



# RE M I N D E R

ROLE OF EUROPEAN MOBILITY AND ITS IMPACTS  
IN NARRATIVES, DEBATES AND EU REFORMS

## Media Effects on Attitudes toward Migration and Mobility in the EU

### LITERATURE REVIEW

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REMINDER

ROLE OF EUROPEAN MOBILITY AND ITS IMPACTS  
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## **Media Effects on Attitudes Toward Migration and Mobility in the EU:**

### **A Comprehensive Literature Review**

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Perceptions and attitudes toward intra- and extra-EU mobility can have different sources. Personal experience can be one source of information. For instance, the experience of free movement within the EU (be it for education or work-related) might affect people's perception and attitudes toward mobility considerably (e.g., Fujioka, 1999; Jacobone & Moro, 2014; Recchi, 2008). However, personal experience is only one source that shapes EU mobility perceptions and attitudes. For people lacking personal experience of mobility within the EU, media communication on such issues becomes important and it may be the only source they rely on when forming a judgment (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). An increasing number of studies provide evidence that media affects political attitudes (e.g., Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009; Iyengar & Simon, 2000; Kinder, 1998) and it has been shown that for most people, media is the most important source of information about EU topics (Vliegenthart, Schuck, Boomgaarden, & de Vreese, 2008). This becomes especially significant, when news is not only a mere transmitter of (external) reality but is biased in a certain direction. Out of thousands of events and issues, journalists need to select especially newsworthy ones for coverage (e.g., Eilders, 2006; Kepplinger & Ehmig, 2006) and prepare, shape and frame the information conforming to the needs of specific outlets and their audiences. Thus, due to media production processes, news content cannot represent reality as it is, and a certain bias might be expected. For instance, in relation to the reporting of crime, studies have found that there is a massive overrepresentation of foreigners (Arendt, 2010) and more threatening depictions of perpetrators of ethnic minorities (Jacobs, 2016, for an overview see Schemer & Müller, in press). Concerning immigration-related news coverage, Vliegenthart and Boomgaarden (2007) found that the media does not reflect real world developments but rather picks up key events that guide further media attention. Brosius and Eps (1995) come to the same conclusion regarding key events in the case of



violence against asylum seekers and, just recently, the key event of sexual assaults on New Year's Eve in Cologne led to increased mentions of foreigner-related attributes (Arendt, Brosius, & Hauck, 2017).

Therefore, media representation of EU mobility and related issues such as coverage of migration or migrant groups can have considerable effects on public opinion toward the perceived benefits and risks relating to EU mobility. The present paper reviews literature on communication effects on public opinion toward EU mobility. Perceptions of and attitudes toward EU mobility are multi-faceted and research on these facets varies considerably. For instance, perceptions of EU mobility encompass public opinion toward social groups that benefit from free movement. These groups elicit different public opinion reactions in citizens. A recent example is Polish migration to the UK: Some political actors and voters favoring Brexit considered Polish migration as threatening to the domestic labor market (Makowski, 2016). Additionally, some political forces consider Muslims as a threat to cultural life in Europe (e.g., Vieten & Poynting, 2016). Thus, the image of the social groups that people have in mind when they think about mobility and migration is of importance for their respective attitudes. In this vein, the representation and depiction of social groups in the media can shape public opinion of EU mobility.

Perceptions of EU mobility may also stem from attitudes related to specific issues, e.g., free movement for borderless travel, work-related travel, or irregular migration of refugees or terrorists within the EU. Depending on the issues that individuals have in mind, they will consider EU mobility as a benefit or a threat for themselves or the society as a whole. These facets of attitudes related to EU mobility can also be found in media representations of the EU. Therefore, the present paper reviews how various facets of news representations of EU mobility (i.e., salience of social groups benefitting from free



movement, specific issues) affect the perception of and attitudes toward EU mobility and related concepts (i.e., perception of social groups, risks and benefits of different aspects of migration and mobility). In some domains, literature on EU mobility is scarce. Yet, as we are analyzing EU mobility from an effects perspective, we make use of research from the US. Although the political and cultural context in the US is different, we argue that research on the cognitive mechanisms underlying media effects can be translated to an EU context. We preferably consider research published in the English language. Previous research has relied on different theories to account for media effects on public opinion. From the perspective of communication science, three research strands dominate the discussion about media effects on migration and mobility-related attitudes: Framing, priming, and cultivation. Furthermore, in the context of migration and mobility, perceived threats play a major role. We thus first show how threats can generally influence attitudes and then present the studies on media effects from a perspective of framing, priming, and cultivation.

