

Who Belongs? A Comparative Case Study Between the U.S. and Canada's Use of Citizenship Revocation

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RESEARCH FOCUS

The focus of this study is to examine the relationship between threat framing of perceived out-groups and rates of citizenship revocation. The thesis proposes that when there is a rise in threat framing of out-groups in media there will also be a rise in revocation cases.

Research Question: Is there a relationship between the perception of out-groups as threats and the government's use of citizenship revocation

MOTIVATION FOR THIS WORK

In recent years, citizenship revocation has emerged frequently as a political issue in liberal democracies. The process of citizenship revocation is defined as the legal process in which a government strips a birthright citizen of their citizenship, or more commonly, a naturalized citizen of their citizenship. It is typically applied as a political tool to protect a country's national security from perceived threats. A recent example in current politics is the political idea of birthright citizenship revocation in the U.S. under President Trump's administration. The rise in current politics led me to wonder what the main reasons were for governments to choose to revoke citizenship. I then narrowed down the study to compare the U.S. and Canada's use of revoking citizenship of Muslim immigrants between 2013 and 2018.

My work engaged with some of the work produced by Émilien Fargues, Elke Winter, Mathew J Gibney regarding citizenship revocation. As well as work produced by Thierry Balzacq, Sarah Léonard, and Jan Ruzicka pertaining to securitization theory.

UNDERSTANDING CITIZENSHIP REVOCATION

Through extensive literature research, I was able to conclude that out-grouping and threat construction are key in how governments justify revoking citizenship. Rather than openly targeting groups based on race, economic class, or religious beliefs, governments frame these groups as risks to national security, economic stability, or as falling outside of the preferred group identity. The framing process allows governments to use revocation as rational, necessary, and protective, even when the true effects are excluding and discriminating. The ability to define threats becomes the power to decide who belongs and who does not. Understanding this is important because it reveals how easily the rights and protections associated with citizenship can be withdrawn when framed as a threat.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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METHOD

Theory: The political theory that is most relevant to the subject being studied is Securitization Theory. Securitization theory was created by academics from the Copenhagen School Buzan and Ole Waever (Flohr 2025). A major component of securitization theory is othering, which directly connects to the out-group component being observed in this study. This grouping outlines the opinion of a country to define who fits "in" with the culture. Allowing a government to pick and choose which groups are not aligned and therefore leading to the identification of threats.

Examples of incompatibility vocabulary framing (in no particular order): Cultural incompatibility, Cultural decay, Cultural decline, "Preserve our way of life", "National values under threat", Western Cultural Values, Banned, Cultural Threat, Religiously Different, Not Assimilating, Language, Race, Traditionalism, Customs, Tribalism or Tribal Community.

Examples of Security threat vocabulary: low-intensity terms include words such as riot, immoral, or risk; medium-intensity terms include fear, criminal, or extremist; and high-intensity terms include terrorist, existential threat, or murder.

