



Owning the issues of crime and immigration: The relation between immigration and crime news and anti-immigrant voting in 11 countries



Bjorn Burscher*, Joost van Spanje, Claes H. de Vreese

Amsterdam School of Communication Research (ASCoR), University of Amsterdam, Nieuwe Achtergracht 166, 1018 WV Amsterdam, The Netherlands

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 26 February 2014

Received in revised form 19 February 2015

Accepted 2 March 2015

Available online 11 March 2015

Keywords:

Anti-immigrant party voting
International & comparative
Agenda setting

ABSTRACT

It is still not well understood how the media affect anti-immigrant party voting. In this paper, we argue and demonstrate empirically that mere exposure to immigration- and crime-related news is positively related to the likelihood that a voter casts a vote for an anti-immigrant party. On the basis of a media content analysis ($N = 20,084$ news items) in combination with a voter panel survey ($N = 17,014$ respondents) conducted in 11 European countries we find for several anti-immigrant parties that – ceteris paribus – exposure to news about immigration or crime increases voters' probabilities to vote for these parties. We discuss our findings in light of prior research on issue ownership, and their implications for the role of the mass media in established democracies.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

In explanations of the rise of anti-immigrant parties (e.g., [Arzheimer, 2009](#); [Ivarsflaten, 2008](#); [Knigge, 1998](#); [Van der Brug et al., 2005](#)), only little attention has been paid to news media. This is perhaps surprising, as the mass media are a main source of political information for citizens (e.g., [Mutz, 1998](#)). The scarce literature on the topic suggests that anti-immigrant party support is affected by the prominence of nationalism, immigration, crime, and 'anti-politics' in the news media ([Walgrave and De Swert, 2004](#)), the visibility of immigration issues in national newspapers ([Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2007](#)), and their prominence in the news more generally ([Bos et al., 2011](#)).

In this paper, we go beyond the extant literature in at least three ways. First, we assess the existence of (individual-level) "media effects" on voting behavior at the individual level. Second, we link self-reported exposure to news outlets in a two-wave panel survey to media content

from each of these outlets between the waves (see [Dilliplane et al., 2013](#)). This enables us to measure what media content each individual voter has been exposed to. We thus improve upon the few individual-level studies of media influences on vote choice ([Bos et al., 2011](#); [Druckman, 2004](#); [Hopmann et al., 2010](#); [Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2007](#)). Except for [Bos et al. \(2011\)](#), these studies do not have this information about every voter, which necessitates the assumption that the media messages of interest somehow found their way to the public, and inhibits the estimation of heterogeneity among voters. Third, whereas previous studies are limited to a single country (e.g., [Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2007](#); [Karapin, 2002](#); [Stewart, 2003](#); [Walgrave and De Swert, 2004](#)), we investigate 11 countries in one study. Indeed, we include in our analysis all major anti-immigrant parties in contemporary Western Europe. This way, we maximize generalizability of our findings. Also, studying several countries at once allows us to use the variation in message flows in the media so as to get a better grip on media effects ([Zaller, 1996](#)).

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +31616064619.

E-mail address: b.burscher@uva.nl (B. Burscher).

1. The theoretical foundation of anti-immigrant party voting

Anti-immigrant parties exist in many established democracies. Their electoral strength varies over time and across countries. For example, the National Front (FN) in France flourished in the early 1990s but was struggling in the late 1990s. In neighboring Belgium a party with exactly the same name existed back then, which was always considerably less successful than the French FN. What explains such variation in anti-immigrant parties' electoral performance? Although many studies have addressed this question (see Van der Brug and Fennema, 2007 for an overview), it has remained largely unanswered.

Existing theories on the electoral performance of anti-immigrant parties include explanations focusing on characteristics of their voters (Betz, 1994; McGann and Kitschelt, 1995), of the parties themselves (Art, 2011; Mudde, 2007), of competing parties (Meguid, 2005; Norris, 2005), and of the countries in which they operate (Golder, 2003; Jackman and Volpert, 1996). These explanations (even sophisticated combinations of them such as Arzheimer, 2009; Lubbers et al., 2002; Van der Brug et al., 2005), to some extent fail to explain the considerable differences in anti-immigrant parties' success within countries over time, and across countries. This is because voter, party, and country characteristics are relatively stable and thus do not account for much of the within-case over-time variation. These characteristics also tend to be similar across countries, so that they do not explain much of the cross-country differences in anti-immigrant parties' electoral fortunes either.

