

In Search of a Safe Harbour: The Framing of Venezuelan Migrants in Mainstream Newspapers in Trinidad and Tobago

Migration and Development
1–16

© 2024 The Author(s)

Article reuse guidelines:

in.sagepub.com/journals-permissions-india

DOI: 10.1177/21632324241281435

journals.sagepub.com/home/mad



Sharifa Simon-Roberts¹  and Timothy Affonso²

Abstract

Driven by national, political and socio-economic circumstances in Venezuela, there has been a mass influx of Venezuelan migrants into Trinidad and Tobago (T&T). Conditions in T&T have affected the receptivity of Venezuelan migrants. Using framing as the theoretical lens, this study extends research on media depictions of migrants into a Caribbean context by examining ways in which the mainstream newspapers in T&T presented Venezuelan migrants over a one-year period. Results reveal that although there is some attention to Venezuelan migrants' integration into life in T&T, such attention is limited. Primarily, T&T newspapers other Venezuelan migrants by labelling and clustering them and highlighting their association with crime, human rights challenges they face and the State's response. Such depictions have the potential to signal the manner in which Venezuelan migrants are seen and treated. We discuss the implications of these representations in relation to the existing literature and offer recommendations moving forward.

Keywords

Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela, migrants, newspaper depictions, framing

Introduction

The recent explosion of migration from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (Venezuela) to Trinidad and Tobago (T&T), the southernmost Caribbean island,

¹ Communication Studies, Emerson College, Boston, MA, USA

² The Faculty of Law, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago

Corresponding author:

Sharifa Simon-Roberts, Communication Studies, Emerson College, 120 Boylston Street, Boston, MA 02116, USA.

E-mail: s_simon_roberts@emerson.edu

began around 2015 (Rodriguez & Collins, 2021) and continued during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–2022 (Boodram, 2023). T&T is approximately 470 miles north of Venezuela, which is situated on the northern coast of South America. The close proximity between the two countries and the porous borders of T&T have facilitated the entry of many Venezuelan migrants into T&T through illegal ports of entry. With its geographic location, Spanish ancestry, and other cultural ties, Venezuelans often identify themselves as Hispanic and Latine. Meanwhile, T&T reflects its history as a former sugar colony that saw Africans forcibly brought to work the plantations—later followed by East Indians. Today, the two largest ethnic groups in the country are people of African and East Indian descent (United Nations Population Fund, n.d.).

As of November 2023, there were ‘approximately 44,800 Venezuelan migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers’ (ACAPS, n.d., para. 1). For the purposes of this study, the term ‘Venezuelan migrants’ will be used to include Venezuelan asylum-seekers and Venezuelan refugees. The large number of persons from one country entering small island developing states, such as T&T, brings with it certain challenges, in particular, a strain on limited resources of the host State and the consequent unique experiences of migrants. These experiences are deeply linked to the lack of adequate legislative protection for refugees and result in the exposure of Venezuelans to violations of the right to non-discrimination, non-penalisation and non-refoulement.

Previous research has documented the media’s ability to shape issues that are in front of mind for the public and thereby to exert some influence on public discourse (van Dijk, 1993). Underscoring the importance of this research is Blinder and Allen’s (2016) assertion that ‘mass media’s discursive construction of “immigration” shapes public perceptions or mental images of immigrants’ (p. 5) and the role of news media in informing political and policy decisions related to immigration (McCann et al., 2023). Especially in a post-colonial slave society (T&T), in which undercurrents of racism and xenophobia exist, it is important to examine the media representation of migrants. Seo and Kavakli (2022), who conducted a meta-analysis of media depictions of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers, contend that there is ‘an utter lack of research outside the European and North American contexts’ (p. 159). Moreover, Wallace and Mortley (2021) declare, ‘the exponential migration of Venezuelans is an emerging issue within the Caribbean that is gravely under researched’ (p. 179). With these factors in mind, the current research moves one step toward filling this lacuna. To that end, the research question guiding this study is: How do mainstream newspapers in T&T present Venezuelan migrants living in T&T?

The major goals of this study are to: (a) identify the most salient themes the mainstream newspapers in T&T used in their coverage of Venezuelan migrants and (b) explore the messages being communicated by the media in their framing of Venezuelan migrants. The study extends investigations on global migration by spotlighting the twin-island Republic of T&T, which has seen a significant influx of Venezuelan nationals seeking refuge.

