

“The Masked Other”: A Comparative Study on the Representation of Immigrants in Fox News During the Obama and Trump Administration.

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July, 2020

“De perto, ninguém é normal”
Caetano Veloso

Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Carla Sofia Mouro, who has patiently and kindly guided me through this thesis, and provided a strong motivational pillar to lean on. Even though from far away, and during a global pandemic, her support always felt very close.

I would like to thank my friends, Rachida, Cath, and Linh, whom embody the best qualities a human being may possess. They have gifted me with boundless amounts of patience and love. Forever shall I remain indebted to them. To my sister, Emillie for sharing her expertise.

To my fellow classmates, Genta and Tainara, whom have helped me share and sustain warm memories during this Master, and proven to be incredible humans and friends.

Lastly, but most importantly, I thank my mother, who has given me strength and moral support during my Master and the writing of this thesis. I couldn't have done this without her.

Abstract

Immigration in the United States has been a prominent issue that has sparked heated debates. News media outlets have long debated over the “illegal” or “undocumented” label, and in doing so have constructed meanings, political knowledge, purpose, and power in stories of immigrants. Major Republican news outlet Fox News has significantly participated in the construction of the narrative around immigrants, often engaging a “we” versus “them” ideology. This study specifically aims to understand how immigrants are represented in Fox News during two contrasting presidential administrations, Obama and Trump, from 2010 to mid-2020. A thematic analysis was performed on a selection of 99 articles, aiming to uncover the main representations of immigrants across this period. The analysis of immigrants in the conservative media may shed light on absences: what could be covered but what is, in fact, not, as well as what is made visible, how and what purpose may it serve. This study aims to make that combination and contribute to understanding the role of political regulation in the news media discourse. Results of this study indicate that Fox News has depicted immigrants through strategic dehumanizing mechanisms, whilst preserving the identity of Americans. Furthermore, the study concludes that political structures and agents influence the way Fox News builds its narrative around immigrants, such as the re-election of Obama, and the (possible) one of Trump.

Keywords: Social Representation Theory, Social Psychology, Media, Immigrants, Fox News

PsychINFO classification categories and codes:

2900 Social Processes & Social Issues

3000 Social Psychology

3020 Group & Interpersonal Processes

2960 Political Processes & Political Issues

2750 Mass Media Communications

Resumo

A imigração nos Estados Unidos tem sido um assunto importante que tem suscitado acesos debates. Os meios de comunicação social têm desde há muito tempo debatido sobre o uso do rótulo “ilegal” ou “não documentado”, contribuindo assim para a construção de significados e conhecimento político, objectivos, e poder nas histórias de imigrantes. A principal agência de notícias conservadora Fox News participou de modo significativo na construção da narrativa em torno dos imigrantes, frequentemente recorrendo a uma ideologia de “nós” contra “eles”. Este estudo visa especificamente entender como os imigrantes são representados pela Fox News, durante duas administrações presidenciais contrastantes, a de Obama e a de Trump, de 2010 a meados de 2020. Foi realizada uma análise temática a uma seleção de 99 artigos, com o objetivo de desvendar as principais representações de imigrantes ao longo deste período. A análise das representações dos imigrantes na mídia conservadora pode clarificar sobre as ausências: o que poderia ser coberto, mas o que na verdade não é, e também sobre o que é tornado visível, como e que propósitos pode servir. O objetivo deste estudo é fazer essa combinação e entender melhor o papel da regulação política no discurso da mídia. Os resultados deste estudo indicam que a Fox News retratou os imigrantes através de mecanismos estratégicos de desumanização, simultaneamente preservando a identidade dos Americanos. Além disso, estruturas e agentes políticos, como a reeleição de Obama e a (possível) reeleição de Trump, têm impacto no modo como a Fox News constrói a sua narrativa em torno dos imigrantes.

Palavras-chave: Teoria das Representações Sociais, Psicologia Social, Imigrantes, Fox News

Classificação nas categorias pela American Psychology Association

2900 Social Processes & Social Issues

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Introduction

Immigration is one of the most prominent issues in the United States. As the number of undocumented immigrants has increased (Passel, 2014), much of the recent discussion has focused on the topic of illegal immigration, especially over the terms used to describe immigrants. The news media has made no exception to this discussion, playing an important role in creating the concept of immigrants as others, actively influencing public opinion and social behaviors (Mannarini, Salvatore & Veltri, 2020).

Especially in conservative tabloid newspapers, stories of immigrants focus on the way they impact the “receiving” countries’ people lives negatively: they take away jobs and create unemployment, they take away houses, and they are unwilling to adapt (van Dijk, 2012). In acting as a mouthpiece between a “self” and a “other” (Mannarini et al., 2020), the news media generates a split between “good” and “bad”, consequently marginalizing and excluding immigrants through a process of homogenization. This generalization of millions of humans into a category that funnels into dehumanization is highly problematic, as it condenses people with strictly different characteristics, societies, cultures into one, and creates a system of representation that stands by one dichotomy: the “us” and “them” (Cottle, 2000; van Dijk, 2012; Hall, 1997).

Importantly, the media are responding both to institutional (political) demands and to their audiences (Castro, Mouro & Gouveia, 2012). In this process, they organize their narratives also considering that readers often expose themselves more to information that is aligned with their values, beliefs and/or political orientations (Oren, Nets-Zehngut, & Bartal, 2015). The lack of alternative narratives is consequential, as it may create real effects in practice (Oren et al., 2015) such as stereotyping, oppression, systemic violence (Cottle, 2000), and deterioration of social bonds (Mannarini et al., 2020).

When looking at the United States, sharply ingrained practices in American journalism have produced a narrative that conditions the public to associate immigration with illegality, crisis, controversy and government failure (Akdenizli, Dionne, & Suro, 2016). This means that even legal immigrants are funneled into the same representational system as illegal immigrants, generalizing immigration as a one dimensional, homogenized phenomena. Concurrently, a considerable body of research conducted in the U.S. has examined the media’s representations immigrants (Cisneros, 2008; Schemer, 2012). Under-representation and stereotypical characterization, negative and problematic portrayal in news form, a

tendency to ignore structural inequalities and lived racism experienced by minorities, are recurring research findings (Cottle, 2000).

Studies show that the political context of the U.S., linked to their positions on immigration, show polarizing views. According to Conway, Repke, & Houck, (2017) the Trump administration, largely lead by a movement of “anti-political correctness”, poses critiques to any linguistic changes in relation to immigration. On the other side of the coin, the election of Obama to the office of the presidency of the United States emphasized the need for social justice in the U.S, and further proposed oppressive dispositions to be erased from American’s everyday words and attitudes (Pedwell, 2012).

Amongst the biggest system of representation and information in the U.S. stands Fox News. The American 24-hour all-encompassing news service ([foxnews.com](https://www.foxnews.com)), dominates the American news landscape (Gramlich, 2020) and is considered by many “the loudest voice in conservative media” (Davis, 2019; Skocpol & Williamson, 2012). Studies centered on Fox News show that it leans significantly towards conservative and Republican beliefs, from covering the Iraq war through pro-conservative slant, as well as the 2004 presidential campaign (Zúñiga, Correa, & Valenzuela, 2012)

Despite these known facts, Fox News is still trusted by at least 43% of Americans (Gramlich, 2020).

Considering the vast body of research, and significant debates in the American media issued specifically on immigrants, it is on immigration rather than migration that this study focuses on¹. Furthermore, taking into account the vast audience that Fox News reaches, and its conservative inclination, this study questions how the news outlet has integrated its discourse on immigrants in regards to new to social and political structures mentioned above, namely the Obama and Trump administration. As media outlets use text to construct perceptions of meaning, political knowledge, purpose, and power in stories of immigrants (Oren et al., 2015), it is difficult to deny the importance, not to say urgency, of this field of investigation. Bearing in mind the social justice movements aimed to change systems of representation, this study specifically aims to understand how immigrants are represented in the conservative news media, Fox News, during two contrasting presidential administrations, Obama and Trump, from 2010 to mid-2020. The analysis of immigrants in the conservative

¹ Migrant is a term that includes refugees and those moving for economic reasons. Immigrant refers to those who have moved to foreign country with the intention of settling there. In the U.S. immigrants can be ‘legal permanent residents’, and have adjective such as ‘illegal’, ‘undocumented’ or ‘unauthorized’ attached to them (Vore, 2015).

media may shed light on absences: what could be covered but what is, in fact, not (Messing & Bernáth, 2017), as well as what is made visible, how and what purpose may it serve.

