

Media Influence On Public Opinion Attitudes Toward The Migration Crisis

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Abstract: Many studies, or facts from the practical experience of many journalist, politicians and professors, show that the media impact on public opinion is enormous and essential. Many issues of everyday life, human crisis or mainstream policies, once covered and analyzed from the lenses of the media, become the main concerns of the citizens and have a meaningful impact on the attitudes of the public opinion. The migration crisis that is challenging the European countries nowadays is a big concern not only for the host countries citizens, but a life challenge for the immigrants themselves. This study will examine of the connection between media reports on immigration and public attitudes and actions, and how migration issues presented in the mainstream media impact the public and political discourse on international migration.

Key words: Immigration, media coverage, impact, public opinion, attitudes.

Introduction

It is widely accepted that the nature of the messages communicated by the media in all its forms can have a discernible impact on overall societal attitudes, which in turn can have a bearing on behaviour. This is particularly relevant to the public discussion of migration, aspects of which have become increasingly contentious in national, regional and global arenas. Migration is a phenomenon that has contributed to shape the history of mankind. Recent times have seen a *striking increase in public attention* to migration. Dramatic events such as drowning of Africans in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean and terrorist threats have coloured debates and public perception. Coping with migration has become a serious challenge for the EU and its Member States. Migrants and refugees streaming into Europe from Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia have presented European leaders and policymakers with their greatest challenge since the debt crisis. The International Organization for Migration calls Europe the most dangerous destination for irregular migration in the world, and the Mediterranean the world's most dangerous border crossing. Political upheaval in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia is reshaping migration trends in Europe. The number of illegal border-crossing detections in the EU started to surge in 2011, as thousands of Tunisians started to arrive at the Italian island of Lampedusa following the onset of the Arab Spring. The most recent surge in detections along the EU's maritime borders has been attributed to the growing numbers of Syrian, Afghan, and Eritrean migrants and refugees. Europe is currently witnessing a mixed-migration phenomenon, in which economic migrants and asylum seekers travel together. This study will underline the impact of the media on social change and on the public perception on immigration.

1. Public opinion attitudes on immigration

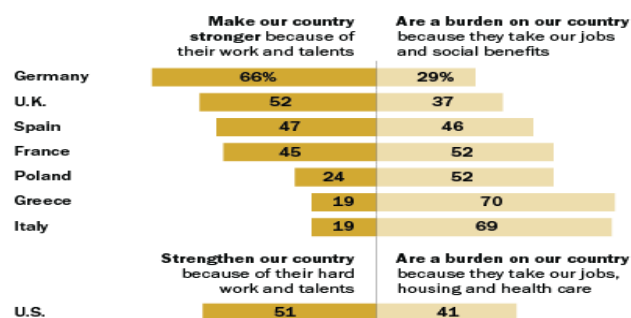
Growing migration flows to developed countries over the past 20 years have transformed several European countries of emigration into countries of immigration, while patterns of migration – countries of origin and types of migration – have become increasingly diversified. The changing situation, as well as the ongoing emergence of a European immigration policy, has prompted more frequent shifts in national migration policies. The setting of migration policies is a complex process, in which public opinion plays a significant role. In the years preceding the current economic crisis, the

