

# Study of Trump's Immigration Policy Coverage based on Semantic Analysis

## -- Taking the New York Times and the Washington Post as Examples

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### Abstract

Immigration policy is one of the important issues in American politics, and the drastic tightening of immigration policy during the reign of President Donald Trump has caused drastic reactions. This study selects the New York Times and the Washington Post, the mainstream newspapers in the United States, and uses the news reports on the topic of Trump's immigration policy from June 2018 to November 2018 as samples for semantic analysis to explore the attitudes and positions of the mainstream media in the United States on this topic, as well as the main values of their communication.

### Keywords

Trump; Immigration Policy; Semantic Analysis.

## 1. Event Narrative

The issue of immigration policy and illegal immigration has always been one of the important issues in American politics. During his presidential campaign, U.S. President Donald Trump proposed to make reforms to the existing immigration policy of the United States, and on June 20, 2018, he proposed a "zero tolerance policy at the Mexican border and a family separation policy." In the same month, Trump emphasized the correlation between immigration and crime, but "Trump's emphasis on immigrant crime to defend his border policy is not supported by statistics," according to a New York Times article, which also showed that "multiple studies have found that their crime and incarceration rates are lower than those of native born Americans."

Since the United States is a multiracial country and a typical country of immigrants, Trump's immigration policy involves many aspects of American politics, economy and culture, and also has an impact on the world situation. This paper intends to take June 2018 as the time point to focus on the general themes and local significance of the Washington Post and the New York Times in their coverage of Trump's immigration policy after the third version of the "travel ban" was upheld by the Supreme Court, and to explore the attitudes, positions and opinions of the U.S. mainstream media on the immigration issue from their news framework. attitudes, positions, and perspectives.

## 2. Research Methodology

In this paper, we will adopt macro-structural theory to explore the news structure and discourse system of Trump's immigration policy-related coverage from the macro perspective of news coverage in two parts: discourse and semantics.

First, we will analyze the reports from the discourse macro-structure. News macro-structure can be depicted as the abstract structural features of discourse or reproduce the rules, norms,

and ideological systems of using news that are socially common knowledge. All discourses exhibit certain structural features, especially news discourse is very programmatic, and its structure is arranged in a programmatic pattern including variables such as people, events, time, place, results, and comments. The macro-structure of the discourse is the high-level semantic structure embodied in the form of propositions expressing the core content of the discourse or discourse, and the micro-structure is the basic propositions expressing the basic events or states. [5] based on the text and narrative framework, the discourse analysis was conducted in three aspects: topic and actor, title and theme, and the specific content and phrasing of the report, and the tendency and characteristics of the macroscopic report were summarized.

Second, the analysis from the semantic macro-structure. Semantic macro-structure is a research method that goes beyond the level of grammatical form and analyzes the organizational structure of news texts from the level of deeper semantic content. Any discourse is a semantic unit composed of a series of propositions, and the propositions are organized according to certain rules or schemas, and the process of discourse production is the process of semantic generation. The semantic macro-structure is derived by gradually condensing the macro-structure of each proposition, which is the high-level, holistic semantic structure of news discourse propositions; the semantic micro-structure, as opposed to the macro-semantic structure, is the low-level, concrete semantic unit of news semantic structure. Based on the macro-structure theory, we will use holistic, associative and selective strategies to parse and memorize the semantic cognitive activities, establish the cognitive model of news event scenarios, i.e., "mental schema", and highlight the causes, times, places, scenarios, people, and events of news. The cognitive model of the news event scenario, i.e., the "mental map", highlights the content of the categories of cause, time, place, situation, person, behavior, and result. Through semantic analysis, we will study how the subtle control of public opinion is carried out in the report.

### 3. Corpus

In this paper, two media outlets, the New York Times and the Washington Post, were selected as a sample of their news reports on the topic of Trump's immigration policy from June 2018 to November 2018. On the basis of framing theory and agenda-setting theory, the analysis explores the two media outlets' coverage patterns on the issue, derives the meaning production mechanism projected in the media discourse, and attempts to explore the potential connection between symbolic assignment and media interests in order to reproduce the overall coverage framework. [8]

The New York Times is a newspaper founded in 1851 that has won 125 Pulitzer Prizes for journalism to date. According to 2016 world newspaper circulation data, the New York Times ranked seventeenth and second in the nation. The New York Times favors the Democratic Party in its political stance. The latest statistics show that 36.08% of the readers of The New York Times are aged 18-29 and 35.64% are aged 30-49, with younger readers and middle-aged readers being the mainstay of The New York Times subscriptions.

