

The 'Threat' of "Channel Migrants": An Exploration into How the UK Media Portrayed People Claiming Asylum

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Abstract

This paper explores how print media in the UK portrayed so-called "channel migrants" during a two-year period preceding a pivotal moment in UK asylum history, where national policy and practice became increasingly exclusionary. This study adopts a corpus linguistics approach to examine the language associated with people on the move in 741 press articles. The findings show during 01/05/19 - 30/04/21 "channel migrants" were predominantly portrayed as 'a threat' in newspapers, with some nuance depending on the publication type and terminology used to refer to people on the move. Where possible, findings are disaggregated by gender, showing significant discrepancies between the media framing of female and male "channel migrants". Finally, this paper offers reflections on a potential relationship between media portrayal and policymaking in the asylum context.

Keywords *channel crossings, media narrative, asylum policy, UK migrants, framing refugees*

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Focus and Relevance

Media portrayal of people on the move¹ continues to be of interest to researchers from a range of academic fields including psychology, sociology and linguistics, political science and criminology. Immigration is a salient topic in the UK² and there is often a focus on people claiming asylum over other forms of immigration. This study primarily explores how people on the move were portrayed in UK newspapers during a two-year period. It focusses on people who were given monikers such as "channel migrants" in reference to how they had travelled by sea to the UK via the English Channel. As asylum continues to gain media attention, particularly in the UK, this study illustrates why the language used in relation to people on the move deserves more scrutiny.

1.2 UK Context

During the period of this study there was an increase in media attention towards "channel migrants". Before 2018, people on the move were more likely to enter Southeast England from Northern France via the Channel Tunnel. When this route was disrupted due to a culmination of the Covid-19 pandemic, Brexit and French port strikes these people began resorting to sea crossings.³ Although it is factually correct that there were more "channel migrants" at this time compared to subsequent years⁴ it is also true that the people making this journey garnered a disproportionate amount of media coverage compared to their actual number.⁵ The UK's socio-political context at this time adds an interesting backdrop for exploring potential media effects. This study encompasses the period ahead of a pivotal moment in UK asylum history, a time when the legal rights of people on the move were being undermined by the UK government.⁶

1.3 Research Overview

This study explores how the UK media portrayed people on the move, with a focus on two key questions:

1. Was there a dominant media framing of "channel migrants" between 01/05/19 - 30/04/21? If so, how was it achieved?
2. Did the media propose "channel migrants" should be prevented? If so, how? Did this align with the media framing of "channel migrants"?

¹ Whilst acknowledging it is not without its own limitations, throughout this paper I adopt the phraseology 'people on the move' to generally refer to any person/s who migrates to claim asylum, as observed in Joseph Maggs, 'The "Channel Crossings" and the borders of Britain' (2020) 61 *Race & Class* 78. As I explain in section B. iv. words such as "migrants", "asylum seeker" and "refugee" are inherently politicised with negative, divisive connotations. Even attempts to adopt non-political terms (e.g. "irregular") have become politicised. For the purposes of clarity in this study I do need to refer to "channel migrants". However, I would like to be explicit that I am fundamentally opposed to perpetuating a discourse that attempts to label and define a person solely by the route in which they arrived in a State and/ or their immigration status.

² Lindsay Richards, Mariña Fernández-Reino, and Scott Blinder, 'UK Public Opinion toward Immigration: Overall Attitudes and Level of Concern' (The Migration Observatory, 24 January 2025) <<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/uk-public-opinion-toward-immigration-overall-attitudes-and-level-of-concern/>> accessed 9 May 2025.

³ Thom Davies, Arshad Isakjee, Lucy Mayblin, and Joe Turner, 'Channel crossings: offshoring asylum and the afterlife of empire in the Dover Strait' (2021) 44 *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2307, 2308.

⁴ Peter Walsh and Mihnea Cuibus, 'People crossing the English Channel in small boats' *The Migration Observatory* <<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/people-crossing-the-english-channel-in-small-boats/>> accessed 26 Mar 2024.

⁵ Emma Jacobs, '"Colonising the Future": Migrant Crossings on the English Channel and the Discourse of Risk' (2020) 4 *Brief Encounters* 37, 38.

⁶ UNHCR, 'UNHCR legal observations Nationality and Borders Bill' (Oct 2021) <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/media/unhcr-legal-observations-nationality-and-borders-bill-oct-2021> accessed 17 Mar 2022.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Why the Media (Still) Matters

Within existing scholarship there is a consensus that mass media has “significant impact and effects”⁷ but perspectives differ as to how, what, and why. This study builds on previous discourse analysis relating to migration and asylum that has shown the media vilifies people on the move, making them “scapegoats for society’s current ills, or alleged ills”⁸. At a time when digital information is abundant, and newspaper circulation figures decline,⁹ it is possible to have a sceptical view of the continued significance of print media. Yet, many believe traditional media outlets are still important. Newman describes the contemporary media landscape as a singular ecology – albeit a more complex one than in the past – where the media has a significant power of influence over large audiences.¹⁰ He suggests as the media has evolved (e.g. social media has gained prevalence) it has enabled more people to participate in the creation and dissemination of news items, making more people more likely to be exposed to and engage with ‘the news’.¹¹ With Newman’s journalistic background and strategic role within the British Broadcasting Corporation¹² there is a caveat here that he may overemphasise traditional media’s role and power.

This study is underpinned by the perspective the media remains particularly relevant in the context of people on the move. Crawley explains the national media have influence on the topic of asylum in the UK because ‘the news’ is the only way most people ‘learn’ about asylum, being unlikely to directly interact with anyone who has experienced it.¹³ Although this study is over twenty years old, it still has contemporary relevance. I pose most of the UK public remain unlikely to interact with people on the move and, in addition, are unlikely to personally experience (or worry about) displacement themselves. Supporting the relevance of the media in this context, Allen describes it as a key source of public information in the UK, especially in relation to political topics such as asylum.¹⁴

2.2 Theoretical Approach

This study is informed by multiple theoretical perspectives, including agenda-setting theory (“agenda-setting”) and the concept of emphasis framing (“framing”). Agenda-setting stems from the notion that the media is the primary link between what happens ‘in reality’ and how we perceive this reality as per Lippmann’s ‘pictures in our heads’.¹⁵ From the agenda-setting stance, the media shape public attitudes and opinions of people on the move by ‘constructing’ certain images and directing public attention to specific

⁷ Jim Macnamara, ‘Media content analysis: It’s uses; benefits and best practice methodology’ (2005) 6 *Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal* 1, 18.

⁸ Roy Greenslade, ‘Seeking Scapegoats, The Coverage of Asylum in the UK Press’ [2005] *Institute for Public Policy Research* 1, 5 <<https://www.ippr.org/articles/seeking-scapegoats-the-coverage-of-asylum-in-the-uk-pressworking-paper-5-of-the-asylum-and-migration-series>> accessed 7 May 2025.

⁹ Charlotte Tobitt, ‘Newspaper ABCs: Sunday People sees biggest annual print circulation decline’ *Press Gazette* (London, 16 May 2025) <https://pressgazette.co.uk/media-audience-and-business-data/media_metrics/most-popular-newspapers-uk-abc-monthly-circulation-figures-2/> accessed 9 May 2025.

¹⁰ Nic Newman, ‘Mainstream media and the distribution of news in the age of social media’ *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism* (2011) 56 <<https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:94164da6-9150-4938-8996-badfdef6b507/files/m4cb759a65ed0264e3c9f4efa7ec0c0a4>> 22 Mar 2022.

¹¹ *ibid* 55.

¹² Reuters Institute, ‘About Nic Newman’, <<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/people/nic-newman>> accessed 26 May 2025.

¹³ Heaven Crawley, ‘Evidence on Attitudes to Asylum and Immigration: What We Know, Don’t Know and Need to Know’ [2005] *Centre on Migration, Policy and Society* 4 <<https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.12223.41128>> accessed 22 March 2022.

¹⁴ William L. Allen, ‘Messaging Migration: Media Agenda-Setting, Immigration Attitudes, and the Effects of Evidence on Perceptions and Policy Preferences’ (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford 2019) ii.

¹⁵ Walter Lippmann, ‘Public Opinion’ (1st edn, Routledge 1992) as cited in Scott Blinder and Ann-Marie Jeannet, ‘The “illegal” and the skilled: effects of media portrayals on perceptions of immigrants in Britain’ (2018) 44 *Journal of Ethnic & Migration Studies* 1444.

information.¹⁶ The key issue is media agencies rely on sales for their survival¹⁷ and are unlikely to provide rich, impartial insight into the highly complex nuanced social phenomenon of migration. News stories are curated (or more cynically, cherry-picked) to sell¹⁸ so it is likely the public will only receive "the news" they will want to buy. In consequence, the media constructs "the notion of immigration in selective and incomplete ways".¹⁹ It is hoped this study will expose some of the incomplete ways "channel migrants" have been constructed by the UK media.

This study is also informed by Goffman's sociological concept of framing which poses how the media organise and convey information plays a role in how it is perceived by the public.²⁰ From this stance, frames are "heuristic devices"²¹ to "interpret the world" (ibid.). The media creates a particular 'frame' through which the public view an "issue" by emphasising some pieces of information over other pieces of information.²² Framing theory has been used to explain how certain 'images' of people on the move have dominated more than others.²³ This study explores if the media have constructed any dominant 'images' to portray "channel migrants".

Most existing research into media portrayal of people on the move has been positioned within either the agenda-setting or framing contexts. Neither approach has been without limitations. Although the media has been described as influential "mediators of public discourse",²⁴ recent studies have shown there may be "resistance to strong media effects".²⁵ This raises the question; to what extent does the media really shape public attitudes?²⁶ Studies that have leant towards framing theory have created "a diversity of frame definitions"²⁷ and many of these media frames have blurred and/ or entwined and obfuscate the key issue. This study provides a concise and accessible overview of how the media has portrayed "channel migrants". It borrows concepts from agenda-setting and emphasis framing, adopting the stance that the media's 'agenda' may interrelate with how the media 'frames' people on the move. Although this alludes to a debate within communication studies that there may be overlap between agenda-setting and emphasis framing²⁸ to meaningfully contribute to this debate is not the purpose of this paper.

2.3 Portraying 'a Problem'

Prior scholarship has shown the media has portrayed people on the move in a multitude of ways. For the purposes of this research, I take a broad-brush view that people on the move have been portrayed as 'a problem'.²⁹ I suggest there have been two dominant media framings ("core frames") when portraying people on the move as 'a problem': 'threat' and 'victim'. A European study found the media portrayed people on the move as an 'a threat' that is "allusive and amorphous"³⁰ and as 'victims' "in need of protection

16 Jelmer Brouwer, Maartje van der Woude, and Joanne van der Leun, 'Framing Migration and the Process of Crimmigration: A Systematic Analysis of the Media Representation of Unauthorized Immigrants in the Netherlands' (2017) 14 *European Journal of Criminology* 100

17 Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance* (2nd edn, Blackwell Publishing Ltd 2009) 89-94.

18 ibid.

19 Scott Blinder and William L. Allen, 'Constructing Immigrants: Portrayals of Migrant Groups in British National Newspapers, 2010-2012' (2016) 50 *International Migration Review* 3.

20 Erving Goffman, 'Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience' (New York, 1974) as cited in Allen (n 14).

21 Henri Charles Nickels, 'Framing Asylum Discourse in Luxembourg' (2007) 20 *Journal of Refugee Studies* 37, 45.

22 Brouwer and others (n 16) 102.

23 Lesley J Pruitt, 'Closed due to "flooding"? UK media representations of refugees and migrants in 2015-2016 - creating a crisis of borders' (2019) 21 *British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 383.

24 Alison Saxton, 'I certainly don't want people like that here': The discursive construction of 'asylum seekers'. *Media International Australia, Incorporating Culture & Policy* (2023) 108, 109-120 as cited in Pruitt (n 23).

