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To cite this article: Jakob-Moritz Eberl, Christine E. Meltzer, Tobias Heidenreich, Beatrice Herrero, Nora Theorin, Fabienne Lind, Rosa Berganza, Hajo G. Boomgaarden, Christian Schemer & Jesper Strömbäck (2018) The European media discourse on immigration and its effects: a literature review, *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 42:3, 207-223, DOI: [10.1080/23808985.2018.1497452](https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2018.1497452)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2018.1497452>



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Published online: 09 Jul 2018.



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## The European media discourse on immigration and its effects: a literature review

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### ABSTRACT

To understand public opinion about immigration in Europe, one has to understand the media's role in it. We present a literature review on research on media discourse on immigration and their effects. Despite differences in the way immigration and migrant groups are represented in European media, we can observe common patterns. Migrants are generally under-represented and shown as delinquents or criminals. Although, media framing differs based on specific migrant groups the discourse is focusing on, immigration coverage is often negative and conflict-centred. Frequent exposure to such media messages leads to negative attitudes towards migration, may activate stereotypical cognitions of migrant groups, and even influence vote choice. In addition to discussing these issues in depth, the present review also focuses on comparative findings.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 19 January 2018  
Revised 29 June 2018  
Accepted 3 July 2018



### KEYWORDS

Migration; media coverage; content analysis; media effects; framing; Europe

## 1. Introduction

With the so-called 'refugee crisis' in 2015 and the 2016 Brexit referendum, migration within the European Union and from third countries is fiercely debated (Hobolt, 2016). However, according to Eurobarometer data from March 2018, 65% of Europeans have positive attitudes towards intra-EU migration. At the same time, only 41% accept immigration from outside the EU. Such attitudes can vary greatly across member countries, with Swedish citizens reporting relatively positive immigration attitudes overall, versus people in the United Kingdom holding rather negative attitudes.<sup>1</sup> Public debates of migration issues are important, and arguably, media coverage can have considerable effects on public attitudes toward immigration and the perceived impact of immigration (Chauzy & Appave, 2014). Knowledge about immigration related news coverage and its effects on citizens' perceptions and attitudes may thus be important to understand looming immigration policy shifts across the European Union, as well as increasing successes of anti-immigration parties (Burscher, van Spanje, & de Vreese, 2015).

This review focuses on studies concerned with media coverage of and media effects related to immigration in Europe. It includes findings from qualitative and quantitative content analyses,

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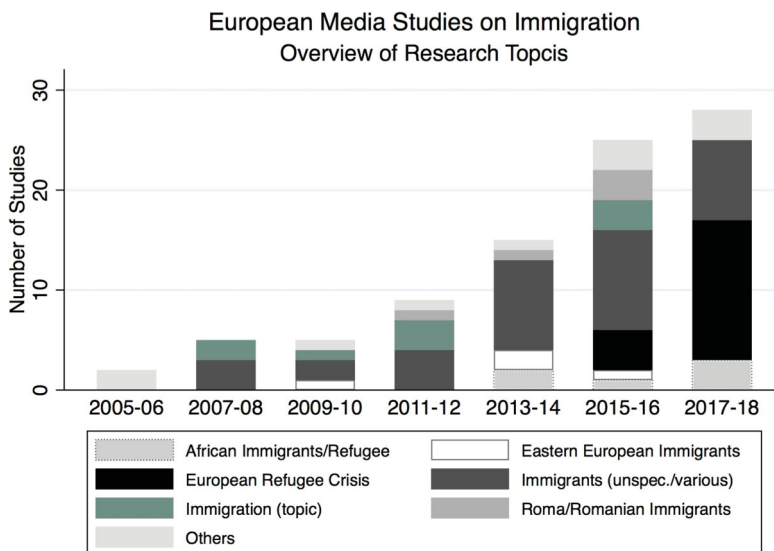
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exposure studies, survey experiments, as well as research linking media content and public opinion. While this literature review is not entirely exhaustive, we collect and summarize key findings on (RQ1) how immigration and different migrant groups are reported in European media coverage and (RQ2) how this coverage affects audiences. This summary speaks to scholars in communication research, migration studies, immigration policy, as well as the broader interested public.

To get a first impression of European media research on immigration, we conducted a systematic review of English-language academic journal publications between January 2000 and June 2018 using the EBSCOhost database.<sup>2</sup> We used a Boolean search string to query journal articles' titles, abstracts, and keywords to identify relevant studies. Based on this procedure, we identified 89 journal articles investigating content or effects relating to immigration news coverage in a European country. While this preliminary search is far from comprehensive (i.e. we do not consider non-English language publications, books, or chapters in edited volumes), we do see a sharp increase in relevant studies. A broad number of studies do not investigate specific groups of immigrants in particular, but rather immigrants in general or the topic of immigration. Note that from 2017 to 2018 the so-called European refugee crisis quickly became the dominant focus of the field (see Figure 1). While this systematic search gives a first glance at the research focus and development of the field over the last years, the following literature review will give an in-depth view of these publications.

For the rest of this literature review, we structure what we believe to be the most relevant content-based findings and conceptualize the impact of media coverage on audiences based on the two main strands of research in this field: *agenda setting* and *framing*. While the first strand is based on the classical assertion that news tells us *what* to think about, the second argues that news also tell us *how* to think about things (see McCombs, 1992). The literature review will proceed as follows. First, we will provide an overview of research on salience of immigration and migrant groups in European media and its effects on media audiences. After that, we present the key findings of research on media framing, again from a content and an effects perspective. We start with studies on issue-specific framing (i.e. welfare, economic, security framing) and continue with generic framing (i.e. negativity and victimization framing). The subsequent section is dedicated explicitly to comparative findings. Limitations of collected findings, implications for current research and future avenues for the field of media and migration research are discussed in the final section.