### **The Role of Perceived Threats on Attitudes towards Mobility and Immigration**

In the context of migration, media coverage linking to specific threats is of particular importance (Boomgaarden & de Vreese, 2007; Esses, Medianu, & Lawson, 2013; Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014; Stephan, Lausanne Renfro, Esses, White Stephan, & Martin, 2005). Two kinds of threats (irrespective of being realistic or imagined) are specifically important when considering immigration: cultural and economic threats (Aalberg, Iyengar, & Messing, 2012; Citrin & Sides, 2008; Esses, Hamilton, & Gaucher, 2017; Lucassen & Lubbers, 2012; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, & Prior, 2004).

Cultural threats can be explained with social identity theory whereas economic threats refer to realistic group conflict. Social identity theory predicts that individuals long to belong



to a social group. In a rather complex process, they reflect the norms and values from their own group through social identification in contrast to other groups. As a result, they are affirmative towards their own group (in-group) and more favorable toward the in-group as compared to out-groups (Tajfel, 1981). Respectively, groups holding values and norms similar to the in-group are evaluated more favorably compared to groups that do not conform to such values. Media exposure can serve as contact to various groups (Ortiz & Harwood, 2007). Furthermore, media coverage might present particular cues related to social groups (e.g., citizens vs. non-citizens, native speakers vs. non-native speakers – on a broader level: In-group vs. out-group). These cues can trigger other aspects of (long-term) memory and thus influence a range of evaluations and judgments beyond the point covered in the specific news issue. “Group cues imbue the discussion of costs and benefits with emotional significance. In other words, group images cause changes in attitudes and behavior by triggering an emotional reaction, rather than by simply changing beliefs about the severity of the problem” (Brader, Valentino, & Suhay, 2008, p. 961). The effectiveness of such cues is related to the degree of their complexity: The more complex a cue is, the less effective it is (Cho, Zuniga, Shah, & McLeod, 2006). Salient cultural attitudes such as language, religion and clothing can trigger or reinforce such out-group feelings (Aalberg et al., 2012; Burns & Gimpel, 2000; Hopkins, 2010; Sides & Citrin, 2007). Thus, by emphasizing ethnicity, media can create out-group hostility (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009). Media portrayals of immigrants with cultural distance to the native population (based on religion or language indicating a set of values differing from the in-group) are often perceived as cultural threats. As these threats concern values and beliefs, they are considered rather symbolic, compared to realistic threats (Stephan et al., 2005).



Realistic group conflict theory focuses on threats such as the economic or political power of the in-group for explaining out-group hostility (Esses, Jackson, & Armstrong, 1998). It stems from the idea that groups presumably have to compete for scarce resources (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996). When individuals form zero-sum beliefs, i.e., immigrants take away money, jobs, or houses from members of the host community, then immigrants are perceived as competitors in a static market and the goods they receive are not available to natives any more (Esses et al., 1998). In particular, those who perceive themselves or members of their in-group as facing unfair treatment see members of other groups as threatening competitors for resources (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996; Quillian, 1995). At the societal level, immigrants pose a risk for tax burdens and general social welfare as they need access to healthcare, settlement services etc. (Aalberg et al., 2012; Facchini & Mayda, 2008; Funk, 2000; Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2010). By focusing on such issues, media coverage leads to the perception of immigrants as economic threat. A second kind of realistic threat is physical well-being (Stephan et al., 2005). Thus, media coverage of topics such as terrorism or crime committed by immigrants might trigger perceived physical threats.

The combination of both realistic and symbolic threats leads to more negative attitudes towards the out-group than just one type of threat or no threat at all (Cho et al., 2006; Costello & Hodson, 2011; Stephan et al., 2005; see van der Linden & Jacobs, 2016 for contrary results). Comparing both kinds of threat, some researchers suggest that perceived cultural threats predicts anti-immigrant attitudes and support for radical right parties to a substantially higher extent than perceived economic threats (e.g. Lucassen & Lubbers, 2012; Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014).