The Washington Post is one of the top three newspapers in the U.S., with a particular focus on U.S. national politics and the dynamics of the federal government. The paper has won 47 Pulitzer Prizes for journalism, 368 White House Press Photographers Association awards, and 18 of its reporters have been awarded Nieman Fellowships. A Democratic-leaning newspaper, the Washington Post has more than 1.27 million digital subscriptions, with 18-29 year olds as its main subscriber base.

### 4. Headline Analysis

Of the 34 stories selected, the headlines fall into five broad categories.

The first type of headlines: quotes from a wide range of U.S. personalities expressing "disapproval" and "discontent"

Category 2 headlines: Immigration Policy Trends and Analysis

Category 3 headlines: The impact of immigration policy

Category IV headlines: Trends and experiences of immigrants who remain in the United States

Category V: Immigration and Crime

The first category headline accounts for the largest proportion, 35% of all coverage, generally through interviews with people from all walks of life and different groups to record their attitudes toward Trump's immigration policy, and all hold different degrees of opposition. Social groups include the general American public, Trump's Democrats, and members of the Homeland Security Advisory Council, covering a wide range of topics. The word "denounce" is often used in the headlines to convey a clear attitude. Most of the coverage is critical in nature, such as grievances, repugnant, and accusing Trump of being racist, which is a politically serious word. In news stories on immigration policy, the use of words such as denounce and blame in headlines constructs a mimetic environment for the audience - -People from all walks of life disapprove of immigration policies.

The second type of headline was also frequently used in the coverage, accounting for 32.3% of the stories. This type of story is a series of reports on the dynamics of Trump's immigration policy, using neutral terms and seeking to maximize the concise coverage of what happened. The actors of such headlines are not all Trump and the Trump administration, such as Judge Upholds Order for Trump Administration to Restore DACA, in which the actor is a judge and the Trump administration is in a passive position. As can be seen, most of the coverage revolves around the process and resistance to Trump's immigration policy.

The third category of headlines is the impact brought by the immigration policy, accounting for 16%, mostly focusing on events and analyzing and commenting on them. A Washington Post story whose actor was the Homeland Security Advisory Council (DHS) used the word warn, and threats against staffers are on the rise out of anger over immigration policies. The story used the headline to create an atmosphere of unease, pointing out the negative effects of Trump's policies. There are also reports of crimes committed by immigrants, but the subjects are personal and sporadic. In general, the headlines on Trump's policies are mostly anxious.

The fourth category of headlines is news profiling, which is more story-oriented, and the actors are all immigrants in the United States. The content of the stories mainly deals with the painful separation of immigrant families, the hardship of reunification, and the tragic situation of immigrant children. This type of headline also accounts for 11.7% of the total headlines. These headlines invariably express sympathy for immigrants.

The fifth category of headlines appears separately because it is relatively negative news coverage. Immigration and crime issues make up a smaller number of the total headlines, 5%, and arrested immigrants appear as individual cases.

## 5. Topic Structure

When examining the thematic structure of the text, there may be instances where the text is out of context in order to attract readers, which is determined by the actual needs of the news. We examined the 34 stories selected, and most articles were concerned with the subject matter expressed in the headline. In fact, in the six Washington Post stories from June to August, the news topics were dominated by the views of people from all walks of life on Trump's immigration policy, especially in the earliest stories, which were almost exclusively quoted from the opposing views of the American public. In terms of length, these articles are medium in length and are dominated by interviews, most of which express the public's concerns about

immigration policy. The New York Times, on the other hand, focused on the dynamics of immigration, such as the protests of immigrant organizations in Washington, the separation of immigrant families, and of course, the views of people from all walks of life on Trump's immigration policy. The New York Times was more direct in expressing its views, using "denounce" in its headlines to indicate opposition and less concern, with more emotional and moral criticism.

