

Euronews Framing Analysis:
Brexit Controversy and Recent Violence in Northern Ireland

Annika Brynildsen, Van Anh Nguyen, ElisaBeth Hutchinson & Noah G. Pegler
Department of Communication Studies, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania

COM 315: International Communication

Dr. Marco Ehrl

May 5, 2021

Euronews Framing Analysis: Brexit Controversy and Recent Violence in Northern Ireland

Intro (Annika)

There have been outbreaks of violence throughout Northern Ireland. This is due to the ongoing Brexit controversy. This first started in January of 2016. The economic crisis relates to the international trade exchange, as well as regulations, and policy reforms. This ongoing debacle has created an uproar within international communication. The main countries involved are the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland.

This controversy is not only important to the countries involved but also all other countries watching it unravel from afar. This is a turning point in history, in which we can learn from. Euronews is a clear concise example of a typical, international news broadcast, “News sources also influence each other, in an intermediary agenda setting” (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 2014).

Our frames included violence, economic crisis, regulation, policy, and international trade. These frames cover the main points throughout this event. These 21 news articles we have tediously read through all highlight the global media market and its relation to society. European news broadcasts such as Euronews, produce factual and unbiased information. Whereas other non-European news broadcasts have named this event the “North Ireland riots,” blaming the rioting on loyalists from the United Kingdom.

Description of Case and News Outlet/Program (ElisaBeth)

According to its own website, Euronews is “Europe’s leading international new channel.” Based in France and founded in 1993, it reaches one hundred fifty million people each month with news not only within Europe, but around the globe (“About Us,” n.d.). Euronews prides itself in presenting the news as factual - unbiased and impartial - and allowing their audience to

make their own decisions after viewing an array of varying opinions. Despite this apparent non-bias, they also mention reporting from a “pro-EU” perspective (Van Zandt, D., 2021).

Another source mostly agrees with Euronews in terms of its evaluation of unbiased news reporting. D. Van Zandt (2021) sums up a review of Euronews’ bias, or lack thereof, this way:

Overall, we rate Euronews Left-Center biased based on well-sourced neutral news reporting and a moderate left lean in editorial content, which represents a small portion of the website. We also rate them High for factual reporting due to proper sourcing and a clean fact check record. (para. 2)

However, Van Zandt (2021) found specifically that when reporting Brexit-related news, Euronews reports negatively more often than not. An explanation for this negativity could simply be derived from the fact that correlated recent events occurring due to Brexit are described negatively, but nevertheless, the fact is worth mentioning.

As for Euronews’ stockholders, a Variety article recounts that in 2017, 25% of the stakes in Euronews were purchased by American company, National Broadcasting Company (NBC). Recently, that same 25% was added to the 63% stake in Euronews already held by Media Globe Networks billionaire owner, Naguib Sawiris. Sawiris’ hand in Euronews now totals 88% (Keslassy, 2020). The rest of Euronews’ shares, Keslassy (2020) says, remain belonging to European broadcasters such as Rai and France Televisions. The fact that an overwhelming portion of Euronews now belongs to one man was a red flag to questioning followers of Euronews who were hesitant that this change in stock could lead to greater bias. In response, Euronews’ CEO, Michael Peters, said Sawiris is not in it to influence - he already has that. Instead, Peters coined the new direction of Euronews “the McDonald’s approach” and explained that “[McDonald’s] ... has managed to implement what I call the ‘glocal’ offer – adapting a

global brand to local specifics.” He then went on to mention the many languages Euronews is translated into as one of these methods of glocalization (Debusmann, 2020).

After all, Euronews uses the catchphrase, “all views.” Interestingly to this framing analysis, they also claim to present, “facts, ideas, and *solutions*” (italicized for emphasis) (“About Us,” n.d.). By presenting the news, international media sources, including Euronews, inherently frame the events they report on in certain ways, whether or not they intentionally frame them those ways (Entman, 1993).

Entman’s (1993) framing theory of communication defines four different types of codes that news sources simply cannot avoid when telling stories: causes of the problem, a definition of the problem itself, their moral evaluation of it, and solutions put forward to resolve the problem. So, in light of the events described above, Euronews’ reporting style, and framing theory, we arrived at the following research question. How does EuroNews frame Brexit as it relates to recent violent outbreaks in Northern Ireland?