Very few studies of anti-immigrant voting take the news media into account. News media content seems a promising complementary explanatory factor, as visibility and tone of media coverage of issues and events tend to vary considerably across time and space (as is the case for European elections, see Schuck et al., 2011). The fickle news media attention may be more likely to drive short-term electoral ups and downs of anti-immigrant parties in Western Europe than more stable voter, party and country characteristics.

Not all news media content is theoretically expected to matter for anti-immigrant party voting. While voting for other parties might be based on the visibility and evaluation of political actors (e.g., Hopmann et al., 2010) and on the media "framing" of issues and events, we contend that anti-immigrant voting is based on the amount of exposure to issues that are strongly associated with anti-immigrant parties: immigration and crime.

We focus on two well-established theories – agenda setting theory (McCombs and Shaw, 1972) and issue ownership theory (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1994; Petrocik, 1996; Van der Brug, 2004). Based on a combination of both theories, we expect voters' exposure to media coverage of immigration and crime issues to increase their probability to vote for an anti-immigrant party.

Agenda setting is the transfer of issue concern from the news media to the public. By drawing on agenda setting theory, we expect that exposure to immigration and crime issues in the news media increases concern about them

among voters. Based on *Issue Ownership* theory, we expect that concern about immigration and crime increases the likelihood of voting for a particular party: an anti-immigrant party.

Issue ownership theory states that some political parties are generally more strongly associated with a certain policy issue than others, and that they are perceived as being more competent than others in handling that policy question (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1994; Petrocik, 1996; Walgrave et al., 2012). Therefore, certain parties are said to 'own' certain issues. It has been empirically demonstrated that perceptions of issue-ownership affect vote choice (e.g., Bélanger and Meguid, 2008; Nadeau et al., 2001; Van der Brug, 2004).

Taken together, the two theories explain how issue-related news can influence anti-immigrant party voting. Firstly, in accordance with the agenda-setting hypothesis, exposure to issue-related news stories is expected to increase the salience of the topic among voters. Secondly, we need to explain how such increased salience translates into a vote choice for anti-immigrant parties. Therefore, we refer to issue ownership theory, which explains that the exposed voter becomes more likely to vote for a party, which is associated with the issue and/or has a reputation of handling the issue. By combining agenda setting theory and issue ownership theory, our research demonstrates that issue visibility plays an important role in explaining how media coverage affects individual-level party preferences.

In accordance with the relevant literature, we assume that anti-immigrant parties own the issues of immigration and crime. In their campaigning, anti-immigrant parties strongly focus on immigration and crime, and also clearly link them to each other (Walgrave and De Swert, 2004; Mudde, 2007; Smith, 2010; Dinas and van Spanje, 2011). Besides, immigration policy and crime are seen as the most important reasons for voting for anti-immigrant parties (Mudde, 2007), and survey research indicates that voters associate immigrants with crime (Ignazi, 2003). We, therefore, expect that voters' concern for immigration and crime issues when casting a ballot translates into voting for an anti-immigrant party.

So far the relationship between issue-related news coverage and party choice has been the subject of a number of studies (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2007; Brosius and Kepplinger, 1992; Druckman, 2004; Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2007; Sheaffer and Weimann, 2005; Walgrave and De Swert, 2004). Most of them do not focus on immigration or crime issues, and provide evidence on the aggregate level only. Brosius and Kepplinger (1992), for example, found that media coverage of political issues in TV news broadcasts affects party leanings. Similarly, Sheaffer and Weimann (2005) concluded on the basis of a study of four Israeli elections that increases in the proportion of the 'security peace' domain in the public agenda were related with increases in the aggregate vote shares of political parties that were associated with that policy domain.

At the individual level, Druckman (2004) tested to what extent the 2000 U.S. Senate campaign affected voters by priming criteria on which they base their party choice decision. He showed that the campaign led attentive voters to

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1051708>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1051708>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)