

Reporting on climate-induced migration: a media discourse analysis of three Dutch newspapers



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Abstract

Over the past two decades, news coverage of climate-induced migration has grown exponentially. In news media, climate-induced migration is often portrayed as vast amounts of climate refugees coming to Western and/or European countries in the future, if we let climate change run its course. By conducting a discourse analysis of the articles by three Dutch newspapers: *De Limburger*, *De Telegraaf* and *De Volkskrant*, retrieved via the database of Nexis Uni, this thesis aims to gain an insight in the way climate-induced migration is being framed in the Dutch media, with specific focus on the political affiliation of the newspapers and their regional focus, as these factors can shape their editorial position and coverage. The findings indicate that *De Limburger*, despite its regional nature, still pays considerable attention to the global dimensions of climate-induced migration. *De Telegraaf* on the other hand, predominantly focuses on climate-induced migration at the national level. Additionally, *De Volkskrant* is significantly more left-wing compared to *De Telegraaf* in their reporting on climate-induced migration, but not compared to *De Limburger*. What the three newspapers have in common is the trend to adopt the 'climate refugee' frame, despite this term being criticized by the scientific literature. Besides, they have the inclination to frame these climate refugees as being a sizable population, depicting their mass migration to the Netherlands or Europe.

Keywords: climate-induced migration, climate refugees, discourse analysis, news media, political affiliation, The Netherlands

1. Introduction

Climate-induced migration is being increasingly perceived as a severe issue (Boas et al., 2021). The media is also increasingly paying attention to the issue of climate-induced

migration. We are now living in ‘the century of climate migration’ (Vince, 2022). There are calls for giving ‘climate refugees’ an official status (Harmsen, 2021). In the context of migration, climate change will affect many people worldwide. It is not only already existing climate migrants or those who are faced with possible forced migration, but also those living in countries or regions that are expected to receive or are already receiving those who are forced to migrate. Inevitably, this development will lead to discussions and opinion-forming regarding climate migrants or refugees and climate-induced migration flows (Farbotko & Lazrus, 2012). As is the case with opinion-forming, a key role will be played by the media. The impact by the media on public opinion is enormous, especially regarding contentious issues such as immigration (Kosho, 2016).

The way the media portrays climate-induced migration and refugees will therefore have a great impact on the perception of climate migrants by the public and similarly impact policymaking. Already the often-used term ‘climate refugees’ is contested, as it has no legal status in international governance and policies (Boano et al., 2012). Newspapers offer an intriguing perspective in this context, as there can be a variety of newspapers within a country, each with potentially distinct political affiliations, whether explicit or not. While many newspapers (and other news sources) claim to be neutral, in many cases there still seems to be a bias in their reporting towards certain frames or stories. This bias can be intentional or unintentional (De Veen & Thomas, 2020). Frames can be used to advance political agendas or spread certain ideologies. There has been some previous research on the political affiliation of newspapers (Puglisi, 2011; Larcinese et al., 2011). However, climate-induced migration, due to its rather recent manifestation, has not yet been studied extensively from a media-discourse perspective, albeit a growing topic of research (Sakellari, 2021). Especially the focus on political affiliations of news sources in the context of climate-induced migration is a novelty. It is thus of great relevance to investigate how exactly climate-induced migration is being portrayed by the media. It is not likely that there will be a singular frame or discourse of climate-induced migration within the media landscape, as frames will be shaped by the type of media. The research question will therefore be: *How do Dutch newspapers frame climate-induced migration according to their political affiliation?*

Answering this question in the first place may give insight into the different discourses on climate-induced migration circulating in a country and shaping public opinion. Secondly, it helps to relate the discourse via the political affiliation of the newspapers to the political domain. Finally, it can function as an explanation for preferred directions in policymaking on climate and migration issues.

The choice to focus on the Netherlands has three reasons: first, the media landscape is diverse and has a high level of pluralism along with a wide range of national and regional newspapers (RSF, 2023). Second, the Netherlands are one of the most densely populated countries of Europe and its population is still growing, mainly due to immigration (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, n.d.). It is therefore likely that the possible increase in immigration numbers due to climate change will become a highly salient issue (Grande et al., 2019). Thirdly, with almost a third of its area lying below sea level, the Netherlands are very vulnerable to sea level rise and thus to climate change as well (PBL, n.d.). This puts them in the unique position of being both a receiving country (at the moment) and a possible sending country (in the future).

The thesis will be structured as follows: in the first section I will lay out the theoretical framework. Here I will discuss the concepts of climate-induced migration and climate migrants and the dominant debates surrounding these conceptualizations. As part of the theoretical framework, I will also discuss the role played by the media in shaping public opinion in general and framing climate-induced migration and refugees specifically. In the section hereafter, I will introduce the methods used to carry out the discourse analysis and provide an overview of the selected newspapers. Thereafter, I will give an overview of the main findings per newspaper. Finally, I will discuss the differences between the newspapers and how the findings relate to their political affiliations.

2. Theory

2.1 Climate-induced migration

One of the primary objectives of this thesis is to investigate and analyze different frames and discourses of climate-induced migration. However, I already want to start by giving an overview of the definitions and discourses on climate-induced migration and migrants that are currently dominant within academic debates and politics on environmental migration.

While there is no universally agreed upon definition of climate-induced migration, it can be defined as the “*movement of people driven by sudden or progressive changes in the weather or climate*” (Wilkinson et al., 2016, p. 2). This definition can include more specific types, such as temporary or permanent, seasonal or singular, and voluntary or forced. Climate-induced migration is a subcategory of environmental migration, which refers to migration because of changes in environments (IOM, 2019). Climate-induced migration

focuses on those changes in the environment which can be attributed to climate change. In this research, I will use the term climate-induced migration because of its focus on climate change and because it fits better with the terms used for the media discourse analysis.