**Figure 1.** EBSCOhost based systematic overview of research topics.

Note: We used the search string ('content analysis' OR 'discourse analysis' OR 'media analysis' OR 'media effect' OR 'media exposure' OR 'experiment' OR 'framing effect') AND ('media' OR 'coverage' OR 'news') AND (migrat\* OR immigrat\* OR refugee\* OR immigrant\* OR migrant\*) to identify relevant publications using content analysis methods or focusing on the effects on immigration related media coverage between January 2000 and June 2018.

## 2. Immigration on the news agenda and its effects

### 2.1. Media salience of issues and actors

Media reports are composed of a set of interrelated objects (e.g. issues, events, or actors), which are emphasized to different degrees. In practice, the salience of immigration related topics on the media agenda is frequently conceptualized as the volume (e.g. Akkerman, 2011; Lawlor, 2015) or intensity (e.g. Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007, 2009) of reporting, compared to other policy topics at a given point in time or in a diachronic perspective. Such studies usually rely on quantitative measures, and are increasingly aided by computer-assisted procedures (e.g. Boomgaarden, Vliegenthart, de Vreese, & Schuck, 2010; McLaren, Boomgaarden, & Vliegenthart, 2017). To ensure that news stories do in fact relate to the issue of immigration, studies use different selection criteria. Quantitative content analyses gather textual data mainly via available online archives; this is especially the case for automated research (e.g. McLaren et al., 2017). To identify relevant stories, most studies rely on extensive Boolean search strings referring, for instance, to events or actors associated with the discourse on immigration (e.g. Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009; Cheregi, 2015). Most commonly, salience is measured based on the absolute number or relative share of news stories referring to immigration or to the presence of certain migrant groups (e.g. Bos, van der Brug, & de Vreese, 2011; Kroon, Kluknavská, Vliegenthart, & Boomgaarden, 2016; Lawlor, 2015).

Studies dealing with the salience of immigration in the news mostly focus on national media systems, including print media outlets (e.g. Lubbers, Scheepers, & Wester, 1998; Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden, & Boumans, 2011) and sometimes television broadcasts (e.g. Igartua, Barrios, Ortega, & Frutos, 2014; Ruhrmann, Sommer, & Uhlemann, 2006; Statham, 2002). By contrast, online media (Cheregi, 2015), especially social media sites including user-generated content, are largely neglected (but see Bennett, 2016). Ultimately, there is little comparative research on the salience of immigration-related issues or actors in the media across different European countries.

Some researchers study systematic variation in the visibility of immigration news over time, particularly focusing on the input from politics. For example, the salience of immigration-related issues and actors on the agenda of Dutch political parties influence these issues' and actors' salience in the media (Vliegenthart & Roggeband, 2007). In the UK immigration related newspaper coverage increased following the election of a Conservative-led coalition government in 2010 (Allen, 2016). Other influences on the salience of immigration issues in media coverage relate to external events (e.g. Kroon et al., 2016; Vliegenthart & Boomgaarden, 2007). In fact, German immigration news coverage had a distinct peak in late 2001, right after 9/11 (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009). Jacobs, Damstra, Boukes, and De Swert (2018), however, found that the relationship between immigration media coverage and real world developments (e.g. immigration or crime statistics) is low overall. The authors explain divergent findings with journalists' tendencies to focus on single events (e.g. large-scale terrorist attacks) rather than on general trends (e.g. immigration numbers).

Generally, there are many different actors related to the immigration discourses in Europe that can be more or less visible. The terminology used to describe migrant actors in particular differs depending on their legal status (e.g. asylum seeker), ethnicity, and religion, but also based on historical contexts. Depending on the discourse, research often focuses on the terms of '(im)migrants' (e.g. Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009), 'refugees' (e.g. d'Haenens & de Lange, 2001), or 'asylum seekers' (e.g. van Gorp, 2005). Moreover, some scholars distinguish immigrants based on their religious affiliation, and find that Muslim immigrants are more salient in media coverage than Christians, Jews, or Hindus (e.g. Bleich, Stonebraker, Nisar, & Abdelhamid, 2015). Others differentiate between Western-European, Eastern-European (e.g. Light & Young, 2009), and African immigrants (e.g. Jacobs, 2017; van der Linden & Jacobs, 2016), or focus on the media visibility of specific ethnicities, such as Roma (e.g. Cheregi, 2015; Kroon et al., 2016; Meeusen & Jacobs, 2017). Studying British national newspapers between 2010 and 2012, Blinder and Allen (2016) show that the use of such distinctions can vary across media genres. While the UK tabloids and midmarket newspapers primarily

reference to ‘immigrants’ or ‘migrants’, broadsheets focus on the discourse and policy fields connected to ‘refugees’. This difference between broadsheets and tabloids even persists during the so-called 2015 refugee crisis (Berry, Garcia-Blanco, & Moore, 2016, p. 37; Vollmer & Karakayali, 2018), hinting towards a deliberate use of the terms ‘migrant/immigrant’ to delegitimize the refugees’ or asylum seekers’ dire political and personal circumstances.

