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Media Coverage Saliency of the Syria and Yemen Conflicts

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Introduction

Violent conflicts are an unfortunate staple in human society and are nothing new to the international sphere. But since the end of World War II, both the international order and media technology have quickly changed. These advancements have created new patterns of interactions between conflicts, media, politics, and humanitarian crises. As of the writing of this thesis, the Russian invasion of Ukraine is exposing strong media biases towards certain refugees. Those fleeing from Ukraine into parts of Europe have been shown strong sympathy, while those from the Middle East fleeing into Europe are often shown with less dignity (King, 2022). Those affected by the crises in Ukraine, Syria, and Yemen, the latter two which are the focus of this thesis, all deserve equitable humanitarian assistance and sympathy. The role of media in conflicts is multilayered and complicated, and these factors can be confounded in the politics of the Middle East region. Unfortunately, unequal coverage of conflicts with comparable humanitarian effects could lead to inequity. Coverage of conflicts can focus more on the politics of a war than the real effects that humans are experiencing, distracting the public and policymakers from developing solutions for those most affected.

In normative theory, all forms of communication, like media, are defined as a form of surveillance (Christians et al., 2009). Surveillance requires observing, collecting, and disseminating current news to a population (Christians et al., 2009). Media's role in society therefore is to surveil important issues and monitor them, eventually bringing them to the larger public. In the early days of news gathering, especially in the seventeenth century, media was focused on collecting reliable facts that could be sold to people thousands of miles apart. This form of news gathering was monetarily assessed by its factual reliability and contributed to modern media norms (Christians et al., 2009). This normative media theory of monitoring

implies a certain state of unbiased facts that were the basis of early media. Now, this is the standard for democratic nation states, as creating a well-informed population is integral to the functioning of representative democracies. But these days, media has morphed from print newspapers gathering facts to digital ones disseminating facts, opinions, and questions. In modern times, "telecommunications do not simply rearrange information and ideas in space, they also alter the balance of power in social struggles" and have important influences on the international community, particularly conflicts (Adams, 1996). The roles have shifted from simply surveilling to altering real-world circumstances, which may not be beneficial to society. This is not to say that mass media and journalistic efforts are inherently unethical, but that they exist in a complicated world. Politics, government, economics, and national identity are all factors that can influence what media chooses to report and when, and how that reporting affects policy, government, and public opinion. Many researchers have hoped to understand if media has positive, negative, or neutral effects on government policies and public opinion. While there have been great strides in this research, there is also an intrinsic feedback loop. These factors can influence what the media covers and how it speaks of current events, just as the media can influence the direction of public opinion and policies. Still, it is important to understand coverage choices in media as generally intentional and influential.

The 2015 picture of a dead Syrian toddler in Turkey by the name of Alan Kurdi made waves in media in the United States, Canada, and Europe. It became a galvanizing photo and helped create a sentiment of compassion and empathy. A few years later, I was volunteering in a refugee camp not far from Turkey in Lesvos, Greece. My time volunteering in the refugee hotspot, which housed over 40 nationalities, showed me many things about the role of media in conflicts and in migration. The speed at which Syrians were moved through the asylum-seeking

process was much smoother than for other nationalities, and they were nearly guaranteed to be resettled compared to other nationalities. Others, such as those from Yemen, Iraq, and Afghanistan, had a much harder time moving through the process quickly. Greece was not happy with any nationality of migrants, but I experienced a clear difference in how various nationalities were treated in their asylum process.

This thesis aims to understand a few key questions based on these observations about how conflict and media intersect in the Middle East. Through the case studies of the Syrian Civil War and the Yemeni Civil War from 2011-2020, the thesis will explore when and under what circumstances do the Syrian and Yemeni wars become salient in the media, specifically newspapers. Saliency here is defined as the frequency and importance at which media outlets, particularly newspapers, create coverage about the two conflicts. To explore this question, data from two Western newspapers and two Arab newspapers will be collected and analyzed to determine saliency of the respective conflicts. For the purposes of this thesis, "Western" is defined as originating from the United States, Western Europe, and Canada, and "Arab" is defined as originating from the Middle East and North Africa region. This thesis will also seek to explain if and when Syria or Yemen receive more media coverage, how coverage differs between Western and Arab media, and how media relates to the reception of migrants in host countries. Asking these more specific questions can help show what imbalances exist and how to adjust for these differences, as well as practical consequences the media has in certain countries. These adjacent inquiries will help add depth and focus to the findings, as well as understand the real-world implications of the data.

By examining data from over 140,000 newspaper articles of two Western newspapers and two Arabic newspapers, the results show coverage saliency coinciding with foreign policy

activity, higher coverage from Arabic newspapers, and lower Western coverage that also focuses more on select issues. The data results show how the media understands and explains the Syria and Yemen conflicts, with some surprising and unsurprising results. Importantly, the results found in this thesis fill a gap in the relevant literature, as it utilizes Arabic-language newspapers in their original text as an important data source. The results offer an invaluable look into regional coverage, international coverage, and the ways they intersect.

Background

The Syrian Civil War

In 2011, Syrian teenagers painted anti-regime graffiti on public walls in Daraa, Syria. The government's response to this graffiti was to detain and torture the teenagers responsible, and peaceful protests against their treatment spread across Syria. Military firepower was unleashed on the peaceful crowds, and a rebel insurgency was soon organized. This began the spiral of complicated conflicts that is now known as the Syrian Civil War.

The Syrian teenagers were inspired by the Arab Spring, a series of uprisings against autocratic rule in the Middle East throughout 2011. Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Syria, and other Middle Eastern countries protested authoritarian governments and demanded democratic rule, each inspired by the others. Arab authoritarians fearfully witnessed uprisings in other Arab countries, and many swiftly acted against protestors, tamping down demands promoting country individualism (Owen, 2012). This quick spread of pro-democracy protests hints at a larger feeling of Arab unity, as Arab youth describe a new spirit of Pan-Arabism, one based on mutual support of each other's democratic aspirations (Frenkel, 2011; Gause, 2011). The classic ideology of Pan-Arabism, which promotes one unified Arab nation-state in the Middle East and North Africa region, was popularized and pursued by Egyptian President Nasser in the 1950's-

1970's, especially in response to the growing power of Israel (Abou-El-Fadl, 2015). The demonstrations of the Arab Spring both create a new type of Arab unity and challenge the authority of classic Pan-Arabism by demanding citizen's rights to small democratic nation-states.

In some countries, protests for democracy went no further than street demonstrations. In other countries, particularly Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, these protests developed into a legitimate political movement that eventually ousted their leaders and overthrew the government. Of course, many of the new democracies were tenuous and have not endured until now. But the mark of the Arab Spring was significant and permanent. Scholars of the Middle East "did not anticipate the Arab uprisings due to [their] overestimation of authoritarianism in the region prior to 2011" (Abd Rabou, 2020). According to these scholars, the stability of authoritarianism and the connection between Islam and state politics was so strong that the region was thought to be incompatible with democracy (Gause, 2011). Still, Arabs around the region showed that they wanted democracy and were willing to fight for it. These uprisings also coincided with a nearly worldwide use of the mobile phone, which made spreading political information even under an oppressive regime far easier. The failure or success of these democracies doesn't take away from the importance that the Arab Spring brought to the world.

Even though the Arab Spring brought a new light to the Middle East, it also brought severe instability and loss of life. The Syrian Civil War is a prime example of this. By 2012, a medley of rebel groups formed a brigade to fight against the government of Bashar Al-Assad, and the conflicts became a full-blown civil war (Yacoubian, 2021). Soon after, in 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, ISIL, or IS) was created and began capturing territory across Iraq and Syria in its quest to form a brutally violent Islamic caliphate. Their cruel terrorism and violent beheadings captured the Western world and its media, and public response

urged Western powers like the United States government to take immediate action. Of course, this action was not clear nor decisive. Eager to avoid another situation like the 2003 Iraq War, Washington provided some supplies, encouraged Syrian rebels with rhetoric, and deployed a small number of military to the region. In addition to the United States, Russia, Iran, other powers would intervene in a variety of ways. Soon, the civil war became a battleground of foreign interests, military interventions, and proxy wars for the world stage.

As of 2022, the Syrian rebels have essentially lost the Syrian Civil War. Early in the war, Al-Assad released terrorists from prison and poisoned the well of the rebel brigade. It became difficult for large powers like the United States to tell who terrorists were and who were the rebels, which tainted any international support that the rebels could receive. Since that moment, Al-Assad has regained most of Syrian territory, while rebels have lost most of their foothold. ISIS also has lost almost its entire territory and has become an underground movement again. Currently, the Assad regime does not risk being overthrown by either rebel groups or ISIS, but the country is neither truly stable nor safe as groups still engage in violent conflict (Snell, 2022). Syrians are also still in a state of crisis and need humanitarian aid to simply survive. More than 6.6 million Syrians have fled the country as refugees since 2011, and 6.7 million people who have been internally displaced. The remaining Syrians have been pushed to destitution, as more than 70% of Syrians live below the poverty line (*Syrian Refugee Crisis*, n.d.). Syria's humanitarian crisis has deepened since 2011, and many Westerners are acutely aware of this issue. The vast numbers of Syrian refugees who have fled into European countries since 2011 has brought significant attention to Syrian refugees, even if humanitarian action is still lacking.

The Yemeni Civil War

Around the 2011 Arab Spring, Yemen's youth was inspired by the other countries fighting for freedom from their oppressive regimes, demonstrating political Arab unity. These regional protests "invigorated Yemen's long- marginalized youth and brought back…the South's once vibrant social movements" (Perkins, 2017). These demonstrations were targeted towards Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had been President for 33 years. The protests demanded the end of Saleh's 33-year rule and for democratization of Yemen. Clashes erupted in the capital of Sanaa and eventually Saleh's deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, is sworn in as President for a two-year term (Sharaf, 2021)**.** In 2014, more anti-government protests occurred, and the Houthis took control of Sanaa, and eventually the Yemen government. Thus started a civil war between Houthi rebels and the former Yemen government, led by Hadi. A Saudi-led coalition of Arab States launched air strikes against the Houthis to support Hadi, and the United States stated support for the coalition in 2014 (Sharaf, 2021). It is important to point out that the Houthi movement is largely composed of Shia Muslims, while the government is Sunni. At this point in the conflict, the Yemeni Civil War is becoming a sectarian proxy war, between Shia and Sunni Muslims, Iran and Saudi Arabia, and Houthi rebels and the government. This civil war has created one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world, with deteriorating infrastructure and rising cases of cholera and famine. Yemen's civilians have suffered greatly for this civil war, and many have been displaced internally within the country.