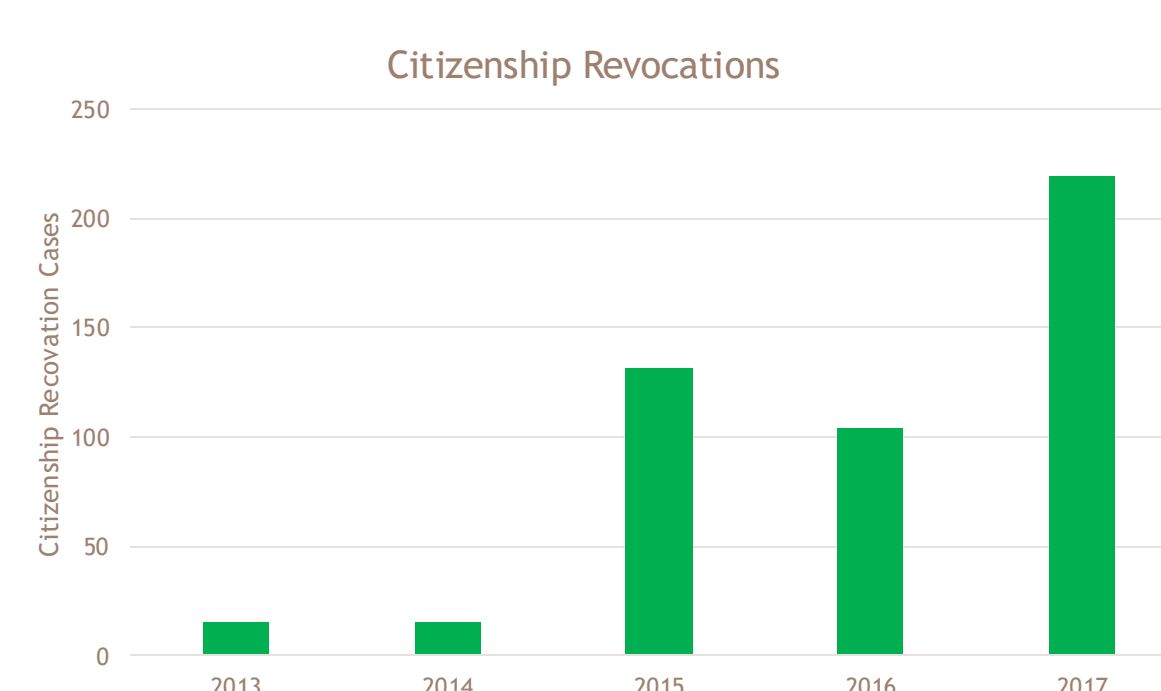


Based on the literature, I seek to hypothesize that when a government rises their description of an out-group as threatening, it will lead