

FRAMING INTERNATIONAL CRISES:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MEDIA TEXTS
ON THE VENEZUELAN COLLAPSE

by Berti Olinto

BA., Universidad Católica Cecilio Acosta, 2000

MA., Goldsmiths' University of London, 2005

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Berti Olinto

FRAMING INTERNATIONAL CRISES:
A COMPARATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF MEDIA TEXTS
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Berti Olinto
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Abstract

This research explores mainstream and diasporic media coverage and discourses surrounding the Venezuelan economic and political crisis from late March 2017 until early May 2018. A comparative content analysis was applied to a total of 256 news articles, editorials, and stories from *the Toronto Star*, one of Canada's largest newspapers, and from *La Portada Canadá*, a Spanish-language Latin American newspaper in Toronto. The results demonstrated diasporic media's appropriation of journalistic biases such as human impact, dramatization, and national interests and the reframing of dominant discourses from international news agencies about the Venezuelan crisis. Whereas there are significant similarities between both media's content regarding the crisis, *La Portada Canadá* stressed the transnational component of the Venezuelan diaspora through discourses about political and civic engagement in Canada. *The Toronto Star* focused more on the economic and political components of the crisis, which are closely linked to the country's national agenda.

Keywords: diasporic media, mainstream media, media coverage, media discourses, international crises, humanitarian crisis, Venezuela, Toronto

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DEDICATION

To my mother and sisters. Thank you for all your love.

To all those Venezuelan immigrants and refugees who fight tirelessly for a better future.

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Introduction

Media outlets produced by and for immigrants, often referred to as *diasporic media*, have become powerful tools for enacting cultural identity, political participation, and civic engagement in the host country. Their relevance in terms of political participation hinges on their ability to provide alternative discourses to mainstream media and to include other voices in response to the dominant discourses promoted by international news agencies (Georgiou, 2005; Ogunyemi, 2017). Moreover, diasporic media is becoming a powerful tool for the discussion, representation, and portrayal of international conflicts and humanitarian crises that regularly have no place in mainstream media and international news agencies (Georgiou, 2005). The role of diasporic media in framing international crises, particularly conflicts related to the diasporic communities, remains to a certain extent unexplored (Ogunyemi, 2017).

Based on this premise, this research focuses on analyzing the ways in which diasporic newspapers in Toronto, Canada, have framed the political and economic crisis in Venezuela between March 2017 and May 2018, and how these newspapers have provided alternative discourses to Canadian media narratives through stories about the Venezuelan diaspora's political engagement in Canada, and international solidarity within Latin American immigrant communities.

This analysis is limited to newspapers, although the Venezuelan crisis has been reported in diasporic magazines and discussed on the Internet (e.g., in the comments sections of different diasporic websites and on Facebook). Despite the current digital trend in international conflicts and humanitarian crises, newspapers can still be considered relevant, as they are generally recognized as having a major influence on public opinion, particularly on diasporic communities (Östberg & Kleinschmit, 2016; Steele, 2016).

A total of 256 articles were included in this media analysis: 55 from the *Toronto Star* and 201 from *La Portada Canadá*, a Spanish-language newspaper produced by and for the Latin American immigrant community in Toronto.

For this analysis, qualitative and quantitative analyses were applied to print media articles to determine the frequency in the use of certain terms and the ways in which these terms were used to construct or frame discussions about the Venezuelan economic and political crisis. Here, media agenda setting, and news values are considered crucial in exploring the differences in the narratives about the transnational condition of the Venezuelan community in Toronto, which is a key aspect in how both newspapers approached the crisis. Hence, different implications of the concepts of nation, community, and national interests are also addressed to explore how both newspapers connect and engage with the Venezuelan diaspora.

Through this exploration of media coverage and narratives, this study aims at answering three primary questions:

1. How have Toronto's Latin American diasporic media constructed discourses and narratives about the crisis in Venezuela?
2. How have these diasporic media reframed dominant discourses promoted by mainstream media and/or international news agencies?
3. What are the topics and themes considered in diasporic media coverage of the crisis and how are they different from mainstream media coverage?

The relevance of exploring these issues focuses on the potential attributed to diasporic media in North America in contributing to the resolution of international conflicts (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2006) and in providing new spaces for democratic dialogue about international crises that are often excluded in Canada's national and political agenda (Yu, 2018).

Background

From January 2016, Venezuela has faced an unprecedented economic and political crisis marked by food and medicine shortages, soaring crime rates, and an increasingly authoritarian executive power (Felter & Labrador, 2018). Critics of current President Nicolás Maduro and his predecessor, Hugo Chávez, have denounced Venezuela's economic issues as the inevitable result of more than 18 years of financial mismanagement. On the other hand, President Maduro's supporters blame plummeting oil prices and the country's business elites (Corrales, 2016; Felter & Labrador, 2018; Rapoza, 2018).

The Legacy of Chávez

Hugo Chávez, a former military officer who launched a failed coup d'état against Carlos Andres Pérez in 1992, was elected President of Venezuela in 1998 with the support of the *Movimiento Quinta República* (Fifth Republic Movement), a socialist platform that had 56% of the electorate preference (Ore, 2013). As a candidate, Felter and Labrador (2018) claim, he railed against the country's elites for widespread corruption and pledged to use Venezuela's vast oil wealth to reduce poverty and inequality. Chávez remained President until his death in 2013, and he was praised by other socialist governments in Latin America for "expropriating millions of acres of land and nationalizing hundreds of private businesses and foreign-owned assets, including oil projects run by ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips" (Felter & Labrador, 2018, p. 1).

According to Johnson (2018), Chávez's goal was to exert control of Venezuela's state oil company, *Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA)*, and maximize its revenue, which he needed to fund his socialist agenda, although "achieving the latter required cooperating with the rest of OPEC, which, as in the 1980s, wanted to cut production in order to raise prices" (p. 2). Johnson

asserts that the problem for Chávez was that many of the PDVSA's then-managers wanted to increase production and to do so they needed to "reinvest more of the company's earnings rather than hand them all over to the government" (p. 3).

Felter and Labrador (2018) suggest that this lack of reinvesting in the oil industry is one of the key elements that gave rise to the current economic crisis: "While some of his underlings clearly understood the havoc he was causing, Chávez was determined to finance his ongoing socialist revolution, and use cheap exports to expand the Bolivarian Revolution; he then kept turning the screws on the oil industry" (p. 13).

This approach to oil industry management, together with the dependence of Venezuela on oil exports and the drop in oil prices in 2014, plunged the country into a severe economic crisis marked by soaring inflation and shortages of food and medical supplies (Felter & Labrador, 2018; Johnson, 2018). Indeed, international observers have characterized the situation in Venezuela as a "humanitarian crisis" (Rendon & Schnider, 2018), in which basic medicines are unavailable or difficult to obtain; hospitals lack basic supplies, like antibiotics, gauze, and soap; and infant mortality has increased more than 30 percent in the last three years (Felter & Labrador, 2018).

Violence, Instability, and International Migration

The political implications of the crisis are linked to the 2015 elections in which the opposition coalition—commonly referred to as *Mesa de la Unidad Democrática*—won a key two-thirds majority of the National Assembly, the country's legislative body under control of Chávez's socialist party since 1999 (Sullivan, 2017). Due to alleged voting irregularities in January 2016, Venezuela's Supreme Court suspended the election of four legislators, three of whom were registered with the opposition coalition. As a result of this suspension, the

opposition accused the court of trying to strip them of their supermajority, and, despite the Supreme Court's ruling, three of the legislators in question were sworn in by the National Assembly ("Venezuela's crisis explained", 2018, para. 5).

The Supreme Court ruled that "the entire National Assembly was in contempt and all decisions it made would be null" ("Venezuela Supreme Court", 2018, para.1). By early 2016, international media had reported a "deadlock" that continued and intensified when the court suspended a referendum against President Nicolás Maduro and postponed regional elections until 2017. The Supreme Court ultimately took over the legislative powers of the National Assembly on March 30, 2017, which prompted protests and street confrontations between opposition supporters and the country's National Guard in Caracas and other cities (Chinae & Polanco, 2017). Although the Supreme Court reversed its decision to take over the National Assembly on April 1, 2017, violent confrontations between opposition and government supporters continued on a daily basis for more than three months (Melimopoulos, 2017).

The political turmoil intensified the severe economic crisis produced by the drop in oil prices accelerated the international migration of Venezuelans to Chile, Peru, Brazil, Ecuador, Argentina, and especially Colombia. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), more than 600,000 Venezuelans emigrated in 2017 (IOM, 2018). This exodus has been labelled by international media as a "migration crisis," "refugee crisis," and "humanitarian crisis" that has considerably affected other countries in the region (Baddour, 2017; Chandran, 2018). By July 2018, international news agencies reported that neighbouring governments of Ecuador and Peru were trying to make it harder for Venezuelan migrants to stay or even enter their countries but, despite their efforts, migration continued accelerating (Rampietti, 2018).

The IOM has stated that the number of Venezuelan nationals living abroad increased from 700,000 to more than 1,600,000 between 2015 and 2017. According to a 2018 report from IOM, “there is clear evidence of continued large-scale migration in South America as indicated by a significant increase of Venezuelan nationals in the subcontinent: approximately 900 per cent between 2015 and 2017 (89,000 Venezuelan nationals in 2015; and up to 900,000 in 2017)” (IOM, 2018, p. 24). Similarly, in Central America and the Caribbean, the number of Venezuelan nationals doubled, from around 50,000 in 2015 to almost 100,000 in 2017 (Orozco, 2017). Moreover, according to the IOM and Human Rights Watch, this trend is likely to continue in 2019.

Although the majority of Venezuelan refugees head to other South American countries, according to Canada’s Immigration and Refugee Board, the number of asylum claims from Venezuelans in Canada more than doubled last year. The number increased from 31 in 2013 to more than 560 in 2015 (Keung, 2017a). Furthermore, due to the increasing number of Venezuelans who have become permanent residents in Canada since 2015—according to Immigration Canada data this number surpasses 3,300 (IRB, 2018)—the conditions in Venezuela have been on the radar of both the House of Commons and Senate. (Keung, 2017a)

However, according to different reports from Canadian media, Venezuelans in cities such as Toronto and Montreal have claimed that “few Canadians seem to realize Venezuelans are dying from food and medicine shortages, as President Nicolás Maduro gradually moves to consolidate power amid a growing political crisis” (Lowrie, 2017). Venezuelans are using media, networks, and community organizations to “ask Canadians to take notice of the escalating political and humanitarian crisis in their homeland” (“Venezuelan-Canadians want”, 2018, para. 3).

