



THE FRAMING OF THE ROHINGYA CRISIS IN BANGLADESHI ENGLISH-LANGUAGE ONLINE NEWS MEDIA: A DIACHRONIC CORPUS-ASSISTED ANALYSIS, 2019–2025

Mostafa Samsul Baryⁱ

Student,

Applied Linguistics and Text Analytics Programme,

Faculty of Humanities,

National Research University Higher School of Economics,

Nizhny Novgorod, Russia

Abstract:

This study examines how Bangladeshi English-language online news media framed the Rohingya refugee crisis from 2019 to 2025, applying Marvin Minsky's dynamic frame theory as its primary analytical framework. Minsky conceptualizes frames as consisting of a stable core that remains constant across contexts and variable slots that are filled with different content over time. Following the methodological template established by Radina and Iakupova (2022), the study conducts a corpus-assisted framing analysis using bigram extraction in AntConc software on a corpus of approximately 250 news articles drawn from three national outlets: The Daily Star, Dhaka Tribune, and bdnews24. The corpus is divided into three periods reflecting the political trajectory of the crisis: humanitarian emergency (2019–2020), diplomatic strategies (2021–2022), and crisis normalization (2023–2025). Findings show that a 17-bigram stable core anchored in humanitarian vocabulary persists across all three periods, while variable role and event slots shift markedly: from victims and emergency responders in Period 1, to negotiators and repatriation talks in Period 2, to security actors and governance concerns in Period 3. Frequencies are normalized as instances per million words to enable valid cross-period comparison. These shifts are interpreted through Entman's (1993) four framing functions, revealing that problem definition, causal attribution, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation are redistributed across the stable core and variable slots as political circumstances evolve. The study extends Minsky's dynamic frame theory, previously applied only to a criminal-trial context, to a protracted humanitarian crisis, and offers a replicable diachronic template for studying host-country media discourse.

Keywords: media framing; Rohingya crisis; dynamic frame theory; corpus linguistics; diachronic analysis

ⁱ Correspondence: email msbary007.ru@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Since August 2017, persecution in Myanmar's Rakhine State has driven more than a million Rohingya to flee into Bangladesh, in what the United Nations Human Rights Council (2018) described as an exemplary case of ethnic cleansing. The Kutupalong camp complex in Cox's Bazar is now widely regarded as the world's largest refugee settlement (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2021). Because most people can never witness such events directly, they depend on media coverage to understand the causes of the crisis and the responsibilities of the actors involved. Journalists, constrained by limited time and space, inevitably select and simplify: a process framing theory calls attention to. How the Rohingya crisis is framed in Bangladeshi media therefore has real consequences for how audiences assign responsibility and imagine solutions.

Framing scholarship on the Rohingya crisis has so far relied almost entirely on manual, synchronic content analysis. Irom, Borah, Vishnevskaya, and Gibbons (2021) compared coverage across four countries using manual content analysis but did not examine the linguistic devices of representation — evaluative language, nomination, collocation — that corpus methods make visible, nor did they track change over time. Vu and Lynn (2020) applied automated framing analysis to elite newspapers in Myanmar, Bangladesh, and the United States, finding that Bangladeshi coverage relied heavily on a humanitarian relief frame, but their study, too, was cross-sectional rather than longitudinal. Outside the Rohingya context, Heidenreich, Lind, Eberl, and Boomgaarden (2019) demonstrated that European media framing of the 2015 refugee crisis shifted substantially in response to political events such as border closures, but no equivalent diachronic account exists for a host country bearing the primary and ongoing burden of a protracted refugee crisis.

This study addresses that gap by asking:

- 1) What are the dominant frames in Bangladeshi English-language online coverage of the Rohingya crisis from 2019 to 2025?
- 2) Following Minsky's (1975) dynamic frame theory, what constitutes the stable core of this coverage across all three periods under study?
- 3) How do role slots (actors) and event slots (actions and processes) shift across the three periods?
- 4) How can these patterns be interpreted through Entman's (1993) four framing functions?

Based on the literature, it was hypothesized that a humanitarian imperative would form the stable core across all periods; that role slots would shift from refugees-as-victims to politicians-as-negotiators to Myanmar-authorities-as-counterparts; and that event slots would shift from emergency response to diplomatic talks to repatriation discussions — with new slot categories accumulating over time rather than replacing the stable core.

The study makes four contributions. First, it provides the first diachronic analysis of Rohingya framing within a single host country's media across nearly a decade. Second, it applies Minsky's dynamic frame theory — and Radina and Iakupova's (2022) bigram-

based operationalization of it, originally developed for a criminal-trial context — to a humanitarian crisis for the first time. Third, it complements the predominantly qualitative, synchronic Rohingya framing literature with a quantitative, corpus-assisted diachronic approach. Fourth, it produces empirical evidence of how media framing evolves in step with political developments in a host country over the course of a protracted crisis.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Framing has an interdisciplinary lineage. Goffman (1974) described frames as "*schemata of interpretation*" that allow people to recognize and organize experience; Bateson (1972) showed that all communication depends on meta-communicative signals that tell receivers how to interpret a message; Fillmore (1982) argued that words are only meaningful within the broader conceptual structures, or frames, that speakers implicitly share. Entman's (1993) definition, which dominates media framing research, synthesizes these strands: framing involves selecting certain aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a text so as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation.

