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The Effect of Humanitarian and National-Interest Frames on Public Opinion

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Citation

Schrader, C. (2020). *The Effect of Humanitarian and National-Interest Frames on Public Opinion*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

2 June
2020



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The Effect of Humanitarian and National-Interest Frames on Public Opinion

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COURSE: MEDIA AND PUBLIC OPINION IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Bachelor thesis

Word count: 8084

Abstract

The research conducted in this thesis focused on different frames found in the news reporting of international and national media on the Australian asylum-seeker policy of ‘offshore processing’. Firstly, a content analysis into the news reporting on this subject was undertaken, and it was found that international newspapers such as *The Guardian*, *The New York Times* and *The Daily Mail* assumed a watchdog position, pushing them to use a humanitarian frame. This is in contrast to national newspapers such as *The Australian*, which assumed more of a lapdog position, pushing them to use a national-interest frame. Subsequently, an experiment was conducted to assess whether these different frames influence public opinion. Respondents with no previous knowledge on the subject were asked to participate in a survey experiment. They were assigned to two different groups – one being exposed to humanitarian framed articles, the other being exposed to national-interest framed articles. The results showed a preliminary direction that public opinion takes, as the group exposed to the humanitarian frame was more negative towards the Australian asylum-seeker policy, and the group exposed to the national-interest frame was more positive towards the Australian asylum-seeker policy. Essentially, more agency must be accredited to the media and the public, in the hope of encouraging a more humanitarian tone towards highly politicised issues.

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Introduction

In the last couple of years, especially since the so-called third ‘wave’ of refugees in Australia, the problem of asylum-seekers arriving by boat on Australian shores gained prominence. The media started to pay more attention to it and began calling these asylum seekers ‘boat people’ who ‘jumped the queue’ in detriment of ‘genuine asylum seekers’. The problem has become increasingly politicized. A good example of this is that many claim the Howard government victory in 2001 was due to the fact that he took a hard stance against ‘illegal immigrants’. Shortly before the elections, the polls predicted defeat of the incumbent prime minister and his party, but because of his tough reaction to the ‘Tampa Affair’ they unexpectedly won the election (Reilly, 2017). In the Tampa incident, the Howard government wanted to turn away a ship that saved more than 400 almost-drowning people who were on their way to Australian shores. When this became impossible, they were exiled to a neighbouring island. The government introduced the ‘Pacific Solution’ whereby ‘boat people’ were to be taken to islands outside of the national territory, where their refugee status would be considered while they were held in detention camps. This way of handling asylum seekers has been refuted by many human rights organizations, CSOs and other nations. However, the public opinion of Australians on the government’s handling of ‘boat people’ has, overall, been quite positive.

This seeming contradiction of public support for policies that cause terrible conditions for asylum seekers is not unique to Australia. An example of a recent event in Europe that contains a lot of similarities to the Tampa incident, is the use of a Greek naval ship as a floating pre-deportation centre in the port on the island of Lesbos (Speed, 2020). The asylum seekers on this ship had the misfortune of arriving in Greece after the 1st of March, when the Greek government suspended asylum rights for anyone arriving at their borders. Many human rights organizations condemned this action, such as the *UNHCR* (Siegfried, 2020) and *Human Rights Watch* (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Furthermore, the Greek government was accused by *The New York Times* of having a secret detention centre where asylum seekers were reported to have been captured and beaten before being expelled to Turkey (Stavis-Gridneff et al., 2020). The hard stance against asylum-seekers was a key point in the campaign of the current Greek government, who won a landslide victory in the 2019 Greek legislative elections (Souli, 2020), which indicates public support for these strong policies against asylum-seekers.

These events raise the question what causes public support for government policies to persist, even though these policies create terrible conditions for asylum seekers.

To form an opinion on government policies, knowledge about the policy must be gained. The general public tends to rely on news media for information about asylum seekers and the policies that affect them. From this follows that, for example, the portrayal of the Pacific Solution by Australian media could have had a profound impact on the way people perceive this problem, and thus can influence their opinion on what appropriate countermeasures are.

There has been much research into the frames media use regarding the issue of asylum seekers (e.g. Nickels, 2007; d'Haenens & de Lange, 2001). Next to this, comparative research is also abundant, comparing frames from national media outlets across countries (e.g. Dzilenski, 2017; Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017), and comparing frames within one country between local and national media outlets (e.g. Lawlor, 2015; Fryberg et al., 2011). However, there has not been much comparative work between the frames of national and international media. This is surprising as international media is easily accessible to most countries and is more likely to diverge from government rhetoric, while there often exists an asymmetrical power relationship between national media and the government (Klocker & Dunn, 2003; Laney et al., 2016). International media thus could be a valuable addition for the public when constructing an opinion on government policies, or a good example for national media.

Moreover, there has not been experimental evidence into whether the different kinds of frames found in national and international media have an effect on public opinion. To measure whether this is the case, an experiment will be undertaken. By exposing two groups to news articles with different kinds of frames, it is tried to safely establish whether the framing could have had an effect on public opinion. The events surrounding the Australian asylum seeker policy are chosen as main focus of this thesis, as respondents are likely to have minimal previous knowledge on this subject. This ensures that other important influences are not present, such as a strong opinion of friends and family, or having received information via other means.

If it is established that the media have played an influential role in creating certain perceptions about asylum-seekers, they can also play an influential role in changing it. Moreover, once we gain more understanding of the ways in which the different frames used by the international and national media can change public opinion, and subsequently bring this to the attention the public, it might encourage them to diversify their media intake. This way it might be prevented that asylum seekers are perceived in extremely negative ways, which could help asylum-seekers gaining foot in all nations, whether they came by boat or not.

Literature Review

Public opinion on immigration issues

Public opinion on immigration issues has been widely studied, and a lot of determinants have been established. Research on the influence of micro-level (individual) determinants in establishing opinions on immigration in Australian surveys show that females, the young, the higher educated, the financially better off and those with left-wing political views are more likely to support softer policies on asylum seekers (e.g. Markus & Arunachalam, 2018; McKay et al., 2011). With regard to macro-level (national) determinants, findings show that the level of national unemployment, the amount of attention to immigration issues and the scale of immigrant flows could influence public opinion (Productivity Commission, 2011). It must be acknowledged however that Australia lacks surveys to match the reach and longevity of overseas research (Productivity Commission, 2011, p. 194). But, when compared to European research on the subject, these micro-level indicators (e.g. McLaren, 2001; Freeman & Kesshler, 2005; Coenders & Scheepers, 2003) and macro-level indicators (e.g. Meuleman, Davidov & Billiet, 2009; Lahav, 2004) are also prevalent in explaining public opinion on immigration and asylum seekers in Europe. An important indicator for attitudes towards immigration which logically is not included in Australian research is the attitude towards European integration, which shows that supporters of the EU are more tolerant of asylum seekers (Lahav, 2004; McLaren, 2001).

Public opinion on asylum-seekers in Australia

When focusing on the public opinion on the arrival of 'boat people' in Australia, a term used for asylum seekers arriving unexpected by sea, it must be noted that when one examines the available opinion polls during the last 25 years, the evidence shows that there has been a growing trend for a desire to close the door on boat people (Betts, 2001). There was a dramatic decrease in boat arrivals between 2003 and 2007, which made the issue less salient. However, in the 2010 federal elections the issue of immigration again flared up, with many discussions regarding how to best handle the issue of these 'boat people'. On August 16th 2012, the bill which reintroduced the Pacific Solution was passed, which meant asylum seekers arriving by boat to Australia were again to be transferred to detention centers on remote islands. Many Australians believed these exclusionary policies were necessary for the protection of Australia's sovereignty (Laughland-Boöy et al., 2014). Further opinion polls in 2016 still showed a strong support for offshore processing (Lowy institute, 2019).

