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Publication date

2014

Document Version

Submitted manuscript

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Bos, L., Lefevere, J., Thijssen, R., & Sheets, P. (2014). *The impact of media coverage on right-wing populist parties: The role of issue ownership*. Paper presented at Paper presented at the meeting of the European Consortium for Political Research, Glasgow, Scotland.

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The impact of media coverage on right-wing populist parties: the role of issue ownership.

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Paper prepared for presentation at the ECPR General Conference 2014,
Glasgow. Work in Progress, please do not cite.

Abstract

Right-wing populist parties have seen increasing electoral support across Europe in the last decades. Several studies supported the notion that mass media coverage might add to their success. This study adds to the existing literature in three ways. First, we examine whether party cues embedded in media coverage enhance support for these parties. By giving right-wing populist parties more visibility, media may act as a catalyst for their support, yet extant research has mostly looked at correlational analyses; instead, we use an experimental design to assess the extent to which media coverage *causes* increasing support, or not. Secondly, we test whether the impact of media cues is contingent upon the issue being discussed. Specifically, we expect that while media coverage on issues already owned by right-wing populist parties increases support, coverage on unowned issues and especially issues owned by other parties has little to no effect on right-wing populist party support. Thirdly, we expect that the effect of media coverage on party support is moderated by positional agreement: media coverage has a larger effect on voters who already agree with the position taken by right-wing populist parties. By and large, the results support our expectations, corroborating the idea that media play a role in the rising support for right-wing populist parties. However, this impact is conditional upon a number of factors.

Introduction

The rise of right-wing populist parties is one of the key shifts that occurred in the party systems of many West European democracies (Kriesi et al., 2008). In explaining the success of these parties extant literature has focused on *demand*-side theories such as socio-structural explanations (Arzheimer & Carter, 2006), protest voting (Betz, 1994) and ideological voting (Van Der Brug, Fennema, & Tillie, 2000), but in recent years more and more attention has been paid to internal and external *supply*-side factors (Mudde, 2010) as these are crucial in determining the electoral breakthrough of especially new parties (Carter, 2005; Coffé, 2005; Eatwell & Mudde, 2003). In the past decade an increasing number of authors working on the populist radical right have emphasized the central role of the mass media in (de-)legitimising right-wing populist parties and their issues (Art, 2007; Eatwell & Mudde, 2003; Ellinas, 2009; Mudde, 2007).

Based on agenda setting theory we know that the salience of parties in the news increases party support (Hopmann, Vliegenthart, De Vreese, & Albæk, 2010), and that media attention is a necessary (albeit not sufficient) condition for electoral success (Vliegenthart & Aelst, 2010). Right-wing populist party research thus far, however, has mostly studied these assumptions at the aggregate level (Koopmans & Muis, 2009; Lubbers, Gijsberts, & Scheepers, 2002; Pas, Vries, & Brug, 2013; Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden, & Van Spanje, 2012) (except for Bos, van der Brug, & de Vreese, 2011) and found conflicting results. Moreover, the test of the reversed causal order also receives some support, as popularity in the polls is an important indicator of newsworthiness.

Additionally, almost all work on the effect of media coverage on right-wing populist parties focuses on immigration, the issue most associated with these parties (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007; Lubbers et al., 2002; Vliegenthart et al., 2012; Walgrave & Deswert, 2004; the latter also look at crime); however, as Mudde already noted in 1999, these parties are not single issue parties, and emphasize a number of issues (Mudde, 1999). Yet, whether media coverage on *other* issues has similar effects on party support has not been investigated. The theory of issue ownership posits that parties come to hold an advantage on certain issues through their history of attention to these issues, and their reputation for dealing with these issues (Petrocik, Benoit, & Hansen, 2003; Petrocik, 1989, 1996). While right-wing populist

parties own the issues of immigration and crime, media coverage featuring these parties also deals with other issues. Because right-wing populist parties hold different reputations on these issues, media coverage on these other issues may have different effects on party support.

This paper adds to the literature in three ways. First, we examine the extent to which party cues in media coverage affect right-wing populist party support. We expect that when coverage cues voters regarding a parties' stance on an issue, this increases support for the party. In contrast to the extant literature, we use an experimental approach which allows us to establish causality at the *individual* level. Secondly, we investigate the contingency of these party cues upon the issues being covered. Though these parties mostly campaign on traditional right-wing populist issues – especially immigration – some of these parties have begun expanding their issue repertoire to include such issues as anti-European stances (e.g., the Dutch PVV has increasingly emphasized its Eurosceptic stances), or putting a new perspective on existing issues. Finally, we also investigate whether these effects are contingent upon the extent to which the respondent agrees with the issue position taken by the right-wing populist party. Therefore, our central research question is *to what extent do party cues increase right-wing populist party support, and to what extent is this effect contingent on the issues being covered, and the positional agreement between voter and party?* We draw upon an experimental design in which a representative sample of Dutch voters (N=600) was exposed to media coverage on one of four issues – immigration, crime, privacy and taxes – and featuring either a right-wing populist party cue (PVV) or not.

Our paper proceeds as follows. First, we outline the extant research dealing with media's role in right-wing populist party support. This leads to our first set of hypotheses which posit an across the board expectation that media coverage increases party support, given the presence of party cues in the coverage. The second part of the theory focuses on issue-specific differences between media coverage, why such differences are relevant for the study of right-wing populist party support, and derives a second set of hypotheses. We then present our experimental design used to test these hypotheses, followed by our results and a discussion of studies' limitations and the broader implications of the findings.

Media and Right-wing populist party support

It is within what is often called an “audience democracy” (Manin, 1997), or “the third age of political communication” (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999) that right-wing populist parties enjoy their electoral success. Central in this political context are the mass media, whose *mediation* function bridges the distance between party and voter. In a context in which the mass media increasingly constitute the dominant source of information in society (Strömbäck & Shehata, 2010) the *mediatization* of politics describes the process in which “political institutions are increasingly dependent on and shaped by mass media” (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999, p. 247). Parties have to accommodate to the way the media operate (Schulz, 2004), which makes the media an indispensable tool for political populism.

