

Framing, Priming or Pretreatment?

Effects of News Reports on Attitudes toward Asylum Policy during the European Refugee Crisis

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Abstract

This paper addresses the effects of news reports on attitudes toward asylum-policy during the European refugee crisis. We conducted a framing experiment in an earlier period of the crisis, and another one seven months later in Hungary where the issue was high on the political agenda in those periods. Our results support the pretreatment hypothesis about the limits to framing of salient issues (Druckman & Leeper 2012). Nonetheless, news reports influence attitudes, but the respondents' reactions to treatments reflect their political orientation, not the framing itself (see Bechtel et al. 2015). Our analysis reveals that this priming effect of news reports may also disappear after a long period of public debate.

Keywords: Asylum policy, public attitudes, issue-framing, priming, issue salience, media effect, survey-experiment, Hungary

1. Introduction

Events and issues related to the recent refugee crisis at the borders of the European Union attracted considerable media attention in several European countries in 2015 and 2016. The large number of recent asylum seekers, the even larger number of potential new arrivals, and the magnitude of the humanitarian tragedy all justified special media attention. As debates emerged over the right asylum-policies, the issue also became highly politicized in some countries.

Asylum- and immigration policies have several conflicting aspects. This has been particularly true for those policies in the recent European refugee crisis. Therefore one may hypothesize that media framing could play a role in shaping public opinion on asylum policy in this period. Nonetheless, due to the politicization of the issue, one may also assume that political orientation could also influence attitudes.

Hungary can be considered as an intriguing case of the political reactions to and the media coverage of the crisis (Simonovits & Bernát 2016, Bernáth & Messing 2016). Its southern border is partly an external border of the European Union, and asylum policy became the most important issue in public discourse for a year and a half here. The Hungarian government was very active, launching a political campaign around migration. In particular, political actors related to the government presented the refugee crisis as an issue about mass immigration and a major threat to the Hungarian economy and society (Bernáth & Messing 2016).

This paper presents the findings of two survey experiments about the effects of news reports on Hungarian voters' attitudes towards asylum policy during this period. The first study was carried out in the first year of the crisis; the second one was conducted seven month later. Respondents in the treatment groups read one of two short newspaper articles about the current refugee crisis, before answering questions regarding the right policy to cope with asylum seekers. One article emphasized the suffering of asylum seekers, while mass immigration was presented as a problematic issue in the other one.

Framing theory and experimental evidence suggest that opinions about policy issues may depend on how the issue is presented. In particular, earlier experimental research has shown that issue-framing strongly affects attitudes towards asylum seekers, immigrants and immigration policies (e.g. Blinder and Jeannet 2014, Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015, Harell et al. 2012, Igartua and Cheng 2009, Igartua et al. 2011, Iyengar et al. 2013, Ostfeld 2016, Sarrasin et al. 2015, Simonovits 2012, Turper et al. 2015).

However, studies on the framing of salient issues warn about the pretreatment effect: public discourse can shape and also stabilize opinions that eventually become resistant to laboratory framing (Druckman & Leeper 2012). That is, as real world media effects become stronger, the experimental measurement of those effects eventually becomes harder and harder.

Investigating attitudes toward immigration policy during a political campaign, Bechtel et al. (2015) point to an interesting mechanism: respondents' reactions to treatments reflect their political orientation, not the framing itself. We interpret this as a kind of priming effect, stemming from the politicization of the issue.

In our surveys, we test the above three hypotheses. In both of our studies, results support the pretreatment hypothesis about the limits to framing of salient issues (Druckman & Leeper 2012). Nonetheless, news reports influence attitudes in the first study, but frames do not matter. Instead, opinion shifts in the two treatment groups depend on the respondents' political orientation (see Bechtel et al. 2015). However, our analysis of the second study reveals that this priming effect of news reports may also disappear after a long period of public debate.