Many of the humanitarian crises that result from Yemen's current war, including starvation, famine, cholera, displacement, and death, have roots far before 2014. Saleh's rise to power in the 1990's following the reunification of Yemen also coincided with the privatization and poor management of water resources, as well as the accumulation of individual wealth rather than development of public infrastructure. Additionally, Yemen experienced a large amount of

dependent development in the 1990's, a term which refers to development of developing

countries primarily through exporting resources to developed countries. The developing

countries become dependent on the developed countries for their economies to grow. It is also

"typically characterized by rapid internal development and growth in foreign trade… typically

via core economics powers" (Perkins, 2017). The consequences of all these things means that

during time of war, basic necessities of civilians will suffer; water is contaminated, food and

energy become scarcer, and medical infrastructure is lacking.

There are multiple similarities between the Yemeni Civil War and the Syrian Civil War,

and yet there are differences in the way the media portrays them, adding to the reasons why they

are worth comparing to each other in the context of media. The Yemeni Civil War is generally

presented as a sectarian conflict and a crisis of starvation and disease rather than migration and

has not received the same amount of media coverage as Syria. But there are striking similarities--

both conflicts have stemmed from the revolutionary ideas of the Arab Spring and that

revolutionary zeal has fizzled out into a difficult and complex conflict with multiple foreign

actors. Yemen's conflict is not typically seen as having rebel roots, but tribal and sectarian roots.

Although there are certainly strong sectarian implications now, the origins of the conflict rest in

youth-led rebellion rather than tribal squabbles. The implication of devaluing the Yemeni Civil

War from a revolution for democracy to a sectarian issue takes it out of the Western eye and

reduces its importance. The Arab Spring was a movement lauded by Westerners, as Arabs

demanded democracy, which many Westerners see as the right way of governing. Therefore, this

dissociation for Yemen's conflict means that neither the media nor the public discourse care.

This cheapening of the conflict's origins also has deep effects for its civilians and how

humanitarian aid can be provided. Additionally, both conflicts have created huge humanitarian

crises and have destroyed infrastructure, including the displacement of millions of people. The humanitarian problems that have stemmed from the conflicts are equally severe, and as are the origins of both conflicts.

Literature Review

The literature surrounding media, Yemen, Syria, displacement, and humanitarian aid comes from a variety of fields. This literature overlaps between political science, communications, conflict studies, media studies, and international affairs theories. There is existing literature about media coverage of Yemen and Syria, media coverage of displacement, and the effects media has on policy and public discourse. Additionally, the literature can help create expectations around what the data will show, and what impacts media has on conflict and migration and vice versa. From the scholarly works, we can expect to see a few things in the data: the media tends to cover Syria more than Yemen, media has a neutral to negative impact on policy making, and media is in a circular influence with policy and public discourse. Also, we can expect to see that media coverage of the conflicts is dependent on the interests of the great powers, specifically the United States, the United Kingdom, and wealthy Gulf states, in which the news outlets are based and which funded them; and that this coverage can differ based on migrant host country interests and sentiments.

Research specifically targeting media in the Syria and Yemen crises is not abundant. But there is one extremely influential piece of research from Guidero and Carter Hallward titled "Global Responses to Conflict and Crisis in Syria and Yemen". This book shows multiple findings that are relevant to this thesis project as it seeks to address the question of why the media covers the Syria conflict more than the Yemen conflict. The first is that "despite the difference in the scale of conflict-related deaths in Yemen and Syria, the humanitarian situation

in both countries is grim, and the conflicts share a number of striking similarities" (Guidero & Carter Hallward, 2019). Therefore, there must be other underlying reasons why there is disproportionate media coverage since their similarities account for more than their differences. The book theorizes that the interests of the great powers in the world have a deep effect on the media coverage of the conflicts. In a situation where multiple countries have intervened in a variety of ways, this theory is very potent. Additionally, the authors theorize that structural inequality in the international system and national security issues have effects on media coverage and that the media coverage has effects on policy intervention. Finally, the book does a quantitative and qualitative analysis of media coverage of Yemen and Syria. This is strikingly similar to this research project, although there are some differences. Guidero and Carter Hallward do not include Arab news sources or Arabic language news sources in their book, and they address humanitarian intervention and international law rather than humanitarian aid. This book is an encouraging and corroborating piece of research for this project, and this thesis also adds to their original research.

In addition to Guidero, other scholars have touched on the topic of media in Middle East conflicts. Doucet describes "the CNN effect" and the Syrian crisis in connection to the effects of media on policy making. The "CNN effect" is an academic paradigm to explain that real time news coverage drives U.S. policies and interventions. Through policy analysis and interviews, they found that media does play a significant role but does not drive strategy, and that often large media coverage actually stilts policy decisions and leads to failures (Doucet, 2018). The intense pressure for many international actors to respond to crises leads to these policy failures. This counters a commonly held idea that media coverage equals action taken. Hoskins covers a similar issue in "Media and Compassion after Digital War" as they describe that mass media

dissemination does not lead to conflict de-escalation. They find that the public falsely equates saturation coverage with tangible effects. Additionally, they compare and contrast the media of Syria and Yemen, claiming that the documentation of human suffering in Yemen has not resulted in action taken. Indeed, there is a lack of visible and coordinated humanitarian relief for those in Yemen. Both in Syria and Yemen there is a cycle of "image-expectation-inaction" that marks humanitarian relief and policy intervention (Hoskins, 2020). Despite the persistent view of human suffering available from media coverage, global inaction remains. Both of these sources lay out a necessary hypothesis that media saturation coverage creates neutral to negative effects regarding the international community and policy makers.

Throughout the Arab Spring, social media became a critical way to disseminate information and capture enough regional and international attention for a regime change (AlSayyad & Guvenc, 2015). According to Al Sayyad, social media brought more coverage and awareness of the Arab Spring movements and had a transforming effect on the urban space. While this research is not focused on social media, it's important to understand the media landscape of the Middle East since 2011. There has been substantial research done on this social media phenomenon, particularly in regard to the political uprisings and conflicts in the Arab world. But this also means that newspapers as traditional media are understudied and undervalued in the context of conflict despite still occupying a valuable space in society. Because of the vast research on social media in the Arab world, there is now a gap in the research about the place of traditional media. This research's purpose is partially to fill this gap.

Much of the previous research on the role of the media in conflicts in the Middle East centers around regime changes, social media, and democratization. For example, research from Hussain and Shaikh observes how "the flip side of digitally enabled democratization is digitally

enabled repression" (Hussain & Shaikh, 2015). It is necessary to have an understanding of the political landscape of the Arab world, one in which the media is a tool of freedom and oppression. Most social media has deep influences from Arab governments, such as Saudi Arabia, and this is true of traditional media as well.

Haimed et al. claims that "news is never a manifestation of facts" but instead manifests certain ideologies and power that will achieve certain goals. Newspapers and mass media are not neutral mediums that simply convey information to the public. They are driven by specific factors, including money, influence, policies, and the government. Haimed compares Western, Arab, and Iranian newspapers in how they portray the Yemen conflict. They found that Western and Arab newspapers portray Houthis as terrorists and rebels to legitimize military intervention, and that these newspaper headlines have a polarizing effect (Haimed, 2021). Here, similarities between Western and Arab media can be found. While this research project seeks to understand the differences in how Western and Arab media portray the Syria and Yemen conflicts, it is equally as important to understand in what ways they are similar. Regarding Yemen, it is essential to realize the biases and influences that many Arab news sources have. Al Jazeera is the largest and most widespread Arab newspaper and started in 1996 to break the consistent rhetoric brought by Arab dictatorships. Today it brings a unique focus to coverage of the wars in the Middle East (Ghanem, 2020). Despite the significance of Al Jazeera's presence, it and many other Arab news sources are deeply influenced by the powerful, such as Saudi and Qatar royalty, in the Middle East. Yaghi finds that the ruling Saudi family exerts its power and influence over pan-Arab media and has deep political and financial controls. This exertion fuels the sectarianism that is found in the Arab world, and that shows up prominently in both the Syrian and Yemeni conflicts (Yaghi, 2017). Al Jazeera in particular is not Saudi run but is funded by the

Qatar government. Regardless, the literature recognizes the influence of Arab governments on Arab media, and how that relates to violent conflict in the region.

In regard to the views and responses of the Western world towards these conflicts, there are also biases and influences. Western mass media plays a huge role in shaping the perceptions and opinions of Westerners towards Syrians and Yemenis. As Simons describes, the timing, nature, and tone of these news events are not random but consciously created. Particularly within the Syrian conflict, news is used to persuade the public and policy makers to permit intervention, and even President Obama at one point asked Congress to look at the media of the conflict to persuade their support for military intervention. The United States' interest in Syria was regime change and to overthrow Al Assad, and there are specific informational mechanisms designed to develop public consent for existing policy (Simons, 2016). This implies that media is used to support policies already in motion rather than for potential policies.