## **Framing Effects on Attitudes towards Mobility and Immigration**

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The strand of research probably mentioned most often in the context of political communication effects is framing. In general, framing investigates how journalists 'frame' certain aspects in the media and how this triggers audience responses. One perspective on frames is considering them as a consequence of media production processes. They are analyzed as the way issues or topics are presented in the media (Iyengar, 1991; for the European context see Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). "To frame is to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Concerning migration and international mobility, there is a tendency to frame immigration in the context of social problems, such as the increase in delinquency and crime, rather than stressing the positive aspects of immigration to a receiving country (for an overview see Igartua & Cheng, 2009). Furthermore, framing is also analyzed from an individual effects-perspective as an independent variable. In this way, frames guide the processing of information and respective forming of attitudes and judgments (for a comprehensive overview see Price & Tewksbury, 1997). Studies have shown that media frames impact cognitive responses as well as attitudes and beliefs in individuals (Igartua & Cheng, 2009). In the research context, mobility and migration frames as an independent variable are often presented as either a cultural (e.g., Brader et al., 2008) or an economic threat (e.g., Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2010) or a combination of both (e.g., Aalberg et al., 2012; Costello & Hodson, 2011; Domke, McCoy, & Torres, 1999; Florack, Piontkowski, Rohmann, Balzer, & Perzig, 2003; Sniderman et al., 2004; Stephan et al., 2005; van der Linden & Jacobs, 2016).





Some authors also consider crime or terrorism as a security (or physical) threat as a specific frame of news coverage (Lahav & Courtemanche, 2012). The depiction of specific social groups related to immigrants and mobility and, on a more abstract level, the depiction of specific issues related to migration and mobility in the media can lead to perceptions of threats in the audience.

In order to demonstrate effects of media framing, Igartua and Cheng (2009) exposed participants to news stories that reflected either the threat of immigration (e.g., increased crime rate) or the benefit of immigration (e.g., economic benefits, labor force). Additionally, they varied the nationality of the migrant group (Moroccan as culturally remote vs. Latin American as culturally close to the Spanish participants). They found that the news story focusing on the positive economic consequences of migration elicited more positive cognitive responses related to the economic contribution of immigrants to Spain. Conversely, exposure to a news article framing migrants as delinquents increases negative perceptions of immigrants as a threat to security. When Latin Americans were mentioned as a social group in the news story, then participants produced more cognitive responses related to economic consequences and marginally more positive cognitive responses. Additionally, when Moroccans (relative to Latin Americans) are mentioned in news stories on the economic contribution of immigration then participants produced more conflict-related cognitive responses. In other words, the culturally remote group is perceived more negatively in news stories on the economic impact of migration than culturally close groups. Finally, the delinquency frame in the news resulted in more negative attitudes toward immigration compared to the economic contribution frame. A replication of this research by Igartua and colleagues (2011) obtained similar findings. Thus, the variation of the social group did not affect people's perceptions or attitudes. They conclude that this occurred



either due to their way of manipulating group cues (the authors chose a manipulation that did not relate to a specific protagonist) or due to sampling specifics (participants scored high in interest in the topic of immigration). Yet, other studies focusing on the effects of the presentation of specific groups generally support the assumption that group cues in news stories can alter people's perceptions of and attitudes towards immigration (Aalberg et al., 2012; Brader et al., 2008; Cho et al., 2006).

Esses et al. (1998) found that a news article focusing "on the successful participation of skilled immigrants in the Canadian job market" relative to a news article on immigration without discussing competition increased the perception that immigration is bad for domestic jobs, deteriorating the attitude toward immigrants and immigration. They replicate this basic finding in several other studies (see Esses, Dovidio, Jackson, & Armstrong, 2001 for an overview). Overall, media issues triggering perceived economic competition with immigrants led to support for restrictive immigration policies and attenuated support for policies that empower immigrants (Costello & Hodson, 2011; Jackson & Esses, 2000). This is even true for economically successful immigrants, which was expressed as the 'immigration dilemma' which challenges "policymakers and the media in determining how immigration policy should be structured and portrayed to limit group conflict and resistance, which could undermine the success of immigrants and of immigration policy" (Esses et al., 2001, p. 397).