Most immigrant groups and ethnic minorities are underrepresented in the media when compared to the respective number of people actually living in each country (ter Wal, 2002). This is particularly true when it comes to intra-European migrants. Instead, as seen in the Netherlands and Germany, the most salient group of immigrants in news coverage tends to be asylum seekers (e.g. Lubbers et al., 1998; Ruhrmann et al., 2006); and this is even before the 2015 refugee crisis. Similarly, in Sweden, a longitudinal study finds that, across the period 2010–2015, news coverage overwhelmingly focused on refugees, whereas labour migration was covered only sparsely (Strömbäck, Andersson, & Nedlund, 2017). Still, a study of British television programmes indicates an increase in representations of ethnic minorities (Statham, 2002), this may be particularly tied to public broadcasting stations having to abide by normative standards of diversity (see also, Law, Svennevig, & Morrison, 1997; Ruhrmann et al., 2006). In a similar vein, Masini et al. (2017) find that the diversity of actors and viewpoints is highest in elite newspapers. Conversely, Gabrielatos and Baker (2008) show that tabloids use nonsensical or strongly negative and biased terms such as ‘illegal refugee’ or ‘bogus refugee’ much more often than their broadsheet counterparts do. A study of British newspapers shows that the visibility of migrant and minority actors also increases with their obtrusiveness to the reporting country (Allen, 2016). In the British press, migration from Eastern Europe was increasingly discussed in 2014, when Romanian and Bulgarian migrants obtained access to labour markets across the EU. Finally, female migrants are doubly disadvantaged as a minority in media coverage, as they are even less visible than male immigrants (Krüger & Simon, 2005).

To sum up, real world events, such as elections or terroristic attacks, can increase salience of immigration related issues in the media. Differences in the visibility between migrant groups was found based on their country of origin, ethnicity, religion, or legal status. These differences have largely been investigated by contrasting broadsheets and tabloids, showing that tabloids use terms that delegitimize refugees’ in particular. In general, immigrant groups are underrepresented in the media, but less so in quality media. Yet, these variations have been insufficiently addressed in extant research, as there is only a low number of studies analyzing different migration groups comparatively or using longitudinal approaches.

## **2.2. Media effects of issue- and actor-salience on attitudes related to immigration**

Researchers argue that media salience influences audiences’ perceived importance of (McCombs, 2005) and knowledge about the objects of coverage (e.g. de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; Eveland & Scheufele, 2000). In turn, perceived importance and knowledge about immigration or immigrants may alter peoples’ perceptions of and attitudes toward immigration or immigrants (Aalberg, Iyengar, & Messing, 2012; Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009; Schemer, 2012). To analyse such relationships between media coverage and public opinion, studies on agenda-setting effects mostly rely on data from (panel-) surveys that link to aggregate analyses of relevant media coverage.

Simply by emphasizing the ethnicity of news subjects (i.e. by making it visible), news media can increase out-group hostility in the native media audiences (e.g. Sniderman, Hagendoorn, & Prior, 2004). van Klingerden, Boomgaarden, Vliegenthart, and de Vreese (2015) show that media visibility of immigration increases public anti-immigration attitudes, even when controlling for real-world developments (e.g. immigrant inflows) or media tone. Hartevelde, Schaper, De Lange, and Van Der Brug (2018) find that high visibility of the refugee crisis in the media increases citizens’ Euroscepticism. The effect of media visibility may even go so far, as to impact audiences’ behaviours. Koopmans (1996) shows that the visibility of the asylum debate in German media led to an increase in extreme-right violence. However, in some instances, visibility of immigration in the media can also have

positive effects on immigration attitudes. For instance, Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart (2009) found that the visibility of immigrant actors in the news (as opposed to the issue more generally) leads to less concern about migration (relative to other issues) in the audience. Furthermore, evidence indicates that the more news media report on immigration (i.e. in quantity alone), the more people tend to vote for parties with an anti-immigrant stance (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007; Burscher et al., 2015), as they are perceived to be the most competent about the issue of immigration (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007; Bos et al., 2011; Walgrave & De Swert, 2004). While aforementioned studies have used media content and linked it to public opinion, other studies focus on survey measures of media exposure, arguing that exposure to certain types of media may influence immigration attitudes. For example, these studies show a significant relationship between exposure to commercial broadcasting (versus public service broadcasting) and negative attitudes towards illegal immigration (Beyer & Matthes, 2015; Jacobs, Meeusen, & d'Haenens, 2016; Strabac, Thorbjørnsrud, & Jenson, 2012).

In conclusion, salience of immigration-related issues can lead to the success of anti-immigrant parties. Exposure to commercial broadcasting in particular seems to negatively affect attitudes toward immigration. Most studies above do not allow for a strict causal attribution of media on attitudes or voting choices, as they remain on an aggregate level or do not link media use to specific content.

### 3. Issue-specific framing of immigration coverage and its effects

#### 3.1. Economic, cultural, and security framing

In the study of news framing, particularly in the field of media research on migration, one of the most central distinctions is between issue-specific frames and generic news frames (Brüggemann & D'Angelo, 2018; de Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001). Generic frames, such as the victimization, conflict, or negativity frame are argued to transcend thematic boundaries and are closely related to routines of journalism, while issue-specific frames (e.g. welfare frame, or multiculturalism frame) are intrinsically related to certain topics such as immigration, or even more specifically, the refugee crisis (e.g. de Vreese, Boomgaarden, & Semetko, 2011).

Most studies dealing with news coverage about immigration focus on issue-specific frames, and thus analyse the importance of economic, welfare, cultural, or security considerations within migration coverage (e.g. Strömbäck et al., 2017). To additionally capture the valence of these frames, studies either focus on the negative part of the frame (e.g. immigrants as a threat to security, economy or culture, see Balch & Balabanova, 2016; Breen, Haynes, & Devereux, 2006; Meeusen & Jacobs, 2017) or investigate the prevalence of both positive and negative frames (e.g. investigating economic costs as well as benefits of immigration; see de Vreese et al., 2011; Schuck & de Vreese, 2006; Strömbäck et al., 2017).

