Television and anti-immigrant sentiments. The mediating role of fear of crime and perceived ethnic diversity.

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Accepted for publication in European Societies: 10.1080/14616696.2017.1290264.

Abstract

Previous research has established a correlation between fear of crime and anti-immigrant sentiments. In this paper, we explore the role of television in explaining individual differences in fear of crime, perceived ethnic diversity and anti-immigrant sentiments. We use the ‘Social Cohesion Indicators in Flanders’ data, a representative survey in the Flemish region of Belgium, combined with real life indicators of ethnic diversity and crime at the community level. Results of a multilevel structural equation model suggest that watching television is positively associated with fear of crime and perceived ethnic diversity, which in turn is associated with anti-immigrant sentiments. Preference for public television is, however, associated with lower anti-immigrant sentiments, perceived ethnic diversity and fear of crime levels. Real crime and ethnic diversity levels are only weakly related to anti-immigrant sentiments. We conclude that especially perceptions are important in influencing anti-immigrant sentiments and that television use is associated with these perceptions.

Key words: Television, Anti-immigrant Sentiments, Fear of Crime, Crime, Perceived Ethnic Diversity

1. Introduction

As the ethnic composition of Western societies is becoming increasingly diverse, the immigration issue has moved toward the center of political debate (Kriesi et al. 2012). The anti-immigrant rhetoric of radical right-wing parties associates immigrants with social disorder and crime (Rydgren 2008). The mass media could also contribute to perceived associations between ethnic diversity, fear of crime and anti-immigrant sentiments, as immigration is increasingly framed from a criminal threat perspective (Fryberg et al., 2012; Lawlor, 2015). Moreover, the high prominence of immigration issues in news is associated with increased public scrutiny of immigration figures and policies, as well as with an overestimation of immigration statistics (Dunaway, Branton, Abrajano, & Diego, 2010). There is not much research, however, on the mechanisms through which television can impact anti-immigrant sentiments. In this study, relying on threat theory, we investigate the association between television consumption and anti-immigrant sentiments, and the extent to which perceived ethnic diversity and fear of crime mediate this relation.

We complement previous research by offering several important additions. First, we evaluate both direct and indirect effects of television viewing on anti-immigrant sentiments. Second, we take into account potential confounding factors (e.g. audience traits, neighborhood characteristics, the type of television exposure). As such, we can ascertain whether the correlation between television viewing and attitudes is robust, and holds while controlling for real-life data on crime and ethnic diversity. This allows us to determine what matters most in explaining anti-immigrant sentiments: objective conditions, or perceptions of threat and diversity? We extend recent work suggesting that especially perceptions are important in this regard (Hooghe & de Vroome, 2015; Raijman & Semyonov, 2004) by determining how television consumption might affect these perceptions. Third, we explicitly bring in fear of crime as an important element underlying anti-immigrant sentiments. This factor has been

understudied in Western European contexts as most research investigating anti-immigrant sentiment focused on economic and cultural threat (Citrin, Green, Muste, & Wong, 1997; Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2010), neglecting the role of fear of crime and (perceived) overrepresentation of immigrants in criminal acts (Dinas & van Spanje, 2011; Fitzgerald, Curtis, & Corliss, 2011).

Threat theory and anti-immigrant sentiments

The available research in intergroup relations has offered compelling evidence that anti-immigrant sentiments are largely driven by feelings of threat. Intergroup threat, as reviewed by Riek, Mania and Gaertner (2006, p. 336), can be defined as the threat experienced ‘when one group’s actions, beliefs or characteristics challenge the goal attainment or well-being of another group’. Threats can take many shapes. Generally, when assessing anti-immigrant sentiments, research in Western Europe has primarily focused on economic and cultural sources of threat (Citrin et al., 1997; Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2010; Raijman & Semyonov, 2004; Schneider, 2008). However, other sources have been identified too. Some studies have emphasized contextual factors, such as immigrant presence in society (Schlueter & Scheepers, 2010; Schneider, 2008), whereas recently also perceived criminal threat posed by immigrants has attracted – albeit rather limited – scholarly attention (Ceobanu, 2011; Fitzgerald et al., 2011; Stupi, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2014).

First, the presence of immigrants or outgroup size in a given society has been suggested to affect feelings of threat (Kunovich, 2004; Quillian, 1995; Schlueter & Scheepers, 2010; Semyonov, Raijman, & Gorodzeisky, 2006). This can be explained within ethnic competition theory, which stresses that the demographic composition of society—the relationship between ingroup and outgroup—may increase intergroup competition. A larger outgroup, such as rising numbers of immigrants, might induce conflict over material resources and cultural tensions

about norms and values (Ivarsflaten, 2005). This assumption, however, is not always supported by empirical evidence (Sides & Citrin, 2007; Strabac & Listhaug, 2008). Previous studies have revealed a weak relation between real immigrant presence and anti-immigrant sentiments: especially the perception of outgroup size plays a key role (Hooghe & de Vroome, 2015; Semyonov et al., 2006). Moreover, research has routinely found that large discrepancies exist between real and perceived immigrant presence (Alba, Rumbaut, & Marotz, 2005). These inaccurate perceptions of immigrant presence levels are expected to foster anti-immigrant sentiments as these might activate feelings of threat (Schlueter & Davidov, 2013; Semyonov et al., 2006).

