



"Welcome" to Europe. How Media and Immigration Affect Increasing Euroscepticism

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English Summary

Since the establishment of the European Union, Europe has gone through a number of transitions. Several Treaties were signed and the EU expanded from six original member states to 28 to date. Additionally, new economic-, security- and social policies were implemented. Since the fifties the political sovereignty gradually shifted from the national to supranational level (EU). But the nineties are known as a turning point with regard to the policy areas of the EU. Where the EU's initial goals were largely economic, the focus shifted to also encompass social and cultural policy areas.

In the years after the signing of the Maastricht Treaty (1992), several social policies were implemented, which directly affected European citizenry. Ever since, Europe's role in national politics and the impact on the public has become increasingly prominent. Furthermore, the political position of the EU is still changing today.

Extant literature argues that the shift in sovereignty has made people more critical towards the EU. A large part of the European population did see EU membership as beneficial, but a growing number of people became skeptical towards the EU and its policies. Negative consequences of European policies reflected upon the European Union and ostensibly increased Euroscepticism. For Europe, the support of its citizens is crucial, as successful European integration largely depends on the support from its citizens.

This dissertation systematically observes the effects of the above-mentioned developments on attitudes towards the European Union. It covers the period between the mid 1990s up to the late 2000s.

The emphasis is on social and cultural policies, as these have become increasingly prominent since the 1990s. In four empirical chapters I aim to explain existing Euroscepticism, but also the observed trend. In other words I aim to answer the question: Why is Europe becoming more Eurosceptic?

The first chapter (chapter 2) combines the most important predictors in Euroscepticism research and compares their impact in the mid-1990s to that of the mid-2000s. The study answers the question: “Has the strength of soft and hard factors in explaining Euroscepticism changed over time?” Arguably, the change of scope of the EU during the 1990s slowly changed the perception of people regarding the EU, and created a different mental linkage in their minds. Over the course of time this has allegedly caused European citizens to judge the EU on the basis of social and identity performances (i.e., soft factors) more so than on economic, utilitarian performance (i.e., hard factors). Therefore, I pose the expectation that the explanatory power of Euroscepticism has moved from hard to soft factors between the two moments of observation. My findings reveal that there is no substantial difference in the effects in the 1990s and 2000s, and that identity has always played an important role with regard to Euroscepticism. Against expectation, the impact of soft factors has not increased between the two time points due to the increased involvement of the EU regarding socio-cultural policies.

Chapter 3 investigates the reciprocal influences between the valence of media messages and Euroscepticism. In this study, media are expected to have a prominent impact on how the public perceives the EU, as media are the primary source of information regarding the European Union. Meanwhile, media are increasingly competing for an audience and are therefore likely to select, and frame their content while taking the public tendency into consideration. Since media are more likely to report on negative trends (e.g., increased Euroscepticism) and people are more responsive to negative information, the reciprocal influences between the two domains are expected to form a 'spiral of negativity'. Causing people and media to become increasingly negative towards the EU. The results show, however, that the public is influenced mostly by negative and not by positive messages, but that this effect is not reciprocal. In other words, the media are not influenced by public opinion. This means that news media do make the public more skeptical, but this does not lead to a self-reinforcing spiral.

In chapter 4 I investigate whether individual attitudes regarding immigration are affected by Real-World Developments (such as immigrant population and immigration inflows), as well as media cues (such as issue salience and the valence of news messages). It is often argued that the size of the immigrant population has a direct effect on people's immigration attitudes. Yet, when people are asked to give an estimation of the immigrant population in their country they are rarely correct. Media are the alleged cause of this discrepancy, as media coverage was found to barely represent immigration-related Real-World Developments (RWDs). Hence, I argue that media have an important additional influence on immigration attitudes, on top of RWDs. The results indicate that immigrant inflows significantly increase negative immigration attitudes. Media attention also increases negative attitudes, while positive media coverage reduces them. The results indicate that media affect immigration attitudes above and beyond RWDs.

In the final empirical chapter (chapter 5) I combine Euroscepticism and immigration attitudes within a single study, as I investigate perceptions towards EU's policies on immigration and border control management. Although media often apply more than one frame to depict political issues, prior research commonly limits itself to the effects of single-frame messages. It is, however, fairly likely that people are exposed to more than one frame at the time. Hence, in this study I capture this complexity of framing effects by investigating the impact of multi-frame messages (MFMs) in a two-wave experiment. The focus in this study is on conflict- (when disagreement between individuals, institutions or groups is emphasized) and valence- frames (depicting or mentioning the issue in either negative or positive terms) and their effects on evaluations of EU's performance regarding immigration and border control. While conflict framing is expected to reinforce attitudes, valence framing is likely to alter people's attitudes. Therefore, I investigate whether the two frames cancel each other out or whether they still have these presumed effects when both frames are present in the same message. The results show that a stronger conflict frame causes people's attitudes to become more stable, while valence framing changes them. The latter effect weakened only slightly, but remained significant with the presence of the conflict frame.

But how do the findings of these four chapters relate to the trend of increasing Euroscepticism? In the chapters I find that individual factors, such as socioeconomic status, gender, and an extreme left-right position affect how one thinks about the European Union. In addition, the economic situation in the EU

countries also plays a role. But these factors do not change structurally between the late 1990s and two 2000s, which means they can not explain the gradual rise in Euroscepticism. To understand the rise, we need to investigate the factors that did change over this period.

One of the main findings was that negative news exerted a stronger effect on EU attitudes than positive news. A systematic increase in the amount of negative news about the EU could therefore provide an explanation for the trend. Although no growth can be observed in the amount of negative news over this time period, there is a constant dominance of negative news, which can eventually also lead to more skepticism. In addition, the number of messages on immigration gradually increased during the same period. My findings indicated that the number of reports about immigrants lead to negative attitudes towards immigration, while negative attitudes towards immigration were found to be positively correlated with negative attitudes towards Europe.

That is why news media do not only have the potential to have a direct, but also an indirect effect on Euroscepticism. But the relationship is slightly ambiguous. The effect of positive reports on attitudes towards immigration has the ability to reduce Euroscepticism, if there was a structural decline of positive immigration messages. But since our data do not show such a trend, this does not contribute to the explanation of growing Euroscepticism. Furthermore, the presence of immigrant groups appeared to have no effect on attitudes towards immigration, while the influx of immigrants exerted a small but significant effect. However, since immigration inflows were especially large in the early 1990s, this effect does not explain why there has been a gradual increase in Euroscepticism up to the late 2000s.

Overall, one can conclude from this that an increased visibility of the immigration issue in the media contributes to the explanation of growing Euroscepticism. But an even more important finding is that negative news has an effect on increasing Euroscepticism. A constant presence of predominantly negative media coverage can indeed lead to growing Euroscepticism within Europe.