Furthermore, it has been assumed by Venezuelan communities in Canada that the crisis in their country and its economic implications are rarely featured in Canadian media (Lowrie, 2017). In this context, authors such as Salojärvi (2017) claim that Venezuelans in the diaspora have found alternative media platforms, including websites, ethnic and diasporic media, and collaborative spaces for representation, portrayal, and discussion of the crisis.

Literature review

Press coverage and media discourses on international crises have been the focus of a wide range of research in the communications and social sciences fields. Both elements have been considered crucial components with regard to the audiences' perceptions and interpretations of international conflicts and the migration phenomena associated with them (Karim & Al-Rawi, 2018; Mathhes, Maurer, & Arendt, 2017; Salojärvi, 2017).

The importance of media coverage and discourse is closely linked to the influence attributed to media in the resolution and/or escalation of international conflicts (Ogunyemi, 2017). Authors such as Ardèvol-Abreu (2015) have asserted that the media are important actors in international crisis management and resolution, not only in the countries in which the crises take place, but also in the rest of the world, "as they are frequently the main source of information for the populations of so-called developed countries" (p. 11).

In this context, terms such as the "CNN effect" began to surface in the 1990s as a way to address the role that coverage of humanitarian crises by 24-hour news networks played in the United States government's decisions to intervene in international crises (Volkmer, 2008). According to Friedman (2018), the political pressure associated with the so-called CNN effect is often perceived as a key element in understanding the United States' military intervention in

conflicts it might have otherwise ignored, from Iraq and Somalia to Bosnia and Kosovo (pp. 3 - 4). Although there has not been a consensus in the academic field about the CNN effect and its influence on international conflicts (Balabanova, 2010), its premise is still the subject of academic research. This premise was explained by Friedman (2018) as the generalized assumption “that mass media need only convey how terribly others are suffering for people and their governments to do something about it” (p. 2).

However, as Livingston and Eachus (1995) suggested, the issue at the heart of topics such as the CNN effect should not be whether media have the capacity to produce an emotional or psychological effect that has an impact on policy; instead, the question should be who controls this capacity? “Believers in the CNN effect claim that the roles of the professional policy expert and diplomat have been undermined by media... To the degree that foreign policy is reactive to news content, the key decisions are those made by reporters, producers, and editors” (Livingston & Eachus, 1995, p. 3). In this sense, Livingston and Eachus (1995) asserted, for those who defend the CNN effect premise, that foreign policy decision-making in terms of international conflict has become a logical result of news decision-making (pp. 3–5).

Conversely, authors such as Hollar (2017) stated that media generally do not serve as independent agents in the development of issues and concerns; instead, news agendas typically reflect the countries’ political and economic interests. For instance, in humanitarian crises and political conflicts in Africa, international media coverage has often been more associated with the relevance of the crisis in terms of political and economic interests of the Western governments than with the interest that these conflicts may generate in media and their audiences (Hollar, 2017; Kareithi & Kariithi, 2008). From this perspective, the ways in which information

about international crises is included in the media agenda is often linked to the national agenda, which is commonly referred to as geopolitical bias.

Our Conflicts: Ethnocentrism, Profitability, and National Interests

Ardèvol-Abreu (2015) pointed out that the news events that are perceived as “ours” are more likely to make headlines and spark interest among readers. In this sense, examples such as the Rwandan genocide in 1994 are useful to illustrate who set the agenda in terms of media coverage: “the massacres in Rwanda were of little interest to the US government, so Rwanda was of little interest to the US media” (Tsatsou & Armstrong, 2014, p. 4).

According to Tsatsou and Armstrong (2014), ethnocentrism and national interests have played a major role in shaping foreign news agendas. An example of this is the limited media coverage of conflicts such as the crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which has been referred to as the world’s deadliest crisis since World War II, resulting in 5.4 million deaths between 1998 and 2007 (Olsen, Carstensen, & Høyen, 2003). Hollar (2009) stated that the little media attention paid to this conflict can be explained not only by the complexity and complicated nature of the conflict but also by the fact that it did not serve United States’ policy and interests in the African continent, nor the narrative of the war on terror (pp. 34–36). Indeed, the Congo “was only mentioned on Fox News Special Report during a brief period in 2005, when peacekeepers for the U.N., a perennial Fox villain, were accused of sexual abuse on duty there. And the Congo coverage viewers saw on CNN’s Anderson Cooper’s 360 more likely than not invoked endangered gorillas or Angelina Jolie” (Hollar, 2009, p. 19).

The “war on terror” narratives after 9/11 and the extensive Western media coverage of conflicts such as the Gulf War in 1991 and the invasion of Afghanistan represent, in one way or

another, this tendency to give relevance to those issues that serve the political and military interests of the nation (Savrum & Miller, 2015).

Geopolitical biases, as a precondition for media coverage, are also closely related to what has been referred to as the “news-attention cycle” or the “issue-attention cycle” (Livingston & Eachus, 1995; Opperhuizen, Schouten, & Klijn, 2018), which implies that due to the multiplicity of international conflicts and how intricate these conflicts are in terms of political and economic interests, the media must negotiate space and sometimes prioritize coverage and attention given to armed conflicts, civil wars, military invasions, and humanitarian crises (Hollar, 2009; Livingston & Eachus, 1995). In other words, the notion of the news-attention cycle implies that some issues, particularly geographically distant ones or those that are not related to the national interests, receive attention only on a cyclical basis, depending on the priorities of the national agenda and in a context in which the “nation does not have an appetite for more than one crisis at a time” (Livingston, 1996, p. 68).

The contrasts among media coverage of the crises in Kosovo, Sudan, and Angola also illustrate the issue of this news-attention cycle. According to Mccgwire (2002) and Williams (2001), the proximity of Kosovo to the countries of the European Union was a key factor in the media coverage there and, therefore, in the attention that the conflict received from the public in those nations. The European Union feared that the violence and civil war would spill over into other former Yugoslavian republics and other Balkan countries (Livingston & Eachus, 1995; Mccgwire, 2002; Williams, 2001). In this regard, Livingston and Eachus (1995) stated:

This type of security interest became even more important because it coincided with the 50th anniversary of NATO when there was a strong political need in both the US and Europe to find a *raison d'être* for the alliance in the absence of the Soviet threat. . . .

[This] turned the Kosovo crisis into high politics. In comparison, the humanitarian crises in Sudan and Angola took place far away from both Europe and North America, and they did in no way represent a security threat to these regions. (p. 17)

Aside from the geopolitical significance of the crisis, another aspect considered in the media coverage of international events is the criterion of news profitability. For the coverage of these events, media editors often allude to the logic of the market: “the public is free to acquire whatever [they] believe appropriate, and the average have to adapt to these demands because they have to make revenues or at least avoid losses” (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015, p. 65).

Opperhuizen, Schouten, and Klijn (2018) pointed out that the corporatization of news has particular relevance in the “selection” of international conflicts and subsequent media coverage. In this sense, it is common for the media to include “biases that find their origin in the pressure to reach a large audience and bring the news in such a way that it is attractive to a large audience” (Author, Year, p. 3). Moreover, the logic behind profitability in the news is that certain information on international conflicts is not considered by media editors if they think it will bore the readers (Savrum & Miller, 2015).

This notion of “profitable news” is linked to the potential of certain conflicts to create an impact on the audiences, based on the events, to shock audiences and generate emotions as a primary element. This is what authors such as Ardèvol-Abreu (2015) referred to as the human-impact bias or human-interest component.

“If It Bleeds, It Leads”: the Human Impact Component

The human interest or human impact bias, bringing an emotional angle to the presentation of an issue or a problem, is a common narrative tool in contemporary news journalism (Figenschou & Thorbjørnsrud, 2015). According to Evans (2010), human impact is one of the

main factors in the process of prioritizing news on the assumption that news stories that show human suffering will be more interesting (pp. 4-5). Moreover, media often focus on the dramatic elements (more so if these elements involve human suffering) than the causes, risks, or historical, environmental, or economic context of the conflicts (Beattie & Milojevich 2017; Evans, 2010; Opperhuizen, Schouten, & Klijn, 2018). The “if it bleeds, it leads” news policy, according to which the most traumatic story will lead the newscast (Kerbel, 2002), has been referred to by some authors, such as Ardèvol-Abreu (2015), as one of the most significant parts of the news selection criteria, especially when the news is related to complex international crises (pp. 2–4).

In many cases, what is considered newsworthy during an international conflict and crisis is the way in which victims die or suffer: “the more atrocious, the most likely to make headlines” (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015, p. 35). For this reason, the term “human impact” is often preferred instead of the more neutral “human interest” (Toledano & Ardèvol-Abreu, 2013, p. 31). In this sense, international conflicts are often framed with “human interest elements” that appeal more to the sensitivity and emotion of the audience and less to the informative component. As Johnston, Friedman and Sobel (2014) claimed, “the analysis (boredom factor) is relegated by the production of sensations, which particularly affect the written press, that mainly relies on written narratives.”

Media Discourses: Framing the Conflict

As noted here, human interest/impact, national interests/agenda, and profitability have been considered some of the most relevant news values in the process of media agenda setting, particularly in regard to international conflicts and crises (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015; Johnston, Friedman & Sobel, 2014). However, the ways in which these values are included or considered to construct the discourses is the other factor that explains the influence of media on international

crises (Evans, 2010). This “construction” of narratives and discourses is commonly referred to as media framing (Johnston, Friedman & Sobel, 2014).

Media framing, as Johnston, Friedman and Sobel (2014) asserted, can be described as the angle or perspective from which a news story is told. In terms of international crises, media framing can define the ways in which the audience interprets narratives, either through the justification, acceptance, or rejection of political, economic, or military actions and decisions (Evans, 2010).

One of the primary functions of media framing is unifying and/or simplifying information into “packages” that can be a powerful tool to influence audiences (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). Kareithi and Kariithi (2008) noted, for example, that the military action carried out by the United States in Somalia was framed in accordance with the geopolitical and economic interests of the United States in the early 1990s. At first, the intervention was classified by the U.S. media as a “humanitarian intervention.” When the United States’ political and economic agenda on Africa changed, the Somalis were then portrayed in the media as “terrorists” and “ungrateful” (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2016; Kareithi & Kariithi, 2008).

According to Steele (2016), the notion of media framing is based on a sensemaking phenomenon that can create and structure the understanding and interpretation of deliberate political action in mediated conflict situations. For that reason, media framing often becomes highly politicized. Roluahpuia (2017) stated that the issue of media bias often arises in issues involving high political stakes: “media has the potential to distort issues or marginalize one issue over the other by under-reporting one perspective over the other” (p. 76).

Furthermore, media framing focuses on specific subjects or issues in order to create a meaningful context for interpretation, which is useful to understand why framing is a key

component in terms of political action (Evans, 2010; Milojevich & Beattie, 2018; Steele, 2016). Kareithi and Kariithi (2008) and Gitlin (1980) applied the Gramscian notion of hegemony to explore how media framing can articulate a narrative and “socially construct” a reality based on dominant frames and the ways in which these frames are justified and taken for granted.

