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# How Do Acts of Terror Affect Public Discourse Concerning Immigration? A Media Analysis Surrounding the Pulse Nightclub Shooting

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How do Acts of Terror Affect Public Discourse Concerning Immigration? A Media Analysis  
Surrounding the Pulse Nightclub Shooting

by

Braedon Lehman

An undergraduate honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of Bachelor of Arts

in

Political Science

and

German

Thesis Adviser

Dr. Joshua Eastin

**Abstract:**

This article aims to examine how terrorist attacks influence public discourse concerning immigration, both in bias and in overall amount of discussion by conducting quantitative and qualitative content analyses on the Pulse Nightclub shooting. I will ultimately try to contribute to the research question: how do acts of terror affect public discourse concerning immigration? I will draw from a wealth of other content analysis articles with particular reference to studies that have studied the effect of differing terms for immigrants affecting public opinion such as Merolla, Karthick Ramakrishnan, and Haynes 2013. This study is split into two parts and specifically looks at positively and negatively slanted word counts in three different newspapers during selected time periods before and after the shooting. I argue that the shooting should increase the amount of overall discourse with a particularly high increase in the incidence rates of negatively slanted words, thereby demonstrating an increase in negative bias towards immigrants. I find initial support for an attack influencing both the amount of overall and negative discourse, although whether or not this increase is uniquely tied to the event remains unproven. I also find some evidence that after an act of terror incidence rates of certain words tied to different racial conceptions of immigrants go up while others go down. In addition, I conduct a qualitative analysis of 60 newspaper articles in differing time periods before and after the shooting, and find little differences in tone before and after the shooting, but interesting results about the types of words that differently leaning publication choose to use.

**Introduction:**

Immigration and public attitudes towards issues surrounding immigration have become progressively more important as nationalist tensions and political discord are high in many

nations; far-right populists have been receiving an increasing percentage of the national vote across America and Europe. Regardless of political stance, it is becoming difficult to engage in productive political discourse as society has radicalized in both directions. This conversation is often based around significant events; acts of terror such as 9/11 have a clear impact on public opinion surrounding immigration – it usually spikes negatively (Muste 2013). It is therefore important to see how acts of terror, specifically major terrorist attacks influence public discourse and attitudes surrounding immigration.

It is difficult to nail down a concrete definition of what exactly constitutes terrorism for the purposes of our study. Broadly speaking, I mean any attack which is seen by the media as terrorism, labeled as terrorism by the government, and generally seen by the public as such. We can draw from legal literature to close the gap and make the definition a little clearer: Michael Lawless argued in 2007 that terrorism functioned as an “international crime,” a crime “so heinous that any member of the community of nations may prosecute the offender.” Other examples of these types of crimes include slavery, piracy, hijacking and genocide. Acts of terror are separate from all of these issues though and there are a few concrete aspects which differentiate it from other heinous international crimes. Lawless argues that some key aspects of terrorism are: the targeting of civilians -- not armed combatants, and the attempt to further a political agenda of some sort. The Pulse Nightclub shooting fits these criteria and is commonly considered by the public as terrorism, it is therefore a valid object of study.

As mentioned before, the response to these attacks comes quickly and makes an impact on public opinion (Nagar 2010). The tonal qualities and word choice of the news influence public stances on immigration and build political capital (Clancy 2010, Merolla Karthick Ramakrishnan and Haynes 2013). Furthermore, sociology and cognitive psychology show us the

concept of “availability cascades.” Certain important events and phrases which are repeated and heavily reported on become easily available examples for people to draw from when debating and discussing issues. As an increasing number of people draw from this pool of easily accessible issues, their influence on the conversation grows in a cascading fashion; more references mean that the issues become even easier to reference in the future (Kuran and Sunstein 2007).

This supports the assertion that terrorist attacks take on a significant role in shaping public discourse around many issues – but particularly the issue of immigration. It further demonstrates that the media’s reaction and word-usage in relation to these events is an issue worthy of study as the response and tone will disseminate and eventually be reflected in the public. This leads me to my research question: how do significant events affect public discourse concerning immigration? To conduct this study, I have elected to study the media’s reaction to one of the most significant events dealing with themes of immigration in recent American history: the Pulse Nightclub shooting. For ease of access and their role as powerful media agents that can influence the public’s political stances (Bauder 2008), I have chosen to study the response of newspapers to the shooting.

### **Pulse Nightclub Background**

The Pulse Nightclub terrorist attack was the deadliest terrorist attack on American soil since 9/11. On June 12, 2016, Omar Mateen, a 29-year-old American citizen, entered a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida and shot 102 people, killing 49 and wounding 53. The shooting took place during a Latin night the club was hosting and as a result, most of the victims were Latino. Although the act of terror was certainly motivated to target LGBTQ and Latin-American

populations, the event also raised general questions about islamophobia, terrorism and the therewith-associated notions of immigration in the media. Mateen himself was a US citizen, however his parents are both first generation immigrants.

This attack played a uniquely important role in shaping the media, particularly as it led up to the 2016 election in which immigration, national defense and racism / xenophobia were all important themes in. Many high-profile candidates and politicians gave speeches referencing the event and it quickly spread and became one of the most reported-on issues of June and the surrounding months. A cursory search on the New York Times website reveals over 1,000 articles that reference the shooting in some way and these are just results which count the specific phrase "Pulse Nightclub." They do not count off-hand references such as "Orlando shooting." With all this in mind: how it brought terrorism to the fore during a highly divisive time, how it was the deadliest attack on US soil since 9/11, the Pulse Nightclub shooting has established itself as an event which ought to be capable of influencing the media.