A serious point of discussion is whether persons displaced as a result of climate change should be referred to as migrants or refugees (Boano et al., 2012). The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol laid the foundation for the protection of refugees. Here, the term refugee was first defined, and it outlined the rights refugees have. A “refugee” is someone who has crossed an international border, “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (UNHCR, n.d.). A migrant on the other hand, would be defined in a more neutral and broader way, namely as someone who moves from one place to another, or more specifically as someone who has no citizenship attachment to the county they moved to. Thus, the use of the frame of ‘refugee’ would imply a greater force at play in displacing people and therefore also make a stronger case for accepting their displacement and calls for protection rights (Boano et al., 2012).

As we see, the definition of refugees does not include people that were displaced due to the occurrences of floods, drought, rising sea levels or degraded soils of farmlands, all consequences of climate change. Thus, officially, climate refugees do not exist, because it is this definition against which the migration labels are tested (Boano et al., 2012). Therefore, people displaced by climate-related events are not granted refugees' status and do not enjoy their protection rights. This does not mean, however, that the term climate refugee is seldom being used. The growing incidence of climate-related occurrences and numbers of displaced people sparked the discussion on whether to include these people under the term of ‘refugees’ as well and whether to grant these people similar rights (Wilkinson et al., 2016).

The current prediction is that by 2050, 1.2 billion people will be displaced by climate change (McAllister, 2022). The term ‘climate refugee’ dates to 1985, when United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) expert Essam El-Hinnawi defined them as “people who have been forced to leave their traditional habitat, temporarily or permanently, because of marked environmental disruption” (El-Hinnawi, 1985, p. 4). So, although there is a definition of climate refugees, they do not enjoy the legal status of a refugee. In other words, they are not protected by international refugee law. Policymakers and scholars also emphasize the issues of the ‘climate refugee’ frame. According to Zetter (2017), speaking of climate or environmental refugees assumes a mono-causal link between climate/environmental change and migration, but this is too simplified. Climate change must be seen in a wider context of

factors that influence people's decision to migrate, which includes socio-economic and political factors. Climate events can then act as triggers that expose these other factors, such as livelihood vulnerability or bad governance, which means that displacement cannot be solely attributed to climate change. Thus, the relationship between climate change and (forced) migration is not as clear and one-dimensional as is assumed by the label of climate refugees. Some groups, however, still often use the term climate refugees, such as the media or NGO's (Amnesty International, 2019). By doing this, they are often advocating to give climate refugees the same protection rights as other refugees.

Also, the distinction between climate migrants and 'other' migrants or refugees is problematic, as the different causes of migration or displacement can be strongly linked in some cases and therefore be difficult to distinguish. Such can be the case when people flee from violence or war, caused by famine in a region. However, the underlying cause might be climate change, causing the degradation of farmlands leading to low food production. This also might lead to people not being able to earn a living, thus migrating in search of better living conditions. Are these people then war migrants, climate-induced migrants or economic migrants? The multicausality of climate-induced migration makes it difficult to answer this question (Black et al., 2011).

With climate change increasingly affecting the world we live in and causing or aggravating climate-related events, such as global warming, rising sea-levels and migration, there is a growing attention among scientists, politicians and society to these issues and ways to solve them. However, as worrisome as these issues are, there are also scholars who criticize the portrayal of climate-induced migration and climate refugees solely as disasters and victims respectively (Farbotko & Lazrus, 2012; Bettini, 2013; Dreher & Voyer, 2015; Boas et al., 2019). According to them, instead of portraying climate refugees as victims who need rescue by the West, more attention needs to be given to the perspectives of these so-called refugees. In some cases, such as the island states of Tuvalu and Kiribati, climate change and rising sea levels has been an integral part of the lives of these people. They have come up with their own perspectives and ways of dealing with these phenomena and shown adaptiveness and resilience in the context of climate change (Dreher & Voyer, 2015). It is now showing that the debate on climate-induced migration is gaining in perspectives.

2.2 Media discourses on climate-induced migration

The media take a central role in shaping public opinion. Therefore, media are to a great extent responsible for the public opinion on climate-induced migration and refugees, depending on

the stories they tell and the frames they use (Kosho, 2016). For example, framing immigrants as victims of war might generate sympathetic attitudes among the public towards immigrants. On the other hand, framing them as ‘enemies at the gate’ or as a cultural threat to the national identity might foster negative attitudes. Even the same frames might lead to different responses depending on context. Framing immigrants as potential labor workers might lead to positive attitudes among high skilled workers, while lower skilled workers might develop negative attitudes, as they might fear competition from these immigrants (Bohman & Hjerm, 2016). This relation might be further moderated by the economic context of a country, such as the saturation of the labor market or the degree of industrialization (Van der Waal & Houtman, 2011).

The media can shape public opinion through a variety of mechanisms, one of these being agenda-setting. By reporting on specific issues, the media can determine which issue is being put on the (political) agenda and which not. By reporting on issues, these issues are being perceived as important and something to deal with. When the media starts to report a growing number of crime stories, the public will increasingly perceive this issue as being serious, even if actual crime rates are dropping (Mastorocco & Minale, 2018).

Not only can the media determine which issues are being put on the agenda, it also has the power to influence the way people perceive these issues, through the employment of different frames (Kosho, 2016). While the media has a strong influence on people’s opinion-forming, this does not automatically mean that people will adopt the same ideas as formulated by the media. Populist messages conveyed through media coverage, for example, leads to both strong approval and disapproval of these messages (Müller et al., 2017). People who are already approving of populist ideas feel strengthened in their ideas, while people disapproving feel attacked and subsequently disapprove even more. Thus, the media does not only contribute to the adoption of specific ideas about the issues it covers, but also to the polarization within debates (Müller et al., 2017). Going back then to climate-induced migration, the media play a significant role in framing the issue and the portrayal of migrants and it influences the public opinion to a great extent (Eberl et al., 2018).

