A Content Analysis of Media Coverage of the Garda Whistle-blower Controversies 2014-2017.

By

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Declaration:

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of the MA in Journalism and Media Communications, is my own; based on my personal study and /or research, and that I have acknowledged all material sources used in its preparation. I also certify that I have not copied in part or in whole or otherwise plagiarised the work of anyone else, including other students.

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Abstract

Whistle-blowers and the media have important roles to play in holding powerful organisations and institutions to account, including State institutions. The research project examined media coverage of the Garda whistle-blower controversies relating to the abuse of penalty points cancellation procedures and other policing shortcomings in Ireland. The research objectives were to discover what news values drove media coverage of the controversies and how did they change over time and how the coverage was framed and how did the framing change as the controversies played out.

The research involved carrying out a content analysis. The methodology followed was that proposed by Hansen (1998). Four news flashpoints were chosen for the analysis, one in 2014, one in 2016 and two in 2017. The flashpoints were chosen as they coincided with some of the most important events in the controversies.

The coverage was driven mainly by the news values reference to elite person, negativity and threshold, in that order. These did not change appreciably over the four news flashpoint periods, although negativity converged with reference to elite persons in the fourth news flashpoint as the sense of crisis in government was heightened.

The most frequently-occurring dominant frames in the coverage were political and moral/ethical. Secondary frames were less polarised. The most frequently-occurring secondary frames were conflict and competence, but crisis, accountability, political and moral/ethical were also important.

The political frame became more prevalent as the controversies developed over the news flashpoint periods. This is because the focus of media attention moved to the government as it struggled to deal with the issues and the sense of crisis in government increased. The moral/ethical frame diminished in importance, as the actions of individuals became less important as retirements and resignations took their toll on some of the main actors involved.

The lesson for public policy is that crises need to be handled quickly and effectively. In this case, the controversies began in earnest in January 2014 and came to a climax with the resignation of a government minister in November 2017. This is an inordinate amount of time and demonstrates the weakness of the response of the government to the crisis, which was brought to the brink of collapse.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine media coverage of the Garda whistle-blower controversies concerning the inadequate investigation of serious crimes in the Cavan/Monaghan Garda Division, the abuse of the cancellation of penalty points by senior Garda officers, erroneous convictions for motoring offences, falsification of Garda records and the treatment of Sergeant Maurice McCabe, the main whistle-blower in the case.

While the whistle-blowers' allegations had been reported as early as 2009, the story only became big news in January 2014 with the appearance of Garda Commissioner Martin Callinan and Sergeant McCabe at the Public Accounts Committee. The story ran at an intensive level of coverage until the resignation of Ms Frances Fitzgerald as Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation in November 2017. The story is still not finished. The Charleton Tribunal set up in 2017 to investigate allegations of a smear campaign against Sergeant McCabe has yet to report.

This research is of importance in the study of journalism and communications as it relates to the policing and administration of the State. Policing is one of the most important functions of a state. It is vital to the preservation of the rule of law upon which so much else depends, including the functioning of democracy and the conduct of trade. To carry out its function, members of An Garda Siochána are given extensive powers to over citizens. The exercise of these powers must be amenable to scrutiny and this is a role the media fulfils. When things go wrong, as they did in this case, the political system is responsible for settings things right. The media has an important role in ensuring this happens. There is also a dearth of scholarship in the area of whistle-blowing, as was highlighted by Wahl-Jorgensen and Hunt (2012). When searching for academic articles on news values and news framing in the Irish context I could only find two articles (Power et al, 2016), (Cawley, 2012). This points to an urgent need to develop the research in this area in Ireland.

The methodology employed for this research was content analysis, as proposed by Hansen (1998). The approach recommended by Hansen is:
1. Definition of the research problem.
2. Selection of media and sample.
3. Defining analytical categories.
4. Constructing a coding schedule.
5. Piloting the coding schedule and checking reliability.
6. Data-preparation and analysis.

Lexis Nexis was used as the source of material and Microsoft Excel was deployed for the analysis. The study examined how the story of the Garda whistle-blowers was presented from the point of view of news values and news frame and how these changed over time. Four news flashpoints were chosen (Russell and Waisbord, 2017). Flashpoint 1 (20 January 2014-15 May 2014) covered the period during which Commissioner Callinan and Sergeant McCabe appeared at the Public Accounts Committee, the retirement of Commissioner Callinan in March 2014 and the resignation of Mr Alan Shatter as Minister for Justice and Equality in May 2014. Flashpoint 2 (1-31 May 2016) covered the period during which the O'Higgins Report was published. Flashpoint 3 (1-28 February 2017) was the period during which false sex abuse allegations against Sergeant McCabe were reported. Flashpoint 4 (1 September-30 November 2017) was the period during which Commissioner O'Sullivan retired and Minister Frances Fitzgerald resigned.

Chapter 2 contains a review of the academic literature on whistle-blowing and content analysis, especially as it refers to news values and news framing. Chapter 3 sets out the methodology in detail. This chapter describes in detail the key steps taken to implement the scheme recommended by Hansen (1998). Chapter 4 contains the analysis of the data and results. Microsoft Excel was used for recording and analysing the data. Chapter 5 contains the conclusions. There is also a comprehensive bibliography and an appendix.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

<u>Background</u>

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine media coverage of the Garda[1] whistle-blower controversies. The examination consists of a content analysis of media coverage of the whistle-blower scandals by at important junctures during the playing out of the controversies.

The reason this story is of importance is that it exposed serious failings in policing in Ireland and led to the resignations of two Ministers for Justice, two Garda Commissioners, two secretaries general of the Department of Justice and indirectly led to the early departure from office of a Taoiseach[2]. It is an impressive list of *dramatis personae*.

Firstly, I think it important to give an outline of the events and timeline involved in the controversies.

Sergeant Maurice McCabe acted out of genuine concerns and is a man of integrity (O'Higgins, 2016). After his posting as sergeant-in-charge to Bailieboro in 2004, he became aware of significant management deficiencies that were to cause serious problems for policing in the district. The post of Superintendent at Bailieboro was treated as a transitional post. Most holders during Sergeant McCabe's time there were newly-promoted out of Dublin and had no intention of permanently re-locating their families to the district. In addition, many of the post-holders were absent for long periods studying for degrees or engaged on other policing work (Clifford, 2017).

The inevitable consequence of the transitory, absentee management culture in Bailieboro district was that indiscipline among rank and file Gardaí was widespread and hampered proper policing. This was compounded by the fact that the district was host to a disproportionate number of probationary Gardaí who were not provided with adequate guidance and supervision. This situation led to a series of failures to adequately investigate serious crimes (Clifford, 2017).

An example of this was the case of a serious assault on a female taxi driver by Jerry McGrath in April 2007 who would go on to plead guilty to the murder of Sylvia Roche Kelly in 2007 in Limerick. Had the Bailieboro case been properly handled it is likely that McGrath would have been in custody the night he killed Ms Roche Kelly. There were numerous other incidents of inadequate investigation of serious crimes. This prompted McCabe to write to his district officer. When there was no

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[1] An Garda Siochána is the name given to the Irish police force, often referred to as Garda or Gardaí.
[2] Taoiseach is the title given to the prime minister of Ireland in the Constitution of Ireland.

improvement, Sergeant McCabe resigned his position as sergeant-in-charge and returned to regular policing. McCabe filed a complaint. This resulted in the setting up of an inquiry headed by Assistant Commissioner Derek Byrne, assisted by Chief Superintendent Terry McGinn.

The Byrne/McGinn inquiry[3] found that there were no systematic failures, only minor procedural issues and placed the blame for any shortcomings on McCabe. Later inquiries by Sean Guerin[4], SC in 2014 and Justice Kevin O'Higgins in 2016 found that there were major flaws in the Byrne/McGinn report (O'Higgins, 2016).

There followed in 2013 an attempt to discredit Sergeant McCabe in connection with a missing computer which was to be used as evidence in a child sex abuse case. Luckily, McCabe was able to prove himself to have not been involved in the investigation of the case in question.

In 2012, McCabe became aware of the fixed charge notice (FCN) (penalty points) abuse. He had been in regular contact with Garda John Wilson and together they carried out some investigations into the practice of cancelling FCNs. They found widespread abuse and decided to bring it to attention. In the light of the experience of the Byrne/McGinn inquiry, they decided there was no point in raising the matter internally. McCabe met with individuals who might be in a position to help including a member of staff of the Comptroller & Auditor General (C&AG), Clare Daly TD, Noel Brett of the Road Safety Authority and Conor Faughnan of the AA. McCabe also sent a 20-page report containing evidence to the Taoiseach who forwarded in to the Minister for Justice.

In response, the Minister for Justice, Alan Shatter TD, established an inquiry headed by Assistant Commissioner John O'Mahony. O'Mahony reported in April 2013 and concluded that there was no corruption but that there was a liberal interpretation of the rules for cancelling FCNs.

The C&AG's report was published in October 2013. The C&AG backed up what McCabe and Wilson had been saying. The Garda Inspectorate issued its report in March 2014. The Garda Inspectorate criticised the O'Mahony report and vindicated McCabe and Wilson.

These events led to the Guerin report which, in turn, led to the establishment of the O'Higgins Commission of Investigation. O'Higgins looked at all the issues raised by McCabe. O'Higgins

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[3] The report of this enquiry was not published but it was made available to the O'Higgins Commission.
[4] The report by Sean Guerin, SC was published but subsequently withdrawn following legal action by former Minister for Justice and Equality, Alan Shatter.

concluded that while some of the complaints made by McCabe did not stand to scrutiny, many of them did and the Commission viewed him as a man of integrity whose motivations were honourable.

Sometime later, Sergeant McCabe became aware that the former Garda Press Officer, Superintendent David Taylor, had made allegations of a smear campaign directed against McCabe. Both McCabe and Taylor made protected disclosures. This led to the setting up of the Disclosures Tribunal.

Throughout these events, Sergeant McCabe was the subject of false rumours of child sexual abuse.

I have relied heavily on Michael Clifford's book for the chronology of events in this section (Clifford, 2017).

The Literature on Whistleblowing

I will now turn attention to the literature on whistleblowing.

Janet Malek (Malek, 2010: 116) provides a definition of whistleblowing from an article by Peter B Jubb in the *Journal of Business Ethics*:

> "…a deliberate non-obligatory act of disclosure, which gets on the public record and is made by a person who has or had privileged access to data or information of an organisation, about non-trivial illegality or other wrongdoing whether actual, suspected or anticipated which implicates and is under the control of that organisation, to an external entity having potential to rectify the wrongdoing."

Malek is concerned with the ethics of whistleblowing in the context of the consequences for the whistle-blower and the consequences for others. Her view is that there needs to be a balance between the consequences of disclosure, or non-disclosure for the whistle-blower as against the consequences for society. She maintains that the more serious the harm for society brought about by the misconduct the weightier the moral reasons to blow the whistle.

If, however, reporting misconduct is unlikely to achieve positive results, the ethical case for doing so is less compelling. She refers to Near and Miceli who suggest that whistleblowing is more likely to be effective when the whistle-blower is credible, in a position of power and reveals his identity; when the recipient of the complaint is credible, in a position of power and is supportive of the whistle-

blower; when there is good evidence of wrongdoing; and when the institutional environment discourages wrongdoing and encourages whistleblowing.

We can see from the experience of Maurice McCabe that the environment he was in was not conducive to successful whistleblowing. The institutional environment was especially hostile to him and the Taoiseach, who was one of the recipients, displayed indifference and simply passed his complaint and evidence to the Minister for Justice without making any effort to establish the facts of the situation for himself.

Wim Vandekerckhove looks at whistleblowing from a human rights perspective (Vandekerckhove, 2016). He refers to a Council of Europe Recommendation for whistle-blower protection where a three-tiered recipient is proposed: internal to the organisation, external to a regulator and publicly through the media or third parties. He also draws attention to two cases of the European Court of Human Rights, Guja v Moldova (2008), and Bucur and Toma v Romania (2013) where the court upheld whilstleblowers' rights to freedom of expression as provided for in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. I would point out that rulings of the European Court of Human Rights are especially important in an Irish context, as rulings of the court are applicable to Irish law under the terms of the European Convention on Human Rights Act 2003.

Ada-Iuliana Popescu (2015) undertook a critical analysis of whistle-blower protection in the EU. Popescu argues that employees who reveal inside information are vulnerable to retaliation and that protection of whistle-blowers and fighting corruption requires harmonising a variety of interests and means.

The author recognises that the UN Convention Against Corruption, the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials and the International Principles for Whistle-blower Protection of Transparency International provide legal guidance for developing whistle-blower protection.

According to the author, worldwide, some countries have taken steps, but most have not. There is no EU law and only four EU member states have legal frameworks for whistle-blowers. Legislation to protect confidentiality and anonymity are key to successful regulation of this area, and proper institutional design is vital.

The author states that all EU countries have ratified the UN convention but have not fully complied with its requirements. Most EU member states do not comply with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Most have ignored the standards issued by the UN, Council of Europe, OECD and Transparency International. Popescu identifies that there is a lack of political will and public pressure in this area. Popescu concludes that whistle-blower protection is a vital anti-corruption measure. In my view the failure of countries to abide by international legal obligations is unacceptable and is some thing that needs to be highlighted by NGOs, journalists and their representative organisations.

The position in Ireland is that whistleblowing is legislated for in the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 (Protected Disclosures Act, 2014). While I have not examined the Act in detail, section 8 provides that where a person is employed in a public body the disclosure is made to the Minister of the Government with responsibility for that body. This is a weak provision, as matters the subject of whistle-blowing are more likely than not to cast a Minister in an unfavourable light. The provision would not have made any difference to the Garda whistleblowing controversy. It will be shown later in the research that the government was unwilling or unable to deal with the controversies, even though the matters had been reported direct to the Taoiseach and the Minister for Justice and Equality.

In their article Robert van Es and Gerard Smit (2003) present a case study relating whistleblowing to media logic. Van Es and Smit point out the potentially serious consequences of whistleblowing for the whistle-blower personally and professionally, and for the organisation. They pose the question: What guidelines can be given to the whistle-blower to minimise the damage for the whistle-blower and the organisation? They formulate three guidelines for the whistle-blower, the organisation and the media.

The case study they recorded involves a senior statistician, K, who works at the Laboratory for Soil and Subsoil Water Research in the Netherlands. It is 1997. K is not satisfied with the way in which the results of research are reported to the government and the media. K raises the matter internally but is not satisfied with the response and decides to go public.

K went to the mainstream media with his story. While they found it interesting and worthy of reporting they found the subject matter to be too specific for daily newspapers. Eventually *Trouw*, a Dutch daily newspaper, decided on an approach to publication. K would write an article that would be placed inside the newspaper along with an interview with him. A small leader on the front page

under the headline "Environmental Institute's lies and deceit" would reference both internal pieces. The articles led to extensive media coverage and questions in Parliament.

In this case, the newspaper did not seek the views of the laboratory. This, they claimed, was in deference to the position of K who did not want his employer alerted for fear of losing his job. He wanted the article published as an employee of the laboratory. He was also a reluctant interviewee. The newspaper explained this position in its coverage. K was initially dismissed from his position but was subsequently reinstated in a different department.

Van Es and Smit posit that the reasonable criteria for publication can be summed up in three simple questions: Is it relevant? Is it well founded? Is it understandable? In taking this approach the editor did not violate the moral code.

The newspaper and the whistle-blower need each other, but professional boundaries can become blurred and professional ethics become compromised. The story of the whistle-blower must fit the 'media logic': there must be a defined story in which the questions who, what, how, where, when and why are answered.

Once these criteria are satisfied a powerful process will develop that cannot be stopped by the individual: it is a wave of publicity or media hype. The whistle-blower must fight for attention to get his story out and then fight to regain privacy. Whistle-blowers are rarely aware of this.

Van Es and Smit formulate three guidelines for whistleblowing:
1. The organisation must prepare to defend itself publicly
2. The media must adhere to professional ethics and treat the whistle-blower with respect, but with due suspicion, and
3. The whistle-blower must be made aware of the media logic and its potential impact on them.

While the second and third guidelines seem to me to me reasonable, the fist is problematic. If an organisation or its officers have acted illegally or criminally there can be no justification for a defence. It is often the case that defending the indefensible does more harm to an organisation than if it owns up to its shortcomings and take swift, convincing action to remedy the situation.

In the RTE documentary *Whistle-blower: The Maurice McCabe Story* (RTE, 2018), Maurice McCabe and his wife recounted the personal toll the process took both in terms of health and family relationships. McCabe also stated that he would not have done it had he known how events would unfold. Of course, McCabe acted on his own initiative and did not appear to involve the media, so there was no one in the media in a position to advise him of the consequences of his actions.

Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Joanne Hunt (2012) look at coverage of whistle-blowers in the UK national press between 1997 and 2009. They carried out a content analysis.

The authors contend that, while journalism scholars have given plenty of attention to mechanisms of accountability and the role of investigative journalism, the role of whistle-blowers has been largely neglected.

The authors refer to Lewis (2004) who states that the relationship between whistle-blowers and journalists can be symbiotic and adversarial. They found that coverage of whistle-blowers is largely neutral or positive and that the acts of whistleblowing that receive attention are those that fit with existing news agendas, and prevailing social and economic trends. They also found that journalism has a preference for public sector wrongdoing.

According to the authors, research to date has been mainly done from legal and business perspectives and distinguishes between internal and external whistleblowing. The authors found that, despite the central role of whistle-blowers in journalism, there is surprisingly little literature on how journalists interact with whistle-blowers. Some academic authors express concern about ethical issues in using whistle-blowers as sources, including questions relating to protection of identities and the need for verification of information. There are also legal dangers for journalists using leaks of secret information.

In their research, Wahl-Jorgensen and Hunt have the news story as the unit of analysis using a combination of standard variables including date, publication, position of story, length, subject, sources and country.

They found that stories about whistle-blowers fit the standard criteria of newsworthiness. Stories about tax evasion schemes at Barclays Bank and financial mismanagement at HBOS were highly newsworthy. Broadsheet, or 'quality' press tended to give more coverage than tabloid newspapers.

Red tops were more interested in exclusive stories, scoops or unique stories that fit with the tabloid culture and political orientation. Journalism cultures shape what is covered and how.

The authors conclude that whistleblowing can contribute to a changing culture and the closing of legal loopholes. The stories examined also stress the risks to whistle-blowers and the need for protection.

Christian Christensen (2014) describes how Wikileaks developed from a small whistle-blower outlet from its inception in 2006 to one of the best-known activist organisations in the world. Christensen identifies three clear phases of the Wikileaks identity: (1) Alternative, (2) Adaptation and (3) Abstention/Attack.