Framing

Since most people do not come into direct contact with asylum seekers or will ever experience a detention centre, they have to gain knowledge about the issue through the media in order to form an opinion. Specifically, research showed that when forming opinions about ‘boat people’, the majority of respondents said to be influenced by media rhetoric (McKay, et al., 2011). It is important to understand that the media only have a limited amount of time or words to bring across news. Moreover, they want to make it easy to understand and provide an interpretative package, ergo reducing the complexity of the issue at hand. This process involves selecting certain issues and making these more salient, while other aspects are left out (Entman, 1993). Small changes in the presentation of an issue or of an event can produce (large) changes of opinion, which is known as ‘framing effects’ (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Many studies have demonstrated how framing can influence what the audience think is most important when making a judgement (Kim, Scheufele & Shanahan, 2002) and subsequently how to evaluate different solutions (Domke, McCoy & Torres, 1999). This means that media discourses can directly shape the public opinion on issues, such as asylum seekers arriving by boat to Australia, and on solutions to these issues, such as offshore detention centres (e.g. Cooper et al., 2017; Dandy & Pe-Pua, 2015).

However, one must keep in mind that the media has oftentimes been referred to as a tool used by the elites to shape public opinion of issues (e.g. Zaller, 1992), in effect giving the media little to no agency. No definitive statements can be made on whether this is case, as the amount of agency the media has is different in every situation and every country, and easy divisions between for example democracies and autocracies cannot be made (Whitten-Woodring, 2009). Research on this topic, however, has shown how both politicians and journalists take great interest in shaping public opinion, and thus compete with each other over creating news frames (Entman, 1989). When politicians’ interests seem to prevail in the framing of the news, the media is said to be a ‘lapdog’, and when journalists use independent documentation to build interpretations that challenge this ‘official’ framing, the media is said to be a ‘watchdog’ (Bennet, Lawrence & Livingston, 2006). These different kinds of roles of the media can thus lead to different kinds of framing (e.g. Entman & Rojecki, 1993; Lim & Seo, 2009; Rodelo & Muñiz, 2018).

Framing of asylum-seekers in Australian Media

In investigations into the reporting of the Australian media on asylum seeker arrivals, negative frames were found time and time again (e.g. Gale, 2004; Pugh, 2004). Media reports are not overtly racist in their remarks, but focus more on issues of economic gain of asylum seekers and exploitation of Australians, rather than the humanitarian issues that have caused individuals to flee from their home countries (McKay, Thomas & Kneebones, 2011).

Media representations of asylum seekers in the Australian press usually fall into binary forms (Mummery & Rodan, 2007). An example of this is that asylum seekers arriving by boat are described as illegal and non-genuine while other asylum seekers arriving through preferred channels are described as genuine (Rowe & O'Brien, 2014). Other words used to refer to the asylum seekers arriving by sea are 'boat people' which dehumanises them, and 'queue jumpers' to make them seem inattentive to 'genuine refugees' arriving by other means.

In picturing the asylum seekers as the other, they are often described as a threat to various issues deemed important by Australians. These include being a threat to the economy (Nickels, 2007), national identity and social cohesion as they usually belong to a contrasting culture (McKay et al., 2011), threatening to health by bringing disease and by the usage of the Australian health care system (Pickering, 2001) and a threat to national sovereignty since they cannot decide who comes into their country (Laney et al., 2016). However, the last couple of years the discourse in the media mostly changed from these kinds of threats to a perceived threat of national security. At the same time, the government's asylum-seeker policies embraced a focus on border protection, indicating shift towards a more militarized and securitized way of dealing with the boat people (Laney et al., 2016). This is in line with the finding of Klocker and Dunn (2003) that changes in national media reporting correspond significantly with changes in government policy.

The latter shows how the media and government are very much interconnected in this case. The government needs the media to report on their policies and other statements, while the media needs the government to have authentic sources on what they report. Research into Australian media coverage of refugee issues suggests that the government has a high leverage on media reporting (Bleiker et al., 2013; Klocker & Dunn, 2003). In a research done by Cooper et al. it was found that 79% of the references in Australian newspaper articles were from politicians and government officials (2017, p. 82), which shows how journalists over-rely on government sources in this situation. Furthermore, government representatives control the flows of information from the islands where the detention centres are situated by passing

laws that prohibit Australian immigration workers to share information on asylum seekers held in the detention centres, and by raising the prices for journalist visas to these islands. Moreover, Dodd and Ricketson concluded from their research into the most widespread newspaper of Australia, *The Australian*, that the ‘number of stories that could fairly be described as the work of a watchdog is far outnumbered by those that are the work of a lapdog’ (2015, p. 77).

Framing of asylum seekers in non-Australian media

The Australian news reporting about asylum seekers and the detention centers has been widely investigated, but comparative work with international news reporting has barely been done. However, if we take together all the other comparative work that has been done on the subject you can see an overall trend. When compared to New-Zealand newspapers, it was found that in general refugee issues in Australian newspapers were often framed in political tones and portrayed the asylum seekers in a negative way, especially after 2001. This is in contrast with New-Zealand newspapers, in which the addition of background context and perspectives from refugees provided a more balanced and sympathetic coverage of the issue (Sulaiman-Hill et al., 2011, p. 363). This is in line with an investigation into international media, in which was found that international media outlets provided a relatively more inclusive platform for stakeholders, for example for asylum-seekers. They themselves could subsequently contribute to the social construction of asylum-seekers in Australia through personal coverage (Laney et al, 2016; Cervin, 2019), in effect creating a humanitarian frame.

Besides the fact that Australian newspapers thus provide a less inclusive platform, it is important to note how the human rights aspect of detention was sometimes highlighted in the Australian media, but received far less attention than the ongoing political debates around border security, national identity, economy and problems such as people smugglers – which are all connected to the national interests of Australia. This is in contrast to international and New-Zealand media, in which a large amount of articles addressed the legal and human rights aspects of detention in relation to the Australian situation (Laney et al, 2016; Sulaiman-Hill et al., 2011).

In sum, it could be said that the Australian media assumes a lapdog position when zooming in on this particular case, as the media relies heavily on government quotes and information. Consequently, they take a more political stance in its reporting and frame the issue of asylum-seekers in light of the issues that most Australians see as important to their nation, thereby assuming a national-interest frame.

This is in contrast to the non-Australian media, which can be seen as a ‘watchdog’ of the Australian government by using a variety of sources instead of mostly government sources. The non-Australian media focus more on the stories of asylum seekers themselves or the objections expressed by human rights organizations, thereby assuming a humanitarian frame.

As there is a lack of research on whether these different frames actually create a difference in public opinion, the following question this will be addressed in this thesis: *Does the difference between a national-interest frame and a humanitarian frame influence the public opinion on ‘offshore processing’?*

To investigate this question, Australian newspapers will be compared to international newspapers because, as said before, these are oftentimes easily accessible and thus could be a valuable addition to the national news-intake of an average citizen. However, since there has been little research on international media portrayal of this issue, and the research that has been done has been of quite small scale, the following hypothesis must first be reflected upon: *H1: International media assume more of a watchdog function, whereas Australian media assume more of a lapdog function.*

If this difference holds, it should follow that non-Australian media will overall be more negative about the offshore processing policies, whereas the Australian media will be more positive of the offshore processing policies. Moreover, following the literature, the difference in function of the media should push them to assume a different kind of frame. From this follows the second hypothesis: *H2: The international media use a humanitarian frame, whereas the Australian media use a national-interest frame.*

Following the literature done on framing and framing effects, these different kinds of framing are expected to have an influence on public opinion, which leads to the third hypothesis which will be reflected upon in this thesis: *H3: People will view Australian asylum-seeker policy more favourably after they have read national-interest framed news about the issue, whereas people will view the Australian asylum-seeker policy less favourably after they have read humanitarian-framed news about the issue.*

Content-analysis – Methodology

To establish whether the literature written about the role of the media and the different frames in the Australian and non-Australian newspapers is correct, and thus supports hypothesis 1 and 2, a content analysis was conducted. The newspaper that was used to represent the Australian media was *The Australian*, since this is the only daily national-wide newspaper. The preference was given to using multiple newspapers, however adding only a few regional newspapers might have had an effect on the results, as research has shown that regional newspapers have diverging frames on asylum seekers because of their geographical location (Cooper et al., 2017). Adding newspapers from every region would have gone beyond the scope of this research. The newspapers that were used to represent the international media were defined as media that have the highest number of unique visitors on their online news sites. This ensured that the readership is broad and not restricted to a specific country, and can be easily accessed from all around the world. The three most-read newspapers turned out to be *The Daily Mail*, *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* (Comscore, 2012).

