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Immigration absorption and anti-immigrant attitudes in European welfare states

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CHAPTER FIVE:

IMMIGRATION- WELFARE FRAMING IN THE MEDIA AND SUPPORT FOR WELFARE REDISTRIBUTION²⁰

²⁰ This chapter is based on an article co-authored by Brian Burgoon and Matthijs Rooduijn. The article was funded by and part of the ENLIGHTEN project (<http://enlightenproject.eu/>).

Abstract

Recent studies have argued that the politics of immigration and welfare are interconnected. Scholars suggest that citizens' support for welfare redistribution is affected by actual levels of immigration and by attitudes towards immigrants (e.g., Brady and Finnigan 2014; Burgoon et al. 2012; Crepaz 2008; Soroka et al. 2006). Their research, however, ignores the potential role of the mass media, plausibly important to how citizens think about migration, social affairs and their interconnection. This chapter explores this possible role. It develops the claim that individuals' support for welfare redistribution is affected by the extent to which news media frames immigration as a welfare issue. The chapter argues that the direction of this effect of the welfare-immigration frame in the news environment on welfare state attitudes strongly depends on individual-level immigration attitudes. The media stories linking welfare to migration can be expected to dampen support for social policies among those people holding negative attitudes towards immigration, but spur support for social policies among those who favor immigration. These claims find significant support in empirical analyses based on automated content analysis linked to individual-level survey data and aggregate-level information about economic circumstances and immigration from 10 European countries between 2002 and 2015. My findings suggest that the public debate in the media on immigration and the welfare state can have a polarizing effect on public opinion about welfare redistribution.

Introduction

A question that has become increasingly important in the public and political debate in Europe is whether welfare states can cope with increasing immigration. Many politicians argue that this is not the case. For instance, during the French presidential election of 2017, Marine Le Pen ran on a platform giving priority to welfare, housing and employment for French nationals and suspending all legal immigration to address the "uncontrollable situation" of immigration into France (Chrisafis 2017). The politics of the welfare state and immigration are becoming increasingly entangled. Various studies have shown that welfare state politics, including attitudes towards government redistribution, are influenced by immigration (e.g., Brady and Finnigan 2014; Burgoon et al. 2012; Crepaz 2008; Soroka et al. 2006). The mechanism starts with high levels of immigration, which makes the immigration issue more salient and fuels in-group/out-group thinking. This in turn dampens support for welfare redistribution to the alleged "undeserving poor" (see Eger and Breznau 2017). Interestingly, however, little is known about how the absorption of immigration is related to opposition of or support for the welfare state. For instance, the extent to which the public debate in the media – the place par excellence for citizens to get their immigration- and welfare-related information – affects welfare attitudes is understudied. This is problematic, because many citizens process societal trends more through these media debates than through first-hand experience. I contend that media reporting that frames immigration as a welfare state issue has an impact on how citizens think about welfare redistribution.

In his book *Why Americans hate welfare*, Martin Gilens describes how white Americans overestimate the proportion of African Americans dependent on government assistance and shows that racial stereotypes are an important component of anti-welfare attitudes (1999). One of the causes, Gilens contends, is that African Americans are disproportionately associated with stories about poverty in the media. The same mechanism could apply to welfare politics in Europe. Surprisingly, research into this phenomenon is very scarce. Recent research shows that media framing and the salience of the immigration issue are relevant in explaining anti-immigrant sentiment (e.g., Czymara and Dochow 2018; McLaren et al. 2018). Apart from a survey experiment by Sabina Avdagic and Lee Savage (2018), there is no study (to my knowledge) that directly connects the media debate on immigration and welfare to attitudes towards the welfare state, at least not using content analysis and survey data.

In this chapter, I argue that the extent to which the issue of immigration is tied up with the issue of welfare in the media environment affects support for welfare redistribution. More specifically, I theorize that increases in the extent of a welfare state framing of immigration in the media debate have implications for attitudes towards welfare redistribution, but that the direction of these implications depends on pre-existing immigration attitudes of individual citizens. I claim that when welfare and immigration politics are increasingly linked to each other in the news environment, people holding negative attitudes towards immigration will express more negative views of welfare redistribution, whereas those in favor of immigration will become more positive towards redistribution.

Empirical analyses based on a combination of the outcomes of an automated content analysis, existing individual-level survey data from the ESS, and aggregate-level information about economic circumstances and immigration from 10 European countries between 2002 and 2015 yield substantial support for these conditional claims. These findings are highly relevant for academic and vernacular debates about immigration and the welfare state. They show that the public debate in the media is of importance for understanding how immigration links to welfare attitudes. It is not just “objective” immigration stocks and flows that matter for the extent to which someone supports welfare redistribution; what is just as important – and maybe even more important – is the extent to which the issues of welfare and immigration are tied up in the media debate. These findings also show that different groups of citizens (i.e., those with anti-immigration attitudes versus those with pro-immigration attitudes) respond differently to the welfare framing of immigration in the media debate. This implies that the public debate in the media has a clearly polarizing effect on public opinion about welfare redistribution (see Baldassarri and Gelman 2008).

