Evolution of negative visual frames of immigrants and refugees in the main media of Southern Europe

Javier J. Amores; Carlos Arcila-Calderón; David Blanco-Herrero

Javier J. Amores ✉
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7856-5392
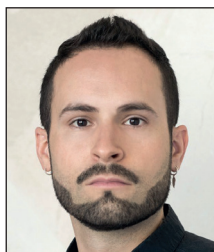
Universidad de Salamanca
Facultad de Ciencias Sociales
Campus Miguel de Unamuno, Edificio FES
Av. Francisco Tomás y Valiente, s/n.
37007 Salamanca, Spain
javieramores@usal.es

Carlos Arcila-Calderón
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2636-2849

Universidad de Salamanca
Facultad de Ciencias Sociales
Campus Miguel de Unamuno, Edificio FES
Av. Francisco Tomás y Valiente, s/n.
37007 Salamanca, Spain
carcila@usal.es

David Blanco-Herrero
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7414-2998

Universidad de Salamanca
Facultad de Ciencias Sociales
Campus Miguel de Unamuno, Edificio FES.
Av. Francisco Tomás y Valiente, s/n.
37007 Salamanca, Spain
david.blanco.herrero@usal.es

Abstract

The Mediterranean migration crisis especially affects three Southern European countries that represent the main gateways into the continent for immigrants and asylum seekers: Greece, Italy, and Spain. In recent years, feelings of rejection towards migration have been increasing in all of them, accompanied by a simultaneous increase in the number of hate crimes. Similarly, the representation of these groups in European news media seems to have worsened, especially since 2015, the year in which the migratory crisis significantly worsened. This coverage could be affecting European citizens on emotional, cognitive, and attitudinal levels and thus should be rigorously analyzed. The present study is based on the theory of framing and, specifically, on visual framing to analyze the connotative representations of immigrants and refugees spread by the reference media of Southern Europe through images, paying more attention to the negative frames in particular, which represent displaced people as a burden or threat. Specifically, 360 photographs taken between 2014 and 2019 and published by the main media in Greece, Italy, and Spain were subject to content analysis. The findings show a temporal increase in the negative visual frames of immigrants and refugees in the analyzed media. Differences were also found between countries, with Greece presenting a higher percentage of images with negative frames, as well as a greater predominance of this type of frame compared with the other countries. Finally, differences were identified between the media themselves, being the Greek Kathimerini the one that stands out for having a greater presence and prevalence of visual frames that represent inmigrants and refugees as a burden and threat.

1. Introduction

The massive entry of immigrants and asylum seekers into Europe since 2015 has awakened remarkable scientific interest in researching the answers that citizens, media, and public institutions are giving to foreigners, posing new challenges regarding their adaptation to social dynamics resulting from human mobility. Undoubtedly, the social response is determined by a set of social, economic, and cultural factors, but, to a great extent, it has been mediated by public discourses of acceptance and rejection reproduced in the media. Far from a "solidary" perception, the spread of negative frames in which these immigrants are considered a burden on or threat to the country or local culture should be noted, which helps to consolidate attitudes of rejection, as well as an increase in the amount of hate speech and crimes against this vulnerable population.

Moreover, this situation is worse in Southern European countries (Greece, Italy, and Spain), which have been the entrance for forced migration, especially during the so-called Mediterranean crisis, caused mostly by the massive movement of Syrian, Iraqi, and Afghan people, although thousands of people of other nationalities have also used this route to flee similar conflicts. In this regard, Greece, Italy, and Spain represent a rather cohesive group, sharing similar cultural features, but facing a common problem, as shown by the great media attention focused on immigration in recent years.

There is broad agreement in the scientific literature surrounding the way in which frames shared by the media play a determinant role in sensitive topics such as migration (**Muñiz**; **Igartua**; **Otero**, 2006; **Van-Gorp**, 2005; **Zhang**, 2005), and there is growing interest in understanding the role of visual framing in news coverage of these topics. Said interest is based on the acknowledgement of the huge impact that photographs can have on public attitudes, as well as the understanding of how a particular selection and organization of certain photographic attributes can influence different degrees of interpretation. In any case, there is an important gap in the research on how the most damaging visual frames and attributes (negative ones in terms of burden or threat) transmitted by the media have evolved over time in countries with similar experiences in the migratory crisis. The present study intends to fill this gap by analyzing the evolution of connotative visual frames about immigrants and refugees in photographs published by the main media in Southern European countries between 2013 and 2019.

In the following sections, this article conceptualizes the attributes that build these negative visual frames about immigrants and refugees: it explains the evolution of the rejection of this group in terms of attitudes, perceptions, and extreme discourses, it details the selection of a sample of photographs and subsequent content analysis, the obtained results, and finally, it discusses these results through the perspective of the existing literature in this field and the theory of framing.

2. Evolution of the rejection of immigrants and refugees in Southern Europe

We begin this section by contextualizing the different experiences of immigration in the three countries present in this study, especially the Mediterranean refugee crisis beginning in 2015. Traditionally, Italy has been mostly affected by African immigration, particularly during the Arab Spring in 2011, and with some very dramatic shipwrecks —in October 2013, a shipwreck near Lampedusa caused the death of 366 people and led to the launch of the Mare Nostrum Operation— before the media began to focus on the migration crisis in 2015. After 2015, Italy experienced a large increase in the number of arrivals using the central Mediterranean route, prompting a significant change in the country's migration discourse (**Stocchiero**, 2017). This migratory crisis had a particularly intense impact in Greece, with the largest volume of refugees, mostly Syrians coming from Turkey, entering the country, and subsequently taking the Balkan route towards other European countries. Greece not only overflowed due to the volume of arrivals, but also due to its weak economic situation, causing a more complex challenge (**Kaitatzi-Whitlock**; **Kenterelidou**, 2017) that reached crisis point and consequently warranted European-level measures in the form of the 2016 EU–Turkish deal to combat the problem and return migrants. Lastly, the beginning of the immigration phenomenon in Spain goes back to the beginning of the new century, between the 1990s and 2000s, with events such as the Cayuco Crisis in the Canary Islands in 2006, or various attempt to jump the fences of Ceuta and Melilla. The Syrian refugee crisis was seen more distantly (**Seoane-Pérez**, 2017), although it gained relevance as the volume of refugees taking the Greek and Italian routes dwindled after the EU–Turkish agreement and the closure of harbors.

The arrival of immigrants and asylum seekers to Europe has also been associated with an increase in anti-immigration and nationalist discourse and the influence of certain political parties (**Dennison**; **Geddes**, 2019; **Burscher**; **Van-Spanje**; **De-Vreese**, 2015). Both trends have led to a growth in media coverage of the topic of migration (**Georgiou**; **Zaborowski**, 2017; **Colombo**, 2018), which, in turn, could have influenced the support that these political parties receive (**Damstra et al.**, 2019). In this context, although negative media coverage of immigration can produce negative attitudes towards immigrants (**Eberl et al.**, 2018; **Schemer**, 2012), there is still no general consensus on the extent to which news frames, both textual or visual, can influence the attitudes that European citizens hold toward immigration, nor on the effect that these attitudes can have on the potential influence of media content. For this reason, it is important to continue to

explore the evolution of this discourse in the media, along with the framing of this discourse and the relationship with attitudes and perceptions towards immigrants and refugees.

According to the *Standard Eurobarometer* from November 2019 (*European Commission*, 2019b), European citizens resident in the three focal countries of this paper consider immigration to be the most concerning and relevant challenge faced by the European Union. Although this *Standard Eurobarometer* offers data about the Common European Asylum System (more favored by Spanish and Greek citizens than Italian) and the strengthening of EU borders (more favored in Greece than in Italy and Spain), the *Special Eurobarometers* offer more information of interest for this study, especially those related to immigration. The *Special Eurobarometer 493: Discrimination in the European Union* (*European Commission*, 2019a), from May 2019, shows that ethnic origin, skin color, or religion are perceived as causes for discrimination among European countries, although to a lesser extent than in the previous version from May/June 2015 (*European Commission*, 2015). That survey, taken before the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean, became a media phenomenon in most European countries, offered particularly negative views, with more perceived discrimination than in 2012.

A more detailed survey with data from October 2017, the *Special Eurobarometer 469: Integration of Immigrants in the European Union* (*European Commission*, 2018), contains the most up-to-date information about attitudes towards migrants and the potential influence of frames used in the media on these attitudes. The survey suggested that Italian, Greek, and Spanish citizens feel poorly informed about immigration, while tending to overestimate both the volume and proportion of illegal immigrants living in their countries. Moreover, Greek citizens have the most contact with immigrants, on average, along with Italians and Spanish citizens as well. This is understandable given that these three countries make up the main entrances to the EU —although, according to *Eurostat* official figures, their proportion of immigrant population is close to the average amount for European countries, highlighting their status as entry rather than destination countries. Regarding their attitudes at a national level, Spanish citizens generally claim to feel comfortable interacting with immigrants; Spain is second on the list of countries with residents claiming to have immigrants as friends or family members, while these values in Greece are well below average, and those in Italy are close to average. This trend is similar in most variables, with Spain being among the countries with the most positive attitudes towards immigration, perceiving integration to be successful and not considering immigration to be such a problem, whereas Italy and Greece show values close to or even below the average in these matters.