Second, recent research suggests that an association is being made between the issues of crime and safety and immigration in the minds of the public (Bircan & Hooghe, 2011; Ceobanu, 2011; Dinas & van Spanje, 2011; Fitzgerald et al., 2011). A 2011 comparative study found that a majority of native citizens in Western Europe agreed that crime problems in society are rendered worse by immigration (Fitzgerald et al., 2011). Moreover, comparison of these perceived criminal threats with cultural and economic arguments revealed that the claim that immigrants contribute to crime received significantly more support among citizens than other forms of threat. Despite this widespread belief that immigration is positively associated with crime, compelling empirical evidence linking immigrants with (an increase in) crime levels is lacking (Stupi et al., 2014).

2. The Role of Television

Intergroup threats are considered important determinants of negative attitudes toward immigrants. Compelling evidence for the role of real immigrant presence, and for a real association between crime and immigration is, however, scarce. This leaves us with an intriguing research puzzle: if the presence of immigrants does not increase crime, why do

citizens think this association does occur? And why do citizens consistently overestimate diversity levels, which may lead to distorted perceptions and trigger threat? Which factors cause the public to hold these beliefs? Past research has stressed that threats do not need to be real, but that perceptions are a sufficient condition (LeVine & Campbell, 1972). How are these perceptions shaped? To disentangle this discrepancy between reality and public perceptions, we highlight the role of media, and television news in particular, as important determinant of anti-immigrant sentiments by affecting threat perceptions. A large body of research indeed assesses the role of the news media in the formation of anti-immigrant sentiments (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009; Schemer, 2012; Schlueter & Davidov, 2013; Van Klingereren, Boomgaarden, Vliegenthart, & De Vreese, 2014).

First, with regard to perceived ethnic diversity, immigration and integration have become increasingly salient issues in Western mass media (Bauder, 2008). Moreover, these stories often tend to be sensational in nature (Charteris-Black, 2006). Media theories on agenda setting assume that public opinion evaluates issues as more pressing if they are perceived to attract media attention (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Hence, if television extensively reports on immigration-related issues, this can be expected to affect perceptions of immigrant presence among the majority population (Schlueter & Davidov, 2013). A recent study on immigration coverage has found evidence that a portion of the effect of immigration on attitudes is related to media reporting about immigration (Van Klingereren et al., 2014). This study concluded that real-world immigration numbers have little bearing on the salience of immigration, whereas news content was highly effective in shaping attitudes toward immigrants.

Second, with regard to fear of crime, crime coverage on the news is often considered an important contributing factor. Crime presents an important ingredient of television news, as conflict is judged attractive, straightforward, and therefore accessible and well-suited to reach large audiences (Lowry, Nio, & Leitner, 2003). More importantly, a particular element of media

framing of crime is the frequent association between immigration and crime. Content analysis of media messages has shown that immigration is increasingly depicted as a security threat and that immigrants are increasingly associated with crime, terrorism and law and order issues (Caviedes, 2015; Dinas & van Spanje, 2011; Lawlor, 2015). Some studies have noted that crime and deviant behavior are dominant themes in news stories on immigrants (Lubbers, Scheepers, & Wester, 1998). This well-documented criminal framing of immigrants in news media, may foster perceptions that immigrants are overrepresented in crime statistics, and thus impact fear of crime levels and anti-immigrant sentiments (Dinas & van Spanje, 2011).

In sum, to the extent that immigration is a visible issue on television, and is framed from a criminal perspective, it can be expected that perceived ethnic diversity and fear of crime may mediate the role between television consumption and anti-immigrant sentiments..

3. Audience Traits, Neighborhood Characteristics and Television Type

In the early years of cultivation theory it was assumed that heavy television viewers would believe that the world as depicted on television closely resembles the real world (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002). This vision, however, has been criticized for neglecting potential confounding factors, such as the diverse nature of the audience, real-life indicators, and the complexity of the television market (Chadee & Ditton, 2005).

First, the strength of television effects on attitudes is conditional on the type of audience (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Television viewing should be approached as a dynamic process where the audience actively interprets the meaning of television messages (Gray & Lotz, 2011). This suggests that television effects might diverge according to personal background and experience. Replication studies assessing the relationship between television consumption and fear of crime, for instance, have found that audience traits (e.g. age, gender, socioeconomic

status, victimization experiences) greatly matter (Eschholz, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2003; Heath & Gilbert, 1996).

Second, the ‘real-world thesis’ suggests that the relationship between television and attitudes is mediated by objective conditions, such as neighborhood characteristics (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). The underlying rationale is that television’s influence will be weaker if messages are perceived to bear little relevance for individuals’ immediate environment. Relevant neighborhood characteristics for our study are crime rates and the neighborhood’s ethnic composition (Eschholz et al., 2003; Quillian & Pager, 2001; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004).