25 Blinder and Jeannet (n 15) 1447.

26 William Allen, 'A Decade of Immigration in the British Press' *The Migration Observatory* (2016) <<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/reports/decade-immigration-british-press/>> accessed 22 Mar 2022.

27 Adriana Valente, Valentina Tudisca, Andrea Pelliccia, Loredana Cerbara, and Maria Girolama Caruso, 'Comparing Liberal and Conservative Newspapers: Diverging Narratives in Representing Migrants?' (2021) 21 *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 411, 412.

28 Allen (n 14).

29 Maggs (n 1).

30 Nicholas De Genova, Martina Tazzioli, and others, 'Europe/Crisis: New Keywords of "the Crisis" in and of "Europe"' (Zone Books Near Future online, 2016) 24 <https://nearfuturesonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/New-Keywords-Collective_12.pdf> accessed 22 March 2022.

and rescue”.³¹ I argue most findings from existing studies, whether they explicitly refer to or simply allude to media framing, have identified constructs/ images that are more akin to ‘sub-frames’. These sub-frames add context to the core frames; providing the reason why people on the move are ‘a threat’ or ‘a victim’. The ‘threat’ frame contextualises people on the move literally e.g. as ‘a threat’ to public security and/ or conceptually e.g. as ‘a threat’ to national identity. Although some believe emphasising a ‘victim’ rhetoric has positive connotations,³² I argue both these media frames are negative. The ‘victim’ frame might generate sympathy, but this is not always helpful; people on the move can be portrayed as “tragic”, but they “remain unwanted”³³ and there is still an emphasis on difference between ‘them’ and ‘us’.³⁴

The framing of people on the move as ‘a threat’ encompasses studies that have shown the media to portray people on the move as ‘a drain on public resources’,³⁵ ‘bogus’,³⁶ ‘criminals’,³⁷ ‘dangerous’,³⁸ ‘deviants’,³⁹ ‘illegal’,⁴⁰ ‘unwanted invaders’⁴¹ and ‘perpetrators of crisis’.⁴² The framing of people on the move as ‘a victim’ includes studies that have shown the media to portray people on the move as ‘a burden’⁴³, ‘genuine’,⁴⁴ ‘other’,⁴⁵ ‘passive’,⁴⁶ ‘tragic’⁴⁷ and ‘vulnerable’.⁴⁸ I pose multiple sub-frames might be simultaneously present within a core frame and have an amplifying effect. It will be interesting to observe if this study supports this theory.

2.4 Framing Techniques

This paper contributes to research that has shown the UK media to frame people on the move in implicit and explicit ways, with media frames morphing and evolving over time.⁴⁹ One of the indirect ways the media has portrayed people on the move has been through using rhetorical devices. Between 2015-2016 people on the move were portrayed using water-related metaphors such as “waves of people”⁵⁰ and framed as “invaders” and “agents of disorder”⁵¹. In the years that followed, Jacobs found this media framing had been superseded by a discourse around ‘risk’ and reckless behaviour,⁵² with “channel migrants” being portrayed as ‘criminals’.⁵³

One of the more direct ways the media has portrayed people on the move has been through using terminology and ‘labelling’. For example, in the European context, the media has referred to “immigrants”

31 ibid 26.

32 Esther Greussing, and Hajo G. Boomgaarden, ‘Shifting the refugee narrative? An automated frame analysis of Europe’s 2015 refugee crisis’ (2017) 43 *Journal of Ethnic & Migration Studies* 1749.

33 Samuel Parker, ‘“Unwanted Invaders”: The Representation of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK and Australian Print Media’ (2015) 23 *eSharp* 1, 9 <http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_404384_en.pdf> accessed 22 March 2022.

34 Valente and others (n 27) 12.

35 Alexander Caviedes, ‘An Emerging “European” News Portrayal of Immigration?’ (2015) 41 *Journal of Ethnic & Migration Studies* 897.

36 Nickels (n 21)

37 Brouwer and others (n 16)

38 Simon Goodman, Ala Sirriyeh, and Simon McMahon, ‘The evolving (re)categorisations of refugees throughout the “refugee/migrant crisis”’ (2017) 27 *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 105.

39 Sharon Pickering, ‘Common Sense and Original Deviancy: News Discourses and Asylum Seekers in Australia’ (2001) 14 *Journal of Refugee Studies* 169.

40 Nicholas De Genova, and Ananya Roy, ‘Practices of Illegalisation’ (2020) 52 *Antipode* 352.

41 Parker (n 33).

42 Jacobs (n 5).

43 Goodman and others (n 38).

44 ibid.

45 Allen (n 14).

46 Heaven Crawley, Simon McMahon, and Katharine Jones, ‘Victims & Villains Migrant voices in the British media’ [2016] Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University.

47 Parker (n 33).

48 De Genova and others (n 30).

49 Nickels (n 21).

50 Pruitt (n 23) 393.

51 ibid.

52 Jacobs (n 5).

53 ibid.

and/ or "refugees".⁵⁴ The key issue here is these terms are based on categories used within asylum policy that are highly politicised and can never be 'neutral'.⁵⁵ These categories inherently "involve moral judgement about the legitimacy of the movement of individuals on the move"⁵⁶ whereas it is not possible (or ethical) to distinguish between types of people on the move in these ways.⁵⁷ This paper contributes to literature that has shown the media have exacerbated this issue by using different terminology to refer to people on the move, somewhat interchangeably, whilst simultaneously 'framing' people according to the terminology used.⁵⁸

2.5 A Triangular Quandary

Although this study is primarily focussed on media portrayal, I include general observations on my findings in conjunction with UK asylum law/ policy and allude to scholarship that has explored the effects of media portrayal of people on the move. Despite many researchers identifying a connection between media portrayal, public perception and policymaking establishing "direct causal relationships"⁵⁹ within this 'triangle' has been difficult.⁶⁰

The dominant perspective is that media portrayal influences public opinion, which in turn influences policymaking. Scholars have posed negative media portrayal of people on the move contributes to negative public attitudes towards issues pertaining to asylum.⁶¹ The causal link between media portrayal and public opinion has been undermined in more recent scholarship. One grey area is "whether mass media reflects or creates culture, attitudes and perceptions".⁶² Debate persists as to whether people buy newspapers that align with their existing political views (reinforcing these views) or if the content of newspapers shapes the person's political views (creating views about certain topics).⁶³ The media has been shown to influence public opinion in more nuanced ways than previously thought⁶⁴ with a consensus that there is growing "resistance to strong media affects".⁶⁵ The connection between public opinion and policymaking has also been scrutinised. Although UK politicians say they respond to public opinion others have accused the government of pushing its own agenda.⁶⁶ In the UK, some see the fact press coverage has not always corresponded to increased levels of migration as evidence of this.⁶⁷

Another stance is that there is a more direct relationship between media portrayal and policymaking. Researchers have argued particularly negative media portrayal of people on the move has been used by policymakers to justify harsh asylum policy.⁶⁸ The Australian media portrayed people on the move as 'illegitimate' by constructing a "discourse of deviancy in relation to asylum seekers and refugees"⁶⁹ which was then used to contribute to and legitimise "repressive state responses".⁷⁰ Politics and policy might also

54 De Genova and others (n 30).

55 Roohi Hussain, 'A Qualitative Exploration of the Social Construction of the Asylum-Seeker Category in UK Policy, Media Discourse and Practitioner Work' (DPhil thesis, Canterbury Christ Church University 2019) 20.

56 *ibid* 20.

57 Heaven Crawley, and Dimitris Skleparis, 'Refugees, migrants, neither, both: categorical fetishism and the politics of bounding in Europe's 'migration crisis'' (2018) 44 *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48, 49.

58 Hussain (n 55).

59 Brouwer and others (n 16) 102.

60 *ibid*.

61 Terry Threadgold, 'The Media and Migration in the United Kingdom, 1999 to 2009' (Washington DC: Migration Policy Institute 2009).

62 Pruitt (n 23) 386.

63 Goode and Ben-Yehuda (n 17).

64 Allen (n 14).

65 Blinder and Jeannet (n 15) 1147.

66 Allen (n 14).

67 *ibid*.

68 Alison Mountz, 'Embodying the nation-state: Canada's response to human smuggling' (2004) 23 *Political Geography* 323; Isabella Ng, Sharice Fungyee Choi, and Alex Lihshing Chan, 'Framing the Issue of Asylum Seekers and Refugees for Tougher Refugee Policy—a Study of the Media's Portrayal in Post-colonial Hong Kong' (2019) 20 *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 593.

69 Pickering (n 39) 184.

70 *Ibid*. p.173.

directly impact media discourse.⁷¹ A government proposal in the Netherlands to make “illegal stay”⁷² of “unauthorised migrants”⁷³ a criminal offence was likely due to government change rather than “active agenda-setting by the media or another actor”.⁷⁴ In Europe the terminology used by the media to refer to people on the move was shown to be influenced by changing political rhetoric.⁷⁵

This study might align with research that has explored how Australian media outlets portrayed people on the move. Firstly, because proposed asylum changes in the UK have been likened to Australia’s repressive border regime.⁷⁶ Secondly, because similarities have been observed in how the Australian and UK media portrayed people on the move.⁷⁷ It will be interesting to see how it compares to a recent study specifically on UK Channel crossings which found a discourse of “illegality, invasion and threat”⁷⁸ aligned with the “violent and militarised border practices we are seeing imagined and enacted in the Channel”.⁷⁹

2.6 Gaps in Existing Scholarship

Many existing studies have explored how the media frame people on the move as ‘threats’. This study also contributes to scholarship that has explored the ‘victim’ media framing. It builds on research that explored media representations of people on the move arriving in Europe and found the ‘victim’ frame was linked to the term “refugees” and themes of deservingness and plight.⁸⁰ It alludes to UK-specific research that analysed how people on the move were portrayed in migration-related media articles just before the 2015 election⁸¹ and identified a ‘humanitarian sub-frame’. It is likely to align with Maggs’ study which showed the media were complicit in framing “channel migrants” as either ‘criminals’ or “feckless victim of smuggling”.⁸²

Unlike most previous research, this study considers how “channel migrants” were portrayed by different publication types. Based on limited existing evidence, I anticipate findings will show a difference in how Tabloids and Broadsheets portray people on the move. Tabloids have tended to frame people on the move more negatively than other publication types⁸³ and with a focus on more sensationalist content.⁸⁴ The portrayal techniques have been shown to vary between publication type more than the ensuing portrayals. Broadsheets and Tabloids have been shown to portray people on the move in the same negative ways.⁸⁵ Tabloids were found to explicitly use stereotyped images whereas Broadsheets generated new stereotypes using more implicit techniques.⁸⁶ The effects of these techniques has been similar and “reinforced the status quo”.⁸⁷ In the UK, Broadsheets have been found to use similar language to Tabloids and Mid-Markets,⁸⁸ suggesting it might not be possible to identify significant differences in how the media portrayed people

71 Threadgold (n 61).

72 Brouwer and others (n 16) 113.

73 *ibid.*

74 *ibid.*

75 De Genova and others (n 30).

76 Maria O’Sullivan, ‘The Dangers of Penalising Irregular Arrivals – Lessons from the Australian Model of Offshore Processing’ (Refugee Law Initiative Blog on Refugee Law and Forced Migration 14 May 2021) <<https://rli.blogs.sas.ac.uk/2021/05/14/the-dangers-of-penalising-irregular-arrivals-lessons-from-the-australian-model-of-offshore-processing/>> accessed 22 March 2022.

77 Parker (n 33).

78 Thom Davies, Arshad Isakjee, Lucy Mayblin, and Joe Turner, ‘Channel crossings: offshoring asylum and the afterlife of empire in the Dover Strait’ (2021) 44 *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2307, 2322.

79 *Ibid*

80 Goodman and others (n 38); Nicholas De Genova, ‘The border spectacle of migrant ‘victimisation’ (20 May 2015) <<https://www.open-democracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/border-spectacle-of-migrant-victimisation/>> accessed 17 Mar 2022.

