

The Framing of Refugees and Refugee Status Through U.S. Presidential Discourse

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Abstract

The topic of refugees and asylum seekers in the United States has come to the forefront as the Syrian conflict continues and Central Americans journey to the country's southern border. This study analyzed the framing of refugee status and refugees by U.S. presidents since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 until September 11, 2018. Using framing theory, a qualitative content analysis evaluated the U.S. presidential discourse of George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump on refugee status and refugees in a total of 72 speeches collected from their respective administrations' official websites. This research shows that Bush's and Obama's references to refugee status and refugees were very similar, emphasizing a national responsibility to assist, while Trump focused on the alleged conflict they could bring to the United States. The topic of how political leaders frame the issue of refugee status and of refugees in the U.S. is not only relevant, but urgent, as the lives and livelihoods of generations of people are impacted by the president's decisions.

I. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to understand, through a framing analysis what the last three U.S. presidents have communicated through their official discourse about refugees and refugee status in the United States. The study also analyzes if those communications through presidential discourse changed over time, both within each of these presidents' respective terms and from president to president. The timeframe for the study starts on September 11, 2001, the day of the terrorist attacks that took the United States by surprise and changed the country's approach to immigration, and it finishes on September 11, 2018, to include 17 years of presidential discourse.

Refugees, in simple terms, are defined by the United Nations Refugee Agency (the UNHCR) and the 1951 Refugee Convention as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UNHCR Emergency Handbook, 2018). As part of the United Nations, the United States has historically agreed to accept refugees in times of crisis (Zong and Batalova, 2015). Through presidential transitions, the number of refugees accepted per year to the United States and the benefits available to them each time have varied (Davis, 2017). This is especially noticeable after the recent transition

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of power from Barack Obama to Donald Trump. An average cap of 70,000 refugees during the Bush and Obama administrations has been lowered to 30,000 in fiscal year 2019 (U.S. Department of State).

How political leaders talk about refugee status and refugees is not only relevant, but urgent, as the lives and livelihoods of generations of refugees in the United States are impacted, in real life, by leaders' perception of the issue.

II. Literature Review

This section describes framing theory, addresses important legal definitions concerning immigration and refugee status, and reviews previous studies that have analyzed presidential speeches.

Framing theory posits that communicators “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” (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

Regarding refugees and refugee status, this study analyzes the generic frames and the issue-specific frames used by three different U.S. presidents. A generic frame is one that can be applied to any issue or situation to see if it is present or not in the content communicated, while an issue-specific frame is a frame that is specific to a certain issue or situation. The five generic frames, as described by DeVreese (2005), are Conflict, Human Interest, Responsibility, Morality and Economic Consequence.

Regarding legal aspects of refugees, it is important to note that the majority of U.S. legislation before 1980 was simply a reaction to migration flows generated by global events such as WWI or the U.S. involvement in Cuba (USCIS, 2018). Before 1980, the United States reacted to events and managed immigration flows via quotas (Migration Policy Institute, 2013), as opposed to creating preemptive structures and systems that supported resettlement to the United States no matter the specific circumstances.

The Refugee Act of 1980 created several institutions such as the Office of Refugee and Parole within the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). In the context of accommodating for an influx of migrants from the Vietnam War, the Refugee Act of 1980 adopted the United Nations' definition of refugee, created the first statute for asylum, and increased the number of refugees admitted annually (USCIS, 2018).

The USA Patriot Act, created in response to the 9/11 attacks, redefined terror and the legal grounds to deny the entry of individuals to the United States if suspected of being associated with terrorism. The attacks also influenced the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security and the breaking down of the INS into the following three organizations: the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (USCIS, 2018), which in turn increased a national focus on deportations and possible terror threats.

The refugee resettlement process today follows these general steps: The fiscal cap in the number of refugees admitted to the United States in any given fiscal year is set by the U.S. president. Then, as decided by the United Nations and the USCIS, refugees selected to resettle in the United States, through an intensely rigorous vetting processes (Park et al., 2017), are transported by the International Organization for Migration to the U.S. territory. There, NGOs that partner with the U.S. government then pick up the refugees from local airports and place them in apartments, thus beginning the official 90-day timeline of resettlement (Cepla, 2018). Apart from setting the yearly fiscal cap and distributing a sum of a little over \$900 per refugee (Edwards, 2012), the entire process of resettlement is left to the assigned agency (Cepla, 2018).