In the next section, we summarize the most relevant developments of the refugee crisis in Hungary in the months before and during our surveys. We present a short literature review and put forward our hypotheses afterwards. Data and method are presented in Section 4, findings are presented in Section 5. The last section concludes.

2. The refugee crisis in Hungary

Around 400,000 asylum seekers crossed the Hungarian border in 2015 (Simonovits and Bernát 2016: 7). More than fifty percent of them came from Syria. In some periods of the Summer, around 3000 migrants crossed the border every day. Note that virtually all of them intended to leave the country and headed mainly for Germany or Sweden.

A flow of migrants of this size could surely justify active government intervention and special media attention. However, the Hungarian government started to focus on the issue much before the peak of the arrivals in Summer. The prime minister first voiced his concerns about immigration at a memorial event in January, just after the terrorist attack against the editorial office of Charlie Hebdo in Paris. In his statement, he connected economic immigration to terrorism (Rettman 2015). In the subsequent weeks, government politicians started to talk regularly about the perils of immigration. Political actors related to the government presented and interpreted the refugee crisis as a major threat to the Hungarian economy and society (Bernáth and Messing 2016). In particular, they depicted asylum seekers as economic migrants who intend to settle in Hungary,¹ and connected the issue of immigration to the problem of terrorism.

In May 2015, the government organized a mail survey called 'National Consultation' and sent its questionnaire to every household in the country. The survey asked voters about their opinion on immigration. The structure and wording of the questionnaire strongly connected immigration to terrorism, and referred to all types of asylum seekers as economic immigrants. At the same time, an advertising campaign included a large number of street posters and commercials addressed „immigrants” who „do not have the right to take the Hungarians' jobs” and „should abide by the law” (Thorpe 2015). Meanwhile, just after the wave of asylum seekers crossing the borders

¹ The share of foreign-born people in the Hungarian population is not particularly low (5%), but most of the immigrants are ethnic Hungarians who came from neighbouring countries (Eurostat 2016).

had reached its peak in June, the government announced the building of a long fence along the Southern border of Hungary (BBC News 2015a, 2015c).

In late August, a crisis situation emerged in a major railway station in the capital after policemen had refused to allow migrants to get on trains heading to Germany (BBC News 2015b). In mid September, new, stricter border rules were introduced with some promises to those entering the country legally. However, misunderstandings soon developed into a violent conflict between a group of migrants trapped in a no man's land and Hungarian policemen at a Southern border station (BBC News 2015c). Those events were followed by a relatively silent period up until February 2016. Then, the Hungarian prime minister announced the government's intention to propose a referendum on the EU Commission's proposal about refugee quotas to distribute asylum seekers among member states (BBC News 2016). The new proposal re-intensified the debate about asylum seekers in Hungary. Note that only a handful of migrants crossed the Hungarian border in this latter period. The intensive political campaign in the run-up to the referendum started in mid-Summer of 2016, after our second survey had been conducted.

3. Theory, empirical evidence and hypotheses

The short-term effects of individual news reports: The classical approach

In political research, the concept of framing refers to a process in which presentation of issues in elite discourse and media coverage influence public opinion. Communication theorists prefer to use the term in a narrow sense in studies on political attitudes. In this narrow sense, "framing effects refer to behavioral or attitudinal outcomes that are not due to differences in *what* is being communicated, but rather to variations in *how* a given piece of information is being presented (or framed) in public discourse." (Scheufele and Iyengar 2012, p.1; emphasis in the original). On the other hand, sociologists prefer to use a more encompassing definition, according to which the frame is "a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events" by highlighting certain aspects of an issue rather than some other aspects (Gamson and Modigliani 1987: 143). In our research, we apply the latter definition, and follow the tradition which refers to this process as issue-framing (Slothuus 2008).