Theory

Most of the debate on how migration relates to welfare state politics focuses on how actual material patterns of migration, such as rising foreign-born stocks in most OECD countries, have implications for the beliefs and normative attitudes of citizens and policymakers. Many of these studies focus on the hypothesis that increasing immigration decreases individuals' support for welfare redistribution. Maureen Eger and Nate Breznau (2017), for instance, build on social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979) and argue that citizens categorize the world into in-groups and out-groups. Their main claim is that immigration makes in-group and out-group boundaries salient and thereby has a dampening effect on support for welfare redistribution, because natives will, under these circumstances, fear that immigrants depend disproportionately on (non-contributory) welfare benefits. The results of studies testing this hypothesis are mixed. Some have found a negative relationship between immigration and attitudes toward redistribution (e.g., Dahlberg et al. 2012; Eger and Breznau 2017; Eger 2010; Schmidt-Catran and Spies 2016), whereas other studies reveal this relationship to be weak or non-existent (Brady and Finnigan 2014; Crepaz 2008; Hjerm and Schnabel 2012; Mau and Burkhardt 2009). These mixed findings might well reflect omission of an important factor, media reporting, that can be expected to alter individual perceptions about immigration and welfare redistribution.

News media are important as a source of information about developments in society. Most people experience major societal trends not so much first-hand, but more through second-hand experience as communicated through various media sources. As long as someone keeps his or her job or does not live next to a refugee or asylum center, the experiences of economic downturn, unemployment, or spiking immigration are not likely to have a strong impact on that person's daily life. Instead, mass media form an essential link between macro-scale structures and processes and public opinion (Demers et al. 1989; Jacobs et al. 2018). Increasing immigration or unemployment can motivate journalists to cover stories on negative externalities of immigration and encourage the public to think more negatively about immigration or the welfare state. Apart from merely following societal trends, news media have their own dynamic, which becomes clear in the amplification of moral panics or the transmission of media hypes (Vasterman 2005). For instance, during the European refugee crisis, media attention to immigration largely followed the same trend as asylum applications, but the media peak was disproportionately higher than the asylum peak and persisted after asylum applicant numbers went down (Harteveld et al. 2018).

When it comes to the relationship between in-group/out-group thinking, support for the welfare state, and immigration, Martin Gilens' (1999) work is an important exception in that it does take seriously the role of media debates. Focused on the US context, Gilens found that the number of media stories about poverty does not simply track the actual poverty rate. He also found that photos next to articles about poverty in mainstream news magazines disproportionately feature

African Americans. Moreover, the pattern of the representation of African Americans featured in the pictures does not match with the relative number of African Americans living in poverty compared to whites over time. Gilens (1999) argues that this could be a reason why white Americans overestimate the relative dependence of black people on government assistance and may underlie the association between racial stereotypes and opposition to welfare programs among whites. In this way, out-group stereotyping, reinforced by media reporting, may lead to increasing welfare chauvinism.

Journalists' professional customs and culture, including the use of content from big news agencies and follow-ups on ongoing stories, lead to a large overlap between different media outlets in the issues they cover (Shoemaker and Reese 2014). Hence, mainstream news media can be seen as an indication of the subjects in the larger media debate. Shifts in the news environment can lead to broad shifts in public opinion on salient issues. Through all kinds of news channels, social media or interactions with other people, the public knows about the top stories in the information environment (Peter 2004; Schmitt-Beck 2003). Various studies in communication science focusing on a range of substantive political and social issues have found strong links between a general (national-level) media debate on the one hand and aggregate public opinion on the other (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2009; Harteveld et al. 2018; Jerit et al. 2006).

According to agenda setting theory, the more salient an issue becomes in the news, the more important that issue becomes to the public (Cohen 1963, 13; Iyengar and Kinder 1987; McCombs and Shaw 1972). Issues with a lot of traction in the news become more accessible in the memory of citizens. However, simply becoming more aware of immigration is probably not enough to alter opinions on welfare redistribution. It is more likely that the issues of welfare and immigration need to be associated with each other in media reporting itself for people to link them. In other words, reporting on the issue of immigration has been framed as a welfare issue. There are many ways of conceptualizing framing, but in this chapter, I follow the theory of associative framing (Schultz et al. 2012; Ruigrok and Van Atteveldt 2007). In the news, issues form associative patterns and a stronger association with a certain concept increases the chance that this will be taken into account by people when they form an opinion about the topic. But this issue association might also have consequences for the issues, actors, or attributions that are associated with the initial issue. In this way, if news media associate immigration with the politics of the welfare state, the public might consider immigration when they are asked about their opinion about welfare redistribution.

This intuition undergirds my central expectation. I argue that the extent to which the issues of welfare and immigration are tied up in the media environment alters how people think about welfare redistribution. Such welfare framing of immigration increases the

visibility of in-group and out-group boundaries (Blumer 1958; Semyonov et al. 2006), in particular vis-à-vis welfare redistribution, and triggers the idea that immigrants rely relatively more often on social benefits than natives do (Boeri 2010; Camarota 2012). This can be expected to cause citizens to think about immigration when they form their opinion about welfare spending.

