraq, part of Syria, Libya, probably Jordan, maybe Egypt. The West, as France sadly demonstrated over the weekend, is simply not psychologically prepared to say what is very obvious. Islam in its essence is violent. There may very well be peace-loving Muslims out there (other than those without firearms and bombs and knives) but they are peace-loving despite their religion, not because of it. (para. 20)

Berman (2015b) paints Islam as a threat when mentioning that “It’s the fact that the Paris killers, at least one of whom posed as a refugee to gain entrance to Europe, and whose leader boasted of his ability to slip in and out of Syria with ease, yelled “Allahu Akbar” as they slaughtered innocents” (para. 6). The cry “Allahu Akbar”, which translates to mean “God is Greater” has been used by many to show a terrorist battle cry, which then acts as evidence to show Islam as a religion of violence. Streiff (2015c) supports the position of Islam as violent, noting that “the tenets of the religion they subscribe to are violent and that violence is an integral part of the faith to the extent that there is no theological push-back possible to refute the violence” (para. 14).

In an attempt to show that Christianity and Islam cannot possibly mix, some contributors chose to show Christians as innocent, while painting Muslims as the culprits of terrorism across the world. Richter (2015e) cites the example of Brian Babin, GOP Representative from Texas, who attempted to debunk the claim that the Biblical account of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph was a refugee account. According to Babin, "Mary and Jesus didn't have suicide bomb vests strapped on them, and these folks do. You can see it in Technicolor in Paris” (Richter, 2015e, para. 3). Caruso (2015) distances the Biblical account of Jesus from refugees by calling out New York
Times contributor Nicholas Kristof, who wrote about the connections between Jesus and the refugee accounts that are present today. In his critique, Caruso declares:

Then he dives into the arena of the absurd to declare Jesus was a refugee. This is a ridiculous thing to say because nothing that happened with Jesus, occurred by chance. He was sent here for a specific purpose. Everything that happened in His life was foretold and it happened for a reason. (para. 6).

Streiff (2015f) attempts to show Christians as innocent by citing the example of Ted Cruz, former GOP candidate for president, who emphasized the innocence of Christians when he said, “There is no meaningful risk of Christians committing acts of terror” (Streiff, 2015f, para. 4). In making these declarations, Cruz vowed that it is impossible for Christians to be terrorists, distancing Christianity from Islam.

These statements begin to show how a divide has been created in news media, pitting Christianity and Islam against one another. By doing so, the news media on the U.S. political right show Islam as a threat to society. The final subtheme focuses on the perceived threat that refugees pose to society.

Refugee Threat. The final subtheme focuses on the perception that Syrian refugees pose a greater threat to society in the United States and in other countries. In the days following the Paris massacre, many news contributors focused on the belief that the refugee resettlement program acted as a conduit for terrorists to filter into the United States. The majority of governors in the U.S. held to this belief, as “roughly 30 state governors have been vocal about not wanting to allow Syrian refugees in their states, following the terrorist attack in Paris. At least one of the terrorists was allowed in through the refugee program” (Swoyer, 2015b, para. 4). The perceived threat of terrorists infiltrating the refugee resettlement program was present in
several news pieces. Swoyer (2015a) discusses the threat present within the refugee program, stating that “one of the alleged terrorists was embedded in the refugee program,” using language that seemingly describes the terrorists as acting as a sort of sleeper cell within the larger resettlement program (para. 2). One Newsmax editor describes the impact that could arise if the information about a terrorist infiltrating the refugee system were true, stating that, “The information is significant because if one or more of the Paris gunmen turned out to have come into Europe among refugees and migrants fleeing war-torn countries, this could change the political debate about accepting refugees” (Newsmax, 2015a, para. 4). Some U.S. citizens hold to the fear that refugees are an unknown entity, posing a greater threat to society because of the uncertainty regarding the refugees that would join the larger society. According to RedState contributor Richter (2015d), "We have to think of third alternatives rather than the extremes because … a lot of American citizens, and certainly some governors, won't accept simply allowing 65,000 or whatever refugees, and how difficult it would be to distinguish the refugees from those who wish us ill" (para. 5). Fields (2015) cited John Kasich, Ohio Governor, as he emphasized the threat that refugees pose by discussing the potential impact on citizens. Kasich’s rationale for not allowing refugees is that “We should not jeopardize our people. And so it’s not just an issue of the heart, it’s also an issue of the head” (Fields, 2015, para. 3). According to Shadwick (2015), Texas Congressman Lamar Smith agrees with this view and calls on the federal government and the Obama administration to come in line, stating that “We should not allow Syrian refugees into our country until this administration can guarantee that they pose no danger to the American people” (para. 15). Streiff (2015g) outlines the threat of the unknown refugee, stating:

The refugees we will be accepting come from an area that is infused with terrorism and
there is no meaningful way to verify much of anything about their refugees. Sure, the procedures look nice on paper but when it is impossible to verify virtually any part of a person’s life story, the procedures become a joke. (para. 1)

While some contributors, including those listed previously, viewed refugees as a whole as a threat, others viewed the infiltration of ISIS within the system as the true threat. According to Mora (2015), “Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL) jihadists and other terrorists are committed to infiltrating the Syrian refugee resettlement flow into Western countries such as the United States” (para. 1). One citizen remarked that he had concerns about the refugee system, stating that “with all this stuff going on, it's got to really be looked into before we make decisions about letting in refugees. Because we could be hiding our own enemy” (Burke, 2015e, para. 11). Burke (2015c) attempts to make a stronger connection between refugees and terrorists when she writes that “Nearly 70 people have been charged with ISIS-related terror plots in the United States over the last 18 months — reportedly including a handful of refugees.” (para. 1). While Burke does not include any instances of Syrian refugees accused of conspiring with ISIS, the general fear of refugees has a deep impact when it come to the overall sentiment towards refugees. The fear of ISIS and other terrorists within the refugee system adds to the fear and distrust of refugees, providing a stronger rationale for people to not support refugee resettlement in the U.S.

Other news contributors focused on the threat that refugees posed to society, not because of any potential ties to terrorist organizations, but because of the sheer number of refugees that were attempting to flee the tumultuous conditions in their countries. One of the more common ways to communicate the threat is by news contributors using language that compares refugees to different natural disasters, invoking imagery of the damage that can be done. Burke (2015b) and Beamon (2015), for example, each discuss how refugees have been “flooding” out of Syria
into countries in Europe and North America. This language invokes thoughts about natural disaster and the impact that those disasters can have on society. Richter (2015d), while not using explicit language about natural disasters, does discuss the need to cease the “influx” of refugees. This language, again, communicates a powerful message about how refugees are viewed by conservative-minded news media contributors.

One individual, Streiff (2015e), focuses on the refugee threat from a different angle. Instead of considering refugees as a threat to society or a potential conduit for terrorists, Streiff calls out refugees for not being true refugees, stating:

I put refugees in scare quotes because this is more accurately a population migration not a refugee problem. These people are not fleeing a war zone. They have already done that. These people are fleeing the safety and relative comfort of internationally supported refugee camps in Turkey. They also are not refugees as we ordinarily consider them. The UN High Commissioner on Refugees says 65% are military aged males. (para. 1)

According to this statement, the threat that is posed is because these refugees are not “true” refugees. Rather, they are more of an asylee. Streiff later moves away from using the term “refugee”, stating that “the original plan was to import 10,000 job seekers and potential terrorists” (para. 2). Here, Streiff accuses refugees of attempting to capitalize on the system and to take resources from the U.S.

One thing of interest is that many of the statements about the threat refugees pose focused on the issue of security and the state of the vetting systems in the U.S. This issue will be discussed in the next section.

**Security.** The second overarching theme focuses on stories that provide commentary on the state of security in the U.S. and around the world. Some individuals may focus on the state of
the vetting system, while others make larger statements about keeping citizens in their respective countries safe.