In a similar vein, Florack and colleagues had participants read either threatening or enriching/beneficial news items about Turkish immigrants, manipulating both realistic and symbolic threats (Florack et al., 2003). The threatening article discussed activities of Islamic fundamentalists and negative media coverage of the host community, as well as discrimination of women in Turkey. In the benefits condition, cultural as well as economic



enrichment was stressed, discussing Turkish cooking, artists and successful Turkish entrepreneurs securing jobs in the host community. When reading the threatening aspects, participants showed less acceptance for the migrant group campaigns. Though it seems problematic that the enrichment and the threatening condition do not seem entirely comparable to each other, the findings that were previously found in the US context (Esses et al., 2001) can also be shown to be valid in an EU context. Threat-related media coverage influences attitudes towards immigrants and immigration in the EU. These findings are also supported in a non-experimental setting by Schemer (2012b; 2014). The author found that repeated exposure to news portrayals of social groups in relation to economic, cultural or security threats increased prejudice over time.

The framing of a news item also leads to respective interpretation of news. Van Gorp and colleagues (2009) tested two different versions of issue coverage about a policy proposal that facilitates the evaluation of asylum requests. Within this news item, the depiction of asylum seekers was varied with an 'innocent victim' vs. an 'intruder' frame. The innocent victim frame implicitly presented asylum seekers as exploited victims of human trafficking, whereas the intruder frame implicitly presented them as abusers of the host community. A third version presented a mixed-frame. Besides the respective main effect of the framing, they found that the interpretation of news on asylum varied respectively. Although in no experimental condition were asylum seekers explicitly labeled as victims or intruders, the asylum seekers on a neutral press photo included in the news item evoked emotions in line with the applied frame in the text.

In the studies presented above, the frame-valence influences attitudes towards immigration depending on the issue being presented as an economic, physical or cultural threat or benefit. Altogether, the studies point to a rather negative effect of media issue



coverage on migration and mobility attitudes. Framing of threats leads to generally negative attitudes toward immigration (Florack et al., 2003; Igartua & Cheng, 2009) and the depicted group (Esses et al., 1998), as well as concerns about the economy of the host country (Igartua & Cheng, 2009). An ultimate negative result of media portrayal is the dehumanization of social groups. Thus, individuals of these groups are denied to be human, which justifies their exclusion, mistreatment, and even support for deportation (Dalsklev & Kunst, 2015; Esses et al., 2013; Esses et al., 2017).

Esses and colleagues suggest two possible strategies to counteract a negative media effect. At least in some cases, an article targeting economic zero-sum beliefs - disputing the claim that immigrants make gains in employment at expense of the host community is untrue - led to more favorable attitudes toward immigrants and immigration. Moreover, in general, issues emphasizing common ethnic roots and a common national identity between members of the host community and immigrants tend to result in more favorable attitudes towards immigrants (Esses et al., 2001; Esses, Wagner, Wolf, Preiser, & Wilbur, 2006; for a discussion of similar results concerning racial identity see Richardson, 2005). The authors explain this through a shift of the in-group salience: By stressing commonalities between members of the in-group and the out-group, categorization of immigrants as out-groups is less likely to occur. Thus, increasing the salience of a common in-group identity can decrease negative affective reactions toward immigrants in the audience. These experimental findings were also validated in the field. Schemer (2014) showed that positive campaign coverage of minorities attenuated negative out-group attitudes. Exposure to frequent news portrayals of asylum seekers as legitimate refugees and innocent victims who had escaped from torture reduced prejudice.



## **Media Priming Effects on Attitudes towards Migration and Mobility**

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Media priming suggests that media coverage not only influences people's attitudes and judgments but also activates related cognitions. Concerning the context of migrants and mobility, media coverage can also activate (or prime) cognitions by portraying minorities negatively. Racial bias in the media can automatically cue negative thoughts about respective social groups (Higgins, Bargh, & Lombardi, 1985). In this way, priming relates to the activation of stereotypic cognitions. For instance, Cho and colleagues (2006) experimentally manipulated a news report that either portrayed Arabs as citizens or immigrants and as either moderates or extremists. They found that the convergence of immigrant and extremist cues led to stronger associations between group evaluations and opposition to immigration, social intolerance and minority disempowerment. In addition, they showed that this combination also reduced response latencies, which provides support for associative priming and thus, judging without cognitive effort. Once such cognitions have been activated by media depictions, they are temporarily more accessible for subsequent judgments (Higgins et al., 1985).