**Expected Results --Do we have reason to believe terrorist attacks will influence language used?**

An event as significant as the Pulse Nightclub shooting should generate a significant amount of media interest. I argue that the incidence rates (both of words overall and especially negative words) should increase in all media outlets. I would expect my conservative source, the New York Post, to demonstrate a higher level of negative language than the New York Times. I would also expect the Tampa Bay Times, which is geographically closer, to react more strongly to the Pulse shooting and therefore have a starker increase in overall and negative discourse. Terrorism is a highly reported-on topic that has the potential to drastically shift public opinion

(Muste 2013) and one would expect that the event should generate a high amount of interest in related topics such as islamophobia, xenophobia and immigration. A connection to immigration provides color that newspapers can use in their analysis and many will likely do so. Negative language regarding immigration is likely to increase as well (Nagar 2010, Steuter and Wills 2010, McClure 2011), although it is worth noting that it might not be the views of the newspapers but rather the sources that they are quoting that represent an increase negatively slanted wording. During the qualitative analysis I expect the New York Times to keep the tone of the articles similar to the tone of all of their articles: relatively neutral with small leanings to the left. The Tampa Bay Times is geographically closer to the affected area, so it is likely going to experience the largest shift in both word frequency and tone. This geographical element is at least partially supported by the literature. Media organizations located closer to large Latino populations and the Mexican border tend to report on immigration issues more frequently and more negatively (Branton and Dunaway 2009, Weberling McKeever, Riffe and Dillman Carpentier 2012). A negative tone shift is expected but it is also possible that the newspaper features many articles that advocate for a more communitarian approach – a “we should come together and not let this attack fracture us” response to a traumatic event. The New York Post might display an increase in negative language, although I expect the baseline of the negative language within the New York Post to be higher to begin with because we know that people with more conservative views typically use more negative language towards immigrants (Clancy 2010).

I expect the qualitative analysis to mostly confirm the results of the quantitative analysis with a greater level of detail and clarity. As mentioned before, some of the words caught by the search on the first round will likely be contained within quotes. The qualitative analysis allows

us to see if these newspapers are quoting sources that are using these phrases or utilizing the phrases themselves. In addition it serves as a mechanism by which we can determine the level of bias with a greater degree of nuance. A human reader is able to pick out finer details about the tone and placement of facts in an article.

### **Literature Review:**

My study and analysis draw from a wealth of studies which demonstrate that terrorist attacks, such as 9/11, influence tonal qualities and the agenda of public discourse, particularly in reference to categorizing and dehumanizing immigrants as an out-group (Nagar 2010, Steuter and Wills 2010, McClure 2011). They find, for the most part, that these attacks do influence public discourse in negative ways. In order to see exactly how these events exert influence over the media, I utilize qualitative and quantitative research in which I link certain word usage to biases in articles. Many studies demonstrate the validity of linking certain words to political viewpoints, including Clancy 2010, Steuter and Wills 2010). Clancy in particular links usage of words such as “illegal immigrant” to more negative views surrounding immigration than other alternatives. Media framing of discussion is heavily discussed in psychology and illustrates how certain images and phrases can automatically color a discussion in a certain way (Soderlund 2007).

Regarding the greater implications of the study, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) show that smaller words and phrases can serve as individual nodal points through which large conclusions about the discourse community can be drawn. There have been others studies that approach this aspect of differing word choice measuring them in assorted media outlets such as the study “Illegal, Undocumented, or Unauthorized” by Merolla, Ramakrishnan and Haynes in 2013. Their



objective was slightly different than my article. They aimed to see if the framing of the issue by using certain words mattered in changing public opinion. The article reported on a survey that gave relatively ambiguous results, different words used did not significantly change public opinion but they did note a difference in the frequency of some words such as “illegal alien” between conservative and liberal media outlets -- despite many defaulting to “illegal immigrant.” This corroborates other studies in the literature community which do show a clear partisan divide in word usage (Clancy 2010), even if using differing words when asking the public a question related to immigration changes policy preferences, like the Merolla et al. study just mentioned.

My article is a novel approach within the literature community because it ties the incidence rates of these words over certain periods of time to terrorist attacks and attempts to draw a comparison between the two. In other words, studies that examine how often certain words can tilt the conversation in the media exist (Clancy 2010, Steuter and Wills 2010, Merolla, Karthick Ramakrishnan and Haynes 2013) and studies that perform content analysis of how the media responds to terrorist attacks to frame issues of immigration exist (Nagar 2010, McClure 2011), but my study is unique in that it attempts to discern if the *frequency* of those slanted words change after a terrorist attack. In addition, although there have been studies that demonstrate how 9/11 (as well as other events such as the 1994 presidential election) changed the media landscape (Muste 2013), to my knowledge this is the first study of its kind to analyze any potential effects of the Pulse Nightclub shooting on the media.

### **Methodology:**

I have selected three newspapers for which to conduct my quantitative and qualitative research: The New York Times, The New York Post, and the Tampa Bay Times. The New York

Times is the default newspaper of record in the United States and plays a special role in setting national discourse. I would have preferred to analyze a large significant slightly right-leaning newspaper to counterbalance the slight left lean of The New York Times but there were some problems with availability on LexisNexis. The most-syndicated conservative leaning paper available was the New York Post, unfortunately also based in New York. The Tampa Bay Times was chosen as it provides a contrast between the national and local stage – of the local papers available on LexisNexis it should certainly be the most heavily affected by the shooting. The Orlando Sentinel would have been my first choice, but it was also not available. The Tampa Bay Times provides an interesting, although not empirically significant, look into whether or not distance to the event has an amplified effect on public discourse.

I have compiled a list of terms that portray immigrants and immigration issues in both positive and negative lights to be searched on newspaper archives on the academic search service LexisNexis. For example, the term “undocumented person” is typically considered a more positive way to refer to an immigrant here without the proper legal allowance than a term such as “illegal alien.” There are three such terms that I am going to search for in the articles of these papers for positive and negative categories plus a baseline term. All of the following terms also contain the various truncation of the terms, so “immigration” also includes “immigrant,” “immigrants,” etc.