During the period 2006-2009 there was very little written about Wikileaks because very few people knew about its existence. It was not until the 2010 Chelsea Manning leaks that Wikileaks entered the mainstream. Prior to this, the organisation had released many significant leaks, but there was little interaction or collaboration with mainstream outlets. There was little media coverage of these leaks, thus supporting years of research pointing towards a pro-corporate, pro-status-quo orientation of the mainstream press. Christensen defines this as the 'alternative' period.

Christensen identifies 2010-11 as the 'adaptation' period when Wikileaks captured the attention of the US government setting in motion the events that would lead to the arrest, conviction and imprisonment of Chelsea Manning. Manning had been working in US military intelligence and provided Wikileaks with documents relating to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and more generalised diplomatic cables.

From an academic perspective the issues that got greatest attention were the collaboration between Wikileaks and the mainstream press, the use of leaked material by the press in general, and whether Wikileaks should be designated as a journalistic organisation and, thus, Julian Assange as a journalist.

The arrest of Manning, the economic embargo imposed on Wikileaks by credit card companies and PayPal, together with Assange's insistence that he was at risk of extradition to the US if he went to Sweden to face questioning relating to sexual assault accusations led to a period defined by Christensen as one of 'abstention and attack'.

Christensen maintains that the sentences handed down to Manning, and the stated intention of the Obama administration to vigorously pursue Edward Snowden sent a chilling message to those considering revealing classified information.

Christensen asks what these three phases of Wikileaks' development tell us and how might media scholars use this decade as a tool for future research? Academic interest in Wikileaks was only piqued when the Manning leaks had been revealed. The earlier work of the organisation had been under-analysed or ignored. Christensen says that academics are focused on the sensational and spectacular, just like news organisations.

Christensen is of the view that the use of law, or threat thereof, should be of primary concern for scholars. According to him, the chilling effect of government crackdown will have profound implications for freedom of the press. There is a recent example of such abuse in the arrest in Northern Ireland of journalists Barry McCaffrey and Trevor Birney who investigated the killing of six catholic men in Loughinisland in 1994 (Waterson, 2019).

Christensen identifies two techno-centric arguments relating to the causal relationship between technology and social change. Christensen looks at two of these: (a) that Wikileaks is a 'borderless' organisation, and (b) that it is a threat to established journalism.

On the 'borderless' aspect, Christensen says that the flow of information is borderless but that Wikileaks has been careful in choosing where to locate its operations. Sweden, Belgium and Iceland were used as locations for operations because they offered maximum legal protection under whistle-blower and freedom of speech laws. Christensen identifies the use of physical and psychological violence in the service of censorship as worthy of attention from media scholars.

In relation to the second point, Christensen refers to the writings of Emily Bell (2010: 5) and Yochai Benkler (2012: 330). Christensen points out that some of the most seminal academic writings view the mainstream media as not defined by their adversarial position vis-à-vis political and economic power, but by their positions within those power structures.

Christensen points out that Wikileaks collaborated almost exclusively with mainstream western media outlets. The notion of Wikileaks promoting a chaotic information free-for-all was far from the truth. Assange had a rationale for not releasing all the material at once. He was aware of the 'news

value' of the material, that zero supply equals high demand, and that as soon as you release all the material supply goes to infinity and demand to zero. He was very much thinking and acting as an information capitalist.

The question of whether Wikileaks is a journalistic organisation is interesting. It certainly would have given more legal protection if it were. This is an issue that should have been clarified by the author by examining the organisation's founding documentation. The founding documentation should make clear the aims and objectives of the organisation and what activities it undertakes in pursuit of those aims and objectives.

Adrienne Russell and Silvio Waisbord (2017) examined flashpoints of coverage of the Edward Snowden leaks on mass surveillance of individuals and foreign political leaders by the US National Security Agency (NSA). Their objective was to understand how the story played out in various news outlets and in various genres and across the technological spectrum between June 2013 and June 2014.

Their study documents the patterns and nature of news coverage of the Snowden revelations in order to assess the role of the legacy press and its relation to other actors in the contemporary news ecology – they use a concept from Benkler's 'networked fourth estate'. The latter refers to practices, organising models and technologies that come together to fill the role that in the twentieth century we associated with a free press. Russell and Waisbord maintain that traditional boundaries between journalistic and non-journalistic actors are blurring.

The questions posed by the authors are:
- What is the role of legacy news organisations in the networked fourth estate? and
- Do legacy news organisations become less relevant in a news landscape populated by new information actors?

News flashpoints are swells of coverage concentrated on specific events and matters used to address the questions. The authors looked at first-tier, or mainstream newspapers and second-tier magazines, blogs and weekly publications. They quote Orville Schell who wrote that first-tier outlets have a narrow bandwidth of opinion, whereas second-tier outlets host the broadest spectrum of viewpoints.

An analysis of Google trends by the authors show the same spikes of coverage as the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* thus displaying a synergy between the interest of journalists and the public at the various points in time.

The initial leaks in June 2013 launched the first, and most coverage-intense flashpoint (6-19 June 2013). At the outset, the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* questioned the legality of the surveillance disclosed by Snowden and the effectiveness of such surveillance against terrorists

The second flashpoint (25 July-24 August 2013) came with Snowden's request for asylum in Moscow and the disclosure of US government funding of the Government Communications Headquarters in the UK. By this time, the pattern of coverage was publication of a leak by a leading news organisation, news about official responses, and coverage of Congressional and judicial proceedings.

The third flashpoint (24 October-13 November 2013) came with coverage of more Congressional hearings, revelations that the NSA had hacked Google and Yahoo and had been spying on international leaders. There was also a debate about the roles and responsibilities of journalists. Journalists became major actors in the story linking, critiquing, reporting and expanding on coverage by others.

The fourth flashpoint (12 December 2013-10 January 2014) was dominated by coverage of official government responses, more leaked documents and the disclosure by *Der Spiegel* of the spying tools employed by the NSA.

The fifth flashpoint (16-28 January 2014) came when *The Guardian* revealed that the NSA were collecting text messages, a speech given by US President Barak Obama to the NSA, and a continuing flow of leaked documents.

Over the six months, coverage of the issues became more nuanced and gave increasing space to questions of legal rights and responsibilities, the role and impact of new technology, and changes in society. US media coverage focused on the US political elite and on US actors and events, even though the story had global significance and many global actors and media were involved.

The *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* relied most on elite US sources. Their coverage mirrored the political discourse that privacy and security were the main topics of public interest. The fact that

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the UK government forced *The Guardian* to destroy electronic storage media containing leaked material did not get reported in the mainstream US news media.

The authors conclude that what is newsworthy depends on traditional newsrooms and their elite sources and that the influence of elite legacy newspapers endures. The networked fourth estate brings more complexity in terms of themes, practices and forms, but it does not operate outside or against the mainstream, but rather in relation to it. Edward Snowden saw that the traditional press was essential to his purpose.

The authors contend that legacy news organisations rely on traditional journalistic norms and practices, and that journalistic logic shaped the evolution of the story across multiple platforms. They found no evidence of a digital logic distinct from journalistic logic in the networked fourth estate. The traditional press still plays a major role. Long-standing news values persist, and Edward Snowden understood this.

In my view the use of news flashpoints is a convenient and efficient way of identifying relevant material for study. It depends on the existence of events. In the case of investigative journalism, the news outlet would be advised to create its own event so that it can be picked up by the news flashpoints approach. The study is encouraging for traditional news outlets, as it shows they remain dominant in the reporting of major events and that the networked fourth estate and second-tier outlets operate in relation to them.

The Literature on Methodologies

The approach to the research is to conduct a content analysis to discover how the various publications used news values and news frames in their coverage of the Garda whistle-blower controversies, and whether news values and frames changed over time and between publications as the controversies unfolded.

Content Analysis

According to Hansen content analysis counts occurrences of specified dimensions and analyses relationships between these dimensions. Content analysis initially fragments texts into constituent parts and reassembles them at the analysis and interpretation stage to examine which ones co-occur in which contexts and with what implications (Hansen, 1998). Hansen sets out a detailed methodology for the conduct of content analysis.

The research will consist of a quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative analysis entails defining the research problem, selecting the media and time-periods, defining the analytical categories, constructing a coding schedule, piloting the coding scheme, preparation of date and analysis of data. According to McNamara, quantitative analysis collects data about media content, volume of mentions, use of key words, audience reach and frequency (McNamara, 2005). This is along the lines of the approach proposed by Hansen (1998). Examples of analytical categories include headlines, story order, source order, length of article, use of illustrations, use of descriptive words and number of sources.

Qualitative analysis examines the relationship between the text and its audience. Qualitative methods include textual, narrative, rhetorical, discourse, interpretive and semiotic analysis. While quantitative analysis can produce objective, measurable results qualitative analysis is necessary to understand the deeper meaning of coverage and its interpretation by audiences (McNamara, 2005).

News Values

The theory of news values was developed by Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge (Galtung and Ruge, 1965) in their article "The Structure of Foreign News" where they examined coverage of conflicts in the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus in Norwegian newspapers. Galtung and Ruge say that something is always happening, for example, a set of atoms emit waves all the time. There is such a cacophony of events that we cannot register everything. We must therefore select, and the question is how the selection is made. In journalistic terms, they ask: how do 'events' become 'news'? The authors suggest criteria by which news outlets decide what is newsworthy and, therefore, what is published. These criteria are outlined below.

Frequency refers to the frequency of the news medium and the length of time it takes for an event to occur. *Threshold* refers to the size of an event. The bigger the event the more likely that it will be reported.

Unambiguity refers to an event with a clear interpretation with no ambiguity in its meaning. *Meaningfulness* relates to events that are culturally proximate and relevant. *Consonance* is where we predict or want something to happen and we are mentally prepared for easy reception of the reporting of the event. Galtung and Ruge introduce a corrective to meaningfulness and consonance

in *unexpectedness*. They posit that it is the unexpected within the meaningful and consonant that grabs attention.

Continuity refers to something that once it makes the news remains in the news for a variety of reasons including inertia and familiarity. This is also partly because the news outlet justifies why it reported an event as news in the first place. *Composition* relates to the balance of news stories in a publication. If the news section of a newspaper has a preponderance of stories of a certain type, this reduces the threshold for stories of a different type that might not otherwise get attention.

Stories about *elite persons* and *elite nations* are more likely to become news because the actions of elite persons and nations are more consequential. *Personalisation* relates to an event that can be seen in personal terms as due to the action of individuals. *Negativity* is the final criterion suggested by the authors.

Galtung and Ruge recognise that these factors are not necessarily independent of each other and that certain pairs of criteria are especially newsworthy. For example, news about elite persons in elite nations or negative news about an elite person are newsworthy without having to satisfy additional criteria. Galtung and Ruge also maintain that the more criteria an event satisfies the more likely it will be reported and, if reported, the more the selection criteria will be accentuated.

<u>*News Framing*</u>

The first formal developments in news framing theory were set down by Robert M Entman in his article "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm" (Entman, 1993). According to Entman, to frame a text is to select some aspects and make them more salient in order to promote a particular problem definition, interpretation, evaluation and treatment. Salience, he defines as making something more "…noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences." (Entman, 1993).

For Entman, frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments and suggest remedies. Framing is achieved by the inclusion or exclusion of key words, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing facts or judgments. According to Entman, frames are defined as much by what they omit as by what they include, and receivers' responses are influenced if they perceive and process information about one interpretation of a situation but are given no information about alternatives. Entman maintains that

framing plays a major role in the exertion of political power, as it registers the identity of actors and interests.

Entman discusses the value of framing theory in the study of mass communication and gives examples in the areas of audience autonomy, journalistic objectivity, content analysis and public opinion, and normative democracy theory. In relation to content analysis, Entman maintains that using framing theory would avoid treating all negative or positive terms as equally salient and influential. He says that without using framing theory, content analysis may yield data that misrepresent the media messages the audience picks up.

Dietram Scheufele built on Entman's theory by identifying media frames and individual frames as dependent and independent variables (Scheufele, 1999). Scheufele refers to Tuchman's definition of framing: "The news frame organises everyday reality…it is an essential feature of news." He also references Gitlin who said that frames allow journalists to quickly identify and classify information for efficient communication with the audience. Referring to McLeod et al, Scheufele says that individual frames describe how audiences make sense of political news.

Scheufele draws on previous research by Gans and Reese to examine the questions of how frames are built and what organisational and structural factors in the media and individual characteristics of journalists impact the framing of news content. Scheufele maintains that the first source of influence is journalist-centred. Journalists construct frames to make sense of information. This stage of framing is influenced by ideology and professional norms. Organisational routines and the political orientation of the outlet then exert their influence. Finally, sources of outside influences are provided by political actors, official authorities, interest groups and elites.

Scheufele and Tewksbury draw an important distinction between agenda setting and news framing. In relation to agenda setting, it is not information about an issue that has the effect, rather it is the fact that the issue receives attention. In news framing, the effect lies within the description or the label used in coverage of an issue. The underlying interpretative schemas are the central effect. According to the authors, the primary difference between agenda setting and frame building is the difference between *whether* we think about an issue and *how* we think about it. (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007).

Lecheler and de Vreese conducted an experimental study investigating the relationship between two mediation processes of news framing: belief importance and belief content. Referencing Nelson, Oxley and Clawson, belief importance relates to framing as a process of altering the weight of particular considerations in the mind of the reader. Referencing Eagly and Chaiken, belief content refers to the addition of new beliefs in the mind of the reader. (Lecheler and de Vreese, 2012).

The authors carried out a survey among a representative group of Dutch citizens about the accession of Bulgaria and Romania into the EU in 2007. A total of 1,527 individuals were recruited and the response rate was 54%. Respondents were asked questions which framed the accession of the two countries as either an opportunity or a risk. The authors conclude that belief content prevailed over belief importance and that individuals with higher levels of political knowledge were more susceptible to framing through belief content. They conclude that while belief importance mattered a great deal, belief content was surprisingly influential.

Lecheler and de Vreese maintain that their results show that even knowledgeable citizens were affected by belief content. This suggests that the extent to which each psychological mechanism acts depends on the information and opinion environment the individual is in. The authors state that when a political issue is important to elites, individuals are more likely to be exposed to issue-relevant messages, including issue frames. They say that their findings suggest that journalistic frames not only convey political positions but can provide new, potentially powerful information.

Boesman, d'Haenens and Van Gorp carried out a multimethod study of journalistic frame building in newspaper newsrooms in Belgium and the Netherlands (Boesman, D'Haenens and Van Gorp, 2016). The authors carried out newsroom observations, news frame analysis, reconstruction interviews and frame-building analysis. For the purposes of analysis, the authors focused on two stories, the Belgian "Syria fighters" and a story about dementia. In relation to the Syria story, the authors made three findings. Firstly, they found that analysing across stories made it possible to develop an inventory of framing devices. Secondly, they found that analysing across media made it possible to identify frame influencing factors. What they found here was that the quality newspapers initially stayed close to the framing favoured by the authorities, while the popular newspapers published human interest stories. Thirdly, the authors found that analysis across time made it possible to sketch the emergence of new framing devices as events unfolded. What they found was that as journalists became familiar with the issue the more they departed from the official line and began to initiate framing devices themselves.

The second story featured a project in which people with mild forms of dementia were living independently. This story was chosen for publication as the project was positive, counterintuitive and cost effective. As a good-news story it was given a prominent place in the newspaper to counterbalance the serious stories in that day's edition. The framing devices used were the metaphor "regain control of your life" and the values "autonomy" and "self-reliance". The project and the persons involved were positively portrayed. The dominant frame package was defined in terms of "forget dementia, remember the people". This, the authors refer to as thematic coding and echoes Hall's theory of coding and encoding of mass communications (Hall, 1980).

The people involved in the project had early onset dementia caused by Korsakoff syndrome which results from excessive alcohol use. Boesman et al state that if framing devices such as "Korsakoff" or "psychiatric and addiction problems" had been used the framing might have been contextualised as people with dementia have themselves to blame. The authors looked at the records of the journalist in the frame-building analysis phase of the study and found that references to alcohol addition were omitted from the published article at the request of the project communications officer as it was deemed to be "stereotyping and irrelevant". The authors describe this outcome as a "source-winning negotiation" between the main source and the journalist. The authors looked at the process of framing from a journalistic and newsroom perspective.

The question remained as to whether frames identified by the researchers and journalists are recognised as such by audiences. They suggest that future research should integrally map the entire news and audience framing process to explore this question.

Di Salvo and Negro carried out a deductive content analysis of newspaper coverage of Edward Snowden in China, the UK and the US (Di Salvo and Negro, 2016). Their research question is: how was Edward Snowden framed by a selection of British, North American and Chinese press? Referencing Nossek, the authors sought to identify the "domestic glasses" worn by journalists in relation to their nation state. The authors also note that the state of academic literature in the field of whistleblowing is limited to the Wikileaks experience. The authors refer to the "stateless published Wikileaks". However, Christensen (2014) has pointed out that, while the flow of information is borderless, Wikileaks was careful to base its operations in countries that gave maximum legal protection to its activities.

Di Salvo and Negro argue that the definition given to Snowden by the press is important in terms of the legitimacy bestowed on him. To frame Snowden as a whistle-blower legitimises doing journalism based on his revelations. Framing him negatively would automatically shed a negative light on reporting of NSA surveillance, the authors suggest. Referring to Luther and Radovic, the authors state that some newspapers framed Wikileaks as a "journalism outlet" worthy of First Amendment[5] protection for the purpose of attributing value to their own reporting.

Di Salvo and Negro used five labels to identify newspaper articles: 'Whistle-blower', 'Villain', 'Hero', 'Martyr' and 'Mole' for the first level of analysis. The second level analysis dealt with sources quoted in the categories 'Politics and Military', 'NGOs', 'University', 'Supported' (for supporters of Snowden) and 'Family' (for members of the Snowden family).

The newspapers analysed were *The Guardian* (UK), *The People's Daily* (China), *The South China Morning Post* (China SAR Hong Kong) and *The New York Times* (US). At the first level of analysis – the category assigned by the journalist – most articles in all the publications portrayed Edward Snowden as a 'Whistle-blower'.

At the second level of analysis – depiction of Snowden by sources quoted – the picture was much more mixed, with his portrayal as 'Whistle-blower' occurring infrequently. Political and military sources were the sources most used by all the newspapers and the most frequent portrayal of Snowden was as 'Hero', 'Victim' and 'Villain'. Most portrayals in *The People's Daily* was as 'Victim' whereas the most frequent portrayal in *The Guardian* was as 'Villain'.

Carlos Rodríguez Pérez examined news framing and media legitimacy in media coverage of the refugee crisis in the EU (Pérez, 2017). According to the author, the basic assumption is that the media acts as information intermediaries and using news frames provides interpretive judgments that influence the political attitudes of audiences and the views on legitimacy they formulate. Pérez argues that the legitimacy of public organisations is crucial to democracy because only legitimate organisations can expect the support of the citizens and that this legitimacy is conferred by the electoral process.

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[5] This refers to the First Amendment of the United States Constitution which states: "Congress shall make no law…abridging the freedom of speech or of the press…".

