Previous research finds that public sentiment on immigration is governed to a large extent by outside events and media coverage, (Atwell Seate & Mastro, 2016; Brader, Valentino, & Suhay, 2008; Dunaway, Branton, & Abrajano, 2010; Kim, Carvalho, Davis, & Mullins, 2011; van Klingeren, Boomgaarden, Vliegenthart, Vreese, & H, 2015; Zúñiga, Correa, & Valenzuela, 2012). The Trump administration has created a new context for the immigration discourse, in that it has made immigration one of its key policy priorities and has created a news climate in which immigration is a constant subject of media coverage. Indeed, public opinion data has shown that views on immigration have grown significantly more polarized in the past 3 years, driven substantially by Democrats' warming on immigration (“Shifting Public Views on Legal Immigration Into the U.S.,” 2018). In this paper, we explore the uses of [big data/natural language processing/whatever the hottest term is?] in analyzing this new migration discourse, connecting national news coverage to public sentiment through the use of twitter data. We suggest that this connection, and the polarized sentiment it engenders, could have significant implications for migration policy in the near future.

Data

We analyze articles from the ProQuest “U.S. Major Dailies” database, which includes *The* *Chicago Tribune, The Los Angeles Times, The* *New York Times,* the *Wall Street Journal,* andthe *Washington Post.* Articles are drawn from the first two years of the Trump era, defined as beginning with Donald Trump’s formal nomination as the Republican candidate for president in late July, 2016 and ending on July 31, 2018. All articles containing the terms “immigra\*” (that is, immigrant, immigration, or other variants of these words) and “U.S.” were included in the sample, for sample size of 15,644 articles. (U.S. was included to narrow the focus by reducing the number of articles exclusively discussing non-U.S. migration topics such as Brexit and the Syrian refugee crisis in Europe.) For comparative analyses, the same search was done on an equivalent period in the early Obama era (7/29/2008 to 7/31/2010), yielding 6462 articles.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Methods

(Monica can you write a bit for this part?)

Descriptive analysis

Finding #1

As a share of all news coverage, immigration was significantly more dominant in the Trump era than in the Obama era, indicating that the news climate has indeed changed. Table 1 gives the total number of articles in the database for each time period. Immigration is mentioned in nearly three percent of articles in the Trump era – 3.2 times as frequently as in the Obama era. Figure 1 shows the number of immigration articles per day. Although the raw number does not account for differences in the overall number of news articles each day, the large difference in overall numbers between the two periods indicate that, proportionally, the Trump line can be reasonably supposed to be even higher than the Obama line.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Articles on immigration | Total articles | Proportion of articles on immigration |
| Obama era | 6462 | 698457 | 0.93% |
| Trump era | 15644 | 528255 | 2.96% |

Table 1.



Figure 1. Number of articles containing immigration per day, by era.

Finding #2

While day-to-day coverage of immigration is somewhat higher in the Trump era, a significant portion of the difference is driven by major news events. These include the election (large one-day spike in November 2016), the Muslim travel ban (gradual increase in early 2017 to a maximum on February 1, when Executive Order 13769 was published), the plan to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA, peaking with the announcement of the plan September 7, 2017 and dominating coverage again in January 2018 as the courts began to block the plan), and the family separation policy (peaking near the end of June, 2018).

One of the most obvious peaks in the Obama era, by contrast, on April 15, 2007, was due to a deportation stay granted to an accused former Nazi prison guard coinciding with the release of a report on undocumented immigrants by the Pew Hispanic Center.



Figure 2.

Finding #3

Sentiment analysis indicates, too, that the Trump era media environment on immigration is marked by unusual events. In this case, we see that sentiment is relatively constant, with the notable exception of coverage of the Muslim travel ban and the family separation policy. Other negative peaks occurred around two terrorist incidents (September 17-19, 2016 and October 31, 2017). (I feel like this might just be telling us how sentiment analysis works – things that are violent (or rhetorically violent) get coded as more negative.)

Finding #4

Topic modeling – what does it show us? What could it show us?

Further research and expected results

1. Obama wasn’t formally nominated until the Democratic National Convention on August 25-27. Not sure if it’s more worthwhile to have the same calendar months or the same temporality vis-à-vis nomination. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)