For diachronic analysis, this study draws on a less conventional source: Marvin Minsky's (1975) work in artificial intelligence. Minsky (1975: 212) defines a frame as "*a data-structure for representing a stereotyped situation*" — such as a restaurant visit — that consists of a stable core, which remains constant across instances, and variable slots, which are filled with different content depending on circumstances. Radina and Iakupova (2022) adapted this framework for media analysis, showing that coverage of a Russian corruption case contained "*role slots*" (criminal, victim, investigator) and "*event slots*" (crime, investigation, punishment) that shifted across four periods even as a stable narrative core persisted. Applied to the Rohingya crisis, role slots designate the actors populating the coverage (refugees, politicians, humanitarian workers), while event slots designate the processes that structure the narrative (emergency assistance, negotiations, repatriation discussions). Because newspaper coverage is a collective, institutionally mediated phenomenon rather than an individual cognitive structure, applying Minsky's framework to media texts requires adaptation; following Radina and Iakupova (2022), this study treats the frame not as a subjective mental structure but as a recurring pattern revealed through corpus-linguistic analysis of a large body of articles.

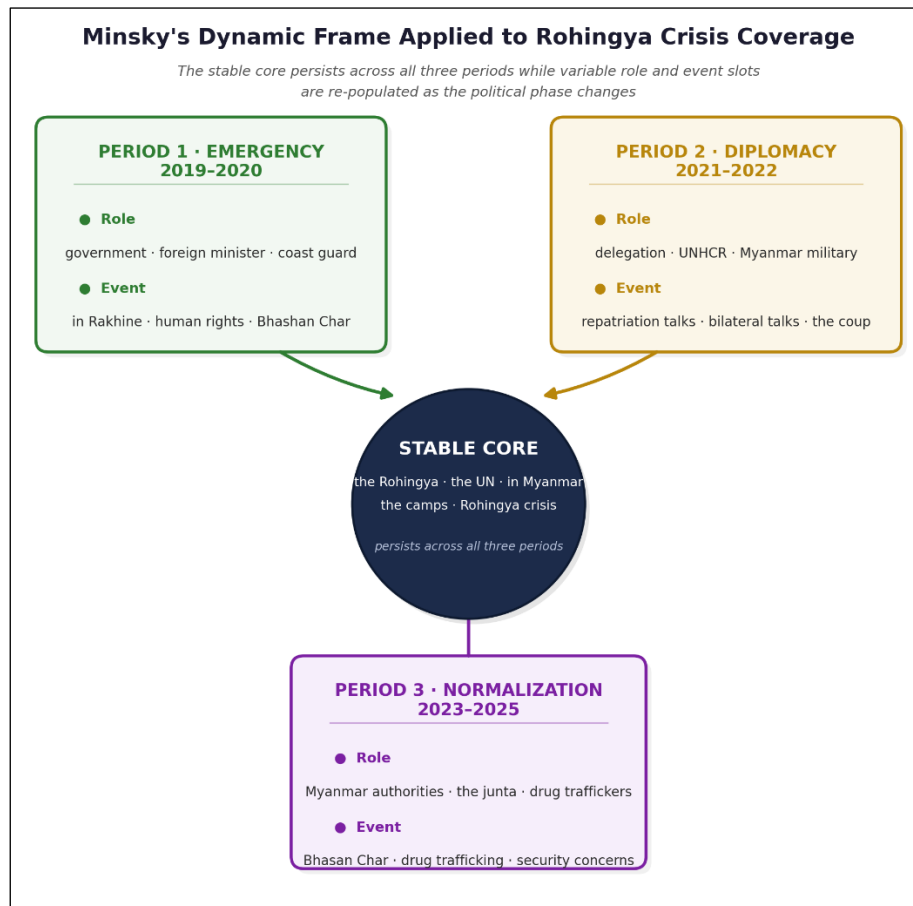


Figure 3: Schematic representation of the study's application of Minsky's (1975) dynamic frame model: a stable humanitarian core (center) persists across all three periods while period-specific role and event slots (boxes) are populated and replaced as the political context changes

2.2 Media Framing of Refugee Crises

Studies of refugee framing consistently find that displaced populations tend to be portrayed collectively rather than as individuals — what Malkki (1996) termed "massification" — and that this coverage frequently constructs refugees as economic, cultural, or physical threats to host societies (Esses, Medianu and Lawson, 2013). Heidenreich et al. (2019) analyzed 130,042 articles from 24 outlets in five European countries during the 2015 refugee crisis and found that frames such as "border," "humanitarian aid," and "welfare" rose and fell in salience according to political events: countries along refugee routes emphasized border frames, while destination countries emphasized welfare and accommodation. Greussing and Boomgaarden (2017) found that European media frequently relied on water and flood metaphors to describe refugee movement, a pattern of dehumanizing framing also documented in United Nations and newspaper discourse by Baker and McEnery (2005) using corpus methods. Chouliaraki and Zaborowski (2017) and Berry, Garcia-Blanco, and Moore (2016) documented substantial cross-national variation, with some European outlets emphasizing humanitarian unity and others security threats — variation shaped in part by discrete triggering events such as the death of Alan Kurdi and the Paris attacks.

Within the Rohingya literature specifically, Irom et al. (2021) found that a victimization frame appeared in every article they examined across Bangladesh, Pakistan, Canada, and the United States (100%), while diversity frames presenting refugees as potential contributors were entirely absent (0%) in all four countries. Thematic and administrative frames varied more by region, with South Asian outlets more likely to situate the crisis in its regional political context. Vu and Lynn (2020), comparing *The Irrawaddy* (Myanmar), *The New Nation* (Bangladesh), and *The New York Times*, found that each outlet filled its role slots differently: Myanmar media downplayed military violence and framed the Rohingya as terrorists, U.S. coverage foregrounded individual trauma and survivor testimony, and Bangladeshi coverage emphasized humanitarian logistics — aid, shelter, food, water. Neither study, however, tracked how these frames changed as the crisis itself moved from acute emergency toward protracted displacement, which is the gap the present study addresses.