2.3 Political affiliation of the media

We now know that media can shape public opinion on issues such as climate-induced migration (Kosho, 2016; Eberl et al., 2018), but before we move towards the analysis of articles on climate-induced migration, it is useful to have an image of what we can expect based on the political affiliations of the newspapers. In other words: how can we expect media

sources on various positions on the political spectrum to report on climate-induced migration and climate refugees?

The right-wing side of the political spectrum is generally associated with higher levels of nationalism and maintaining social order, especially with a focus on traditionalistic and conservatist values (Van der Meer et al., 2009). In the case of climate-induced migration, this would mean that right-wing media sources are expected to adopt a nationalistic focus on the issue of climate-induced migration. This can happen in a few ways. First of all, the focus can be put on domestic forms of climate-induced migration and associated refugees. In the case of the Netherlands, this could be the discussion of sea level rise of the North Sea or the floods in Limburg, putting Dutch people in the risk of being or becoming climate refugees. Secondly, the focus can be put on domestic consequences of climate-induced migrations, whether global or not. These include flows of climate migrants coming to the Netherlands or responsibilities of the Netherlands towards climate migrants. Also, right-wing views are generally of the nativist sort, especially radical right-wing views (Bohman & Hjerm, 2016). Nativism entails the idea that states should exclusively be inhabited by the native population and that non-native elements, be it ideas or people, pose a threat to the homogeneous nation-state. This would lead to the expectation that radical right-wing media sources would discuss climate refugees in a way that would portray them as ‘threatening’ (Hameleers, 2019).

The left-wing side of the political spectrum is generally associated with advocating for social change, in the direction of greater equality. Core values include equality, solidarity, progressiveness and system change (Van der Meer et al., 2009). This leads to the expectation that the left-wing media might be more open and welcoming in their portrayal of climate migrants. Furthermore, it could be that left-wing newspapers more often frame climate migrants as climate refugees, as opposed to more right-wing newspapers. This is because, as we know now, labeling someone as a ‘refugee’ evokes the claim that that person is entitled to special protection rights (Boano et al., 2012). This is in line with the desire of the left to promote equality, in this case advocating for more rights and protection for those who are the most vulnerable in the context of climate change.

3. Methods

To gain insight into the media discourses and frames of climate-induced migration and the wording they use (i.e., ‘refugee’, ‘migrant’, etc.) in the Netherlands, news articles from a selection of three Dutch newspapers will be analyzed. Newspapers can be distinguished on a

geographical level or on a national/regional dimension, but also on a political dimension (De Hond, 2019). Many newspapers are not that explicit in their political views. After all, they want to keep up the appearance of being a neutral, objective news source. However, based on their content, frames of their content and readers, newspapers can still be categorized, to a more or lesser extent, along the political spectrum. Here I want to discuss the characteristics of the three Dutch newspapers, two of the largest national newspapers, *De Volkskrant* and *De Telegraaf*, and one regional newspaper, *De Limburger*. In making the selection of newspapers, the aim was to include both newspapers that differed on the political spectrum and newspapers that differed on the national/local level.

The oldest and largest newspaper, meaning with the most readers, is *De Telegraaf*. *De Telegraaf* claims to be a newspaper for the ‘common man’. This is also expressed in the layout and content of the newspaper. The headlines are big and draw the attention of the reader. *De Telegraaf* also contains relatively many articles on sport and gossip. Generally, the articles seem to take on a rightist perspective (Bakker & Vasterman, 2007). The rightist nature of the newspaper is also reflected by the voting behavior of its readers (De Hond, 2019).

Another large, but rather different newspaper, is *De Volkskrant*. Originally, *De Volkskrant* was a catholic newspaper which positioned itself on the center-left position of the political spectrum (Bakker & Vasterman, 2007). Instead of sport, *De Volkskrant* contains many columns and research articles. The newspapers attract many highly educated readers, causing the newspaper to also increasingly pay attention to topics of culture and art.

De Limburger is a regional newspaper in the province of Limburg. While *De Limburger* historically does not have a specific political or religious affiliation, some expectations can be drawn from the political affiliation of the province itself. Generally, the province of Limburg can be put on the right side of the political spectrum, based on the voting behavior of its citizens (AlleCijfers, n.d.). Next to the regional focus of the newspaper, a second reason underlies the choice for including *De Limburger* in the analysis. In the Summer of 2021, the province of Limburg has been greatly affected by floods occurring due to heavy rainfall. The occurrence of these events can to a great extent be attributed to climate change. It is thus interesting to investigate if and in what way these floods have impacted the framing and discourses on climate-induced migration in *De Limburger*.

The news articles will be retrieved by using the database of Nexis Uni. Nexis Uni is an online news database containing news articles from a wide variety of domestic and foreign journals and magazines. One of the benefits of Nexis Uni is that the database includes a wide range of articles, also including reviews and opinion pieces. This allows for including many

different views and reflections on the topic of climate-induced migration in the analysis. Nexis Uni allows to filter out articles by using specific search terms. Search terms that were used for selecting relevant articles, included “klimaatmigratie” (climate migration), “klimaatmigrant(en)” (climate migrant(s)), “klimaatvluchteling(en)”/“milieuvluchteling(en)” (climate refugee(s)).

The first of these terms that popped up in the database, was the term “milieuvluchtelingen”, which appeared on October 31, 1992, in *Trouw*, a ‘quality’ newspaper. This article didn’t view climate refugees as something of the far future, it already highlighted the existence of many million climate refugees in Africa. Interestingly, the first article that contained the term “klimaatvluchtelingen”, was published on January 1, 2000, in *Eindhovens Dagblad*. The article, written by a climate expert, contained a few predictions about the ‘new century’, one of these being the existence of two-hundred million climate refugees in the next few decades. For most of the searched terms, there has been quite a substantial increase in their frequency of being mentioned in Dutch articles, especially “klimaatvluchtelingen” and “klimaatmigratie”. There has been a minimal increase or even decrease for the terms “milieuvluchteling(en)”. This is probably because “klimaatvluchteling(en)” became the more commonly used term for climate refugees.