to an increase in citizenship revocation.

CITIZENSHIP REVOCATION RATES

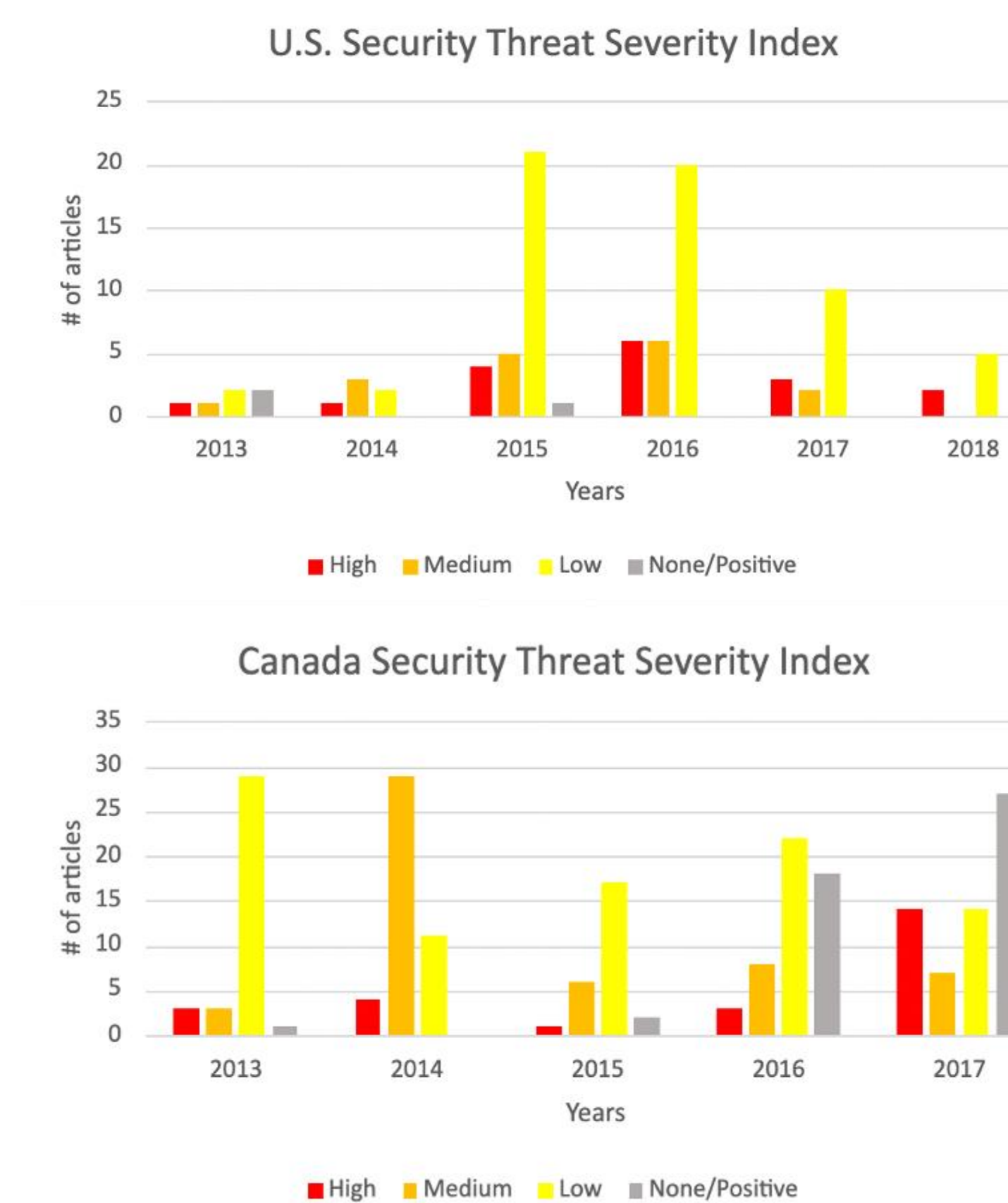
Year	# of Revocation Cases
2013	
2014	
2015	
2016	15
2017	25
2018	110