In the majority of studies analyzing Western perceptions of immigrants and refugees, a connection is made between negative attitudes and the perception of these groups as a burden on or threat to the host societies. This is the case for a study conducted by the *Pew Research Center* in 2016, researched and written during the migratory crisis in Europe and the Mediterranean entitled "Europeans fear wave of refugees will mean more terrorism, fewer jobs." According to this study, European sentiment towards refugees is predominantly negative in most Western countries, mostly due to the perception of these minorities as a threat. As seen in Table 1, results from this investigation show that, within Southern Europe, Spain is the country where a smaller percentage of citizens consider refugees a burden or threat. Meanwhile, Italy is the country in which a greater percentage of citizens consider refugees a threat, and Greece is the country in which a greater percentage consider them a burden. Negative attitudes toward refugees are linked to economic aspects of a country, as well as to their rate of terrorism or crime, as European citizens see newcomers as a threat, both to economic prosperity and to peace, respect, and social welfare.

> Greek citizens have the most contact with immigrants, on average, along with Italians and Spanish citizens as well. This is understandable given that these three countries make up the main entrances to the EU

Table 1. Negative perceptions about refugees in Southern Europe in 2015

Country/question	Refugees are a burden on our country because they take our jobs and social benefits	Refugees in our country are more to blame for crime than other groups	Refugees will increase the likelihood of terrorism in our country
Spain	40%	13%	40%
Italy	65%	47%	60%
Greece	72%	30%	55%

Source: Spring 2016 Global attitudes survey, Q51a-c. In: Wike, Richard; Stokes, Bruce; Simmons, Katie (2016). "Europeans fear wave of refugees will mean more terrorism, fewer jobs." *Pew Research Center*, 11.

The *Pew Research Center* is also responsible for the *Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey*, in which the surveyed are asked whether they perceive immigration as a strength or burden, concluding that most citizens from the 18 main destination countries for immigrants believe that these people make their countries stronger. This was the case in Spain, but not in Italy or Greece, two of the countries that demonstrated the most negative opinions in this category. Similarly, there was a minority in Spain that reported perceiving immigrants as a threat, as more responsible for crimes than other groups, or as stimulating terrorism in the country, while in Italy, and especially Greece, negative responses increased significantly (Table 2). These results show an increase in negative perceptions that identify immigrants as a burden for European countries, especially in Greece. To sum up, these data suggest that negative attitudes towards displaced people can be influenced by sociodemographic, political, and media context, given that the migratory pressure is higher in these countries than in other parts of Europe.

Table 2. Negative perceptions about refugees in Southern Europe in 2017

Country/question	Refugees are a burden on our country because they take our jobs and social benefits	Refugees in our country are more to blame for crime than other groups	Refugees will increase the likelihood of terrorism in our country
Spain	37%	29%	41%
Italy	54%	44%	60%
Greece	74%	59%	65%

Source: *Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey. Around the world. More say immigrants are a strength than a burden*.

These results allow us to contextualize the relationships that these countries have with immigration; however, partly due to social and digital media, attitudes of rejection are prevalent in these nations. Bearing this in mind, numerous studies have complemented their traditional survey research (**O'Rourke**; **Sinnott**, 2006; **Verkuyten**; **Mephan**; **Kros**, 2018) with analyses of the rejection or feelings shown towards immigration in social media (**Gallego**; **Gualda**; **Rebollo**, 2017; **Kreis**, 2017).

In general, the study of attitudes (**Esses** *et al.*, 2005), prejudices, and rejection towards immigrants (**Peherson**; **Brown**; **Zagefka**, 2011) is frequent in the area of Social Sciences, particularly in the analysis of racism, xenophobia, or prejudices towards the "other," the so-called *exogroup*. This concept has its origin in studies about social identity theory (**Tajfel**, 1978; **Tajfel**; **Turner**, 1979), explaining how the self-conception of a person comes from their belonging to a specific social group. Therefore, we must highlight the relevance of studies discussing rejection and negative attitudes towards immigrants and refugees, as it is these perceptions that can potentially be a precursor to more extreme forms of discrimination, such as hate speech (**Contrada** *et al.*, 2001; **Arcila-Calderón**; **Blanco-Herrero**; **Valdez-Apolo**, 2020). In fact, online hate speech has become a topic that has received great attention from academia (**Burnap**; **Williams**, 2015; **Davidson** *et al.*, 2017; **Valdez-Apolo**; **Arcila-Calderón**; **Amores**, 2019). This is largely due to evidence showing that online hate speech can act as a trigger for hate crime (**Müller**; **Schwarz**, 2018). In fact, a constant increase in the number of registered hate crimes has been observed over the last few years in each of the three countries studied herein (Table 3). Racism and xenophobia are always the most common cause of these crimes.

Table 3. Hate crimes registered by the police in Spain, Italy, and Greece (2014-2018)

Year	Spain	Italy	Greece
2018	1,598	1,111	164
2017	1,419	1,048	128
2016	1,272	736	40
2015	1,328	555	60
2014	1,285	596	71

Source: *OSCE. Hate crime reporting*.
https://hatecrime.osce.org

This evidence allows us to appreciate the relevance of analyses focusing on societal attitudes towards immigrants, especially rejection and hate speech. Research within Communication Studies has frequently approached the topic of mass media and its potential to influence society, particularly societies' feelings towards certain groups, such as immigrants (**Igartua**; **Muñiz**, 2004; **Marcos-Ramos** *et al.*, 2014; **Cheng** *et al.*, 2014) or other ethnic minorities (**Entman**, 1992) through the use of theories such as agenda-setting or framing. In recent years, these theories have been applied to social and digital media, such as the study by **Gil-Ramírez** and **Gómez-de-Travesedo** (2020) of the representation of immigration and the *Aquarius* case on *YouTube*, although it is true that traditional mass media (mostly press and television) still dominate this branch of research in Communication (**Borah**, 2011; **Matthes**, 2009; **Piñeiro-Naval**; **Mangana**, 2019; **Saperas**; **Carrasco-Campos**, 2015; **Vicente-Mariño**; **López-Rabadán**, 2009). Recently, there have been frequent studies using framing theory to study the representation of immigration in the media, especially in the context of the aforementioned migratory crisis (**Greussing**; **Boomgarden**, 2017; **Amores**; **Arcila-Calderón**; **Stanek**, 2019). In the present article, we follow this line of work.

3. Connotative visual frames

As noted above, framing is one of the theories most widely used in the Social Sciences to study the representation of immigration in the media. This is because it allows a broad approach, with the ability to focus on topic selection, or even on denotative element selection within the news, as well as on more formal aspects involved in the construction of frames, such as the symbolic representation that they transmit or their ideological intention, and finally on the effects these frames have on the audience. The basis of this theory is focused on the different effects that media coverage can have on public opinion, as the media actively set the reference frames used by the audience to interpret and discuss public events (**Tuchman**, 2002; **Weaver**, 2007). Currently, it is considered that no media outlet can escape from this framing process in its informative activity via selecting and prioritizing some elements or attributes over others (**Entman**, 1993).

This also suggests that news content cannot be seen as free from ideological influence (**Fahmy**, 2010; **Gamson** *et al.*, 1992; **Tuchman**, 2002) given its intrinsic mediated, rather than immediate, nature.

However, these processes do not only occur on the textual level that has been focused on since its creation; rather, framing is equally used more frequently and accurately for graphic and audiovisual news content. Media professionals are aware that the iconic, symbolic, and expressive weight of photography is more significant than that of any written text (**Mandell**; **Shaw**, 1973; **Messaris**; **Abraham**, 2001; **Ramírez-Alvarado**, 2011), particularly nowadays, when societies have become more visual than ever due to content overload and its increasingly ephemeral nature. Given the iconic nature of photography, photographs always seem closer to the truth, so much so that spectators tend to ignore the possibility of there being a biased construction with an underlying symbolic and ideological reality (**Bock**, 2017; **Rodríguez**; **Dimitrova**, 2011). Images are easier to interpret by the public as they does not require previous knowledge of representation rules (**Zillmann**; **Gibson**; **Sargent**, 1999), making them the perfect tool to frame, transmit, reinforce, or construct ideas and perceptions.

In this light, it is surprising that visual analysis is not more common in the Social Sciences. Specifically, **Palacios** (2015) remarks that, among all the studies based on framing, only 17% focus on visual aspects. Furthermore, this proportion seems to be even smaller in Spanish research, given that, as **Piñeiro-Naval** and **Mangana** (2019) point out, only 6.7% of framing studies in Spanish–American journals indexed in *Scopus* conduct visual

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analyses, while 51% carry out textual ones. Most efforts to study visual elements using framing theory only focus on the denotative level, without identifying the implicit reality transmitted, maybe due to the complexity of dealing with this connotative reality in a reliable and replicable way. This is directly connected with the model of the study of visual frames presented by **Rodríguez** and **Dimitrova** (2011), in which four possible levels of analysis are introduced; denotative, stylistic, connotative, and ideological.

This text focuses primarily on the analysis of implicit representation that is transmitted by photographs of immigrants and refugees, as this representation will be responsible for the emotional and cognitive effects on citizens, and the influence of (or equally, the influence on) the ideological frame at the fourth level. Regarding this connotative level of visual analysis, it should be noted that, in any case, it will be motivated by the selection and emphasis of denotative elements within an image and, in the case of photographs of immigrant and refugees, by the defining features of the depicted subjects, such as demographic aspects of gender, age, skin color, religion, job position, or perceived ethnic origin, to the character within the photograph, including their expressions, acts, and behaviors (**Amores**; **Arcila-Calderón**, 2019; **Amores**; **Arcila-Calderón**; **González-de-Garay**, 2020). However, in this analytical process, if the connotative features transmitted in a type of image seem to be clear, and are reported as such, there is a chance to examine the third level directly, which can provide the most information about the potential effects of the image (**Amores**; **Arcila-Calderón**; **Stanek**, 2019). For this reason, the main goal of this study is to focus on the third level of visual framing analysis, to identify the way in which Southern European media connotatively represent immigrants and refugees in their photographs, and how this representation has changed over time.