On the basis of the search terms used, a total number of 144 articles have been selected: 19 from *De Telegraaf*, 81 from *De Volkskrant* and 44 from *De Limburger*. On the selected articles, a critical discourse analysis (CDA) will be conducted. A CDA involves three levels of analysis: textual analysis (describing), discourse practice analysis (interpreting) and social practice analysis (explaining) (Fairclough, 2013). Thus, the analysis will first focus on the words and frames that are being used in the articles. Secondly, the analysis will look at how these words and frames are being used to construct dominant discourses. Finally, having identified the dominant discourses and frames on climate-induced migration and migrants per newspapers, it will be explored how these discourses relate to the political affiliation or regional focus of the newspaper to see to what extent the reporting is in accordance with the political/regional nature of the newspapers. The analysis has been conducted through a process of open coding using NVivo. Before the coding process, a code tree has been created, which has been supplemented and adapted during the coding process. At the end of the coding process, the following codes had been distinguished:

Name	Files	References
Adaptation	1	1
Animals as climate refugees	9	9
Benefits of migration	2	2
Big numbers	29	29
Calls for action	30	30
Climate as weather	3	3
Climate fiction	16	18
Dangers of climate fiction	1	2
Comedy	4	4
Conflicts	8	8
Consequences	5	5
Denial of the issue	1	1
Discussion of concept	4	4
Economics	5	5
Environmental justice	9	10
Europe	16	17
Expression	2	2
First climate refugees	5	5
Generalizing	1	1
Intergenerational justice	6	6
Left-wing	8	8
Outside NL generic	1	1
Outside NL specific	34	36
Politics	13	13
Reader response	7	7
Related to woke-ness	2	2
Resilience	3	3
Responsibility	16	16
Right-wing	1	1
Science	17	17

Severe problem	27	28
Small numbers	1	1
Social justice	8	8
Summary	7	7
Threat	10	10
Vacation	3	3
Within NL	16	18

Table 1: Codebook

4. Results

In this section, I will present the main findings per newspaper, illustrated with relevant quotes. In the section hereafter, I will compare the newspapers and discuss in what way the used frames and discourses are in line with the newspapers' expected political affiliations.

4.1 De Limburger

An interesting finding regarding the portrayal of climate migrants relates to the floods in the Summer of 2021, which occurred in Limburg and in some regions of Belgium and Germany. The floods occurred due to heavy rainfall and caused many casualties and greatly damaged the affected regions, which made the floods the second most expensive natural disaster of the world in that year (NOS, 2021). Not unsurprisingly, the disaster received a lot of media attention, especially by De Limburger, with many more than a hundred articles covering the disaster. It is difficult to provide exact numbers, but when searching Nexis Uni for articles since July 2021 on basis of the search terms 'flood' and 'Limburg', 156 articles pop up. However, these articles rarely adopt the frame of climate-induced migration or climate refugees to talk about the phenomenon, even though many people lost their homes due to the floods and even though extreme weather in general and heavy rainfall specifically, are becoming more common due to climate change. Does this mean that the province of Limburg stays absent from the stage of climate migration in De Limburger? Not really. De Limburger in fact does discuss and predict climate refugees in Limburg. In these cases, however, Limburg is on the receiving end instead of the sending one. The concerning articles predict that when the sea level will rise and when parts of The Netherlands will become submerged, the province of Limburg will become a place of refuge.

“I once predicted that all vacant homes in Limburg are badly needed to accommodate climate refugees from Holland in due course if the sea level rises too fast” (De Limburger, 11/05/2016).

“Limburg as a refuge for compatriots with wet feet. Call it not done or premature, but that did not stop Ronald Rovers from speculating about this during his inauguration as lecturer at Hogeschool Zuyd... Just people's realization that it is not wise to live below sea level can trigger an influx of climate refugees to Limburg” (De Limburger, 07/04/2009).

Another interesting finding is that, despite De Limburger being a regional newspaper, it still pays a relatively lot of attention to global issues such as climate-induced migration. As expected, De Limburger pays more attention to the local dimension and consequences of climate-induced migration, compared to the other newspapers. However, it still reports to a significant extent on the global or international dimensions of climate-induced migration. Readers of De Limburger can read about climate refugees from Pakistan, Congo, The Carteret Islands or the Pacific. An explanation for this could be that, as we're living in an increasingly globalized world, the desire to be updated and informed on global affairs such as climate change and climate-induced migration increases accordingly. Hence, the increasing attention being paid to these global issues by even regional newspapers.

As mentioned earlier, I predicted, or rather discussed, the possibility of De Limburger writing about climate-induced migration and climate refugees in a populist right-wing way, based on the voting behavior of the citizens of Limburg (AlleCijfers, n.d.). Also, as right-wing views tend to be more nativist (Bohman & Hjerm, 2016), this would predict a more opposing view towards climate migrants as they would be perceived to be threatening to the nation-state and its culture. However, while not explicitly mentioning their views on migration, they tend to stress the overwhelming number of migrants that could arrive in Europe, as shown in the quote below:

“An ominous thought is that millions of climate refugees from Africa will take up residence in Western Europe in the coming decades” (De Limburger, 26/10/2022).

By framing the fight against climate change in such way, they suggest that the arrival of climate refugees is very unpleasant:

“If we don't get rid of fossil fuels soon, it will be very uncomfortable on this planet. Now it's just waiting for climate refugees” (De Limburger, 23/06/2015).

No direct reference to culture is made here, but speaking of an uncomfortable situation still implies some form of threat, at least to a comfortable way of living. Thus, although the articles do not speak of climate migrants as a literal threat and not as a threat to the Dutch culture and ‘our ways of living’, the idea of them coming to the Netherlands or Europe is still being met with concern and regarded as worrisome. Furthermore, De Limburger presents the arrival of climate migrants in such a way that it will disrupt Europe entirely:

“Whoever sees how 1.5 million migrants can already completely disrupt Europe, can easily imagine the consequences if there are several million later” (De Limburger, 01/12/2015).