Number of revocation cases for the U.S. between 2013 and 2018.

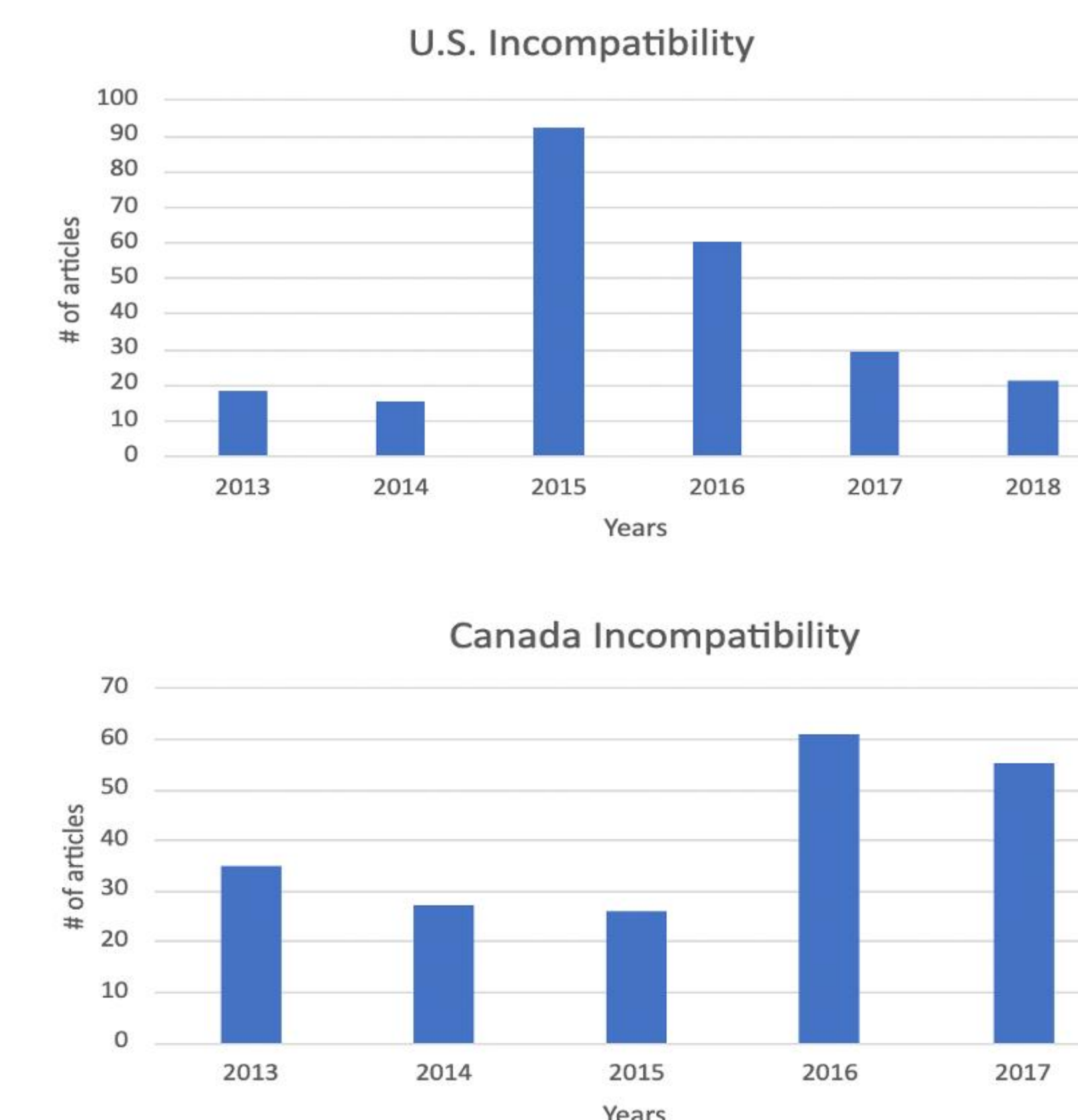


Number of revocation cases for Canada between 2013 and 2017.

RESULTS



The number of articles from each news source describing Muslim immigrants by different levels of security of threat language per year.



The number of times each news source described Muslim immigrants as incompatible with each country's culture, by year.

IMPLICATIONS

- Imbalance between article data pools
- U.S. records of citizenship revocation are incomplete due to the lack of accessible records
- The assumption that the total number of citizenship revocations is a fair representation of Muslim immigrants citizenship revocations
- Only two news sources being analyzed in the thesis

SUMMARY

The findings of this analysis produce sufficient evidence of correlation between the independent and dependent variables. The proposed hypothesis suggests that an increase in a country's perception of out-groups as national security threats, along with incompatibility in each connected country, leads to an increase in the country's use of citizenship revocation. The provided combined analysis of threatening vocabulary, along with the collection of incompatibility mentions, compared with the amount of citizenship revocations per country, provides substantial evidence to support the proposed hypothesis, although with certain caveats and exceptions.

In the U.S., incompatibility rates rose dramatically in 2015, with threat language also rising in 2015 and 2016, corresponding to the highest rate of revocation of citizenship also being in 2015. This pattern of correlation between the two is followed in the Canadian graphs as well. This demonstrates that revocation intensified following the same pattern of news media perception of Muslim immigrants as security threats. This peak of threat language, incompatibility, and revocation also aligns with political power shifts and certain executive orders impacting Muslim immigrants. The evidence provided is consistent with the proposed hypothesis that the news media's construction of Muslim immigrants as threatening outsiders creates conditions to increase the government's use of citizenship revocation.

To examine the hypothesis to its full extent and avoid ecological fallacy, a continuation of the study should include individual Muslim immigrant citizenship revocation rates, as well as an extended date for the U.S., and an equal number of article sources for both countries. Without such qualities, the current analysis supports the hypothesis but not to its strongest extent, and therefore cannot fully confirm or deny the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable

FUTURE RESEARCH

Although it would be ideal to recommend direct legislative reform and policy making limiting the injustices caused in citizenship revocation, this study reveals that the process depends on the very actors who benefit from and instill these powers. Therefore, instead, I recommend a policy for those who work in migrancy advocacy. I draw on the importance of recognition of the way the media portrays Muslim immigrants, which strongly affects the actions of revocation at higher rates. These increased rates serve as a warning for when this political tool will be most likely used more frequently. Immigration advocates could potentially create a systematic media monitoring mechanism that tracks the volume and intensity of threat framing and the incompatibility of labeled out-groups within each country's media sources. With the results of this, they would be able to investigate the validity of the publications as well as notify the publishers of any faulty projections. Therefore, limiting the likelihood of support for high amounts or unjustified citizenship revocation.