4. Representation of immigrants and refugees in Western media

Given the media's capacity to cover events and transmit deliberate perceptions regarding these events and the main actors involved to the audience, it is relevant to pay attention to these representations, especially when they include vulnerable and historically stigmatized groups, such as immigrants and refugees.

In this regard, it seems that Western media have traditionally represented migrants in a negative and mostly prejudiced way (**Igartua** *et al.*, 2007; **Muñiz** *et al.*, 2006; **Van-Gorp**, 2005; **Zhang**, 2005), frequently connecting them with violent and terrorist acts, especially when the depicted migrants come from the Middle East or North Africa (**Kalkan**; **Layman**; **Uslaner**, 2009; **Corral-García**; **Fernández-Romero**, 2015; **Maataoui**, 2006; **Said**, 2011), which is where the majority of those arriving in Southern Europe are from nowadays.

Nonetheless, the current media and systematic representation do not seem to be so clear, especially when the main actors are mostly refugees or asylum seekers, rather than economic immigrants. In the current European context, with the continent in the middle of an unprecedented migratory crisis, Western media coverage of migration and refuge seems to diverge, depending mostly on the social, demographic, political, and economic context of the audience in the region (**Pantti**, 2016). Even though images in European media are expected to continue to depict refugees in a negative way, as they previously did with immigrants (**Esses** *et al.*, 2008; **Nightingale**; **Goodman**; **Parker**, 2017), this is not always true.

This is confirmed by recent studies that have analyzed the representation of migrants and/or refugees, in both text and images. During the current migratory crisis, Central or Eastern Europe media outlets continue to associate refugees with a notion of threat to the security and economy of the country. This happens particularly in Austrian media (**Greussing**; **Boomgaarden**, 2017), as well as in Czech and Slovakian media (**Kovář**, 2019). This negative coverage is also present out-

side European borders, such as in Israeli media, which not only represent refugees as a security threat but also seem to reify them using formal photographic techniques (**Tirosh**; **Klein-Avraham**, 2019). Canadian media also represent immigrants as criminals or terrorists, although, in this case, the *victimization* frame comes into play (**Stelian**, 2014). On the other hand, some European media seem to show solidarity with refugees, as the Spanish media did for example at the beginning of the refugee crisis (**López-del-Ramo**; **Humanes**, 2016). Moreover,

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Zhang and **Hellmueller** (2017) defend that there was a turning point in media coverage of the migratory crisis after 2015, after the publication in September of Aylan Kurdi's picture, the Syrian child lying dead on a Turkish beach, causing great international shock (**Nightingale**; **Goodman**; **Parker**, 2017). These authors highlight the differences between the representations of migration by *CNN International* and *Der spiegel* after this publication. While international media depicted refugees in a more humanized way, German media amplified the representation of refugees as a security threat, transmitting the need to control and decrease the presence of refugees in images while increasing the presence of security forces. This change in informative frames after 2015 has also been pointed out by other authors, such as **Lenette** and **Cleland** (2016) or **Greenwood** and **Thomson** (2020), although they describe the changing frames not only as notions of symbolic or real threats, but also in terms of a potential burden, as the photographs seem to be loaded with large amounts of people fleeing wars or persecution, located at borders or on boats (**Greenwood**; **Thomson**, 2020). These denotative elements frequently transmit two main ideas, namely displaced people as victims and a burden to society.

These examples illustrate the heterogeneity, complexity, and variability of the media coverage of the migratory crisis, depending on the sociodemographic features and migratory pressures of different regions. Furthermore, this review allows us to conclude that the most recurrent frames in the media, at both a textual and visual level, are the following: those that represent migrants and refugees in a human and normalized way, those that depict them as victims, as an economic burden for the hosting society, and as a threat to security, as well as to the social and cultural values of Western societies. Nonetheless, as mentioned above, these frames vary depending on the media outlet and the social, political, and economic context of each country, as well as the editorial and ideological aims of each media outlet or institution.

For this reason, the present study analyzes the connotative representations of immigrants and refugees transmitted by Southern European mass media, focusing on four visual frames defined in previous studies (**Amores**; **Arcila-Calderón**; **Stanek**, 2019; **Amores**; **Arcila-Calderón**; **González-de-Garay**, 2020):

- *normalization*,
- *victimization*,
- *burden*, and
- *threat*.

Among these, it is understood that the two negative frames are *burden* and *threat*, which can promote reification and dehumanization of immigrants and refugees (**Stelian**, 2014), as well as a potential increase in feelings of fear within host societies, which at the same time could lead to behaviors that attack the social welfare of immigrants and refugees. Nevertheless, although the *normalization* and *victimization* frames can have a more positive effect on these feelings and attitudes, this has yet to be confirmed, and in fact some studies suggest that frames that victimize migrants also tend to contribute to their dehumanization (**Stelian**, 2014), despite being able to improve positive attitudes by increasing empathy and positive emotions (**Parrott** *et al.*, 2019). Meanwhile, the *normalization* frame is considered to depict displaced people in the most humanized way, but the effect on societal opinion could indeed be the opposite, generating a negative response in the audience due to comparisons mediated by initial prejudices or lack of empathy. However, these effects still need to be proven empirically, as is planned in later phases of this research.

As mentioned above, the main goal of this study is to explore the way in which immigrants and refugees are connotatively depicted in images used by Southern European media during the migration crisis in Europe and the Mediterranean, with the aim of identifying potential differences between the three most affected countries —Spain, Italy and Greece— as well as possible changes in media coverage over time. Thus, according to the review, there has been an increase in negative feelings and attitudes, as well as a rejection of displaced people since the beginning of the crisis, along with views that consider migrants and refugees as a burden on or threat to the host societies. Furthermore, the incidence of hate crimes in the three countries studied has continuously increased over recent years, possibly due to an increasingly negative media and institutional discourse (**Vollmer**; **Karakayali**, 2018; **Esses**; **Hamilton**; **Gaucher**, 2017). Even though representations of refugees tend to be more divergent and benevolent than that of immigrants, this representation also seems to have worsened in recent years, especially after 2015, when the migratory crisis deteriorated and requests for asylum rapidly increased (**Amores**; **Arcila-Calderón**; **Stanek**, 2019). For this reason, the following hypothesis is proposed:

> H1: There has been a temporal increase in the presence of negative connotative visual frames of immigrants and refugees in Southern European media since the beginning of the migratory crisis.

Furthermore, despite this negative trend in the attitudes of citizens and the representation of migration in European media, as mentioned above, this does not occur similarly in each region; the most apprehensive attitudes have developed in the areas most affected by the massive arrival of immigrants (**Hangartner** *et al.*, 2017; **Hopkins**, 2010). At the same time, media coverage of the migratory crisis seems to be conditioned by contextual elements. Thus, the most negative representations of displaced people occur are presented by media outlets located in the geographic areas most affected by the migratory crisis, or in areas with specific sociopolitical and economic circumstances, such as some Central and Eastern European countries. This has been proven by several studies that identify a more negative and biased coverage of the migratory crisis in the media in Germany compared with other countries that are less affected by migratory pressure, perhaps due to Germany receiving the largest number of asylum requests per year (**Zhang**; **Hellmueller**, 2017; **Amores**; **Arcila-Calderón**; **Stanek**, 2019). Bearing this and the different attitudes and perceptions towards migration in each territory in mind, we expect to find statistical differences between the perceived representation of immigrants and refugees in the three Southern European countries analyzed in this work. We thus present the following hypothesis:

> H2: There are differences in the presence of negative visual frames of immigrants and refugees transmitted in different Southern European countries during the migratory crisis.

Finally, the coverage seems to be dependent not only on the geographical context but also on the ideological aim of each media outlet and institution. This is shown by the fact that the most negative informative frames about migration are not only sourced from media in countries with high migratory pressure but also those in which anti-immigration discourses and policies are most well accepted. For this reason, alongside national differences, it is important to explore the potential differences between media outlets, given that the coverage of the crisis might be more influenced by the editorial line of each media outlet than by the country in which it is located. Bearing this in mind, the following research question is posed:

> RQ1: Are there differences in the presence of negative visual frames of immigrants and refugees transmitted by each of the analyzed media?

5. Methods

5.1. Sample

Content analysis was conducted to examine the connotative visual frames of immigrants and refugees in the main news media in the Southern European countries most affected by the consequences of the migratory crisis. Content analysis is one of the most reliable quantitative tools for studying news coverage and the representation of social actors in the media (**Neuendorf**, 2002). Therefore, the unit of analysis in this article is each of the informative photographs depicting immigrants and/or refugees published between 2014 and 2019 by digital versions of the most representative mass media in Spain, Italy, and Greece. The specific media were selected using the following criteria: (i) a well-known, general information media outlet with the largest possible number of readers, (ii) with a digital platform, preferably recognized by *Google News*, (iii) with relevant use of photography, (iv) a large distribution, transcendence, and influence in European public opinion, and finally, (v) with the presence of different editorial lines, contributing to the end goal of collecting a reliable and representative sample of different content focused on migration and asylum seekers published in each country.