Overall, the literature focuses on a few key themes of media, conflict, and humanitarian aid in the Middle East. The literature shows that there is a gap to fill regarding the analysis of Arabic language newspapers, as there is no research using Arabic language media to compare the conflicts in Syria and Yemen. Additionally, previous research done related to the Syria and Yemen conflicts help establish hypotheses for the findings of this project. Drawing from Guidero and Carter Hallward, I expect that media coverage of Syria outnumbers that of Yemen, and that the interests of great powers are influential in coverage saliency due to structural inequality in the international community. The interests of great powers, specifically the United States, the United Kingdom, and wealthy Gulf states, will focus particularly on migration, terrorism, and sectarianism. Hoskins' research helps develop expectations related to media relationships; I can expect that media coverage saturation will equate with inaction but may seem to achieve tangible

results. Research from Haimed et. al and Simons show that I should expect news coverage that is consciously created and for news articles to manifest ideologies and agendas of respective countries. This is specifically relevant to the two Arabic newspapers, which are influenced by government biases. Drawing from the increasing influence of Arab media, I also expect that the Arabic newspapers will report more on both the Syria and Yemen conflicts and issues stemming from these conflicts due to their geographic proximity. These hypotheses can be summarized as such:

1. Media coverage of Syria will outnumber Yemen

2. The interests of great powers will be influential in coverage saliency due to structural inequality in the international community

3. Media coverage will be more sympathetic towards Syria than Yemen in Western newspapers but will be equal in Arabic newspapers

4. Media coverage will manifest ideologies of a newspaper's home country

5. Arabic newspapers will report more on both the Syria and Yemen conflicts due to geographic proximity

Methodology

The methodology of collecting data for this project is focused on the headlines and body texts of newspaper articles from Western and Arab media. By collecting these newspaper articles, the project examined the kind of trends that characterize different news outlets, how they compare to each other, and the differences between global and local media. To achieve this, I quantitatively analyzed data by collecting newspaper articles from four newspapers into data sets and then calculating the relative frequency of the mentions of Syria and Yemen in the headlines and body texts of articles for all newspapers from approximately 2011-2020. I then searched for

the frequency of specific keywords, related to terrorism and migration, among the general

frequency data for Syria and Yemen. I also searched for keywords related to themes of war and

crisis, although these did not make it into the final findings. After compiling the quantitative

findings into four figures, I conducted qualitative analysis. I took a random sampling of each

newspaper's headline coverage of Syria and Yemen and read the samples looking for tones

towards the conflict. These headlines were read in their original English or Arabic. I coded each

headline for sympathetic, political, war-related, and terrorism-related coverage to gauge the

overall level of sympathy and understanding that each newspaper had towards the two conflicts.

Analyzing the frequency of certain headlines over others through a set period of time gave

tangible results and yielded multiple plots that constitute most of the findings. The findings

include eight figures, three bar graphs and four double line graphs, showing substantial results.

Sources

Selecting the sources that will comprise the data was an intentional process. Many factors

were considered, such as the monetary influences on the newspaper, the host country of the

newspaper, political leanings, etc. But in the end, the sources were chosen based on two main

characteristics: the widespread, popular nature of its reputation and the ease of collecting articles

for data analysis. I chose two Western newspapers and two Arab newspapers: The *New York

Times*, The *Guardian*, *Al-Jazeera*, and *Al-Arabiya*. Additionally, even though social media was a

crucial aspect of the rebel groups' rise in Syria and Yemen, it will not be featured in this project.

The reasoning behind this decision lies in the fact that despite social media's growth, traditional

newspapers are still an important path in which people produce and receive news. Additionally,

the four newspaper outlets chosen have social media presence and digitally publish their articles.

There is already an abundance of research investigating conflicts arising from the Arab Spring

and social media, and therefore newspaper articles are now underutilized in researching Arab conflicts.

The *New York Times* was chosen due to the large influence of American media and the historical involvement of the American military in the Middle East, including Washington's military interventions in Syria and significant contributions to humanitarian aid. Additionally, the United States has had a large influence on peace talks and ceasefires in Middle Eastern conflicts. This is not to say that these have been largely successful, but that the United States has had a vested interest in peace in the Middle East region. This interest could be because of oil reserves, national security, maintaining international reputation, and other reasons. But regardless of the reason, it is essential to include an American media source. I will note that the *New York Times* is left leaning, which could possibly impact the data analysis of issues like migration and military firepower (*AllSides Media Bias Ratings*, n.d.). There was an effort to include a more center leaning American newspaper, such as the Washington Post. Unfortunately, due to data availability, this source was not included.

The *Guardian* was chosen to include a British perspective on conflicts in the Middle East. As a European country, the United Kingdom has experienced a significant influx of migrants and refugees being resettled. It has been one factor in the increasing political division in Britain, as the world saw through Brexit in 2016. Asylum-seekers have clearly become a significant issue for the British public, even though the United Kingdom has not been a frontline country dealing with a massive number of asylum seekers, such as in countries like Greece. It should be noted that the *Guardian* is also a left leaning newspaper, which will certainly impact its coverage of key events. It is still useful to see how media coverage of Syria and Yemen intersects with the national British interests and public discourse. Additionally, the convenience

of Britain as an English-speaking country is useful for data analysis, as to avoid the difficult nuance of translations that would occur with a Greek newspaper.

Al Jazeera and *Al Arabiya* were both chosen due to their widespread influence in the Arab region and around the world, as they are the most popular Arab newspapers. In many ways, *Al Jazeera* is reshaping global politics by reducing the monopoly of Western news outlets and influencing Arab politics, a phenomenon coined the "*Al Jazeera* effect". The influence of *Al Jazeera* on the Arab region and the global stage should not be underestimated. Its rise in presence and influence in the international community is important, as it is seen as representing perspectives from the Middle East and the Global South, often contrary to Western perspectives. Many Westerners also consume this media through an English version of the news, as it is often viewed as a more credible news source compared to other Arab newspapers (Elmasry et al., 2013). *Al Jazeera* operates in a variety of languages, and there are differences between its English and Arabic coverage of news (*Al Jazeera English vs. Al Jazeera Arabic*, 2017).

Al Arabiya was created in 2003, largely with the intent to challenge *Al Jazeera*'s dominance and offer a Saudi perspective of the news (Kosárová, 2020). Although its influence is smaller than *Al Jazeera*, it still is influential as an Arab newspaper and exists as the "Saudispeak" of the international community, and routinely covers media with a strong bias. This bias promotes Saudi interests, and the newspaper largely lacks a strong normative voice in the international community (Behravesh, 2014). Additionally, because of the connections to Saudi Arabia, especially as a United States ally, it is often accused of being too friendly to Western interests (Elmasry et al., 2013), particularly in contrast to *Al Jazeera*, a media that looks to disrupt Western news monopoly. Including data from *Al Arabiya* offers a slightly opposing

narrative of news coverage compared to *Al Jazeera* and a more complete picture of Arabic-language media.

The data in this project will look at *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya*'s original Arabic language articles, excluding the English versions. Looking at the original Arabic newspapers is perhaps the most useful aspect of this thesis, as it will give a more intimate look at the amount of Syria and Yemen news articles as it pertains to an Arab audience. There are differences between the English and Arabic versions of these news articles, which is why the best data set would include Arabic-language news articles.

Government influences on Arab media

While freedom of the press in Western nations is essentially sacred, the state of media in the Arab world is more nebulous. Because there are weaker democratic institutions in the Middle East, there are also fewer truly independent Arab news outlets. News outlets in the Arab region tend to be state-owned, state-influenced, or independent. But the number of truly independent Arab news outlets is quite small, and few of them are as influential as *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya*. The two Arab news outlets chosen do have ties to Gulf governments, and are not truly independent newspapers. *Al Jazeer*a is based in Doha, Qatar and receives funding from the government of Qatar. Additionally, its chairman is Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer bin Mohammed Al Thani, a member of Qatar's ruling family (*Sheikh Hamad Bin Thamer Al Thani*, 2017). Structurally, the newspaper receives funding but is editorially independent. In reality, this independence is "relative and conditional" and is influenced by the Qatar government and its interests (Ustad Figenschou, 2013). Despite this relative independence, *Al Jazeera* still reflects the interests of its state sponsor. For example, *Al Jazeera* reported more negative news about the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen after Qatar was expelled from the envoy, and consistently shows

bias even in news not related to conflict (Kosárová, 2020). Like *Al Jazeera*, *Al Arabiya* is based in Dubai and operated by media conglomerate MBC, which is in turn owned by the Saudi government. Specifically, the Saudi royal family has indirect ownership of *Al Arabiya*. As previously mentioned, Saudi bias has a strong influence over news coverage in *Al Arabiya*, as the newspaper often has opposing headlines to *Al Jazeera* and reinforces the status quo promoted by Saudi Arabia. This latter aspect has specifically shown in *Al Arabiya*'s tendency to reinforce Shi'ite and Sunni sectarianism, showing Shi'ite Islam as a creeping menace on society (Behravesh, 2014). Considering that both Syria and Yemen have sectarian involvement, it is important to note this specific bias. This is necessary to consider as the interests of those who own and fund the two Arab newspapers can have effects on what events are covered and how they are covered. Acknowledging the inherent interests of Arab newspapers and their governments can bring insights into saliency choices.

Initially, I considered whether including newspapers with possibly warped interests would be useful for analyzing data. Analyzing news articles from newspapers that are influenced by Gulf governments means having to take into account more confounding factors and the national interests of these Gulf states. Especially considering the sectarian and proxy nature of both conflicts, understanding Qatar and Saudi Arabia's interests in the Syrian and Yemeni conflicts can put their news article data in better perspective. But in fact, that is very similar to my considerations for the Western newspapers. American and British based media will also have its own perspectives and national interests despite freedom of the press, although likely expressed in a different way. Additionally, the most popular and widespread Arab newspapers are more useful than independent newspapers and will be easier to collect data on.