81 Crawley and others (n 46)

82 Maggs (n 1) 5.

83 Costas Gabrielatos, and Paul Baker, ‘Fleeing, Sneaking, Flooding: A Corpus Analysis of Discursive Constructions of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK Press, 1996-2005’ (2008) 36 *Journal of English Linguistics* 5; Threadgold (n 61).

84 Threadgold (n 61) 6.

85 Majid Khosravini, ‘The representation of refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants in British newspapers, during the Balkan conflict (1999) and the British general election (2005)’ (2009) 20 *Discourse & Society* 477.

86 *ibid.*

87 *Ibid* 49.

88 Blinder and Allen (n 19).

on the move between publication types.

Although there is an increasing body of scholarship showing that displacement affects women differently⁸⁹ there is a marked absence of research that explores whether media portrayal of people on the move is affected by gender.⁹⁰ People on the move have been shown to be under-represented in media coverage,⁹¹ women especially so, meaning their real and distinct needs remain "even less visible".⁹² In this study, I will disaggregate my findings by gender⁹³ to see if there were any differences in how the media portrayed female and male "channel migrants". Contemporary studies have shown gender is not always explicit in UK media coverage of people on the move.⁹⁴ If I am unable to separate my findings according to gender, it will still be insightful, raising the question; is it factually correct (or just assumed) that, at least in the context of the UK, all people on the move are male?

If it is possible to separate findings, I anticipate there will be differences in the portrayal of female and male "channel migrants". Sociolinguistics have already identified differences in the words most closely associated with females compared to males more generally. A study into the British National Corpus (BNC) showed that the words "woman" and "man" were most closely associated with different words and/ or grammatical patterns which impacted how females and males were represented.⁹⁵ Women were more likely to be described using words closely associated with a "lack of status and power"⁹⁶ including being 'objects' of acts of others (specifically, men). Women were more likely to be characterised by their social identity in relation to men e.g. whether they were married/ had children.⁹⁷ Conversely, men were found to be more likely to hold and exercise power and be the 'subject' of (often negative) acts.⁹⁸

Del Zotto's research into the media portrayal of women on the move during the Kosovo conflict remains highly relevant to this study and shows how media portrayal often perpetuates gender tropes.⁹⁹ Six media framings of women were identified in Kosovo's news reports, constructing and reinforcing stereotypes including 'the passive refugee' and 'the waiting wife'.¹⁰⁰ Assuming similar themes will be present in UK media reports, I pose females will be more likely to be framed as 'victims' than males, with males being more likely to be framed as 'threats' than females. Post-colonial feminists have highlighted how (some) scholarship has subjectified women from the Global South, portraying "a composite, singular 'Third World Woman'".¹⁰¹ Refugee women, specifically, have regularly been presented as 'victims' with a co-occurring discourse around needing to be 'saved'.¹⁰² This 'victim' framing 'justifies' "protective and imperial, rather than rights-based, responses to women's human rights violations".¹⁰³ In addition, existing studies have shown that, in the context of people on the move, women and children are regularly portrayed "as one

89 Anita Orav, 'The Gender Dimension of Asylum Claims' *European Parliament Think Tank* <[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2025\)767209](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2025)767209)> accessed 2 May 2025.

90 Jakob-Moritz Eberl, Christine E. Meltzer, Tobias Heidenreich, Beatrice Herrero, Nora Theorin, Fabienne Lind, Rosa Berganza, Hajo G. Boomgaarden, Christian Schemer, and Jesper Strömbäck, 'The European media discourse on immigration and its effects: A literature review' (2018) 42 *Annals of the International Communication Association* 207, 218.

91 Liane Rothenberger, and Melanie Schmitt, 'Refugee Women in the Media- Prevalence, Representation and Framing in International Media Coverage' (2024) 50 *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 3913, 3914.

92 *ibid.*

93 Newspapers in this study present gender as 'female' or 'male', despite many people not identifying within gender binaries.

94 Lindsey Blumell and Glenda Cooper, 'Measuring Gender in News Representations of Refugees and Asylum Seekers' (2019) 13 *International Journal of Communication* 4444, 4456.

95 Michael Pearce, 'Investigating the Collocational Behaviour of MAN and WOMAN in the BNC using Sketch Engine' (2008) 3 *Corpora* 1.

96 *ibid* 11.

97 *ibid.*

98 *ibid* 9.

99 Augusta C. del Zotto, 'Weeping Women, Wringing Hands: How the Mainstream Media Stereotyped Women's Experiences in Kosovo' (2002) 11 *Journal of Gender Studies* 141.

100 *ibid.*

101 Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses' (1988) 30 *Feminist Review* 61, 62.

102 Heaven Crawley, 'Saving Brown Women from Brown Men? "Refugee Women", Gender and the Racialised Politics of Protection' (2022) 41 *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 355.

103 *ibid* 357.

homogenous group”,¹⁰⁴ evoking an image of vulnerability and disadvantage.¹⁰⁵ Blumell and Cooper’s study into gender inequality in UK asylum news reporting showed women were present in fewer news reports overall, although featured in more “story topics” compared to men.¹⁰⁶ It is implied that this is a positive thing; portraying women on the move as multi-dimensional beings, such as “nurturer, mother, and/ or victim”¹⁰⁷ compared to the media portrayal of men as solely an economic/ security ‘threat’.¹⁰⁸

104 Jacqueline Bhabha, ‘Demography and Rights: Women, Children and Access to Asylum’ (2004) 16 *International Journal of Refugee Law* 227, 227.

105 *ibid.*

106 Blumell and Cooper (n 94) 4457.

107 *ibid.*

108 *ibid.*

3. Methodology

3.1 Methodological Approach

To explore my research questions, I adopted a methodology developed by previous researchers that incorporates corpus linguistics into more discursive forms of media analysis¹⁰⁹ to investigate the media's use of the 'target words' MIGRANT/S, IMMIGRANT/S, REFUGEE/S and ASYLUM SEEKER/S. Studies into media portrayal of people on the move have tended to focus on detailed analysis of small samples of text.¹¹⁰ In contrast, corpus linguistics involves large collections of texts and uses computer software to assist data analysis.¹¹¹ Methodologies used in corpus linguistics have advantages; they are easily replicable,¹¹² minimise the risk of researcher's bias which increases the study's validity¹¹³ and can reveal elements of discourses and identify patterns that might not be visible in other types of study¹¹⁴. I supplement my quantitative findings by incorporating manual qualitative techniques, more traditionally used in critical discourse analysis. Combining what are usually considered two different methodologies, my findings give a more complete overview of media portrayal and effects in the context of people on the move; an approach described as "a methodological synergy".¹¹⁵

3.2 Creating the Corpus

I required an appropriate corpus; one that was large enough to explore these questions and small enough that I could complete my study with limited resources. I focussed on a representative sample of articles from six newspapers (see Table 1), two from each category of publication type identified by the Audit Bureau of Circulations; Tabloids, Mid-Markets and Broadsheets and their Sunday supplements. I hoped this would provide an accurate reflection of how different publication types portrayed "channel migrants" with a balance of Tabloids, which are the most widely circulated and Broadsheets, which are considered higher 'quality' journalism.¹¹⁶ I used public data to select two newspapers from each publication type, basing my decision on newspapers with the greatest number of readers across platforms.¹¹⁷ My corpus consisted of articles found on Nexis UK newspaper database using a search string "MIGRI!", "BOAT!" and "CHANNEL!" This search string was informed by previous researchers who refined it to maximise their own findings.¹¹⁸ I manually inspected these findings for relevance on at least two occasions; firstly, to eliminate any duplicate or irrelevant articles and secondly when converting the articles into plain text format ahead of uploading files into my computer software. I observed there were variations in article type between publications (e.g. letters from the public, sports sections) so for consistency I only included news articles. The resulting corpus consisted of 741 text articles containing 57,6803 words that, as far as possible, captured all mentions of MIGRANT/S, IMMIGRANT/S, REFUGEE/S and ASYLUM SEEKER/S within the period of 01/05/19 - 30/04/21. I divided this corpus into three sub-corpora (Tabloid, Mid-Market and Broadsheet) for the purpose of making comparisons between publication type throughout my research.

109 Paul Baker, Costas Gabrielatos, Majid Khosravini, Michal Krzyżanowski, Tony McEnery, and Ruth Wodak, 'A useful methodological synergy? Combining critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics to examine discourses of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK press' (2008) 19 *Discourse & Society* 273; Blinder and Allen (n 19); Blinder and Jeannot (n 15).

110 Gabrielatos and Baker (n83)

111 Brouwer and others (n 16).

112 Blinder and Allen (n 19).

113 Baker and others (n 110).

114 Blinder and Allen (n 19).

115 Baker and others (n 110).

116 Miryam Nadkarni, 'Tabloid vs. Broadsheet' (European Journalism Observatory 7 March 2011) <<https://en.ejo.ch/ethics-quality/tabloid-vs-broadsheet>> accessed 5 May 2025.

117 Statista, 'Top national newspapers ranked by platform reach UK 2020' <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/246082/distribution-of-the-reach-of-selected-national-newspapers-in-the-uk-by-type/>> accessed 4 Mar 2022.

118 Blinder and Allen (n 19).

Table 1: UK Newspaper Publications Used Within this Study

Tabloids	Mid-Markets	Broadsheets
The Sun	The Express	The Guardian
The Sun on Sunday	The Sunday Express	The Observer
Daily Mirror	The Daily Mail	The Independent
Sunday Mirror	The Mail on Sunday	The Independent on Sunday

3.3 Analysis

3.3.1 Identifying the words most closely associated with “channel migrants”

To investigate media portrayal of “channel migrants” I used the corpus linguistic software LANCSEBOX to identify collocates of MIGRANT/S, IMMIGRANT/S, REFUGEE/S and ASYLUM SEEKER/S. Collocates are words that cooccur with other words more frequently than would be expected by chance alone,¹¹⁹ are key to how we find meaning in sentences.¹²⁰ They may even explain why we automatically associate some words with others, even when one of those words is not present.¹²¹ The assumption here is that collocation analysis will provide insight into the attributes or ideas the media attaches to “channel migrants” through the language it associates with them. My study focussed on two types of collocation. Analysing two forms of collocation is particularly insightful for understanding the language used in conjunction with a target word as well as the wider discourse surrounding the target word.¹²² Please see Figure 1 and Figure 2 to assist the following explanation. To begin, I analysed the relationship between my target words and their L1 collocates (the word immediately before or after the target word). Secondly, the relationship between my target word and its L5 collocates (words within a 10-word window of a target word, five-words before and five-words after). L1 collocates are generally a small set of words which directly ‘modify’ the focus word e.g. adjectives.¹²³ L5 collocates are more likely to be a larger set of words which, although associated with the target word, are more significant for understanding the wider context surrounding it.¹²⁴ Following previous practices¹²⁵ I only report the most significant collocates, identified by two statistical tests: 1. Log likelihood (LL), requiring a minimum score of 6.63, which determines that the collocate is statistically significant¹²⁶ 2. Mutual information (MI), requiring a minimum score of 5.0, which shows how powerfully the collocate is associated with the focus word.¹²⁷ It is important to highlight LANCSEBOX normalises results per 1000 articles to enable comparison between corpora of different sizes.

Figure 1: Collocations and their Relationship to a Target Word

L5 | L4 | L3 | L2 | L1 | Target word | R1 | R2 | R3 | R4 | R5

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*

¹²⁰ Baker and others (n 110).

¹²¹ Gabrielatos and Baker (n 83).

¹²² *ibid.* 13.

¹²³ Blinder and Allen (n 19) 11.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*

¹²⁵ *ibid.*; Brouwer and others (n 16).

¹²⁶ Gabrielatos and Baker (n 83).

¹²⁷ Blinder and Allen (n 19).