Description of Method and Proceedings (Van Anh)

Framing is a method that is commonly used in news and is defined differently by each author. “Using framing to look at journalistic practice helps reveal insights into the production of news, which is not merely the result of factual reporting undergone with objectivity and impartiality” (Schudson, 1989). By using framing, we would be able to highlight specific features on a certain issue that are aimed to draw attention to the readers (Entman, 1993). Problem definition, cause, moral judgement, and solution are the four specific parts that are promoted in the text. Framing analysis helps to study how political problem understandings and concomitant solutions are intersubjectively constructed (Ville & Gheyle, 2021). By doing that,

when reading news articles, readers can identify the dominant key words that the writer wants to emphasize on the issue.

For example, when corruption is the key thing that needs to be listed in the news, we will analyze words related to corruption throughout the article to draw attention. It makes other less important information become salient and we will mainly focus on the core of the issue instead. The reason that framing analysis is the best method in analyzing international news and entertainment media is that the concept of framing has been attributed an important role in agenda-setting and in affecting policy outcomes and “can also play a role in reconfiguring the nature and constellation of conflicts” (Ville & Gheyle, 2021). By using framing, the audiences can understand the political messages differently depending on how they perceive the issue. A sentence in the news can be interpreted as problem definition or cause, and there is no right or wrong answer because it is up to people’s perspective.

The event we picked is the violence in Northern Ireland due to Brexit; therefore, when picking the time frame, we draw from the origin of the issue, which started in 2016 when Britain decided to leave the European Union, and after that is Northern Ireland. There are debates and arguments about the issue throughout 2016 to 2018, but not until 2019 was the outbreak of the violence. Currently in 2021, constant violent events are still happening every day in Northern Ireland, which makes it easier for us to analyze the problem with recent updates and statistics.

Regarding the keywords that we use to search for the event, we believe it is significant to find words that can narrow down the search as much as possible and have to make sure those are within the timeline we picked. Focusing on the title of the topic helps to choose the keyword easier. “Northern Ireland” is one of the keywords that was used, and since the events are recent, many articles about the violence in Northern Ireland due to Brexit pop up right in the first page.

Another keyword is “Brexit,” which has a direct correlation to the topic since it is one of the causes of the violence in Northern Ireland. After finding around 25 articles by using those search terms, we continue to skim through each of them to make sure none of the articles is opinion-based.

After analyzing 21 articles, we all come up with several coding categories for each frame function. For the cause, the coding categories are Brexit controversy - United Kingdom vs. Northern Ireland, trade regulations preferred over border wall and border restriction. Those terms appear constantly in the article to point out what leads to the violence in Northern Ireland. For problem definition, the coding categories are Northern Irish nationalists/loyalists, violence and fear of violence, and economic crisis. The current events show that the nationalists are opposed to the idea of Northern Ireland leaving the EU, and it initiates the violence against the government. When violence constantly occurs between the government and the people, it influences the economy of the country, especially in trading with other countries.

The coding categories for moral judgement are the lack of responsibility of Northern Ireland leaders is unacceptable, violence is an atrocity and needs to end, and the idea that separating families at border and interfering with trade is totally wrong. Not every article has moral judgement, but overall, the general pattern is how the Northern Ireland’s government has not fully shown their responsibility in handling the violence. The three coding categories for the solution are regulatory equivalence, tariffs and stopping the return of hard borders. Those are the possible ways that the government of Northern Ireland can do to mitigate the chaos in the country at the moment.

Findings

Timeline: Jan. 2016 - Apr. 2021 (ElisaBeth)

On January 25, 2016, Euronews published an article entitled, “‘Brexit’ could cause difficulties for Northern Ireland” (Euronews, 2016). Thus, this date marked the beginning of or close examination of the framing of this event. This is because it was clear to see, even before creating our coding book, that Brexit was frequently mentioned by the news source in relation to the violent outbreaks in Belfast from 2019 through the present. After noticing this, we decided to search Euronews.com for the first mention of Brexit and Northern Ireland in the same article. Our selected articles then follow the progression of events until the date we first collected our data, April 20, 2021. There is no reason for choosing this end date other than having our own deadline to meet! However, we could have extended this end date, if we had more time, due to the ongoing coverage of this event and its lack of a political solution being reached, like for instance in 1998 when the Stormont Peace Accords originated.

Coding Categories & Frequencies

Once our timeline was determined and our keywords led us to a sample of 21 Euronews articles on the topic, we thoroughly read through each piece, highlighting instances where we noticed the source framing causes, problems, moral evaluations, and solutions. To improve the quality of our data, 2 students separately analyzed the first half of the sample while another two separately analyzed the second half of the article samples. So, when we reconvened after doing so, we chose the coding categories based on examples that both students individually arrived at. Doing so confirmed the strength of the coding categories we determined.