Influences on Western Media

Just as there are influences on Arab media, there are certain aspects of the Western newspapers' home countries that could affect their coverage. Due to democratic norms and laws around freedom of press, these influences are much more subtle compared to Arab media, who receives direct funding from its governments. The United States holds a powerful role in the policies and rhetoric of the international community, and this is especially true for the Middle East. Washington tends to hold three main goals regarding the Middle East: "countering terrorism and stopping nuclear proliferation; safeguarding the security of the region; and unconditionally supporting strategic allies and partners" (Baydas, 2021). While the history between the United States and conflicts in the Middle East is too complex to fully explain in this project, I will point out the aspects of this relationships that could affect the data. The first important point being the strong alliance between Israel and the United States, which tends to drive nearly all of Washington's foreign policy in the region. Protecting Israel from neighbors is one of the top priorities for the United States, and Israel has been "the largest annual recipient of direct U.S. economic and military assistance since 1976" (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006). The United States consistently sides with Israel diplomatically, rescues it in wartime, and gives wide latitude regarding Gaza and the West Bank (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006). Washington's diplomatic siding with Israel often occurs with Arab nations, most of whom are either unfriendly or actively hostile. This was present in Washington's foreign policy towards Syria before the Syrian civil war, as foreign policy was pressured to punish Syria for its enmity towards Israel, particularly regarding the Golan Heights region (Landis, 2010). This pressure eased off after the start of the Syrian Civil War, although today the relationship between the United States and Syria is not an alliance, as seen in its involvement with the rebel groups in the war. Another important relationship from a United States perspective is Saudi Arabia, who is both an ally of the U.S. and

an adversary of Israel. This creates an interesting dynamic in which Saudi Arabia expresses

hostile rhetoric towards Israel but does not engage in active conflict due to its relationship with

the U.S. The strange relationship between the three could particularly effect how the *New York*

Times reports on the Yemen conflict, since Saudi Arabia intervened in Sanaa through a coalition

in 2015. These influences must be noted due to the United States' strong presence in the world,

even if its effects on media coverage are subtle.

Britain was deeply influential historically in creating the circumstances and borders Arab

countries now occupy. In the hegemonic world order of the 21st century, British influence is less

clear. Still, it carries similar modern goals to the United States: the control of oil and the desire

for regional stability (Covarrubias & Lansford, 2016). Although, these goals are carried out with

less intensity and power than the United States. These foreign policy interests could certainly

influence media coverage. Another important influence is the influx of migration into Britain in

the last ten years, particularly from Syria. Between 2014 and 2019, over 17,000 Syrian refugees

have settled in Britain, and were settled very quickly during migration peaks (Mistry &

Wainwright, 2019). Additionally, migration tends to be a divisive topic in Britain, like the United

States. The practical effects of migration and Syrian refugees on British society could be a strong

factor in the results of the data.

<div align="center">*Parameters*</div>

The parameters for this data set were created intentionally. I picked two Western and two

Arab news sources, which creates a balance that is useful for comparison. The definition of

"Western" being newspapers originating from the United States, Western Europe, or Canada,

and the definition of "Arab" being newspapers originating from the Middle East and North

Africa region. Additionally, the theoretical time period for the data set is January 2011-January

2020. This creates nearly a decade's amount of newspaper headlines to track through time and see how it has changed. The timeline also begins and ends in a useful way; starting in 2011 means capturing the fervor of the Arab Spring, while ending in January 2020 excludes the COVID-19 pandemic which would create an unnecessary factor in the data. Unfortunately, this time period could not be perfectly realized due to the news articles available for collection. Data from the *Guardian* and the *New York Times* were able to be collected for the complete timeline parameters, while *Al Jazeera* data was collected from January 2011- January 2019 and *Al Arabiya* from January 2014-2018. Additionally, there is missing *Al Arabiya* data from April 2013- January 2014 and May 2017- January 2018. Despite the unrealized parameters, this data still includes a significant amount of news articles to draw conclusions from, particularly during the beginning of Yemen's humanitarian crisis in 2014 and the mass migration of Syrian refugees in 2015.

Findings

After collecting the data, I analyzed the data from a quantitative and qualitative standpoint. This included the headlines of all the newspaper sources, and the body of all except the New York Times. The findings were surprising in some ways and unsurprising in others. In regard to my specific hypotheses previously described, the data confirmed my first hypothesis that Syria coverage saliency will outnumber Yemen saliency, as well as my second hypothesis that interests of great powers are influential in media coverage. This will be clear in examining when articles are salient and in the qualitative analysis of article tone. My third hypothesis, that media coverage will be more sympathetic towards Syria than Yemen in Western newspapers but fairly equal in Arab newspapers, was not confirmed. The findings show that sympathy was more equal in Western newspapers than in Arab newspapers, and that increased coverage numbers

were not consistent with sympathetic tones. The fourth hypothesis, that coverage will manifest ideologies of the newspaper's home country was confirmed, especially regarding the Arabic-language newspapers. My final hypothesis was also confirmed, albeit with caveats. Arabic newspapers did report more on both Syria and Yemen, although they also reported more on Syria than Yemen. These mixed findings point to a complicated relationship between media, government powers, and the two crises.

Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative analysis will show, throughout approximately January 2011-January 2020, how many headlines and body texts include the word "Syria" or "Yemen" for each newspaper. From these findings about how often Syria or Yemen is mentioned, I also looked at the frequency of certain keywords, specifically ones related to terrorism and migration, respectively. I examined these keywords in English and Arabic, and it is important to note that there was not a direct translation of the keywords, but a consideration of what keywords would be prominent in each newspaper.

Below, Figure 1 shows the top three article volume peaks for each newspaper, sorted by country and displayed by month and year. For each country and newspaper, the top three article volume peaks also display how many articles the peaks consist of. There are a variety of interesting findings here, my initial one being that for the Arabic newspapers, their Yemen volume peaks are exactly the same. Both *Al Arabiya* and *Al Jazeera* reported about Yemen the most in Spring of 2015, which was also when the Saudi-led coalition intervened into the Yemen Civil War. The Western newspapers did not show the same pattern, although the top peak for the *New York Times* reporting of Yemen was April 2015, during the Saudi-led intervention. Additionally, regarding Western coverage of the Yemen crisis, both the *Guardian* and the *New*

York Times had peaks in 2011, during the beginning of the Arab Spring and the Yemen conflict. This peak is absent in the Arab newspapers.

In Figure 1 it is also clear that the number of articles regarding Syria vastly outnumber ones regarding Yemen. This is also confirmed by Figures 2, 3, and 4. In every single instance, no matter the keywords or newspaper, articles mentioning Syria outnumber articles mentioning Yemen. The uneven coverage is extremely pronounced, and we can see that no matter the political circumstance, humanitarian crisis, or state of war, saliency of Syrian coverage is higher. The peaks of the volume of articles mentioning Syria generally coincide in late 2015, early 2016, and a few in September 2013, and one in September 2014. These peak levels are more consistent between *Al Arabiya* and *Al Jazeera*, and there is a bit less consistency between the *New York Times* and the *Guardian* peaks. The *New York Times'* top peak of September 2013 is a bit of an outlier compared to other top peaks, but this peak occurred after the Ghouta chemical attack in Syria, and right when the U.S. Senate filed a resolution to authorize the use of the American military against the Syrian military in response to the chemical attacks. However, this intervention was eventually averted. All the peaks coincide with rising migration rates of Syrians fleeing their home country, with peaks of late 2015 and early 2016. After the rate of movement stabilized around 2018, coverage decreased significantly.
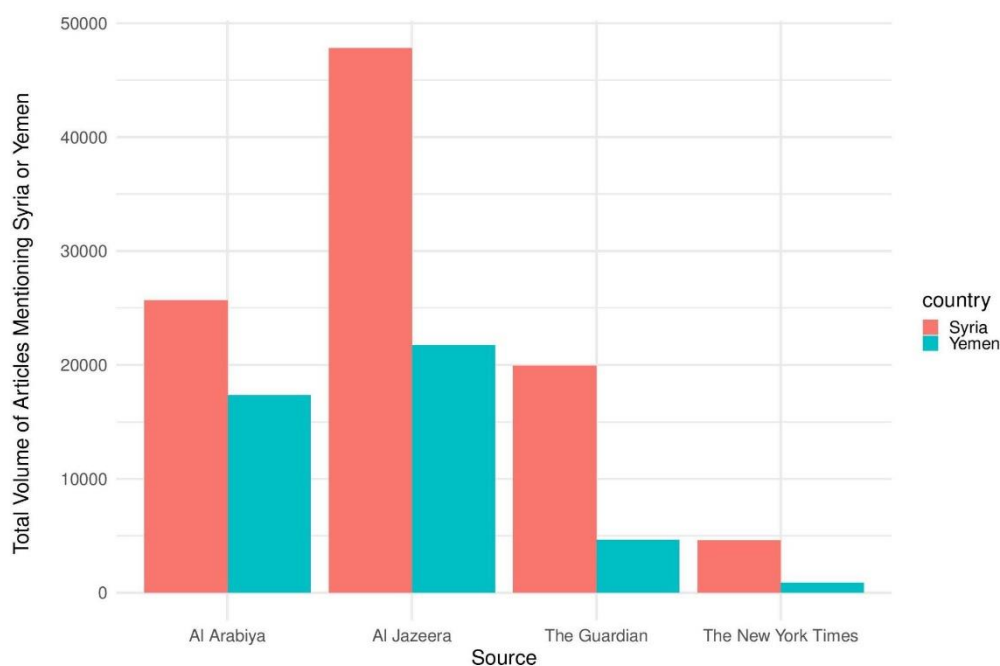
Figure 1

Volume Peaks by Month and Year

	Yemen	Syria
New York Times	1. April 2015 – **40** 2. March 2011 – **33** 3. June 2011 – **33**	1. Sept. 2013 – **172** 2. April 2017 – **134** 3. Oct. 2015 - **115**
The Guardian	1. Feb. 2017 – **117** 2. March 2011 – **106** 3. Jan. 2017 – **100**	1. Nov. 2015 – **676** 2. Sept. 2015 – **590** 3. Sept. 2013 – **589**
Al Arabiya	1. April 2015 – **892** 2. March 2015 – **637** 3. May 2015 – **620**	1. Oct. 2015 – **961** **2.** Nov. 2015 – **926** 3. Feb. 2016 – **785**
Al Jazeera	1. April 2015 – **536** 2. March 2015 – **445** 3. May 2015 – **376**	1. Feb. 2016 – **667** 2. Nov. 2015 – **643** 3. Sept. 2014 – **631**

Figure 2 below shows the total volume of articles over time for each newspaper and country. What this shows us is that the Arabic language newspapers report far more on both Syria and Yemen than the Western newspapers, and that *Al Jazeera* published more articles about Syria and Yemen than the other three newspapers. It should be noted that the difference between Yemen article volume for *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya,* although present, is not very large. The difference between Syria article volume for the Arabic newspapers is much larger than for Yemen across the board, especially the difference between *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya*. *Al Jazeera* covers both conflicts the most, and disproportionately covers Syria over Yemen. Additionally, we can see a large difference between Syria and Yemen coverage of the *Guardian* compared to the *New York Times*. The *Guardian* also has a much larger volume of Syria articles compared to its Yemen articles and to Syria articles from the *New York Times*.