steady improvement in the employment situation had helped calm the debate on labor migration and reduce the weight of opinion opposed to increased immigration in many developed countries. However, the crisis threatens to revive opposition to immigration and foster anti-immigrant feelings. Concerns are again being expressed in some circles over what is seen as unfair competition from immigrants in the labor market and their potential negative impact on public finances. Managing these potential sources of social tension presents a serious challenge to governments of developed countries, especially as prevailing demographic trends will require many of them to reappraise the role of labor migration over the next few years. There are numerous studies of public opinion about migration and migrants, most of them focusing on destination countries. However, there is little systematic study of attitudes concerning emigration and emigrants in countries of origin, despite the increasing focus on the potential benefits that emigration can deliver to them. A recent, growing literature in economics and political science has analyzed the determinants of individual preferences regarding migration policy, paying particular attention to the role played by perceptions of the economic effects of immigration and by concerns about the impact of immigration on the way of life of local populations. Basically, this literature attempts to uncover the fundamental motives which make some people more or less favorable to immigration. The unresolved refugee crisis still moves many Europeans is also reflected in the new statistics released by the latest EU-sponsored Eurobarometer of the public opinion poll. Yes, there is a new top issue in Europe. Immigration has currently even overtaken the economic situation as the most frequently cited concern at EU level, according to the latest Eurobarometer poll. Opinions on migration vary, depending on whether migrants are moving within the EU, or into the EU from outside: the immigration of people from other EU Member States evokes a positive feeling for a majority of Europeans, whereas the opposite is true in the case of immigration from outside the EU. Overall, more than seven in ten Europeans are in favour of a common European policy on migration, while 20% are against it. This opinion is held by an absolute majority of respondents in all 28 EU Member States, in proportions ranging from 84% in Lithuania to 59% in Austria, the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom and Finland. In Spring 2015 Standard Eurobarometer, on average 38 percent of respondents in

the 20 EU member states consider immigration the most important EU issue. This is a jump by 14 percentage points. In Germany, the number is as high as 55 percent of respondents. Only Malta has an even higher value of 65 percent. Amazingly, Italy or Greece don't have the highest values. The immigration of people from outside the EU is rejected by 56 percent of Europeans. In Great Britain, according to a study done by the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, immigration is unpopular, with approximately three quarters of the British public favouring reduced levels. Existing evidence also clearly shows high levels of opposition to immigration in the UK. In recent surveys, majorities of respondents think that there are too many migrants, that fewer migrants should be let in to the country, and that legal restrictions on immigration should be tighter. Polls show that large majorities in the 2013 British Social Attitudes survey endorsed reducing immigration. Indeed, over 56% chose 'reduced a lot', while 77% chose either 'reduced a lot' or 'reduced a little'. Pollsters and scholars commonly assess levels of public concern by asking people to name the 'most important issue' or 'issues' facing the nation. Ipsos MORI conducts a monthly poll asking respondents first to name the most important issue. Immigration ranks consistently among the top five issues. As of June 2015, it was the issue picked most often by respondents (45%). Existing evidence also clearly shows high levels of opposition to immigration in the UK. In recent surveys, majorities of respondents think that there are too many migrants, that fewer migrants should be let in to the country, and that legal restrictions on immigration should be tighter. Public opinion in other comparable European and North American countries is not as strongly opposed to immigration, even when measured by the same questions within the same cross-national survey (Transatlantic Trends 2010). Immigration is also more often viewed as a salient and pressing political problem in Britain than in other countries surveyed. Germans, the British and Americans hold the most positive views of immigrants, while Greeks and Italians hold the most negative views, according to surveys conducted by Pew Research Center in the U.S. and seven European nations.

Views of Immigrants in Europe and the U.S.

% who say immigrants today ...



Note: Don't know/refused and both/neither responses not shown.
Source: Pew Research Center survey of U.S. adults, May 12-18, 2015; and Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey.

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Figure 1.1. The views on immigrants in some European countries and the US

Source: Pew Research Center. (What Americans, Europeans think of immigrants)