3. Material and Methods

This study employs a quantitative, corpus-assisted diachronic framing analysis following the methodological template of Radina and Iakupova (2022). Three sub-corpora, each corresponding to a distinct political phase, were compiled and analyzed independently before being compared: humanitarian emergency (2019–2020), diplomatic strategies (2021–2022), and crisis normalization (2023–2025). Although the exodus began in August 2017, the corpus begins in 2019 because comprehensive online archives are consistently available for all three newspapers from that date and because the 2017–2018 period has already been extensively studied (Irom et al., 2021; Vu & Lynn, 2020); the present study therefore targets the less-examined subsequent period.

The corpus comprises approximately 250 articles from three Bangladeshi English-language national outlets — *The Daily Star*, *Dhaka Tribune*, and *bdnews24* — selected for editorial credibility, consistent online publication throughout 2019–2025, and keyword-searchable archives. Articles were retrieved using the keywords "*Rohingya*," "*refugee*," and "*crisis*," and the sample includes hard news, editorial, and opinion content. Word-token counts derived from the compiled article files are 41,317 for Period 1, 19,677 for Period 2, and 62,114 for Period 3, for a total corpus of 123,108 word tokens; these figures are used for the ipm normalization reported in Table 5 and Figure 1. To validate the compiled files against the frequencies reported in Table 1, word-boundary-matched counts of five stable-core bigrams ("*the Rohingya*," "*the UN*," "*in Myanmar*," "*the Rohingyas*," "*Rohingya crisis*") were computed directly from the compiled files across all three periods and compared against the corresponding AntConc-derived frequencies. Across all fifteen period-by-bigram comparisons, the compiled-file counts differed from Table 1 by at most 4 occurrences (mean absolute difference of 1.5 occurrences), with compiled-file counts equal to or slightly below the Table 1 value in every case — consistent with a small number of articles present in the final curated AntConc corpus but not in the compiled files retained for this validation, rather than any tokenization discrepancy. This close

correspondence supports treating the word-token counts and the ipm figures derived from them as reliable.

Bigram extraction was performed using the N-Gram function in AntConc (version 4.x; Anthony, 2022), which identifies two-word combinations and ranks them by raw frequency within the target corpus. This tool was chosen over AntConc's Keyword List function — which compares frequencies against a reference corpus using log-likelihood (Dunning, 1993) — because the research goal was to identify the most recurrent bigrams constituting each period's dominant frame, not language that is statistically unusual relative to general English. The analysis was restricted to noun+noun, noun+verb, and noun+adjective bigrams carrying substantive semantic content; purely grammatical and stopword-containing combinations were excluded, and a minimum frequency threshold of five occurrences per sub-corpus was applied.

The analysis proceeded in four stages. First, the top 100 bigrams by frequency were extracted from each sub-corpus. Second, bigrams appearing among the high-frequency items in all three periods were identified as the stable core. Third, the remaining period-distinctive bigrams were classified into role slots (actors) and event slots (actions, processes, situations); because the Rohingya crisis is a substantially more multidimensional social reality than the criminal-trial context for which Radina and Iakupova (2022) originally developed this scheme, bigrams that did not fit either category — spatial, temporal, or security-evaluative bigrams — were retained and labeled according to their semantic function rather than forced into the binary scheme. Fourth, slot frequencies were compared across periods, and concordance lines were reviewed to confirm that high-frequency bigrams were semantically meaningful rather than incidental co-occurrences. The resulting patterns were then interpreted through Entman's (1993) four framing functions.

Several limitations should be noted at the outset. The analysis is restricted to bigrams rather than longer n-grams or full keyword lists; it captures co-occurrence rather than syntactic or discourse structure, though concordance review partially mitigates this; it covers English-language outlets only, while Bengali-language media reach a substantially larger domestic audience; and the roughly 250-article sample, while adequate for concordance-based verification, is modest by computational-linguistics standards. Because the three sub-corpora differ substantially in size (see sample above), raw frequencies are not directly comparable across periods; this study addresses that issue by reporting ipm-normalized frequencies for all cross-period comparisons of stable-core bigrams (Table 5), while retaining raw AntConc frequencies in Tables 1–4 for consistency with the frequency-based ranking procedure described above.

3.1 Illustrative Concordance Lines

As described above, concordance lines were reviewed for high-frequency bigrams to confirm that they functioned as meaningful, non-idiomatic combinations rather than incidental co-occurrences. Table 6 presents illustrative KWIC (keyword-in-context) examples drawn directly from the compiled article corpus for one stable-core bigram (*"the*

Rohingya") and two Period 3–distinctive bigrams ("Myanmar authorities," "drug trafficking"). These excerpts are reproduced here only as short, illustrative fragments to demonstrate typical usage; they are not a systematic concordance sample and should not be read as representing the full range of contexts in which each bigram occurs.

Table 6: Illustrative concordance (KWIC) lines extracted directly from the compiled Period 1 and Period 3 article files. Keyword bigrams are shown in brackets. Lines are selected for illustration, not systematic sampling; "Myanmar authorities" and "drug trafficking" both occur exclusively or near-exclusively within Period 3 in these files, consistent with their classification in Table 4.

Bigram	Period	Concordance line (KWIC)
<i>the Rohingya</i>	P1	<i>...for a six-day visit to meet [the Rohingya] community. Lee will also visit Thailand...</i>
<i>the Rohingya</i>	P1	<i>...a sweeping legal victory for members of [the Rohingya] Muslim minority, the United Nations' top court...</i>
<i>the Rohingya</i>	P3	<i>...before that, Bangladesh opened its border to [the Rohingya] in a humanitarian gesture to save their...</i>
<i>the Rohingya</i>	P3	<i>...The main targets of the gangs are [the Rohingya] women and children, many of whom are...</i>
<i>Myanmar authorities</i>	P3	<i>...Rohingya must cease immediately. We urge the [Myanmar authorities] as well as the Arakan Army to...</i>
<i>Myanmar authorities</i>	P3	<i>...Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, in 2017. Photo: Reuters [Myanmar authorities] have confirmed that they have identified 180,000...</i>
<i>drug trafficking</i>	P3	<i>...addressing emerging challenges like online gambling and [drug trafficking]. The two sides agreed in principle...</i>
<i>drug trafficking</i>	P3	<i>...social and environmental costs. He warned that [drug trafficking] and other criminal activities linked to the...</i>

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The Stable Core

Of the 100 most frequent bigrams extracted from each sub-corpus, 51 appeared across all three periods; after removing purely grammatical combinations (e.g., "of the," "in the"), 17 content-bearing bigrams remained, constituting the stable core of Bangladeshi media framing of the Rohingya crisis (Table 1).