Within these newspapers, articles focussing on the policy of ‘offshore processing’ were selected, as the puzzle surrounding public opinion on this topic created the incentive for this research. Because it has been found that media representations of asylum seekers can shift according to key events (Klocker & Dunn, 2003), articles were picked that were written after three different key events that took place in the last two decades in the policy of offshore processing.

The first event was the Tampa Affair, which played out in late August 2001. This event was the catalyst for the implementation of the Pacific Solution, which opened detention camps in places such as Nauru and Manus in which the refugee status of asylum seekers would be considered rather than in Australian territory. The asylum seekers on the *MV Tampa* were one of the first to be taken to Nauru.

The second event was the Malaysian Solution, signed in July 2011. This event showed a different course of action from the government, as the agreement was meant as a different means of dealing with asylum seekers arriving by boat. This ‘solution’ would swap maritime asylum seekers with long-standing ‘genuine’ refugees from Malaysia, as the ruling Labor government was not supportive of the Pacific Solution. However, eventually this agreement was deemed unlawful by the Australian High Court, which meant that the government had to start using the offshore processing centres again. This event can uncover whether the media took a ‘lapdog’ function and welcomed the new direction taken by the government, or took

more of a ‘watchdog’ function and showed to be critical of the new policy by the Labor government, thereby testing hypothesis 1.

The third event was the publication of the Nauru files in August 2016. These files consisted of 2000 documents of incident reports written by staff working in the Australian detention centre on Nauru between 2015-2016. The (alleged) incidents included things as rape, sexual misconduct with children and beatings by the detention centre staff. This event could give the opportunity to *The Australian* to surpass the government as a main source, as the refugees’ stories could be easily quoted and the Australian government did not reply much on the revelations, and start focussing on humanitarian aspects. This event would thus put both hypothesis 1 and 2 to a critical test, as one would assume that *The Australian* would use more quotes from asylum-seekers and human rights organizations and assume more of a humanitarian frame in this situation.

The articles that were analysed to look whether the newspapers assumed more of a watchdog position and a humanitarian frame, or more of a lapdog function and a national interest frame, were the ones that were published in the week following these three different key events in the *New York Times*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Guardian* and *The Australian*. Key terms were used to find that articles that connected to the three events (see Appendix 1).

In order to limit the amount of articles, the minimal word count in each article investigated was set on 450 words. This method of limiting cases ensured the articles used for the analysis were less likely to focus on only one aspect of the event, and would more likely be an overview of the situation. Small articles can more easily be focused on only one aspect (e.g. the humanitarian or economic aspect) and will more likely use little to no sources. This means that the longer articles could test the first two hypotheses more thoroughly. This was chosen over the method of random selection of articles, as the minimal-word-count method was thus more likely to comprehensively show the frame of the newspaper at hand.

To test the first two hypotheses and thus assess the function and frame of the newspapers, firstly a quantitative content analysis was carried out to investigate the variety of sources and the inclusiveness of the media platform. For this, all quotations used in the articles were categorized into their corresponding sources (see Appendix 1). The categories of sources are drafted from expectations, but extra categories could be added during the analysis. For every event and every newspaper, the amount and kind of sources was counted and converted to percentages of the total amount of quotations.

Subsequently, a qualitative content analysis was executed, in order to make sure the sources of quotations resulted in the expected frames. The underlying assumption of hypothesis 1 was, namely, that certain sources of quotations result in a humanitarian frame and others will result a national-interest frame. For example, that quotes of refugees were used in order to try and create a feeling of empathy for the readers, or that quotes of the government were directed towards the national interest, such as national security, economy and so on. In this way it was made sure that the watchdog or lapdog function of the media indeed resulted in a humanitarian or a national-interest frame.

Content-analysis – Results

For the content analysis, 48 articles satisfied the conditions set to be taken along in the research. Out of all the quotations within the collected articles from the different newspapers, the following categories were eventually utilized: Australian government, Australian politicians, other (non-Australian) politicians and governments, organizations focussing on human rights, human rights activists, refugees and asylum seekers, experts, and other. The latter was divided into positive, neutral or negative towards asylum seekers (see Appendix 1).

When comparing the international newspapers with the Australian newspaper across all events, there was a clear pattern in the quotations (Table 1). None of the categories of sources in the international newspapers covered more than 20 percent of the total amount of quotations, while in the Australian newspaper both the Australian government and other Australian politicians made up more than 20 percent (40,1% and 22,5% respectively). This showed that the international newspapers provided a more inclusive and evenly distributed platform, whereas the Australian newspaper mostly focused on government sources.

The percentages of quotations showed a preliminary direction of the role the media played in the international and national newspapers. Taken together, the international newspapers used political sources 39,5 percent of the time, while the Australian newspaper used these 68,8 percent of the time. This showed a high potential for a lapdog function, and thus a national interest frame, in the Australian newspaper. When adding up the sources connected to a humanitarian focus, it could be seen that the international newspapers used human rights advocates, organizations, refugees and asylum seekers as sources 35 percent of the time, while the Australian newspaper only used these 26,2 percent of the time. This showed a high potential for a watchdog function, and thus a humanitarian frame, in the international newspapers. These trends could be seen in all the events taken together, but even when looking at the events separately (see Appendix 2, table 1-4).

Table 1. The amount and source of quotations in articles of all three events in the international newspapers vs. the Australian newspapers.

	International Newspapers	The Australian
Australian government	18,2%	40,1%
Australian politicians	12,5%	22,5%
Other politicians/governments	8,8%	6,2%
Organizations focussing on human rights	19,8%	8,4%
Human right activists	3,6%	0,4%
Refugees/ asylum seekers	11,6%	4,9%
Experts	5,5%	3,1%
Other (positive)	13%	6,6%
Other (negative)	4%	1,8%
Other (neutral)	3%	6,2%
<i>Total</i>	<i>329</i>	<i>227</i>

When delving deeper into the articles of the Australian newspaper surrounding the Tampa affair, it was clear from the first article published after the *MV Tampa* incident that typical negative framing of asylum seekers was present. In this article the asylum seekers were said to “not only swamp Christmas Island’s facilities, but overwhelm the country’s three detention centres dedicated to newly arrived boatpeople”, and that the *MV Tampa* was “steaming to Christmas Island” (Carson & Dore, 2001). By using these particular words, it was subtly shown that Australia could not make a choice whether the ship was coming to Australian waters or not, and thus that these asylum seekers were a threat to Australian sovereignty. On the contrary, when reading the news in the international newspapers, it was implied that Australia made a clear choice and made aggressive moves to follow up on this. *The Daily Mail* began one of its articles by saying “Australian SAS troops stormed a ship crammed with 434 asylum seekers yesterday ready to force the captain to steer it back in international waters, at gunpoint if necessary” (Shears, 2001). The international newspapers did use a fair amount of quotations from the government in the articles written about *MV Tampa* incident, which was not in line with the expectations. However, upon closer investigation it was revealed that these were oftentimes used to show the ‘brutal’ stance of the government,

in line with the expected humanitarian frame. This hard line of the government was shown for example by a quote of the prime minister whom said that he “planned to introduce new laws – and force Parliament to sit all weekend to pass them if necessary – to retroactively justify its actions” (Reuters, 2011), which in effect portrayed a lack of empathy towards maritime laws, the refugees or the captain of the ship.

In the second event, it was found that the (very few) times that *The Australian* let human rights organizations speak, the underlying assumption of hypothesis 1 that using quotes from human rights organization would result in a more humanitarian tone, was not always correct. For example, in the articles about the agreement of the Malaysian solution, *The Australian* quoted an Afghan human rights organization that “warned that increasing lawlessness in Afghanistan could prompt a flood of asylum seekers hoping for a safe-haven in Australia” (Powell & Rintoul, 2011). These kinds of quotes were used to support a harder stance on asylum seekers than taken with the agreement with Malaysia. Furthermore, the co-director of this Afghan human rights organization was quoted saying “those hoping for safe haven would not be deterred by the threat of being sent to Malaysia” (Powell & Rintoul, 2011), in effect supporting the earlier offshore processing policy and assuming more of a ‘watchdog’ position. The negative usage of quotes from human rights organizations was in clear contrast to what was found in the articles from the *New York Times* on the Malaysian Solution, whom used quotes to show the (in their eyes) unlawfulness and abominableness of the law. *Human Rights Watch* was for example quoted saying “Australia is using Malaysia as a dumping ground for boat people it does not want and in the process walking away from its commitments to follow the 1951 Refugees Convention” (Gooch, 2011).