Numerous scholars have examined the role of the U.S. president in information distribution: how it is framed, when it is given out and under what contexts is the information given. Paletz and Entman (1980) connect the figure of the president to the concept of nationhood, arguing that the figure of the president is representative, and that the president can use his actions and voice to accomplish his own goals. People across the globe are focused on the president and what is spoken. A president can plan conferences or speeches intentionally to promote a narrative that then gets picked up as a media priority (Paletz, Entman, 1980).

Entman (2003) notes that information often flows down from the person with the most political power, often the president. As is the case with natural waterfalls, information is disseminated wider as the story falls from its original, higher source. However, while more information can be added down the line, the

creation and promotion of ideas is most strongly concentrated with those on top. Entman describes the use of tools by the Bush administration, following 9/11, to change strategies when, originally, the media pushed back on some of Bush's framing of the issue (Entman, 2003). Related research has examined George W. Bush's response to the 9/11 attacks, the power his speeches had across the nation and the globe, and, most importantly, it highlights the significance of September 11, 2001 as a turning point for public opinion about immigration (Scheufele, Nisbet, & Ostman, 2005).

Drawing from the literature presented in this section, the present study helps fill a gap in the literature by focusing, in particular, on presidential speeches about refugee status and refugees, using framing theory and framing analysis as its theoretical base. It does so by examining the following research questions:

RQ1: How has the topic of refugees and the issue of refugees coming to the United States been framed in the administrations of George W. Bush, Barack Obama and Donald Trump?

RQ2: How has the U.S. presidential discourse about refugee status and refugees been impacted by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001?

RQ3: Was the presidential discourse in alignment with the existing legislation about refugees at those times?

III. Methods

For this study, generic and issue-specific frames related to refugees and refugee status were analyzed in the 72 presidential speeches included in this research. This study also analyzed the context of the presidential discourse for each speech, meaning where and when each speech was given, the keywords used, and the tone of the discourse. Examples of occasions that were coded include press briefings, State of the Union Addresses, executive orders, official conversations between leaders, and official remarks.

The speeches identified from the official archived websites of the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations and from the present official website for President Trump. They were chosen for their mention of one or more of the following keywords: refugee, refugee status, asylum, asylee, immigration reform, terrorism, and/or travel ban. In some cases, if the full transcript was not on the administration site, it was located elsewhere. Campaign speeches were not taken into consideration. Each speech was presented between September 11, 2001 and September 11, 2018. A coding book and coding sheets were developed following the example of other framing studies (Besley, 2005; Fiss et al., 2005; Entman, 2003).

The discourse was coded to document what generic frames were salient, such as *conflict*, *human interest*, *responsibility*, *morality*, and *economic consequence* (DeVreese, 2005), and further, what issue-specific frames were being used in any given speech, such as *terrorism*, *safety/well-being*, *taking of resources/expenses*, *jobs/workers*, *freedom and repatriation*, *dehumanization*, *criminalization*, and finally, *assimilation*, with the purpose of comparing and contrasting the speeches over the years within any given term and from president to president. The coding book included categories such as the location where the speech was given, the purpose/occasion, total speech length (by paragraphs), section of speech that was relevant to the topic (by paragraphs), generic frames present, issue-specific frames present, relevant exemplary quotes, keywords used, and speech tone. Each speech was read carefully, several times, and coded for content indicating a framing of the subject of refugee status and, in the greater context, of immigration reform.

To ensure reliable results in the coding, before coding all the 72 speeches, a subsample of 20 percent of the speeches (15 speeches in total) were selected and coded both by the author of the study and a secondary coder, which in this case was a student hired and trained by the author. The results of both coders were compared, and the level of intercoder reliability (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken 2002) was measured. The first round of intercoder reliability measurement concluded with an overall level of 91.5 percent agreement, and most categories reached acceptable intercoder reliability levels, but not all. For that reason, further refinements in the codebook and the codesheet were made before proceeding to code again the subsample of 20 percent of the speeches and then, later on, the rest of the presidential discourse collected. At that point, the author of this study coded the other 57 speeches on her own.