Greeks and Italians, whose nations border the Mediterranean and are therefore a natural endpoint for refugees crossing the sea, are also more likely to say immigrants are a burden on society because they take jobs and social benefits. By contrast, people in the UK and Germany are more likely to say immigrants make their country stronger because of their hard work and talents. People in these seven EU countries are less concerned about a possible uptick in crime due to immigration. But 51% of Greeks say immigrants are more to blame for crime than other groups, as do 48% of Germans and 45% of Italians. Regarding refugees in particular, four-in-ten in the EU say their country's policies should be more restrictive, but again this sentiment is particularly strong in Italy (57%) and Greece (56%), according to the German Marshall Fund's Transatlantic Trends survey in 2014. Greeks and Italians are also the most likely to be concerned about immigration from outside the EU (84% and 76%, respectively, are concerned about this). However, trends on the public discourse on immigration are changing, strongly influenced by a shift in the course of the media reporting. The reactions of the public in general and the European citizens in particular, are changing rapidly. Desperate people are still arriving on Europe's borders and on its shores, as they have been for months and years. But the tone of the public's reaction is shifting fast. We're starting to hear less about the "threat" posed by these people and more about the "unbearable" sight of a three-year-old boy washed up, dead, on the shore of Turkey, and everything it implies. Increasing numbers of people across Europe are offering support to displaced people in large and small ways. They are signing online petitions, sending money, visiting the camps in Calais, joining protests, and even offering shelter in their own homes. Now, we are seeing much more vivid pictures of the mass movement of people that bring home just what it means. The focus is back on borders, and not on enforcement on our streets. But this stage of the crisis has stirred a similar impulse to the one we identified in our research. Across Europe, ordinary people are offering their homes, their money, their time, and their support to those in desperate need. It seems that it has taken the unbearable image of Aylan Kurdi – the three-year-old boy who drowned – to have this recognised as a public outcry.

2. Media coverage of the migration crisis

The impact of the media in public opinion psychology principal were sketched by Walter Lippmann in his 1922 classic, *Public Opinion*, which began with a chapter titled "The World Outside and the "Pictures in Our Heads." As he noted, the news media are a primary source of those pictures in our heads about the larger world of public affairs, a world that for most citizens is "out of reach, out of sight, out of mind." Lippmann describes a fictional citizen attempting to understand the events of the First World War from hazy mental images constructed from second-hand reports. Attitudes about the war, he shows, were necessarily about 'pictures in the head' of the war rather than the actual war, distant and unknowable for most. To better understand the position of the media and its reporting connotation in the case of social crises, such as the excessive flow of migrants towards Europe, careful monitoring of international and local media, is a necessary

approach. The Foreign media coverage of the migrant crisis in September and October has produced headlines such as:

1. GERMANY: Bavaria's tough asylum policy gains support across Germany (www.euractiv.com)
2. Italian coastguard rescues 1,800 migrants as five found dead - Almost 2,000 migrants have died in the Mediterranean so far this year, on top of 3,500 last year (Guardian)
3. Czech Republic and Austria to re-enforce border patrols in view of growing number of illegal migrants (Prague Monitor)
4. Migrant crisis: The truth about the boy on the beach Aylan Kurdi. (express.co.uk, 15/09/2015)
5. First hotspot inaugurated on Lesbos (ekathimerini.com)
6. Amnesty International Urges Independent Probe into Bulgaria Migrant Death (novinite.com)
7. Hungary reinstates border controls at Slovenian frontier (DW)
8. Just how safe is the EU 'safe list'? ([euractiv](http://euractiv.com))
9. EU migrant crisis: Hungary Prime Minister Viktor Orban pushes for Greek border to be sealed (International Business Time)
10. Balkan asylum seekers face tougher times as Germany clamps down (Reuters, 09/09/2015)
11. Catastrophic moral failure as rich countries leave millions of refugees to cruel and uncertain fates (Amnesty International)
12. Don't believe everything (The Budapest Times, 12/09/15)
13. Eastern Europe's Crisis of Shame (Project-syndicate, 13/09/15)
14. While Welcoming Some Refugees, Germany Is Also Expelling Migrants Back to the Balkans (Vice News, 15/09/2015)
15. Report: German Media Covering Up Rapes Committed by Muslim Migrants (Infowars, 22/09/15)
16. Germany in a state of SIEGE: Merkel was cheered when she opened the floodgates to migrants. Now, with gangs of men roaming the streets and young German women being told to cover up, the mood's changing. (Daily Mail, 23/09/15)
17. Migrant Crisis: Germany Gets Serious with Laws for Balkan Asylum Seekers (Christian Post, 30/09/2015)
18. EU Immigration has made working people poorer', warns Labour's Andy Burnham(Mirror.co.uk, 30/09/15)

From the monitoring of foreign media came as a conclusion the maximum attention that televisions and newspapers gave to the migrant crisis, only reflecting step by step every event related to the issue, the losses, the treatment of refugees, etc, but also by putting pressure on European leaders that should manage and solve the migrant crisis management. By monitoring the Albanian media in terms of coverage of the migrants crisis, during the period September-October 2015, the media has built a complete picture of the crisis of migrants in Europe, giving considerable space to the issue of Albanian asylum seekers and other from the Balkans, mainly to Germany. Media coverage has shown sensitivity to the problems of Albanian asylum seekers, but generally focused only on the coverage of the crisis than in analyzing the causes, consequences, the role of politics, etc.

