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Framing Turkey: Identities, public opinion and Turkey's potential accession into the EU

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INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the European Community, enlargement has been considered as an important policy area and as part of the European integration process (European Commission, 2003). From only 6 members at the foundation of the first European Community, the European Union now counts 27 member states, one acceding country (Croatia), five candidate countries (Iceland, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey) and three potential candidates (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo). Of all enlargements (past and potentially planned in the future), Turkey's prospective EU membership is probably the most contested ever, both among political elites (Grigoriadis, 2006) and the general public (McLaren, 2007). Opposition is even so wide spread that we should probably not speak of Turkey's *prospective* EU membership, but of Turkey's *potential* EU membership.

Not only the level of contestation of the issue makes Turkey's potential accession an interesting case, but also the multifaceted nature of the debate, revolving around issues of democracy, economics, security and identities (Redmond, 2007). Moreover, some argue that the debate on Turkey's potential EU membership has acted as 'a proxy for a larger and overdue debate on the future shape of the European Union' (Grigoriadis, 2006), because *hidden* perceptions and fears of the EU come to surface in the debate on Turkey's potential accession (Nicolaidis, 2001). Following a similar line of reasoning, several authors (e.g., De Vreese, Boomgaarden, & Semetko, 2008; Gerhards & Hans, 2011; McLaren, 2007) argue that explanations of support for Turkey's potential EU membership may show similar patterns as explanations of public opinion towards EU integration. As such, in this dissertation we will focus on the case of Turkey's potential accession, not only as an interesting case in itself, but also to learn more about the EU.

The role of public opinion in the European integration process

With European cooperation starting as a project to prevent war and with an unprecedented long period of peace between the countries participating in the European cooperative project, one might think that public opinion towards the project would be rather favourable. However, one might describe public opinion in the early days as rather uninterested. Scholars

called this a period of *permissive consensus*. European cooperation was for the elite, and citizens approved of what the elites did as long as it did not (negatively) affect them (e.g., Steenbergen, Edwards, & de Vries, 2007). But with the treaty of Maastricht and the founding of the European Union, the competences of the EU expanded and European issues began to enter the public and political debate (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). As a result, citizens also became more critical of what happened ‘in Europe’. With politicians now looking over their shoulder when negotiating European issues, to ensure whether there is public support for their actions, the permissive consensus seems to have made way for a *constraining dissensus* (e.g., Down & Wilson, 2008; Hooghe & Marks, 2005).

The idea of a constraining dissensus illustrates two things. First, it shows that the public is not undivided in favour of European integration. Second, it shows that public opinion about European integration matters. Thus it is important to understand how attitudes towards European issues are formed. But how do citizens form an opinion about EU matters? Public opinion towards the EU has been studied along various lines. But one may cluster these lines along two dimensions: (1) EU attitudes depend on information about the EU, such as for instance provided by the media, and (2) EU attitudes depend on how antecedents, mostly at the individual level, relate to characteristics of European integration.

Information about the EU

One source of information is national politics. Although we cluster it under information sources, the actual argument here is that with a general lack of information, citizens turn to national politics (something they do have information about) to form attitudes about the EU (about which they have relative little information). Some scholars argue that citizens turn to cues from political parties (e.g., Anderson, 1998; Gabel, 1998; Van der Eijk & Franklin, 1996; Wessels, 1995), although the relation between party positions and attitudes of their followers would depend on levels of disagreement among parties, party unity, issue salience and party attachment (Ray, 2003). Others argue that opinion about the EU depends on evaluations of the national government (e.g., Crum, 2007; Franklin, Van der Eijk, & Marsh, 1995; Hix, 2007). With the Council of Ministers central to

European policy making, the national government is a central actor at the European level. As a consequence, most of the news about the EU policy making that citizens are exposed to revolves around members of governments meeting and negotiating about these policies. Thus, if citizens perceive the national government to take part in the integration process, they are also likely to form evaluations of the integration process based on their support for the national government (Anderson, 1998).