Table 1: Top 17 stable-core bigrams by combined frequency. P1 = Humanitarian Emergency (2019–2020); P2 = Diplomatic Strategies (2021–2022); P3 = Crisis Normalization (2023–2025)

Rank	Bigram	Classification	P1	P2	P3	Total
1	<i>the Rohingya</i>	Role Slot	178	68	381	627
2	<i>the un</i>	Role Slot	79	29	143	251
3	<i>in Myanmar</i>	Event Slot	67	36	124	227
4	<i>the international</i>	Event Slot	85	32	109	226
5	<i>the Rohingyas</i>	Role Slot	95	47	73	215
6	<i>Rohingya crisis</i>	Event Slot	36	27	141	204
7	<i>Rohingya refugees</i>	Role Slot	55	33	114	202

8	<i>in Bangladesh</i>	Event Slot	55	32	113	200
9	<i>Myanmar's</i>	Role Slot	47	18	103	168
10	<i>the camps</i>	Event Slot	33	40	87	160
11	<i>international community</i>	Role Slot	44	25	90	159
12	<i>the world</i>	Role Slot	42	20	58	120
13	<i>the Myanmar</i>	Role Slot	44	16	57	117
14	<i>camps in</i>	Event Slot	37	19	52	108
15	<i>Rohingya camps</i>	Event Slot	35	17	45	97
16	<i>the situation</i>	Event Slot	36	12	44	92
17	<i>prime minister</i>	Role Slot	25	22	33	80

Nine of the 17 bigrams function as role slots. The most prominent, "*the Rohingya*" (627 total occurrences), together with "*the Rohingyas*" (215) and "*Rohingya refugees*" (202), form a tripartite referential system for the affected population, consistent with the tendency toward collective, anonymized reference — Malkki's (1996) "*massification*" — documented elsewhere in refugee coverage. Institutional actors appear through "*the UN*" (251) and, at lower frequency, "*prime minister*" (80), while "*Myanmar's*" (168) and "*the Myanmar*" (117) stably position Myanmar as the crisis's origin across all three periods regardless of diplomatic developments. "*International community*" (159) and "*the world*" (120) invoke a global audience and collective responsibility, consistently framing the crisis as a matter of international rather than purely bilateral concern.

The remaining eight bigrams function as event slots, anchoring the crisis spatially and situationally. "In Myanmar" (227) and, together with camp-related bigrams "*the camps*" (160), "*camps in*" (108), and "*Rohingya camps*" (97) — accounting for 365 occurrences collectively — construct the material infrastructure of encampment as a permanent narrative feature, consistent with what Agier (2011) has described as the distinctive spatial governmentality of the refugee camp. "*Rohingya crisis*" (204) and "*the situation*" (92) provide overarching situational labels that prevent the coverage from being decontextualized into routine news.

Taken together, the stable core confirms the first hypothesis: Bangladeshi media construct a humanitarian core in which the Rohingya are victims of persecution, situated in camps in Bangladesh but originating from Myanmar, requiring sustained engagement from the UN, the international community, and the Bangladeshi state. Consistent with Irom et al.'s (2021) finding that diversity frames were entirely absent across four national contexts, no bigrams referencing refugee agency, economic contribution, or cultural integration enter the stable core here either — an absence that appears to be a structural feature of the frame rather than an incidental omission. This pattern echoes what Pupavac (2008) has termed the "*psychologization*" of refugee representation, in which complex political subjects are consistently reduced to suffering bodies in need of rescue.

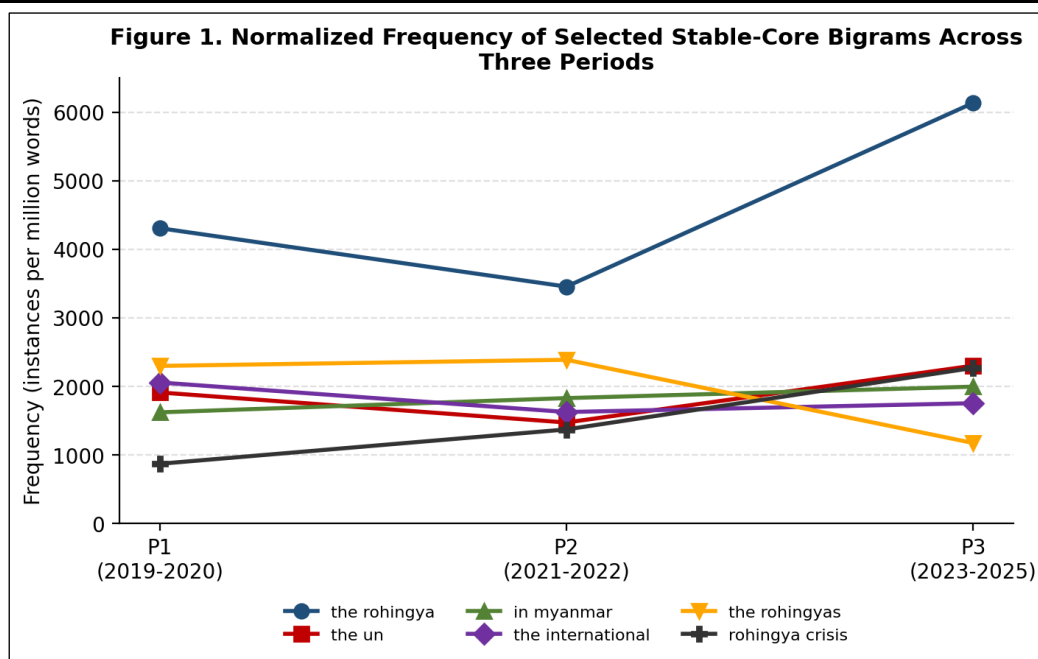


Figure 1: Normalized frequency (instances per million words) of six representative stable-core bigrams across the three periods, calculated using actual sub-corpus sizes (P1 = 41,317 words; P2 = 19,677 words; P3 = 62,114 words).