As our identities informed the research process, it is worth noting aspects of our identity. We are Trinbagonian. One of us identifies as a woman of African descent, the other as a man of Asian and European ethnicity.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Okoye (2022) asserts, 'Framing theory helps us to make sense of the complexity of mediating immigration and migrants' (pp. 2157–2158). The theory contends that the media organise information about the subjects they cover and the narrative presented. In so doing, the media '[select], [emphasize] and [give] precedence to certain attributes' of a news story (Amores et al., 2019, p. 148). The media's presentation of information, in turn, affects how audiences' view particular topics (Goffman, 1974). Definitions of framing abound. D'Angelo (2017) contends, a media frame is 'a written, spoken, graphical, or visual message' used 'to contextualize a topic, such as a person, event, episode, or issue, within a text' (p. 1). Meanwhile, Neuman et al. (1992) describe frames as 'conceptual tools which media and individuals rely on to convey, interpret and evaluate information' (p. 60). Simon and Xenos (2000) state, 'a frame is an ever-present discursive device that channels the audience as it constructs the meaning of particular communicative acts' (p. 367). Entman (1993) notes, as communicators frame subjects, some aspects are accentuated, whereas others are excluded. By increasing or decreasing the salience, the media define the issue and discourse around it and ascribe meaning. By functioning as mental constructs, media frames can shape people's understanding of a subject (Reese, 2001). Moreover, the perpetuation of media frames reinforces specific viewpoints.

Media Framing of Migrants

Not only do media depictions contribute to public attitude and discourse, but they can also influence policies and foster certain lines of thinking (Fleras & Kunz, 2001). As frames are discursively constructed, they serve as rhetorical tools that (re)produce common beliefs about various topics, including migrants (Scardigno et al., 2024). The media's representation of migrants, therefore, can affect people's view of immigrants (Esses, 2021; Esses et al., 2021; Haynes et al., 2016). Increasingly, Western media depict immigrants and refugees as threats to the host country (Esses et al., 2013), jeopardising safety, cultural identity, economy and health in the host country (McCann et al., 2023). Atwell Seate and Mastro (2016) note, 'immigrants who belong to racialised outgroups are constructed as a physical threat, economic threat, or symbolic threat (jeopardising the host country's culture).' Furthermore, Crawley (2005), Threadgold (2009) and Balch and Balabanova (2016) posit that the media's negative portrayals of migrants and asylum seekers have instinctively given rise to negative public attitudes and indeed promote opposition toward immigrants. Lawlor and Tolley (2017), though, found, media frames of immigrants and refugees differ, with coverage of refugees leaning 'more negative' than that of immigrants (p. 985). Liu (2019) asserts, regardless of 'historical, demographic, economic, and political' factors (p. 2), media frames of immigration are limited and tend to be negative or ambivalent. To a lesser extent, migrants are framed as victims, and to an even smaller

degree, they are framed as assets (Crawley et al., 2016). As Amores et al. (2019) contend, visual media frames of migrants and refugees are influenced by external factors. In Europe, 'media in regions under more pressure from the wave of migration adopt a more biased treatment of the crisis, with a clear interest in showing the displaced people less as victims and more as a burden or threat for Western cultures and societies' (Amores et al., 2019, p. 157).

Hence, 'Whenever native-born respondents observe images or stories including foreigners on television, in the newspaper, or on the radio, they are reminded of the presence of immigrants in their country' (Herda, 2010, p. 677). Taking Herda's (2010) statement into account, news coverage of Venezuelan migrants in T&T likely makes it hard to forget that this group of migrants is present. Additionally, as news media contribute to public perception of 'the legal and moral responsibilities of' the host country to migrants (McCann et al., 2023, p. 6), the coverage also reinforces social, legal, political and economic factors tied to migration.

Prior to COVID-19, media frames around Venezuelan migrants in T&T often stigmatised them and were 'co-mingled with xenophobia and labelling' (Peters & Berkeley, 2021, p. 274). Ramcharitar (2023) argues that in T&T, mass media can promote views that result in 'nativism not just [being] pervasive, but normal and acceptable' (p. 257).

Trinbagonians' Attitude Toward Venezuelan Migrants

Admittedly, 'the phenomenon of Venezuelan migrants [...] is understudied in Trinidad and Tobago' (Peters & Berkeley, 2021, p. 280). A review of the literature suggests, generally, Trinbagonians view Venezuelan migrants in a negative light. Anatol and Kangalee (2021) highlight a viewpoint that the crime increase in T&T is attributed to migration from Venezuela. Although there is a low incidence of crime at the hands of migrants, public opinion fora in T&T are plagued with anti-immigrant sentiment (Neptune-Figaro, 2023). The anti-immigrant attitudes exist among the general public as well as by the State (Chapman, 2023). Peters and Berkeley (2021) call attention to public officials in T&T whose comments have reinforced stigma against Venezuelan migrants. As Amores et al. (2019) state, 'political and economic factors have a direct influence on the decisions made in the media, and conversely, the media can influence the decisions that are made in politics' (p. 157). While the government is not the focus of this study, their position may have contributed to newspapers' presentation of information on Venezuelan migrants.

Taking the foregoing discussion to its logical conclusion, this research is urgently required. We undertook the study, motivated by Bilge's (2019) contention that 'the host culture's mass media is demonstrative of general perceptions about the newcomer' (p. 114). Gaining an understanding of the 'host culture's perceptions of the newcomers' (Bilge, 2019, p. 114) through an examination of mainstream newspapers' coverage offers further insight into the receptivity of Venezuelan migrants into T&T and forewarns of their integration into the fabric of T&T's society. As Irom et al. (2022) did, we use a critical lens to probe the

framing of Venezuelan migrants in T&T. Media frames can ‘perpetuate existing systemic inequalities’, and therefore, it is necessary to go beyond counting the themes in newspaper articles to examine the overt and underlying implications of those themes (Irom et al., 2022, p. 110).