News media are another source of information. According to Norris (2000), the media are most likely to influence citizens' attitudes towards a particular issue, when citizens rely on the media as their main source of information for that issue. Given that over the last decades citizens repeatedly report to rely on television and newspapers as their main source of information about the EU (Eurobarometer, n.d.), news media are likely to influence EU attitudes. Indeed, several (mostly experimental) studies showed that exposure to specific news content affected levels of support for the EU, general enlargement and accession of specific countries (e.g., De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2003; De Vreese, Boomgaarden, & Semetko, 2011; Lecheler & De Vreese, 2010; Maier & Rittberger, 2008; Schuck & De Vreese, 2006). As news media are likely to vary both visibility and tone of EU issues over time, exposure to news media is also likely to predict dynamics in EU attitudes. But if citizens are easily persuaded by news media, it raises the question whether citizens actually hold systematic and meaningful (to themselves) attitudes about the EU. Scholars did find citizens to hold systematic and meaningful attitudes about the EU, due to factors in the second cluster: the antecedents of EU support.

Antecedents of EU attitudes

Already in the early 1970s, when European integration was perhaps still presumed an elite affair, Inglehart proposed that support for European integration depends on cognitive skills (Inglehart, 1970a; Inglehart, Rabier, & Reif, 1991). The assumption is that information concerning European integration is of a very abstract nature and an individual needs a certain amount of cognitive skills to understand this information. And those who understand what is being communicated about Europe would perceive Europe as less threatening.

Related to this, Inglehart (1970b; 1990) also argued that political values would affect support for European integration. The argument holds that citizens with post-materialistic values, i.e. being more in favour of improving democracy and environmental protection over issues of economic and physical security, would be more in favour of European integration, as European integration could be used to further these post-materialistic goals. Later studies, however, show that the impact of values was rather minimal (Gabel, 1998) or only function through individuals with post-materialist values also having higher cognitive skills (Janssen, 1991).

With European integration starting primarily as an economic project, a second strand of explanations of EU attitudes revolves around explaining support using economic considerations. The general idea behind the economic utilitarian models is that those individuals who are likely to profit or expect to profit from European integration are also more supportive of European integration (e.g., Gabel & Palmer, 1995). As Hooghe and Marks (2005) show, within the realm of economic models we can differentiate between ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ factors, and ‘egocentric’ and ‘sociotropic’ evaluations. This leads to predictors as, for instance, the level of education or type of occupation (objective and egocentric: e.g., Gabel, 1998), whether one’s country is a net recipient or donor of the EU (objective and sociotropic: e.g., Anderson & Reichert, 1996), personal economic prospects (subjective and egocentric: e.g., Anderson, 1998), and national economic prospects or perceived economic threat to the national economy (subjective and sociotropic: e.g., Gabel & Palmer, 1995; McLaren, 2002).

With the European project increasingly exceeding economic dimensions and increasingly moving towards political integration, scholarly attention also broadened and turned to community and identity related factors to explain EU attitudes (e.g., Carey, 2002; De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2005; De Vreese et al., 2008; Hooghe & Marks, 2004; McLaren, 2002).¹ Central to these explanations is the question how individuals make sense of their own

¹ Interestingly, although scholarly attention only focused on the identity factors when European integration became more political, Van Klingeren et al. (in press) showed in an analysis of Eurobarometer data from the 1990s that identity factors were already of importance, only not noted by the academic community.

identity and the identity of other Europeans.

Identity factors

In this dissertation, the identity factors will have a central role (with a special interest towards anti-immigrant attitudes). Several studies show that identity factors are at least as important as utilitarian consideration (e.g., Carey, 2002; Hooghe & Marks, 2005) or have even stronger effects (e.g., De Vreese et al., 2008). And since ‘the EU is not just a free trade zone, but rather [...] making policies that were formerly within the prerogative of the nation-state’ (McLaren, 2002, p. 554) and ‘citizens care – passionately – about who exercises authority over them’ (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 2) it is all the more important to understand how citizens define ‘us’ and what effects this has.

Several scholars focus on identity factors as explanations of EU attitudes, in which national identity plays a central role. For instance, Carey (2002) argues that national identity may stem from the attachment to several territorial entities. Important is here the concept of ‘terminal community’ (Deutsch, 1966; Peters & Hunold, 1999), which is the highest political unit an individual feels he owes allegiance to. When an individual perceives the nation state to be the terminal community, which according to McLaren (2002) most citizens are socialized to do, further European integration takes away power from where this individual believes it should actually be (Carey, 2002). This leads to the conclusion that identification with or attachment to the nation would result in more negative attitudes towards the EU, and this has been found in several studies (e.g., Carey, 2002; Hooghe & Marks, 2005).

Of course, the terminal community does not necessarily have to be the nation state. Younger and better educated citizens have been found to see themselves less as part of a particular national group and more as Europeans (e.g., Duchesne & Frogner, 1995). Identification with Europe would lead to increased support for EU integration, and several authors found evidence for this to be the case (e.g., Carey, 2002; Karp & Bowler, 2006).