In the days immediately following the Paris Massacre, many U.S. leaders were in favor of closing U.S. borders to refugees. Swoyer (2015a) focused on Paul Ryan (R-Wisconsin), noting “he is willing to pause the Syrian refugee resettlement program, as it is better to be safe than sorry” (para. 5). The idea of wanting to be safe rather than sorry was present in several statements. Berry (2015) points to the example of Bobby Jindal, Louisiana Governor and former GOP candidate for U.S. President, stating that “Jindal demanded information about ‘whether additional protections and screenings will be put in place, particularly following the Paris attacks and the discovery that some of those responsible…held Syrian passports’” (para. 5). Fields (2015) looks at John Kasich, Ohio Governor, as an example, noting:

Kasich is just one of many U.S. governors who oppose the resettlement of Syrian refugees in the wake of the Paris attack. The governors of Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin say that they are against accepting refugees into their state because of the possibility that those with terrorist ties may pose as refugees. (para. 5)

This sample of passages seems to communicate a desire for greater self-preservation and a fear of the unknown. As such, it seems that the individuals in these passages believe that it is better for us, as a country, to protect ourselves rather than to risk opening our borders to help others.

Other individuals focused on the state of the vetting system in the U.S., with some expressing confidence that they believed that the current vetting system can do its job. Kirt Lewis, leader of World Relief Sacramento stated that “Since 9/11, over 750,000 (refugees have been relocated). None of them have ever been indicted for domestic terrorism. I think that’s a
pretty amazing track record and it shows to the thoroughness of the vetting process” (Bigelow, 2015, para. 6). California governor Jerry Brown also showed his support for letting Syrian refugee in under the current system, saying that they would be “fully vetted in a sophisticated and utterly reliable way” (Bigelow, 2015, para. 1). However, while these individuals believed in the state of the vetting system, others believed that the vetting system in the U.S. was fundamentally flawed and required more work to be done. Hayward (2015d) expresses this view when he provides sarcastic commentary about the effectiveness of the vetting system:

Rest assured, these refugees will be examined as thoroughly as the psychopath who was allowed to get on stage with Obama in South Africa and pretend to be interpreting the President’s remarks for the hearing impaired. They’ll be managed as carefully as the thousands of illegal alien criminals Obama turned loose on the streets during Shutdown Theater. (para. 3)

Howley (2015) cites the example of James O’Keefe, a right-winged filmmaker, who created “a new video showing people who claim to be Syrian refugees explaining how supposedly easy it is for Syrian refugees to obtain fake passports to gain entry to Europe” (para. 1). According to Howley, the video gives pause to the innocence of those in the middle of the humanitarian crisis, as “the ease with which these Syrians claim to be able to get fake passports for a cash fee is disturbing, raising serious questions about how many Syrian terrorists might currently be living in Europe with fake identifying information” (para. 3). Streiff (2015g) expresses their own doubts about the strength and tenacity of the current vetting system, stating that “the screening process is an elaborate Potemkin village which gives the illusion of being comprehensive but can only screen out the least competent and least intelligent terrorists… if we are going to admit terrorist I would prefer the stupid and incompetent” (para. 1). Scott Jones, Sacramento Sheriff,
has his own concerns about the vetting system, saying that “I have no confidence that the
[refugees] we’re getting from Syria and other places have been appropriately and fully vetted,
and that puts people at risk” (Bigelow, 2015, para. 7). One Newsmax contributor expressed their
doubts about the entire vetting system regardless of its condition, declaring that “there’s no
perfect way to screen out Syrian terrorists from Syrian refugees. It may be that someone we let in
will, eventually, do something horrible” (Newsmax, 2015c, para. 24). Nolte (2015a) mentions
that government officials already pointed out the flaws in their own system:

The F.B.I. has already admitted that it cannot adequately vet these refugees, and ISIS has
promised to use the Syrian refugee process as a means to infiltrate the West with
terrorists. Early reports indicate that two, or maybe three, of the gunmen that hit Paris
Friday snuck in through the refugee program. (para. 8)

Streiff (2015g) continues the negative thought about the vetting process, positing that “what
makes the system a fraud is that the Obama administration is claiming, against mountains of
evidence to the contrary, that the refugee screening system is sufficiently robust to identify and
screen out terrorists when it simply is not” (para. 33). That being said, Streiff’s sentiments can be
summed up in the following statement:

The entire screening process is based on the idea that, in a worst case scenario, you admit
people who are simply economic migrants or maybe some petty crooks. The system
wasn’t set up to filter out people who are terrorists and who are joining the refugee flow
with the intent of carrying terror to the United States. We may have the best system
possible but it is still woefully inadequate to accomplish what is being required of it.
(para. 32).

These news contributors show how they perceive that security, including the vetting system in
the U.S. is fundamentally flawed, creating more issues in the already turbulent humanitarian crisis. This view then influences how individuals view refugees. This will be explored in the next section.

**Refugee as Burdensome Outsider.** The third theme derived from examining news media at this critical point focuses on the view that refugees are burdensome and are seen as an “other” that can never truly fit into society. Something to note is that this theme was present even before the Paris massacre, which occurred in mid-November 2015. On October 31, Beamon (2015) reported that “asylum-seekers were met with protests by anti-government protesters in Austria, many of whom chanted slogans and carried banners reading ‘No Way; or ‘You will not make Europe your home’” (para. 8). Support for refugees after the Paris massacre slipped. As Nolte (2015b) notes, results from a Washington Post/ABC News survey show that “Only 43% of Americans are in favor of additional refugee, while a clear majority of 54% oppose the idea” (para. 2). However, May (2015) reports that states began feeling pressure from the federal government to allow refugees stating that “The Obama administration has warned states to comply with federal efforts to resettle Syrian refugees in communities around the U.S. or else find their states subject to enforcement action” (para. 1). May describes the task that was placed on states’ shoulders, stating that

> In a letter this week, the Office of Refugee Resettlement threatens states concerned about resettling Syrians with punitive responses if they refuse to accept the refugees/ ORR explains that states may not refuse ORR-funded benefits for refugees on the basis of religion and national origin. (para. 2).

In the aftermath of the Paris massacre, state legislators were posed with the choice of either accepting refugees along with the uncertainty associated with them, or reject them and face
fallout from the federal level. However, some U.S. citizens saw fault in the government’s plan, especially in light of the cost of supporting refugees. According to RedState contributor Checkmate2012 (2015),

A journalist at National Review thinks it’s immoral to bring them here at a cost of 12 times the amount it costs to help one refugee in region. He likened it to saving just one person from a sinking boat instead of providing life jackets for all 12 people on board. Who is the lucky person that gets to live and who gets to decide? (para. 13)

A Newsmax contributor shared that they supported bringing refugees into the U.S. However, they also decried some of the rationale for supporting refugees, stating:

Explaining that everything Islamic State does is really our fault, so we have a moral obligation to take in refugees fleeing a war it has escalated. Obviously, U.S. foreign policy has strongly shaped the region. And yet there’s often a whiff of racism here. It reduces the citizens of these nations from complex human beings who do things for an array of reasons, to sort of amoebas responding only to stimulus from the U.S., which is why we have to take full moral responsibility for their actions. (Newsmax, 2015c, para. 16).

Here, the role of refugee as burdensome outsider takes on new form. For some individuals, helping refugees is viewed as a moral duty rather than a duty done out of goodwill. However, the contributor notes that depicting refugees in this manner actually has a negative impact on the refugees themselves, as it removes their humanity and agency, forcing them into a role that they likely neither wanted nor asked for.

These excerpts help to show how refugees have been painted as a burdensome outsider by some news contributors. The final theme in this section will explore the impact that perceived
religious bias has had on news contributors as they provide these stories to their respective audiences.

