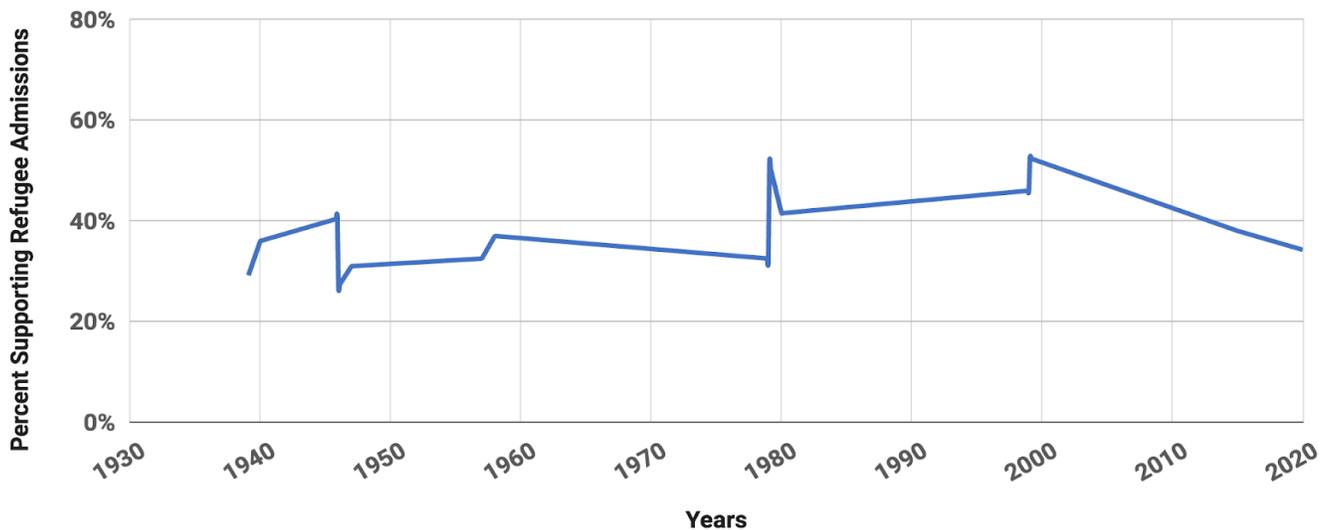


Introduction

More people are leaving their homes crossing international borders seeking safety than at any other point in history ([Adida et. al, 2017, p. 2](#)). According to the latest estimates by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there are 22.5 million refugees in the world (2018). Previously, the record high was 18 million during the early 1990's. These numbers steadily decreased until settling at between 8-10 million from 2000-2010 ([Connor, 2014](#)). By 2014, that number crept up to 19.5 million refugees ([UNHCR, 2014](#)).

Historically, U.S. public opinion on whether to let refugees into the United States to resettle has been volatile (see Figure 1¹ below). Since 1958, public opinion polling finds that rarely does more than half of the U.S. public approve of increasing refugee resettlement numbers ([Krogstad & Radford, 2017, p. 4](#)). The current state of the world--an increase in forced migration and protracted refugee crisis with no resolution in sight--brings to the fore the question of American public opinion towards refugees once again.

