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When Figurative Frames Decrease Political Persuasion: The Case of Right-Wing Anti-Immigration Rhetoric

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ABSTRACT

The rhetoric used by right-wing anti-immigration politicians is considered important to their political success. Such rhetoric commonly contains figurative frames with metaphor and/or hyperbole. In two experiments ($n_{experiment1} = 411$, $n_{experiment2} = 407$), we tested when and how such figurative frames add to the intense and emotive character of anti-immigration statements and their subsequent persuasiveness. Results showed that different voters respond differently to figuratively framed anti-immigration rhetoric: overall, voters perceived figuratively framed populist statements as more intense and emotive than nonfigurative statements, which caused boomerang effects by decreasing political persuasion. By contrast, right-wing populist voters were not persuaded by rhetorical variations in anti-immigration statements. Our findings underscore how anti-immigration rhetoric can broaden the gap between voters and put in motion further polarization in our society.

Introduction

Electoral support for populist parties has more than tripled across Europe between 1998 and 2018 (Lewis et al., 2018). The rhetoric used by such populist leaders is generally seen as a decisive factor in their success (Hogan & Haltinner, 2015). With this research, we explored if anti-immigration rhetoric can partly explain for their electoral success.

Right-wing populist politicians use various grievances to mobilize their electorate, related to issues like political elitism, corruption, economic change, and immigration (Ivarsflaten, 2008). Even though anti-immigration rhetoric is not part of the electoral program for every right-wing populist party (Van Spanje, 2011), anti-immigration rhetoric has been described as a key factor for electoral success of many right-wing populist parties (Ivarsflaten, 2008). Typical anti-immigration rhetoric used by right-wing populist parties (RWPPs) presents immigrants as outsiders who are framed as a threat to the populists' idealized nation (Bos & Brants, 2014; De Cleen, 2017). In their anti-immigration rhetoric, politicians typically use strong, vivid, and negative metaphors and hyperboles to frame their political statements (Hogan & Haltinner, 2015; Musolff, 2017; Santa Ana, 1999). Scholars generally agree that, at least for parts of the electorate, such populist anti-immigration rhetoric can be highly persuasive (Bos et al., 2013; Brown et al., 2019; Matthes & Schmuck, 2017).

This research responds to calls for more research on the reception of populist rhetoric among individual voters (Reinemann et al., 2016), with an emphasis on immigration rhetoric. With two experiments, we examined how figuratively framed anti-immigration rhetoric affects voters' political opinion. We tested how figurative frames affect emotions and perceptions of message intensity and whether these responses served as underlying mechanisms for effects on political persuasion. We

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expected anti-immigration rhetoric to appeal to the part of the electorate that voted for right-wing populist parties and tested whether voters' political affiliation influenced persuasive effects. Experiments 1 and 2 were identical in terms of design, procedure, and measurement but used a different set of anti-immigration metaphors and hyperboles.

How anti-immigration rhetoric attracts voters

Metaphors and hyperboles are often used in public discourse to discuss a wide variety of subjects (e.g., Burgers et al., 2018; Claridge, 2010; Sopory & Dillard, 2002). Metaphors are "cross-domain mappings" that transfer elements of a source domain onto a target domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 203). For example, Brown et al. (2019) conducted an experiment in which participants were exposed to anti-immigration metaphors framing immigration as a disease. This specific frame highlights only negative characteristics of immigration. As such, metaphors can be used to create or reinforce negative stereotypes and accentuate differences between the presumed "good" people of the in-group and the presumed "bad" people of the out-group (De Landtsheer, 2015).

Another type of figurative language that can add to the typical character of anti-immigration rhetoric is hyperbole. A hyperbole is an expression that is "more extreme than justified given its ontological referent" (Burgers, Brugman et al., 2016, p. 166). For example, Donald Trump claimed Mexico to be "the second deadliest country in the world" and therefore argued that a border wall should be built to protect the United States (Los Angeles Times, 2017). Such a hyperbolic frame can portray an issue or event as larger than it actually is (Norrick, 2004) and can refocus a political discussion, from the more open question whether something is good or bad to the more closed question how good or bad something exactly is. Hyperbole thus creates a message that lacks nuance, leaves no room for contingencies, and appeals to emotions (Kalkhoven, 2015). Using a hyperbolic frame over a longer period of time may have important consequences for political policy. Kaufmann (2004), for instance, argues that support for George W. Bush's Administration to go to war with Iraq came (partly) through the Administration's exaggeration of the alleged threat of Saddam Hussein's regime and weapons of mass destruction. Thus, hyperboles can contribute to legitimacy formation of policy proposals (Kalkhoven & De Landtsheer, 2016).

Anti-immigration rhetoric typically plays on emotions, like anger (Breeze, 2020) and fear (Kopytowska & Chilton, 2018), and promotes straightforward policies that are very specific and leave no room for contingencies (Hameleers et al., 2017). Metaphor and hyperbole can spark emotions by eliciting a vivid image (Charteris-Black, 2006; Claridge, 2010) and can increase perceived message intensity (i.e., the degree to which a statement differs from an objective, nonevaluative statement; Hamilton & Stewart, 1993). Metaphors can activate connotations attached to intense and negative concepts, like war and other threats, and hyperboles can exaggerate danger and emphasize threats (Charteris-Black, 2006; Kalkhoven, 2015). Thereby, both tropes can be used to increase the intensity of anti-immigration rhetoric and to evoke negatively toned emotions (Charteris-Black, 2006). This leads to our first hypothesis:

H1: Compared to literal language, negatively toned metaphor or negatively toned hyperbole each increase (a) perceived message intensity of anti-immigration rhetoric and each evoke (b) stronger negative emotions and (c) weaker positive emotions.

When metaphor and/or hyperbole are used to frame a political issue, these figurative frames can affect political opinion (Boeynaems et al., 2017). In framing theory, frames are typically defined as consisting of two elements: framing devices, which suggest a framework within which to view the issue, and reasoning devices, which provide justifications or reasons for a general position (Gamson & Lasch, 1983, p. 399). Traditionally, framing scholars have categorized figurative-language types (e.g., metaphor, hyperbole) under the heading of framing devices only (Gamson & Lasch, 1983). Burgers, Konijn et al. (2016) introduced a new perspective on this matter and argued that figurative language

can work both as framing devices *and* reasoning devices: Metaphors and hyperbole do not only add rhetorical flourish to a statement but can transfer conceptual content as well (Burgers, Konijn et al., 2016). Thereby, figurative frames can fulfill one or more of the framing functions defined by Entman (1993): They can promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, problem evaluation, and/or a possible problem solution (Burgers, Konijn et al., 2016). Such figurative frames likely affect how voters perceive an issue (Brugman et al., 2019).