The same contrast could be found when looking into the quotes used by refugees or asylum seekers themselves. In the international newspapers, their quotes mostly showed the desperateness of refugees arriving by boat, or the anxiety of asylum seekers in detention centers. This was especially the case in the articles written about the Nauru files, in which asylum seekers were quoted saying things like “I am still thinking about ending my life, but I am scared that they will mistreat my dead body” (Davidson, 2016). However, in *The Australian* these quotes tried to show how even ‘genuine’ asylum seekers themselves think going on a boat towards Australia was a morally wrong thing to do: “Because I have three daughters and I love them, I will never go by boat” (Maley, 2011).

The Nauru Files event was chosen because it was expected that *The Australian* would most likely take a more humanitarian stance in this case as it was, amongst other things, about the alleged abuse of children. However, the amount of articles that could be taken along in the analysis about this event (three, as opposed to eleven articles written on first and second event) clearly showed that instead of adopting a more humanitarian frame, *The Australian* simply wrote less articles on the subject. The three articles that were analysed did not rely heavily on political quotes, which was not in line with the expectations, most likely because of the fact that the government hardly reacted on the allegations that came forward. Consequently, the use of sources shifted more towards human rights organizations in this particular event. However, it is important to note that these were partly used in a way to downplay claims made in the Nauru Files. For example, Kenny (2016) included the answer of a woman working for *Amnesty International* on the question why Nauruans would want to hurt refugees in the detention camps, which was “You know there is a very simple answer to that, they do it because they can do it”. The author then concluded that for this to be possible “we need to accept a bleak view of 10.000 Nauruans” (Kenny, 2016). Thus *The Australian* did not even take a more humanitarian stance in this event. Whereas in the international media, especially in *The Guardian*, many quotes of asylum seekers were used to describe the kinds of assault and abuses they said to have been victim to (e.g. Davidson, 2016; Farrel, 2016).

In sum, the content analysis showed that the international media had a more inclusive platform, while the Australian media clearly used more government quotes. However, this did not always result in the the Australian newspapers assuming a lapdog function, as it did take a negative stance towards the government in the ‘Malaysian Solution’ event. Hypothesis 1 thus could not be completely supported.

The qualitative content analysis nevertheless showed the tendency of *The Australian* to assume a national-interest frame, and the tendency of the international media to use a humanitarian frame. Not only were political sources of quotes used more often by the Australian media, the other sources were mostly used in the detriment of asylum seekers. The exact opposite was the case in the international media, in which sources such as human rights organizations were used more often, and the political quotes were used to create more sympathy towards asylum seekers. Hypothesis 2 could thus be supported.

Experiment – Methodology

As the findings of the content analysis were in line with earlier literature written on the topic of framing, the next step was to see whether these kinds of framing had an effect on the way people perceive the Australian asylum-seeker policy. For this a survey experiment was conducted. The respondents were randomly assigned to two different groups, who were exposed to typical cases of the two kinds of frames that came forward out of the content analysis. One group of people had to read three articles written in a national-interest frame, the other group had to read three articles written in a humanitarian frame. Both of the experimental groups were presented with officially published news articles about each of the three events described earlier, which enhances the ecological validity of the findings (Harbridge & Malhotra, 2011, p. 500).

As the method of snowball sampling was used to gather respondents, the expected response group would most likely be Dutch, who probably do not have extensive knowledge about the subject of offshore processing. To make sure, a pre-test question was asked whether this was actually the case. The response group having little knowledge on the subject was perceived as useful for the purpose of this experiment, as it ensures they were not influenced by other important factors, such as previously gained knowledge or friends and family with strong opinions and the like. Subsequently, the framing of these articles was the main determinant when establishing their opinion. Other pre-test questions were asked to establish the respondents' age, sex, education, income, opinion on the EU and ideology – as the literature review showed that these are important indicators for opinion on asylum-seekers.

After the respondents read the articles (see Appendix 3), they firstly had to answer a multiple choice question which established whether they perceived the articles as having addressed either humanitarian or national-interest aspects the most. A chi-square test was executed to test whether the manipulation was successful. Subsequently, their opinion on different aspects of the offshore detention policy and on the different events was asked. These questions could be answered on a scale of 1 to 10, which respectively stands for completely disagree and completely agree. To be able to measure the difference in opinion between the two randomly selected groups and the corresponding frames, linear regressions were executed. The main independent variable was a dummy variable that represented the two different frames, with the base group being the humanitarian frame. The dependent variable in every regression executed was one (or a combination of) post-test questions which assessed the respondents' opinion on different aspects of the Australian policy or the three events.

Experiment – Results

The total amount of people who started the survey was 82 respondents, however 53,7% did not complete the survey¹. This was a high attrition rate, which spiked after the survey was spread on social media. When looking into whether the attrition was random or whether people with certain characteristics were more likely to drop out, it first had to be noted that when looking at the variable ‘age’ the assumption of homogeneity is violated, $F(1, 69)=7,613$, $p= 0,007$. This however was expected, as most respondents would most likely be students. The most important thing to note was that, on average, the people who dropped out of the survey ($M=3,82$, $SE=0,255$) were often significantly less educated than the ones that completed the survey ($M=4,68$, $SE=0,173$)². This bias in attrition could be explained by the fact that those who participated in the survey were primarily Dutch, and as the survey was conducted in English some might have experienced difficulties in completing it – causing them to drop out.

Even though the two treatments groups were randomly allocated, the high attrition rate still could have caused unbalanced samples. Certainly since, when the partial responses were removed, it became clear that the ‘humanitarian frame’ group had slightly more people completing the survey ($n=21$) than the people allotted to the ‘national interest frame’ group ($n=17$). So first, the characteristics of the respondents of different treatment groups were compared to assess whether the randomization still resulted in balanced samples. Independent t-tests were used for every pre-test variable to assess the differences in the distribution of respondent characteristics between the national interest frame and the humanitarian frame. The main independent variable was a dummy variable indicating whether respondents were assigned to the condition with the humanitarian frame, or the condition with the national-interest frame. Again, the only statistically significant difference between the groups was found in the education level, which showed that the people allotted to the ‘humanitarian frame group’ were statistically significantly higher educated ($M=5$, $SE=1$) than the persons allotted to the ‘national interest frame group’ ($M=4,29$, $SE=0,254$)³. This means the samples were not balanced on all aspects deemed important in relation to the issue of asylum-seeker policy, which could have had an impact on the results of the experiment.

¹This includes those who stopped as early as the pre-test questions (23,3%), and the people who remained long enough to be assigned to a treatment status (13,4%). The rest (17,1%) attrited during or after they’ve read the articles.

² The difference in education of the two groups was 0,861, BCa 95% CI [-1,465, -0,257], $t(70)=- 2,843$, $p=0,006$.

³ The difference in education between the two groups was 0,706, BCa 95% CI [0,030, 1,381], $t(36)=2,119$, $p=0,041$.

Another aspect that could have impacted the results of the experiment was whether the manipulation check was successful or not. In both groups, three answer choices were chosen, albeit in different proportions (Table 2). A chi squared test of independence was performed to test the relation between the frame of the articles and the perceived focus of the articles by the respondents, which showed that there was not a statistically significant association (χ^2 (N=38) = 3,792, p=0,150). It must be noted, however, that the assumption of having a minimum of expected count of 5 in 80% of the cells was violated due to the low response rate. Still, the result means that the manipulation was not successful, even though the difference in percentages seemed to be quite large.

Table 2. Answers to the question ‘On which of these aspects did the articles focus on most, in your opinion?’.