Figure 2: Total Volume of Articles Mentioning Syria or Yemen

Figures 3 and 4 below are similar to Figure 2, but instead of just collecting articles

mentioning Syria, it includes articles also mentioning migration or terrorism keywords. Similarly

to Figure 2, the volume of Syria migration articles heavily outnumbers the volume of Yemen

migration articles across all four newspapers. This was to be expected. Additionally, it is

unsurprising that there is a very low amount of Syria and Yemen migration articles in the *New*

York Times, so much so that the Yemen component is barely visible. It is extremely notable that

the highest volume of Syria and Yemen migration articles come from the *Guardian*, despite it

not covering the highest volume in general. Additionally, the difference between Syria migration

articles and Yemen migration articles in the *Guardian* are extreme. This both confirms and

disproves my previous theory that the countries experiencing the most immediate effects of

migration would cover it more, which is the case for Syria migration articles from the *Guardian*

but not for Yemen migration articles. The volume of Yemen migration articles is highest from

the *Guardian*, despite the general lack of immediate consequences to migration in the United

Kingdom. In Figure 4, Syria and Yemen articles with terrorism seem to tell a similar, though not

exact, story as the migration bar graph. Like Figure 3, the *Guardian* outnumbers the other

newspapers in covering Syria and Yemen terrorism articles, despite the fact that it does not

outnumber in general articles. *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya* have roughly the same amount of

coverage regarding terrorism in both countries, although Syria is higher. Again, the *New York*

Times has negligible amounts of terrorism coverage, even lower than overall and migration

articles.

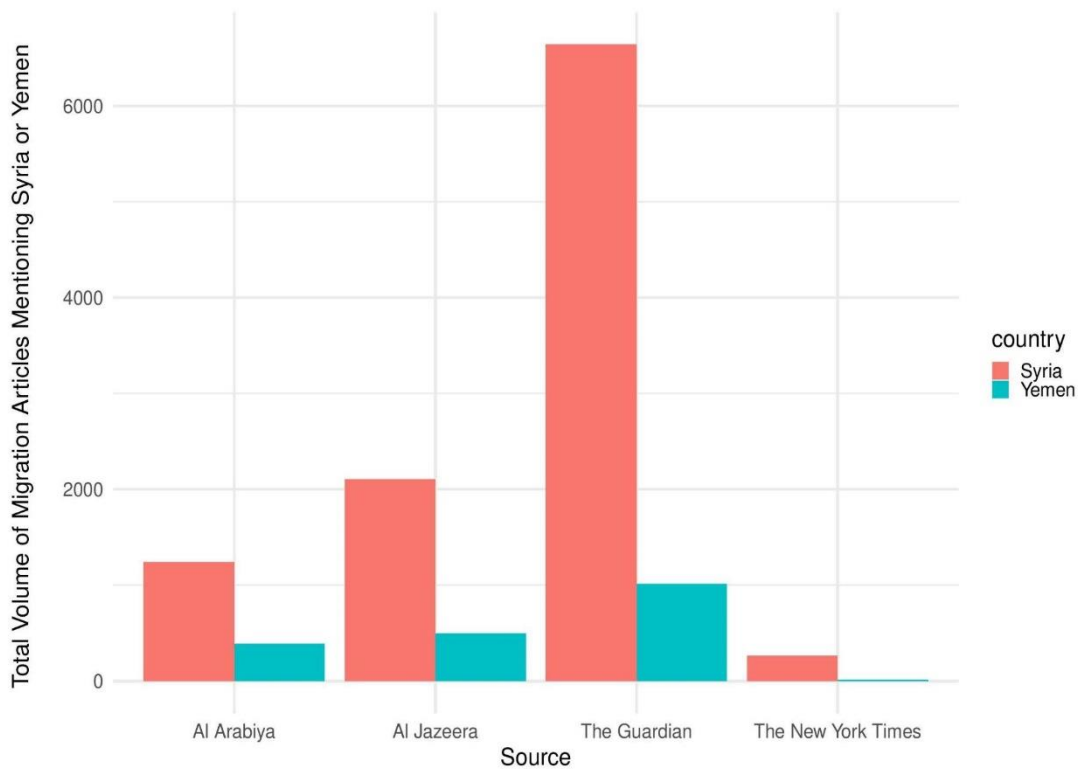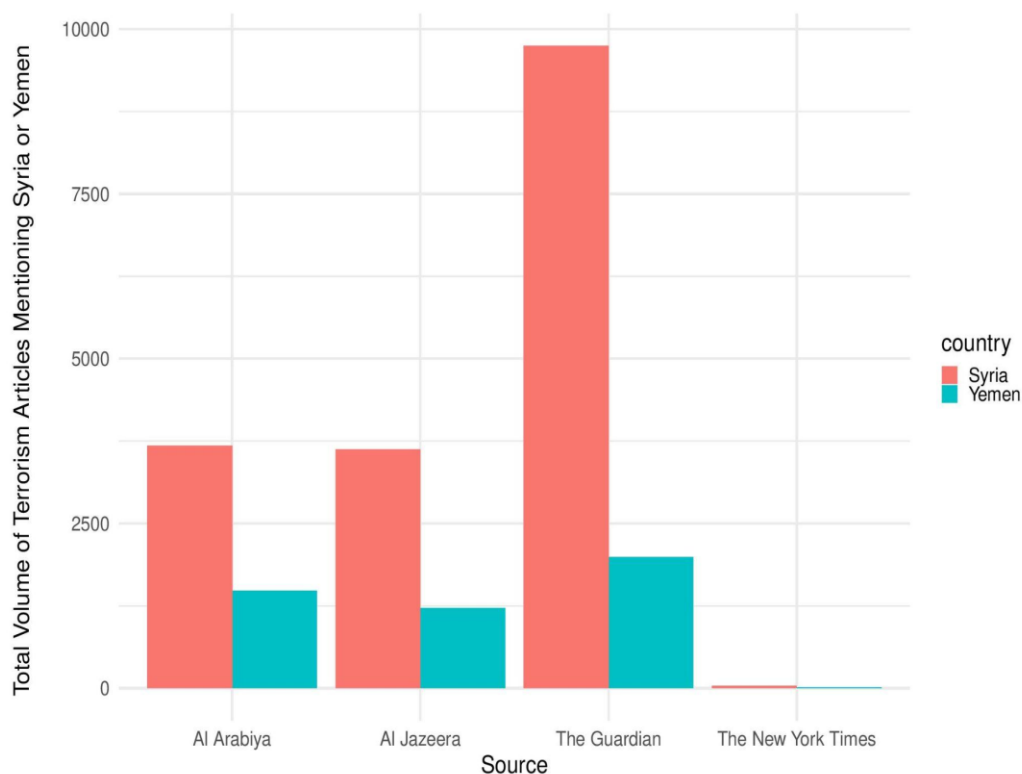*Figure 3:* Total Volume of Migration Articles

Figure 4: Total Volume of Terrorism Articles

It is also useful to see how the volume of articles for each conflict and newspaper changes over time. To accomplish this, the total volume of articles of Syria and Yemen for one newspaper were overlaid on top of one another in Figures 5 - 8. The first impression from these plots is that Syria articles are more salient than Yemen articles across all newspapers, affirming the results from the previous bar graphs, Figures 2 - 4. What is interesting to look at in the line plots is when the Yemen lines match or exceed the volume of Syria coverage. In Figure 5, the *Guardian* shows no time in which the volume of Yemen articles exceeded that of Syria. In the *New York Times*, shown in Figure 6, there are a couple of times when exceeding data occurs, roughly in Spring of 2015 and late 2019, the latter matching rather than exceeding Syria articles. In *Al Jazeera*, shown in Figure 7, there are a few significant moments that exceed Syria, specifically Spring of 2015, November 2017, and Fall of 2018. In *Al Arabiya*, shown in Figure 8,

there are also a few times where Yemen exceeds Syria in volume, also in Spring of 2015 and

October 2018. Additionally, *Al Arabiya*'s coverage in Spring 2015 is the largest increase

compared to the other newspapers at the time. These results show a lot about when Yemen

became more salient than Syria, which was over a consistent period in Spring 2015, right when

the Saudi-led coalition intervened in the conflict. There are exceeding Yemen articles in late

2017 for *Al Arabiya*, which coincides with the cholera epidemic, but no other newspapers reacted

the same way. The large amount of Yemen articles in the Fall of 2018 is a mystery. Overall, it

seems that the world, regionally and globally, only increased their coverage of Yemen

substantially when Saudi Arabia intervened. This tells a sad and difficult story about how the

international community has reacted to both the Syria and Yemen conflicts.