How particular individuals respond to this increased salience of in-group/out-group boundaries, however, is not entirely clear. On the one hand, the increased pervasiveness of messages that immigrants rely disproportionately on welfare state support might well foster feelings that natives (i.e. the in-group) are victims of social policy redistribution while immigrants (i.e. the out-group) are undeserving winners. This line of reasoning follows in-group threat theory, according to which the in-group is considered superior to the out-group and according to which welfare should only be distributed to members of the in-group (Blalock 1967; Quillian 1995). For citizens susceptible to this way of thinking, the welfare framing of immigration will likely fuel welfare chauvinism. If the assumption is that welfare spending disproportionately supports the out-group or the undeserving poor, welfare-immigration framing in the media debate might well lead to less support for welfare redistribution.²¹

On the other hand, not all citizens see immigrants as a threat. Public opinion in Western societies is increasingly structured along a socio-cultural dimension (e.g., Kriesi et al. 2006; 2008; Van der Brug and Van Spanje 2009) and a relatively large group of citizens holds cosmopolitan and multiculturalist attitudes. Confronted with the message that immigrants are disproportionate welfare recipients, these citizens might well conclude that less well-off immigrants are victims of various processes they themselves are not responsible for, and, therefore, deserve more state support. If this is the case, I expect a positive relationship between the welfare-immigration linkage in the media debate and welfare attitudes. This offsetting set of implications leads to the first two hypotheses (see the arrows H12a and H12b in Figure 5.1):

H12a: The welfare framing of immigration in media reporting will decrease an individual's support for welfare redistribution.

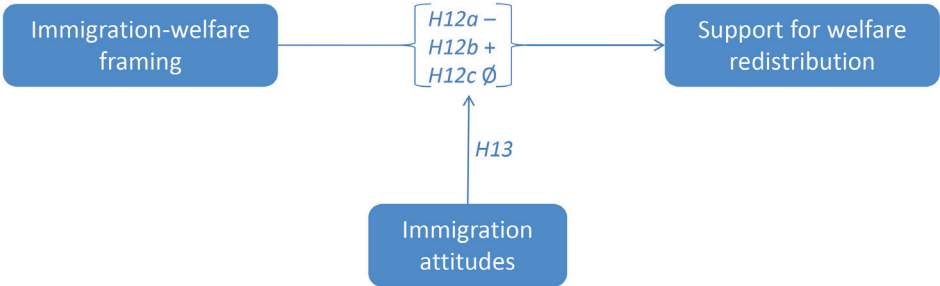
H12b: The welfare framing of immigration in media reporting will increase an individual's support for welfare redistribution.

²¹ Theoretically, one might reason that if individuals believe the in-group or oneself to be the main victim of immigrants being overrepresented among welfare recipients, they may believe that protection of the in-group through redistribution is more important than the exclusion of the out-group. This is unlikely, however, to the extent that the welfare-immigration linkage in media reporting make natives believe that more redistribution will benefit immigrants rather than the own group.

Finally, it may well be that these offsetting implications, constituting positive and negative effects, will cancel each other out, yielding no net effect on support for government redistribution. This constitutes the null hypothesis about the welfare-state implications of the welfare-immigration association in the media debate. Captured by H12c in Figure 5.1, this hypothesis is:

H12c: The welfare-immigration framing in media reporting will neither decrease nor increase an individual's support for welfare redistribution.

Figure 5.1: Conceptual framework of the hypotheses



Given the offsetting and hence uncertain character of the effects of the media debate on attitudes toward welfare redistribution, I surmise that the contrasting effects are likely moderated in predictable ways by individual-level characteristics. In particular, I argue that the extent to which the welfare framing of immigration in media reporting affects welfare attitudes might well be conditional upon a person’s attitude toward immigration (see H13 below and summarized graphically in Figure 5.1 above).

Various studies have shown that someone’s immigration attitude has significant implications for that person’s attitudes toward welfare redistribution (Boeri 2010; Garand et al. 2017; Gilens 1995; 1996; Finseraas 2008; Kulin et al. 2016). In this study, however, I am not so much interested in the direct effect of immigration attitudes on welfare support, but in how immigration attitudes moderate the relationship between the immigration-welfare media reporting and welfare support. The literature on motivated reasoning teaches that effects of (media) messages are often dependent on someone’s prior convictions (Kunda 1990; Lahav and Courtemanche 2012; Taber and Lodge 2006). Even if the information is based on scientific consensus, if a debate is polarized, people tend to process information conflicting with their viewpoint in such a way that it confirms their prior opinion instead of challenging the conviction (Hart and Nisbet 2012). Because of both the tendency to discard information opposing someone’s worldview (disconfirmation bias) and a strengthening of the prior opinion based on confirming information (confirmation bias), people tend to

move more to the extreme than to find common ground (Taber and Lodge 2006). Following to this reasoning, it is possible that news that frames immigration as a welfare state issue is processed differently based on someone's prior immigration opinion. Motivated reasoning in polarized debates tends to increase the existing differences of opinions.