Figure 2: Snapshot from LancsBox

Search migrant	Occurrences 661 (16.81)	Texts 741	▼ Corpus	CM_Total_Corpus	▼ Context 5	▼ Display Text
Index	File	Left	Node	Right		
1	'BORDER FAF	capabilities" to tackle the Channel	migrant	crisis, a watchdog warned. And		
2	'Brutal' borde	continent. Read more Search for	migrant	who 'fell overboard' in English		
3	'Brutal' borde	following the disappearance of a	migrant	woman who is presumed dead		
4	'Brutal' borde	dangerous. Read more Search for	migrant	who 'fell overboard' in English		
5	'Crossing is c	evictions of the areas where	migrant	families are sleeping (Human Rights		

3.3.2 Identifying underlying themes and concepts associated with "channel migrants"

Following this, to aid my depth of understanding as to how "channel migrants" were portrayed within the media, I investigated the more discursive elements of my corpus. After identifying the words most closely associated with "channel migrants" I manually performed concordance analysis on any words where the meaning was ambiguous or looked particularly insightful. Concordance analysis relates to the observation of how the collocate appears within the line of text it cooccurs with and can be particularly useful in identifying the presence of media frames.¹²⁸ I then grouped the words most closely associated with "channel migrants" according to their meaning, which resulted in the emergence of 10 topoi: Accommodation, Authenticity, Demographic, Journey, Legality, Out of Control, Plight, Quantity, Strategy, Water. Although these topoi were informed by studies with a similar methodology¹²⁹ the categorization of collocates was dependent on my own discretion.

3.3.3 Exploring if terminology affected media portrayal

To consider if terminology used by the media to refer to "channel migrants" affected how they were portrayed. I repeated the processes of collocation and concordance analysis outlined above for further target words IMMIGRANT/S, REFUGEE/S and ASYLUM SEEKER/S.

3.3.4 Exploring if gender affected media portrayal

To explore if the gender of "channel migrants" affected how they were portrayed by the media. I repeated the processes of collocation and concordance analysis outlined above for female/ male target words; WOMAN, WOMEN, GIRL/S, MAN, MEN, BOY/S.

3.3.5 Identifying strategies to prevent "channel migrants"

To investigate the strategies proposed within the media to address "channel migrants" I used the rationale, outlined in section B.iii, that people on the move have traditionally been portrayed as 'a problem'. Firstly, I performed collocation analysis and concordance analysis using PREVENT*¹³⁰ and STOP*. Although my research question specifically related to the word 'prevent', preliminary research showed PREVENT* was only present within the corpus 161 times. To generate a larger, more informative quantity of findings for analysis I made the decision to include the target word STOP* too. This provided 716 occurrences for analysis. I then grouped these collocates according to their meaning and identified 'tactics' and 'strategies'. These categorisations were entirely my own.

3.3.6 Observing prevention strategies alongside asylum law/ policy

Finally, I wanted to briefly consider the strategies proposed within the media to prevent "channel migrants" alongside an example of (then-existing) asylum law/ policy changes. For brevity, I explored the three main policy objectives outlined in Nationality and Borders Bill 2021 ("NBB"). Although "channel migrants" were

128 Gabrielatos and Baker (n 83) 15.

129 Baker and others (n 110).

130 * including all tenses of this verb

not directly mentioned in this proposed law, they were strongly implied through repeated references to “immigrants arriving by vessel”.¹³¹ I also made brief observations about the language used in Illegal Migration Act 2023 (IMA 2023) and how it compared with the findings of this study.

3.4 Limitations

A key limitation of this study was the corpus. Ideally it would have been larger with a broader range of publication types. Some of my methods, such as categorising collocates into topoi, relied on my own input which is inherently biased. If this study was to be repeated it would be helpful to have additional researchers involved in the data collection phase who could also review the data for validity ahead of analysis.

¹³¹ Home Office, ‘Nationality and Borders Bill: factsheet’ (2021) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-nationality-and-borders-bill-factsheet>> accessed 9 May 2025.

4. Findings

4.1 Part One: Media Portrayal

4.1.1 "Channel migrants" as 'a threat'

The findings show, both within the corpus and at sub-corpora level, "channel migrants" were predominantly framed by the media as 'a threat'. I suggest the 'threat' frame comprised of concurring sub-frames (summarised in Table 2): a. a 'numerical' sub-frame, b. an 'agents of disorder' sub-frame c. a 'unwanted' sub-frame and d. an 'invaders' sub-frame. These sub-frames were achieved through closely associating MIGRANT/S with certain words and themes and/ or concepts.

Table 2: Overview of Media Frames Identified within this Study

Core Frame	Sub-frame	Description
Victim	Humanitarian	People on the move are victims of unfortunate circumstances and require sympathy and assistance.
	Lack of agency	People on the move are passive, inherently vulnerable victims and solely dependent on external assistance.
Threat	Numerical	People on the move are a threat due to the scale and pace of their movement.
	Agents of disorder	People on the move are reckless and irresponsible and threaten order and decency.
	Unwanted	People on the move have the potential to threaten a state's economy, resources and public safety.
	Invader	People on the move threaten borders and consequently state sovereignty.

- a. The data indicates a 'numerical' sub-frame contributed to the core framing of "channel migrants" as a 'threat'. Table 3 shows, within the corpus, 40% of the top five words most closely associated with MIGRANT/S were numbers e.g. "At least 7,000 migrants have made it across the English Channel in small boats this year."¹³² Supporting the presence of this sub-frame, 37.5% of the words within the five-word window either side of MIGRANT/S closely related to the theme/ concept of 'quantity' (as shown in Figure 3). e.g. "BRITAIN'S Border Force intercepted a record number of illegal migrants crossing the Channel by boat yesterday".¹³³ In some instances, this 'quantity' was explicitly 'too large' e.g. "The images of people crammed into flimsy boats crossing the Channel inevitably feed into a deeper set of anxieties".¹³⁴ This 'numerical' sub-frame was most prominent in Tabloids. As shown in Figure 3, 100% of the top five words most closely associated with MIGRANT/S in the Tabloid sub-corpora related to numbers compared to Mid-Markets (80%) and Broadsheets (20%). In addition, the theme/ concept 'quantity' was associated with 43% of top 20 words in Tabloids, compared to Mid-markets (36%) and Broadsheets (11.5%).

¹³² Michael Drummond, '7,000 boat arrivals 'overwhelm' border staff' *The Express* (London, 2 Oct 2020) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/deec5737-cc96-4b91-9118-63586ad6bb03/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

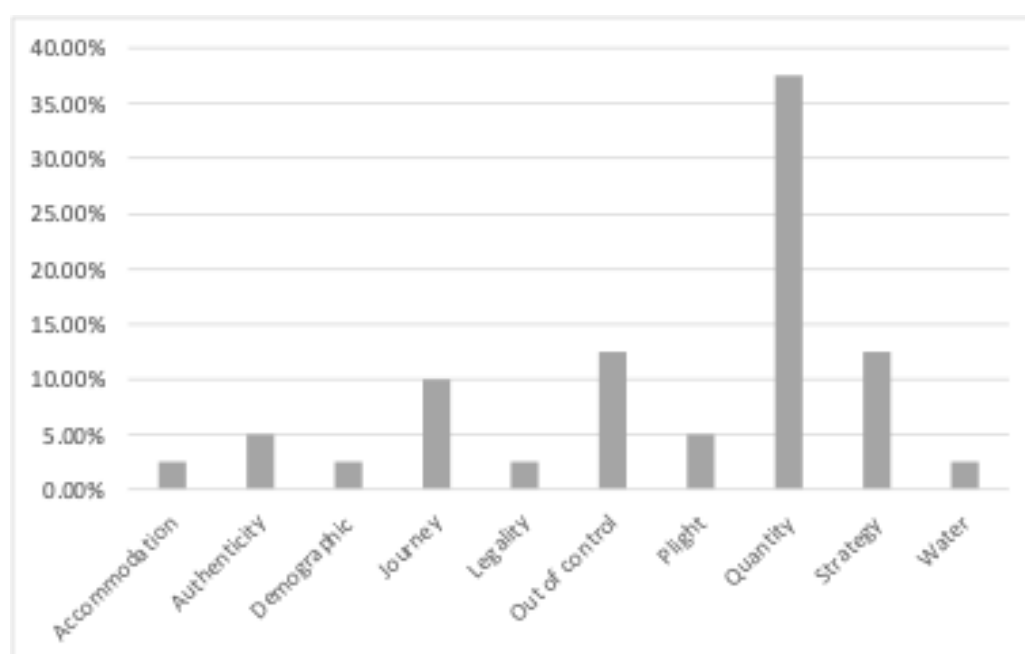
¹³³ Ian Drury, '102 Migrants Cross Channel Just Hours After a Record 90' *Daily Mail* (London, 8 February 2020) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/9330a47f-6aa6-4637-bfe7-f1e5decd75d9/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹³⁴ Kenan Malik, 'Inventing a 'migrant invasion' is part of a toxic rhetorical ploy; Issues around asylum continue to divide Britain, undermining the route to progress' *The Observer* (London, 16 Aug 2020) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/f2ded2c0-a1fb-41ab-8e7c-0a8adb01c049/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

Table 3: Top 5 Level 1 Collocates (MIGRANT/S)

Ranking	Corpus		Tabloids		Midmarkets		Broadsheets	
	Collocate	Frequency	Collocate	Frequency	Collocate	Frequency	Collocate	Frequency
1	4000	28	4000	7	econom-ic	9	attempting	25
2	econom-ic	20	5000	6	1000	8	4000	16
3	50	19	180	5	60	7	pushing	16
4	pushing	16	(none)	0	500	6	drive	13
5	drive	13	(none)	0	150	6	forcing	13

Figure 3: % of Top 20 Collocates by Topoi (MIGRANT/S)



Identifying the presence of a 'numerical' sub-frame within the dominant 'threat' frame is significant. Portraying people on the move as numerical values, especially large quantities, might support findings from prior studies where numbers have been shown to quantify 'a threat' and make it 'real'.¹³⁵ Numbers have also been "used to support the narrative that asylum seekers are criminals".¹³⁶ From another perspective, studies in different fields have shown people risk becoming detached when numbers (especially large numbers) are used to conceptualise the scale of something without a market value.¹³⁷ This implies equating "channel migrants" with numbers is dehumanizing.

- b. The findings suggest an 'agents of disorder' sub-frame contributed to the core framing of "channel migrants" as a 'threat'. Table 3 shows, within the corpus, 40% of the top five words most closely associated with MIGRANT/S related to being 'unwieldy' e.g. "...what was pushing them to leave their homes, and why were they unwilling to stop elsewhere?".¹³⁸ Supporting the presence of this sub-frame, 12.5% of

¹³⁵ De Genova and others (n 30).

¹³⁶ Parker (n 33) 6.

¹³⁷ Martin Harrison, 'Large numbers are dehumanising, so should big data worry us?' *The Guardian* (London, 16 Apr 2015) <<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/apr/16/large-numbers-dehumanising-so-should-big-data-worry-us>> accessed 22 Mar 2022.

¹³⁸ Daniel Trilling, 'The Essex lorry deaths throw up so many questions. It's vital we ask the right ones; This horrific event was not caused by lax border controls but by governments that force the most vulnerable to risk their lives' *The Guardian* (London, 23 Oct 2019) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/399ab13d-e700-4dc0-b918-7d0154dc3dc7/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022

the top 20 words most closely associated with MIGRANT/S related to being 'out of control' (as shown in Figure 3) e.g. "He also insisted efforts should be stepped up to catch people-traffickers fuelling the crisis."¹³⁹ This 'agents of disorder' sub-frame was most prominent in Broadsheets. As shown in Figure 3, 60% of the top five words most closely associated with MIGRANT/S in the Broadsheet sub-corpora related to 'unwieldy' compared to Mid-Markets (0%) and Tabloids (0%). In addition, the theme/ concept 'out of control' was associated with 11.5% of top 20 words in Broadsheets, compared to Mid-Markets (3.5%) and Tabloids (0%).