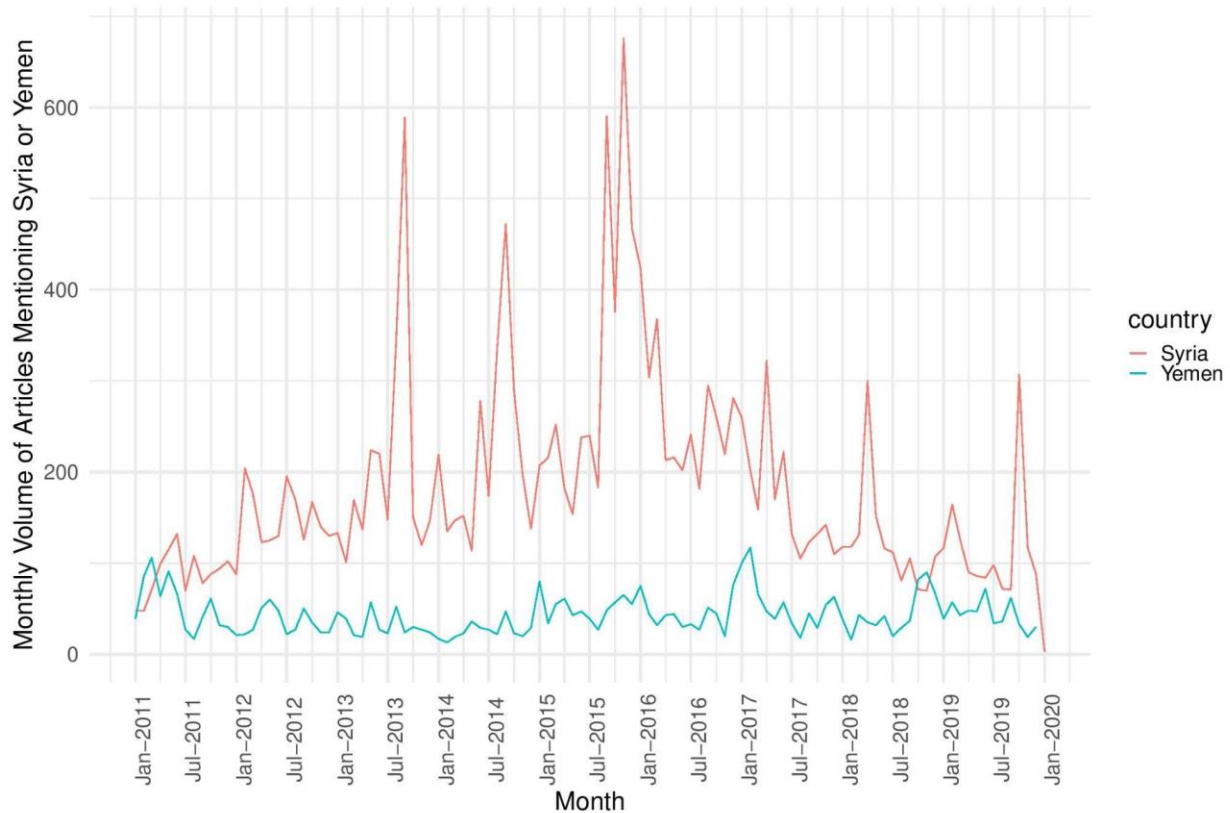*Figure 5: Guardian* Articles Mentioning Syria and Yemen

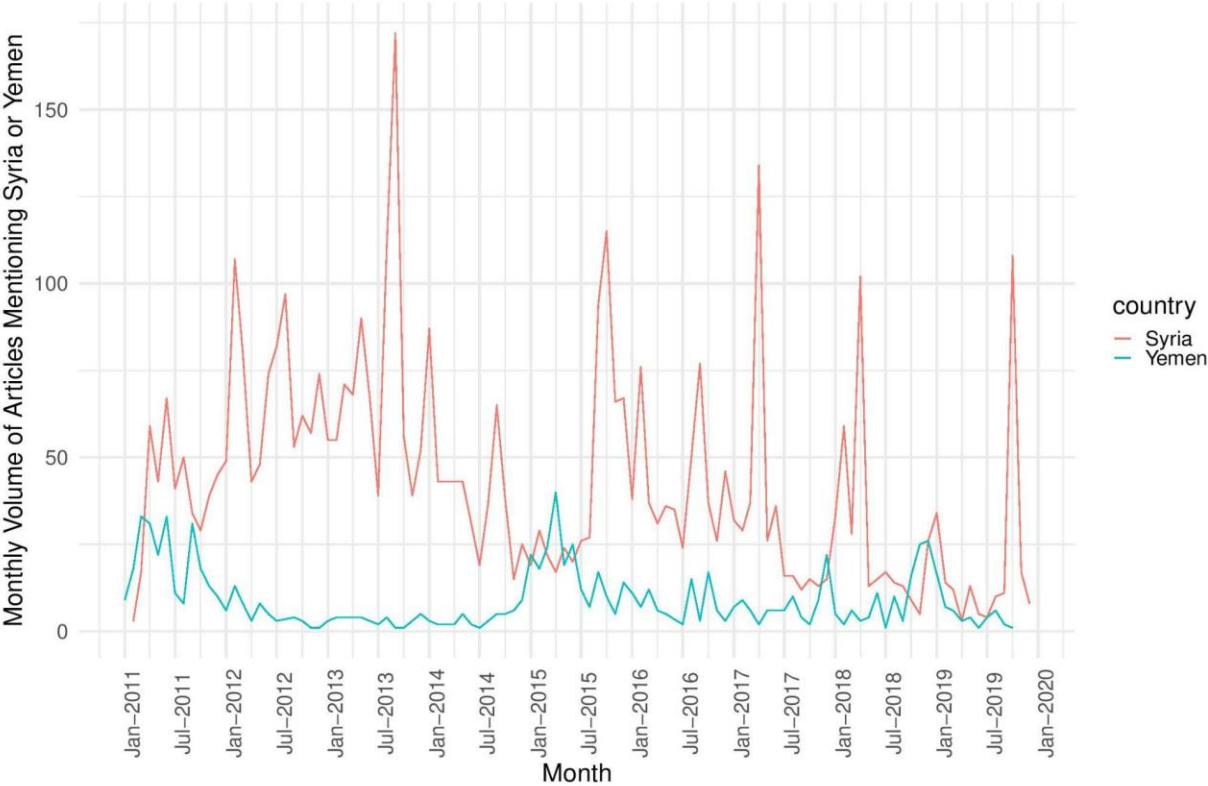*Figure 6: New York Times* Articles Mentioning Syria and Yemen

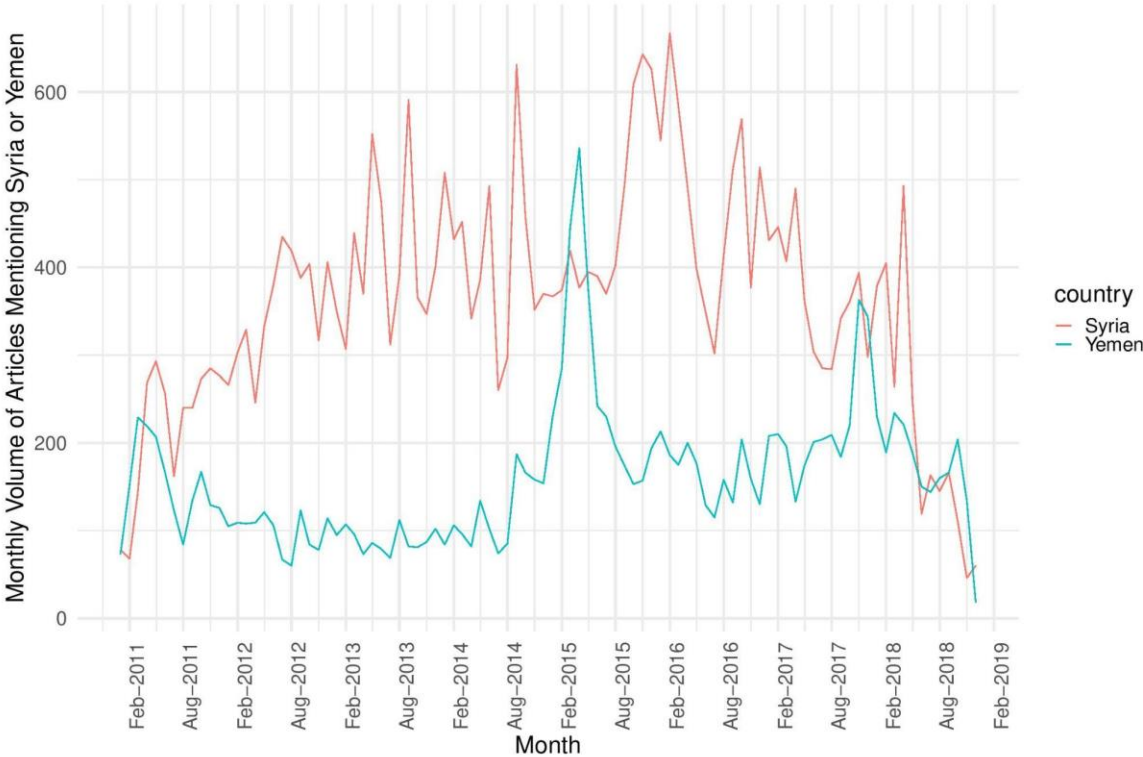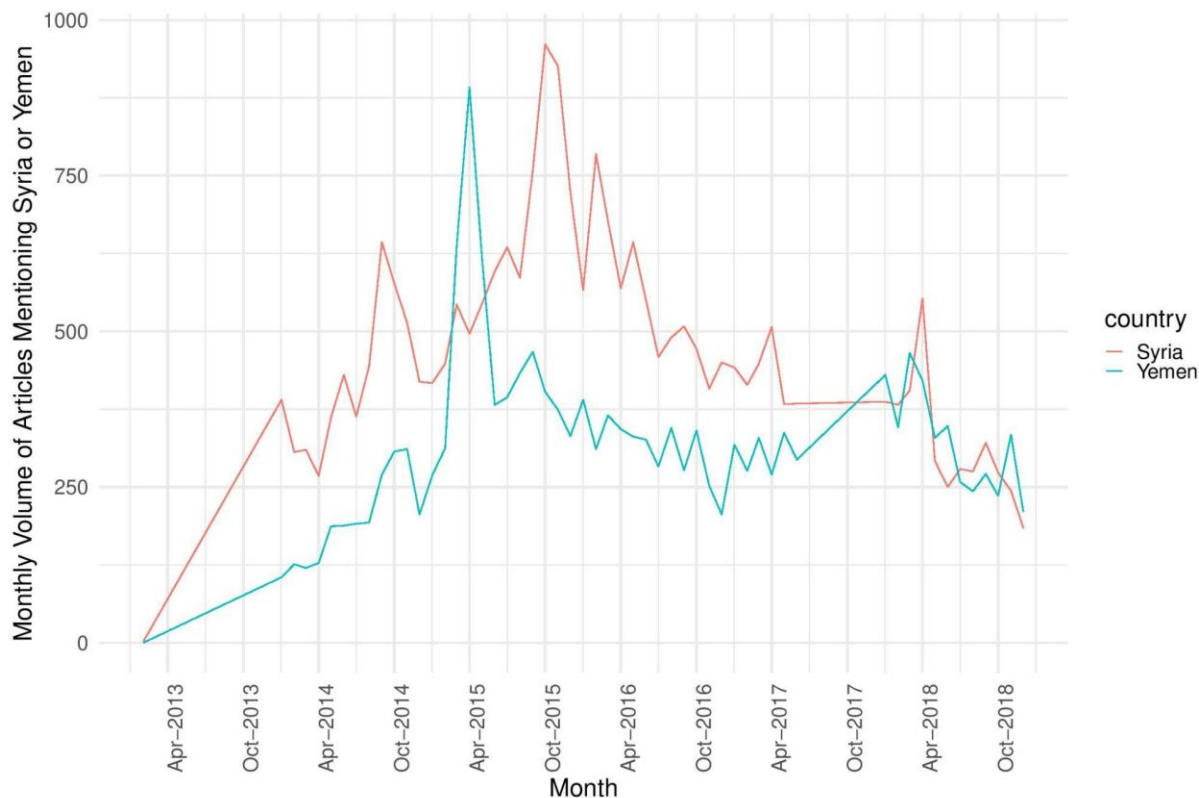*Figure 7: Al Jazeera* Articles Mentioning Syria and Yemen

