Explaining the rise of anti-immigrant parties:
The role of news media content

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Abstract

Anti-immigrant populism is on the rise throughout western Europe. Traditionally, economic and immigration-related factors are used to explain support for anti-immigrant parties at the aggregate level. Until recently, the role of news media has received only limited attention. The present study assesses the power of news content as an explanatory contextual factor, simultaneously controlling for the unemployment rate, the level of immigration, and leadership in the Netherlands for the period from 1990 to 2002. The results show that the prominence of immigration issues in national newspapers has a significant and positive impact: The more news media reported about immigration-related topics, the higher the aggregate share of vote intention for anti-immigrant parties, even when controlling for real-world developments. Future research explaining anti-immigrant party success needs to take into account the role of news media content.

Keywords: Anti-immigrant parties; News; Content analysis; Time-series analysis; Netherlands

A vast number of European and Australasian democracies witnessed electoral success of right-wing anti-immigrant parties throughout the past two decades (Betz, 1994; Eatwell and Mudde, 2004; Norris, 2005). Whereas in some countries these parties emerged and largely disappeared again, such as One Nation in Australia, or the Republikaner in Germany, in other countries they made a rather successful entrance into the party system, such as the Freiheitlich Partei Österreich (FPÖ) in Austria or the Vlaams Blok in Belgium. Factors contributing to the success of anti-immigrant parties have been object of heated popular and scientific debate. We argue that an important point has been largely neglected in previous analyses: the role of media content. Previous explanations focus on the level of the individual voter (Givens, 2004; Lewis-Beck and Mitch-ell, 1993; van der Brug and Fennema, 2003; van der Brug et al., 2000) or on the macro level, considering contextual factors (Andersen and Evans, 2003; Betz, 1994; Givens, 2002; Goldner, 2003a,b; Ignazi, 2002; Jackman and Volpert, 1996; Kitschelt, 1995; Lubbers et al., 2002). The present study looks at the latter to explain the dynamics in electoral success of

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anti-immigrant populist parties. Only recently news media content has been identified as an independent contextual factor (e.g., Mazzoleni et al., 2003; Walgrave and de Swert, 2004). We contribute to the existing literature by improving upon previously employed methodology and more importantly by demonstrating the importance of news media content as an explanatory factor, whilst controlling for other real-world factors and developments.

Previous macro-level studies consider three sets of variables: economic variables, most notably the unemployment rate, immigration-related variables, and electoral system variables, such as the number of political parties or the threshold to enter parliament. However, until recently the literature largely ignored an important factor that accounts for dynamics in public opinion towards and electoral support for anti-immigrant populist parties, which is the mass media. As stated by Blumler (2003, p. xvi) “any future attempt to analyze populism without taking into account [...] ‘the media factor’ will be severely incomplete”. By focusing on particular issues and by providing public space for the core issues of anti-immigrant populist parties, the news media intentionally or unintentionally provide an information environment in which electoral support for these parties increases (see also Billiet et al., 1993). We further consolidate the argument of the importance of taking news media content into account when explaining the popularity of anti-immigrant populist parties. Only a small number of previous studies consider the impact of the media (Jagers and Walgrave, 2003; Mazzoleni et al., 2003; Walgrave and de Swert, 2004). Often, however, the relationship is studied in a bivariate form, not taking into account other explanatory factors and thereby providing only limited evidence.

The present study investigates the impact of news content to explain the rise of anti-immigrant populism in the Netherlands while simultaneously controlling for the influence of the state of the economy, the level of immigration and the leadership of Pim Fortuyn. Over a period of 13 years we assess the influence of these variables on vote intention for anti-immigrant populist parties. Thereby, we provide a rather conclusive test of whether news media content can be held (partly) responsible for the rise of anti-immigrant parties. The Netherlands is an interesting case to consider since the country witnessed rather modest success of anti-immigrant parties during the 1990s and a dramatic increase and subsequent decrease of support throughout the years 2001/2002.

1. The dependent variable: support for anti-immigrant populism

Our dependent variable is support for anti-immigrant populist parties in the form of vote intention measured in monthly public opinion surveys. Since our analysis stretches over a period of 13 years, we are dealing with several parties throughout the years. The terminology used to describe parties on the far right of the political spectrum is rather inconsistent, unclear and confusing. Previous literature speaks about extreme right, right-wing, radical right, anti-immigrant, racist, neo-fascist, populist or neo-populist parties, oftentimes without providing clear definitions and failing to distinguish between different conceptualizations (for an exception see Golder, 2003a,b). Fennema (1997) refers to parties in this party family as anti-immigrant parties. He argues that “the general overlap between protest, racist and extreme-right parties lies—obviously—in the fact that they all attack the government’s migration policy” (Fennema, 1997, p. 489) and that “one thing they all share in common is resentment against migrants” (Fennema, 1997, p. 474).1 For the Dutch case, we identify three parties that share these characteristics. Following, we provide information on the history and development of the three Dutch anti-immigrant populist parties that are at the core of our analysis.