Earlier experimental research has shown that issue-framing can strongly affect attitudes towards asylum seekers and immigrants, and preferences on immigration policies (e.g. Blinder and Jeannet 2014, Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015, Harell et al. 2012, Igartua and Cheng 2009, Igartua et al. 2011, Iyengar et al. 2013, Ostfeld 2016, Sarrasin et al. 2015, Simonovits 2012, Turper et al. 2015). Based on the accumulating evidence and the above theoretical considerations, one might expect that news frames could significantly influence respondents' revealed attitudes and preferences. That is, large enough differences between the framing of various versions of the vignettes might induce significant differences between the distributions of responses in different

treatment groups. This is our first hypothesis (H1) that relies on the classical approach to framing experiments.

Note, however, that the active communication campaign of the government and the media hype around the issue (see Section 2) might have limited the independent influence of additional news reports. Our investigation addresses the potential opportunities for and constraints of framing effects of individual news reports in such a special context.

The pretreatment effect suppressing the experimental effect

The investigation of the social context around the experiments is at the core of this study. Nevertheless, it is common sense that researchers conducting experiments on the influence of media contents on attitudes should not ignore the real-world media effects subjects have been exposed to prior to the experiment (Druckman and Leeper 2012). As a matter of fact, however, these kinds of real-world effects have long been considered by experimental researchers of media effects as disturbing external noises which could limit the validity of the findings of the experiments. What is more, the effects of real world media discourses are often ignored in publications of experimental media research (Einstein and Glick 2015).

Nonetheless, some recent studies have focused their attention on the moderating effect public discourse on experimental manipulations. This moderating influence is called pretreatment effect. The first important observation about pretreatment was that experimental effects could be diminished if the manipulation is related to a salient issue (Druckman and Leeper 2012, Lecherer et al. 2009; see also Einstein and Glick 2015, in the context of immigration: Bechtel et al. 2015). Nonetheless, this new line of research is still in its infancy and there are not too many findings on pretreatment effects in framing experiments.

Investigation of pretreatment effects poses a challenge for experimentalists. With the inclusion of real-world effects in the experimental design, all the problems of observational studies come into the picture. For instance, difficulties of replication and dilemmas of generalization soon arise, since no two media hypes or political campaigns are alike. However, the investigation of influences of media contents in the context of outside media noise is important because real-world media reports mostly shape real-world public opinion when there is a media hype around the issue in question. It is an open question whether one could generalize from findings in pretreatment-free experiments to real-world media effects during an intensive campaign.

Based on the first findings of explicit investigations of pretreatment effects, one might expect that treatment effects are significantly weakened or even disappear during a period of intensive media discourse. This is the second hypothesis (H2) to test in our studies. H2 is not only about the feasibility of media effect experiments. If those experiments have external validity, then pretreatment effect has implications for real world media consumption as well. Namely, it means that after a period of intensive media campaign, additional new reports may have diminished influences on the audience.

The interaction between the effects of treatments and political orientation

Issues related to immigrants and immigration were regularly on the political agenda in many countries across Europe much before the recent refugee crisis (Ruedin et al. 2013). This is not surprising since many people in many societies interact with immigrants or descendants of earlier migrants, and migrants themselves are or would be voters in many democracies. Moreover, immigration has become a symbolic issue for many voters whose everyday life is hardly affected by immigrants. As we have shown (see Section 2), immigration also has been in the spotlight in Hungary in the past two years.

It is a common (albeit not universal) tendency in contemporary democracies that right leaning voters tend to be more hostile towards immigrants and immigration than centrist ones who, in turn, are more hostile than left leaning ones (Ceobanu and Escandell 2010). This is the case in Hungary as well (see Sik 2016).

Political orientation is important for us because it could interact with the reactions to framing treatments. Bechtel et al. (2015) investigate how the effects of political orientation and frames interact in shaping attitudes towards immigration in the run-up to a referendum on the issue in Switzerland. In their experiment, respondents reacted to vignettes presenting the issue but, irrespective of the frames and cues presented, simply by increasing support for the position in line with their party affiliation. That is, they show that pretreatment effects could do more than simply suppressing the influences of experimental manipulation in the laboratory and new media reports in the field (see also Ciuk and Yost 2016 for an investigation of other nuances).