IV. Findings

This section is outlined first by president, in chronological order, from President George W. Bush to President Trump, then by the top two or three generic frames found per president. When a generic frame is present across terms in the same contexts within the same presidency, the secondary section is not included.

President George W. Bush

U.S. President George W. Bush was inaugurated on January 20, 2001, just eight months before the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States by 19 militant members of al-Qaeda, an extremist group that associated itself with Islam (Bergen, 2003). From the three presidents included in this study, Bush was the one who spoke the least on the subject of refugees and resettlement to the United States during his time in office. The tone of his discourse when referring to immigrants, and refugees in particular, was clearly positive though he had recently faced a devastating attack on U.S. soil during his first term in office. He remained consistent in his references to refugee resettlement, describing this process as a necessary and positive aspect of the U.S. international assistance, distinguishing refugees from violence or threats to national safety (Bush 2001, November 10; Bush 2003, January 28; Bush 2003, February 26).

Responsibility. This generic frame refers to a problem that has a clear party (individual or group) causing or solving the problem in discussion (DeVreese, 2005). Bush spoke of the strength that the United States holds in the international order and thus the great responsibility the United States has to share the country's *freedom* and strength with other countries and peoples experiencing terror or repressive regimes. For example, he said in the State of the Union address on January 28, 2003:

America is a strong nation, and honorable in the use of our strength. We exercise power without conquest, and we sacrifice for the liberty of strangers. Americans are a free people, who know that freedom is the right of every person and the future of every nation. The liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world, it is God's gift to humanity. We Americans have faith in ourselves, but not in ourselves alone (Bush 2003, January 28).

This type of message was emphasized on several occasions. Bush used a similar word choice and themes to discuss the United States responsibility as a nation, but also the personal responsibility that U.S. citizens have to ensure the safety and well-being of others who rely on the support of the United States. He said, "A threat to all must be answered by all ... The security of our nation and the hope of millions depend on us, and Americans do not turn away from duties because they are here. We have met great tests in other times, and we will meet the tests of our time" (Bush 2003, February 26). Bush spoke about the responsibility to have laws that reflect remembrance, laws that are just and kind across the globe. He emphasized the ability to maintain laws that are accepting of immigrants and that allow to keep the nation and its citizens safe. He did not conflate the idea of immigrants with the idea of terror, or associated the term immigrant with the term "threat," but he instead separated the two in the call to action (Bush 2004, January 7).

Human interest. *Human Interest*, which is, as defined by DeVreese (2005), the emphasis of the human story or experience tied to the topic being discussed. In several of his speeches, Bush would include a detailed and emotionally riddled description of the trauma and human challenges faced by those experiencing and being displaced by violence abroad. Bush maintained the thread of humanity, framing the issue of assistance as something that should be done and even prioritized when responding to threats.

It is presumptuous and insulting to suggest that a whole region of the world-- or the one fifth of humanity that is Muslim-- is somehow untouched by the most basic aspirations of life ... In our desire to care for our children and give them a better life, we are the same. For these fundamental reasons, freedom and democracy will always and everywhere have greater appeal than the slogans of hatred and the tactics of terror (Bush 2003, February 26).

President Bush also focused on the goal of giving freedom (*freedom* issue-specific frame) to those who are experiencing terror, along with the importance of viewing such individuals as human beings with shared goals and hopes for safety and wellbeing (*safety/well-being* issue-specific frame).

Economic consequence. During his second term in office, Bush used the generic frame of *economic consequence*. Bush denounced the practice of economic isolation, or protectionism, as disastrous to any nation and to the world (Bush 2006, January 31). Bush claimed that assisting refugees and being a leader in immigration reform is a way to ensure the safety and well-being not just of those displaced by conflict, but also of the sovereignty and economy of the United States. During his 2006 State of the Union address, Bush stated:

The road of isolationism and protectionism may seem broad and inviting- yet it ends in danger and decline. The only way to protect our people, the only way to secure the peace, the only way to control our destiny is by our leadership-- so the United States will continue to lead (Bush 2006, January 31).