Some researchers prefer a qualitative reading of the selected articles to identify the range of arguments that refer to pre-defined frames, after which they proceed with a more in-depth analysis (Balabanova & Balch, 2010; Balch & Balabanova, 2016). Others follow a more quantitative approach. There is the one-step-approach, where each issue-frame is identified by a set of variables to be coded for every single article (e.g. Cheng et al., 2014; Schuck & de Vreese, 2006). Another method is to first identify the central topic of the article (e.g. criminal, economic, or cultural aspects) and then, to code whether a problem related to a specific migrant group was reported. The combination of the two identifies the issue-specific frame (e.g. Meeusen & Jacobs, 2017). Moreover, there are also automated approaches to frame analysis. Following principal component analysis, texts are converted into word clusters based on word co-occurrences that can be interpreted as frames (Blinder & Allen, 2016; Hellsten, Dawson, & Leydesdorff, 2010; Vicol & Allen, 2014). Such word-clusters (i.e. principal components) are regarded as prototypical for the semantic meaning of a frame (see Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017).

Which frames are most common in media coverage may depend on the specific groups of migrants and thus, the migration discourses that news stories focus on. Baker et al. (2008) find that the terms ‘migrants’ and ‘immigrants’ are closely associated with the frame of economic threat – for instance, threat of increased competition on the labour market –, while ‘refugees’ and ‘asylum seekers’ are associated with an economic burden – such as a burden on the welfare system. Meeusen and Jacobs (2017) show Roma to be more frequently depicted as an economic threat than other groups, whereas North-Africans are more often portrayed as a cultural threat than Eastern-Europeans. Moreover, North-Africans are most closely associated with the security threat frame, and secondly with the cultural threat frame, but not at all with an economic threat frame (van der Linden & Jacobs, 2016). Balch and Balabanova (2016) suggest that media coverage about immigration from Romania and Bulgaria most commonly relies on framing connected to welfare chauvinism and economic nationalism. Generally speaking, Eastern Europeans are more often depicted as a threat to the economy and welfare system, while Non-Europeans are seen as a threat to the host countries’ culture. Conversely, Chouliaraki and Zaborowski (2017) find refugees to be often depicted in the context of economic crisis, antipathy of Islam, or terrorism, which relates to the threat-framing described above. Furthermore, in their study on the framing of news about Turkey’s potential membership in the EU, de Vreese et al. (2011) find that cultural framing was most present and strongly focused on threats of potential immigration to EU member states after Turkey would have acquired EU membership.

There may also be framing differences between media genres. For instance, in British coverage of immigration from Romania, the economic frame, the social benefits frame, and the employment frame are all strongly used by tabloids. However, the educational frame (which is less negative; e.g. Romanians as students at British Universities) and the EU-policy frame (a ‘constructive’ frame; e.g. policy focus on freedom of movement) are more salient in broadsheets (Cheragi, 2015; Kroon et al., 2016; but see Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017). While such differences may arise because tabloids deliberately tend to cover immigration more negatively than the highbrow press, differences in framing may also arise because media outlets focus on different parts of the immigration debate. Helbling (2014) demonstrates that the cultural frame is more prevalent in the media discourse about integration of immigrants, while the labour, welfare, and economic frames are more present when it comes to the question of immigration itself.

The fact that there is generally a limited framing repertoire when it comes to the debate about migration, perhaps due to time and resource constraints, results in journalistic reporting that consciously or unconsciously reproduces and reinforces dominant, mostly negative frames, in the debate about migration (Armstrong & Neuendorf, 1992). This risks to result in perpetually very similar and simplified storytelling about immigration, argues Hooper (2014). Consequently, news stories will often focus on myths concerning the number of or economic impact of migrants, potentially legitimizing ethnocentric and nationalist rhetoric, or undermining policy efforts concerning long-term integration of migrants and refugees (Grobet, 2014; Staglianó, 2014).

### 3.2. Economic, cultural, and security framing effects

Media effects research on the migration discourse in Europe focusses most often on cultural and economic threat framing (e.g. Aalberg et al., 2012; Costello & Hodson, 2011; Florack, Piontkowski, Rohmann, Balzer, & Perzig, 2003; van der Linden & Jacobs, 2016). When investigating issue-specific framing effects, researchers typically expose participants to different media stimuli in an experimental setting. In such studies, the treatment often consists of varying (opposing) frames in relation to immigration as part of a short news story (e.g. Florack et al., 2003; Igartua & Cheng, 2009; Igartua, Moral-Toranzo, & Fernández, 2011; van Gorp, Vettehen, & Beentjes, 2009). Note that looking at framing effects using survey data is rare (Schemer, Wirth, & Matthes, 2012).

In order to demonstrate effects of media framing, Igartua and Cheng (2009) exposed participants to news stories that reflected either a security threat frame (e.g. increased crime rate) or an economic

benefit frame (e.g. increase in labour force). Results show that the news story focusing on the positive economic consequences of migration elicits more positive cognitive responses in participants.

Media frames depicting perceived economic competition with immigrants lead to support for restrictive immigration policies and attenuated support for policies that empower immigrants (Costello & Hodson, 2011). In a similar vein, Florack et al. (2003) show that reading news stories highlighting threatening aspects about Turkish immigrants, leads to lower levels of perceived legitimacy of residence and perceived permeability of Turks in respondents from the host country. Threat-related media coverage thus negatively influences attitudes toward immigrants. These findings are also supported in a non-experimental setting, showing that repeated exposure to news portrayals of social groups in relation to economic, cultural, or security threat frames increases prejudice over time (Schemer, 2012, 2014). Even the mere linking of immigration issues to issues about the economy or education increases citizens' concerns about immigration (McLaren et al., 2017). There is evidence that such framing effects are especially pronounced for the economically less successful, as they tend to perceive immigrants as more of a threat concerning labour market competition (Quillian, 1995).