Normalizing by sub-corpus size changes the picture in an instructive way. A naive reading of the raw AntConc frequencies in Table 1 would suggest that most stable-core bigrams dip sharply in Period 2 before recovering in Period 3 — but Period 2 is also, by a wide margin, the smallest sub-corpus (19,677 words, versus 41,317 in Period 1 and 62,114 in Period 3), so part of that apparent dip is simply an artifact of there being less text to draw frequencies from. Once normalized, several bigrams — "*in Myanmar*," "*Rohingya crisis*," "*Rohingya refugees*," "*in Bangladesh*," and "*international community*" — turn out to rise continuously across all three periods rather than dipping in Period 2 at all. Most strikingly, "*the Rohingyas*" reverses direction entirely: its raw frequency appears to dip in Period 2 and recover in Period 3, but its normalized frequency actually peaks in Period 2 (2,388.6 ipm) and falls to its lowest point in Period 3 (1,175.3 ipm) — the opposite pattern from what the raw counts imply. Only a smaller subset of bigrams, including "*the Rohingya*" itself, retain a genuine (if less dramatic) Period 2 dip after normalization: its relative salience falls from 4,308.2 to 3,455.8 ipm before rising to 6,133.9 ipm in Period 3, a real but proportionally much smaller dip than the raw counts (178 → 68 → 381) suggest on their own.

The full normalized dataset for all 17 stable-core bigrams is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Ipm-normalized frequencies of all 17 stable-core bigrams, calculated from actual sub-corpus word counts (P1 = 41,317; P2 = 19,677; P3 = 62,114 words). "Pattern" describes the trajectory of normalized (not raw) frequency across P1→P2→P3. Five bigrams show a monotonic rise, six show a dip in Period 2 followed by recovery, five show a rise in Period 2 followed by a fall, and one shows a monotonic fall — a more heterogeneous picture than the raw frequencies in Table 1 suggest on their own.

Bigram	Classification	P1 (ipm)	P2 (ipm)	P3 (ipm)	Pattern
<i>the Rohingya</i>	Role Slot	4308.2	3455.8	6133.9	Dip then rise
<i>the UN</i>	Role Slot	1912	1473.8	2302.2	Dip then rise
<i>in Myanmar</i>	Event Slot	1621.6	1829.5	1996.3	Monotonic rise
<i>the international</i>	Event Slot	2057.3	1626.3	1754.8	Dip then rise
<i>the Rohingyas</i>	Role Slot	2299.3	2388.6	1175.3	Rise then fall
<i>Rohingya crisis</i>	Event Slot	871.3	1372.2	2270	Monotonic rise
<i>Rohingya refugees</i>	Role Slot	1331.2	1677.1	1835.3	Monotonic rise
<i>in Bangladesh</i>	Event Slot	1331.2	1626.3	1819.2	Monotonic rise
<i>Myanmar's</i>	Role Slot	1137.5	914.8	1658.2	Dip then rise
<i>the camps</i>	Event Slot	798.7	2032.8	1400.7	Rise then fall
<i>international community</i>	Role Slot	1064.9	1270.5	1448.9	Monotonic rise
<i>the world</i>	Role Slot	1016.5	1016.4	933.8	Monotonic fall
<i>the Myanmar</i>	Role Slot	1064.9	813.1	917.7	Dip then rise
<i>camps in</i>	Event Slot	895.5	965.6	837.2	Rise then fall
<i>Rohingya camps</i>	Event Slot	847.1	864	724.5	Rise then fall
<i>the situation</i>	Event Slot	871.3	609.8	708.4	Dip then rise
<i>prime minister</i>	Role Slot	605.1	1118.1	531.3	Rise then fall

This heterogeneity qualifies the claim, made from raw frequencies alone, that the stable core simply "recedes" during the diplomatic phase before "re-intensifying" in Period 3. A more accurate summary is that the stable core's overall salience holds roughly steady or rises across the timeline for a majority of its constituent bigrams (11 of 17 show either a monotonic rise or end Period 3 higher, in normalized terms, than where they began), while a substantial minority (6 of 17) genuinely dip during the diplomatic phase before recovering. What the normalized data rule out is the simpler story that the entire stable core uniformly weakened in Period 2 — that pattern turns out to be concentrated in a specific subset of bigrams, most of which name the Rohingya, the UN, or the international community by name, rather than being a corpus-wide phenomenon.

4.2 Period 1: Humanitarian Emergency (2019–2020)

Table 2 presents bigrams distinctive to Period 1, defined as those appearing exclusively or with markedly higher rank in this sub-corpus.