According to these requirements, the final selection for each of the countries included: *El país* and *El mundo* in Spain, *La repubblica* and *Corriere della sera* in Italy, and *Ta nea*, *To vima*, and *Kathimerini* in Greece. For the Greek media, images from three digital media outlets were used: a leading conservative newspaper, *Kathimerini*, and two outlets with center-left editorial lines, added to contrast with the previous one. This was necessary given that none of the more progressive media had a large enough sample size during the years in question. With this in mind, photographs for the sample in each year were selected, taking care to maintain the same representation in each media outlet.

Once the media outlets had been selected, photographs were collected through *Google News* and temporal search criteria for each of the chosen media outlets, within a time range of one year from 2014. Boolean operators were used to search the site within the determined time range. In short, to locate the specific content on immigrants and refugees, the search was carried out using predefined keywords in each of the three languages. The terms used were the following: refuge, migration, immigration, refugee (masculine, feminine, singular, and plural forms), migrant/s, immigrant/s. However, for one of the media outlets, *El mundo*, images could not be collected through *Google News*, since it was no longer included in the news aggregator portal in recent years. For this reason, photographs from this outlet were compiled directly from its website, where it offers a library section with a search engine. In this case, the same temporal search strategy was followed using the preestablished terms.

Once the indexed images with the key words in each of the predetermined years had been located, we collected the first ten photographs published each year from each of the media outlets in which immigrants and/or refugees appeared, paying attention to the chronological order of appearance with relevant criteria. For the Greek media outlets, ten images were collected from each year from *Kathimerini* (conservative) and five from each of the other two media, *Ta nea* and *To vima* (center-left).

Finally, the same number of units of analysis from each media outlet (or editorial line in the Greek case) and country were obtained. In total, a sample of ten images was collected for each media outlet (or editorial line) and year, 20 in each country and year (60 images in total from each media outlet or editorial line, and 120 in each country), contributing to a sample of 60 photographs from each year (2014–2019), with a total of 360 images (Table 4).

Table 4. Distribution of photographs per media outlet and country

Country	Spain		Italy		Greece	
Media outlet	*El país*	*El mundo*	*La repubblica*	*Corriere della sera*	*Ta nea / To vima*	*Kathimerini*
Photographs	60	60	60	60	60	60
Country subtotal	120		120		120	
Total	360					

5.2. Instrument and measures

To carry out this study, the coding system designed by the authors in previous studies (**Amores**; **Arcila-Calderón**; **Stanek**, 2019; **Amores**; **Arcila-Calderón**, 2019) was used, based on the identification model of visual frames proposed by **Rodríguez** and **Dimitrova** (2011) that had been inspired by the coding systems previously designed by **Zhang** and **Hellmueller** (2017), **López-del-Ramo** and **Humanes** (2016), and **Muñiz** et al. (2006). Given that the goal of this work is to examine the implicit representation of displaced people transmitted in photographs and disseminated through Southern European media, and that the original instrument had three blocks including the analysis of the stylistic, denotative, and connotative dimensions of the images, for this work only the connotative analysis block was used. This block makes it possible to identify the four predefined connotative visual frames (*normalization*, *victimization*, *burden*, and *threat*) in the images of immigrants and refugees based on various attributes of their symbolic representation. Thus, the categorical system used for this work is divided into two main sections. The first is dedicated to the basic identification data of the photograph (*identification number*, *country of reference*, *news medium*, and *year of publication*), while the second section is dedicated to the analysis of the connotative dimension of the photographs (the third level of visual framing analysis). This section of connotative analysis, in turn, has four scales corresponding to each of the visual frames, each comprising eight connotative attributes, operationalized as dichotomous variables which may or may not be identified within the displaced persons portrayed in the photographs. Below is a summary of the categories that make up the coding system, as well as the attributes that make up the connotative representation frames:

A. Identification data
    A.1. Photograph number
    A.2. Coder number
    A.3. Country
    A.4. Media outlet
    A.5. Year

B. Connotative analysis of the photograph
In this section, the underlying connotative representation of immigrants and/or refugees is studied. To do this, four groups of eight dichotomous and accumulative variables were defined, with matching attributes implicitly connected to each of the predefined visual frames.

    B.1. *Normalization frame*: This identifies whether the immigrant/refugee is presented as:
        1=Humble/modest; 2=Honorable/supportive; 3=Open/tolerant; 4=Familiar/close; 5=Affable/friendly; 6=Integrated/adapted; 7=Hard-working/responsible; 8=Skillful/intelligent

    B.2. *Victimization frame*: This identifies whether the immigrant/refugee is presented as:
        1=Victim/innocent; 2=Vulnerable/defenseless; 3=Needy; 4=Excluded; 5=Stigmatized; 6=Wretched; 7=Miserable; 8=Martyr

    B.3. *Burden frame*: This identifies whether the immigrant/refugee is presented as:
        1=Potential burden; 2=Misfit; 3=Clumsy/uneducated; 4=Lazy; 5=Homeless; 6=Rude; 7=Profit-seeking; 8=Undocumented/illegal

    B.4. *Threat frame*: This identifies whether the immigrant/refugee is presented as:
        1=Potential threat; 2=Intolerant; 3=Conflictive; 4=Rebel/subversive; 5=Offender; 6=Fanatic/extremist; 7=Islamist; 8=Terrorist

The internal consistency of the connotative analysis section was acceptable for each of the predefined frames; specifically, the reliability coefficients of the scales were .82 for the *normalization* frame, .81 for the *victimization* frame, .77 for the *burden* frame, and .78 for the *threat* frame. In addition, the instrument showed acceptable average intercoder reliability (α_k=.71), as tested using the original instrument with three external coders. Specifically, once the mean of the reliability of each of the dichotomous categories was obtained, the level of agreement between the different frames was .75 for the *normalization* frame, .62 for the *victimization* frame, .70 for the *burden* frame, and .77 for the *threat* frame. In this regard, although the current work focuses mainly on the negative frames (burden and threat) and the average

Table 5. Intercoder reliability of the items in each visual frame

Normalization frame (α_k=.75)							
Humble/ modest	Honorable/ supportive	Open/ tolerant	Familiar/ close	Affable/ friendly	Integrated/ adapted	Hard-working / responsible	Skillful/ intelligent
.583	.843	.732	.784	.753	.855	.757	.683
Victimization frame (α_k=.62)							
Victim/ innocent	Vulnerable/ defenseless	Needy	Excluded	Stigmatized	Wretched	Miserable	Martyr
.576	.652	.679	.748	.762	.584	.526	.418
Burden frame (α_k=.70)							
Potential burden	Misfit	Clumsy/ une-ducated	Lazy	Homeless	Rude	Profit-seeking	Undocumen-ted /illegal
.892	.693	.814	.654	.566	.834	.542	.588
Threat frame (α_k =.77)							
Potential threat	Intolerant	Conflictive	Rebel/ subversive	Offender	Fanatic/ extre-mist	Islamist	Terrorist
.776	.624	.727	.683	.834	.825	.831	.884

level of agreement of the entire connotative block is good, the corresponding figure for the *victimization* frame does not reach the minimum threshold acceptable in the Social Sciences (.67), thus it should be noted that the results related to this frame should be interpreted with a degree of caution. The intercoder reliability of each of the items that make up the four frames is presented in Table 5.

Finally, to obtain a quantitative indicator of the predominance of each connotative frame in the analyzed photographs and media outlets, new variables were calculated by adding the values of the dichotomous categories that compose each of these frames. As each block had the same number of items, it was not necessary to standardize these measurements. Thus, the new variable capturing the predominance of each frame uses a scale from 0 to 8, where 0 corresponds to no presence of any of the eight possible connotative attributes and 8 corresponds to all the attributes identified in the unit of analysis, which would be the highest level of presence of the connotative frame.

Thereafter, the average presence of each of the frames by country, media outlet, and year was compared using the one-factor analysis of variance (Anova) statistical test to evaluate the hypotheses proposed above and answer the research question. Thus, in the descriptive analysis, it was considered that the identification of only one of the attributes of a connotative frame would indicate the inclusion of the frame in the unit of analysis, while for the inferential analysis, the prevalence scales of the frames were used.

> The coverage seems to be dependent not only on the geographical context but also on the ideological aim of each media outlet and institution

6. Results

Although the present work focuses on an analysis of the negative connotative visual frames of immigrants and refugees transmitted by Southern European media, which are expected to have increased in recent years, in order to capture more broadly the evolution and differences among media outlets and countries, the results were extracted for all the predefined connotative frames. Thus, in the first place and at a descriptive level, the frequency of images with each of the frames is presented, including the photographs in which the presence of at least one of the connotative attributes was perceived. Note that the same photograph can transmit multiple connotative representations at the same time, thus encoding the attributes of different frames in the same unit of analysis.

In this regard, the most common frame that appeared in the analyzed photographs was *victimization*, with 81.7% (294 photographs), followed by *burden*, with 75.8% (273 photographs). The *normalization* frame appeared in 182 photographs (50.6%), and *threat* in 180 (50%), generally maintaining a similar presence. Regarding the evolution of this frequency distribution, a priori, there seems to be a significant increase in images with negative connotative attributes, for both *burden* and *threat* (Table 6).

Table 6. Distribution of percentages of images for each connotative visual frame and year

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Normalization	55%	41.7%	58.3%	63.3%	38.3%	46.7%
Victimization	85%	78.3%	80%	85%	83.3%	78.3%
Burden	40%	68.3%	76.7%	75%	95%	100%
Threat	21.7%	48.3%	40%	50%	70%	70%

However, breaking down these percentages by country, this evolution already presents divergences at a descriptive level (Graph 1). While there is a high and stable percentage of images where the attributes of *victimization* are detected in all countries, this does not occur with the rest of the frames, since the percentage of *burden* photographs in Greece is constantly higher than those containing *victimization* attributes, while the images with a *threat* frame increase in 2015, as well as in the final 2 years of the analysis. In Spain and Italy, both the *burden* and *threat* frames appear to increase gradually over the years.