In the remaining coverage from September to November, the number of stories on the immigration policy process increased, and nine articles mentioned the upcoming midterm elections. Nearly all of the stories concluded that Trump's immigration policies would affect the outcome of the midterm elections, causing his approval ratings to slip. The words protest and opposition were used in almost every story. The New York Times also reported that Trump's advocacy for immigration policy was "inaccurate, repetitive and exaggerated.

Meanwhile, there was not as much coverage focusing on the refugee community as we might have expected. This type of coverage is medium in number but longest in length, with reporters providing a more comprehensive account of the lives and plight of refugees today, with some grim details thrown in. It is notable that immigrant groups appear in almost all stories as vulnerable groups, interviewed as victims of immigration policies. Even in the sporadic coverage of refugee crime, it is explained that the motivation of the other side is likely related to Trump's immigration policy and the discrimination and pressure to survive that it brings, while issues such as illegal entry are more muted. Either by passing over or not mentioning it, giving readers a sense of "it doesn't matter.

The story on Haitian immigrants, for example, begins with a profile of an ordinary Haitian immigrant, emphasizing the impact of Trump's immigration policy on the family and the negative impact of the policy: deportation of people who should not be deported. The story sympathizes with the Haitian immigrants to further create an atmosphere of public opinion against the immigration policy.

There was also coverage of marchers arrested in protest of Trump's immigration policies, which was featured in the Washington Post. The use of hundreds of thousands of people in the story, rather than a specific estimated number, gives the reader a more subjective feeling and emphasizes the concept of "large numbers. In this way, it is implied that there are many (perhaps more than the actual number) people who oppose the policy. In this way, the newspaper, through a series of reports, is able to achieve the goal of confirming that readers have a negative view of Trump's immigration policy.

## 6. Semantic Analysis

We took coverage of illegal immigration as the subject of our study and divided it into illegal underclass immigrants, international students who became illegal as a result of the policy change, and immigrants who have not yet entered the country, depending on the actors, three topics that were covered in detail by both newspapers.

### 6.1. Illegal Underclass Immigrants

The situation of illegal underclass immigrants and related policies have always been of great interest to mainstream newspapers, and both newspapers have detailed reports from the underclass targeting different immigrant groups. We selected a Washington Post story on illegal immigrants in Haiti as a typical case study.

This Thanksgiving together might be their last. The headline of the story, titled Haitian immigrants revived America's turkey town, was provocative: comparing the contributions of Haitian immigrants to U.S. society with their treatment. This Thanksgiving together might be their last. The story then features a profile of Jean Felix Petit-Frere, who works at the Butterball

factory (one of the world's largest turkey processing plants) in a small town on Mount Olive. He is one of nearly 59,000 Haitians under a temporary protection status program set up for them by the United States after the 2010 earthquake triggered a humanitarian crisis. "It's an important financial pipeline to an impoverished country." The article mentions that "in this country, many children bathe in buckets and clean water is sold in bags."

The story then answers the headline as to why "this could be their last Thanksgiving together": President Trump has moved to end protections for Haitian immigrants, saying temporary regulations cannot be allowed to remain in place indefinitely. Trump also plans to remove similar protections for certain people in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Sudan, a move that would result in the deportation of 200,000 American workers, including more than 200,000 of their children born inside the United States.

While resonating with readers' dissatisfaction with the administration's policies, the article suggests that immigrant and support groups are suing to stop illegal immigrants from being deported, and that both they and the White House are now awaiting court rulings. The article argues that illegal Haitian immigrants have begun to integrate with the native American community and that large U.S. companies would suffer greatly if they were deported. In interviews with town officials, local officials said the arrival of Haitian immigrants has reshaped companies and surrounding towns, filling vacant homes, creating new businesses and pumping money into local grocery stores and retailers whose revenues had stagnated. "If these workers are repatriated, it could take some of the momentum out of the region's recovery of the past eight years." He also mentioned that it would hit eastern North Carolina agriculture hard, not just the town.

In addition, the report also detailed the living conditions of a mother and daughter duo in the United States and Haiti, respectively. The story intentionally contrasts the situation of the mother and daughter, highlighting the superior environment in the United States and the job opportunities and benefits offered to Haitian immigrants. On the one hand, this gives readers the idea that "we saved the Haitian illegal immigrants"; on the other hand, it inspires sympathy for the immigrants, which may lead readers to support the Haitian illegal immigrants who have settled down to stay and thus oppose Trump's current immigration policy.