**Religious Bias.** The final theme focuses on the perception that there is a religious bias against Christian and other minority refugees. Some individuals argue that Obama showed bias against Christian refugees. Nolte (2015a) is one of the individuals who argues strongest against Obama’s claims:

Despite President Obama’s sanctimonious proclamation Monday that America does not have a religious test when it comes to admitting refugees into America, the actual math appears to show the complete opposite is true. According to CNSNews.com, who looked at the data, only 53 Syrian Christian refugees have been allowed into America, compared to 2,098 Syrian Muslims. (para. 1)

Nolte continues his argument against Obama, stating that “the president is lying” and that “those refugees being discriminated are both Christians and those who are the most victimized and persecuted in Syria” (para. 9). As a result of this belief, Nolte views Obama’s behavior as discriminatory in nature, as evidenced when he asks, “Who’s the bigot now, Mr. President?” (para. 9). Because of the perceived religious bias and threat, some called for simplified vetting procedures that allowed for Christian refugees to enter the U.S., while still providing stringent vetting of Muslim refugees. Jeb Bush, one of the GOP candidates for president, stated in 2015 that “I do think we have a responsibility to help with refugees after proper screening. And I think our focus ought to be on the Christians who have no place in Syria” (Spiering, 2015, para. 4). Bush discussed the ability to institute a religious test, saying, “I mean, you can prove you’re a Christian. You can’t prove it, then, you know, you err on the side of caution” (Bush, cited in Spiering, 2015, para. 7). Former GOP House Majority Leader Tom DeLay mirrors this
sentiment in his own remarks, stating “The Christians are being completely wiped out in the Middle East right now. Obama doesn't know the definition of what is American. We've got to be very careful who we let into this country” (DeLay, cited in Richter, 2015c, para. 9). DeLay also showed his lack of confidence in President Obama, saying that he believed that “he has surrendered to ISIS” (para. 2).

Some political leaders supported allowing any refugee in that is sufficiently examined. Steve Beshear, former Governor of Kentucky, used religious appeal in his support for refugees, stating that “Kentucky should do the Christian thing and welcome all refugees who have passed extensive background checks” (Beshear, cited in Breitbart News, 2015b, para. 19). Additionally, President Obama showed his support for letting in all refugees, noting that “the idea of only allowing Christians in amounted to "political posturing" that runs contrary to American values” (Obama, cited in Newsmax, 2015b, para. 6).

**Critical Incident #3 – Trump’s First Executive Order Attempt**

The final critical incident that I analyzed fell in the period of January 13 – February 10, 2017, the weeks before and after U.S. President Donald Trump attempted to sign his first executive order banning refugees from seven countries, including Syria. While Trump claimed that the executive order was signed to protect those in the United States, it was quickly overturned by federal judges who claimed that the executive was unconstitutional and religious discrimination. In analyzing articles from these news media sources on the U.S. political right, four themes emerged: Security Concerns, Religious Competition, Placing Blame, and Refugee Threat. Each theme is discussed in the following sections.
**Table 6: Frequency of Themes for Alternative News Media (U.S. Political Right) at Critical Incident #3**

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<thead>
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<th>BREITBART</th>
<th>NEWSMAX</th>
<th>REDSTATE</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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<tr>
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<td>10</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RELIGIOUS COMPETITION AND/OR BIAS</strong></td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>68</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PLACING BLAME</strong></td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>REFUGEE THREAT</strong></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
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**Security Concerns.** The first theme examined arguments surrounding the executive order that focused on issues of security in the United States and in other countries. As I studied these sources, I noticed that several contributors wrote about their desire for more extreme vetting procedures in the United States. According to Clark (2017), “America must first and foremost defend our homeland” (para. 6). Clark, among other contributors, expressed a desire for self-preservation. Rev. Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas also supported the idea of self-preservation, stating that he believed that “Trump was fulfilling his God-given responsibility to protect this country (Newsmax, 2017, para. 8). Paul Ryan, Speaker of the House, supported this thinking, noting that “our number one responsibility is to protect the homeland” (Beamon, 2017a, para. 2). The desire for self-preservation seemed to trump any other desire for helping refugees. As such, vetting became a means of strengthened self-preservation. According to Clark (2017),

> There should be “a moratorium on the admittance of all refugees from Syria to the United States until the American people can be assured that the federal government has
implemented an extensive and reliable vetting process to establish the identity and associations of those persons who are admitted to our country so that no radical Islamic jihadists may enter camouflaged as ‘refugees.’” This is extreme vetting. (para. 9)

The idea of vetting, just as it was in the time after the Paris Massacre, was promoted as a means of tightening security. Some believed that Barack Obama, in his time as president, failed to adequately vet individuals who came into the U.S. As Patterico (2017) suggests, “one suspects that the Obama administration did not do enough to ensure that they would be properly vetted” (para. 1). As such, the Trump Administration claims that the need arose for stricter vetting procedures to be implemented. According to Trump, "We're going to have extreme vetting, which we should have had in this country for many years” (Trump, cited in Beamon, 2017b, para. 5). Trump describes the vetting procedures, stating that “It’s working out very nicely – and we’re going to have a very, very strict ban” (para. 4). When Trump’s executive order was introduced, some individuals likened it to a religious ban, as all seven countries listed in the order had Muslim-majority populations. However, Buchanan (2017) argues against this thinking, claiming that, “of the seven countries facing a 90-day ban, three are U.S. designated state sponsors of terror, and the other four are war zones. Clearly, this is about homeland security, not religious discrimination” (para. 7). That being said, some stated that the desire for stronger vetting did not mean that they did not support refugees. For example, House Speaker Paul Ryan stated that, “we are a compassionate nation, and I support the refugee resettlement program, but it’s time to reevaluate and strengthen the visa vetting process” (para. 2). Clark (2017) argues that vetting and safe zones in the Middle East is the most Christian response that the U.S. can provide. According to Clark, “in-region safe zones is actually the most compassionate way to care for the most people, the quickest, when dealing with a refugee crisis such as is seen in the
Middle East today” (para. 14). Clark further describes this rationale:

It is more humane, more compassionate, and more workable to take care of them, protect them, and shelter them right there in their own homeland, allowing them to quickly and easily return to their own homes and way of life as soon as the crisis has been ended and ISIS has been soundly defeated. In fact, it could help far more people far more quickly, as President Trump’s draft order sets a 90-day deadline to begin implementation. (para. 16)

One argument that arose from the executive order was that the Trump Administration was picking and choosing which countries to ban based on previous connections that were established with leaders in those governments. As such, some questioned why countries such as Saudi Arabia were not included in the proposed ban, whereas Syria, Iraq, and Iran were. One argument arose that Saudi Arabia should be included because of past ties to terrorism. However, Shihabi (2017) contends that there is a strong rationale as to why this is not the case:

There is a simplistic, knee-jerk reaction among political commentators who try to paint Saudi Arabia in broad brush strokes by pointing out that 15 of the 19 hijackers on 9/11 were Saudi citizens. Yes, that is true. But what may surprise many Americans is the extremely close security relationship that has developed between Saudi Arabia and the United States in the wake of that horrific event. (para. 6).

Shihabi argues in support of Saudi Arabia, stating that, “Saudi Arabia is not, and has never been, considered by the State Department to be a state sponsor of terrorism, unlike Iran. Saudi Arabia is also not a failed state like others on the list” (para. 4).

One of the biggest arguments for increased vetting is that the present security system does not adequately screen individuals entering into the U.S. Clark (2017) argues that, due to these inadequacies, “there is no way to import millions upon millions of Christians and other
religious minorities fleeing ISIS genocide. Our refugee program could not even come close to helping the number of people who need assistance” (para. 15). Napolitano (2017), while noting the precedence of the U.S. helping refugees, contends that the president is responsible for ensuring that the security standards of the country are strong enough to protect U.S. citizens:

Everyone knows we are a nation of immigrants. Three of my grandparents immigrated here as children. Most people recognize that all people have the natural right to travel, which means they can seek entry here; but the country has accepted the ideas that our borders are not open, that the welfare state here is not without financial limits and that in perilous times such as today, immigration is largely and legally in the hands of the president, whether one has voted for him or not. (para. 17)

These selections describe some of the sentiments surrounding Trump’s first attempt at an executive order restricting refugee access to the U.S. and how it relates to the security needs of the country. The next section focuses on the perception that there is competition among Christians and Muslims to be allowed in the U.S., as well as the thought that religious bias has been exercised in the past.