The same occurs when exploring the distribution of percentages of the connotative frames by analyzed media outlet. A priori, differences are perceived between the media, even within each country (Graph 2). These differences suggest a higher percentage of images with *burden* and *threat* frames in media with a more conservative editorial line, although all the media show an increase in images with negative frames over the years.

Furthermore, the frequency distribution of the connotative attributes that make up each of the frames was explored to identify those that have increased the most in the images analyzed. In this regard, the attributes that stand out the most in the *normalization* frame are those that reflect the displaced as modest or humble, familiar or close, and integrated or adapted. In the case of the *victimization* frame, the attributes that stand out are those that portray the immigrant as needy, wretched, vulnerable, or defenseless, and as a victim or innocent. However, the frequency of all the attributes re-
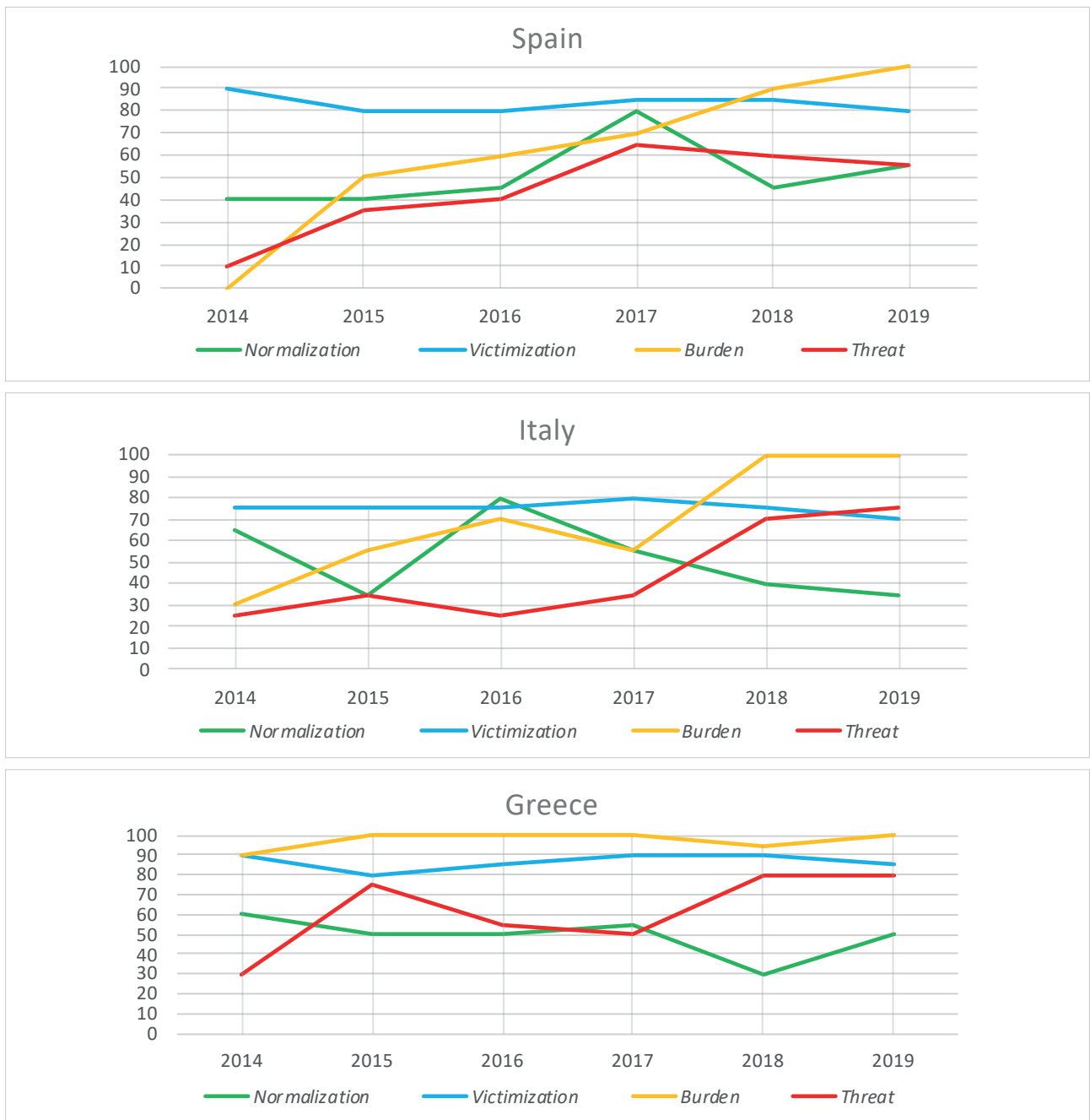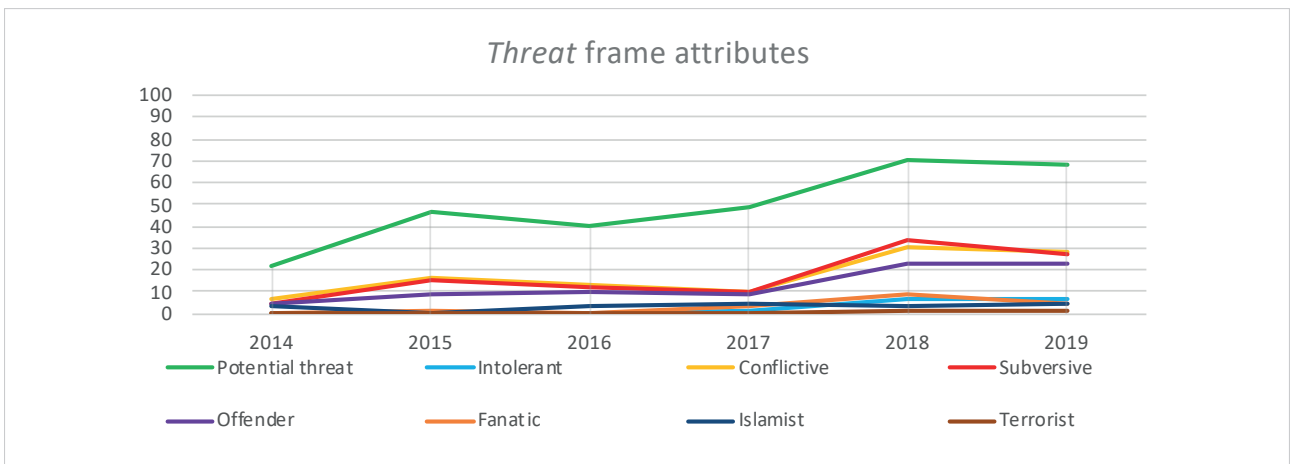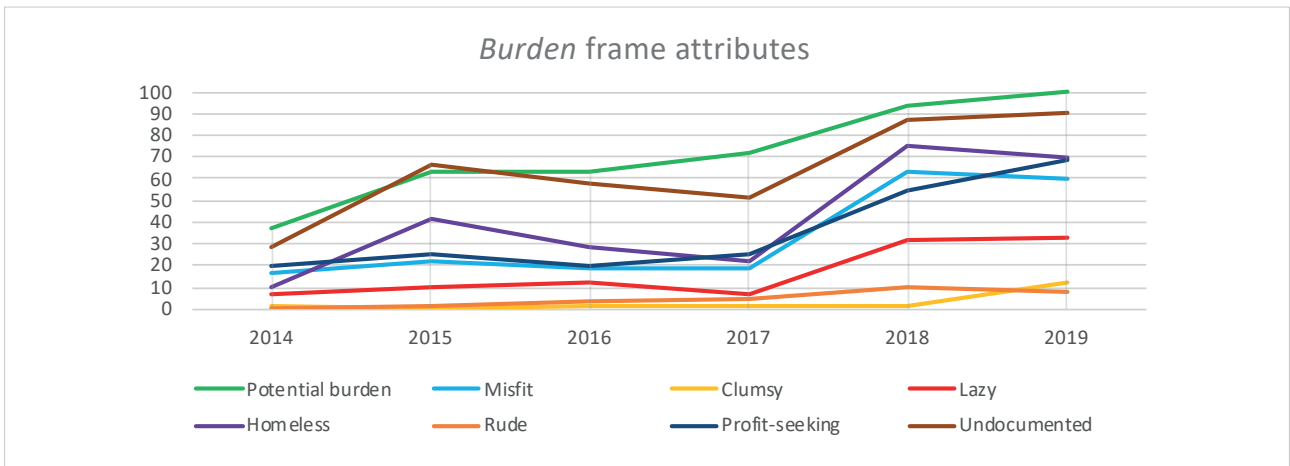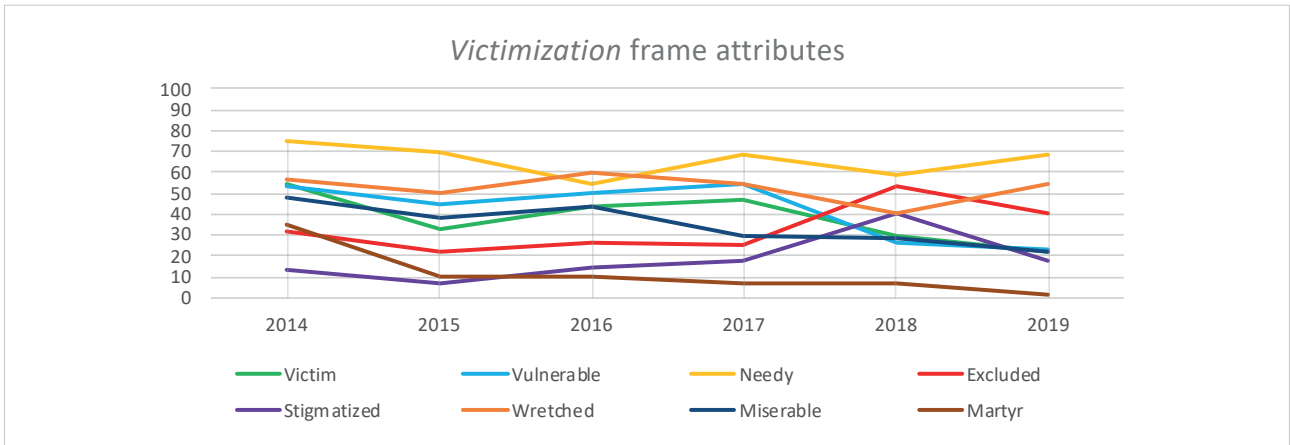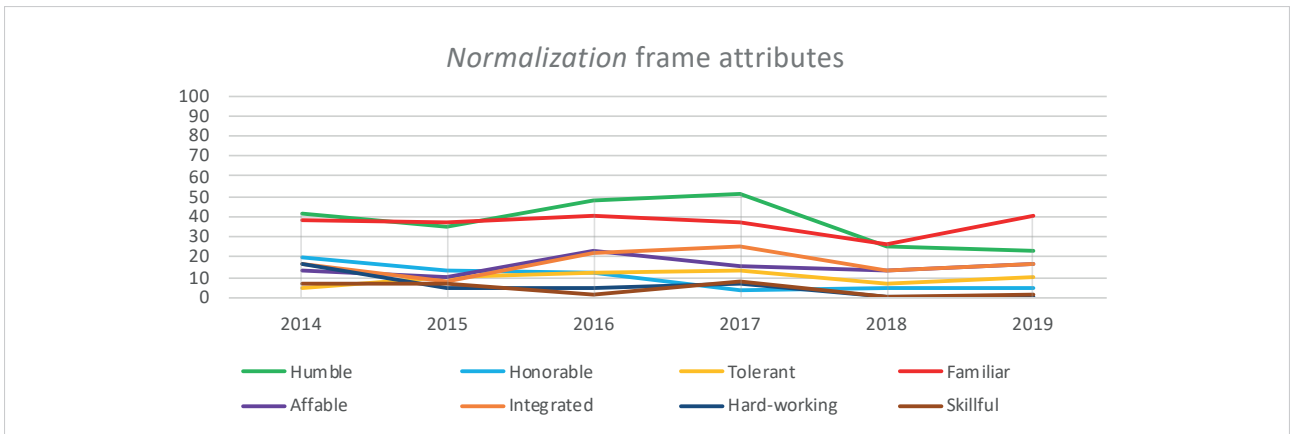