Considering the motivated reasoning theory, I expect that natives with anti-immigration attitudes will be more likely to fear that welfare redistribution will benefit the out-group disproportionately when exposed to a media climate in which immigration is framed in terms of welfare and thus will show decreasing support for government redistribution. Although I do not study political parties, this can be seen as an argument comparable to recent work exploring the interaction between immigration attitudes and party discourse (Schmidt and Spies 2014). In other words, I expect H12a to be confirmed among those with strong anti-immigration attitudes. On the other hand, I also expect that the welfare framing of immigration can cause individuals with pro-immigration attitudes to be more positive about redistribution, because welfare and immigration are more prominent on the agenda. As a result, they might well feel that both natives and immigrants deserve more support. Hence, I expect H12b to be confirmed among those with strong pro-immigration attitudes. This leads to the following two-sided moderation hypothesis, summarized in Figure 5.1 as H13:

H13: The welfare framing of immigration in media reporting will increase (decrease) an individual's support for welfare redistribution to the degree that s/he is supportive (opposing) of immigration.

Data and methods²²

To assess the above hypotheses, I explore how measures of welfare framing of immigration in the media affect measures of attitudes towards government redistribution and I investigate the extent to which this relationship is conditional upon individuals' immigration opinion. This is a challenge, because it requires large and high-quality samples, both of news media coverage and of well-worded questions on issues of immigration and redistribution, ideally including significant variation over time and countries.

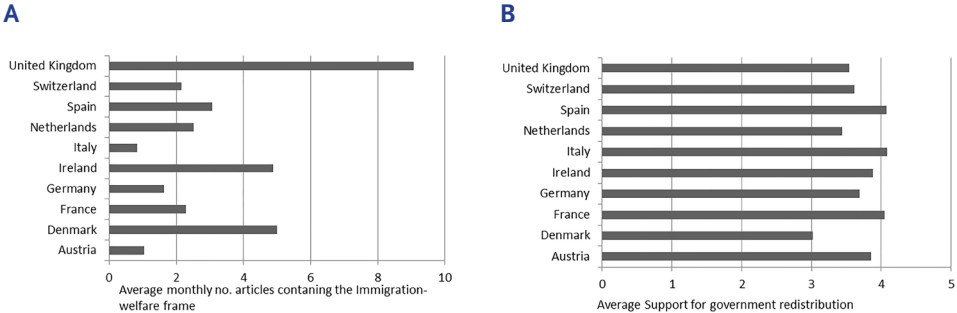
My approach is to use seven waves of the ESS (Round 1-7) datasets, which have strong sampling, extensive coverage, and repeated questions on immigration and welfare. I combine this with my own automatic content analysis of newspapers and country-level information provided by the World Bank (2015), the OECD (2015b; 2015c; 2018), and

²² I use largely the same data and analytical approach as in Chapter Three. Parts of the methodology repeats Chapter Three, but to I prefer the chapter's ability to be read as stand-alone articles over originality.

Eurostat (2015). I include 10 countries in the analyses: Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. These cases reflect variation in terms of geographical location (the British Isles, Western-European, Scandinavian, Southern-European), immigration history and patterns, and the existence of anti-immigrant parties, and were selected based on the availability of data on media debates. All sampled countries are net-immigration countries. Given the Europeanization of immigration policy and the increasing support for anti-immigrant parties in most European countries, it is important to study whether there are patterns in the media and public debate that are similar across Europe, but even for countries which are not part of the Schengen area, such as Ireland and the United Kingdom, European policies are relevant to their entry, because a number of migrants entering from Southern Europe try to make their way through France to the United Kingdom. The sample is currently the most extensive available for immigration-related news.

In my baseline estimates, I focus on specifications limited to a subsample of only native-born respondents. Although the ESS waves are published bi-annually, through the interview date of individual responses it is possible to match the ESS data with the newspaper measures of a particular country on a monthly basis. The unit of analysis is individuals within countries-months. The ESS is not a true panel survey, so the data is multilevel repeated cross sectional in nature.

Figure 5.2: Articles using the immigration-welfare frame (A) and country mean support for government redistribution (5-point scale) (B)



Source panel B: ESS round 1-7

For my main independent variable, I collected all newspaper articles available in the LexisNexis archive of one (if possible) leading mainstream newspaper per country containing synonyms and related terms to immigration, see panel A of Figure 5.2. The country selection is based on the availability of major mainstream newspapers in LexisNexis. The following titles form the sample: *Die Presse* (Austria), *Le Monde* (France),

Die Welt (Germany),²³ *The Irish Times* (Ireland), *La Stampa* (Italy), *De Volkskrant* (the Netherlands), *El Pais* (Spain), *Tages-Anzeiger* (Switzerland), and *The Guardian* (United Kingdom).²⁴ For each country, I tried to sample the mainstream newspaper with the largest circulation. If there were more than one option, I chose a mainstream liberal newspaper over a mainstream conservative newspaper or a tabloid. Research on the Dutch case shows that different outlets largely follow the same agenda (Roggeband and Vliegthart 2007). The differences of framing are in line with the presumed political leaning of the newspaper (ibid., 543). Stephanie Fryberg et al. (2012) compared the framing of immigration in US newspapers and found that the liberal and conservative newspapers cover the issue in surprisingly similar ways. By a margin, conservative newspapers made more use of the ‘immigrants are a threat’ frame (ibid., 106). Lauren McLaren et al. (2018) point out that conservative or right-wing newspapers tend to be more negative about immigration and negative news tends to have stronger effects on public opinion than positive news. Conservative newspapers also show stronger effects (ibid.). However, for this research I am interested in the welfare framing, or issue linkage, of immigration in the media debate, instead of the tone of the reporting. Finally, mainstream liberal newspapers contain relatively more political news than tabloids, which often focus more on sports and entertainment. To get a sense of the serious political and societal debates, relative to other news, mainstream liberal newspapers provide a better indication. In a robustness test, I changed liberal newspapers to conservative ones if available. The newspaper articles were uploaded to the Amsterdam Content Analysis Toolkit (AMCAT) for automatic content analysis (Van Atteveldt 2008).

