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



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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.

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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](#)).

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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

vote on the issues that were salient in the campaign. Kleinnijenhuis et al. (2007) studied the influence of issue coverage on party choice during the 2003 electoral campaign in the Netherlands. The authors concluded that more news on a party's owned issues increased the likelihood to vote for that party.

Two aggregate-level studies explicitly tested the link between news-media content and voting for anti-immigrant parties. Walgrave and De Swert (2004) investigated the contribution of the news media to the electoral success of the Flemish Bloc (VB) in Belgium between 1991 and 2000. By means of analyzing party manifestos and voter surveys, the authors identified four public issues, the party focused on: Nationalism, immigration, crime, and 'anti-politics'. Using data from a media-content analysis and public opinion poll data, they found a substantial association between the electoral success of the party and the prominence in the news media of the four issues mentioned above.

Boomgaarden and Vliegthart (2007) investigated to what degree the visibility of immigration issues in Dutch national newspapers affected electoral support for three anti-immigrant parties between 1990 and 2002: the Center Party (CP), the Center Democrats (CD) and Pim Fortuyn's List (LPF). Controlling for contextual factors as immigration- and unemployment rates, they found a positive effect of the quantity of immigration-related news coverage on the aggregate share of vote intention for anti-immigrant parties.

Furthermore, there is evidence that salience of the crime issue among voters affects voting for anti-immigrant parties. Lubbers and Scheepers (2000) studied the role of attitudinal dispositions in voting for the German anti-immigrant party the Republicans. They found that perceiving 'law and order' as important positively relates to voting for the Republicans.

We conclude that, until now, the effect of immigration- and crime news on anti-immigrant party voting has barely been studied at the individual level. Furthermore, there is only little evidence of an effect of exposure to issue-specific news content on individual vote intentions more generally. This is an unfortunate state of affairs, because making inferences about specific individuals solely based upon aggregate statistics collected for the group to which those individuals belong comes along with the danger of ecological fallacy (Robinson, 2009).

Therefore, it is crucial to test whether the findings presented above hold when analyzing individual-level data. We aim to do so in this paper. We expect that the more a voter is exposed to immigration- and crime-related news, the more likely s/he is to vote for an anti-immigrant party, controlling for all other relevant factors. This leads to the following hypotheses that will be tested in this paper:

H1: Exposure to immigration in the news media increases the likelihood of voting for an anti-immigrant party.

H2: Exposure to crime in the news media increases the likelihood of voting for an anti-immigrant party.

The initial issue-ownership model (Petrocik, 1996) was developed and tested by focusing on valence issues - issues

on which all voters and parties share the same goal, such as reducing unemployment or fighting crime. More recent research (e.g., Bélanger and Meguid, 2008; Walgrave et al., 2012) suggests that for positional issues - issues on which voters and parties may hold different preferences - the effect of issue-ownership on party preferences is conditioned on positional agreement between voters and issue owners.

Crime can be considered a valence issue, which means that parties and voters most likely agree on a need to reduce crime rates. Immigration issues, however, have positional elements to them, where voters and parties can disagree on. Consequently, we expect that the effect of exposure to immigration and crime in the media on voting for an anti-immigrant party particularly occurs among voters who do not rule out a vote for an anti-immigrant party in the first place. That is, voters who are in favor of immigration restriction and a strengthening of the fight against crime, and who are prepared to set aside their possible hesitations about anti-immigrant parties for this policy goal. For those people, immigration is an issue of valence. Thus we expect the H1 and the H2 effect to be stronger among voters who intend to vote for an anti-immigrant party before being exposed to immigration or crime in the news media. This leads to the following hypotheses.

H3: The positive effect of exposure to immigration in the news media on voting for an anti-immigrant party is stronger for voters with a higher initial likelihood of voting for an anti-immigrant party than for voters with a lower initial likelihood of voting for an anti-immigrant party.

H4: The positive effect of exposure to crime in the news media on voting for an anti-immigrant party is stronger for voters with a higher initial likelihood of voting for an anti-immigrant party than for voters with a lower initial likelihood of voting for an anti-immigrant party.

We study 13 anti-immigrant parties in 11 Western European countries. Judging from the literature (e.g., Mudde, 2007; Norris, 2005; Van der Brug et al., 2005), this is about the entire population of anti-immigrant parties in Western Europe. These are the British National Party (BNP, Britain), National Front (FN, France), Northern League (LN, Italy), the Republicans (REP, Germany), National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD, Germany), Sweden Democrats (SD, Sweden), Danish People's Party (DF, Denmark), Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ, Austria), Flemish Interest (VB, Belgium), National Front (FN, Belgium), Freedom Party (PVV, Netherlands), True Finns (PS, Finland), and the Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS, Greece).