Unlike Bechtel et al. (2015), we interpret this association as a result of a priming effect. We hypothesize that an individual news report, while highlighting certain aspects of an issue, could also highlight the memories of recent discourses on this issue. However, the activation might also affect those aspects which are not highlighted in the report. In this case, one might expect that those experimental treatments which highlight the memories of a recent discourse may influence attitudes irrespective of the particular aspects highlighted. Hence, different frames could have similar impacts on opinions. Since voters tend to evaluate arguments in public discourse in the light of their political views, we hypothesize that the priming effect of news frame treatment depends on respondents' political orientations. This is the third hypothesis (H3) to test in our experiments.

Note that if many respondents tend to recall the main elements of a salient discourse from memory even without reading a news report about it, then the process described in H2 could be in effect: experimental treatment effects are significantly weakened or even disappear.

4. Data and methods

We conducted two survey experiments on media effects in 2015 and 2016. We contracted an online polling firm (Kutatocentrum) to carry out survey-experiments on population samples. The first

survey was conducted in December 2015 on a quota sample of 500 adult internet users. The second survey was completed in a two week period in June and July 2016 on an online quota sample of 1000 respondents.

Target variable and treatments

The dependent variable is a question about legal asylum seekers. Respondents had to choose one of six options they suggest the government should do about legal asylum seekers arriving from a war zone. In the statistical analyses, three response categories of the dependent variable are distinguished: 1) expel them immediately, 2) give them short term shelter and, , 3) grant asylum for them.

We use the vignette technique which is a survey experiment method. I manipulated news-frames and wording² using a between-subject factorial design. We cooperated with the largest Hungarian online newspaper (Index.hu) to select real-world articles and discuss the limits, opportunities and responsibilities of journalism in such a situation. In the first study, we compiled 2000 character-long excerpts of two articles published in the above-mentioned newspaper. The articles were a few months old at the time of the survey but both of them were still relevant when respondents read them. The first one reports the situation in Turkey, next to the Syrian border, and tries to find the motivation of those leaving their homes. The second one is a summary of an EU summit in which leading politicians expressed hostile or at least cautious approach to the new wave of migrants. In the second study, on the other hand, two fictitious reports were compiled of news-related to events in that period. Both of them talk about the low number of current arrivals and a potentially larger number of new arrivals, from Syria in particular. The first one concentrates on the reasons to leave Syria and the humanitarian catastrophes on the Mediterranean Sea. The second one, on the other hand, focuses on the burden new waves of migrants would pose on Europe.

The very last sentence in each article serves as an attention check (see Oppenheimer et al. 2009), which is also a call for more attention for those passing the test (Hauser and Schwarz 2015). More than sixty percent of the respondents failed this test in the experiments. This rate is higher than the ones reported in some earlier studies using such types of attention check (e.g. Oppenheimer et al. 2009). However, those passing the test responded only slightly differently than those who failed. And, as we will see, many of those who failed the test reacted to the news-frames presented to them.

Explanatory models

There has been a discussion in the methodological literature about the adoption of multiple regression models with socio-demographic controls for analysing the effects of experimental manipulations (Freedman 2008, Lin 2013). The major justification for simple two-way comparisons is a proper randomization process in experiments. However, it was hard to exclude or control for treatment-dependent non-response bias in our online surveys. This is the main reason

² See XXXX for the analysis of wording effects.

to use multivariate regression models for testing our hypotheses. Nonetheless, this choice does not change our qualitative findings.