**Religious Competition and/or Bias.** This theme contains statements about the perception of religious competition and/or religious bias when accepting refugees from Syria.

In the days following the release of Donald Trump’s first executive order banning all individuals from seven countries, several individuals condemned the order as xenophobic and discriminatory in nature (Ayoub & Beydoun, 2017). Others, such as Spiegel and Rubenstein (2017) claimed that the order would cause irreparable harm to countless individuals who were trapped by the order. Prior to the executive order’s release, Trump stated that “his administration is giving priority to Christians because they had been treated unfairly and suffered “more so”
than others, so we are going to help them” (Spencer, 2017b, para. 2). In the executive order, Trump gives preference to individuals who are labeled as religious minorities in order to protect them and to give them ease of access to the U.S. However, some officials claimed that Barack Obama used his own version of religious vetting during his time as president. Spencer (2017a) reports that, “in 2016, there were 15,302 Muslims who arrived in the U.S. from Syria and there were 93 people, also from Syria, who identified as either Catholic, Christian, Protestant, or Jehovah’s Witness” (para. 8). Daniel Manion, a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals, questioned Obama’s past judgements about refugees. “In November, he voiced concern over the almost complete absence of Christians among the Syrian refugees. He noted that “of the nearly 11,000 refugees admitted by mid-September, only 56 were Christian”” (Donohue, 2017, para. 7). Donohue (2017), based on this information, argues in support of Trump by comparing Trump’s actions to those of his predecessor, stating that “it is not persuasive to say that Obama did not explicitly employ a religious test against Christians. His defenders cannot have it both ways. If Obama didn't have a religious test, then neither does Trump — there is no “Muslim ban”’” (para. 9). Streiff (2017a) praises Trump’s efforts, declaring that “This is a great start. An even better start would be for Trump to start bringing in Middle Eastern Christians as a priority class” (para. 10). Streiff (2017b) contends that favoring Christian and other minority refugees is necessary, stating that:

For reasons that remain unfathomable by any logical evaluation, Obama has shunned Middle Eastern Christians in the refugee stream when they are a) highly unlikely, to the point of non-existence, to have terror ties and b) they are very easy to vet because they tend to have become refugees as part of a community. (para. 31)

Streiff claims that many of the Syrian refugees escaping the war in Syria are not actually
refugees, but economic migrants. As a result, “the fact that we are giving these true refugees priority is a good thing” (para. 31).

However, Christian leaders soon came out against Trump’s executive order. One group of religious leaders took out an ad in The Washington Post, stating that, “as Christian pastors and leaders, we are deeply concerned by the recently announced moratorium on refugee resettlement. As Christians, we have a historic call expressed over two thousand years, to serve the suffering. We cannot abandon this call now” (para. 3). Another group of leaders claimed that, “by giving preference to Christians over Muslims, the executive order pits one faith against another” (Spencer, 2017b, para. 9). Spencer then announces that, “I haven’t been so disappointed our Christian faith leaders since they gave a huge propaganda victory to the evil doers in 2006”, claiming that speaking out against the executive order was as negative as when religious leaders denounced U.S. military action in Iraq (para. 12). In the days following the signing of the executive order, several individuals, including Trump himself, attempted to show that the executive order was not what the news media claimed that it was. Mack (2017) points out that the executive order could not amount to a Muslim registry, as “it does not mention Muslims at all” (para. 1). Kellyanne Conway, Counselor to President Trump, stated that “it does not discriminate in any way but only applies to terrorism” (Mack, 2017, para. 2). Trump himself mentions that “this is not about religion – this is about terror and keeping our country safe. There are over 40 different countries worldwide that are majority Muslim that are not affected by this order” (Kew, 2017, para. 3). Streiff (2017c) points out the hypocrisy shown towards Trump for doing something similar to what Obama had done in the past, claiming that “one would have thought that there would be a general agreement that [bringing in minority refugees] was a good thing. But the president is Donald Trump and, by definition, Donald Trump can do no good”
When Trump’s executive order was overturned, some claimed that the religious bias from the Obama era continued. Leahy (2017b) reports that Syrian refugees were rushing into the U.S. on the Monday immediately following the ceasing of the executive order. While only 113 entered the country, Leahy claims that there is more to consider than simply the number of refugees that entered, as “all 113 refugees who entered the country were Muslims, according to the State Department. No refugees who were Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, or any religion other than Islam entered the country” (para. 5). As such, the perception of religious bias continued to be spread.

**Placing Blame.** In the third theme, news contributors and other individuals call out others in an attempt to blame them for something happening. During this critical incident, many individuals placed blame for the overturned executive order, the humanitarian crisis and views of Muslim immigrants, and the larger state of affairs in the Middle East.

In the days following Donald Trump’s first attempt at passing an executive order limiting the entry of refugees from other countries, several individuals called for Trump’s executive order to be overturned, as they labeled the policy as xenophobic and Islamophobic. According to Beamon (2017c), “the fallout from President Trump’s decision was widespread, with Democrats, some Republicans and other advocacy groups slamming it as lacking focus, discriminatory or amounting to a Muslim ban” (para. 24). However, RedState contributor DaveNJ1 (2017) mentions that these responses are hypocritical in nature:

> And where there has been criticism from the Muslim world calling the action “un-American,” there is a certain level of hypocrisy. Yet from 2011 to 2014, the Obama
administration, through a nontransparent executive order, effectively banned Syrians. It was only in his last year of office that policy changed. (para. 3)

Wright (2017b) agrees with this view, stating that Trump’s executive order is actually “Obama’s travel ban, since he signed off on the list” (para. 1).

Other news contributors called out government officials, namely Democrats, who seemed to flip from earlier positions that they held on Muslim immigrants and refugees in the past. For example, North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper is one of the U.S. governors who spoke out against Trump’s executive order. However, Wright (2017a) mentions that Cooper’s position on refugees was quite different after the Paris Massacre. Cooper stated that, “As chief law enforcement officer of North Carolina, I support asking the federal government to pause refugee entries to make sure we have the most effective screening process possible so our humanitarian efforts are not hijacked” (para. 20). Richter (2017) also noticed that Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer had a similar change in opinion between the Paris Massacre in November 2015 and the signing of the executive order in January 2017. After the executive order, Schumer displayed visible emotion as he spoke about the cruelty of the executive order. Yet, Richter notes that “the New York Democrat was singing a different tune in 2015 after a series of deadly terror attacks in Paris, saying a pause in Syrian refugees might be called for” (para. 2).

Some contributors chose to call out former President Barack Obama for the role that he played in creating unrest and instability in the Middle East. According to RedState news writer DaveNJ1 (2017), “Most of the sensible Muslim countries, especially those in the Middle East, do not blame Donald Trump but Barack Obama for the current state of affairs” (para. 4). He continues, stating that “through incompetence and weakness, they blame the Obama administration for the state of affairs” (para. 4). Clark (2017) agrees that Obama is responsible
for the unrest in the Middle East, claiming that “ISIS arose from America’s foreign leadership failures over the past eight years” (para. 8).