2. Methods

We use two-wave panel survey data from the 2009 European Election Campaign Study. Representative samples of the electorates of 11 Western European countries were interviewed about one month prior to the June 4–7 2009 elections for the European Parliament, and once again immediately after the elections. Fieldwork dates were

6–14th of May and 8–19th of June 2009. The survey was conducted using Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI).

The fieldwork was coordinated by TNS Opinion in Brussels. A total of 17,014 18 year old + respondents participated in wave one and 12,115 respondents participated in wave two.¹ On average, 1101 respondents per country completed the questionnaires of both waves, varying from 1001 in Austria to 2000 in Belgium.² In each country, a sample was drawn from TNS databases. These databases rely on multiple recruitment strategies, including telephone, face-to-face, and online recruitment. Quotas (on age, gender, and education) were enforced in sampling from the database. The average response rate was 29% in wave 1 and the re-contact rate was on average 82% in wave 2.³ The samples show appropriate distributions in terms of gender, age and education compared to census data. As we are mostly interested in the underlying relationships between variables, we consider the deviations in the sample vis-à-vis the adult population less problematic and we exert appropriate caution when making inferences about absolute values.⁴ The questionnaire was developed in English and translated into the different national languages. It was then translated back into English as an additional check of the accuracy of the translations.

Our dependent variable is the (individual-level) likelihood to vote for each of the anti-immigrant parties. To measure this likelihood, vote intentions for each anti-immigrant party are assessed. In both panel waves respondents are asked about their party choice “if elections for the national parliament were held tomorrow”. Note that, in accordance with the relevant literature (Van der Brug et al., 2000; Van der Brug and Fennema, 2003; Van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996), we use the context of European elections to study national-level elections (considered

more important by voters). The data set is well-suited to study national elections, as the indicators that we use (national parliamentary vote intention) here refer to this type of elections.⁵ National vote intentions have been asked before in European elections, and this has been unproblematic (e.g., Van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996). See the robustness checks for empirical evidence that our measures of national vote intentions are not biased by the context of the European election study.

Second, our moderating variable is the likelihood to vote for an anti-immigrant party before the exposure to immigration in the news media. Therefore, in wave one propensities to vote for an anti-immigrant party are tapped by asking respondents the following question: “We have a number of parties in (country). How probable is it that you will ever vote for the following parties? Please specify your views on a 10-point scale where 1 means ‘not at all probable’ and 10 means ‘very probable’.”⁶

The key independent variables are individual exposure to immigration- and crime-related news scores between the voter panel waves. In order to compute these values, we use data from a media content analysis. The content analysis is carried out on a sample of national news media coverage in the 11 countries mentioned above (Schuck et al., 2011). In each country the main national evening news broadcasts of the most widely-watched public and commercial television stations are included. Furthermore, two ‘quality’ (i.e. broadsheet) and one tabloid newspaper from each country are analyzed. These media outlets are selected to provide a comprehensive overview of the news coverage in each country. The television sample consists of 24 TV networks and the newspaper sample consists of 33 different newspapers.

The content analysis was conducted for news items published or broadcasted within the three weeks running up to the 2009 elections to the European Parliament. As election day varied across countries also the coding period varied from e.g. May 14th–June 4th for some countries up to May 17th–June 7th for others. All news outlets were collected either digitally or as hardcopies. With regard to story selection, for television, all news items have been coded; for newspapers, all news items on the title page and on one randomly selected page as well as all stories pertaining particularly to the EU and/or the EU election⁷ have been coded. In total, 20,084 news stories have been coded in the 11 countries under study.

Coding was conducted by a total of 24 trained⁸ and supervised coders at the University of Amsterdam and the

¹ The age limit in Austria was 16. This is because voting age in Austria is 16 (whereas it is 18 in all other countries).

² In Belgium, 1000 Flemish respondents and 1000 Walloon respondents completed both waves of the survey.

³ The response rates vary from 19% (Denmark) to 38% (Italy) in wave 1 and the re-contact rate between 74% (Belgium) and 86% (Greece). An analysis of the non-participation showed that non-respondents were younger and included more men compared to women in the UK, Sweden and Denmark and more women in Italy, the Netherlands, and Austria. Concerning education, the pool of non-respondents was significantly lower educated in three countries (Denmark, the Netherlands and Finland).

⁴ An overview of the composition of our sample vis-à-vis census data per country showed small differences between the adult population and the sample in terms of gender ($M = 2.76\%$; $SD = 3.43\%$). Deviations occurred (0–8%), with sometimes women overrepresented and sometimes men. Young citizens were generally slightly overrepresented in the samples. The share of young citizens (under 35) deviated 9.62% on average ($SD = 8.95\%$), with a minimum of 1% absolute deviation (overrepresentation) in Italy and Sweden, and a maximum of 34% (overrepresentation) in Greece. The share of older citizens (55+) ($M = 16.57\%$, $SD = 9.91\%$) deviated from 1% in France and the UK (overrepresentations) to 33% (underrepresentation in Greece). Most countries had slight underrepresentation of older citizens. The German sample had the largest overrepresentation (2%). In terms of education (collapsed in three categories, following the European Social Survey), deviations ($M = 8.12\%$, $SD = 8.37\%$) were found in other countries with higher-educated citizens being overrepresented in the samples. Underrepresentations were found in Greece (1%), France (6%), and Sweden (11%).