I measure the association between immigration and welfare in the news by the number of articles per month containing a synonym of or related term to welfare within a 15-words proximity of a synonym of immigration or immigrants. The 15-words proximity should make sure immigration is not only mentioned in the same article, but actually relates to terms concerning the welfare state. Setting the distance between words as too short (< 5) risks leaving out too many relevant articles, whilst a too-large word distance (> 50) would sample too many irrelevant newspaper articles. After several sampling rounds and a validity checks, 15 words appeared to be the optimal word distance for this study. The concept of the welfare state and immigration often fall nicely within the same sentence or paragraph and a validity check shows that of a random sample of 100 articles, between 79 and 89 articles are relevant, depending on how I count articles that mention the immigration-welfare problem in other Western countries. The welfare and immigration search terms are intentionally kept short and basic to keep the measure comparable and

²³ *Die Welt* is considered a conservative newspaper instead of a liberal newspaper. *Die Welt*, however, was the only available major German newspaper.

²⁴ For Switzerland, the first 16 months of the research period media data is unavailable; for Austria the first 28 months are missing from the database.

translatable across countries and contexts and to avoid false negatives in the sample. For instance, terms related to the origin country of migrants are excluded, because words like “foreigners”, “Poles”, or “Turks” do not always relate to immigrants and should therefore be excluded. Articles that mention these kinds of words in the context of immigration usually also use words specific to migrants, according to my data check. Including them would lead to an increase of false positives in the data, whereas leaving them out does not decrease the number of articles substantially and does not cause bias in the data. A similar media association measure has been used in combination with other dependent variables and data sets, showing intuitive results (Harteveld et al. 2018).

Search terms English example:²⁵

Welfare state: *Welfare, benefits, beneficia-, social policy, social spend-, social provision-, social program-, social security, social insurance NOT ageing.*

Immigration: *Immigr-, migr-, refuge-, illegal alien-, asylum seeker-.*

The number of articles per month per newspaper containing the immigration-welfare frame is divided by the total number of articles in that month per newspaper to measure the importance of the immigration-welfare frame relative to the total news supply. Before the analysis I removed duplicate articles, a known problem of working with LexisNexis data. The articles are not weighted by the number of times a welfare-immigration association appears in the article, the place of the welfare framing of immigration in the article, article length, or the place of the article in the newspaper, because this information was not consistently available across news outlets and time.

My expectation is that the effect of a news peak does not suddenly disappear after a month, but fades over a couple of months. The baseline models contain a weighted moving average, counting the month of the interview double, one month prior to the interview as one, and two months prior divided by two, building on previous aggregate media effect studies (Boomgaarden and Vliegthart 2009, 535; Dearing and Rogers 1996, 68). Robustness tests include measures without weighted moving averages and measures where the media measures are led, instead of lagged, to explore the possibility of reversed causality.

The (individual-level) dependent variable is *support for government redistribution*. It is measured by the following question: “The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels.” The answering categories range from “1” (strongly disagree) to “5” (strongly agree).²⁶ Figure 5.2, panel B, above provides a summary of the sample

²⁵ Please find the search terms for the other languages in Appendix 5.

²⁶ Although employing a single-item measure might be criticized, various studies rely on this ESS measure as their dependent variable (see Burgoon 2014; Finseraas 2008; 2009; Jæger 2006; Schmidt-Catran 2016).

country means, smoothed across the seven waves. As can be surmised, support for welfare redistribution tends to be stronger in settings where such welfare protection and redistribution is less developed, although there are plenty of outliers (e.g., the United Kingdom and France). This pattern is a reminder that *ex ante* social protection efforts ought to be taken into account as a control variable.

To measure the aggregate-level moderating conditions highlighted in H2, I rely on both the ESS and aggregate data sources. The moderating variable is a respondent's support for immigration. I measure such attitudes by means of a scale consisting of three 11-point items on immigrants and immigration repeated in all ESS waves. Respondents could answer the following three questions on a 0-10 scale: (1) "Would you say it is generally bad or good for [respondent's country]'s economy that people come to live here from other countries?" (0 = bad; 10 = good); (2) "Would you say that [country]'s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?" (0 = undermined; 10 = enriched); and (3) "Would you say it is generally bad or good for [country]'s economy that people come to live here from other countries?" (0 = bad; 10 = good) (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.85) (ESS rounds 1-7).²⁷

The association between welfare and immigration in the media is expected to at least partly reflect actual developments in society. To control for relevant real-world developments, I use the immigration size as the yearly percentage of foreign-born population lagged by one year, unemployment lagged by one year, and the percentage of GDP spent on social programs. To ensure I measure the welfare-immigration association instead of a proxy for media attention to immigration in general, I control for the monthly number of newspaper articles mentioning immigration (media salience immigration). On the individual level, I control for respondents' personal characteristics, such as age, gender, education, income, social class, personal welfare state dependency, and living in an urban or rural area. I also hold 'news attentiveness' constant, measured by how often the respondent watches the news, to focus on the media environment's effect instead of the possible omitted variable of people being more or less interested in the news altogether.