Figure 8: Al Arabiya Articles Mentioning Syria and Yemen

Qualitative Analysis

From these large amounts of data that span decades, I analyzed news articles from a qualitative standpoint, to assess attitudes towards the two conflicts. To achieve this, I took a random sampling of ten articles from each newspaper regarding both conflicts, resulting in eighty articles in total to be analyzed. For this analysis, I looked primarily at the headlines for analysis. Due to data limitations, only the headlines were available for the *New York Times*, and I used this parameter for qualitative analysis of the other newspapers as well. But this parameter also had an added benefit, as most people who skim newspapers tend to look at headlines but are less likely to read the body text. Therefore, examining headlines qualitatively gives the most accurate and real-world findings. I coded headlines individually by a political tone, sympathetic tone, and if they discussed words related to war or terrorism. The purpose of these coding

categories was to assess how each newspaper viewed the two conflicts. Additionally, examining the Arabic-language news articles is especially helpful, as I read the articles in their original languages to understand the clearest picture of coverage tone. My goal for the qualitative analysis was to understand coverage tone for each newspaper and country, and how they were similar or different to one another.

For the *New York Times*, I observed that half of Syria articles expressed a sympathetic attitude towards the conflict, using words such as "aid", "nightmare", "protest". An example of this is: "For Those Who Remain in Syria, Daily Life is a Nightmare". Specifically, this sympathetic tone was directed towards civilians experiencing the war rather than towards the government or the rebels. Three out of ten of the articles used keywords relating to war and the military, and 2 out of ten were a daily update article that contained other, additional news. The three headlines that focused on war used "deployed", "missile", and "strike", one example being "Syrians Seen Dragging Missile". Regarding Yemen articles from the *New York Times*, half expressed a sympathetic tone, similarly to the Syria articles. These sympathetic articles use phrases such as "heavy toll", "famine", and discusses numbers of civilians killed. This did not match my initial expectations, as I believed that there would be more sympathetic articles towards the Syrian civil war. While that aspect was similar to the Syria articles, the remaining *New York Times* Yemen articles diverted quite a bit. Three of the Yemen articles focused on the U.S. role in the conflict, discussing the roles of the Senate and former Secretary of State John Kerry in the crisis. The sample of the Syria headlines did not directly mention the United States. This difference shows a politicization of one crisis over the other. One of the Yemen articles was part of a daily debrief, and the last headline was formatted as a question about the Houthis of

Yemen. This last article was of particular interest to me, since it represented a lack of knowledge about the Yemen conflict in American society.

Qualitative analysis of the *Guardian* articles was quite similar to the *New York Times*, much more than expected. Half of Syrian articles expressed sympathy towards the Syrian Civil War, using words such as "crisis" and "aid". The sympathetic articles almost exclusively use these two words, and sometimes these specific words are what carry the sympathy. Although these articles were generally sympathetic, they focused more on politics and policies from the United Kingdom regarding the war, rather than the humanitarian crisis. This is shown in the headline "Syria crisis blindsided UK government, says report". Of the remaining articles, three mentioned terrorism, one mentioned asylum, and the last mentioned war related keywords. Still, half of the headlines mention politics surrounding the crisis while expressing sympathy. There is a larger emphasis on terrorism and asylum in the *Guardian* as compared to the *New York Times*, despite some other similarities in the data. One headline states that "Syria terrorism cases on rise, CPS says" while there seems to be virtually no concern in the *New York Times*. Regarding Yemen articles from the *Guardian*, there were only two expressing sympathy for Yemen, a remarkable difference from its own Syria articles and Yemen articles from the *New York Times*. Additionally, two articles focused on the political aspect of the war, including commenting on how other countries have responded, specifically mentioning John Kerry and Russian President Vladimir Putin. The last two articles contained one explaining the conflict and an outlier. There is a state of misunderstanding or lack of knowledge of the conflict towards the Yemen conflict in both Western newspapers, as shown by the similar proportion of headlines posed as a question about Yemen.

Syria articles from *Al Jazeera* contained more and stronger sympathetic tones than the *New York Times* and the *Guardian*, with seven out of ten articles expressing sympathy to conflict in Syria. Important phrases that express this sympathy include: displacement, relief, crisis, warning, and facing problems. There seems to be more emphasis on specific problems Syrians experience, such as manufacturing problems, relief distribution, who is receiving support, and who is being displaced. In *Al Jazeera,* there is less focus on the international politics of the crisis compared to the Western newspapers. Two of the seven mixed their sympathetic response with political and diplomatic undertones, while two of the articles were purely political, and one was an outlier. While the Western newspapers were generally sympathetic towards the Syrian civil war, *Al Jazeera* expressed the most sympathetic response, even compared to *Al Arabiya*.

The comparison between *Al Jazeera'*s coverage of the Syrian war versus the Yemeni war shows a sharp reduction in sympathetic connotations, with four articles showing sympathy. These keywords focus on famine, hunger, crisis, poverty, and homelessness. Five articles focused on the politics of Yemen, about laws, truces, the Houthis, etc. There was also one article regarding terrorism. Coverage of Yemen seems to be more specific in mentioning famine, poverty, and homelessness, while coverage of Syria is more generally about the crisis and aid relief. The best example of this specificity is in one headline that states "Besieged by Hunger, Poverty, and Homelessness, University Professors in Yemen are Dying"

Al Arabiya's coverage of the Syrian civil war is largely unsympathetic, mostly focusing on the political aspects of the conflict. Their Syria articles also discuss topics regarding war and the military. Out of all the newspapers, *Al Arabiya* has the lowest sympathy towards the Syria conflict, and a large focus on the politics of the Syrian civil war. These types of articles reference democracy a couple of times and the role of world powers such as Iran and the United States. *Al*

Arabiya's response to the Yemeni civil war is also unsympathetic, although slightly more so than Syria. Three of the Yemen articles have a sympathetic response, specifically mentioning casualties and the cholera epidemic. Most of the articles, around eight, either mentioned keywords related to politics or war, and seem to emphasize the sectarian aspect of the conflict. *Al Arabiya* also heavily mentioned the Saudi-led intervention, directing sympathy towards the envoy. The newspaper largely paints the Saudi coalition as a hero saving the Yemen crisis who will find a solution to the crisis and warn people about the crisis, with headlines like "Yemen: International Envoy Leaves Sanaa and Warns of Wasting Time". This is unsurprising considering the strong connections *Al Arabiya* has to the Saudi government, essentially acting as its mouthpiece in the international community.

The qualitative analysis of each newspaper's samples has results that do not always confirm the previous expectations. While it's not surprising that each newspaper focuses on the foreign policies of their respective countries, it is unexpected the amount of sympathy given by the Western newspapers. Regarding the *New York Times*, the sympathy is fairly consistent, as both Yemen and Syria articles carry sympathetic attitudes toward the conflict, albeit with a slightly different focus, as the Yemen articles are centered around famine, casualties, and healthcare.

Summary of Findings

The findings described above cover a vast number of articles across four newspapers that have been synthesized to eight clear figures. Even though some of the results are surprising and others are not surprising, it does tell an interesting story about how media and conflict interact. In total, the findings can be summarized through these key points:

- In general, coverage saliency tends to coincide with foreign policy activity of a newspaper's home country and increases during key events, specifically increased migration flows and foreign interventions.

- Arabic language newspapers report more on Syria and Yemen than Western newspapers, yet this increased coverage does not create consistent sympathy for both conflicts.

- Western coverage is overall lower, yet focuses more on migration and terrorism, while also expressing consistent sympathy for those affected by the conflicts.

Discussion

Measuring both changes in saliency and content of the Syria and Yemen wars over time provides insight into the different coverage patterns, why they arise, and their real-world implications. While it is easy to understand when media becomes salient, it is more of a puzzle to pinpoint under what circumstances this saliency occurs. Still, they can be explained through understanding how foreign policy, domestic policy, media, and humanitarian crises interact.

In looking at the previous summary of findings, I will provide explanations and theories to understand the deeper meanings of the findings beyond the initial numbers. In general, the coverage saliency of all four newspapers seems to stem from a realist-oriented world view. The newspapers increase their coverage as foreign policy activity from the home country increases toward Syria or Yemen, regardless of the status of the war. These newspapers also cover the two conflicts more during key events, like surges of migration flows and conflict interventions from foreign powers. This focus on the foreign policy of home countries stems from a worldview of competition and conflict; these home countries are players making strategic moves in a confrontational world, and may be impacted domestically by key events. Of course, it is only natural to understand the world's problems in the context of your own country. However, doing

so can have benefits and drawbacks. This realist lens can help inform and empower citizens and policymakers to change foreign policy for the better, yet it can also overly politicize international conflicts and detract from the humanitarian reality of these crises.