Bearing this in mind, this study asks two questions: (1) how are immigrants represented by the conservative press? and (2) do these representations respond – and how - to the political context?

To address these questions, Chapter I explores some of the present literature on Social Representation Theory, representation of immigrants in the media, and Fox News. Chapter II illustrates the methods applied to this study: its qualitative lens and thematic analysis. Chapter III explores the results and finally, Chapter IV presents a discussion on the findings of this study, its contributions and limitations.

Chapter I – State of the Art

Social Representation Theory and News Media

Social Representation Theory (SRT) was advanced by Serge Moscovici in 1961. The theory assumes the centrality of self-other-object relations (Moscovici, 1972), which essentially illustrates the role of relationships in how meaning is developed, maintained and changed whilst highlighting the indispensable focus on self-other communication (Batel & Castro, 2018). The self is relationally and socially composed, meaning that what starts as external also becomes internal (Moscovici, 1972), and in this process, social representations provide specific contents that correspond to one's knowledge, beliefs, images, and uses of language (Marková, 2008). In the words of Batel and Castro (2018), in SRT, meaning making, or re-presenting, happens therefore through relations, that is, with an other. This means that social representations are the products of 'thinking societies' where there is argumentation, exchange of ideas and debate (Andreouli & Sammut, 2017). As forms of everyday knowledge, social representations provide a common frame of reference for groups and communities as they constitute the symbolic environment that enables community members to communicate with each other (Andreouli & Sammut, 2017).

SRT is a fruitful framework that explores the social construction of meaning enabled by communication. Moscovici (1961/1976) was interested in the ways communication had an impact on social representations, and suggested that the media played a significant role in communication strategies (Andreouli, & Sammut, 2017). To better understand how language and discourse play a role in communication, some empirical studies have worked with the junction of discourse analysis and SRT (cf. Batel & Castro, 2018), such as the one conducted by Amer and Howarth (2018). This study drew on tools from Critical Discourse Analysis and SRT to examine the construction of white British Muslims as a threat in eight newspapers.

This theory holds great significance to this study as the news media can be understood as a significant agent in the production of discourse and social knowledge. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, SRT was used to explore the social representations of immigrants through the ways in which they are used, and shaped by, discourses in the news media.

SRT conceives of social representations as phenomena that are culture-specific, shaped by societal forces, such as historical occurrences, but also media discourses. (Mannarini et al., 2020). The role of communication in representation within the constructionist assumptions of SRT is a central one, with mass media being one of its major dialogical strands (Batel & Castro, 2018), functioning as a mediating system (Castro et al.,

2012). In the words of Mannarini and colleagues (2020), “media communication has been recognized as playing a leading role in the way new objects, and above all technical and scientific subjects, are transformed into understandable and pragmatic forms of social knowledge that people use in their daily life” (pg. 22). SRT suggests that our perception of the world can be largely shaped by the news, and the discourse they carry.

Language and Textual Data

Language acts as a primary vehicle for the articulation and reproduction of dominant structures of power (Foucault, 1972), power relations, and social change (Batel & Castro, 2018). Connected to this, three pillar assumptions linked to language can be made: people express different ideas in different contexts, it is performative, and it constructs realities (Batel & Castro, 2018). As pointed out by Ahmadian and Farahani (2014), news discourses play a significant role in shaping people’s opinions about events, and the people and the world around them. The authors further mentioned that “in newspapers the events are not usually (re)presented as they are in reality, but are represented in a way that the newspapers intend them to be” (pg. 2114). The events, therefore, do not mirror reality, but instead go through journalistic practices “which involve linguistic recontextualization in language” (Ahmadian & Farahani, 2014).

Although SRT is open to all kinds of methods, as long as they contribute to solving the research problem in question (Marková, 2008), it is important to illustrate the interactional link between the constructionist approach of SRT and language. Numerous studies have analyzed textual data as a product of communication in self-other relations, with focus on how meanings are negotiated (Batel & Castro, 2018). For example, one of such studies had the goal of exploring resistance to new ecological laws that were met with degrees of oppositions (Castro, Seixas, Neca, & Bettencourt, 2017). The authors linked the opposing arguments and new laws to social representations at play in the public sphere, through a content analysis of 122 press articles. The study worked with a dialogical analysis of direct quotations, which showed how protestors sought legitimacy by establishing ground with valued representations, by invoking and undermining arguments that worked in their favor (Castro et al., 2018).

The next section focuses more specifically on how Others, such as minorities and immigrants, have been represented in the media.

Representation of the Other in the News

The media contributes to shaping representations of groups and political issues, by highlighting certain interests over others (Hamlin, Bloemraad, & Graauw, 2015). For example, in emphasizing the fear of terrorism, promoting the claim for nationalism and advancing the rejection of ethnic variety (Mannarini et al., 2020), the media combines such social constructions and categories with otherness. In studying ethnic minorities in the media, Cottle (2000) pointed out that it is often the marginalized that become ontologically disenfranchised from humanity, misrecognized as “Other”, oppressed and consequently, made vulnerable. In the same vein, Hall (1997) emphasized how historically, the “Other” was represented as the “dark” side: forgotten, repressed, and denied; the reverse image of enlightenment and modernity. Indeed, studies on minorities have suggested that media depiction of third-world people as stereotypically backward, traditional, or uncivilized, helps maintaining the Western paternalistic prejudice toward them (Ramasubramanian, 2005).

As maintained by Hall (1997), this representative discourse of “the West and the Rest” remains alive and well in the modern world. Indeed, the media continue to play a central role in maintaining distinctions between immigrants and non-immigrants (Estrada, Ebert & Lore, 2016) by othering immigrants from the “Rest”. The process of creation of otherness includes two opposed mechanism: exclusion/distance, based on the impossibility of any continuity between the self and the other (Mannarini et al., 2020). These mechanisms generate three consequences for the other: marginalization, dualistic split (good/bad), and objectification (Mannarini et al., 2020).

Notably, otherness is the product of power and discursive strategies, and the media play a significant role in its construction (Mannarini et al., 2020). In fact, when describing the European means of representing the Orient during colonialism, Edward Said (1979) stated that “what is commonly circulated by it is not “truth” but “representation”, an idea that aligns with the framework of SRT. The constructive nature of media messages as knowledge products that establish common sense about groups is a process that normalizes specific unusual or disturbing ideologies, into something familiar and concrete (Mannarini et al., 2020). A remarkable body of research has focused on media representation on marginalized groups based in the E.U., and reveals persistent under-representation and stereotypical featuring, along with a tendency to underestimate issues that relate to structural inequalities and discrimination (Mannarini et al., 2020).

Common Representations of Immigrants

Numerous scholars have examined how the media portray minorities or cover cognate issues such as immigration (Cottle, 2000; van Dijk, 2012). As claimed by van Dijk (2012) topics in the news may be about virtually any subject that is of public concern, however, topics in news on ethnic minorities do not carry much variation. On the contrary, much research has shown that “ethnic” news focuses on only a few main topics, which on the whole may be summarized as problem news (Van Dijk, 2012). In the United States this is of specific concern when it comes to immigrants. Despite many other aspects of immigration policy (such as shortage of workers with advanced degrees) the U.S. public’s attention has been focused on the problem of illegal immigration (Haynes, 2013, Merolla & Ramakrishnan, 2013).