⁵ We also assessed all models using European Election vote intentions (w1) and European Election reported votes (w2) instead of national election vote intentions as dependent variable, and found nearly identical results for our hypotheses.

⁶ This way of asking about party preferences is standard practice in European electoral studies (Van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996; Van der Eijk et al., 2006).

⁷ EU-related stories were coded on any other page within the Political/News, Editorial/Opinion/Comment, and Business/Economy sections of the newspaper.

⁸ All coders participated in a two-weeks intensive coder training course.

University of Exeter, using an online survey tool. All coders were native speakers of the respective languages. Inter-coder reliability tests based on all coders on a subset of news items yielded satisfactory results.⁹ The unit of analysis and coding unit was the distinct news story.

In order to compute individual scores of exposure to immigration- and crime-related news, for each TV news item as well as each newspaper story the primary topic has been coded. The primary topic of a news item is defined as the subject of the story taking the most space or time. The topic has to be mentioned or referred to at least twice in the article or newscast. Coders could choose from a list of 146 topics. If the main topic of the news item was coded as Immigration, Labor Migration, Multiculturalism or National Immigration Policy, we coded item 'immigration-related'.¹⁰ If the main topic was coded Crime Story or National Crime Prevention Policy, we coded item 'crime-related'. Appendix A provides per country an overview of the total number of coded news items as well as the number of items coded as immigration- or crime-related.

In a next step, a mean 'immigration-news' and a mean 'crime-news' score were computed per news outlet. We integrated the media content data and the survey data according to the following procedure: for each respondent we matched the media data with reported media exposure in such a way that the respondent was assigned a score based on a multiplication of the reported frequency of use per outlet and the aggregated mean of the relevant content characteristics of that outlet in the period between the interviews (for a similar procedure, see De Vreese and Semetko, 2004). If, for example, a voter saw newscast A each day of the week and read newspaper B three out of six times a week, she would receive an 'immigration exposure score' that would equal the visibility of immigration issues in newscast A plus half the frequency of that visibility in newspaper B. Using the same procedure, we also computed individual scores of exposure to crime-news.

3. Data analysis

We assess our hypotheses using data from a two-wave panel survey. Panel data can be handled in various ways. Two prominent methods are the lagged dependent variable model (LDV) and the change score model (CS) (Johnson, 2005). As our main independent variable (news exposure) is observed only in the first panel, we followed the logic behind an LDV. In the LDV model, the first-wave measure of the dependent variable is controlled for by adding it as an independent variable to the model.

In order to assess our first hypothesis, we estimate per party a rare-events logistic regression (King and Zeng, 2001) model (Models 1). We use rare-events logistic regression, because the logit coefficients of a logistic regression analysis tend to be biased in samples where the key dependent variable is zero in the vast majority of cases.

Each model contains the second-wave measure of the national vote intention for a specific anti-immigrant party ($0 = \text{no}; 1 = \text{yes}$) as the dependent variable (Y_t), and exposure to immigration-related news as the key independent variable (X_1). Also, the first-wave measure of the national vote intention for the specific anti-immigrant party (Y_{t-1}) and a set of control variables (μ) are added to each model as independent variables. These are variables which are theoretically related to voting for anti-immigrant parties: age, gender, education, social class, employment status, political ideology, immigration attitudes, political trust, political cynicism, national identity, and satisfaction with democracy.¹¹ Please see Appendix B for information regarding the theoretical foundation of the chosen variables as well as their operationalization. This leads to the following regression model, where all regression coefficients are bias-corrected for rare events as described in King and Zeng (2001):

$$\ln\left(\frac{Y}{1-Y_t}\right) = b_0 + b_1 Y_{t-1} + b_2 X_1 + \mu,$$

where μ is a $k \times 1$ vector with bias-corrected regression coefficients for the control variables.

To test our second hypothesis, we estimate the same set of models, but use exposure to crime-related news as the key independent variable X_1 (Models 2).

To test our third and fourth hypothesis, we estimate two additional series of regression models (Models 3 & 4). These models differ from the previous models in that two independent variables are added. First, for each anti-immigrant party, we recoded the first-wave measure of the propensity to vote for it into a binary variable (low vs. high) indicating the likelihood to vote for an anti-immigrant party before exposure (X_2).¹² The 'high'-group consists of respondents who, in the first panel wave, reported being very likely to ever vote for an anti-immigrant party. The low-group consists of all other respondents. Second, we multiplied this binary variable with exposure to immigration-related (or crime-related) news ($X_1 X_2$). Both the initial vote propensity dummy and the interaction term [initial vote propensity (low/high) * issue exposure] are added to each party-specific model. Aside from that, Models 3 are identical to Models 1 and Models 4 identical to Models 2. We expect a positive interaction effect, which would indicate that the more exposure *and* the higher the

⁹ Inter-coder reliability is satisfactory, as Krippendorff's alpha for story type is .68.