Causes (Van Anh)

Brexit controversy between the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland is one of the main themes that are mentioned in 13 out of 21 articles, which accounts for 62%. The main topic already reflects the overall problem that is happening, that is the reason why this category is emphasized in a lot of articles to explain the cause of the violence. "The new trading border is the result of the Northern Ireland Protocol, introduced to avoid the need for a hard border on the island of Ireland," and it is where the tension started (Hirst, 2021). The protocol means that Northern Irish must remain in the EU single market, and the products that go from Great Britain to Northern Ireland will have to follow EU procedures (Hirst, 2021). For the Northern Irish loyalists, it is a disadvantage for the trading of their country. As mentioned in one of the articles, "Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) is launching a legal challenge against the Brexit deal's Northern Ireland Protocol." (Euronews, 2021).

Additionally, trade regulations preferred over the border wall are talked about in 12 out of 21 articles, which accounts for 57%. After Britain left the EU, Northern Ireland imposed the protocol that directly influenced the trading industry and got the immediate opposition from the nationalists. "If Britain leaves the EU it could damage trade for Northern Ireland, which remains part of the UK" (Euronews, 2016). Since the beginning of Brexit, there had already been predictions about the possibilities of trade damage to Northern Ireland, and it happens eventually.

The last coding category for cause is the border restrictions. "Brexit has created a border with the European Union and London could impose restrictions of movement. The border issue has re-ignited old fears" (Euronews, 2016). Border is mentioned the most out of all keywords, in

15 out of 21 articles, and accounts for 71%, the highest frequency we found. Border leads to trading arguments, and it came from Brexit, so all the causes are linked together.

Problem Definitions (ElisaBeth)

7 out of 21 or 33% of articles mentioned the clash between Northern Irish nationalists and loyalists as a definition of a problem. An example of this tension being described as the problem is, “Unrest has erupted over the past week - largely in loyalist, Protestant areas - amid rising tensions over post-Brexit trade rules and worsening relations between the parties ...” (Euronews, 2021.) Often in this disagreement, the loyalists are especially noted by Euronews as part of the problem, as exemplified in this quote. However, the fact that there is conflict between these two parties in general is how the problem is more often defined.

If you read this sentence, “Another night of violence on the streets of Belfast, with people setting fires, throwing petrol bombs and stones over "peace gates" separating communities...” (Euronews, 2021), is it clear that violence (or fear of violence) is another definition of the problem. With a whopping 67% of the articles either directly using the term violence or intently discussing the violent acts and arousing fear, there is no debating that this is viewed as an issue to Euronews.

The third problem definition that occurred in 43% of the articles is the idea of an economic crisis in Northern Ireland. There is somewhat of a condescending tone towards their decisions and handling of their finances, as can be seen in quotes like from this Euronews (2016) article, “We analyse the pre-Brexit economic forecasts for Scotland and Northern Ireland, which looked quite gloomy even before the vote.”

Moral Evaluations (Annika)

A main point highlighted within moral evaluations of judgement was the lack of responsibility of Northern Ireland leaders.

Clearly the violence needs to end. It has been referred to as an atrocity. This violence is not only destroying property, and injuring people, but it is also hurting Ireland's overall image as a country. Their police are being ambushed and brutalized at the expense of business trade.

The creation of a hard border has created turmoil for families who are being separated especially because this is an international business issue regarding trade, which just so happens to affect many other things. Morally, there should have been more thought put in place to get the government's point across while remaining an empathetic, unified country.

Solutions (Noah)

Regulatory equivalence is one of our possible solutions for trade so that it is fair for each of the markets. One article stated "Britain hopes to exempt small traders and farmers from customs regulations and create "regulatory equivalence" with the EU to avoid inspections for goods crossing the border. Fears remain that this could create a "backdoor" into the EU" (Euronews, 2017). So, this is a solution that could have backing on both sides even though some criticism may follow.

Another solution would be the decrease of tariffs in Northern Ireland because they have been one of the big problems for the businesses and in a small part have influenced the violence. "Dismissing trade disruption at the borders as simply short term" is what one article found about one of the solutions (Euronews, 2021). This is a major problem that resulted from haste and indecisiveness.

Lastly, at any cost people want the leaders to stop the return of hard border between the countries of Northern Ireland and Ireland. “Intended to prevent the return of a physical border between the British province and the EU member Republic of Ireland, the checks are held at Northern Irish ports” (Euronews, 2021). It’s one thing to avoid putting up a wall but it is another to figure out what can coexist in the future. The rules that are being put in place are for everyone’s safety.