Methodology

This qualitative study centred on understanding the picture mainstream newspapers in T&T paint of Venezuelan migrants. We chose the medium of newspapers because print media depict immigration in a realistic manner (Herda, 2015). In keeping with previous studies such as Liu (2019) and Yang (2021), we focused on a one-year period—from 30 July 2022 to 29 July 2023 inclusive. We selected this time frame primarily because T&T lifted major COVID-19 restrictions on 29 July 2022; prior to the removal of these restrictions, much of the discourse on Venezuelan migrants in T&T revolved around their role in the spread of COVID-19. We wanted to analyse the data without having COVID-19 overshadow the conversation.

There are three local daily newspapers in T&T: *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday* and *Trinidad Express Newspapers*. All of these publications have a national circulation, are privately owned and their content is available in print and online. None leans particularly liberal or conservative.

Using the publications’ online search tools, we searched for all news articles on Venezuelan migration to T&T published between 30 July 2022 and 29 July 2023. The terms used in the search included ‘Venezuelan migrant’, ‘Venezuelan national’, ‘Venezuelan refugee’ and ‘*Vene*’ (informal reference to Venezuelans). We identified 147 articles and then excluded 26 results because they were not related to the topic at hand or were duplicates. For example, if an article contained both the terms ‘Venezuelan national’ and ‘Venezuelan refugee’, the same article would appear in the search results twice. As such, we deleted one of the results. The final sample comprised 121 articles.

We used thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Our search for themes relied on an inductive approach. We read the newspaper articles multiple times to become familiar with the data. Next, we perused the articles to generate initial codes. Following this, we combined the codes to develop possible themes. We reviewed the themes and patterns among them, and from there, we conducted subsequent analyses to develop a final list of themes, which we defined and named. As we coded the data, we conferred with each other to ensure we were in agreement and to increase the trustworthiness of the results. Upon completion of our thematic analysis, we identified five themes.

Results

During our analysis, we noticed two trends. The first trend sought to portray Venezuelan migrants positively and was captured in the following theme:

Theme 1: Venezuelan migrants' integration into life in T&T.

The second trend represented the media's overt othering of Venezuelan migrants and was apparent in the following themes:

Theme 2: Human rights challenges faced by Venezuelan migrants in T&T;

Theme 3: Labelling and clustering of Venezuelan migrants;

Theme 4: Venezuelan migrants' association with crime; and

Theme 5: The State's response to the influx of Venezuelan migrants.

Venezuelan Migrants' Integration into Life in T&T

This theme refers to steps both migrants and the host country were taking to encourage the social inclusion of Venezuelan migrants and promote harmonious relationships between the two groups. Newspaper articles highlighted the contribution of Venezuelan migrants to the economy of the country, their participation in skills-training programmes, sports and cultural events. Also spotlighted was the bridging of the language gap through the exchange of Spanish and English and the extension of the migrant registration programme by the Government of T&T.

A 30 May 2023 article in *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday* stated, 'The first cohort of Venezuelan migrant and refugee women graduated [...] from the Venezuelan Integration and Development Association's (VIDA) pilot project that trained the women in home-based gardening, agribusiness and conversational English.' Meanwhile, a 23 February 2023 article in *Trinidad Express Newspapers* pointed out that during the 'Carnival Tuesday late-night revelry, known traditionally as the Las Lap', some revellers were 'ably assisted by a group of Venezuelan migrants armed with drums and playing a lively rhythm as they led a procession ... At one point, members of the Venezuelan contingent started a samba dance in the middle of the road.' Such articles point to Venezuelans availing themselves of opportunities and embracing T&T's traditions while retaining elements of their culture.

Within the theme, we noted that there was also a focus on steps that entities within T&T were taking to provide for migrants. Some articles published in T&T newspapers called attention to the work of the Roman Catholic Church and non-governmental organisations, such as La Romaine Migrant Support Group, Living Water Community and Is There Not a Cause, in supporting Venezuelan migrants.

Human Rights Challenges Faced by Venezuelan Migrants in T&T

The data pointed to challenges Venezuelan migrants faced navigating life in T&T in accessing education, healthcare and, at times, becoming victims of slavery or servitude. Primarily, this is a result of the disadvantageous position in which they find themselves as a result of their immigration status and T&T's governmental policies. For instance, an article published in *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian* on 14 July 2023 stated,

A study conducted by the International Organization for Migration unearthed that more than 60 percent of Venezuelan migrant children did not have access to education in T&T. The findings of the study also showed underpayment of Venezuelan migrants and pointed to increased concerns about the uptake of sexual and reproductive health.

Moreover, the following 14 May 2023 article in *Trinidad Express Newspapers* illustrates the risk that Venezuelan migrants face, being held in slavery or servitude:

A 19-year-old Venezuelan migrant has told of being abducted, raped and sold into sexual slavery in Trinidad [...] The woman [...] told police that [...] she was taken from a bar [...] and carried to a house [...] where she was raped. She was then taken to another apartment [where], with a gun to her head, she was told by a man that she had been sold to them, to be a prostitute.