¹⁰ We also conduct all analyses with the primary as well as the secondary topic coded. Results are similar to those using the initial coding.

¹¹ Internal consistency of the applied scales is satisfactory as measures of Cronbach's range from .80 to .89. When assessing the same models without controlling for such variables that are theoretically related to voting for anti-immigrant parties, we find significant effects for the same parties as in models where control variables are included.

¹² Wave 1 vote propensities are measured on a 10-point scale (1 means 'not at all probable' and 10 means 'very probable'). For the dummy, respondents scoring between 1 and 8 on the first wave vote propensity measure are recoded 0, and respondents scoring between 9 and 10 are recoded 1. (We also assessed all models using a dummy that distinguishes between respondents scoring between 1 and 7 and respondents scoring between 8 and 10 on the first wave vote propensity measure. This leads to similar results.) Recoding the variable like this, we distinguish wave-1 respondents with an unambiguous intention to vote for an anti-immigrant party from respondents without a clear intention to vote for an anti-immigrant party.

Table 1
Full model (Models 1 & 2) for the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ).

	Models 1	Models 2
Constant	–5.73	3.07
National identity	.14 (.11)	.15 (.11)
Age	–.03 (.01)*	–.02 (.01)*
Years of Education	–.05 (.03)*	–.04 (.03)
Gender	.18 (.25)	.05 (.25)
(Un)employment Dummy	.75 (.47)	.62 (.47)
Manual Worker Dummy	–.63 (.35)	–.93 (.36)**
Left–Right Ideology	.14 (.06)**	.14 (.06)**
Satisfaction Democracy	–.08 (.09)	–.10 (.09)
Political Trust	–.12 (.13)	–.10 (.13)
Political Cynicism	.20 (.13)	.19 (.13)
Immigration Attitude	.29 (.13)*	.28 (.13)*
W1 ptv FPÖ	3.17 (.30)***	3.07 (.29)***
Immigration news exposure	4.42 (.65)***	–
Crime news exposure	–	1.39 (.19)***
Pseudo <i>R</i> -squared	.47	.47
<i>N</i>	1281	1281

Note: * $p < .05$ (one-tailed).

propensity to vote for an anti-immigrant party before the exposure, the higher the likelihood to vote for the party after the exposure. This leads to the following regression model (again, all regression coefficients are bias-corrected for rare events):

$$\ln\left(\frac{Y}{1-Y_t}\right) = b_0 + b_1 Y_{t-1} + b_2 X + b_3 X_2 + b_4 (X_1 X_2) + \mu$$

4. Results

We first present results of tests of whether exposure to immigration (Models 1) and crime (Models 2) in the news media is related to changes in the likelihood to vote for an anti-immigrant party. The fit of Models 1 ranges from Pseudo *R*-squared = .22 for the British National Party to .57 for the party National Front in France ($M = .43$, $SD = .09$). For Models 2, the model fit ranges from Pseudo *R*-squared = .21 for the British National Party to .59 for the party National Front in France ($M = .44$, $SD = .09$).

Table 2

The effect of exposure to immigration- and crime-related news on national vote intentions (Models 1 & 2) and the conditional effect of the initial likelihood to vote (Models 3 & 4) for 13 anti-immigrant parties.

Party	Models 1	Models 2	Models 3	Models 4
BNP	10.88 (4.09)**	1.20 (.65)*	.35 (6.88)	.21 (1.10)
FN (F)	19.98 (5.41)***	1.63 (.44)***	5.12 (16.38)	1.04 (.84)
LN	1.91 (.54)***	.73 (.15)***	1.52 (1.23)	.68 (.33)*
REP	11.29 (6.50)*	.56 (.46)	11.93 (9.21)	–.90 (1.19)
NPD	7.71 (4.74)	.83 (.58)	9.90 (7.19)	–.37 (.92)
SD	3.92 (1.23)***	1.25 (.31)***	–.42 (2.82)	–.36 (.72)
DF	3.51 (.77)**	1.81 (.36)**	1.46 (1.49)	.81 (.67)
FPÖ	4.42 (.65)***	1.39 (.19)***	3.70 (1.54)**	1.42 (.50)**
VB	10.66 (3.17)***	2.25 (.42)***	3.59 (10.78)	.39 (.93)
FN (B)	15.02 (6.95)*	1.29 (.74)*	7.40 (22.67)	.96 (1.56)
PVV	9.56 (1.29)***	2.64 (.32)***	19.14 (8.93)*	3.47 (1.18)**
PS	9.13 (1.36)***	1.23 (.16)***	14.19 (6.14)**	1.39 (.48)***
LAOS	5.78 (1.17)***	5.95 (1.19)***	9.19 (2.93)***	8.37 (2.74)***
Avg. Pseudo R^2	.43	.44	.47	.49
Avg. <i>N</i>	1258	1257	1182	1184

Note: Unstandardized regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < .05$ (one-tailed).