The media, in their turn, driven by commercialization, are thought to pay attention to these parties, and possibly even support them and their issues, because it resonates with their audience (Stanyer, 2007); a process coined “media populism” by Mazzoleni (2003, 2008). Media provide a stage for populists by spreading their message, but more importantly they provide mediated legitimacy by way of framing issues and actors as politically viable—particularly important for less mainstream parties. By giving them media access (illustrated by e.g. Mazzoleni, Stewart, & Horsfield, 2003; Rydgren, 2004) the media “confer legitimacy and authority to political newcomers and (...) dispel voter doubts about their electoral viability” (Ellinas, 2010, p. 210).

As explicated in the introduction, research thus far has looked at the impact of media attention to parties and issues at the aggregate level (i.e. Koopmans & Muis, 2009; Vliegthart et al., 2012). If we zoom in and take on an individual-level perspective, we also need to look at the textual characteristics that might trigger changes in attitudes. In this paper we depart from agenda-setting theory and assume that the media play an essential role in political discourse, by cueing the public to think *about* certain actors, issues and topics in certain ways (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Media cues, in this study, are understood to be simple references within a news text that can

bring to mind, or prime, specific issues, groups, topics, or political parties. Media priming literature suggests that such cues are then brought to the forefront of voters' minds when making electoral decisions (Dalton, Beck, & Huckfeldt, 1998; Iyengar, Kinder, Peters, & Krosnick, 1984; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

A parties' media visibility affects its support amongst voters. Being more visible in media coverage prior to an election, for example, leads to better election outcomes for the party (Van Aelst, Maddens, Noppe, & Fiers, 2008; Blais, Gidengil, Fournier, & Nevitte, 2009; Hopmann et al., 2010). In line with the idea of media cues, when parties are increasingly visible in media, they can be expected to become more accessible in voters' minds, and consequently have a higher chance of being considered as an option when voters' decide whom to vote for. More specifically, literature on information effects on public opinion and electoral behavior highlights the role of party cues in affecting support (see, e.g. Bullock, 2011; Druckman, Peterson, & Slothuus, 2013). A party cue, following Bullock (2011) is defined as mentioning a party in relation to a certain issue and its interpretation. It has been argued that party cues help voters to efficiently cope, structure, and make sense of the complex political world around them. By relying on partisan cues the rational voter minimizes information costs (Downs, 1957), "while still producing relatively well-grounded political opinions" (Mondak, 1993, p. 188). Party cues thus act as information shortcuts, especially in low information or motivation contexts (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001; Rahn, 1993). In line with this literature it is argued that adding a party cue may increase the preference for the mentioned party, which is in line with Vliegenthart et al.'s (2012) finding that increasing visibility of the party in news coverage alone was related to stronger public support:

H1: Media coverage containing party cues increases support for right-wing populist parties.

Issue-specific effects of media cues

Most work on the role of media in right-wing populist party support has focused on immigration. As this is a core issue of these parties, the focus of scholars is warranted. Various scholars have asserted that it is by advocating clear – and usually divergent – positions on these issues over extended periods of time that right-wing populist parties have managed to garner support (Minkenberg, 2001; Mudde, 2007, 2013).

Moreover, right-wing populist parties can be said to ‘own’ the issues of immigration and integration. The theory of issue ownership posits that parties come to hold an advantage on certain issues through their history of attention to these issues, and their reputation for dealing with these issues (Petrocik et al., 2003; Petrocik, 1989, 1996). In the case of right-wing populist parties, immigration and integration have been ‘core’ issues, which were consistently emphasized by these parties themselves (van Heerden, de Lange, van der Brug, & Fennema, 2014; Mudde, 2007; Walgrave & De Swert, 2007) and in media coverage dealing with these parties (Rooduijn, 2013; Walgrave & de Swert, 2004). Evidence suggests that indeed, right-wing populist parties such as the Belgian *Vlaams Belang* and the Dutch PVV are considered by the population at large as owning the immigration issue, and to a lesser extent crime (Kleinnijenhuis & Walter, 2014; Walgrave, Lefevere, & Tresch, 2012).

Issue ownership theory predicts that right-wing populist parties will tend to focus on issues that they own, because they hold a competitive advantage on these issues: if these issues are salient in the public debate, the issue owning party should get a higher share of votes, all else being equal (Petrocik et al., 2003; Petrocik, 1989, 1996). This results in what Budge and Farlie’s (1983) saliency theory describes as parties ‘talking past one another’, focusing on their own issues and avoiding the opponents’ issues.

Nevertheless, right-wing populist parties may choose to emphasize other issues as well – in fact, Mudde concluded that these parties were not even single issue parties to begin with: “*ERPs [Extreme Right Parties] ... address various issues, which contradicts the supply side of the [single issue party]*

thesis.” (1999, p. 192). Even though their ownership would push parties to focus on ‘their’ issues, parties have a number of incentives to emphasize other issues.

Firstly, trespassing allows parties to attract new voters (Damore, 2005; Holian, 2004). Williams (2006) concludes that some radical right parties have been quite entrepreneurial in finding new arguments to link to their core issues, such as voicing economic concerns regarding unbridled immigration. This in turn may appeal to new voters. For example, the French and Austrian radical right parties adapted their party platforms and kept introducing novel arguments to their core issue of immigration and asylum seekers, effectively tying the issue to the economic and security issues. More broadly, communicating competence on novel issues allows parties to expand their voter base (e.g. Holian, 2004)

Secondly, even though radical right parties hold ownership of immigration issues as this issue has been their core issue, changes in public sentiment may push these parties to address new issues. When non-core issues rise on the public agenda, parties – including the radical right – may attempt to ‘ride the wave’ of these issues (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1994). Furthermore, radical right parties have only had a limited impact on actual immigration policies (Mudde, 2013), or on the positions taken by other parties (van Heerden et al., 2014), which may erode their ability to display competence on their core issues. In such cases, parties may attempt to regain ground by trespassing on other issues (Arceneaux, 2008).