Thus far, we have focused on anti-immigration frames that comprise metaphor or hyperbole in isolation. Metaphor and hyperbole are distinct tropes (Carston & Wearing, 2015): While metaphor transfers elements of a source domain onto a target domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), hyperbole implies an evaluation along a qualitative or quantitative scale (Burgers, Brugman et al., 2016). Nevertheless, albeit being distinctive figurations, metaphor and hyperbole are readily combined (Carston & Wearing, 2015). Anti-immigration rhetoric is often associated with the occurrence of frames that combine metaphor and hyperbole (Kalkhoven, 2015). For example, Dutch right-wing politician Geert Wilders hyperbolically extended the metaphor *a wave of immigrants* into "a tsunami" when he referred to Islamic immigrants coming to the Netherlands (NU.nl, 2006). Thus, metaphor and hyperbole can be used to form three types of figurative frames: frames containing metaphor only, frames containing hyperbole only, and frames combining metaphor and hyperbole.

Both metaphor and hyperbole can affect how voters perceive an issue (Boeynaems et al., 2017; Kalkhoven & De Landtsheer, 2016). Moreover, frames that contain both metaphor *and* hyperbole combine the persuasive potential of the individual figures (Burgers, Konijn et al., 2016). Such a combinatory figurative frame contains two rhetorical operations at the same time, making it harder for critics to challenge the frame, which likely increases its persuasiveness. Therefore, *combinatory* figurative frames are expected to establish persuasive effects that reach beyond the impact of frames that contain one type of figuration (Burgers, Konijn et al., 2016). Thus far, scholars who studied the persuasive impact of combinatory figurative frames (e.g., *immigration is a natural disaster*; Charteris-Black, 2006) have focused on their metaphorical nature and did not study their combinatory effects (Boeynaems et al., 2017). Moreover, such studies typically took a critical-discourse approach and looked mainly at the prominence of figurative frames in the public debate (Charteris-Black, 2006; Musolff, 2017).

Although it has been widely acknowledged that figurative language can be used to increase a message's persuasiveness (e.g., Boeynaems et al., 2017; Sopory & Dillard, 2002), thus far, no experimental studies have tested the persuasiveness of these tropes in the context of anti-immigration rhetoric. To test for the persuasive power of metaphor and hyperbole in this context, we hypothesized the following:

H2: Anti-immigration rhetoric combining metaphor and hyperbole is more persuasive than either metaphorical or hyperbolic anti-immigration rhetoric, which in turn is more persuasive than nonfigurative anti-immigration rhetoric.

Scholars generally agree that at least a part of the persuasive power of anti-immigration rhetoric lies in its intense character and force to elicit anger and fear responses (Breeze, 2020; Wirz, 2018). The hypothesis that metaphors and hyperboles can be effective through affect is also supported by theories of persuasion and media-effects research. For instance, Meyers-Levy and Malaviya (1999) presented a persuasion model in which experiential processing (the notion that judgments can be based on process-generated sensations or experiences) is added as an important precursor to persuasion. Other research showed that emotions and affect add to persuasion in general (Konijn, 2008; Nabi, 2009) and specifically to the realism perceived in media messages, which further increased their attributed information value (Konijn et al., 2009). Rhetorical figures are likely to be processed through such an experiential route (Van Mulken et al., 2005), and thus their persuasive effects are likely to be influenced by the emotions they evoke (Konijn, 2008; Meyers-Levy & Malaviya, 1999; Nabi, 2009). This leads to our third hypothesis:

H3: The persuasive effects of negatively toned figuratively framed populist statements are mediated by (a) perceived message intensity, (b) negative emotions, and (c) positive emotions.

Individual differences between voters

An important debate hinges how effects of figurative frames are moderated by voters' prior positions. Some metaphor scholars propose that effects of figuration outweigh effects of prior opinion. For instance, a well-known series of studies by Thibodeau and Boroditsky (2011, 2013) looked at the ways in which differential metaphorical frames for crime impacted participants' preferred policy solutions. They contrasted two metaphors that described crime either as a beast or as a virus. They found that the beast metaphor led to more support for "enforcement" policies (e.g., stricter punishment) than the virus metaphor, which implied "reform" policies (e.g., curing the societal system). Furthermore, they propose that the persuasive effects of figuration are stronger than effects of individual differences, such as prior political opinion.

However, other studies and theories posit that prior opinions are more important when predicting whether or not messages persuade. Smith et al. (2006) introduced a model for formative research into persuasive campaigns based on Social Judgment Theory. They predicted that persuasive messages are most effective when these tap into an individual's latitude of noncommitment, which means that the persuasive message is relatively neutral in relation to their prior opinion. They also posit that messages that fall into an individual's latitude of rejection, in which case a persuasive message goes against their prior beliefs, are unlikely to be persuasive (see also Byrne & Hart, 2009; Meirick & Nisbett, 2011). Individuals faced with information that does not coincide with their worldview are likely to discredit this information in an attempt to solve the dissonance generated by this information (Festinger, 1957). Moreover, when a persuasive statement goes against a specific voter's political ideology or challenges this voter's worldview, a boomerang effect can occur; the statement can steer recipient's opinion further away from the statement (Byrne & Hart, 2009; Meirick & Nisbett, 2011). Extremely intense messages that go against the addressee's beliefs are likelier to backfire on the sender than more neutral messages (Meirick & Nisbett, 2011). Thus, it seems unlikely that the persuasive effects of anti-immigration rhetoric will hold for all voters (Meirick & Nisbett, 2011; Müller et al., 2017).

Research suggests that populist statements typically appeal to only a part of the electorate (Bos et al., 2013; Krämer, 2014; Müller et al., 2017) and that their impact depends on prior convictions (Krämer, 2014; Müller et al., 2017). By highly appealing to voters' social identity, populist anti-immigration rhetoric likely offers confirmation for those who identify with these ideas and at the same time deters those who do not identify (Miller & Johnston Conover, 2015; Müller et al., 2017). Hereby, anti-immigration rhetoric can put in motion a divergence of attitudes, where voters who disagree reject the ideas even stronger and voters who already agree will agree more strongly (Müller et al., 2017). This leads to our next hypotheses:

H4a: For voters with a matching political affiliation, figuratively framed anti-immigration statements are more persuasive than nonfigurative statements.
H4b: For voters with a mismatching political affiliation, figuratively framed anti-immigration statements are less persuasive than nonfigurative statements.

Methods

To test our hypotheses, we conducted two experiments investigating the impact of anti-immigration metaphors and hyperboles on political persuasion. Experiments 1 and 2 used a similar design, procedure, and instrumentation but varied in terms of stimuli used, which increases the external validity and generalizability of our findings (Jackson et al., 1988).

Participants

Participants were recruited online from a nationally representative database of a large Dutch research company. Participants who met our inclusion criteria (Dutch nationality, Dutch mother tongue, completed secondary school, eligible to vote in the Dutch elections) were redirected to one of the two online experiments. None of the participants of Experiment 1 participated in Experiment 2.

Experiment 1

A total of 460 participants completed the online survey. Forty-nine participants were excluded because they did not pass a simple reading check (i.e., could not name any relevant keywords from the statement they read). This left 411 unique participants for analysis (230 men, 181 women, M_{age} = 52.52 years, SD_{age} = 13.65, range = 19-71).