The hypothesis tests are based on a range of baseline and robustness and sensitivity tests focused on how the welfare framing of immigration in the media debate shapes support for redistribution in ways moderated by immigration support. My baseline models consider all countries and estimate models in which I include all the above individual and key aggregated variables. Because the inclusion of macro-level variables violates assumptions of the standard OLS, logit or probit models (Gelman and Hill 2006), I estimate multilevel

²⁷ Analyses measuring not the general immigration attitude, but only the economic related immigration attitude are included as robustness test.

random intercept, ordered logit models, wherein individuals (level 1, $n = 78,879$) are nested in country-rounds (level 2, $n = 55$). I explore two models: one without interaction terms to assess hypotheses 1a-1c; then one for the interaction between immigration-welfare framing and immigration support. In addition to this baseline series, I consider a range of other specifications, including alternative measures of the main independent variable, alternative regression models.

Results

Table 5.1 shows the results of the baseline estimates. The intra-class correlations (ICCs) are consistently significant, which provides evidence of country-round-level clustering and justifies the multilevel estimator. With respect to the possible direct effects of immigration-welfare framing in the media debate relevant to H12a-12c, the baseline result in model (1) in Table 5.1 suggests no direct statistically significant relationship between immigration-welfare framing in the media debate and support for welfare redistribution. All other things being equal, increasing media attention to immigration in relation to welfare does not seem to increase or decrease respondents' support for the welfare state in general. This means that I find no support for H12a or H12b across the sample.

The control variables perform in line with many previous studies on support for welfare states and redistribution. Those with lower incomes and the lower educated are significantly more likely to support welfare redistribution than those with higher incomes and a better education, respectively. Older respondents and women are more likely to support redistribution than younger respondents and men, respectively, and more religious respondents are less supportive of government redistribution. Among macrolevel controls, it appears that social welfare expenditure is not *ex ante* related to support for redistribution, but the aggregate percentage of actual foreign-born migrants seems to be positively related to support for government redistribution.

Table 5.1: Welfare-immigration framing in the media debate and support for redistribution

| DV: Support for government redistribution | (1) | (2) |
|---|------------------|-------------------|
| Welfare-Immigration framing | .08 (.23) | -1.14*** (.32) |
| Immigration support | .02*** (.00) | .0 (.01) |
| Welfare-Immigration X Pro-Immigration | | .24*** (.05) |
| Media salience immigration | -.05† (.03) | -.04† (.03) |
| Education | -.05*** (.01) | -.05*** (.01) |
| Age | -.37*** (.01) | -.37*** (.01) |
| Income | .18*** (.03) | .18*** (.03) |
| Welfare recipient | .04 (.04) | .04 (.04) |
| Unemployed | -.07*** (.00) | -.07*** (.00) |
| Social class | .01*** (.00) | .01*** (.00) |
| Religiosity | -.03*** (.00) | -.03*** (.00) |
| Rural | -.02 (.01) | -.02 (.01) |
| Female | .30*** (.01) | .30*** (.01) |
| News attentiveness | .02*** (.01) | .02*** (.01) |
| Country's unemployment | .05*** (.01) | .05*** (.01) |
| Foreign born percentage | .03* (.01) | .03* (.01) |
| Country's welfare expenditure | -.02 (.01) | -.02 (.01) |
| Total N | 76,879 | 76,879 |
| Group N | 55 | 55 |
| Chi2 | 4105.799 | 4133.399 |
| Log Likelihood | -.00 | -.00 |

Note: DV: Support for redistribution (0 = Do not support redistribution, 5 = Full support redistribution), multilevel fixed effect ordered logit models (individuals within countries), standard errors (in parentheses). VIF-scores indicate no multicollinearity between education level and immigration attitude.

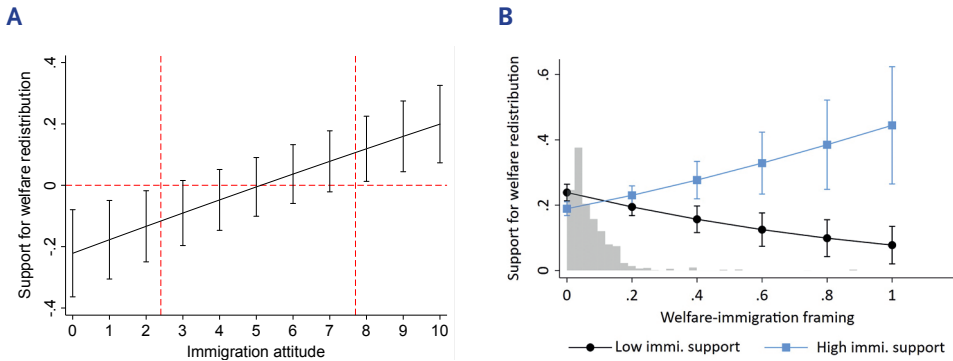
† $p < .1$, * $p < .5$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Model (2) of Table 5.1 shows the estimates testing H13. In the model, there is a significant positive coefficient for the interaction between immigration-welfare framing in the media debate and immigration support. In other words, the interaction performs statistically significantly in support of H2. What this means for the actual predicted conditional effect of welfare framing of immigration in the media debate for support for redistribution cannot simply be read off the interaction terms and components. The substantive size of such moderating effects requires more counterfactual analysis, like that summarized in Figure 5.3 below.²⁸ It is important to show both the marginal effects with immigration-welfare framing as the independent variable and support for immigration as the interaction variable and vice versa, because this theoretical difference cannot be extracted from the regression table alone. Panel A shows the predicted effects of immigration-welfare framing in the media on the support for government redistribution for different levels of support for immigration. There are statistically significant results at levels of pro-immigration attitudes roughly below 2.2 and above 7.8, where people with low support for immigration decrease their support for redistribution when there is more emphasis on immigration-welfare framing in the media and people with a more positive immigration opinion tend to be more in support of government redistribution when the immigration-welfare framing increases.