The fact that right-wing populist parties may also address issues other than their traditional issues raises questions regarding the impact thereof on their support. Extant research has not investigated to what extent and how media coverage’s effect on right-wing populist party support is contingent upon the issues that are being covered. We argue that depending on the issues addressed in media communication, its effects on right-wing populist party support differ. We expect different effects on right-wing populist support for three types of issues: issues on which the *right-wing populist* party already

enjoys a reputation (owned issues), issues on which *no* party has a reputation (unowned issues), and issues on which *another* party already enjoys a reputation (trespassing issues).

When media cover issues that are owned by parties, they are covering issues on which these parties already hold a track record of attention and competence (Egan, 2013; Walgrave et al., 2012). By making these issues more salient amongst voters, media coverage should, all else being equal, foster support for right-wing populist parties: this is the central proposition of issue ownership theory as developed by Petrocik (1989, 1996). Because these issues are intimately related to right-wing populist parties, we expect that even when the coverage does not contain a party cue, this will increase support for the party. As argued by Walgrave et al. (2012), when parties are spontaneously associated with issues the mere mention of them triggers thoughts of the party, effectively priming the party amongst voters. Thus, even if coverage on immigration does not contain a right-wing populist party cue, this coverage should trigger thoughts of the right-wing populist party, and foster its support.

H2: Coverage on an issue owned by right-wing populist parties increases right-wing party support, even when party cues are absent.

Conversely, on unowned issues extant research has shown that media coverage can help parties establish competence (Walgrave, Lefevre, & Nuytemans, 2009; though note Walgrave, Lefevre, & Tresch, 2014). By being able to communicate on new issues, parties can stake their claim and show that they have solid arguments and policies to deal with the issue. At the same time, as with owned issues the coverage simultaneously raises the public's awareness of the issue. Thus, we expect that coverage on unowned issues should raise support for right-wing party support. However, as these unowned issues are not linked to the party as owned issues are, the presence of a party cue will be mandatory for the effect to occur. Such party cues should

be a dominant cue in such settings: since no party has a clear reputation on unowned issues, there is little competing policy information, which might condition the effectiveness of party cues (Boudreau & MacKenzie, 2013; Bullock, 2011; Druckman et al., 2013; Nicholson, 2011; Slothuus & de Vreese, 2010). Because no parties hold a strong reputation on the issue however, the party cue is not challenged by competing cues, which might override the effectiveness of the party cue. Hence, we expect that:

H3: Coverage on an unowned issue that contains party cues increases right-wing populist party support.

Finally, right-wing populist parties can also trespass on other parties' owned issues. Though issue ownership theory would not expect parties to do this – since they stand at a disadvantage on them – various studies have in fact shown that parties do address each other's issues during election campaigns (Damore, 2005; Dolezal, Ennsner-Jedenastik, Müller, & Winkler, 2014; Hayes, 2010; Sigelman & Buel, 2004). Even though parties may be talking on the same issues, the fact that issue owners hold an electoral advantage on their issues still stands (Bélanger & Meguid, 2008; van der Brug, 2004; Lachat, 2013; Petrocik et al., 2003; Walgrave et al., 2012). In addition, as mentioned above the effectiveness of party cues may be conditioned by policy information. When another party holds a strong reputation over an issue, we expect this to substantially condition the effectiveness of the party cue: even though the party is mentioned in relation to an issue, the issue itself is associated to another party – which has a better reputation on the issue. When right-wing populist parties trespass on issues owned by other parties, we would therefore expect that this does not bolster support for these parties¹.

¹ Note that we posit this expectation for short term trespassing efforts – should parties engage in long-term adoption of new issues, they are essentially 'building a reputation' which may in fact increase their support by overtaking the opposing parties' ownership.

H4: Coverage on an issue owned by other parties that contains party cues does not increase right-wing populist party support.

Finally, we expect that the extent to which voters agree with the position taken by a party will moderate the effect of media coverage on party support. Selective exposure theory suggests that voters are less willing to expose themselves with information they disagree with (Festinger, 1957; Iyengar, Hahn, Krosnick, & Walker, 2008). However, even if voters are exposed to information with which they disagree, Zaller's (1992) RAS model suggests that because the information clashes with previously held beliefs and attitudes, voters are unlikely to accept it. In addition, spatial models of issue voting suggest that voters are unlikely to vote for parties with whom they disagree on issues important to them (MacDonald, Listhaug, & Rabinowitz, 1991; MacDonald et al., 1991). Thus, even if media coverage would prime an issue and party amongst voters who disagree with the party on that issue, these voters are on the one hand unlikely to accept this information, and on the other hand are likely to *lower* their support for the party since they disagree with the party that has just become more important to them. Conversely, amongst voters that agree with the position of the party, coverage is both more likely to be accepted, and will cue voters to think of the party as being closer to them in the ideological space. Thus, we expect that:

H5: Positional agreement moderates the effect of media coverage on right-wing populist party support. When a voter disagrees with the party on an issue, coverage lowers party support. When a voter agrees with the party on an issue, coverage increases party support.

Methods

We conducted an online survey experiment among a representative sample of Dutch adults to examine the effects of the role of issue ownership in right-

wing populist party support. In the current Dutch political landscape we focus on the PVV (Partij voor de Vrijheid), a party mainly organized around its political leader Geert Wilders. The PVV is characterized as a right-wing populist, anti-immigration party (Bos & Van Der Brug, 2010; Vliegenthart et al., 2012). Even though differences between right-wing populist parties exist, the PVV is a fairly typical example, with its leader being considered as “one of the figureheads of contemporary populism” (Vossen, 2011, p. 179): besides its populist character, emphasizing the Dutch identity, and criticizing the elite, it has predominantly focused on the issue of immigration, though it has also increasingly focused on European issues, taking a Eurosceptic stance. Finally, the PVV has gathered a substantial amount of support in the last few elections, and was relatively visible in the mass media – though mainly through its leader Wilders (Vliegenthart & van Aelst, 2010).