Unstandardized regression coefficients suggest that exposure to news about immigration as well as exposure to news about crime is positively associated with the likelihood to vote for an anti-immigrant party (see Table 1 for an example of a full model and Table 2 for an overview of the relevant coefficients for all parties). The relation between immigration news and anti-immigrant voting is found for 12 of the 13 parties under study. The exception is the German National Democratic Party. The relation between crime news and anti-immigrant voting is found for 11 of 13 parties. Here, the exceptions are the Republicans and the National Democratic Party in Germany. In all 26 cases the relation is positive, as expected.

The strongest relation is found for the Freedom Party in Austria. A one standard deviation increase in the exposure to immigration measure produces, on average, a .84 increase in the log odds of voting for the Austrian Freedom Party. The weakest relation is found for the German Republicans. One standard deviation increase in the exposure to crime measure produces, on average, a .25 increase in the log odds of voting for the Republicans in Germany.

Second, we turn to the question of to what extent the relation between immigration exposure (Models 3) as well as crime exposure (Models 4) and the likelihood to vote for an anti-immigrant party depends on the propensity to vote for the party before the exposure (H3 & H4). The fit of Models 3 ranges from Pseudo *R*-squared = .37 for the Belgian party Flemish Interest to .60 for the party National Front in France ($M = .47$, $SD = .07$). For Models 4 fit ranges from *R*-squared = .4 for the Belgian party Flemish Interest to .62 for the National Front in France ($M = .49$, $SD = .06$). The conditional effect we expect with regard to H3 is found for 4 of the 13 parties: The Freedom Party in Austria, the Dutch Freedom Party, the True Finns in Finland and the Popular Orthodox Rally in Greece (for an overview of the coefficients for all parties see Table 2). The conditional effect of H4 is found for 5 of 13 parties: The Freedom Party in Austria, the Dutch Freedom Party, the True Finns in Finland, the Popular Orthodox Rally in Greece and the Italian National League. In all these 9 cases the effect is in the expected direction and statistically significant ($p < .05$, one-

tailed). More generally, we find positive coefficients in 22 out of 26 cases.

Based on these rather mixed findings, we cannot clearly say if the relation between immigration- and crime news and voting for an anti-immigrant party depends on whether or not one already considers oneself likely to vote for an anti-immigrant party. In the nine cases for which we found a positive interaction effect, this means that the relation between exposure to the issue in the news media and voting for an anti-immigrant party is stronger among voters reporting a high propensity to vote for an anti-immigrant party in the first panel wave than for those who did not consider themselves likely to vote for an anti-immigrant party in the first wave.

In order to make the conditional process at work more insightful, we have plotted the interaction effect of immigration exposure and W1 vote propensity for the Dutch Freedom Party (PVV) and the British National Party (BNP). See Figs. 1 and 2.

The amount of exposure to immigration in the news media is plotted on the x-axis and the predicted probability of the intention to vote for the respective anti-immigrant party is plotted on the y-axis. The line with little squares refers to respondents with a low W1 vote propensity for the respective anti-immigrant party, and the line with little circles refers to respondents with a high W1 vote propensity for the respective anti-immigrant party. The semi-transparent areas around the lines indicate the confidence intervals.

Fig. 1 shows that the effect of immigration exposure is significantly bigger for respondents with an initial preference for the Freedom party than for respondents, who were unlikely to vote for the party in the first panel wave. The confidence intervals of the two lines do not overlap. This indicates that the H1 relation is stronger among voters with an initial preference for the Freedom Party, which is evidence in support of H2.

However, in most cases the conditional effect is not as clear as it is for the Republicans. As Fig. 2 shows, the relation between immigration news and voting for the British National Party (BNP) is not significantly stronger among voters with an initial preference for the BNP than for voters, who were unlikely to vote for the party in the first panel wave. The semi-transparent areas, which show the confidence intervals, overlap.

5. Robustness checks

We conduct several sensitivity analyses. First, we estimate per party models that predict respondents' exposure to immigration and crime in the news media. These models include W1 measures of the intention to vote for an anti-immigrant party as key independent variable and exposure to immigration news (or crime news respectively) as dependent variable. Furthermore, we included the same control variables as in our main models (Models 1 and 2). We find no significant effects of party-specific vote intentions (as measured in the first panel-wave) on exposure to immigration and crime news. From this, we infer that the *intention to vote for an anti-immigrant party* and *exposure to immigration in the news* were not correlated before the exposure. We conclude that the "effect" between exposure and anti-immigrant voting appeared between the two panel waves.