**Positive Terms**

Undocumented person  
Undocumented worker  
Asylum seeker

**Negative Terms**

Illegal immigrant  
Illegal alien  
Refugee

**Baseline**

Immigration

The first four terms are relatively clear: undocumented against illegal convey two different meanings. Language is used for far more than simply conveying ideas; it is used to shape how people think about certain issues. Undocumented does not imply that the immigrants themselves are illegal; it only conveys that they are lacking necessary documents to reside legally in the country. Although whether or not the term “illegal immigrant” is actually dehumanizing or derogatory to immigrants is a hotly debated subject, the choice of whether or not to use it has broadly become a signal as to one’s stance on the issue. Kristine Clancy in 2010 published a dissertation on the usage of different terms including “illegal alien,” “undocumented,” and “worker/laborer” by congressional representatives during a debate over the Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005. The study analyzed how these persuasive definitions of immigrants “functioned as arguments *by definition* by constructing immigration policy in a specific way.” The dissertation goes into a significant amount of detail of the conditions and legislative history that lead to the construction of the term “illegal alien,” but essentially concludes that, across the board, representatives that used terms such as “illegal alien” and the like demonstrated an increased likelihood to support restrictive immigration policy and increasing accountability in immigration law.

The term “asylum seeker,” while almost certainly less common than “refugee,” functions as a euphemism in a similar fashion as “undocumented” does to “illegal alien.” “Refugee,” while not being an explicitly negatively connoted word in the way “illegal alien” is, is still slightly more negative than the phrase “asylum seeker;” “asylum seeker” implies an extra level of awareness as the author is consciously avoiding the more common phrase and likely signaling support. Furthermore, “refugee” is used more often in conjunction with metaphor, which Clancy also details in her dissertation. A higher usage of metaphor using phraseology such as “a tide of

refugees” also correlates with an increased likelihood in having negative opinions surrounding immigration. The term “asylum seekers” is not used with as frequently in these metaphors, for reasons that might include length and prevalence in common vernacular.

I will search each of the papers in two six-month timespans for articles that contain these words in the body of the article. The first timespan will be from January 12<sup>th</sup> - June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016. The second will be from June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016 – December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016. In order to compare the results with previous years and increase rigor, I will also include the average of the results of the previous five years for each period. The average provides a historical context to use to see if the selected time period falls outside of the normal range. Many events occur regularly on a yearly or semi-yearly basis such as the finalizing of certain government budgets, the election of representatives and the president. The historical average helps distinguish if the Pulse Nightclub shooting had a tangible effect on public discourse. To attempt to see the Pulse Shooting’s effect on the media more clearly, I have also included a one-month search period directly after the shooting. If my hypothesis is correct and the event has had a measurable impact on public discourse, the month-long period immediately after the shooting should show a greater difference than would be expected in all other months based on the yearly totals. It should additionally be higher in 2016 than in the five-year averages.

The baseline of “immigration” is included to gauge overall immigration discourse in a way that is not necessarily tinted positively or negatively. This serves as a metric to account for the fact that, due to the nature of selecting specific strings of words to search for, many articles concerning immigration are likely to be missed.

Although this study does not necessarily find the slant of the article as articles containing these words may either be quoting direct sources that utilize these words or decrying the usage of

these words, it does do a good job at demonstrating overall discourse surrounding these words. Even if the article uses a quote with one of these words and is ostensibly a pro-immigrant article, the very usage of the word demonstrates that someone in the public sphere used the word and therefore influenced the sphere of public discourse in a negative way before the article refuted it in a positive way. It is also possible that some articles will contain multiple search terms and will therefore be registered as hits when searching for different terms, creating an overlap. It is important not to view the entirety of the results as cumulative; the results should rather be viewed as general indicators of negative or positive sentiment generated as the result of the shooting under each category. That is to say, it would be empirically unsound to tally up the cumulative results of negative word frequency in our study and use that number to demonstrate the specific amount of negative discourse generated as potential word overlap makes this measurement invalid.

To further increase the accuracy of the study, I will also be conducting a qualitative review on aspects of several randomly selected articles from each newspaper taken from within the six month timeframe on either side of the event. The qualitative analysis will search for whether or not the article portrays immigration positively or negatively and put special emphasis on certain aspects of language that the quantitative portion of my study might have missed. Due to the limitation of time I have chosen to review a relatively small amount of articles. Each paper will be randomly assigned one of the search terms from both the positive and negative category, utilizing all terms except the baseline of “immigration.” The term pairings are listed below. Each term will be searched ten times, five times in the six-month period before the shooting and five times in the six-month period following the shooting. Each paper, having two terms assigned to it, will have 20 articles resulting in a total study of 60 articles.