Labelling and Clustering of Venezuelan Migrants

The data also denoted the newspapers' labelling and clustering of Venezuelan migrants. The words 'illegal' and 'undocumented', which were used to describe Venezuelan migrants living in T&T without the necessary legal documentation, reduce these individuals to their immigration status and underscore their otherness or difference. 'Illegal' and 'undocumented' carry with them negative undertones, and articles that used these terms signalled that the individuals being referenced did not belong to T&T and further emphasised that their presence in the country was illegal. Examples include: 'The Heliport was set up in 2020 ... as a COVID-19 quarantine centre for those illegal immigrants' (*Trinidad Express Newspapers*, 3 July 2023) and 'Government had expressly said illegal immigrants, whether or not they had an asylum-seeker certificate, would be treated in accordance with provisions of the Immigration Act' (*Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*, 3 July 2023). Articles later that month stated, 'The State is set to defend scores of compensation claims from illegal migrants' (*Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, 26 July 2023) and 'the purpose of the Heliport facility was strictly to accommodate illegal migrants' (*Trinidad Express Newspapers*, 27 July 2023).

Further, newspaper reports often refer to immigrants as a cluster or group of collective elements, and this depersonalises them and their experiences. It further denies them of their individuality, personality and even dignity. A case in point is the headline of 10 July 2023 in *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, which referred to Venezuelan migrants as undocumented and lumped them into a single group: '200 undocumented Venezuelans arrested.'

Venezuelan Migrants' Association with Crime

The theme reflects Venezuelans as both victims and perpetrators of crime. The extensive reporting on Venezuelan migrants' being tied to crime in some capacity fuels the perception that they are dangerous and simply being in their presence could pose a danger to one's safety. The newspapers' decision to highlight that the victims and perpetrators were Venezuelan nationals underscored that they were not T&T citizens and therefore different from Trinbagonians.

A single article published by *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday* on 15 April 2023 included the following: ‘A Venezuelan national had been charged with operating an illegal gambling house’ and ‘A 25-year-old Venezuelan woman was arrested for operating illegal gaming houses.’ Media representations of a seemingly inextricable link between Venezuelan migrants and crime feature prominently with headlines such as:

‘Venezuelan accepts private-hire work, gets robbed & shot’ (*Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, 7 August 2022)

‘Man, 19, charged with robbing Venezuelan salesman’ (*Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, 8 August 2022)

‘Venezuelan knifed to death in Couva’ (*Trinidad Express Newspapers*, 14 August 2022)

‘Venezuelans held with big money’ (*Trinidad Express Newspapers*, 21 August 2022)

‘Venezuelan national charged with human trafficking’ (*Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, 3 October 2022)

‘Venezuelan woman charged with assaulting police officer, resisting arrest’ (*Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, 26 October 2022)

‘15 year old Venezuelan charged with murder’ (*Trinidad Express Newspapers*, 20 March 2023)

The State’s Response to the Influx of Venezuelan Migrants

A common State response stemmed from claims by Venezuelan migrants who were seeking judicial redress. One case dealt with an order made by the Minister of National Security to detain migrants at the Chaguaramas Heliport, which led to migrants’ claim of a breach by T&T of the United Nations Human Rights Due Diligence Policy. The case also drew attention to what they claimed to be ‘inhuman’ conditions at the Heliport (*Trinidad Express Newspapers*, 20 July 2023; *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*, 25 July 2023).

In another matter, the question of the effect of international law on domestic law arose as the High Court considered the applicability of local immigration laws on refugees in light of the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention. That case arose from an order by the Minister of National Security to deport a Venezuelan migrant. Newspaper headlines included ‘Reactions after court ruling on asylum-seekers, refugees: “Urgent need for legislative reform”’ (*Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*, 4 July 2023) and ‘[UPDATED] Judge: T&T not bound by UN convention - WAY CLEAR TO DEPORT’ (*Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*, 4 July 2023). This case is the subject of an appeal.

Discussion

Coming out of our analysis of the mainstream newspapers in T&T, we call attention to three main takeaways: (a) a limited number of “positive” depictions of

Venezuelan migrants in contrast to an array of negative portrayals, (b) the media's dehumanisation and depersonalisation of Venezuelan migrants in T&T and (c) the role of otherness in the unique racial landscape that is T&T. Following the discussion of the takeaways, we put forward recommendations.

First, it is worth restating that negative newspaper coverage of Venezuelan migrants surpassed positive. Within the seemingly positive trend, the theme of integration spotlighted the way in which status is utilised in portraying messages about Venezuelan migrants. Venezuelan migrant status is commonly used when reporting on a negative story but frequently omitted when the story is positive. Through this convenient use of status, the newspapers frame an imbalanced image of Venezuelan migrants in T&T. The limited presence of the theme of integration within articles is not shocking given de Vreese's (2005) finding about the coverage of topical issues and general principles of framing, which show that newspaper reports call attention to certain elements and exclude others. 'The people's paper', *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*, presented the most comprehensive view of Venezuelans in T&T. Portrayals of Venezuelans' integration that do exist align with the idea of social inclusion, whereby there is an emphasis on reducing social exclusion and promoting full participation in society (McDonald et al., 2019).