Studying media representation of illegal immigrants and U.S. immigration reform in the mid-1980s, Coutin and Chock (1995) uncovered a discussion of citizenship and national identity. They studied 283 news articles to analyze media images of amnesty applicants, citizens, and illegal aliens after the enactment of U.S. Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, which criminalized employment of illegal aliens and granted certain illegal aliens amnesty to become citizens (Coutin & Chock 1995). The study found that journalists play a role in defining categories related to immigrants and IRCA: depicting amnesty as a “godsend” to immigrants, whilst illegal immigration continues to “threaten social stability”. The study further shed light on how identities are constructed and negotiated within public discourse.

According to van Dijk (2012), positive stories about immigrants are similarly rare. Although immigrants have significantly contributed to the economic welfare of the U.S., such contributions seldom make headlines in the press. Their contributions to the arts, social diversity, multiculturalism, multilingualism, international relations, cuisine, fashion, and not to forget sports may only occasionally enter the marginal human interest and sports pages (van Dijk, 2012). Instead, themes of violence, chaos and influx are emphasized in the coverage of immigration (Davis, 2019). In a study that revisited the culture wars through far-right website Breitbart.com, Davis (2019) outlines the contrasts made in 3 articles covering immigrants. Migrants were represented as criminal, unworthy and likely to be excluded by merit-based policies. The third played a ‘number game’ (van Dijk, 2000) that implies in-group powerlessness given the sheer weight of out-group numbers (Davis, 2019). Importantly, they all involved a ‘we’ who needs to be defended from an influx.

To address how the “we” is represented can be fundamental to understand the type of “We-Other” relationships that are conveyed by the media. To this purpose, we draw upon a parallel literature, from Oren and colleagues (2015), which addresses dimensions that have not been previously looked at in media studies. The authors analyzed the specific case of the Israeli-Jewish narrative of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with regard to discursive devices that were used in the Israeli’s narrative’s construction in order to preserve its dominance nationally and internationally. They concluded that mass media often strive to maintain the dominance of conflict-supportive narratives by persuading the international community that their own metanarrative is the only valid and truthful one. The oppositional narrative, interestingly pointed out, features the own group as having just goals, moral acts, as being under existential threat, and a victim of power asymmetries (Oren, et al., 2015). However, the rival’s narrative is discredited, as well as its goals, evidently becoming delegitimized, presented as inhuman and conflict-oriented. This would justify more policing and governmental intervention, as expected from conservative news media outlets. The study coined recurrent themes to conflict-supporting narratives, which can be generally found in every society involved in intractable conflict. By considering these themes in the analytical procedure, this work will look not only at how immigrants (the Other) were portrayed but also how the “receiving” nation (the We) was represented – and whether these representations were organized to perpetuate conflict. As this study aims to follow a parallel line of research in the context of the U.S., the researchers adopted an exploratory perspective, to see which of the themes identified by Oren and colleagues would be relevant for the current research question.

Fox News

Launched in 1996, and created by Rupert Murdoch, Fox News has quickly become one of the most prominent news outlets in the United States. Considered by many “as a central hub of the conservative well-oiled media machine” (Ackerman, 2018), Fox News had its highest-rated year in prime time in 2019, throughout the network’s 23-year history, with a total average audience of 2.5 million viewers (Joyella, 2019). A study titled “The Fox News Factor”, written by Morris (2005), concluded that Fox News audiences are less likely to follow stories that were critical of the then Bush administration, and more likely to follow entertainment-based news stories that reflected their personal views. The author suggested that the trend of being exposed only to reinforced preconceived notions could not only shrink

a balanced debate, but also constrain an open dialogue and contribute to further polarization between the left and right America (Morris, 2005).

More recently, in a book titled “the Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism”, Skocpol and Williamson (2012), described Fox News as “an aptly named conservative media echo chamber”, “the loudest voice in conservative media”, and “the right-wing blogosphere”. In fact, the founding of the Tea Party in late 2009, was heavily supported and orchestrated by Fox News (Davis, 2019; Skocpol & Williamson, 2012). Studies have indeed shown that the news outlet leans significantly toward conservative and Republican beliefs (Baum, & Groeling, 2008; Martin, & Yurukoglu, 2014), affecting political beliefs (DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2006), and negatively associating individuals’ perception of immigrants (Zúñiga et al., 2012). Ironically so, Fox News does the best job of attracting Americans with the increasingly common traits of lower political knowledge, and less political involvement (Morris, 2005). For example, Fox News viewers were more likely to underestimate the death toll of U.S. soldiers that had died in Iraq than nonviewers. The same audience also paid less attention to September 11 congressional hearings compared to CNN viewers (Morris, 2005).

In trying to understand whether Fox News cable markets had an impact on voting, DellaVigna and Kaplan (2006) conducted a study by using the data of 9,256 U.S. towns. The investigation focused on whether Republicans gained vote share in towns where Fox News entered the cable market. The results showed a significant effect between the introduction of Fox News on the vote share in Presidential elections between 1996 and 2000. The study also concluded that Fox News convinced 3 to 8 percent of its viewers to vote Republican (DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2006). The authors further suggested that exposure to Fox News media bias affect political beliefs and voting. Since immigration is a central issue in anti-immigrant populist parties, the high level of coverage in the news, irrespective of the frame used, results in people voting for them (Mannarini et al., 2020).

An equally interesting study conducted by Zúñiga and colleagues (2012) examined the relationship of media exposure, individuals’ ideological predispositions and their attitudes towards policy-making on immigration. They did so through a U.S. national survey between 2008 and 2009. This study revealed yet again, that conservative Republicans are more likely to watch Fox News, and added that they associate negative perceptions to Mexican immigrants.

On account of the ideological loading and meaning-making function of news, it should come as no surprise that many scholars have investigated news discourse within different

socially committed frameworks (Ahmadian & Farahani, 2014). On the other side of the coin, while some emerging literature tries to address the costs and benefits of illegal immigration (Hanson, 2006), very little is known on the factors that influence individual attitudes towards this facet of globalization (Facchini, Mayda, & Puglisi, 2017). Hainmueller and Hopkins (2013) stated that, to date, the measurement of the information environment within the discussion of immigration has been coarse, with scholars frequently assuming the same information environment for all residents of a country at a given point in time. This suggests the importance of measuring the changing frames salient in discussions of immigration, namely in the news, during different time periods and political stages.

These studies above mentioned are important to this particular study in that they show the link between representations of immigrants in the news media and consumers, by providing insight into what is already known about how the news media, namely Fox News, can set agendas.

Considering that Trump has been president of the U.S. for 4 years, this study takes into account that there is enough data to execute a comparative study with former president Obama. Unlike any previous research done on immigration and the news media, this study takes an in-depth look into a major U.S. outlets, and compares representations of immigrants during two political eras. This study therefore analyses the representation of immigrants in Fox News, and questions how it contributes to stereotyping and “othering” immigrants. Furthermore, it also examines whether different political periods have had an impact on reporting on immigrants.

Chapter II. Methods

Research Design

As highlighted by Cottle (2000) one needs to deploy sensitive analytical tools if one is to recover exactly how meanings are embedded within, and reproduced through, the discourses, language, and narratives of media representations. In order to reach a comprehensive and comparative understanding of the relationship between how immigrants are represented by Fox News media in two political eras, a qualitative research was conducted. The motive of choosing qualitative methodology over quantitative lies in the literary and humanistic focus, whereas quantitative research is grounded in mathematical and statistical knowledge (Gephart, 2004). As pointed earlier, it is through language, narratives and discourses, that the media (and specifically dominant ones) form a system of representation that impact how we experience and perceive the world. Qualitative research addresses fundamental questions on social experiences: such as how they are created and given meaning, and how they produce representations of the world that make the world visible (Gephart, 2004). More specifically, it deals with how narrative of people's view(s) are constructed and applied on words and text (Gephart, 2004). Additionally, qualitative approaches to discourse data collection and analysis constitute the main methodological framework used within the main theoretical approach of this thesis, SRT.