According to Kareithi and Kariithi (2008, p. 54):

One picture of the world is systematically preferred over others, usually through practical routines and at times through extraordinary measures. Normally the dominant frames are taken for granted by journalists and reproduced and defended by them for reasons . . . that the journalists do not consider as either ideological or hegemonic.

This notion of hegemony is closely linked to the process of “meaning construction” in order to facilitate audiences’ understanding and, in many cases, may influence public opinion. Kaufman, Elliott, and Shmueli (2003) asserted that “frames provide meaning through selective simplification, by filtering people’s perceptions and providing them with a field of vision for a problem” (p. 34).

Some authors conceive media framing as an incentive that uses the medium for the audience to read a story in a certain way, and because the frames are often “unnoticed,” their impact is by stealth (Milojevich & Beattie, 2018; Van Gorp, 2007). The “perceived reality” of an international conflict is then achieved through the conceptualization and structuring of those dominant frames that the journalist or editor uses to explain a story through the emphasis of some aspects of the narrative to the detriment of others (Östberg & Kleinschmit, 2016).

This implies, to a lesser or greater extent, the decontextualization of the international conflict in favor of a Manichean narrative of rapid impact, given the assumption that a thorough and detailed analysis of an international conflict can bore the audience (Toledano & Ardèvol,

2013). The result is a large number of international conflicts, civil wars, and humanitarian crises being portrayed without cultural, religious, or economic background (Evans 2010) or interpretive analysis (Östberg & Kleinschmit, 2016).

Toledano and Ardèvol-Abreu (2013) claimed that international crises are often reported in a predictable manner, usually forced to fit into a preexisting mold that makes them all equal in the public gaze: “News media turn crises into good and bad stories, without explaining the underlying causes, and then abandon their monitoring before crises conclude, thereby depriving the audience of information about crisis outcomes” (p. 12). This style of news coverage, Van Gorp (2007) asserted, goes all out for “hyper-emotion,” resulting in “emotional blackmail where analysis (which is considered boring) is replaced by the production of sensations” (p. 11).

The Role of News Agencies

Ardèvol-Abreu (2015) stated that international news agencies play a major role in this hyper-emotion component of news and the decontextualized and simplistic approaches associated with them. The media that rely on international news agencies, particularly in the Western world, tend to simplify and reproduce the discursive patterns of news agencies of global influence, in which conflicts and crises are normally “packaged” according to the Western interests (Milojevich & Beattie, 2018; Van Gorp, 2007)

However, the influence of news agencies on the construction of dominant discourses regarding international crises is still subject to academic debate (Toledano & Ardèvol, 2013). Authors such as Paterson (2003) pointed out that international agencies is one of the first factors to take into consideration in the analysis of global discourses surrounding international events. The fact that many media in the Western world still use news agencies as a primary source of information in their international section, often without reframing or rewriting the news and

reports they receive (Rauch, 2003; Steele, 2016), is crucial to understanding the influence of news agencies in framing international crises.

Ardèvol-Abreu (2015) described this role of international agencies in the framing of news as follows:

If agencies can decide in which places and at what moments a humanitarian crisis should be covered, they actually have a considerable influence. Furthermore, to what extent can one separate the influence on news selection from the influence on the type of news coverage? If, for example, a news agency highlights a famine in a refugee camp in northwestern Kenya and the media flock to cover that information, besides influencing news selection and setting the first level of the agenda, the news agency also plays a role in the news framing. (p. 24)

Authors such as Rafeeq and Jiang (2018) stated that international news agencies were considerably affected by the international economic crisis of 2008; thus, they no longer represent the main force in terms of media setting and discourses. Ardèvol-Abreu (2015) pointed out that even before the economic crisis of 2008 in Europe, most of the media in countries such as Spain seemed to address their audiences with a single voice because the difficulties and limitations of having qualified correspondents and knowledge of international conflicts led to treating certain issues in the same light and with the narrative imposed by the same information providers.

Because budgetary concerns have reduced the number of correspondents in recent years (Carroll, 2006), journalists from international agencies often have to cover more than one country. The demand for coverage of breaking stories has led to reporters “jumping between war zones. . . . These correspondents have been dubbed ‘parachutists’, who drop in on violent conflicts, or ‘firemen’ rushing between hot spots” (Evans, 2010, p. 10).

In this sense, academic research over the last 10 years has focused on to what extent the economic and budget constraints that have affected international news agencies have also had an impact on the coverage of international crises that were already of little interest to the media (Toledano & Ardevol, 2013). In other words, what alternatives are there for international conflicts that have no place in the so-called mainstream media (Ogunyemi, 2017)?

Diasporic Media and Alternative Discourses

Despite the significant gaps in Western media coverage around issues concerning international crises that are not aligned with national and/or media interests (Toledano & Ardevol, 2013), there are other media formats in which these crises—and the actors involved in them—have alternative spaces for representation and portrayal. These alternative media formats are regularly linked to cultural and ethnic minorities and diasporic communities that are often excluded from the hegemonic discourses promoted by international news agencies and the mainstream media—understood here as the media that both reflect and shape prevailing and dominant currents of thought (Chomsky, 1997). Some of these alternative media outlets are often referred to as ethnic media (Smets, 2016), minority media (Gilboa et al., 2016), and/or diasporic media (Georgiou, 2006; Ogunyemi, 2017).

According to Ogunyemi (2017), the diasporic media play a major role in representing international conflict and have become an important part of the increasingly mediatized everyday lives of migrants on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a communicative space to facilitate mobilizing and organizing civic engagement, particularly in regard to conflicts in immigrants' countries of origin (pp. 3–4). Therefore, diasporic media outlets are commonly described as the media that are produced by and for migrants and deal with issues that are of specific interest for

the members of diasporic communities, in which international conflicts and humanitarian crises are often perceived as key elements (Ogunyemi, 2017).

Functions attributed to this type of media are manifold. According to Bozdag, Hepp and Suna (2012), diasporic media open up new spaces for self-reflective discourse among migrants. Georgiou (2006) asserted that the influence of diasporic media on contemporary communications focus on reinforcing immigrants' sense of belonging, and according to Husband (2006), this kind of media contributes to the ethnic diversity of a multiethnic public sphere.

Diasporic media have, on the one hand, the potential to elaborate alternative narratives that are not commonly found in the mainstream media and, on the other, to develop deeper and closer insights of the international conflicts for the ethnic communities and minorities and the religious groups with which these media are often associated.

Along with family remittances, diasporic media are considered an important part of the “transnational reality” of many communities in North America and Europe, especially with regard to their ability to reenact cultural practices and sociopolitical activities of the diaspora. Salojärvi (2017) stated that the fact that immigrants often spread across borders to the country of origin, diasporic media can function “as a messenger, transmitting and fashioning the information” (p. 6). Moreover, Dufoix and Rodarmor (2008) used the term “temporal proximity” in reference to the connection between the diasporas, the diasporic media, and the countries of origin, which essentially refers to diasporic media's capacity to establish a connected intimacy with the homeland despite being far away (pp. 78–79).

On the other hand, extensive research has focused on the relationship between diasporic media and the dynamics of integration in the host country (Chama, 2015; Gilboa et al., 2016; Karim & Al -Rawi, 2018; Ogunyemi, 2017; Salojärvi, 2017). In this context, the influence of

diasporic media on the conformation and/or strengthening of diasporic communities has been analyzed through the notion of “imagined communities” proposed by Benedict Anderson (1991), giving a new perspective to media, diaspora, and the concept of nation, nationhood, and community (Dufoix & Rodarmor, 2008). For instance, Kastoriano (2000) referred to the notion of the “transnational community” as “groups that are established within different national societies, and who act on the basis of shared interests and references (which may be territorial, religious or linguistic), and use networks and media to strengthen their solidarity beyond national borders” (p. 353).

In these communities, the portrayal and representation of international crises have particular relevance in terms of solidarity and civic engagement because it is argued that transnational and diasporic communities stay much more politically engaged in the host country by following local and national news streamed from their homeland (Ogunyemi, 2017; Salojärvi, 2017).

Ogunyemi (2017) affirmed that there has been an increase in diasporic media consumption in recent years. One of the factors that explain this increase of diasporic media consumption, in conjunction with the lack of representation of minorities and alternative discourses on mainstream media, is the reported distrust of some members of the diasporic communities toward mainstream media and large-scale international news agencies (Chama, 2017; Ogunyemi, 2017). For instance, it has been reported that communities of African immigrants in Europe have shown preference toward reading news about the situation in their countries of origin through online diasporic media because they do not rely on the European media (Plaut, 2017). Similarly, Chama (2017) affirmed that in cases such as the Somali diaspora in Canada, diasporic media’s role is essential to how community members are informed about

conflicts back home, such as military operations against Al-Shabab and civil wars, and about life in Canada (pp. 21–23). Moreover, Chama (2017) argued, diasporic media’s role is often perceived as more relevant than that of Canadian mainstream media to Somalis within the diaspora.

Mainstream media’s tendency to either exclude the cultural expressions and narratives of the smaller groups in society (Ogunyemi, 2017) or misrepresent ethnic, religious, and cultural minorities is another factor that illustrates the relationship between diasporic media and diasporic communities. Gilboa et al. (2016) asserted that the narratives about diasporas and the events that take place in their home countries are often distorted, romanticized, or completely ignored in mainstream media and policy framings. According to these authors, mainstream media is often responsible for the “over-writing of local narratives and local experiences, by imposed narratives as local understandings of conflicts are constantly ‘reconstructed’ and ‘translated’ into conflicts more understandable to outside observers” (p. 89).

Authors such as Georgiou (2006) stated that diasporic media has become a relevant factor in the analysis of how international conflicts are mediatized according to the human groups and communities to which the discourses are directed.

Diasporic media often struggle to become legitimate sources of information that provide alternative discourses on international conflicts. According to Ogunyemi (2017), this struggle is characterized by the diasporic media’s appropriation of journalistic norms, their engagement strategies with their audiences, and their initiatives to include other voices in the narratives about international conflicts (pp. 67–68). Similarly, Salojärvi (2017) posited that diasporic media enable members of the community construct their own meaning about the conflicts and events that take place back home and participate as political actors by engaging through these narratives.