New York Times Positive: Asylum seeker

New York Times Negative: Illegal immigrant

New York Post Positive: Undocumented person

New York Post Negative: Illegal alien

Tampa Bay Times Positive: Undocumented worker

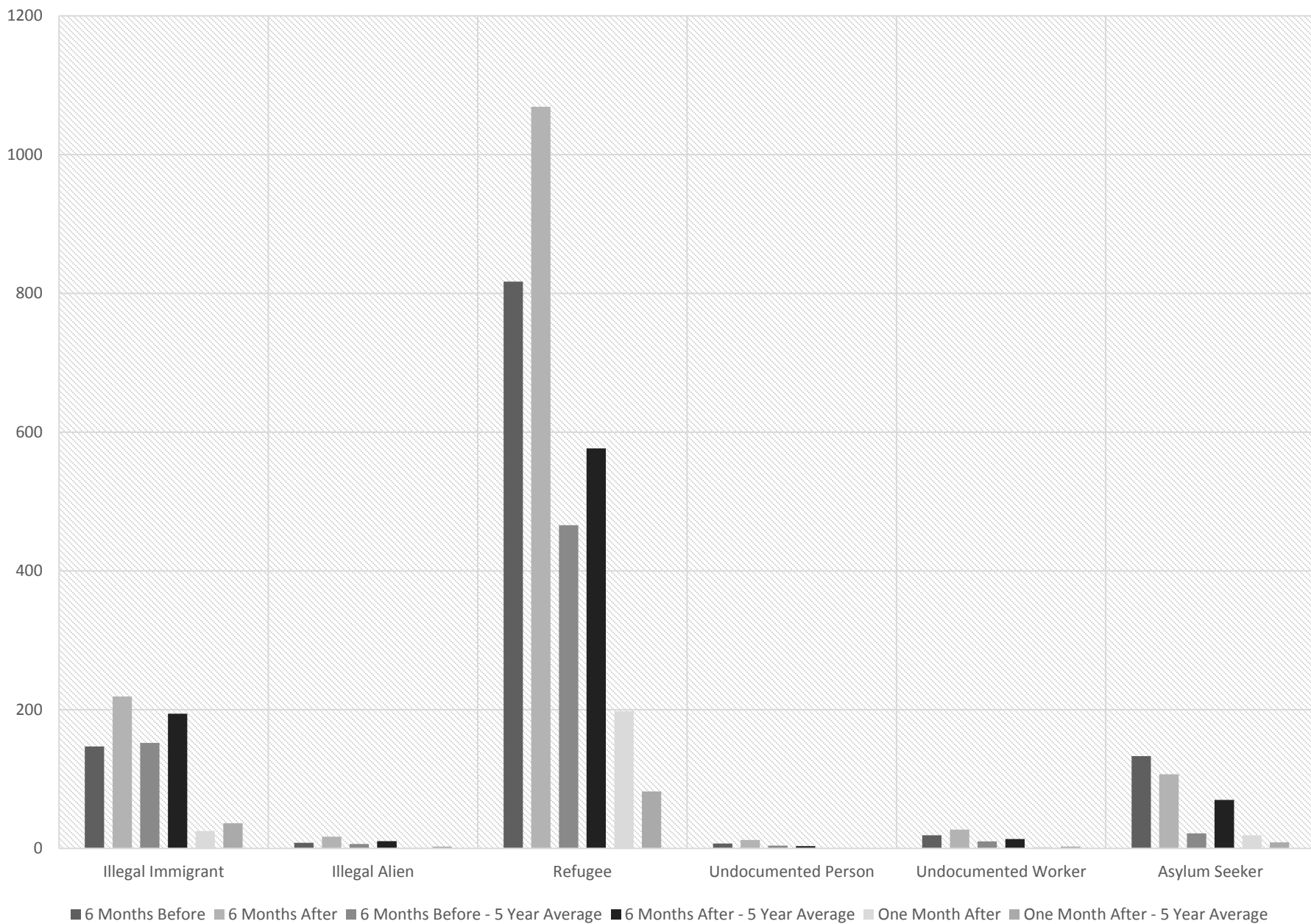
Tampa Bay Times Negative: Refugee

The results from this study will be compared with the quantitative results in order to lend either validity or question the results. The articles will be read and tagged pro, anti or neutral immigration, as well as a short synopsis which might illuminate any of the findings in the quantitative portion of the study.

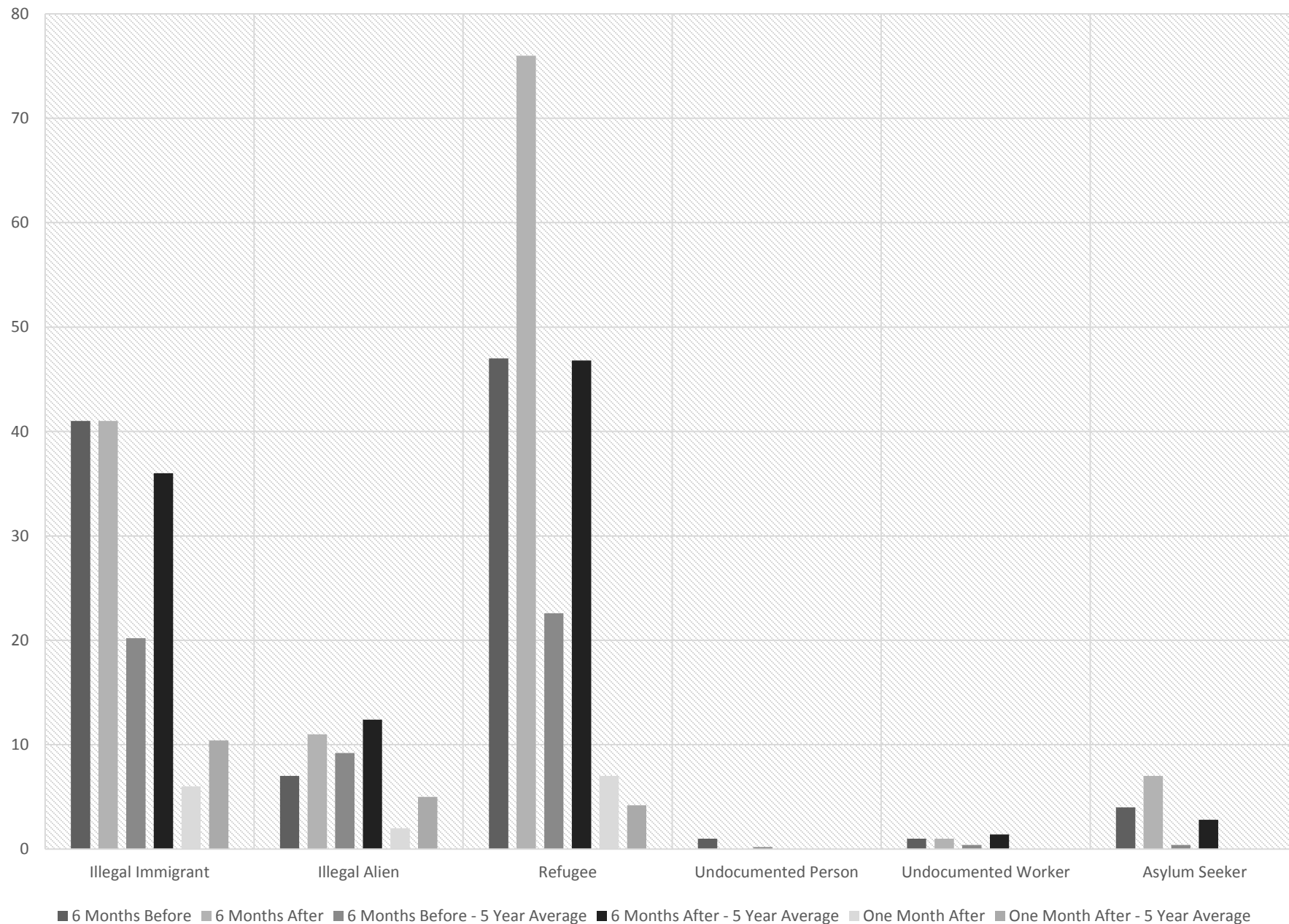
### **Results:**

The quantitative results will be displayed first. For context, each graph represents a newspaper, except the final graph, the immigration baseline graph, which represents all three newspapers searching the same term. For the full table of results, please see the appendix. The two six-month periods are compared as the first two lines, the next two lines are the five-year averages of the same time periods. The final two bars in the graph are the one-month period immediately following the shooting. A shift between the first two lines means that the frequency increased in between the two periods in 2016, and if that shift is bigger than the five year average lines then it suggests that 2016 was unique in how much discourse increased.