Moreover, this study heavily focuses on comparing data between two political eras. The very richness of qualitative data lies in allowing the researcher to interrogate the data. One can make comparisons between data, classify these data according to their distinctive characteristics, check for associations, and to explain their variation(s) (Dey, 1993). Additionally, the themes chosen for this study, based on Oren et al. (2015), such as collective self-victimhood, trust in law enforcement and positive self-collective image, are complex and multi-dimensional concepts to measure, and quantifying them by using a quantitative research design would be less appropriate to capture their complexity and layers.

Thematic Analysis

This study aims to uncover the representations and discursive devices used in media outlet Fox News when depicting immigrants, in a comparative manner, during the Obama and Trump administration.

Thematic analysis (TA) offers a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data. Following Batel and Castro's (2018) guidelines on

what to pay attention to whilst performing a TA, this study (1) identified themes deductively and inductively, (2) incorporated both manifest and explicit themes revealed in discourse, and (3) analyzed both the presence and absence of themes. This last point is crucial as, in the words of Batel and Castro (2018) “the analysis of the presence and absence of certain themes is relevant to understand the stability and change of meaning, as it is often in what is left unsaid that we can diagnose the operations of power” (pg. 9).

This study uses a constructionist approach to TA, which essentially examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences are effects of a range of discourses operating within society (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In other words, through TA, this thesis analyzed the meaning and reality associated to immigrants within the United States by Fox News.

Data Collection

This study worked with news articles about immigrants as primary data. The data was collected by gathering all English written articles found under the search criteria “immigrant” on the official Fox News website. The articles selected were textual content type, meaning that all articles including videos and slideshows were retracted, focusing on text based content only. Because this study investigates patterns and themes employed during the Obama administration, (2009 to 2017), and the Trump administration (2017 to present day), the timespan chosen was January 1st, 2010, to May 1st 2020. This also means that during the writing of this thesis Trump is the current president of the United States, having one more year left in the office, and is legally entitled for a second term, which depends on his 2021 reelection.

In the timeframe of 2010 to mid-2020 at least 30,555 articles were identified. Nine articles were selected at random for each year, all including the descriptor *immigrant, from January 1st, 2010 to May, 1st, 2020, amounting to a total of 99 articles². The articles were transferred in one excel sheet per year and then imported to qualitative data analysis software NVivo for analysis.

Data Analysis

Once the data was collected it was analyzed to identify a coding scheme (or themes). A coding scheme is a list of codes and their associated definitions, beneficial for the

² The choice behind use of the descriptor ‘immigrants’ instead of ‘migrants’ was based on the number of articles available on Fox News for both descriptors, with 52,000 results for ‘immigrants’, and only 18,900 for ‘migrants’.

organization of the data in a systematic and meaningful manner, that helps prepare the dataset for analysis (Orphanidou & Kadianaki, 2020). In this study a mixture of deductive and inductive approaches was used, thus allowing space for new themes to emerge. Deductive coding was used during the preparatory phases of the coding scheme, based on pre-existing literature on press analysis and immigration. One particular work which focused on the construction and maintenance over time of conflict-supporting narratives (Oren. et al., 2015) was fundamental in the deductive process of the coding scheme. Though its focus was on a different topic (the Israeli-Jewish conflict), the article focused on the organization of such narratives by identifying the main themes and functions they fulfill (Oren et al. 2015). These themes helped structure the coding schemes for this study given that previous literature showed that press narratives about immigration often underlined feelings of threat and danger posed by immigrants. Each code was named as a summary of what the code was about (Orphanidou & Kadianaki, 2020).

The inductive coding was used during the execution but also finalization of the data analysis. For example, during the reading of the articles it was noted that immigrants were far less directly cited than U.S. citizens, creating therefore two more codes: “directly quoted immigrants” and “directly quoted U.S. citizens”. The coding scheme was iteratively applied by and discussed with another researcher, with the necessary adjustments made to the coding framework. The unit of analysis were sentences in each article, which were classified under the elected codes. No code was used more than once for each article, as to avoid implications in counting and frequency analysis for the results.

Table 1 breaks down the main categories in the data, into their respective sub-categories, with definitions and examples.

Representations of Immigrants in Fox News

Main categories	Definition	Sub-category	Definition	Examples from articles
Crime by immigrants	Mention of the dangers that immigrants pose to U.S. society/citizens. Immigrants portrayed as violent, sex offenders, criminals.	Murder and Homicide	Mention of serious crimes conducted by immigrants on U.S. citizens including murder and homicide.	"11.7 million illegal immigrants in the U.S. account for 13.6 percent of all offenders sentenced for crimes committed in the U.S. Twelve percent of murder sentences"
		Sex crimes	Mention of rape, child molesters, sexual abuse, sexual harassment as forced on US citizens by illegal immigrants.	"In Germantown, two illegal immigrants are accused of raping an 11-year-old and, in a separate case, another illegal immigrant is accused of raping a 16-year-old at Knifepoint, according to FOX5."
		Vandalism, Drugs, Violence	Homicide, kidnapping, domestic violence, gang affiliation, drug use and murder mentioned as forced on U.S. citizens by illegal immigrants.	"Our archives are filled with stories of drunk-driving illegals killing U.S. citizens,"
Dehumanization of immigrants	Articles that dehumanized immigrants through labels, stereotypes,	Illegal, Alien, Criminal labels	Terms used to describe immigrants: illegal, rats, undocumented, criminals,	"undocumented aliens -- generally illegal" "hunt for those criminal aliens and fugitives" "They're here illegally. They're illegal immigrants or aliens"

Representations of Immigrants in Fox News

	and discursive mechanisms.		aliens, illegal aliens, fugitive, criminal alien, alien children.	
Voice: Directly cited U.S. cited U.S. citizens	When a U.S. citizen is directly cited in the article ("quoted")			"Immigrants increase crime!" "Go back to Mexico or die!"
U.S. self-collective victimhood	Presentation of U.S. citizens as the victims of immigrants.			How many more Americans must die at the hands of illegal aliens before our borders are secured?
Trust in law enforcement and policies	Debate of whether or not the U.S. law enforcement, homeland security, government agencies, correction facilities should apply restrictive measures towards immigrants.	Negative	Negative mentions of immigration laws, immigration officials, border security, DHS, as unreliable in managing illegal immigrants.	"The DHS has simply chosen not to enforce the United States' border security laws,"
		Positive	Positive mentions of immigration laws, immigration officials, border security, ICE, as reliable in managing illegal immigrants.	"Our dedicated officers strive to make our communities safer by arresting convicted criminal aliens and removing them from the United States,"

Table 1. Dictionary of five main categories relating immigrants found in data set linked to their sub-categories and definitions

Chapter III. Results

This chapter presents an overview of the two overarching themes that emerged from global patterns in the data and went beyond the coding themes. These were found throughout the results of the data analysis of immigration news articles conveyed by Fox News. The results are reported by focusing on the sub-categories linked to each theme and by highlighting the similarities and divergences found in the comparison between the Obama and Trump administration periods.

Two major themes were identified during the thematic analysis of the articles, (1) “illegal immigrants”: not humans, criminals, and voiceless, and (2) the desire for preservation of American values and cultural diversity.

Theme 1: “Illegal Immigrants”: not humans, criminals, and voiceless

“Immigrant” and “illegal” were the most prevalent words throughout the database, suggesting that the ensemble of Fox News articles allocated much of their journalistic investigation to illegal immigrants and not immigrants per se.

The ongoing debate on the “illegal immigrant” label was given particular focus through an array of articles, namely a transcript from “The O’Reilly Factor”, published by Fox News. Titled “Journalist Group Wants to Change Term ‘Illegal Alien’ to ‘Undocumented Immigrant’”, a conversation between Bill O’Reilly and Bernie Goldberg, a journalist and contributor to Fox News, explicitly proposed their thoughts on the matter:

Goldberg: “its’ politically correct nonsense [...] my first thought to that was tough noogies. I mean, too bad. They’re here illegally. They’re illegal immigrants or aliens. [...] this is one more reason why there should not be a National Association of Hispanic Journalists or an association of black journalists or gay journalists or women journalists. [...] They snuck in and they’re illegal” . (Fox News, January, 2011)

Moreover, it was seen that in general, immigrants were generally delegitimized through dehumanizing labels, however, these labels became more elaborate after 2016. Depictions of immigrants as criminals linked to harsher policies started rising more in 2016 onwards, or, the beginning of the Trump administration.