Titles such as:

- Exodus, the flowing wound, over 30 thousand Albanians in Germany in 8 months (Ora News, 09/07/2015);
- The wave of refugees is drenched Europe (Balkan Web, 09/09/15);
- The crisis of migrants, EU statistics: Nearly 10 thousand Albanians fled to asylum in Europe via Greece (Ora News, 09/10/15);
- Statistics, Albanian asylum seekers, Eurostat, ranked third, after the Syrians and Afghans (Ora News, 18/09/15);
- Germany to return 550 Albanian asylum seekers (Albeu, 23/09/15);
EU: expediting the return of "false refugees" (Shqip, 10/09/15),

Reveal a steady trend of Albanian media to inform and sensitize the Albanian society on the gravity of the crisis of the asylum seekers.

III. The impact of media on public attitudes on immigration

The media take centre stage in the presentation of migration and ethnic minorities, and a substantial number of text- and content-based studies from various countries have demonstrated that mainstream media tend to construct our image of minorities along the same lines, using similar frames. In their study "The moral police. Agenda-setting and Framing Effects of a New(s) Concept of Immigration", Tine U. Figenschou, Audun Beyer dhe Kjersti Thorbjørnsrud, argue that "In polarized black or white news stories, they tend to be defined as intruders (queue jumpers, threats or frauds), but also as heroic victims of war, natural disasters and oppression". Negative portrayals of migrants in the press are dehumanizing and can sow a sense of social crisis, even if there is not such a crisis. This is the conclusion of a study published in the Journal of Social Issues, by a team of Canadian social psychologists. This paper gives an overview of previous studies that describe the role of the media in shaping national perceptions about immigrants. In most Western countries today, immigration policies and the treatment of immigrants and refugees are contentious issues involving uncertainty and concern. There is considerable uncertainty about the costs and benefits of allowing migrants and about the obligation of host nations to provide protection to those seeking asylum. Questions arising on the issue of migrants, including for example how many immigrants are admitted each year; the extent to which immigrants and refugees pose a threat to members of the host nations; if refugees and asylum seekers are legitimate in their demands; and on the types of assistance to be provided to immigrants and refugees. The study suggests that the news media may take advantage of an existing uncertainty and unease around immigration policies and the treatment of immigrants and refugees to create a crisis mentality in which these groups are portrayed as "enemies at the gate" attempting to invade western nations. Such portrayals catch the attention of the public, warning it about possible threats. In this way, the uncertainty can be used by the media and politics as an advantage, transforming ordinary events on scoops sold to the public and that can serve as support for