Figure 1
Public Support for Allowing Refugees into the Country Over Time

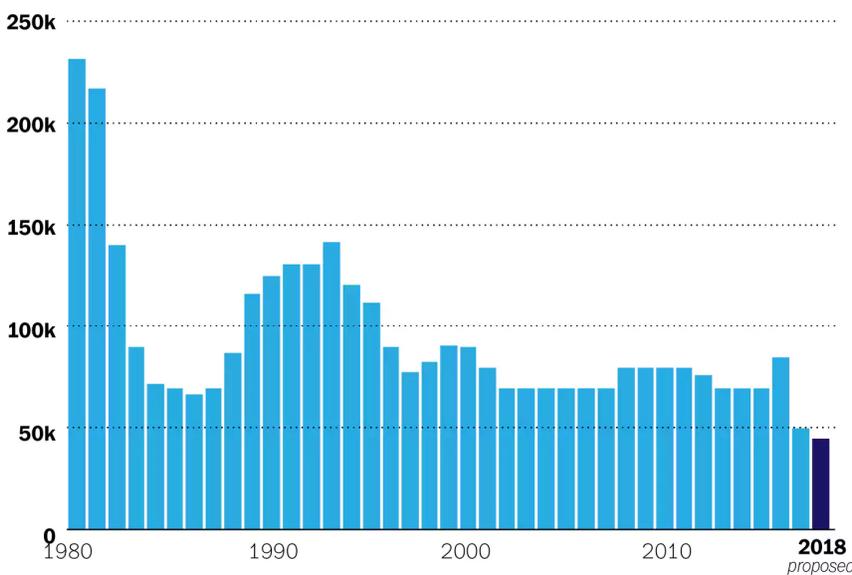


¹ Data for table sourced from Gallup table "Gallup Questions about Refugees Over Time" in [Newport, 2015](#).

Refugee resettlement programs, including that of the United States, are not keeping pace with the growing need. Former President Barack Obama raised the number of allotted resettlement slots from 85,000 to 110,000 in light of the growing crisis in Syria during his tenure ([MPI, 2016](#)). President Donald Trump’s early executive orders and his refugee resettlement policy sought to walk those numbers back ([Krogstad & Radford, 2017, p. 1](#)). As of this writing, Trump has set the refugee resettlement ceiling at 45,000 spots ([Amos, 2018](#)). Since its start in 1980, no president in U.S. history ever set the resettlement program’s ceiling so low (see Figure 2²).

Figure 2
Proposed refugee cap is lowest since 1980

Annual refugee resettlement ceiling by fiscal year



WAPQ.ST/WONKBLOG

Source: Migration Policy Institute

In October 2017, the Trump administration resumed resettling refugees, but those from countries deemed high security risk now must go through additional security screenings ([Torbati, 2018](#)).

It is here that the power of public opinion comes to the fore for advocacy organizations,

including Human Rights Watch. Crisis like those in Syria and Yemen show no sign of ending, and the number of people forced from their homes continues to rise. Politicians look, in part, toward their constituents when deciding their stance on salient issues such as refugee³. The recent number of right-wing populist politicians elected into power in western democracies at

² Table sourced from [Ingrahm, 2017](#)

³ [Burstein, 2003](#); [Burstein, 2006](#); Wlezien & Soroka, 2007

first seems to suggest that public sentiment is firmly against more liberalized refugee policies ([Inglehart & Norris, 2016, p. 2](#)). This report posits that, in fact, hope is not lost, and that there are communication and outreach strategies that can be employed to strengthen the resolve of current refugee supporters in the U.S., and to soften the opposition.

Landscape of Public Opinion Polling and Data

Figure 3: U.S. Public Opinion Towards Refugees

Poll Question	Date	Poll Administrator	Sample Size	Results
Do you think the U.S. does or doesn't have a responsibility to take in refugees fleeing from other countries	09/2015	YouGov	491	It does: 27% It doesn't: 54% Not sure: 18%
In order to help deal with this situation [refugee crisis in Syria], the United States recently announced it will increase the number of refugees it accepts. All in all, do you approve or disapprove of this decision?	09/2015	Pew	1,502	Approve: 51% Disapprove: 45% Unsure/Refused: 4%
Do you think the United States should take in more or fewer refugees than it does now?	04/2016	Marist Poll	572	Should take in fewer: 53% Should take in more: 35%
Would refugees be welcomed in your community?	05/2016	Brookings Institute	845	Yes: 55%
How much do you agree with this statement: "We must close our borders to refugees entirely—we can't accept any at this time?"	06/2017-07/2017	Ipsos	1,000	Agree very much: 18% Agree somewhat: 22% Disagree somewhat: 27% Disagree very much: 25% Don't know: 7%

Most recently, public opinion polling of Americans about refugees and refugee policies center around two main policy shifts and related events—President Obama's response to the Syrian refugee crisis, and President Trump's Executive Orders in early 2017.⁴ Results show that the U.S. public's feelings about refugees vary as demonstrated in Figure 2 (above). These inconsistencies may be due to a number of factors such as recent events or question content. I explore these considerations in the *Hypothesis* section.