According to Oren et al., individuals considered opponents are delegitimized through various dehumanizing labels, and that can be manifested in acts of negative-other presentation (Lawton, 2013). Throughout the data set, it was not uncommon to notice immigrants negatively presented, or illustrated as incompetent, and reckless. For example, some articles draw attention to immigrants' "inability to drive", heading the wrong way in a one-way street, oftentimes under the influence of drugs or alcohol, consequently injuring and/or killing U.S. citizens:

... Republicans argue. According to a memo circulated by GOP aides on the Senate Judiciary Committee, there are a host of crimes illegal immigrants would be allowed to commit and still qualify -- assault, domestic violence, sexual abuse, reckless driving and various types of fraud among them. (Fox News, December 8, 2010)

Words used to describe illegal immigrants in the data set included "alien", "undocumented immigrant", "illegal invaders", "illegal immigrant criminals", "illegal aliens", "undocumented aliens", "criminal alien", "immigration fugitive", "undocumented Democrat", "immigrant children", "alien kids", and "undocumented minors".

These descriptors are often followed or preceded by: (1) a country other than U.S. (often Mexico, Guatemala, or African countries) (2) large numbers (3) criminal actions (4) negative connotations. The definition of dehumanization and delegitimization may prompt confusion if not clarified. According to Oren and colleagues (2015), delegitimization is any form of transgression of moral conduct rules, and dehumanization is any form of removing human characteristics. The latter can be linked to immoral or improper conduct (Tileagă, 2007). Table 2 illustrates the sentences and discursive mechanisms applied by Fox News to dehumanize immigrants, and table 3 the ones that delegitimize immigrants.

Extract	Discursive mechanism	Date published
Immigrants can "go out there like rats and multiply"	Immigrants compared to animals, in this case rats that want to procreate.	November 17, 2014
<u>Hunt</u> for those criminal aliens and fugitives	Immigrants presented as criminals that need to be hunted.	September 28, 2011
Millions of illegal immigrants.	Reference to an unspecified number of immigrants, that is enormous, suggesting they are too many.	April 3, 2013
President Obama promised to transform America -- and this is how he's doing it -- by opening	Word normally used to quantify liquids or refer to natural disasters as a way to dehumanize immigrants.	July 8, 2015

up our borders and <u>flooding</u> the nation with millions of illegals.		
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Table 2. Examples from articles of discursive mechanism of dehumanization.

Extract	Discursive mechanism	Date published
They're here illegally. They're illegal immigrants or aliens.	Making salient their 'illegality', often using illegal and/or aliens juxtaposed to immigrant.	January 3, 2011
More than 35,000 Cubans, including 28,000 who are convicted criminals, have been ordered deported but remain on U.S. soil	Large numbers of immigrants described as criminals, thus in need of control by the state.	June 28, 2016
An unlicensed illegal immigrant was "grossly impaired"	Immigrants considered irresponsible, thus incapable of following rules of coexistence.	February 13, 2018
The 21-year-old undocumented immigrant accused of sexually assaulting	Immigrants linked to committing sex crimes.	February 6, 2019

Table 3. Examples from articles of discursive mechanisms of delegitimization.

As seen by the extracts and their respective dates, discursive mechanism that included dehumanization were more prevalent during the Obama administration, whilst delegitimization was more present during the Trump administration.

Immigrants represented as criminals

Throughout the articles, immigrants were represented as a serious and constant growing danger to the United States. The "illegality" and "criminality" of immigrants was paired with detailed descriptions that considered immigrants as apathetic, irresponsible, dangerous, that need to be controlled by the State, as exemplified in the following extract.

Isaias Naranjo was arrested after crashing into state Rep. Mike Moran's car at 60 miles per hour and then bragging to police that they couldn't punish him. According to the report, the suspect "just laughed, slurring that he was going to go back to 'my country' Mexico. 'Nothing is going to happen to me, man.'" (Fox News, May, 2010)

In general, the data showed that crime allegedly committed by immigrants was concisely reported, reaching peaks during 2011, 2016, and 2019. It is important to highlight that 2011 and 2016 were pre-election years, and 2019 the (possible) pre-election year of Trump.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the frequency and types of the crimes allegedly committed by immigrants, reported by Fox News, where the peaks in time are noticeable.

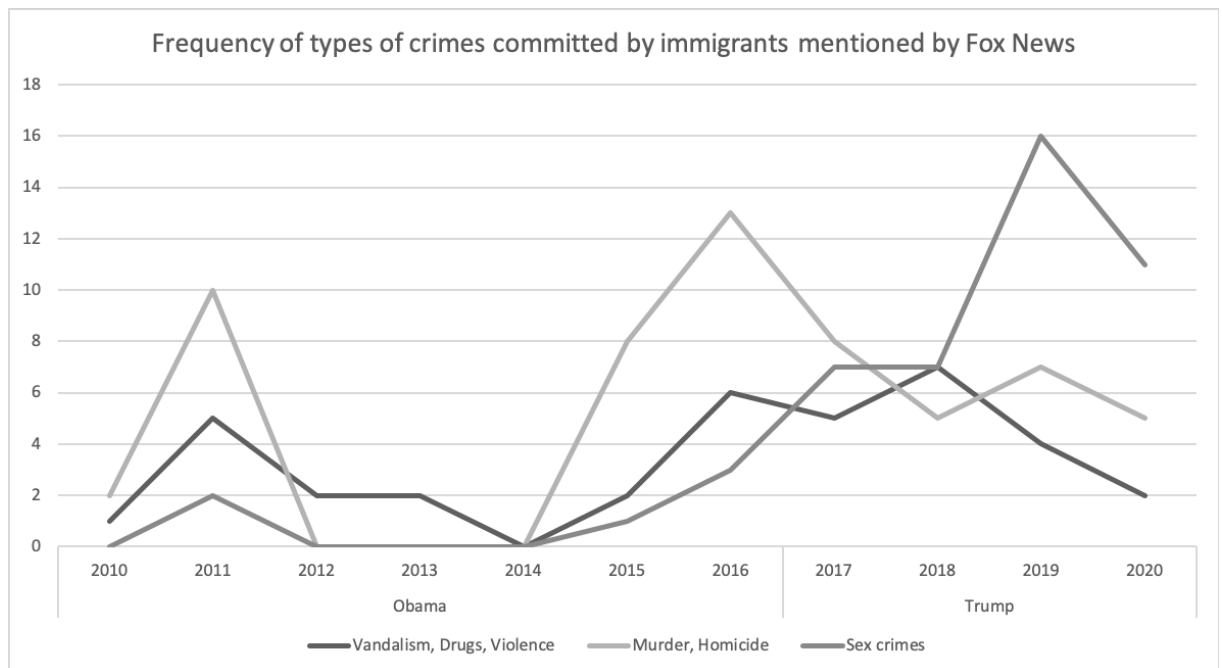


Figure 1. References to crimes committed by immigrants between 2010 and 2020

In addition to criminality as a shadow trait of immigrants, an impressive amount of articles highlighted sex crimes allegedly committed by immigrants.

Van Dijk (2012) suggests that one of the ways to emphasize the negative acts of the “Others” is to provide very detailed descriptions, for example, of their alleged cultural deviance, violence, or crimes. This descriptive narrative on criminality was indeed well reported across the data set, particularly when immigrants committed sex crimes against U.S. victims. Below are two examples of this discursive strategy:

Local police said the victim, who was 16 at the time, was taking a nap at the apartment where Reyes-Medrano also lived when she felt someone else get on the bed. She opened her eyes and saw the 46-year-old had positioned himself on top of her. "Take your clothes off," Reyes-Medrano allegedly told the victim twice according to court documents obtained by WJLA, before placing the dull side of a knife against the victim's neck. (Fox News, August 27, 2019)

"Victim A stated that she could not move and Emilio Carrasco-Hernandez was squishing her with his body," detectives reportedly said of the incident. The 200-lb.