Third, authors have stressed the need to adopt a multidimensional perspective when investigating television effects, differentiating between specific television content, type and programs (Esser & de Vreese, 2007; Hooghe, 2002). Especially in Western Europe, we may expect differences between commercial and public broadcasting (Schmitt-Beck & Wolsing, 2010). Public broadcasters are generally expected to serve the public good (Holtz-Bacha & Norris, 2001), and they have sometimes explicitly engaged themselves to promote tolerance and diversity. Commercial stations, on the other hand, are mainly guided by profit and audience maximization, making these stations more inclined to broadcast sensational reports about crime and immigration (Holtz-Bacha & Norris, 2001; Schmitt-Beck & Wolsing, 2010). A study investigating the media salience of crime issues in the Belgian context, has found that the main commercial broadcaster in Belgium devotes twice as much attention to crime stories as the public broadcasting corporation (Walgrave & De Swert, 2002). Furthermore, a recent EU study concluded that public broadcasters more carefully represent cultural diversity in their program content (Rogers, O’Boyle, Preston, & Fehr, 2014). When investigating the relation between media consumption and fear of crime, it is important, therefore, to pay attention to these factors.

4. Hypotheses

The theory and literature review lead to the following hypotheses:

H1: Watching television is positively associated with perceived ethnic diversity, fear of crime, and anti-immigrant sentiments.

H2: A preference for public television is associated with lower anti-immigrant sentiments, perceived ethnic diversity and fear of crime.

H3: The relation between television consumption and anti-immigrant sentiments is partially mediated by fear of crime and perceived ethnic diversity.

H4: Television consumption patterns are associated with anti-immigrant sentiments, perceived ethnic diversity and fear of crime, even when controlling for audience traits and neighborhood characteristics.

5. Data, Method and Measurements

5.1 Data

We rely on data from the Social Cohesion Indicators in Flanders (SCIF) survey. The SCIF survey was carried out in 2009 among a representative sample of the adult population in Flanders, i.e. the Dutch-speaking northern region of Belgium. This survey was specifically designed to provide an adequate overview of patterns of social cohesion in Flanders. In face-to-face interviews, 2,085 citizens were questioned on their media use, attitudes and socio-demographic characteristics. The contact procedure was as follows: all the selected addresses received an informative official letter in advance of the interviewer's first visit explaining the scope and aims of the project. The letter emphasized the confidentiality of the study. Within two weeks after the letters were sent, respondents were contacted face-to-face. Respondents that were unreachable at the first visit were revisited minimum four times. The response rate was 54%, which is an average rate for surveys in Belgium. Like other European countries, Belgium is confronted with a phenomenon of declining response rates in population surveys,

so the 54% conforms to accepted scientific standards (Hooghe, Vanhoutte, & Bircan, 2009). Five percent of respondent candidates were eliminated due to language barrier as their level of Dutch, the language of the questionnaire, was insufficient. Again, we would like to stress that this type of response pattern is typical for countries like Belgium, the Netherlands or Germany. Only respondents that were born in Belgium and of whom both parents were born in Belgium were included, so that we assess anti-immigrant sentiments among the native majority population. The respondents are nested in 40 randomly selected municipalities, resulting in a hierarchical data structure. The individual-level data are supplemented with real-life indicators at the municipal level. More specifically, municipalities' crime and ethnic diversity levels are taken up as neighborhood characteristics. The data on the ethnic diversity of the municipality are derived from the Belgian National Institute of Statistics. The data on municipalities' crime levels were obtained from the Belgian Federal Police, encompassing the registration of criminal activities by federal and local police forces. Crime statistics always underestimate real crime occurrence, but the Belgian federal police has invested extensively in establishing a reliable database on the registration of criminal acts, increasing the validity of the data. Municipalities in Flanders are rather small with on average 20,000 inhabitants, so that they can still be considered to constitute a neighborhood environment.

5.2. *Measurements*

5.2.1. *Dependent Variable.*

The dependent variable, *anti-immigrant sentiments*, is measured as an eleven-point scale composed of respondents' assessments of three items on immigration which have been validated by previous studies. These items are regularly used in cross-national studies, e.g. the European Social Survey (ESS), as indicators of 'anti-immigrant sentiments' (Rustenbach, 2010). Respondents had to judge the consequences of immigration for the country in general,

the economy and its cultural life. The exact wording was: “Would you say it is generally good or bad for Belgium’s economy that people come to live here from other countries?”, “Would you say that Belgium’s cultural life is generally enriched or undermined by people coming to live here from other countries?” and “Is Belgium made a better or a worse place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?”. The answers were coded on an eleven-point scale ranging from 0 (indicating a very positive assessment) to 10 (indicating a very negative assessment) ($M=4.92$, $SD=1.83$). Higher values correspond with more negative attitudes toward immigrants. The unidimensionality of these items is shown by a principal component analysis (Cronbach’s α : .73, Eigenvalue: 1.95, explained variance: 64.85).

5.2.2. Mediators

Perceived percentage of non-Belgians. This variable refers to the perceived level of ethnic diversity and was operationalized by asking respondents to estimate the percentage of non-Belgians currently living in Belgium. This variable ranges from one percent to ninety-nine percent ($M=27.18$, $SD=16.74$).

Fear of crime. To operationalize fear of crime, we have adapted the avoidance behavior scale from the Belgian Security Monitor, which measures the behavioral component of fear of crime (Hooghe et al., 2009). This variable was measured with an assessment on five-point scales, ranging from ‘never’ to ‘very often’, of the following three items: ‘I avoid certain areas in my neighborhood because I think they are not safe’, ‘I avoid to open the door to strangers because I think it is not safe’, ‘I avoid leaving home after dark because I think it is not safe’. The scale is unidimensional (Cronbach’s α : .71, Eigenvalue: 2.295, explained variance: 57.39), ranging from zero to four ($M=0.58$, $SD=0.72$).