The study by Pérez is concerned with media legitimacy, that is, the media projection of judgments of legitimacy on different organisations and actors. Referencing Powers and Fico, Pérez says that organisations are sources of information and in selecting them as sources, journalists give them authority. The author also references Yoon, stating that institutional sources deserve special attention, as they have privileged access to the media and become primary definers of news agendas, thereby setting the limits of discussion by virtue of their power, representativeness and expertise.

Pérez focuses on moral legitimacy which is subdivided into consequential legitimacy, procedural legitimacy, structural legitimacy and personal legitimacy. Consequential legitimacy measures the evaluation of results and consequences; Procedural legitimacy, the procedure followed; Structural legitimacy, the means and resources provided; Personal legitimacy, the leadership capacity of the organisation. Referencing Iyengar, the author describes episodic and thematic news. Episodic news has narrative tension with a script and personal characteristics, while thematic news place public issues in a general or abstract context in order to offer general outcomes or conditions. Episodic frames tend to individualise attribution of responsibility, thereby shielding governments and society from responsibility.

For his study, Pérez sampled articles from the Spanish newspapers El Pais and El Mundo covering EU Home Affairs Council meetings and EU Heads of Government meetings from April 2015 to May 2016. The author used the 'negative-neutral-positive' method for measuring legitimacy and the Janis-Fadner coefficient of media endorsement. The coefficient uses values ranging from -1 to +1. Coverage favouring the performance of the organisation will give a Janis-Fadner coefficient nearer to +1 and unfavourable coverage will give a result nearer to -1. Pérez found that media endorsement of the EU and the government of Spain were negative for procedures, results, structures and personal legitimacy in handling the refugee crisis.

Visual Framing

Lula Rodriguez and Daniela V Dimitrova (2011) looked at the use of visual framing in media discourse. The authors argue that images are powerful framing tools as they require less cognitive load than text and audiences may be more likely to accept images without question. They refer to Ferguson who said there is evidence that where there is a conflict between textual and visual framing, visual frames often win. They also quote Wischmann who said visuals are "capable not only of obscuring issues but of overwhelming facts".

The authors propose four levels of visual framing:

>Level 1: Visuals as denotative systems

>Level 2: Visuals as stylistic-semiotic systems

>Level 3: Visuals as connotative systems, and

>Level 4: Visuals as ideological representations.

According to the authors, frames derived from denotative or representational meanings are established by titles, captions, inscriptions or other textual descriptions that accompany the image.

Stylistic-semiotic systems take into account stylistic conventions and technical transformation. Pictorial styles gain social meanings such as when a close-up shot signifies intimacy, a medium shot signifies personal relationship, a full shot signifies social relationship and a long shot signifies context, scope and public distance.

Rodriguez and Dimitrova maintain that at the connotative level, persons and objects not only denote a particular individual, thing or place but also the ideas or concepts attached to them.

In ideological representation symbols and stylistic features are drawn together into a coherent interpretation. Referencing Pieterse, the authors say that those in search of frames at this level are looking for answers to questions related to access and ideology: what interests are being served, whose voices are being heard and what ideas are dominant?

Research Questions

Several authors have identified gaps in research and opportunities for further study. Wahl-Jorgensen and Hunt (2012) commented that the role of the whistle-blower has been largely neglected in journalism scholarship and that research done to date has been mainly concerned with legal and business perspectives.

Christensen (2014) describes a Google Scholar search he carried out and found very little scholarly articles on Wikileaks and the few academic articles he found tended to come from political science and law. While Wikileaks is not the subject of my research, it does involve the general subject matter of whistleblowing.

Referencing Brevini et al., Leigh and Harding, and Lynch, Di Salvo and Negro (2016) state that the academic literature in the field of whistle-blowers is limited to the Wikileaks experience.

These findings are reflected in my own research experience. I have been unable to find any academic research in Ireland on whistleblowing or the Garda whistle-blowers.

One of the most common vehicles used for media analysis is content analysis and this is the approach I intend to use. In my dissertation this will involve both a quantitative and qualitative analysis of media coverage of the Garda whistle-blower controversies. As McNamara (2005) has pointed out quantitative analysis yields measurable results, but qualitative analysis is necessary to understand meaning. The most appropriate theories to apply are the theory of news values developed by Galtung and Ruge (1965) and the theory of news framing postulated by Entman (1993) and further developed by other authorities referenced above.

The research questions to be addressed are:
1. What news values drove media coverage of the Garda whistle-blower controversies and how did they change over time?
2. What news frames were employed in media coverage of the Garda whistle-blower controversies and how did they change over time?

Chapter 3: Methodology

For the purposes of this study I used the model of content analysis set out by Hansen (1998). The key steps in content analysis proposed by Hansen are:

1. Definition of the research problem
2. Selection of media and sample
3. Defining analytical categories
4. Constructing a coding schedule
5. Piloting the coding schedule and checking reliability
6. Data-preparation and analysis.

Definition of the Research Problem

As stated at the end of Chapter 2, the research questions to be addressed are:

1. What news values drove coverage of the Garda whistle-blower controversies and how did they change over time?
2. What news frames were employed in media coverage of the Garda whistle-blower controversies and how did they change over time?

Selection of Media and Sample

Hansen (1998) states that it is rarely possible or desirable to analyse all media coverage of an issue and for practical reasons the media content needs to be selected and narrowed down. The media coverage of the Garda whistle-blower controversies continued over many years and generated extensive media coverage. Lexis Nexis was used to select the media content. The article was used as the unit of analysis.

The key search term used was "garda whistle-blower". Other possible search terms such as "Maurice McCabe", "penalty points" and "Garda Siochána" were dismissed as being less likely to return comprehensive results. The term "Maurice McCabe" returned articles referring to other people with the same name. It is also the case that while Maurice McCabe was first named in the *Sunday Times* in 2010, many outlets did not name him until much later. Using the search term "penalty points" would not have returned articles relating to other controversies that the whistle-blowers raised. The term "Garda Siochána" would have returned all articles referring to the activities of an Garda Siochána including those that do not relate to the whistle-blower controversies.

The first article returned by the search term "garda whistle-blower" was dated 2 February 2009 and appeared in the Irish Examiner and concerned alleged failures to properly investigate crime in Cavan. Maurice McCabe was based at Bailieborough Garda Station at the time. The number of articles in the period 2008-2012 was 69, some of which related to the setting up of the whistle-blower system in 2008 following the publication of the Morris Tribunal Report into Garda practices in Donegal.

The number of articles for all media returned by Lexis Nexis in the years 2013-2018 is in Table 3.1.

2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
97	1,322	156	408	1,266	590

Table 3.1: Number of articles across all media 2013-2018.

Coverage increased from a low of 97 articles in 2013 to a peak of 1,322 in 2014 with the next highest peak being in 2017 at 1,266 articles. At this point I decided to use the approach of Russell and Waisbord (2017) to establish the news flashpoints. News flashpoints are swells of coverage of specific events. I further analysed the coverage for 2014, 2016 and 2017, the three most coverage-intensive years, to establish in which months coverage peaked. I excluded 2018 from consideration, as the coverage during that year is mostly concerned with the aftermath of the controversies and the work of the Disclosures Tribunal which has yet to report on the substantive issues before it. The results are in Table 3.2.

	2014	2016	2017
January	106	10	17
February	266	9	393
March	367	2	90
April	76	11	47
May	238	155	53
June	40	22	48
July	46	7	114
August	27	3	12
September	47	9	87
October	17	119	24
November	39	41	276
December	53	20	105
Total:	1,322	408	1,266

Table 3.2: Number of articles across all media for 2014, 2016 and 2017 by month of publication.
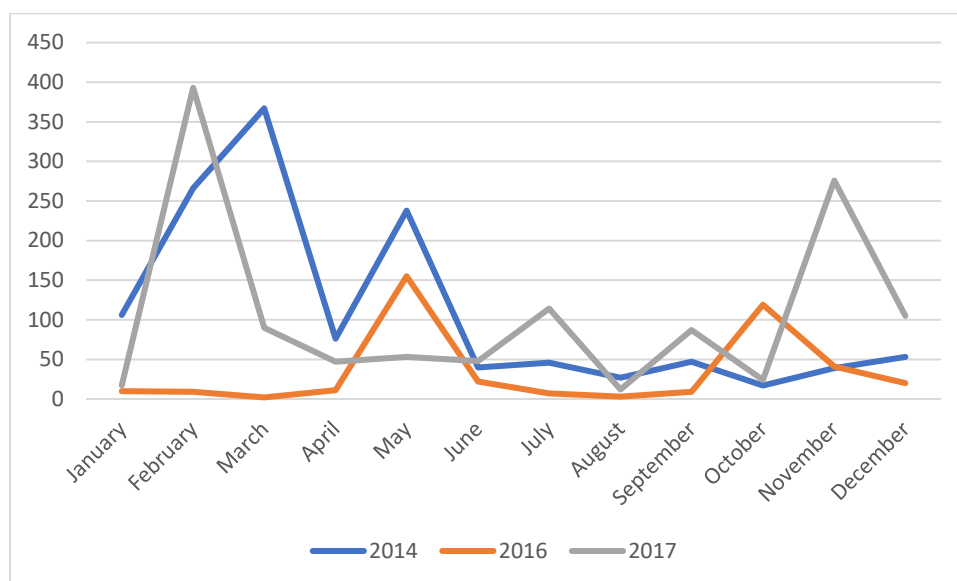
The data is presented graphically in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1: *Number of articles across all media for 2014, 2016 and 2017 by month of publication.*

Figure 3.1 shows that in 2014 news flashpoints occurred in the months February-May inclusive. The number of articles published in these months were 266, 367, 76 and 238, respectively. In 2016, the biggest flashpoint was in May when 155 articles were published. In 2017, the biggest flashpoints were in February (393) and November (276). I examined articles in Lexis Nexis to determine the possible causes of these flashpoints. This enabled me to compile a chronological list of the main events which caused the news flashpoints (see Appendix 1).

The period February-May 2014 coincided with the appearance of Garda Commissioner Martin Callinan and Sergeant McCabe at the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) towards the end of January 2014, a speech by Dr Leo Varadkar TD, Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport on 20 March 2014 and the resignation of Mr Alan Shatter[6] TD as Minister for Justice and Equality in May 2014. The involvement of the PAC in the controversies followed publication of a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General into abuses of the penalty points system in September 2013. The Garda Inspectorate report which found widespread abuse of the penalty points system was published in

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[6] Mr Shatter also served as Minister for Defence while he was Minister for Justice and Equality.

March 2014. Both reports confirmed the veracity of what the whistle-blowers had alleged. I decided that the first flashpoint would be from 20 January 2014 to 15 May 2014 (Flashpoint 1).

The month of May 2016 saw the publication of the O'Higgins Report. The O'Higgins Commission of Inquiry was set up to enquire into the allegations made by Sergeant McCabe. I decided that the second flashpoint would be from 1 May 2016 to 31 May 2016 (Flashpoint 2).

The news flashpoint in February 2017 coincided with the publication that false allegations of sex abuse had been made against Sergeant McCabe. The period I chose for the third flashpoint was 1 February 2017 to 28 February 2017 (Flashpoint 3). The fourth flashpoint coincided with the resignations of Ms Noreen O'Sullivan as Garda Commissioner and Ms Frances Fitzgerald as Minister for Justice and Equality. The period chosen was from 1 September 2017 to 30 November 2017 (Flashpoint 4).

These periods were chosen because they coincide with some of the most important events in the controversies.

I had intended to analyse coverage across several outlets including the *Irish Independent*, *The Irish Times*, *Irish Examiner*, *RTE News Now* and *thejournal.ie*. I ruled out *thejournal.ie* as there are no articles from this outlet on Lexis Nexis. Table 3.3 contains the number of articles for the remaining outlets for the flashpoint periods chosen.

Outlet:	*Irish Independent*	*The Irish Times*	*Irish Examiner*	*RTE News Now*	Total:
Flashpoint 1	134	131	105	40	410
Flashpoint 2	26	33	11	11	81
Flashpoint 3	59	56	19	25	159
Flashpoint 4	51	51	12	19	133
Total:	**270**	**271**	**147**	**95**	**783**

Table 3.3: Number of articles for selected news media for the chosen flashpoints.

This exercise still left an unmanageable number of articles for possible analysis. The total number of articles for the chosen outlets was 783 for the four flashpoint periods. The *Irish Independent* published 270 articles, *The Irish Times* 271, the *Irish Examiner* 147 and *RTE News Now* 95. The total number of articles published by all outlets in each news flashpoint identified was 410 in Flashpoint 1,

81 in Flashpoint 2, 159 in Flashpoint 3 and 133 in Flashpoint 4. The number of articles could only be made manageable by reducing the number of outlets whose articles would be analysed or reducing the number of news flashpoints. I was reluctant to reduce the number of flashpoints, as they coincide with some of the most important events in recent Irish history and omitting any of them would leave too much of a gap in the development of the coverage. I finally decided that I would concentrate on articles published by the *Irish Independent*.

The *Irish Independent* was chosen over other outlets for several reasons. Firstly, the *Irish Independent* has the highest circulation of any of the newspapers published in Ireland. In the period July-December 2017, the *Irish Independent* had average daily circulation of 90,107, *The Irish Times* had 61,049 and the *Irish Examiner* had 27,589 (NewsBrands Ireland, 2017). The *Irish Independent* also has a wider geographic and social class reach than the other newspapers and has a dedicated weekly farming supplement. The total number of articles published in the newspaper at 270 was reduced by the exclusion of letters, mentions in passing and colour pieces, leaving a total of 196 articles for analysis.

The *RTE News Now* website is not the main news delivery channel for *RTE*. Rather it appears to operate in a supporting role to the TV and radio channels. It has much less coverage of the whistle-blower controversies than the newspapers and the articles tend to be much shorter. For example, during flashpoint 3, the average length of an *RTE News Now* website article is 260 words, whereas the average for the *Irish Independent* in the same period is 516. This is not surprising. Kelsey Lucyk (2016), quoting Weinrich, Obendorf, Herder and Mayer, states that eye-tracking studies have found that web users read an average of 28% of words per page. Thus, the more words a web-based outlet uses, the less likely its message will be conveyed.

It would have been better to include multiple outlets in the analysis to enable comparisons to be made but, given the volume of coverage involved, such an exercise is beyond the space and time available for this research project.

Defining Analytical Categories
In his model for carrying out a content analysis Hansen (1998) states that there is no single answer as to what analytical categories should be used. However, he does describe the more common dimensions such as coder, name of medium, date of publication, length of article, classification and so on.

A coder and outlet identifier would normally be used, but as there is only one coder, the author, and one outlet, the *Irish Independent* these are unnecessary.

Article ID is the allocation of a sequential number (1….n) to each article for ease of identification during the analysis. Date, article length, author, headline, type of article and page were downloaded from Lexis Nexis to Excel and formatted for ease of analysis. An example of formatting required was the removal of certain delimiters (spaces and commas) used by Lexis Nexis and the splitting of data in certain fields and allocation to separate fields.

The values for author (by-line) are as downloaded from Lexis Nexis. Where an article had more than one author only the first-named author was retained in the dataset. This is to facilitate ease of analysis of this dimension.

Type of articles has the possible values: news, feature, opinion, editorial.

Source is included in a drop-down list in Excel containing the values. Possible values are: government, opposition, public official, legal, academic/commentator, garda, whistle-blower, enquiry/tribunal, journalist, trade union, other and unspecified.

Primary definer is recorded using the name and an indication of position or rank of the person. For example, when Mr Alan Shatter TD is speaking as Minister for Justice and Equality, the value entered is MinJ Shatter.

Stance refers to the tone of the text. Boydstun et al (2013) suggest the values 'Positive', 'Negative' and 'Neutral'. A positive tone is where the whistle-blowers are cast in a favourable light. A negative tone is where the whistle-blowers are cast in an unfavourable light. A neutral is where the whistle-blowers are portrayed using both positive and negative tones. The authors describe the 'Neutral' tone as containing both positive and negative portrayals that balance each other out, or the article does not appear to discuss the issue either positively or negatively. In the pilot, I came across one article that portrayed the whistle-blowers in both a positive and negative light. My preference is to use the value 'Mixed' for this portrayal and to use 'Neutral' where the article contains neither positive nor negative portrayals.

News values used are as defined by Galtung and Ruge (1965). These were enumerated in Chapter 2.

Framing as defined by Entman is to "…select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation." (Entman, 1993, p.52). In their article Guo, Holton and Jeong distinguish between generic, domestic and issue-specific frames (2012). Boydstun et al (2013) propose a policy frames codebook which is the nearest I could find that might be suitable for what the authors call "frame discovery" (Boydstun et al, 2013, p.1). While the present study is not concerned with a debate about the merits and de-merits of a particular policy proposal or the effectiveness of an existing policy, it does concern the implementation of public policy as decided by the Oireachtas.

The frames proposed by Boydstun et al (2013) are economic, capacity and resources, morality, fairness and equality, constitutionality and jurisprudence, policy prescription and evaluation, law and order and crime and justice, security and defence, health and safety, quality of life, cultural identity, public opinion, political, external regulation and reputation, and other. The authors state that researchers can chose to employ these categories or use issue-specific frames that can be categorised under the list of generic frames identified by the authors.

In the present case, I used a combination of generic and issue-specific frames. The frames I used for the pilot were moral/ethical, accountability, competence, political, conflict, health and safety, crime, governance, legal, crisis, equality and fairness, credibility and defensive. The frames 'accountability', 'competence' and 'governance' are issue-specific and could be categorised under the capacity and resources frame identified by Boydstun et al (2013). The 'crisis' frame does not fit neatly into any of the generic frames, but it became clear from an initial review of the media coverage that this was an appropriate frame to use in this instance. The 'defensive' category was used as it emerged during the examination of articles during the pilot that certain actors framed their positions in this way, especially when they were in imminent danger of losing their positions. For example, the terms 'innocent', 'guilty' and 'due process', which have criminal connotations were used where no criminal accusations were present.

During my initial review of the coverage it became clear that owing to the scale of the controversies and the number of actors it would be beneficial to include dominant and secondary frames to provide an additional dimension to the analysis.

The coding schedule is in Appendix 2.

Piloting the Coding Schedule and Checking Reliability

To construct the pilot, I chose 24 articles at random in proportion to the total number of articles in each news flashpoint period. During the construction of the pilot it became clear that the values for sources and frames were not comprehensive. Initially, the sources listed were government, opposition, garda, whistle-blower, other. The frames used for the pilot were morality, accountability, competence, political, conflict, health and safety, crime, governance, legal and crisis. I carried out a review of all articles to discover what additional sources and frames were appropriate.

In relation to sources, I found that legal, public official, academic/commentator, enquiry/tribunal and trade union should be added. It was also clear that in many articles the source was unclear or could only be guessed at or was unspecified. I included a value of unspecified to cover these articles. The initial and revised lists are in Table 3.4.