From the idea of the terminal community, strong levels of national attachment are likely to be associated with low levels of European identity.

But several authors have witnessed cases of ‘double allegiances’, where strong national attachment correlates with strong European identity (e.g., Diez Medrano, 2003; Haesly, 2001; Marks, 1999). Van Kersbergen (2000) argues that this European identity is derived from allegiance to the nation state, when European allegiance facilitates perceived national interests. This has led Hooghe and Marks (2004) to make a conceptual difference between national attachment and exclusive national identity.

What binds these explanations is that they revolve around the idea that the degree of national identification results in individuals evaluating the EU in terms of what it does to (the sovereignty of) the nation state. Linked to this idea, but subtly different is the idea that EU attitudes are not about how individuals perceive ‘themselves’, but stem from fear and rejection of the ‘other’. In terms of social identity theory: EU attitudes can be understood by looking at attachment to the in-group, or by looking at fear and rejection of the out-group.

The idea is that individuals may perceive a ‘realistic threat’ (threats of economic nature) or a ‘symbolic threat’ (threats of cultural nature) to the in-group from this ‘other’ (McLaren, 2002; 2007). In the context of the EU, the nation state is often defined as the in-group, where other member states and/or candidate countries are defined as out-group (based on differences in nationality, ethnicity, culture and religion: De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2005).

Several scholars have linked these fears for realistic and symbolic threats from other countries to threats perceived from immigrants. The idea is that those who see threats from one group are likely to see the same threat from other groups. For instance, De Master and Le Roy (2000) argue that xenophobia is the fear of the unknown stranger, and as they know the nation but not the EU, xenophobes are also likely to fear the EU. McLaren (2002) argues that those who fear changes in national culture or national control over resources from minority groups are likely to fear similar changes from the process of European integration.

De Vreese and Boomgaarden (2005) explain this linkage by arguing that negative attitudes towards immigrants do not say so much about the immigrants, but more about the individual holding these attitudes. The central factor in the formation of attitudes towards immigrants is argued to

be the degree to which people categorize themselves and others into ‘us’ and ‘them’. This comes from the work of Sniderman, Peri, De Figueiredo and Piazza (2000), who show that tone of individuals’ evaluations about immigrants doesn’t vary when varying groups of immigrants (although one may expect different groups of immigrants have different characteristics and are thus likely to be judged differently). They conclude that attitudes towards immigrants are purely the result of a general categorizing of immigrants as ‘other’. De Vreese and Boomgaarden (2005) consecutively argue, that if an individual has negative attitudes towards immigrants (and this is because this individual strongly sees the world in ‘us’ versus ‘them’) this individual is also likely to see other Europeans as ‘them’ because of their differences in nationality, ethnicity, culture and/or religion. Adding, finally, another premise from social identity theory, this means that because other Europeans are defined as ‘other’, they are also evaluated negatively merely because they are the other (see Brown, 2000; Tajfel, 1981). And evaluating other Europeans negatively, also results in evaluating cooperation with them negatively, i.e., the EU.

Framing

A central concept we will use in relation to explaining EU attitudes is framing. Framing is about giving meaning to a particular issue. According to Scheufele (1999) frames should be considered as schemes for both presenting and comprehending information. To present information, frames are present in communicating texts as *media frames*. A media frame is defined by Gamson and Modigliani as ‘a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events ... The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue’ (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 143). To comprehend information, frames are also argued to be present in the mind as *individual frames*. Entman defines individual frames as ‘mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals’ processing of information’ (Entman, 1993, p. 53).

Framing is often used in EU studies, but primarily as media framing. These studies look at the presence of media frames in news coverage (e.g., De Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000) or how media frames affect EU attitudes (e.g., De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2003;

Schuck & De Vreese, 2006). In this dissertation, we will focus on the use of individual frames. Scholars explaining how antecedents affect support for EU integration all argue that citizens have a particular frame in mind that is used to form an opinion about EU integration. For instance, when Gabel (1998) argues that the higher educated are more in favour of EU integration than the lower educated, he argues that individuals with a higher education are more likely to profit from EU integration and that this potential profit is used to evaluate EU integration. Thus, he argues that individuals frame the issue in terms of (potential) profits and losses, i.e. in utilitarian terms. Similarly, other explanations are built on the idea that a particular frame, related to the antecedent the scholar uses to explain support for EU integration, is used to evaluate EU integration. However, how individuals actually frame EU issues has rarely been studied (for an exception, see Ruiz-Jimenez & Torreblanca, 2007).