Experiment 2

A total of 456 participants completed the online survey. Forty-nine participants did not pass the reading check. This left 407 unique participants for analysis (248 men, 159 women, M_{age} = 52.00 years, SD_{age} = 12.63, range = 19-71). In both experiments, participants were evenly distributed across experimental conditions regarding age, gender, education level, and political affiliation on the left-right spectrum.[1]

Design and stimulus materials

Both experiments had a 2 (right-wing anti-immigration metaphor: present, absent) × 2 (right-wing anti-immigration hyperbole: present, absent) between-subjects design. Participants read a short statement that was supposedly made by an anonymous Dutch politician who responded to a question by a journalist about economic refugees. The fictitious statement comprised a policy proposal to reduce the influx of (economic) refugees into the Netherlands. Variations of the statements for the two experiments were created for this study. All statements were based on actual Dutch public discourse in news media, thereby representing perspectives that audiences could encounter in mainstream Dutch media. Calculations with G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2009) showed that with this experimental design to find a medium effect (f = .25) with alpha set at .01 and a power of .90, we would have needed at least 242 participants.

Experiment 1

Participants were exposed to a short statement in which a politician gave a negative evaluation of refugees, suggesting that many refugees come to the Netherlands solely for economic reasons. The anti-immigration metaphors were based on a comparison between economic refugees and fortune seekers (Trouw, 2017) and contained references to welfare benefits as *a pot of gold* and to the Netherlands as *the land of plenty*. In the condition with populist hyperboles, exaggerations like *everyone knows that* and *ultra-strict asylum policy* were used. The condition with metaphors and hyperboles included combinations like *the gigantic pot of pure gold* and *the ideal land of plenty*

Experiment 2

Participants were presented with a short statement in which a politician argued that stricter asylum policies are needed to prevent economic refugees from disadvantaging the Netherlands. Metaphors were based on a comparison between economic refugees and thieves (RTL Nieuws, 2015) and contained metaphorical references to economic refugees as *a gang of asylum seekers* and to the costs of sheltering refugees as *our country has been robbed*. In the condition with anti-immigration hyperboles, exaggerations like *incredibly disadvantaged* and *by all means necessary* were used. The condition with anti-immigration metaphors and hyperboles contained combined expressions like *our country has been plundered* and *an organized gang of asylum seekers*.

To check whether our manipulations were successful and to verify that - with the exception of the target metaphors and hyperboles- the statements did not contain any other metaphors or hyperboles, we analyzed our statements with established and reliable linguistic procedures for metaphor and hyperbole identification (Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit, Steen et al., 2010; Hyperbole Identification Procedure, Burgers, Brugman et al., 2016).

Not all metaphors are the same, and not all metaphors are processed in a similar way (Bowdle & Gentner, 2005). Metaphors can be processed in two ways, either by comparison or by categorization, and it is argued that a metaphor needs to be processed by comparison to be able to shift a recipient's perspective (Bougher, 2012; Steen, 2011). This means that recipients need to actively compare source and target to understand the metaphor's intended meaning (Steen, 2011). Therefore, we conducted a pretest in which we tested whether the metaphors were likely processed by comparison or not by asking participants to write down their associations with the statements. This is the case when such spontaneous associations contain words related to the source domain of the metaphor (*fortune seekers* for study 1, *thieves* for study 2). The pretest (82 participants, 63.2% women, M_{age} = 30.65 years, SD_{age} = 13.26, range = 18–61) showed that metaphorically framed statements evoked images related to the source domain of the metaphors, which indicates that these metaphors were likely processed by comparison. Moreover, since many hyperboles have become so ingrained in our everyday language that they go unnoticed and may lose their impact (Claridge, 2010; McCarthy & Carter, 2004), we tested whether our hyperbolic stimuli affected perceived message intensity. Based on the outcome of the pretest, we optimized the stimulus materials. An overview of the stimuli (original Dutch statements and English translations) and a complete report of the pretest can be retrieved from Digital Appendix A (https://osf.io/xmcve/).

Measures

The same measurements were used for both experiments. Political persuasion was operationalized through three constructs: policy attitude, evaluation of the politician, and likelihood to vote for the politician.

Policy attitude was tapped by asking participants to indicate on seven-point semantic differential scales (based on Hartman, 2012) to which extent they thought the proposed policy would be (1) unfavorable or favorable for the Netherlands, (2) unnecessary or necessary for the Netherlands, (3) negative or positive for the Netherlands, (4) a bad or a good idea for the Netherlands (α_{exp1} = .968, α_{exp2} = .974).

Evaluation of the politician was measured with a feelings thermometer on which participants could indicate how unfavorable (cold) or favorable (warm) (sliding scale, 0–100) they felt about the politician (Ditonto et al., 2013).

Likelihood to vote for the politician was tapped by asking participants with seven-point rating scales how likely they would (1) vote for the politician, (2) vote for the politician if elections were held today (Fernandes, 2013; r_{exp1} = .985, p < .001, r_{exp2} = .987, p < .001).

Perceived message intensity was measured by asking participants to rate on seven-point semantic differential scales to which extent they perceived the statement as forceful (not forceful to very forceful), extreme (not extreme to very extreme), intense (not intense to very intense), and exaggerated (not exaggerated to very exaggerated). The first three items were derived from the perceived language intensity scale (Hamilton & Stewart, 1993). Since hyperbole can be defined as an expression that is more extreme than justified given its ontological referent (Brugman, Burgers et al., 2019), we added a fourth item that asked to which degree participants believed the statement to be exaggerated. Scale reliability was low for the four items (α_{exp1} = .563, α_{exp2} = .609). After removing the item "forceful," reliability was sufficient (α_{exp1} = .696, α_{exp2} = .744; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Emotions were measured with seven items on seven-point slider scales. Participants rated to which extent they felt the following discrete emotions when reading the statement: anger, fear, contentment, enthusiasm, hope, compassion, and sadness (Lecheler et al., 2015).

Perceived novelty and *perceived aptness* were measured as control variables. Some scholars proposed that aptness is a prerequisite for the "success" of a metaphorical frame (Steen, 2011; Thibodeau & Durgin, 2011). Aptness reflects the degree to which a metaphor captures important topic features; a figurative comparison can be perceived as apt or not, depending on the quality of the cross-domain mapping (Pierce & Chiappe, 2008; Thibodeau & Durgin, 2011). Moreover, recipients can perceive a hyperbolic statement as apt or not, depending on the extent to which they feel the exaggeration fits the context (Claridge, 2010; McCarthy & Carter, 2004).