Frames (ElisaBeth)

After finding the frequencies of each coding category, we were then able to step back and review the overarching frames that Euronews used when covering this event.

Violence or fear of violence was a problem definition coding category of this analysis, but its prevalence, appearing in 67%, urged us to conclude that Euronews usually described both Northern Ireland’s history, recent events and expected continuing of these events as violent and to be feared. While the frequent occurrence of violence as a frame makes sense when describing these events - it is hard to find a source covering the topic that does *not* use the term violence - it is perhaps intentionally that Euronews depicts the ongoing violence and the anticipated future violence. Could it be that Euronews cares more about viewers tuning in next time to hear about the next riot, than about simply informing their audience of the news?

Another frame is that of an economic crisis. Euronews certainly did more than breeze over the economic implications of both a hard border and the Brexit controversy; they reminded their audience of these monetary repercussions on a regular basis. We wonder if this is yet another fear tactic of Euronews or a way to retain their audience.

Regulation and policy is a frame as well because it is a practical conversation that is ongoing throughout the entirety of the timeline. Even though it was not counted as a coding

category and is not always explicitly mentioned in the news articles, its discussion rate is high. We do not foresee the negative implications of this general frame, but rather note its existence.

The final frame we diagnosed is international trade exchange. 'International' frames are a subcategory for professional media framing analyzers (Di Gregorio, Price, Saunders, & Brockhaus, 2012). We saw that the reporting on trade exchange was approached through the lens of how it could affect international relations, specifically between nearby European countries. This frame fits with the neutral news-reporting style Euronews claims to take, since it is based on quantitative data and facts. Also, trade exchange is news that their audience likely cares about, and further, depends upon for daily life.

Conclusion (Noah)

Both sides are blaming each other because in every story, there are always two perspectives. One side thinks the other is out of line and the only way to find a solution is to conform to their beliefs. Tensions will continue to boil over if nobody strives to seek out peace. It makes matters worse when there is peace then another party disrupts the whole system that causes the problems to build up once again. The violence between the two sides has been taking place for a long time. Families have been affected and cultures have been changed by the motivations of the protestors. The world watches as we see people fighting one another and the people who are assigned to maintain the violence become one of the victims. This issue will take a long-term plan that will take many leaders in the present and the future to resolve.

Framing analysis can be very useful and persuasive because it can tell you who is responsible for these actions. In this case, it is about political parties that can control these frames and it can be different countries. This will be an ongoing unless both sides come together and settle on a deal that is comfortable with both sides.

Coding Book: Euronews					
Issue/Event	Frames	Frame Functions	Coding Categories	Examples/Descriptions/ Stylistic Devices	Frequency
Violence in Northern Ireland due to Brexit Controversy (Jan. 25, 2016 - Apr. 20, 2021)	Violence Economic Crisis Regulation and Policy International Trade Exchange	Cause	Brexit controversy in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland	"Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) is launching a legal challenge against the Brexit deal's Northern Ireland Protocol."	13/21 ≈ 62%
			Trade regulations preferred over border wall	" ... if Britain leaves the EU it could damage trade for Northern Ireland, which remains part of the UK."	12/21 ≈ 57%
			Border restrictions	"Brexit has created a border with the European Union and London could impose restrictions of movement. The border issue has re-ignited old fears."	15/21 ≈ 71%
		Problem Definition	Northern Irish nationalists/loyalists	"Unrest has erupted over the past week - largely in loyalist, Protestant areas - amid rising tensions over post-Brexit trade rules and worsening relations between the parties ..."	7/21 ≈ 33%
			Violence or fear of violence	"Another night of violence on the streets of Belfast, with people setting fires, throwing petrol bombs and stones over "peace gates" separating communities ..."	14/21 ≈ 67%
			Economic crisis	"We analyse the pre-Brexit economic forecasts for Scotland and Northern Ireland, which looked quite gloomy even before the vote."	9/21 ≈ 43%
		Moral Judgment	Lack of responsibility in Northern Ireland leaders is unacceptable	"Despite denying that she had any knowledge of the impending disaster the scheme would become, the earliest whisperings of concern ..."	2/21 ≈ 9.5%
			Violence is an atrocity and needs to end	"This is not a protest. This is vandalism and attempted murder. These actions do not represent unionism or loyalism," ... condemned "shocking scenes which could set our society back years" and "violence on both sides of the interface at Lanark Way."	4/21 ≈ 19%
			Separating families at border and interfering with trade is wrong	"Some 30,000 people cross the border unhindered everyday. There are growing fears that any semblance of a "hard border would have devastating implications for trade on both sides of the border and could even reignite the bitter conflict which raged on the island for 30 years."	7/21 ≈ 33%
	Solution	Regulatory equivalence	"Unless more is done to ease admin burden on those that do business overseas, and increase access to markets outside the EU, it will weigh heavy on our efforts to recover from the most severe downturn on record, ..."	4/21 ≈ 19%	
		Tariffs (short-term solution)	"Dismissing trade disruption at the borders as simply short term ..."	3/21 ≈ 14%	
		Stop the return of hard border	"Intended to prevent the return of a physical border between the British province and the EU member Republic of Ireland, the checks are held at Northern Irish ports."	9/21 ≈ 43%	