Bush emphasized that isolation would impede the country's leadership and success globally. Beyond saying that immigration reform would not hurt the United States, Bush outlined how the economy of the United States relies on immigration and immigrants, and how immigration reform would be positive for the country. He said, "We hear claims that immigrants are somehow bad for the economy-- even though this economy could not function without them. All these are forms of economic retreat, and they lead in the same direction- toward a stagnant and second-rate economy" (Bush 2006, January 31). President Bush associated immigrants with growth and evolution, and he also associated the refusal to accept immigrants with decline and stagnation.

President Barack H. Obama

The speeches during President Obama's first term rarely mentioned refugees or immigration reform, instead, they were focused on economic reform considering the 2008 economic recession and a housing crisis (Havemann, 2009). The subjects of immigration reform and refuge-seeking individuals were much more salient in his second term in office, yet, throughout both terms, President Obama spoke positively in regards to the U.S. role in supporting refugees globally (Obama 2009, December 10; Obama 2014, November 20).

Responsibility. The most salient generic frame from President Obama's administration was that of *responsibility*. Referencing Emma Lazarus' poem at the Statue of Liberty, Obama said, "Let us remember these words. For it falls on each generation to ensure that that lamp— that beacon — continues to shine as a source of hope around the world, and a source of our prosperity here at home" (Obama 2010, July 1). Obama framed the issue of refugee assistance as a generational *responsibility* for the United States as a global force of hope.

Human Interest. President Obama also highlighted human progress as an incentive to actively assist refugees and asylum seekers displaced by war and conflict (Obama 2009, December 10). He shared some iterations of the United States' migrant-led history as a way to frame the issue positively. He stated that, at its foundation, America is simple. It can be defined by "E pluribus unum," which Obama translated as "out of many, one." With this in mind, he used inclusive pronouns such as "we" and "ourselves" to connect the audience to the shared narrative, "Our nation is a nation of immigrants, a nation of shared ideals" (Obama 2011, May 10). He explained, as well, why immigrants historically were and still are, presently, interested in resettling within the United States.

That's why millions of people, ancestors to most of us, braved hardship and great risk to come here -- so they could be free to work and worship and start a business and live their lives in peace and prosperity. The Asian immigrants who made their way to California's Angel Island. The German and Scandinavians who settled across the Midwest. The waves of Irish, and Italian, and Polish, and Russian, and Jewish immigrants who leaned against the railing to catch their first glimpse of the Statue of Liberty. This flow of immigrants has helped make this country stronger and more prosperous (Obama 2011, May 10).

Morality. *Morality* is a frame that highlights a description or interpretation of an event through religious principles (DeVreese 2005). The use of this frame was salient throughout his second term. Obama (2013, November 25) presents the frame of *morality* through the use of key words such as “ideals,” “creed,” and “enduring principles.” He outlined, “What makes us American is our shared belief in certain enduring principles, our allegiance to a set of ideals, to a creed, to the enduring promise of this country” (Obama 2013, November 25). Obama identified a set of principles that are, in his words, fundamental to the American people (as mentioned in Obama 2013, November 25; and Obama 2014, July 16). Obama further stated that his beliefs do not poorly impact his pride or his love for America (Obama 2016, September 20). Connecting his beliefs to the responsibility of assisting those in need to find the *safety/well-being* they can no longer find in their home nations encapsulates the salient themes Obama used.

President Donald J. Trump

President Trump has almost exclusively spoken on immigration reform and the U.S. role for refugee assistance using a negative tone, with the exception of one speech where he highlights the issue of refugee assistance positively (Trump 2017, May 21). Trump was also highly repetitive in each speech, an example being in a meeting for the signing of the Space Policy Directive, on June 18, 2018, “Immigration is the fault, and all of the problems that we’re having ... I say it’s, very strongly, the Democrats’ fault. They’re obstructing. They’re really obstructionists. And they are obstructing” (Trump 2018, June 18).