Pilot List of Sources	Revised List of Sources
Government	Government
Opposition	Opposition
Garda	Garda
Whistle-blower	Whistle-blower
Other	Other
	Academic/Commentator
	Enquiry/Tribunal
	Public Official
	Trade Union
	Legal
	Unspecified

Table 3.4: *Pilot List of Sources and Revised List of Sources.*

In relation to frames I found that equality and fairness, credibility, defensive, explanatory and conspiracy should be added. The initial and revised lists of frames are in Table 3.5.

Pilot List of Frames	Revised List of Frames
Moral/Ethical	Moral/Ethical
Accountability	Accountability
Competence	Competence
Political	Political
Conflict	Conflict
Health and Safety	Health and Safety
Crime	Crime
Governance	Governance
Legal	Legal
Crisis	Crisis
	Equality and Fairness
	Credibility
	Defensive
	Explanatory
	Conspiracy

Table 3.5: Initial List of Frames and Revised List of Frames.

Data Preparation and Analysis

Hansen (1998) recommends that data collected for content analysis should be entered in a computer data file and analysed using one of several computer programmes available for such purposes. Hansen references Microsoft Excel in this regard and this is the application used for the present project.

Lexis Nexis has a facility to download certain data fields to Excel. These are by-line (author), date, headline, length of article, publication, section (genre) and page number. The data required a considerable amount of cleaning to make it suitable for analysis using Excel tools. Each article was given a unique numeric identifier beginning with '1' using the fill tool. Additional column headings were added to facilitate the recording of the remaining variables contained in the coding schedule. Each of the 196 articles for analysis was examined and the required variables extracted and recorded in respect of each article. This enabled the complete dataset to be compiled.

The detailed analysis of the dataset is in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Results

The filtering process outlined in Chapter 3 left 196 articles from the *Irish Independent* for analysis. In relation to the news flashpoints, the distribution of articles is set out in Table 4.1.

Flashpoint	Period Covered	Number of Articles
Flashpoint 1	20 Jan 2014 – 15 May 2014	103
Flashpoint 2	1 May 2016 – 31 May 2016	21
Flashpoint 3	1 Feb 2017 – 28 Feb 2017	43
Flashpoint 4	1 Sep 2017 – 30 Nov 2017	29
Total:		**196**

Table 4.1: Number of Articles per News Flashpoint and Total Number of Articles.

Flashpoint 1 covering the period 20 January 2014 to 15 May 2014 had 102 articles published on the Garda whistle-blower controversies. Flashpoint 2 covering 1 May 2016 to 31 May 2016 had 21 articles. Flashpoint 3 from 1 February 2017 to 28 February 2017 had 43 articles and flashpoint 4 from 1 September 2017 to 30 November 2017 had 29.

The types, or genres of articles included in the analysis are editorial, feature, news and opinion. Table 4.2 contains details of the numbers of each article type by news flashpoint period.

	Flashpoint 1	Flashpoint 2	Flashpoint 3	Flashpoint 4	Total	Percent
Editorial	5	0	1	0	6	3%
Feature	8	0	2	0	9	5%
News	74	21	40	28	163	83%
Opinion	16	0	0	1	17	9%
Total:	**103**	**21**	**43**	**29**	**196**	

Table 4.2: Number of Articles by Type by News Flashpoint period.

The predominant article type was news, at 163 articles or 83% of the coverage, followed by opinion at 17 articles or 9%, features at 9 articles or 5%, and editorials at 6 articles or 3% of the coverage.

News Values

The news values that drove the *Irish Independent* coverage of the Garda whistle-blower controversies for all four news flashpoints were frequency, negativity, reference to elite persons, personification, continuity, threshold and unexpectedness. By far the most frequent news value was

reference to elite persons which was present in 178 articles. This is not surprising, given the status of persons referred to in the coverage. The main actors were Taoiseach Kenny, Taoiseach Varadkar, cabinet ministers, leaders of opposition parties and senior public officials, some of whom were well-known.

The second most frequently occurring news value was negativity which was present in 144 articles. This reflects the fact that the controversies related to matters and events concerning malpractice and poor performance in An Garda Siochána, along with allegations of corruption. Negativity was also present because the elites were often portrayed as lacking the will and competence to manage the crises effectively and for displaying arrogance, complacency and naivety. This was in the face of report after report which confirmed that what the whistle-blowers were alleging was largely true. For example, the Comptroller and Auditor General published his report on the 2012 public accounts in September 2013. This report supported the allegations made by the whistle-blowers in relation to the cancellation of penalty points, yet it was not until January 2015 that an independent overseer was appointed to monitor the system. The poor treatment of the whistle-blowers by the establishment, especially Sergeant McCabe was a major issue late in the coverage.

Threshold was present as a news value in 121 of the articles analysed. While the penalty points issue had been reported on in the media prior to 2014, the total number of articles found on Lexis Nexis for 2013 was 97 (see Table 3.1). The *Irish Independent* published eight articles in 2013. The most significant events in 2013 as far as coverage by the *Irish Independent* is concerned were the cancellation of penalty points incurred by the Garda Commissioner while on duty, the publication of the O'Mahoney report which found no evidence of corruption, the Road Safety Authority call for an independent investigation and the examination by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of evidence of penalty points abuses. The most interesting article was written by Philip Ryan and published on 11 June 2013. This is the article which reported the call by the RSA chair, Mr Gay Byrne for an independent investigation. It was also reported in the article that Transport Minister, Leo Varadkar had met with the whistle-blower and found him to be credible. It is of note that these same actors brought the controversy to the top of the political agenda in March 2014.

Galtung and Ruge (1965), using the metaphor of radio signals, define threshold as something which has a strong signal, or amplitude. It has to do with the size or importance of an event. Penalty points is an issue that effects thousands of people in different ways. The most important of these is road fatalities. The penalty points system was introduced in 2002 in an effort to reduce road fatalities and

injuries from road traffic accidents. According to the Road Safety Authority, the number of road fatalities was 640 in 1972. In 2002, the year the system was introduced there were 376 road fatalities. In 2018 there were 147 fatalities (Rsa.ie, 2018). In addition, 180,000 drivers incurred penalty points in 2018 for a variety of offences, including speeding (130,000). Incurring penalty points can lead to a driving ban and an increased insurance premium. Individual cases of penalty points cancellations were anonymously reported in the *Irish Independent*. These included cases where drivers had subsequently been involved in fatal accidents, and where relatives of Gardai, prominent individuals and people with the right connections had penalty points cancelled. In an opinion piece by Martina Devlin (Opinion Writer) published on 30 January 2014, it was reported that six members of Garda Siochána Ombudsman Commission (GSOC) had penalty points cancelled. GSOC was the body tasked by Minister for Justice and Equality, Alan Shatter, TD to investigate the controversy.

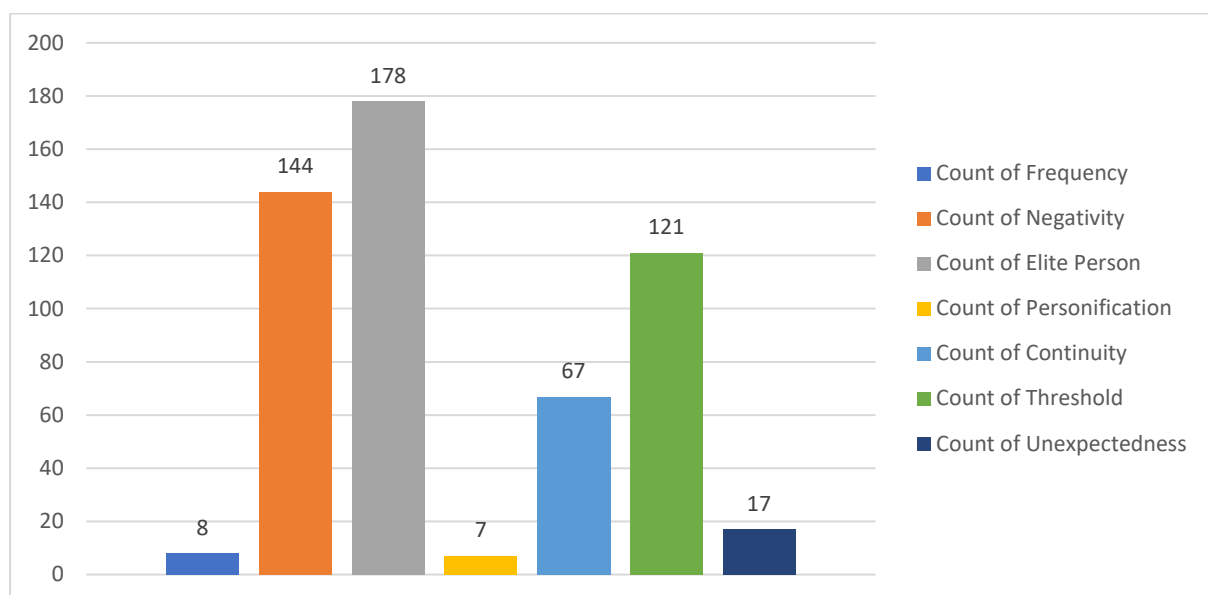The total number of instances of occurrence of news values is shown in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: *Total number of instances of occurrence of news values.*

The news value continuity was present in 67 of the articles analysed. Articles with continuity often appeared in clusters. For example, there were five articles with continuity on 25-26 February 2014. The first of these articles, on 25 February 2014, relates to whether former Minister for Justice and

Equality, Dermot Ahern, who had been a member of the previous government, knew about the allegations. On the same date, it was reported that the chair of the Road Safety Authority, Mr Gay Byrne had raised concerns following the publication of the O'Mahoney Report. This was reported previously on 11 June 2013. An opinion piece by Shane Coleman (*Newstalk* Presenter) was published in 25 February which stated that Minister for Justice and Equality, Alan Shatter, TD had brought trouble on himself and that his cabinet colleagues were either unable or unwilling to stop him. On 26 February an article was published reporting that former Minister for Justice and Equality, Dermot Ahern had been made aware of the claims by Sergeant McCabe. This followed a report the previous day that Minister for Finance, Michael Noonan, TD had said that the matters complained of had happened when Fianna Fáil was in office.

The news value unexpectedness was present in 17 of the articles analysed. One such article by Niall O'Connor (Political Correspondent) and John Downing (Political Correspondent) published on 29 January 2014 reported that Commissioner Callinan was furious at the decision of the PAC to hear evidence from Sergeant McCabe, and that this decision had been taken in the face of strong opposition from the Commissioner and Minister Shatter. On 30 January 2014 it was reported that doubts emerged about the appearance of Sergeant McCabe at the PAC. In the event, Sergeant McCabe did appear before the PAC in closed session.

The news values frequency and personification appeared relatively rarely, at 8 and 7, respectively. In relation to frequency this is to be expected. As shown in Table 3.1 the controversies received coverage over several years and was particularly intense in 2014 and 2017. However, there was a small number of events that chimed with the news cycle. One example was the reporting on 15 November 2017 of the retirement of Mr Noel Waters as secretary general of the Department of Justice and Equality at the time Labour TD, Alan Kelly started asking parliamentary questions about communications between Mr Waters and Commissioner O'Sullivan relating to the Commissioner's intention to challenge the credibility and motivation of Sergeant McCabe at the O'Higgins Commission of Investigation.

While several persons were named as benefiting from penalty points cancellations in the coverage, there was no elaboration as to their personal stories or reasons for the cancellation. The articles with personification as a news value tended to refer to persons who had been affected by the failure to properly investigate alleged crimes or malpractice in the Cavan/Monaghan Garda Division. One such story published on 12 April 2014 reported that a young woman who was allegedly sexually

assaulted as a child by a serving garda claimed the incident was covered up through a botched investigation. A further report published on 16 April 2014 contained extensive quotes from the woman, although she was not named.

Trend in News Values

I now propose to examine each news flashpoint period to see how the trend in news values developed as the story unfolded.

Flashpoint 1

Table 4.3 shows the occurrence of news values in the articles analysed for the period covered by the first news flashpoint from 20 January 2014 to 15 May 2014.

	January	February	March	April	May	Total
Frequency	1	2				**3**
Threshold	8	10	29	6	12	**65**
Unexpectedness	3	1	6		2	**12**
Personification			1	2	2	**5**
Negativity	11	16	23	2	13	**65**
Elite Person	10	24	35	5	16	**90**
Continuity		9	12	6	5	**32**
No. of Articles	12	25	40	8	18	**103**

Table 4.3: Occurrence of news values in the first news flashpoint.

The most frequently-occurring news values were references to elite person which was present in 90 (87%) of the 103 articles published in this period, negativity which was present in 65 (63%) of articles and threshold which was present in 65 (63%) of articles. The movement in trends over time is shown in Figure 4.2.
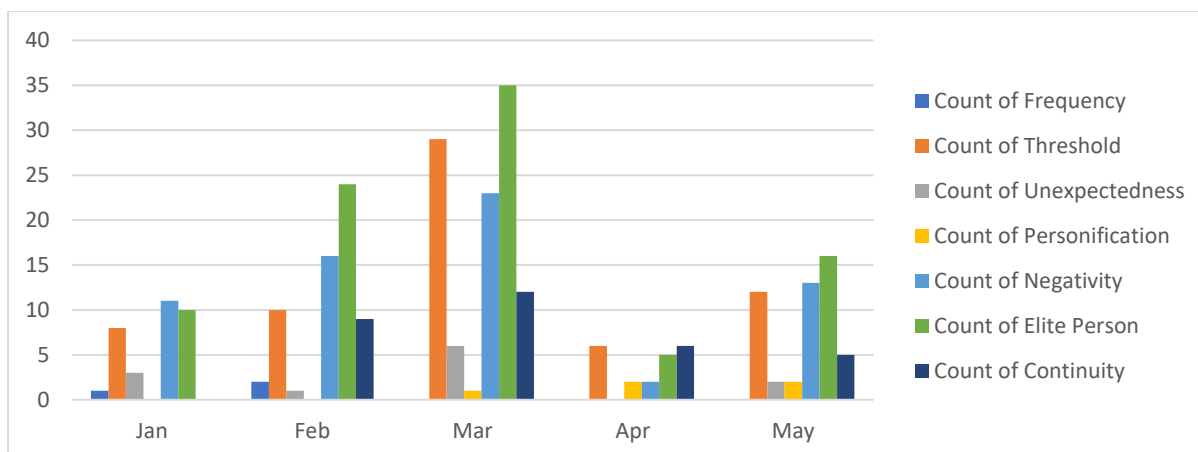
Figure 4.2: *Count of occurrence of news values in the first news flashpoint (20 Jan-15 May 2014).*

In January 2014 there was a fairly even distribution as between threshold, negativity and reference to elite persons as the dominant news values. Coverage in January 2014 was dominated by appearances at the PAC by Commissioner Callinan and Sergeant McCabe, details of reasons for penalty points cancellations, more revelations from the whistle-blowers, loss of revenue to the exchequer and an announcement by the Minister for Justice and Equality of a further investigation. Things changed markedly in February when negativity and reference to elite persons ranked much higher than threshold, with reference to elite persons dominating. Reference to elite persons appeared in 24 of the 25 articles published in February 2014.

The pattern of news values changed again in March 2014 when threshold and references to elite persons dominated with each appearing 29 and 35 times, respectively out of a total of 40 articles. Coverage in March was dominated by reportage of the involvement of Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, TD, in the controversy, criticism of the handling of events by the Minister for Justice and Equality, Alan Shatter, TD, the announcement by the Taoiseach of the Guerin Inquiry, robust Dáil exchanges involving Minister Shatter and the leader of the opposition, Micheál Martin, TD, and the retirement of Martin Callinan as Garda Commissioner.

April 2014 was a relatively quiet month with only 8 articles published. Threshold, reference to elite persons and continuity dominated as news values, accounting for 6, 5 and 6 articles, respectively. Coverage included the appointment of Deputy Commissioner, Noreen O'Sullivan as interim Commissioner, opinion pieces critical of Minister Shatter, reporting of an alleged sexual assault that was not properly investigated, and new allegations of Garda malpractice by Sergeant McCabe.

In May 2014, the dominant news values were reference to elite persons which appeared in 16 articles, negativity which appeared in 13 articles, and threshold which appeared in 12 articles. The coverage in May was dominated by the publication of the Guerin Report and the resignation of Alan Shatter, TD as Minister for Justice and Equality.

The dominant news value in the first news flashpoint was reference to elite persons which appeared in 90 of the 103 articles analysed. Negativity was the dominant news value in January 2014. In February 2014, negativity outranked threshold, and in March 2014 the positions were reversed. In April 2014, threshold and continuity dominated. Reference to elite persons, negativity and threshold were the top-ranked news value, respectively, in May 2014.

 Flashpoint 2

Table 4.4 shows the occurrence of news values in the articles analysed for the period covered by the second news flashpoint from 1 May – 31 May 2016.

	1-31 May 2016
Frequency	1
Threshold	15
Unexpectedness	0
Personification	2
Negativity	18
Elite Person	21
Continuity	6
No. of Articles	21

Table 4.4: Occurrence of news values in the second news flashpoint.