Research questions

Although scholars found consistent results with respect to the effect of anti-immigrant attitudes on EU attitudes and they agree that this has to do with framing other Europeans as an out-group, there are still important questions left unanswered. Credible as these explanations may be, assessments of the degree to which citizens frame the EU in terms of in-groups and out-groups are rare, and no study has tested whether this framing actually facilitates the effect of anti-immigrant attitudes on EU attitudes. In this dissertation we will try to fill that gap. We do so by first asking the question *which frames citizens use to explain their support or opposition towards Turkey's potential accession*. Second, as it is not likely that all citizens frame the issue of Turkey's potential membership in terms of identities, we ask the question *what explains the use of the frame*. Third, given the explanation of the effect of anti-immigrant attitudes on EU attitudes, we ask *whether this effect is indeed mediated by citizens with anti-immigrant attitudes framing the other Europeans as out-groups*.

In this dissertation, we will also try to make a next step in understanding what anti-immigrant attitudes mean for EU attitudes. We do this, by merging the antecedent explanation of anti-immigrant attitudes with the 'information based' explanations mentioned above: political cues and

exposure to media content. Above we discussed that citizens use political cues to form opinions. These cues can have direct effects on support, but also have effects through altering weights of different considerations (Sniderman, Hagendoorn, & Prior, 2004). We thus ask the question *to what degree political and media cues influence the effect of anti-immigrant attitudes* (i.e., framing in terms of out-groups) on EU attitudes. The other ‘information based’ explanation mentioned above is exposure to media content. It is unlikely that all individuals will react similarly to the same information (Perse, 2001). Therefore, several authors have looked (also in the realm of EU attitudes) at how different individuals are affected by exposure to media content. In these studies the focus is primarily on political knowledge, with the assumption that individuals with high political knowledge will be less affected by exposure because they have stronger predispositions and the arguments to counter information in the media (e.g., Lecheler & De Vreese, 2010; Schuck & De Vreese, 2006). Under the assumption that the way information about other Europeans (or Turks) is evaluated depends on whether an individual is already more inclined to think of the other European (or Turks) as an out-group, *we will test whether anti-immigrant attitudes influence the reception of evaluations in the news.*

Answers to the first set of questions are important, because they will confirm theoretical ideas of how citizens give meaning to European integration. Answers to the second set of questions are consecutively important, because they shed light on (1) the systematic differences in anti-immigrant attitudes effects (i.e., in framing in terms of out-groups) and (2) on the dynamics of EU attitudes and the role of individual framing in terms of out-groups therein. But answers to these questions are not only important to fill the gaps in the literature, but there is also a strong societal relevance. Identification with a political system is essential for the legitimacy of that system (Scharpf, 1999).

The case of Turkey’s potential EU membership

For this project, we will look at the specific case of Turkey’s potential accession. Turkey’s wish to become a member has already a long history. In 1959 Turkey applied for an associate membership in the European Economic Community. In the so called ‘Ankara Agreement’ of 1963,

agreements were made to integrate Turkey into a custom union, with the eventual goal that Turkey would become a full member. In 1987, Turkey finally applied for full membership, but it encountered a veto from Greece. In 1999 Greece gave up their opposition and Turkey was recognized by the EU as a candidate country. Accession negotiations were opened in 2005, but are still open and with no final decision of Turkey's membership in sight.

But why is the case of Turkey's potential EU membership an interesting case for this study? Apart from the already discussed multifaceted nature of the issue and the high contestation of the issue, it is also an issue that most citizens know about. Compared to this issue, most EU policies are rather complex, both in terms of what they are actually about and in terms of what possible decisions could be taken (and what they mean). Enlargement issues are relatively simple, as most citizens have a clear idea what it means (maybe not in technical details, but at least in general terms). Also, comparing Turkey's potential membership with other applicant countries, this enlargement issue has received relative much attention in public debates (Timmerman, Rochtus, & Mels, 2008). The relative straightforwardness of, the familiarity with and the relative large attention in the media towards the issue will make it likely that citizens have already thought about the issue and have real opinions about it (Converse, 1970). Also, the Turkish case is perhaps a most likely case to look at identity related factors, as most Turks differ from most Europeans by their nationality, ethnicity, culture and religion. That means that compared to other enlargements or other EU issues, identity issues are more likely to be relevant in the Turkish case and more easily assessable.