Demographic Breakdowns

⁴ For examples, see [Pew, 2015](#); [Quinnipiac, 2015](#); [Quinnipiac, Sept. 2017](#); [NBC News & Wall Street Journal, 2017](#); [Quinnipiac, Feb. 2017](#); [Pew, 2017](#); [CBS News, 2017](#); [CNN & ORC, 2017](#); [Quinnipiac, Dec. 2015](#); [CBS & New York Times, 2015](#); [PRRI & Religion News Service, 2015](#)

Party Affiliation

There is a clear, decisive split along party lines in public opinion toward refugees. Poll results find Democrats to be more supportive of pro-refugee policies in general⁵ and more open to resettling Syrian and Muslim refugees in the U.S.⁶ Republicans are less supportive in both categories ([Stone, 2017, p. 4](#)). Voters identifying as Independents have more volatile opinions across polling data⁷.

There is one area where party affiliation does not seem to impact public opinion though. Interestingly, there is fairly consistent agreement across parties that refugees should not be given priority acceptance solely because they are Christians.⁸ Perhaps it is more important to Americans that those refugees granted entrance into the country be considered equally regardless of religion, even if their “ideal” refugee claimant was Christian.

When polls divide respondents based on whether they supported Trump in the 2016 elections, it becomes clear that even among Republicans, Trump supporters are the least supportive group of more liberalized refugee policies. A survey conducted by Brookings and the University of Maryland⁹ found that 77% of Trump supporters (as opposed to 63% of all Republican respondents) opposed admitting refugees from Syria or other Middle Eastern conflicts, even if there were a screening process in place ([Telhami, 2016, p. 2](#)).

Age

Some polls measuring public opinion on refugees focus on generational divides, and a portion of those found that younger generations are more welcoming to refugees and less

⁵ [Telhami, 2016, p. 1, 4-5](#); [YouGov, 2015, p. 1, 6](#); [Adida, Lo, & Platas, 2017, p. 15](#); [McElvein, 2016, p. 1](#)

⁶ [Telhami, 2016, p. 1, 4-5](#); [Telhami & Rouse, 2017, p. 4](#); [Jones et. al, 2016, p. 4](#) ; [YouGov, 2015, p. 2-4](#); [Rasmussen, 2017](#); [Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2016, p. 1-2](#)

⁷ See [Telhami & Rouse, 2017](#); [Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2016](#); [Rasmussen, 2017](#); [Newhouse & Blizzard, 2015](#)

⁸ [Telhami & Rouse, 2016](#); [Enten, 2017](#); [Neufeld, 2017](#)

⁹ N=845

threatened by U.S. society's increasing diversity¹⁰. For example, a Rasmussen poll¹¹ found that younger generations were mildly less supportive of the "refugee ban" than older ones (2017). A Marist poll¹² found that the Millennial generation (ages 18-34) is the most sympathetic towards Syrian refugees with 66% of Millennial respondents against a ban on Syrian refugees compared with 48% of Gen X'ers (35-50), 41% of Baby Boomers (51-69), and 35% of respondents from the Silent/Greatest Generation (69+) ([pbs.org](https://www.pbs.org), 2016).

However, other polls suggest a more complex story--that when breaking down survey responses by age and question type, it is not clear that there is a strong trend in relation to age. For example, when it comes to America's responsibility to aid Syrian refugees specifically, the oldest Americans are sometimes more sympathetic. In a nationally representative YouGov poll¹³, 39% of 18-24 year olds and only 25% of 30-44 year olds felt the U.S. had this responsibility. Of the older set, only 17% of 45-64 year olds and 38% of people 65 years and older felt the U.S. had a responsibility to take in Syrian refugees (2015).