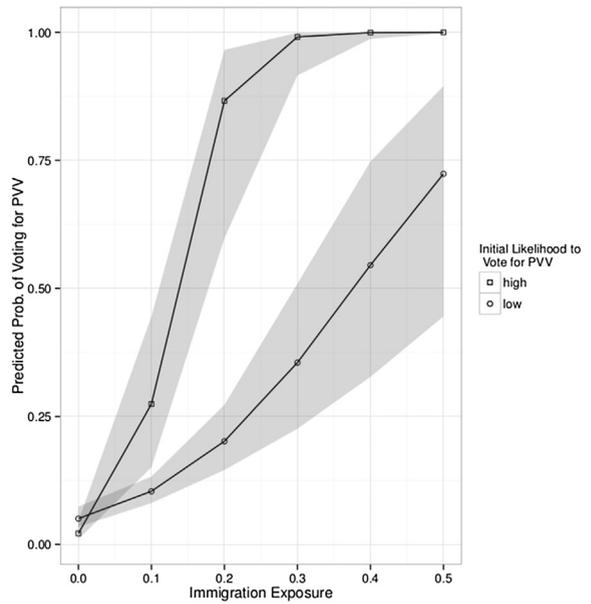


Fig. 1. The interaction effect of immigration exposure and the initial intention to vote for the Dutch Freedom Party (PVV) on change in the intention to vote for that party.

Second, variation in vote intentions for anti-immigrant parties might be due to variation in news exposure in general. Therefore, we assessed for each anti-immigrant party the effect of general news exposure on vote intention. Results show no significant effect, which leads to the conclusion that the presented variation in vote intentions is due to exposure to issue-specific news coverage.

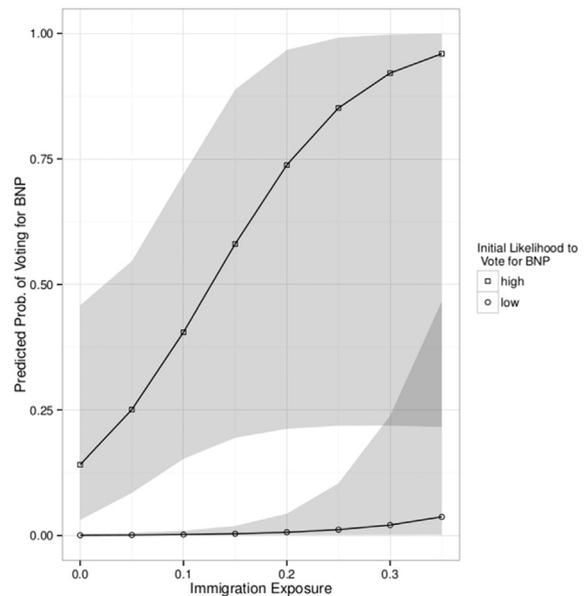


Fig. 2. The interaction effect of immigration exposure and the initial intention to vote for the British National Party (BNP) on change in the interaction to vote for that party.

Third, we re-estimated all models controlling for exposure to coverage of the anti-immigrant parties under study and their leader. To do so, to each model a variable is added that indicates the amount of exposure to news about that specific anti-immigrant party and its leader and other party members in the news media. We find the main effects of exposure to immigration as well as for exposure to crime on vote intentions for 7 (immigration) and 8 (crime) of the 13 anti-immigrant parties. This indicates that estimated effects on anti-immigrant voting are not purely the result of exposure to party-specific news content, but of exposure to news about immigration and crime in general.

Finally, to make sure that measures of the key dependent variable – national vote intentions – are not biased by the context of the European election study, we compared wave two measures of national vote intentions with (a) actual outcomes of the closest national general election in each country, and with (b) actual outcomes of the 2009 European Parliament elections. Results show that measured national vote intentions closely resemble outcomes of the closest national general election in each of the countries (2007–2011). On average, wave two measures of the national vote intention deviate by only 1.36 percentage points from actual outcomes of national elections. In contrast, the average difference between 2009 European Parliament election outcomes and measures of the national vote intention is nearly twice as big. Moreover, in the second wave, measures of the national vote intention do not resemble actual outcomes of European Parliament election more closely as in the first wave. Based on these numbers, we find no evidence that our measures of the key dependent variable are biased by the context of the European election study.

6. Conclusion

In this study we have investigated the relationship between exposure to news about immigration and crime and the likelihood to vote for an anti-immigrant party. We have tested this relationship for 13 anti-immigrant parties in 11 countries. A positive relation between immigration news and voting for an anti-immigrant party has been found for 12 of the 13 parties, and a positive relation between crime news and voting for an anti-immigrant party has been found for 11 of the 13 parties. We, therefore, conclude that exposure to news about immigration as well as exposure to news about crime are positively related to the likelihood to vote for an anti-immigrant party.