These characteristics, however, do not imply that we cannot learn from the Turkish case and generalize to other enlargements or more general support of European integration. Turks may differ from most European by their nationality, ethnicity, culture and religion, but so do many other Europeans. And as McLaren (2002) shows, there was no difference in effect of attitudes towards immigrants on support for Turkey's membership and support for membership of all countries joining in 2004 and 2007. Similarly, Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas and De Vreese (2011) distinguish five different dimensions of EU attitudes. Although not all antecedents have the

same effect on the different dimension (e.g., economic outlook has a positive effect on the dimension of EU performance evaluations, but not on the dimension of support for strengthening of the EU), anti-immigration attitudes have a clear negative effect on all dimensions. And this is supported by multiple studies with attitudes towards immigrants explaining different operationalizations of EU attitudes finding similar effects (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2005; McLaren, 2002; 2007). We would argue that this is because every dimension or operationalization of EU attitudes is about cooperation with ‘other’ Europeans.

So because Turkey’s potential membership is a special case, it is ideal to study effect of identity factors. But although Turkey’s potential membership is a special case, we argue that it is sufficient to make claims about the relation of identity factors and more general EU attitudes.

Data

We constructed and used three datasets to answer our research questions. These datasets were the result of a collaborative research effort at the University of Amsterdam, funded by a NWO VICI project (grant # 453-07-002).

The first dataset was a citizen *survey* held in the Netherlands in December 2008. After we developed the questionnaire on the base of previous research and deliberation within the group, the actual interviewing was outsourced to a professional polling agency with a high quality online panel (TNS-NIPO). In the survey, we asked respondents open-ended questions on why they had their opinion on Turkey’s potential accession. By coding this open-ended question, we were able to answer which individual frames are present among citizens. Also, with the coded answers to the open-ended question in dataset, we could test whether the effect of anti-immigrant attitudes on support for Turkey’s EU membership is indeed mediated by citizens framing the issue in terms of out-groups.

The second dataset came from a *panel survey held in 21 countries* of the EU. Due to financial limitations not all EU member states could be included in the survey. In selecting the countries in the sample, we made sure to include larger and smaller member states, countries from North, South, East and West, and long terms and new members to the EU. The countries included

were Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and the UK. The questionnaire was based on findings and experience with the Dutch survey (e.g., we did not opt for open-ended questions as coding was not feasible, but used the results of the open-ended questions in Dutch survey to construct closed-ended questions in the panel survey). In collaboration with TNS in Brussels (who also perform the Eurobarometer studies) the questionnaire was translated in the languages of the different countries and set out in each country by 'TNS' subsidiaries. The first wave of the panel was held three weeks prior to the 2009 European Parliament Elections and the second wave directly after the elections.

With the closed-ended questions in the panel, which were based on the open-ended questions in the Dutch survey, we could assess for who uses certain frames. The fact that we had 21 countries to compare made it possible to also test contextual variables to explain the use of frames. To answer the question how cues from national politics and national media influence the effect of anti-immigrant attitudes, a comparison between countries was also necessary. To be able to answer this question, we added to the dataset some contextual variables, with the information coming from Eurostat data, the PEW forum and the Chapil Hill Expert Survey.

The panel component of the survey was used to answer the question on the effect of exposure to media evaluations and the moderation effect of anti-immigrant attitudes. In the panel we could assess change between the waves and which media outlets respondents frequently used. To be able to actually test the effect of exposure to media content, we needed data from the third dataset we constructed: the media content analysis data.

The *media content analysis* was performed in collaboration with a team of scholars of the University of Exeter within the larger project of European Election Studies/PIREDEU. In collaboration, a codebook was developed (partly based on previous EES media content analyses to ensure comparability over time; partly with new insights), tested and eventually used to analyze both television news and printed press in all 27 EU member states. For the analysis, students from each country were approached so coding could be done in each native language. Part of the coders was in

Amsterdam and the rest was in Exeter. To ensure that coding was not dependent on the location of coding, the persons who trained the coders did both training in Amsterdam and Exeter. Analysis of inter-coder reliability showed that the data was sufficient reliable.

By linking the media content analysis data to a self-reported media exposure measure in the survey, we were able to test whether exposure to actual media content explained change in support for Turkey's EU membership.

Outline

We conclude this introduction with an outline of the dissertation. In Figure 0.1, we give an overview of the different chapters and how they relate to each other.