	Humanitarian frame	National interest frame
Human rights and welfare of asylum seekers	38,1%	11,8%
The politics surrounding the three events	42,9%	70,6%
Asylum seekers being a threat to Australia	19,0%	17,6%

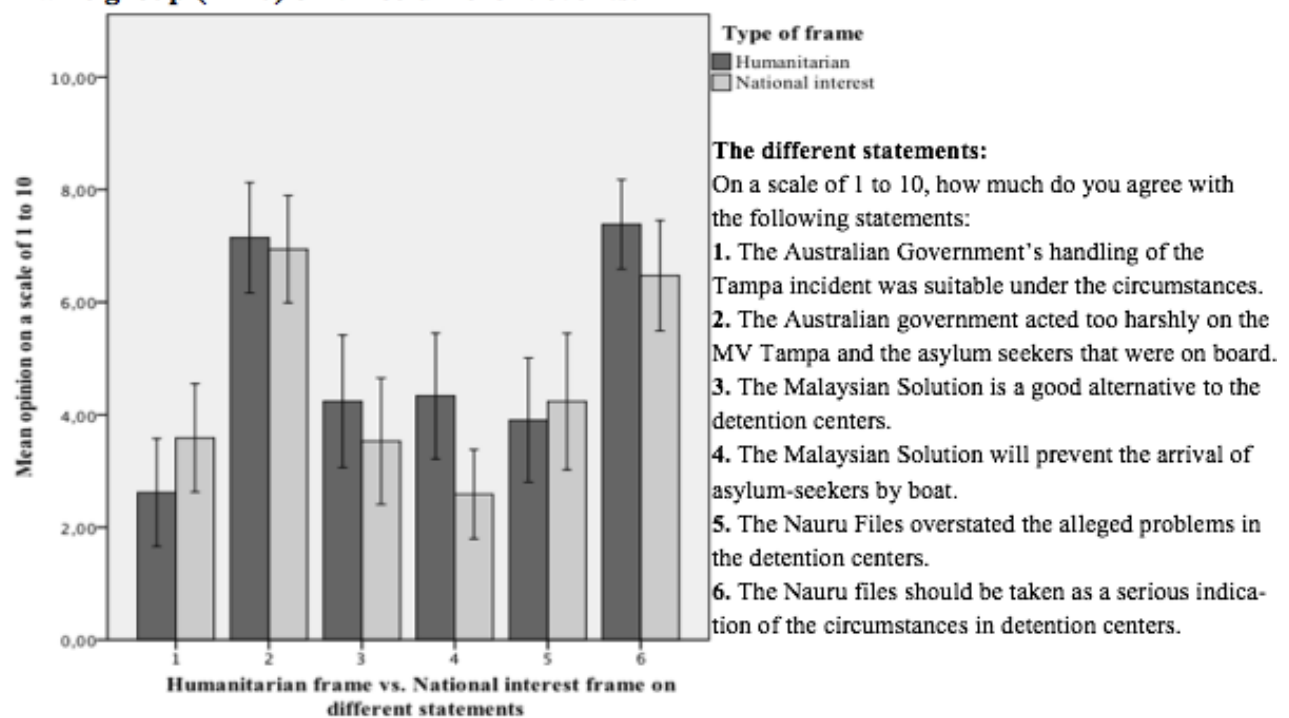
Next, in order to see whether these different frames resulted in different opinions on the situation surrounding the detention centers for asylum seekers in Australia, a linear regression was carried out. Of main interest was the independent dummy variable that represented the frames. Besides this, all the pre-test questions that could have influenced opinion on asylum-seeker policy were added as independent variables into the model as well. This was because the groups did differ on some personal characteristics which should be controlled for. As identified in the literature review, the most important control variables were age, sex, education level, income level, ideology and opinion on the European Union.

The outcomes of the linear regressions of the individual post-test questions were combined in one table containing the six general policy related questions (Appendix 4, table 5) and in one table containing six questions relating to the three events (Appendix 4, table 6).

For a more straightforward view on whether the opinion differed between the two groups on general policy-related questions (the first six post-test questions), a variable was calculated adding up the data and dividing it by the amount of questions. A multiple linear regression was calculated to predict the overall Australian policy opinion, based on the important pre-test

questions and the differing frame⁴. From this analysis came forward that political views, income and age were significant predictors of the eventual general opinion on Australian asylum-seeker policy. This was the case despite the high standard error caused by the small sample size, which showed the effect size of these variables were large. When looking at the main independent variable of interest, the media frame, the amount of change between either frames was only 0,13 on a scale of 1 to 10 (with a standard error of 0,57). This means that the national-interest group, based on this small amount of respondents, were slightly more positive of Australian asylum-seeker policy than the humanitarian group – however it must be noted that the results were not statistically significant.

Figure 1. Opinions of the humanitarian frame group (n=21) vs. the national-interest frame group (n=17) on three different events.



When looking at the opinion of the respondents on the three different events found in the articles they have read, again political views and age were significant predictors. However, this time the level of income did not seem to matter as much. In addition, the type of frame turned out to be important in the assessment of the Australian government's handling of the *Tampa* incident (statement 1), and the assessment of whether the Malaysian Solution would prevent the arrival of asylum-seekers by boat (statement 4), as can be seen in figure 1. Furthermore, all results of the multiple linear regressions on the events followed the expected

⁴ A significant regression equation was found with $F(7,30)= 2,921$, $p=0,019$, with an R^2 of 0,405.

direction. The humanitarian frame group showed a more negative stance towards the Australian government in the *MV Tampa* incident, a more positive stance on the Malaysian Solution as this replaced the policy of detention centers, and more often believed the allegations made in the Nauru Files were serious indications of the circumstances in the detention centers. It must be noted again that the differences were not always significant.

A cautious conclusion can be drawn from these results, namely that respondents viewed Australian asylum seeker policy more favourably after they have read the national-interest framed news about the events, whereas respondents viewed the Australian asylum-seeker policy less favourably after they have read humanitarian frames news about it. However, as most results were not statistically significant, hypothesis 3 could not be supported.

Conclusion

The focus of this research was to find out whether the difference between a national-interest frame and a humanitarian frame influences public opinion, specifically in the case of ‘offshore processing’. To determine whether this was the case, firstly it had to be established whether these frames could actually be found in the news reporting on the issue. The quantitative content analysis of the frames showed that indeed the international newspapers used a bigger variety of quotes (including human rights organizations and asylum-seekers) thereby assuming a watchdog function, whereas the national newspaper used primarily political quotes, thereby frequently assuming a lapdog function. Respectively, this predicted a more humanitarian and a more national-interest based frame. Further qualitative content analysis only reinforced these results – as the political quotes in the national newspaper were indeed used to underline the national interests, and quotes from human rights organizations and asylum seekers in the international newspapers were used to create a sense of sympathy. This was thus in line with earlier research done on the topic and the first two hypotheses.

Secondly it had to be established whether these frames resulted in a differing opinion on the asylum-seeker policy of Australia. For this an experiment was undertaken in which the respondents were divided into two groups, whom either read articles with a humanitarian frame or articles with a national-interest frame. However, when looking at the respondents’ opinion on the overall Australian asylum-seeker policy, no significant results were yielded. The small difference that was found between the groups was in line with hypothesis 3, nevertheless it could not be supported. When looking at the opinion of the respondents regarding the three different events, there was a statistically significant difference in opinion

in two cases. Moreover, all of the other differences between the two groups were in the expected direction (as for example Cooper et al., 2017 and Laney et al., 2016 predicted), however most differences were again not significant.

The lack of significant results can be due to the fact that the number of respondents turned out to be quite low, causing a high standard error to occur. Thus no conclusive statements could be drawn from this research. However, one must keep in mind that the provisional outcomes of this research did show a preliminary direction of the results that can be expected in additional research, which would have to accumulate more respondents to possibly retrieve more conclusive statements on the subject. Further research on this specific subject is thus encouraged, however two important adjustments need to be made. Firstly, one must recruit a larger amount of respondents to see whether significant results can then be yielded, and ideally a more representative group – as this would heighten the external validity to some extent. Secondly, one must incorporate more types of newspapers with an (expected) national-interest frame, to make sure whether the first and second hypothesis are still supported when adding multiple regional newspapers to the ‘national-interest frame’ group.