### New York Times Words Incidence Rates

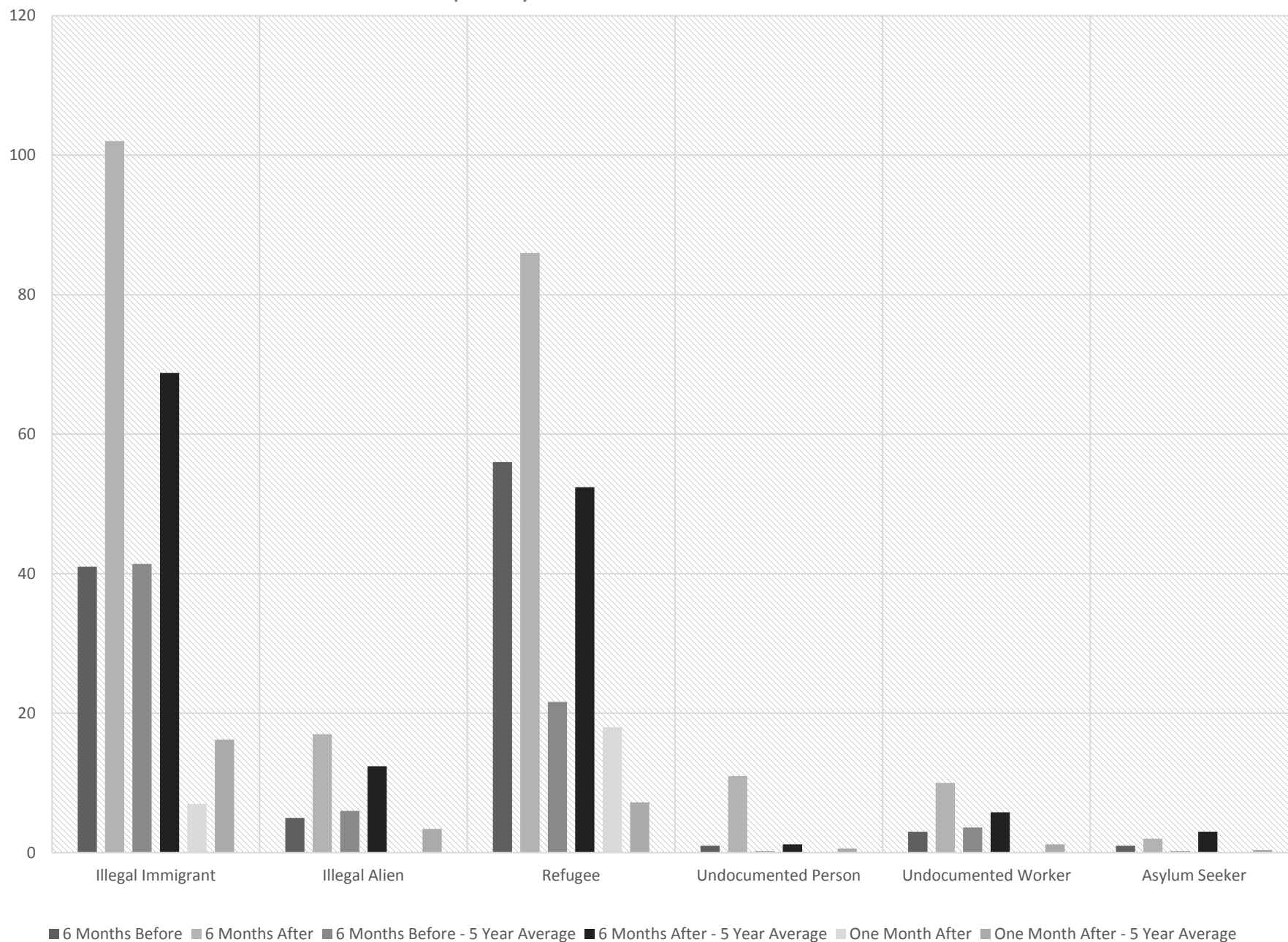


### New York Post Words Incidence Rates

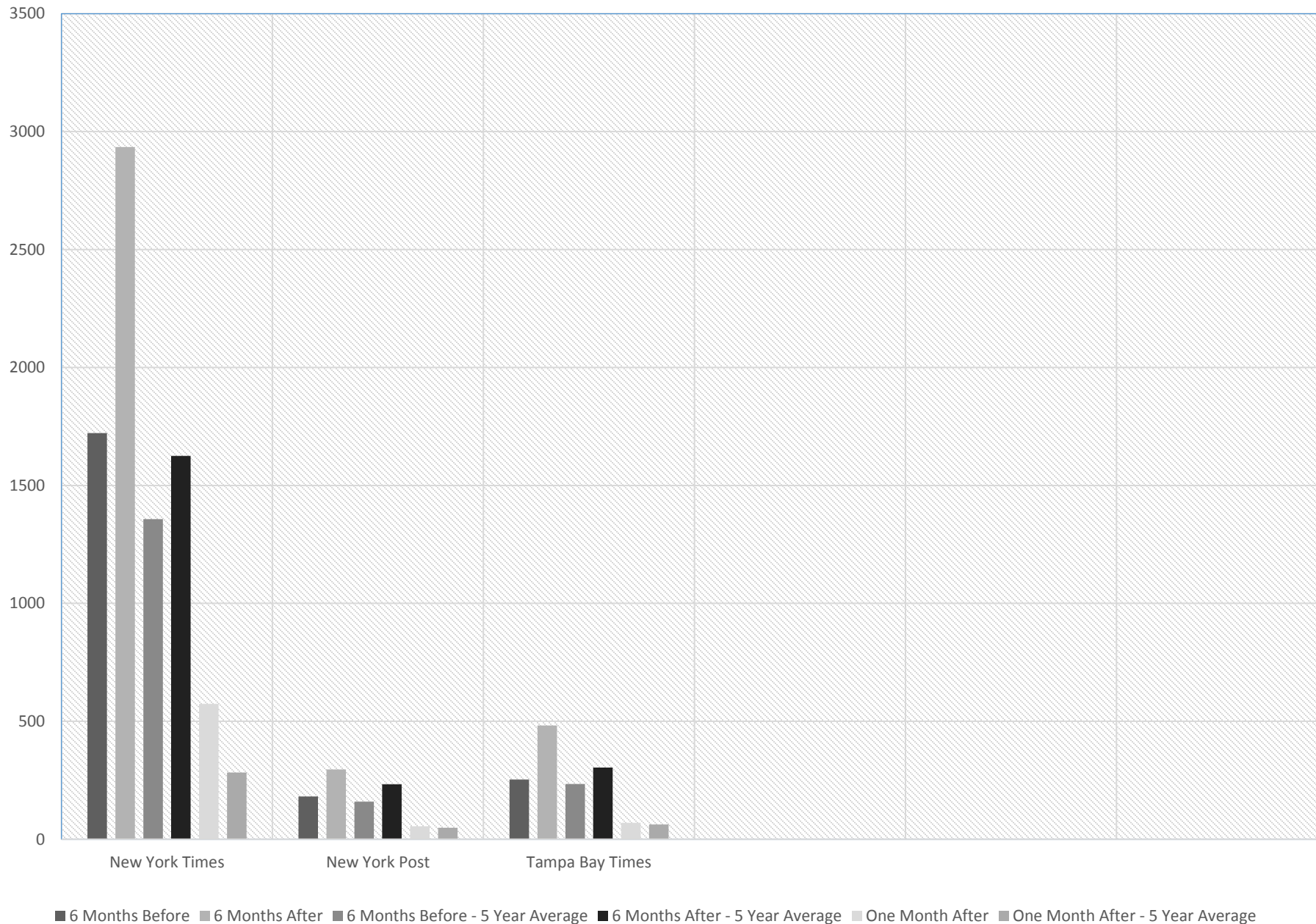




Tampa Bay Times Words Incidence Rates



### "Immigration" Baseline Word Incidence Rates - Multiple Papers



**Qualitative Results:**

New York Times – Detected Bias in articles tagged with certain words

Time Period	Articles with “illegal immigration”	Articles with “asylum seeker”
6 Months Before	1 neutral, 3 slight left, 1 left	2 neutral, 2 slight left, 1 left
6 Months After	2 neutral, 2 slight left, 1 left	1 neutral, 2 left, 2 strong left

New York Post – Detected bias in articles tagged with certain words

Time Period	Articles with “illegal alien”	Articles with “undocumented people”
6 Months Before	1 neutral, 1 slight right, 2 right, 1 strong right	1 slight right
6 Months After	2 neutral, 2 right, 2 strong right	No results

Tampa Bay Times – Detected bias in articles tagged with certain words

Time Period	Articles with “refugee”	Articles with “undocumented worker”
6 Months Before	3 neutral, 1 left, 1 strong left	1 slight left, 2 left
6 Months After	2 neutral, 2 slight left, 1 left	2 neutral, 1 slight left, 2 left

**Analysis and discussion:**

Analysis will first begin with some general quick observations, and then go into a more detailed analysis of every paper’s results individually. Finally, the results will be compared with each other and the evidence will be examined to see if it supports or does not support the initial hypothesis of increasing negative immigration discourse and decreasing positive discourse.

First: some general observations. Nearly every paper showed a significant increase in mentions of all search terms between the six-month periods before and after the shooting, the one exception being a reduce in the incidence rate of “asylum seeker” in the New York Times. Taken en face one might suspect that this supports the hypothesis, however the month immediately after the shooting showing almost a universal decrease in immigration related discourse sheds some

doubt on this assumption. It is also worth noting that the period later in the year captured a lot of discourse surrounding the presidential elections and Donald Trump. While an increase exists and while the Pulse Shooting may have played a role, it is difficult to isolate it as a primary agent that affected the search terms. The single month datasets do show a notable exception in that they did show a large increase in mentions of refugees. This could be for a variety of reasons, but one explanation might be different conceptions of immigration in America. A terrorist attack by a Muslim who had sworn allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant likely triggers a sense of islamophobia, which is more closely connected with “refugee crises” than ideas of “immigration.” “Immigration” might be more closely tied to notions of Mexicans and Central / South Americans. Americans do view immigrants differently who possess different racialized physical traits (Ostfeld 2017). It is also possible that, since most of the victims of the Pulse Nightclub shooting were Latinos, this further divorced the attack from conceptions of Latin American immigrants.