Even though these quotes do not frame climate refugees literally as a threat, words such as ‘ominous’, ‘uncomfortable’ and ‘disrupt’ can still contribute to sentiments of fear and threat regarding climate migrants. Thus, it is possible to instill many different ideas upon readers based on a single or few words, sometimes even regardless of the intention of the author.

4.2 De Telegraaf

The first thing that stands out when comparing the results of De Telegraaf to those of the other two newspapers after using the selected search terms, is that significantly fewer articles pop up: 19 from De Telegraaf against 44 from De Limburger and 81 from De Volkskrant. This finding might indicate that De Telegraaf has a weaker interest in reporting on stories of climate-induced migration. It is important to note however, that the results are based on a limited number of search terms, among which ‘climate refugees’. As mentioned earlier, calling someone a refugee means that that person is entitled to certain protection rights. We know that right-wing media is more hesitant in recognizing these protection rights as they are also relatively more emphasizing the threat immigrants might pose to the nation state. Therefore, it might not be that they refrain from reporting on climate-induced migration per se, but that they just use different wordings. For instance, a popular and commonly used frame to describe migrants in a degrading manner, is that of the “gelukszoeker” (fortune seeker). This term implies that migrants do not have an actual danger or a dreadful situation to

migrate from. They rather want to profit from a better situation elsewhere, which would make their appeal for asylum weaker. When conducting an additional search in Nexis Uni for “gelukszoekers” (fortune seekers), De Telegraaf indeed is the newspaper with the second most results overall and the most results of our three newspapers, with 491 results against 453 and 286 by De Volkskrant and De Limburger, respectively. However, when searching for variations of the term: ‘gelukszoeker’, ‘gelukzoekers’ and ‘gelukzoeker’, De Volkskrant appears to have more results.

Also, compared to the other two newspapers, De Telegraaf more often uses the climate refugee frame in the domestic contest. Not only that, but in half of these cases, the term is used to describe people who flee from climate measures, not from climate change:

“The first Dutch climate refugees are a fact. Not because of wet feet, but because citizens cannot stand the sound of wind farms. Residents living near biomass plants also complain bitterly. Are health and the environment in the Netherlands secondary to our climate goals?” (De Telegraaf, 31/10/2020).

“When it comes to climate refugees, I don't immediately think of Flevoland. Yet a couple of years ago, a couple who became ecstatic about the wind turbines left precisely from that polder province” (De Telegraaf, 30/10/2019).

Instead of climate change being the problem, measures to deal with climate change are being put forward as the cause of migration. This finding is also in line with the fact that right-wing ideologies are generally associated with higher levels of climate skepticism (Huber, 2020).

While coding, an interesting frame, or rather topic regarding climate migrants did come up, which is climate fiction, or “cli-fi”. Climate fiction is a genre within literature and cinema which deals with climate change. More specifically, it aims to imagine the impact of disastrous climatological change and events on human life (Irr, 2017). One of the main goals of creators of climate fiction is to make people aware of the urgency of climate change. Climate fiction is not free from criticism, as scholars argue that the depiction of climate change is often associated with extremely negative emotions, which could hinder productive environmental engagement (Schneider-Mayerson, 2018). In the articles of De Telegraaf, we can also see forms of climate fiction. The writers of the articles are not themselves producing climate fiction, but they discuss climate fiction or are even interviewing creators of climate fiction. What is remarkable however, is that not only climate fiction is being discussed that

aims to make people aware about and engaged with climate change and migration, but also climate fiction which ridicules climate-induced migration and of which could even be said to downplay the issue.

“You made the film (R)evolution, about climate refugees on their way to the hills of Limburg, because the Netherlands was largely under water. Slightly exaggerated image, you thought yourself... “In my opinion, that fatally rising water was indeed too much doom thinking” (De Telegraaf, 16/07/2022).

“In your book, you depict climate refugees from Marseille playing jeu de boules at the bottom of dried-out Amsterdam canals. That kind of irony doesn't do well with D66 and GroenLinks... And then you also let Jesse Klaver [party leader of the Dutch green party], the 81-year-old office employee of the Linguistic Innovation department of the Meertens Institute, waste away in the heat and rob him of his food by climate refugees from the south of France. “I had fun with [it]”” (De Telegraaf, 11/03/2023, interview with author Sylvain Ephimenco).

In the second quote, it is evident that Ephimenco puts climate refugees in a comical setting in his book ‘Twelve Incorrect Stories’. From reading this quote, and the remainder of the article, one would not get the impression Ephimenco shares the same goal as other authors of climate fiction. The presence of these articles in De Telegraaf does not necessarily mean that the authors don’t believe in the severity of climate change or do not care about it. However, it is telling that of the four articles discussing works of climate fiction (two articles discuss the same work thus three in total), only one article discusses a work that seems to fulfill the traditional purpose of climate fiction: making aware and engaging. The other three discuss works of which the creators claim it is exaggerated or comical, as illustrated by the quotes. Again, this fits within the more climate-skeptical nature of right-wing media.

Related to climate skepticism is the perceived severity of climate change and climate-induced migration. One of the codes is ‘Severe problem’, which includes the articles that perceive climate change and climate-induced migration to be a severe problem. This is one of the most filled codes, with 27 articles explicitly emphasizing the severity of climate-induced migration. De Telegraaf again has relatively the lowest number of articles discussing climate change as a severe issue, only in two of the nineteen.