Panel B displays the predicted probability of supporting redistribution across the full spectrum of immigration-welfare framing in the media debate, conditional upon low levels (0) versus high levels (10) of immigration support. This panel helps to interpret the effect size. Low levels of the moderating condition tend to significantly decrease of the effect on support for redistribution, while high levels of immigration support have opposite implications for the dependent variable. For people who are strongly opposed to immigration, there is a predicted 16 percentage point chance of moving from in support of government redistribution to not in support of government redistribution. For those who are in favor of immigration, there is a predicted 26 percentage point chance of moving from not in full support for government redistribution to fully in support of government redistribution, across the full range of immigration-welfare framing in the news environment. However, the data on media reporting is very skewed, because there is not usually a lot of news reporting on immigration and welfare, but in times of a media hype the scores can be very high in a given month, relatively. The predicted probability one standard deviation below and above the mean of immigration-welfare framing in the news environment shows a 3.2 percentage point chance of moving from in support of government redistribution to not in support of government redistribution for people who are against immigration and a 2.9 percentage point chance of moving from not in support of government redistribution to in support of government redistribution for people who are pro-immigration.

²⁸ In order to model the marginal effects, logit models are used instead of the ordered logits in the baselines. The dependent variable is converted to 0 = Not in full support for government redistributing (values 1-4) and 1 = In full support for government redistribution (value 5).

Figure 5.3: A) Marginal effects of welfare-immigration framing in the media debate (scale) on support for redistribution, across levels of support for immigration (against = 0, for = 10) and B) predicted probabilities of increasing support for redistribution depending on immigration attitudes across levels of welfare-immigration framing in the media debate



Note: For clarity of the figures, I have deleted the most extreme outliers of welfare-immigration framing in the news. These outliers have no effect on the size or significance of the effects of the baseline models.

Robustness

To consider the sensitivity and robustness of the baseline results, I explore a range of alternative specifications. Table 5.2 summarizes five of the most important of these, with two models per specification, parallel to the baseline results. To conserve space, the table shows only the results for immigration-welfare framing in the media debate and its interaction with respondents' immigration attitude, without the results of the control variables, even though the specifications are identical to those in the baseline from Table 5.1 (full tables available upon request).

Table 5.2: Robustness tests

| DV: Support for redistribution | (1) | (2) |
|---|---------------|-------------------|
| A: Fixed effects | | |
| Immigration-welfare framing | -.14 (.25) | -1.14* (.52) |
| Immigration support | .02* (.01) | .00 (.01) |
| Welfare-Immigration X Pro-Immig. attitude | | .20* (.10) |
| B: Specific anti-immigration measure | | |
| Immigration-welfare framing | .11 (.23) | -1.09*** (.30) |

| | | |
|--|-----------------|------------------|
| Immigration support | -.00 (.00) | -.02*** (.00) |
| Welfare-Immigration X Immig. good for economy | | .24*** (.04) |
| C: Conservative newspapers | | |
| Immigration-welfare framing | -.32 (.32) | -1.05** (.40) |
| Immigration support | .02*** (.00) | .01† (.00) |
| Welfare-Immigration X Pro-Immig. attitude | | .14** (.04) |
| D: Absolute no. art. | | |
| Immigration-welfare framing | .00 (.00) | -.01* (.00) |
| Immigration support | .02*** (.00) | .01* (.00) |
| Welfare-Immigration X Pro-Immig. attitude | | .00*** (.00) |
| E: No wma | | |
| Immigration-welfare framing | .10 (.13) | -.63** (.21) |
| Immigration support | .02*** (.00) | .01† (.00) |
| Welfare-Immigration X Pro-Immig. attitude | | .15*** (.03) |
| F: Lead | | |
| Immigration-welfare framing | -.15 (.13) | -.68*** (.17) |
| Immigration support | .02*** (.00) | .01* (.00) |
| Welfare-Immigration X Pro-Immig. attitude | | .11*** (.02) |
| G: Weights | | |
| Immigration-welfare framing | .60 (.38) | -.47 (.67) |
| Immigration support | .02 (.01) | .00 (.02) |
| Welfare-Immigration X Pro-Immig. attitude | | .22* (.10) |

Note: DV = supp. redist. (categorical), multilevel fixed effects ordered logit. All models include full panel of parameters as reported in Table 5.1 (results not shown).