However, the relationship between mainstream and diasporic media is not always analyzed through opposition or comparison. Some studies have shown a certain sense of complementarity among large media corporations, international news agencies, and diasporic media. For instance, Volkmer (2008) pointed out that although transnational powerful news outlets such as CNN, BBC, and Al Jazeera still set the media agenda, their narratives are reframed in a variety of emerging discursive spheres that dynamically redirect the narrative structure of international conflicts. In this context, diasporic media carry the potential to reproduce hegemonic discourses by reframing and translating narratives produced by international news agencies while retaining the ethnocentric elements of mainstream media's narratives. Indeed, diasporic media's ability to legitimate themselves as political factors (Georgiou, 2006), reproducers of dominant discourses, or promoters of alternative narratives within and beyond their audiences continues, to some extent, to be unexplored (Ogunyemi, 2017).

In light of these observations, this study investigates how diasporic media have framed the political and economic crisis in Venezuela and how this framing opposes, challenges or reproduces the narratives from mainstream media and international news agencies. In this research, it was anticipated that mainstream media treatments of the Venezuelan crisis would focus on the economic and political aspects according to Canada's national interests and political agenda, while diasporic media outlets would take a more personal approach of the crisis through narratives that emphasize experiences and testimonies of Venezuelan immigrant and refugees.

Methods and Methodology

This research project aims to explore the ways in which Toronto's Latin American diasporic media have framed the Venezuelan crisis, for which a comparative analysis between mainstream and diasporic media is considered essential. One of the main objectives is to evaluate to what extent diasporic media challenge the dominant discourses regarding this crisis and in what ways diasporic discourses deal with the singularities of the crisis in a globalized news environment.

The selection criteria of the sample were based on the focus of the articles in regard to the socioeconomic, political, and cultural implications of the Venezuelan crisis. In this sense, only those articles in which the Venezuelan crisis was either the main focus or a relevant component (i.e., comparative analysis of international crises) were included in this study. The purpose of this was to identify commonalities and/or differences in the ways in which both mainstream and diasporic media portrayed the crisis to their audiences, and then apply a comparative analysis between both discourses.

La Portada Canadá, a Spanish-language newspaper produced by and for Latin American immigrants in the Greater Toronto area was selected as the diasporic media component, and the *Toronto Star*, one of Canada's largest daily newspapers, was selected as the mainstream media component. Using digital editions of both newspapers, a search was conducted to identify and select all the articles and stories related to the Venezuelan crisis during the research period.

A total of 272 news articles were identified, 256 of which met the inclusion criteria. Of the articles selected, 201 were published in *La Portada Canadá* and 55 were published in the *Toronto Star*. All articles were published between March 29, 2017, when the government of Venezuela stripped the opposition-held parliament of its legislative powers, and May 20, 2018,

when Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro was re-elected in a process that both international media and foreign powers defined as an “electoral fraud.”

From the data collected, quantitative content analysis was applied to explore media coverage of the Venezuelan crisis in both newspaper types. The key aspects of the analysis were the number of published articles related to the crisis and their classification according to the source of information (international news agencies or original content) and the frequency in which certain topics were mentioned as key elements of the crisis (e.g., economic impact, political implications, the oil industry, humanitarian assistance, human rights, international sanctions, dictatorship, etc.).

Based on this categorization of topics and using NVivo as a tool for the coding process, five major themes were identified in both media discourses. The news articles were organized according to each theme, which led to the development of a series of 32 sub-themes. For instance, the humanitarian crisis element, which is one of the major themes, was divided into other sub-categories such as health crises, food shortages, and medicine shortages. A comparative analysis of how both media treated these topics and how relevant these themes were in the narratives was the next step in the study.

Qualitative analysis was useful in terms of analyzing the narratives. The key element was evaluating terms used by both media outlets to categorize discourse patterns regarding the crisis in Venezuela. In this sense, the ways in which the crisis was described by both mainstream and diasporic media were deemed essential in understanding how diasporic media discourses co-exist with mainstream and/or dominant discourses.

A limitation of this study is that the two newspapers are published in different languages: English and Spanish. As language is an essential component of the process of constructing and

defining realities and in giving constructive accounts of meaning (Lepore & Ludwig, 2005), these language differences affect the ways in which both newspapers have defined and illustrated the Venezuelan crisis and all its implications.

An additional limitation is the different publication frequencies of the two newspapers. All newspapers produced by and for the Latin American community in Toronto are published on a weekly basis, and the *Toronto Star* is a daily newspaper. This could, in terms of coverage, affect the frequency and content of reporting on the Venezuelan crisis.

Results and Discussion

In analyzing the media coverage and discourses regarding the political and economic situation in Venezuela, the five major themes that are prevalent in the stories and narratives from the two newspapers selected for the study are: 1) the political aspects of the crisis, 2) the economic aspects of the crisis, 3) the international sanctions imposed on the government of Venezuela 4) the humanitarian crisis elements of the stories, and 5) Venezuelan migration.

Media Coverage: Prevalent Themes

In this sense, Figure 1 shows that in the 55 articles published by the *Toronto Star*, the most prevalent terms used to describe the Venezuelan economic and political situation were *political crisis* (15 articles, 27.2%), *political/economic crisis* (13 articles, 23.6%), *economic crisis* (11 articles, 20%), *a conflict with international repercussions and sanctions* (seven articles, 12.7%); *humanitarian crisis* (five articles, 9%), and *migration crisis* (four articles, 7.2%). *La Portada Canadá*, on the other hand, published 201 articles about the situation in Venezuela. The most prevalent terms to describe the situation in Venezuela were *a conflict with international repercussions and sanctions* (51 articles, 25.3%), *a political/economic crisis* (40

articles, 19.9%), *economic crisis* (34 articles, 16.9%), *political crisis* (32 articles, 15.9%), *migration crisis* (28 articles, 13.9%), and *humanitarian crisis* (16 articles, 7.9%).

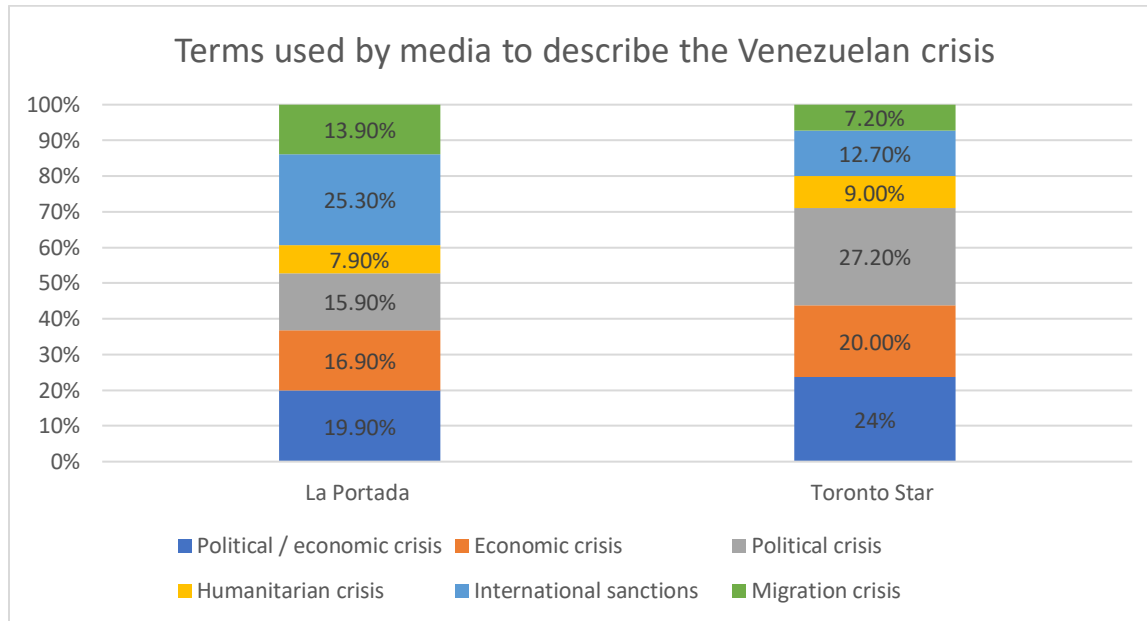


Figure 1. Terms used by the media to describe the Venezuelan crisis.

In this section, these themes are analyzed to identify the news values that may have been considered by both mainstream and diasporic media in the agenda setting process. In other words, how and why did the newspapers consider these themes as a relevant component in their discourses? How did they use these terms to construct the narratives about the Venezuelan crisis? In this sense, each theme will be analyzed through the lens of the news values that, according to Lobb, Mock, and Hutchinson (2012) and Ardèvol-Abreu (2015), are normally considered in the media coverage of international conflicts and crisis: national interests, human impact and negativity.

Themes 1 and 2: Political and Economic crisis

According to Triandafyllidou (2017), topics such as international crisis, humanitarian crisis and migration are as much about reality as they are about perception. This perception is

based, to a large extent, on what citizens/voters perceive from media discourses and how these discourses are linked to the national agenda. Authors such as Gianfreda (2018) have referred to the politicisation of humanitarian crisis based on how these crises are framed within political and media discourses.

In this sense, the political and economic elements of the Venezuelan situation have been essential in framing the crisis in both newspapers. In their narratives, both *La Portada Canadá* and the *Toronto Star* have constructed a narrative in which terms such as *economic catastrophe*, *economic collapse*, and *political disaster* are crucial to categorizing the events that occurred in Venezuela between March 2017 and May 2018.

In the case of the *Toronto Star*, the vast majority of the articles focused on the political turmoil and economic crisis. The prevalence of international oil prices and their impact on the United States and Canada's economies and political agendas is a key element for the media coverage of the crisis, for which the emphasis was often put on the relevance of Venezuelan oil exports. For example, in a treatment of the United States' and Canada's reaction to President Maduro's re-election on May 20, 2018, the *Toronto Star* highlighted the United States' intentions to isolate Maduro's administration, for which crude reserves in Venezuela were presented as a key element in the narrative:

Canada joined a growing list of nations on Monday decrying the presidential election as a farce, with the U.S. announcing financial restrictions aimed at further isolating Maduro's government. U.S. President Donald Trump signed an order restricting the Venezuelan government's ability to liquidate assets, stopping short of delivering threatened and potentially crippling oil sanctions for the nation atop the world's largest crude reserves. (Blatchford, 2018)

Another aspect to consider is the fact that international media reported in April 2018 that Canadian heavy crude topped U.S. imports of Venezuelan oil for the first time ever (Lewis, 2018). Canadian mainstream media such as *The Globe and Mail* considered this a “major reversal that reflects a deepening humanitarian and economic crisis in Venezuela, which production has languished owing to underinvestment and mismanagement at its state-run oil company” (Lewis, 2018).

The fact that oil exports are one of the most relevant aspects in the *Toronto Star*’s articles demonstrates that national interests, as a news value, may have been considered the key element in the inclusion of news about the Venezuelan situation. This is closely linked to the idea that in certain cases, international conflicts may not necessarily be considered because of their impact on the local population but because of their potential impact on the country’s national agenda (Lobb, Mock, & Hutchinson, 2012).