5.2.3. Independent Variables

Television Variables. The first variable refers to the amount of time spent watching television and was measured by asking respondents the following question: ‘How many hours do you spend watching television on an average weekday?’ The answers range from no time at all to 11.5 hours ($M=2.40$, $SD=1.56$). Respondents were also asked to indicate their preferred television station. Respondents chose from a detailed list that included the most frequently watched public and commercial television stations in Flanders. The answers were used to construct a dummy variable indicating whether respondents prefer a commercial or public television station ($M=0.54$). Although this variable does not specifically assess television exposure, a preference measure is considered more optimal as it reduces possible bias in self-reporting (Prior, 2009). Moreover, statistics show that the answers reflect actual market shares (European Audiovisual Observatory, 2014). US Studies have suggested that especially local television is important when studying fear of crime (Chiricos et al., 2000; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). In Flanders, however, market shares of local television are limited (European Audiovisual Observatory, 2014). Flanders has approximately 6 million inhabitants and covers a geographical area of 5,221 square miles. We therefore assume that information brought to the audience by regional Flemish broadcasters can be considered sufficiently realistic and proximate for most viewers.

Audience Traits and Neighborhood Characteristics.¹ Both audience traits and neighborhood characteristics are taken up to avoid spurious effects, as they can offer alternative explanations when assessing anti-immigrant sentiments (Aarts & Semetko, 2003). The audience traits at the individual level concern mostly socio-demographic background variables. Gender is included since women tend to be more fearful of crime, but more tolerant towards immigrants (Valentova & Alieva, 2014). Men were coded as 0, and women were coded as 1

¹ We do not include racial or ethnic prejudice as control variable in the analysis, as analyses showed that in Western Europe this measure very strongly correlates with anti-immigrant sentiments.

($M=0.51$). Age in years is taken up ($M=48.42$, $SD=17.85$), as older respondents tend to be more fearful and more negative toward immigrants (Chiricos et al., 2000; O'Rourke & Sinnott, 2006). Moreover, especially economically disadvantaged segments of society would be more susceptible to anti-immigrant sentiments (Burns & Gimpel, 2000; Eschholz et al., 2003). The realistic group conflict theory implies that citizens who are vulnerable to economic fluctuations and consequently undergo changes in their individual economic position (e.g. lower wage, becoming, being or having been unemployed) may feel more threatened by immigrants (Citrin et al., 1997; Kunovich, 2013; Lancee & Pardos-Prado, 2013; Quillian, 1995). Moreover, vulnerability theory suggests that low status individuals typically may feel more unsafe as they are vulnerable social groups (Visser, Scholte, & Scheepers, 2013). Three variables are included to operationalize respondents' objective and subjective socio-economic status and economic vulnerability: educational level, employment status and income satisfaction. First, respondents were asked about the highest level of education they have completed. This variable has five categories, ranging from 'no education' to 'tertiary education' ($M=3.08$, $SD=1.13$). Second, respondents were asked whether they have ever been unemployed for a period of more than six months as this allows us to identify individuals in precarious economic situations.² This variable is included as a dummy variable ($M=0.15$). Third, we take up a subjective measurement and include respondents' level of satisfaction with the household income. This variable is measured on a six-point scale ranging from zero ('very difficult to live on present household income') to five ('very easy to live on present household income') ($M=3.45$, $SD=1.08$). Income satisfaction is preferred over actual income data, because of the high proportion of missing answers (15%) on this latter question. Other individual-level audience traits that are controlled for are victimization, religiosity, life satisfaction, household structure, intergroup friendship and

² There is no specific theoretical reason to assume that the effect of unemployment experiences would disappear after a specific number of years, but we simply had to include the question as it was phrased in this survey.

left-right self-placement. Victimization is a dichotomous variable referring to ‘whether the respondent has been victim of a criminal act in the last five years’ ($M=0.16$).³ In line with previous research we expect victimization to be positively related to fear of crime (Chiricos, Hogan, & Gertz, 1997; Pickett, Chiricos, Golden, & Gertz, 2012; Quillian & Pager, 2001; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). Respondents’ religiosity is measured by asking respondents whether they identify with a denomination or religion or not ($M=0.49$). Research suggests that religion can be related to attitudes on immigrants and fear of crime, although it is inconclusive on the direction (Bohman & Hjerm, 2013). Self-reported life satisfaction is measured on a scale ranging from zero (‘extremely dissatisfied’) to ten (‘extremely satisfied’) ($M=7.95$, $SD=1.53$). Life satisfaction is expected to lower negative feelings such as fear of crime and anti-immigrant sentiments (Hooghe, 2012). Respondents’ household structure is taken up as dichotomous variable referring to a single household or not ($M=0.12$), since previous research has established that persons living in single households are more vulnerable for feelings of social isolation, and hence also for threat (Ross, Mirowsky & Pribesh, 2001). Intergroup friendship is included as contact theory suggests intergroup contact reduces anti-immigrant sentiments (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Maintaining meaningful contacts (such as friendship) with members of minority or immigrant groups forms a powerful buffer against prejudice. Respondents were asked about they have friends with other ethnic backgrounds or not ($M=0.35$). Finally, respondents’ political left-right orientation was assessed by asking them to place themselves on a left-right scale ranging from zero to ten ($M=5.37$, $SD=2.09$). Ample evidence shows that a right-wing ideology is positively correlated to negative attitudes toward immigration, as (extreme) right-wing parties tend to take a rigid and strict stance on immigration, favoring immigration restrictions (Rydgren, 2008).