Despite how liberal or conservative the outlet was, newspapers preferred the term “illegal immigrant” heavily to other, more positive terms concerning immigration. Although illegal alien jumped up in the conservative publication, all publications used both “undocumented worker” and “undocumented person” very sparingly.

The New York Times was by far the largest sample size. This could be because the newspaper is better archived in LexisNexis than the other newspapers, but is likely because it simply features more coverage about more political and international issues. Conducting the same search using the New York Post’s own archives, for example, yielded a similar amount of results – supporting the theory that LexisNexis archives papers correctly. It is likely that the New York Times simply features more articles that deal with immigration as a specific theme using

terminology that happens to fit in well with the study. The New York Times experienced the most significant rise in overall mentions of “immigration” in terms of deviation from the five-year average for all time periods. Particularly in the month following the shooting, overall mentions of “immigration” rose 103.11% over the five year average for the month. This raise in frequency is still high and statistically significant even when taking into account that 2016 was a year that had more instances of “immigration” in general than the previous years. This supports a claim that the Pulse shooting might have led to an overall increase in immigration discourse in the month following the shooting – in the New York Times at least. It also experienced the second greatest change in overall mentions between the two six-month 2016 time periods. It also had by far the highest number of positive word hits in all categories. This could likely be due to the fact that the paper is the most internationally focused out of all papers searched, but might also be due to the fact that the Times leans more to the left and attempts to stay on top of politically correct terminology. Mentions of “asylum seeker!” rose by 115% over the five-year average for June 12 - July 12, suggesting that the shooting did trigger an increase in positively portrayed asylum discourse. It is worth noting, however, that all instances of asylum for all newspapers rises dramatically in 2014 and 2015 with the advent of the European refugee crisis. In 2015 there were 21 mentions, suggesting that the amount the New York Times talked about asylum seekers in 2016 is consistent with baseline expectations once one accounts for the European refugee crisis and its media dominance. The other two positive terms did not return enough results in a one month period to be statistically significant. The New York Times did demonstrate an overall increase in negative terminology in the six months following the shooting as opposed to the six months before, although interestingly it demonstrated a higher change in positive mentions compared to five year averages than it did of negative mentions. This suggests

that it might have been trying to change language more positively in the face of other publications utilizing increasingly negative language.