1.1. The Centrumpartij (CP)

The CP was founded in 1980. It gained one seat in parliament in the 1982 national election, but has not had any members in parliament since 1986 and did not take part in the 2002 election anymore. The CP established itself as an openly racist and xenophobic party, making use of traditional tactics of extreme right parties, for instance promoting a party program called “Eigen Volk Eerst” (own people first). Most prominent member in the early 1980s was Hans Janmaat, who was forced to resign as chairman in 1984. He then founded

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1 Fennema (1997) suggest differentiating between protest, racist and extreme right parties. It could be argued that for the Dutch case the LPF and to a lesser extent LN were able to book success also due to peoples’ discontent with politics and protest voting against traditional parties. However, we contend that it is especially the anti-immigrant issue that fuelled support (see Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2003). Van der Brug and Fennema (2003, p. 102) show that even though the ideology of anti-immigrant populist parties may differ across countries, the motivations of voters to vote for these parties are largely the same. In our empirical part we conduct two analyses: one for the whole period and one excluding the last one and a half year, when LN and LPF entered the political arena and we assess whether the results differ.
the CD, which is seen as the beginning of the end of the CP. The party further radicalized throughout the years and ever more clearly promoted racist and nationalist points of view (see also Lucardie, 1998).

1.2. The Centrumdemocraten (CD)

The CD was founded by Hans Janmaat in 1984. Whereas the CP sought further radicalization, the CD tried to establish itself as a more moderate right-wing party, still adhering to the principles of racism and xenophobia, however, in a more disguised way. In the national elections in 1989 and 1994, the CD won one and three seats respectively in parliament (out of a total of 150 seats). 1994 was the party’s most successful year, when pre-election polls predicted up to eight seats in the then upcoming election. The CD disappeared from parliament in 1998 and did not take part in the 2002 election. Janmaat died in 2002, which was believed to be the end of the CD (see also Lucardie, 1998).

1.3. The Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF)

The LPF signifies the most recent and most dramatic upsurge of anti-immigrant populism in Dutch party politics. In November 2001, Pim Fortuyn became the leader of the moderate, traditionalist new party Leeuwarder Nederland (LN) for the upcoming election in 2002. After controversial statements about the Dutch constitution and Islam, Fortuyn was forced to resign and one day later founded his own party, the LPF. Focusing among others on issues such as asylum-seekers, immigration and the preservation of Dutch culture and values, the LPF quickly gained support among the population. Fortuyn was assassinated 9 days before Election Day in May 2002. Nevertheless his party took part in the election, won 26 seats in parliament and joined a three-party government coalition with the Christian Democrats (CDA) and the Liberals (VVD). After only a few months the coalition government resigned, mainly due to internal struggles within the LPF. In the subsequent election in January 2003, the party was able to regain only eight seats and is part of the opposition since (see also Couwenberg, 2004).2

2. The independent variable: why news content matters

Support for anti-immigrant populism in the Netherlands is volatile and greatly fluctuated throughout the research period. The aim of this study is to establish the degree to which news media contribute to these fluctuations. We believe that most previous macro-level approaches to explain the rise of anti-immigrant parties have missed an important factor by ignoring the information environment provided by news media. Mazzoleni (2003, p. 2) states “the scholarly literature about populism has paid very limited attention to the contribution of the media, especially the news media, to the surge of populism”.3

Investigating Austrians’ political orientations and news media use, Plasser and Ulram (2003) find a correlation between peoples’ fear of foreigners and the use of tabloid style newspapers. They conclude that the FPÖ more than other parties “must try to guide the media agenda and manage political and social issues in an active way, and to direct public attention to its own framing of problems” (Plasser and Ulram, 2003, p. 40). Their analysis of news content that would contribute to such a relationship, however, remains anecdotal and their statistical analyses are rather weak. Similarly, when analyzing the success of the Front National in France, Birenbaum and Villa (2003) argue that Le Pen’s success was primarily based upon his ability to influence the political debate by bringing up themes and issues that were not present on the domestic political agenda.

Stewart et al. (2003) conclude that “media factors” do play a vital role in the emergence and development of neo-populist parties. They argue that news media when selecting stories lean to choose those issues that are known to appeal to the public, and that especially Austrian, French, Italian, Australian and Canadian outlets “tended to report (sometimes favorably, mostly critically) on the anti-immigration (and anti-immigrant) policies of the neo-populist movements” (Stewart et al., 2003, p. 226). In the present study we are not particularly interested in the valence of news reporting but rather in the salience of immigration issues in the media. Hereby we refer to the visibility and prominence, thus the intensity of reporting about issues related to immigration and integration, which affects the public’s

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2 As mentioned above, Pim Fortuyn set out his political career as the leader of LN. This party would not be validly classified as an anti-immigration party, since their main issue stances concern direct democracy and transparent government. It can be argued, however, that during the months of Fortuyn’s leadership, he directed the party towards an anti-immigrant issue party and also attracted voters supporting mainly because of anti-immigrant sentiment (Kleinijenhuis et al., 2003). For these reasons, we add vote intention for LN during the months of Fortuyn’s leadership to our dependent variable.

3 A number of studies look at the impact of news media content or exposure on arguably related dependent variables, such as racial policy attitudes (Kellstedt, 2003) or anti-foreigner violence (Koopmans and Oltzak, 2004). In the present review we focus only on those investigations that relate news media specifically to successes of anti-immigration parties.
cognitive accessibility of these issues. We believe that news media coverage highlighting immigration issues as politically and socially important significantly contribute to the success of anti-immigrant populism.