Novelty has been depicted as a success factor of figurative language as well (McCarthy & Carter, 2004; Steen, 2011). Novel metaphors (in contrast to conventional ones) are likely to be processed by comparison; recipients have to actively compare source and target domain to get to the metaphor's intended meaning (Bowdle & Gentner, 2005). Novel metaphors and hyperboles attract attention and provide recipients with new issue viewpoints (McCarthy & Carter, 2004; Steen, 2011). Therefore, we measured perceived novelty and perceived aptness by asking participants to rate how novel (1 = very novel to 7 = very conventional) and how apt (1 = very inappropriate to 7 = very appropriate) they perceived the choice of words of the politician (Pierce & Chiappe, 2008). To make sure that participants were reminded of the target statements when making their evaluation, we provided a short introduction to the question informing participants that we were interested in their opinion on the language used by the politician and repeated a number of target statements from the stimuli. For our analyses, we recoded the scores of novelty such that a higher score indicates that a metaphor was perceived as more novel.

Demographic variables

Participants were asked for their age, gender, education level, and political affiliation in commonly accepted ways. Political affiliation was measured in two ways: by asking participants to indicate their political position on the left-right spectrum on a slider-scale from 0 (far left) to 10 (far right) and by asking participants to select their favorite Dutch political party from a list with all 13 political parties receiving at least one seat in the Dutch House of Representatives in the 2017 general elections.

Procedure

Data were collected online through Qualtrics (www.qualtrics.com) via a large Dutch research company between May 11 and 18, 2017. In the database of the research company, participants were first randomly assigned to one of the two experiments or an unrelated study. Within the study, participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions. First, participants read a short introduction and were asked for their informed consent. Next, they were presented with a short anti-immigration statement (see *Design and StimulusMaterials*). After reading the statement, participants were exposed to the reading-check question, asking them to describe what images the political statement evoked. When the answer indicated that the text was not read properly (e.g., when a participant could not mention the general topic or keywords of the text), we discarded this participant from our analyses. Subsequently, we asked participants about political persuasion (policy attitude, evaluation of the politician, likelihood to vote).[2] Then, participants answered the items on language intensity and emotions.[3] Subsequently, perceived novelty and perceived aptness were tapped. The questionnaire ended with questions about demographics, after which participants were debriefed, thanked for participation, and redirected to the research company's website to collect their reward.

Results

Experiments 1 and 2 differed in terms of stimuli. However, the experiments used similar designs and measurements and tested the same hypotheses. Therefore, data of Experiment 1 and Experiment 2

were analyzed in a similar way. Results are presented per hypothesis: For each analysis, we provide the results of Experiment 1 and Experiment 2 successively. After hypothesis testing, we compared the effect sizes of both experiments by checking for similarity in their direction, magnitude, and confidence intervals. Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. All reported tests are two-tailed. A correlation matrix for both experiments can be retrieved from Digital Appendix B (https://osf.io/xmcve/).

Control analyses

As a control analysis, we first explored whether and how anti-immigration metaphors affected perceived novelty and perceived aptness. See Table 1 for descriptive statistics and Table 2 for the statistical analyses.

Experiment 1

A MANOVA revealed an overall effect of anti-immigration hyperbole. After a significant multivariate effect, we further used univariate analyses. To prevent alpha inflation, we used the Holm method to adjust the alpha level in the univariate tests.[4] Hyperbole decreased *perceived aptness* and increased *perceived novelty*. No effect of metaphor and no interaction effects between metaphor and hyperbole were found.

Experiment 2

A MANOVA showed an overall effect of anti-immigration metaphor. Metaphor decreased *perceived aptness* and increased *perceived novelty*. No effect of hyperbole and no interaction effects between metaphor and hyperbole were found.

Hypotheses testing

First, we tested whether negatively toned anti-immigration metaphor and hyperbole affected message intensity, negative emotions, and positive emotions (*H1*). For each experiment, we used a 2 × 2 ANOVA to test whether anti-immigration metaphor and hyperbole affected message intensity. Consequently, we used a 2 × 2 MANOVA with metaphor and hyperbole as independent variables and emotions as dependent variables. The different emotions (negative emotions: anger, fear, sadness; positive emotions: enthusiasm, hope, contentment; other: compassion)[5] were treated as discrete variables (cf. Lecheler et al., 2015). For the purpose of readability, we present the statistical results of our analyses in Table 2.

Experiment 1

Message intensity

Both anti-immigration metaphor and hyperbole increased *message intensity*. No interactions between metaphor and hyperbole were found.

Emotions

We found an overall main effect of anti-immigration metaphor on emotions. Subsequent univariate analyses with Holm corrections showed that metaphor increased the *negative emotion* of fear and did not affect any of the other emotions. No effects of hyperbole and no interaction effect between metaphor and hyperbole on emotions were found.

For message intensity, results were in line with *H1*: Metaphor and hyperbole increased message intensity. For emotions, we only found that metaphors increased fear. We found no effects of metaphor and hyperbole on positive emotions, and no effects of hyperbole on negative emotions.

Table 1. Mean Scores (and Standard Deviations) of Message Intensity, Emotions, Novelty, Aptness, Policy Attitude, Evaluation of the Politician, and Likelihood to Vote

	No Metaphor		Metaphor	
Experiment 1 (N = 411)	No Hyperbole (n = 106)	Hyperbole (n = 97)	No Hyperbole (n = 106)	Hyperbole (n = 102)
Message intensity	3.74 (1.18)	4.46 (1.33)	4.31 (1.41)	4.84 (1.46)
Negative emotions				
Fear	2.77 (1.45)	2.94 (1.50)	3.08 (1.76)	3.64 (1.77)
Anger	3.79 (1.76)	3.70 (1.89)	3.91 (2.03)	4.32 (1.93)
Sadness	2.91 (1.70)	3.32 (1.91)	3.48 (1.91)	3.44 (1.74)
Positive emotions				
Enthusiasm	3.86 (1.92)	3.33 (1.88)	3.75 (1.98)	3.36 (1.97)
Hope	4.12 (1.78)	3.58 (1.89)	3.66 (1.94)	3.40 (1.89)
Contentment	4.27 (1.84)	3.46 (1.98)	3.74 (2.00)	3.30 (1.92)
Other emotions				
Compassion	3.53 (1.73)	3.35 (1.63)	3.23 (1.87)	3.14 (1.66)
Control variables				
Perceived novelty	3.23 (1.76)	3.86 (1.84)	3.56 (2.07)	3.89 (2.03)
Perceived aptness	4.74 (1.93)	3.90 (2.10)	3.71 (1.77)	3.83 (2.20)
Political persuasion				
Policy attitude	5.37 (1.62)	4.90 (1.72)	5.06 (1.92)	4.73 (1.95)
Evaluation of the politician	64.61 (27.19)	53.60 (28.98)	55.82 (32.42)	49.04 (32.54)
Likelihood to vote	4.38 (1.96)	3.59 (2.17)	3.73 (2.14)	3.41 (2.23)
	No Metaphor		Metaphor	
Experiment 2 (N = 407)	No Hyperbole (n = 105)	Hyperbole (n = 97)	No Hyperbole (n = 102)	Hyperbole (n = 103)
Message intensity	4.24 (1.32)	4.40 (1.37)	5.05 (1.36)	5.13 (1.39)
Negative emotions				
Fear	3.24 (1.71)	3.16 (1.62)	3.66 (1.72)	3.55 (1.84)
Anger	4.04 (1.78)	4.19 (1.77)	4.65 (1.83)	4.56 (1.96)
Sadness	3.62 (1.78)	3.41 (1.83)	4.13 (1.73)	3.91 (1.93)
Positive emotions				
Enthusiasm	3.35 (1.80)	3.44 (1.93)	3.01 (1.80)	2.88 (1.92)
Hope	3.52 (1.82)	3.39 (1.94)	3.00 (1.79)	2.85 (1.87)
Contentment	3.47 (1.76)	3.46 (1.87)	3.19 (1.88)	2.82 (1.92)
Other emotions				
Compassion	3.45 (1.65)	3.10 (1.58)	3.37 (1.78)	2.97 (1.83)
Control variables				
Perceived novelty	3.58 (1.70)	3.85 (1.93)	5.18 (1.69)	4.84 (1.97)
Perceived aptness	3.95 (1.97)	3.88 (2.07)	2.90 (1.92)	3.12 (2.17)
Political persuasion				
Policy attitude	4.79 (1.94)	4.47 (2.00)	4.49 (1.93)	4.24 (2.11)
Evaluation of the politician	53.97 (30.31)	50.46 (32.49)	42.83 (32.94)	40.04 (35.27)
Likelihood to vote	3.56 (2.09)	3.41 (2.16)	3.17 (2.12)	2.94 (2.32)