On the other hand, framing effects may be weaker for partisans, who tend to ignore or reject dissonant information, especially when it comes from media they perceive to be biased. Such tendencies have become even more distinct concerning media coverage of refugees in 2015 (Wolling & Arlt, 2016). Issue-specific knowledge can moderate media effects, i.e. poorly informed individuals are more likely to rely on stereotypes activated by media coverage (Schemer, 2012).

The framing of a news item also leads to a respective interpretation of the news itself. van Gorp et al. (2009) tested two different versions of a news item, in which the asylum seekers were either depicted as 'innocent victims' or as 'intruders'. An identical photograph of immigrants was inserted in all three versions. Different positive or negative interpretations of the photograph were offered (e.g. trusting the persons on the photograph, being frustrated by the picture). The photograph was interpreted less positive in the intruder frame, than in the mixed or in the victim frame versions. Thus, the framing of the article suggests how the photograph may be interpreted, and how it can evoke emotions in line with the frame (see also Powell, De Swert, Boomgaarden, & de Vreese, forthcoming).<sup>3</sup>

Summing up, the frames described in the first part of this section can affect attitudes related to migrants and immigration. Notably, media content involving threatening aspects (e.g. labour market competition or the undermining of cultural values) leads to respective negative effects. Research in this respect is, however, limited to mainly experimental methodology, putting the durability of identified effects into question.

## 4. Generic framing of immigration coverage and its effects

### 4.1. Negativity and victimization framing

There is abundant research about the alleged trend towards increasing negativity in news coverage, and particularly in that of political news (e.g. Vliegenthart et al., 2011). Humans have been shown to be more interested in and more reactive to negative information. It thus follows that journalists who want their content to be read, will tend to be biased toward a more negative style of reporting (Soroka & McAdams, 2015). In studies on the immigration discourse in Europe, negativity is mostly measured based on one of the two following dimensions. First, there is tone, i.e. negative vs. positive tonality of media coverage (e.g. Bleich et al., 2015; Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009). Second, there is the crime- and problem-centeredness of news items (Lubbers et al., 1998). To be more precise, indications of such negativity can be further measured by the framing of a news story as a problem and crisis, or instead, as a success and benefit (e.g. Bleich et al., 2015; Lubbers et al., 1998; Strömbäck et al., 2017), which we already touched upon above.

To measure tone, some studies code each news item on a scale from -1 (negative) to +1 (positive) (e.g. Igartua, Muñiz, Otero, & de la Fuente, 2007; van Klingeren et al., 2015). Moreover, some use



aggregate analyses of depictions or evaluations of immigration-related actors, as well as metaphors (e.g. Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009; Gardikiotis, 2003; Ruhrmann, 2002; Ruhrmann et al., 2006; Schemer, 2014). Finally, an increasing number of studies use automated dictionary approaches to measure the sentiment of single words (Lawlor, 2015) or to identify negative issues related to immigration (Schlueter & Davidov, 2013).

News about immigration seems to be strongly negative (Igartua et al., 2007). A comparative study of news coverage in 16 Western democracies shows that 'immigration and integration' is the third most negative topic in political news coverage (Esser, Engesser, Matthes, & Berganza, 2017). Concerning the Swedish and Finnish coverage of African migration to Spain in 2006, Horsti (2008) identifies the portrayal of these migrants to be not only stigmatizing but also even constructing a division between Europe and Africa. However, there are nuances as well. Studies regarding Belgian, Dutch, and German news found that non-EU migrant groups are much more likely to be associated with violent crime than EU immigrants or natives (Jacobs, 2017; Lubbers et al., 1998; Ruhrmann et al., 2006). In some countries, migrant groups of a specific faith may be more stigmatized than others. For example, depictions of Jews are less negative in the Netherlands than those of Muslim immigrants (Lubbers et al., 1998; but see Meeusen & Jacobs, 2017).

Another source of negativity in media reporting about immigration and refugee movements in particular, has to do with journalists often portraying immigrants and refugees very negatively as 'masses' or 'hordes', thus as enemies invading European countries. Migrants, and predominantly refugees, are often dehumanized by the use of terms referencing natural disasters (Charteris-Black, 2006; Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008; Gardikiotis, 2003; Ruhrmann, 2002) and 'water themed' metaphors in particular (El Refaie, 2001).

Negativity and tone toward immigration-related issues and migrant groups may also vary between media genres. Again, research shows that coverage in tabloids is more negative than that of quality newspapers (e.g. Cheregi, 2015; Kroon et al., 2016; Lawlor, 2015; Statham, 2002). A study comparing different television formats finds that ethnic minorities are portrayed more positively in talk shows than in any other television format (ter Wal, 2002). Furthermore, there are differences between types of media. On average, television news tend to portray immigration or immigrants much more negatively than print news (e.g. Igartua et al., 2007; Ruhrmann et al., 2006). While liberal newspapers will, at times, exhibit more positive portrayals of immigrants than their conservative counterparts (Geißler, 2000), they may also focus on different dimensions of negativity – with conservative newspapers focusing more strongly on crime, and liberal newspapers on the somewhat more moderate issue of group-related problems (Lubbers et al., 1998).