Walgrave and de Swert (2004) investigate the impact of media coverage on support for the Vlaams Blok for the period between 1991 and 2000. Their theoretical framework is twofold: “By combining the issue-ownership thesis with agenda-setting theory the media can be considered as affecting voting behavior.” (Walgrave and de Swert, 2004, p. 482). Concerning issue ownership, an analysis of the Vlaams Blok party manifesto was conducted, yielding four main issues the party focuses upon: Flemish nationalism, immigration, anti-politics, and crime policy. Three newspapers and two television newscasts were analysed to assess the visibility of these four issues. Walgrave and de Swert (2004) demonstrate a strong association between the success of the Vlaams Blok and media coverage of the party’s themes. Similarly, Karapin (2002) argues that a high publicity and public attention for immigration issues contributed to the success of radical right parties in Germany in the 1990s. As acknowledged by Walgrave and de Swert (2004, p. 496) their study falls short of controlling for real-world indicators and has to rely on unsatisfactory data concerning voting intention. Building upon their theoretical framework, the present study deals with these shortcomings and provides evidence of the proposed relationship in a different context.

We contend that anti-immigration themes are at the core of Dutch anti-immigrant parties and their voters’ interests (Kleinnijenhuis et al., 1995; Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2003). Therefore, we consider it most relevant to look at news media coverage of immigration-related issues and its impact on support for anti-immigration parties. We rely upon the theoretical framework provided by Walgrave and de Swert (2004). On the one hand we argue that the salience of immigration-related issues in the news sets the public’s agenda (McCombs and Shaw, 1972; for a good overview see Dearing and Rogers, 1996). A higher salience would accordingly lead to an electorate that considers immigration issues as problematic and important to be dealt with. Anti-immigrant populist parties focus on just these issues. The issue ownership hypothesis argues that certain parties own certain issues and that people feel drawn to a party when they believe it can deal with the issue at stake more effectively than other parties. It is about “issues that confer an advantage in order to prime their salience in the decisional calculus of voters” (Petrocik et al., 2002, p. 599; see also Budge and Farlie (1983) and Petrocik (1996); for a recent adjustment of the issue ownership hypothesis see van der Brug (2004)). Therefore immigration issue salience in media, in combination with the ownership of the issue by the anti-immigrant parties, influences people to support and vote for them (Walgrave and de Swert, 2004, pp. 481–483).

Dutch newspapers are independent from political parties. Since witnessing a strong move towards depillarization in the 1960s and 1970s, the Dutch media system is characterized by a rather autonomously acting press, without partisan alignment or endorsements and showing high internal pluriformity in terms of content (e.g., van der Eijk, 2000, p. 329; see also Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Therefore we believe newspapers to be independent in their coverage of political news, deciding what to cover based on news values and audience demands, but not based on party political pressures. This is not to say that the news do not pick up on issues brought to the forefront by political actors, however, the press exercises great freedom in making the choice whether to report on what is being said and thereby contributes independently to formation of audience agendas.

3. Controlling for unemployment, immigration, and leadership

The utilitarian perspective on support for anti-immigrant parties emphasizes the impact of economic factors. At the individual level, it is assumed that a person’s economic position, such as occupational status, class membership, income (Betz, 1994; Givens, 2004; Iversflaten, 2002; Lewis-Beck and Mitchell, 1993; van der Brug et al., 2000), or individuals’ evaluations of their personal or the national economic situation (Lewis-Beck and Mitchell, 1993; van der Brug and Fennema, 2003) can influence support for anti-immigrant parties. An unfavorable economic situation makes people more likely to turn against foreigners or immigrants based on a belief that these groups threaten economic security (e.g., Sniderman et al., 2000). This sentiment against foreigners then translates into support for anti-immigrant parties. At the aggregate level, some studies find a positive relationship between the unemployment rate and support for anti-immigrant parties (e.g., Anderson, 1996; Jackman and Volpert, 1996). Recent studies, however, argue that unemployment rates

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4 Different newspapers do promote different values and ideas. We, however, consider the full range of national newspapers in our study, which means that even if some of them are more inclined to report on immigration and integration issues, the differences should cancel each other out.
matter only in times when immigration levels are high: only the interaction term between unemployment and immigration yields a positive relationship with support (Golder, 2003a,b; Jesuit and Mahler, 2004; for contradicting evidence see Knigge, 1998). We do include both the unemployment rate and the interaction term between unemployment and immigration in our model.

Immigration-related variables also prominently feature in the existing literature. At the individual level, the personal contact hypothesis would predict that frequent contact with foreigners reduces negative attitudes towards them (Allport, 1954; see also Ray, 1983), so that people living in a country/area with many foreigners should be less prejudiced and therefore less likely to support right-wing parties. On the other hand, it could be assumed that a high number of foreigners living in a country can make citizens more likely to see them as competitors in, for instance, the job market. Accordingly, it is argued that people are more likely to develop anti-immigrant sentiment, therefore might be more susceptible to arguments by right-wing parties and thus more inclined to support and vote for them. At the aggregate level, some studies demonstrate a positive relationship between the number of foreigners or immigrants and anti-immigrant party support (Givens, 2002; Golder, 2003a; Lubbers et al., 2002), whereas others provide contrary results (Jesuit and Mahler, 2004). Golder has shown a positive effect of immigration levels on support for populist parties: “higher levels of immigration always help populist parties” (Golder, 2003a, p. 460). Many studies confirm the positive relationship using a range of different indicators, such as the number of foreigners or non-Western residents living in a country or the number of asylum seekers (Anderson, 1996; Givens, 2002; Knigge, 1998; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2001; Lubbers et al., 2002; Pfaller, 2002). This study uses the monthly level of immigration and the number of asylum applications.\(^5\)

In addition to these contextual control variables, we include a Fortuyn specific leadership measure. Generally, literature on voting behavior suggests effects of leadership strength, charisma and personalization of politics on citizens’ vote choice (e.g., Aarts, 2001; Kaase, 1994). Husband (1998) has taken this concept to explain electoral success of extreme right parties (see also Eatwell (2003) and Madsen and Snow (1991)). Lubbers et al. (2002) empirically test the argument using expert ratings from various countries categorizing the strength of charisma of anti-immigrant party leaders. They show that strong leadership (in combination with a strong party organization) significantly and positively influences voting for the extreme right (for conflicting evidence see van der Brug and Mughan, in press).