Table 2: Selected bigrams distinctive to Period 1 (rank/frequency within Period 1 sub-corpus)

Bigram	Classification	Rank	Freq
<i>the government</i>	Role — Bangladesh state actor	20	64
<i>foreign minister</i>	Role — Diplomatic leadership	51	34
<i>coast guard</i>	Role — Maritime rescue actor	66	28
<i>women and</i>	Role — Gendered victim reference	79	25
<i>Myanmar government</i>	Role — Perpetrator state	93	22
<i>international court / court of</i>	Role — Judicial context (ICJ)	76	26
<i>in Rakhine / Rakhine state</i>	Event — Geographic origin of violence	16	72
<i>human rights</i>	Event — Rights-based discourse	21	62
<i>at sea / Bangladesh to / Myanmar to</i>	Event — Displacement movement	31	48
<i>Bhushan char</i>	Event — Relocation site	73	27
<i>refugee camps</i>	Event — Camp infrastructure	73	27

Role slots in this period center on state-level management alongside victim reference. "*The government*" (64 occurrences) reflects Bangladesh's prominent camp-administration and coordination role during the emergency, while "*foreign minister*" (34) reflects active diplomatic outreach to mobilize international pressure on Myanmar. "*Coast guard*" (28), entirely absent from later periods, reflects the maritime crossings that were still significant in this phase. On the perpetrator side, "*Myanmar government*" (22) and the ICJ-related cluster "*international court*"/"*court of*" (26 each) reference the case brought by The Gambia in November 2019, introducing legal accountability as a narrative thread from the outset.

Event slots construct active displacement and emergency response: "*in Rakhine*"/"*Rakhine state*" (72/54) anchor causal responsibility geographically in Myanmar; "*human rights*" (62) reflects extensive reference to UN and NGO documentation of abuses; and movement bigrams ("*Myanmar to*," "*at sea*," "*Bangladesh to*") construct an ongoing, fluid displacement narrative. "*Bhushan char*" (27) marks the emergence of the island relocation project that would become far more prominent in Period 3. Overall, Period 1 combines humanitarian urgency with nascent legal-political accountability, consistent with — but more textured than — the purely humanitarian relief frame Vu and Lynn (2020) identified in Bangladeshi coverage.

4.3 Period 2: Diplomatic Strategies (2021–2022)

The February 2021 coup in Myanmar and the COVID-19 pandemic reshaped the crisis's political logic during this period, shifting Bangladeshi coverage from emergency response toward negotiation.

Table 3: Selected bigrams distinctive to Period 2 (rank/frequency within Period 2 sub-corpus)

Bigram	Classification	Rank	Freq
<i>the delegation</i>	Role — Diplomatic actor	18	52
<i>Myanmar military</i>	Role — Perpetrator/coup actor	29	41
<i>the UNHCR</i>	Role — International agency	35	37
<i>Bangladesh government</i>	Role — Host state actor	42	33
<i>China and</i>	Role — Mediator state	55	27

<i>donor countries</i>	Role — International funders	62	24
<i>repatriation talks</i>	Event — Diplomatic process	15	58
<i>bilateral talks</i>	Event — Diplomatic process	22	45
<i>the pandemic</i>	Event — Health crisis context	24	44
<i>voluntary repatriation / safe return</i>	Event — Policy framework	38	35
<i>the coup</i>	Event — Political rupture	64	23

Role slots shift decisively toward institutional negotiators. "*The delegation*" (52) and "*the UNHCR*" (37) — distinguished from the stable core's generic "the un" by specifying technical facilitation — reflect the machinery of bilateral and multilateral negotiation, while "*Myanmar military*" (41) replaces Period 1's "*Myanmar government*," signaling a shift from perpetrator-under-legal-pressure toward negotiating counterpart following the coup. "*China and*" (27) marks Beijing's emergence as a third-party mediator, and "*donor countries*" (24) introduces resource dependency as an emerging framing concern.

Event slots construct suspended resolution: "*repatriation talks*" (58) and "*bilateral talks*" (45) dominate as the central procedural mechanisms, while "*voluntary repatriation*" and "*safe return*" operate as moral-evaluation frames implicitly judging any coerced return as unacceptable while holding Myanmar responsible for the conditions required to satisfy them. "*The pandemic*" (44) and "*the coup*" (23) intrude on this bureaucratic framing as reminders of external contingency and unresolved political violence. This confirms the hypothesized shift in role slots from victims to negotiators and in event slots from emergency response to diplomatic talks, though the co-presence of moral condemnation (the coup) alongside pragmatic engagement (the delegation, China and) reveals a tension the original hypotheses did not fully anticipate.

4.4 Period 3: Crisis Normalization (2023–2025)

By 2023, the crisis had become a permanent feature of Bangladesh's political and spatial landscape, with declining international attention, precarious donor funding, and rising security concerns within the camps.

Table 4: Selected bigrams distinctive to Period 3 (rank/frequency within Period 3 sub-corpus)

Bigram	Classification	Rank	Freq.
<i>Myanmar authorities</i>	Role — Counterpart state actor	12	112
<i>the junta</i>	Role — Myanmar ruling regime	19	89
<i>camp residents</i>	Role — Refugee population	25	76
<i>drug traffickers</i>	Role — Security threat actor	31	68
<i>the donors</i>	Role — International funders	37	61
<i>the police / the navy</i>	Role — Security actors	43	55
<i>Bhasan Char</i>	Event — Relocation site (established)	14	98
<i>drug trafficking</i>	Event — Security crime	21	82
<i>the repatriation</i>	Event — Return process	23	78
<i>humanitarian aid</i>	Event — Assistance type	28	71
<i>security concerns / living conditions</i>	Event — Governance concern	46	53

"*Myanmar authorities*" (112) — a bureaucratic designation that neither condemns nor legitimizes — represents the clearest confirmation of the hypothesized shift toward Myanmar-as-counterpart, while "*the junta*" (89) simultaneously re-moralizes causal attribution, producing a bifurcated framing strategy of pragmatic engagement alongside continued political condemnation. New security-oriented role slots — "*drug traffickers*" (68), "*the police*" (55), "*the navy*" (46) — mark a decisive shift from the humanitarian and diplomatic actors of earlier periods toward internal security and containment. "*Camp residents*" (76) replaces victim-centered terminology with a spatial-administrative category that normalizes presence while depoliticizing status.