Despite what might appear to be positive on the surface, the trend reveals that there are significant gaps to true integration. According to Ndofor-Tah et al. (2019), 'Integration encompasses access to resources, like education and healthcare, opportunities for work and leisure, as well as broader concepts like social mixing' (p. 7). Thousands of migrants remain unregistered and, per newspaper reports, are ineligible to receive free healthcare. Therefore, they cannot fully integrate into life in T&T. A similar situation exists with access to education and the right to work in the country legally.

Second, in contrast to the media's limited focus on integration stands the tendency by the media to treat Venezuelan migrants differently. The media's othering of Venezuelan migrants is multidimensional. This othering may be attributed to weak human rights protection by the State. After all, politics has a direct influence on media decisions (Amores et al., 2019). Thus, if Venezuelan migrants are not seen as being worthy of protection by the State, it is easier for the media to dehumanise them (Curle, 2020). The prevalence of newspaper reports on human rights violations such as breaches of the right not to be prosecuted for illegal entry (non-penalisation), the right not to be discriminated against on the basis of their status (non-discrimination) and the right not to be returned to their country of origin prior to a determination of their status (non-refoulement) undermines their integration. Continuous reporting on the human rights challenges Venezuelan migrants face and the State's response reinforces the otherness of Venezuelan migrants.

In addition to a steady focus on migrants' human rights challenges and government actions, newspapers dehumanise and outcast Venezuelan migrants by linking them to crime. This, according to Bar-Tal (2000), others those who do not belong to the dominant group and strips them of their human nature. Dehumanisation has far-reaching consequences on affect and behaviour (Bar-Tal, 2000; Esses et al., 2008, 2012, 2013, 2021; Sutter, 2017). Framing immigrants—in this case, Venezuelan migrants—as a threat, stokes apprehension about the racialised outgroup (van der Linden & Jacobs, 2017). As Haslam (2006) declares,

dehumanisation is ‘arguably most often mentioned in relation to ethnicity, race, and related topics such as immigration’ (p. 252). The media’s dehumanisation of Venezuelan migrants can signal to the public ‘how immigrants and refugees should be viewed and how they should be treated’ (Esses et al., 2013, p. 522). Further, as the results show, mainstream newspapers in T&T other Venezuelan migrants through the use of the terms ‘illegal’ and ‘undocumented’ when referencing them. The use of the terms such as “‘illegal immigrants,” “boat people” or even “asylum seekers” is problematic’ (O’Doherty & Lecouteur, 2007, p. 2). At the heart of such terms are the citizenship, legal status and intentions of the newcomers (O’Doherty & Lecouteur, 2007).

Third, the current study contributes to ongoing conversations about race in T&T (Kelly, 2023; Potter et al., 2010; Rampersad, 2012). Based on the skin tone measurement developed by Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America, where 1 represents the lightest skin tone and 11 represents the darkest skin tone, the mean colour of skin for Venezuelans is 4.17; for Trinbagonians, it is 6.74 (Painter II et al., 2020). Xenophobic attitudes within host countries have been cited as a source of hostility directed toward Venezuelan migrants (Wallace & Mortley, 2021). In T&T, more specifically, the discrimination has been attributed to personal characteristics such as ‘being culturally different, light-skinned, [and] being different in nationality’ (Herbert, 2021, p. 18). Herbert’s (2021) research reveals, the skin colour of Venezuelan migrants is a factor in the treatment they receive by the national population. It can be argued that this situation is tied to the notion of ‘racism in reverse’, defined as ‘the concept of the superiority of the previously oppressed race’ (Rubin, 1962, p. 434), which according to Rubin (1962), developed in some formerly British colonies.

Persons who are part of the dominant race—one that has been historically oppressed—perpetuate the experience they once had against the other racial group that is representative of the former oppressor. In this case, White Venezuelan migrants or White-presenting Venezuelan migrants are victims of discrimination and victimised due to the colour of their skin (Herbert, 2021). This could help to explain why the attitudes reflected in the newspaper articles toward Venezuelan migrants exist in a realm of dehumanisation. According to Reny et al. (2020), the ‘feelings of outgroup resentment or threat’ (p. 9) directed toward Venezuelan migrants are possibly tied to their race, ethnicity, and nationality. Reny et al. (2020) contend, racial resentment ‘is associated with generalised outgroup prejudice and correlated with anti-Latino attitudes’ (p. 9). In essence, the newspaper articles revealed a subcurrent of indirect or veiled racism directed toward Venezuelan migrants.

Recommendations

Newspaper portrayals of Venezuelan migrants can—wittingly or unwittingly—be used to further justify the treatment they receive. Taking into account the results of the study, subsequent analysis and the media’s ability to influence immigration-related matters (McCann et al., 2023), as a matter of urgency, we

offer recommendations grounded in human rights principles. These recommendations pertain to the media as well as the State.