Particularly for the period of Fortuyn, it is important to take leadership quality into account. Research on media coverage during the 2002 campaign showed that, when compared to other political actors, Pim Fortuyn alone received approximately 25% of the coverage (Kleinitjenhuis et al., 2003). The authors state that “Fortuyn was the party, and the party was Fortuyn” (p. 79). Any analysis dealing with populist parties in the Netherlands without taking into account the effects of Fortuyn’s performance is, at least, incomplete (see also Couwenberg, 2004; Pennings and Keman, 2003). The present study does not consider other party leaders for two reasons. First, Fortuyn was regarded as far more competent by the Dutch population than any other previous populist party leader and during the 1990s Janmaat was arguably considerably less visible and appealing than Fortuyn in the short period in 2001 and 2002 (see van der Brug and Mughan, in press). Second, the entrance of Janmaat into the party system falls outside our research period, and his death stood at the end of an already long decline in popularity of his party. Therefore, only Fortuyn’s entrance into and his disappearance from the political system are taken into account.

4. Additional factors

Recent studies show political or electoral opportunity structures, thus the openness of a political system for new party actors, to matter for anti-immigrant party support (e.g., Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; van der Brug et al., 2005). Arzheimer and Carter (2006) distinguish long-term institutional variables, like the disproportionality of the electoral system, medium-term party system variables, such as parties’ ideological positions, and short-term contextual variables. Due to our single-country research design, long-term institutional variables do not vary at all and accordingly cannot be put to test here. Short-term variables encompass both immigration and unemployment levels, which are already included in the research design. We make a first attempt to consider party system factors in a longitudinal study by testing the effects of party’s position on immigration issues. Again because of the single-country focus, little variation in this set of independent measures is to be expected and therefore, anticipated effects are unlikely to materialize.

\(^5\) Due to data unavailability, monthly measures of the number of foreigners living in the Netherlands are not included.
In addition to contextual variables individuals’ predispositions have been shown to explain support for anti-immigrant parties. The most important attitudinal variables relate to individuals’ levels of prejudice towards immigrants or anti-immigration sentiments (e.g., Lubbers et al., 2002; van der Brug and Fennema, 2003) and to political discontent (Bélanger and Aarts, 2006). Socio-demographic factors, such as gender, age, and education (e.g., Lubbers et al., 2002) and occupational (or class) status (e.g., Kitschelt, 1995) also influence individuals’ likelihood to vote for an anti-immigrant party. Data on these attitudinal and socio-demographic measures at regular time points, however, are either not available (e.g., anti-immigration attitudes) or do not have sufficient variance on an aggregate level (e.g., gender). Therefore we have to refrain from putting these considerations to test in the present model.

5. Hypotheses

In accordance with the literature reviewed above, we formulate the following hypotheses concerning the effects of alternative explanations for support for anti-immigrant populist parties other than media content.

- **Hypothesis 1**: The unemployment rate positively influences support for anti-immigrant populist parties only in times when immigration is high. Unemployment—not interacting with immigration levels—is not significantly related to anti-immigrant party support.

- **Hypothesis 2**: The level of immigration is positively and significantly related to support for anti-immigration parties.

- **Hypothesis 3**: The entrance of Fortuyn into the political system is positively related and his disappearance after his assassination is negatively related to support for anti-immigrant parties.

Concerning news media content, we expect that an emphasis on the core issue of anti-immigrant populist parties is influencing public support (Walgrave and de Swert, 2004). We focus on immigration issues in the news as such and immigration coverage that relates to the economy (referred to as economic news in an immigration frame). Thereby we can directly assess the differential impact of real-world data on immigration and the economy on the one hand, and news reporting about just these issues on the other hand.

- **Hypothesis 4a**: The salience of stories about immigration issues is significantly and positively related to support for anti-immigration parties.

- **Hypothesis 4b**: The salience of stories about the economy in an immigration frame is significantly and positively related to support for anti-immigration parties.

Following, information on the operationalization of the variables is provided.

6. Methods

6.1. Salience of immigration news and of economic news in an immigration frame

To obtain data on the salience of news about immigration we conducted a computer-assisted content analysis of the five most-read Dutch national newspapers (Bakker and Scholten, 2003): NRC Handelsblad (1990–2002), Algemeen Dagblad (1992–2002), de Volkskrant (1995–2002), Trouw (1992–2002) and the Telegraaf (1998–2002). All articles published in these newspapers are digitally available. Articles were selected using an extensive search string, containing words indicating articles dealing with immigration and integration. The search resulted in 168,240 articles for the whole period, of which 10,272 articles were excluded, because further analyses indicated these articles actually did not deal with immigration issues. Within our sample we searched for those articles mentioning economic terms in order to obtain data on the frequency of articles that deal with economic issues in an immigration frame. This search resulted in 240 articles for the whole period, of which 27 articles were excluded, because further analyses indicated these articles actually did not deal with immigration issues. Within our sample we searched for those articles mentioning economic terms in order to obtain data on the frequency of articles that deal with economic issues in an immigration frame.