³ Victimization thus asks about any punishable act. A measure asking about specific types of crime (e.g. assault, robbery) could have presented a better measure, but was not available.

At the municipality level, ethnic diversity and crime levels are taken up.⁴ In Belgium, ethnic diversity mainly refers to the presence of migrant populations from Turkey and Morocco that have arrived as guest workers and via family reunification in the 1960s, as these are the largest immigrant groups in Belgium (Morelli, 2004). Measurements of anti-immigrants sentiments show that these sentiments do not have a bearing on immigrants from neighboring European countries, but specifically refer to immigrants and their descendants from outside Western Europe (Hooghe & de Vroome, 2015; Semyonov et al., 2006). The level of ethnic diversity is operationalized as the percentage of Turks ($M=0.37$, $SD=0.58$), Moroccans ($M=0.36$, $SD=0.67$) and Eastern Europeans ($M=0.91$, $SD=0.80$) present in the municipality. This data comes from the official statistical office in Belgium. It has to be noted here that Belgian population data do not include any information at all about ethnic descent of inhabitants with Belgian nationality. Therefore, the only information we have available is based on citizenship status. In practice this means that the ethnic diversity is underestimated, as we do not have information about, e.g., inhabitants of Turkish descent, but having Belgian nationality. A previous analysis, however, has shown that the correlation between this official measurement (based on nationality), and a more comprehensive measurement based on various cultural markers of ethnic descent is .99 at the community level. This implies that those with Turkish nationality indeed live in exactly the same neighborhoods as inhabitants from Turkish descent but with the Belgian nationality. The very strong correlation of .99 would imply that in practice

⁴ Prior research suggested that especially changes in levels of ethnic diversity are important (Hawley, 2011; Hopkins, 2010; Meuleman, Davidov & Billiet, 2009; Stupi, Chiricos & Gertz, 2014). We have therefore also used the change over the last nine years before the survey as community-level independent variable. This measure, however, is not ideal as many Flemish communities are rather small, so that results are based on small numbers and are not always reliable. Most likely as a consequence, results of this analysis proved to be rather unstable.

this variable does not make a difference, but for reasons of reliability we stick to the official data.

Also the inflow of foreigners as a percentage of the municipality's population size is included ($M=0.39$, $SD=0.32$). For municipalities' crime levels, violent and property crime rates are included. These figures are weighted by the municipality size, thus referring to the amount of violent and property criminal acts per 1,000 inhabitants.

5.3. Method

The theoretical model predicts the existence of both direct and indirect relations between patterns in television use and anti-immigrants sentiments. In order to test this theoretical model, we conducted structural equation modeling (SEM) (Kline, 2011). Since the data structure is hierarchical, containing information on individuals (level 1) nested in municipalities (level 2), multilevel SEM was conducted.

6. Results

Table 1 first displays the audience traits and neighborhood characteristics to evaluate hypothesis 4. Women have lower anti-immigrant sentiments ($b=-.244$, $p<.01$), while older respondents have more negative attitudes toward immigrants ($b=.010$, $p<.001$). Respondents' socioeconomic status is important, as especially the lower-educated ($b=-.265$, $p<.001$), and respondents dissatisfied with their household income ($b=-.066$, $p<.05$) evaluate immigrants more negatively. Respondents that are satisfied with their lives ($b=-.123$, $p<.001$), religious ($b=-.76$, $p<.01$) and report intergroup friendship ($b=-.678$, $p<.001$) also hold less anti-immigrant sentiments. Political ideology matters, as right-wing respondents ($b=.122$, $p<.001$) evaluate immigrants more negatively. Second, we observe that generally women ($b=.347$, $p<.001$) and older respondents ($b=.004$, $p<.01$) are more fearful. Higher-educated respondents ($b=-.051$,

$p < .001$), however, display lower fear of crime levels. Intergroup friendship is also negatively correlated with fear of crime ($b = -.083$, $p < .05$). Finally, religious respondents ($b = .119$, $p < .001$) and respondents recently victimized ($b = .136$, $p < .01$) report higher fear of crime levels. Third, considering perceived ethnic diversity levels, especially women ($b = 8.464$, $p < .001$), young ($b = -.127$, $p < .001$), right-wing ($b = .488$, $p < .01$), single-household ($b = 2.672$, $p < .05$), and long-term unemployed respondents ($b = 1.735$, $p < .10$) perceive higher ethnic diversity levels. The highly educated ($b = -2.211$, $p < .001$) report lower levels of perceived ethnic diversity. Next, we consider the neighborhood characteristics. For anti-immigrant sentiments, neighborhood characteristics are only marginally important. Only the percentage of Moroccans living in the neighborhood is positively correlated to anti-immigrant sentiments ($b = .291$, $p < .01$). Also real crime levels are not significantly related to anti-immigrant sentiments. For fear of crime, we note – interestingly – that municipalities’ real crime and ethnic diversity levels are not related to fear of crime. Finally, considering perceived ethnic diversity, only the presence of Turks ($b = 2.802$, $p < .05$) and Moroccans ($b = 3.336$, $p < .001$) in neighborhoods is positively related to perceived ethnic diversity.