Graph 1. Evolution of the percentage of images with each connotative visual frame depicting immigrants and refugees in Southern European countries from 2014 to 2019

mains relatively constant through the years. This does not occur with the negative frames, where a gradual increase in all their attributes is perceived. In the case of the *burden* frame, the items that stand out are those that show the displaced person as a potential burden, as undocumented, illegal or without papers, as a misfit, and as a homeless person. Finally, regarding the *threat* frame, the attributes with the highest percentage are those that define the immigrant as a potential threat, as a conflictive, rebellious, or subversive person, or as an offender. In both cases, the aforementioned attributes are also those that exhibit the greatest increase over the years. The evolution of these attributes is shown in Graph 3.

Once this initial exploration has been carried out, it is possible to conduct an inferential verification of the proposed hypotheses based on a comparison of means. To do this, we used the variables that were applied to record each of the frames based on the sum of the connotative attributes present in the photographs.
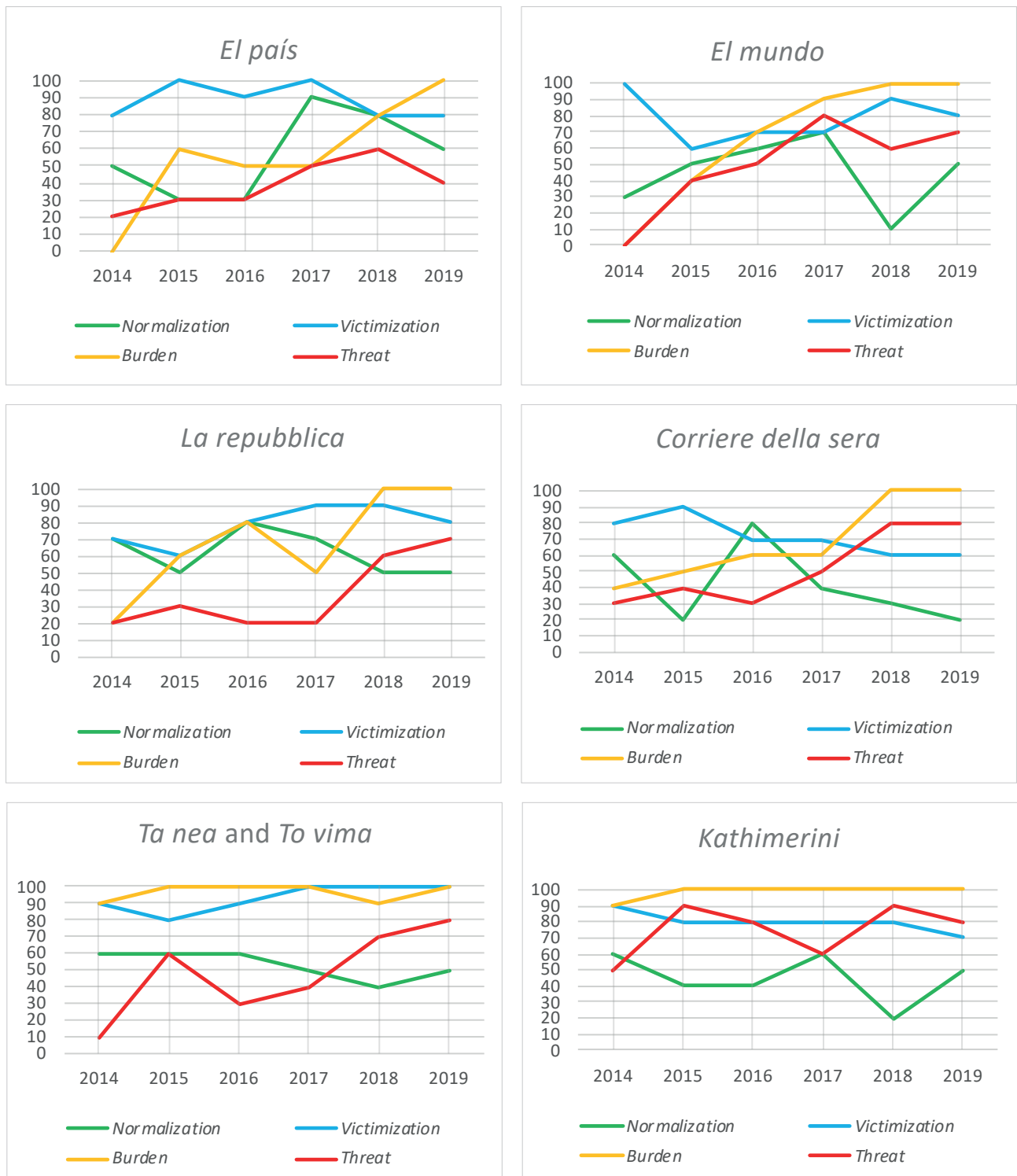
Graph 2. Evolution of the percentage of images with each connotative visual frame depicting immigrants and refugees in Southern European main media from 2014 to 2019

Graph 3. Evolution of the percentage presence of each connotative attribute corresponding to each visual frame in the studied images depicting immigrants and refugees from Southern European countries from 2014 to 2019
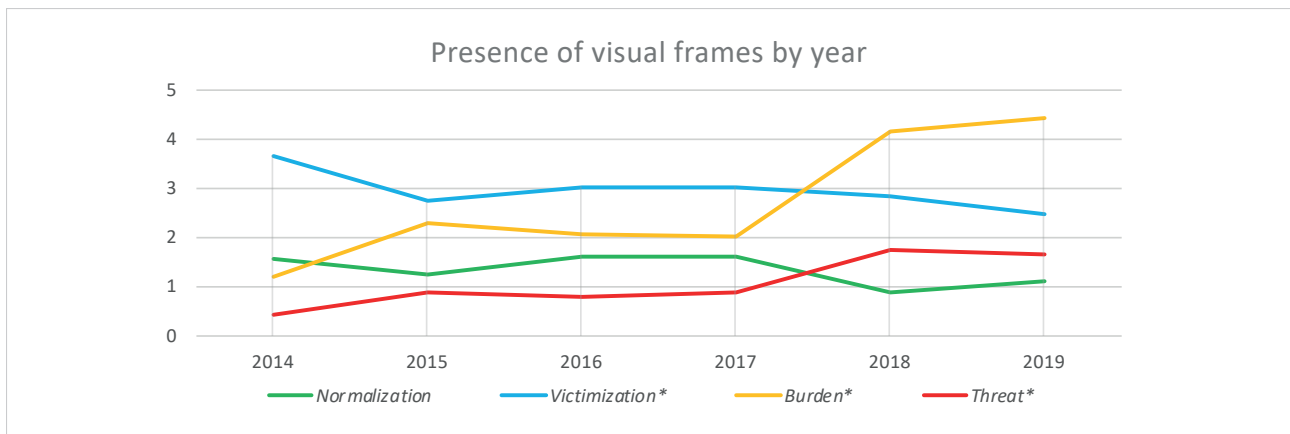
Graph 4. Comparison of presence of visual frames of immigrants and refugees by year

Regarding H1, which posits a temporal increase in the presence of negative visual frames of immigrants and refugees in Southern European media since the beginning of the migratory crisis, there were indeed temporal differences in both negative frames, i.e., *burden* [F(5, 354)=34.281, p<.01, η^2=.308] and *threat* [F(5, 354)=9.216, p<.01, η^2=.115], as well as the *victimization* frame [F(5, 354)=2.24, p <.05, η^2=.031], although in the latter case, there are only significant differences between the first (2014) (M=3.68, SD=2.45) and last year (2019) of the study (M=2.5, SD=1.86), with a large effect size [t(354)=3.113, p<.05, d=0.748].