A different explanation for the insignificant results could be that there simply is no effect to measure, and that in this case framing does not result in a difference in opinion. This could partially be explained by the respondents’ not having much interest in the issue at hand, which causes them not to form their own strong opinion – assuming that people are internally conflicted over most political issues at hand and respond to survey questions on the basis of whatever ideas are at the top of their head (Zaller & Feldman, 1992). However, this is exactly what framing is said to influence. Thus following this explanation, the frames were most probably not strong enough – which is a possibility as the people who read the humanitarian articles still thought ‘the politics surrounding the events’ was most prominent. Moreover, a chi-square test showed no statistically significant relation between the types of frames and the perceived focus of the articles read by the respondents.

Another important point to make is that ecological validity was naturally not reached in this experiment. This was not the objective of this experiment, and the usage of respondents that had no knowledge of the issue was perceived to be an asset, as this would isolate the frame-variable from other influences for creating an opinion. However, further research might want to focus on issues known to the respondents, as this would create more ecological validity. Of course, familiar issues would bring other factors in as well, but this kind of research can better assess whether exposing people to humanitarian frames often used

by international newspapers, rather than their 'national-interest' framed national news, can possibly create a different opinion. This subsequently will have a higher practical significance, as in practice most people already have created an opinion on politicized issues to varying degrees, which might possibly limit the framing effects (Bechtel et al., 2015).

The content analysis thus has shown a difference in framing between international and national newspapers, in which the national newspapers over-relied on political quotes and oftentimes assumed a lapdog function. However, one must keep in mind to never reduce the national mass media as having the role of a conveyer belt, and must elevate it to being an independent strategic actor (Baum & Potter, 2008, p. 57). Especially since, in the articles surrounding the Malaysian Solution, *The Australian* showed to have an opposing opinion to the then ruling government, subsequently assuming more of an independent watchdog position in this event. This shows again how the function of the media can indeed be different in every event, and uncomplicated divisions on the function of the media cannot be made (Whitten-Woodring, 2009).

By laying bare the differences between national and international frames, and in this specific case the national-interest and humanitarian frame, this research increased the understanding of the ways in which media portrays issues and can change public opinion. However, even more research must be done on the subject in order to change the focus from the traditional link between political actors and public opinion, to a more complete picture in which the media plays an important role. Once more agency is accredited to the media – it might perceive itself more clearly as an actor of change, assuming a watchdog position in every event, instead of over-relying on government sources. Moreover, this thesis showed that more agency of the public could also make a difference by choosing to step beyond national interest frame, and include non-national media in their own news-intake, in order to create a more comprehensive view on highly politicised issues. This will encourage a more humanitarian tone towards immigration issues, which in turn could harmonize societies.

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Appendix 1 – Codebook for the content analysis

1. Selection procedure of articles.

The newspapers that are used to collect articles from are *The Australian*, *The New York Times*, *The Daily Mail*, and *The Guardian*. To identify the articles written about three chosen events, the following key words and dates are used:

- *MV Tampa* stranding in international waters Key word: ‘Tampa’
Time frame: 24 August 2001 – 30 August 2001
- Signing of the *Malaysian Solution* Key words: ‘Malaysia’ and ‘Australia’
Time frame: 25 July 2011 – 31 July 2011
- Publishing of the *Nauru Files* Key word: ‘Nauru’
Time frame: 10 August 2016 – 16 August 2016

Next to this, all articles used in the analysis have a minimum 450 words.

2. Coding unit and categories.

The unit of analysis used in the content analysis is quotes. Quotes are recognized in the following ways: “... said”, “... reacted”, “... are threatening”, “... claimed”, “... insisted”, “... replied”, and other ways of showing an explicit reaction/opinion of a person or organization. The categories that are used for the quotes are defined as follows:

- **Australian government** – all politicians associated with the then current ruling party.
- **Australian politicians** – all politicians not associated with the then current ruling party.
- **Other politicians/governments** – all politicians associated with governments from any other country than Australia.
- **Human rights organizations** – all organizations known for promoting human rights, or people explicitly associated with these organizations.
- **Human rights activists** – all persons not associated to organizations known for promoting human rights.
- **Refugees/asylum seekers** – all persons whom are explicitly referred to as being either a refugee or an asylum seeker.
- **Experts** – all persons whom are to be seen as experts on certain issues connected to the events, such as human rights or maritime laws.
- **Other** – All of the other quotations that could not be put in either of the latter categories, such as locals or a security officer in the detention camps, subsequently divided into subcategories: positive towards asylum seekers, negative towards asylum seekers, neutral about asylum seekers.

3. Coding form.

For every event, a coding form with the amount of quotations from every source is set up in the following way:

Event 1, 2 or 3	The New York Times	The Daily Mail	The Guardian	The Australian
Australian Government				
Australian Politicians				
Other politicians/ governments				
Human rights organizations				
Human rights activists				
Refugees/asylum seekers				
Experts				
Other (positive)				
Other (negative)				
Other (neutral)				
Total amount of quotations				

Appendix 2 – Outcomes content analysis tables

Table 1. The amount and source of quotations in articles about the ‘Tampa Affair’ of the New York Times International, The Daily Mail, The Guardian and The Australian.

	New York Times International	The Daily Mail	The Guardian	The Australian	Total
Australian government	55,6%	28,6%	15%	44,7%	35,8%
Australian politicians	0%	5,7%	12,5%	24,3%	17,1%
Other politicians/ governments	11,1%	20%	20%	10,7%	14,4%
Organizations focussing on human rights	11,1%	5,7%	12,5%	1,9%	5,3%
Human right activists	0%	2,9%	0%	0%	0,5%
Refugees/ asylum seekers	0%	2,9%	2,5%	0%	1,1%
Experts	0%	2,9%	2,5%	1%	1,6%
Other (positive)	22,2%	31,4%	22,5%	8,7%	16,6%
Other (negative)	0%	0%	7,5%	1,9%	2,7%
Other (neutral)	0%	0%	5%	6,8%	4,8%
<i>Total</i>	9	35	40	103	187

Table 2. The amount and source of quotations in articles about the ‘Malaysian Solution’ of the New York Times International, The Daily Mail, The Guardian and The Australian.

	New York Times International	The Daily Mail	The Guardian	The Australian	Total
Australian government	25%	0%	0%	41,7%	40,5
Australian politicians	0%	0%	0%	21,4%	19,8%
Other politicians/ governments	12,5%	0%	0%	2,9%	3,6%
Organizations focussing on human rights	50%	0%	0%	11,7%	14,4%
Human right activists	12,5%	0%	0%	0%	0,9%
Refugees/ asylum seekers	0%	0%	0%	8,7%	8,1%
Experts	0%	0%	0%	1,9%	1,8%
Other (positive)	0%	0%	0%	3,9%	3,6%
Other (negative)	0%	0%	0%	1%	0,9%
Other (neutral)	0%	0%	0%	6,7%	6,3%
<i>Total</i>	8	0	0	103	111

Table 3. The amount and source of quotations in articles about the ‘Nauru Files’ of the New York Times International, The Daily Mail, The Guardian and The Australian.

	New York Times International	The Daily Mail	The Guardian	The Australian	<i>Total</i>
Australian government	31,25%	25,7%	12,4%	9,5%	15,1
Australian politicians	6,25%	0%	17,7%	19%	14,7%
Other politicians/ governments	0%	14,3%	3,8%	0	4,7%
Organizations focussing on human rights	50%	22,9%	19,9%	23,8%	22,5%
Human right activists	6,25%	8,6%	3,2%	4,8%	4,3%
Refugees/ asylum seekers	0%	2,9%	18,8%	9,5%	14,7
Experts	0%	2,9%	8,1%	19%	7,8%
Other (positive)	6,25%	8,6%	9,1%	9,5%	8,9%
Other (negative)	0%	2,9%	4,8%	4,8%	4,3%
Other (neutral)	0%	11,4%	2,2%	0%	3,1%
<i>Total</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>186</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>258</i>

Table 4. The amount and source of quotations in articles of all three events in the New York Times International, The Daily Mail, The Guardian and The Australian.