Note. Except for attitude toward the politician, which was measured on a scale from 0 to 100, all variables were measured on seven-point scales; higher scores indicate higher intensity, more negative emotions, more positive emotions, higher perceived novelty, higher perceived aptness, a more positive attitude toward the proposed policy, a more positive attitude toward the politician, and a higher likelihood to vote for the politician.

Experiment 2

Message intensity

Anti-immigration metaphor increased *message intensity*. No effect of hyperbole and no interaction effect between metaphor and hyperbole was found.

Emotions

We found an overall main effect of anti-immigration metaphor on emotions. Subsequent univariate analyses with Holm corrections showed that metaphor increased the *negative emotions* of anger, fear, and sadness and decreased the *positive emotion* of hope, contentment, and enthusiasm. No effects of hyperbole and no interaction effect between metaphor and hyperbole on emotions were found.

Table 2. Results of 2 (Metaphor: Present, Absent) × 2 (Hyperbole: Present, Absent) Analyses of Variance with the Distinct Emotions (H1), Message Intensity (H1), and the Control Variables Novelty and Aptness (Additional Analyses) as Dependent Variables

		Experiment 1				Experiment 2			
		H1 Testing							
IV	DV	df	Error df	F	p	df	Error df	F	p
Metaphor	Message Intensity	1	407	12.87	<.001*	1	403	32.72	<.001*
	Emotions (MANOVA)	7	401	2.85	.007*	7	397	2.38	.022*
	Fear	1	407	9.71	.002*	1	403	5.56	.019*
	Anger	1	407	3.84	.051	1	403	7.35	.007*
	Sadness	1	407	3.79	.052	1	403	7.82	.005*
	Enthusiasm	1	407	.04	.834	1	403	5.95	.015*
	Hope	1	407	2.97	.086	1	403	8.30	.004*
	Contentment	1	407	3.33	.069	1	403	6.36	.012*
	Compassion	1	407	2.28	.132	1	403	.372	.542
Hyperbole	Message Intensity	1	407	21.95	<.001***	1	403	.731	.393
	Emotions (MANOVA)	7	401	2.37	.022*	7	397	1.08	.373
	Fear	1	407	5.11	.024	—	—	—	—
	Anger	1	407	.76	.385	—	—	—	—
	Sadness	1	407	1.09	.297	—	—	—	—
	Enthusiasm	1	407	5.67	.018	—	—	—	—
	Hope	1	407	4.72	.030	—	—	—	—
	Contentment	1	407	10.54	.001*	—	—	—	—
	Compassion	1	407	.61	.435	—	—	—	—
Metaphor x Hyperbole	Message Intensity	1	407	.579	.447	1	403	.095	.758
	Emotions (MANOVA)	7	407	1.99	.056	7	397	.449	.871

		Experiment 1				Experiment 2			
		Additional analyses testing							
IV	DV	df	Error df	F	p	df	Error df	F	p
Metaphor	Control Variables (MANOVA)	2	406	.595	.552	2	402	27.78	<.001*
	Novelty	—	—	—	—	1	403	51.37	<.001*
	Aptness	—	—	—	—	1	403	20.14	<.001*
Hyperbole	Control Variables (MANOVA)	2	406	5.38	.005*	2	402	.07	.933
	Perceived novelty	1	407	6.27	.013*	—	—	—	—
	Perceived aptness	1	407	10.73	.001*	—	—	—	—
Metaphor x Hyperbole	Control Variables (MANOVA)	2	406	.339	.713	2	402	1.85	.159

* Significant at the .05 level. For univariate analyses following a significant multivariate (MANOVA) effect, the Holm correction was applied to prevent for alpha inflation.

For metaphor, results were again in line with *H1*: Anti-immigration metaphors increased message intensity and negative emotions (anger, fear, sadness) and decreased positive emotions (hope, contentment, enthusiasm). However, *H1* is not supported for anti-immigration hyperboles that had no effect on message intensity and emotions (positive or negative).

Next, we tested our hypothesis concerning the main effects of figuratively framed statements on political persuasion (*H2*). A 2 (anti-immigration metaphor: present, absent) × 2 (anti-immigration hyperbole: present, absent) × 2 (study) MANOVA with the dependent variables policy attitude, evaluation of the politician, and likelihood to vote for the politician was conducted.

Experiment 1. We found no effect of metaphor on political persuasion, Pillai's Trace = .014, F (3,405) = 1.95, p = .121, whereas hyperbole did affect political persuasion, Pillai's Trace = .02, F (3,405) = 3.02, p =.030, η_p^2 = .02 . Subsequent univariate analyses showed that anti-immigration hyperbole negatively affected policy attitude, $F(1, 407)$ = 4.96, p = .026, η_p^2 = .01, evaluation of the politician, $F(1, 407)$ = 8.81, p = .003, η_p^2 = .02, and likelihood to vote for that politician, $F(1, 407)$ = 6.97, p = .009, η_p^2 = .02. No interaction effect between metaphor and hyperbole was found, Pillai's Trace = .01, $F(3,405)$ = .673, p =.569.