4.3 De Volkskrant

Of the three newspapers, De Volkskrant has the most articles containing the selected search terms, making up more than half of the total amount of the articles, 81 from 144. This should not be that surprising, as it probably has the broadest scope of the three, being less regional than De Limburger and less national than De Telegraaf, with climate-induced migration being a global issue. Similarly, of the three newspapers, De Volkskrant has the most articles that make references to locations outside of the Netherlands that are affected by the consequences of climate change, more than twice the amount of De Limburger with De Telegraaf only having one article. Also, the articles in De Volkskrant seem to be significantly longer than those in the other two newspapers. This fits with the image of De Volkskrant being a newspaper mainly intended for a higher educated audience and therefore spending more time on articles discussing the topic.

Considering the fact that De Volkskrant is seen as a left-wing oriented newspaper, this would have certain implications regarding the type of frames and discourses on climate migrants and climate-induced migration we can expect to find. As discussed earlier, the left is associated with advocating for social justice, equality, solidarity and progressiveness. During the research and coding process, certain codes have emerged that can be linked to the mentioned left-wing characteristics and sentiments. Regarding the concept of justice, three codes or subcategories of justice have been distinguished: 1) social justice, 2) environmental justice and 3) intergenerational justice.

Social justice holds that everyone should have equal access to certain inalienable social rights, such as wealth, health, opportunities and well-being. Environmental justice is intricately linked to social justice, as it also relates to equal treatment and distribution of rights, but it evaluates this distribution in the context of climate change. The questions of environmental justice are: how should we distribute the costs of dealing with climate change? Or: to what extent should those who have profited from and contributed to climate change compensate those who are suffering from the consequences of it? Environmental justice in this sense adopts a more global perspective. Lastly, intergenerational justice discusses the nature and extent of moral obligation between generations, mostly of current to future generations (Duckworth, 2013). In the articles published in De Volkskrant, all these aspects of justice are touched upon when discussing climate-induced migration.

Social justice: ““In terms of natural law, I think in principle that all people have the right to live anywhere on the planet”” (De Volkskrant 22/02/2020).

Environmental justice: “One way or another, victims in the world's poorest countries are thus paying the heaviest price for climate change, which has mainly been caused by rich countries. It is therefore only natural that the richest countries take responsibility for the consequences” (De Volkskrant 27/01/2021).

Intergenerational justice: “If we want to keep the limit of 1.5 degrees in sight, we must have reduced emissions by 50 percent within twelve years. That is a huge undertaking, requiring a global effort. And it is the responsibility of a single generation: ours” (De Volkskrant, 06/04/2019).

However, De Volkskrant does not significantly stand out in its focus on dimensions of justice. When discussing climate-induced migration, De Volkskrant does not appeal to justice more often than De Limburger. It does, compared to De Telegraaf, in which discussions in terms of justice are completely absent. The Limburger on the other hand, also emphasizes the justice aspect of climate-induced migration to a considerable extent. In the case of intergenerational justice, De Limburger even has five articles putting focus on this dimension of justice, while De Volkskrant only has one article.

Another more direct aspect that reflects the left-wing character of De Volkskrant, is the fact that it interviews left-wing party members like Frans Timmermans from the PvdA (social-democratic labor party) or members of the think tanks of PvdA and Groenlinks (social green party). De Volkskrant thus pays more attention to the perspectives of the left-wing parties, while criticizing right-wing parties:

“The PVV undermines parliament ('fake parliament'), judiciary and free press. FvD is out to destroy the democratic system, if necessary with violence” (De Volkskrant, 19/02/2022).

Earlier on, I briefly touched upon the growing amount of scientific literature criticizing the dominant discourses of climate refugees as victims who are in need of rescue from their apocalyptic and disastrous faiths. According to these scholars, this frame of climate refugees as victims of climate change shifts the focus away from power structures and dynamics that underlie climate change and climate-induced migration. The current approach perpetuates these power relations and marginalization of climate refugees and hinders effective action that

should emancipate them, with a priority on justice for these people (Bettini, 2013). Also, there should be more attention to the resilience displayed by many of the people who have learned to live with the threats of climate change. Although marginally, De Volkskrant seems to be the only newspaper that highlights some of these cases and perspectives:

“And she spoke with people who refuse to run from the advancing water. That takes steadfastness; one third of the population has since moved abroad. Because of better job opportunities, development and a brighter future, and because of the water. It is touching, the determination with which interviewees refuse to become a climate refugee. And intensely sad” (De Volkskrant, 14/05/2018).

In one article, De Volkskrant even discusses the critique held by the scholars:

“The attitude of the islanders attracted the attention of scientists. Ma. (Maria) Laurice Jamero and others published a study in Nature Climate Change in 2017 in which she stated that the inhabitants of Batasan and the other islands show that the widespread and dystopian mass climate migration theory is incorrect: they are not moving en masse to the capital Manila or the wealthy West, but choose to stay on their island and adapt, preserving their community and their traditions. They are not victims but show resilience. It became a popular good news story at a time when Western countries were increasingly fearful of huge flows of climate refugees” (De Volkskrant, 16/12/2022).

However, the majority of the articles by De Volkskrant still seem to discuss climate-induced migrants and climate refugees in the traditional way, speaking of victims who will travel in massive numbers to Europe in search of better living conditions.

4.4 Comparison between newspapers

While there are some frames and discourses that can be attributed to mostly one of the three newspapers, certain frames seem to find traction in all three newspapers. I noticed that all three newspapers at times use the frame of climate refugee to talk about Dutch people being displaced, but this seems to occur only in certain contexts. One instance is when the articles are referring to future scenarios:

“As a delta area, the Netherlands is completely in the danger zone: if the sea level rises sharply, the Delta Works will no longer offer any protection. Moreover, we are also attacked from behind by immense water flows that are drained via the Maas and Rhine. The Dutch will become climate refugees if action is not taken quickly, predicts leading climate scientist James Hansen” (De Limburger, 02/06/2012).

“It could just be that within a few generations a significant part of the Netherlands will be under water due to the rise in temperature. Will foreign soldiers then stop the Dutch climate refugees at their borders, as is now happening with refugees elsewhere in Europe?” (De Volkskrant, 08/06/2022).