Gender

Few polls separate respondents by gender. However, of those that did, the results pointed to women being either slightly more supportive of their government doing something to help refugees or equally as supportive as male respondents¹⁴. For example, Amnesty International's *Refugee Welcome Survey* found that globally, "men are slightly more likely than women to disagree that their government should do more to help refugees fleeing war or persecution (31% vs 29% respectively)" ([Holme & Prudhomme, 2017, p. 8](#)). These results were

¹⁰ [Inglehart, 2016, p. 13](#); [pbs.org, 2016](#); [Galasso, et. al, 2017, p. 7](#); [Telhami, 2016, p. 5](#); [Holme & Prudhomme, 2016, p. 10](#); [Pew, September 2015](#)

¹¹ N=1,000

¹² Poll question asked: "Which comes closer to your opinion: 'Syrian refugees should be banned from entering the United States at least temporarily' or 'The United States should continue its current policy for Syrian refugees,'" N=572

¹³ Poll question read: "Do you think the U.S. does or does not have a responsibility to take in refugees from fleeing from other countries?"; N=491

¹⁴ [YouGov, 2015](#); [Holme & Prudhomme, 2016](#); [Blizzard & Newhouse, 2015](#); [Ferwerda et. al, 2017](#); [Shepherd, 2017](#)

not separated by country, however.

An [April 2017 Quinnipiac University poll](#) found stronger support amongst women than men for admitting Syrian refugees into the United States. Of the 1,062 registered voters who participated in the survey, 62% of women respondents supported admitting Syrian refugees as compared with 52% of men ([Shepherd 2017, 2](#)).

Finally, a [2015 YouGov poll](#) found mixed results. In some questions, women were more supportive of the idea that their government should be helping refugees in some way. In other polls, levels of support were roughly the same between men and women.

Socioeconomic Status

Very few polls that ask about opinions on refugees break down responses based on the socioeconomic status of respondents. However, there are two that provide some insight, and that suggest Americans with a higher socioeconomic status are more supportive of liberalized refugee policies. In a survey administered by the Brookings Institute and PRRI, results of white respondents were broken down by class. The poll found that 53% of white working class respondents¹⁵ were in favor of passing a law to prevent Syrian refugees from coming to the United States while 32% of white college-educated Americans¹⁶ were opposed to passing such a law ([Jones, et. al, 2016](#)). A [2015 YouGov poll](#) that asked respondents, “would you support or oppose the United States government allowing more Syrian refugees to move to the U.S.?” found a slight difference in opinion between those respondents within the lowest income bracket versus respondents in a middle or higher income bracket. Among those making less than \$50,000 per year, 34% supported taking more Syrian refugees¹⁷. Of respondents making between \$50,000 and \$100,000 per year, 44% supported this action¹⁸. Finally of the wealthiest respondents making over \$100,000 per year, 47% of respondents supported taking in more

¹⁵ (N=744)

¹⁶ (N=822)

¹⁷ 11% responded “strongly support;” 23% responded “somewhat support”

¹⁸ 15% responded “strongly support;” 29% responded “somewhat support”

Syrian refugees¹⁹.

Polling Discussion

While there are quite a few polls measuring American public opinion related to refugee issues, surprisingly little scholarly or experimental research has been dedicated to closer analysis of this data. However, in a review of the limited literature available, as well as closer analysis of trends emerging from the polls detailed above, there are some theories that come to the forefront. Below, I detail three hypothesis that I propose to help explain some of the results of polls and the motivations behind respondents' answers.

Hypothesis 1: Social Desirability Bias

The concept of a “social desirability bias” simply means that respondents are more likely to answer polling questions in what they perceive to be a socially-acceptable way if the poll is administered in person or by a live person on the phone (as opposed to by a recording over the phone or through an anonymous online form). The concept implies that polls will more accurately reflect respondent opinions if they are not conducted by people, but rather via anonymous online surveys or pre-recorded telephone calls ([Adida, Lo, & Platas, 2017, p. 25-26](#)). This is especially salient for refugee-related polls. According to a study by the Cato Institute of recent polls on refugee issues, there was a stark change in responses depending on whether a poll was administered online or by telephone.