Another common frame in media research about immigration is the victimization frame, which – in its valenced form – is defined as a victim vs. perpetrator frame (Kroon et al., 2016). In the European context, this frame is mainly applied in relation to women, refugees, and asylum seekers, and portrays immigrants as in need of help (Horsti, 2008; van Gorp, 2005; Vliegenthart & Roggeband, 2007). Thus, migrants are more often portrayed as victims than natives (Igartua, Barrios, & Ortega, 2012). Exemplified by the European refugee crisis, Greussing and Boomgaarden (2017) show that the victimization frame is particularly important at the beginning of a news cycle, while an event is still new and unfolding, but becomes less relevant at later points. A study of Belgian press coverage shows that the perpetrator frame is a rather constant one, while the victimization frame strongly increases around the Christmas holidays, as people tend to become more charitable (van Gorp, 2005). How strongly journalists will emphasize such a victimization frame may depend on their access to the victimized group in question, as shown by Chouliaraki and Zabrowski (2017) in the case of Bulgarian and Turkish coverage of the 2015 refugee crisis. Political preferences of the media audiences may also be a relevant factor (Aalberg & Beyer, 2015). For a more in-depth perspective, qualitative research identified a so-called hero frame in news coverage, when refugees are portrayed as risking their lives to support their families (Horsti, 2008). While the victimization frame may not always help the migrants' cause (Chouliaraki, 2012), Horsti suggests that the hero frame might actually be able to 'promote social change for a more humane politics of immigration' (Horsti, 2008, p. 52).

## 4.2. Negativity and victimization framing effects

The tone of news coverage is particularly important because it can provide media audiences with templates, peripheral cues, and shortcuts for understanding politics - thereby influencing voters' perceptions of political actors and, ultimately, their attitudes and voting behaviour (Valentino, Buhr, & Beckmann, 2001; Zaller, 1991). Concerning the study of immigration-related attitudes, negativity in media coverage has been shown to increase people's perception of the issue of immigration as more problematic relative to other policy issues (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009).

Vergeer, Lubbers, and Scheepers (2000) observe that exposure to newspapers which allegedly characterize ethnic minorities in a negative way leads to a higher level of perceived threat among their readers over time. More importantly, recipients exposed to more than one newspaper perceived ethnic minorities as *less* threatening than recipients reading just one newspaper. Arendt (2010) shows in a panel survey that the more time people spend reading newspapers, the more they tend to overestimate the number of foreign offenders. However, he also finds that those who read more than one newspaper show more negative implicit attitudes toward immigrants. These conflicting results may stem from the different newspapers (Netherlands vs. Austria) and the different periods or topics under investigation (ethnic minorities in general vs. crime and personality of the offender).

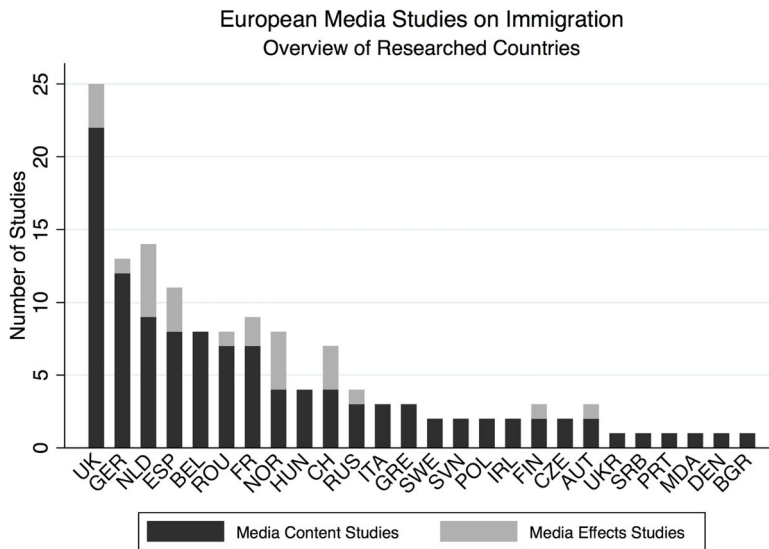
Eyssel, Geschke, and Frindte (2015) show that preferences for TV channels depicting Muslims in a negative way coincide with higher levels of Islamophobia over time. Similarly, Schlueter and Davidov (2013) find a strong (positive) correlation between the volume of negative immigration related news reports and citizens' immigration-related threat perceptions. This kind of association is found to be particularly strong in regions with small immigrant populations. Furthermore, the researchers demonstrate that negative immigration-related news reports increase perceived group threat (Schlueter & Davidov, 2013), and Schemer (2014) finds that negative news portrayals of immigrants increase stereotypical attitudes during political campaigns.

While the salience of the victimization frame in media coverage may influence the salience of the victimization frame in political discourse, Vliegenthart and Roggeband (2007) find that this positive relationship goes both ways. Since the victimization frame often appeals to unfair suffering of immigrants (Goetz, Keltner, & Simon-Thomas, 2010), it comes as little surprise that this frame elicits emotions of compassion in readers (Lecheler, Bos, & Vliegenthart, 2015). However, an alleged positive effect of victimization framing on attitudes toward immigrants is not uncontroversial (also see Horsti, 2008). While Vescio, Sechrist, and Paolucci (2003) show that exposure to news stories with victimization framing to reduce intergroup bias, other studies have indicated that its effect is actually very weak or even negative on immigration attitudes (Bos, Lecheler, Mewafi, & Vliegenthart, 2016).

## 5. Immigration coverage: a European perspective?

Media effect studies and, to a lesser extent, media content analyses focus on a few key countries in Europe. In fact, based on the aforementioned systematic review using the EBSCOhost database, we identified 78 studies using quantitative or qualitative methods of content analysis, dealing with media coverage about immigration. The studies cover a wide range of European countries, however, only 19 studies investigate an Eastern European country (including Russia).<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, only 20 studies investigate more than one, and only 9 more than two countries. Importantly, even when the studies have a comparative set-up, they are often limited to mere descriptions of results, without the aim of explaining differences between countries. The Western European dominance becomes more palpable when looking at media effects studies. Out of 22 identified journal publications, merely one investigates an Eastern European country (namely Romania) and only three are comparative (see Figure 2). While, again, this systematic search is far from comprehensive, it should still provide a good overview of geographical foci of the recent literature.