By focusing on how Arabic-language newspapers display patterns of coverage saliency, the findings also provide insight into how government influences on media and media coverage interact. The Arabic language newspapers of this project reported much more on Syria and Yemen than its Western counterparts, and yet this increased saliency did not translate to consistent expressions of sympathy towards both conflicts from both newspapers. It is unsurprising that regional newspapers will report on regional issues, as conflicts geographically closer to a newspaper's home country can impact its citizens and even its media capabilities. But it is also interesting the sheer volume of articles regarding Syria and Yemen, and the stark difference between the volume of Syria and Yemen articles. Even though Syria is in the Middle East, it has little in common with Qatar or Saudi Arabia and is not as close as Yemen to these countries who host the Arabic-language newspapers. One possible explanation for this strong coverage of Middle Eastern countries despite cultural and local differences is the strong sense of Arab unity stemming from the Arab Spring. Even though Arab Spring agendas were domestic in nature, Arabs involved in the uprisings inspired other nationalities to protest injustice without challenging regional boundaries (Gause, 2011). This mutuality between Arabs of different nationalities has lingered and is what allows such increased coverage, as those in Gulf countries such as Qatar can relate with citizens in Levant countries like Syria, as they hold tightly to their Arab identity. Still, this worldview is overshadowed by the lack of consistent sympathy for Arabs impacted by both conflicts. Here, the findings provide evidence of deep politicization of the conflicts, coming from the government influences on Arabic language newspapers. Due to

the blatant biases and government influences, coverage is more concerned with furthering a certain foreign policy than helping their fellow Arabs. I initially expected some politicization from the Arab newspapers because of their financial origins but was surprised to see deeper politicization than anticipated. Government influences impede coverage that focuses on humanitarian crises within the conflict and how fellow Arabs are being harmed by overly focusing on political sectarianism between Sunni and Shia Muslims and between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Sectarian divides are key to understanding this data set of Arab newspapers, as Gulf countries like Qatar and especially Saudi Arabia are steeped in the sectarianism that has deepened since the Arab Spring has created new political and social space (Abdo, 2017).This shows that the consequences of government pressures on media outlets do not just affect political rights within a certain country but can impact people experiencing humanitarian emergencies in the region by impeding citizens from truly understanding the depths of crises and acting as an obstacle for true relief.

While Western coverage of the conflicts is lower compared to its Arab counterparts, the two Western newspapers report far more about migration and terrorism even while they express more consistent sympathy for those affected by the conflicts. Despite projected sympathy, Western newspapers and their home countries care more about the conflict when it could impact them domestically. Historically, migration and terrorism have been domestic and international concerns for the United States and the United Kingdom, particularly in the last 21 years. Particularly since 9/11 and the Trump administration, rhetoric about the Middle East has focused on these two themes. It is shown that saliency is clearly linked to domestic procedures, policies, and concerns. Additionally, countries like the United Kingdom, who have experienced more on the ground effects of refugees, vastly outnumber the other three newspaper for migration and

terrorism coverage. The more intense a country experiences one of these issues, the more they will report on them. While this isn't surprising, it is unexpected that *Al Jazeera*, the newspaper with the most coverage on Syria and Yemen, did not focus its coverage on migration nearly as much as the *Guardian*. Despite the record number of refugees fleeing from Syria, *Al Jazeera*'s sympathy is not focused on these migration flows. For all newspapers regarding Syria, coverage peaks as migration flows increase, particularly in the mid-2010s. Yet this coverage drops off once numbers stabilize, even if they stabilize at a concerning level. As of 2020, 6.8 million people were forcibly displaced from Syria (Buchholz, 2021), a number consistent since 2018. While there are still an extremely large number of refugees and displaced people due to these conflicts, coverage is far less salient as the numbers have stabilized. But just because the number of displaced peoples has stabilized in recent years, does not mean that there is not still a humanitarian need. Overall, the findings show that Western newspapers are much more concerned about migration and terrorism in relation to the Syria and Yemen civil wars, and they are concerned when migration flows increase.

The findings and their explanations carry important implications. Overall, we can see a general trend towards politicization of the conflicts and a focus on policies from respective home countries. While this tendency may seem natural, it must be stated that every decision in the media is intentional. It is not an accident that certain topics, countries, and conflicts receive more coverage than others or are expressed with certain attitudes. The danger of this politicization and domestic focus is that it distracts from the harrowing reality of humanitarian emergencies. This creates a lack of depth for these crises for anyone reading the newspapers: the public, policy makers, etc. That could have real effects on the equity of humanitarian aid distribution; unequal coverage of humanitarian conflicts can lead to inequity due to unequal funding of humanitarian

aid. Additionally, politicization of conflicts can prevent true, lasting resolutions from being formed. Of course, politics and diplomacy are inherent qualities of international conflicts. However, what is seen in the findings is an over-politicization of news, to the extent that it is the primary focus, particularly for the Yemen conflict.

<p style="text-align:center">Limitations</p>

There were several limitations. Many of these were impossible to avoid and had to be included to find quality results. For example, some of the newspaper data does not cover the entire 2011-2020 timeline, which creates some missing data. But in this case, capturing important events in the timeline can be more useful than capturing the entire timeline itself. While not all of the newspapers capture what I initially hoped for, the numbers still account for the vast majority of the timeline. Additionally, there is a small potential for Arabic to English translation issues due to the nuanced method of reading Arabic-language headlines.

Only looking at data from four newspapers that do not include other countries affected by the Syrian and Yemeni crisis creates an incomplete picture of how media impacts data. But for the purposes of this project, it is more feasible to limit the data to four popular newspapers. This is a limitation on the time and resources allotted for the project. Additionally, I acknowledge the fact that because there is only headline data available for the *New York Times*, there could be some inconsistent quantitative findings. Using only headlines for one newspaper could make the data for that particular newspaper lower than if body text was also included. However, this limitation was unavoidable. I decided to still include body text data for the other three newspapers because I wanted to capture as complete a picture as possible. Furthermore, the possible inconsistencies in data do not impact the amount of coverage; even if I was able to include body text from the *New York Times*, the relative coverage ratio would likely be very

similar. Overall, the limitations on the quantitative and qualitative data I collected and examined were inevitable, still the findings provide an interesting story about conflict media saliency.

Conclusion

Currently, there are 6.8 million people displaced from Syria and 3.6 million people internally displaced in Yemen (Buchholz, 2021; *UNHCR Yemen Country Factsheet - September 2021*, n.d.). Additionally, 20 million Yemenis, 66% of the population, depend on humanitarian assistance to live (*Yemen Fact Sheet, August 2021 - Yemen*, n.d.). Even though media coverage of these conflicts has declined steadily over the years, especially since the conflicts first began, these effects have remained. The media has chosen to not focus on crises that have remained the same, even though they are crises the same, just as the media consistently does not reflect the severity of refugee flows worldwide (Brandle & Reilly, 2019). Findings from this project specifically have seen uneven coverage of both conflicts and topics that distract from the respective conflicts, despite the different newspapers. These are both significant obstacles for the public to stay informed on the importance of the conflicts and its effects, as well as obstacles to equitable humanitarian assistance. According to the USAID, $14 and $4 billion, respectively, have been given to Syria and Yemen as foreign aid since the start of the conflicts. While this is just aid from one country, the United States is a significant donor to humanitarian issues around the world, and often sets the precedent for other countries' donation patterns. Additionally, the UN Security Council has been approached by a Yemen representative, stating that necessary humanitarian aid has not been delivered to an adequate level, leaving millions at risk (*Failure in Delivering Aid for Yemenis 'the Worst International Response to a Humanitarian Crisis', Civil Society Briefer Tells Security Council | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases*, 2021). These

humanitarian problems have remained since they began, and coverage of the conflicts have real world implications for citizens displaced by and living in the conflicts.

While the findings of this project show the differing saliency of these two conflicts over time, it also opens the door for more research to be done. Something unique about this project is the data collection and analysis of Arabic-language newspapers in relation to conflict. From the literature review, there seems to be a gap of scholarly research around the role of Arabic language media and how it affects regional and global issues, such as conflicts. Specifically, examining the tone that is utilized in Arabic-language newspapers could give a greater understanding of its influence on the Arab world and conflicts within. The growing presence of *Al Jazeera* in the Arab world is an additional incentive to research Arabic-language media. Another area for additional research is the connection between humanitarian aid distribution and media coverage, and how media coverage of conflicts can affect how much humanitarian aid is distributed to countries in need, specifically Syria and Yemen. Understanding this aspect better can give more insights into how, quantitatively, the amount of aid can increase or decrease with related media saliency. Another related area of further research is how migration responses fluctuate as media coverage changes, and what exact effect media coverage has on the response of host countries to increased migration flows. Of course, the effect of media can be hard to pinpoint and can easily become a feedback loop question. It would still be useful to have more measures of how they are related, and the impact media has on the world's response to crises.

As of the writing of this project, the world is witnessing a devastating Russian invasion of Ukraine. This invasion has forced millions to flee their country and find asylum in other European countries, and the media has been a key component documenting this exodus. However, the media rhetoric regarding Ukrainians fleeing their country or fighting for their

country is starkly different from the rhetoric of similar situations in the Middle East. This overwhelming sympathetic response from the media was not found in the findings of this project, and shows how different the media portrays Ukrainian refugees versus Syrian or Yemeni refugees. These preliminary observations show that the media and its choices of covering conflicts matter a great deal and are deeply influential, given the global outpouring of support for Ukraine. Critically analyzing how global and local media saliency and content changes throughout time can give insight into what the world deems important in terms of conflict. Just because the media gives stronger coverage and sympathy towards a war or conflict does not mean it is more important than others and does not mean those affected deserve more help or sympathy. Media saliency can and will have consequences for public opinion, domestic policies, foreign policies, aid, and interventions. In the hope of creating a more equitable and empathetic world, it is vital to understand how media can affect how a conflict is viewed and what responses occur as a result to ensure that those most in need receive relief.

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