Another notable difference in the Trump administration is that the speeches available on the official presidential website are archived as prepared, or as written originally, whereas the speeches for Obama and Bush were more consistently archived in their websites as delivered, including any interruptions by audience members, the president’s response, or tangential comments from the prepared-in-advance remarks (see, for instance, Trump 2017, May 21; Trump 2017, June 26). This is significant because, as is the case for the occasions of mass communication included in this study, the majority of the discourse had an audience present, whether members of the cabinet, other world leaders, or a group of citizens, situations in which questions are expected and outbursts can influence the direction of the speech.

Conflict. The frame of *conflict* is defined by DeVreese (2005) as the indication of a conflict between parties, whether individuals, groups, institutions or countries (DeVreese, 2005). Since his first days in office, Trump’s narrative has been consistently focused on tightening or eliminating an alleged lack of thorough, comprehensive practices within the refugee assistance program due to “risk” and “conflict” (Trump 2017, January 27; Trump 2017, October 8). In a quote taken from Executive Order 13679, Trump explicitly connected refugees, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and the risk of conflict coming across the U.S. national borders (Trump 2017, January 27). He went on to state that due to “deteriorating conditions” in specific countries, the United States has a responsibility to protect itself from *conflict* and *terrorism* by no longer accepting individuals seeking refugee status and asylum from specific countries, because it is too risky.

Trump often framed the issue of national security in a specific, conscious way, by repetitively connecting refugee status seekers with not only the conflict of their home countries, but also with the conflict that could be to the United States.

The United States will not be a migrant camp, and it will not be a refugee holding facility. It won’t be. If you look at what’s happening in Europe, if you look at what’s happening in other places, we can’t allow that to happen to the United States — not on my watch (Trump 2018, June 18).

Responsibility. In his case, Trump presented the concept of *responsibility* as a sense of the safety and security of the United States within its borders (Trump 2017, February 10; Trump 2017, September 19). Trump often spoke of the danger that comes with accepting immigrants from “high-danger zones,” and he said that the foremost obligation of his administration is preserving the “greatness” of the United States. In an address to Congress in 2017, Trump presented his stance as a universal and widely shared perspective in an effort to solidify his travel bans and to raise support for his zero-tolerance immigration stance. He claimed,

But then the quiet voices became a loud chorus as thousands of citizens now spoke out together, from cities small and large, all across our country. Finally, the chorus became an earthquake, and the people turned out by the tens of millions, and they were all united by one very simple, but crucial demand: that America must put its own citizens first. Because only then can we truly make America great again (Trump 2017, February 28).

To contextualize this statement, Trump made references to the “lawless chaos” of the current U.S. immigration structures that allow “radical Islamic terrorism” and the “bad ones” to enter into the country and harm “American victims” (Trump 2017, February 28). By using expressions such as “we have to” and words such as “should” recurrently, President Trump tried to connect his desire to create stricter immigration laws with a notion of shared *responsibility* among U.S. citizens.

Economic consequence. In many ways, Trump has focused on the “costs” associated with refugee resettlement processes during his speeches, whether associated with danger or with financial strain (Trump 2017, February 28; Trump 2017, September 19). To establish this frame, he repeated terms early in his presidency such as “lower-skilled” and “countless dollars.” One particular example from about a month into his term in office was his address to Congress on February 28, 2017. He said,

Switching away from this current system of lower-skilled immigration, and instead adopting a merit-based system, we will have so many more benefits. It will save countless dollars, raise workers’ wages, and help struggling families—including immigrant families-- enter the middle class. And they will do it quickly, and they will be very, very happy, indeed (Trump 2017, February 28).

Here the president not only connected the current immigration system to low-skilled workers and expensive resettlements, while ignoring the economic contributions of immigrants to the U.S. economy, but he also created a hierarchy of immigrants who are welcome and those who are not.

In a 2018 speech to border patrol agents in Sterling, Virginia, he referenced, again, the money the U.S. has spent on aid. He said, “So we give them billions and billions of dollars and they don’t do what they’re supposed to be doing. And they know that. But we’re going to take a very harsh action” (Trump 2018, February 2). Through his consistently negative tone and the “contextualization” of the generic frame of *economic consequence* (in other words, by talking about the economic consequences in different ways based on the context and the audience of the speech), Trump links the generic frame of *economic consequence* to the issue-specific frames of *safety/well-being*, *terrorism*, and the *criminalization* of immigrants to the U.S.