Salience is operationalized by calculating a visibility score for all the articles. We interpret visibility as the chance of reading about an issue in one “unit” of reading time, (i.e. the chance that if one randomly draws one news unit from the news an average person consumes it will be about that issue). We make the assumption that

6 The specific search string used to obtain newspaper articles on immigration issues was: discrim! OR (haat w/5 aanzet) OR inburgering! OR (scholing or (cursus! OR les! OR onderwijs) w/10 (imm! OR alloch! OR asiel! OR buitenl!)) OR taalcur! OR taalles! OR taalonderw! OR gezinsherenig! OR schijnhuw! OR nephuw! OR uithuw! OR immig! OR alloch! OR asiel! OR buitenland) OR (bruid! AND buitenland) OR (grondwet w/10 artikel 7) OR importbruid OR (bruid! AND buitenland) OR (inkomenseis w/20 trouw!) OR multipliform! OR asielzoeker! OR vluchteling! OR (generaal pardon) OR pardonregeling.

7 The search string for identifying economic news was: economi! OR werk! OR arbeid!
this probability is sublinearly dependent (in this case $2\log$) on the frequency at which the issue is mentioned (see Manning and Schütze, 2002). The score is weighed by the importance $fp$ of an article (front page is weighted as 2 versus other pages as 1), and the position of search terms within the article (sublinearly, where the first occurrence in headline is weighted as 3 and in the body of the text as 1). Finally, the importance of an article is assumed to be proportional to the circulation number of the newspaper $circ(a)$, which we derived for each of the newspapers on a yearly basis from Bakker and Scholten (1999, 2003). In concrete:

$$p(issue) = \sum_{a \in \text{articles}} \text{Score}(issue|a) \cdot p(a)$$

$$= \sum_{a \in \text{articles}} \log(8f_{\text{head}}(issue,a)) + 2f_{\text{body}}(issue,a) \cdot circ(a) \cdot fp$$

where $fp$ is 2 if the article is on the front page and 1 otherwise. $\text{Score}(issue|a)$ is the visibility of an issue in an article and is defined as being proportional to $p(issue|a)$. Since we conduct linear analyses using the reading chances we need not be concerned with the constant factor that would turn the proportionality into equality.\(^8\)

The scores per article are aggregated resulting in monthly visibility scores for immigration-related issues. For months in which, because of electronic availability, not all newspapers could be analyzed, the scores are weighed to correct for this gap. The same procedure is followed when estimating the salience of economic issue in an immigration frame. Though we acknowledge the deficiencies related to the use of automatic content analysis (Althaus et al., 2001), we believe that for our purpose it presents an appropriate strategy, since we only deal with salience and not with tone or direction of the news. Prior research has shown that the intensity of reporting—as opposed to the tone of the coverage—can be measured appropriately using similar computer-assisted methods (Johnston, 2002). Furthermore, such an approach makes the analysis of large amounts of newspaper articles possible, as is desirable for studies considering media content over a long period of time.

6.2. Level of immigration, unemployment rate, and Fortuyn

The level of immigration is the monthly number of people that moved to the Netherlands. Unemployment rate is measured as the percentage of the total labor force with seasonal fluctuations removed. Data are available from the Dutch governmental statistical institute CBS from 1990 onwards. We use two dummy variables to capture the effects of the Fortuyn’s leadership, one for his entrance in the political arena as party leader of LN in November 2001 and one for his assassination in May 2002.\(^9\)

6.3. Political opportunity

Concerning party-related political opportunity variables we tested the effects of ideological positions of the mainstream right party (the Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie, VVD) and the degree of convergence in party positions between mainstream parties on this issue (Arzheimer and Carter, 2006). We draw upon data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (Budge et al., 2001) and for both variables construct a measure based on the party’s policies on multiculturalism, which is the category most closely related to the issues of immigration and integration of foreigners.

6.4. Support for anti-immigrant populist parties

Support for anti-immigrant populist parties is the percentage of people that reported intending to vote for one of the following parties when asked for their vote choice if parliamentary elections were held next Sunday. We consider the Centrumdemocraten (CD), the Centrum Partij (CP), and the Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF) as anti-immigrant populist parties. Furthermore, we regard Leefbaar Nederland (LN) during the months of Fortuyn’s party leadership. Data were made available by the opinion poll institute TNS-NIPO from 1990 until the end of 2002.\(^10\)

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\(^8\) Although there is some fluctuation in the total amount of newspaper coverage (for instance the total number of articles published per month) within a given year, the variation is comparatively small and the amount of articles per newspaper and size of the newspapers included in the analysis remain largely stable over the entire research period.

\(^9\) Though these two dummy variables are not suitable to investigate precisely what the effect of “leadership” or “charisma” is, they do point to the difference the leadership of Fortuyn allegedly made.