Carrasco-Hernandez allegedly kissed the girl's body and even bit her shirt in one incident. (Fox News, August 31, 2019)

'Giving voice' to U.S. citizens versus immigrants

Throughout the entire data set immigrants were directly cited in 12 articles compared to 61 articles in which U.S. citizens were directly cited. Interestingly, immigrants are directly cited in articles that cover stories related to “distinguished” immigrants. This includes celebrities that once were undocumented immigrants, such as the Mexican actress Salma Hayek, a Pulitzer prize-winning journalist and a college graduate.

These articles tend to be relatively short, and do not go much into detail. Immigrants were quoted in brief sentences, and normally addressed either the difficulties endured as an undocumented immigrant in the U.S. or feelings of admiration and gratefulness towards the country. Moreover, articles citing immigrants directly appeared mostly during the Obama period (10 articles), and were therefore significantly absent during the Trump period.

“I was an illegal immigrant in the United States,” Hayek said during the interview.

“It was for a small period of time, but I still did it.” (Fox News, December. 2010)

“I’m done running. I’m exhausted. “I don’t want that life anymore” (Fox News, June 2011)

“I believe this is the best country in the world” (Fox News, June, 2015)

On the other side of the coin, when U.S. citizens were directly quoted, sentences were longer, and also tended to go into more detail. Often starting with “I feel”, “I think”, “I don’t believe” “he is”, “we are facing”, “we want”, “we need”, “in my State”, “they should”, these openings indicate that the American voice is heard and described starting from an internal to an external angle. In other words, Americans are frequently quoted to speak on behalf of themselves but also the country.

The coverage of the first theme described above, along with its categories, reached peaks during the same year, 2016, a ‘transition year’ that marked the pre-election period of Trump. This means that any difference made in the narratives by the media could be considered as a potential effort for recruiting and convincing electors to vote for Trump.

During the year of 2016, immigrants were delegitimized the most by Fox News, U.S. citizens were directly quoted the most, and crime by immigrants was highlighted the most. However, the more specific sub-themes, or categories, of each theme showed a less linear path. Data showed that the dehumanized category, which included labels “illegal”, “alien” and “criminals” was most frequently applied in 2011, then in 2014. The crime by immigrants theme, whom had three categories, “vandalism, drugs, violence”, “murder, homicide”, and “sex crimes” appeared most in 2018, 2016, and 2019 respectively.

Theme 2: The desire for preservation of American values and cultural identity

Especially in stories that illustrate crimes allegedly committed by immigrants, Fox News seemed to refer to the American public as victims. Although the crime could be committed by one person, the implication was that the consequences were on the entire population.

“Lives are being lost, the public’s safety is at risk, and American families are suffering,” Grassley said. “It cannot continue.” (Fox News, June, 2016)

In relation to immigrants, Americans were also portrayed as victims in other frameworks, such as missed opportunities for education, and infliction of their good health. In an article that covered a college favoring students with special needs, Fox News presented arguments against this initiative as giving better treatment to “illegal aliens” than Americans.

“Too bad for the very well prepared student, a U.S. citizen and taxpayer in this state, whose parents might once have thought their kids should have a shot at the flagship campus,” (Fox News, May, 2011)

In regards of health issues, immigrants were often linked to bringing diseases to the United States, such as tuberculosis and the novel coronavirus.

Active TB is highly contagious and requires isolation and multi-drug treatments that take between 12 and 24 months to complete. Symptoms include coughing, weight loss, night sweats and blood-streaked mucous. “The closer one is, the more time spent in continuity [to an infected person], the more likely you are to get it,” With

immigrants coming from high-risk countries, most of them have latent TB. (Fox News, July, 2014)

“Last Thursday, @CBP apprehended an Indian national trying to cross the SW border illegally,” Acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf said. “Noticing #coronavirus symptoms, astute CBP Agents quickly isolated this individual - who later tested positive. In a statement, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) said the 31-year-old was apprehended along with three Mexicans. (Fox News, May, 2020)

The pattern of self-victimization could also be seen in the few Fox News articles that confronted the usage of label of “illegal” immigrant, or “alien”. In those articles, those whom use the label, are described as “oblivious”, and “unaware”.

Some of us use the term out of obliviousness – we hear the label so often from others it simply becomes an apt moniker. (Fox News, February 2020)

For the sake of preservation, authorities need to play their role and thus laws need to be applied and made more strict. Critics are made to those who are jeopardizing the nation’s unity in the face of threat to (a certain) U.S. cultural identity. On one side of the coin, authorities were portrayed in an active helping role. This mainly happened when Fox News referred to ICE (Immigration and Custom’s Enforcement) a federal law enforcement agency that protects America from cross-border crime and “threatening” illegal immigration (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, n.d.)

“Our dedicated officers strive to make our communities safer by arresting convicted criminal aliens and removing them from the United States,” Ricardo Wong, field officer director for the division of Enforcement and Removal Operations at U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), said in a statement. “By focusing our resources on the most egregious offenders, we ensure the very best use of our resources while immediately improving public safety.” (Fox News, June 2016)

Officers that work for the agency were portrayed as dedicated, good-willed, hardworking, sharing the common goal of wanting to protect the U.S. from “illegal immigrants” and, generally speaking, danger. The articles suggested that Americans trust ICE

much more than DHS (Department of Homeland Security) as it carries out scale operations that specifically target immigrants, often in large numbers, instead of the wide-ranging approach of DHS (Department of Homeland Security, n.d.).

Nava was one of more than 2,900 people arrested as part of "Operation Cross Check" -- a seven-day enforcement bust across all 50 states and four U.S. territories. The program is ICE's largest criminal alien operation. (Fox News, September, 2011)

DHS, which claims to "prevent attacks against the U.S. [...] by responding to natural and man-made disasters" is quite often portrayed as working counterproductively, against America's benefits.

"To put this in another context, the DHS policy is as logical as taking illegal drugs or weapons that it has seized from smugglers and delivering them to the criminals who initially solicited their illegal importation/exportation. Legally, this situation is no different." (Fox News, December, 2013)

Grassley told Johnson he wants answers as to why the DHS is not using the sanctions authority to get full cooperation, saying he is frustrated with the "inadequacy" of the Department of Homeland Security's efforts to persuade recalcitrant countries to cooperate. (Fox News, June, 2016)

But DHS was not the only law enforcement agency linked to American's mistrust. Policies (laws), correctional facilities, sanctuary states were also heavily criticized.

As for whether Singh's death was preventable, Christianson noted that had law enforcement previously been able to report the suspect to Immigration and Customs Enforcement because of his criminal record, the loss of life might never have occurred. (Fox News, December, 2019)

In Florida, there were 5,061 illegal immigrant inmates in state prison facilities as of June 30, but neither the state Department of Corrections nor the Florida Department of Law Enforcement track the number in county prisons. (Fox News, September, 2015)

A California sheriff is calling for immigration reform in his state after he says sanctuary city policies freed a violent illegal immigrant who went on to shoot a police officer and lead cops on a wild, high-speed chase. (Fox News, September, 2019)

Negative opinions on law enforcement are present in the entire data set, but much like the other themes, the articles seem to focus far more on their errors, failures, incautiousness from 2016 onwards, again, the year before the election of Trump. Positive coverage of law enforcement remained scarce throughout the dataset, with a total of only seven articles throughout 2010 and 2020.