the relatively extreme political platforms. The analysis of the impact of the medial on the public discourse on immigration, has a added social value. As the Italian journalist Gabriela Jacomella expressed in its study "Media and migration", immigrants are citizens of the future. "Denying, hiding or ignoring their presence will only protract and pointlessly delay the building of a much needed new concept of citizenship. As media professionals, we should be aware of what is at stake, and be ready – and willing – to play our part in the game", argues Jacomella. In her study, Gabriela first focuses on exploring a new methodology for evaluating the media coverage of migration. She then applies this evaluation grid to the press coverage of the Rosarno riots in Italy which took place in January 2010. She chooses four newspapers from her own country Italy, and the same number in Germany and the UK, the last two as examples of countries with a diverse and long-standing history of migration, as well as a substantially different media approach. Amongst her many fascinating conclusions is her observation that 'every newspaper seems to fall prey, at various degrees, to the temptation of inflating news and portraying the sensationalistic, simplified version of the story. The readers are therefore presented with a coverage that kicks off with strong negative messages, and an identification of the "migrant issue" with disturbing concepts such as emergency, segregation, and cultural differences.' A second relevant finding is that the voice of migrants is highly under-represented, regardless of the political orientation of the newspapers. As Victoria Danilova underlines in her article on the impact of media on public opinion on immigration, the language used in the mainstream media when covering stories about migrants vividly mirrors the existing narrative of migrant as 'the other' and shapes it at the same time. Perhaps the clearest articulation of anti-immigration sentiment can be found in the British press. Examining 43 million words (i.e., the content addressing migration in 20 popular British newspapers) between 2010 and 2012, a 2013 report by the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford, found that the most common word used in relation to "migrants" was "illegal". Headlines like "Eight-fold increase in the number of illegal migrants entering Europe" are typical. "Failed" turned out to be the most common descriptor of "asylum seekers", while in order to describe the security concerns and aspects of legality of migration, words such as "terrorist", "sham" were most commonly used. This kind of language criminalizes migrants who often cross borders in vulnerable circumstances. In his publication, Ian Law puts in a nutshell the most relevant characteristic of news coverage on migration and ethnic minorities in Europe: "The identification of strong negative messages and mechanisms in news coverage across Europe has also been established... Country reports on media coverage confirmed that once a negative discourse on migrants or ethnic minorities was established it tended to remain prevalent. This became a 'fixed repertoire', where event coverage involved a repetitive chain of statements, actions and conclusions. It was found that journalists provided a reading of the events which shaped hostility and was markedly different to the perceptions of inhabitants of neighbourhoods that had become the focus of reporting (because of conflicts, protests, or decay) and that they did not recognise themselves or their positions in the way their

problems or lives were shown in the media. For example in Italy and Greece news coverage was found to be fuelling hysteria or alarm about (the settlement of) immigrants, an alarm which was then appeased by police operations. An anti-immigrant consensus was constructed in the Italian press coverage on such cases, by combining several forms of stereotypical and negative portrayal supported by representations of 'public opinion', or directly through the mobilisation by political authorities". Christian Kolmer estimates that media bias on a particular issue and the impact on public opinion, cannot be discussed in a meaningful way without reference to content" - a content analysis to provide a device that enables researchers to get 'a better understanding of the impact of the media on society'. An example that shows the importance of the content of media coverage in determining the effects on the public, is the study "The Italian Case" of Giovanna Campani, which analyzes Italian media coverage of immigrants. This book documents the nature of recent migration flows into Italy, and the political debate about these immigrations. The author makes a comprehensive analysis of the statements of the Italian politicians toward Albanian immigrants and the media coverage - strongly influenced by the language of politics and the stereotypes that exist in Italian society against immigrants in general and specifically towards Albanians. According to Campani, immigration to Italy since '90 was seen divided in three phases, in which immigrants were stereotyped in three formats or images: the first phase was folklorization – the attribution of certain features to migrants to differ them from locals, eg.: dominant physical features, the way they dress, the lifestyle, etc. The Second stereotypical image of immigrants highlights to their inferior position, comparing with domestic poorest. The third image of immigrants in the media is their criminalization. For example, according to Campani: "Albanians and Slavs were presented as savages and pimps". The views and decisions of policy makers on the issue of immigration affect the other two poles of the political communication triangle: media and public opinion. In the report entitled "Public Opinion, Media Coverage, and Migration", featured in the Transatlantic Council on Migration, Demetrios G. Papademetriou and Annette Heuser, underline that the communication on migration issues of the decisionmakers through the lens of the media, strongly influences the public opinion. According to the authors of the report, the right words spoken by the politicians can properly shape public opinion by promoting correct attitudes towards immigrants and creating a positive approach toward this complex phenomenon. While communication with negative connotations, could polarize public opinion, adding anxiety and creating many stereotypes on immigrants. According to the study conducted by Jérôme Hericourt and Gilles Spielvogel, how media exposure on immigration issues affects public opinion trends and policy making, the data from public opinion surveys in Europe, have come to the conclusion that media exposure appear as a key determinant of beliefs: individuals spending more time to get informed on social and political matters through newspapers and radio have a better opinion on the economic impact of immigration, not only relatively to the average individual, but also (and even more) relatively to the individuals which devote time to other types of contents. More positive beliefs