The news values reference to elite persons, negativity and threshold were the dominant news values during the second news flashpoint at 21, 18 and 15, respectively. The news value reference to elite persons was present in all the articles analysed in the period. The publication of the report of the O'Higgins Commission of Investigation was the main news event in May 2016. The coverage in this period was dominated by reports that the O'Higgins Report vindicated former Garda Commissioner, Martin Callinan and former Minister for Justice and Equality, Alan Shatter, TD. The O'Higgins Report was also reported to have stated that the whistle-blowers acted out of genuine and legitimate concerns. During this period, leaks of transcripts were reported which brought to light the fact that counsel for Commissioner O'Sullivan had sought to challenge the integrity and credibility of Sergeant McCabe at the O'Higgins Commission hearings. An article by Colette Browne (Opinion Writer)

published on 24 May 2016 was critical of the way Minister for Justice and Equality, Frances Fitzgerald, TD handled the controversy over the Commissioner's legal strategy at the O'Higgins Commission of Investigation. The trend over time is shown in Figure 4.3.
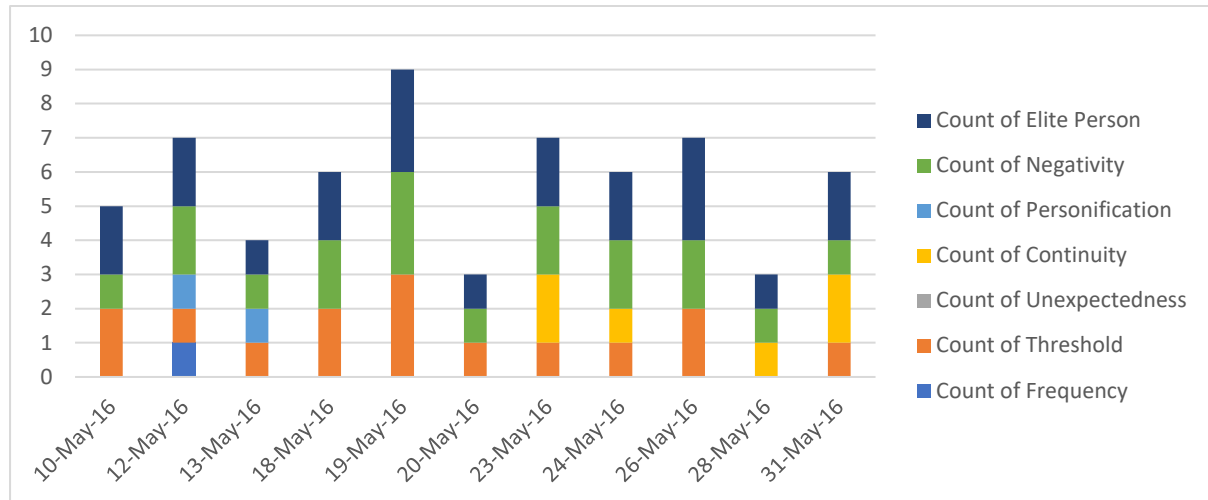

Figure 4.3: *Count of occurrence of news values in the second news flashpoint (1-31 May 2016).*

It can be seen from Figure 4.3 that reference to elite persons, negativity and threshold were present in all the articles published in May 2016. Personification is present in just two articles published on 12 and 13 May 2016. These articles which were written by Paul Williams[7] (Special Correspondent), who took the view that both Alan Shatter and Martin Callinan had been vindicated by the O'Higgins Commission and refers to the adverse personal impacts of the loss of career on them both. Continuity is present in the coverage from 23-31 May and includes articles which develop issues raised by the O'Higgins Commission Report including the legal strategy adopted by Commissioner O'Sullivan to challenge the credibility and motivation of Sergeant McCabe.

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[7] Paul Williams describes himself as an award-winning journalist, author, broadcaster and criminologist in his LinkedIn profile. (Accessed: 25 July 2019.)

Table 4.5 shows the occurrence of news values in the articles analysed for the period covered by the third news flashpoint from 1 February 2017 – 28 February 2017.

	1-28 February 2017
Frequency	
Threshold	26
Unexpectedness	1
Personification	
Negativity	34
Elite Person	40
Continuity	18
No. of Articles	43

Table 4.5: *Occurrence of news values in the third news flashpoint.*

References to elite persons and negativity were the dominant news values in coverage in the third news flashpoint from 1-28 February 2017, at 40 and 34, respectively. Threshold, at 26 articles and continuity, at 18 were also significant drivers of coverage in this period. Coverage was dominated by reports of allegations of a smear campaign, including false allegations of sex abuse, against Sergeant McCabe and the developing political crisis that led to the setting up of the Charleton Tribunal and the beginning of moves to remove Enda Kenny as Taoiseach. The articles in which continuity was present mainly related to reporting on the political crisis and the poor handling of the issues by the government. Some of the articles also foretold the demise of Taoiseach Kenny. Mandy Johnston (Opinion Writer) wrote in an article published on 11 February 2017 that on-the-record briefings for journalists provide a lot of news content but much more is provided off the record. It is possible that off-the-record briefings contributed to continuity being present in so many articles in the third news flashpoint. The trend over time is shown in Figure 4.4.
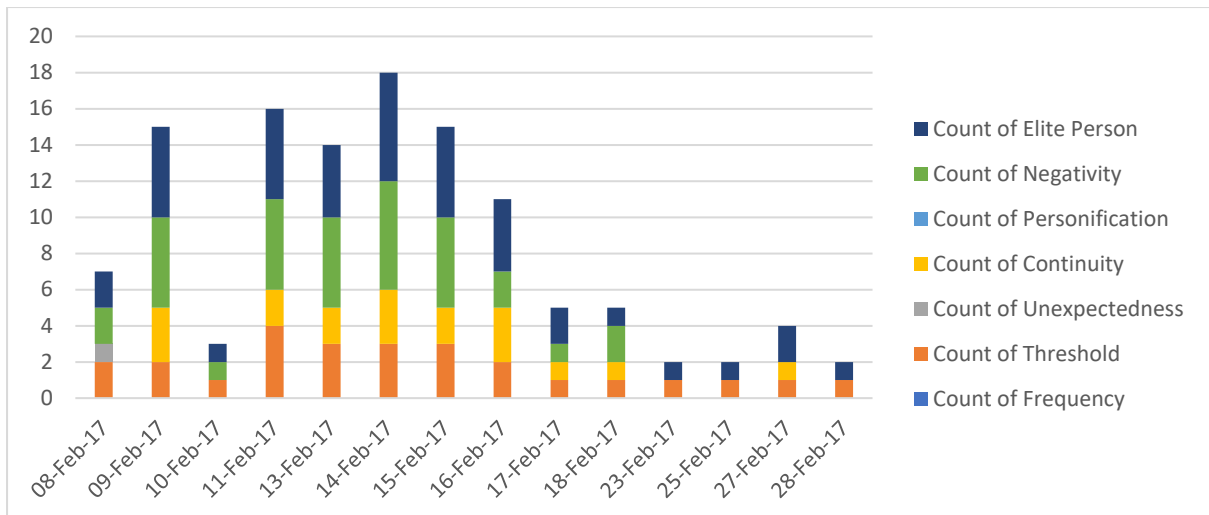
Table 4.4: *Count of occurrence of news values in the third news flashpoint (1-28 February 2017).*

The news values reference to elite persons, negativity and threshold were the dominant drivers of coverage during February 2017. Continuity was also present in a substantial number of articles. Unexpectedness was present in one of the articles published on 8 February which relates to allegations of a smear campaign against Sergeant McCabe. This article also contains reference to the fact that the former head of the Garda Press Office, Superintendent Dave Taylor who was suspended from duty and was reported to have been one of the main players in the controversy. Superintendent Taylor had been arrested in May 2015 in an unrelated matter. I searched Lexis Nexis for articles relating to this. The first article I found relating to the arrest of Superintendent Taylor was written by Paul Williams and published in the *Irish Independent* on 14 May 2016, a full year after Taylor had been arrested. Negativity is not present as a news value in the articles published from 23-28 February 2017. These articles relate to Taoiseach Kenny's move to calm matters politically by indicating his intention to deal with the leadership issue after his visit to the US for St Patrick's Day, and statements by ministers in support of Commissioner O'Sullivan.

Table 4.6 shows the occurrence of news values in the articles analysed for the period covered by the fourth news flashpoint from 1 May – 31 May 2016.

	September	November	Total
Frequency	1	3	**4**
Threshold	3	12	**15**
Unexpectedness	2	2	**4**
Personification			
Negativity	10	17	**27**
Elite Person	10	17	**27**
Continuity	8	3	**11**
No. of Articles	12	17	**29**

Table 4.6: *Occurrence of news values in the third news flashpoint.*

The news values reference to elite persons and negativity had equal ranking in the fourth news flashpoint, at 27 instances each. Threshold was present in 15 articles and continuity 11. The news coverage in this period began on 5 September when a member of the Garda Inspectorate was reported as having said that Commissioner O'Sullivan faced difficulties with her own team. This was taken as a criticism of the management team of An Garda Siochána. This follows an earlier report where the chairperson of the Garda Inspectorate, Ms Josephine Feehily expressed qualified confidence in the Commissioner. Commissioner O'Sullivan resigned on 10 September 2017 and this was reported by the *Irish Independent* on 11 September 2017. This is one of the articles where unexpectedness is present. A second article on that day reported on the turmoil in government and the crisis in An Garda Siochána following the announcement, given that it was reported that the government had strongly resisted opposition calls for her to be removed. This article was also driven by unexpectedness. Most of the remaining reportage dealt with what Minister Frances Fitzgerald[8], TD knew about Commissioner O'Sullivan's legal strategy at the O'Higgins Commission to discredit Sergeant McCabe, and speculation about the threat to the stability of the government and a possible

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[8] Frances Fitzgerald, TD was moved from the Department of Justice and Equality and became Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when Dr Leo Varadkar, TD became Taoiseach in June 2017.

general election. Ms Fitzgerald resigned as Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation on 28 November 2017. The trend over time in the fourth news flashpoint is shown in Figure 4.5.
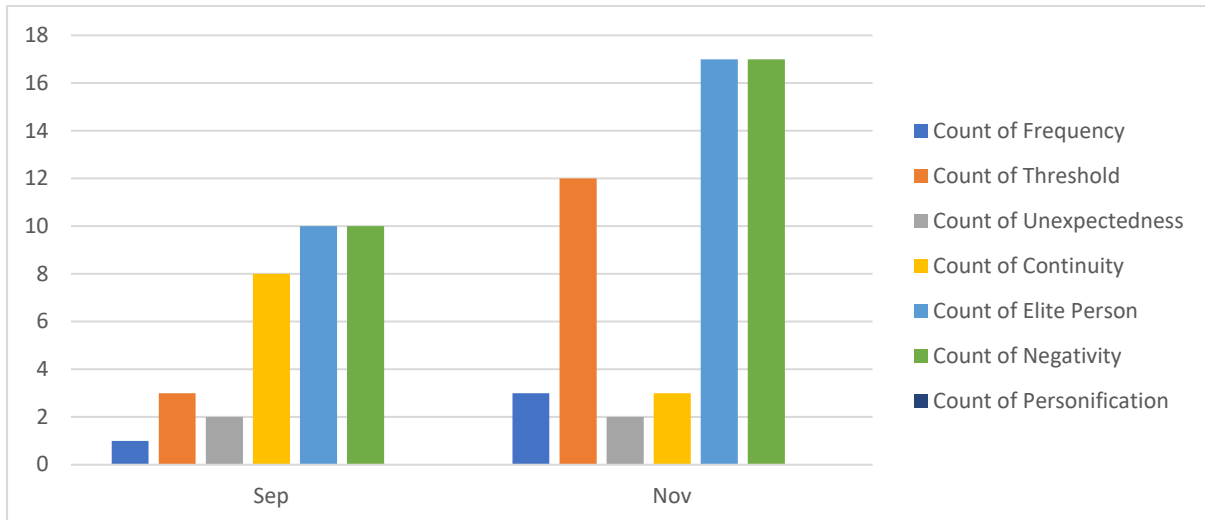

Figure 4.5: Occurrence of news values in the fourth news flashpoint (1 Sep-30 Nov 2017).

As with other news flashpoints, reference to elite persons and negativity were the dominant drivers of coverage during September-November 2017. Five articles were published in October 2017, but these related to separate issues or contained only mentions in passing. Continuity was the next ranking news value in September 2017. These articles relate to the aftermath of the retirement of Commissioner O'Sullivan. Threshold was the third-ranking news value in November 2014. The articles published in November relate to the developing political crisis which threatened to bring down the government towards the end of November 2017.

Frames in the Coverage

The frames identified in the pilot are listed in Table 3.5 in Chapter 3. As stated in Chapter 3, I analysed both dominant and secondary frames to provide an additional dimension to the analysis. The frames used were those proposed by Boydstun et al (2013) with the addition of my own issue-specific frames that emerged during the pilot described in Chapter 3. The distribution of dominant frames used across the 196 articles analysed is shown in Figure 4.6.
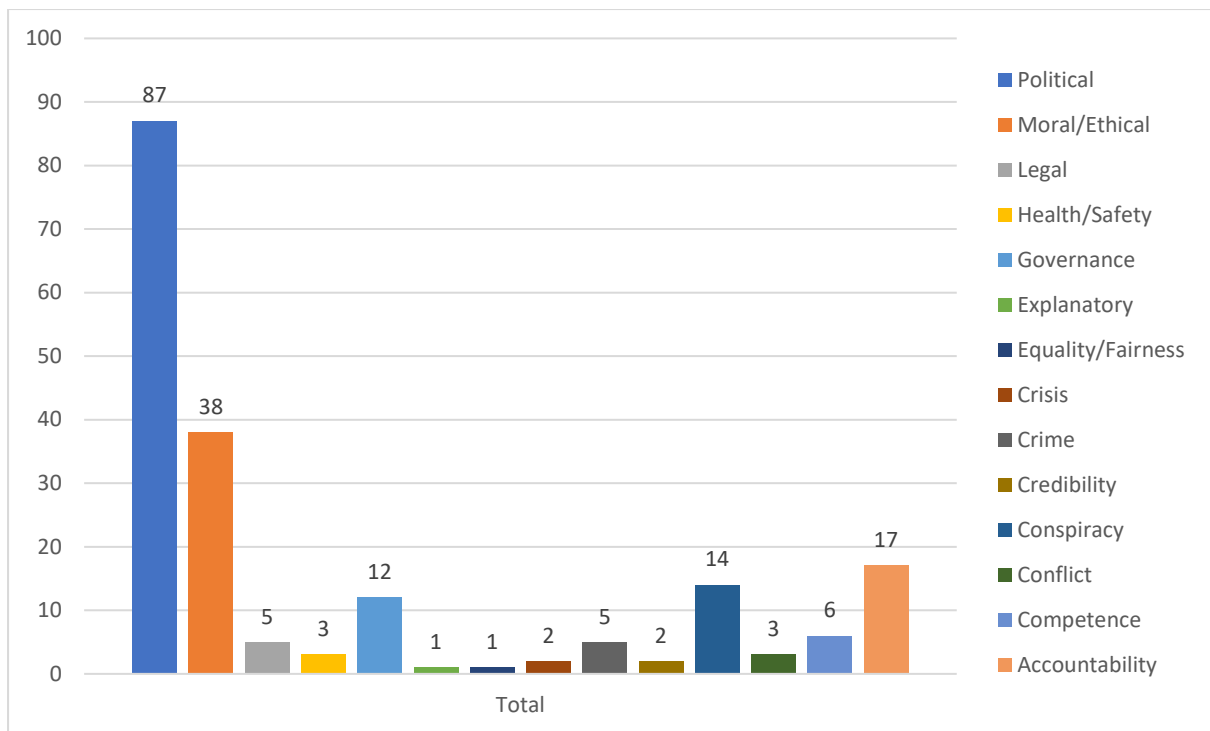
Figure 4.6: *Distribution of count of dominant frames across all articles analysed.*

Figure 4.10 shows that the most frequently-appearing dominant frame was the political frame which was present in 87 articles, or 44% of the total. The moral/ethical frame ranked second at 38 articles, or 19% of the total. The next highest-ranking frames were accountability (17), conspiracy (14) and governance (12). Competence was the dominant frame in 6 articles, legal and crime in 5, health and safety and conflict in 3, crisis and credibility in 2, with explanatory and equality and fairness in 1 article each.

The distribution of secondary frames used in the articles analysed is shown in Figure 4.7.
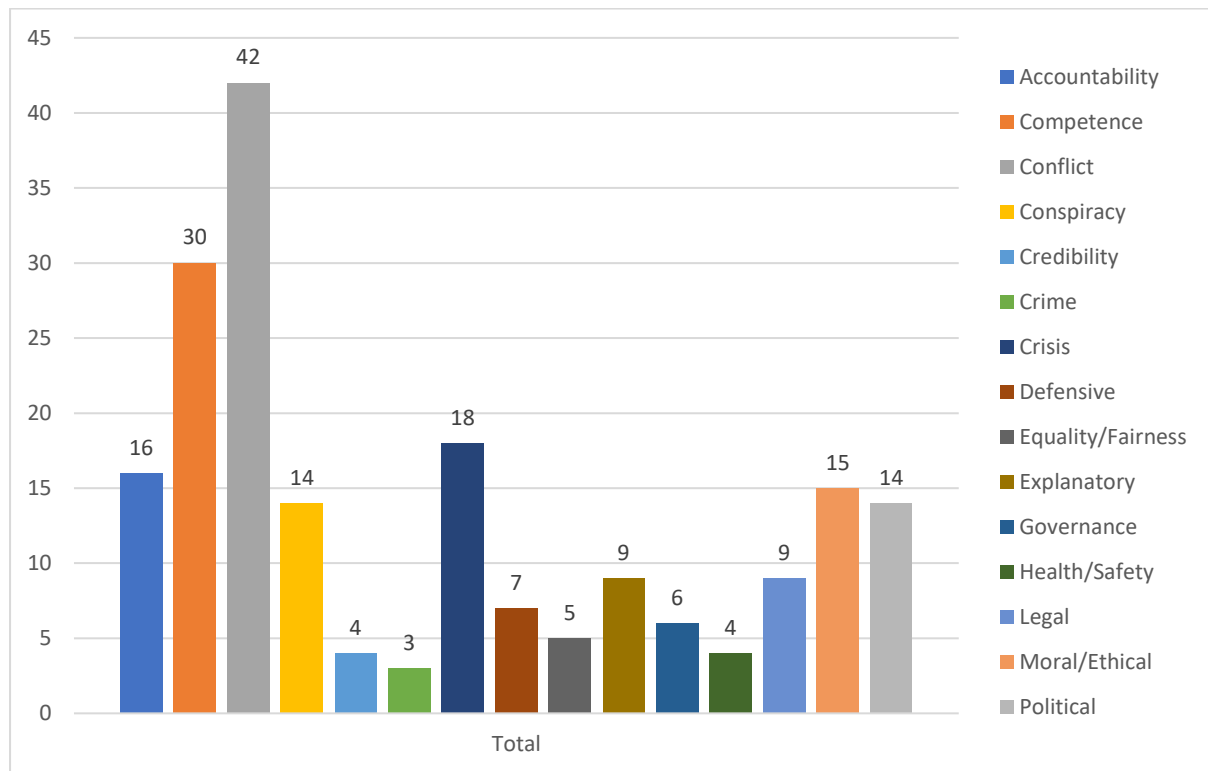
Figure 4.7: *Distribution of count of secondary frames across all articles analysed.*

The first thing to note is that while the distribution of dominant frames is heavily skewed towards political and moral/ethical, the distribution of secondary frames is not as polarised. The more nuanced character of secondary framing demonstrates the value of analysing coverage for secondary frames.

Conflict was the most common secondary frame where it appeared in 42 articles, or 21% of the total articles analysed. This was followed by competence at 30 (15%), crisis at 18 (9%) and accountability at 16 (8%) as the next highest-ranking frames. The moral/ethical frame ranked next at 15 articles, followed by political (14), conspiracy (14), explanatory (9), legal (9), defensive (7), governance (6), equality and fairness (5), credibility (4), health and safety (4) and crime (3).

Sources of Frames

As noted in Chapter 2, Scheufele (1999) identified the main sources of frames as journalist-centred, the organisational routines and political orientation of the news outlet, and outside influencers such as political actors, official authorities, interest groups and elites.