To test our hypotheses we used a between-subject 4 x 2 experimental design. Each condition contained either an owned issue (immigration or crime), an issue owned by another party (taxes) or an unowned issue (privacy), combined with the presence or absence of a right-wing populist party cue.

Participants

The participants for this study were recruited through Research Now, an international research company that offers samples of the Dutch population drawn from an online panel. For completion of the online experiment, participants received a small financial compensation. The total sample consisted of 600² native Dutch citizens, and the panel has an average response rate of 20%. The participants were randomly distributed over the conditions, with the N per condition fluctuating between 64 (taxes * PVV) and 82 (crime * PVV). The experimental groups did not differ significantly between conditions with respect to variables like sex [$F(7,592)=0.63$,

² Total amount of invited panel members.

$p=0.728$], age [$F(7,592)=0.64$, $p=0.727$], education [$F(7,592)=0.56$, $p=0.785$], and ideology [$F(7,592)=1.19$, $p=0.304$] suggesting that the random assignment was successful.

Procedure

All participants agreed with the informed consent and completed the online questionnaire. The experimental procedure consisted of three parts and started with a pre-test including several socio-demographic variables, prior attitudes toward the issues, political cynicism, political interest, media use, political knowledge and perceptions of issue ownership. Thereafter, participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight conditions and asked to carefully read a news article encompassing one of the issues with or without right-wing populist party cues. Finally, participants completed a post-test questionnaire, which consisted of a cognitive response, dependent variables such as political cynicism and populist attitudes, party support, immigrant attitudes, vote choice and manipulation checks. The online questionnaire ended with a short debriefing.

Stimulus material

The stimulus material comprised one news article per condition. We created four news articles about different issues, of which each article had one version with right-wing populist party cues and one version without right-wing populist party cues. Thus, there were eight conditions in total: Privacy * no Party cue ($n=76$), Privacy * Party cue ($n=77$), Crime * no Party cue ($n=71$), Crime * Party cue ($n=82$), Immigration * no Party cue ($n=74$), Immigration * Party cue ($n=80$), Taxes * no Party cue ($n=76$), Taxes * Party cue ($n=64$).

The news issues (Privacy, Crime, Immigration, Taxes) were chosen based on literature about issue ownership of Dutch political parties (Kleinnijenhuis & Walter, 2014) and corresponded with our measurements of participants' associative issue ownership "which party spontaneously comes to mind when you think of [issue]?", and competence issue ownership

perceptions (“which party is best able to effectuate its program on [issue]?”). Table 1 shows that the PVV is indeed considered the clear owner of the Immigration issue amongst the respondents in our study as well: almost half of the respondents associates immigration with PVV, and it is also judged competent by a most respondents. For Crime, the PVV’s ownership is more contested, since many respondents also associate the VVD with the issue, and the difference in perceived issue competence is small. Therefore, though the PVV can still be said to own the crime issue, this issue is decidedly more contested. As expected, Privacy is clearly an unowned issue: associative and competence issue ownership perceptions are quite evenly distributed between the parties, and we see the most don’t knows for this issue. Finally, in keeping with our expectations Taxes is not owned by the PVV, but by another party. Almost 40% of the sample associates the VVD with this issue, and it also holds a decisive edge on competence. The PVV is only associated with the issue by 4% of the respondents, and is only judged as having the best policies by 6%.

< Table 1 about here >

Each stimulus elaborated on a recent news topic related to these four issues to ensure external validity: East-European labour migrants (immigration), early release of convicted criminals (crime), privacy online (privacy), and housing taxes (taxes). The news article consisted of four textual parts: a headline, lead and two paragraphs. The headline introduced the subject. The lead was a description of the topic based on a fictive public opinion poll. The first paragraph outlined the role of politicians related to the issue and the second paragraph stated the opinion of the Dutch public. Constructed stimulus articles ensure a high amount of control. Effort was made to adapt the presentation and writing of the articles to the structure and language of Dutch news coverage. The basic core information within all news issues was kept identical, while each textual part of the news article that included a right-wing populist party cue referred a few times to the opinion of

the PVV. In the non PVV cue conditions, the same position was advocated, but was not attributed to any specific party. The articles were successfully tested in a pilot study, and a manipulation check in the main study uncovered successful manipulation, allowing us to attribute contrasts between treatment groups in the post-test to the experimental manipulation (see below). All stimulus material is available in Appendix A.

Measures

Our dependent variable, *party support for the PVV*, was measured after exposure to the stimulus, through propensity to vote questions (PTV) (see Van der Eijk, Van Der Brug, & Franklin, 2006). PTV questions are especially useful for research on smaller fringe parties (Van der Eijk, 2000). Respondents were asked to indicate the probability that they would ever vote for any of the main parties (PVV, SP, CDA, VVD, PvdA, and D66) on a 10-point Likert scale from very unlikely (1) to very likely (10) [$M = 3.732$, $SD = 3.319$]. For our analysis, we focus on the propensity to vote for the PVV.

For hypotheses H1 through H4, we rely on comparisons between conditions. To test H5, we also measured voters' *Issue agreement*. The participants' agreement on the four different issues (privacy, crime, immigration, taxes) was assessed via four statements – one statement per issue – on a 7-point Likert scale, with higher values signifying higher agreement on the topics used in the stimuli. Participants were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed on the following statements: 'There should be stricter rules for foreigners who want to work in the Netherlands' (immigration) ($M = 4.627$, $SD = 1.343$); 'All convicts should serve their full sentence' (crime) ($M = 5.765$, $SD = 1.524$); 'Security services have too easy access to online information and e-mails' (privacy) ($M = 4.712$, $SD = 1.497$); and 'The government needs to assist citizens on the housing market through the tax system' (taxes) ($M = 5.205$, $SD = 1.606$). The statements were shown to the participants in random order.