Domke and colleagues (1999) presented different news issues on immigration using actual political statements taken from several campaigns. In their study, they altered framing of a news article as either material (i.e., by presenting the issue in terms of economics, expedience, and tangible resources) or ethical (i.e., by presenting the issue in terms of human rights, principles and morality, and personal responsibility) on a societal level. The (fictional) candidates covered a range of aspects such as job opportunities, general financial benefits and life quality, as well as economic and cultural contributions. Individuals receiving a material frame of immigration interpreted the issue solely in material



terms whereas subjects who received an ethical frame included ethical as well as material considerations. This again influenced their perceptions of migrant groups: Material framing of immigration led to less favorable evaluation of Hispanics concerning violence, laziness, and intelligence. This contributed to their appraisal of whether the host economy in general benefits from immigration. From a priming perspective this suggests that news issues prime subjects to focus on certain considerations and neglect others when evaluating the issue of immigration. A single news item can obviously activate judgments about a whole social group.

Even without direct coverage of immigrants, issues that trigger an economic threat might enhance anti-immigration attitudes. Media coverage might prime negative evaluations of social groups far beyond the issue covered. From a methodological view, this is important as it indicates that effects might occur beyond the actual media coverage which is measurable with content analysis. This becomes even more important as there is evidence that frequent exposure to biased media coverage can enhance the chronic accessibility of stereotypic beliefs for judgments and evaluations (Dixon, 2008; Domke, 2001). This explains the long-term influence of media over time, which is described in the next section.

On a broader level, it has been shown that media can also influence the standards by which political leaders are judged. This is also addressed in (cognitive) priming, which proposes that public evaluations of political leaders are based on how they perform on issues on the top of citizens' minds. Media can serve as a key source for information 'priming' people's thoughts and judgments (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). When the media call attention to specific issues, political leaders will be evaluated by their performance on these issues. This has been demonstrated extensively for media impacts on the evaluation of US



presidents (e.g., Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Pan & Kosicki, 1997; see Roskos-Ewoldsen, Klinger, & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007 for an overview). Individual media outlets can also differ in the way they link specific issues to specific parties and thus influence citizens' perceptions of these parties' respective policy positions, which in turn may affect voter support (e.g., Brandenburg, 2005; Eberl, Boomgaarden, & Wagner, 2015).

Within the context of the EU, de Vreese (2004) finds priming effects for the introduction of the euro. When this topic became more visible in the media and thus highly salient, readily available, and on the top of citizens' minds, the importance of the euro issue for general evaluations of political leaders increased. Within the context of migration and mobility, this would mean that as soon as the issue of migration becomes more salient in the media agenda, political leaders will be evaluated by their handling of this topic.

### **Long-term Effects of Media Coverage affecting Mobility and Immigration Attitudes**

Cultivation analysis looks at the influence of media messages on society as a whole and from a long-term perspective. It is based on the idea that the media (especially television) presents certain messages with a systematic distortion of reality. Hence, it cultivates a distorted construction of social reality in its recipients (Gerbner & Gross, 1976) affecting social perceptions as well as attitudes and values (Morgan & Shanahan, 1997). In relation to political communication on immigration, theoretical foundation building on cultivation is rather scarce (for exceptions see Arendt, 2010; Atwell Seate & Mastro, 2016; Vergeer, Maurice, Lubbers, Marcel, & Scheepers, 2000). From a cultivation perspective, media effects on attitudes towards mobility and migration can be explained via implicit cultivation (e.g. Shrum, 2007; for a discussion in relation to EU attitudes see Arendt, 2010; Matthes & Schmuck, 2015). Implicit attitudes operate as a mediator between media exposure and



explicit attitudes. They are activated automatically when encountering a relevant (media) stimulus and result in an affective reaction tied to particular associations. Thus, without cognitive effort, without the intention to evaluate an object and without considering these evaluations as correct, these associations can be activated. That again provides the basis for explicit evaluative judgments. This means, furthermore, that even if overtly expressed attitudes and judgments cannot be detected, media can still exert an influence on implicit attitudes (Matthes & Schmuck, 2015).

Vergeer and colleagues (2000) observe that newspapers that characterize ethnic minorities in a negative way lead their readers to a higher level of perceived threat over time. More importantly, recipients exposed to more than one newspaper perceive ethnic minorities as less threatening than recipients reading just one newspaper. This might be a hint that exposure to different newspapers articulating different depictions or opinions about ethnic minorities leads to more skeptical attitudes (Vergeer et al., 2000, p. 140). Arendt (2010) showed the causal impact of newspaper consumption in a cross-lagged panel design. The more time people spent with newspaper reading, the more they tended to overestimate the frequency of foreign offenders and the more negative were their attitudes towards the EU, both implicit and explicit. Contrary to the findings by Vergeer and colleagues (2000), those who read more than one newspaper showed more negative implicit attitudes. These conflicting results may stem from the different newspapers under investigation (Netherlands vs. Austria) and the different periods or different topics under investigation (ethnic minorities in general vs. crime and personality of the offender).