New contributors also considered the role that news media played in the time surrounding the first executive order. Several individuals believed that the news media was wrong and perpetuating fake news. Trump, himself, attempted to show that the media was at fault about how it described the executive order, stating: “To be clear, this is not a Muslim ban, as the media is falsely reporting” (Larma, 2017, para. 5). Buchanan (2017) describes the role that the news media played in fostering discontentment towards the executive order, observing that “all five stories on page one of Monday's Washington Post were about the abomination. The New York Times' editorial, "Trashing American Ideals and Security," called it bigoted, cowardly, xenophobic, Islamophobic, un-American, unrighteous” (para. 5). As such, Buchanan blamed the media and for the role that they played in stoking fear and outrage toward Trump, claiming that their response was due to feeling attacked by Trump. According to Buchanan, “When the Times rages that "American ideals" or "traditional American values" are under attack by Trump, what they really mean is that their ideology and agenda are threatened by Trump” (para. 10). Freeman (2017) reports that the view of media as enemy and worthy of blame is present within the White House administration, claiming that “the administration has a ready-made scapegoat of an unfair media or other perceived opponents for any moves that actually do go wrong” (para. 5). Moving away from the executive order, Edmunds (2017) reports that the BBC had spread fake news about Trump’s intentions on helping refugees. According to Edmunds, “The BBC has reported that a recent claim by U.S. President Donald J. Trump that under his predecessor, President Barack Obama, it was “almost impossible” for Syrian Christians to claim asylum in the United States was “without any factual basis”” (para. 2). She defends Trump by including statistics from
the Barnabas Fund, an organization working to help displaced and persecuted Christians around the world, showing that “of the thousands of Syrian refugees arriving in the USA last year only 56 people in total were Christians, equivalent to 0.5 percent of the total” (para. 8).

**Refugee Threat.** The final theme that emerged from this critical incident focuses on how news media contributors on the U.S. political right frame refugees as a type of threat. The threat may be violent in nature; however, some contributors also focused on the threat of refugees coming into the U.S. and taking resources that other people may need. Refugees, under this theme, may also be viewed as inhuman.

As mentioned previously, some contributors saw the refugee resettlement program as a potential channel for terrorists to infiltrate. According to Clark (2017), “ISIS has called for the infiltration of refugee programs and has successfully inflicted mass terror attacks through this infiltration” (para. 9). Patterico (2017) also suggests that the refugee program could be a conduit for terrorists by citing the issues that various countries in Europe have had in bringing in refugees:

One need only consider the continual problems European countries are having assimilating refugees — and the likelihood that ISIS is sending sleeper terrorists among them — to be skeptical of a policy that would admit tens of thousands of these folks within our borders. (para. 1)

Martel (2017) describes the threat of terrorists infiltrating the refugee program by providing several incidents in which this was alleged to be the case:

The Islamic State terrorist responsible for the New Year’s Eve massacre in Istanbul’s Reina nightclub, for example, entered Turkey through Syria with his wife and child, despite being an Uzbek national. Nearly a year before that attack, another Islamic State
suicide bomber succeeded in killing 25 people in Istanbul, entering Turkey as a Syrian refugee. In Western Europe, four Islamic State terrorists cleared Syrian refugee vetting in October 2015, with two of them successfully attacking Paris. (para. 11)

Even Syrian President Bashar al-Assad supports this view, stating that “Some migrants coming into Western states as Syrian asylum seekers are “definitely” terrorists” (Edmunds, 2017b, para. 1). As such, refugees were viewed with trepidation and seen as dangerous forces. To further this point, Martel (2015) cites the case of a refugee who was accused of supporting ISIS, noting that “At least one refugee with ties to the Islamic State has been arrested in the United States: Omar Faraj Saeed Al Hardan, an Iraqi refugee who pled guilty to “providing material support and swearing allegiance to ISIS” in a Texas court” (para. 12). Tomlinson (2017) attempted to show Syrian refugees as a threat by writing about a Syrian refugee who was on trial for murdering his pregnant lover. By including this story, Tomlinson could cause some individuals to consider what might happen if Syrian refugees were allowed within their communities and to wonder whether they would see violence like this enter.

Other individuals declared that refugees didn’t necessarily pose a physical threat, but more a threat of taking resources from the U.S. Tomi Lahren, former GOP commentator compared the Syrian population to the U.S. population, stating, “Americans stand up and fight for faith, family, and freedom. Syrians run away” (Howe, 2017, para. 5). As such, Lahren depicts all Syrians, not only refugees, as individuals who run from the first sign of trouble or conflict. Howe then discusses the dissonance that occurs with Lahren’s line of thinking:

On the one hand, she’s saying that all Syrians are cowards with no regard for their families or their homeland or freedom or eagles, and therefore we should not accept them. On another hand, she is saying we need to know who is who so we can figure out
which moral cowards are acceptable and which are terrorists. On another hand, she’s suggesting they are all terrorists and should be kept out entirely. And on a fourth and final hand, she’s saying that they really are, in fact, refugees fleeing destruction, but it’s not “uncompassionate” to tell them to screw off. (para. 8).

In order to show the threat that refugees pose to resources in the U.S., some contributors use language that depicts the force that refugees use to come into the country. For example, Leahy (2017b) wrote about how 100 refugees rushed into the country immediately following the overturning of the executive order. Leahy (2017a) describes refugees entering the U.S. as a flood. Leahy then describes the rapid influx of refugees in the following statement:

Sources tell Breitbart News that the federal bureaucrats who run the refugee resettlement program and voluntary agencies who manage it at the local level have filled the pipeline with an extraordinarily high number of refugees literally waiting to get on the planes coming to the United States. (para. 21)

However, one way that contributors show that refugees are different and that they should be distant from society is through the use of non-inclusive language. Harrington (2017), in discussing what Trump had and had not done during his first week as President, said that he thought Trump would immediately exercise his power to stop “these people” (para. 4). As discussed previously, Tomi Lahren discussed refugees by making blanket statements about all Syrians being weak and fleeing. Even Clark (2017) attempts to speak for the refugees when he says that” The refugees themselves do not want to be uprooted from their way of life and thrust into a different culture” (para. 16). While the sentiment may be true, it is dangerous for individuals to make statements that reinforce assumptions about different people groups, especially when those people groups are already in a marginalized position.
Analysis of Images in Alternative News Media

The final section of this chapter moves its focus from the written word to the representation of refugees in images. More specifically, this section focuses on how the use of imagery and visual framing differs based on the political ideology of the alternative news media source. One item of interest in this section is that there were two news sources that could not be examined – RedState and Democracy Now. In the case of RedState, when I entered the site, I could not see any images that were included, as all images were obscured by the RedState logo. It may have been that you needed to have a registered account to view the images. Although I requested an account in July 2017, I was not able to gain access to the site to see the images. Had I been able to receive access, I may have been able to view the images in the PDF documents that I analyzed. Democracy Now was a bit different. While there were images on the Democracy Now website, I was not able to get those images in the PDF documents that I analyzed for this research. I wanted my approach to be as unbiased as possible. As such, I did not treat this as a special case and I did not go back online to retrieve those images. As a result, this section only focuses on images used in articles from Breitbart, Newsmax, Huffpost, and The Nation. In this section, I’ve included a sample of images that are exemplars of the types of images that these alternative news media channels use. For this portion of the research, I first describe the types of images that news media sources on the U.S. political right use. I then describe the images that news media sources on the U.S. political left use.

Alternative News Media (U.S. Political Right) Image Analysis

This section focuses on images that were included in stories written by news contributors from Breitbart and Newsmax. One item that immediately emerged from the analysis was that, in looking at images in articles written for Breitbart, there were no captions included with any of
the images. As such, there was no context provided for the images outside of what the news contributors wrote about in the articles. As such, the images could act as a priming mechanism for what was being read. Another item that became evident was that many images from both Breitbart and Newsmax focused on politicians rather than refugees themselves. As such, this could create the image that refugees are secondary, even when considering the humanitarian crisis, which impacts them directly.