Identifying the presence of an 'agents of disorder' sub-frame within the dominant 'threat' frame appears to align with Pruitt's study from which I borrowed the concept of 'agents of disorder'.¹⁴⁰ However, a key difference between our findings is how the media achieved this framing. Pruitt found water-related metaphor was the main contributor to the media portraying people on the move as 'agents of disorder'.¹⁴¹ However, within my corpus only 2.5% of the top 20 words most closely associated with MIGRANT/S related to 'water' (see Figure 3). e.g. "Boris Johnson called crossing the English Channel a "very bad and stupid and dangerous and criminal thing to do" amid a surge in migrant boat crossings."¹⁴² I suggest although this implies the media has changed its rhetoric over time, it has continued to frame people on the move in similar ways. This sub-frame might also align with studies that have identified news reports that ascribe blame towards people on the move for taking 'risks'.¹⁴³

- c. The findings allude to an 'unwanted' sub-frame that may have contributed to the core framing of "channel migrants" as a 'threat'. As shown in Figure 3, 12.5% of the top 20 words most closely associated with MIGRANT/S related to 'strategy'. I suggest the theme/ concept of 'strategy' implies "channel migrants" are 'unwanted' (otherwise a 'strategy' would not be necessary). This 'unwanted' sub-frame was likely more explicit in Tabloids. As shown in Figure 3, 17% of the top five words most closely associated with MIGRANT/S in the Tabloid sub-corpora related to 'strategy' compared to Mid-Markets (11%) and Broad-sheets (11.5%). I analyse these findings in detail in section D. v.

Table 4: Topoi by Publication Type (MIGRANT/S)

TOPOS	TOP 20 L1 AND L5 COLLOCATES OF MIGRANT/S			
	Corpus	Tabloids	Mid-Markets	Broadsheets
Accommodation	camps (2.5%)	(none) (0%)	camps (3.5%)	camps (3%)
Authenticity	economic, would-be (5%)	suspected (4%)	economic (3.5%)	economic, would-be (6%)
Demographic	Vietnamese (2.5%)	(none) (0%)	(none) (0%)	Sudanese, Vietnamese (6%)
Journey	cross, crossed, crossing, reached (10%)	crossed, travelled (8.5%)	arriving, cross, crossed, landed, reached (18%)	channel, cross, crossed, crossing, crossings, dinghies (17%)
Legality	undocumented (2.5%)	smuggle (4%)	(none) (0%)	undocumented (3%)

(emphasis added).

139 Andrew Levy, '43 migrants pulled from the channel' *Daily Mail* (London, 13 May 2019) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/d9ca4d4c-2f88-4b6e-beeb-a485946e71e8/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

140 Pruitt (n 23).

141 *ibid.*

142 Lizzie Dearden, 'Channel Crossings: Boris Johnson calls for legal change to 'send away' more asylum seekers amid surge in migrant boats; Ministry of Defence deploys surveillance aircraft to Channel as crossings continue' *The Independent* (London, 10 Aug, 2020) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/4997e042-8dca-4183-a242-70fe132db068/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

143 Jacobs (n 5).

Out of control	crisis, drive, forcing, invading, pushing (12.5%)	(none) (0%)	crisis (3.5%)	drive, forcing, invading, pushing (11.5%)
Plight	attempting, rescued (5%)	saved (4%)	rescued (3.5%)	attempt, attempting, desperate, missing, rescued (14%)
Quantity	49, 50, 86, 180, 409 500, 1000 4000, 5000, 7000, 8000, crammed, dozens, record, thousands (37.5%)	44, 50, 69, 180, 4000, 5000, dozens, forty-four, record, thousands (43%)	39, 60, 86, 100, 150, 500, 1000, 4000, crammed, dozens (36%)	100, 4000, 7000, four (11.5%)
Strategy	detained, detect, intercepted, picked, stopped (12.5%)	detained, held, seized, stem (17%)	caught, deter, send (11%)	intercepted, policies, return, stopping (11.5%)
Water	surge (2.5%)	surge, wave (8.5%)	flow (3.5%)	(none) (0%)

- d. The findings imply an 'invader' sub-frame contributed to the core framing of "channel migrants" as 'a threat'. Table 3 shows, within the corpus, 60% of the top five words most closely associated with MI-GRANT/S related to the verb 'to cross' e.g. "On Saturday 103 migrants, including women and children, crossed the Channel in small boats in thick freezing fog."¹⁴⁴ Supporting this perspective, 10% of the words within the five-word window either side of MIGRANT/S closely related to the theme/ concept of 'journey' (as shown in Table 4). e.g. "A RECORD number of migrants reached Britain by illegally crossing the Channel last month, it has been confirmed."¹⁴⁵ This 'invader' sub-frame was more explicit in Mid-Markets and Broadsheets. As shown in Table 4, 18% of the top five words most closely associated with MIGRANT/S in the Mid-Market sub-corpora related to 'journey' compared to Broadsheets (17%) and Tabloids (8.5%).

Identifying the presence of an 'invader' sub-frame appears to align with Parker's study.¹⁴⁶ A difference between our findings was how the media achieved this framing of people on the move. Parker found that rhetoric around "channel migrants" as 'criminals' contributed to this 'invader' framing. It is important to acknowledge our methodological differences; Parker took a critical discourse approach to media analysis which may have uncovered insights my methodological approach did not. I suggest it was particularly insightful that, within the corpus, the word REACHED was closely associated with MI-GRANT/S. "Channel migrants" were no longer just potential 'invaders' (e.g. 'crossing') but had reached their destination; the 'threat' of 'invasion' was not just imminent, it had happened.

4.1.2 Effect of publication type

Although there were differences at collocate level, Tabloids, Mid-Markets and Broadsheets used between 60-70% of the same topoi when portraying "channel migrants" (as shown in Table 5). However, there were significant differences between how publication types portrayed "channel migrants" at the sub-frame level, particularly between a. Tabloids and b. Broadsheets.

¹⁴⁴ Paul Jeeves, '60 migrants cross freezing Channel' *The Express* (London, 11 Jan 2021) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/fb8e-3fe7-f53b-435e-978c-2c7537d2c919/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁴⁵ David Barrett, 'RECORD 1,450 MIGRANTS CROSSED THE CHANNEL IN DINGHIES LAST MONTH' *Daily Mail* (London, 2 Sept 2020) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/2a4b77dc-f63e-4c77-90b4-5c731f0ff8ce/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁴⁶ Parker (n 33).

Table 5: % of Shared Topoi by Publication Type (MIGRANT/S)

	Tabloids	Mid-Markets	Broadsheets
Tabloids		70%	60%
Mid-Markets	70%		70%
Broadsheets	70%	70%	

- a. The results imply Tabloids placed more emphasis on framing "channel migrants" as 'a threat' using the numerical sub-frame more than Broadsheets and Mid-Markets. As shown in Table 4, in the Tabloid sub-corpora, MIGRANT/S only had three collocates which were all numbers. Supporting this argument, Tabloids showed the least diversity in themes/ concepts used when portraying "channel migrants", using just 7 topoi. This echoes previous studies¹⁴⁷ and suggests Tabloids were more likely to quantify the 'threat' of "channel migrants" and adopt a more sensationalist approach to media reporting.¹⁴⁸
- b. The data suggests Broadsheets were more likely to use alternatives to the numerical sub-frame to portray "channel migrants" compared to Tabloids and Mid-Markets. As shown in Table 4, Broadsheets associated MIGRANT/S with 9 themes/ concepts and a dominant theme/ concept could not be identified. Supporting this argument, Broadsheets appeared to be the only publication type to portray "channel migrants" using the 'victim' frame as well as the 'threat' frame. In some instances, this was explicit e.g. "Everyone on these boats is a victim of our deadly policy of shutting down safe routes..."¹⁴⁹ In other instances this was inferred by associating "channel migrants" with topos such as 'plight' e.g. "Sajid Javid, declared the increasing number of migrants attempting to cross the Channel a "major incident""¹⁵⁰

This aligns with Khosravini's study¹⁵¹ that found Broadsheets were also likely to create stereotypes around people on the move, just perhaps in more implicit ways than Tabloids.

4.1.3 Effect of Terminology

The findings showed differences in the portrayal of "channel migrants" depending on whether the media referred to "migrants", "immigrants", "refugees" or "asylum seekers". I will now a. outline why caution must be taken when suggesting a potential relationship between terminology used and media portrayal b. show how "immigrants", "asylum seekers" and "migrants" were predominantly framed as 'threats' c. show how "refugees" were predominantly framed as 'victims'.

- a. The data shows the media used different words and themes and/ or concepts to portray the terms "migrants", "immigrants", "refugees" and "asylum seekers". As shown in Table 6, within the corpus 0% of the Top 5 words most closely associated with MIGRANT/S IMMIGRANT/S, REFUGEE/S or ASYLUM SEEKER/S were the same. This might imply a relationship between the terminology used and media portrayal. However, as shown in Table 7, MIGRANT/S, IMMIGRANT/S, REFUGEE/S and ASYLUM SEEKER/S did appear to share the topoi 'authenticity' and 'quantity'. Some terms were portrayed more similarly than others, especially MIGRANT/S and REFUGEE/S which shared 90% of the same topoi. However, topoi were not always consistent in meaning. For example, 'authenticity' was associated with ECONOMIC for MIGRANT/S, SUSPECTED for IMMIGRANT/S, GENUINE for REFUGEES and FAILED and GENUINE for ASYLUM SEEKERS. Although caution must be taken when interpreting these findings, overall, they align with studies that have shown terminology plays a role in media portrayal.

¹⁴⁷ De Genova and others (n 30).

¹⁴⁸ Threadgold (n 61).

¹⁴⁹ Lizzie Dearden, 'Channel crossings: Home Office 'twisted judge's remarks' to defend branding migrants as 'people smugglers' *The Independent* (London, 30 Nov 2020) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/8179b5c5-12c6-4980-ba08-036fc56883ed/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁵⁰ Aamna Mohdin, 'The child refugees risking the Channel by boat - one year on; Kent youth asylum seeker charity has seen a 50% rise in demand for its services since December 2018' *The Guardian* (London, 30 Dec 2019) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/24ca6a59-2004-4f3b-9fec-4f849507cc85/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁵¹ Khosravini (n 85).

Table 6: Top L1 and L5 Collocates in Corpus (MIGRANT/S, IMMIGRANT/S, REFUGEE/S, ASYLUM SEEKER/S)

Term	Top L1 Collocate	Top L5 Collocate
Migrant/s	4000	crossing
Immigrant/s	illegal	illegal
Refugee/s	child	child
Asylum seeker/s	failed	countries

Table 7: % Shared Topoi by Terminology

	Migrant/s	Immigrant/s	Refugee/s	Asylum Seeker/s
Migrant/s		40%	90%	70%
Immigrant/s	40%		40%	40%
Refugee/S	90%	40%		60%
Asylum Seeker/s	70%	40%	60%	

- b. The findings indicate “immigrants” and “asylum seekers” were predominantly portrayed using the ‘threat’ frame. IMMIGRANT/S were portrayed in the least diverse ways with the fewest words and themes/ concepts associated with them. As shown in Table 6, IMMIGRANT/S were most closely associated with the word ILLEGAL e.g. “MORE than 200 illegal immigrants crossed the Channel to arrive on the British coast yesterday - a record for a single day.”¹⁵² As shown in Table 6, ASYLUM SEEKERS were most closely associated with the word FAILED. e.g. “At the same time, the government has resumed deportation flights for failed asylum seekers and reopened travel routes for the public and tourists.”¹⁵³ This mirrors the findings of Blinder and Allen¹⁵⁴ who found the modifiers of IMMIGRANT/S and ASYLUM SEEKER/S to be ILLEGAL and FAILED, respectively.