Recommendation 1: Although newspapers purport to be reporting objectively on a subject, by choosing which stories they cover and the angles they feature, they are inevitably framing issues. Such framing can affect public sentiments, discourse and ultimately policies. The media, therefore, need to pay particular attention to including a diversity of stories. Additionally, media entities and public officials alike ought to prioritise language grounded in cultural awareness and sensitivity, with the aims of humanising migrants and strengthening the relationship between migrants and Trinbagonians.

Recommendation 2: Based on the data, a significant amount of media attention centred on the State's response to Venezuelan migrants in T&T. It is apparent that the government plays a crucial role in newspaper reports on the migrant population in T&T. One step toward reducing the othering of Venezuelan migrants would be to pursue the question of the legal recognition of their status. The passage of national laws that are consistent with international legal standards of State behaviour toward refugees and asylum seekers is essential in promoting a harmonious relationship. Protecting Venezuelan migrants from discrimination, illegal deportation and penalisation allows for greater integration into T&T. This broader integration can also be achieved through the guaranteeing of rights inclusive of education, work, healthcare, family life and privacy as would be enjoyed by Trinbagonians.

Recommendation 3: There is a need for an effective national system for the processing of migrants. For example, the processing of asylum seekers would include the prompt registration of all asylum seekers, the speedy assessment of whether they meet the international standards to be determined refugees and their settlement into T&T. Such a process, in accordance with international best practices for refugees, can alleviate the resource burden on T&T and ensure that the rights of Venezuelan migrants can be guaranteed. An efficient system can counter perceptions that Venezuelan migrants are an economic threat to Trinbagonians. Given the media's role in the cultural fusion process, once a robust system is in place, the government should work with news outlets to publicise this information (Croucher & Kramer, 2016). Reporting on this would signal, at the very least, the government's willingness to work with migrants.

Limitations and Future Research

The current research centred on the attitude toward Venezuelan migrants in T&T through an examination of newspaper articles. One limitation is that the data were restricted to a one-year period. Also, although we looked at all of the mainstream newspapers in T&T, the sample size might still be considered relatively small. Further, we did not include social media content and individual perspectives

of the public. Additionally, as the research relied on qualitative methods, other scholars who apply the same methodology could view the data differently, given their background and identity. Future research would benefit from the use of quantitative data collection and analysis, which would allow for the generalisability of the findings. Although we did not directly examine race and the impact of colonisation on current attitudes toward migrants, it is a topic that arose within the research and can, by itself, be the subject of future investigations.

Conclusion

The cultural context of Venezuelan migrants in T&T is complex and sensitive. The sentiments captured in the mainstream newspapers in T&T were overwhelmingly negative. As the media play a unique role in signalling the receptivity of Venezuelan migrants among Trinbagonians, as well as national policies and legislation, the media's framing of Venezuelan migrants is of utmost significance. Whether or not the mainstream newspapers recognise it, media depictions of Venezuelan migrants contribute to migrants' finding themselves in a precarious place in T&T.

Data Availability Statement

The data will be shared on reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Sharifa Simon-Roberts  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2957-8725>

References

ACAPS. (n.d.). *Country analysis: Trinidad and Tobago*. <https://www.acaps.org/en/countries/trinidad-and-tobago#:~:text=As%20at%20November%202023%2C%20approximately,total%20population%20of%201.5%20million>