Manipulation check

After being exposed to the stimulus material and the post-test measures, participants were asked five questions to control if they had noticed the manipulation in the news articles. Participants were first asked which political parties were mentioned in the article (PVV, PvdA, VVD, CDA, or none of the above - the answer options were randomized). Thereafter the participants were asked on a 7-point Likert scale from completely disagree (1) to completely agree (7) to what extent they thought that the news article was about privacy online, crime relating to early release, East-European labor migrants and/or housing taxes. The manipulation check showed successful manipulation in both regards. Respondents in the party cue conditions significantly more often reported seeing the PVV in the article [$F(7,592)=116.52, p=0.000$], as did respondents in the issue conditions confirmed the article they read was about the issue manipulated [Privacy: $F(7,592)=135.45, p=0.000$; Crime: $F(7,592)=112.71, p=0.000$; Immigration: $F(7,592)=143.78, p=0.000$; Taxes: $F(7,592)=148.01, p=0.000$;].

Results

We start with our analyses with a gloss over the average probability to vote PVV in the eight conditions of our experiment. Table 2 presents the means of the eight conditions on the propensity to vote (ptv) PVV. Focusing on the party cue, the table does show differences between the means, but also makes clear that the means do not move in the same direction in all issue conditions when a PVV cue is added. For the most part, the findings confirm our expectations. Exposure to the issue most clearly owned by the PVV, immigration, seems to slightly increase party support, and this increases when a PVV cue is added. On the more contested issue of crime, and especially taxes, adding a PVV cue *lowers* party support for the PVV. Surprisingly, the control condition for the tax issue shows the highest level of support for the PVV. Finally, on the unowned issue of privacy exposure to coverage as such does not increase PVV support. However, when a party cue

is added PVV support increases, as expected. If we move our attention to the differences between the issue conditions, we see that PVV party support is highest in the taxes condition, and lowest in the privacy condition. However, an F-test indicates no significant difference between the means: $F(7, 592) = 1.781$ ($p < 0.088$).

< Table 2 about here >

We continue with a regression analysis in which we estimate the effects of media coverage and party cues on support for the PVV (Table 3). To test H1, the first model regresses the propensity to vote PVV on the presence or absence of the PVV cue. If we estimate the impact of a PVV cue, irrespective of the issue it is combined with, it has no significant impact on the probability to vote PVV. This indicates that, when we do not account for issue-specific differences, mentioning a party in media coverage in itself does not seem to affect (right-wing populist) party support.

< Table 3 about here >

We now move to the hypotheses on the effects of the separate issues. In the second model we add the issues as independent variables, and use the taxes issue (the trespassing issue) as the reference category. H2 predicted that on owned issues – immigration and to a lesser extent crime - even coverage without the presence of a party cue would lead to higher support for the PVV. The coefficients indicate that only the immigration issue has a barely significant and positive effect: respondents confronted with a news article on immigration reported a higher propensity to vote PVV than respondents in the other conditions. Though we also see a positive coefficient for crime, it is insignificant. This finding partially supports H2: we find that only the key owned issue – Immigration – has a small impact on support for the right-wing populist party. However, as we reported in the method section,

associative issue ownership perceptions as well as competence issue ownership perceptions lead us to believe that the PVV's ownership of the Crime issue is contested. Coverage on an unowned issue (privacy) does not affect party support regardless of the presence or absence of a party cue, as expected (H3). Similarly, coverage on the trespassing issue (taxes) does not affect party support, and this is also in line with our expectations (H4).

To test whether the impact of party cues on party support are contingent on the issue, Model 2 includes interactions between the PVV cue and the issue cues. Both the interaction between the PVV cue and the Immigration issue and the interaction between the PVV cue and the Privacy issue differ significantly from zero. To better understand these interactions, Figure 1 plots the marginal effects of these interaction terms. We first return to our second hypothesis, which was already partially corroborated: participants in the immigration conditions indicated a slightly higher party support than in the taxes conditions. Figure 1 shows that if a PVV cue is embedded in the immigration issue the propensity to vote PVV is even higher. However, for crime this does not seem to be the case. Table 2 already indicated no increase in party support for participants in the crime conditions, and adding a PVV cue does not change this. Taken together, our findings indicate only partial support for hypothesis 2.

Our third hypothesis stated that we expected party support to increase when an unowned issue was combined with a party cue. Table 3 as well as Figure 2 show support for this hypothesis. The first plot indeed shows that adding a PVV cue to the unowned Privacy issue significantly increases the propensity to vote PVV.

Finally, based on the theory we did not expect the liberal issue to affect party support for the right-wing populist PVV. Moreover, we expected that adding a party cue to an issue owned by another party would decrease party support for the PVV. The final plot in figure 2 shows that our fourth hypothesis finds confirmation in our data.

< Figure 1 about here >

In an additional analysis we take the position of the respondent on the four issues into account, since one can assume that the extent to which a PVV cue can persuade a respondent to be more in favour of the party, is not only dependent upon the issue in which the cue is embedded, but also upon the respondents' personal opinion on that issue. In the pre-test we asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they agree with four statements³ that related directly to the operationalization of the four issues in the stimulus material. We constructed a variable "Issue Agreement" based on these statements in such a way that for each respondent their agreement to the position of the PVV on the issue they were exposed to in the stimulus material, was included. We recoded this variable into three categories, representing the (1) 15.8% lowest scores, (2) 68.2% average scores, and (3) 15.8% highest scores.

Table 4 presents the results of this analysis. In model I the first two models of Table 2 are replicated. Controlling for Issue Agreement strengthens the effect of the immigration issue on the probability to vote PVV, making it significantly differ from zero at the .05-level. The interactions with Issue Agreement in model II however, do not lead to effects in the expected direction. The effect of the Immigration Issue on support for the PVV is moderated so that the more one agrees with the issue at stake the less one prefers the PVV, and the same holds for the Privacy Issue. So, instead of finding (as we expected in H5) a positive interaction effect between issue agreement and the effect of the issue on party support, we find that when a voter disagrees with the party on the immigration issue and the privacy issue, coverage of these issues *increases* party support, and that when a voter agrees with the party on these issues, coverage *decreases* party support.

³ These statements were embedded in a larger battery.