Although not explicitly conducted with a theoretical foundation on cultivation, the general notion of a long-term influence of media portrayals has been supported by other studies as well. Schlueter and Davidov (2013) demonstrate that negative immigration-





related news reports increase perceived group threat, which was measured with a negative evaluation of the number of immigrants living in the host society. Schemer found that negative news portrayals of immigrants lead to increased stereotypical attitudes during political campaigns (Schemer, 2012a, 2014).

Using trend data from the European Social Survey, Héricourt and Spielvogel (2013) find media exposure as a key determinant of beliefs on the influence of immigration on the economy. Results show a significant difference concerning the type of media: Newspaper reading leads to a more positive opinion on the economic impact of immigration whereas TV broadcast viewing displays a negative impact. Other studies investigating the specific effect of television support the negative impact on migration- and mobility-related attitudes: In their multimethod study, Meeusen and Jacobs (2016) first conducted a content analysis of prime-time television news in Flanders regarding several minority groups (in the context of mobility and migration, Eastern Europeans, North Africans and Roma were analyzed). In a second step, they linked the content analysis with survey data. They find that ethnic minority groups are often depicted as a problem in negative news stories and half of the news stories under investigation contain a threat. The prejudice hierarchy among the news shows large similarities with the ethnic hierarchy that is reflected in public opinion. Ethnic minority groups that are most negatively evaluated by the public are generally depicted negatively, problematized, and associated with threat frames in the news. This result is supported by a study by Beyer and Matthes (2015) who find a significant relationship between exposure to commercial broadcasting and negative attitudes toward illegal immigration in Norway and France. The authors attribute this negativity bias to the negative and sensationalist journalistic style of commercial news broadcasting focusing on negative aspects of immigration and promoting threats. Accordingly, Eysel and colleagues



(2015) find that preferences for TV channels that depict Muslims in a negative way led to higher levels of Islamophobia over time. Finally, looking at a behavioral component, studies indicate that exposure to immigration- and crime-related news is positively related to the likelihood to cast a vote for an anti-immigrant party in Europe (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007; Burscher, van Spanje, & de Vreese, 2015).

In summation, the studies cited above point in the direction that exposure to negative (positive) media message about immigrants leads to respective negative (positive) attitudes toward migration and mobility. Some news might pay more attention to ethnic minorities, depict them in different ways, or frame the issue of migration in more threatening ways than others do. This seems especially the case for sensationalist television coverage. Repetitive consumption of such messages leads to increasingly negative attitudes towards mobility and migration over time. This becomes especially significant as reciprocal effects of a ‘reinforcing spiral’ have been observed. Negative media messages do not only produce or reinforce negative affects but also encourage attention to and selection of messages that are comparably negative (Eyssel et al., 2015; Schemer, 2012a).

Contrasting these negative findings, there is also a positive role media can play concerning attitudes and perceptions. Mere exposure to out-group members in the news is sufficient to improve attitudes. Wojcieszak and Azrout (2016) show that over time, variation in the quantity of mediated contact with Muslims and Poles decreased social distance toward, and perceived threat from, both out-groups. Thus, a positive or at least non-threatening depiction of migrants might make members of the host community more familiar with them, which in turn leads to less perceived threat towards the out-group.

## Mediators and Moderators of Media Effects

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In this section, we will highlight the intervening variables discussed most frequently in the context of migration and mobility. These variables can moderate (or mediate) the effects of media coverage on attitudes or evaluations. The first important variable discussed in the context of migration and mobility is formal education. Education equips individuals not only with knowledge but also with the cognitive skills to acquire knowledge (Matthes & Schmuck, 2015). Issue-specific knowledge has proven to moderate media effect, as it increases critical processing of information. On the contrary, poorly informed individuals are more likely to rely on stereotypes activated by media coverage (Schemer, 2012b). Furthermore, Matthes and Schmuck (2015) suggest that education leads to more capability to suppress explicit attitudes. Thus, the effects of media messages on implicit attitudes may especially be present for people with higher education, whereas they are more likely to influence direct attitudes for less educated people. For a discussion about the intervening influence of media on political attitudes see Matthes and Schmuck (2015, pp. 6-8).