In *La Portada Canadá*, the political turmoil/crisis factor is also often linked to economic crisis elements. However, *La Portada Canadá*’s focus was on the role of international organizations that have mediated the conflict. Aspects such as the peace initiatives promoted by the Lima Group (a group conformed by 14 Latin American countries that did not recognize President Maduro’s re-election on May 20, 2018), the “complicity” of other Latin American countries towards the Maduro government, and the political sanctions promoted by the Organization of American States (OAS) were crucial aspects in the articles that explained and illustrated the political turmoil and economic crisis elements of the narratives.

In the following excerpt from an article published by *La Portada Canadá* on August 2, 2017, the leadership developed by the Lima Group as a mediator in the conflict and the political

pressure exerted by the OAS are portrayed as two important elements in terms of the economic and political implications of the crisis:

Although international pressure is growing, especially following the statements by the OAS and the Lima Group, Maduro still has the support of several allies in the Caribbean that receive oil from Venezuela... which continue defending the government that has plunged this South American country into a deep political, economic, and social crisis, in which people are dying of hunger or in hospitals because of a lack of medicine. (“Canada se suma” [“Canada will join”], 2017, para. 3)¹

La Portada Canada refers to the constant violations of human rights by the Venezuelan government against opposition leaders as a crucial element with which to demand more political and economic pressure from the international community.

Here, the national interest elements, as a news value, can be analyzed from the perspectives and interests of the diasporas or immigrant communities that constitute *La Portada Canadá*’s audience and the countries involved in these communities. For instance, the newspaper highlighted the participation of the “international community” as an equivalent to that of the “Latin American community,” and in many cases, the narratives emphasize the participation of countries such as Colombia and Mexico as key components in this notion of “international community”.

In an article published on April 18, 2017, *La Portada Canadá* described the role of the international community as a major component in exerting political pressure on Maduro’s government. Mexico’s and Colombia’s participation is highlighted within the narrative.

¹ En un comunicado, el Grupo de Lima reafirmó su compromiso de redoblar esfuerzos para alcanzar una salida pacífica y negociada a la crisis que enfrenta Venezuela, y anunció una reunión en Canadá para octubre, pero no confirmó la fecha, ni el lugar (“Canadá se suma”, 2017, para. 3) Translation by author.

Dozens of Venezuelans came to the summit to demand a vote against the Venezuelan government and to save their country from a deep humanitarian crisis. Meanwhile, the international community and member states of the Organization of American States (OAS), particularly Colombia and Mexico, sought the votes required to achieve a strong declaration against the government of Nicolás Maduro. (“Once países confrontan” [“Eleven countries will confront”], 2018, para. 1)²

An important aspect in analyzing Mexico and Colombia’s significance in *La Portada Canada*’s narratives is the fact these two countries are generally perceived as being parts of the most influential Latin American communities in Canada (Pellerin, 2017), which is relevant in terms of the newspaper’s expansion, influence, and scope among Latin American audiences. On the other hand, the notion of national interest is problematized by the fact that the “nation” is a complex structure in the case of an audience such as the Latin American community and/or diasporas in cities like Toronto. From this perspective, the national interest structure in the Latino media discourse may include the country of origin, the host country, and the countries that integrate the notion of the Latin American community (Hamman, 2002; Hatch, Mardock-Uman, & Garcia, 2016; Overmyer, 2015). Therefore, allusions to *Latin American* and *inter-American values*, *Canadian support*, *Latin American solidarity*, *our countries’ efforts*, and the *community of nations* are commonplace within the discourse. The next excerpts from an article

² Decenas de venezolanos llegaron a las puertas de la cumbre a pedir un voto en contra del gobierno venezolano y para salvar su nación de la profunda crisis humanitaria, mientras la comunidad internacional y países miembros de la Organización de Estados Americanos (OEA), entre ellos Colombia y México buscaban los votos necesarios para lograr un fuerte pronunciamiento contra el Gobierno de Nicolás Maduro (“Once países confrontan”, 2018, para. 1) Translation by author

published on July 19, 2017, is an example of this approach of the Latin American community and its ties to Canada:

Our community and our countries question what is happening in Venezuela... We also lament the increase in the number of casualties during demonstrations... On the other hand, Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada, said in a statement that Canada fully supports the announcement by Peru and other Latin American countries of not inviting Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro to the 8th Summit of the Americas, to be held in Lima on April 13 and 14. (“Canadá ofrece apoyo”, [“Canada offers support”], 2018, para. 2)³

The complex relationship between the concepts and implications of the nation and national interests within the Latin American diasporic media is also relevant to understanding how international sanctions from other Latin American countries against Venezuela have played a major role in terms of media coverage and discourses.

Theme 3: International Sanctions

Both media discourses shared more commonalities than differences in regard to the international sanctions imposed on the Venezuelan government. Whereas the sanctions were portrayed by both media in a similar light using key terms such as “*imperative*”, and “*urgent*”, the narratives were framed from different angles. To a large extent, *La Portada Canadá* gives the same relevance to the countries that imposed or promoted economic and political sanctions as it

³ Nuestra comunidad y nuestros países cuestionan lo que pasa en Venezuela y lamentamos el aumento de los muertos en las marchas de protesta... Chrystia Freeland, ministra de Asuntos Exteriores de Canadá, afirmó en un comunicado que Canadá se solidariza y apoya totalmente el anuncio de Perú y otros países de Latinoamérica de no invitar al presidente venezolano, Nicolás Maduro, a la VIII Cumbre de las Américas que se celebrará en Lima los días 13 y 14 de abril (“Canada ofrece apoyo”, 2018, para. 2) Translation by author

has given to Venezuela. For instance, the roles of Colombia and Canada—as countries that imposed significant sanctions against Nicolas Maduro’s government—were emphasized as the contributions of nations that have “helped to resolve” and “been affected by” the crisis.

In an article published on April 12, 2018, *La Portada* Canadá stressed Colombia’s political initiatives against Maduro’s government and how the crisis has affected the country, particularly in regards to migration:

The Latin American countries that questioned what is happening in Venezuela signed a statement, with the support of Colombia, to demand that President Maduro respect the right to protest and the call for elections...The real problem with immigrants in Colombia is the current influx of Venezuelans, as a result of the critical economic, political and social situation that is occurring in the neighboring country. (“Colombia enfrenta problema” [“Colombia faces challenge”], 2017, para. 1)⁴

In another article published on November 6, 2017, *La Portada* Canadá accentuated the role of Canada in regard to the international sanctions against Maduro’s administration. The confrontation between the two countries and Canada’s stance in regard to alleged corruption and human rights violations in Venezuela was a key component in the narrative:

The current conflict between the Government of Canada and the Government of Venezuela does not seem close to a resolution: Maduro’s insults against the Government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, in response to the first sanctions imposed, were met with

⁴ Los países latinoamericanos que cuestionaron lo que pasa en Venezuela, firmaron con el soporte de Colombia, un comunicado para pedir al Presidente Maduro, el respeto de los derechos de las personas a salir a protestar... La verdadera problemática con los inmigrantes en Colombia es el movimiento que se está dando de venezolanos, a raíz de la crítica situación económica, política y social que se registra en el vecino país (“Colombia enfrenta problema”, 2017, para. 1) Translation by author

additional economic sanctions against senior officials of the Venezuelan regime, which, according to Canada, continues to violate human rights and commit increasingly corrupt actions. (“Canada aplica más sanciones” [“Canada applies more sanctions”], 2017, para. 1)⁵

On the other hand, the *Toronto Star* focused more on the announcements from the Canadian government to expel Venezuelan diplomats. The narratives emphasized the economic sanctions promoted by the United States government, many of which were, to a greater or lesser extent, connected to the North American Free Trade Agreement. The following excerpt from an article published on July 29, 2017, is an example of this:

Some polls leading up to Sunday’s voting showed that large majorities of Venezuelans did not think their country needed a new constitution. U.S. President Donald Trump threatened “swift economic actions” from the United States, which buys nearly half of Venezuela’s major export, oil, if Maduro went through with Sunday’s vote. (Farooqui, 2017)

This example can be used to illustrate the generalized assumption that for many political and economic conflicts in underdeveloped nations, the mainstream/international media coverage focuses more on the economic relevance of the crisis for the developed world than on the intensity of the conflicts (Hollar, 2017; Kareithi & Kariithi, 2008). This connection among economic interests, media, and international crisis is also present in other topics included in the media narratives about the situation in Venezuela, such as the impact of the crisis on

⁵ El enfrentamiento existente entre el Gobierno de Canadá y el Gobierno de Venezuela, parece que no tendrá fin, porque a los insultos de Maduro contra el Gobierno del primer ministro Justin Trudeau, por las primeras sanciones impuestas, la respuesta fue más sanciones económicas contra altos funcionarios del régimen venezolano, que de acuerdo a Canadá sigue violando los derechos humanos y avanzando en actos de corrupción (“Canada aplica más sanciones”, 2017, para. 1). Translation by author

international migration and its implications as a humanitarian crisis, with economic and political repercussions in North and South America.

Themes 4 and 5: Humanitarian Crisis and Migration

The *Toronto Star* included the term *humanitarian crisis*, as referred to by international organizations and NGOs such as Caritas Venezuela and Human Rights Watch, in which the narratives focused more on statistics from international organizations regarding the effects of the crisis on vulnerable populations. While the human impact is an important element of the narratives, the political, demographic, and economic effects of the crisis are the relevant components:

Child hunger in parts of Venezuela is a "humanitarian crisis," according to a new report by the Catholic relief organization Caritas, which found 11.4 per cent of children under the age of five suffering from moderate to severe malnutrition, and 48 per cent "at risk" of going hungry (Faiola, 2017).