< Table 4 about here >

If we add the PVV cue to the equation, however, the results become more in line with our expectations. Model III shows a positive interaction between PVV, the Immigration Issue and Issue Agreement. The plot of this interaction is given in Figure 2, plot 3, in which it becomes clear that it is the combined cue PVV * Immigration that generates the highest preference for the PVV, especially among those who agree most with the position propagated (by the PVV) in the text. This is in line with hypothesis 5, in which we expected a positive interaction effect, such that those respondents who agree with a harsh line on labour migration, will increase their support for the PVV when they are covered with this issue. However, again, we do not find this effect for the Crime issue.

< Figure 2 about here >

Additionally, we find a positive effect of the PVV cue when it is embedded in the Privacy Issue, especially among those who are most in favour of the parties' position on the Privacy issue. Moreover, when issue agreement is at its lowest, whether the PVV cue was present or not had no significant effect on party support, as is shown by the overlapping 95% confidence intervals in the lower right hand side of the plot. Conversely, amongst respondents that do agree with the position propagated by the PVV, the cue has a discernible effect on party support. This suggests that when right-wing populist parties campaign on unowned issues, they can indeed gain support; however, they are likely to do so only amongst voters that already had similar policy positions.

Conclusion

Our studies' main goal was to investigate the impact of media coverage on support for right-wing populist parties. The role of media in the rise of these parties has previously been studied mostly through aggregate level studies. Conversely, our study used an experimental design, which allowed us to lay bare the causal relationship between exposure to media coverage and people's support for right-wing populist parties. Our study also moved beyond extant research in two other ways.

Firstly, we did not only test the general effect of right-wing populist party cues in media coverage, but also examined whether these effects differed between issues. On issues that are owned by right-wing populist parties – immigration and crime – we expected that media coverage would indeed increase support. However, for issues that are owned by other parties we expected that coverage would not increase support. Finally, for issues owned by no party we expected that media coverage could increase right-wing populist party support if, and only if, a party cue was also present. Secondly, we hypothesized that the effects of media coverage would be moderated by positional agreement between the public and the party. Only when citizens agree with the parties' position would exposure to media coverage make it more likely that they would vote for the party.

Our results indicate that media coverage indeed affects right-wing populist party support, but that its effects are contingent upon both issues and positional agreement. Contrary to our first hypothesis, we did not find an across the board effect of party cues embedded in media coverage on party support. Thus, when right-wing populist parties appear in media coverage this does not automatically foster support. This does not mean that media have no effect, however: as expected by our second hypothesis, on the issue of immigration, media coverage had a small but discernible effect on party support even if the party itself was not mentioned. The presence of a party cue only increased the effect of exposure to this coverage. On the issue of crime we did not find significant results. We suspect that this is due to the fact that for

the party used in the experiment (PVV) crime was not a strongly held issue. The liberal VVD also had a substantial share of respondents seeing it as the most competent party. Similarly, on taxes, the issue that was not owned by the right-wing populist PVV but rather the liberal VVD, exposure to media coverage with a PVV cue had a *negative* effect on party support for the PVV, as we expected. Since right wing populist parties have to compete with a party that has a better reputation on the issue, coverage on this issue does not seem to help them get support. On unowned issues on which no party has a strong reputation, media coverage did cause greater support for the right wing populist party, but only when a party cue was present.

Positional agreement also mattered, but – in taking with the above – only for some issues, and only in those conditions where a party cue was present. For most issues, when higher agreement on the issue existed between the party and the respondent, exposure to issue coverage led to higher evaluations, but only when the party was explicitly mentioned. This is not that surprising, since especially for less salient issues the parties' position may not be well known to respondents. When media coverage gives a clear clue as to the parties' position however, respondents take this into account.

Our study has a few limitations. Regarding generalizability, we only focus on a single party. Though we see no a priori reason to expect radically different dynamics for other similar populist right wing parties, some results may be specific to our case. Most strikingly is the fact that, contrary to our expectations, the crime issue was not a clearly owned issue for the PVV: the liberal VVD also had a substantial share of voters designating it as the owner. Since apart from immigration, crime is also associated with populist right-wing parties (Walgrave & Deswert, 2004; Smith, 2010), this is surprising. That said, the clearly owned issue of immigration gave mostly expected results, with coverage increasing support for the party. Because this issue is widely regarded in the literature as a 'classic' issue for these parties, we would expect both the ownership and the effects to remain identical in other cases. Related, we only included a right-wing populist party in our study and did not

make a comparison with a mainstream party. However, since our results are in line with general theories on issue ownership we expect no differential effects for mainstream parties. This is in line with previous empirical research by (among others) Van der Brug et al. (2000) and Bos et al. (2010, 2011) testing Mudde's "pathological normalcy" thesis (2010) in which it is argued that right-wing populist parties and mainstream parties are not poles apart. Also, our study only included a single unowned issue. Though the results did seem to confirm our expectations, other issues may not quite work the same way. Previous work on issue ownership has amply demonstrated that depending on the issue the impact of issue ownership may be radically different – the distinction between valence and positional issues seems especially relevant here (Egan, 2013). The issues included here all had a positional component to them, but issue agreement does not matter for consensus issues, so perhaps the reputational advantage of being an issue owner has a greater impact on party support for those issues.

Given these limitations, our study does provide more insight into the impact of media coverage on the support for right-wing populist parties. Most crucially, its impact is highly contingent upon the type of issue being discussed: when issues on which right-wing populist parties hold a reputation are salient in the media, this helps them gather support. Media attention in general does not have this impact. Conversely, issues owned by other parties dominate the news agenda do not seem to offer much opportunities for right-wing populist parties. Our findings suggest that even if right-wing populist parties manage to make the news on them, it does not necessarily result in electoral payoffs. The reputational disadvantage compared to the issue owner is not easily overcome, it seems. Perhaps most interestingly, unowned issues may be a way for these parties to expand their voter base. By addressing these new issues right-wing populist parties may tap into new parts of the electorate that agrees with them on these issues. Some real-life examples of this exist. Prior to the 2014 European Elections the Flemish *Vlaams Belang* took a decidedly more Eurosceptic stance than it had in the past, which it may have

done in the hopes of attracting Eurosceptic voters (which have little alternatives in the predominantly pro-European Belgian party landscape), a strategy also adopted by the PVV.