While findings from individual countries appear, to some degree, to converge, therefore yielding a more general and systematic picture of country differences and similarities, explicit comparative



**Figure 2.** EBSCOhost based systematic overview of researched countries.

Note: We used the same search string as before (see note for Figure 1). Studies relying on a content analysis and a media effects analysis are listed only once in both categories. Studies researching more than one country are listed once for each country they studied. That results in this figure, showing 78 media content studies, but only 114 media content observations, and 22 media effects studies, but only 25 media effects observations.

studies are needed. Europe is not a homogenous group of countries. Thus, the visibility and framing of immigration issues and actors, as well as their impacts, may differ in more or less systematic ways.

For example, a comparative study has shown that in the UK, economic framing is more common in migration news as compared to Italy and France (Caviedes, 2015). While reasons for such differences are often difficult to pin down, Caviedes (2015, p. 15) argues that one possible source of variation lies in countries' differing political agenda. In fact, during the period of analysis the British government was strongly preoccupied with its fiscal responsibilities (ultimately leading to the Brexit referendum in 2016), while Italy or France were more concerned with the cultural integration of immigrants. Frame emphasis may also differ based on whether the country is on the sending or receiving end of migration. Specifically, sending states have a greater interest than receiving countries in supporting international human rights for migrant workers (Balabanova & Balch, 2010, p. 385).

Focusing on the UK, Germany, Sweden, Spain, and Italy, another study (Berry et al., 2016) analyses press coverage on the refugee crisis, looking at specific aspects of the news coverage samples (i.e. key sources in coverage, the labels used to describe refugees and migrants, countries of origin, themes, explanations and solutions). Here, the main findings show that there is considerable variation between countries (e.g. Swedish press being most positive towards newcomers, UK press most negative), and – focusing on variations within national press systems – that the debate in the UK is highly polarized in a divide between broadsheets and tabloids when compared to more homogeneous coverage across different news outlets in other countries.

Semi-structured interviews with journalists in several European countries (Italy, Greece, Ireland, the UK, Poland, and the Netherlands) have shown that, when covering the refugees and asylum seekers, there are differences between countries of new immigration (e.g. Italy and Greece) and old ones (e.g. Germany, Netherlands) (Bennett, ter Wal, Lipiński, Fabiszak, & Krzyżanowski, 2013, p. 260). In new immigration countries, journalists are more reliant on official sources, as they have a problem accessing migrant sources. Eventually, this results in migrants being less visible as quoted sources. Therefore, how journalists cover immigration in different countries is tied to journalistic routines or differences in media systems. Among these factors are time pressure, the degree of journalists'

specialization on the topic of immigration, journalist's networks and access to migrant sources, and the news outlets' political agenda (Bennett et al., 2013; Gemi, Ulasiuk, & Triandafyllidou, 2013).

Differences between countries also exist because media coverage tends to ignore the transnational and inter-connected nature of immigration. Bennett et al. (2013, p. 258) state that 'references to the EU or other European countries were extremely rare'. Member states with similar media systems or countries facing similar challenges regarding the integration of immigrants may exhibit similar media framings. While one study noted that Bulgarian newspapers 'imported' frames from foreign media and debates (Balabanova & Balch, 2010), the pan-European media coverage about immigration is, in fact, still missing a European perspective (Caviedes, 2015).

Comparative media effects studies are even less frequent. However, there are at least three studies using European Social Survey (ESS) data, thus including a vast amount of European countries. All investigate media effects based on media exposure and not media content measures. First, Herda (2010) finds that TV news exposure results in an overestimation of the number of immigrants in the public. Conversely, newspaper exposure relates to a more accurate perception of immigrant population size. As overestimation of the immigrant population is a good indicator of perceived immigrant threat, these findings echo previously presented findings about the detrimental effects of television news when it comes to immigration coverage. Second, Aalberg and Strabac (2010) similarly show that exposure to TV news does not increase respondents' knowledge about immigration. While differences in the levels of knowledge between the different European countries are fairly large, differences in media systems (see Hallin & Mancini, 2004) do not add any predictive power to their analyses. Third, Héricourt and Spielvogel (2014) argue media exposure to be a key determinant of beliefs regarding the influence of immigration on the economy. More specifically, printed news exposure leads to a more positive opinion on the economic impact of immigration, whereas TV news exposure leads to a more negative opinion. While the authors identify differences in effect sizes between the various European countries, no systematic comparative pattern emerges.

## 6. Discussion and conclusion

This review of research on immigration media coverage and its effects in the context of European migration clearly shows that discourses on this topic are quite diverse. While migrant groups are generally underrepresented, when they *are* present in the media, they are often framed as either economic, cultural, or criminal threats and thus covered in a highly unfavourable way. The visibility of immigration issues and migrant groups, however, may vary across time, across media outlets or genres, and between countries. Differences are explained by the types of immigration, namely regular or irregular immigration, as well as the type of migrant group (e.g. culturally close vs. culturally remote). Additionally, real-world events shape the discourse over a short time-period, while shifts in the political landscape may lead to more long-term changes. Finally, media outlets' format and political leaning can strongly shape the immigration media discourses in Europe.

Salience of immigration issues in media coverage eventually influences audiences' political attitudes, as well as party preferences. This effect appears more pronounced when media coverage provides valenced news stories on immigration, and frames immigration as threatening for the host community. Threats concerning the economy, culture, or security are especially influential on attitudes toward migrant groups or immigration in general. Moreover, media representations of groups and issues can prime the interpretation of a media message. Finally, the mostly negative coverage of immigration can lead to activation of stereotypical cognitions of migrant groups. When the audience is repeatedly exposed to negative media messages over time, this effect might be reinforced and, in the long run, influence perceptions of political actors and even audiences' voting behaviour.