Commonalities and disparities among presidents

This section looks at recurring vernacular phrases and similarities or disparities in how each president framed what was salient through their definition of the problem, the chosen context each offered and in what tone, and the proposed calls to action.

Nation of immigrants, nation of laws. George W. Bush and Barack Obama often used the same and classic phrase, “Ours is a nation of immigrants. We’re also a nation of law” (Bush 2006, October 26; Obama 2009, June 25; Obama 2010, July 1) to reference the United States. Not only were they referring to the origin of the United States, but they were also using this statement as both a charge for more comprehensive immigration laws and a call for empathy for the situation of immigrants traveling to the United States. “We define ourselves as a nation of immigrants -- a nation that welcomes those willing to embrace America’s ideals and America’s precepts” (Obama 2011, May 10). Both Obama and Bush used this idea as a call to action, normalizing the influxes of immigrants as the world eases in and out of war, a goal in stark contrast to that of Trump. In a speech to salute “Heroes of Immigration and Customs Enforcement” held on August 20, 2018, Trump said, “Everyone here today understands a vital truth: that America is a land of opportunity because we are a nation of laws. For America to be a strong nation, we must have strong borders” (Trump 2018, August 20).

God-given and inalienable rights. A notable change in vernacular from President Bush’s to President Obama’s administration can be seen in the way each contextualized human rights. When discussing the United States’ *responsibility* in offering assistance to refugees based on their human rights,

Bush always mentions their “God-given rights” (Bush 2003, January 28; Bush 2006, January 31; Bush 2004, January 7; Bush 2007, May 4). While *morality* was not one of Bush’s most salient frames, this reference to God-ordained rights framed the issue of refugee assistance in light of a higher power’s design. Obama, on the other hand, made the transition throughout his two terms in office from using the phrase “God-given rights” to “inalienable rights” (Obama 2011, May 10; Obama 2014, November 14; Obama 2016, November 16), separating rights from a prescription to a specific higher power.

Refugees: Consequences of terrorism or cause? In the beginning of 2017, there was a notable shift in the framing of refugee resettlement to the United States as the presidential administration of Barack Obama turned over to Donald Trump. While Presidents Bush and Obama both emphasized making a distinction between refugees and the causes of terror, President Trump often conflated the two, even saying that refugees create conflict and terror through destabilizing countries (Trump 2017, January 27; Trump 2017, September 19). Where Bush and Obama defined refugees as consequences or victims of terrorism and conflict, Trump stated that refugees can cause and perpetuate conflict and terror in unsuspecting countries.

Deteriorating conditions in certain countries due to war, strife, disaster, and civil unrest increase the likelihood that terrorists will use any means possible to enter the United States. The United States must be vigilant during the visa-issuance process to ensure that those approved for admission do not intend to harm Americans and that they have no ties to terrorism (Trump 2017, January 27).

While Trump often compared refugees and asylum seekers to criminals, gang members, and rapists (Trump 2017, February 28; Trump 2017, September 5; Trump 2018, August 20), Presidents Bush and Obama would highlight their humanity and rights. While Trump emphasized tougher vetting of and even the suspension of refugee resettlement from specific countries, mentioning “the wrong people” and “infiltrating the U.S through immigration” (Trump 2017, February 7; Trump 2017, February 28), Bush set a different tone: “to inflame ethnic hatred is to advance the cause of terror. The war against terror must not serve as an excuse to persecute ethnic and religious minorities in any country” (Bush 2001, November 10). It is interesting to note that both a Republican and a Democratic president stood firmly against the association of refugees with causes of terror and pushed against fear-mongering. Trump has done the opposite since his first days in office and throughout the following two years.

V. Conclusion

Presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama and Donald Trump all gave relevance to issues related to refugee status and assistance to refugees in the United States, but each framed these issues in distinct ways, especially in the case of Donald Trump.

Notably, while Bush and Obama are affiliated to different political parties, which today tend to have highly contrasting views regarding immigration topics, the two presidents’ discourse regarding refugees was not that different. The framing analysis conducted for this study revealed that Bush’s and Obama’s discourse were similar in the frames they privileged and the topics they prioritized. The discourse of Bush, compared to that of Trump, fell on the complete opposite side of the spectrum, although both presidents belong to the Republican Party.