These quotes, especially the one from De Limburger, seem to follow the assumption that the Dutch will only become climate refugees when sea levels will rise in the future.

Another case of Dutch climate refugees is when ‘climate refugee’ is being used as an imagery, for example describing someone who goes on a holiday to a region with different weather:

“I am a climate refugee, settled in Finland to make old-fashioned long skating trips on old-fashioned thick, mirror-smooth ice” (De Volkskrant, 09/12/2017, written by editor Evelien van Veen).

“When I left Amsterdam, it was 35 degrees here, when I arrived in Lisbon the same day it was 24 degrees. I had fled the heat. After all, I was a 'climate refugee'. That almost sounds committed.” (De Volkskrant, 02/08/2018, written by columnist Stephan Sanders).

However, as shown by the case of the floods in Limburg, the frame is not or seldom being used when describing Dutch people who have in fact been displaced by catastrophic climate events. This absence of the climate refugee frame in this context, could indicate a couple of things. Journalists might refrain from using the climate refugee frame, because they don't perceive Dutch victims of climate events like those in Limburg, to be or become refugees. However, they will use the refugee frame when discussing the expected sea level rise and predicting the consequences for Dutch citizens, as illustrated by the previous quotes. This might indicate an inclination on the part of the newspapers to mainly speak of climate

refugees in cases of irreversible climate events, such as sea-level rise. This fuels the conception of climate-induced migration as an apocalyptic phenomenon.

Relating to the apocalyptic frame of climate-induced migration, other likewise frames were used as well by the three newspapers. One of these I coded as the ‘big numbers’. All three newspapers publish articles in which the reader is warned of the arrival of many thousands, hundreds of thousands, 1.5 million, millions, 30 million, hundreds of millions of climate refugees. This portrayal in terms of numbers adds to feelings of threat. Using these large numbers gives the idea that there will be an explosion of needy people. Also, these numbers were often accompanied by the prediction of the climate refugees coming ‘this way’:

“Europe must therefore prepare for a million climate refugees a year, who will apply for asylum by the end of this century. This is the conclusion reached by researchers at Columbia University in New York” (De Volkskrant, 12/05/2018).

“Millions of climate refugees will join economic refugees and war refugees in the coming years and will want to move to Europe for a better life” (De Telegraaf, 27/08/2021).

The combination of these large numbers and the prediction that they will come to the Netherlands, fuels the refugee-as-threat frame and might lead to the demand for protectionist measures and xenophobic attitudes towards climate migrants (Bettini, 2013).

5. Discussion

The topic of climate-induced migration is getting increased attention by media such as newspapers and the way these media sources frame and discuss climate-induced migration matters for the public opinion-forming on climate-induced migration and subsequently the preferred political action (Kosho, 2016; Eberl et al., 2018). This research had as its purpose to explore the dominant frames and discourses within Dutch media and distinguish these by their assumed position on the political spectrum and their regionality. Therefore, a critical discourse analysis has been conducted on the written news articles on climate-induced migration by three popular Dutch newspapers: De Volkskrant (left-wing), De Telegraaf (right-wing) and De Limburger (local news) (Bakker & Vasterman, 2007). The analysis led to

both expected and unexpected findings. Again, I will first discuss the findings per newspaper and then discuss some findings relating to all three newspapers.

First of all, even though De Limburger is considered to be a local newspaper, it still pays a relatively large amount of attention to global issues such as climate-induced migration. Of course, the search was specifically focused at articles on climate-induced migration, so it is only partly surprising that the focus in these articles was globally oriented. However, De Telegraaf showed significantly fewer results on the search terms and while its scope is also limited as a nationally focused newspaper, it still is more broadly oriented than De Limburger. At least, that would be the assumption. Furthermore, the expectation was put forward that De Limburger would elaborate more upon the floods that occurred in the province of Limburg in the summer of 2021, as it destroyed many houses, and the cause could be attributed to climate change. However, although De Limburger did extensively discuss the floods, it did not use the frame of climate-induced migration here. Finally, the expectation that De Limburger would relatively more often adopt a right-wing focus due to the province of Limburg containing relatively more right-wing voters, seems to hold partially. De Limburger didn't frame climate refugees as a threat to the Dutch culture. However, some of the articles do express their concern of refugees coming 'here', asserting that their arrival will be unpleasant at least.

Secondly, interesting on the part of De Telegraaf, was the significantly smaller number of articles containing the search terms, which might indicate a weak interest in climate-induced migration held by De Telegraaf and its readers. Other explanations can account for this difference as well. As discussed earlier, right-wing media sources are expected to pay greater attention to national issues as opposed to global issues. While climate-induced migration certainly has an impact on domestic affairs, the issue could very well be seen as a mainly foreign issue, especially with regards to the places of origin of climate refugees and the areas mostly affected by climate-related events and thus contributing mostly to climate-induced migration flows. Another explanation for the fewer articles could be found in the wordings De Telegraaf might use. Differences in naming of words could highlight how journals reflect upon migration. This is why an additional search was conducted on top of the preselected search terms, which used the term "geluk(s)zoeker(s)" (fortune seeker). This term is more critical of the underlying motivations causing people to migrate, in the sense that they are seen as wanting to profit from better conditions elsewhere, instead of fleeing actual danger. The expectation would then also be that this term would find more traction in right-wing media. The results on Nexis Uni, however, did not point in this direction. Furthermore,

having the most articles containing the term ‘geluk(s)zoeker(s)’ does not necessarily mean that that newspaper most often aims to degrade the position of climate refugees to that of fortune seekers. It could be that most of the authors write about the problems or immorality about referring to climate refugees as fortune seekers, like De Telegraaf does here:

“Fleeing violence, hopelessness, jihadists, extreme drought, the Wagner group. With the war in Sudan, the number will increase. They are cynically called 'fortune seekers' - but most end up in a refugee camp” (De Telegraaf, 29/04/2023).