In focusing on the images, there were some themes that immediately became evident. Many pictures used by news media sources from the U.S. political right communicated a fear of refugees being an invasive force. For example, consider Figure 1:

![Angry Group of Refugees](The Associated Press, 2015)

*Figure 1: Angry Group of Refugees (The Associated Press, 2015)*

This is one of many pictures used by media contributors when writing their stories. Images such as this communicates several things. First, the expressions on the refugees’ faces appear to be more menacing and threatening in nature. The mob mentality is communicated by seeing the refugees reaching out toward the photographer. Secondly, the image may appear more
threatening due to the picture being taken at night. There is more uncertainty in the picture, as it’s not known how large the crowd is. The perspective of the picture communicates that there is a massive crowd of people. Moreover, the blurring in the background of the picture makes the crowd seem even larger. The use of shadows in the foreground of the image communicates the menace that is presented. The image was included with no context in a Breitbart article where the authors contends that China is shirking its responsibility for helping refugees by saying that the U.S. should take more refugees while the Chinese government refuses to accept refugees (Hayward, 2015a).

This is not the only image that communicates these messages. Consider Figure 2, as pictured immediately below:

![Figure 2: Crowd of Refugees on a Path (Mitchell, 2017)](image)

This image is taken during the day, which helps somewhat with visibility. However, like Figure 1, there is a great deal of uncertainty communicated in the image. Like the previous image, there is a focus on a crowd of individuals. No caption for the image was provided. However, it was
included in an article focusing on an overwhelming number of Muslim refugees entering the country, compared to a dearth of Christians and other religious minorities (Nolte, 2015a). As such, the image communicates that these individuals contribute to the religious disparity being reported. Additionally, the blurring in the background creates the image that the crowd of refugees is endless, communicating a fear of refugees due to the mass number that could enter the country.

Other images of refugees focused on the potential threat that refugees pose to society due to a potential connection to violence or terrorist activity. Consider Figure 3:

![Rushing Crowd of Refugees](Platt, 2015)

Like the previous images, there were no contextual captions provided with this picture. As such, news consumers are left to assume that the refugees in the image are responsible for whatever violence may have occurred. In the image, there seems to be more chaos, as it appears to show many bodies rushing forward and refugees trampling over one another. The dust in the foreground and the blurring in the background again communicate an uncertainty about the
crowd, namely how large the crowd of refugees is. The background shows a chain-link fence, which shows that officials were either trying to keep the group fenced in or fenced out of an area.

Figure 4: Individual Standing near picture of ISIS flag  
(Karadeniz, 2017)

Figure 4 communicates a somewhat different message than the first three. For one, the image only focuses on one individual. However, there is still a threat communicated, as the individual is holding a gun and standing near a painting of an ISIS flag on top of a mound of skulls. Like before, there was no original caption for the picture. As such, it is unknown whether the individual is an ISIS supporter or part of a militia fighting against ISIS.

In analyzing the images used by news media contributors from the U.S. political right, one theme emerged – that of Refugee as Threat. The images used helped to communicate the idea that refugees pose a threat to society. The images also worked in tandem with the articles themselves, as many of the news articles contained passages depicting refugees as a potential threat. While these are a sample of the images used by news media contributors on the U.S.
political right, they effectively communicate a message about refugees and the role that they play in society, as well as the potential impact that they can have on individuals.

**Alternative News Media (U.S. Political Left) Image Analysis**

This section focuses on images used by news contributors writing stories for *Huffpost* and *The Nation*. In analyzing these images, two key concepts emerged. First, when looking at both *Huffpost* and *The Nation*, each source tended to provide captions with their photographs to provide context for what was occurring. This allows the photos to stand on their own as historical artifacts that viewers can interpret and understand. However, the captions can also provide support for what the news contributors wrote about in their piece. Additionally, many of the photos focused on the refugees themselves. In many cases, stories about national leaders and public figures featured a photograph with said individuals alongside refugees. This can act as a means of enhancing the credibility of the public figures, especially considering work with refugees.

When focusing on the photographs, it became apparent that news media contributors situated on the U.S. political left used photographs that either highlighted innocence in the midst of the humanitarian crisis or showed the tumultuous nature of the humanitarian crisis itself.
Figure 5 shows Syrian school children lined up together at a school in Egypt where their families have fled to. This is one instance of how news media contributors from the U.S. political left frame the humanitarian crisis. They attempt to highlight the innocence of those caught in the middle of the refugee crisis by featuring children, individuals who are often seen as the purest and the most innocent in a time of great trial. Some of the children are looking directly at the camera, which could evoke an emotional response from a reader, as it appears that the children are looking directly at the reader.
Other pictures in news media situated on the U.S. political left featured children in the midst of the crisis itself. Seeing pictures such as the one featured in Figure 6 evokes an emotional response, as they show children as the greatest victims of the humanitarian crisis. Imagery such as this parallels that of the photo of Aylan Kurdi’s body washing ashore in Turkey in September 2015. Here, the child has a dirty face and is the only item of focus in the photograph. Moreover, the child’s sadness is evident and communicated clearly through the image. News contributors include pictures like this to show humanity in the midst of the crisis. Additionally, many individuals may see children as symbols of innocence in the midst of a circumstance that can be seen as evil.

News contributors even used pictures of children to highlight the conditions that refugees endure in the midst of the crisis, as seen in Figure 7:
Here, readers can see one aspect of the humanitarian crisis that often goes unseen, namely that refugees face a great deal of hardship. In this image, children are searching for bottles to find a way for their families to make money. This is one way that news contributors can begin to highlight some of the hardships that refugees face.

Some news contributors focused on the human nature of the humanitarian crisis without featuring children in their articles. Consider Figure 8:
This image is one example of how news contributors can show the conditions of the humanitarian crisis without focusing on individuals. In this figure, one can see the conditions of some buildings in war-torn Aleppo. It should be noted that this picture was taken in 2013, only a few years before fighting in Aleppo increased as military forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad wrested Aleppo away from rebel fighters. As such, this figure shows some of the damage in the earlier stages of unrest and fighting in the region. Images such as this help to emphasize the conditions of a crisis that, for individuals in the United States, many may not realize is ongoing. Images such as the one featured above showcase the destruction of refugee homes. As a result, seeing these images may help some news consumers better understand the conditions from which many refugees are fleeing.

As I analyzed the images from the news media sources situated on the U.S. political left, I noticed that the images tended to emphasize innocence and humanity in the midst of a violent crisis. If images focused on people, they tended to be smaller groups, usually families or small
children. In several instances, news contributors focused on the humanity of the crisis by featuring pictures of individuals, showcasing the emotion of the situation. By doing so, news contributors can give a face to the humanitarian crisis as a whole, which can act as an emotional tool for individuals in other countries to think that they should provide aid for those who are caught in the crisis.

This chapter focused on the themes that emerged from articles at three critical incidents. In this chapter, I defined these themes, as well as focused on the narratives that emerged from said themes. I also considered the role that images played in furthering each of the narratives. In the next chapter, I focus on the research questions from the study, as well as discuss the implications of this research.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

This dissertation has examined how depictions of the Syrian humanitarian crisis differ based on the political ideology of the reporting source. Chapter I provided a historical overview of the Syrian humanitarian crisis. It also helped guide the other chapters of the dissertation. Chapter II began by defining and explaining the concepts of identity and alternative news media. It then focused on the theoretical frameworks used to conduct the research. Chapter III explained what textual analysis is and how it was used. Chapter IV focused on the themes that emerged from the alternative news media articles at each critical incident. It also considered the images that alternative news media contributors used in their articles. This final chapter will go deeper into examining the results. The chapter begins by answering the research questions that guided the study that was conducted. It then considers how the results have a greater impact on society before considering limitations and future directions for research.