The second sociodemographic variable often under investigation is income (or economic success), which becomes especially important concerning economic threats. As already stated, those who are economically less successful (or believe themselves to be so) are particularly likely to perceive immigrants as a threat concerning labor market competition (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996; Quillian, 1995). Thus, those individuals in particular might be susceptible to media-induced threats.

Another variable receiving attention in the context of migrant and mobility-related attitudes is political self-positioning or ideology. In connection with economic threats, Pardos-Prado (2011) suggest that, particularly in times of low economic vulnerability,



immigrants are not directly framed as a threat compared to times of high economic vulnerability. Thus, people have to rely on their left-right predispositions to make sense of media coverage.

The last variable of particular importance in the context of intergroup salience stems from Social Dominance Theory, which suggests that human societies are characterized by hierarchical power. Respectively, individuals scoring high on social dominance orientation (SDO) generally perceive out-groups as more threatening, prefer intergroup hierarchies and inequality among social groups compared to those scoring low in SDO. For instance, Costello and Hodson (2011) found that individuals high in SDO exhibited greater resistance to helping immigrants upon exposure to economic or cultural threats. In addition, higher social dominance oriented individuals are more likely to dehumanize refugees (Esses, Veenvliet, Hodson, & Mihic, 2008).

## **Discussion**

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In reviewing the literature on media effects on public perceptions and attitudes related to EU mobility and migration, it becomes clear that media coverage can play an essential role in judgment formation of EU citizens. This is especially important when media coverage provides valenced news stories on immigration or migrants, i.e., portraying migration as threatening vs. beneficial for the host community. Specifically, experimental studies have shown that threats concerning the economy, culture, or security can significantly influence attitudes towards migrant groups or migration in general. Such threats can be directly addressed in the media, e.g., by covering issues such as physical threats stemming from delinquency or terrorism (e.g., Cho et al., 2006; Florack et al., 2003; Igartua et al., 2011);



economic threats such as competition for jobs or social services (e.g., Esses et al., 1998); or cultural impacts of migration (e.g., Domke et al., 1999; Florack et al., 2003).

As a result, recipients are affirmative towards their host community (in-group) and unfavorably inclined towards the migrant group (out-group). In particular, the combination of both symbolic and realistic threats leads to negative attitudes towards immigrants (Costello & Hodson, 2011; Stephan et al., 2005). This has been demonstrated for general evaluations of social (out-) groups (Esses et al., 1998) and attitudes toward immigration (Igartua & Cheng, 2009). Moreover, these studies show that media representation of groups and issues can prime the interpretation of a media message (van Gorp et al., 2009). Thus, media framing leads recipients to focus on certain considerations and neglect others, which in turn negatively affects evaluations of mobility and migration (Domke et al., 1999). This effect has been demonstrated outside of experimental research in 'real world' settings. Media covering immigrants and migration in a negative way leads to increased group threat (Schlueter & Davidov, 2013) and increased negative attitudes over time (Arendt, 2010; Schemer, 2012; Vergeer et al., 2000). The effect seems to be particularly negative for television consumption (Beyer & Matthes, 2015; Eyssel et al., 2015; Héricourt & Spielvogel, 2013; Meeusen & Jacobs, 2016). This can be explained from a cultivation perspective. The negative media messages cumulatively affect attitudes over longer periods of time and serve as a socializing force when it comes to learning about one's own in-group and various out-groups (Vergeer et al., 2000).

The research presented above has several limitations. Although the studies are concerned with migrant groups or general attitudes towards migration and mobility, a number of the studies cited above were not conducted within an EU but in the US context. Cultural context and thus important migrant groups and host community policies differ



between the US and the EU. A replication for some of the findings cited above is needed within the EU. Even the studies conducted in the EU did not necessarily focus on the media impact of migration and mobility within the EU. Most of it is concerned with asylum seekers or permanent arrivals. Yet, there are other (and in the context of the EU rather positive) aspects of EU mobility that were not addressed in the studies above. For instance, the benefits of free movement on traveling, studying, and working abroad within the EU. Moreover, especially in the EU context it seems to be important to differentiate between intra- and non-EU mobility. Attitudes towards migrants from an EU country might be more favorable as they might be perceived as culturally closer and thus part of the in-group compared to members of non-EU countries.