The New York Post uses almost no positive language regarding immigration at all, which might have to do with the fact that it is conservative leaning. Even accounting for the smaller sample size, the New York Post only used the term “undocumented person/people” once in the past six years, suggesting that when they refer to immigrants they do so using negative or neutral terminology. The one instance of them using “undocumented people” was a mistake caught by LexisNexis. The sentence caught the term truncated, so it was similar to: “...the changes were undocumented. People...” Even with the smaller sample size, the Post actually used the term “illegal alien” more than the New York Times over five-year averages, and almost as much within the last year. Although it does not do anything to directly support the hypothesis of the shooting having an effect on public discourse, it does, at the very least, show differences in tone and wording between publications of different political leanings. All of the positive terms searched within the New York Post returned such a small amount of hits that there are not enough for meaningful statistical analysis.

The Tampa Bay Times had by far the largest increase in negative immigration discourse in the six months following the shooting, although it follows the same pattern where in the month immediately following the shooting instances of all negative words go down except refugees. It was also the only newspaper to reference the Orlando shootings in the qualitative component of the study. It is possible that the event goes on to influence the conversation at later dates triggering articles that might look back at the attack retrospectively that happen later in the year, but it is a more likely explanation that it simply covers these themes inside of broader contexts like the 2016 presidential election. Even still, one might guess that the negative

influence of the attack primed the coverage to use more negative wording while covering ostensibly unrelated events. The Tampa Bay Times also did not have enough instances of positive wording to be statistically significant when examining the effect of the shooting on discourse.

The qualitative results did not significantly support or detract from the results in the quantitative portion of the study regarding significant events affecting either rates of usage or bias. The most significant pattern was that, of the random sample of articles, the New York Times positive words shifted slightly more towards a liberal bias in the six-month period after the shooting. This is, again, likely heavily influenced by the election and the paper publishing articles that swing more towards the left in an attempt to counterbalance the discourse from Trump.

Although it is not directly related to the research question, the qualitative analysis does an excellent job at illustrating exactly how important presidents are actors in discourse. Many of the articles read to determine bias were framed through the presidential election or used the president and president-hopefuls as actors through which to tell their stories. Seven out of the ten random articles mentioning illegal immigrants searched from the New York post mentioned Donald Trump or the election and nine out of nineteen articles surveyed from the Tampa Bay Times mention the election. The New York Times had slightly fewer articles that mentioned elections, clocking in at four out of twenty.

The vast majority of articles referencing refugees or asylum seekers were articles that placed it in an international context, which might by the New York Times returned the most results of these terms in the quantitative section. The qualitative section does confirm earlier literature that suggests that certain phrases are tied to certain political views. Most articles that

used “illegal alien” had very negative language referencing immigrants, with additional heavy use of metaphor such as “waves of refugees.”

**Limitations:**

It is difficult or impossible to link the frequency of words being used directly back to significant events because of how wide of a net was cast – many of the articles returned likely did deal with the 2016 election, even in the one-month isolation period that was set up. They are also not a perfect proxy for testing bias or political reaction to a significant event. The sample size for the qualitative study was quite small and likely not very empirically useful, randomness distorts too much at a sample size of 10 positive and negative articles per newspaper. The New York Post was particularly problematic as it only had one hit using the search term “undocumented people.” Had I had a team of coders, a better approach would have been to read all articles tagged “immigration” in the various time periods and code them for connections to events, certain argumentation styles, and word choice. This would have also allowed for a better collection of data which a simple word search cannot pick up, such as metaphor being used as a device which can dehumanize immigrants. Utilizing a five-year average, while at least partially useful in providing another measurement with which to evaluate the results, is slightly flawed because some terms grew with time. Asylum seeker and refugee, for example, grow substantially towards 2015 and therefore the five-year average is distorted to the low end for how much they really are discussed.

There should also be something said about the exact fitting of the words selected into “immigration” discourse. Although phrases like asylum seeker and refugee can technically apply to people in the United States, the qualitative study showed that they are mostly used in



international contexts. Although it is certainly a valid question to ask how the Pulse Nightclub shooting affects conceptions populations moving between foreign countries, it is not exactly analogous with how “immigrants” is used in US papers and therefore is not a perfect unit of comparison.

**Suggestions for further / future research:**

There are a few branches of this study that are ripe for further research in the future. Regarding term usage growing or shrinking over time (perhaps in relation to significant events, perhaps not) it might be useful to do a much broader study that compiles the incidence rates of words for various papers every month for several years. It would be interesting to see any patterns that emerge. One could likely draw interesting conclusions from the research as one would have the ability to see what newspapers had spikes of a given word in a given month. This would be particularly useful in determining the effects of an election on newspapers, as well as very clearly illustrating any spikes that might occur from significant events. If we could compare the data that I collected with data from previously heavily-contested presidential elections where immigration was a central theme then it might be possible to get a better idea if the Pulse Nightclub shooting had an effect on the discourse in the six months following it that was outside of the normal expected range.

As mentioned before, a comprehensive study of the newspaper landscape with coders tagging references to Pulse as well as other forms of bias, metaphor and subjects reported on would be a far more accurate way to judge the influence of significant events on the media. It would additionally be possible with relatively few resources depending on how broad the search term.