Portrayal of the Obama versus the Trump administration

Obama administration

By getting familiar with the data it was observed that Obama was far less directly quoted than Trump. Obama is directly cited only once in the entire data set, whilst Trump had seven direct quotations. When Obama is directly quoted, the sentence that follows starts with “but” – which suggest a way to deflect and oppose whatever is said by the then president:

President Obama, though, told reporters the numbers right now at the border are trending in the right direction. "The number of apprehensions in August are down from July, and they're actually lower than they were August of last year. Apprehensions in July were half of what they were in June," Obama said.

But Smith says the problem hasn't been solved, and he expects more surges at the border.

"There is a downturn with all categories of illegal immigrants in the summer. It's the hottest month, it's probably the most dangerous time to cross hundreds of miles of desert, and so this is not unusual," Smith said. "I do think there will be an uptick again."

Obama's name was also often associated with asking enormous favors from governmental

institutions, such as large amounts of money, that he requested in order to “help the situation at the border”. This indicated that Fox News presents Obama, perhaps as incompetent, and poorly equipped to govern the country:

Obama is seeking about \$2 billion to respond to the flood of immigrants illegally entering the U.S. through the Rio Grande Valley area of Texas and ask for new powers to deal with returning immigrant children apprehended while traveling without their parents. (Fox News, July, 2014)

(on DREAM Act, backed by Obama) "The bill subsidizes education for illegal immigrants, grants them amnesty, encourages more illegal immigration and inevitably takes jobs from American workers. In short, the DREAM Act is a nightmare for the American people." (Fox News, December, 2010)

Republican authorities and people were cited often, namely during the Obama administration. With the exception of one article, they all expressed their discontent and mistrust with the Obama administration in terms of the management of illegal immigrants in the country.

Trump administration

Between the years of 2016 and 2017, Trump was often addressed as “a solution” for the problem posed by immigrants in the U.S.. In these articles, we can read strong worded promises of the building of a wall, enforcement of tougher immigration laws, and zero tolerance for criminal aliens.

The Trump administration has been amping up its efforts to secure the border, particularly amid the coronavirus pandemic. It has continued with border wall construction, while closing off non-essential travel at the land border. (Fox News, May, 2020)

What was also noticed were the references to the Left, or liberal media, as one that corrupted, and distorted the image of Trump, suggesting that Trump is unnecessarily attacked and misrepresented, despite his best efforts to help Americans.

The New York Times describes 11 million people – those who are living in the country illegally – as sleepless with anxiety, waiting for the “fists pounding on the

door, the agents in black, the van ride, the cell.” Who has thrown such fear into this community? How about the Left, aided and abetted by the liberal media, which has purposefully distorted President Trump’s immigration policies, characterizing them erroneously as a radical departure from past practices? (Fox News, February, 2017)

One year before the Trump election, and especially after the election, Fox seems to highly emphasize on crimes committed by immigrants. Murders, violence, drug use, and above all, sex crimes allegedly committed by immigrants were significantly pointed out from 2016 onwards.

“Still, Trump has drawn support from Americans who say he is openly confronting the severity of the immigration problem that others won’t publicly acknowledge. You may not like his rhetoric - but he's telling the truth. Sadly - many in the Mainstream Media can't handle the truth.” (Fox News, July, 2015)

Further into the data set, words such as “hysteria”, “panic”, and “terror” were linked to immigrant communities and ICE operations, under the siege of Trump. But these lexical terms were always swiftly denied and rebutted as unnecessary and false, as they condemned Trumps intentions.

The hysteria over recent ICE operations is a great example of how Trump’s policies are being misrepresented. (Fox News, February, 2017)

Another news organization proclaimed that “panic” and “terror” is...running through immigrant communities in the U.S. following raids carried out across at least six states as part of Donald Trump’s pledge to crack down on illegal immigrants.” But the head of ICE in LA said, "These operations take weeks and sometimes months of planning, so this operation was in the planning stages before the current administration came out with the executive orders." In other words, the raids had nothing to do with Trump. (Fox News, February 2017)

Chapter IV. Discussion

The present study was oriented by two research questions: (1) how are immigrants represented by the conservative press? and (2) do these representations respond – and how – to the political context? To answer these, it investigated in which ways immigrants have been represented through the conservative news outlet Fox News. Specifically, it compared representational and discursive features linked to immigrants during two political eras, Obama and Trump administrations. The methodological contribution was to study this research question qualitatively, through a thematic analysis, in order to understand how meaning was constructed around the topic of immigrants, and reality is portrayed? through news media. Social Representation theory (Moscovici, 1961/1976) was chosen as the theoretical framework for this study because it allowed to properly examine representations of the self and other, a fundamental element to this study.

From our youngest age the media instill in us specific ways of seeing the world, presenting us with a ready-made construction of the world in which we grow up in, the categories which govern it and the principles by which we understand it (Rateau et al., 2012). Indeed, narratives in the news media fulfil important functions in satisfying the basic sociopsychological needs of the individuals and the collectives involved, as well as in maintaining a positive image of the society, which is why narratives tend to be selective, biased, and simplistic (Oren, et al., 2015). As earlier mentioned, immigration is one of the most prominent issues in the United States, and this study has shown that indeed, much oxygen has been given to the topic in the news media. According to van Dijk (1988) in the conservative press, immigrants are generally portrayed in terms of ‘problems’ (in crime, employment, housing or welfare), and this was also generally what was found through the analysis of the data of this study.

The overarching themes that rose from the analysis in this study were (1) “Illegal Immigrants”: not humans, criminals, and voiceless, and (2) the desire for preservation of American values and cultural identity. These themes englobe smaller themes, which were constructed based on the work of Oren and colleagues (2015). Dehumanization, delegitimization (crime by immigrants), voiceless, trust in law enforcement and U.S. self-collective victimhood were the smaller themes. In their study, Oren and colleagues (2015) identified eight common themes that can be found in groups involved in conflicts. Amongst those, delegitimization, collective self-victimhood, security, and positive collective self-image were used as common ground for coding the articles, and developing deductive themes.

Additionally, this study used delegitimization as an umbrella theme, again, borrowed by Oren et al. (2015), but was able to disentangle delegitimization from dehumanization through a fine-grained analysis of lexical choices made by Fox News. The latter is considered a contribution from this study, as the two discursive mechanisms were used in different timeframes: dehumanization more prevalent during the Obama administration and delegitimization for Trump.

Theme 1: Portrayal of immigrants as not humans, criminals, and voiceless

In the articles collected, Fox News seemed to systematically represent immigrants through dehumanizing terminologies and discourses, illustrating “them” as “deviant aliens” from the moment they enter “our” country in “waves”. According to Oren et al. (2015), dehumanizing labels are used in order to delegitimize individuals considered as the opponent, in this case, the other. The way the news media exercises this is by stressing “certain aspects of reality and pushing others into the background”, generally diffusing a problematic view of migration, conveying stereotyped and negative representations of immigrants (Triandafyllidou, 2013). It was seen that Fox News applied lexical choices that presented immigrants as “too many”, “aliens” that “flood” the country, a mechanism that homogenises immigrants into an undifferentiated amalgam, which facilitates prejudice and discrimination. Indeed, Mannarini and colleagues (2020) emphasized how media depiction and portraits of minorities as naïve and less civilised helped maintain the Western paternalistic prejudice towards them.

Additionally Fox News used discursive mechanisms that seemed to delegitimize the presence and rights of immigrants, that deprived immigrants of any independent existence and subjectivity (Mannarini et al., 2020). It did so by highlighting their “illegality”, presenting them as incapable of following rules, and thus stressing the need for them to be controlled by the State. According to Hoops and Braitman (2018) “the representational power of labelling a person ‘illegal’ constitutes an individual as an outsider and thus deserving of any negative outcomes they experience, such as racial profiling, deportation, and separation from one’s family” (pg. 156). The authors further argue that the implications of such labeling practices have effects on public opinion and laws that are implemented, as immigrants become scapegoats that preclude the examination of structural forces, such as systemic racism and a broken immigration system. “Illegal immigrants” are thus seen as having made their choice, and that’s all that matters (Hoops & Braitman, 2018). This correlates to what prevails in the

data set, with “immigrant” and “illegal” being the most prevalent words, suggesting Fox News articles allocated their focus to “illegal immigrants” and not immigrants per se.