First, we looked at generalized ordered logit models to test our hypotheses (Williams 2006, 2016). Remember that the dependent variable has three response categories. By using this method we can distinguish between effects of covariates on choosing the first category (vs. the second and third one) on the one hand, and choosing the third one (vs. the first and second one) on the other. Tests for parallel lines assumptions of the ordered logit model failed to show significant differences between the parameters in the two binary logistic regression models (the model of the binary choice of the lowest category vs. the rest, and the model of the choice of highest category vs. the rest). Still, we think that important pieces of substantive information remain hidden if we use ordered logit models. Hence, we decided to estimate two binary regression models for each test instead of an ordered one. Our conclusions do not change in this way but the reader can see in each case that whether decisions about asylum or the ones about immediate expulsion tend to drive the estimated associations between the dependent variable and the covariates.

Second, we compared the average marginal effects in binary logistic models to the ones in corresponding linear probability models (LPM, based on OLS estimates). The parameters and p values are very similar in the two types of models, and we did not find any difference in our conclusions regarding significance and effect sizes. Therefore we present LPM-OLS estimates of binary choices in this paper. Comparability of parameters, moreover the interpretability of interaction effects and R^2 s are all better in LPM.

Political attitudes are measured in two ways: position on the left-right scale on the one hand, and the satisfaction with the government on the other. In the explanatory models we distinguished left-wing opponents of the current government from the rest of the sample. This distinction is justified by the differences in attitudes toward asylum policy (in the non-treated groups of the two studies): while left-wing opposition voters are distinctive with their strong support for asylum and opposition to expulsion, other sub-groups of voters³ are more or less similar to one another in this respect.

Some control variables are also included in the empirical models. Namely, we control for media use, age, gender, education, place of residence, labor market status, household income and foreign friends.

³ Namely, right wing opponents of the government, right wing pro-government voters, centrist (and leftist) pro-government voters, and centrist opponents of the government.

5. Results

In both of our studies, we asked our respondents how should the Hungarian government deal with legal asylum seekers who crossed the Hungarian border. 28% of the respondents support to grant them asylum in the first study, and 31% support it in the second study. On the other hand, 17% and 15% of the respondents would prefer to deport them immediately in the two studies, respectively (the rest of the respondents suggest to give short-term shelter). Note that those data are drawn from online quota samples, and are not necessarily representative of the Hungarian population. What is important, however, is that there is enough variance in policy preferences (as there are ones in major socioeconomic characteristics) in the samples.

Study 1

Our results show that there are no significant differences between the distributions of responses in the two news-frame conditions. (Table 1). That is, our data does not support the hypothesis about the context-free effect of framing on policy attitudes. Nonetheless, our model estimates that it is a bit *less* likely to grant asylum in the positive than in the negative news frame condition ($p=.17$). Political orientation, on the other hand seems to play an important role in how to form opinion after reading a news report (especially, when it comes to the decision about granting asylum (see Table 1).

Table 1. Effects of news frame and political orientation on attitudes towards asylum policy in the treated groups of Study 1 (LPM-OLS estimates).

<i>What to do with asylum-seekers?</i> (options: expel, shelter, asylum)	<i>Model 1</i>				<i>Model 2</i>			
	<i>y=1: not to expel</i>				<i>y=1: grant asylum</i>			
VARIABLES	LPM coeff.	p value	95% confidence intervals		LPM coeff.	p value	95% confidence intervals	
<i>(Reference: negative news frame condition & pro-govt., centrist or right wing voter)</i>								
Left-wing opposition voter	.12	.03	.01	.22	.32	.00	.21	.43
Positive news frame	.02	.58	-.06	.10	-.06	.17	-.14	.03
Observations	389				389			
R-squared	.10				.21			
Controls	YES				YES			

Dependent: What should the government do with *refugees/immigrants* applying for asylum who came from a war zone and arrived legally?

However, responses in the control group differ significantly from those in the treatment groups. Both positive and negative news frames *decrease* the level of support for long term care for asylum-seekers. This finding is in contrast with expectations based on the pretreatment-effect

hypothesis. Point estimates of the effect sizes are very similar in the positive and negative frame treatments (see S...).