\(^10\) For their regularly conducted public opinion polls, TNS Nipo uses a representative sample of the Dutch population. The data have been the basis for previous studies (e.g., Kleinnijenhuis and de Ridder, 1998; Kleinnijenhuis and Fan, 1999).
6.5. Analysis

For our analysis we rely on Box–Jenkins transfer modeling (e.g., McCleary and Hay, 1980; for an example in political science see Clarke et al. (1990)). We conduct a range of analyses, step by step adding the independent variables, to not only look at the effect of the individual variables, but also at the explanatory power of the different models (Residuals Means Square) as well as their goodness of fit (Akaike Info Criterion). In the first step, we test the univariate ARIMA model. Subsequently, we successively add the Fortuyn variables (model B), immigration, unemployment and the interaction between the both (model C) and finally our media variables (model D). In the first series of analyses we take into account the period 1990–2002. Subsequently, we retest our hypotheses for the period from 1990 to June 2001, thus excluding support for LN and the LPF. This allows estimating the robustness of our results: When similar results are found for the two periods, it indicates that the established effects are stable over time and thus not contingent upon differences between the various political parties included in our dependent variable.

7. Results

Before turning to the statistical analyses we provide some descriptive information on the dynamics of the various variables. Fig. 1 displays the development of selected indicators in the Netherlands between 1990 and 2002. We see immigration levels being relatively high in the early 1990s, slightly decreasing from 1994 onwards. From 1996 until 2001 immigration is steadily on the rise again, dropping once more after 2001. Unemployment, by contrast, was about 6% in the early 1990s and steadily rose, reaching almost 8% in 1994. Thereafter, unemployment steadily decreased to below 2% in 2001, after which it somewhat increased again.

Further, we see the salience of immigration issues in newspapers increasing dramatically throughout the years. Immigration issues had a relatively low salience until late 1997 (see also Lubbers et al., 1998, p. 420; Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000, p. 104). Thereafter it slightly increased until 2001, after which there is a rather steep incline with considerable fluctuation in 2001/2002. Last, we see support for anti-immigrant populist parties peaking for the first time in the early to mid-1990s, approaching 4% in 1994. However, the much more dramatic increase took place in 2001, when within a few months support rose to approximately 16%. We now turn to the statistical analyses to test the hypotheses stated above.

A Box–Jenkins analysis can only be processed if all variables in the model have stationary means and variances. The visual representation of the anti-immigrant party support series and the accompanying statistics suggest that the level as well as the magnitude of change differ greatly over time. Therefore, we transformed the variable by logging and differencing its values (for more information see Appendix A). The autocorrelation and partial autocorrelation functions for the transformed series suggest a moving average at lag 1, which indeed has a significant coefficient in a univariate ARIMA model (see Table 1, Model 1a). The residual statistics now indicate no correlation in the residuals (Ljung–Box Q over 20 lags) and the absence of a unit-root (augmented Dickey–Fuller test) (see Table A1 in Appendix A).

Next, we model the Fortuyn leadership effect by adding two dummy variables (Table 1, Model 1b). The effects of these variables can occur gradually as well as abruptly and can be temporary as well as permanent. The analysis suggests that both variables have an abrupt and permanent effect. The entrance of Fortuyn sorts this effect immediately and causes a 225% increase in support for anti-immigrant and populist parties. The effect of the assassination of Fortuyn only takes place with a lag of 4 months and leads to a 70% decrease, undoing the entrance effect. Both dummy variables have a significant influence on the dependent variable and adding them results in a superior model compared to the univariate ARIMA model. The Residual Means Square (RMS) decreases from 43.81 to 40.06 and a slightly better model fit is indicated by the Akaike Info Criterion (AIC), thus confirming our third hypothesis about the effects of Fortuyn’s leadership.

In the third model (Table 1, Model 1c) we added the immigration level, the unemployment rate and their interaction term. We pre-whitened the independent and dependent variables using the univariate ARIMA specifications of the independent variables (see Table A1 in Appendix A) and cross-correlated the residuals of each independent variable with the residuals of the dependent variable. The analysis suggests following effects: immigration at lag 1, unemployment at lag 2 and the interaction at a lag of 7 months. Model 1c shows that all three have a significant effect on support for anti-immigrant populist parties. Hypothesis 1 is partly

11 Accordingly the independent variables in all further analysis are also logged.
12 As the dependent variable is logged, the effect of a dummy variable with a coefficient of \( e^w \) sorts a proportional increase of \((e^w - 1) \times 100\%\).
confirmed. The interaction variable has a positive influence on support, though only with a relatively long lag. Unemployment, however, shows a significant negative influence whereas no influence was expected. Hypothesis 2 is confirmed. High levels of immigration lead to higher anti-immigrant party support. Again, the explanatory value of the model improves, with the RMS decreasing from 40.06 to 34.65 and the AIC indicating a better goodness of fit. Including party-related political opportunity variables did not result in any significant effect or model improvement. As anticipated, visual inspection of the values of these variables shows that for our research period, variation over time is very limited. Also, only a very limited number of points of measurements can be taken into account, since values only change prior to and after parliamentary elections.

The last model includes the two newspaper issue salience variables. After pre-whitening, the cross-correlation function indicates most likely effects with a time lag of 3 months for news on immigration and a lag of 1 month for news on the economy in an immigration frame. The two indicators have a significant influence. The results confirm hypotheses 4a and 4b. Salience of immigration issues in the news positively influences support for anti-immigrant populism. The RMS (33.25) again decreases and the AIC indicates that this model is superior to the previous models.