- Amores, J. J., Calderón, C. A., & Stanek, M. (2019). Visual frames of migrants and refugees in the main Western European media. *Economics and Sociology*, 12(3), 147–161. <https://doi.org/10.14254/2071-789X.2019/12-3/10>
- Anatol, M., & Kangalee, Q. M. (2021). Crime in Trinidad and Tobago: The possible impacts of increased crime due to migration from Venezuela. *Migration and Development*, 10(2), 260–272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21632324.2020.1809281>
- Atwell Seate, A., & Mastro, D. (2016). Media's influence on immigration attitudes: An intergroup threat theory approach. *Communication Monographs*, 83(2): 194–213. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2015.1068433>
- Balch, A., & Balabanova, E. (2016). Ethics, politics and migration: Public debates on the free movement of Romanians and Bulgarians in the UK, 2006–2013. *Politics*, 36(1), 19–35. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.12082>
- Bar-Tal, D. (2000). *Shared beliefs in a society: Social psychological analysis*. Sage Publications.
- Bilge, N. (2019). Friend or foe: Cultural fusion theory and media coverage of Syrian refugees in Turkey. *Communication Culture & Critique*, 12(1), 110–127. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ccc/tcz003>
- Blinder, S., & Allen, W. L. (2016). Constructing immigrants: Portrayals of migrant groups in British national newspapers, 2010–2012. *International Migration Review*, 50(1), 3–40. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imre.12206>
- Boodram, C.-A. S. (2023). Migration experiences during a pandemic: An investigation into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrant Venezuelan women in Trinidad and Tobago. In W. C. Wallace (Ed.), *The movement of Venezuelans to the Americas and the Caribbean in the 21st century* (pp. 251–270). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-31762-0_13
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Chapman, N. (2023). “Trinbago Trumpism”: A digital ethnography on local attitudes towards Venezuelan migrants in Trinidad and Tobago. In W. C. Wallace (Ed.), *The movement of Venezuelans to the Americas and the Caribbean in the 21st century* (pp. 181–201). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-31762-0_13
- Crawley, H. (2005). *Evidence on attitudes to asylum and immigration: What we know, don't know and need to know* (Centre on Migration, Policy and Society Working Paper). University of Oxford. <https://pureportal.coventry.ac.uk/en/publications/evidence-on-attitudes-to-asylum-and-immigration-what-we-know-dont>
- Crawley, H., McMahon, S., & Jones, K. (2016). *Victims and villains: Migrant voices in the British media*. Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University. https://pure.coventry.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/8263076/Victims_and_Villains_Digital.pdf
- Croucher, S. M., & Kramer, E. (2016). Cultural fusion theory: An alternative to acculturation. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 10(2), 97–114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17513057.2016.1229498>
- Curle, C. (2020, January 24). *Us vs. them: The process of othering*. Canadian Museum of Human Rights. <https://humanrights.ca/story/us-vs-them-process-othering#:~:text=Othering%20involves%20zeroing%20in%20on%20a%20difference%20and,persecution%20by%20reducing%20empathy%20and%20preventing%20genuine%20dialogue>
- D'Angelo, P. (2017). Framing: Media frames. In *The international encyclopedia of media effects*. Wiley.
- de Vreese, C. H. (2005). News framing: Theory and typology. *Information Design Journal*, 13(1), 51–62.

- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>
- Esses, V. M. (2021). Prejudice and discrimination toward immigrants. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 72, 503–531. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-080520-102803>
- Esses, V. M., Medianu, S., & Lawson, A. S. (2013). Uncertainty, threat, and the role of the media in promoting the dehumanization of immigrants and refugees. *Journal of Social Issues*, 69(3), 518–536. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12027>
- Esses, V. M., Medianu, S., & Sutter, A. (2021). The dehumanization and rehumanization of refugees. In M. Kronfeldner (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of dehumanization* (pp. 275–291). Routledge.
- Esses, V. M., Veenvliet, S., Hodson, G., & Mihic L. (2008). Justice, morality, and the dehumanisation of refugees. *Social Justice Research*, 21(1), 4–25.
- Esses, V. M., Veenvliet, S., & Medianu, S. (2012). The dehumanization of refugees: Determinants and consequences. In S. Wiley, G. Philogène, & T. A. Revenson (Eds.), *Social categories in everyday experience* (pp. 133–150). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/13488-007>
- Fleras, A., & Kunz, J. L. (2001). *Media and minorities: Representing diversity in multicultural Canada*. Thompson.
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Harvard University Press.
- Haslam, N. (2006). Dehumanization: An integrative review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 10(3), 252–264. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr1003_4
- Haynes, C., Merolla, J., & Ramakrishnan, S. K. (2016). *Framing immigrants: News coverage, public opinion, and policy*. Russell Sage Foundation.
- Herbert, C. (2021). More Venezuelans in Trinidad in the 21st century: A brief account and analysis of the first large-scale irregular migration of Venezuelans to Trinidad and Tobago in recent years. *International Journal of Anthropology and Ethnology*, 5, 1–33. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41257-021-00056-3>
- Herda, D. (2010). How many immigrants? Foreign-born population innumeracy in Europe. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 74(4), 674–695. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40927164>
- Herda, D. (2015). Beyond innumeracy: Heuristic decision-making and qualitative misperceptions about immigrants in Finland. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38(9), 1627–1645. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1005643>
- Irom, B., Borah, P., Vishnevskaya, A., & Gibbons, S. (2022). News framing of the Rohingya crisis: Content analysis of newspaper coverage from four countries. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 20(1), 109–124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2021.1906472>
- Kelly, M. D. A. (2023). Racial inequality in the Anglophone Caribbean: Comparing the cases of Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 49(5), 1125–1153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2022.2044767>
- Lawlor, A., & Tolley, E. (2017). Deciding who's legitimate: News media framing of immigrants and refugees. *International Journal of Communication*, 11, 25. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/6273>
- Liu, S.-J. S. (2019). Framing immigration: A content analysis of newspapers in Hong Kong, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, and the United States, *Politics, Groups and Identities*, 9(4) 759–783. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2019.1674162>
- McCann, K., Sienkiewicz, M., & Zard, M. (2023). *The role of media narratives in shaping public opinion toward refugees: A comparative analysis*. (Report No. Migration