Experiment 2. In contrast to Experiment 1, we found an effect of anti-immigration metaphor on political persuasion, Pillai's Trace = .05, $F(3,401) = 6.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. Separate univariate analyses revealed negative effects of metaphor on evaluation of the politician, $F(1, 403) = 10.92$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, but not on policy attitude, $F(1, 403) = 1.87$, $p = .172$, and likelihood to vote for the politician, $F(1, 403) = 3.94$, $p = .048$,[6] $\eta_p^2 = .01$. We found no effect of hyperbole on political persuasion, Pillai's Trace = .01, $F(3,401) = .799$, $p = .495$, and no interaction effect between metaphor and hyperbole, Pillai's Trace = .001, $F(3,401) = .163$, $p = .921$.

For both experiments, we found that reading a figuratively framed anti-immigration statement (vs. a nonfigurative statement) made the general voter *less* positive about the politician and the proposed policy. These results contradict *H2*, which predicted figuratively framed populist statements to be more persuasive than nonfigurative populist statements. However, as outlined in our introduction, processing anti-immigration messages apparently is less straightforward than sometimes assumed, which is further examined below.

Underlying mechanisms

We expected message intensity, negative emotions, and positive emotions to mediate the impact of figuratively framed populist statement on political persuasion (*H3*). Message intensity and the distinct emotions (negative, positive) correlated with all elements of political persuasion. We carried out a mediation analysis with multiple mediators using the Process macro v3.4 for SPSS statistics (Hayes, 2017; Model 4; 5,000 bootstrap samples). For mediation to be possible, the independent variable should directly affect the proposed mediator (Hayes, 2017). To prevent Type 1 error inflation in this analysis, we used the composite variable "political persuasion" (the mean of the standardized measures of policy attitude, evaluation of the politician, and likelihood to vote; $\alpha_{exp1} = .941$, $\alpha_{exp2} = .942$) as dependent variable for our mediation analyses. We conducted one mediation analysis per independent variable per experiment (Table 3).

Experiment 1

Mediation analysis showed significant indirect negative effects of anti-immigration metaphor on political persuasion via perceived message intensity and fear. Moreover, mediation analysis showed a significant indirect negative effect of hyperbole on political persuasion, via message intensity, contentment, and perceived aptness.

Experiment 2

Mediation analysis showed significant indirect negative effects of anti-immigration metaphors on political persuasion, via perceived message intensity, perceived aptness, and hope. However, where we expected, based on our theoretical review, statements that are perceived as intense and emotive to positively affect political persuasion, findings showed the reverse. For the general voter, figuratively framed anti-immigration statements were not persuasive. Rather, they pushed voters' opinion further away from the politician and the proposed policy. When figuratively framed populist statements were perceived as intense, when they increased negative emotions, or when they decreased positive emotions or perceived aptness, this negatively affected voters' evaluation of the politician and the proposed policy. In those cases, a boomerang effect occurred in that figurative frames push voters' political opinion away from those in the framed statement. Next, we examined whether voter characteristics influenced figurative-framing effects (Meirick & Nisbet, 2011).

Individual differences between voters

To test *H4*, which predicted political affiliation to influence the effects of figuratively framed anti-immigration statements on political persuasion, we collapsed the data from Experiments 1 and 2 in one file and conducted a 2 (metaphor: present, absent) × 2 (hyperbole: present, absent) × 2 (study)

Table 3. Partially Standardized Indirect Effects of Figuratively Framed Populist Statements on Political Persuasion via Message Intensity, Emotions, and Aptness.

IV		Mediator	DV	b	$SE\ B$	99% CI
Experiment 1 ($N = 411$)						
Metaphor		Message intensity	Political persuasion	−.2096	.0617	[−3823, −.0595]*
	Negative emotions	Fear	Political persuasion	−.0360	.0182	[−.0995, −.0006]*
Hyperbole		Message intensity	Political persuasion	−.0524	.0227	[−.1189, −.0036]*
	Positive emotions	Contentment	Political persuasion	−.1004	.0346	[−.2013, −.0207]*
	Control variables	Perceived aptness	Political persuasion	−.1738	.0559	[−.3251, −.0348]*
Experiment 2 ($N = 407$)						
Metaphor		Intensity	Political persuasion	−.1029	.0297	[−.1825, −.0398]*
	Positive emotions	Hope	Political persuasion	−.0491	.0201	[−.1078, −.0043]*
	Control variables	Perceived aptness	Political persuasion	−.2500	.0587	[−.4083, −.1055]*

Note: b indicates the value of the unstandardized indirect effect, and $SE\ B$ indicates the standard error of the unstandardized indirect effect.
* Significant indirect effect at $p < .01$ (99% confidence interval does not include zero).

MANCOVA with voters' political position on the left-right spectrum as a covariate and the three items of political persuasion as dependent variables. By including voters' political affiliation in the statistical model, we tested for interaction effects between our independent variables and voter differences in political affiliation. We found a significant main effect of political affiliation on political persuasion (Pillai's Trace = .30, $F(3,804) = 114.97$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .30$). Voters with a more right-wing political orientation scored higher on policy attitude ($F(1,806) = 247.04$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .24$), evaluation of the politician ($F(1,806) = 341.17$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .30$), and likelihood to vote for the politician ($F(1,806) = 262.22$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .25$). However, we found no two- or three-way interactions with political affiliation and metaphor and/or hyperbole.[7] Thus, results did not support *H4*: political affiliation did not moderate the persuasive impact of figuratively framed populist statements. Rather, we found direct effects of political affiliation on political persuasion (see also Matthes & Schmuck, 2017), regardless of the figurative framing of populist statements.

Additional Analyses

The role of populist-party affiliation
With 13% of total votes in the 2017 national elections, Geert Wilders' Freedom Party (PVV) became the second largest political party in the Netherlands. Populist newcomer Forum for Democracy (FVD; led by Thierry Baudet) received 1.8% of total votes and won two seats in the Dutch House of Representatives. Since both PVV and FVD can be characterized as right-wing populist parties with a strong anti-immigration focus (Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2017), we conducted additional analyses to examine how voters who support PVV or FVD respond to our stimuli. Since each experiment by itself had not enough power, we merged the data from Experiments 1 and 2, selected PVV and FVD supporters ($N_{total} = 161$; $n_{exp1} = 86$, $n_{exp2} = 75$), and repeated our analyses conducted for the hypotheses testing above. To control for possible variations caused by differences between experiments, we used "experiment" as a control variable.

Emotions. First, we tested whether populist metaphors and hyperboles affected emotions for this selection of voters. A 2 × 2 MANCOVA with the distinct emotions as dependent variables and experiment included in the statistical model as a covariate revealed a significant effect of metaphor, Pillai's Trace = .139, $F(7,150) = 3.45$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$, but not of hyperbole, Pillai's Trace = .04, $F(7,150) = .875$, $p = .528$, and no interaction effect between metaphor and hyperbole, Pillai's Trace = .05, $F(7,150) = 1.08$, $p = .383$. We found no effect of "experiment," Pillai's Trace = .07, $F(7,150) = 1.57$, $p = .150$. Univariate analyses with Holm corrections demonstrated that anti-immigration metaphors

reduced compassion, $F(1,156) = 7.80$, $p = .006$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. Metaphor did not affect any of the other emotions.