La Portada Canadá, on the other hand, utilized narrative elements that are more likely to be based on the dramatization bias, which mainly linked the human impact/interest as a news value. The *suffering* (*sufrimiento*), *isolation* (*aislamiento*), and *hopeless condition* (*desesperanza*) of the Venezuelan population and their diasporas in other countries in South America were significant aspects of the discourse. As noted in the following example from an article published on May 13, 2017, the “suffering” component is presented as a significant element of the “humanitarian crisis” component in which the “danger” and the risks of “taking to the streets” are also relevant elements in the narratives:

The cruelty and suffering that are being experienced in the streets of Venezuela reveal the difficult situation lived by millions of Venezuelans, who face a profound humanitarian

crisis. They participate in protests despite the danger involved in taking to the streets to demand the call to presidential elections. (“Aumentan los muertos” [“The number of casualties increases”], 2017, para. 2)⁶

La Portada Canadá also highlighted the cooperation with other South American countries and called for more effective assistance measures from the international community. Again, the idea of a Latin American community in Canada based on the diasporas’ involvement and participation is present in the narratives, in which the political factor is definitive. In this case, the Latin American community is portrayed as comprising political actors whose cooperation and participation are needed to support other members of the community. As Dufoix and Rodarmor (2008) asserted, the influence of diasporic media on immigrant communities’ cultural identity and political participation has given a new perspective to the notions of solidarity in the host country. The next excerpt from an article published on June 9, 2017 in *La Portada Canadá* is an example of this:

The Latino community in Canada is showing support for the protests in this South American country plunged into a deep social and political crisis of human rights and hunger. (“Sentida marcha en Toronto” [“Protest organized in Toronto”], 2017, para. 1)⁷

In both mainstream and diasporic media, the term *humanitarian crisis* was used in connection to some international agencies’ reports about the exodus or massive migration of

⁶ La crueldad y el sufrimiento que se está viviendo en las calles de Venezuela dejan ver el duro panorama que viven millones de venezolanos en este país, que ante la profunda crisis humanitaria van a las marchas, pese al peligro que representa salir a las calles a exigir el llamado a elecciones presidenciales (“Aumentan los muertos”, 2017, para. 2) Translation by author

⁷ La comunidad Latina en Canadá está mostrando apoyo ante las protestas en este país suramericano sumido en una profunda crisis social, política, de derechos humanos y de hambre (“Realizan marcha en Toronto, 2017, para. 1) Translation by author

Venezuelans to the rest of South America. In this context, *La Portada Canadá* approached the migration and transnational aspects by focusing on the flow of Venezuelan migrants to other South American countries.

As the next example demonstrates, *La Portada Canadá*'s emphasis was on the lives of hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans living in a migratory and political limbo at the Colombian border as well as the subsequent social, political, and economic issues that the Venezuelan migration has caused in some Colombian towns and small cities:

The real problem with immigrants in Colombia is the current influx of Venezuelans, as a result of the critical economic, political and social situation that is occurring in this neighboring country. Figures from Migration Colombia reveal the extent of this phenomenon, because until a few years ago it was common for Colombian citizens to try to stay there, and now the opposite is true... In cities such as Cúcuta, Bucaramanga, Maicao, Barranquillas, Bogotá, Medellín, and a large part of the small border towns, hundreds of Venezuelans are already sleeping in parks in small tents (“Colombia enfrenta problema” [“Colombia challenge”], 2017, para. 3)⁸

The economic and political measures adopted by the Colombian government to support the flow of Venezuelan migrants and their settlement in Colombia, as well as its condemnation of President Nicolas Maduro, were crucial elements in illustrating the crisis in terms of migration. The next excerpt from an article published on April 21, 2018, shows how Colombia has played a major role in the Venezuelan exodus, according to *La Portada Canadá*:

⁸ La verdadera problemática con los inmigrantes en Colombia es el movimiento que se está dando de venezolanos, a raíz de la crítica situación económica, política y social que se registra en el vecino país. Cifras de Migración Colombia dan cuenta del fenómeno que se presenta, pues hasta unos años era común que ciudadanos colombianos buscaran quedarse allá, y ahora ocurre todo lo contrario (“Colombia enfrenta problema”, 2017, para. 3). Translation by author.

The Colombian government has strongly criticized the Venezuelan government, promoted sanctions and opened its doors to Venezuelans. Up until now, it has allowed them to enter without any major obstacles and to be cared for by the health system. It also provides some help to immigrants, despite its own needs, but it can no longer handle it. (“EEUU dona a Colombia” [“US makes a donation to Colombia”], 2018, para. 6)⁹

Media Discourses: The Venezuelan Diaspora in Toronto

As noted in the previous section, a relevant aspect in terms of media discourses was how mainstream and diasporic media framed the civic engagement of Venezuelans in Toronto. Figure 7 shows that 14.5% of the 201 articles of *La Portada Canadá* focused on the Venezuelan diaspora in Toronto and its political engagement as a direct result of the political and economic situation back home. By contrast, 11.1 % of the 55 articles from the *Toronto Star* included the diasporic community aspect as a key element in the coverage of the crisis.

⁹ El Gobierno colombiano ha criticado fuertemente al gobierno venezolano, ha promovido sanciones y les ha abierto las puertas a los venezolanos. Les permite hasta ahora el ingreso sin mayores contratiempos, incluso que sean atendidos por el sistema de salud y les brinda algunas ayudas a los inmigrantes, en medio de sus propias necesidades, pero ya no resisten más (“EEUU dona a Colombia”, 2018, para. 6). Translation by author

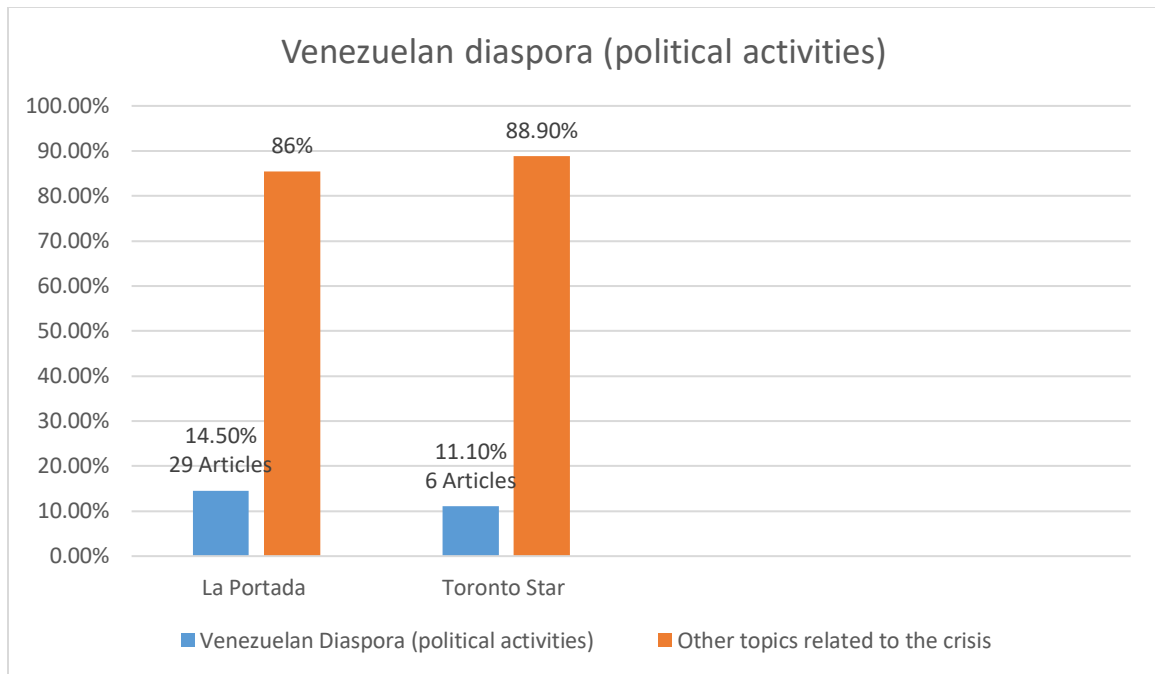


Figure 2. Venezuelan diaspora (political activities).

Although *La Portada Canadá* only included 29 articles about the Venezuelan diaspora, this inclusion is relevant in terms of the diaspora's cultural identity and political participation, which were the focus of only six articles from the *Toronto Star*. In this sense, as Ogunyemi (2017) stated, diasporic media often struggle to become a legitimate source of information that provides alternative discourses on international conflicts. This struggle is characterized by the diasporic media's engagement strategies with their audiences by including other voices in the narratives about international conflicts (Ogunyemi, 2017, pp. 67–68).

A way to illustrate this in the case of *La Portada Canadá* involves the marches and public demonstrations by Venezuelan political leaders in Toronto's Queen's Park—the site of the Ontario Legislative Building, which houses the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and Dundas Square, commonly referred to as the central hub of the city's downtown.

The next example demonstrates how *La Portada Canadá* emphasized the importance of informing Canadians about the Venezuelan crisis as one of the most relevant aspects of the diaspora's political activities in Toronto

This “cry of freedom” in Queen’s Park was intended to make even more visible to Canadians the suffering of their countrymen, due to hunger, poverty, lack of medicine, a humanitarian crisis, insecurity, but especially, the current repression against anti-government demonstrations. (“Ante Parlamento de Ontario” [“Before the Government of Ontario”], 2017, para. 3)¹⁰

The *Toronto Star* did not cover these public demonstrations and political activities. Moreover, it succinctly approached Venezuelans’ political engagement in Toronto in only one story, which focused on a Venezuelan referendum held in Toronto in 2017 against the government of Nicolas Maduro. In this article, Venezuelans’ public manifestations and protests were not an essential aspect of the narrative.

Organizers in Toronto were prepared for 5,000 to 7,000 voters when the facility opened at 10 a.m. But by 8:30, crowds were already gathering — clad in Venezuelan flags as they lined up around the block (“Expats call Venezuela”, 2017, para. 3).

Conversely, the interests of the *Toronto Star* have focused on the hardships of Venezuelan refugees in Toronto, a group of refugees labelled as “forgotten refugees” due to the priority given to other refugee communities. The transnational aspect of the Venezuelan community was crucial only in regard to its impact on refugee statistics in Toronto. The

¹⁰ Este “grito de libertad” en Queen’s Park tenía como fin hacer aún más visible para los canadienses el sufrimiento de sus compatriotas, como el hambre, la miseria, la falta de medicamentos, la crisis humanitaria, la inseguridad, pero especialmente la represión que hoy hay contra las manifestaciones contra el Gobierno (“Ante Parlamento de Ontario, 2017, para 3). Translation by author

newspaper published three articles containing interviews with Venezuelan refugees and representatives of nongovernmental organizations supporting new Venezuelan refugee communities in Toronto, an aspect that was not included in any of the *La Portada Canadá* articles:

We have families. We have lives. We have been paying taxes in Canada, Zamora said. “We don’t have any criminal record. We contribute to this country. It is just not fair. We are asking for amnesty for us so we can move on with our lives. (Keung, 2017a)

In the *Toronto Star*, the relevance of Venezuelans’ political struggle was reflected through a more descriptive narrative that showed the reality of political refugees from 2011. Although the narratives included projections about the Venezuelan migration’s impact on Canada at large, they also addressed the nation’s concerns regarding immigration, fueled by the United States’ policies on refugees and irregular migration. This approach is an example of a certain tendency by local newspapers to depict immigration in a more positive light than large-scale, national newspapers do, in which refugees and immigration are often described as a threat (Triandafyllidou, 2017).