- Research Series, No. 72). International Organization for Migration. <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/MRS-72.pdf>
- McDonald, B., Spaaij, R., & Dukic, D. (2019). Moments of social inclusion: Asylum seekers, football and solidarity. *Sport in Society*, 22(6), 935–949. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2018.1504774>
- Ndofor-Tah, C., Strang, A., Phillimore, J., Morrice, L., Michael, L., Wood, P., & Simmons, J. (2019). *Home office indicators of integration framework 2019* (Report No. 109). Home Office. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/627cc6d3d3bf7f052d33b06e/home-office-indicators-of-integration-framework-2019-horr109.pdf>
- Neptune-Figaro, M. (2023). Threats to Trinidad and Tobago's security: An assessment of Venezuelan immigrants' involvement in crime. In W. C. Wallace (Ed.), *The movement of Venezuelans to the Americas and the Caribbean in the 21st century* (pp. 61–81). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-31762-0_13
- Neuman, W. R., Just, M. R., & Crigler, A. N. (1992). *Common knowledge: News and the construction of political meaning*. The University of Chicago Press.
- O'Doherty, K., & Lecouteur, A. (2007). "Asylum seekers", "boat people" and "illegal immigrants": Social categorisation in the media. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 59(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049530600941685>
- Okoye, J.-B., S. (2022). Mediated representation of Middle Eastern and African migrants in UK and US press in the Wake of Brexit and Trumpism. *Journalism*, 23(10), 2153–2170. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884920984693>
- Painter, M. A., II, Noy, S., & Holmes, M. D. (2020). Skin tone and asset inequality in Latin America. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 46(18), 3892–3919. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2019.1592881>
- Peters, K., & Berkeley, B. (2021). A phenomenological study of the experience of tribal stigma among documented male Venezuelan migrants in Trinidad. *Migration and Development*, 10(2), 273–293 <https://doi.org/10.1080/21632324.2020.1809282>
- Potter, R. B., Conway, D., & Bernard, G. S. (2010). "Racism in a melting pot...?" Trinidadian mid-life transnational migrants' views on race and colour-class on return to their homes of descent. *Geoforum*, 41(5), 805–813. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2010.05.002>
- Ramcharitar, R. (2023). Caribbean xenophobia and nativism. In S. O. Abidde, M. R. Hall, & J. de Arimatéia da Cruz (Eds.), *Xenophobia and nativism in Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean* (pp. 255–278). Routledge.
- Rampersad, R. (2012). Interrogating pigmentocracy: The intersections of race and social class in the primary education of Afro-Trinidadian boys. In K. Bhopal & J. Preston (Eds.), *Intersectionality and race in education* (pp. 57–75). Routledge.
- Reese, S. D. (2001). Prologue—framing public life: A bridging model for media research. In S. D. Reese, O. H. Gandy, Jr., & A. E. Grant (Eds.), *Framing public life: Perspectives on media and our understanding of the social world* (pp. 7–31). Routledge.
- Reny, T. T., Valenzuela, A. A., & Collingwood, L. (2020). "No, you're playing the race card": Testing the effects of Anti-Black, Anti-Latino, and Anti-Immigrant appeals in the post-Obama era. *Political Psychology*, 41(2), 283–302. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12614>
- Rodriguez, N., & Collins, J. (2021, April 28). *As desperation grows, Venezuelans look to survive on the little money we had saved*. The New Humanitarian. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2021/4/28/venezuelans-look-to-a-dangerous-caribbean-escape-route>

- Rubin, V. (1962). Culture, politics and race relations. *Social and Economic Studies*, 11(4), 433–455. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27853703>
- Scardigno, R., Guagnano, G. D., & Pagliarulo, F. (2024). Framing news and framing migrants: A qualitative study. *World Futures*, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02604027.2024.2340773>
- Seo, S., & Kavakli, S. B. (2022). Media representations of refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants: A meta-analysis of research. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 46(3), 159–173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2022.2096663>
- Simon, S., & Xenos M. (2000). Media framing and effective public deliberation. *Political Communication*, 17(4), 363–376. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600050178979>
- Sutter, A. (2017). *The behavioural consequences of the implicit and explicit dehumanization of refugees* [Doctoral thesis, Western University, London, Canada]. Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository. <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/4449/>
- Threadgold, T. (2009). *The media and migration in the United Kingdom, 1999 to 2009*. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/TCM-UKMedia.pdf>
- United Nations Population Fund (n.d.). *Caribbean Sub-region. Country Profile: Trinidad and Tobago*. <https://caribbean.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Trinidad%20Country%20Profile%20%281%29.pdf>
- van der Linden, M., & Jacobs, L. (2017). The impact of cultural, economic, and safety issues in Flemish television news coverage (2003–13) of North African immigrants on perceptions of intergroup threat. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 40(15). <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2016.1229492>
- van Dijk, T. A. (1993). *Elite discourse and racism*. Sage.
- Wallace, W. C., & Mortley, N. K. (2021). (De)constructing our migrant neighbours: Regional and international impacts of the Venezuelan crisis in the Caribbean. *Migration and Development*, 10(2), 173–180. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21632324.2020.1809276>
- Yang, J. (2021). Framing immigration and illegal immigration in the 2016 presidential campaigns: Comparing Donald Trump and Bernie Sander's position. *Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications*, 7(1), 9–22. <https://www.athensjournals.gr/media/2021-7-1-1-Yang.pdf>