

Us Versus Them and the Role of the Media

The Influence of Media on Attitudes Toward Migration in Europe

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Nora Theorin (nora.theorin@jmg.gu.se)

Department of Journalism, Media and Communication, University of Gothenburg

Box 710, SE-405 30 Göteborg

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University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Abstract

During the last decade, migration has become one of the most salient and politicized issues in Europe, and even more so during and after the sharp rise in immigration in 2015. This issue appears to have consolidated a central position in political debates and on media agendas across European countries. At the same time, there are sharp differences *within* as well as *between* European countries, in attitudes toward migration and perceptions of migration. This makes it important to understand how people's attitudes toward migration are shaped. In this context, the media – a key source of political information – is likely to play a crucial role. The aim of this dissertation is therefore to investigate when and how the media influence public attitudes toward migration, and perceptions of migration across European countries. Toward this end, the dissertation combines media effect theories and intergroup relationship theories, and relies on panel data as well as a survey experiment conducted in seven European countries. The main findings of the dissertation are: (a) The effects of media use on attitudes and perceptions depend on where the migration is coming from, (b) The effects vary between media types, and alternative media appear to have more substantial effects on attitudes toward immigration than traditional media, (c) The relationships between media use and attitudes is likely to be reciprocal, (d) Emotions and perceptions can function as mediators that explain framing effects on attitudes toward immigration, but emotions appear to be a more important mediator than perceptions, and (e) Media do not always move public opinion on migration, and the effects are country-specific rather than universal.

Keywords

Media effects, attitudes toward migration, panel data, experiment, cross-national research

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Nora Theorin

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The dissertation is based on the following studies:

Study I: Theorin, N., & Strömbäck, J. (2020). Some media matter more than others: Investigating media effects on attitudes toward and perceptions of immigration in Sweden, *International Migration Review*, 54(4), 1238–1264. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0197918319893292>

Study II: Theorin, N. (2019). Maintainers of ethnic hierarchies? Investigating the relationship between media use and attitudes toward perceived remote versus perceived close immigration, *Mass Communication and Society*, 22(6), 826–850. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2019.1660368>

Study III: Theorin, N. (2021). Different effects on different immigrant groups: Testing the media's role in triggering perceptions of economic, cultural, and security threats from immigration. *Under review*

Study IV: Theorin, N., Meltzer, C. E., Galyga, S., Strömbäck, J., Schemer, C., Lind, F., Eberl, J.-M., Heidenreich, J., & Boomgaarden, H. G. (2021). Does news frame affect free movement attitudes? A comparative analysis. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 98(3), 725–748. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10776990211006793>

Study V: Theorin, N. (2021). How news frames affect immigration attitudes: Perceptions and emotions as underpinning mechanisms? In J. Strömbäck, C. E. Meltzer, J.-M. Eberl, C. Schemer, & H. Boomgaarden (Eds.), *Media and public attitudes toward migration in Europe. A comparative approach* (pp. 190–208). Routledge

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