In relation to journalist-centred framing, it is noteworthy that 91 (46%) of the articles published by the *Irish Independent* during the four news flashpoints were written by political staff. Kevin Doyle, who was the author of 30 of the articles, was News Editor and, from September 2015, Group Political Editor. Fionnan Sheahan, who was the author of 17 of the articles, was Group Political Editor and, from January 2015 Editor of the *Irish Independent*. A further 22 articles were written by Shane Phelan, Public Affairs Editor. Taking political and public affairs together, a total of 114 articles were written by these staff, or 58% of the total. It seems to be the case that the editorial board of the *Irish Independent* saw the whistle-blower controversies as primarily political and assigned it to its political staff. This would help explain the high ranking of the political frame as shown in Figure 4.10. A list of writers, roles and number of articles is in Appendix 3.

The influence of the political orientation of the *Irish Independent* on the framing of the controversies is less obvious. According to Power, Haynes and Devereux (2016), the political orientation of the *Irish Independent* is centre-right. The Irish political spectrum operates across a rather narrow bandwidth, especially when it comes to larger political parties, and ranges predominantly from the centre-right to the centre-left. The Fine Gael party was in government throughout the controversies. It was in coalition with the Labour Party from 2011-2016 and with the Independent Alliance, underpinned by a confidence and supply agreement with Fianna Fáil, from 2016. The Fine Gael party is widely viewed as being of the centre-right. The Labour Party is seen as being of the centre-left. The Independent Alliance is made up of individuals who coalesce for the purpose of being in government. It comprises members of differing political persuasions and does not have an identifiable political stance.

The influence of sources and primary definers on framing will be examined next. Figure 4.8 and Figure 4.9 give an overview of the sources associated with the dominant frame across all articles.
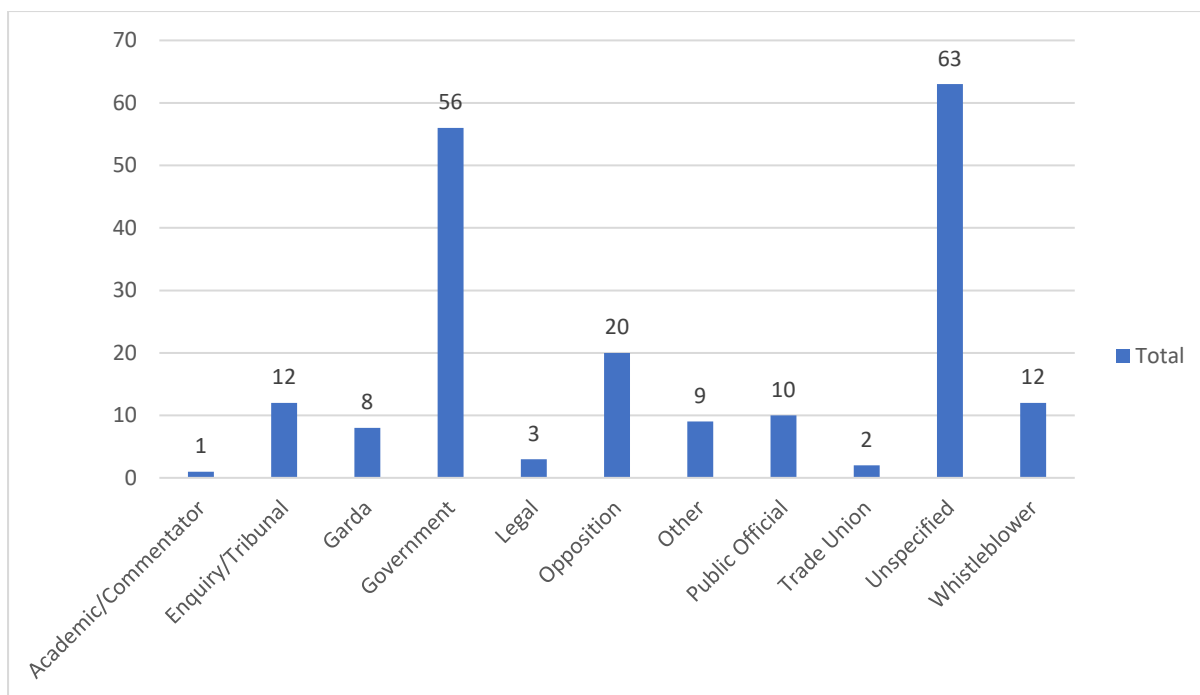
Figure 4.8: *Total number of dominant frames in articles by source.*

Figure 4.8 shows that the most common source for material was the government, at 56 articles, or 29% of the total. This was followed by the opposition at 20 articles, enquiry/tribunal 12, whistle-blower 12, public official 10, other 9, Garda 8, legal 3, trade union 2 and academic/commentator 1.

The striking thing is the number if articles where no source was specified. This category represents the largest number of articles at 63, or 32% of the total. I checked to see whether there was any pattern in the proportion of unspecified sources as the story moved through the four flashpoints. I found that 27% of articles used unspecified sources in flashpoint 1, 33% in flashpoint 2, 35% in flashpoint 3 and 45% in flashpoint 4. Flashpoint 4 was the period of greatest crisis for the government when a motion of no confidence tabled for late November 2017 threatened to bring down the government and was only averted by the resignation of Frances Fitzgerald, TD as Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation. I examined the 13 articles published during news flashpoint 4 that had unspecified sources. Nine of the articles were published in the aftermath of the retirement of Noreen O'Sullivan as Garda Commissioner. Four of the articles referred to "informed sources", "early signals from government", "feeling among government backbenchers" and "feeling in Government Buildings". Other articles included a timeline of events, references to other Garda scandals and reform, a description of the accountability processes still to be faced by Ms O'Sullivan, and a report that the head of human resources of An Garda Siochána had expressed

concern about continued access by Ms O'Sullivan to the Garda legal team. There was one opinion piece.

Of the four articles published in the lead up to the resignation of Frances Fitzgerald with an unspecified source one article set out a summary of events, and two articles had anonymous political sources. There was one opinion piece that did not quote sources.

What is also striking about this period of coverage is the complete absence of government sources in the aftermath of the retirement of Ms O'Sullivan. An article written by Shane Phelan published on 11 September 2017 referred to a sense of government surprise and shock at O'Sullivan's departure. An article by the same author published on 13 September 2017 relates that the government was fortunate in the manner of O'Sullivan's departure, and that a major problem had been removed without any blame attaching to the government. The government did not emerge again as a source until 22 November 2017 when its very existence began to be threatened.

The total number of primary definers identified in the analysis was 38. Table 4.8 contains details of the most significant primary definers and the number of articles associated with them over the entire period of the coverage analysed.

Primary Definer	No. of Articles
Taoiseach Varadkar	13
Taoiseach Kenny	12
Minister Shatter	8
Minister Fitzgerald	8
Sean Guerin, SC	8
Sergeant McCabe	7
M Martin, TD, opposition leader	7
Commissioner O'Sullivan	4
J McGuinness, PAC chair	4
Minister Zappone	4
Garda J Wilson	3

Table 4.8: *Primary definers and number of articles.*

Dr Leo Varadkar, as Taoiseach and minister was the most common primary definer at 13 articles. He was followed by Enda Kenny as Taoiseach at 12, Minister Shatter 8, Minister Fitzgerald 8, Sean Guerin, SC 8, Sergeant McCabe 7, Micheál Martin 7, Commissioner O'Sullivan 4, John McGuinness 4,

Minister Zappone 4 and Garda Wilson 3. This is what would be expected according to journalistic logic, with the most frequent primary definers being the highest-ranking persons. It also points to the seriousness of the controversies that the highest-ranking political figures are the most frequent primary definers. It is noteworthy that Commissioner Callinan did not appear as a primary definer.
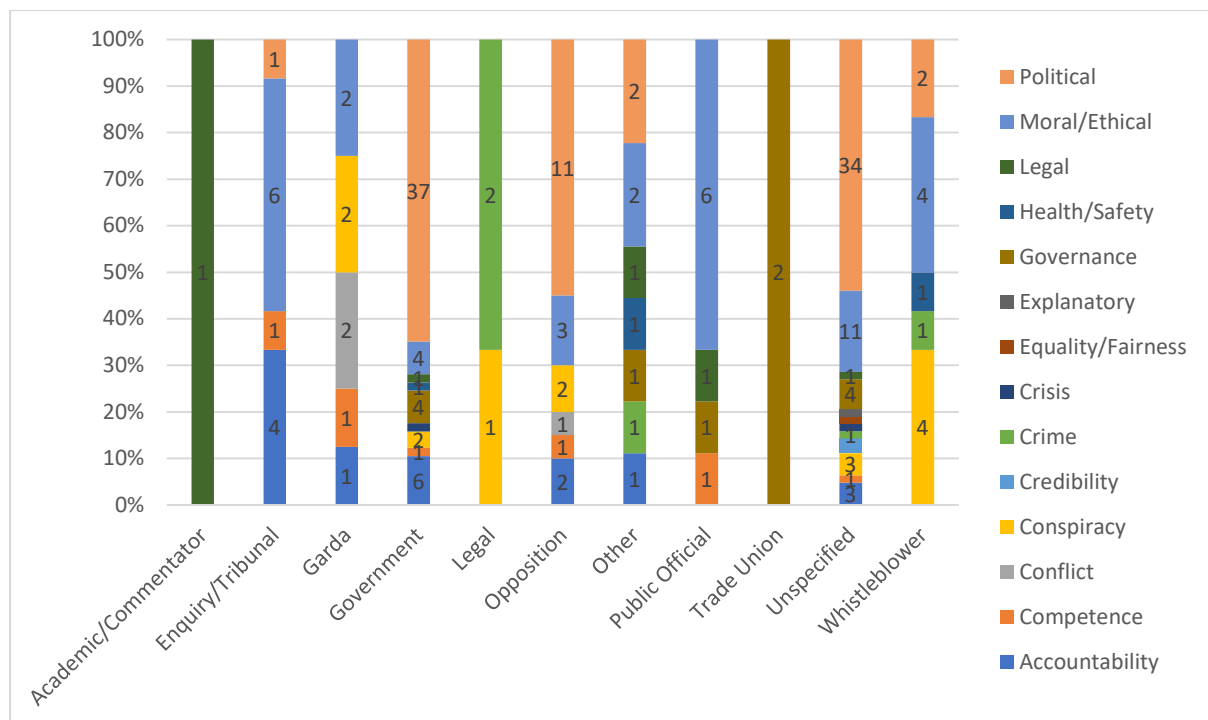

Figure 4.9: *Total number of articles analysed by dominant frame and source (100% stacked column).*

The breakdown of articles by source in Figure 4.8 is further analysed by frame type in Figure 4.9. As was shown in Figure 4.8, the number of articles where the government (56), unspecified (63) and opposition (20) were the sources account for 139 of the 196 articles analysed, representing 71% of the total. When government, unspecified and opposition are sources, the most frequently-occurring dominant frame is political. These sources account for 37, 34 and 11 instances of the political frame, respectively, giving a total of 82 articles, or 42% of the total.

I now turn attention to an examination of secondary frames as they appear in relation to dominant frames. As was shown in Figure 4.7, the highest-ranking secondary frames were conflict,

competence, crisis and accountability. Figure 4.10 shows the count of dominant frames (columns) as they relate to secondary frames (*X* axis) for all articles analysed.
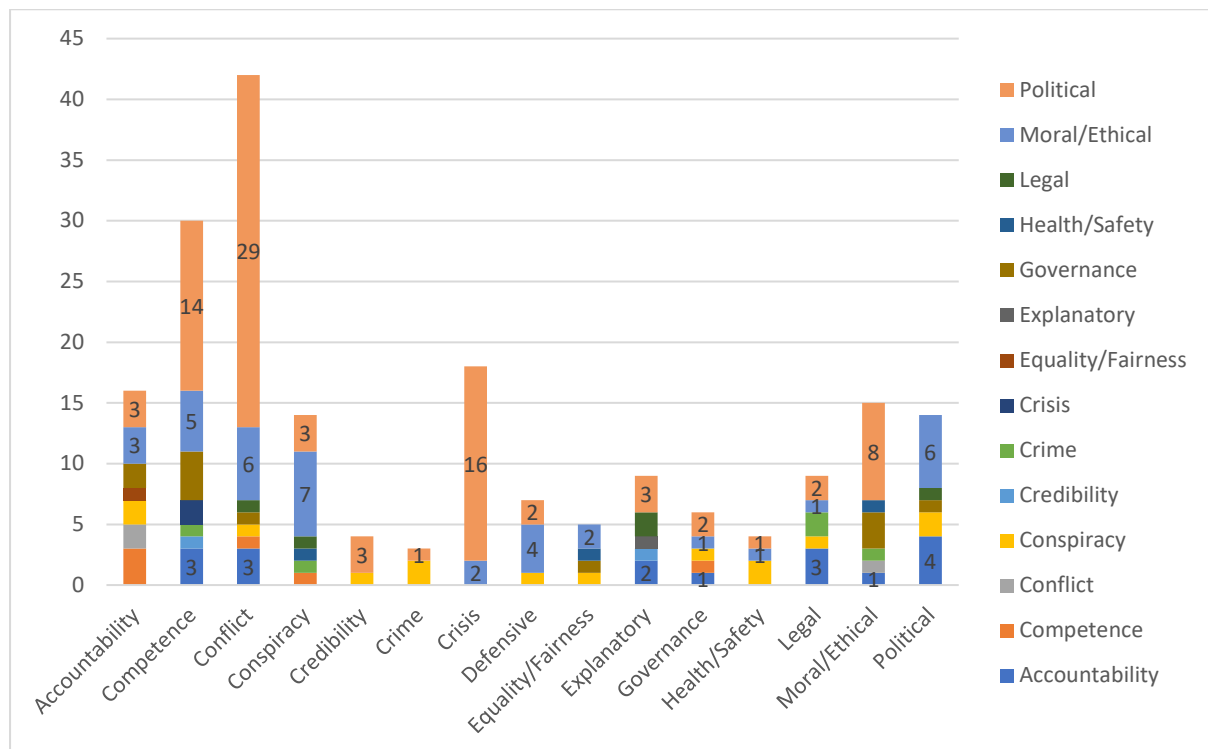

Figure 4.10: *Count of dominant frames as they relate to secondary frames.*

As was shown in Figure 4.6, the most frequently-occurring dominant frames were political (87 articles) and moral/ethical (38 articles). Figure 4.10 shows that the relationship of the political frame as dominant frame to secondary frames is quite concentrated on conflict (29 articles), crisis (16 articles), competence (14 articles) and moral/ethical (8 articles). Put another way, these four secondary frames are present in 67 of the 87 articles that have political as the dominant frame, or 77% of the total. Political conflict was a recurring theme of the coverage with conflict between government parties and opposition parties, conflict between Labour and Fine Gael when they were in government up to 2016, and conflict between Fine Gael ministers. Examples of this in the coverage include an article by Niall O'Connor (Political Correspondent) published on 21 March 2014 which reported that Ministers Varadkar and Shatter had fallen out over the government's handling of the penalty points controversy.

This was followed by an article by Fionnan Sheahan published on 22 March 2014 where it was reported that Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, TD publicly warned ministers to stop raising concerns in public

and to raise them at cabinet meetings only. The same article reported several Labour Party ministers as calling for Commissioner Callinan to withdraw his reference to Sergeant McCabe as "disgusting" at the PAC the previous January. An article by Kevin Doyle published on 16 February 2017 reported that three ministers, Leo Varadkar, Simon Coveney and Simon Harris had spoken at a Fine Gael party meeting of the need to be prepared for an election and that Dr Varadkar warned of losing its reputation as the party of law and order and integrity in public office. These interventions were interpreted by unnamed sources quoted in the article as an attack on the Taoiseach.

Moral/ethical as a dominant frame relates to conspiracy (7 articles), political (6 articles), conflict (6 articles) and competence (5 articles) as secondary frames. These relationships account for 24 of the 38 articles where moral/ethical is the dominant frame, or 63% of the total.

This points to the conclusion that much of the coverage was framed in terms of the sense of the inability or unwillingness of the government and the administration to grasp the gravity of the situation, to provide effective political and moral leadership, and to competently address the failures which had been exposed.

Trends in Framing

I will now examine trends in framing over time for each of the four news flashpoints. Figure 4.11 shows the distribution over time of the dominant frames in the first news flashpoint (20 Jan-15 May 2014).
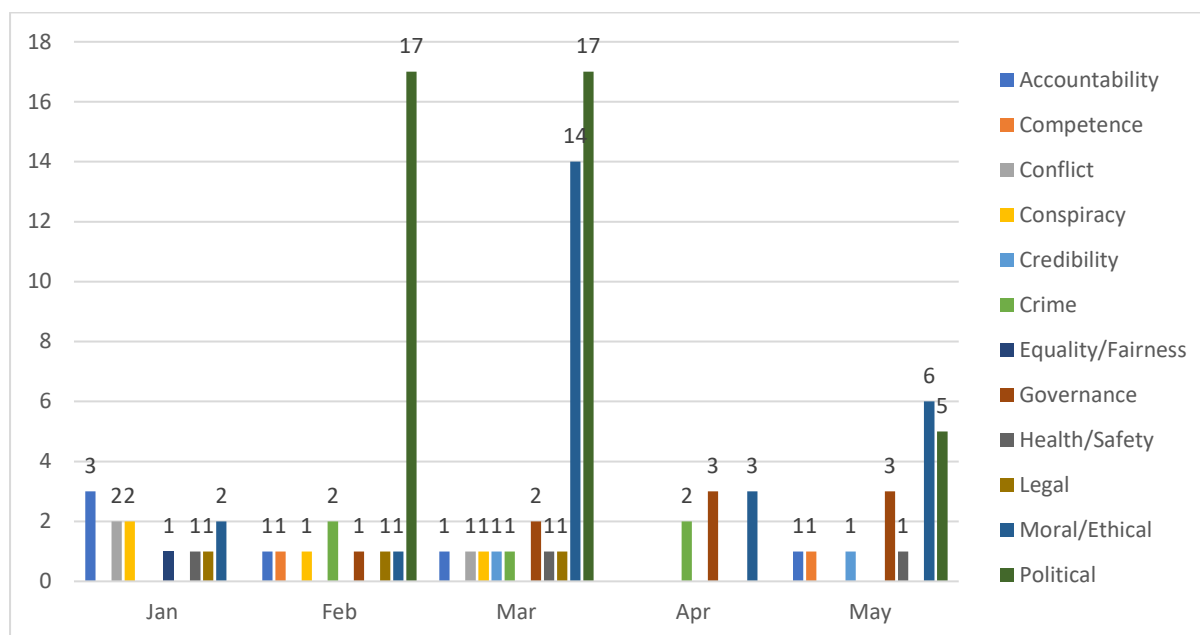

Table 4.11: *Count of distribution of dominant frames in the first news flashpoint (20 Jan-15 May 2014).*

The coverage in January 2014 (20 Jan-31 Jan) was mainly concerned with the appearance of Commissioner Callinan and Sergeant McCabe at the PAC. While the PAC is part of the political process, the main function of the committee is to oversee the probity and correctness of public spending and mainly hears evidence from public officials rather than politicians. The main frame in this period was accountability (3 articles) followed by conflict, conspiracy and moral/ethical (2 articles each). Matters turned political in February 2014 with 17 articles in the political frame that month. This was as a result of an intervention by Minister Varadkar, who was reported in an article published on 4 February 2014 to have said that GSOC should have been asked to investigate matters a year previously. Taoiseach Kenny became the subject of coverage in an article published on 13 February 2014 in relation to the comments allegedly made by the Confidential Recipient, Oliver Connolly, SC to Sergeant McCabe to the effect that Minister Shatter would go after him. Coverage in

this period also related to the handling of the controversies by Alan Shatter, TD, Minister for Justice and Equality.