Our results indicate that these strategies might work, at least in the short term. However, other parties might be quick to also claim a stake on these new issues. Nevertheless, our study suggests that while media coverage indeed helps right-wing populist parties maintain and extend their voter base because of their strong ownership of the issue, they may increase their voter base further still by expanding their issue repertoire - provided they manage to attract media coverage on these issues. Latent attitudes of voters on unowned (valence or positional) issues can thus be capitalized by these parties, and add to the extension of the right-wing populist electorate.

This is in line with Mudde's idea that (1999) right-wing populist parties are no single issue parties: their electoral support is not necessarily dependent upon specific right-wing populist issues, such as immigration and crime. When these parties campaign on unowned issues, such as privacy, they are "here to stay" even when the immigration issue "would cease to be an important political issue" (1999:193).

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Appendix A. Translated stimulus materials

1. News article about privacy issue (control condition)

Resistance to online privacy violation

AMSTERDAM - A recent poll by TNS Nipo⁴ shows that 73% of the Dutch people is worried about the distribution of sensitive information on the Internet. In particular, the NSA affair has resulted in citizens having become more aware of the risks they face online.

Politicians are urged to take action. Political actors call for the introduction of stricter conditions to restrain the interception of Internet traffic by security services. Thus, the AIVD⁵ should only be allowed to check the Internet after intervention of a judge, and citizens must explicitly give permission for the use of their data by third parties.

Four out of ten Dutch people feel that their privacy should not be violated, even if this makes it harder to locate terrorists. Various politicians believe that security and privacy considerations must be balanced.

2. News article about privacy issue + right-wing populist party cue (underlined text to indicate the inserted party cues)

PVV resistant to online privacy violation

AMSTERDAM - A recent poll by TNS Nipo shows that 73% of the Dutch people is concerned about the distribution of sensitive information on the Internet. In particular, the PVV claims that the NSA affair has resulted in citizens having become more aware of the risks they face online.

Politicians are urged to take action. The PVV calls for the introduction of stricter conditions to restrain the interception of Internet traffic by security services. Thus, the AIVD should only be allowed to check the Internet after intervention of a judge, and citizens must explicitly give permission for the use of their data by third parties, according to the PVV.

⁴ TNS NIPO is a well-known polling firm in the Netherlands.

⁵ AIVD (Algemene Inlichtingen en Veiligheidsdienst), translated “General Intelligence and Security Service”, is the Dutch equivalent of NSA and similar governmental intelligence services.

Four out of ten Dutch people feel that their privacy should not be violated, even if this makes it harder to locate terrorists. The PVV believes that security and privacy considerations must be balanced.

3. News article about crime issue (control condition)

Resistance to early release of convicts

AMSTERDAM - A recent poll by TNS Nipo shows that 73% of the Dutch people is concerned about the early release of convicted criminals. In particular, the release of Volkert van der G.⁶ has resulted in citizens having become more aware of this practice.

Politicians are urged to take action. Political circles call for the introduction of stricter conditions that enable judges to decide whether detainees can be released earlier. Thus, in principle, prisoners should serve their entire sentence, and are only allowed to leave the detention center earlier in case of impeccable behavior and with electronic monitoring.

Four out of ten Dutch people feel that the interests of prisoners and those of society must be balanced. Various politicians believe that the automatic early release should be abolished, even if it makes rehabilitation more difficult.

4. News article about crime issue + right-wing populist party cue (underlined text to indicate the inserted party cues)

PVV provides resistance to early release of convicts

AMSTERDAM - A recent poll by TNS Nipo shows that 73% of the Dutch people is concerned about the early release of convicted criminals. The PVV claims that in particular, the release of Volkert van der G. has resulted in citizens having become more aware of this practice.

Politicians are urged to take action. The PVV calls for the introduction of stricter conditions that enable judges to decide whether detainees can be released earlier. Thus, in principle, prisoners should serve their entire sentence, and are only allowed to leave the detention

⁶ Volkert van der G. is an environmental activist that was convicted of the assassination of Pim Fortuyn.

center earlier in case of impeccable behavior and with electronic monitoring, according to the PVV.

Four out of ten Dutch people feel that the interests of prisoners and those of society must be balanced. The PVV believes that the automatic early release should be abolished, even if it makes rehabilitation more difficult.

5. News article about immigration issue (control condition)

Resistance to increase of East-European labor migrants

AMSTERDAM - A recent poll by TNS Nipo shows that 73% of the Dutch people is concerned about the growing number of East-European labor migrants in our country. In particular, the unfair competition in the labor market has resulted in citizens having become more aware of this trend.

Politicians are urged to take action. Political circles call for the introduction of stricter conditions that prevent a new influx of East-Europeans in the Dutch labor market. Labor migrants staying in the Netherlands without a work permit have to return to their country of origin.

Four out of ten Dutch people feel that their chances in the labor market should not deteriorate because of cheaper foreign workers. Various politicians believe that the new EU-regulation, allowing Romanians and Bulgarians to work in the Netherlands without a work permit from 1 January 2014, was introduced too early.

6. News article about immigration issue + right-wing populist party cue (underlined text to indicate the inserted party cues)

PVV provides resistance to increase of East-European labor migrants

AMSTERDAM - A recent poll by TNS Nipo shows that 73% of the Dutch people is concerned about the growing number of East-European labor migrants in our country. The PVV claims that in particular, the unfair competition in the labor market has resulted in citizens having become more aware of this trend.

Politicians are urged to take action. The PVV calls for the introduction of stricter conditions that prevent a new influx of East-Europeans in the Dutch labor market. Labor migrants staying in the Netherlands without a work permit have to return to their country of origin, according to the PVV.

Four out of ten Dutch people feel that their chances in the labor market should not deteriorate because of cheaper foreign workers. The PVV believes that the new EU-regulation, allowing Romanians and Bulgarians to work in the Netherlands without a work permit from 1 January 2014, was introduced too early.