Answering the Research Questions

RQ1 asked how alternative news media sources use language and imagery to describe refugees in their depictions of the Syrian humanitarian crisis. There was a marked difference in the language used in the alternative news media articles as compared to their mainstream counterparts. Some sources, such as Breitbart and Democracy Now, used more emotionally charged language in their reporting, with one Breitbart contributor going so far as to call former U.S. President Barack Obama “a bigot”. Other sources, such as The Nation and Huffpost used emotional language as a sort of persuasive tool. Some articles in Huffpost were direct in their persuasive appeal, providing concrete examples of how individuals could help refugees who were caught in the humanitarian crisis. Other articles, such as those featured in The Nation, created a persuasive message by describing the detrimental impact of different policies on
refugees and urging readers to stand up and speak out in order to make a difference and change said policy.

As for imagery, news contributors tended to use photographs that were available through public sources, such as the Associated Press or Getty Press. Only one source, *Huffpost*, wrote stories and included pictures from individuals that were referred to in the story. That being said, news contributors used photographs that helped to supplement the narratives that were included in their stories. One source, *RedState*, did not allow individuals without registered accounts to see the images used in various posts. Another source, *Breitbart*, did not include any sort of caption for the images that they used, which forces news consumers to assume that the images are directly related with the content being addressed in the articles. However, it should be noted that the reporting styles of both *RedState* and *Breitbart* differ from those of mainstream news sources. With regard to *RedState*, every story that is written comes from someone who is a registered user of the website. Some of those individuals are journalists or politicians. However, stories can be written by individuals who have no journalistic background, acting as a sort of blog or personal journal for those individuals. *Breitbart*, according to former Trump campaign director Steve Bannon, “is the platform for the alt-right” (Posner, 2016, para. 2). As such, the manner in which its reporting occurs is very different than other sources that may fall closer in line with mainstream media sources.

In the second research question, I asked how, if at all, depictions of Syrian refugees differed based on the political leanings of the alternative news media sources. For this, two questions must be answered. First, was there a difference in the depictions of Syrian refugees? In my analysis of the news articles, it became clear that there was a difference in how news contributors framed Syrian refugees, as well as the humanitarian crisis as a whole. The second
question that must be answered, then, focuses on how these depictions differed, especially when taking political ideology into mind. In looking at the themes that emerged from media sources situated on either the U.S. political left and the U.S. political right, there were two overarching views of refugees that surfaced – Refugees as Innocent Victims and Refugees as Dangerous Threats. There were some instances when the Threat frame surfaced in alternative news media from the U.S. political left and the Victim frame surfaced in alternative news media from the U.S. political right. However, these frames tended to exist because of reports from outside figures rather than statements from the news contributors themselves. These themes were perpetuated regardless of the critical incident that the articles referred to. For example, some Breitbart articles written shortly after 3-year-old Aylan Kurdi’s body washed ashore in Turkey focused on Kurdi’s father, claiming that he was dishonest in his motives for attempting to bring his family to Canada. In another instance, several articles from Huffpost written shortly after Donald Trump signed his executive order attempting to ban refugees focused on the children caught in the crisis and questioned how anyone could fear an innocent child. Consequently, the alternative news media from the U.S. political right framed itself as being against the threat of refugees and showing that refugees could never amount to being more than a threat, whereas the alternative news media from the U.S. political left framed itself as sympathetic to the plight of refugees, while refusing to address the question of what refugees could provide in society. As for the images themselves, news media from the U.S. political right tended to use images that emphasized the threat that refugees pose to society. They did this by focusing on images of large crowds, angry individuals, or violent acts. These images tended to have a wide focus with blurring in the background in order to create uncertainty about the exact size of the crowd. In contrast, news media from the U.S. political left focused on innocence and the emotional sides of
the humanitarian crisis by using pictures that focused on individuals or small groups of people, namely families. Many pictures included children so as to provide an innocent face for the crisis. Others focused on the damage done to buildings or the conditions that refugees face in the refugee camps. Overall, these photos played a powerful part in continuing each of the narratives crafted by the news contributors.

In asking the final research question, I wanted to see how framing theory could be expanded from a static concept to one being more fluid. Thus, I asked if and how the framing of refugees changed over time. As I examined each article, I compiled tables noting the number of statements that fit into each theme from each source. For news media situated on the U.S. political left, Aid for Refugees was the theme that was most cited by the three sources in articles surrounding the first critical incident. This makes sense, as the first critical incident focused on the time surrounding Aylan Kurdi’s body washing ashore in Turkey. In this instance, Aylan became a face for the humanitarian crisis, highlighting the sensitivity of the crisis, as well as providing a face for a once nameless and faceless crisis. Refugee Sensitivity was the second-most frequently referenced theme during the first critical incident. Contributors chose to emphasize these themes to highlight the arduous conditions that refugees were facing at the time.

During the second critical incident, Refugee Sensitivity and Aid for Refugees were, again, the top two referenced themes. However, Refugee Sensitivity took precedence, with 100 more references than Aid for Refugees. This, again, makes sense given the context of the situation. In Critical Incident #2, Refugees were viewed by some as a threat to society. As a result, news contributors attempted to show that refugees were as much a victim of ISIS as those who were directly impacted by the Paris Massacre. During the third critical incident, framing shifted. In the time surrounding the signing of Donald Trump’s executive order, contributors for alternative
media sources that self-identify as being on the U.S. political left chose to focus on the humanity of refugees, as well as the threats that refugees themselves face. Many contributors viewed the executive order as a direct attack on refugees, who they viewed as innocent bystanders in the process. As such, the contributors chose to emphasize that innocence in their reporting, showing how refugees were facing yet another threat to their existence.

Framing used by alternative media sources that self-identify as being on the U.S. political right over time was also very telling. During the first critical incident, contributors predominantly focused on a variety of threats. The majority of relevant statements that emerged from this analysis focus on the threat that refugees pose. In the time surrounding Aylan Kurdi’s body washing ashore, many saw refugees as individuals caught in a tragic circumstance. These media sought to counter the narrative by questioning the refugees’ motives, as well as by casting skepticism on refugees by questioning the truth and validity of their claims. Due to the unknown nature that the refugees presented, there was an inherent fear of the unknown, resulting in a desire for the exclusion of refugees. In the time surrounding the Paris Massacre, alternative news media situated on the U.S. political right focused even more on the threat that refugees pose to society, as there were 313 statements included in stories that focused on the refugee threat, as opposed to the second-most prevalent theme, Security, with 77 statements. In the aftermath of the massacre, Parisian officials found what was believed to be a Syrian passport next to the body of one of the assailants. While that passport was eventually proven to be fraudulent, many news contributors used that piece of evidence to prove to news consumers that refugees are not to be trusted or believed. In the time surrounding the signing of Trump’s executive order, these contributors changed their focus. In a time when many were calling the executive order a “Muslim Ban”, alternative news media contributors situated on the U.S. political right began
focusing on the religious bias that had been prevalent throughout Barack Obama’s presidency, especially when it came to the refugees that were allowed into the country. These contributors cited the dearth of Christian refugees that had been allowed in, calling for a provision to allow religious minorities from the Middle East to be allowed to enter, while excluding Muslims. One of the interesting things that emerged through the analysis is the fact that the refugee threat became the second-most prevalent theme, rather than the most prevalent. In fact, in my analysis, I found that one source, Newsmax, did not refer to refugees acting as a threat to society. During the other two critical incidents, the Refugee Threat was the most used frame by Newsmax. This does not mean that the news contributors at Newsmax stopped viewing refugees as a threat. Rather, their focus shifted based on the fact that Trump’s executive order was under attack.

**Major Findings**

In conducting this research, several key things emerged. First, there is a difference in framing based on the political ideology of the source. Namely, threat frames were used most often by alternative news media sources situated on the U.S. political right and victim frames were used most often by alternative news media sources situated on the U.S. political left. The persistence of these frames confirms previous research, showing that news contributors often turn to these frames when discussing immigration and refugees.