–Table 1–

Table 2 and Figure 1 present a formal test of the total, direct and indirect relationships between television consumption and anti-immigrant sentiments. The results in Table 2 confirm that the indirect relations via fear of crime and the perceived percentage of non-Belgians are statistically significant, confirming hypothesis 1 to 3.

–Table 2–

Figure 1 visually displays the direct and indirect relations between television consumption and anti-immigrant sentiments, controlling for audience traits and neighborhood

characteristics⁵. It should be noted here that, when conducting multilevel SEM, standardized coefficients are not meaningful as relations refer to different levels of analysis (individual and contextual). We therefore cannot compare the relations in size, and focus on interpreting the significance of the relations. There is no direct relationship between the amount of time spent watching television and anti-immigrant sentiments, but fear of crime and perceived ethnic diversity mediate the relationship between the television variables and anti-immigrant sentiments. Frequently watching television is positively related to fear of crime ($b=.034, p<.05$), which in turn is positively related to anti-immigrant sentiments ($b=.319, p<.001$). In addition, frequently watching television is positively related to perceived ethnic diversity ($b=.970, p<.001$), which in turn is positively related to anti-immigrant sentiments ($b=.010, p<.001$). Fear of crime and perceived ethnic diversity function as mediators as well between preference for public television and anti-immigrant sentiments. A preference for public television is negatively related to both fear of crime ($b=-.080, p<.01$) and perceived ethnic diversity ($b=-4.789, p<.001$). Moreover, there is a direct, negative relation between preference for public television and anti-immigrant sentiments ($b = -.529, p<.001$).

– Figure 1–

We can thus conclude that, while audience traits are important, neighborhood characteristics are only weakly correlated with perceived ethnic diversity, fear of crime and

⁵ Model fit statistics show a good fit for the proposed model. $X^2(2)=1.146$, ns, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation [RMSEA]=0.000, Comparative Fit Index [CFI]=1.000. The Chi Square in the SEM model has a value of 1.14, and when the Chi Square is lower or equal to the degrees of freedom the RMSEA adopts a value of 0 and the CFI of 1. It is thus more informative to consider the value of the Chi Square in this regard and as this value is low and not significant, this suggests a good model fit. Formula $RMSEA = \sqrt{((X^2/df - 1)/(N - 1))}$.

anti-immigrant sentiments. The relations between television and these attitudes, however, remain intact.

7. Discussion

This primary aim of this paper was to examine the role of television consumption in the formation of anti-immigrant sentiments. The initial expectation was that perceptions rather than real-life conditions matter when investigating determinants of anti-immigrant sentiments. Results largely confirmed this expectation. Frequently watching television is associated with higher fear of crime and perceived ethnic diversity, which is in turn associated with higher anti-immigrant sentiments. However, the type of television broadcaster greatly matters: preference for public stations, compared to commercial stations, has a direct negative association with anti-immigrant sentiments, lower fear of crime and perceived ethnic diversity. These correlations remain even while controlling for audience traits and neighborhood characteristics.

It turns out that the neighborhood characteristics that were examined, i.e. real ethnic diversity and crime levels, play a relatively minor role in explaining anti-immigrant sentiments, fear of crime and perceived ethnic diversity. Apparently real immigrants presence and actual crime figures in the neighborhood, have little bearing on these attitudes. This is in line with recent studies finding limited impact from immigration figures both at the national and municipal level on anti-immigrant attitudes (Hooghe & de Vroome, 2015; Van Klingeren et al., 2014). Moreover, it corroborates evidence from studies on fear of crime suggesting that crime levels and fear of crime are not always empirically related. A possible explanation may be that it remains difficult for citizens to accurately estimate real-world developments. Still, some qualification is in order. The analysis does not allow for a conclusion that neighborhood characteristics do not matter at all, but simply shows that the specific variables in terms of ethnic diversity and crime levels that we considered did not explain much of the variation in anti-immigrant studies. Future studies might want to replicate these findings, expanding the

number of neighborhood characteristics with other possible relevant indicators, such as poverty or unemployment levels.

Audience traits matter, but even controlling for these socio-demographic characteristics, the relationship between television and attitudes holds. We can therefore conclude that what mainly matters while evaluating immigrants are perceptions and that these perceptions are heavily shaped by patterns in television consumption. This highlights television's role as socialization agent in the immigration debate in Western European societies.

This study's main contribution is that it sheds light on the mechanisms through which television impacts anti-immigrant sentiments. Our results suggest that the influence of television exposure is not direct, but rather indirect as it affects anti-immigrant sentiments via other attitudes, i.e. perceived ethnic diversity and fear of crime. With regard to perceived ethnic diversity, we can speculate that television coverage of ethnic diversity primes the immigration topic, prompting worries about future immigration and immigration-related issues. This may lead individuals who frequently watch television to overestimate ethnic diversity levels in society, which in turn may provoke hostile attitudes toward immigrants. Moreover, a relevant question relates to how the correlation of fear of crime with anti-immigrant sentiments can be explained. Although our data do not allow us to be conclusive on this question, on a speculative note individuals may perceive an overrepresentation of immigrants in crime statistics, which may be stimulated by news content and elite rhetoric. There is evidence that in Western Europe, often cognitive associations are made between immigration and crime in the news (Caviedes, 2015; Lawlor, 2015) and that political rhetoric by right-wing anti-immigrant parties highlight criminal threats posed by immigrants (Rydgren, 2008). The tendency of television to construct linkages between immigration and crime has the potential to make fear of crime a powerful source of anti-immigrant sentiments. The prevalence of patterns of threat in television news coverage therefore warrants further investigation, as—even when real-life indicators suggest

otherwise–majority group members tend to believe images constructed by television. What specific type of news content could be associated with these effects, however, still has to be determined. It is important to note, however, that the crime-related causal mechanism apparently is just as strong in Western European societies as in the US context, despite lower crime levels and a different ethnic composition of the population in Western Europe.