For instance, Chavez (2008) asserts that national mainstream media tend to characterize Latino immigrants in North America “along the lines of the Latino threat narrative” (p. 2). Conversely, media that are closer to their local audiences tend to “include more positive reporting on migration including everyday stories that would not hit the headlines of certain national media. Such examples are more often found in quality newspapers that had reporters specialised on the topic” (Triandafyllidou, 2017, p. 3). The next two excerpts from articles written by the *Toronto Star*’s immigration reporter Nicholas Keung illustrate this idea:

Dayana Zamora, 28, came to Toronto in 2011 from Venezuela seeking asylum. She said that in Venezuela she was kidnapped, held for two days and later released when her family paid a ransom. Zamora, who has a law degree from back home, met her husband, Miguel Trejo, 32, also a legacy claimant from Venezuela, in Toronto and the couple now has a 2-year-old Canadian-born son also named Miguel. (Keung, 2017a)

These examples also illustrate how the *Toronto Star* has constructed a narrative in which Venezuelan immigrants are normally portrayed as taxpayers and contributors in need of amnesty. Moreover, in the stories that addressed Venezuelan immigration, both refugees and immigrants have names and are often depicted as university-educated people in need of Canada's support. The editorial policies of specific media outlets and their strategy for setting news agendas also play an important part here in shaping the coverage.

Media Discourses: The Crisis in Context

In terms of the media discourses about the crisis and confrontations in Venezuela, the lack of sociocultural context in the stories and the immediacy that has characterized media coverage in other international conflicts are also present in the narratives from *La Portada Canadá* and the *Toronto Star*. In this regard, the simplification implicit in the media's framing of international conflicts, likely aimed at facilitating audiences' understanding, is a key factor in analyzing how *La Portada Canadá* and the *Toronto Star* framed the political confrontations and the economic crisis in Venezuela.

Kaufman, Elliott, and Shmueli (2003) asserted that "frames provide meaning through selective simplification, by filtering people's perceptions and providing them with a field of vision for a problem" (p. 34). One of the primary functions of framing is unifying and/or

simplifying information into packages, which can be a powerful tool to influence audiences (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). These packages are often characterized by decontextualization, with narratives that describe in situ events with no historic or sociocultural background, in which journalists and editors seem to ignore context and complexity by presenting everything in black and white, while the nature of politics often is a balancing act between contradictory interests and demands (Kronig, 2004).

Figure 3 shows that only two (1%) of the 201 articles from *La Portada Canadá* provided the audience with an analysis of the political, historic, and cultural background of the situation.

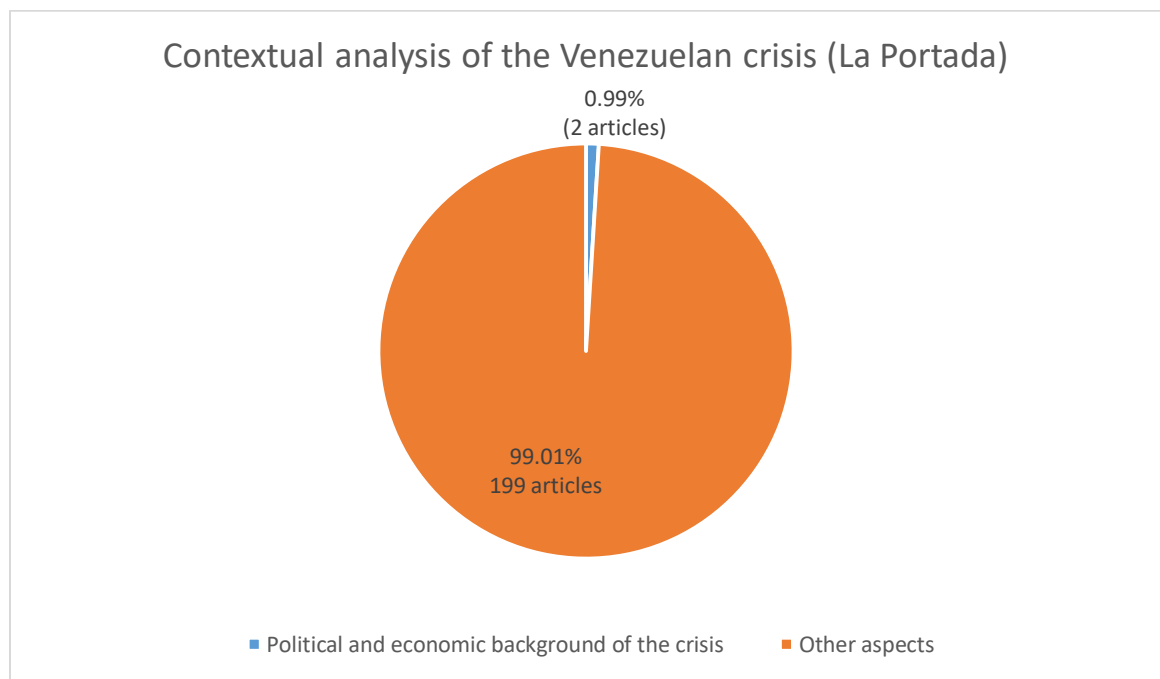


Figure 3. Contextual analysis of the Venezuelan crisis in *La Portada Canadá*.

These two articles focused on the legal and political aspects of the “autocratic measures” imposed by the government against the opposition-led National Assembly. One of the articles portrays Maduro’s government as an “autocratic legalism” regime in which government officials abuse power, to the detriment of other rightfully elected bodies. In one of the articles, entitled “*Canada y la crisis en Venezuela*” (“Canada and the Crisis in Venezuela”) Maduro’s government

was portrayed as a hybrid administration that combines democratic, participative, and dictatorial practices:

According to Javier Corrales, professor of political science at Amherst College, Massachusetts, “hybrid regimes, also known as competitive authoritarianism, are those that simultaneously demonstrate democratic and authoritarian practices.” Corrales affirms that Venezuela is the best example of a hybrid government, since the governing party competes in “free” elections (a democratic act), but at the same time the president governs with a system of “undermined checks and balances” (a demonstration of authoritarian practice). (Moreno, 2018)¹¹

Instead of contextualizing the crisis using the privileged access to the diasporic perspectives and knowledge of the conflict, *La Portada Canadá* opted for more personalized news, which according to Bennett and Townend (2009), focused on the journalistic bias that gives preference to individual actors and human-interest angles in events over larger institutional, social, and political contexts (p. 14). In this sense, 199 articles of the 201 analyzed in this study are based more on describing the hardships of Venezuelan immigrants in Colombia and Brazil, the political engagement of the Venezuelan community in Toronto, the street confrontations between the Venezuelan government and opposition’s supporters in Caracas, the food and medicine shortages, and the collapse of public services in the country. The next

¹¹ Según Javier Corrales, profesor de Ciencias Políticas en el Colegio Amherst, Massachusetts, el “concepto de los regímenes híbridos, también conocidos como autoritario-competitivos, son aquellos que manifiestan simultáneamente prácticas democráticas y autoritarias”. Corrales asegura que Venezuela es el mejor ejemplo de un gobierno híbrido, ya que el partido de gobierno compite en elecciones “libres” (acto democrático), pero a la vez el presidente gobierna con un sistema de “frenos y contrapesos socavados” (demostración de practica autoritaria). (Moreno, 2018) Translation by author

example illustrates how *La Portada Canadá* framed the discourse surrounding the daily confrontations and the “danger” associated with the crisis:

The anti-government protests, which began in late March, have left at least 77 dead, 1,400 injured and more than 500 detained. The fear of dying in the streets has now extended to buildings, because at night, armed men shoot without control at buildings where government opponents are said to live. (“Aumentan las protestas” [“The number of protests increases”], 2017, para. 1)¹²

In the case of the *Toronto Star*, six (7.2%) of the 55 articles included the historic, political, and/or economic context and geopolitical implications of the situation (see Figure 4).

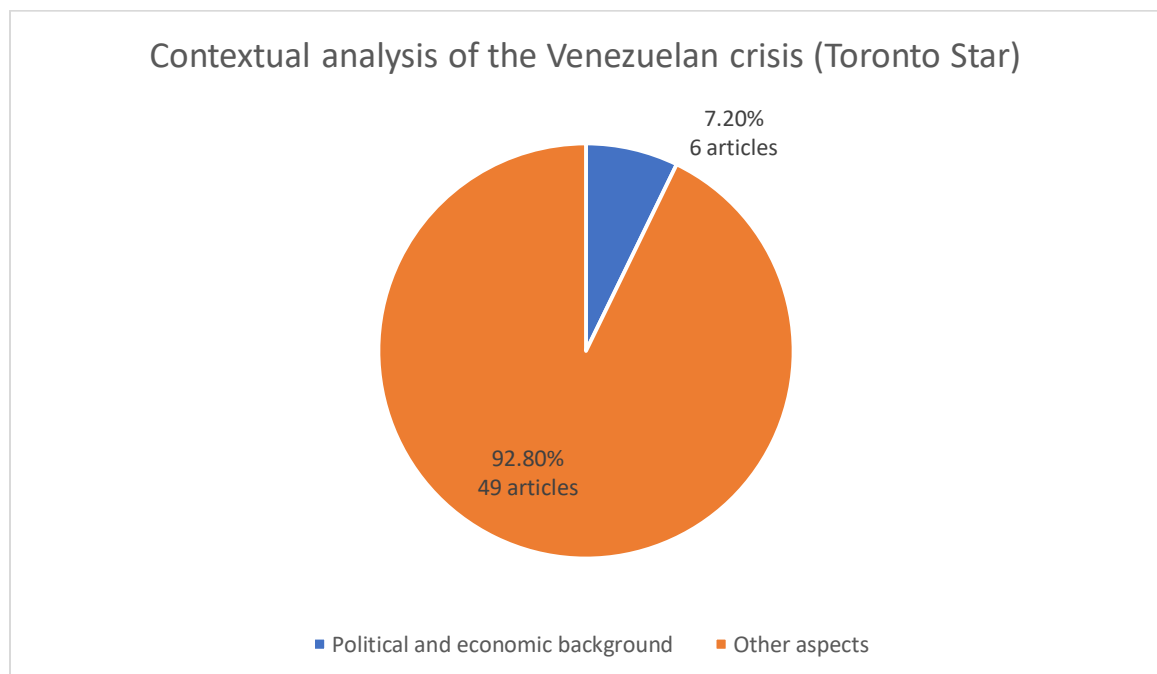


Figure 4. Contextual analysis of the Venezuelan crisis in the *Toronto Star*.

¹² Las protestas antigubernamentales, que se iniciaron a fines de marzo, han dejado al menos 77 muertos, 1,400 heridos y más de 500 detenidos. El temor de morir en las calles, ahora se trasladó a los edificios, porque por las noches hombres armados disparan sin control contra edificaciones donde supuestamente viven los opositores al Gobierno (“Aumentan las protestas”, 2017, para. 1). Translation by author

These analyses emphasized the economic context of Venezuela as a member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and how the crisis has impacted other OPEC members' oil industries, which the previous sections have explored as part of the national agenda/interests. On the other hand, the historic background, particularly in regard to the Bolivarian Revolution of 1999 and the relevance of the late President Hugo Chavez in Venezuelan politics, was relevant in two of these articles.