In *chapter 1*, we will assess the question how citizens actually frame the issue of Turkey's potential membership. As we are interested in what individuals have to say themselves, we coded the answers to an open-ended question on why they were in favour or not of Turkey becoming a member.

After having established in chapter 1 that citizens indeed frame the issue in utilitarian terms and identity we proceed in *chapter 2* to investigate for whom the different frames are more or less important. Using survey data from 21 EU countries, we argue that framing depends on more general values of what is important. Which individual frame is used thus transcends the specific issue of Turkey's potential EU membership.

In *chapter 3*, we turn to the question whether anti-immigrant attitudes indeed affect EU attitudes through the framing of other Europeans as out-groups. Using the coded answers to open-ended questions mentioned in chapter 1, we proceeded to perform a mediation analysis, and found that the more negative an individual's attitude towards immigrants, the more likely he frames Turks as an out-group and because of that the more he is opposed to Turkey becoming a member.

In *chapter 4*, we turn to the question under what conditions anti-immigrant attitudes are more or less important in opinion formation about the EU. We argue that this can be explained by looking at how important immigration issues are in each country. Differently than chapter 1, we here

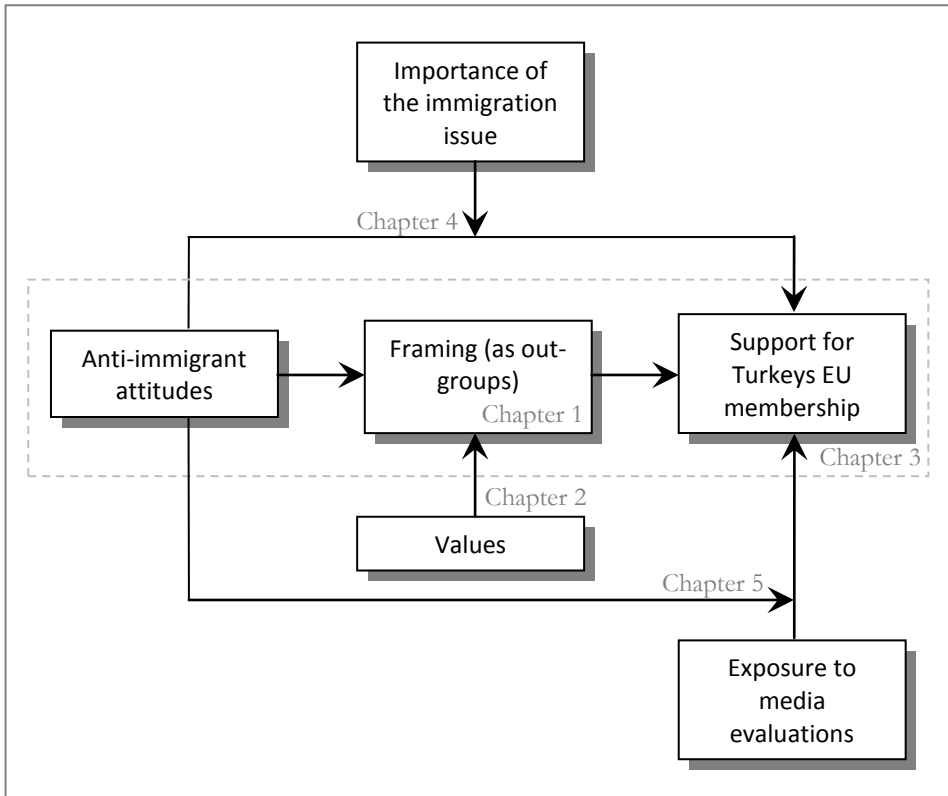


Figure 0.1. Outline of the dissertation. As chapter 1 is not about a causal relation, but a measurement of that one concept, the label is inserted inside the box. Chapter 2 is about a causal relation between values and frames, the label is added to the causal arrow. As chapter 3 is about the entire mediation, the label is added to the dashed box around the concepts in the mediation. Chapters 4 and 5 are about moderated effects, and are thus added to the moderator arrows.

do not only focus the importance within the public, but look at cues from national politics and national media as predictors.

In *chapter 5*, we look at how these anti-immigrant attitudes, as a characteristic of individuals themselves, affect how these individuals perceive information. For this we link citizen panel survey data to a media content analysis of television news and newspapers. By assessing the change between the panel waves in support for Turkey's membership, we test for the effects of exposure to evaluations of Turkey's membership in the media.

We will conclude with a summary of our key findings and a discussion of their implications and methodological reflections.