7. News article about taxes issue (control condition)

Resistance to increase of retable value

AMSTERDAM - A recent poll by TNS Nipo shows that 73% of the Dutch people with a private home is concerned about the recent rise in housing costs. In particular, the increase in retable values has resulted in homeowners having become more aware of this.

Politicians are urged to take action. Political circles call for the introduction of stricter conditions to protect homeowners against unintended burden increases. Thus, the flat rate, on which income tax is paid, should either decrease or at worst remain the same , but is should not rise.

Four out of ten Dutch people feel that they should not have to pay more taxes, while the value of their home has dropped. Various politicians believe that the retable value should be frozen and the way the retable value is determined should be taken under scrutiny again.

8. News article about taxes issue + right-wing populist party cue (underlined text to indicate the inserted party cues)

PVV provides resistance to increase of retable value

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Table 2. Mean differences in Propensity to Vote PVV

Conditions	N	Mean	SD
Immigration Control	74	3.88	3.231
Immigration PVV	80	4.35	3.357
Crime Control	71	3.76	3.374
Crime PVV	82	3.28	3.221
Privacy Control	76	3.59	3.560
Privacy PVV	77	3.99	3.342
Taxes Control	76	4.14	3.494
Taxes PVV	64	2.70	2.694
Total	600	3.73	3.319

Table 3. Regressing ptv PVV on the cues

	Model I	Model II	Model III
PVV	-0.225 (0.271)	-0.235 (0.271)	-1.442 (0.561)**
Immigration		0.652 (0.388)†	-0.266 (0.540)
Crime		0.036 (0.389)	-0.384 (0.545)
Privacy		0.316 (0.388)	-0.553 (0.536)
PVV*Immigration			1.913 (0.773)*
PVV*Crime			0.962 (0.775)
PVV*Privacy			1.837 (0.774)*
Constant	3.845 (0.193)***	3.593 (0.307)***	4.145 (.379)***
R ²	0.001	0.007	0.021

Note: † p < .10* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Table 4 Interactions with Issue Agreement

	Model I	Model II	Model III
Issue Agreement	0.901		1.860
(IA)	(0.233)***	1.875 (0.478)***	(0.481)***
PVV	-0.165 (0.269)	0.431 (0.977)	-0.169 (1.015)
Immigration	0.795 (0.385)*	3.492 (1.429)*	3.086 (1.429)*
Crime	-0.193 (0.389)	1.482 (1.380)	1.313 (1.377)
Privacy	0.425 (0.385)	3.651 (1.378)**	3.337 (1.377)*
PVV * IA		-0.273 (0.454)	-0.549 (0.518)
Immigration * IA		-1.331 (0.695) †	-1.586 (0.700)*
Crime * IA		-0.805 (0.603)	-0.873 (0.610)
Privacy * IA		-1.593 (0.660)*	-1.870 (0.667)**
PVV * Immig * IA			0.960 (0.375)*
PVV * Crime * IA			0.382 (0.341)
PVV * Privacy * IA			0.926 (0.369)*
Constant	1.689 (.0579)**	-0.362 (1.055)	0.192 (1.066)
R ²	0.0317	0.0435	0.0582

Note: † p < .10* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Figure 1 Predicted PTV PVV for various issues and presence/absence of PVV cue

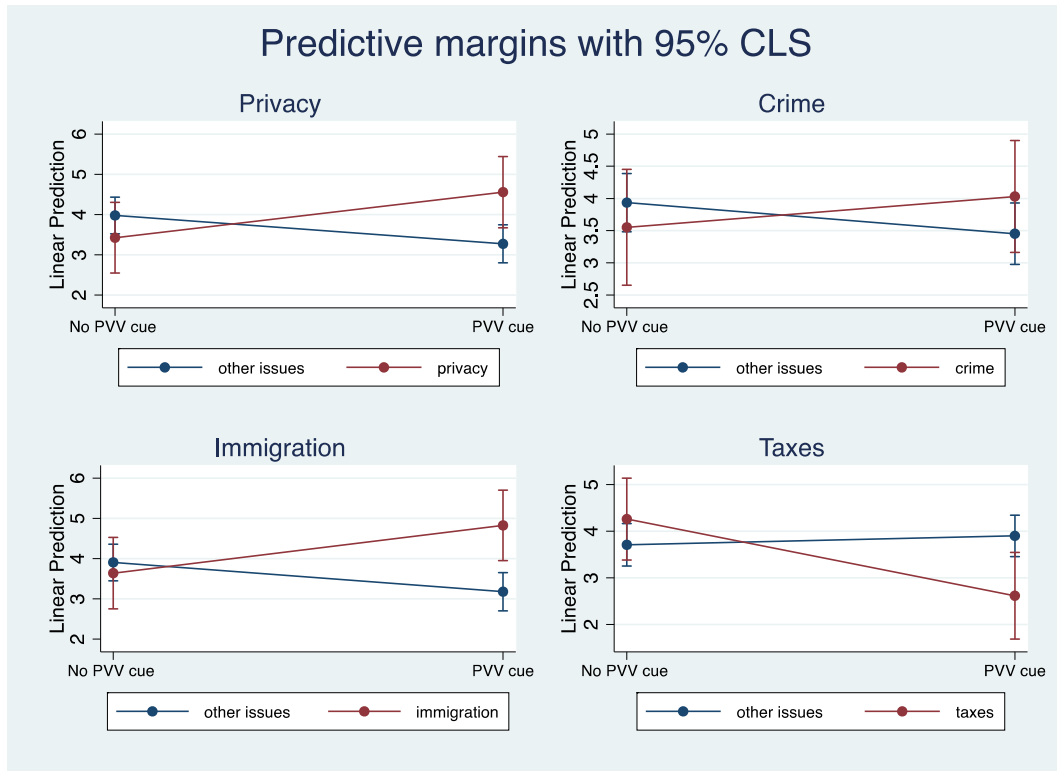


Figure 2 Predicted PTV PVV for various issues, presence/absence of PVV cue and issue (dis)agreement