Hypothesis 2: Words Matter

There are several reports that point to the importance of wording used in poll questions. Opinions notably shift depending on the way a question is worded. Philip Bump of the *Washington Post* pointed out the differing results from polls about Trump's refugee ban across three different polling administrators--Rasmussen, Reuters-Ipsos, and Gallup. The Rasmussen question included that the proposed refugee ban was temporary and that it could improve the

¹⁹ 19% responded “strongly support;” 28% responded “somewhat support”

security screening process refugees must go through prior to U.S. entry. The Reuters-Ipsos question included that the policy was focused on mainly-Muslim countries. Finally, Gallup included both that the proposed ban was temporary and aimed at mainly Muslim countries. While the Rasmussen and Reuters-Ipsos polls suggested that there was a plurality of support for the ban, the Gallup poll suggested the opposite was true. Bump hypothesizes that the inclusion or exclusion of certain elements in questions are partially to blame for changing results ([2017](#)).

The Cato Institute also supports Bump's analysis. It found that "when refugees and immigrants are described as coming from 'terror-prone regions' or when respondents are told that government needs time to enhance security measures" ([Ekins, 2017, p. 2-3](#)), support for more liberalized refugee policies decreases. However, the opposite becomes true if the poll question suggests that there should be some sort of "religious test" to determine refugee admissions (Ekins, 2017, p. 3).

Hypothesis 3: Current Events and Context

A final possible influence over public opinion relates to contextual factors. David Frum in *The Atlantic* suggests that for some Americans regarding refugees fleeing persecution in the Middle East, "it may seem reckless to respond to that hatred by inviting more of it into their own countries, and more reckless than ever after the Paris and San Bernardino jihadist atrocities" ([2015](#)). Frum argues that with coverage in the media of violence that refugees are fleeing comes fear and anxiety for some Americans responding to these polls.

Shortly after the Paris terrorist attacks on November 13th, 2015, researchers from the Qatar Foundation and University of Edinburgh tracked tweets about the attack using a number of hashtags, and then mapped the tweets' origin countries. Overall, they found that 68% of tweets about the attacks out the United States were anti-refugee, while 32% were pro-refugee ([Darwish & Magdy, 2015](#)). Without comparison data about level of support expressed in tweets prior to the attacks, it is impossible to assign cause to this level of negativity toward refugees.

However, it may suggest that with terrorism comes publicly expressed negative views of refugees.

Similarly, when the Cato Institute completed an analysis of polls of the U.S. public about refugees, researchers found “that support for accepting refugees and immigrants varies with what’s happening in the news and the level of threat Americans perceive” ([Ekins, 2015, p. 2](#)). This finding supports Frum’s hypothesis and the Twitter analysis research that with coverage of terrorist incidents (even if they were not committed by refugees themselves) comes opposition towards more liberalized refugee policies.

Messaging Literature Review

The scholarly literature that exists about messaging and refugees is limited, but growing. As the issue of refugees continues to be politically charged and more media attention is focused on the refugee debate, it appears that scholars are beginning to respond in-kind. Assessing the scholarship produced thus far in combination with analysis from media sources offers a rich collection of material from which to start an exploration of messages about refugees.

National Identity Threat

One of the most frequently cited messages about refugees that shows up in the literature and polling reports is refugees as a threat to American national identity and American cultural values. Additionally, anxiety over the United States becoming majority non-white, residents speaking a diverse array of languages other than English, Islam as incompatible with American values also contributes to the perception that the U.S. is at risk of losing its identity ([Jones et. al, 2016](#); [Galasso et. al, 2017](#); [Connelly et. al, 2017](#)).