Watching television, however, can also be related to lower anti-immigrant sentiments, but this is dependent upon the type of broadcaster: a preference for public broadcasters is associated with lower anti-immigrant sentiments, perceived ethnic diversity and fear of crime levels, suggesting that public and commercial broadcasters may diverge in their framing of minorities and the immigration debate. This could be explained by both broadcasters' distinct goal attainment, which may elicit different journalistic and news production values, likely reflecting in actual news content. Whereas public broadcasters follow a public logic, aimed at fostering democratic values in society, commercial broadcasters are mainly guided by a market-logic (Rogers et al., 2014). More specifically, crime and immigration may be covered in a more sensational way on commercial television than on public television. Moreover, we know that crime is a popular ingredient of commercial news, because the issue is widely recognized to attract a large audience, straightforward, and simplistic (Lowry et al., 2003). Past studies have indeed shown that crime coverage is more prevalent on Flemish commercial news (Walgrave & De Swert, 2002). Future research efforts should therefore systematically content analyze immigration news coverage while differentiating between broadcasters, pinpointing whether differences in content can explain this attitudinal gap.

Notwithstanding its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, although the inclusion of real-life crime statistics presents an advantage, crime statistics inevitably underestimate real crime levels. Nevertheless, Belgian law enforcement has heavily invested in developing a uniform procedure for reporting and registering criminal acts. Second, our data is

geographically limited to Flanders. Although at first sight, the integration of non-nationals seems more difficult in a small language region, compared to a major language region like the French region, analysis of the European Social Survey (2008 and 2010) shows that Dutch and French-language respondents do not hold significantly different attitudes toward immigrants. Moreover, the Belgian migration context and television market are not exceptional compared to other Western European countries either. Third, due to data limitations, we could not rely on more detailed data on media use to obtain content-specific measures as well. Future studies may therefore want to include more measures on specific types and content of media use. Finally, we rely on cross-sectional survey data, which does not permit us to make causal claims. Nevertheless, we consider it safe to conclude that future efforts to explain the relation between television and anti-immigrant sentiments should also pay attention to patterns of criminal threat. Although this relation has received systematic attention in US-based research, too often it is neglected in research on European societies. Despite lower crime levels in most Western European countries compared to the US, crime and fear of crime seem to be strongly related to anti-immigrant sentiments in these societies too, and our results suggest that television plays an important role in this relation.

8. References

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Figure 1. Direct and indirect relations between television consumption and anti-immigrant sentiments, controlling for audience and neighborhood characteristics

Source: SCIF 2009. N=1657. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$ (two-tailed). Notes: Reported are the unstandardized relations (standard errors in parentheses), results of a SEM analysis in MPLUS. Estimation controls for audience traits and neighborhood characteristics.

Table 1. Audience traits and neighborhood characteristics for the model of television consumption and anti-immigrant sentiments

Path		B	se	p
<i>Individual level</i>				
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Female	-.244	.093	**
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Age	.010	.003	***
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Education	-.265	.046	***
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Long-term unemployment	-.007	.108	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Income satisfaction	-.066	.030	*
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Life satisfaction	-.123	.026	***
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Intergroup friendship	-.678	.103	***
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Religiosity	-.273	.101	**
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Victimization	-.076	.114	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Left-right self-placement	.122	.028	***
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Single household	-.192	.154	
Fear of crime	← Female	.347	.038	***
Fear of crime	← Age	.004	.001	**
Fear of crime	← Education	-.051	.013	***
Fear of crime	← Long-term unemployment	-.043	.051	
Fear of crime	← Income satisfaction	-.012	.015	
Fear of crime	← Life satisfaction	-.019	.012	
Fear of crime	← Intergroup friendship	-.083	.035	*
Fear of crime	← Religiosity	.119	.030	***
Fear of crime	← Victimization	.136	.043	**
Fear of crime	← Left-right self-placement	.007	.009	
Fear of crime	← Single household	.105	.061	
Perceived % non-Belgian	← Female	8.464	.712	***
Perceived % non-Belgian	← Age	-.127	.024	***
Perceived % non-Belgian	← Education	-2.211	.404	***
Perceived % non-Belgian	← Long-term unemployment	1.752	.992	Υ
Perceived % non-Belgian	← Income satisfaction	-.173	.377	
Perceived % non-Belgian	← Life satisfaction	.041	.251	
Perceived % non-Belgian	← Intergroup friendship	-.880	.838	
Perceived % non-Belgian	← Religiosity	-.182	.768	
Perceived % non-Belgian	← Victimization	.459	1.317	
Perceived % non-Belgian	← Left-right self-placement	.488	.167	**
Perceived % non-Belgian	← Single household	2.672	1.329	*
<i>Neighborhood level</i>				
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← % Turks	-.004	.123	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← % Moroccans	.291	.104	**
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← % Eastern Europeans	-.010	.123	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← % Inflow foreigners	-.074	.175	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Property crime rate	-.005	.012	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	← Violent crime rate	-.018	.022	
Fear of crime	← % Turks	.097	.094	
Fear of crime	← % Moroccans	.212	.122	
Fear of crime	← % Eastern Europeans	-.065	.077	
Fear of crime	← % Inflow foreigners	.074	.121	
Fear of crime	← Property crime rate	.003	.005	
Fear of crime	← Violent crime rate	.008	.009	
Perceived % non-Belgian	← % Turks	2.802	1.140	*
Perceived % non-Belgian	← % Moroccans	3.336	.431	***
Perceived % non-Belgian	← % Eastern Europeans	-1.706	.874	
Perceived % non-Belgian	← % Inflow foreigners	.223	1.240	