To test H2 directly, we distinguish the left-wing opponents of the right-wing government from the rest of the sample. Table 2 shows the tests of H2. Our results show that right-wing or centrist and/or pro-government voters react negatively to news reports. According to the LPM point estimates, left-wing opposition voters' opinions do not shift in the same direction in the news frame condition. This is more or less in line with what Bechtel et al (2015) found and we explicated in H2 (note that not all the parameters are significant statistically).

Table 2. Effects of news frame and political orientation on attitudes towards asylum policy in Study 1 (LPM-OLS estimates).

<i>What to do with asylum-seekers? (options: expel, shelter, asylum)</i>	<i>Model 1</i>				<i>Model 2</i>			
	<i>y=1: not to expel</i>				<i>y=1: grant asylum</i>			
VARIABLES	LPM coeff.	p value	95% confidence intervals		LPM coeff.	p value	95% confidence intervals	
<i>(Reference: control group & pro-govt., centrist or right wing voter)</i>								
Left-wing opposition voter (control gr.)	-.07	.54	-.27	.14	.20	.09	-.03	.43
News frame condition (right or centrist)	-.11	.04	-.21	-.00	-.12	.04	-.24	-.00
News frame # Left-wing opposition	.18	.11	-.04	.41	.12	.35	-.13	.38
Observations	465				465			
R-squared	.09				.19			
Controls	YES				YES			

Dependent: What should the government do with *refugees/immigrants* applying for asylum who came from a war zone and arrived legally?

Study 2

Similarly to Study 1, the results of the second study also show that there is no difference between the distributions of responses in the two news-frame conditions. In the model without controls, there are small negative effects of the two news frame treatments, but those effects disappear as controls are included. Hence, we can conclude that the evidence provided by our experiment is in contrast with the first hypothesis based on classical framing theory.

Our data in Study 2 do not support H2 about the diverging reactions to news frames among right-wing and centrist vs. left-wing opposition voters either (Table 3). There are no significant differences between policy attitudes in the control group and the news frame conditions. It seems that by this later period of the crisis (and the political campaign conducted by the government), even this priming effect was “pretreated”. One can see that political orientation has a large effect on decision already in the control group – especially when it comes to the choice about granting

asylum. Trying to make the issue more salient by presenting a news report does not increase the difference between left and right wing voters.

Table 3. Effects of news frame and political orientation on attitudes towards asylum policy in Study 2 (LPM-OLS estimates).

<i>What to do with asylum-seekers?</i> (options: expel, shelter, asylum)	<i>Model 1</i>				<i>Model 2</i>				
	<i>y=1: not to expel</i>				<i>y=1: grant asylum</i>				
VARIABLES	LPM coeff.	p value	95% confidence intervals	LPM coeff.	p value	95% confidence intervals	LPM coeff.	p value	95% confidence intervals
<i>(Reference: control group & pro-govt., centrist or right wing voter)</i>									
Left-wing opposition voter (control gr.)	.12	.00	.04 .20	.29	.00	.19 .38			
News frame condition (right or centrist)	-.02	.44	-.07 .03	.00	.97	-.06 .07			
News frame # Left-wing opposition	-.03	.54	-.14 .08	-.04	.60	-.17 .10			
Observations	938			938					
R-squared	.05			.16					
Controls	YES			YES					

Dependent: What should the government do with *refugees/immigrants* applying for asylum who came from a war zone and arrived legally?

Comparing Study 1 and 2

We can also investigate pretreatment effects by comparing treatment effects in Study 1 and Study 2. Since there is no difference between the two framing conditions in Study 1, our investigation should be restricted to the dynamics of priming effect of salience (explicated in H2). Table 2 already shows that this priming effect disappears by the time of the second study. Table 4 presents the direct tests of this process. The LPM estimates indicate that the negative effect of news reports is almost completely suppressed in Study 2. Opinions in the news frame condition of the first study correspond to the opinions of the control group of the second study. In other words, it seems that the issue had become salient with the help of experimental treatment in the earlier period of the crisis, but was salient enough without experimental treatment by the time of the second survey.