The report points out that Trump believes that the existing U.S. immigration policy is too lenient and that he wants well-educated foreign workers, such as immigrants from places like Norway, to enter the United States, rather than people from poor countries like Haiti.

His views have also met with opposition from different quarters. Reports summarize some of the reasons for opposing the policy: 1. Deporting existing illegal Haitian immigrants back to their home country could create more desperation, prompting others to try to flee. This would lead to more undocumented immigrants seeking to enter the U.S. 2. It involves racial discrimination. 3. The turkey processing plant is the most labor-intensive industry in need of workers. The large number of workers needed to do the "hard, dirty work" that not everyone is capable of doing. Haitian illegal immigrants have been filling the factory's labor gap, and deportation would hit the business hard. The reporting is very realistic and persuasive, with numerous interviews, quotes and data cited.

This article stands in sympathy with the Haitian illegal immigrants and reports on the Haitian illegal immigrant community from the background to the individual, from point to point. The author expresses sympathy for the immigrants' sufferings and thus raises questions and concerns about Trump's deportation policy. In addition to giving readers a wealth of information to understand the real situation of immigrants, such a report also broadens the space for rational discussion and provokes heated debates among readers. In subsequent letters to the editor, many readers also mentioned the story, expressing their support, doubts and opposition to Trump's immigration policy from different perspectives.

## 6.2. Students Who Became Illegal Due to Policy Changes

Those affected by Trump's series of immigration policies are not only illegal immigrants, but also legal immigrant groups, typically international students who contribute nearly \$37 billion to the U.S. economy. This is also a very large group of people who rely on student visas to stay legally in the U.S., but the policy changes have put many of them at risk of losing their education today. In the reports, they are usually seekers from Muslim or socialist countries, caught off guard by the sudden law, panicked, confused and overwhelmed.

The Washington Post has conducted extensive interviews about this group, with many stories from the perspective of international students. One of the articles recounting the experience of Libyan students (A Libyan student confronts the uncertainties of Trump's travel ban, with a Harvard education at stake) describes the dilemma: they are no longer "legal" anymore. At the beginning of the article, the story recounts the uncertainty of Elyazgi, a Libyan student, from her perspective: The Supreme Court has upheld the president's right to ban people from certain countries, including Libya, if he deems it necessary to protect the United States. This means that if she returns home now, she will likely not be able to return to the United States to complete her master's degree at Harvard. The article uses the description "despair" to first paint a picture of a desperate international student.

The article then raises concerns: Technically, students from all of the affected countries - except North Korea and Syria - can get student visas. But that has not been happening consistently in practice, some advocates argue. This implies that the situation is not as good as the Trump administration claims, and that the international student community may be under more pressure, which also adds to the atmosphere of concern.

The article also lays out numbers to try to make the game between the Trump administration and the international student community more factual. The author cites USCIS data, but is quick to challenge it, arguing that the agency is overstating the numbers by not counting students who may have moved on to another legal path (such as work visas or marriage). Such wording then gives the reader a hint that the authorities are trying to repatriate highly educated international students who are studying in the country for various reasons.

The story is a profile that, after describing the current state of policy and the background of public opinion, returns to Elyazgi, an international student. The article goes into great detail about the moment she learned of the change in her fate: disbelief, highlighting her shock. She was then forced to stay in a small hotel in Istanbul because she was banned from entering the country.

The story depicts the wonderful time she spent at home with her family, and the awards and recognitions she received in the U.S. for her academic excellence, all pointing to the central idea that such a talented person was rejected by the U.S. because of her nationality and faith. The story creates a context of pity and sympathy, and uses a lot of details to make readers empathize and unconsciously take a stand against Trump's immigration policy.

Thus, through the experience of international student Elyazgi, the whole story condemns the negative effects of Trump's immigration policy from an individual perspective - the loss of outstanding foreign talents from the U.S. and the impact on the subsequent education of international students and outside attitudes.

Under the same theme, the New York Times takes a similar attitude and position. For example, in a story: Trump's Crackdown on Students Who Overstay Visas Rattles Higher Education, students who have overstayed their visas are also considered "illegal immigrants" under the current Trump policy. But the report does not categorize them as "illegal" at all, and the term illegal does not appear in the text, but rather as "overstayed, once-legal immigrants."