The bulk of research in this field has focused on traditional news media and, to a lesser extent, their effects. The experimental research outlined above typically relies on the variation of a specific frame, frame valence, or specific portrayal of an immigrant group. This (often one time)

controlled manipulation allows for causal attribution of media effects. Yet, it is unknown how long these effects last, which can lead to overestimation of the effects in real world settings. The second and more externally valid approach is to investigate media effects with panel studies (i.e. the analysis of media content and variation in attitudes over time). However, this approach longs for very general categorization and thus often simplification of both, media content and attitudes. This in turn leads to larger measurement errors and thus, changes in attitudes are likely underestimated.

In order to provide a more coherent picture of how immigrants are portrayed in the media and how these portrayals affect people's attitudes, future research can go in several directions. The majority of content analyses are devoted to traditional news in the media, while news on and interpersonal communication through social media has largely stayed on the side-lines (but see Bennett, 2016; Boukala & Dimitrakopoulou, 2018). Here, the focus may be on different actors, i.e. how political actors like parties or individual politicians depict the issue of immigration or immigrants as a social group. Researchers could also study how journalists and media users frame immigrants and immigration, e.g. on social network sites of newspapers, in comment sections of news outlets, or in interpersonal communication among media users that is visible to a broader public.

Similarly, research on depictions of immigrants in entertainment content, e.g. serials or movies, are less prevalent in the European context (but, see Igartua et al., 2012), even though this audience is more likely to be exposed to entertainment content than news in the media. By ignoring social media and entertainment discourses on immigration and migrant groups, we neglect a part of the media reality that a large portion of European audiences use exclusively or in addition to news stories. Even less is known about the impact of social media or entertainment media on citizens' immigration attitudes (but see, Hsueh, Yogeewaran, & Malinen, 2015; Müller, 2009). By including social media and entertainment media in future content and effects studies, researchers will be able to map media discourses more broadly.

Another research line to push further is systematic research on how individual level variables (e.g. education, income) moderate media effects, specifically for immigration-related coverage. Most studies so far have looked at average effects of news frames of immigration or immigrants. However, we know from other fields of research that there are inter-individual differences in media effects (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). These differences are most likely to refer to people's (perceived) vulnerability to immigration in terms of socio-economic status, but also to people's attitudinal predispositions and knowledge that can result in more or less persuasion through media messages, and more or less biased processing (e.g. Schemer, 2012).

This literature review also showed that this field is restricted to a handful of European countries, oftentimes with similar media systems. Research thus far does not allow for a proper mapping of a European discourse on immigration in Europe. This is of particular importance, since scholars have argued that not all EU-members take part equally in a European public sphere, or in media debate about European issues such as immigration and integration (Pfetsch, Adam, & Eschner, 2008). To be able to map these discourses properly, media coverage and its effects in newer member states (i.e. Eastern European countries) in particular, should be studied in more detail, and contrasted with long-time members. In addition, there is a need to further our understanding of the long-term changes in immigration perceptions and social representations of immigrants in the public sphere, as well as the role of media coverage in this respect.

Reflecting the focus of the reviewed literature, this article presents research on media discourses about immigration, and migrant groups. Research on news about emigration, freedom of movement or mobility within Europe, as well as research on specific migrant groups such as 'emigrants', 'expats', 'international students', 'high-skilled workers', or 'female migrants' is still largely missing (although see Balabanova & Balch, 2010).

As varying countries in the EU are affected differently by migration, and take distinctive stances in the EU migration policies, there is an even stronger need for more systematic and comparative content analyses. Research should investigate the portrayals of migrant groups and migration

issues in diverse news outlets, throughout several countries that differ with respect to their political system, their media system, their net migration figures and even their migration policies. All these factors have been shown to impact migration media coverage in one way or another.

This review has shown that, at times, media coverage plays a significant role in the development of public opinion on immigration. As anti-immigrant parties are on the rise throughout Europe, and given that the open border policies within Europe are increasingly challenged, research needs to understand immigration discourses in the media and its influences on public opinion with a more holistic approach, taking into account broader media samples, including new and social media and comparative assessments across different countries. Migration is likely to stay as a decisive socio-cultural and political topic in the years to come. Thus, to provide in-depth knowledge about media coverage on immigration, the forces behind certain types of coverage and its effects on public opinion is essential for understanding ongoing and future shifts in public perception and public policy of migration in Europe and beyond.

## Notes

1. Own analysis based on Eurobarometer Interactive 89.3, European Commission (2018, 06, 29). retrieved from <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Chart/getChart/chartType/gridChart/themeKy/59/groupKy/279/savFile/646>
2. To be more precise, we used the specified EBSCOhost sub-databases 'Communication & Mass Media Complete', 'Humanities Source', 'SocINDEX with Full INDEX'.
3. For more studies on visual framing of immigration in news coverage, see e.g., Martinez Lirola (2014), for a critical discourse analysis of photographs of immigrant minors in Spanish newspapers; or see Wilmott (2017) for a quantitative content analysis of photographs of Syrian refugees in UK online media.
4. This imbalance increases when studies that have not been published in journals listed in the Thomson Reuters 2016 Journal Citation Reports® are excluded. In fact, the number drops down to five (i.e. 11% of all ranked studies identified by this systematic review).

## Acknowledgements

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 727072. We would like to thank Rachel Edie, Luisa Gehle as well as the editors and our anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and insights.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Funding

This work was supported by Horizon 2020 Framework Programme [grant number 727072].

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