As already outlined in section D. i., “migrants” were predominantly framed as ‘threats’. MIGRANT/S were portrayed in a diversity of ways and had the most words and themes/ concepts associated with them (see Table 8). There are some instances where the ‘victim’ frame was used by the media to portray “migrants”. MIGRANT/S were associated with the topos ‘plight’. e.g. “TWO people in a kayak were among 41 migrants rescued in the English Channel yesterday - during five separate attempts to reach the UK.”¹⁵⁵ This aligns with studies that showed the ‘victim’ frame distinguishes between ‘them’ and ‘us’.¹⁵⁶ “Channel migrants” are portrayed as the ‘victim’ who need to be ‘rescued’, making ‘us’ the ‘hero’. The persistent nature of the attempts of the “channel migrants” also alludes to them being a burden (e.g. on the coastguard). The juxtaposition of the ‘threat’ and ‘victim’ frame amplifies the need to prevent “channel migrants”. This echoes Parker who posed although the ‘threat’ and ‘victim’ frames appear different, both “remain unwanted”.¹⁵⁷

- c. The findings suggest “refugees” were portrayed distinctly from “migrant/s”, “immigrant/s” and “asylum seeker/s”, solely using the ‘victim’ core frame. I suggest this was achieved through a sub-theme around “refugee/s” having a ‘lack of agency’. ‘Demographic’ appeared to be a prevalent theme/ concept for REFUGEE/S. This aligns with Allen’s study that found “refugees” were more likely to be described according

¹⁵² David Churchill, ‘BORDERING ON MADNESS’ *Daily Mail* (London, 31 July 2020) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/50a59d53-b58d-4576-8f53-0b579bb5ddc8/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁵³ Lizzie Dearden, ‘Channel crossings: Government claims refugees can use resettlement scheme that has been closed for six months; ‘There are plenty of legal routes by which people can claim asylum,’ minister tells MPs, as dozens more migrants reach Dover’ *The Independent* (London, 2 Sept 2020) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/cf9362ae-72dd-4344-9526-6dadb8d8c620/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁵⁴ Blinder and Allen (n 19)

¹⁵⁵ Editorial, ‘41 migrants are saved in the Channel’ *Daily Mirror* (London, 10 Aug 2019) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/a6fd38f1-569e-4584-b0cc-e640c0289fb4/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁵⁶ Valente and others (n 27); De Genova and others (n 30).

¹⁵⁷ Parker (n 33) 9.

to their origin compared to other terms used to refer to people on the move.¹⁵⁸ On one hand providing this contextual information could be considered a more neutral form of media portrayal, humanising people on the move as opposed to framing them wholly negatively as 'threats' or 'victims'. However, a collective view of the words associated with REFUGEE/S constructs a different image; portraying "refugees" as immobile and dependant and framing them as 'victims' who 'lack agency'. As shown in Table 6, the word most closely aligned with REFUGEE/S was CHILD e.g. "The people of Britain are full of love and compassion and are really able to, and want to, welcome these child refugees in."¹⁵⁹ As shown in Table 8, REFUGEE/S were also associated with 'plight' e.g. "DESPERATE refugees waiting in appalling conditions to cross the English Channel last night begged Boris Johnson: "Give us a chance."¹⁶⁰ I argue these are examples of "patronising discourses that present migrants as purely passive 'victims'".¹⁶¹

The findings imply a 'humanitarian' sub-frame may have contributed to the framing of "refugees" as 'victims'. For "refugees", instead of quantifying 'a threat', numbers were used to quantify the extent of human suffering and to evoke sympathy and generate support. e.g. "Charities argue that the increasing tempo of evictions, a strategy backed by UK border authorities, is forcing the 1,300 refugees currently in northern France to risk the dangerous Channel crossing."¹⁶² This aligns with Crawley and others' study that similarly identified a 'humanitarian' subframe within the 'victim' frame.¹⁶³

Table 8: Topoi by Terminology

TOPOS	TOP 20 L1 AND L5 COLLOCATES			
	Migrant/s	Immigrant/s	Refugee/s	Asylum Seeker/s
Accommodation	camps	(none)	camp, camps	house, housing, accommodation, centres, camps, hotels
Authenticity	economic, would-be	suspected	1951, convention, genuine, status, un, unhcr, un's	genuine, failed
Demographic	vietnamese	(none)	(none)	syrian, syria
Journey	carrying, cross, crossed, crossing, reached	come, enter	(none)	arriving, arrived, steer
Legality	undocumented	illegal	convention, status	(none)
Out of control	crisis, drive, forcing, invading, pushing, surge	(none)	crisis	(none)
Plight	attempting, rescued	(none)	desperate, waiting	(none)

¹⁵⁸ Allen (n 26).

¹⁵⁹ Katy Fallon, "We said we'd take 3,000 children - only 220 are safe"; The death of Alan Kurdi in 2015 spurred the government into action but efforts have stalled, reports Katy Fallon' *The Independent* (London, 2 Sept 2019) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/4540530b-4e23-43d2-8fd4-0e6143ba3e73/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁶⁰ Matthew Young, 'We are human... give us a chance; REFUGEES: HELLISH REALITY OF CALAIS Migrants desperate to reach UK say they just want to keep their families safe' (London, 14 August 2020) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/f51d92b6-c5f1-47e8-b7c3-397e5023a89a/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁶¹ De Genova (n 80).

¹⁶² Mark Townsend, 'Record refugee evictions at camps in France to halt Channel crossings; Calais-based human rights observers report 'relentless harassment' of asylum seekers' *The Observer* (London, 22 Jun 2019) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/a427aec1-6f5c-454d-9856-343597a3728b/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁶³ Crawley and others (n 46).

Quantity	50, 86, 150, 180, 409, 500, 1000, 4000, 5000, 7000, 8000, crammed, dozens, record, thousands	number	million	1000, 20, thousands
Strategy	detained, detect, intercepted, picked, stopped	(none)	help, resettlement, welcoming	deportation, deter, offshore, remove, send, sending, sent

4.1.4 Effect of Gender

The findings show there were differences in how the media portrayed “channel migrants” when their gender was included in news reports. I will now a. reveal how the findings imply a dual relationship between gender and media portrayal b. outline how females were predominantly portrayed as ‘victims’ c. present how males were portrayed in more nuanced ways.

- a. Although only a limited quantity of findings could be disaggregated by gender, the data showed there were differences in how “channel migrants” were portrayed depending on whether they were reported as being female or male. As shown in Table 9, 0% of the five words most closely associated with WOMAN, WOMEN, GIRL/S were the same as the five words most closely associated with MAN, MEN, BOY/S. This echoes Pearce’s 2008 BNC study, where the words “woman” and “man” were not closely associated with the same words. I will explore these words in detail, along with further differences in how female and male “channel migrants” were portrayed and what this might mean, in section iv. b. and c.

There were also differences in how “channel migrants” were portrayed when gender was reported, irrespective of gender itself (i.e. whether people on the move were reported as being female/ male). A new theme/ concept of ‘family status’, not identified in elsewhere in this study, was apparent when gender was included. e.g. “One boat had seven toddlers, two women and ten men on board UK Border Force vessels intercepted families who risked a treacherous 21-mile trip across busy shipping lanes”.¹⁶⁴ Associating people on the move with ‘family status’ might be interpreted as a more humanising form of portrayal, showing ‘them’ to be like ‘us’. This would differ from existing studies that have shown people on the move to be portrayed as ‘other’.¹⁶⁵ When gender was reported, some of the themes/ concepts shown to contribute to the media’s negative portrayal of “channel migrants”, as identified in Part One, were absent. For example, neither WOMAN, WOMEN, GIRL/S or MAN, MEN, BOY/S were associated with ‘out of control’. This implies a more neutral form of portrayal, moving away from the core frames of ‘victim’ and ‘threat’. This might show an additional relationship between gender and media portrayal; that gender affects media portrayal irrespective of whether people on the move are reported as being female or male. As far as I am aware, this is not something that has been identified previously.

Table 9: Top L1 and L5 Collocates in Corpus (WOMAN, WOMEN, GIRL/S, MAN, MEN, BOY/S)

	Term	Top L1 Collocate	Top L5 Collocate
Female	Woman	pregnant	pregnant
	Women	men	men
Male	Girl/s	little	little
	Man	iraqi	iraqi
	Men	women	women
	Boy/s	sudanese	16-year-old

¹⁶⁴ Amir Razavi, ‘125 boat migrants stopped in a day’ *The Sun* (London, 19 July 2020) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/e84e0ebd-1936-4b6a-b17283b9636cd9b5/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁶⁵ Allen (n 14).

- b. The findings show "woman", "women" and "girl/s" were predominantly portrayed by the media using the 'victim' framing. I suggest this was achieved through the sub-framing of female "channel migrants" as having a 'lack of agency'. As shown in Table 10, the words closely related to WOMAN, WOMEN and GIRL/S related to just two themes/ concepts 'plight' and 'family status'. Words associated with WOMAN, WOMEN and GIRL/S referenced suffering and/ or loss of life e.g. "... in August 2019, an Iranian woman drowned".¹⁶⁶ This was also true of MAN, MEN and BOY/S (see section D iv. c.). However, unlike males, females were also associated with words relating to being 'saved' e.g. "Earlier on Sunday, 31 migrants, including a pregnant woman and two children, were rescued from two boats off Dunkirk."¹⁶⁷ I pose this supports the presence 'lack of agency' media frame in two ways: Not only did females 'need' to be 'rescued', implying they could not (unlike men) 'save themselves', but it also has paternalistic undertones; echoing scholarship which highlights how refugee women 'need' to be 'saved'.¹⁶⁸ These findings are similar to Pearce's observations of the BNC where women were represented as powerless 'objects' whereas men were 'subjects'.¹⁶⁹

In section D iv. a. I suggested associating people on the move with 'family status' might be a form of positive portrayal. However, I argue this is not true for female "channel migrants" and 'family status' instead emphasises a 'lack of agency'. Within the topos 'family status' the word most closely associated with WOMAN was PREGNANT e.g. "...at least five more boatloads of migrants, including a reportedly pregnant woman and a child, arrived at Dover yesterday".¹⁷⁰ Focussing on a woman's social identity (in this example, her childbearing status) implies she is only relevant within gender norms and not with agency in her own right, with her own rights. This echoes del Zotto's study where women's experiences were shown to be misrepresented by the media through gendered stereotypes.¹⁷¹

- c. The data implies "man", "men" and "boy/s" were portrayed by the media in more nuanced ways; as 'threats', 'victims' and possibly more neutral ways. As shown in Table 10, MAN, MEN and BOY/S were associated with a diversity of themes/ concepts and the words most closely associated with males were dispersed between topoi (see Table 10), implying male "channel migrants" were portrayed in varied ways. In section D. v. g. I will explore how the media portrayed male "channel migrants" as 'threats' by associating them with 'strategy'. However, males were also portrayed as 'victims' having a 'lack of agency', akin to how the media portrayed females. As shown in Table 10, approximately 17% of the top 20 words most closely associated with MAN, MEN and BOY/S could be categorized within the theme of 'plight'. e.g. "The dead man could not swim".¹⁷² Finally, I suggest male "channel migrants" were portrayed in more factual, potentially neutral ways. For example, as shown in Table 9, MAN was most closely associated with IRAQI e.g. "Cops reckon he and the older man, an Iraqi, "probably came from the same boat"...".¹⁷³ As previously outlined in D. iii. c. associating "channel migrants" with demographic information (where they were from, their age etc) might not be a negative thing. It might suggest the media portrayed male "channel migrants" in more diverse and nuanced ways, moving away from the 'victim' and 'threat' dichotomy. This contrasts with Blumell and Cooper's findings that showed men were only portrayed as 'a threat'.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁶ Lizzie Dearden, 'Channel crossings: Sudanese migrant who drowned trying to reach UK named as Abdulfatah Hamdallah; Exclusive: Drowning victim had been living in Calais 'Jungle' for two months before fatal crossing attempt' *The Independent* (London, 20 Aug 2020) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/4d8ae517-2a03-4a0d-83a0-646f1e1180de/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁶⁷ Peter Allen, '19 MIGRANTS ARE SAVED FROM OVERLOADED BOAT' *Daily Mail* (London, 31 Dec 2019) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/6ec1848a-f25d-41a7-8e10-eab289c115f1/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁶⁸ Crawley (n 102).

¹⁶⁹ Pearce (n 95) 11.