Event slots confirm this normalization-securitization trajectory: "*Bhasan Char*" (98) — far exceeding its Period 1 frequency of 27 — shifts from a controversial emergency proposal to an established camp infrastructure; "*drug trafficking*" (82) and "*security concerns*" (53) construct camp space as a site of criminality rather than purely humanitarian vulnerability; and "*the repatriation*" (78), while still present, appears increasingly in contexts of stalled implementation rather than active negotiation. Humanitarian vocabulary persists ("*humanitarian aid*," 71) but is now filtered through governance and livelihood framing rather than emergency relief. This exceeds the original hypotheses, which anticipated a shift toward repatriation discussions but did not anticipate the prominence of security and criminality framing that emerged as the crisis protracted.

4.5 Summary: Role- and Event-Slot Distribution Across Periods

Figure 2 summarizes the full counts of period-distinctive role-slot and event-slot bigrams identified in Tables 2–4 (including bigrams beyond those selected for narrative discussion above). Event slots outnumber role slots in every period, but the gap narrows over time — from 15 versus 8 in Period 1 to 14 versus 10 in Period 3 — indicating a gradual proliferation of named actors (state security forces, donor institutions, community groups) as the crisis moved from an emergency requiring response to a protracted situation requiring ongoing governance by an expanding cast of actors.

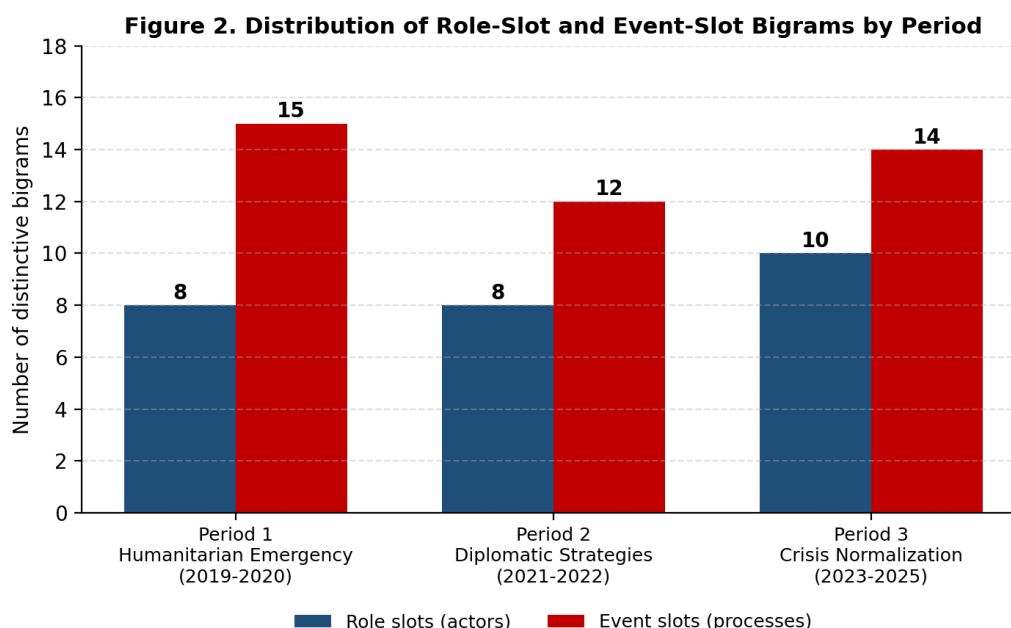


Figure 2: Number of role-slot (actor) and event-slot (process) bigrams distinctive to each period, drawn from the complete bigram classification in Tables 2–4.

4.6 Discussion

Entman (1993) identifies four functions performed by framing: defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments, and recommending treatments. Across the three periods examined here, these functions are not static but are redistributed between the stable core and the variable slots as the political context evolves. Problem definition remains anchored in the stable core throughout — Rohingya victims, Myanmar origin, Bangladesh host, international engagement — but is specified differently in each period: an acute emergency requiring rescue and legal accountability in Period 1; a diplomatic impasse over stalled repatriation mechanisms in Period 2; and a chronic governance challenge combining humanitarian vulnerability with criminality and resource depletion in Period 3.

Causal interpretation follows a parallel trajectory, moving from a single, unambiguous perpetrator (the Myanmar government, reinforced by ICJ proceedings) in Period 1, toward a more distributed causal landscape in Period 2 (the Myanmar military for the coup, but also the pandemic and donor inaction), toward a bifurcated attribution in Period 3, where the junta remains the ultimate source of displacement even as donor fatigue and camp mismanagement are increasingly implicated. Moral evaluation undergoes the most substantial transformation: an unequivocal victim/host/perpetrator triad in Period 1 gives way to pragmatic compromise in Period 2, and in Period 3 splits into a genuinely bifurcated evaluation in which the Rohingya are simultaneously vulnerable residents deserving humanitarian aid and education, and a population whose camps are associated with drug trafficking and violence requiring police and naval intervention — a securitization trajectory that mirrors patterns Esses, Medianu, and Lawson (2013) documented in prolonged refugee presence elsewhere. Treatment

recommendation moves accordingly, from emergency relief and legal pressure (Period 1), to diplomatic process (Period 2), to a fragmented portfolio in Period 3 combining continued aid, security enforcement, and Bhasan Char relocation as an accepted fait accompli rather than a contested proposal. This loss of prescriptive coherence in Period 3 may itself be among the study's more consequential findings: as crises normalize, media frames appear to lose clear direction toward resolution and instead offer management.