In the following we present the results of our second analysis, excluding the last 18 months and thereby the presence of LN and the LPF in our time series (for more details see Table A2 in Appendix A). Accordingly, the two leadership variables are excluded. Table 2 shows that the results are very similar to those for the full period. Immigration, unemployment and the interaction between unemployment and immigration all influence the dependent variable in the same direction and at the same time lags. The independent variables add to the explanatory power of the model, with the RMS decreasing from 32.63 to 24.76 and the AIC pointing to a better goodness of fit for the model. When adding the news content variables, we again find a positive influence of the salience of immigration issues at a lag of three and of the salience of economic issues in an immigration frame at a lag of 1 month. Again, compared to the previous model we find a decrease of the RMS

13 We also assessed the impact of the monthly number of asylum applications. Including this variable in an additional model for the period for which these data were available (1991–2002), we were not able to detect an additional effect on anti-immigrant party support.

14 These additional analyses are available from the authors upon request.

Fig. 1. Immigration, unemployment, immigration news salience and support for anti-immigrant populism in the Netherlands, period 1990–2002 (monthly data).


and of the AIC. The results are identical to the ones in the previous analyses, indicating no different patterns for the different time periods.

8. Conclusion

We set out to provide evidence for the relevance and importance of taking media content into account when explaining the rise and decline of anti-immigrant populist parties. Relying upon previous work by Mazzoleni et al. (2003) and Walgrave and de Swert (2004) we expected an emphasis in news content on immigration-related issues to significantly contribute to the success of anti-immigrant populism. This was confirmed by the empirical results. We found a significant positive influence of news on vote intention for anti-immigrant parties but demonstrating a substantive relationship. Hereby we confirm findings of Walgrave and de Swert (2004), showing an influence of news media issue attention on anti-immigrant party success. We add to their results by simultaneously controlling for the impact of real-world indicators, which provides a rather rigid test of the basic proposition, and by making use of complete survey data series. We note that the impact of news media on anti-immigrant parties has been confirmed in a number of countries now, thus substantiating the relationship.

Is it sufficient to only look at the intensity of reporting rather than also to consider the tone of the coverage? We believe that certainly for the present study a pure intensity measure is adequate, since we are looking at agenda-setting effects, where traditionally tone of coverage is not considered (Dearing and Rogers, 1996). However, it could be argued that a positive tone in coverage of immigration issues would contribute to a decline in anti-immigration votes; even so when there is a lot of coverage. Yet, Lubbers et al. (1998) conclude that groups of ethnic minorities in Dutch newspapers are reported about in terms of criminalization and problematization.15 Therefore, it is

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15 Although the authors argue that different ethnic groups are covered differently in the newspapers under analysis, we contend that for our purpose the differentiation between ethnic groups is not important. Lubbers et al. (1998) show that coverage was negative most often in relation to asylum-seekers and immigrants from Morocco, Turkey, and the former Dutch colonies. Furthermore, they demonstrate that the bulk of the coverage was about just these groups of ethnic minorities. Therefore, we can assume that immigration coverage is in rather generally negative in tone.
reasonable to assume that immigration reporting oftentimes collides with negative reporting and thus increases the public’s concerns about these issues. Further research, however, should test this assumption.

To provide more conclusive evidence for the role of news content, we controlled for contextual indicators. We find a significant and positive influence of the interaction between unemployment and immigration on aggregate vote intention for a relatively long time lag of 7 months. This seems reasonable, however, since the assumption made by the interaction term is a rather complex one. The situation of a deteriorating economy has to be cognitively linked to rising immigration, which arguably takes time to get through to the people. Since a number of recent studies emphasize the role of an interaction between immigration and unemployment for right-wing party success (Golder, 2003a,b) we believe this result to be more than just a statistical artifact. We find a significant positive influence of immigration on aggregate vote intention for an anti-immigrant party in both periods under analysis and a significant negative effect of the unemployment rate.16 Fortuyn’s leadership strength affected anti-immigrant party support in the expected directions. The entrance of Fortuyn into the political arena positively contributed to support. His assassination, though with a lag of 4 months, affected support negatively. The latter indicates that it might have been the lack of strong leadership that contributed to weakening support for the LPF. This result also indicates that Fortuyn likely appealed to a great group of supporters that otherwise would not be considered as traditional anti-immigrant voters.

We believe our findings to be rather robust. First, we use monthly data for all indicators with no missing values over a considerable period of 13 years. This presents a good opportunity to test the proposed causal relationships between the variables. Second, though with minor differences, the findings in the two periods we looked at are very similar, indicating no large differences between traditional extreme-right parties (CD and CP) and the more recent phenomenon of anti-immigrant populism (LN and LPF) with regards to their support being partly dependent upon news content.

The questions whether newspaper content is exogenous or whether it is likely that external events drive both media coverage and anti-immigrant party support is an important qualification to consider. Newspapers might indeed from time to time be inclined to report about external events that simultaneously could affect anti-immigration party support. However, especially the intensity with which media cover an event is still largely based on independent editorial decisions and processes in the news production chain (i.e., news values, gatekeeping). We therefore argue that this qualification does not fundamentally alter our conclusions. After all, most people hear or read about events in the media and do not experience them directly (e.g., Mutz, 1998). In that sense, to what degree an event or an issue is considered important and consequently might have an impact on vote intention largely depends on the intensity of discussion of the event in the media. Thus, if we consider news media as an independent

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16 These main effects in presence of the interaction term need to be interpreted with some caution, since they only occur when the other variable included in the interaction term is zero. However, the negative effect of unemployment confirms the tendency shown in previous research. Knigge (1998) explains the negative relationship between unemployment and radical right support relying on a picture of a rather rational voter, who, in times of bad economic developments turns to established parties with “a solid program and record on economic issues” (Knigge, 1998, p. 270; see also Golder (2003a) and Givens (2002)).
societal actors, then we must acknowledge that the mediatisation of events and issues in terms of prominence is largely based on the media’s decision whether and how intensively to cover it.