Regarding the *burden* frame, significant differences were identified between 2014 (M=1.2, SD=1.78) and 2015 (M=2.3, SD=1.91), with a moderate effect size [t(354)=3.264, p<.05, d=0.596], and between 2014 and 2018 (M=4.17, SD=1.67) [t(354)=9.42, p<.01, d=1.721], 2014 and 2019 (M=4.42, SD=1.6) [t(354)=10.411, p<.01, d=1.902], 2015 and 2018 [t(354)=5.709, p<.01, d=1.042], 2015 and 2019 [t(354)=6.596, p<.01, d=1.203], 2016 (M=2.05, SD=1.88), and 2018 [t(354)=6.514, p<.01, d=1.192], 2016 and 2019 [t(354)=7.42, p<.01, d=1.358], 2017 (M=2.02, SD=1.86) and 2018 [t(354)=6.656, p<.01, d=1.216], and between 2017 and 2019 [t(354)=7.571, p<.01, d=1.383], all with a large effect size.

Regarding the *threat* frame, significant differences were found between 2015 (M=0.88, SD=1.19) and 2019 (M=1.65, SD=1.71) [t(354)=3.105, p<.05, d=0.523], between 2016 (M=0.78, SD=1.19) and 2019 [t(354)=3.51, p<.01, d=0.591], and between 2017 (M=0.87, SD=1.189) and 2019 [t(354)=3.17, p<.05, d=0.529], all of them with a medium size effect, and between 2014 (M=0.42, SD=0.93) and 2018 (M=1.77, SD=1.72) [t(354)=5.466, p<.01, d=0.976], 2014 and 2019 [t(354)=4.992, p<.01, d=0.894], 2015 and 2018 [t(354)=3.372, p<.01, d=0.602], 2016 and 2018 [t(354)=3.98, p<.01, d=0.669], and between 2017 and 2018 [t(354)=3.644, p<.01, d=0.609], all with a large effect size.

These results, which are visualized in Graph 4, confirm H1, as they prove an increase in the presence of negative frames in recent years.

Secondly, H2 posits the existence of differences in the presence of negative frames transmitted in the different Southern European countries. In this case, statistically significant differences were also detected in both negative frames, i.e., *burden* [F(2, 357)=36.646, p<.01, η^2=.170] and *threat* [F(2, 357)=5.45, p<.01, η^2=.029]. Significant differences were also observed in the *victimization* frame [F(2, 357)=10.799, p<.01, η^2=.057], between Spain (M=3.63, SD=2.26) and Italy (M=2.89, SD=2.18), with a moderate effect size [t(357)=2.776, p<.05, d=0.333], and between Spain and Greece (M=2.41, SD=1.62), with a large effect size [t(357)=4.610, p<.01, d=0.620].

For the *burden* frame in particular, differences were detected between Spain (M=2.01, SD=2.20) and Greece (M=3.93, SD=1.63) [t(357)=7.639, p<.01, d=0.991], and between Italy (M=2.13, SD=1.97) and Greece [t(357)=7.143, p<.01, d=0.995], both with a large effect size. Regarding the *threat* frame, significant differences were found between Spain (M=0.89, SD=1.26) and Greece (M=1.41, SD=1.63) [t(357)=2.841, p<.05, d=0.357], and between Italy (M=0.88, SD=1.32) and Greece [t(357)=2.917, p<.05, d=0.357], both with a moderate effect size.

These results also confirm H2, since they represent statistically significant differences in the predominance of negative frames in the analyzed countries. Although such a difference is not perceived between Spain and Italy, both of these countries present differences compared with the Hellenic nation, where the presence of both negative frames is greater. These differences are presented in detail in Table 7.

Table 7. A comparison of the presence of visual frames of immigrants and refugees among the analyzed countries

	Spain		Italy		Greece	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Normalization	1.43	1.80	1.42	1.94	1.21	1.69
Victimization *	3.63	2.26	2.89	2.18	2.41	1.62
Burden *	2.01	2.20	2.13	1.97	3.93	1.63
Threat *	0.89	1.26	0.88	1.32	1.41	1.63

Finally, a research question was posed regarding the existence of possible differences in the presence of negative visual frames of immigrants and refugees among the analyzed media. In this case, as expected, once again significant differences were found in both negative frames, i.e., *burden* [F(5, 354)=15.351, p<.01, η^2 =.178] and *threat* [F(5, 354)=5.11, p<.01, η^2=.067], as well as for the

> Although such a difference is not perceived between Spain and Italy, both countries present differences compared with the Hellenic nation, where the presence of both negative frames is greater

victimization frame [F(5, 354)=6.927, p<.01, η^2=.089], in this case between *El país* (M=4.05, SD=2.13) and *Corriere della sera* (M=2.77, SD=2.34), with a moderate effect size [t(354)=3.486, p<.01, d=0.572], and between *El país* and *Ta nea* and *To vima* (M=2.88, SD=1.70) [t(354)=3.171, p<.05, d=0.607], between *El país* and *Kathimerini* (M=1.93, SD=1.40) [t(354)=5.753, p<.01, d=1.177], between *El mundo* (M=3.2, SD=2.33) and *Kathimerini* [t(354)=3.443, p<.01, d=0.661], and between *La repubblica* (M=3.02, SD=2.03) and *Kathimerini* [t(354)=2.943, p<.05, d=0.625], all with a large effect size.

For the *burden* frame specifically, significant differences were found between *El país* (M=1.93, SD=2.21) and *Ta nea* and *To vima* (M=3.62, SD=1.69) [t(354)=4.728, p<.01, d=0.859], between *El país* and *Kathimerini* (M=4.25, SD=1.51) [t(354)=6.508, p<.01, d=1.226], between *El mundo* (M=2.08, SD=2.21) and *Ta nea* and *To vima* [t(354)=4.306, p<.05, d=0.783], between *El mundo* and *Kathimerini* [t(354)=6.087, p<.01, d=1.147], between *La repubblica* (M=2.17, SD=2.05) and *Ta nea* and *To vima* [t(354)=4.073, p<.01, d=0.772], between *La repubblica* and *Kathimerini* (M=1.93, SD=1.40) [t(354)=5.851, p<.01, d=1.155], between *Corriere della sera* (M=2.1, SD=1.91) and *Ta nea* and *To vima* [t(354)=4.261, p<.01, d=0.843], and between *Corriere della sera* and *Kathimerini* [t(354)=6.039, p<.01, d=1.249], all with a large effect size.

Regarding the *threat* frame, significant differences were found between *El mundo* (M=1.05, SD=1.33) and *Kathimerini* (M=1.85, SD=1.77) [t(354)=3.149, p<.05, d=0.511], between *Corriere della sera* (M=0.98, SD=1.23) and *Kathimerini* [t(354)=3.413, p<.01, d=0.571], and between *Ta nea* and *To vima* (M=0.97, SD=1.34) and *Kathimerini* [t(354)=3.476, p<.01, d=0.561], with a moderate effect size; and between *El país* (M=0.73, SD=1.16) and *Kathimerini* [t(354)=4.398, p<.01, d=0.748], and between *La repubblica* (M=0.78, SD=1.42) and *Kathimerini* [t(354)=4.201, p<.01, d=0.667], both with a large effect size. The differences between the means are presented in Table 8.

These results confirm that there are indeed differences between the different media in Southern Europe in the way they connotatively represent immigrants and refugees. The Greek media outlet *Kathimerini* stands out regarding both negative frames, with a greater presence of negative frames than the other analyzed media. Similarly, this medium has the lowest presence of the *victimization* frame. Thus, as pointed out in the initial review, the differences seem to indicate a greater presence of negative frames in media with a more conservative editorial line, even in media from the same country, such as Greece, since *Kathimerini* shows a significantly higher presence of the *threat* frame when compared with the two center-left media in the same country, *Ta nea* and *To vima*.