In order to make conclusive claims about the use of the frame ‘gelukszoeker’, a more thorough analysis needs to be conducted, which investigates the exact uses of this term, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, because De Telegraaf is a nationally oriented newspaper, this can explain the remarkable finding that De Telegraaf adopts a national focus on a rather global issue such as climate-induced migration. Thirdly, in some of the articles the term climate refugee is used to criticize climate adaptation measures. This then, could be explained by the climate skepticism generally found in right-wing media outlets. Likewise, the forms of climate fiction discussed in De Telegraaf show a similar downplayed attitude on the severity of climate-induced migration.

Thirdly, what stood out when analyzing De Volkskrant, was that it accounted for the majority of the articles, reflecting their broader scope compared to the other journals. Also, De Volkskrant contained many long-reads on the topic of climate-induced migration, which fits with its catering to the higher-educated readers. Climate-induced migration was then also discussed more in depth. Secondly, by determining to what extent the left-wing orientation of the newspaper was expressed in its articles, the analysis focused on dimensions of justice that were emphasized. De Volkskrant didn’t show a significantly higher degree of discussion of these topics compared to De Limburger. However, it could be that the notions of justice were assumed more implicitly in the articles of De Volkskrant, which again could be explained by them being more catered to the educated audience.

A fourth finding is that the three newspapers have in common that they often speak of climate refugees in terms of their vastness. Large amounts of climate refugees will come into existence in the near future and will move to Western countries, mainly Europe. While the intention might differ across the journals in emphasizing these numbers, the image that is created perpetuates feelings of resistance, along with the idea that climate refugees will be

with too much to handle, possibly leading to demand for protectionist measures (Bettini, 2013).

Finally, while scientific literature criticizes the use of the term ‘climate refugees’ due to it not being officially recognized as a refugee status and thus refrains from its use, the news media does not seem to share this position. The term ‘klimaatvluchteling(en)’ was accountable for the vast majority of the results. Only in three of those articles, the term was up for debate. Furthermore, ‘klimaatmigrant(en)’ was found in only six of the articles, five by De Volkskrant and only one by De Limburger. The fact that these discourses and frames were used in all three newspapers, give a first impression and indication on the way climate-induced migration is being portrayed by other Dutch newspapers.

Some limitations of this paper need to be discussed. Earlier I reflected upon the low number of articles by De Telegraaf on the topic of climate-induced migration. This small number of articles also reflects a shortcoming of the research, as the lower number makes it difficult to make generalizing statements and draw conclusions that can be extended to the whole content of the newspaper. However, the findings do fit the expectations that were formulated before the conduct of the analysis.

Another shortcoming of this research relates to the limitations of search terms. I have selected articles based on them having specific keywords such as ‘klimaatvluchteling’ and ‘klimaatmigratie’. However, this does not mean that I’ve been able to include all the articles that discuss these topics. There are many ways imaginable to discuss climate-induced migration that do not use these exact words. Future research could therefore explore and make use of this richness, not only in language, but also in phenomena. For instance, it might be worthwhile to delve deeper into specific migration flows, climate events or places of migration origin to obtain more precise insights in the ways these cases are being framed by the media and to what extent they differ from each other and why.

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Appendix

Ethics checklist



CHECKLIST ETHICAL AND PRIVACY ASPECTS OF RESEARCH

INSTRUCTION

This checklist should be completed for every research study that is conducted at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS). This checklist should be completed *before* commencing with data collection or approaching participants. Students can complete this checklist with help of their supervisor.

This checklist is a mandatory part of the empirical master's thesis and has to be uploaded along with the research proposal.

The guideline for ethical aspects of research of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV) can be found on their website (http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17). If you have doubts about ethical or privacy aspects of your research study, discuss and resolve the matter with your EUR supervisor. If needed and if advised to do so by your supervisor, you can also consult Dr. Bonnie French, coordinator of the Sociology Master's Thesis program.

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: Reporting on climate refugees: a media discourse analysis of Dutch newspapers

Name, email of student: Maxim Landweer – 669499ml@student.eur.nl

Name, email of supervisor: Lore Van Praag – vanpraag@essb.eur.nl

Start date and duration: 24/04/23-25/06/23

Is the research study conducted within DPAS

YES - ~~NO~~

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?
(e.g. internship organization)

PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1. Does your research involve human participants. YES - NO

If 'NO': skip to part V.

If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research? YES - NO

Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act ([WMO](#)) must first be submitted to [an accredited medical research ethics committee](#) or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects ([CCMO](#)).

2. Does your research involve field observations without manipulations that will not involve identification of participants. YES - NO

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

3. Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary data that has been anonymized by someone else). YES - NO

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

PART III: PARTICIPANTS

- 1. Will information about the nature of the study and about what participants can expect during the study be withheld from them? YES - NO

- 2. Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written 'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study? YES - NO

- 3. Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation at any time be withheld from participants? YES - NO

- 4. Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants? YES - NO
Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose of the study is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).

- 5. Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by participants? YES - NO

- 6. Will information be collected about special categories of data, as defined by the GDPR (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a person, data concerning mental or physical health, data concerning a person's sex life or sexual orientation)? YES - NO

- 7. Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or other groups that cannot give consent? YES - NO

- 8. Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study? YES - NO

- 9. Can participants be identified by the study results or can the confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured? YES - NO

- 10. Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study? YES - NO

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is unavoidable in this study.

What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).

Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or have negative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible circumstances this could be.

Please attach your informed consent form in Appendix I, if applicable.

Continue to part IV.

PART IV: SAMPLE

Where will you collect or obtain your data?

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the size of the population from which you will sample?

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

Continue to part V.

Part V: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

Personal
computer _____

Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

I
am _____

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

Yearly _____

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

N.A. _____

Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.

PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Maxim Landweer

Name (EUR) supervisor: Lore Van Praag

Date: 24/03/23

Date: 24/3/2023