My findings justify potential linguistic studies that deal with how we associate certain words with certain classes of people could be done. Although it is very possible for someone from South or Central America to be a refugee, “refugee” in our modern dialect seems to carry with it some racialized traits towards people coming from the Middle East. Technically “refugee” could just as easily be applied to people escaping from some very dangerous areas in central and South America yet we do not do it, they are lumped under the “illegal immigrant” or “alien” category. It also opens the door to studies done on what differences might exist between someone being legally or culturally considered a refugee.

**Conclusion:**

Overall, my study primarily sought to see if certain newspapers changed their frequency or word choice of certain words surrounding immigration in response to the Pulse nightclub shooting. I had expected to see a notable shift, at the very least in the frequency of the words used. It appears that the event, however, did not have a significant impact on public discourse. There were a few exceptions. The Tampa Bay Times experienced a massive increase in public discourse concerning immigration in the six months following the terrorist attack, which would lend some credence to the theory that distance plays an important factor in how dramatically these attacks affect the types and amount of words used. Even still, based on the results of the qualitative portion of this study, it is likely (although still unconfirmed) that the presidential election had the biggest impact on immigration discourse in these three newspapers.

Unfortunately, most of the results were simply inconclusive. Although there was a marked increase in the frequency of both positive and negative words after the terrorist attack, there was a notable decrease in the frequency of all words in the month immediately following the shooting

with the exception of the word “refugee.” This does have some interesting implications for how we view and characterize immigrants from different countries that display different racialized features in the media, but does unfortunately does not directly support the hypothesis. Even in the one month after the shooting, the frequency of the words alone is not enough to prove a link between the shooting and an increase in the term “refugee” in public discourse, although it is enough to provide motivation for potential future research.

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**Appendix:**

New York Times - Negative			New York Times - Positive		
(Illegal Immigra!)	(Illegal Alien!)	(Refugee!)	(Undocumented P...!)	(Undocumented W...!)	(Asylum Seeker! AND OR Asylee!)

**6 Month Timeframe**

1/12/16-6/12/16	147	8	817	7	19	133
1/12/16 - 6/12/16 (5 Year ave)	152	6.4	365.8	4	10	21.6
% Deviation from 5 Year ave 1-6	-3.30%	25%	123.35%	75%	90%	515.74%
6/12/16-12/12/16	219	17	1069	12	27	107
6/12/16-12/12/16 (5 Year ave)	194	10.4	576.5	3.4	13.6	70
% Deviation from 5 Year ave 6-12	12.88%	63.46%	85.43%	252.94%	98.53%	52.86%
% of Change (6 month time periods)	67%	47%	76%	58%	70%	-20%

**Single Month**

6/12/16-7/12/16	25	1	198	0	2	19
6/12/16-7/12/16 (5 Year ave)	36.4	2.8	82	0.6	2.6	8.8
% Deviation from Average	-31.32%	-64.29%	141.46%	0	-23.08%	115.91%

**New York Post - Negative**

**New York Post - Positive**

(Illegal Immigra!)	(Illegal Alien!)	(Refugee!)	(Undocumented P...!)	(Undocumented W...!)	(Asylum Seeker! AND OR Asylee!)
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**6 Month Timeframe**

1/12/16-6/12/16  
 1/12/16 - 6/12/16 (5 Year ave)  
 % Deviation from 5 Year ave 1-6  
 6/12/16-12/12/16  
 6/12/16-12/12/16 (5 Year ave)  
 % Deviation from 5 Year ave 6-12  
 % of Change (6 month time periods)

41	7	47	1	1	4
20.2	9.2	22.6	0.2	0.4	0.4
102.97%	-24%	107.96%	400%	150%	900.00%
41	11	76	0	1	7
36	12.4	46.8	0	1.4	2.8
13.89%	11.29%	62.39%	0.00%	-28.57%	150.00%
0%	57%	61.70%	0%	0%	75%

**Single Month**

6/12/16-7/12/16  
 6/12/16-7/12/16 (5 Year Ave)  
 % Deviation from Average

6	2	7	0	0	0
10.4	5	4.2	0	0	0
-42.31%	-60.00%	66.67%	0	0.00%	0.00%



Tampa Bay Times - Negative			Tampa Bay Times - Positive		
(Illegal Immigra!)	(Illegal Alien!)	(Refugee!)	(Undocumented P...!)	(Undocumented W...!)	(Asylum Seeker! AND OR Asylee!)

**6 Month Timeframe**

1/12/16-6/12/16	41	5	56	1	3	1
1/12/16 - 6/12/16 (5 year ave)	41.4	6	21.6	0.2	3.6	0.2
% Deviation from 5 year ave 1-6	-0.97%	16.67%	159.26%	400%	-16.67%	400.00%
6/12/16-12/12/16	102	17	86	11	10	2
6/12/16-12/12/16 (5 year ave)	68.8	12.4	52.4	1.4	5.8	3
% Deviation from 5 Year Ave 6-12	48.26%	37.10%	52.56%	685.71%	72.41%	50.00%
% of Change	148.78%	240%	53.57%	1000%	61.11%	100%

**Single Month**

6/12/16-7/12/16	7	0	18	0	0	0
6/12/16-7/12/16 (5 Year ave)	16.2	3.4	7.2	0.6	1.2	0.4
% Deviation from Average	-56.79%	0.00%	150.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

**Immigration Baseline**

New York Times	New York Post	Tampa Bay Times
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**6 Month Timeframe**

1/12/16-6/12/16

1722	181	253
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1/12/16 - 6/12/16 (5 Year Ave)

1357	159.8	233.8
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%Deviation from 5 Year Ave 1-6

26.90%	13.27%	8.21%
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6/12/16-12/12/16

2935	296	482
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6/12/16-12/12/16 (5 Year Ave)

1624.8	233.2	303.8
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% Deviation from 5 Year Ave 6-12

80.64%	26.93%	58.66%
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% of Change (6 month time periods)

70.44%	63.54%	90.51%
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**Single Month**

6/12/16-7/12/16

574	55	70
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6/12/16-7/12/16 (5 Year)

282.6	49	62.8
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% Deviation from Average

103.11%	12.24%	11.46%
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