¹⁷⁰ Max Aitchison, Abul Taher and Tim Finan, 'PEOPLE SMUGGLING GANG CONTROLLED' *The Mail on Sunday* (London, 16 Aug 2020) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/6eddfa5a-1520-40b0-8da1-3e829d31711f/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁷¹ del Zotto (n 99).

¹⁷² Paul Routledge, 'Toxic policy has led to the death of a desperate man; Telling it like it is...' *Daily Mirror* (London, 21 Aug 2020) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/14244ada-b6fa-44a3-9710-d1f12dc18c41/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁷³ Editorial, 'MIGRANT PAIR DIE' *The Sun* (London, 16 Oct 2019) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/a575deb9-ce47-43ca-931f-710309ad57dd/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁷⁴ Blumell and Cooper (n 94).

Table 10: Topoi by Gender

TOPOS	Top 20 L1 AND L2 COLLOCATES	
	Female	Male
Accommodation	(none)	(none)
Authenticity	migrants	(none)
Demographic	iranian	20s, african, iranian, iraqi, sudanese, young
Journey	boat, channel	carrying, channel, gibraltar, isle, life, wearing
Legality	(none)	(none)
Out of control	(none)	(none)
Plight	dead, died, drowned, feared, rescued	body, dead, died, drowned, trying
Quantity	one, two, four	11, one, two, three, four, six, eight, ten
Strategy	(none)	arrested, jailed, years
Family Status	child, children, man, men, pregnant	woman, women

4.2 Part Two: Addressing a 'Problem'

4.2.1 Prevention Strategies Proposed Within the Media

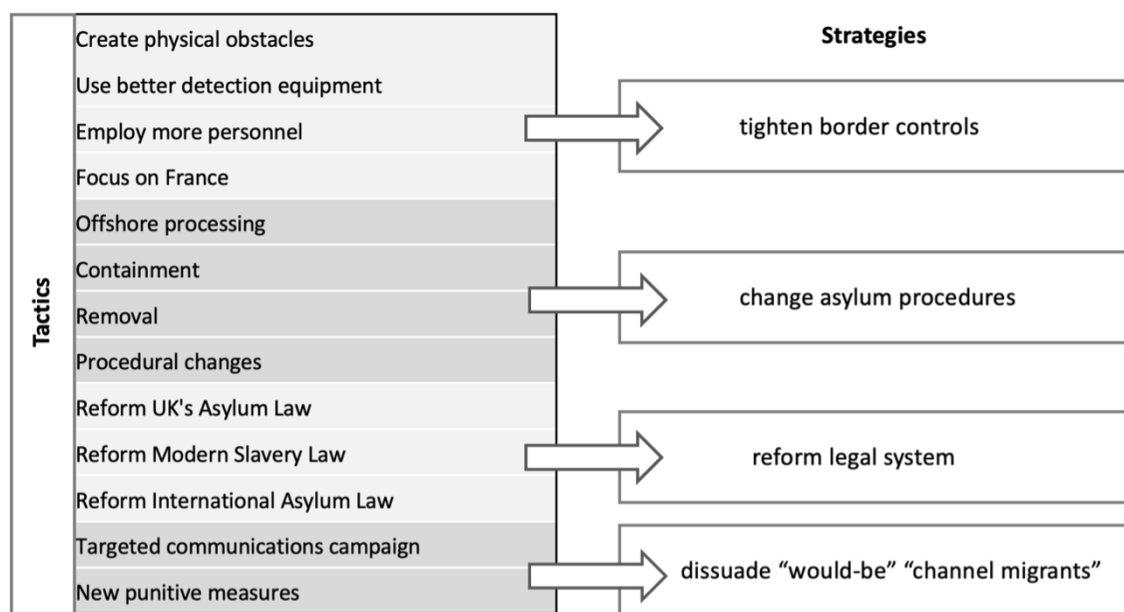
The findings show, there was a significant quantity and diversity of measures proposed within the media to prevent "channel migrants". I will now a. summarise the strategies proposed within the media to prevent "channel migrants" b. explain how these strategies aligned with the dominant media framing of "channel migrants" c. show how the strategies appeared to align with the media framing of "migrants", "immigrants", "refugees" and "asylum seekers" d. suggest a connection between specific prevention strategies and the terminology used to refer to "channel migrants" e. allude to a link between strategies and the media's sub-frames f. suggest these findings might allude to an interrelationship between terminology used, media frames and strategies proposed within the media to prevent "channel migrants" g. show how gender appeared to relate prevention strategies.

- a. An attempt to identify strategies proposed within the media to prevent "channel migrants" produced significantly more results than anticipated. Although the corpus contained a lot of measures to prevent "channel migrants", the strategy behind these measures was not always explicit. To summarise these findings, I organised findings into tactics, details, and strategies. As shown in Table 11, 13 tactics were proposed to prevent "channel migrants", for example removal. There were direct references to over 80 specific ways these tactics might be implemented in practice ('details'), for example return to country of origin. I grouped tactics based on their context/ purpose to identify four overarching strategies (as shown in Figure 4): tighten border controls, change UK's asylum procedures, reform legal system/s and dissuade would-be "channel migrants". For example, the strategy change asylum procedures could be actualized through the tactic containment which could be implemented through the details camps, secure units, hostels, reception centres and/ or secure detention centres. Although some of the proposed prevention measures did not appear to be explicitly 'hostile' towards "channel migrants", they mirrored some of the hostile practices that have been implemented in other states to prevent people on the move e.g. Australia's 'Pacific Solution'.¹⁷⁵

Table 11: Prevention Measures Proposed within the Media

Tactic	Detail
Containment	camps, secure units, hostels, reception centres, secure detention centres
Create physical obstacles	floating walls, nets, artificial wave machines, marine fencing, boat blockades, water cannons, devices to ensnare boat propellers
Employ more personnel	more border patrols, deploying RAF/ navy, extra police, SBS on standby
Focus on France	better intelligence sharing, collaboration with France, British financial support to France, destroy camps in France, increase security presence in France
Procedural changes	faster asylum processing, proper advisory services, fairer decisions, tougher age assessments, tighter appeals system, Fingerprinting, EURODAC database
Removal	return to country of origin, redirect out of UK territory, send to safe third countries, send back to France
New punitive measures	Target criminals/ people smugglers/ traffickers/ organised networks/ facilitators, introduce life sentences for traffickers
Offshore processing	Northern France, disused oil rigs, cruise liners, ferries, remote islands, Ascension island, Moldova, Eastern Europe, Isle of Wight, Isle of Man, Shetland Islands
Reform International Asylum Law	Introduce common policy across Europe towards people seeking asylum, introduce bilateral agreement with France
Reform Modern Slavery Law	Target 'loophole' in modern slavery act
Reform UK's Asylum Law	introduce humanitarian visas, reform family reunion rules, reform resettlement plans, reinstate Dubs amendment, make special arrangements for asylum-seeking children, new Borders Bill, new temporary protection scheme for boat arrivals, enforce 'safe' third country returns (e.g. Dublin), introduce two-tiered asylum system
Targeted communications campaign	convince potential "channel migrants" journey is 'pointless', new specialised campaign e.g. Facebook
Use better detection equipment	drones, jet skis, CCTV, aerial surveillance, night vision goggles, cameras, ANPR, radar equipment, high-tech binoculars, speedboats

Figure 4: Tactics and Strategies Proposed within the Media



- b. The findings indicate prevention measures proposed within the media aligned with the dominant 'threat' framing of "channel migrants", identified in Part One. This 'threat' frame was present in individual tactics and when taking a more holistic view of proposed preventative measures. Sometimes tactics were presented singularly e.g. "The Home Office is considering permitting the use of nets to prevent migrants from crossing the Channel in smallboats to the UK to claim asylum, according to a former Royal Marine tasked with preventing the journeys."¹⁷⁶ More commonly, a range of tactics were presented at the same time "The tactic is... locking migrants up on oilrigs, sending them more than 5,000 miles away to Ascension Island in the south Atlantic and using water cannons to create waves to push back vessels."¹⁷⁷ Some prevention measures were presented as building on existing ones e.g. "...a Shadow R1 aircraft would be added to track vessels and pass information to the Border Force, alongside a team of royal navy planning and logistics personnel."¹⁷⁸ Others were presented as novel ideas e.g. "A floating wall to block migrants crossing the Channel is being considered by the Home Office..."¹⁷⁹

The quantity and diversity of measures, suggests "channel migrants" were not just portrayed as 'a threat', but as a particularly complex 'threat'. This might align with the identification of sub-media frames in Part One ('numerical', 'agents of disorder', 'unwanted' and 'invaders'). These sub-frames implied "channel migrants" were 'a threat' for multiple reasons. The 'numerical' sub-frame is echoed in the quantity of resources required to implement the prevention measures. As the number of "channel migrants" increases so does the quantity of resources required e.g. "more officers will be on patrol and increased Border Force vessels will be available" (The Express, 2020c, emphasis added). I suggest these strategies might link to the 'invader' sub-frame. Actors required to implement some of the tactics were linked to state defence. e.g. "In one of the biggest peacetime operations, the combined forces of the police, border guards, customs officials and military personnel will help keep the UK moving."¹⁸⁰ This

¹⁷⁶ James Grierson, 'Home office may use nets to stop migrant boats crossing channel' *The Guardian* (London, 11 Oct 2020) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/ac95bfae-295e-448f-9473-e5b8fc01078d/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Lizzie Dearden, 'No plans for Royal Navy to Patrol for Migrant crossings' *The Independent* (London, 16 Aug 2020) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/db0c3a2d-d4d1-4a0c-aade-f7abeacffa5f/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁷⁹ Michael Knowles, 'Floating wall in channel to stop crossings' *The Express* (London, 2 Oct 2020) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/7ffed6de-54cf-4afe-8320-4a39088baed9/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁸⁰ Larisa Brown, 'ACTION STATIONS!' *Daily Mail* (London, 14 Dec 2020) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/47bdd55-cbc5-4610-aecc-813e097e0ff7/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

might imply the negative discourse surrounding "channel migrants" has worsened with time. In 2018 "channel migrants" were portrayed as 'criminals',¹⁸¹ whereas this study shows "channel migrants" had become 'a threat' of such magnitude that military intervention was required.

- c. The findings imply measures proposed to prevent "migrants", "refugees" and "asylum seekers" correlated with the dominant media framing of these terms, aligning with the findings in Part One. The words associated with 'strategy' suggested "migrants" and "asylum seekers" were 'a threat'. Words associated with preventing MIGRANT/S were DETAINED, DETECT, INTERCEPTED, PICKED, STOPPED. e.g. "They will use radar and other surveillance gadgets to detect, deter and disrupt people traffickers."¹⁸² Words associated with preventing ASYLUM SEEKER/S were DEPORTATION, DETER, OFFSHORE, REMOVE, SEND, SENDING, SENT. e.g. "A Whitehall brainstorming session prompted by Priti Patel led to the idea being floated of sending asylum seekers to a volcanic island in the South Atlantic, the Guardian understands."¹⁸³ This aligns with Parker's findings that "asylum seekers" were frequently associated with 'removals'.¹⁸⁴

The words associated with 'strategy' suggested "refugees" were 'victims'. Words associated with preventing REFUGEE/S were HELP, RESETTLEMENT, WELCOMING. "A Home Office spokesperson said: "The UK has a long and proud history welcoming those in need and escaping persecution and resettles more refugees than any other country in Europe."¹⁸⁵ These findings support studies that have shown how terminology plays a role in dividing people on the move according to their perceived legitimacy.¹⁸⁶ Portraying some "channel migrants" as 'legitimate' means all others must be 'illegitimate', which 'justifies' the prevention strategy proposed within the media.