Three important aspects stemming from contextual as well as individual variables might dynamically increase the effects found above. First, from a long-term perspective, we can expect that the more media consumption leads to salience of intergroup differences, the stronger the in-group favorability, and the more the in-group relates with itself (Atwell Seate & Mastro, 2016). Thus, with increased negative media coverage about migrants and migration-related topics the groups become even more distinct. Second, this effect might be boosted as studies have identified a mutual influence of media use and migration attitudes in reinforcing spirals. Negative media coverage does not only influence corresponding attitudes but, in turn, these attitudes influence media selection (Eyssel et al., 2015; Schemer, 2012a). Third, media can create 'external shocks' by exaggerating certain media depictions about immigrants or immigration (Boomgaarden & Vliegthart, 2009; Coenders & Scheepers, 1998; Sniderman, 2000). Thus, comparable to other changes in societal conditions, such as increasing unemployment or an increasing number of immigrants, news coverage needs to be taken into account as a contextual factor. News impact is stronger



when immigration and asylum application levels are high. These dynamics speak for increased negative attitudes towards mobility and migration over time. Ultimately, this might result in subsequent voting behavior for anti-immigrant parties and thus shapes political reality (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007; Burscher et al., 2015).

The research described above relies on three traditional theoretical strands of research, cultivation, framing, and priming. The last two strands of research mentioned are concerned with rather short-term media effects. Cultivation, on the other hand, is concerned with long-term effects of media coverage. The more homogeneous and consonant the media messages, the more pronounced are the effects over time. In an era of digitalization and media fragmentation the effects described above will become even more pronounced for individuals using media constantly making the topic of immigration salient or specifically highlighting negative impact of immigration. A drastic example would be an individual solely consuming far-right alternative media. Contrary, an individual with a more balanced media diet will be less affected by negative impact. However, if media messages are rather negative over time, this leads to a negative effect on migration related attitudes and perceptions from a cultivation perspective. Looking at the migration-related content of (mainstream) media, it rather points into a consonant direction of negative media messages in the context of migrants and mobility (see Boomgaarden et al 2018 for an overview). Hence, although the negative effect of media on the impact of immigration and attitudes toward free movement might not be equally strong for all individuals, an overall negative effect can be expected. The content of personal media use as well as personal characteristics described above moderate this effect.



The literature above has not discussed the possible effects stemming from Social Network Sites. The mere influence of posts on social media related to the threat scenarios described above, should exert effects in the same pattern as the effects described above. Yet, the specific user generated content in Social Network Sites (liking, commenting, and sharing posts) might change the dynamic of the effects. For instance, when user comments include xenophobic terms even when the original article does not, it is possible that negative effects stem from user generated, but not original media content (Harlow, 2015). Further, the source of immigrant-related content might play a role. Research has shown that those who support populist politicians are affected by their online messages whereas those who oppose populist politicians showed even reduced populist attitudes after reading their messages (Hameleers & Schmuck, 2017). Lastly, prejudiced comments influence users to post more prejudiced comments themselves (Hsueh, Yogeewaran, & Malinen, 2015). Thus, online environments should be incorporated in future research looking at media effects on migration and mobility.

There is a silver lining to the negative effects of media. Data from Esses and colleagues suggest that media can counteract perceived threats, by actively targeting them. For instance, by claiming that zero-sum beliefs behind perceived job competition are simply not true, media can lead to more favorable attitudes towards immigrants. Moreover, media can play a positive role in the perception of social groups. Instead of stressing intergroup saliences, media can portray commonalities between immigrants and the host-community (Esses et al., 2001, p. 404; Esses et al., 2006). The latter manipulation does not necessarily have the intended effect. In some cases, a common in-group identity has led to even higher levels of bias (e.g., Waldzus & Mummendey, 2004). Yet, it has been shown that a non-threatening depiction of out-groups can lead to an improvement in attitudes (Mutz &





Goldman, 2010; for an EU context see Wojcieszak & Azrout, 2016) and that positive media coverage can reduce prejudice (Schemer, 2014).



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# REMINDER

ROLE OF EUROPEAN MOBILITY AND ITS IMPACTS  
IN NARRATIVES, DEBATES AND EU REFORMS

The REMINDER project is exploring the economic, social, institutional and policy factors that have shaped the impacts of free movement in the EU and public debates about it.

The project is coordinated from COMPAS and includes participation from 14 consortium partners in 9 countries across Europe



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