Table 8. Comparison of the presence of visual frames of immigrants and refugees among the analyzed media

	El país		El mundo		La repubblica		Corriere della sera		Ta nea/To vima		Kathimerini	
	M	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**
Normalization	1.55	1.81	1.30	1.81	1.82	2.18	1.02	1.59	1.35	1.76	1.07	1.60
Victimization *	4.05	2.13	3.20	2.33	3.02	2.03	2.77	2.34	2.88	1.70	1.93	1.40
Burden *	1.93	2.21	2.08	2.21	2.17	2.05	2.10	1.91	3.62	1.69	4.25	1.51
Threat *	0.73	1.16	1.05	1.33	0.78	1.42	0.98	1.23	0.97	1.34	1.85	1.77

7. Discussion and conclusions

The results of this study confirm that, in general, although the dominant frame within the analyzed images is *victimization*, followed by *burden*, there is a temporal increase in the presence of connotative visual frames that negatively represent immigrants and refugees in Southern European media. From the analysis, it is clear that both the *burden* and *threat* frames have not stopped increasing in the recent years of the migratory crisis. In the exploratory analysis, a slight, one-off increase in these frames is also observed in 2015, the year in which the numbers of asylum applications in Europe increased exponentially. However, this does not imply a statistically significant increase, since there are no differences in the surrounding years. The same occurs, but inversely, with the *victimization* frame, which seems to decrease in that year, which would make sense, but this decrease is not significant in statistical terms, and it should be noted that the intercoder reliability of the construct measuring this frame did not reach the accepted minimum. In sum, it has been found that, while the presence of negative frames has increased in the analyzed countries, especially since 2018, the *victimization* frame seems to have gradually decreased since the beginning of the crisis until last year, with significant differences in this frame between 2014 and 2019, while the *normalization* frame has remained low but constant over time. This contribution is directly related to the increase in negative attitudes and the rejection of displaced people detected in the analyzed countries. Similarly, these findings can be linked to the general increase in hate speech within these countries, as well as other types of hate crimes which, on specific occasions, can lead to major crimes, as explained in previous sections.

Secondly, it is confirmed that there are differences between the analyzed Southern European countries regarding their visual representations of immigrants and refugees in the media. Even though the coverage seems to be broadly similar, as the *victimization* and *burden* frames stand out above the rest in all the analyzed countries, statistically significant differences were found with regard to the two negative frames, as well as the *victimization* frame, although, in this case, the results must be interpreted with caution given the limited reliability of the frame. Even so, the latter shows a greater presence in Spanish than in Greek media, where it has the lowest presence among all three countries. Regarding the negative frames, both are more prevalent in the Greek media. However, the frame that stands out is the *burden* frame, which has also remained practically constant in Greece since the beginning of the crisis. Meanwhile, the *threat* frame is more present in Greece, although an increase is perceived over time in all three countries. In general terms, the country that shows the most positive depiction of displaced people is Spain, although its coverage is very similar to that of Italy —they only differ in the presence of the *victimization* frame, with this being higher in Spanish media—while the most negative representation is found in the Greek media. This also fits the information analyzed in the literature review of the perceptions of the citizens of each country and the hate crime figures. The data collected by the *Pew Research Center* surveys, which explored the percentage of citizens who viewed immigrants and refugees as a potential *burden* on or *threat* to their country, directly relate to the results of this study, since Spain is, and has been since the beginning of the crisis, the country with the lowest percentage of citizens with negative attitudes towards migration, followed by Italy and, finally, Greece.

> The victimization frame shows a greater presence in Spanish than in Greek media, where it has the lowest presence among all three countries. Regarding the negative frames, both are more prevalent in the Greek media

The results of this work confirm that the visual representation of immigrants and refugees differs between Southern European countries and between media outlets themselves. In this regard, differences have been found in the presence of negative frames between most Spanish and Italian media outlets on the one hand, and the Greek outlets on the other. This can be considered to be logical, since we have seen that negative frames stand out much more in Greece than in other countries, especially the *burden* frame. However, on analyzing the comparisons in detail, not all Spanish and Italian media show differences with *Ta nea* and *To vima*, especially in terms of the *threat* frame, while they do with *Kathimerini*. In sum, when the conservative Spanish or Italian media are compared with the conservative *Kathimerini* newspaper, statistically significant differences are perceived, albeit medium-sized. Meanwhile, the center-left media and the Greek conservative media show a large, statistically significant difference. In addition, within the Hellenic state itself, differences were also found between the analyzed media themselves, with *Ta nea* and *To vima* having a significantly lower presence of the *threat* frame than *Kathimerini*. Thus, at a general level, it can be concluded that *Kathimerini* is the media outlet with the greatest presence of negative frames, and moreover also stands out for having the lowest presence of the *victimization* frame. On the other hand, the media outlet with the highest predominance of the *victimization* frame is the center-left Spanish newspaper *El país*, which, in turn, presents the lowest predominance of the *threat* frame in its photographs.

On the one hand, these findings reveal that the representation frames of immigrants and refugees transmitted by Southern European media images are related to feelings and attitudes present in the public opinion of each country. This suggests, in turn, and as speculated in the review, that media may indeed have an emotional and cognitive effect on their audience, either positively or negatively influencing attitudes towards migration and, ultimately, on their conduct and behavior towards these groups. On the other hand, and inversely, it could be speculated that public opinion, as well as sociodemographic circumstances and migratory pressure itself, directly influences the coverage of the refugee crisis in Southern European media. In this sense, it is also important to note that the effects of the arrival of immigrants in Greece were particularly dramatic during the peak of the so-called Mediterranean Refugee Crisis in 2015, not only because of the concentration of arrivals at the main refugee internment camps such as Moria on the Greek island of Lesbos, but also because Greece's socioeconomic situation was the most delicate among all the countries analyzed. This could help to explain the higher proportion of negative frames found in Greek media. However, given that the comparisons between media show differences in frames related to their editorial lines, the results also seem to suggest that the representation of displaced people does not depend only on the social, demographic, and economic contexts of the country, but is also subject to political or ideological intentionality, or the media itself. Thus, as seen when answering the research question, although all media outlets are involved in the increase in negative visual frames transmitted, the proportion of this increase is greater among conservative media, since they promote the most negative representation. The real effect on public opinion could be tested in order to assign greater responsibility to them. What holds true is that all the analyzed media outlets seem to have gradually adapted to such a dehumanizing discourse, making an effort not to show too many images that victimize immigrants, such as portraying them in refugee camps, deserts, and war scenes, and instead beginning to show them at our borders, whether on boats or breaking barbed wire, and often surrounded by security forces. There may be a marked intention to sow in public opinion the representation of migration as a possible *burden* on or *threat* to our societies, in order to reduce feelings of moral responsibility and legitimize possible anti-immigration measures, or it may be that this coverage simply responds to news events occurring in each country. Nevertheless, these findings seem to confirm what various studies mentioned during the review have observed since the beginning of the migration crisis: that the representation of immigrants and refugees by Western media seems to diverge depending on the

socio-demographic, political, and economic contexts of the different regions, but also on the media outlet's editorial line, something that seems to be especially notable since 2015 (**Amores**; **Arcila-Calderón**; **Stanek**, 2019; **Greenwood**; **Thomson**, 2020; **Lenette**; **Cleland**, 2016; **Pantti**, 2016; **Zhang**; **Hellmueller**, 2017). In this sense, while the Spanish media have been transmitting more positive news frames of displaced people than other Western European countries, as **López-del-Ramo** and **Humanes** (2016) have already discovered, media outlets in countries such as Greece that are most strongly affec-

> The representation of immigrants and refugees by Western media seems to diverge depending on the socio-demographic, political, and economic contexts of the different regions, but also on the media outlet's editorial line, something that seems to be especially notable since 2015

ted by migratory pressure (and especially conservative media) seem to be drastically worsening their representation of displaced people in recent years, dehumanizing them and associating them more and more with notions of burden on and/or threat to the host societies, in a similar way to the media in Central and Eastern European countries that have strong anti-immigration policies (**Greussing**; **Boomgaarden**, 2017; **Kovář**, 2019). This proves, as **Hangartner** *et al.* (2017) or **Hopkins** (2010) have noted, that the most negative image of migration, as well as the most apprehensive attitudes towards displaced people, tend to develop in geographical areas most affected by the massive arrival of immigrants.

These conclusions open the path to future studies that empirically test the effects of these connotative visual frames of immigrants and refugees on the audience. Similarly, it is deemed necessary to continue exploring these trends in the media representations of displaced people, a group traditionally excluded from and stigmatized in our societies, and to verify whether negative frames continue to increase in the media, not only in Southern Europe but also in the rest of the continent as well, and whether moreover, a priori, positive frames such as *victimization* are indeed gradually declining. On the other hand, the limitations of the present study should be noted to allow for correction in future works. This work focuses only on the visual frames, therefore no complementary textual content, such as captions or headlines, was included in the analysis. This is due to the fact that the study focused exclusively on images as visual elements with greater impact, but it is possible that the texts accompanying them can modify their interpretation, therefore this analysis could be extended to a broader range of content in future studies. Along the same line, given that this analysis focused on the visual content of images, their metadata, or aspects such as the location of the photographs, were not considered. Thus, it would be interesting for future studies to also address issues such as the possible differences that may exist between images taken within the country where the media outlet is located or elsewhere. On the other hand, the sample is limited to seven news media outlets from the three Southern European countries most affected by the migration crisis. This means that the sample, albeit representative of the content within these countries, is not sufficient to extrapolate the findings to other host European countries. Therefore, it becomes necessary to explore the representation of migration that occurs in the leading media of other European countries. Finally, it would be useful to complement this analysis with a social media study, where it is also possible to directly collect related public opinion, along with other methods that could include machine-learning techniques for the analysis of large volumes of data.

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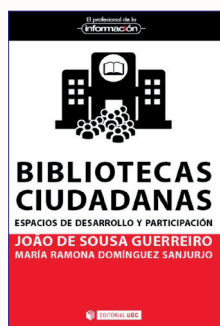*https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2019.1681860*

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