These findings both confirm and extend the existing Rohingya framing literature. Irom et al.'s (2021) finding that the victim frame appeared in 100% of articles across four countries is given a linguistic mechanism here: the stable-core bigrams "*the Rohingya*," "*the Rohingyas*," and "*Rohingya refugees*" persist across all three periods regardless of political phase. Their finding that diversity frames were entirely absent (0%) is likewise confirmed as a structural rather than incidental feature: no bigrams referencing economic contribution, cultural integration, or refugee agency enter the top-frequency lists in any period studied here. Vu and Lynn's (2020) identification of a dominant humanitarian relief frame in Bangladeshi coverage is confirmed for Period 1 specifically, but the diachronic view reveals its temporal limits: by Period 3, humanitarian vocabulary persists in the stable core but is increasingly displaced in the variable slots by security and governance terminology. A synchronic study conducted only in 2024 would likely have concluded, erroneously, that Bangladeshi media frame the Rohingya primarily as a security concern; a synchronic study conducted only in 2019 would have concluded the opposite. Both observations are correct at their respective moments, which is precisely the insight a diachronic design is positioned to capture.

The temporal responsiveness documented here parallels Heidenreich et al.'s (2019) finding that European frames shifted with political events such as border closures. However, where Berry et al. (2016) and Greussing and Boomgaarden (2017) documented sudden, event-triggered frame shifts in Europe (the death of Alan Kurdi, the Paris attacks), the Bangladeshi case shows a more gradual, structurally driven trajectory shaped by cumulative protraction rather than singular shocks — suggesting that host countries bearing the primary displacement burden may exhibit a logic of protracted attrition rather than event-driven rupture. Notably, the dehumanizing water and flood metaphors that Greussing and Boomgaarden (2017) and Baker and McEnery (2005) documented in European and UN discourse are absent from the Bangladeshi stable core and variable slots alike; Bangladeshi coverage instead relies on concrete spatial and institutional bigrams (the camps, in Bangladesh, Bhasan Char), plausibly because Bangladeshi media frame an already-resident population requiring governance rather than an external force approaching a border.

Theoretically, integrating Minsky's structural model with Entman's functional analysis proves productive: the stable core explains the persistence of humanitarian vocabulary across nearly a decade, while Entman's functions explain what that persistent vocabulary is doing at different moments — the bigram "*the Rohingya*" operates within a problem definition of acute victimization in Period 1 and within a problem definition of chronic management in Period 3. Extending Radina and Iakupova's (2022) template from

a criminal-trial context to a humanitarian crisis required introducing categories beyond role and event slots — spatial slots (Bhasan Char) and security-evaluative slots (drug trafficking, security concerns) — indicating that the framework requires flexible adaptation, rather than rigid application, when transferred across substantially different social domains.

5. Recommendations

Several directions for future research follow from this study's design and limitations. Analysis of trigrams and reference-corpus keyword statistics would capture patterns beyond two-word co-occurrence that bigram analysis alone cannot detect. Integrating corpus methods with critical discourse analysis of selected articles would allow examination of how these bigrams function within extended argumentative sequences rather than as isolated co-occurrences. Because Bengali-language outlets reach a far larger domestic audience than the English-language press examined here, replication using a Bengali-language corpus is a priority for establishing whether the stable core identified in this study holds across linguistic boundaries within the same national media system. Cross-national replication of the stable-core/variable-slot template — applied to Myanmar, Indian, or international coverage of the same crisis — would also help establish whether the humanitarian core identified here is nationally specific or shared across regional media systems reporting the same crisis.

For journalists and media organizations, the documented drift from humanitarian to securitized framing as the crisis protracted suggests a need for deliberate editorial counterweighting — sustaining refugee-agency and livelihood reporting alongside security coverage — to avoid an unintended erosion of public empathy over time. Media organizations covering protracted humanitarian crises more broadly might consider explicit ethics guidelines requiring balanced representation of displaced people's voices as coverage moves from emergency to routine.

For policymakers, the finding that treatment recommendation becomes fragmented rather than resolved as crises normalize suggests that funding decisions and camp conditions do not merely produce objective outcomes but actively shape the discursive space within which future policy options are imagined; sustained attention to media framing, not only to material conditions, is therefore relevant to policy design in protracted displacement settings.

For media and corpus-linguistics researchers, the replicable stable-core/variable-slot template developed here — combining Minsky's (1975) dynamic frame theory with Entman's (1993) four framing functions and AntConc-based bigram extraction — offers a transferable method for tracking how host-country media discourse adapts to the political logic of sustained displacement in other protracted crises, from Syrian refugee coverage in Lebanon to Venezuelan displacement in Colombia.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how Bangladeshi English-language online news media framed the Rohingya crisis from 2019 to 2025 through Minsky's dynamic frame theory, operationalized via corpus-assisted bigram analysis and interpreted through Entman's (1993) four functions. A durable, 17-bigram humanitarian stable core persists across all three periods, while variable slots produce three distinct framing profiles: an emergency-justice frame (2019–2020), a diplomatic-process frame (2021–2022), and a normalization-securitization frame (2023–2025). The humanitarian imperative documented by Irom et al. (2021) and Vu and Lynn (2020) do not disappear with time; it becomes the background against which new foreground elements — diplomatic stalemate, donor fatigue, camp security — are successively projected. This carries a methodological implication for the wider field: synchronic studies of protracted crises risk mistaking a foreground variable slot for a permanent national characteristic, when what appears securitized in one year may have been emphatically humanitarian several years earlier within the very same media system. The study's limitations — its restriction to bigrams, to English-language outlets, and to a moderate-sized corpus — are addressed above as priorities for future research.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks the Faculty of Humanities, National Research University Higher School of Economics, for institutional support and supervision during the term paper on which this article is based.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

About the Author(s)

Mostafa Samsul Bary is a Student in the Applied Linguistics & Text Analytics degree program, Field of Study 04.45.03 (Fundamental and Applied Linguistics), Faculty of Humanities, National Research University Higher School of Economics, Nizhny

Novgorod, Russia. His research interests include media framing, corpus linguistics, and discourse analysis of humanitarian and refugee crises.

Email: msbary007.ru@gmail.com.

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