Future research can improve upon the present study by, for instance, addressing a broader range of aspects in news content, such as attention for the parties under analysis. Further, a more sophisticated content analysis might be useful, in which not only the visibility or salience of certain issues is considered, but in which relational aspects such as support or criticism are also taken into account. Here the tone in immigration stories towards anti-immigrant parties would be interesting to look at over time. Moreover, it would be interesting to test the relations put forward here in a cross-national design, since that would allow for the inclusion of system-specific variables and for a better test of effects of party-related political opportunity structures. Finally, individual data, collected in varying information contexts, including measures of vote intention and media exposure should be used to investigate whether the aggregate relation holds at the individual level. Thereby it could be considered whether the effect of media content is immediate and direct, or whether it is (at least partly) mediated by attitudinal variables, i.e. media content positively affecting anti-immigration attitudes that in turn increase support for anti-immigrant parties. Nevertheless these possible improvements, we believe that we made an important contribution to the study of the role of news media in explaining the popularity of anti-immigrant parties.

Following Aarts and Semetko (2003) we consider the Netherlands an excellent case to study the relation between media and politics and believe that the case study presented here might very well apply to other European democracies facing similar developments. We argue that media content does have an influence in its own right, and might in times sway support for anti-immigrant parties in one or the other direction. How large the impact of news media reporting would be in other countries possibly hinges on party factors and systemic aspects. Also, there might be a difference in media impact for parties that are already more established in the countries’ party system. Still, we expect that our findings for the Netherlands and also the findings of Walgrave and de Swert (2004) for Belgium are likely to be found in other Western democracies facing the rise of anti-immigrant populist parties and we are confident that the relation between news media content and anti-immigrant party success holds also across the borders of the Benelux. To establish whether this is indeed the case, future research on explanatory factors for success of anti-immigrant, populist parties in Western democracies needs to take into account the impact of news coverage.

Appendix A

For each variable in the analysis, Table A1 shows with which ARIMA(p,d,q) model it is best represented. All variables have to be differenced once, except unemployment, which has to be differenced twice. The most common unit-root test (augmented Dickey–Fuller test) suggests no unit root after this transformation and Ljung–Box Q indicates the absence of correlation in the residuals.

Table A1
ARIMA models of the various variables, period 1990–2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>ARIMA model</th>
<th>Ljung–Box Q (20)</th>
<th>Augmented Dickey–Fuller test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Populist party support</td>
<td>(0,1,1), MA(1)</td>
<td>18.50*</td>
<td>−17.75†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News on immigration</td>
<td>(0,1,2), MA(1,2)</td>
<td>22.41*</td>
<td>−11.42†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News on economy</td>
<td>(0,0,2) (1,0,0)12, MA(1,2)</td>
<td>16.68*</td>
<td>−4.99†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>(1,1,3)(1,0,0)12, MA(2,3,7)</td>
<td>23.77*</td>
<td>−3.80†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>(0,2,3), MA(1,2,3)</td>
<td>25.47*</td>
<td>−7.52†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment × Immigration</td>
<td>(0,1,3), MA(1,2,3)</td>
<td>25.57*</td>
<td>−7.48†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asylum seekers</td>
<td>(0,1,1)(1,0,0)12, MA(1)</td>
<td>19.09*</td>
<td>−5.31†</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * indicates no correlation in residuals; † indicates absence of unit-root; ‡ created with the number of immigration and the first difference of the level of unemployment.

Table A2 again indicates for each of the variables in our first analysis with which ARIMA(p,d,q) model it is best represented. The results are very similar to the first analysis (Table A1). Again the augmented Dickey–Fuller test suggests after the applied transformation no unit root and Ljung–Box Q indicates the absence of correlation in the residuals.
Table A2
ARIMA models of the various variables, period 1990 to June 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>ARIMA model</th>
<th>Ljung–Box Q (20)</th>
<th>Augmented Dickey– Fuller test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Populist party support</td>
<td>(0,1,1), MA(1)</td>
<td>14.84*</td>
<td>-7.39‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News on immigration</td>
<td>(0,1,0)</td>
<td>25.23*</td>
<td>-10.76‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News on economy</td>
<td>(0,1,2), (1,0,1)</td>
<td>22.24*</td>
<td>-5.32‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>(1,1,2), (1,0,1)</td>
<td>21.20*</td>
<td>-4.14‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>(0,1,1), MA(2)</td>
<td>16.90*</td>
<td>-7.99‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment × immigration</td>
<td>(0,1,1), (1,0,1)</td>
<td>16.94*</td>
<td>-7.98‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asylum seekers</td>
<td>(0,1,1), MA(1)</td>
<td>18.77*</td>
<td>-11.99‡</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * indicates no correlation in residuals; ‡ indicates absence of unit-root; † created with the number of immigration and the first difference of the level of unemployment.

References