† $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

I have made choices in the estimation that could have implications for the results. The robustness tests presented in Table 5.2 are different models and estimations of the main variables. Specification A uses fixed effects models instead of the multilevel random intercept models of the baselines. The effects of the baseline interaction model with fixed effects are only slightly weaker and the significance decreases a little bit compared to the baseline, but remains intact. For specification B, I did not use the constructed measure of immigrant attitude as the moderating variable, but the specific survey question on whether immigration is good or bad for the country's economy in the eye of the respondent. The results are exactly the same as the baseline with the constructed support for immigration indicator.

Specification C considers a potential bias in the sample of newspapers. For three countries I was able to obtain the data of conservative instead of progressive newspapers: *Le Figaro* for France, *De Telegraaf* for the Netherlands, and *The Daily Mail* for the United Kingdom. For the other countries there was no conservative newspaper available consistently, so those newspapers are kept the same for this model. The results show no difference in the significance or the direction of the results. The interaction effect between immigration-welfare framing and pro-immigration attitude becomes slightly weaker. This is most likely due to the lower amount of political news that these newspapers carry in general. More tabloid-like outlets give relatively more attention to sports and entertainment and are therefore a slightly less preferred indicator for political news. The models under D and E concern different specifications of weighting the newspaper articles. The baseline measure takes the percentage of newspaper articles on immigration of the total number of articles in the newspaper to have a measure of the relative attention to immigration with a weighted moving average of three months to test the assumption that the media effect slowly fades. Specification D mirrors the baseline models, but instead of the relative attention to immigration, takes the absolute number of newspaper articles per month containing one or more words from both the immigration and the welfare search term, without dividing the amount by the total news of that month. Specification E is the baseline without weighted moving average. Both specifications show no difference to the baselines in terms of significance or direction of the results. The models with the absolute number of articles have a very low coefficient because of the different scale. The coefficient of the measure without the weighted moving average shows a slightly weaker relationship than the baseline.

An important threat to inference that I want to address is possible reverse causality. There is the possibility that, instead of news about immigration affecting support for welfare redistribution, media reporting is informed by people's opinion about the welfare state. The idea is that journalists try to get a sense of what their readers are worried about and report the news catered towards to these priorities (Welbers et al. 2016). Theoretically, this would

be less likely than citizens responding to the news, because it assumes journalists have a good sense of even small changes in public opinion and that they put the wishes of their audience above journalistic customs, such as news values. The preferred way to statistically analyze reversed causality is by adding a lagged dependent variable. Unfortunately, my dependent variable is on individual level and not based on a true panel, which makes lagging the variable impossible. To get some idea of the threat of reversed causality, I analyzed models with a lead for the media measure instead of the lagged weighted moving average (specification F). The coefficient of the interaction effect with the lead does not negate the effects entirely and they are still statistically significant, but substantially weaker than the baseline model. This means that I cannot preclude the possibility that the associations reflect two-way, recursive associations – which is theoretically possible, but less plausible. Finally, I included a specification (G) of the baseline models which includes the ESS design and population weights. This decreases the significance of the interaction models, but it remains statistically significant at the .05 level.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued and demonstrated that the connection of immigration and welfare politics in the media affects individuals' attitudes about government redistribution. This effect is strongly conditional upon someone's prior attitudes about immigration. The immigration-welfare framing in the media tends to undermine support for welfare redistribution among respondents who are negative about immigration, while this media linkage strengthens support for redistribution for people with positive views on immigration. These results show both that welfare framing of immigration can have an impact on welfare state support, which indicates spill-over effects from one issue into another, and that the interpretation and outcome is dependent on people's prior opinion, in this case immigration opinion. Along these lines, aspects of immigration absorption can affect welfare state support. These patterns appear to go well beyond econometric whim and reflect an important pattern in how welfare politics can be affected in negative and positive ways by the news environment, depending on one's immigration attitude.

I harbor no illusions that my conclusions are the definitive word on how news stories on immigration and the welfare state are linked. As I have sought to make clear, using the empirical tools available I aim to open a debate, rather than to settle one. Future studies should employ more fine-grained measures of media reporting, preferably with more media outlets in more countries, and of attitudes towards welfare states – including more specific information on migrants and welfare. Such studies might also combine the data with experimental treatments geared towards exploring the hypotheses on positive and negative immigration spill-over effects or panel data which includes survey questions on media consumption to improve the leverage of causal claims. Such measures need to go beyond even the rapidly developing research lines currently underway.

Yet I believe that the substantial overtime and cross-country coverage and high-quality sampling of the ESS instrument does provide some important hints that the media environment has an impact on attitudes about welfare redistribution. If the conclusions articulated above hold up to further exploration, I consider the results to be important and rather unwelcome news for the future of social policy protection and redistribution. This is because the findings suggest that the media debate could polarize views on immigration. Although this study is not based on individual-level longitudinal data, and I can therefore not track changes within respondents, I have shown that the immigration-welfare framing in the media debate has a different effect on those with positive attitudes about immigrants compared to those with more negative beliefs. This suggests that when the association between welfare and immigration in the media increases, these two groups drift further apart vis-à-vis their welfare attitudes.