The article "*Canada Is on the Wrong Side of the Conflict in Venezuela*," published by the Toronto Star on March 15, 2018, analyzed how Chavez is a key political figure in the crisis and how his populist leadership is the key ingredient to understanding his phenomenon in the country. In this article, Canadian journalist Linda McQuaig analyzed how the United States's and Venezuela's wealthy elite are among the real causes of the political and economic crisis. McQuaig's approach towards the crisis constitutes the only favourable narrative or opinion towards Nicolas Maduro's government in the Toronto Star. According to McQuaig (2018),

...the Obama administration targeted individual Venezuelans with sanctions, but the Trump administration's sanctions are much broader, taking punishing aim at the country's entire economy.... Venezuela has been in Washington's crosshairs since the dramatic 1998 election of Hugo Chavez, a charismatic, populist leader — and this is one case where "populist" legitimately applies. Unlike the "populist" Donald Trump, Chavez actually came from humble roots as the child of Black and Indigenous parents, and actually championed his country's large peasant population (para. 4)

Most of the descriptions about the Venezuelan crisis were presented through in-situ news, in which terms such as *violent place* and *daily confrontations* were common elements in the

Toronto Star's articles, while *human rights violations*, *repression*, and *anarchy* were crucial in *La Portada Canadá*'s narrative:

Venezuela has turned into an out-of-control country. At night, supporters of *Chavismo* open fire on the buildings where political opponents live, without any authority stopping them. During the day, demonstrations are still taking over the cities, in spite of repression by the authorities, and of the dead who remain on the street. ("Aumentan Las Protestas" ["The number of protests increases"], 2017, para. 2)¹³

This excerpt from an article published on June 28, 2017, also demonstrates that according to *La Portada Canadá*, an important aspect of the political crisis is how violent groups that support the government are protected by the country's security forces, which is an element that is present in the majority of the articles that recounted the confrontations between March and June 2017. Indeed, in all the articles from *La Portada Canadá*, neither Nicolas Maduro's government nor his political followers were portrayed in a positive light.

Media Discourses: The Role of International News Agencies

The majority of articles that met the selection criteria for this study came from international news agencies, which implies that, to a large extent, most of the discourses and narratives from agencies such as Reuters, Sputnik News, and EFE (Spain) were replicated or reproduced in both the mainstream and diasporic newspaper.

¹³ En un país sin control se ha convertido Venezuela, en las noches, seguidores del chavismo disparan a los edificios donde viven los opositores, sin que ninguna autoridad los controle, en el día las marchas se siguen tomando las ciudades, pese a la represión de las autoridades, y los muertos que siguen quedando en la vía pública ("Aumentan Las Protestas, 2017, para. 2). Translation by author

A key factor in analyzing this influence of news agencies in media coverage and discourses on international crises is the fact that both printed and digital media still use news agencies as primary sources of information in their international section, often without reframing or rewriting the pieces of news and reports they receive (Rauch, 2016; Steele, 2016).

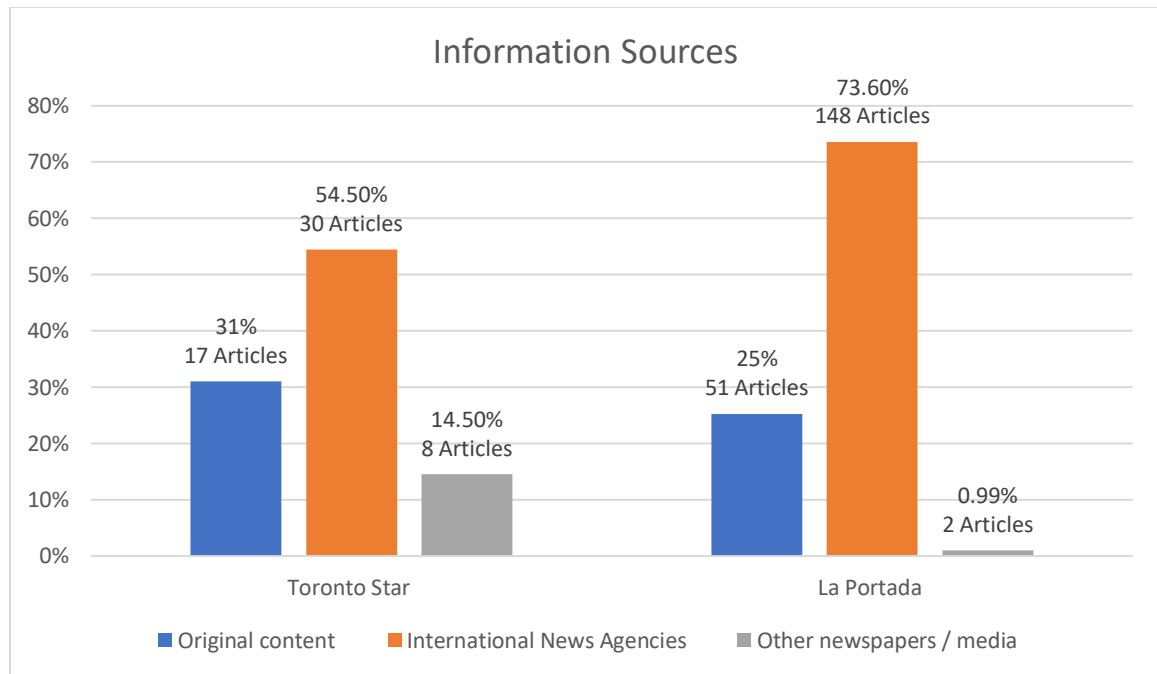


Figure 5. Information Sources.

As shown in Figure 6, of the 55 articles published by the *Toronto Star*, 30 (54.5%) came from international news agencies (mainly the Associated Press), 17 articles (31%) were written by the newspapers' journalists or collaborators, while eight stories (14.5%) came from international media or other international newspapers such as the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. *La Portada Canadá* published 148 articles (73.6%) from international news agencies, and 51 articles (25%) were written by the newspaper's editor, journalists, and/or collaborators. Nine of these 51 articles were editorials. Two articles (0.99%) were produced or edited by other international media.

A relevant aspect in terms of *La Portada Canadá*'s coverage of the conflict is how it adapted and/or reframed newswires from international news agencies, likely to make them more appealing for its Latin American audience in Toronto. This adaptation implied the reframing of newswires from Spanish international news agencies such as EFE, for which the inclusion of narrative elements that accentuated the human impact aspects in the stories was also common. The next excerpt is from an article distributed by the Spanish agency *EFE* and published by *La Portada Canadá* in late August 2017. The original content, in which former Mexican President Vicente Fox denounced Maduro's regime, was adapted according to the newspaper's editorial style. Colloquialisms were added, and some of the wording was changed or emphasized possibly to intensify the generalized criticism against Maduro.

President Nicolas Maduro, who has plunged Venezuela into a deep crisis... is receiving criticism from all sides. Now, the latest comes from former Mexican President Vicente Fox, who held nothing back and said "That donkey Maduro does not care about the law or about human rights. But Venezuela will soon be free, and that dictator will either resign or leave with his feet first, in a box." ("Al burro de Maduro" ["To that donkey Maduro"], 2017, para. 1)¹⁴

This reframing of the narratives from international agencies can be used to illustrate how diasporic media need to be situated within the dynamic contexts of globalization and diaspora (Srinivasan & Pyati, 2007). Whereas the narratives distributed and promoted by international agencies such as EFE and Reuters have been considered dominant discourses (Putnis, 2014),

¹⁴ Al presidente Nicolas Maduro que tiene sumido en una profunda crisis a Venezuela...le llueven críticas por todos lados, la última de ellas, la del ex presidente de México, Vicente Fox, que se fue con todo y dijo "Al burro de Maduro no le interesa la ley ni los derechos humanos, pero Venezuela será libre próximamente, y ese dictador sale por su renuncia o sale con las patas por delante, en un cajón". ("Al burro de Maduro", 2017, para. 1). Translation by author

diasporic media such as *La Portada* Canadá can also utilize some elements from these sources and give them a different context that can be useful to connect with their audiences. This (re)construction of unique discursive elements from major international sources is, according to Lamb (2009), one of the most distinctive elements of diasporic media and narratives.

Conclusion

Diasporic media articles are a key component in framing popular discourse related to the Venezuelan humanitarian crisis. Although diasporic newspapers do not necessarily challenge the dominant/mainstream discourses from international news agencies, they have incorporated narrative elements and stories that are often excluded or have limited media coverage in Toronto's mainstream media.

This study demonstrated that coverage and discourses on the Venezuelan crisis have been significantly different in terms of the narratives and journalistic biases applied by mainstream and diasporic media to present stories to their respective audiences. Firstly, *La Portada* Canadá, a weekly newspaper for Latin American immigrants in Toronto, provided more extensive coverage than the Toronto Star, the largest daily newspaper in the Greater Toronto Area. Although a large percentage of *La Portada* Canada's articles replicated or reproduced dominant discourses from international agencies, the newspaper developed its own narrative approach by including local and transnational elements of the Venezuelan crisis in Toronto. This transnational approach focused on the political and civic engagement of Venezuelans in Toronto and the struggle of this growing community to legitimate their political cause in Canadian society.

The results also showed that media in the Latin American diaspora appropriated journalistic biases in order to connect or engage with their audiences. The human impact and dramatization biases are the most prevalent elements within the diasporic media narratives

analyzed in this study. In this sense, diasporic media tend to reframe or adapt dominant discourses and make it more relatable to their audiences by stressing the human impact element.

Traditional mainstream media news values, such as focus on the national interest, can have alternative implications in diasporic media. This study showed that in the Latin American diasporic media, the national interest bias is problematized by complexity surrounding the concept of ‘nation’ within the diaspora. In their coverage, the Venezuelan crisis was approached through the lens of the host country’s national interest, but additionally from the national/diasporic interests of the individual Latin American countries that constitute the readership of newspapers such as *La Portada Canadá*. Therefore, the crisis is portrayed as a Venezuelan catastrophe as much as a Latin American catastrophe, with more or less severe consequences in Canadian society.

Though this study focused on issues of diasporic media coverage and discourses, the impact of these discourses on the Latin American and Venezuelan diasporas provide interesting avenues for future research. In particular, the human impact, dramatization and local-transnational input in media coverage could be crucial elements in assessing the role of Latin American diasporic media in the reactions and responses of Toronto’s Venezuelan community during the post- crisis period.

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