Crime by immigrants

Rumbaut and Ewing (2007) note that “the misperception that the foreign-born, especially illegal immigrants, are responsible for higher crime rates is deeply rooted in American public opinion and is sustained by media anecdote and popular myth” (pg. 3). In this sub-theme, it was indeed noted that immigrants were often depicted as architects of serious crimes, from raping and molestation, murder and voluntary manslaughter, vandalism, and unsurprisingly, crossing the U.S. border illegally. It was found that the description of crimes allegedly committed by immigrants was very detailed, frequently included the opinion (direct quotations) of police, politicians, or U.S. citizens, whilst not giving way to the voice of the “perpetrators”. Following this, a debate on whether the punishments applied to those who committed the crime was rigorous enough, which often opens suggestions for stricter policies and law enforcement. In line of this, Oren and colleagues (2015) noted that discussing at length specific events that accord importance to self-presentation as the victim, are done through repetition and giving them prominent placing.

Giving voice to U.S. citizens versus immigrants

Castro and colleagues (2017) indicate that direct quotations can explore how communication is oriented to the Other and how arguments of the public find their visibility. In line of this, an analysis of “voice” revealed a prevalence of quotations from the U.S. citizens in comparison to immigrants, with more than half of the articles quoting Americans. It also shone light not only on how U.S. citizens tend to be portrayed, but also the country itself. Indeed, the voice of U.S. citizens was able to freely navigate through the articles, not only by taking positions with strong anti-immigration sentiments but also sharing their beliefs on immigrants, regardless if these individuals had contact with immigrants or not. This seemed the case especially for politicians, namely Trump. Their sentences were longer in comparison to the sentences of directly quoted immigrants, which were already in an alarmingly small amount compared to U.S. citizens in the entire data set. The articles that contained a direct quotation by immigrants were not only far less inferior to the ones of U.S. citizens, but also appeared mainly during the Obama administration (10 articles out of 11). This suggests the choice Fox News makes in muting immigrants, rendering heard only the voice of those the media outlet considers the in-group during selected political periods.

The desire for preservation of American values and cultural identity

In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson (1991) defines a nation as a socially constructed community, imagined by people who recognize themselves as part of that group. The nation becomes symbolic of an imagined community that is limited through processes by which a group socially constructs and categorize themselves. Nations express their sovereignty through the construction of boundaries that delimit who is inside those boundaries and who is outside (Anderson, 1991).

On a first note, this theme proposed the American society linked to having just goals, by portraying itself as a victim and delegitimizing (Oren et al., 2015) immigrants, thus reducing feelings of guilt and shame that usually prevent individuals and groups from committing harmful acts (Oren et al., 2015). More specifically it seemed to form a shared sense of identity. When quoting Klein (1967), Mannarini and colleagues (2020) explain that individuals tend to perceive as a threat every critical event that hinders their actions and desires. This in turn develops an identity that desires to be protected from external threats, and that develops in virtue of enduring the perception of other as enemies (Mannarini et al., 2020). Life thus is experienced as an attacked “us” and a threatening “them” (Mannarini et al., 2020), placing U.S. citizens in the role of victims. This theme emphasized how Fox News portrays U.S. citizens as actual victims from immigrants, that rob them from opportunities, good health, and security.

Caviedes (2015) concluded that press representations revolve equally around the economic theme—encapsulating matters such as the labor market, employment competition and fiscal costs—and the security theme, which specifically relates to health, crime and physical threats. The securitization of immigration captures the demand of the receiving societies for a strong identity with the result that the reassertion of “we-identity” engenders the exclusion of “they-Otherness” (Mannarini et al., 2020). The data showed indeed, that Americans were funneled into a “we-identity”, powerless, scared and prone to exposing their health to diseases brought by immigrants, such as the novel coronavirus or tuberculosis. The data further showed that there was very little trust in the law enforcement systems that worked to regulate immigration, suggesting again that the American society is under threat, both physical and psychological, as Americans “live in fear”. This mechanism strengthens the split between the “us” and “them”, othering immigrants to great lengths.

Obama versus Trump administration

In this theme, a maximization of non-shared characteristics (Jervis, 1999) in the depiction of each president and their administration was found. Whilst Obama was often described under a Democratic helpless, incompetent, unequipped lens, Trump was referred under a more triumphant and honorable light. This may come as no surprise, considering that Fox News is majorly led by Republican journalists.

In addressing the second question of this study, whether representations of immigrants respond to political contexts, and how, a remarkable finding spurred from the data. It was seen that the coverage of specific themes reached peaks during the same years: 2011, 2016, and, 2019. These years, which might seem random at first sight, actually correspond to years of pre-elections. For example, articles covering crimes allegedly committed by immigrants, especially reports on sex crimes, were dramatically amplified in frequency by Fox News during 2011, and 2016. In 2019, they reached their highest frequency, possibly suggesting that Fox News is playing an active role towards the re-election of Trump by covering topics that align with his political views and mission. The way Fox News seems to use to concept of immigration is reduced to an argument, which varies in frequency, with the sole goal of strengthening and justifying the Republican, right-wing agenda. Political regulation therefore, seemed to be one of the core mechanism filtering the representation of immigrants in Fox News. In addition, the vision of immigrants as “illegal” was somehow materialized and evidently homogenized into a reality through the news discourse.

Through inflexible discourses from the media, the reader can understand or imagine interconnected webs of activities, instruments, objects, subjects in social relations, times, places and values (Fairclough, 2003). In this way, news outlets open a public discourse that, unlike any other, bridges imaginary contact between the reader and “the Other”. Whilst the bridging of imaginary contact may be beneficial when “the Other” is outlined in humanizing manners, in the case of conservative Fox News it can prove to be problematic, as “the Other”, namely immigrants, are radicalized, delegitimized, undesirable, and misrepresented. Thus, as long as people have no direct personal experiences with immigrants, they have no concrete mental models as a basis for the formation of their general attitudes towards them. Concurrently, by focusing on illegality, Fox News rendered legal immigrants invisible (Batel & Castro, 2018), while at the same time the same representations can easily be used for them too.

All themes lead to a configuration of psychosocial factors—of which central ones are a well-organized, Other-oriented, argumentation; high visibility (Castro et al., 2017). By doing so the Fox News respond to political demands and to their audience (Castro et al., 2012). The analysis of the narrative of Fox News suggested that the media outlet aligns its messages to the values, beliefs and political orientations of their audience orientations (Oren, et al., 2015). In other words, the media are responding to both institutional and political demands (Castro et al., 2012).

Finally, as highlighted in this study and previous literature, the topic of immigration is a topic of global and current concern, on a small or large scale, in our daily lives. The obtained results contribute to developing a more profound understanding on the role that news media play in constructing and shaping people's perception and reality on immigrants, but also its political agenda, and how it seems to be applied as a filter for people's views and opinions (audience and politicians alike).

The researcher was aware that the study included some limitations, and it is plausible that these limitations could have influenced the results obtained. One of such limitations was the restricted number of articles analyzed, an option taken given the timeframe for the analysis. Yet, as the articles were selected randomly, it is plausible that they are a fair sample of what would be found in the larger sample.

A second limitation lies in the fact that a comparison with other media, right-wing and/or left-wing would have provided a more complex pictures of how the media portrays immigrants, as well as the impact of political regulations. The researcher acknowledges her own political orientations, which are not inseparable from the theoretical choices and research question proposed for this study. However, this was dealt with by having a mixed approach to the coding scheme, and having the data and analysis discussed with another researcher.

The researcher believes that trustworthiness in the study arises from having findings that are aligned with what has been shown in similar literature on representation on immigrants on the media. Correspondingly, this study also adds interesting findings that were unexpected, such as the influence of Presidential elections on the narrative of Fox News. This would be a highly interesting topic for further research.

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