	New York Times International	The Daily Mail	The Guardian	The Australian	<i>Total</i>
Australian government	36,4%	27,1%	12,8%	40,1%	27,2%
Australian politicians	3%	2,9%	16,8%	22,5%	16,6%
Other politicians/ governments	6%	17,1%	6,6%	6,2%	7,7%
Organizations focussing on human rights	39,4%	14,3%	18,6%	8,4%	15,1%
Human right activists	6%	5,7%	2,7%	0,4%	2,3%
Refugees/ asylum seekers	0%	2,9%	15,9%	4,9%	8,8%
Experts	0%	2,9%	7,1%	3,1%	4,5%
Other (positive)	9,1%	20%	11,5%	6,6%	10,4%
Other (negative)	0%	1,4%	5,3%	1,8%	3,1%
Other (neutral)	0%	5,7%	2,7%	6,2%	4,3%
<i>Total</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>226</i>	<i>227</i>	<i>556</i>

Appendix 3 – Experiment articles

Articles used for the humanitarian-frame group:

Event 1: Gun point threat to refugee ship.

Australian SAS troops stormed a ship crammed with 434 asylum seekers yesterday ready to force the captain to steer it back into international waters, at gunpoint if necessary.

The Afghan, Pakistani and Sri Lankan refugees, who were rescued by the freighter after their people-smuggling boat sank in the Indian Ocean, are desperate to claim asylum in Australia. But the Canberra government says they must return to Indonesia, from where they set sail. The refugees are threatening to commit mass suicide by jumping overboard rather than go back.

Yesterday's dramatic storming of the Tampa was the the first time in modern maritime history that a friendly nation had sent troops to board a ship from another Western country. Last night, furious Norwegian politicians and the ship's owners branded the commandos 'pirates', saying the Australian action was inhumane. The move also provoked outrage among human rights activists, who claimed Australian politicians who face re-election this year are putting their self-interest ahead of the safety of desperate people fleeing oppression.

Amid threats that Australia could be sued for piracy, Norway appealed to the United Nations and the International Maritime Organisation to intervene.

Norwegian prime minister Stoltenberg came to the defence of the freighter's captain, Arne Rinnan. 'One cannot force a ship, which the captain deems unfit, to sail into international waters,' he said after exchanging 'strong words' with his Australian counterpart John Howard. The Norwegian Foreign Minister insisted the refugees are Australia's responsibility because they were rescued at the request of Australian customs officers. 'Australia is acting irresponsibly and in an inhuman manner,' he added. 'Its actions contradict its obligations and contradict the laws of the sea.'

But Australian Immigration Minister replied that Captain Rinnan had tried to mislead the Australian authorities over the true condition of the refugees. 'We found there were no cases that required urgent medical evacuation.'

Just 24 hours earlier, the captain had insisted he feared for the safety of his crew and for the welfare of the refugees. 'At least six people were very sick', said a spokesman for the freighter. 'I cannot understand how they can say anything about the health situation for hundreds of people in a couple of minutes.'

Event 2: Australia agrees with Malaysia on refugee swap.

Australia and Malaysia signed a refugee-swapping agreement on Monday that aims to stem the flow of asylum seekers to Australia's shores. But while the plan promises greater rights for the migrants Australia will send to Malaysia than afforded to those already here, it has failed to satisfy refugee advocates, who accuse Australia of abandoning its international obligations.

Rights advocates say Australia risks violating its obligations under the U.N. refugee convention because Malaysia is not a party to the convention and has a poor track record in its treatment of refugees. Human Rights Watch said that 'Australia is using Malaysia as a dumping ground for boat people it does not want and in the process walking away from its commitments to follow the 1951 Refugees Convention.' Tenaganita, a Kuala Lumpur-based support group for migrants, said 'What Australia should have done, is to push Malaysia to ratify the convention, then you are assured of protection of rights for all refugees.'

Hussein, the Malaysian minister for home affairs, said that the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration would help ensure that migrants' rights were protected.

The Australian government has said that, since the outlines of the plan were announced in May, there have been fewer asylum seekers arriving in Australia by boat than during the same period last year. 'This is an arrangement which sends a very clear signal that Malaysia and Australia are serious about stopping people smuggling,' said Bowen, the Australian immigration minister.

The U.N. office said that while its preference had always been for all asylum seekers arriving in Australia to be processed there, the new deal contained important 'safeguards,' including protection against arbitrary detention and access to education and jobs. 'The critical test of this arrangement will now be in its implementation both in Australia and Malaysia, particularly the protection and vulnerability assessment procedures under which asylum seekers will be assessed in Australia prior to any transfer taking place,' the U.N. office said in a statement.

Event 3: Gillian Triggs says public pressure can change detention policy after Nauru files leak.

‘Only the Australian public paying attention to the horrors in offshore immigration detention can change government policy,’ the Human rights commissioner Gillian Triggs said.

She was addressing the Nauru files, a cache of more than 2,000 leaked documents from inside Australia’s offshore immigration processing centre on Nauru. The documents have revealed the extent of abuses and trauma on the island over a 26-month period.

“We really need to public’s attention to ensure that our politicians change the policy. This is unsustainable, and extremely expensive to the Australian taxpayer.” Triggs argues the media should have access to the immigration centres. “Our democratic system depends on transparency and access by our journalists who can speak up and take photographs. That is what really moves the public, when they actually see how these children are being treated.”

Elaine Pearson of Human Rights Watch said ‘The fact that the number of serious incidents has not declined but continued steadily, and in some cases escalated, is further proof that the failure to address abuses is a deliberate policy of the Australian government to deter further boat arrivals.’ Pearson added, ‘Australia’s policy of deterrence is premised on making people in offshore locations suffer. This policy is inhumane and irresponsible. They need to be removed from Nauru immediately.’

The Australian Opposition defence spokesman said the reports were concerning, and that Labor had argued for independent oversight of the centers to maintain transparency. ‘We have been very critical of the government’s lack of transparency in the running of Nauru over the last couple of years.’ Another member of the opposition said he was “shocked by what I’ve seen” in the Nauru files reports. He said government’s inability to conclude a third country processing arrangement had resulted in leaving asylum seekers “amongst the most traumatised in the world” despite the flow of people to Australia being small by world standards.

A refugee activism group called for an immediate public inquiry into the centres and for all detainees to be transferred to Australia or a third country. Pamela Curr, from Australian Women in Support of Women on Nauru, said ‘Our politicians know all about this – the broader community may be kept in the dark but both Labor and the Coalition know all about this, and their silence is taken as consent.’

Articles used for the national interest frame group:

Event 1: New wave of 1000 illegals – Fortress Australia under attack.

A NORWEGIAN freighter last night rescued more than 400 boatpeople from an Indonesian fishing vessel, first heading to Christmas Island, then changing course to return them to Indonesia, before changing back again for Australia. Their expected arrival will bring to nearly 1000 the number of refugees expected to arrive at Christmas Island early today. This would be the single largest influx of refugees to land on Australian soil and would not only swamp Christmas Island's facilities, but overwhelm the country's three detention centres dedicated to newly arrived boatpeople.

The Norwegian-flagged Tampa took the mostly Afghani refugees and Indonesian crew on board and was steaming to Christmas Island. It was understood that although the Tampa was heading out of Australian waters, the Afghanis had demanded to be taken to Australia. A second Indonesian boat carrying up to 500 people was heading to Christmas Island and, like the Tampa, was expected to arrive last night or early today.

By late yesterday, authorities on Christmas Island had evacuated 360 boatpeople who arrived last week - increasing its capacity to 540. "If we were to get 500 we would have to start asking for assistance," said island administrator Bill Taylor. "I'll be looking out my window at 5am to see if anything is on the horizon."

The rescue was launched after Coastwatch, Australia's coastal surveillance agency, read "SOS" spelt out on the deck of the wooden ferry by the panicking boatpeople during a routine flight yesterday. Another Coastwatch flight on Saturday first spotted the boat adrift in Indonesian waters - 80 nautical miles (148km) northwest of Christmas Island - signalling that it was in trouble, with passengers on board waving for help.

Indonesian authorities contacted by Australia could not immediately help with the rescue. Instead, Australian Search and Rescue broadcasted a call for assistance from any commercial ship in the area, just after midday yesterday. The Tampa arrived about five hours later.