It is interesting that the generic frame of *responsibility* was one of the two most-used frames across all terms and across all presidencies, but meant different things from one president to the next. While both Bush and Obama used this frame to refer to the U.S. national *responsibility* to respond to refugee crises, to receive refugees on national soil, and to assist them in their resettlement process, Trump tied the *responsibility* frame to the issue-specific frames of *criminalization* and of *safety/well-being*, to create a narrative where the U.S. national *responsibility* is not to help refugees, or to solve international crises, or to open its doors to foreigners, but to prioritize self-preservation, to reject alleged criminals, and to guarantee the safety of U.S. citizens.

For Bush and Obama, the second most salient generic frame was that of *human interest*, where the focus was the refugees’ personal stories of struggle and their need to receive justice. Trump’s most salient

frame, on the other hand, was the generic frame of *conflict*, where he connected the issue of immigration to the notion of fear – fear of conflict being generated by people coming through the U.S. borders and fear of the spread of terrorism as a result of resettlement processes of refugees.

Bush was intentional, following 9/11, to not blame any member of the Islamic faith for those acts of terror, and to explicitly support others abroad who were victims of terrorism. In the same breath, however, he lowered the fiscal cap of refugees by 10,000 the following year (in 2002), to a limit of 70,000 refugees, maximum, which was maintained for the following five years. Obama, during his administration, spoke very highly of assistance, and in his last year in office he raised the fiscal cap significantly, to 110,000 refugees, which is the highest cap set within this study's timeframe and within recent U.S. history. This increase, however, never came to completion.

When power transitioned to Trump just a few months later, he used Executive Orders to undermine Obama's targets. In 2017, the number of refugees actually resettled to the United States was half of the set cap for that year. The following years, Trump remained consistent, lowering the cap number time and again, until reaching a cap of 30,000 in 2019.

In summary, the caps and numbers of refugees actually resettled to the United States per fiscal year between 2003 and 2018 seem to indicate that, regarding refugees, Bush kept his discourse positive, but the numbers of refugees resettled went down in 2002 and 2003 (not surprising after what happened on 9/11) or remained somewhat steady after 2004. President Obama also kept his discourse positive but the refugee cap numbers remained steady (in his first term) or slightly lower (in his second term), while the numbers of actual refugees resettled to the U.S. fluctuated during his first term in office and increased during his second term. In his second term, the Obama Administration received almost the maximum number of refugees allowed by the cap, between 2014 and 2016).

Trump, in stark contrast, strongly reduced the caps and even more the number of refugees actually brought to the country, taking them to historical lows. His negative discourse and his consequential actions to drastically lower the number of refugees arriving to the United States were aligned. These findings are significant because, as previous scholarship indicates, presidents' words matter. Refugee resettlement numbers, as well as the resources allocated to support them, are parameters that are dependent on the decisions of the standing president in consultation with Congress.

In summary, the point of view of the president of the United States can have an impact on the point of view of the nation's citizens on a given issue. Moreover, the president's framing of the issue through his discourse has real-life implications. As an iconic figure and a global leader, the president of the United States has influence, and words matter: They change the lives, for better or worse, of thousands of human beings who request refugee status or asylum to the United States.

With the popularization of social media platforms and with the ways in which the dissemination of information is changing, one limitation of this study is related to the availability of speeches collected for the analysis, in particular for the case of Trump's communications. The primary way in which Donald Trump communicates his own thoughts and narratives to the public is through Twitter, and this creates both a limitation and an opportunity. Particularly in Trump's case, it would be important to analyze not only speeches but also social media content. An additional limitation is that not all presidential speech transcripts were available.

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First, I must thank my God, who was a refugee fleeing the wrath of a king. This truth and example lays the foundation for the work that I do and inspires me to stay steady in seeking truth, evaluating what I believe, and advocating for those most vulnerable. Next, I must thank my family new and old. And, finally, Associate Professor Vanessa Bravo, let me begin by saying how grateful and appreciative I am for your time and dedication to my academic and personal pursuits. Thank you.

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