The coverage during the month of March 2014 had 17 political frames and 14 moral/ethical frames. The coverage included the intervention of Leo Varadkar, TD, Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when he characterised the whistle-blowers as "distinguished" and a subsequent report about a falling out among ministers. This was the month during which Martin Callinan retired as Garda Commissioner and Minister Shatter apologised to the whistle-blowers in the Dáil. The moral/ethical frame was present in coverage of the behaviour of certain individuals, including the refusal of Commissioner Callinan to apologise and criticism of the government for its handling of the controversies.

Coverage during April 2014 was relatively muted. The main frames in the coverage were governance (3 articles), moral/ethical (3 articles) and crime (2 articles). Articles covered proposed reforms, new allegations from Sergeant McCabe, and allegations from a woman who alleged she had been sexually assaulted by a serving garda as a child and that the matter had not been properly investigated.

In May 2014, the coverage was mostly framed by moral/ethical (6 articles), political (5 articles) and governance (3 articles). The main topics were the criticism of the handling of the controversies by Minister Shatter, his resignation as Minister for Justice and Equality and assessments of his career. Martina Devlin wrote an article published on 10 May 2014 in which it was reported that Sergeant McCabe's wife, Ms Lorraine McCabe, had contacted Minister Shatter about an alleged death threat to Sergeant McCabe. The writer criticised the minister's response as formal, legalistic and evasive.

Figure 4.12 shows the distribution over time of the dominant frames in the second news flashpoint (1-31 May 2016).
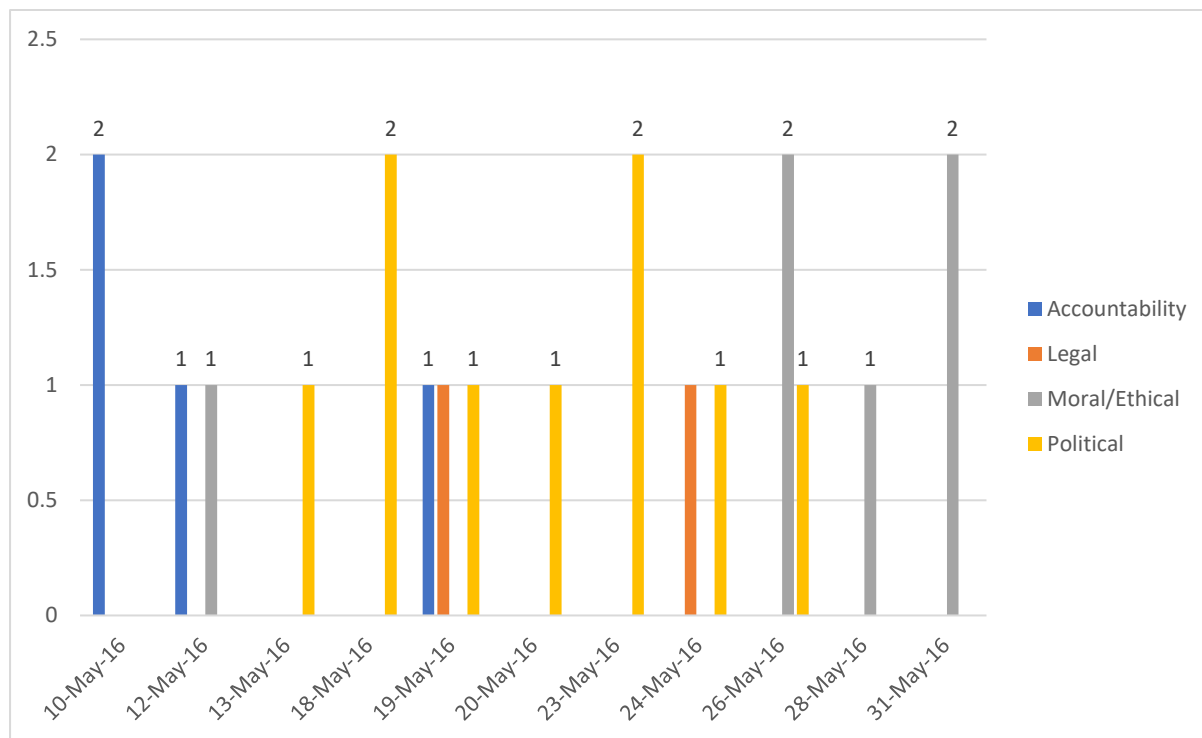

Table 4.12: *Count of distribution of dominant frames in the second news flashpoint (1-31 May 2016).*

The period covered by the second news flashpoint was concerned with the publication of the O'Higgins Commission Report and the political reaction to it. It is of note that only four frames appeared in the coverage in the period. This was the period in which details of the legal strategy to challenge Sergeant McCabe's motivation and credibility emerged. Coverage was also critical of Minister Fitzgerald's handling of the controversy.

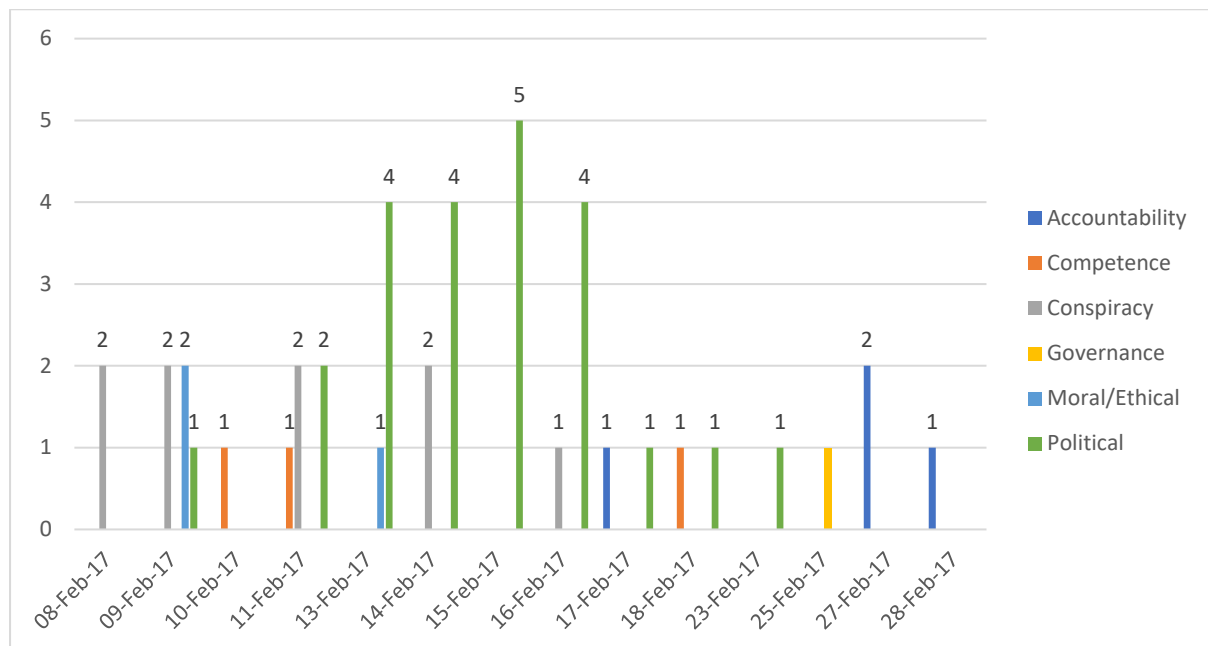Figure 4.13 shows the distribution over time of the dominant frames in the third news flashpoint (1-28 February 2017).

Table 4.13: *Count of distribution of dominant frames in the third news flashpoint (1-28 February 2017).*

The focus of coverage by the *Irish Independent* during February 2017 was the making of false allegations of sex abuse against Sergeant McCabe. Twenty-three out of a total of forty-three articles published in February 2017 were framed as political. The most coverage-intensive period was from 13-16 February, most of which was concerned with what Taoiseach Kenny and Ministers Fitzgerald and Zappone knew about the sex abuse allegations. The conspiracy frame also appeared frequently, especially at the beginning of February when the allegations were first reported. Conspiracy appeared in 9 of the articles analysed. This gave way to the political frame in the middle of the month as the story began to revolve around the Taoiseach and ministers. This was also when Taoiseach Kenny's position came under threat. The coverage towards the last days of February centred on the establishment of the Charleton Tribunal and the accountability frame entered the discourse.

Figure 4.14 shows the distribution over time of the dominant frames in the fourth news flashpoint (1 September 2017-30 November 2017).
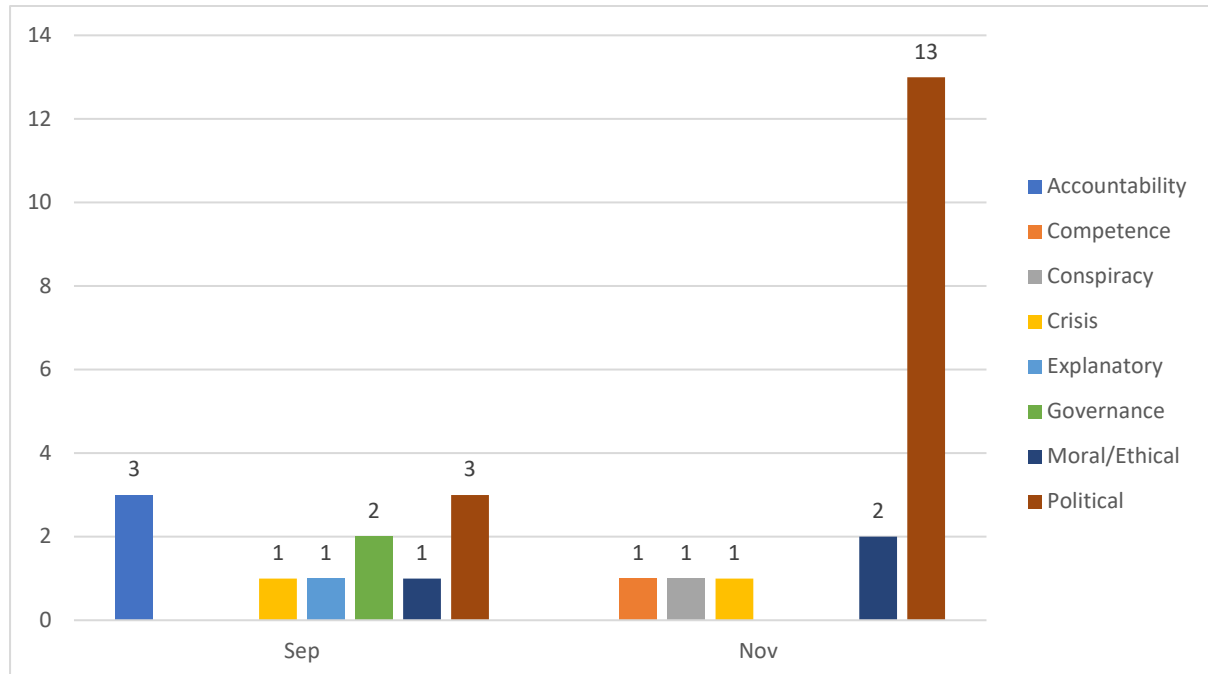

Table 4.14: Count of distribution of dominant frames in the fourth news flashpoint (1 Sep-30 Nov 2017).

The main events in the fourth news flashpoint period was the retirement of Noreen O'Sullivan as Garda Commissioner on 10 September 2017 and the resignation of Frances Fitzgerald, TD as Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation towards the end of November 2017. Of the 28 articles analysed in the period, 16 had political as the dominant frame, or 55% of the total. This is a most interesting period of coverage when considered in conjunction with framing sources. As stated earlier, the aftermath of the retirement of Ms O'Sullivan was notable for its absence of political sources in the coverage. The three articles published in September with a political frame had unspecified sources and unspecified primary definers. It is reasonable conclude that the source of the frames in these articles was journalistic. In an article published on 11 September 2017, John Downing reported that the government had invested a great deal of their political credibility in Ms O'Sullivan in the face of ongoing revelations and pressure from the opposition parties.

Looking at the coverage in November, the government was the source in 5 articles and opposition parties in 4. The source in a further 4 articles was unspecified. The primary definers amongst the

government sources were Taoiseach Varadkar and Frances Fitzgerald, TD. The fact that the Taoiseach and Tánaiste were the only primary definers on the government side, and the fact that the Taoiseach continued to back Ms Fitzgerald right up to the day of her resignation is a remarkable display of public and media discipline on the part of the government. This is especially so given that its continuation in office was under severe threat. This contrasts with the coverage in the first, second and third news flashpoints when there were reports of cabinet dysfunction and open defiance of Taoiseach Kenny by ministers which undermined his authority and led, eventually, to his departure from office.

Sentiment Towards the Whistle-blowers

I will now examine how the sentiment or stance – whether mixed, negative, neutral or positive - toward the whistle-blowers was framed in the coverage. Taking all the articles analysed, 111 (56%) were neutral, 62 (32%) were positive, 14 (7%) were negative and 9 (5%) were mixed. The majority of articles were either neutral or positive towards the whistle-blowers, representing 88% of the total.

An examination of stance by source and over time was carried out. Figure 4.15 shows the number of articles by stance for each article source.
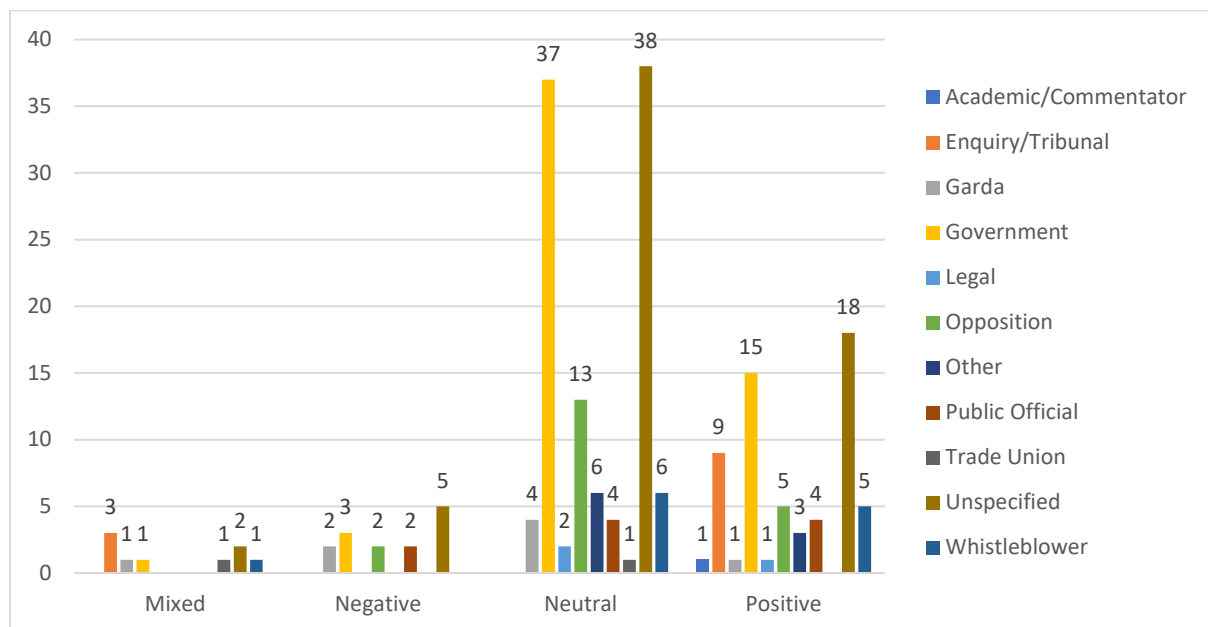

Table 4.15: _Count of articles by stance for each source._

As has been shown previously, there were many articles where the source was unspecified. In the case of identified sources, Figure 4.15 shows that where the government was the source, only 3 articles were negative, with 37 articles neutral and 15 articles positive. This is almost mirrored by the stance in the articles with an unspecified source where neutral and positive stances accounted for 38 and 18 articles, respectively. It is interesting that government sources would frame the whistle-blowers with predominantly neutral and positive stances, given the amount of difficulty the controversies caused for the government. While the government was slow to come to grips with the issues, it would appear it found the whistle-blowers to be credible for the most part.
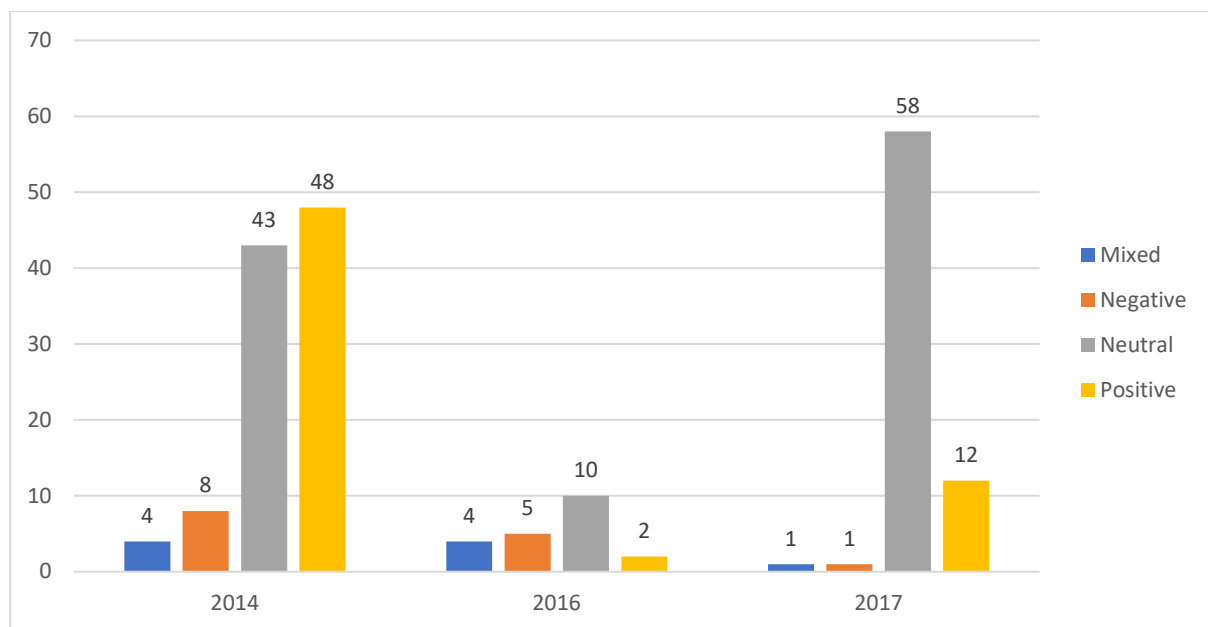
Table 4.16 shows the distribution of stance over time.