seem therefore dependent on information related to political and social matters. Conversely, TV broadcasts on news and politics display a negative impact on openness to immigration. Editorial focuses on more sensationalist /superficial presentations (on the whole more anxiety-producing), and different abilities to process information among individuals appear as possible explanations. The professor of communication and cultural studies at Cardiff School of Journalism, Terry Threadgold, describes the symbiotic relationship between media and migration policy in the United Kingdom as follows:

Politicians, media and academics provide the language for talking about immigration and thus set the agenda and frame the stories. A certain policy focus is transmitted from government to media. The stories that the media then produce feed back into policy discourse. In addition to driving policy, 'media panics' also influence academic research on media coverage of migration...This in turn gives rise to further policy changes, thus feeding a cycle.

IV. Conclusions

Numerous studies, the monitoring of the press and mainstream electronic media, as well as the surveys of public opinion, are some of the tools used to prove the essential influence of the media on public attitudes. Media coverage of the demographic, conditioned by disasters, war or political repression, is one of the aspects of the fourth power - that has a enormous impact at the public behavior and also puts pressure on decision makers, imposing the agenda setting policy. Immigration is a issue with high sensitivity, not only for the policy makers, but also for the citizens of the host or source country. Immigration is a complex phenomenon; the knowledge, attitudes and the impressions on immigration are constructed by continuous information from the media. The results of various surveys of the public opinion in the European countries most affected by the influx of immigrants, show a high level of opposition and skepticism on domestic public opinion against immigrants. The UK is one of the countries with negative discourse concerning immigrants. Much of British society (three quarters) require the reduction of immigrants, clearly showing a high level of opposition to the immigration in the UK. The British media analysis, has shown a negative terminology on immigrants focused on the key words like 'illegal', 'failure', 'terrorist', etc. Unlike the United Kingdom, other European countries and the US, public attitudes on immigration are more tempered. Germans and Americans have more positive attitudes on immigrants, while the Greeks and Italians have the most negative views. Researches and monitoring of the media in Italy and Greece have found that news coverage urged the panic to resolve the issue of immigrants. The Studies on media reporting and public attitudes on immigration, have shown that the images in the media, the descriptions and the labeling of the immigrants, influence public attitudes on immigrants and affect the policies on immigration. With the increase of the international movement of people, the attention is focused on the immigration policies and issues, in the frame of the portrayal of this phenomenon in the media and impact on the decision makers. First of all, the media studies and the opinion polls show the impact of the

media coverage of the immigration on the perceptions of public opinion on immigration. Second, the media agenda setting affects policymaking in the countries of destination, especially of the sense of 'crisis' related to immigration. The crisis of migrants and asylum seekers, as well as the tragedies of early times-by-side in the Mediterranean shifted the public discourse. The Photo of Aylan Kurdi, three-year-old child layed dead on the Turkish coast, induced a human sympathy and solidarity in host countries. By monitoring the international media during the September-October 2015 period, was found that the mainstream media – especially the Television had given a maximum attention to the migrant crisis, by not only reflecting step by step any event related to the issue, the disposition, the losses, the treatment of refugees, but also by putting pressure on European leaders to influence the management or resolution of the crisis. Albanian media monitoring, in terms of the coverage of the crisis of migrants toward Europe, came at a conclusion that the media has built a complete picture of the crisis, giving considerable space to the of asylum seekers issue. Media coverage has shown sensitivity to the problems of Albanian asylum seekers, but generally was focused on the coverage of the crisis, rather than its analysis. In conclusion, we can say that the coverage of the numerous tragedies that accompanied the exodus of migrants from the Middle East and Africa, increased the public awareness, and brought the increasing focus of the media, creating a cycle of engagement: media - public - politics.

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