This part of the theme is often followed by statements about Trump's immigration policies, with numerous quotes from higher education associations, international student administrators, the

Institute of International Education and lawyers. This part of the theme was quoted in 331 words out of 1339 words, or 25% of the coverage. They argue that Trump's immigration policies are closing the door to top scholars (shutting out). The article also praises the contributions made to the United States by talented people from abroad who contribute billions of dollars to the U.S. economy, support the research institutions they lead, support the highest-skilled jobs and contribute to the goals of science, technology, math and engineering work.

The word "harsh" appears five times in the article, as a modifier of policy and punishment, such as harsh penalty and harsh punishment, indicating the firmness and "cruelty" of Trump's approach to international student visas this time around.

In addition, most reports suggest that Trump's immigration policy makes students vulnerable and that the lack of humane rules will make the study life of international students more difficult. International students are among the most scrutinized in the immigration system because their visas require constant reporting of enrollment information, such as address, full-time status and school. But now, even errors in communication with school officials can lead to violations. "Many students with extenuating circumstances are disqualified."

As a whole, the New York Times conveys a more welcoming attitude toward the intellectual and elite group of immigrants and completely erases any trace of "illegality," even if they would be illegal under current immigration policy by overstaying their visas.

### 6.3. Immigrants Who have not Yet Entered the Country

The issue of immigrants who have not yet entered the country has been one of the main focuses of media attention, with the Washington Post, for example, producing 4,526 results for a search on "illegal Mexican immigrants. The media has a series of detailed reports on the migrants waiting at the Mexican border. From the choice of words and the use of phrases, we can see that the Washington Post's coverage of illegal immigrants is divided into two distinct aspects. On the one hand, the newspaper reports on the lives of a large number of illegal immigrants, portraying them as poor sufferers, vulnerable people in desperate need of asylum; on the other hand, the immigrants are portrayed as illegal border crossers and refugees who may take jobs from American citizens. The coverage we have seen has almost always maintained a delicate balance between the two attitudes.

At the beginning of a story titled Border patrol: More families cross illegally to San Diego, a mother and daughter are portrayed as burrowing through a hole in the wall under the border into U.S. territory and are eventually taken away by border protection agents. details like Dust, dirty The first is to highlight the wretchedness of the immigrants, to arouse sympathy, and the second is to give people an "undignified" "dirty" view, to set the stage for illegal immigrants to distinguish themselves from ordinary American citizens.

Next, the article writes, "Thousands of migrants are waiting on the Mexican side of the border wall to apply for political asylum," while "the United States processes up to 100 applications a day." The words Thousands of migrants and 100 requests at most each day, one is a general "large number" and the other is a specific number that highlights objectivity, which in contrast shows that the number of illegal immigrants is huge and the U.S. border crossing is The contrast shows that the number of illegal immigrants is so large that the U.S. borders are overwhelmed. In addition, the verb crowd gives the reader the impression that there are too many of them, which brings about the concern and fear that our country will be overwhelmed by too many illegal immigrants. Thus, in the implied context, Trump's assertions that the U.S. should build a new border wall and that "the cost of building the wall would be less than the cost of illegal immigration" are unwittingly endorsed, despite the poverty, violence and death threats faced by illegal immigrants.

The report also quoted an illegal immigrant from Honduras who said she would definitely jump (jump) over the border wall if she had the chance. But the article followed up with, "But she

lined up Tuesday to apply to Mexican officials for a humanitarian visa that would allow her to live and work in Mexico for a year." By drawing such a contrast, the article paints a negative image of a person seeking the welfare of the United States, implicitly criticizing the tendency of such immigration practices. It then quotes another illegal immigrant's attitude in response, "I'm not like that, I prefer to work here and behave better." By contrasting the attitudes of the two immigrants, the report actually affirms the view that "illegal immigrants should stay and work in Mexico" and rejects the view that "illegal immigrants should climb over the border wall.

In summary, the story uses numbers, metaphors, and negative terminology to construct an image of illegal immigrants who are poor, disorganized, and potentially a threat to the American state and social status quo. While they deserve sympathy, it is clear that they are not so welcome in America anymore.

