

## Abstract

This monograph investigates the politicisation and framing of immigrants and refugees in the political and media arenas in two Central and Eastern European countries – Czechia and Slovakia – in the period surrounding the “2015-2016 European migrant crisis”. Immigration today constitutes one of the main challenges that politicians must handle. Immigration has a considerable impact on the political agendas of governments around the world. Recently, conflicts over immigration have become salient in the Brexit referendum as well as in national elections in many countries. Nevertheless, until recently immigration has been practically invisible as an issue in the socio-political debates in most Central and Eastern European countries. This has changed following the outbreak of the “2015-2016 European migrant crisis”. Following its outbreak immigration became a key issue in political competition as well as wider societal debates. Against this backdrop, this volume sets out to examine how immigrants and refugees were debated in the political and media arenas in the two selected Central and Eastern European countries with the use of politicisation and framing theories. In doing so, it covers the period between October 2013 and October 2017 so that a sufficiently long period, including phases both before and after the “crisis,” would be covered, as we know that crises may alter established practices and trends in debates surrounding particular issues.

The volume opens by providing background information vis-à-vis the research aims and identifies gaps in the existing relevant research that the volume aims to fill. The first chapter identifies especially the following research gaps: (a) the existing research mostly investigates a single event or a short period of time ranging from several weeks to several months, (b) the previous research is almost exclusively focused on Western European countries, and leaves out Central and Eastern European countries, (c) many previous studies focus only on a limited number of print media outlets or a combination of broadsheet newspapers and public-service TV broadcasters, and leave out tabloid newspapers and commercial TV channels in particular, or leave out TV channels altogether, and (d) an overwhelming majority of the studies do not differentiate between various categories of immigrants based on their legal status, religious background, and/ or country of origin although the existing research shows that different categories of immigrants are represented differently. The monograph sets out to address all these, as well as other, shortcomings of prior research. The introductory chapter also justifies the selection of all the main print and audiovisual news outlets and plenary speeches as fruitful venues for investigating politicisation and framing of immigrants and refugees. To provide the

necessary background information, the second chapter also briefly discusses (the history of) the politics, policies, and public opinion regarding immigration in Czechia and Slovakia. Before discussing the main body of the research findings, the monograph discusses the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological issues related to its research goals. In doing so, it especially elaborates on its understanding of politicisation and framing theories and how they will be specifically applied to achieve the formulated research aims. Besides theoretical and conceptual issues, the third chapter also discusses the methodological foundations of the monograph: the book mainly relies on quantitative content analysis, descriptive statistics, and regression analysis as methodological approaches.

The volume then goes on to provide the main research results. First, it discusses the descriptive aspects of politicisation of immigrants in media (news media items) and political arenas (plenary speeches). In a nutshell, it shows that immigrants were only politicised to a highly limited extent before the advent of the “crisis” in both the political and media arenas. However, with the outbreak of the “crisis”, immigration became heavily politicised in both countries’ plenary debates and media. The post-crisis year of 2017 saw a substantial decline of politicisation of immigration in the two countries’ media and political arenas. Nevertheless, even after this decline, the politicisation of immigration remained above the pre-crisis levels, and it thus appears that the crisis induced a longer-lasting politicisation of immigration.

Second, the volume accounts for the identified trends and the variation of the politicisation of immigrants and refugees using inferential statistics. It shows, among other things, how politicisation of immigrants is positively associated with ‘triggering’ real-world developments. An increased politicisation of immigration is evident following humanitarian incidents, while no relationship with politicisation of immigration is found in cases of occurrences of terrorist attacks (at least not in the media arena). The volume also does not find a link between institutionalised political events (European Council summits and national elections) and politicisation of immigration. To a certain extent, politicisation of immigration also follows real-world immigration statistics. While asylum statistics measured at the country-level are not associated with politicisation of immigrants, their politicisation is linked with the number of asylum applications lodged and the number of detected illegal border crossings detected across the EU-28. For the political arena, the volume also shows that it is primarily the radical right parties which politicise immigration, although some other party-political characteristics (such as party Euroscepticism) play a role in accounting for the politicisation of immigrants and refugees.

Next, the volume also presents the findings regarding framing of immigrants. I show that five main frames were employed in this case: the security, cultural, economic, administrative, and humanitarian frame. The book shows how certain frames were more salient than others and identifies several national, outlet-specific, and party-specific trends in the framing of immigrants. It thus shows that the security, administrative, cultural, and economic frames were the most salient during the investigated period, while the humanitarian frame was significantly less salient. All the frames except for the humanitarian frame were predominantly employed in a negative manner, highlighting the costs and negative aspects of immigration related to each frame rather than its contribution and positive aspects. In particular, the portrayals of immigrants in media and political debates were becoming more preoccupied with (negative) security, cultural and administrative aspects of immigration as the crisis progressed, and this was particularly the case following the proposal for the EU refugee relocation scheme. In contrast, the humanitarian perspective was gradually disappearing since the second half of 2015. The crisis therefore had a significant effect regarding the negative securitisation and culturalisation of immigrants and their presentation in governance and managerialist terms in both countries.

The volume also shows that framing of immigrants is highly associated with evolving events and real-world immigration statistics. Media as well as politicians respond to what happens in the world regarding immigration by altering the framing repertoire to make sense of immigration and by making particular frames more prominent after certain events. For instance, the periods following terrorist attacks on European soil are generally positively associated with an increased likelihood of security, cultural, and administrative frames being used. The periods following humanitarian incidents are positively associated with the salience of humanitarian framing and negatively associated with the salience of cultural and security frames. The institutionalised political events included in the analyses (i.e., European Council summits and national elections) are not associated with the changes in the salience of framing of immigrants. The volume also shows how the salience of immigrant-related frames in media is related to real-world immigration statistics. While asylum statistics measured at the country-level are not associated with the salience of immigrant-related frames, media respond to the number of asylum applications lodged and the number of illegal border crossings detected across the EU-28. For example, a higher number of asylum applications and detected illegal border crossings in the EU-28 is related to an increased salience of the (negatively valenced) security, cultural, and administrative frames.

Framing of immigrants also substantially varies based on the explicitly mentioned characteristics of immigrants in immigrant-related news items and plenary speeches. Explicit references to the immigrants having an origin in the MENA region are often associated with more frequent use of the (negative) security, cultural and administrative frames. In contrast, references to the immigrants having an origin in (non-EU) Eastern Europe are linked with an increase of (both positive and negative) economic and (positive) humanitarian framing. In terms of the immigrants' religious background, direct references to a Muslim religious background are associated with a more frequent use of the (negative) security, cultural, and administrative frame. They are also linked with a negative framing based on humanitarian grounds in which the humanitarian duty and the suffering of immigrants are rejected. In contrast, references to religious backgrounds other than Muslim are linked with an increased use of positive humanitarian framing, in which immigrants are understood as deserving help and compassion, as well as with a more common use of positive cultural framing (in the case of the political arena) and a less common use of negatively valenced cultural framing (in the media arena). Last but not least, the volume shows how framing of immigrants in the political arena is largely structured by traditional political party characteristics. It shows that two conflict dimensions, the socio-cultural, and the European integration dimension, significantly structure the party competition over immigrants. In doing so, the book shows that political competitions in Central and Eastern Europe, or at least in Czechia and Slovakia, are not necessarily as unstructured as some prior arguments hold. The monograph is concluded by a discussion of the implications of the extant findings vis-à-vis the different strands of the existing literature it aims to speak to.