Researchers out of Harvard University’s *Immigration Policy Lab* sought to understand more about the variety of narratives produced about refugees and how respondents perceived refugees as a result. They found that “individuals adopt exclusionary attitudes and behaviors towards immigrants when they perceive from them either a cultural or an economic threat”

([Adida et. al, 2017, p. 7](#)). The researchers asked respondents²⁰ to assess different refugee 'profiles' on whether or not they would permit them to come into the United States. The results reiterated the fears about loss of American identity in that respondents favored refugees who would be "most likely to integrate seamlessly into mainstream American culture" (2017, p. 15). The preferred refugee profile chosen by respondents was someone who is "high-skilled, Christian, male...who speak[s] fluent English" (2017, p. 15). This preference held true across ideological lines. The result of this scholarly experiment is consistent with polls showing Americans are increasingly concerned about the U.S. losing its particular culture or values²¹.

Other traditionally American values are sources of support for welcoming refugees or at least consistent with being welcoming, although using these values to construct messaging about refugees has yet to be explored in the academic literature. For example, research out of the University of California at Riverside found that shortly after Trump announced his Executive Orders on immigration and refugees, traditional American imagery used in protests against the policy ignited further support for refugees. The research team surveyed the same 311 respondents²² a few days before the announcement of the executive order and a few days after. In the second survey, the researchers found that "individual level support for the ban shifted dramatically, particularly among...strong American identifiers" ([Collingwood et. al, 2018, p. 24](#))²³. Images such as "protestors draped in American flags...linked ideas of inclusive immigration policies to concepts of American equality" ([Al Jazeera, 2016](#)), and thus generated opposition to the executive order temporarily banning refugees.

Similarly, the *Associated Press* and the NORC Center for Public Affairs out of the University of Chicago found that values like liberty and freedom were popular among American

²⁰ N=5,400; nationally representative sample

²¹ See [Connelly et. al, 2017](#); [Finn et. al, 2017](#); [Ekins, 2017](#); [Galasso et. al, 2017](#); [Jones et. al, 2016](#)

²² This sample was not nationally representative as it utilized Amazon's MTurk software

²³ This article has not been published yet, but is forthcoming. It can be accessed on the lead author's website.

respondents, even when speaking of people coming from other countries. For instance, researchers found that “the idea that the United States is a safe haven for people fleeing violence or persecution, or even simply looking for better economic opportunities is an important aspect of the American identity to most people” ([Connelly et. al, 2017](#)). Additionally, 65% of the 1,004 nationally-representative respondents also said that “diversity makes the United States stronger” (2017). More scholarship needs to be dedicated to analyzing these messages to know their level of influence over American public opinion, but this early literature points to possible strategies to influence opinions on refugees using this particular rhetoric.

Humanization

There has been some scholarly work in the realm of media studies and political science examining the importance of humanizing refugees. In the study previously discussed out of Harvard University's *Immigration Policy Lab*, researchers also found that personalizing individual refugees was useful in influencing some people originally opposed to more liberalized refugee policies. They utilized an “empathy treatment” or an “information treatment” on various respondents to measure if initial attitudes about refugees shifted based on this additional messaging. The empathy treatment asked respondents to imagine what it would be like to be a refugee themselves with questions such as, “what would you take with you, limited to what you can only carry yourself, on your journey” and where would you flee, or would you stay in your own country?” ([Adida, et. al, 2017, p. 10](#)). In the information treatment, researchers provided neutral information about refugee resettlement, such as the share of refugees that the U.S. has resettled relative to country size in comparison with other countries. Their results found that the “empathy treatment shifted attitudes toward inclusion for Independents” ([Adida et. al, 2017, p. 15](#)). Researchers also found that when they offered respondents an opportunity to take a step further and take action on behalf of refugees by writing a letter to government officials expressing support for refugees, the empathy treatment influenced Democrats and even some Republicans to take action. In contrast, Republicans who received the information treatment

actually responded more negatively, which researchers attributed to a backlash to facts contrary to their previously held belief system ([Adida, et. al, 2017](#)).