Furthermore, we have tested whether the strength of the relationship between (media) exposure and the likelihood to vote for an anti-immigrant party depends on the propensity to vote for the party before the exposure. We have found this conditional effect for only 4 (immigration), and respectively 5 (crime), out of 13 parties. From this, we conclude that the relation between immigration news as well as crime news and anti-immigrant party voting is not significantly larger among voters with a clear initial preference for anti-immigrant parties. We speculate that the expected conditional effect exist for each of the 13 parties, although we are unable to demonstrate it in most cases.

This might be due to a lack of precision in measurement and of statistical power. The fact that almost all coefficients are positive for both H3 and H4 points in that direction. Yet, we have to leave this to future research.

With these findings, we provide empirical evidence in support of understudied hypotheses. We show that exposure to an issue in the news is not restricted to effects on how voters evaluate political candidates or parties, but also affects the relevance of the issue to party choice. Up to now, this area of research has received scant attention. Existing research (e.g., [Iyengar and Kinder, 1987](#); [Krosnick and Kinder, 1990](#)) provides ample support for effects of news coverage on the importance of policy dimensions in, especially, US presidential evaluations. Only a few studies, however, have extended this line of research to effects on actual party choice. Our research thus highlights the importance of issue visibility in explaining how media coverage affects individual-level voting behavior.

Furthermore, we strengthen the theoretical foundation of anti-immigrant voting. We demonstrate that when it comes to anti-immigrant parties this foundation concerns the visibility of immigration and crime issues in the news. We go beyond the existing literature by studying the relation between exposure to immigration as well as crime news and voting on the individual level, and by showing that the relation holds for nearly the entire population of relevant anti-immigrant parties in contemporary Western Europe.

One might object that the issue-ownership model of voting only holds for valence issues ([Van der Brug, 2004](#)), where political parties and voters agree on the goals, but disagree on the means of achieving, or the priority of, these goals. Crime clearly is a valence issue, as one can safely assume that both politicians and the public generally wish for low crime rates. With immigration, however, this is not necessarily the case. We thus have to raise the question whether exposure to immigration in the media can actually cause anti-immigrant voting, because not all voters might advocate a decline in immigration. Our results weakly indicate that the relation between immigration exposure and the anti-immigrant vote might be stronger for respondents who already sympathize with an anti-immigrant party and, therefore, are likely to hold attitudes against immigration. This suggests that issue positions toward immigration play a role when it comes to issue-ownership voting with a positional issue. This finding would be in line with previous issue-ownership research (e.g., [Bélanger and Meguid, 2008](#)). However, our evidence for this explanation is rather weak. We, therefore, must conclude that we have no conclusive evidence for explaining the exact way in which exposure to a positional issue like immigration affects party preferences. According to issue-ownership theory, this effect is caused by a priming of issues on which parties and voters share the same positions. In our study, we have not found such a priming effect.

How much confidence can we have in the results? Findings of the media-content analysis suggest that the issue of immigration received relatively little attention in the news media. Consequently, the variation in our key independent variable is relatively modest. Most respondents score low on

the variable exposure to immigration-related news. This is problematic, because there might be insufficient stimulation for the emergence of strong effects. This said, when we use more encompassing operationalizations of media coverage of immigration (leading to more variation in the data), our conclusions do not substantially change. Besides, crime issues received significantly more attention in the news media than immigration issues. As we find similar results for effects of exposure to immigration and crime news, we believe that our general findings hold. We thus do not expect our results to be strongly affected by the lack of variation in our main independent variable. In future research this issue should be addressed by focusing on other topics that are more dominant on the media agenda.

Furthermore, we want to address limitations related to the endogeneity of our main independent variable – exposure to immigration and crime news. The ‘effect’ of exposure to immigration/crime news on voting for anti-immigrant parties could be spurious as the found association between the variables can be driven by selective exposure (e.g., Garrett, 2013). Voters with a preference for an anti-immigrant party might be more likely to expose themselves to immigration and crime news than other voters. Furthermore, other (unmeasured) variables might affect both immigration exposure and vote intentions.

In this paper, we estimated a lagged-dependent variable model. This does not solve the endogeneity problem, but makes it unlikely that changes in the intention to vote for an anti-immigrant party between the panel waves cause variation in news exposure as measured in the first panel wave. Furthermore, we included various independent variables in our models, which are known to be related to voting for anti-immigrant parties. This way we try to control for factors, which might cause a spurious correlation between news exposure and vote intentions.

However, doing all this, we cannot know for sure whether changes in vote intention are actually caused by media exposure, because we have no randomly selected groups and cannot control for all relevant variables in our models. For this reason, we must interpret our findings in terms of an association between exposure to immigration and crime in the news and voting for anti-immigrant parties, and cannot speak about a causal effect of the former on the latter.