- d. The findings allude to a connection between the terminology used to refer to "channel migrants" and specific prevention strategies. As shown in Table 12, MIGRANT/S were associated with the strategy tighten border controls and ASYLUM SEEKER/S the strategy change the UK's asylum procedures. Although the words associated with REFUGEE/S did not align with any of the strategies identified in this study, they might suggest the presence of a fifth prevention strategy, exclusively for "refugees", help the deserving. For example, "Campaigners have called on ministers to allow refugees to "apply safely" for asylum from outside the UK after two boats carrying 40 people were intercepted off the Kent coast."¹⁸⁷ This would echo Goodman's study that found the 'victim' frame was specifically linked to "refugees" and the dichotomy of 'deserving/ undeserving'.¹⁸⁸

Table 12: Preventions Strategies Proposed within the Media by Terminology

Term	Top 20 L1 and L2 Collocates	Strategy
Migrant/s	detained, detect, intercepted, picked, stopped	tighten border control
Immigrant/s	(none)	(none)
Refugee/s	help, resettlement, welcoming	help the deserving

¹⁸¹ Jacobs (n 5).

¹⁸² David Wooding, 'PRITI'S WAR ON PEOPLE SMUGGLERS; BID TO END TIDE OF MISERY New secret command HQ Land, sea and air blitz' *The Sun* (London, 10 Jan 2021) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/938b78d0-9d9e-43b0-a88f-f928c90a82a4/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁸³ Peter Walter and Jessica Murray, 'Priti Patel looked at idea of sending asylum seekers to South Atlantic' *The Guardian* (London, 30 Sept 2020) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/d672a0af-da51-44a0-ba83-39beed107db8/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁸⁴ Parker (n 33).

¹⁸⁵ Lizzie Dearden, "Channel crossings: French politician accuses UK of causing teenage migrant's death; 'How many more tragedies will it take for the British to regain an ounce of humanity?'" *The Independent* (London, 19 Aug 2020) <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/channel-crossings-death-sudan-child-migrant-asylum-seeker-pierrehenri-dumont-a9678476.html>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁸⁶ Hussein (n 58).

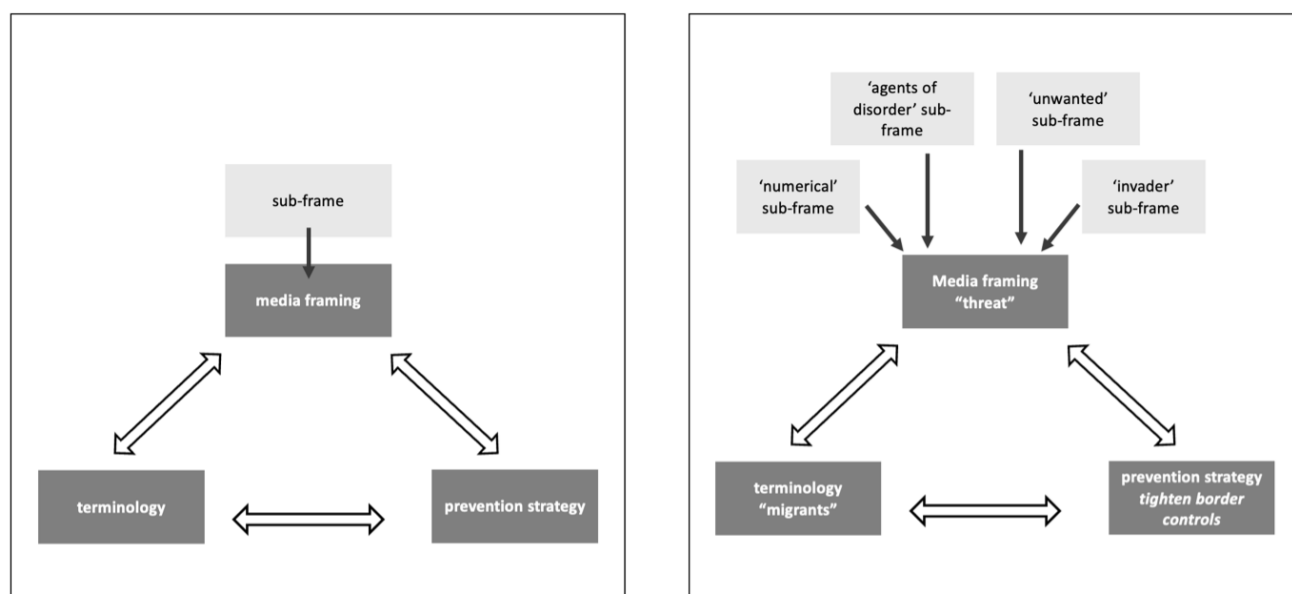
¹⁸⁷ James Tapper, 'Calls for safer asylum regime as 40 people are intercepted in Channel; Two boats stopped by Border Force in latest of growing number of such incidents' *The Guardian* (London, 15 June 2019) <<https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/9c8a4ce6-6d7f-4c6f-8c68-eb752e48798/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁸⁸ Goodman and others (n 38).

Asylum Seeker/s	deportation, deter, offshore, remove, send, sending, sent	change asylum procedures
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- e. I suggest strategies proposed within the media to prevent “channel migrants” may have linked to the sub-frames used by the media to portray “channel migrants”. This is noticeable in the strategies associated with the terms “migrants” and “refugees”. For example, the strategy tighten border controls and the tactics related to its implementation focus on preventing “migrants” entering the UK e.g. “A FLOATING wall to block migrants crossing the Channel is being considered by the Home Office, it is claimed”. This aligns with the ‘agents of disorder’ subframe, where “migrants” were associated with words related to being ‘unwieldy’ and the concept of being ‘out of control’. In contrast, I pose the strategy help the deserving and the tactics related to its implementation lean more towards the UK’s legal obligations to protect “refugees” e.g. “The government must urgently restart its hugely successful refugee resettlement programme”. This aligns with the ‘humanitarian’ subframe, where “refugees” were associated with the theme of ‘plight’. This, again, echoes Crawley’s finding of a humanitarian theme within the ‘victim’ framing.
- f. Acknowledging an additional level of generalisation on my part, these findings might allude to an interrelationship between the terms used by the media to refer to “channel migrants”, the frames used by the media to portray “channel migrants” and the strategies proposed within the media to prevent “channel migrants”. In Figure 5 I use the example of MIGRANT/S to show how terminology might be influenced by media framing and influence how the media frames “channel migrants” whilst simultaneously influencing the prevention strategies proposed within the media. I pose there may be a triangular relationship, whereby prevention strategies continue to fuel the media framing of “channel migrants”/ reinforce the need for terminology to distinguish between ‘types’ of “channel migrant”. The implications of this would be far-reaching and suggest that the effects of media portrayal in the context of people on the move is (even) more complex than originally thought.

Figure 5 i): Proposed Triangular Link Between Terminology, Media Framing and Prevention Strategies ii): Demonstrating this Link Using the Term “migrants”



- g. The measures proposed within the media to prevent “woman”, “women”, “girl/s” and “man”, “men” and “boy/s” may have aligned the media portrayal of female and male “channel migrants”. WOMAN, WOMEN, GIRL/S were not associated with ‘strategy’ (see Table 10). Although this does not directly link to the ‘victim’ media framing identified in D.i.v. it implies female “channel migrants” were not portrayed as ‘threats’ (as there was no need to ‘prevent’ them). This might add weight to the ‘lack of agency’ sub-

frame within the core 'victim' framing of female "channel migrants". In contrast, "man", "men" and "boy/s" were associated with 'strategy', aligning with the 'threat' frame identified in section D.iv.c. As shown in Table 10, the Top 20 words most closely associated with preventing MAN, MEN, BOY/S related to punitive measures/ criminal acts e.g. "Altaib Mobarak, a 43-year-old Sudanese man, was jailed for two years in August for "facilitating illegal entry into the UK""¹⁸⁹ Associating male "channel migrants" with criminality supports existing research that has found people on the move have been portrayed as 'criminals'.¹⁹⁰ However, in Part One male "channel migrants" were shown to be portrayed in nuanced ways, not 'just' as 'a threat'.

Table 13: Preventions Strategies Proposed within the Media by Gender

Gender	Top 20 L1 and L2 Collocates
Female (Woman, Women, Girl/s)	(none)
Male (Man, Men, Boy/s)	arrested, jailed, years

4.2.2 General Observations: Media Portrayal and Asylum Law/ Policy

It is beyond the scope of this study to explore if the media's portrayal of "channel migrants" had a causal impact on asylum law/ policy. However, as this study precedes a period of significant change in the UK asylum system, I now make some general observations which might inform more substantive research in the future.

Figure 6: Comparing NBB Objectives and Findings from this Study

POLICY	MEDIA		
NBB Objective	Prevention Strategy	Tactic	Framing
1. To make the system fairer and more effective so that we can better protect and support those in genuine need of asylum.	reform legal system/s	reform UK's asylum law	?
2. To deter illegal entry into the UK breaking the business model of criminal trafficking networks and saving lives.	dissuade would-be "channel migrants"	new punitive measures	Threat
3. To remove from the UK those with no right to be here.	change asylum procedures	removal	Threat

Some of the measures proposed within the media to prevent "channel migrants" may have aligned with the overarching objectives of the NBB. As shown in Figure 6, there were synergies between prevention strategies, as identified in this study, and the three objectives of the NBB. For example, the objective to remove those with no right to be in the UK more easily was similar to the media's prevention strategy change asylum procedures, specifically the tactic removal. Based on the argument that prevention strategies may have linked to the media framing of "channel migrants", as shown in section D. v., it might be assumed NBB objectives also linked to the media portrayal of "channel migrants". Even a cursory view of the objectives alongside the media's prevention strategies aligns with the findings of this research, that "channel

¹⁸⁹ Lizzie Dearden, 'Patel warned against arrests of exploited asylum seekers' *The Independent* (London, 5 Oct 2020) < <https://advance.lexis.com/api/permalink/1704dd36-43d4-446e-ae2a-f6d12e227147/?context=1519360&federationidp=4HKXSX59158>> accessed 22 Mar 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁹⁰ Brouwer and others (n 16).

migrants” were predominantly framed as ‘a threat’ (see Figure 6).

Examples of the language used by the media to portray “channel migrants” was also present in succeeding legislative changes. As shown in D. iii. the word most closely associated with IMMIGRANT/S was ILLEGAL. This word was present in Illegal Migration Act 2023 (“IMA”) e.g. “The purpose of this Act is to prevent and deter unlawful migration, and in particular migration by unsafe and illegal routes”¹⁹¹ (emphasis added). This instrument also contained ‘prevention strategies’ that had been proposed within the media, including removal¹⁹² and detention.¹⁹³ This is significant as IMA was deemed to amount to “an asylum ban”,¹⁹⁴ directly contravening provisions within the Refugee Convention that protect people claiming asylum against penalties for illegal entry/ presence.¹⁹⁵

These observations imply the UK government may have used the negative media portrayal of “channel migrants” to ‘justify’ harsher asylum law/ policy. This would align with studies that found this approach was used by the Australian government.¹⁹⁶ However, these are only assumptions, although this study implies a causal link between media portrayal and policy, it does not indicate the direction of this link. The question remains; ‘who’ influences ‘who’? Further research might look to explore this in more detail with a particular focus on identifying whether media portrayal was more likely to influence asylum law/ policy or vice versa.

191 Illegal Migration Act, 2023, s 1.

192 Illegal Migration Act 2023, s 1(2)(a).

193 Illegal Migration Act 2023, s 1(2)(b).

194 UNHCR, ‘The Illegal Migration Act’ (July 2023) <<https://www.unhcr.org/uk/what-we-do/uk-asylum-policy-and-illegal-migration-act/illegal-migration-act>> accessed 7 Jul 2025.

195 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (adopted 28 July 1951, entered into force 22 April 1954) 189 UNTS 137 art 31.

196 Pickering (n 39).

5. Conclusion

This paper has outlined how between 01/05/19 - 30/04/21 "channel migrants" were predominantly portrayed as 'a threat' in UK print media. By portraying "channel migrants" as 'a problem' I suggest news reports (at best) contributed to a socio-political environment in which increasingly restrictive asylum policy could be launched. Crucially, emphasising why choice of language remains vitally important in the context of people on the move.