Refugees as Impacting the Economy

Somewhat surprisingly, there has been little scholarly work done on messaging related to refugees and economics. We are fairly certain that there is a contingency of Americans who are increasingly worried about the economy, disappearing job opportunities for themselves, and financial instability ([Jones et. al, 2016](#)). However, little work has been done to directly link these feelings to refugees, and no scholarly experiments at all were found in the literature. The researchers out of the *Immigration Policy Lab* did note that political scientists point to the fact that perceived economic threats can result in exclusionary attitudes, however they did not test this assertion themselves as it relates to refugees ([Adida, et. al, 2017](#)).

Terrorism/Dehumanization and Crisis/National Security Frame

Media Messaging about refugees directed at the United States public often is couched in terms of national security. Some common narratives linking refugees and national security risks include assertions that current security clearance processes cannot truly weed out terrorists from refugee applicants and that past tragedies such as the 2015 Bataclan Concert Hall attacks in Paris or the 2015 shootings in San Bernardino, California, should result in more restrictive refugee policies ([Kuzcera, 2017, p. 44](#)). Polling data also demonstrates that after a terrorist attack (even if the attack was not committed by someone who arrived in the country with refugee status), American public opinion shifts away from supporting more liberalized refugee policies and expresses an increase in fear of terrorism ([McElvein, 2016](#)).

Little scholarly research has been dedicated to understanding the way or to what extent American public opinion is influenced by messages linking refugees to a national security threat. However, one study published in 2018 attempted to explore this question via social media. The team of researchers examined social media posts about Syrian refugees seeking to learn what are the dominant messages about refugees communicated across platforms. The team

conducted a quantitative content analysis of 750 unique Instagram posts and 750 unique Pinterest posts that were identified through hashtag searches. Overall, the study found that the dominant portrayal of Syrian refugees on Pinterest was related to security concerns, while on Instagram the dominant frame was humanitarian concern. The researchers also observed another trend--posts that framed refugees as security concerns frequently "focus[ed] on larger issues of the refugee crisis rather than specific people or events" ([Guidry et. al, 2018, p. 14](#)). Pointing to prior scholarly work done on framing of political issues, the research team notes that people are typically more persuaded by messaging that includes broader contextualization. Thus, they suggest that when supporters of refugees communicate about refugee issues on social media, they should be sure to situate the images or stories within the larger context and provide further information about the general crisis beyond specific stories or events (Guidry et. al, 2018).

Peer Organizations

Of Human Rights Watch's peer organizations, I found three utilized public opinion polling in some way. Amnesty International and Human Rights First both commissioned their own polls and made them available to the public. Refugees International included public opinion polling information in their communications, but did not commission polls.

Amnesty International: Refugee Welcome Index and Global Survey

In 2016, Amnesty International commissioned the *Refugees Welcome Survey* to understand the willingness of people around the world to welcome refugees ([Holme & Prudhomme, 2016](#)). The study surveyed 27,000 people across 27 countries and asked if respondents thought refugees should be allowed to seek asylum in other countries, if their government should be doing more to support refugees, and at what proximity they would be comfortable welcoming refugees. For the last question, respondents could select within their own household, in their neighborhood, in their city/town/village, in their country, or not at all. ([2016, p. 3](#)).

From this global survey, [Amnesty](#) created the “Refugee Welcome Index” as a way to measure how welcoming each country’s population was to refugees. The scale scores countries from 0-100. A score of 0 means that 100% of respondents in that country would not allow refugees in their country. A score of 100 means that 100% of survey respondents said they would allow refugees into their neighborhood or home. The United States’ score was a 60, above the average score of 52.

Human Rights First and Public Opinion Strategies Survey

In March of 2015, Human Rights first partnered fielded a survey about refugee policies. They targeted voters in 25 congressional districts²⁴, and also administered surveys statewide in New Hampshire and South Carolina. They asked a battery of questions related to specific asylum and refugee policies in an attempt to learn more about which policies, if any, may sway voters. The results were not nationally representative. They found that respondents did not believe the U.S.’s asylum program was ‘working well’ and felt policy changes were appropriate. They also found that Independent women were amenable to a stronger asylum system in the U.S., and that this demographic could be targeted to support pro-refugee policies in upcoming elections ([Newhouse & Blizzard, 2015](#)).