In this dissertation, I wanted to use Critical Race Theory to examine refugee narratives included in news stories. However, I was unable to do so directly, as there were so few refugee narratives included. That being said, this does fall in line with CRT in that those in the hegemonic majority determine how those in the minority are depicted. As such, the hegemonic majority continues to silence the minority. In this research, I analyzed 473 news articles from alternative news media sources. Of those, nine (1.9%) included any narrative from a refugee’s
perspective. This finding is fascinating due to its problematic nature. News contributors write about events that are occurring in society so as to inform audiences about things that are happening around the world that they may not know about. That being said, it is difficult for reporters to speak with refugees, as they are barred from entering refugee camps due to the conditions of the camps. It would not make sense for news media from the U.S. political right to include first-hand experiences from refugees, as that would destroy the narrative that the media contributors have constructed. However, the fact that so few news contributors from the U.S. political left focused on the refugee narrative can potentially be seen as a silencing mechanism, even if it was done inadvertently. By not including this narrative, it appears as if news contributors from the U.S. political left understand the crisis more than those who are actually intimately involved with it.

Additionally, statements included in the analyzed articles reaffirm the five tenets of CRT developed by Lawrence III, Matsuda, Delgado, and Crenshaw (1993). However, the articles analyzed strongly reaffirmed the first two tenets. The first tenet, according to the authors, declares that racism is a prevalent and pervasive phenomenon in U.S. society and that the main focus of CRT is how the hegemonic norms and ideals in the U.S. help to contribute to the racism and discrimination that persists in society. This belief was evidenced in many of the statements that emerged. From former GOP presidential candidate Mike Huckabee urging the U.S. to close its borders to Syrian refugees by saying that “It’s time to wake up and smell the falafel” (Mellen, 2015, para. 2), to contributors repeatedly conflating refugees with terrorists, there were many instances in which racist thought was present in arguments against refugees. The second tenet of CRT emphasizes the dominance of whiteness as the hegemonic norm in U.S. society (Lawrence III. Matsuda, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). This thought was present in many of the articles
analyzed, as the majority of the articles were written by individuals who are white. While the
narrative of white individuals should not necessarily be discounted, it should not replace the
narratives of individuals of different racial and ethnic backgrounds who have experienced what
is being reported.

Some additional findings that emerged related specifically to Said’s (1978) *Orientalism*. One such finding focused on depictions of refugee humanity. When I analyzed the alternative
news media articles situated on the U.S. political right, I found that the themes that emerged
communicated the thought that refugees are an unknown Other, thus posing a threat to society.
This falls in line with what Said (1978) describes in his work *Orientalism* in that, through the
lens of these contributors, refugees are first an Other, then a refugee, and finally an Other. In the
eyes of news contributors from the U.S. political right, no matter what a refugee may do, the
refugee will never be able to escape the label of being an Other. Rather, they are doubly
oppressed by their “Otherness”. However, while the alternative news media situated on the U.S.
political left did frame refugees in a different light, the framing that was used could still result in
a loss of agency. In many instances, news contributors from the U.S. political left painted
refugees as a helpless victim in need of saving. This framing may appear to be inherently
different from that of the alternative news media situated on the U.S. political right. However, it
can have just as damaging an impact, as it limits the refugee’s potential. By only focusing on the
refugee as a victim and not addressing what refugees can bring to a society, news media
contributors situated on the U.S. political left remove the agency and humanity from the
refugees. This thought is very similar to that in Freire’s (1968) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, as
this framing results in the alternative news media situated on the U.S. political left, which
attempts to act as a type of savior in contrast with the news media situated on the U.S. political
right, turning from a savior into a new oppressor. This shows that neither is blameless. Rather, each has played a role in silencing and dehumanizing refugees. However, the methods used to do so differ, as the news media from the U.S. political right is more overt in its view of refugees, while news media from the U.S. political left is more covert in its removal of refugee agency.

In addition, the findings of this dissertation reaffirm Said’s thoughts on the “Us versus Them” dichotomy that is perpetuated in society. As mentioned in Chapter II, one of the tenets of Orientalism states that “the Orient is at bottom something either to be feared . . . or to be controlled” (p. 301). By viewing refugees as either helpless and needing to be saved or as a threat to be vanquished, alternative media self-identified as being on either the U.S. political left or the U.S. political right create an “Other” to be feared or to be controlled. By doing so, the media sources create a greater divide between citizens of the United States and those who are seeking refuge in the midst of a widespread humanitarian crisis.

Finally, this research works to advance Oliver Boyd-Barrett’s definition of alternative media. According to Boyd-Barrett’s (2007) definition,

Alternative media are more likely than mainstream to oppose dominant ideologies, agendas, values; represent a wide diversity of sources and perspective; be considered ‘extreme’, by the mainstream; promote activism and interactive dialogue between producers and receivers; exhibit innovative, hybrid, and unconventional formulas; demonstrate partisanship and polemic; feature ‘non-professional’ and ‘out-of-house’ contributions; and observe ‘public sphere’ criteria. (Boyd-Barrett, 2007, pp. 206-207, emphasis in original).

When Boyd-Barrett (2007) introduced his definition of alternative media, he focused more on media forms emerging from the U.S. political left. However, this dissertation research
demonstrates that the definition of alternative media should consider more than platforms on the U.S. political left, as there are sources such as Breitbart, Newsmax, Info Wars, and others that espouse doctrines on the extreme political right while operating on the right-most fringe of the U.S. political spectrum. From this dissertation, I would define alternative media as ‘extreme’ sources that oppose dominant agendas while representing a range of perspectives and espousing a variety of partisan thoughts that are supported and advanced within their respective political spheres.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

While this research had some major findings, it also had its share of limitations. For one, when gathering articles to begin my analysis, I hoped to gather at least 35 articles per source for each critical incident, so as to try to reach theoretical saturation. However, when conducting the search, that goal was unreachable, as there were some sources that published less than 35 articles focusing on the humanitarian crisis during the four-week period that I was focusing on. This shows that, while the humanitarian crisis has grown in importance over time, there were still moments when the crisis was not viewed as particularly relevant in the United States. Another limitation that emerged was the aforementioned issue that there were so few refugee narratives included in the analyzed articles. As stated previously, this dissertation research focused on 473 articles from various alternative media sources. Of those articles, 1.9% of them contained any statements from refugees. As such, it was not possible to analyze their statements to understand the impact that the crisis was having on refugees. Many of these articles focused on conditions of the crisis; however, few articles truly examined those who are most impacted by the humanitarian crisis. For future research, researchers should focus on the refugee perspective and interview refugees about their experiences and how the humanitarian crisis has
impacted them. It is one thing to look at a news contributor’s perceptions of refugees and the humanitarian crisis. It is another to consider the perceptions of those who are directly impacted by the crisis.

In conducting the research for this dissertation, it became apparent just how necessary this research is. This dissertation acts as a starting point for repositioning framing theory. In examining the frames used by news contributors, it became evident that framing is much more than a static concept showing how news contributors frame a story at a singular point in time. Rather, viewing framing as a fluid concept allows individuals to understand the narrative surrounding a story or topic. This dissertation examines articles from three critical incidents over the span of two years. Future researchers who wish to develop the idea of framing as a fluid concept should examine several critical incidents within a one-year time span. Additionally, future research should consider examining similar types of critical incidents, as the incident itself and the narrative surrounding it can play a great role in how framing occurs. Furthermore, future research should examine how international media sources depict world events such as the Syrian humanitarian crisis in order to understand how the depictions in international media differ from depictions in U.S.-based media. Finally, I would encourage future researchers to collaborate with scholars from other countries, such as Germany, in order to better understand the impact of the humanitarian crisis on different countries, as well as to analyze the distance between citizens and those persons who are seeking asylum. Research such as this is important as it acts as a means of bringing a voice to a crisis of which many may not be aware, or that they may be aware of but only in sensationalized or stereotypical terms, rather than in a well-informed, nuanced, contextualized manner. By giving voice to those who have been silenced, researchers can begin to take power away from the majority and give it to those who have been abused by that power.
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