Source: SCIF 2009. N=1657. *** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, (two-tailed). Notes: Entries are the result of a SEM analysis in MPLUS. Reported are the unstandardized coefficients (b), standard errors (se) and significance values (p).

Table 2. Specific relationships between television consumption and anti-immigrant sentiments

				b	se	p
<i>Effects of time spent watching TV</i>						
Anti-immigrant sentiments	←	Hours watching TV	(Total)	.041	.032	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	←	Hours watching TV	(Direct)	.020	.030	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	←	Hours watching TV	(Indirect)	.021	.006	**
Anti-immigrant sentiments	←	Fear of crime	← Hours watching TV	.011	.006	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	←	Perceived % non-Belgian	← Hours watching TV	.010	.004	*
<i>Effects of preference for public TV channels</i>						
Anti-immigrant sentiments	←	Preference public TV	(Total)	-.603	.092	***
Anti-immigrant sentiments	←	Preference public TV	(Direct)	-.529	.092	***
Anti-immigrant sentiments	←	Preference public TV	(Indirect)	-.073	.017	***
Anti-immigrant sentiments	←	Fear of crime	← Preference public TV	-.025	.011	*
Anti-immigrant sentiments	←	Perceived % non-Belgian	← Preference public TV	-.048	.017	**

Source: SCIF 2009. N=1657. *** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, (two-tailed). Notes: Entries are the result of a SEM analysis in MPLUS. Reported are the unstandardized coefficients (b), standard errors (se) and significance values (p). Estimation controls for audience traits and neighborhood characteristics.

Appendix: Table A.1.

Descriptive statistics of variables included in the analysis

	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
<i>Dependent variable</i>				
Anti-immigrant sentiments	0	10	4.919	1.830
<i>Mediators</i>				
Fear of crime	0	4	.584	.721
Perceived % non-Belgian	1	99	27.184	16.736
<i>Independent variables</i>				
Hours watching TV	0	11.5	2.401	1.562
Preference for public TV	0	1	.546	
<i>Audience traits</i>				
Gender = Female	0	1	.506	
Age	18	85	48.418	17.846
Education level	0	5	3.084	1.126
Long-term unemployment	0	1	.147	
Income satisfaction	0	5	3.449	1.078
Life satisfaction	0	10	7.946	1.525
Intergroup friendship	0	1	.345	
Religiosity	0	1	.494	
Victimization past five years	0	1	.161	
Left-right self-placement	0	10	5.366	2.094
Single household	0	1	.123	
<i>Neighborhood characteristics</i>				
% Turks	0	2.02	.378	.578
% Moroccans	0	2.53	.355	.664
% Eastern Europeans	.13	3.00	.914	.802
% Inflow foreigners	0	1.80	.389	.316
Property crime rate/1000 inhabitants	9.93	71.23	31.516	17.202
Violent crime rate/1000 inhabitants	3.64	29.72	14.095	6.669

Source: SCIF 2009, National Institute for Statistics and Belgian Federal Police. N=1657.

Appendix: Table A.2

Covariances, residual variances and intercepts for the final model

			b	se	p
<u>Individual level</u>					
<i>Covariances</i>					
Fear of crime	W.	Perceived % non-Belgian	.334	.234	
<i>Residual variances</i>					
Anti-immigrant sentiments			2.450	.096	***
Fear of crime			.406	.037	***
Perceived % non-Belgian			227.405	10.711	***
<u>Neighborhood level</u>					
<i>Covariances</i>					
Fear of crime	W.	Perceived % non-Belgian	.048	.064	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	W.	Perceived % non-Belgian	-.194	.180	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	W.	Fear of crime	.022	.011	*
<i>Residual variances</i>					
Anti-immigrant sentiments			.047	.030	
Fear of crime			.022	.012	
Perceived % non-Belgian			4.582	2.691	
<i>Intercepts</i>					
Anti-immigrant sentiments			6.925	.368	***
Fear of crime			.159	.132	
Perceived % non-Belgian			32.817	3.355	***

Source: SCIF 2009. N=1657. *** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, (two-tailed). Notes: Entries are the result of a SEM analysis in MPLUS. Reported are the unstandardized estimates (b), standard errors (se) and significance values (p).

Appendix: Table A.3

R-squares final model

	Estimate
Individual level	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	.246
Fear of crime	.141
Perceived % non-Belgian	.163
Neighborhood level	
Anti-immigrant sentiments	.365
Fear of crime	.598
Perceived % non-Belgian	.527

Source: Source: SCIF 2009. N=1657.