Refugees International

Unlike Amnesty International and Human Rights First, Refugees International did not commission their own poll. However, they did refer to some polling data in a blog post about Trump’s “travel ban.” They pointed to a poll from Brookings and the University of Maryland in April 2017 that found 59% of Americans supported taking in Syrian refugees ([Refugees International, 2017](#)).

Implications for Human Rights Watch

As noted in previous sections, public opinion can and does have an influence over policy

²⁴ N=600

changes, particularly when issues are salient. Refugees and the politics surrounding them are especially salient in the United States at present. With an administration opposed to being more supportive of refugees as evidenced by the extremely low refugee resettlement ceiling, influencing the American public may be an indirect route to achieve policy change goals, or to influence political will.

Political scientists have found that for elite messengers to influence public opinion, the public “must be exposed to the explanation, they must pay attention to it, they must comprehend it, they must accept the account as legitimate and credible” ([McGraw, 1995, p. 55](#)). While these conditions are generally applied to politician rhetoric, other “visible experts” (1995, p. 54) can also be public opinion influencers. Therein lies Human Rights Watch’s entry point if and when the organization seeks to target the American public specifically, or decides to use public opinion as a leveraging tool to advocate for policy changes.

Polling-- both across time, as well as more recently--suggests that American public opinion is moveable on refugee policies. In particular, Independents²⁵ have shifting views depending on the poll and the contextual factors when the poll was administered. Research out of the *Immigration Policy Lab* at Harvard also points to the possibility that even Republican-identifying Americans can shift their opinion with the right messaging ([Adida, et. al, 2017](#)). However, a challenge lies in the fact that scholarship on messaging about refugees as impacting public opinion is still nascent.

The evidence shows that Americans are concerned that refugees will undermine American identity and values, and are particularly concerned about this when refugees are Muslim ([Jones et. al, 2016](#); [Galasso et. al, 2017](#); [Connelly et. al, 2017](#)). However, evidence also suggests that Americans align themselves with traditionally American values that are especially relevant to promoting refugee welcome. Values such as religious liberty, freedom,

²⁵ See [Telhami & Rouse, 2017](#); [Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2016](#); [Rasmussen, 2017](#); [Newhouse & Blizzard, 2015](#)

independence, and hard work lend themselves well to promoting positive refugee portrayals, garnering support for more liberalized refugee admissions policies, and are consistent with human rights values ([Connelly et. al, 2017](#); [Al Jazeera, 2016](#); [Robins, 2003](#)).

There is evidence that supports the importance of humanizing refugees with personal stories as a way to garner more support for pro-refugee policies ([Adida, et. al, 2017](#)). We need positive portrayals of refugees to push back against preconceived notions about them (and especially about Muslim refugees), and underline their compatibility with the values that are influential to the American public ([Adida, et. al, 2017](#); [Stone, 2017](#); Kaufmann, 2017). These messages can have even more impact, especially on conservative respondents, if they are presented with information that more broadly contextualizes events that caused refugees to flee and seek protection in the first place ([Guidry et. al, 2018](#)).

Finally, it is important to note that evidence shows that responding to deeply held beliefs or anxieties with shaming messages and contradictory facts (even if they are true) is not effective. It can lead to communication shut down, further ingraining flawed reasoning, and cause those Americans who are scared or worried to feel resentment towards messages (and messengers) trying to promote more liberalized refugee policies. Worst of all, it may even lead to backlash from opponents, inciting them to take political action against refugee policies ([Adida et. al, 2017](#); [Frum, 2015](#)). Addressing these fears and anxieties from which significant opposition toward refugees arises by emphasizing commonalities between refugees and Americans, framing Muslims in positive ways, and avoiding shaming people for their anxieties and fears is evidenced to be more effective in persuading tentative allies or outright opponents of pro-refugee policies.

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