Our paper has significant implications for the study of effects of media salience and for society in general. Previous research has clearly demonstrated a link between the dominance of an issue in the news media and its salience among the public. Extending such research by assessing the effects of exposure to issue-related news on party choice is a logical next step. Up to now, research has mainly focused on effects on how voters weight political issues when voting. It is, however, perhaps even more important to investigate how issue salience in the media affects party choice. Various parties strongly focus on single issues such as immigration, European integration, and the environment. Understanding how the media affect the electoral performance of such parties by prioritizing certain topics over others is not only of relevance to theory building, but to society more generally.

Appendix A. News media coverage of immigration and crime.

Country	Immigration items	Crime items	Total items
Austria	3.1%	5.8%	1598
Belgium–Flanders	0.9%	5.4%	1762
Belgium–Wallonia	1.0%	5.5%	1046
Denmark	3.0%	5.3%	1159
Finland	1.0%	6.7%	1338
France	0.6%	6.9%	2016
Germany	1.3%	4.1%	2009
Greece	2.3%	1.8%	2919
Italy	3.0%	10.1%	1751
The Netherlands	1.8%	4.8%	1810
Sweden	1.3%	4.1%	1474
United Kingdom	1.1%	5.5%	1202
Total	1.7%	5.3%	20,084

Appendix B. Specification of control variables added to the regression models

In all regression models we control for a series of variables, which the relevant literature suggests are theoretically and empirically related to voting for anti-immigrant parties. First of all, younger voters (Arzheimer, 2009), male voters and manual workers (Arzheimer, 2009; Lubbers et al., 2002), are more likely to vote for anti-immigrant parties. In some studies, the same holds for unemployed persons (Arzheimer, 2009; Lubbers et al., 2002). Also, higher education is associated with a lower propensity to vote for anti-immigrant parties (Lubbers et al., 2002; Arzheimer, 2009). Furthermore, anti-immigrant attitudes (Lubbers et al., 2002; Van der Brug et al., 2005; Ivarsflaten, 2008), feelings of political dissatisfaction (Lubbers et al., 2002; Arzheimer, 2009; Ivarsflaten, 2008), and political ideology (Arzheimer, 2009; Van der Brug et al., 2005) have been demonstrated empirically to affect anti-immigrant voting. Finally, we include political cynicism, political trust and national identity (Van der Brug, 2003).

Variable	Question wording & coding	Cronbach's alpha
Age		
Gender	0(male), 1(female)	
Immigration attitude	"Could you please indicate for every statement below to what extent you agree or disagree with it. (1) Immigrants abuse [country]'s social welfare system, because they take more out than they put in. (2) Immigrants are a threat to the security of [nationality] people. (3) The religious practices of immigrants are a threat to the [nationality] way of life and its traditions. (4) Immigrants are an important cause of crime in [country]. (5) Immigration is good for the (nationality) labour market." From 1(strongly disagree) to 7(strongly agree).	5 items, alpha = .83

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(continued)

Variable	Question wording & coding	Cronbach's alpha
Education	"How old were you when you stopped full-time education?" If still studying, age was coded. Maximum age was set to 26 to avoid distortion of older people still/again studying.	
Employed	0(<i>no</i>), 1(<i>yes</i>)	
Man. worker	0(<i>manual worker</i>), 1(<i>non-manual worker</i>)	
Left–right position	"In political matters, people talk about 'the left' and 'the right'. What is your position?" From 1(<i>left</i>) to 10(<i>right</i>)	
Political cynicism	"Please consider the following statements about politics in general. Could you please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with them. (1) Almost all politicians will sell out their ideals or break their promises if it will increase their power. (2) Most politicians are in politics for what they can get out of it personally. (3) Most politicians are truthful with the voters. (4) Most politicians are dedicated and we should be grateful to them for the work they do." From 1(<i>strongly disagree</i>) to 7(<i>strongly agree</i>).	4 items, alpha = .78
Satisfaction with democracy	Regardless of who is in government, on the whole, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy works in (country)?	
Political trust	"Now thinking about political institutions for a moment. Using a scale that reaches from 1 to 7, on which 1 means that you have no trust at all and 7 means that you have a great deal of trust, how much trust do you have in the following institutions? (1) the [national parliament], (2) the [nationality] government, (3) the European (EU) Parliament, (4) the European (EU) Commission?"	4 items, alpha = .80
National identity	"Please consider the following statements about [country] and tell us for each of them to what extent you agree or disagree. (1) I am proud to be an (nationality) citizen. (2) Being (nationality) means a lot to me. (3) I feel close to fellow (nationals). (4) I feel more (nationality) than European." From 1(<i>strongly disagree</i>) to 7(<i>strongly agree</i>).	4 items, alpha = .89

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