References

- Berti, C. (2019). Rotten apples or rotten system? Media framing of political corruption in New Zealand and Italy, *Journalism Studies*, 20:11, 1580–1597, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2018.1530068>
- Debusmann Jr., B. (2020, February 8). *50 shades of truth: Euronews CEO Michael Peters*. Arabian Business. <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/media/439593-50-shades-of-truth>
- Di Gregorio, M., Price, S. H., Saunders, C. E., & Brockhaus, M. (2012). Code book for the analysis of media frames in articles on REDD (Revised ed.). Center for International Forestry Research.
- Douglas, J. (2021, April 8). Riots in Northern Ireland spurred by Brexit, crime and Covid-19 restrictions. WSJ. https://www.wsj.com/articles/riots-in-northern-ireland-spurred-by-brexit-crime-and-covid-19-restrictions-11617900072?mod=searchresults_pos6&page=1
- Entman, R. M. (1993). “Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm.” *Journal of Communication*. 43:4, 51–58.
- Euronews. (n.d.). *About us*. <https://euronewsabout.enwsccloud.com/about>
- Euronews. (2016, January 26). Brexit could cause difficulties for Northern Ireland. <https://www.euronews.com/2016/01/25/brexit-could-cause-difficulties-for-northern-ireland>
- Euronews. (2016, June 29). Brexit sharpens the focus on the future of Northern Ireland and the border with the Republic of Ireland. <https://www.euronews.com/2016/06/29/brexit-sharpens-the-focus-on-the-future-of-northern-ireland-and-the-border-with>

- Euronews. (2016, June 29). Scotland and Northern Ireland: post-Brexit economic fears. <https://www.euronews.com/2016/06/29/scotland-and-northern-ireland-post-brexit-economic-fears>
- Euronews. (2021, February 22). Brexit: DUP launches legal challenge to Northern Ireland protocol. <https://www.euronews.com/2021/02/22/brexit-dup-launches-legal-challenge-to-northern-ireland-protocol>
- Euronews. (2021, April 8). Protesters hurl stones and petrol bombs in Northern Ireland. <https://www.euronews.com/2021/04/08/protesters-hurl-stones-and-petrol-bombs-in-northern-ireland>
- EuroNews*. Variety. <https://variety.com/2020/biz/global/nbc-sells-25-stake-in-france-headquartered-broadcaster-euronews-1234585780/>
- Hirst, M. (2021, April 14). *NI riots: What is behind the violence in Northern Ireland?* BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-56664378>
- Keslassy, E. (2020, April 21). *NBC sells 25% stake in France-headquartered broadcaster*
- Langfitt, F. (2021, April 9). Loyalist protests in Northern Ireland threaten to inflame old tensions. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2021/04/09/985860401/loyalist-protests-in-northern-ireland-threaten-to-inflame-old-tensions>
- McCombs, M. E., Shaw, D. L., & Weaver, D. H. (2014). New directions in agenda-setting theory and research. *Mass Communication and Society*, 17(6), 781–802. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2014.964871>
- Schudson, M. (1989). “The Sociology of News Production.” *Media, Culture and Society*, 11, 263–282. Crossref.
- Symington, M. (2021, April 21). *Violence in Northern Ireland sparks fears of a return to The*

Troubles. NBC News. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/violence-northern-ireland-sparks-fears-return-troubles-n1264763>

Thussu, D. K. (2019). *International Communication* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Sage Publication.

Van Zandt, D. (2021, January 9). *Euronews*. Media Bias / Fact Check.

<https://mediabiasfactcheck.com/euronews/>

Ville, F. D., & Gheyle, N. (2021) Small firms as the main beneficiaries of trade agreements? A framing analysis of european commission discourse. *New Political Economy*.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2021.1879760>