Message intensity. A 2×2 ANCOVA showed an effect of anti-immigration metaphor on message intensity, $F(1,156) = 4.06$ $p = .046$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, in that metaphors increased message intensity. We found no effects of hyperbole, $F(1,156) = .313$, $p = .577$, and no interaction between metaphor and hyperbole, $F(1,156) = .681$, $p = .411$. Again, results showed no effect of "experiment," $F(1,156) = 1.51$, $p = .222$.

Political persuasion. Next, we conducted a similar MANCOVA with the dimensions of political persuasion as dependent variables and "experiment" as a covariate. For right-wing populist-party supporters, figuratively framed populist statements did not affect political persuasion. No effects of populist metaphor, Pillai's Trace = .03, $F(3,154) = 1.56$, $p = .201$, and populist hyperbole, Pillai's Trace = .03, $F(3,154) = 1.49$, $p = .219$, and no interaction effects between metaphor and hyperbole, Pillai's Trace = .02, $F(3,154) = .862$, $p = .462$, were found. Again, no effect of "experiment" was found, Pillai's Trace = .004, $F(3,154) = .231$, $p = .875$.

A final MANCOVA was conducted to test whether figuratively framed anti-immigration statements affected perceived novelty and perceived aptness. No effects of metaphor, Pillai's Trace = .02, $F(2,155) = 1.26$, $p = .288$, and hyperbole, Pillai's Trace = .003, $F(2,155) = .255$, $p = .775$, and no interaction effects between metaphor and hyperbole, Pillai's Trace = .005, $F(2,155) = .375$, $p = .688$, were found. However, "experiment" did affect perceived novelty and perceived aptness, Pillai's Trace = .09, $F(2,155) = 7.27$, $p = .001$.[8] Overall, the statements from Experiment 1 were perceived as less novel and more apt than the statements from Experiment 2. To compare these results to the rest of the electorate, we conducted the same analyses for all voters who did not support PVV or FVD ($N = 657$). These analyses showed similar findings as the hypothesis tests with all participants. A detailed report of these analyses can be retrieved from Digital Appendix D (https://osf.io/xmcve/). In all, our findings showed that where anti-immigration metaphors and hyperboles pushed the opinion of nonpopulist voters away from the anti-immigration statements, they did not affect the political opinion of right-wing anti-immigration voters.

Discussion and conclusion

The aim of the current research was to explore how figuratively framed right-wing anti-immigration statements affect voters and whether and how voter characteristics moderate these effects. We tested whether metaphor, hyperbole, and their combinations accounted for the typically intense and emotive character of anti-immigration rhetoric and whether a voter's political affiliation influenced its persuasive impact. Our results showed that voters of right-wing populist parties (RWPPs) responded differently to figuratively framed anti-immigration statements than other voters.

In line with *H1*, we found that for the voter population as a whole, negatively toned figuratively framed populist statements were perceived as more intense and emotive than nonfigurative frames. As expected, both metaphors and hyperboles increased the intensity of anti-immigration statements and added to their emotive force. However, for voters who indicated support for an RWPP, this worked differently: Figuratively framed anti-immigration statements were perceived as less emotive than nonfigurative statements. Moreover, RWPP voters, in contrast to other voters, perceived anti-immigration metaphors and hyperboles as conventional and appropriate to use in the immigration debate. When people are repeatedly exposed to an intense and emotive stimulus, they can become desensitized: The stimulus may then lose its intense and emotive force (Tryon, 2005). Hence, it might be that these processes of habituation and desensitization specifically hold for RWPP voters; they are likely regularly exposed to and possibly make frequent use of typically populist metaphors and hyperboles (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). Thus, for many of these RWPP voters, in contrast to other voters, anti-immigration rhetoric may be a larger part of their common repertoire.

Contrary to our predictions (*H2*), figuratively framed anti-immigration statements were not more persuasive than nonfigurative statements. In fact, anti-immigration metaphors and hyperboles pushed the political opinion of the general voter away from anti-immigration policies. These boomerang effects were mediated by message intensity and emotions, which is in line with *H3*. However, contrary to our expectations, figuratively framed statements indirectly pushed voters' political opinion further away from anti-immigration ideas. The strong individual effects of anti-immigration metaphors and hyperboles on message intensity and emotions can explain why we did not find populist statements that combine metaphor and hyperbole to be most persuasive, as was proposed by Burgers, Konijn et al. (2016).

Although the typically intense and emotive anti-immigration rhetoric used by right-wing populist leaders is often seen as an important factor for their success (Ivarsflaten, 2008), our findings do not directly support this idea. For the voter population as a whole, figuratively framed statements that were perceived as intense and emotive established a boomerang effect. Thereby, our studies contradict the hypothesis that effects of figuration are stronger than those of prior political opinion (Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011, 2013). Instead, our study supports the Social Judgment Theory, which predicts that messages that go against one's beliefs are unlikely to be persuasive (Smith et al., 2006; see also Meirick & Nisbett, 2011; Byrne & Hart, 2009). Moreover, results support the idea that when such messages are perceived as intense, the chance increases that it backfires on its sender (Meirick & Nisbett, 2011).

Boomerang effects have been attributed to different types of persuasive messages, varying from health campaigns to political policy proposals (Byrne & Hart, 2009). However, to the best of our knowledge, no current studies show that figurative language can account for such boomerang effects (Boeynaems et al., 2017). Rather, it has been argued that metaphors might be tools to circumvent boomerang effects because of their ability to increase the emotive character of a message without causing a negative reaction in the receiver (Bowers & Osborn, 1966). Our findings go against this hypothesis and show that within the context of anti-immigration rhetoric, metaphors and hyperboles can steer opinion away from the position advocated in the political message.

We hypothesized these boomerang effects to occur for voters with a mismatching political ideology (*H4*). Indeed, in our studies, the political affiliation of most voters deviated to such an extent from anti-immigration sentiments that for the voter population as a whole, anti-immigration metaphors and hyperboles caused boomerang effects. When we isolated the group of voters with an RWPP affiliation, we found that these voters responded differently to anti-immigration rhetoric from other voters. Although we expected these voters to be persuaded by right-wing political rhetoric (Krämer, 2014), their political opinion was not affected.

At first sight, our findings suggest that the typically intense and emotive rhetoric used by anti-immigration politicians cannot be seen as a factor that explains their success. However, by pushing the opinion of voters with opposing ideas farther away from their own ideas, populist leaders broaden the gap between populist voters and other voters, which might indirectly benefit populist success (Krämer, 2014; Müller et al., 2017). Voters who are offended by the intense and emotive rhetoric that goes against their beliefs (Müller et al., 2017) are likely to express themselves against the anti-immigration politician and its constituency (Miller & Johnston Conover, 2015). In such cases, the anti-immigration party may be ostracized by other parties and/or voters. However, such ostracism may actually increase support for such parties (Van Spanje & Weber, 2019): When anti-immigration voters, in turn, believe their in-group, their group leader, and/or their shared ideology are threatened, their party identification might be strengthened (Westfall et al., 2015). Moreover, when these voters perceive a greater polarization between their anti-immigration in-group and the out-group of other voters, they are more likely to engage in all forms of political action, including voting for an anti-immigration politician (Miller & Johnston Conover, 2015; Westfall et al., 2015).