Table 4.16: *Distribution of stance over time.*

The period of the first news flashpoint (20 Jan-15 May 2014) was the only period where the majority of articles had a positive portrayal of the whistle-blowers, at 48. In the coverage in the third (1-28 Feb 2017) and fourth (1 Sep-30 Nov 2017) news flashpoints in 2017, the predominant stance was neutral at 58 articles, with only 12 portraying the whistle-blowers positively. The first news flashpoint was when Minister Varadkar described the whistle-blowers as "distinguished", Martin Callinan retired as Garda Commissioner and Minister Shatter apologised to the whistle-blowers and subsequently resigned as Minister for Justice and Equality. The credibility of the whistle-blowers had by then been established in the public sphere and there was no longer a need for any interest group to frame them. In the coverage that followed, their *bona fides* was accepted and the coverage

moved on to focus on other actors. This approach prevailed even in the face of revelations of a smear campaign against Sergeant McCabe and the legal strategy to challenge his credibility and motivation at the O'Higgins Commission of Investigation. In the light of this, it is difficult to see what purpose attempts to undermine Sergeant McCabe at the O'Higgins Commission could have served.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

My first observations are that I found the methodology for content analysis as proposed by Hansen (1998) to be very useful. Lexis Nexis is a great source of raw material for newspaper articles and the ability to download certain data to Excel saves a lot of time and effort. Excel is a very powerful tool for the recording, cleaning and analysis of data. The carrying out of a pilot as proof of concept is especially important, as it helps to narrow down the number of news values present in the articles to be analysed and is a great way of establishing that the frames identified are comprehensive.

It is appropriate at this juncture to look again at the research questions to see how they might be answered. The research questions are:

3. What news values drove media coverage of the Garda whistle-blower controversies and how did they change over time?
4. What news frames were employed in media coverage of the Garda whistle-blower controversies and how did they change over time?

I will address the questions in order.

It is appropriate, firstly, to enumerate the controversies that were either the subject of whistle-blowing or arose in response to disclosures by the whistle-blowers:

1. Failure to properly investigate alleged serious crimes in the Cavan/Monaghan Garda District.
2. Abuse of the penalty points system by senior gardai.
3. Financial irregularities in the Garda Training College.
4. Falsification of driver breath test statistics.
5. Allegations of an orchestrated smear campaign against Sergeant McCabe.
6. Allegations of a threat to the life of Sergeant McCabe.
7. Allegations of bullying and harassment of Sergeant McCabe.
8. Bungling in Tusla which resulted in the creation of false records of sex abuse by Sergeant McCabe.
9. Erroneous motoring offence convictions.
10. The legal strategy to discredit Sergeant McCabe at the O'Higgins Commission of Investigation.
11. Falsification and deletion of Garda records to hide dereliction of duty.

12. Attempts to implicate Sergeant McCabe in the disappearance of a laptop which was evidence in an investigation.

13. Attempts to blame Sergeant McCabe for the release of a person on bail who subsequently murdered Sylvia Roche Kelly.

News Values

Reference to elite persons, negativity and threshold were the most frequently-occurring news values across all 196 articles analysed. Reference to elite persons occurred in 178, articles or 91% of the total. This is not surprising, given that the controversies implicated many individuals in top positions in the Irish political, policing and administrative spheres and resulted, either directly or indirectly, in the retirements and resignations of many elite persons. The list of retirements and resignations included a Taoiseach, two Ministers for Justice and Equality, two Garda Commissioners and two secretaries general of the Department of Justice and Equality.

Negativity was the next most frequently-occurring news value which was present in 144 articles, or 73% of the total. It is clear from the list of controversies set out above that there were a lot of negative events and it is to be expected that negativity would feature prominently as a news value in the coverage. Other drivers of negativity were the emergence of political infighting among the leadership of the government and the failure of the government to deal with the issues promptly and effectively.

Threshold was present in 121 articles, or 62% of the total. This was a big news story, or rather a series of related stories that were shocking in and of themselves. This is evidenced by the intensity of the coverage over a long period of time. The total number of articles found on Lexis Nexis using the search term "garda whistle-blower" from 2013-2018 was 3,839 (Table 3.1). An Garda Siochána is charged with keeping communities safe, protecting the security of the State and bringing offenders to justice. They are given powers unavailable to others. They can stop, search, detain and question individuals. When the proper exercise of these functions and powers is in question, this is news.

Other news values appearing in the coverage were continuity (67 articles), unexpectedness (17 articles), frequency (8 articles) and personification (7 articles). Galtung and Ruge (1965) define continuity as a news story that continues to be defined as news partly to justify its initial categorisation as news, partly because of inertia and partly because what was unexpected has become familiar. In the case of the Garda whistle-blowers, the *Irish Independent* allocated

substantial resources to the story as evidenced by the number of journalists assigned to the story and the seniority of the personnel. I would also suggest that off-the-record briefings may have alerted the newspaper that there was more to come, and it had an interest in keeping the story alive in anticipation of further revelations and events. In respect of the latter, there were many investigations and reports from official sources.

Table 5.1 sets out details of the occurrence and percentage of news values over the course of the coverage under analysis.

	Flashpoint 1		Flashpoint 2		Flashpoint 3		Flashpoint 4		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Elite Person	90	87	21	100	40	93	27	93	178	91
Negativity	65	63	18	86	34	79	27	93	144	73
Threshold	65	63	15	71	26	60	15	52	121	62
Continuity	32	31	6	29	18	42	11	38	67	34
Unexpectedness	12	12	0	0	1	2	4	14	17	9
Personification	5	5	2	9	0	0	0	0	7	3
Frequency	3	3	1	5	0	0	4	14	8	4
No. of Articles	103		21		43		29		196	

Table 5.1: Number of occurrences of news values over the course of the coverage under analysis.

Reference to elite person, negativity and threshold were the dominant drivers of coverage over the four news flashpoint periods. Reference to elite persons was the highest-ranking news value in the early coverage but there was a convergence with negativity at the end. This reflects the growing seriousness of the crisis, leading almost to the collapse of the government, and the negative consequences of the inability of the government to deal with the controversies.

Frames in the Coverage
As was shown in Chapter 4, dominant frames were quite polarised around political and moral/ethical frames, which between them accounted for 64% of the articles analysed. The distribution of secondary frames was less polarised. While conflict and competence accounted for 37% of the secondary frames, crisis, accountability, moral/ethical and political were also prominent.

Sources and primary definers were dominated by government and governmental figures. The government accounted for 56 article sources, or 28% of all articles analysed, and a member of the government was the primary definer in 45 articles. It was also noted in Chapter 4 that in 63 articles

the source was unspecified. This represents a substantial 32% of articles in the study. The question arises as to why there would be such a high proportion of articles with unattributed sources. Articles with unspecified sources accounted for 34 political frames. This was not much lower than where the government was the source, at 37 articles. This would suggest that many of the unspecified sources were, in fact, political. This could be expected, given the high political drama generated by the controversies and the reluctance of individuals for their names to appear in print at times of crisis.

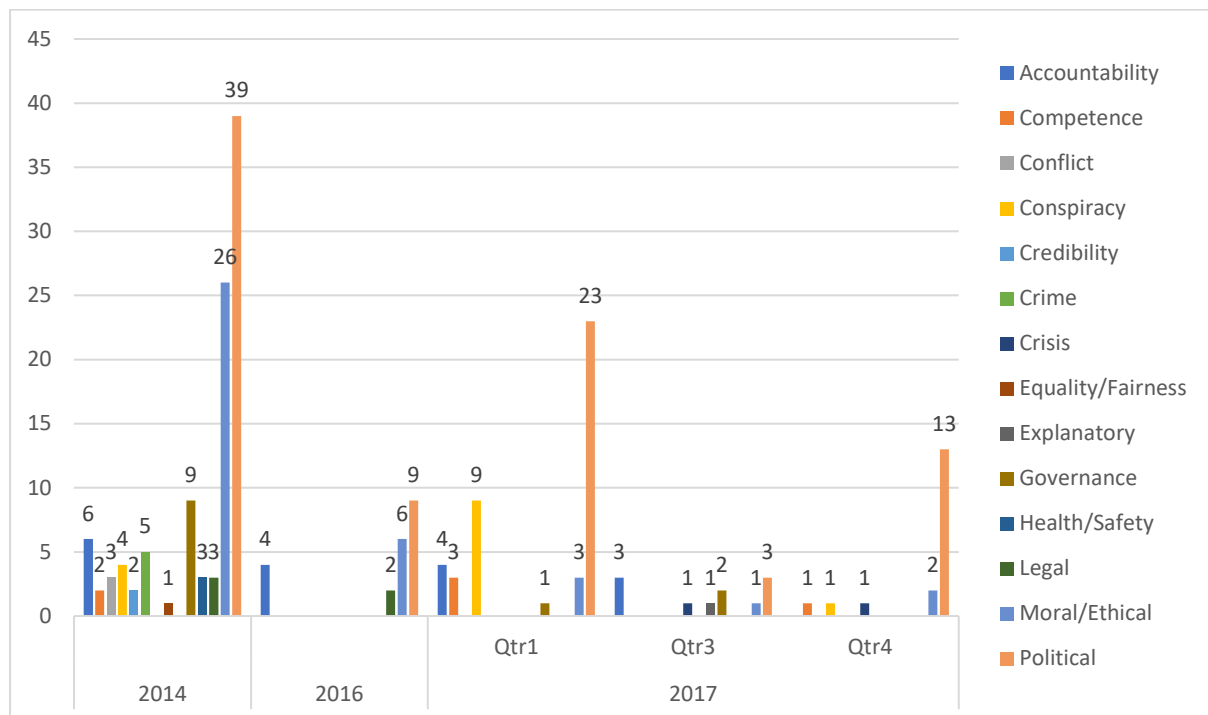Figure 5.1 shows the trend in occurrence of dominant frames over the four news flashpoint periods.

Figure 5.1: *Occurrence of dominant frames over the four news flashpoint periods.*

The first and second news flashpoints occurred in 2014 and 2016. The third news flashpoint was in Qtr1, 2017 and the fourth news flashpoint in Qtr3 and Qtr4, 2017. The political frame was the highest-ranking of all frames. It appeared in 38% of articles in news flashpoint 1, 43% in flashpoint 2, 53% in flashpoint 3 and 55% in flashpoint 4. It is noteworthy that the moral/ethical frame ranked high in news flashpoint 1, but not in later periods. The actions, inactions and behaviours of individuals were considered important in the first news flashpoint period but became less so as retirements and resignations took their toll on actors. The developing political crisis of later flashpoints may have crowded out other frames, including the moral/ethical frame.

Areas for Further Study

Constraints of time and space combined with the volume of coverage prevented me from researching the coverage in the wider Irish and international media. Further studies could widen the scope to encompass print, online, broadcast and international coverage of the controversies. There is also potential for a study of social media interactions relating to the controversies,

According to Power, Haynes and Devereux (Power at al, 2016) most Irish newspapers occupy the liberal-pluralist, centre and centre-right points on the ideological spectrum. It would be interesting to see a study that explored why this is the case.

Other possible areas for further study include an examination of why certain sources are not identified in the whistle-blower coverage in the Irish Independent, how the journalists framed the articles, what were the main outside influences on framing and how readers received the frames.

Public Policy Implications

The main lesson of the sorry saga is that crises in public policy must be dealt with swiftly and effectively and with appropriate moral authority and resolve. The time span from the retirement of Martin Callinan as Garda Commissioner in March 2014 to the resignation of Frances Fitzgerald as Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation in November 2017 was inordinately long and prolonged the suffering of well-intentioned individuals. It also did enormous damage to An Garda Siochána and the political system in general. The response of the government to a crisis needs to be properly planned and executed effectively. The key message for the government and the leadership of An Garda Siochána is that much of the damage was self-inflicted and this could have been avoided.

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APPENDIX 1

Garda whistle-blower chronology of main events:

Date	Event
15 May 2013	O'Mahony Report published
1 Oct 2013	C&AG Report on Fixed Charge Notice (penalty points) cancellations
23 Jan 2014	Martin Callanan evidence to Public Accounts Committee
30 Jan 2014	Maurice McCabe evidence to Public Accounts Committee
19 Feb 2014	Confidential Recipient Oliver Connolly sacked by Alan Shatter
26 Feb 2014	Taoiseach announces Guerin Inquiry
12 Mar 2014	GSOC Report on Fixed Charge Notice cancellations
20 Mar 2014	Varadkar Speech to Road Safety Conference
25 Mar 2014	Garda Commissioner Martin Callinan resigns
7 May 2014	Justice Minister Alan Shatter resigns
9 May 2014	Guerin Report published
6 Feb 2015	O'Higgins Commission established (Cavan/Monaghan policing)
11 May 2016	O'Higgins Report published
13 May 2016	Efforts to impugn McCabe at O'Higgins Commission reported in media
9 Feb 2017	False sex abuse allegations against McCabe reported in media, incl Primetime
13 Feb 2017	McCabes issue press release
17 Feb 2017	Charlton Tribunal established (smear campaign against Maurice McCabe and Harrison allegations)
19 May 2017	Charlton 1st Interim Report (procedural)
10 Sep 2017	Garda Commissioner Noreen O'Sullivan resigns
28 Nov 2017	Former Justice Minister, now Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation Frances Fitzgerald resigns
30 Nov 2017	Charlton 2nd Interim Report (Harrison module)

APPENDIX 2

Coding Schedule:

Code all articles downloaded form Nexis. The variables downloaded from Nexis are Author, Date, Headline, Length (wordcount), Type of article and Page in publication.

Variable 1: Date
The date is as downloaded from Nexis subsequently formatted as DD-MMM-YY.

Variable 2: Article ID
The article ID is a sequential number beginning with 1. This was inserted using the fill handle in Excel in Column B.

Variable 3: Length
The length (wordcount) is as downloaded from Nexis.

Variable 4: Author
This was downloaded from Nexis using the Excel download format. If an article has more than on author, only the name occurring first is coded. This is to facilitate data handling and analysis. Where no name is given, "unknown" is entered.

Variable 5: Headline
The headline text is as downloaded from Nexis.

Variable 6: Type of Article
The Type of article is as downloaded from Nexis. This refers to the genre or type of article written. The possible values are:
1. News
2. Opinion
3. Features
4. Editorial

Certain articles will have "Editorial, Comment, Features" as the Section. If an article has a by-line, it is labelled either "Comment" or "Feature".

Variable 7: Page in publication
This is the number of the page of the publication the article appeared in.

Variable 8: Source
This is the main source used in an article. Each value is contained in a drop-down list in the appropriate Excel cell. Possible values for sources are:
1. Government
2. Opposition
3. Public official
4. Legal
5. Academic/commentator

6. Garda
7. Whistle-blower
8. Enquiry/Tribunal
9. Journalist
10. Trade union
11. Other
12. Unspecified

Variable 9: Primary Definer
This is the name of the person who is primary definer along with an indication of that person's position or rank, if appropriate. The appropriate value is entered as free text in the cell. For example, MinT Varadkar is used to denote Dr L Varadkar when he was Minister for Transport. MinSCA Varadkar is used to denote Dr L Varadkar when he was Minister for Social and Employment Affairs and Taoiseach Varadkar after he became Taoiseach. If there is no primary definer, there are multiple definers of equal prominence or the primary definer is not named, the value "Unspecified" is entered.

Variable 10: Stance
The tone or attitude to the whistle-blower in the article is recorded. The values are contained in a drop-down list in the appropriate Excel cell. The possible values for stance are:
1. Positive
2. Negative
3. Neutral
4. Mixed

Variable 11: News Value
The news values are as set down by Galtung and Ruge (1965). Not all news values identified by Galtung and Ruge manifested themselves in the pilot. More than one news value often appears in the articles. The values are contained in a drop-down list in the appropriate Excel cell. The news values present in the sample identified during the pilot are:
1. Frequency
2. Threshold
3. Unexpectedness
4. Continuity
5. Reference to an elite person
6. Personification
7. Negativity

Variable 12: Frames
News framing serves to define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments and suggest remedies (Entman, 1993). The present analysis looks at both primary and secondary frames. The values suggested by the pilot are:
1. Moral/ethical
2. Accountability
3. Competence
4. Political
5. Conflict
6. Health & safety

7. Crime
8. Governance
9. Legal
10. Crisis
11. Equality & fairness
12. Defensive
13. Conspiracy/coverup
14. Credibility
15. Explanatory

Appendix 3

List of authors and roles:

Author	Position	No. of Articles
Kevin Doyle[9]	News Editor/Group Political Ed.	30
Shane Phelan	Public Affairs Editor	22
Unattributed		21
John Downing	Political Correspondent	18
Fionnan Sheahan[10]	Group Political Editor/Editor	17
Niall O'Connor	Political Correspondent	16
Philip Ryan	Reporter	10
Tom Brady	Security Editor	9
Cormac McQuinn	Political Correspondent	7
Dearbhail McDonald	Legal Editor	5
Shane Coleman	Newstalk Presenter	4
Paul Williams	Special Correspondent	4
Daniel McConnell	Political Correspondent	4
Martina Devlin	Opinion Writer	3
Mandy Johnston	Opinion Writer	2
Ian O'Doherty	Opinion Writer	2
Colette Browne	Opinion Writer	2
Wayne O'Connor	Reporter	1
TJ McIntyre	Legal Academic	1
Tim Healy	Reporter	1
Remy Farrell	Senior Counsel	1
Luke Byrne	Reporter	1
Liz O'Donnell	Opinion Writer	1
Liam Fay	Opinion Writer	1
Joyce Fegan	Reporter	1
Jim Cusack	Security Correspondent	1
James Downey (Dec'd April 2016)	Opinion Writer	1
Ivan Yates	Newstalk Presenter	1
Greg Harkin	Reporter	1
Gerard O'Regan	Reporter	1
Gareth Morgan	Reporter	1
Emma Jane Hade	Reporter	1
Eamon Delaney	Opinion Writer	1
Claire Murphy	Reporter	1
Andrew Lynch	Reporter	1
Alan Shatter	Solicitor and former minister	1
Alan O'Keeffe	Reporter	1

[9] Kevin Doyle was appointed Group Political Editor of the *Irish Independent* in September 2015.
[10] Fionnan Sheahan was appointed Editor of the *Irish Independent* in January 2015.