A spokesman for Mr Ruddock last night confirmed the Government was awaiting a much larger boat, estimated to be holding as many as 500 people, to arrive at Christmas Island.

Event 2: Asylum swap attempts to fix Labor's own dilemma.

WHATEVER their views on the divisive border protection issue, few Australians will draw comfort from the Prime Minister and her Immigration Minister finalising the asylum-seeker agreement with Malaysia. This is a watered down version of the bilateral exchange of asylum-seekers prematurely announced more than two months ago. Although is significant the UNHCR is less than enthusiastic about the arrangement, we trust that Australia will make good on its promise to ensure adequate healthcare, education and living conditions.

This mess is entirely of Labor's own making. By weakening our border protection regime in 2008, they rekindled the people-smuggling trade, and Labor refused to admit they had caused the problem. After inheriting only six people in detention from the Liberal government, the current government has had to establish centres in every state to house more than 6000 detainees.

The consequence of unpicking a border regime that worked has been more human suffering on the high seas, at Christmas Island and in other detention centres. Now, belatedly, Julia Gillard (Prime Minister) and Chris Bowen (Immigration Minister) have admitted responsibility by deciding they must present a disincentive to asylum-seekers, in order to prevent people risking their lives in the hands of people-smugglers.

The only positive from the so-called Malaysian Solution is that it shows a comprehension, long denied, that 'pull' factors are drawing asylum-seekers to our shores. The government has been stubborn by refusing to reopen Nauru, which would have been cheaper, quicker and more effective. Ms Gillard's reason for not using Nauru - that it was not a signatory to the UN Convention on Refugees - is revealed as fallacious now that she is sending asylum-seekers to another country that is not a signatory. Clearly, her real reason was political. So, in order to avoid a political humiliation, much time and money has been wasted, diplomatic tensions have been stirred and additional human misery has been created. The winners are the 4000 refugees coming from Malaysia, now to be processed here rather than Malaysia.

But, when all is said and done, there must be some considerable chance the uncertainty created by this scheme will stem the flow of boats. If that is the case, it will represent a belated, less than ideal, expensive and possibly temporary resolution with ongoing repercussions requiring careful management. If it fails to stop the boats, this arrangement could represent the worst of all possible worlds.

Event 3: Limbo is Nauru's real torture.

We understand that the motivations of the refugee lobby have their genesis in compassion. But for some the cause transforms into partisan activism, political abuse and personal smears. The toxicity of this debate has played out again this week after incident reports from Nauru were revealed. The leak provided details about all sorts of complaints, from cases of self-harm to claims of assault and rape. Much of this was reported at face value as proof that Australia is “torturing” children in what is “systematic abuse” of refugees.

I interviewed one of the report's authors, Amnesty's Anna Neistat, and it was clear she had little direct evidence. She spoke of “daily” attacks, “people being hacked with machetes, women who have been raped” and the “regular occurrence” of self-harm for which people “don't get sufficient” support. She said virtually all of this violence was being inflicted by Nauruans. So why would Nauruans want to hurt the refugees? “You know there is a very simple answer to that,” she said. “They do it because they can do it.” For this to be plausible we need to accept a bleak view of 10,000 Nauruans, their government and police force, even though they are assisted and trained by Australian Police.

None of us can disprove claims. Nor would we expect Nauru to be crime free. But we shouldn't accept implausible claims at face value when there is an obvious incentive for exaggeration or concoction, especially when it is so damning of the people of Nauru and hundreds of Australians working with them.

It is these sorts of reports that prompted my visit to Nauru last October when I inspected the processing centres, spoke with dozens of asylum-seekers, locals, police and the Nauruan government. As my reports relayed, the sense of isolation, torment and uncertainty for the asylum-seekers was overwhelming. But where Neistat tells us women are afraid to leave their accommodation for fear of rape or attacks, I saw refugee women walking alone around the island and catching buses to English lessons. Where the activists talk about rampant abuse, I saw friendly children whose mothers insisted they were safe. “It is a different kind of abuse,” said one mother. “It is the uncertainty.”

Critics who say the policy of offshore processing is too harsh have every right to oppose it, of course. But it is another matter to accuse Australia of condoning or conducting abuse. Establishing the facts is crucial. People stranded on the island have a clear interest in undermining the policy, seeking international attention or securing transfer to Australia on medical or other grounds.

Appendix 4 – Outcomes linear regression tables

Table 5. Linear regression results for post-test questions asking people’s opinion on aspects of the Australian asylum-seeker policy, on a scale of 1-10.

	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Question 6
CONSTANT	-234,298** (78,039)	-180,519* (71,942)	-62,769 (68,910)	20,839 (83,381)	-126,691* (60,922)	-105,344 (57,443)
Frame (Ref. = humanitarian frame)	-0,196 (0,858)	-0,221 (0,791)	0,610 (0,757)	-0,840 (0,917)	0,081 (0,670)	1,339* (0,631)
Age	-0,119** (0,039)	0,093* (0,036)	0,033 (0,034)	-0,010 (0,042)	0,065* (0,030)	0,052 (0,029)
Sex (Ref. = male)	-0,793 (0,919)	-1,061 (0,847)	0,564 (0,811)	0,272 (0,982)	1,018 (0,717)	0,326 (0,676)
Level of education	0,059 (0,432)	-0,101 (0,398)	-0,627 (0,381)	-0,318 (0,461)	-0,536 (0,337)	0,072 (0,381)
Income	0,344 (0,182)	0,382* (0,167)	0,289 (0,160)	0,090 (0,194)	0,545** (0,142)	0,247 (0,134)
Political views (Ref. = extremely left)	0,436* (0,201)	0,421* (0,185)	0,280 (0,178)	0,561* (0,215)	0,414* (0,157)	0,522** (0,148)
Opinion European Union (Ref. = very negative)	-0,317 (0,471)	-0,295 (0,435)	-0,151 (0,416)	0,242 (0,504)	-0,623 (0,368)	0,011 (0,347)
R²	0,301	0,339	0,258	0,312	0,509	0,402
Adj. R²	0,138	0,184	0,085	0,152	0,394	0,263
N	38	38	38	38	38	38

Note: OLS-regression coefficients with standard errors between brackets. *** p<0,001, ** p<0,01, * p<0,05

Table 6. Linear regression results for post-test questions asking people’s opinion on the various described events in Australian asylum-seeker policy, on a scale of 1-10.

	Tampa Incident 1	Tampa incident 2	Malaysian Solution 1	Malaysian Solution 2	Nauru Files 1	Nauru Files 2
CONSTANT	-129,178* (56,702)	4,914 (56,046)	-105,425 (80,133)	44,899 (64,617)	48,112 (72,077)	91,315 (60,112)
Frame (Ref. = humanitarian frame)	1,513* (0,623)	-0,529 (0,616)	-0,485 (0,881)	-1,918** (0,710)	0,830 (0,792)	-1,204 (0,661)
Age	0,065* (0,028)	0,002 (0,028)	0,055 (0,040)	-0,020 (0,032)	0,025 (0,036)	-0,041 (0,030)
Sex (Ref. = male)	0,286 (0,667)	0,600 (0,660)	-0,172 (0,943)	0,527 (0,761)	-0,893 (0,848)	-0,026 (0,708)
Level of education	0,039 (0,314)	-0,096 (0,310)	-0,137 (0,443)	-0,456 (0,357)	0,269 (0,399)	-0,035 (0,332)
Income	0,208 (0,132)	-0,074 (0,130)	0,032 (0,187)	0,234 (0,150)	0,017 (0,168)	-0,124 (0,140)
Political views (Ref. = extremely left)	0,539** (0,146)	-0,420** (0,144)	0,374 (0,206)	0,138 (0,166)	0,473* (0,186)	-0,279 (0,155)
Opinion European Union (Ref. = very negative)	-0,120 (0,343)	0,001 (0,339)	-0,179 (0,484)	0,026 (0,390)	0,156 (0,435)	0,008 (0,363)
R²	0,401	0,391	0,143	0,361	0,284	0,184
Adj. R²	0,262	0,249	-0,57	0,212	0,117	-0,006
N	38	38	38	38	38	38

Note: OLS-regression coefficients with standard errors between brackets. *** p<0,001, ** p<0,01, * p<0,05.