Limitations and directions for future research

This research focused on figurative-framing effects in the context of right-wing anti-immigration rhetoric. Therefore, our findings are limited to this specific context. Nevertheless, right-wing populist discourse can focus on other perceived grievances as well like economic change, political elitism, corruption, and other topics. Future research could strive to replicate these results across these other relevant topics and with other relevant figurative frames.

We presented participants with a concrete, highly debated, and politically charged issue (Musolff, 2017), and voters who sympathize with refugees might have been offended by the extreme and negative language that was used (Müller et al., 2017). Our results confirm that anti-immigration rhetoric typically appeals to the negative emotions of anger and fear (Hameleers et al., 2017). Furthermore, while we did find differences between the two stimulus sets on figuration-specific variables like perceived aptness and novelty, we found hardly any interactions between the stimulus sets on the one hand and the variables of metaphor and/or hyperbole on the other hand on variables like emotions and political persuasion. This suggests that even though the specific message sets differed in perceived novelty and perceived aptness, the figurative frames generally worked in similar ways in establishing effects on emotions and political persuasion.

However, metaphors and hyperboles might spark positive emotions as well, for example, when they are used to create political frames with a positive valence (Lecheler et al., 2015) or when they are used in a nonpolitical context, like advertising (Van Mulken et al., 2005). Such positive emotions can mediate figurative-framing effects in different ways (Lecheler et al., 2015). Future research should explore for different political issues and within different contexts how metaphor and hyperbole affect different positive and negative emotions and to what extent these emotions mediate figurative-framing effects. Furthermore, future research can also delve deeper into whether and how personality characteristics like need for cognition (Kim & Park, 2019) or need for affect (Maio & Esses, 2001) impact how recipients process figurative frames.

We aimed to isolate the effects of populist metaphor and hyperbole on emotions, perceived message intensity, and political persuasion. Therefore, we controlled for the influence of source by using fictitious stimuli from anonymous politicians. However, since party identification can play an important role in shaping and reinforcing political attitudes (Miller & Johnston Conover, 2015), future research could explore if and how prior source knowledge and prior political beliefs can influence figurative-framing effects, for example, by attributing identical political statements to different, known politicians or political parties. Furthermore, we looked at political attitudes and intentions as dependent variables. Some scholars propose that figurative frames can also impact comprehension and sense-making of societal topics (e.g., Droog et al., 2020; Semino et al., 2018). Future research could thus explore whether variations in figurative frames impact how voters understand the issues discussed.

In our experiments, populist metaphors and hyperboles did not affect RWPP voters. It might be that for these voters, anti-immigration rhetoric resonates with, rather than steers, existing political opinion. While the current study tested for the causal effects of populist message characteristics on political attitudes, future research can explore a reverse relation and examine if anti-immigration rhetoric attracts a specific group of voters. Such a relation was suggested by cross-sectional studies that did not find increased anti-immigration attitudes in response to the rise of RWPPs in Europe (Berning & Schlueter, 2016; Bohman & Hjerm, 2016) and argued that anti-immigrant attitudes precipitate rather than follow voters' preference for RWPPs (Berning & Schlueter, 2016). These cross-sectional studies, however, cannot claim causal effects, and more experimental research is needed to further unravel the (causal) relations between the use of typical anti-immigration rhetoric and support for RWPPs.

Most effects we report can be classified as statistically "small" (Fritz et al., 2012). This seems to contradict studies that describe the persuasive impact of figurative frames as strong, for example, by claiming that extended metaphors are the "homeruns of persuasion" (Thibodeau, 2016). Such claims, however, are primarily based on the criterion of significant *p*-values, and by refraining from reporting

and interpreting effect sizes, too far-reaching conclusions are easily drawn (Cumming, 2014). Our findings suggest that readers should draw more cautious conclusions about the impact of figurative language in a political context.

To conclude, we showed that RWPP voters respond differently to figuratively framed anti-immigration statements than other voters. Contrary to current theories (Bos et al., 2013; Brown et al., 2019; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), rhetorical figures did not increase direct support for anti-immigration politicians among voters with a matching political ideology. Among voters with a mismatching political ideology, we found boomerang effects, which were hitherto not attributed to the use of metaphors and hyperboles. Our findings do not necessarily indicate that using such charged metaphors and hyperboles is without persuasive effect. Rather, anti-immigration politicians can use metaphors and hyperboles to broaden the gap between supportive and opposing voters and thereby put in motion further polarization in our society.

Notes

1. Experiment 1: age, $F(3,407) =.7$, $p =.506$, gender, $\chi^2(3) = 2.99$, $p =.393$, education, $\chi^2(15) = 9.37$, $p =.857$, and political affiliation on the left-right spectrum, $F(3,407) =.83$, $p =.476$. Experiment 2: age, $F(3,403) =.629$, p =.596, gender, $\chi^2(3) = 2.05$, $p =.563$, education, $\chi^2(15) = 7.77$, $p =.932$, and political affiliation, $F(3,403) =.88$, $p =.449$.
2. In both experiments, we asked participants to indicate the approximate political position of the politician and to evaluate the statements' tone of voice with an open-ended question. These items were measured in between likelihood to vote and perceived language intensity but fall outside the scope of this study and are not included in our analyses.
3. After the questions on emotions, both experiments included measured on perceived political persuasion, asking participants to evaluate how they believed *others* would rate the items of policy attitude, evaluation of the politician, and likelihood to vote (Golan et al., 2008). These items are not included in our analyses. No further variables were measured.
4. In applying the Holm correction, we followed recommendations by Aickin and Gensler (1996) and Bender and Lange (2001). The Holm correction requires to first rank the *p*-values of the different univariate tests in order from smallest (rank 1) to largest (rank k). Next, the corrected α can be computed with the formula: target α /(n – rank +1), with n referring to the number of dependent variables in the MANOVA. We set target α at .05 for all tests.
5. Factor analyses supported dividing emotions into two factors: negative and positive emotions. Only compassion did not fit either of these factors. See Digital Appendix C (https://osf.io/xmcve/) for a full report.
6. The Holm correction indicated that the Holm-corrected alpha level for this effect of metaphor on likelihood to vote was .025.
7. We found no significant interaction effects between metaphor and political affiliation, Pillai's Trace =.007, $F(3,804) = 1.78$, $p =.149$, between hyperbole and political affiliation, Pillai's Trace =.002, $F(3,804) =.593$, $p =.620$, or between the interaction metaphor × hyperbole and political affiliation, Pillai's Trace <.001, $F(3,804) =.121$, $p =.948$.
8. We also ran these different MANOVAs without including Experiment as a covariate and found similar results for metaphor and hyperbole.

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