On this theme, the New York Times appears more radical than the Washington Post.

### **6.3.1. Contempt for Policy**

When migrants from the U.S.-Mexico border try to enter the United States to seek asylum, the New York Times directly determines that they are "illegal" and that they are acting in "contempt" of the policies of the U.S. and Mexican governments.

The report gave the number of migrants an imaginary number "thousands of" (thousands of), "most of the caravan" (most of the caravan), so that the audience felt the seriousness of the incident. At the same time, the report suggests that the Mexican government, under pressure from the Trump administration, has ordered migrants to be processed by immigration authorities when crossing the border, but with little success. From the perspective of the Mexican government, it implies that the migrants are "born in injustice" and not only violate the rules of the United States, but also defy their own government.

### **6.3.2. Illegal Border Crossing**

Without giving more footage and words to the migrants, the New York Times quoted a local government official's description.

estimate more than 7,000 people - had crossed the border illegally in recent days by swimming or rafting across the Suchiate River.

Illegality is further linked to "crossing the border". In fact, the process of crossing the river and rafting is so dangerous that in the picture accompanying the next thread, more than two dozen people are stacked on a raft of a few square meters, one on top of the other, in four layers, with the person at the bottom struggling to hold on to the corner of the raft. But this picture is not presented in this theme.

### **6.3.3. Desperate Migrants**

The New York Times began to turn its lens on migrant families, and the reporter interviewed a 17-year-old girl named Maria, who was from Honduras and had waited at the border for a long time and felt desperate.

She said she had waited at the border until mid-Saturday but became desperate at how long it was taking to be processed.

The interview is only 22 words in an article containing 1044 words. The latter text outlines the refugees' exhaustion by walking 20 miles. No more sympathy or concern is expressed and the overall style is smooth.

### **6.3.4. Border Police and Officials**

do not stop, suggest other ways to apply for legal immigration status.

The article devotes a lot of ink to describing how border police and officials are handling this group of "illegal immigrants" and emphasizes that border police and officials are acting in accordance with the law, implying that U.S. border officials could legally stop them, but border



officials and police are not doing so. This seems to reflect the humanitarianism of the border officials and police, but also puts the refugees in the position of "injustice" again.

## 7. Conclusion

After analyzing 34 stories from the Washington Post and the New York Times from June to November 2018, we conclude the following.

First, both the Washington Post and the New York Times had a generally negative attitude toward the immigration policies enacted by Trump and incorporated negativity into many dimensions of the news frame. The mimetic environment of the current state of immigration in the United States is constructed in the news through a series of reports on topics such as the current state of immigrant families, the statements of Trump and his administration, the dynamics of immigration policy, and the comments of people from all walks of life on immigration policy. It is certain that the two traditional media, which are Democratic, are "discontent" and "fearful" of the immigration policy - Trump is overturning the traditional immigration policy.

Second, the New York Times and the Washington Post frame their news differently for different immigrant groups. For the highly skilled and knowledgeable illegal immigrant population, they tend to downplay their "illegality" and highlight their outstanding impact on the U.S. political economy. Such stories are often combined with texts on "global economic integration" and "the rise of Asia," and focus heavily on the "source texts" of the business and educational elites, thus casting immigration policy as "one-size-fits-all. This has led to criticism of immigration policy as "one-size-fits-all" and "anachronistic. For the illegal immigrants, the two media outlets use "racial discrimination" as the main angle, and the reports are mostly presented with vivid stories of refugees, expressing a wide range of sympathy. Finally, for immigrants who have not yet entered the country, on the one hand, the newspapers report on the lives of a large number of illegal immigrants, portraying them as poor sufferers and vulnerable people in need of asylum. On the other hand, immigrants are portrayed as illegal border crossers and as refugees who may take jobs from U.S. citizens. While they deserve sympathy, they do not deserve welcome.

Third, while the above is a longitudinal analysis of the coverage, in the course of the analysis, we also find nuances in the New York Times and the Washington Post. Although the horizontal comparison of the two media outlets is not the focus of our article, we can suggest room for elicited discussion here. The New York Times is more aggressive and strident than the Washington Post, as reflected in the wording of headlines, frame construction, interview groups and quotes. The Washington Post is more moderate and neutral, but this does not mean that its reporting is completely objective and neutral.

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