Comparing the control groups of the two studies, our models estimate that the effect of political orientation was increasing by the latter period of the crisis and campaign. Nonetheless, the changes of those effects are not statistically significant (though the effect sizes are not small).

Table 4. Effects of news frame and political orientation on attitudes towards asylum policy: comparing Study 1 and Study 2 (LPM-OLS estimates).

<i>What to do with asylum-seekers?</i> (options: expel, shelter, asylum)	<i>Model 1</i>				<i>Model 2</i>			
	<i>y=1: not to expel</i>				<i>y=1: grant asylum</i>			
VARIABLES	LPM coeff.	p value	95% confidence intervals		LPM coeff.	p value	95% confidence intervals	
<i>(Reference: control group & pro-govt., centrist or right wing voter in Study 1)</i>								
Left-wing opposition voter	.10	.00	.05	.15	.28	.00	.22	.33
Study 2 (control group)	-.04	.40	-.13	.05	-.10	.07	-.20	.01
News frame (in Study 1)	-.07	.15	-.15	.02	-.10	.05	-.21	.00
Study 2 # News frame	.04	.44	-.06	.14	.09	.12	-.02	.21
Observations	1,403				1,403			
R-squared	.05				.16			
Controls	YES				YES			

Dependent: What should the government do with *refugees/immigrants* applying for asylum who came from a war zone and arrived legally?

In sum, our data indicates that recent public discourse can moderate the (short-term) effects of individual news reports on a more or less salient issue. In an earlier period of the political and media campaign, news frames activated contrasting considerations related to the refugee crisis. In a later period of the campaign, opinions seemed to be fairly stabilized so issue framing hardly could influence attitudes.

Conclusions

An unprecedented large number of asylum seekers have crossed the borders of the European Union in the years of 2015 and 2016. Not surprisingly, this wave of migration have attracted considerable media attention and prompted strong reactions from political actors in some European countries. Nonetheless, everyday life of the vast majority of Europeans is hardly affected by the new asylum seekers. However, immigration has become a symbolic issue for many voters, irrespective of their direct contact with immigrants. One might argue that the refugee crisis, along with a series of terrorist attacks in Western Europe will have consequences not only on asylum policies, but also on attitudes towards immigration in general and even on the perspectives of multiculturalism in Europe. Hence, the responsibility of news media in this case may have been stronger than in many other domestic and foreign policy issues.

When it comes to the media hype around the new migration wave and the political reactions to the events, Hungary can be considered as an intriguing case of the crisis. Immigration is a virtual

issue in Hungary. Asylum seekers have left the country as fast as they could. Still, the refugee crisis, framed as an immigration problem has been *the* central topic of public discourse in 2015 and 2016. Hence, developments in Hungary could have shown the limits and opportunities of media framing under extreme conditions.

We were interested in the role that issue-framing of mediareports about the refugee crisis could play in forming attitudes towards asylum seekers at times when the issue is in the spotlight. We focused on the potential effects of single news reports. A series of online survey experiments on population samples was carried out in 2015 and 2016. Respondents in the treatment groups first read a newspaper article about the current refugee crisis, and answered questions regarding the right policy to cope with asylum seekers afterwards.

Our data shows that political orientation is an important determinant of attitudes towards asylum seekers. On the other hand, our experiments indicate that the effects of news frames of individual reports are fairly limited in this context. If there is a significant impact of reading a news article on revealed attitudes, it is independent of the particular news frame presented. That is, raising the issue that matters in itself, and not how it is presented. The results point to the political elite's capacity to frame issues, and the limits of news reporting to reframe issues in the context of heated political debate (c.f. Bechtel et al. 2015, Druckman and Jacobs 2015).

The Online Supplement is available here:

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